



# **STRATEGIC PLAN** for the **ARDMORE INITIATIVE** 2018-2023



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# PLAN SNAPSHOT



## NEW MISSION STATEMENT

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“The mission of the Ardmore Initiative is to **manage the business improvement district** in Ardmore, PA...”

SEE PAGE 9



## NEW VISION STATEMENT

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“Our vision for downtown Ardmore is to create a **welcoming, walkable, and inclusive** downtown...”

SEE PAGE 9

## FOUR STRATEGIES FOR DOWNTOWN ARDMORE



### 1. Experiential Retail

“Examples of experiential retail include retail shops that offer in-store classes on how to use their products, social opportunities such as wine or food tastings, and hybrid-retail concepts such as a coffee shop doubling as a bookstore...”

**SEE PAGE 15**



### 2. Family Friendly: Family Serving

“Businesses can create an environment more inclusive to families by offering incentives such as kids eat free, in-store play areas, and back-to-school sales...”

**SEE PAGE 17**



### 3. Specialty Food & Dining

“Ardmore residents are committed ‘foodies’ and want more opportunities to run downtown to purchase ethnic, vegetarian, organic or specialty foods for a weekday dinner or special occasion...”

**SEE PAGE 21**



### 4. Organizational Sustainability

“To reach the ambitious goal of a \$400,000 organizational budget by 2023, the Board must determine how to solidify existing revenue sources and continue to diversify its fundraising...”

**SEE PAGE 23**

# INTRODUCTION

The Ardmore Initiative (AI) is ready to begin work on a new five-year Strategic Plan for its downtown revitalization work for 2018-2023. Since the commercial district revitalization program was established using the Main Street Four Point Approach™ in 1988, the Ardmore Initiative's Board of Directors, volunteers, and staff have worked hard to enhance the downtown commercial district. In 1993, Ardmore Initiative was designated as a municipal business district authority by Lower Merion Township. Ardmore Initiative's charter was renewed in 1998, 2003, 2008, and most recently in 2013 for a ten-year period.

In spring 2016, the Ardmore Initiative received a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development to conduct a Market Study and Strategic Plan for the Ardmore Business District. The Ardmore Initiative conducted the Market Study and Business Recruitment Plan in-house, and, through a competitive RFP process, enlisted Heritage Consulting Inc. to complete the Strategic Plan, as well as advise on the Market Study, Focus Groups and Business Recruitment Plan.

Throughout the last ten years, the Ardmore Initiative has been promoting downtown Ardmore's variety of retail, restaurants, and service businesses, hosting special events and retail events, helping existing businesses expand while recruiting new ones, and marketing and communicating about the downtown and the organization. The organization works in close cooperation with the Ardmore Business Association (ABA), which also hosts special events in the downtown that are community focused.

The variety of projects and services undertaken by the Ardmore Initiative are funded in part by a special real estate assessment on each commercial property within the business district boundaries based on the assessed value of the property. The payment of the annual assessment is enforceable in the same manner as municipal real estate tax assessments.

The commercial district subject to the special real estate assessment includes the east-west boundaries of the district extended from Wyoming Avenue and 333 West Lancaster Avenue on the western end to 233 East Lancaster and 218 East Lancaster Avenue on the eastern end. The northern boundary follows the railroad tracks, and the southern boundary proceeds along Rittenhouse Place up to and including 30 East Athens Avenue, and along Cricket Avenue up to 123 Cricket Avenue. The district also includes the commercial properties along Greenfield Avenue.

More than 10% of the 2017 \$300,000 operating budget of the organization comes from sources other than the BID assessment. This \$35,000 sum comes from a variety of revenue sources including: an annual appropriation from the Township of Lower Merion, sponsorships, event vendor fees, board member contributions, fundraising events, grants from area foundations, corporations and government entities, and community fundraising appeals.

**The Ardmore Initiative hosts annual seasonal events including Ardmore Oktoberfest.**



The Ardmore Initiative has a history of creating strong and enduring Strategic Plans and using market-based information to assist the management of the business mix downtown. The most recent Market Analysis and Business Recruitment Plan for downtown Ardmore was undertaken in 2008 at the start of the Great Recession. This report

provided excellent guidance on changes to the retail business mix and the report's suggestions on business recruitment have resulted in the creation of Ardmore as a well-known downtown dining destination with more than 45 restaurants that serve all price points. The 2008 Market Analysis also identified home furnishings as another market niche to expand.

### Map of Ardmore Business District



The recently completed 2017 Market Analysis and Business Recruitment Plan prepared by Marie Suvansin, Assistant Executive Director of AI, was guided by a steering committee.

**Participants at the SWOT Analysis meeting posted their thoughts and ideas about downtown Ardmore.**

facets of the research leading up to the creation of this new Strategic Plan. This 2018-2023 Strategic Plan represents the next phase in the Ardmore Initiative's organizational development.

**Stakeholders listen to presentations at the Ardmore Initiative's 2017 Leadership Breakfast and Annual Meeting.**

## RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

These research activities for this 2018-2023 Strategic Plan for the Ardmore Initiative included six activities, which are outlined below.

### 1. Customer Survey

A Downtown Ardmore Customer Survey was organized by Marie Suvansin, Assistant Executive Director of AI. The survey was open for four weeks from August 31, 2016 to October 4, 2016. This survey had a very large response rate with more than 704 completed surveys. The survey provided critical demographic and market data about the current Ardmore downtown shoppers. Heritage Consulting Inc. analyzed the survey data and produced a 141-page report, which was circulated to the AI Board of Directors in February 2017. The Downtown Ardmore Customer Survey was the subject of the annual Leadership Breakfast in March 3, 2017, where Ms. Suvansin made a presentation about the survey results.

### 2. SWOT Analysis

A SWOT Analysis was held on June 15, 2017. This three-hour evening meeting gathered input from 27 participants including AI Board members, downtown merchants, property owners, several representatives from the Ardmore Business Association, Lower Merion Township planning and economic development staff and several members of the Lower Merion Board of Commissioners. Heritage Consulting Inc. prepared a summary memo that offered observations and recommendations for solving several specific short and medium-term problems on June 30, 2017.

### 3. Focus Groups

To fill gaps from the Downtown Ardmore Customer Survey, Ms. Suvansin conducted five Focus Groups in May 2017. Thirty-five (35) people participated, and represented a cross-section of existing customers, potential customers, and demographic cohorts with poor survey response rate. As an extension of the Customer Survey, the focus groups gathered richer, more thorough responses. Heritage Consulting provided guidance on the invitees, the script for the focus groups, and read a draft of the final report prepared by Ms. Suvansin in June of 2017.

