



## VMS 2007 Application Round Frequently Asked Questions

### Pre-Application Workshop

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**Question #1: In the application, Section IV, part I, letter B, what constitutes a household? Is it just the occupied units or is it all that are available?**

Answer: Household here is used in the demographic sense so this should all come from census data and be related to only the actual number of households that have been counted. This is based on the entire locality, not just the proposed Main Street district. If you're looking for a place to include unoccupied / available spaces where a household could live, Section IV, Part I, Letters F and Q deal with that to some extent.

**Question #2: When determining the proposed Main Street district boundary, do I include the linear footage of the cross streets when calculating the setback percentage? For example, when measuring down the length of our Main Street, do I include the 40 or so feet of space made up by the intersecting street and its sidewalks as not meeting the minimum 15 ft setback requirement? Or do I skip over the intersecting street and pick back up once I cross it?**

Answer: Just count the street frontage (where the street abuts a parcel of land), so don't count the open street. So the answer to your questions are: no, no, yes.

**Question #3: Do you have a particular way that you want the building and business inventories completed?**

Answer: No. We only ask that you answer the questions the best you can given the limited time you have. That being said, we strongly recommend collecting this data in such a way that it can be used by the organization in the future. An intended outcome of the application process is to give each community a baseline of data from which they can better judge their progress going forward; this building and business inventory is an important part of that.

A terrific resource for completing a building and business inventory is found on the Wisconsin Cooperative Extension's website:  
<http://www.uwex.edu/CES/CCED/downtowns/dma/1.cfm>. It is part of a larger resource for completing a market analysis. Here you can find Microsoft Access databases and forms that you can use to complete the inventory.

**Question #4: How will the mandatory community presentation on May 2 impact our final score on the application?**

Answer: While the presentation is an important part of the application process, the presentation itself does not have any points assigned to it. The purpose of the presentation is to allow the community to verbally explain why they are pursuing designation and should draw from, and highlight, key information submitted in the application. May 2 will also provide an opportunity for the Application Review Team to ask questions to clarify or gain additional details about question responses in the application. The impact of the presentation on scoring is that it could potentially raise the applicants score due to reviewers improved understanding of the application.

**Question #5: What do you mean by a “Mature” community?**

Answer: A community is considered a “Newly Designated Main Street Community” for the first three years after official designation. During these three years Virginia Main Street provides the most intensive services to help the community assess issues facing downtown and increase organizational capacity. After this three year timeframe, during which these intensive services have been provided, the community is considered a “Mature Main Street Community”. In the “Mature” phase communities will continue to receive on-going services to maintain long-term effectiveness and progress, but in a more limited way. See the VMS Program Guidelines for additional details.

**Question #6: How big should your Board and committees be? Do you need to have representation from each of the stakeholder groups you mentioned in your presentation?**

Answer: Ideally, the board should have between nine and 15 members that typically, but are not required, to represent the following stakeholder groups: the commercial district’s property owners, retailers, professionals, and other business owners; lenders; city and/or county government officials; business association members; heads of neighborhood organizations; recognized community leaders; local civic organizations; preservation and/or historical societies; or interested citizens. Committee size and makeup varies greatly and may depend on the projects being undertaken, but should also include a variety of stakeholders and at least one board member to help maintain communication.

**Question #7: How are the design services Virginia Main Street (VMS) provides through Frazier Associates given out?**

Answer: The design specialist will conduct initial reconnaissance visits to each newly designated Virginia Main Street community, along with VMS staff, in order to determine key issues and priorities for the community with a focus on design needs. Once the community has completed a building inventory, the design specialist will provide on-site training for property owners and the design committee and begin working with the committee to create a prioritized list for façade drawings. This will be based on an owners readiness and commitment which means that purely speculative drawings will be done last. Design consultations will range from assistance in selecting exterior paint colors and compatible sign design to recommendations on entire storefront design and rehabilitation. The design specialist will provide general technical assistance on proper building rehabilitation techniques as needed.

