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by

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**Texas's Recertified Main Street Cities:  
A Narrative Evaluation**

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**Texas's Recertified Main Street Cities:  
A Narrative Evaluation**

by

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**Thesis**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
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## **Abstract**

### **Texas's Recertified Main Street Cities: A Narrative Evaluation**

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One of the most notably successful historic preservation tools is the National Main Street Center's Four-Point Approach™, which focuses on using design, economic restructuring, promotion, and organization to achieve its goals of preservation-based economic revitalization in cities across America. The Main Street Program's approach has been broadly designed to accommodate the unique combination of factors that differ from city to city.

Three of Texas's twenty recertified Main Street cities were studied in order to answer the question: In recertified Main Street cities, what are the impacts within a historic downtown district after a community leaves the program and what factors encourage their return? This study examines the effects participation in the program has had on the downtown historic districts of Brenham, Gainesville, and Kilgore. The act of joining, leaving, and rejoining the program provides an opportunity for internal comparisons within these communities over time. Interviews and archival research were used to determine the reasons each selected recertified city left and returned to the

program, and identified current problems that could threaten the program's continued success.

Despite some differing circumstances, these case studies suggest that the basic reasons both for leaving the program and later returning were strikingly similar: economic hardships in the cities eliminated support for the projects, causing them to end participation, while continued struggles with downtown vacancy rates and high business turnover sparked interest in rejoining. These communities realized the worth of the Main Street program's structure and network in the success of revitalizing their downtown historic districts. The flexibility of the program's framework allows for each participating city to tailor the approach to meet their specific needs and highlight their unique character. While the methods of implementation differ, many of the ongoing problems are the same. Recertified cities represent only a quarter of the cities currently participating in the Texas Main Street Program, but the lessons learned are potentially valuable to all Main Street communities as they face challenges in revitalizing their downtown districts and encourage the longevity of their own programs.

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## INTRODUCTION

The stage for the eventual development of the Main Street Program was set during World War II. As the young men of the country mobilized, the construction of highways and cars came to a halt. Metal, oil, tires, and batteries were used for trucks, tanks, and airplanes (Kay 1997, 222). With the government pushing conservation in automobile usage, citizens were forced to walk or take buses and trains to work. To take advantage of the underutilized auto factories, the government contracted carmakers to assist with wartime manufacturing. This later provided the automobile industry with the money necessary to make and market new cars to the masses, as well as put them in a position to lobby for the expansion of the U.S. highway system at the war's end.

The successes of the Second World War brought changes to Downtown America. The American people felt energized and powerful after their victories overseas. The American Dream was in full effect. The first order of business was to improve and expand the highway system. These new roads encouraged commercial and leisure travel. Many roads were constructed on the edge of towns so that travelers could bypass downtown congestion (Moe & Wilkie 1997, 143), shifting development tailored for these travelers outside of downtown proper. In addition to the opportunity to cash in on the long-distance traveler's needs, larger, less expensive areas of land were available outside of the commercial downtown.

The Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944 (also known as the G.I. Bill of Rights) created the VA loan guarantee program, which offered low interest, zero down payment loans for troops returning home to buy houses. For the first time in America's history, the majority of young, able-bodied men could afford to buy their own homes and

start families. Automobiles, shopping malls, and suburbia were spreading rapidly, resulting in the relocation of everyday activities closer to where people resided and away from downtown commercial centers. One-stop shopping centers were created to cater to this growing car culture, constructed quickly with cheaper materials and without the architectural embellishments and characters unique to historic downtown commercial centers.

The late 1940s marked an economic upswing after two decades of depression and war. In order to create jobs and clear out blighted areas created by the hardships of the previous years, the Housing Act of 1949 and Urban Renewal Act of 1954 were passed. These acts provided a federally funded stimulus to redevelop blighted areas for new development (Tyler 2009, 44). Depression-era sentiments took their toll on the urban streetscapes as the country recovered and had the means to start fresh. These often poorly designed projects proved to be socially destructive as new construction was favored over existing structures, resulting in the loss of significant historic fabric — the economic, social, and physical heart of America's downtowns (Miller 1988, 5-7). While large urban renewal projects were more frequent in larger cities, smaller towns also felt the effects of the growing national trend and the desire for a fresh start.

The year 1949 also marked the founding of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Started as a national organization for the growing grassroots preservation movement, the National Trust was initially an organization that bought and managed historic properties. It wasn't until the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966 that the organization had real legislation backing its cause. NHPA established a national-level preservation program, along with a set of enforcement procedures, for the protection of historic and cultural resources. Among other things, NHPA established the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the National Register of Historic Places, and Section

106, which explicitly protects properties on or eligible for the National Register from federal agency actions (National Trust for Historic Preservation). While much of the act only “encourages” action, its significance should not be overlooked. Amendments in 1969, 1976, 1980, and 1992 strengthened the Act.

The post-war development of the interstate highway system changed the prospects of many small rural trading centers previously based on rail access. Major changes, including increasing scale and capital intensity in agriculture, created a large labor and population shift from rural towns toward urban areas. The subsequent emergence in the 1960s of discount retail formats undercut struggling downtown retailers. Through the 1970s, the former central business districts of smaller towns and cities were in major decline, as businesses continued to move out of downtown districts and into the suburbs (Kemp 2000). Strip malls gradually fell out of fashion with the introduction of the shopping mall, which created a convenient and comfortable enclosed environment for shopping. National store chains became widespread and booming businesses, with the ability to offer discounts that independent stores could not. Downtown buildings struggled with high vacancy rates and the districts became abandoned and inadequately maintained (Lahr 1998). These district failures made it difficult to spark interest in downtown real estate.

As businesses became chains and franchises, shopping malls and suburban retail strips across America began to look more and more similar. This homogenization of American towns was only amplified by the deterioration of their unique historic commercial cores. Finally in the 1970s, citizens of these declining communities began to recognize the need for revitalization programs. However, each community was operating largely on their own, limiting the possibility of success. Only a networked, nationwide

approach, begun as a test program more than 30 years ago, would prove to be widely successful.

### **NATIONAL MAIN STREET CENTER**

Sparked by these threats to traditional commercial architecture in economically struggling downtowns across America, the Main Street Project was founded in 1977 as a three-year demonstration project. Launched by Mary Means, then director of the Chicago office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the program focused on undoing the work done by the urban renewal schemes of the 1970s, that in hindsight did more harm than good (Moe & Wilkie 1997, 68). Seventy towns competed for three spots in the initial project, which was designed to study why so many downtowns were in decline and how they could be revitalized. The three pilot communities — Galesburg, IL, Madison, IN, and Hot Springs, SD — ranged in size from 5,000 to 38,000 people.

The National Trust provided hands-on help to analyze the towns' assets and needs, and provided each with a program manager to organize and advocate for the program from within the community. The results of the demonstration program recognized the need for strong partnerships between the public and private sectors; a full-time program manager; a commitment to good design; quality promotional programs; and a coordinated, gradual process of implementation (History of the National Main Street Center). According to Kennedy Smith, former director of the National Trust Main Street Center, "Like the mall, the downtown needed a market strategy, an economic game plan," but the Main Street plan was based on "community self-determination and gradual transformation" (Moe & Wilkie 1997, 150). In recognizing the mall as the downtown

commercial district's biggest rival, the National Trust was able to apply mall management techniques to make historic districts relevant again. The program also benefited from good timing and much-needed assistance from the National Trust, who lobbied for the beginning of the federal rehabilitation tax credit program and Urban Development Action Grants. These programs also required the public and private sectors to join forces on redevelopment projects (Moe & Wilkie 1997, 150). At the end of the three years, business had improved in all of the demonstration districts.

After the successes in Galesburg, Madison, and Hot Springs, the National Trust for Historic Preservation established the National Trust Main Street Center. With initial support from Department of Housing and Urban Development, National Endowment for the Arts, Department of Transportation, Economic Development Administration, Small Business Administration, and Farmers' Home Administration, the National Trust Main Street Center began a second demonstration program in 1980 in collaboration with International Downtown Executives' Association (IDEA), which was the beginning of the state coordinated network (History of the National Main Street Center). Six states participated, nominating five towns each to participate, and the project concluded with more impressive results.

In 1983 at the end of the second demonstration program, the National Trust Main Street Center had collected enough data to make a case for a continuation and expansion of the program nationwide. In the participating communities, new downtown organizations, rehabilitation incentive programs, and business recruitment programs were started, resulting in new businesses and reinvestments in the millions of dollars. Throughout the 1980s, the program continued to test methods and expand the network. The third demonstration program tackled both neighborhoods and downtowns in urban areas with a population of 50,000 and up, and was followed by yet another project at the

opposite end of the spectrum with a focus on communities with populations of less than 5,000. The National Trust went to great lengths to make the Main Street Program applicable to a wide variety of environments. During this time of research and development, the National Trust founded the Main Street Network Membership program, whose many benefits include a subscription to *Main Street News*, a monthly magazine that continues to offer information, resources and news to member communities.

Today, the National Main Street Center has expanded from those first three communities to a nation-wide network of over 1,200 regional, state, and local programs. Their mission statement is as follows:

The National Main Street Center's mission is to empower people, organizations, and communities to achieve ongoing downtown and neighborhood district revitalization based upon the principles of self-determination, resource conservation, and incremental transformation represented through the comprehensive Main Street Four-Point Approach™ .

The Four-Point Approach™ is the best illustration of the Center's objectives: economic restructuring, design, promotion, and organization. The National Main Street Center developed its Four-Point Approach™ based on the results it received in its very first demonstration program and it is the foundation of the highly successful preservation-based economic redevelopment tool. Through the four points, communities can organize themselves to best meet their specific needs and provide the basis necessary to get started on the often-long road to revitalization. Within communities, the approach is primarily driven by volunteerism, as the majority of Main Street communities only require a single full-time staff member — the Main Street manager. Volunteer committees are often formed for each of the points to ensure they are being fairly balanced and equally implemented.

The success of the Four-Point Approach™ is guided by the eight principles, which include: comprehensive, incremental, self-help, partnerships, identifying and capitalizing on existing assets, quality, change, and implementation. The National Main Street Center claims that these principles are what set this program apart from other revitalization programs. These principles make the community aware of important realities about their participation in the program: the community has to be responsible for the implementation of the approach through collaboration with their neighbors and peers, and they must be aware that the effects of the program will not be seen overnight. It also requires that the community determine what assets they already have and how to highlight and improve on those pre-existing features in order to create a distinct sense of place that distinguishes them from other nearby communities.

In addition to the Four-Point Approach™ and the Eight Guiding Principles, the National Main Street Center also provides a list of ten standards of performance, which are not requirements, but instead are a detailed checklist of expectations for Main Street participants to strive to meet. This set of standards was developed in order to create sustainable organizations instead of placing requirements on economic performance, as the success of a Main Street city cannot be measured by economics alone. Each standard has its own set of guidelines to assist in achieving success. Many of the standards align with the points and principles, but others outline ways to ensure the ability to operate the program by having an adequate budget and track changes in the district and region by reporting key statistics each year. These standards further the organized approach of the Main Street Program, providing communities with the resources they need to best understand and successfully utilize this revitalization tool.

Currently, the National Main Street Center does not actively engage in implementing the program, and instead delegates that task to state coordinating programs.

After much success, the center serves only as a resource and support center for participating states and cities across the country. The center provides a means for communities to improve by offering services such as training, networking, technical assistance, and nationwide resources. One of the ways these services are offered is through an annual National Main Streets Conference. The conference brings together managers, volunteers, architects, planners, and other participants for an opportunity to share their successes and challenges in the program. The conferences gives a means for all of those involved in the Main Street program and process to share ideas and experiences, with a particular focus each year on the host city and its surrounding communities. In addition to the annual conference, the center also offers consulting services and a Solution Center that addresses a multitude of problems that a Main Street city can run into along the way.

Originally founded under the umbrella of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the organization has spun off to become a non-profit subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation as of the beginning of 2013. Changes within the center will be necessary, as it is now responsible for its programmatic and financial future. The first of such changes was to drop “Trust” from its name to become the National Main Street Center. The newly formed organization will work to expand its range in order to generate more revenue by spreading their program beyond its current focus markets. This will likely mean that the center will return to its demonstration programs in order to determine how it can continue to be applicable in an even wider market (Lynch 2012). Many of the details of the center have not been decided, leaving a blank slate for Patrice Frey, the new president and Chief Executive Officer (CEO), to decide on the organization’s new vision and direction. Frey is currently the head of the National Trust’s Sustainable Communities priority and directs the research of

Preservation Green Lab. Frey will work with the new National Main Street Center board and state coordinators on many issues that will move the national Main Street effort forward, including determining if the current volunteerism and committee-based model is still the most logical, relevant, and realistic approach to downtown revitalization.

The National Main Street Center has been a successful downtown revitalization tool for the past thirty years and has continued to grow and expand to meet the needs of communities across America. Through thorough demonstration programs and a nationwide network, the center has been able to connect with communities of all sizes, from the smallest neighborhood to the largest city, in order to assist in their mission of achieving revitalization of neighborhoods and districts in the face of an ever-changing world. Their ability and willingness to tailor their approach to maximize the reach and applicability of the program has proved successful and surpassed the reach of any other downtown revitalization tool.

#### **TEXAS MAIN STREET PROGRAM**

Texas was one of six states selected for the National Trust's second demonstration program. For the demonstration program, five towns in each state were chosen to participate, starting the statewide network model of the program. The program has been successful in Texas for over thirty years, and has expanded to currently include 84 cities. Benefits of participation to designated communities feature both direct services and education. These include access to a statewide network of Main Street programs and resources facilitated by the state office; design services for properties within the defined Main Street districts; training and professional development for local staff and volunteers

to increase understanding of preservation and of the Main Street approach to downtown revitalization.

