

**CITY OF MONROE
DOWNTOWN ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
300 W. CROWELL STREET
MONROE, NORTH CAROLINA 28112
Wednesday, January 14, 2026 - 8:30
AM
AGENDA**

1. Call to Order
2. Roll Call
3. Approval/Acceptance of Minutes (Action Required)
4. Downtown Sponsorship Application: Downtown Monroe Art Walk
5. 2026 Meeting Schedule
6. Downtown Master Plan Update
7. NC Main Street - State Conference
8. Adjourn Meeting (Action Required)

ATTENTION ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS: Board Members will contact Ashley Nowell at anowell@monroenc.org to confirm their attendance. Regular meetings are scheduled on the 3rd Wednesday of the month at 9 a.m.

AS A COURTESY, PLEASE TURN OFF ALL MOBILE DEVICES WHILE MEETING IS IN PROGRESS.

**CITY OF MONROE
DOWNTOWN MONROE ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
300 W CROWELL STREET, MONROE, NC 28112
November 19, 2025
MINUTES**

DAB Members: Chair: Joyce Rentschler, William Heisner, Courtney Garrison, Lisa Boix, Sheila Crunkleton and Greg Moore were all present.

Member(s) Absent: Clint Lawrence

Staff Present: Assistant City Manager Jeff Wells, Downtown Manager Donna O'Keefe

Item 1: Call to order

Joyce Rentschler called the Wednesday, **November 19, 2025**, Downtown Advisory Board Regular Meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

Item 2: Roll Call

Roll was documented by Donna O'Keefe through a sign-in sheet.

Donna O'Keefe welcomed the board and requested to the chair that Jeff Wells, Assistant City Manager, have a few minutes to update the board on the progress of the Downtown Master Plan project.

Jeff Wells, Assistant City Manager, stepped to the podium and shared with the board that he was pleased to tell them that the consultants had already had the engagement of over 100 people on the project so far. He shared with the board that these individuals included key stakeholders and affinity group participants. These groups included business owners, property owners, and residents and that he was very excited about the participation so far.

Mr. Wells shared the importance of public engagement to the project. Engagement ensures that the project would deliver an effective plan from our consultant. He reinforced that our considerable community input so far was encouraging and would be very important to the project.

Mr. Wells thanked the board for their time and told them that they would continue to receive regular updates from staff.

Item 3: Grow Monroe Grant Application for Foils and Faded Salon & Spa owner Lindsey Shelton

Joyce Rentschler introduced this item.

Donna O'Keefe asked the Downtown Advisory Board to consider and recommend a Grow Monroe Grant for Lindsey Shelton, owner of Foils and Faded Salon & Spa at 103/105 Hayne Street.

Ms. O'Keefe explained that Lindsey Shelton, owner of Faded and Foils Salon & Spa, has entered into a two-year lease with Milton and Denice Polemides for a retail space at 103/105 S. Hayne Street. She explained that this is a matching 50/50 downtown grant program designed to provide assistance with rental expenses and/or up-fit expenses for a new business and awards are determined using a formula based square footage.

Ms. O'Keefe explained that Foils and Faded Salon & Spa is a 2341 sq. ft. retail space. This makes the Foils and Faded Salon & Spa owner eligible for \$6 per sq. ft. or a maximum of \$14,046.00 through this grant program. She also highlighted that Ms. Shelton has applied for rental assistance only as part of opening her new business and shared with the board that the monthly rent expense for this business is \$2700.00 per month or \$32,400 per year. Fifty percent of the annual rental expense is \$16,200, so Ms. Shelton is eligible for a maximum of \$14,046.00 in rental assistance through this grant with \$7023.00 paid to the applicant at the end of six months, and \$7023.00 after twelve months. Proof of timely rent payment in full is required before funds can be released.

Ms. O'Keefe requested the Downtown Advisory Board recommend the approval of the Grow Monroe Downtown Grant to Foils and Faded Salon & Spa's owner Lindsey Shelton to City Council with the Resolution and Budget Amendment to appropriate funds of \$14,046.00.

The Chair, Joyce Rentschler called for a motion.

Motion: Greg Moore made the motion to approve.

Second: Lisa Boix

Action: The motion passed unanimously.

Item 4: Grow Monroe Grant Application for JamZ Pizza and Wings

Joyce Rentschler introduced this item.

Donna O'Keefe asked the Downtown Advisory Board to consider and recommend a Grow Monroe Grant for Mark Fox, Julie Fox, Angela Delli Colli, and Jim Delli Colli, owners of JamZ Pizza and Wings at 104 S. Main Street.

Ms. O'Keefe explained that the owners of JamZ Pizza and Wings have entered into a three-year lease with Kerr Main LLC for a 1000 sq. ft. restaurant space at 104 S. Main Street. This makes the owners eligible for \$8 per sq. ft. or a maximum of \$8000.00 through this grant program.

Ms. O'Keefe explained to the board that the owners have applied for up-fit only as part of opening their new business. The owners are eligible for a maximum of \$8000.00 in up-fit assistance through this grant. She explained to the board that the applicants have provided proof of payment documentation for \$19,548.34 in qualifying up-fit expenses.

Ms. O'Keefe requested the Downtown Advisory Board recommend the approval of the Grow Monroe Downtown Grant to Mark Fox, Julie Fox, Angela Delli Colli, and Jim Delli Colli, owners of JamZ Pizza and Wings to City Council with the Resolution and Budget Amendment to

appropriate funds of \$8000.00.

The Chair, Joyce Rentschler called for a motion.

Motion: Sheila Crunkleton made the motion to recommend the approval of the Grow Monroe Downtown Grant to the owners of JamZ Pizza and Wings along with the Resolution and Budget Amendment.

Second: Bill Heisner

Action: The motion to approve passed unanimously.

Item 5: Special Events Sponsorship Program

Joyce Rentschler introduced this item.

Donna O'Keefe thanked the chair for the opportunity to speak with the board about considering a new event sponsorship program and seeking input and direction from the board. Ms. O'Keefe explained that the current Retail Sponsorship Program only allows for the approval of one event application per quarter of up to \$1500. She explained that this prohibits anyone else for applying during a single quarter. She suggested that a new program could better define eligible expenses and allow more applicants the opportunity to receive event support during a year. She explained that the current program awards a maximum amount of \$6000.00 per year. The new program would award the same \$6000.00 per year but to potentially more applicants.

Ms. O'Keefe explained to the board that our current program does not require applicants to provide any proof of expenses. She explained that since this program is budgeted through the downtown budget, it would be her recommendation that this program become a reimbursement program designed to encourage Monroe's downtown businesses to organize, host, or sponsor private events that attract visitors and foster a vibrant downtown environment.

Ms. O'Keefe explained that this new program would be funded each year and be available until that year's funding was exhausted. She also recommended that the application period open each July 1st or the beginning of the city's fiscal year and run until all monies were allocated.

Ms. O'Keefe reviewed some additional detail of the proposed sponsorship program. This program would offset qualifying expenses up to \$1500 per year/per applicant and reimbursements would require proof of payment in full prior to monies being released. Applicants must be located within the boundaries of the Downtown Business District or have a sponsor whose business is located within the Downtown Business District. Applicants would also be required to submit a completed application that includes an approved event permit, list of approved event expenses, a list of collaborating businesses, as well as a list of business who will benefit from the event. Applications would be considered on a first come first serve basis.

The board discussed the suggested program and identified several concerns.

The board expressed concern that a single business could potentially submit multiple applications as an event organizer or sponsor. The board felt that the program should limit the number and frequency to one person or business to receive an award.

The board would like to define “event” better. The example of a Tupperware party was used. The board wants to be sure that they would have the authority to approve the type of events on a quarterly basis. They would like to award the event applications that bring the most visitors and economic vitality to the city. They would like to evaluate the percentage of downtown businesses that would be positively impacted by the proposed event.

