

# **Sweet Home Downtown Redevelopment Assessment Report**

prepared by

**Rural Development Initiatives Inc.  
Oregon Downtown Development Association**

March 14 and 15, 1994  
Sweet Home, Oregon

Edited by

Kate Joncas, Field Services Manager  
Jenny Wyss-Jones, Association Manager  
Oregon Downtown Development Association  
Mary Bosch, Strategic Planner  
Rural Development Initiatives Inc.

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## INTRODUCTION

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### Purpose of the Assessment

Rural Development Initiatives Inc. (RDI) and the Oregon Downtown Development Association (ODDA) are working together to provide an opportunity for Oregon communities to assess the potential of their downtown areas for redevelopment.

Communities selected to participate received a two day assessment visit by an assessment team made up of RDI and ODDA staff, and a summary assessment report. In addition, each participant will receive ODDA membership for one year, which will provide the community with access to ODDA's network of communities implementing downtown redevelopment projects, information and telephone consultation.

For communities that are prepared to make the investment necessary to more fully explore and develop a comprehensive redevelopment program – beyond the initial assessment – additional help may be available through RDI and ODDA.

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### Assessment Program Goals

The goals of the downtown redevelopment assessment are to:

1. Inform and educate communities which have identified downtown redevelopment in their strategic plan about the elements of a downtown redevelopment program, and the role of the downtown in an overall economic development program, and to show examples of how other other communities have successfully revitalized their downtowns;
2. Assess the community's current capacity to implement a long term downtown redevelopment strategy;
3. Identify issues and future opportunities for downtown redevelopment;
4. Determine for each community the steps required to implement a long term downtown redevelopment program, or to identify and prioritize a series of downtown projects.

This report presents the findings and conclusions of the joint RDI and ODDA Assessment Team visit to Sweet Home March 14 and 15, 1994. The visit was sponsored by the Sweet Home Chamber of Commerce and supported by citizens concerned about the downtown.

Working closely with Chamber of Commerce staff and volunteers, City officials and local leaders, the team toured the district, conducted interviews with approximately 30 people, and presented information at a public meeting. The conclusions and recommendations presented in this report are based on the information collected during these activities.

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## Assessment Team

The Assessment Team members were:

- **Kate Joncas.** Ms. Joncas is the Field Services Manager for ODDA.
- **Mary Bosch.** Ms. Bosch is a strategic planner for RDI.
- **Jenny Wyss-Jones.** Ms. Wyss-Jones is the Association Manager for ODDA.

This report has been compiled and edited by Kate Joncas and Jenny Wyss-Jones, and printed by the Oregon Downtown Development Association for Sweet Home. It represents the findings of the Assessment Team as determined during the March assessment visit.

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## The Main Street Approach to Downtown Revitalization

The Main Street Approach was developed by the National Main Street Center in 1980 to stimulate the revitalization of traditional commercial districts. There are now over 800 Main Street programs throughout the United States. The Oregon Downtown Development Association has successfully assisted Oregon communities in implementing this downtown revitalization process since 1982. The Main Street Approach incorporates the following elements:

Organization is the foundation upon which long term Main Street success is built. Downtown revitalization requires the cooperation and commitment of many volunteers and a broad based coalition of public and private groups, including businesses, property owners, civic associations, local government agencies, financial institutions and consumers.

Design deals with the visual quality of the commercial district. Main Street programs focus on improved design quality and encompass building facades, signs, public areas and amenities, traffic and circulation, parking, landscaping, roadways and alleys, merchandising and promotional materials.

Promotion projects aim to create a positive district image that will attract customers and investors and rekindle community pride. Festivals, retail sales and a unified image all serve to promote the positive changes taking place in the commercial district.

Economic Restructuring activities strengthen the commercial district's existing economic assets while diversifying its economic base. Main Street communities accomplish this by developing programs to retain and expand existing markets, recruiting new businesses to provide a balanced commercial mix, converting unused or underutilized space into income producing property and sharpening the entrepreneurial skills of commercial business people.

Sweet Home's downtown leaders should remember that while the "Main Street" methodology has a proven track record, some Main Street districts have failed in their mission. The reasons for failure have proven to be one or more of the following:

1. Failure of business and property owners, the community and city government to make a genuine and sincere commitment to the development of the district and to work together toward that goal;
2. Failure to fund and implement the position of a project manager responsible for coordinating each aspect of the commercial revitalization effort;
3. Failure to work in all four areas of the comprehensive Main Street Approach: Organization, Promotion, Design, and Economic Restructuring.

