



2020 Year-End Report

About Our Town Belfast	1
2020 Accomplishments	2
2020 High-level goals	2
Promotion Work	2
Economic Vitality Work	3
Design Work	5
Organization Work	6

About Our Town Belfast

Our Town Belfast exists to grow and sustain our historic downtown while celebrating our unique cultural heritage.

We believe in supporting local businesses, honoring our heritage through historic preservation, and bringing together the community in order to make downtown Belfast a better place to live, work, and play utilizing the Main Street approach.

Our Town Belfast envisions a vibrant future in which our waterfront, commercial district, treasured historic buildings, and outdoor public spaces are alive with activity.

The Heart of Communities

The Main Street movement grew out of a recognition that a community is only as strong as its core. In an era when many people had given up hope about the commercial and cultural viability of downtown, and when suburbs, shopping malls, and big-box retailers were dominating the American landscape, this seemed like an unlikely proposition. But, over the last four decades, the Main Street movement has proven that downtowns are the heart of our communities and that a community is only as strong as its core.

The Maine Downtown Center's core program is Main Street, which is a proven Four-Point Approach® to downtown revitalization developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1980 and is currently used in 44 states in over 2,200 communities. Currently, ten communities have achieved and maintained Main Street Maine designation: Bath, Belfast, Biddeford, Brunswick, Gardiner, Rockland, Saco, Sanford, Skowhegan, and Westbrook.

Main Street Fundamentals

The Main Street Approach is centered around Transformation Strategies. A Transformation Strategy articulates a focused, deliberate path to revitalizing or strengthening a downtown or commercial district's economy.

A program's work on Transformation Strategies should be organized around the Four Points: Economic Vitality, Design, Promotion, and Organization.

A revitalization program's work – and its Transformation Strategies – need to be informed by a solid understanding of local and regional market data, and sustained and inclusive community engagement.

2020 Accomplishments

2020, was to be a year of celebration. Our Town Belfast turns 10, the State of Maine celebrates its bicentennial, we were working on a whole host of activities to celebrate both. Additionally, we were working on other events and activities designed to support downtown like Restaurant Week, Sidewalk Sale, and coordinating advertising to produce the pocket map. Like many of you, we were forced to pivot our operations.

Despite the challenges and disruption brought to our downtown due to COVID-19 Our Town Belfast survived and even thrived. The investments made over the last ten year by the City of Belfast, our partners, and members of our community have positioned OTB to be in a place of strength despite the pandemic.

Our 2019 year-end report outlined several high-level goals for 2020. As you read through this report you'll see where OTB has met and exceeded many of these goals.

2020 High-level goals

- Engaging New Volunteers
- Collaborating with other organizations to increase the reach of our mission
- Continued relationship building
- Continued collection of data to determine the health of downtown
- Work with City and various property owners to support future infill development, especially housing

Promotion Work

GOALS OF Promotion Work:

1. *Defining Main Street's Market Niche and understand the changing market and how OTB can support*
2. *Create signature retail/restaurant promotions, and special events to lure people into our*

Beautiful Downtown

3. *Develop “unique experience” fundraising opportunities*

2020 Promotion Accomplishments:

Promotion of Downtown

- Weekly Email Newsletter
 - Open rate for 2020 40% ('19-36%)
 - Email subscription grew by 5% over '19 - (12% from '18 to '19)
- Social Media
 - Facebook - 8200+ followers - 13% growth over '19 (10% Growth over '18)
 - Instagram - 1700+ followers
- Website - launched a new website in May
 - 21,529 website visits
 - 35,000 page views

Create signature retail/restaurant promotions, and special events to lure people into our Beautiful Downtown. Continued to develop collaboration opportunities for downtown businesses.

- Holiday Passport Program - Our alternative to the traditional Early Bird Sale, the Passport was a booklet containing participating businesses and information about specials or deals they may be offering nearly 50 downtown businesses participated.
 - 50 participating businesses; 1,000 passports were distributed along with \$5,000 in prizes.
- Indigenous People's Day Sidewalk Sale
 - 28 participating businesses
- Worked with the City of Belfast to launch a COVID-19 public education plan As part of the Keep Maine Healthy initiative by the Mills Administration, the City of Belfast applied for and was awarded funding to develop and implement this COVID-19 prevention and protection plan.
 - Creation of a 30 second Public Service Announcement
 - Assistance with the distribution of signage
 - Social Media and Newsletter content to support the campaign

Economic Vitality Work

GOALS OF Economic Vitality Work:

1. *Understand Belfast's current economic condition and identify opportunities for growth*
2. *Strengthening existing businesses and recruiting new ones*
3. *Develop financial incentives and capital for building rehab and development*
4. *Monitor the economic performance of the district*

