

Main Street Amenities Program (1977-1984)

Total Cost Actual: \$1,114,270

Total Cost Standardized to 1977 Dollars: \$899,576¹

Total Cost Adjusted for Inflation: \$3,548,859²

Beginnings

The Main Street Amenities Program was the last time that that the City undertook major revitalization efforts to the sidewalks and aesthetics of Downtown Nashua. The program, which focused on adding trees, trash receptacles, benches, and brick sidewalks along Main Street, as well as refurbishing the Main Street bridge, was a piece of a larger effort to revitalize the central city area. Although the project would experience instances of public opposition, overall, the Main Street amenities program was well received by the public and local businesses, and seen as an effective investment of public resources for the City's future. Even just a few years after its completion, the project was looked back upon as a success in revitalizing the downtown.

The Main Street amenities program was implemented between 1977 and 1984 under the oversight of Mayor Maurice Arel's administration. However, the original concept appears to have been conceived prior to Mayor Arel taking office. In March of 1976, then City Planning Director, Richard Cane, announced to the Heart of Nashua group the plan to utilize federal funding from the newly created Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds for a series of central city improvements that were intended to revitalize the downtown area. While the overarching project boundaries for the CDBG program encompassed the area from Mt. Pleasant Street to Allds and Lake Street, and Pine Street to Harbor Avenue, special focus was put on improvements in the central business district. The original project outline for what would become the Main Street Amenities Program entailed the following improvements along Main Street from the Nashua River to West Hollis Street, although these numbers and attributes would soon change:

- The planting of 60 trees, which would require the removal of 4'x4' slabs of sidewalk.
- 22 trash receptacles
- 20 park benches
- Brick sidewalks

At this time, Richard Cane also announced the establishment of the Central Nashua Committee. The new Committee would include 50 people who would meet over the course of the next year to explore programmatic solutions to problems in the central city area. Work on the Main Street amenities program was expected to begin in the fall.³ This would evolve into a four-phase multi-year development

¹ DollarTimes.com (Inflation Calculator): <http://www.dollartimes.com/calculators/inflation.htm>.

² Ibid.

³ N.A. 1976 "City Planner Addresses Heart of Nashua Group", Nashua Telegraph. Mar. 6, 1976.

<<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=Hp4rAAAIBAJ&sjid=MfwFAAAAIBAJ&pg=3493,1209806&dq=city+planner+addresses+heart+of+nashua&hl=en>>.

project that would exclusively rely on CDBG funds and minor contributions from downtown financial institutions, and would eventually include the following revised components:

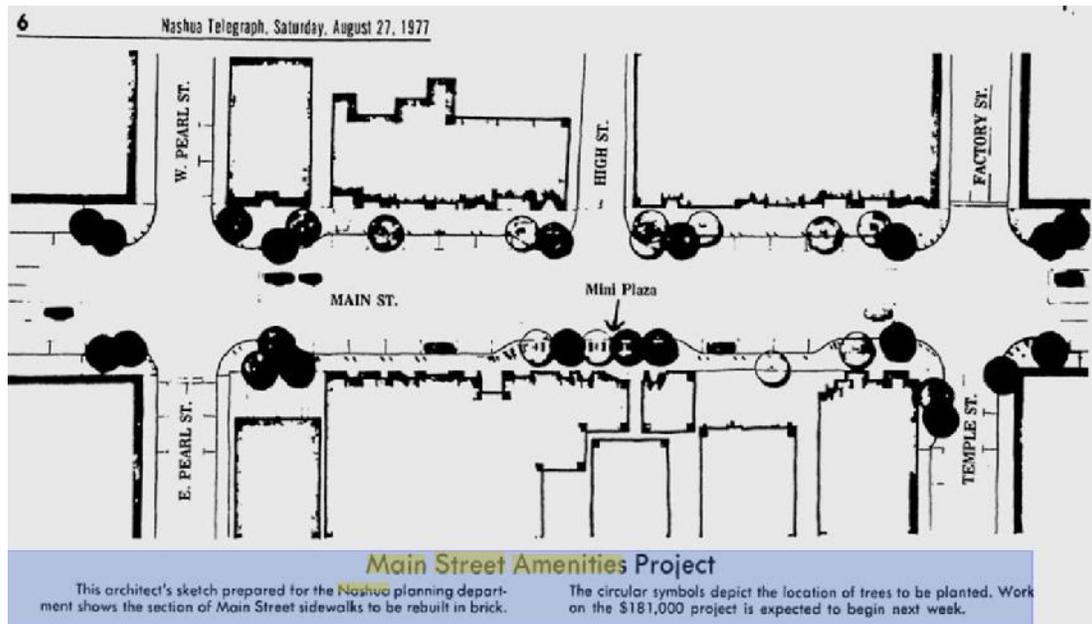
- The planting of 31 trees, complete with ornamental grates and iron fencing around the base of each tree
- 22 trash receptacles
- 16 park benches
- Brick sidewalks
- Ramped sidewalks at intersections
- Main Street bridge restorations and railings.