### 4. Visioning & Strategic Planning Workshop

A Visioning and Strategic Planning Workshop was held on November 1, 2017 with 18 attendees. This two-and-a-half-hour-long session included three AI Board members, business owners, key volunteers, one Ardmore Business Association representative and a Township official. At the workshop, all participants received a memo and heard a report about the Market Analysis work conducted by Ms. Suvansin. During the workshop, we reviewed the current mission statement and reviewed lists of possible projects that fit within the Transformation Strategies. By refining specific projects within each of the Transformation Strategies, the group helped to further refine the organization's preferred future.

### 5. Market Analysis & Business Recruitment Plan

A Market Analysis and Business Recruitment Plan was completed by Ms. Suvansin in late 2017. Elements of the Business Recruitment Plan are included in this report.

### 6. Executive Committee Meeting

An Ardmore Initiative Executive Committee Meeting was held on November 7, 2017 and a Board of Directors meeting was held on November 14, 2017, during which the Board of Directors reviewed a draft of the Strategic Plan. Further refinements were made because of this meeting, and the Executive Committee reviewed the draft on December 7, 2017 and the Board of Directors reviewed the final draft on December 12, 2017.

### What is a Strategic Plan?

**Board Source™**, a national nonprofit organization whose mission is to advance the public good by building exceptional nonprofit boards and inspiring board service, defines a Strategic Plan as a written document that defines an organization's overarching strategies and major areas of work for the next five years to achieve the organization's mission.

Strategic Plans for nonprofit organizations are created through a process that builds on research to accumulate wisdom about the organization, its environment, and its economic potential. This process involves stakeholders to ensure that the resulting Strategic Plan contains a comprehensive understanding of the organization's preferred future.

## WHAT IS A MISSION STATEMENT?

A mission statement articulates where the organization is now, not where it will be at some desired point in the future. An ideal mission statement identifies why the organization exists, who benefits from it, what the organization does, and, finally, how it does what it does. A good mission statement conveys how the organization relates to its public and communities, why and how it enhances the well-being of others and improves quality of life, and, finally, what service it provides. A mission statement should be easily memorized, as it becomes a part of the “elevator speech” about the organization.

## CURRENT ARDMORE INITIATIVE MISSION STATEMENT

The Ardmore Initiative’s mission is to create and maintain a thriving, economically viable downtown business district for the benefit of merchants, residents, and visitors. The Ardmore Initiative achieves this by providing regular sidewalk cleaning, planting seasonal flowers, offering business assistance services, marketing and promoting the downtown, and advocating for the interests of business and property owners, among many other initiatives.

## OUR REVISED MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Ardmore Initiative is to manage the business improvement district in Ardmore, PA, to improve the business mix, to foster the preservation and development of downtown’s historic buildings, be an advocate for business and property owners, promote the downtown for the benefit of all Ardmore residents, and to partner with the Township of Lower Merion and area community organizations.

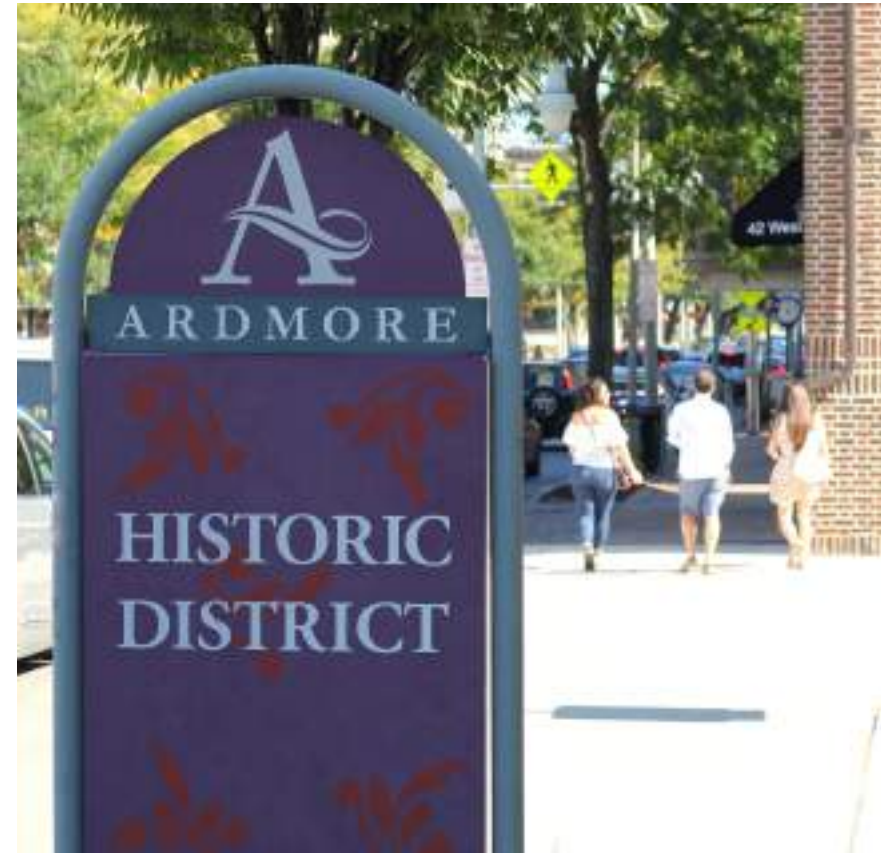
## WHAT IS A VISION STATEMENT?

A vision statement describes the preferred future of both the organization and commercial corridor after five years of work towards fulfilling the dreams of stakeholders. The vision statement should focus on the community impact and the power of the organization to transform downtown. A good vision statement is ambitious enough to force people out of comfortable routines and is conceptual but practical, taking advantage of fundamental trends from consumer research. A vision statement should be clear enough to articulate the visual changes in downtown.

## OUR VISION FOR DOWNTOWN ARDMORE IN 2023

Our vision for downtown Ardmore is to create a welcoming, walkable, and inclusive downtown that offers a vibrant business mix, including family-friendly independent and national retail stores and service businesses. Our specialty food shops and restaurants build on our already robust reputation as a regional dining destination. Downtown will serve as a vital destination for all Ardmore residents and visitors, with shops and eateries to meet every budget. Our yearlong calendar of well-regarded and highly anticipated special events will make memories for generations of Lower Merion residents and shoppers. Visit Destination Ardmore.

