



INVESTING IN RURAL DOWNTOWNS: What role are EDDs playing?

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INVESTING IN RURAL DOWNTOWNS: What role are EDDs playing?



Downtowns are what typically give rural, suburban and urban areas life, providing a place to shop, socialize and connect with others, creating a sense of community for residents, but also making visitors feel welcome. Maintaining a strong downtown core can be challenging especially for rural regions struggling with outmigration of youth and others, an increase in big box stores and dollar stores, and the provision of necessary services. Downtowns are also typically the social centers of towns, offering spaces in which to connect with others, while also often holding historical and cultural significance in the area.

This paper explores the content of the Thriving Downtowns investment playbook, translating the most meaningful content for EDDs, while showcasing how EDDs are playing roles in downtown revitalization in their regions.

THRIVING DOWNTOWNS AND INVESTMENT READINESS

A recent publication, [Thriving Downtowns: an Investment Playbook for Appalachian Rural Communities](#), sheds some light for communities on how to be investment ready for downtown revitalization.

The wealth creation approach – an economic development approach with its principles of recognizing and building multiple forms of wealth, promoting local ownership and control, and improving livelihoods for those on the economic and social margins – is integral when considering investment readiness and how to engage in downtown revitalization. The eight capitals provide a way to start by considering what assets your region has. The playbook also

contains a section on investment readiness with an assessment that communities can take. Investment readiness is broken into the following sections:

Community Assets

This includes partners, leadership, and networks, and the capacity these groups have to plan and achieve shared priorities.

Local government and civic structures

This entails community self-identity, and how the local government can help via the use of municipal tools. In smaller communities, informal citizen networks can support units of government that rely on part-time elected officials.

Economic Ecosystem

The goal of an economic ecosystem is to nurture a local economy to become regionally connected, innovative, and rooted in the assets of its residents and businesses.

Built Infrastructure

This includes water/wastewater utilities, roads, sidewalks, and broadband, which are key resources for enabling successful downtown revitalization.

Natural Environment

Connections to the natural environment through local parks, bike trails and walking paths can make rural downtowns more attractive.

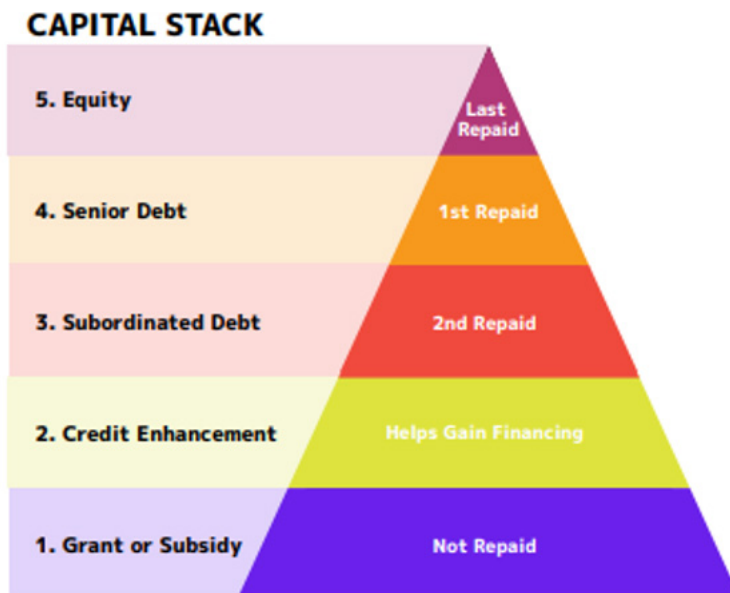
The [investment readiness assessment](#) allows communities to understand what they have in place and where they can invest their time in increasing their readiness.

Downtown Investment

The Thriving Downtowns investment playbook also discusses the pathway to revitalization with an investment lens. The pathway moves from planning activities focused on forming a project idea and examining community plans through predevelopment (analysis and feasibility), to a go/no go decision, into development (construction or start-up) and through ongoing management and administration of the property.

Where do Economic Development Districts fit into this process? EDDs typically aren't developers or managers, but they may fit into the Planning and/or Predevelopment activities, assisting with planning, community outreach, securing funding, prefeasibility and feasibility studies, etc.

