



Central Florida

MAIN STREET OPPORTUNITIES

Orange County, Florida

Technical Assistance Panel | February 20-21, 2025

About

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Urban Land Institute is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 48,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission of shaping the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide. ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific regions, with members in 84 countries.

Cover photo: Businesses along South Orange Avenue as it runs through Pine Castle, Florida. (ULI)

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Since 1947, the Urban Land Institute has harnessed its members' technical expertise to help communities solve difficult land use, development, and redevelopment challenges. ULI's technical assistance programs provide expert, multidisciplinary, unbiased advice to local governments, public agencies, and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use and real estate issues in central Florida. Drawing from its seasoned professional membership base, ULI Central Florida offers objective and responsible guidance on various land use and real estate issues ranging from site-specific projects to public policy questions. The sponsoring organization is responsible for gathering the background information necessary to understand the project and presenting it to the panel. Panelists work together to develop an understanding of the problem within the context of the market and stakeholder insights and deliver recommendations to the sponsoring organization. ULI's technical assistance takes a variety of forms, ranging from half-day workshops to two-day panels to five-day national advisory service panels.

About

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Executive Summary

Main streets are the commercial backbones of cities across the United States. Nationally, Main Street America provides valuable guidance and support to communities wishing to revive or activate their "Main Street" districts. In Florida, a state-wide program provides similar organizational and technical support. Orange County, Florida, likewise recognizes the value of community focus on and support of Main Street districts and has programs that support these efforts.

While commercial districts are found along corridors bearing names other than "Main Street," the character and nature of the corridors have the potential to serve their communities in much the same way as a traditional Main Street—with vibrant community centers, robust commercial and entertainment options, and even residential opportunities often situated on the stories above.

Orange County has long supported community efforts to bolster Main Street-style corridors. Orange County was interested in exploring creating a Main Street District program and turned to the Urban Land Institute Central Florida District Council (ULI) for assistance in evaluating potential districts in the Pine Hills, Lockhart, and Pine Castle areas. ULI, using its technical assistance panel (TAP) program, convened a panel of real estate professionals to help determine which community might be best positioned to pursue a formal Main Street program.

District Opportunities

North stars for a Main Street. The panel agreed on a set of "north stars" or goals for a Main Street environment that would guide their recommendations. With guidance from the stakeholders and elected officials interviewed, the panel noted that a Main Street district should provide the following:

- Feel like a neighborhood
- Embrace its unique history
- Foster innovation, activation, collaboration, and inclusion
- Further empower/support the existing surrounding community
- Feature a sense of destination
- Support a sense of belonging in the community

Assets and opportunities. The panel also considered the current economic activity, community buy-in and grassroots activities, and available capacity in each of the three communities. The panel identified several opportunities within each community that could be strengthened by, could influence, or might benefit from Main Street-type activities.

Pine Hills' broad-based opportunities include: aggregating smaller lots to assist future development; activating the commercial corners and leveraging surface parking lots; creating a town center near the new transit center; leveraging existing community assets as hubs; supporting greater pedestrian and non-vehicular movement; and improving community perceptions.

In Lockhart there are opportunities to: build on community energy and pride to further activate the streetscape; leverage the business community to build momentum; amplify community walkability; recruit food and beverage opportunities; and explore opportunities and resources for additional commercial development.

Pine Castle has broad community opportunities that include: leveraging history and community pride; embracing community inclusivity, education, and diversity; addressing traffic concerns; celebrating the island between S Orange and Hansel Avenues; and creating a memorable brand.

Activation and Development Strategies

Frequent events and programming are key to the success of any Main Street program as they create a sense of community, expectation, and pattern of use that will eventually translate to the businesses lining the Main Street district's roadways. Each of the three communities has a solid foundation of existing events that help define community identity. As Main Street program discussions progress, civic leaders are encouraged to engage deeply with residents to determine how to best position the Main Street district, the types of events that would best support businesses, and identify those who may be interested in and have the capacity for meaningfully leading such an effort.

Additional activation strategies were contemplated for each community. For Pine

Hills, these opportunities might include:

- Identifying and activating the gateways at key intersections.
- Focusing larger development along Pine Hills Road.
- Celebrating the intersection of Silver Star and Pine Hills Roads as the heart of the community.
- Turning Pine Hills Road into a community festival/plaza space.
- Celebrating the trail as an inland waterfront.

Lockhart opportunities could include:

- Activating the area between Rose and Mott Avenues.
- Creating a civic anchor at the church property.
- Looking for future rail transit-oriented development (TOD) opportunities.
- Creatively reusing the existing industrial buildings.

The panel viewed Pine Castle's opportunities in relation to the urban island and amplifying current efforts.

- Leverage the urban island between S Orange and Hansel Avenues.
- Explore cross-site activities to catalyze additional activities around town.
- Embrace eclectic building stock.
- Create a unifying Pine Castle brand.
- Activate large parking lots.
- Move quickly to create a center of gravity and create a brand.

Each community is home to a range of organizations that could support Main Street

“

The path forward will require operations that are: lighter, quicker, cheaper; funding that is patient; and big ideas and bold thinking.

—TAP PANEL CHAIR

efforts, each with its own leadership and volunteer capacity. Further engagement with these organizations is recommended to determine interest in, support of, and/or participation in a Main Street initiative.

Alignment with Main Street Programs

The success of a Main Street initiative depends upon the ability of the leadership, residents, and business owners within identified Main Street geography to commit to the process, the activities, and the Main Street identity.

The panel recommends that the County work with the three communities to build and strengthen grassroots efforts toward establishing a Main Street district. Through these efforts, it may soon become clear which community is ready to move formally into a Main Street program.

Where to Begin

Orange County is interested in launching Main Street efforts in one or more of the communities studied, yet grassroots efforts should lead and underpin all Main Street work—and will influence where a Main Street initiative can succeed. The panel believes that the decision to launch a Main Street initiative should come from the community with support from the County. Early steps the County should take include:

1. Hire internal staff to manage the County's role in the Main Street process.
2. Host community charrettes to share Main Street program information.
3. Provide initial seed funding.
4. Consider grants to support building (e.g., façade) improvements.
5. Pursue a frictionless development process.

The panel also provided a set of selection criteria the County can use to identify communities for additional Main Street funding.

Each community has the potential to launch a Main Street program. Across all three communities, a deeper dive with community stakeholders will be needed to identify overlaps and gaps for a potential Main Street district. District boundaries should be determined by the community and include both resident and business voices. Well-programmed centers of gravity can create a destination, a strong sense of place, and a nexus around which and within which community members can live, work, and play.



Introduction and Background

Across the City of Orlando, Main Street initiatives have taken hold, coaxing sleepy commercial districts into vibrant destinations and encouraging community members to engage in local activities and take an active role in supporting local businesses.

