

# New Jersey Main Street Program and Dunellen's Future Downtown

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# National & New Jersey Main Street Programs

A Brief History and Overview

# National Main Street Program

- Created in 1980 to catalyze downtown economic development and historic preservation
- More than 2,000 communities have cumulatively participated
- Raised \$100 billion in investment



# Main Street New Jersey (MSNJ) History

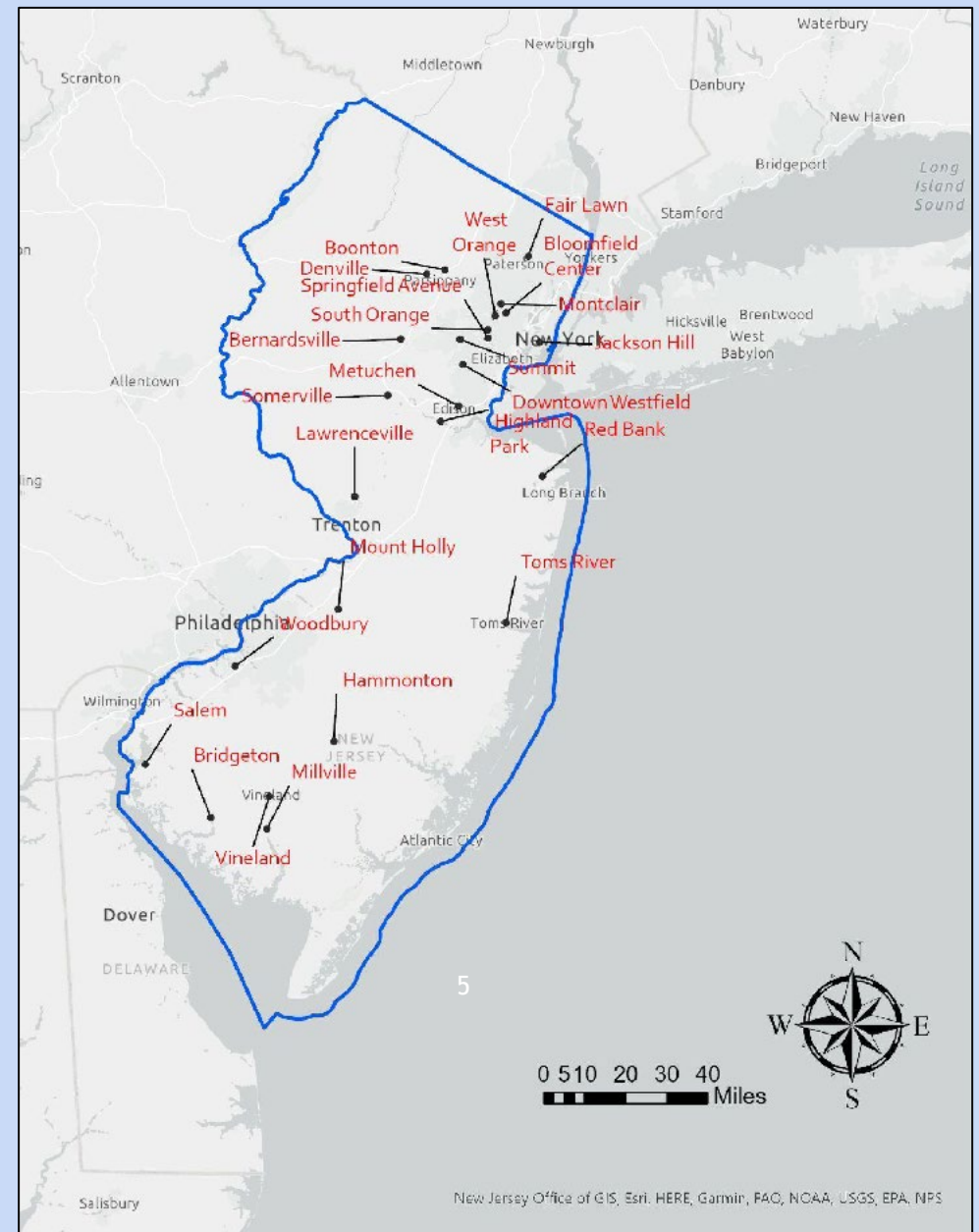
- Established in 1989 to support downtown revitalization efforts
- Administered by the Department of Community Affairs (DCA)
- Significant economic benefits realized by all Main Street Communities



