

# THE OREGON MAIN STREET NETWORK

*Bringing New Vitality  
to Our Historic  
Downtowns*

By Sheri Stuart



Oregon is rich in historic downtowns and traditional commercial neighborhoods in communities small and large. Downtown are the heart and soul of a city, an indicator of a community's economic health, quality of life, community pride, and reflects a town's heritage and history. Many have suffered years of decline, and helping them restore their vibrancy is vital to Oregon's economic future.

To that end, Oregon Main Street (OMS) was re-started by the Oregon Legislature in 2007 to help spark reinvestment and breathe new life into these districts. Today over 90 communities across the state are participating at some level in its tiered structure.

OMS is housed within Heritage Programs in Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. It is designed to assist the revitalization of traditional downtowns and historic commercial districts, promote economic development, and encourage historic preservation. OMS empowers local communities to develop their own comprehensive action plans based on a vision for where they want to be in 10 to 15-years.

Support comes in the form of resources and technical assistance based on the highly successful Main Street Approach™ (Organization, Promotion, Economic Vitality, and Design) developed by the National Main Street Center forty years ago, and used in thousands of communities across the country. This Four-Point Approach™ advocates a return to community self-reliance, local empowerment, and the rebuilding of central business districts based on their assets, unique architecture, personal service, local ownership, and entrepreneurship.

**Organization** involves getting everyone working toward the same goal and assembling the appropriate human and financial resources to implement a Main Street revitalization program. A governing board and project committees make up the fundamental organizational structure of the volunteer-driven program. Volunteers are coordinated and supported by a paid executive director.

**Promotion** forges a positive image of the commercial district and encourages consumers and investors to live, work, shop, play, and invest in the Main Street district. Advertising, media relations, retail promotional activity, special events and marketing campaigns carried out by local volunteers promote the district's unique characteristics.

**Design** means getting Main Street into top physical shape. Capitalizing on its best assets — such as historic buildings and pedestrian-oriented streets — is just part of the story. An inviting atmosphere, created through attractive window displays, well-managed parking areas, building improvements, street furniture, signs, sidewalks, lights and landscaping, conveys a positive visual message about the district and what it has to offer.

**Economic Vitality** strengthens a community's existing economic assets while expanding and diversifying its economic base. The Main Street program helps sharpen the competitiveness of existing business owners, helps to foster entrepreneurial start-ups and expansions, and recruits compatible new businesses and new economic uses to build a commercial district, create jobs, and respond to today's consumer. Converting unused or underused commercial space into economically productive property also helps boost the profitability and sales tax revenue of the district.

#### Historic Preservation = Economic Development

OMS collects quarterly data from the top two tiers in the network. Since 2010, these twenty communities have seen:

- \$112.1 million total private investment in physical improvements
- \$109.8 million total public sector investment in physical improvements
- 1,262 building improvement projects
- 644 net new businesses
- 151 business expansions
- 3,885 net new jobs
- 241,761 total volunteer hours

Plus, OMS has had two back-to-back "Great American Main Street" award winners: Downtown Oregon City Association (2018) and Alberta Main Street (2019).

Source: Restore Oregon's Field Notes Magazine. Fall 2020. Reprinted with Permission.



## Case Studies

### Klamath Falls

In 2008, a group of ambitious business people, property owners, and interested citizens saw an opportunity to enhance Klamath Falls' charming, historic downtown and formed the Klamath Falls Downtown Association (KFDA). Since its inception in 2009, KFDA has conducted numerous projects aimed at improving economic conditions, preserving historic assets, and promoting downtown Klamath Falls as a destination.

One of the key challenges for downtown was the vast number of vacant upper floor spaces. KFDA saw the opportunity to encourage and support upper floor residential development. They worked with the City and OMS on a series of workshops geared towards property owners to identify barriers and connect with resources. The big stumbling block was the need to add elevators for accessibility.

When funding became available through the Oregon Main Street Revitalization Grant in 2017, KFDA applied and received a \$100,000 grant to fund elevators for two buildings, which helped two housing projects move forward, resulting in 24 new housing units.

KFDA was the recipient of a second OMSRG in 2019 for another upper-floor housing project. The impact went beyond the housing units created. As Darin Rutledge, executive director of KFDA, stated, "This project will inspire others to explore the potential for upper level residential units in our unused spaces. The fact that these 4 apartments filled up in less than a week, during a virus-related economic shutdown is indicative of the severe need of quality rentals."

### Albany

Our Oregon Main Street Communities have been particularly resourceful and innovative during the pandemic. They have been on the ground working one-on-one with business owners, connecting them with the resources and information that they need to survive. And, they have been creative in developing marketing efforts such as Albany's Drive Up Downtown activity that both promoted restaurants that were available for take-out, and worked with the City to temporarily establish take-out parking spots to make it easy for customers to have no-contact meal pick-up.

