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Getting downtown's ducks in a row

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For those who have always wanted to help revitalize downtown — and those tired of hearing everybody just talk about it — the time has come to take action.

Bridgett Roberts, executive director of the Johnson City Development Authority, is giving a presentation at 6 p.m. Tuesday on the state's Main Street program. She will overview the process and its benefits — most prominent of which is organization conducive to action.

"There's so much energy here," she said. "Let's focus it and get our ducks in a row."

Main Street has been in place for 20 years nationwide, but was cut at the state level under the previous governor. Now reinstated, it is a model to be followed that can result in official recognition by the state. Certified communities have access to technical assistance and expertise in developing long-term strategies that promote economic growth and development.

Roberts will explain Tuesday how those interested can have a hand in downtown redevelopment. Suggestions all stem from Main Street's 10 criteria: broad-based community support; vision and mission statements relevant to community conditions; a comprehensive Main Street work plan; a historic preservation ethic; an active board of directors and committees; an adequate operating budget; a paid, professional executive director; a program of ongoing training for staff and volunteers; a reporting system of key statistics; and membership in the National Trust's Main Street Network Program.

"There are so many different ways to get involved," she said.

For instance, those who enjoy writing can interview downtown business owners for the Friends of Olde Downtown newsletter. Some can take pictures of buildings to use in an inventory database. Others can help plan First Friday and the Blue Plum Festival.

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Downtown property owners can commit to making improvements to their buildings, she added.

“If your neighbor improves his building, your property value is going to go up. Everybody knows that,” she said. “But if you don’t do anything to yours, you’re going to stick out like a sore thumb. So, you’re going to want to be a part of this process.”

Since the program is not state-funded, it must be supported by the entire community, including local government and private business. The City Commission presented a resolution in support of Main Street at its Thursday meeting.

“We all have to work together. It cannot work if we don’t all work together,” Roberts said.

Tuesday’s meeting will be hosted by the Downtown Neighborhood Association at the Johnson City Public Library. It will begin at 6 p.m. with the slide presentation “Rebuilding the Railroad Town: Johnson City.”

DNA acts as a collective voice for downtown residents, business and property owners. For more information, call Karen Heaton at 232-0061 or e-mail kheaton.lbrtax@charterinternet.com.

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