The board wants to be sure that they would have the responsibility of reviewing applications and approving or denying them, but recommended that staff come back with a schedule for submission. An example was presented that if an event was scheduled to take place in July – Sept the applicant would need to apply for sponsorship six months in advance. This would ensure that the applicant know if their approved for sponsorship or not. The board also felt this would allow them to award the amount based on the application and quality of the event.

The board requested the new Downtown Director come back to them with revisions that addressed the concerns the group discussed to either their January or February 2025 meeting.

Ms. Okeefe reminded the board that their January meeting would include board training by a Main Street program representative.

Item 6: Adjourn (Action Required)

Ms. O’Keefe informed to the board that there was no significant business planned for their December meeting and asked the board wished to cancel that meeting and meet again in January of 2026.

The Chair, Joyce Rentschler called for a motion to cancel the December meeting and adjourn the current meeting.

Motion: Courtney Garrison made a motion to cancel December and adjourn.

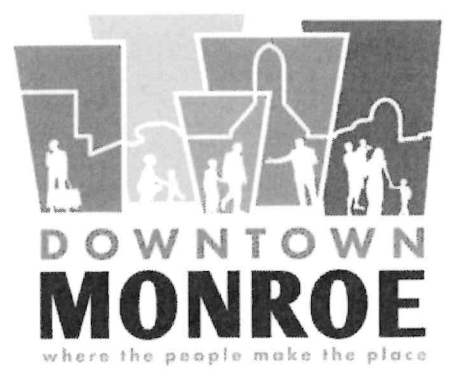
Second: Lisa Biox

Action: The motion to cancel the December Downtown Advisory Board meeting and to adjourn passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 10:05 am

Downtown Sponsorship Application

The City of Monroe Downtown pursues an ever growing economic development initiative which emphasizes the need for new and exciting places, events, and people. If you have an event you feel could have a positive impact on the growth of Downtown, we want to help make that dream become a reality. Listed below are questions the City must consider to sponsor an event in Downtown:



All questions must be answered "Yes" for consideration

	Yes	No
Is your business within the Central Business District?		✓
Will the event produce a positive impact on the Downtown Monroe Community and coordinate well within the existing promotions calendar?	✓	
Will the event encourage visitors to shop at the event and surrounding downtown businesses? (including street closures and new traffic/pedestrian patterns)	✓	
Will the event have the financial support necessary to carry out operations of the event or will it require additional funding sources?	✓	
Does the event generate enough interest to draw in people from within the City of Monroe and the surrounding area?	✓	
Are all Downtown businesses offered to participate?	✓	
Are there at least 10 Downtown, retail and/or restaurant businesses participating? (Please Provide a List)	✓	
Will the event occur within the Central Business District?	✓	

Please note that the sponsorship may not exceed \$1500 per event and funds are limited to one per quarter. A person(s) may only apply for one sponsorship per year. The Downtown Advisory Board has the final decision on where these funds are to be allocated.

Contact Information

Name of Person Submitting Event: *Joyce Rentschler*
Email: *jrentschler55@gmail.com* Phone Number: *704-207-3102*

Description of Event

Event Name: *Downtown Monroe Art Walk*

Brief Description below or add attachment:

This is a gallery crawl with galleries set up in downtown buildings. All businesses are invited to get their own art and participate

What month(s), day(s), and time of the week do you see the event taking place?

April 10th 5:30-9:00
April 11th 10:00-2:00

How often do you propose the event will take place? *twice a year*

Is there a direct way to tie this event to the Downtown Monroe businesses? Explain:

Any business who chooses to participate is put on a map and given a sign to display for the event.

Marketing

Who is the target market for this event? *People of all ages.*

Core message of the campaign: *Enjoy the businesses and buildings.*

Please describe how this event would be promoted.

*social media
radio commercials and interviews
newspaper coverage
poster in buildings; banners outside*

Below describe each method of promotion in detail.

Medium or Channel	Length of Time	Start Date of Promotion	Specific Target Group
<i>social media</i>	<i>month before</i>	<i>March 10</i>	<i>anyone who uses</i>
<i>radio</i>	<i>month before</i>	<i>March 10</i>	<i>listeners</i>
<i>newspaper</i>	<i>week before</i>	<i>April 5</i>	<i>readers</i>
<i>posters and banners</i>	<i>month before</i>	<i>Apr+March 10</i>	<i>shoppers</i>

Pre-Planning Management

Please describe the steps involved in the actual pre-planning process- where, when, hours and time, activities involved, groups who will participate in planning.

In February artists are contacted to confirm participation. In March times to hang are set up. I spend about 50 hours for this. In April I and my helper spend 4 days arranging the galleries.

Food: YES NO Will the food be: GIVEN AWAY SOLD (County Permit Required if YES)

*Will the event require street or parking lot closings? YES NO (City Permit Required if YES)

NOTE: If yes, please provide a map showing which streets will need to be closed & exactly where barricades will need to be located.

*Will the event require a tent or temporary structure? YES NO (City Permit Required if YES)

*What is the square feet of the tent or temporary structure?

*Will the tent structure be used by 10 or more occupants? YES NO

NOTE: Building and fire permits are required for tents or other temporary structures erected for a period of less than 180 days and that has an area greater than 120 square feet or is to be used by 10 or more occupants.

Please describe in detail the labor needs on the day of the event. This could range from security, volunteers to clean up.

My helper and I monitor the galleries we have set up to take care of any problems. We, and other volunteers welcome guests and answer questions.

Funding

Please give a budget for expenses related to this event. Attach separate sheet if necessary. Income generators /revenue streams include such activities as ticket sales, vendor space rentals, beverage sales, sponsorships, etc.:

Description of Expenses	Amount
posters, maps, banners	\$300
performers	\$200
Total Expenses	\$500

Description of Income Generators	Amount
tips	usually \$50 - \$75
Total Income	\$50 - \$75

Net Income (Total Income minus Total Expenses):

Have you included sponsorships as one of your income generators? If so do you have the ability to raise these sponsorships? YES NO

Thank you for taking the time to share your event idea with us. This information will be shared with the Downtown Department and City of Monroe Committees. You may be asked to attend the scheduled meeting of the committees to further discuss your idea. We appreciate your interest in bringing people to Downtown Monroe!

Businesses that have participated

Alice Jules Coffe Houos

High Octane

First Baptist Church

Belk Mansion

Central Methodist Church

Union County Community Arts
Council

Home Brew Taproom & Tunes

Outlawed Beauty

The Petal Shoppe

Southern Range Craft Beer

M-Bellish

So Much More to the Story

Local Logic

Dowd Center Theatre

Presson Gallery

Jam Pac Records

Director's Cut Salon

Main Street Bistro

Sorella Coffee

Boutique on Main

Janzr Pizza & Wings

Victory Shoe Repair

47 K Market place

Backstage Vintage
Lowe Country Estates
Murphy's on Main
Infinity's End
Belk Artists
Chain Reaction Studios
Charlie's Cat Café
Americana Beer Co
Peddler's Paradise
Courthouse Self-Pour
Patty & the Dogs
Gingham Girl Cake Rolls
Bursting Boba Café
Exchange Pizza Depot
Foils & Faded Salon
3 Chicks
Lucky Ducks Kids
Silver Lining
Funroe Board Co
Rech Law
Sweet Union Hemp Co
Monroe Massage & Yoga
East Frank Superette
Clipperz Barber & Beauty
Franklin Court Grill
First Presbyteria Church

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Date 9-17 2025

P.O.# Donna Okeke

City of Monroe

Down Town Monroe

QUANTITY	DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT	TOTAL
150	Monroe Art walk Posters	120.00	
500	Art walk Half Price Flyers	156.00	
		276.00	
		<u>18.63</u>	
		294.63	
			294.63



STAFF REPORT

TO: Downtown Advisory Board

DATE: January 14, 2026

FROM: Jeff Wells, Assistant City Manager

PREPARED BY: Ashley Nowell, Downtown Director

SUBJECT: Downtown Sponsorship Applications – Downtown Monroe Art Walk, April 2026

SUMMARY STATEMENT

The Downtown Advisory Board is asked to consider a recommendation for a Downtown Sponsorship Application for Joyce Rentschler for the Downtown Monroe Art Walk on April 10 and 11.

