

## SUMMARY



 OECD

 **OECD Local Development Forum Webinar**  
**From "mom and pops"**  
**to pop-ups:**

**Local development and  
the future of retail**

**12 July, 16h30 - 18h00 CEST**

**LEED@40**



# From “mom and pops” to pop-ups: Local Development and the future of retail

## ■ What’s the issue?

Retail is an important part of local economic fabrics and helps give vitality and character to local communities. For some places, it is a significant part of local employment and tax bases, but these bases are being eroded. The pandemic has changed the fabric of many downtowns as a result of remote work. Simultaneously, many retailers are struggling because of e-commerce or just need to find new approaches to market their goods and services. This webinar examined local development strategies for making retail corridors, main streets and high streets thrive in these new realities.

## ■ About the workshop

This [OECD Local Development Forum](#) workshop brought together policy makers, practitioners and entrepreneurs to discuss the future of retail, main streets and high streets:

- **Jack Markell**, U.S. Ambassador to the OECD and former Governor of Delaware
- **Sydney Alison**, Community Engagement Coordinator, Kendall Whittier Main Street, Oklahoma, Winner of the 2020 Great American Main Street Award, United States
- **Hannah Wright**, High Streets Task Force Board member, United Kingdom
- **Pino Di Ionia**, CEO of BeaverTails, Canada
- **Richard Guiney**, CEO of Dublin Town, Ireland
- **CJ Dippel**, Senior Policy Advisor, Retail, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
- **Norma Ramírez de Miess**, Vice President of Revitalization Services, Main Street America, United States

Moderated by **Jeff Finkle** (international expert on local economic development) with opening remarks from **Karen Maguire** (Head of Division, LEED Programme) and closing remarks from **Anna Rubin** (Manager of the OECD Local Development Forum).

Learn more about the communities, organisations  
and programmes featured in this webinar

[Main Street America](#) | [High Streets Task Force](#)

[Dublin Town](#) | [City of Amsterdam](#) | [Kendall Whittier Main Street](#) (Tulsa)

[BeaverTails](#) (pastry shops)

## ■ Main take-aways

### What's happening now . . .

#### Main streets and high streets give our communities life and vitality

Beyond their economic impacts and importance as local tax bases, main streets, high streets and local retail corridors are important markers of local identity, culture and historical legacies. They serve as gathering places for socialising and entertainment and help give communities life and vitality. Accordingly, ensuring they can continue to thrive and serve as community gathering points is critical.



*I served for eight years as the Governor of Delaware, and there was no question in my mind -- as it is I think probably for all governors -- how important it is that our main streets be vibrant. . . We know how impactful COVID has been, to see the drop-off in foot traffic in so many of our communities, to see the difficulties that so many of our retailers have been through. . . This [webinar] to learn creative best practices from your peers around the world I think is really, very valuable.*

**Ambassador Jack Markell**, US Representative to the OECD

#### The nature of retail is changing, accelerated by the pandemic

COVID-19 lockdown measures as well as the longer-term expansion of remote working has significantly impacted retail corridors, high streets and main streets. However, by pivoting to online experiences or adjusting business strategies, some retailers found ways to effectively cope with the pandemic, or even thrive in the case of BeaverTails which saw an expansion during that period. Similarly, no businesses in Kendall Whittier closed as a result of COVID-19.

Today, high end and value retail are performing relatively well, but the middle tier is being squeezed and is particularly vulnerable to competition from e-commerce. Generally, the share of consumer spending on experience, leisure and entertaining is also growing. For example, in North/South Dublin City, the share of people coming to the city centre to have a drink in a restaurant, bar or café grew by 4 percentage points between 2018 and 2020.