The Playbook shares the capital stack as a framework for thinking about investment in small downtowns, and the spectrum of financial return, which is important to understand as a project begins to search out different kinds of funding and financing. As EDDs work in the Planning and Predevelopment phases, the parts of the capital stack they may be most helpful in acquiring will typically be in the Grant or Subsidy or Credit Enhancement areas. However, EDDs may also be useful in identifying additional investors that may support more of the development and management activities and fit more into the Subordinated Debt, Senior Debt or even Equity parts of the capital stack.



HOW EDDs ARE SUPPORTING DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

Economic Development Districts (EDDs) are engaging in downtown revitalization in their regions in a variety of ways. Naturally, as regional organizations, EDDs are not always focused on one community. However, their work with communities follows a variety of pathways, including main street planning, brownfields redevelopment, facilitation, funding and implementation.

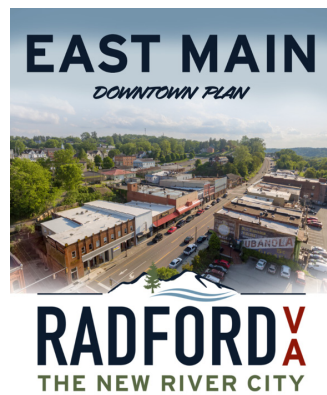
Downtown Planning

Many EDDs engage with their communities through downtown planning or [placemaking](#). "Placemaking is centered around observing, listening to, and asking questions of the people who live, work, and play in a particular space in order to understand their needs and aspirations for that space and for their community as a whole." EDDs' work on main street planning can take many forms.



The [New River Valley Regional Commission \(NRVRC\)](#), along with the City of Radford, Radford University, the Appalachian Regional Commission, the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, local business and property owners, and citizens of Radford, worked to develop the [East Main Downtown Plan](#). The plan was completed in 2021, funded by the Appalachian Regional Commission and the VA Department of Housing and Community Development. Recognizing that a vibrant and active commercial district is key to the health of the community and creates opportunities for entrepreneurship, placemaking, and enhancements of cultural amenities, the Plan recognizes that the East Main Downtown area has several significant advantages—including well-established community fabric, historic buildings, and an advantageous location—but had suffered from disinvestment and vacancies in the streetscape. The planning process engaged residents and stakeholders, collected and analyzed data, conducted studies (parking, community engagement, retail visioning,

building inventory), and ultimately created a series of [recommendations](#) to aid in the revitalization of the area. Leveraging the streetscape, curbing, sidewalk and traffic calming improvements, over 25 business and building owners, which collectively employ over 300 employees, will benefit from improvements identified in the East Main Downtown Plan. [In the past year](#), a new cupcake store opened, as well as a coffee and pastry shop. The city is investing \$2.4 million on a revitalization project, including new sidewalks and new lighting structures. The city is also reimbursing businesses that buy new awnings, or repaint or renovate their storefronts. A downtown parking lot is also being converted into a small park with benches and trees; they're also planning to build a walking and biking trail from downtown to Bisset Park.



Radford University is getting into the action, partnering with the city on a new economic development center on East Main Street. The University is remodeling an old bank building into offices and conference spaces, called the HUB, to be used for workshops, trainings, and as an incubator space for up and coming small businesses, in turn supporting work experiences and internships with entrepreneurs.

Program Planning Areas



The [Lake Champlain/Lake George Regional Planning Board \(LCLGRP\)](#), based in Lake George, New York, aggregates a variety of funding sources to assist municipalities in its five counties in creating, implementing, and applying for funding for community planning initiatives including:



1. Recreation and amenities planning

The region's natural assets can be used to benefit residents, while also attracting visitors and facilitating economic investment. The Planning Board works with communities to leverage their existing natural and recreational resources to access opportunities that enhance their member communities. These projects can impact trails, parks and waterfront improvements. Funding for these projects typically comes from EPA Technical Assistance money related to recreation economy for rural communities.

2. Community Revitalization Programs

LCLGRP collaborates with communities to enhance their traditional main streets, downtowns, and neighborhoods. Revitalization can mean economic growth, business expansion and attraction, supporting and retaining existing main street businesses, creating a more walkable downtown, or promoting existing natural resources to attract new visitors, depending on the community. LCLGRP assists in developing and articulating a vision and identifying funding opportunities to achieve it. For example, USDA Rural Development through Rural Business Development Grants (RBDG) allow LCLGRP to do Main Street reinvestment plans – currently in the Towns of Essex, Westport, and Crown Point. These projects are focused on main street corridors, with an expanded objective of connecting their main streets to their underutilized and often not publicly accessible waterfronts along Lake Champlain. This work is accomplished by engaging elected officials, doing community outreach, hosting a Community Day, where people walked around, participated in a tour of the area, and held open sessions in the evening.

