

MONROE DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION STRATEGY

NOVEMBER 2016



TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2
ROLES & ACTIONS SUMMARY 4
DMA SCOPE & SUSTAINABILITY..... 12
APPENDIX:
CHAMBER & DMA ACCOMPLISHMENTS..... 14

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

STEERING COMMITTEE

Erin Angus-Snapka
Annique Bennett
Mike Buse
Dianne Forth
Yvonne M. Gallardo-Van Ornam
Patti Gibbons
Chris Hendrickson
Ernst ter Horst
Shelley Nyhammer
Bridgette Tuttle
Teresa Willard

CITY OF MONROE

Geoffrey Thomas, Mayor
Gene Brazel, City Administrator
David Osaki, Community Development Director
Pam Baker, Executive Assistant

DOWNTOWN MONROE ASSOCIATION

Dianne Forth, Chair
Erin Angus-Snapka
Stefan Buckley
Patti Gibbons
Paul Graf
Samantha Idle
Shane Johnson
Jackie Kiter
Terri Weigelt
Teresa Willard

MONROE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

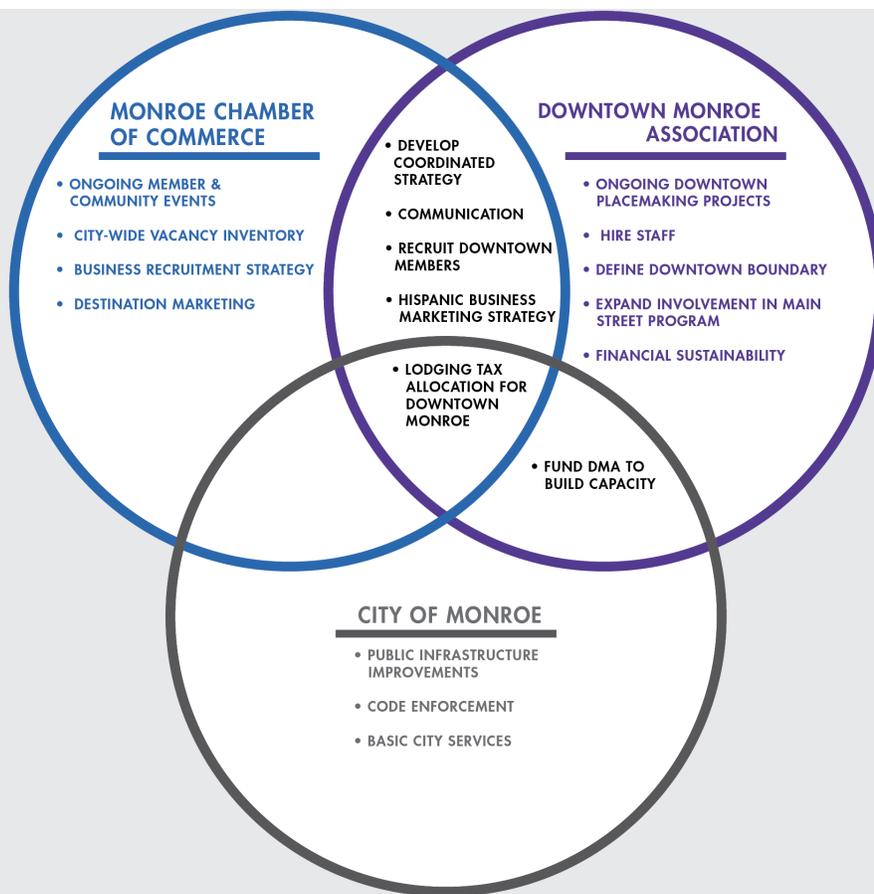
Mike Buse, President
Lisa Caldwell
Traci Hobbs
Adam Hoffman
Miriam Hollins
Ernst ter Horst
Bill Warburton
Kathleen Sather
Adrian Taylor
Bridgette Tuttle
Yvonne M. Gallardo-Van Ornam, Executive Director
Shelley Nyhammer, Operations Manager

ADDITIONAL INTERVIEWS

In addition to the individuals listed above, confidential interviews were conducted with about a dozen downtown Monroe business and/or property owners.

