

## chapter 3

# PLANNING MAIN STREET'S WORK

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Strategic plans, master plans, work plans, vision plans.

Can't we just get to work?

Fortunately, planning is work, and important work at that. Planning Main Street's work is an inclusive process that gets people thinking about the community's goals for the district's future and how your Main Street program can effectively help in achieving those goals.

Most Main Street organizational planning is composed of three parts—a vision plan, a mission statement, and an annual work program. This chapter will discuss the vision plan, which will help your community establish a common goal for the district, as well as the mission statement and annual work plans, which will guide your program and keep everyone on track. Finally, we will discuss the importance of tracking your actual progress through benchmarking as your plans successfully come to fruition.



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## Mission Statement

The mission statement is a short description of your organization's purpose stated clearly and simply. It should state who your group is (the name and type of agency), what you do and where you do it, and distinguish your organization from others in the community. Keep the statement flexible so it will stay relevant as your organization evolves. Mission statements should be only a few sentences. A good mission statement is the organization's "elevator speech," a short answer about what your organization does that you can recite during an elevator ride. Post your mission statement to your website and include it in your annual report, newsletters, press releases, and other materials.

While your mission statement won't list projects or initiatives, it will serve as the starting point for developing an annual work plan and will prevent your organization from taking on work that exceeds your program's purpose. If someone proposes taking the organization in a new direction or tackling a major new project, board members can refer to the mission statement to see if the new project or direction adheres to the mission. See the sidebar below, "Sample Mission Statements," for examples.

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## Developing Your Vision

Once you know who you are, you need to decide where you are going. All program leaders must have a clear vision of their "destination." Vague goals, such as "to achieve a vibrant commercial district," leave room for unfocused revitalization efforts. Visioning has become the standard practice to determine a community's physical and economic future as well as to manage change in a meaningful way.

Through a comprehensive visioning process, your community can develop consensus on a variety of social, economic, and physical development goals, and then decide on strategies and benchmarks to achieve these goals. The consensus is then summarized in a vision statement. The issues explored by visioning projects can be quite broad, such as education, economic development, transportation, tourism, citizen involvement, and housing, among others. Visioning projects can also focus on specific issues, such as a new riverfront development project or plans for outlying development that would not hurt downtown. Municipal governments, chambers of commerce, large employers, civic groups, economic or community development corporations, school dis-

### Mission Statement

States who you are.

### Vision Statement

Tells where you want to go.

### Work plans

Show how to get there.

tricts, and revitalization programs are some of the typical groups who participate in visioning initiatives.

Vision plans can vary widely but the National Trust Main Street Center recommends they be at least several paragraphs long and be written as if the writer were compiling the program's accomplishments 10 to 30 years from now. The vision statement is a glimpse into the future to see how the revitalization effort paid off, what the Main Street district is like, and how the Main Street program helped transform the district. You can think of this document as being similar to those created by developers for new projects to get investors on board, sell the idea to a zoning or other municipal board, or appeal to prospective renters or buyers.

The Main Street program can use its vision when selling the community's dream to potential investors, business owners, volunteers, partners, and others. Your statement will coalesce a dream, and the work going on behind the scenes will be geared toward achieving that vision. The Main Street organization can use the vision statement as a means not only to motivate its staff and volunteers but also to see if its annual projects and initiatives will help you realize this dream. If not, your program should reassess how it allocates its resources and change its plan of action.

Vision plans can also be part of a community master plan. While this is discussed in depth in Chapter 16, Master Planning, a master plan is a document that guides how the community grows and manages change over the years. It is generally a process led by the municipality, but ideally it should also engage the public's input and participation and bring the Main Street program to the table in some way. Depending on your community, a community-wide master plan may already be on the books, as well as a downtown or neighborhood business district master plan. There might be an existing vision statement associated with one of these plans that your program may want to use. Because plan-

## Sample Mission Statements

### Ripon, Wisconsin

The purpose of Ripon Main Street, Inc., is to enhance the quality of life for the citizens of Ripon, Wisconsin. Main Street will work with both the public and private sectors to restore the vitality once common in the downtown by enhancing our community identity and heritage, fostering a center of activity, and ensuring economic stability through concentrated efforts in organization, promotion, design, and business development.

### Elgin, Illinois

The Downtown Neighborhood Association of Elgin is a not for profit 501(c)(3), volunteer-driven coalition that represents the interests of the individuals and organizations with a presence in downtown Elgin, Illinois. The Association's purpose is to foster a center of activity and ensure economic stability for the heart of Elgin through historic preservation, communication, education, promotion, and economic revitalization.



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ners don't necessarily start a master planning process with a visioning exercise, there might not be a vision statement. This presents an opportunity for your organization to lead a community visioning process. You are strongly encouraged to work as a team with the municipality on this effort. Your program can lead the visioning process itself or encourage the municipality to set aside funds to lead the initiative (along with a master planning process if one hasn't been created yet or if the current one is outdated). If the local government is not planning a visioning process, lead one of your own as it will be beneficial for your future work.

