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# THE COMMERCIAL SPACE AS AN ENGINE FOR URBAN REGENERATION: THE MAIN STREET PROGRAM IN THE UNITED STATES



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# The commercial space as an engine for urban regeneration: the Main Street Program in the United States

## Public space and commercial activities

Commercial activities have traditionally been among the main activities that determined the birth of the city and consequently of the public space. Even today, 'going downtown' evokes taking a walk to admire the shop windows, buy something, have a coffee.

In ancient times both the *Greek Agora* and the *Roman Forum* were the place of commercial functions, as well as of information exchange and political debate. In the medieval city the 'market square' was the beating heart of the community, together with the cathedral square and the town hall square; but not only the squares, even the streets, as well as being transit channels, represented an additional space of the house, where merchandise was exhibited or crafts work was carried out. For centuries public space has been, to a good extent, the privileged place for commercial activities, creating an indissoluble relationship between commerce and the city.

Apart from the tradition of *Arab bazzaars*, only in the nineteenth century in Europe some building structures specifically dedicated to commercial activities were born, such as covered markets, department stores and galleries. And today some large buildings, the shopping centers, tend to compensate for the total absence of urban functions in the endless and anonymous suburbs, in the United States as in Europe and in our country. The development of large shopping centers in suburban areas has often put in crisis the commercial areas of downtown, which have had to adopt adequate countermeasures, promoting the birth of 'natural shopping centers', i.e. not closed inside an artificial space but organized around the public urban space. The latter, today, are increasingly seen as an engine for the regeneration of degraded urban areas, because on the one hand they provide a solid economic base for regeneration, on the other they push towards a redevelopment of urban space, whose quality is proved to be one of the most important attractors of users and consumers. This paper illustrates some experiences of urban regeneration lead in the United States, related to a program promoted by the Federal government called *Main street* which, in the course of more than 30 years since its foundation, has involved States and hundreds of municipalities.

## The National Program 'Main Street America'

The *Main Street America Program*<sup>1</sup> is one of the most important examples of a program of actions largely based on the economic role of the commercial sector and aimed at urban redevelopment, with particular reference to small – medium – sized urban centers or historic districts inside of large metropolitan areas.

The program was launched in 1977 by the *National Trust for Historic Preservation* as a tool to reverse the process of abandonment and crisis of the historic centers of many American cities, due to the development of suburbanization<sup>2</sup>. After 30 years from its foundation<sup>3</sup>, Main street presents an absolutely positive balance compared to the results obtained, both in terms of urban redevelopment and in terms of economic impact; the reasons for this success lies in the characteristics of the program itself, which we can summarize in four fundamental aspects:

*Involvement of the local community.* The first is certainly linked to the ability to involve in the process of revitalization the local community, which is the true protagonist of the process; Main street is an unthinkable and unachievable program without the active participation of the stakeholders and of the entire community, whose role is fundamental in the planning, management and implementation phase.

*Integration and multi-sectoral.* Another of Main Street's characteristics is that of being cross-sector, i.e. able to involve all the possible aspects related to the revitalization of the area, from the promotion of commercial activities, to the recovery of historic buildings, to housing, to social and cultural aspects; a multi-sector approach, whose purpose is not only to address all the themes in an integrated way but also to involve the greatest number of 'stakeholders' and thus to expand the participatory basis of the community.

*Lighter, quicker and cheaper.* Another of the reasons for the success of Main street lies in its ability to demonstrate that concrete and visible results can be achieved within a short period. Hence the distinction between *short* and *medium-term strategies*, the last entrusted with the task of giving solid foundations and sustainability to projects; normally these strategies are based on 'milestones', objectives capable of ensuring substantial and lasting changes over time and capable of transmitting to the community the sense of a process of solid and not ephemeral innovation. *Short-term strategies*, on the other hand, must instill in the community the feeling that the efforts and the path taken are effective and correct, and that the objectives are achievable in a lighter, quicker and cheaper way, that is without excessive expenditure of energy, in a short time and at a low cost.

*Recovery and enhancement of historical environments.* Main Street is presented as a program of actions that has as its main goal the overall revitalization of urban areas, but with particular reference to those with historical characteristics, being the program

1 For a general knowledge of the history, the goals and the experiences of the Main Street program you can look at the website: <https://www.mainstreet.org/home>

2 There is a deep difference between Main street and other similar programs like the *Business Improvement District* (BID) or the *Business Improvement Areas* (BIA); in fact, while the last tend to improve urban quality and services in great commercial areas, Main street has the specific goal to conserve the historic heritage of the old, small – medium sized urban centers, with a primary role assigned to small commercial activities and crafts.

