

# Keys to a Successful Downtown

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I recently participated in a book study with colleagues over “13 Ways To Kill Your Community” by author Doug Griffiths. Griffiths visits common issues that communities face when they begin to struggle and see population relocating when trouble seeps into a community. Change in a small town is often difficult. Griffith’s publication works hand in hand with a First Friday E-Call with Nancy Daniels of K-State Research and Extension. Daniels hosted Scott Sewell, from Kansas Mainstreet to share on his organization and their offerings to small town businesses and local main street revitalization. Part of his presentation focused on what success looks like for downtown/main streets. Sewell list the following as key components to a successful downtown:

**Open and Thriving Downtown-** A thriving business district builds a positive image for your entire community. It will also attract new businesses, create new jobs and keep local dollars in your community. Even businesses outside of the “downtown” area should be concerned with how the downtown area is healthy and viable.

**Maintained Buildings-** Looking at a main street, often look at how many of the buildings within that downtown district are up kept and are functional. How many of those buildings located in the blocks of main street are condemned and not functional for any new opportunities to open within the community? “13 Ways To Kill Your Community” author Griffiths talks about how a coat of paint can change the character and looks of a vibrant downtown, enticing people to visit and become a part of the culture.

**Utilization of Public Space-** Having space that is open for the public to utilize to host events to bring more individuals into the community is a vital part to success. An event that brings people that don’t reside in the community, will bring more revenue to town and in return those people may return at a different time to revisit a new favorite location withing the town.

**A Place to live-** Many older buildings in the main street areas were once used for a housing opportunity above businesses. In the past few years many towns and business owners have started to revitalize those spaces as apartments or short term rentals. How many businesses in your main street district have livable spaces to use or renovate into functional living spaces? Swell mentions that 4-6% of population in past towns they have visited are interested in living in downtown loft apartments.

**Includes Culture and History-** A main street that in-cooperates and exhibits history of the town and past main street business will also preserve historical character of the whole community. Swell talks about how the importance of building in a downtown, builds assets and are easily noticeable by the architectural aspects, a sense of place as well as a personal service that you can’t find anywhere else.

**A “Cool” Environment-** Unique features within the downtown area, make people want to visit and spend time within local businesses and want to return to enjoy those features they cannot get at another location.

For more resources to help in your community, please contact your local chamber, local revitalization groups or Amanda Clasen, Community Vitality Agent, at [amclasen@ksu.edu](mailto:amclasen@ksu.edu) or at any Southwind Extension office. To sign up for upcoming Friday E-Calls Visit <https://bit.ly/3NeEYMx>