



# **From Vacant to Vibrant Webinar Series: Strategies for Rural and Small-Town Renewal**

Webinar #1  
**Filling Empty Buildings**  
September 9, 2025





**EDD CoP**

Economic Development District  
Community of Practice



**More info at: [www.nado.org/EDDCoP](http://www.nado.org/EDDCoP)**

This webinar is offered through the Economic Development District Community of Practice (EDD CoP), managed by the NADO Research Foundation to build the capacity of the national network of EDDs. To learn more, visit: [www.nado.org/EDDCoP](http://www.nado.org/EDDCoP). The EDD CoP is made possible through an award from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce (ED22HDQ3070106). The statements, findings, conclusions, and recommendations in this webinar are those of the speakers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Economic Development Administration or the U.S. Department of Commerce.



## The State of the EDDs & CEDS Content Guidelines Updates (June 2023)



In the spring of 2023, the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) designed its 400th **Economic Development District (EDD)** and also released updates to the **Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Content Guidelines**. The website landing provides a reflection on the state of the national network of EDDs and information about the updated CEDS Content Guidelines that highlight equity, climate resilience, and workforce development. Presentation slides are [available here](#) (PDF).

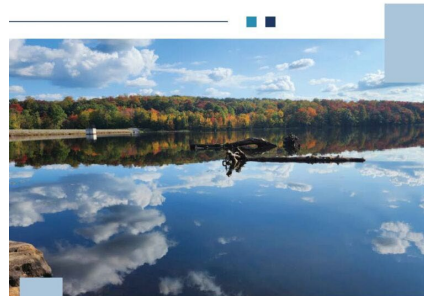
### CEDS 101: What You Need to Know Right Now About the CEDS (March 2021)



During the webinar, staff from the U.S. Economic Development Administration, NADO Research Foundation, and local/state conference (LSC) covered CEDS fundamentals, best practices, and latest trends. The session is intended primarily for new staff working on the CEDS, though it may also be of interest as a refresher for CEDS veterans. Presentation slides are [available here](#) (PDF).



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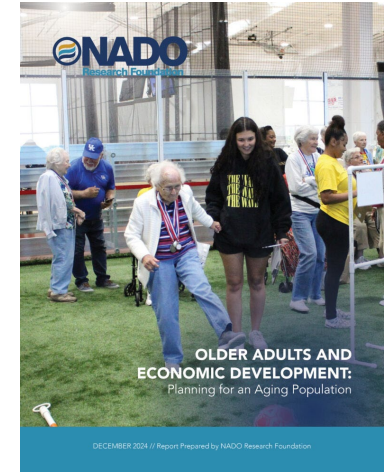
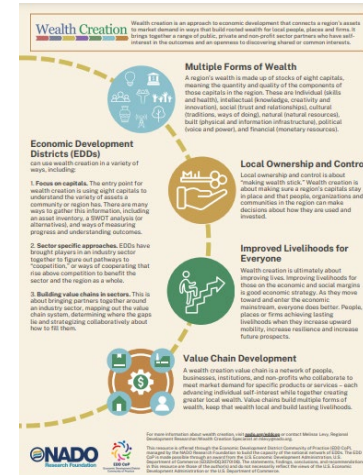
## HOW TO BUILD THE CEDS STRATEGY COMMITTEE



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## TRIBAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVES A PRIMER FOR EDD STAFF



## OLDER ADULTS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: Planning for an Aging Population

DECEMBER 2024 // Report Prepared by NADO Research Foundation



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## NADO RESILIENCE WORKSHOP PLANNING GUIDE

Sourced from recommendations and strategies created by successful EDDs, the following resource will walk you through the steps to set up your own workshops and provide tips and tricks for creating valuable conversations for your region.



## HAZARD MITIGATION & CEDS INTEGRATION

TIP SHEET



## Wisdom from the Field: 10 Practical Tips for EDD Staff to Improve Projects and Programs

No one ever said doing regional economic development was easy. Whether navigating complex partnerships, aligning diverse community needs, or securing the right resources, EDD staff routinely face a wide range of challenges in their efforts to drive meaningful change. While there's no single roadmap for success, one of the best ways to chart a path forward is by learning from peers who've tackled similar hurdles.