Phase I (Pilot)

Start: September 1977	Actual Cost: \$181,000	Boundaries: E & W Pearl St. to Temple/Factory St.
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Beginning as a pilot program in September of 1977, Phase I of the Main Street amenities program cost \$181,000. The architectural responsibilities were split between a Nashua firm, Page/Michaelis/Associates and the Sasaki Associates of Watertown, Massachusetts. The design was based on similar projects that Sasaki had done in Portland, ME, Newburyport, MA, Hartford, CT, and Waterfront Park in Boston. There were discussions of closing off Main Street from vehicular traffic, making it a pedestrian mall, but this clearly proved to be logistically impossible due to traffic volumes.

The image below is a rendering of the original plans for Phase I.⁴



⁴ Durocher, Claudette. 1977. "Section of Main Street to Feature a New Look. Nashua Telegraph, Aug. 27, 1977. < <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2209&dat=19770827&id=rXdjAAAAI BAJ&sjid=oXkNAAAAI BAJ&pg=5737,5308927>>.

By the end of November 1977, the project was beginning to experience some opposition from the public. The primary argument at this time was based on fears that the bricks would heave in extremely cold weather, thus creating treacherous walking conditions. In addition to frost heaves, seniors envisioned the bricks glazing over with ice and becoming hazardous to traverse. Alderman Robert Dupay reported receiving phone calls from residents that had already fallen on the new sidewalks and had concerns that were similar to those mentioned previously. These anxieties prompted some citizens to call for delaying the implementation of Phase II of the project. Richard Cane and the Heart of Nashua Foundation would adamantly defend the project’s integrity, stating that it was too early to judge the City’s efforts, as Phase I was still under construction and cracks between the bricks would be filled. Further, fears of the brickwork heaving had not materialized in other communities with similar weather.⁵

Phase II

Start: July 1978	Actual Cost: \$250,000	Boundaries: Temple/Factory St. to Nashua River Bridge
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As Phase I was nearing completion in the spring of 1978, after being delayed by winter weather the previous year, the planning for Phase II was well underway. Sasaki Associates were being pushed by the aldermanic planning committee to advertise for construction bids in order to expedite the process and break ground in July of that year. The current CDA coordinator at the time projected the costs of Phase II to fall between \$240,000 and \$262,000, all paid for by CDBG funds. Once again, the project experienced minor opposition as business owners expressed concerns about small portions of the sidewalk that would jut out to create tiny parks along the street, which would take away parking spaces and create traffic bottlenecks.⁶

Phase III

Start: Summer 1980	Actual Cost: \$499,500	Boundaries: Pearl Street to Hollis Street
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Phase III was overseen by Sabia Construction Group of Windsor, VT, and would involve similar improvements that had been undertaken on Phase I & II of the Main Street amenities program. The

⁵ Durocher, Claudette. 1977. “Several Projects Eyed For Proposed CDA Funds”. Nashua Telegraph, Nov. 30, 1977 < <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2209&dat=19771130&id=nX9jAAAAIbAJ&sjid=3HkNAAAAIbAJ&pg=4770,6065466>>.

