

Downtown Milford, Inc.

Strategic Plan
2018-2021



Milford
River Town.
Art Town.
Home Town.



Board of Directors 2018

Sara Pletcher, President
Peggy Reilly, Vice President
Bob Starkey, Treasurer
Pat Sparks, Secretary
Matthew Babbit
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Walter Hepford
David Pickrell
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Downtown Milford, Inc., an accredited Main Street Community

Being a Main Street America Accredited™ community is a mark of distinction that signifies commitment to comprehensive revitalization, community engagement, and rigorous outcome measurement.

DMI has a proven track record of success in planning, implementing, and measuring results that align with the Main Street Approach and have met a series of rigorous accreditation standards. Accredited programs are selected by the local Coordinating Program, which in Delaware is known as Downtown Delaware. That program is administrated through the Delaware Office of Small Business and Tourism and is a division of the Delaware Department of State.

Staff

Murrie Zlotziver, Executive Director

Downtown Milford, Incorporated is managed by a full-time paid executive director who is responsible for working with the Downtown Milford, Inc. Board of Directors to implement and administer the Downtown Milford programs; he provides program support tasks; serves as central advocate for the downtown district; acts as liaison between the program and the City of Milford, public agencies, civic groups, downtown stakeholders, and the community



Committees

ECONOMIC VITALITY

Walter Hepford, Chair

Focuses on capital, incentives, and other economic and financial tools to assist new and existing businesses, catalyze property development, and create a supportive environment for entrepreneurs and innovators that drive local economies.

PROMOTION

Nina Pletcher, Chair

Positions the downtown district as the center of the community and hub of economic activity, while creating a positive image that showcases a community's unique characteristics.

DESIGN

Milly Pederson, Chair

Supports a community's transformation by enhancing the physical and visual assets that set the commercial district apart.

ORGANIZATION

Pat Sparks, Chair

Involves creating a strong foundation for a sustainable revitalization effort, including cultivating partnerships, community involvement, and resources for the district.

Signature Events

BUG & BUD FESTIVAL

DMI & Parks & Rec Partnership
Last Saturday in April

LADYBUG MUSIC FESTIVAL

Gable Music Ventures
Saturday, September 22, 2018

Community Events

PROMOTION COMMITTEE

- St. Patrick's Day Pub Crawl
- Father's Day Event
- Small Business Saturday
- Santa House
- Holiday Stroll

ECONOMIC VITALITY COMMITTEE

- 3rd Thursday
- Riverwalk Farmers Market
- Fall Farmers Market

DESIGN COMMITTEE

- Milford in Bloom



D E S I G N



ORGANIZATION



ECONOMIC VITALITY



P R O M O T I O N



Forward: About the Plan

This document is a result DMI's first major strategic planning effort under its new revised board and committee structure. The planning effort took place under the guidance of the Downtown Delaware program. Resources from that program were used in developing this plan. It was guided by accreditation standards from the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Because organizational growth patterns tend to be uneven, the reader will notice that some parts of the plan are more developed than others. Where initiatives are presented in a more general sense, the reader may assume that certain administrative or other support functions must be in place before a recommended initiative can move forward. The goals and objectives for functional areas correspond to the programmatic areas.

Readers will notice programmatic initiatives are presented by lifecycle stage. This progressive growth structure was designed to encourage the introduction of new initiatives as technology, economic and other circumstances change. It also allows for the identification of programs that require a phasing out or transition period.



Background

In October of 2017, the Downtown Delaware contracted with downtown development specialist, Georgeanna Windley, to provide mentoring services to the DMI Board and Staff with the intent of developing a Strategic Plan for the organization, one that would serve to guide the organization over the next three to five years. Executive Director, Murrie Zlotziver supported the effort and served as the Planning Coordinator.

A significant amount of preparation work was made available through DMI, Interim Director and Certified Main Street Manager, Lorraine Dion. Mrs. Dion's work from 2016 was supplied and used as a basis for this plan. This plan was also designed to align with the Downtown Milford Master Plan by Arnett Muldrow & Associates.

Between January 2018 and May 2018, the Board, its Executive Director, volunteers and partners worked together to conduct internal and external environmental scans. Structured planning methods were utilized. Facilitated planning sessions revealed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with the key business units that make up DMI. Both internal and external factors were taken into consideration.

The SWOT covered the following areas:

1. DMI Board
2. DMI Office Operations
3. DMI Committees
4. DMI Programs
5. DMI Communications
6. Downtown Milford

A day-long board retreat was conducted and included facilitated sessions and educational refreshers presented by Gigi Windley and Donna Harris. The Board also reviewed, with a facilitator the accreditation requirements, and completed a self-assessment to how well they were meeting the accreditation requirements. The retreat covered capacity building and resource development techniques, and other topics beneficial to the planning process.

