



Smart Growth America
Making Neighborhoods Great Together



(Re)Building Downtown A Guidebook for Revitalization



About this guide

(Re)Building Downtown: A Guidebook for Revitalization is a resource for local elected officials who want to re-invigorate and strengthen neighborhood centers of economy, culture, and history through a smart growth approach to development.

This guidebook can be used as a stand-alone resource. Smart Growth America is also available to help your community use this process. Visit smartgrowthamerica.org/rebuilding-downtown to learn more about our consulting services.

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Published December 2015

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Smart Growth America is the only national organization dedicated to researching, advocating for, and leading coalitions to bring better development to more communities nationwide. From providing more sidewalks to ensuring more homes are built near public transportation or that productive farms remain a part of our communities, smart growth helps make sure people across the nation can live in great neighborhoods.

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Introduction

Downtowns, Main Streets, and city centers across the country are witnessing a renaissance. As more Americans chose the convenience and connectivity of walkable neighborhoods, communities are seeing new businesses, restaurants, and shops open in areas that were formerly vacant or economically distressed.

This movement presents an economic opportunity for communities. Creating a vibrant, walkable neighborhood can help attract and retain talented people and the companies that want to hire them. It can expand economic opportunity within your community, and create a culture of engagement. It can help your region grow without compromising open land or working farms. It can also make your town or city stand out within your region as a destination to shop, dine, visit, move to, or invest. It's a chance to celebrate your community's diverse history, create new opportunities for long-time neighborhood residents, and to achieve the triple-bottom line of a more equitable community, stronger economy, and protected environment.

If your town or city already has a Main Street or neighborhood business district waiting for reinvestment, fantastic. You have great context for the strategies outlined in this guidebook. If your community does not have this kind of place, don't despair. These strategies can also be applied to places like suburban shopping centers, former industrial parks, or other underused places with the potential for redevelopment. Each is an opportunity to create a long-term, resilient, economic asset for your community.

(Re)Building Downtown: A Guidebook for Revitalization is a resource for local elected officials who want to re-invigorate and strengthen neighborhood centers of economy, culture, and history through a smart growth approach to development.

This guide uses Smart Growth America's seven-step approach to downtown redevelopment:

- 1. Understand your community**
- 2. Create an attractive, walkable place**
- 3. Diversify economic uses**
- 4. Plan for equity**
- 5. Improve government regulations and processes**
- 6. Finance projects**
- 7. Establish on-going place management**

These seven steps are fundamental to fostering a successful downtown district. Your community may decide to use some or all of them, depending on where you are in the (re)building process. This guidebook will discuss each of the above steps in detail, and provide specific ways for communities to implement each.

Any community, of any size can use this approach. Through public engagement, strategic planning, public commitment, and ongoing support, you can create a place that unites your community, attracts visitors, and supports businesses for years to come.



STEP 1

Understand your community

The first step in any revitalization process is to understand your community's context. First, look at the past. What is your community's history and heritage? What assets drew your city's founders to create your town in the first place?

Next, look at who you are now. What is the demographic makeup of your town right now? What are your assets? What have you lost? What do you need that you don't have?

Finally, ask what your community wants to become. What is the vision for your town? What kind of place do you want to pass on to your grandchildren? Who do you want to be in your town 10 years from now? And what is your unique potential moving forward?

This first section is designed to help you find answers to these questions. Doing so will help you understand what your community values, and help bring people together around the idea of revitalization. As those projects advance, understanding your community's values will also help you talk about your work in successful ways. The following section outlines how to find answers to all of these questions.

Strategy 1: Engage community members

Revitalizing a downtown is about bringing people together, and it's best to do that from the very beginning. Bring together everyone with a vested interest in downtown to gain a complete understanding of what your community hopes to get out of revitalization. This might reveal perspectives you did not realize before, or assets you weren't aware of. It will also help create built-in support for the project moving forward, and will give your project staying power.

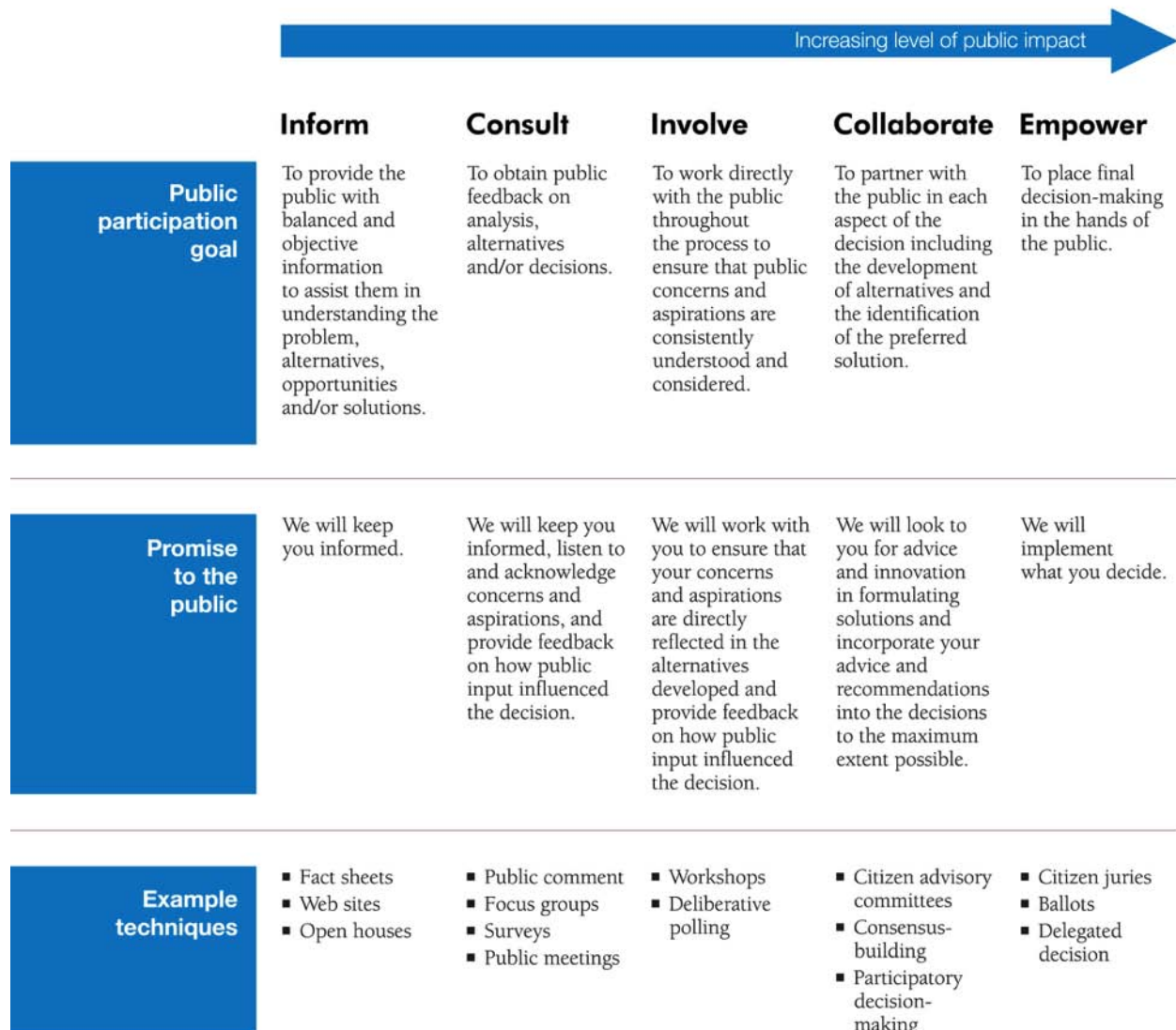
Before anything else, assign someone to lead this fundamental component of your revitalization work:

- **Designate a senior-level staff member to serve as liaison** to all stakeholders involved in or affected by the revitalization process.
- **Designate a staff member to convene and coordinate department heads.** Ideally, create a new senior-level position on your staff with the authority to convene and coordinate department heads, and commit to actions on behalf of the City. Once you have designated one person in charge of engaging community members, that person should begin a comprehensive public engagement process.