#### A wide variety of tools being used to support retailers and main streets . . .

For example, the Main Street Approach™<sup>1</sup> used in Kendall Whittier and other Main Street America programmes considers four main components:

- **Economic vitality:** assisting new and existing businesses and catalysing property development via capital, incentives and financial tools, and building a strong entrepreneurship ecosystem
- **Design:** enhancing physical and visual assets of a community, celebrating historic character, and creating people-centred public spaces
- **Promotion:** marketing and communication, with a focus on unique characteristics of a particular main street
- **Organisation:** building leadership capacity, strong organisations and community engagement

<sup>1</sup> For more information, see the Main Street Approach: <https://www.mainstreet.org/mainstreetamerica/theapproach>



*Although we don't have control over what businesses want to be in Kendall Whittier, we do work with business and property owners to find the right fit. We are always talking about progress without marginalisation which means that we try to keep our businesses accessible and affordable while also bringing people to the district.*

*All the [business] services that we offer are free. We offer one-on-one assistance for businesses and kind of act as a guide to best practices. Some of the businesses in Kendall Whittier are very well established and have been around for decades and they might not need those services, but we are always there to support businesses who need maybe a little extra help.*

**Sydney Alison**, Community Engagement Coordinator, Kendall Whittier Main Street, Oklahoma

In Amsterdam, the city also provides a number of supports

- **Stimulating Business Improvement Districts (BID)** by granting them a subsidy if entrepreneurs want to set up a BID or a business association. Subsidies are also available for BIDs to identify a branding strategy or hire a street manager, who works to stimulate economic activities on a shopping street;
- **Organising collaboration between real estate owners, retailers and the like** to develop with an appealing profile / identity for their street or district;
- Providing **subsidies** for property owners or tenants to renovate a historic shop facades; and
- Providing for **advice to tenants** regarding their rights.

**... and with different organisational and delivery forms**

Kendall Whittier Main Street operates as a non-profit without charging local businesses a fee for its services. Business Improvement Districts (BID), such as Dublin Town, where local businesses provide financial contributions to support the work of the organisation are another model. In other cases, such as in Amsterdam, local authorities also have dedicated staff for working on retail.



*Main Street is a collaborative model where the governments at the local, state or county wide level can come together and work with the private sector to help our businesses. At the end of the day who we serve is the retailer and the business owners that are in our districts.*

*The opportunity for organisations and governments to work together not to regulate but to go beyond regulating, to actually being the advocate for good business, local business, local and skilled development is an important part of what Main Street is all about.*

**Norma Ramirez de Miess**, Vice President of Revitalization Services, Main Street America, United States

There are also a number of national organisations, such as Main Street America and the High Streets Task Force (with funding from the UK government), that provide support and coordinate local efforts across their respective countries via research and analysis, best practice sharing, capacity building and technical assistance.

## . . . and what the future may hold

### Everything could change – or relatively little could

Panellists had different opinions about how radically different the future of retail and main streets will be – will most of us eventually return to the office at pre-pandemic levels or will high levels of remote working be a permanent feature of our labour markets? Will online shopping, with its convenience and 24 hour availability, largely replace brick and mortar stops over the longer-term? While there was no consensus as to the answers to these questions, panellists did agree that COVID-19 has accelerated changes that were already taking root pre-pandemic, rather than catalysing new ones.



*It might be that in a year or ten or fifteen years all physical retailers have disappeared because they moved to the internet, because that offers a better business model for them than renting a physical unit. There are some people who would say “Well it's better to redevelop the vacant retail spaces that are now in main streets, etc to housing because there's a lot of demand for affordable housing.” But the problem is that once it's changed into residential real estate it's almost impossible to reverse to a commercial usage for which at present there might be no demand. But that does not mean there is no future demand*

*for those commercial retail units. So, it's very risky to say “residential real estate will have priority in everything”. It's all about the right balance of all those space seeking activities, now and in the future.*

*We have the luxury to say that many people come to Amsterdam because they want to visit the historic monuments and architecture and when people have seen the museums, etc. they want to do something else. They then go to a restaurant or they shop. You don't go to Amsterdam to shop online in your hotel room. So to that end, there will be a physical demand for some years and a need for retailers in bricks and mortar to stay in those shopping streets. But I don't know how it will be in 15 or 20 years because, for example, flying will be difficult because of COVID.*

**CJ Dippel**, Senior Policy Advisor, Retail, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

### Experiences will be essential

There was widespread agreement amongst the panellists about the need to integrate “experiences” into retail – whether its combining social, dining and shopping in downtown districts; creating café corners in bookstores; improving the outdoor experience, such as creating more green spaces and parklets in retail corridors, or more ambitious projects to reimagine the physical, sensorial and emotional experience of retail spaces all together, such as the “Friends Experience” in the Toronto Yorkdale Mall. Factors such as safety, and indeed perception of, and other “welcoming” factors also help to shape these local experiences.



