



# Main Street Matters!

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## SPOTLIGHT ON PALESTINE: HEART OF OUR HISTORY – KEY TO OUR FUTURE

*Written by Greg Laudadio, Main Street Manager, Palestine Main Street Program*

Palestine is a town steeped in rich history with the distinction of having the second most historic designations in the state. The heart and soul of that history can be found in the 44 blocks of its historic Main Street district. Stretching from the courthouse square and running over a mile south and west to the visitor center, this large district is home to historic churches, turn-of-the-century hotels, shops and restaurants, one of the few remaining Carnegie Libraries, parks, art sculptures, restored downtown lofts, murals, a farmers market, pubs, and entertainment venues.

### History

Palestine was established in 1846 as the seat of Anderson County. It prospered with an inland port on the Trinity River at nearby Magnolia Landing. Barges and steamers traveled from Galveston to pick up



Palestine's Main Street district houses many buildings that still stand and operate as they did over a hundred years ago.

shipments of cotton, timber, and other agricultural goods. In 1872, the International-Great Northern Railroad established its presence in Palestine. This helped make Palestine a regional center for the shipping and receiving of goods and a prosperous location for merchants to set up shop. Around the turn of the century, Palestine was home to a three-story opera house, an impressive Masonic Lodge, active train depot, five-story hotel, law offices, railroad offices, merchant shops, sawmills, a cotton gin, and a street car that ran from the train depot up the hill to the courthouse.

Palestine's Main Street district encompasses the areas that have historically been the heart of the original town. Today many of those original buildings still stand and operate as they did over 100 years ago.

### Historic Architecture

Residents and tourists love Palestine's historic architecture and the history of each of these buildings. A stroll through the Main Street district will showcase a large diversity of styles and genres, each telling a little story that helps make up the fabric of the town.

The courthouse square, as with most Texas county seats, is often the center of activity and a backdrop to festivals and parades. The current Anderson County courthouse was preceded by four prior courthouses. Built in 1914, it is exceptionally beautiful and draws tourists who can still climb the winding wood and marble double staircase to view the stained glass under the dome, and look down to the mural on the floor below. Parades begin and end their winding routes through town at the courthouse square, and the columns are decorated with lights, ribbons, and bows to celebrate the holidays.

The Carnegie Library is one of only 13 remaining in the state. Built over 100 years ago, it operated continuously as a public library until the 1980s. It now appropriately serves as the city office of the Historic Preservation Department.

The historic Redlands Hotel plays host to travelers today just as it did over 100 years ago. This five story fireproof building was a technological wonder in its day. Steel beams, concrete, brick, and mortar have held the impressive façade in place since 1914.

Sacred Heart Catholic Church towers over the Main Street district as it has since 1892. Nicholas J. Clayton of Galveston, called by many “Texas’ First Architect,” designed the church. He is also known for designing the iconic Bishop’s Palace in Galveston. A gothic revival structure with a spire and bell tower, the building is constructed of 675,000 handmade bricks. The mud for the brick was hauled from the Trinity River and was molded on the construction site.



(Top) The Carnegie Library is one of the only 13 remaining in Texas. (Second row) The courthouse square is the center of activity and backdrop for several festivals and parades for downtown Palestine. (3rd row left) The historic Redlands Hotel has hosted travelers for over 100 years. (Third row right) The Sacred Heart Catholic Church was designed by Nicholas J. Clayton. (Bottom) A stroll through the Main Street district showcases a large diversity of architectural styles and genres.

There are many architecturally significant buildings in the Main Street district, some of which have been converted into downtown living. One of the most significant is a 1950s insurance agency that has recently been renovated into a Mid-Century Modern style residence. The owner, the son of the original insurance agent that built it, decided it was time to move downtown. While there are only a handful of full-time downtown residents, interest seems to be growing.

While Palestine's historic Main Street district has many amazing assets, it still has its challenges. Some of the buildings are vacant and have absentee owners. Some buildings are used for storage and are not well-maintained. There are issues with code enforcement and compliance, and owner neglect often causes the integrity of these amazing old buildings to suffer.

**Center of Community Activity**  
Palestine's Main Street district is the epicenter of community activity. This town loves a parade! There are several festivals, parades, holiday events, and parties happening here each year. Some have been going on for decades. All take place in the Main Street district. This year, the Dogwood Trails Festival and Parade will celebrate its 79th year.

