

# THE IMPACT OF IOWA'S DOWNTOWNS THROUGH THE LENS OF THE MAIN STREET IOWA PROGRAM

REPORT PRODUCED FOR IOWA ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

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Iowa's downtown revitalization efforts generate significant impacts on the local and state economy, enhance the vibrancy of communities, and ensure resiliency, preservation, and sustainability for years to come.

This report summarizes the economic impact of Iowa's downtowns through the analysis of the 53 Main Street Iowa districts.

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# THE IMPACT OF IOWA'S DOWNTOWNS THROUGH THE LENS OF THE MAIN STREET IOWA PROGRAM

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Downtowns play an important role in the economic and social fabric of the state of Iowa. The Iowa Economic Development Authority's (IEDA) Iowa Downtown Resource Center (IDRC) helps communities learn about the importance of downtown development and assists local stakeholders in implementing revitalization strategies. In partnership with Main Street America, IEDA commissioned this study to assess and communicate the value of Iowa's downtowns for residents across the state.

This analysis uses Iowa's 53 downtowns that are designated Main Street Iowa districts as a case study for the impact of IEDA's investment on spurring economic growth, supporting livable communities, and creating economic resiliency. Importantly, Main Street programming reflects only a portion of the full body of technical assistance, financial resources, and network opportunities provided to Iowa's downtown communities. **This report finds that Main Street Iowa's downtown revitalization efforts generate strong positive impacts on local communities by strengthening Iowa's local economies, attracting a mix of commercial and residential investment in downtowns, and helping to create more economically resilient conditions.**

## KEY FINDINGS FROM THIS STUDY

### IOWA'S DOWNTOWNS ARE THE ECONOMIC HUBS OF THEIR REGIONS.

Iowa's downtowns serve as the physical and economic centers of their communities. With more than just retail and restaurants, Iowa's downtowns bring a balanced mix of industries and employment.

**IOWA'S DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION PROGRAMS WORK.** Iowa's downtowns are thriving, often in the midst of regional population decline. Thanks to state and local investments, Iowa's downtowns retain their historic charm while remaining vital to their regional economies. IEDA helps local communities develop and implement downtown revitalization programming, administer building rehabilitation grants, and provide a range of resources to existing businesses while continuing to attract new businesses.

**IOWA'S DOWNTOWNS PROVIDE AN ALTERNATIVE HOUSING STOCK AND RESIDENTIAL CLIMATE THAT SERVES AND ATTRACTS A VITAL MIX OF RESIDENTS.** Iowa's downtowns offer a wide range of housing types for homeowners and renters alike, including apartments and condominiums above ground floor retail, a typology of housing often lacking in the state's more rural and suburban areas. Iowa's downtown housing stock helps provide the "missing middle" of affordable housing options to Iowans. Iowa downtowns' higher densities and proximity of residential, commercial, and entertainment uses create vibrant atmospheres that bring higher shares of Gen Z and Millennial populations.

**IOWA'S DOWNTOWNS ARE ECONOMICALLY RESILIENT.** Iowa downtowns are characterized by a robust mix of industry types and a diverse mix of customer bases. These are the very elements that support economic resiliency, which explains why downtown economies remained remarkably steady in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consumer spending dropped 7.8% across the state early in the pandemic but declined only 1.3% in Iowa's downtowns. By November 2021, customer spending in Iowa's downtowns recovered to surpass pre-pandemic spending levels (in November 2019) by 15.4%. By comparison, statewide customer spending increased only 12.1% over the same period.

**HOUSING BRINGS VIBRANCY TO A DOWNTOWN. IOWA'S RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS HELP RESTORE RESIDENTIAL BUILDING STOCK ACROSS THE STATE.** IEDA, in addition to the Iowa Finance Authority's housing program efforts, directly support the rehabilitation of housing units in downtown. With more than half of the Main Street housing stock built before 1930, the important assistance serves Iowa's residents of all income levels, activating vacant or blighted buildings and preserving downtowns' history and character.

**IOWA'S DOWNTOWNS REFLECT THE IDENTITY AND LEGACY OF THEIR CITIES AND PROVIDE A SPACE FOR COMMUNITY CONNECTION FOR ALL.** Nearly one out of every three Iowans lives within a 10-minute drive of a Main Street Iowa district, and approximately two-thirds of Iowans reside just 20 minutes away. Iowa's downtowns provide a common gathering place, represent a physical and psychological center of activity, and reflect the identity of their greater community. IEDA's downtown investment helps foster a sense of pride and strengthens community connection.

## PRIORITIES FOR MOVING FORWARD

Providing continued support for Iowa's downtowns will help retain their important role for local residential communities, area business owners and employees, municipal and regional stakeholders, and the state of Iowa at large. To continue the success and value of the impacts of Iowa's downtowns, consider the following priorities:

- **Continue to invest in Iowa's downtowns to strengthen the state's economy.**
- **Provide consistent incentives to retain and grow housing supply in Iowa's downtowns.**
- **Provide placemaking investment to preserve the identity and role of Iowa's downtowns.**
- **Continue to integrate accountability measures by tracking program performance and impact.**

*Additional insights on these priorities can be found on page 40.*

## ABOUT IEDA

IEDA's mission is to strengthen economic and community vitality by building partnerships and leveraging resources to make Iowa the choice for both people and business.

IEDA administers state and federal resources and programs to help Iowans, the state's communities, and businesses of all sizes reflecting all industries. Between the start of 2011 through June 2021, over \$83 million in direct financial assistance has been awarded and distributed by IEDA. In addition, over \$848 million in tax credits brought projects to Iowa, resulting in nearly 75,000 jobs and over \$18 billion in capital investment for Iowa's economy.<sup>(1)</sup>

As an agency, IEDA prioritizes two tracts of investment and programming - business development and community development. While IEDA's business development efforts focus on business expansion, workforce attraction, international trade, and innovative technologies, the agency's community development centers around revitalizing and sustaining Iowa's downtowns and communities. A fundamental charge of this includes the Iowa Downtown Resource Center (IDRC), home to Main Street Iowa, a Main Street America® Coordinating Program. For more information about IEDA, please visit [www.iowaeda.com](http://www.iowaeda.com).

## PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

**Iowa's downtown revitalization efforts generate significant impacts on the local and state economy, support the livelihood and vibrancy of communities, and ensure resiliency, preservation, and sustainability for years to come. This report summarizes the economic impact of Iowa's downtowns through the analysis of the 53 Main Street Iowa districts.** This report communicates Iowa's downtown revitalization programs' role in spurring economic growth and creating economic resiliency. This report articulates how IEDA's downtown revitalization efforts impact local communities and demonstrates the value and return on investment of these measures.

Findings presented in this report include third-party data through leading data providers, such as ESRI, US Census, and American Community Survey. Third-party credit card spending data, provided through MasterCard Retail Location Insights, was used to assess downtown economic resiliency between 2019 and 2021. Conversations with Main Street Iowa leadership, including leadership representatives from local Main Street programs across the state, supplement the analytical findings in this report through select case studies.

This analysis was conducted by Jon Stover & Associates (JS&A), an Economic Development Consulting firm specializing in place-based economic development and impact quantification of downtowns. JS&A bridges the gap between the different worlds of policy, business, development, and community interests to help make great communities and neighborhoods.

(1) FY 2021 Iowa Economic Development Authority Annual Report ([iowaeda.com/UserDocs/IEDA\\_AnnualReport\\_2021.pdf](http://iowaeda.com/UserDocs/IEDA_AnnualReport_2021.pdf))

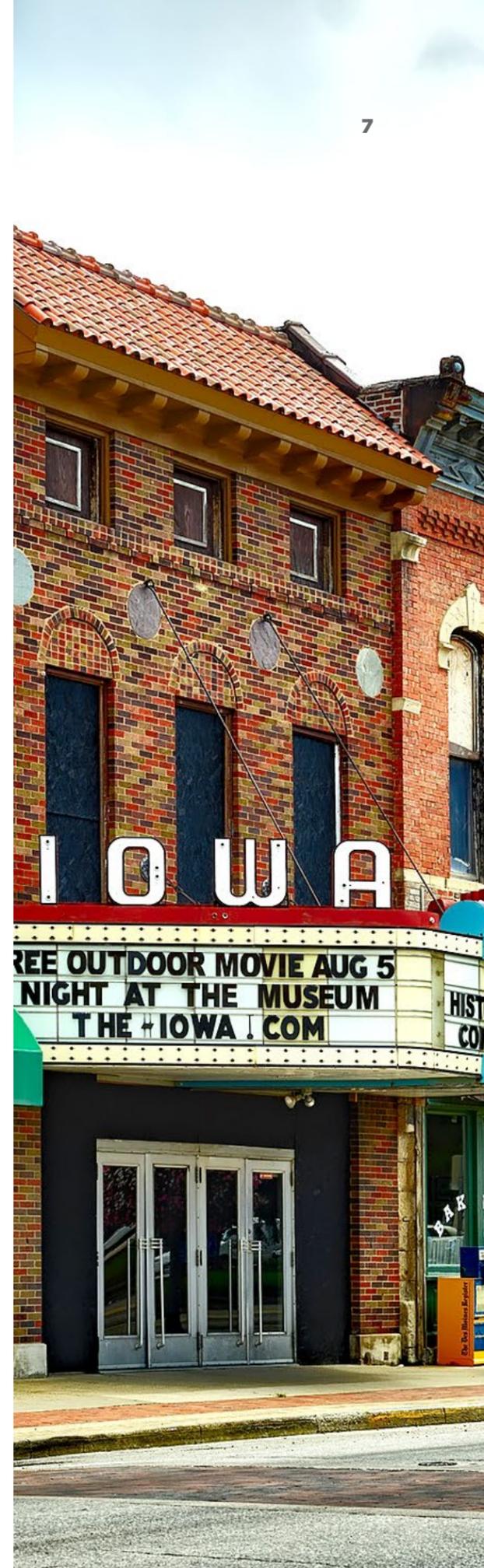
## ABOUT THE IOWA DOWNTOWN RESOURCE CENTER

IEDA's Iowa Downtown Resource Center (IDRC), helps communities learn about the importance of downtown development and how to implement strategies to make downtowns more vibrant and viable for living and working.

