



Summary Report from the Start Up Team Visit to Camden



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Presented to the Town of Camden

"Where the Mountains Meet the Sea"

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Healthy, thriving downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts are assets to communities endeavoring to sustain or grow their local economy and create or retain jobs.

INTRODUCTION

The Maine Downtown Center (MDC) is a program of the Maine Development Foundation (MDF). The MDC helps communities throughout the state revitalize their downtown economy, preserve and enhance appearance, and boost the image of their traditional business districts using a range of services and assistance.

Downtown revitalization is a proven economic development strategy in Maine. Vibrant downtowns are dynamic and community-based resulting in historic building rehabilitation, business growth, job creation, diverse housing creation, tourism and cultural enhancement, and healthy walkable commercial districts. Through MDF's Maine Downtown Center, 30 towns and cities representing every county are actively engaged in reclaiming the traditional role of their downtowns as the multifunctional, vibrant, heart of the community. That number increases each year.

Downtown revitalization and historic preservation require leadership and innovative thinking, which when combined with engaged citizens and solid public policy result in an increased tax base, unique market edge, fierce community pride and a legacy of heritage for future generations.

We utilize the successful **Main Street Four-Point Approach®** developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation's National Main Street Center as its foundation for assistance. The Main Street Four-Point Approach® has a national reputation as one of the most powerful economic development tools for downtowns. This approach emphasizes economic development within the context of historic preservation and is based on principles of self-determination and direct community participation. The Main Street Four-Point Approach® focuses on four key areas of revitalization which are worked simultaneously:

- **Organization.** Involving all constituencies having an interest in downtown revitalization and management of both human and financial resources. Organization helps everyone work towards the same goals and maximizes involvement of public and private leaders within the community.
- **Design.** Implementing projects that improve the appearance and functionality of downtown buildings and physical environment. Design enhances a district's appearance and pedestrian amenities while preserving its historic features.
- **Promotion.** Creating programs that market your downtown to potential and existing customers, producing special events and festivals, and promulgating a positive image of downtown. Promotion brings people downtown by helping to attract visitors, shoppers, and investors.
- **Economic Restructuring.** Studying your community's economy and market opportunities and using the information to develop programs that strengthen and expand existing businesses and aid in recruiting new businesses to downtown. Economic restructuring stimulates business development and helps strengthen the district's economic base.

This comprehensive approach has long been proven an effective methodology for revitalizing traditional, pedestrian-oriented commercial districts in your downtown. In essence, the Main Street Four-Point Approach® stresses grassroots involvement in the revitalization process where the community works beyond just the downtown stakeholders, to develop a compelling vision for your downtown. Each downtown program is locally driven, responds to locally identified priorities, and is locally funded. The MDC is committed to be a partner in this essential revitalization process for the future!

OVERVIEW OF THE MAINE DOWNTOWN NETWORK

As part of a three-tier approach to downtown revitalization in Maine, the MDC launched the **Maine Downtown Network (MDN)** in 2009 as an affiliate to our successful Main Street Maine program and Downtown Institute. The MDN program provides a range of services and assistance to meet a variety of community commitment and readiness levels with technical support through its staff and other experienced consultants.

The MDN is for communities beginning or strengthening a downtown revitalization effort and/or for those hoping to achieve Main Street Maine status. MDN services help communities build an appropriate organizational and funding base for a comprehensive downtown or neighborhood commercial district revitalization program. Participation as a MDN community does not guarantee selection as a future designated Main Street Maine community, although it will help communities strengthen their revitalization efforts.

MDN communities are required to:

1. Understand, commit to and follow the Main Street Four-Point Approach® to downtown revitalization (Organization, Design, Promotion and Economic Restructuring) established by the National Trust Main Street Center and promoted by the Maine Downtown Center.
2. Maintain and report on quantitative measures of success twice annually, specifically volunteers, volunteer hours, net new jobs, net-new businesses and submit these to the MDC.
3. Develop and/or maintain a volunteer board, including representatives of downtown business entities, the greater community and local government, to oversee the continuing development of the local downtown revitalization program for the terms of this agreement.
4. Engage staff, committee and/or board members and volunteers in ongoing training offered by the Maine Downtown Center. Travel expenses for such training shall be paid by the Local Program, unless otherwise provided by the MDC. Discounted registration fees shall be made available to MDN Local Program participants to attend Downtown Institute sessions and the annual Maine Downtown Conference.
5. Access technical services in historic preservation provided through the MDC in partnership with Maine Preservation's field service staff.
6. Share lessons learned from your experience as a MDN Local Program and share documents and products with the MDC and other communities in instances where sharing will not compromise the work of the Local Program.
7. The Local Program will illustrate the acknowledgement of the receipt of the MDC's services by crediting its participation in, and as a beneficiary of, the MDN program through the appropriate methods (i.e., website, printed acknowledgement in public notices, press releases, project signs, publications, verbal recognition at public meeting, etc.)
8. Pay an annual participation fee to the MDC based on population.