A number of Main Street programs have created vision statements and formally submitted them to their municipalities for review and endorsement as an official statement for downtown or the neighborhood business district. Often times they are approved at a public ceremony and incorporated into the existing commercial district master plan.

Although the actual document is useful, the process of creating it is just as important. Consensus building among stakeholders will create higher levels of commitment and enthusiasm for community revitalization. If citizens have a forum to provide their input, they will be more inclined to support revitalization initiatives. Extend personal invitations to key stakeholders and send a general invitation asking the public to participate in your visioning meetings or to submit their ideas in advance. Your staff, board members, and committee chairs should be required to attend and all volunteers should be strongly encouraged to actively participate. While it is best to solicit the input from the public in this process, if that doesn't happen and your vision statement only reflects the views of your volunteers and staff, make it clear that your document is the Main Street program's vision statement.

## The Visioning Process

The time, money, and energy that your community spends on implementing a visioning process depend on the scope and scale of the visioning exercise and the ultimate use of the results. If your goal is to create a comprehensive vision statement that will guide overall community planning and address a breadth of issues, the process should involve all segments of the community and will most likely

take six months to a year. In that scenario, it is likely the municipality will be leading the effort as well as paying for it. Less comprehensive or smaller visioning activities will obviously require less time and fewer resources. Most visioning projects are facilitated by outside consultants, such as specialists from coordinating Main Street programs or the National Trust Main Street Center, vision planners, design professionals, and community organizers.

Generally, a visioning process has four steps:

1. **Preliminary/Initiation Phase.** If your Main Street program is running the show and you have the budget, you can hire a trained meeting facilitator to guide these discussions or pick a Main Street staff or board member to lead them. If the local government is leading the effort, offer your assistance. At the first meeting, explain to the participants what a vision statement is, what a visioning process involves, and how the statement will be used. The first step is to determine the logistics and timeline of the process. Set up a steering committee made up of individuals and groups representing broad segments of the community to guide and implement the process. When a Main Street program undertakes a visioning initiative, the board of directors should represent the different interests of the commercial district. It is also during this phase that target areas are identified and a timeframe of 10, 20, or 30 years is established for the visioning project.

2. **Facilitated Discussions.** Every meeting facilitator has his or her own technique for guiding interaction. There is no right or wrong way as long as everyone has an opportunity to be heard. To get you started, here are the questions the National Trust Main Street Center has used to promote productive dialog.

- ◉ Why is Main Street special to you personally?
- ◉ How do you wish Main Street were better?
- ◉ What will revitalization success look, sound, smell, and taste like?
- ◉ What will revitalization success feel like emotionally?
- ◉ How do you want Main Street to be viewed in 10 years?
- ◉ What activities and businesses do you hope to enjoy on Main Street in 10 years?

Another technique is called a "SWOT" analysis. The facilitator asks participants to name the commercial district's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as the first steps toward building a vision. Regardless of your chosen technique, assign someone to keep track of comments and ask the group to vote on ideas to confirm consensus. Present the results of the vote to the group and ask for reactions. If the results need to be amended slightly, do it while the group is still together.

3. **Writing the Vision Statement.** Next, draft a preliminary vision statement narrative using keywords from the public meeting(s). Distilling the many ideas from the visioning meetings will be tricky and you'll need to enlist the most gifted writer among your staff or volunteers. Writing the vision statement should be the job of a single person. The statement should be written in the present tense and approached as though the community has achieved all of its goals. For example, "It is 10 years from [today's date] and we have created our most desirable district." See the sample vision statement below for an example. The draft should then be reviewed and edited by each board member. Now is not the time to introduce new concepts—the statement and the board's edits must respect the community's input. If your program wishes to submit the statement for formal endorsement by the municipality, you can do so once the board approves it.

The final vision statement should be presented publicly. Hold another meeting to unveil the statement, discuss next steps, and generate excitement for the years ahead. Be sure to post the vision on your website, e-mail it to stakeholders and partners, and highlight salient concepts in press releases to local media. Make sure the public has access to the statement and understands the consensus-building process used to develop it.

4. **The Vision and Implementation Plan.** After the vision statement is approved, your Main Street organization needs to develop its work plan. Work plans are the guiding implementation documents that boards of directors and committees use to carry out the program's activities. In the case of community-wide visioning projects, short- and long-term implementation strategies are developed and responsibilities assigned to those delegated to carry out the vision. These strategies may include timetables for achieving specific objectives as well as integrating the vision

into current community planning activities. Large-scale, community-wide visioning and master planning processes will include implementation strategies for many entities in the community, not just your organization.