3. Feasibility Studies

The Planning Board provides technical support to municipalities who are interested in site specific analysis for community led projects. Feasibility studies can be used to apply for grant funding for supplemental planning and/or implementation. The USDA feasibility studies are often done by the Regional Planning Board staff who are working on comprehensive plans or by external contractors.

4. Comprehensive Planning

LCLGRP works with communities to develop comprehensive plans every 5-10 years to communicate a community's goals and objectives and provide a strategy for the future of growth, development and land uses. The Regional Planning Board just recently started doing these; once they're done, the hope is that they will roll up into their CEDS. EDA partnership planning money helps to earn grants; these grants pay staff to do the comprehensive planning. Communities in the region have more interest in updating their comprehensive plans. The NY Department of State has grant programs for comprehensive plan updates.

5. Community Resiliency

LCLGRP connects communities to grant funding for developing community resilience strategies, which are typically focused on upgrading water/wastewater physical infrastructure for communities that may not be able to afford it on their own. Any meaningful development requires infrastructure to support it, which also relates to climate resiliency. These community resiliency projects are typically funded through USDA Community Facilities funds, New York State funds through Department of Environmental Conservation, Environmental Facilities Corporation, which is the state Revolving Loan Fund for water/wastewater), and Empire State Development, as well as the Northern Borders Regional Commission.



The [West Piedmont Planning District Commission \(WPPDC\)](#) in Virginia partnered with two communities on downtown revitalization planning projects. The Town of Boones Mill and the Town of Stuart (Patrick County) were both awarded funding from the VA Department of Housing and Community Development for Downtown Revitalization Planning Grants through the Community Development Block Grant program. Each community was eligible to receive up to a \$50,000 grant for the creation of an economic restructuring plan to revitalize and promote investment in

their downtowns. West Piedmont staff provided technical assistance for the application process and will administer the grants for both localities.

The Town of Boones Mill will focus their study area on the town's commercial corridor along US 220, focusing on façade improvements, evaluating streetscaping needs, and addressing the lack of pedestrian connectivity within the town. The Town of Stuart planning area encompasses their recently designated historic district. Their plan is looking to address the lack of cohesive parking, improve safe pedestrian pathways, and mitigate blight within their downtown.



In partnership with the [Central Florida Regional Planning Council](#) and the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, the City of Bowling Green has embarked on a significant endeavor with the creation and execution of the [Imagine Bowling Green: Downtown Vision and Action Plan](#), combined with the implementation of pertinent Land Development Regulations. The plan aims to proactively shape the future of the downtown locale, while effectively addressing the city's economic circumstances. Bowling Green contracted the Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC) through a Florida Department of Economic Opportunity

Community Planning Technical Assistance Grant to develop Downtown Development Strategies; a Downtown Master Plan; and Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Regulation amendment recommendations to implement the Downtown Master Plan. To help create these items, the CFRPC provided a Downtown Existing Conditions Report that included data and analysis reviewing land use patterns, existing and programmed infrastructure/utility conditions, mobility conditions related to roadways, vehicles, pedestrians, bicycles and parking, and overall downtown economic trends. The CFRPC also facilitated community engagement and provided grant administration critical to the overall effort.



The [Northeast Florida Regional Council \(NEFRC\)](#) developed a comprehensive engagement process to safeguard the historic essence and residential populace of Welaka, a town located in Putnam County, Florida. This initiative was precipitated by the impending construction of a significant fishing resort nearby, raising concerns over the erosion of the town's distinct character due to external commercial influences. To address this, a series of five meetings were convened, coupled with an all-encompassing site survey and a visual preference survey conducted through the interactive tool, Mentimeter. The outcome of this deliberative process yielded eight key recommendations, which encompassed endeavors like a tree survey, conservation of green

infrastructure, and enhancements to waterfront facilities to capitalize on existing assets. The Strategic Planning process embarked upon by the Town of Welaka sought to uphold the unique identity and quality of life, envisioning a village center replete with residential and locally-owned commercial structures lining the vital Elm Street and other thoroughfares. The town's aspiration was to simultaneously preserve its distinctive Floridian essence and tap into novel locally-driven economic prospects, all while safeguarding its communal spirit and accessibility amidst a lush oak-tree landscape. The project's triumph was greatly attributed to widespread community involvement, facilitated through extra meetings, a dedicated email address, and social media outreach.

