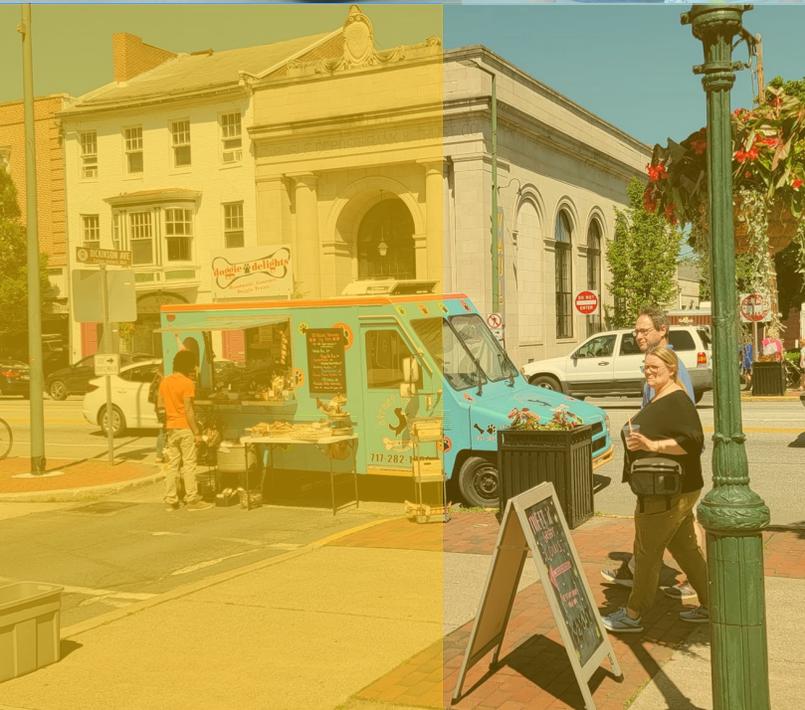
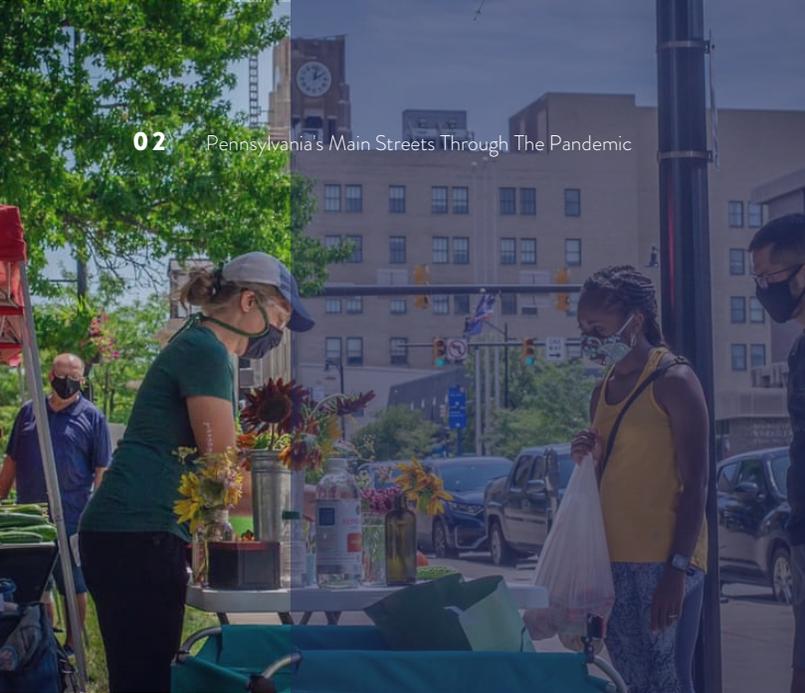


PENNSYLVANIA'S MAIN STREETS THROUGH THE PANDEMIC



Exploration of the Resiliency of
Pennsylvania's Main Street Program
During the COVID-19 Pandemic

JULY 2022





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The Impact of the Pennsylvania Main Street Program on Local Economic Resiliency

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Pennsylvania Downtown Center (PDC), a Main Street America® Coordinating Program, provides technical assistance, board and committee support, and education to designated Main Street and Elm Street Programs in Pennsylvania. The Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) provides access to funding opportunities and oversight of these programs. This study assesses local business resiliency in Pennsylvania's 32 communities with dedicated Main Street organizations.

Pennsylvania, along with the rest of the world, faced a new set of societal challenges at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. As this global health crisis disrupted the lives of people in all types of communities, business activity and consumer spending also shifted. During these unexpected and challenging times, Main Streets were a crucial link between businesses, residents, and local stakeholders. Main Street programs add economic and social value to communities across the Commonwealth by supporting local businesses and creating vibrant downtowns. The Pennsylvania Downtown Center and Pennsylvania's local Main Street programs tailored their approaches to addressing the unique needs of their downtowns based on their communities' needs. Main Streets quickly and effectively directed resources and programmatic support to businesses most in need of assistance throughout the pandemic.

Collectively, Main Street communities have made great strides towards recovery since their local economies initially took a hit in 2020, but there is still a lot of work to be done. This report reflects the nuanced nature of local economies during a global health crisis. While there is no one-size-fits-all answer to supporting downtowns in Pennsylvania and beyond, distributing ongoing resources, funding, and programmatic support is vital to the future economic resilience of businesses across the state.

This study measures the economic resiliency of businesses in Main Street districts in Pennsylvania (historic downtowns in which there is the presence of a Main Street organization) by assessing third-party credit card spending data to understand the economic impacts of the pandemic and Main Street Communities' contributing roles. To understand the value of Main Street efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic, consumer spending in Main Street districts was analyzed along with statewide economic trends.

During the pandemic Pennsylvania's Main Streets were an essential link between State decisionmakers and resources and the needs of downtown communities. Main Street programming proved to be a vital tool not just for economic recovery, but also to create the pre-conditions, such as diverse business mixes and customer bases, that bolster economic resiliency.

The analysis and report was conducted and written by Jon Stover & Associates (JS&A), an Economic Development Consulting firm that bridges the gap between the different worlds of policy, business, real estate development, and community interest to help make neighborhoods great.

Main Street communities were hit particularly hard at the onset of the pandemic, but customer traffic quickly rebounded.

