



The Virginia Main Street Program



Town Council Presentation – Cape Charles, VA
September 8, 2016

Intro –

Who am I? - **Felicia Hart** –

- Community Development Director, Town of Front Royal, VA
- Over 35 years of Virginia Main Street experience – but not here as a representative of the Virginia Main Street program
- I've worked with over 25 Main Street communities
- I've also worked with over 60 non-profits to train board members
- I've served on numerous large disasters with the RC and had to quickly train “managers” and over 5,000 willing volunteers on-the-fly
- And of course, The School of Hard Knocks

Expectations of this meeting –

- Open dialogue – ask questions when you want to
- I understand you are looking at who should be considered as a potential member of this committee
- I understand the Virginia Main Street program is brand new to most of you
- I understand that you were an affiliate of the Virginia Main Street program
- I understand that the Council fully believes in the Main Street approach
- I understand we have approximately an hour to discuss tonight

Overview of Virginia Main Street –

- Been around for almost 40 years
- Movement led by the National Trust Main Street Center
- Times have changed – most Main Streets can no longer provide the range of goods and services that our parents expected
- Downtowns must be a collaborative effort with both public and private investments
- A gradual process – lots of work involved
- Requires full-time, professional attention with an overall game plan

Four-Point Approach –

- A community business district often accounts for as much as 40 percent of the district's jobs and 50 percent of its tax base;
- But your Main Street is more than an economic asset;
- Your Main Street evokes strong emotions and helps define your identity;
- You can't just paint or revitalize and expect long-term success;
- A holistic approach must be understood and practiced –
- Thus the four-point approach was developed

Four-Point Approach –

- **1) Organization –**
 - means getting everyone working toward the same goal(s). Using a volunteer-driven program with an organizational structure of a governing board and committees can ease the hard work of building consensus and cooperation among the groups that have an important stake in your downtown.



Four-Point Approach –

- **2) Promotion –**

- Means selling the image and promise of Main Street to all prospects. By marketing the downtown's unique characteristics to shoppers, investors, both existing and new businesses, and visitors, an effective promotion strategy forges a positive image through advertising, retail promotional activity, special events and marketing campaigns carried out by local volunteers. It serves to improve consumer and investor confidence in your downtown.

Four-Point Approach –

- **3) Design –**

- Means getting your Main Street into top physical shape. Capitalizing on its best assets – such as historic buildings and traditional pedestrian-oriented layouts – is just part of this. An inviting atmosphere, created through window displays, parking areas, building improvements, street furniture, signs, sidewalks, street lights, and landscaping, conveys a visual message about what the commercial district is and what it has to offer – and more importantly – sends a loud message that your town and elected officials care.

Four-Point Approach –

- **4) Economic Restructuring –**
 - Strengthens a community's existing economic assets while diversifying its economic base. By helping existing businesses expand and recruiting new ones to respond to today's market, Main Street programs help convert unused or underutilized space into economically productive property and sharpen the competitiveness and profitability of businesses.

Now, all that being said –

- **Fair warning –**
 - Most resources (people and money) are local
 - Not everyone will want to play with you
 - Everyone has an agenda
 - There are no special formulas or magic wands (big sticks maybe)
 - Make sure you're selling yourself now – and always
 - Set realistic expectations for everyone finally sitting at that same table

Board make-up –

- Members need to be –
 - Decisive;
 - Action-oriented;
 - Able to help recruit committee members;
 - Small enough to represent cross section of your community;
 - Ideally between nine (9) and 15 members

Who should you be looking for? –

- At least a couple of current business owners
- Downtown property owner(s)
- A realtor
- A rep from your Planning and Zoning department
- A government representative (town and county)
- Several roll-up your sleeves local volunteers who care
- A media person (if possible)
- A local banker
- A local resident
- A Chamber representative
- Reps from local community organizations (historical society/churches, etc.)
- A rep from your local business association
- A rep from your EDA or regional commission
- A rep from your Visitor Center
- A rep from a business outside your downtown area
- A rep from a larger industry in your area

Advisory Committee/Council –

- I understand you currently have one
- I would suggest, that depending on how many committee members want to become full-fledged board members, that you transition this Advisory Committee to an Advisory Board – this ensures that your vision is being carried forward.
- Your Advisory Board should be working in that “advisory” capacity with your Main Street Board

Be aware that at the same time –

- You are looking for four (4) board members to serve as committee chairs of:
 - Organization committee;
 - Promotion committee;
 - Design committee; and the
 - Economic Restructuring committee



Consider too –

- Board member applications - includes
 - Board member definition/expectations;
 - Board member application form; and
 - Board member letter of intent that they sign

I highly recommend that –

- Each committee is responsible for finding their own committee members – based on their specific goals:
 - Organization committee;
 - Promotion committee;
 - Design committee; and the
 - Economic Restructuring committee
- This helps ensure
 - Board members don't get burned out;
 - A broader base of volunteers who care

Consider –

- While all this is going on, you should be
 - Finalizing the job description for your Executive Director
 - Council should be deciding on how much financial support will be given from the town – **and for how long;**
 - Council develops expectations on what this “department” does vs what the other departments are doing downtown, i.e. maintenance, flower beds/baskets maintenance, etc.