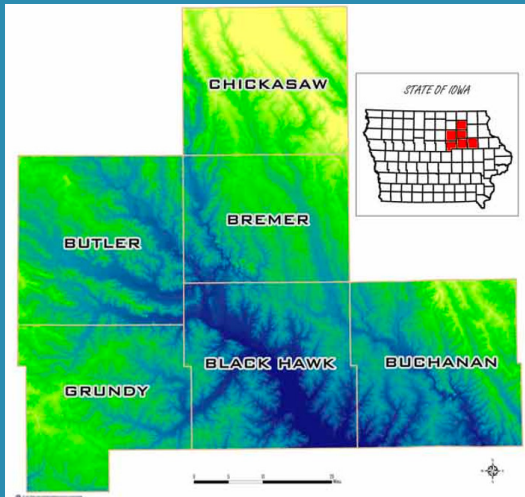
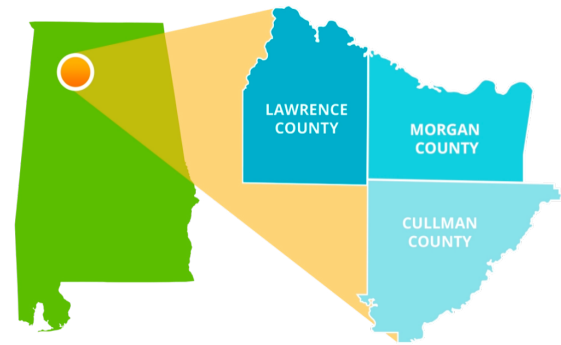


North Central Alabama Regional Council of Governments

[North Central Alabama Regional Council of Governments \(NARCOG\)](#) in Decatur has taken a regional approach to downtown revitalization. Since 2017, NARCOG has partnered with Main Street Alabama on their 4-Point Approach (Design, Organization, Promotion, and Economic Vitality) to Downtown Revitalization. Six communities within the NARCOG region are part of their “Centers” based approach to economic development. These include: Courtland, Falkville, Hanceville, Hartselle, Moulton and Town Creek. NARCOG’s work is supported by city/ town contributions, volunteer participation and supplemented by available grants.

NARCOG’s work is focused on facilitating implementation of the projects identified in

Walkability Audits that were conducted in 2019. The Audits began with in-person downtown assessments, which examined existing building conditions, occupancy and vacancy, and existing land use. NARCOG staff also visited with community members, business owners, and town officials to survey the needs of the town and collect valuable information for the Downtown Improvement Plan. This work has led to the development of downtown improvement plans for some of the communities.



The [Iowa Northland Regional Council of Governments \(INRCOG\)](#) partnered with Grow Cedar Valley and Deere Corporation to create a placemaking master plan “Cedar Valley River Experience Vision.” Waterloo and Cedar Falls were not often viewed as a connected economic development unit, but local leaders understood that in order to be competitive for funding opportunities, the two communities had to come together as a unit to collectively position itself for the betterment of the Cedar Valley. The Cedar Valley River Experience Vision Steering Committee creation was the beginning of a

collaboration between the two communities. The Steering Committee, composed of community leaders and stakeholders, was a critical part of the planning process and helped inform community and regional assets, identify projects and opportunities, and identify next steps. The Steering Committee met three times over the course of the project. They were invaluable to the process and their constructive feedback and local knowledge was key to developing the final document.

The document provides a broad baseline for the potential of the Cedar River to connect the downtowns into greater economic and community growth, laying out a full vision for enhancing and amplifying one of the region’s greatest natural assets, the Cedar River. The final document outlines this vision and lays out a plan of action for turning existing and potential assets into a connected framework, focusing on seven key regional opportunities including celebrating the Water in Cedar Falls, Promoting the Chain of Lakes, Celebrating the Waterloo River Basin District, Building a Strong Downtown Waterloo, Cross Utilizing Historic Downtowns, Linking Economies with Our Shared Brand, and Enhancing Regional Mobility.