When the pandemic initially hit Pennsylvania in March and April 2020, spending on Main Street dropped 19.5%. Many Main Streets have a higher concentration of dining, shopping, and entertainment establishments – the types of businesses most impacted by closures. However, Main Street districts rebounded relatively quickly, and by the spring of 2021, spending had consistently surpassed pre-pandemic levels.

Pennsylvania Main Streets provided critical on-the-ground support to their local business communities throughout the pandemic, enhancing the ability of thousands of businesses to adjust and sustain their operations.

Main Streets across Pennsylvania mobilized quickly at the onset of the pandemic to deliver much-needed resources to their businesses. Main Street assistance included providing direct financial resources, support in applying to grants and loans, health and policy updates and delivery of safety supplies, the creation of outdoor spaces, assistance setting up e-commerce and e-delivery platforms, promotional events and customer attraction measures, and more.

The restaurant industry struggled severely but performed significantly better on Main Street.

Main Streets provided a range of assistance targeting food and beverage businesses, and it worked. Restaurants located on Main Street saw spending drop by 39% in the spring of 2020, compared with a statewide average reduction of 51%. Restaurant customer spending on Main Street recovered to pre-pandemic levels sooner than the statewide restaurant average.

Some Main Street communities struggled more than others. Urban areas were hit harder than suburban or rural communities during the pandemic.

Due to the shift to virtual work in many industries nationwide, many urban areas overcame significant economic challenges during the pandemic, particularly those who benefitted from the daytime traffic brought by commuting office workers. Communities that have not yet reached pre-pandemic spending levels are often contending with larger challenges brought on by nationwide shifts in the way people live, work, and play. On the other hand, some Pennsylvania communities saw their local economies strengthen in 2020 and 2021 due to their proximity to outdoor recreation and other local tourism opportunities that increased in popularity as a result of the pandemic.

Over the years, Main Streets have worked to develop loyal local customer bases. This paid off as residents frequented their nearby businesses at much higher rates – a trend that continues through today.

Communities with a strong existing local consumer base trended towards being more economically resilient than visitor-heavy areas. Main Streets with a larger share of local customers, instead of commuters and tourists, typically experienced less of an economic impact at the onset of the pandemic and recovered faster to pre-pandemic spending levels. Widely, residents of Main Street communities began patronizing their local businesses more during the pandemic. This trend has persisted, with a 56% average increase in local customers in 2021 compared to before the pandemic in 2019.

MEASURING THE ECONOMIC RESILIENCY OF PENNSYLVANIA'S MAIN STREETS

About this Study

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted local economies and the day-to-day lives of people in communities across the country and world. Businesses and their customers navigated challenging health and safety protocols that altered how people shopped, dined, and socialized. Businesses of all sizes and in all types of communities were forced to adjust their operations in response to changing regulations, consumer preferences, and safety measures starting with the onset of the pandemic in early 2020. The purpose of this study is to help the Pennsylvania Downtown Center and its stakeholders understand how the pandemic impacted Pennsylvania's downtown business districts. Importantly, this study assesses the role that Main Street programs played in supporting local businesses during this challenging period and measure the impact of Main Street programming and support services on local economic resiliency.

This study measures the economic resiliency of Pennsylvania's Main Streets in two ways: (1) the ability to limit the magnitude of the immediate loss of business revenues, defined as "instantaneous resiliency," and (2) the ability to reconstruct and recover post disaster, defined as "dynamic resiliency."

Economic resiliency is the ability of a community to survive, recover, and rebuild their local economies after facing a devastating disaster, such as the global pandemic of COVID-19. While there are many metrics and methodologies to quantify economic resiliency, leading best practices reflect the World Bank's categorization of two types of resiliency: instantaneous and dynamic.

Instantaneous resiliency refers to the ability of a community to limit the immediate effects of the disaster. In this case, in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, instantaneous resiliency reflects the revenue decline during the first months of the pandemic, or the biggest and most dramatic drop in sales. In Pennsylvania's economy, this occurred during March and April 2020. Dynamic resiliency stretches beyond the immediate effects and centers around recovery and reconstruction after a disaster. A community's dynamic resiliency encompasses their abilities to improve economic conditions and increase revenue and sales beyond the lowest point immediately after a disaster. In many cases, the specific time frame of dynamic resiliency may not be clear-cut. This study's methodology looks at dynamic resilience as when economic conditions achieved their highest levels after the onset of the pandemic. Dynamic resiliency throughout this report is defined as February 2022.

To understand the role of Pennsylvania's Main Streets had on local economic resiliency, this report compares consumer spending levels in communities with dedicated Main Street programs to statewide figures and trends.

This methodological framework helps isolate the attributable effects of Main Street programs, analyzing third-party credit card spending data provided through MasterCard Retail Location Insights. Data is collected and assessed at the Census Block and Tract Group level for Main Streets from January 2019 through February 2022. This consumer spending data is analyzed through month-to-month changes as well as annual trends in spending. Because businesses assess profitability on an annual basis, understanding the impacts between 2019, 2020, and 2021 brings additional insights into the economic shifts that occurred in Pennsylvania's Main Streets.

This study was conducted on behalf of the Pennsylvania Downtown Center by Jon Stover & Associates (JS&A) and completed in July 2022.

Pennsylvania Main Streets provided critical on-the-ground support to their local business communities throughout the pandemic, enhancing the ability of thousands of businesses to adjust and sustain their operations.

Main Streets across Pennsylvania mobilized quickly at the onset of the pandemic to deliver important and necessary assistance and resources to support downtown small and local businesses. Immediately after the onset of the pandemic, Main Streets began helping their local businesses respond to new challenges, roadblocks, and unprecedented changes in the economy. Below are just a few of the many ways Pennsylvania's Main Streets helped their downtown businesses during the pandemic. The impacts of these strategies are showcased throughout this report.