BDS PLANNING & URBAN DESIGN

Brian Scott
Gabriel Silberblatt
Heather Manning
Jacqueline Gruber



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DOWNTOWN MONROE ASSOCIATION, CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, AND CITY OF MONROE HAVE A COORDINATED STRATEGY

The Downtown Monroe Association (DMA), Chamber, and City are partners in downtown Monroe’s success. Every action performed by the DMA, Chamber, and City should be carefully chosen to complement and augment the efforts of the other partners by accomplishing a unique strategic goal:

- **THE DMA** should focus its efforts on downtown as a destination district—physical projects and activities that improve the *public experience* of visitors in the *historic downtown area*.
- **THE CHAMBER** should maintain a *citywide focus*, serving as a resource to the business community as well as pursuing efforts that promote Monroe as a *destination* in the surrounding region and beyond.
- **THE CITY** should continue its efforts to enhance downtown Monroe through public infrastructure improvements, code enforcement, and other basic City services. The City should also support the efforts of both the DMA and Chamber through transparent and predictable annual funding and discourage the two organizations from competing with one another over funding.

DOWNTOWN MONROE ASSOCIATION EXPANDS INVOLVEMENT IN STATEWIDE MAIN STREET PROGRAM

The DMA should take full advantage of its new membership in the statewide Main Street Program by availing itself of unique funding resources, networking opportunities, and training. Resources to help Monroe restore and promote the historic elements of downtown are available for specific projects.

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & DOWNTOWN MONROE ASSOCIATION LEVERAGE SNOHOMISH COUNTY RESOURCES

Snohomish County has built significant momentum around the development of rural tourism activities in the sectors of adventure travel, outdoor recreation, and agritourism.

The Chamber should actively promote Monroe's incorporation into the proposed Sky to Sound Water Trail and leverage County resources to align its destination marketing activities with countywide initiatives already underway.

The DMA should focus its design projects on making downtown Monroe a great place along the Sky to Sound Water Trail.

DOWNTOWN MONROE ASSOCIATION FOCUSES ON CURRENT ACTION PLAN, DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS, & STAFF HIRING