As part of the process, over a dozen stakeholders were interviewed and asked about their current plans, projects, and initiatives, particularly those related to the river. These conversations helped inform the final list of Opportunities. The lists help INCRCOG to understand what is going to drive people to not only visit but live in these communities by enhancing the region's assets. Using the Cedar River as the link, the proposed plan will support existing hospitality, cultural and retail economic bases and help to attract and retain workforce in the Cedar Valley. The impetus of the plan will be to maintain and improve the economies of the Cedar Valley communities by increasing the density of destinations, focusing on the two downtowns, underscoring recreational opportunities, and creating environmentally sustainable development along the river. The unique aspect of this plan is its interest in connecting downtowns using the

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river as the draw. The project has the potential to have a large impact on how this EDD thinks about the river, not only between the two downtowns, but also beyond. Although this placemaking project focused on the connection between downtown Cedar Falls and Waterloo, the Cedar River runs through a significant portion of the INRCOG region. According to Isaiah Corbin, INRCOG Development Director, "We continue to think regionally on how we can capitalize on this feature and continue to promote our region as a great place for people to live and work. Our next steps is to continue the momentum of this project through a newly created nonprofit organization that is able to help generate this growth and put the vision to action."

growcedarvalley.com

Brownfields

A brownfield is a property for which expansion, redevelopment or reuse is complicated by the presence, or potential presence, of hazardous substances, pollutants or contaminants. Brownfields are often present in downtowns and need to be assessed, and sometimes remediated, before they can be redeveloped. With EPA funding, EDDs can support their communities in cleaning up these potentially contaminated properties and readying them for redevelopment.

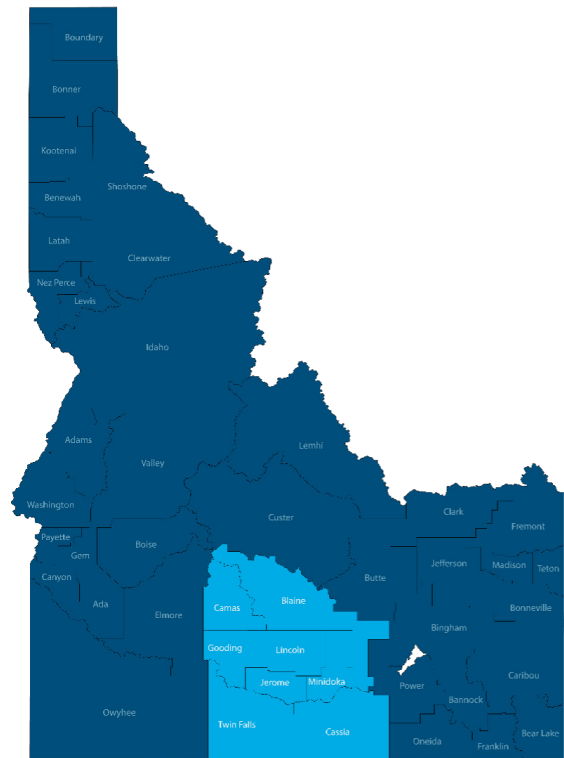
[Bear Paw Development Commission](#), based in Havre, Montana, operates a brownfields program for its communities. Bear Paw has been awarded brownfields assessment grants from EPA to complete environmental assessments on properties contaminated with petroleum and other hazardous substances, including asbestos and lead-based paint. The Bear Paw Brownfield Program is voluntary and assessments are performed at no cost to the property owner. Information generated from the assessments



can be used to satisfy purchaser concerns, regulatory agency requirements, or to determine if environmental contamination exists on a property. Bear Paw has also received grants to capitalize a Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund, providing low-to-no-interest loans to eligible applicants to rehabilitate brownfield sites. Local governments and non-profit organizations may also be eligible for a sub-grant to clean-up a contaminated property.



[Region IV Development Association](#) in south central Idaho has an EPA-funded brownfield program as well. The South-Central Idaho Brownfield Revitalization Program can help pay for a Phase I and/or Phase II Environmental Assessment before a buyer commits to purchasing a property. The program also has a Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) to provide low-interest loans to property owners completing contamination cleanup. The program is open to both public and private entities and can be used in a funding stack to make limited dollars go further. The program has been in operation since October 2021 and has seen significant success in redeveloping blighted and underutilized properties.



Facilitation

EDDs are connectors, building social (trust and networks) and political capital (voice and power), by bringing communities, businesses and institutions together. Facilitating discussion around downtown development is a key role for EDDs.

[Metropolitan Area Planning Agency \(MAPA\)](#), based in Omaha, Nebraska serves as a facilitator and connector in local downtown revitalization. Through their Block Talks program, conducted in-house with support from the City of Omaha and Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) staff, MAPA collaborates with neighborhood associations like Benson Neighborhood Association on virtual walks to explore community improvements and connectivity; the ultimate goal is to create a more robust community that promotes more foot traffic and slows down traffic flowing through the area.