Each downtown has its own individual identity and subsequently, its own revitalization agenda. It is nonetheless imperative that the downtown revitalization program include a commitment to the comprehensive methodology of Main Street. Through the incremental implementation of the Main Street Approach assisted by this Assessment Team Report, Sweet Home's downtown will have its greatest chance of achieving the success that it desires.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

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The key conclusions of the assessment team are:

- Sweet Home must first achieve consensus on who will lead downtown projects, and who is responsible for their implementation. In Sweet Home, three organizations—the Chamber, the Sweet Home Economic Development Group (SHEDG), and the retail merchants' association—as well as the City, have been working on downtown projects. We recommend that SHEDG take on the leadership role in downtown projects, in cooperation with the other groups. SHEDG should not be responsible for implementing all projects, but should coordinate the activities of the other active organizations in Sweet Home.
- Efforts in downtown design—consistent and comprehensive efforts to improve downtown's image—will support the other recommended activities in organization, promotion and economic restructuring. Sweet Home has already made great strides in improving the look of the downtown. Still, it is important to continue to work on design and maintenance projects, since these efforts will affect the long-term image of downtown Sweet Home to residents, visitors and investors.
- SHEDG should hire a full-time economic development staff person, who should spend a portion of staff time on downtown revitalization. Because a comprehensive approach to downtown is so important, the community must invest in either half- or third-time staff to support downtown projects only. With several projects already on the workplans of SHEDG, the Chamber, and the retail merchants' association, volunteer resources for concentrating on downtown issues are limited.

When organizational resources are determined and design recommendations addressed, the community should prioritize the remaining short and long term recommendations. Several of the short term recommendations can be achieved this year, as long as the number and scope of the activities are carefully tailored to the available resources.

This report should be reviewed by SHEDG, the Chamber, the retail merchants' association and other appropriate stakeholders.

### Recommendations

ORGANIZATION	
Short term	Long Term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>SHEDG should take on the leadership of downtown projects, in cooperation with the Chamber, the City and the retail merchants' association.</i></li> <li>• <i>Promote downtown successes by developing a formal action plan listing each success, objectives and volunteers.</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Form a downtown revitalization board and hire a full-time manager.</i></li> </ul>

Recommendations (cont.)

ORGANIZATION (CONT.)	
Short-term	Long-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hire a <i>full-time economic development staff person, devoting up to half-time on downtown</i>, to provide staff support to volunteers.</li> </ul>	
ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING	
Short-term	Long-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct a <i>Business Owner Survey</i> to find out the current customer base and perception of the downtown.</li> <li>• Downtown should be the focus of SHEDG's <i>business assistance program</i>.</li> <li>• Distribute <i>demographic information</i> for the Sweet Home trade area to local businesses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct further <i>market research</i> by surveying downtown workers and other consumers.</li> <li>• Diversify the <b>business mix</b> by identifying expansion opportunities in existing businesses.</li> <li>• <i>Encourage all retail stores to locate in the retail core</i>, rather than on the edges of town, to promote pedestrian activity downtown.</li> </ul>
PROMOTION	
Short-term	Long-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify a <i>lead organization</i> to coordinate promotional efforts and promote a consistent image of downtown.</li> <li>• Plan a "fun and safe" <i>downtown trick or treating event</i> for children.</li> <li>• Develop and distribute a simple <i>business directory</i> listing all businesses in downtown.</li> <li>• <i>Work with the Oregon Jamboree to plan tie-in events downtown</i>.</li> <li>• Plan an <i>Open House event at Christmas</i> for downtown businesses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All downtown stakeholders should meet to <i>identify an image</i> to promote downtown to visitors and local shoppers.</li> <li>• Produce a <i>walking tour brochure of the murals</i>, when the mural project is completed.</li> <li>• <i>Install an additional information kiosk at the Foster Lake and Green Peter Lake Recreation Areas</i>, including downtown business directories and maps.</li> <li>• Expand the <i>Rock and Quilt Show</i> event to downtown through a partnership with downtown businesses.</li> </ul>
DESIGN	
Short-term	Long-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Revise the sign code</i> to offer clear guidelines.</li> <li>• <i>Redesign the facade loan program</i> so that it can be used for small grants.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Provide a buffer for pedestrians when developing left turn lanes</i>.</li> <li>• Continue with the <i>mural project</i>.</li> </ul>

