

MORRIS MAIN STREET PROJECT

January 1, 1984 - December 31, 1986



FINAL REPORT

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Background

The City of Morris made application for designation as one of the first five Main Street Cities in Minnesota in the fall of 1983. After Morris was notified of its selection in November, Ed Larson, City Manager and Linda Roles, Chamber of Commerce President, attended an informational meeting in St. Paul.

On January 10, 1984 state and national Main Street officials visited Morris and addressed a public meeting about the Main Street philosophy. Approximately 100 enthusiastic people attended this meeting. A committee was then formed to review applications for the Main Street Coordinator position. Committee members were: Roy Larson (Chair), Loren Carr (Vice Chair), Gail Nelson, Linda Roles, Carl Benson, Bettina Blake, Steve Gawron and Bill Rickmeyer.

Ron Meiss assumed the duties of Main Street Coordinator on February 13, 1984. Meiss and five committee members (Roles, Nelson, Carr, Rickmeyer and Ed Larson) attended a 3-day training workshop in St. Paul, February 15-17, 1984. An official Board of Directors was established in late February. Board members were: Rita Feuchtenberger, Trisha Dirks, Ed Larson, Roy Larson (Chair), Loren Carr (Vice Chair), Bill Rickmeyer, Gail Nelson, Jack Imholte, Linda Roles, Carl Benson and Steve Gawron.

On April 27, 1984 the National Main Street Resource Team presented information they had gathered about all facets of the Morris community. (Printed report is available in the Chamber Office.) This presentation served as a blueprint for future Main Street activities.

Gail Nelson was named Main Street Project Coordinator in March 1985, following the resignation of Ron Meiss. This was a full-time position until January 1986. Effective January 1, 1986 the Coordinator position became half-time, due to third year budgeting constraints. The Main Street Office was located in City Hall until March 1985, after which it shared office space with the Morris Area Chamber of Commerce and the West Central Minnesota Small Business Cooperation Office at 8 East 6th Street.

Budget

	<u>City Contribution</u>	<u>Local Pledges</u>	<u>Unpaid Pledges</u>
1984 - 85	\$ 25,000	\$ 31,795 (63)	\$ 2,075 (6)
1986	<u>10,000</u>	<u>10,320 (37)</u>	<u>25 (1)</u>
TOTALS	\$ 35,000	\$ 42,115	\$ 2,100

Accomplishments

The Main Street program approaches downtown revitalization by applying and integrating four components -- Organization, Promotion, Design, and Economic Restructuring. Accomplishments will be addressed in relation to the four components (including component definitions).

Organization

Many separate groups, working together for downtown revitalization. Community-wide involvement and effort in all components of the program.

- * Board representation includes Chamber of Commerce, agriculture, University of Minnesota, Morris, retailers, professional service providers, city government, media and financial institutions.
- * Strong media support has been received from the Morris Sun and Tribune and KMRS/KKOK radio.
- * Community involvement on committees has increased, i.e., Prairie Pioneer Days, Main Street Design and Promotion Committees, UMM and Farmer Appreciation events.
- * Membership in the Morris Area Chamber of Commerce has increased from 110 members in 1984 to 203 members in 1986.
- * A Town and Gown team has been formed to look at ways the campus and community can work together on economic development.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: The Main Street Board of Directors has served as the Organization Committee.

Promotion

Activities (special events/festivals, community events and retail promotions) held to promote downtown as a unified marketplace.

- * The Committee sponsored a workshop on "Effective Window Displays."
- * A "Morris On The Move" bumper sticker campaign was organized.
- * A "Farmer Appreciation Breakfast" was held.
- * An annual "Welcome Back UMM" appreciation event (banner, evening meal, entertainment, prize drawings) for students, faculty and staff has been organized.

- * An annual community festival, Prairie Pioneer Days, is now in place -- Main Street fundraisers have included a Slave Auction, Potato Recipe Contest and Cookbook, and a Hot Potato Stand.
- * A Morris video has been produced to be used in recruitment.
- * Area community special events have been recognized through ads in area newspapers.
- * Community events and Main Street happenings have been promoted via a weekly radio show and weekly newspaper column.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Catherine Huebner, Muriel Krusemark (Chair),
Linda Roles, Steve VanSlooten, Dick Vatthauer.

Design

Enhance the visual quality of downtown.

