

Main Street Matters

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HILLSBORO

*Written by Chris Moore, Main Street Manager, Hillsboro
Main Street Program*

Most Texans have heard of and driven through Hillsboro, but few have seen the “real” Hillsboro. Historically, Hillsboro has always been the point at which state highways fork to go to Dallas or Fort Worth. In fact, since the

creation of state highways, there have been four “Y’s” in Hillsboro. In 1989, the focus moved even more toward Interstate 35 with the opening of the Outlets at Hillsboro, one of the first outlet malls to open in the state. In its heyday, the mall would attract visitors from hundreds of miles and finding a parking space in the mall’s large parking lots was a test of one’s patience. But over the last 28 years, the climate for outlet malls shifted as new centers were built in larger cities and gradually visitors to Hillsboro’s outlet mall began to wane.

(Cont. on page 2)



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Today, when people drive through Hillsboro on Interstate 35, they assume that the community is diminishing because the outlet mall has decreased to only 18 stores. However, this is not an accurate depiction of the community. Hillsboro's main street area is thriving and experiencing unprecedented growth. The Hillsboro main street area is the "real" Hillsboro.

Hillsboro has a rich history with the Texas Main Street Program. In 1981, Hillsboro was chosen as one of the original five programs and continued as a Main Street community until a three year hiatus in 1998. In 2001, Hillsboro returned as a Main Street Street city and has remained since.

After several years of little growth in downtown, the city council, along with new city manager Frank Johnson, decided to make the Main Street program a priority for the city in early 2015. In May of 2015, Chris Moore was hired as the new Main Street manager. With full support from the city manager, the Main Street program has taken a downtown area that had only 84 businesses in May 2015 to a bustling downtown of 124 businesses as of July 2017. This represents a jump in occupancy rates from 61% to its current 90%.



In the early 2010s, the city completed a renovation of the sidewalks and historic style lamps in portions of downtown.

So what is the secret to Hillsboro's growth?

"Honestly, I feel like we have stumbled into doing things right," says Moore, who was a pastor for ten years prior to accepting the position with Hillsboro. "I was given permission to be creative and to use my lack of traditional experience to our advantage by asking the questions others might not ask, and attempting ideas that others typically don't attempt," Moore explained.

It all began with the restoration of downtown Hillsboro's image.

"When my family moved to Hillsboro, I was struck with the beauty of the downtown area. Yet all I saw online or heard in the community were comments that Hillsboro was dying and there was nothing going on here. So when I began as main street manager, I realized that the first goal was simply to just change the conversation surrounding our main street area," Moore continued.

To change the conversation, the Main Street program took a Facebook page that had only a few hundred followers in the area and began to daily talk about Hillsboro's history, its people, its businesses, and historic buildings downtown. Over time, hundreds became thousands. Today, the Facebook page has the largest following of any page in Hill County with almost 7,000.

One of the first big projects as a Main Street city was the downtown streetscape. This provided handicap-accessible sidewalk ramps, shade trees, banners, better parking, and more accessible entrances for businesses. The project began in 2007 and has refreshed the appearance of downtown.

This presented a unique opportunity as Hillsboro Main Street now had control of their message to people inside the community and, for the first time, the message of downtown was making its way beyond Hillsboro. But the changes did not remain



(Left) The Bond's Alley Art Festival attracts visitors from around the state to one of Hillsboro's oldest alleys. It is between Texas' oldest pharmacy, T.B. Bond Pharmacy, and Old Rock Saloon, built in 1876, and one of Hill County's oldest buildings. (Middle) The Hillsboro Farmers Market on the Hill County Courthouse square features locally grown and produced items and is open every Saturday from May through October. (Right) Fire and Ice is an annual event the Saturday following Valentine's Day that features a gourmet meal and Sinatra style concert in a historic building downtown.

just in cyberspace. Through numerous brainstorming sessions with Frank Johnson and city secretary, Karen Warren, Moore developed a strategy to reintroduce Hillsboro Main Street as a "third space" where people would want to spend their time after work and home. The strategy focused on attracting to people downtown through events.