FIGURE 1

Spectrum of public participation

Adapted from the International Association for Public Participation.



This leader will be responsible for making sure everyone in your community is part of the (re) building downtown process. Anyone who is interested in downtown's revitalization should be able to weigh in on the process (not a specific outcome). At a minimum, that means asking for input from current residents, community groups, and business owners, as well as investors, developers, and any major institutions like universities, hospitals, and military bases. Each of these groups will come to the table with concerns, mistrusts, and prejudices. Your role as a public leader is to facilitate dialogue between each of these groups in a focused and sustained way.

Start by working with existing “civic infrastructure”—neighborhood associations, charitable organizations, faith-based groups, and other community groups. These groups are often uniquely situated to bring together many members of the community. An elected official can be very effective as a convener: things that may have been regarded as hard or impossible suddenly become possible when people realize an elected leader has a strong commitment to their issue. A passionate leader or group of leaders can also act as a champion for the project more broadly, and attract new people from the community or the region to join the effort.

You can start engaging these groups in a number of ways. The International Association of Public Participation provides a very useful categorization of approaches that helps to elicit the goals of engagement (see Figure 1 on page 3). Before beginning an engagement process, you should carefully consider where on this spectrum you intend your effort to be.

A sincere commitment on the part of public officials can play a huge role in this process's success or failure. Bringing everyone to the table should not be a hollow gesture, or merely a way to check a box. (As you start, ask yourself, “Am I prepared for the outcome of the public engagement process to materially change the program we intend to pursue?”) This is a genuine way to make your project stronger and more effective. Your aim should be to create a stable, ongoing partnership between public staff, business leaders, neighborhood advocates, and landowners or developers. Here are a few ways to do that:

- **Bring in the business community.** Create a partnership or association of local businesses and landowners. At the beginning, bring these people together to collect their ideas and identify their priorities. Eventually, this group might sponsor festivals or streetscape improvements. Establish regular communication between downtown business owners and city staff.
- **Partner with community organizers.** Community-based non-profits, civic organizations, churches, social groups, business owners, etc. can help bring diverse community interests to the development table. Ask these groups about the challenges their community members are facing.
- **Collect public feedback.** Create a wide array of ways for residents to weigh in on this process. Public meetings, polls and surveys, and online crowdsourcing platforms are three good ways to start. Think creatively about the people in your community and how to bring them together.
- **Get input from long-term residents as early as possible.** Allow long-term residents to weigh in at the earliest possible stage of the project. Conduct surveys and hold charrettes or community meetings to learn what long-term residents want to preserve about their neighborhood, what they would like to change, and what they want to gain

from new development. Understanding their needs and concerns will make the project stronger and help earn their buy-in from the start. Read more about this in Step 4 starting on page 21.

- **Expect disagreements—and have a strategy for how to handle them.** Neighborhood changes can stir racial and socioeconomic tensions that go far broader and deeper than any one community. When local change rubs against this nerve, tensions can flare quickly. These conflicts are deep and important, and should not be ignored. Handling them successfully requires a history of trust as well as a more formal approach to conflict resolution. The best strategies seek to build trust early and resolve tensions before they become entrenched battles.¹
- **Commit to ongoing engagement.** Engage with residents in an ongoing way, and give them regular, recurring opportunities to understand what’s happening and to voice their concerns. Being consistent and predictable with this process will help build trust between the government, developers, businesses, and residents. Hold community meetings and information sessions at several different times and locations, and create a mailing list and send project updates by email. Also consider starting social media channels for the project and encourage community members to follow and share their thoughts online. Project-sponsored gatherings like block parties, festivals, and other community events are another good way to make the project visible. These events can also remind a neighborhood that it is, in fact, a community. These are also good opportunities to highlight local businesses and attract people to see the new progress.
- **Create a mechanism or schedule for ongoing engagement activities,** and communicate about the process throughout the year. Be sure that this commitment includes a plan for digital outreach and social media.
- **Come together around shared values.** For all the differences we see across communities, there are certain universal desires – basic safety, opportunities for kids, and convenient access to needed amenities – which will pull together disparate parties. Create a narrative for this project that everyone in the community can share. In public events, in branding, and in project plans, emphasize your community’s history and character, and how this will create positive community change. Focus on the values that residents want to see in their community moving forward. Local mores and norms help guide and protect a community, but a shared identity also offers an invitation to newcomers.



A community planning session for the EnLiVen Lathrup Community Development Project in Lathrup Village, MI.

¹ With thanks to Brown, S. (2014, July). “Beyond Gentrification: Strategies for Guiding the Conversation and Redirecting the Outcomes of Community Transition.” Harvard’s Joint Center for Housing Studies. Available at http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/jchs.harvard.edu/files/w14-12_brown.pdf.

Strategy 2: Do research

Once you have collected feedback from your community, it's a good time to do your background research. Community feedback is a great opportunity to understand your community from an anecdotal perspective, but there are a variety of data sets and tools available to comprehend your community from a quantitative standpoint. Your research will also help identify the feasibility of the various components of your redevelopment plan.

- **Perform a market study.** An analysis of the current and potential inventory of housing, retail, and office space will help you determine what the real estate market is and what it could be. The study can help you determine the surpluses and shortages of uses in the market.
- **Gather demographic information.** Sources like the U.S. Census (including the American Community Survey and LEHD), and commercially available services can provide valuable information about your city and region's population. Key demographic indicators to examine include ages, income levels, housing values, unemployment rates, gender, household sizes, and other demographic categories. This information can provide surprising insights into your community's needs.
- **Conduct a survey.** By conducting a survey residents, citizens, and other stakeholders can provide opinions in a format that allows the researcher to interpret the results in a quantitative manner.
- **Complete a fiscal impact study.** The analysis allows local governments to understand the amount of tax revenue, jobs, and other benefits a project will generate while simultaneously taking into account the cost to provide services such as sewer, water, roads, schools, etc. To be most useful, the study should incorporate an analysis of the net impact over time of the pattern of development on the municipal budget.

Strategy 3: Specify goals and make a plan to achieve them

Once you have gathered community feedback and researched the feasibility of redevelopment, the third step is to create a strategic plan. This plan will frame and guide the process for revitalizing your downtown.

This process should start by bringing together a select advisory group which includes representatives from neighborhood groups, retailers, investors, developers, property owners, churches, the mayor, and key city councilors, the heads of select city departments, non-profit organizations, artists, homeless advocates, and others. The group should be relatively small (no more than 25 individuals) in order to both build a sense of trust and cohesion and, ultimately, to ensure the process stays focused on results. It is also crucial that the individuals be people who are interested in successful solutions, not narrow political gain. This group should be select but it should not be secret: consider allowing community members to observe meetings and/or provide copies of the group's materials publicly.

One potential way to structure the work of this group is to schedule two one-day sessions, a month apart, to create the strategic plan. Before the first day, assemble a briefing book with the

findings of your public outreach and feasibility study. The first day will be used to introduce the group to one another, to understand the contents of the briefing book, and to lay out the possible options for your strategic plan (below).

