



Figure #1: Church Street, Burlington, Vermont in February 2023.

Photo Credit: Gillian Kolody

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“Main streets act as the ‘front yard’ of rural communities and a place to promote local business and community identity.”

(Paterson, D. & Hunt, K., n.d., para. 7)

Pedestrian-friendly Main Streets are a crucial part of towns and cities alike. **They are simultaneously a thoroughfare and a destination, while also acting as cultural, historic, and economic centres.** The prioritization of cars and trucks has been detrimental to Main Streets, influencing economic vitality, walkability, and overall safety (Main Street America, 2019, p. 2). After the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, fostering social connectedness and supporting local entrepreneurship is more important than ever (Paterson, D. & Hunt, K., n.d., para. 3).

There are many existent organizations that seek to revitalize and support Main Streets. One example is Main Street America, an American movement that aims to revitalize and strengthen communities across the US via preservation-based economic development (Main Street America, n.d., “Our Mission”). Another example is Bring Back Main Street, a Canadian research and advocacy campaign that recommends actionable policies to partners across Canada, to assure that Main Streets can recovery from the pandemic.

Examining precedents in conversation with the WHO’s *Global age-friendly Cities: A Guide* will demonstrate how interconnected age-friendliness is with pedestrian-friendly Main Streets. **The following precedents will examine different steps that municipalities can take to support their Main Streets and the folks who use them.**

Mississippi Mills, Ontario: Downtown Revitalization

Mississippi Mills, Ontario, is a small town outside of Ottawa. The project to revitalize downtown Almonte in Mississippi Mills has been under construction since 2011, as there was a need to replace their outdated sewer and water pipes (Mississippi Mills, 2023, para. 4). The town took this as an opportunity to turn its downtown into a pedestrian-friendly environment as well (see fig. 3). **From spring 2022 to fall 2023, the town underwent construction to build accessible sidewalks with tactile paving at intersections and heighten pedestrian safety by introducing traffic calming measures. 48 new trees, 11 benches, bike racks, and receptacles are now scattered throughout the main street** (Mississippi Mills, 2023, para. 5).

These improvements confirm with the Town’s official plan, which includes the goal of maintaining and improving the streetscapes in downtown, by assuring that there is appropriate lighting in public areas for pedestrians, adequate

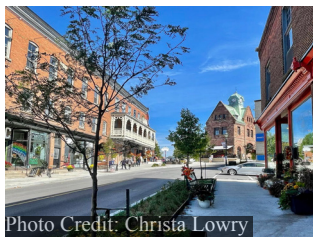


Figure #2: Downtown Almonte, Mississippi Mills in September 2023 after the revitalization.



Figure #3: Downtown Almonte, Mississippi Mills revitalization plan.

amounts of street furniture, clearly marked pedestrian crossways, greenery, clear signage, and a riverwalk (Municipality of Mississippi Mills, 2019, pp. 99-100). It is too soon to determine the success of the revitalization project, but it is clear that this was a monumental project for the municipality and has been highly anticipated for years (Mississippi Mills, 2023, para. 3).

Burlington, Vermont: Church Street Marketplace

Burlington, Vermont is known for Church Street Marketplace, which has been deemed one of America's Great Public Spaces by the American Planning Association. Inspired by the transformation of Strøget, Copenhagen's main shopping centre in the 1960s (see fig. 5), Bill Truex, Burlington's Planning Commissioner, looked to change Church Street into a pedestrian-friendly environment (see fig. 4) (Church Street Market, n.d.2, para. 1). **On September 15, 1981, Church Street Marketplace opened up two blocks of pedestrian-only roads. By 2005, Burlington's Church Street Marketplace consisted of four pedestrian-only blocks, lined with shops, restaurants, civic offices, among other things.** This pedestrian-friendly Main Street is still thriving and often visited today (see fig. 1) (Church Street Marketplace, n.d.2, paras. 2-4).

One June 10, 2013, the people of Burlington, the City of Burlington and Town Planning & Urban Design Collaborative LLC collaborated on *planBTV: A Master Plan for Burlington's Downtown and Waterfront*. Concerning Church Street specifically, the plan indicates that they wish to add potential new buildings to the street, allowing for additional programming and thus attracting more people to the north end of Church Street (The City of Burlington, 2013, p.106).

The plan looks to add more seating, suspended rigid awnings, and a seasonal agricultural installation in celebration of Burlington's local agriculture (The City of Burlington, 2013, p.106). **planBTV also highlights the importance of walkability, with a focus on destination, distance, and design specifically, which is key when looking at pedestrian-friendly Main Streets** (The City of Burlington, 2013, p. 36).

