

Richmond receives \$500,000 grant

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Funds will be used for downtown revitalization projects

RICHMOND — The Maine Department of Economic and Community Development announced Friday that Richmond has secured a \$500,000 Downtown Revitalization Grant.

Richmond was the only community in Maine to receive this competitive grant this year. To compete for the grant, the town had to submit an overall master plan for targeted development and agree to borrow \$210,000 to install a new sidewalk on north part of Front Street. The \$500,000 will be used for streetscapes, site amenities, sidewalks, streetlights, waterfront and park improvements, and parking.

DECD Commissioner John Richardson will be on Main Street in Richmond at 3 p.m. today to present the Downtown Revitalization Grant certificate to the town.

Richmond Selectman Seth Goodall said the town started its downtown revitalization in 2004 and called this another rung on the ladder of that work. He praised Richmond Economic and Community Development Director Darryl Sterling for preparing the application that landed the town the grant.

"Darryl Sterling really completed a top-notch application and without his effort, Richmond wouldn't have been awarded a grant," Goodall said.

Sterling said Friday that news of the grant award is very exciting, and the grant "will allow us to take the downtown revitalization effort to a renaissance level," allowing for more balanced activity happening simultaneously to help revitalize the downtown.

The town also received a \$150,000 state grant in 2007 for improvements on building facades and streetscapes.

Sterling said the downtown revitalization is important for improving a town's quality of life.

"What this revitalization accomplishes or achieves is you improve the look and feel of a community; therefore, you take more pride in it," he said.

Since the town began its efforts last year with improvements like the new crosswalks, streetscape and sidewalk work and business face-lifts, "We've had more foot traffic in town," Sterling said. "We've had additional business and cultural events, and Richmond is being explored by people in our community and people from away."

For example, 3,000 people attended the Taking Panes exhibit on display in the Ames Mill during March, which in turn helped restaurants like the Old Goat and The Railway Café see record-breaking business. A new Texas Barbeque has opened in town along with a handful of businesses that opened at the end of 2007, Sterling said.

One business new to Richmond is Hodgdon Yachts, which is now expanding at the Richmond Business and Manufacturing Center and is expected to create 50 or more new jobs in town, and "that brings in more people to town to live, work and play here," Sterling said. "You improve your community, you get results."

Sterling points to the economic downturn on the national and state level, where Richmond seems to be bucking the trend.

"This demonstrates some good village planning that we've put together over the last several years," he said. "There's no doubt about it, the renaissance has started."

The downtown project will take place from June 2008 through September 2009. Part of the grant will be aimed at the entrance to downtown near Richmond High School on Main Street, which will become a "tree-lined corridor," said Sterling.

In addition, more colorized crosswalks will be created as well as some street print, park benches and landscaping on Main Street and some benches and new picnic benches at the waterfront. The project will include improving sidewalks for a more walkable community, improve off-street parking and adding some lighting to

improve waterfront parking.