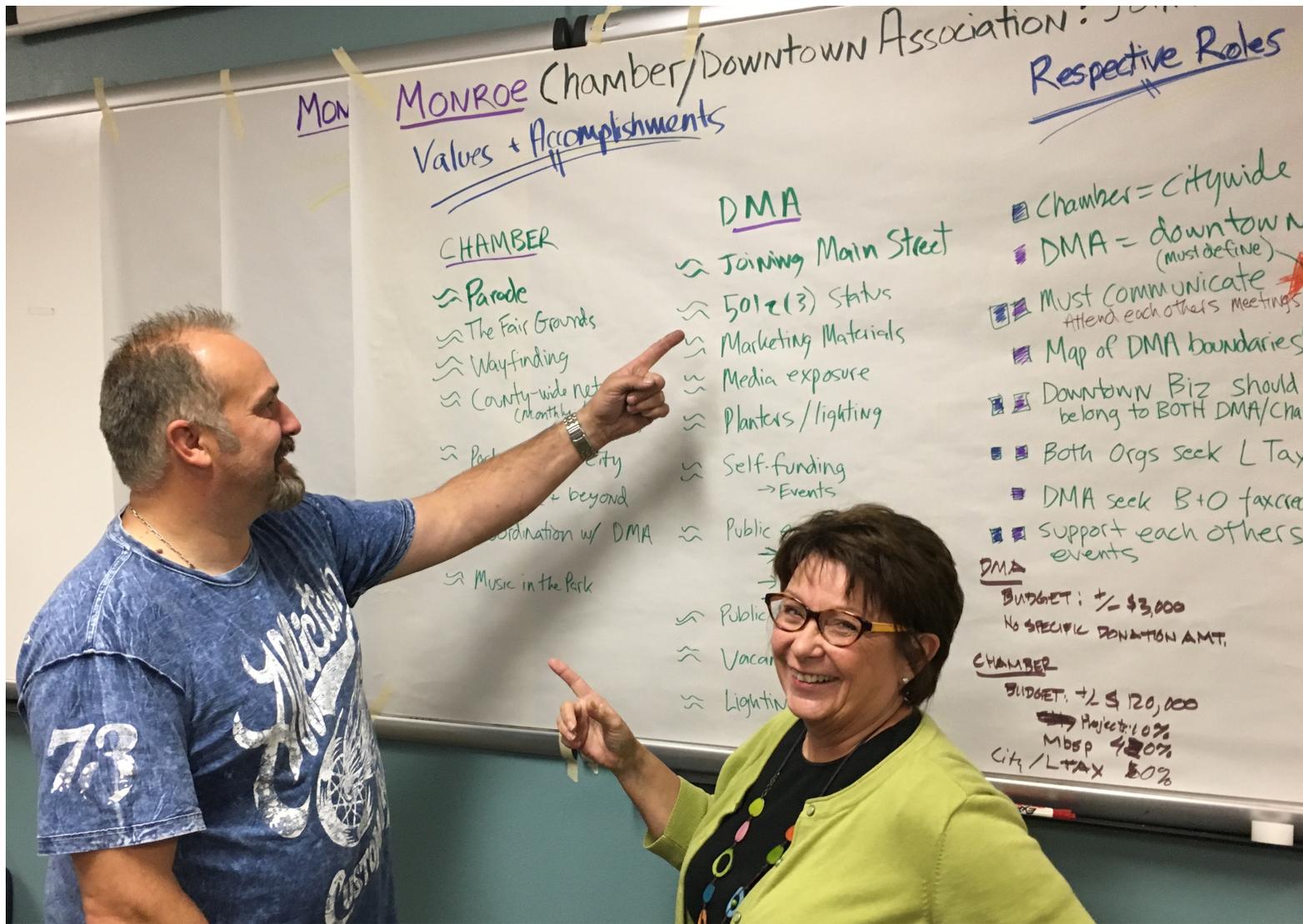
The DMA will continue work on its current action plan with new financial support from the City for hiring staff, promoting economic development, providing services and building organizational capacity. Demonstration projects and "quick wins" will help build momentum and raise the organization's profile.

DOWNTOWN MONROE ASSOCIATION PURSUES SUSTAINABLE FUNDING MODEL

The DMA should continue its focus on attaining and documenting tangible successes for downtown Monroe. A primary benefit of these visible successes is building a track record on top of which a sustainable funding model can grow. DMA should implement a 4-year financial strategy to secure stable and sustainable funding that incorporates memberships & donations, mandatory assessments on businesses and/or property, city support, outside grants and State Business and Occupation (B&O) tax credits.

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & DOWNTOWN MONROE ASSOCIATION PROVIDE COORDINATED MARKETING OF HISPANIC BUSINESSES

With a significant and growing Latino community that can bring its growing purchasing power to the district, the Chamber should pursue coordinated marketing that focuses on the Latino population. There is a clear competitive advantage in marketing to this population and in educating current business owners on the inherent advantage to many of their bottom lines. The Chamber should develop events that reflect the culture and interests of the Latino business community and its surrounding neighborhoods. The DMA can reinforce this strategy with design and placemaking activities downtown that celebrate Monroe's diversity.



ROLES & ACTION SUMMARY

The recommendations in this Downtown Revitalization Strategy have been organized by implementation partner and timeline.

Immediate Actions are those that are either currently underway or should be prioritized within the **first six to twelve months of the delivery of this Strategy**. The Immediate Actions may be understood as necessary preconditions to the successful completion of the longer-term activities.

Items categorized as **“Sustained Efforts”** will require greater expenditures of time and financial resources—they should be implemented **over a 1-4 year time horizon** after the Immediate Actions are operationalized.

JOINT DMA / CHAMBER ACTIVITIES

One of the most critical components of this Downtown Revitalization Strategy is the careful coordination of DMA and Chamber activities.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

DEVELOP COORDINATED STRATEGY

As partners in the continued success of Downtown Monroe, the DMA and Chamber should agree on their respective roles and strategies, clearly delineating and communicating these for the City, the business community, and the general public.

