

# Planning Ulster



## Ulster County Main Streets: A Regional Approach

Ulster County Planning Department, 244 Fair Street, Kingston NY 12401

### Why do we take a regional approach to Main Streets?

There are many different approaches to supporting these centers in our local economy. The goal of the Ulster County Main Streets approach is to develop a program that is based on our region's specific needs and support appropriate responses and strategies that are built and sustained from within our communities. It is also founded upon the idea that communities are stronger when they work together, share knowledge, leverage their resources, and think regionally to support their "competitive advantage."



### What is the Main Streets Strategic Toolbox?

Any successful planning effort requires solid information as a basis for decision-making. The Toolbox includes resources to help your community create a strong, sustainable strategy for Main Street revitalization. For a full list of topics in the toolbox, please contact our staff at 845-340-3338 or visit our website at [www.ulstercountyny.gov/planning](http://www.ulstercountyny.gov/planning).

### Cost/Benefit Analysis for Main Street

A good cost/benefit analysis measures not only the costs of a strategy and the benefits it might bring, it addresses the tangible as well as intangible factors and long-term effects of a project, investment or action. A lively, economically sustainable Main Street will have a diverse mix of uses that attract various types of customers, contribute to quality of life by providing amenities such as gathering spaces, public and essential services, and provide an economic return to the community through increased property values that help pay for those amenities. Indeed, part of building a vital Main Street area is to ensure that many (if not most) of the uses encouraged in the Main Street area have high enough property values as well as the intangible "amenity value" to contribute to the economic well being of the community.

Planning  
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## **What kinds of tools are in the toolbox?**

### **1. Asset Based Planning**

- **Developing a Main Street**

*Strategy: How to work as a team to pursue a plan.*

- **Asset-Based Planning Workbook:**

*A hands-on guide to identifying your community's assets and working with others on a strategic plan.*

### **2. Community-Led Initiatives**

- **Asset-Based Planning Workbook:**

*this also has a series of exercises to help develop community-led initiatives.*

- **Social Networking for Main Street:**

*The uses of web-based technology to keep the community connected.*

### **3. Land Use and Design Analysis**

- *Design Guidelines for Main Street*

- *Supporting a Healthy Residential Mix*

- *Using Incentives and Streamlining Approvals*

- *Creating an Attractive Setting*

- *Building Placement and Features*

- *Street Design and "Wayfinding"*

- *Traditional Neighborhood Design*

### **4. Market and Economic Analysis**

- *Cost/Benefit Analysis for Main Street*

- *Market Analysis for Main Street*

- *Creating a Destination Magnet*

- *Identifying the Right Retail Mix*

### **5. Targeted Development Initiatives**

- *Case studies and best practices from Ulster County and elsewhere will be posted on the Toolbox.*

In a sense, a community's Main Street area should be one of the places that attracts uses that are associated with high property values.

Therefore, in setting policy for land uses in a Main Street area, it is important to consider what economists term "opportunity costs" involved with these decisions (see box on page 4). For example, if a community decides to change its zoning to encourage more storage units versus banks or entertainment uses, it may forego the opportunity to attract or to develop banks or offices in that same area. And, in many cases, developers of those higher value-added uses look for densely developed high-traffic areas for their projects. If such sites in a Main Street area are already given over to lower-value uses, the developers may bypass that community altogether and look to a Main Street area or shopping district in a nearby town.

How do you know which uses are high value-added for your community and suited for a Main Street?

## **Getting the Information**

The Ulster County Office of Real Property Services maintains data on property tax parcels for each town and village. These data will help determine the mix of uses and values on Main Street. For further information in these data, visit the Ulster County Office of Real Property Tax Services webpage at <http://www.co.ulster.ny.us/resources/realproperty.html>.

Data can also be accessed by the local assessor. The data files are typically in Excel format and contain property information such as acreage, use (classified according to a system maintained by the New York State Office of Real Property Services), assessed value, and market

value. Other information in these files varies from municipality to municipality and can include the square footage of buildings on the property and condition.