This resource shares ten pieces of advice from Economic Development District staff whose 2023 NADO Impact Award-winning projects show how vision, planning, and collaboration can lead to meaningful results. These insights offer practical guidance for moving initiatives from concept to completion, reflecting the creativity, determination, and problem-solving needed to advance economic and community development. Whether you're starting a new effort or working to complete an existing one, these lessons provide real-world encouragement from those who've successfully navigated the path.



September 2025

## Federal Grant Administration Webinar Series

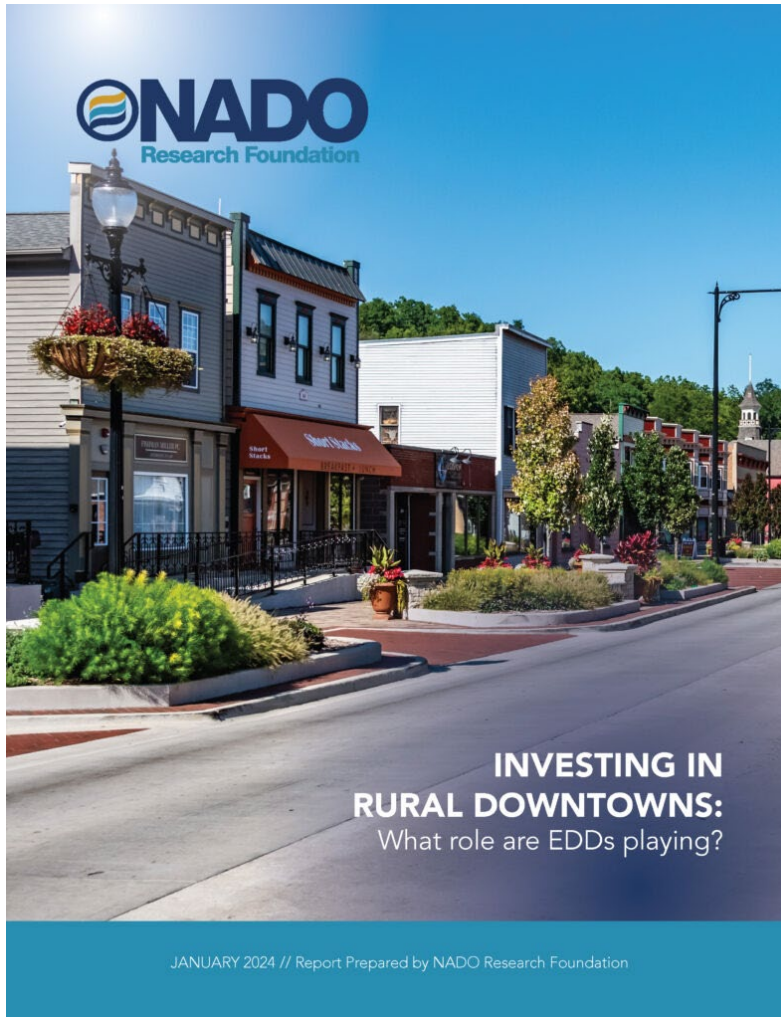
11	September	SINGLE AUDIT READINESS AND SURVIVAL	2:00-3:30 p.m. ET
26	September	GRANT COST ALLOWABILITY 101	2:00-3:30 p.m. ET
02	October	INDIRECT COST RECOVERY FOR RDOs	2:00-4:00 p.m. ET
09	October	PURCHASING GOODS AND SERVICES WITH FEDERAL FUNDS	2:00-3:30 p.m. ET

LEARN MORE AND REGISTER FOR FREE AT:  
[nado.org/eddcop/calendar-eddcop/](#)

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Visit: [www.nado.org/EDDCoP](http://www.nado.org/EDDCoP)



## Investing in Rural Downtowns: What role are EDDs playing?

Downtowns are what typically give rural, suburban and urban areas life, providing a place to shop, socialize and connect with others, creating a sense of community for residents, but also making visitors feel welcome. Maintaining a strong downtown core can be challenging especially for rural regions struggling with outmigration of youth and others, an increase in big box stores and dollar stores, and the provision of necessary services. Downtowns are also typically the social centers of towns, offering spaces in which to connect with others, while also often holding historical and cultural significance in the area.

This resource explores the content of the Thriving Downtowns investment playbook, translating the most meaningful content for EDDs, while showcasing how EDDs are playing roles in downtown revitalization in their regions. This resource is offered through the NADO Research Foundation's Economic Development District Community of Practice (EDD CoP).

