



FILLING VACANCIES



ABOUT THE SOLUTION CENTER

The Main Street Solution Center is a free access portal to resources for communities and organizations working to revitalize and strengthen their local economies. The Solution Center's curated resources are designed to help guide and inspire local leaders and advocates as they navigate the complexities of downtown and neighborhood business district revitalization and economic growth.

ABOUT THE PARTNERSHIP

This Main Street Solution Center publication was underwritten by Michigan Main Street and Main Street Iowa. Their generous support demonstrates a shared vision and ongoing commitment to freely share knowledge, experience, tools, and best practices to fuel revitalization and economic growth in their own communities, and in locales spanning the nation.



ABOUT THE CREATORS

Leigh Young, AICP is Senior Main Street Specialist with Michigan Main Street and a driving force behind the creation of the Main Street Solution Center. Her deep passion for planning, placemaking, community engagement, and sustainable urban development is evident in her work to advance the cause for revitalization and economic development in downtown and neighborhood business districts across Michigan.

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Ben Muldrow is a partner at Arnett Muldrow & Associates, a consultancy renowned for its creative approach to economic development, branding, and marketing strategies for small towns and cities across the nation. He brings an innovative mindset and a deep understanding of the unique dynamics of community branding to each engagement, blending traditional community values with modern marketing techniques to help communities and districts unlock their potential.

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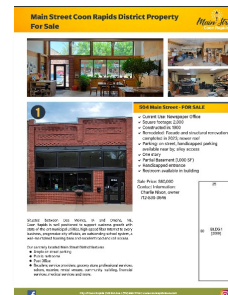
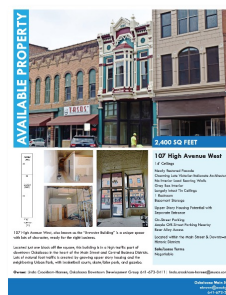
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Most every downtown or neighborhood business district has at least one or more buildings that are vacant or underutilized. Their presence can have adverse impacts on the district’s image, economy, and overall activity, so it’s in everyone’s best interest to fill vacancies and maximize real estate. Use these hints and tips to get started or to take your efforts to the next level.

Do the groundwork.

- Compile and maintain an up-to-date building and business inventory. Keep property contacts up to date, and use the inventory to flag vacant and underutilized properties.
- Meet one-on-one with owners or agents to gain a better understanding of each vacant or underutilized property’s condition, and the owner’s goals or plans for the property (e.g. sell or lease, pricing, preferred tenants, plans for improvements, possible tenant incentives, etc.). Share market data, including a list of business types targeted for expansion and recruitment, along with information on marketing assistance, resources, and incentives that might be available to help accomplish goals.
 - It’s likely that not all property owners will have reasonable expectations for their site, that some will not be ready to activate their properties, and still others will just not be ready or willing to work together. It is still important to make periodic contact and to include them in district and property owner-specific communications. Doing so, over time, could help build trust and demonstrate your organization’s readiness to work together as situations change.
- Use information from owners and agents to create and maintain a current list of properties and spaces available for sale or lease. Include basic property information and a contact for each property.
- Create a property “cut sheet” template and work with owners and agents to populate and generate a cut sheet for each property. Cut sheets can include photos, a brief property description, a line diagram showing layout and dimensions, a locational map, owner or agent contact information, and information on pricing, terms, amenities, and other features.
- Create an easy to locate place on your website to make the list of available properties and cut sheets, along with links to other online information or materials maintained by owners, brokers, or agents, available to view or download.

Find examples of available properties lists, cut sheets, and more at downtownpros.com/r2-library



STAGE AND PROMOTE OPPORTUNITIES

Strategies and tools to prepare, market, and fill vacancies include:

- Regularly sharing your list of available properties and spaces with area economic development partners and real estate professionals as updates are made.
- Developing a business recruitment process, and producing and sharing business recruitment materials - a community guide, market data, primary data from community input, business development incentives, etc - so that when prospects appear, your organization is ready.
- Using temporary storefront treatments (e.g. posters and banners, art, displays, window clings, etc.) to identify opportunities on the street and make a positive statement.
- Working with property owners and agents to host district-wide open house-style tours of redevelopment sites and properties available for sale or lease.
- Seeking out and inviting prospective tenants - like incubator occupants, home-based businesses, farmers and makers market vendors, and businesses from surrounding areas considering an additional location - to make a visit and explore opportunities in your district.
- Hosting small-scale events, entertainment, and networking mixers in unoccupied spaces.
- Promoting strategies and improvements to right-size or retrofit appropriate sites for pop up spaces, micro retail shops, co-working arrangements, and other contemporary uses.
- Working with owners and economic development partners to explore options for limited-term or rent-reduced spaces for pop ups and startups, possibly in tandem with entrepreneur centers, incubators, or business pitch competition organizers.
- Working with owners, partners, volunteers, etc. to get properties show-ready. Small efforts and improvements, like cleaning, a fresh coat of paint, and removing items specific to former occupants (slat walls and fixtures, signage, furniture, equipment, etc.), can make the space more attractive to a larger group of potential tenants.
- Identifying properties currently unfit for tenants, and connecting willing property owners with economic development partners to redevelop and whitebox spaces to make them move-in ready.



- Promoting technical assistance, resources, and incentives to get properties show-ready, or to help offset buildout and tenant improvement costs.
- Working with high school, community college, apprentice and skilled labor organizations, and workforce development programs to prepare and buildout spaces for occupancy.
- Creating tip sheets or short videos with hints and tips for building owners to prepare and fill spaces, including examples of simple improvements and staging techniques to enhance appearances and curb appeal, along with information on funding sources, technical assistance, and examples of landlord incentives.



- Creating a landing page on your website to promote real estate and business opportunities. Use it as a portal for users to access information on available properties, property development and business startup technical assistance, resources and incentives, and other information targeting prospective buyers, developers, investors, entrepreneurs, and businesses.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[How to Fill Vacant Commercial Properties: Strategies for Success by Mike Tolj](#)

[Activating Empty Storefronts with Arts-based Activities by Sydney Gross](#)

