

Downtown Delaware

Downtown Delaware is a resource center within the [Delaware Economic Development Office](#) (DEDO) that focuses on downtown revitalization issues, with particular emphasis on business development, vacancy reduction, and proactive planning for selection and placement of retail goods and services in commercial business districts throughout Delaware. Following after the [National Trust Main Street](#) model, additional areas of focus include organization, design and promotion.

The resource center's mission is to provide Delaware's historic downtowns, communities, and small businesses with tools to revitalize their commercial districts, increase entrepreneurship and innovation, and enhance quality of place.

Downtown Delaware offers technical assistance and training to staff and volunteers within the eight designated Main Street towns, representatives of Delaware Commercial District Affiliate communities (including seven USDA "Recipient" Towns), and to downtown stakeholders statewide, including property owners, and small businesses, including women and minority business owners.

Recently, the DEDO was awarded a USDA Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI) grant of \$234,643 that allowed DEDO to expand technical assistance to seven rural towns in Kent and Sussex Counties over a three year timeframe. These "USDA Recipient Towns" include Bridgeville, Delmar, Harrington, Laurel, Milford, Millsboro, and Milton. All communities statewide are invited to participate in services provided to these towns. , performing arts, loca

What is the Main Street program?

Main Street is a program of economic development whereby communities build on their downtown's unique character and assets.

Some of these assets include:

- historic assets (buildings, landmarks, public areas)
- natural assets (such as waterways, beaches);
- cultural assets (such as colleges/universities or a core of museums or arts venues);
- political assets (such as is found in a capitol city or county seat.)

In all cases, a significant core of historic buildings must be present in the Main Street town, and preservation of these buildings must be an ongoing ethic within the community. Each Main Street program is volunteer-driven, organized via a board of directors, and coordinated by a paid manager. Volunteers represent all interests in the downtown, such as merchants, property owners, community organizations, residents, and the City/Town.

How Does the Program Work?

The Main Street Four-Point "Approach" (attached) is a comprehensive strategy in which the four points of Organization, Design, Economic Restructuring and Promotion are integrated into a comprehensive program designed to draw upon local opportunities and build community self-reliance for downtown development. The philosophy and the [Eight Guiding Principles](#) (attached) behind this methodology make it an effective tool for community-based, grassroots revitalization efforts.

Nationally, the Main Street Approach has been successful in communities of all sizes, both rural and urban. Certified Main Street towns have met The National Main Street Center's Ten Criteria for Recognition. (See attached.) www.mainst.org

Through effective planning and concentration on each of the four points, each town adapts the Main Street approach to fit the specific needs of its downtown and thus ensure that the program's activities are designed to best take advantage of the community's strengths and resources.

District Affiliates

"Commercial District Affiliate" status is a new designation developed by the DEDO for communities that choose to implement strategies specific to business development. This status affords DEDO a broader reach in assisting any community statewide with a business district to take part in training and other resources of Downtown Delaware.

Current "Commercial District Affiliates" include:

- [Bridgeville](#)
- [Delmar](#)
- [Harrington](#)
- [Laurel](#)
- [Millsboro](#)
- [Milton](#)
- [Old New Castle](#)
- [Smyrna](#)

What is Delaware Commercial District Affiliation?

In Delaware, towns and communities statewide are invited to learn strategies for downtown revitalization and business development so that growth in their commercial district is "by choice" and not "by chance." "Affiliation" is for communities that are exploring downtown revitalization, that are preparing for Main Street designation, and for those that may not desire or be eligible for Main Street designation. It is an opportunity for communities to plan proactively for a viable mix of retail goods and professional services.

What are the Benefits of being a Delaware Commercial District Affiliate?

A core feature of the service to Affiliates is access to training by state and national downtown development experts. Previously, this training was limited to fully designated Main Street

communities. Now Affiliates have the opportunity to learn about best practices in the field of revitalization, to work with a downtown business development expert, and to network with peers from around the state, particularly in the area of business development. Affiliates are offered an opportunity to plan proactively for a vibrant, synergistic downtown commercial business district.

DEDO and USDA Partnership to Benefit Communities Statewide

Delaware Main Street, a program of the Delaware Economic Development Office, is the recipient of a USDA Rural Development Grant in the amount of \$200,000. Funds are used to provide technical assistance and training to nine rural communities in Kent and Sussex counties.

The USDA Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI) grant targets the communities of **Bridgeville, Delmar, Georgetown, Harrington, Milford, Millsboro, Milton, Seaford, and Smyrna**. The main focus of the assistance is downtown business development, but energy efficiency and renewable energy design options, organizational development, downtown design issues, and community image promotion, marketing and advertising is addressed as well.

"Because a primary component of a healthy downtown is a strong business mix, technical assistance will lean heavily toward planning and implementation of strategies to reduce downtown vacancy and to retain, expand, and recruit appropriate businesses," according to Diane Laird, State Main Street Coordinator. "With this grant, we are piloting the Rural Business Accelerator, whereby local entrepreneurs act as "liaisons" between downtown businesses and a business development consultant to address ways to stabilize and even expand their operations. In this way, we are building both local businesses and local capacity to build business. There will also be a concentrated focus on assisting small, women, and minority-owned businesses," said Laird.

The USDA's *Rural Community Development Grant (RCDI) Program* promotes sustainable economic development in rural communities with exceptional needs through provision of training and technical assistance focusing on business development, building rural entrepreneurship, small business innovation, and economic development planning.

USDA Rural Development achieves its mission by helping rural individuals, communities, and businesses obtain the financial and technical assistance needed to address their diverse and unique needs. Rural Development works to make sure that rural citizens can participate fully in the global economy.