The Florida Main Street program and Main Street America, the national Main Street organization, have created structures and programs that can support communities in their pursuit of a revived "Main Street" district. The state and national programs create organizational structures that can support economic vitality, design and development, and promotion of areas defined as a "Main Street" district. The work is often led by a champion or board and the work is distributed across committee members who are eager to see activity and investment in their community.

In Orange County, public sector leadership is exploring the idea of championing Main Street efforts, potentially assisting with resources to help the work take hold and assisting community members in identifying the strengths and resources they can build upon in their economic development and programmatic work. Understanding the value that this type of focus can bring to a Main Street district, the Orange County economic development administrator collaborated with the County's planning department to identify three potential new Main Street districts in the County. To support the work in one or more of the districts, the County has committed start-up funding and light

personnel support. The challenge that remained was identifying which of the three areas would make the most sense for this infusion of support.

To help identify the right opportunity and best path forward, Orange County leadership turned to the Urban Land Institute Central Florida District Council (ULI) for assistance. ULI, using its trusted and objective technical assistance panel (TAP) program, convened a panel of seven professionals with the type of experience to help answer the County's questions and provide guidance for the formation of a new Main Street district or districts. With expertise in architecture, development, economic development, community redevelopment, and Main Street initiatives, the panel of professionals spent two days reviewing briefing materials provided by the County, touring the three potential districts, and interviewing community stakeholders. The panel reviewed the information, deliberated their findings, and arrived at a series of recommendations that should prove helpful as the County decides which path to pursue.

The three communities selected for evaluation by the County included Pine Hills, Lockhart, and Pine Castle. Through the stakeholder interviews, the panel learned that each community is unique in its own right and that each has its own community vibe, business climate, and cultural touchstones.

Pine Hills. The tour through Pine Hills highlighted several key features including the following:

TAP Questions

1. Do each of the proposed districts fit the requirements of the Main Street District Program?

Do any of the existing community organizations have the capacity to oversee and manage a Main Street District? If so, what are the recommended boundaries for each area?
2. What are the key elements for successful activation for each of the proposed Main Street Districts, including timing?
3. Should the county launch its Main Street District program coordinating with the State of Florida or with the National Main Street Association, which holds the best advantages?

- A vibrant commercial corner at the intersection of Pine Hills Road and Silver Star Road marked by attractive monument signage.
- LYNX, a new County transit transfer station, is due to open later in 2025.
- Median infrastructure designed to protect pedestrians from unsafe road crossings.

- An attractive trail connection that winds around a retention pond, a senior living development, and utility infrastructure.
- A striking number of residential buildings that have converted to commercial uses, notably childcare facilities.



Orange County professional staff led the panel on a tour of the three communities.

While not a part of the tour, the panel also learned about the multi-cultural center in the southwest section of the community, which is home to an array of restaurants featuring cuisines from other countries, spaces for community gatherings, and a variety of niche retail stores.



Pine Hills monument signage at Silver Star and Pine Hills Road intersection.



The LYNX Transit Center is nearing completion in Pine Hills.



Median fencing was installed to prevent pedestrian crossings outside of crosswalks in Pine Hills.

Lockhart. In Lockhart, the panel observed the following community characteristics during the tour:

- A commercial corridor that is characterized by legacy businesses,



Manufacturing in Lockhart enjoys a strong business community network.



Murals share the Lockhart community's history.



An active rail line parallels Edgewater Drive in Lockhart.



The island of land between Orange and Hansel Avenues is underutilized.

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Pine Castle has a good commercial base.

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History is celebrated in Pine Castle as seen here at the Ann and Larry White House.

LI

many of which still house smaller-scale manufacturing businesses.

- Murals that tell some of Lockhart's history as a "hardworking and caring" community.
- Some vacant or underutilized parcels that could hold promise for future use.

Pine Castle. Finally, in Pine Castle, the panel observed the following features:

- An island of underutilized land and commercial space between S. Orange Avenue and Hansel Avenue.
- A fairly busy, low-density, and diverse commercial environment with some architecturally interesting buildings.
- A historic flavor highlighted by the Women's Club building and surroundings.
- Active neighboring communities that blur the borders of Pine Castle.



District Opportunities

The goals of Main Street programs typically center around bringing life, vibrancy, and economic vitality to a particular area of town. The panel considered their observations from the tour and layered the information gathered during the stakeholder interviews to create a more comprehensive picture of where each community stands in relation to current economic activity, community and resident buy-in/grassroots activities, capacity to support Main Street strategies, and the early best path forward for the County.

North Stars for a Main Street

Orange County elected leadership shared several goals for the community. These goals, combined with the panel's professional insights, became the following north stars around which the panel oriented its evaluation and recommendations.

Every area feels like a neighborhood. During the stakeholder interviews, community members and elected leaders mentioned that they wished for residents to feel a sense of neighborhood. This could apply just as easily to commercial areas as well as residential. Supporting this goal are local businesses that are authentic to the community as well as an environment that is safe, walkable, and family-friendly.

Significant and unique histories. Digging deeper into the histories of each area, the panel learned facts that further differentiated each community. These histories are unique to the place, create a shared understanding

of the community's growth, and should remain a factor in future economic and community development endeavors.

Innovation, activation, collaboration, and inclusion. These words were used to describe the desired approach to working in the three communities and the benefits that should result from the efforts.

Ensure communities feel/are empowered. The Main Street work is not something that can be done to communities; it should be done with them. In each instance, the communities have the power to achieve the goals they set for themselves; it's the County's responsibility to ensure that they have the resources and support to leverage their own collective power to bring about the change they desire.

Sense of destination. More than just a place to pass through, a Main Street district should be a destination in its own right. Retail, restaurants, and other commercial destinations add life during the daytime hours and into the evening. Activities, programming, events, and festivals can support the destination nature of the district and draw additional consumers to the district's businesses.

Community matters. Places are built for people and community members should feel a sense of belonging—that this place is meant for them. Main Streets can and should welcome visitors, but it is the community that surrounds and makes up the district that



Main street districts are vibrant throughout the day.



Regular programming is key to district activation.

serves as the constant, the neighbors and constituents who will be there through it all.

Assets and Opportunities

The panel identified several opportunities within each of the three communities that could be strengthened by, could influence, or might benefit from Main Street type activities.

Pine Hills

- **Aggregate lots.** Pine Hills Road is lined by lots that feature homes that have turned into commercial uses. These lots are quite shallow for broader commercial appeal and may require aggregation to attract new commercial development.

- **Activate corners.** The commercial corners, particularly the intersection of Pine Hills Road and Silver Star Road, are marked by uses that are pulled back from the street into a suburban style plaza. By activating the corners around and closer to the intersection (with uses beyond the current gas stations and convenience stores), a greater sense of place can be established, building on the municipal investment in the monumentation at that intersection.
- **Create a town center.** The area around the trail head and County fire station could be an interesting location for town center-type activities. The retention

pond could be refashioned into a water feature or amenity and, with boardwalks built around it, could complement the nearby trail system while connecting pedestrians to other uses in the area.