**Downtown Ardmore is recognized as a historic district and hub for independantly owned businesses.**



**Downtown Ardmore has something to offer shoppers of all ages.**



# 2018-2023 STRATEGIES for DOWNTOWN ARDMORE

The Ardmore Initiative will use the following strategies to implement projects over the next five years.

## 1. EXPERIENTIAL RETAIL

“Experiential retail” encompasses physical retail spaces utilizing an omnichannel approach to provide customers with authentic, personalized experiences. Examples of experiential retail include retail shops that offer in-store classes on how to use their products, social opportunities such as wine or food tastings, and hybrid-retail concepts such as a coffee shop doubling as a bookstore. Most importantly, experiential retail encourages strengthening both online presence and in-store customer service. For example, a boutique clothing store could sell inventory online while also offering complementary in-store personal styling. Through experiential retail, small business owners can compete in a world where most goods can now be purchased online.

## 2. FAMILY FRIENDLY FAMILY SERVING

Introducing family-friendly, family-serving promotions, events, and activities is a strategy for enhancing commercial vitality through increased foot traffic and customers in the door, especially in the early evenings and on Saturdays. Businesses can create an environment more inclusive to families by offering incentives such as kids eat free, in-store play areas, and back-to-school sales. Encouraging cross-promotion between businesses that service multiple family members, such as hair salons, toy stores, and restaurants, can also make the downtown more appealing to families. Considering the strong presence of families in the Main Line, it is important that family-friendly, family-serving remain at the top of mind for business owners.

## 3. SPECIALTY FOOD & DINING

In 2017, Ardmore had over 45 restaurants and a variety of retail outlets that sell specialty food products, but more can be done to offer customers natural, organic or sustainably sourced products and services to meet the needs of Ardmore residents who shop at different price points. Ardmore residents are committed “foodies” and want more opportunities to run downtown to purchase ethnic, vegetarian, organic, or specialty foods for a weekday dinner or a special occasion. Existing restaurants can increase their appeal to this foodie culture by naming their local ingredients and suppliers or revising their menus to focus on locally grown or raised products. Retail food purveyors can broaden their price points to appeal to a wider variety of customers.

## 4. ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

Today more than 10% of the Ardmore Initiative’s \$300,000 annual operating budget comes from non-Business Improvement District assessed sources and this revenue must continue to grow to support the organization’s ambitious programing as spelled out in this Strategic Plan. The BID assessments will rise in the next three years to an estimated \$325,000 as the three, mixed use, new construction projects are completed, and they begin paying their BID assessments. To reach the ambitious goal of a \$400,000 organizational budget by 2023, the Board must determine how to solidify existing revenue sources and continue to diversify its fundraising to enable the Ardmore Initiative to raise \$75,000 from sponsorships, special events, corporate contributions, and residential memberships by 2023.

The Transformation Strategies cited above provide overarching market-based strategies for the organization. These strategies need to be anchored into goals for the volunteer working groups that AI uses to marshal volunteers, partners, and staff to implement its many projects. Below is the Strategic Goal for each of the four AI strategies.

Families visit downtown Ardmore to shop and dine.



# 2018-2023 GOALS for each STRATEGY

## 1. EXPERIENTIAL RETAIL

The Ardmore Initiative will differentiate itself by promoting in-store and event-based consumer experiences to help our retailers, dining, and personal care businesses expand their profitability.

## 2. FAMILY FRIENDLY FAMILY SERVING

The downtown will cater to area families by expanding family friendly retail promotions and events, revising existing events or creating new special events, recruiting new businesses that cater to families, making upgrades in pedestrian safety, continuing to enhance the public realm, and making our diverse downtown attractive for everyone.

## 3. SPECIALTY FOOD & DINING

Enhance Ardmore as an outstanding regional dining destination. Encourage bars, restaurants, cafes, and food shops to meet the needs of area foodies by tweaking their offerings to focus on natural, organic or sustainably-sourced products for Ardmore's increasingly diverse residents who shop at a variety of price points.

## 4. ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

Ensure that the Ardmore Initiative has a highly functioning, full complement of Board members and superb Board leadership, employs quality staff, has diverse and expanding revenue sources, a growing volunteer corps, ample and appropriate partnerships, and communicates about the organization and the downtown on a regular basis.

## PURPOSE OF GOALS

The four Strategic Goals serve as the bridge to the new vision for the heart of Ardmore's downtown. All the short and longer-term projects, individually and collectively, drive the organization toward making this vision into a reality by allocating all its financial and volunteer resources accordingly.

All the activities and programs that the Ardmore Initiative will implement in the next five years, through the combination of board, staff, working groups, partners, and individual volunteers, must be aligned to achieve at least one (1) of the four (4) above Strategies and Goals. If a project does not *clearly* meet any of the Strategic Goals, the project should neither be staffed nor funded, as the organization has a finite number of volunteers and financial resources.

## ROLE OF WORK PLANS

Work plans for each project are reviewed and approved by the AI Board of Directors. The work plan provides detail on how to implement an effective project. Every work plan contains the following elements: Who (person or partner organization), What, When, How Much Cost, How Much Income, Volunteer Hours, Staff Hours and of course, the Strategic Goal(s) met. Collectively, these work plans become the substance of the materials submitted to the Pennsylvania Downtown Center to substantiate the work plan requirement for national accreditation. The Work Plan can be used to sell sponsorships, as well as to assertively market the volunteer and collaborative opportunities therein to individuals and groups of current or potential stakeholders.

## BOARD ROLE, STAFFING & VOLUNTEERS

This Strategic Plan sets out a very ambitious improvement agenda for the Ardmore Initiative over the next five (5) years. These activities are important and worthy, but the Ardmore Initiative Board of Directors must reach an agreement about how it will staff them.

While there are already some volunteers involved with the organization, there are not enough to implement even a small portion of these activities.

The current staff cannot take on any more duties, as it is already significantly overstretched. If the Ardmore Initiative Board, along with teams of volunteers, is to be responsible for implementing these tasks, then the Board of Directors must continue to invest substantially in volunteer infrastructure. Leadership for any new volunteer effort must come from the Directors themselves, primarily in the form of promoting volunteer recruitment throughout the organization.

## CONCLUSION

This 2018-2023 Strategic Plan for downtown Ardmore is a review of the past performance of the organization and a showcase of its hopeful future. This Strategic Plan contains a revised mission statement and a new vision statements. The four Strategies and resulting Strategic Goals mentioned above organize the rest of the document and should be used to guide all the organization's work in the next five (5) years, which is the useful life of this planning document.

