

Thriving Through Construction: Tips, Best Practices and Resources

Presented by:

The City of Montevallo
Montevallo Chamber of Commerce



Project Co-sponsored by:
City of Montevallo
Montevallo Water Board
Montevallo Development Cooperative District



DATE: October 19, 2015
TO: Montevallo Business and Property Owners
FROM: Mayor Hollie Cost
RE: Downtown Montevallo Revitalization

We are all very excited about the upcoming improvements to our historic downtown. We understand these improvements, while critically important to our future, will create short-term challenges which we must work together to overcome. Over the past year or so, we've been meeting with local businesses, property owners and other area stakeholders in an effort to prepare ourselves as best we can to meet these challenges. As part of that effort, we've examined other communities to learn lessons from their successful downtown revitalization projects. Of key importance, we've learned that being properly prepared for the revitalization process can help us all not only to survive, but thrive!

Thriving Through Construction: Tips, Best Practices and Resources is designed to share some of the ways other businesses, property owners, cities and community stakeholders have turned the challenges they faced during similar projects into opportunities, not just surviving but actually thriving! Hopefully, if you haven't already begun to prepare, this publication will give you some ideas where to begin. If you've already started, we hope this guide will help you take your preparations to the next level. We all need to be as prepared as possible before construction begins.

For our part, our city officials and employees, engineers and architects, and our construction managers and crews are all committed to doing their very best to help minimize the disturbance and other adverse impacts on your businesses. Please remember, as with any project of this size and scope, unforeseen issues can arise which will change construction timelines or alter other plans. While we can't fully prevent those types of occurrences, we will work diligently to communicate any and all changes to you and all of our community stakeholders in a timely fashion. In addition, we are committed to regular open meetings to discuss challenges and keep you current on all plans.

As you can imagine, preparing to thrive through a construction project such as this is not easy. It takes time, it takes effort, and yes, it takes money. But most importantly, it takes commitment – commitment on all of our parts to work together to keep our customers served and those cash registers ringing. We can't do this for you and we can't do it without you.

We look forward to working with you and appreciate your continued support.

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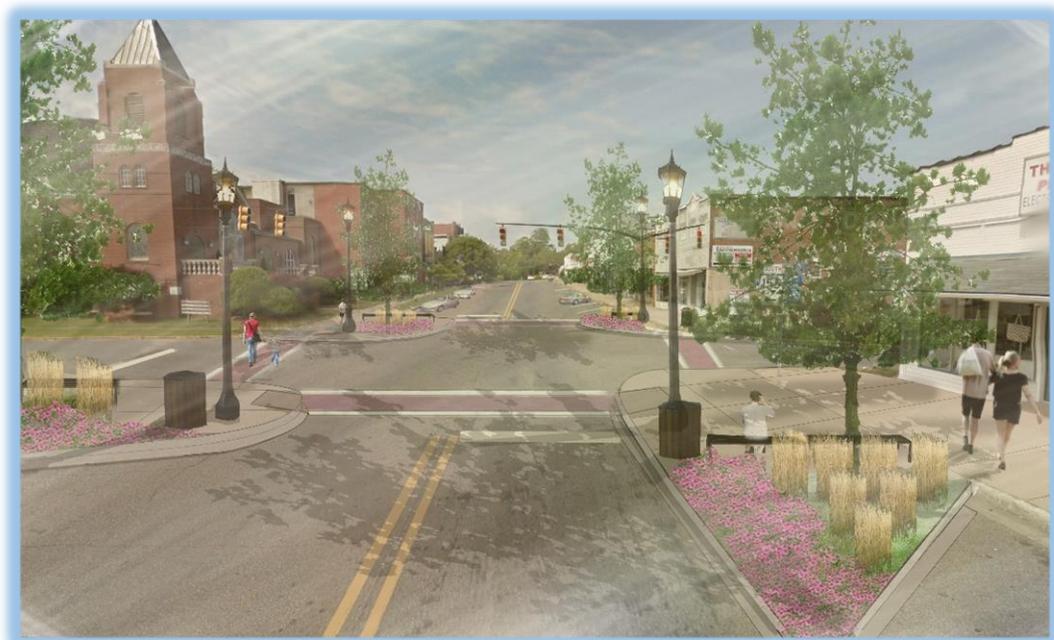
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Our Shared Vision