## Recommendations (cont.)

DESIGN (CONT.)	
Short-term	Long-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Continue to promote the <i>design theme</i> developed by Cameron and McCarthy.</li><li>• Develop a <i>map of existing parking</i> and identify vacant lots for potential parking downtown.</li><li>• Continue to <i>encourage downtown property owners to do maintenance</i> and keep their buildings neat and clean.</li><li>• <i>Dress up vacant spaces</i> by putting in window displays.</li><li>• Continue <i>streetscape improvements</i> downtown.</li><li>• <i>Reduce vandalism</i> through cooperation with the Police Department and local high school students.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Develop a parking strategy</i>, addressing RV parking and directional signs.</li><li>• <i>Improve window displays</i> through seminars and one on one consultations.</li></ul>

## ISSUES, OPPORTUNITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to better define its downtown development program needs, the community should first have a clear understanding of the issues and opportunities in the downtown. As noted previously, a key principle of the Main Street Approach is that a town should recognize and build upon its assets. This allows the revitalization program to establish a strong foundation for its efforts.

The Team's recommendations are structured along the four points of the Main Street Approach. The following pages present each point in order, beginning with the Issues and Opportunities observed in that area, and followed by Short Term and Long Term Recommendations. It is expected that the Short Term Recommendations will be implemented within the next year; the Long Term Recommendations require a greater commitment of time and resources.

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### Organization

#### Issues

There is no recognized leader for downtown development in Sweet Home, although several organizations have taken responsibility for different activities downtown.

The Chamber of Commerce has a broad constituency and many demands on its limited resources. It does not have the ability to consistently make the downtown a priority. On the other hand, the retail merchants' association does not represent a cross-section of downtown stakeholders. The City cannot take on leadership of a downtown program without support from the business community.

#### Opportunities

The Sweet Home Economic Development Group (SHEDG) has a track record in economic development generally, and has been responsible for successful downtown projects. SHEDG's credibility should allow it to make strides in downtown development.

The downtown has experienced many successes in the past two years. Buildings are better maintained and presented, several vacant lots have been cleaned up, one mural has been painted (with plans for more), and there is greater cooperation among merchants, the Chamber and the City than ever before. The Oregon Jamboree has renewed pride in the community. It is a good time to build on these successes with an expanded downtown development agenda.

SHEDG's very successful event, the Oregon Jamboree has gained more and more volunteer support. In its third year, it expects to involve 350 volunteers. With such a strong base of support for this event, SHEDG might interest these volunteers in taking on other projects in the downtown.

The Jamboree has also been a source of revenue for SHEDG projects; some of these funds should be directed toward an economic development/downtown development staff position.

Although different groups do not always work in tandem on community projects, there are several competent organizations—the Chamber, SHEDG, the City and the retail

merchants' association—which have invested their time and resources in the downtown. These organizations all have a contribution to make to downtown and should pool their energies for greater effectiveness.

### Short Term Recommendations

#### **Lead Organization**

There are several organizations working on downtown projects, and although each group is doing important work, they could be much more effective if their activities were coordinated.

SHEDG seems best positioned to take on leadership of many of the recommended projects. SHEDG, in cooperation with the Chamber, the City and the merchants' association, should take the lead in coordinating and implementing projects. Then, each group can be assigned projects under the guidance of SHEDG.

#### **Promote success**

There have been a lot of successes in the past two years, but they are not documented and celebrated. A formal action plan could adapt a format like the La Grande Action Plan which lists past successes, current objectives and current volunteers. La Grande's Plan is their most successful communication and fundraising tool.

#### **Hire an economic development staff person**

The list of projects in SHEDG's work plan is long enough and complex enough that SHEDG and the community would receive a big return for money invested in an economic development staff person. The staff person could spend one-third to one-half of their time devoted to downtown projects. Sources of funds for the position might include revenue from the Oregon Jamboree, membership support from business and property owners in Sweet Home, and corporate grants and donations, among others.

### Long Term Recommendations

#### **Form a downtown revitalization board and hire a full-time downtown manager**

The most effective downtown revitalization programs have a governing board and full-time staff. A special downtown revitalization board should be formed under SHEDG or the Chamber to manage the downtown program. A board would develop a mission, set priorities and a workplan, hire and work with a manager, and would monitor the results of a downtown program. Communities have found that the amount of money invested in salary is more than recouped in increased sales and property values, not to mention increased community pride as buildings are renovated and vacancies filled. The manager should be the day to day organizer of the priorities set by the board.

Funds for a manager salary and expenses of a downtown program could be derived from membership support from business and property owners, an economic improvement district, a business license fee, corporate donations, city general fund contributions, event revenue and other sources.

When Sweet Home is ready to implement a full-time staffed downtown program, they should work with ODDA and RDI in developing a workplan and timeline.

