

Storytelling

SUMMARY

This Community Transformation Strategy focuses on refining the brand and identity of the commercial business district. Creating a connection, for visitors and residents alike, to the history of and heart of downtown is critical to its success. The Storytelling Strategy is a combination of elements from the Placemaking and Maintaining Authenticity strategies, focusing not only on the built environment, but also on how people interact with it and learn from it. When implemented effectively, this strategy should build relationships, increase foot traffic, inspire hometown pride and help to shape your community's narrative.

KEY DESCRIPTORS

Image, perception, brand development, marketing, investor confidence, community pride, safety, wayfinding, community engagement, advocacy, history, community narrative, job security, relationship building, education, connection, resident ownership, community culture, selling, advertising, tourism and destination marketing.

“When we own our stories, we avoid being trapped as characters in stories someone else is telling.”
— Brené Brown

PROS

- Storytelling helps to build a positive image.
- This strategy sets your community apart.
- Storytelling facilitates owning your story.
- Storytelling preserves or builds a sense of community.
- This strategy encourages public buy-in.

CONS

- Storytelling will always be an ongoing process.
- The impact and return can be hard to quantify.
- Projects can be intangible.
- It can be challenging to find one community voice.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Storytelling needs to be comprehensive and should address more than one of the Four Points.
- It takes a diverse platform to engage the public.
- It is important to know your audience.
- Marketing Main Street and downtown are two separate and unique things.
- One is a destination; the other is an organization.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

- What is our story? Is it worth telling?
- Who are your current champions in the community?
- What are you hoping to achieve by taking on this strategy?
- What kind of budget can you commit to implement projects?
- What could prevent you from fully committing to this strategy?

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FOUR-POINT APPROACH ACTIVITIES

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Work with local media to offer co-op advertising opportunities for local businesses so that the downtown district can be viewed as a united marketplace.
- Work with existing businesses to be your downtown's brand ambassadors.
- Offer a coupon book or discount card to unite your businesses under one brand.
- Conduct market research to identify business niches or themes that exist in your downtown.
- Attract businesses that would complement your city's assets and broader themes addressed in other community transformation strategies.
- Offer incentives like matching grants or micro-loans to encourage the growth or development of businesses that support your themes.
- Establish a crowd-funded micro-grant to encourage the community to unite in supporting this historic heart of the community, downtown.

DESIGN

- Tie in the downtown's brand with downtown's design elements: bike racks, banners, planters, paint and public spaces.
- Install public art or murals that complement your community's specific assets. For example, Valdosta painted a mural with azaleas because they are the "Azalea City."
- Research, design and install downtown plaques that speak to the history or something significant to the community.
- Ensure alley ways and downtown public areas are safe and accessible.
- Activate underutilized spaces to engage the public and share your story (e.g. selfie spots, Main Street Museum, window clings, pop-up shops or art).

PROMOTIONS

- Develop a downtown newsletter or community calendar to share the impact of what is happening downtown.
- Develop and share a downtown specific hashtag. Downtown Milledgeville uses #ilovemilly.
- Unify your social media presence to create a brand that is cross-represented through all of your program's social media channels.
- Develop an asset-based brand, along with collateral marketing materials to share and distribute.
- Share impact numbers or community data to change or address community's perceptions.
- Share the Main Street program's annual impact and downtown's priorities on the city or Main Street website.
- Develop walking or audio tours that highlight your downtown's history and community assets.

ORGANIZATION

- Host a community visioning session to identify downtown's assets.
- Host a community scrapbook night to collect historical photos.
- Use a downtown ambassador program to engage with visitors and share the story of your community.
- Host a monthly or quarterly meeting with partners to share the Main Street program's vision for downtown.
- Ensure promotions-based committees are comprised of people with creative skill sets and a passion for telling the story of Main Street and downtown.
- Make regular presentations to civic clubs, city council and partners regarding your program's annual impact downtown.

PARTNERS

- Local convention and visitors bureau
- Local arts council
- Educational institutions
- Civic clubs
- Historical society or clubs
- Museums
- Local city and county governments
- Staff of local tourism amenities and destinations
- Local media outlets
- State tourism partners
- Regional tourism associations
- Chamber of commerce
- Georgia Department of Economic Development
- Your neighboring Main Street managers