IDRC offers a variety of services that help downtown communities identify strengths, weaknesses, and achievable solutions and strategies, including the following:

- **Downtown Assessment Visits** where experienced IDRC professionals perform on-site studies of downtowns, which include public presentations and written reports with short- and long-range planning recommendations.
- **Downtown Walk Arouns** offer a community an honest first impression of its downtown to help identify strengths, challenges, and basic revitalization strategies.
- **Funding Opportunities Such as the Community Catalyst Building Remediation Grant** which awards up to \$100,000 to assist communities with the rehabilitation of buildings to stimulate economic growth and reinvestment in the community.
- **Networking Opportunities with Industry Professionals and Other Iowa Downtowns** through various connections and events including the annual Iowa Downtown Conference and multiple Iowa Downtown Forums throughout the year.
- **Main Street Iowa** administers the time-tested downtown revitalization approach in partnership with designated Main Street programs across the state.

These programmatic offerings, among many more, contribute to the economic and demographic impacts communicated throughout this report.





# IOWA'S MAIN STREET ECONOMY

6,665

TOTAL BUSINESSES LOCATED IN MAIN STREET IOWA DISTRICTS

75,811

PEOPLE EMPLOYED IN MAIN STREET IOWA DISTRICTS

\$9.2B

OF REVENUE GENERATED BY BUSINESSES LOCATED IN MAIN STREET IOWA DISTRICTS

The above business, employment, and revenue figures reflect the collective 53 Main Street Iowa districts and their programmatic geographic boundaries. Source: ESRI Community Analyst, InfoGroup (2021)

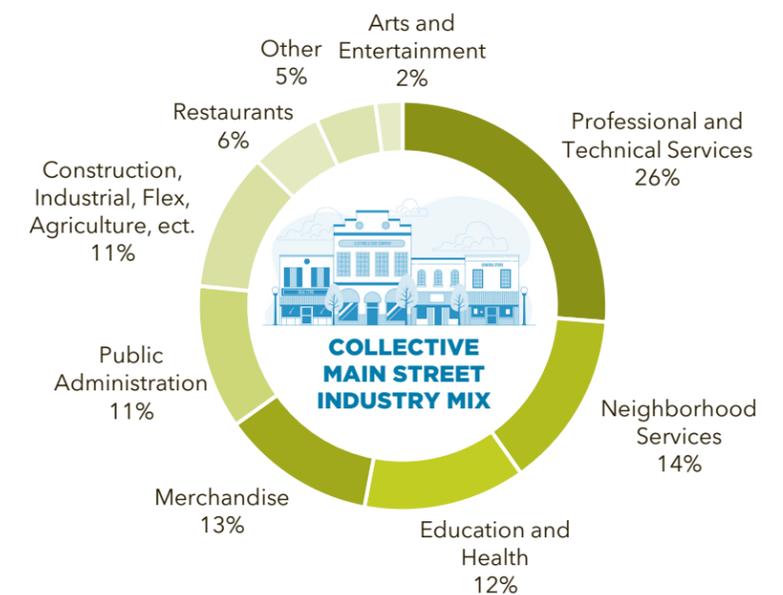
Iowa's Main Streets play critical roles in local, regional, and state economies as concentrated commercial districts filled with unique businesses, employment opportunities, and pathways toward entrepreneurship.

While the charm of independent retailers and their eye-catching storefronts often resonates when imagining Iowa's Main Streets, these downtowns are much more. From retail spaces and offices for various professional services like accountants, insurance agencies, and lawyers to neighborhood services such as barbershops, beauty salons, and dry cleaners, Iowa's downtowns have a diverse industry mix of businesses. Positioned at the historic and government centers of many of Iowa's municipalities and counties, Main Streets offer a diverse blend of businesses, government agencies, educational institutions, and cultural establishments.

Iowa's Main Streets foster collaborative business environments with these varied commercial districts, allowing businesses to form relationships, create a supportive economic climate, and strengthen synergies and collaborations that enhance spending at the local level. Programmatic economic development efforts and dedicated economic development leadership, such as Main Street Executive Directors and staff, create champions and allies for each downtown business community. These dedicated programs provide resources fundamental to generating economic impacts, increased business revenue and sales tax revenue, and support for Iowa's current and prospective businesses and entrepreneurs.

## INDUSTRY MIX

Main Street Iowa districts are home to a wide assortment of businesses beyond traditional merchandise retailers, which only represent 13% of the collective Main Street businesses across the state. More than one out of every four Main Street businesses are professional and technical services, the largest cohort of industries on Main Street. Despite the typical small footprints of downtowns, 4% of the state's manufacturing businesses are located on Iowa Main Streets.



The above industry mix reflects all businesses in the 53 Main Street Iowa districts. Industry classifications are based on NAICS industry sector codes. Industries within the "Other" category reflect all other industries not specified in the chart as well as unclassified businesses. Source: ESRI Community Analyst, InfoGroup (2021)

# EMPLOYMENT IN MAIN STREET IOWA DISTRICTS

Employment in Main Street Iowa districts spans a variety of different key industries. The following employment profile represents the total employment by industry sector across the 53 Main Street Iowa districts.



## 17,367 PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL SERVICES

Including Finance and Insurance, Real Estate, Architecture, Consulting, and more



## 18,129 EDUCATION AND HEALTH

Including Educational Services, Health Care, and Social Assistance



## 1,701 ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Including Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation



## 4,843 NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES

Including Auto Repair, Barber Shops and Beauty Salons, Dry Cleaning, Pet Care, and more



## 7,875 MERCHANDISE RETAIL

Including General Merchandise, Gas Stations, Clothing, Grocery, and more



## 9,068 PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Including Government Support, Police, Judiciary Courts, and more



## 11,393 CONSTRUCTION, INDUSTRIAL, FLEX, AGRICULTURE

Including Manufacturing, Construction, Wholesale, and Agricultural Industries



## 4,404 RESTAURANTS

Including Fast Casual and Full-Service Restaurants and Bars



## 1,031 OTHER

Representing Other Industries and Jobs Excluded from these Categories

The above employment figures reflect the total employment for all 53 Main Street Iowa districts. Industry classifications are based on NAICS industry sector codes. Employment within the "Other" category reflects all other industries not specified in the chart as well as employment at unclassified businesses. Source: InfoGroup (2021)

## DOWNTOWN INITIATIVES AND EFFORTS TO GENERATE STRONG ECONOMIES

IEDA helps commercial districts revitalize the economy, appearance, and perceived image to bring more jobs and local businesses to Iowa's downtowns.

### Programs & Initiatives

The well-tested Main Street Approach™ prioritizes Economic Vitality, a key pillar of the Approach, in downtown communities. By celebrating existing economic assets, such as renowned downtown landmarks and clusters of unique industry niches, Main Streets deploy a variety of programs and initiatives that diversify the downtown economy and create environments for local business success.

### Bringing New Businesses to Downtown

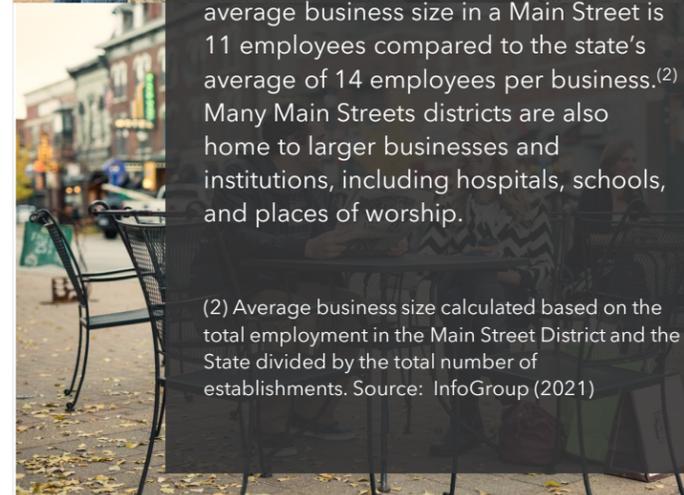
A distinguished effort by all of Iowa's Main Streets, business attraction to the downtown helps ensure filled storefronts and vibrant communities. From understanding the downtown market advantage to assisting new businesses in navigating regulatory processes, Main Streets' programmatic efforts provide an avenue for Iowa's cities to support promising entrepreneurs and new businesses.

### Retaining Local Businesses

Business owners face continuous operational challenges, from inventory and product management to incorporating e-commerce and digital marketing to day-to-day staffing and operations. Main Street leaders support their business community as a dedicated resource and reference point for business owners. They provide an encyclopedia of support strategies that help businesses navigate turbulent times and emergencies in addition to planning for prosperity. Iowa's devoted downtown leadership helps keep business doors open and growth abundant.

### Enhancing the Customer Base of Businesses

With targeted efforts like events and programming to attract customers downtown and improving experiences, brands, and perceptions of commercial districts, Main Street programmatic efforts bring more customers to local businesses throughout the year.



## Small businesses play an important role in Iowa's statewide and local economies, especially in Main Street Iowa districts.

Businesses in Main Street Iowa districts are smaller than the state average. The average business size in a Main Street is 11 employees compared to the state's average of 14 employees per business.<sup>(2)</sup> Many Main Streets districts are also home to larger businesses and institutions, including hospitals, schools, and places of worship.

(2) Average business size calculated based on the total employment in the Main Street District and the State divided by the total number of establishments. Source: InfoGroup (2021)

Main Street Spotlight:

## JEFFERSON MATTERS

Creating New Reasons to Visit Downtown  
and Supporting Emerging New Industries



Jefferson Matters supports, promotes, and preserves the historic downtown of Jefferson while contributing to the greater community's continued vitality.

**4,100+**

Citywide Population  
*US Census (2020)*

**112**

Businesses in  
the Downtown

**900+**

Employees in  
the Downtown

**\$80 Million**

Annual Business  
Revenue in Downtown

*Total Businesses, Employment, and  
Revenue in the Main Street District  
provided through InfoGroup (2021)*

Jefferson Matters helps the community reimagine the prospect of what it means to be a rural community. Recognized as a national Great America Main Street Award Semifinalist, Jefferson Matters continuously markets the downtown to new visitors to support downtown businesses and is at the forefront of balancing the rural community with emerging technology sectors for a prosperous future.

Jefferson, the county seat of Greene County, is located an hour northwest of Des Moines, bringing visitors from the greater Des Moines region to explore and enjoy the intimate community and its business district.

Recipient of the Outstanding Attraction 2021 Iowa Tourism Award, Jefferson is a premiere downtown for rural tourism.