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## Economic Restructuring

### Issues

Interviewees commented that the business practices downtown—for example, return policies and store hours—are not uniform throughout the business district. There was also concern that many downtown employees are not knowledgeable about area attractions and resources, and did not know how to respond to the needs of tourists.

While some business development workshops have been put on by the chamber, there seems to have been little interest or follow-through by downtown businesses. On-going business support is needed to gain the trust and cooperation of downtown merchants.

Existing businesses need assistance on current market opportunities and marketing strategies. For instance, several interviewees mentioned growth in retirees and out-of-staters in the area. No one has analyzed the potential of these markets for local business.

A few owners of downtown buildings are not investing in maintenance. Some of their buildings are in poor condition, suffering from deferred maintenance and lack of updating. They detract from the overall condition of the downtown.

### Opportunities

There is an existing cluster of specialty retail in the retail core, on Main and Long Streets, to expand and build upon—such as Periwinkle Provisions, Moondance Gallery, the Grey Goose, and the two flower shops.

A partnership with the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at Linn-Benton Community College has already been initiated through retail workshops presented by Kent Smith. Kent Smith has begun to establish a relationship with some business owners downtown.

Although several interviewees expressed a need for the availability of certain basic products and services downtown, some stores have already taken advantage of expansion opportunities, such as the addition of frames and framing at Epps' Furniture, and the "coffee corner" at the Feed and Seed store.

Both the local and area tourist markets are large and growing. Sweet Home's population was nearly 7000 in 1990. The Oregon Jamboree, still in its infancy, is expected to attract 30,000 visitors in 1994. Foster and Green Peter Reservoirs, just east of Sweet Home, had a combined total use of nearly 900,000 visitor days in 1993.

### Short Term Recommendations

#### **Business Owner Survey**

Survey business owners to find out their current customer base and perception of the business district. This will help to determine priorities for the business development program and strategies for business assistance.

### **Focus Business Assistance Program on Downtown**

SHEDG's Business Assistance Program should emphasize assistance to downtown businesses, covering topics such as merchandising and customer service. Potential options are workshops followed by one-on-one consultations for individual businesses in their stores or a "video lunch" series as Baker City has done. Continue to build on the relationship already established with the SBDC. Businesses may need to be personally contacted on a regular basis to build trust and awareness of SBDC services.

### **Market Demographics**

Pacific Power and various government agencies have demographic information on the Sweet Home trade area, which includes Lebanon, Brownsville and Sweet Home. The Chamber could get this data and make it available to members through the newsletter, although it should be shared with all businesses. The data will be helpful with target marketing, product and service orientation, and the development of new business opportunities.

### Long Term Recommendations

#### **Market Research**

Survey downtown workers and other consumers to determine their needs and perception of the business district. This will help in prioritizing which businesses to recruit and which existing services to strengthen.

#### **Business Mix**

The market opportunities for Sweet Home appear to be in convenience goods (grocery, pharmacy, and services and restaurant, things people buy close to home) not in comparison shopping (apparel, shoes and things you commonly find at the shopping mall). Through the survey research, expansion opportunities may be identified for existing businesses in needed items. For example, children's clothes could become a stronger product line at Seamingly Creative, or office supplies could be added at one of the drug stores or the print shop.

#### **Retail Clustering**

Encourage all retail stores to locate in the retail core and not out on the edges of town. This will help to build the retail shopping density, promoting pedestrian activity. In general, specialty retail should be encouraged downtown, and specifically, more businesses with an arts and crafts orientation. This strategy also reinforces the recommendations from the recent tourism assessment that retail seek to attract area visitors.

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## **Promotion**

### Issues

The business district is large, encompassing several miles and two major streets (Main and Long Streets). Several of those interviewed were concerned that it is difficult to unify and promote the downtown as a district because it is so amorphous.

While the Chamber has a listing of its members, there is no comprehensive directory of downtown businesses, and no strategy for distributing the directory to promote downtown businesses to local shoppers and visitors.

Because several organizations are engaged in doing events in and around the downtown core with limited coordination among them, it is difficult to promote a specific image of downtown.

While several successful events are being held throughout the year, the calendar of events could be enhanced with more retail promotions. There is also no large-scale holiday retail event during the fall and winter.

### Opportunities

The Oregon Jamboree has been a great success and is a source of local pride. The visitors to the Jamboree offer an excellent "captive market" for downtown services and a good overall marketing opportunity for downtown.

Several good events which already take place, at least in part, downtown—like the Jamboree, the Sportsman's Holiday, the Rock and Quilt Show, and Christmas in Sweet Home—offer an opportunity to showcase businesses downtown. These events provide a good foundation for a year-round promotional calendar.

