

Main Streets Programs in Boston



Boston Main Streets Program

City of Boston; <http://www.ci.boston.ma.us/mainstreets>
Boston, MA; August, 2000

Boston Department of Neighborhood Development

City of Boston; <http://www.ci.boston.ma.us/dnd>
Boston, MA; August, 2000

Federal FY 2000 Action Plan for Community Development: Citizen Summary

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BOSTON MAIN STREETS

In 1983, then Boston City Councilor Thomas M. Menino brought the Main Street program to Boston's Roslindale neighborhood. At the time, Roslindale suffered from disinvestment and a deteriorated building stock. Using the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street model, Roslindale merchants, owners, city officials and residents built an organization and workplan to reverse their prospects. By its third year, the volunteer-driven organization saw amazing results: 73 facade changes, 43 commercial building renovations, 29 business gains and 132 net new jobs, totaling in an investment of more than \$5 million.

In 1995, newly elected Mayor Thomas Menino challenged the National Trust for Historic Preservation to expand its National Main Street model to Boston. The result was Boston Main Streets, the first urban, multi-district Main Street program in the United States. Boston Main Streets now brings the technical knowledge of business district revitalization to nineteen Boston business districts.

This is the first intensive urban use of this highly successful 20-year old model for commercial district revitalization in the nation. Ten neighborhood commercial districts were designated as Boston Main Street programs in 1995 following a city-wide competition. Four districts were selected in 1997 and four more in 1999. Roslindale Village continues as a mature program today.

Each district receives technical assistance and intensive training in the Main Street approach from the City of Boston Main Streets office and the National Main Street Center as well as a funding package from the City of Boston for six years. In turn, each Main Street organization hires a full time Executive Director, raises matching funds, incorporates its organization and implements its programs according to an annual work plan.

Boston Main Streets districts follow a four-point comprehensive approach that creates and sustains the district's image:

1. community organization
2. promotion
3. design
4. economic restructuring.

Specific Main Street activities and operations include storefront improvement grants, public enhancements, local promotional and fund-raising events such as road races, parades, auctions, multi-cultural festivals and holiday shopping events that strategically aim to enhance the image of the business district and attract consumers. Using the Main Street four-point approach, district staff and volunteers draw upon the skills and experience of the local stakeholders to revitalize the district.

Main Street districts represent a framework utilizing many different tools for neighborhood economic development. Dudley Square Main Street, for example, has

successfully steered \$10.5 million of Empowerment Zone resources toward redevelopment of four abandoned commercial buildings into retail and office space.

Program Funding

The City of Boston commits a significant portion of its federal Community Development Block Grant funds to the Boston Main Streets program. In addition, the City of Boston commits six full time staff to assist the local districts in many aspects of their programs. Local districts also have access to city architects, design staff, transportation planners and technical assistance specialists.

The Boston Main Streets program is designed as a self-help program. The initial four year funding decreases year to year with the goal that, in year four, the local Main Street districts will be self-sustaining. Although originally a four year commitment, BMS has provided two years of additional funds for salary, promotion and physical improvements to keep the momentum the local districts have built over their first four years. The funding is broken down into basic categories:

1. Program Manager and Program Assistant Salary
2. Physical Improvements (Public & Private)
3. Technical Assistance
4. Promotion.

In addition, Boston Main Streets provides local districts with design assistance from local architecture firms in the form of Design Hours. The contracts with the architecture firms are administered by the Office of Business Development Design Services Unit.

Boston Main Streets also provides workshops and training through contracts with the National Trust for Historic Preservation and other consultants.

The Corporate Buddy Program

Boston Main Street districts are teamed up with a Corporate Buddy. The Corporate Buddy is a large business or corporation that contributes \$10,000 each year for four years towards operational expenses. More importantly, the Corporate Buddy provides access to technical resources such as printing, marketing assistance, and volunteer projects.

Boston Main Street Statistics

The nineteen Main Street districts continue to mature and develop into solid volunteer based organizations with realistic strategies and action-oriented programs. Quantitatively, the results are impressive. The following statistics have been compiled by monthly district reports from 1995 to 1999:

- Net new & expanded businesses: 313
- Net new jobs: 2,326
- Volunteer hours invested: 46,579

- Completed storefront projects: 120
- Businesses receiving design assistance: 363
- Total grants to building improvements: \$346,955

Qualitatively, the overall goal of the Boston Main Streets program is to improve the quality of life in Boston's neighborhoods. The vitality of a neighborhood's business district is critical to the health of the neighborhood as a whole and for that reason all sectors of the community are involved with each Main Street organization. Stakeholders include residents who typically represent the consumer to business and property owners, public and private institutions, community development corporations and merchant associations.

Lessons Learned

For Boston, the need to strengthen the commercial and community center of each neighborhood supports several economic development goals: jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities for Boston residents; commercial districts that are the social heart of the community; unique neighborhood commercial districts that attract prospective investment; and to an understanding that the commercial core of each neighborhood is vital to the residential community and vice-versa.