Also Consider –

- While all this is going on, you should be
 - Pulling together by-laws for this group (with town attorney approval if needed);

Make sure first tasks of board are –

- Developing a mission statement;
- Developing a vision statement;
- Developing a 30-second elevator pitch;

And, let me just say –

- Think about these -
 - Will the Town be content on just being an “affiliate” of the Main Street program, or will the Town want to become a Designated Community – make sure you understand the long-term commitment to this;
 - Once you have your board established, reach out to the Virginia Main Street and ask for training – but training for the entire board and I would highly suggest, training that includes all of Town Council and maybe even department heads

Think about these –

- I'm willing to bet you are like most other small towns and there has been talk about doing something – make sure your business/work plan includes several easy, low-hanging “successes” that you can start off with. It's important to show that you are not just another group that is talking about making a difference – you need to show these successes;
- Make sure that your work plan establishes realistic expectations that include individual line items for budgeting, a time line for accountability, and point people to manage;
- And ensure that your work plan includes a viable, robust marketing plan so that everyone knows what (and when) you are trying to achieve.

Wrapping Up –

- Starting your own Main Street is a huge undertaking;
- Take it slow to ensure you think things through and understand the repercussions of your actions – or not;
- This is a work in progress

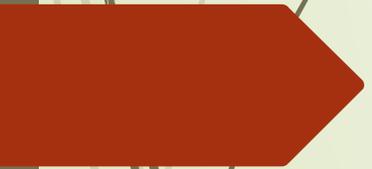


Questions? –

- Open dialogue here –
- I'm always available should you have additional questions afterwards;
- Lots of on-line resources to take advantage of too.

Thank you –

- For wanting to make a positive difference;
- And for inviting me to visit





Organization Committee

Purpose:

- Promote program to stakeholders and the community;
- Manage staff and volunteers;
- Raise money for activities and administration;
- Manage the program's finances

Internal tasks:

- Draft a committee work plan;
- Put together a media resource list;
- Develop a speakers' bureau;
- Develop a volunteer recruitment strategy;
- Develop a fund raising strategy

Organization Committee

External tasks:

- Produce a newsletter;
- Develop social media outlets;
- Create a website for the program;
- Produce a revitalization program brochure;
- Develop fund-raising materials;
- Hold semi-annual volunteer orientation seminars;
- Hold an annual fund drive;
- Hold an annual meeting and produce an annual report;
- Write a newspaper or magazine column

Promotion Committee

Purpose:

- Develop a marketing strategy;
- Enhance downtown's image;
- Provide assistance at retail events;
- Develop special events that tie in all your businesses/ restaurants/shops

Internal tasks:

- Draft a committee work plan;
- Produce and analyze promotional calendar and events;
- Develop a promotional strategy, based on market analysis;
- Develop an advertising strategy

Promotion Committee

External tasks:

- Create a logo for your Main Street;
- Produce a printed calendar of Main Street events – push through website and social media;
- Produce a business directory;
- Develop an image-enhancement ad campaign for the district;
- Develop holiday promotions and decorations;
- Develop retail tie-ins to existing events; add fresh promotion/ads and new activities

Design Committee

Purpose:

- Provide design education and technical assistance;
- Develop finance assistance and incentives;
- Plan public improvements;
- Provide design regulation and review

Internal tasks:

- Draft a committee work plan;
- Conduct a building inventory with pictures;
- Review codes and ordinances;
- Inventory and evaluate technical and financial resources available for design improvements

Design Committee

External tasks:

- Conduct merchant/building owner visits in conjunction with program director;
- Hold a “clean-up day”;
- Conduct a traffic/parking study;
- Draft voluntary design guidelines;
- Provide improvement incentives, such as grants, loans, discounts and technical design services;
- Produce a design incentives brochure;
- Identify and solicit a minimum of four solid commitments to rehabilitate buildings

Economic Restructuring Committee

Purpose:

- Collect data about downtown businesses and markets;
- Develop business retention, expansion and recruitment strategies;
- Develop property;
- Create incentives for business/property development

Internal tasks:

- Draft a committee work plan;
- Collect existing data, such as market studies, master plans and current incentives;
- Conduct a business survey that evaluates your “gaps” in service;
- Keep a Main Street progress chart of rehabs, jobs, new businesses, investment, tax revenue, etc.
- Create a revitalization district base map;
- Help Design Committee develop financial incentives for building rehab projects;
- Develop financial/technical assistance for business owners

Economic Restructuring Committee

External tasks:

- Create an orientation kit for new business owners;
- Create a business recruitment kit;
- Hold workshops for business owners on topics such as customer service, floor planning and business plans, window decorating, managing social media, etc.;
- Conduct a preliminary market analysis;
- Develop business incentives