

Nine Character Main Streets in Central Florida: Design and Content.

Overview of the Towns.

Population. Central Florida’s character towns are of a size and age that befits their condition. Their populations range from 20,000 to 75,000 in 2021, a far cry larger than their populations upon founding.

Age. Each is a “centennial” town, being over a century old. Most were built in the era of railroad expansion with rail lines and stations located in the heart of downtown. Only two of the towns are without lakefront downtowns; DeLand and Winter Garden. The others feature great lake front parks and avenues along the shoreline.

Incorporation Dates and Population Central Florida’s Character Towns		
Town	Yr. Est’d	Pop., 2021
Clermont	1916	44,530
DeLand*	1882	38,764
Eustis	1883	23,543
Kissimmee*	1883	79,436
Mount Dora	1910	16,665
Sanford*	1887	60,681
Tavares*	1885	19,526
Winter Garden	1903	46,502
Winter Park	1887	29,131

Note: * County Seats
Source: The American Fact Finder & Wikipedia

Each of the nine towns have been examined as a case study to determine their main street characteristics. The following discussion presents the **Nine Case Studies of Character Main Streets in Central Florida** including:

- **Physical Design Analysis,**
- **Civic and Private Use Analysis,**
- **The Full Range and Mix of Uses and Activities on the Selected Character “Main Streets” and**
- **Conclusions.**

Character Main Street Case Studies.

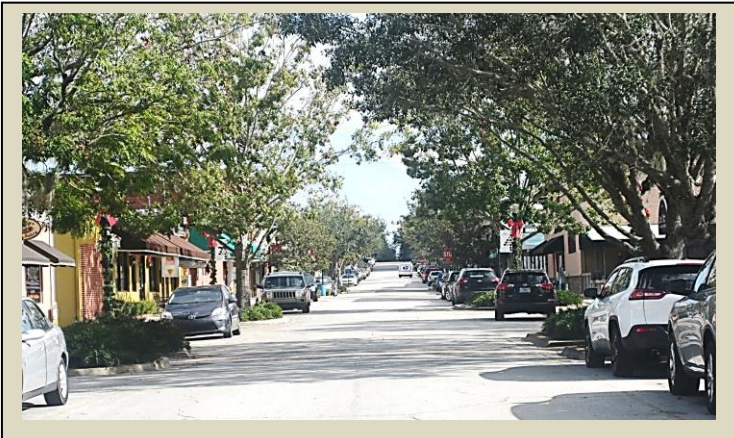
CLERMONT, Incorporated 1916.
 Population [2022]: 46,506
 Main Street: W. Montrose Street
 “Active Zone”: West Ave to Lake Ave.

- Block Faces/Length: 6/1,700’
- Predominant Bldg Height: 1-2 stories

Special Feature on main street:

- City hall, 3 stories
- Community center
- Lakefront park, near main street

On-street parking, free
www.clermont.org



DeLAND, Incorporated 1882.

Population [2022]: 41,324

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 on main street:

- City hall and county courthouse near main street
- 1 bldg w/5 stories, at “main and main”
- Theater near main street
- Hotel
- Stetson Univ., at main street terminus
- Future SunRail station, west of town

On-Street Parking, free

County seat

<https://www.deland.org>



EUSTIS, Incorporated 1883.

Population [2022]: 23,691

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 on main street:

- City hall
- “Foundation” vacant block
- Lakefront park, at main street terminus
- Theater, museum, near main street

On-Street parking, free

www.eustis.org/



KISSIMMEE, Incorporated 1883.

Population [2022]: 80,003

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 on main street:

- Lakefront park, near main street
- City Center: 7 stories MF, near main street
- City Hall: 4 stories, near main street
- County Administration & Courthouse Bldgs 4 stories, near main street
- SunRail, Amtrak and Lynx Superstop multi-modal station area at “main and main”

On-Street parking + deck, free

County seat

<https://www.kissimmee.org/>



MOUNT DORA, Incorporated 1910.

Population [2022]: 17,160

Main Street: Donnelly Street

“Active Zone”: W. 5th Ave to RR Crossing

- Block Faces/Length: 6/860’
- Predominant Building Height: 2 stories

Special Features on main street:

- City hall
- Lakefront park, near main street
- Donnelly Park, at “main and main”
- Lakeside Inn, near main street

On-Street parking + deck, free

<https://ci.mount-dora.fl.us/>



SANFORD, Incorporated 1877.

