



# Economic Impacts of Main Street Skowhegan Operations

January 2025





# About the Study

Main Street Skowhegan commissioned Camoin Associates to analyze the economic contributions of both Main Street Skowhegan and the Central Maine Growth Council, along with four regional projects proposed under a U.S. EDA Recompete Pilot Program Phase 2 Implementation grant application.

The analysis evaluates the economic and community benefits of these organizations and their initiatives, focusing on their roles in strengthening the Central Maine region.

This report, a subset of a larger study examining the impacts and initiatives of both organizations, quantifies the economic benefits generated by Main Street Skowhegan's operations, programs, and activities. It highlights the direct, indirect, and induced jobs, earnings, and sales created by the organization, while also compiling additional community benefits tied to its ongoing efforts.

The study measures economic impacts within a 20-mile radius of Waterville, encompassing northern Kennebec County, southern Somerset County, and parts of Franklin and Waldo counties.

*Cover photo courtesy of Capshore Photography and the Kennebec Valley Tourism Council*

*Photo at left courtesy of MXH Marketing*

# Economic Impact of Main Street Skowhegan Operations

This report examines the economic and societal impacts of Main Street Skowhegan's (MSS) leadership and diverse initiatives, which are integral to regional revitalization, economic growth, and community resilience. Key areas of focus include MSS's entrepreneurship and business support programs, outdoor recreation efforts, and events, as well as the contributions of its staff and volunteers.

## Economic Impacts of Entrepreneurship Programs

Main Street Skowhegan provides critical support services for entrepreneurs, including a broad suite of business technical services, networking opportunities, and engagement that collectively shape the entrepreneurial culture of the local startup community.

Pitch competitions provide a platform for entrepreneurs to showcase their ideas and connect with potential investors; rentals and coworking space offer entrepreneurs the infrastructure they need to develop their businesses without high overhead costs; tailored advising and mentorship provide entrepreneurs with guidance to navigate the complexities of launching and growing a business successfully; and youth engagement creates an infusion of fresh ideas and cultivates the next generation of entrepreneurs.



Based on Main Street Skowhegan's program data, 47 jobs have been directly created by businesses that participated in the Business Lab.

The total economic impact generated by the Business Lab's participants, including the multiplier effect, are estimated to be:



**57**  
jobs



**\$2.2M**  
in earnings



**\$6.1+M**  
in sales

In other words, for every 10 businesses that participate in the Business Lab program, an estimated 24 jobs, \$933 million in earnings, and \$2.5 million in sales are generated throughout the Central Maine economy.

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*Left: Start Summit participants at Main Street Skowhegan's Center for Entrepreneurship.*

This diverse set of activities works to foster innovation, accelerate business growth, and create a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem that supports individual businesses to thrive and boosts the economic vitality of Central Maine.

Main Street Skowhegan is also leading the development of The Kitchen at 185, a project that will drive food innovation in the Central Maine region. Components include a shared-use commercial kitchen for food entrepreneurs, service programming for incubation, community programming for residents and visitors, co-packing to add value to surplus farm products, and job training to support career pathways in the food industry.

On an annual basis, once the kitchen is completed, an estimated three to five businesses are expected to graduate to their own storefronts, restaurants, and production facilities, generating additional jobs and private investment.

### Business Lab Program

Main Street Skowhegan's Business Lab program is a free, 8-week program that provides classes and other support services for entrepreneurs looking to start or grow a business.

Since the start of the Business Lab in Fall 2022, Main Street Skowhegan has supported 24 entrepreneurs over four cohorts through participation in the program. Additionally, \$21,000 has been distributed to businesses as prize money from accompanying Pitch Competitions.

Across these four cohorts, 24 total participants completed the course. As of August 2024, 19 participants currently run operating businesses,

one participant started a nonprofit, one is working towards purchasing a property to launch a business, and only three did not move forward with the business. In 2024, the organization's Business Lab and Pitch Competition supported 5 women-owned businesses and created a Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge. Over four cohorts, Business Lab has assisted 24 businesses that have directly generated 47 jobs. Of the business entities, 14 are LLCs, 7 are sole proprietorships, 2 are unknown, and 1 is a nonprofit.

In addition to the economic impacts detailed above, the business lab program impacts the entrepreneurial ecosystem by improving the local business network and connecting startups to local partners.