SUPPORTING THE OPERATIONS OF LOCAL BUSINESSES



Administering Grants to Help Businesses Pivot their Operations and Adapt to New and Evolving Public Health Constraints



Keeping Small and Local Businesses Up-To-Date on State and Local Public Health Regulations That Impact Business Operations



Creating Resources and Toolkits to Help Businesses Navigate Pandemic-Related Logistics Such As Re-Opening and Social Distancing

ATTRACTING MORE CUSTOMERS TO DOWNTOWN BUSINESSES



Leveraging Social Media to Promote Downtown Businesses and Incentivize Different Ways to Shop Local During the Pandemic



Compiling Lists of Local Restaurants Open For Delivery and Take-out Services, and Local Retailers with Online Stores and Gift Cards



Creatively Programming Public Spaces and Hosting Downtown Events Outdoors To Boost Sales at Nearby Businesses

What's a Main Street?

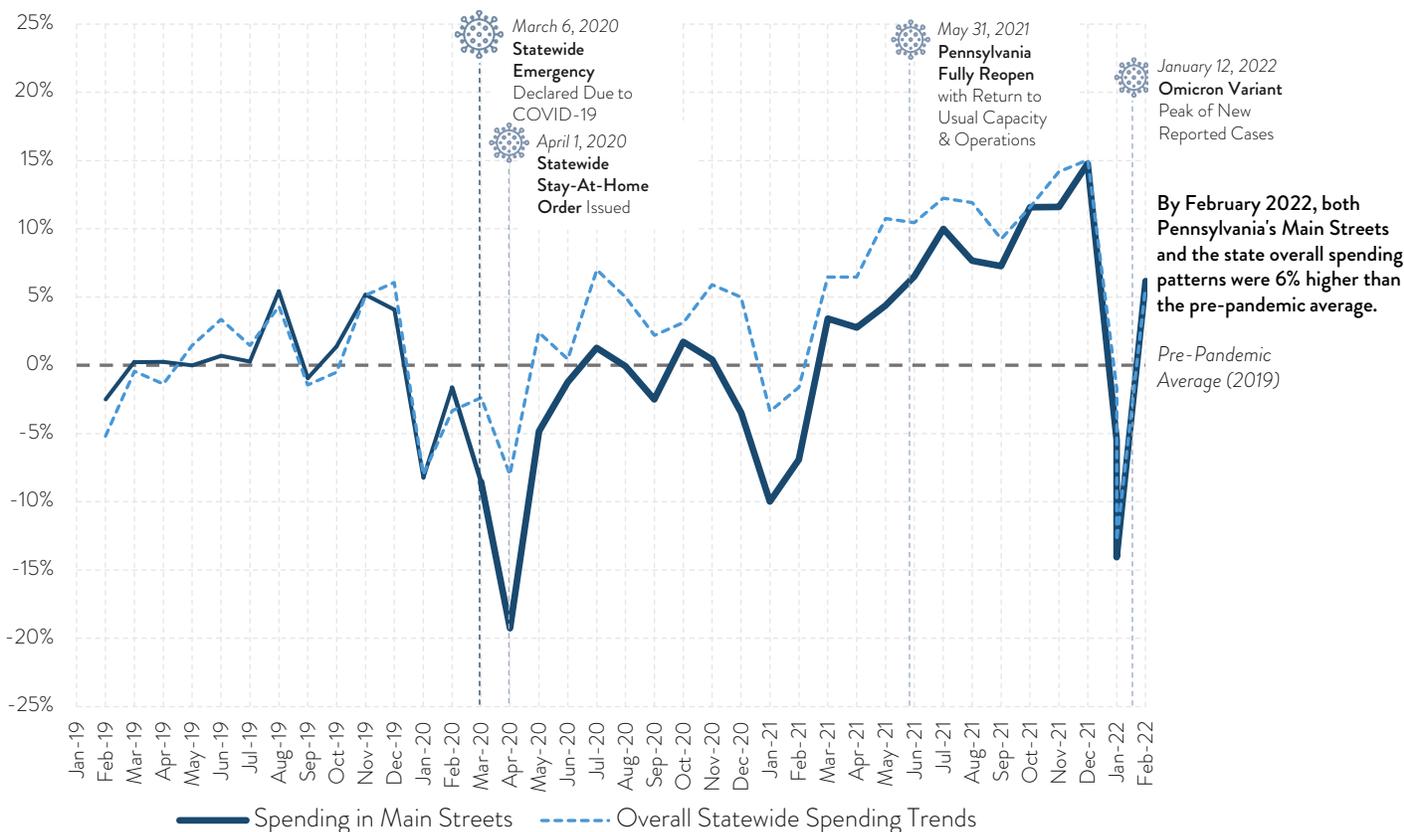
Pennsylvania Downtown Center (PDC) is a Main Street America® Coordinating Program. The Main Street approach is a comprehensive, community-based framework for revitalizing downtowns across the country. Main Street empowers communities to leverage local leadership, transform their economies, and improve the vibrancy of downtowns of all sizes. Main Streets in Pennsylvania lead and deliver locally-based technical assistance and support for downtown revitalization efforts in communities across the Commonwealth. More information about PDC and all of its programmatic efforts can be found on their website at www.padowntown.org.



Pennsylvania's Main Streets were hit particularly hard at the onset of the pandemic due to their higher concentrations of businesses that depend on in-person customer traffic, such as restaurants, retailers, hotels, and recreational venues. With the support of Main Street programmatic efforts, customer traffic quickly bounced back, and downtown consumer spending surpassed pre-pandemic levels for most of 2021.

Sales in Pennsylvania's Main Streets dropped precipitously in March and April of 2020, an initial decline in sales that far exceeded statewide averages. Main Streets offered much-needed support to their local business community in response to this dramatic decline in sales. With these efforts, Main Streets regained customer spending quickly and reached pre-pandemic levels by July 2020. Outdoor dining and shopping conditions diminished along with cooler temperatures in the fall of 2020, and Pennsylvania saw a second wave of diminished sales activity. However, sales rebounded by March 2021 and the state and its Main Street communities saw a surge in spending that lasted nearly the full year.

CONSUMER SPENDING TRENDS IN PENNSYLVANIA'S MAIN STREETS COMPARED WITH THE STATEWIDE AVERAGE

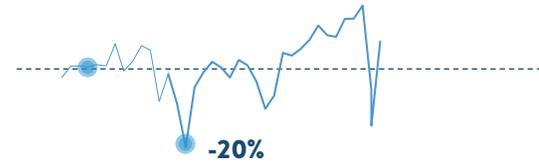


The above figures are adjusted for inflation and represent consumer spending trends indexed to pre-pandemic conditions defined as the 2019 average. Due to data limitations Lebanon and Castle Shannon are not included in the chart. Source: MasterCard Retail Location Insights (2022)

At the onset of the pandemic, consumer spending in Main Streets dramatically dropped 20% compared to 2019.