- * A logo was selected to represent the Main Street Program (used on stationery, workshop brochures, bumper stickers, Prairie Pioneer Days promotional material).
- * A Morris sign was developed and placed on the Highway 28 East entrance to the City (Dick Kaye property), with \$1500 contributed by the Kiwanis Club.
- * The following businesses used Design Committee assistance to improve building facades (paint, signage, awnings, etc.): Eldorado Jewelers, Mrs. V's, Second Hand Rose, Sonia's Scientific Hair Center, Walt's Shoes.
- * A "Morris Main Street Design Workshop" was organized and held.
- * Suggestions were made for new Morris street lights.
- * The development of a Library Mall Landscape Plan was contracted for incorporation into the City's permanent improvement plan.
- * Design criteria were developed to help determine eligibility for Loan Pool funds. Projects were reviewed and recommendations made to the Economic Restructuring Committee.
- * The Design Committee has tried to function as a "community conscience" to encourage downtown improvements.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Karen Berget (Chair), Greg Garmer, Merrill Pedersen, Jan Brown, Jack Imholte. (Past members: Linda Reeves, Larry Hutchings, Greg Nelson, Tricia Dirks.)

Economic Restructuring

Diversify the downtown economy by recruitment
of new stores to provide a balanced retail mix.

- * Two Loan Pools were implemented. Year 1, \$250,000 was designated to be used to: improve appearance and quality of store facades; update and/or improve major interior retail space; improve or add to furniture, fixtures, and equipment; and/or expand into new lines of inventory.

The following businesses made use of these funds:

Bon Jo's	Papa Johns
LaVilla Restaurant	Sonia's Scientific Hair Center
Moser, Brown, Olson and Co.	Morris Radio and T.V.
Signs of Quality	Hong Kong Restaurant
Sunwood Athletic Club	Walt's Shoes
The Hair Clinic	United Farm Agency
The Frame Merchant	P.J. Munchi's

Year 2, \$125,000 was designated to be used to: improve exterior design elements of buildings; rehabilitate historical aspects; corporate landscaping and public access design; improve display windows; and/or, redesign signs or install new ones. The following businesses have made use of funds to date:

Dairy Queen Brazier	Pedersen's Funeral Home
Mrs. V's/Footprints	Eldorado Jewelers

- * A Community Development mailer was developed and is being disseminated via business billings, correspondence, etc.
- * A Consumer Feedback Card was developed to provide area shoppers with the opportunity to give feedback to merchants about service, store appearance, product/value and how they might be served better.
- * The Committee is working on a strategy to employ a full-time economic developer for the County.

January 1, 1984 - December 31, 1986

	<u>First 18 mon.</u>	<u>Second 18 mon.</u>	<u>Total</u>
Facade Changes	7	5	12
Rehab Projects	6	3	9
New Construction Projects	3	5	8
Number of Business Starts	21	14	35
" " " Closings	2	12	14
Cost of Rehab Projects	\$ 566,000	140,970	\$ 706,970
Cost of New Construction	\$ 770,000	190,700	\$ 960,700

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: Loren Carr, Bob Carruthers, Ken Keller/Doug Johnson

MAIN STREET BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND TERMS

Roy Larson	Feb 1986	Loren Carr	Feb 1987
Rita Feuchtenberger	Feb 1986	Steve VanSlooten	Feb 1987 (replaced Roles)
Dick Vatthauer	Feb 1986 (replaced Gowran)	Fred Lucius (Linda Roles replaced)	Feb 1987 (replaced Nelson)
Tricia Dirks	Feb 1986	Catherine Huebner	Feb 1987 (replaced Benson)
Ed Larson	Feb 1988	Nick Wolff	Feb 1989
Jack Imholte	Feb 1988	Ron Jacobson	Feb 1989
Muriel Krusemark	Feb 1988 (replaced Rickmeyer)	Kelly McCann	Feb 1989
Liz Regimbal, ex-officio		Dick Vatthauer	Feb 1989

"Unfinished Business -- Coordinator Comments"

"Great accomplishments have resulted from the transmission of ideas and enthusiasm."

--Thomas J. Watson

In looking back over the past 3+ years of the Morris Main Street program, I honestly believe that there have been great accomplishments! However, I also believe that there is still much to be done. Somehow we seem to think that in three years, all goals should have been accomplished. The reality is better stated in the National Main Street Resource Team Report (April 1984).