- **Leverage existing community connections.** Stakeholders noted the existing cultural and community hubs in Pine Hills—notably the public schools and the multi-cultural center. Recognizing these places as community hubs and gravitational centers of activity can support additional community gathering, cohesion, pride, and connection.
- **Continue utility upgrades.** In addition to the work underway to upgrade the sewer lines, additional attention should be paid to the powerlines crossing the area, particularly those at commercial corners. By placing these service lines underground, the businesses and signage at the corners gain more prominent visibility and the area becomes much more welcoming.
- **Facilitate public transit.** The new LYNX Transit Center is an exciting investment in transit access for the community. Creating strong cross connections to this resource, limiting vehicular speed in the area, and creating safe pedestrian connections is important.
- **Support greater pedestrian and non-vehicular movement.** There is a pedestrian safety initiative already underway in Pine Hills. Recent



Pine Hills*

Size: 12.2 square miles
Population: 66,111
Median Age: 35.7
Median Household Income: \$71,735
Total Housing Units: 22,219
Homeownership Rate: 63.4%

* Source: US Census Bureau

improvements, particularly fencing within the median, may need additional treatment to soften the blockade appearance and address the trash that accumulates along the fencing. Additional connections to the existing trail network should also be encouraged.

- **Inform to influence community perceptions.** Perceptions are reality. Pine Hills residents are proud of their strong homeownership rates (63 percent of residents own their home), yet the rate is actually lower than the statewide average. Broader perceptions around safety and crime can conflate with perceptions around density, creating a correlation that can result in opposition to proven multifamily housing solutions.

Lockhart

- **Build on community energy and pride.** In addition to winning the Orange County District 2 "Corridor of the Year" award and hosting a 150-year celebration, the Lockhart community also hosts a National Night Out and other events throughout the year. Special interest projects, such as the community-led public art and murals that dot the community, support community pride and help activate the streetscape. (The traditionally blue-collar community is not without its challenges, however, and stakeholders noted an issue with crime.)

Lockhart*

Size: 4.4 square miles
 Population: 14,058
 Median Age: 36.6
 Median Household Income: \$70,051
 Total Housing Units: 5,559
 Homeownership Rate: 62.1%

* Source: US Census Bureau



- **Leverage the strong business community.** The business community in Lockhart seems to know one another, with family-owned businesses—and business connections—passing from generation to generation. This can be a tremendous asset to a Main Street initiative and coordination efforts with these engaged and legacy business owners is strongly encouraged.
- **Amplify community walkability.** Lockhart is a quaint and walkable community. Pedestrian, bicycle, and other non-vehicular movement is facilitated by the trail that will run through the community.

The recent \$10M investment in the Coast to Coast Trail connector is a tremendous asset that should be leveraged through additional connections where possible.

- **Seek food and beverage opportunities.** While home to a number of small-scale manufacturers, Lockhart lacks robust retail and restaurant options, particularly for evening dining. Stakeholders called Lockhart a food desert. Recruiting restaurateurs to the community can bring more revenue and tax dollars to Lockhart while also serving the community in ways they value.

- **Explore built environment opportunities and resources.** Lockhart is full of interesting industrial buildings that could find new life as retail or dining establishments or as breweries or distilleries. The community would also be well-suited for a rail station along the forthcoming rail line—and placing it near Edgewater Drive would help further activate a Main Street-type environment. Other community-oriented uses along Edgewater—the First Baptist Church and school properties—may also present opportunities for co-location of community activities or, in the event of surplus property, potential new corridor development.

Pine Castle

- **Leverage history and community pride.** What it lacks in land area, Pine Castle makes up in community pride. Smaller than the other two communities studied, Pine Castle's early history was shaped by its railroad connections and citrus crop. This history is celebrated through its annual Pioneer Days celebration and through local institutions like the Women's Club.
- **Embrace community inclusivity, education, and diversity.** The mix of incomes and racial diversity in Pine Castle is a strength, allowing a wide population to feel welcome and at home. Plans for a

new K-12 school will further support the educational needs of area residents.

- **Address traffic concerns.** Orange Avenue, which bisects Pine Castle, is busy and creates a significant barrier to pedestrians or other non-vehicular movement east and west. Improved traffic-related infrastructure, particularly more robust pedestrian crossings, is needed, and the addition of a park-n-ride facility in Pine Castle could help pull some of the traffic from the road by encouraging more rail commutes.
- **Celebrate the island.** The land between S. Orange Avenue and Hansel Avenue creates an interesting commercial and placemaking opportunity. Highly visible from two busy roadways, the land on this "island" could be leveraged into more active and connected uses, which would benefit from the pedestrian and traffic calming suggestions noted above.
- **Create a memorable brand.** Pine Castle is sandwiched between the communities of Edgewood, Belle Isle, and Sky Lake. Whether it is a brand for Pine Castle alone or for the area more broadly, a Main Street initiative along S. Orange Avenue would benefit from the creation of a clear brand and identity for the area.



Pine Castle*

Size: 2.4 square miles

Population: 11,122

Median Age: 36.9

Median Household Income: \$46,154

Total Housing Units: 3,994

Homeownership Rate: 43.4%

* Source: US Census Bureau

Although it is technically outside of the Pine Castle limits, Cypress Grove Park plays an outsized role in the community as the location of the annual Pioneer Days celebration. The presence of the park just north of the community could be factored into Main Street programming and the identity of Pine Castle.



Activation Strategies

Activation and programming of a Main Street district are foundational to a district's success. Engaging with existing grassroots programming, events, and momentum can harness existing community energy, help support early energy within the Main Street district, and lend a sense of authenticity to the new activities. A new district is well-served by the following early actions.

Conduct surveys. Events and programming should be informed by, if not led by, the community. Surveys and robust community and business engagement can help further identify unique events that can amplify the new Main Street district's brand and strengthen its emerging community voice.

Tailor events. Event ideas can and should come from a wide range of sources, including other communities. To successfully leverage these outside ideas, events will need to be tailored to the local businesses' and neighborhood's interests.

Recruit unified leadership. None of this work can be done alone or in a silo. A Main Street champion is helpful, a board will become essential, and eventually, staff can take the lead on logistics. Through it all, a unified leadership team that is willing and able to recruit volunteers will be needed to design and run the events that will raise the visibility of the Main Street district and draw visitors, shoppers, and residents to the activities.

Frequent events and programming are key to the success of any Main Street program as they create a sense of community,

expectation, and pattern of use that will eventually translate to the businesses lining the Main Street district's roadways.

