

# Preface (partial)

In recent years particularly the past decade, citizens have demanded that their aging main streets be brought back to life. Our municipal officials have responded to this challenge in a number of different and creative ways. Numerous strategies have evolved in recent years to revitalize our main streets, including the use of economic development incentives. While municipal officials can ensure the public's safety by hiring police officers and fire fighters, and they can rebuild the public infrastructure, other measures are needed to attract merchants and professionals to fill up vacant space on Main Street. Over the past decade, the tools to rebuild our downtowns have evolved from a loose assortment of inducements to the use of many diverse, yet highly focused, incentive programs. In many cases, these incentives can be tailored in such a way as to achieve those goals desired by public officials as they rebuild their main streets.

The first section of this volume includes an introduction to the state of America's small cities, and provides a brief overview of their economic development programs as they relate to revitalizing our main streets. The actual steps required to get started with the downtown renewal process are also briefly examined. Cur-

rent economic development trends and practices are reviewed based on a national study conducted by the international City/County Management Association. The survey results lend insight into how communities plan their economic development programs, the levels and sources of their funding, the types and number of people assigned to these programs, and to what extent they use performance measurements to determine program results. Since small businesses play such an important role on Main Street, issues facing small businesses are reviewed. This chapter also examines how to tailor assistance and incentive programs to address these issues. The chapters in this section provide the reader with insight into the evolving field of Main Street renewal.

The second section examines how communities should organize and manage their Main Street renewal programs. The results of a national study on how local governments organize for economic development set the stage for a detailed discussion on this topic. The role of municipal government in the economic development process is examined. The author stresses that public officials at City Hall must be involved in the revitalization of their downtowns. Because of its importance, a chapter is included

on precisely how to create partnerships between city government and small businesses. The various participants involved in this process, as well as their roles and responsibilities, are also highlighted. Public officials, prior to initiating a main Street program, need to conduct a critical self-evaluation of their community to assess their commitment and involvement in this process. The concluding chapter of this section examines ways to manage development and growth, placing emphasis on sustainable community development practices, including preservation strategies.

The two longest sections are devoted to the tools available for Main Street renewal, and the actual case studies showing the successful application of these tools. These tools include, but are certainly limited to, how a community should assess its development potential, requirements of the Community Reinvestment Act, ways to revitalize our main streets, practices to improve downtown safety, and the use of the Rehabilitation Tax Credit to attract investment. Chapters are also included on how to keep retailers on Main Street, the importance of parking facilities and the proper ways to manage them, how to use rural banks for economic growth, available small business development tools, methods to strengthen downtown businesses, and the use of tax increment financing. Eleven chapters examine the tools available for Main Street renewal. A discussion of these tools, however, would not be complete with showing how they have been successfully applied in our communities across America.

Case studies describe, among other things, how municipalities should evaluate and assess their Main Streets, the initial phase of a longer-range strategic planning process. Other case studies examine how to use plazas and public

spaces to attract citizens, how residential streets can be brought back to life, what public officials should learn from the shopping malls, and how to use a community's available infill development potential. Public officials in a few municipalities have even created new Main Streets to foster a "sense of community." Some communities have carefully focused their attention on the use of architecture and building design criteria to attract downtown merchants and shoppers. Others have sought out specific types of retail development and tenants to match the needs of their citizens. One case study even examines how an old Eastern mill town was revitalized. In all, 18 case studies highlight the successful application of the Main Street renewal tools described in the previous section.

The communities examined in this volume are typically small ones, ranging in size from a few thousand citizens in rural locations to over 50,000 in a few cases like Santa Monica, California, and West Palm Beach, Florida. These cities are larger because they are located in highly congested metropolitan areas. Clearly, most of America's cities are not large population centers. The municipalities selected for this volume are typically very small by big city standards, and usually, with few exceptions, include those communities with populations under 25,000. The focus of this work is on ways to revitalize our Main Streets — that single street that represents the very essence of our downtown. Geographically, those communities examined range from the west (California, Colorado, Washington) to the east (Massachusetts, New York, and Ohio), and from the north (North Dakota and Wisconsin) to the South (Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas), as well as the midwest (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, and Kansas). In short, the cities and towns examined in

this volume represent a healthy mix of small communities in virtually every geographic region of the United States.

The final section of this volume includes a chapter that provokes critical thinking about how local economic development programs are conducted as we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Also examined are the private pressures brought to bear for incentive programs, and how local government officials can use them judiciously, keeping in mind their goal of serving the public's interest. Next, ten traditional myths about downtown revitalization are highlighted, along with seven secrets of downtown success. A national survey reveals that jobs and economic development scored high on the minds of community leaders across the nation. Slightly over one-half of the survey respondents felt that local public officials should be doing more in the area of municipal economic development. The final chapter stresses the importance of cities and suburbs working together, based on the strong justification that is provided for them to achieve the mutual needs of their local economic region. This study, conducted by the National League of Cities, proves that a positive economic linkage exists between center cities and the towns and communities that surround them. The bottom line is that it is in the best interest for cities and their suburbs to work together to achieve their economic development goals.

A listing of resource organizations for local economic development is provided in the Appendix. This listing categorizes resources into four main areas: general, business attractions, business retention and expansion,

and tourism and retirement development. Two Internet resources are also listed. One provides on-line information about rural resources available to communities. The other provides access to the on-line resources provided by the National Center for Small Communities.

A comprehensive annotated bibliography on small city economic development is included. The brief narrative descriptions for each entry provide the reader with quick insight into the essence of each book contained in this selective bibliography.

The use of Main Street assistance and incentive programs has evolved primarily over the past few decades. They are typically applied in a piecemeal and incremental fashion by public officials from community to community, depending upon the unique set of inducements considered by individual municipalities. While federal and state law may limit the types of incentives that can be provided by communities, the need exists to codify the available information concerning those generally acceptable practices of local Main Street programs. This information must be made available to our local elected leaders, our municipal public officials, and, most importantly, to the citizens they represent. Most published works on economic development practices deal with large cities and big deals. This volume, on the other hand, deals with small towns and community-business partnerships. For this reason, this work is important because it is a collection of the best-written resources available focusing exclusively on this topic.