



History of Oklahoma Main Street

With initial funding from the 1985 Oklahoma State Legislature, the Oklahoma Main Street Program officially began on November 15, 1986 with the hiring of the first staff members. Originally housed in the Department of Economic and Community Affairs, the program still is a part of the Oklahoma Department of Commerce, the successor agency.

By the spring of 1986, an advisory board selected the first five towns (Alva, Anadarko, Duncan, Okmulgee, and Tahlequah) from a pool of 12 applicants. Five additional towns joined the network in 1987. Three towns joined in 1988; three, in 1989; and two, in 1990 before the staff recommended taking a year to plan for a number of major events.

In 1992, the Oklahoma Main Street Program expanded in many directions. Two components, a Small Town program (for towns less than 5,000 people) and an Urban program (for traditional commercial areas in towns with more than 50,000 people), complemented what then became the Mid-Size Program (towns with populations of 5,000 to 50,000 people).

During 1992, the staff of the Oklahoma Main Street Center partnered with many other groups for new programs and events. One of the programs was "DesignWorks," offering design assistance to very small Oklahoma towns. One of the major events was hosting the 6th Annual National Town Meeting on Main Street in Tulsa. Over 660 people from 42 states and six countries came to see Tulsa and celebrate historic Route 66's 66th birthday. Conference attendees were greeted with a first-ever historic preservation issue of Oklahoma Today magazine, which remains the best selling issue ever.

Over the years, the program evolved, expanded, and partnered with numerous other state agencies. Annual events include Main Street Day at the Capitol, Main Street Awards Banquet, National Main Streets Conference (hosted in Oklahoma City in 2010), Statewide Preservation Conference, and Main Street Week (October).

Current services include committee training in many areas (volunteer development, promotional, organizational, visioning, work plan development, etc.), design assistance, business development (confidential one-on-one consultations and group workshops), interior design consultations, and reinvestment reports.

Current products and technical assistance vary widely and include design publications, annual coloring books, energy grants, newsletters, and business tools.

Of the 67 towns selected to be part of the Oklahoma Main Street network and guaranteed a minimum three-year commitment, 63% of the towns remain active. More than 57% of the active Main Street towns have been part of the network for 10 or more years.