Instantaneous Resiliency: The Initial Economic Hit

At the onset of the pandemic, in April 2020, consumer spending in Main Streets dramatically declined 19.5% compared with the prior year. Main Street communities experienced a larger revenue drop early in the pandemic than Pennsylvania as a whole, which saw a statewide decline of 7%. Main Street spending caught up to the statewide average by the fall of 2021, demonstrating the value Pennsylvania's Main Streets brought to their local businesses and community.



Consumer spending at businesses in Main Street between January 2019 and February 2022. The dashed horizontal line represents average spending levels in 2019. The blue dots signify the points in time (April 2019 v. April 2020) that represent the metrics for instantaneous resiliency.

By the spring of 2021, spending in Main Streets started to exceed pre-pandemic levels.

Dynamic Resiliency: When Local Economies Began to Recover

As the COVID-19 pandemic persisted through 2020 and 2021, Pennsylvania's Main Streets remained economically resilient with dedicated loyal customers and resources provided by Main Street programs. Main Street spending mirrored overall state spending trends by the end of the year. These longer-term spending trends show the importance and value of Main Streets' recovery efforts and their support for their local business community.



Consumer spending at businesses in Main Street between January 2019 and February 2022. The dashed horizontal line represents the average spending in 2019. March 2021 is when Main Streets businesses collectively started seeing significant economic recovery.

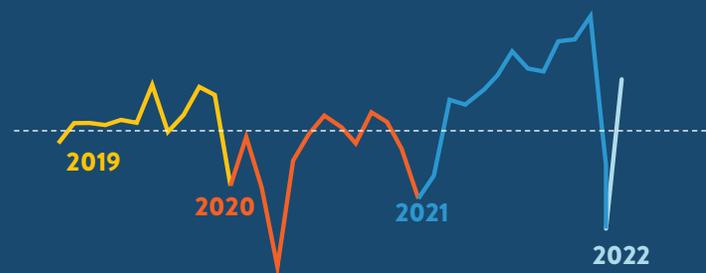
Source: MasterCard Retail Location Insights (2021)

Many of Pennsylvania's Main Streets feature cyclical economies with peaks in collective sales during the winter holiday season.

Pennsylvania sees a significant drop in consumer spending in January and February every year. This economic trend occurred before the pandemic and remained steadfast during 2020 and 2021, with Main Street communities experiencing lower consumer spending volumes from January to May annually.

Businesses think of profitability on an annual basis. Annual spending was down in 2020 but was higher in 2021 than before the pandemic.

When comparing average consumer spending (indexed to pre-pandemic spending) for Main Street communities, spending in 2020 dropped 3.9% compared to 2019. But by 2021 spending was 9.5% higher than in 2020 and 5.3% higher than in 2019, demonstrating the economic recovery of communities in Pennsylvania with Main Street programs.



Source: MasterCard Retail Location Insights (2022)



Diamond City Partnership's Get Your Business Outside Grant

Diamond City Partnership supported restaurants in Downtown Wilkes-Barre during the pandemic to establish and expand their outdoor operations or modify their indoor dining. The grant covered costs associated with outdoor dining (including sidewalks, parking lots, and patios to provide additional seating) and costs to support safe indoor dining.

Main Street Gettysburg Cares

In addition to their ongoing programs to help businesses, such as the Zero-Interest Loan Program (ZILP) and Facade Improvement Program (FIP), Main Street Gettysburg launched a program during the COVID-19 pandemic to provide funding, guidance and products to help their downtown stores and restaurants called Main Street Gettysburg Cares. This included the creation of the *MSG Cares Business Jumpstart Toolkit* which included free safety supplies and promotional materials that enabled businesses to reopen in accordance with Pennsylvania state guidelines as well as an email newsletter to help businesses navigate re-opening.



Support Easton

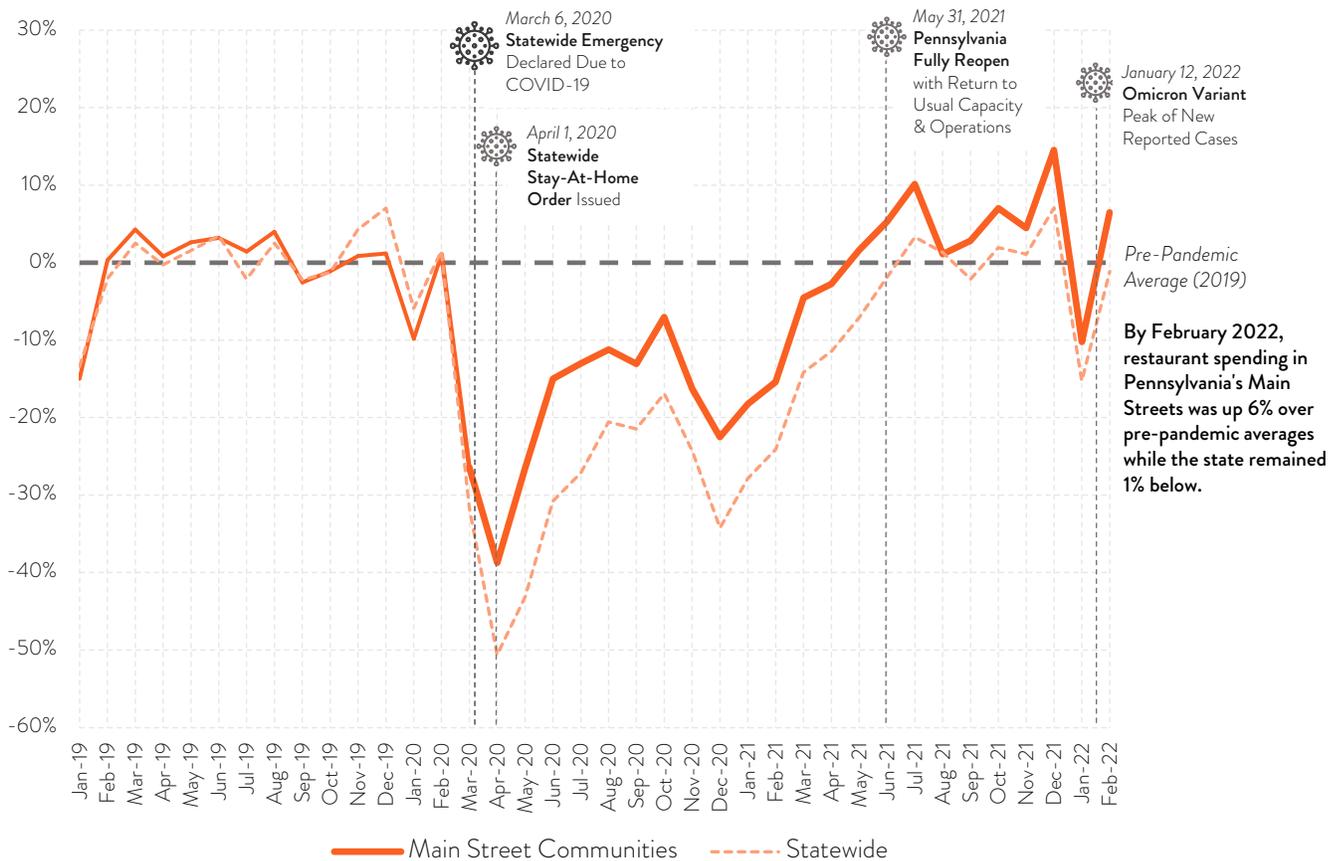
The Greater Easton Development Partnership (GEDP), of which Easton Main Street Initiative is a subsidiary, created a social media campaign and website called *Support Easton* to support local businesses during the pandemic. The Support Easton website included a robust list of restaurants with outside seating or offering delivery or curbside pick-up. This initiative encouraged people to support local businesses by leaving positive reviews and sharing photos of their meals on social media with the hashtag #SupportEaston.



