



First & Main

A Blueprint for Prosperity in America's Local Communities

The corner of **First & Main** is where everything happens. Whether in a rural area, a tribal community, or a smaller city, First & Main is the anchor of it all. It's where east and west meet north and south. It's the county seat. It's where you can find the old train depot that built the town, City Hall, the family restaurant everyone knows, or the corner from which to spot the most beautiful historic buildings in town.

The potential of America's small and midsized communities is abundant, yet decades of disinvestment have undermined their economic potential. Communities across the country have seen factories shuttered, local roads and bridges deteriorate, quality of life compromised, and jobs lost. President Donald Trump campaigned on a promise to lift up America's small and midsize communities. But does this Administration—and Congress—have a clear picture of exactly what's required to help turn these places into beacons of opportunity for everyone, including those who are struggling and have been left behind within them?

There's no need to hunt for some new magical formula—we already have the roadmap to prosperity. We know that promoting the economic vitality of First & Main and preserving the qualities that give it a unique sense of place will send prosperity rippling out to not only every corner of town, but to the entire country. But this is only possible when they can count on a reliable federal partner to support their homegrown, local efforts—and that support today is threatened.

This First & Main Blueprint is about **protecting** the programs proven to work for local communities, **improving** the programs that should be more effective, and **creating** new programs to provide local communities with additional resources. Local elected officials developed this blueprint because it provides communities with the resources they need to prosper.

The First & Main Blueprint

Civic and elected leaders in these places see deep inequities in the health, transportation, and economic development outcomes that result from federal investments. Many smaller or mid-sized communities are too often left out, but even when investments do reach them, the benefits often fail to extend to everyone within their community. To correct these disparities, local elected leaders from small and mid-sized American towns and cities have developed this new Blueprint to cross party lines and extend prosperity to their towns and cities—and the people within them—that have been missing out or left behind.

The First & Main Coalition

Mayors, city councilors, town leaders, county executives and commissioners, tribal leaders, and other local elected officials from across America have come together to call on the federal government to support and partner with their local communities by enacting this Blueprint. They urge a focus on proven solutions that will stimulate the kind of economic growth that will create vibrant, healthy communities; bring prosperity to all of their residents, families, and workers; and produce the rising tide that lifts all boats in their communities.

After a public launch in early 2018, these local leaders have been advocating for this Blueprint through all available avenues including annual appropriations and budgetary processes, a federal infrastructure package, streamlining existing programs, promoting key policy improvements, and other federal domestic programs.

In April 2018, dozens of local officials in the First & Main coalition [convened in Washington, D.C.](#) to deliver this message to Congress and the Administration, and share ideas and strategies about how national policies and investments could support community revitalization and economic growth. This united group of local leaders is continuing to advocate for this Blueprint and work hand-in-hand with national leaders to put these proven, practical ideas into action.



Key Principles of “First & Main”

- 1. Support locally-driven community revitalization**
- 2. Build vibrant, healthy, walkable towns and cities**
- 3. Create opportunities for everyone in America's small and midsize communities**
- 4. Invest in smart infrastructure that creates lasting value**

Support locally-driven community revitalization

Supporting and assisting locally-driven economic development and revitalization is essential to the vitality of these communities. Federal programs can help small communities do everything from educating and training their workforce to revitalizing manufacturing, redeveloping brownfields, and spurring rural development. These investments drive American economic growth, providing steady jobs and quality products that not only support existing families, but also retain and grow communities by attracting additional investment in the region.

Build vibrant, healthy, walkable towns and cities

People of all backgrounds in every community want to live in attractive, healthy, walkable communities. Making investments to promote this type of development helps address health disparities and connects everyone in the community to greater opportunities. Creating vibrant neighborhoods ripe with jobs, housing, arts, culture, and recreation requires civic leaders, government officials, residents, and businesses to work together in partnership. This strengthens entire regions, enhances quality of life, and attracts additional and sustained economic investment.

Create opportunities for everyone in America's small and midsize communities

Less than 22 percent of Americans live in large communities. The bulk of the population call small towns and midsize communities home. A \$200,000 federal grant won't make much impact in a large metropolis, but can be transformative in a rural area or small town. These places, and the people who live there, deserve every opportunity to access programs that can improve their communities. Federal funding programs should provide equal access and distribution to small and midsize communities.