Students from the local high school have already participated in one downtown project—the Moondance mural—and more opportunities exist through participation in the Sweet Home Business Education Partnership. Students could be a volunteer resource for downtown events or local clean-up projects.

Sweet Home has already attracted interest from Volksmarch groups which organize walks through the community. Downtown events done in conjunction with the walks could capitalize on these visitors to Sweet Home.

Several retailers are very motivated to invest their time and creativity in promoting the downtown and could be the catalyst for more active involvement of the downtown merchants over the long term.

There are already a number of tourist and visitor attractions in or near the downtown, including the museum, the mural, the covered bridge and Foster Lake further out.

### Short Term Recommendations

#### **Lead Organization**

It is important to coordinate promotional efforts among different organizations, to project a consistent image of downtown. These promotion recommendations should be implemented through SHEDG as the lead downtown organization. This does not preclude other organizations from taking part in downtown events, but promotions should be centrally coordinated to assure the best chance for success. By projecting to the public that Sweet Home's leaders are working together to keep downtown a vital, attractive place, the message will be better conveyed to visitors to the community.

#### **Halloween**

Make Halloween a downtown/community event by having safe downtown trick-or-treating for Sweet Home's children. Involve the high school by finding a club that would help to organize and supervise the event. In Albany, the leadership class at the local high school now completely develops and runs the downtown Petting Zoo event every year, while

in La Grande, a committee from Eastern Oregon State College has successfully produced the downtown trick-or-treating event.

#### **Business Directory**

The Chamber has a business directory, but in order to be most useful to visitors, a directory should include every business in town, not just Chamber members. Develop a simple business directory that lists all of the businesses in the downtown. Include a simple map and information about parking and historic sites. Try to complete it by the Jamboree to distribute to attendees, and have it available at the Chamber of Commerce, in businesses, at City Hall and other prominent locations. SHEDG would be in the best position to produce a comprehensive directory and map. ODDA has many examples of directories and historic walking tours on file.

#### **Jamboree Tie-in Events**

Develop at least one program in downtown for Jamboree attendees. If the schedule will accommodate, hold it during the morning and early afternoon while people are waiting for the music. Interviewees suggested events for children, like pony rides, story telling, crafters' booths, and history events at the museum. Also suggested were a business open house, a coupon book and extended business hours.

A SHEDG task force should be set up to coordinate downtown events with Jamboree planning. The task force should focus on doing one or two activities, and doing them well, for this first year.

#### **Open House at Christmas**

Businesses should consider a Christmas promotion such as an open house at Christmas time with carolers, and hot chocolate and Christmas treats in the stores. This promotion could be planned in conjunction with the parade or lighting ceremony during Christmas in Sweet Home.

#### Long Term Recommendations

##### **Image planning/Values identification**

The downtown group should meet with other stakeholders to clearly identify an image—or marketing theme—for downtown. For example, downtown Albany has successfully promoted itself as a charming Victorian city and antiques center, counteracting its formerly negative image as a smelly mill town.

One way to approach the identification of an image is to hold a series of town meetings to discuss community values. SHEDG could sponsor several Town Hall meetings for residents, property owners and business owners, conducted by ODDA facilitators. The purpose of the meetings is to identify common values of the community, to prioritize those values and to gain consensus for support of the values which serve as a basis for the image the community wants to project. Once an image is determined, it can be sold consistently through an image campaign.

##### **Walking Tour Brochure of Murals**

When the mural project is complete, a walking tour brochure should be developed. This might be combined with the business directory, the way Albany combines historic information with a business directory.

### Foster Lake Information Kiosk

Update the existing information kiosk and install an additional kiosk at the Foster Lake and Green Peter Lake Recreation Areas. This is one possible way for the downtown to capitalize on tourists and visitors to the area, as identified in the tourism assessment. The kiosk could hold a downtown map, business directory, walking tour brochure and other information about downtown businesses. The lake receives frequent use in the summer and visitors would be more likely to visit downtown if they could get information easily at the lake. Funding may be available for the project from the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Army Corps of Engineers or the Parks Service.

### Rock and Quilt Show

This popular event attracts many participants to the area. It could be made more festive, and attract visitors to the stores if the businesses participated with special window displays. For example, the winners of a juried quilt show could be displayed in the stores or in the windows, or displays on rocks and crystals could be used. Also, food booths provided by downtown restaurants, churches or community organizations could be set up at the show.

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## Design

### Issues

Although a number of buildings have been cleaned up and painted in the last few years, there are still several severely deteriorated buildings in the downtown core.