Data was gathered through one-on-one interviews with leadership, through committee interaction, from existing plans and through facilitated sessions with the Board. Key strategic issues were identified and validated with the full Board.

From this work, the planning team developed a set of values based on the comments received. They worked collectively to update and develop the mission and vision statements so that they reflect current conditions and projected future conditions.

Additional feedback was collected through an online survey at board meetings. Leadership and board members reviewed drafts and provided feedback on the information and ideas generated throughout the planning process.

Information was compiled and presented back for validation at a subsequent board meeting. Governing Statements were reviewed and revised by the Board through an interactive process.





Governing Statements for Downtown Milford, Inc.

OUR PURPOSE:

Serve as the life-giving element for our historic downtown district.

OUR MISSION:

Partnering to build Milford's historic downtown into a unique, vibrant, and livable place for all.

The following statement may be used in grant applications in selected governing documents.

ABOUT DMI:

Downtown Milford, Incorporated, is a dynamic multi-faceted economic development organization that serves as positive force in the community at large. We work with business and property owners to beautify, revitalize, protect, preserve, and promote our historic riverside district. DMI operates as 501c3 nonprofit organization and is accredited through the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Downtown Delaware Program.

OUR VISION:

Our community will become a unique and vibrant destination place, a welcoming focal point for community gatherings, and a desirable place to live, shop, learn, work, and enjoy recreational opportunities.

Central to our vision, is our ability to provide public access to the waterfront. We aim to partner with property owners, residents, businesses, and government entities to bring new life into our historic district.

OUR VALUES:

The mission and vision statements are complemented with organizational values that were created with input from all members of the Board and reflect best practices for publicly funded 501-c3 organizations.

As an organization DMI will be:

- Nimble
- Results-oriented
- Collaborative
- Multi-faceted
- Transparent
- Accountable

The programs and services we provide will be:

- Community oriented
- Effective
- Socially Equitable
- Environmentally Sustainable
- Economically Feasible
- Customer Friendly



The Eight Principles of Main Street¹

While the Main Street Four-Point Approach™ provides the format for successful revitalization, implementing it is based on eight principles that pertain to all areas of the revitalization effort.

1. **Comprehensive.** Downtown revitalization is a complex process that cannot be accomplished through a single project. For successful, long-term revitalization, a comprehensive approach must be used.
2. **Incremental.** Small projects and simple activities lead to a more sophisticated understanding of the revitalization process and help to develop skills so that more complex problems can be addressed and more ambitious projects undertaken.
3. **Self-Help.** Local leaders must have the desire and will to make the project successful. The NMSC provides direction, ideas and training, but continued and long-term success depends upon the involvement and commitment of the community.
4. **Public-Private Partnership.** Both the public and private sectors have a vital interest in the economic health and physical viability of downtown. Each sector has a role to play, and each must understand the other's strengths and limitations so that an effective partnership can be forged.
5. **Identifying and Capitalizing on Existing Assets.** Business districts must capitalize on the assets that make them unique. Every district has unique qualities, like distinctive buildings and scale, that give people a sense of place. These local assets must serve as the foundation for all aspects of the revitalization program.
6. **Quality.** Quality must be emphasized in every aspect of the revitalization program. This applies equally to each element of the program, from storefront design to promotional campaigns to educational programs.
7. **Change.** Changes in attitude and practice are necessary to improve current economic conditions. Public support for change will build as the program grows.
8. **Implementation Oriented.** Activity creates confidence in the program and even greater levels of participation. Frequent, visible changes are a reminder that the revitalization effort is underway. Small projects at the beginning pave the way for larger activities as the program matures.

Strategies for Downtown Milford, Inc.

The following strategies were developed as an off-shoot from the feedback that was obtained through the focus groups, facilitation sessions, and board member surveys. In order to ensure that DMI remained compliant with the 10 standards of performance requirements, they are aligned with the Vision and Mission statements and also work with the “Rivertown Rebirth Plan.” These strategies apply across the board and apply to the Board, the Committees, and the Volunteers. Leadership refers to these strategies when developing future work plans and budgets. They are designed to remain in place for a multi-year period and may be reordered in terms of priority as conditions change.

