

Main Street Innovations.

Small City Innovation Advantages.

Small cities and towns have a tremendous advantage over larger communities when it comes to innovation in the design and operation of municipal systems to create an interesting, pleasant and prosperous community.

Size and character are the keys. A small city can be comprehended, it can be observed in its totality and it can be managed through effective communication with a majority of the citizens. A small city with character appeals to residents, businesses and visitors who have a choice of where to go and where to stay.

The disadvantages often cited are money and talent. Small cities do not have the money of larger towns in the aggregate, but they may have as much or more in the margins; plus, small city programs cost less than those of their larger cousins. Small cities used to have trouble recruiting talent. Given the times, this is changing, especially in large metro areas. Small cities are becoming very competitive in attracting private and public sector talent.

The advantages possessed by small cities are only of value if the city thinks big. Small cities can have access to the global marketplace with high-speed broadband internet service. They can have access to the regional transportation system; and they can have access to the intellectual capital of their neighboring cities if they embrace “partnering” and “collaborating”.

This attitude fosters innovation at a time when massive new investments will be forthcoming.

It is time to be ready for success.

Critical Main Street Innovations.

Main street innovations are required and enabled by technology, but they are not technological in and of themselves. Small city innovations that create character are:

1. Attracting people to live downtown,
2. Expanding small city tourism,
3. Building social, economic and physical main street systems,
4. Growing e-commerce and global business opportunities by offering high-speed broadband internet service, and
5. Transforming main street into the social center of the city, the city’s “Third Place”.

Paraphrasing Thomas Friedman’s quote from *The Leopard*:

“For everything to stay the same, everything must change.”

Consider On-Going Innovations.

Creative thought based on the latest ideas and technologies has penetrated the very core of main street businesses, governments and institutions. Main street will “Grow or Die”.

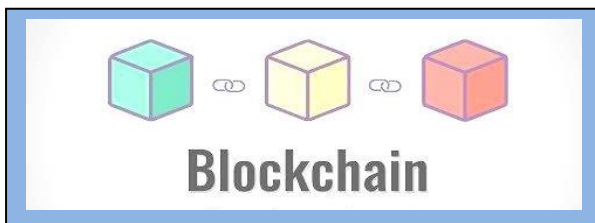
- **Living downtown** on or near main street has been re-discovered.
- **Close-in neighborhoods** are being refurbished, especially historic districts.

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“Some infrastructure systems can be reinvented as they stand, while others must be replaced entirely”.

The implication of this is that someday massive amounts of money will be spent to upgrade old infrastructure systems with new technologies, for those who are ready.

- **Small apartment buildings**, for rent and sale, with 10 to 20 units are becoming financeable; new projects are appearing on small city main streets.
- **Small town tourism is back.**
 - Small towns with theaters, galleries and museums are attracting regional patrons and New Economy workers.
 - Hotels in small cities and towns are being built, first by regional “flags” but increasingly by national hotel chains.
- **Communication is instantaneous;** thoughtfulness seems a bygone concept.
 - Main street organizations and businesses are learning to act fast and thoughtfully, to take advantage of the increased pace of conversation.
- **Social media and the “sharing” mentality** have pressurized people into an obsession with FOMO, the “fear of missing out”.
 - Main street can harness this obsession by frequently “refreshing” the names of businesses, the facades of buildings, the messaging and lighting from “smart poles” and the programming of public spaces.
- **Blockchains** offer secure and transparent ways for businesses and governments to improve products and services.
 - Main street organizations can offer education on new technologies such as blockchains, utilizing colleges, existing businesses and business organizations.
- **Main street is a system of systems.** Using a systems approach is essential.
- **Transportation is becoming a service.**
 - Main street can exploit ridesharing, electric vehicles and the general disdain people have for finding parking by offering valet service and zones for AV parking and drop-off/pick-up.
 - Bikeways and pedways are growing elements of the main street mobility system.
- **Public open spaces continue to be valued.**
 - Main street already employs these spaces but can perhaps expand their use as 24/7/365 assets using static displays, seasonal beautification and crop planting programs, more frequent community events, celebrations, art shows, recitals, festivals and concerts.
- **“Smart poles” are a new application of available technology.** The internet has been around for decades; the new idea is to connect existing single-purpose infrastructure, like street lights, to the internet. Linking the old and the new creates opportunities.
 - Main street can partner with the city to ensure that streetscape improvements and infrastructure upgrades include high-speed broadband internet service along with security, lighting and other information capabilities.



