

*City of Taunton
Office of the Mayor*



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**O'CONNELL ANNOUNCES PROGRAMS TO DRIVE
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN TAUNTON**

**New Sign and Façade Program and Expansion of Rent Rebate Program
to Provide Financial Assistance to Local Businesses**

Taunton, MA...Today Mayor Shaunna O'Connell announced the opening of the City of Taunton's new Sign and Façade Program for eligible commercial properties as well as expansion of the City's successful Rent Rebate Program to the Weir and Whittenton commercial areas.

"Our goal is to support local businesses and economic development across the City. We are excited to offer these programs not just Downtown, but in our urban neighborhoods as well. Our local businesses are the backbone of our economy and the foundation of prosperity in our City. When we support local businesses, we ensure the vitality of our community," said O'Connell.

Funded by Taunton's allocation of American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) federal funds, the Sign and Façade program will allow commercial property owners in qualified census tract areas to receive assistance toward improving the appearance and integrity of their buildings, in turn enhancing the beautification of the City's urban neighborhoods and villages.

Colleen Simmons, Executive Director of the Downtown Taunton Foundation/Business Improvement District (DTF/BID) applauds Mayor O'Connell's continuous efforts to support businesses in Taunton. "The Business Improvement District and Downtown Taunton Foundation is very appreciative of the Mayor's continued support of Downtown and other sections of our City. This program will help promote a coherent, creative, attractive appearance while promoting the unique character of City neighborhoods. The appearance of individual buildings plays a major role in the success of business districts and will further enhance economic development in these areas," said Simmons.

Taunton business owners are also excited by the new opportunities now open to businesses in Whittenton. Ken Patel, owner of 414-424 Bay Street, a mixed-use block in the heart of Whittenton Village, is looking forward to the Sign and Façade Program opening. "This will be a unique opportunity for buildings such as mine to partner with the City in making some noticeable updates," said Patel.

The maximum grant amount is capped at \$40,000 with the recipient being required to pay a minimum 25% cost share of the total project. This program can fund restoration services including windows, doors, awnings, siding, repointing brick, exterior lighting, and decorative architectural details.

The Rent Rebate Program began as a reimbursement grant program for businesses moving into an eligible vacant space Downtown with a maximum reimbursement of \$5,000 in year one and \$2,500 in year two. Tonya Miller, owner of Sheepdog Athletics, one of the recipients of the program in its initial round, found that this program had an appreciable impact on her business. "When we first opened Sheepdog Athletics, the Rent Rebate Program allowed us room to breathe in those first few months when our startup costs were highest. The fact that the City offered this program was a confirmation that we were opening our business in a city that was dedicated to the revitalization of Downtown and growth of businesses."

Mayor O'Connell has expanded the Rent Rebate Program to include more areas in the City targeted for economic development. The new district includes an expanded Downtown zone as well as two new zones covering the commercial corridors of Weir Village and Whittenton. O'Connell also increased the maximum subsidy to \$6,000 in year one and \$3,000 in year two.

Kris Silva, President and CEO of the Taunton Area Chamber of Commerce, is appreciative of O'Connell's efforts to support businesses in Taunton, particularly following the pandemic. "It is vitally important that we continue to support our new and existing local businesses as they continue to recover from the impacts of COVID and face new financial challenges. These funding initiatives offer exciting opportunities for economic growth, not only for Downtown Taunton businesses but also in the growing commercial areas of Whittenton and Weir Village. The Chamber applauds Mayor O'Connell and her Office of Economic and Community Development for their commitment to look for new ways to assist the small business owners in the City of Taunton; programs like these will further strengthen the greater downtown area and the overall quality of life in the community," said Silva.

The application process for both programs will open on Monday, August 15, 2022 at noon. Applications will be available online and printed copies will be available for pick up at the OECD office on the 3rd floor at City Hall. For information on eligibility and how to apply for these programs, please visit the City's website (taunton-ma.gov) or call the Mayor's Office of Economic and Community Development at 508-821-1030. ###