



# PORTLAND MAIN STREET FACT SHEET



## What is the Portland Main Street Program?

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**PICTURE THIS.** *Your neighborhood business district bustles with vitality as a growing center for businesses and jobs, with local shop owners greeting regular customers, distinctive storefronts restored to their original, appealing character, pedestrians strolling along smooth, attractive sidewalks with fresh plantings and benches offering respite, and residents biking through the neighborhood or catching the bus at a clean, well-lit street corner.*

This is the vision and promise of Portland's Main Street Program.

Launched in 2009, the Portland Main Street Program is an initiative of the City of Portland administered by the Portland Development Commission (PDC), whose purpose is to revitalize commercial districts, support small businesses, and foster economic development in Portland neighborhoods.

The Program is a community-driven, volunteer-based, comprehensive method of revitalizing older, traditional business districts. It should be seen as one of many tools that a community utilizes to generate economic and entrepreneurial growth.

### Who runs the Program?

The Portland Main Street Program is administered under the umbrella of PDC's Neighborhood Team and is part of the 2010 Neighborhood Economic Development Strategy. Using the National Trust Main Street Center's Four Point Approach®, staff works to train and support communities selected to participate in the Program. Staff meet with community leaders, review past and current revitalization efforts, identify the district's strengths and opportunities, examine resources, and develop a comprehensive, realistic set of recommendations to strengthen each unique commercial district.

### Is the Program connected to the City's 2009 Economic Development Strategy?

The core goal of the Portland Main Street Program - neighborhood business vitality - is central to the adopted Economic Development Strategy. Healthy commercial districts create opportunities for locally-based business start-ups and expansion; contribute to sustainable living; allowing residents to shop and eat locally; and help preserve historic structures.

The underlying premise of the Main Street Four Point Approach (Approach) is summed up in the program goals – to encourage economic development that is appropriate to today's marketplace within the context of preserving older and historic properties.



The Approach advocates a return to community self-reliance, empowerment, and the rebuilding of commercial districts based on traditional assets, unique architecture, personal service, local ownership, and a sense of community.

**Our community has issues beyond the business district. Can the Main Street Program help with those as well?**

A local Main Street Program is *not* designed to tackle the bigger issues of an entire community. The focus is limited to revitalization of a targeted area of a business district, taking into account that a healthy, economically viable, and attractive commercial district is important to the whole community's overall health and vitality. Both the public and private sectors of the community must be involved and committed for a local Main Street program to succeed. Each sector has an important role to play and each must understand the other's needs, strengths, and limitations so that an effective partnership can be created.

**When will a community see results?**

The Approach is incremental and will not produce wholesale, immediate change. A long-term revitalization effort will require careful attention to every aspect of the commercial district – a process that takes time and requires leadership and local capacity building. Smaller changes in the commercial district will lead to larger achievements and more sophisticated projects over time.

**Why use the Main Street Four Point Approach?**

The Main Street model works. It is currently in use in more than 1,600 neighborhoods in 45 states across the country. The Portland Program is modeled after successful urban Main Street programs in Boston, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C.

Main Street Districts are driven, funded, organized, and operated by local volunteers. Everyone with a stake in the commercial district and its future should be involved. Financial support for the district comes from local groups that have a stake in the business district: city government, merchants, businesses, residents and the public. The success of the Main Street district over the years lies in the fact that it is a local initiative, both organizationally and financially. When there is local buy-in, people care more about the success of the district and become more involved. In order to succeed, a long-term revitalization effort requires careful attention to every aspect of the business district — a process that takes time and requires leadership and local capacity building.



## How does the Main Street Four-Point Approach work?

The Main Street Approach is the foundation for local leaders to revitalize their districts by leveraging local assets. It is a comprehensive methodology tailored to meet local needs and take advantage of opportunities in order to revitalize business districts. It encompasses work in four distinct areas — Organization, Promotion, Design, and Economic Restructuring — that are combined to address all of a commercial district's needs.