Main Street Metuchen, Digital Commonwealth

# Main Street Programs

- 25 Main Street Programs
- 18 programs established after 2000
- 16 programs co-exist with a Business Improvement District (BID) or Special Improvement District (SID)
- Programs can additionally realize funding through municipal donations, fundraising, and Transformation Grants from DCA

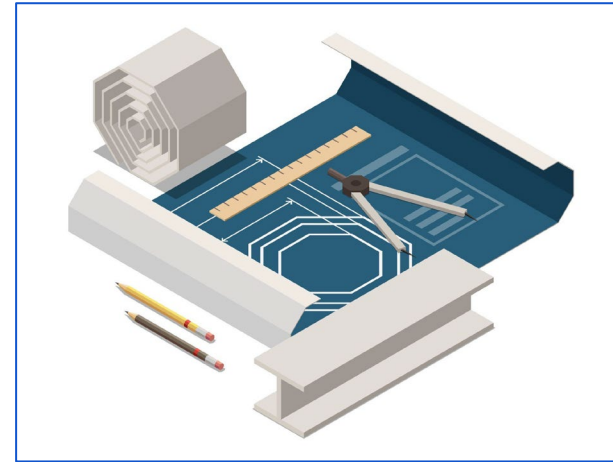


New Jersey Map showing Main Street Programs

# MSNJ Reinvestment Benefits (2022)



- **1,018** Full and Part-time jobs
- **179** New Businesses Created
- **\$31 million** Public and Private Investment



- **78** Rehabilitation Projects
- **12** Public Improvement Projects
- **16,883** Volunteer Hours Contributed

# Insights from Studio Survey of MSNJ Program

- Majority are **501(c)3**
- Third of programs had budgets **beneath \$100,000**
- **Bids, Grants, and State Funding** were the most common funding sources
- **Social Media** is the best way to market programs
- Hosting **events** and supporting **business** were most common successes
- **Murals** were most common form of Public Art/ Placemaking

# **N.J. Main Street Case Study**

Metuchen, NJ

# Case Study: Metuchen

- 15,049 residents
- Median household income:
  - \$141,915
- Middlesex County
- Train station on Northeast Corridor
- Main Street Program est. 2016
- 2023 recipient of Great America



Source: Wikipedia



Source: centraljersey.com

# About the Metuchen Downtown Alliance (MDA)

- Full-time Executive Director
- Supported by **volunteers**
- Annual budget: **\$372,400**
  - \$250,000 SID contribution
- Activities and improvements funded through the **SID**
- Formed to address increasing **vacancy rates, deteriorating downtown**



# Revitalization

Foot traffic



Source: NJfamily.com

Small business support



Credit: Richard Alfonzo

Family-friendly events



Credit: Richard Alfonzo

# Redevelopment

## Woodmont Metro at Metuchen Station

- Constructed in 2016
- Former commuter parking lot
- Retail and 300 housing units
- 15% affordable housing
- Created “Town Plaza” public space



# Metuchen Successes & Challenges

Successes	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <b>Economic enhancements</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- 144 new jobs</li><li>- 104 buildings rehabilitated</li><li>- \$168 million in reinvestment</li><li>- 387 new downtown apartments</li><li>- Lower vacancy rates (22% → 4%)</li></ul></li><li>- <b>Community improvements</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Boost in activities, events, attraction</li><li>- Pride of place</li></ul></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Attracting new <b>volunteers</b> and avoiding burnout</li><li>- <b>Expanding</b> downtown district</li><li>- Attracting <b>variety</b> of businesses despite reduced vacancies</li><li>- Re-establishing <b>core Main Street aspects</b> (design emphasis)</li></ul>

