

City of Morganton Main Street Program



Morganton, NC, a North Carolina Main Street Community since 1982

The Morganton Main Street program has spent more than 30 years working to maintain a vibrant and energized downtown. The program has generated more than \$60 million dollars of public and private investment into downtown and that investment has helped downtown Morganton weather the storms that left many downtowns across America crumbling and desolate. Today, downtown Morganton, the heart and soul of the City, is strong and healthy largely due to the Main Street program.

Why Main Street?

Morganton hasn't always had a Main Street program. In the late 1970s, downtown Morganton was facing the same fate as thousands of other downtowns throughout the country. The City's downtown buildings were aging, many properties were in disrepair, and several were boarded up. There was no merchants association and no combined effort to promote downtown businesses. There were no festivals or Friday-night concerts, and public parking was limited. No Main Street program existed to focus on the health of the downtown, but that changed in the early 1980s thanks to the efforts of the group that would become the Historic Burke Foundation.

In 1980, the National Trust created the National Trust Main Street Center to help communities focus on downtown revitalization. The goal of the national Main Street program was to stimulate economic development within the context of historic preservation, using a comprehensive approach to downtown revitalization. At the same time the national Main Street program was being launched, the Historic Burke Foundation was working to restore the



Alleyway on West Union Street in downtown Morganton

Old Burke County Courthouse. The Historic Burke Foundation members saw the national Main Street program as a way to further their work on the Old Courthouse and promote the renovation of other historic properties in downtown Morganton.

The group brought the idea to apply for Main Street designation to City Manager Doug Bean. Bean agreed that the Main Street program could benefit Morganton by reenergizing the downtown district and promoting economic activity, and he took the plan to Mayor Andy Kistler and the City Council. Kistler and the Council recog-

nized that the program would benefit Morganton and they agreed to fund the effort. In 1982, Morganton was approved as a Main Street Community,

the seventh town in North Carolina to receive the designation. The other six municipalities were New Bern, Salisbury, Shelby, Tarboro, Washington, and Clinton.

Today, Morganton is one of 61 Main Street communities in North Carolina, and one of thousands across

the country. Morganton's City leaders had the foresight in 1982 to take part in the program and got a 30-year head start on towns just now applying to assist with downtown revitalization.

The Main Street program has been fabulously successful. One of the smartest moves our City fathers ever made was to apply for that designation.