In the second meeting, you should lead participants to discuss and ideally agree on the general and specific items most appropriate for your downtown. Here are some of the things that conversation should include:

- **Community vision.** Based on your public engagement work from Step 1: Strategy 1 on page 2, articulate your community's goals and vision for revitalization.
- **Neighborhood character.** Define the boundaries of downtown and where the focus of your work will be. You might also outline things like how dense that area should be, and how it should relate to the immediate surrounding neighborhoods.
- **Housing.** What kinds of housing should be available downtown? Consider including a wide array of housing types, with some areas of moderate or high density, at both market rate and affordable levels. Be sure that any housing options you include are legally allowed. Read more about this in Step 4 starting on page 21 and Step 5 starting on page 25.
- **Retail.** What type of retail options should be downtown? Consider a mix of types, including entertainment (movies, restaurants, night clubs); specialty retail (clothing, furniture, and other boutique stores); regional retail (department stores and major chains); and local-serving retail (grocery stores, drugstores, dry cleaners, etc.) A mix of retail types can give a neighborhood critical mass, identity, and a reason for people to live there. The precise elements and proportions will of course depend in part on the scale of your particular downtown. Read more about this in Step 3 starting on page 16.
- **Business recruitment.** How will your city recruit new businesses downtown? Plan to include both "export" businesses—those that sell goods and services to customers outside your area—and regional-serving companies. Business recruitment usually occurs later in the revitalization process, after a critical mass of urban entertainment and housing has been established.

Below: Residents of Macon, GA show their support for the Macon Action Plan.



- **Culture.** What unique cultural facilities could be enhanced, moved, or created downtown? This can include things like arenas, stadiums, performing arts centers, museums, historic sites and buildings, and other attractions. This can help attract visitors from around the region to your downtown, who can in turn support local businesses.
- **Public infrastructure.** What public infrastructure would need to change as part of this project? Focus on essential issues like water and sewer, structured parking, and enhanced security and cleanliness, among others. Parks and open space, and, when appropriate, opportunities for waterfront development, should also be included. Read more about this in Step 2 starting on page 9.
- **Community involvement.** Map out your plan to make sure citizens have continuous opportunities for input and involvement in the revitalization process. Read more about this in Step 1: Strategy 1 on page 5.
- **Marketing.** How will you market downtown to residents and businesses? If you plan to draw people downtown with events, plan how you will market those as well. If residents currently have a negative view of downtown, you will need to work hard to change their perceptions. This is also an important part of attracting the investment community. Read more on this in Step 7 starting on page 30.
- **Support needs.** Will the city government be able to do this revitalization work alone, or will you need external support? Consider creating a business improvement district or a transportation management organization, as well as temporary task forces, a parking authority, an arts' coordinating group, and others.
- **Phases.** It is not possible to do all this all at once, so establish phases for your revitalization work. Focus on doing catalytic projects first—those that will motivate future changes to follow. This approach can help community members see progress underway, and remind project champions of the end vision you are working toward.

The outcomes of this conversation should form the basis of your strategic plan. At the end of the second day, determine together the immediate next steps for formalizing the plan and its implementation, including who will be responsible for those next steps and when they should be accomplished. The plan should be summarized in writing very quickly after the second meeting and distributed for comments. Final plans are usually only 10 to 15 pages long and should be sent out to politicians and citizens as part of the marketing and community involvement strategies.

Then it's time to implement your plan. The remainder of this document outlines some of the most important aspects of that. Consider how to integrate this work into existing city processes, and schedule regular check-in meetings to make sure you are meeting the goals and deadlines laid out by the plan.



STEP 2

Create an attractive, walkable place

Once you have a strategic plan in place, it's time to put that plan into action and change the built environment. This second step involves five strategies: make the area clean and safe; activate empty spaces in the short term; facilitate redevelopment in the long term; improve public spaces; and provide multiple transportation options.

Strategy 1: Make the area clean and safe

Making downtown feel safe is the first order of business for any revitalization work. Without a baseline atmosphere of safety, all other downtown amenities or services will struggle. A place must not only be safe objectively but also feel safe subjectively. Cleanliness—streets that are generally free of litter and graffiti—is closely related, as it affects both the aesthetic impression of a place as well as perceptions of personal safety.

If crime or cleanliness is a problem in your downtown, take all necessary steps to address it:

- **Conduct a safety assessment** and work with local businesses to identify areas in particular need of attention.
- **Establish a visible security presence in the neighborhood.** Partner with the local police force to have officers dedicated to the area in squad cars as well as on foot or bike patrols. Consider whether an additional private security effort would be appropriate.
- **Establish city trash and street cleaning level of service**, and coordinate any private cleanliness efforts with city agencies. In some cases, crime or cleanliness may not be as much of a problem as public perceptions of the neighborhood.

- **Create a Business Improvement District (BID).** A BID, usually funded by a tax or levy on businesses within a set area, provides a range of services to promote and enhance the neighborhood, including cleaning streets, providing security, making capital improvements and streetscape enhancements, and marketing. BIDs are often the organization primarily responsible for a downtown's revitalization, and their responsibilities can include much more than just safety and cleanliness. We talk about them more in Step 7 on page 30.
- **Create a team of street ambassadors.** Street ambassadors act as a concierge to assist visitors, field questions and provide motorist assistance, offer first aid, help homeless in the neighborhood, and pick up trash. This is often something a BID is responsible for.

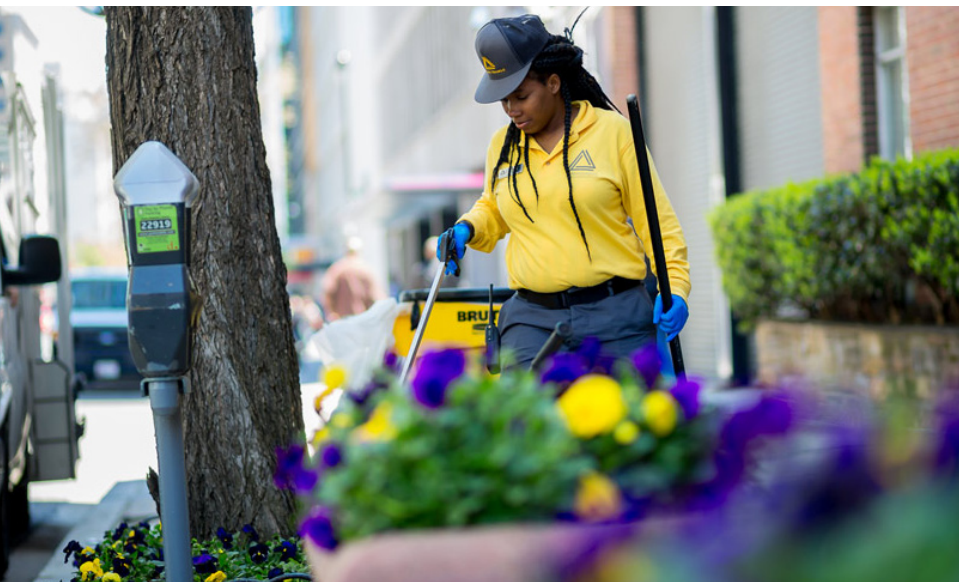
Strategy 2: Beautify public spaces

Beautiful public spaces give visitors and residents a place to sit, relax, people-watch, and enjoy the neighborhood—a simple way to encourage people to spend more time downtown. Public spaces should be well maintained and attractive, and provide a central focus for gatherings.