3 After a limited amount of pilot projects, in 1985 the *Main Street Network* was set up to sprawl the program around the Nation; at the beginning of this Century the network started to develop increasingly complex and integrated programs in partnership with local Community Development Corporations. Today Main Street network, renamed in 2015 *Main Street America*, involves over 2000 *local communities* and has devoted, from the beginning of its activity around 66 billion dollars, creating over 500.000 jobs and restructuring 260.000 buildings.



promoted and supported by the *National Trust*, due to the fundamental role played by heritage, in a relatively young country like the United States, in promoting and strengthening the sense of community identity.

«More importantly, however, historic preservation has become a fundamental tool for strengthening American communities. It has proven to be an effective tool for a wide range of public goals including small business incubation, affordable housing, sustainable development, neighborhood stabilization, center city revitalization, job creation, promotion of the arts and culture, small town renewal, heritage tourism, economic development, and others » (Ripkema , Cheong, Randall, 2011: 1).

*The role of Social Housing.* A final brief consideration regards the role that Social housing programs are acquiring within Main Street, to help the moving of new residents to the area or as a response to the gentrification process that revitalization programs may create. This strategy not only responds to the need to create multi-purpose areas, but also contributes to solving the problem of the availability of housing for lower-income families, a problem whose social relevance has grown during these years of crisis.

So in recent years, within the Main street programs Social housing interventions are provided, often supported by the Federal Government (Department of Housing and Urban Development) and largely managed by non-profit associations, some of which are Community Development Corporations (Fera, 2008; Walker, 2002),<sup>4</sup> whose goal is the social and economic promotion of local communities, with integrated actions that include housing but also health, training, elderly care, job placement, etc.

Among these we had the opportunity to know directly the experience carried out in recent years by *Better Housing Coalition*, an association active in Richmond and in general in Virginia, which has the main purpose to provide low-cost homes for the most popular and disadvantaged categories; the latter are less and less traditional families, but mostly concern lonely elderly people, divorced women with children, etc. Faced with this new and growing social demand, BHC is working to strongly innovate the housing offer, through co-housing, apartments equipped with numerous shared services (nursery, laundry, kitchen, meeting rooms, etc...). As a non-profit organization BHC has been able to carry out many interventions using the *Low Income Housing Tax Credit* mechanism, according to which a non-profit organization, which plays the role of developer of a social housing project, receives from the Federal Government a tax credit roughly equal to the amount of the project, which can be transferred to a private company (investor), usually a large bank, receiving in exchange an equivalent financing (JCHS, 2010).

## The methodological approach

According to what already illustrated, we can say that the methodological model of Main Street is based on some key elements:

- an *integrated approach* that involves various themes and different sectors, from the re-launch of commercial activities, to housing problems, to the consideration of local culture and aspirations, etc.;
- *action oriented and incremental strategy*, that starts from the idea that small projects, that can be easily realized, can make a big difference giving to the whole community and economic operators the sense that 'Things are happening', that the program is under way and generating in this way collective trust;

<sup>4</sup> See the web site of the *National Congress for Community Economic Development*:

<https://www.eli.org/brownfields-program/national-congress-community-economic-development-nccd>

- *activation of local capacities and promotion of public-private partnership*, i.e. the program must be able to promote an active collaboration between public and private, enhancing the different roles and generating a virtuous process to help the entire local community to recognize and promote its own resources and capabilities;
- *promoting environmental quality*; from the design of public space to the recovery of historical buildings, quality is one of the main objectives for the success of the program.

Basically Main Street identifies a methodology defined as ‘of common sense’, based essentially on the involvement and enhancement of existing local social, economic and environmental resources; an approach, therefore, ‘communicative’, where aspects of scientific nature (study of the economic and social conditions of the context) are flanked by aspects of a more ‘narrative’ character, in which the ‘feeling of the community’, ‘the sense of place’ come into play, due to the historical heritage, local traditions, etc. In other words it is a methodology based on a mix of science and art, economy and culture, able to trigger a real process of community – based revitalization and which provides for a joint program in three different steps:

1. The construction of the Community vision and the analysis of the market (the inputs of the plan);
2. The definition of transformation strategies;
3. Impacts and evaluations in both quantitative and qualitative terms (outputs).

*The construction of the community vision.* The Main Street approach begins with the creation of a community vision supported by an analysis of the realities of the neighborhood market that aims to evaluate:

- the potential catchment area of probable consumers;
- the trend of the population, the composition of households, income and spending capacity within the basin;
- the consumption trends in relation to the different goods offered on the market and the current location of the supply of some goods;
- the number of commercial activities in the area according to the different product sectors.