"To attract attention to downtown early on, we realized that we had to give people an excuse to come," said Moore.

To do this, some new events were created, such as the Cinco de Mayo Celebration, 2nd Saturday Downtown Flea Market, and Fire and Ice, an annual event the Saturday following Valentine's Day that features a

gourmet meal and Sinatra style concert in a historic building downtown. Other events already existed, such as the Bond's Alley Art Festival, Cotton Pickin' Fair, Hillsboro Farmers Market, and Christmas on Elm Street. But Moore and Johnson determined that if Main Street was going to host events, then they were going to be quality events. As a result, all pre-existing events were improved, with the help of the Main Street board of directors, to become something that would be an attraction beyond Hillsboro as well.

It wasn't long before downtown businesses began taking matters into their own hands. R&R Fitness began hosting the annual Halloween in Hillsboro event downtown in 2014 but expanded the event in 2015. Following suit, several businesses banded



(Left) The Cotton Pickin' Fair is held on the fourth weekend of September each year and features some of Texas' top musicians, vendors, and an IBCA State Championship BBQ Cook-off. (Middle) On the first Saturday of May, downtown Hillsboro hosts the annual Cinco de Mayo celebration with children's activities, concerts, and food competitions. (Right) The community enjoys the downtown window displays, parade, and the lighting of the Hill County Courthouse on the first Saturday of December every year.

together to host quarterly downtown concerts called “Downtown Sounds.” Then Carroll Estes and the Roadside America Museum decided to bring back the Elm Street Rod Run, which attracted almost 300 classic cars and thousands of visitors to downtown in 2016.

Some of the growth Hillsboro has experienced has been the result of the perfect storm. In 2015, the television show, *Fixer Upper*, restored a home in Hillsboro and began attracting people to the community from around the country.

“We received a real boost downtown when there were pictures online of Joanna Gaines shopping in several of our downtown businesses,” Moore explained. Not long after the episode aired in December 2015, Hillsboro won the Viewer’s Choice episode of the television series, *The Daytripper*. Much of this was due to a strong online push through the Hillsboro Main Street Facebook page that encouraged followers to go online and vote for Hillsboro. Once the Hillsboro Daytripper episode aired, Main Street immediately began to see results.

“People were coming from all over the country and discovering our downtown after *The Daytripper* episode aired. It’s funny because we can tell every time the episode re-airs as we see a spike in visitors again,” Moore commented.

Hillsboro’s Roadside America Museum was also featured on *Texas Country Reporter*, and *Texas Farm and Home Magazine* ran a feature story on Hillsboro Main Street in their June 2016 issue. In the August 2017 issue of *Texas Highways*, Chet Garner’s “The Daytripper” column will also feature Hillsboro. Main Street now boasts 10 outstanding restaurants, 29 retail businesses ranging from home décor and clothing to antiques and auto parts, along with numerous service and office locations downtown.

“138 is the magic number for me now,” says Moore. “This is the number of storefronts in downtown. We have 124 of them filled right now and I’m working daily to get us to 100% occupancy. Beyond the obvious draw of a full downtown, an occupied building is one that is being preserved, which is our ultimate goal. Many of our downtown buildings are more than 120 years old. We’re going to make sure they have life for generations to come.”



(Top) *Fixer Upper* filmed an episode in Hillsboro in 2015. Several downtown businesses received a boost when Joanna Gaines was shown online shopping in Hillsboro’s downtown shops. This photo was taken in the Hillsboro Antique Mall. (Middle) In 2016, *The Daytripper* featured Hillsboro in their Viewers’ Choice episode. (Bottom) The Roadside America Museum was featured on *Texas Country Reporter* and hosts the annual Elm Street Rod Run every June.



to a historic building, it complements and finishes off the whole project. Signage is the “jewelry” on the façade. In the bigger picture, Main Street is more than just the historic buildings. It is about making a community thrive again, and small business is a huge part of that success. Signage is essential to the image of a business; it is often the first impression a customer has. Recently Main Street design staff, Sarah Blankenship and Marie Oehlerking-Read, visited two sign companies to better understand modern materials and processes being used in the signage industry to better align our services with the reality of the production world.

