

Why is Downtown Important? ...

Can malls and discount centers take the place of downtowns in the future? The answer is most definitely no. Though malls and discount centers play important roles in our communities, downtown is much more than a shopping center. It is critical for everyone involved in downtown revitalization to understand the value of downtown. Here are some good reasons why downtown is important (though they're not in any particular order):

1. Your central business district is a prominent employment center. Even the smallest downtown employs hundreds of people. Downtown is often the largest employer in a community.
2. As a business center, your downtown plays a major role. It may even represent the largest concentration of businesses in your community. It also serves as an incubator for new businesses—the successes of tomorrow.
3. Most of the businesses in your downtown are independently owned. They support a local family who supports the local schools, etc. Independent businesses keep profits in town.
4. Downtown is a reflection of how your community sees itself—a critical factor in business retention and recruitment efforts. When industry begins looking at your community as a possible location, they examine many aspects including the quality of life. Included in quality of life is interest in downtown — is it alive and viable, or does it represent local disinterest and failure?
5. Your downtown represents a significant portion of the community's tax base. If this district declines, property will decrease in value and subsequently increases the tax burden on other parts of your community.
6. The central business district is an indispensable shopping and service center. Though it may no longer hold the place as your community's most dominant shopping center, it still includes unique shopping and service opportunities. Attorneys, physicians, accountants, and insurance offices, as well as financial institutions, are often located downtown.
7. Your downtown is the historic core of your community. Many of the buildings are historically significant and help highlight your community's history.
8. Downtown represents a vast amount of public and private investment. Imagine the costs to recreate all the public infrastructure and buildings already existing in your central business district. Think of the waste of past dollars spent if downtown is neglected.
9. A central business district is often a major tourist draw. When people travel, they want to see unique places. There isn't a downtown like yours in the world!
10. Downtown is usually a government center. Most likely it is where your city hall, county courthouse, and post office are located. This "one stop" shopping for government services is a notable feature of downtowns across the country.
11. And, perhaps, most important, your downtown provides a sense of community and place. As Carol Lifkind, author of *Main Street: The Face of Urban America*, said "...as Main Street, it was uniquely American, a powerful symbol of shared experiences, of common memory, of the challenge, and the struggle of building a civilization... Main Street was always familiar, always recognizable as the heart and soul of the village, town or city."

(Edited from an article by Alicia Goehring, Wisconsin Main Street/Better Hometown program, Wisconsin Department of Development)

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