The restaurant industry was one of the hardest hit industries during the pandemic. However, **Main Street restaurants consistently outperformed the statewide restaurant industry throughout the pandemic**, a trend that did not exist before 2020.

Reflecting both national and statewide trends, restaurant spending in Main Streets immediately declined at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic with a 39% drop in spending in April 2020 compared to the prior year. Quickly, Main Streets experienced a greater uptick in restaurant spending than Pennsylvania as a whole. When comparing yearly trends, Main Street's food and beverage spending dropped 17% in 2020 compared to in 2019. But by 2021, restaurant spending overall recovered with 20% more spending than in 2020. Pennsylvania's Main Streets played a big role in supporting local restaurants during these times of need. From helping restaurants navigate changing regulations, promoting restaurants on social media for customer attraction, and hosting successful events to bring more people to safely dine and drink, Main Streets' efforts helped develop a more resilient downtown restaurant industry.

RESTAURANT INDUSTRY SPENDING TRENDS IN PENNSYLVANIA'S MAIN STREETS COMPARED WITH THE STATEWIDE AVERAGE



The above figures are adjusted for inflation and represent consumer spending trends indexed to pre-pandemic conditions (2019 average). Due to data limitations, not all communities with Main Street Programs are factored into the above chart. Source: MasterCard Retail Location Insights (2022)

Local customers stepped up to support their Main Street businesses throughout the pandemic. Even as local economies began to stabilize, elevated levels of local customer support continued throughout 2020 and 2021 and has remained a lifeblood for Main Street businesses.

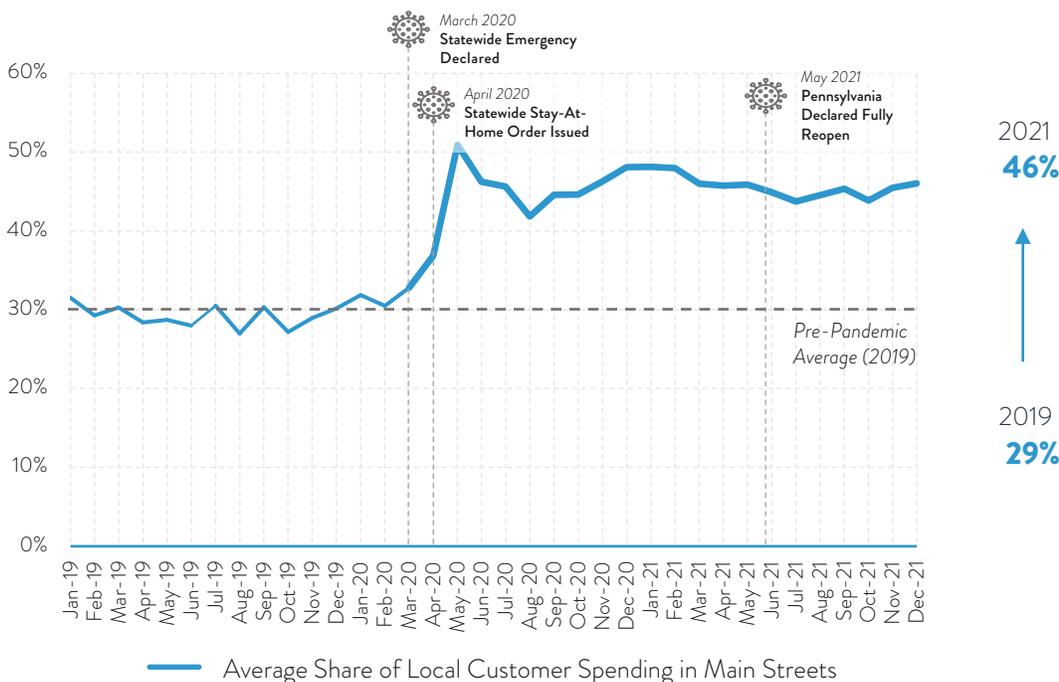
Before the pandemic, nearby customers typically accounted for approximately 30% of the sales and transactions at businesses within Pennsylvania's Main Street program boundaries. When the COVID-19 pandemic began and stay-at-home orders were initiated in the spring of 2020, Main Streets experienced a slight uptick in local customers, with local customers accounting for about 35% of the average Main Street business's sales and transactions. By May 2020, this percentage peaked with local customers accounting for around 50% of Main Street sales. As the pandemic continued and lifestyles began to normalize, customers in Main Street communities remained consistent in supporting their local businesses. On average in 2021, local customers made up 46% of the total customer base for Main Streets. This trend has continued into 2022, reflecting a lasting increase of local customer base support of Main Street businesses and demonstrates the success of Main Streets' efforts to heighten community loyalty and support for their small and local businesses.