⁶ Levesque, Jeannine. 1978. “Parking, Street Width Main St. Project Problems”. Nashua Telegraph, Apr 21, 1978. < <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2209&dat=19780421&id=GZkrAAAAIbAJ&sjid=oPUFAAAAIAbAJ&pg=7103,4954777>>.

aldermanic Finance Committee recommended the final approval of \$499,500 in July of 1980, which once again was to be entirely funded from CDBG money.⁷

Phase IV

Start: Summer 1982	Actual Cost: \$170,000	Boundaries: Main Street Bridge
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The fourth phase of the Main Street Amenities project saw Sasaki Associates come back into the scope as the project engineers, along with a bridge restoration specialist Abba Litchenson. The bridge, which was the focal point for this phase, would receive new railings and brick sidewalks. A compromise was reached that encompassed refurbishing the original sidewalls of the bridge, true to form of the bridge that burned on Dec. 12, 1924, and installing new railings that were up to current US DOT code.⁸ The aldermen voted to approve \$170,000 from the 1982 CDBG funds in June of 1982. \$13,777 was earmarked for architectural work.⁹

The months leading up to the final approval for funding of Phase IV of the Main Street amenities program proved to be the most contentious in terms of community opposition, which was led by a Nashua-based group, the New Hampshire People's Alliance. Their arguments were rooted in three issues that had surfaced throughout the project's lifespan. The first was the safety of the sidewalks, citing that the elderly and handicapped had experienced injuries on the slippery bricks. Second, they claimed that the project had eliminated 50 parking spaces along Main Street, even though the project was being built in conjunction with the High Street parking garage. Third, they argued that the CDBG money was being misappropriated to the downtown businesses, and not directly to the population that they claimed needed it most, the surrounding downtown neighborhoods.¹⁰

This argument was raised as a minor point prior to the launch of Phase II in 1978, but the defense was made that many of the city's poorer residents were confined to downtown jobs due to transportation costs, so the funding was directly aiding this demographic. At the same time during the early 1980's when the New Hampshire People's Alliance was voicing opposition, a national trend with similar undertones was emerging regarding the prudent application of CDBG funding. The city of Nashua's annual appropriation was significantly reduced following the last phase of the Main Street amenities

⁷ Heaney, Joe. 1980. "Main Street to get more bricks". Nashua Telegraph, Jul. 16, 1980. <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=2J8rAAAABAJ&sjid=V_wFAAAAIBAJ&pg=2975,2983388&dq=main+street+amenities+program+nashua&hl=en>.

⁸ Dillaby, Donald. 1982. "New-old look for Main St. bridge". Nashua Telegraph, Aug 24, 1982. <<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=I6lrAAAABAJ&sjid=lfwFAAAAIBAJ&pg=5163,4433409&dq=main+street+amenities+phases+nashua&hl=en>>.

⁹ Namowitz, Dan. 1982. "A new 'old' look for Main St. bridge". Nashua Telegraph, Jun. 12, 1982. <<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=JqUrAAAABAJ&sjid=yvwFAAAAIBAJ&pg=3190,2597414&dq=main+street+amenities+program+nashua&hl=en>>.

¹⁰ Namowitz, Dan. 1982. "City beautification project hit, defended". Nashua Telegraph, April 27, 1982. <<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2209&dat=19820427&id=naMrAAAABAJ&sjid=qPwFAAAAIBAJ&pg=6959,5341904>>.

program due to new, more stringent, guidelines which required CDBG funds to directly benefit impoverished census tracts.

Future Phases

In subsequent years, the amenities program was expanded to include West Pearl Street as well as the intersection of Spring Street and East Pearl Street. In 1985, the sidewalks along West Pearl Street were reconstructed. Decorative light posts were installed, but were funded by the Heart of Nashua (more information being gathered). Similar work was completed in the 1980s on Spring and East Pearl Street as part of an effort to prepare the area for the County Courthouse, which was constructed at the corner of Spring and Pearl.

The investments the physical infrastructure made during the late 1970s into the early 1980s led to a wave of private investments during the 1990s and 2000s. New downtown housing, riverfront development projects and exciting new restaurants helped to solidify Downtown Nashua as a great place to spend time. However, by the late 2000s, some of that excitement was lost as the streetscape improvements began to show their age.