Positioned centrally in the historic downtown, the city's Mahanay Bell Tower brings visitors from around the state to the downtown commercial district. The landmark soars fourteen stories above the two- and three-story buildings that line the streets of the downtown. Its observation deck offers spanning views of the downtown and surrounding community, a unique opportunity that the downtown leveraged to bring more customers to local businesses. Downtown Jefferson's Rooftop Art connects artists with blank rooftops throughout the downtown, providing a new canvas for murals and a distinct attraction for new visitors, a perspective viewable from the Mahanay Bell Tower.

### RE-IMAGINING RURAL TECH: THE FORGE

Rehabilitation of a Historic Downtown  
Building as a Nationally Acclaimed  
Technology Training and Incubation Hub

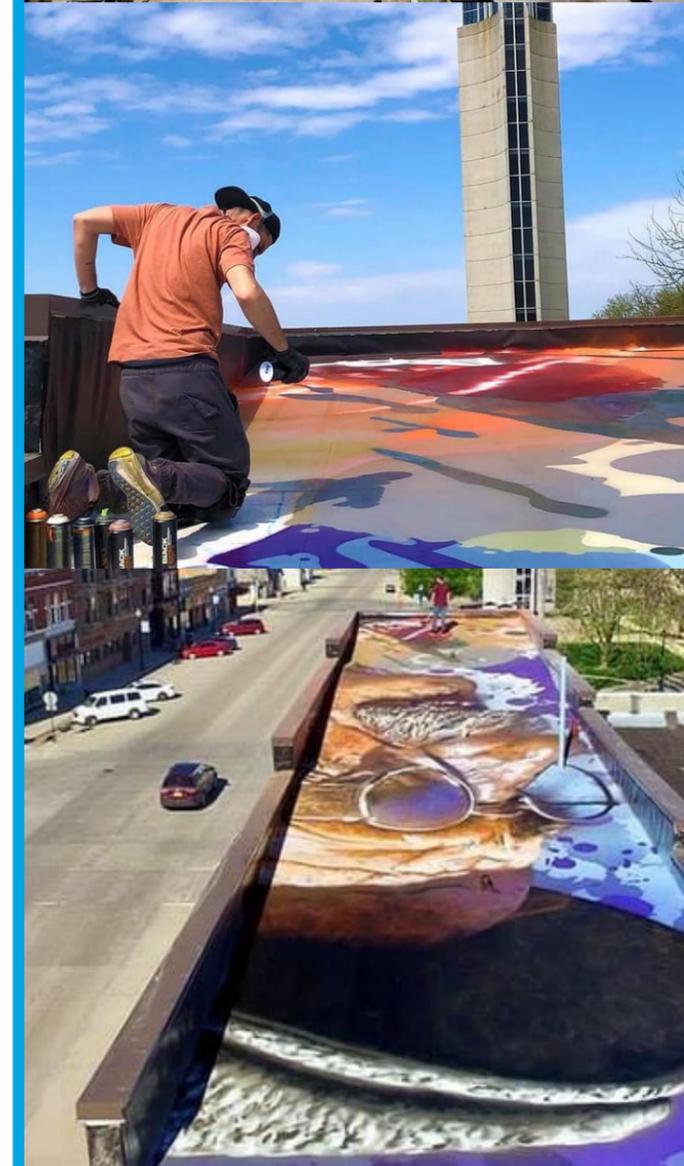
Located in the 1800s Historic Odd Fellows Building in Jefferson's downtown, The Forge is a renowned catalytic investment in the community, anchored by a local business, Pillar Technology, and various technical workshops and classes. Serving Jefferson and the surrounding 39 communities within a thirty-mile radius of the downtown, The Forge provides Iowans with access to job and career training in the high-tech industry.

"The Forge demonstrates what's possible when a shared vision meets drive and ambition, and it will serve as a model for small towns across our state and country."

— Governor Reynolds at the Grand  
Opening of The Forge in September 2019

Filling two storefronts and 6,000 square feet, The Forge creates a pathway for students in the region, including Greene County high schools, Iowa Central Community College, and Des Moines Area Community College, to gain traction in software development and related fields through training, courses, and scholarship opportunities. The \$1.8 million rehabilitation investment into The Forge would not be possible without collaborative public-private partnerships and city, regional, state, and federal resources such as the following:

- USDA Economic Development Loan
- State and Federal Historic Tax Credits
- State Redevelopment Tax Credits
- IEDA Community Catalyst Grant
- City of Jefferson Façade Grant and TIF
- Greene County Development Corporation Grant Support





Main Street Spotlight:

## WOODBINE MAIN STREET

Serving as the Connection Between Businesses and the Community



Woodbine Main Street promotes historic preservation, champions downtown and hometown vitality, and builds community partnerships while applying sustainable practices in the downtown

**1,600+**

Citywide Population  
*US Census (2020)*

**52**

Businesses in the Downtown

**680+**

Employees in the Downtown

**\$164 Million**

Annual Business Revenue in Downtown  
*Total Businesses, Employment, and Revenue in the Main Street District provided through InfoGroup (2021)*

A nationally recognized downtown revitalization program, Woodbine Main Street blends community development and revitalization to reinvest in the historic downtown and serve as the connective thread in the community.

Located in Harrison County, Woodbine sits in Western Iowa approximately 45 minutes away from Omaha, Nebraska. Downtown Woodbine has seen considerable reinvestment in recent years lead by Woodbine Main Street.

Over \$12 million has been invested in downtown rehabilitation efforts, bringing upper-story housing to the rural community, refreshing more than two dozen façades, and preserving over 45 buildings. Woodbine Main Street creates successful partnerships among property owners, the city, and area nonprofits that spur strong community ties and pride in their downtown.

Beyond revitalizing the downtown building conditions, Woodbine Main Street leverages opportunities, connections, and shared resources to bring new experiences downtown. Recognizing a lack of lodging accommodations in the small town, Woodbine Main Street partnered with property owners of a vacant 1880s Victoria Cottage to establish Mitzi's Place, a short-term rental accommodation for overnight guests in the community. With Woodbine Main Street's marketing skills and Airbnb and VBRO platforms, the cottage introduces new visitors to Woodbine, meets a need of the community, and brings more spending capacity to local businesses.



### FOSTERING CONNECTIONS

Spurring New Relationships in the Business Community and Sparking New Ideas

Woodbine Main Street has successfully tackled significant development initiatives and navigated complex public-private partnerships to generate results for the community. The downtown revitalization program generates economic and community impacts at all scales, including one-on-one personal connections and relationships.

When a retired farmer and butcher approached the Main Street Executive Director with a desire to play a more active role in the community, Woodbine's Executive Director immediately thought of the nearby tavern restaurant in the heart of downtown. After introducing the retiree to the restaurant owner, an idea was formed to help mentor and teach the restaurant workers skills and the butchery trade, improving the quality and cuts of the restaurant's dishes. This informal and impromptu workforce development initiative led to expanded business offerings of the restaurant, launching a new business segment, "Butcher at the Bar," at the establishment.

The restaurant now offers high-quality cuts of meat for purchase for preparation at home, fulfilling a community's need for additional access to quality groceries, expanding the restaurant's revenue stream, and creating an expressive value for the retired butcher.

Although small in scale and incremental in idea, Butcher at the Bar demonstrates the meaningful impact of downtown revitalization programs and leaders in Iowa's communities. One-on-one business and community connections catalyze and embody the character, core, and soul of downtowns, form lasting relationships that span beyond the workday, and ripple through the network of downtowns.



# IOWA'S MAIN STREETS: GREAT PLACES TO LIVE

**FOR BOTH THOSE LIVING AT THE CENTER OF IT ALL AND THOSE RESIDING A SHORT DRIVE AWAY, MAIN STREETS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE LIVABILITY, DESIRABILITY, AND VIBRANCY OF IOWA'S COMMUNITIES.**

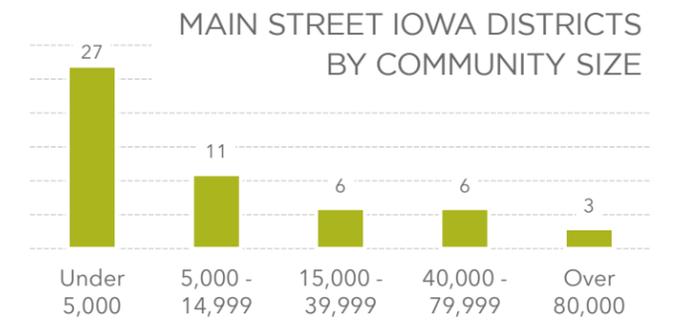
## **DOWNTOWNS ARE VITAL TO IOWA'S COMMUNITIES.**

One out of every three Iowans live within a 10-minute drive from a Main Street Iowa district, and two-thirds of the state's population live just 20 minutes away.

Main Street Iowa districts are just a short drive away for most Iowans, with 32% of the state's population residing within a 10-minute drive to the center of one of the 53 Main Street Iowa districts. With 63% of the state's population living within a 20-minute drive<sup>(4)</sup> of a Main Street district, these commercial downtowns provide residents with places to shop, play, work, and importantly, live.

Iowa's Main Streets serve not only as downtown destinations for shopping and dining, but as vibrant communities to live in. Iowa's downtowns serve residents living directly in the downtown and those living a short walk or drive away. The diversity of downtown options throughout Iowa, including growing metropolises, bustling urban centers, and rural small towns, generates unique offerings for a place to call home. In rural and urban settings, Iowa Main Street districts offer walkable and authentic live-work-play environments.

Half of Main Street Iowa districts are located in cities with populations of less than 5,000. Approximately 10% of Lansing's population, 13% of Conrad, and 8% of Woodbine, Central City, and Elkader live in the downtown Main Streets. Of the ten Main Street districts with the lowest municipal populations, an average of 6% of the community lives in the downtown Main Street District.<sup>(5)</sup> And for many, downtown Main Streets are only a short drive away for locally oriented shopping, dining, and entertainment options.



Sources: Main Street Iowa (2022)

<sup>(4)</sup> Drive-time buffers derived from ESRI analysis reflecting estimated drive-times toward the center of Main Street districts.

<sup>(5)</sup> Percent of population residing in Main Street district based on US Census data.

# MAIN STREET RESIDENTS

## DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The following demographic profile represents the collective population of Iowans residing in the 53 Main Street Iowa districts.