The Texas Main Street Program operates within the Community Heritage Development Division of the Texas Historical Commission (THC). This division works with communities and regions to revitalize historic areas, stimulate tourism, and encourage economic development through preservation (Texas Historical Commission Self Evaluation Report 2005). Other areas of the THC that fall under the Community Heritage Development Division are the Certified Local Government Program and the Texas Heritage Trails Program.

Each year the Texas Main Street Program can accept up to five new participants, dependent on available resources. Applications are due by the last working day of July each year. Communities fall into one of three general categories and apply under the criteria set for each: Small City — population of 50,000 people or fewer; Urban — population of 50,001 people or greater; and Recertified — any population that was formerly in the program, has reapplied and been accepted as a Main Street City (Texas Administrative Code, Title 13, Part 2, Ch. 19, §19.3). A new or recertification Small City application places the program under the city government with the Main Street manager as a city employee and requires an initial three-year commitment. A new or recertification Urban application traditionally creates the program as a non-profit organization, which is governed by a board who employs the manager and with funding coming partially from the city. Urban applications can also be part of city government, as in Small City programs. Both Urban models require an initial fully staffed five-year commitment.

The application process has a number of requirements, including a completed application form, a budget, maps, and letters of intent and support. The application itself

requires demographic information, such as population of city and county, ethnic breakdown, unemployment rate and size of labor force, as well as city revenue from general sales tax and hotel occupancy tax. The applications are reviewed and ranked by a Main Street Interagency Council made up of representatives from the Texas Main Street staff and other state agencies. The categories of ranking criteria are: historic commercial fabric and historic identity; community and private sector support and organizational capacity; public sector support and financial capacity; physical capacity; and demonstrated need. These rankings are forwarded along to the Board of Commissioners of the THC, who makes the final decision on which cities to designate as official participants in the program.

While the Main Street Program is based upon self-reliance and self-help efforts, participation opens a number of doors for financial assistance in preservation-based economic restructuring. Main Street cities are eligible for a number of funding sources, such as the Texas Capital Fund Main Street Improvements grant, a small grant program eligible to non-entitlement cities for infrastructure improvements administered by the Texas Department of Agriculture with funds from the statewide Community Development Block Grant allocation. The Texas Department of Agriculture also administers the Infrastructure and Real Estate Development Programs. The Texas Main Street Program is an important option for rural Texas communities looking to expand businesses and expand their economies. In 2012, the Texas Main Street Program brought in \$229.8 million in total reinvestments (public, private, and joint ventures), and was responsible for the creation of 1,150 jobs and 337 small businesses (Texas Historical Commission).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The difficulty in measuring the impacts of the Main Street Program — and, truthfully, the impact of the entirety of the field of historic preservation — is that the values that it encompasses are often not measurable. In addition, there are many factors to consider in the whole picture of preservation: design, economics, demographics, and so on. There is no single test to measure the successes of preservation because each place is different — the basis of wanting to preserve it in the first place.

Main Street's Four-Point Approach™ is no different. Despite being nationally implemented for over thirty years, few studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of the approach, and most literature devoted to the program is merely descriptive (Robertson 2004, 56). Additionally, much of the literature available is produced by the National Main Street Center itself. These internal studies have been done to produce brochures and reports to market the Four-Point Approach™, but little has been done to objectively research the scope and effects of the program.

Kent Robertson, formerly a professor and Director of Community Development at St. Cloud State University and downtown revitalization consultant, acknowledged the lack of literature and independent and objective research on the program and made attempts in his career to provide studies to examine and evaluate its inner workings. In a 1999 study, Robertson surveyed 57 small cities nationwide in an attempt to determine the most successful of 16 downtown redevelopment strategies, with the Main Street Four-Point Approach™ coming out on top (Robertson 2004, 56). He followed with another study in 2004 that examined how exactly the four points are implemented in communities (Robertson 2004, 59). Through a nationwide survey of Main Street communities,

Robertson used four cities as representative case studies for the entire program in order to determine what percentage of time and effort was dedicated to each of the points. Across the board, promotion was the most utilized point based on the comfort and ease associated with the objectives and actions used with it. Organization, design, and economic restructuring require an increasingly higher level of expertise, which is not always readily available in smaller communities. Studies such as Robertson's provide the National Main Street Center with valuable information that can be used in focusing resources and training on where the successful implementation of the approach is being undermined.

The strategy continues to be examined on a number of levels, but because of the inability to find control communities that are widely applicable it is challenging to evaluate consistently on a large scale. Community dynamics are an integral part of how the program operates and can differ greatly from one community to the next. Resources (financial, cultural, historic, so on), demographics, and geography also vary greatly. Because of this, smaller scale evaluations are more common, with a focus on a particular city, state, or region. No matter the scale and methodologies of the studies, they all come to similar conclusions: the Main Street Program is an effective revitalization tool for historic downtown commercial districts.

Several master's theses have been used on this smaller scale to study the Main Street Program and its Four-Point Approach™. Katherine Anthony of the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill analyzed the use of the Main Street model in urban neighborhood revitalization. She used four case studies, categorized by city size (at least 200,000), program length (at least two years) and approach to implementation (citywide, community development corporation, and independent/grassroots). The case studies were focused around reviewing the challenges, strategies, and accomplishments of the

programs. Anthony looked for common threads across the programs that appear to aid in the successes and identified six key factors and challenges: importance of public support and commitment, partnerships with private and nonprofit agencies, widespread community involvement, program adaptability and flexibility, addressing gentrification and displacement concerns, and efforts made towards sustainability (Anthony 2003).

Lisa Hechesky of Marshall University established the characteristics of a model Main Street program and compared a single case study in West Virginia to the model. Hechesky identified five elements of successful programs: city support, private and public partnerships, focal point downtown, promotions, and events and celebrations of community (Hechesky 2005). In the conclusion, Hechesky emphasizes the importance of the other factors of the Four-Point Approach™, stressing that communities need to reevaluate the role of the program as not just an economic tool, but also as a connection to the community's history, culture and architecture.

Mark Soeth used a matched-pairs comparison of participating and non-participating Iowa Main Street towns to determine if the Main Street model is more effective than other revitalization strategies. Instead of using Main Street's Four-Point Approach™, Soeth evaluated the pairs based on economic development, historic preservation, planning, and social capital using a point-based system (0-3) to rate results (what happened) and process (how it happened) (Soeth 2005). This somewhat subjective method of evaluation came across as overly complicated and difficult to repeat.

Perhaps most useful to this particular study was Taner Ozdil's dissertation on the Texas Main Street program, which evaluated the relationship between urban design and economic activity. In the study, Ozdil analyses economic changes over a five-year period (1997-2001) using three categories of cities: active, inactive/former, and non-participating (Ozdil 2006). The four points were used for a rating system to determine the

success of the basic structure of the program in all categories of cities. In most cases, the active Main Street communities performed better across the board than the other two categories, and Main Street communities with populations below 50,000 performed better than their larger counterparts.

Ever important to marketing the Main Street Program is economics. Donovan Rypkema, Caroline Cheong, and Randall Mason were commissioned by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to create a report to evaluate the current methods being used to determine economic impacts of historic preservation. Additionally, the trio identified recommended measures, which include jobs, property values, heritage tourism, environmental measurements, and downtown revitalization. For each, the authors explain the purpose and the methodology. For downtown revitalization, the purpose is to “understand the role of historic preservation and downtown commercial district revitalization” (Rypkema 2011, 4). The methodology suggests expanding the data collected by the National Main Street Center and commissioning regular analysis of comparative approaches to revitalization and how these approaches deal with historic resources. It makes recommendations as to what to measure and how to measure it in order to begin to have consistent, useful and credible data.

Rypkema’s study also acknowledges the role of qualitative measures in historic preservation. This type of data is relevant to this study, as it is a collection of opinions about the Main Street Program and its value in a community. While Rypkema’s report does not directly address the notion of social equity, Rypkema and his co-authors do provide a guide for qualitative measurements in Appendix D (Rypkema 2011, 53). They suggest future study of both longitudinal public opinion about historic preservation and the social impacts of preservation. Longitudinal public opinion should be measured through three discrete approaches recommended by the authors: decision-maker surveys,

community indicators, and an annual survey of bellwether preservation sites. Social impacts of preservation could be measured using decennial Federal Census data, by tracking changes in relationships; but it is warned that this type of analysis would yield information about the correlation of preservation and social factors, not necessarily establishing causal relationships (Rypkema 2011, 54).

These studies each follow a different methodology, and often look at very different yet specific aspects of the program, making it difficult to come to any consensus on how the program works across the board. While this study is no different, in that it looks at a small number of self-selected participating communities in just one state, it will inform a larger trend by creating a narrative of the program from different, but equally involved groups and analyze the comparative aspects of each case study. Additionally, the methodology could be repeated in other communities in other states across the nation.

## METHODOLOGY

Each of the three case studies serve as its own internal comparison, as they each have three phases of participation in the program: Phase I - initial participation; Phase II - non-participating; and Phase III - recertification. Each of these independent time periods can be compared to the other case studies to determine if there are significant trends that lead to a community leaving the program and what causes them to return.

In order to establish a baseline for the program organization in these communities, a set of questions was sent to the managers of the recertified cities. These questions established trends across the cities based on basic organization (volunteerism, size of Main Street district, etc.) and called upon the current managers to explain (and sometimes guess) why the city left the program and why it returned. Being able to organize these communities based on a variety of different factors aided in determining what factors were important in drawing comparisons.

The three case studies were chosen only from those cities where the Main Street managers responded to the preliminary questionnaire (Appendix A). The case studies were selected based on active years, current population, and distance from major cities.

City	Active Years I	Active Years II	Population (2011)	Distance from nearest MSA*
Brenham	1983-1989	1999-present	15,716	73.5 miles (Houston)
Gainesville	1982-1985	2001-present	15,984	72.9 miles (Dallas-Ft. Worth)
Kilgore	1987-1991	2007-present	13,110	Within Longview MSA

Table 1. Case Study selection items. \* MSA: Metropolitan Statistical Area

All of the cities are considered Small Cities, and their Main Street programs therefore fall under city government, as determined by the THC's guidelines. Case study selections differed in region, based on the Texas Heritage Trail regional divisions, located within the Independence, Lakes, and Forest regions, in order to differentiate among possible regional economic factors. Minor differences in the primary criteria for selection will aid in approximating potential factors for discrepancies and allow for limited projection of the given results.

This report uses three sources of evidence — documentation, archival records, and interviews — allowing for “a broader range of historical, attitudinal, and behavioral issues” (Yin 2003, 98). Focused interviews allow a targeted and insightful narrative of the Main Street Program to be established from the point of view of several different community members. In allowing the participants to initiate the conversation, the interviewer can make deductions based on what they feel is important enough to discuss without prompting. Additional questioning was geared towards collecting consistent information from each city to draw comparisons. This source qualitatively informs the viewpoints of what occurred within the community to bring it back to the program.

In order to quantify the events in each community, documentation (newspaper articles and administrative data) and archival records (organizational records and survey data) are used to validate information given in the interviews. Comparisons made between applications of the program from initial participation and recertification periods help to determine the changes that took place during the inactive years. It is also

necessary to assume some changes took place in the initial participation phase. Newspaper articles and program applications corroborate changes within the community during these years. Reinvestment figures collected by the Texas Main Street Program are also used as the basis for comparisons, both within each case study and among the case studies.

By triangulating these qualitative and quantitative sources on a single research question the case studies will be “much more convincing and accurate...following a corroboratory mode” (Yin 2003, 98). In speaking directly with key players in the Main Street program from different sectors of the community in three recertified cities, the study establishes a record of the perception of the Main Street Program — and lack thereof during inactive years. Quantitative information gathered from the Texas Main Street Program in the form of Main Street applications, resource team reports, program budgets, and reinvestment figures collected during the participatory phases, is used to back up the narratives conveyed in the interview portion of the study. This method takes into account that all Main Street communities differ in history, culture, and execution of the program based on their individual assets and needs. This study contributes to the literature on the Texas Main Street Program and provides a model that can be easily repeated with sensitivity to the unique nature of each place.

## CASE STUDIES

Based on the previously described methodology, three case study cities were chosen from the twenty currently participating recertified Main Street cities. All twenty of the current recertified cities were originally admitted during the first eight years of the program in Texas, between 1981 and 1988. During this time, forty cities were accepted into the program. Five of those forty cities never left the program and the remaining fifteen cities are no longer active. The average initial participation for the recertified cities was five and a half years, with some participating for as little as a single year and others as many as seventeen years. The average time out of the program was twelve and a half years, with some exiting for as little as three years or as many as twenty-eight years.

Important to note is the inclusion of the following question in the original Main Street application: What will be the long-term impact of this project after support from the Texas Main Street Project is concluded? This question was in each case study's initial application to the program. Its appearance in the application makes it clear that at the inception of the program (and for several years after, as it appeared as late as 1987) the intent was for participation to last a finite amount of time — three years as established in the demonstration projects — and end with the cities using the fundamentals organized and implemented by the state coordinators.

Resource team reports were provided to participating cities after admission to the program. The preface to these reports clarifies the inclusion of this question: “The

selected cities are required to fund for three years a full-time project manager employed by the city and reports to the city manager. In turn, the Texas Main Street Project is pledged to work with each of these communities for three years, providing start-up assistance in the first year and then assisting in development of local initiative and expertise in the next two years.” The program was not required to end after the initial participation period, but the services from the THC would end at that time. The resource team reports provided in the first year gave the cities focus areas to work towards implementing with the help of the THC over the next two years, and beyond, if the city wished. As illustrated in the following case studies, organizers eventually realized that formal and consistent participation in the program was the key to its success.