Getting from this:



To this:



Project Description

Thanks to federal highway funding made available to us through the Alabama Department of Transportation, the City of Montevallo is about to begin a long overdue downtown revitalization project. The project area will run along Main Street from Bloch St to the bridge at West St and along Middle Street from Main to Valley St. The Main Street portion of the project is anticipated to result in approximately \$3 million in improvements to our downtown. The Middle Street portion is expected to add another \$500,000 in improvements to our community.

The project will improve the appearance of downtown. Our streetscape will be designed with historically appropriate lighting, improved landscaping, spacious sidewalks, and new paving. However, the real work involves those things you won't necessarily be able to see. For instance, most of the utility poles that line Main Street will be removed or repositioned to clean-up the view down Main Street. We will improve or replace water and sewer lines which run beneath Main Street. We will also be making certain our sidewalks, parking spaces and crossings meet ADA requirements and in the process make it safer and easier for all pedestrians to cross Main Street. Similarly, parking along Main Street and Middle Street will be redesigned to make it easier to see oncoming traffic as you back out. All of this is designed to help make downtown Montevallo a safe, inviting place people will want to visit again and again.

Construction Notes

- The plans call for the contractor to begin working on the east side of Main Street (McDonald's side)
- Contractors should construct the improvements block by block, substantially completing each block before moving to the next.
- Once the east side is complete, the contractor should begin on the west side using the same process.
- Project Note 709 requires that "The Contractor shall maintain at least one access to businesses and residences during all phases of construction."
- Please keep in mind that ALDOT has the authority to make changes (or allow the contractor to make changes) to the construction sequence during construction to allow the contractor to modify our planned approach if they think it will benefit the project.

City and Chamber Support

What we can do for you

- Provide you with the most current project information available.
- Provide signage to direct customers to your business.
- Work together to structure a shuttle service for your customers if needed during construction.
- Assist with marketing for your business.

What we can't do for you

- Market events we don't know about
- Create advertisement campaigns for individual businesses

What we've already done for you

- Secured a significant promotion budget to market our Montevallo business districts
- Secured a van that can be used for shuttle services if needed
- Hired a city marketing director
- Created a Facebook page and a city app that provides valuable marketing space for your business and serves as a conduit for construction information
- Partnered with Greater Shelby County Chamber of Commerce enabling you to access
 - Business planning platforms
 - Skills training for employees
 - A coupon creation template
- Committed to spend \$700,000 on downtown infrastructure improvement.
- Created “The Montevallo Project” to support Montevallo’s economic growth and development.

Tips and Best Practices

Communication

- ✓ Make plans to attend public meetings and information sessions
- ✓ Information will be shared through city app, Chamber google group, City Facebook page and the City Website.
- ✓ Projects can and will change. Attending meetings will ensure that you have the most current information and can adapt your business accordingly.
- ✓ Make sure appropriate staff attend meetings with you and/or you share all pertinent information to any and all staff impacted by construction

Spread the Word

- ✓ Use email and social media to inform customers of easy access routes.
- ✓ Consider sending weekly or bi-monthly emails to your customers so they remain informed and do not change buying habits.
- ✓ Don't forget the phone
 - Consider keeping a script, construction fact sheet, or updated FAQ by the phone so that all staff can offer, easy, and accurate customer service.
- ✓ Continue to find ways to inform customers of project progress and highlight days when travel is easiest

Cultivate Relationships

- ✓ Get to know superintendent(s) and local officials
- ✓ Consider providing water or refreshments to construction crews. They could be your customers and a happy worker is an efficient worker.
- ✓ Local crew will share the most current/up to date information with city leaders who, in-turn will share it with you.