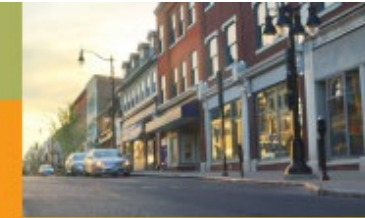
### HOW EDDs ARE SUPPORTING DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

Economic Development Districts (EDDs) are engaging in downtown revitalization in their regions in a variety of ways. Naturally, as regional organizations, EDDs are not always focused on one community. However, their work with communities follows a variety of pathways, including main street planning, brownfields redevelopment, facilitation, funding and implementation.

### DOWNTOWN PLANNING

Many EDDs engage with their communities through downtown planning or *placemaking*. "Placemaking is centered around observing, listening to, and asking questions of the people who live, work, and play in a particular space in order to understand their needs and aspirations for that space and for their community as a whole." EDDs' work on main street planning can take many forms. Read stories from Virginia, New York, Florida, Alabama, and Iowa.

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## TAKEAWAYS

### 01 INVENTORYING

A key starting point for downtown revitalization efforts is inventorying what the community has - its readiness factors including:

- Community assets
- Economic ecosystem
- Local government and civic structures
- Built infrastructure
- Natural environment

### 02 PATHWAY TO REVITALIZATION

The pathway to revitalization moves from planning activities through predevelopment, to a go/no go decision, into development and into ongoing management and administration of the property. EDDs typically aren't developers or managers, but they may fit into the planning and/or Predevelopment activities, assisting with planning, community outreach, funding, prefeasibility and feasibility studies.

### 03 ROLE OF EDDs

While it may be surprising that regional organizations are playing important roles in individual communities, EDDs have the expertise and a broader regional view. EDDs are contributing to downtown redevelopment in a variety of ways that make sense given their strengths, including planning, brownfields assessment and redevelopment, placemaking, facilitation, funding and implementation. This, like much of what EDDs do, requires collaboration with communities and state and federal agencies.



Learn more at:

<https://www.nado.org/ruraldowntowns/>

## Peer Learning

The NADO Research Foundation manages four virtual Peer Learning Communities as part of the Economic Development District Community of Practice. These cohorts are designed to build and strengthen bonds among EDD staff across the national network Economic Development Districts. Each group has a different audience and objective – read on to learn more about the specifics of each and how you can get involved.



### EDD CoP Collaborative Learning Group

The Collaborative Learning Group (CLG) is a 6-month virtual training and networking opportunity for new Economic Development District (EDD) staff who have been at their organization for 2 years or less.

[Learn More](#)

### CEDS Peer Exchange Groups

These informal groups are designed to help staff troubleshoot challenges with their CEDS, share methods and 'best practices', and support each other during yearly and 5-year CEDS updates.

[Learn More](#)

### NADO Mentor Program for Executive Directors

The NADO Mentor Program pairs experienced executive directors with new executive directors for one year to help new executive directors address the challenges facing their organizations and regions by connecting with experienced RDO leaders.

[Learn More](#)

### New Executive Directors Resources

The New Executive Directors group was formed to share experiences, learn firsthand from experienced Directors, and have support when beginning this often-challenging role.

[Learn More](#)

### Virtual EDD Chapter Meets Ups

Virtual EDD Chapter Meet Ups provide a space for Economic Development District staff to connect and network quarterly in small group discussions with peers in their EDA regions/NADO chapters.

[Learn More](#)

Learn more about our **virtual peer learning groups** at: <https://www.nado.org/copgroups/>

Join us in Salt Lake City, UT on October 14-17, 2025!

More info at: <https://www.nado.org/2025atc/>





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# **From Vacant to Vibrant Webinar Series: Strategies for Rural and Small-Town Renewal**



Stay in Touch!