# 2013 Texas Main Street Cities

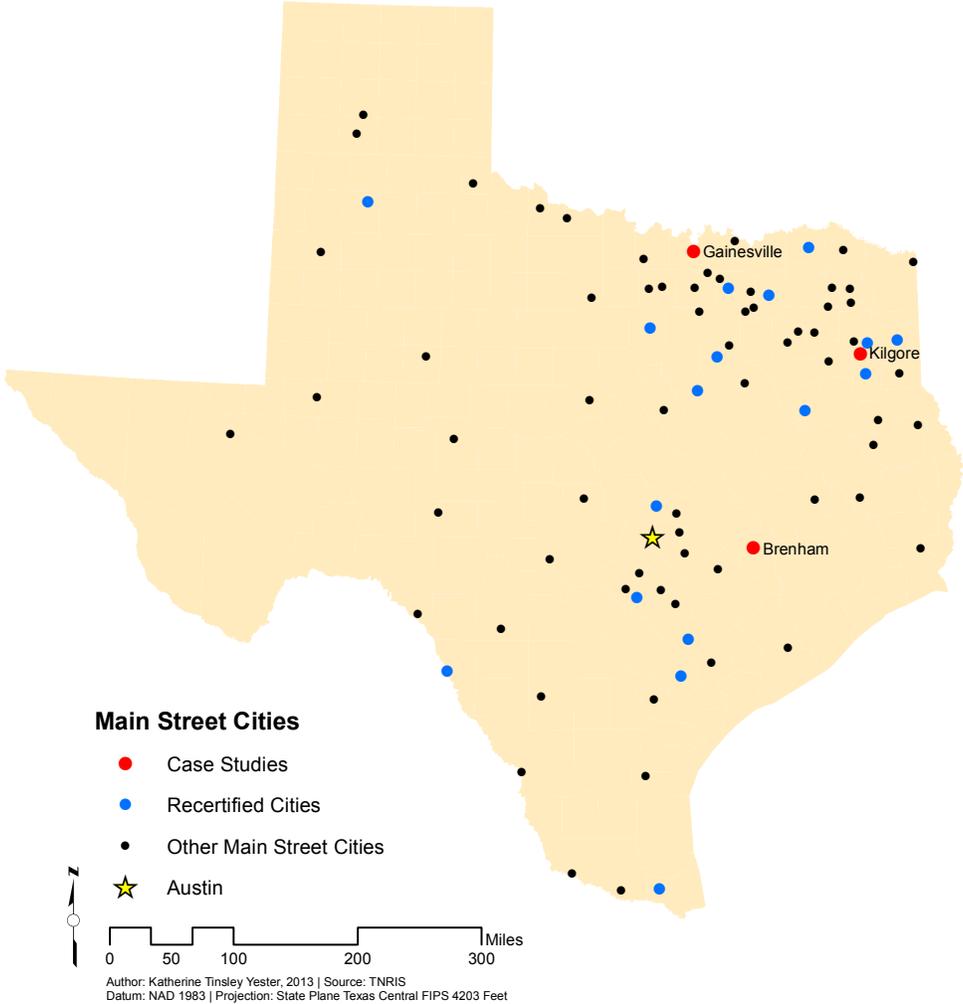


Image 1: Map of 2013 Texas Main Street Cities.

## **BRENHAM**

### *History*

Brenham has been the seat of Washington County since 1844, and saw significant growth in 1860 with the construction of the Washington County Railroad serving as the terminus and distribution point for the state's interior. This growth continued into the 1890s despite a yellow fever epidemic and a number of destructive fires. The railroad continued to expand to include the Gulf, Colorado, and Santa Fe Railways, increasing Brenham's status as a bustling commercial hub in a largely rural agricultural area.

Brenham's economy took off as early as the 1890s when the city established itself as a hub for manufacturing and processing everything from cottonseed oil to mattresses (Christian 2012). Despite a population dip between the 1910s and 1950s, Brenham kept its place as a regional economic center because of its hold on production industries. Brenham is also considered a regional education center as it continues to be home to Blinn College, founded in 1883.

Despite its rich history, well-regarded educational system, and gradually increasing population, downtown Brenham suffered from the fate of many other mid- to small-sized towns in Texas and across the nation. While U.S. Highway 290 provides a direct connection from Brenham east to Houston and west to Austin, a bypass was put in place directing traffic south of the city in 1990, taking a toll on Brenham's downtown district during the time the city was out of the Main Street Program.

*Phase I: 1983 - 1987*

Brenham first joined the Main Street Program in 1983, after being rejected by the program in 1982. Newspaper articles from August of 1982, prior to their official acceptance, track the opinions of the program in the city. Paula Peters, a consultant at the THC's Main Street Center, is quoted saying that the downtown area is the "image, the core of our town — it's a physical statement of how we grew, how we developed" (Hahn 1982). At a meeting held to gauge public interest in the program, Peters told a group of citizens that the "uppermost in the Main Street objectives is building up the economic strength of a downtown area, which later leads to physical improvements" (Hahn 1982).

The decision to reapply did not come easy. On August 17, 1982, the Brenham City Commission voted to determine if they would apply to the program again. Commissioner Jack Ireland abstained because of financing: "The city should not have to pay for it. I'm not in favor of this coming out of city funds" (Hahn 2 1982). First National Bank president Richard Neal, on the other hand, was wholeheartedly in favor of the program, explaining, "We're at a crossroads in the downtown area, in my opinion. It's either going to go up or it's going to go down" (Hahn 2 1982). In addition to his verbal support, Neal promised that his bank would commit to a pool of low-interest loans for building improvements.

The meeting also started a discussion about absentee business owners. Commissioner Charles Lange questioned those owners' desire to make improvements on their buildings: "Absentee owners don't want their taxes to go up. That's why they're letting [their buildings] deteriorate, I guess. Why should we spend this money if they

don't want to fix these buildings up?" (Hahn 2 1982). Hal Moorman, 1981 chamber president and advocate for the program, countered Lange's question by suggesting the possibility that the project might remove some of the absentee owners by attracting buyers who are more interested in being active in the downtown district. In the end, the vote passed, the city applied, and Brenham was accepted into the program.

The initial application cites the primary goal for participation in the program as being "to provide for the economic revitalization of downtown within the framework of historic properties conservation" (Smith 1981, 2). Specific objectives for the program are listed: hiring a project manager, organizing downtown merchants and property owners, improving downtown parking, and encouraging property owners to renovate or restore historically significant buildings.

The initial application asks the question "What will be the long term impact of this project after support from the Texas Main Street Center is concluded?" The plan at that time was to develop "a process to ensure continuous low-cost incremental changes in all aspects of downtown life" (Smith 1981, 9). This goal was noted to be contingent on reaching the objectives outlined for the course of the statewide center's involvement in the project in Brenham. To ensure their goals were met, the application stipulates for periodic evaluations of the project in order to determine "project direction, objective accomplishment, and community response to the program" (Smith 1981, 9). The hope was that Main Street would evolve to become firmly embedded in the minds of the residents of Brenham, and that sense of pride for their historic fabric would become an

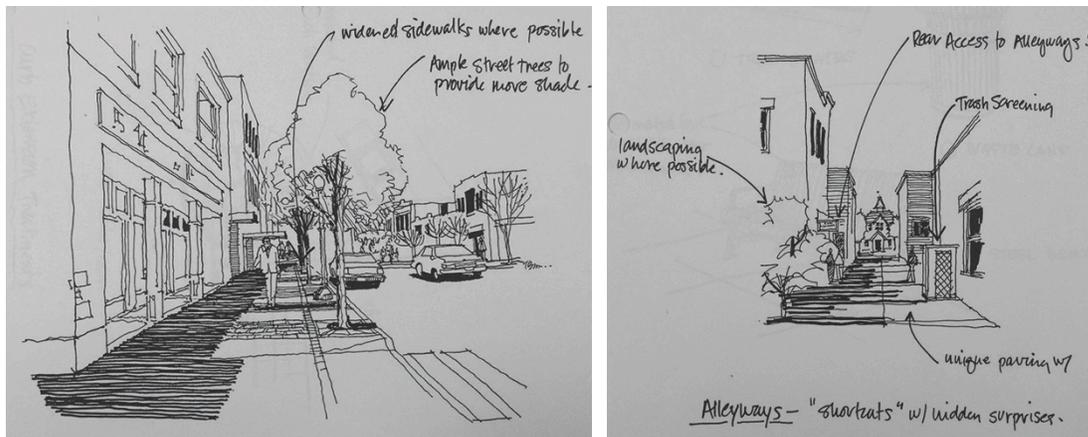
integral part of the community system and infrastructure. Of all the case studies, Brenham's first phase in the program lasted the longest.

After official acceptance into the program, the THC provided a resource team report for each city admitted. The study in Brenham was conducted during a visit to the city between June 27 and 29, 1983. Team members included: Anice Read, director of the Main Street Program; Tom Moriarity, program associate at the National Main Street Center in Washington, D.C.; Barb Nuckles, parking consultant from DeShazo, Starek & Tang out of Dallas; Jim Roberts, group manager for the Rouse Company; Phil Davis, chief of community relations at the Texas Tourist Development Agency in Austin; and Stan Klein, architect at Wagner and Klein in Fredericksburg. Myra Hargrave McIlvain was responsible for writing the report, which was published by the THC.

The report addresses parking and traffic, tourism, and architecture, with appendices providing relevant information on investment analysis and methods for compatible new construction. In the introduction, the report states that Brenham remains a healthy marketplace despite the retail decline in the downtown district and the halt of the oil boom (McIlvain 1983, 3). Community support was illustrated when six of Brenham's lending institutions — Brazos Savings and Loan Association, Brenham National Bank, First National Bank, First Savings and Loan Association, South Central Saving Association, and Washington County State Bank — created a loan pool of \$120,000, from which \$10,000 could be borrowed at eight percent interest for exterior rehabilitation of downtown buildings (McIlvain 1983, 3). The national average for lending rates at this time was 10.8 percent (The World Bank). Additionally, sales tax

revenues in Brenham were more than \$1 million in 1982 and the city planned to hold that figure for 1983.

The report focuses not only on the downtown, but on the city as a whole, as “the central business district does not operate in a vacuum” (McIlvain 1983, 11). General observations made by the team about downtown include: vacant stores and buildings (cited as 12 percent on first-floor levels and 80 percent on upper floors); lack of convenient parking (with a current, pre-revitalization occupancy rate of 75 percent); relocation of stores outside of the CBD; the need for better maintenance of buildings; poor fiscal condition of city (with five of its six municipal funds in a deficit); lack of retail variety and selection; and a lack of strong marketing and advertising plan, including special events and displays (McIlvain 1983, 11).



Images 2-3. Streetscape suggestions (Resource Team Report).

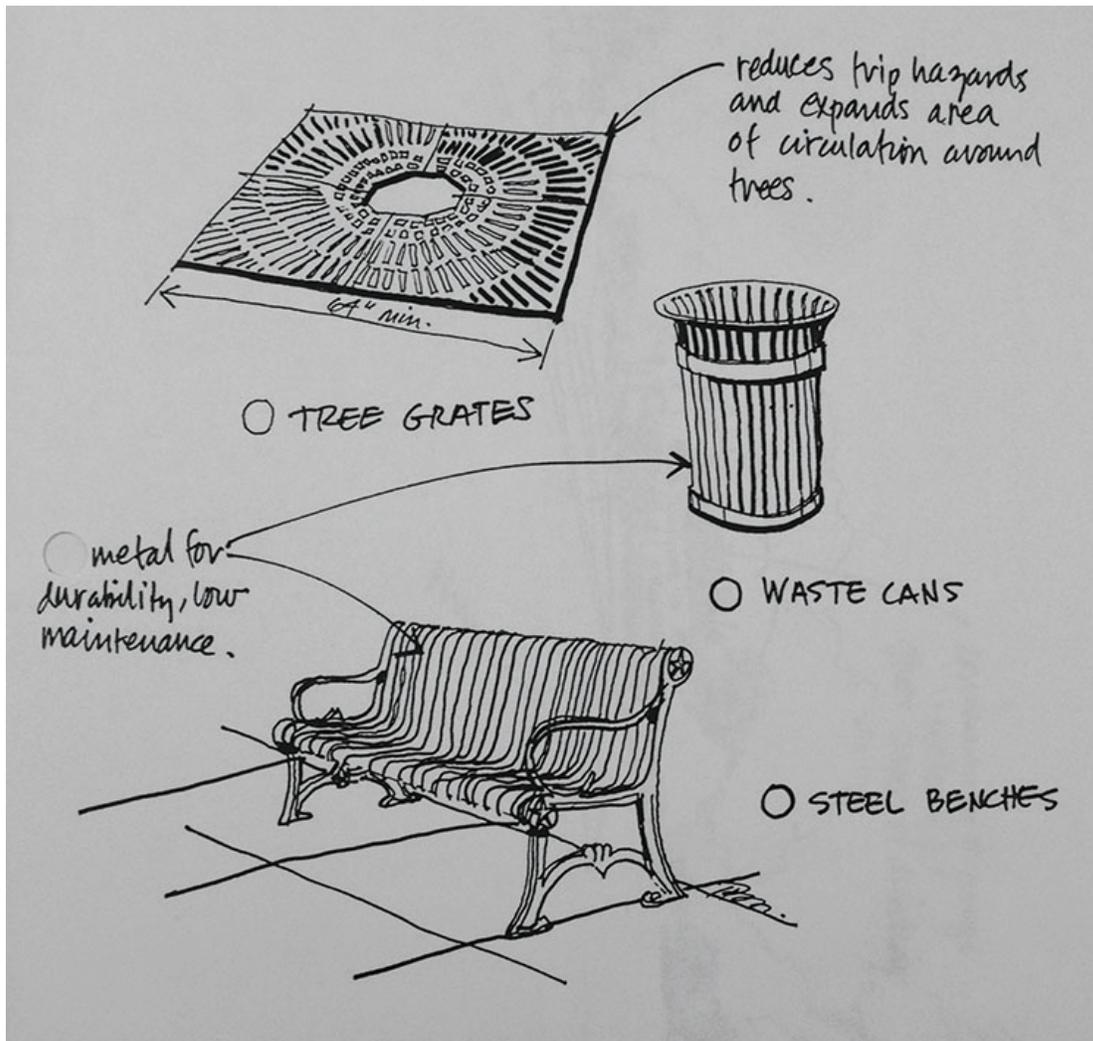


Image 4. Pedestrian amenities (Resource Team Report).