REVIEW

Joyce Rentschler organizes the Downtown Monroe Art Walk and is requesting downtown event sponsorship funds. The event will occur on Friday, April 10 from 5:30 – 9:00 p.m. and Saturday, April 11 from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

The event is an art crawl with galleries set up in downtown businesses. All businesses are invited to participate by scheduling artists to locate inside their business. Businesses that participate are shown on a map and given a sign to display during the event. The event is marketed to people of all ages and shared on social media, radio, newspaper, posters, and banners. Total expenses for the event are estimated at \$500.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Downtown Advisory Board approve the Downtown Sponsorship Application for the Downtown Monroe Art Walk in April 2026 to Joyce Rentschler in the amount of \$500.

Attachments:
Application



STAFF REPORT

TO: Downtown Advisory Board
DATE: January 14, 2026
FROM: Jeff Wells, Assistant City Manager
PREPARED BY: Ashley Nowell, Downtown Director
SUBJECT: 2026 DAB Meeting Dates & Times

SUMMARY STATEMENT

The Downtown Advisory Board is asked to consider their meeting dates, times, and locations for the 2026 calendar year.

REVIEW

The Downtown Advisory Board has previously met on the third Wednesday of the month at 9 a.m. at City Hall. Now that the Downtown offices are complete, the DAB has the opportunity to move meetings to the new office space. Dates and times recommended as follows:

- Wednesday, January 14, 8:30 a.m. (date and time changed for training with NC Main Street)
- Wednesday, February 18, 9 a.m.
- Wednesday, March 18, 9 a.m.
- Wednesday, April 15, 9 a.m.
- Wednesday, May 20, 9 a.m.
- Wednesday, June 17, 9 a.m.
- Wednesday, July 15, 9 a.m.
- Wednesday, August 19, 9 a.m.
- Wednesday, September 16, 9 a.m.
- Wednesday, October 21, 9 a.m.
- Wednesday, November 18, 9 a.m.
- Wednesday, December 16, 9 a.m.



STAFF REPORT

TO: Downtown Advisory Board
DATE: January 14, 2026
FROM: Jeff Wells, Assistant City Manager
PREPARED BY: Ashley Nowell, Downtown Director
SUBJECT: Downtown Master Plan Update

SUMMARY STATEMENT

Staff will provide the Downtown Advisory Board with an update on the status of Monroe’s Downtown Master Plan.

REVIEW

The Master Plan Steering Committee held its first meeting on Monday, December 8 with the Shook Kelley consulting team and city staff. The group reviewed the role of the steering committee, discussed master plan branding, and share initial public input concepts and communications.

Staff has scheduled the first public input workshop for Wednesday, February 18 from 4-7 p.m. at the Dowd Center Theatre. The City’s Communications Team has launched the [Master Plan webpage](#) and will use this page to communicate progress. Communications regarding the plan will go live on the City’s communication channels (Facebook, Instagram, website, email, etc.) in mid-January along with an initial short survey. We will also plan to create posters and a-frame signs to share the plan.

The Downtown Advisory Board is a crucial piece of the plan and your input is needed and valued! When the communications are live, please be sure to share with your friends and family.

Attachments:
December 8 Master Steering Committee Notes



STAFF REPORT

TO: Downtown Advisory Board
DATE: January 14, 2026
FROM: Jeff Wells, Assistant City Manager
PREPARED BY: Ashley Nowell, Downtown Director
SUBJECT: NC Main Street State Conference

SUMMARY STATEMENT

North Carolina Main Street is hosting their annual conference on March 10-12 in New Bern, NC. Information on the event is included in the agenda packet.

REVIEW

The North Carolina Main Street Conference is a 3-day event and the largest state main street conference in the country. This year is its 25th anniversary and will be held in New Bern, NC. The conference will feature keynote speakers, toolkit/breakout session, award ceremonies, Champion recognitions, and walking tours.

These conferences are a great way to learn about the Main Street program and network with other Main Street board and staff. It’s a chance to re-evaluate, strategize new projects, and learn best practices.

As a part of Monroe’s Main Street Program, staff and one volunteer attendance is required. NC Main Street comps two registrations for each program. So far, Ashley and Sheila have registered. For those wanting to attend, Monroe will cover the registration fee and reimburse hotel expenses and mileage. If any DAB Members would like to attend, let Ashley know by Thursday, February 12.

RECOMMENDATION

Informational item.

Attachments:
Conference Guide
Hotel Information



Main Street: INSPIRING IMPACTFUL CHANGE




North Carolina
MAIN STREET



2026 NC MAIN STREET CONFERENCE

March 10-12, 2026 | New Bern, NC

Conference Overview 1

Keynote Speakers 2

Plenary Speakers 3

Full Schedule at a Glance 4

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS:

 Tuesday 5

 Wednesday 9

 Thursday 15

Downtown New Bern Map 17



Photo courtesy of Visit New Bern

2026 NC MAIN STREET CONFERENCE

March 10-12, 2026 | New Bern, NC



Photo courtesy of Visit New Bern

The North Carolina Main Street Conference is an annual three-day conference held in the downtown of a beautiful North Carolina community. The venue changes each year, as do the speakers, sponsors, vendors, tours, and sessions. The conference is open to anyone interested in learning about downtown economic development.

Attendees gain valuable knowledge through networking with others that are passionate about downtown, and by attending sessions facilitated by a handpicked lineup of notable speakers.

#NCMainSt2026

Main Street: INSPIRING IMPACTFUL CHANGE

As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the NC Main Street Conference, the largest statewide downtown revitalization conference in the country, we reflect on the transformative journey that has shaped North Carolina's downtown districts. From Murphy to Manteo, the Main Street program has been a driving force in revitalizing communities, preserving historic architecture, and fostering economic growth. This conference is a testament to the resilience and vision of the communities that have embraced the Main Street approach, turning challenges into opportunities and inspiring impactful change across the state.

The Main Street program has proven its ability to spark both small and monumental changes in local economies. Through lessons learned from years of successful revitalization efforts, we will explore how Main Street strategies have helped communities not only preserve their heritage but also drive innovation and attract new investments. Inspirational stories, projects, and programs from across North Carolina will showcase how cities and towns have used the four-point approach - economic vitality, design, organization, and promotion - to spark energy, excitement, and impactful change in their downtowns, fostering vibrant spaces for locals and visitors alike. These stories will highlight how grassroots efforts have led to lasting transformation, improved quality of life, and boosted local economies. Small towns and large cities have leveraged the program's principles to create environments that are economically sustainable, culturally rich, and welcoming to all.

New Bern, one of the original Main Street communities, is an exceptional community to host this year's anniversary celebration. Since 1980, Swiss Bear and the City of New Bern have led efforts to revitalize its historic downtown through preservation, economic development, and public engagement. These efforts have transformed downtown New Bern into a walkable, bike-friendly destination enhanced by public art, beautification projects, and cultural events. Historic buildings have been rehabilitated, new development has complemented the city's heritage, and local businesses have flourished, making New Bern a model for Main Street success.

The NC Main Street Conference brings together downtown economic development professionals, local officials, business owners, volunteers, and others committed to revitalization. Attendees will experience inspiring keynote speakers, dynamic breakout sessions, and curated tours of New Bern's historic assets. Bring a group of community leaders, Main Street board members, city and town staff, elected officials, and volunteers to get the most out of the conference experience. Whether you are a seasoned professional or a first-time attendee, this conference offers inspiration, ideas, and a network that will fuel your community's growth.

We'll see you at the NC Main Street Conference!





