

Celebrating 40 Years of Main Street South Carolina



Impact Report



Municipal Association of South Carolina

1411 Gervais St.
PO Box 12109
Columbia, SC 29211

 803.799.9574

 803.933.1299

 www.masc.sc/main-street-south-carolina

Contents

Main Street South Carolina The Municipal Association of SC

Our History

- 1983 – 2023
- Remembering Our Founder
- Our Journey
- Lessons from Main Street

Our Work

- The National Network
- The Four Point Approach™
- Statewide Results
- Technical Assistance
- Program Structure
- The Great American Main Street Award in SC

Locally Powered

- Local Program Leadership
- Careers With Impact
- Local Government Partners
- Small Business Leaders

Looking Ahead

Credits



MAIN STREET
South Carolina



The Bailey Building
Laurens, SC

Main Street South Carolina

In 1983, South Carolina established its Main Street program to help revitalize South Carolina's historic downtowns. As a program of the Municipal Association of South Carolina, Main Street SC offers comprehensive technical assistance, expert training, and a supportive network to transform our state's historic commercial districts into vibrant economic and cultural hubs.

In the 40 years since 1983, Main Street SC has helped over 70 communities. Today, we proudly serve 33 local Main Street programs, guiding strategic planning and downtown revitalization management. By building local capacity, we help communities leverage their unique assets, driving sustainable economic growth and preserving the state's invaluable historic fabric.

As a coordinating partner of the national network of Main Street America, we connect our communities to broader opportunities. This connection not only places South Carolina's communities on a national platform, but it also enables the sharing and implementation of successful strategies from across the country. We adapt economic development best practices to the specific needs of South Carolina's historic commercial districts.

Through a holistic grassroots preservation-based approach, Main Street South Carolina works to ensure that each of our communities thrives. We believe in the potential of SC's historic downtowns and commit to nurturing their growth and prosperity.

Guided by the Main Street Four Point Approach™, a strategic framework that fosters sustainable economic growth, Main Street SC has effectively leveraged our state's limited local resources.

Central to our work is the belief that the success of revitalization must be directed by the communities themselves. We serve as facilitators, providing support, resources, and guidance. It is each community's initiative and action that make true transformation possible.

The relationships among local Main Street programs and community leaders across the state is a cornerstone of the Main Street network's effectiveness. The Main Street network fosters a dynamic, collaborative community of practice, facilitating the sharing of insights and challenges — ensuring we learn from each other and continually improve.

Our dedication to supporting economic opportunities, growing community engagement, and preserving South Carolina's historic resources will continue to guide the ways in which we help strengthen vibrant downtown districts.



Jenny C. Boulware
State Coordinator
Main Street South Carolina



The Municipal Association of SC

During the past four decades, South Carolina's Main Street program has supported the revitalization of our state's downtown districts, harnessing the power of local resources and action to guide long-term economic growth.

Main Street's relevance and impact was underscored when our world was upended by the COVID-19 pandemic. Main Street South Carolina was essential in helping local communities coordinate their responses and resources.

From its inception in 1983, Main Street South Carolina has understood the significance of our state's downtowns — they are geographic centers of commerce and community.

Main Street SC's success is evident. By utilizing the Main Street Four Point Approach™, vacant structures have been transformed into vibrant enterprises, historic facades have been restored, and new jobs have been created.

We are proud partners of the Main Street America™ network, committed to building stronger communities through preservation-based economic development.

About the Municipal Association of SC Board of Directors

A 19-member board of directors, composed of both elected and appointed officials, sets policy for the Association. The officers are elected to one-year terms at the Association's Annual Meeting.

Board members are elected at the Association's Annual Meeting for three-year terms. The board is composed of representatives from each area of the 10 councils of governments and four at-large seats.

As we celebrate the 40th anniversary of South Carolina's Main Street Program, I am filled with pride for the remarkable revitalization of our city's and town's downtown districts. Over the past four decades, we have seen countless transformations, proof that when communities establish a vision, great action unfolds.

We understand that South Carolina's historic downtown districts are far more than economic hubs — they are reflections of our history, culture, and spirit.

The success of Main Street SC is magnified by its unique position as our economic development technical assistance program. This arrangement offers unparalleled value by allowing seamless coordination and streamlined communication with cities and towns across our state. It leverages a unified network that brings together diverse resources and knowledge, enabling communities to learn from each other's experiences and successes.

As we celebrate this milestone, I would like to thank our dedicated staff, members, volunteers, and partners who have been part of our journey. Your unwavering dedication has been instrumental to visible success.



B. Todd Glover, Executive Director
Municipal Association of SC



Municipal Association
of South Carolina

Our History



The first five Main Street Cities launch their downtown revitalization programs: Chester, Georgetown, Lancaster, Sumter and Union.

1984

SCDDA developed partnerships with various state agencies, including the SC Arts Commission, the SC Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism, the SC Chamber of Commerce and Clemson University.

1985

By this year, the State of SC had invested \$345,000 in the program, and a combination of public and private investment amounted to over \$3 million. This resulted in over \$40,000,000 in new private investment, more than 1,800 new jobs, and 484 new businesses.

1990



Bill Stiener becomes the second program director of SCDDA.

2002



Beppie LeGrand becomes the third program director of the renamed Main Street SC program.

2005



Main Street SC is rebranded to reflect the Four Point Approach.™

2020

The "South Carolina Downtown Development Association" is established for the purpose of implementing "The Main Street Program." SCDDA is a non-profit and that sets up the framework to launch a formal partnerships with cities and towns across South Carolina.

September 14
1983



Ben Boozer is hired as the first statewide Main Street Director in South Carolina.

Establishment of the "Small Towns Program" targeting communities with populations less than 5,000.

1985



Agreement established between the Municipal Association of SC and SCDDA to provide office space at the Municipal Association building.

1987

39 communities had become members of SCDDA, with most enrolled in the Main Street and Small Towns Programs. SCDDA added a fifth staff member, Beppie LeGrand, who oversaw the execution of the quarterly training events and annual retreats, providing technical assistance to communities around the state.

1995



SCDDA is renamed Main Street SC when it officially becomes a technical assistance program of the Municipal Association of SC (MASC).

2005

Jenny Boulware becomes the fourth program director of the state Main Street Program.

2018



MASC adds a full-time staff member dedicated to support Main Street SC.

2023

Remembering Our Founder

Benjamin Carol (Ben) Boozer

April 4, 1936 – April 12, 2022

In the landscape of South Carolina's economic development, few figures have had as significant an impact as Benjamin Carol Boozer, a man I was fortunate enough to call a close friend for over 30 years. Ben was the founder of South Carolina's Main Street program, and he passed away on April 12, 2022, leaving behind a legacy of achievement and service to the state he loved. At 86 years old, he had lived a full life, one marked by his dedication to his community, his state, and family.

