



## **Strategic Plan: 2015-2018**

### **Mission:**

The mission of Waukegan Main Street is to stimulate the physical, economic, and cultural vitality of downtown Waukegan and the lakefront through community and business partnerships.

### **Vision:**

Downtown Waukegan, our lakefront, and surrounding neighborhoods will be a regional destination for the arts, cultural activities, outdoor activities, dining, and entertainment. The area's growth and development will integrate our rich history with our dynamic and diverse business and resident populations, providing for the improved quality of life of its existing residents and a place of opportunity and experience for future residents and visitors.

Waukegan Main Street will be the lead convener and champion of the downtown and lakefront, continuing to lead the community down the path to revitalization and linking our passion for Waukegan with the efforts of our peer organizations, the local government, and the business community.

### **Core Values:**

*Building upon our existing assets:* Waukegan is a place with a rich history, significant physical and environmental resources, an important role in the regional economy, and a diverse and dynamic residential and business base. While we continue to look towards the future of our downtown and lakefront and work towards increased economic vitality and vibrancy, we recognize that we are a city with great existing assets that can be leveraged and used as a strong foundation for the future.

*Holistic Revitalization:* In order to ensure a sustainable future for our downtown and lakefront, we recognize that the revitalization strategy must be a deep, multi-faceted approach that not only enhances the physical environment, but also builds our social and human capital, strengthens our public policy, and improves our small business environment.

*Coalition-based action:* Given our city's size and history, we recognize that our work does not exist in isolation- there are many organizations in Waukegan, doing a range

activities and work. We believe that holistic change is only possible through coalition-based action: the bringing together of stakeholders who all have different strengths, knowledge, and assets to work towards a shared vision of a vibrant, sustainable, and economically viable downtown and lakefront. We are committed to coalition building in all of our work through encouraging non-members to join committees and volunteer, working with other organizations on different projects and events, and convening downtown and lakefront groups to dialogue on issues that affect the area.

*Community Engagement:* A volunteer-based organization, our principal strength is our human capital: our volunteers. Waukegan Main Street is committed to fostering a rewarding and unique volunteer opportunity for area residents and businesses. Recognizing the importance of volunteers to our mission and vision, we are committed to volunteer recognition and appreciation. Furthermore, we are committed to engaging with Waukegan residents in dialogue in order continually share information and knowledge about the District, local initiatives and policies affecting the area, and other relevant information to the community's conversations about the District.

*Balancing the Past and the Future:* Based in the National Main Street Center model, Waukegan Main Street's program framework includes a specific focus on historic preservation, emphasizing the desire to retain and celebrate Waukegan's unique architectural history and built environment. While using historic preservation as a key revitalization strategy by developing and maintaining our unique sense of place, we recognize the importance of balancing this respect and celebration of the past with the city's need to evolve and grow, at times requiring the replacement of aging infrastructure and built structures.

#### Shared Principles: National Main Street Center & Waukegan Main Street

Waukegan Main Street is a designated and accredited Main Street Program by the National Main Street Center, a subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Therefore, our work is guided by The National Main Street Center's Eight Principles<sup>1</sup>:

*Comprehensive:* No single focus — lavish public improvements, name-brand business recruitment, or endless promotional events — can revitalize Main Street. For successful, sustainable, long-term revitalization, a comprehensive approach, including activity in each of Main Street's Four Points, is essential.

*Incremental:* Baby steps come before walking. Successful revitalization programs begin with basic, simple activities that demonstrate that "new things are happening" in the commercial district. As public confidence in the Main Street district grows and participants' understanding of the revitalization process becomes more sophisticated,

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<sup>1</sup> Accessed from the National Main Street Center's website (2014): [http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street/the-approach/eight-principles.html#.VASH\\_IdXg0](http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street/the-approach/eight-principles.html#.VASH_IdXg0)

Main Street is able to tackle increasingly complex problems and more ambitious projects. This incremental change leads to much longer-lasting and dramatic positive change in the Main Street area.

*Self-help:* No one else will save your Main Street. Local leaders must have the will and desire to mobilize local resources and talent. That means convincing residents and business owners of the rewards they'll reap by investing time and money in Main Street — the heart of their community. Only local leadership can produce long-term success by fostering and demonstrating community involvement and commitment to the revitalization effort.

