

Town rallies around downtown construction

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SaveYour.Town

Imagine that your Main Street is on a state highway. And major work needs to be done. This happened in Hutchinson in 2020.

Repairs were going to happen and included the replacement of all city services below ground, and the Chamber had three years to get the town and businesses ready for it.

The project included 133 parcels along an eight-block by two-block corridor of downtown.

The original goal was to keep 100 percent of businesses open during construction.

Man plans, God laughs. The pandemic shut down everything, except con-

struction. While there were a few businesses open, many were closed to the public.

The project went faster because there was no foot or vehicle traffic anywhere.

Project updates were still very necessary. Here's what helped:

- They put up billboards on all four main incoming state highways, supporting local downtown businesses.
- Signage was placed along detours directing people to downtown parking lots.
- They wrote newspaper updates to the community and email updates to businesses.
- The Chamber webpage had all the updates, contacts and news.
- Business owners made social media videos asking people to keep coming downtown.
- Back alley video tours were shared on social media and local access TV.
- Blessings of the road was done by local ministries.

There were road viewing opportunities from businesses with large windows to the gaping holes.

Keys to Success

- Plan ahead, be proactive versus reactive.
- Bring in experts and business people affected by the project.
- Educating the general public is very important, more so for your community's residents they have habits for shopping, from where they park, to when/where they enter, tourists don't know what's different from regular operating procedures.
- Listen to business people. They are scared, frustrated and anxious. Not only are they losing some business, they have to pay the assessments.
- Like anything, it's hard when it's happening, but it will seem like a blip on the monitor after it is done.

Positive outcomes

- Businesses started to cross-market each other.
- MN Retailers Association presented The Paint Factory with the 2020 Innovation Award.
- No business closed permanently due to construction.
- Because of the preparation ahead of time, businesses were also able to maintain through the pandemic.
- Partnerships were formed.
- A Marketing/Website company offered staff for the task force and free Main Street 2020 logo and marketing materials to the chamber.
- Two local marketing/website companies offered discounted rates and help to businesses.
- Economic Development Authority (EDA) adapted its previous Sign and Awnings Grant to include back entrances, and updated their facade loan grants for downtown businesses.
- A local doctor certified in ADA compliance offered his services to audit any business requesting support.
- State ADA expert offered a free webinar and provided self-assessments.
- Business and building owners sat on the task force, providing ideas, input and helping to share the information with others.
- Collaborative efforts continue in 2025.
- This could've been really ugly. But it wasn't. Because many people came together to work through what needed to be done.
- And many more got it done. They shared ideas, stories, laughter and enforced shopping local. Well, insisted on shopping local.
- This is the power of small towns.

World



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