**Tired Hands Brewing Co. volunteers clean up Schauffele Plaza.**



# 2018-2023 PROJECTS for DOWNTOWN ARDMORE

## EXPERIENTIAL RETAIL GOAL:

The Ardmore Initiative will differentiate itself by promoting in store and event based consumer experiences to help our retailers, dining and personal care businesses expand their profitability.

## PROVIDE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND TRAINING

- Collect up to date information about how many Ardmore businesses have web sites that they use to sell products/services, and how many businesses have an active social media presence to showcase their products/services. Complete the survey to determine current needs of local businesses related to online marketing, sales and logistics and share results with local businesses.
- Aid existing business owners who want to begin or add personalized service and customer experiences in their shops by circulating appropriate literature, make referrals to webinars, small business financing experts, and consultants to provide additional expertise.
- Offer regular local workshops, training, and technical assistance to existing businesses interested in expanding their profitability by creating a website or other social media presence.
- Continue to offer one-on-one marketing and other business technical assistance through volunteer consultants and social media interns.
- Market AI as the 'go to' resource for business attraction and business mix management, especially within the real estate and entrepreneurial community.

## Increase the longevity of existing small businesses

- Identify businesses with weak online presence and offer social media, website, and photography assistance as needed.
- Work one-on-one with existing downtown businesses to identify how they can create unique and authentic customer experiences at their location.
- Create and maintain a list of social media, website, photography, and other related services and share with businesses. Create a social media handbook for businesses to follow. Hire a social media intern to provide one-on-one assistance with merchants.

**Calliope Music offers experiential retail by selling sheet music, hosting musical performances, and offering instrument rentals.**



- Encourage businesses to take control of their social media presence by sharing their story on their business pages, posting and responding to comments regularly, and including promotional introductory videos in the “about” section.
- Encourage businesses to take high-quality photographs of their inventory for social media posts, especially Instagram.
- Encourage businesses to provide personalized services that meet the needs of its customer base, especially families, Millennials, and Baby Boomers. Depending on the business, this could include babysitting, personal styling, or convenient pick-up and delivery options.
- Encourage businesses to use e-commerce platforms such as eBay, Etsy, and even Facebook Live to sell inventory, especially during slower retail seasons.
- Where appropriate, encourage businesses to sell and promote products that are natural, fair trade, and ethically sourced.
- Encourage downtown businesses to add additional sales channels, especially online selling through websites, or existing sales platforms such as eBay, Etsy, Facebook for Business, Amazon, or other online platforms specific to their industry.

### **Recruit new businesses that meet market based demand**

- Encourage a business mix that balances the needs of all stakeholders by pursuing hybrid business types that provide spaces where people of different ages can socialize while shopping or dining as requested by participants of the Focus Group.
- Recruit new hybrid business types identified by participants of the market study and business recruitment plan.
- Review suggestions for new experiential retail business from the Visioning and Goal Setting session and create a business recruitment package specifically geared for these businesses. Recruit these businesses when there is an appropriate space available.
- Determine if the AI Board wishes to hire a retail recruitment consultant dedicated to filling downtown Ardmore vacancies based on the 2017 Market Analysis and Business Recruitment Plan.

### **Create retail events that focus on experiences**

- Review existing special events and retail events hosted by AI and create or expand experiential activities at each event as appropriate.
- Enhance commercial vitality through increased foot traffic by planning promotional events that increase foot traffic to several businesses at once, such as Ladies Night Out.

### **Promote the downtown as an appealing shopping and dining destination**

- Continue to use the Destination Ardmore website, Facebook, e-blasts, and timely press releases to promote small business owners.
- Use the Destination Ardmore Instagram page to showcase inventory of businesses in the downtown
- Create a shop-local campaign to connect residents with existing businesses.
- Build relationships with local colleges to communicate retail-related news, promotions, and events to students.
- Work with community organizations to improve the relationship between South Ardmore and businesses in the downtown.

### **Promote customer experiences to differentiate downtown Ardmore**

- Actively promote the businesses that routinely offer customer experiences including music, outdoor dining, tastings, demonstrations, and classes for adults and kids to the local and regional trade areas.
- Promote the experiential activities at AI events to area bloggers, magazines and information sources viewed by area families.
- Continue the current proactive Business Recruitment Strategy, and update and distribute New Business Welcome Kits based on the recently completed Market Analysis and Business Recruitment Plan, to help incoming businesses establish a positive presence in the district.
- Continue and expand the ongoing and productive working relationship with Suburban Square management. Determine if they would be interested in any kind of cooperative signage and joint marketing to mutually benefit both shopping areas.

## FAMILY FRIENDLY FAMILY SERVING GOAL

The downtown will cater to area families by expanding family friendly retail promotions and events, revising existing events or creating new special events, recruiting new businesses that cater to families, making upgrades in pedestrian safety, continuing to enhance the public realm, and making our diverse downtown attractive for everyone.

**pucciManuli in downtown Ardmore sells a collection of finely crafted gifts for children of all ages.**



## Widely share the results of the Market Analysis & Business Recruitment Plan

- Host a public meeting to explain the results of the 2017 Market Analysis and Business Recruitment Plan. Post these documents on the AI web site and widely disseminate the documents to area economic development entities. Host small workshops to explain key highlights for merchants and property owners. Send both documents to each downtown business and property owner by email.

## Encourage existing businesses to offer family friendly deals

- Encourage businesses to create an environment more inclusive to families by offering incentives such as kids eat free, in-store play areas, and back-to-school sales.
- Encourage cross-promotion between businesses that service multiple family members, such as hair salons, toy stores, and restaurants.

## Recruit new family friendly businesses

- Review suggestions for new family friendly businesses from the Visioning and Goal Setting session and create a business recruitment package specifically geared for these businesses. Recruit these businesses when there is an appropriate space available.
- Attract new businesses or spaces that provide safe activities and gathering spaces for teenagers in the downtown.
- Continue the current proactive Business Recruitment Strategy, and update and distribute New Business Welcome Kits based on the recently completed Market Analysis and Business Recruitment Plan, to help incoming businesses establish a positive presence in the district.
- Recruit the family friendly, family serving businesses identified by participants of the market study.

## Promote family friendly special events and activities

- Review existing special events hosted by AI and create or expand family friendly activities at each event as appropriate. However, some family friendly events may not benefit from explosive growth. Once these decisions are made, make stakeholders aware of AI's intentions, recruit additional volunteers, and execute.
- Continue to partner with community organizations to host seasonal outdoor events that families enjoy, such as the Easter Egg Hunt, Halloween Spooktacular, Cricket Boo, and Cricket Cringle.
- Promote the family friendly components at AI events to area bloggers, magazines and information sources viewed by area families.