## Knowing the mix of uses

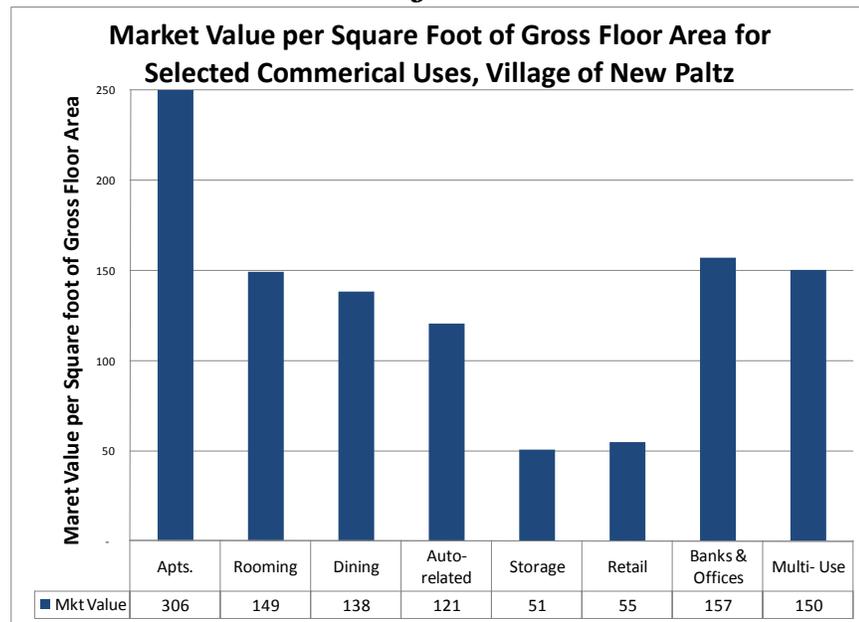
Knowing the mix of uses allows you to compare your main street with other communities and determine its relative health. It is important to remember that the *market value* and *assessed value* data in these files represent that determination by the assessor in each municipality. Thus, the files may not always be comparable. However, they do allow you to make relative comparisons between uses. With this information, you can create a basic “benefit/cost” model for evaluating the contribution various types of uses contribute to a Main Street area. Other methods of analyzing your business mix are discussed in the box on page 5 and in our Planning Guide *Identifying the Right Retail Mix*.

## Calculating Relative Benefits

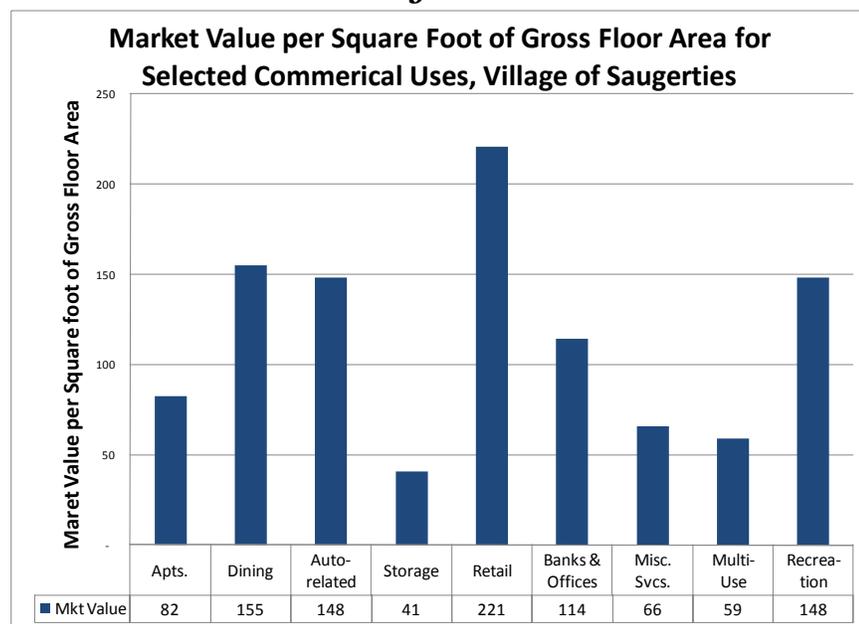
The real property tax data files allow you to measure the value per

acre and per square foot of building for each of the property classes in a town or village. For example, Figures 1 and 2 (right and next page) show the value per square foot of gross floor area for various types of commercial and retail development in two communities with successful main street areas in Ulster County: the Village of New Paltz and the Village of Saugerties. Figures

**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**



### The Opportunity Cost of Choices on Main Street

**Opportunity cost** is the value of mutually exclusive choices. As Main Street is heavily reliant on the interrelationships among businesses and the ability to attract and retain customers through a “sense of place.” Any use that does not contribute to this may present an opportunity cost. Choices that detract from Main Street may include the demolition or obscuring of uses and historic structures and uses that: support character and ambiance, encourage foot traffic, increase length-of-stay, support pedestrian activity and visibility of businesses, and provide goods and services that support the goals of Main Street as the heart of the community. Examples might include: drive-in convenience stores, storage facilities, parking lots, dollar stores or volume discount stores that turn over frequently, and uses that limit foot traffic on the ground floor, such as professional offices.

