

Revitalization Toolkit

presented to
Minden, NV



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PROJECT OVERVIEW

In July 2017, Main Street Minden hosted Civilis Consultants with the goal of studying Minden's commercial districts in order to identify areas where economic improvement could be catalyzed, and to impart tools for businesses, property owners, and the public sector that will help create brand and increase sales per square foot. This report contains Minden's findings and shared toolkits.

Assessment of the districts in July included:

- **Tours.** With Main Street Minden and Douglas County staff, reviewed all commercial areas, future trail access, and participated in a walkthrough of the new distillery under construction.
- **Focus Groups and Meetings.** Attended the Chamber of Commerce coffee, Main Street Minden board member discussion, and convened focus groups of property owners, business owners, and public sector agencies to gather information about how Minden's commercial districts are performing.
- **Mapping/Photography.** Documented activity on the street, assessed the highway and the downtown for short-term and long-term development opportunities, and identified nodes where it might be easiest to create a stronger identity for Minden's commercial areas.
- **District Secret Shopper.** Toured businesses, and spent time in the district with a "tourist hat" on — recording what enticed and the places that provided positive brand association.



Chamber of Commerce Coffee & Frozen Yogurt!



Former Grain Silo in New Distillery



Minden Meat and Deli!

MINDEN FINDINGS

Findings will be covered by first discussing the types of commercial districts found in Minden, and then by sharing information gleaned from interviews and focus groups.

Types of Commercial Districts

Minden has two distinct types of commercial districts, neither of which is performing optimally to maximize economic activity:

- **Small Town Downtown**
- **Mid-Century Arterial**

Small Town Downtown

Downtown Minden is a gem, with a scale of street, size of structure, and surrounding residential charm that evoke another era. This evocation is a very positive reaction that can be leveraged to improve brand identity and retail performance throughout the town.

The downtown consists of about two blocks of commercial buildings, which front on Esmeralda Ave, a street that acts as the Main Street of Minden's historic core. The commercial buildings do extend 1 block to the north, which front on Highway 395. And a few commercial structures extend 1 block to the south of Esmeralda Ave.



Highway 395 with 5 Lanes, No Parking



Minden Has a Beautiful Downtown Park

The downtown's original buildings are characterized by small lot development, typically in footprints that range in the 2,500 SF to 10,000 SF range, which is common for communities that were built in this era. In Minden's concentrated commercial core, there is about the same amount of SF devoted to parking (also known as car storage) as there is devoted to commercial structures (see the graphic on page 6).

Downtown also features a gorgeous park with a gazebo, complete with a stunning backdrop of snow-capped mountains.

The park is surrounded by cute, well maintained single-family homes and the charming commercial buildings downtown. This green space is home to beloved events for the town and is an amenity valued in Minden.

Small Town Downtown: Optimal Economics

These districts function at their highest sales per square foot and, therefore, at their highest building value, when they have two characteristics: Adjacency and Activity.

- **Adjacency.** Downtown districts must have a concentrated collection of buildings built right up to the sidewalk, right next to each other without interruption by parking lots, in order to be economically successful and operate at their highest and best use.
- **Activity.** The uses on the ground floor of these districts must be active, engaging, open to the public, and should make the sidewalk a great place to be 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. There are currently only two businesses in downtown that meet that requirement: Tumblewind and Corner Bar, below.



Connected and Active Are the Goals!



Tumblewind Is the Only Retail Store



The Corner Bar Is Appealing, Even When Closed

Since Small Town Downtowns make all of their money from the cross-pollination between businesses by pedestrians in the district, any lack of activity in downtown has a negative economic impact on the district.

Remember, downtown sales come from... a person impulse buying a necklace after getting a cup of coffee... a customer snagging lunch after paying a bill at the county... a diner impulse-buying a rug for their living room after one glass of wine too many at a restaurant!

Let's look more closely at adjacency and activity in downtown Minden.

ADJACENCY

The physical environment in downtown Minden's commercial area is too disconnected from its edges and has too much parking, which stops buildings and businesses from interconnecting with each other. This is the great paradox of downtown districts: the more parking lots there are, the worse it is for business. Why is this? Because the more car storage in a district, the less people want to walk around it. And the less people want to walk in the district, the lower the cross-pollination between business. Without that exchange between businesses, sales per square foot plummet.

If you look at top performing retail nodes in small, rural downtowns, they are always in the part of downtown with the least amount of off-street parking.

A downtown can create a vibrant retail/restaurant district with as little as a block of buildings, but not if they are riddled with parking lots. Currently, the downtown commercial area of Minden is small, and there is a concentration of buildings, but there are many parking lots.

The yellow areas in the graphic below shows the parking lots that currently exist in downtown. There is just about as much space devoted to car storage as there is to buildings. These should all be considered as future development sites!

TOO MANY PARKING LOTS IN CORE AREA OF DOWNTOWN MINDEN

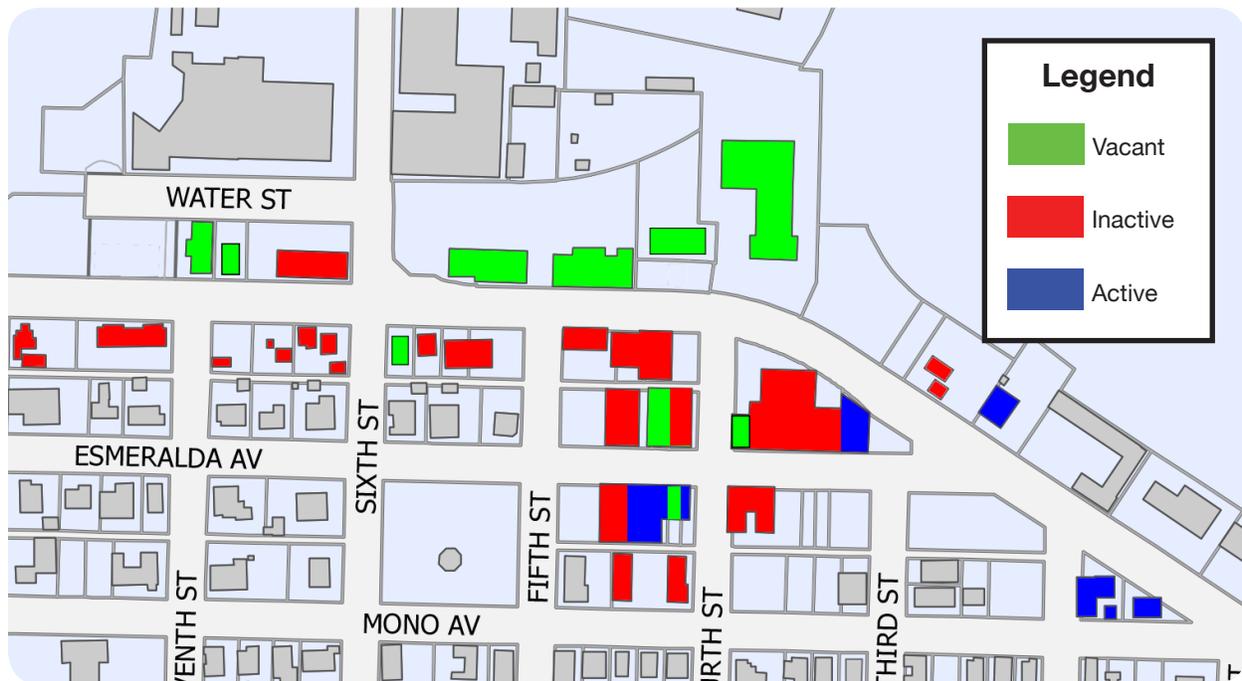


ACTIVITY

The primary attraction for shoppers in a district, and the very thing that encourages pedestrian circulation, is activity on the ground floor. Active uses are businesses that are a) open to the public; b) have dynamic and interesting windows; c) create multi-sensory experiences; d) use the sidewalk as an extension of their business; e) collaborate and cross-pollinate with other businesses; and, f) are ever-evolving. An economically successful downtown district is one that always gives customers a new experience!

One of the easiest ways to assess how a district is doing in regards to activity is to create ground floor activation maps, like the one shown below for downtown Minden.

GROUND FLOOR ACTIVATION MAP FOR DOWNTOWN MINDEN



On the map above, nearly all of the commercial buildings in the core downtown area and its borders are inactive. Office uses, such as county offices, planning firms, and other administrative-uses dominate the landscape. There are only three instances of truly active use in blue that exist in the downtown core: Francisco's, Corner Bar, and Tumblewind. On the border of downtown, visible for a pedestrian standing at Esmeralda Ave and Highway 395, are active uses too: the Red Barn and Minden Meat & Deli.

I also want to note that any type of business can be designated as active or inactive. It is about how it is executing in creating story and exchange at the sidewalk, as enumerated in the opening paragraph of this section. So, it might be tempting to say, for instance, that the casino downtown is an active-use. But, it is not. It truly is a gorgeous building renovation, but nothing about it is active. The windows are darkened,

and nothing can be seen within the building. It is unclear which doors are for show, like the windows, and which ones can actually be used for ingress/egress.

Here is a good test if you are not sure if something is active or inactive. If you can't, at-a-glance, tell when driving down Highway 395 or Esmeralda Ave whether any given business is open or closed, and if you can't see inside that business, then it probably should be designated as inactive.

The goal when trying to spur more economic activity in a downtown district is to string together as much blue as you can. The more blue you have in your district, the healthier it is. The more green and red, the more vacant it feels, and the less likely people are to visit because there is nothing to experience there!

And, it's easy to track how you are doing over time by adjusting the Ground Floor Activation Map yourself as businesses change and new development comes into town.

Mid-Century Arterial

The state highways that crisscross our nation go through myriad small towns, most of which contain what we characterize as mid-century arterial commercial space. It is "arterial" because it is on a road with fast-moving traffic. It is "mid-century" because the land use pattern is from that era. The lot sizes are smaller than that which is usually found on modern arterials, and these lots are not large enough to support today's big box and anchored center concepts. The buildings are usually set closer to the street, are smaller, closer together, and have a lower parking ratio than we would see in a large regional mall or modern arterial, for instance.

HIGHWAY 395 IS NOT REFLECTING THE MINDEN BRAND



Mid-century arterial retail space is most often populated by an array of local tenants, and Minden is no exception. Most of the businesses and developments along the Highway 395 corridor are local. These establishments are essentially small businesses

on fast corridors — so they have to work doubly hard to get drivers to notice them and make positive brand association while people whiz by on a highway, usually faster than the posted speed limit.

Highway 395 is seen as a pass through place, which definitely has a negative impact on local commercial businesses, because they become invisible. One interviewee in the focus groups mentioned that he remembered when 395 was two lanes with on-street parking. Not surprisingly, he recalled there being a lot more walking happening!

There are two areas of focus for improving mid-century arterials.

The first is to help local businesses and the buildings that house them tell a better story from the street, so they create brand association, and draw attention from the traffic going by. Generally, it's best to focus on creating nodes within existing strip centers, and then branch out to better interconnect adjacent properties and businesses.

There are wonderful concentrations of local expertise, local services, and local experiences on offer, and it's everyone's job to make sure people notice!

MOST BUILDINGS ON 395 HAVE NO IDENTITY FACING THE HIGHWAY



The second area of focus for mid-century arterials is to make the highway itself be more relatable as a road, so it can play a role as a Main St and as a Highway.

Of course, it is typical for state thoroughfares to have wide lanes and fast moving traffic, because they are administered by agencies that are very focused on traffic throughput. But, when these types of roads lack on-street parking, when they have wide lanes and fast moving traffic, they are rendered into essentially vast seas of asphalt that are unappealing to cross, unappealing to walk on, and difficult to own a business on.

It is not easy for a road to act both as a Main St and as a highway. But, it is not impossible for a street to play both roles. And, in the case of 395, if changes were made to restore some of its functions as a Main St, it would improve how businesses perform and people's perception of the district.

Focus Group Findings

Many of the previous observations regarding Minden's commercial districts that were quantified while mapping and conducting secret shopper activities were also echoed by the local focus groups and interviews.

In the case of focus groups, we asked the same question-set to attendees representing groups such as property owners, business owners, the public sector, and non-profit agencies. All of the answers were pooled together, and the results relevant to commercial district revitalization will be shared in this section of the report. (The appendix to this report contains the questions that weren't used in the analysis of this report.)

