The Design and Content of a Character Main Street.

CENTRAL FLORIDA'S CHARACTER MAIN STREETS.

The five county Orlando Region is fortunate to have many small cities and towns with character downtowns; towns that are attractive with successful retail and civic "main streets".

A survey of nine towns reveals an instructive commonality in the length of their main street active zones, the provision of parking and the height of their buildings. This history can inform the preservation of established character towns and the design of new towns.

Each is a **"centennial town",** with over 100 years of incorporation. Most were developed as the railroad came to town; before buildings had elevators and steel frame construction.

Dates of Incorporation
Central Florida's Character Towns

Town	Yr. Est'd	Pop., 2017
Clermont	1916	35,200
DeLand*	1882	32,500
Eustis	1883	20,800
Kissimmee*	1883	71,100
Mount Dora	1910	13,900
Sanford*	1877	59,300
Tavares*	1885	16,900
Winter Garden	1903	43,500
Winter Park	1887	30,900

Note: * County Seats
Source: The American Fact Finder, US Census.
and: wck | planning from Wikipedia

URBAN DESIGN GUIDANCE.

In recent times, one hopes a sense of proportion along with market considerations have played a role in limiting the height of buildings and the length of Active Zones on main streets in character towns.

THE ACTIVE "COMMERCIAL" ZONE.

The Active Zone is the length of main street with restaurants, shops and other public, private and institutional activities that are open for business on week-ends and evenings. Active Zones are defined by the blocks without parking between the main building and the main street.

The Active Zone, if properly designed and populated can be a "third place" as originally defined by Ray Oldenburg…a welcoming place between home and work where conversation and conviviality are the main currency.

MAIN STREET AS A "THIRD PLACE".

"Third places" are traditionally specific places such as diners, bars and cafés, but a creative main street can become such a place in and of itself by hosting specific places and by providing a street with parks, plazas, seating and conversation areas that serve the same purpose in an outdoor setting. For main street to be a "third place", the length of the Active Zone is generally limited to create some intimacy.

MAIN ACTIVE ZONE FEATURES SURVEYED.

Each main street is profiled and then analyzed. The survey of the nine central Florida character towns revealed the following features for the length of each main streets' Active Zone:

- **Length of the Active Zone.**
- **Range of building heights.**
- **Street widths, lanes and medians.**
- **General width of sidewalks and the building face to building face distance across main street.**
- **Presence or not of canopy street trees.**
- **Approach to parking; on-street, metered, decks.**

CHARACTER MAIN STREET PROFILES.

CLERMONT, Incorporated 1916.
Population [2017]: 35,200
Main Street: W. Montrose Street
Active Zone: West Ave to Lake Ave.
- Block Faces/Length: 6/1,700'
- Predominant Bldg Height: 1-2 stories
- City Hall, 3 stories, on main street

Special Feature:
- Lakefront park, near main street

On-street parking
www.clermont.org

DeLAND, Incorporated 1882.
Population [2017]: 32,500
Main Street: S. Woodland Bv.
Active Zone: W. Wisconsin Ave to E. Howry Ave
- Block Faces/Length: 12/2,000'
- Predominant Bldg Height: 2-3 stories

Special Features:
- 1 bldg, 5 stories, at "main and main"
- Theater near main street
- Hotel, on main street
- College [Stetson], at main street terminus
- Future SunRail station, west of town

On-Street Parking
County seat
https://www.deland.org

EUSTIS, Incorporated 1883.
Population [2017]: 20,800
Main Street: E. Magnolia Ave.
Active Zone: N. Bay St to N. Grove St
- Block Faces/Length: 4/650'
- Predominant Bldg Height: 2 stories

Special Features:
- Foundation vacant block on main street
- Lakefront park, near main street
- Theater, museum, near main street

On-Street parking
www.eustis.org/

KISSIMMEE, Incorporated 1883.
Population [2017]: 71,100
Main Street: Broadway
Active Zone: W. Neptune Rd to Ruby Ave
- Block Faces/Length: 10/1,750'
- Predominant Bldg Height: 2-3 stories

Special Features:
- Lakefront park, near main street
- City Center: 7 stories, near main street
- City Hall: 4 stories, near main street
- County Administration: 4 stories, near main street
- SunRail, Amtrak and Lynx Superstop
- Multi-modal station area at "main and main"

