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Testimony on HB481
Senate Business, Labor, and Economic Affairs Committee
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Testimony presented by
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The Montana Historical Society supports HB481, the creation of a Montana Main Street program. I wish to thank Representative Lindeen for sponsoring this bill.

Main Street is a very successful program that was developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation 25 years ago to help small and large downtowns revitalize business and offer new life for historic buildings. Over the years, some of the program's issues have changed. For example: the popularity of malls has given way to big box stores, sprawl has increased, and customers are now shopping on-line. But the Main Street program has adapted and continues to adapt to new challenges and remains consistent to its community revitalization and preservation goals.

Put simply, the Main Street program improves downtowns. Nationally, Main Street communities consistently report downtown property value increases, pedestrian traffic increases, upper floor housing development, outstanding festivals and events, and lower crime rates.

According to studies, on average, every Main Street program dollar returns $35 in community reinvestment. Since 1980, over 1,700 communities nationwide participated in the program making for some impressive national figures. The total amount of public and private reinvestment in physical improvements in Main Street communities is $18.3 billion. The number of building rehabilitations undertaken is 96,283. And the net gain in jobs is 244,543.

The Montana Historical Society's State Historic Preservation Office plays a role in historic building rehabilitations by administering the federal historic rehabilitation tax credit program. Over the past eight years in Montana, historic rehabilitations under the federal tax credits program have generated over $17.7 million in expenditures. This number would undoubtedly increase significantly when combined with the efforts of and encouragement from the Main Street program. Main Street would also be a strong partner for another of the Montana Historical Society programs - our community preservation program or so-called Certified Local Government (CLG) program now operating in 15 Montana communities. Main Street and the CLG program would greatly enhance each other by offering more ideas, opportunities, events, education, and incentives to Montanans.

In summary, the Main Street program offers community leaders, local officials, business owners, organizations, the state, and the public a myriad of benefits and reasons to adopt the program. I urge your support of H.B. 481 and of the creation of a Montana Main Street program.