

TEXAS MAIN STREET PROGRAM

Determining Boundaries for Your Main Street District

The Texas Main Street Program (TMSP) is the entity enabled to approve and amend boundaries of Main Street districts in Texas. TMSP staff members have provided the following comments for potential Main Street applicants and existing Main Street programs that are considering changes to district boundaries.

Considerations for communities that are determining or redrawing district boundaries

The Main Street district boundaries identify the area of work for a local Main Street program. While boundaries may include modern buildings, districts should focus on the historic downtown commercial core, highlighting the architectural history and character of your town. Communities propose district boundaries in the Main Street application; once accepted into the network, TMSP staff members work with communities to finalize the local program district.

As Main Street downtowns thrive, a community may feel it advantageous to expand boundaries and the impact of their revitalization efforts. Boundary decisions are critical to the healthy functioning of a Main Street community, so we recommend that local program participants carefully consider any proposed changes prior to initiating a formal request to expand or decreasing the boundaries. TMSP must approve proposed changes to each Main Street district.

The comments below will help those who are considering a new district or changes to an existing district.

- Remember that Main Street is a **commercial district** revitalization program that focuses on the historic downtown core. Residential resources are important to the vitality of the Main Street program area; however, the amount and type of residential property in the district should complement the programmatic strategies you have established for downtown revitalization. For similar reasons, the district should not include large swaths of vacant land, nor should it include purely manufacturing areas. The exception would be historic grain silos, warehouses, etc. that have commercial potential.

Existing districts: What type of buildings are included in your proposed district expansion? These additional properties should fill gaps that currently exist with respect to space, amenities, etc. or complement the healthy balance of building stock and public space that exist in your district.

- Make sure that one full-time manager (with volunteer support) can address the needs of the proposed district. Consider what services the local program will provide to the Main Street district's primary stakeholders—can the Main Street manager and board provide these services consistently across the district? A local program's first three years of work must show visible progress in the downtown core, so you want to draw clean district lines to define the concentration of assets that have the most potential for revitalization success.

Existing districts: Would your Main Street manager be able fulfill the needs of a larger district? Do the needs of stakeholders within the proposed boundary expansion follow services already provided by the local program or will their needs require shifts in Main Street programming? How do those potential new stakeholders feel about Main Street—supportive or hesitant to participate in program activities? Can Main Street’s board and volunteer pool increase participation to serve a larger district?

- Does your community have other types of districts that might complement or compete with your proposed boundaries? Find out what other districts exist, for instance National Register districts, historic overlay districts, neighborhood districts, etc. Compare boundaries and consider if adjusting the proposed Main Street district to align with another district is to Main Street’s advantage.

Existing boundaries: If community did not compare districts initially, a local program may consider how an alignment of districts might establish a stronger connection to area assets and opportunities. If advantageous, aligning districts may be a reason to propose changes to an existing Main Street district.

- Determine if the proposed boundaries group complementary assets that contribute to the character of your downtown. Be able to articulate why the boundaries have been selected and what advantages/opportunities exist within the district you have proposed.

Existing boundaries: What is the specific reason for wanting to change the boundaries—how will local Main Street program goals and strategies benefit from a proposed boundary change? Do the new boundaries enable quality reinvestment opportunities? For example, does the proposed expansion include a significant row of buildings; a block with strong potential-friendly ownership; sections of downtown that recently have been rezoned; or property that the city recently has acquired with an eye towards development. A community must make a compelling case for changing district boundaries.

Proposing changes to Main Street district boundaries

One compelling case for expanding districts is when a community feels that it has accomplished the core work for which the local Main Street program was established. Successful and stable Main Street programs may be ready to expand districts to increase opportunity and impact of revitalization efforts.

Conversely, a community may want to DECREASE its district boundaries, a decision which requires TMSP approval, as well. Reasons to decrease boundaries include the following: initial boundaries were too ambitious given local program capacity; district has suffered extensive losses to building stock, especially historic fabric; or community changes that have decreased downtown activity dramatically.

Communities that have substantiated constructive reasons for modifying Main Street district boundaries should request a formal review of proposed changes; review this flyer for specifics. District changes also may require formal approval from your Main Street board or local government. If your district was created by ordinance or resolution during the application process, then work with your city to determine what local protocols are in place to change district boundaries.