



2024 Downtown Project of the Year

The Uptown - Bath, Maine

The Uptown, a 60-unit residential development, including 42 units that have affordable rents, is the redevelopment of two existing buildings along with the construction of new housing on an adjacent infill vacant lot. The project rehabilitated two historic properties, which had existing residential and commercial space, and the addition of loft-style apartments and communal space.

The Uptown project builds density in Downtown Bath, recreates underutilized space and provides attainable housing for older residents, all the while honoring goals set out in our newly completed comprehensive plan. Project partners sought to facilitate the preservation of the character of downtown Bath, encourage economic stimulus in the walkable central core and maintain rental housing at modest prices for those who live and work in Bath.

Congrats to the Szanton Company and all project partners who brought this development to fruition!



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2024 Downtown Small Business

Rhona Beauty - Biddeford, Maine

Rhona Beauty is a hair salon on Main Street in Biddeford that the owner, Rhona Deah, says "helps multi-cultural women achieve their best hair and lashes." Rhona creates a positive environment in her shop that promotes "empowerment and self-love." In addition to hosting multiple booths for other stylists, Rhona employs two braiders to meet hairstyling needs from people primarily from African heritage communities. Rhona is an immigrant from Liberia and her customers regularly remark that Rhona builds a welcoming and joyful community in her shop.

Rhona Beauty is a winner of the "Inclusive Backing" grant from Main Street America and a host for BIPOC entrepreneur and professional networking via The Third Place. The salon is helping to fill the void for the underserved ethnic hair community here in Maine.

Congrats to Rhona and team!



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2024 William F. King Jr. Downtown Champion



Luke R. Dyer - Van Buren, Maine

This year, MDF and MDC are honored to present the Downtown Champion Award to Luke Dyer, Town Manager of Van Buren, Maine. After holding a law enforcement career spanning over 30 years, he retired as Van Buren's Patrol Sergeant and transitioned into an administrative role for the town. In 2022, he became the Town Manager, a position in which he continues to serve the citizens of Van Buren. In 2024, he completed the Maine Development Foundation's Institute for Civic Leadership, proudly joining the ranks of the Elephant Class.

As Town Manager, Luke has been at the forefront of several economic development projects in Van Buren, including the Grant Street Park & Community Garden project, funded through the Community Resiliency Partnership through the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and Future and the Van Buren Acadian Passage lighting project funded in part by Maine Community Foundation. Several upcoming projects include a \$1.8 million community tech hub and the renovation of the former Van Buren Municipal Building into a community market and small business incubator. Luke's vision and energy for his community is both admirable and inspirational.

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