# Brett Schwartz

Associate Director  
NADO Research Foundation

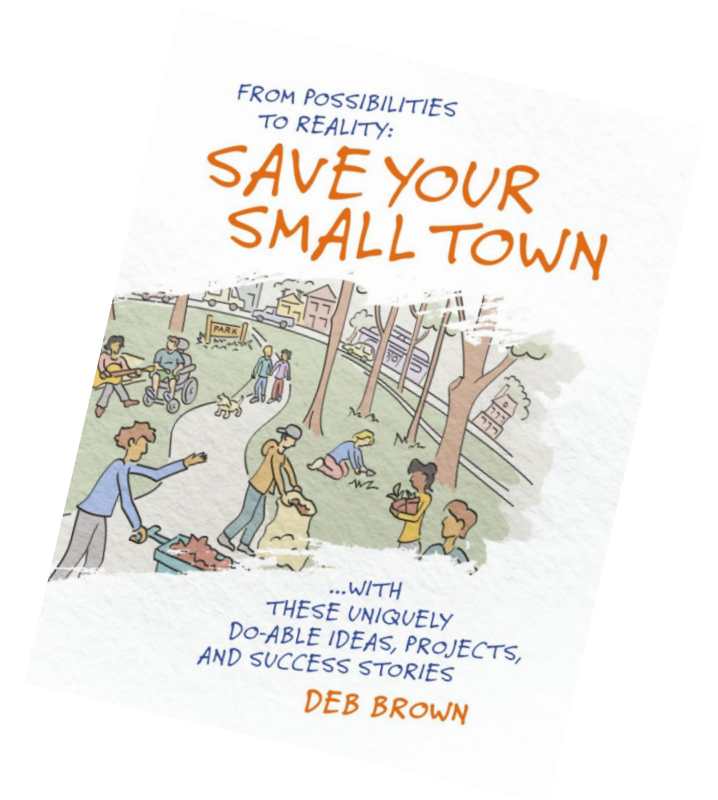
[bschwartz@nado.org](mailto:bschwartz@nado.org)



# Our Guide Today



**Deb Brown**  
Cofounder, **SAVEYOUR**  
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**SAVE YOUR**

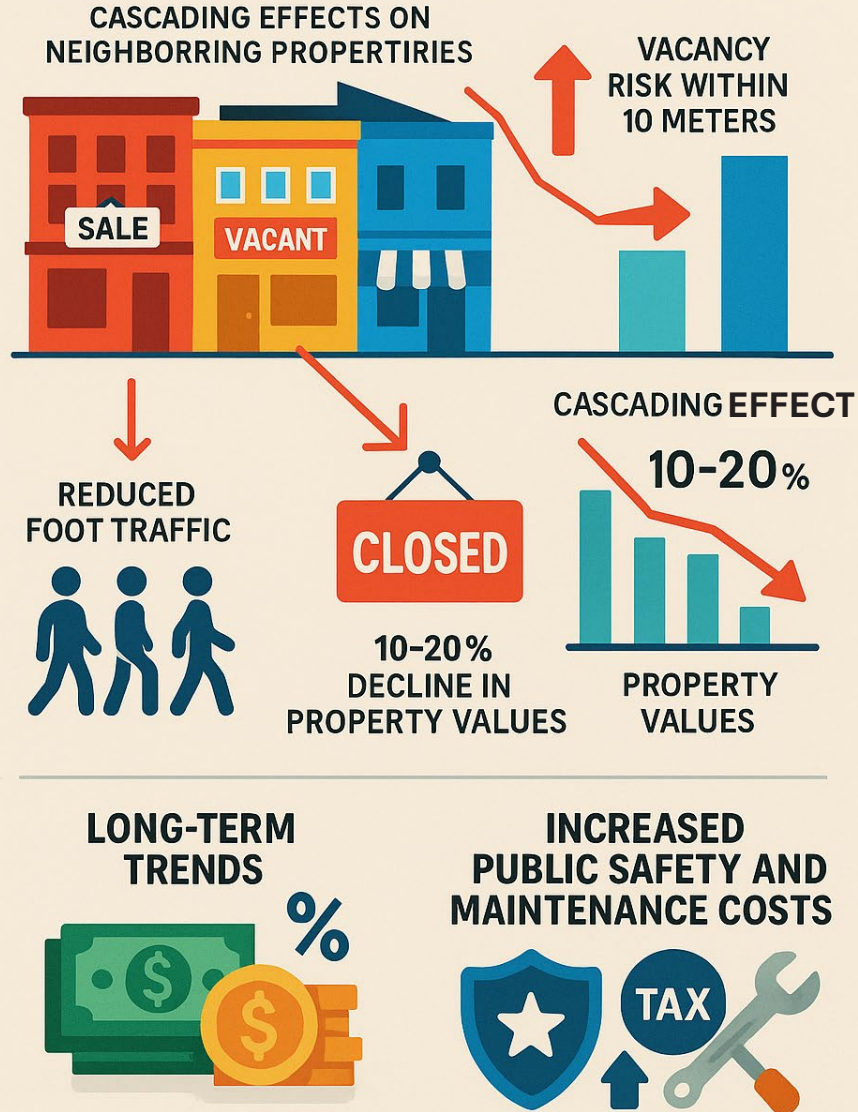
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**Filling Empty Buildings**

