



Colorado Sustainable Main Streets Initiative

Overview and Results

Background

The Colorado Sustainable Main Streets Initiative is a tremendous success story of an outcome-based approach focused on collaboration, which has allowed the communities of Five Points in Denver, the Town of Fowler, and the Cities of Monte Vista and Rifle to make remarkable progress toward downtown main streets revitalization. The initiative kicked-off in April 2010 when agencies agreed through Executive Order to collaborate under the leadership of the Department of Local Affairs (DOLA). The Sustainable Main Streets Initiative used a collaborative, integrated process to leverage technical and financial resources to help communities enhance the sustainability of their downtowns.



The program was highly successful, bringing state, federal, local, nonprofit, foundation and private sector resources to help develop better solutions and outcomes in the four pilot communities. Collaboration at all levels of government, as well as with the private and nonprofit sectors, was a key ingredient to the success of the Sustainable Main Streets Initiative. This broader network maximized resources, opened up new possibilities and ideas for problem solving and built new partnerships that ultimately strengthened community resiliency. Typically, communities have to fit their needs into agencies' program criteria. The Sustainable Main Streets Initiative was different in that the agencies had to find a way to make their programs meet the needs of the pilot communities.



Another critical element of the successful initiative was having an effective community champion. The champion must be respected by the community at-large; demonstrate integrity and credibility that inspires trust; have a vision of the community's future; support a well established, positive, and collaborative process, and ensure community ownership.

DOLA solicited input from state agencies and others to modify the federal sustainability principles (adopted by HUD, DOT and EPA in 2009) for Colorado, which were listed in the Executive Order and served as the framework for the initiative. The principles include:

- Increase economic competitiveness;
- Promote equitable, affordable housing;
- Support the existing built environment;
- Provide more transportation choices;
- Conserve, responsibly utilize and protect natural resources;
- Value healthy communities and neighborhoods, and
- Enhance integrated planning and investment.



A menu of outcomes was designed, consistent with these principles, to: (1) focus community discussions on desired outcomes instead of jumping to solutions, and (2) provide a role for each state agency to participate in a significant way.

Results

In eight months, the four pilot communities were able to accomplish several projects ranging from historic preservation and façade improvements to conceptual design and financial strategy building for major redevelopment sites. These catalyst projects helped the pilot communities achieve imminent goals while bridging sustainable community development to the future.



Despite the limited time frame to develop and complete projects, the pilot communities were successful in developing and completing several significant projects, and in planning next steps. While progress was made in many areas, the following represent the significant progress on the communities' priority projects.

Five Points

- Master plan (phase one), and joint planning with Denver
- New visitor and cultural center opened, along with successful marketing
- Significant community engagement and a strong core working group
- Energy audits for small businesses
- Preliminary plan to develop a local Farmers' Market
- Branding and marketing for investment and business retention

Fowler



- Final design for a major pedestrian safety improvement funded at state highway/Main Street intersection (construction scheduled for 2011)
- Historic structure assessment and conceptual design for renovation of historic theater
- Created an application assistance site for health care services
- Significant community engagement and a strong working group

- Emergency preparedness and response plan for the downtown
- Brownfield inventory and building assessment

Monte Vista

- Collaboratively developed a highway/Main Street streetscape improvement project that met downtown revitalization, pedestrian and traffic safety goals. This project between the city, Department of Transportation and Department of Local Affairs is timed so that significant cost savings will be achieved and disruption to downtown merchants will be minimized.
- Developed an economic blueprint, including a market analysis, branding and wayfinding for the downtown and business support
- Pedestrian safety assessment for the downtown
- Established a local historic preservation board



Rifle

- Valley Lumber redevelopment site planning and progress
- Renovation of the Ute Theater downtown
- Developed economic strategies for downtown revitalization
- Provided support to businesses by marketing resources such as a revolving loan fund and by coordinating small business support systems

State

- Over \$1 million invested in the four communities (through existing grant funds and pro-bono work) toward community priority projects
- Over 3,000 hours of time spent on projects by citizens, public employees, nonprofit groups, and other participants.
- Improved awareness and understanding of different agency programs, resources and rules
- New relationships formed and enhanced existing relationships between state agencies, and with nonprofits, private sector and foundation partners
- A better understanding of how various communities define sustainability
- State agencies are more aware of how they need to amend their rules and procedures to reduce barriers to communities.



Major Partners

State primary agencies:

Department of Local Affairs	Department of Transportation
Governor's Office of Economic Development & International Trade	
State Historical Fund	Governor and Lt. Governor's Offices
Dept. Public Health and Environment	Governor's Energy Office
Dept. Health Care Policy and Financing	Natural Resources

Additional partners:

Colorado Municipal League	Colorado Counties, Inc.
CSU Rural Technical Assistance	UCD Rural Technical Assistance
Downtown Colorado, Inc.	Sonoran Institute, Rocky Mountain Ofc.
Private sector businesses	Nonprofits and foundations
American Planning Association, Colorado Chapter	

Lessons Learned

Having diverse pilot communities -- with different geographies, populations, values and objectives-- broadened the experience of this initiative. Despite the differences, however, there were common lessons learned.

- Simply having many diverse stakeholders actively engaged in the discussions allow for more ideas, more resources and better solutions.
- A strong community champion ensures broad community participation, effective communication and momentum strong enough to reach consensus and implementation.
- It is difficult for communities, especially those with very limited resources, to fit their needs into the myriad grant and resource programs. This program turned that process around, with state agencies charged to determine how their programs best fit the needs of the community.
- Agencies were able to devote attention and resources in new ways, going beyond their normal scope of work. This was due in part because of the condensed timeline and limited number of communities, which allowed the agencies to devote significant time and resources to the communities.
- Communities benefitted from forming broad working groups, going beyond their usual partners to include some that in the beginning seemed peripheral. These working groups allowed relationships to form that will outlast this initiative and continually build resiliency in these communities.



Colorado Sustainable Main Streets and Federal Partners

Our federal partners play a significant role in the future implementation work for 2011-2013. Due to the success of the initiative, the Department of Local Affairs, along with the four pilot communities, received over \$1.2 million in US Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) Challenge and US Department of Transportation (DOT) TIGER II grant funds. These funds will allow the four pilot communities to complete several projects conceived during the Sustainable Main Streets Initiative. Specific plans for work include:

- Five Points will be working with the City and County of Denver, Denver Urban Renewal Authority and the Regional Transportation District to create a vision plan that focuses largely on transit-oriented sustainable redevelopment and energy efficiency.
- Fowler will develop construction-ready design drawings for their historic theater downtown, integrating historic preservation and downtown revitalization.
- Monte Vista will create a construction-ready design for a historic building downtown to create affordable housing upstairs and retail downstairs. This project folds into their overall work to preserve their historic charm while making their downtown more vibrant and pedestrian friendly.
- Rifle will develop transit-oriented development and pedestrian-friendly plans and designs for their gateway and core downtown, incorporating revitalization, housing, transit and energy efficiency.



The Department of Local Affairs supports and administers this grant for the four communities and will consistently report on the progress.

For more information, please contact Andy Hill at the Department of Local Affairs, Division of Local Government at 303.866.3785 or andy.hill@state.co.us.