*Partnerships:* Both the public and private sectors have a vital interest in the district and must work together to achieve common goals of Main Street's revitalization. Each sector has a role to play and each must understand the other's strengths and limitations in order to forge an effective partnership.

*Identifying and capitalizing on existing assets:* Business districts must capitalize on the assets that make them unique. Every district has unique qualities like distinctive buildings and human scale that give people a sense of belonging. These local assets must serve as the foundation for all aspects of the revitalization program.

*Quality:* Emphasize quality in every aspect of the revitalization program. This applies to all elements of the process — from storefront designs to promotional campaigns to educational programs. Shoestring budgets and "cut and paste" efforts reinforce a negative image of the commercial district. Instead, concentrate on quality projects over quantity.

*Change:* Skeptics turn into believers and attitudes on Main Street will turn around. At first, almost no one believes Main Street can really turn around. Changes in attitude and practice are slow but definite — public support for change will build as the Main Street program grows and consistently meets its goals. Change also means engaging in better business practices, altering ways of thinking, and improving the physical appearance of the commercial district. A carefully planned Main Street program will help shift public perceptions and practices to support and sustain the revitalization process.

*Implementation:* To succeed, Main Street must show visible results that can only come from completing projects. Frequent, visible changes are a reminder that the revitalization effort is under way and succeeding. Small projects at the beginning of the program pave the way for larger ones as the revitalization effort matures, and that constant revitalization activity creates confidence in the Main Street program and ever-greater levels of participation.

## **Our Conceptual Framework:**

Waukegan Main Street's approach to mission implementation is guided by the National Main Street's Four-Point Approach, which is a unique, proven approach to local economic development in distressed downtowns. The Four-Point Approach is the structure for Waukegan Main Street's committees, although the Approach's work is not limited to work with in the committees, but rather functions as a way to explain and contextualize the programmatic work of the organization. The following (taken from the National Main Street Center's website (2014)) explains the approach:

### *Organization*

Organization establishes consensus and cooperation by building partnerships among the various groups that have a stake in the commercial district. By getting everyone working toward the same goal, your Main Street program can provide effective, ongoing management and advocacy for the your downtown or neighborhood business district. Through volunteer recruitment and collaboration with partners representing a broad cross section of the community, your program can incorporate a wide range of perspectives into its efforts. A governing board of directors and standing committees make up the fundamental organizational structure of volunteer-driven revitalization programs. Volunteers are coordinated and supported by a paid program director. This structure not only divides the workload and clearly delineates responsibilities, but also builds consensus and cooperation among the various stakeholders.

### *Promotion*

Promotion takes many forms, but the goal is to create a positive image that will rekindle community pride and improve consumer and investor confidence in your commercial district. Advertising, retail promotions, special events, and marketing campaigns help sell the image and promise of Main Street to the community and surrounding region. Promotions communicate your commercial district's unique characteristics, business establishments, and activities to shoppers, investors, potential business and property owners, and visitors.

### *Design*

Design means getting Main Street into top physical shape and creating a safe, inviting environment for shoppers, workers, and visitors. It takes advantage of the visual opportunities inherent in a commercial district by directing attention to all of its physical elements: public and private buildings, storefronts, signs, public spaces, parking areas, street furniture, public art, landscaping, merchandising, window displays, and promotional materials. An appealing atmosphere, created through attention to all of these visual elements, conveys a positive message about the commercial district and

what it has to offer. Design activities also include instilling good maintenance practices in the commercial district, enhancing the district's physical appearance through the rehabilitation of historic buildings, encouraging appropriate new construction, developing sensitive design management systems, educating business and property owners about design quality, and long-term planning.

### *Economic Restructuring<sup>2</sup>*

Economic Restructuring strengthens your community's existing economic assets while diversifying its economic base. This is accomplished by retaining and expanding successful businesses to provide a balanced commercial mix, sharpening the competitiveness and merchandising skills of business owners, and attracting new businesses that the market can support. Converting unused or underused commercial space into economically productive property also helps boost the profitability of the district. The goal is to build a commercial district that responds to the needs of today's consumers.