The MDC will provide these additional services to MDN communities:

1. Designate a MDC Program Manager to act as liaison with the Local Program and to facilitate communications between the Local Program, the Maine Downtown Center, other Maine communities and the National Trust Main Street Center where appropriate.
2. Organize and conduct an initial “Start-Up Visit” whereby the Center’s Program Director and members of the Center’s Advisory Council, Senior Advisors and selected consultants will visit the Local Program to conduct an informal needs assessment. This visit is anticipated within 90 days of the date of this agreement. A customized Start-Up Visit Report will be provided by the Center via email within ten weeks of the team visit; this report is designed to assist the Local Program in organizational development, work planning and project prioritization over the initial two year period.
3. Organize and conduct at least one training visit by the Center’s Program Director and/or member(s) of the Center’s Advisory Council Ambassadors to assist the Local Program as needed. A written summary via email will follow this visit within four weeks, identifying progress and providing suggestions for moving forward. This visit is suggested to be scheduled near the end of Year One or within the first few months of Year Two, based on availability of both the Center staff/Advisory Council Ambassadors and the Local Program coordinators.
4. Provide training opportunities for board members, committee members, staff and volunteers providing intensive and comprehensive training on the content and methodology of the Main Street Program at the local level. Trainings may include customized worksessions during the annual Maine Downtown Conference and through the annual Downtown Institute sessions, and may also include webinars provided by the National Trust Main Street Center, the Center and/or other organizations and agencies.
5. Provide resource and consultant information to MDN Local Program in topic areas specifically related to organization, design, promotion and economic restructuring.
6. Assist in the selection of a Downtown Manager, if appropriate, and provide orientation and training at the MDC office.
7. Provide for the MDN Local Program’s membership fee of \$250 in the National Trust Main Street Network for two years during the term of this agreement.
8. In general, facilitate learning among Maine Downtown Network and Main Street Maine communities and the general public.
9. Post success stories and testimonials from MDN Local Program on the MDC website and share links to the National Trust Main Street Center and other state coordinating programs.
10. Provide opportunities for special program participation, benefits and grant opportunities, such as the MDC’s Green Downtowns program.

In summary, the Maine Downtown Network is what you make of it. Tap into the energy! Consider yourself part of a growing family of historically rich, civic minded, volunteer-driven cities and towns in Maine. Join forces with passionate people committed to protecting and enhancing their special sense of place and courageous enough to invest the energy necessary to convert their vision of a vibrant downtown to reality. Now let’s get to work!

THE START UP VISIT

In August 2012, a group of enthusiastic downtown supporters from Camden representing both the public and private sectors met with the Maine Downtown Center's team. Our discussion focused on past efforts, current activities and future visions. We began with an introductory gathering followed by an orientation meeting and walking tour taking the group into key businesses and buildings. We concluded our tour over a working lunch by sharing observations and discussing next steps as a Maine Downtown Network community. Our intent with this report is to share comments, ideas and suggestions from the team for consideration as you continue to work in the Main Street model for downtown revitalization, incorporating the Four Point Approach.



The Start Up Visit team! Report photos provided by Roxanne Eflin, Senior Program Director, Maine Downtown Center

ORGANIZATION OBSERVATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR CAMDEN

Effective downtown revitalization efforts require the energy, leadership, vision, passion and *positive attitude* of an organized, engaged and diverse group of downtown supporters. The role of this committee is to set the climate for the challenges and transitions you are facing. As you already know, but cannot be stated too often, your leadership as advocates for downtown is vitally important to help solidify support from not just the business community, but municipal staff, elected officials, community organizations and residents. All of these individuals and groups have a role in the future of your commercial core and it is important that each of them understand how the Main Street approach works. Local government needs to position itself as a partner (and sometimes facilitator and implementer), encouraging the leadership roles to be served by the private sector. A balanced three-way partnership between the merchants/property owners, municipality and the residents is critically important for sustainable success. As MDC Senior Advisor Bill King says, "It's all together for success!"

It is important for other civic, faith and education leaders who do not yet have a stake in downtown to be persuaded to get involved to help lead the effort. We encourage the delegation of tasks into committees organized along the Four Point Approach in order to keep the movement pulsing forward and prevent individual burn-out. As with many of our participating communities, often the committee chair, board president or paid executive director does much of the heavy lifting because they do it so well! We encourage balance within the leadership to spread both the enthusiasm and work throughout the committees and staff. This balanced leadership ethic will help groom others to smoothly pick up the pace when, and if, your top leaders wish to step back from their respective roles.

Greg Paxton, Executive Director of Maine Preservation and MDC Advisor states:

“Relative to the engagement of Town government in Main Street, I think the trick is for the town to serve as the facilitator but for active volunteers to be involved who feel they have a say and a stake in the ongoing plans and are active in the Four Point committees. The initial team visits can help develop a set of priorities that the community can massage into a plan. With this forming the consensus, it can then be helpful to have a town employee there to carry out the plan and use other municipal government assets to help achieve it – with continued volunteer input. The biggest problem is the long-term status of the program can be affected by a local election with new leadership that wants to move in a different direction than predecessors. So a broad constituency for the program is important.”