Pine Hills

Current programming. The Pine Hills Neighborhood Improvement District (NID) is an active leader in the Pine Hills community. The NID already hosts a number of community events, including:

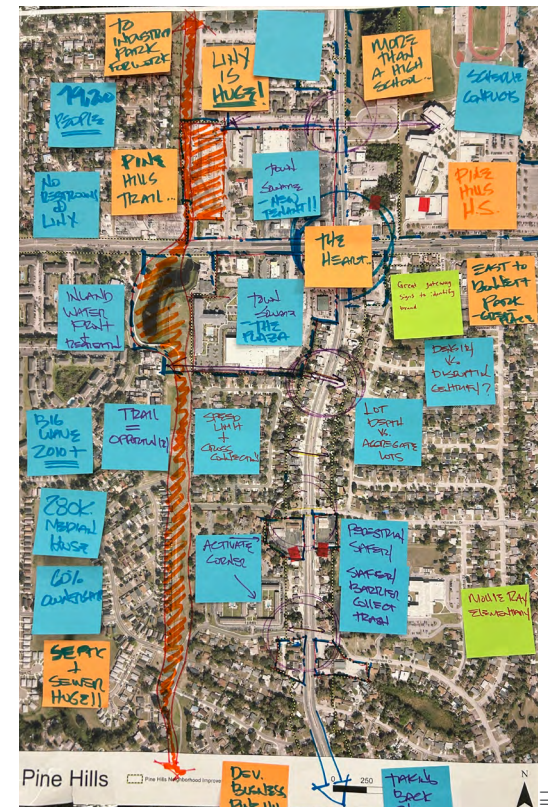
- Four annual events and one big event
- Small Business Week
- Business Corridor Cleanup
- Annual Pine Hills Parade (partner)
- Monthly meetings

Potential programming. In addition to the current NID programming, the panel listed a number of other events that might further support the community, bringing residents together, supporting local businesses, and raising the visibility of Pine Hills more broadly.

- Progressive dinner and jazz nights featuring niche pockets of Pine Hills.
- Heritage-based programming elevating the multicultural nature of the community.
- A multiplicity of events and locations to help people explore more areas of the community.
- Trail activation, with public art or an open-air market, and activating other open spaces across the community.
- "Take back the street" events using



Stakeholders shared their experiences and insights.



With community input, the panel identifies existing assets and potential new activations in Pine Hills.

Pine Hills Road as an event venue and closing it to vehicular traffic for a day or weekend.

- A plaza festival at Silver Star and Pine Hills Road leveraging the numerous large surface parking lots in the area.
- Mobile art classes at trailheads or in other community open spaces.
- Corporate sponsored events.

Development opportunities. When considering where to focus work in Pine Hills, the panel identified the following strategies:

- **Identify and activate the gateways.** With multiple busy roadways coming in and

through Pine Hills, several gateways to the community exist. By activating these gateways, people will know when they have entered Pine Hills and can begin to associate the vibrancy of the activation with the community.

- **Focus larger development along Pine Hills Road.** Pine Hills Road could be a vibrant commercial corridor, yet the shallow lot depths may prove limiting. By focusing on existing larger parcels close to intersections, critical commercial mass can be built and strengthened over time.
- **Celebrate the heart.** The intersection of Silver Star Road and Pine Hills Road should be viewed as the heart of the community. New economic activity in the heart of the community can be supported by encouraging more and denser development around the intersection and activating the parking lots with community events.
- **Take back the street.** Pine Hills Road could be turned into a community festival or plaza space by closing it to vehicular traffic and inviting the community to make it their own for a day, a night, or a weekend.
- **Celebrate the trail as an inland waterfront.** The trail that winds around the water retention area between the fire station and Golf Club Parkway could be viewed as 'inland waterfront' land and activated in a manner that brings people to relax and recreate by the waterfront.

Lockhart

Current programming. The Lockhart community has several established community events and recently hosted a 150th Celebration of the community. A sample of annual events include:

- Two large annual events
- National Night Out
- Monthly clean-up days
- Rose Avenue Celebration

Potential programming. Building on these existing events, the panel recognized an opportunity to expand Lockhart's programming to potentially include:

- Events could include tours that might appeal to young adults who might like Lockhart's industrial vibe or a more traditional rose and garden festival that leverages the existing Rose Avenue Celebration for those who love to garden.
- Food trucks and farmers markets can bring more food options and healthy food access to the area that has been noted as a food desert.
- Family events could include a couple's night out and/or a children's market that could feature a bake sale or shark tank-type event for kids.
- Public art, chalk art events, music festivals, or an art walk can encourage residents and visitors to get out and explore the neighborhoods and invite



Stakeholder interviews helped inform the panel's recommendations.

them to express themselves directly as artists if they feel so inspired.

- A wine walk or similar event could help pique the community's interest in a new winery, brewery, or distillery in the area.
- The above 'wine walk' or happy hour could be paired with tours of some of the area's manufacturing businesses, which could also tell the story of Lockhart both past and present.
- Mentorship programs with area schools could highlight the manufacturing history of Lockhart by bringing the kids to the businesses to see how products are made. Similarly, local businesses could

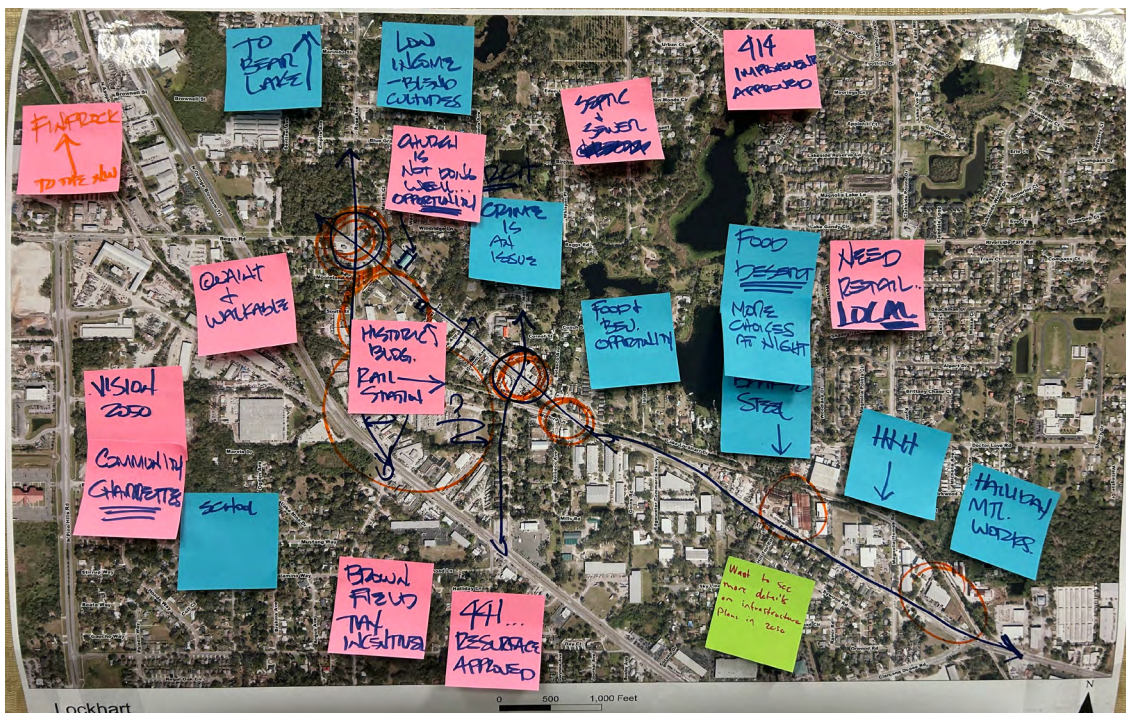
sponsor mentorship programs or a maker lab within the school.