Ben was a native of South Carolina, residing in Charleston and Columbia for many years. Known as a natural leader, he had a profound affection for all things South Carolina. His career was a testament to this, spent largely in public service as an expert in city and community development where I grew to know him well. He was recognized for his contributions with an honorary doctorate from Clemson University and the state's highest award, the Order of the Palmetto, in recognition of his lifetime of extraordinary achievements, service, and contributions.

Ben was in many people's eyes, the "Superhero of Main Street South Carolina." He had the innate ability to see the unseen – to imagine what a downtown could become, to bring people together for the greater good of their community and to believe that success was possible if the people simply believed in themselves and their ability to accomplish the goal at hand.

We cannot overlook Ben's strength and determination! He worked tirelessly and moved from one community, to the next. He listened when he could have spoken. He knew when to push forward and when to hold back. His ability to "read" people was definitely one of his strongest attributes.

Ben believed that downtowns were a vital part of every community's economic engine. He worked hard to ensure that every project was unique to the community that he was working in at the time. "Cookie cutter" and "one size fits all" were never options for him. Ben Boozer loved South Carolina's Main Streets – its directors, its people and their willingness to make "their place" better. He valued the human connection and considered it to be the heartbeat of a vibrant community. Most of all, he took extreme pleasure in the joy discovered when people could see their clear vision become reality.

As we look around at the thriving network of Main Street communities across South Carolina, we are reminded of Ben's extraordinary impact. His spirit of unity, his belief in the power of community, and his tireless dedication continue to inspire us. Ben Boozer may no longer be with us in person, but his heart—the heart of South Carolina's Main Street program—beats strong in the communities he helped shape, guiding us forward and reminding us of the power of believing in the potential of our places and our people.

I was extremely blessed to have known him, worked with him and I am proud to have called him a true friend.

W. Maceo Nance

South Carolina Department of Commerce
2024 Recipient of the Order of the Palmetto



Ben Boozer



Our Journey

Over the last 40 years, few programs across the State of South Carolina, and more broadly across the United States, have had a larger positive impact on small businesses, and have directly touched the lives of so many people who live and visit rural communities, more than the Main Street program.

Looking back over these 40 years and reflecting on the triumphs, challenges, and opportunities, it is crucial to listen closely to the leaders who had the drive and vision to invest their lives into Main Street, into the people, the history, and the culture that Main Street supports and promotes.

In her book *Main Street's Comeback*, Mary Means, arguably the “founder” of the Main Street movement, reflects on the overall impact of the National Main Street Program across 1,600 communities. It has created over 745,000 new jobs, renovated and restored over 325,000 buildings, and started more than 168,000 new businesses all while leveraging \$101 billion in public-private investment. These concerted efforts to restore and revitalize downtown communities across America, all “without big government subsidy, and sometimes in places where no one would have predicted success” are monumental.

The story of Main Street South Carolina is the story of the underdog and is only a success story because so many individuals came together to work toward making their communities a better place. Main Street is more than just a program, it is also a story of leveraging our strengths to preserve, protect, and reinvigorate the culture, history, and the American dream.

On her time as a Main Street Director in Conway, South Carolina from 1986 to 1990, Elizabeth Stevens shared, “it was difficult because we were inventing a profession and we were lucky we had an excellent board, and an amazing city manager who was totally committed to the community. At the time people didn't necessarily believe that downtowns would be thriving places and there was a lot of skepticism; malls were supposed to be the future and downtown was dying.” Against this backdrop, they were able to work with local businesses, community groups, and city government to renovate dozens of buildings and attract businesses to open up downtown, setting the stage for a resurgence in Conway's downtown. Conway was an early adopter of the Main Street Approach™ in South Carolina. To this day, Conway continues to have an active program focused on Main Street, called “Conway Downtown Alive.”



Left to Right: Bill Steiner; Nancy Brown; Ben Boozer; Front: Bepie LeGrand; Irene Dumas Tyson

Lessons from Main Street

The Fight for Downtown Resurgence

Reflecting on the challenges of the 1980s and 1990s, Billy Parrish, another visionary associated with the Main Street movement and a former member of the National Main Street team assigned to South Carolina, shed light on trends in those early days. *"The rise of big box stores had a chilling effect on our downtowns,"* Parrish explained, *"There was a significant loss of retail, and we watched in real time as big box stores hollowed out the middle class in these communities."* As mega-stores dominated consumer attention, downtowns became shells of their former glory. Historic buildings sat empty, and businesses struggled to stay afloat amid a sea of skepticism. The impact of this trend was felt across South Carolina and the entire nation.

Yet, amid the discouraging atmosphere, the Main Street program did not lose hope or focus. Instead, they viewed it as a call to action. Speaking about Ben Boozer, the founder of the Main Street South Carolina program, Parrish said, *"Ben completely understood if you cannot connect downtown to the heart of the community, to the heart of the people that make up that community, then we are simply not succeeding in bringing downtown's back."* In the face of adversity, the Main Street Program exemplified the spirit of resilience and optimism, and that belief, coupled with unwavering effort, led to the rejuvenation we see today in downtowns across the country.

Giving Voice to the Community

In reflecting on her time as the Main Street South Carolina's third Program Director, Beppie LeGrand shared, *"I think my fondest memories were going into our communities and watching the light bulbs go off in the heads of business owners when, the man who owns the hardware store, the lady who owns the beauty salon, they would fully realize that they have a voice in the future and that they are the quality of their community, and it impacts their individual businesses. Seeing them just light up and get on board wanting to work on Main Street and making it the best it can be for their community was incredibly rewarding."*

Generational Impact of Main Street Programs

In her current role as Main Street Director in Mobile, Alabama, Elizabeth Stevens spoke about the generational shift taking place in downtown across America because of the efforts of Main Street programs. *"Downtown is again becoming a place in the national psyche. There is now a generation that grew up attending Main Street events that we were organizing for children in the 1990s and 2000s. Before that, we had a whole generation of people that never came downtown, who grew up in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. This generational shift has ushered in a new generation of business owners that want to be downtown when 20 years ago this was simply not the case."*

Community Building and Leadership

Bill Stiener, Main Street South Carolina's second Director, spoke fondly on his time working with Ben Boozer. *"Ben just wanted to help communities and never gave up on a community. He always believed that, as terrible as things were, there was the possibility for something good happening. He was always there for them. In a lot of cases, he was the person that made something actually happen just for the sheer force of will that he had. He loved the state. What Ben started and I continued was a powerful and important program for building community in the small towns of South Carolina; it was impactful."*

Celebrating Community

Fred Delk, the former Main Street Manager in Union, South Carolina from 1986 to 1996, said that in order to have a successful Main Street program, *"it takes the nature of the Main Street manager and the core of that person has to be community. They have to have the best interest of their town in their heart, and they will do what they have to make that town work. It takes an enormous amount of creative energy and endless positivity. These are hard jobs and you have to learn to celebrate every single event. I'm not kidding! If you plant a tree on Main Street, get five merchants from that block and gather together to celebrate it."*

The National Network

As Interim President and CEO of Main Street America, it is exciting to highlight our longstanding relationship with South Carolina's Main Street program. Established in 1983, South Carolina became one of the pioneering members of our network, embracing our vision of stronger communities through preservation-based economic development.