Edward Erfurt
Strong Towns

STRONG COMMUNITIES BEGIN DOWNTOWN

TUESDAY | 2:30 – 3:15 PM

Edward Erfurt is the Chief Technical Advisor at Strong Towns. He is a trained architect and passionate urban designer with over 20 years of public and private sector experience focused on the management, design, and successful implementation of development and placemaking projects that enrich the tapestry of place. He believes in community-focused processes that are founded on diverse viewpoints, a concern for equity, and guided through time-tested, traditional town-planning principles and development patterns that result in sustainable growth with the community character embraced by the communities which he serves.



Joe Minicozzi
Urban3

THE ECONOMICS OF A CITY AND THE POWER OF DOWNTOWNS!

TUESDAY | 3:30 – 4:15 PM

Joe Minicozzi is an urban planner imagining new ways to think about and visualize land use, urban design, and economics. Joe founded Urban3 to explain and visualize market dynamics created by tax and land use policies. Urban3's work establishes new conversations across multiple professional sectors, policymakers, and the public to creatively address the challenges of urbanization. Urban3's extensive studies range geographically over 30 states, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Joe holds a Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Miami and a Master of Architecture and Urban Design from Harvard University. In 2017, Joe was recognized as one of the 100 Most Influential Urbanists of all time.



Joe Borgstrom
Place + Main Advisors

MODERN MAGNETS: POWERING DOWNTOWNS WITH TODAY'S ANCHOR DESTINATIONS

THURSDAY | 9:30 – 10:15 AM

Joe Borgstrom is a nationally respected expert in downtown redevelopment, economic development strategy, and place-based revitalization. Over a 25-year career, he has helped communities leverage more than \$2.2 billion in private investment by aligning vision with market opportunity, financial tools, and smart execution. As Principal of Place + Main Advisors, Joe leads a boutique consulting firm known for high-impact, place-driven strategies. The firm works with communities and regions ready to pursue bold, transformative projects. Joe's work spans real estate finance, retail market analysis, redevelopment strategy, and business recruitment.



Reginald Speight

N.C. Department of Commerce

DOLLARS & DENSITY: UNPACKING THE PRICE OF PLACE A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

TUESDAY | 4:15 – 4:45 PM

Reginald Speight serves as the Assistant Secretary of Rural Economic Development at N.C. Commerce, leading our team of experts focused on strengthening rural communities across the state.

Prior to joining Commerce, Reginald served as the United States Department of Agriculture's Rural Development State Director for North Carolina. In that role, he provided general oversight and direction over the Rural Housing, Community Facilities, Business Services, Water and Environmental, and Broadband Infrastructure Programs. During his 3-year tenure, the organization funded over 15,000 projects with over \$5.9 billion in investments.

Plenary moderated by Assistant Secretary Reginald Speight, with Edward Erfurt, Strong Towns, and Joe Minicozzi, Urban3



Erin Barnes

Main Street America

MAIN STREET FORWARD: WHERE LESSONS LEARNED POWER THE FUTURE

THURSDAY | 10:15 – 10:45 AM

Erin Barnes is President & CEO of Main Street America, a national nonprofit that leads an inclusive, impact-driven movement dedicated to creating vibrant commercial corridors in big cities, small towns, and everything in between. Born and raised in Virginia, Erin now calls Brooklyn, New York, home. She began her career in independent book and music stores in Charlottesville and Alexandria, Virginia, then, after college, went into community organizing in the Pacific Northwest. After completing her master's at Yale in water economics, where she did research in Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Brazil, Erin worked as an environmental writer for the United Nations, Vice President Al Gore, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and Men's Journal Magazine. Erin is one of three founders of ioby, a national nonprofit technology company that funded resident-led neighborhood projects. For her work at ioby, the Rockefeller Foundation awarded her the Jane Jacobs Medal, and President and Mrs. Obama welcomed her into the inaugural class of Obama Foundation Fellows.

ABOUT MAIN STREET AMERICA™

For more than 45 years, Main Street America™ has helped strengthen and reenergize downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts across the country. Founded in 1980 as the National Main Street Center®, a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Main Street America leads an inclusive, impact-driven movement focused on place-based economic development and community preservation in older and historic commercial areas.

North Carolina Main Street is one of the oldest statewide Coordinating Programs in the Main Street America network and has played a key role in advancing these principles at the local level. Collectively, the Main Street America network has generated more than \$115.27 billion in local reinvestment, rehabilitated 345,801 buildings, created 815,894 new jobs, and supported the launch of 181,647 new businesses in over 2,000 communities nationwide.



FULL SCHEDULE AT A GLANCE

TUESDAY, MARCH 10

8:00 AM - 5:30 PM Registration	
8 AM	
9 AM	
10 AM	9:30 AM - 10:30 AM Downtown Toolkit Sessions 1-5
11 AM	10:30 AM - 11:00 AM Tradeshow
	11:00 AM - 12:00 PM Downtown Toolkit Sessions 6-10
12 PM	
1 PM	12:00 PM - 2:00 PM Tradeshow / Lunch on Your Own
2 PM	2:00 PM - 2:30 PM Opening Remarks: Liz Parham
	2:30 PM - 3:15 PM Keynote Speaker: Edward Erfurt
3 PM	3:15 PM - 3:30 PM Break
	3:30 PM - 4:15 PM Keynote Speaker: Joe Minicozzi
4 PM	4:15 PM - 4:45 PM Plenary Session: Panel
	4:45 PM - 5:00 PM Break
5 PM	
6 PM	5:00 PM - 6:30 PM Welcome Reception with Exhibitors
7 PM	6:30 PM Dinner on Your Own
8 PM	

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11

8:00 AM - 5:00 PM Registration	
8 AM	8:00 AM - 9:00 AM Tradeshow
9 AM	9:00 AM - 10:15 AM Breakout Sessions 1-6
10 AM	10:15 AM - 10:45 AM Tradeshow
11 AM	10:45 AM - 12:00 PM Breakout Sessions 7-12
12 PM	
1 PM	12:00 PM - 2:00 PM Tradeshow / Lunch on Your Own
2 PM	
3 PM	2:00 PM - 3:15 PM Breakout Sessions 13-18
4 PM	3:15 PM - 3:45 PM Tradeshow
	3:45 PM - 4:45 PM Downtown New Bern Tours
5 PM	4:45 PM - 5:00 PM Break
	5:00 PM - 5:30 PM Cocktails / Networking
6 PM	5:30 PM - 6:30 PM NC Main Street Awards Ceremony
7 PM	6:30 PM Dinner on Your Own
8 PM	

THURSDAY, MARCH 12

10:30 AM - 11:00 AM Champion & Guest Registration	
8 AM	8:00 AM - 9:00 AM Downtown New Bern Tours
9 AM	9:00 AM - 9:15 AM Break
	9:15 AM - 9:45 AM Morning Remarks: Liz Parham
10 AM	9:45 AM - 10:30 AM Keynote Speaker: Joe Borgstrom
	10:30 AM - 11:00 AM Plenary Speaker: Erin Barnes
11 AM	11:00 AM - 11:30 AM Coffee with the Champions
12 PM	11:30 PM - 12:45 PM NC Main Street Champions Recognition Ceremony
1 PM	12:45 PM - 1:00 PM Closing Remarks: Liz Parham

TUESDAY, MARCH 10

8:00 AM - 5:30 PM

REGISTRATION

Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street

9:30 AM - 10:30 AM

DOWNTOWN TOOLKIT SESSIONS 1 - 5

Locations Available at Registration

Designed to provide attendees with best practices to build a highly effective downtown revitalization program and operation.

1 | The Art of Crafting Smart Incentives

ECONOMIC VITALITY

In rural communities, a thriving downtown is more than a destination; it's a symbol of resilience, identity, and future growth. Learn how to craft and manage targeted incentive programs, like building improvement grants, business recruitment packages, and tax tools, that are grounded in your community's strategic economic development goals. Learn how to align revitalization efforts with broader plans, build public-private partnerships, and avoid common pitfalls. Whether you're just starting or refining an existing program, you'll leave with actionable strategies to spark investment and reinvigorate your rural downtown for the long haul.