**17,075+ RESIDENTS**

People Live in Iowa's Main Street Districts



**8,065 HOUSEHOLDS**  
Total Households in Iowa's Main Street Districts



**34 MEDIAN AGE**  
of an Iowa Main Street Resident



**\$109,500+ HOME VALUE**  
Median Value of a Home in Main Street Districts



**\$36,096 HOUSEHOLD INCOME**  
Median Household Income of Main Street Residents



**30% WITH A COLLEGE DEGREE**  
Share of Main Street Population with College Degree<sup>(6)</sup>

Main Street demographic factors vary across the different downtown communities, reflecting each municipality's unique composition. Main Street districts in downtown urban environments skew younger than the Main Street average overall. Main Streets such as the 6th Avenue Corridor Inc. in Des Moines, Dubuque Main Street, Marshalltown CBD, and Cedar Falls Community Main Street, attract residents at or under the median age of all Main Street residents throughout the state. Ames Main Street near Iowa State University and Hilltop Campus Village, abutting St. Ambrose University in Davenport, is home to younger residents.

Similarly, the average household size of Main Street residents skews smaller than the state's average. Across all Main Street Iowa districts, the average household size is 1.8 compared to the state's average household size of 2.4 people per household. This smaller household size contributes to a lower median household income of Main Street residents than the state's median. Despite this, Main Street residents still bring spending power to support their local businesses.

<sup>(6)</sup> Educational attainment includes residents with Associate, Bachelor, and/or Graduate or Professional Degree.

Note: The above demographic profiles reflect the population residing in the collective geographic areas of the 53 Main Street Iowa districts.

Source: US Census, ESRI (2021)

## GENERATING IMPACT

Main Streets are attracting residents downtown.

Nearly 400 people moved to Iowa's Main Street districts between 2010 and 2021.

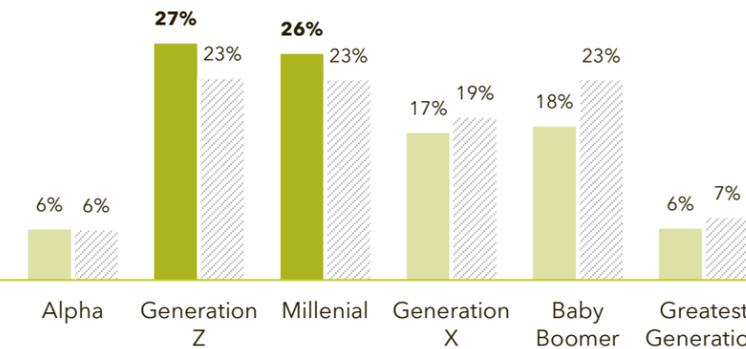
Iowa Main Street districts are also attracting new residents nearby, with 31,400 people moving within a 10-minute drive of Main Streets between 2010 and 2021.

Between 2010 and 2021, the population of Main Street residents increased by 398 to a total population of 17,075 people living in Main Street Downtowns throughout the state. This population represents a 2.7% growth rate overall. Although this growth rate is lower than the state's rate of 5.6%, investment and interest in Iowa's downtowns continue to strengthen the livability and desirability of each community. In fact, more than a third (37%) of Main Streets grew at a faster population growth rate compared to their county's growth rate, an important consideration given larger trends of fleeting populations in many places.

Notably, while the population of the downtown districts increased, the areas surrounding the Main Streets also continued to grow in population, bringing more residents and spending power downtown. Approximately 31,391 residents moved within a 10-minute drive of Main Streets between 2010 and 2021. To put this into context, that population increase is more than the entire population of Marshalltown or Mason City, demonstrating the value of Main Street in Iowa.

## ATTRACTING MILLENNIALS AND GENERATION Z TO LIVE DOWNTOWN

Main Street Iowa districts attract more Generation Z and Millennial residents, as shown through higher shares of these populations residing in Main Streets than the state's average. These younger populations bring higher levels of disposable incomes and more discretionary spending, supporting local businesses in Iowa's downtowns.



Source: US Census, ESRI (2021)

■ Population Residing in Main Street Iowa Districts    ▨ State of Iowa Overall

# LIVING ON MAIN STREET

## MAIN STREET HOUSING PROFILE

The 53 Main Street Iowa districts include over 10,000 housing units for renters and homeowners. The following housing profile reflects the housing supply across all Main Street Iowa districts.



**10,026 HOUSING UNITS**  
Total Residential Housing Units in Iowa's Main Street Districts



**1940 AVERAGE YEAR BUILT**  
Median Year Housing Structure Was Built in a Main Street District



**56% UNITS BUILT BEFORE 1930**  
Total Percent of Housing Units in a Main Street District that were Built Before 1930



**\$521 MEDIAN MONTHLY RENT**  
Median Rent of Rental Units in Main Street Districts



**\$109,500+ HOME VALUE**  
Median Value of a Housing Unit in Main Street District



**13% OF INCOME SPENT ON MORTGAGE**  
Average Percent of Household Income Spent on Mortgage for a Housing Unit in a Main Street District

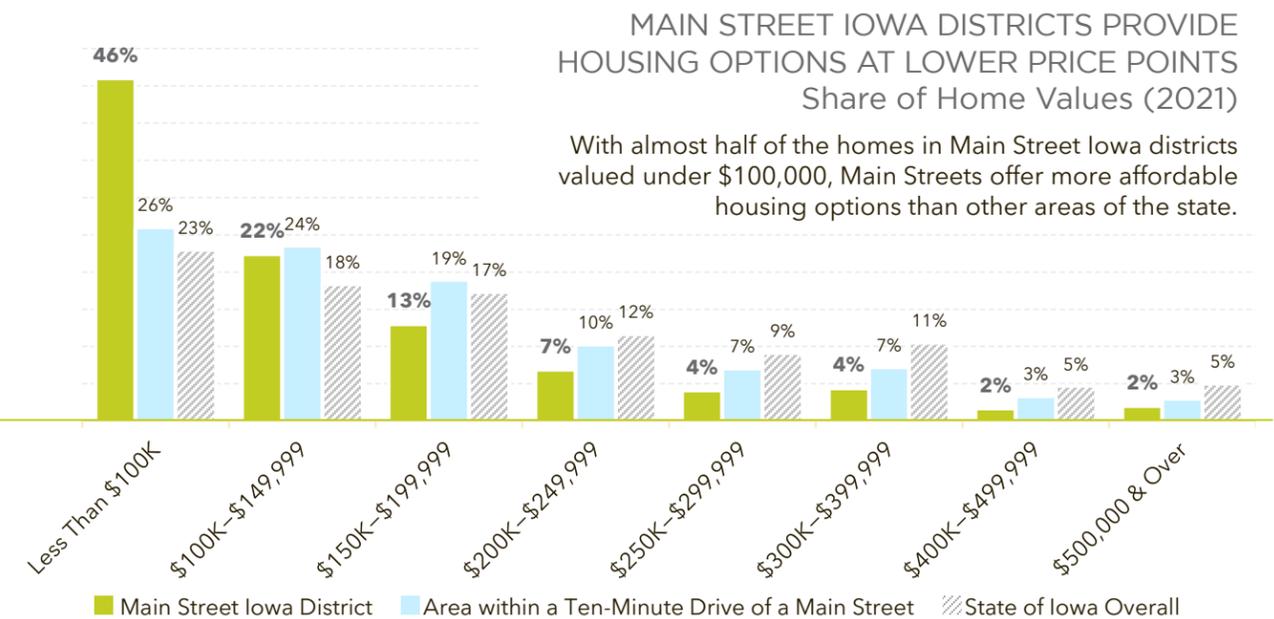
The above housing profile reflects housing supply and conditions based on the collective geographic areas of the 53 Main Street Iowa districts. Sources: US Census, ACS (2015–2019), ESRI (2021)



Main Street Iowa districts offer more affordable housing options compared to the statewide housing market. As downtown housing units continue to age, preservation efforts remain crucial to bolstering the continued growth of downtown housing options.

Homes in Main Street Iowa districts are more affordable, with the median home value in Main Streets (\$109,500) considerably lower than the statewide median home value of \$174,000 in 2021. In fact, more than half of the housing units in Main Street Iowa districts are valued under \$100,000.<sup>(9)</sup> Similarly, rents are generally more affordable in Main Street Iowa districts than elsewhere in the state. The median rent of a rental unit in a Main Street district is \$521, approximately \$118 lower than the state's median rent of \$639 in 2021.<sup>(7)</sup> Despite this affordability, Main Streets continue to address residential vacancy in their downtown communities.<sup>(8)</sup>

Residential housing preservation, renovation, and rehabilitation efforts continue to be a focus in the building supply of Main Street Iowa districts. More than half (56%), of housing units in Main Street Iowa districts were constructed before 1930, over double the state's share of pre-1930 housing (26%). Main Street Iowa districts have experienced limited new housing supply in recent years, with only 6% of the total housing supply across the 53 programs built since 2000.<sup>(9)</sup> This aging stock has been a focus of recent downtown revitalization efforts with dedicated resources at the state and local levels available for renovation efforts.



The above data compares the median home value of housing units in the geographic programmatic area of the 53 Main Street Iowa districts, the areas near and surrounding a Main Street district as defined by a ten-minute drive, and the state of Iowa overall. Sources: US Census, ACS (2015–2019), ESRI (2021)

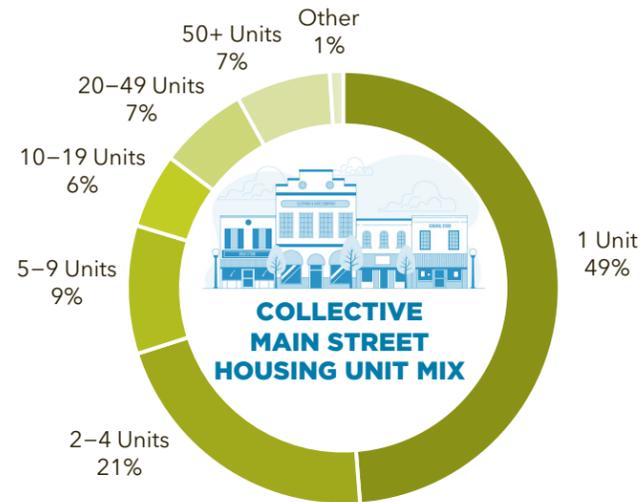
(7) US Census Bureau (2020) with ESRI Forecasts for 2021.  
 (8) US Census Bureau and ESRI Forecasts for 2021 reported 19% residential vacancy rates in Main Street Iowa districts compared to the state's 10% housing vacancy.  
 (9) American Community Survey 2015–2019

## Connecting With National Housing Trends

### MAIN STREET IOWA DISTRICTS HELP ADDRESS THE “MISSING MIDDLE” OF HOUSING OPTIONS FOR IOWANS

With a diverse range of housing options from free-standing single-family structures to units above commercial storefronts and small upper-floor apartment buildings, Main Street Iowa districts offer a variety of different living conditions for owners and renters.