The Vision is based on the ability of the local community to prefigure a specific role for its future (artistic or cultural hub, innovative district, etc.), with respect to the objectives of the transformation, that must be integrated and multi-sectoral. The identification of a specific role, based on local potential, must put the district in a position to present itself as a specialized and highly competitive place of excellence in the chosen sector.

*Community Transformation Strategies.* Following and consistently with the proposed Vision, the model provides for the identification of transformation strategies defining the actions that the community intends to adopt to achieve the Vision; transformation strategies tend to be selective and normally 2 or 3 key strategies are identified, both in the short and in the long term. Each transformation strategy is developed according to the four key areas indicated in the model guidelines, namely:

- *Economic vitality.* Creating an environment and the most favorable conditions to promote the investments of small and medium-sized entrepreneurs existing on site, represents a sort of pre-condition necessary for the overall enhancement of the district. In this context, the historical-artistic heritage and the traditions in the productive and commercial fields are considered the main resources to move from;
- *Design.* A welcoming and of high quality urban environment is considered a fundamental condition for attracting users and visitors, whether for cultural, com-

mercial or catering activities; from this point of view Main street, we said, tends to favor the historical districts as they have a high environmental quality potential compared to other areas.

- *Promotion.* The promotion of the area involved in the project can take place in many forms through: the highlighting of cultural traditions, the celebration and conservation of important architectures and history, encouraging local companies to act in a cooperative way, promoting commercial offer campaigns, hosting special events to enhance the perceived image of the district.
- *Organization.* Another aspect to consider is that of guaranteeing the conception and implementation of the program through appropriate forms of organization (ad hoc foundation, non-profit organization, public or mixed company, etc.) but, whatever the choice made, the goal is to put in place all the necessary resources, from financial to human.

Two case studies will help to better understand the idea of the work method and the path followed: the Main Street program of the *Shaw district in Washington DC* and the recovery of the *Brookland Park boulevard*, a commercial corridor in Richmond, Virginia.

### Main street Shaw in Washington DC

Being one of the most 'ancient' cities of the United States, the capital Washington presents one of the nation's most important historical heritage and its conservation and enhancement is one of the main objectives of urban policies<sup>5</sup>. In this context Main Street has played a major role since 2002 (the year of the creation of the 'District of Columbia Main Street program') in the revitalization and conservation of the important historical and cultural heritage. The mission of 'DC Main Street' was to revitalize the commercial corridors that characterize the numerous districts surrounding the historic-monumental center; many of these neighborhoods originated in the second half of the nineteenth century and were often of ethnic origin, as the example that we will discuss later, born to host African-American population. Created with the contribution of the *National Trust* and placed within the 'Department of Small and Local Business Development' (DSLBD) in 2016, the Main Street program in Washington counted on 10 active programs in as many commercial corridors around the Capital<sup>6</sup>.

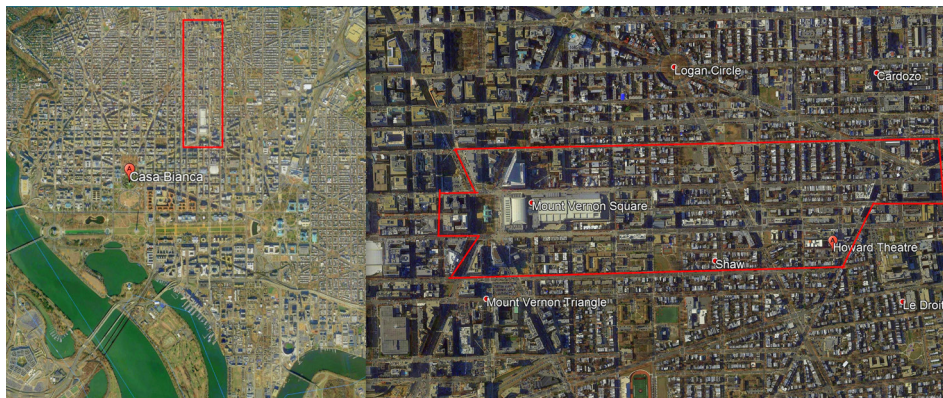


Figure 1 | Left: map of Washington with the area of Shaw; in the center the Monumental area of the Capital with the White House; down on the left the Pentagon; right a detailed map of the area of the commercial corridor.

5 For the great part of the information related to the Shaw experience we have to thank, for her precious cooperation, Cristina Amoruso, head of the Main Street program in Washington DC, who also meet us in a on-site tour.