Public relations about your revitalization efforts should be constant – in the press, social media, on public access television and in educational presentations by your members. Create a PowerPoint or video presentation for your committee members to use throughout the community and in the schools to educate and inspire teachers and students (K-12) and, subsequently, their entire families. Eventually you will want to develop a downtown logo and slogan statement based on a “five-senses” vision statement, and make this available for use by merchants, businesses, nonprofits and the municipality throughout your downtown to continually reinforce the message and image. “Branding” downtown, while requiring careful thought and substantial input from the community, is a powerful marketing tool – if done correctly.

Currently, downtown Camden’s web presence needs further development. You must be easily found via search engines. The current mention of the Camden Downtown Network needs to be made much more prominent on the Town’s webpage. We strongly suggest you create a dedicated page on your Town’s website and establish a link to the existing a Facebook page for the Town of Camden as well as establish your own Facebook page specific to your Downtown Network organization and efforts. Seek student assistance, if necessary. Additionally, you are required to identify yourself as a Maine Downtown Network Community, a program of the Maine Development Foundation’s Downtown Center, and link our website to yours (www.mdf.org). Please utilize our Maine Downtown Center logo to indicate our partnership.

An adequate budget is necessary to accomplish your goals. Begin by answering basic questions such as: What needs to be done to improve the downtown? What could be done to help market the downtown? What would this cost? How will the money be raised? Fundraising is an ongoing challenge and opportunity. We encourage all our participating communities to “think in threes” for income sources: 1/3 from the municipality, 1/3 from downtown businesses and property owners and 1/3 from the residents/special events/earned income. A balanced fundraising plan is important to help spread the ownership and prevent a setback should any one source be cut or curtailed. You should work in tandem from bottom to top/top to bottom - establish your budget and a funding pyramid – then get busy! If necessary, partner with an established 501(c)3 nonprofit organization who can assist as a pass-through funding agent while you are getting organized. This is the time to inventory all your assets and promote

these as a fundraising marketing tool. A number of small gifts are as important as your top gifts when building your base of support. Create your one minute statement of mission, benefit and need. Develop the list of donor names with target donation amounts and delegate the right two-person team to each name on the list. Practice making “the ask” among yourselves; personalize your request with your own story about why you care. Remember to thank every donor in writing within 48 hours after their gift is received – larger gifts deserve a face-to-face thank you.

We urge you to develop a positive presence at Town Council meetings and invite one of them to serve on your board or a committee, perhaps as an official liaison. It is useful to rotate the spokesperson role at Council meetings in order to show the many faces of downtown and develop speaker leadership. The local cable access channel is an excellent medium to inform the region’s citizens of your downtown revitalization efforts.

We strongly encourage the individuals involved in the downtown effort to receive training in historic preservation in order to fully understand the essential role that historic preservation, and the accompanying incentives, plays in economic development. Currently in Maine, historic preservation projects are leading the real estate development and housing sectors. Including people within your committee or organization with a background in historic redevelopment, architecture and design is strongly recommended. Camden’s use of the Camden Historic Resources Committee is promising and we encourage that effort towards the eventual goal of becoming a nationally designated Certified Local Government. CLG status would enable you to apply for federal grant funds through the Maine Historic Preservation Commission to assist you with education, planning and capital projects. For further information and guidance, contact Robin Reed at the MHPC at 207.287.2132.

We also encourage you to take advantage of the training and networking opportunities made available by the Maine Downtown Center, including the Downtown Institute – six sessions held throughout the year on a variety of topics specific to the Main Street Four Point Approach®. We strongly believe that an informed and well organized group, comprised of downtown retailers and business owners, local residents, nonprofit organizations and municipal government, has the singular ability to elevate downtown Camden to the year-round prominence it rightly deserves.

MDC ADVISORS COMMENTS ON ORGANIZATION

Top Three Action Steps

1. **Formalize your Downtown Network coordinating group.** There is good energy in Camden from a core group of passionate leaders. It is crucial that this group include a balance of downtown business owners, property owners, the municipality and residents. Municipal and agency support for downtown is the essential backdrop for revitalization, but retailers and entrepreneurs must be in the leadership role. We strongly recommend you involve the Camden Opera House, Camden International Film Festival and the Camden Conference as well as other prominent cultural and educational organizations in the organizational structure and build stronger partnerships with the Penobscot Bay Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Camden Downtown Business Group. The wider the group of people you gather, the easier it is to build support and spread the word. All of these entities will benefit from a thriving, year-round downtown and should support your effort, both programmatically and financially. Consider forming a downtown nonprofit organization and obtaining 501(c)3 tax exempt status from the IRS. Check out the basics: <http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street/getting-started/>.

2. **Develop a written work plan for the next 12 months**, and start conservatively, prioritize goals and pick three or four top ideas for each of the four committees. Refer to the action steps established in the Downtown Master Plan.
3. **Establish a more prominent web presence for your downtown efforts and agree upon a logo “brand” for graphic unification.** It’s confusing as to who is doing what and where to go for answers.