- Actively promote the businesses that routinely offer family friendly offerings such as kids menus or kids eat free discounts for children, children's play areas, in store babysitting etc. to the local and regional trade areas.
- Promote the abundance of convenience retail businesses in the downtown to area residents.
- Expand relationships with local schools to inform them of the family friendly events happening downtown.
- Partner with other family serving organizations to encourage them to host events in the downtown.
- Consider how to better use Rittenhouse Place as a play street or a location for larger events.
- Promote family friendly street activities like hopscotch, checkers or chalk art, kid's games and contests to activate more spaces in downtown.
- Encourage a business mix that balances the needs of all stakeholders by pursuing community spaces where families can socialize and enjoy educational programming as requested by participants of the Focus Group.
- Determine if the organization wishes to encourage storeowners to be open late one evening a week.

## Diversity

- Promote the diverse population of Ardmore and increase the diversity of shops and restaurants at varying price points.
- Do more to recruit minority-owned businesses downtown and actively welcome minority shoppers from Ardmore and elsewhere.
- Build more partnerships with community organizations and recruit new board members and volunteers from these partnerships.
- Work with community organizations to improve the relationship between South Ardmore and businesses in the downtown.

## Promote the downtown as an appealing shopping and dining destination

- Continue to use the Destination Ardmore website, Facebook, e-blasts, and timely press releases to promote family-friendly, family-serving events in the downtown.

- Continue to create seasonal event and shopping guides and promote them more widely on social media and through press releases.
- Redesign the Destination Ardmore website to make the events calendar more apparent and functional.
- Use live-action social media features, such as Facebook Live and Instagram Stories, while at events to engage the community.
- Develop relationships with and promoting the downtown to local schools and other family serving organizations in the community.
- Create a shop-local campaign that highlights family-friendly businesses, especially those that are cross-promoting.

### **Pedestrian safety and walkability study**

- Work with the Township of Lower Merion to address pedestrian safety, including better crosswalks, pedestrian lighting, and pedestrian and traffic signals.
- Continue to work with the Township on regular trash collection of the public receptacles.
- Ask existing business to keep their window display lights on until 11 PM every day to add additional lighting to downtown sidewalks at night.
- Undertake a “walkability study” in collaboration with the Township to address the many dangerous crosswalks, need for more pedestrian lighting, benches, planters, wayfinding, and sidewalk concerns. Identify funding for planning and implementation, and apply to the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development.

### **Upgrade downtown’s infrastructure**

- Provide handsome streetscape amenities to promote a walkable, pedestrian and family friendly downtown that includes benches, seasonal décor, planters, and pedestrian level lighting throughout the district. Also increase beautification efforts through public art, murals, children’s play based activities, and appealing landscape architecture.
- Reimagine Schuylkill Plaza as an inviting and lively public space through pop-up events and activities, such as a pop-up library, food fairs, and outdoor games.

- Implement streetscape improvements that make the downtown more walkable, cohesive, and pleasant, such as artistic streetscape furniture, holiday lighting, and benches at bus stops.
- Add public recycling receptacles or composting stations throughout downtown and promote Ardmore as being highly environmentally friendly to differentiate the district.
- Advocate to Township elected officials and staff about the pressing needs for physical upgrades to downtown Ardmore and jointly agree how these critical improvements will be planned, designed, and funded over the next five years.
- Continue to work closely with the Township and the Pennsylvania DOT regional engineer on better signaling, speed, general maintenance, and safety improvements for the downtown’s main artery, Lancaster Avenue (Rt. 30), a state highway.
- Coordinate with the Township on the 2017 project to repair sidewalks and tree beds in downtown Ardmore which have been damaged by tree roots.

### **Upgrade the Ardmore train station**

- Advocate to SEPTA and Amtrak for Ardmore Train Station’s upgrades and enhancements to the pedestrian and parking areas adjacent to the station.

### **Manage the disruptions caused by new construction**

- Construction of three new multiuse buildings and infrastructure improvements will continue in Ardmore until 2020. Continue to regularly communicate about these major disruptions to residents, pedestrians, commuters, and business owners throughout construction.

### **Parking**

- Parking is a shared responsibility between the public and private sectors in Ardmore. Once the current construction is complete, advocate for the Township to conduct another parking study to determine if there is enough available and convenient public parking for downtown shoppers.

- Improve the parking experience for shoppers by creating maps of existing parking; work with the Township to provide more visible parking signage; expand the number of distribution locations for Smart Cards, and determine if a parking shuttle bus is feasible.
- Continue to advocate for funding and building of a new parking garage to be used primarily by employees and permit-holders, thereby freeing up current on-street permit spots.

### Provide design assistance

- Continue to have the AI Design Committee and staff provide design assistance to small businesses, so that applicants for Township incentives or physical improvements are approved faster and with fewer complications.
- Continue to host links on the AI website for all Township incentive programs and collaborate with Design Committee to promote current incentives.
- Continue to make referrals to the Lower Merion Historical Society when owners or architects need historic photos of downtown buildings.
- Continue to use the design guidelines and distribute them to merchants and property owners.
- Continue to assist property owners with the façade grant applications and guide them through the Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB) approval process as needed.

### Provide incentives for appropriate rehabilitation

- Continue to work with the Township, County, and State governments to secure and maximize all available grant dollars for façade improvements.
- Encourage property owners with storefronts that do not meet existing codes to make improvements so that they can attract higher quality tenants. Make them aware of any incentives to promote quality rehabilitation work.
- Help business owners plan their grand opening or ribbon cutting ceremonies, especially for each storefront improvement project.
- Write press releases, blog posts, and website stories. Post videos, and before and after photos of storefront projects. Post these stories and photos to Facebook and other social media outlets and pitch them to local media.

### Monitor change in the downtown

- Continue to work with the Township zoning officer to ensure that downtown buildings meet existing property maintenance codes.
- Continue to monitor any zoning changes or variances requested in the downtown.
- Continue to monitor rent per square foot for improved and code compliant retail spaces in the downtown.
- Continue to monitor sales of commercial buildings in the downtown. Post listings of available properties for rent or sale on the AI website.
- Continue to work with the Township and consultants on any zoning changes in the downtown.

**The Big Dig event was a ground breaking celebration with play activities for children and families to enjoy.**



## SPECIALTY FOOD & DINING GOAL

Enhance Ardmore as an outstanding regional dining destination. Encourage our bars, restaurants, cafes and food shops to meet the needs of area foodies by tweaking their offerings, to focus on natural, organic or sustainably sourced products for Ardmore's increasingly diverse residents who shop at a variety of price points.