Benjamin Briggs, President & CEO, Preservation North Carolina

Charles Halsall, Jr., MSARP, Main Street Program Specialist, NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center

Lisa Rueh, Main Street Grants Administrator, NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center



Photo courtesy of Visit New Bern



2 | Pop-Ups, Placemaking, and Temporary Activation for Economic Bursts

DESIGN ECONOMIC VITALITY

Short-term strategies can create long-term impact—especially when it comes to energizing vacant downtown spaces. This session explores creative approaches like pop-up shops, temporary art installations, interactive signage, and placemaking projects that breathe life into underused buildings, lots, and streetscapes. Learn from communities that have sparked economic activity and community pride through temporary activation. Get inspired by memorable examples and discover how to turn empty spaces into opportunities.

Jennifer Herbert, Downtown Development Director, Town of Wake Forest

Amanda Ronan, Senior Director of Programs, Research Triangle Park

Theresa Thompson, Assistant Planning Director & Downtown Director, Town of Pittsboro

3 | How to Gracefully Retire an Event: Knowing When and How to Move On

PROMOTION

Sometimes events run their course, and it's time to reevaluate their impact or retire them altogether. This session explores when and how to make that transition thoughtfully, including strategies for reorganizing or ending events without alienating your community. Learn how to effectively communicate changes, measure return on investment (ROI), and shift focus toward smaller, more impactful retail or community events that better serve your downtown's current needs. Gain tools to ensure your event lineup remains fresh, relevant, and sustainable.

Nicole Bentley, Executive Director, Heart of Brevard

Debbie Malenfant, Executive Director, Elizabeth City Downtown

Bernadette Peters, Economic Development Director, Town of Sylva

4 | Mapping the Future: Integrating Strong Planning for Downtown

ORGANIZATION DESIGN

A strong planning framework, rooted in both a Comprehensive Plan and a Downtown Master Plan, is crucial for guiding short-term and long-term growth, public and private investments, new development, and preservation. This session examines how these plans collaborate to shape your community's future, with a focus on the distinctive role of downtown. Discover the key elements of community engagement, land use, infrastructure, and economic development. Learn from communities that have recently completed plans and how they're using them to create and leverage public-private partnerships, build community and political support, attract funding, and align stakeholders towards a common vision. Walk away with actionable steps to start or update plans that reflect your downtown's identity and your community's long-term goals for sustained prosperity and vitality.

Carly Bostic, Executive Director, Uptown Shelby Association

Ashley Nowell, Business Development Director, City of Monroe

Irene Dumas Tyson, AICP, Associate AIA, Director of Planning, BOUDREAUX

5 | Creating a 'Friends of Downtown' Movement That Matters

ORGANIZATION

Your Main Street needs more than just helpers, it needs believers, doers, and donors. This session will walk you through building a Friends of Downtown program that turns passive interest into passionate involvement. Whether you're starting from scratch or refreshing an old model, you'll learn how to define your "friends," structure memberships, build real value, and rally support that lasts. This panel will help you walk away with tools, templates, and a game plan to build a strong, sustainable network of supporters who are committed to the long haul.

Jamie Carpenter, Downtown Manager, City of Hendersonville

Leah Hardesty, Executive Director, Downtown Morehead City, Inc.

April Spencer, Executive Director, Uptown Roxboro Group



Photo courtesy of Visit New Bern

10:30 AM - 11:00 AM

TRADESHOW

Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street

11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

DOWNTOWN TOOLKIT SESSIONS 6 - 10

Locations Available at Registration

6 | Curb Appeal Counts: The Power of Storefront

DESIGN

Peeling paint? Faded signs? Your storefront might be saying "stay away" when it should say "come on in!" This fun, idea-packed session explores how thoughtful facade design and simple curb appeal upgrades can transform downtown buildings into customer magnets. This session will cover low-cost improvements, smart design, and creative curb appeal. Walk away with practical tips to get your downtown and businesses noticed, without breaking the bank!

Kista Mansell, AP Assistant Professor, Main Street Fellows Director, Historic Preservation Programs Coordinator, Department of Interior Architecture, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Main Street Fellows

7 | Retail Promotion Strategies: Driving Downtown Sales and Engagement

PROMOTION

Explore effective retail promotion tactics that energize downtown shopping and support local businesses. This session will highlight a variety of strategies, including Downtown Dollars programs, as tools to boost customer engagement and increase sales. Hear from Main Street communities that have successfully launched and sustained promotional campaigns, sharing lessons learned and best practices. Gain practical ideas to create compelling promotions that attract shoppers and strengthen your downtown retail economy.

*Joy Almond, Main Street Program Specialist,
NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center*

*Paige Grochoske, Downtown Development Manager,
City of Concord*

Makenzie McGinnis, Main Street Manager, City of Morganton

8 | Decoding Downtown: Codes and Ordinances for Revitalization

ECONOMIC VITALITY

Zoning, building codes, and local ordinances can be powerful tools for downtown transformation. This session will break down regulatory barriers and highlight strategies communities are using to attract investment, encourage mixed-use development, and preserve historic character. Learn how Main Street communities are enacting thoughtful code updates that are leveraging economic growth and renewed vitality in downtown districts.

*Jason Epley, AICP President, Benchmark Planning, and
Executive Director, NCDDA*

Ray Gibbs, PLA, Principal, Gibbs Urban Advisors



Photo courtesy of Visit New Bern

9 | Be Strategic - Real Plans for Real Progress

ORGANIZATION

Learn how to move your community from ideas to impact with a focused, achievable economic development plan. This session will guide local leaders, Main Street Directors, and stakeholders through the process of creating a Strategic Economic Development Plan tailored to your community's assets and opportunities. Attendees will explore best practices for stakeholder engagement, goal setting, and aligning projects with available resources. The session emphasizes creating a practical 12-18 month implementation roadmap that prioritizes high-impact, realistic initiatives to drive visible results. Leave with tools, templates, and confidence to lead your community forward.

*Sherry B. Adams, CMSM, Main Street Program Manager,
NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center*

*Samantha Darlington, Community Economic Development
Planner, NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center*

10 | The Four Points: A Crash Course Without the Crash

ECONOMIC VITALITY DESIGN PROMOTION ORGANIZATION

New to Main Street or just need a refresher? This fast-paced, no-fluff session introduces you to the Basic Four Points courses in the Main Street America Academy - your official entry point to understanding the building blocks of Main Street success. This session will break down the Organization, Promotion, Design, and Economic Vitality points in plain language, show you how they work together in real life, and guide you to the Academy course that ties it all together. You'll leave with a better grasp of what makes the Main Street Approach® tick and how it will help you and your community leverage growth, quality of life, and investment!

Tasha Sams, Director of Education, Main Street America

12:00 PM - 2:00 PM

TRADESHOW / LUNCH ON YOUR OWN

**Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street /
Downtown New Bern**

2:00 PM - 2:30 PM

OPENING REMARKS: LIZ PARHAM

Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street

*Liz Parham, CMSM, Director,
NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center*

2:30 PM – 3:15 PM

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: EDWARD ERFURT **Strong Communities Begin Downtown**

Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street

Resilient, prosperous communities start with strong downtowns. This session explores how Main Street revitalization and Strong Towns principles work together to build financially sustainable, people-centered places. Learn how small, incremental changes in your downtown can yield big returns, supporting local businesses, reducing liabilities, and strengthening community connections. Whether you're a civic leader, planner, or community advocate, this keynote will give you practical tools and inspiring examples to help your downtown lead the way toward a stronger future.

Edward Erfurt, Chief Technical Advisor, Strong Towns

3:15 PM – 3:30 PM

BREAK

Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street

3:30 PM – 4:15 PM

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: JOE MINICOZZI **The Economics of a City and the Power of Downtowns!**

Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street

In the effort to build strong downtowns, we often hear familiar counterarguments:

“People like driving.”