The network we have today, consisting of more than 40 Coordinating Programs and 1,200 designated neighborhoods across the country, is a testament to the shared commitment of states like South Carolina. It is their proactive efforts in building vibrant, inclusive, and economically thriving communities that have advanced our national grassroots movement.

South Carolina's leadership and contributions to the Main Street network have been invaluable. Their ability to weave the Main Street Approach™ and the Four Points (Economic Vitality, Design, Promotion, and Organization) into local context has paved the way for sustainable revitalization, stimulating economic growth while preserving community character.

In a time when many questioned the relevance and vibrancy of downtowns, South Carolina stood out as an advocate for their significance. Their hard work emphasized that downtowns are not just commercial districts — they are the heart of communities.

South Carolina's 40th year as a nationally recognized Main Street program is a tremendous milestone. We look forward to continuing to elevate economic vitality across America.



Hannah White
Interim President and CEO, 2022–2023
Main Street America



The Four Point Approach™



HOW MAIN STREET WORKS

The Main Street Approach™ is different from other community development strategies because it provides a comprehensive organizational framework.

- Main Street strengthens community connections.
- Main Street focuses on the highest and best uses of its historic buildings.
- Main Street is committed to good design.
- Main Street creates quality promotional programming.
- Main Street ensures a coordinated, incremental transformation process.

At its core, impactful Main Street work is fueled by professional management, dedicated volunteers and a commitment to action.



The Main Street Approach™ is centered around Transformation Strategies. A Transformation Strategy articulates a focused, deliberate path to revitalizing and strengthening a downtown commercial district's economy.

A local Main Street community's Transformation Strategies and action-based work should be organized around the Four Points.

Transformation Strategies – generated through meaningful community engagement and informed by an analysis of the district's realistic market dynamics – help to guide revitalization initiatives. An effective Transformation Strategy serves a particular customer segment, responds to an underserved market demand, or enhances downtown as a destination.

Some ready-to-use strategies – called Catalyst Strategies – fall into two broad categories: those that are focused on a specific customer segment and those that are focused on an industry, product, or service segment. Examples include:



- Arts and Entertainment
- Beautification Initiatives and Design
- Business Activation and Development
- Workers and Residents
- Community Serving
- Transportation and Pedestrian Experience
- Maintaining Authenticity
- Ecotourism and Recreation
- Public Health and Wellness
- Greenspace
- Family-Friendly
- Agricultural Focus
- College Town
- Placemaking
- Storytelling
- Foundation Building

DESIGN

With History in Mind, Design for Today

Main Street South Carolina's design principles echo a respect for the past while nurturing future growth. The ethos lies in the careful balance of honoring historical architectural gems and fostering innovative design ideas that enrich the community, ensuring every detail contributes to a charming, vibrant, and unified streetscape that bridges the old with the new.

The Mantissa Hotel
& Sam Kendall's
Hartsville, SC

Reviving History, Crafting Comfort: A Boutique Escape in Downtown Hartsville

The Mantissa Hotel has updated a central part of downtown Hartsville by combining modern design with refurbished history to provide a unique and comfortable upscale boutique hotel property. Completed in 2015, each glamorous suite offers its own dramatic décor within walking distance of local shops, restaurants, and Coker University.

Designing and Building A Catalyst for Reinvestment

Hartsville, SC is an accredited member of Main Street South Carolina. It has had a long history with the state Main Street network which has translated into clear results.

Main Street South Carolina partners closely with participating communities in providing technical advice and resources to support both design and historic preservation.

The City of Hartsville is nestled in the heart of the Pee Dee region with a population of around 7,500 about 30 miles from Florence and about an hour from Columbia.

Inspired by adaptive reuse projects, Hartsville transformed a Kimbrell's Furniture Store into a boutique hotel – The Mantissa. The building's rich architectural history and value helped to shape this project, ensuring that the end result would not only be a thriving boutique hotel and restaurant but also a monument to Hartsville's history.

This collaboration is a testament to the power of partnerships and vision in revitalizing communities, breathing new life into old structures, and preserving unique local character.

The Mantissa Hotel
Hartsville, SC

PROMOTION

Showcasing the Magic of Main Street and Making Downtown a Destination



The promotional aspect of the Four Point Approach™ to revitalization positions downtown as the center of activity, culture, commerce and community life, while creating a positive image that showcases the community's unique characteristics.

Promotion takes many forms, but the goal is to instill community pride and improve consumer and investor confidence in the commercial district. Advertising, retail promotions, special events and marketing campaigns help sell the image of Main Street to the community and surrounding region. Promotion communicates a commercial district's unique characteristics, business establishments and activities to shoppers, investors, potential business and property owners and visitors.



Festival of
Discovery
Greenwood, SC



Keeping Main Street's Traditions Alive and Vibrant

The revitalization of downtown Greenwood is a constant interplay between targeted promotional efforts, like the **Festival of Discovery** and strategic economic initiatives. As lively events attracted crowds, a renewed business pulse emerged in sync, creating a vibrant ecosystem. This harmonious blend of promotion and economic revitalization rekindled the heart of Greenwood, inviting businesses back into a once-forgotten downtown.

Festival of
Discovery
Greenwood, SC

Creating Connections, Celebrating Community

Promotion is crucial in revitalizing downtown areas. It stokes economic activity and instills community pride by celebrating the unique culture and history of a place.

The **Festival of Discovery** holds a significant place in Greenwood, South Carolina, as an important catalyst for growth and community engagement. This highly anticipated event showcases the best of the city, drawing both locals and visitors with its tantalizing food, vibrant atmosphere, and diverse range of attractions.

With its roots dating back to 2000, the Festival of Discovery has become an emblem of Greenwood's spirit, celebrating not only culinary delights but also music, arts, and the rich heritage of South Carolina. This annual gathering has played a vital role in driving tourism, supporting local businesses, and fostering a sense of pride and camaraderie among residents. As it continues to evolve and captivate audiences, the **Festival of Discovery** stands as a testament to Greenwood's thriving community and its bright future.