Some things other communities have used to improve their public spaces:

- **Invest in the streetscape.** Repair broken sidewalks, and consider adding features like street benches, planters, bike racks, trees with a healthy canopy, and tree boxes. Make sure the arrangement of windows and doors favors pedestrians and is not dominated by sides of buildings, or parking structures.
- **Create outdoor lighting geared towards pedestrians.** Put in ample lighting designed for people walking, rather than automobile traffic.
- **Establish a façade improvement program.** Provide financial incentives to businesses and property owners to upgrade and visually improve building exteriors. Façades are usually privately owned and are not public spaces strictly speaking, but they have a significant impact on the look and feel of a public space.

Below: Street ambassadors in Washington, DC (left) and Missoula, MT (right).



- **Install water features.** Water features can act like a centerpiece of an area. Classic fountains can provide a beautiful, decorative gathering place. Interactive fountains can give families with children a great opportunity to come out and play.
- **Develop a downtown arts district** and organize related programming like art gallery openings or “First Fridays”, art markets, or performance festivals. Arts districts often are organized in the form of a non-profit with a paid staff that works to create programming and events on a regular basis throughout the district. Tax incentives can be targeted towards arts industries to attract artists to the districts.
- **Install public art.** Public art installations are another way to add interest, create a focal area, and give people a reason to visit a neighborhood. Partner with a local arts organization or hold a competition to solicit pieces.
- **Create easy to use maps and directions on prominent signs.** Install eye-catching and easy-to-use signs that direct visitors to popular locations. This should include both “trail blazing” (which guide motorists to an area) and “wayfinding” (which help pedestrians find their way within the area).

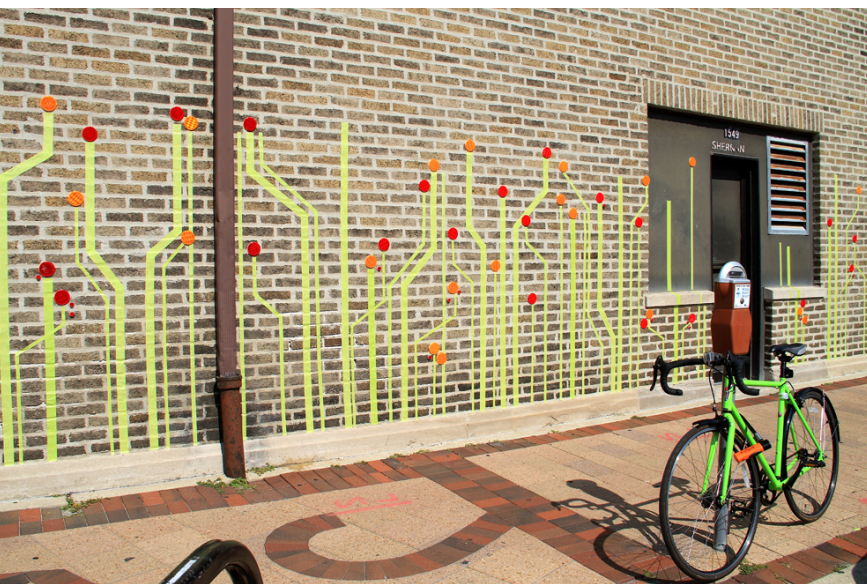
Strategy 3: Activate empty spaces in the short term

Which comes first: great shops or lots of people? In most cases, the two build off one another. You can help get that process started by filling in empty lots and vacant storefronts. This creates a virtuous cycle in which a more interesting, complete walking experience draws more pedestrian traffic, which helps to support on-street businesses, which draws more pedestrians, and so on. On the other hand, gaps or voids along the sidewalk that interrupt the continuity of experience discourage pedestrian participation and undermine downtown vitality.

Focus on each block one at a time, and aim to create a continuous “wall” of shops and activated spaces. Ideally, work to get a minimum of two to four complete, activated blocks together. Ultimately your goal will be to fill these spaces with permanent shops, offices, or restaurants. In the interim, here are some ideas for ways to activate the empty spaces:

- **Create a visitors center.** If your downtown has vacant storefronts, consider leasing one in the heart of downtown and transforming it into a welcoming, engaging visitors center.

Left: “Flourish,” a public art piece in downtown Evanston, IL. Right: Pedestrian lighting in downtown Charlottesville, VA.



- **Create “pop-up” shops.** A great way to fill empty storefronts is to invite local existing businesses, manufacturers, crafters, makers, artisans, or other entrepreneurs to open a temporary pop-up shop. These flexible spaces allow business owners to experiment in a new location without the high up-front costs of building out a new retail space. Do everything you can to make securing the space and permitting its use easy and affordable.
- **Allow for interim uses of vacant lots.** Temporary uses can serve as a great interim measure for vacant lots downtown. For example, seasonal cafés or restaurants in the summer, or holiday markets in the winter. The City may lease the lot from the landowner, if necessary. Be sure City regulations allow for this use.
- **Establish a farmers’ market.** Weekly markets give people a reason to come downtown regularly and support small, independent businesses.
- **Bring in food trucks.** Mobile cart and food truck eateries can bring a critical mass of people to places they might not have been before, and also show the potential for revitalized economic activity in an area.
- **Invite artists to create installations.** Work with a local artists’ alliance to create public artworks in vacant spaces. Artworks that include light elements are particularly engaging after dark.
- **Install outdoor kiosks.** Use them as an information desk for visitors, or rent them out to entrepreneurs selling souvenirs, jewelry, artwork, etc.

No matter what you decide, appoint a member of staff to maintain this effort, give it an ongoing presence, and promote the temporary uses.

Strategy 4: Facilitate redevelopment in the long term

As the interim uses discussed above begin to draw people to downtown, it will be easier for residents and developers to see the potential for revitalization. Leverage that potential into long-term redevelopment projects with some of the following strategies.

Left: A holiday pop-up shop in Hagerstown, MD. Right: Window installations in a former department store in downtown Missoula, MT.



- **Eliminate regulatory barriers to redevelopment.** First and foremost, make sure city regulations are not inhibiting growth downtown. Modernize outdated zoning and building regulations, and make sure new regulations support your community's revitalization plans. Specifically, make sure codes allow for and encourage: reuse of existing structures; strategic infill construction; mixed uses; higher density development.
- **Create more flexible zoning code definitions of building use.** Explore mixed-use zoning that allows retail and residential. Consider form-based codes that use physical form (rather than separation of uses) as the organizing principle for the code. Examine parking requirements attached with existing zoning. These changes can make it easier, faster, and less expensive for developers to build downtown.
- **Waive local development fees.** Consider waiving fees associated with building construction or redevelopment in your neighborhood of focus.
- **Support redevelopment with grants or loans.** Establish a pre-development grant or low-interest loan program to complete financial and architectural feasibility studies, design development studies, prospective appraisals or historic tax credit qualification.
- **Apply for redevelopment grants from your state.** State economic development agencies often make funding available for brownfields remediation, infill development, and renovation of old or blighted structures.
- **Make underutilized public land available for private sector development.** If there is underutilized, publicly owned land within the revitalization district, consider selling or ground-leasing it to make it available to private developers. Former industrial sites, factories, empty public buildings, vacant, or other blighted buildings are often excellent candidates for redevelopment.
- **Identify land owners of large parcels.** Pursue public private partnerships with land owners of large parcels that may be unused. Develop partnerships for the property to facilitate redevelopment with experienced developers.



A historic building rennovated into lofts above ground-floor retail space in Cleveland, OH's Gordon Square Arts District.