The Texas Theater is one of the few remaining vacant downtown properties. Many in Hillsboro long for the day it reopens and draws more visitors to downtown.

In March of 2016, design staff provided renderings for the Park Plaza Hotel in Seguin illustrating appropriate placement and size. The signs were executed almost exactly as the renderings depicted. We asked Seguin’s Main Street Manager, Kyle Kramm, where the sign was made, and that led us to our first site visit at U.S. Signs in New Braunfels.

Hillsboro Main Street will continue moving forward. They understand they are not just restoring the past, but also building a great future for Hillsboro.

For more information on Hillsboro’s Main Street, visit www.hillsboromainstreet.org.

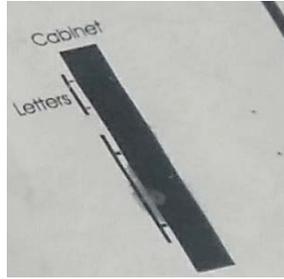
RENDERING TO REALITY: SIGN MATERIALS AND FABRICATION

Article written by Sarah Blankenship, Project Design Assistant, Texas Main Street Program

Main Street design staff has created thousands of renderings that include signage. We have toyed with the idea of taking signage services away for many years because it goes beyond our main role of preserving the building. However, we have found countless examples of signage that is improperly sized and placed, which significantly detracts from the historic building. In this sense, signage is a vital component in the design process. When a properly proportioned and quality sign is added

DEPTH IS KEY

On the next page is US Signs’ mock up for the Plaza Hotel sign. Depth is a very important factor in signage that can often times help convey quality of the sign itself and the business. Note in this mock up the dimension details for the letters. The letters are 1/8 inches three-dimensional router cut aluminum letters, and they are attached to the sign cabinet with studs. The aluminum letters are painted white with an automotive grade paint. In the actual photograph of the signage, upper right, the depth on the vertical blade sign and canopy sign is apparent. Note the shadows (a primary indicator of depth) made by the letters, logo, and decorative details by separating them from the background. The studs (pins) that attach the letters to the background are typically ¼ inches. The pins provide another important role—preventing streaking. By separating the letters from the background, rain can flow in between. Any paint run-off or rusting by adjacent materials is avoided by the separation.



(Top images) Main Street design staff renderings. (Bottom left and middle) Sign company rendering and specifications. (Bottom right) Router cut metal letters.

Park Plaza Hotel with new signage installed.

CHANNEL LETTERS, MORE DEPTH AND LIGHTING

Channel letters are a very common sign type today. In general, they are more appropriate to strip centers, but we are seeing more of them in downtowns. How do we bridge the gap and choose what is appropriate for Main Street cities?

First, we need to understand what channel letters are. Channel letters are separate pieces of sheet metal that are welded/attached together to make three-dimensional letters. They get their name from the internal “channel” contained within each letter. The internal channel is where the lighting components are located. Today, there are four basic configurations: front lit/standard, reverse lit (or halo lit), front/back lit, and open face. Main Street Staff does not deem front lit letters appropriate for historic downtowns because the light is too glaring and bright. In general, an indirect source of light should be used. Spot lights that are completely separate from the sign are appropriate. If lighting the letters is still desired, staff finds reverse lit channel letters appropriate. Open face can be appropriate on a case by case scenario if exposed neon is used.