“No one wants to park two blocks from their destination.”

“Suburbs exist because that’s how people prefer to live.”

So how do we respond? With math!

Joe Minicozzi, founder of Urban3, will break down the true costs of sprawl-highways, subdivisions, and big-box stores - and show why the numbers don't add up. Attendees will learn how to use this data to shift conversations with local leaders and make a compelling case for the economic power of downtowns.

Joe Minicozzi, AICP, Founder & Principal, Urban3



Photo courtesy of Visit New Bern



Photo courtesy of Visit New Bern

4:15 PM – 4:45 PM

PLENARY PANEL

Dollars & Density: Unpacking the Price of Place A Community Conversation

Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street

Join Strong Towns and Urban3 for a provocative conversation on the hidden math behind how we build our communities - and who really pays. Moderated by N.C. Commerce Assistant Secretary Reginald Speight, this session dives into the economics of land use, infrastructure, and the fiscal traps cities fall into when growth outpaces value. Expect sharp insights, hard truths, and a challenge to rethink everything you thought you knew about development.

Moderator: Reginald Speight, Assistant Secretary for Rural Economic Development, N.C. Department of Commerce

Edward Erfurt, Chief Technical Advisor, Strong Towns

Joe Minicozzi, AICP, Founder & Principal, Urban3

4:45 PM – 5:00 PM

BREAK

Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street

5:00 PM – 6:30 PM

WELCOME RECEPTION WITH EXHIBITORS

Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street

6:30 PM

DINNER ON YOUR OWN

Downtown New Bern

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11

8:00 AM – 5:00 PM

REGISTRATION

Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street

8:00 AM – 9:00 AM

TRADESHOW

Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street

9:00 AM – 10:15 AM

BREAKOUT SESSIONS 1 - 6

Locations Available at Registration

1 | Main Street IS Economic Development

ECONOMIC VITALITY DESIGN PROMOTION ORGANIZATION

Economic development is an essential strategy for driving inclusive and sustainable growth in your community. This session will highlight how a strong Main Street Program supports broader efforts by fostering entrepreneurship, creating jobs, and attracting private investment. As a form of place-based, community-driven economic development, Main Street revitalizes downtowns by leveraging local assets, encouraging small business growth, and building long-term local wealth. Attendees will discover practical tools and North Carolina success stories that demonstrate the transformative power of Main Street in advancing long-term economic goals.

Julie Metz, Team Lead/Owner, Metz Solutions

*Liz Parham, CMSM, Director,
NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center*

2 | Culture That Clicks: Authentic Events That Drive Downtown Buzz

PROMOTION

Forget cookie-cutter festivals and one-size-fits-all programming. This session is all about creating cultural events that truly reflect your community. Attendees will learn how to design inclusive, meaningful experiences that celebrate local identity, attract diverse audiences, and boost downtown foot traffic. They will also explore practical strategies for evaluating event impact and using those insights to improve future programming. Get ready to rethink what a “downtown event” can be—with personality, purpose, and plenty of local flavor.

*Kathy La Plante, Vice President of Coordinating Programs,
Main Street America*



Photo courtesy of Visit New Bern

3 | The Main Street Elected Official Playbook

ORGANIZATION

With every election cycle or leadership change, Main Street programs must reintroduce their mission, impact, and value to new elected officials and town managers. This session will explore effective strategies for building understanding and support, from concise onboarding materials to one-on-one meetings and immersive downtown tours. Learn how to communicate your program’s return on investment, align with local priorities, and foster champions at the decision-making table. Ensure your Main Street message stays strong, even as leadership changes.

*Kelli Parrish Laudate, Executive Director,
Downtown Sanford, Inc.*

Terry Mann, Mayor, City of Whiteville

Sally W. Sandy, City Manager, City of Morganton

4 | Parks Pay Off: The ROI of Greenspace in Downtowns

DESIGN

Discover how downtown parks serve as more than just beautiful places—they’re powerful catalysts for economic growth and community vitality. This session highlights the ways parks increase foot traffic, attract new businesses, raise property values, and enhance quality of life. Learn from communities that have leveraged green spaces to spark investment and create vibrant, welcoming downtowns. Gain practical insights into planning and maintaining parks that deliver lasting economic and social benefits.

*David Leonetti, Business and Community Development
Manager, City of Hickory*

Dillon Lackey, ISA, Horticulturist, LandDesign

Jeff Mis, PLA, Senior Associate, Studio Leader, LandDesign

*Beth Poovey, PLA, Principal, Director of Greenways,
Parks & Open Space, LandDesign*



5 | Math Shouldn't Be Scary: Unlocking the Economics of Community Building

ECONOMIC VITALITY

Join Joe Minicozzi for an engaging Q & A session that demystifies the math behind North Carolina's municipal finance system. Learn how to break down complex tax policies and economic concepts into clear, relatable terms. Joe will highlight how thoughtful investment in walkable, vibrant downtowns drives economic growth and builds a strong sense of place. Whether you're a community leader, planner, or advocate, you'll gain valuable tools to communicate the power of building a smart community.

Joe Minicozzi, AICP, Founder & Principal, Urban3

6 | Where Main Street Meets the Scenic Route

PROMOTION

Heritage travelers stay longer, spend more, and seek authentic, place-based experiences—making them key to downtown vitality. With 62 scenic byways weaving through North Carolina, many pass right through Main Street communities, offering a powerful opportunity. This session explores how downtowns can position themselves as gateways to these routes by aligning with traveler motivations, leveraging trail initiatives like the Main to Main Trail, and forging strategic partnerships. Attendees will gain practical tools to assess visitor readiness, amplify local stories, and create seamless, high-impact connections between byways, heritage assets, and vibrant downtown experiences.

Wanda Maloney, Founder, Corridor Solutions

Heidi Glatfelter Schlag, Founder, Culture-Link Communications

10:15 AM – 10:45 AM

TRADESHOW

Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street

10:45 AM – 12:00 PM

BREAKOUT SESSIONS 7 - 12

Locations Available at Registration

7 | Cultivating Creative Communities: Do Artists and Makers Have a Seat at Your Table?

ECONOMIC VITALITY DESIGN ORGANIZATION

Join a panel of North Carolina artists and community leaders who will share their perspectives on the creative process and the vital role artists play in shaping public art and downtown spaces. Hear about the do's and don'ts of working with creatives, what they seek in studio or gallery spaces, and how Main Street programs can help overcome barriers to permanent downtown locations. This session will highlight the economic and cultural benefits of integrating arts into downtown revitalization. Gain practical insights on building meaningful partnerships with artists to enrich your community and drive economic growth.

Jeff Bell, Executive Director, North Carolina Arts Council

Lourdes Guterrez, Downtown Director, Tryon Downtown Development Association

Kimberly Van Dyk, Planning & Community Revitalization Director, City of Wilson

8 | Leadership in Communities: Through Tough Situations for Transformational Change

ORGANIZATION

This session explores how grassroots leadership can spark transformational change that improves the quality of life and revitalizes local economies and downtowns. Building on recent discussions around workforce housing and broadband infrastructure, it digs deeper into the often tough, messy organizational and political realities behind real progress. With compelling case studies, engaging storytelling, and a touch of humble humor, this session offers an honest look at what it takes to lead lasting community change.

Alex Dadok, Principal, Alex Dadok Consulting

9 | Startup Sparks: Igniting Bold Business Programs in Small Communities

ECONOMIC VITALITY

Communities are full of entrepreneurial potential, but what they often lack are the structured programs and resources to bring ideas to market. This session will guide local leaders through the essential steps to design and implement impactful business development programming, including pitch competitions, business accelerators, coaching networks, incubators, and certification pathways. Whether you're starting from scratch or strengthening existing efforts, walk away with a toolkit and resources to ignite sustainable small business growth in your community.