***Deb Brown, SaveYour.Town***

## IMPACT OF VACANT COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS IN DOWNTOWN AREAS



# Cost of Doing Nothing

Vacancy risk – 8%

Property values decline 10-20%

Lowered tax revenues

Safety hazards grow exponentially

Maintenance drain resources

Negative community perceptions intensify

source: Illinois Extension

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## Start where you are



*Photos by Columbiana city manager*

**Start with  
buildings you  
already have,  
not meetings  
you need to  
schedule.**

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# Porterdale, GA



Photos by Teri Haler

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## Renovate what you can

# Pop Ups: Experimentation, not compromises

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Hamilton County Animal AdvocaTees

*Photo from Facebook for Hamilton County Animal Advocates*

**How do you  
know your  
product has  
a market?**



*Photo by Deb Brown*

# Pop-up businesses



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## Borrowed sheds



# Benefits of the Pop Up Event

- No large investment
- Immediate foot traffic
- Market testing
- Active participation by students
- Community excitement



Miller SD Cozy Cabin Christmas photo

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## Single Best Strategy for Filling Empty Buildings



Photos by [www.coppescommons.com](http://www.coppescommons.com)

# Shared Spaces



# Try it before you buy it



Photo by Sarah Grunewaldt



Photo by Cathy Lloyd

# Seasonal Split

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## **Creative Approaches to Fill Empty Buildings and Lots**

# Artist Residency and Gallery Space

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*Cord McMahon*

# Walls For Rent



Photo by Deb Brown

**Rent out the  
front display  
window**

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Alva OK window display photo by Becky McCray

**Anyone can  
do it**

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*Photos via Harmon County Forward*



Photos by Deb Brown

# Outdoor Spaces Transform Vacant Properties



# Living Room

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*Photo by Deb Brown*

## **Empty Lot Ideas**

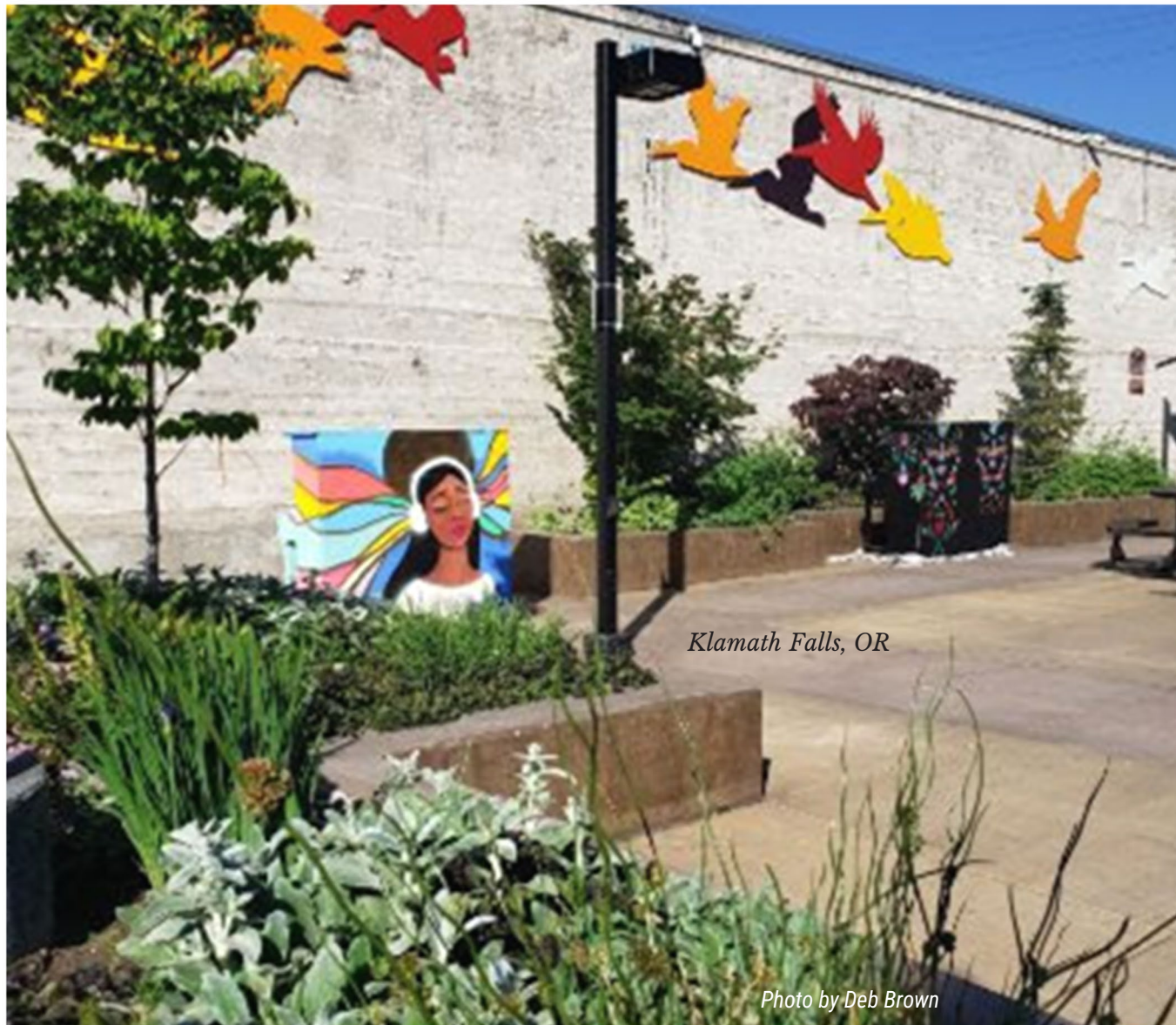
- 'meet the mayor'**
- poetry readings**
- storytelling**
- chess tables**
- farmers' market**
- yoga classes**
- open-air art studio**