### Beaverton

The City of Beaverton experienced rapid growth in the 1970s and 1980s spreading outward quickly, with large, suburban-style shopping centers, single-family homes, and widening roads to accommodate increasing car

traffic. As a result, Beaverton's traditional downtown remained underdeveloped and overlooked. The Beaverton Downtown Association (BDA) was formed in response to the community outcry for a vibrant downtown filled with shops, entertainment, housing and events, with activities 18 hours a day.

When BDA and OMS surveyed the community in 2017, community members used words like "potential", "emerging", "disjointed" and "undiscovered" to describe downtown. They said downtown Beaverton needed more nightlife, unique retail shops, restaurants and coffee shops, and updated storefronts. Currently, downtown Beaverton is in the midst of transforming into the vibrant downtown the community desires.

Thirteen new restaurants have opened downtown since the City of Beaverton launched an initiative in 2016 in partnership with the BDA to recruit new restaurants. During the pandemic, the City and BDA have worked to open outdoor seating in on-street parking spaces. It has been a lifeline for businesses during a time when they can't allow as many people in their stores. In addition, in 2019 BDA received a \$200,000 Oregon Main Street revitalization grant for improvements to the 1940 Nak Won building. This supports retention of five viable downtown businesses owned by people of color.

### Partnerships

One of the true strengths in Oregon is the willingness of different partners to support the work of others. This is certainly true for Oregon Main Street and some of our key partners, such as Restore Oregon. A great example is the Historic Theaters project. Historic theaters are part of a community's identity, provide gathering and performance spaces, and are a catalyst for economic development.

Restore Oregon conducted a series of regional workshops, hosted the League of Historic American Theaters regional conference in Oregon, and laid the foundation to enable Oregon Heritage to receive a \$615,000 historic theaters restoration grant from the National Park Service. Restore Oregon has supported the work of local Main Street organizations, including: development of the Preservation Toolkit; producing white papers on issues like unreinforced masonry buildings; advocating for more preservation incentives, and by giving threatened Main Street properties visibility on the Most Endangered Places list along with providing consultation, advocacy, and seed grants.

Sheri Stuart is the State Coordinator at Oregon Main Street. She has worked with Main Street communities for 30 years at the local, state, and national levels, including 11 of those here in Oregon. Photos courtesy of Sheri Stuart. All photos pre-COVID19 pandemic. 📸



2021

Date: January 2021

# OREGON MAIN STREET NETWORK PARTICIPANTS

Performing Main Street	Transforming Downtown	Exploring Downtown	Associate Community
<p>Albany Astoria Corvallis Estacada Klamath Falls La Grande McMinnville Oregon City Roseburg The Dalles</p> <p>Urban: Alberta District</p>	<p>Bandon Beaverton Carlton Coos Bay Cottage Grove Dallas Dayton Hillsboro Lebanon Milton-Freewater Newberg Pendleton Port Orford Tillamook</p>	<p>Amity Athena Baker City Banks Burns Cave Junction Chiloquin Coburg Coquille Enterprise Florence Forest Grove Gold Beach Harrisburg Hermiston Independence John Day Lakeview Lincoln City Medford Merrill Myrtle Creek Myrtle Point Oak Grove Oakridge Ontario Philomath Prineville Redmond Reedsport Salem Sheridan Sherwood St. Helens Stayton Sutherlin Tigard Union Wallowa Warrenton West Linn Woodburn Yamhill</p>	<p>Aumsville Aurora Bend Bonanza Canby Cornelius Donald Elkton Irrigon La Pine Malin Milwaukie Monmouth Moro Mosier North Plains Sandy Scappoose Silverton Sisters Stanfield Turner Veneta Weston Willamina</p>

# OREGON MAIN STREET REVITALIZATION GRANT

OREGON HERITAGE, OREGON PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT

---

## Basics:

- Funds are awarded to Main Street Network organizations – there are over 90 communities currently participating.
- The funds, which can come from any source, must be used to acquire, rehabilitate or construct buildings to facilitate community revitalization.
- At least 50 percent of the funds go to rural communities with population under 30,000 and outside of the Portland METRO Urban Growth Boundary.
- Three years to complete projects.



Central Hotel, Burns 2017 awarded project. Vacant for 40 years and now a hotel and two businesses.