Development opportunities. With a focus on Edgewater Drive, the panel had the following suggestions for potential development in Lockhart.

- **Activate the area between Rose Avenue and Mott Avenue.** The span of Edgewater between Rose Avenue and Mott Avenue should be the focus of initial development and Main Street efforts. The area is walkable and home to several long-standing community uses.
- **Create a civic anchor at the church property.** The northern section of the

Rose-to-Mott span is home to the Lockhart Baptist Church. In addition to being a long-standing community institution, the physical presence of the church near the intersection of Rose and Edgewater presents an opportunity for a civic or community anchor for future Main Street-type programming and events. The open space at the church property (and that of the elementary school across the street) might also hold potential as future event and programming locations.

- **Look for future rail TOD opportunities.** The rail line that travels through Lockhart runs quite close to and even crosses Edgewater. With a potential station in the works in Lockhart, transit-oriented development (TOD) would be a wise addition to this section of the city.
- **Creatively reuse the existing industrial buildings.** The industrial buildings along portions of Edgewater are visually interesting and hold some of Lockhart's community history. For those business owners interested in selling, the panel recommends creative reuse of some of these more interesting structures. (Breweries or distilleries could be great next-generation uses for those buildings.)



The panel mapped the existing assets and potential activations for Lockhart.

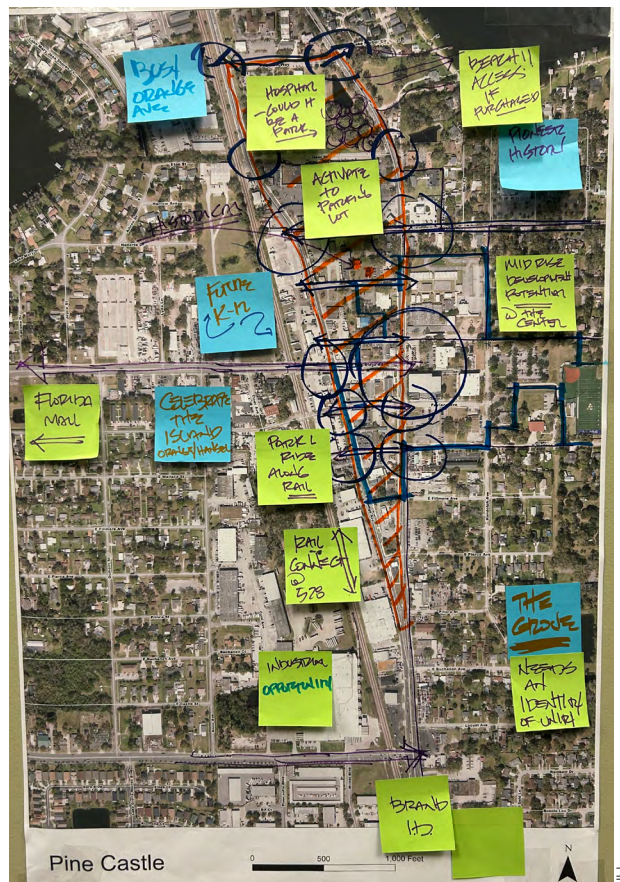
Pine Castle

Current programming. With the most active business environment of the three subject

communities, Pine Castle is also known for a few large events, including:

- Chili Cook-off
- Pioneer Days
- Women's Club monthly events

Scouting America is also quite active in Pine Castle and stakeholders noted several community activities hosted by the organization.



Stakeholders helped the panel map existing assets and helped inform potential new activation strategies.

Potential programming. Building on the existing energy, Main Street-type events in Pine Castle might include an amplification of the Pioneer Days and Chili Cook-off events as well as potential new events like those outlined below.

- The urban island of land between S. Orange Avenue and Hansel Avenue would be a great location for a food truck roundup or street festival that blocks off Hansel and uses the island as an activity anchor.
- An outdoor fair could also bring more energy and activity to the community. The urban island noted above could serve as the primary location and activities could move between the nearby blocks.
- Unique experiences, like a Renaissance festival or fishing rodeo, can bring families and fans from around the area. Unique businesses, like the Oak Ridge Gun Range, might also have interesting ideas for broader, community-centered activities that align with their customer base.
- The business community and other established organizations in Pine Castle can be good early partners and can help amplify the visibility of Main Street activities.

The County is also encouraged to host community workshops in the early days to help identify the characteristics that should shape the community's identity and brand.

Development opportunities. Pine Castle's development opportunities center around the urban island and amplifying what is currently in place.

- **Celebrate the urban island.** There is a good opportunity to better leverage the land between S. Orange Avenue and Hansel Avenue. The parking lots could be used for events and more dense land uses between the streets should be considered. Additionally, activating the east-west streets that run between Hansel and Orange Avenues would also be helpful in creating more vibrancy.
- **Explore cross-site activities.** The city's existing popular events could be used as catalysts for additional activities or complimentary events at other sites across Pine Castle.
- **Embrace existing eclectic building stock.** The community is full of interesting and unique buildings that could be highlighted and celebrated through programming, branding, or tours. Unique assets like these help differentiate a community from neighboring cities.
- **Create a unifying brand.** While it may be nice to have the lines blur between the surrounding communities, Pine Castle should also stand out and be known for its unique characteristics and cultural identity. Community workshops can help civic leaders unpack all that Pine Castle has to offer in pursuit of an identity that stands out and is authentic to the community.

- **Activate large parking lots.** The large surface parking lots in the community would be great locations for events, programming, and possibly pop-up vendors. Going forward, considering the ample supply of parking, shared-use parking could prove helpful in densifying the commercial areas without creating more surface lots while still providing adequate parking for all business operators.
- **Move quickly to create a center of gravity and create a brand.** With potential development on the horizon in and around Pine Castle, the community should move quickly to create a commercial center of gravity AND a community brand identity before neighboring new development pulls the energy in its direction or casually brands Pine Castle in a way that does not serve the community well.