Vacant retail spaces and lots are not well-maintained and present an unwelcoming image. Even some occupied spaces look closed or unfriendly, due to curtains covering the windows or because of tired, dirty window displays.

Due to perceptions about the difficulty of applying for the program, the no-interest loan program is not being used for design improvements.

There is a limited awareness of the design theme recommended by Cameron and McCarthy, which emphasizes the original historic character and appearance of buildings.

The district suffers from the presence of incompatible or inappropriate signs. There are no consistent design guidelines being implemented downtown, and several merchants expressed frustration at what they saw as inconsistent enforcement of the sign code, and an inability to obtain useful information about appropriate signs.

There is a perception that parking is difficult, especially for recreational vehicles. It is difficult to identify parking aside from spaces on the Main Street.

Vandalism to downtown buildings and street furniture is an ongoing problem.

With so few turn lanes on Main Street, accessibility to businesses on both sides of the street is limited. In addition, Long Street is not well-identified so that most visitors overlook that part of the business district; there is a need to tie in Long Street with Main Street in the downtown.

## Opportunities

Improvements to the visual quality of downtown have been progressing steadily, with several storefronts painted and vacant lots cleaned up, and plans for street trees, median improvements and the addition of flower pots. Momentum and the high degree of interest generated by these improvements presents a window of opportunity for further design projects.

Although the low-interest loan program has not been as successful as was hoped, there are funds available to do design improvements.

The mural project is progressing nicely, with one mural completed and another nearly finished. A \$10,000 grant for downtown murals was recently awarded by the Oregon Tourism Division, and private funds for murals have also been offered.

A number of vacant lots on or near Main Street exist for possible development into parking facilities.

## Short Term Recommendations

### **Revise the Sign Code**

The sign code should be revised so that it is clearer and provides guidelines for appropriate signs. The City could contract with ODDA for assistance in writing guidelines and revising the code. ODDA also has examples of sign ordinances, design guidelines, and appropriate uses of signs for the city to use as a guide.

### **Redesign Facade Loan Program**

Consider redesigning the loan program to allow for grants. Require that the grants be matched at least one to one with private dollars (or in-kind donations like contract labor or materials) and target sign replacement. This should stimulate more immediate visual changes along the street. A suggested grant amount is \$500 to \$1,000. Provide design assistance and require design approval for sign designs to encourage high quality results. Also, identify owners of buildings in poor condition and encourage them to make use of the loan program.

### **Design Theme**

Continue to follow the recommendations of the Cameron and McCarthy architects to focus on your real history, not a fake design theme. Work with what you have, consult historic photos when renovating buildings to bring them back to their original design. When there is an opportunity for new construction, the building should look modern, be high quality and complement the scale and style of existing buildings.

The Cameron and McCarthy design theme should be re-publicized through an organized public relations campaign, and in the Chamber newsletter, public meetings, design workshops and the local media.

### **Parking**

A good map locating all existing parking and vacant lots is needed as the first step to developing a parking strategy. The map could be incorporated into the business directory or walking tour map. The high school drafting class may be able to take this on as a project if City Engineering does not have time.

### **Maintenance and Neat Appearance**

The City has been very successful at encouraging property owners to clean up their property, although work still needs to be done. Keep the pressure on. Even if full renovations cannot be done at the current time, it is important to keep the appearance of downtown structures neat and attractive.

### **Dress Up Vacant Spaces**

Put up window displays in vacant retail spaces. Encourage students to display art work in the windows (which could be rotated from week to week with different schools contributing), offer the space to local non-profit groups, or rent the display area to nearby businesses. In Salem, the windows of the vacant downtown department store are consistently and attractively filled by volunteers and local businesses.

### **Streetscape Improvements**

The community has made excellent progress on improving the visual quality of downtown, planting flowers and purchasing flower pots. These types of improvements make a big difference in encouraging pedestrian activity, and we recommend the community push ahead with the flowers, garbage cans, benches, the median improvements and hanging flower baskets. Make sure to maintain the existing street trees and to plant others.

### **Vandalism**

There are several things that can be done to reduce vandalism:

- √ encourage business owners to keep their window and outside lights on (timers are effective) until 11:00 or 12:00.
- √ work with the Police Department to set up a business watch program.
- √ encourage the Police Department to cruise the business district routinely at night.
- √ involve high school students in an anti-vandalism or clean-up program.

