

Main Street Matters

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WAXAHACHIE

By Anita Brown, Waxahachie Main Street Manager

When Waxahachie rejoined the Main Street program in 2002, the groundwork was laid for the boom we are experiencing now. A TIRZ (Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone) district was established that included the Central Business District. Its purpose was to provide a funding stream for downtown projects and it has over-performed since its implementation. For the first project, bonds were issued to do streetscape and sidewalk improvements, antique lighting, intersection design, and signage. Subsequent projects included the \$1.3 million rehabilitation of the MKT Depot, renovation of the former lumber yard into a

permanent home for the Farmers Market and a retail establishment, and purchase of the Texas Theater, to name a few.

A downtown master plan was developed in 2001 that identified some future events that were sure to have a significant impact on Waxahachie's historic downtown. For many years Ellis County used several downtown properties as supplemental office space in addition to the beautiful Ellis County Courthouse, which was restored through the THC's Historic Courthouse Preservation Program in 2000. The buildings were deteriorating and the county sought to build a new Court & Administration building that would house the majority of county employees in one spot. They had options of where to build this new facility, and downtown was one of them. However, the issue of parking was making them look at alternative locations

(Cont. on page 2)



From parades, festivals, events, and concerts, there is plenty to choose from when visiting downtown Waxahachie.

for their new building. The City of Waxahachie did not want to see county operations leave the downtown area, so city leaders pledged to build a parking garage to address that problem.

After many years and a few false starts, the new Ellis County Courts & Administration building was completed in 2010. Along with it was a three-story parking garage that has 317 parking spaces and the capacity to enlarge to four stories in the future. The county also renovated a former utility building into a new home for Adult Probation and Emergency Management functions. In 2016, the county built a new elections building close to its other new offices.

With the completion of the new Courts & Administration building, the county vacated five buildings on the square—four on the south side and one on the west side. They put these buildings on the market and we anxiously awaited a buyer. This turn of events had been anticipated in the master plan from 2001, and was a key component of our downtown revitalization dreams. Making the proper deal was crucial in achieving our objectives.

In August of 2012 a developer from Dallas drove through downtown Waxahachie and saw the county properties for sale. She came to city hall to get information on them and received more than she was probably looking for! She was pleased to find that much of the work developers usually have to tackle

had already been done. The city had made streetscape and sidewalk improvements, and ADA-accessibility issues had been addressed. Zoning was in place to allow for residential downtown, and there were no off-street parking requirements for buildings in the central area regardless of occupancy. Ordinances allowing for sidewalk dining were in place, and establishments serving alcohol were allowed. The three-story parking garage just one block off the square was an added bonus. Because all of these programs, policies, and needed infrastructure had been put into place, all the developer had to do was rehabilitate the buildings and find tenants. This made investing in downtown Waxahachie very attractive.

After more exchanges of information and introductions to key players, a deal was struck. The city was able to provide incentives in the form of a Chapter 380 agreement to the developers who would then invest over \$3.4 million in the rehabilitation of the properties. The agreement included an easement (so a deck could be built on the back of the buildings), a forgivable loan (providing benchmarks were met), tax abatements, and waiver of fees. The end product was 11 residential units, three restaurant spaces, 10 offices, and three retail spaces.

The incentives were funded by the TIRZ. At the time it was established, none of the county buildings were on the tax rolls. When the tax abatements on the properties expire in July 2020, every bit of the value, which has increased significantly, will roll into the TIRZ. This will allow more projects to be funded and more development



The Ellis County Courts & Administration building along with a three-story parking garage opened in 2010 for county employees.

to occur. In the meantime, the increased sales tax revenue from the businesses now occupying the once severely underutilized, then vacant, spaces is a benefit to the city and the entire downtown.

The Master Plan for revitalizing downtown Waxahachie had worked as it should—initial investment was made by the public sector to spur activity, and then the private sector took up the ball and ran with it. Since 2013, private sector investment has eclipsed public sector investment downtown each year. The amount of money invested in the former county buildings indicated to others that downtown is a place worth investing in, and it has drawn additional investment. Some buildings have changed hands and been rehabilitated; others have been updated and improved by long-time owners.

In the past two years, new construction has been the biggest reinvestment occurring downtown. A local builder and developer purchased several vacant lots on the west side of the Central Business District. He just completed six luxury townhomes that were almost all sold before they were finished. Because of the interest and need for quality downtown living spaces, he is building another four units across the street from the first set. These residences are selling for \$350-400,000 and they are being snapped up like hotcakes.

The same builder partnered with a favorite downtown eating establishment that had outgrown its space. Two Amigos Taqueria now has a brand new larger building with outdoor patio dining on the side. It sits directly behind the new Franklin Townhomes and is a great addition to downtown Waxahachie. More new construction in the form of mixed-use development is in the works for downtown.