### Continue to promote Ardmore as a dining destination.

- Work one-on-one with existing downtown food related businesses to identify how they can change their product or service mix to focus on natural, vegetarian, organic or sustainably sourced products as well as services to meet the needs of Ardmore's increasingly diverse residents, based on psychographic profiles that stress their interest in quality food.

### Increase the longevity of existing small businesses

- Encourage businesses to promote their usage of natural and organic foods.
- Encourage businesses to take control of their social media presence by sharing their story on their business pages, posting and responding to comments regularly, and including promotional introductory videos in the "about" section.
- Encourage businesses to take high-quality photographs of their menu to share on social media and with the press.
- Encourage businesses to start or expand their profiles on Yelp, Trip Advisor and other customer review platforms.
- Where appropriate, encourage restaurants to open later as many in the Focus Groups reported a lack of late-night dining options.

### Recruit new businesses that meet market based demand

- Look to Philadelphia and elsewhere for trends, continuing to attract new and innovative specialty food stores, restaurants, and bars that fill gaps and complement the existing dining scene. Recruit the Specialty Food and Dining businesses identified in the market study and business recruitment plan.

- Welcome new dining options that appeal to diverse consumers in both cuisine and price point while simultaneously strengthening the dining scene.
- Pursue hybrid business types that provide spaces where people of different ages can socialize while shopping or dining as requested by participants of the Focus Group.

**Snap Pizza serves hand crafted pizzas made from high quality and fresh ingredients.**



## Recruit new specialty food shops, quality bars, cafes, and restaurants

- Despite the current wealth of restaurants and food related business in the current downtown mix, more can be done to tweak the mix by working with property owners and area brokers to recruit high quality tenants to current and anticipated vacancies due to retirements.
- Review suggestions for new specialty food and dining businesses from the Visioning and Goal Setting session and create a business recruitment package specifically geared for these businesses. Recruit these businesses when there is an appropriate space available.
- Continue the current proactive Business Recruitment Strategy, and update and distribute New Business Welcome Kits based on the recently completed Market Analysis and Business Recruitment Plan, to help incoming businesses establish a positive presence in the district.
- Promote this food-based strategy to any retail recruiter interested in placing new, independent or chain food based businesses in existing buildings in the downtown.
- Work with community organizations to improve the relationship between South Ardmore and businesses in the downtown.

## Promote the downtown as an appealing shopping and dining destination

- Monitor the Philadelphia dining scene to identify contemporary trends. Recruit businesses of those types and promote heavily to the press as part of a greater dining story.
- Continue to use the Destination Ardmore website, Facebook, e-blasts, and timely press releases to promote new restaurants, dining events and dining-related promotions in the downtown.
- Use live-action social media features, such as Facebook Live and Instagram Stories, to introduce restaurants to followers.
- Build relationships with local colleges to communicate dining-related news, promotions, and events to students.
- Create a downtown dining passport to encourage diners to try multiple restaurants in the downtown.

## Promote food-based events

- Review existing special events hosted by AI and create or expand experiential food-based activities at each event as appropriate.
- Actively promote the businesses that focus on high quality, natural, organic or sustainably sourced products as well as services to the local and regional trade areas.
- Continue to partner with merchants and related organizations to plan special dining events like Ardmore Restaurant Week.

### **Downtown Ardmore's Delice et Chocolat is an authentic French pastry shop and cafe.**



## ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY GOAL

Ensure that the Ardmore Initiative has a high functioning Board and Board leadership, employs quality staff, has diverse and expanding revenue sources, a growing volunteer corps, ample and appropriate partnerships, and communicates about the organization and the downtown on a regular basis.

### Board membership and leadership

- The AI Board should review the current role of the Board and whether it wishes to be primarily a working or governing board, given its ongoing fiduciary responsibilities.
- Review the current roster of Board members given the future direction spelled out in this Strategic Plan. Identify new skills that the AI Board will soon need to implement key projects, and recruit board members to fill vacancies as they occur.
- Grow the board to its full strength as noted in the bylaws.
- Host a board training every year. Identify likely board candidates, orient and train them, and maintain a waiting list for the AI Board and officer positions.
- Review the current AI board member agreement and spell out any board-giving requirement. The board chair should report on progress in collecting board gifts at each board meeting.
- Seek 100% participation from board members in annual board giving effort with a goal of raising \$12,000 dollars (by making their own personal contribution or finding other cash sources) yearly by 2023.
- Review the charge of every Board Committee to determine its alignment with the AI Board's decision about the role of the Board.
- Create a Board Committee on fundraising to provide guidance to AI staff on development of an individual giving ("friends of") program and collecting corporate contributions. After reviewing program ideas, launch the individual giving campaign to gather small donations for specific physical improvements in the downtown such as benches, bike racks, planters or maintenance of floral displays.

## AI operating budget

- Grow the current AI budget from 300K to 400K by 2023. The BID assessments will expand because of new construction from 225K to 325K, and fundraising should increase from the current 35K to 75K by 2023.
- Review the BID assessment formula after the three-new mixed-use development projects are completed to assure that the BID budget has grown enough to support the larger ambitions of AI when the next BID renewal occurs in 2023.
- Consider expanding the physical boundaries of the BID to County Line Road when the next BID renewal occurs in 2023.
- The AI Board should reconsider how the organization currently raises money from corporate contributions, individual donations, sponsorships and special events today. Create an AI Board Committee to research how much other BID/Main Street organizations raise from these sources, and make a proposal for AI Board consideration. Rethink fundraising staffing needs based on this research and AI Board discussion.
- Consider whether to ask nonprofits to contribute to from Payment In Lieu of Taxes agreements (PILOT).

## Staffing, office, and technology

- Rethink the current staffing model based on budget projections for the next two years and again when the three mixed use development projects are completed in 2020. Review job descriptions for all personnel as changes are made and retain appropriately compensated, and high quality full and part time staff.
- Maintain current office location and upgrade technology as needed.
- Use the AI office as the de facto Visitor Center for the community.
- Review the organization's bylaws in 2017 and at least every five years to determine if they are still meeting the needs of the organization and make changes as needed.

## Communications and marketing

- Continue to expand the email list, newsletter, and increase the use of social media along with traditional news sources. Add Instagram and other social media platforms to AI's current online presence, to complement existing marketing efforts.