Additional Organization Action Steps and Observations

- If this hasn’t been fully accomplished through the Downtown Master Plan effort, work together to create:
 - ✓ An asset inventory of why your downtown is special
 - ✓ Your committee also needs to cultivate an expanded list (ideally an email list) of interested parties to send updates, solicitations and invitations. Look for talented retirees and professionals with a few hours to donate.
- Make your meeting agendas very clear, transparent and well-promoted in advance. This is especially critical for newcomers who bring fresh, passionate, intelligent energy to the community and want to get involved but feel uncomfortable and uninformed.
- Have some fun times together, preferably after hours, at several different businesses. The Bath Business Barometer is an excellent model, resulting in team building.

Important Excerpt from the Camden Downtown Master Plan

When the Downtown Master Plan project was initiated by the Town in September 2011, the approach included the formation of a Work Group represented by the Downtown Business Group, Penobscot Bay Regional Chamber of Commerce, and Community & Economic Development Advisory Committee (CEDAC). This Work Group has helped guide the Town as it worked with the consultant team to create the Plan, which included community wide meetings and input.

The MDC Start Up Team was not clear if CEDAC or the Downtown Business Group or another to-be-determined hybrid group was being created to take on the role of the Organization committee. However you decide to organize, remember to engage the entire community.



Graduating Class at Camden High School with Edna St. Vincent Millay, seated third from right

DESIGN OBSERVATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR CAMDEN



Design is not about buildings alone. This component of the Four Points addresses everything visible: plantings, street furniture, bike racks, banners and flags, public art, trash and recycling receptacles, lighting, storefront windows, even in-store merchandising. A cohesive and quality design appearance, with individual creativity, is what you are aiming for. This will help project a solid sense of business, caring and broad downtown cooperation.

The overarching slogan for the Main Street program is “economic development within the context of historic preservation.” Historic buildings provide the distinctive setting for downtown revitalization and, when combined with a beautiful natural setting, are a community’s greatest economic development assets.

Your good historic building stock is relatively intact, with the exception of a few storefronts that have been modified over time. While many people do, it is important for the entire community to recognize the quality of these irreplaceable buildings, their character-defining value, and their potential to leverage the benefits of incentives such as the federal and state historic tax credits to restore and preserve them well into the future. Historic preservation *is a proven economic development tool* and will significantly raise the level of revitalization here to the status it deserves.



Greg Paxton, Executive Director of Maine Preservation and MDC Advisor states:

Camden has great bones and natural assets. It is blessed with an unusually rich store of historic buildings which is a key asset that differentiates this community from all others of relative size in Maine. This is their key economic asset which is incumbent upon them to preserve and manage. Historic preservation needs to manage growth and accommodate change while retaining the historic fabric that makes the community unique. The community needs to establish quality effective and enforceable design review like Gardiner and Belfast. Communities and downtowns with local historic districts that protect their authentic significant buildings and building materials appreciate faster than communities that do not protect these assets and whose quality subsequently begins to erode.

Camden's downtown is unique in that it is small and physically compressed yet dense with larger scale buildings prominently defined by the magnificent Opera House/Town Hall. They also need to find their niche among the many thriving historic coastal communities of Maine. Camden is economically on the higher end scale of Maine downtowns and many shops reflect this.

Design plays a key role here. Because of its geography, Camden needs to be very creative with all existing spaces and find multiple year-round uses for places such as theaters. Downtown leaders need to consider every square foot of their downtown district: backs of buildings, parking areas, walking paths from parking areas down side streets, areas around and leading to and from the Knox Mill and all nooks and crannies in between. Camden needs to view their parking lots as the beginning of the walking experience! Expanded foot traffic throughout the entire downtown district with signage, carefully placed street trees and enticing design will strengthen the year-round viability of retailers and restaurants and provide a "come see what's new in your favorite Jewell by the Sea!" opportunity.



Historic photos are extremely useful tools in determining the scope of restoration and/or rehabilitation projects

Many of the following points have also been articulated or underscored in some form within your newly adopted Downtown Master Plan.

Infill Development and Compatible Design

Infill development that is compatible with the historic fabric creates attractive places for people and art, as part of your creative economy/local crafts niche. You always want to be ahead of that development and in control of what new development will look like. It is strongly recommended, and a valuable exercise, to examine and compare all the plans, design guidelines and ordinances affecting downtown to ensure compatibility with your vision for the future. Integrated redevelopment that preserves and enhances significant structures (of which there are a few) and street character is an essential goal of this program. Structures should not only be compatible with the character of the surroundings, but also be oriented with the storefront facing the street and buildings abutting the sidewalk.

Research

An excellent team building education project is to collect and organize all the historic photos of your downtown buildings, with the help of your local historical society, library, high school history department, and anyone interested in helping. This treasure trove of historic data should be utilized to assist property owners, your Design committee and the Camden/planning board in making façade design decisions. Base your design decisions upon those historic photos you gathered or find clues in the building. Your leadership in these efforts is imperative. Become the “Go To” resource for design.

Changes Over Time

Most often, changes over time detract from the original design integrity. We see many examples of this erosion in downtowns across Maine, including Camden. Small changes and improvements can make a significant difference and will begin to build interest from property owners. *The Secretary of the Interior Standards for the Treatment of Historic Buildings* and the *Guidelines for Improving Energy Efficiency in Historic Buildings* (Maine Preservation) offers practical, common sense advice to building owners and contractors. You will begin to accomplish three things: 1) restore the authentic appearance of these character-defining buildings; 2) rehabilitate buildings with sensitivity to original design principles and the neighboring context, and 3) utilize all available incentive tools to stimulate preservation projects.



