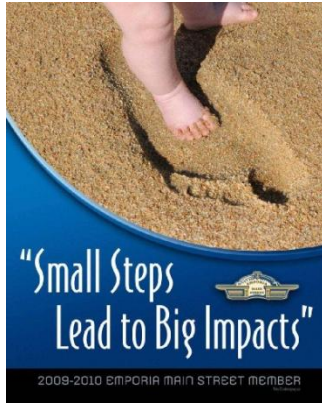


# Making the Community Look Better

## Carrot versus a stick approach...



In your e-mail newsletters, I am often asked about how we decide what articles to include. Some articles are based on training that staff receives from the state or national Main Street organization. Some articles are based on experiences that I think would be helpful to the community, and a lot of the articles are based on your questions which require answers that are too long for the "Did you Know" portion of the e-mail. This article is based on a series of questions/discussions about community aesthetics.

**What is the Main Street organization's stance on improving the look of the community?** That's an easy answer with a complex back story. Of course we want the community to look better! Doesn't everyone? We actually have a Design Committee that deals with community aesthetics. The questions should revolve around if we, as a community should treat individual occupant owned residences the same as a profit producing rental, and if we should paint those properties with a broad brush that effects everyone (including people doing a great job of keeping up with property management) or should policies target obvious examples of neglect?

**Secondly, whenever you decide to focus on improving an area through government intervention, those improvements cost tax dollars.** We hear the calls to cut taxes every day. We also hear the call to increase services every day. We can't have both and maintain what we have. It's just simple math... So, we have to decide what additional services we are willing to pay extra taxes for.

**Third, we have to determine the responsibility of general citizens within the discussion of aesthetics.** Every day, average Emporian's do simple things to help make our community look better. Picking up trash on the sidewalk, pulling weeds, helping a neighbor mow their lawn and other routine activities (when done frequently) make a HUGE difference in how the community looks. The "look" of a property does have an effect on the value of surrounding properties, but in a smaller town part of our charm comes from the fact that we can choose to offer help to those around us. It's not charity, it's called being neighborly. And, as I've always heard, you have the right to gripe if YOU take the responsibility to do something about it (that means real, sweat producing, WORK).

**Here's where the carrots come into play...** When we ask individuals to make investments in aesthetics, we are obviously asking individuals to commit resources in levels that they may not be comfortable with. In Emporia Main Street, we've always taken the "how can we help" approach when attempting to improve design aesthetics. Sometimes, we can help through our own Main Street programs, and sometimes we can help by making people aware of other programs: below is a little of both. (click on the blue underlined links for more information).

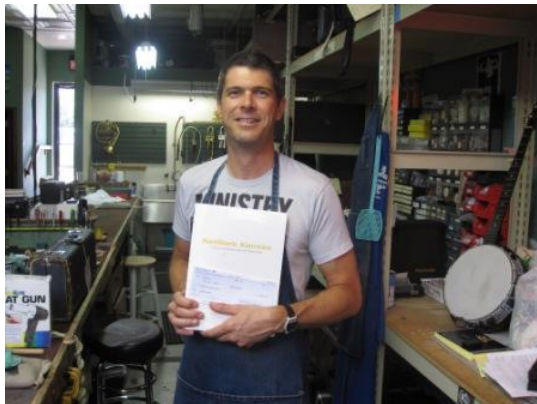
## Potential property improvement and/or new construction incentives available-

[Emporia Neighborhood Revitalization Program](#)- This program offers a property tax rebate on properties in certain areas that receive revitalization investments. (pick up a form in the Main Street office)

[Kansas Main Street Incentives Without Walls](#)- Administered through the local Emporia Main Street Program, this zero interest loan is a 3:1 matching loan up to \$20,000 within a defined district. Emporia Main Street fills out the IWW application for businesses, but there are some pieces of information required from applicants. See Emporia Main Street for details.

**Trusler Loan Program**- A privately funded zero interest loan pool donated by the Trusler Foundation and administered through Emporia Main Street. This loan pool can be used on any commercial property in Emporia, but it's policies mimic Incentives Without Walls funds. *(no link, but we have information available in the office)*

[Network Kansas](#)- As a network Kansas Partner, Emporia Main



Flint Hills Music recently received a Network Kansas Loan.

Street can apply for funds that match the terms of other local loan funds (like IWW or Trusler) in a 60/40 split.

[New Market Tax Credits](#)- Common on the coasts and larger urban areas, the New Market Tax Credits are just now being used in Kansas. This 35% tax credit can be used in census tracts deemed "distressed" or "severely distressed", which is virtually everywhere with the exception of properties west of Industrial Road.

