



A thriving downtown to help businesses, the arts prosper

Since joining Gallup MainStreet Arts & Cultural District in November we have been working to help would-be entrepreneurs create new businesses, attract new businesses to the district, expand the existing businesses by creating a population density in the downtown, and make physical improvements to the public areas to revitalize and redevelop downtown Gallup to make you proud of where you live.

Creating a thriving downtown, of course, is no small task. It requires local leaders, business owners, and community residents to come together to identify our strengths, strategically situate ourselves within the regional economy, and develop a shared vision and identity to sell to the world. Through things like creating quality public spaces, prioritizing local entrepreneurship, emphasizing production, and supporting downtown housing, we can make this a reality.

Activating public spaces creates a sense of excitement and pride in Gallup that can sustain long-term revitalization efforts and promote outside investment in our community. Nationally, MainStreet programs generate \$39.70 of private investment money for every public dollar. Dollar for dollar it has been the most successful economic development program created. In Gallup we're not there yet, but we've started moving the needle – last year we generated \$13 of private money for every \$1 of public investment. We're well past that number already this year only 5 months into the year and we're continuing to learn how to bring more investment and density into our downtown.

Last week I had the opportunity to attend the annual conference of the National Main Street Center, Inc. Over 1,600 Main Street directors from small towns, mid-sized cities and urban neighborhood business districts shared successes and insights, addressed challenges, and planned for the future of our communities.

The conference affirmed what we've been working on and gave us more goals to aspire to. Here's what we learned and what Gallup MainStreet will continue working to accomplish:

Placemaking – a people-centered approach to transforming public spaces into community places – helps to create a sense of belonging and emotional connection to place. This sense of connection is critical to quality of life and is an important factor in successful talent attraction by helping build a place where people want to be. Gallup MainStreet ACD does this through the planning and designing of new community public spaces. You'll start to see more of this as the weather gets warmer.

Connection is the single best indicator of a community's prosperity. A higher level of community attachment – an emotional connection to a place that transcends satisfaction, loyalty, and passion – corresponds with a higher GDP growth. One way GMSACD is promoting this type of connection is to encourage residents and business owners to "buy local." This helps to build relationships within the community and creates a ripple effect that can include the creation of new jobs.

Economic gardening is an alternative ED model based on the principle that it is entrepreneurs that drive economies, rather than large firms. Every Tuesday morning at 9 am we meet at Gallup Coffee Company to talk through ideas for the community and struggles of local business

owners so that we can find solutions together.

Storytelling: Every community needs a storyteller. Working with the City of Gallup's Tourism Department, GMSACD is working to tell your stories to get the word out about the amazing people who work and live in Gallup.

Use **infographics** to communicate important, but complicated, points more quickly and easily. I'm just barely a millennial but I've bought into the idea that storytelling through graphics is a quick and easy way to get people's attention. Gallup MainStreet ACD provides free graphic and marketing services to all the interested business downtown.

When faced with the challenge of determining potential re-uses for an empty commercial or industrial building, it can be helpful to "**listen to the building.**" Does it have a large, reinforced, open floor plan, like, for example, an old printing company? What other types of companies need a large facility with this type of floor? A brewery? A restaurant? GMSACD works with entrepreneurs and existing businesses to find the right use for each building and fill in the vacant spaces downtown.

You need big ideas to create excitement and momentum, but if you actually want to get something accomplished, **chunk those big ideas into smaller, more doable parts.** For example, we have thousands of talented artists in the area and we want to showcase and support them. It is more feasible for us to start with an artist incubator that can help entrepreneurs launch and grow their businesses than it would be to try to open a multi-million-dollar museum to start out. GMSACD works in incremental and visible change to create lasting development that will make you proud to be from Gallup.

Economic development isn't just oil, gas and coal so don't overlook the potential of Gallup MainStreet as a partner or an ally in your business development. The boat will go further, faster if everyone is rowing in the same direction.

If you would like to get involved or would like to learn more, please contact us at: *gmsacddirector@gmail.com*
or (505) 399-2890.

Economic Development Week ...

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