To combat these challenges, the report suggests establishing leasing priorities by seeking “stores and services that will bring vitality and energy downtown and at the same time maintain the heritage of the people that founded this charming Central Texas town” ((McIlvain 1983, 11). The report team created a list of businesses that the downtown district needed to become a marketplace to put history and a sense of place back into the city: unique antique shops, an art gallery, a bookstore, a gift shop, a flower shop, a sweet shop, and a German bakery and restaurant. To draw businesses away from the

competition, the team noted the 33 cents per square foot rent in downtown as being far more attractive than the 75 cents to \$1.25 per square foot charged in nearby strip centers (McIlvain 1983, 12).

In August of the same year, Dr. Dennis U. Fischer conducted a Trade Area Analysis for Brenham, submitting it to the THC's Main Street Program. The analysis showed that Brenham merchants drew trade from substantial distances. It cited Brenham as being the largest city for fifty plus miles, with its location on U.S. Highway 290 and other highways being key to accessibility from all directions. While the population in Brenham was growing at a slower rate than the state average, the per capita income was growing rapidly, increasing the buying power of the area residents (Fisher 1983, 3). In addition to residents of Brenham, the study took into account nearby county residents as well, citing that many of the homes outside of the city were second residences, providing two different types of buying power in the city and the county.

#### *Phase II: 1989-1999*

The recertification application gives hints to what went wrong in the initial iteration of the program. It identifies the two major failings: a tax increment financing district was formed through the program, but because of a subsequent economic downturn, no funds were realized; and the perception by the former city management that the program was not bringing in new business and was ineffective, leading to its discontinuation (Webster 1998, 3).

In a letter dated September 12, 1990 addressed to Anice Read, then executive director of the THC and the original state coordinator of the Main Street Program, Herb Maddock thanks Read for her efforts in getting the Main Street Program started in Brenham. He explains that there is no longer a Main Street Director, and that he and a colleague “have been unsuccessful in convincing the City Manager and Mayor we should have one” (Maddock 1990). Maddock seems hopeful that the active Downtown Association — “now being spearheaded by the young people “ — will eventually win over the city council. This, however, did not happen until nine years later.

Despite the strengths identified in the resource and trade analysis studies, Brenham did not thrive on its own once out of the Main Street Program. In 1999, ten years after leaving the Main Street Program, downtown property values had dropped 60 percent (Eckermann 2013). The city and the Chamber of Commerce set up a task force to determine what actions to take to reverse the downtown’s decline. They decided that participation in the Main Street Program was an integral part in revitalizing their declining downtown district. The recertification application notes changes that took place in Brenham that better prepared it to function as a Main Street city. New city management and a renewed interest in the preservation of the downtown district created the movement towards recertification. Brenham’s application for recertification was accepted and the city has remained active ever since.

*Phase III: 1999 - Present*

Through re-entering the Main Street Program, the city of Brenham hoped to “use the preservation of our historical resources as a catalyst for economic development and revitalize our downtown, which in turn, can serve as a catalyst for overall community economic development” (Webster 1998, 1). Tourism increased during the non-participating years and sparked hope that the return of the Main Street program would further develop a vibrant downtown district. The close proximity to and ease of travel between Austin and Houston allows visitors to make day trips to the area for shopping and local attractions (Webster 1981, 2). A new master plan for the downtown hints at larger developments to attract conferences and conventions to the soon-to-be renovated Simon Theatre, which currently serves as the visitor center.

Main Street manager Jennifer Eckermann is aware of Brenham’s strategic location along Highway 290, saying, “Any success that we have is location...and we need to keep taking advantage of that.” Eckermann was brought up in Brenham, and left for college thinking that she would never return. However, she did return to Brenham and has served as Main Street manager since recertification after working for ten years in public relations at local ice cream factory, Blue Bell Creameries. Eckermann credits her dedication to the fact that she grew up in Brenham and works daily to revitalize her own hometown.



Images 5-6. Top: The Simon Theatre in disrepair in the 1990s. Bottom: The Simon Theatre today (Save Our Simon).

Many other long-term residents do not share Eckermann's nostalgia for Brenham. "It seems like the newer people in town have more of an appreciation for downtown ... than the people who have been around for a long time," she explains. "Here they're called 'BIBs' and 'BOBs' — Born In Brenham and Born Out of Brenham. The 'BOBs' have a lot more appreciation than the 'BIBs'... There are a lot of locals who don't get it. They've always had it and they don't want this old stuff. They want what you get in in Houston. They're more interested in getting a Target and an Academy than doing anything downtown."

Suzy Hankins is one such "BOB." Hankins and her husband moved to Brenham just last year after purchasing the Ant Street Inn, a boutique bed and breakfast located in the heart of downtown. Hankins expresses interest in the Main Street Program and is working to become more involved. Within months of moving to town Hankins and her husband provided feedback and recommendations on the downtown master plan project and began attending merchant meetings, which work to unifying business owners. Hankins admits that the Main Street Program made Brenham attractive to them: "The fact that Brenham's historic downtown was full of life and business was a major factor in us purchasing our property and business ... We had been to Brenham in the past, but only to drive through or visit Blue Bell. It wasn't until we started researching Brenham in light of owning a business here did we realize the amazing treasure it is!"

While enthusiastic, Hankins also recognizes the challenges the program faces: "One of the biggest challenges I see is the ability of property owners to renovate their buildings. The city, state and federal laws really make it expensive to expand or renovate

... There also seems to be a lack of unity between the downtown area and the rest of the town. Residents don't support the area as much as we need in order to grow.” Hankins is working to become more involved in the program through joining one of the Main Street committees and by participating in events by providing event space.

Another “BOB” is Bruce Margolis, owner of American Man Cave, Brenham’s only retail store geared towards men, located just off of the square in downtown Brenham. The store opened at the end of 2012 and is the store’s second location. The store’s original location is in downtown Bellville, just twenty miles south of Brenham. Many other downtown merchants are excited by the diversity American Man Cave brings to the downtown district, which currently houses primarily antique stores and gift shops. Margolis recalls his first visit to Brenham in the early 1990s, stating that it was “unremarkable” and that it looked like “just another Texas town that was past its glory days.” However, the changes he’s seen in downtown Brenham have been promising, and in deciding to open up a second location of his store he didn’t consider anywhere else in town. He is impressed by how pro-active the Main Street Program is in Brenham, and how the events the program organizes bring a significant number of potential customers to the downtown area. Margolis organized his own downtown event, using the nearby Ant Street Inn, with everything from a barbeque cook off and a poker tournament to live music and charity auctions. The event not only benefits his own business, but introduces new customers to all of downtown Brenham.

There are also several “BIBs” who support the Main Street movement. Eckermann speaks highly of them and their commitment to the downtown: “This little

core group on West Alamo, they did it right. They knew what they were doing and they kept it going. They were tremendously successful as the rest of downtown was just falling apart. People were coming and going, rent was cheap, so they have seen it all, but they're very proud of what they've done and understandably so. I think they feel like they can do it whether Main Street is here or not ... As a whole, [downtown] needs Main Street to keep things going, but they're really good supportive businesses and thank goodness for them because they continue to be a draw."

One of these businesses is Hermann's Furniture Company. Run by John Hermann and his daughter Jennifer, the business has been in their family and in its original downtown location since 1876. John Hermann vaguely remembers the first phase of the Main Street program in the 1980s, but more clearly recalls the high turnover rate in the downtown during the inactive years. "People go into business and a lot of people don't have any idea what a business is. Some people go in and work very hard and they may make it, they may not. It's a fight every day," John says. The Hermanns credit their success to changing with the times and diversifying their business to reach broader markets. In addition to their furniture store, where they offer interior design services, they have expanded and now also run a general store and an antique mall. They advertise not just in Brenham, but also in neighboring cities, such as Austin, Houston, and Bryan-College Station.



Images 7-8. Left: Hermann Furniture. Right: Retail block on West Alamo

Connie Wilder is another long-term business owner and has run the Pomegranate and the Funky Art Café since 1979 out of what used to be father’s blacksmith shop. Wilder has seen a lot in her time in downtown Brenham. “The thing that concerns me is we have a lot of vacant spaces. I don’t like to see the revolving door of businesses coming and going, it’s not good for anybody,” she says. “First of all, I don’t like to see a business fail. If you came in tomorrow and said you want to open up a business, I sure want you to succeed because it’s terrible for a person to try to do it on their own and not make it.” Her current worry is that there is not enough diversity in businesses downtown and that the district is over retailled. “We have too many people selling the same thing,” she explains. “We don’t have people coming in and being imaginative and creative.”

Despite the city’s success during its time in the program, there is a lack of cooperation among some of the downtown business owners. “People are afraid their property values are going to go up and ... they don’t want to pay any more taxes,” Eckermann explains. It is this mentality in the downtown that is preventing support for

new development in the district that was laid out in the new downtown master plan. Business owners see this lack of cooperation too. John Hermann recalls his time as head of the Downtown Association: “You’d try to get people to do an ad [for a collective event], and they’d say ‘Oh no, I don’t want to do that,’ but the day of the sale they’re running the same deal. They just want to... let you spend your money and they’ll reap the benefits.” Wilder felt similarly: “The problem then as it is sometimes now is that we can’t get everybody on board. They want to ride the coattails of other businesses.”

Wilder, like Hankins, acknowledges the difficulties in building codes that have prevented some development from coming to fruition. The cost of many renovations are very expensive based on the size of many of the downtown buildings, and city code compliance makes it virtually impossible to create second-floor loft spaces in many of the buildings. Wilder had plans for a renovation, but found the permitting process too difficult. “In a situation where you have old and new there has to be some coming together,” she explains. “I have dreams and things I want to do with the space, but it’s too difficult and I’m too old.”

Eckermann is confident in Brenham’s ability to stick with the program and continue to make improvements in the downtown district despite the challenges. “We have such a story to tell,” she says. Eckermann believes the proof for the effectiveness of the program has garnered enough to support in the community to ward off any threats. “I think back then [in the 1980s] there wasn’t that story to tell...There wasn’t the ‘what happens when we get out?’... People understand more, and people care more maybe now too. It’s all kinds of reasons, but I don’t think that would happen now.”

Brenham has had a number of successes while in the Main Street Program. The aesthetics of the downtown district illustrate the ideas provided in the 1982 resource team report, with a number of streetscape improvements that benefit the pedestrian experience. In creating an amenity-rich environment, Brenham has been able to expand its status as a regional tourist destination. As the program in Brenham continues to progress, it will be important to keep taking advantage of the city's location along a major state transportation route and to stress the importance of cooperation from all downtown business owners. The newly approved downtown master plan provides a structured strategy to support future revitalization efforts in the district. While the program sees challenges in parking, code compliance, and at times uncooperative business owners, Brenham has made great strides in revitalizing and preserving its downtown district.

## **GAINESVILLE**

### *History*

Gainesville is the seat of Cooke County and is located directly off of Interstate 35 just north of Dallas and seven miles south of the Oklahoma border. The city was founded in 1850 on a forty-acre tract, but struggled to grow in its first decade because of frequent Indian raids despite becoming a stop on the Butterfield Overland Mail route. After the Civil War, however, Gainesville experienced a period of rapid growth due to the booming cattle industry and the arrival of the Santa Fe rail line in 1886. By 1890, Gainesville was a freight and commercial hub for ranchers and farmers, acting as a major supply stop for ranchers driving cattle north to Kansas (Minor 2013). It was during this period just before the twentieth century that Gainesville experienced much of the construction that characterizes its downtown district and adjacent residential neighborhood.

With the decline of the cattle industry following the depression of 1893, Gainesville managed to thrive thanks to the high price of cotton, which continued for twenty years. In the 1920s, the discovery of oil nearby aided in protecting the city from the harsh effects of the Great Depression. Because of this fortunate combination of cattle, cotton, and oil, Gainesville was able to survive several economic slumps better than many other small North Texas towns. Today, Gainesville continues to be home to a number of industries that have embraced the community and has taken strides to contribute financially to the downtown district.

*Phase I: 1982-1985*

In Gainesville's initial application to the Main Street program, the community wanted to achieve revitalization of the downtown area by attracting more retail businesses to fill the 18.3% of buildings in the Central Business District that were then vacant (Sartain 1981, 1). The first application emphasized community cooperation and pride. Some members of city council, however, voted against the program, specifically the requirement to hire a project manager, with one council member saying he did not see how the city would benefit from the \$22,000 salary when it could be better spent elsewhere. The vote passed with council member Anne Heffron stating, "I think in the long run [Main Street] will bring more benefits than its cost" (McClendon 1981).

As early as their 1981 application, Gainesville had a strong interest in their built heritage and at the time was in the process of surveying historical resources. The city and the county worked together to provide financial support for the survey, and their funds were matched with a grant from the THC (Sartain 1981, 2a). A new attitude was emerging in the field of historic preservation. "We are moving away from the time when you pickled buildings and made museums of them," then-THC director Truett Latimer was quoted as saying. "We've pickled all we need ... We are now at the stage where economic vitality is what makes preservation go" (Jones 1981). The city of Gainesville was encouraged by the 300 historic sites the survey identified within the city limits.