Overarching Strategies to Reset the Organization

(listed in order of importance)

1

Develop into a resourceful and strategically-oriented Board

2

Place an intentional emphasis on the long-range efforts of the Economic Vitality and Design Committees that reflect the historic preservation ethic

3

Identify and report key statistics

4

Build a broader base of support in the community
Build strong case statements and strive for excellent ratings from philanthropic rating organizations

5

Diversify and build sources of funding that supports stated design improvements and economic vitality initiatives

6

Empower educate and motivate the community’s volunteer workforce

7

Spin off successful large-scale events into separate self-contained business units
(may still be linked to DMI)

8

Partner effectively and efficiently

Strategies for reinvigorating Downtown Milford's Historic District

The following strategies were developed as an off shoot from the feedback that was obtained through the focus groups, facilitation sessions, and board member surveys. They are designed for the DMI staff and committees to refer to when developing action plans. They work with the existing Rivertown Rebirth Plan for Downtown Milford.

Overarching Strategies for the Downtown

(listed in order of importance)

1

Embrace the values the Community cherishes:
Friendly, Hospitable, Community Minded

2

Focus on the three W's:
Walkability, Water, and Wayfinding

3

Focus on creating permanent downtown river-themed attraction(s) and recruit small businesses that complements life on the river

4

Create Milford's unique brand by engaging local, hospitality-driven businesses and by connecting to and supporting the visual and performing arts

5

Create multi-level linkages with "stakeholder" employers in Milford

6

Make spaces and places for the learning economy to thrive

7

Engage with the City and utilize the Downtown Master Plan, "Rivertown Rebirth," as a road map for project prioritization and selection

Strategies for promoting Downtown as a desirable place to visit, start a business, purchase property, or to simply enjoy life

The following strategies were developed as an off-shoot from the feedback that was obtained through the focus groups, facilitation sessions, and board member surveys. They are designed for the DMI staff and committees to refer to when developing action plans. They work with the existing plans for Downtown Milford and help to support promotional strategies across committees. These are the guiding strategies for the DMI staff to use when making promotional decisions.

Overarching Market Boosting Strategies for Downtown Milford, Inc.

(listed in order of importance)

1

Build brand and improve web presence
Utilize analytic devices and develop strong graphic standards that can be easily applied in the new media environment

2

Create strong graphics that work well on mobile devices and reflect the unique identity of our downtown

3

Engage in experience design and heavily publicize the experiences in a cost-effective manner
Use short video clips

4

Create a positive environment for retailers to flourish and be creative with their promotions

Strategies for Committees

Creating an environment for investment is at the core of DMI's Historic Commercial District's Revitalization Initiative. DMI works to accomplish its mission through the Main Street Four-Point Approach™.² The Main Street Four Point Approach™ succeeds when the committees are fully functional and when the Approach is combined with the above eight principles. Devised and developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Main Street Four-Point Approach™ has a record of turning commercial districts across the country around. The committees develop annual actionable workplans. The following strategies were developed as a guide for the development of those plans and to keep the workplans focused over an extended period time.

DMI has a high degree of organizational responsibility as compared to other Main Street organizations in the State. They maintain property and run large-scale events. Their funding is not diversified and comes mainly from event production. While this sustains the organization to some extent, the events distract the Board and Committees away from the approach required to create improvements that are more permanent in nature.

As a way to correct this, committees need to be strengthened and, in some cases, refocused around the organizational strategies. The following is a recommended strategic framework to guide committees.

Board Executive Committee Reset

GUIDING ACTIONS:

- Review DANA'S Board Excellence Manual
 - Review Main Street/ Downtown Delaware Accreditation Standards
1. Consider restructuring the board composition or agenda to ensure that all four major committee chairs have a voice on the Board
 2. Align the Board agenda with the committee reports
 3. Create a Board Action Calendar with key board related events
 4. Create a Board Expectations Policy and onboard all board members in a timely manner
 5. Communicate with and provide the Executive Director with the resources needed to do the job
 6. Restructure budget framework so that it aligns with actionable work plans

² National Trust for Historic Preservation Main Street Program

Organization Committee Reset

The Organization Committee establishes consensus and cooperation by building partnerships among the various groups that have a stake in downtown. This will allow the Revitalization Program to provide effective, ongoing management and advocacy of downtown. Diverse groups from the public and private sectors (city and county governments, local bankers, merchants, the Chamber of Commerce, property owners, community leaders, and others) work together to create and maintain a successful program. This committee develops financial and volunteer resources to support the efforts of the Board and other committees.

