

# Our view: A vision of success for Beverly Main Streets

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Downtown Beverly has always been a difficult area to develop and promote, because it's really two distinct downtowns — Cabot Street and Rantoul Street — with no real connection.

Cabot Street has had some landmark attractions — most notably, the Cabot Cinema, the block-long gift shop Casa de Moda, and (in our humble estimation) the terrific Mexican restaurant Cielito Lindo, all of which drew traffic from outside the city. But when all of them closed over the past year or so, things were looking pretty bleak for those who love a city with a bustling downtown.

Enter Beverly Main Streets.

No, Main Streets has not transformed Cabot Street into a bustling shopping mecca. But it has paved the way for a transformation, with everything from summer block parties in the downtown, adding to a sense of vibrancy, to the nuts and bolts of improving parking lots and adding retail incentives. And now, with the reopening of The Cabot, the Atomic Cafe plus bookstore opening in the old Casa de Moda space, and even a proposed skate park in the empty Bell Market, the building blocks seem to be in place for a revival of sorts.

Master plans can make for eye-glazing reading, but Main Streets has focused its vision plan on several key objectives, and has kept plugging away at them. They've also been helped along the way by the increased presence of Montserrat College of Art in the downtown, and its increasing interaction with the community. And while the downtown is still split — Cabot Street on one side, Rantoul on the other — the addition of 100 new residences on Rantoul Street in recent years can only benefit both areas of the city eventually.

What Main Streets' plan offers, more than anything, is a sense of hope, of movement. Five years ago, their dream of a cultural district seemed like so much pie in the sky. Now, with Montserrat's galleries, the reopening of both The Larcom and The Cabot theaters, a smattering of restaurants, including Chianti, that offer live music — not to mention the reactivated North Shore Music Theatre — the city does have the makings of a lively cultural center. They continue to promote projects like



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Courtesy drawing This arch would be a possible start to a cultural district envisioned for Cabot Street in Beverly.

the Beverly Oracle, a unique public artwork still to come, and old standards like the summer arts fest.

The pieces are in place, and as Main Streets and its partners, both public and private, continue working toward their vision, we really can expect to see a walking path, for example, connecting Cabot Street to Beverly Common, and a well-defined cultural district on Cabot Street, maybe highlighted with the kind of arch Main Streets depicts in its drawings.

As Main Streets director Gin Wallace told reporter Dustin Luca this week, she's actually getting calls out of the blue from business owners saying, "Downtown Beverly is looking good. Tell me what you've got."

The downtown — whether it's Cabot or Rantoul — still has lots of issues to resolve, but it's come a long way in recent years. Beverly Main Streets, made up of public and private partners, has made economic development here its mission; and despite setbacks, it has made quite remarkable progress not only toward achieving that goal, but in making Beverly a more livable community.

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