The first question we asked focus group attendees was how they would describe Minden. The results are below in a word cloud. (The larger the word, the more often it was said. The smaller the word, the less frequently it was mentioned.)

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE MINDEN?

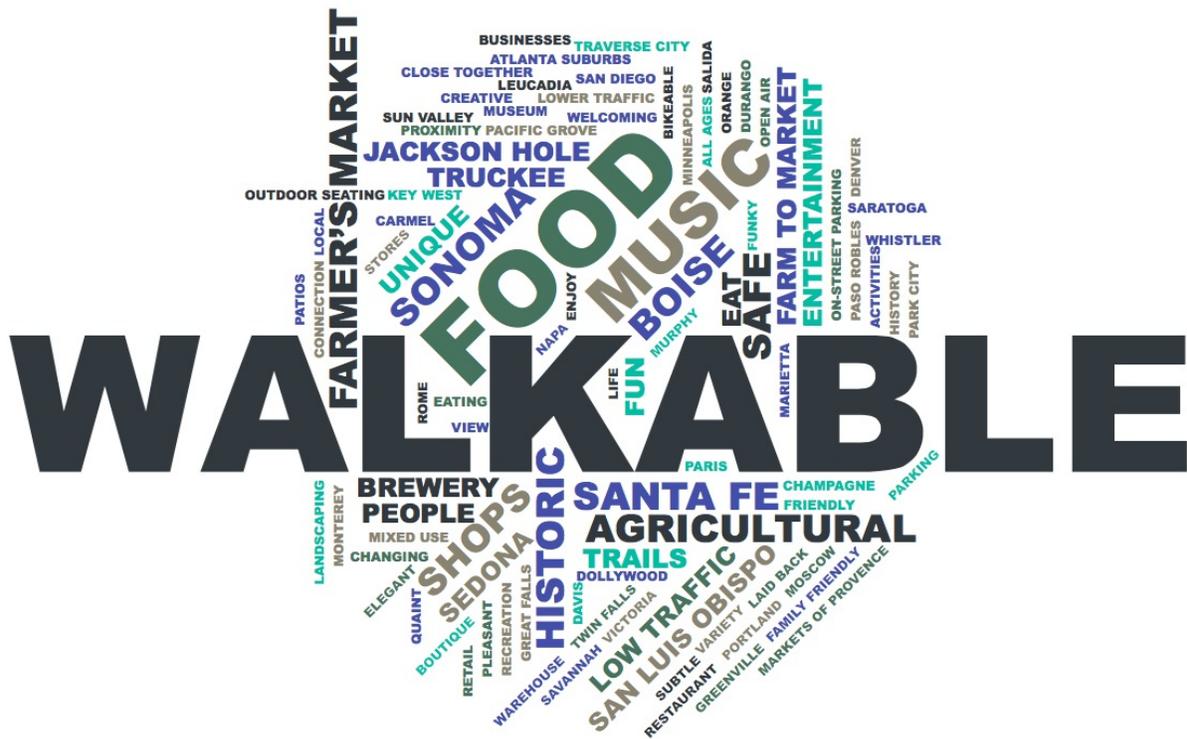


This is a very informative question because it actually reveals the way potential customers feel when they are in a given commercial district. And in Minden's case, these words are not indicative of an experience that reminds people to visit, that lures them in as they pass through, or that entices them to stay. Dominant themes were CONFUSED, DISJOINED, EMPTY, UNFRIENDLY, LONELY, TIRED, and INVISIBLE. There were some bright spots, with people saying it was COMFORTABLE and POISED TO BLOSSOM. For the most part though, the brand of Minden as a community is not remotely reflected in the experience the commercial infrastructure is offering across Minden. Changing these perceptions is an area we will focus upon in the toolkits to follow.

Another interesting note from the word cloud on the previous page were the side discussions about the role of the Highway 395, and how many people wanted to see a bypass so that the highway could have less truck traffic, slower speeds, and a more welcoming environment.

The first question gave a sense of Minden's overall brand identity. The second told us how the commercial district was performing. The next natural step is to get a sense of what experience people in Minden would like their commercial district to offer, so we asked, "Where have you been, anywhere in the world, that offers an experience that Minden could/should offer?" We also asked what attributes made these places so appealing.

WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN THAT OFFERS AN EXPERIENCE YOU WOULD LIKE MINDEN TO OFFER?



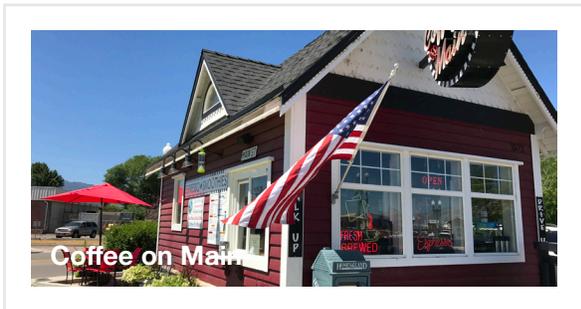
It's pretty clear that WALKABILITY was valued very highly. This calls back to the issues of adjacency that we discussed previously for downtown districts. The more connected the districts are physically, the more walkable they are. Every place listed on this word cloud is a great walking district because there are buildings right next to each other, right up to the sidewalk, without disruption.

The next large theme in the previous word cloud about what people want to see in Minden has to do with the second component of successful downtown districts: activity! Specifically, multisensory activity. MUSIC, FOOD, PEOPLE, FARMER'S MARKETS, and SHOPS are what the people like, and it's what the people want! In short, a dynamic environment offering unique, one-of-a-kind experiences with largely a mix of local businesses. There also was a connection to places with agricultural and farm-to-table food options.

That's a pretty clear road map we will be incorporating into recommendations in the toolkit sections.

As evidence that local and active businesses are what communities value the most, we asked focus groups, "What are Minden's most beloved businesses?" The answers are below. As you can see, it's not a long list, but there are a few very important themes: *food*, *entertainment*, and *local*. Also note that a business that hasn't even opened yet, the distillery, made the list. That's impressive.

WHAT ARE MINDEN'S MOST BELOVED BUSINESSES?



The last question from the focus groups, which was a topic in each interview, was understanding better who is not relating to Minden. This question lets me know more about opportunity for everything from small business recruitment to attracting new customers to finding employees for small businesses. The answers to the question about who does not relate are below.

WHO DOES NOT RELATE TO MINDEN?



The fact that YOUNG FAMILIES, MINORITIES and just young people in general were consistently mentioned as not relating to Minden could be an economic drain on the town.

The backbone of the commercial identity of Minden is local business. The improvement that attendees wanted the commercial district to embrace involved offering more and better experiences with active, small businesses. To do this, Minden will have to figure out how to attract more young people, more families, and folks from diverse backgrounds, because these are the people who open small, active businesses, and these are the people who staff those businesses. Without better representation from these demographics, you will make it more difficult to populate your commercial spaces with the distinct, interesting, and evolving offerings that focus group attendees wanted to see.

One of the biggest hurdles to rounding out the population demographic in Minden was seen as housing costs—there just aren't a lot of housing options for a wide variety of work-force and middle class millennials and families.

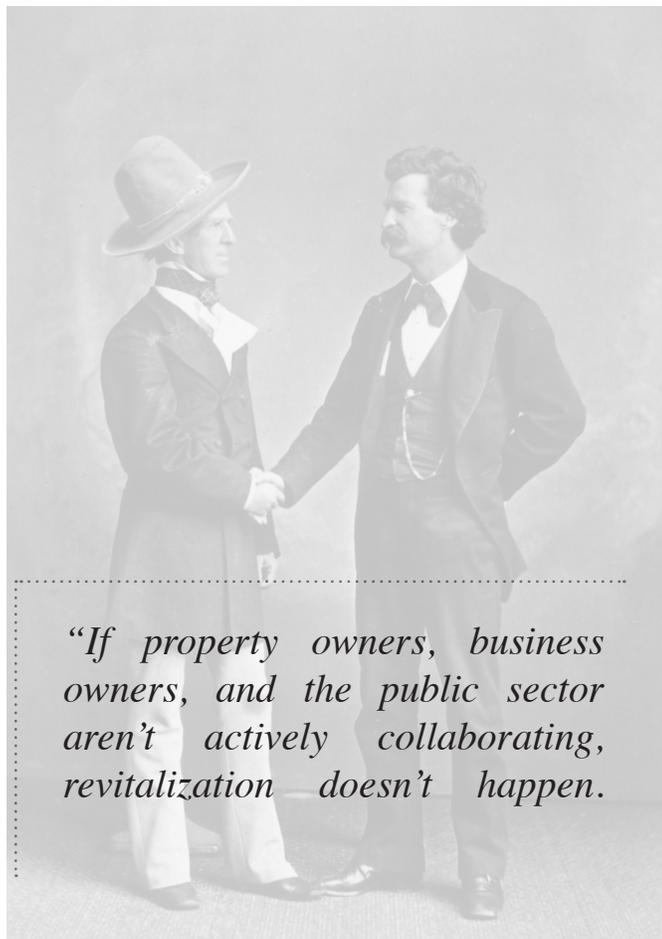
It is worth noting that the strong sense of safety people feel in Minden is one of the reasons they enjoy living there. Yet, public safety is being compromised because it's impossible for the sheriff to recruit local officers because there are few to no housing options. Policing that happens from within the community is always most effective, and there are myriad consequences, such as this, that come from not having a variety of housing opportunities, both for sale and for rent. We will discuss ways to address housing in the public sector toolkit.

What's Next for Minden?

Next up, we are going to start diving into the toolkits, with specific areas of focus for the three groups that must work together in order to lift economic performance and brand identity in Minden's commercial districts: property owners, business owners, and the public sector.

To make headway with renewal, these three groups will have to work closely to align goals and bring change, which will require collaboration. Property owners and business owners must band together to raise sales per square foot by creating fabulous, engaging experiences for customers of the district.

And, the public sector and private sector must partner to facilitate the introduction of more adjacency and activity to the commercial districts through improvements in the public and private realm, as well as changes to zoning and code to allow for a better and more active mix of businesses.



“If property owners, business owners, and the public sector aren't actively collaborating, revitalization doesn't happen.”

FINDINGS SPOTLIGHT

What Is Minden's Brand?

Overall, people saw Minden's fundamental identity as being a place with quaint historic charm, surrounded by natural beauty and myriad recreation opportunities, with a strong sense of community. Yet, the commercial districts were not seen as reflecting any of that fundamental brand. Instead, the commercial areas were cited as being lonely, confused, tired, disjointed, empty, and unfriendly.

The focus groups also offered a pretty clear path for healing the identity gap that exists between the town as a whole, and the commercial districts, when they shared the types of experiences they thought Minden should offer: walkable places with a variety of stores, restaurants, and businesses that engage all of the senses, with a particular focus on local businesses, since those are the most beloved in the community.

The toolkits to follow in this report are going to be centered on ways for property owners, business owners, and agencies (non-profit and public sector) to bring Minden's commercial districts more in line with its fundamental brand: being a charming historic small town with fabulous, active local businesses. Additional themes to explore and showcase when considering the Minden brand includes connecting to agriculture and recreation.

Identity Areas of Focus

- **Agriculture.** The entry into Minden from the north has a particularly dramatic boundary between undeveloped and developed property, which speaks to the strong agricultural heritage in the community. (The boundary to the south is less dramatic as it occurs on an arterial of commercial development between Gardnerville and Minden.) From a marketing and branding perspective, borders and boundaries are powerful and memorable. The large estate distillery being built that grows its own grains will be a huge farm-to-table draw, as well. So, thinking about how to leverage the agricultural identity in town is worth pursuing. Ideas could include the following:
 - Ensure every restaurant highlights local offerings, locally sourced ingredients, and locally made value-added food products, such as salsas, etc.
 - Build upon and expand farm-to-table food events, walks, tours, etc. Package them as day-trip friendly, or weekend-trip friendly happenings with lodging, fun transportation options (like a hay ride to the event), and one-of-a-kind food stops. Advertise them!

- Develop materials for different types of visitors (overnight, day, pass through) that gives them farm-to-table offerings relevant to their needs: recreation, tasting, long meals, short meals, to-go food, fresh food, etc. If someone happens to be staying at the Carson Valley Inn on a farmer's market day, they should know about it, and be enticed to walk to it!
- Create a commercial kitchen and small purveyor outlet for food makers who want to create value added food products around the food produced in the area. A kitchen like this could also be used for classes, such as the art of whole animal butchering, a natural tie-in to the ranching in the region.
- Build an outlet downtown featuring local agricultural products.
- Work with a grower to create a cute, honor-based, unmanned produce stand.

