

# UDS

URBAN DEVELOPMENT SERVICES  
*Changing The Way America Looks At Urban Spaces*

## **City of Olmos Park Commercial District Feasibility Study**

Communities of all sizes have found the need to manage their commercial districts on a day to day basis rather than just accept the status quo. Each community's approach will be unique depending on local resources and the ability to marshal those resources. A feasibility study examines local resources over the course of two to three days and then turns this information into a plan describing how to proceed with the revitalization effort. The study will test for the feasibility of the Main Street Approach developed by The National Trust for Historic Preservation's National Main Street Center and will also consider other approaches to revitalization as identified by the steering committee. The Main Street Model is comprehensive, incremental, and based on principles of self-determination and direct community participation in the revitalization process. The intent of a Main Street-type revitalization initiative is for the community to put in place a community-based board and staff to direct the revitalization effort. Ideally the board will take root and become a sustainable part of the community.

The feasibility study will provide the initial analysis regarding crafting and implementing a commercial district revitalization strategy that reflects the community's vision, is achievable, is long-lasting, and builds on the qualities inherent in the district's historic and traditional commercial architecture to define the district's image and strengthen community spirit and pride. The feasibility study offers your community an objective analysis of the commercial district's strengths and weaknesses, evaluates the likelihood of launching a successful revitalization effort, and provides an achievable action outline for the immediate future.

### **Feasibility Study Objectives**

The study has four major objectives:

1. Identifying the commercial district's major problems, opportunities and needs;
2. Providing community members with information about approaches to commercial district revitalization;
3. Recommending a realistic, achievable course of action or implementation for the short term; and
4. Determining which revitalization approach is an appropriate strategy for the district's revitalization.

## How is the study conducted?

During the visit, UDS will conduct private interviews and focus groups for two to three days depending upon how extensive the interview list is. During that time, we typically tour the commercial district and the community; meet with a broad range of constituents from both the public and private sectors; conduct confidential interviews with key players; speak with local media; and hold a public presentation that outlines other communities' revitalization experiences. All the information gained by the interviews is confidential and will be condensed down to core observations and recommendations. After the interviews UDS will summarize the key findings and then meet with the steering committee for a debriefing. This meeting is to outline our observations and our recommendations for immediate action, to gain feedback on what aspects of the study you want to have detailed in the final report, and to determine the format of the report.

## What do we look for during the feasibility study?

Before and during the feasibility study, we examine a number of characteristics of the commercial district in order to evaluate the district's health and to determine what the best strategy for its revitalization might be. Among the things we look for — characteristics that suggest that the Main Street approach or another approach is likely to be successful in the community — are:

- ∞ **Evidence of broad-based community support:** A broad range of organizations and individuals from throughout the community should be supportive of the revitalization effort.
- ∞ **Support from both the public and private sectors:** In order for revitalization of a traditional commercial district to succeed, it must have the support of both the public and private sectors, both of which have special skills and resources to bring to the revitalization process.
- ∞ **Likelihood of being able to secure financial support for the revitalization effort:** Revitalization programs that rely on local financial resources are often more successful than those that depend on government grants or other outside sources of financial assistance. Being able to develop an effective, volunteer-driven fund-raising strategy for the commercial district's revitalization effort is key to its success.
- ∞ **Collaborative working style and a history of volunteerism:** Revitalization efforts are more enduring when shaped and implemented by the community itself, involving dozens — eventually hundreds — of volunteers.
- ∞ **Expressed desire for change and a willingness to take risks:** Commercial district revitalization is both revolutionary and evolutionary. A community unwilling to take risks will most likely continue on its present course.
- ∞ **A desire to retain or build the commercial district around a traditional planning approach:** First and foremost, the commercial district should have a cohesive core of traditionally placed commercial buildings that incorporate mixed-use development. This means that most of the buildings are built to the edge of the sidewalk. It could also mean that the community desires to build in this format. Many communities are wary of pursuing a Main Street type revitalization because they feel that they don't have any or enough

historic buildings. In our experience, it's more important to have the majority of buildings built to the edge of the sidewalk than to have historic buildings.

- ∞ **Market potential:** Most commercial districts have several market opportunities that have not yet been pursued. Although it isn't possible to conduct a thorough analysis of the commercial district's market potential during the feasibility study, we evaluate whether the market tide seems to be running with or against the district.

While it's unlikely that any commercial district will be strong in all these areas, these are strengths are built over time, as the revitalization effort gradually improves its capacity to tackle tough issues. During the feasibility study, we'll suggest ways in which the revitalization effort can become stronger.

### **What happens after the feasibility study?**

During the study we might find that the community is ready to move ahead right now with a full-blown commercial district revitalization effort. In other instances, we might find that the community isn't yet ready for an intensive effort, but that there are some important activities it can pursue in order to become ready. And, sometimes we find that a community's current efforts are on track and only need minor changes and that the community doesn't really need much ongoing assistance.

During the study, we will carefully consider the specific activities through which we believe we can best assist in the district's revitalization efforts, as well as make recommendations for other sources of assistance if we do not honestly believe a Main Street type revitalization is particularly well suited for Olmos Park.

As a firm specializing in commercial district revitalization, UDS is committed to seeing commercial districts plan and develop in a sound way while capitalizing the community's historic and cultural resources.