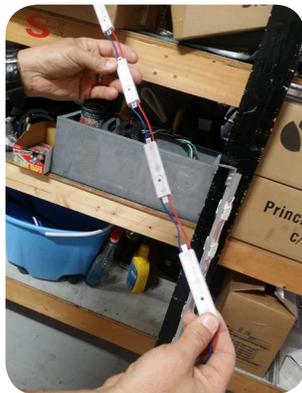
In the close-up side views of U.S. Signs monument



(Top left) front lit (not recommended), (top right) reverse lit (recommended), (bottom left) front/back lit (not recommended), and (bottom right) open face (appropriate on case by case basis).

signage below, notice both the separation from the background and the depth of the letters. In comparison to the Park Plaza Hotel, these letters are very deep. 5 inches is a standard depth for channel letters. This standard depth comes from the history of their use with neon signs.

From our Main Street design perspective with signage on historic buildings, we typically find that 5 inches

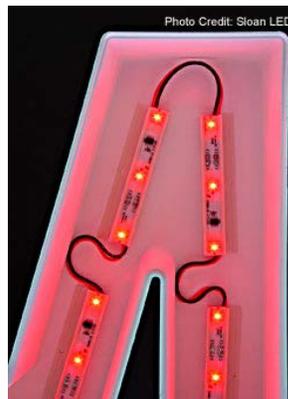


(Top) Monument sign in front of U.S. Signs. (Middle images) Side views of channel letters showing studs and LED lighting. (Bottom left) Basic channel letter form. (Bottom right) Strip of LED lighting.

channel letters create a letter that is too bulky and detracts from the building. Most downtown commercial buildings are one to two stories and 25 feet in width. The architectural detailing typically projects in smaller increments. For example, brick corbelling would step out half the brick width or less, which is only 1.8 inches. If these 5 inches letters are going on a very large building with many stories, it will not be as big as an issue because the higher the letters are, the smaller they will look. We inquired if sign companies can make channel signs with smaller widths. The answer is yes, and 1 ½ inches to 3 inches was recommended. Therefore, our recommendation to business owners with a typical downtown building is to inquire about channel letters with a smaller depth when looking into fabrication. Likewise, request that the cabinet (what the sign is mounted to) have a shorter depth to decrease the appearance of bulkiness.

LIGHTING

Today, LED lighting has become the common lighting source. It is less expensive, lighter, easier to attach, and does not break as easily. The LED bulbs also last longer than other forms of lighting. It is commonly used in closed face channel letters. The strips of light are attached to the back side of the channel letter or the side walls. The thinner the channel letter, the more “hot spots” the lighting can make. If you are considering a 1 ½ inches to 3 inches depth channel letter, the LED should be located on the side walls to decrease hot spots. LED is not used on open face signs. This is because it is not one continuous tube of light, but rather rectangular units with pinpoints of light with wiring in-between, which is not aesthetically pleasing. Neon on the other



(Left) Letter LED lights lit. (Right) Neon in open face channel letter.



NEON signs from CSC's Sign Gallery.

hand, is a historic sign method that does have the continuous tube of lighting and works well with open face channel letters.

While LED is very popular, there is somewhat of a neon resurgence happening, which led us to our next sign company, Custom Sign Creations (CSC), in Austin. Neon signs are made with glass tubes that are blown into the specific shape of the business' name or logo. "Neon Signs" derives from neon being the original gas used to light the tubes. Several other gases have since been used along with different tints and phosphor coating for the glass tubes that produce a variety of over 50 colors. For example, helium creates yellow, carbon dioxide is white, and mercury makes blue. A high-voltage electrical current is passed through the gas and the tubes emit light.

CSC conveyed to us that there is a misconception that neon is not energy efficient, in fact, they consider it more efficient. Neon signs in the past have been temperamental and short easily, leaving non-lit signs. However, new technology has changed that. Transformers now have a ground fault projection that allows the sign to come back on when it is dry. The transformers have helped take away the audible hum of older signs. There have also been advancements in keeping water out of the housing. Both lighting types can be used in historic downtowns. It just depends on the signage design and local ordinance.