➤ **Outdoor Recreation.** It was mentioned repeatedly in the focus groups that a love of the outdoors, and access to many different types of recreation, are a huge part of the reason that people like to live and visit the greater area around Minden. Unfortunately, this connection to outdoor recreation is not seen in the commercial areas of town. Showcasing this activity should be a priority. Some options to consider to strengthen this brand association include:

- Tap into the Martin Slough Trail that's going to skirt to the north of the center of Minden by creating a very clear bike path, that is safe and separated, to lure folks into the town core. It could be besprinkled with a sculpture, some food carts, and other offerings to encourage exploration off the trail and into town.
- Offer small recreational bike share that is visible from the highway, so people can stop, rent a bike, and hop on the trail from the center of Minden.
- Attract outfitters that plan regional recreational trips to headquarter in Minden, so the town becomes a jumping off point for regional recreation.
- Construct an outdoor climbing wall or a bouldering course as a public park amenity, perhaps in land/parking lots in between the Carson Valley Inn and the distillery. This would create more visual interest for riders on the trail and, also, visually minimize the impact of the jail on the commercial environment from the highway.

- Create (with partners, if needed) regional sports events that begin and end in Minden, such as marathons, cycling road races, ride and tie races, etc. This requires participants to avail themselves of overnight lodging and food and beverage in the area. Furthermore, it would cement people's perception that the town is a hub for outdoor activity. If that activity is visible from the highway, so much the better!

PROPERTY OWNER TOOLKIT

Of the three groups that impact revitalization, property owners are the most important because they control how buildings look and what tenants go into those buildings. That is game, set and match right there when it comes to revitalization. How buildings look and what tenants go into those buildings is the actual toolkit for property owners: implementing a vision for their buildings and tenancing to build long-term value.

Property Owner Toolkit #1: Implement a Vision

There are three areas to consider for immediate action by property owners that will make space easier to lease and that will incubate successful outward-facing businesses that create district identity and strong rents. These action items are going to focus on the ground floor, because that is where the identity of a district is almost entirely established. If street-level buildings, businesses, and the public sphere are not working hard to get visitor's attention, those potential consumers will pass by, leaving everything unnoticed, at best, or disliked, at worst.

There is a fundamental rule for retail commercial districts, whether you are a dentist or a women's clothing boutique: *People form their opinion of a business and your district long before they walk in a door!*

Therefore, the most immediate and highest impact way to improve district brand and experience is to work with each individual building to change the story it tells from the street. This is vitally important because a place tells a story 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, so every space better be telling a great story, all the time, open or closed. Every building should **show** me something about the district, the area, the businesses, and why I might want to stop there as a customer, or why I might want to lease space if I were a business. How buildings look really matters.

The three areas of focus for property owners are listed below:

- Building Interiors
- Building Exteriors
- Parking Lots/Sidewalks (particularly relevant on Highway 395)

Building Interiors

Subpar interior space is important because the interior experience strongly shapes our perception of a business and its products, and it heavily impacts our mood just as we are closest to making purchases. The interior of a space also plays a huge role in a)

how leasable the space is; and, b) how successful a business will be in a space. In other words, you can take a great business and put them in a horrible looking (or horrible smelling) space, and they will fail. Likewise, you can take a fair business and put it in a rocking space, and it will do well.

Consider the interior of the coffee shop, pictured below left. It is clearly a neighborhood gathering spot and is offering a modern but cozy retail experience on the interior. It's very well done.

You might be surprised to learn that this space is inside a dated little strip mall in Carmichael, CA, pictured below right.



Surprising Strip Mall Interior in Carmichael, CA



The Dated Strip Mall That Houses the Coffee Shop

There are basic elements that create a framework for success in ground floor commercial space, whether it is in a Small Town Downtown district or a Mid-Century Arterial, which is particularly important in districts that are comprised of local businesses.

These basic elements include:

- *Right Size Spaces.* Most long-term vacancies, or less-than-optimally tenanted spaces, or spaces with a lot of turnover, occur in buildings such as dated strip mall/box infrastructure, or in old downtown department stores and banks. Why? Because these are large spaces, larger than the retail/restaurant/active-use market wants to absorb. In order to appeal to the widest possible pool of tenants and uses, spaces need to be designed so they can be divisible down to sizes more likely to be absorbed by the local market: about 1,000 SF to 1,500 SF is optimal for retail. One of the most important skills in adaptively reusing buildings is dividing spaces into optimally usable spaces that are going to return the most in rent per square foot. The smaller the space, the higher the return per square foot, typically.

- *Tall Ceilings.* Remove low ceilings, be they acoustical tile drop ceilings or old hard lids. Anything that smacks of a 1980s office space ceiling with fluorescent lighting is not providing a distinct brick-and-mortar experience, which is what small businesses must provide in today's retail climate. In studies on human reactions to ceiling height, psychologist Oshin Vartanian of the University of Toronto-Scarborough found that "participants were more likely to judge a room beautiful if it had a high ceiling" and that "part of the appeal of high ceilings seems to be that they capture our visual attention and engage our desire to observe our surroundings." (Source: Fast Company, *Why Our Brains Love High Ceilings*, Eric Jaffe, March 5, 2015.) Both of these characteristics are great for business!

The formula for ceiling success is to rip out false ceilings, expose the roof deck and/or truss structure, and then put insulation above the roof deck or between roof joists. (A good example of the latter is pictured at Yogurt Beach on Page 3, and at Minden Meat & Deli on page 43.)

- *Make Windows Transparent.* Windows are the eyes into the soul of your commercial district. Landlords need to make sure glass is as transparent as possible, and that any window film allows for maximum visibility. (Window film that prevents UV damage and heat gain, but is still fairly transparent is available.)
- *Introduce Great Light.* It's always easier to attract tenants in light, bright cheerful spaces. Especially if you are completing renovations of dated strip malls. And, the interior experience in spaces with great light is always better. So, every owner should consider installing opaque skylights in one-story buildings and installing reasonable baseline light fixtures too. A good rule of thumb is to create lighting in the color range of 3,000 kelvins or less (this has a more amber character that makes both product and people look good). Also, encourage bulbs with a CRI (color rendering index) as high as you can afford, generally above 90.

WE WANT TO SEE IN YOUR WINDOWS MINDEN!



Building Exteriors

The four elements needed to execute on a great exterior building experience, that will draw maximum customer attention and loyalty, are listed below. These four items are easy to implement in phases, they can be approached over time, out of cash flow for the private sector, and they provide the biggest district bang for the lowest cost.

- *Color.* There is no cheaper or easier way to bring vibrancy and excitement to a place than by introducing color. When was the last time that someone called you up and said, “Oh my gosh, the coolest building just got painted in our downtown, you have to come see it!” That is exactly what happened with the building pictured to the right. Every building in all of your districts should be using color to show visitors something about their business, about the area, and about the experience they want to provide.



Second Floor Office Space in Concrete Block Bldg

- *Highlight Building Detail.* Every building has interesting elements or unique materials that can be highlighted to make the structure engaging, eye catching, and inviting. This is doubly important on a corridor, where potential consumers are hard to engage. In the example below, you can see a mid-century building painted all white that was largely used as legal offices. The owner of the practice was retiring and was going to begin leasing space. Using color to make the building more appealing, and to highlight building detail, completely changed market perception of the space.



BEFORE: Drab Mid-Century Legal Office



AFTER: Highlights Horizontal Siding, Shapes & Windows

- *Transparency.* The hardest thing that any business has to do is get someone to walk through the door, whether it's for the first time or as a repeat customer. This is particularly true for a small business with which we have no familiarity. The bottom line is that customers do not like to enter businesses unless they can see inside, because they want to first understand the experience on offer. So both the store and the merchandise in the windows must appeal to consumers. This lesson is all too often lost with small ground-floor businesses, especially if they have blocked their windows. Consumers should be able to tell whether a store is open or closed, and know what a business actually does by glancing at the windows for a second or two.



Good Example of Transparency in Optical Store

This idea of transparency is doubly important for food businesses because their customers are unique—their only job is to hang out and the product is multi-sensory! So every restaurant/bar should be showcasing its customers, essentially making them very visible, in order to attract more visitors. And, it makes a district vibrant!

- *Exterior Lighting.* Every place, every building, and every business is telling a story, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Just because a business closes at 5 pm does not mean their responsibility for contributing to the experience of being in the district ends at 5 pm. It is building lighting, tree lighting, product lighting, sign lighting—everything other than street lighting—that tells us a district is safe, a district is welcoming, a district is interesting, a district is open for business.



Seating Area in Former Parking Lot at Night

A great example of vision by a property owner, both interior/exterior, is found in the Mid-Century Arterial renovation of a gym into a Trader Joe's, shown on the next page. It is a mid-century box with a parking lot, located near a freeway. Notice how they introduced transparency by opening up the facade, and they used warm natural wood as a dominant color, inside and out, to create an inviting atmosphere in a sea of asphalt. Of course, it has great lighting too!

This building is priming people to want to shop, to want to spend money, to want to partake of the Trader Joe's experience long before they walk in the door!



BEFORE: Dated Box Last Used as a Gym



AFTER: Reimagined Into Vibrant and Compelling Retail

Parking Lots/Sidewalks

The last area of improvement that property owners need to consider is tackling parking lots and sidewalks—they can be used to advantage, creating identity, generating revenue, and providing a necessary buffer from busy traffic on fast corridors.

In the strip mall redevelopment shown on the next page, they did a great job of making their parking lot and sidewalks engaging from all angles. From the bus stop, which is incorporated into the development, to the street, which has interesting landscaping and a cool rusted metal wall to block out the image of cars being so dominant. It also creates a welcome gateway to those passing by, on foot or by car, with a walkway between the store-sidewalk and the



Even Parking Lots Can Be Pedestrian Friendly

street-sidewalk. And, it used some of the parking spaces in front of the restaurant to create a beautiful outdoor seating area, softening the edges of the hardscape.

STRIP MALL PARKING LOT IMPROVEMENT EXAMPLE

Parking Lot Screen



Integrated Bus Stop



Strip Mall



Walkway



Seating Area



The recipe for improving the parking lot and sidewalk experience is as follows:

- *Engage Both Sidewalks.* One of the challenges of having a recessed building is that businesses and buildings have two sidewalks to engage—the one directly in front of the building (the building sidewalk), and the one directly adjacent to the street (the street sidewalk). To optimize the consumer experience, businesses and buildings have to create a great experience on both.

- *Create a Pedestrian Walkway Between Both Sidewalks.* Every recessed building should have an area focused for walkers to pass through the parking lot, like the one pictured to the right, which leads to a medical-office building. (There is also a public garden they programmed into the parking space as well on the left!)
- *Create a Store Zone on the Building Side-walk.* Many older corridor buildings have parking infrastructure built almost directly to the edge of the building, such as the auto body shop pictured below. This is a mistake for retail space. Generally, with recessed buildings, you want to create a buffer between the parking and the actual stores and businesses by developing a store zone where people can circulate, sample products, maybe go to a food cart, or use as a seating area.

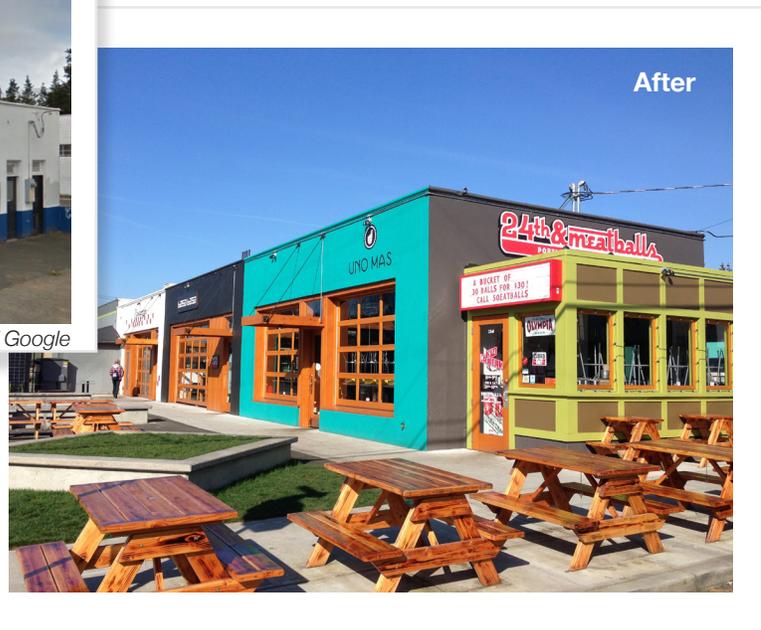


Great Walkway Between Sidewalks!