Plan Ahead

Your staff is the face of your business and should be just as informed as you are about any impact construction will have on business access. Make sure your employees have directions and access to information about alternate routes, parking, etc. as well as where to go to get updated information.

Make sure your staff does not make the area more congested. Consider working with other merchants and local organizations (i.e. churches, the university) to offer off-site parking and carpooling options during appropriate times.

Customer Education & Accommodation

- Actively find ways to make it easier for customers to get to you
- Promote public parking and make sure customers know where it is
- If necessary or possible, promote back entrance and visually draw attention to this entrance prior to construction
- Offer extended or adjusted hours to be accessible during times of light or no construction
- Increase in-store signage – make it bigger and change/rotate on a regular basis

Find Ways to Bring Your Product or Service to Customers

- Consider offering delivery and/or drop-off points
- Keep track of regular purchases by loyal customers and take initiative to contact them to arrange purchases
- Consider collaborating with other businesses to develop a weekend market in Merchant's Alley or elsewhere in town.

Diversify

- Consider offering new products or services that will create more customer interest, weighing this with the expense of adding a new offering.
- For product-based businesses, can you offer a service that compliments your product?
 - Services often have higher profit margins
- Consider partnering with another local business to co-market your product/service (i.e. progressive lunch, nails and haircut).
- Take advantage of all city events to market your products (i.e. Artwalks, Cars by the Creek, Critters by the Creek, Art Festivals, Youth and University sporting events)

Create a United Front

- Utilize cooperative advertising
- Communicate with other merchants to share experiences and strategies
- Remain positive with customers in all interactions
- Attend all informational meetings and include staff

Staff Appropriately

Make sure you create a plan for various scenarios. Also, consider keeping a file of employment applications and having a line-up of interested applicants in case you are faced with employee turnover. If necessary, gradually begin cutting back staffing hours. Keep employees informed of potential cutbacks and have ongoing, open and candid communication.

After your employees learn of the changes coming your way, talk with them about strategies to stay prosperous during construction. Discuss marketing plans and ask for employee feedback. Actively engage them about their concerns and ideas. Your staff will likely appreciate the opportunity and such dialogue can spark new ideas to benefit the business.

Business Signage

Temporary signs may be needed to provide easier access to your business during construction. The City will provide you with information regarding the process to secure temporary signage. It is important that you consult with the city **before** you order and place signage. Information regarding temporary signage will be available at City Hall or on the City's website at www.cityofmontevallo.com.

Three types of temporary business signs

1. Driveway signs – tell motorists where to turn (These signs will be available through the City and will be placed during construction.)
2. Alternate business access – place in advance of intersections to inform motorists where to turn. Business provides name placard, which project contractor installs below alternate business access sign. (These will also be available through the City.)
3. Directional signs – these are used to direct motorists to use a side street to access business (These signs are to be provided and placed at the discretion of the business owners upon approval.)

Tried and True Marketing Strategies

Establish Online Presence

- Make sure all information is correct
- Create or update business profile so that it will generate interest from customers or potential customers
- Encourage and monitor all online reviews – especially encourage notes about accommodations and special arrangements during construction

Utilize Email Consistently – Incoming & Outgoing

- Begin a contact list IMMEDIATELY if you haven't already
- Use email to update customers on traffic/parking conditions, delivery options, changes in hours of operation, and any specials

Consider this!