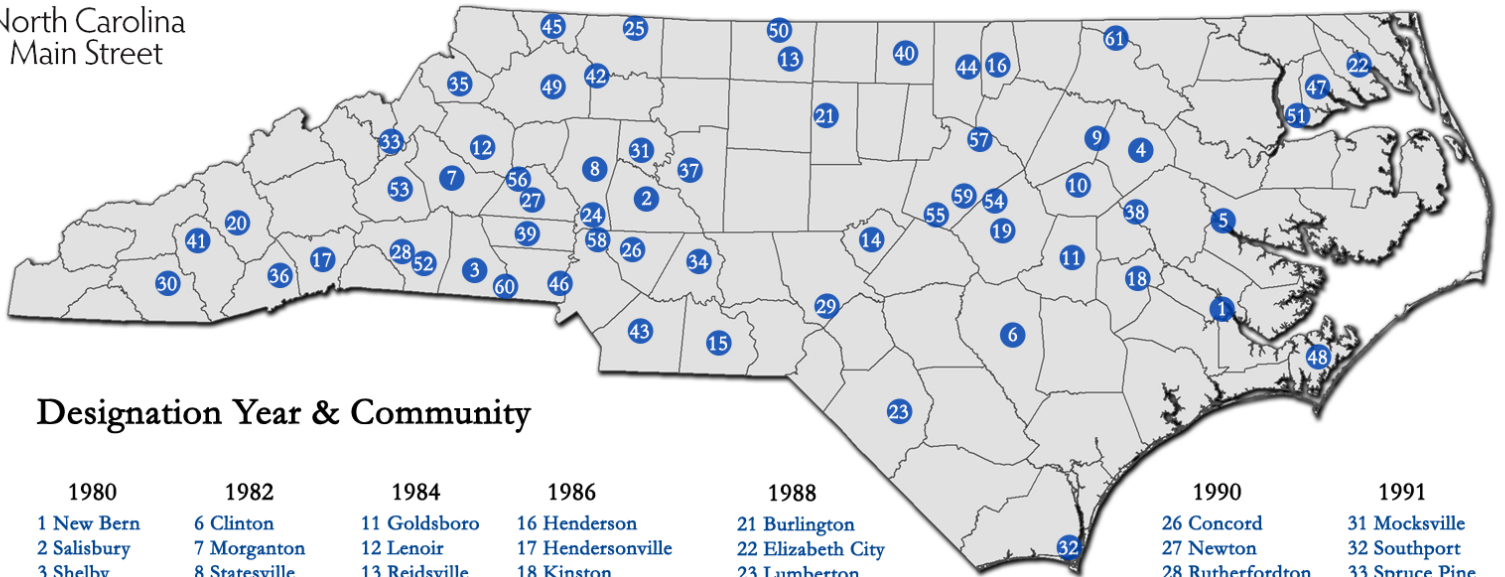
- Barbara Norvell

First President of the
Historic Burke Foundation



North Carolina Main Street Communities

North Carolina
Main Street



Designation Year & Community

1980	1982	1984	1986	1988	1990	1991
1 New Bern	6 Clinton	11 Goldsboro	16 Henderson	21 Burlington	26 Concord	31 Mocksville
2 Salisbury	7 Morganton	12 Lenoir	17 Hendersonville	22 Elizabeth City	27 Newton	32 Southport
3 Shelby	8 Statesville	13 Reidsville	18 Kinston	23 Lumberton	28 Rutherfordton	33 Spruce Pine
4 Tarboro	9 Rocky Mount	14 Sanford	19 Smithfield	24 Mooresville	29 Aberdeen (N-A)	
5 Washington	10 Wilson	15 Wadesboro	20 Waynesville	25 Mount Airy	30 Franklin	
1993	1995	1998	2000	2003	2006	2009
34 Albemarle	38 Farmville	42 Elkin	46 Belmont	50 Eden	54 Clayton	58 Davidson
35 Boone	39 Lincolnton	43 Monroe	47 Hertford	51 Edenton	55 Fuquay-Varina	59 Garner
36 Brevard	40 Roxboro	44 Oxford	48 Morehead City	52 Forest City	56 Hickory	60 Kings Mountain
37 Lexington	41 Sylva	45 Sparta	49 North Wilkesboro	53 Marion	57 Wake Forest	61 Roanoke Rapids

The Main Street program has been so successful in North Carolina and the nation that surrounding communities are still applying to become Main Street communities themselves. Valdese received designation as a Main Street Community in 2013. In 2006, nearby Hickory joined the program. Marion joined in 2003. Newton joined in 1990, and Lenoir joined the Main Street Program in 1984.

Getting Started

In the beginning of the Main Street program in Morganton, staff knew they had a lot of work to do. The downtown commercial district had become stagnant. There was no downtown landscaping, and many of the sidewalks were cracked and broken. Public parking was limited and there were few efforts to advertise and market businesses downtown. The Main Street Department started applying the program's four-point approach of organization, design, promotion and economic restructuring. The goal was to bring business, employment and economic activity into downtown while maintaining the character and charm of downtown Morganton.

Main Street staff started working to get façades painted, put up awnings and start landscaping the streets and sidewalks. Main Street then started working to promote the downtown shopping district through advertising and sidewalk sales, and Main Street held a festival in downtown to promote awareness of downtown businesses; that festival would branch off and become the Historic Morganton Festival, Inc., now in its 33rd year.



Thousands of people fill the streets of downtown Morganton during the 2013 Historic Morganton Festival. The festival is held every year on the weekend after labor day.

Funding

When the City Council approved the Main Street program in 1982, the City funded the program 100% with general fund revenues. In 1984, the Council approved an 8-cent downtown special district property tax to help supplement program expenditures such as façade grants and landscaping. In 1994, the City Council increased the tax to 14 cents to help fund and implement the Downtown Master Plan. Fifty-one cities in North Carolina have established special tax districts with tax rates ranging from 2 cents to 64 cents. Morganton's 14 cent rate falls in the middle of the pack; 14 other communities have special tax rates in the teens.

Today, the Main Street budget averages more than \$450,000 dollars. Those funds are spent on personnel, capital improvements, marketing, operations, public parking, and grants. The downtown special tax generates \$114,000, roughly 25% of the Main Street program budget, and the remaining funds come from the City's general fund revenues. The City puts in roughly \$3 for every \$1 generated by the downtown tax.