- **Shopping and dining are transformed by e-commerce** into stay-at-home activities.
 - Main street can educate shop owners on trends in store and display designs, “experience” shopping, delivery services and partnerships between retailers and restaurateurs.
- **Last-mile warehouses** are necessary for immediate deliveries of goods and services ordered on-line. With AI and in-home listening devices, we may soon receive goods we want before we order them.
 - Main street can partner with city agencies to properly locate warehouses close to main street to supply stores and facilitate deliveries to downtown customers and close-in neighborhoods.
 - AV loading zones can be planned.
- **Night time activities** in small cities can be random, unproductive and occasionally dangerous. Planning overcomes these traps.
 - New ideas, like hiring night-time events managers, are being explored.
 - De-coupling complex activities helps target specific actions for each of the individual events and activities.
 - A packaged “small city crawl” can link several cities with marketing, event scheduling, lodging and travel that gives tourists a great multi-city experience.

Main Street Reliance on Institutions.

Small cities depend on the benefits derived from institutions outside the city. The county, regional, state and federal agencies and related organizations provide programmatic and monetary resources. Three conditions exist in the early 21st century that affect small cities:

- 1) Institutions of all kinds and purposes are being challenged, abused and de-constructed; main street organizations are in a position to strengthen institutions that support their cause.
- 2) Data has economic value. Small cities can learn to control their own data and information for internal use and selective external sharing. Remember Senator Patrick Moynihan’s lament: *“Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts.”*
- 3) Main street businesses are in a great position to partner with institutions engaged with global institutions that enhance main street commerce.

Institutions that support main street’s success include city government’s various departments and many organizations. Contributions of money or maintenance come from special taxing districts that include all or part of main street, the utility company, the regional economic development agency, the merchants’ association and county, state and federal agencies. Participation also comes from the NGOs, financial institutions and others with venues on main street.

Partnering and collaboration are the key attitudes to take maximum advantage of the services offered by institutions that impact main street. The challenge is to strengthen institutions with visions and resources that support main street.



Study Big Cities as First Adopters.

The reason the big cities are leading the experimentation and adoption of new technologies is because they have the leadership and resources to make progress. Small cities can learn from these pioneers, adopt proven methods and avoid some pitfalls.

Money is available to small cities ready to be creative. Partnering is essential. Applying new processes and technologies to a wide range of real situations involves experimentation and risk. Innovative corporations and institutions are looking to small cities for real-world applications and they bring funding.

“Smart City” Lessons for Small Cities.

The US DOT Smart City Challenge offers cities a great opportunity to examine their operating systems and learn better practices from cities across the nation employing innovative technologies. “Smart” city programs are the ultimate application of systems thinking.

“In December, 2015, the U.S. Department of Transportation [U.S. DOT] launched our Smart City Challenge, asking mid-sized cities across America to develop ideas for an integrated, first-of-its-kind smart transportation system that would use data, applications, and technology to help people and goods move more quickly, cheaply, and efficiently.”

The Challenge generated an overwhelming response: 78 applicant cities with seven finalists who then worked with DOT to further develop their ideas. The lessons for small city main streets are several and available from the US DOT.

First, every small city can learn new techniques from the several “smart” applications to the US DOT.

NLC Partnership - EXCERPT:

*Today [11.9.18], the National League of Cities (NLC) is announcing **\$100 million** in local partnerships to expand America’s innovation economy. Cities must lead on the nation’s most pressing issues in the absence of federal leadership.*

Over the past year, NLC, with support from Schmidt Futures, has worked with city leaders, universities, the business community and the social sector to design innovative partnerships that harness the power of science, technology and entrepreneurship to build stronger, more equitable local economies.

*Today, over **50 cities**, ranging from rural townships and college towns, to major metros, as well as over **200 local partners**, are announcing new and specific partnerships that will be supporting young businesses, leveraging technology and ensuring STEM education and workforce training for all.*

Link: <https://www.nlc.org/article/national-league-of-cities-announces-100-million-in-partnerships-to-support-entrepreneurship>

Second, measuring outcomes is important. Performance evaluations report progress, or the lack thereof, either of which inspires further learning, innovation and action.

“With the publication of our report, ‘Smart City Challenge: Lessons for Building Cities of the Future,’ we are making good on our promise to share the lessons we learned about the transportation challenges America’s cities face and about the innovative solutions that could help us meet those challenges. The winner of the \$40 million grant was Columbus, Ohio.”

