The American Fork Main Street Vision includes specific recommendations for six districts:

1. “Meadows” Western Gateway District
2. Main Street Business District
3. Downtown Historic Core District
4. Transit Oriented Development (TOD) District
5. State Street Business District
6. Eastern Gateway District

Proposed Merchant Street pedestrian mall
Downtown Historic Core District

The Downtown Historic Core District lies between Pacific Dr, 200 West, 100 South and 100 East. This district is already identifiable and is the historic heart of the City. It hugs Main Street and has a number of historic structures that serve as strong attractions to the downtown.

Focus Items:

1. **Strengthen the image of the Historic Core District as the Heart of the City.**
   - Encourage preservation, restoration and reuse of historic buildings in this district to maintain historic image, feel, and scale.
   - Adopt strategies for infill development in this district that contributes to an appropriate level of density – buildings up to three stories that are situated in close relation to each other – to strengthen the street wall.
   - Create opportunities for pedestrian activity with infrastructure, features and elements within the historic core to support retail and business activity and to create a vibrant atmosphere.
   - Adopt policies and incentives to encourage the location of specialty retail stores, restaurants and professional services in the Historic Core district.
   - Explore opportunities for the locating of cultural facilities and community events in the historic district.

2. **Ensure that the Historic Core is a destination, while providing access to I-15 and neighboring communities.**
   - Utilize traffic calming strategies that reduce traffic speeds in the Historic Core.
   - Use measures to reduce vehicular – pedestrian conflict by introducing elements like traffic signals, wider sidewalks, street center medians and bollards.
   - Encourage on-street parking, where feasible, to animate the streets and to bring patrons closer to businesses.
   - Introduce infrastructure to support multiple transportation modes, such as bike lanes and dedicated bus lanes.
   - Utilize large bulb outs as opportunities for on-street dining, sales and dining.

Do's:

- Do limit building heights to one (1) to three (3) stories.
- Do use street furniture such as signs, street lamps, benches, and trash cans that will enhance the pedestrian experience in the Historic Core.
- Do create a strong historic character by a unified and consistent use of compatible and complementary building materials and elements.
- Do require set back range of zero (0) to five (5) feet.

Don’ts:

- Do not encourage high traffic speeds. Have appropriate speed limits (average of 22 – 25 mph) and have street design match the intended speed.
- Do not destroy historic buildings or fabric – these are an asset and provide a base of unique character for American Fork.
TOD District

The Transit Oriented Development (TOD) District is adjacent to the Historic Core district and is bordered by 300 East, 200 North and 100 South. This district will take advantage of being in a quarter (1/4) mile radius from a future TRAX / Bus station on Pacific Dr. The District will have higher intensity mixed use facilities and infrastructure to promote pedestrian activity.

Focus Items:

1. Develop and design the TOD district as a destination that serves the daily needs of residents and employees, and attracts visitors.
   - Provide mixed uses in the TOD district, including retail, office, entertainment and dining.
   - Expand the amount of housing in downtown American Fork, and provide a mix of high-quality housing opportunities for a variety of life cycle stages and age groups.
   - Promote higher density development in the district, to create a critical mass of people to support transit and mixed-use activities.

2. Make the transportation hub an effective point for transit related activity.
   - Ensure that there is safe, effective and efficient transfer of passengers to and through the TOD district, including improvements to rail crossings.
   - Allow for daily tasks to be conducted in the district with little or no automobile use.
   - Where the use of automobiles is necessary, provide adequate and effective parking opportunities.
   - Require the construction of safe pedestrian facilities.

Do's:

- Do encourage building heights of three (3) to five (5) stories.
- Do ensure that most mixed use multi-level buildings have first floor retail.
- Do introduce interesting building designs and elements, but ensure that these complement the historic character in the Historic Core district.
- Do provide community gathering spaces and an events or cultural center in the district.
- Do require set back range between zero (0) to ten (10) feet.
- Do consolidate surface parking, and introduce parking structures. Create shared driveways for adjacent buildings.

Don'ts:

- Do not place parking lots between buildings and major streets.
- Do not allow “big box” retailers in this district.
Eastern Gateway District

This district is located between 500 East and 1100 East and is roughly one block deep on either side of State Street. The District will serve as an eastern gateway into American Fork’s Downtown. The District will have a focus on office parks, medical/employment support, and infill development. The street will be developed into a boulevard to create an attractive entrance and emphasize its role as a gateway.