Great American Downtown BID Committee (2009)

In 2009, Great American Downtown (GAD) recognized that the pace of downtown growth had slowed. GAD hosted a series of five (5) meetings to look at new opportunities to improve Downtown Nashua. GAD created a committee to explore the possibility of implementing a Business Improvement District (BID) in Downtown Nashua. The BID would provide a mechanism for collecting contributions which could be used to develop downtown promotional events and make investments in sidewalk repairs, new street furniture and decorative arches throughout Downtown. The GAD Committee recommended the establishment of a Services Advisory Committee and to further study the opportunity. GAD and the City of Nashua successfully petitioned the State Legislature to change the statute to allow infrastructure improvements, like sidewalk repairs, to be paid by BID revenues.

Services Advisory Committee (2009-2010)

In July 2009, Mayor Lozeau and the Board of Alderman established the Services Advisory Committee (SAC) to investigate and make a recommendation on the feasibility of a Business Improvement District (BID) in Downtown Nashua. Appointments were made to ensure representation from a diverse group of Downtown Nashua stakeholders, including property and business owners located in the core of Downtown Nashua, Railroad Square and Main Street South of Kinsley Street.

The Services Advisory Committee began meeting on a weekly basis in December 2009. Twenty-two (22) meetings were held on Friday mornings at City Hall. All were open to the public. Meeting minutes are available on City's website. Separate surveys were sent to 588 Downtown business owners and 5,000 consumer households in Greater Nashua in order to understand perspectives of the most pressing issues facing Downtown Nashua. Surveys were completed by 106 businesses (18% response rate) and 962 consumer households (19% response rate), respectively.

Three (3) separate public information sessions were hosted during 2010. These meetings were well-attended. The meetings were hosted in order to give downtown stakeholders a chance to provide input on downtown issues and to inform about potential solutions. The first session held on March 30, 2010 shared the results of the business and consumer surveys and featured a brainstorming session about what were the greatest issues facing Downtown Nashua and which revitalization strategies stakeholders wished the City would pursue. The most popular strategy discussed was "the repair and maintenance of sidewalks." The second session on May 4th, 2010 shared lessons learned from other successful downtowns and gained feedback on potential budgets and funding strategies for improvement. A draft plan was released and distributed to the public in September. A mailing went out to 444 Downtown Nashua businesses to let them know of the reports availability. The final public information session, held on October 10, 2010 sought feedback and comments on the draft revitalization strategy.

The final report, "Cultivating Vitality: A Strategy to Create a Thriving Downtown Nashua" was released to the public in November. It included a detailed strategy to improve Downtown Nashua. It featured a recommendation to make a sizable investment in the streetscape infrastructure. It provided detailed cost estimates for the work and a comprehensive financing plan to make this plan a reality. The plan was presented to the Board of Alderman on November 16, 2010.

Downtown Improvement Committee (2011-present)

The Downtown Improvement Committee was created by O-11-76, which established a Committee and Funding Plan for Downtown Improvements. The ordinance enabled the capture of additional Downtown parking funds and the use of these funds "shall include, but not be limited to, improvements to infrastructure, beautification, and marketing and promotions." The Committee was established to develop budget advice the Mayor and the Board of Aldermen on matters related to Downtown Nashua.

Since 2012, the Committee has met 8 times. The topics of the meetings follow a consistent pattern. The Committee reviews parking revenue receipts from Downtown Nashua meters and lots. It also has hosted Mayor Lozeau and the DPW Director, Lisa Fauteux on many occasions. They reviewed engineered drawings of sidewalk plans and provided valuable feedback to City staff on the design and implementation of the sidewalk reconstruction efforts.

Other Public Meetings and Presentations (2011-present)

Details about the Downtown Nashua sidewalk improvement project have been presented during additional public meetings+ since 2011. On June 1, 2011, Economic Development Director Thomas Galligani made a presentation to the City of Nashua Capital Improvements Committee that provided a broad overview of the project and its need. On the evening of July 7, 2012 Mayor Lozeau hosted a detailed public presentation about the sidewalk project along with staff from the Division of Public Works. This 2012 meeting was well attended by various Downtown Nashua stakeholders and Nashua residents.