Main Street is where the art is. The Art Tracks Program invites artists from all over the country to loan their sculptures to the city and have them prominently displayed throughout the Main Street district. This has been a huge success. There is a sculpture park being built in the district that will showcase Palestine's historic ties to the railroad. Inspired by other Main Street communities, local artists have started a downtown mural project, which welcomes people to town, and beautifying old painted masonry walls. Each year, tens of thousands of tourists

come to Palestine to ride the Polar Express at the Texas State Railroad. Main Street merchants gladly welcome the added business each season. Main Street is the heart of the town for the people who live here as well as those who are visiting.

### **Community Rallies Around Main Street Businesses**

Deadly flooding affected the city of Palestine and Anderson County in the late hours of April 30 into the early morning of May 1, 2016. Six people lost their lives, and dozens of homes and businesses were destroyed or damaged. Among those businesses affected were several within the Palestine Main Street district along Wells Creek in an area known as Old Town. The Oxbow Bakery, Shelton Gin, Pint & Barrel Pub, and Hambone's Cajun Grill were flooded under several feet of water. Vehicles floated downstream as people scrambled out of the water



(Left) This year the 79th Dogwood Trails Festival and Parade will take place. It spotlights the area's beautiful dogwood trees while raising funds for various local non-profit organizations. (Right) Local artists have started a downtown mural project which welcomes people to town and beautifies old painted masonry walls.

to avoid being swept away. The next day, the community came together and rallied around these popular establishments. Many volunteers (over 200) showed up to help with clean-up efforts and to raise funds for employees who were temporarily out of work until repairs were completed. This outpouring of support showed us just how important our small businesses in the Main Street district are to our community. Efforts to reopen these businesses were ongoing for several months, but thanks to the outpouring of support they are all back up and running and serving the community that continues to support them.

### Growth and Smart Incentives

Some of the factors contributing to growth are simple policy changes that make downtown more attractive. Others are more impactful to everyday lives. While the railroad is a major part of Palestine's history, the train horns blowing downtown may soon be a thing of the past. The city has voted to support a quiet zone, which will stop trains from blowing their horns as they pass through town. This is something that is expected to help promote new business and increase downtown living.

Other examples of efforts to improve growth are various incentive programs offered by Main Street and Economic Development. The façade improvement program, which offers matching funds for improvements to the exterior and roofs of Main Street district buildings, has been successfully utilized by dozens of downtown property owners over the years.

Additional incentives were recently created in an attempt to address



(Top) Over 200 volunteers came together after deadly flooding in May 2016, and helped with clean-up efforts and raising funds for employees who were out of work. Efforts to open up businesses that were affected are still ongoing. (Bottom) The railroad is a major part of Palestine's history, the city recently voted to support a quiet zone to stop trains from blowing their horns when they pass through town.

issues that cause added expense to restoration efforts. Older buildings can be purchased for much less than newer buildings in a more modern part of town. Unfortunately, the restoration expense can sometimes exceed the purchase price. To help offset this, matching fund grant programs have been put in place to help incentivize growth in the Main Street district. One distinct issue that potential buyers encountered was damages caused by bats roosting in upper floors of vacant buildings. The accumulation of guano over the years can cause deterioration to the surfaces it

comes in contact with and cleanup and restoration is necessary. It is also necessary to evict the bats. This added expense was scaring away potential buyers. Main Street and Historic Preservation worked with various agencies (including Texas Parks and Wildlife since the Mexican free-tailed bat is a protected species) to come up with a process to do this correctly. By forming a public/private partnership and providing matching funds, we can get more business downtown and preserve these historic buildings simultaneously.

Another example of an issue encountered on a regular basis in

the historic downtown area is the discovery of asbestos materials in old buildings. While this problem can be managed and mitigated, it scares a lot of potential investors away due to the added expense, so we created another matching grant to help offset their expenses. By simply investing in our downtown through partnerships with property owners, we build stronger relationships, show the public that we are serious about improving our downtown assets, and make a meaningful contribution to the future of these buildings.

### Looking to the Future

Many people see the potential in Palestine's Main Street district. Those people know that to preserve it and protect it, we must use it.

The Main Street Advisory Board, Palestine Economic Development Corporation, and the City of Palestine are currently funding a downtown assessment study to help guide future development and preservation efforts. Expanding opportunities for new business and new downtown living have become a priority. Finding new ways to utilize old or existing assets seems smarter now than ever. What's old is new again. Palestine has always looked to the future while embracing its past. The biggest investment to preserve and enhance this area is one of time and persistence.