CARVED FOAM

Until now, the article has focused on metal, based on the course our Park Plaza Hotel signage took us. However, Styrofoam is another option to consider. Historically, wood was carved to create beautiful

three-dimensional signs. We were told that good quality wood for this purpose is getting harder to find. High density foam is now the common material used to create effect of carved wood using a router. The background can even be given a wood texture. Carved foam is a great option to give a sign more depth while also maintaining a traditional appearance.

Thanks for joining us on our sign company visit adventure. There is so much to learn and share, but we'll stop here for now. [Preservation Brief #25](#)



(Top left and bottom left): Styrofoam cut signs, (Right) High density foam before cutting.

includes additional history and preservation of signs. Keep in mind that signage is often your business' first impression. It should not be an afterthought. Carefully consider what fits on your building and what materials would work best to make your businesses stand out for the right reasons.

SPECIAL VOLUNTEERS

In each edition of *Main Street Matters*, we continue to spotlight those volunteers whose contributions and dedication are important to the success of local programs. If you would like to honor a special volunteer with a spotlight, please send a short narrative and image to sarah.marshall@thc.texas.gov.

Becky Kauffman, Waxahachie Main Street Program

*Written by Anita Brown, Main Street Manager,
Waxahachie Main Street Program*

It's hard to comprehend how much Becky Kauffman has done and continues to do for the city of Waxahachie and its Main Street Program. Becky moved to Waxahachie in 1976, and it did not take her long to recognize the need to preserve the wonderful resources here. In 1978, she was one of the founding members of Historic Waxahachie, Inc. (HWI), one of the most important preservation groups in Waxahachie.

In 1984, with the strength of preliminary survey work conducted by Becky and others, the city of Waxahachie and HWI partnered on the first Historic Resources of Waxahachie—a Texas survey which was published in 1985. Since then, Becky has helped with two other historic property surveys. She also co-authored three publications developed by HWI—*Downtown Walking Tour* (1984), *Driving Tour* (1987), and *Researching Your Historic Property* (2010). All of these publications are great tools for the Main Street Program and used almost daily.

The city of Waxahachie passed its first preservation ordinance in February of 2000. This ordinance established the Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC), which functions as the design arm of our Main Street Program. Becky has served as the Chair of the HPC since its inception and helped to research and draft all of Waxahachie's preservation ordinances. She was also instrumental in helping Waxahachie become a Certified Local Government and Visionaries in Preservation community.

Becky purchased and restored a vacant downtown building in 2002-2003 from which she ran two successful businesses—Becky Kauffman's Living Spaces and Waxahachie Farms. She utilized the Federal Historic



Tax Credits in doing the restoration and has used the knowledge gained in that process to assist other property owners interested in that incentive. As a downtown building and business owner, she was an active member of the Downtown Merchants Association, sharing her expertise in a variety of ways.

Becky has helped with the design of new structures built in the Overlay District making sure they complement the historic downtown. She has also done research for several historical markers including the 1899 Rogers Street iron bridge, the 1868 Wyatt building, and the 1855 Calaboose. She is currently doing research for a marker on the MKT Depot. All of these properties are downtown.

Becky has helped countless property owners who have come before the HPC by offering her design skills, preservation knowledge, and material resources. She is always willing to help with any project and consult with any citizen. She is a great asset to the city of Waxahachie and is a driving force in most every preservation project in the city.

The core tenant of Main Street is **preservation as a tool for economic development**. Recent figures show that tourism, heritage tourism in particular, accounts for almost 10% of Waxahachie's economy. If our historic resources had not been protected and preserved, that money would not be coming here. A lot of the credit for that goes to Becky who got the preservation ball rolling in Waxahachie. She has spent 40 years protecting the history, architecture, and beauty of a city she adopted and we are so thankful she belongs to us!