At a three-hour joint planning session, the DMA and Chamber agreed on the following areas of responsibility:

- The Downtown Monroe Association will focus on activities and programs that enhance the experience of visiting, shopping, or simply lingering in Downtown Monroe (see p. 12 for a map of this area). The DMA's focus will continue to be on placemaking activities for the public realm, including its design, physical condition, and cleanliness.
- The Monroe Chamber of Commerce will focus its efforts on destination marketing¹ for Monroe citywide, promoting the city as a place to visit, shop, and do business. To accomplish this the Chamber will continue offering resources to business owners and organizing notable events throughout Monroe, while it begins to develop new tools and activities to raise Monroe's profile within the region.

COMMUNICATION

The foundation of a coherent and maintainable coordinated strategy between the DMA and the Chamber is an overt and formalized system for communication. A direct line of communication between the executive leadership of the two organizations must be established. It is critical that those who are **operationally responsible** for the activities of each group have a regular and predictable opportunity to provide updates, learn about upcoming items, and identify opportunities for collaboration. This might take the form of a standing one-on-one check-in meeting once a month between the board presidents/chairs and executive directors of both organizations.

In addition, but secondary to the leadership communication just described, the staff of both groups should be invited to participate in each other's relevant standing committee meetings: i.e. Light Up Monroe & Parade (Chamber) and Promotion & Community Meeting (DMA).

Destination marketing promotes tourism through online content, advertising, distribution of promotional and collateral material, hosting journalists and travel industry personnel, and sponsoring other hospitality functions. The target decision maker of these marketing initiatives is not typically a resident in the community—therefore, the marketing activity usually takes place or is directed outside the community. Destination marketers in larger destinations often will market nationally and globally, while smaller cities may focus just on their state, region, or specific niche tourism markets.

Lastly, representatives from both groups should regularly attend the meetings of the Monroe City Council to keep the Council up to date on progress in downtown Monroe.

SUSTAINED EFFORTS

RECRUIT DOWNTOWN MEMBERS

At the joint planning session of the Chamber and DMA, the leadership, staff, and volunteers of both groups agreed that it was in the best interest of Monroe for businesses in Downtown to become members of both groups.

In the context of the coordinated aforementioned strategy as well as an environment of open and deliberate communication, the DMA and Chamber should both actively recruit Downtown members. The recruitment of these members should not be seen as a competitive endeavor between the Chamber and DMA, but rather a coordinated “ask” coming from both groups.

HISPANIC BUSINESS MARKETING STRATEGY

Almost one in every five Monroe residents identified as Latino or Hispanic in the 2010 Census, which is more than double the proportion of these ethnic groups in Snohomish County (~9%). With a large Latino community that can bring its growing purchasing power to the district, it is clear that a coordinated marketing strategy between the DMA and the Chamber focusing on Latinos would offer Monroe a unique competitive advantage within the region.

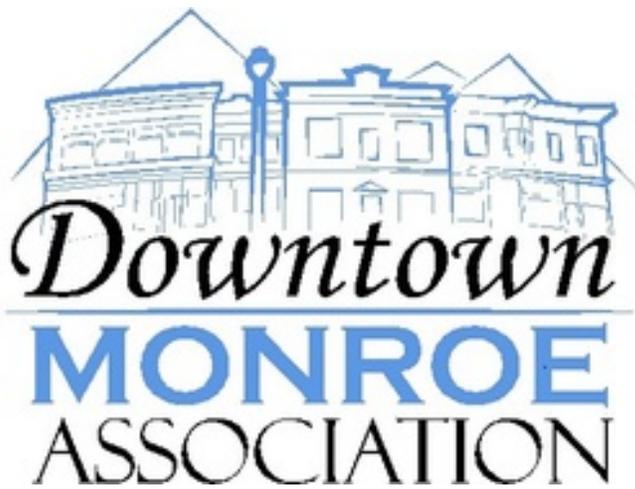
Such a strategy would involve the Chamber actively marketing Monroe as a destination for Latino and Hispanic-owned businesses, while simultaneously educating all Monroe business owners about the inherent advantage to their bottom lines.