**Organization** involves assembling the appropriate human and financial resources to implement a Main Street revitalization district - with everyone working toward the same goal. A governing board and standing committees make up the fundamental organizational structure of the volunteer-driven program, with a professional Main Street Manager employed to implement the program. This structure not only divides the workload and clearly delineates responsibilities, but also builds consensus and cooperation among the various stakeholders.

**Promotion** sells a positive image of the commercial district's unique characteristics and vitality to residents, investors, business owners, and visitors, encouraging these populations to live, work, shop, play and invest in the Main Street district. An effective promotional strategy forges a positive image for the district, improves stakeholder confidence and encourages activity and investment, through advertising, retail promotions, special events, and marketing campaigns carried out by local volunteers.

**Design** means getting Main Street into top physical shape. Capitalizing on its best assets — by rehabilitating older and historic buildings and developing pedestrian-oriented streets — is just part of the story. An inviting atmosphere, created through attractive window displays, parking areas, building improvements, street furniture, signs, sidewalks, street lights, and landscaping, conveys a positive visual message about the commercial district and what it has to offer. Design activities also include instilling good maintenance practices in the commercial district, encouraging appropriate new construction, developing design management systems, and long-term planning.

**Economic Restructuring** strengthens a community's existing economic assets while expanding and diversifying its economic base. This element of the Approach helps sharpen the competitiveness of existing business owners and recruits compatible new businesses and new uses to build a commercial district that responds to today's consumers' needs. Converting unused or underused commercial space into economically productive property also helps boost the profitability and overall positive perception of the district.

For more information on the Main Street Four Point Approach, please visit [www.MainStreet.org](http://www.MainStreet.org).



### **Will sustainability play a role in Portland's Main Street Program?**

The Portland program is unique in its emphasis on sustainability as a core value. PDC works with the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS), the Alliance for Portland Neighborhood Business Associations (APNBA), Office of Neighborhood Involvement (ONI) and other partners to provide resources for the country's first "green" urban Main Street program. Participants must incorporate sustainable practices and projects into the community's support for local businesses, neighborhood values and environmental stewardship.

### **What areas of the City are eligible for the Main Street Program?**

At this time, applications are not being accepted. It is expected that only applicants located outside urban renewal areas (URAs) and within Portland city limits may apply. (To learn whether your area is outside a URA, type your address into Portland Maps which will list this information. <http://www.portlandmaps.com/>)

### **Why is the Main Street Program focusing on areas outside urban renewal areas?**

Business districts inside urban renewal areas have access to a number of resources, including grants to improve storefronts, loans to expand businesses, and funding for infrastructure projects like parks, streetscapes and bicycle facilities. To make revitalization and economic development a city-wide activity, the Portland Main Street Program is initially targeting those areas that do not receive the benefits of urban renewal funds.

### **How large an area does the Main Street Program cover?**

The most successful districts are those in defined areas where:

- The area selected as the "target area" is the traditional central business district for your neighborhood,
- There are minimal interruptions in storefronts and the storefronts are contiguous to other similar businesses,
- The target area has a concentration of neighborhood serving ground floor businesses,
- There is a high potential to be pedestrian oriented, and
- The "target area" is identifiable, with distinguishing characteristics representing the community's architectural heritage.

Nationally, the typical Main Street District covers *between 5 to 15 blocks, with an average of 8 blocks*. While the emphasis is placed on improving a smaller area within a larger business district, the benefits are to the community at large. Please note that the question of geographical size is not whether or not blocks should be "in or out," rather it's about where



efforts should be concentrated for maximum success. As one business “node” is improved, others can become the focus in the future.

The designation of a particular area as the Main Street District does not exclude the participation of businesses that are located outside the area. Participation is important and as success comes, should benefit those outside the target area also.