Below is an example of a typical mid-century building, slightly recessed from the street. It was an auto body shop, converted into micro restaurant spaces. Notice, they entirely removed the parking lot and created a gigantic store zone that is a shared seating area. And, they also used color and active tenanting to make it a beloved and iconic project.



Courtesy of Google



Property Owner Toolkit #2: Tenant for Long Term Value

The second major thing every property owner should be thinking about is how to tenant in such a way that they build a good base for stable rents and increased property values. How can owners do this? By finding the right tenants, and by appropriately tenant mixing.

Finding the Right Tenants

In a nutshell, property owners should always be thinking about how they can tenant to increase sales per square foot in their district. Why? Because the more successful the businesses are, the more sales they generate, and the more sales they generate, the more rent spaces can generate, and the more rent your spaces generate, the more your building is worth.

So Landlords, you really are in business with your tenants, in a sense.

In districts that have yet to become mature, stable retail or mixed-use areas, there are two ways to manage property:

- Manage for Short Term Cash Flow
- Manage for Activity

Managing for Short Term Cash Flow. In this scenario, landlords only care about tenant stability and the fact that the tenant is financially able to pay rent every month. On the surface, this may sound like a good way to manage real estate. But, in districts where you are trying to build brand, identity, and sales, it is disastrous. It can actually bring about the death of a district because the very tenants that are the most stable financially, are the ones that kill a retail district: accountants, doctors, dentists, lawyers, real estate firms, and insurance agencies.

These kinds of uses are not engaging at the street, they don't always cross-pollinate well with other retail and restaurant uses, and they are often open only from 9 am to 5 pm, which makes it difficult to create an 18-hour district, a goal when creating a thriving commercial node.

So, while I like all these uses, I generally prefer them to be upstairs, or have very small storefronts with spaces toward the rear of a building if it is a Small Town Downtown district. In Mid-Century Arterial Districts, I generally don't want these to dominate the ground floor either. But if you do have service office uses, then group them in a building theme around like professional services (real estate, or health and wellness, for instance). And, they still have to make it look great from the ground floor.

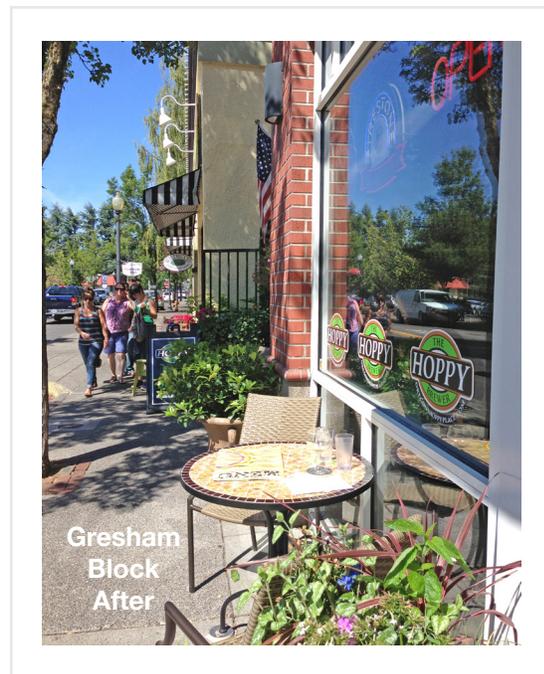
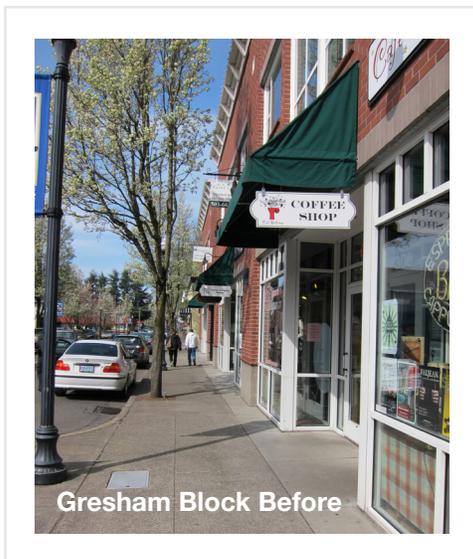
Managing for Activity. The other way to manage your property is to tenant for activity. Instead of asking if the tenant can pay the rent every month, your first question should be, “Is this tenant going to add vitality to the building, create a great sidewalk experience, merchandise some awesome windows, and cross-pollinate with other nearby businesses?”

That’s it. The more you increase activity, the more people want to be there. And the more people, means higher sales per square foot... and we know where that leads—higher property values.

It can feel like a bit of a leap to tenant your buildings based on activity, because some of these businesses may not make it. And it’s true that this approach does sometimes result in more turnover. But over the long-term, you will make more money as a property owner if you tenant for activity.

As an example, consider Cliff Kohler who owned many properties in downtown Gresham, OR. He decided to change only two things about how he managed his property: he delivered more engaging interior spaces with high ceilings and exposed finishes, and he tenanted for activity. On the latter, he chose tenants that would activate storefront windows and the sidewalk. By offering better spaces and choosing only active tenants, in a little over 2 years, he took a dead block on Main St and made it the most happening block and, in the process, achieved the highest rents he had been able to command up to that point.

Please find sidewalk photos before and after of this Gresham example below:



Tenant Mixing

Property owners in every kind of commercial district should be thinking about how to tenant mix, which is grouping businesses around themes and/or with an eye toward what will create the most cross-pollination between businesses.

In Small Town Downtown Districts, a mix of what we call “active destination businesses” are the most desirable tenants to attract for success. These are businesses that have an active storefront but whose customers are coming as a part of a planned trip rather than just stopping by purely on an impulse. Examples include:

- Restaurants/Food (Coffee, Bakery, Brew Pub)
- Fabric/Knitting/Quilt Shop
- Specialty Paper/Printing Store
- Eyeglass/Optometrlist Store
- Music/Instrument Store
- Bird Feed/Yard Supplies
- Manufacturer/Showroom
- Wholesaler/Retailer
- Pet Grooming/Specialty Pet Food
- Antiques
- Salon/Spa/Wellness

In a Small Town Downtown District, it is absolutely essential to have a mix of active tenants from a variety of these kinds of categories. If you cluster around just one theme, you will have a dead place. For instance, if you have all salons, then you will have no cross-pollination between businesses because customers don't leave one salon and go into another salon immediately after. In contrast, customers will browse in other stores while waiting for an appointment or sit in a coffee shop if they are early. That is why you need a variety of offerings.

Unlike downtowns, Mid-Century Arterial infrastructure is more able to absorb some thematic tenanting because each development is its own node, and these nodes typically don't offer pedestrian environments that encourage cross-pollination between them. So, for arterial spaces without storefront windows, with large setbacks, or which aren't visible from the main arterial, feel free to tenant and brand around like clusters with less activity (service businesses, health and medical, professional office, etc). For highly visible and accessible arterial space, especially near downtown or the distillery, a complimentary mix of active destination businesses will achieve the highest return for owners.

PROPERTY OWNER SPOTLIGHT

So Where Do You Start?

Property owners in Minden definitely need to focus on tenanting retail and restaurant commercial spaces with active uses. They need to write into their leases that ground floor uses will engage the sidewalk. And, they need to participate in helping make their spaces offer a framework for tenant success. This needs to be a priority for owners not because they will be a “good guy” for doing the work, but because it is what is best for owners economically, and it is what is best for the district economically. Anything you do that improves sales per square foot, increases building value.

The goal, both in the downtown and in local retail hotspots on Highway 395, is to encourage, highlight, and support activity. Every building needs to offer a visually interesting, appealing, and eye catching view from the street. And, they need to offer spaces of approximately 1000 SF with an interior experience that reflects today’s shopping tastes (no false ceilings and carpet, lots of natural light and windows).

Any building owner can implement the techniques from this section. Having said that, districts get more of a multiplier effect on brand and commerce when these improvements are made in concentrated areas, and when they are featured in retail and restaurant space, which is the most visible and where people in the community congregate.

Below we will look at two types of redevelopment examples, one from Minden’s downtown, and one from Minden’s Highway 395.

Redevelopment Overview

- **County Offices.** The Douglas County office building to the right is uniquely suited to redevelopment because of its location in the heart of downtown and because of its grand, historic nature. Luckily, it is currently occupied by the county offices, which gives it an office occupancy designation under building code rules. This means that within a redevelopment scenario to office/retail, there may be a way to re-tenant without triggering expensive building upgrades. The upper floors are just transferring their occupancy designation office to office. The lower floor would be transferring its occupancy from office to mercantile, which is typically allowed under



Development Opportunity , County Offices

building code. *Please note, a full plan set would need to be developed, a review by an architect should be conducted, and a code review completed by the county to ultimately determine whether changing the occupancy would precipitate costly building improvements. The observations in this document are merely reporting that the initial conditions look good and warrant a deeper look.*

Activating the ground floor of the building presents the largest challenge, because the retail space is not at grade. As such, it can't really be divided into small, individual units with their own street entry. Instead, the grand stair common entry and rear ADA access should be maintained. And the interior should be developed into a collective of small incubator service/retail spaces, fronting on a common entry/hall. These spaces should have a lot of glass, which creates a strong sense of community, develops activity in the common spaces, and encourages economic cross-pollination.

An example of a retail/service creative commons incubator ground floor space is shown to the right.



Creative Commons Interior Retail Space

- **Highway 395 Strip Malls.** There are a number of small retail commercial buildings either clustered together or that house multiple retail tenants on Highway 395. These are great places to turn into nodes of activity. An example of one is shown below right.

This is an optimal piece of property for easy and affordable improvement because of its size, its visible location near the highway, and the fact that it already houses the Cowboy Cafe, one of the town's beloved businesses, as well as a myriad of other local businesses. The areas for improvement first would include a more vibrant paint scheme, perhaps with a neutral base color and, then, vibrant storefront colors that change for each individual establishment. Breaking longer spaces up with color shows customers there are a lot of individual businesses to explore. And second, offering some outdoor seating with umbrellas for the Cowboy Cafe would serve as a great sign!



Great Candidate for Upgrades!

BUSINESS OWNER TOOLKIT

Most of the places focus group attendees referenced as giving an experience that they thought Minden could or should offer featured eclectic mixes of local businesses. What's interesting is that Minden already has an interesting mix of businesses, but many are in buildings that are not offering a framework for success (remember, the retail experience happens long before someone walks in a door). And, many are not executing on the basics of the most important tool for ground floor businesses: Show, Don't Tell.

Biz Toolkit #1: Show, Don't Tell

Every business should pretend that signs are illegal and language doesn't exist. Then, they should consider how they are going to **SHOW** customers what sort of experience they offer, what their business actually is, and why a customer might want to interact with them. Every single ground floor business should *show* us what they do, not try to *tell* us with a sign.

Consider the photograph to the right. This is a dentist's office in a medical tourism town in Mexico where North Americans come for affordable dental work.

Now consider, how do people feel when they go to the dentist? Nervous. How do they feel going to another country to get medical care? Nervous. Do you think they travel there alone? No.



Beautiful Dental Office In Mexican Medical Tourism Town

What is this practice showing us to assuage these concerns? It demonstrates success in the finish work, caring and calmness with the color and design, and they have a great place to sit and wait for those accompanying patients here!

They are showing patients that they are going to take care of everything!

The three most important areas of execution for Show, Don't Tell are:

- Windows
- Lighting
- Sidewalks

Windows

Windows are really the heart and soul of a commercial district. They are the one item that should always be changing and they should always be engaging. Improving windows is usually the cheapest, quickest, and easiest project to improve district brand and get people walking in the door of businesses.

A checklist for window *Show, Don't Tell* execution is below.

- *Can I see your windows?* You would be surprised at how often I have to ask this! It's very common for storefront windows to be blocked by landscaping, by hanging flower baskets, by signage. If you can't even see a storefront window, that should be fixed.



