

Main Street's Active Zones: "Not Too Tall, Not Too Long".

THE ORLANDO REGION'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 a commonality in the length of the main street active zones and the height of their buildings. The populations in the nine towns in 2010 ranged from 12,663 to 63,392 people. Each is a "centennial town", with over 100 years of incorporation.

CENTENNIAL TOWNS.

One reason for the similar pattern is the age of the towns. Most were developed as the railroad came to town; before elevators and steel frame construction.

Dates of Incorporation Orlando Region Character Towns	
Clermont	1916
DeLand	1882
Eustis	1883
Kissimmee	1883
Mount Dora	1910
Sanford	1887
Tavares	1885
Winter Garden	1903
Winter Park	1887

Source: wck | planning from Wikipedia

URBAN DESIGN.

In recent times, one hopes a sense of proportion has played a role in limiting the height of buildings and the length of Active Zones on main street based on market considerations and urban design principles.

THE HEIGHT OF BUILDINGS ON MAIN STREET.

The survey discovered building heights in the nine main street Active Zones. The Active Zone limits were liberally construed; some tall buildings are close but not actually in the Zones.

- Interestingly, the building heights on the main streets are pretty uniform at 2-stories;
- There are nineteen buildings on the nine main streets with 3-stories; nine with 4-stories. Ten of these 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 tenants were found. Taller buildings add nothing to the street and disturb the skyline based on street tree heights.

Main Street Building Heights Orlando Region Character Towns			
	Predominant # of Floors	# Bldgs. w/ 3-4 Floors	# Bldgs 5+ Floors
Clermont	1-2	1	
DeLand	2-3	6	1
Eustis	2	1	
Kissimmee	2-3	6	1
Mount Dora	2	2	
Sanford	2	1	1
Tavares	1-2	6	
Winter Garden	1-2	3	
Winter Park	2	2	1

Source: wck | planning

LENGTH OF ACTIVE ZONES ON MAIN STREET.

The survey of nine character towns in the Orlando Region reveals a common length of their “main street” **active zones**.

- The active zone on main street includes the blocks with restaurants, shops and other activities that are open for business beyond nine-to-five, Monday through Friday. Week-end and evening hours are critical if the “active zone” of main street is to be active.
- The active zone has no off-street parking between the street and the primary business building.
- To be a “third place”, the length of the active zone must be compact to create an intimate setting. The nine towns have active zones ranging from 350’ to 2,600’. The heart of the range is 1,000’ to 2,000’.

Main Street	Blocks	Active Zone
Clermont	4	2,300’
DeLand	6	2,000’
Eustis	2	650’
Kissimmee	5	1,750’
Mount Dora	2	650’
Sanford	6	2,000’
Tavares	6	2,100’
Winter Garden	5	1,800’
Winter Park	8	2,600’

Source: wck | planning

RECENT MASTER PLANNED DOWNTOWNS.

In the Orlando Region, three master planned “new towns” have emerged: Celebration, Avalon Park and Baldwin Park. Celebration’s main street has three and four story buildings; Baldwin Park has three story buildings on main street and Avalon Park has three and four story buildings along its main streets. Nothing taller!

POPULATION.

Interestingly, after a hundred years, the towns of character have some 20-40,000 residents.

Clermont	35,211
DeLand*	32,506
Eustis	20,827
Kissimmee *	71,104
Mount Dora	13,916
Sanford *	59,317
Tavares *	16,865
Winter Garden	43,596
Winter Park	30,879

Source: The American Fact Finder, US Census.
* County Seats

ACTIVE ZONE INFRASTRUCTURE.

The presence of a 2-4 block-long section of main street with 2-3 story buildings, even when fully occupied, does not make a successful downtown. People make main street work, e.g., residents, employees and visitors. Once downtown, the activity must offer good value for people to come and return to main street.



As William Whyte discussed in his book *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, there must be food and beverage places, shops, outdoor seating, weather protection, lights, signs and furniture that let people linger, relax, enjoy the space and their companions.

Places for children are more commonly found in the company of their parents at restaurants and other entertainment venues. Dogs are evermore present.

A diversity of spaces, people, activities and housing helps make downtowns and main streets places where people go when not at work or at home. Downtowns can become the “ultimate third place” that mitigates the isolation inherent in the digital world.



Downtowns and main streets will prosper as they cater to people, families with children, adults with dogs, active seniors and visitors of all stripes. Wide sidewalks, benches, street lights, wayfinding, street trees, flowers, parks and plazas, convenient parking and active businesses create an inviting atmosphere. Concentrating these uses within an “active zone” of only a few blocks in length will intensify people’s interest and participation.



CONCLUSIONS on Character Main Streets.

1. The preponderance of buildings on character main streets have 2-3 stories. One story buildings and 4+ story buildings should be discouraged.
2. The number of blocks in the Active Zones varies, but the typical length is some 2,000 feet long with 4 to 6 block faces of active retail, restaurant, civic buildings and public venues. Don’t disperse the energy.
3. Civic buildings and public venues [city halls, museums, libraries, e.g.] belong on or near the main street. Public buildings not open nights and weekends should be located at the end of the Active Zone so not to interrupt the flow of diners and shoppers on evenings and weekends.
4. Historic neighborhoods within walking distance of main street can be connected with well-lit and safe bike/ pedways.
5. Over half of the character downtowns have apartments, townhouses or condominiums within walking distance of the main street.
6. “Active Zone” businesses can be offered certain benefits not available to those outside, like special taxing districts to fund amenities, master parking systems, local business marketing programs and other activities to support **active zone** businesses.