The other six finalists were: [Austin](#), [Denver](#), [Kansas City](#), [Pittsburgh](#), [Portland](#) and [San Francisco](#). Check out their progress.

NOTE: Results, including their proposals, are at <https://www.transportation.gov/smartcity/7-finalists-cities>.

Systems Analysis.

Systems analysis is an explicit formal inquiry carried out to help decision-makers identify a better course of action and make a better decision than s/he might otherwise make.

A systemic view of organizations is trans-disciplinary and integrative. The systems approach gives primacy to the inter-relationships, not to the elements of the system. Systems Analysis, the learned skill, provides tools and techniques for studying systems in a holistic manner, systems like cities.

Systems analysis is called upon when systems are complex and the outcome of any course of action is uncertain.

A great resource is *Thinking in Systems: A Primer* by [Donella H. Meadows](#) (Author) and [Diana Wright](#) (Editor). Ms. Meadows worked on The Limits of Growth for the Club of Rome and fully understands the systems approach to developmental analysis.

Master Systems Planning.

The inherent prerequisite for development of every master system is a master plan. A comprehensive, long-term master plan considers the fundamentals of the system being designed plus the external impacts of the system on its environment.

Master systems planning is an essential activity for preserving or creating character main streets.

Main Street Master Systems.

A systems approach can be applied to many facilities not traditionally systematized, such as, public art locations, calls for artists and artwork rotation and replacement schedules. Public art is only one example of a non-traditional system.

The facilities and services that benefit from a collaborative systems approach are:

- Health Care and Shelter for Homeless and Indigents,
- Marketing and management programs,
- Integrated land use and circulation,
- Parking with drop off/pick up zones,
- Stormwater amenitization,
- Multi-modal transportation services,
- Renewable energy demonstrations,
- Ubiquitous free internet service,
- Omnipresent security and safety,
- Open spaces and connections,
- Rotating public art,
- Reduced solid waste, and
- Recycled water and sewer processes.

The Dashboard Concept.

In *Smart Machines*, the IBM authors present the idea of smart systems coming together in a city-wide dashboard. Consider a dashboard that connects the sensor-laden streetlight and power pole network that provides real time, cross-platform, location-specific information such as accident data, road closures, active crimes, high-attendance events, power outages or maintenance issues.

Small cities and especially their main streets are the heart and soul of America. Commitment to the common good and America's social compact is palpable. Slowly, the social contract honored for the last several generations is dissolving, ready for a resurgence in small cities.

Domestically, the 20th century social compact was that everyone could expect secure employment, the realistic prospect of owning a home, reliable health care, a comfortable retirement and the opportunity to send one's children to college. Internationally, multilateral institutions prospered, promoting peace and prosperity.

The social compact of the 21st century is still unclear. So far, the 21st century contract between the American people and their society is not as comforting, dependable or enlightened as the previous deal. Small cities can be the front-line agents to articulate the new contract.

- Main street organizations can enable links to the world economy without eroding the fundamental values previously depended upon to avoid the "race to the bottom".
- The 21st century social compact is evolving to be more individualistic; more subject to global conditions and less oriented to the common good. Main street can counter this trend by providing programs, events, systems and activities that bring people together; people in the city and beyond.

Character main street organizations and their host cities, small and large, have the opportunity to re-define a social compact with their residents and businesses based on their collective and thoughtful vision of the city's future.

Character main streets depend on being interesting, pleasant and prosperous. They will increasingly rely on access to high-capacity internet service. Main streets can be the locations for investments in face-to-face and virtual shopping, education, entertainment, recreation and living. Main street businesses can participate in the global economy.

At the end of the day, the small city main street businesses and organizations have choices:

- They can encourage city hall to experiment with new technologies and programs in the main street district prior to initiating citywide investments in innovations.
- They can encourage the city to provide high-speed broadband internet service in the main street district as a utility, readily available to everyone.
- They can find global and regional trading partners and new market interventions.
- They can leverage their colleges, libraries and incubators to offer small business services, local entrepreneurial education, training, financing and resources necessary for local businesses to build a unique character and join the global economy.

Conclusions: Main Street Innovations:

1. **A belief that character is linked to prosperity,**
2. **The use of Dashboards to monitor performance,**
3. **The rediscovery of downtown living,**
4. **The encouragement of small city tourism,**
5. **Economic and physical systems leveraged to strengthen social infrastructure,**
6. **E-commerce and global business opportunities enabled by high-speed broadband internet service, and**
7. **Main street's transformation into the city's social center, the city's "Third Place".**