New amenities have also been added. In 2017, the Parks Department renovated an existing downtown plaza and created our first downtown splash park. It is located on the north side of the Central Business District behind a favorite local restaurant. Ground will be breaking soon on a new amphitheater/entertainment area on the south side of downtown. This will provide another venue for events, concerts, community activities—and it will bring a splash park to this part of downtown.



Waxahachie's downtown is booming with lots of changes lately, along with new businesses opening, residential units, restaurants, and a splash park.

It is an exciting time in downtown Waxahachie! We have made lots of progress, but there is still much to do. Our first brewery is about to open and it will join 15 restaurants, 11 antique stores, two art galleries, 10 boutiques, five craft and hobby stores, and a full range of other retail, specialty, and service businesses downtown. There truly IS something for everyone in downtown Waxahachie...and more to come!

AFTER THE APOCALYPSE: UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF DOWNTOWN RETAIL IN A DIGITAL WORLD

By Alan Cox, Economic Development Specialist, Texas Main Street Program

The decline of America's downtowns is a well-known story. In the halcyon years following the end of World War II, the nation was brimming with optimism and looking forward to a future filled with technological progress in telecommunications and transportation. Regarding the latter, a path was literally put in place to allow for Americans to easily travel about the country in their sparkling new automobiles. In 1956, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the Federal Aid Highway Act, which authorized the construction of the Interstate Highway System. This act, coupled with the previously passed GI Bill which provided hefty government housing subsidies for military veterans, opened vast swaths of new land for development on the periphery of American cities. Thus began the great suburban land rush, leading to disinvestment in the core of communities and the inspiration for the new American Dream.

As Americans moved to the suburbs, commerce swiftly followed and adapted to a whole new set of single-use

zoning rules that changed development patterns forever. The familiar walkable downtown retail experience was replaced by car-oriented shopping centers surrounded by a sea of parking. In the same year as the passage of the highway act, the Southdale Center in Edina, Minnesota, opened its doors, becoming America's first climate-controlled indoor shopping mall. This development model was replicated across the country and dominated the retail landscape for the next 40 years. During the 1990s, however, Wal-Mart Supercenters and other big box retailers emerged, which commenced the slow decline of the American mall. Today, even these retailers are beginning to struggle due to the emergence of yet another new retail model: online shopping and home delivery. As a result, last year became known as the year of the "retail apocalypse," when dozens of well-known chains shuttered stores by the hundreds.

As Main Street supporters, this raises an intriguing question: If online retail leads to the deterioration of the suburban retail model, does this then provide an opportunity for the reemergence of downtown shopping?

The correct answer is probably that it is too soon to know. That said, there are already some tantalizing

CONGRATULATIONS

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Congratulations to the Hillsboro and Texarkana Main Street programs, who have been selected as quarterfinalists in the 2018 America's Main Streets contest sponsored by Independent We Stand and STIHL, Inc. More than 117,000 votes were cast for 303 entrants during the nominations phase. Hillsboro and Texarkana are the two Texas nominees in a field of 25 quarterfinalists nationwide. Voting takes place daily through May 27 at <https://www.mainstreetcontest.com/>.

CONGRATULATIONS



By proclamation, April 16 was named “Main Street in Motion Day” in San Marcos to celebrate recent accomplishments that included among others National Accreditation for 19 consecutive years; becoming live on www.downtownTX.org; having downtown selected by the Texas Chapter of the American Planning Association as a “Great Neighborhood;” and receiving a grant from the Lower Colorado River Authority for downtown beautification. Mayor John Thomaides (left, front row) read the proclamation. Later, Texas Main Street cake was served!

signs that the answer might be “yes.” Over the last few years, several national and regional retailers, including Wal-Mart and Target, have begun experimenting with downtown locations, making significant modifications and shrinking their formats to fit smaller urban sites with restricted parking. Other retailers are beginning to treat their brick and mortar spaces more as showrooms where products are displayed for the customer to experience the product in person and giving her the option to either place an order on-site or at home online. For example, brands such as Macy’s and Sephora have begun to offer in-store pickup for items bought online, as well as supporting home delivery of products purchased in-store. In many ways, this blending of digital and physical shopping mirrors a similar model used on the American frontier at the turn of the last century, where customers could order goods through a catalog or at the local dry goods store.