A Linen Store's Window When Closed

- *Can I See in Your Windows Day and Night?* Storefront windows are a 24/7 advertisement for your business, so make sure they look great when you are open, and that they look great when you are closed. This is not only important for businesses, but it's important for districts too, so it always looks inviting, safe, and active no matter what time of day or evening.
- *Do Your Windows Provide Store Transparency?* When you are a small business, and especially when you are a small business on a busy corridor, your prospective customers are unlikely to commit to walking through your door unless they can get a sense of who you are from the exterior. If you build out window boxes, or otherwise block your windows, it will discourage people from dipping their toe in the pool of what your business has to offer!
- *Are your Windows Merchandised Well?* This speaks for itself. If people walk by your window and never turn their head, if they never look in, then you aren't doing it right! Again, windows are where you market you business, no matter what it is. Make sure they are fantastic.
- *Do Your Windows Change Frequently?* At a minimum, every ground floor business should be changing their windows every month, with the exception of restaurants. The latter should just be showcasing people in their windows!

Every street level business should answer yes to every one of the above questions.

Lighting

Light impacts our mood very dramatically. It makes products look either alluring or anemic and it also makes human skin appear either alluring or anemic (an important consideration when selling products that require customers to look attractive in a mirror)!

Proper retail lighting could be a report in and of itself. For the purposes of this toolkit, and the fundamentals for Show, Don't Tell, we are going to focus on window lighting specifically because this type of lighting, when done properly, is what makes windows transparent during the day, and it's what makes storefronts look amazing at night. Also, this type of lighting makes product almost appear to hop through the glass, enticing people into businesses.

The keys to good window lighting are pretty simple:

➤ *Install Spot Light Fixtures Just Inside the Window.* Every window should have spot lights just inside the glass, pointed down toward the products and slightly back toward the store.

➤ *Proper Shape/Size/Color of Bulb.* A bulb is essentially a shower head of light. And the size and spread of a bulb must be selected so the light focuses on the

products in the window, not above or below them, so you are essentially aiming your shower head of light! To aim light with high ceilings, a bigger bulb with a narrower spread is needed (spread is the width the light angles out from the bulb). For lower ceilings, smaller bulbs with slightly wider spreads are optimal. Color should be lower than 3,000 kelvin to keep it warm. And the Color Rendering Index, or CRI, should be above 90, if possible.

You can change the world with good lighting!



Lighting is Mood



This Wedding Dress Store is Perfectly Lit, It Glows!

Sidewalks

Sidewalks are public spaces where we should see people, product, and activity. Human beings are pack animals, and we are wired to go do, and see, what other people are doing. And the sidewalk is the most public place to showcase product, to show something about your business, and draw people. The bottom line is that if a district doesn't make its sidewalks appealing and attractive, it is costing sales.

In this report we are going to look at the types of sidewalks we usually encounter on corridors and in downtowns: street sidewalks and building sidewalks. Below, please note which sidewalk types marry to the types of districts found in Minden.

MID-CENTURY ARTERIALS

- Street Sidewalks
- Building Sidewalks

SMALL TOWN DOWNTOWNS

- Building Sidewalks



*Giant Ball of Yarn on Yarn Store Sidewalk
(Photo Courtesy of Megan Curry)*

Street Sidewalks. In arterial form, these are the kinds of sidewalks that have street on one side, parking lot on the other. They may be the most sad and neglected types of sidewalks in America. Ways to improve the street sidewalk were discussed in the Property Owner Toolkit on pages 25-27 because these changes are typically considered improvements undertaken by property owners.

Building Sidewalks. This type of sidewalk, built directly next to buildings, is present in both downtown and in corridor development. How can businesses use these sidewalks to improve sales and ramp up positive brand association? Two ways:

1. Know your Zone
2. Follow the Rules!

Know Your Zone!

Building sidewalks have two zones, the “store zone” and the “district zone”.

The Store Zone is the area of the sidewalk right next to businesses. In the store zone, every business should be showing customers something unique and interesting about what they do (like the yarn store, above right).

The District Zone. This is the area near the curb of the building sidewalk. This is where you place repetitive banners, wayfinding for a strip mall, benches, street furniture, district landscaping, etc.

Follow The Rules!

Sidewalk Rule #1. The store zone can invade the district zone. It is perfectly normal, even desirable, for stores to put their own stamp of identity on the entire sidewalk.

Sidewalk Rule #2. The district zone should not invade the store zone. District identifiers are repetitive and, when located right in front of businesses, aren't actually showing anything unique about the offerings in the establishments. In fact, if the same bench, planter, or piece of street furniture is found in front of all businesses, it will all appear the same to passersby, and they will tune out the businesses because there is nothing distinct to catch their attention.



Building Sidewalk Zones

SHOW, DON'T TELL EXAMPLE

Here is an example of the impact of Show, Don't Tell using windows, lighting, and sidewalks to offer a new visual experience in a service office business — Love Travel — in a small downtown area of Auburn, WA.

Right: This window is dark, it provides no store transparency, and it has an old, faded poster propped up against a staircase, and some poinsettia plants left-over from Christmas six months before. There is a much more dynamic story about travel to tell here!





LIGHTING. The first thing we did was install the correct size, shape, and color of light bulb into their window lighting infrastructure and turned it on. This made the window transparent.

WINDOW. Next, we decorated the window with items that SHOWed the type of travel people would be making in this season (it was cold), with a colorful display mostly reusing items already found throughout the travel agency — posters, luggage, etc.

SIDEWALK. And last, we brought the story out to the sidewalk. The owner had a collection of antique uniforms in the agency, so we bought a form for her to use with these over time. In this instance, with our tropical cruise/travel theme, we chose all weather Hawaiian hula material for the form as well as all weather nautical flags. All of this is better than an A-board sign. The skirt and flags move gently in the wind, they make everyone smile when they go by, and they are tactile to touch and interact with. (And they can be moved inside easily at the end of every day.)

Right: And, of course, the window is sensational at night, reminding everyone traveling through when the business is closed that they might want to take a cruise! This building is also making downtown look incredible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They are a good steward of the store sidewalk and are adding to district experience, open or closed.



BUSINESS OWNER SPOTLIGHT

Get to Showing!

Helping businesses do a better job of Show, Don't Tell can bring about dramatic visual changes in a district, and it's also a great way to build relationship, build community, and cross-pollinate sales between businesses. It's an area where you can have a big impact with sweat equity and smaller sums of money, so they are good areas for early projects!

Minden needs to build a makeover team and start working on projects. These team members can come from the community and from the business owners. (Often retirement hubs have an amazing source of professionals that enjoy dipping their toe back in retailing, display, design, and lighting for the good of their community!) Priority areas include downtown and retail/restaurant uses on Highway 395. Remember, signs are illegal, language doesn't exist—how do you show a customer they want to stop in your business?

Examples

- **Farm-to-Table.** A mural on the side of Minden Meat & Deli that harkens back to old world butchery, locally raised livestock, and hand cured meats would be a great addition to the neighborhood.
- **Windows, Windows, Windows.** Start with your existing retailers and restaurateurs and consider their storefront windows. Catalog them photographically, and start improving them. Focus first on windows with very active retail businesses, both in the downtown and on Highway 395. Improve merchandising and lighting. Make them compelling. Actually track whether they capture people's attention (do they slow down, do they stop and look, do they talk about the window, etc) both in the day and in the evening. (Picking times to track this during busy events would be good.)
- **Heartstrings.** This is a gorgeous little building and they have created a lovely garden out front. However, it's not entirely clear that it's a gallery and gifts store. An outdoor display that more clearly highlights its retail nature might spur more impulse stops from Highway 395 traffic.
- **Testa Motorsports!** This is an attention-getting and visible business on Highway 395. It places product outside and is one of the few establishments connecting to outdoor recreation. So curate those displays, paint a rad snowmobile taking a jump mural on the building, and draw a race track on the parking lot!



Mural: Old World Food Craftsmanship

PUBLIC SECTOR/AGENCY TOOLKIT

The public sector and agency role in revitalization is two-fold. First, agencies need to collaborate with the private sector to implement their toolkits, incentivizing and facilitating a series of small changes over a period of time. And second, they need to think about the areas under their bailiwick — roads, the public realm, zoning, code — and how they can be used to boost economic activity. For the purposes of this report, an agency could be a local governing body, a regional governing body, a county, a non-profit agency, a Main Street organization, or any combination of the above.

Public Sector/Agency Toolkit #1: Incentivize Incremental Improvement

The public sector and agencies interested in revitalization should be creating programs to support all of the private sector activities just outlined in this report: Show, Don't Tell, Have Vision, and Tenanting for Long-Term Value. Just as a district is greater than the sum of its parts, revitalizing a district is about achieving a greater good through a series of small and medium-sized incremental improvements.

The toolkit for Incentivizing Incremental Changes includes the following:

- Quantify the Opportunities
- Assemble the Team
- Use the Power to Convene
- Create Improvement Programs



Downtown Minden Building Detail

Quantify Opportunities

While any property owner or business owner can individually implement changes based on the recommendations herein, it behooves the public sector to focus these kinds of interventions in places where they will have the most economic impact first. The more concentrated improvements are in areas where they augment active uses and good infrastructure, the more likely it is that these interventions will be successful, catalyzing the market to naturally mirror these kinds of improvements elsewhere in Minden.

Areas of potential focus are described below, broken down by the type of district.

SMALL TOWN DOWNTOWN

Esmeralda is the most important street in downtown, so it should be an immediate priority to make it more active at the sidewalk level. Potential interventions include everything from making some changes to windows to spurring new development!

Improve or Create Window Displays. Every business with a ground floor presence should think about how to create and/or improve window displays, whether they are an office or an existing retailer. Create a window makeover team with folks from the community all working together to improve each other's windows. Or, pull in high school or community college art and design students to do windows for office users so they are engaging and periodically change. And remember, sometimes a good window can just be effectively revealing what is happening on the interior of a space, introducing transparency and good lighting!

GET SOME WINDOW CHANGE GOING!



Help with Vacancies. There are three key vacancies in downtown. Provide one-on-one technical assistance to these property owners on how to affordably and effectively divide and finish their space, how to market their space, and brainstorm potential tenants. This type of property owner technical assistance could also be extended to the owner of the building containing Tumblewind, which has a very dated interior shell finish that could use a refresh.

HELP WITH THESE VACANCIES



**NOTE* The Civilis photo of the vacancy at 1595 Esmeralda Ave was corrupted, so the 2012 photo from Google Streetview was used for reference above right. The building has been renovated since the Google photo was taken.*

Develop New Government Offices. One of the reasons some historic buildings are still in existence in the downtown is because the county offices went into these buildings. An occupied building is a saved building, at the end of the day. And while the county offices should absolutely be downtown, they shouldn't dominate the ground floor landscape of the district. So what about taking one of those yellow parking lots downtown (shown on the map on page 6) and developing a three-story building that contains government offices over retail. This would keep employees and activity downtown, add more retail space, which downtown needs, and free up the existing offices to turn into an eclectic mix of retail and creative office? As you can see in the picture to the right, there is one office already finished with exposed brick and wood and, if the rest of the building were finished in that manner, the spaces could be easily leased out to a myriad of local users, which would provide an experience very consistent with the Minden brand (see page 17).



Offices Could Become Creative Hub

Downtown Is a Good Place for Multifamily. People across all income and age demographics are choosing to rent for various reasons; this includes Millennials making over six figures as programmers, to families who don't want to spend every weekend at Home Depot fixing their house, to seniors who want to downsize and age in place but don't want the burden of owning a home. The many parking lots in downtown, and the greenfield area to the south of downtown pictured below, would lend themselves to higher end mixed-use or multifamily investments because they would be considered highly walkable.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY FOR MULTI-FAMILY



Courtesy of Google

HIGHWAY 395

There are four broad areas to consider here for improvement: 1) Strengthening already great assets; 2) Focusing on the area of 395 that borders on downtown; 3) Creating a local strip mall hot spot; and, 4) Exploring a road diet for 395. (A road diet involves creating a more complete and functioning street that works for cyclists, pedestrians, businesses, local shoppers, and people passing through. Methods used in road diets include creating bike lanes, on-street parking, shorter pedestrian crossing distances, more efficient throughput, narrowing car lanes, etc.)

Improve Already Great Assets. If something is blue on your Ground Floor Activation Map (page 7), it doesn't mean your work is done. You should always be thinking about how to make it better and how to interconnect it more.