- Continue to maintain the Destination Ardmore and Ardmore Initiative websites to promote the downtown and the organization; continue to improve web site functionality and usability, and update these websites regularly.
- Retain a public relations consultant to assist with placing news stories in local and regional news outlets.
- When funds are available, consider a wholesale review of the downtown branding and marketing efforts.
- Determine if a printed shopping directory makes sense, or if a downtown app or downtown kiosk are more likely to be used.
- Collect and promote reinvestment statistics as tangible evidences of success through storytelling, info-graphics, and numbers.

## Volunteers

- Review the current role and need for volunteers and how to recruit them.
- After this review, create a robust volunteer program, including recruitment, retention, and recognition activities to support committees and provide a potential pool for future Board candidates.
- Maintain a database of current and possible volunteers, conduct regular volunteer orientations, solicit them for events, and recruit volunteers at every AI event.
- Host an annual volunteer appreciation event or activity and invite all volunteers to attend and be recognized.

## Partnerships

- Coordinate with Ardmore Business Association to enhance relationships and reduce duplication of marketing efforts.
- Continue to advocate for and serve as a liaison on behalf of commercial property and business owners to Lower Merion Township.
- Maintain existing partnerships and develop new partnerships with appropriate civic or community organizations for the continued betterment of the commercial district.
- Retain membership with the National Main Street Center, Pennsylvania Downtown Center, Keystone Communities, and national accreditation.

**The Ardmore Initiative shows appreciation to its most dedicated community members through its annual awards ceremony.**



# 2018-2023 SHORT, MEDIUM & LONG TERM PROJECTS

## EXPERIENTIAL RETAIL PROJECTS

### Short term projects for years 1 and 2

- Collect information on local business web sites and social media to determine needs.
- Aid and make referrals to business owners to begin or add personalized services.
- Offer regular local workshops and technical assistance on websites and social media.
- Continue to offer one-on-one marketing help via consultants.
- Market AI as the 'go to' resource for business mix management.
- Help businesses create unique and authentic customer experiences at their shops.
- Review, create or expand experiential activities at special events.
- Update Business Recruitment Strategy and welcome kits based on Market Analysis.
- Use Destination Ardmore website and social media to promote small business owners.
- Work to improve the relationship between South Ardmore and businesses district.
- Use the Destination Ardmore Instagram page to showcase business inventory.
- Create a shop-local campaign to connect residents with existing businesses.

- Pursue hybrid business types so shoppers can socialize while shopping/dining.
- Offer social media, website, and photography assistance as needed.
- Create and maintain a list of e-commerce related service providers.
- Create a social media handbook and provide one-on-one assistance to merchants.
- Encourage businesses to use e-commerce platforms to sell inventory.
- Encourage businesses to share their story on their business web sites and social media pages.
- Encourage businesses to take high-quality photographs of their inventory.

### Medium range projects for years 3 and 4

- Review new business ideas from the Visioning and Goal Setting session and recruit new businesses accordingly.
- Plan new promotional events that increase foot traffic to several businesses at once.
- Help businesses add additional sales channels and make referrals to technical assistance providers.

- Build relationships with local colleges to communicate promotions to students.
- Recruit new hybrid business types per market study and business recruitment plan.
- Consider hiring a retail recruitment consultant dedicated to Ardmore.
- Promote businesses that routinely offer quality customer experiences.
- Promote the businesses that have experiential activities to area media and families.
- Encourage the sale and promotion of products that are natural, fair trade, and ethically sourced.
- Encourage businesses to provide personalized services to meet customer needs.

### Long term projects for years 5 and beyond

- Expand relationship with Suburban Square management and create joint marketing.



## FAMILY FRIENDLY FAMILY SERVING PROJECTS

### Short term projects for years 1 and 2

- Widely disseminate Market Analysis and Business Recruitment Plan.
- Work with existing downtown businesses on programs and deals for families.
- Review ideas for new family friendly businesses and recruit them.
- Update and revise Business Recruitment Strategy based on Market Analysis.
- Review, create or expand family friendly special event activities at each event.
- Promote family friendly events at businesses to area media and families.
- Promote businesses that offer family friendly offerings.
- Promote the abundance of convenience retail businesses in the downtown.
- Promote the diversity of shops and restaurants at varying price points.
- Recruit minority owned businesses downtown and actively welcome minority shoppers.
- Complete the 2017 project to repair sidewalks and tree beds in downtown.
- Continue to provide maps and signage for existing parking during construction.
- Continue efforts to secure state grant dollars for façade improvements.
- Continue to encourage property owners to meet codes and to make improvements.
- Help business owners plan their grand opening and ribbon cutting ceremonies.
- Continue to assure that regular trash pickup continues.
- Continue to provide design advice from the AI Design Committee.



## Short term projects for years 1 and 2 (continued)

- Continue to host links on AI website for all Township incentive programs.
- Continue to make referrals to LMHS about historic photos of downtown buildings.
- Continue to use the design guidelines and distribute to stakeholders as needed.
- Continue to assist property owners with façade grant applications.
- Continue relationship with Township zoning officer on code enforcement issues.



- Continue to monitor any requested zoning changes or variances.
- Continue to monitor rent per square foot in downtown.
- Continue to monitor sales of commercial buildings and post available spaces on website.
- Continue to monitor and participate in downtown zoning changes.
- Create a shop-local campaign that highlights family-friendly businesses.
- Promote the downtown to local schools and other family-serving organizations.
- Use live-action social media features during events.
- Redesign the Destination Ardmore website events calendar.
- Continue to create seasonal event and shopping guides.
- Improve the relationship between South Ardmore and downtown businesses.

## Medium range projects for years 3 and 4

- Address pedestrian safety with Township.
- Encourage storeowners to be open late one evening a week.
- Address traffic matters on Lancaster Ave. with Township and PennDOT.
- Expand relationships with local schools about downtown events.
- Encourage shop owners to keep window display lights on until 11 PM daily.
- Partner with other family serving organizations to host events in the downtown.
- Use Rittenhouse Place as a play street or a location for larger events.

- Advocate to the Township for another parking study when construction is done.
- Promote family friendly and children's street activities in downtown.
- Identify new businesses or spaces for safe activities for teenagers.
- Promote any completed storefront improvements through social and traditional media.
- Undertake a "walkability study" in collaboration with the Township and find funding.
- Continue to manage construction until 2020 and regularly communicate to merchants.
- Advocate to Township for physical upgrades and find funding for planning and implementation.
- Recruit new board members and volunteers from community based partnerships.
- Create community spaces where families can enjoy educational programs and socialize.
- Reimagine Schaufele Plaza as an inviting and lively public space.
- Increase beautification efforts through public art and children's play based activities.
- Add benches, seasonal décor, planters, and pedestrian level lighting throughout downtown.