Block Talks have been a useful tool for gathering information about street conditions, engaging community members, and informing planning and traffic safety projects.



These Block Talks involve three steps:

1. Registering in advance and accessing Virtual Block Talk materials.
2. Before the Block Talk, using a smart device, participants are asked to either walk the designated route and submit comments or view the video footage online and submit comments.
3. Attend the Zoom follow-up meeting, see summarized results from all participants and join the discussion of possible strategies.

One example of this work is the 13th Street Corridor, which is aiming to create a lively community and friendlier streets for the public. One strategy is to implement changes to draw more businesses and people to the area by improving walkability and increasing access for pedestrians and bicyclists. Along with redevelopment, another focus is analyzing current traffic conditions and providing solutions to help reduce traffic speed to create a safer, more walkable place for pedestrians and bicyclists. The revitalization plan has seen some success already. New businesses will be locating in the area – including Omaha Creative Institute, Grain & Mortar, Boho Rice, Vincent Outfitting Co., Archetype Coffee, a barber shop, a salon and a bar.

A few key outcomes include:

Public comments were provided by MAPA staff during a separate safety review by the DOT.

The City of Omaha is conducting a Heartland 2050 Mini-grant safety study along a corridor which includes NW Radial Highway, a portion of which was looked at in the Benson block talk.

Virtual block talks were held at other portions of the Highway 64 corridor and the Highway 75 corridor.

In parallel, the City of Omaha has been updating their traffic signal infrastructure.

Other local organizations continue to use the Block Talks, including Live Well Omaha.



Houston Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) in Texas takes a hands-on approach. Started in 2014, Bringing Back Main Street is an H-GAC initiative to provide technical assistance to help cities and small communities sustain economic development in their downtowns. H-GAC wanted to engage local governments, non-profits, businesses and other stakeholders to learn to work together to implement downtown revitalization programs.

To continue the conversations, facilitate networking, and give local communities the opportunity to share their successes and brainstorm ways of overcoming challenges, H-GAC launched quarterly Bringing Back Main Street Roundtables. These 2-hour events are hosted in a community in the region, allowing the community to highlight how they are supporting or revitalizing their downtowns. The events are a combination of networking event and seminar, with presenters varying from community staff, planning consultant firms, funding agency representatives, CDC experts, or local business owners.

In addition, in early 2015, H-GAC hosted a series of workshops with experts from throughout Texas

providing tips on how to create an economically vibrant Main Street.

In 2019, H-GAC introduced a Downtown and Small Town Revitalization Summit. This longer event was held at centrally located H-GAC offices and features expert speakers offering a more in-depth look at specific topics, such as special events and eco-tourism.

In April 2020, because of COVID, H-GAC pivoted to bring the roundtable online. While they lost some of the opportunity for networking, they also embraced the opportunity to invite experts from outside the region to join the roundtables and share their specific expertise. H-GAC and local communities have hosted 4 summits and 28 roundtables in 10 of the 13 counties in the H-GAC service area.

The Bringing Back Main Street Initiative cost \$100,000 and was funded by public and private entities, including H-GAC, the Houston-Galveston Area Local Development Corporation (H-GALDC), the Trull Foundation (Palacios, Texas), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) through its Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI). The project was recognized in 2015 with a National Association of Development Organizations Innovation Award.

Funding and Implementation

Once the plans have been developed, the brownfields have been cleaned up and the networks have been established, it's time for implementation. Many EDDs assist their communities with the funding required helping put together the capital stacks to make these projects happen.



In early 2021, [East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission \(ECWRPC\)](#) program staff released an application opportunity for rural member cities and counties to apply for a specialized economic development technical assistance program. This program was funded by CARES Act funding through the US Economic Development Administration, through a three-year partnership planning grant for small community technical assistance. The program asked communities to submit a priority list of projects requiring further technical assistance and planning services related to downtown growth and redevelopment in their communities. The ECWRPC region, like many rural areas in the country, has experienced significant business closures, population loss, and a private investment gap in their downtown spaces. Applications were restricted to communities under 12,000 in population to provide the targeted support to rural cities and counties that do not have the planning or staff capacity to undertake specialized planning projects.

Out of 26 applications received in 2021, 8 communities were chosen to participate in the first cohort of projects. While each community project was focused on downtown redevelopment and growth, the full list of projects shows a great diversity in needs. Ranging from downtown alleyway activation planning to waterfront redevelopment to zoning analysis and traffic

and pedestrian improvements, these action plans confronted and addressed placemaking, economic development, and land use issues plaguing each communities' downtown space.