On-Street + deck
County seat
https://www.kissimmee.org/

MOUNT DORA, Incorporated 1910.
Population [2017]: 13,900
Main Street: Donnelly Street
Active Zone: W. 5th Ave to RR Crossing
- Block Faces/Length: 6/860'
- Predominant Building Height: 2 stories

Special Features:
- Lakefront park, near main street
- Donnelly Park, at "main and main"
- Lakeside Inn, near main street

On-Street parking + deck
https://ci.mount-dora.fl.us/

SANFORD, Incorporated 1877.
Population [2017]: 59,300
Main Street: E. 1st Street
Active Zone: N. Elm Ave to N. Sanford Ave
- Block Faces/Length: 11/2,000'
- Predominant Building Height: 2 stories

Special Features:
- Lakefront park and promenade, near main street
- 3 Buildings, 4 and 5 stories, at "main and main"
- 6 story lakefront condo, near main street
- Theater and hotel, near main street

On-Street parking
County seat
https://www.sanfordfl.gov/

TAVARES, Incorporated 1885.
Population [2017]: 16,900
Main Street: W. Main Street
Active Zone: Roundabout to Roundabout
- Block Faces/Length: 6/2,100'
- Predominant Bldg Height: 1-2 stories

Special Features:
- Lakefront park, Sea Plane terminal, near main street
- County Admin. Bldg., 5 stories, on main street
- Courthouse, 4 stories, on main street
- Lakefront Hotel, 4-5 stories, near main street

On-Street parking
County seat
https://www.tavares.org/

WINTER GARDEN, Incorporated 1903.
Population [2017]: 43,500
Main Street: Plant Street
Active Zone: S. Woodland St to S. Park Ave
- Block Faces/Length: 11/2,300'
- Predominant Building Height: 1-2 stories

Special Features:
- 4 Buildings, 3 stories, on main street
- Edgewater Hotel and Church, on main street
- Garden Bldg and City Hall, on main street
- Theater, on main street
- West Orange [Bike] Trail, on main street

On-Street parking + deck
https://www.cwgdn.com/

WINTER PARK, Incorporated 1887.
Population [2017]: 30,900
Main Street: Park Avenue
Active Zone: Fairbanks Ave. to E. Canton Ave
- Block Faces/Length: 11/2,600'
- Predominant Building Height: 1-3 stories

Special Features:
- Central Park, ~5 acres, on main street
- Barnett Bank [fka], 5 stories, on main street
- Theaters, near main street
- Museum and galleries, on main street
- Hotels, on main street
- Rollins College, at terminus of Active Zone

On-Street parking +2 decks
https://cityofwinterpark.org/

LENGTH OF ACTIVE ZONES.

The length of the Active Zones in the nine towns ranges from 650' to 2,600'. The average length is 1,778'; but by discarding the extremes, the general length is around 2,000' with 10 to 12 commercialized block faces.

Block Faces and Length of Active Zones
Central Florida Character Towns

Main Street	Block Faces	Length
Clermont	6	1,700'
DeLand	12	2,000'
Eustis	4	650'
Kissimmee	10	1,800'
Mount Dora	6	860'
Sanford	11	2,000'
Tavares	12	2,100'
Winter Garden	11	2,300'
Winter Park	11	2,600'

Source: wck | planning

RANGE OF MAIN STREET BUILDING HEIGHTS.

The survey discovered building heights in or very near Active Zones of the nine main streets.

- Interestingly, the main street building heights are pretty uniform at 2-3 stories;
- There are nineteen buildings on the nine main streets with 3-story buildings; nine with 4-stories. Ten are newer city or county buildings without ground floor retail.
- There are only four buildings in the nine towns at 5 stories or more. Three are office buildings and one is a residential building; all have ground floor retail uses.

Building heights on main street, in the Active Zone, are important. Buildings of 2-4 stories provide a comforting "enclosure" at the street level. The upper floors are typically used for office, but some creative NGO tenants were found.

As a general rule, consider that new taller buildings add nothing to main street; they disturb the skyline, diminish the impact of specimen street trees, require deck parking and fail to contribute to the existing urban form. Tall buildings should be scrutinized closely.

Main Street Building Heights
Orlando Region Character Towns

	Predominant # of Floors	# Bldgs. 3-4 Floors	# Bldgs 5 – 7
Clermont	1-2	1	
DeLand	2-3	6	1
Eustis	2	1	
Kissimmee	2-3	6	1
Mount Dora	2	2	
Sanford	2	1	2
Tavares	1-2	6	2
Winter Garden	1-2	3	
Winter Park	2	2	1

Source: wck | planning

STREET FEATURES.