For example, four of Minden's most visible, distinct, interesting, one-of-a-kind businesses that are walking distance from one another are: Tumblewind, Red Barn Antiques (which has arguably the most unique collection of merchandise in the town), Heartstrings, and F.I.S.H. Thrift Store. So create a "What Locals Like to Do" card, marketing an antique/art crawl between these four fabulous businesses (who should all be working together, as well), and place them in the guest-rooms of CVI and other hotels in Minden.

Minden Meat & Deli is an incredible asset. The food is delicious, the ingredients local and superlative, and the experience on the interior is great. Unfortunately, the exterior doesn't tell the same story as the interior, so the restaurant is missing potential customers by not using the building to lure new customers when they drive by the restaurant!



Why No Minden Activities in CVI Rooms?

EXTERIOR AND INTERIOR EXPERIENCES SHOULD BE CONSISTENT



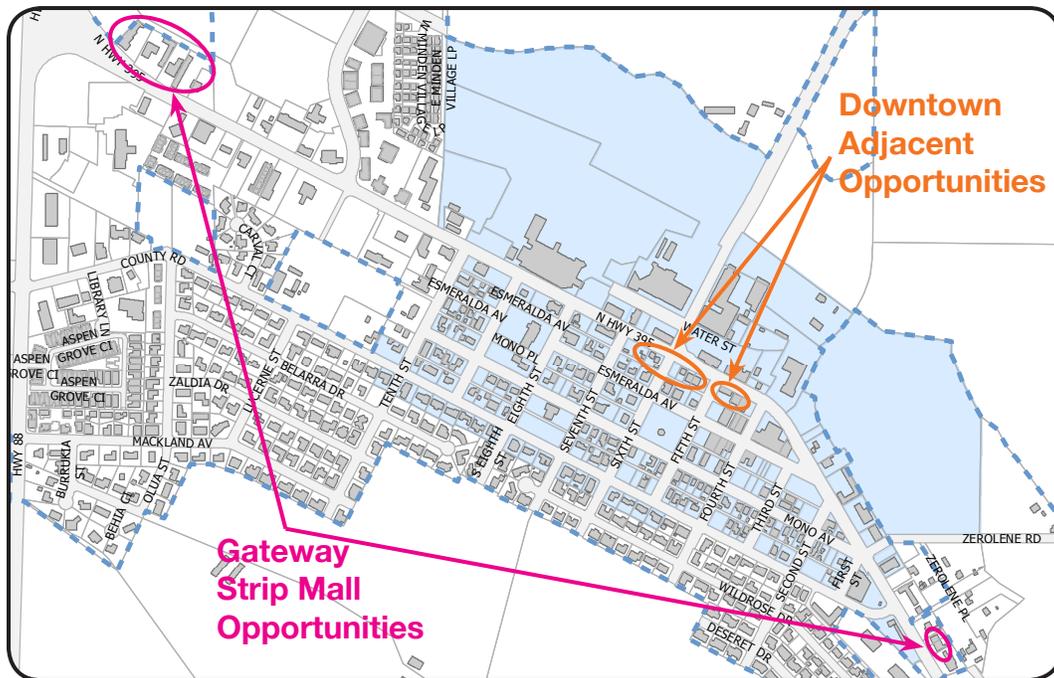
Minden Meat & Deli Interior



Minden Meat & Deli West Exterior

Improve Highway Structures Adjacent to Downtown. No one is going to make the turn for downtown if the area on 395 adjacent to the town core doesn't tell a great story. If you don't *Show* them what is to come, they won't stop and explore based only upon a sign. The two biggest areas of opportunity adjacent to downtown are shown below in orange, and they are the houses across from the new distillery and the fire station.

REDEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES ON HIGHWAY 395



The Houses. The new distillery going into Minden's tallest, most visible, most historic building is going to be a huge visitor draw for the area. However, the front entry to the building will be on the parking lot, facing to the north, away from the highway and downtown. This means that Minden will have a cute, historic downtown on Esmeralda Ave. It will have a distillery facing away from the town core. Neither is within sight line of the other. So, how can commerce be encouraged between the two? Easy—by making sure the buildings in between the two areas, the historic houses circled above in orange, serve as a bridge. Concepts particularly around food and farm-to-table would work well. In wine country all over the western United States, some of the best restaurants are located in houses converted into food establishments. It's cozy. It's homey. The buildings are historic. And the yards become fantastic places for outdoor dining. If you can showcase people and activity on the highway, it will encourage circulation across the busy road, and make people want to explore further.

The Fire Station. If it were available, there is no building more ripe for redevelopment into small retail spaces that would provide an amazing bridge between the

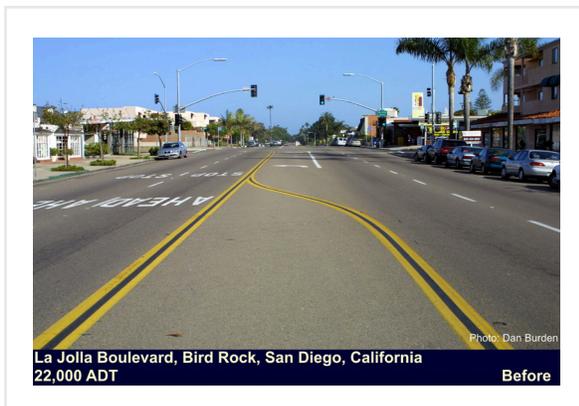
highway and downtown than this building. It has tall ceilings. The dimensions of the building lend itself to easy redevelopment and good retail space sizes. The structure already has roll up doors. It's a natural!

Create 395 Gateway Strip Mall Hot Spots. The collection of older strip malls on 395 that are circled on the map on the previous page in pink are the perfect size to incubate small, local businesses even more than they already are (see page 32 for an example). Help these buildings tell a more exciting brand story from the street!

Boulevard Highway 395. If there was on-street parking on 395, and fewer lanes, with slightly slower traffic, the street would be a much more hospitable place to walk, a nicer street to cross, and a better street for small business. This is true for any kind of business, even auto-focused businesses. In Roseville, CA, they took a corridor with used-car lots and turned it into the most charming Main St you have ever seen. Afterward, this district became *the* place to go to buy a used car, partly because the experience of just being in the district, and on the road, was so great!

There is a recent road diet in San Diego's Birdrock neighborhood that might be analogous to Highway 395. Traffic-counts on La Jolla Blvd were about 22,000 ADT, and they transformed that boulevard from 5 lanes to 2 lanes, lowered the speed limit, and were still able to move the same volume of traffic through in the same amount of time by using roundabouts. The nature of the businesses that could be successful on the street, and the way the street was used by pedestrians changed dramatically (see the pictures below from Dan Burden).

You have a similar traffic-count in Minden, and it would be worth studying whether you could create a road diet since it doesn't look like a bypass is going to happen anytime soon. In order to successfully boulevard a street, it's important to use traffic engineers and planners who understand how to implement them successfully. The team that helped conceive, plan and create the new La Jolla Blvd were Dan Burden and traffic engineer Michael Wallwork.



Assemble the Team

Who are the designers, architects, contractors, engineers, planners, and generally talented people in your community that are interested in collaborating on how to adaptively reuse buildings, how to get the correct lighting into stores, how to divide spaces and finish them appropriately, how to just pick paint colors for a great three-color paint scheme...?”

When you find property owners willing to do something differently, and you provide outside assistance to develop a market-based approach to redevelopment, they are still going to need local people, on-the-ground to implement it all. Agencies need a go-to list of people that love the “improve what you have” puzzle.

The Power to Convene

Successful districts usually have a tight-knit band of people working in concert to promote their district, lobby for their district, and advocate for change in their district. Every single business and every single building is impacting every other business and every other building in all of your commercial districts. No man is an island in a commercial district. And if they aren't working together, it's akin to working against each other. The public sector and non-profit agencies are uniquely positioned to use their power to convene to gather together and organize the commercial community to improve commerce and experience.

Get a group together to repaint a building. Assemble artsy creative types for a group window merchandising project. Hold a property owner summit, and provide one-on-one help to specific property owners with vacancies or inactive buildings. If a property owner does a renovation, host a tour, and have that owner share lessons learned from the project so everyone can share in the learning.

Notice that suggested convenings are usually built around taking direct action on a specific project, or focused on a specific group and bringing tools to the table for their needs. It's always easiest to build relationship around the shared experience of actually doing something to make things better! So try to gather people around action, not organization.

Incentivize Incremental Improvement

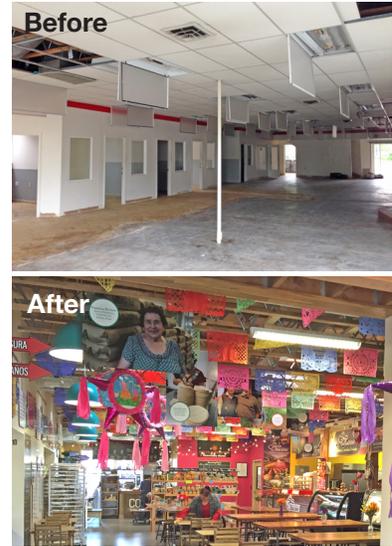
It is common for the public sector to try to catalyze improvement by placing public funds into one large mega project somewhere. Unfortunately, even if you complete one exciting new project somewhere, if the rest of the existing businesses and buildings are not executing on creating a great experience, it won't really matter.

To make real progress, you have to weave together a tapestry of new visual experiences within the existing fabric of Minden. This means incentivizing small changes. The most proven way to do this is through various types of improvement programs. When creating these programs, consider how to weave in volunteer help and affordable/guerilla approaches to improvement that can be completed over time, for smaller amounts of money. Examples of incremental improvement programs that could be created by the public sector or Main Street Minden include:

- **Parking Lot Improvement Program.** If a pool of money was created to improve parking lots, be clear that it is not a re-striping fund! This should be used to create more active, attractive, and interesting parking lots, since they are the most visible element of the Highway 395 experience. Starting with a parking space to outdoor seating conversion fund would be an excellent way to showcase the restaurants in the district. Also, facilitating more food carts and mobile food in empty or dead places would be a good use of public capital. (Multnomah County, Oregon has a great base of regulations for pretty much any type of mobile food vending and is a great model for regulating outdoor food.)
- **Retail Assistance Program.** Work with retail consultants to provide technical assistance to retailers to help ramp up merchandising, drive more traffic to stores, and track customers and their interactions in a store. Retail businesses ultimately are the brand of a district, so help them execute well!
- **Window Improvement Program.** Create a program that provides financial resources to businesses just for the development of better window displays and making those displays more visible. Infrastructure covered by such a program might include: track lighting with moveable heads, light bulbs, display platforms up to window sill, ceiling grids, and display fixtures. Assistance could also include merchandising and display classes.
- **Facade Improvement Program.** Storefront improvement is designed to improve the impact of the exterior of a building. Major renovations should require retail and design technical-assistance, so resulting spaces, windows, doors, and layouts are designed to maximize commerce, exchange, and customer experience.
- **Color & Paint Program.** The cheapest and easiest way to bring about perception change in a district is with just paint and color. This program, a more streamlined version of facade improvement, could pay for painting if they follow the recommendations of a pre-approved color consultant.
- **Interior Improvement Program.** Don't forget about the inside of buildings! Generally, these funds should go toward improvements that stay with the building, such as removing carpet, improving lighting, introducing skylights, or exposing original building materials, like brick walls and ceiling trusses. Focus this only on retail and restaurant spaces — active businesses.

- **False Ceiling Removal Program.** A subset of an interior improvement program could be just a focus on removing false ceilings and very low ceilings in retail and restaurant spaces. The impact of this change on a space is dramatic. See the before and after in a mid-century remodel and ceiling removal to the right.

Remember, there is no better way to build relationship between the public and private sector than for the public sector to say, *“We are going to bring you some technical expertise on how to make more money from your building and your business. And, we are going to give you some funds to implement what you learn.”* And there is no better way to build relationship between the people who own, live, and work in a district than to have them come together to spend this money wisely.



False Ceiling Removal Can Be Dramatic!

Public Sector/Agency Toolkit #2: Reward What You Want to See

As we’ve already covered, a large part of renewal is about reusing and improving what is already there and then bringing in active uses. In order to do that, it has to be cheaper and easier to rehabilitate a building than to build new. And, it has to be possible to bring in active uses without requiring more parking infrastructure, for example. If a place’s entire fee and code structure is set up to regulate new greenfield development, it can make adaptive reuse and active tenanting almost impossible.