Population [2022]: 63,154

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 on main street:

- 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, free

County seat

<https://www.sanfordfl.gov/>



TAVARES, Incorporated 1885.

Population [2022]: 20,372

Main Street: W. Main Street

“Active Zone”: Roundabout to Roundabout

- Block Faces/Length: 6/2,100’
- Predominant Bldg Height: 1-2 stories

Special Features on main street:

- City hall
- Lakefront park, Sea Plane terminal, a block south of main street
- County Admin. Bldg., 5 stories
- Courthouse, 4 stories
- Lakefront Hotel, 4-5 stories, near main street

On-Street parking, free

County seat

<https://www.tavares.org/>



WINTER GARDEN, Incorporated 1903.

Population [2022]: 47,049

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 on main street:

- City hall
- 4 Buildings w/3 stories
- Edgewater Hotel and Church
- Garden Bldg and City Hall
- Theater
- West Orange [Bike] Trail

On-Street parking + deck, free

<https://www.cwgdn.com/>



WINTER PARK, Incorporated 1887.

Population [2022]: 29,816

Main Street: Park Avenue

“Active Zone”: Fairbanks Ave. to E. Canton Ave

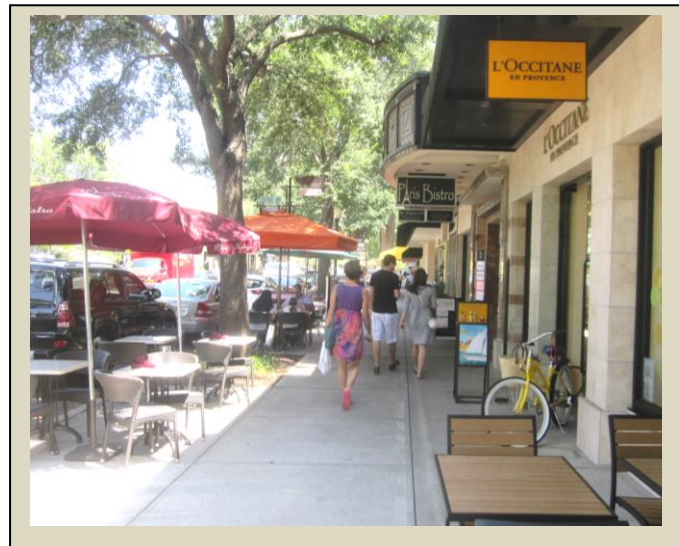
- Block Faces/Length: 11/2,600’
- Predominant Building Height: 1-3 stories

Special Features on main street:

- Central Park, ~5 acres
- City hall
- A five-story office building at “main street and main”
- Theaters, near main street
- Museum and galleries
- Hotels
- Rollins College, at terminus of main street

On-Street parking +2 decks, free

<https://cityofwinterpark.org/>



Physical Design Analysis.

Each town is a character town. Each town’s main street has been examined for the length of the active retail zone, the height of buildings in the “Active Zone”, building separation across the main street, canopy trees, parking and other features that contribute to their character.

Protecting the “Active Zone” is critical. It is the length of main street with workday, week end and evening restaurants, shops and other activities. “Active Zones” are the business blocks without parking between the building and the street. The “Active Zone”, if properly designed and managed 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.

Length of Main Street “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.

<u>Main Street</u>	<u>Block Faces</u>	<u>Length</u>
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 with five stories or more in the “Active Zones”. The four are office buildings, each with 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 starting point, consider that tall buildings add nothing to main street; they disturb the skyline, diminish the impact of specimen street trees, require deck parking and fail to enhance the existing urban form. Proposals for new tall buildings in the “Active Zone” need close scrutiny.

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

Source: wck | planning

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. Tavares and Mount Dora use palm trees; others use species that actually provide some shade and shelter.

Main Street Character Features.

The main streets in the nine towns all have many aspects of “character”. Most have two lane – two-way travelways. A few have new streetscape projects with wide sidewalks [10’-12’] to enable outdoor dining and sidewalk merchandising. Selected distinctive features:

- Kissimmee’s Broadway has a median with frequent traffic calming devices. Broadway remains a state highway and, as a result, experiences above-average thru-traffic.
- Plant Street in Winter Garden also has a median that features the West Orange Trail, a regional bike trail, a factor that spurred dramatic redevelopment in the City.
- Winter Park is the only town with a brick pavement on its main street and a large central park that establishes the image of the City.