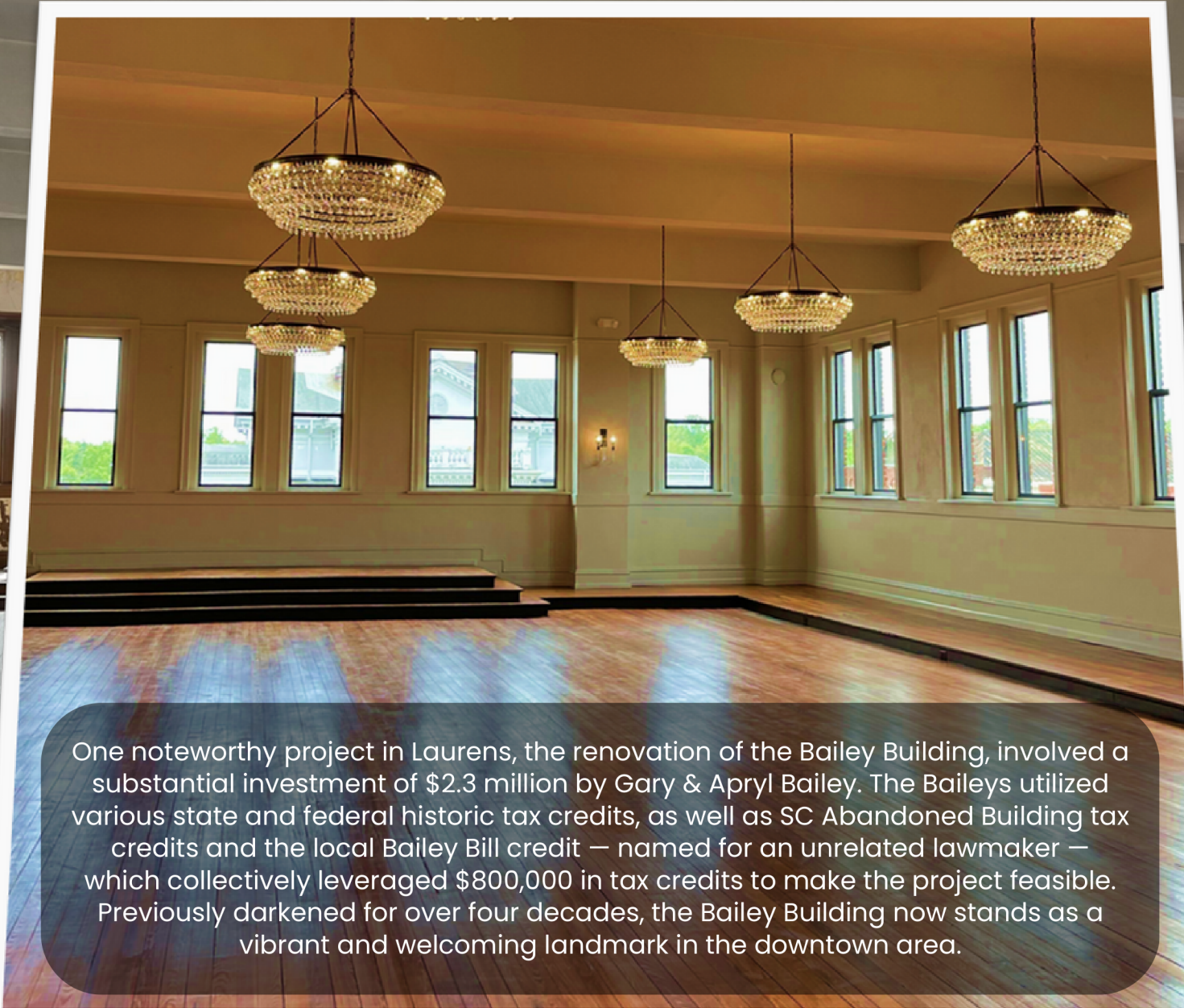
**\$2.8
MILLION**

**2022 TOTAL
ECONOMIC
IMPACT**

Data collected is derived from festival attendee expenditure projections, sales tax generated, restaurant revenue generated, and hospitality taxes generated.

ECONOMIC VITALITY

Fueling Economic Growth in Laurens



One noteworthy project in Laurens, the renovation of the Bailey Building, involved a substantial investment of \$2.3 million by Gary & Apryl Bailey. The Baileys utilized various state and federal historic tax credits, as well as SC Abandoned Building tax credits and the local Bailey Bill credit — named for an unrelated lawmaker — which collectively leveraged \$800,000 in tax credits to make the project feasible. Previously darkened for over four decades, the Bailey Building now stands as a vibrant and welcoming landmark in the downtown area.

ROOTIMENTARY



The Economic Enhancement team for Main Street Laurens includes representatives from small businesses, the Laurens County Development Corporation, the Laurens County Chamber of Commerce, the local utilities, the city and community members.



The Swofford Building
Laurens, SC

In 2019, Main Street Laurens organized Transformation Strategy workshops in collaboration with National Main Street staff and Main Street SC. Through this process, key strategies were identified for downtown development: Culinary, Arts and Entertainment, and Residential Development. The focus of the Residential Development strategy is to support the city and county by ensuring downtown is prepared to meet the wants and needs of new residents as more residential projects are initiated.

Since 2019, downtown has witnessed an impressive reinvestment of over \$8 million, primarily from private sources. These investments have led to the creation of over 75 new jobs and the establishment of more than 20 new businesses within a span of four years.

ORGANIZATION

Fostering Collaborative Growth

Aiken's Main Street program, led by the Aiken Downtown Development Association, leverages the Organization component of the Four Point Approach™ in a significant manner. Their core emphasis is on creating a sustainable revitalization effort where partnerships are cultivated, the community is involved, and resources are pooled for the downtown district.



Volunteers
Aiken, SC

Empowering Grassroots Revitalization

Volunteerism is critical to the success of Main Street. It fosters community involvement and engagement, which are essential for successful revitalization efforts.



Investing in partnerships is the key strategy that Aiken has adopted. The organization has fostered relationships with downtown business owners, local government, colleges, and the community at large through multiple initiatives. These include volunteer opportunities, merchant meetings, public art installations and established communication practices. This strategic networking and partnership-building effort has elevated Aiken's Main Street program.

Why Organization Matters

ADDA's emphasis on the Organization component has profoundly impacted Aiken's community, strengthening relationships, boosting local businesses, enhancing cultural aspects, and improving accessibility. This affirms that an organized, collaborative approach is indeed vital for successful, sustainable community revitalization.

Volunteer-Driven

In addition to partnerships, ADDA boasts one of the most hands-on, engaged boards in the state. The board members not only serve on the board for three to six years but also participate in a committee reflecting the Four Point Approach™. This dedication is manifested in the organization's annual volunteer hours - over 800 hours are logged each year.

ADDA's commitment to the Organization component has yielded exceptional results. A notable achievement was during the 2019 holiday season where they helped to double, and in some cases triple, seasonal profits for downtown businesses. They managed this by introducing events such as the Holiday Wine Walk and Holiday Cookie Stroll, increasing advertising, and offering carriage rides. This drew over 2,000 non-local visitors in two months that year. ADDA has continued to grow this holiday initiative since then.