## WHY IS IT HARD TO LIVE IN DOWNTOWN, TX? MIXED-USE BUILDING CODE ISSUES IN HISTORIC BUILDINGS

*Article written by Riley Triggs, Architect, Town Square Initiative, Texas Main Street Program*

In postwar America, zoning ordinances designed to separate differing uses combined with HUD and FHA financing programs that encouraged low-density, detached single family dwellings to proliferate outside of our urban cores. This began the decline of downtown living because those strategies served to move wealthier residents out of our cities and to concentrate poverty in urban centers. This led to the general drop in care of building stock, and downtown living acquired a stigma for citizens and governments alike. Higher property values and subsequently higher tax bills put more pressure on living options downtown because lease rates were lower in the increasingly blighted downtowns. This compelled property owners to leave buildings vacant and unmaintained rather than to seek tenants and to bear the costs of properly caring for their buildings and having property values and taxes increase.

These conditions are largely still in effect today in many of our Texas Main Street towns, but with generations from Baby Boomers to Millennials seeking affordable quality urban experiences, there is a potential market and a growing interest in reinhabiting



The Texas Theatre is a prime example of showing the care and attention Palestine residents have taken to preserve their buildings. After its original opening in 1930, the building has survived two devastating fires and a host of closings and re-openings. It's a reborn venue with a new purpose – live theatre!

and revitalizing our small town Texas urban cores with upper story residential uses.

There are, however, even more barriers now to realizing a vision of livable, walkable, and revitalized downtowns than those that caused their underutilized state to begin with. This includes off-street parking requirements, deteriorating building stock, antiquated water and wastewater systems, and absentee investor property owners. Another common and significant barrier to reinhabiting upper-story residential spaces in historic downtown Texas are building codes that are intended to improve the general health and safety of our cities.

Some of the common codes and regulations that come into play when thinking about re-occupying second-story historic structures in Texas are the locally adopted building codes possibly with amendments for special fire districts, the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for historically designated structures, and the Texas Accessibility Standards (TAS) to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This article will address only the largest obstacle to upper-story residential units in historic structures, which is the building code.

Generally, building authorities in Texas have moved from the Southern Building Code (SBC) and the Uniform Building Code (UBC) to either the 2009 or 2012 International Building Code (IBC). In the IBC, mixed-use



A small 1930s office building is being converted to upper-story residential units in Sherman.

buildings, like having residential above a commercial use, are more stringent and difficult to deal with because of the differences in how aware people are to dangers according to the different ways they occupy a building.

The type of occupancy and use takes into account hazard levels of each activity and awareness of occupants to dangers. The commonly found mixes of occupancies in downtowns are referred to in the code as Groups A, B, M, and R. Generally found on the first floor are the commercial occupancies of Group A (with assembly type uses of people in restaurants, art galleries, community halls), Group B (with business uses like banks, professionals, dry cleaners) or Group M (uses of mercantile businesses like retail, drug stores, and markets) with Group R being the residential component on the upper stories creating the mixed-use

situation. Typical downtown mixed-use residential is further classified as Group R-3 for not more than two dwellings and R-2 for more than two dwellings.

Usually residential occupancies in downtown fall under the commercial IBC code instead of the International Residential Code (IRC) because they are either attached dwellings—the buildings are physically attached to other buildings instead of freestanding detached dwellings or townhomes on individual properties—and/or because of the mixed-use occupancy in a single building. A building that is not attached to another structure and has an R-3 residential occupancy could be built under the IRC and not under a more stringent IBC. Unfortunately, this is a rare case in downtowns as most of the buildings are both attached to adjacent structures and are mixed-use. Additionally, if a building is

in a specially designated fire district or other area, it may be mandated that the buildings be under the commercial IBC code regardless of their occupancy type and use.