Designing for Distance

To serve the needs of communities impacted by the pandemic, Pennsylvania Downtown Center partnered with Pennsylvania Historic and Museum Commission to implement a series of small-scale design projects related to implementing social distancing in historic downtowns. This pilot program serves to provide municipal leaders and community organizations with practical solutions, designs and implementation strategies to help their businesses adapt to a new set of difficulties caused by COVID-19.

SHARE OF LOCAL CUSTOMER SPENDING IN MAIN STREETS



Source: MasterCard Retail Location Insights (2022)



#LoveBFT Gift Cards & Discovery Passports in Bellefonte

Downtown Bellefonte, Inc. has helped to promote local businesses with the creation of a community-wide gift card and Discovery Passport challenge. The #LoveBFT gift card enables consumers to use one gift card to shop at over forty local retailers, restaurants, services and entertainment venues in Bellefonte, while the Discovery Passport encourages participants to patronize local businesses to earn stamps and enter gift card raffles.

#NoPlaceLikeLocal

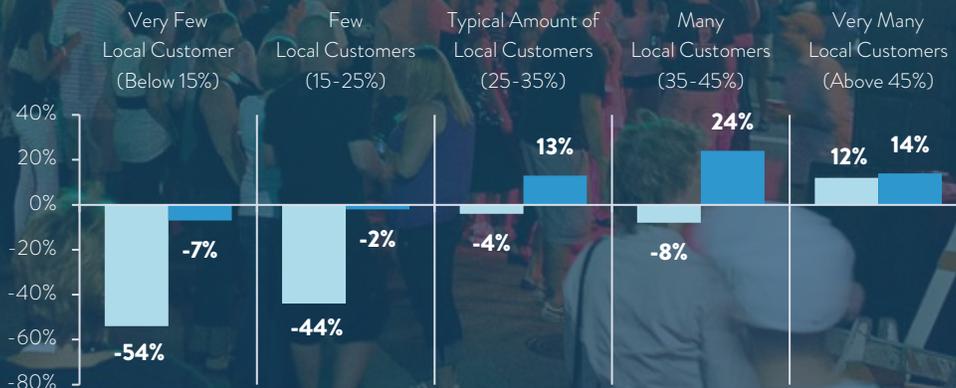
Most of Pennsylvania's Main Streets use social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram as tools to promote businesses in their downtowns. At the onset of the pandemic in 2020, Main Streets enforced the urgency of supporting local small businesses on social media. They posted about retailers to support by shopping online or buying gift cards, and restaurants open for delivery or curbside pickup. Pennsylvania Downtown Center has encouraged people to shop local through their ongoing "No Place Like Local" campaign which incentivizes shoppers to patronize local businesses and post pictures with the hashtag #NoPlaceLikeLocal for the chance to win gift cards.



Two important customer bases waned during the pandemic: tourists and office commuters. Main Street districts that depend on these customers were hit the hardest.

Main Streets with more local customers (compared to communities with more destination customers such as commuters and tourists) typically saw spending levels drop less at the beginning of the pandemic and recover faster. By February 2022, communities with a higher share of customers with local zip codes saw spending levels that were even higher than before the pandemic. At the same time, many communities with more destination customers have not yet seen their spending fully recover.

CHANGE IN CUSTOMER SPENDING AT THE ONSET OF THE PANDEMIC AND DURING RECOVERY



Main Streets with more destination customers

Main Streets with more local customers

Instantaneous spending level change at the beginning of the pandemic in April 2020 (compared to April 2019)

Spending level change during economic recovery in February 2022 (compared to February 2020)

Pennsylvania's Main Street programs are dispersed throughout the Commonwealth from rural areas, cities, and suburban boroughs in the bustling metro areas of Pittsburgh and Philadelphia.



Main Street Programs Across Pennsylvania

- Ardmore Initiative - Bradford Main Street - Building A Better Boyertown - Castle Shannon Borough
- Clearfield Revitalization Corporation - Danville Business Alliance - Diamond City Partnership - Downtown Bedford Inc.
- Downtown Bellefonte Inc. - Downtown Carlisle Association - Downtown Chambersburg Inc.
- Downtown Hazleton Alliance for Progress - Downtown Lebanon - Downtown Lewistown Inc.
- Downtown Shenandoah Inc. - Ebensburg Main Street Partnership - Erie Downtown Partnership
- Greater Easton Development Partnership - Greater Honesdale Partnership
- Lansdowne Economic Development Corporation - Lewisburg Downtown Partnership - Main Street Gettysburg
- Main Street Hanover - Main Street Mount Joy - Mt. Lebanon Partnership - Oil Region Alliance - Our Town Foundation
- Quakertown Alive - Venture Lititz - Washington Business District Authority - Waynesburg Prosperous & Beautiful
- West Reading Community Revitalization Foundation



The geographic location and the population size of Main Street communities significantly influenced their recovery during the pandemic.

These factors influenced the types of support Main Streets provided and the challenges their businesses faced.

Pennsylvania’s Main Street communities feature a wide range of sizes, customer bases, and relationships with their regional economies. As such, the resiliency of Pennsylvania’s Main Streets varied by geographic and population factors.

Socio-Economic Behavior Trends and National Insights

Nationally, larger urban metro areas experienced the greatest decline in business activity over the course of the pandemic. Central business districts and other areas with high concentrations of daytime office workers experienced steep declines in customer traffic as stay-at-home orders were issued and workers began working from home. People across the country flocked to more rural areas, a trend tied to the ability to work remotely and the preference of many to socially distance themselves.