Enticing building owners and businesses to improve their buildings and land usually involves the following:

- **Fee & Tax Structure.** If a simple improvement project triggers greenfield-scale impact fees, requires all new utility upgrades, and tacks on street improvements, then rehabilitation will never happen because places with economic challenges cannot support these fees.
- **Zoning and Use.** Active uses and blended uses need to be encouraged and allowed. Zoning in particular needs to allow for a mix of activity and be flexible, especially now as a retail is changing. For instance, many retailers have a big online presence, so having the ability to showroom/warehouse is important. Unfortunately, under some types of zoning code, that would be an “industrial” use and would be disallowed. Also, it needs to be legal to put stuff outside of businesses — product, seating, etc. Please note, this is different than sign code. Allowing merchandising and seating on the sidewalk is not the same as allowing them to place A-board signs or flags/banners. The latter should

still be regulated under sign code. And, since no one reads signs, you want to encourage businesses, with code, to make their exterior interesting.

- **Prize Activity.** To make a district more vibrant, and to improve brand association, we are typically looking to upgrade existing uses to more active businesses (such as light industrial to retail or office to restaurant). Unfortunately, upgrading the use of a building can trigger a host of expensive upgrades, not to mention the need for higher parking minimums, all of which puts a halt to projects and prevents the very upgrades needed to improve economic performance in commercial areas. So look at your building code, fee structures, and parking minimums and figure out where you have impediments to upgrading the intensity of use of your buildings, either in terms of time, cost, or process.

(Incidentally, this is a big part of building the team that was discussed earlier. The architects on the team need to understand how to reuse existing buildings in optimal and affordable ways using the existing building code.)

As a project example, look to the auto-body shop to restaurant conversion described and pictured on page 27 — this is exactly what you should be encouraging on Highway 395. Does your regulatory framework encourage or discourage a project like this, which removed off-street parking and allowed outdoor seating area in its place? If your code wouldn't support it, you should change your code. In truth, Minden should not have parking minimums for commercial uses at all, because they discourage the very active uses that you should be trying to attract.

For corridors, site intensification should be allowed and encouraged. Mid-century arterials usually have shallower lots and residential neighborhood immediately adjacent. To bring improvement and vitality to this type of commercial infrastructure, consider the following redevelopment process:

1. Improve and/or re-tenant existing structures.
2. Add new office/retail buildings on the arterial.
3. Place new residential on the back or the side of the lot, away from the busy arterial.

This is a much more sustainable way to develop on older corridors.

On the following page is an example of site intensification on a commercial lot that fronted on the very busy former Highway 99 in Portland, Oregon, a classic mid-century arterial. This project was called Vanport Square and it first created commercial condominium spaces from the existing building on the site, which were sold to women-owned, long-term resident owned, and minority-owned businesses in the district. The project then built a new mixed-use office and retail building on the parking lot. And lastly, constructed row houses along the rear edge of the parking lot, closest to the existing residential.

VANPORT PROJECT, THREE DIFFERENT USES ON THE SAME LOT:
RETAIL, OFFICE, AND BACK-OF-LOT ROW HOUSES



DEV PHASES

Phase 1: Existing Building Renovation

Phase 2: New 3-Story Mixed-Use Office/ Retail Building Constructed

Phase 3: Row Houses Built Near Existing Residential, Away from Busy Road



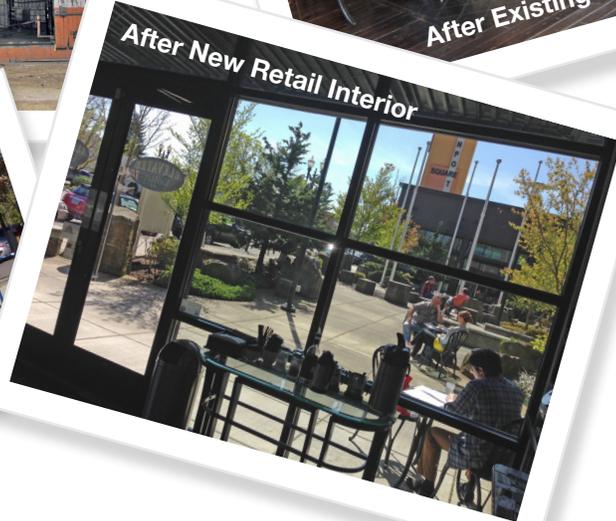
Before Existing Building



After Existing Building



After Row Houses



After New Retail Interior

PUBLIC SECTOR/AGENCY SPOTLIGHT

Top Down, or Bottom Up?

There is a tendency when approaching the organization of a project across a town, such as spurring commercial revitalization, to tackle it in a top down manner: develop a master plan, create a clear step-by-step flow chart of action items, and employ jurisdiction over every step of the process. This approach requires a large amount of capital and capacity, which is typically out of reach for smaller communities. And, it is often unsuccessful at catalyzing actual change.

Agencies should instead be thinking about how to encourage revitalization from the bottom up, through a series of small, more simple actions, undertaken by a wide cross section of people passionate about the work, their projects, and their communities.

Ant colonies provide a great inspiration for this, since they create incredibly complex physical infrastructure and organized communities through a series of small, simple local interactions. There is no centralized planning whatsoever. As Steven Johnson writes about in his book “Emergence, The Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities, and Software”, there are fundamental principles that a system designed to learn from the ground level must exhibit, as an ant colony exhibits. Let’s consider those and think about how they apply to Minden, revitalization, and forward progress.

More Is Different. *The statistical nature of ant interaction demands that there be a critical mass of ants for the colony to make intelligent assessments of its global state.* Revitalization application: The more projects that can be spurred and interconnected in Minden, the more a global sense of improvement will arise. Catalyzing more small changes creates critical mass, while one big change does not.

Ignorance Is Useful. *It is better to build a dense interconnected system with simple elements and let sophisticated behavior trickle up.* Revitalization application: every property owner and every business owner does not have to spend time comprehending all parts of an overarching plan, its goals, and desired outcomes. All they need to do is know what next steps might have immediate economic upside for them, and take those steps.

Encourage Random Encounters. *Encounters with individual ants are arbitrary, but because so many of them are in the system, those encounters allow individuals to gauge and alter the macrostate of the system.* Revitalization application: the public sector and agencies should always be looking for new ways to bring commercial district participants together, to foster new partnerships, and bring new and interesting expertise from outside to the table. Every new encounter will generate a new, unanticipated, and usually positive result.

Pay Attention to Your Neighbors. *Local information can lead to global wisdom.* Revitalization application: after considering what a business, property owner, or public sector agency can do locally with the areas under their own control, those entities should begin considering what is happening immediately on their borders, and how they can interact with their edges more advantageously. A business, a property, a public space, is heavily influenced and sometimes even defined by what is adjacent.

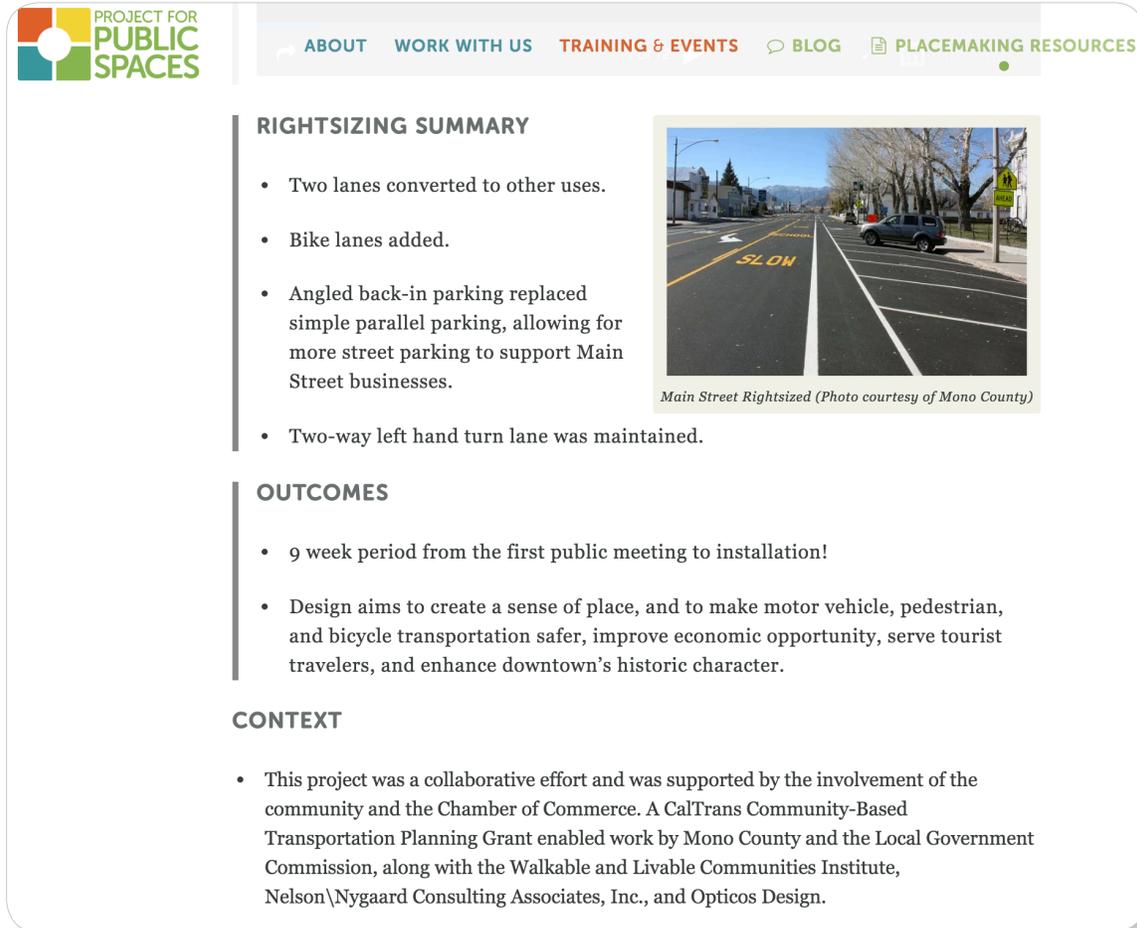
To paraphrase: Get all of your stakeholders talking and doing — the more people the merrier. The more projects the merrier. The more activity the merrier.

Or, to put it more formally, if Minden creates space for a sizeable amount of small local interactions, these can bring about positive changes with more modest monetary investments. And, these interactions and projects will take your town in directions you never imagined and couldn't have planned for. So yes, as Johnson writes, "Let sophisticated behavior trickle up."

Start the Trickle Up

- **Pick Some Projects!** The entire purpose of this report is to provide your business owners and property owners with a basis to affect change entirely on their own. It is also designed to give interested parties (agencies, community, owners, etc) opportunities to organize and tackle projects as a group. Should these ad hoc groups choose projects that I recommend, or should they select projects that they are passionate about? The answer is the latter. People who select what they want to work on always finish that work, and that success gets them excited to take on other projects. So use this report as inspiration. Pick an idea in it, and run with it. Multiple people could go in multiple directions at the same time. That's okay.
- **Assemble the Makeover Team.** Create an ad hoc team of Minden Makeover folks to work on high impact, low cost Show, Don't Tell projects.
- **Assemble a Professional Redevelopment Team.** Think about local providers who can come together to advise on challenging projects, like redeveloping the County building. Who are your architects, contractors, engineers, and development professionals who can guide you to a successful project? (They must have experience in adaptive reuse.)
- **Visit a Small Town Road Diet.** The town of Bridgeport, CA, population 595, in Mono County right sized their stretch of US Highway 395 so it could serve as both a Main St and as a Highway. And they did it in record time, taking their 5 lanes through town, reducing those to 3 lanes, and adding better pedestrian crossings, angled parking, and bicycle lanes. For more information about this project see the article below. A good resource to begin

this conversation would be Paul Zykofsky at the Local Government Commission, who participated in this project. Please see more information in the story below by Project for Public Spaces.