Invest in infrastructure that creates lasting value

Investing in stable, long-lasting infrastructure is critical for communities of all shapes and sizes to remain regionally and globally competitive, attract talent, create jobs and preserve their quality of life. But small and medium-sized towns and cities also need infrastructure investments that will create long-term assets, not expensive liabilities for which they lack the money to maintain. They need investments in transportation that meet everyone's needs to access essential services. Along with investments in broadband internet access, clean air and water, and reliable electricity, smart infrastructure investments produce a resilient framework for creating long-lasting value. Connecting more places and people is critical for success, and rebuilding and fixing existing infrastructure upon which we have relied for decades should be our first priority.

Summary Of Key First & Main Strategies

Topic area	Strategies (with recommended funding levels on annual basis)
Redevelopment & Revitalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Preserve Tax-Exempt Municipal Bonds ➤ Preserve New Market Tax Credits ➤ Preserve Historic Preservation Tax Credits ➤ Create Neighborhood Rehabilitation and Investment Tax Credits ➤ Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfields grants - \$250 million ➤ Implement Opportunity Zones that work for all communities
Local Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Economic Development Administration (EDA) Public Works, Economic Adjustment, and other grants - \$275 million ➤ U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development funding - \$2.33 billion ➤ Expand Appalachian Community Renewal - \$1 billion ➤ Manufacturing Extension Partnership - \$150 million ➤ Department of Labor (DOL) Apprentice Grants and Promise Grants - \$200 million
Rebuilding Downtown & Core Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Create a new National Park Service (NPS) “Public Square” grant program - \$100 million ➤ Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) neighborhood renewal grants - \$1 billion ➤ Create new Housing and Urban Development (HUD) “Anchor Institutions Initiative” - \$25 million ➤ National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) grants - \$150 million ➤ Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of Sustainable Communities - \$11.1 million
Housing & Neighborhoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Affordable Housing Tax Credits backed by Private Activity Bond incentives ➤ Preserve National Housing Trust Fund, funded from government-sponsored-enterprises ➤ National Park Service (NPS) Land & Water Conservation Fund grants - \$900 million ➤ Preserve Transit Oriented Development and Local Project Eligibility in the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) program and the Railroad Rehabilitation & Improvement Financing (RRIF) program ➤ Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) - \$3 billion ➤ HOME Investment Partnership program grants - \$1.6 billion ➤ Rural Housing Assistance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Housing Preservation Grants - \$5 million ○ Rural Housing Grants - \$28.7 million ➤ Housing Trust Fund (HTF) - \$3.5 billion

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Supportive Housing for the Elderly - \$533 million ➤ Indian Community Development Block Grant program - \$56 million
<p>Infrastructure Investment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Community-scale and priority transportation projects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Department of Transportation (DOT) Transportation Alternatives Program - \$900 million ○ Department of Transportation (DOT) The Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grants - \$2.5 billion ○ Passenger Rail: Sustain the Amtrak Passenger Rail system, including the national network, state-supported routes, and the northeast corridor - \$1.5 billion or greater and fund Consolidated Rail Infrastructure Safety Improvements (CRISI) and Restoration and Enhancement Grant (REG) programs at authorized levels ○ Federal Transit Administration (FTA) transit levels - \$2.45 billion annually between FY19-FY20 ○ Reauthorize transportation programs to repair our infrastructure and build smart new projects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Create Regional Infrastructure/Financing Banks (via TIFIA) ➤ Broadband Internet Access <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gigabit Zone broadband deployments by USDA/EDA - \$2.5 billion ➤ Water Infrastructure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Clean Water Fund grants - \$9 billion ○ Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Drinking Water Fund grants - \$5 billion ○ Create Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Integrated Water Infrastructure grants - \$25 million ○ Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act \$35-50 million for FY18-19

Appendix: Detailed Strategies of “First & Main”

The “First & Main” coalition proposes thirty-six (36) federal strategies that would make a major difference in America’s small, midsized, and tribal communities, grouped into five key areas:

I. Redevelopment and Revitalization

- 1) **Preserve Tax-Exempt Municipal Bonds:** Local governments join with the private sector to call on Congress to preserve, and not cap, the critical infrastructure tool of tax-exempt municipal bonds, which have supported \$3.2 trillion in infrastructure, school and health/hospital investments in the past decade, and are the key source for future local public works investment.
- 2) **Preserve New Market Tax Credits:** The federal government should maintain and improve the New Market Tax Credits to leverage private investment in community revitalization in struggling localities.
- 3) **Preserve Historic Preservation Tax Credits:** The federal government should maintain the Historic Preservation Tax Credits, as they are essential for quality community redevelopment.
- 4) **Create Neighborhood Rehabilitation and Investment Tax Credits:** The federal government should create a tax benefit that accelerates private capital investment in rehabilitating existing buildings and repairing neighborhood infrastructure to create walkable, healthier communities.
- 5) **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfields Revitalization:** Congress should reauthorize the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Brownfields program and provide the authorized amount of \$250 million annually for U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) brownfields area-wide planning, assessment, cleanup, and workforce development.



- 6) **Implement Opportunity Zones That Work For All Communities:** The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act created a new community development program aimed at encouraging long-term private capital investment in America’s low-income urban and rural communities. The federal Opportunity Zones program provides three scalable tax incentives for investors to re-invest their unrealized capital gains into Opportunity Funds dedicated to investing in distressed communities. If properly utilized, the Opportunity Zones program will contribute to community revitalization and economic development efforts. To ensure the Opportunity Zones program delivers on its promise to improve lives by improving communities, First & Main will work to guide the real-world implementation and execution of the Opportunity Zones program.

II. Local Economic Development

- 1.) Economic Development Administration:** Congress should appropriate \$275 million annually for Economic Development Administration (EDA) Public Works, Economic Adjustment, manufacturing, regional innovation, and planning projects. These funds help accelerate small-scale manufacturing and provide communities with assistance to create sustainable economic growth opportunities through locally driven initiatives. The EDA provides grants for planning, technical assistance, and infrastructure construction that communities can use to leverage further resources.
- 2.) U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development:** Congress should fund the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development program by appropriating the authorized levels in the Agriculture Act of 2014 for Community Facilities, Rural Business Development, Rural Cooperative Service, and other key programs, at an annual level of \$2.33 billion. Reforms are also needed in order to fund the projects that uphold the long-term goals and vision of a community, sustain the community's ongoing needs for the life of the project, and improve residents' access to daily necessities.
- 3.) Expand Appalachian Community Renewal:** Congress and the Administration should expand bipartisan support for planning and implementation grants, infrastructure upgrades, and job training programs at the Appalachian Regional Commission, EDA, and the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), by providing \$1 billion annually and instituting reforms to ensure the best projects receive funding.
- 4.) Manufacturing Extension Partnerships:** The Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) is the only public-private partnership created to serve U.S. manufacturers, with a focus on small- and mid-sized enterprises (representing 99% of all U.S. manufacturing firms). When local government leaders need to help their current manufacturers or to attract new manufacturing, they turn to the MEP. More than 88,000 manufacturers have worked with MEP, leading to \$100 billion in sales, \$16 billion in cost savings, and 800,000 manufacturing jobs. Congress should continue the investment in the valuable MEP manufacturing program, providing \$150 million annually for the 51 MEP centers located in every state and Puerto Rico.
- 5.) Department of Labor (DOL) Apprentice Grants and Promise Grants:** These programs support workers with training and apprenticeships. American workers continue to struggle to advance and maintain family-wage jobs, while U.S. companies continue to seek a talented workforce. DOL should continue and boost Apprenticeship grant programs at \$100 million annually and the America's Promise Job-Driven grant program for innovative job training partnerships at \$100 million annually.