### Long Term Recommendations

#### **Left Turn Lanes**

Eventually, when left turn lanes are developed, it is very important to provide a buffer between the pedestrians on the sidewalk and the traffic in downtown. Without a line of parked cars or a planted easement strip, pedestrians will not walk along Highway 20. Whatever design option is chosen, require a pedestrian buffer. This should be a non-negotiable requirement.

#### **Murals**

This is a great project, especially for Sweet Home, because although the buildings are handsome, they are not fancy. Murals will dress up the business district with beauty.

#### **Parking**

Develop a comprehensive parking strategy. Study elements should include overall parking supply and demand, RV parking, a map with parking identified (in the business directory), and attractive and visible directional signs. If additional parking lots are needed, work with private owners. One option could be for private owners to lease their land to the City for a nominal fee in exchange for surface improvements and insurance coverage by the City. ODDA has examples of parking plans in its resource files.

### **Improve Window Displays**

Education is needed to improve window displays and to project a clear image of the businesses in downtown. A window display or marketing consultant could meet with business owners one on one to focus on window displays and appearance of retail businesses, inside and out.

## MEASURES OF SUCCESS

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The true success of a downtown management program must be measured in both *quantifiable* and *qualifiable* terms. Quality of life issues such as investor confidence and community pride are just as important as dollars invested and jobs created.

In fact, in the first years of a program the intangibles are often more apparent and stronger indicators of future success. Changes in investor and consumer attitudes will later be reflected in the dollars expended and invested in the downtown. This must be understood and emphasized to funders who are likely to make judgements based only on economic data.

A strong downtown management program should be measured by:

- Volunteer leadership
- Volunteer commitment
- Staff commitment
- Broad based support
- Effectiveness of its outreach
- Clarity of vision

Given these factors, quantifiable results should also be considered:

- Net gain in jobs
- Net gain in businesses
- Business expansions
- Private dollars invested
- Public dollars invested
- Numbers of rehabilitations

Together these factors will give an indication of the downtown management program's strengths and ultimate success.

# COMMUNITY LIVABILITY ASSESSMENT

prepared for

RDI's Rural Futures Forum

as part of its training module on

**Quality of Life**

by the Oregon Downtown Development Association  
a division of Livable Oregon, Inc.

**L**ong-term community vitality depends on people working together to develop both a sustainable place and activities that engage citizens in the community. We must nurture *local leaders* and *independent entrepreneurs*. Those people must shape sustainable places of *focused development* with a *community sense of place*. And, they must promote activities that involve residents in the community through *mixed land uses* and a *vital street life*.

The following set of Livable Community attributes and action steps will help you stimulate and measure your community's progress toward these attributes.

**People**

**Local Leadership**

Local leaders with a vested interest in community vitality.

Local leadership is covered elsewhere in the Rural Futures Forum.

**Independent Enterprise**

Individual enterprise means locally vested entrepreneurs who have a stake beyond short-term profits and reinvestment. They have a stake in the community's schools, roads, libraries, and other community services.

Independent enterprise is covered elsewhere in the Rural Futures Forum.

**Adequate Affordable Housing**

Housing available for a variety of age groups, income levels and lifestyles.

Measures of adequate affordable housing include:

- Adequate rental housing is available and affordable to families with below average incomes.

EXISTING SITUATION:    excellent    mixed    poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

- Quality housing is available for families with average or better incomes.

EXISTING SITUATION:    excellent    mixed    poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Dependent Care**

Facilities and services to care for those who cannot care for themselves.

Measures of dependent care include:

- Child care is available and affordable for working families.

EXISTING SITUATION:    excellent    mixed    poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

- Elder care is available and affordable for working families.

EXISTING SITUATION:    excellent    mixed    poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

- Adequate facilities are available to care for the physically and mentally disabled.

EXISTING SITUATION:    excellent    mixed    poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

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° \_\_\_\_\_

**Health Care**

Access to primary care.

Measures of health care include:

- Residents have adequate access to mid-level health care practitioners such as a physician's assistant or nurse practitioner.

EXISTING SITUATION:    excellent    mixed    poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

° \_\_\_\_\_

° \_\_\_\_\_

- Residents have adequate access to a primary care physician.

EXISTING SITUATION:    excellent    mixed    poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

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° \_\_\_\_\_

- Residents have adequate access to medical specialists.

EXISTING SITUATION:    excellent    mixed    poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

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° \_\_\_\_\_

- Residents have adequate access to a hospital.

EXISTING SITUATION:    excellent    mixed    poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

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° \_\_\_\_\_

**Places**

**Focused Development**

If spread-out development creates problems for the environment, for communities, for public services and for citizenship, focused development offers a better vision for communities—one in which new growth is focused into areas with existing development and coupled with investment in both physical and social infrastructure.