Richard Brown, Director, Knox St. Studios

Talib Graves-Mann, Executive Director, Knox St. Studios

10 | Pocket Parks, Alleys, and Plazas: Leveraging Small Spaces for Big Impact

DESIGN

Even the smallest spaces can become powerful community assets with the right vision and design. This session explores how pocket parks, alleys, and plazas can be transformed into vibrant gathering places that support events, social connections, and downtown activity. Learn from communities that have successfully activated small spaces to boost foot traffic, enhance livability, and foster local pride. Discover practical strategies for funding, designing, and programming these spaces to maximize their impact.

Matt Black, Economic Development Director, City of Mount Holly

Dan Lambert, PLA, ASLA, Director, Landscape Architecture, McAdams



11 | Inclusive by Design: Diversifying Main Street Participation

ORGANIZATION

A thriving Main Street reflects the full diversity of its community - not just in its storefronts, but in its leadership, decision-making, and engagement. This session explores how to intentionally diversify your program's board, volunteers, and leadership pipeline to create more equitable and inclusive outcomes that better represent the whole community. Learn strategies to broaden outreach, build trust with underrepresented groups, and create opportunities that resonate across cultures and generations. Whether you're in the early stages or already doing the work, this session offers practical tools, case studies, and conversations to help you create a Main Street where everyone feels seen, heard, and valued.

Jennifer Everett, Founder, Culture Queens

12 | Tourism Trends and the Local Advantage: Harnessing Travel to Boost Community Vitality

ECONOMIC VITALITY

This session explores current tourism trends and how communities can leverage them to support local economies, small businesses, and downtown revitalization. Learn how to attract and retain tourists by highlighting authentic experiences, natural assets, and local culture. Discover practical strategies to turn tourism into a long-term community benefit, not just seasonal traffic.

Marlise Taylor, Director, Tourism Research, Visit NC, Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina

12:00 PM – 2:00 PM

TRADESHOW / LUNCH ON YOUR OWN

Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street / Downtown New Bern

2:00 PM - 3:15 PM

BREAKOUT SESSIONS 13 - 18

Locations Available at Registration

13 | Check In, Revive, & Thrive: Boutique Hotels Boosting Downtown Economies

ECONOMIC VITALITY DESIGN

Boutique hotels breathe new life into historic buildings and energize downtown districts. In this session, discover how these unique stays are attracting visitors, supporting local businesses, and transforming underutilized spaces into economic powerhouses. Hear real success stories and learn practical strategies to turn hospitality into a cornerstone of your community's growth.

Charles Cushman, Chief Executive Officer, Heron Hospitality

Stephen Britt Hill, Chief Executive Officer, Mother Earth Brewing, and Owner, The O'Neil

Srikanth Kamma, President, Sunhouse Development Company

David Maurer, Principal, Maurer Architecture

Holton Wilkerson, Founder, CommunitySmith, and National Facilities Director, Self-Help Credit Union

14 | Advocating for Downtown: Making the Case for Your Community's Core

ORGANIZATION

Downtowns are the heart of a community, but they need consistent advocacy to remain a priority in local planning and investment. This session will explore how to effectively communicate the value of downtown to elected officials, stakeholders, and the public. Learn strategies for crafting strong messaging, leveraging data, and engaging partners to achieve your goals. Walk away with tools to elevate your voice and ensure downtown remains central to your community's future.

Kelly Humrichouser, Senior Director of Government Relations, Main Street America

Renee Kuhlman, Senior Director of Preservation Services and Outreach, National Trust for Historic Preservation



15 | The 'Curse' of Success: Challenges for Mature Main Street Programs

ECONOMIC VITALITY ORGANIZATION

Success isn't the end - it's the next big challenge. For mature Main Street programs, the perception of having "made it" can make the work harder. Complacency creeps in, funding shifts, and the urgency that once fueled progress fades. This session dives into the hidden struggles faced by thriving Main Streets—from keeping stakeholders engaged to redefining purpose in a post-revitalization phase. Attendees will hear a candid, validating conversation on what happens after success—and how to stay resilient, relevant, and ready for what's next.

Diana Schwartz, MSARP/HREFP, Owner, Impact Strategies, LLC

16 | Partnering for Place: Driving Change with Destination Agencies

PROMOTION ORGANIZATION

Main Street communities are experiencing positive impacts because of strategic partnerships between Main Street Programs and their local destination marketing organizations (DMOs). This session will showcase best practices for building local collaboration to enhance downtown vitality, drive tourism, and strengthen local identity. Learn how towns that have successfully aligned branding, events, marketing, and storytelling efforts are amplifying the community and visitor experiences. Attendees will leave with actionable strategies to build or enhance their own destination partnerships for long-term success.

Angela Allen, TMP, Certified Travel Marketing Professional, Director of Granville County NC, Tourism Development Authority

Simon Jones, Founder, NatureScapes and Tourism Works

Freddie Killough, Executive Director, Marion Business Association

Carol Kline, Professor, Walker College of Business, Appalachian State University

17 | Catalysts for Community Change: Unlocking the Power of New Markets Tax Credits

ECONOMIC VITALITY

New Markets Tax Credits (NMTCs) are more than just a financing tool - they're a catalyst for economic transformation in underserved communities. This session explores how NMTCs can be used to fund a wide range of impactful projects, from workforce development and healthcare to innovation hubs and rural revitalization. This session will break down how NMTCs work, who needs to be at the table, and what makes a project successful. Featuring the Provalus tech hub in Edenton, NC, as a case study, presenters will show how NMTCs helped bring high-paying jobs to a rural town and how similar strategies can be applied across the state.

*James 'Ches' Chesson, Executive Director,
Main Street Edenton*

Corey Gooden, Town Manager, Town of Edenton

Emma Wyatt, Chief Operating Officer, The Innovate Fund

18 | Bank on It: Financing Your Downtown Dreams with Local Muscle!

ECONOMIC VITALITY

Join this power-packed panel featuring F&M Bank and Uwharrie Bank as they dive into creative and community-rooted financing solutions for small businesses and downtown development. Whether you're restoring a historic storefront or launching your next big idea, discover how local banks are fueling transformation with flexible funding, personalized support, and a deep commitment to Main Street success.

*Mike Dougherty, Downtown Development Specialist,
NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center*

Tonya Lowder, Loan Officer, Uwharrie Bank

Tracie Sells, Vice-President Commercial Banker, F & M Bank

3:15 PM - 3:45 PM

TRADESHOW

Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street



3:45 PM - 4:45 PM

DOWNTOWN NEW BERN TOURS

**Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street
Front Lawn**

1 | Art in the Open

Explore the vibrant streets of Downtown New Bern on a Mural Walking Tour showcasing the city's history, culture, and creative spirit. Each mural tells a story from New Bern's colonial roots to its riverfront charm and artistic community, turning downtown into an open-air gallery. Discover how local artists have transformed ordinary walls into colorful reflections of the city's heritage.

2 | Old & New in Downtown

Experience the blend of history and innovation on a walking tour of Downtown New Bern's newest and oldest businesses. Visit the city's newest Fair-Trade store, enjoy fresh brews from a local coffee roastery, and explore a hardware store that has served the community for over a century. Meet the owners of a stained-glass shop who quite literally sailed into town—and loved New Bern so much, they bought a building and made it home.

3 | Sight, Sounds, and Shows

Art, theatre, and music are part of what makes Downtown New Bern a destination for both visitors and locals. Visit a theatre and gallery with the Executive Directors that steer New Bern's arts scene and get a deeper understanding of the programming that makes the city a cultural destination.

4 | City Projects

Discover New Bern's commitment to community and accessibility through its latest city projects. Union Point Park and the Riverwalk offer scenic waterfront spaces for recreation and relaxation, while the new fishing pier provides prime spots for angling enthusiasts. The City Hall Elevator Annex enhances accessibility, ensuring all residents and visitors can easily navigate downtown's civic hub.