ECWRPC and their consultants conducted day-long individualized visioning sessions, downtown walking tours, zoning consultations, and project collaboration opportunities with the communities. In the same day, the consultant team drafted recommendations and presented them in the evening. The results were easily digestible action plans for the community on their chosen issue area. These small-scale planning sessions allowed ECWRPC staff to better understand their rural communities' needs, which will inform its 2023-2028 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.



In 2022, ECWRPC renewed its commitment and extended the downtown economic development technical assistance program for an additional year, awarding four applicants out of 15 applications. The diversity and breadth of project areas continued into 2022, allowing ECWRPC staff to address a wide variety of downtown placemaking and redevelopment opportunities all at once. Taking on projects ranging from plaza redevelopment to trailheads and downtown connectivity, each communities' action plan gives them a roadmap to address issue areas vital to each community's future downtown growth. As a regional convener and planner, ECWRPC was well-suited to carry out this project. Spending \$90,000 on this project- \$7,500 per community plan- created massive benefits for relatively little investment in each community.

One key outcome has been the redevelopment of riverfront space behind businesses in the City of New London; in 2023, the community has been

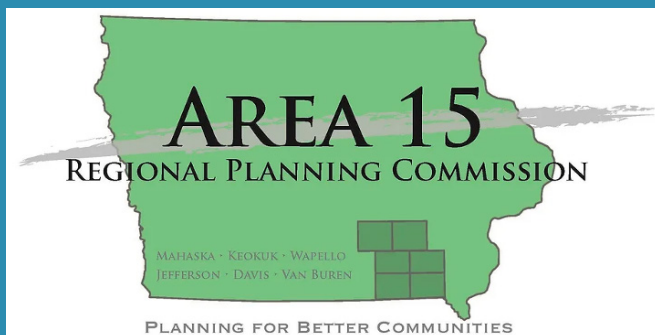
Continued: East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

reconnecting the main street to the river; in 2024, their work will focus on revitalizing the back alleyways behind businesses.

ECWRPC will be running one more program cycle for small communities. They've received nine applications for four spots.

Another program, the Main Street Bounceback Program, was funded by ARPA funds, through Wisconsin Economic Development. Working in partnership with the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, East Central administered the Main Street Bounceback Program which was developed to help

communities rebuild and renew downtowns after the pandemic by providing \$10,000 grants to businesses and nonprofits who filled vacant buildings. East Central awarded 900 grants of \$9 million to businesses within the region ranging from Wittenberg to Campbellsport in 18 months.



Area 15 Regional Planning Commission (RPC) in Iowa helps develop projects with its communities around downtown redevelopment. One community, Sigourney, pursued grants to help its small business and property owners to help rehabilitate underutilized buildings, making building improvements and adding the first upper-story housing units downtown in over a decade. The RPC also helped Sigourney with development of an application for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Upper-story Housing Conversion fund to rehabilitate a vacant second-floor space into several apartments. The RPC also assists communities find funding for façade renovations in their downtowns. The RPC helped the Town of Ottumwa acquire CDBG Community Facilities streetscape funds;

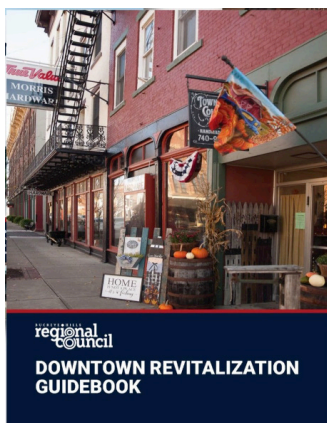
intersections were torn out and rebuilt, including all new utility infrastructure and connections to adjacent properties, new pavement with consistent lane configurations, wider sidewalks with ADA accessibility improvements, LED lighting improvements, and vegetated planter boxes with electrical hookups. Permeable pavers and vegetated biocells were constructed for stormwater mitigation.

The RPC helped Main Street Ottumwa secure Challenge Grants from Main Street Iowa, providing for front and rear façade improvements, a new roof, and some interior rehab on a 1920s bank building. Sigourney and Ottumwa each received grants to convert vacant upper-level spaces in downtown buildings to new affordable rental housing units. The 100-300 Blocks of E. Main Street in Ottumwa have been completely transformed into a safe, inviting, and sustainable space for both vehicles and pedestrians alike. Improvements included replacement of underground water/sewer/stormwater infrastructure, new sidewalks, streets, permeable pavers, bike racks, benches, planting areas, trees, and public art.