6 On the experience of Main Street Washington see: *Departement of Small and Local Business Development*: <http://dslbd.dc.gov/service/DCMS>



Among these, the Shaw district (located north of the Monumental Center) (Fig. 1) program is one of the most significant and won the *Great America Main Street Award* in 2016.

The African-American cultural roots marked the development of the neighborhood, that became the seat of theaters and venues where jazz was played, and during the beginning of last century a commercial corridor between the 7th and 9th streets was created, featuring the development of the area. But in 1968 the district was the scene of a revolt of the black population, an event that started a process of decline, with the closure of several businesses and the abandonment of the neighborhood by several residents. At the end of the last century two important achievements created the premises for the rebirth of the district: the construction of a *Green Line subway station* in 1991 and the construction of the *Walter E. Washington Convention Center*, a structure of about 200,000 square meters with 70 meeting and conference rooms and hosting around 1 million visitors a year.

The resources offered by the district today represent the strengths on which the revitalization process was founded. First of all, the high accessibility guaranteed by the presence of two underground lines (the Green line mentioned above and more recently the Yellow line) with two different stations, and the presence of important motorway junctions.

The rich cultural tradition of the neighborhood is linked to some legendary figures of Jazz, like Duke Ellington, born in Shaw, and is embodied in the famous Howard Theater (Fig.2), recently restored, historical site of Jazz and R&B concerts. Strengthened by this tradition, Shaw is home to numerous clubs where you can listen to some excellent music, which represent a specific attraction to the whole city (Fig. 3).



Figure 2 | The Howard theatre recently restored.



Figure 3 | Buildings of the end of XIX Century at Shaw.

The Shaw Main Street program began operating in 2003, with the identification of the intervention area, a rectangle of about 2 km x 800 meters including about thirty blocks. The interventions regarded mainly:

- *low-interest loans* up to a maximum of \$ 50,000 for small investors, for the launch of commercial activities (DSLBD) or for the recovery of historic buildings;
- *training and technical assistance* to investors in the preparation and implementation of their projects, with particular attention to the recovery of historic buildings;
- *development of studies and market surveys* in order to lead investors towards the activities most requested by residents or those lacking in the area;
- *additional services* such as street cleaning, planning and care of urban green areas, improvement of road signs, overall improvement of the quality of public space;
- *marketing and promotional activities* including the organization of cultural or recreational events to attract visitors to the area.

In addition to this small activity, some important large pilot projects have been promoted, including two which seem to be of great importance:

- The *Citymarket at O Street project*, a \$ 330 million investment to build a 72,000 square meter Giant Food Supermarket, a 182-room hotel, 497 apartments and 560 parking spaces (Fig. 4).
- The *Wonder bread factory*, a technological hub and co-working space, hosting studios and laboratories in the high-tech sectors, obtained from the recovery of an old bread factory built in 1911.



Figure 4 | The Giant Food Supermarket at O Street.

