

Town of Ashland Economic Development Annual Report 2022



Smart. Safe. Sustainable.



Town of Ashland
101 Main Street
Ashland, MA 01721

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Message from Ashland's Economic Development Director

The past few years have been more challenging than ever due to the global pandemic, but the Ashland business community remains strong. We have seen several new businesses open their doors despite the challenging business climate and more than 95% of businesses remained opened and continue to thrive despite the impact of COVID-19 on our world. The past few years have certainly taught us how to use our creative minds to think outside the box, adapt to an ever-changing world and to flex when needed in order to thrive.



The definition of what Economic Development means for Ashland is evolving. There is still truth to an Economic Policy Plan from 2010 by Community Opportunities Group, Inc. where they state; "Many people think "economic development" is about bringing more businesses into a community and increasing the tax base. However, businesses are only one component of a community's economy, and tax revenue is only one benefit of a strong economy. Economic development involves improving the quality of life in a community through refinements in education, health, social infrastructure, transportation, the environment, and the provision of employment and housing choices." I will continue to use this holistic thought process when describing what Economic Development means to Ashland as I feel we are moving in the right direction.

Over the past years, the Economic Development department increased communications tremendously. We created newsletters, utilized social media in productive, positive ways and provided content that is transparent of the work we do. The office created events that bring the community together in places of commerce which showcase the entire business community including store fronts and home based businesses. More recently, we took the lead on two new State grant opportunities that helped businesses keep their doors open. We are also continually looking for ways to create marketing platforms to help promote business in town.

Ashland has certainly seen growth over the past few years and I look forward to all that is to come. The Downtown and Route 126 beautification projects will lead to more mixed-use buildings which will provide affordable housing, placemaking areas and commercial opportunities. I am proud of the work we have done this past year, I celebrate the new businesses that have joined our community, those that grew in size and success and am thankful that we were able to help those who struggled during the difficult times. In the coming pages you will read about the progress that is being made to strengthen and grow our business community. We will continue to work hard to increase the commercial base while supporting existing businesses. We will also continue to encourage creative thinking in an ever-changing climate and celebrate success.

Beth Reynolds

Director of Economic Development and Community Outreach
Town of Ashland

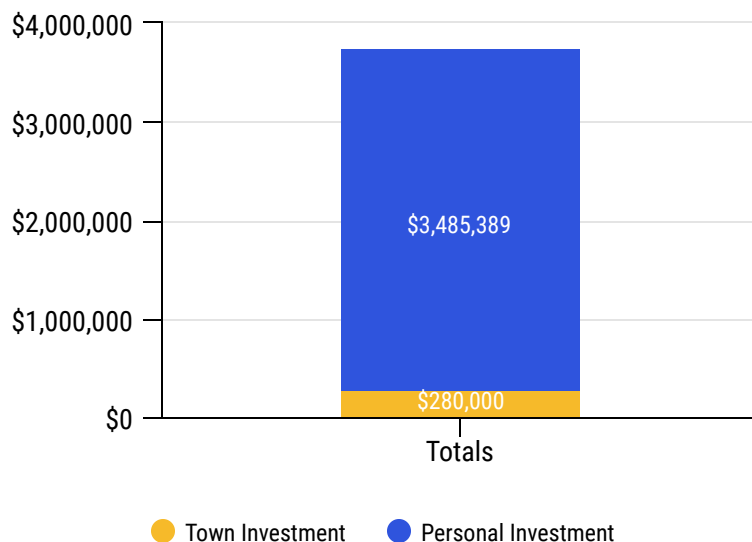
GRANTS AND INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

