

4.13.2026

House Finance Committee
Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Written Testimony in Support of House Resolution H8316 (MAKING AN APPROPRIATION OF \$150,000 TO THE MAIN STREET RHODE ISLAND PROGRAM)

FROM:

Diane Jacques

Deputy Director of Planning

Housing and Construction Development

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the Rhode Island House Finance Committee:

As Deputy Director of Planning Housing and Construction Development at City of Central Falls, I write in strong support of continued state funding for Main Street Rhode Island, managed by Grow Smart RI in partnership with Main Street America. I am a participant in the 2026 RI Main Street Learning Cohort, and I urge the Committees to approve the \$150,000 appropriation enabled by H8316. This is one of the most cost-effective economic development investments the state can make.

Main Street Rhode Island launched immediately after the 2025 legislation passed and has grown with remarkable speed. In addition to ongoing free programs open to the entire state, Main Street RI has convened a group of eleven teams representing Main Street districts across ten cities and towns throughout the state for a 6-month training program. Experts from around the country are sharing strategies and case studies to help us replicate the beneficial economic and social outcomes that thousands of other communities around the country have realized through the implementation of the Main Street Approach. These teams bring together local government, neighborhood associations, community development nonprofits, and small business owners around a shared goal: stronger neighborhood commercial centers that serve residents, attract investment, and support local economies.

As a cohort member, I feel that the training our team receives through Main Street Rhode Island's formal partnership with Main Street America is essential to my community's efforts to strengthen Central Falls. Without continued funding, that access ends. The expertise and framework our community has been building toward would be cut off at a critical point in our development.

The cohort has assisted the City of Central Falls in obtaining a great understanding of the scale of Main Streets. We have a full-time employee who works on behalf of and with local businesses. She will benefit most from this cohort. The feeling of community is another benefit I had not expected from his group. We are now in connection with our neighbors to bring a hometown feeling to our city. We are going to designate two streets in our city as Main Streets. The two corridors run parallel through our city. The streets can be identified as Broad Street and Dexter Street. Broad Street begins at the Cumberland Line and finishes in Pawtucket. Both Broad and Dexter are largely populated with restaurants and small shops. The city hall is also located on Broad Street and serves as a main route to local business. Dexter Street offers the same type of amenities but also has Dexter Plaza which the city has begun upgrades for a fun destination. We are expecting this site to be the home for local festivals, dancing, and a host of other activities.

I have felt more of a community rather than a stand-alone city trying to make changes. It has been helpful to hear what obstacles other communities have overcome and obtain guidance from others within the group. If Year 2 funding wasn't secured, we would lose the momentum this group has given. With the guidance and knowledge this group provides we have a better understanding of the value of Main Streets. With continued support of this group, we hope to avoid costly mistakes and time delays.

The Main Street America model carries a documented average return on investment of 22 to 1. The state's \$150,000 does not simply support a program, it catalyzes private spending, business development, and property reinvestment that would not otherwise occur. As we near the end of Year 1, cohort communities are already moving from learning to action, developing real projects with genuine economic potential.

Cutting off funding at this moment would forfeit the returns on an investment Rhode Island has already made, and would sever our access to Main Street America's technical expertise at exactly the point when we are ready to put it to work. **I respectfully urge the House Finance Committee to approve the \$150,000 appropriation for Main Street Rhode Island in FY 2027.**

Thank you for your consideration. I invite you to contact me should you have any questions or wish to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

Diane Jacques

Deputy Director of Planning

djacques@city.centralfalls.ri.gov

401-744-2831