Focus Items:

1. Create a distinguished entry and eastern gateway corridor into American Fork’s downtown.
   - Develop State Street into a boulevard with a planted median and street trees.
   - Ensure that the boulevard creates a pleasant experience for the automobile user and the pedestrian, and still continues to serve as a major arterial for the community.
   - Utilize the wide existing right-of-way for frontage roads, dedicated bike paths, pedestrian walkways and transit corridors.
   - Explore the possibility of locating a future TRAX stop close to 1100 East.

2. Create an attractive business and retail environment along the boulevard, and expand the District’s role in providing local employment opportunities.
   - Encourage infill development on surface parking lots where feasible, to create a more unified development.
   - Develop a master plan for this district to tie together with the ongoing “Vintaro” development.
   - Capitalize on the existing nearby medical facility and office parks to create a business and employment center, and possibly a business incubator.
   - Encourage and increase the number of retail facilities that support the business environment. (copiers, restaurants, dry cleaners etc.)
   - Consider developing housing opportunities in the district to allow employees to live near their work.

Do's:

- Do use low maintenance trees, native plants and xeriscape for landscaping along the boulevard.
- Do limit development to three (3) stories.
- Require set back range of five (5) to 15 feet.
- Put include street infrastructure to make the boulevard pedestrian friendly.
- Do look for opportunities to tie open space development and trail systems into the gateway boulevard.

Don'ts:

- Do not allow new development to have large parking lots in front of buildings.
Main Street Business District

The Main Street Business District is bounded on the west by State Street and on the east by 200 W. Pacific Drive serves as the northern boundary and I-15 is the southern boundary. This district serves as a transition zone from the large scale retail Meadows area to the Historic Core area. The district currently has a number of small scale businesses and professional offices and this general mix is encouraged to continue and expand.

Focus Items:

1. **Reinforce the character of Main Street as a retail and business destination.**
   - Encourage infill development to create a continuous street wall.
   - Ensure that shops and businesses open up to the street with windows, entrances and displays to encourage pedestrian activity.
   - Consider a Main Street improvements program that addresses street elements such as trees, signage, lighting, sidewalks and landscaping.

2. **Make Main Street a Complete Street**
   - Ensure that automobile traffic moves efficiently through the district at appropriate speeds for safe pedestrian activity and business development.
   - Make Main Street an efficient conduit for multiple modes of transportation including transit and bicycles, as well as cars.
   - Consider a one-way couplet system through the Main Street to move traffic easily from west to east.
   - Encourage on-street parking, where appropriate, to bring patrons closer to businesses, to animate the streets, and provide a buffer for pedestrians.
   - Consider the provision of a planted median on Main Street to slow traffic and provide a sense of entrance to the City.

Do's:
- Do scale development to match existing architecture and character.
- Do limit development to three (3) stories.
- Do require setback range of five (5) to ten (10) feet.

Don'ts:
- Do not encourage high traffic speeds. Have appropriate speed limits and have street design match the intended speed.
“Meadows” Western Gateway District

The “Meadows” Western Gateway district serves as the western gateway to American Fork and is bounded on the West by I-15. The district is visible from I-15 and makes a visual statement about the City. State street serves as the eastern boundary of the district and Pacific Drive is the northern boundary. The district is currently dominated by big box retail stores and large surface parking lots, and serves as one of Utah County’s largest retail centers.

**Focus Items:**

1. **Redefine the Meadows area as an entry to American Fork.**
   - Develop a program of beautification that includes signage, lighting, architectural character, open space design and pedestrian infrastructure.
   - Consider an elaborate landscape program that will transform the district into a pleasant, beautiful and pedestrian friendly environment with parks, trails and waterbodies which will reinforce the “meadows” name and create a unique entry to American Fork.
   - Consider the introduction of a mixed business environment and housing in adjacent areas and vacant lots to increase to the number of nearby residents to support development in the district.

2. **Make the District accessible by multiple modes of transport.**
   - Introduce roadway improvements that support pedestrian activity and also efficiently move automobile traffic. These may include an I-15 flyover connection to commuter rail, streetscape improvements and landscaping.
   - Capitalize on the location of the future Front Runner station and the adjacent future TRAX line to introduce a mix of attractions and businesses.

