Maine’s Main Streets and Downtowns: Success Strategies & Lessons Learned

April 18, 2024
• Who is MDF?
• Measures of Growth- Economic Indicators
• Maine Downtown Center
• Entrepreneur Ecosystem Development in Rural Maine
Statewide non-profit, non-partisan membership organization uniquely established by the Legislature and the Governor in 1978 to drive economic growth in Maine. We are conveners who bring leaders together across sectors to find common ground, explore new approaches to persistent challenges, solve problems and improve the lives of all Mainers.
Measures of Growth

- Created in statute in 1993 to develop a long-term vision and indicators for Maine’s economic growth
- Members jointly appointed by the Governor, Speaker of the House, and President of the Senate
- Administered by MDF
The Council’s vision of “high quality of life for all Maine people includes: a vibrant and sustainable economy, thriving communities and a healthy environment.
Key themes of the Council’s work:

**Skilled, educated, and entrepreneurial workers**

**Foundational issues** that significantly affect outcomes

**Controlling costs** for businesses and people

**Targeted investment** in areas that support our economy and quality of life
Fundamental Performance Indicator: Labor Force

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
State and Local Tax Burden

STATE AND LOCAL TAXES AS A PERCENT OF INCOME

Source: U.S. Census Bureau and U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis
Housing Affordability

MAINE HOUSEHOLDS UNABLE TO AFFORD MEDIAN-PRICED HOME

(Use no more than 28% of gross income for house payment)

Source: MaineHousing
Cost of Energy

INDUSTRIAL RETAIL ELECTRICITY PRICE

- New England
- Maine
- United States

Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration
Mental & Behavioral Health

Source: National Children’s Health Survey
Internet Connectivity

PERCENTAGE OF MAINE LOCATIONS WITH INTERNET ACCESS BY SERVICE LEVEL

- Below 100/20 Unserved: 22% (2022), 14% (2023)
- 100/20 - 100/100 Average Service: 65% (2022), 61% (2023)
- 100/100 or Higher Broadband: 13% (2022), 25% (2023)

Source: Maine Connectivity Authority
Takeaways

• We see reasons for optimism and proof that we must chip away at our deficits and connect the pockets of excellence and progress across our state.

• The time is now to utilize this 28-year body of research to continue building a long-term economic plan for Maine.
State coordinator for the National Main Street Program

Statewide resource for any community interested in downtown revitalization
MISSION: To foster downtown revitalization that is dynamic and community-based, and results in economic development, business growth, job creation, historic preservation, housing revitalization and cultural enhancement. At the core of our approach to revitalization is a commitment to creating places of shared prosperity, equal access to opportunity and inclusive engagement.
40 year-old approach to downtown revitalization

Over 1200 programs across the country

Implementing the 4-point approach
The Main Street Four Point Approach

- Community Vision
- Market Understanding

Transformation Strategy

- Design
- Organization
- Promotion
- Economic Vitality

Transformation Strategy

- Quantitative Outcomes
- Qualitative Outcomes
Good Design and Historic Preservation
Placemaking, and lots of it.
Organization:
Volunteers That Get it Done!
Events
Entrepeneurs
and
Small Business Owners
Survey for your Needs
Recent Highlights
Entrepreneur Ecosystem Building in Rural Maine

Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Development
Findings and Recommendations

Skowhegan, Maine
November 16, 2020

Prepared by Matthew Wagner, PhD
Vice President of Revitalization Programs
National Main Street Center
Challenges

- Rural
- Communication
- Organic
- Funding/Resources
- Climate
- Demolition by neglect
What's working

• Partnerships/Relationships
• Entrepreneur Ecosystem Building
• Increased local capacity through grants and Tif’s
• Intensive hand holding
• Collecting good data
• Participation stipends
Entrepreneur Ecosystem

Building
3 Pilots 2019-2021: MCF
$240,000

9 Replication Sites
2022-2024: CDS through SBA $747,000
The Importance of Place in the Ecosystem

“A sense of place is a unique collection of qualities and characteristics – visual, cultural, natural, and social – that provide meaning to a location.”

– MSA
Main Street Entrepreneurs are Central

99.2%
Relationships & Human Capital are Priceless

Intersection between quality of place & broader economic development
Hyper-local Meets Regional/State
Implementation Projects

- Central Resource Directory
- Trainings & Pitch Competitions
- Local Infrastructure Improvements, i.e. wayfinding, digital engagement, pop-ups
- Storytelling, i.e. podcasts
- Working with the underserved
Lessons Learned that translate to anyone working on rural economic development

• Build relationships
• Take the time for handholding and follow-through— it’s worth the investment
• Replicate and share models that are working
• Be inclusive. Who is not at the table?
• Always measure
Thank you and Questions

Anne Ball
aball@mdf.org