Volunteers
Aiken, SC

STATEWIDE RESULTS

**Local Program Impact
(1983 – 2022)**



MAIN STREET
South Carolina

88,807

Volunteer
Hours
Invested

**\$864
MILLION**

**Public &
Private Sector
Investment**

2,132

Rehabilitation,
Construction &
Public Works
Projects

1,367

New Small
Businesses
Opened

33

**Participating
Communities**

- Six with populations under 2,500
- Six with 2,500 – 5,000
- 16 with 5,000 – 20,000
- Five over 20,000

*Cumulative statewide impact
reported by participating communities
from 1983–2022*

2022 Statewide Impact

\$179.5 MILLION

Public & Private Dollars Invested Locally

469

Net
New Jobs

81

Net New
Businesses

362

Buildings
Rehabbed

24,406

Volunteer
Hours

investment data tracked by
20 Main Street SC communities in 2022



Orangeburg, SC



2022 Main Street
Now Conference
Richmond, VA



Quarterly Training
Kingstree, SC - Sept. 2023



Training
Columbia, SC - May 2023



Quarterly Training
Beaufort, SC June 2023

What We Do

Main Street South Carolina specializes in providing technical support for downtown development, with a focus on professional training, planning, and resource sharing. Our program delivers hands-on quarterly training sessions across the state of South Carolina. We also support communities in strengthening local asset awareness (itinerary programming), providing promotional support through a statewide business marketplace (WeShopSC) and delivering educational webinars and videos to our network of Main Street Managers across the State.

We also offer a comprehensive toolkit for economic incentives and facilitate a statewide network that connects local economic development professionals across communities to collaborate on revitalization and development challenges. These services form the core of our technical assistance, supporting the growth and sustainability of South Carolina's downtown areas.



Quarterly Trainings



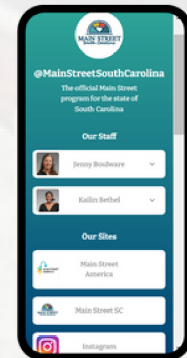
Itinerary Development

Webinars and Videos



Statewide Marketplace for Small Businesses

Toolkit Development



Statewide Networking Tool

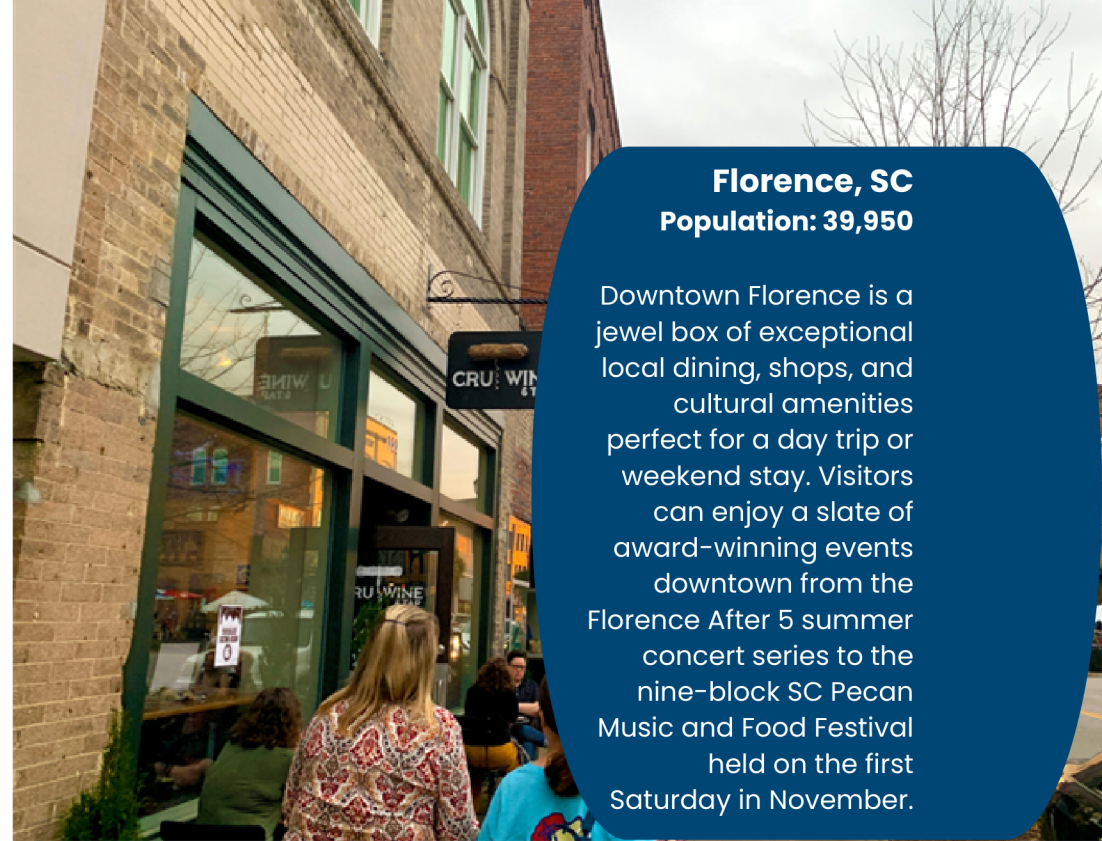
ACCREDITED



Aiken, SC

Population: 32,025

With over 170 tree-lined parkways, more than 20 public art installations, numerous elite-level golf courses in the area, and a hotspot for first-class polo and horse races, Downtown Aiken is the destination for fine arts, food and fun. Downtown plays host to the largest collection of owner-operated local businesses in the region and one of the nation's largest urban forests.



Florence, SC

Population: 39,950

Downtown Florence is a jewel box of exceptional local dining, shops, and cultural amenities perfect for a day trip or weekend stay. Visitors can enjoy a slate of award-winning events downtown from the Florence After 5 summer concert series to the nine-block SC Pecan Music and Food Festival held on the first Saturday in November.



Greenwood, SC

Population: 22,545

Greenwood serves as the regional hub for a seven-county region. Always in bloom, Greenwood is the capital of the Lakelands, home to Lander University and the destination for experiencing the largest collection of locally owned businesses in the region.

Laurens

Population: 9,335

Historic Laurens sets the scene for one of the most intimate courthouse squares in South Carolina. The small town feel is made even better during the live music event "Finally Friday." Experience live music performances and unique, locally owned shops in a growing downtown.



Orangeburg

Population: 13,240

Anchored by two Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Edisto Memorial Gardens, Downtown Orangeburg is preserving its authentic South Carolina history from its indigenous past to the civil rights era.



Hartsville

Population: 7,446

Known for its historic architecture and vibrant arts scene, Hartsville's tranquil Kalmia Gardens offers serene exploration, while its lively community events create a dynamic atmosphere. Hartsville offers a blend of heritage, culture, and natural beauty.



What Is National Main Street Accreditation?