This collective mix of downtown housing units supports diverse populations with family-centric options of attached townhomes and detached single-family houses as well as studio, one, and two-bedroom units configured for single occupancy residency, partners, and roommates. Multifamily condominiums and apartment buildings help bridge the economic and financial gap of housing affordability. Downtown investment in upper-story housing and rehabilitation support this continued mix of unit typologies in Iowa’s communities. Housing in Iowa’s downtowns strengthens the livability of the communities and allows community members to live in walkable environments adding to the vibrancy of the place.



The above housing unit mix reflects the total housing inventory in the 53 Main Street Iowa districts. Source: ESRI Community Analyst, ACS (2015–2019)

National emphasis and current trends in affordability of housing centers around concern for the disappearing “missing middle” housing typologies. New housing construction gravitates toward the polar ends of the spectrum at single-family housing and large-scale multifamily buildings with a lack of smaller multifamily residential buildings such as duplexes, triplexes, and small apartment buildings.<sup>(10)</sup> Limited new construction of smaller unit buildings impacts the affordability of housing and limits options for renters and homebuyers alike. Approximately 30% of Iowa’s Main Street housing supply, compared to the state’s overall supply of 9%, includes housing specifically in this “missing middle” classification, or buildings between two and nine residential units.<sup>(11)</sup> In this context, Iowa’s downtowns play a critical role in helping the state ensure a variety of housing typologies and options for Iowa’s residents. With barriers in new construction for significant financial and development viability of this scale of residential building, preserving downtown’s existing supply remains critical.

In tandem with addressing higher residential vacancy rates in Main Street Iowa districts compared to statewide vacancy rates, Main Streets devote resources and support to improving residential housing options, quality, and supply in their downtown districts. Main Street programs connect property owners in their districts with grants and resources for redevelopment and have catalyzed the conversion of underutilized upper floors into housing options. Main Streets’ leadership brings more residents downtown.

(10) www.missingmiddlehousing.com  
 (11) ACS Community Survey (2015–2019)



### Main Street Impact: ACCELERATING HOUSING GROWTH IN NEARBY AREAS

In addition to Main Streets generating impact by preserving and developing housing directly in their downtown communities, Main Street Iowa districts helped spur additional housing development adjacent and near their districts, though not directly in the downtown. Being within a short drive of a Main Street downtown proved to be an asset for many communities across the state.

**Between 2000 and 2021, the number of housing units within a twenty-minute drive of a Main Street Downtown grew by 20%, 3% higher than the state average.<sup>(12)</sup>**

Quality downtowns with demonstrated investment, activity, and community connections support the overall character and sense of place for each Main Street in Iowa. Between providing options for nearby jobs, community events, and places to dine and shop, the relationship between Main Street and its residential community reaches far beyond its geographic boundaries.

(12) US Census (2020), ESRI Forecasts (2021)

### WHY MAIN STREET IOWA DISTRICTS ATTRACT RESIDENTIAL GROWTH

The charm, character, and reinvestment in Iowa’s downtowns bring more people wanting to live within the downtown Main Street Iowa districts.

#### A Short Walk Away ... and In the Heart of It All

With coffee shops, boutique stores, and restaurants within blocks, Iowa’s downtowns are walkable environments. From nightlife activity to peaceful mornings, downtown residents enjoy the commercial amenities and vibrant places in downtown. Enhanced placemaking and pedestrian experiences create desirable places for living and exploring.

#### Affordable Opportunities

Iowa’s downtown housing options lean more affordable than in many other areas of the state. Smaller unit sizes and mixes of housing typologies provide residents with a range of different price points less readily available in areas more defined by single-family homes. Iowa’s downtowns have seen a surplus of demand in many communities between millennials and Gen Z residents who may not be financially positioned to purchase a home and older generations wanting to downsize with a more active lifestyle.

#### Community Spirit and Sense of Connection

Main Street Iowa’s revitalization efforts not only improve the physical infrastructure and built environment but foster a stronger sense of connection among its residents. Programmatic offerings, including events such as Saturday morning farmer’s markets, Friday night concerts, and boutique shopping days bring residents into the streets and gathering places as shared experiences. Generating more than revenue for local businesses, downtown revitalization efforts provide social experiences to form desired connections and relationships.



Main Street Spotlight:

## MAIN STREET MASON CITY

Bridging Partnerships for Catalytic Downtown Development

Main Street Mason City enhances, promotes, and preserves Mason City as a diverse business, cultural, and residential destination for the benefit of the entire community.

**26,700+**

Citywide Population  
*US Census (2020)*

**285+**

Businesses in the Downtown

**3,260+**

Employees in the Downtown

**\$397 Million**

Annual Business Revenue in Downtown  
*Total Businesses, Employment, and Revenue in the Main Street District provided through InfoGroup (2021)*

Recognized for its famous architecture, including Frank Lloyd Wright’s only hotel design and the birthplace of Meredith Willson, composer of “The Music Man,” Mason City’s downtown has seen considerable investment in recent years. Champions of the downtown and collaborative partners to the city, chamber, and other economic development entities, Main Street Mason City is dedicated to catalyzing change.

Mason City’s downtown has seen significant changes in recent years with a resurgence of investment compounding into an active area for businesses, visitors, and community members alike. New development, redevelopment, and rehabilitation in the downtown blend the historically and culturally rich community with modern-day vibrancy, bringing higher levels of tourism and visitation to downtown Mason City.

### READY TO RECRUIT

Inspiring change as an economic driver, Main Street Mason City actively works to bring new business opportunities to the downtown area that reflect the desires of the Mason City community.

After spearheading a robust community engagement survey of Mason City residents, visitors, and downtown workers, Main Street Mason City developed a list of targeted industries for prospective business expansion and recruitment. Within months of the launch of the findings, momentum began for all top priorities.

## GAME-CHANGING DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT

Through Catalytic Collaboration Among the Public and Private Sectors

River City Renaissance Project, a collaborative master plan and vision with the city, area nonprofits, and major organizations, including Main Street Mason City, celebrates these five impactful downtown developments:

### PLACEMAKING AND COMMUNAL GATHERING SPACES IN DOWNTOWN

New public pavilions, parks, and the proposed River Walk celebrating Willow Creek through the center of the downtown, enhance the pedestrian experience of Mason City, improve the quality of spaces for events and visitors, and demonstrate considerable investment toward ensuring downtown customers stay longer and spend more during their time downtown.

### REFRESH AND REORIENTATION OF THE DOWNTOWN SHOPPING MALL

New anchor tenants and indoor and outdoor improvements at the Southbridge Mall transition this shopping mall toward a lifestyle center supporting the downtown commercial district. The latest designs of previously blank façades will transform new storefronts with compatible designs in the downtown district.

### MULTIPURPOSE ARENA IN THE HEART OF THE WALKABLE DOWNTOWN

The recently constructed Mason City Arena, an \$18 million investment, was redeveloped from a vacant big-box retailer in the downtown shopping mall. The arena attracted a new hockey team to Mason City and brings more overnight visitors downtown.

### DOWNTOWN HOTEL CONNECTING VISITORS WITH MUSIC MAN SQUARE

With more reasons to spend the night downtown, proposed development Hyatt Place Mason City pays tribute to Frank Lloyd Wright’s architectural contributions to the city. The development connects to the Meredith Willson Museum and provides the city with its first downtown conference center for both leisure and business travelers.

### EXPANDED RESIDENTIAL HOUSING OPTIONS IN THE HEART OF DOWNTOWN

Between new development and conversion of upper floors in existing commercial buildings, Downtown Mason City continues to offer a larger supply of housing units with demand surging. Recognized at the 2021 Housing Iowa Conference as the best multifamily project in the state, The River Mason City, located within walking distance of downtown, experienced a four-year waiting list for townhome units, a success that’s spurred a next phase of development. Within eight months of launching a new downtown housing initiative to support redevelopment of upper-story housing, five downtown building owners received \$550,000 in grant support for rehabilitation.

A success of Main Street Mason City’s Ready to Recruit program, Simply Nourished launched a storefront downtown providing Mason City residents and workers with access to healthy foods and grocery items while celebrating local products and businesses.





Main Street Spotlight:

# MAIN STREET NEVADA

New Opportunities for Downtown Revitalization

Main Street Nevada preserves and grows the downtown as a business center for the community, drawing people downtown for shopping and fun while preserving the downtown's historic buildings and creating an inclusive community-friendly atmosphere.

**6,900+**

Citywide Population  
*US Census (2020)*

**102**

Businesses in the Downtown

**895**

Employees in the Downtown

**\$61 Million**

Annual Business Revenue in Downtown  
*Total Businesses, Employment, and Revenue in the Main Street District provided through InfoGroup (2021)*

Main Street Nevada is one of Main Street Iowa's newest programs. The Main Street program brings new and enhanced revitalization efforts to its downtown, generating investment in the historic community and achieving dramatic results. Main Street Nevada is refreshing and reenergizing new life into the historic core of the city.

Nevada, the county seat of Story County, has found creative ways to ignite its downtown with new commercial amenities and investments in its historic building stock. Located approximately 40 miles northeast of Des Moines, Nevada includes a historic downtown district, featured in the National Register for Historic Places, and is home to numerous small and locally owned businesses that have been serving Nevada for decades.

Downtown Nevada features the historic Camelot Theater, which first opened its doors in 1913, with a starting admission price of ten cents. After a period of vacancy, the theater is now home to The Talent Factory comedy club, once again bringing live shows, crowds, and entertainment into the heart of Nevada.

State Bank & Trust Co., a local, full-service bank, has also served as a downtown anchor in Nevada over the last sixty years. Reflective of its long-standing roots in the community, the bank is a key lending partner to surrounding businesses, helping downtown Nevada remain vibrant, economically competitive, and open for business.