**Do’s:**
- Do ensure that all surface parking lots have trees and plantings at regular intervals.
- Do encourage new developments to have building setbacks of no more that 30 feet.

**Don’ts:**
- Do not orient structures away from streets.
- Do not provide entryways to the building only from parking areas.
- Do not allow one-story strip development, although additional big box development may be appropriate.
**State Street Business District**

The State Street Business district is a transition between the Eastern Gateway District and the TOD District. It will have businesses that support the TOD and the employment centers in the Western Gateway District. The District should also include iconic structures that will serve as landmarks in the City and provide terminus to Main Street & State Street.

**Focus Items:**

1. *Create and enhance this district as a connection and focal point for all other districts.*
   - Capitalize on the jog on Main Street & State Street to create an iconic architectural landmark or feature.
   - Introduce traffic and street enhancement strategies that will make the street easier to navigate, and eliminate conflicts at intersections.
   - Install pedestrian infrastructure to increase walkability and access to businesses, where missing.
   - Encourage infill development on vacant and underutilized lots to create a continuous street wall and to encourage pedestrian activity.
   - Provide a mix of activity and businesses including housing opportunities in this District.

**Do’s:**

- Do require set back range of five (5) to ten (10) feet.
- Do encourage an iconic architectural structure that becomes a landmark for American Fork.
- Do ensure that there are pedestrian connections between the Western Gateway and the TOD Districts

**Don’ts:**

- Do not locate parking lots between the front of the building and the sidewalk. Locate parking in the rear; side parking may be allowed if appropriately buffered by landscaping.
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The economic development portion of this study focuses on answering the following questions:

- What types of business clusters and mix of uses should be encouraged on Main Street and in the immediately surrounding blocks?
- What is the appropriate role for Main Street?
- Where are potential areas for redevelopment? and
- How can the City finance and incentivize the preferred types of development?

In order to evaluate the economic development potential of the downtown area, the consultants completed the following tasks:

- Community survey of residents, business owners and property owners in the downtown area;
- Sales gap (“leakage”) analysis for American Fork City; sales trends analysis for the downtown area and surrounding areas;
- Interviews with local officials and business owners; and
- Business cluster and employment analysis.

The Vision Plan for American Fork - including land planning, transportation and economic development - identifies four major areas of concentration as follows:

- Prosperous
- Functional
- Beautiful
- Achievable

Economic development objectives have been discussed in the section labeled “Prosperous,” with financial incentives discussed in the section labeled “Achievable.”

PROSperous

Goal: Main Street is a dynamic, vibrant and walkable city center with a mix of residential, office and retail uses, including clusters of restaurants and specialty stores that draw people to the downtown area.

Main Street is the heart of the American Fork community. Its unique role is as a community gathering place – not as a major sales tax generator. Because of this, the scale of Main Street is smaller, more pedestrian-friendly. The 146 retail outlets on Main Street generate approximately $57 million in sales annually --- an average of over $390,000 per store. In comparison, the 90 outlets at the Meadows generate more than $356 million in sales annually – an average of nearly $4 million per store and more than ten times the average of the stores on Main Street. They are larger in size, have large parking lots near their stores, generate significant revenues, but lack the human scale of downtown.

Because American Fork is a strong regional retail destination, with good sales tax revenues, it is not dependent on Main Street to act as a major sales tax generator and it does not need large-
scale development to occur in that area. The capture rates shown in the following table show that American Fork is capturing 100 percent or more of the purchases made by its residents, indicating that people from outside of the area are coming to American Fork to do their shopping.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Capture Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building and Garden</td>
<td>377%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Merchandise</td>
<td>383%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Stores</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor Vehicle Dealers</td>
<td>325%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apparel &amp; Accessory</td>
<td>229%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furniture and Electronics</td>
<td>162%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating Places</td>
<td>189%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous Retail</td>
<td>121%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Services</td>
<td>174%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Services</td>
<td>130%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auto &amp; Misc. Repair</td>
<td>205%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment &amp; Amusement</td>
<td>136%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, within the larger categories shown above, there are several smaller subcategories that are not capturing a high percentage of purchases made by local residents. These areas are listed below and represent areas of economic development opportunity for Main Street:

- Specialty retail stores
  - Jewelry
  - Camera and photographic
  - Gift stores
  - Sewing and needlework
  - Music
  - Home furnishings
  - Electronics
- Restaurants
- Fitness/Day Spa

Main Street also needs to work on establishing business clusters – like types of businesses that gain synergy from being placed in close proximity to each other. Currently, Main Street is lacking in business clusters. Those businesses that currently predominate on Main Street are auto repair and fast food – neither of which need to be in close proximity to each other nor promote a pedestrian-friendly atmosphere in downtown.