**What is meant by the term “unified image” when referring to the area to become the focus for the Main Street District? Doesn’t this program just want us all to look alike?**

Actually, the Main Street volunteers, business owners, neighbors, and other stakeholders in the community determine what they want to emphasize about their target area. Programs are encouraged to build on the unique characteristics of their business district and to emphasize the historic details of the buildings.

“Unified image” refers to commercial districts where there is a feeling of connection or where there is a perceived relationship between businesses. The Main Street Program focuses on the uniqueness and the character of each district, so the specific image varies from district to district. Achieving a unified image is accomplished by answering such questions as “what makes people want to stay in the target area and visit multiple businesses?” It would be hard to describe a “unified image” if the target area is broken up by surface parking lots, vacant lots and non-retail use buildings fronting the main street.

**How does a neighborhood business district become a Main Street?**

Neighborhoods receive their designation as a participant in the Main Street Program through a competitive application process. In the inaugural year, 2009-2010, three (3) neighborhoods were selected for the Program. At this time, there is no date set for the second round of applications. Steps toward becoming a Portland Main Street District include:

**Organize.** The first step to being designated a Portland Main Street District is to organize a broad-based support group including neighborhood associations, business associations, property owners and other stakeholders including financial institutions, religious institutions, social organizations, and schools.

**Attend Application Workshop.** Two members of your group are required to attend an Application Workshop to begin the formal process of becoming eligible for the Main Street Program.

A **Letter of Interest** may be submitted at any time to the Main Street Coordinator.



A **Letter of Intent** must be submitted by a date unique to each Application Round. In order to submit a Letter of Intent, two members of the organizing group must have attended an Application Workshop.

**Attend Non Profit Association of Oregon Organization Building Workshops.** Groups interested in applying to become a Portland Main Street District may be required to attend a workshop(s) designed to help groups build a coalition of stakeholders willing to organize in order to apply to be designated a Portland Main Street District.

**Submit Application.** A completed application must be submitted to the Coordinator by 4:00 p.m. on by a date unique to each Application Round. A second round is not scheduled at this time.

**Fundraise for Private Match to Public Dollars.** When submitting an application to become a Portland Main Street District, the applicant is required to also provide proof of approximately \$30,000 in matching donations from the community.

Interested groups are encouraged to contact the Portland Main Street Coordinator to ask questions about garnering support for the Program. PDC's Main Street Coordinator: Claudia Plaza, [plazac@pdc.us](mailto:plazac@pdc.us) or (503) 823-3234.

### **What are the legal requirements for forming a Main Street organization?**

Groups that form based on the common interest of implementing a Main Street organization in their business district must be willing to create a full-time organization responsible solely for commercial district revitalization. The organization should be structured around one of the following formats:

- A new independent, not-for-profit Main Street 501c3 organization.
- An existing not-for-profit organization (business association, community development corporation, special assessment district organization) that will be modified to become a Main Street organization with full representation from merchants, residents, property owners and institutions.
- An existing organization that will add a Main Street program to its current mission. The original mission should be community development. A separate Main Street Board of Directors and four volunteer committees representing the Four Points of the Main Street Approach - Promotion, Organization, Design and Economic Restructuring - must be dedicated to the commercial district.

Once the local Main Street organization is created, that entity will need to complete standard documentation for the use of city funds, including creating organization by-laws.



**Our business district is surrounded by multiple neighborhoods with different neighborhood associations. How do we organize a cohesive Main Street Program?**

Main Street district boundaries do not have to align with a particular neighborhood association. Therefore, a Main Street organization may include stakeholders such as neighborhood association and business district representatives, architects, business owners, etc. When the areas adjacent to a Main Street District include multiple neighborhood associations, the district may include representatives from each. In fact, having multiple neighborhood associations involved is an advantage in terms of human resources and ensuring a cohesive vision.