Since starting the Business Lab program, Main Street Skowhegan has sponsored four pitch events, with 240 individuals in attendance. Additionally, 20 partners have been engaged in business lab programming, including advising and support services.

Key Business Lab Metrics	
Number of businesses that have participated	24
Total amount of award money distributed at pitch competitions	\$21,000
Total amount of award money distributed to Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge participants	\$1,750
Number of pitch events held	4
Total attendance at pitch competitions	240
Number of partners engaged for Business Lab programming	20
Number of applications for Business Lab	38

Source: Main Street Skowhegan



*Matt Quinn, owner of Quinn's Tree Farm and winner of Main Street Skowhegan's inaugural pitch competition.*

## Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge

The Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge began in 2024 and engages high school students from Skowhegan High School. The Spring 2024 cohort included 4 high school students with business ideas and provided them a platform to engage with the wider business and entrepreneurship community in Central Maine. This programming occurred at the June 2024 Business Lab Pitch Competition, giving young entrepreneurs better exposure to business leaders and regional support networks.

The Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge led to three participating students winning a total of \$1,750 in prize money to support their business ventures.

## Skowhegan Center for Entrepreneurship Coworking Space

The Skowhegan Center for Entrepreneurship is a hub for entrepreneurs throughout the region. The program supports business owners and entrepreneurs seeking a variety of opportunities, from physical working space to business advising services. The Center cultivates innovation and business growth, while also encouraging collaboration, providing space for community gatherings and meetings, and further fostering the wider business and entrepreneurial community. Since April 2022, Main Street Skowhegan has provided technical assistance and support to more than 100 businesses, totaling more than 300 hours of advising services.

## Entrepreneur Spotlight: Joe's Flat Iron Café



*Joe's Flat Iron Café*

In 2022, Joe Almand was in search of a new career path after an accident made him unable to continue working as a firefighter and self-employed carpenter. After much thought and consideration, he decided to pursue a café in downtown Skowhegan, with the goal of providing a comfortable space for the community to gather that Skowhegan previously lacked.

Joe participated in the Fall 2022 Cohort of Main Street Skowhegan's Business Lab Program, where he learned the fundamentals of opening a business. His biggest takeaway was learning how to speak publicly and pitch his business. He notes that accessing a network and executing on shared knowledge is critical in starting a small business. In August 2023, Joe's Flat Iron Café opened on Water Street.

After participating in the first cohort of the Business Lab, Joe has remained active with the program, helping to make tweaks in the curriculum and programming, and even hosting the Fall 2024 cohort's pitch competition at his new café.

Joe's Flat Iron Café has become an integral part of Skowhegan's community. The Café employs several high school students, and Joe notes that he is particularly proud of the development he's helped to foster in those young workers.

The Café has also hosted a number of community events, including an opportunity during the 2023 election for town residents to meet and hear from candidates running for Selectman. This event helped to foster civic engagement in Skowhegan, bringing better public awareness and a more informed election for Skowhegan. Joe's also supports other small businesses by hosting pop-up shops in the café's space.

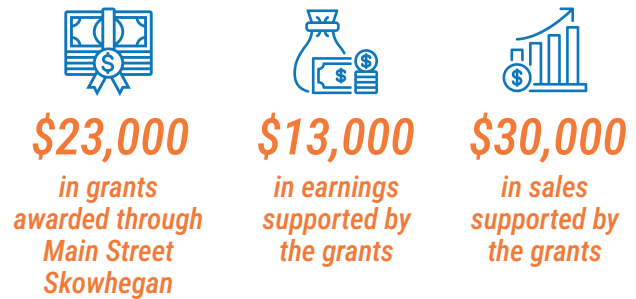
Joe's Flat Iron Café is co-located with Main Street Skowhegan's gear library, the Skowhegan Outdoors Basecamp, which helps to bring awareness and combine Skowhegan's community offerings in one integrated space.

## Economic Impacts of Technical Assistance Grants

Main Street Skowhegan operates a technical assistance grant program for local businesses. This program provides mini grants that are used to grow small businesses in Skowhegan.

A total of \$23,000 has been awarded through this program, and has been spent on equipment, professional services, and marketing. All grant funding was allocated to Skowhegan-based businesses and it is assumed that the money was spent locally.

While these mini grants do not support a full net new job in the study area, they support over \$13,000 in earnings and almost \$30,000 in sales locally.