**Question #8: What marketing services and publications does VMS provide?**

Answer: Regular press coverage and exposure is provided through media releases (sent by VMS or templates to be completed and used by the community) and marketing materials, including cooperative advertisements, the Downtown Driving Tour Brochure and VMS Annual Report.

**Question #9: In reference to the Application Section III, Part 3, Question F regarding buildings listed as contributing structures to historic districts, do we have to give the address of each individual building?**

Answer: It is important for each community to be aware of their historic resources. You will need to list each of the buildings within the boundaries of your proposed Main Street district. Please indicate whether they are contributing to an existing national or state registered historic district or are old enough to be considered contributing to a potential national or state registered historic district. One of the most important criteria to be considered for listing is that the building be at least 50 years old. Ranges of street addresses may be used to maximize the application space, i.e. 500 through 540 East Main Street.

**Question #10: Regarding Attachment C, which requests 10 – 15 digital photographs of downtown, indexed, and burned onto a CD-ROM, does the index of photographs need to be in hardcopy format, or can it just be included as a word document on the CD?**

Answer: The photographs will need to be clearly labeled on the disk with appropriate filenames and numbered to correspond to the map in Attachment B-1. The index should be on the CD case and also included as an electronic version on the CD to make identification easier.

**Question #11: Can money already given to the organization be included in the budget submitted?**

Answer: It depends. Section III, Part 2, Question G asks for a first year budget and depending on if the money was received and/or expended within the timeframe of what the organization considers its first year, it may be included. For example if the organization is looking at a fiscal year of July 1, 2007 through June 30, 2008 and has received money for a special project prior to July 1 for a planned expenditure in fall of 2007 that should be reflected. The initial budget should be based on the amount needed to effectively run a Main Street organization and the amount of income the organization anticipates raising from various sources.

**Question #12: On page 22 of the application, where we list numbers and types of downtown businesses, where should we include an antique mall type businesses and other businesses that are prevalent, but don't fall into any of the categories given? For the antique mall, how many businesses would that count as?**

Answer: This is a decision that the applicant will have to make, but should be consistent throughout your calculations for downtown. Please consider the predominant service or product being offered by the business if the business combines two or more types, for example flowers and gifts. If a particular business or service does not fit at all into one listed category, even when considering its predominant service or product, then include it in the "other" category. Antiques or other categories should be added to the list as appropriate. For an antique mall that operates collectively it should only be counted as one business unless individual stalls operate as separate, autonomous businesses.

**Marion Application Workshop – 1/18/07**

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**Question #13: When setting up Main Street boundaries, how do you justify them to those who may have just been excluded? For example, how can you say OK, the boundary stops here, it includes Barbara's building, but not Joe's, which is right next door?**

Answer: Virginia Main Street requires a compact, pedestrian-oriented district. The main reason why a locality needs to draw boundaries is to keep the revitalization area focused. Experience has shown that focusing resources on a particular area is essential to successful downtown revitalization. Boundary determination is a local decision influenced by many factors, but VMS reserves the right to tighten boundaries, if necessary, as a condition of designation. It may be helpful to share with the property or business owner outside the district the benefits that will still be available (attending business seminars, participating in certain promotions, etc.) In the end a thriving Main Street district provides benefits throughout the community.

**Question #14: Our local government believes it should be able to eventually reduce its funding so that the Main Street organization becomes financially self-sufficient. Is this really the case?**

Answer: Absolutely not. This is a common misperception that most likely stems from the initial requirement in the resolution submitted to VMS with the application that local government “be a financial partner with the Main Street organization for at least five years.” That can be mistaken to mean that their commitment ends after the five-year period which is not the case. This language is included to ensure that the fledging downtown organization has some financial stability for a period of time while they build capacity and begin to show tangible results, but it does not mean that local government should stop being a financial partner in downtown revitalization at some point.

Main Street is only successful when it has broad-based public and private support. The program guidelines require “strong support from both the public and private sectors” in order to achieve and maintain designation. While it is OK for public funds to make-up a decreasing proportion of the organization’s total budget over time, as funding from other sources grows, it would be a cause for concern if public funding, in absolute terms, declined. VMS hopes that as the organization’s capacity increases, the public sector will choose to increase its support for the organization because it believes it is getting a good return on its investment. This is where Letter of Agreements of Contracts with local government can help clearly outline what local government receives as a return on its financial investment in the Main Street organization.