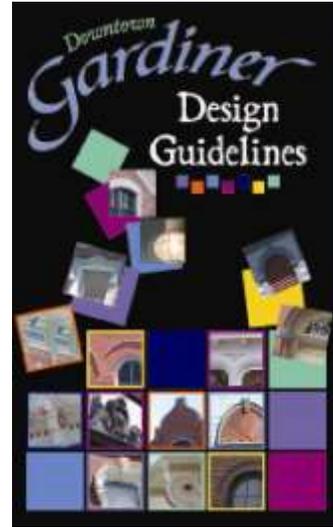
Maintenance and Demolition Protection

Develop and adopt minimum maintenance standards for significant historic resources, whose demise may come from owners unwilling or unable to maintain them. The MDC has numerous examples of how this is accomplished in communities across Maine. Historic buildings need proper care and rehabilitation to correct deferred maintenance and/or unsympathetic changes that have occurred over time. It also appears that the Town does not have strong protection mechanisms or design review for historic buildings in the commercial core. Demolition of significant historic resources results in gutting the heart of your community of its heritage and distinctive character and is environmentally unsound. Because smaller downtown commercial buildings are viewed on all sides, including the waterfront, attention to detail beyond the façade is vital. Assistance and samples of applicable legislative tools are available through the Maine Downtown Center, Maine Preservation and/or the Maine Historic Preservation Commission. The Design committee’s advocacy and education efforts are essential here.

A final word on Land Use Legislation for historic buildings

It is more important than ever for downtown Camden to pay attention to the role of design in attracting redevelopment. Raising your standards to a higher level to reflect the quality and diversity of your historic architecture will help attract redevelopment. In order to achieve this, effective design guidelines, review

and enforcement are needed which will increase property values, pride and activity on many levels. The failure to do this is actually holding back the ability of the downtown district to thrive to its full potential. You should consider strengthening your local regulations regarding historic preservation with the intent of accommodating growth while preserving the unique historic qualities of downtown Camden. You will discover, once you actively begin working the Main Street Four-Point Approach, that downtown Camden will become even more appealing to investors and investment.



*Owners most often wish to do “the right thing” for their historic buildings.
Help them by providing information, training and good guidance.*

Check out Gardiner Main Street’s Design Guidelines efforts – their publication is posted on their website. A fresh coat of paint and some simple maintenance (like patching the roof and redirecting runoff) are easy opportunities for volunteers to pitch in to make an immediate difference. Design guidelines serve to inform, educate and encourage good design alterations that are sympathetic and compatible to the downtown context. They also inform good building stewardship practices and should discuss ways to incorporate savvy “Green Downtown” energy efficiency methods while retaining historic building fabric.

Signage is always an essential aspect of good design, and Camden’s signage is generally superb. If you are not satisfied with how your existing sign ordinance is performing, get busy researching others around Maine and propose revisions or craft an ordinance that works for you – and the local enforcer. Provide incentives to achieve good, effective sign design and retire lesser effective or attractive signs.



Our Start Up Visit Team did not review any current parking studies during our time there, though parking in one way or another can be challenge for downtowns. This often stems from employees parking in the front of businesses, an issue that the employer can and should control and model good parking behavior.

A comprehensive parking study is the obvious first step, to analyze all parking opportunities and flex-time parking alternatives. Avoid having auto-related uses including drive-through windows and curb cuts that disrupt the feeling, perception and reality of a pedestrian-friendly corridor. As previously mentioned in this report, the pedestrian experience begins in the parking lot.

MDC ADVISORS COMMENTS ON DESIGN

Top Three Action Steps

1. Inventory and photograph all your buildings and spaces downtown, document conditions, concerns and potential, and engage and train volunteers to conduct this essential foundational work.
2. Determine how, where, when, what type of appropriate street trees to add to the downtown landscape.
3. Provide more benches and places for people (and dogs) to stop, rest and absorb the surroundings. Benches are inviting and necessary, permitting people to linger longer downtown to shop, meet, chat and eat. Recycling containers are also strongly recommended and send a positive environmental message.



Downtown design takes in everything we see and involves street furniture, barrels, plantings, bike racks, etc.

Additional Design Action Steps and Observations

- Adopt demolition delay regulations to help protect historic resources. Then go further and become a designated Certified Local Government by adopting a historic preservation ordinance and community-wide education program. Contact Robin Reed at the Maine Historic Preservation Commission for details. (287-2132)
- If you haven't already done so, changing your street lamps to LED lighting will be a significant cost savings. Lighting manufacturers state that installing a heat sink at the top of poles under the luminaries will help absorb the energy produced by the LED lights, thereby preventing overheating

and early burn-out. Check with Efficiency Maine in terms of their assistance program to commercial businesses to cover a portion of the cost to change over to LED lights.