### Implementation:

Waukegan Main Street implements its mission through staff, a volunteer board of directors, four volunteer-led committees, and other volunteers. Waukegan Main Street currently has five active committees operating under the following frameworks:

1. *Board Executive Committee*: composed of the executive officers of the board (president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary), who work closely with staff to manage operations (mostly in a support role to staff) and manage information sharing with the rest of the board of directors.
2. *Design Committee*: composed of a committee chair, built environment stakeholders, and other interested parties. The Design's Committee's focus is on improving the aesthetics of the area and promoting the preservation of Waukegan's historic character through education and advocacy.
3. *Economic Development Committee*: composed of a committee chair (board member) and other business/economic stakeholders in the area. The ED Committee is focused on improving the business and economic environment in downtown and the lakefront through advocacy, education, coalition-building, and acting as a liaison between different stakeholders.
4. *Organization Committee*: composed of a committee chair (vacant at the time of this plan) and other volunteers with interests in event planning, fundraising, and organizational development. Perhaps one of the organization's deepest committees, the Org Committee has a scope of work focused on resource

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<sup>2</sup>In 2012, Waukegan Main Street Board of Directors voted to change its Economic Restructuring Committee's name to Economic Development Committee. Throughout this document and others this committee will be referred to by this name or by its acronym "ED" Committee.

development and membership. At the time of this plan, the Org Committee has a membership subcommittee focused on strengthening the organization’s membership recruitment and retention infrastructure. As a part of its role in resource development, Org Committee currently also plays a key role in event planning for our fundraising activities.

5. *Promotions Committee*: composed of a committee chair and other volunteers interested in events and media. The Promo Committee is the public voice and advocate for downtown and the lakefront activities and events, the brand, and the organization’s messaging. Promo Committee is also the main source for planning and implementation of many of Main Street’s downtown events such as Holiday Wauk, Wine and Art Stroll, and Art Wauks.

Occasionally, the organization convenes different Ad Hoc committees that are responsible for the planning and implementation of specific tasks with end dates (ex: the Strategic Plan Ad Hoc Committee). Staff and committees all have work plans to guide their work and ensure that day-to-day activities are connected to the organization’s overall strategy. With the adoption of this strategic plan, all work plans will be evaluated and edited appropriately to connect with the organization’s adopted strategy.

**Analysis of the Existing Conditions:**

Internal Environment: Self-Reflection and Assessment

As a part of the strategic plan process, the board and staff individually analyzed and then discussed as a group the existing conditions of the organization. Using the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) tool to assess the state of the organization, the following conclusions emerged:

<b>Strengths:</b>	<b>Weaknesses:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our people: the dedication, passion, diversity (backgrounds /knowledge/demographics) of our board, staff and volunteers (the most cited strength of WMS).</li> <li>• Relationships with city, other organizations, volunteers, community</li> <li>• Longevity &amp; Credibility of the organization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenges in volunteer recruitment and engagement</li> <li>• Lack a long term plan and vision/strategy</li> <li>• Declining credibility in community, with MS district businesses</li> <li>• Diversity of Funding sources</li> <li>• Communication- internally and externally</li> <li>• Board engagement</li> <li>• Limited administrative organization and efficiency</li> </ul>

<b>Opportunities:</b>	<b>Threats:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic plan- narrow our focus and activities, focus on strengths</li> <li>• Relationships- have a lot of existing relationships and a lot of untapped social and political capital, need to develop strategy and capitalize on our relationships</li> <li>• New Staff and Board members; staff and board development</li> <li>• Recent successes that we can use as momentum</li> <li>• Improving economic and political conditions externally that create opportunity for the organization to take a leadership role in the community and validate the mission of the organization.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited WMS branding and messaging in the community that confuses and/or misplaces our image, role, and position</li> <li>• Negative image of city in business and development communities- both of the community and the municipality</li> <li>• Political and bureaucratic constraints at City</li> <li>• Lack of a structured long-term vision and how to get there</li> <li>• Funding- declining membership, fundraising, donations</li> </ul>

**Our Strategy: 2015-2018**

The organization’s conversations leading up to this plan suggest that both our internal and our external environments are in periods of transition and change. Internally, we are still recovering from several key staff turnovers and leadership changes in the board within the past five years, which have had a major impact on the continuity of programming, the maintenance and support of volunteers and members, and the internal administrative infrastructure. Externally, the last five years has proved extremely challenging for Waukegan, the state of Illinois, and the nation. The city continues to recover from the Great Recession, with promising developments such as the completion of the lakefront cleanup and the planned multi-million dollar investments by the College of Lake County and County of Lake.