Strategy 5: Provide multiple transportation options

Don't just move people through downtown: give them easy, safe, convenient ways to get to and move within downtown. Three major elements of a transportation system encourage people to come downtown and keeps them coming back: parking, transit, and streets designed to make

walking and biking safe and convenient.

Parking

Parking is an expensive use of valuable real estate. And though it is an important feature that supports the livelihood of any downtown, it should be used strategically. Parking options should allow people to park once and then walk to multiple destinations, and ideally multiple people throughout the day should use each space. Successful parking strategies come in a variety of forms.

- **Create shared parking.** “Shared parking” refers to parking spaces that multiple people use throughout the course of the day and week. As office users leave their parking spaces at the end of the workday, for example, evening entertainment users can use those same spaces to see a performance or go out to dinner. This strategy provides an adequate number of spaces but not so much that there is an excess supply.
- **Rethink parking minimums.** Many zoning codes require a minimum number of parking spaces for each use. An apartment building might require 1.5 parking spaces for each unit built, for example. The result can be overbuilt parking garages that increase project costs for developers, regardless of whether there is demand for these spaces. By adjusting parking requirements to better align with demand, cities can reduce construction costs for developers and avoid a glut of empty parking that can make downtown feel empty. Some successful places are actually replacing parking minimums with parking maximums.
- **Develop a parking authority.** A centralized parking operator can make sure parking is used as efficiently as possible by enforcing parking restrictions and working with local businesses to evaluate the needs and limitations of downtown parking. Taxes and revenue generated through parking fees can go to a revolving loan fund that supports downtown businesses or public improvements.

It is important to get the amount of parking right. Too much parking is a waste of a scarce resource, and vacant spaces can signal a lack of activity. Too little (or not enough in the right places) and people will consider a trip downtown too frustrating. Experiment, collect data, and adjust your parking strategy accordingly.

Transit

Think of public transportation in the same way you think of great shops, beautiful park space, or five-star restaurants: an important amenity that can help attract new residents, employers, and visitors. Small towns and even rural areas can use this strategy to catalyze private investment and improve connections between people and jobs.



One of Washington, DC's Circulator buses.

- **Develop a circulator bus system.** Circulator buses provide frequent, convenient service between popular destinations around town. Typically, an urban circulator operates within a closed loop, usually three miles or shorter in length. They run frequently, are easy to use and affordable, and have distinct branding that associates them with downtown.

Cities often partner with private transit operators to manage the system.

- **Connect existing regional hubs.** Regional hubs like airports, universities, hospital centers, and military bases can provide a steady stream of visitors. Help bring those people downtown by providing convenient transit service from those hubs.
- **Improve users' experience on transit.** Transit systems need to be high quality to attract riders and keep them returning. Stops and stations should be well lit, inviting, clean, and well maintained. Some cities have even partnered with artists to create installations that serve double-duty as public art and bus stop facilities.
- **Give transit priority on roadways.** Create dedicated bus lanes, preferred signaling, or other priority options to keep transit trips convenient and efficient.
- **Capture the value of real estate near transit.** Real estate near transit stops is nearly always in-demand, and it's often owned by a government entity or transit agency. "Joint development" is one way to make the most of this valuable asset. Usually the public agency partners with a private developer to develop the land and share the proceeds. The construction process can enhance infrastructure or create new facilities, and the resulting development can create a long-term revenue stream for the city or agency while also boosting ridership rates.

Streets that are safe and convenient for people walking and biking

Take a walk along your Main Street. Are the sidewalks wide and inviting, or narrow and cramped? Is crossing the street easy or treacherous? Is the street safe for people riding bicycles or taking the bus? What about children, older adults, or people in wheelchairs—will they find the street welcoming or challenging?

Vibrant downtowns are almost always places where walking is comfortable and safe, and how streets are designed and built can have a huge impact on that. We call this using a "Complete Streets" approach. Here's how to put that approach into action:

- **Pass a Complete Streets policy.** A Complete Streets policy is a city's formal commitment that future transportation projects will take into account the needs of everyone using the road. These policies direct transportation planners and engineers to routinely design and operate the entire right-of-way to enable safe access for all users, regardless of age, ability, or mode of transportation.
- **Create an implementation plan.** Smart Growth America's National Complete Streets Coalition has a wealth of documents on how to implement a Complete Streets policy and change the way your streets are designed and built. Bring a Complete Streets workshop to your community or view all the resources on our website at www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets.



Complete Streets features like crosswalks and pedestrian islands in Cleveland, OH.



STEP 3

Diversify the downtown economy

Diversifying the types of activities in your downtown gives people many reasons to come to the neighborhood. Economic development professionals talk about creating an “18-hour” place—that is, a neighborhood bustling with activities in the morning, afternoon, and evening, seven days a week. To do that, focus on jobs, housing, and retail. Promote employment downtown and work to support a diversified economy. Build new housing options downtown, including housing for low-income families and homes at a variety of price points. And come up with a strategy for supporting retail that includes everyday errands as well as major shopping destinations.

Strategy 1: Promote employment downtown

Jobs are the engine of most downtowns. Workers are usually the majority of customers for local business as well as the most common riders of transit and patrons of cultural activities. Here are some ways to promote a diverse range of employment opportunities for workers at all salary levels.

- **Show employers that you are working to create a more walkable downtown.** Many businesses seek downtown locations for the business advantages these locations provide (see Smart Growth America’s 2015 report *Core Values: Why American Companies are Moving Downtown* for more about this). Make it clear to companies in the area that you are actively working to make downtown a walkable, vibrant neighborhood—and give them an opportunity to get in on the ground floor.
- **Locate government offices and facilities** in the neighborhoods where you want to encourage investment, jobs, and activity. Government offices can stabilize a stagnant or declining neighborhood by providing a daytime population.
- **Create incentives for employers to move downtown.** Proactively reach out to

businesses that would be a good fit for your downtown, and provide services to facilitate their search for the perfect office space. Streamline permitting processes, if possible, and provide an ombudsman to help relocating businesses easily navigate local regulations.

- **Work to attract companies in specific sectors.** Many industries thrive in “clusters,” benefitting from access to a pool of skilled workers and supporting businesses. Consider cultivating a business cluster by seeking out businesses in a specific industry. Provide grants and industry-specific supports to attract those companies, and show your ability to attract and train workers with the necessary skills. This strategy is most successful when based on an industry cluster your area already has to some extent, or other assets that suggest a potential competitive edge.
- **Encourage small businesses to open downtown.** Create a homegrown economy by welcoming entrepreneurs and small business owners. Finding affordable space can be especially tough for businesses that need small offices or retail shops with easy access to larger tenants. Work with state and non-profit small business development agencies in your area to provide information and matchmaking services that help management companies fill available space. Consider working with building owners to negotiate lower rents for promising new businesses, or using vacant storefronts as pop-up spaces for entrepreneurs that need visibility. Establish a loan fund to provide targeted loans to businesses considering moving downtown.
- **Create co-working spaces or shared office spaces.** Co-working or shared office spaces can help fledgling companies, freelancers, and entrepreneurs find a home in underutilized vacant office space. Co-working spaces most obviously meet the needs of smaller proprietors and start-ups, but increasingly larger businesses are also using these spaces to take advantage of the connections and information shared there. These locations are also ideal for business incubators that help new and startup companies develop by providing services such as management training.
- **Partner with local universities and community colleges** to create training programs in industries you want to cultivate. Encourage institutions to create a downtown satellite campus presence that offers classes, and/or student housing options.
- **Consider working with or establishing a non-profit, community economic development partnership** to facilitate collaboration between major institutions/technical schools and the business community in order to coordinate workforce training and business development needs in service of community goals for economic development.