### The commercial revitalization plan of Brookland Park boulevard

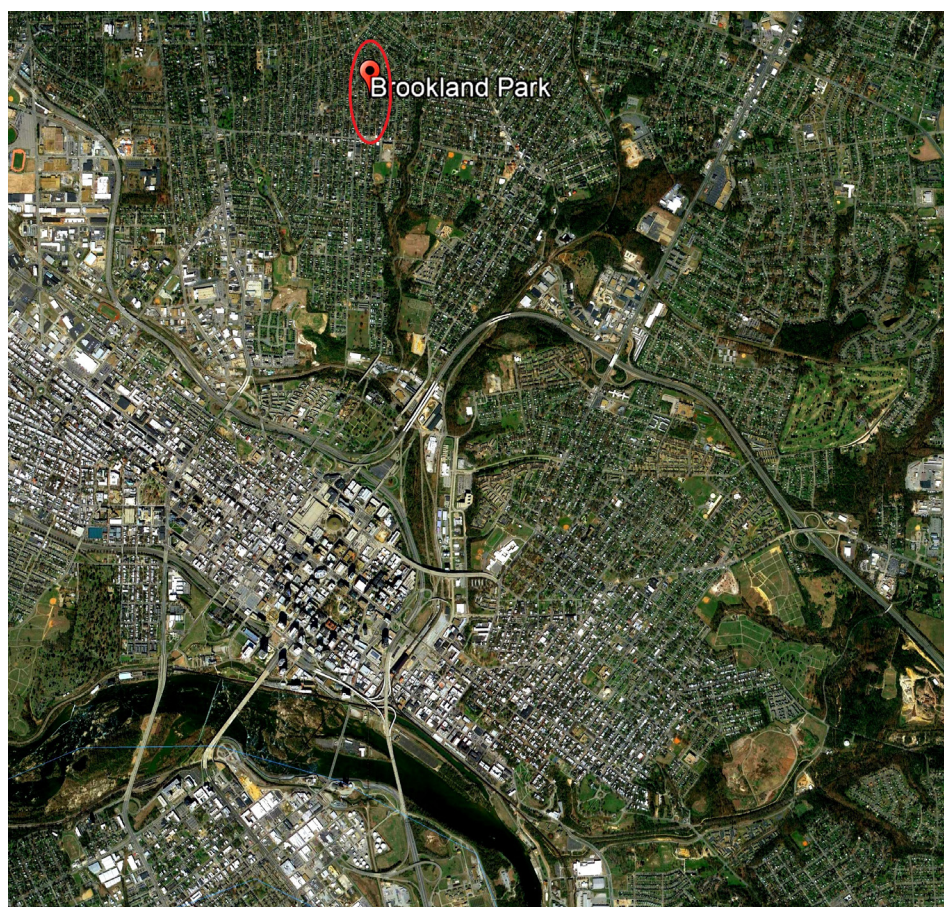
Main Street was also widely used in the state of Virginia (Accordino, Fasulo, 2015) and it was inspired by several other interventions; among these, an interesting example concerned the area of the *Brookland Park Boulevard* in Richmond<sup>7</sup>. The plan proposed the revitalization of the area through the enhancement of commercial activities that, with alternating events over the years, had characterized the economy and urban development. The Boulevard in question represents an important traffic corridor as a gate from the north to the city center of Richmond (Fig. 5) and connecting axis between two major interstate highways: the I 95 and the I 64 connecting Richmond to Kansas city. Thanks to this enviable position, since the end of the nineteenth century, the boulevard has been a place of great traffic and therefore a privileged place for the birth of commercial activities.

This commercial vocation has also encouraged the emergence of residential settlements in the surroundings, with the formations of some districts now considered 'historic' for the entire first half of the last century (Fig. 6). Since the 1960s, the sharp increase in the African-American population has led to a displacement of the white population with a higher income, and this has led to a policy of disinvestment, abandonment of real estate, closure of commercial activities. At the end of the 80s the first attempts to start a policy of recovery and revitalization of the area were witnessed; the first interventions implemented in 1988 included a program to restore the façades of historic buildings, thanks to the birth of the *Higland Park community Development Corp.*

<sup>7</sup> The *Brookland Park Boulevard commercial revitalization plan* has been elaborated for the City of Richmond and the Brookland Park Community, by a group of teachers and students of the *Virginia Commonwealth University* coordinated by professor John Accordino in December 2005. See: Accordino, 2005.



Since 1996 these efforts have been increased thanks to the efforts of the *Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority* and a Municipal program for relaunching commercial activities.



*Figure 5 | Downtown di Richmond and the area of Brookland Park.*



*Figure 6 | The Brookland Theater and typical buildings of the beginning of XX Century.*



*Diagnosis: strengths and weaknesses.* With the 2005 plan the city of Richmond and the Community of Brookland Park wished to bet on the possibility of returning to the previous vitality and the commercial importance of the area, starting from some significant ‘strengths’ we have already mentioned, like the historical value and its high accessibility near downtown Richmond. Furthermore, the social and economic conditions of the population of the surrounding areas, a well-established middle class, offer good prospects for commercial activities, in terms of spending capacity and consumer propensity. Finally, some commercial activities that are characteristic of the area must be considered, first of all the one linked to the male and female hairstyles, which has now become a consolidated tradition among the Afro-American population; a very well-known and specific activity that attracts numerous customers from a vast surrounding territory (Fig. 7).



Figure 7 | An Hairdresser and Tattoo shop, a very famous activity on Brookland Park Boulevard.

Given these strengths, there are obviously some critical issues, first of all the presence of criminal activities, whose danger, however, appear to be more related to the perception of the citizens than to a real condition. Starting from these basic considerations, the plan has carried out a careful check of the same, in order to evaluate with greater attention strengths and weaknesses. After a general description of the area, its evolution and its historical features, a detailed review of the existing planning tools was carried out, within which were particularly important the *Master plan of the city of Richmond* and the *Commercial Areas Revitalization Effort (CARE)*, a program of financial aid to small and medium-sized commercial enterprises promoted by the State of Virginia<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> The Program provides technical assistance and support to the companies aiming to start commercial and crafts and the provision of loans at a subsidized rate, roughly at the 50% of the market rate.

