

The Better Hometown Program

"Economic development through downtown revitalization, heritage preservation & restoring a sense of place."

Georgia's Main Street/Better Hometown program is an effective economic development plan that produces fundamental changes in a community's economic base.

Originated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Main Street approach helps improve the local economy and quality of life while preserving the character and heritage of the town.

The Georgia Better Hometown Program is for communities with populations under 5,000; the Main Street Program is for cities of 5,000-50,000.

This comprehensive revitalization process uses an action-oriented, self-help approach to bring about long-lasting economic benefits. It requires community-wide commitment and participation to reach its

The Four-point Approach

The goal of our Better Hometown Program is to improve the community's economy & quality of life within the framework of cultural & historic preservation. This program uses a simple but effective four-point approach to produce a practical downtown revitalization strategy.

ORGANIZATION

Goal: To provide an operational framework for the long-term effort required to revitalize the downtown.

The Organization Committee coordinates the overall revitalization effort; organizes resources; distributes the workload; identifies sources of funding; builds consensus & cooperation among individuals & groups.

DESIGN

Goal: To encourage improvements in the downtown through good design compatible with historic features.

The Design Committee works to enhance the visual appeal of the downtown; educates the community about good design practices; supports improvements compatible with the historic & cultural heritage of the community.

PROMOTION

Goal: To promote the downtown as the community's social, cultural & economic center.

The Promotion Committee helps identify the downtown as the heart of the community; markets a positive image of the downtown; encourages shopping locally; builds & strengthens existing promotions; develops other promotional opportunities & events.

ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING

Goal: To strengthen & broaden the economic base of the downtown commercial center.

The Economic Restructuring Committee works to improve downtown economic opportunities; promotes communication with downtown property owners; develops a market profile; helps recruit & retain businesses; develops a system to market downtown properties.

Typical Committee Projects

The following are the types of projects that revitalization committees undertake.

Organization

Builds consensus for the downtown revitalization program; provides an appropriate organizational framework; manages the overall program; raises funds. Projects include:

- Develop a mission statement
- Establish a website
- Publish a newsletter
- Develop printed informational pieces about the Better Hometown program
- Hold educational events about the program
- Secure funding sources for local program

Design

Creates an attractive, pedestrian-friendly downtown by capitalizing on the unique assets & heritage of the community; promotes improvements that are compatible with the community's historic & cultural heritage.

Projects include:

- Conduct a survey of downtown buildings & parking
- Identify assets & detractors in the downtown
- Develop design guidelines publication
- Provide information on design services
- Provide information on facade grant program
- Identify priorities for public improvements
- Promote storefront improvement & building renovation projects
- Assist owners with National or State Register nominations

Promotion

Celebrates the downtown through marketing, events & image; markets a unified, quality image of the downtown business district as the center of activities, goods & services in the community; markets to retailers, shoppers, investors, & visitors. Projects include:

- Identify the special character of the downtown
- Develop a logo & "image"
- Publish an events calendar
- Create a business directory
- Organize co-op advertising opportunities
- Install banners in downtown
- Sponsor special events downtown
- Co-sponsor historic tours

Economic Restructuring

Develops a market strategy that results in an improved retail mix, a stronger tax base, increased investor confidence & more stable economy in the downtown; recruits & retains businesses. Projects include:

- Inventory businesses in the downtown
- Inventory buildings in the downtown
- Survey downtown customer base & trends
- Develop a color-coded map showing building usage in the downtown
- Develop a business recruitment packet
- Identify potential business prospects
- Identify sources for business & real estate development
- Locate building rehabilitation financing
- Educate realtors & others about the revitalization program

For more information on Blairsville's revitalization effort,
contact Jean Oakley at 706-994-4837 or ddaofb2005@alltel.net.

For more information on the Georgia Main Street/Better Hometown Program,
see www.dca.state.ga.us/bht/

For more information on the National Main Street Program, see www.mainstreet.org