Someplace
Kind Of
Wonderful
A Message from Main Street Skowhegan
Executive Director Kristina Cannon

It’s been quite a year. As an organization we’ve weathered the storm and done our best to turn this pandemic into a learning opportunity. During the midst of this spring’s quarantine, we realized it was a defining moment for us. We could continue our good work and brace for change, or take initiative and MAKE change. I’ve never been one to back down from a challenge, so we dug in, doubled-down, and started laying groundwork for Skowhegan to come out on the other side of the pandemic stronger and more resilient.

Major initiatives like Run of River, Skowhegan Outdoors, and our Technical Assistance Grant Program took precedence over event planning. We also spent significant time focused on business growth opportunities, advancing several projects within our new economic resilience strategy, Scale Up Skowhegan.

We are acutely aware of perhaps one silver lining of the pandemic—the unique opportunity for rural Maine towns to attract new residents. Pandemic trends, confirmed by a 32% increase in Somerset County home sales this summer over last, find people moving to rural communities that offer broadband, lots of land, and easy access to outdoor recreation. Skowhegan has all this and more, and we must take advantage of this opportunity to add new residents, which will in turn help stabilize our workforce, add new businesses and jobs, and increase local spending.

Skowhegan is already Someplace Kind Of Wonderful — #SKOW — and we’re working hard every day to make it even better for everyone. I truly believe our best days are still to come.

Please also consider donating to our operations fund. We cannot do this work without the support of our community, partners, advocates, and volunteers.

I hope you’ll take time to peruse the following pages and check out what we’ve done this year and what we have planned for 2021 and beyond.

I am so proud to serve Skowhegan.

-Kristina

This photo is courtesy of the Outdoor Sport Institute. Here I am learning how to whitewater SUP on the Penobscot—prepping for our future whitewater park in Skowhegan.

I don’t just talk the talk, I walk the walk.

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Front: Skijor Skowhegan at the Skowhegan Fairgrounds Feb. 2020 - photo by Jonathan Wheaton
Right: View of Skowhegan from the gorge looking North - photo by Sam Horine

We are focused on the big picture and committed to improving the quality of life for everyone who lives here, in our little slice of heaven on the Kennebec River.
Local Business Grants

Main Street Skowhegan TA/COVID-Relief Grants

We awarded $20,000 in varying amounts to 23 Skowhegan businesses through our Technical Assistance / COVID-Relief Grant Program in May—at the height of pandemic-related business closures. Many thanks to our donors for making this happen. We are already raising funds for a 2021 round of grant funding!

MainStreetSkowhegan.org/TA

“Thanks to this award, Happyknits will be able to update our website! We’re grateful to Main Street and all of the funding partners who made this grant possible. We appreciate all you do!”

-Karla Bailey, MaryLou Ridley, Sarah Davis

Community Economic Resource Council

Main Street board member Sam Hight spearheaded the formation of the CERC, an alliance of local economic development leaders that includes representatives from the Skowhegan Economic Development Corporation, Skowhegan Regional Chamber of Commerce, Somerset Economic Development Corporation, the Town of Skowhegan, Skowhegan Savings Bank, and Main Street Skowhegan. This partnership will strengthen economic development initiatives, promote Somerset County as the ideal rural Maine location to start a business, and provide a one-stop resource for business owners and new entrepreneurs.

MainView at SomersetCounty.org

In 2020, this group worked together to raise and award $100,000 in funding to 50 Somerset County businesses negatively impacted by the pandemic.

Learn more at somersetbusinessresources.org

“Thank you for your financial assistance that will allow Bigelow Brewing Company the ability to redesign our outdated website. This project is especially important now, more than ever, as we navigate our way through the new normal. As businesses are shuttered to customer traffic, relying on a virtual presence that will propel commerce is vital, especially for rural Maine communities.”

-Jeff Powers, Bigelow Brewing Co.

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Ensuring Equitable Access to the Outdoors

Our AmeriCorps members, serving as Outdoor Rec Facilitators, lead free outdoor programs, clinics, and activities every week, including guided hikes, cross-country ski clinics, forest scavenger hunts, and more. We’re also building a gear library for residents to borrow the equipment they need to get out and enjoy this beautiful region we call home.

“It has been fulfilling personally and professionally to serve for the Skowhegan Outdoors AmeriCorps Program. We have had the privilege to watch our outdoors community grow in Skowhegan through programming and also to take part in laying the foundation for such an exciting project. We believe that whoever has the opportunity to serve for this program will grow immensely and continue to serve their future communities with grace and gusto.”

- Emma Corwin (back) & Mara Kavanaugh

Outdoor Recreation Facilitators
SkowheganOutdoors.com

In 2020, we invested more than $75,000 in grant funding in our community via Skowhegan Outdoors programming, trainings, and gear purchases.