Market Square in Pittsburgh, PA helps the lunch time crowd get up from their desks with cafe seating. The Square is also a space for evening events.

Strategy 2: Build new homes downtown

Workers provide the pulse of downtown between 9 and 5. Creating the option for people to live downtown as well means people will be there around the clock to keep the place hopping. And market demand is so high for homes in walkable neighborhoods that not creating them is a missed opportunity. Here are some ways to create or improve housing options downtown.

- **Permit downtown housing through zoning changes.** Many single-use zoning codes outlawed housing in central-business districts, and may have banned the types of neighborhood-serving retail that residents need. Review your codes to make sure they permit residential development in a variety of densities from single-family townhouses to apartment buildings.
- **Mix uses vertically.** Whether your downtown includes three-story walk-ups or high-rise towers, permit and encourage buildings with retail or commercial space located below housing.
- **Provide homeownership grants.** Incentivize new downtown residents by providing grants that assist with closing costs or down payments.
- **Leverage historic resources.** Communities lucky enough to have 19th and early 20th century warehouses close to downtown have the ideal infrastructure for residential infill due to floor plans that are conducive to residential or even office redevelopment. Often historic buildings were clustered in industrial districts that can provide a unique urban experience often with prime locations adjacent to downtown.
- **“Adaptive reuse” can apply to office buildings, too.** Find existing buildings where converting from office to residential use make sense. Evaluate your current mix of uses and vacancy rates, and you may find that some buildings intended for office space could be better positioned as a residential conversion. Changes to your zoning and building codes may be necessary to pursue this tactic.

We talk more about creating housing downtown in Step 4 on page 21.

Left: Park Forest, IL built 69 single family homes within walking distance to downtown on the footprint of the former Goldblatts Department Store. Right: Toole Crossing in Missoula, MT, will offer condos above street-level commercial space.



Strategy 3: Create a diverse retail and business environment

Once you have people living and working downtown, give them great places to eat, drink, shop, and explore. Consider a full range of business types, including multiple types of retail. Identify locations that will serve businesses based on their different needs—some will want foot traffic, some will want freight access, and some will want proximity to other businesses, for example. Here are some ways to create a diverse retail and business environment.

- **Create a strategy for diverse retail.** When it comes to downtown development, there are three general types of retail: those that meet people's everyday needs (pharmacies and dry cleaners, for example), those that draw on a regional market (such as major shopping destinations), and those that are a unique destination (a sports stadium or major cultural complex). Each of these types of retail has a distinct economic development profile, and brings or keeps people downtown at different times of the day and of the year. They also each require different infrastructure, parking strategies, and promotional programs. Develop a strategy to attract different types of retail to the most appropriate locations based on these needs and intended economic outcomes.
- **Develop relationships with commercial retail brokers.** These professionals have contacts with local, regional, and national retailers and can help recruit retailers to your downtown.
- **Concentrate retail in a walkable area.** Foot traffic is a downtown shopping district's biggest competitive advantage for local and small businesses. Concentrate retail shops in a walkable district to generate this traffic, and diversify retail types (see the point above) to support foot traffic at different times of the day. Perform pedestrian traffic counts at key intersections to use that as a marketing tool to strengthen your recruitment strategy. Retailers like to be located together. Create a retail cluster by working with property owners and retailers to achieve a continuous retail experience.
- **Identify and market vacant properties.** Compile an inventory of vacant properties that can be marketed towards retailers. Modern retailers have specific requirements for the layouts of their stores and given these constraints, being familiar with building inventories can help guide retailers to the right property.
- **Encourage people to stay downtown once they're there.** Do you have a performance space or sports venue that already draws people downtown? Come up with ways to encourage people to stay downtown once they're there. Examples of easy ways to do this are distributing maps of what's nearby or running restaurant promotions.



Walkable retail in Ithaca, NY.

- **Promote periodic and seasonal markets.** Farmers markets, flea markets, and seasonal markets provide novelty that attracts people downtown when they might otherwise stay home. Markets also create an opportunity to showcase permanent businesses and create a focus for promotional efforts that identify downtown as an exciting, rewarding shopping destination.
- **Build a “Shop Local” campaign.** Small, locally owned and operated businesses are an essential element to your downtown’s authentic sense of place. Organize campaigns and promotions to highlight these businesses and provide visibility during times of the year when shoppers may gravitate towards larger retailers (e.g., Christmas or back-to-school).
- **Maintain “pop-up” locations to grow local start-ups and experiment with retail formats.** As downtown values escalate, smaller businesses can find it difficult to locate affordable space, and small retailers such as artisan boutiques, may find it difficult to generate enough income from sales to justify a permanent storefront. Pop-up shops generate interest among shoppers while giving entrepreneurs the chance to test the waters or reach new customers. This strategy can be particularly useful in areas with several vacant storefronts.



Shoppers and vendors at Local First Milwaukee's 2015 Buy Local gift fair.



STEP 4

Build in equity

The best revitalization work brings new people and energy downtown—and makes sure the people already living there also benefit from these improvements. This means creating jobs at all skill and salary levels, keeping existing homes affordable (both rental and ownership), and creating new homes at a variety of price points.

Strategy 1: Incorporate affordable housing strategies early

If you are at the beginning of your revitalization work, affordable housing might seem like the last thing you need to worry about. But at the beginning—when development plans are still flexible and real estate values are lower than they are likely to be after revitalization—is exactly the time to lay the groundwork for long-term housing affordability.

Making downtown an affordable place to live means creating homes at a variety of price points in addition to programs that support low-income residents. These strategies can support higher occupancy rates downtown and also reduce the likelihood of foreclosures that can lead to properties sitting vacant and blighted. It can also help workers at all income levels live near their jobs, and in doing so help companies downtown attract and retain employees.

Several policy tools, described below, can help communities preserve affordability. Some of these policies require legislative action; local groups acting independently can implement others. Some may already exist in the community, but may be poorly enforced or underutilized. Here are three different ways to keep the neighborhood affordable while still allowing property values to rise.

Help current residents stay in the neighborhood

- **Provide homeownership counseling and assistance.** The best time for low- and moderate-income individuals to purchase property is right at the beginning of a neighborhood transition. As home values rise, low-income families will likely be unable to purchase and may also find it more difficult to rent. Those who own homes at the beginning of the rise, however, are not only spared from the price increase but can also benefit from significant increases in home equity.
- **Allow for principal resident tax abatements.** To help homeowners deal with large assessment increases on their principal residence, governments can establish income-based credits that reduce homeowner tax liability. Tax abatement policies are most frequently offered for elderly residents who live on fixed incomes, but have also been developed for low-income residents and for those who invest in remodeling and rehabilitation.
- **Provide tenants the opportunity to purchase.** Opportunity to purchase can be crucial when owners of low-rent apartment buildings look to sell their buildings for conversion to higher income producing properties.
- **Create energy efficiency and maintenance programs.** Provide free or reduced grants, loans, and services to qualified families for energy conservation and home repair measures. Weatherization programs can come through the city or a partnership with local utility companies. Necessary home repair programs can also help elderly homeowners correct serious home repair deficiencies.

Create new homes at a variety of sizes and price points

- **Review and update zoning codes.** If your city's zoning codes currently restrict development to single-family homes in one neighborhood and multifamily homes in another, consider changing them to encourage diverse home types. Be sure your codes allow for mixed-use development—where buildings may have some combination of retail, offices, and housing—and consider increasing density allowances in some areas of the downtown core.
- **Develop mixed-use, mixed-income, higher-density buildings.** There may be statewide programs available that encourage local governments to do this. Tie density-based incentives to inclusion of affordable units. Require or incentivize two- and three-bedroom units to accommodate families.