*We sell this delicious pastry but we often relate to our new staff that while we serve a pastry we actually sell joy. I know it sounds cliché, but we really do believe that. The example of the science shop doing online experiments [during lockdowns], that is a form of emotion. It may not be joy it's maybe education or inspiration but*

*if we can all relate to emotion. I think emotions is where our species is going and maybe that'll guide us to come up with more meaningful local solutions. What's the emotion that we want to portray?*

**Pino Di Ionia**, CEO of BeaverTails, Canada

## The sum will be more than the whole of its part: moving to a multi-channel and multi-modal world

Combining in-person and digital experiences is becoming increasingly important. Examples ranged from placing QR codes in storefront windows to ease access to online shops, as was done in the Digital Window Shopping pilot in Southwold to designing physical spaces that lend themselves well to social media snapshots

How to support people using main streets and high streets in different ways and support multi-modal transportation was also a key question. For example, can delivery services from main streets to people's home encourage people to arrive in the afternoon for shopping and then stay into the evening for socialising and dining or to bicycle to run their shopping errands more often?



*I think we need to make it easier for people to spend in our retail environment. We have a scheme in Dublin of shared last mile delivery where smaller units will cooperate on deliveries reducing the number of vehicles that have to come into the city improving the air quality and emissions. But I think we have to look at things like shared deliveries out so that we can make it easier for people who are coming in for various different purposes to engage with retail so they don't have to worry about carrying bags to the restaurant afterwards or when they're meeting their friends. And also to encourage the use of sustainable transport so that people can come in on their bicycle. We know twice as many people come in on a bicycle to go to an office than to go a shop, for example.*

**Richard Guiney**, CEO of Dublin Town

## Sustainability will continue to be an overarching concern

The sustainability imperative will have wide-ranging implications, for example:

- How food purveyors like BeaverTails package their food and the carbon footprint of shipping;
- What modes of transport locals take to city centres in places like Dublin ;
- How changes in overall tourism patterns like could strongly impact tourism-heavy economies like Amsterdam; and
- What the implications overall shifts in consumer behaviours, including the potential for overall less consumption, could mean for retailers.



*I think no matter what we look to do in the future, it has to be within a sustainable framework. Prosperity doesn't need to have growth. . . Towns and cities can prosper without there needing to be more shops. I think there needs to be more green spaces, there needs to be more focus shifted onto people's well-being, less cars in the cities. A lot of it is about experiential events and activities and a focus away from just buying. . . Every high street has a responsibility whether you're a local government or whether you're a business owner.*

**Hannah Wright**, High Streets Task Force Board member, United Kingdom

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## ■ Contact

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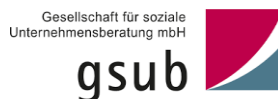


The OECD Local Development Forum is a network of thousands of individuals worldwide, united by their shared commitment to making their communities more resilient, inclusive and sustainable. It counts members from over 70 countries, representing city, regional and national governments, education, employment and training agencies, chambers of commerce, social innovators, start-ups, businesses and NGOs in the fields of local economic development, employment, skills, entrepreneurship and social innovation. It is a unique setting for the private and public sector to challenge assumptions, learn from each, and work together to forge practical solutions to today's economic and social challenges.

The Local Development Forum is part of the OECD's Local Employment and Economic Development programme (LEED). LEED provides practical solutions for how to create good jobs in great places. It was launched in 1982, when OECD governments were struggling to provide solutions to the jobs crisis of the day and saw a need for an international forum to share innovative approaches to local job creation, social inclusion and economic development. Since then, it has continued to bring together policy makers and practitioners from around the world to identify, evaluate and disseminate promising approaches to local development.

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