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 adequate space remains 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, street trees 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
 * indicates w/medians
 Source: wck | planning using Google Earth.

Parking.

Every main street relies on people who drive to dine, shop or attend a show. Until ride sharing becomes more pervasive, personal vehicles will continue to need to be parked. Each of the nine towns has free 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 free public parking decks near their main streets.

- DeLand hosts the County seat. Volusia County has a public parking deck two blocks east of Woodland Boulevard 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 multi-modal 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.

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.

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 individual “third places” amidst 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.

Get Multiple Use from Sidewalks and On-Street Parking Spaces.

Sidewalks can be used as areas to sell merchandise. Sidewalks have traditionally been used for dining. On-street parking spaces are being used for “pop-up” stores, temporary parks and dining areas.

Civic and Private Use Analysis of Nine Central Florida Character Towns.

Each of the nine towns has a successful main street with many civic and private activities.

Residences – All nine towns have neighborhoods or apartments on or near main street.

City Halls – All nine towns have city halls located on or near main street. None are located in main street’s “Active Zone”.

Libraries – Only four of the nine towns have their public library on or near main street. Two are close. When a new in-town library is necessary, a location on or near main street would reinforce activity downtown.

Post Offices – Six of the nine towns have a downtown post office, one is nearby. Like libraries, post offices draw people downtown. Future post office locations should consider a main street location.

Local History Museums – Seven of the nine towns have a local history museum on or near main street. What a great opportunity to bring people, especially students, downtown to learn about the history of their community. A civics lesson can also be introduced.

Hotels – Six of the towns have downtown hotels. A main street hotel in a small city or town is a threshold event that indicates an investor believes in main street enough to invite people to stay the night downtown for business or the pleasure of enjoying a theater performance, restaurants and bars, recreation associated with the waterfront or local history. Downtown hotels are great indicators of success.

Central Parks and/or Downtown Waterfront Parks – Interestingly, six of the nine towns are on significant bodies of water. Each has taken advantage of this resource. Most have large parks along their waterfront. Two of the nine do not have waterfronts but have significant main street parks and open spaces.

Community Theaters – The old one-screen theaters have been refurbished and repurposed in four of the towns. Three others have theaters in more eclectic downtown buildings; meaning, seven of the nine towns offer night-time entertainment in the form of live performances in character structures.

Small Business Incubators – This is a declining use in small city downtowns. Only one remains in the nine towns. This important service is being offered in more regional locations; still, support for small businesses should be on the radar of every town – businesses such as banks, office suppliers, quick-print shops, delivery and related services.

Commercial Main Streets – Active shops, restaurants, civic and entertainment uses and activities are a must. Providing infrastructure, facilities and services such as main street programming and marketing are all part of the deal; and they are all present in the nine character main streets.

Inventory of Civic Activities On or Near Main Street Nine Character Towns in Central Florida

	Res.	City Hall	Libr.	Post. Office	L. Hist. Museum	College	Hotel	Park/ Lake	Theater	Business Inc'btr	Active Main St.
Clermont	[7]	*	*	*	*			*	*		*
Deland	[9]	*	*	*	*	*	*		*		*
Eustis	[8]	*	*	*	*			*	*	*	*
Kissimmee	[7]	*	*	*	+	+		*		*	*
Mount Dora	[5]	*	*		*		*	*			*
Sanford	[9]	*	*	*	*		*	*	*		*
Tavares	[7.5]	*	*	+	*		*	*	*		*
W.Garden	[8.5]	*	*	+	*		*	*	*		*
Winter Park	[9]	*	*		*	*	*	*	*		*
TOTAL	9	9	5	6.5	8.5	2	6	8	7	2	9

* On Main Street within One Block [one point];
+ Not on Main Street but within walking distance [1/2 point]



Eustis Lakefront Park at the foot of main street.



Sanford's main street adaptive reuse.

An Aspirational List

The Full Range and Mix of Uses and Activities for Character Main Streets.