*Photo courtesy of MXH Marketing*

## ShopSmall Week

Main Street Skowhegan's annual Shop Small Week, held at the start of the holiday season alongside Small Business Saturday, highlights Skowhegan's small businesses, a vital part of the local economy. This event drives economic growth, fosters local pride, and keeps money circulating within the community, helping preserve Skowhegan's character and ensuring it remains a vibrant place to live and work.

In 2023, 40 businesses participated in Skowhegan Shop Small Week, and approximately 800 raffle tickets were submitted. Shoppers can turn in raffle tickets each time they make a purchase at a participating business, indicating that Shop Small Week incentivized approximately 800 new purchases at local small businesses.

## Economic Impacts of Community Outdoor Recreation

Main Street Skowhegan is spearheading a comprehensive approach to community transformation through outdoor recreation by weaving together infrastructure development, programming and gear, mentorship and third spaces for youth, and career pathways.

The organization is managing development and fundraising for the Skowhegan River Park, which will redevelop the industrial downtown river corridor into an accessible outdoor recreation asset with an expanded trail network and enhanced whitewater.

The river park will not only benefit community members through improved river access, free recreation opportunities, and new civic infrastructure but also bolster the regional economy by attracting visitors, businesses, and new residents.

To encourage outdoor activity in preparation for river access and trail development, improve health and wellness outcomes, and provide free opportunities for connecting with nature and across socioeconomic barriers, Main Street Skowhegan launched the Skowhegan Outdoors AmeriCorps Program in 2019.

Through this program, the organization provides free, guided outdoor recreation activities, training, and gear for area residents; hosts youth-focused programming and summer day camps centered on whitewater kayaking, mountain biking, and hiking; and works with several statewide partners, including Wabanaki Public Health and Diversify Whitewater, to increase access to outdoor recreation among underserved populations.

The Skowhegan Outdoors Basecamp serves as a home base for the Skowhegan Outdoors program, a gear-lending library, and a third space for youth.

The Skowhegan Outdoors AmeriCorps Program aims to provide free and inclusive programs, training, and gear for all area residents, regardless of socioeconomic status.

Since its inception in 2019 through the end of 2024, Skowhegan Outdoors has guided 983 programs, served 7,383 participants, provided 3,379 youth experiences, and established a gear library with 200+ items available for residents to borrow.



**983**  
programs  
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**7,383**  
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**3,379**  
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*Skowhegan Outdoors Basecamp is a gear-lending library and third space for youth.*

## Economic Impacts of Events

Main Street Skowhegan organizes and hosts several events throughout the year that attract visitors, drive tourism, and create a positive impact for the local economy. Those events include Somerset SnowFest and Skijor Skowhegan, River Fest, Dinner in the Park, the Skowhegan Craft Brew Festival, #ShopSmall Week, and SKOW-Whoville. Additionally, Main Street Skowhegan plays a role in co-hosting the Build Maine conference. In 2018, Main Street Skowhegan coordinated the Skowhegan Moose Festival and contributed to breaking a Guinness World Record for “Most people moose calling simultaneously.”

These MSS-sponsored events draw significant numbers of visitors to the Central Maine region. According to Main Street Skowhegan, over 9,500 visitor-days are generated by this set of events, with approximately one-third visiting from outside the region.

### Estimated Net New Visitors at Skowhegan Events

Event	Estimated # of Visitor-Day Annually	Estimated % from out of Region	Net New Visitor Days
Skowhegan Outdoors Program	1,801	20%	360
Somerset SnowFest and Skijor Skowhegan	3,500	30%	1,050
Dinner at the Park	240	2%	5
Build Maine Conference	450	95%	428
Skowhegan Craft Brew Festival	1,300	65%	845
SKOW-Whoville	750	10%	75
Skowhegan River Fest	1,500	10%	150
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,541</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>2,913</b>

*Source: Main Street Skowhegan*



According to data from the Maine Office of Tourism, visitors from outside the region are estimated to spend \$156 per day, resulting in over \$455,000 in direct tourism spending generated by these events and attractions. This spending creates ripple effects throughout the economy, as the businesses receiving this revenue purchase goods and services from other local businesses, and employees spend their earnings within the community. This phenomenon is known as the “multiplier effect.”