Ashland Business Incentive Grant

The business incentive program proves to be a successful addition to the Economic Development toolkit. Since 2019 we have distributed nearly \$220,000 in funding for sign and façade improvements as well as rental and equipment reimbursement, while receiving nearly \$3.5 million in return from personal investment in Ashland yielding a 1250% return on the investment. Thanks to an additional earmark in 2020 from the State and Senate President Karen Spilka we have assisted 17 businesses in total. Collectively those businesses have added over 30 new jobs. This tool has been instrumental in drawing businesses to town and has helped them be successful from the start. The return on our investment in these businesses is the true testament of the importance of this tool. It helped draw six new businesses to Ashland in the past three years despite the pandemic. It helped take vacant spaces such as 120 Pond Street (Blockbuster), 200 Homer Ave. (Telechron), West Union Street (PapaGino's) and transform them into thriving businesses that bring much needed amenities, vibrancy and additional revenue to the town. The program also helps existing businesses continue to choose Ashland as their home base of operations, such as BioSurfaces, a biotech company. They chose to remain in town after receiving support as they expanded from research to development. The program also allows for the business community to contribute to the betterment of the town in aesthetics as well as quality business no matter how long the business has been in operation.



Town Investment vs. Personal Investment



Business Recipients of the grant

- Wine Empire
- Dulce d Leche
- Erica's Ristorante
- The Groundskeeper
- 2 Mauro's Cafe
- Diversity Early Learning Center
- Mazi Kitchen & Bar
- BioSurfaces
- Doragon Collective
- Madras Market
- Main Street Wine & Spirits
- Zen Family Dental
- My Ashland Office
- Blush Bouquets
- Zeta Fencing
- Kids in Motion Therapy

GRANTS AND INCENTIVE PROGRAMS



Before



After

2Mauro's Cafe

CDBG-HUD Microenterprise Grant

The Town of Ashland was the lead community and part of a 23 community consortium that received \$4,950,000 for the CDBG-HUD competitive Microenterprise Grant. This grant was available to small businesses of 5 or fewer employees who met the State LMI (Low to Medium Income) level for two years. Preference was given to minority, women-owned, and veteran-owned businesses.

Together, we administered funding to approximately 360 small businesses in the communities of Ashland, Beverly, Burlington, Canton, Concord, Dedham, Essex, Lexington, Manchester by the Sea, Marlborough, Melrose, Milton, Natick, North Reading, Norwood, Randolph, Reading, Sharon, Southborough, Stoneham, Watertown, Winchester and Woburn.

21 Ashland businesses were assisted with this grant equaling \$370,000.

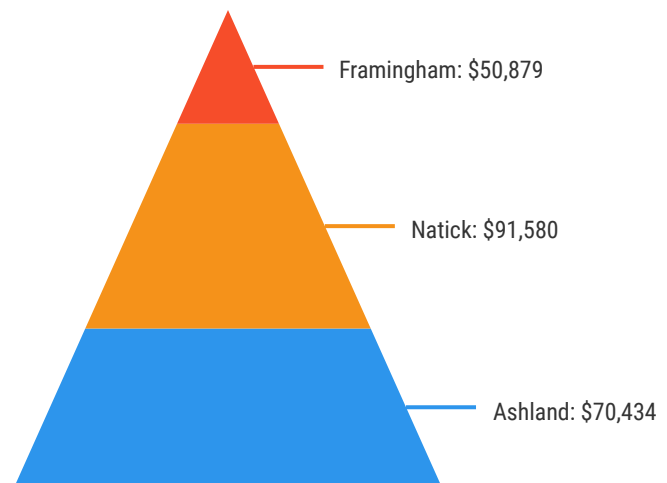
MOBD Regional Pilot Program -Marketing Grant

The MA Office of Business Development (MOBD) announced a regional Pilot Program Grant opportunity in 2021 in response to the business climate due to the pandemic. The Ashland Economic Development team partnered with Natick and Framingham to create a Marketing Grant for small businesses. Through the grant, businesses were paired with a marketing team that helped to build or rejuvenate a website, take professional photos, build out SEOs, create social media campaigns and more. The goal was to help increase visibility for these businesses in turn increasing their sales and profit.

In total 37 businesses were assisted and the \$250,000 grant was quickly distributed.

Please visit www.ashlandmass.com to see the final products and to understand the beneficial impact this grant had on our local businesses.