In order to promote cluster development, the City needs to consider redevelopment of existing areas, and the creation of a Community Development Area (CDA) so that tax increment can be used to assist the desired types of development and to create appropriate infrastructure to attract these types of businesses.

Action Items:
- Identify specific geographic locations with redevelopment potential
  - Suggestions for business types in the historic district:
    - Restaurants
    - Specialty retail with a regional draw (fitness, food, music, camera, art, needlework, etc.)
Suggestions for incentives in CDA area:
- Rebate of sales tax revenues for a period of time for desired retail in CDA
- Assist with property renovation
- Assist with property aggregation or demolition of existing structures if necessary

Suggestions for key geographic locations where development incentives may be offered. Other areas should be considered as well:
- Near 100 East – North of Main Street
- Center Street to 100 West – North of Main Street
- Southwest corner of Main Street and Center Street

- Ensure that zoning regulations allow for commercial and residential uses in existing structures in the Main Street Business, Historic, and TOD Districts
- Identify a city destination center in the historic district and focus on redevelopment of this key area
- Encourage the development of business clusters in this area
- Encourage office development in the State Street and Eastern Gateway Business Districts

ACHIEVABLE

Goal: The Main Street Vision is implementable. A finance plan based on a variety of public/private partnerships and funding mechanisms will fund infrastructure and incentivize desired development types. Refined regulatory tools ensure new development contributes to the overall character of Main Street. Coordination with transportation agencies ensures harmony among local and regional plans.

In order to accelerate and facilitate the renovation of the downtown area, the City will likely need to provide some forms of public financial assistance. Potential funding mechanisms that work well in downtown renovation, along with the major characteristics of each funding source, include the following:

1. Creation of a Community Development Area (CDA)
   - Tax increment generated in the project area can be spent on projects within the area
   - No new taxes
   - Requires voluntary participation of the taxing entities
   - Local sales tax revenues can be included
   - In today's market, cannot obtain financing secured by tax increment, but tax increment can be used as a repayment source
   - Good tool for incentivizing desired business development types at specific locations

2. Special Assessment Area (SAA)
   - Annual assessment payments made by property owners based on assessment method (frontage, taxable value, acreage, etc.)
   - Assessment method tied to properties benefited
   - Used to fund essential infrastructure; can only be used for capital facilities
   - Requires the consent of at least 50% of the property owners to form an SAA
   - SAA funding is difficult in today's market

3. Revenue Bonds – Class C or Sales Tax
• Relatively easy to obtain financing
• No new revenues created; rather a diversion of existing revenues
• Class C road funds could be considered for roadway enhancements

4. Revolving Load Funds
• Low-interest loans available for façade renovation or business expansion in key areas
• Load funds must initially be capitalized by the City

5. Matching Grants
• 50 – 50 public/private investment for façade renovation; no repayment required

Action Items:
• Identify and create community development area (CDA)
  o General CDA boundaries to consider:
    ▪ 200 North to 200 South
    ▪ 500 West to about 600-700 East
• Prioritize projects and potential funding sources for each project
  o Potential incentives by development type include:
    ▪ Office – CDA tax increment to reduce infrastructure costs, acquire property, or to assist with parking
    ▪ Retail – CDA tax increment to assist with renovation or property acquisition costs; revolving loan funds or matching grants to assist with façade renovation
• Work with City to clarify policy regarding incentives that the City is willing to offer
• Issue an RFQ to developers describing city goals and incentives available for downtown development
American Fork Downtown: One-way vs. Two-way Streets

Below is a summary of some of the advantages and disadvantages of one-way and two-way streets. While there are positive and negative aspects for both one-way and two-way streets, some of the data gathered offer conflicting viewpoints. For example, both sides, those in favor of one-way streets and those in favor of two way streets, claim that their option is the safest.