Overall, tourism spending stemming from MSS events generates an estimated total of:



**7**  
jobs



**\$203+K**  
in earnings



**\$608K**  
in sales

## Economic Impacts of Main Street Skowhegan Staff

Additional economic impacts can be derived from Main Street Skowhegan’s day-to-day operations. Currently, Main Street Skowhegan has 10 employees. Through the multiplier effect, these jobs generate a total economic impact of:



## Economic Impacts of Volunteer Engagement

Main Street Skowhegan relies on volunteers for its board of directors and committees, as well as its many programs, initiatives, and events. **In 2023, Main Street Skowhegan engaged 223 volunteers, totaling 1,283.5 volunteer hours and worth an estimated \$39,210.93.<sup>1</sup>** Engaging volunteers helps address local needs while fostering a sense of collective responsibility and unity, promoting a more connected and resilient community.



Main Street Skowhegan volunteers ready for the annual Skowhegan Craft Brew Festival.

In addition to serving as board members and program instructors, volunteer activities include:

- Serving as parking and gate attendants
- Assisting with event registration and check-in
- Serving as bartenders, judges, and time-keepers
- Assisting with event set up
- Staffing information tables
- Maintaining the Triangle Garden
- Participating with community service and trail maintenance



<sup>1</sup> Independent Sector estimates that in 2023, the value of volunteer time in Maine was \$30.55 per hour.  
**Source:** "Value of Volunteer Time by State (2009-2023)." IndependentSector.Org, independentsector.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/is-vovt-report-all-years\_v2-1.pdf.

# Grant Funding Return on Investment

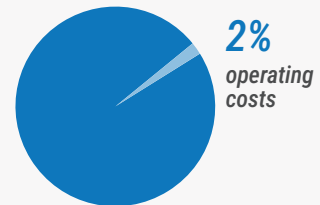
Main Street Skowhegan leverages support from the Town of Skowhegan to raise additional funds. Since 2015, Main Street Skowhegan has secured \$10.4 million in grant funding, 98% of which has been used for projects, with 2% for operating costs. This compares to \$539,000 in funding from the Town of Skowhegan during the same time period.

**Overall, for every \$1.00 of funding from the Town of Skowhegan, Main Street Skowhegan has leveraged \$19.24 in grant funding. Only 5.2% of funding over the past 9 years has been sourced from the Town.**



**\$10.4M**  
in grants raised by  
Main Street Skowhegan  
since 2015

**98%**  
used for  
projects



*Local youth prepare to paddle the Skowhegan gorge while attending MSS' whitewater kayaking summer camp.*

# Regional Initiatives

Main Street Skowhegan is leading several regional initiatives that will strengthen the economy, attract new businesses, and position Central Maine as a premier destination for tourism and business investment while enhancing the area's unique assets and cultural identity.

## EDA Recompete Pilot Program

In December 2023, a regional coalition led by Main Street Skowhegan secured an Economic Development Administration Distressed Area Recompete Pilot Program Phase 1 Strategy Development Grant of \$425,000 to create and connect people to good jobs.

This represents a significant win for the Central Maine region, bringing both attention and funding to the local area to support major economic development projects. In addition, the coalition was invited as one of 22 national finalists—out of more than 500 applicants—to apply for up to \$50 million in Phase 2 Implementation funding in the spring of 2024.

In preparation for the Recompete Phase 2 submission, 50 community meetings were held, engaging 274 stakeholders to help inform the plan's approach. As the lead applicant, Main Street Skowhegan helped bring together a coalition of 50 partners at the regional, state, and national levels.

While the Recompete Phase 2 grant request wasn't funded in this round, Main Street Skowhegan is forging ahead with several projects that will help revitalize the region and reduce the prime-age employment gap.



*River Fest attendees gather along Water Street for the annual bed races.*



*The Triangle Garden in downtown Skowhegan is maintained by Main Street Skowhegan volunteers.*

## Regional Strategic Planning and Brand Development ●

In 2023, Main Street Skowhegan, the Central Maine Growth Council, and the Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce were awarded \$484,500 from the Maine Office of Tourism to develop a destination development plan and brand strategy for the Skowhegan/Waterville area. This collaborative planning effort will connect and uplift the many current and future development efforts and investments across municipal borders to enhance the visitor experience and improve the quality of life for residents.

A corresponding branding initiative will capitalize on the development plan by driving tourism and competitively attracting new businesses, entrepreneurs, and workforce talent to the area, ensuring long-term economic prosperity and resilience.

In addition, Main Street Skowhegan will soon update the 2016 Skowhegan Strategic Plan for Community Transformation, engaging a steering committee and members of the public to ensure the plan reflects the aspirations of the community.