In 2023 Main Street South Carolina recognized six communities with accredited status which is Main Street America's top tier of recognition. This exclusive designation signifies a commitment to comprehensive revitalization, community engagement, and outcome measurement. Accredited programs meet and demonstrate rigorous accreditation standards:

1. Broad-based Community Commitment
2. Inclusive Leadership and Organizational Capacity
3. Diverse and Sustainable Funding
4. Strategy-Driven Programming
5. Preservation-Based Economic Development
6. Demonstrated Impact & Results

ASPIRING



Clover

Population: 6,671

Clover is "The Town with Love in the Middle." Its growth and proximity to larger urban areas has created opportunities for local businesses to thrive. Alongside its growing downtown, Clover also hosts a St. Patrick's Day Festival and Highland Games and Scots-Irish Festival to celebrate their heritage.



Inman

Population: 2,990

In the scenic foothills of South Carolina, Inman celebrates its peach farming and textile history. Its small-town charm is evident in the historic downtown, friendly locals, and seasonal farmers' markets. Balancing rustic appeal with modern conveniences, Inman offers a unique blend of pastoral tranquility and community.



Fountain Inn

Population: 10,416

This bustling downtown brims with diverse eateries and shops, while outdoor activities and cultural events make Fountain Inn a delightful place to raise a family and a great place to visit.



Walterboro

Population: 5,544

Known as the "Front Porch of the Lowcountry," Walterboro features a vibrant downtown, the South Carolina Artisans Center which includes artwork from over 200 juried artists, and a variety of boutiques and restaurants. Walterboro's native wildlife can be explored in the state's largest city park, the Walterboro Wildlife Sanctuary.

What is an Aspiring Community?

Aspiring communities are committed to three years of intensive programming. During these formative foundation years, Aspiring Communities focus on developing communication plans, funding plans and action plans to formalize and build a sustainable downtown revitalization program that integrates the Main Street Approach™.

Walhalla

Population: 4,072

Nestled between Lake Keowee and the Blue Ridge Mountains, Walhalla is the "Main Street to the Mountains." This town boasts a rich German heritage and a vibrant blend of historic homes, churches, and locally owned boutiques. Its annual Oktoberfest is a community highlight, celebrating its cultural roots. Just a stone's throw from diverse outdoor activities like hiking, biking, and fishing, Walhalla is where small-town charm meets big-hearted hospitality.



CLASSIC



Classic Level Communities

have an active program, a full-time director dedicated to Main Street efforts, and have proven they are able to leverage volunteers to support Main Street initiatives and programs in their communities. Their pedestrian-oriented downtown district has a cohesive core of historic commercial buildings that represent the community's architectural heritage.

Classic level communities are also responsible for guiding formalized action plans and for annually tracking downtown investments.

FRIENDS



Friends Level Communities

are entry level members who are able to attend quarterly trainings and are connected to the network of Main Street professionals across South Carolina. They are exploring incorporating the Main Street program in their communities. This is also for communities that wish to apply the Main Street Approach™ in a non-traditional commercial setting.

Communities participating at this level receive notification of Main Street SC trainings and information sharing, but do not receive technical assistance.



In 2002, when the Downtown Florence Main Street Program was founded as a partnership between the City of Florence and Florence Downtown Development Corporation, organizers never could have imagined that 21 years later Florence would bring home the biggest accomplishment in downtown revitalization — the Great American Main Street Award.

Once described as “too far gone to be saved,” Downtown Florence is now a vibrant culinary and entertainment destination filled with whimsical public art, activated historic storefronts, world-class cultural amenities, and over 100 residential units at full occupancy. Most importantly, the work to revitalize and sustain Downtown Florence isn’t complete.

Early efforts to spark revitalization in Downtown Florence were met with skepticism, but organizers were persistent and had a plan. Foundational work — a volunteer committee-led building inventory, National Register district designation, implementation of Maintenance and Appearance Codes, and early district activation efforts such as the creation of the Florence After 5 and the SC Pecan Music and Food Festival — all contributed to setting the stage for real change to occur.

In 2010, the program adopted a new Downtown Master Plan. This visionary document built upon foundational work from the first eight years of the program and crafted a vision for the future based upon public input and market-informed strategies. This attracted new leadership to the organization and investment from local residents to create catalyst projects in response to public and institutional investments taking place district-wide. In concert with the development of Francis Marion University’s Performing Arts Center, private investors made the decision to rehabilitate 126 W. Evans Street into Hotel Florence—Florence’s first boutique hotel, and ultimately the first major private-led catalyst project downtown. That hotel, which opened in 2013, sparked the \$300 million of investment that has taken place downtown over the last decade.

Downtown Florence has been a champion of the use of Main Street America’s Four Point Approach™ since its inception. This proven model for community revitalization was attractive largely because of its scalability and holistic approach to getting things accomplished. Florence first achieved accreditation in 2008, but accreditation was not prioritized in subsequent years. Florence rejoined the Main Street SC network in 2018 as a Classic community. With new leadership at the helm in 2020, the program recognized the importance of recognition as an Accredited community — the mark of distinction that places programs at the top of their fields nationwide as models for the Main Street Approach™. Downtown Florence achieved accreditation in 2021, 2022 and most recently was a pilot for new Accreditation standards in 2023.

The Great American Main Street award represents a benchmark for Downtown Florence, and a promise to the Florence community and state to continue to be a beacon of progress and a thoughtful practitioner of the Main Street Approach™ as work to expand the district continues.

Downtown Florence’s story is truly a local one. There were no silver bullet solutions — just incremental progress rooted in Main Street America’s Four Point Approach™ and guided by a downtown master plan that identified its assets, focused on its transformation strategies, and laid the pathway for progress in the future. Its investors were local citizens — those tired of seeing Florence overlooked for opportunities due to the state of its downtown, change agents who not only understood the power of place, but wholly believed in making a difference because it was the right thing to do. Those local residents kept their eye on the past, invested in their hometowns, and have been critical to solidifying downtown’s future.

Celebrating Excellence

The Great American Main Street Award program recognizes communities exemplifying the use of the Main Street Approach™ to revitalize commercial districts. Winners are selected from a nationwide pool of applicants by a jury of Main Street professionals and leaders in the fields of community and economic development and historic preservation. Since the award’s inception in 1995, over 100 Main Street programs have been honored as GAMSAs communities; including Greenville in 2003, the first South Carolina city to win this prestigious award.



Locally Powered

Representing a diversity of skills, backgrounds and experiences, the leaders of South Carolina's Main Street programs have confronted the challenges in recent years through the COVID-19 crisis with unwavering resolve. In the face of uncertainty, they've leveraged challenges into opportunities, ensuring the vitality of our communities.

Their steadfast commitment continues to champion the heartbeat of communities across the state.

Careers with Impact

Hannah Davis

Development Manager,
Downtown Florence Main St Program
Florence, SC

"Our approach of robust support worked, we didn't lose a single downtown business through the COVID-19 crisis."

Fundamentally, all Main Street programs are doing the same work, albeit in unique local contexts. State and national networks allow us to learn best practices from high performing communities and mentor those just starting out. It's about genuine R&D, sharing what's working well and bringing what we've learned back to our own communities.