"WITHOUT FAIL, ANY GOOD SUCCESSFUL IDEA WILL TAKE AT LEAST TWICE AS LONG, REQUIRING TWICE AS MUCH EFFORT TO WORK OR TO BE ACCEPTED THAN ORIGINALLY ESTIMATED. MANY GOOD IDEAS HAVE FAILED SIMPLY BECAUSE OF LACK OF PERSISTENCE. NO ONE EVER SAID DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION WOULD BE FAST OR EASY. It is a very comprehensive, incremental process, demanding much time, patience and effort to undo long entrenched problems which have been allowed to fester and compound over time. Downtown revitalization is comparable to industrial development; it requires long-term, ongoing commitment and management."

I only hope that the people of our community have an ongoing commitment to the Main Street philosophy for downtown revitalization. My challenge for the future would be to INCREASE COMMITMENT to work in UNISON on downtown revitalization, I.C.U. --INCREASE, COMMITMENT, UNISON vs. INTENSIVE CARE UNIT! I fear that if Morris citizens don't continue to work together on revitalization, the downtown will degenerate. I believe Morris has remained relatively healthy during these tough economic times because the Main Street program has provided motivation and an impetus for action. Many other communities have not been so fortunate.

I would like to direct specific comments to the four Main Street elements -- Organization, Promotion, Design and Economic Restructuring. I will attempt to incorporate suggestions from the National Resource Team Report along with my personal observations, based upon my 3+ years association with the project.

ORGANIZATION

At the end of the year Morris will no longer have an official organization whose responsibility it is to coordinate the efforts of many different individuals and interests to benefit the community. The Main Street Board of Directors, with its broad representation, provided overall direction, decision-making and

implementation strategies for the program. There has been a strong working relationship between the Morris Area Chamber of Commerce and the Main Street Program.

However, both the Chamber and Main Street Program have had (and continue to have) difficulty in mobilizing special task forces and/or committees to take on special projects. In some cases we have not challenged others to become involved. In other instances volunteers are sought, but responsibilities end up with a few people who soon "burn out." The Retail Trade Committee of the Chamber is one such example -- there is currently no such committee. It is hard to believe that in a city the size of Morris, there is so little unity among business owners. This lack of unity has been referred to by many as "merchant apathy." By and large, most businesses seem to be content to let local media and/or the Chamber make decisions for them on such things as promotions, special sales and community events. I think it is of utmost importance to organize a group of downtown businesses to think creatively about downtown -- its potential and how it can best become an attractive marketplace for west central Minnesota.

I also believe that Morris needs to continue to develop a greater community appreciation of UMM. We need to be thinking about businesses with specific student appeal. Related suggestions might include an outlet store downtown that would carry UMM paraphernalia, such as clothing items, mugs, pennants, gift items, etc. Another idea might be a place downtown that carries art work created by UMM students and/or faculty -- consignment sales might be one option. This would give area residents an opportunity to purchase quality art, while at the same time providing income to the artists. Such an arrangement would also serve to demonstrate increased involvement between downtown and the University.

Morris has many creative people in its midst -- the challenge remains to involve more people and organizations/community groups in local program activities. Such groups might include the Morris ministerium, study clubs, garden club, 4-H groups, professional service providers, service clubs, public schools, realtors and merchants and property owners. Morris and all of its residents benefit when there is broad-based community support for projects which enhance the community's viability.

PROMOTION

The Main Street Program has seen much success in the area of promotions. A quality logo was developed and is available for future use. The program and special events have received extensive coverage by KMRS/KKOK radio and the Morris Tribune. A weekly radio show was sponsored by Otter Tail Power Company and space was doanted in the Morris Tribune for a weekly Main Street column.

We are fortunate to have such cooperative media. Special newspaper supplements have complimented such activities as Prairie Pioneer Days, Welcome Back UMM events and the Morris On The Move campaign.

The Main Street promotion philosophy talks about the importance of three types of downtown promotions -- special festivals, community events and joint retail promotions. As mentioned earlier, the waning interest in, and subsequent demise of the Retail Trade Committee makes joint retail promotions difficult, if not impossible. Such a group must be reestablished if new promotions are to be implemented in the future. This group needs to build and improve on past promotions -- Crazy Days, Moonlight Madness, etc., adding new events to attract more people downtown. In addition, new promotions should be considered, perhaps targeting special groups -- teens, working women, senior citizens, farm families, traditional local customers, etc. Downtown merchants also need to continue their efforts to reach consensus on store hours. When potential out of town customers call the Chamber to ask what hours Morris businesses are open (particularly during the holidays) it's embarrassing to have to ask, "Which store?" With such a group in place, the Chamber of Commerce would be in a better position to work on other promotional activities.