**Other Elements to Consider.** The use of graphics, such as architectural renderings and site plans, are especially useful if the vision process is focused on physical developments, such as a streetscape project. Design charrettes can be incorporated into the visioning process to help members of the community visualize future changes. Graphics can also be used to market the visioning process and final product through a report, posters, banners, and other communications.

Most Main Street programs find that the original vision plan can guide their work for several years. Every five years or so, your board members may want to review the plan to see whether it is still relevant or if it needs modifying. Small changes are normal but a whole-sale rewrite should not be necessary.

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## Work Plans

Every year, each committee will outline its work for the next 12 months. In younger programs, this work plan is often a list of projects the committee can realistically complete within a year. More mature programs will outline objectives and strategies that guide a series of projects. For example, market studies during the early years of the revitalization effort may reveal that the commercial district has strong potential as an arts and entertainment district. Consequently, the next work plans will outline how each committee will work to establish this market niche. After the first year or two, programs become better at estimating how much they can accomplish during a year.

## CASE STUDY

Elgin, Illinois

Vision Statement for Downtown Elgin



Our vision for a preferred downtown Elgin is a destination where the community works, lives, and enjoys the arts, quality entertainment, outstanding restaurants, and delightful shopping experiences in the unique atmosphere of historic Elgin on the Fox River. It is a place where people desire to live in renovated loft residences and new up-scale condominiums.

Property owners enjoy 100 percent occupancy of office, retail, and residence space. They prosper with the demand for space at market rates and reinvest their profits in their properties. The infrastructure is "tech ready." All Internet and computer connections and power are more than adequate to handle the growing number of tech businesses locating downtown.

Those who work downtown enjoy a real sense of community and the conveniences of a downtown location. Many travel on Metra from Chicago and other suburbs. Parents kiss their children goodbye as they bring them to a first-rate child care center one block from their office. Others drop clothing at the dry cleaners and get in a 20-minute workout at the local recreation center before starting their day. Workers settle into workstations that are the envy of any Internet/computer-based business in the world.

The work plan should reflect the organization’s major priorities and be realistic in its scope. It should exclude items that cannot be accomplished in one year. Remember that the Main Street program cannot be everything to everyone; to be effective, it must focus its efforts. Don’t take on activities that do not fit your purpose. Don’t attempt projects for the wrong reasons, e.g., because a grant is available to conduct the project, because the activity will put someone on the payroll, or because the project will generate publicity. That said, don’t turn down good opportunities when they come along, but be sure that any changes in the Main Street program’s agenda are made for sound reasons. Scrutinize every proposed activity and be sure it makes sense for the program. Your organization’s leaders and volunteers will likely have many good ideas that will have to be temporarily “parked” on a list until resources and time permit revisiting them.



### How to Write a Work Plan

A work plan should include:

- Goals for the standing committees;
- Specific objectives necessary to accomplish each goal; and
- A list of activities with an appropriate time frame for accomplishing each objective.

Goals, objectives, and activities define the projects your organization will implement to fulfill the directives in its mission statement. Your goals broadly state what your organization wants to accomplish within each of the Main Street four points. Your objectives should outline what your board and committees need to do to accomplish

your goals. And, finally, a list of activities should outline the specific tasks needed to accomplish your objectives.

**Goals.** Board members create the goals for each committee. The board is responsible for the Main Street program’s direction and thus is accountable for its activities. It also must make sure that the work of each committee dovetails with the others and fits within the mission. Committee members must clearly understand their responsibilities and look to the board of directors for direction and management. With experience comes the opportunity for committee members to take a stronger leadership role in developing work plans and establishing their own goals. When committees are ready to “fly solo,” a board member should mentor the committee chairs so they can take charge of the process, but the board should provide guidance and support as needed.

**Objectives.** The objectives for each goal should be developed by the standing committees, in conjunction with the board. A board that dictates too much to the committees risks driving away volunteers. You can motivate volunteers more by giving them a role in creating the work plan. Each committee should brainstorm various objectives that will help it achieve its goal. After listing a dozen or so objectives, see if any can be combined and then ask volunteers to prioritize them. Board members can help ensure that committee objectives don’t overlap and prevent a committee from taking on too much. When committee leaders are ready to develop their own objectives, board members should mentor them in this process as well.

They have 24-7 access to the Internet and clients from around the world.

During the noon hour, the streets are filled with people on their way to the bank, bookstore, and drug store or to lunch. They wait in a short line to be seated at fabulous restaurants that provide quick lunchtime service. Regulars ask for their favorite server and greet the owner and other familiar patrons. Some get their lunch “to go” and sit in the park, enjoying the open spaces and taking in the sun.

Youth breathe life into the community while attending the performing arts high school and college at downtown campuses.