Strive to improve the pedestrian experience both in terms of safety and aesthetic from Main Street along Washington Street to the mill as well as access to and along Bay View Street. At places, the proliferation of overhead wires combines with a relatively uninteresting experience (monotone colors, vernacular facades, lack of streetscape vegetation) which could be improved to make a significant positive difference in this area of downtown. In other locations, surprising paths beg us to take them, like this connection next to the library and the lovely path leading to the Camden Riverhouse Hotel and Inns.

- Focus on the falls! We believe one of Camden’s unsung attributes is the waterway through and under downtown, spilling over the rocks into the harbor. Historic images show a waterfall over the mill pond, which could be experienced via a bridge to connect with the Harbor Park pathway. We heard a great deal of excitement around this idea during our Start Up visit.



PROMOTIONS COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR CAMDEN

“Signature” events are *vital*ly important. More events, seasonally at a minimum, will help continue the buzz. Promotions require a high level of volunteer commitment, leadership and energy to be effective; therefore, we encourage you to start small. Even smaller promotions accomplish a variety of goals, including media buzz and volunteer participation.

Congratulations on your impressive calendar of events of all kinds, nearly year round! We offer this portion of the Start Up Report under the heading “There is always room to improve upon a good thing!”

Through your association with the Maine Downtown Center, you have a vast array of resources available to you through the Main Street Resource Café section of our website (www.mdf.org, Maine Downtown Center) and through the National Trust Main Street Center’s members-only section online. You will find a substantial amount of practical advice, innovative ideas and guidance to help you continue to refine a solid promotion strategy for downtown Camden. Our goal is to help you increase the “feet on the street!”

Remember the importance of retail events. These serve triple duty: 1) they bring shoppers to downtown, 2) they get shoppers inside stores spending money, and 3) they can galvanize merchants to your downtown mission, vision and efforts. Many of our participating Main Street Maine and Maine Downtown Network communities have created annual signature retail events that have become extremely successful. If you don’t already, you should try an “Early Bird” sale as a retail promotion for the first day of hunting season; details are available through the Maine Downtown Center. These events are easy, fun, successful and are great media photo opportunities! Please visit the “Success Stories” section of the MDC webpage for great ideas from other Maine towns and cities! Please also share yours with us.

Promoting “heritage retailing” is becoming increasingly effective for downtown retail districts and celebrates Maine’s creative community. According to the National Main Street Center, heritage retailing is “the term for buying local and providing those purchasing opportunities to visitors and community

residents alike.” Buying local can be implemented on a variety of scales from large to small, and one of its many positive aspects is that any community or individual can participate. Buying goods and art made locally keeps revenue in your community and, if these products reflect the history or character of your community, they will play an important role in your development of a heritage retailing strategy. Use your collective media buying power to promote your unique position in the regional marketplace.

Recall the earlier mention about downtown branding. The promotional component of the Four Points is where we encourage you to develop and share your branding image and urge everyone to use this widely: merchants, partner organizations, the municipality, etc. and everywhere, on websites, banners, shopping bags, marketing materials and public signs including way-finding, directional, entry gateways, facility identification and town entry monuments. (For a PowerPoint on Promotions, Marketing and Branding, visit the MDC website at mdf.org/SessionVResourceList.php.)

Sister Cities are another good way to connect merchants and residents to communities with some connection to Camden. You don’t have to have just one. Not only does this encourage international heritage tourism and school connections, but it provides good publicity and good will between communities.

Take the lead through events to build pride in your built environment and tap into MDC’s Green Downtowns program. Well managed historic downtowns are the epitome of sustainability and are the link between the natural and built environments. These are increasingly important factors with Americans, particularly with heritage tourists, which we urge Camden to focus on attracting. Find opportunities to work with your schools, historical society, library and private teaching facilities (all ages) to create lesson plans centered on the substantial history and significant historic architecture of Camden. The Design and Promotions committees might consider working together on projects such as:

- creating an architectural scavenger hunt downtown and in the residential neighborhoods where your historic architecture is among the most authentic and impressive in the state
- developing a monthly downtown building trivia contest
- printing a coloring book based on historic downtown and residential architecture

Remember: Promotions need to attract people; good design will hold them. Work with the Design Committee to ensure that the surroundings – the sense of place, the quality of place – will bring them back again, perhaps even longer. A great idea is to market your events statewide, beginning with the Maine Office of Tourism’s website (visitmaine.com) and the MPBN statewide calendar.

MDC ADVISORS COMMENTS ON PROMOTION

Top Four Action Steps

1. Make sure the Historic Downtown Camden map/brochure is up to date, especially with the exciting influx of new businesses recently. This map, which we understand was created in 2009 and artistically embellished by Deborah Winship, is excellent and informative, though the version that exists online appears to need updating.
2. Assess the existing promotions/ events that occur in the downtown. Gather all the sponsoring organizations that put on such happenings, list all the events and do a collective SWOT analysis. Fill the fall, winter or spring void with a new event targeting the local residents and families.

3. Create an event all about wellness! The new *Healthy Maine Streets* program being launched by the Maine Downtown Center will provide a variety of great promotional ideas to celebrate “Making the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice – for ME!” More details will be provided soon at mdf.org.
4. Develop a Camden gift certificate sold by the Downtown Network group and made available for sale by banks, key shops in the downtown, Town Hall and elsewhere you decide. They make great Corporate Holiday gifts and work well for residents to give a “flavor” of Camden to their family and friends. Connect with Main Street Bath for details.