# Advice from Metuchen

1. Know and understand the challenges your downtown faces
2. Consult with other Main Street programs
3. Seek support from the Main Street NJ office
4. Form a steering committee
5. Build and sustain political/public support



Credit: Richard Alfonzo

# Local Perspectives

Dunellen Community Survey and Local Business Questionnaire

# Community Survey

- Objective: Understand how residents and frequent downtown visitors perceive downtown Dunellen along with changes they would like to see
- Emailed to listserv, posted on Borough website and Facebook page (10/31-11/16)
- 22 questions
- 241 responses

***Dunellen: Small Enough to Know You, Large Enough to Serve you!***

<https://tinyurl.com/Dunellen2023CommunitySurvey>  
Respond by November 13th, 2023

Help enhance the  
**Dunellen Downtown!**

Find the survey link on  
the Borough website and  
Facebook page or in your  
email!

**We Appreciate Every Response We Can Get!**

 **For More Information**  
732-968-3033, x4  
[www.dunellen-nj.gov](http://www.dunellen-nj.gov)



# Results: Downtown Attraction

- **Attraction to ANY Downtown**
  - **78%: Restaurant or bar scene**
  - **53%: Community Events**
  - **41% Shopping**
- **Dunellen Attractions**
  - **66%: Community Atmosphere**
  - **31%: Housing Availability/Cost**
  - **21%: Public Transit Access**

# Results: New Businesses

- **Desired New Businesses**
  - **50%: Brewery**
  - **49%: Kids Entertainment**
  - **47%: Hobby Store**
  - **41%: Book Store**
  - **28%: Pet Store**
  - **26%: Coffee Shop**



# Results: Community Atmosphere

## - **Desired Amenities**

- **58%: Additional Grocery Store Options**
- **57%: Improved Infrastructure**
- **46%: Additional Public Art**
- **40%: More Benches (Or Other Communal Seatings)**

## - **Desired Community Events**

- **78%: Live Music**
- **73%: Street Fairs**
- **65%: More Frequent Farmers Markets**

# Business Questionnaire

- 11 questions
- Conducted October 28th in person (door to door) (9 responses)
- Emailed to remaining businesses (0 responses)
- **Understand local business owners perspective on the success and challenges of Dunellen's central business district and any strategies to evolve**
- **Dunellen strengths**
  - Diversity, strong community, high traffic area
- **Dunellen weaknesses**
  - Parking, lack of diversity in businesses
- **Main Street Program?**
  - Majority: Yes if it helps community businesses
- **BID/SID?**
  - Split: 50% believe it could be useful, 50% don't see the point in it

# Other/Complimentary Programs

Arts & Culture | Design | Sustainability | Transit

# Murals

## Other Community Programs

Westfield NJ,  
Main reet New  
Jersey Grant,  
2019



Farmington, NM,  
AARP Community  
Challenge Grant,  
2023



## Potential Dunellen



# Community Theatres

## Other Community Programs

Metuchen, NJ,  
Middlesex County  
Cultural and Arts  
Trust Fund, 2018



Lovington, NM,  
T-Mobile's  
Hometown Grant,  
2023



## Potential Dunellen



# Bike Stations

## Other Community Programs

Woodbridge, NJ  
Sustainable Jersey grant  
Award, 2021

Grand Forks, ND, AARP  
Community Challenge Grants, 2021



## Potential Dunellen



# Shading Sidewalks

## Other Community Programs

Atlantic City, NJ  
Atlantic City Electric and Sustainable Jersey Award, 2022

Lihue, HI, AARP Community Challenge Grants, 2021



## Potential Dunellen



# Safe Streets

## Other Community Programs

West Orange, NJ,  
Alternative  
Set-Aside  
Program, 2021



Auburn, ME AARP  
Community  
Challenge, 2023



## Potential Dunellen



# Thank you for listening to our presentation!

- A special thank you to Mayor Jason Cilento and Julie Grof for your continued support and for giving us the opportunity to explore Dunellen.