Regional MOBD Grant - \$250,000



TAX AND GROWTH

Local Meals Tax

The local meals tax revenue, which now funds the Economic Development budget, averages approximately \$230,000 per year. In 2019 the large increase likely results from the addition of two new restaurants, 2Mauro's and Erica's Ristorante. However between 2020 and 2021 the pandemic negatively affected revenue for restaurants while people were encouraged to social distance. Only two restaurants closed completely for several months during the pandemic while four others deferred their local meals tax payments to the State during this time. FY 2022 is projecting higher than the past two years, having collected \$140,874 in Q1 and Q2. With recommendations from the CDC that it is now safe to dine-in unmasked, we hope to see an increase in sales for 2022.

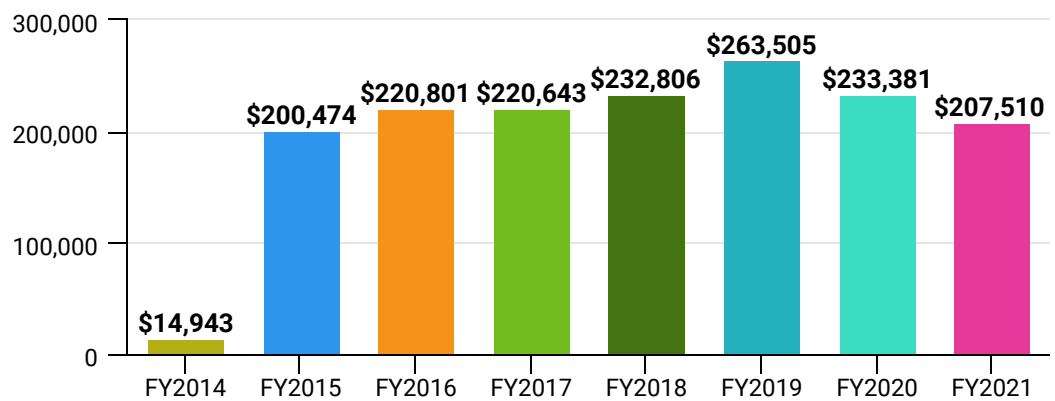


Dulce d Leche



Erica's Ristorante

Local Meals Tax - Ashland



Pivoting During Critical Times

2019-2021 brought unprecedented challenges to the business community. However, the best part of working in Ashland is having the support of the town leadership team to allow for new ideas and creativity. The Economic Development team works closely with business owners on a daily basis. During critical times it has been even more important to build on these relationships. When COVID-19 hit, we got to work and thought creatively about how to help businesses the most; we pivoted.

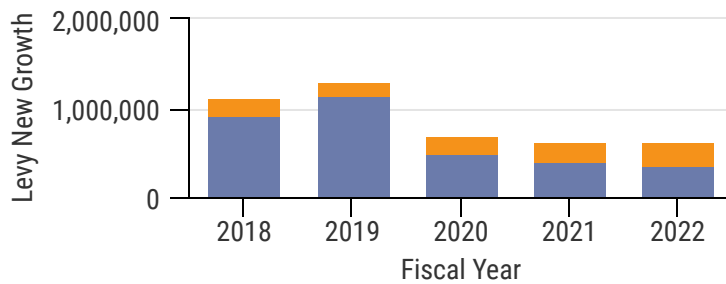
Types of assistance and support we provided:

- We created the Resident, Restaurant, Relief Program (3R) that utilized funding from the Emergency Fund to feed residents in need while also supporting the restaurants with guaranteed sales during the hard hit times.
- The Economic Development team advocated for liquor license fees to be waived for those restaurants that were struggling; this initiative was supported unanimously by the Select Board.
- Temporary outdoor seating was a necessity. The Economic Development Director worked directly with the community development team, as well as Police and Fire, to create a temporary outdoor seating policy for restaurants that were struggling to keep their doors open. This policy saved many restaurants at a time when they were only able to run at half occupancy.
- The Economic Development team created social media campaigns and social distanced events. Up Ashland and the Circle of Love were two programs that brought the community together during a difficult time. The team created a new Facebook page to promote businesses, Ashland BizBuzz is still running strong. Additionally we created online dining and shopping directories, weekly newsletters and new informative webpages were created to keep the community current with the ever changing updates and guidelines.

