

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** William T. Lichter, Village Manager

**From:** David A. Hulseberg, AICP, Director of Community Development

**Date:** November 12, 2003

**Subject:** Lombard Main Street Organization

The Economic and Community Development Committee at their November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2003 meeting voted unanimously to make the following recommendation. The ECDC committee recommended that the Village Board set forth a grant initiative to encourage downtown businesses in the general geographic area of Elizabeth Street to Grace Street along St., Charles Road, Grove Street to Maple Street along Main Street, and Michael McGuire to Grove Street along Park Avenue to organize and create a not-for-profit Main Street organization under the parameters of the National Historic Trust's Main Street initiative. Further, the Village of Lombard's grant initiative shall include a four year funding package where the Village contributes annually to the Main Street organization under the following structure; year one - \$90,000, year two - \$90,000, year three - \$75,000, year four - \$75,000.

### **Background:**

The Main Street concept has been discussed by the ECDC since June of 2001. The concept of introducing the program to Lombard was as a result of Downtown Lombard United. This organization has since merged with the Chamber of Commerce.

The Village of Lombard has long recognized that its downtown is important, not only as a symbol of the community and gathering place, but also as an ideal location for small, independent businesses to grow and thrive. In the 2002 Strategic Plan, Downtown Lombard is addressed by ten different objectives intended to bring a new vitality to the area.

One way in which the Village can foster downtown redevelopment is to encourage the development of a Main Street program. Main Street is a public-private partnership for economic development and urban renewal that builds an effective, volunteer-driven downtown management organization. Its goals include enhancing the downtown's appearance and design, developing promotional strategies to bring people downtown, and recruiting new businesses while also retaining and strengthening existing businesses. One of Main Street's other purposes are to develop economic restructuring strategies to sustain the vitality of the downtown. All of these ideas are consistent with the goals identified in the Village's Strategic Plan; therefore, it would make sense for the Village to promote a Main Street program in downtown Lombard.

In order to ensure that the Lombard Main Street program is a success and is accepted by the downtown merchants and property owners, the ECDC suggested the Village of Lombard fund the Main Street program for four years. The Coordinator of the program would manage the establishment of a new, independent organization committed solely to the downtown that would become Lombard's Main Street organization after it is accepted into the program.

### **The Main Street Program – Functional Structure**

The Main Street Program is made up of over 1,600 member communities nationwide that are committed to promoting locally driven downtown revitalization. The program was created by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1980 as a public-private partnership to bring new life into America's downtowns. Every member community is a part of the National Main Street Network, but each state runs its own program. Illinois Main Street has over 50 communities that have been accepted into the program.

In order to become a Main Street Community, an organization must first apply to Illinois Main Street to be considered for the year-long Organizational Phase. During the Organizational Phase, the local organization must incorporate itself and be designated a 501 (c) (3) not-for-profit organization by the Internal Revenue Service. In this year, the organization works with Illinois Main Street staff to meet all of the national designation criteria in order to become an active Main Street Community with full member status.

### **Why should the Village of Lombard be involved?**

Local governments are not usually directly involved in the genesis of a Main Street organization, so there are some potential disadvantages. While a Village-sponsored Main Street program is assured financial backing and security, that security may come at the expense of private sector involvement. The National Main Street Network has found that often, Main Street programs housed in city government become too closely aligned politically and, consequently, are perceived as pro-government, not pro-business. And, the security of the political alignment can dissolve with the next election. Thus, this is why the committee is suggesting a grant initiative.

As noted in many of the Main Street network's publications, downtown revitalization requires the cooperation and commitment of a broad-based coalition of public and private groups: businesses, civic groups, local government, financial institutions, consumers and many others. It also involves mobilizing a large number of volunteers to implement activities. A strong, viable organization provides the stability necessary to build and maintain a long-term effort. The ECDC wants to see long-term improvement in the downtown, and developing a management program that is well structured, well funded, and committed to the future is the only way to make lasting changes.

Successful Main Street programs are well-organized, with widespread support and broad-based community representation. However, it is essential for Main Street to be supported by its own organization. The ideal vehicle is a strong, independent organization whose express purpose is downtown revitalization – with no other conflicting agenda. While

many groups have an interest in the downtown, organizations such as the Village of Lombard and the Chamber of Commerce are responsible for the health of the entire community and may not always have the resources available to provide the downtown and its inhabitants with the attention it deserves. By organizing a Main Street-type organization, Downtown Lombard would have its own representative group with a distinct constituency and a clear, shared sense of mission and a well-defined set of goals and objectives.

### **What would the Main Street Coordinator do?**

The Coordinator's main job function would be to organize all of the necessary resources to be competitively selected for Organizational Level status in Illinois Main Street. The Coordinator would be responsible for ensuring that the downtown organization meets the ten national designation criteria for Main Street communities:

1. Broad-based community support
2. Vision and mission statements
3. Comprehensive work plan
4. Historic preservation ethic
5. Active board and committees
6. Adequate operating budget
7. Paid, professional Main Street manager
8. Ongoing training
9. Reporting of key statistics
10. Main Street network membership

The Village would assist the interested parties in creating the Main Street program in setting up the framework of the organization and determining how it should be operated.

### **Summary**

The Main Street Program is, at its core, a public-private partnership. By funding the Main Street program for the first four years, the Village of Lombard would be investing in a proven redevelopment program that will ultimately benefit not only the downtown merchants, residents, and property owners, but also strengthen the entire community. And, by limiting the Village's control over the process to the pre-Main Street stages, once Lombard is accepted into Illinois Main Street the citizens of Downtown Lombard can be assured of a strong, active organization that is devoted entirely to their needs.