The DMA can reinforce this strategy with design and placemaking activities downtown that celebrate Monroe’s diversity.

Parallel to this effort, the Chamber could help to sponsor events that reflect the culture and interest of the Monroe Latino and Hispanic business and resident community. Building on activities like the Cinco de Mayo Celebration, other possibilities might include music festivals, food tastings, or rodeos. By providing some small wins for the community through successful culturally appropriate events it will be easier to build trust and maintain momentum.

LODGING TAX ALLOCATION

BDS recommends that the City designate a substantial portion of the lodging tax to the Chamber’s ongoing efforts at destination marketing. Additionally, the City should designate a small portion of the lodging tax to DMA projects aimed at making downtown a stronger destination district. There might be additional funds open for competitive bid, but these two items should be reserved to support this three-way partnership for downtown Monroe.



DOWNTOWN MONROE ASSOCIATION ACTIVITIES

The Downtown Monroe Association is a young, all-volunteer organization already making visible progress toward achieving their stated goal of “enhancing the beauty and sustainability” of Downtown Monroe. The following section offers a set of prioritized activities for the DMA as it matures.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

ONGOING DOWNTOWN PLACEMAKING PROJECTS

The DMA should continue its ongoing efforts to improve the “customer experience” of Downtown Monroe. The DMA has and should continue to improve the appearance of downtown storefronts with the following activities:

- Monthly Award for the Best Storefront
- Storefront Sign Grant
- Holiday Painting

The DMA can help to improve the streetscape downtown by expanding on some of its existing activities:

- Organizing Downtown Clean-ups
- Advocating for Better Lighting
- Facilitating Design Consistency for Street Furniture
- Advocating for Additional Trash Cans
- Advocating for more Consistent Sidewalk and Curb Cleaning

HIRE STAFF

The DMA should use its City funding and additional fundraising to retain a paid executive director at least half-time. Forty years of experience with the Main Street program reinforces the lesson that downtown revitalization programs and promoting economic vitality perform much better with a paid executive director to coordinate volunteer activity.

DEFINE DOWNTOWN BOUNDARY

The DMA must clearly articulate what it means by “downtown.” The map on page 12 delineates a boundary that the DMA proposes to use as an area of focus for its activities.

EXPAND INVOLVEMENT IN MAIN STREET PROGRAM

As a new member of the Washington Main Street Program, the DMA now has access to a variety of new opportunities:

- On-Site Trainings and Seminars by National Main Street Program staff are available on the following topics:
 - Organizational Development

- Commercial District Design
- Promotion and Marketing
- Economic Revitalization
- Networking at National Main Street Conferences
- Financial Resources
 - Business & Occupation Tax Credits
 - Public Utility Tax Credits

SUSTAINED EFFORTS

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

The primary challenge for the DMA over the next several years will be the development of a sustainable business model that allows the organization to become increasingly financially independent from the City. (See the next section for a four-year strategic budget for the DMA.)

One logical source of funding is through the Washington Main Street Program’s Business & Occupation Tax Credits for contributions to local Main Street programs. Because downtown Monroe is a member of the state’s Main Street program, it is eligible for access to these tax credits through a statewide competitive process, and should pursue this assertively.

By far the most predictable, stable, and popular mechanism for funding on-going programs of downtown and neighborhood commercial district revitalization and management in Washington (and nationally) is an assessment on properties and/or businesses in the district.

In Washington, these assessments are known as “Parking and Business Improvement Areas” or “BIAs.” More than 20 of these districts are operating in Washington today in Snohomish, Spokane, Vancouver, Yakima, Olympia, Seattle (10 districts), and many other communities.

In a nutshell, when a BIA is enacted by the local city council, it requires all properties and/or businesses to pay into a common fund to provide services that are in the mutual best interest of those properties and/or businesses. The BIAs are managed by a nonprofit organization (like the DMA) to provide services as dictated by the ratepayers themselves. The most common services provided by these districts are marketing, design improvements, cleaning and maintenance, business development, district management and advocacy.