5 | Five Points: Past, Present & People

Explore New Bern's Five Points with a fun walk through of The Wood Shop, Freshwater Beer Co., Firefly Café, and Brewery 99—a quick taste of local craft, flavor, and community. The Wood Shop features custom, handmade furniture and classes. Freshwater Beer Co. is a local gathering place for running clubs, friends, and pop-up markets. Firefly Café, one of our newest restaurants is located in the old City Laundry building, and Brewery 99 is a community watering hole that always brings people together.

6 | Upstairs Downtown

Take a peek at several innovative downtown residential spaces. Spaces include fully renovated apartments and condos, some of the most beautiful residences in New Bern. Inspiration is just a staircase away.

7 | Buildings on the Move

Explore Downtown New Bern's architectural history on a unique tour of houses that have been relocated from their original sites. Discover the stories behind these historic homes, from preservation efforts to creative restorations, as you stroll through charming streets. This tour offers a fascinating look at how the city preserves its heritage while adapting to modern growth.

4:45 PM - 5:00 PM

BREAK

Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street

5:00 PM - 5:30 PM

COCKTAILS / NETWORKING

Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street



5:30 PM - 6:30 PM

NC Main Street Awards Ceremony

**RIVERFRONT CONVENTION CENTER
203 S. FRONT STREET**

The NC Main Street Awards ceremony recognizes the top projects in the state that were completed in the last two years.

NO TICKET REQUIRED

6:30 PM

DINNER ON YOUR OWN

Downtown New Bern



Photo courtesy of Visit New Bern

THURSDAY, MARCH 12

8:00 AM – 9:00 AM

DOWNTOWN NEW BERN TOURS

Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street
Front Lawn

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Photo courtesy of Ben Lindemann Photography

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9:00 AM – 9:15 AM

BREAK

Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street

9:15 AM – 9:45 AM

MORNING REMARKS: LIZ PARHAM

Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street

*Liz Parham, CMSM, Director,
NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center*

9:45 AM - 10:30 AM

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: JOE BORGSTROM
Modern Magnets: Powering Downtowns with Today's Anchor Destinations

Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street

Downtowns across North Carolina are evolving, and so are their anchors. Today's economic drivers are no longer just department stores or banks - they are breweries, co-working spaces, convention centers, boutique hotels, cultural venues, and experience-based retailers. This keynote will explore how communities identify and leverage these modern anchor businesses and locations to drive economic growth, attract new investment, extend business hours, and create jobs. Learn how forward-thinking downtowns are strategically supporting these assets to cultivate vibrant, resilient districts that serve both residents and visitors alike.

Joe Borgstrom, Principal, Place + Main, LLC

10:30 AM - 11:00 AM

PLENARY SPEAKER: ERIN BARNES
Main Street Forward: Where Lessons Learned Power the Future

Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street

As we celebrate 25 years of the NC Main Street Conference, this closing plenary with Erin Barnes, President and CEO of Main Street America, reflects on the transformative impact of Main Street communities across North Carolina. From decades of revitalization work come powerful lessons and insights that now shape the path forward. This session will explore how the collective wisdom and experience of local leaders, businesses, and volunteers continue to fuel innovation, resilience, and growth. Join us as we honor the past, embrace the present, and power the future of Main Street together.

Erin Barnes, President & CEO, Main Street America



10:30 AM - 11:00 AM

CHAMPION REGISTRATION

Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street

11:00 AM - 11:30 AM

COFFEE WITH THE CHAMPIONS

Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street

11:30 AM - 12:45 PM

**NC Main Street
Champions Recognition
Ceremony**

**RIVERFRONT CONVENTION CENTER
203 S. FRONT STREET**

Main Street Champions are selected by their respective Main Street communities, and the North Carolina Department of Commerce is proud to recognize each nominee submitted by local Main Street leadership at the NC Main Street Champions ceremony.

NO TICKET REQUIRED

12:45 PM - 1:00 PM

CLOSING REMARKS: LIZ PARHAM

Riverfront Convention Center, 203 S. Front Street


*Liz Parham, CMSM, Director,
NC Main Street & Rural Planning Center*

DOWNTOWN NEW BERN, NC



 Main Conference Venue

 Additional Session Venue

 Shuttle Drop Off and Pick Up

 Tour Meeting Location

 Public Parking

 ATMs





2026 NC Main Street Conference Hotel Block Information

Conference Date: March 10-12, 2026
(Tuesday morning to Thursday)

Block Dates: March 9-12, 2026
(Monday Check-in to Thursday Checkout)

Conference Location:

Riverfront Convention Center | 203 S. Front Street, New Bern, NC

Hotel Name: Doubletree by Hilton Hotel New Bern Riverfront

Hotel Address: 100 Middle St., New Bern, NC 28560

Hotel Phone Number: 252-658-9000

Hotel Website: <https://www.hilton.com/en/hotels/ewnmsdt-doubletree-new-bern-riverfront/>

Dedicated Conference Reservation Link | **VERIFY** Check-in and Check-out:

<https://www.hilton.com/en/attend-my-event/ewnmsdt-9ma-9bb2b4ed-db8d-4b9e-a4e4-ddcaf9041ea7/>

Hotel Rates: Starting at \$199.00

Hotel Room Release Date: 02/10/2026

Hotel Name: Tryon Riverfront Inn, Tapestry Collection by Hilton

Hotel Address: 100 Craven St, New Bern, NC 28560

Hotel Phone Number: 252-649-0950

Hotel Website: <https://www.hilton.com/en/hotels/cltriu-tryon-riverfront-inn-new-bern/>

Dedicated Conference Reservation Link | **VERIFY** Check-in and Check-out:

<https://www.hilton.com/en/attend-my-event/cltriu-tma-320a686d-84f0-4442-ae0b-e4ccc234acf1/>

Hotel Rates: Starting at \$220.00

Hotel Room Release Date: 02/09/2026

Hotel Name: Hampton Inn New Bern

Hotel Address: 200 Hotel Dr, New Bern, NC 28562

Hotel Phone Number: 252-637-2111

Hotel Website: <https://www.hilton.com/en/hotels/nbrnchx-hampton-new-bern/>

Dedicated Conference Reservation Link | **VERIFY** Check-in and Check-out:

<https://www.hilton.com/en/attend-my-event/nbrnchx-mas-ed304e50-d078-4cd0-b665-60e58008a746/>

Hotel Rates: Starting at \$179.00

Hotel Room Release Date: 02/09/2026

Hotel Block Name: **NC Main Street Conference**

Hotel Name: Courtyard by Marriott

Hotel Address: 218 E Front St, New Bern, NC 28560

Hotel Phone Number: [\(252\) 636-0022](tel:(252)636-0022)

Hotel Website: <https://www.marriott.com/en-us/hotels/ewncy-courtyard-new-bern/overview/?scid=f2ae0541-1279-4f24-b197-a979c79310b0>

Hotel Rates: Starting at \$189.00

Hotel Room Release Date: 02/10/2026

Hotel Block Name: **NC Main Street Conference**

Hotel Name: Bridgepointe Hotel & Marina

Hotel Address: 101 Howell Rd, New Bern, NC 28562

Hotel Phone Number: 252-636-3637

Hotel Website: <https://www.bridgepointe.com/>

Dedicated Conference Reservation Link: No Link Available, Please Call 252-636-3637

Hotel Rates: Starting at \$130.00

Hotel Room Release Date: 02/16/2026

Hotel Block Name: **NCMS26**

Hotel Name: Springhill Suites by Marriott New Bern

Hotel Address: 300 Hotel Dr, New Bern, NC 28562

Hotel Phone Number: 252-637-0017

Hotel Website: <https://www.marriott.com/en-us/hotels/ewnsh-springhill-suites-new-bern/overview/>

Dedicated Conference Reservation Link: Please Call: 252-637-0017, Reference the 2026 Main Street Conference

Hotel Rates: Starting at \$179.00

Hotel Room Release Date: 02/07/2026

Hotel Block Name: **2026 Main Street Conference**

