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MANAGING DOWNTOWN THROUGH A STREETSCAPE PROJECT

Based on feedback received from Main Street communities throughout the country, the ongoing involvement of the local Main Street community is extremely important during a downtown streetscape project.

A key focus must be on how everyone can work together to ensure this project is not only successfully completed, but also to ensure the actual construction phase minimizes disruptions and maximizes opportunities to promote both downtown and the local Main Street organization. There are two common themes:

1. Ongoing and timely communication to the multitude of “users” of downtown
2. Advance preparation and troubleshooting which will minimize the problems that are bound to arise in any construction project

Below are some specific ideas to consider. The best advice is to keep your plans as simple as possible. These ideas suggest great ways to involve other partners who can help provide resources of people and money in order to get things done.

COMMUNICATION

While it may seem daunting, those communities that have been through a streetscape project stress the need for daily communication between all of the stakeholders and the project contractor:

- A representative from the Main Street program should be on the construction project management team. The local Main Street program should also have its own internal task force with at least one representative from each of the 4 committees to develop and implement the action plan for the construction project.
- The final written agreement between the city and the contractor should include the names of the primary contacts for the contractor, the city and the local Main Street program. The contract should stipulate that there are meetings at least once if not twice a week to keep everyone up to date on schedules, unexpected problems and any other issues.
- Once your contractor is selected, sit down with them and ask them what kind of things can go wrong and/or what your communication challenges are. The answers to these questions will lead to ways that the local Main Street program can play a helpful role.
- Ask the contractor for a written weekly update that can be turned into a newsletter, fax, email or some other communication tool.

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- Efficient communications systems are key, especially if there is an emergency like a power outage. There are a number of communication suggestions below, no matter how you decide to implement the communications system, it should be formalized and understood by all relevant parties.
- One local Main Street program that had done their homework, made a presentation to the construction manager on how they could be involved and help. The contractor was so impressed that he offered to pay each of the four committees \$2,000 each for their work because it not only would save him at least that much money, but they were equipped to do some things better because they knew their local community better.
- In Flagstaff, AR the contractor paid the Main Street program \$5,000 to produce a weekly newsletter update and paid the design committee \$2,200 to keep all signage up to date in terms of where to drive, park or walk.
- Keep downtown merchants involved and informed. In one community, volunteers made sure that every merchant was visited by a volunteer every day (and they had 396 businesses in their downtown). The visit might not entail more than a quick hello, how are things going. But this gave the merchant the chance to discuss a problem if they had one which could be then brought back to the appropriate person(s).

PROMOTION COMMITTEE

- Downtowns have held ground breaking parties the night before construction begins. Participants included downtown stakeholders, the contractors and the construction workers. It was not only a team building opportunity, but also an opportunity to promote the vision of what the downtown would look like when the project was complete. *The idea is to keep people focused on the outcome, not the inconvenience, of the construction.*
- The number of ideas for events is almost limitless. The key is to determine which ones can be pulled off successfully in a short period of time. Be sure you know what the goal of the event is. Is the goal important enough to warrant finding the resources to do it? Sales events that can call attention to the fact that the merchants are open are a good idea and hopefully would get the merchants involved. Some examples include:
 - Back door sales, promoting the fact that people can use the back doors of businesses when the fronts are closed or more difficult to access.
 - Find spaces like alleys or parking lots or open space to do a sidewalk sale without a sidewalk, or are there any temporary large indoor spaces where merchants could set up booths to sell merchandise throughout construction?
- All of the activities surrounding construction can be a great way to keep the media involved and doing stories not only on downtown today, but what it will be like when the project is finished.
- Determine what existing events may need to be rescheduled or re-configured due to construction and create an alternative plan.
- Hold another party celebrating the end of the construction period with a ribbon cutting ceremony.
- Provide the construction workers (and possibly volunteers) with T-shirts that they will wear each day with the Top Ten Reasons to Shop Downtown during construction.

DESIGN COMMITTEE

- The Design Committee can be responsible for ensuring that all construction signage is appropriately placed.
- In one town, a volunteer took it upon himself to go out every day at dawn and place or move the signs as needed. In another town, a volunteer did an early morning test drive through the project to make sure the signage worked from the driver's point of view.
- In one town, design volunteers painted the plywood planks that were used for pedestrian bridges into storefronts bright red and yellow to call attention to the storefronts.
- Consider the activities that usually happen on the street that may need to move such as bus stops, post office boxes, crosswalks and deliveries.
- Make sure construction is not happening during peak commuting hours. Have as much construction as possible down at night. This may be too expensive, but worth discussing. This also could be an issue for residents in downtown who don't want their sleep disturbed. This all leads to the fact that no matter when construction happens, it has an impact that needs to be minimized as much as possible.
- Daily site clean up and safety issues must be priorities.
- All holes and trenches must be covered, make sure no projecting elements are left exposed.
- Determine the locations for staging areas, material and equipment storage. Make sure they do not have a negative impact on safety, traffic and pedestrian flow or parking.
- Look at temporary parking alternatives during construction. Are there any large private lots or church lots that can be used? Is there a need to have a golf cart taxi people to and from these parking areas? In one town, the tips the volunteers received from taxing people in the golf carts paid for the rental of the carts.

ORGANIZATION COMMITTEE

- Make sure the local Main Street's logo is on everything possible, this is a great way to help "brand" the organization.
- All volunteers should be immediately recognizable, so that the local Main Street program gets credit for all of their good work. This can be in the form of a pin, T-shirt, or a canvas apron that each volunteer wears.
- Develop daily or, at least weekly, communications vehicles
 - Develop a website, or use an existing one to make it easy for folks to access daily information.
 - Have a phone company donate a hot line that can be updated daily on construction news.
 - Newsletters, emails and faxes.
- Hold a pre-construction meeting with all stakeholders to get them informed and involved.

ER COMMITTEE

- Find examples from other communities on how they developed a rear entrance program during construction.
- Institute a block captain program to insure good daily communication.
- There will be the proverbial broken pipe, electric or telephone line. Planning for these problems can come in handy. In one community that had a Radio Shack in its downtown, the ER committee arranged for every merchant to be able to have a cell phone with their normal business number on it in the event of the phone lines going down. The phone lines went down for two days, but the downtown merchants had their cell phones within a couple of hours. Another community arranged a head of time to have generators strategically planned in the case of a power outage so business could go on as usual.
- Make sure no business should ever be forced to close for any period of time.

Managing downtown through a streetscape project can be a great way to galvanize the community, build lasting partnerships, and help launch downtown into a brighter future!