While still facing economic, political, and social challenges, we recognize that we are approaching a moment of great opportunity and are committed to being ready to move forward into the next stage of Waukegan’s development. In order to respond strategically to these changes, as a part of the strategic planning process, the organization assessed both internal and external factors that affect our abilities to successfully do business. Ten key areas of focus came out of this assessment, are categorized by our three key work types and act as the foundation of our strategic plan document, these areas include:

<b>Work:</b>	<b>Area of Focus:</b>
<b>1. Administration</b>	1.1 Organizational Planning and Evaluation
	1.2 Board Development
	1.3 Staff Development and Management
	1.4 Volunteer Coordination
	1.5 External Relationships/Partnerships
<b>2. Fundraising</b>	2.1 Resource Development
<b>3. Program</b>	3.1 Design/Historic Preservation
	3.2 Economic Development
	3.3 Organization
	3.4 Promotion

To lay out the strategy of the organization over the next three years, each area of focus includes strategic goals and objectives, which will then be operationalized into associated tasks with timelines that explain steps to implementation in accompanying work plans and implementation table (appendix). As mentioned previously, the committee and staff work plans will also be key implementation tools for the strategic plan and are drafted on annual basis. This strategic plan is considered by the organization to be a living document, one which will be reviewed and adapted as necessary annually in conjunction with the committee and staff work plans.



# **1 Administrative Goals:**

## **1.1 Establish an organizational strategic framework that is strategic, clear, and implementable.**

WMS's effectiveness, growth, and sustainability are dependent upon strategic actions, which need to be planned, monitored, and evaluated over time to ensure the organization's adherence to the stated mission and vision, despite changing internal and external conditions.

O1: Develop a three year strategic plan and annual operational plans that connects the organization's high-level strategy with the day-to-day activities of staff and volunteers.

O2: Evaluate the organization's accomplishments on annual basis through assessments of annual work plans and strategic plan.

O3: Identify annual priorities/themes to target the organization's efforts.

## **1.2 Build and strengthen the Board of Directors, leveraging the experiences and expertise of these community leaders and empowering them to act as ambassadors for the organization and the community.**

WMS's Board of Directors should represent the community and be a collection of area leaders that bring different experience, expertise, and strengths to the organization in order govern and lead the organization towards successful implementation of mission and vision attainment. Because the Board is composed of volunteers, it is critically important to have a clear and engaging framework to guide the participation of the members and the role of the staff tasked with managing the board.

O1: Maintain a clear definition of Board members' roles and responsibilities to promote accountability and clarity in program implementation.

O2: Assess and evaluate existing board composition and ongoing/changing needs for board representation.

O3: Develop Board education and development framework to ensure Board members' knowledge of and effectiveness in governing WMS's programming.

O4: Establish and maintain (adapt over time) strong and clear staff-board communication mechanisms so that there is consistent and open communication and information-sharing with board, empowering them to make decisions on behalf of the organization.

### **1.3 Provide clear and comprehensive framework of roles and responsibilities for staff members to ensure success and a positive work environment.**

Responsible for the management and coordination of all day-to-day activities of WMS, the staff plays an integral role in the success of our programming and in our impact. Providing staff with a clear, consistent, and supportive work environment is a high priority for WMS. The work of WMS is not easy, but WMS is committed to providing staff with a challenging, but positive and supportive work environment.

O1: Develop and evaluate annual staff work plans that act as a guide and point of reference for staff progress and accomplishments

O2: Encourage and offer opportunities for professional development to promote ongoing growth both as a professional and within the staff role at WMS.

### **1.4 Build and maintain a diverse group of volunteers, providing a positive volunteer experience while accomplishing the organization's work.**

Volunteers are the backbone of WMS. They have an important presence in high-level leadership, fundraising, day-to-day administration, and our special events. In order to maintain and continue to build our volunteer base, WMS recognizes the importance of a clear, consistent, and fun volunteer program.

