

RESTORE
OREGON

FieldNotes

FALL 2020

MAGAZINE

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION



HORSING AROUND



WITH HARLEY COWAN

THE HERITAGE DOCUMENTATION OF
PORTLAND'S ICONIC CAROUSEL

+ BRINGING NEW
VITALITY TO OUR
HISTORIC
DOWNTOWNS

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THE OREGON MAIN STREET NETWORK

*Bringing New Vitality
to Our Historic
Downtowns*

By Sheri Stuart



Oregon is rich in historic downtowns and traditional commercial neighborhoods in communities small and large. Downtown are the heart and soul of a city, an indicator of a community's economic health, quality of life, community pride, and reflects a town's heritage and history. Many have suffered years of decline, and helping them restore their vibrancy is vital to Oregon's economic future.

To that end, Oregon Main Street (OMS) was re-started by the Oregon Legislature in 2007 to help spark reinvestment and breathe new life into these districts. Today over 90 communities across the state are participating at some level in its tiered structure.

OMS is housed within Heritage Programs in Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. It is designed to assist the revitalization of traditional downtowns and historic commercial districts, promote economic development, and encourage historic preservation. OMS empowers local communities to develop their own comprehensive action plans based on a vision for where they want to be in 10 to 15-years.

Support comes in the form of resources and technical assistance based on the highly successful Main Street Approach™ (Organization, Promotion, Economic Vitality, and Design) developed by the National Main Street Center forty years ago, and used in thousands of communities across the country. This Four-Point Approach™ advocates a return to community self-reliance, local empowerment, and the rebuilding of central business districts based on their assets, unique architecture, personal service, local ownership, and entrepreneurship.

Organization involves getting everyone working toward the same goal and assembling the appropriate human and financial resources to implement a Main Street revitalization program. A governing board and project committees make up the fundamental organizational structure of the volunteer-driven program. Volunteers are coordinated and supported by a paid executive director.

Promotion forges a positive image of the commercial district and encourages consumers and investors to live, work, shop, play, and invest in the Main Street district. Advertising, media relations, retail promotional activity, special events and marketing campaigns carried out by local volunteers promote the district's unique characters.

Design means getting Main Street into top physical shape. Capitalizing on its best assets — such as historic buildings and pedestrian-oriented streets — is just part of the story. An inviting atmosphere, created through attractive window displays, well-managed parking areas, building improvements, street furniture, signs, sidewalks, lights and landscaping, conveys a positive visual message about the district and what it has to offer.

Economic Vitality strengthens a community's existing economic assets while expanding and diversifying its economic base. The Main Street program helps sharpen the competitiveness of existing business owners, helps to foster entrepreneurial start-ups and expansions, and recruits compatible new businesses and new economic uses to build a commercial district, create jobs, and respond to today's consumer. Converting unused or underused commercial space into economically productive property also helps boost the profitability and sales tax revenue of the district.

Historic Preservation = Economic Development

OMS collects quarterly data from the top two tiers in the network. Since 2010, these twenty communities have seen:

- \$112.1 million total private investment in physical improvements
- \$109.8 million total public sector investment in physical improvements
- 1,262 building improvement projects
- 644 net new businesses
- 151 business expansions
- 3,885 net new jobs
- 241,761 total volunteer hours

Plus, OMS has had two back-to-back "Great American Main Street" award winners: Downtown Oregon City Association (2018) and Alberta Main Street (2019).



Case Studies

Klamath Falls

In 2008, a group of ambitious business people, property owners, and interested citizens saw an opportunity to enhance Klamath Falls' charming, historic downtown and formed the Klamath Falls Downtown Association (KFDA). Since its inception in 2009, KFDA has conducted numerous projects aimed at improving economic conditions, preserving historic assets, and promoting downtown Klamath Falls as a destination.

One of the key challenges for downtown was the vast number of vacant upper floor spaces. KFDA saw the opportunity to encourage and support upper floor residential development. They worked with the City and OMS to on a series of workshops geared towards property owners to identify barriers and connect with resources. The big stumbling block was the need to add elevators for accessibility.

When funding became available through the Oregon Main Street Revitalization Grant in 2017, KFDA applied and received a \$100,000 grant to fund elevators for two buildings, which helped two housing projects move forward, resulting in 24 new housing units.

KFDA was the recipient of a second OMSRG in 2019 for another upper-floor housing project. The impact went beyond the housing units created. As Darin Rutledge, executive director of KFDA, stated, "This project will inspire others to explore the potential for upper level residential units in our unused spaces. The fact that these 4 apartments filled up in less than a week, during a virus-related economic shutdown is indicative of the severe need of quality rentals."

Albany

Our Oregon Main Street Communities have been particularly resourceful and innovative during the pandemic. They have been on the ground working one-on-one with business owners, connecting them with the resources and information that they need to survive. And, they have been creative in developing marketing efforts such as Albany's Drive Up Downtown activity that both promoted restaurants that were available for take-out, and worked with the City to temporarily establish take-out parking spots to make it easy for customers to have no-contact meal pick-up.

Beaverton

The City of Beaverton experienced rapid growth in the 1970s and 1980s spreading outward quickly, with large, suburban-style shopping centers, single-family homes, and widening roads to accommodate increasing car

traffic. As a result, Beaverton's traditional downtown remained underdeveloped and overlooked. The Beaverton Downtown Association (BDA) was formed in response to the community outcry for a vibrant downtown filled with shops, entertainment, housing and events, with activities 18 hours a day.

When BDA and OMS surveyed the community in 2017, community members used words like "potential", "emerging", "disjointed" and "undiscovered" to describe downtown. They said downtown Beaverton needed more nightlife, unique retail shops, restaurants and coffee shops, and updated storefronts. Currently, downtown Beaverton is in the midst of transforming into the vibrant downtown the community desires.

Thirteen new restaurants have opened downtown since the City of Beaverton launched an initiative in 2016 in partnership with the BDA to recruit new restaurants. During the pandemic, the City and BDA have worked to open outdoor seating in on-street parking spaces. It has been a lifeline for businesses during a time when they can't allow as many people in their stores. In addition, in 2019 BDA received a \$200,000 Oregon Main Street revitalization grant for improvements to the 1940 Nak Won building. This supports retention of five viable downtown businesses owned by people of color.

Partnerships

One of the true strengths in Oregon is the willingness of different partners to support the work of others. This is certainly true for Oregon Main Street and some of our key partners, such as Restore Oregon. A great example is the Historic Theaters project. Historic theaters are part of a community's identity, provide gathering and performance spaces, and are a catalyst for economic development.

Restore Oregon conducted a series of regional workshops, hosted the League of Historic American Theaters regional conference in Oregon, and laid the foundation to enable Oregon Heritage to receive a \$615,000 historic theaters restoration grant from the National Park Service. Restore Oregon has supported the work of local Main Street organizations, including: development of the Preservation Toolkit; producing white papers on issues like unreinforced masonry buildings; advocating for more preservation incentives, and by giving threatened Main Street properties visibility on the Most Endangered Places list along with providing consultation, advocacy, and seed grants.

Sheri Stuart is the State Coordinator at Oregon Main Street. She has worked with Main Street communities for 30 years at the local, state, and national levels, including 11 of those here in Oregon. Photos courtesy of Sheri Stuart. All photos pre-COVID19 pandemic.