Improvements

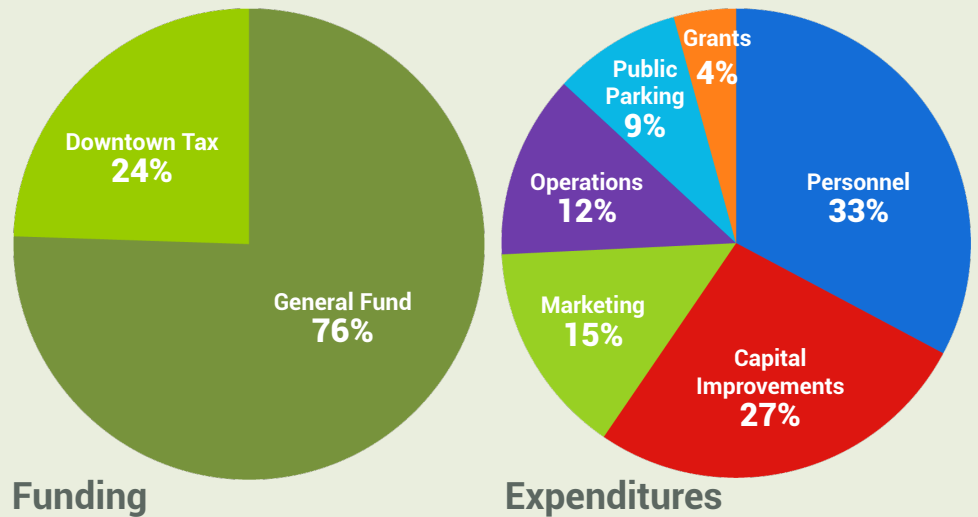
Since its creation, the Main Street program has helped implement a tremendous amount of improvements to downtown Morganton. Property owners have completed 206 façade improvements and 124 building renovations. The Main Street program has installed streetscapes, improved sidewalks and alleyways, installed benches and trash receptacles, and most recently started installing wayfinding signs that direct visitors to the downtown district and throughout Morganton.

Main Street provides regular landscaping and beautification to downtown as well as seasonal decorations, daily trash pickup, daily

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Main Street Budget Funding & Expenditures

The pie charts below show the breakdown for the Main Street program funding and expenditures for the 2013-2014 budget year. The downtown district tax funds about one fourth of the Main Street budget every year. The remaining funds come from the City's general fund revenues.



Some Main Street Program Services

- Streetscapes
- Landscaping and beautification
- Seasonal decorations
- Concentrated marketing, including advertising and billboards promoting downtown
- Community events attracting people downtown
- Farmers Markets attracting people downtown
- Wayfinding signs, parking signs, gateway signs
- Grants for property improvements
- Grants for business development
- Trash Receptacles
- Decorative Benches
- Daily trash collection
- Daily sidewalk cleaning
- Daily parking lot clean up
- Public parking lots
- Parking enforcement officer
- Enhanced police protection
- Snow and ice removal during inclement weather
- Tenant and business recruitment into downtown



Top Left: A local church volunteered their time and man power to fill flower planters and distribute them through downtown Morganton. The Main Street program paid for the pots, flowers and soil. **Top right:** South Mountain Children & Family Services is one of many facades updated with the help of the Main Street Program. **Above:** The Main Street program provides year-round landscaping to downtown streets. **Right:** This alleyway on N. Sterling Street was improved with Main Street program funds, and the deck on Yianni's Family Restaurant was funded with a Main Street Solutions grant.

sidewalk cleaning, and daily parking lot clean up. City staff works hard to keep the downtown clean and litter free, and visitors are routinely impressed by the beauty of the town. Thanks to the Main Street program, downtown Morganton is in ever improving shape and offers a charming and inviting atmosphere for shoppers, workers, residents, and visitors.

Main Street staff also works to help property owners find tenants for their buildings. Staff actively recruits and shows downtown properties to potential tenants, and staff main-

tains a database of available properties. Staff assists business owners with business plans and recruits new business to move into the downtown tax district. Main Street also provides architectural services to downtown property owners to promote second-floor development. In 2010, Main Street was awarded a \$271,455 grant from the NC Main Street Solutions Fund, which was used to provide three grants to downtown property owners and more than \$200,000 in loans to nine downtown businesses.

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Top: City workers plant landscaping funded by the Main Street program on the Old Burke County Courthouse Square. Above: The Main Street program funded and installed decorative benches in downtown so visitors and shoppers could take a rest and enjoy the scenery.



The Kaleidoscope Mini Park is yet another beautification project to enhance downtown Morganton.



Top photos: Thanks to efforts by the Main Street program staff, the City installed wayfinding signs that will direct visitors to the downtown district and throughout Morganton.

