

JOHN C. SHEPARD, AICP

jcshepard.aicp@gmail.com | linkedin.com/in/jcshepard | jcshepard.com

How would YOU measure “success” on Main Street? I posed that question the **Inland Northwest Partners** gathered to discuss economic development and Main Street on July 9th, 2026, on campus at EWU in Cheney, Washington. We talked about traditional metrics, Main Street America’s four-point approach, and indicators of success we might better build around that structure.

As a mid-point group exercise, I asked participants to discuss a question at their tables:
*What **one** thing in your community would you want to see still there 20 years from now?*

Each table chose a scribe to write their answers down, and to report one to the assembly. With participants from all over the region, Idaho and Washington, the answers were varied yet clustered around a few big themes: keeping community-serving institutions and businesses, preserving public and natural spaces, maintaining historic character and local identity, and sustaining everyday social life and events downtown.

Community institutions and services

Many participants named core institutions people rely on daily: schools (K–12 and higher ed), clinics and quality medical care, pharmacies, banks, libraries, post offices, and community buildings. These function as anchors that make the place livable and give residents reasons to stay and participate in community life.

Shop local for economic vitality

Several responses focus on having “small local stores,” a “thriving business climate,” a “healthy downtown,” a “vibrant food scene,” and “thriving downtown” overall. Even specific suppliers (like fertilizer plants) show that people want local jobs and commerce that keep Main Street active and economically resilient.

Public spaces, parks, and nature

There’s a strong thread about “green spaces/parks,” “city & community parks,” pools, public squares, and “public spaces,” plus repeated mentions of “access to natural spaces,” “conservancy & access to natural assets,” and being in “close proximity...near nature & preservation of open space.” Cycling, outdoor events/activities, and kids outside reinforce the desire for places where everyday outdoor life and recreation are easy and normal.

History, architecture, and character

Multiple tables mentioned “historic buildings,” “historic properties,” “beautiful architecture with character,” “unique architecture,” and “history preserved.” There’s also concern that places like “Cheney & Harrington feel like Cheney and Harrington,” along with “neighborhood continuity,” “spirit & charm,” and “places,” all pointing to preserving the distinctive look and feel of each town rather than generic development.

Social fabric, events, and everyday community life

Responses highlight “families gathering downtown,” “small town events,” “Mayfest & Fall Fest,” “Paul Bunyon Days,” and “events” in general. People also explicitly name “civility of discussion & neighborly care,” “people = community,” “third places,” “vibrant neighborhood centers,” and walkability, which together emphasize relationships, informal gathering spots, and the ability to move around safely and easily on foot.

Sense of progress and stewardship

A few items speak to the future: “continued forward progression,” being “proactive to keep up with future plans,” and “functioning infrastructure (quality) updated/maintained.” These reflect a desire not just to freeze the present but to responsibly maintain and improve what exists so the community can adapt over the next 20 years.

This seemingly simple question gave us a remarkably clear picture of what success on Main Street really means to the people who live and work in the Inland Northwest. Across all twelve tables, people pointed not to abstract metrics like “bigger population” or “more jobs”, but to concrete, everyday places and relationships. Their answers remind us that the real work of economic development is long-term stewardship so our towns still feel like themselves—today and 20 years from now.

Inland Northwest Partners Summer Workshop:
“How to Measure “Success” on Main Street?”, John C. Shepard, AICP
7/09/2026

*What **one** thing in your community would you want to see still there 20 years from now?*

Access to natural spaces	History preserved
Art & culture	Kids outside
Bank	Libraries
Beautiful architecture with character	Libraries
Bring art to rural communities—paint the silos and have tourist maps to traе alnd see/tell the story of the town and region—a “Silo Art Trail”	Library
Cheney & Harrington feel like Cheney and Harrington	Lights on at night for safety
City & community parks	Mayfest & Fall Fest
Civility of discussion & neighborly care	Movie Theater
Clinic	Neighborhood continuity
Close proximity →near nature & preservation of open space	Outdoor events/activities
Community anchors—schools, libraries, post offices, parks/green spaces	Park and pool
The Community Building	Paul Bunyon Days
Conservancy & access to natural assets	People = Community
Continued forward progression	Pharmacy
Cycling / outdoor connection	Places
Events	Pools
Events	Post office
EWU	Proactive to keep up with future plans
Families gathering downtown	Public spaces
Fertilizer plants	Public square
Functioning infrastructure (quality) updated/maintained	Quality medical care
Green space	School
Green Spaces/Parks	Schools doing well
Grocery store	Schools (public)—higher ed & K-12
Grocery store	Small local stores
Healthy downtown	Small town events
Historic buildings	Spirit & charm
Historic buildings	Third places
Historic properities	Thriving business climate
Historical buildings	Thriving Downtown
	Train station
	Unique architecture
	Vibrant food scene
	Vibrant neighborhood centers
	Walkability