Additional Promotion Action Steps and Observations

- Focus on your authentic assets and build on those. Camden is renowned for its beautiful downtown, library, churches, parks and harbor location.
- Add retail promotions to draw the local residents to the downtown. Cash Mobs are a great new addition that captures the current trend in retail selling. Other ideas are: “customer appreciation week-end” in the fall or early spring; an Early Bird Sale, based on Renys highly successful event on the first Saturday of November. Add a Late Night shopping day – no more than once a week in summer - asking each store to stay open one extra hour. Add simple entertainment to this. Eventually with ongoing education and merchant to merchant support this can be expanded.
- Add “image building/ community spirit” events such as an extension of Christmas activities in the downtown including a decorator contest amongst the shops with shoppers as voters Borrow the SYTYKC (So You Think You Know Camden) Event from Bath, Rockland, Biddeford or Belfast.
- Develop a Coop-Advertising campaign with the help of your media reps. Invite one or more of them to serve on your committee.
- Focus on customer service. Work to get the people who are already coming to stay longer and make sure that they become repeat customers. This is a marketing effort that is far less expensive than attracting first time visitors and has less impact on the community. Look closely at who your current visitor is (you should know who they are) and market specifically to them.
- Add music to any happening, especially if you can use the school music programs.
- Please take time to check out these fantastic and free resources:
 - National Trust Heritage Tourism Program:
<http://www.preservationnation.org/issues/heritage-tourism/>
 - Cultural Heritage Tourism:
<http://www.culturalheritagetourism.org/>
- The holidays should be a major focus for a community celebration. Anything you currently do should be considered for expansion. Some action items include:
 - Lengthen the celebration to five weeks and bring together all organizations in town
 - Kick it off with open houses and fanfare
 - Post your holiday events on the Maine Downtown Center’s webpage and promote the statewide “Take ME Downtown For the Holidays!” campaign
 - Include more children’s activities: invite the schools to do concerts/small plays and create student art work to be displayed in vacant windows (this can happen throughout the year)
 - Get lots of press coverage! Invite the press and media in. Send them news releases.
 - Produce a small brochure (tri-fold) for events during the holiday season, involving all nonprofits in the community
 - Get the merchants together for a holiday brainstorm!

- Decorate more with lights (ask each store to pay for those in front of their space); the municipality can take care of the entrance and other areas. Also ask residents in a “fundraising letter” to contribute to decorations (it works!)
- Have a storefront Christmas decorating contest and let the shoppers vote who then become eligible for donated prizes

ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING OBSERVATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR CAMDEN

The historic buildings, unique character and cultural attractions contribute to the area’s success in attracting “creative class” businesses. Your committee in partnership with the Town of Camden needs to ensure that the public and private sectors of downtown continue to create a vibrant and livable mixed-use environment that builds on your sense of place. Your commercial core needs to be viewed as a place that supports and expresses the creative and innovative energy of its human capital, and a place that attracts and welcomes all members of the community. “Quality of Place” is featured in the *Making Maine Work* report as one of the top investment imperatives in our state. And, the MDC’s goal for downtowns across Maine, Camden included, is to be ahead of the curve in understanding and supporting downtown’s role as the signature economic engine in Quality of Place.



The Start Up Team was extremely impressed with the leadership, passion and dedication to “all-things-Camden” shown by downtown business owners, residents and a variety of staff members.

Marketing the historic tax credits is another strategy to stimulate downtown development - by contacting real estate-oriented new owners, encouraging residential development, getting a few smaller projects started at the same time and marketing downtown as a whole during the process. A thorough understanding of every historic building (over 50 years old) is necessary to effectively market preservation-based incentive tools to potential developers. For more information on this, visit the MDC online Resource Library (www.mdf.org), or contact Mike Johnson at the Maine Historic Preservation Commission (287-2132) or Greg Paxton at Maine Preservation (847-3577).

Strengthening your downtown’s position in the marketplace is a never-ending challenge. It’s straightforward: people need a reason to come downtown. Reinforcing downtown as the community’s gathering place - the cultural, commercial, civic heart of the region - is the mission of the Maine Downtown Center and, we expect, yours.

Business retention and recruitment requires the work of downtown ambassadors. Package your amenities and assets and go after the businesses you lack to further strengthen downtown Camden in the regional marketplace. A good book to read and share is, "Niche Strategies for Downtown Revitalization," by N. David Milder. Check first in your local bookstore or buy it through www.downtowndevelopment.com. "Niche Strategies" shows readers how downtown areas can grow and prosper by focusing their efforts on specific groups of customers or of goods and services.

Properly designed surveys, of which there are many for downtowns, are vitally important tools to provide a basic understanding of your downtown in the regional marketplace. This is energy well spent, within reason and budget; however, it is important for a variety of reasons to not simply turn this over to paid consultants and students to accomplish. Your ER committee, perhaps bolstered with students and other volunteers, needs to roll up its sleeves and dive in – after receiving training on how to best approach people for information. This is where professional guidance can channel, champion and help you analyze your efforts. An example worth investigating is the ROMEO (Retired Old Men Eating Out) group in Bath, who enjoy conducting a variety of intercept surveys.