*The market analysis.* The first step in the realization of the plan was, therefore, the identification of the possible area of influence of the commercial corridor; for this purpose, a territory within a radius of one mile was considered, with regard to basic necessities, and within a radius of three miles from the corridor for non-daily consumer goods; within the territory itself, all possible additional attractors of the population and users were identified, including historical buildings, schools, public and private services (Fig. 8). The nearest Commercial Corridors have also been identified in order to assess, for the different product sectors, the levels of possible competition present in the territory (Fig. 9).



Figure 8 | The image locates the two areas of commercial influence (basic and non-daily necessities) of the Brookland park boulevard and the other commercial corridors within a three-mile radius.

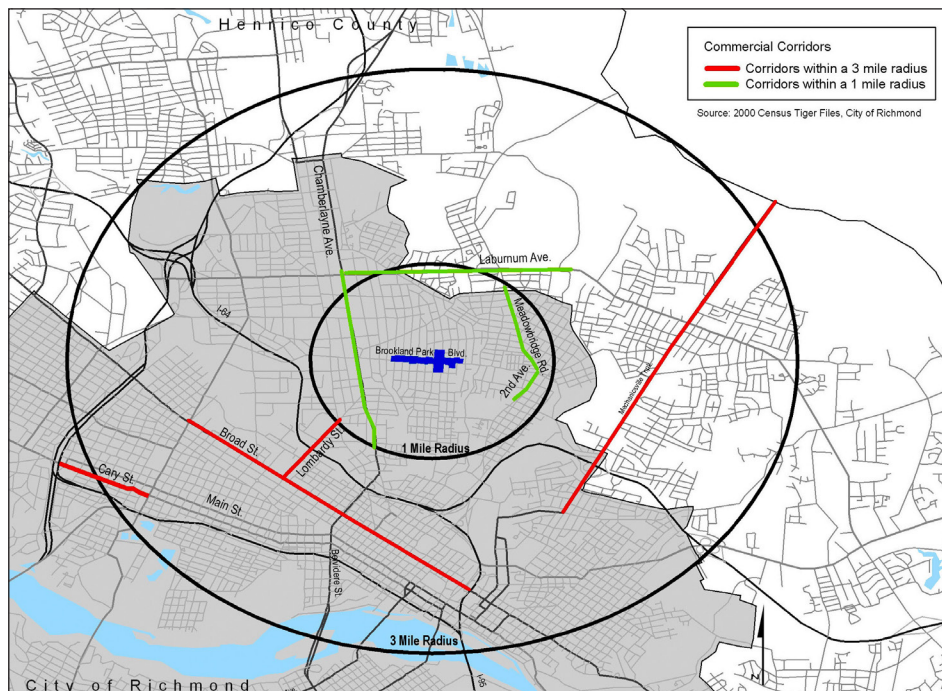


Figure 9 | Additional facilities for population and users within the area of influence of the commercial corridor of Brookland park.

Within the area thus identified, a statistical analysis of the present population and of the economic and social conditions of the same was carried out, integrated with an on-site survey, carried out through questionnaires and interviews with traders and consumers; it was thus possible to evaluate the total value of consumer demand, broken down by different product sectors and expressed in dollars per year. This value was divided by an indicator called *Sales per square foot*, through which it was possible to estimate the commercial surface requirements for the sizing of the plan. Another important area of analysis concerned the real estate sector, with the aim of understanding if the demand of space for new sales activities corresponded with an adequate offer by the market. In this way it was possible to configure a quantitative model of supply-demand related, on the one hand, to commercial activities according to their type, and on the other to the spaces necessary for the development of the same.

*The role of urban space.* One of the foundations of the Main street policies, as we have already mentioned, is to consider the quality of the architectural and urban space and the efficiency of the territorial infrastructures, as a key to promote or not the commercial development of a determined region. This was also one of the fundamental aspects considered in the Brookland park plan; to this end, a detailed survey was conducted which essentially covered three aspects, and for each of them any strengths and weaknesses were highlighted:

- *Accessibility:* road infrastructure, presence of cycle paths, pedestrian areas, parking areas, type and quality of public transport;
- *Building heritage:* historic buildings, the presence of unused or underused buildings, state of conservation of buildings, availability of areas for residential purposes;
- *Public space:* the most frequented places, the state of the sidewalks, lighting, presence and quality of the green areas and type of trees, elements of furniture and signage.

The following table summarizes in brief the main strengths and weaknesses that emerged from the diagnostic phase of the plan.