**Question #15: Generally speaking, how much support do Main Street programs receive from the surrounding county government?**

Answer: Only four out of the 19 designated VMS organizations receive financial support from the county surrounding them. For those that do receive financial support, the amount of support ranges from between five to 20 percent of the local organization’s total budget.

VMS believes that having a strong downtown benefits a county in numerous ways and encourages local organizations to approach the County for philosophical and financial support. A vibrant downtown, especially in the county seat, can be a potent recruiting tool for a county’s economic development team, in addition to other benefits.

**Question #16: Do we need to have to have an Executive Director hired, the organization completely set-up, etc. at the time we apply?**

Answer: No. A pledge to meet the designation requirements, backed up with plans and supporting documents (essentially Section III, Part 2 of the application) to make all those things happen soon after designation is sufficient. However, all things being equal, having these systems already in place will show stronger readiness to implement and score higher on the application than pledges alone. Having some organizational capacity in place will also allow for the community to effectively utilize VMS services more quickly.

**Question #17: Clarify the first line of the sample resolution (Appendix C) that states in part “the city, town or county manager to assist in coordination of all program application activities.”**

Answer: This does not mean that the local government staff needs to take a lead role in putting together the application, just that they need to be aware of the application process and involved to some degree in gathering information, maps, etc. as appropriate.

**Question #18: Regarding Section III, Part 2, Question E, if our organization is planning to change its status or create a new organization if designated, do you still want us to include our current organization’s bylaws, articles of incorporation, IRS Tax status, etc.?**

Answer: The organization should include any information or documents that explain how the organization currently operates, but include information in the response to this question to explain any proposed changes in structure and funding and the timeline for those changes.

**Question #19: Can communities receive National Main Street Accreditation in addition to Virginia Main Street Designation?**

Answer: Yes, but only after VMS designation is achieved. Each year, designated communities are required to submit a data packet to VMS for review. VMS uses this information in a variety of ways, such as tracking overall program performance and determining what services to provide to communities. It is also used to determine if a community will achieve National Main Street Accreditation, an honorary distinction from the National Main Street Center. VMS communities are required to achieve National Main Street Accreditation at least once every three years to maintain VMS designation.

**Question #20: In Appendix D (page 15) of the Application Instructions, which provides a sample answer for Section III, Part 1, Question F & G, the dollar amounts for the public and private sector commitments seem really high, please explain.**

Answer: These figures are not monies given to the Main Street program, rather they are the amounts of money that other organizations are investing in downtown. They help VMS staff better understand the amount and type of upcoming and recently completed major investments in the district and the commitment to downtown being made by the public and private sector.

Once communities are designated, they are required to submit monthly reports to VMS that include public investment in downtown (streetscape, new sidewalks, etc.) and private sector investment (building rehab, new construction, etc.). These are two key figures used to track program performance.

**Question #21: A follow up question, when listing these public and private commitments to the downtown, how far back can we go?**

Answer: It is up to the community, but upcoming projects or ones that are presently occurring present the most persuasive case. Adding one or two of the most significant projects from no more than five years ago is acceptable, but in general, focus on current and pending projects. Section III, Part 1, Question A “Local Revitalization Efforts” provides a better opportunity to talk more about past downtown revitalization projects.

**Question #22: How detailed should the community support section be (Section III, Part 1, Question B)?**

Answer: If you have specifics, great! If not, you may be general. You may list actual supportive tasks or note the organization’s general purpose in relation to the Main Street organization. The most important thing here is to clearly demonstrate support for downtown revitalization in general and the Main Street organization in particular. A general statement of support is fine, but the more specific and tangible ways these organizations will show their support (through financial or volunteer commitment, for example), the more compelling this section of your application will be.