The updated Skowhegan strategic plan and the regional destination development master plan will guide Main Street Skowhegan's work in the coming years as they continue community revitalization efforts.

# Private Investments in Community Revitalization

Over the past three years, Skowhegan has attracted significant public and private investments, reflecting growing confidence in the town's revitalization. Notably, major multinational corporations have made substantial financial commitments to the region.

**sappi \$418M**

*investment in its Somerset Mill, which will expand the production of packaging and specialty papers manufactured in Skowhegan<sup>2</sup>*

 **\$65M**

*investment in expanding its Skowhegan factory by 120,000 square feet, which will bring an estimated 200 new jobs to Skowhegan<sup>3</sup>*

Other key projects in the area, funded by both public and private sources, include:



**\$75.4M**

*for a new elementary school<sup>4</sup>*



**\$1.6M**

*for an early childhood education center at the site of the new elementary school<sup>5</sup>*



**\$15M**

*for a mixed-use building project by MaineGrains (more details on the following page)<sup>6</sup>*



**\$10.5M**

*for broadband expansion*



**\$23M**

*for the mixed-use Spinning Mill redevelopment*



**\$5.4M**

*for affordable housing apartments*



**4**

*solar projects totaling \$23 million<sup>7</sup>*

These major investments total over \$650 million. They will benefit the local community in various ways, including creating new jobs at key manufacturing employers, bolstering the K-12 education infrastructure, providing opportunities in the local food economy, improving energy and broadband infrastructure, and increasing housing options throughout the community.

<sup>2</sup> Sappi Announces \$418 Million Paper Machine Rebuild at its Somerset Mill in Skowhegan, Maine | Sappi Global

<sup>3</sup> Construction begins on Skowhegan factory expansion that New Balance says will add 200 new jobs | Maine Public

<sup>4</sup> Skowhegan ceremony formally marks launch of construction on \$75 million elementary school (centralmaine.com)

<sup>5</sup> Skowhegan early learning center gets \$1.6 million boost (centralmaine.com)

<sup>6</sup> Business Leaders: Amber Lambke is breaking bread to grow Maine Grains, and to build a community | Mainebiz.biz

<sup>7</sup> Why people are investing \$650M in Skowhegan? | Bangor Daily News



*Visitors and residents gather for an evening of trivia in Main Street Skowhegan's pop-up, seasonal, riverfront green space.*

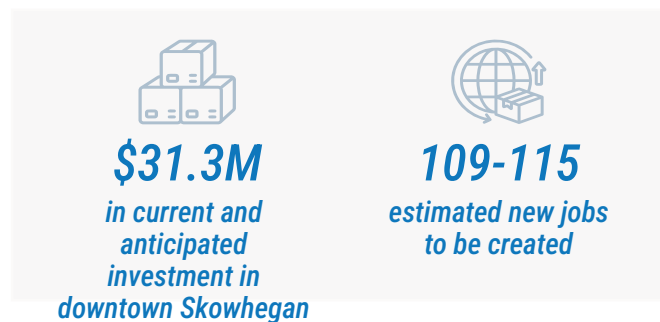
Skowhegan is attracting substantial investment from diverse sources, reinforcing its role as a regional economic driver and signaling long-term business confidence. These investments will generate jobs, enhance infrastructure, and improve the community's appeal for both businesses and workers.

While this analysis does not directly quantify the economic impact, the effects are expected to be significant, fueling job creation, earnings growth, and increased local sales. Public and private investments also create ripple effects, expanding economic opportunities as goods and services circulate through the region.

Notably, private investments from Sappi and New Balance alone—totaling \$483 million—would increase Skowhegan's total assessed property value by 32%. These major investments will strengthen the town's financial position and contribute substantially to future property tax revenue.

## Downtown Investment

Meanwhile, riverfront development and the Skowhegan River Park initiatives coordinated by Main Street Skowhegan and the Town of Skowhegan have spurred additional private investment by many businesses, property owners, and developers within the local Skowhegan area. These improvements are expected to increase tourism and attract new residents and, therefore, have catalyzed interest in related investments in the downtown area.



In total, \$31.3 million in current or anticipated private investment in downtown businesses and infrastructure will create an estimated 109-115 new jobs and save 40 existing jobs in the local area. These projects were documented as part of Main Street Skowhegan's recent grant application to the EDA's Phase II Recompete Implementation grant program.



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