If this back-to-the-future approach materializes and becomes the predominate retail model, Main Street managers, urban planners, and downtown boosters will be required to create new strategies for promoting downtown retail in a digital world. These could be complementary extensions of existing ones, such as encouraging local

retailers to embrace social media for reaching their customers. Other actions, however, might be more demanding and could require technical assistance. For example, an increasing number of Americans are turning to their phones to meet their online shopping demands, and according to a Google research study, 71 percent of shoppers now use smartphones to research while shopping. The study also found that three out of four shoppers who find local product results through their web-browsing are more likely to visit that local brick and mortar business. Recognizing the benefit of having a strong digital and mobile presence, many retailers have responded by creating apps that allow customers to find their closest location, browse merchandise inventory, comparison price, and place direct orders. Main Street responses might include identifying local developer talent to create customized apps for downtown retailers, or creation of a common app for all Main Street businesses. Obviously, this creates the challenge of relying on small business owners to continuously update their products and prices, but it could be a powerful tool for placing local retailers on more level playing ground in the digital sphere.

Another opportunity might include identifying local entrepreneurs who are already conducting business online. The popularity of websites such as Etsy, eBay, Amazon Handmade, and Artfire has provided an alternative to flea and trade markets for “makers” to reach a wide audience and deliver merchandise worldwide. Unfortunately, many of these small business owners must create and store all their merchandise at home and could benefit from an outside physical location. One strategy a Main Street manager could adopt is creating a recruitment program to identify local online retailers and offering an incentives policy that enables them to locate into a downtown space, allowing them to have a brick and mortar presence and higher local visibility. Such incentives could take the form of cash grants, subsidized rent, or marketing assistance. Part of this strategy might also include a test phase that a pop-up venture would allow. Another approach might be establishing a shared space for craftspeople to create and/or display their merchandise. Regardless, this type of local online business could present a previously untapped user of downtown space.

While it is still too soon to understand what the full array of strategies and tactics might be, the time is indeed ripe for beginning to ask questions to help explore this unfamiliar retail environment, such as:

- Does my downtown have sufficient broadband capacity to support online retailers?
- Do I need to create a parking policy for FedEx, UPS, and other delivery services?
- Should I establish a makerspace for local craftspeople?
- Is there local expertise available to provide technical assistance for mom and pop retailers?
- What kind of impact will online retail have on local sales taxes?

These questions, however, are just a start, and we are still in the initial stages of this retail revolution. But what we do know is that information technology has already altered the way we do business, communicate, and shop in innumerable ways. We also know that these trends are accelerating. In the very near future, a customer will be able to order a coffee mug from Amazon for next day delivery, which will be communicated to a robot in a warehouse and will be transported to her town by an autonomous truck and brought to her doorstep by a flying drone. This represents a near pinnacle of convenience and efficiency. Given that much of their business model is built on those principles, it appears suburban chains and discount merchants are most at threat, which provides an opening for downtown merchants to partially recapture some of their lost sales. But Main Street store owners must be willing to be nimble and adapt to this new marketplace by maximizing their digital presence while also leveraging what has always been their greatest advantage: providing extraordinary personal service and offering high-quality merchandise to well-known local customers.

CELEBRATING VOLUNTEERS

Helen Walker, Victoria Main Street

Helen Walker has been there from the very beginning. Her passion for Victoria and downtown has always been a priority for her. When Victoria was designated a Main Street City in 2011, she hit the ground running. She has served on the Victoria Main Street Board for two terms, chaired committees, and spread the word about the Victoria Main Street Program to anyone and everyone.

Her professional career was in downtown Victoria for 29 years. Helen was Victoria's county treasurer for 17 years and then went on to serve our community as county judge for 12 years. Her proudest achievement was the restoration of our 1892 County Courthouse, which was dedicated in 2001, just a year before her retirement in 2002. Even though she has been retired, she has not slowed down on her commitment, dedication, and passion for the revitalization of downtown, by volunteering at every Main Street event held.

Her dedication to our community is shown through her involvement in many organizations that promote quality of life, historic preservation, and economic vitality. Helen will be ending her second term with the Victoria Main Street Board this September. Her words, "I may be off the board, but I will still be on the committees."



Helen Walker, Victoria Main Street

PRESERVATION MONTH



Each year during May, Preservation Month is celebrated across the country under a theme of This Place Matters (#ThisPlaceMatters). People nationwide are encouraged to celebrate and recognize places that matter to them. In Texas, our local Main Street communities are celebrating with special activities all month long. Texas Main Street's affiliated program, the Town Square Initiative, has coordinated a series of *Imagine the Possibilities Tours* featuring property showcases and investment opportunities in 19 Texas Main Street communities. During each tour, selected properties will be open and accessible to the public. Three additional tours will be held in June.

Cuero Main Street started off Preservation Month on May 1 with a first-time event called Hometown Harvest on Main, in collaboration with the city and DeWitt County Ag Extension. Healthy recipes and farm-to-table foods were showcased, and cooked by a downtown restaurant. Proceeds went to a scholarship fund for the county Go Texan and 4-H programs.