To the initial application question "What will be the long-term impact of this project after support from the Texas Main Street Project is concluded?" Sartain answered that it "should consist of a revitalization of the Central Business District, together with

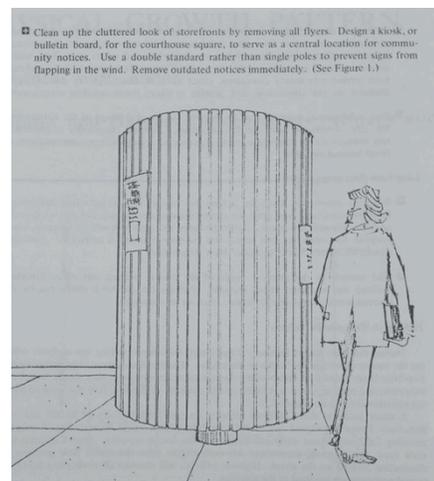
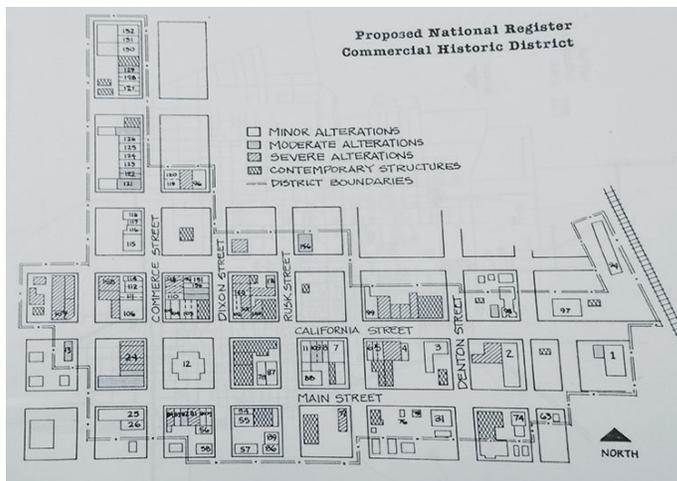
the achievement of greater appreciation for the historic architecture, which is too often taken for granted” (Sartain 1981, 3). The applicant places an emphasis on restoration of the character of the downtown district, noting that the project should have the “continuing effect of preserving salvageable historical landmarks before their destruction by neglect, misuse or abuse, creating new business opportunities and improved employment in the Central Business District” (Sartain 1981, 3). It is clear that even prior to the Main Street Program the city of Gainesville not only had a cooperative and proud community, but one that also recognized the importance of the role of preservation in the economic revitalization of downtown.

The initial application identified a number of assets and problem areas that remain today. The location immediately adjacent to Interstate 35 and the proximity to the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, as well as the wealth of historic commercial and residential architecture are all assets to the success of the downtown district. They also identify the growing industrial base. Problem areas are the vacant storefronts and upper floors and the need for a greater variety of businesses. The development of a new shopping center was also a contributing factor in taking business away from the Central Business District (Sartain 1981, 3-3b).

After being admitted to the program, Gainesville received a resource team report from the THC, conducted between August 23 and 25, 1982. The team included: Tom Moriarity, program associate with the National Main Street Center; Anice Read, director of the Texas Main Street Project; Dr. Larry Zuercher, landscape architect and planner at Myrick, Newman, and Dahlberg in Dallas; Janet Reed, vice president of the Rouse

Corporation and manager of Highland Mall Shopping Center in Austin; Phil Davis, chief of community relations with the Texas Tourist Development Agency in Austin; and Killis Almond, of DeLara-Almond architectural firm in San Antonio.

The team provided recommendations for streetscape improvements and parking management, as well as addressing how to turn the downtown district back into its historical use as a marketplace and how to develop Gainesville for visitors. It also addressed the downtown building as economic assets and provided short- and long-term recommendations for retaining the historic fabric. In this section of the report, the team focused on the courthouse, as it “offers a grand focal point.” Short-term solutions included seeking a district nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, converting the Santa Fe Depot into a restaurant, repairing the courthouse dome and clock, and strengthening the downtown image through zoning to eliminate undesirable structures (McIlvain 1982, 15). Long-term solutions included promoting upper floor rehabilitations for office or living spaces, working to insure code compliance with life-safety codes, and retain the structures around the square (McIlvain 1982, 16). The appendix addressed the use of tax incentives and figures were used to illustrate possible upper floor plans along with cost projections and cash flow analysis for rehabilitation projects.



Images 9-11. Top: Sample upper floor loft floor plan. Left: Proposed National Register Commercial Historic District. Right: Sample kiosk for centralized community notices (Resource Team Report).

*Phase II: 1986 - 2000*

Gainesville remained in the program for the entirety of their three-year commitment, but no steps were taken by the city to continue the program on their own.

According to Carlos Vigil, Gainesville's original Main Street manager, the program fell

by the wayside when economic hardships came to the city soon after joining the program. Business owners were focused only on keeping their own doors open. The program lost all centralized organization, slowly dissolving into inactivity, and exited the program in 1985.

In 1988, several years after leaving the Main Street Program, the Gainesville Enterprise Zone was established based on unemployment and chronic abandonment of commercial and residential structures, and nationally designated as a distressed small city by the Urban Development Action Grant Program (UDAG) (TEZ-EEP 1994, 3). This zone was created to encourage investment in existing business and to promote new business development as a means to provide employment opportunities to the residents of the zone.

In June of 1994, Gainesville received a resource team report from the Texas Enterprise Zone's Economic Empowerment Program (TEZ-EEP). Funding from the report came from technical assistance funds for the benefit of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) communities through the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The funds were to be used to "provide technical assistance designed to attract and/or encourage business development and expansion, job creation and retention, skill development, housing and other needs identified by the community" (TEZ-EEP 1994, 1). The Texas Department of Housing and Community affairs (TDHCA) in cooperation with the Texas Department of Commerce applied for and received a grant in the amount of \$250,000 in April of 1993. The main objective for the funding in Texas was the development of an economic empowerment program that would

complement and support implementation of enterprise zones. Ten communities were selected to participate in the TEZ-EEP, including Gainesville.

The team met with city officials and community leaders in Gainesville between April 19 and April 22, 1994. The team was comprised of five members: Shea Burgamy of the Texas Department of Commerce; Larry McManus and Kim Patterson from TDHCA; Thom Lambert of TU Electric; and David Hawley from the Grayson County Sheriff's Department. In interacting directly with the community over several days, the team was able to assess the potential economic and financial resources available in Gainesville.

Through the resource team report the city was able to identify major community goals, which included: expand the economic base, recruit value added businesses and industries and increase high end jobs; develop more housing at all price levels; increase citizen involvement and awareness on civic and economic development issues and progress toward community unification; and upgrade the school system (TEZ-EEP 1994, 4). The first initiative (expansion of the economic base) recommendations included business recruitment, small or historically underutilized businesses, downtown, and tourism. Many of the recommendations for downtown were the same as recommendations provided by the Main Street Program (TEZ-EEP 1994, 6-7).

Other areas of economic development issues included job training, arts and culture, and beautification initiatives — all of which directly correlate to the Main Street Program's mission, particularly the beautification efforts, which directly referenced the Main Street Program, calling for the development of “a master beautification plan which includes the review of Gainesville's Main Street Report from the Texas Historical

Commission” and the investigation of Gainesville’s “ability to apply for Main Street Funds through the Texas Capital Fund” (TEZ-EEP 1994, 14). Involvement in the program required Gainesville to identify at least one primary initiative from the report and work towards accomplishing that single goal (TEZ-EEP 1994, 16). Quarterly reports delivered to TDHCA were also required to ensure progress was being made towards the chosen goal. No information was accompanying the report to determine which initiative was chose and how the city progressed, however it is likely that the participation in the program aided Gainesville in retaining focus on their downtown district during non-participating years.

Despite economic hardships, Gainesville remained committed to preservation during this time out of the program. It was not until participation in the Main Street program ended that a restoration effort got underway to restore the city’s historic train depot. The Santa Fe Depot was built in 1902 and abandoned in 1979 after the Lone Star passenger train stopped servicing the city. In 1981, the building was deeded to the city and the Main Street resource team identified it as a historic asset during their visit in 1982. Many people in Gainesville feel that it was the depot project that sparked the city’s interest in returning to the Main Street program. The project was completed just after recertification in October of 2001. The depot is now operational again, serving as a stop on the Amtrak Heartland Flyer route between Oklahoma City and Fort Worth. The depot is also the center of an annual event, Depot Day, which celebrates the importance of Gainesville’s railroad history.



Images 12-13. Top: Santa Fe Depot and train, 1954 (Museum of the American Railroad, Dallas, Texas).  
Bottom: Santa Fe Depot, Gainesville, 2010 (Madison Berndt).

### *Phase III: 2001 - Present*

During the fifteen years out of the program, Gainesville's goals for their downtown remained stable. In the recertification application, the expected achievements were taken almost word for word from the original application (Vigil 2000, 2). The application also addresses the current problems in the downtown district, which continued to include vacancies. The recertification application lacked information about other groups that had taken over the role of the Main Street program to ensure the preservation and revitalization during the years out of the program. It also lacked comparable demographic and property data from the city and the downtown core, making it more difficult to glean what went on when the city was out of the program, requiring reliance on interviewees for information about recertification.

The commitment to revitalization and preservation illustrated in the initial application remained through the inactive years, and a new long-term goal was set for the program: "It is the city's goal to retain as many of the local youth within the community to inherit the pride that made this city such a wonderful place to live (Vigil 2000, 4)." The ability to have a consistent big-picture vision for the future is an important part of the success of Gainesville's Main Street program. Perhaps Sartain just said it best in the original Main Street application, but in speaking with the key players in the program it is clear that the dedication to the program's mission did not waiver despite the years out of the program.

Lynette Pettigrew has been with the City of Gainesville since 1997, and is proof of the commitment the community has for their downtown. A lifetime resident of

Gainesville, Pettigrew held several jobs with the city before taking on the role of Main Street manager when the city recertified in 2001. She later took on a second role as Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce. Having Pettigrew in a dual role ensures that the Main Street goals are being considered in the Chamber's activities, but the partnership was there prior to Pettigrew.

Paige Davidson runs her custom handbag shop out of what had been her grandfather's auto parts store from 1945 into the mid-1970s. She has been renting the property from her parents for five years. She was a child when the city was first involved in the program, but recalls only a handful of core retail shops during the non-participating years: "I used to walk to my dad's downtown office after junior high and though there were a few key businesses ... but the turnover seemed to be high. Things would pop up for a year or two and then disappear."

Davidson is active in the program now that her business is located in the downtown district. She has taken advantage of the design services provided by the THC and hopes to add an awning and utilize the façade grant when her building needs it. She believes that the façade grant program has made it possible for many owners to improve their buildings: "We're seeing great renovations happening to the buildings downtown ... We are seeing more and more preservation and rehabilitation." Davidson also believes that the events the Main Street Program organizes have been helpful to the downtown businesses: "Ladies Night and Art Walk in particular have helped to bring new customers into our shops and have really helped remind them that there is quality retail downtown now, where for years there wasn't."

Like all business owners, Davidson has her worries. She feels that the program is gaining footing in the downtown, but recognizes that there are still challenges, stating that the biggest is re-energizing exhausted business owners to participate in more events and hold longer hours. “I think we have all of the foundation laid for great success — great architecture, a condensed downtown retail district, great products — but it will take *all* of the businesses being enthusiastic and pushing forward as a cohesive unit in terms of marketing and promotion,” she explains. “There’s always room for improvement ... but we’re making great strides.”

Downtown business owner, Donna Hertel owns and operates a restaurant, antique store, and bed and breakfast all in the downtown district. She runs a second bed and breakfast out of her home, which is located in the adjacent historic residential neighborhood. Her commitment to the downtown has been made through personal sacrifices, waiting six years to get permitted for a bed and breakfast. She explains how she knew she had to be persistent with the process in order to make it easier on future business owners: “If you don’t take the bullet for the people behind you, nobody’s going to take the bullet.” Through zoning changes and special permitting she was finally able to open her bed and breakfast. Hertel can’t pinpoint where her interest in preservation came from, but she says she prefaces every decision she makes in her buildings with, “I’m not going to be here some day. This is going to be something for the town to be proud of’ and that has been the most important, driving factor for everything.”

John Noblitt, Community Services Director at the City of Gainesville, has helped the Main Street Program in getting the city’s cooperation for these special projects. The

Community Services Division is responsible for building permits and inspections, code compliance, and planning and zoning. Noblitt previously served on the Main Street board as a city liaison, providing them with tools to leverage codes and zoning towards the aesthetics of downtown. Noblitt's own interest in preservation often clashes with his business sense, especially when talking to downtown building owners. He often explains to them, "Look, from me to you, before you get into this deal, you might consider bringing this down rather than keeping it up because per square foot you're going to save a lot of money'... But, their perspective has always been this building has been here 100 years, it's going to be here another 100 years, and I'm going to take care of it like its going to be here another 100 years... At times I'm just shocked because it doesn't make sense to me, but it's the passion and the commitment to the long term. They know that our community at large would not be the community that it is without that downtown and they know going into the future that is something we have to preserve to maintain our community as a whole."

Not only are long-term residents and employees of the city backing the program, but also local industries have been quick to invest in the downtown district. Several large companies based in Gainesville have invested in office buildings downtown. Noblitt explains the commitment these corporations have made to Gainesville: "From an economic development standpoint, these people have asked very little from the city in terms of tax abatements. These are people who are purely taking their profitability and pouring it back into the community... In a lot of cases these guys have come in and

they've done things that don't benefit them at all in order to make us more sustainable and to bring us back to life.”

Pettigrew has seen this commitment from the industries on her end as well. “Part of the reason they've chosen to stay here is because they want our community to be successful. They could have gone to Houston and moved their offices there with the industry that they're in...but they have roots here and they want to see this community successful, so they've chosen to stay here and keep their families here.”

Noblitt believes the city's willingness to work with the zoning has given heritage preservation more teeth in local politics. Many guidelines were in place when he joined the city in 2005, but there were no penalties or processes in place to make sure things got done. Between 2005 and 2007, the Main Street program was fortunate to have several members of the planning commission who were backers of their efforts and took advantage of having those people in a position to make a difference by pushing through zoning changes that are helpful to the program's goals.

Recent developments in downtown Gainesville include the restoration of the Cooke County Courthouse completed in the fall of 2011 through the THC's Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program (THCPP), which provides partial matching grants to counties for the restoration of historic courthouses. The center of the downtown district, the courthouse square is the venue for many of the city's events. According to Pettigrew, “if you have a courthouse you are a very lucky city as far as I'm concerned because you have a built in crowd.” The restoration helped to solidify how dedicated and committed Gainesville is to preservation.