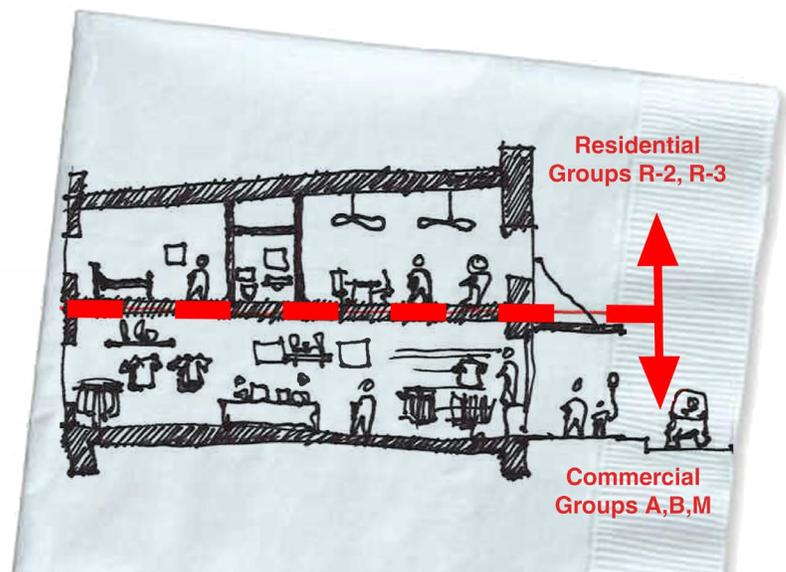
Separation is required between different occupancies based on the relative level of danger and time to escape and fight fires in different use situations. Separations are expressed at the time the particular type of construction resists a standardized fire test. The higher the separation rating, which ranges from one to four hours, the higher the cost of construction because of the increase in quantity and construction methods required to be used. In addition, the type of use dictates other safety measures. The mixed-use combination of these occupancies is what triggers a sequence of code issues.

This difference in residential and commercial code and construction standards is a source of frustration for inexperienced building owners like those who wish to relocate from a single family home to downtown or residential developers expecting to be able to operate as they are accustomed to under the less-stringent IRC. The implications of being under the IBC are expensive, and the single largest code barrier for residential reinhabitation downtown is the requirement for a fire sprinkler that is initiated by the mixed-use nature of downtown and falling under the IBC instead of the IRC. This requirement comes from Chapter 9, Section 903 Automatic Fire Sprinklers of both the 2009 and 2012 *International Fire Code*, **903.2.8 Group R** An automatic sprinkler system installed in accordance with Section 903.3 shall be provided throughout all buildings with a Group R fire area.

The costs of fire sprinkler systems are usually not a problem in normal commercial situations, but buildings in typical small Texas downtowns command lower rent at the moment, which makes cost more of an issue—especially if it is unexpected. Usually at \$1-\$3 per square foot in new construction, costs can be anywhere from \$2-\$7 in existing commercial buildings, and in rare cases, retrofitting in sensitive historic structures can cost upwards of \$10+ per square foot because of the increased care and difficulty of installation (National Fire

Safety Association). For a normal existing downtown building that measures 50' x 100', that can add \$20,000-\$70,000 to a project, which can hinder the ability of small developers and small business owners to execute a renovation of upper story residential living.

This assumes that the existing city water lines are up to code and can handle the volume and pressure necessary for commercial sprinkler systems. If not, the cost to upgrade a line can be disproportional to the



(Top) An empty second story space above an otherwise vibrant streetscape in Sherman. (Bottom) Typical mixed-use occupancies in Texas downtowns.

revenue generated by inhabiting the upper stories, which again can be a hurdle that leaves otherwise perfectly good buildings underutilized.

Further adding to the cost is the requirement for installation of fire alarms and sprinkler monitoring, which is also unfamiliar territory for many building owners. Along with this come requirements for dedicated phone lines and direct outside access to the alarm and sprinkler facilities for inspections and fire rescue use during emergencies. Sprinkler and fire alarm costs are, however, somewhat balanced by reductions in insurance premiums, not to mention the increased health and safety of buildings and people in the entire city.

All of these items discussed are normal occurrences in today's development and building world, but often owners of our downtown buildings are individuals with little or no experience in commercial development. Compounding the problem is that many of these owners do not retain the services of registered architects who would be able to set realistic expectations, address code requirements, and help navigate the permitting process.

The cost savings of not hiring a professional are often immediately lost by delays, mistakes, and redoing or addressing code items late in the construction process, which add expense and frustration to the project.

This translates into lingering

dissatisfaction with doing projects downtown, which ultimately discourages further projects and revitalization efforts in the entire downtown area, landing us back right where we started with vacant and underutilized buildings in our historic downtowns. To avoid this cycle, Main Street managers should be able to communicate the following key code concerns for property owners—perhaps in a simple booklet and/or on your web page:

- Typical code requirements and permitting process for your downtown, including contact information for local building and fire officials.
- Realistic expectations for your property owners in terms of code requirements, enforcement penalties, and costs.
- List of architects, engineers, contractors, and trade craftsmen who have worked in your downtown and/or have a specialization in historic commercial buildings.
- Why it is important for buildings and downtowns to be fully utilized, and how this will translate into higher revenues and a better city.
- Examples of successful projects and tips from experienced building owners on how to avoid common mistakes and pitfalls.