- Jennifer, Skowhegan Outdoors participant, granddaughter Layla pictured below

“T ook my granddaughter on a hike up the Moxie Trails with this group and had a blast. Mara and Emma are both knowledgeable about plant and animal life and encourage active participation in learning about various sightings along the trail. It was also great to know they are certified lifeguards and trained in emergency response. These coaches are the real deal. My granddaughter who is 8yrs old was a first-time hiker, and she was thrilled every time they encouraged her to climb the challenging areas. There was one particular challenging rock climb. Emma was so kind while encouraging her to use what method was comfortable, while explaining the safest rocks to hold and use to her advantage. My granddaughter shouted out ‘I did that!’ many times. Beautiful day and a spectacular view! Great job Skowhegan Outdoors!! I highly recommend it! Thank you Emma and Mara for giving Layla her best, first experience climbing a mountain!”

Skowhegan Outdoors
Weekly yoga at Lake George Regional Park
Family stroll in Coburn Park
Bike clinic during recamp at Lake George Regional Park
Canoeing clinic
Fly fishing clinic in partnership with Fins & Furs Adventures
Guided hike
Weekly yoga at Lake George Regional Park
Through the implementation of Scale Up Skowhegan, we will help diversify Skowhegan’s economy, strengthen our community, and position Skowhegan as an ideal location to call home via the following tactics:

1. Utilize $50,000 in secured grant funding from the Maine Community Foundation to strengthen our entrepreneurial ecosystem and bolster support for local businesses and startups. Use recent assessment data and focus group/survey findings to draft strategy winter 2021; select and launch implementation projects spring 2021.


5. Inspire new business development via findings from the soon-to-be-completed industry marketing analysis. Share data and opportunities with business owners & new entrepreneurs winter 2021.

6. Promote Skowhegan as a great place to live, work, and play. Launch a community pride initiative winter 2021 and new business & resident recruitment campaign summer/fall 2021.

The need to strengthen support systems for our locally owned businesses and diversify our rural economy has never been more urgent—a hard lesson learned from the pandemic. As the Skowhegan community continues to weather negative impacts from COVID-19, we are laying the groundwork for economic recovery and making plans for building community resilience.
In partnership with the Town of Skowhegan, we are working behind the scenes to make Run of River a reality.

In 2020 we met with regulatory agencies to kick-off the environmental permitting process, worked with a designer to create new renderings and a video to help people visualize the project, and strengthened relations with Maine’s whitewater community to bring future in-river events to Skowhegan. We continue to cultivate donors and seek grant funding to cover remaining costs.

For more details, check out RunofRiver.org.
The prototype sculpture & base were completed and installed in the Big Eddy in August 2020. In collaboration with the Wesserunsett Arts Council, we are currently commissioning additional sculptures to finalize the installation in Summer 2021.

Maine Wood Heat fabricated the base and assisted Central Maine Crane with getting the base and sculpture into and out of the Big Eddy. The Skowhegan Fire Department provided manpower and a boat to tow the base and sculpture across the Big Eddy.

The installation can be viewed from Coburn Park and the sandy beach off the Babe Trail.

Through this project, we’ve funneled more than $11,000 in Maine Arts Commission grant funding directly into our local economy. We’ll invest an additional $75,000+ in the coming years as we employ local businesses and artists in the creation of additional sculptures.

We lit the sculpture during a small ceremony in August. Several additional sculptures will create a striking display when installed next summer.
In collaboration with Lake George Regional Park, we hosted Somerset SnowFest in February 2020, featuring the 2nd annual Skijor Skowhegan, the long-time favorite box sled race, as well as two new events—a downhill kayak race and winter triathlon.

In lieu of our annual brew festival, we prepared a pre-packed Skowhegan Craft Brew Bag complete with 15 Maine craft brews and local goodies for people to enjoy at home.

Skowhegan #ShopSmall Week
November 28 - December 5

Extended from 1 day to 8 days to reduce crowds
49 participating local businesses offered shopping incentives
$300 in prizes for shoppers—gift cards to local businesses
More than $2,000 spent in marketing to promote local businesses
How You Can Make a Difference in Skowhegan

RoundUp lets you round up and donate the change from your credit or debit card purchases. You can even cap the maximum amount you want to donate in a given month!

Use the enclosed form, or go to mainstreetskowhegan.org/donate.

Talk to your financial or tax advisor to find out about making a charitable gift directly from your IRA assets without tax implications.

Every donation helps, and we sincerely appreciate our community’s generosity!

Do you shop on Amazon for things you can’t find locally? Use Amazon Smile, and they’ll donate a percentage of all eligible purchases!

Just go to smile.amazon.com, sign in with your Amazon login, type “Main Street Skowhegan” under “Pick your own charitable organization,” and click “search.” Select Main Street Skowhegan and follow additional prompts. Then, each time you shop Amazon, be sure to start at smile.amazon.com!

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are core tenets of thriving communities. Our nation’s collective commitment to these tenets is imperative for the future success of our society and our economy.

To that end, we believe Skowhegan is a place for everyone. At the core of our approach to community revitalization is a commitment to shared prosperity, equitable access to opportunity, and inclusive engagement.

We model and champion this vision through our actions and programs.