Image 14. Cooke County Courthouse, 2013.

Despite Noblitt’s skepticism of preservation because of the large investment it often requires, he has seen the benefits it has brought to his hometown, stating the biggest advantage of the Main Street program has been to give heritage preservation a voice in the process. Noblitt credits Pettigrew and Hertel and others like them who understand and have a passion for preservation and are able to relay that back to a planning and zoning commission or a city council. Noblitt says that those abilities have been huge in making “the downtown go from almost certain death to flourishing to where it is now.”

While Gainesville exited the program after the initial three-year commitment, the preservation and revitalization of the downtown district continued. The Gainesville Enterprise Zone maintained the city’s focus on economic redevelopment, while community interest led to the completion of preservation projects without Main Street

resources. Even though Gainesville was able to accomplish goals without the program, the city still struggled with problems common to historic downtowns and recognized the value in the support of Main Street program and its network. Gainesville benefits not only from participating in the program, but also from the community's commitment to and passion for the preservation of its built heritage.

## **KILGORE**

### *History*

Like many Texas towns, Kilgore was established with the introduction of a railroad stop. In 1872 the Missouri-Pacific Railroad was established in Kilgore, a distribution hub for a largely rural cotton farming area in East Texas. By the 1920s, the town was in steep decline until the discovery of oil on then-depleted cotton farmland in the fall of 1930. The town was transformed overnight from a struggling agricultural community to “The Capital of the World’s Largest Oil Field,” with the population growing from 400 to 5,000 practically overnight (Florio 1986, 1). All of the original structures in downtown Kilgore were demolished to make way for oil derricks. Soon after, the community began to rebuild on the lots that did not house derricks and Kilgore’s downtown commercial district was constructed in the art deco style popular at the time. During a time when much of the rest of the country was deep in the Great Depression, Kilgore was a thriving boomtown.

### *Phase I: 1987 - 1991*

In the mid-1980s, there was a downturn in oil-related industries, taking drastic toll on Kilgore’s population, sales revenue, employment, and construction. Without city income from the oil business, the town began losing retail to nearby towns of Tyler and Longview — both with populations eight times that of Kilgore. It was this threat to Kilgore’s commercial district that sparked their initial application to the Main Street

Program (Florio 1986, 3-d). Their application, submitted in 1986, stated, “if unchecked, loss of retail sales to neighboring areas, namely to the shopping malls in Longview and Tyler, can result in business closings, commercial property vacancies, decreased downtown property values, and lowered tax collection (Florio 1986, 1-b).” They went on to point out that this loss in earnings would result in cutbacks in city services, with the ultimate outcome being “an irreversible loss of character for the City of Kilgore and the inability to survive as an independent city (Florio 1986, 1-b).”

Newspaper articles from the period give a number of insights into how the program was received by the community. Downtown shop owner Sissy DePascal had a lot to say during the discussion period, as the city decided whether or not to apply. At one meeting, she described what usually happened when visitors come to downtown Kilgore: “They ask for directions to the East Texas Oil Museum and we direct them. But they don’t stay downtown — there’s nothing to stay *for*” (Kelly 1986). She continued, “I know oil has carried you for years, but oil is not going to carry us anymore. There are two major industries in Texas — one is oil and gas, tourism is the other. It’s time to concentrate on tourism.”

The city also received advice from the Main Street managers of neighboring participating cities, including Lufkin, another East Texas Main Street city. Lufkin manager Carol Moore provided suggestions to Kilgore, telling them to capitalize on the city’s status as the cradle of the East Texas oil industry as a way to stimulate tourism and downtown business. She also stressed the importance of support, from the city and county to the chamber of commerce and the business community: “For success as a Main

Street city you must have city backing. I understand your mayor is delighted and that's 100 percent of the battle" (Kelly 1986).

The city's goals for the Main Street Program were to develop a rehabilitation program to mold a renewed and more desirable shopping area in downtown, as well as to create an environment resplendent of the oil field beginnings of the downtown to attract tourism (Florio 1986, 1). In creating a tourism industry through the reconstruction of the World's Richest Acre in downtown Kilgore, the city hoped that retail stores and restaurants would follow. It is unclear to what extent these goals were reached by the Main Street Program compared to how much was done by preservation groups who followed the end of the initial participation period.

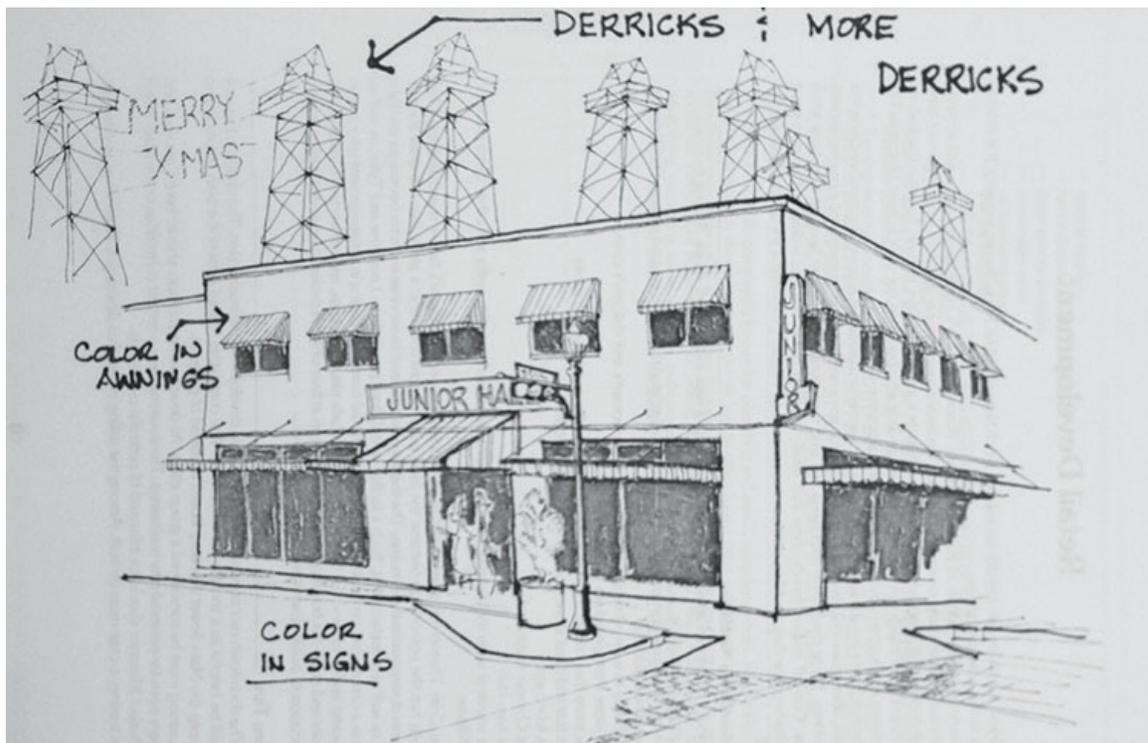


Image 15. Suggestions for downtown derrick restoration and building improvement project (Resource Team Report).

To the question “What will be the long-term impact of this project after support from the Texas Main Street Project is concluded? (Florio 1986, 2-d),” Florio answered, “Although formal participation in the Main Street Program will conclude after three years, Kilgore would carry on the activities of the project (Florio 1986, 1-d).” It is not clear in the application if the city was expecting to continue funding the Main Street manager position after the initial three-year commitment, and Florio’s response lacked clear directives in how the city would continue the revitalization effort.

However, early on in its first stint in the Main Street Program, Kilgore formed a preservation non-profit to support the efforts of the program. The Kilgore Historic Preservation Foundation (KHPF) was created in 1987 and continued to operate during the inactive years, holding events and raising money to save historic buildings across Kilgore, primarily the Crim and Texan Theaters, and to recreate the derrick skyline of the 1930s. The recertification application cites a number of activities that were initially the responsibility of the Main Street Program that KHPF took on and completed during the inactive years. Kilgore also joined the Texas Downtown Association during this time, and continues to be active today. These additional support systems for preservation and revitalization helped Kilgore to attain Main Street goals while the program was inactive.



Images 16-17. Top: "World's Richest Acre," unknown date (KHPF). Bottom: Restored derricks, 2013.

The program received a lot of positive press after the city was formally admitted. Mike Joseph, owner of a jewelry store, was quoted as saying, “When I heard about it, I thought it was great ... It’s not going to happen overnight, but it’s better to do something than nothing” (Dugan 1987). In addition to verbal support from business owners, local banks provided a pool of funds for merchants and property owners for low-interest rehabilitation loans on downtown structures. Just a month and a half after joining the program, three local banks — City National Bank, Allied Citizens Bank, and Kilgore First National Bank — increased the size of the pool from \$100,000 to \$250,000 and dropped the interest rate on loans of up to \$10,000 from 7 to 6 percent (Dugan 1987).

The program met a number of successes during its time. In a newspaper article from 1988, Kilgore was identified as a model to other Texas cities on how to survive revenue loss through “cutback management” (Kilgore News Herald 1988). City manager Ron Cox said the city had survived a 60 percent drop in sales tax revenues, a 35 percent reduction in the municipal workforce, and a 22 percent cut in the city budget — all due to the economic downturn — without having to eliminate any essential services. He attributed some of this success to the introduction of the Main Street program, calling it “the single largest project that I’ve ever seen a city gather around,” as well as attributing the increase in sales tax receipts at least in part to a “new willingness to shop in Kilgore first.”

In 1988, two years into the program, DePascal, then chairman of the Main Street Advisory Board, and Dot Maples, president of the Downtown Association of Kilgore, presented the accomplishments of the programs in the revitalization of the central

business district to the Kilgore City Commission. “One of the most important results has been a change in attitude to a positive belief that by working together we can revitalize not only the downtown but the entire city,” DePascal said (Dugan 1988, 5). Maples continued the sentiment, saying, “Two years have only given us a start. Our energies and enthusiasm are on the incline and we hope that we never reach the peak. Small towns have such a quality of life to offer that high-density areas cannot provide. We are sitting on the perimeter of great happenings in Texas” (Dugan 1988, 5). They also presented their goals for the future, including: to ensure the continuation of the Main Street Project; to continue to target tourist development; to continue to work for the improved visual appearance of the downtown area through building rehabilitation, clean up, and attractive signage; and to concentrate on business retention and recruitment.

Their efforts were likely sparked and aided by the resource team report created for Kilgore after admission to the program in May of 1987. The team consisted of: Anice Read, director of the Texas Main Street Project; Dick Ryan, architect for the Texas Main Street Project; John H. Armstrong, landscape architect from Boyd & Heiderich of Dallas; John Klein, of Wagner & Klein, Inc., Architects; Lydia G. Sears, marketing manager from Mall St. Vincent in Shreveport; and R. Glen Wilson, manager of retail operations at Carillon Mall in Houston.

The report addresses landscape architecture, architecture and planning, retail development, and marketing, providing goals, short-term and long-term recommendations for each section. The sections highlight both the strengths and weaknesses of downtown Kilgore. Each section strives to improve the image of Kilgore

by creating inviting exterior spaces, accentuating the buildings and their character, advertising for its unique markets, and highlighting its history to increase tourism (Cottrell 1987, 3-16).

Kilgore was able to complete a number of projects in its time in the program. It was this success that helped to convince the City Commission to continue a small Main Street Advisory Board after the designation lapsed. The commission appointed nine of the 16 original members to function as an advisory group to continue to promote economic development and to carry out the goals and objective set under the program (Waters 1990). Newspaper articles addressing the City Commission vote give the best insight into what was expected after the three-year participation ended. The vote made no mention of the Main Street manager position, but did explain that the board would serve as a liaison between the city's economic development force, the mayor's task force on economic development, the downtown association, and the Texas Main Street Center (Waters 1990). This continued communication between the city's program and the Texas Main Street Center imply that while they were no longer receiving services they were still tied to the state-level program.

#### *Phase II: 1992 - 2006*

Despite the extra effort of the city commission to ensure the continued support of the Main Street program's objectives, Kilgore's formal participation in the program came to an end in 1991, just a year after the vote to keep the Advisory Board. The same economic downturn in the 1980s that prompted Kilgore to join the Main Street program

was also the cause of the program being dropped by the city after just four years. In the late 1980s, soon after joining the program, the oil business collapsed and Kilgore hit a difficult financial time. In addition to the Main Street Program, the fire department, police department, and other city programs were scaled back, resulting in a rise in unemployment within the city (Woodall 2006).

It was during the time after Kilgore left the Main Street Program that local business owner Harry Crouse moved to Kilgore from Dallas and took advantage of the low property values in downtown Kilgore. This created a personal financial incentive for ensuring the success of downtown Kilgore. According to public records, Crouse has over \$450,000 invested in real estate in downtown Kilgore, and one of the five buildings houses his interior design and architecture firm. Crouse was part of the committee responsible for the decision to apply for recertification.

### *Phase III: 2007 - Present*

Kilgore applied for recertification in 2006, citing the city's eagerness to reinvest in the program because "results of the earlier Main Street Program were tangible and transformative" and "the disappointing results of its absence (Howell 2006, 21)" were clearly visible. The decision to recertify came after the City of Kilgore formed a Strategic Planning Committee to hold a series of SWOT (Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunity-Threats) sessions, during which the revitalization of the downtown district was identified as a priority.

Lynda David, owner of The Lucky Cowgirl, was born and raised in Kilgore. She opened her store in a leased space in downtown Kilgore in November of 2010. She recalls what the district was like prior to recertification, calling it a ghost town that was “only used as a pass through to get from one area of town to the next.” Now active on the Main Street Advisor Council, she helps to shape the direction that the downtown is going — from what types of businesses they would like to see come to downtown to events to landscaping. She feels the program has been successful through beautification projects, but would like to see increased signage to direct visitors to the downtown district. “If we are to be a destination, then people need to know how to find us,” she explains.