**How is the Portland Main Street Program funded? Is this a federal program?**

The Portland City Council has funded the Main Street Program with the City's General Funds. ***Each year funding for the Main Street Program will be included in the Portland Development Commission's proposed budget which the City Council approves annually. Work on the next year's budget requests begins in December each year. The amount of financial assistance available to the Participant's program is subject to the budget appropriation and the availability of funds.***

In addition to city funds, each Main Street District is required to provide ongoing financial support from community stakeholders: neighbors, stakeholders and local businesses who are vested in the health and vitality of their business district. It is important to note that one of the reasons the Main Street programs are successful is because financial support for the program does not rest solely on the businesses in the target area but rather is shared community wide. Some participants have success at applying for sponsorships and grants to supplement their budgets. Programs in other cities have found business support to create local Business Improvement Districts to help fund revitalization work.

It should be clarified that the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which holds the copyright to the Main Street name, is not a federal agency and receives the majority of its funding from private resources. The City contracts with the National Trust for the right to use the Main Street designation for the Portland Main Street Program, which also does not receive any federal funds.

**There's no way we could raise the money.**

This seems to be a commonly held belief, however, our experience shows that of our 6 inaugural year Applicants, volunteers from 5 districts were able to raise \$30,000 within a period of about 2 months. A good portion of the donations came from residents, who feel vested in the future of their neighborhood business district, and from banks, corporations, and local businesses.



### **What is an average Main Street District budget?**

The average budget for a successful Main Street neighborhood based on Portland's Districts is very similar to other urban Main Street programs (Baltimore, Boston, Washington DC) - \$70,000 - \$120,000 annually. Main Street Districts receive financial assistance from PDC toward their administrative expenses, which reduces the amount that districts need to raise. A sample budget is included in the Application Guidelines. As funding allows, additional grant funds may be available for capital projects and for promotions.

### **What does the Portland Main Street Program provide?**

Below is a sample of some of the resources that neighborhoods receive as participants in Portland's Main Street Program, but it is not intended to be inclusive. Full details on the benefits provided to designated districts can be found in the Main Street Application which is updated annually.

- Recognition as one of Portland's participating Main Streets Districts;
- Architectural services for design assistance from the Main Street Architect;
- Annual matching operating funds (districts receive a 1:1 matching grant each year toward the full time program manager position and administrative expenses);
- Training in the Main Street Approach;
- Technical support from the Main Street Coordinator;
- Grants for sustainable investments and property improvements;
- Ongoing training for staff and volunteers;
- Membership in the National Trust Main Street Center; and
- Registration Fee for the Executive Director to attend the annual national conference.

### **Why is there a Portland Main Street Architect?**

The Main Street Program has a designated architect selected through a Request for Proposal (RFQ) process. The architect receives Main Street Design training from the National Main Street Center.

The Architect's role is to serve as a resource and to provide leadership and design expertise to participating Districts and to PDC as it relates to the many design aspects of the Main Street Program.

Property owners are not required to use the Main Street Architect for their personal property improvements. The Architect works with each district's Design Committee to support the plans and guidelines they develop. The Architect does not dictate design direction to the District; rather their role is to advise property owners on the design strategy for the target area that the



Design Committee is responsible for. If a Main Street organization or business owner wishes to contract for additional services from the Main Street Architect, they may do so independent of the contract of the Portland Main Street Program.

### **What are the program requirements?**

Below is a sample of the requirements that will be documented in an annual Memorandum of Understanding between Portland Main Streets and each local participant.

*(Call the Portland Main Street Coordinator at 503-823-3234 for more specific information.)*

- Maintain good standing as a nonprofit organization in the State of Oregon;
- Place an emphasis on sustainability;
- Establish a strong volunteer committee system as detailed in the Four Point Approach;
- Maintain an engaged Board of Directors;
- Fund an adequate operating budget;
- Fundraise a minimum of \$50,000 annually;
- Demonstrate progress in implementing all four areas of the Four Point Approach;
- Employ a full-time, professional Main Street Program Manager whose sole responsibility is the daily implementation of the vision and work plan associated with the Main Street district;
- Maintain an office within the Designated Main Street boundaries;
- Maintain and adhere to a comprehensive Main Street Work Plan;
- Emphasize the preservation of older and/or historic buildings;
- Maintain timely communication at all times with the Portland Main Street Coordinator;
- Report key statistics on a monthly basis; and
- Maintain records of all actions.