The main thing is to keep “Main Street” the main street. Every town either has one or wants one; and its absence may, in and of itself, eliminate the possibility of a place being a character town. The full complement of uses and activities to strive for on the main street are:

1. **Buildings** with:
 - Ground floor shops, restaurants or other uses open beyond weekdays from nine to five.
 - Doors that open to the street, and
 - Two or more stories of height; but not taller than the tree canopy or four stories.
2. **Streets** that are not foreboding, but inviting with:
 - Two travel lanes, with or without a median, with on-street parking and the distance from building face to building face across the street no greater than 100 feet,
 - Local government ownership of the street, not a federal or state highway agency, and
 - Wide sidewalks [min 10’], bus stops, pedestrian crosswalks, street trees, streetlights and customer friendly signs.
3. **Active store-front uses** such as restaurants, bars, ice cream and chocolate shops, fruit stands and farmers’ markets with regional foods including convenience shopping, drugs, groceries, books, gifts, clothing, hardware, automotive parts and discount retail.
4. **Personal and Business Services** such as laundries, dry cleaners, barber shops, car care shops, plus tech support and business services like banks, full-service copy centers, and business incubators.
5. **Hotels** and other types of visitor accommodations to support “small town” tourism.
6. **Venues for community entertainment and personal gatherings** including theaters for live performances, local history museums, religious gatherings, weddings, and funerals.
7. **Programmed activities** such as book fairs, parades, festivals, car shows, sporting events and community celebrations.
8. **Visitor information** centers, physical and virtual, for residents and visitors:
 - Guides to local places and activities,
 - Notice of non-recurring events and tickets to local events.
9. **Water amenities** with parks, lakes or waterfronts on or near main street including boat ride vendors, promenades, café’s, carousels, playgrounds, fountains and amphitheaters.
10. **Something authentic**, an iconic place or event, unique to the town, for example:
 - The West Orange Trail, Heritage Museum and Garden Theater in Winter Garden;
 - The Florida Museum for Women Artists and Athena Theater in DeLand;
 - The Lakeside Inn in Mount Dora; the Pro Bass Tour event in Kissimmee;
 - The Winter Park and Mount Dora Art Festivals; the Orlando Air and Space Show in Sanford;
 - The State Theater and Bay Street Players in Eustis; and, the Tavares Seaplane Base and Marina.

In sum, the “main street” is a full service, connected and accessible place for the enjoyment of residents and visitors with an integrated mix of businesses and activities including shops and restaurants, offices and venues for entertainment, cultural, education and recreational.

Source: wck | planning.com

Conclusions.

1. The “**Active Zone**” of main street can function as a viable business district, a place for civic buildings and active open spaces that enable the heart of main street to be the town’s “third place”; the place where people want to be when not at work or home. “Active Zones” are uninterrupted with buildings and businesses closed weekends and evenings.
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 activities of main street will either encourage or discourage people to reside, 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 long with 4 to 6 block faces of active retail, restaurant, civic buildings and public venues; an “Active Zone” that is too long diffuses commercial and social energy.
5. **Front doors** on main street are important.
6. **Parking** is an important resource; a strategic approach that works for patrons without enabling employees to park in prime customer parking spots is the objective. The system may include free on-street parking controlled with time limitations supplemented with nearby free parking in surface lots or parking decks. Walkability is critical when creating a “park once” system. Five of the nine towns have parking structures near main street offering free parking.
7. There is **two-way traffic** on every main street in the nine small cities. Only two have medians.
8. **Building height** is 2-3 stories. Most buildings on character main streets in Central Florida have 2-3 stories; 2 story buildings are much better than single story main street buildings. 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 and they tend to have low occupancy in the upper floors. In general, they are out of scale with 2-3 story buildings; although specific sites may be acceptable for a taller building.
9. **Civic buildings and public venues** [city halls, museums, libraries, e.g.] belong on the ends of main street, on side streets or nearby. They do not need to be in the middle of the “Active Zone” if they are not open weekends and evenings so not to interrupt the flow of diners, shoppers and event patrons as they stroll main street evenings and weekends.
10. **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.
11. **Historic neighborhoods** are usually within walking distance of main street. Bikeways and pedways that connect the city center to all close-in neighborhoods are important.
12. **Downtown regulations** work best that focus on site specific development standards and design guidelines. The uses in the building are of less importance than building access and locations on the site. Form-based codes are useful. Uses will change over time; universally designed buildings can change occupants and uses over the decades without de-constructing the buildings.
13. **Guard the main street “Active Zone” jealously**, it is a limited and valuable resource.