Tax Growth

As you will see in the chart below, commercial, industrial and personal property tax revenues increased over the past four years while the residential and open space taxes decreased. This shift is encouraging to see as the business community steadily grows in Ashland. The chart below shows this growth over the past five years.

Town of Ashland RO vs CIP New Growth

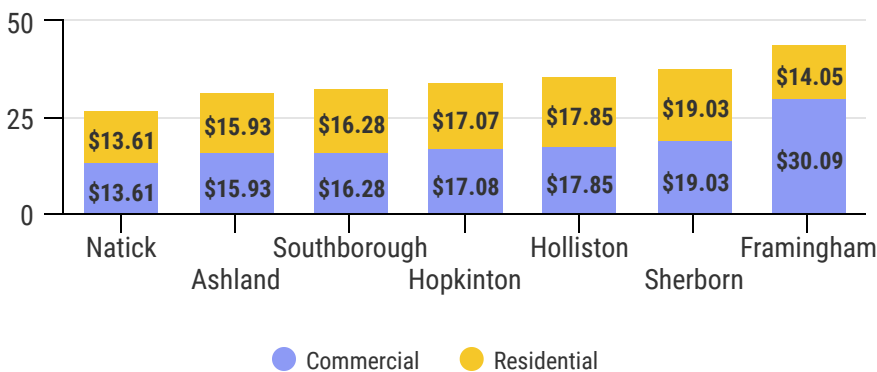


Data Current as of 11/15/21

● Residential & Open Space ● Commercial, Industrial & Personal Property

Class Group	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Residential & Open Space (RO)	922,451	1,141,290	488,787	415,282	354,911
Commercial, Industrial & Personal Property (CIP)	199,842	151,535	199,283	220,525	284,966
	1,122,293	1,292,825	688,070	635,807	639,877

2021 Commercial Tax Rates by Communities



Tax rates in Ashland are considerably lower than other communities in the MetroWest Region which makes it a desirable location for residential and commercial relocation. Low per capita spending in comparison to the rest of the region enables the town to maintain reasonable, affordable taxes. Because of the modest spending and excellent leadership from the finance team, Ashland continues to stay competitive with neighboring communities in the MetroWest Region as an affordable place to live.

Goals and Focus

The Economic Development team will continue to work hard to attract new businesses to Ashland with a continued focus on professional services, retail and hospitality industries. The Economic Development Director will continue to work closely with building owners, developers and real estate agents to ensure quality businesses choose Ashland for their future success. We will continue our work to support existing businesses in Ashland with evolving focus on inclusivity with BIPOC businesses, veteran, women-owned and LGBTQIA2S+ business owners ensuring they receive the full support of the town and are made to feel welcomed in our community. The community development team in Ashland will continually look for ways to redevelop underutilized spaces and oversee new mixed used projects which will enhance the commercial corridors in town. Our focus will always be to encourage a smart, safe, sustainable community that all residents and business owners can be proud of.

RIBBON CUTTINGS & EVENTS

Ribbon Cuttings



MAZI Kitchen & Bar



Dr. Greens Indoor Golf



Kids in Motion



We happily welcomed new businesses to Ashland and love celebrating them! The Town Economic Development Department, in collaboration with the Ashland Business Association, conduct ribbon cuttings and anniversary celebrations where State and local leaders are invited to show support. This Ashland welcome makes a huge difference!

Events

The Economic Development office offers many events throughout the year to showcase and support businesses. You will find incubator space for pop ups at the The Corner Spot and events such as CultureFest, FallFest, Shop on The Spot or the Annual Holiday Stroll which supports small businesses and encourages residents and visitors to shop local.

For more information go to www.ashlandmass.com/economicdevelopment or visit The Corner Spot Website www.cornerspotashland.com

The Ashland Business Association also has ways to network and provide educational, fun events for Ashland businesses or community members who live in Ashland. Visit www.ashlandbusinessassociation.com for more information.



CONTACT US

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