Nova Scotia Main Streets Initiative



Figure #4: Church Street in 1962, prior to becoming a pedestrian-only street.

“Essentially acting as the ‘living room’ of the city, Church Street is a vibrant, pedestrian-oriented corridor... [serving] as a strong nucleus for the city.”

(The City of Burlington, 2013, p. 104)



Figure #5: Strøget, Copenhagen's main shopping centre that is pedestrian only.

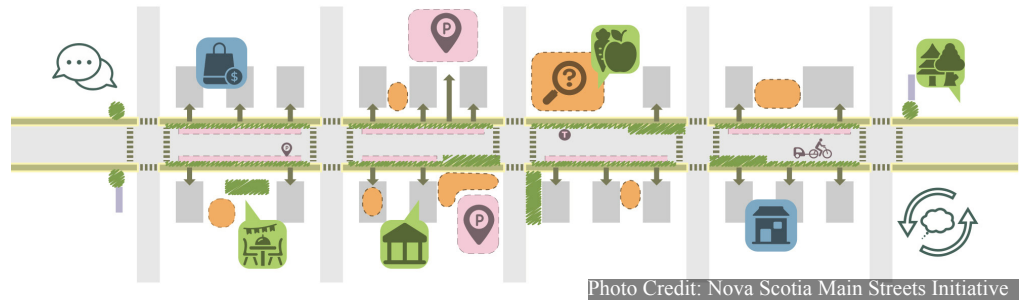


Photo Credit: Nova Scotia Main Streets Initiative

Figure #6: A model of a vibrant community main street, following the seven principles presented in the Nova Scotia Main Streets Initiative: Community Workbook.

“Communities are constantly evolving, building on current assets, and developing in new directions. Main Streets should be integral to the overall evolution of communities.”

(NSFM, 2020, p. 54)

In June 2020, the *Nova Scotia Main Streets Initiative Community Workbook* was released, with the intention of acting as “a starting point in the conversation about achieving the possibilities for Nova Scotia’s Main Streets” (NSFM, 2020, p. VII). **The initiative begins by noting that environmental, economic, and social sustainability are the three key pillars to supporting local action on Main Street** (see fig. 6) (NSFM, 2020, p. 2).

Achieving this mutual goal requires involvement from government bodies, entrepreneurs, residents, and organizations alike. The initiative then discusses background information concerning Nova Scotia’s current issues and opportunities, various planning concerns, and citizen attitudes and opinions (see fig. 7) (NSFM, 2020, pp. 4-27).

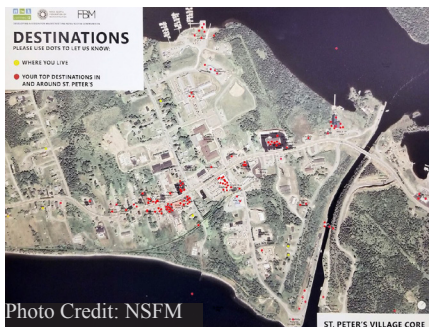


Figure #7: “Place a dot on your destination” map exercise during community engagement in St. Peter’s, Nova Scotia.

Of note is their usage of Main Street America’s *Navigating Main Streets as Places: A People-First Transportation Toolkit* (2019), which is a resource that aids in finding a balance of mobility and placemaking. Finally, the initiative includes a workbook, filled with guiding questions and exercises to be used to examine your community’s Main Street (NSFM, 2020, pp. 28-55).

Final Thoughts

These precedents demonstrate that pedestrian-friendly Main Streets in small communities can revamp a community by creating a focal point for residents and tourists alike. **As seen with the precedents, creating a pedestrian-friendly Main Street can in turn aid in making a community age-friendly, as it focuses on physical accessibility, walkability, and safety for pedestrians** (WHO, 2007, pp. 13-15). A pedestrian-friendly Main Street done correctly is a great space which thus creates a clean and pleasant environment to explore and rest in, corresponding with a crucial component of age-friendly outdoor spaces and buildings (WHO, 2007, p. 12).

Unlike Nova Scotia, Manitoba does not have its own Main Streets Initiative, yet this is a great precedent that the province can look to. **Having a collective vision of which elements create successful and impactful pedestrian-friendly Main Streets is a key starting point to transform towns in Manitoba.** This type of initiative could do the heavy-lifting work for municipalities and provide a free resource and workbook for municipalities to reference when analyzing their Main Street.

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