## Long term projects for years 5 and beyond

- Advocate for a rehabilitated Ardmore Train Station and pedestrian amenities nearby.
- Add recycling receptacles or composting stations throughout downtown.
- Provide new, handsome streetscape amenities for all users.
- Advocate for funding and building of a new parking garage.

## SPECIALTY FOOD & DINING PROJECTS

### Short term projects for years 1 and 2

- Assist current food related businesses to change their product or service mix.
- Encourage businesses to promote their usage of natural and organic foods.
- Review ideas for new specialty food and dining businesses, and recruit new businesses accordingly.
- Update food-based Business Recruitment Strategy based on the Market Analysis.
- Promote this food-based strategy to any retail recruiter.
- Review, create or expand experiential food-based activities.
- Monitor the Philadelphia dining scene to identify trends and recruit accordingly.
- Encourage businesses to share their story on their web site and social media page.
- Fill gaps and complement the existing dining scene, by recruiting new and innovative bars, restaurants and food shops popular in Philadelphia.
- Recruit Specialty Food and Dining businesses noted in the market study and business recruitment plan.
- Continue to use the Destination Ardmore website to promote new restaurants and events.
- Improve the relationship between South Ardmore and businesses in the downtown.
- Create a downtown dining passport to encourage diners to try multiple restaurants.
- Build relationships with local colleges to communicate promotions and events.
- Encourage restaurants to use live-action social media features to develop followers.

- Welcome new dining options in terms of both cuisine and price point.
- Encourage businesses to claim their Yelp and other public accounts.
- Encourage businesses to take high-quality photographs of their menu.

### Medium range projects for years 3 and 4

- Work more with property owners and area brokers to tweak the business mix through business recruitment.
- Continue to partner with merchants to plan special dining events.
- Pursue hybrid business types where shoppers can socialize while shopping or dining.
- Promote businesses with natural, organic or sustainably sourced products.
- Encourage restaurants to open later to offer more late-night dining options.



# ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY PROJECTS

## Short term projects for years 1 and 2

- Review current role of the Board, identify new board members to reach full complement.
- Review the current Board roster, identify new skills needed and recruit accordingly.
- Host a board training every year.
- Review the current AI board member agreement and update as needed.
- Create a Board Committee on fundraising.
- Create a robust volunteer program for recruitment, retention, and recognition.
- Continue to maintain a volunteer database and solicit help regularly.
- Rethink the current staffing model based on budget projections.
- Maintain current office location and upgrade technology as needed.
- Use the AI office as the de facto Visitor Center for the community.
- Continue to expand email list, newsletter, and expand to more social media platforms.
- Continue to retain a public relations consultant.
- Continue to collect reinvestment statistics, use for storytelling, and graphics.
- Review the current role and need for volunteers.
- Continue to coordinate with the Ardmore Business Association and prevent the duplication of programs and activities.
- Continue to advocate for property and business owners to Lower Merion Township.
- Maintain and expand partnerships with civics or other community organizations.

- Retain National Main Street Center accreditation, Keystone designation, and membership in PDC.

## Medium range projects for years 3 and 4

- Review the charge of every Board Committee.
- Continue to maintain both websites and upgrade as needed.
- Determine if a printed business directory, downtown app or kiosk would benefit the downtown.
- Create a Board Committee to review all fundraising, conduct research, and implement changes.

## Long term projects for years 5 and beyond

- Grow the budget to 400K by 2023: BID assessments to 325K, and fundraising to 75K.
- Consider whether to ask nonprofits to contribute to BID through PILOT agreements.
- Review the organization's bylaws at least every five years.
- 100% of board members make board gifts, raising \$12,000 dollars annually by 2023.
- When funds are available, review all downtown branding and marketing efforts.
- Review the BID assessment formula in 2023.
- Consider expanding the physical boundaries of the BID in 2023.



## CREDITS

Donna Ann Harris wrote this 2018-2023 Strategic Plan for the Ardmore Initiative. Marie Suvansin, Executive Director of the Ardmore Initiative, wrote the Ardmore Initiative Business Recruitment Plan. We included projects from the Experiential Retail and Family Serving Family Friendly sections of the Business Recruitment Plan in this document.

### Donna Ann Harris

Donna Ann Harris is the principal of Heritage Consulting Inc., a Philadelphia-based Women's Business Enterprise (WBE) consulting firm that aids non-profit organizations and government agencies nationwide in the following practice areas: downtown and commercial district revitalization, historic preservation, tourism product development, and non-profit organizational development.

Prior to starting her firm fourteen years ago, Ms. Harris was the state coordinator for the Illinois Main Street program for two years and the manager of the Illinois suburban Main Street program for four years. Prior to her Main Street career, Ms. Harris spent 15 years as an executive director of three start-ups and two mature preservation organizations, each with its own organizational and fundraising challenges.

Since starting her firm, Ms. Harris has worked with state, regional, and local Main Street programs in 23 states. She has written six feature articles in the National Main Street Center's quarterly publication Main Street Now and is a regular contributor to their Main Street Week blog. She has also spoken at the Main Street Center's annual conference for the last dozen years and has conducted webinars for the Center on fundraising and organizational development topics. Ms. Harris has authored scholarly articles in the American Association for State and Local History's History News and the National Trust's Forum Journal. Ms. Harris's book *New Solutions for House Museums: Ensuring the Long-Term Preservation of America's Historic Houses* was published by AltaMira Press in 2007. Ms. Harris is a Certified Main Street Manager.

### Marie Suvansin

Marie Suvansin has been an employee of the Ardmore Initiative since 2015, when she started as Assistant Executive Director. She holds a master's degree in city planning with a concentration in community and economic development from the University of Pennsylvania. Her focus within city planning is market analysis and the application of market-based strategies in strategic planning and commercial corridor revitalization.

Marie moved to the Philadelphia area in 2013 to attend the University of Pennsylvania. Prior to that, she spent a year abroad teaching English and community research at Northeastern University in China. Through her cross-cultural experiences, she has developed a strong interest in the intersection of food culture, immigration, and policy.

Following the Four Point Main Street Approach, at the Ardmore Initiative, Marie oversees the implementation of market-based strategies through comprehensive work in Economic Vitality, Design, Organization, and Promotion. She believes that inclusive, people-focused approaches are at the heart of economically vibrant downtowns.

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