# Art Park

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Albany GA ArtPark graffiti via FB page portrait

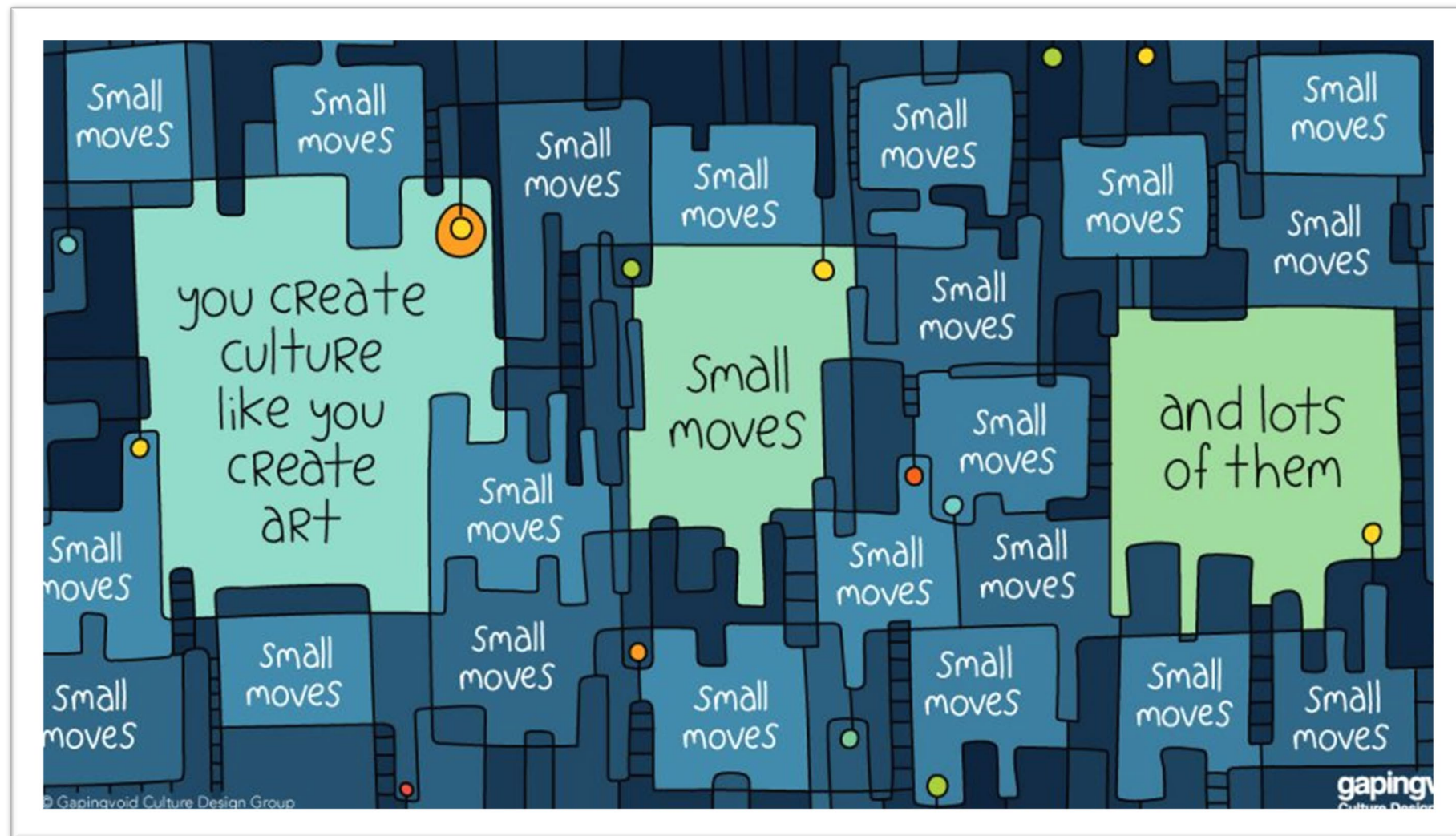


*Klamath Falls, OR*

*Photo by Deb Brown*

- More color**
- Cultural expression**
- Photo ops**
- Community identity**

# Small But Meaningful Steps



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Artwork by @gapingvoid

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**What About the Buildings  
that Need Work?**

*empty buildings*

**FULL  
POTENTIAL**

# Historic and Adaptive Reuse Codes

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*This is in Tucson and was a gas station before – now it's a restaurant.*

# Economic Incentives Target Specific Renovation Challenges

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# Property Maintenance Codes

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**TIPS FOR KEEPING YOUR  
DOWNTOWN PROPERTY/BUSINESS BEAUTIFUL!**

**Did you know that YOU are responsible for the upkeep of the sidewalk and trees located in front of your property?**

The **York City Property Maintenance Codes** and the **City of York Codified Ordinances** require all property owners to maintain the public area adjacent to their property, including the sidewalk and any trees, clean and free of obstructions and hazards to pedestrians and vehicles. Below are reminders of many of the common maintenance items that businesses/property owners should be mindful of and tips on how to maintain a safe and welcoming storefront.

