

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS: **Main Street Program/Downtown Carbondale**

Although Carbondale Main Street is a non-profit organization not directly connected with the City of Carbondale, its mission is compatible with the goals of the Preservation Commission and its principles are rooted in historic preservation.

Background

The Carbondale Main Street effort began in 1988 as an ad hoc committee of interested citizens who worked to beautify downtown, lobbied the City Council on behalf of downtown businesses, and supported Station Carbondale, another non-profit group, with their efforts to preserve the historic train depot. The growth of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's National Main Street Program and the establishment of the Illinois Main Street Program, led the committee to organize a new group that would follow the four-point approach advocated by the national and state organizations. Thus organized, and with the backing of business and community leaders, Carbondale Main Street, Inc. was accepted into the Illinois Main Street Program in 1996. The mission of the Carbondale Main Street Program is:

“to enhance and promote the economic and social vitality of Carbondale’s downtown district through the cultivation of a unique and quality atmosphere that attracts businesses and shoppers to our downtown.”

The program has a paid manager and office space, and is run by an eighteen member volunteer board of directors. A diverse group, the board is currently composed of property owners, businesspeople, city representatives, and interested citizens. The board is elected by the general membership. Members are those businesses located within the Special Service Area (Carbondale Main Street District), which pay an annual assessment, and interested individuals, who pay annual dues. As of April 2002, the organization includes between 350-400 members.

The program follows the national four-point approach of organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring, with committees established to coordinate each point. After five years of activity, the Main Street Program has become accepted within the downtown business community and has become known for its positive impact on downtown Carbondale. Among the more successful projects coordinated by Main Street are special events, most notably the “Pig Out,” a festival that welcomes Southern Illinois University students to Carbondale and acquaints them with downtown businesses. Also successful are Carbondale Main Street’s three grant programs: Facade with Signage Grant, Architectural Design Assistance Grant, and Rear Entrance/Alleyway Grant. Properties must be located within the Special Service Area to be eligible for the three grant programs. All of the grants are funded through Main Street’s operating budget, which is supported through the Special Service Area assessment, city allocations, and organizational fund raising.

Grant Programs

Facade with Signage Grant Program

The Facade with Signage Grant program began in 1998. It is a 50 percent matching grant program with a maximum allotment of \$1,000. Grant funding can be used for any exterior improvement or repair to a building's main elevation or facade abutting a public right-of-way, including door and window repair or replacement, paint removal or repainting, masonry and cornice repair, wall and storefront refurbishment or removal of false fronts, awnings, exterior lighting, and signage. Grants for signage and lighting alone are limited to a single, 50 percent matching grant per quarter (or four sign grants per year) with a maximum grant of \$500. As of April 2002, six facade grants and seven signage grants have been dispensed for a total of \$7652.50.

Architectural Design Assistance Grant Program

The Architectural Design Assistance Grant program pays up to \$400 for professional design services relating to exterior rehabilitation in an effort to retain the architectural integrity and historic character of the Carbondale Main Street district. One grant has been used for this purpose as of April 2002.

Rear Entrance/Alleyway Grant Program

A recent grant program was instituted that focuses on rear elevations that are exposed to public view by alleyways, parking lots, or railroad tracks. Applicants are encouraged to develop new rear entrances, renovate dated rear entrances, or develop attractive murals/artwork for outer walls to make the best use of buildings, parking situations, and physical aesthetics of the property. The Rear Entrance/Alleyway Grant is also a 50 percent matching grant that has a maximum subsidy of \$500. This money can be used for window and door repair and replacement, exterior painting or paint removal, masonry repair, wall refurbishment, exterior lighting, signage, landscaping, and beautification including the addition of murals. No grants have been issued under this program as of April 2002.

Architectural Review Procedures

All grant applications are reviewed by the Carbondale Main Street Grant Committee for their architectural appropriateness, and advice from local architects is often solicited. The entire review process can take two or more months. Although there are no formal written guidelines, the Main Street committee looks at an application's suitability and positive effect on the historic character of the building. If the building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is a designated Carbondale Landmark, or is on the City's *Master List of Historic and Architecturally Significant Properties in Carbondale*, then the applicant is urged to consult with the Carbondale Preservation Commission. Both groups informally follow the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation* and *Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Structures*. In 1996, the Preservation Commission published *Architectural Preservation Guidelines*, which contains suggestions for design standards for local historic buildings. In addition, buildings listed on the Carbondale Register of Historic Places include specific design standards as part of the designation. Three buildings within the Main Street District are locally listed: the Old Railroad Passenger Depot, the Old Freight Building (Town Square Pavilion), and the F.A. Prickett Building.

Future Considerations

The Carbondale Preservation Commission and the Carbondale Main Street Program have a good working relationship. Grant applicants of landmarked and even potential landmarks are urged to discuss their plans with the Commission before the Main Street Board awards a grant. However, formal adoption of the Commission's 1996 *Architectural Preservation Guidelines* by the Main Street Program would standardized the review procedure and perhaps shorten the review period as prospective applicants would have written guidelines to follow in the preparation of their project design. Such standardization would also make the grant program more effective in protecting the historic resources of downtown Carbondale.

The Commission might consider partnering with the Main Street Program in holding a series of design charrettes or infill competitions for specific areas, such as South Illinois Avenue, or for specific buildings in need of sensitive rehabilitation that would demonstrate how the *Guidelines* might be applied. The entries could be published in a booklet. Rock Island conducted such a competition under a Certified Local Government (CLG) grant and published "New Homes in Old Rock Island." A competition could also publicize the Architectural Design grants and Rear Entrance/Alleyway grants which have been under used.

The Commission and Main Street should also promote the use of the 20 percent federal tax credit for certified historic rehabilitation projects whenever applicable for commercial projects, thus encouraging listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Main Street's grant programs might also be amended so that nationally or locally listed buildings would receive a 70 percent grant rather than the current 50 percent. Moreover, a five-year City property tax freeze on approved landmarked property improvements might be considered.

The Main Street Program is also a good partner for the Commission in many of the educational activities outlined in this Plan. Tours of the Town Square have been developed, but information about the tours and distribution of tour brochures could be handled effectively by business members of Main Street. Additionally, the informational exhibit, once developed by the Commission, should be displayed at all Main Street promotional events. Empty storefronts could be decorated with historic pictorial displays from the City's Photographic Archives. Main Street could also be a co-sponsor for Commission events such as the Kids' Building Fair or the Old House Fair.

The Main Street Program works in Carbondale by following the National Trust's four point approach: organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring. The Carbondale Preservation Commission should continue to work with the Main Street Program and further its own preservation mission by coordinating efforts and taking advantage of Main Street's strengths and organization.

Recommendations

- The Preservation Commission should continue to partner with the Carbondale Main Street Program on activities that promote the historic character and resources of the

downtown. Such activities include, but should not be limited to, co-sponsoring special events and/or design charrettes, distribution of tour brochures, display of the Commission's proposed informational exhibit, and the promotion of the Commission's mission to landmark significant properties.

- The Preservation Commission and the Main Street Program should continue to jointly review grant applications of landmarked and potential landmark buildings in the Downtown.
- The Preservation Commission should encourage the Carbondale Main Street Program to adopt the Commission's 1996 *Architectural Preservation Guidelines* as their grant guidelines.
- The Preservation Commission should promote the use of the 20 percent federal tax credit for National Register-listed commercial properties.
- The Main Street Program should consider amending their grant programs to provide a greater financial benefit to those buildings that are nationally or locally designated as historic.