Existing Organizational Capacity

Through its evaluations of each community, the panel also considered the existing organizational capacity present in each. Main Street programs require leadership, volunteers, and stamina from both in order to host the events, engage with the business and residential community, and sustain the energy needed for positive impact. While not exhaustive lists, the following organizations were noted by stakeholders as having a good presence in each community. Any one of

these could be foundationally supportive to a Main Street initiative or, in some cases, could be tapped to provide initial staffing support until the program can sustain itself.

The elected leadership representing each community has also demonstrated a keen interest in this work and may provide additional resources or support if needed.

Pine Hills

- Neighborhood Improvement District
- Chamber of Commerce
- Pine Hills Safe Neighborhood
- Pine Hills Community Council
- Greater American Haitian Chamber

Lockhart

- Faith-based entities
- People of Lockhart Community Association
- Strong informal and legacy business network

Pine Castle

- Pine Castle Women's Club
- Pine Castle Historical Society
- Pine Castle Safe Communities
- Pine Castle Preservation Association
- Pine Castle Safe Neighborhoods
- Pioneers Day Board
- South Orange Chamber of Commerce

The path forward will require ...

Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper

The communities will need to find ways to host programming that is light (easy to execute), quick (can be hosted without months of preparation or lead time), and cost-effective as funds in early days will be limited.

Slow Money

Financial support for Main Street efforts will likely require "slow money," which can best be described as funders who do not require a return on their investment within typical investment time frames. Also called "patient capital," these funders are supportive of systems-level change and are willing to wait for the change (i.e., the "return" on their investment) to occur.

Big and Bold

No one makes a splash with just one raindrop. Work on Main Street initiatives requires bold thinking and big ideas that can gain attention and create momentum.



Alignment with Main Street Programs

Main Street Potential

While there may be some differences in community readiness and identified capacity, each of the three communities studied by the panel has the potential to become a Main Street program.

Community-Led is Mission-Critical

It is critical to underline the premise that community-based, grassroots efforts should lead and underpin all “Main Street” work. Top-down initiatives will lack authenticity and struggle to gain the critical community buy-in that drives event attendance and bolsters programming and activation activities.

State and National Alignments

There are unique benefits and challenges associated with the [Florida Main Street](#) program and the national [Main Street America](#) program. A few of the key differences are outlined below.

Benefits of an organized coalition. Both programs offer helpful educational resources and organizational guidance that can prove very helpful in the early days of launching an initiative. The networks curated at both levels, made up of other Main Street initiatives across the state or the entire US can also prove helpful in sharing best practices, identifying additional resources, or sharing event or speaker ideas.

Challenges of the state and national programs. There are also some challenges

that come with joining either the state or national program that should be considered. The national program has a fee structure that may prove limiting and its strict organizational

structure, which supports broad success, may not provide the level of flexibility a community may seek. The national program also requires that staff be in place and that a \$250,000 budget is achievable.

Main Street Principles from the Florida Program

The following principles, detailed by Florida’s Main Street program, should underpin any community embarking on a Main Street initiative.

- 1. Comprehensive.** Downtown revitalization is a complex process and cannot be accomplished through a single project. For successful long-term revitalization, a comprehensive approach must be used.
- 2. Incremental.** Small projects and simple activities lead to a more sophisticated understanding of the revitalization process and help to develop skills so that more complex problems can be addressed, and more ambitious projects undertaken.
- 3. Grass roots.** Local leaders must have the desire and the will to make the project successful. The National Main Street Center and the state Main Street program provide direction, ideas, and training, but continued and long-term success depends upon the involvement and commitment of the community.
- 4. Public/private partnership.** Both the public and private sectors have a vital interest in the economic health and physical viability of the downtown. Each sector has a role to play, and each must understand the other’s strengths and limitations so that an effective partnership can be forged.
- 5. Identifying and capitalizing on existing assets.** Business districts must capitalize on the assets that make them unique. Every district has unique qualities – like distinctive buildings and human scale that give people a sense of belonging. These local assets must serve as the foundation for all aspects of the revitalization process.
- 6. Quality.** Quality must be emphasized in every aspect of the revitalization program. This applies equally to each element of the program, from storefront design to promotional campaigns and to educational programs.
- 7. Change.** Changes in attitude and practice are necessary to improve current economic conditions. Public support for change will build as the program grows.
- 8. Implementation-oriented.** Activity creates confidence in the program and ever-greater levels of participation. Frequent, visible changes are a reminder that the revitalization effort is under way. Small projects at the beginning of the program pave the way for larger activities as the revitalization effort matures.

Generally, the Florida Main Street program has lower start-up fees and lighter reporting requirements. These lower barriers to entry and operation can free up critical (and often limited) energy for deeper local impact.

Success Hinges On...

The success of a Main Street initiative depends upon the ability of the leadership, residents, and business owners within the identified Main Street geography to commit to the process, the activities, and the Main Street identity.

Grassroots. Early community engagement, support, and leadership will help ensure that the effort is rooted in the community and that the activities executed are thoughtful and curated to align with the district's unique identity and value proposition.

Leadership. Throughout the life of the Main Street initiative, active and engaged civic, business, and community leadership is required. In the early days, these leaders help rally the resources to get the initiative off the ground. Sustaining that leadership interest and support will help with the continuity of resources and broader strategic planning for the organization.

Resources. In addition to public resources provided in early days to help launch the effort, additional private capital (e.g., slow money or philanthropic funding) will be needed to help sustain the work over time. Fundraising is a constant need and public-private partnerships are encouraged.

Sense of place. Creating or curating a sense of place, highlighting the character of the Main Street geography, and making sure the district is a place people want to be and return to are important factors in delivering and sustaining a successful Main Street experience.

Recommendations

Based on this TAP study, the panel recommends the County continue its work with the three communities to build or strengthen grassroots efforts toward establishing a Main Street district. Through these efforts, it may soon become clear which community is ready to move formally into a Main Street program.

Additional structural questions that will require early consideration in any Main Street formation:

- How will the Main Street program run? Will it be community-led or will it be led and run by Orange County?
- Who will be on the board? How will the board best represent the district with business members, residents, and other related organizational leadership?

Once initial formation efforts are underway, the panel noted a preference for a potential future alignment with the State's Main Street program over the Main Street America (national) program.

Where to Begin

The panel believes that the decision to launch a Main Street initiative should come from the community with support from the County. To reach a point where the community is comfortable making that determination for itself, the County is encouraged to engage with each community, share its ideas for a Main Street initiative in their area, and share information about the benefits and associated responsibilities of running a district.

Pine Hills. Presently, Pine Hills has demonstrated strong community participation and engagement. The initial challenge in Pine Hills may involve identifying a physical center of gravity in a community that has multiple commercial hubs.

Lockhart. The legacy businesses in Lockhart are a clear community strength and would serve as a great foundation for a Main Street program. More grassroots community engagement is needed to determine broader interest and support.