The main streets in the nine towns are generally the same. Most have two 11'-12' lanes with asphalt pavement and travel in both directions. A few have completed streetscape projects that have widened the sidewalks the typical 4'-6' to 10'-12' to accommodate outdoor dining and merchandising. Cities with distinctive features are:

- Kissimmee's Broadway has a median with frequent traffic calming devices. Broadway remains a state highway and, as a result, experiences above-average through traffic.
- Winter Garden also has a median; but in the median is the West Orange Trail, a regional bike trail. The Trail was a factor that spurred dramatic redevelopment in the City.
- Winter Park is the only town with a brick pavement on its main street.

DISTANCE ACROSS MAIN STREET, BUILDING FACE TO BUILDING FACE.

The distance across the nine main streets from building to building varies. The closer the buildings are together, the better; as long as space is appropriately retains space for the street pavement, on-street parking, wide sidewalks and planting strips. The building-to-building distances across the main streets in the nine Central Florida character towns are reported below.

A great tool to test the width of rights-of-way needed to accommodate travel lanes, on-street parking, sidewalks of various widths and planting strips is https://streetmix.net.

Building Separation Across Main Street
Building Face to Building Face
Central Florida Character Towns

Town	Separation [Ft.]
Clermont	60’
DeLand	70’
Eustis	65’
Kissimmee*	90’-100’
Mount Dora	65’ – 70’
Sanford	80’ – 85’
Tavares	75’ – 80’
Winter Garden*	120’
Winter Park	65’ – 75’

Notes:
Each street has on-street parking
*** w/medians**
Source: wck | planning using Google Earth.

CANOPY TREES/STREET TREES.

A visual survey based on field observations and Google Earth confirmations indicates that most of the character main streets have street trees of various species and spacings. Tavares and Mount Dora use palm trees; others use species that provide some shade, shelter and beauty.

PARKING.

Every main street relies on people who drive to dine, shop or attend a show. Until ridesharing becomes more pervasive, personal vehicles will continue to need to be parked. Each of the nine towns has on-street parking on main street. None of them has metered parking.

Parking decks are more common than first imagined. Five of the nine cities surveyed have public parking decks near their main streets.

- DeLand hosts the County seat. Volusia County has a public parking decks two blocks east of Woodland Bv. at its courthouse in downtown DeLand.
- Kissimmee, with Osceola County, has a multi-level parking deck near the south end of Broadway; a second deck recently opened at the SunRail commuter rail station in the heart of downtown.
- Mount Dora has a two-level parking deck at the south end of Donnelly Street.
- Winter Garden has a three-level deck a block south of Plant Street.
- Winter Park has two multi-level decks; one at the north and south ends of Park Avenue.

RECENT MASTER PLANNED DOWNTOWNS.

In the Orlando Region, three master planned “new towns” have emerged: Celebration, Avalon Park and Baldwin Park.

- Each has a short Active Zone.
- Three and four story main street buildings are found in Celebration, Baldwin Park and Avalon Park. No buildings taller than four stories have been built on the three “new town” main streets in the region.
- Each has street trees, 10’-12’ sidewalks, “free” on-street parking and two travel lanes without medians.

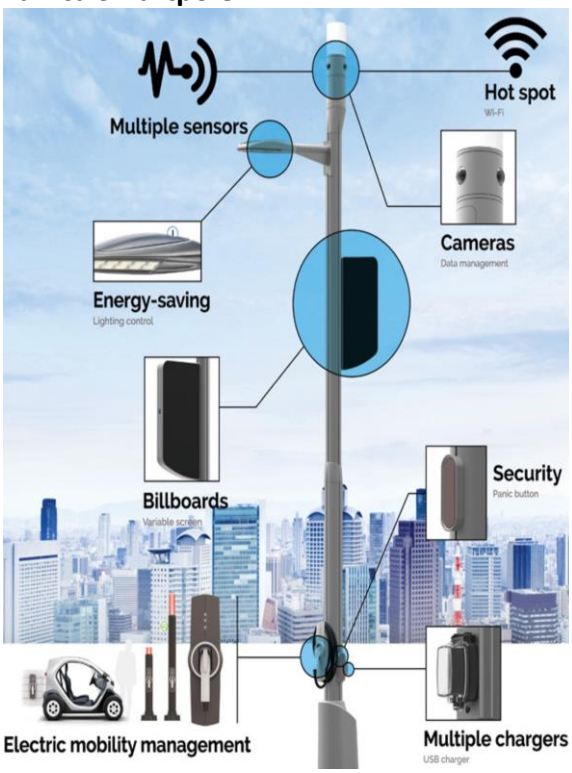
SYSTEM OF SMART POLES.

