



February 14, 2023

Dear Senator Margaret Rotundo, Chair Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
Representative Melanie Sachs, Chair Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and
Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

Please find this letter as proof of the results-driven economic development work led by the Maine Development Foundation (MDF) and Maine Downtown Center (MDC). In my seven-year tenure as the Executive Director of Main Street Skowhegan, one of Maine's 10 accredited Main Street Communities, I've witnessed an increased need for the services provided by MDF/MDC—and in turn, the team at MDF/MDC has stepped up in a big way.

For example, early in 2020 during the onset of the pandemic, MDC spearheaded a pilot entrepreneurial program for three communities in Maine: Skowhegan, Lisbon, and Monson. As a result, each community received guidance and funding to bolster support for local entrepreneurs. The resulting impacts in Skowhegan are tangible and have buoyed our recent success. Thanks to this program, we were able to:

- Survey the entrepreneurial community to assess local needs and determine strategic priorities.
- Commission a Skowhegan Housing Needs Assessment to provide data around the housing crisis. This report has been critical in enticing several developers to invest in Skowhegan and will continue to be important as we work to attract additional housing projects to the region.
- Hire our Business Relations Manager, Patric Moore, who works with local business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs, helping them to start or grow a business, make connections, find funding, and more. In 2022, Patric hosted more than two dozen business trainings and met with more than 100 area business owners and entrepreneurs.
- Launch the Skowhegan Center for Entrepreneurship, a facility that serves as the entrepreneurial hub in Somerset County as well as a space for meetings and coworking—another need identified by our survey work.
- Host our first Business Lab & Pitch Competition, a seven-week course designed to walk entrepreneurs through business planning, culminating in a pitch competition for \$5,000 to start or grow a business. Winner Matt Quinn, owner of The Cornville Christmas Tree Co., used the prize money to purchase equipment to help increase efficiencies at his tree farm, resulting in an 80% increase in sales in 2022. Matt will continue his entrepreneurial journey in Maine Center for Entrepreneurship's Top Gun program in 2023. With nearly a

dozen aspiring entrepreneurs on the waitlist, we'll launch our second Business Lab & Pitch Competition in spring 2023.

- Leverage additional funding for our entrepreneurial work, including a recently awarded \$195,000 grant from Maine Technology Institute's (MTI) Prime Ecosystem Fund to develop a kitchen incubator and food hall in downtown Skowhegan. Our work during the survey phase of the pilot program was critical to this funding—MTI was impressed that we had done the research to know what our community needed.

Without the work of MDF/MDC, none of the above would have been possible. These are outcomes from just one project in one community; the impacts of MDF/MDC's work are evident throughout the state. In fact, the positive effects of the entrepreneurial pilot program, as described above, generated more funding for 10 additional Main Street communities in Maine thanks to a \$747,000 federal earmark awarded to MDF/MDC. I have no doubt that these communities will see positive results similar to ours in Skowhegan.

Without the guidance and support of MDF/MDC, many of our historic downtowns—important assets for both Maine's economy and state tourism efforts—would still be struggling to define themselves, revitalize, and grow. Instead, the downtowns under the purview of MDF/MDC are flourishing.

For more than fifteen years, the work of our Main Street program in Skowhegan has been building momentum, and we've begun to see direct results of these efforts. While there are a number of factors that have been important to the recently reported \$650 million investment in Skowhegan (see the Jan. 30th Bangor Daily News [article](#)), the upward momentum, volunteer energy, commitment to strategic redevelopment, and innovative spirit of Skowhegan's community—all elements of our Main Street program—have played a significant role in driving investment.

That said, I urge you to fund the MDF/MDC request in full. Frankly, the value of their work far exceeds the amount requested, and in my humble opinion, the amount appropriated should be far more. Under the leadership of Yellow Light Breen and Anne Ball, the Maine Downtown Center has played a critical role in supporting Maine's economy over the years and will continue to do so for years to come.

Please contact me with any questions.

Best,
Kristina



Kristina Cannon
Executive Director, Main Street Skowhegan
Accredited Main Street Maine Community