3 and 4 show similar measures for the hamlets of Milton and Port Ewen.

The values in the figures vary by use and by Main Street area. For example, in the college community of New Paltz, apartments have a much higher value than in other communities. Similarly, New Paltz and Saugerties, as high-traffic destination communities, have higher values for dining than Port Ewen and Milton. That said, decision-makers and regulators need to be cautious about opportunity costs. Dining activities are major drivers for Main Street businesses, and meet the essential needs of Main Street customers. These Main Street drivers and their importance to maintaining and attracting customers

Figure 3

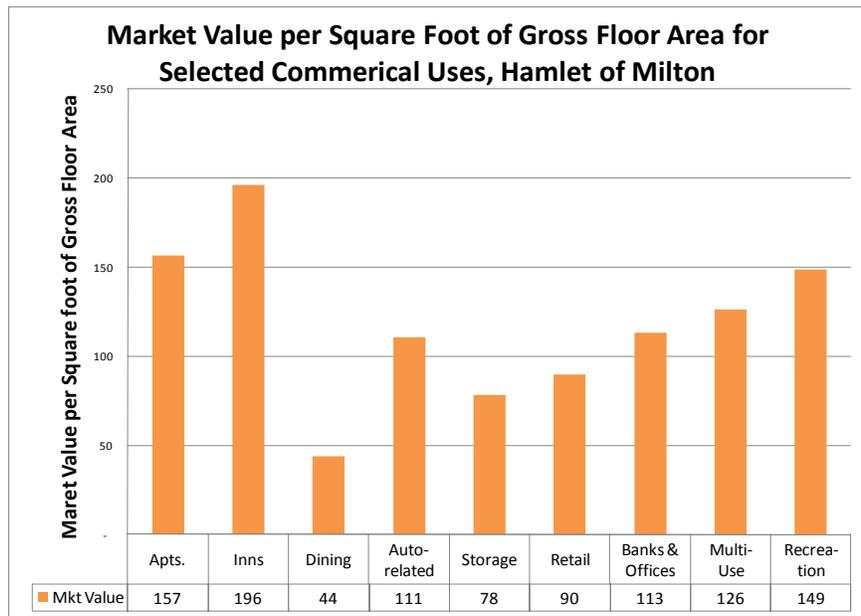
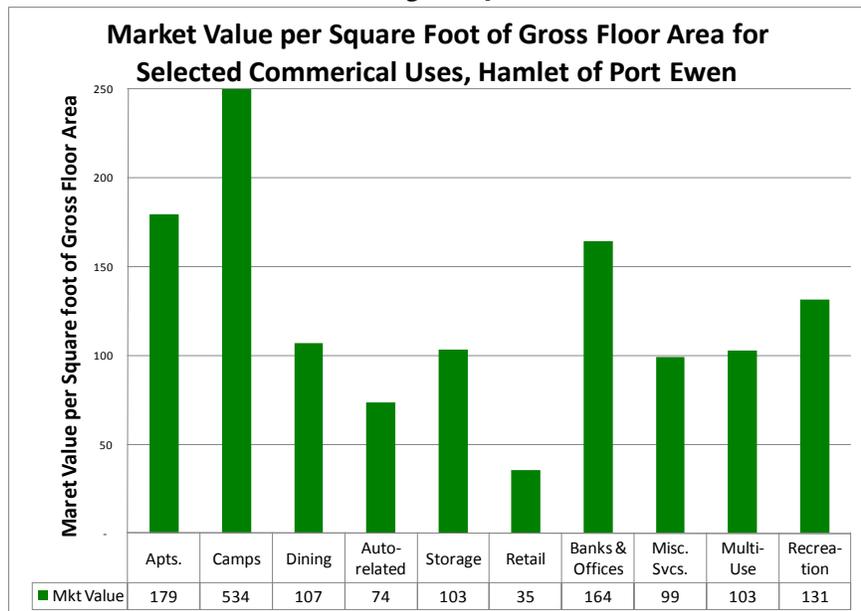


Figure 4



are discussed in *Introducing Ulster County Main Street Toolbox*. If Milton and Port Ewen were to de-emphasize dining in favor of other uses, they may forego the opportunity to build a strong dining sector in the future.