EDD Produced Resources

Economic Development Districts (EDDs) are developing their own downtown revitalization resources for their own communities, including the few mentioned below. EDDs who are interested in downtown revitalization may find these resources useful as sources for inspiration or elements that might be easy to adapt or adopt in their own places.

[Buckeye Hills Regional Council \(BHRC\)](#), with support from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, partnered in the summer of 2022 with Designing Local to host a series of Downtown Revitalization Workshops in each of its counties in Southeast Ohio. Through these workshops, local leaders identified strengths and areas for improvement in their communities. Historic

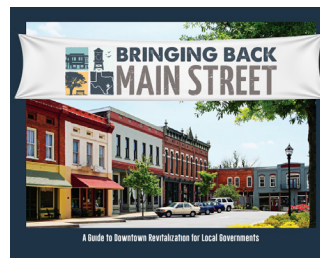


preservation, and the use of Historic Tax Credits more specifically, was of great interest as communities seek to preserve distinctive historic properties. The [Downtown Revitalization Guidebook](#) was created to help capture the themes from these workshops and conversations and

to inspire community leaders as they work to build on their community's unique assets. The 75-page guidebook offers strategies around community branding, creative placemaking, wayfinding, public space improvement, technology infrastructure, historic preservation, tourism planning and public space activation. The guidebook also offers tips on boosting economic growth by leveraging critical infrastructure investments, state and federal incentive programs, historic preservation, and resiliency planning. Since its publication in the fall of 2023, more than 200 copies have been distributed to community leaders across southeast Ohio.

[Houston Galveston Area Council \(H-GAC\)](#)

developed its own Downtown Revitalization Guidebook. H-GAC conducted [extensive research](#), interviewed experts from around the region and across the state, and led hands-on



workshops to inform the publication of [Bringing Back Main Street: A Guide for Downtown Revitalization](#). This best practice guide focuses on characteristics of robust downtowns,

including planning and creating a vision; policies, programs and funding tools to help communities realize that vision; and different ways that communities can market downtown spaces to potential businesses, residents, and visitors. *Bringing Back Main Street: A Guide to Downtown Revitalization for Local Governments* provides an overview of how communities can create vibrant downtowns, highlighting successful revitalization efforts implemented by small cities throughout Texas. To retain and restore these downtown areas, H-GAC's *Bringing Back Main Street: A Guide to Downtown Revitalization for Local Governments* recommends establishing a community-based vision, investing in attractive streetscape design, encouraging a variety of uses, and developing effective marketing.

[Lake Champlain/Lake George Regional Planning Board \(LCLGRPB\)](#)

developed its own [Main Street Toolkit](#), which provides support and guidance to local communities to identify and support Main Street development and



enhancement projects that build upon individual community assets and characteristics while incorporating placemaking and complete street techniques into their

existing Main Street corridors. The toolkit focuses on physical and natural capital in the region's downtowns, including street furniture, street markings and traffic calming, walking enhancements, green space and street trees, and signage. It also offers a checklist that can be used to inventory existing conditions within a community's Main Street corridor and resources for implementation and funding. The toolkit can be used to identify, organize and implement strategies to reinvigorate their Main Streets.

TAKEAWAYS

1. Inventorying

A key starting point for downtown revitalization efforts is inventorying what the community has – its [readiness factors](#). These can include:

- a. Community assets
- b. Local government and civic structures
- c. Economic ecosystem
- d. Built infrastructure
- e. Natural environment

2. Pathway to Revitalization

The pathway to revitalization moves from planning activities focused on forming a project idea and examining community plans through predevelopment (analysis and feasibility), to a go/no go decision, into development (construction or start-up) and into ongoing management and administration of the property. EDDs typically aren't developers or managers, but they may fit into the Planning and/or Predevelopment activities, assisting with planning, community outreach, funding, prefeasibility and feasibility studies.

3. Role of EDDs

While it may be surprising that regional organizations are playing important roles in individual communities, EDDs have the expertise and a broader view of the larger region. EDDs are contributing to downtown redevelopment in a variety of ways that make sense given their strengths, including main street planning, brownfields assessment and redevelopment, placemaking, facilitation and funding and implementation. This work, like much of what EDDs do, requires collaboration with their communities, state agencies, federal agencies and others.

TOOL: [Readiness Assessment](#)