**Question #23: What do we need to list for outcomes (Section III, Part 2, Question A)?**

Answer: You should list projects that are currently underway or anticipated in 2007. VMS is looking to understand what your organization’s current workplan looks like in order to have the necessary information to provide appropriate technical assistance or help identify key projects that have not been included. In terms of structure, there should be four objectives aligning with the four points and one or more projects related to each objective depending on the capacity and needs of the organization. One project under each objective (four total) should be the basis for a detailed implementation plan.

**Question #24: Should proposed historic districts also be included (Section III, Part 3, Question F)?**

Answer: Information and a proposed historic district map should be included if it is within the proposed Main Street District boundaries. You should include information on the individual structures in this proposed district and a narrative explaining the progress and timeline for listing. This question is designed to promote awareness of the Main Street districts historic assets and set the stage for encouraging individuals to take advantage of appropriate incentives for rehabilitation.

## **Post-Application Workshop**

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**Question #25: I am confused about Section III, Part 1, Question B. What is the difference between the letters of support we are asking these organizations to write (Attachment G) and section at the bottom of the page for organizational information that we can duplicate as many times as needed?**

Answer: Ideally you will have two items from each community organization that is supporting you. A letter of support, on their letterhead if possible/appropriate, and an entry under Section III, Part 1, Question B. The differences between the two are that the letters can provide a greater level of detail concerning how and why that group will support the Main Street organization, including any past or future specific examples of collaboration. The entries in the application itself are briefer and more to the point – a bulleted list is acceptable. Also, unlike the letters, this section can be filled out by the applicant alone if necessary, using perhaps information gleaned from a group’s letter of support or a conversation had with the group’s leader.

See question #22 above for more information on this part of the application.

**Question #26: Is it possible to get a copy of a successful application from the 2004 round?**

Answer: Each application is individual and includes unique information that is specific to the particular locality submitting the application. Additionally, each past application has certain strong responses to questions and others that are weak, making it impossible to put forward any one application as a “model” – you would have no way of knowing which responses scored highly versus not. It is because of these reasons that Virginia Main Street has determined from experience that the most helpful assistance to communities is provided by including sample responses in the application instructions (Appendix D, pages 15-23).

**Question #27: Who will be on the Application Review Team?**

Answer: The Application Review Team is made up of five individuals: Louellen Brumgard, Associate Director, DHCD; Kathy Frazier, VMS contract architect; Kyle Meyer, Community Development Administrator; Stephen Versen, Community Development Administrator; Amy Yarcich, Program Manager. Each person will individually score all applications and then individual scores will be averaged. Based on past experience, the variety of expertise represented on the panel creates an effective and comprehensive scoring process.

**Question #27: What is an acceptable operating budget for the first year?**

Answer: There's no magic number to answer that question, each community and program is unique. That being said, first look to the sample budgets in the Application Instructions to provide a rough guide. That sample shows a community with a population of under 5,000 with a budget of \$66,550 – therefore, something between \$60-75,000 is expected, but naturally more is better. However, it is most important that a budget be reality-based. A good way to do this is to look at projected expenses or talking with other nonprofits in your area about expenses and then create the budget you can support as “required” to run the organization versus picking a number that seems “reasonable” and working backwards to try to make everything fit within it.

**Question #28: Section IV, Part 1, Question B about Mean (average) Household Size. The 1990 data is not available for this locality - it's just broken out by county with no data on individual households. How can this data be obtained?**

Answer: Either, provide 1990 and 2000 county average data and then add in a line to list what the 2000 town average household size is – or – see if there's a way to use the data available to mathematically calculate the average for 1990. At the very least, fill in the 2000 information for the town and leave 1990 blank. This question is just designed to show VMS any emerging trends and provide snapshot data for the community's future use – do not feel compelled to spend inordinate time on this data question.

**Question #29: On page 27 of the app, question X asks about a service district. What exactly is meant by a Service District?**

Answer: A service district is a funding mechanism in use in a few VMS communities, but certainly not all. Essentially a small, additional property tax is added to buildings in the district, the proceeds of which are used to fund the development organization. It is something that takes significant education and planning in order to implement successfully and may not be appropriate for all communities in the start-up stage, therefore not having one is not a problem. We look at the application as an opportunity to gather information in the event that a community has implemented one prior to applying.