<b>ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS</b>	Good economic conditions of resident families Community organizations and will to participate Presence of active merchant organizations	Presence of criminal activity more perceived than real
<b>COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES</b>	Excellence cluster tied to hair dressing and in general to beauty and wellness	Commercial network poorly articulated and concentrated only on a few commodity sectors
<b>REAL ESTATE</b>	Positive trend of construction activity and sales in the last years Still affordable prices	Increasing prices
<b>BUILDING STOCK</b>	Historical building of good architectonic quality attractive for commercial purposes	Along the boulevard many buildings appear abandoned and in conditions of decay
<b>ACCESSIBILITY</b>	Very good road system Frequent public buses connecting Downtown Richmond	Poor parking areas Lack of pedestrian areas
<b>PUBLIC SPACE</b>	A captivating and good quality overall landscape image, thanks to the presence of historic buildings and places	Sidewalks are small and in bad conditions Poorly illuminated areas Lack of green areas and rest spaces Degraded image due to the presence of abandoned buildings



*The objectives and actions of the plan.* The 'Commercial revitalization plan of Brookland Park' (Fig. 10-11) is an integrated plan with objectives of a different nature, economic, social, infrastructural and environmental. It has been divided into 5 general objectives, each of them divided into sub-objectives, and corresponding actions. The five general objectives are:

*Strengthen existing business activities and encourage the emergence of new ones through:*

- the use of the CARE program for the granting of technical assistance and subsidized loans for old and new businesses;
- the creation of an association of local merchants to foster and strengthen forms of cooperation;
- promoting the recovery of historical facades and in general of existing buildings, already in use or not.

*Promote the establishment of new families through appropriate provision of new residential opportunities through:*

- the construction of a residence for the elderly (Senior housing facility);
- residential use of upper floors, when commercial activities use only the ground floor;
- changes, where necessary, to the Richmond City general plan to encourage the establishment of residential activities.

*Improve the quality of the urban image and public space through:*

- the creation of a pedestrian area along the boulevard easily accessible and safe;
- the restructuring of the sidewalks and the creation of safe crossings
- the creation of pocket parks and the extensive use of green as street furniture through the use of specific trees that also serve to define a more vivid urban image.

*Promote the brand and the image of the Boulevard park commercial corridor through:*

- the creation of a school for aspiring hairdressers, barbers and in general body care workers, to enhance the commercial specificity of Brookland Park;
- creation of a brand that identifies the Brookland park boulevard commercial corridor, marketing activities and media advertising;
- creation of a cultural festival

*Reduce the actual crime and its perception:*

- request the municipality a greater police presence and facilitate its cooperation
- with citizens and traders organizations;
- encourage the placement of control cameras and improve street lighting.

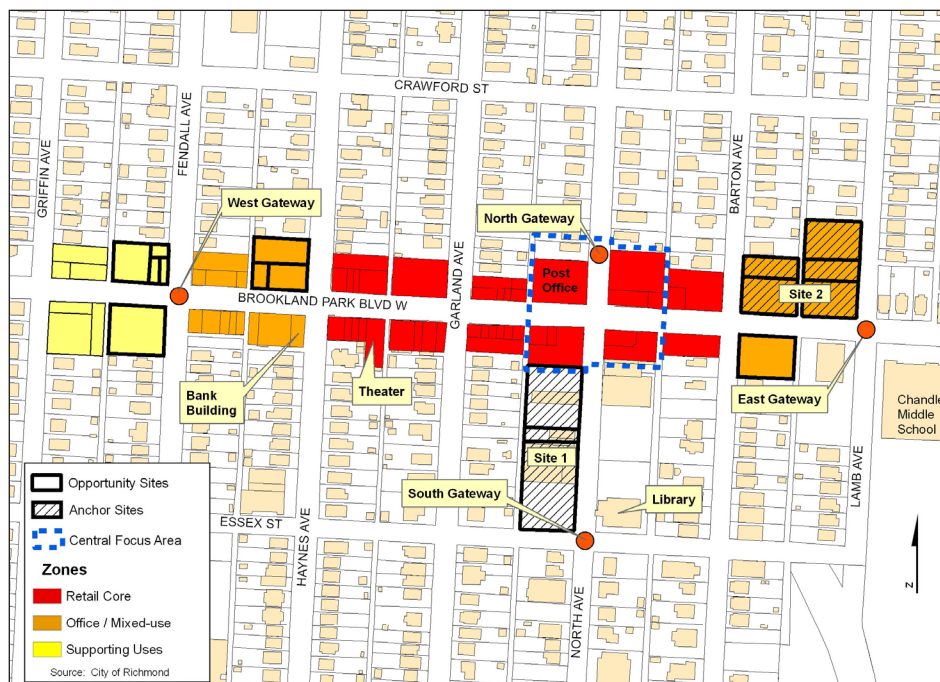


Figure 10 | The development plan of the Brookland Park commercial corridor with the different land uses.