Above: My Local Bakery and The Music Center on N. Sterling Street are two recent facade improvements to downtown buildings. The Main Street program facilitated the design work and funded the upgrade to the facades. Main Street staff also helped the My Local Bakery owners develop a business plan and budget projections, and assisted securing the building. Left: a City worker clears snow from a downtown sidewalk.

Promotion & Events

The Main Street staff also constantly works to promote downtown businesses and create a positive image of the commercial district. Main Street has created various concentrated marketing campaigns to promote downtown including "Shop Local" and "Get It" Downtown, as well as shopping and dining guides that highlight local merchants and restaurants. Main Street has assisted retailers with retail promotions such as "Girls Night Out", "Think Third Thursday", "16 New Faces of Downtown", sidewalk sales, holiday open houses, and more. Main Street funds three billboards to promote and direct visitors into downtown, and Main Street distributes a biweekly e-mail newsletter (D2U) that highlights downtown events and activities.

Main Street also helps produce many community events including the ACC Chili Cook-Off, the Halloween Spooktacular, and the Christmas Parade, which are sponsored by the Downtown Development Association. The Main Street department staffs the Historic Morganton Festival, Inc., a now self-sustaining non-profit that produces the downtown farmers markets, the TGIF Free Friday-night Concert Series, and the annual Historic Morganton Festival. These events draw thousands of residents and visitors into downtown every year and people from all over the region have the opportunity to see what downtown Morganton has to offer.

Right: The Morganton Farmers Market operates two locations in downtown Morganton during season. The Market's main location is at 300 Beach Street where vendors gather every Saturday morning to offer the best locally grown products in the area. The Farmers Market also operates a Wednesday Mini-Market in the afternoon located at 111 N. Green Street.



Top: Thousands of people visit downtown Morganton every year during the Historic Morganton Festival. Above left: Residents dance on the Historic Burke County Courthouse lawn during a TGIF Free, Friday-night concert. Above: Children trick-or-treat during the downtown Halloween Spooktacular. Below: Volunteers serve chili during the annual ACC Chili Cook-Off held at the Morganton Community House.



Revitalization

Main Street has been instrumental in downtown economic development. Main Street staff found and recruited an operator and a developer to build a 7-screen movie theater downtown, which brought Marquee Cinemas to Morganton. Main Street assisted with the development of an incentive program that resulted in the development of the King Street Town Homes on the corner of King Street and W. Meeting Street. Main Street worked with the City's Redevelopment Commission to convert an old and vacant hosiery mill into what is now Morganton Trading Company and the home of City Hall, residences, offices, and restaurant space.

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Above: The Morganton Main Street Department was instrumental in bringing a new 7-screen theater to downtown . The City of Morganton paid for conceptual plans and a market study, and Main Street worked to secure an operator and developer interested in a small downtown location. Right column: Main Street also worked with the City's Development and Design Department to develop and convert an old diner located at the corner of Gillam Street and E. Union Street into what is now Millside Manor, offering 28 senior living apartments.



Dedicated Staff

What may be most impressive about the City's Main Street program is the size of the staff. The Main Street program accomplishes everything it does, year after year – building improvements, merchant promotions, marketing, community events, business recruitment – with two full-time positions and one part-time position. The Main Street department does receive support from City staff in other departments and hundreds of volunteers, and that cooperation has contributed to the success of the Main Street program.

These efforts, over the course of 30 years, have preserved downtown Morganton as the heart and soul of the community. Downtown is the social center of Morganton and offers a movie theater, restaurants, shops, art galleries, festivals, Friday night concerts, parades, fundraising events and much more. This would not be the case without the continued support of the City Council; downtown merchants, property owners and residents; and the support of the taxpayers who fund the many projects that set downtown Morganton above many surrounding communities.

City leaders could have decided to pass up the opportunity to start the program in Morganton, but they didn't. Mayor Kistler and the City Council saw the Main Street program as a chance to revitalize downtown Morganton, enhance the City's character, and strengthen the local economy. The Main Street program has been successful in its efforts. Morganton has weathered many economic storms during the past three decades and the downtown district continues to be a vibrant and thriving part of the local economy, the community, and the region. Thanks to the commitment of the City of Morganton and the Main Street program, downtown Morganton has set a high mark and is an example that other communities strive to imitate.



The Main Street Department helped create the City's Redevelopment Commission, which was established to improve the eastern side of the downtown. Main Street worked with the Commission and the Development and Design Department to purchase, design and market an abandoned hosiery mill in downtown. That old hosiery mill was eventually converted to a mixed-use development that houses businesses, residential condominiums, and Morganton City Hall. Thanks in part to the efforts of the Main Street program, a blighted property was turned into a jewel of downtown Morganton.