To create a BIA, local organizers must devise a program of services, budget, and assessment mechanism, and then gain support from ratepayers representing 60% of the assessment. — This strategy is an excellent long-term strategy for sustainable programs and operations, *but because it requires support from ratepayers, the DMA should not pursue a BIA until it has established a proven track-record of solid achievements.*

As such, 2017 should focus on solid achievements; 2018 should continue tangible results and begin BIA planning; with 2019 focused on establishing a BIA.

Additionally, the DMA should continue to pursue opportunities to access project-based funding for their activities. The Puget Sound Energy lighting grant application is a good example of aligning DMA programs with available grant

funding. Similarly, the DMA should actively pursue project funding through competitive process for local lodging tax support.



CHAMBER ACTIVITIES

The Monroe Chamber of Commerce is an established, member-driven organization that is focused on making valuable connections between the business community and non-profits, local government, and Monroe citizens. The following section offers a set of prioritized activities for the Chamber to build on its strength of hosting member events and popular community promotions.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

ONGOING MEMBER AND COMMUNITY EVENTS

In the very near-term the Chamber should continue its successful ongoing events geared toward making connections within the

Monroe business community, such as its monthly Lunch and Learns and T.I.M.E. Outs, as well as its signature public events, such as Fair Days Parade, Music In the Park, Light Up Monroe, Harvest Festival, and the Job Fair.

CITY-WIDE VACANCY INVENTORY

An important near-term activity for the Chamber will be the creation of a complete, citywide vacancy inventory that will allow the Chamber to track where business recruitment and retention efforts are a priority. Once created, this tool can be refreshed annually and will be a major contribution by the Chamber to the City and the business community.

SUSTAINED EFFORT

BUSINESS RECRUITMENT STRATEGY

Building on the information provided by the vacancy inventory, the Chamber of Commerce should look to design and implement a strategic business recruitment effort. This means preparing detailed market information about Monroe as well as an inventory of available business locations.

Next, the Chamber should develop relationships with property owners to understand their needs and to educate them about targeted industries identified by the Chamber as great opportunities for success in Monroe. It also means working with the City to be sure that permitting and infrastructure issue make doing business in Monroe as easy as possible.

Finally, it means a determined effort to promote Monroe as a great place to do business.

DESTINATION MARKETING

The Chamber of Commerce should continue its efforts to promote Monroe as a destination for visitors. This is an activity that can be highly coordinated with the

Downtown Monroe Association since downtown Monroe is perhaps the community's most unique and charming feature.

The Chamber should promote Monroe as a great place to visit for its quaint downtown, small town character, great community events, riverfront location, and other assets, as well as its excellent overnight accommodations. All this makes Monroe a great place to visit both as a primary destination and as a place to stop along the way.

Three unique features should be key to the Chamber's destination marketing:

1. **Promote Downtown Monroe as a visitor district.** Feature the downtown's charming historic character, pleasant street environment, and eclectic mix of locally owned restaurants and shops.
2. **Strategically link into the Sky to Sound Water Trail.** This regionally planned 84-mile water trail stretching from the north and south forks of the Skykomish River to Everett will directly interact with 10 communities. Monroe should be envisioned as a key stop where people can get into and out of the water. Doing so will help build connections and bring harmony to existing regional tourism efforts.
3. **Hispanic/Latino marketing.** As previously described, this approach will continue to set Monroe apart, and give the downtown a unique angle for branding.



CITY ACTIVITIES

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

FUND THE DMA TO BUILD CAPACITY

Downtown Monroe is one of the community's greatest assets, and has huge potential for economic growth as a visitor district that is attractive to locals and visitors alike. As such, downtown Monroe should be a City economic development priority.

The National Main Street Program builds on the experiences and amazing success of thousands of small communities in every state over 40 years. This program focuses on promotions, design, and economic improvements, but more than anything on sustained organization and local leadership.