The City of Boston, through a community-based, public-private partnership, has established Boston Main Streets, a successful model for urban commercial district revitalization that strengthens local business districts through strong organizational development, community participation, resident and merchant education and sustainable development.

The Boston Main Streets' innovative approach to neighborhood business development brings significant resources to the community. The complex urban issues faced by Boston's historic commercial districts are examined through a holistic framework that realizes that many of the neighborhood problems are linked. It is this comprehensive approach that has brought the action-oriented projects to completion.

The volunteers who have brought more than 46,000 hours of time to their communities are a strong indicator of community interest, enthusiasm and investment of stakeholders working to better their communities. Main Streets events and promotions have fostered community pride and spirit. Façade improvements offer physical proof that the community is prospering. Merchants are using current market information provided through this project to improve merchandising and retail sales.

Boston Main Streets has learned from experience that government can not do everything and that each community must take leadership in shaping the character of their neighborhood. Our nineteen districts participate in this grassroots program to improve their physical appearance, economic structure, and overall quality of life. Our districts pride themselves on the development of their individual identities. The diversity of Boston's neighborhoods is reflected in each of the districts. At the same time a citywide

perspective is maintained through unified support for each other's programs and events and the exchange of knowledge and information across the city's neighborhoods.

The obstacles that face Boston's urban commercial districts are not unique. The Boston Main Streets framework teaches communities how to begin a successful revitalization process. We believe the foundations are set for Boston Main Street Districts to serve as a model and to share their challenges and accomplishments with other urban commercial districts.

BOSTON DEPARTMENT OF NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT

The mission of the Department of Neighborhood Development is to make Boston the most livable city in the nation by working with communities to build strong neighborhoods through the strategic investment of public resources.

To achieve its mission, DND provides services and programs through five operating divisions:

1. Capital Construction (CC) plans, designs, and builds the City's public buildings. Capital Construction strategically locates and designs buildings as multi-purpose facilities. By incorporating such features as public meeting areas, enhanced schoolyards, child care centers, and ATM vestibules, Capital Construction builds buildings which enhance neighborhoods and encourage private development.
2. The Office of Business Development revitalizes neighborhood business districts. This Division supports the work of the City's innovative Main Streets program, the Blue Hill Avenue Initiative and the Boston Empowerment Center. It offers loan and technical assistance programs for existing small businesses and startups. It also assists non-profit organizations with matching capital funds to improve their facilities.
3. Housing Services works with non-profit and for-profit partners to develop and preserve affordable housing and create neighborhood open spaces. It enhances neighborhoods by renovating abandoned properties and providing housing and services for vulnerable populations.
4. Real Estate Services manages tax-foreclosed land and buildings and conveys these properties for private use as well as for housing and commercial development.
5. Homeowner Services encourages strong, stable neighborhoods by providing homeowners with financing and technical assistance to maintain and improve their homes.

Home Buyer Assistance provides first-time home buyers with educational courses and financial assistance, and markets homes developed for income-eligible, first-time homebuyers. The Boston Home Center also assists homeowners with education and foreclosure prevention counseling.

In November of 1997, the agency changed its name from the Public Facilities Department to the Department of Neighborhood Development (DND).

The new name more appropriately reflects the Mayor's broad and coordinated Neighborhood Development Strategy. This strategy recognizes the interdependence of many elements: affordable housing, neighborhood business districts, local jobs, loan programs, neighborhood goods and services, and public land and building programs.

Specifically, the strategy recognizes that:

- neighborhood development requires local leadership, combined with public and private resources across the full range of community needs.
- affordable housing programs depend upon neighborhood business districts providing essential services and becoming attractive places to shop.
- local business districts rely on housing programs that enhance the community thereby attracting shoppers and employees.
- homeownership programs and homebuying programs require easily accessible information as well as a financial assistance component.
- local job creation requires a range of loan and technical assistance programs for existing small businesses and startups.

well constructed and maintained municipal buildings and open space can contribute to neighborhood security and quality of life.

FEDERAL FY2000 DRAFT ACTION PLAN FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: CITIZEN SUMMARY

NEIGHBORHOOD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- **Boston Main Streets Program**

Boston Main Streets is a partnership of the City of Boston and the National Main Street Center of the National Trust for Historic Preservation to provide four types of assistance to support the efforts of organized neighborhood groups to revitalize their neighborhood business district -- design assistance to improve the appearance of the commercial district, organizing assistance to build neighborhood partnerships, marketing assistance to promote the commercial district, and assistance with recruiting new businesses, diversifying the business mix and making improvements to the district's commercial buildings. City funds are used to develop the capacity of local Main Street organizations by

- 1) providing matching grants for 4 years for a local Main Street program manager
- 2) providing grants for technical assistance.

In addition, program funds will be used for matching grants for small-scale rehabilitation projects, for public facility improvements and for business district promotional services.