- Make Facebook your best friend
- Begin generating “likes” **NOW** if you haven't already
- Provide daily updates on construction and accessibility tips
- Keep customers informed of delivery/drop-off options
- Promote specials & consider promoting a daily product and/or service highlight
- Use this opportunity to make connections with customers
- Use Facebook to take informal polls, encourage customers to ask questions & encourage positive comments
- Create posts that will attract attention from people who are not current customers
- Encourage current customers to “share” your post to their online community
- Support other businesses in your community by “liking” and making positive comments on their posts and ask them to do the same for you

- Provide customer tips and product/service education on your Facebook and web page – this will help create long term loyalty

Cooperative Paid Advertising

- Pool resources for more impact such as collective print ads, flyers, radio, etc.

Create Construction Project Specials

- Create discounts in line with a construction theme (for example 10% of all orange products)
- Create a friendly rapport with construction staff – they may be your customers!
- Consider supplying ice-water during hot days or other supportive gestures. It is important to remember that these workers are following instructions from their supervisors with the end result being improvements in our community!
 - In order to get the best results, any construction concerns should be addressed through official contacts supplied in this guide or as updated by the City
- Get creative

For example: A business in another area going through road improvements had a construction worker sit outside the shop during posted times to talk to kids and families about the progress taking place. The trucks and equipment were a big draw and created a wholesome family environment.

Other Ideas

- Offer discounts on slow moving inventory
- Create a frequency program – encourage multiple sales or visits

- Have a punch card or business card where multiple visits and purchases can be marked. After a certain number of visits or purchases the customer receives a free item
- Have a consistent look and message (branding)
- Use similar color scheme, logos, slogans
- Run ads on a regular basis
- Promote your biggest advantages
 - Identify your competitive advantage and market it like crazy (for example, do you deliver, are you locally owned, etc.)
- Make sure it's something of high value to customers
 - Host classes or information sessions to create relationships and generate interest
 - Provide demonstrations
 - Offer educational programs

Budgeting

Before Construction Begins

- Use last season's sales as a guide for what to project this season
- Keep track of sales and see how they compare throughout the season
- Current financial information helps prevent surprises
- Some businesses secure lines of credit in advance to prepare for the unexpected.

Evaluate Expenses

- Look for areas where you can save
 - Start with utilities, phone, internet, insurance, merchant services, payroll, etc.
 - Inventory (again, review last season's sales and don't overstock what didn't sell)
- Frequent observation and diligent organization make it easier to respond quickly to customer needs
- Ramping up the monitoring of inventory will especially help during times of progress.
 - Shop around for best pricing on supplies, materials, inventory, etc.
- Consider allocating funds to minimize construction disruption
 - More money might be needed for cleaning during certain phases of construction. Even though there is little you can do to reduce noise and dust from construction you can focus on minimizing dust and debris in your business area
- DO NOT cut marketing and advertising!
- Know what your breakeven point is
 - Will help to gauge success on an ongoing basis

Resources and Contacts

- ❑ MVP Construction Season Business Support Grant
- ❑ City of Montevallo Facebook Page
- ❑ Montevallo Chamber of Commerce Facebook Page
- ❑ University of Montevallo Volunteers, servicelearning@montevallo.edu
- ❑ Montevallo Chamber of Commerce
 - Director: Steve Gilbert
 - montevallochamber@gmail.com
 - (205) 665-1519,
- ❑ City of Montevallo
 - Marketing Director: Sarah Hogan ; shogan@cityofmontevallo.com
 - City Clerk: Herman Lehman; hlehman@cityofmontevallo.com
 - Mayor: Hollie Cost hcost@cityofmontevallo.com
 - (205) 665-2555



Preparation Checklist

- Consider an alternate entrance
- Apply for temporary business signage
- Evaluate staffing needs
- Develop and place signage (interior and exterior)
- Create rapport with construction workers
- Post directions and access information for staff
- Look into social media options
- Develop alternate plans for products or services (delivery, other venues, etc.)
- Contact city to discuss shuttle service if needed
- Know your message and keep it current
- Mark public meetings on calendar
- Consider varying store hours
- Be positive – these are your tax dollars hard at work, improving your community and the result will be remarkable!