Technology needs to be downtown on main street. Systems are being deployed that provide security, communication, education, entertainment and energy for recharging, plus much more. The time is now for exploration of technology applications for downtowns and their main street organizations.

Smart poles are synonymous with ubiquitous internet service. Economic development will depend on full access to high speed broadband internet service. Many major cities worldwide are launching smart city initiatives. Kansas City has demonstrated how real-time data gathered by sensors provides tangible benefits to citizens.

Small cities and towns can use their downtowns to roll-out high tech services, such as smart poles, to provide business access to the global market place; to test reliability and usefulness.

Lumca Smartpole



MICRO-GRIDS, SMART AND GREEN.

"A micro-grid is a local energy grid with control capability, which means it can disconnect from the traditional grid and operate autonomously." http://www.energy.gov/articles/how-microgrids-work

Smart micro-grids, through technology, can provide discrete control of generation, distribution, hours of operation, pricing and automatic load control and allocation down to individual customers. Smart microsystems can also reduce greenhouse gas emissions and select from a wide range of energy sources.

Every main street has businesses and residents vulnerable to power outages. The use of micro-grids, especially micro-grids supported by alternative energy sources, offers a tremendous opportunity to avoid the misery caused by the lack of power and its many energy-dependent facilities and systems.

The strategic deployment of micro-grids can build main street's resilience with grids designed to:

- Connect and disconnect from the central grid, as appropriate,
- Access alternative energy sources to provide cheap power in normal times and emergency power when necessary,
- Provide power to critical facilities that need to be free-standing in an emergency,
- Differentiate downtown and main street locations from competitive districts by providing reliable power at lower prices and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Every downtown and main street can benefit from widely available internet service and energy independence provided by a micro-grid.

CONCLUSIONS.

1. The Active Zone of main street can function as a viable business district, a place for civic buildings and spaces that enable the heart of main street to be the town's "third place"; the place where people want to be.
2. The physical features of main street are important determinants of the economic and social value main street provides to the entire community.
3. The physical design and content of main street will either encourage or discourage people to reside downtown, visit or locate their business on or near main street.
4. The number of blocks in the Active Zones varies with length, but the typical length is some 2,000 feet long with 4 to 6 blocks of active retail, restaurant, civic buildings and public venues; an Active Zone that is too long diffuses commercial and social energy.
5. Buildings taller than 4-stories do not belong on a traditional main street in a small city or town. They distort the scale of main street, they concentrate too many people in one block and they provide office or residential space that consumes market demand in unusually large quantities for a small city.
6. The preponderance of buildings on character main streets in Central Florida has 2-3 stories.
7. Civic buildings and public venues [city halls, museums, libraries, e.g.] belong on the ends of main street or nearby. They do not need to be mid-Zone if they are not opened week-ends and evenings.
8. Do whatever is necessary to keep civic buildings on or near main street.
9. Public buildings not open nights and week-ends should be located at the end of the Active Zone or on a side street so not to interrupt the flow of diners, shoppers and event patrons as they stroll main street on evenings and week-ends.
10. Parking is an important resource; a strategic approach may include on-street parking controlled with time limitations supplemented with nearby free parking in surface lots or parking decks.
11. Residential developers who provide vision-consistent housing on or near main street's Active Zone can be encouraged with city support. All of the nine character downtowns have apartments, townhouses or condominiums within walking distance of their main street.
12. Historic neighborhoods are usually within walking distance of main street. Bikeways and pedways can connect the city center to all close-in neighborhoods.
13. Downtown regulations should focus on site specific development standards and design guidelines. The uses in the building are of less importance and will change over time; universally designed buildings change occupants over the decades without de-constructing the buildings.
14. Technological innovation is changing the way main street operates. Smart poles providing high-speed broadband internet service and micro-grids for reliable, green power are being deployed and distinguishing progressive downtowns from other less ambitious main streets.
15. The Active Zone on main street is a limited and valuable resource. Guard it jealously; develop it aggressively.