## Timeline:

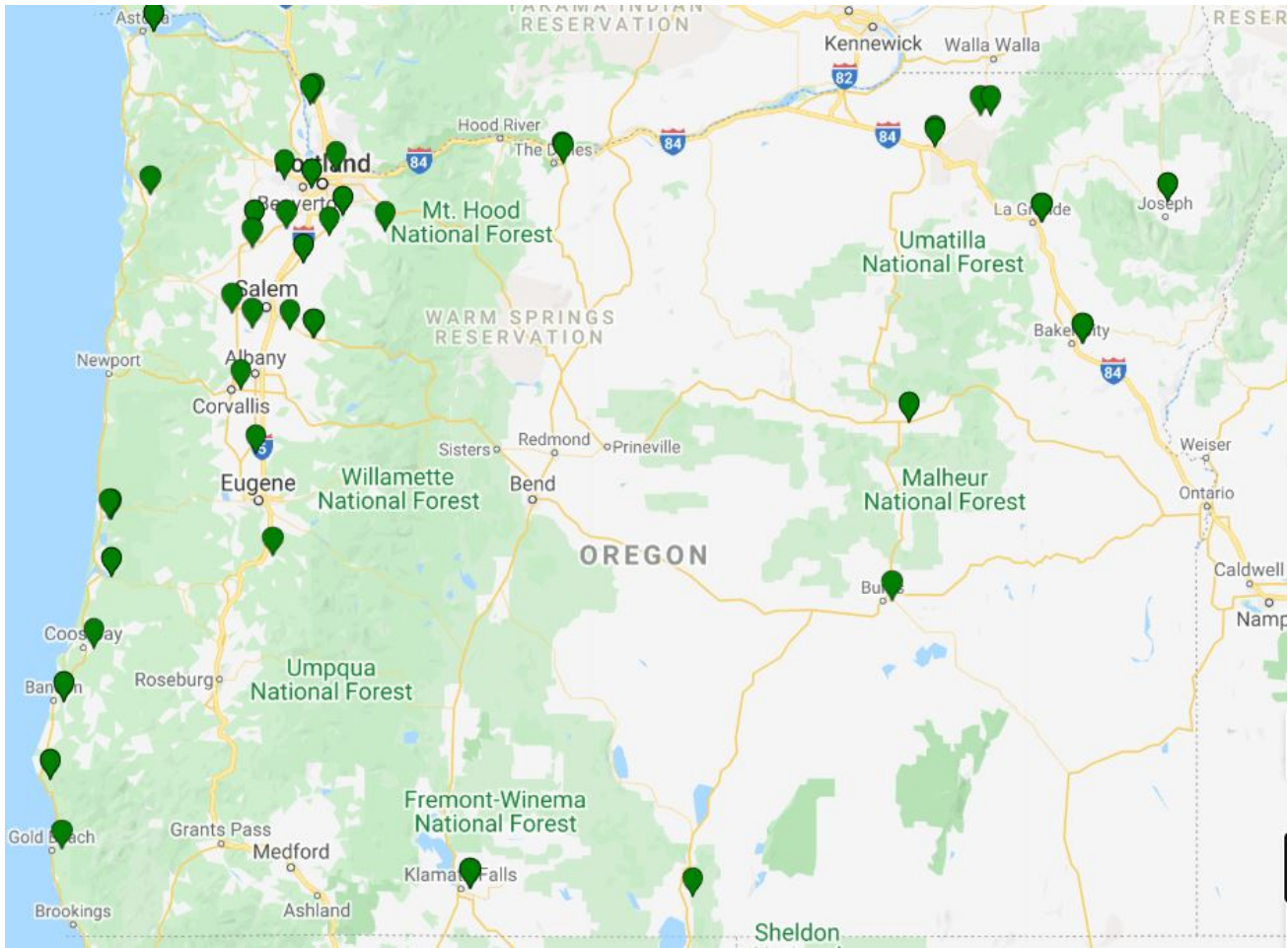
- 2015: Grant, fund and initial lottery bond funding (\$2,500,000) approved by the legislature.
- 2017: First grant round awarded. Second lottery bonding funding approved for \$5,000,000.
- 2019: Second grant round awarded. Third lottery bond funding approved for \$5,000,000.
- **2020: Due to COVID, sale of 2019 lottery bond package is canceled. Any source of dollars can replenish the fund. The 2021 grant cycle is on hold due to the lottery bond sale cancellation. 25-33 proposals were expected. See projects being planned on page 4.**



Celebrations in Lakeview and Reedsport!



## 2017 & 2019 Grant Award Information



2017 & 2019 award locations

	2017	2019
Total awarded	\$2,355,733	\$5,244,261*
Total matching source	\$3,023,531	\$4,713,101
Grants awarded	27 of 45, 60%	30 of 47, 64%
Number of grants	27 projects in 26 communities	30 grants in 30 communities
Award range	\$17,500-\$100,00	\$56,731 to \$200,000
Percent rural	80%	93%
Completed	20	4
Extended due to COVID-19	4	0
Canceled	2	0
*Amount from lottery bond sale \$5,000,000. Additional award from unawarded, canceled and underbudget grants from previous rounds. Award amount increased to up to \$200,000 from \$100,000.		