## SIDEWALKS:

York City Property Maintenance Code Section 302.3 states that “All sidewalks, walkways, stairs, driveways, parking spaces, and similar areas shall be kept in a property state of repair, maintained in a clean and sanitary condition, and maintained free from hazardous conditions.”

You can comply with this code by simply keeping your sidewalks clear of leaves and any other debris that could be a hazard to pedestrians. This also includes timely snow and ice removal in the winter. You should also regularly assess the condition of your sidewalk, checking for potential tripping hazards or grade changes that would make it difficult for pedestrians, especially those with physical disabilities, to navigate it.

## TRENCH DRAINS:

As trench drains are inherently part of the sidewalk, they too must be kept in a condition of good repair that does not pose a hazard to pedestrians (Codes Sections 909.19).

## TRASH:

York City Codified Ordinances Section 951.06 states “It shall be the responsibility of all property owners to maintain in a clean, sanitary condition the shared or public places of the dwelling, yard, and sidewalk.”

Property/Business owners should only place refuse for pick-up on days designated by the City and only in approved containers. All information approved containers,

large item pick-up, and other refuse information is available at [yorkcity.org/resident/trash-large-items/](http://yorkcity.org/resident/trash-large-items/).

Any trash that accumulates on the sidewalk or street due to improper storage is the responsibility of the property/business owner to clean up. This includes any storm drains abutting your property.

