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Richmond named business-friendly town by Maine

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RICHMOND — Richmond is now a Certified Business-Friendly Community, less than a year after the state spurned the town's efforts to win the designation.



Bill Keleher

Staff file photo by Andy Molloy

However, that doesn't mean the town was a hostile place to do business and has since mended its ways, officials said.

The town has been a good partner with businesses for the last several years, but local leaders just weren't able to prove it to the state until this year, on their second try, according to officials.

"I think Richmond has a lot to offer," said Clarence Cummins, chairman of the selectmen. "Now people are starting to realize it."

The designation, which **Gov. Paul LePage** started last year in response to sessions his administration held with business owners, does not carry any state funding but is used by communities as promotional tools. **Richmond** will get two state road signs to place in town recognizing its designation.

Cummins said **Richmond** likely didn't win the Certified Business-Friendly designation last year because "we just didn't fill in all the blanks."

"So we resubmitted, and I think they recognized the validity of what we were saying," he said.

A panel of public and private economic development experts makes the designations. According to a news release from the state Department of Economic and Community Development, which oversees the program, **Richmond's** recent initiatives include: "The town's active membership and participation in the Southern Midcoast Chamber of Commerce; its collaboration with local businesses to produce a business resource guide; and the town's successful utilization of local, state and federal programs resulting in significant investments into public infrastructure and downtown revitalization."

Victoria Boundy, community and business development director in **Richmond**, said the town already was a member of the regional chamber of commerce when its first business friendly bid was rejected. However, the town had to clarify its membership and take other steps, she said.

"The state asked that the town of **Richmond** provide them with more examples of how we've collaborated with local businesses and regional and state organizations, as well as to clarify our relationship with the regional chamber of commerce," Boundy said. "We had a follow-up meeting with DECD staff to be clear on their goals and relay the town's goals and accomplishments, as well as our strong record at working with regional and state entities."

Boundy noted **Richmond** has an extensive recent record of working with local businesses and has created a Tax Increment Financing district that gives some downtown businesses a tax break on new development.

It has also applied for and received Community Development Block Grant funding:

- A 2005 Business Assistance Grant of \$400,000 to help start Shucks Maine Lobster and, in 2007, another \$400,000 grant from the same program to help bring the interiors division of Hodgdon Yachts to [Richmond](#), both in the [Richmond](#) Business and Manufacturing Center.
- A \$150,000 grant program in 2007 that helped seven business improve their building facades and spurred private investment of \$300,000.
- A \$200,000 grant in 2009 to help Kennebec River Biosciences, formerly Micro Technologies, expand on Main Street and add 10 jobs.
- A \$420,000 Public Infrastructure Grant in 2009 to help the [Richmond](#) Utilities District conduct stormwater system improvements throughout the downtown area.
- And grant funding in 2011 used as part of \$1.5 million in improvements to sidewalks and lighting on Main Street.

Bill Keleher, owner of Kennebec River Biosciences, an aquatic animal health laboratory company, said the town secured a \$200,000 grant on his business's behalf in 2008 that allowed it to expand and add employees. It has also provided his and other businesses with loans to make improvements from a revolving loan fund, he said.

Keleher said the Planning Board process that allowed his business to expand was also business friendly.

"As we've been growing, the town has been very helpful along the way," Keleher said. "The willingness of them to work with us, and other businesses in town, whenever we have a need, is clearly there. I'd say it's well-deserved, being designated business friendly."

Cummins said it's the little improvements that add up to [Richmond](#) being a more business friendly place. For instance, he pointed to town employees such as police and public works who communicate with citizens more often, Main Street improvements to

storefronts and sidewalks, a new Downeast Credit Union building, and an influx of new businesses and residents who provide an able workforce.

"These are little things, but they add up to a better town to live and work in," Cummins said. "The trend is **Richmond** is improving across a wide variety of fronts."

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