Create below-market-rate housing

- **Set goals for committed affordable housing units.** Set a quantitative goal or target for the number of affordable homes to build in the area, as well as the price-diversity mix you want to achieve.
- **Incentivize affordable units through density bonuses.** Consider offering an increase in density to developers who include affordable units in their multifamily construction.

- **Consider adopting an inclusionary zoning ordinance.** Inclusionary zoning ordinances require or encourage a given share of new market-rate residential construction to be affordable by people with low to moderate incomes for sale or rental for a set period of time.
- **Facilitate use of the federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program.** LIHTC is perhaps the most important resource for creating affordable housing in the United States today. Make sure your jurisdiction has the capacity to take maximum advantage of the program by collaborating with state agencies that administer allocations at the local level. Position your housing department or agency to serve as a facilitator for affordable housing developers to access the tax credit process.
- **Create a local affordable housing fund.** An affordable housing fund or similar type of revolving loan fund can help homebuilders finance construction or renovation of low-income housing. The fund can serve as a source of bridge loans and can leverage LIHTC and conventional loans to make projects with rent restrictions economically viable. The fund can also be used to help non-profits with pre-development costs. Funding can come from real estate transfer and interest-related fees and taxes, or developer contributions associated with project approvals, general fund contributions, or some combination.
- **Consider other federal programs.** Other programs from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development may benefit your community, including the HOME Program, the Self-help Homeownership Opportunity Program, the Choice Neighborhood program, and Community Development Block Grant funding.



Below-market-rate homes at Indianapolis' The Braxton at Lugar Tower are close to downtown and connected to public transit.

Strategy 2: Foster economic opportunity

Income and wealth inequality threatens the potential and well-being not only of the most vulnerable residents; it places everyone's economic future at risk. A growing body of research shows that greater equality brings about more robust economic growth for everyone.²

Foster economic opportunity at all income levels by supporting small and locally owned businesses, supporting job training, and better connecting low-income residents to jobs. Here are a few ways to do that.

² Pastor, M. and Benner, C. (2008). "Been Down So Long: Weak-Market Cities and Regional Equity Retooling for Growth." *Retooling for Growth: Building a 21st Century Economy in America's Older Industrial Areas*. Brookings Institution Press.

- **Offer discounted rents to independent and minority-owned businesses.** As new retail spaces are created, consider partnering with developers to provide discounted leases for independent and/or minority-owned businesses.
- **Protect existing small businesses.** Existing small businesses and ethnic shops are part of the neighborhood's identity and serve a clear market need. Work with business owners and landlords to protect these contributing members of the community.
- **Work with local and minority-owned construction companies.** Community revitalization often comes with significant construction projects. Make sure those jobs benefit your community members by requiring opportunities for minority- and women-owned businesses and contractors. Work with trade schools and community colleges to identify apprenticeship programs for the building trades industry.
- **Support entrepreneurship.** Create homegrown economic drivers by supporting entrepreneurship downtown. Consider creating flexible workspaces, tax incentives for independent businesses or new businesses establishing a presence in targeted locations, or an investment fund for entrepreneurs.
- **Create job-training opportunities.** Recruit new companies that will do job training, or partner with local or state job support agencies.
- **Connect people to jobs.** Do you need a car to get around in your region? If so, low-income workers might have a hard time simply getting to work. Create or improve public transportation services between job centers and downtown residential neighborhoods.



The owners of Lee's Flowers on U St. NW in Washington, DC.



Pasadena, CA

STEP 5

Improve government regulations and processes

Improve public processes to facilitate the outcomes you want. First, make sure government regulations and procedures do not stand in the way of downtown revitalization goals. Even better, create new programs or assign staff to support the work moving forward.

Consider changes to local zoning, development codes, and related ordinances. Rather than having rigid regulations that require businesses to request cumbersome exemptions, make codes simpler and more flexible.

Also consider improving the process for things like permits, site planning, and inspections. Improving these processes can reduce time and cost for developers and businesses, and ultimately encourage new projects. Ask current business owners what regulations are most inhibiting, and consider how to modify those regulations while still maintaining the city's obligation to public health and safety.

Strategy 1: Improve public processes and regulations

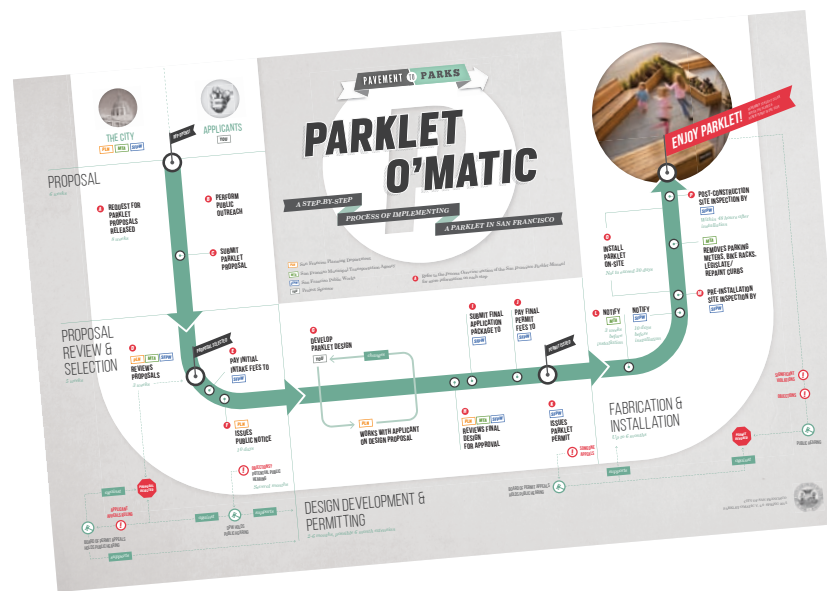
- **Look for ways to improve permitting processes.** Explore the potential for process re-engineering, so that post-approval permitting does not slow implementation of development projects. Consider how you could improve the process for small business owners as well.
- **Update zoning codes to allow and encourage the type of development you want.** Consider implementing a form-based code or similar approach, which can make the zoning process more predictable for developers and community members alike.
- **Update ordinances.** Make sure your city is not needlessly prohibiting activities that

could contribute to revitalization and a vibrant downtown environment, like expanding the allowable uses of sidewalks, alleys, other public spaces for café seating, and recreational or entertainment venues.

- **Identify existing public initiatives that could support revitalization.** Integrate building reuse as a goal in other policy initiatives and reforms, such as zoning code updates, building code reforms, parking policy changes, transit-oriented development guidelines and climate adaptation plans.

Strategy 2: Make life easier for businesses and developers

- **Create a guidebook for small business owners** with clear, simple explanations of how to navigate the permitting and regulation process.
- **Create a guidebook for developers.** Give developers or other potential investors an overview of government-offered or supported incentives for investing downtown, including things like facade improvement loans, tax abatements, opportunities like historic and New Market tax credits, additional security, trash removal for businesses, etc.
- **Create a business concierge service.** Make it as easy as possible for businesses to understand and navigate the permitting process. Assign a clear point of contact for business owners to talk to, and have that person act as a concierge to help make sure the City meets businesses' needs as efficiently as possible.



San Francisco created a “Parklet-o-matic” flowchart to help people navigate the the city’s approval process for temporary parks.