When I took over in 2020, we set a goal for accreditation as a mark of distinction, affirming our alignment with the Main Street Approach™. Despite COVID-19's impact, we used this challenging period to evolve our program, shoring up fundamental data collection, focusing on small business support and ensuring program alignment with asset-based transformation. Our approach worked: we didn't lose a single downtown business throughout the COVID-19 crisis. Together, these experiences highlight the true value of our Main Street program and the power of collaborative learning.



Jahara Graves

Director of Tourism, Parks, and
Recreation
Bennettsville, SC

"Main Street SC has been instrumental in supporting our incredible community."

When I started as the new director about eighteen months ago, the program provided me with the necessary guidance and resources to navigate the complexities of my role. Their team and community served as a valuable source of information, helping me acclimate quickly and efficiently.

I've had the chance to interact with seasoned directors who have been in the field for decades, and their advice has been incredibly useful. Main Street has helped to streamline our progress, providing insights on proven strategies.

As a result, we've been able to focus more on making an impact on our community, aligning our efforts with the shared vision for our town's future. We're redefining Bennettsville in a way that reflects the pride we hold for our community, all the while preserving the city's inherent charm and beauty for years to come.

Lara Hudson

Former Community
Development Director,
Greenwood, SC

"Having the network of other Main Street professionals has been invaluable to our community and has led to many successes."

Being an accredited Main Street program has afforded our community and the small businesses we support; with access to resources and connections. We can network and communicate with peer communities across the state and nation for assistance with ideas, issues or concerns. Having the network of other Main Street professionals has been invaluable to our community and has led to many successes.

Collaborating with other Main Street programs, especially during COVID allowed us to quickly share ideas, solutions, and respond. We're able to apply successful practices from other communities and tailor them. The collective wider network is like a roadmap, guiding us towards innovative solutions and approaches.

Our Main Street accreditation isn't just a badge — it's a catalyst. It's driven us towards growth, innovation and has helped us build a thriving community we're all proud to be part of."



Careers with Impact



Haley Knight

Former Executive Director,
Aiken Downtown Development
Association | Aiken, SC

"Main Street has given me the ability and the tools needed to really develop as a leader and grow"

I'm a proud Aiken native who's always had a deep love and commitment to my hometown. The charm and sense of community in our small town drew me back. The opportunity to work with Main Street fell into my lap, and I embraced it wholeheartedly, initially as an assistant.

Eventually, I stepped into the director's position with Aiken Downtown Development, a role I held for over six years. This period transformed me, helping me understand the complexities of creating a vibrant community and molding me into a confident leader. Main Street didn't just have a profound influence on our community; it had a significant impact on me personally, reshaping my identity and enhancing my leadership skills.

I've always placed significant value on collaboration and inclusivity, inviting everyone to share their ideas and contribute their efforts. I'm particularly passionate about empowering the younger generation to be active in their communities and drive change.



Katie Wheeler

Former Main Street Director,
Town of Kingstree, SC

"For young individuals considering a career in local economic development, I can say from experience that the rewards are profound."

In my role as Kingstree's Main Street Director, I've found that passion and drive can translate into tangible improvements for the town I love. When I first heard about this opportunity, it struck a chord in me. I saw it as my chance to contribute to a brighter future for our community especially our younger generation and my children. It's a role that allows me to use my skills in business, hospitality and tourism, and communication to attract investments and revitalize our downtown. It's a role that allows me to use my skills in business, communication, and technology to attract investments and revitalize our downtown. I also see it as an opportunity to create a vibrant social presence that showcases the beauty and potential of Kingstree. For young individuals considering a career of service in local economic development, from my personal experience I can say the rewards are profound. I encourage anyone with a love for their community and a vision of the future to consider this as a potential career.

Matt Winburn

Main Street Manager,
City of Hartsville, SC

"Knowing that I'm able to contribute, even if a little, to creating a thriving community... makes the few struggles of this job worth it."

"I have a servant's heart, so being able to serve my community, work with downtown business and property owners and watch them flourish does my heart good. By taking time to meet community members, listen to their needs, and use tools provided by the Main Street Program, my team and I can create a downtown community that's representative of all of Hartsville.

Our mission revolves around a commitment to diversity and inclusion; we truly believe that everyone is welcome in downtown Hartsville. Knowing that I'm able to contribute, even if a little, to creating a thriving community that's focused on sustainable business development and historic preservation, makes the few struggles of my job worth it. I would highly encourage anyone with an interest in public service and local development to explore an impactful career working with the Main Street program."



Alize Thomas

Marketing & Development Manager
City of Lancaster, SC

"It is important to really LOVE what you do. Being proactive in engaging local businesses and residents, it's the little things that makes me proud of what I do for our local community"

Take it from me, jumping into a Main Street program / economic development role straight out of school isn't a walk in the park, but it's worth every step. I started out early, beginning in a local municipality where I learned the fundamentals of a strong team working for the same goal, supporting the local economy. I took a leap of faith through guidance from mentors and began my new journey at the City of Lancaster.

Seeing downtown Lancaster bustling with visitors, local businesses thriving, and our community coming together — that's the joy of this job. For instance, the Red Rose Festival. A once modest affair now draws over 20,000 visitors, invigorating our town of Lancaster, which is home to a little over 9,000 residents. It's not just a festival — it's a celebration of community, culture, and economic growth. That's what I love.



Local Government Partners

Carolyn Prince

Former Mayor, Bennettsville, SC

"Main Street should exemplify the heartbeat of our communities, embodying our resilience, creativity, and shared aspirations for a vibrant future."

Main Street revitalization is central to our growth in Bennettsville and key to the pursuit of equity. As the first African American mayor in our 200-year history, I am deeply committed to supporting these initiatives. Our Main Street is the heartbeat of our city and it should bring us all together, embodying our resilience, creativity, and shared aspirations for a bright future for our neighbors and loved ones.

These revitalization efforts do more than improve aesthetics – they stimulate the economy, respect the lessons from our past, and foster a vibrant future for all of our residents. Each development, every supported business, and every community event brings us closer to the Bennettsville we envision.

In my role as mayor, I champion these efforts, striving to build a city that offers affordable, quality living for all. Our Main Street should reflect Bennettsville's spirit, a testament to our collective legacy and hope for future generations.



Robert Wolfe

Town Manager, Cheraw, SC

"Main Street is not a one-size-fits-all program. It provides diverse resources tailored to meet the needs of individual communities across the state."

For Cheraw, the true value of being part of the Main Street community isn't about a sudden influx of capital – it's about shared values and collective goals. We face similar problems in our downtowns, but the strength of this program lies in our access to a network of communities, all working together, sharing ideas, and practicing the best strategies. Our affiliation with Main Street is a badge of our commitment to downtown redevelopment. The diversity within Main Street isn't just beneficial – it's essential.