# Registries and Inspections



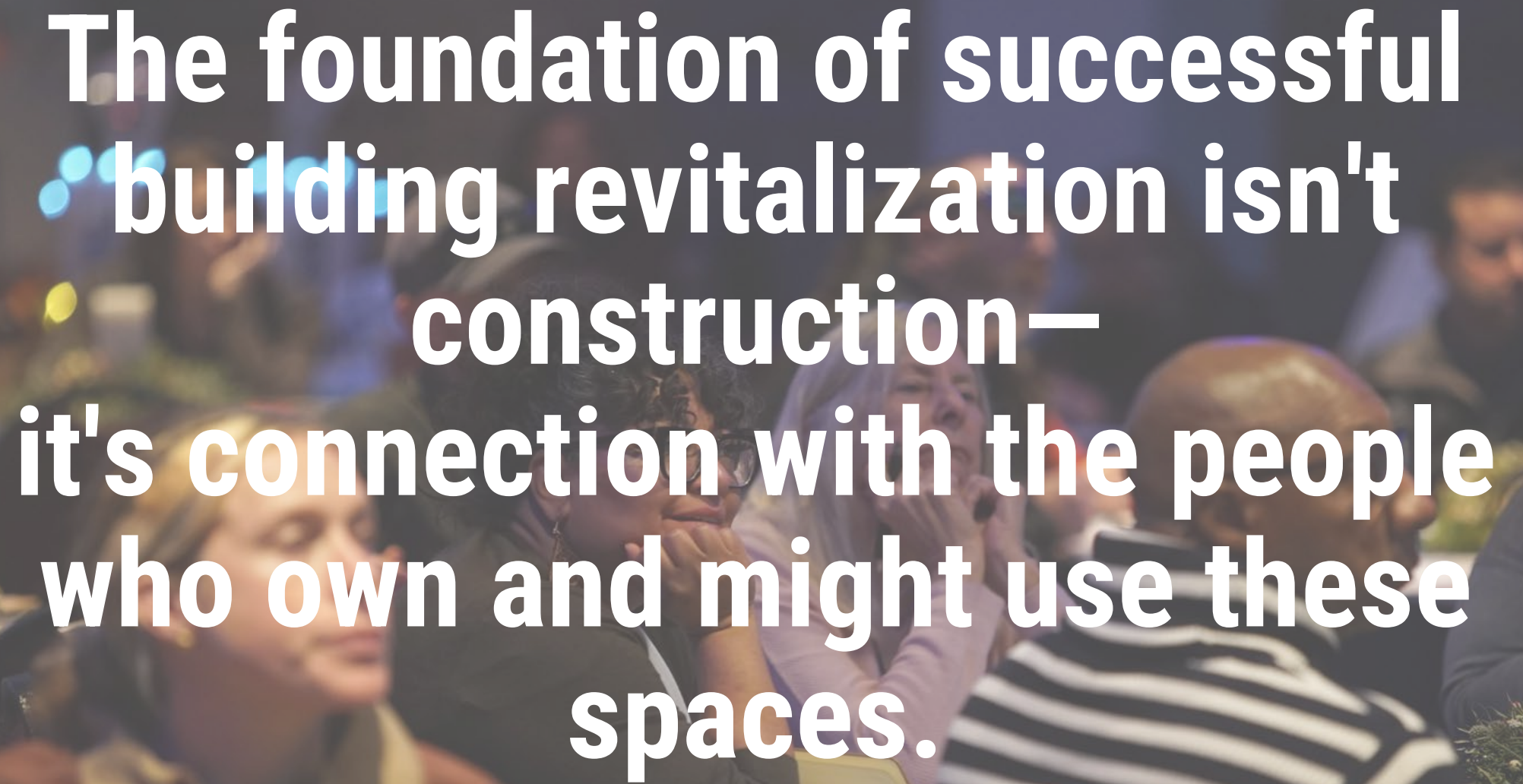
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## Listen





**The foundation of successful  
building revitalization isn't  
construction—  
it's connection with the people  
who own and might use these  
spaces.**

**Listen well.**

# Pop Ups



Photo by Becky McCray



Photo by Hutchinson Chamber of Commerce

# ***Momentum***



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## ***Shared Spaces***

***Each successful  
activation builds  
momentum for the  
next project, creating  
a positive cycle of  
revitalization that  
grows organically.***



**Transform your  
empty buildings  
from liabilities into  
community assets!**

**SAVE YOUR**  
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[www.BuildingPossibility.com/BuyTheBook](http://www.BuildingPossibility.com/BuyTheBook)