By better communicating and setting realistic expectations on the technical and permitting process side of reinhabiting downtown buildings, there is a much better chance of success on individual

projects, which will encourage other building owners to follow suit. This will create a positive and infectious atmosphere of vitality that will carry over to business owners, customers, and residents leading to faster realization of revitalization efforts in your own Downtown, TX.

## SPECIAL VOLUNTEERS

We continue to spotlight in each edition of *Main Street Matters* 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](mailto:sarah.marshall@thc.texas.gov).

### Lillie Bush-Reves, Mount Vernon Main Street Program



Lillie Bush-Reves is a woman who wears many hats. She is the editor of the award-winning *Mount Vernon Optic-Herald*; a lay minister and verger

at St. Mark's Episcopal Church; the recipient of the Silver Beaver honor with the White Oak District of the Boy Scouts; and board member of the Franklin County Historical Association, Mount Vernon Music, and more regional and local boards in leadership positions than one can mention.

Lillie was there when Mount Vernon became a Main Street City in 1992 and continued to be a driving force for the organization. Although she will be stepping down from the Main Street Board at the end of this year after serving as president for six years, she will continue to play an active role on our committees and as chairperson of the Mount Vernon Landmark Committee.

During her service to Main Street, Lillie has kept a watchful eye on the preservation of our downtown buildings. Her guidance and tenacity have saved more than one downtown building from an unfortunate design choice. Lillie's attention to detail, plus her understanding and appreciation of historical accuracy, contributes to our program in innumerable ways.

Since 2009, Lillie has been the face of Main Street as she manages the hospitality suite for our wine festivals. The night before the event, she rolls in with her catering basket and transforms a rather common-looking city council chamber into a warm, inviting seasonal respite for all our wineries and retail vendors. Plus, she makes sure there are tasty offerings for our

guests. This is not your fruit platter and cheese tray hospitality suite!

Carolyn Teague, Mount Vernon Main Street manager says, "Lillie regularly saves me from myself. She is the nuts and bolts to my 'big picture' and I will miss her guidance and steady hand terribly when she is gone."

A Mount Vernon native, Lillie can recall much of the history of Mount Vernon's people, places, and stories and is a great, colorful storyteller. When you hear her say,

"I remember," or "Did you know," you are in for a treat. Lillie said, "I see Main Street as our community's 'wellness' program. Mount Vernon has become healthier from the efforts of Mount Vernon's Main Street, not only economically through increased investment and retail activity, but psychologically through citizens seeing a brighter future for the community."

As a native of the city and a Main Street volunteer, I'm proud to have played a small part to promote future vitality and preserve the community's history for future generations."

## IN THE NEWS: COTULLA MAIN STREET SHOWCASE!



Cotulla Main Street held a Main Street Showcase on October 12, 2016 to highlight the completion of several downtown beautification projects that began about 24 months ago. Phase one consisted of renovations to Veterans Park, including a new bronze sculpture of city founder Joseph Cotulla. The second phase entailed sidewalk replacement, gas light district creation, and landscaping the downtown area. The culmination of the project involved a 96'x16' mural directly across from Veterans Park showcasing the local history of the area. The event served as an opportunity for the community to go downtown and observe the hard work that went into beautifying their community.



## IN THE NEWS: LOVE DOWNTOWN AWARDS AND PROJECT JUMPSTART THE HEART!



(Left) On October 14, 2016 San Marcos Main Street celebrated its 30th anniversary! At the Love Downtown Awards ceremony held on the grounds of the Hays County Courthouse, they commemorated the milestone and announced their annual downtown award winners. Thanks to a hard working staff, board, and volunteers, San Marcos Main Street has of which to be proud. Cheers to another 30 years! (Right) After months of work behind the scenes, the Sherman City Council unanimously passed two new incentives for downtown Sherman in October based on the feedback they received during the Resource Team last summer. They launched a rental reimbursement incentive and a fee waiver incentive to compliment the existing facade grant. They have branded their downtown incentives "Project Jumpstart the Heart." Sherman joined the Texas Main Street program in January 2016, and they are already off to a good start working with their city to revitalize downtown.

## Websites of Interest

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

Texas Historical Commission  
P.O. Box 12276  
Austin, TX 78711-2276  
512.463.6100  
fax 512.475.4872  
[thc.@thc.texas.gov](mailto:thc.@thc.texas.gov)



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