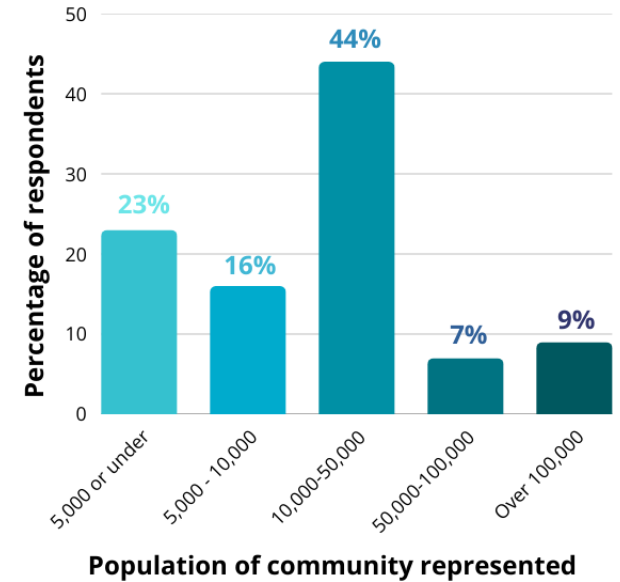
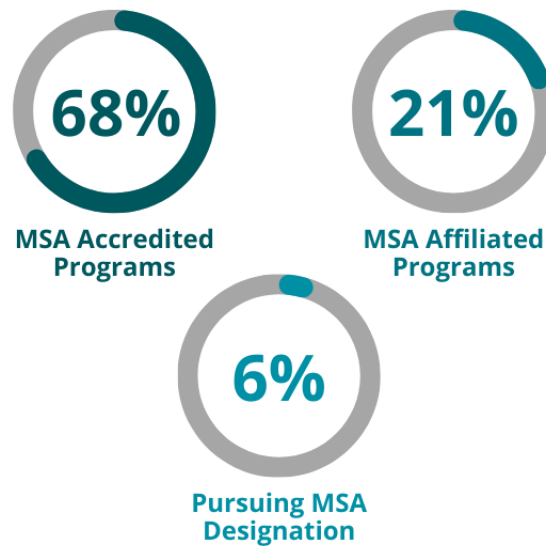
Pine Castle. The existing economic activity in Pine Castle is a great foundation for a Main Street district. There may be challenges in early days, however, with finding consensus among the various community, organizational, and business stakeholders.

The following information was published in a March 2025 Main Street America blog wherein authors shared findings from an annual Main Street America survey conducted to understand leaders' challenges, opportunities, goals, and network needs.

“Every year, local Main Street leaders tout successful events and support for existing businesses as their top two wins, and placemaking has been the third or fourth highest priority each year. But in 2025, leaders touted advocacy with government officials more often than in years past (16% in 2025; 8% in 2024), as well as success with accessing new sources of revenue (15% in 2025; 10% in 2024 and 2023). Meanwhile, in 2025, only 2% of respondents cited support for housing development as a major win, which is half as many as in the two years prior.”

—EMI MORITA, MANAGER OF RESEARCH
AND MICHAEL POWE, PH.D. SENIOR
DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH
MAIN STREET AMERICA

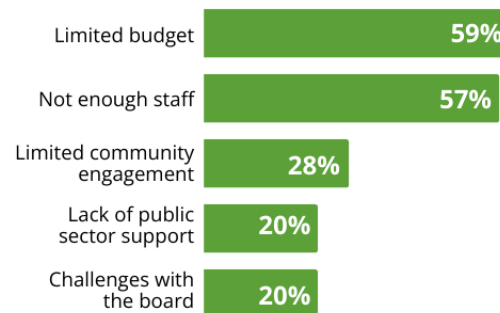
Survey Respondents Represented the Full Breadth of the Movement



SOURCE: MAIN STREET AMERICA

The challenges and frustrations facing Main Street organizations and communities have been consistent over the past few years, with some notable exceptions

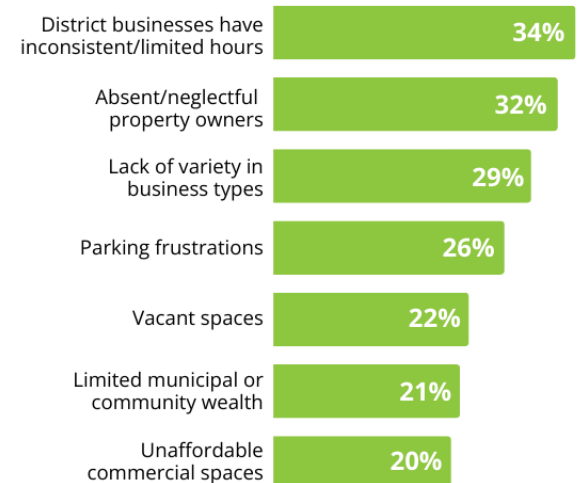
Top Organizational Challenges



64%

of those who selected “Limited budget” as a top challenge had budgets of \$100k or more

Top Community Challenges



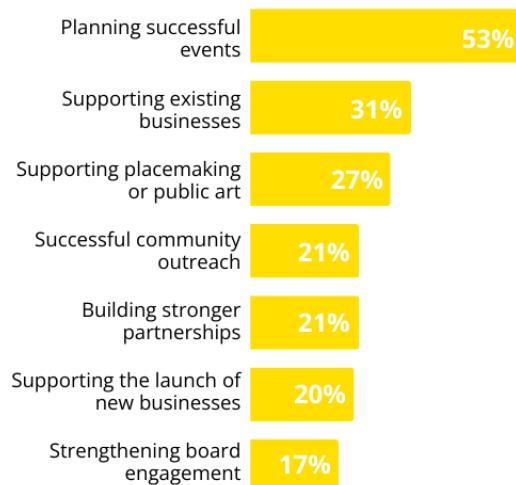
SOURCE: MAIN STREET AMERICA

Successful events continued to stand out as top organizational wins, and grant opportunities emerged as the most preferred form of support needed

The rest of the survey findings are posted on the Main Street blog [here](#).

Information provided courtesy of Main Street America and authors Emi Morita and Michael Powe.

Top Organizational Wins



Top Preferred Forms of Support



SOURCE: MAIN STREET AMERICA

Conclusion and Next Steps

Each community has the potential to support a Main Street program. While Orange County is interested in launching Main Street efforts in one or more of the communities studied, grassroots efforts should lead and underpin all Main Street work. The County does have critical roles to play in these early days and its continued support and advocacy will be important going forward.

Next Steps

The County is encouraged to take the following next steps to incentivize the community to take advantage of a Main Street program:

1. Hire internal staff (one or more) to manage the County's role in the Main Street process. Later this should include providing educational and awareness-building activities, organizational support/community of practice for Main Street leaders, and advocacy.
2. Host community charrettes to inform the three communities about the Main Street program, its benefits, and community roles in its implementation.
3. Provide initial seed funding to communities to support their early conversations and district formation efforts.
4. Consider using Orlando DTO grants or similar programs as a model for supporting façade and other building improvements along key commercial corridors.