The Chamber and Main Street staffs have talked about such things as downtown business directories, Morris shopping bags and post cards, and Employee/Employer of the Month awards. Discussions have also focused on the need for additional promotional banners, colored pennants for store fronts and entry signs to downtown. The National Resource Team told us in 1984 that our downtown does not work together on critical business questions and promotional matters. If indeed this is true, perhaps it's because things aren't really that tough in Morris. And until they are, downtown businesses have little incentive to work together. In communities where there are severe economic problems, we see united efforts to preserve downtown. I hope Morris addresses the need for downtown cooperation before it must address a crisis situation. I believe there is great truth in the statement, "If we don't hang together, we will hang separately." Morris can't let that happen.

DESIGN

Design relates to the image of downtown -- how it reflects the pride a community has in itself. A visitor to our City commented on our well-maintained residential areas -- well preserved homes, beautiful lawns, etc. They found it interesting that that same pride was not reflected downtown. This observation may not be totally valid, but it does relate to some of the frustrations felt by Design Committee members. Throughout the past three years, several businesses

have used Committee expertise to improve building facades. However, in nearly all cases, Committee services were utilized as mandatory to obtain Loan Pool funds. If this Committee were to continue beyond Main Street's existence, I think a couple of things would need to happen. The City would have to adopt downtown design guidelines. The Committee could then serve as a clearinghouse for downtown improvements and should have the power to approve or disapprove facade changes, building expansions, signage, etc. As a "community conscience," the Committee could also recommend both private and public improvements. Such projects might include improvement of store rear entries and enhancement of entries to downtown. The Committee might also be charged to work with the City on a public/landscape improvement plan for downtown (plantings, trash receptacles, benches, etc.). The Committee could serve as a clearinghouse for groups seeking to undertake community pride projects.

The Design Committee was under-utilized during the 3-year Main Street project. The commitment of Committee members was strong, but interest in what people perceive as aesthetics was minimal.

ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING

In the past 3+ years, Morris has enjoyed a significant reinvestment in downtown. Supportive tax increment financing and cooperative efforts by Morris' three financial institutions have stimulated new business development, construction and rehab projects. I do believe however, that Morris has not been able to effectively address some basic economic problems. While we have been able to encourage small business development, we have been unable to attract or incubate new industry. The agricultural crisis has compounded the need for increased employment opportunities,

Since we are currently without the services of an economic developer, no-one is actively addressing this problem. The City and County have made financial commitments to partially underwrite the position of economic developer. I think this position should be filled as soon as possible on either a part-time or full-time basis. Both the City IDC and the WCIIC need to take the leadership in filling this position. The two IDC's and the developer need to coordinate the efforts of all those working on economic development -- Chamber of Commerce, bankers, realtors, City, County and Small Business Cooperation Office (and there may be others). To assist a developer in business/industry recruitment, a "strike force" (with representatives from the aforementioned) should be organized. This group should meet with the developer on a regular basis, in addition to being available to visit prospective businesses. A developer should then begin work on

securing up-to-date, local market information -- labor surveys, etc. Such information gathering might be coordinated with efforts for Morris' designation as a Star City. The developer also needs to actively investigate agri business opportunities. (A valuable resource exists in the West Central Experiment Station.) Job creation should be a primary goal in business/industry recruitment.

Any economic development effort will need the ongoing support of Morris' financial institutions. In addition to business development Morris needs to look for ways to support existing businesses. To stimulate "at home" spending our banks might be challenged to investigate the possibility of instituting a "Morris Credit Card" or low-interest loans for major purchases made locally.

SUMMARY

In summary, I think that there are three actions that need to be taken to insure continuation of downtown revitalization in Morris:

1. An economic developer needs to be hired to INCREASE business/industry recruitment activities and coordinate current economic development efforts.
2. A downtown landscape/improvement plan should be developed that includes a COMMITMENT to enforcing specific design guidelines. A Committee needs to be set in place to see that downtown improvements are consistent with the plan. (This Committee might be appointed by, and accountable to, the City Council.)
3. A downtown retail trade group/association needs to be created (revitalized) to pull merchants together to work in UNISON on special festivals, community events, joint retail promotions and consistent store hours.

The time is right! Let's not quit now! Let's INCREASE our COMMITMENT to work in UNISON on Morris downtown revitalization!!