In making the decision about choosing whether or not to convert to one-way streets, the city must first determine their overall goal. Is the goal to focus on the economic development of the downtown area or to move traffic through the city more efficiently? If economic development and improving businesses downtown is top priority then two-way streets may be better, but if traffic issues are of greater concern perhaps one-way streets are preferred. The following outlines some of these issues and compares the advantages and disadvantages of one-way and two-way streets.

Safety Issues:
- One way streets eliminate conflict points, meaning that there should be less pedestrian accidents. However, the opposing side argues the opposite that the motorist makes more turns on a one-way street increasing the possibility of conflict with pedestrians. They also claim that the increase in pedestrian accidents would potentially include an increase in accidents involving children.
- The higher speeds of one-way streets may be associated with a greater chance of pedestrian accidents.
- Evidence suggests pedestrians are hit more frequently after converting from one-way to two-way streets.
- A study in the 1930’s and 1970’s when cities switched to one-way streets said that the one-way streets had a 10-20% lower accident rate than two-way streets and pedestrian accidents decreased by 30-60%.
- One way streets simplify crossing for pedestrians; most conversions to one way streets result in decreases of pedestrian crashes.

Advantages of One-way Streets:
- Simplified traffic operations
- Can move up to 20-50% more cars
- Drivers can move at continuous speeds (with limited stopping)
- Less air pollution
- Some claim a positive effect on businesses on one-way streets because of increased traffic volumes
- One article claimed that one-way streets are good for longer commuting but that two-way streets are better for short trips to local downtown shops
- One-way streets create undesirable environmental influences in residential areas (pollution, dirt, noise, safety) that could potentially affect the demand and price of residential property. However, a case study actually concluded that property values increase on one way streets because of the increase in traffic volumes. Property values appreciated as a result of an increase in locational and advertising advantages and speculation. Traffic volume plays a large role in valuing residential properties.
Disadvantages of One-way Streets:
- One way streets tend to be faster which result in new problems
- High speeds reduce awareness of one’s surroundings, intimidate pedestrians, and divide the street into separate entities.
- There is the possibility that the motorist will drive too fast and pass their destination which will result in a loss of time and patience backtracking to their destination.
- Can be confusing (especially for visitors)
- Increase in some types of pedestrian accidents
- The increase in speed results in an increase in crash severity
- Can be difficult for emergency response routes
- Reduces exposure to businesses
- Increase in turning and total vehicle miles traveled
- Increase in traffic volumes on a given segment or intersection
- Most retailers prefer the exposure and accessibility located on two-way streets
  - Example: Vine Street, Cincinnati was converted to a one-way street. The article claims that later nearly 40 percent of the businesses located on the street closed. However, the area was economically depressed prior to the street change.
  - Some storefronts on one way streets may be eclipsed (out of view to motorists) – one article claimed that one side of every cross street will be partially eclipsed from view to motorists.
  - Fast and loud one-way streets often result in drivers and pedestrians being unable to describe the details of the streets they travel every day.

Advantages of Two-way Streets:
- Slower traffic speeds which means that motorists are more likely to see stores downtown and stop to shop.
- Less confusing
- Reduces travel time, fuel consumption and emissions
- Allow for direct emergency access
- Increased exposure for businesses
- Increased access to properties
- One article claimed that businesses on two-way streets have a comparatively elevated tax base, command stronger commercial rents and net higher real estate values than businesses on one-way streets.

Disadvantages of Two-way Streets:
- Slower “stop and go” traffic means more pollution from cars
- Increased traffic congestion
- Increased conflict points at intersections and increase in some types of crashes
- Narrow two-way streets might make it difficult for fire vehicles or other large vehicles to maneuver

Other Facts:
- One way streets are best in pairs: separated by no more than .25 miles.
Most towns that are reverting back to 2 way streets claim that it will allow for better local access to businesses and that it will slow traffic. Many of these towns are hoping that this change will aid in the economic development of their downtown area.

One article claimed traffic speeds were independent of one or two way streets because coordinated traffic signals can be set for desired speed, meaning one-way streets can be made manageable by keeping the traffic speeds slow.