[Kansas Historic Tax Credits](#)- We are hoping to pursue a historic district that would allow for the expanded use of this 25% (for profit) or 30% (not for profit) state tax credit. These tax credits can be used on qualified expenditures in historic buildings or buildings deemed as "contributors" within historic districts. These tax credits can even be used to revitalize current non-contributing buildings to make them a "contributor" to the aesthetic of a district. Things like



Cooper Carts recently received an IWW loan.

plumbing, electrical, air conditioning and other mechanical issues are typically covered under this program. Historic Tax Credits are popular enough that a series of developers specialize in their use. We have had inquiries from developers about a historic district in Emporia, but obviously we haven't been able to capitalize on their interest due to the lack of a district. State Historic Tax Credits are transferable (meaning you can sell the credits for cash).

[National Historic Tax Credits-](#) These 20% federal tax credits are similar to the state Historic Tax Credits, but are used less frequently and on larger projects. The National Historic Tax Credits are non-transferable and do require that buildings are either on the national register or are a contributor within a historic district.

[USDA Low interest loans-](#) Emporia resides within the USDA Section 3 in Kansas, and the district office made Emporia Main Street aware of a low interest loan program for businesses within our city. USDA low interest loans are a grant to a local utility that is then loaned out to businesses at a low interest rate (usually around 4%). [The USDA also has loans available for low income homes in rural areas.](#)

[Efficiency Kansas-](#) More low interest loans or grants are available through Efficiency Kansas for energy efficient upgrades to existing structures.

[USDA REAP- Projects below \\$200,000-](#) REAP programs provide tax credits for upgrades on structures that have an energy efficient component to them. Recently, High Gear in downtown Emporia utilized REAP to receive a tax credit on upgrades on electrical systems and other efforts undertaken during the remodeling of their building.



High Gear was one of the first projects in Kansas to receive REAP tax credits.

[USDA REAP- Projects above \\$200,000-](#) Similar to the under \$200,000 program with some different forms. Luckily, we have access to USDA representatives that are happy to help businesses through the application process.

[E-Community-](#) Another potential loan pool, E-Community mimics local funds (like IWW or Trusler) loaned out to businesses in a community defined area (like a city or county). Funds for the loan pool are raised through the sale of tax credits which form an account for a specific entity. E-Community funds do require a funding match.

[JOBS \(Joint Opportunities for Building Success\) Grants-](#) These grants can be applied for through local banks that are



**Scott Dorcas recently received Trusler Loan Funds to help purchase and renovate Thompson Auto Repair.**

a part of the Federal Home Loan Land Bank. Up to \$25,000 per application can be used for economic development or other revitalization efforts, if funds are granted.

**HOPE VI Funding-** Specific to Main Street Cities, Hope VI funds are a grant that can be used to create housing within a designated district. Currently, two Kansas Cities (El Dorado and McPherson) are in the process of applying for Hope VI funds for building redevelopment and upper story development projects. This is a HUD program, so some housing requirements apply to the utilization of these funds. However, because the standards for housing are federal in nature, the median income of Emporia

would fit well within housing guidelines.

**Community Development Block Grants-** CDBG funds are applied for through city governments and can be used for revitalization efforts, and in some cases a loan pool.

**Local Community Foundations-** Entities like the Emporia Community Foundation, Trusler Foundation and others are a source of capital for many community improvement initiatives.

**Local Sources of Volunteers-** Emporia Main Street, ESU programs, local service clubs, churches, youth organizations and other entities can help with clean up labor in certain instances.

**Contact Emporia Main Street if you would like your name added to a listing of potential volunteers. We always have things to do, and we frequently get requests for help on various projects. We would love to add your name to the list of people striving to make Emporia a better place to live, work and play.**



You may have seen people out doing clean ups, working on design projects or you might have heard about Emporia Main Street making loans to businesses to improve aesthetics. You might have heard about conceptual design assistance through Kansas Main Street, on-site consultations, the Adopt-A-Garden project or the over 10,000 hours of volunteer work facilitated by Emporia Main Street since the inception of the program. When people say "Somebody really ought to do something about that", "Someone should take care of this situation" or "I wish somebody would just clean this up", let me introduce you to a group of "somebody's" that have been working to make this community a better place for 19

years: the volunteers of Emporia Main Street. The "somebody" that makes things better could be you. Be "somebody", join Emporia Main Street in taking real steps to make our community look better. We get our fingernails dirty, we work off hours and the jobs aren't always glamorous, but I've yet to see a trash pile get picked up by talking at it. Be somebody, get involved and let's build a sustainable community through assistance, incentives and just being neighborly. We can do that, can't we?

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[For past editions of the Emporia Main Street E-News, check out our E-News archives by clicking HERE.](#)

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