Tonja Denmon is another Kilgore native who works in the downtown district as the manager of Heart to Heart, a retail store. She recalls being a teenager in Kilgore, when the only place to shop at was Wal-Mart. When the city was not participating in the program the downtown, Denmon remembers the downtown as “dead and deserted. Nobody wanted to come down here because it wasn’t very nice and there wasn’t anything down here.” That shifted when the Main Street Program returned. “It’s prettier, lively, fresh — people want to be here,” she explains. The store has been in its current location for three years, and moved there because it was better for them as a business.

The current Main Street Manager, Clara Chaffin, has been on the job just over a year. With a background in rural revitalization, she is working hard to employ Robert Brooks’ destination development techniques, primarily the 10+10+10 rule. This “Rule of Critical Mass” states that for every three linear blocks, there needs to be 10 restaurants, 10 retail stores, and 10 entertainment venues (Brooks 2011). Despite its small size, the

downtown district has a wide variety of different types of uses, including specialty shops, restaurants, and professionals' offices. This offers a draw to downtown for everyday activities as well as special events.

Chaffin's primary focus for downtown has been to restore the historic downtown theatres, the Texan and the Crim. She believes making these viable event spaces will help to create an anchor for a new entertainment district in downtown Kilgore. Many of the events she has planned since becoming Main Street manager have been geared towards raising money for the theatres, including a Fright Night haunted house at Halloween and a Carols in the Crim just before Christmas. All of the funds raised at the events go solely to the restoration of the theatres.



Images 18-19. Left: The Crim Theatre, 2013. Right: The Texan Theatre, 2013.

Chaffin is aware of the challenges in the quest for revitalization of the downtown district. Operating hours are a never-ending struggle, as many of the businesses are often the secondary job or the primary job with people with families. The fluctuation in operating hours makes it confusing for people to know when things are open. To aid in

convincing the business owners that consistent operating hours are important, the Chamber of Commerce conducted a retail analysis. According to Crouse, the retail consultant responsible for the analysis said, “‘It’s like everyone is independently wealthy and these shops are just their hobby,’ and it’s almost true!” To meet in the middle, Chaffin is suggesting a First Thursday event, so that business owners only have to stay open until 8 pm one night a month, but Crouse says, “No one will do it. No one wants to stay open when customers don’t come.” Chaffin believes it will eventually be successful for those involved, but that takes a year or two to train the consumer to remember that businesses will stay open past the traditional but early five o’clock p.m.

Chaffin also recognizes the financial hardships building renovations can put onto owners. She credits code compliance for the difficulties in converting second-floor space to lofts and office space. Sprinkler systems and firewalls are expensive, and asbestos abatement is often required, further increasing the cost. However, the lofts that have been converted have been hugely successful and never remain vacant for more than a month. A new residential development is being considered for an empty lot in the downtown core and will have to adhere to design requirements to ensure it fits the aesthetic of the existing historic fabric. Chaffin hopes that by increasing the residential space in the downtown district, the opportunity for nightlife will increase, aiding the entertainment district developments.

Crouse owns several of the downtown loft spaces and recognizes the financial requirements of renovating buildings. He scoffs at the notion that the Main Street Program has anything to do with historic preservation, even though he is aware of the

façade grant program and the architecture services offered to Main Street cities by the THC. “To me, Kilgore is not this charming Salem, Massachusetts. It’s never going to be historically correct because people can’t afford to do it. Like when I restored these buildings, I didn’t even think about what they were like originally,” Crouse explains. Despite Crouse’s beliefs, Kilgore has nine structures listed as Texas Historical Landmarks, with two more eligible for listing. Over 60 percent of buildings in the Main Street district were built prior to 1953, meaning even more have reached the fifty year mark for eligibility as historic.

To ensure the district retains its Art Deco building stock, it is protected to a certain extent by the local zoning laws. The core blocks of the district are zoned with a Historic Core overlay. With the restorations and adaptations of the historic theaters, the city hopes to include an Entertainment overlay on top of the pre-existing historic core overlay. The current zoning allows for high density mixed use and the district features a number of loft apartments above ground floor retail. It is this more modern and urban usage that will attract young, creative types to Kilgore’s downtown district and continue to promote revitalization.

While Kilgore has taken strides to make its downtown a destination, in many ways, more work is required to draw visitors because the district is not a main thoroughfare through town and is located five miles south of the main highway, Interstate 20. The restaurants receive good business because there is so much adjacent commercial space around the district, but holding special events is imperative to getting people to come downtown on the weekends. However, with most shops closing between noon and

two p.m. on Saturdays, it is difficult to draw people from out of town to come spend their afternoons in Kilgore.

Crouse expresses worries about downtown Kilgore, based primarily in the detachment among the key players — KHPF, the Chamber of Commerce, and Main Street Kilgore — from the downtown businesses. “I’m not sure what’s going to happen down here. There have been a lot of changes that haven’t been necessarily positive. I just hope that the key people don’t leave,” he explains. Vic Price, board chair at the Chamber of Commerce, acknowledges the occasional tension between the Chamber and Main Street, saying that there hasn’t always been an easy flow between the two and, in some ways, they’re almost in competition. Often the several organizations at play in the downtown area act in their own interests, and not in the interests of the district and its businesses.

Denmon did not mention any animosity among the key organizations and believes that having events downtown are key, as is advertising. She regularly attends the downtown merchant meetings and finds them helpful as it gives people an opportunity to voice their opinions: “You get an idea on how other merchants feel about certain things. When there is an event coming up it helps everybody exchange ideas and get on the same page. That way your don’t have too many chiefs and not enough Indians.”

She also finds communication among business owners easy, primarily because the town is so small, and they share the same end goals of preservation and revitalization of the downtown district: “People know each other outside of just the downtown. People are neighbors, or go to church together, or went to school together ... No one wants to see

the old landmarks go but having [the Main Street Program] come in and say ‘We’re going to revitalize downtown and preserve these buildings and bring back the old lamp posts and street signs’ – that makes you want to get involved and see to it that things are carried through.”

Regardless of the challenges, Kilgore’s Main Street has succeeded in reaching many goals laid out in the recertification application: to create a springboard and blueprint for revitalization of downtown economic opportunities; to create an attractive downtown retail, entertainment, and residential environment; to develop downtown facilities for community functions; to change community attitudes about the importance of a commercially viable downtown; and to improve the infrastructure (streets, sidewalks, lighting, etc) in the downtown commercial core (Howell 2006, 23). Some were started through a combination of community activities and projects prior to the recertification and the current Main Street program. Chaffin’s use of Brooks’ destination management techniques has ensured a dynamic business mix. The derrick park is used as an event space for annual programs put on by the Chamber of Commerce, Main Street Kilgore, and KHPF, and the impending restoration of the downtown theatres will increase the event space available in the district. The goal to improve infrastructure was aided by a streetscape improvement fund, which provides money for annual projects to improve the pedestrian experience. These major successes outweigh the day-to-day challenges the program faces, and provide proof in Kilgore that the Main Street Program is a real tool for achieving results in revitalization and preservation.

## COMPARISONS

In examining the narratives of each of the case studies, the reasons the cities left and rejoined the Main Street Program are strikingly similar. Each of the programs cited financial and economic reasons for their cities dropping out of the program after the first phase. The Texas economy had long been dependent on cotton, cattle, timber, and oil, as illustrated in the histories of the case study cities. In the 1970s, prior to the Main Street Program, Texas was thriving off of its oil resources, with the state's economy growing 6 percent a year between 1978 and 1982, twice the national average at the time. However, in 1982, the worldwide recession caught up with Texas, and the oil industry declined steeply due to a lower energy demand, over production of oil, and the resultant drop in oil prices (Calvert). The state's unemployment jumped from 6.9 percent in 1982 to 8 percent in 1983. Oil and gas revenue in Texas went from 28 percent of the total state revenue in 1981 to just 15 percent five years later. Many of the state's other industries supported the oil industry and were also hard hit.

In Brenham, the economic slump hit in 1989 causing the failure of a tax increment-financing district, and the likely related perception of the Main Street program by the city as ineffective. Economic hardships were felt in Gainesville as early as 1985, causing the city and its business owners to lose focus on their revitalization goals in favor of pure survival. Kilgore, financially strapped after the collapse of the oil business, was

also forced to exit the program due to insufficient funding. It was during this transitional time in the late 1980s that Texas began to diversify its economy to rely less on oil.

During their time out of the program, each city experienced high turnover and vacancy rates. A few key businesses were able to survive, and in some cases thrive, but the majority of the businesses in the downtown districts suffered. In Brenham, property values tanked. Gainesville proved to be the most preservation-centric case study, crediting the renovation of their downtown train depot as the spark to recertify. In Kilgore, building owners, wanting to protect their real estate investments and rental agreements, lobbied for the program to increase and encourage activity in the downtown district.

Historically, Brenham and Gainesville are more similar in that they both flourished prior to the turn of the twentieth century because of their rail hub status and thriving cotton and cattle industries, while Kilgore did not experience major growth until the 1930s oil boom. Brenham and Gainesville are both located directly off of major highways, with downtown Gainesville visible from Interstate 35 and Brenham just a short detour off of Highway 290. Kilgore requires a longer detour off of Interstate 20, and is a smaller city located in a cluster of other cities in East Texas, many of which are also in the Main Street Program. These similarities and differences explain some of the inherent challenges and successes unique to each.

Each city has experienced a number of successes and challenges, with many overlaps between the case studies. Singular challenges are Brenham's lack of business diversity and Kilgore's competitive downtown organizations. Well-established business

owners in Brenham and Kilgore feel that they could succeed without the program, but also recognize its necessity for the success of the district as a cohesive unit. All of the case studies reference vacancies and turnover rates, even years after recertifying, as well as difficulties complying with city codes when renovating downtown buildings.

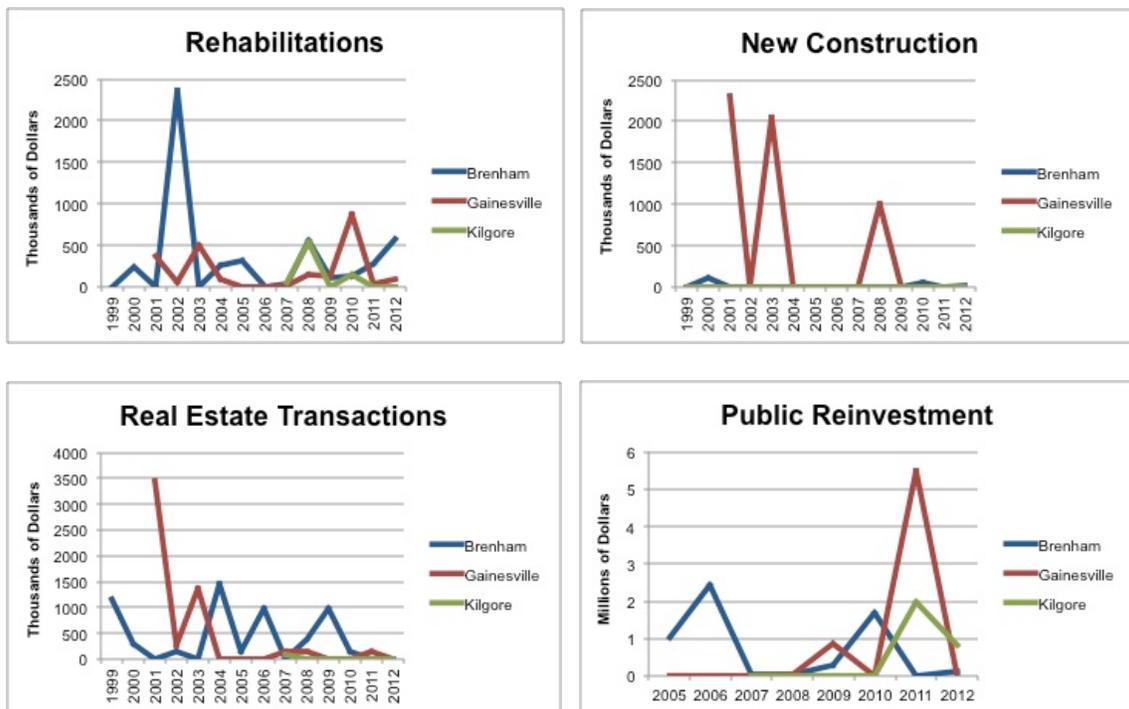
Even with the challenges, each case study had an even longer list of success stories. Brenham and Gainesville have been able to create tourist destinations based on the good fortune of their location along major highways. Impending downtown development geared towards conferences and conventions will have a major effect Brenham’s downtown, bringing in a new audience for the district. In Gainesville, their high regard for historic architecture has made their Main Street Program particularly preservation-focused. The recent restoration and rededication of the Cooke County Courthouse is proof of that. Kilgore’s strategic mix of retail, restaurants, and entertainment ensure there is something for everyone in their district.

Considering the wealth of similarities among the case studies it is imperative to note also how their reinvestment figures and budgets compare. Reinvestment data was collected in the early years of the program, but has been combined to represent the sum of the reinvestments in the initial phase of the program. Phase II reinvestments have been summed for comparison.

	Phase I Total Reinvestments	Phase II Total Reinvestments	Grand Total Reinvestments
Brenham	\$6,234,179 (1983-85)	\$18,120,517	\$24,354,696
Gainesville	\$992,300 (1982-85)	\$17,042,808	\$18,035,108
Kilgore	\$1,166,285 (1987-91)	\$4,115,283	\$5,281,568

Table 2. Reinvestment totals.

The following graphs illustrate the reinvestment performance of the cities during the second phase of participation in the Main Street Program. These graphs only take into account the reinvestment figures after recertification, as they give a year-by-year breakdown. The ability to visually determine the reinvestment activities of each in juxtaposition with the others is a useful tool when taking into account the previously mentioned comparisons and notable values of each program.