Measures of focused development include:

- Development is oriented to the pedestrian, placing the auto in a supporting role (i.e. buildings and entrances are oriented to the sidewalk with parking lots to the side or rear).

EXISTING SITUATION:      excellent      mixed      poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

• \_\_\_\_\_

• \_\_\_\_\_

- Major governmental and institutional functions are clustered (i.e. downtown) to provide community focus.

EXISTING SITUATION:      excellent      mixed      poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

• \_\_\_\_\_

• \_\_\_\_\_

- The transportation system provides easy access to areas of focused development, with emphasis on pedestrian, bicycle, and other non-auto travel.

EXISTING SITUATION:      excellent      mixed      poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

• \_\_\_\_\_

• \_\_\_\_\_

- A system is in place to provide access to service vehicles (i.e. garbage and delivery trucks) without excessive disruption to transportation flow.

EXISTING SITUATION:      excellent      mixed      poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

• \_\_\_\_\_

• \_\_\_\_\_

### Community Sense of Place

A unique identity for each city, both physically and socially, which bonds people to their place and to each other.

Measures of community sense of place include:

- The historic fabric (i.e. buildings, landmarks, trees, plazas) of the community are largely intact and well maintained.

EXISTING SITUATION:    excellent    mixed    poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

◦ \_\_\_\_\_

◦ \_\_\_\_\_
  
- The community has an annual series of events and celebrations that are well managed and attended.

EXISTING SITUATION:    excellent    mixed    poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

◦ \_\_\_\_\_

◦ \_\_\_\_\_
  
- Adequate indoor and outdoor places (i.e. plazas, parks, halls, conference centers, libraries) are available for community events.

EXISTING SITUATION:    excellent    mixed    poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

◦ \_\_\_\_\_

◦ \_\_\_\_\_
  
- Adequate design ordinances are in place to ensure that rehabilitation and new construction will reinforce the community's sense of place.

EXISTING SITUATION:    excellent    mixed    poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

◦ \_\_\_\_\_

◦ \_\_\_\_\_
  
- Design guidelines are in place for public and private improvements (i.e. buildings, street furniture, trees, signs) to build sense of place.

EXISTING SITUATION:    excellent    mixed    poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

◦ \_\_\_\_\_

◦ \_\_\_\_\_

**Activities**

**Mixed Use**

Mixed uses allow people to walk between activities. They can be as simple as a store in the neighborhood, or a more complex mixing of office, retail, government and/or housing.

Measures of Mixed Use include:

- Significant activities, such as culture, employment, government, education, shopping, services and housing are clustered together.

EXISTING SITUATION:    excellent    mixed    poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

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° \_\_\_\_\_
  
- Functions are grouped in close proximity (i.e. restaurants, galleries, banks, etc.) to provide clusters of like activities and to encourage walking.

EXISTING SITUATION:    excellent    mixed    poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

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° \_\_\_\_\_
  
- Zoning ordinances allow for some mix of uses in all zones, except where they present specific health hazards (i.e. heavy industry).

EXISTING SITUATION:    excellent    mixed    poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

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° \_\_\_\_\_
  
- Incentives are in place to encourage mixed-use pedestrian oriented development (i.e. apartments over stores, commercial/office mix).

EXISTING SITUATION:    excellent    mixed    poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

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° \_\_\_\_\_

**Vital Street Life**

Vital street life means that it feels good to be a pedestrian. Sidewalks, public areas, and storefronts are interesting, bustling and safe. Distances between attractions are short. Cars are present, but people are walking. A community's image and identity are reflected in the vitality and diversity of its street life.

Measures of vital street life include:

- Storefronts are interesting and attractive, with well maintained buildings and well designed displays.

EXISTING SITUATION:      excellent      mixed      poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

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 ° \_\_\_\_\_

- Adequate pedestrian amenities (i.e. awnings, street furniture, street trees, phone booths, drinking fountains) are provided for a pleasant walking environment.

EXISTING SITUATION:      excellent      mixed      poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

° \_\_\_\_\_  
 ° \_\_\_\_\_

- Community events are designed to bring diverse groups of community residents into downtown and neighborhood centers.

EXISTING SITUATION:      excellent      mixed      poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

° \_\_\_\_\_  
 ° \_\_\_\_\_

- Distances between significant attractions are short (no more than 400 feet); circulation killers (such as blank walls, vacant storefronts, and large parking lots) are minimized.

EXISTING SITUATION:      excellent      mixed      poor

Possible actions to improve situation:

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 ° \_\_\_\_\_