5. Set a tone of a frictionless development environment to encourage and streamline the real estate and economic development activities in the identified districts.

Once the above actions have been addressed, the following selection criteria for additional Main Street funding could prove helpful. Communities should be able to demonstrate or provide:

- A defined organization, an individual champion or point of contact, and a unified voice for the district.
- Identification of a clear brand for the community or the district.
- Active grassroots momentum with an understanding of future Main Street criteria. The County is encouraged to prioritize grassroots efforts.
- Ability to form a board with early commitments from key members, and ability to raise funding outside of County grants.
- A one-, three-, and five-year plan of actionable steps for the district.

It might also be helpful for those interested in Main Street program pursuits to consider collaborations with or other organizational alignments with NIDs or Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) to help gain synergy and focus.

Broadly, the County's Main Street efforts should help define district boundaries and reinforce community identity. The Main Street work should synergize with current land use intensities in the communities, align with Vision 2050, and support and amplify grassroots efforts in the community.

In each instance, across all three communities, a deeper dive with community stakeholders will be needed to identify overlaps and gaps for a potential Main Street district. District boundaries should be determined by the community, including resident and business voices, yet those edges should blur, remaining mindful that hard edges can create boundaries and become exclusionary. Instead, living and organic boundaries will support the broader community as well and well-programmed center(s) of gravity can create a destination, a strong sense of place, and a nexus around which and within which all community members can live, work, and play.

ABOUT THE PANEL

Pictured here with County staff





Panel Chair
David Crabtree,
AIA, LEED, WELL
AP

Principal
HiveWorkshop

Dave's passion is
 fostering design

excellence focused on positive impacts for the human experience and community value through a collaborative research-based process. As the founder of HiveWorkshop, he has honed a reflexive regional modern design approach with leading global design firms such as Perkins&Will, Gensler, and Little in a wide variety of project types and scales. Dave combines a construction background with a foundation of over 18 years of award-winning design experience spanning workplace, corporate headquarters, urban mixed-use, urban design, public safety headquarters, municipal planning, transit, and other health and community project types.



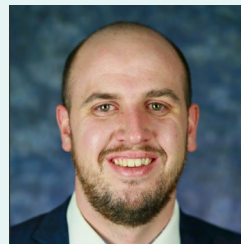
Monica Pinjani
Chawla, LEED GA

Urban Designer &
Founder
Square Inch Design

With a focus on all
 things people, design,

and equity, Monica is a passionate urbanist and architect interested in the entire project life cycle, creating better urban places to improve individual quality of life while advancing environmental, social, and economic outcomes. With over 15 years of experience across both the private and public sectors, Monica has collaborated with

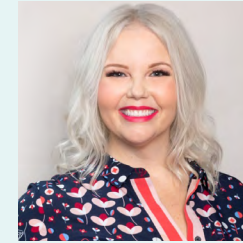
clients and stakeholders to push the boundaries of design and practice excellence. By adeptly blending urban design and policy she looks forward to collaborating and developing ideas big and small through site experience, conversation, and activism. Monica received her MSAUD, Master's in Science Architecture and Urban Design from Columbia University, New York.



Spencer Evans
Former Economics
Professor, Penn State
President
Extreme Graphics

Spencer is the President
 of Extreme Graphics
 (EGX), a national sign,

signage, and wayfinding company headquartered in Central Florida. EGX specializes in hospitality, multifamily, and corporate sign programs across the country. Spencer acquired EGX in August 2024 after a nationwide search for real estate-adjacent businesses. Prior to acquiring EGX, Spencer was an Instructor and Research Economist in the Real Estate group at the Smeal College of Business at Penn State University where he taught courses on Commercial Real Estate valuation. Spencer's research was focused on place-based policies (Opportunity Zones), CMBS default risk modeling, and LEED/Energy Star renovations Capital Expenditures in Commercial Real Estate. Prior to Penn State, Spencer worked at Lockheed Martin and received Bachelors Degrees in Supply Chain/Operations and Quantitative Economics from Brigham Young University.



Misty M. Heath
Executive Director
SoDo Main Street
District

With a passion for
 fostering vibrant,
 thriving communities,
 Misty brings over a

decade of expertise in leadership, administration, and strategic planning. Her work is rooted in enhancing collaboration, streamlining operations, and delivering impactful initiatives that leave lasting benefits for organizations and the people they serve.

Whether overseeing complex projects, driving engagement within diverse teams, or implementing innovative solutions to address community needs, Misty approaches every challenge with a results-driven mindset and a genuine desire to make a difference. Her ability to balance big-picture thinking with detail-oriented execution has been the key to her success in managing programs, budgets, and operations that elevate both efficiency and impact.



Diana Marrero-Pinto

**Executive Director
Kissimmee Main
Street**

Diana Marrero-Pinto has served as the Executive Director for Kissimmee

Main Street since 2016. In her position, Diana establishes policies and procedures for the organizations and creates the strategic plans for the Kissimmee Main Street district. Diana has an extensive background within the non-profit field and community development from her time working in Lorain County, Ohio. Diana believes that a healthy community requires that everyone have a place at the table, and she is an advocate for all. Whether promoting and supporting small business development and longevity or assisting a number of nonprofit organizations, her personal mission is to help people, change lives, and build community.



Emma Maury

**SODO Board
Member
Senior Development
Manager
Atrium Management**

Emma Maury is a driving force within

Atrium Capital Group, assuming the role of Senior Development Manager with a focus on orchestrating all facets of our development projects and spearheading the expansion of the company's portfolio. A proud UCF Knight, Emma holds a BS degree in Legal Studies and boasts over a decade of experience in the commercial real estate realm, stemming from her roots in the construction industry. With a rich background collaborating with various stakeholders across Central and South Florida, Emma is deeply rooted in the community, having called Orlando home for more than 25 years. Her passion for the outdoors is unparalleled, as she finds solace in activities like animal encounters, biking, diving, and flying.



Samia Singleton, FRA-RA

**Community
Redevelopment
Agency Manager
City of Kissimmee**

Samia Singleton is the Community

Redevelopment Agency Manager for the City of Kissimmee, overseeing projects for both the Downtown Kissimmee Community Redevelopment Agency and Vine Street Community Redevelopment Agency. A Rochester, NY native, she relocated to Florida ten years ago by way of Colorado after completing a two-year term as an Americorp VISTA for an economic development corporation. Before joining the City of Kissimmee, Samia was an Economic Development Specialist and Redevelopment Specialist for the City of Cocoa, FL. Her diverse background ranges from journalism to corporate social responsibility in the oil and gas industry. She is a certified Florida Redevelopment Association Redevelopment Administrator (FRA-RA). Samia has a passion for developing local solutions that leave a lasting impact on communities.