The screenshot shows the Project for Public Spaces website. The navigation bar includes 'ABOUT', 'WORK WITH US', 'TRAINING & EVENTS', 'BLOG', and 'PLACEMAKING RESOURCES'. The main content area is titled 'RIGHTSIZING SUMMARY' and lists several changes: two lanes converted to other uses, bike lanes added, angled back-in parking replacing simple parallel parking, and a two-way left hand turn lane maintained. A photo of the street is included with the caption 'Main Street Rightsized (Photo courtesy of Mono County)'. Below this is the 'OUTCOMES' section, which notes a 9-week period from the first public meeting to installation and the design's goals for safety and economic opportunity. The 'CONTEXT' section describes the collaborative effort supported by a CalTrans grant and various community organizations.

PROJECT FOR PUBLIC SPACES

ABOUT WORK WITH US TRAINING & EVENTS BLOG PLACEMAKING RESOURCES

RIGHTSIZING SUMMARY

- Two lanes converted to other uses.
- Bike lanes added.
- Angled back-in parking replaced simple parallel parking, allowing for more street parking to support Main Street businesses.
- Two-way left hand turn lane was maintained.



Main Street Rightsized (Photo courtesy of Mono County)

OUTCOMES

- 9 week period from the first public meeting to installation!
- Design aims to create a sense of place, and to make motor vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle transportation safer, improve economic opportunity, serve tourist travelers, and enhance downtown's historic character.

CONTEXT

- This project was a collaborative effort and was supported by the involvement of the community and the Chamber of Commerce. A CalTrans Community-Based Transportation Planning Grant enabled work by Mono County and the Local Government Commission, along with the Walkable and Livable Communities Institute, Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates, Inc., and Opticos Design.

- **Adopt an Improvement Program.** Start a grant-based improvement program to jump start change, referencing the list on page 47 and 48 for inspiration.

The bottom line is that there is no perfect place to start. No exactly right first step. It's just about taking steps... a lot of small steps. Choose the ones that are of most interest to the people who will be working on them, and they will be brought to fruition. Don't worry too much about adhering to an overall theme; instead the focus should be about meeting the characteristics of economically successful retail districts. You want to encourage ground floor uses that are local, active, and visually engaging to populate really fantastic, eye-catching buildings. The overall identity of Minden will trickle up from the authentic collage created by everyone's unique implementation of their vision.

CONCLUSION

Minden is starting out of the revitalization blocks with a few advantages other rural communities don't have: an amazing natural setting and an affluent residential base. On top of that, it has some wonderful local businesses and a great little historic downtown. And on top of that, it has Bently, a native son investor willing to renovate large existing structures into distinctive, one-of-a-kind uses like a distillery on their main highway! In short, Minden is further along than it may feel in the race toward revitalization.

On a fundamental level, the town needs only to execute on making its retail and commercial infrastructure reflect the authentic characteristics of the Minden brand.

➤ *Property Owners.* Visually highlight all of the gorgeous historic buildings in the community, differentiating them from each other and tenanting them with outward facing uses. On the mid-century corridors, the key will be finding dated strip malls and working with owners to redevelop, energize and, in some cases, tenant or re-tenant existing buildings. Over time, it would be great to see these sites intensify with small new buildings, interconnecting with areas around them. It's especially strategic to focus on structures that are ideally suited to division into smaller spaces: these achieve more per square foot, are in high demand, and allow an owner to tenant mix for identity and brand, whether it's around health and wellness (for a building set way off the street with little visibility), or restaurants (for a building closer to the street, with better visibility, but some buffer from the traffic).

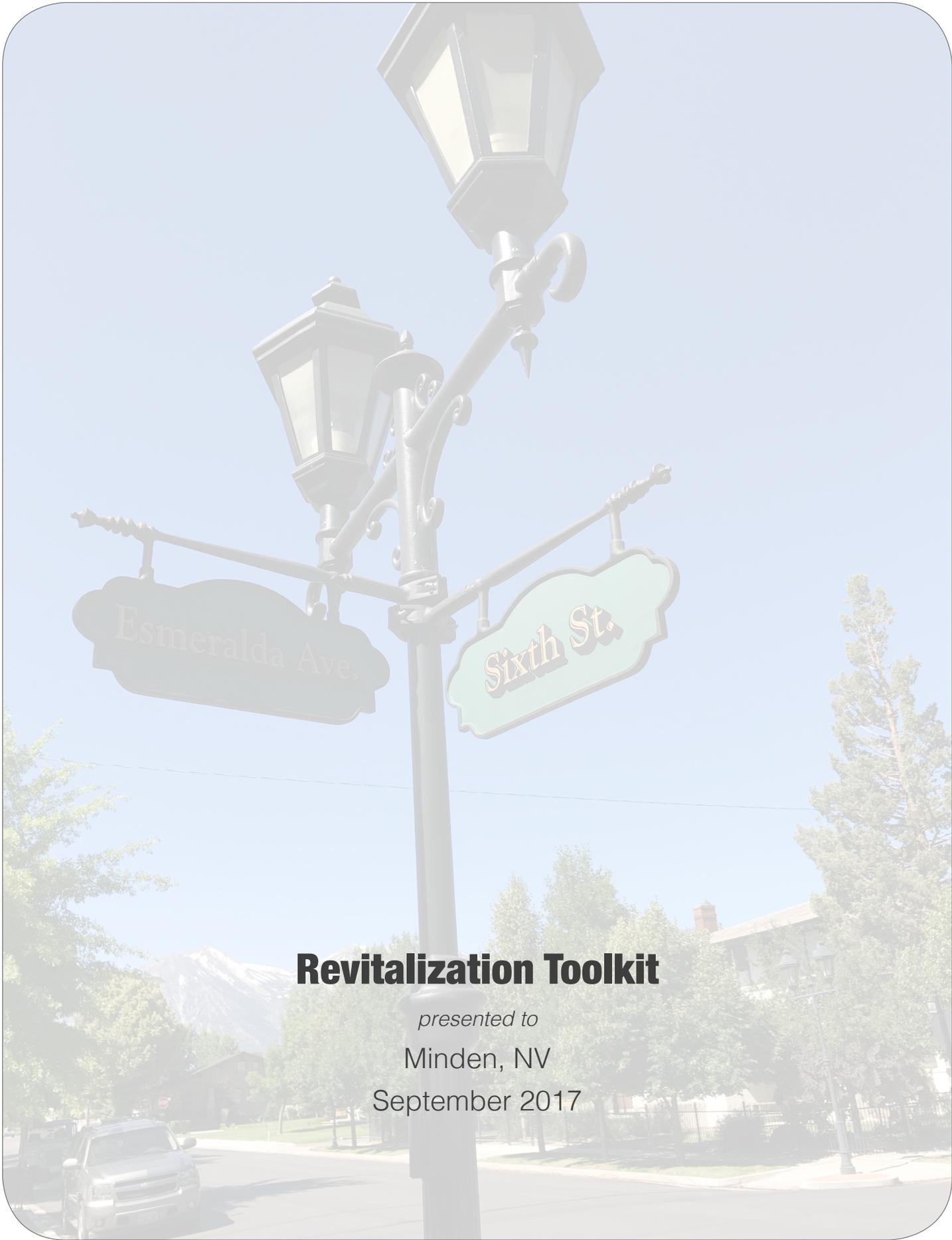


Gorgeous Buildings!

- *Businesses.* A distinct identity can be created in any place where there are interesting collections of small, one-of-a-kind businesses, experienced locals, or people offering world-class services. Small business expertise and performance are the basis upon which you want to brand your districts, helping them to better highlight their offerings and work together to offer an integrated experience. Frankly, streets that are stuffed with the same old national tenants you find in every other community are difficult to turn into beloved community assets. Local businesses definitely can compete with nationals, but they have to execute at a high level, because brick & mortar is more and more about delivering an authentic and fantastic experience rather than about selling a commodity.
- *The Public Sector.* Agencies and county government can help the private sector execute on their roles by providing assistance and programmatic funding in target areas or on catalytic types of projects. And, they should consider how to impact

development patterns and attract active uses by reviewing the implications of their regulatory framework on the built environment. Are zoning, code, tax, and development charges consistent with attracting the sort of redevelopment projects and tenants Minden wants to see? If not, change it!

And lastly, everyone needs to be collaborating—private and public sector—to take Minden’s collection of great businesses and buildings and SHOW customers why we might want to connect with them, making the built environment look great, showcasing local talent and expertise. Minden has all of the building blocks needed, and more, to take it to the next level in terms of economic activity and improved brand connection.



Revitalization Toolkit

presented to

Minden, NV

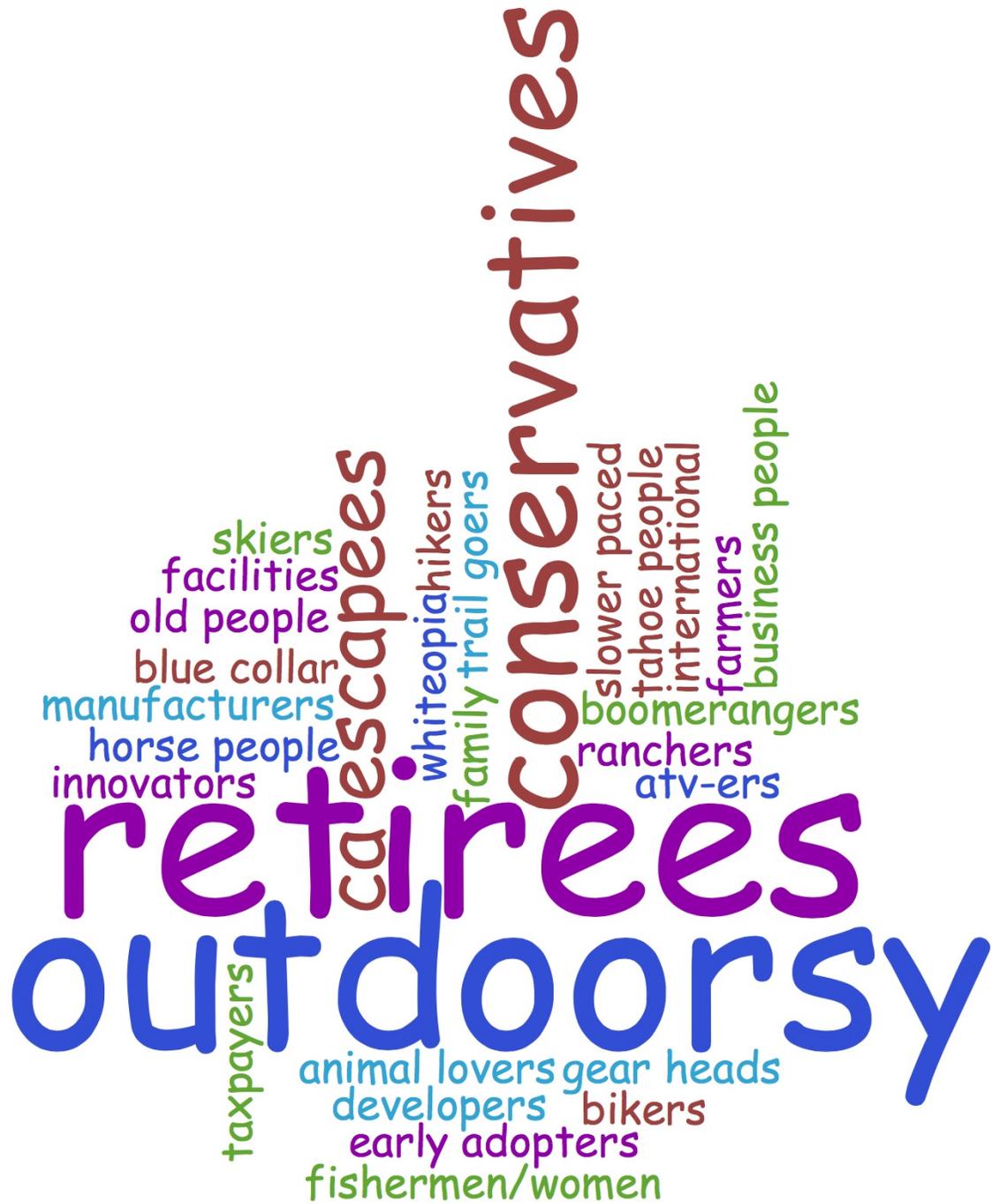
September 2017

APPENDIX

The focus group results that were not included in the main body of the report are contained in this appendix. The questions are:

- Who Does Relate to Minden?
- What Are The People of Minden Passionate About?
- How is Minden Perceived Regionally and in the State?

WHO DOES RELATE TO MINDEN?



WHAT ARE THE PEOPLE OF MINDEN PASSIONATE ABOUT?