Graphs 1-4. Reinvestment categories.

It is clear from the graphs that only a few major projects have taken place in the districts, with Brenham being the most active in rehabilitations and Gainesville the most active in new construction. In real estate and public investment, Gainesville has had one or two big projects, while Brenham has had more frequent smaller projects. Kilgore has very little activity in terms of reinvestments.

In all three case studies, the Main Street Program operates using a percentage of the city's general fund — 0.8 percent in Brenham and Gainesville and 0.7 percent in Kilgore.

	City General Fund FY2013	Main Street Budget FY2013	HOT Fund Total FY2013	HOT Fund Main St. FY2013
Brenham	\$16,384,181	\$134,227	\$435,030	\$14,000
Gainesville	\$6,960,261	\$62,113	\$908,904	N/A
Kilgore	\$14,958,430	\$109,790	\$280,500	\$30,000

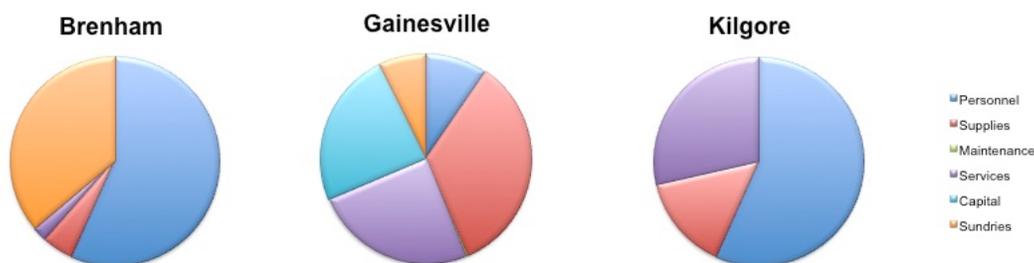
Table 3. Breakdown of funding for case study programs.

The Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) Fund is used as a supplement to general fund budgets in Brenham and Kilgore. This money is often used for special projects and is divided among a number of city programs. In Brenham, the Main Street Program is budgeted to receive 3.2 percent of the HOT fund for the year, while Kilgore is budgeted to receive 10.6 percent of the city's HOT fund. This seems like a small percentage, but in Brenham the fund is distributed among nineteen other city programs, with the majority of the fund going to the Convention and Visitors Bureau. In Kilgore the majority of the fund goes to the Chamber of Commerce. The other benefiting programs include the Kilgore Historic Preservation Foundation and the East Texas Oil Museum. In Gainesville, no HOT funds are delegated to the Main Street Program, but a large portion goes to the Chamber of Commerce, which often works in conjunction with the local Main Street program.

The itemization of each city's budget also shows differences in how each program uses the money they are given to run their program.

	Personnel	Supplies	Maintenance	Services	Capital	Sundries
Brenham	\$76,102	\$6,500	\$0	\$3,075	\$0	\$48,550
Gainesville	\$5,940	\$21,100	\$200	\$15,373	\$15,000	\$4,500
Kilgore	\$62,195	\$16,220	\$0	\$31,375	\$0	\$0

Table 4. Itemized budget for Main Street Program.



Graphs 5-7. Itemized budget for Main Street Program.

In terms of percentage, the amount of money available to each program is comparable, but the distribution illustrates the fact that each program does work differently based on a set of unique needs. It is important to recognize some key differences in funding sources, as well, especially in Gainesville. The Personnel allotment is low because Pettigrew serves a dual role in the city as Main Street manager and Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce. Most of the funding for her salary comes from the Chamber, not the Main Street Program. Additionally, generous funding is available in Gainesville for the façade grant program through their Economic Development Corporation (EDC).

Among the many similarities seen between the case studies, the most relevant for the continued success of the program is the difficulties identified through interviews and archival research. What is important for downtown business owners to realize is that many of these difficulties are inherent to historic downtown districts. It is necessary to identify the challenges and be aware that they are *not* unique to any one Main Street program or even one small town. The following list identifies each of the complaints made about the program, in order of most frequently referenced to least.

- Building codes and zoning restrictions preventing rehabilitations, restorations, and new development
- Parking shortages

- Vacancies and turnovers
- Competition from nearby shopping centers and larger towns
- Uncooperative business owners and organizations
- Lack of communication between key players

The four most frequent complaints are common to all historic downtowns, not just those participating in the Main Street program. The remaining two complaints are programmatic because they deal with having to cooperate and communicate with a central organizer. Finding solutions to these challenges should be prioritized. In creating a record of recognized difficulties in the implementation of the program, the hope is to identify common problems in historic districts in general and in Main Street districts specifically, and work to reach collective solutions.

## CONCLUSION

In identifying the reasons that these cities left and returned to the Main Street Program, it is possible to use the narratives to determine areas to heighten future education and awareness. Each of these case studies provides a different lesson for the Main Street Program as a whole. In order to simplify these lessons, a single take-away from each case study has been identified. Each of these concepts references a quality — either positive or negative — seen at work in the case study cities. Each occurs in varying degrees in the other case studies, as well, but is well embodied in a particular case study example.

Cooperation in Brenham is needed among downtown business owners in order for the program to continue achieving goals. While it is understood that business owners may look out for themselves above all others, it is important to view the bigger picture of the downtown as a singular unit. Participating in Main Street events and discussions creates an atmosphere that all can benefit from.

Gainesville successfully embodied the idea of commitment. In the original application and the recertification application, the goals the community set for their city remained constant. It was this constant commitment to preserve their built heritage that has given them a strong identity and a sense of community pride, providing a basis for district revitalization. In setting a long-term, broad goal, Gainesville attempts to avoid discussions that lose sight of the purpose of the program.

The lesson learned in Kilgore is the importance of communication. A single local business owner felt the local Main Street Program was not adequately considering the needs of the downtown business owners. This seemed largely due to the fact that this particular owner did not participate in downtown meetings. While it is of course possible that his feelings are isolated to him alone, the Main Street Program should strive to continuously improve by taking suggestions from the community and encourage participation.

Each of these lessons can be used to refocus current participating Main Street communities. Many of the difficulties identified in the interviews and referenced in the Main Street applications could have been resolved through placing extra emphasis on these three concepts. Encouraging cooperation among business owners, opening lines of communication between merchants and managers, and having a clear commitment to achieve a long-term goal are all requirements for a healthy Main Street program. Additionally, providing basic literature to the community about the purpose of the Main Street Program will help to alleviate confusion about its goals.

While this study provided interesting insight into the histories and perceptions of the Main Street Program, this study was not performed without limitations. There were a number of differences among the applications, making it difficult to make specific comparisons between city demographic data at the time of the original certification and the recertification. While many of the original applications were similar to one another, the recertification applications differed more and included less general information about

the city. Additionally, the way reinvestment figures are collected has also changed over the course of the program, making it difficult to trust the comparisons are reliable.

The success of the Main Street Program requires those invested in the downtown to have a sense of ownership over the district and the feeling that they have the power to voice their opinion, be heard, and make positive changes in their cities. The Main Street Program provides the structure and focus necessary to achieve downtown revitalization, but it is still possible to lose sight of broader goals for smaller disagreements. Without the role of Main Street manager and the larger Main Street network, it is difficult for a city to successfully preserve and revitalize downtown historic districts. The extra effort and funding it often takes to properly restore or rehabilitate buildings is difficult to come by without financial and organizational help. Each of the case study cities realized the need for this role and support within their communities and rejoined the program after years of inactivity. Each has recognized that the program does not have an end date and that constant maintenance is required for success. Despite its limitations, this study provides insight into the perceptions of the program by those whose interests are most invested in its results.

**APPENDIX A**  
**Initial Main Street Questionnaire**  
**Case Study City Responses**

## **Brenham**

Main Street Manager: Jennifer Eckermann

Email: [jeckermann@cityofbrenham.org](mailto:jeckermann@cityofbrenham.org)

Website: [www.downtownbrenham.com](http://www.downtownbrenham.com)

Why did your city leave the Main Street Program?

There really isn't anyone on staff who can answer that for sure, but what I heard when I started in 1999, is that the City felt it was doing well and knew how to continue on its own without being part of Main Street.

Why did your city decide to re-enter the Main Street Program?

After ten years, property values in the downtown area had dropped 60%. Task forces were set up by the Chamber and the City to figure out what to do about downtown. Both had different ideas, but came to the conclusion that the city needed to get back into the Main Street Program.

Is the program organized under city government or as a nonprofit?

City government.

How many people are employed by your Main Street Program?

One

How many regular active volunteers assist in your Main Street Program?

25.

How do local businesses participate in the program?

Sponsor events, participate in promotions

How do you implement and enforce the Four-Point Approach?

Implemented by board and committees, not sure about "enforcement"

How many blocks is your Main Street district?

What are the main industries in your city and where are they located in relation to downtown?

Blue Bell Creameries and numerous manufacturers are mostly located on the outskirts of the city.

What has been the economic impact of the program since you have returned?

More than 16 million

## **Gainesville**

Main Street Manager: Lynette Pettigrew

Email: [lynette@gainesvillecofc.com](mailto:lynette@gainesvillecofc.com)

Website: [www.shophistoricgainesville.com](http://www.shophistoricgainesville.com)

Why did your city leave the Main Street Program?

The City got out of the program prior to me joining the City in September of 1992. My understanding was the program was dropped due to budgetary constraints.

Why did your city decide to re-enter the Main Street Program?

The City completed a Tourism Master Plan in in 1997. (Leisure and Recreation Concepts) In that plan were several recommendations including resubmitting and becoming a Texas Main Street City again. Being re-designated was part of an overall strategy to enhance Gainesville's opportunities of being a destination community and expanding its economic base.

Is the program organized under city government or as a nonprofit?

We are funded and organized under City government.

How many people are employed by your Main Street Program?

One full time.

How many regular active volunteers assist in your Main Street Program?

Primarily my current Advisory Board of nine members, who are appointed by the Mayor. During events the volunteer base expands to downtown merchants and area organizations. For example our Depot Days festival was just completed the second weekend in October. Depot Days has a committee of seven. Only two of those members are on the Advisory Board.

How do local businesses participate in the program?

Local businesses participate by financially sponsoring events in particular our Summer Sounds music events and our annual festival that is held in the historic downtown.

How do you implement and enforce the Four-Point Approach?

Promotion – events and marketing materials. Design and Economic Restructuring – investment in streetscape and offering of grant for façade improvements. Organization – primarily for board members and volunteers

How many blocks is your Main Street district?

35

What are the main industries in your city and where are they located in relation to downtown?

At present Weber Aircraft (manufactures airplane seats) Weber is located on the far west edge of our city limits approximately 4.5 miles from our downtown. North Texas Medical Center (one of only two hospitals in Cooke county) NTMC is located approximately 4 miles west of the downtown. Select Energy Services (centered around petroleum and related services, company is a home grown corporation) SES is located approximately 3.8 miles west of the downtown

What has been the economic impact of the program since you have returned?

Approximately 9.2 million in improvements to the downtown according to the Reinvestment Reports we have filed with the Texas Main Street program. This does include the restoration of the Cooke County Courthouse. This project was approximately 6.4 million and was a Texas Historic Commission project.

## **Kilgore**

Main Street Manager: Clara Chaffin

Email: [Clara.Chaffin@cityofkilgore.com](mailto:Clara.Chaffin@cityofkilgore.com)

Website: <http://www.cityofkilgore.com/>

Why did your city leave the Main Street Program?

The City did not have the revenue to continue the program, and building owners were unwilling to invest in the rehab of their property.

Why did your city decide to re-enter the Main Street Program?

Building owners downtown had begun to invest in rehab of several buildings downtown, bringing in several new businesses, and the City had the funds to be able to budget for Main Street Program.

Is the program organized under city government or as a nonprofit?

The Main Street Program is organized under the City Government.

How many people are employed by your Main Street Program?

One, the Main Street Manager.

How many regular active volunteers assist in your Main Street Program?

There are 11 members on the Advisory Board and these are the core volunteers. The Design Committee has 5 additional people. The Economic Restructuring Committee has 3 additional people. Our Promotions Committee has 1 additional person. Under that Committee we have events which have several more people based on the event. For example our Crime Theater or Fright House Committee has an additional 5 people and every night (9 nights total) we have been open we have 38 volunteers. We have 95 people who have volunteered to work the Fright House fundraiser. We have 5 additional people on our Theater Restoration Committee.

How do local businesses participate in the program?

Businesses in the Main Street Overlay participate in events and draw on resources such as façade grants and training opportunities. The merchants also meet semi-regularly where I give updates on programs in Downtown. Businesses outside the Overlay help sponsor projects in the Downtown Core.

How do you implement and enforce the Four-Point Approach?

The Four-Point Approach has never been implemented until recently in Kilgore. The only functioning committee from 2007-present was the Design Committee and they only approved façade grants and helped make decisions on Streetscape Phase I and Phase II. The Economic Restructuring Committee was formed in August and had the first meeting in September of this year. The Promotions Committee is half formed and has

not had an official meeting yet. However, each event has a committee and includes members of the Promotions Committee. The Organization Committee is not formed yet, although it does have a chair who is also an Advisory Board Member. As the new Main Street Manager I have strived to develop a Work Plan and implement the Four-Point Approach.

How many blocks is your Main Street district?

14 blocks in the Main Street Overlay District, 19 blocks in the Main Street Core

What are the main industries in your city and where are they located in relation to downtown?

What has been the economic impact of the program since you have returned?

Private Sector Reinvestment: \$827,665 (more in e-mail)

Public/Private Joint Ventures: \$477,929.57

Number of Public Projects: 3

Public Expenditures: \$2,808,688.17

Total business starts, expansions and relocations: 32

Net gain in business starts expansions and relocations: 20

Net gain in jobs tracked: 89

Volunteer hours logged: 3135

Number of downtown housing units tracked: 7

Number of downtown residents: 12

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Interview Contacts**

## **Brenham**

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