The Impact Analysis for the City of Kelowna offered a methodology to determine the potential impacts on local businesses of conversion to a one-way street. (see page 25)
Top Ten Myths of Downtown Planning


By Philip L. Walker, AICP

The 1970s were an innovative era in design for many facets of American life, including clothing, hairstyles, architecture, and, yes, urban planning. By the early 1970s, a number of forces were already in full play, resulting in unparalleled residential and commercial growth in the suburbs and a steady spiral downward for many downtowns.

In a desperate attempt to turn that situation around, numerous downtowns across the country jumped onto the pedestrian mall bandwagon. In an effort to compete head-to-head with suburban shopping malls, these downtowns blocked off vehicular access on their primary retail streets in order to create open-air pedestrian malls.

Because the market forces that were causing the downtowns' downfall were much larger than the issue of vehicular access, these panic-stricken efforts, not surprisingly, did little to reverse the fortunes of these downtowns. In fact, in most cases, the "malling" of Main Street only exacerbated downtown's problems, resulting in a slow and painful death for many of them.

During the 1970s, Burlington, Iowa, then a town of 26,839 people, converted the block of Jefferson Street between Main and Third streets into a pedestrian mall. By the late 1990s, it was clear that the pedestrian mall was not helping businesses along that block, so the downtown organization, chamber of commerce, and business association pressured the city to reopen the block to automobiles.

Downtown Allentown, Pennsylvania, erected a canopy along Main Street on the same day that its first suburban mall opened, but it was recently dismantled and replaced with historic streetscape furnishings. Even major cities with seemingly critical masses in their downtowns, such as Louisville, Memphis, and Seattle, have undone their downtown pedestrian malls to reintroduce vehicular traffic.
These failed examples are not an indictment of all pedestrian malls. Some large downtowns, such as those in New York City and Baltimore, can support them. College towns, such as Charlottesville, Virginia, can support them. Those cities constituting both, such as Madison, Wisconsin, can clearly support a pedestrian mall, as evidenced by State Street.

However, because the "mauling" of Main Street resulted in failure for so many other communities across America, not to mention the tragedy of "urban renewal" programs that razed countless blocks of historic architecture, the 1970s are rarely recollected by most downtown advocates with any degree of nostalgia. In short, any downtown master plan proposing a pedestrian mall should be met with extreme scrutiny before receiving a stamp of approval.

The true essence of every downtown plan is a collection of ideas. The misinformed notions below are among those frequently voiced by citizens, sometimes voiced by elected officials, and occasionally voiced by professional planners and downtown "experts" who should know better. Many have some element of truth, but none is entirely accurate.

1. Our downtown just needs one "big ticket" development to turn things around.

Rarely does a "quick fix" really repair a downtown over the long haul. Developments such as sports facilities and casinos can vanish as quickly as they arrived, and even if they stick around, their novelty to the public may not.

Downtowns that have reversed their downward spirals to become success stories have typically done so incrementally, through numerous small steps over time. Most struggling downtowns did not reach their current conditions overnight, so turning them around overnight is unquestionably unrealistic.

2. Replacing some existing buildings with parking lots will bring more shoppers downtown.

Buildings are the most fundamental element of any downtown. Generally speaking, more buildings in a downtown — particularly occupied ones — are better than fewer buildings because the activities that occur inside them attract people and their money. People do not visit downtowns to park their cars.

Furthermore, in the case of historic or unique buildings, it is their character that helps make the downtown unique. While parking lots located interior to their blocks are necessary, those fronting directly onto streets create dead spaces along the streetscape and are visually unattractive. Parking is a challenging issue for most downtowns and one that must be addressed, but razing buildings is rarely the long-term solution.

3. Our strategy for revitalizing downtown should focus on retail.

Successful downtowns enjoy a rich mixture of diverse uses, including offices, housing, institutions, entertainment, and, yes, retail. However, a singular focus on retail is usually an ill-advised strategy, despite that fixation for so many downtown revitalization programs.

In fact, given its importance to most downtowns, housing is often the best bet of any component of downtown to
promote — though success with housing is frequently difficult to achieve. In addition to providing further market support to retail and other uses, residents make their downtown feel inhabited and safe, thereby attracting those living outside of downtown to visit for shopping, dining, cultural events, and other activities.