## REINVESTING IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Reimagining places for businesses and people

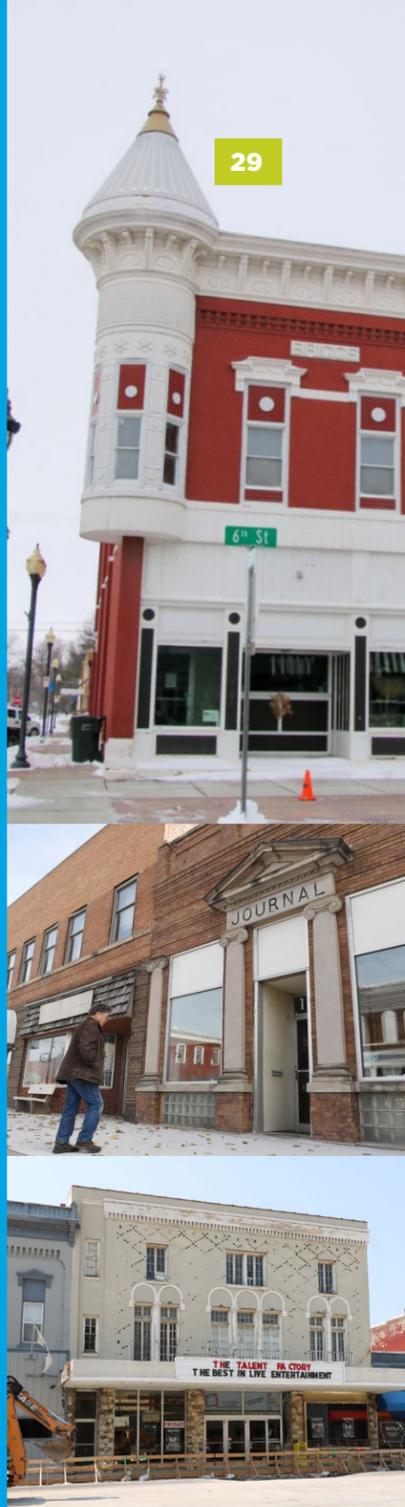
In recent years, Downtown Nevada has seen a notable amount of investment in its downtown building stock, sparking new ideas for businesses and historic building uses. Through its Building Façade Grant Program, Main Street Nevada provides mini-grants to business and property owners to enhance their storefronts and façades. The Main Street provides \$1 for \$1 matching funds up to \$500 for a \$1,000 project. Improvements include updated paint, third-party historic building evaluation, new signage or canopies, masonry tuckpointing, and the replacement of doors and windows. Over 10% of all downtown buildings have already taken advantage of the program as of March 2022.

In July 2021, owners of a historic downtown building, home to Tipton's Pharmacy for over 50 years, received a \$100,000 grant from IEDA's Community Catalyst program to revitalize the building. With these funds, four apartment units will be added to the building's second floor, which has been vacant for decades. The project activates a long-vacant space of a historic building and serves as a proof-of-concept for future efforts to encourage residential growth in the town's downtown.

"This project is really bringing back a space that has been underutilized in the past, and it's a kickstart of the effort downtown of upstairs living. It's pretty exciting."

— Henry Corbin, Nevada Main Street (2021)

Reinvestment continues in downtown Nevada with the historic News Journal building at 1133 Sixth Street undergoing significant reinvestment to revitalize the building to transform space for a new brewpub or restaurant. This \$350,000 renovation includes awarded funds through IEDA's Main Street Challenge grant that will allow for outdoor seating and a welcoming public entrance.



In downtown Nevada, an influx of new younger residents has been creating opportunities for older business owners to develop succession plans to future owners and operators. Main Street Nevada helps facilitate these relationships, playing its role in ensuring downtown Nevada retains its legacy businesses and continues providing key services for nearby residents and visitors.



# THE ECONOMIC RESILIENCY OF IOWA'S MAIN STREETS

**IOWA'S DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION EFFORTS THROUGH MAIN STREET PROGRAM CREATED MORE RESILIENT LOCAL ECONOMIES AND A FASTER RECOVERY OF BUSINESS SALES.**

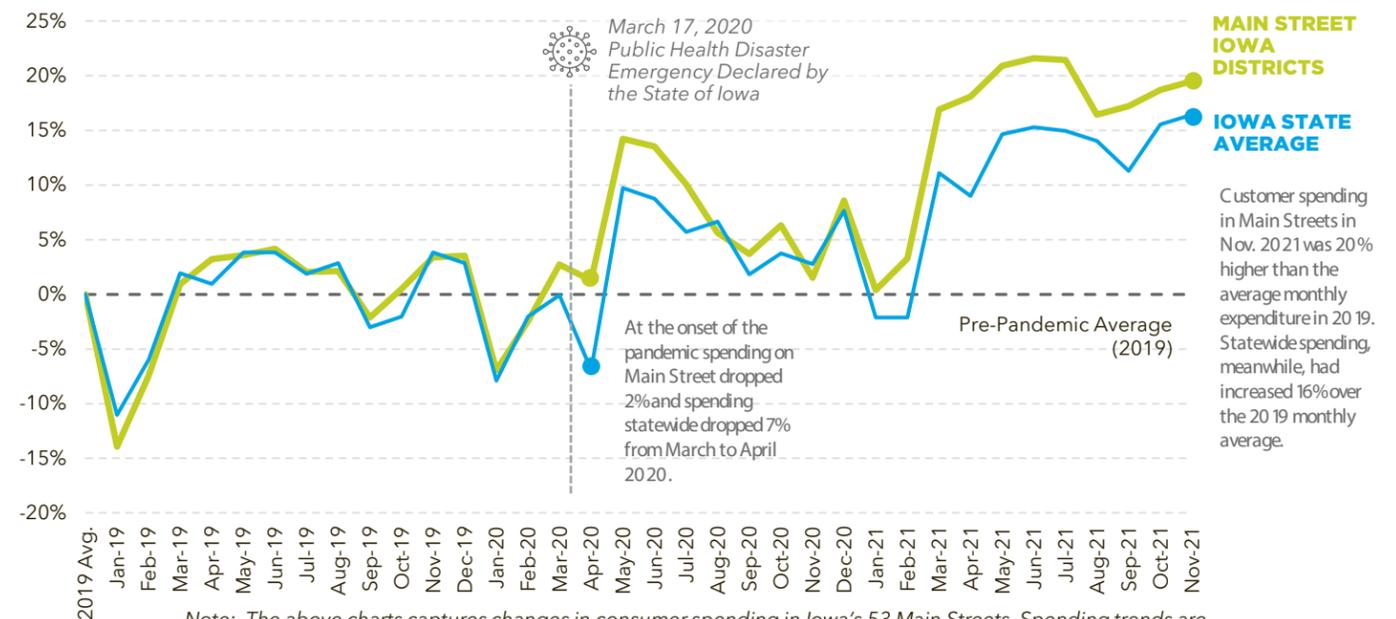
The COVID-19 pandemic brought economic disruptions to local, state, and national economies beginning in March of 2020. However, Main Street Iowa districts remained economically resilient during the COVID-19 pandemic with higher consumer spending levels than the statewide average.

As shown in the chart below, consumer spending in Main Street Iowa districts experienced less decline than the state average at the onset of the pandemic, and spending has surged in these communities in 2021. By **November 2021, consumer spending in Iowa increased 12% beyond spending levels at the same time period in 2019. Spending within Main Street Iowa districts, on the other hand, had increased an impressive 15% beyond pre-pandemic levels.** Main Street programmatic efforts and business support resources in these downtowns played an important role in contributing to this heightened level of economic resiliency.

## CHANGES IN MAIN STREET IOWA DISTRICTS' CONSUMER SPENDING COMPARED TO STATE SPENDING TRENDS

(2019 – 2021)

The below line graphs depict changes in consumer spending relative to pre-pandemic spending levels. Main Street Iowa districts, on average, outperformed the state consumer spending average by marginal amounts before the pandemic. However, compared to 2019 levels, consumer spending in Main Street Iowa districts significantly outpaced statewide levels in 2021.

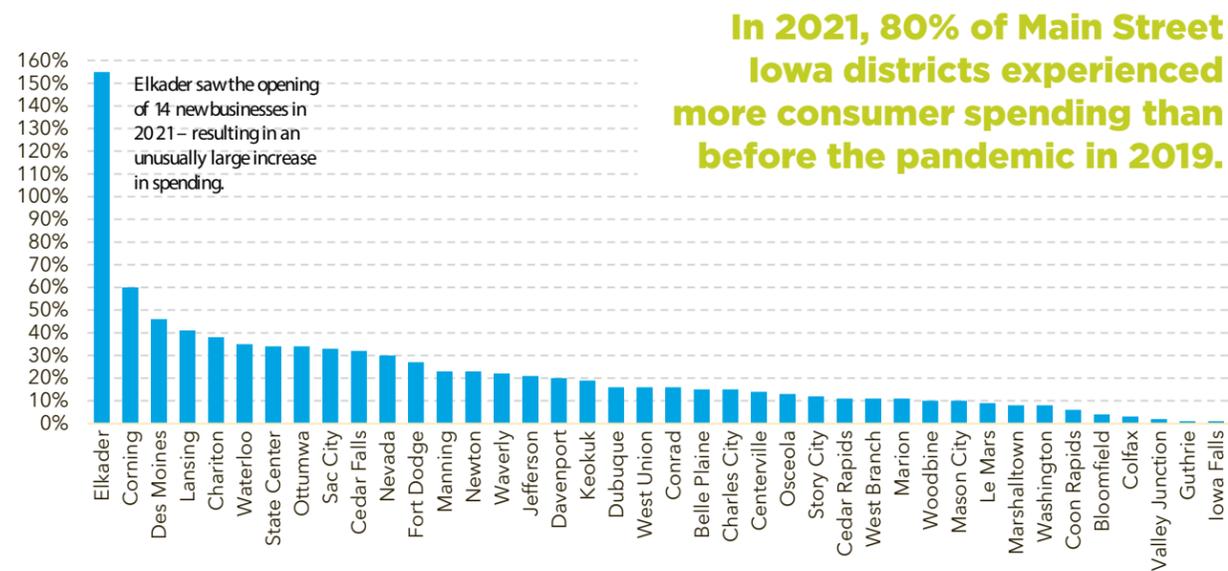


Note: The above charts captures changes in consumer spending in Iowa's 53 Main Streets. Spending trends are indexed to 2019 average conditions and adjusted for inflation. Source: MasterCard Retail Location Insights (2021)

# MAIN STREETS' IMPACT ON DOWNTOWN ECONOMIC RESILIENCY

In the spring of 2020, Main Street Iowa districts experienced an initial decline in customer spending that was only one third as severe as the statewide decline.