The arts are an integral part of people’s daily lives. Workers and visitors attend an artist’s workshop and see new and unique statues in the attractive sculpture garden. Families congregate at weekly events and monthly festivals. They enjoy an outstanding library and a stroll along the riverfront. They meet with friends for summer concerts under the stars or listen to symphonic music. On bright winter days, parents sip hot cocoa as they admire their children’s skill on the ice rink.

Bicyclists travel into downtown along the bike path and park their bicycles next to others in front of a small cafe. They order beverages and catch up with old friends. They go for a short walk and browse the windows of boutiques, vowing to return the next day to shop. They get back on their bicycles and head off into one of the surrounding neighborhoods on a historic bike tour.

The nighttime brings excitement, music, dancing, and dining. A little jazz, a little blues, a little Cajun, a little Italian. Anything you desire. A foreign film, the latest flick, old-time favorites, late into the evening, entertainment for everyone.

There is no fear, there is no crime, and parking is just around the corner. The short walk from your car to your destination is a delightful experience of sights, sounds, and smells. You pass a boutique, a bakery, a coffee shop, friends sipping tea and discussing a new author at an outside café, and the riverboat sounds its horn. You observe a “citizen guide” giving directions to a visitor. The local beat officer passes by, smiles, and greets you with a “good afternoon.” You think to yourself that coming downtown is always such a pleasurable experience. You can’t wait for the holiday season to see how vendors will light up the downtown.

Activities. Committee members must brainstorm ideas for activities that will meet their work plan objectives. Once they decide on activities for the year, they will need to write up work plans for each activity.

For each project, the committee should generate a list of steps, which will become tasks that can be assigned to volunteers. By defining all the steps necessary to complete a project, setting a timeline and budget, and assigning volunteers to be responsible for every step, each committee will have a clear idea of the resources it will need that year. For example, if you are putting together a business directory, you know that the steps include contacting all the businesses; compiling information; and then coordinating the directory's design, printing, and distribution. Because the work plan reduces all projects to incremental tasks that volunteers can complete in a specific period of time, the task of contacting business owners can be delegated to several volunteers. Be careful not to overload a single volunteer or staff member. If the committee doesn't have someone to handle every task, such as finding someone to design the directory or work with the printer, those unassigned jobs become volunteer recruitment priorities. That is why a work plan is so crucial for recruiting volunteers. Taking the time to plan ways to complete each project can save time later in the year when projects are already under way. The work planning process is important—every person who participates in the process will offer his or her own creativity and unique perspective.

## Adopting the Completed Work Plans

The board of directors should review the completed project plans, looking for duplication or overlap among the committees and using the committee budgets to establish the program budget. After determining whether committee projects can be accomplished in one year, the board also approves timelines for each activity. The timing of projects is important, especially for activities that rely on other tasks being completed first—such as a façade improvement program that will not be announced until the low-interest loan pool is established.

Once projects have been adopted, committees should be free to complete them without seeking approval from the board on every matter. As long as work progresses according to the plan, board members don't need to become involved in the details; instead, they should be available for support or mentoring. Any amendments to the plan should be taken to the board for approval. Each year, the board should examine the committees' goals to see if they need to be modified as the program matures.

Share the final work plans with the members of all committees so that they know what everyone is working on. The work plans should also become tools for guiding all committee and board meetings. At committee meetings, the agenda should include discussion, or at least reports, of progress and deadlines coming up in the work plan.

## Work Plans with a Purpose

When developing annual work plans, remember the purposes they serve:

- To manage the wide range of activities that must take place for a revitalization effort to succeed. From a project management perspective, work plans get committee members on the same page so they understand clearly what needs to be accomplished during the year. The board can also use work plans to ensure integration of the four points among all committees.

Understanding how many steps it will take to complete a project can help you realistically plan what can be done each year and create a timeline for pacing incremental activities. A detailed work plan that breaks down big projects into volunteer-sized tasks will divide the workload into manageable pieces and help the committee identify additional volunteer needs for the year.

- To develop a budget for activities. Work plans are crucial budgeting tools. Committee members need to assign costs and revenues to all portions of their work program. The board of directors then compiles all of these individual budgets into a full organizational budget. As previously stated, work plans should drive the budget, not the other way around.
- To explain the organization's purpose and activities to the public. Good work plans have benefits beyond organizing work. They are also useful public relations

## An Example of a Work Plan Element

Goal for Economic Restructuring Committee:

Research and analyze the downtown's economic conditions.

Objective #1: Understand the retail market conditions that affect the downtown.

### Activities:

- Gather the most recent Census data.
- Conduct customer and merchant surveys.
- Obtain copies of market studies from city planning department.
- Conduct preliminary market analysis.

Objective #2: Gather information about downtown real estate.

### Activities:

- Develop a base map that shows all downtown buildings.
- Conduct a building inventory and note vacant lots and abandoned buildings.
- Collect real estate data from tax office.
- Collect historical data (maps, photos, directories).