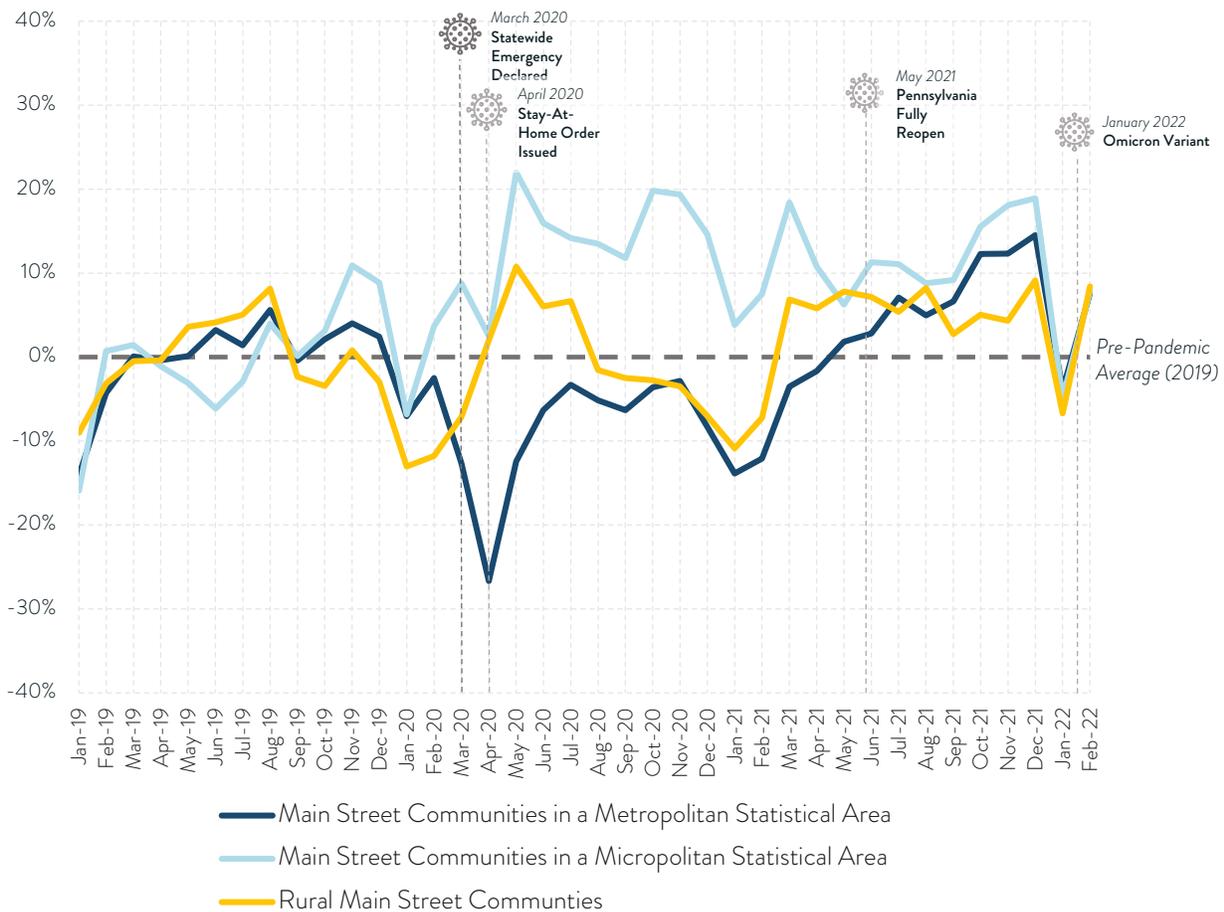
Places with robust tourism economies experienced a wide range of changes to visitation patterns. Local economies that relied heavily on tourism suffering decimated sales and visitors early in the pandemic as people canceled vacations and stayed close to home. Similarly, other tourism areas across parts of the country that experienced fewer restrictions had sales and visitation figures higher than ever before. Pennsylvania was uniquely positioned to bring enhanced rural tourism to its downtown communities given the Commonwealth’s surplus of outdoor recreation opportunities. Communities with a broad mix of uses, workers, and residents generally fared better during the pandemic, as their diversified economies retained customer activity and allowed them to better weather constantly shifting conditions brought on by the pandemic.

The following pages of the report highlight how Pennsylvania's different Main Streets fared during the pandemic based on the type of geographic and market area of the Main Street and the community's population size.

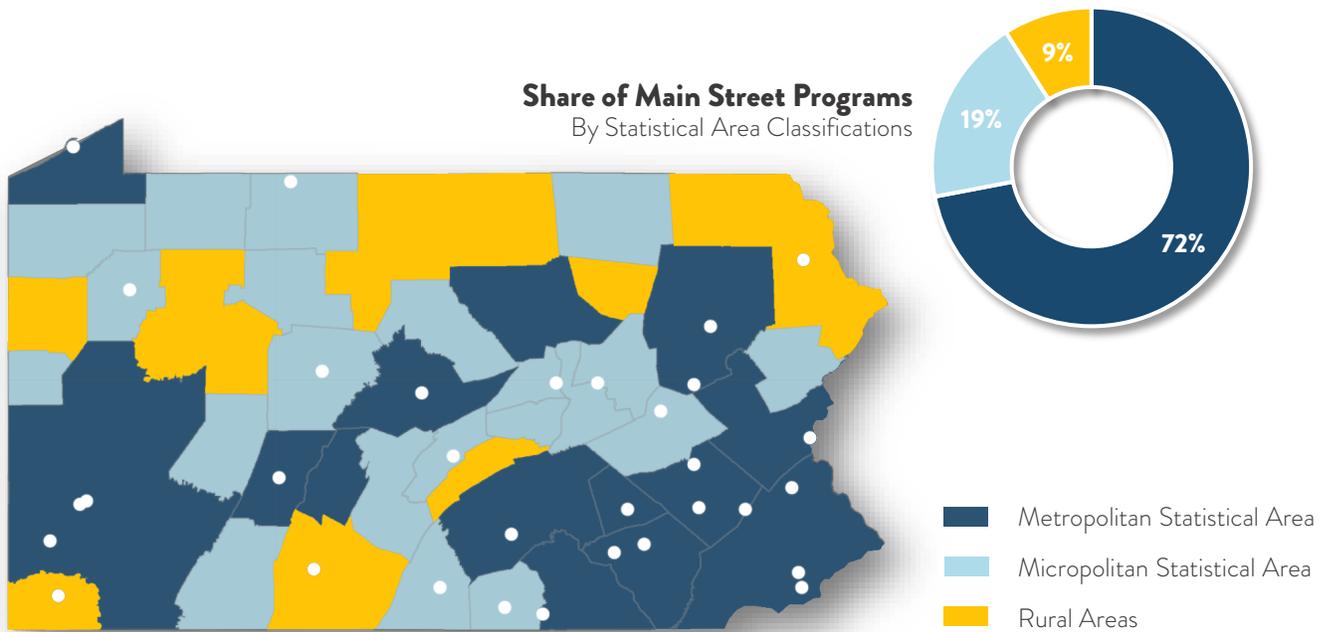
Pennsylvania's Main Street communities feature a wide range of sizes, customer bases, and relationships with their regional economies. As such, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Main Streets in a wide range of ways.