Once your basic surveys are conducted and analyzed, you should consider conducting a residential survey. As you well know, many residents rarely or never come downtown. It will be very beneficial to discover what would change their lack of interest in downtown. Visit our website to access links to tools and recent PowerPoint presentations on innovative market analysis for downtowns today. These are powerful tools.

If you have already conducted some market analysis, consider reviewing the results of that analysis and convene a meeting of as many of the business owners on the street as will participate (along with the owners/leasing agents of the vacant space). Test with them the recommendations coming out of the existing data. Is it valid? Will these types of businesses support or deter from the existing business mix? What types of businesses are missing from the list? Use this discussion to identify the two or three types of businesses that would best enhance what is currently present. Within each of the types explore (1) if there is anyone in town who might develop such a business; (2) if there are similar businesses elsewhere in Maine or New England – or in Maritime Canada - who might consider an additional location.

If you move to option (2) above, be very specific. Name the business. Research the business: owner's name(s), size of store, population served, how long in business, etc. Using what you know about these businesses, and data about Camden demographics, traffic patterns, and the available space, compile an information package to leave with the prospective business owner(s). Call ahead and set up a time to meet. Send someone who represents the assets of Camden well and who understands why this would be a good fit. Talk through the materials and leave copies with them. Send a thank you letter being sure to include contact information. Follow up in a couple of days. Follow up in a week. Send a summary of the key advantages to a Camden location. Follow up in two weeks. Add them (with permission) to your database for e-news that goes out. Follow up every two-three weeks for as long as there is space available and they haven't told you to "go away". If the space rents, let them know and tell them that you hope there will be another opportunity, because you truly believe they would be such a good fit.

To address this issue, and enhance engagement of more business owners in the downtown, efforts should be made to strengthen the relationship between businesses, promoting an atmosphere of teamwork and cooperative spirit. Some meetings might be a combination of presentation and roundtable discussion, but every meeting should include sufficient time for a roundtable to encourage dialog among the businesses. Agenda topics can be decided by the group, but might include topics such as:

- Effective window displays (Camden's are usually excellent!)
- Whether and how to utilize social media such as Facebook or Twitter

- Working with the municipality to improve parking, street cleaning or other issues of concern
- Sources of financing
- Hours of operation (Remember the Magic Hour! 6:00-7:00 p.m.!)
- Upcoming events and promotions

By distributing and collecting an evaluation of every meeting, a space can be provided on the evaluation form asking for suggestions for future meeting topics. This would allow a business owner to ask for a sensitive topic to be addressed without having to reveal that the issue is of unique concern to them.

Business opening events are successful because they have access to a communication source and they know how to craft a public relations message (or spin) to help obtain the reaction they want. To achieve the most sizzle, the ER and Organization committees will want to join forces. Business openings and expansions should be big events with ribbon cuttings, food, press releases, photo-ops, etc. Take any and every opportunity to promote good things happening downtown! Think about entities that are successful in pushing an agenda or message.

Most downtowns, to be vibrant and economically successful, need a mix of ground floor retail and services with offices and apartments above. Think clustering: Keep your eyes open to complimentary businesses and their locations. The potential redevelopment of the vacant industrial building near offers exciting opportunities.

Utilize your new connections to the Maine Downtown Center’s resources (staff, Advisory Council, Senior Advisors, website, annual conference, Downtown Institute and the 29 other participating Main Street Maine and Maine Downtown Center communities.) Also, take advantage of your membership with the National Trust Main Street Center and tap into their vast online resources and listserve.

MDC ADVISORS COMMENTS ON ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING

Top Action Steps

1. Provide and encourage a “merchant forum” where they get together among themselves to share and get to know each other as supporters, not competitors. The merchants must be organized so they have a forum to talk about their problems and develop a group approach to promoting business in downtown Camden. Convene a meeting (like Bath’s Business Barometer) to encourage communication and trust building.
2. Conduct local intercept surveys on Main Street and from residents (including seasonal residents and maritime visitors) to learn from year-round and seasonal residents what they need/want from downtown and determine where they come from. This will garner support for your downtown efforts. This could also be partly accomplished with a survey questionnaire sent out with the Town’s tax bills.
3. Access to local food downtown is increasingly important to the downtown marketplace. Consider creating a winter location downtown for your local Farmers Market.

Important Excerpt from the Camden Downtown Master Plan

At the first community meeting held in January (2012), the top hope of the participants was to preserve Camden's quality of life. The top concern was jobs: good paying, year-round jobs. The downtown plays an important role as a job center. Job creation doesn't happen overnight. A community needs to have the necessary foundation in place to attract economic development and new investment. The Master Plan does include many recommendations on ways we can attract and increase employment opportunities which include providing incubator space for start-up businesses, fully using our creative economy assets, and recognizing the use of technology to connect us to the global economy.

We applaud the community of Camden for your leadership in becoming a Maine Downtown Network community.

We look forward to our continued relationship with you!



"My candle burns at both ends;
It will not last the night;
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends—
It gives a lovely light."

Edna St Vincent Millay