A major tenet of the Main Street Approach is paid staff for a downtown organization. DMA's success as an all-volunteer organization is nothing short of remarkable, but it is not sustainable.

As such, the City of Monroe should provide funding for the Downtown Monroe Association in the amount of \$25,000/year for three years to underwrite the cost of a paid executive director. As part of this support, the City should require the DMA to:

- Retain a paid executive director to work at least half-time;

- Actively participate in the Washington Main Street Program, including its extensive training and networking opportunities;
- Provide services to enhance downtown economic development and provide reports on progress related to those services;
- Provide regular reports to the City on activities and accomplishments toward its short- and long-term plans; and
- Work toward sustainable funding independent of City funds to be reached by 2020.

Many successful local Main Street programs began with substantial City support, and many continue with the City as one part of a multi-faceted funding structure in the long-term. Great examples of this are Ellensburg, Washington and McMinnville, Oregon.

DEDICATE LODGING TAX TO DOWNTOWN MARKETING AND DOWNTOWN MONROE AS A VISITOR DISTRICT

The City of Monroe should consider setting aside a small portion of its lodging tax for downtown projects because downtown Monroe should be a top community priority for economic and tourism development. The long-term viability of downtown Monroe is the community's best opportunity for sustained visitor activity.

The lodging tax is a primary source of the Chamber's operating budget, and should remain so because of the Chamber's good work in staffing a visitor center and promoting Monroe as a destination. Downtown projects should be part of the competitive portion of the lodging tax funding, but *BDS recommends that there be a dedicated portion of the fund that is specifically earmarked for downtown.*

SUSTAINED EFFORT

The City's long-term, ongoing responsibilities for downtown should pertain to the following:

- **Public Infrastructure Improvements.** Capital improvement projects should continue to be prioritized to promote the improvement of the downtown. In addition, Monroe will need to make infrastructure improvements at the water's edge in order to benefit from the tourism elements of the Sky to Sound Water Trail.
- **Code Enforcement.** The City must continue to enforce compliance and to work proactively with businesses downtown and throughout the city that may need assistance navigating the rules.
- **Basic City Services.** The City should continue to provide street-cleaning and other basic services downtown, augmented by collaboration with the DMA.



DMA SCOPE & SUSTAINABILITY

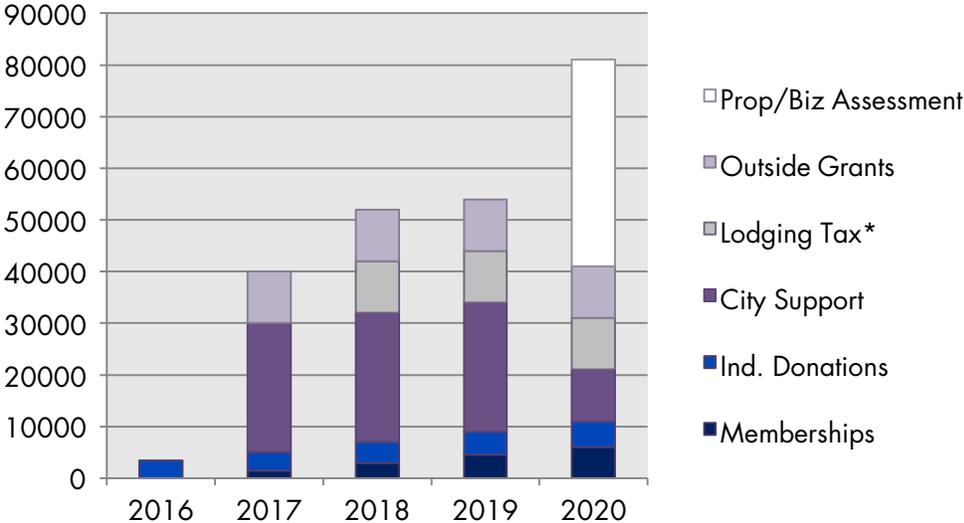


DMA ORGANIZATIONAL MAP

The DMA must ensure that its work is clearly focused within an agreed-to boundary of downtown. The DMA can use the boundary illustrated in the map to the left to communicate internally, and externally with its partners, the City, and the public, about precisely what is within their purview as a downtown organization. Until the boundaries are revised, the DMA projects and activities described in this downtown revitalization strategy should be dedicated to the businesses and public realm described by this map.