New York, NY

STEP 6

Finance projects

Revitalizing downtowns is about creating a durable economic asset for your community, and those kinds of assets require investment. Most successful revitalization projects involve both public and private investment—public investment usually comes first, and is best used as a catalyst for private investment. Public investment demonstrates to investors and potential partners the city's commitment to redevelopment. This section outlines innovative strategies to fund redevelopment projects and attract private investment.

Strategy 1: Think creatively about funding

Public investment shows potential partners that the city is committed to redevelopment—but finding public resources for that investment can be challenging. Think creatively about where to find the money to start your redevelopment. Here are some ideas to consider.

- **Corporate donors.** Private companies are often willing to contribute to revitalization efforts, but lack models of what to do and how to engage in partnerships with the public sector. Approach companies with a specific project in mind, and a clear way for them to get involved. Some examples include selling naming rights to buildings or public spaces, or recruiting them to sponsor specific events, projects, or programs.
- **Foundation donations.** Local or state foundations often have an interest in downtown redevelopment. Consider foundations that work in equity, environment, public health, or the arts.
- **Explore state and federal grant funding and tax credits.** Make sure all options for state and federal grant funding have been exhaustively reviewed. Some possible tax credits include state and federal Historic Preservation Tax Credits, which provide equity

investments in eligible historic buildings; New Markets Tax Credits, which incentivize commercial projects in targeted low-income communities; brownfield tax credits, which incentivize the remediation and redevelopment of former industrial and contaminated sites; HUD's Neighborhood Stabilization Program, which helps with the purchase and redevelopment of foreclosed homes; and the Community Reinvestment Act, which encourages financial institutions to meet the credit needs of the communities they serve.

- **Public-private partnerships.** Public-private partnerships, or "P3s," have become an essential financing mechanism for many revitalization projects. In P3 agreements for development or redevelopment, the public entity usually provides some combination of tax incentives, infrastructure investments, financing assistance, or public land or other assets. The private entity contributes capital investments, commits to providing jobs, contributes development expertise, and should assume most of the financial risk for the ultimate project outcomes. These agreements can have short life spans covering only the construction period for the project, or longer life spans covering debt repayment or long-term operating agreements.
- **Create tax incentives.** Tax incentives can be used to attract business and industry, and to encourage quality development of all kinds. These can come in the form of property and income tax abatements, and can encourage everything from commercial building rehabilitation to new residential development to traditional industrial and manufacturing spaces.

Strategy 2: Use value capture

Redevelopment adds value to properties within—and near—the revitalizing district. "Value capture" refers to a variety of mechanisms that derive revenue from the resulting growth in land value. These mechanisms essentially recoup value from the private sector and reinvest it back into the revitalizing district. Here are a few value capture mechanisms to consider.

- **Create a special assessment district.** Special assessment districts are areas where a tax is assessed against parcels that have been identified as receiving a direct and unique benefit as a result of a public project. Assessment districts are commonly used to fund the development of sewer, water, utilities, streets, transit, and other public services.
- **Inclusionary zoning.** As described in Step 4, incorporating affordable housing is a critical component of any redevelopment. Inclusionary zoning requires developers to leverage some of the profits from market rate housing to pay for affordable units. In some cases developers can receive a density bonus in exchange for creating affordable units.
- **Tax Increment Financing (TIF).** Under a TIF, a local government typically issues bonds to pay for infrastructure improvements, brownfield remediation, or other upfront public costs that are critical to the success of a redevelopment project. The bonds are used to pay for the improvements and tax revenues from the increased property value of the development cover the debt service. TIFs can stimulate private investment by providing developers financing for the infrastructure needed to support a proposed development that may not be feasible otherwise.

Strategy 3: Create an entity for catalytic investment

In some cases revitalizing cities or towns have difficulty attracting private developers. In these situations a local catalytic development company can be formed to undertake the projects that are deemed to have too much risk by traditional developers. A catalytic developer can undertake complete projects from beginning to end or engage in activities that make development more attractive, such as assembling land for construction or financing gaps between conventional financing and the required investment for the project.

Strategy 4: Leverage public investments

Even if there are no new sources of funding available, there is still all of the money already being spent on capital improvement and infrastructure projects that can be leveraged for downtown revitalization. Roads and sidewalks, schools, libraries, and municipal buildings are all examples of investments that can support redevelopment if made strategically. For example, building a new municipal building? Locate it within your redevelopment district rather than on the edge of town. Many of the strategies outlined in Step 5 also work towards leveraging public investments.



STEP 7

Establish on-going place management

Once buildings are renovated, new homes are built, and new businesses move in along Main Street, it's important to have a long-term steward for the neighborhood. Much like a house that needs regular upkeep, a downtown needs continual investment, maintenance, and on-going management to keep it vibrant.

That means giving people reasons to come downtown again and again. It means creating a culture of hospitality for companies, and continuously pursuing and promoting redevelopment. It means hosting events in public spaces, and inviting new people and businesses to come downtown who have never been before.

To do this, bring together government leaders, business owners, neighborhood representatives, landowners, and real estate developers to create a formal, long-term stewardship organization. Could an existing community organization take on this work? If not, consider creating an entity like a Business Improvement District or a Main Street group. Here are some of the ongoing things that entity should be responsible for.

- **Manage the day-to-day needs of the neighborhood**, from trash pickup and street cleaning to graffiti removal and changing streetlights.
- **Market downtown to potential investors**, both from within the region and from outside of it, and create a culture of hospitality for companies.
- **Program public spaces** to bring residents to the neighborhood throughout the day, week, month, and year.
- **Pursue and promote redevelopment opportunities.** Work with business owners, developers, and interested companies to help downtown continue to grow.

- **Regularly convene key stakeholders.** Bring together landowners, business owners, and developers at regular intervals to discuss needs, address problems, and strategize for future growth. Consider inviting business development staff from other towns, the county, or the state, and aim to think expansively about how downtown can become even better—now and in the future.
- **Assess performance.** Keep track of how the neighborhood does over time. Are there vacancies and business closings, or new tenants and new construction? The steward should compile data that measures the outcomes, progress, and goals of downtown over a short-term, mid-term, and long-term basis, and work continuously to improve that performance.

Conclusion

Downtown revitalization is much more than making physical improvements; it's about bringing people together. Vibrant downtowns, Main Streets, and city centers give people reasons to come to a neighborhood and to return over and over again. Attractive public spaces can help individuals connect with each other, business owners, and the broader community. This process can strengthen and diversify a local economy and expand employment opportunities for people of all income levels.

Though it may be difficult to look at a downtown full of vacant storefronts and see anything other than challenges, those empty and underused areas can be untapped potential for reinvigorating communities and expanding economic opportunity. Through public engagement, strategic planning, public commitment, and ongoing support, you can foster neighborhood centers of economy, culture, and history.

This guide is designed to give local leaders an approachable framework—and concrete next steps—to realize your community's vision of a vibrant downtown. Whether your town or city is looking to reinvest in an already existing neighborhood business district, or wants to transform an underused area into an attractive public space, the strategies outlined here are applicable to communities of any and all sizes.

Communities in all stages of the (re)building process can use this guidebook as a stand-alone resource. Smart Growth America is also available to help your community implement these strategies. Visit smartgrowthamerica.org/rebuilding-downtown to learn more.



Smart Growth America
Making Neighborhoods Great Together

Smart Growth America is the only national organization dedicated to researching, advocating for, and leading coalitions to bring better development to more communities nationwide. From providing more sidewalks to ensuring more homes are built near public transportation or that productive farms remain a part of our communities, smart growth helps make sure people across the nation can live in great neighborhoods. Learn more about our work at smartgrowthamerica.org.