San Augustine's "This Place Matters" building highlight for Preservation Month 2018 is the San Augustine County Courthouse in the Main Street District. Supporters met at the county commissioners court for the picture. Texas Main Street Cake was served as well. Imogene's Café, a restaurant downtown, baked the cake! San Augustine Main Street Patrons and Loyal Supporters purchased the cake and hosted the event. Signs will be used for future building projects as well.



(Left and middle) Cuero held its first-time event, Hometown Harvest on Main Street. (Right) San Augustine supporters gathered at the San Augustine County Courthouse for a This Place Matters group picture.

TEXAS FIRST LADY CECILIA ABBOTT VISITS 2018 MAIN STREET CITIES

Texas First Lady Cecilia Abbott continued the grand tradition of the Texas Main Street Program's First Lady's Tour, and welcomed Pearsall and Temple as the 2018 Texas Main Street communities. The May 1 event kicked off Preservation Month for the Texas Main Street Program. During the visits, Mrs. Abbott was joined by Executive Director Mark Wolfe of the THC, state and local officials, local business owners and volunteers, and dozens of local residents eager to see the Main Street vision for their respective towns. The

First Lady's design renderings, created by the design staff of the Texas Main Street Program, is a tradition of the annual event, and were unveiled at the ceremonies. The architectural drawing shows the potential and showcases possibilities for the historic downtown by demonstrating how prominent buildings in the Main Street district can benefit from design improvements.

Special thanks to the Independent Bankers Association of Texas for sponsoring this year's First Lady's Main Street Tour. They have been the sponsor for the last 24 years, and we could not do it without them!



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(Top left and right) THC Executive Director Mark Wolfe and First Lady Cecilia Abbott address the crowd at the May 1 visit to the newly designated Main Street community of Temple. (Bottom left) Main Street cake is still always on the menu when it comes to a special downtown event. Pearsall Main Street Advisory Board Chair Melinda Garrett-Gudim cuts the cake at the Pearsall First Lady's reception. (Bottom right) A good crowd turned out for the Pearsall Main Street ceremony, despite inclement weather that forced the event indoors.



Part of the tradition of the Main Street First Lady's event is the unveiling of a rendering created by the TMSP design staff that is designed to demonstrate potential and possibilities for the historic downtown. (Top) The three buildings along Oak St. in the heart of the Pearsall Main Street district selected for the 2018 Pearsall First Lady's rendering include the 1916 Frio Masonic Lodge building that retains a high level of historic fabric. (Bottom) The set of buildings presented in the Temple First Lady's rendering along North Main Street target both a possible slipcover removal and restoration of historic features to several buildings, along with recommendation on another building to retain a mid-century slipcover.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



(Top left) The Corsicana Main Street board held a goal setting meeting during April. (Top right and bottom images) The Town Square Initiative and Canton Main Street kicked off the Downtown Action Plan process with an open house at the grand opening of the farmers market on April 21. About 150 people stopped by to see community survey results, add their stories to the memory boards, and vote on types of specific uses they would like to see downtown in the future.

Websites of Interest

- **Advisory Council on Historic Preservation:** www.achp.gov
- **African American Heritage Preservation Foundation:** www.aahpfdn.org
- **(The) Alliance for Historic Landscape Preservation:** www.ahlp.org
- **(The) American Institute of Architects:** www.aia.org
- **American Planning Association:** www.planning.org
- **American Society of Landscape Architects:** www.asla.org
- **(The) Cultural Landscape Foundation:** www.tclf.org
- **(The) Handbook of Texas Online:** www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online
- **Keep Texas Beautiful:** www.ktb.org
- **League of Historic American Theatres:** www.lhat.org
- **National Main Street Center:** www.preservationnation.org/main-street
- **National Park Service:** www.nps.gov
- **National Trust for Historic Preservation:** www.preservationnation.org
- **Partners for Sacred Places:** www.sacredplaces.org
- **Preservation Easement Trust:** www.preservationeasement.org
- **Preservation Directory.com:** www.preservationdirectory.com
- **Preservation Texas:** www.preservationtexas.org
- **Project for Public Spaces:** www.pps.org
- **Rails-to-Trails Conservancy:** www.railstotrails.org
- **Scenic America:** www.scenic.org
- **Texas Department of Agriculture:** www.TexasAgriculture.gov
- **Texas Commission on the Arts:** www.arts.texas.gov
- **Texas Downtown Association:** www.texasdowntown.org
- **Texas Folklife Resources:** www.texasfolklife.org
- **Texas Historical Commission:** www.thc.texas.gov
- **Texas Parks and Wildlife Department:** www.tpwd.texas.gov
- **Texas Rural Leadership Program:** www.trlp.org
- **Texas State Preservation Board:** www.tspb.state.tx.us
- **Urban Land Institute:** www.uli.org