



## Main Street Basics: Design Committee's Role

**The job of the Design Committee is to encourage physical improvements in the commercial district, educate property and business owners about proper preservation methods and plan for future growth downtown. Design Committee members must develop a thorough understanding of the district's unique characteristics, opportunities for positive improvements, and to develop a plan of action to guide improvements.**

### Design Committee's Five Major Area of Responsibilities are:

- ◆ Educate community about good design
- ◆ Provide appropriate advice about design improvements
- ◆ Plan for downtown's growth and help shape regulations for it
- ◆ Work with Economic Vitality committee to create incentives & guidelines for private sector investments
- ◆ Work with the private investor to assure implementation of their design and their investment in their project

*The Design Committee should work closely with other committees, such as the Economic Vitality Committee, in developing incentive programs pertaining to the physical aspects of downtown, promotions in designing marketing materials and Organization for articulating the efforts of the design committee.*

### Make-Up of the Design Committee:

- ◆ Preservation Architects
- ◆ Landscape Architects
- ◆ Interior Designers
- ◆ Artists
- ◆ Paint Store Owner
- ◆ Rehab Contractor
- ◆ Realtors
- ◆ Building Inspector
- ◆ Planner

### Good Design Basics

- ◆ **Start small.** Tackle the low-hanging fruit first rather than a large-scale project.
- ◆ **There are no themes for downtown.** Leave these to theme parks. Main Street design is a preservation-based program. Work to enhance your historic building stock.
- ◆ **Observe the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.** This is required for all Main Street private improvements.
- ◆ **Stress preservation and rehabilitation over demolition.** Every building in your downtown tells a story. Learn your stories and tell them to your community.
- ◆ **Focus on quality.** Your historic commercial buildings deserve the best possible solutions and materials.
- ◆ **Be unique.** Every Main Street community has its own history, which gives its sense of place. Celebrate your unique heritage and architectural character.

### Types of Information to Gather & Examples of Initial Committee Projects:

- ◆ Buildings and public spaces inventory
- ◆ Develop design standards/guidelines
- ◆ Façade Incentive Grant program
- ◆ Training Committee members through the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center—Design Basic Training is offered once a year
- ◆ Design workshops
- ◆ Walking tour brochure
- ◆ Find & collect old/historic photographs and postcards of downtown buildings and streets

### Successful Storefront Design:

- ◆ Looks at the entire building, removing inappropriate features and enhancing architectural character
- ◆ Is compatible with neighboring commercial buildings
- ◆ Can be changed dramatically with new paint colors
- ◆ Incorporates cloth awnings for color and shade
- ◆ Uses appropriate signage that is pedestrian in scale
- ◆ Uses appropriate lighting
- ◆ Continues inside with appealing window displays, lighting, color, product displays/placement

### Types of Design Assistance:

**Recommendations.** The committee should work closely with property/business owner in order to make specific design recommendations. These could include drawings/renderings, specifications and work descriptions, and can be provided by the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center who contracts with UNC-Greensboro's Dept. of Interior Architecture to provide design renderings. Other recommendations could include but not limited to interior design/store layout and product placement.

**Resource Lists.** The Committee should develop a list of local contractors and suppliers who are familiar with older, historic buildings, professionals or schools who can provide educational services in interior design for commercial spaces and product layout, possibly offering one-on-one consultations to downtown businesses in the area of design.

**Planning.** Work with your city's planning and/or zoning department on public improvements and on projects impacting the design of the downtown district.



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### **Preservation Encourages Economic Development:**

**Since 1980, North Carolina's Main Street cities and have seen over \$2 billion in investment. The Design Committee must educate its community about the benefits of preservation by:**

- ◆ Promoting your downtown's historic features
- ◆ Demonstrating the monetary impact of quality design projects when they are implemented
- ◆ Visiting neighboring designated Main Street cities to see and learn from their experiences
- ◆ Inviting a Main Street Director from another community to speak to your community on the benefits of quality design within their community
- ◆ Keep repeating that the Main Street program is **Economic Development within the Context of Historic Preservation!**

*If your downtown has a **National Register Historic District (NRHD)**, then the Design Committee should encourage the use of Investment Tax Credits for Certified Rehabilitations. If your downtown does **not** have a NRHD, then work with the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) staff to consider your downtown's potential for this designation.*

This information was adapted from the National Main Street Center's *Design Committee Handbook* and drawing from the NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center's staff experience.