We're a community dedicated to rejuvenating our cities, attracting private investments, and building a better life for our residents. Main Street South Carolina, under the strong leadership of Jenny, provides us with vital support. The team delivers technical assistance, advice, training, and coordination that's crucial to our development. The resources offered by Main Street go beyond networking – they provide us with the tools we need to succeed. For those interested in revitalizing their hometowns, I strongly recommend considering the Main Street program. It has been a game-changer for us and can be for you, too.

Daniel Moore

City Manager, Hartsville, SC

"Main Street's transformative power is evident, consistently attracting significant public and private investment, thereby driving substantial community revitalization and economic growth that is tangible."

The value of the Main Street program to the City of Hartsville is crystal clear. Since rejoining the program in 2013, our downtown occupancy has risen from 55% to 96%, with increased residency and broader district boundaries reflecting our diverse demographic. Through the Main Street Approach™, over \$1 million is invested annually into our downtown from both private and public sources.

The program's future is promising as we aim to offer more incentives, install creative placemaking opportunities, and continue building relationships with our community, while protecting our historic assets.

Guidance from the Main Street SC team, led by Jenny Boulware, has been crucial. We're proud to contribute to South Carolina's growth through the Main Street program and anticipate ongoing partnership and success.



Small Business Leaders on Main Street

Ella Frazier

Owner Ella's Boutique,
Florence, SC

"We now have people come downtown to see all the changes and difference. I love to tell them it's not over yet!"

In 2009, I had a dream about owning my own boutique. I ended up buying a building and moved in around December of 2011. That was before the revitalization of downtown really started and there wasn't really anyone else in downtown at the time.

I became involved in the planning and revitalization when I moved into my store and it's been exciting to see the growth over these past years and to now have people come downtown to see all the changes and differences.



Clay So

Owner of Blooming
Innovations 2 | Walterboro, SC

"My path from being an educator, to building a successful venture in our downtown shows how much a business can progress with the right support."

Main Street always caught my attention, even when I was a teacher. It was full of life, brought people together, and put local businesses on display. These experiences inspired me to start my own business. Now, as a downtown business owner, I can see firsthand the value of the Main Street program. It serves as a meeting point for people, a marketplace, and a growth opportunity for businesses like mine. The path from a small kiosk to a corner shop shows how much a business can progress with the support of this program and the value of investing in and revitalizing our downtowns.



Laura Bachinski

Award Winning Local Artist,
Owner of Main & Maxwell,
Greenwood, SC

"Programs like Main Street are critical to preserving culture and promoting the arts in our community."

As a deeply involved member of this artistic community, I can truly appreciate the essential role of the Main Street program. It's more than just a focus on a meeting point or a marketplace. It's an accelerator for businesses, including those in the arts, allowing them to develop and flourish. Every new day on Main Street brings new possibilities for engagement, learning, and inspiration.

Art is a powerful tool for maintaining our connection to our roots and promoting understanding among all people, young and old. This is why the arts need our continued promotion and support, and why programs like Main Street are so important for places like Greenwood.

Darren Hooks

General Contractor, Cheraw, SC

As a lifelong resident and general contractor in Cheraw, South Carolina, I've witnessed firsthand the decline of our downtown but today we are witnessing a resurgence, and I'm honored to play a role in it.

The restoration project I've been working on is about preservation just as much as it is about being part of our community resurgence. I believe strongly in reusing what we have — for instance, the lumber I retrieved from this building undergoing renovation. New lumber won't preserve as long, and there's an added layer of character in the old that simply cannot be replicated. By preserving and reusing, we're not just maintaining superior quality and aesthetics, we're also honoring our history.

However, this journey hasn't been without challenges. Last year, while working on a downtown office and apartment project, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer. The news was a blow and left me unsure if I could continue my work. But just as I fought the disease, I fought to keep my commitment to the town I love. Despite the uncertainty, I was determined to push forward, to bring back the life and soul of our downtown.

For me, this project is about preserving our legacy, enhancing the character of our town while contributing to its resurgence. It's about fighting for our downtown and Main Street, just as I fought my personal battle with cancer.

"Working on projects to revitalize our downtown is a labor of love, and a way of giving back to the community that's given me so much."

Looking Ahead

The future is bright for South Carolina, as cities and towns across the state continue to attract individuals seeking authentic and vibrant downtown districts.

As South Carolina continues to experience a surge in new residents wanting small-town charm, Main Street South Carolina is poised for significant growth. With its proven track record of helping to revitalize downtowns and fostering community development, Main Street South Carolina is positioned to guide and support these evolving communities.

However, this growth also brings challenges such as managing increased demand for resources, preserving each community's unique character and ensuring equitable development for all residents.

By embracing these challenges and leveraging its expertise, Main Street South Carolina is committed to continuing its impactful work and helping communities thrive.



Credits

Interviews: Current Main Street Directors

Al Joseph	City of Georgetown, South Carolina
Alize Thomas	City of Lancaster, South Carolina
Hannah Davis	City of Florence, South Carolina
Jaharra Graves	City of Bennettsville, South Carolina
Katie Wheeler	Town of Kingstree, South Carolina
Lara Hudson	City of Greenwood, South Carolina
Leigh Newman	City of Sumter, South Carolina
Matt Winburn	City of Hartsville, South Carolina

Other Interviews

Billy Parrish	BillyParrish Consulting
Darren Hooks	Hooks Construction Services
Don Rypkema	President of Heritage Strategies
Irene Dumas Tyson	Master Planner and Community Designer, BOUDREAUX
Rodney Swink	Senior Associate at Heritage Strategies
Randy Wilson	Community Design Solutions



Learn more about



Interviews: Former Main Street Directors

Beppie LeGrand	Main Street South Carolina Program Manager (2005–2018)
Bill Steiner	Main Street South Carolina Program Manager (2002–2005)
Connie Kincaid	City of Conway, South Carolina (1993–1996)
Elizabeth Stevens	City of Conway, South Carolina (1986–1990)
Fred Delk	City of Union, South Carolina (1986–1996)
Haley Knight	City of Aiken, South Carolina (2018–2023)
Jonathan Irick	City of Laurens, South Carolina (2006–2023)
Liz Parham	City of Sumter, South Carolina (1986–1987)
Austin Watters	City of Fountain Inn, South Carolina (2022–2023)
Rob Wolfe	Town of Cheraw, South Carolina (2019–2022)

Editorial Team

Jenny Boulware	Main Street South Carolina
Emily Parrish	Consultant, Palmetto Advisors
Paul Daniele	Managing Partner, Palmetto Advisors

Photo Credits

Florence, Cover	True Light Photography
Florence, pages 24, 33	Downtown Florence Main Street Program
Florence, page 30	Blue Edge Photography
Florence, page 33	Phil Eich, Storyville Social
Greenwood, page 14, 15	Laura Wood Photography
Aiken	South Carolina National Heritage Corridor / The Southern Edge Magazine
All other photos	Main Street SC staff, local program staff