### **What is the organizational structure for Portland Main Street participants?**

An Board of Directors, made up of representatives of the business district associations, neighborhood organizations, and other stakeholders typically forms a tax-exempt, nonprofit 501c3 organization that allows them to conduct fund raising. Working with the committees and community members, the program leadership develops a unique vision for the targeted area of the business district, which informs a long-term work plan. The work plan then becomes the guide for implementation of the Main Street Program in each neighborhood.

Committees representing each of the Main Street Approach points (Organization, Promotion, Design and Economic Structuring) meet simultaneously to carry out the Board Work Plan.



### **It's expensive and takes time to become a 501c3, why is this necessary?**

The Portland Program works with the Small Business Legal Clinic to provide legal services to the Designated Districts to file to become a nonprofit. Districts are responsible for paying their filing fee. One benefit of becoming a 501c3 is donors can write off their donations.

### **Our community already has a Neighborhood Plan. Is this just another planning project?**

Existing Neighborhood and/or long range business district plans are a valuable and complementary resource, and are a good starting point for the creation of a District's Board Work Plan. The Main Street program is not about developing yet another plan, but rather, taking incremental steps to bring more business to your commercial district. While your neighborhood plan most likely has goals or recommendations calling for a vibrant commercial district, the Main Street Program provides a framework to implement those recommendations. The local program organizes around committees that will support tangible improvements in your commercial district, i.e. improving the look of the street and storefronts, attracting businesses to vacant spaces, and setting up special events and promotions.

### **What are the time requirements for the district organizations?**

Once designated as a Portland Main Street District, board members, committee chairs and the Executive Director are initially required to attend a one-day board training, and a two-day Main Street Basic 101 training.

During the period when a program is being launched and established, a heavier time commitment from volunteers is required than during subsequent years of the program. Our experience shows that the leadership members of a new program need to commit between 10 and 20 hours a month to the program.

Participants are required to participate in regular on-going trainings for volunteers, Board members, and the Executive Director. Basic trainings are required of all incoming volunteers and as terms expire for the leadership positions.

### **Why do districts need a full time staff person?**

The City Council selected Main Street as an ongoing program for economic revitalization of neighborhood commercial districts. Just as shopping centers and malls have full-time staff who continuously work to ensure proper leasing, management, and marketing, successful neighborhood commercial districts need dedicated, focused attention.



### **Are Main Street Executive Directors city employees?**

No. Main Street Executive Directors are not city employees and they do not work for Portland Main Street, the Portland Development Commission, the National Trust Main Street Center or the National Trust for Historic Preservation. **Each Main Street Executive Director is an employee of the local district organization they work for.** As a result, the local district organization has hiring, supervisory, and termination authority for their Executive Director.

### **What is the average salary for a Main Street Executive Director?**

Nationally, the average urban Main Street Program Manager salary is \$40-50,000 annually plus benefits.

### **What are the responsibilities of a typical Main Street Executive Director?**

Urban Main Street Directors are responsible, most importantly, for daily, grassroots, direct contact with the merchants in the business district. As managers they tackle problems ranging from engaging increased security in the commercial area to helping a merchant create a business plan. Their duties are likely to encompass providing support for the Board's fundraising activities, daily oversight of accounts payable, management, administrative duties, event and business promotions, design work such as façade improvements or designing streetscapes, volunteer recruitment and training and management, data management and analysis, business outreach, recruitment, and retention.

### **When will a Main Street District see measurable results?**

Data collected by the National Trust Main Street Center indicates that measurable results become apparent toward the end of the third year of a program. Measurements of jobs created, investment in property improvements, and the number of new businesses are maintained by each district organization are reported regularly. The Portland Main Street Program provides grants to the Districts for capital projects that early on can make a difference in the District and are visible to the community..