## Completed project impacts:

- 21 buildings improved
- 31 housing units added
- 12 lodging units added
- 7 documented inspired other improvements
- 3 properties purchased
- 4 vacant buildings filled
- 1 ADA improvement
- 1 new construction

## Combined impacts:

- Full restoration of several buildings, some decades vacant, including the Central Hotel in Burns, Merwyn Building in Astoria, Mills Garage in Independence, Au Franc Building in Port Orford, IOOF Building in La Grande.
- Creation of new or improved residential units including eleven new apartments in Coos Bay, six apartments and retail upgrades in Cottage Grove, two projects to support a total of 24 units in Klamath Falls, 40 new units in Astoria, four new apartments in Tillamook, renovation of five apartments in Reedsport, three new spaces in The Dalles, and 10-12 new units in Woodburn.
- Façade restorations including a model block program coordinated by Revitalize Downtown Stayton that includes improvements on seven of nine properties in downtown. Other facade improvements include the Litch Building in Enterprise, Riviera Building in Astoria, Railroad Avenue buildings and The Coin in Oregon City, Morris Miles & Co Building in Newberg, and Alberta district in Portland.
- Structural and roof repairs including five properties in Reedsport, two buildings in Baker City, the historic Masonic Building in Bandon, the Hill Theater (antique store) in Hillsboro, the Bungalow Theater & Museum building in Woodburn, and one building each in Dallas and Weston.
- Historic Theater acquisition and improvements including purchase of the Alger Theater in Lakeview, and improvements to the Liberty Theater in La Grande, Columbia Theater in St. Helens, OK Theatre in Enterprise, and Rivoli Theater in Pendleton.

## Community Comments on Results

Klamath Falls (2019 project) – “This project will inspire others to explore the potential for upper level residential units in our unused spaces. The fact that these 4 apartments filled up in less than a week, during a virus-related economic shutdown is indicative of the severe need of quality rentals.”

Astoria – “Three years after the renovation, the businesses housed in the Riviera Building are continuing their success. One space that was vacant momentarily has been filled.”

Burns – “property values are going up on our block. Our neighbors have made improvements to their buildings and businesses as well!”

Carlton – “The Tavern has now doubled in its number of employees.”



Florence – “The building’s value has increased compared to three years ago. It is believed that the building improvements have been part of that increase in value. Likewise, improvements to this building—especially the new sign, are believed to have improved pedestrian traffic.”

Pendleton – “This project has been an incredible precursor to some fantastic revitalization in our downtown. This has spurred many building owners to restore their facades and second-stories by showing how important and drastic this change can be in creating a better atmosphere downtown.”

Port Orford – “The project – dealing with a derelict property in the heart of Main Street has impacted the community greatly. A new business was built across the street. An empty commercial space diagonally across the street is now a business. The closed movie theater one-half block away is being renovated and more.”

## Projects that Communities Anticipated Applying for in the Canceled 2021 Grant Round

Bandon – “Now, this is devastating news! A lot of folks locally were seeing this as a big boost in our recovery.”

Astoria – The OMSRG has become a very important source of funding generating a lot of interest. Two projects under consideration are a housing project in the old State Hotel building or a block of facades for three buildings where businesses currently have to operate out of the back of the buildings.

La Grande – Elevator and building improvements for a 4-story building with activated ground floor but upper floors that have been vacant for years.

Klamath Falls – Complete building rehab project for a building that has been vacant for twenty years including developing ground floor retail and upper floor residential.

Oregon City – The restoration of a 120 year-old building that is currently bricked in and being used for back office space. Intent is to create space for retail use to activate the space and the street. The other high priority project is the build out for restaurant use a space that has been vacant for twenty years.

Beaverton – Helping with the restoration of the Bakery Block to activate commercial use while allowing for manufacturing on the other side.

Lebanon – Multiple buildings in the downtown are looking at creating or renovating upper floor housing including the old JC Penney building and the old Lebanon Hotel which could create 50 to 80 residential units.

Albany – Elevator to make vacant upper floor and basement levels accessible.

Ontario - The Lackey Building has new owners that are interested in putting apartments on the 2nd floor. Also, a former theater that has been empty for over 30 years has new owners who are interested in improving the building that has been gutted and will need major work.

The Dalles - They have many projects that will now be on hold including exterior upgrades and repairs for the Civic Auditorium and the Neon Sign Museum, as well as low-income upper floor housing in multiple buildings including ADA accessibility.