4-YEAR (2017-2020) STRATEGIC BUDGET FOR DMA

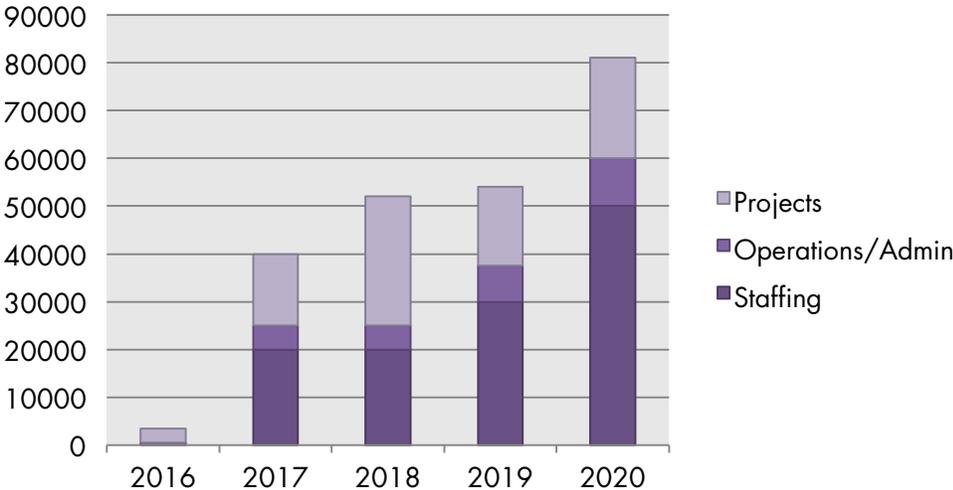
DMA FUNDING SOURCES



The proposed four-year (2017-2020) strategic funding direction shows the influx of City support in the DMA’s budget during a period of growth in organizational capacity.

The intention is that the City will begin to reduce the amount of funding support in 2020 as the DMA supplements its budget with increasing membership dues, donations, and a property or business assessment.

DMA FUNDING USES



The proposed budget for the DMA shows the allocation of funds over the next four years (2017-2020). Growth areas are primarily staff capacity and projects, with the increased costs associated with preparing a business or property assessment analysis noted in 2018.



APPENDIX:

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN 2016

CHAMBER

PUBLIC EVENTS:

- Fair Days Parade & Market
- Music in the Park
- Light Up Monroe
- Community Awards Ceremony
- Harvest Festival / Oktoberfest Planning
- Cinco de Mayo celebration Projects
- Wayfinding Project

EDUCATION / NETWORKING

- Monthly Lunch and Learns
- Time Out Events
- Job Fair

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Partnering with the City
- City-wide Focus
- Coordination with DMA

DMA

PROJECTS

- Planters w/ Lighting
- Public Art
- Downtown Commercial Vacancy Inventory

PUBLIC EVENTS

- Trick or Treat
- Old Homes Tour
- Holiday events

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Puget Sound Energy Lighting Grant Application
- Self-Funding / All-Volunteer
- Joining the WA Main Street Program
- Achieving 501(c)3 Status

MARKETING

- Development of Marketing Materials
- Media Exposure

BDS

PLANNING & URBAN DESIGN

BDS facilitated the Monroe Downtown Revitalization Strategy process and is the primary author of this document.

BDS offers comprehensive community development services, with emphasis on projects that require building consensus and unlikely coalitions, communicating complex information, demonstrating leading ideas, and shaping policy. Projects include strategic plans, downtowns & neighborhood centers, community visions, master plans, public & stakeholder engagement, and public decisions.

BDS principal and founder, Brian Douglas Scott, Ph.D., has more than 35 years of experience in downtown revitalization and management. He is the Pacific Northwest's premier expert on establishing and maintaining assessment districts to pay for downtown revitalization efforts.