### **Why waste our time and put in all the effort it takes if we won't see progress right away?**

This model for economic revitalization is not a "quick fix" but rather, a comprehensive program showing incremental improvements over the years. A lot happens in those first 3 years as the organization plans and builds its capacity to take on projects or issues impacting the District.

Over time, commercial business district revitalization initiatives like the Main Street Program achieve significant investment in their commercial districts, including significant growth in the number of businesses and jobs.



### **How long does the Main Street Program last?**

The Main Street Program is ongoing. Some communities have had active Main Street district organizations in place for more than 20 years. In order to be identified as a Main Street neighborhood, the Main Street Approach must remain as the guiding structure for implementing the Work Plan, and the Board and Four Point Committees must remain active.

### **If we didn't apply for the Program initially, when can we next apply?**

The opportunity to apply to become a Portland Main Street District is predicated on the availability of city funds. Interested parties may submit a Letter of Interest at any time, and in the interim, are encouraged to attend public outreach sessions, application trainings and Main Street workshops given throughout the year. The Portland Main Street Program Coordinator is available to answer exploratory questions.

### **Affiliations**

The Portland Main Street Program and Oregon Main Street are two separate organizations and each has a contract with the National Trust Main Street Center that authorizes the use of the Main Street name. Portland's Coordinating Partner is Portland Development Commission, which contracts with the National Main Street Center on an annual basis and is then authorized to designate selected business districts as Main Street Districts. *No funding is provided by the National Trust Main Street Center or the National Trust for Historic Preservation which are not federal programs.*

### **If our business district was a Main Street in the past, can we apply for the new Portland Main Street Program?**

All neighborhoods outside URAs may apply, including participants from previous Main Street programs.

### **Our street is designated as a "Main Street" in the Metro 2040 Growth Concept. Will this help us be designated a Main Street District?**

Not necessarily. The designations for "main streets" according to the 2040 Growth Concept and the Portland Main Street Program are based on different considerations. In general, to be selected as a Portland Main Street, the target area must have an identifiable, cohesive concentration of primarily older buildings that can accommodate local businesses.

Only those Districts designated by Portland Main Street as a Main Street District are authorized to use the 'Main Street' designation when referring to revitalization efforts of an organization in their District. The National Trust for Historic Preservation has copyrighted the term "Main Street" and controls its use when used in the context of revitalization of a business district.



Portland Development Commission contracts with the National Trust for the right to designate qualified neighborhood business districts as Portland Main Street Districts.

### **Who benefits from the Main Street Program, and how?**

#### **Benefits to Neighbors/Consumers**

- Enhanced marketplace (better shopping and the benefits of shopping locally)
- Sense of pride in business district
- Increased social/cultural activities
- Historical awareness (preservation of District architecture and human history)
- Home values increase

#### **Benefits to Property Owners**

- Increased occupancy rates
- Rent stability
- Increased property values
- Reduced vandalism/crime deterrent

#### **Benefits to Retail Business Owners**

- Increased sales
- Increased value of business
- Increased traffic
- District marketing strategies
- Better business mix

#### **Benefits to Preservationists**

- Reinforces common goal of preservation
- Increases awareness and credibility
- Education of public

### **Who is the primary contact for the Program?**

***Claudia Plaza***  
***Portland Main Street Coordinator***  
***Portland Development Commission***  
***222 NW Fifth Avenue***  
***Portland, OR 97209***  
***(503)823-3234***  
***[plazac@pdc.us](mailto:plazac@pdc.us)***

***For general information on the Portland Main Street Program, visit***  
***[www.pdc.us/mainstreet](http://www.pdc.us/mainstreet)***



*For information on the National Trust Main Street Center, visit [www.mainstreet.org](http://www.mainstreet.org).*