III. Rebuilding Downtown & Core Areas

National policies and resources can unleash community revitalization, economic development, and creation and the creation of healthy, vibrant downtowns and neighborhoods. These goals can be furthered by federal investments in:

- 1.) Create a Public Square Initiative:** Congress and the Administration should launch a new “Public Square” initiative to provide \$100 million in National Park Service grants that are leveraged by local government, philanthropic, and crowdfunding resources, to support the design and construction of public spaces such as parks, recreational areas, community centers, public waterfronts, and public squares.
- 2.) Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Neighborhood Renewal:** Congress should improve and expand to \$1 billion annually the HUD Choice Neighborhoods Program, including both Planning-Action and Implementation Grants, to support struggling communities and provide necessary resources for neighborhood renewal.
- 3.) Create a Department of Housing and Urban Development “Anchor Institution Initiative”:** Anchor institutions, including hospitals and healthcare systems, colleges, universities, and cultural institutions, are driving economic development, job creation, and private investments in the struggling communities they serve. America’s cities and towns call for the creation of a new “Anchor Institutions Initiative” at HUD that would provide \$25 million annually for \$250,000 strategic planning grants to communities to boost economic development and revitalization in neighborhoods with key local anchors.
- 4.) National Endowment for the Arts Public Arts Grants:** Local communities use the arts to boost creativity, raise property values, drive economic development and revitalization, reduce crime and blight, and enhance education for children and families. Congress should continue to support National Endowment for the Arts programs at \$150 million annually.
- 5.) U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of Sustainable Communities:** Congress should fund this office at \$11.1 million to support locally led, community-driven efforts to revitalize local economies and attain better environmental and human health outcomes. This includes technical assistance that includes economic and fiscal health, downtown revitalization and the expansion and leveraging of broadband internet access.



IV. Housing & Neighborhoods

Localities need tools to leverage private funding to improve health outcomes and local quality of life in struggling communities. The federal government can support redevelopment and livability with:

- 1.) Affordable Housing Tax Credits:** These tax credits are the single most important resource for financing affordable housing, creating opportunities for low-income Americans, and incentivizing private investment in the development and preservation of affordable housing projects. Congress should preserve the 9% and 4% credits for private investments, and the tax-exempt private-activity bond program. With a recently lowered corporate tax rate, this tax credit is less valuable, which means that Congress should shore up this incentive through approaches such as accelerating the time period to claim the credit, increasing their percentage against qualified basis, and other approaches.
- 2.) Preserve National Housing Trust Fund:** Preserve, as authorized, and ensure that annual payments from Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac continue to support the federal National Housing Trust Fund, which is critical to the development and preservation of affordable housing projects.
- 3.) The National Park Service (NPS) Land & Water Conservation Fund:** This program invests earnings from offshore oil and gas leasing to help strengthen communities, preserve our history, and protect our national endowment of land and waters using zero taxpayer dollars. Congress should permanently authorize and provide the full authorized amount of \$900 million annually, including \$155 million in State and Local Assistance Grants, to continue its bipartisan commitment to support recreational planning, acquiring lands and waters, and developing outdoor recreational facilities.
- 4.) Preserve transit-oriented development and local project eligibility in the Transportation Infrastructure Financing and Innovation Act (TIFIA) and Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing (RRIF) loan programs** to ensure local communities can realize the full economic and health benefits of their investments in infrastructure and livable communities.
- 5.) Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)** provides communities with resources that can be used for a variety of needs, including infrastructure, housing, and community revitalization. Congress should continue to provide \$3 billion annually for this critical program.
- 6.) The HOME Investment Partnership program** provides formula grants to States and localities that communities use - often in partnership with local nonprofit groups - to invest in affordable housing for rent or homeownership or to provide direct rental assistance to low-income people. Investments include building, buying, and/or rehabilitating affordable



housing. HOME is the largest Federal block grant to state and local governments designed exclusively to create affordable housing for low-income households. Congress should provide \$1.6 billion for this important program.

- 7.) Rural housing assistance, including the Housing Preservation Grants program and Rural Housing Grants** provide funding to local governments, nonprofits, and tribal communities, for the repair or rehabilitation of housing occupied by low and very low income people. Congress should ensure communities can continue to provide these services by allocating \$5 million for Housing Preservation Grants and \$28.7 million for Rural Housing Grants.
- 8.) The Housing Trust Fund (HTF)** complements existing federal, state and local efforts to increase and preserve the supply of decent, safe, and sanitary affordable housing for extremely low- and very low-income households, including homeless families. HTF funds may be used for the acquisition, new construction, reconstruction, and/or rehabilitation of non-luxury housing with suitable amenities. Congress should provide at least \$3.5 billion.
- 9.) Supportive Housing for the Elderly**, known as the Section 202 program, helped expand the supply of affordable housing with supportive services for the elderly. It provided direct loans and capital advances to build housing for very low-income elderly and provided seniors with options that allow them to live independently but in an environment that provides support activities such as cleaning, cooking, transportation, and others. Although no new funding has been available for Section 202 capital advances since 2012, affordable senior housing developments that were built with Section 202 funds continue to provide housing and services to their residents. Congress should provide at least \$533 million to fully fund and expand this program.
- 10.) Indian Community Development Block Grant (ICDBG) program** provides direct grants for use in developing viable Indian and Alaska Native Communities, including decent housing, a suitable living environment, and economic opportunities, primarily for low and moderate income persons. Congress should allocate \$56 million for this important program.