CALENDAR

SATURDAY 8.5

- Buda: First Saturday in Downtown Buda (9–noon)
- Ennis: Ennis Farmers Market (8 a.m.–1 p.m.)
- Farmersville: Farmers & Fleas Market (9 a.m.–3 p.m.)
- La Grange: A Day Out in La Grange (10 a.m.–5 p.m.)
- Rockwall: Rockwall Farmers Market (8 a.m.–noon)
- San Angelo: Concho Valley Farmers Market (7 a.m.–noon)
- San Augustine: Junk in the Trunk Trades Day (8 a.m.–noon)

THURSDAY 8.10

- Elgin: Sip, Shop & Stroll (5–8 p.m.)
- Levelland: Movie on the Square (4–9 p.m.)
- Rockwall: Night Owls Late Till 8! (5–8 p.m.)

FRIDAY 8.11

- Canton: Free Outdoor Movie (8:45–noon)
- Taylor: Movies in the Square (7–8 p.m.)
- Waxahachie: Summer Moonlight Movie (9–11:30 p.m.)

SATURDAY 8.12

- Caldwell: Second Saturday Slavnost (10 a.m.–6 p.m.)
- Ennis: Ennis Farmers Market (8 a.m.–1 p.m.)
- Georgetown: Second Saturday Market Days (9 a.m.–4 p.m.)

SATURDAY 8.12 CONT.

- Gladewater: Gladewater Art Stroll (12–5 p.m.)
- Hillsboro: Summer Outdoor Movie Series (8:30–11 p.m.)
- Nacogdoches: Main “Sweet” Treats and Beats (10 a.m.–5 p.m.)
- Rockwall: Rockwall Farmers Market (8 a.m.–12 p.m.)

THURSDAY 8.17

- Victoria: Summer Street Dances (7–10 p.m.)

SATURDAY 8.19

- Ennis: Ennis Farmers Market (8 a.m.–1 p.m.)
- Georgetown: Pistons on the Square Car Show (8–10 a.m.)
- Rockwall: Rockwall Farmers Market (8 a.m.–noon)

SATURDAY 8.26

- Ennis: Ennis Farmers Market (8 a.m.–1 p.m.)
- Farmersville: Bugtussle Classic Car Trek (9 a.m.–4 p.m.)
- Rockwall: Rockwall Farmers Market (8 a.m.–noon)

Websites of Interest

- **Advisory Council on Historic Preservation:** www.achp.gov
- **African American Heritage Preservation Foundation:** www.aahpfdn.org
- **(The) Alliance for Historic Landscape Preservation:** www.ahlp.org
- **(The) American Institute of Architects:** www.aia.org
- **American Planning Association:** www.planning.org
- **American Society of Landscape Architects:** www.asla.org
- **(The) Cultural Landscape Foundation:** www.tclf.org
- **(The) Handbook of Texas Online:** www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online
- **Keep Texas Beautiful:** www.ktb.org
- **League of Historic American Theatres:** www.lhat.org
- **National Main Street Center:** www.preservationnation.org/main-street
- **National Park Service:** www.nps.gov
- **National Trust for Historic Preservation:** www.preservationnation.org
- **Partners for Sacred Places:** www.sacredplaces.org
- **Preservation Easement Trust:** www.preservationeasement.org
- **Preservation Directory.com:** www.preservationdirectory.com
- **Preservation Texas:** www.preservationtexas.org
- **Project for Public Spaces:** www.pps.org
- **Rails-to-Trails Conservancy:** www.railstotrails.org
- **Scenic America:** www.scenic.org
- **Texas Department of Agriculture:** www.TexasAgriculture.gov
- **Texas Commission on the Arts:** www.arts.texas.gov
- **Texas Downtown Association:** www.texasdowntown.org
- **Texas Folklife Resources:** www.texasfolklife.org
- **Texas Historical Commission:** www.thc.texas.gov
- **Texas Parks and Wildlife Department:** www.tpwd.texas.gov
- **Texas Rural Leadership Program:** www.trlp.org
- **Texas State Preservation Board:** www.tspb.state.tx.us
- **Urban Land Institute:** www.uli.org