O1: Assess ongoing volunteer needs- both in role and skill needs- in order to connect volunteer positions with matching volunteers.

O2: Develop clear and comprehensive volunteer structure in which expectations are clear, reasonable, and respectful of volunteers' time and commitment.

### **1.5 Build and leverage community partnerships to promote the mission of WMS and the overall health and sustainability of the community.**

WMS believes in the power of collective action. We know that our work in downtown Waukegan and the lakefront does not happen in isolation. We, therefore, seek out partnerships to implement our own mission and also to support the work of other community stakeholders such as governmental entities, other non-profits, and the business community.

O1: Build upon existing strong ties with local governmental institutions to ensure mutual support and a two-way flow of information.

O2: Reestablish relationships and reconnect with businesses within the Main Street District in order to improve our services for businesses and to build the district's support network and conversation around revitalization.

O3: Build upon existing relationships and shared projects with other District and city-wide non-profit organizations to capitalize on and leverage organizational strengths and to collectively support our shared vision of a vibrant, strong downtown and lakefront.

## **2 Fundraising Goals:**

**2.1 Develop sophisticated fundraising strategy and administrative infrastructure in order to communicate our message, the importance of our work, and the impact of individual and corporate giving in a formal, strategic, and consistent way.**

**2.2 Diversify WMS's resource base through a variety of different support sources ensuring the sustainability and flexibility of the organization's activities.**

The long-term financial health and sustainability of WMS depends on its ability to diversify funding. Over the long term, we seek to build out our programming and our staff positions, all of which requires additional funding from a variety of different sources.

O1: Expand upon our existing fundraising events to build up more regular fundraising opportunities in new and creative ways.

O2: Identify and apply for relevant grant opportunities to expand WMS's programming.

**2.3 Build and maintain a base of large donors (Big Cs), who through their leadership have a great impact on the community and sustainability of the organization.**

WMS offers a great opportunity for generous individuals to have a major impact on downtown Waukegan and the lakefront. Given the great potential for revitalization in the district, we believe there to be great interest within the community to contribute in this way. This type of fundraising does require significant

administrative infrastructure, regular contact, and follow through in order to appropriately engage these very generous donors.

O1: Build organization's corporate sponsorship portfolio leveraging the strong corporate presence in Lake County.

O2: Build relationships with individual Big Cs offering them an opportunity for leadership in the revitalization efforts of downtown and the lakefront.

### **3 Program Goals:**

#### **3.1 Design:**

**3.1.1 Lead advocacy efforts for historic preservation and good design in rehabilitation and revitalization, shaping the physical image of downtown Waukegan as an attractive, vibrant and inclusive community.**

**3.1.2 Provide information and tools for historic preservation and design action in downtown Waukegan, offering community stakeholders a space for dialogue and action.**

#### **3.2 Economic Development:**

**3.2.1 Work collaboratively with governmental entities, businesses, and other non-profits to improve the business environment of downtown and the lakefront primarily through information sharing and resource identification.**

**3.2.2 Identify and advocate for sensible economic development policies and programming that promote a vibrant downtown business environment.**

**3.2.3 Build an active and diverse ED committee with members from the public and private sectors that bring different expertise and perspectives to enrich the ED conversation on downtown revitalization.**

#### **3.3 Organization:**

**3.3.1 Build and sustain the WMS's membership at all levels through regular engagement with current and potential members.**

**3.3.2 Develop and engage a strong base of organizational volunteers to meet the needs of our growing organization and to also provide meaningful volunteer opportunities for interested community members.**

### **3.4 Promotions:**

- 3.4.1 Develop and build our WMS brand to shape our public image as the leading economic and community development organization in Waukegan.**
- 3.4.2 Build and disseminate the downtown/lakefront brand in partnership with other organizations to improve our district's image at the local and regional levels.**
- 3.4.3 Expand the reach of our communications through our traditional mailings, social media, and online presence.**
- 3.4.4 Leverage our existing partnerships to both acquire and distribute information about what is going on around town and in the district.**
- 3.4.5 Build strong communication and coordination of information and event planning between District business owners, property owners, and other interested parties to ensure well-coordinated activities.**