## The Problem with Calculating Costs

The methodology above focuses on comparing relative values of various uses. In that sense it compares relative benefits of uses without regard to costs associated with them, including required services from local government (e.g., as street maintenance, policing, etc.). It is possible to generate rough estimates of those costs using techniques associated with fiscal impact analysis. This involves apportioning costs to local government service for each type of use.

Although not precise, typically costs for each use are estimated by assuming that costs of local government services are proportionate to the intensity of activity associated with each type of land use (i.e., properties that generate a lot of visitors or automobile traffic also require more services from the local government).

Theoretically, it is then possible to list the benefit of each use along with its cost. However, given the imprecise nature of this measure, the time and effort to generate the cost side of the equation is not worth the effort for this analysis. Exceptions can occur such as when a particular use becomes widespread and generates extraordinary expenses. Examples can be found in bars and student housing in New Paltz.

## How to Use this Analysis

These types of analyses are best used to help guide policy decisions such as allowable uses under zoning and the use of incentives for Main Street areas. They may also be applied at the regional level to suggest relative values and sustainability of Main Street areas. They should not be used to evaluate a particular development.

## What's the Right Business Mix for your Main Street?

Some key questions to help you answer this:

- How well does current the mix work?
- How does it compare to the most successful, *comparably situated* commercial districts in your region?
- How concentrated is the business activity (as compared to highway business and other areas)?
- Are there specific business categories that are over- or under-served?

Business associations and chambers of commerce should strive to maintain a current inventory of businesses in the community. This information can be collected a number of ways. A walk-through is a good way to start, as there is no substitute for direct observations, which can include the condition of the businesses, the streetscape, and the atmosphere of the place. Information may be purchased from data sources such as Dun and Bradstreet or InfoUSA (information geared more toward finding small businesses).

Understanding mix of businesses is useful as a means of comparison to economically vibrant communities and is one of the first steps toward a more strategic approach to a successful Main Street.

**For more on this topic, see our Planning Guide:  
*Identifying the Right Retail Mix***

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**The Main Street "Strategic Toolbox"**

This Toolbox has been created to provide communities in Ulster County with the strategic land use, market analysis and planning information they need to make decisions for revitalization and/or repositioning their "Main Streets" and commercial centers. This project is part of Ulster County's comprehensive planning approach now being developed simultaneously with this project. The approach recognizes the value of compact development and the utilization of existing resources as a means to sustainable economic development.

**Outreach and Technical Assistance | Seminars and Presentations | Tools and Handouts  
Useful Links | Case Study Reports and Documents**

**Outreach and Technical Assistance**

We have worked with numerous groups and communities throughout Ulster County in the following Main Streets and Hamlets:

- Ellenville Village
- High Falls Hamlet
- Highland Hamlet
- Gardiner Hamlet
- Kingston Downtown (Rondout)
- Kingston Midtown
- Kingston Uptown (Stockade)
- Milton Hamlet
- Pine Hill Hamlet
- Port Ewen Hamlet
- Rosendale Village
- Stone Ridge Hamlet
- Woodstock Village

For more information on our work with these, click on the name or see **Case Study Reports and Documents** (below)

### Some Useful Main Street Links:

*see our website for additional links*

New York Main Street Program:  
[www.dhcr.state.ny.us/Programs/NYMainStreet/](http://www.dhcr.state.ny.us/Programs/NYMainStreet/)

National Main Street Center, a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation:  
[www.preservationnation.org/main-street/](http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/)

Center for Community and Economic Development, a program of the University of Wisconsin Extension in Madison, WI:  
[www.uwex.edu/ces/cced/](http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cced/)

Project for Public Spaces, a nonprofit planning, design and educational organization dedicated to helping people create and sustain public spaces that build stronger communities:  
[www.pps.org](http://www.pps.org)



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