GUIDING ACTIONS:

- Build and fund this committee as it serves as the foundation for the program
1. Create three sub-committees with strong chairs
 2. Recruit three strong and dedicated chairs and work to retain those chairs
 - a. Volunteer
 - i. Recruitment
 - ii. Retention
 - iii. Training
 - b. Resource Development
 - i. Membership
 - ii. Grant Prospecting and Management
 - c. Organizational Image
 - i. Produces Annual Report and publicizes organizational successes

Design Committee Reset

The Design Committee takes advantage of the visual opportunities inherent in a downtown by directing attention to all of its physical elements: public and private buildings, storefronts, signs, public spaces, landscaping, merchandising, displays, and promotional materials. Its aim is to stress the importance of design quality in all of these areas, to educate people about design quality, and to expedite improvements downtown.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE:

- Build on Existing Assets

GUIDING ACTIONS:

- Incorporate best practices in Historic Preservation where applicable
 - Utilize and make known the resources that are available to DMI through Downtown Delaware and the National Trust
1. Focus on improving pedestrian wayfinding:
 - Start with temporary and fun placemaking exercises by creating focal points around existing assets.³
 - Move into more permanent initiatives that reflects the nature of the community like high quality public art.
 - Recruit architect, retail designer, graphic designer (one who is well trained and understands harmonic proportions and color theory)
 - Design and place pedestrian wayfinding system to include signage, maps, and online mobile device presence. Use coordinated graphic standards to unify the look. Starting points are at the most visited businesses and public places.
 2. Advocate for investment in public spaces
 - Collaborate with the City and encourage good stewardship of City-owned and operated properties. The City becomes a role model for good design of public space. Focus on improving the park area around the Riverwalk. DMI serves as a resource for best practices.
 3. Continue with façade improvement program
 4. Continue the effort to beautify the downtown with seasonal plants

³ Historic buildings, Riverwalk, Farmers Market, restaurants, shops, galleries, parks, the river, historic buildings and facades, Goat Island, the Vinyard Shipyard, public kayak dock behind Arena's, shopping district, Milford Public Library, Milford Museum, historic bed & breakfast inns, art galleries, coffee shop, Santa House

Economic Vitality Committee Reset

The Economic Vitality Committee strengthens a downtown's existing economic assets while diversifying its economic base. This is accomplished by retaining and expanding existing businesses to provide a balanced commercial mix, converting unused or underutilized space into productive property, sharpening the competitiveness and merchandising skills of downtown business people, and attracting new businesses that the market can support.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

- Embrace the entrepreneurial spirit
- Know infrastructure needs and capabilities before recruiting

GUIDING ACTIONS:

- Encourage immediate and consistent lead follow up
 - Vet new businesses for potential for success, refer appropriately
1. Continue to support the creation of signature businesses and attractions for the downtown by utilizing a focused task force for the Vinyard Shipyard project and other proposed projects that are destination drivers
 2. Became a trusted resource for market and property data and on the downtown. Empower local existing businesses with market data they can use
 3. Continue the Entrepreneurs Network
 - Partner more with business assistance organizations to create a positive learning/collaborative environment to help to keep small independent businesses up to date with technological resources and provide avenues for them to access working capital
 4. Conduct regular visitations to existing businesses and report on potential to expand
 5. Continue with business recruitment efforts and transfer business recruitment materials to digital media enhanced with video testimonials from existing businesses
 - Formalize the lead sharing process (see attachment in appendix)
 - Match recruitment efforts to what is most feasible
 6. Build stronger relationships with the property owners and real-estate community
 - Possibly create an invest in downtown event
 7. Move the Farmers Market to be an off-shoot of the Promotions Committee
 8. Create incentives to encourage businesses to be open when the customers are most available

Promotion Committee Reset

Promotion takes many forms, but the goal is to create a positive image of Main Street in order to rekindle community pride. Promotion seeks to improve retail sales events and festivals and to create a positive public image of downtown in order to attract investors, developers, and new businesses.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE:

- Frequency in messaging is key, use the rule of 7

GUIDING ACTIONS:

- Plan ahead. Have your “product on the shelf” for as long as possible
 - Ensure the entire organization knows when you are about to launch a promotion
1. Create Positioning Statements for each campaign/or event
 2. Run a competitive analysis before choosing the date for major events
 3. Think in terms of an integrated promotional campaign by event or objective that works across many platforms
 4. Recruit marketing professionals who have access to market data to assist
 5. Save on design cost and recycle and update things that are working
 6. Absorb the Farmers Market as a subcommittee of Promotions
 7. Create a promotional program and incentives to encourage businesses to be open when the customers are most available
 8. Publish and distribute a marketing plan with intended target markets
 9. Include contact and wayfinding info on everything you do
 10. Develop graphics and graphic standards and graphic formats for new media
 11. Find a volunteer who can be proactive in uploading content on key websites
 12. Keep an up-to-date media list
 13. Public service announcements
 14. Create a technical advisory team of marketing professionals and media buyers to advise local businesses (ad reps may not serve on this team)