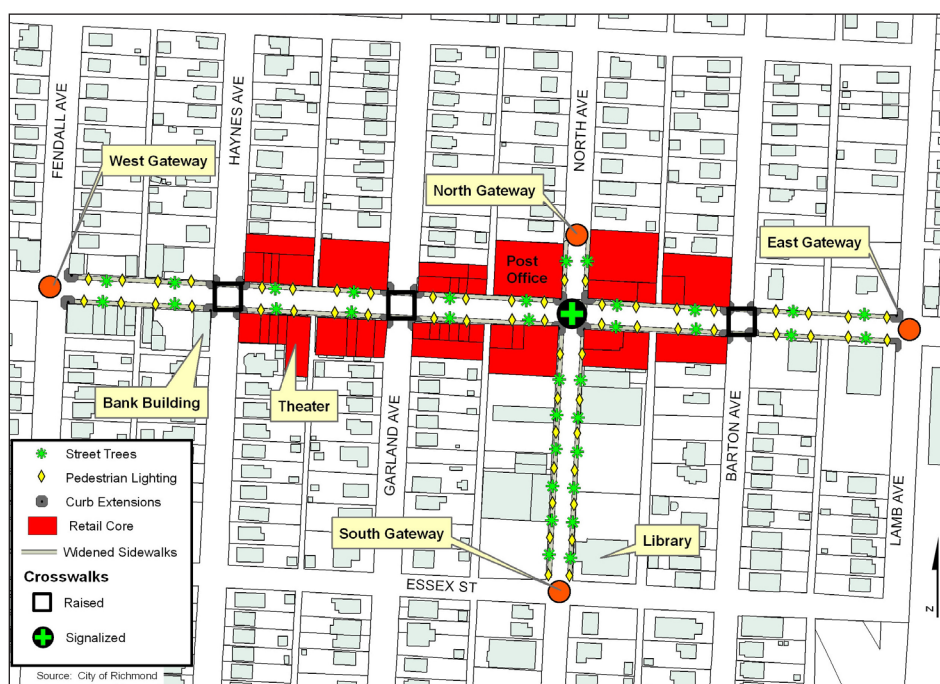


Figure 11 | The development plan of the Brookland Park commercial corridor; the expected actions.

## Conclusions

The experience of the Main Street program seems extremely interesting and significant because of its approach trying to provide a solid economic basis for urban regeneration, supporting projects for the development of the local economy, mainly commercial and craft activities. The proposed methodology bases much of its success on the ability to activate a partnership involving, from design to implementation and management, public and private institutions, each with well-identified and specific tasks and roles. In particular, regarding the public institutions, the centrality of a trans-scalar approach emerges involving, with obviously different roles and weights, the Federal Government, the different States, the single Municipalities. At the same time a key role plays the local community, that is economic operators, cultural associations and all the citizens, who are entrusted with the task of transforming the program into concrete actions. In other words, the examples illustrated confirm the effectiveness of a truly bottom up method, in which the Community is the main actor, especially in the implementation and management phase of the program itself. The program schedule and its articulation in short and medium-term strategies is one of the most significant elements of the project, where, as already mentioned, the solidity and weight of long-term strategies are accompanied by short term objectives, summarized in the slogan 'lighter, quicker and cheaper', able to give to the whole community the idea of a project immediately achieving some concrete and tangible results.

Another significant element is the ability to produce an integrated strategy in which economic support to businesses, in the form of tax relief or subsidized loans, is combined with the redevelopment policies of the building stock, entrusted to a large extent to individuals, and of public spaces; without neglecting all the aspects related to marketing, such as the promotion of the image of the neighborhood, the creation of support associations, the realization of promotional events.

Within this framework, an aspect of particular interest as far as the architect-planner is concerned, is the role assigned to the quality of the public space, as a real 'attractor' for users that of course love to meet and walk inside a space of quality; as a consequence particular attention has been paid to the themes of accessibility, the presence of car parks and above all the creation of pedestrian areas and pocket parks.

Paradoxically, the great strength of the Main Street program (at least in the cases we have experimented) the capacity to achieve the goal of regeneration, represents, one year after the other, one of the main weaknesses; in fact, one of the negative consequences of Main Street is that over the years (and now the experiences are dated enough to allow an assessment of the effects in the medium term) the process of urban regeneration tends to push up the price of buildings, proportional to the success of the project, triggering a gentrification process. A contraindication only partially mitigated by social housing interventions, designed, as we said, to allow the partial maintenance of the original population on the spot.



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