

The Design and Content of Character Main Streets.

Central Florida’s Character Main Streets.

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

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.

Incorporation Dates and Population Central Florida’s Character Towns		
Town	Yr. Est’d	Pop. 2017
Clermont	1916	35,211
DeLand*	1882	32,506
Eustis	1883	20,827
Kissimmee*	1883	71,104
Mount Dora	1910	13,916
Sanford*	1887	59,317
Tavares*	1885	16,865
Winter Garden	1903	40,799
Winter Park	1887	30,879

Note: * County Seats
Source: The American Fact Finder & 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 Case Studies.

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 Blvd.

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 min"

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.cwgd.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/>



Main Street “Active Zones” Lengths.

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.

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

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.

	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

Main 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, as shown below. The closer the buildings are together, the better, as long as the space accommodates two travel lanes, on-street parking, wide sidewalks for dining and merchandise display, generous planting strips and space for buses and bus stops. Medians that promote safety, civic beauty and activities take another 20-30 feet.

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 sorts and spacings. A few use palm trees; most cities use other species that provide full canopies and better shade and shelter.

Parking.

Every main street relies on people who drive to dine or 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 in small cities are more common than first imagined. Five of the nine cities surveyed have free public parking decks on or near their main streets.

- DeLand hosts the County seat. Volusia County has a public parking decks two blocks east of Woodland Blvd. [main street] at the downtown county courthouse.
- Kissimmee in Osceola County has a multi-level parking deck near the south end of Broadway [main street]; 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 its main street.
- Winter Garden has a three-level deck a block south of Plant Street [main 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.

Conclusions.

1. The “Active Zone” of main street can function as a viable business district, a place for civic, institutional and commercial 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” studied varies with length, but the typical length is some 2,000 feet 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. Empty spaces in the “Active Zone” can block or discourage pedestrian movement further along main street.
5. Buildings taller than 4-stories do not belong on a traditional main street in a small city or town. A few taller buildings were found in the Case Studies, but, in general, 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 have 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-Active Zone unless they are opened week-ends and evenings. If they are closed, they tend to interrupt the flow of diners, shoppers and event patrons as they stroll main street evenings and week-ends.
8. Parking is an important resource; a strategic approach that provides patrons with prime parking spots is the objective. Employee parking should be provided near but not on main street. The system may include on-street parking controlled with time limitations supplemented with nearby free parking in surface lots or parking decks.
9. Residential developers who provide vision-consistent housing on or near main street’s “Active Zone” can be encouraged and supported by the city. All of the nine character downtowns have apartments, townhouses or condominiums within walking distance of their main streets.
10. Historic neighborhoods are usually within walking or biking distance of main street. Bikeways and pedways can connect the city center to all close-in neighborhoods.
11. Downtown regulations work best that focus on site specific development standards and design guidelines. The uses in the building are of less importance than a building’s on-site location and its pedestrian and vehicle access. Uses will change over time; universally designed buildings can change occupants and uses over the decades without de-constructing the buildings.
12. An Impediment Analysis will identify physical, economic and social factors that preclude or compromise main street infill and redevelopment.
13. The “Active Zone” on main street is a limited and valuable resource. Guard it jealously.