4. Attractive new brick sidewalks will bring more people downtown.

New sidewalks, as with streetscape improvements in general, are certainly useful in broadcasting a message that downtown is important to the community. As part of a comprehensive urban design strategy, they will sometimes even stimulate adjacent private development, which can indirectly attract more people to the downtown. However, very few people visit downtowns simply to enjoy their high-quality sidewalks, so their value must always be kept in perspective.

5. Downtown needs a large national department store to compete with the suburban malls.

Unless a downtown is large enough to enjoy the market support of thousands of people on any given day, in most cases time should not be wasted trying to recruit a national department store. National stores’ numeric criteria for trade-area employees, residents, and vehicular traffic, as well as sales volume potential per square foot, are typically too high for all but the largest downtowns to meet. Instead, most downtowns are better served by focusing on niche retailing that suburban malls are not filling, in addition to other uses such as offices, housing, and institutions.

This principle does not preclude targeting smaller stores that happen to be national chains or franchises, as a limited number of such tenants are usually desirable to supplement locally owned businesses. However, unique, independently owned stores are among the strongest draws for most downtowns.

6. On-street parking should be converted to another driving lane to improve traffic flows for the benefit of downtown.

The inability of vehicles to flow quickly through its streets is not the root of a downtown's problems. A lack of destinations to attract vehicles and their drivers to the downtown is more likely the challenge. On-street parking is important as a convenience to shoppers and diners, as a traffic calming device for drivers, and as a physical and psychological barrier protecting pedestrians from moving vehicles. The conversion of on-street parking to driving lanes simply results in faster moving traffic that makes downtowns less pedestrian-friendly and less business-friendly.

7. Existing one-way streets should be maintained for traffic flows that will benefit downtown.

Even more alarming than simply maintaining the status quo, some communities that are still stuck in a 1960s mindset will proactively contemplate the conversion of existing two-way streets into one-way couplets. One-way traffic is more beneficial to through traffic than it is to traffic for which downtown is the destination.

For most downtowns, one-way streets prove unnecessary and even counterproductive because they encourage speeding, limit the visibility of retailers, and are confusing to new visitors to downtown. Confused visitors can easily become irritated visitors, and irritated visitors may never return. From a traffic flow perspective, one-way streets create many of the same problems caused by the conversion of on-street parking into driving lanes, which, in turn, can generate the need for remedial traffic calming measures.

8. Downtown special events are a waste of time and money because few dollars are spent in businesses during the events and a great deal of preparation and cleanup
are required.

In most cases, special events are more important for their long-term benefits than for their short-term gains. Special events often attract some people who rarely or never frequent downtown, but their attendance at a downtown event makes them aware of businesses or activities that they might seek out at a later date.

Furthermore, a positive visitor experience during special events can reap tremendous future rewards, including word-of-mouth advertising. Given the relatively low costs of preparation and clean up, particularly if volunteers are mobilized, special events are a worthwhile form of promotion when strategically linked to the downtown's particular marketing strengths.

9. One of downtown's primary streets should be closed to traffic and converted into a pedestrian mall.

While that concept was in vogue during the 1970s, downtown experts are now recommending that these streets be transformed back to drivable ones. Most Americans are still, and might always be, too automobile dependent to completely abandon their cars. Pedestrian malls typically work only in downtowns that have a high resident or employee density, large volumes of tourism, or some other unique circumstance, such as an adjacent university.

10. Too many regulations will kill downtown's businesses.

Perhaps in theory it would be possible to regulate a downtown to death, but not in political reality. Politicians enacting a detrimental level of regulation would likely be voted out of office. Well-crafted and detailed codes, such as design standards for buildings and signs, might be considered overly stringent by some, but they can clearly elevate the quality of the built environment if used properly.

A physically and aesthetically enhanced downtown typically results in increased property values because of one simple principle: Real estate values are ultimately based upon the degree of a place's desirability. While the associated increased rents can result in some businesses having to relocate, they are usually replaced by more profitable ones.

Some of the most highly regulated downtown districts in America, such as Princeton's Palmer Square, Charleston's King Street, Cambridge's Harvard Square, and New Orleans's French Quarter, are also some of the most commercially successful. In fact, in 2005, the Old Town district in Alexandria, Virginia, added yet another regulatory layer to limit chain stores and ground-floor offices, yet its virtues as a fertile environment for prosperous businesses show no signs of abating.

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**Resources**