Businesses in Iowa's Main Streets, with revitalization programs and dedicated leadership, experienced an impressively small 1% decline in consumer spending compared to the state's 8% decline overall. Iowa's downtown economic revitalization programs and dedicated local leadership played substantial roles in helping their business districts navigate the economically turbulent times with the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. As business owners and workers faced regulatory, economic, and social dynamic shifts in March and April 2020, downtown leaders, Main Street Executive Directors and IEDA staff provided on-the-ground support for local retailers, connecting businesses with financial resources and relief, technical assistance for pivoting business models to face shifts in e-commerce and delivery options, and much more. This support, these resources, and this guidance led to positive economic impacts. Main Street Iowa districts experienced a less significant decline in revenue than the statewide average revenue trend for customer-oriented businesses during this time.



Note: Clarence and Jewell are excluded from the above chart due to data limitations.

This chart reflects the change in average consumer spending between January and November 2019 and 2021 adjusted for inflation.

Source: MasterCard Retail Location Insights (2021)

## Measuring Downtown Economic Resiliency

Quantifying the economic resiliency of a community can be a nuanced challenge. Best practices in measuring the resiliency of an economy during an economic crisis, emergency, or recession include analyzing impacts through two different time periods. As defined by the World Bank, "Instantaneous Resiliency" refers to the ability to limit or reduce the degree of the immediate production loss or revenue. "Dynamic Resiliency" reflects the ability to recover after a disaster or economic hardship. Both of these resiliency definitions are applicable to determining the economic resiliency of Iowa's downtowns during the COVID-19 pandemic. The instantaneous resiliency of Main Street Iowa districts reflects revenue and consumer spending patterns immediately at the onset of the pandemic during March and April of 2020 while dynamic resiliency reflects revenue trends in late 2021.

### INSTANTANEOUS RESILIENCY

Iowa Main Street districts remained largely resilient at the onset of the pandemic. **In April 2020, spending in Main Street districts dropped only 1% compared to April 2019. In comparison, statewide spending in April 2020 dropped 8% from April 2019 levels.**

### DYNAMIC RESILIENCY

By Spring 2021, as public health conditions improved, spending levels throughout the state began significantly rising – particularly in Main Street districts. **By November 2021, spending in Main Street districts was up 15% compared to November 2019. This increase is 3% higher than the statewide average, which saw spending levels increase 12% over the same time period.**



### RESILIENCY BY CITY SIZE

Change in Consumer Spending in Main Street Iowa Districts with Municipal Populations:

	Instantaneous Resiliency (March & April 2020 Compared With March % April 2019)	Dynamic Resiliency (November 2021 Compared With November 2019)
Over 80,000 Residents	-26%	34%
Between 40,000 and 79,999 Residents	-30%	17%
Between 15,000 and 39,999 Residents	17%	10%
Between 5,000 and 14,999 Residents	2%	11%
Under 5,000 Residents	2%	14%
<b>Iowa State Average</b>	<b>-8%</b>	<b>12%</b>

Source: MasterCard Retail Location Insights (2021)

Similar to demographic impacts of Iowa's downtowns, the community setting and rural and urban positioning of downtowns affect economic resiliency. In the case study of the pandemic's impacts, more urban Main Street Iowa districts tended to experience higher levels of retail revenue decline than Iowa's less populated cities. This trend follows national findings in urban areas. Generally, cities with higher concentrations of inflow employment base experienced more volatile retail revenue patterns as surges in teleworking and remote work affected the customer base and spending capacity in urban downtowns. Importantly, urban Main Streets experienced an impressive rebound over 2021 and by year's end were experiencing some of the largest spending gains.

# RESTAURANT RESILIENCY IN MAIN STREET IOWA DISTRICTS BETWEEN 2019 AND 2021

The restaurant industry was hit particularly hard at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Restaurants in Main Street Iowa districts displayed greater instantaneous and dynamic resiliency than the state’s restaurant industry overall.

## INSTANTANEOUS RESILIENCY

Restaurants saw a dramatic decline in revenue at the onset of the pandemic. **In April 2020, consumer spending at restaurants across the state overall saw an immediate decline of 35% in April 2020. However, restaurant spending in Main Street Iowa districts decreased only 25%.** Restaurants were hardest hit in the larger cities, where businesses were more likely to close down and whose customer bases had a higher portion of office workers and tourists, demographics that declined dramatically. Iowa’s restaurants recovered relatively quickly compared to many places across the country, and sales surpassed pre-pandemic levels in the spring of 2021.

## DYNAMIC RESILIENCY

Iowa’s restaurants recovered relatively quickly compared to many places across the country, and sales surpassed pre-pandemic levels in the spring of 2021. **By November 2021, restaurant spending in Main Street districts was up 7% compared to November 2019. This increase is 5% higher than the statewide average, where spending was 2% above pandemic levels at the time period.**



### RESTAURANT RESILIENCY Change in Restaurant Spending in Main Street Iowa Districts with Municipal Populations:

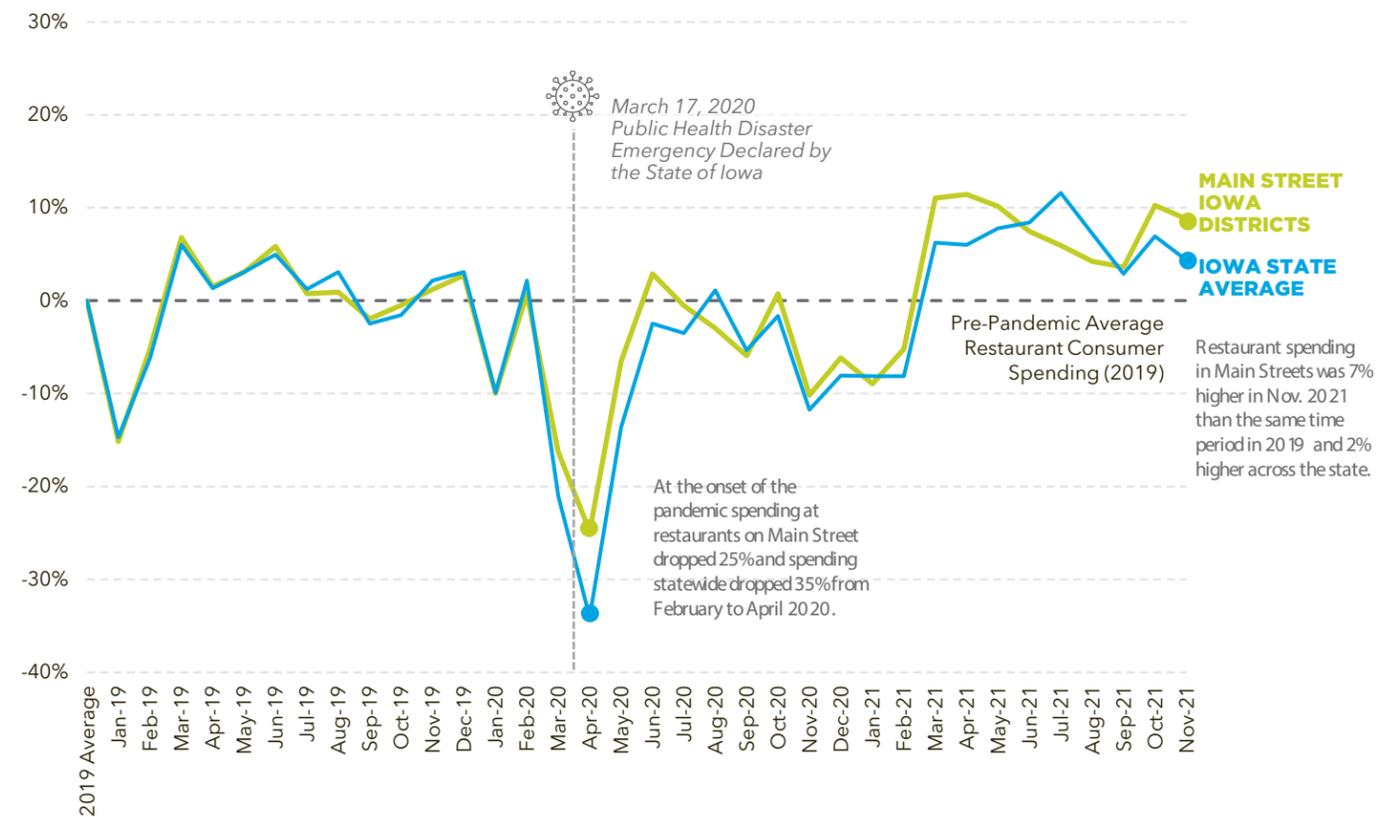
	Instantaneous Resiliency (March and April 2020 Compared With March and April 2019)	Dynamic Resiliency (November 2021 Compared With November 2019)
Over 80,000 Residents	-40%	-22%
Between 40,000 and 79,999 Residents	-45%	22%
Between 15,000 and 39,999 Residents	-27%	5%
Between 5,000 and 14,999 Residents	-14%	1%
Under 5,000 Residents	-8%	13%
<b>Iowa State Average</b>	<b>-35%</b>	<b>2%</b>

Source: MasterCard Retail Location Insights (2021)

Restaurants in Main Street Iowa districts experienced a softer immediate shock during the onset of the pandemic, and in 2021 they rebounded to gain an average of 7% more sales than pre-pandemic levels in 2019. This is more than double the statewide average of 2% sales growth.

## RESTAURANT SPENDING IN MAIN STREET IOWA DISTRICTS COMPARED TO STATE TRENDS (2019 – 2021)

Consumer spending at eating and drinking places in Main Street Iowa districts reflected statewide trends prior to March 2020. After the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Iowa’s downtowns outperformed the state average.



Note: The above chart captures changes in consumer spending in Iowa’s 53 Main Streets. Due to data limitations, not all Main Street programs are included in this graph. Spending trends are indexed to 2019 average conditions and adjusted for inflation. Source: MasterCard Retail Location Insights (2021)



Main Street Spotlight:

# MOUNT VERNON-LISBON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GROUP

Achieving the Community's Downtown Vision



The Mount Vernon-Lisbon Community Development Group and Mount Vernon Main Street celebrates the downtown's past, present, and future to provide quality experiences for its residents and visitors.