The Main Streets in larger metro areas experienced a sharp decline in customer spending and sales in March and April 2020. This likely reflects the fact that downtown areas in larger metro areas typically have a stronger economic reliance on tourists, business travelers, and office workers. Main Streets in metro areas comprise the vast majority (72%) of Pennsylvania's Main Street communities and includes programs in market areas such as Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Erie, State College, and Harrisburg (highlighted in dark blue on the map on the adjacent page). Economic trends in the other Main Streets, or about a quarter of Pennsylvania's Main Street programs, tell a different story. Spending, for the most part, increased during the early months of the pandemic. In fact, the six Main Streets in small and mid-sized (10,000-50,000 residents) saw increased sales throughout 2020 and 2021 compared to pre-pandemic levels. Although the pandemic's economic effects varied dramatically across the state's market areas, Main Street communities' recoveries began to converge by January 2022 as Main Streets in larger metro areas recovered to similar levels as their rural counterparts.

MAIN STREET SPENDING TRENDS WITHIN DIFFERENT GEOGRAPHIC MARKET AREAS IN PENNSYLVANIA



Note: Rural is defined as not located in either a Metropolitan or Micropolitan Statistical Area. The above figures are adjusted for inflation and represent consumer spending trends indexed to pre-pandemic conditions (2019 average). Due to data limitations Lebanon and Castle Shannon are not included in the chart. Source: MasterCard Retail Location Insights (2022)



Main Street Communities Across Pennsylvania
With Statistical Area Classifications

What do Statistical Area Classifications mean?

Many people live and work outside of city boundaries which means a lot of jobs, sales, spending, and socializing occur in the greater region beyond just the city. The Census Bureau and the US Office of Management and Budget carve out these areas commonly known as Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas, or regions surrounding urban clusters.

- **Metropolitan Statistical Areas** are centered around an urban core with a population of at least 50,000 people.
- **Micropolitan Statistical Areas** are centered around an urban core that has a population of at least 10,000 but less than 50,000 residents.
- This report defines **Rural Areas** as the parts of Pennsylvania that aren't covered by a Metropolitan or Micropolitan Statistical Area.

Looking at the spending trends in Main Streets through these three groups uncovers insights into how the pandemic impacted different communities in different ways. Despite these geographic locations and classification, Main Streets boosted local economies during the pandemic and will continue to in the future.

The population size of Main Street communities played a role in the resiliency and recovery of the local economy.

Similar to the geographic market area trends, Main Streets in communities with under 10,000 people saw higher spending levels during the first months and year of the pandemic. Collectively, Main Streets in communities with over 10,000 people didn't experience spending above pre-pandemic levels until June 2021.



The Pennsylvania Downtown Center and the Pennsylvania Main Street Program played a pivotal role in the economic resiliency and recovery of downtown communities throughout the pandemic.

Main Streets provided a local conduit for national, state, and local resources and administered a range of technical and financial support services that help explain how these communities recovered relatively quickly despite the pandemic's long and devastating impacts.

The Main Street is an established model for downtown vitality and business growth. Many of the same factors that make Main Streets impactful are true in good economic times and challenging times— such as during a pandemic. Different places were impacted uniquely, but Main Street's ability to provide hand-catered resources and support in response to specific local needs had a clear and positive influence on business health and corridor vitality for all types of communities, including those that were hardest hit.

The Next Chapter of Pennsylvania's Main Streets in the Post-Pandemic Economy

Continuing to support and fund Pennsylvania's Main Street programs at the state, regional, and local levels will have lasting effects on downtown vitality and vibrancy for years to come. Main Streets play a unique role in fostering downtown economies that are attractive and vibrant places where businesses want to locate, people want to visit, and customers want to shop and dine. The pandemic illustrated the value and role of placemaking in local economics, an initiative and effort that Main Streets play a fundamental role in creating.

While spending is up in Main Streets at the time of this study, the pandemic illuminated the importance of investing in the conditions that create resilient communities. This is true during both economically prosperous and economically challenging times. Continuing to bolster the programmatic efforts of Pennsylvania Downtown Center and its Main Street program will provide the Commonwealth with economic value and benefits for years to come.

For more information about the Pennsylvania Downtown Center, Pennsylvania's Main Street program, and other downtown revitalization efforts, please visit www.padowntown.org. More information about Keystone Communities and other local economic development news, resources, programs, and stories, can be found on the Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development website at www.dced.pa.gov.

Opportunities to Enhance Main Streets' Impact on Resiliency:

Understand how Pennsylvania's Main Streets play a key role in building economic resiliency through tangible programming and direct assistance and less tangible efforts related to community identity and pride, which builds a loyal customer base.

Communicate these findings and key graphics on State and local websites, newsletters, presentations, and program-specific one-pagers developed through this process that summarize the impact of individual communities with the intention of bolstering local fundraising efforts.

So much of resiliency comes down to placemaking and creating the physical and social environment that attracts a range of residents, land uses, and business types. Helping to restore and provide new housing is another critical element that addresses community needs while building a strong local customer base.

The economy is in unprecedented times, and the story of resiliency is not over. Consider updating this study within the next two years to tell a more complete story and identify current consumer trends, business needs, and best practices for supporting business districts in 2023 & beyond.

Main Streets are a flexible, adaptive, and efficient link between state oversight and local economic conditions. **The role of Main Street is more important than ever** as changes in technology, employment, supply chain, consumer preferences, and more continue to change rapidly. Continue to encourage innovation and creativity in local programming.



PENNSYLVANIA
Downtown Center
• Since 1987 •