Projected Accomplishments FFY2001:

19 Main Street organizations assisted

Proposed Funding FFY2000:

\$2,539,599

More Information:

call Emily Haber (617) 635-0293, or visit the Boston Main Streets

Website at <http://www.bostonmainstreets.com>

- **ReStore Program**

The ReStore program provides a one to one match loan and grant (maximum of \$10,000) for moderate to substantial exterior façade improvements for businesses in the neighborhood commercial cores.

Projected Accomplishments FFY2000:

50 businesses assisted

Proposed Funding FFY2000:

\$1,233,319

Location:

Program will be available citywide. As shown in Reference Map 9, projects located in low-moderate income trade areas will show how the storefront improvements will benefit area residents, while outside these areas, projects must

not only show benefits to area residents but must also create/retain jobs suitable for low-moderate income households.

More Information:

call Ed Wallace (617) 635-0402, or visit the City of Boston Website at http://www.ci.boston.ma.us/dnd/obd/G_OBD_ReStore_Boston.asp

- **Commercial Real Estate Development**

This program provides non-conventional loans to cover the gap in the amount of financing needed for an economic development project and the amount that conventional lenders can underwrite. Decisions are based on cash flow, collateral, management, equity, and public benefit. Terms and conditions of the loan are flexible as long as the project can demonstrate some type of repayment during the life of the project. Real Estate loans are provided to economic development projects that involve the acquisition, construction or rehabilitation of real property. Business loans are provided to support economic development by financing the purchase of equipment, fixtures, inventory, leasehold improvements and working capital.

Projected Accomplishments FFY2000:

75 jobs created/retained; 10 businesses created/retained serving low/mod areas

Proposed Funding FFY2000:

\$2,373,614

Location:

Citywide availability with projects selected on a rolling basis. Priority area for service is the Empowerment Zone.

More Information:

call Keith Hunt (617) 635-0418.

- **Business Technical Assistance Program**

This program provides technical assistance services to businesses that demonstrate a financial need for a variety of business services. These services include, but are not limited to, financial management, bookkeeping, inventory management and control, marketing, and design assistance. Most of these services are provided through outside technical experts contracting with the City.

Projected Accomplishments FFY00:

70 businesses

Proposed Funding FFY2000:

\$599,030

Location:

Program will be available citywide. As shown in Reference Map 9, projects located in low-moderate income trade areas must either show how the strengthened business will benefit area residents or create jobs suitable for low-moderate income households. Outside these areas, projects must create/retain jobs suitable for low-moderate income households.

More Information:

call Greg Molina (617) 445-3413, or visit the City of Boston Website at http://www.ci.boston.ma.us/dnd/obd/G_OBD_Business_Assistance_Team.asp

- **Business Recruitment**

This program enables the City of Boston – DND to be pro active in the attracting of new businesses to the City through marketing, public relations and the provision of direct financial assistance to small businesses in the form of loans, loan guarantees or grants for reimbursements of relocation/expansion expenses including working capital, equipment purchases and other relocation related costs. The program includes preparing strategic marketing materials about economic opportunities available in Boston's neighborhood business districts, identifying potential businesses that could take advantage of those opportunities and recruiting those businesses to available and appropriate sites. The program gives priority to working with the Boston Main Streets Districts, Boston's Empowerment Zone and the Blue Hill Avenue area to support the comprehensive neighborhood revitalization efforts of those three programs. This program is managed by the Boston Business Assistance Team.

Projected Accomplishments FFY2000:

20 businesses recruited and 30 jobs created or retained

Proposed Funding FFY2000:

\$510,832

Location: Citywide availability. Recruited businesses will either provide necessary services for residents in the low-moderate income trade area as shown in Reference Map 9, or will create jobs suitable for low-moderate income households citywide.

More Information:

call Greg Molina (617) 445-3413, or visit the City of Boston Website at http://www.ci.boston.ma.us/dnd/obd/G_OBD_Business_Assistance_Team.asp

- **Partners with Non-Profits Program**

This program provides flexible grants to community-based non-profit businesses. Grants of up to \$25,000 can be used to make physical improvements to non-profit facilities used to serve low and moderate-income residents. Additionally, matching grants for community events of up to \$1,000 and matching grants of up to \$5,000 for community service projects are available.

Projected Accomplishments FFY2000:

37 community based organizations assisted

Proposed Funding FFY2000:

\$768,542

Location:

Citywide availability with projects selected primarily by competitive Request for Proposals. Since, due to the nature of services provided by these organizations, most community-based organizations serve primarily low and moderate-income residents regardless of geographic location, a broad citywide distribution of activities can be expected.

More Information:

call John Lynch (617) 635-0328.

- **Boston Empowerment Center**

The Boston Empowerment Center brings together Federal, State and City economic development services along with the private financial and technical resources and houses them together in the Business Development Center. The Business Development Center serves as a central focal point for all small business services provided by the City of Boston, enabling client business to access a large variety of technical and financial services at a single location.

Projected Accomplishments FFY2000:

60 Businesses served

Proposed Funding FFY2000:

\$155,800

Location:

Services are available to businesses citywide.

More Information:

call Reggie Nunnally (617) 445-3413.