Between the downtown's variety of dining options, galleries of arts and culture, and an eclectic mix of retailers, Mount Vernon and Lisbon are "far from ordinary" with award-winning festivals and exciting and innovative downtown programming. With a team of over 500 volunteers ranging from age six to 84, the Mount Vernon-Lisbon Community Development Group reflects the authenticity of the community.

Located 20 minutes north of Iowa City and less than a half-hour east of Cedar Rapids, the Mount Vernon Main Street District offers a mix of experiences for its family-friendly residents, the nearby student population of Cornell College, and destination visitors. From the recently completed First Street Community Center, a thriving business incubator that supports 15 businesses, to legacy establishments on First Street in the heart of the community, the Mount Vernon Main Street District has become a regional shopping and dining destination.

Since forming in 2008, the organization has prioritized blending economic development, preservation, and community development to achieve a vibrant downtown. Once experiencing a commercial vacancy rate of over 8%, the downtown district is now filled with businesses and is in high demand with prospective retailers. Mount Vernon Main Street leadership is frequently found creating connections downtown, helping to form collaborative relationships among the business community.

**4,500+**

Citywide Population  
*US Census (2020)*

**51**

Businesses in  
the Downtown

**375+**

Employees in  
the Downtown

**\$96 Million**

Annual Business  
Revenue in Downtown  
*Total Businesses, Employment, and  
Revenue in the Main Street District  
provided through InfoGroup (2021)*



## INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO ACHIEVE THE COMMUNITY'S DOWNTOWN VISION

Creative Resourcefulness For Improved Placemaking

Known as the "Face of Main Street" and a fixture in the community, Mount Vernon Main Street plays a pivotal part in connecting the community's vision with the city leadership, creating results and improved places and spaces throughout the downtown. Inspired by an idea to transform an unsightly alley in the downtown, Mount Vernon Main Street worked to create an alley pocket park as a shared space for people to gather and connect. Recognizing a \$50,000 deficit in allocated funding for project completion, the Main Street's Executive Director found a creative, and unusual, funding source. The Cold Turkey Challenge offered a chance to win a \$50,000 grant for the Iowa community that could successfully form a group of tobacco users to quit nicotine "cold turkey." Mount Vernon Main Street formed a team of "fighters" to sign up for the challenge, secured partnerships with Mercy Care and a local wellness collective, and successfully won the grant challenge with a 100% success rate among participants. Mount Vernon Main Street was awarded the \$50,000, dedicated to the alley pocket park placemaking effort, in March 2021.

### SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT FUND

For Economic Resiliency During the COVID-19 Pandemic

As a collaborative effort between the city and Mount-Vernon Lisbon Community Development Group, the Small Business Support Fund in 2020 provided financial assistance to 82 businesses throughout the City of Mount Vernon and the City of Lisbon. The Small Business Support Fund provided thousands of dollars in economic relief for businesses and helped keep the doors open for many establishments with over \$218,000 secured for businesses through city funding, the Mount Vernon-Lisbon Community Charitable Development Group, and private donations. These collaborative partnerships helped ensure businesses received grants immediately during challenging times, with the majority of the funds distributed to businesses in early April of 2020.

### A SEAT AT THE TABLE

...and in City Hall

Over the last nearly fifteen years, Mount Vernon Main Street has formed a positive relationship with Mount Vernon city staff and leadership, bringing collective efforts and a desire to collaborate toward implementing positive change. This demonstrates the symbiotic relationship between the public and nonprofit sectors in downtown revitalization efforts. The city's commitment to Main Street positions the organization to generate even more substantial impacts in the community. With the Main Street Executive Director now on the city's payroll and offices located in City Hall, Mount Vernon Main Street creates another avenue for the community to engage with the municipal leadership helping to achieve tangible changes in the downtown.

## IOWA RESOURCES FOR ECONOMIC RESILIENCY

### REVITALIZATION RESOURCES DEDICATED TO SUPPORTING DOWNTOWN COMMUNITIES DURING THE PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic required an innovative and rapid response to provide critically needed help to Iowa's families and businesses. The team at IEDA and the Iowa Finance Authority (IFA) were proud to step up and provide this response all while not missing a beat in continued work to make Iowa the choice to live, work and do business. The IEDA | IFA team transformed into a robust relief operations center, providing COVID-19 impacted renters, homeowners, small businesses, farmers, restaurants, bars and nonprofits with critically needed assistance. In total, the agencies put out more than a half a billion dollars in relief funds. The IEDA | IFA team launched an e-commerce platform, ShopIowa.com, to give small retailers statewide a way to sell their products online at no charge. The team showcased incredible stories of resilience through Iowans Unite, a marketing campaign developed to support small businesses and build consumer confidence. And it gave industry partners a seat at the table in the work of an advisory board convened by Governor Reynolds to turn the obstacles of 2020 into opportunities for the future.

- **ShopIowa.com** is a shared online marketplace dedicated to connecting local businesses and entrepreneurs with digital customers. This online store allows Iowa businesses to list products for sale while connecting customers with businesses from across the state with a single click. Downtown revitalization programs helped local businesses take advantage of the new platform through shared lightboxes for product photography to navigating the process to submit information. ShopIowa.com reduces the burdens of creating and marketing an online website for individual businesses.
- **Shared Collection of Resources** among downtown revitalization leaders facilitated by Main Street Iowa, helped downtowns across the state collaborate and learn success strategies for navigating curbside pickup, social distancing design considerations, fundraising support, and event guidance. By sharing these strategies and what communities were doing during the pandemic, local leaders reduced and eliminated decision-making fatigue and challenges while implementing approaches in their downtowns based on strategies with proven results.



## HOW DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION EFFORTS IMPROVE ECONOMIC RESILIENCY

Iowa's downtown revitalization efforts and Main Street Iowa proved valuable and essential during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### On-the-Ground Leadership Connecting Business Owners with Vital Resources

Iowa's Main Street leaders and volunteers served as critical liaisons and support for downtown businesses as the COVID-19 pandemic altered business operations through challenging economic times. This downtown leadership cohort provided additional resources, complementing municipal and state agencies while helping businesses apply for local, state, and federal aid and funding.

### Marketing Downtowns to Bring More Customers to Local Businesses

From establishing recommended trip itineraries and things to do downtown to promoting downtown businesses on social media, downtown revitalization programs and Main Street communities generate higher visitation levels and customers to local businesses. These collective marketing efforts proved fundamental to many businesses helping ensure increased revenues.

### Guiding Local Businesses on Pivoting Strategies

Quick to become a buzzword of the pandemic, the "pivot" refers to the necessity of business owners to quickly adjust their operations to meet changing consumer demands and regulations impacting business operations. Downtown revitalization efforts brought e-commerce training to local businesses, helping brick-and-mortar downtown locations adapt to online delivery platforms, social media marketing, and digital stores. These trainings and resources helped businesses incorporate these approaches quickly, reducing the learning curve burden and leading to more resilient business models.



# PRIORITIES FOR CONTINUED DOWNTOWN IMPACT

**IEDA'S DOWNTOWN INVESTMENTS  
HAVE BENEFITED IOWA'S LOCAL  
AND REGIONAL ECONOMIES AND  
ENHANCED THE QUALITY OF LIFE  
FOR RESIDENTS THROUGHOUT THE  
STATE. OPPORTUNITIES EXIST TO  
MAINTAIN THIS MOMENTUM.**

**IOWA'S DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION PROGRAMS ACHIEVE  
RESULTS AND GENERATE IMPACT.  
INVESTING IN IOWA'S DOWNTOWNS STRENGTHENS THE STATEWIDE  
ECONOMY.**

IEDA's programmatic efforts generate considerable economic and demographic impacts for downtown communities of all types and sizes. Continuing to prioritize investments in Iowa's downtowns will help keep Iowa's local, regional, and statewide economies strong and ensure that its commercial districts remain attractive communities where businesses want to locate, where customers want to shop, and where residents want to live.

**HOUSING IS THE LIFEBLOOD OF A VIBRANT DOWNTOWN,  
AND IOWA'S DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION PROGRAMS  
HELP RESTORE RESIDENTIAL STOCK ACROSS THE STATE.  
PRIORITIZE INCENTIVES TO RETAIN AND GROW HOUSING SUPPLY IN  
IOWA'S DOWNTOWNS.**

Housing adds a vital land use to downtown districts by enhancing pedestrian activity in the evenings and weekends and providing revenue streams to local businesses at off-peak times. In addition, Iowa's downtowns provide a different housing typology than offered elsewhere, such as multifamily product or units above ground floor retail spaces. Continue to support and expand the capacity of IEDA's programs that help preserve and rehabilitate downtown housing. Consider prioritizing housing investment in areas with an older or historic housing stock, areas with higher levels of building decline, regions that are facing population decline, and downtowns in which market forces alone will not develop new housing supply or restore existing supply.

**IOWA'S DOWNTOWNS ARE THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL,  
AND EMOTIONAL HUBS FOR ITS COUNTIES.  
PROVIDE PLACEMAKING INVESTMENT TO PRESERVE THEIR ROLE  
AND VISUAL IDENTITIES.**

IEDA's programs help preserve the character and legacy of Iowa's downtowns, retaining their role as gathering places, entertainment and shopping destinations, and the visual identity of a city. Help preserve these important characteristics by implementing placemaking efforts that retain the brand identity of Iowa's downtowns, that keep them safe and clean, and that continue to draw all types of visitors, residents, and workers for years to come.

**IOWA'S MAIN STREET PROGRAM HAS ESTABLISHED ITSELF  
AS A NATIONAL LEADER IN DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION.  
CONTINUE TO INTEGRATE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES TO ENSURE THEY  
REMAIN IMPACTFUL AND GENERATE A POSITIVE RETURN ON INVESTMENT.**

Main Street Iowa is widely considered one of the strongest Coordinating Programs and networks throughout the country. The program continues to strengthen the process in which local Main Street program designation is retained, issued, and communities are held accountable for implementing the Main Street Approach®. This can be done through the creation of a regular occurring re-designation process, refining program expectations in the program agreements, and expectations of program impact documentation. Enhanced performance measures could include the documentation of placemaking measures, business attraction, downtown housing efforts, and private investment in downtown.