2020 Economic Vitality Accomplishments:

- Keep The Faith Fund
 - Our Town Belfast helped raise \$11,000+ from a GoFundMe campaign
 - Served as a member of the selection committee
 - Our Town Belfast served as the fiscal sponsor for the fund for business grants, distributing 128 \$500 checks.
- Continued working with property owners to identify challenges to development
 - Brownfield Revitalization Study (Market Study)
 - Worked with the Economic Development Director to get council approval to undertake a Brownfields Revitalization Plan. The plan when completed will support economic development and revitalization efforts within the downtown. This included collecting property owner surveys and gathering information for the consultant. This plan will be finalized early in 2021.
 - Facade Improvement Grant
 - Member of the selection committee, selections to be made in January 2021.
 - Assisted Economic Development Director with obtaining the \$100,000 grant from the State of Maine Community Development Block Grant Program.
 - Opportunity Zone Technical Assistance Program - Worked with the City Economic Development Director and a consultant hired by the United States Environmental Protection agency to better understand how property owners downtown can utilize the Opportunity Zone program. In 2021 a prospectus document will be completed that can be shared with potential investors.
- In late March, with support of the other nine Main Street Communities in the State, Our Town Belfast led the effort to write a letter to our Federal Congressional delegation and Governor Mills advocating for financial support, technical assistance, and a request to consider relaxing regulations that would support the downtown business community.
- Met with members of the congressional delegation twice to advocate for additional financial assistance
- Implemented a weekly call of downtown business owners for 12 weeks until most businesses were fully back to work. The goal of the calls was to share information and understand the challenges business faced. As a result of these calls and the feedback received there, we were able to work with partners to develop several important programs, to support businesses and their efforts.
 - Distributed a wide variety of information about COVID-19 (at times daily) topics ranging from the Paycheck Protection Program to Unemployment benefits through our various email lists.
- Connected building owners with business owners allowing for building owners to rent space and business owners to find space, in addition created a section of our website to better promote these opportunities.
- Continued collection of data to determine the health of downtown
 - In [2020](#) 11 New Businesses /10 Closed in the downtown

- Worked with the National Main Street Center to help develop a case study to show the need for additional Federal support.
- Worked with/continued to work with the National Main Street Center to gather and share information about the health of our downtown so that they can effectively lobby for support for small businesses.

Design Work

GOALS OF Design Work:

1. *Maintain and enhance the architectural heritage of the area while encouraging smart use.*
2. *Hosts educational platforms that teach citizens and business owners effective design techniques and provides assistance in planning and implementation.*
3. *Plans for the beautification and encouragement of the use of public spaces.*

2020 Design Accomplishments:

- Organized, fundraised and hung 39 wreaths throughout the downtown
- Organized responses to Santa Letters
- Activated the Park on Main
 - Managed the installation of lights throughout the park with support of the Parks and Recreation Department.
 - Created and managed the “Loop Hoop” project. Members of the community decorated hula hoops that were then hung throughout the park with support of the Parks and Recreation Department.
- Managed the preparation, planting, composting, pruning, fertilizing, mulching, and organization of volunteers to water, weed and mulch 16 tree wells throughout downtown. Nearly 500 plants were installed.
- Managed the preparation, planting, composting, pruning and organization of 10 trash top planters; 100 plants were installed.
- Successfully wrote and obtained a \$5,000 Maine Community Foundation Arts Expansion Grant for crosswalk art to be implemented in Spring 2021.
- Designed, created and installed the Launchpad Project. The Launch Pad is an 8'x8' performance platform for instrumentalists, singers, story-tellers, poets and actors to launch their voices and expressions into the world.
- Worked with the City of Belfast City Manager's Office and Code and Planning office to create and launch the Curbside Belfast program. The program allowed for restaurants and retail operations to provide temporary outdoor areas for businesses to use. To date, 16 businesses have participated.
- Bicentennial Banner Project in partnership with the City of Belfast, Belfast Area Chamber of Commerce, Belfast Historical Society & Museum, Penobscot Marine Museum 6 banners were designed and hung throughout the downtown to celebrate the State of Maine's bicentennial. The banners will remain hung through Indigenous People's day 2021. <https://ourtownbelfast.org/bicentennial/>

Organization Work

GOALS:

1. *Raising Money - for projects and administration, from donations and sponsorships*
2. *Promotion of the program*
3. *Recruitment and Retention*
4. *Administration (Managing Finances)*

2020 Organization Accomplishments:

- Welcomed 3 new board members
- Pivoted fundraising activities due to inability to hold in person events like Dinner on the Bridge or the Annual Auction our primary fundraising opportunities.

Outreach/Tours/Speaking Engagements

- Member of Maine Downtown Advisory Council - 2 Year Term ending in 2021
- Hosted Policy Leaders Academy for Panel Discussion with JB Turner, Front Street Shipyard; Economic Development Director Thomas Kittridge Economic Development Director, Mayor Eric Sanders; State Senator Erin Herbig. Leadership Maine (Maine Development Foundation and State Legislators) - January 29th
- Participated in Round Table discussion of State of Maine 10 year Economic Development Strategic Plan with Department of Economic and Community Development Commissioner Heather Johnson and State Senator Erin Herbig and City of Belfast staff. - February 5th
- Participated in a panel discussion for Leadership Maine, about OTB's support of the downtown throughout COVID-19 - August 21st
- Participated in National Main Street Center - Sustainable Funding Seminar - Sharing the success of the OTB Partners program with Main Street programs from across the Country - September 17
- Participated in a panel discussion with Midcoast Leadership Academy - October 22nd
- Hosted Tour of the downtown for Educate Maine - Education Leaders Experience - November 13
- Participated in a Jobs for Maine Graduates Panel discussing OTB's work- December 9th