Infrastructure Investment

Local government leaders urge the Administration and Congress to provide resources and support to small and medium sized communities seeking to improve their infrastructure through:

1.) Community-scale and priority

transportation projects: Localities welcome national incentives for private investment in infrastructure. Yet, federal transportation policy cannot leave community-scale projects in small and medium localities behind, as these projects may not be large or lucrative enough to be underwritten and financed by complex private-public transactions. Key community-scale projects include roads and bridges essential for economic development opportunities, complete street upgrades, public transit projects, transit-oriented development, and walking/biking trails to connect communities. Infrastructure authorizations and programs should support community-scale infrastructure approaches through expanded public works resources such as:



- **Transportation Alternatives Program** grants to support safe, walkable, connected streets, trails, and other transportation investments, budgeted at over \$900 million annually under the current Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act.
- \$2.5 billion annually for **U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) TIGER grants**, including TIGER Planning grants. DOT should commit to provide a fair share of TIGER grants to medium-sized communities.
- **Passenger rail and related investment programs** provide critical connections between small communities and economic opportunities. Amtrak relies on federal support to run its national network. Congress should sustain the Amtrak Passenger Rail system, including the national network, state-supported routes, and the northeast corridor at \$1.5 billion or greater and fund the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure Safety Improvements (CRISI) and Restoration and Enhancement Grant (REG) programs at FAST Act authorized levels. These grant programs ensure Amtrak can make necessary improvements to maintain and expand the national passenger rail network.
- **Fund Federal Transit Administration (FTA) programs** to support locally-driven transportation options that connect communities and provide access to jobs and opportunity for residents. The bipartisan FAST Act authorized \$2.45 billion annually between FY19-FY20 for those FTA programs not covered by the highway trust fund.
- **Reauthorize and reform transportation programs** to repair existing infrastructure and build smart new community-scale projects, and **ensure the long-term stability of the highway trust fund** to maintain economic development opportunities.
- **Create Regional Infrastructure Financing Banks** (via TIFIA and RRIF) to allow regions and local governments in need of greater capacity to finance infrastructure and

redevelopment projects. Too often federal financing programs are too burdensome and costly. To level the playing field for local communities and stakeholders to access TIFIA and RRIF financing, Congress should consider expanding eligible applicants to include lenders and capital funds, while expanding project eligibility to include public and privately sponsored infrastructure revolving funds, including transit-oriented development revolving funds.

2.) Broadband internet access through gigabit zones: EDA and/or USDA should provide \$2.5 billion annually in grants and low-cost loan support to cities and rural areas for planning, engineering and deployment of gigabit-speed broadband systems in under-served areas and economic opportunity zones. Increasingly, access to the internet means access to economic opportunity. These investments ensure the people of America's small and mid-sized communities can enjoy the economic opportunities available online.

3.) Water infrastructure funding & integrated water infrastructure approaches:

- Congress should expand funding for **State Clean Water & Drinking Water Revolving Funds** to \$5 billion annually for drinking water and \$9 billion annually for clean water.
- Congress should create an **integrated water infrastructure program** that streamlines and harmonizes complicated clean water requirements for sanitary sewer, combined sewer, and stormwater infrastructure systems, including a 50-pilot initiative to deploy these common-sense approaches, funded at \$25 million annually.
- **The Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act** helps communities make investments in our nation's water infrastructure by providing long-term, low-cost loans for regionally and nationally significant projects. Congress should address the need for renewed water infrastructure by providing funding at authorized levels for FY18-19.

