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Working together in Medford and Gilman to support small businesses

WEDC Secretary's visit includes presentation of first FIX-IT Grant award

MEDFORD, WI. MAY 29, 2025 – Two Northern Wisconsin communities are demonstrating the power of collaboration when it comes to projects that benefit small businesses, their communities, and the region.

"Collaborative efforts between communities are incredibly important because they unlock a synergy that allows communities to achieve far more together than they ever could individually," said Medford Area Chamber of Commerce Vice President Billie Hartwig. "We live this every day. Our region is not as populated as larger metropolitan areas, but by working together, we can streamline our efforts while still having our voices heard."

The most recent collaborative effort between the City of Medford and the Village of Gilman is the FIX-IT Grant, which will support small businesses within the two communities with grants to jumpstart projects on the façade, interior, and exterior of aging or historical buildings, projects to make the buildings ADA compliant, or complete demolition. The grant program is funded in part with a \$120,000 Small Business Development Grant (SBDG) from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation.

"We believe positive change promotes positive growth," said Hartwig, who was the architect of the FIX-IT Grant. "We're excited to see the ideas our small businesses come up with for their buildings."

WEDC Secretary and CEO Missy Hughes and other WEDC leaders are visiting communities throughout Wisconsin this year to celebrate their successes in building an Economy for All, by creating communities where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

Hughes was in Gilman and Medford Thursday to hear how the two communities are teaming up jointly to invest in small businesses through a SBDG.

"There's a lot of power in communities collaborating," Hughes said. "Hearing how Gilman and Medford are working together to support the small businesses in their communities, and as a result, make their downtowns even more vibrant, is exciting."

During Thursday's visit, Medford officials awarded the first FIX-IT Grant to Lynn Hicks, owner of HayMow, a Medford business that transforms old furniture through paint and distressing techniques.

The two communities have worked together on different projects in the past, Joe Harris, Medford city administrator, said. The vision each community has for its future aligns and both realize that working together can have a positive result for everyone.

LOOK FORWARD ➤

Gilman Village Clerk Candice Grunseth said she had been thinking of ways to create a grant program aimed at business facades since the COVID pandemic. When she learned about WEDC's SBDG program, she knew it would be a great opportunity to collaborate with the City of Medford and benefit both communities.

"When we had the meeting for the SBDG, I was excited but wasn't sure how to go about it myself," Grunseth said. "It was great to collaborate with the City of Medford. Working together benefits both communities and our county as well. If we don't all pull our ideas and resources together, we might miss a great opportunity."

Hughes also visited the downtowns in each community, visiting projects funded through Vibrant Spaces, Community Development Investment, and Idle Sites Redevelopment grants. In Medford, Hughes visited a Vibrant Spaces project that constructed a pavilion and splash pad to bring people downtown, a renovation of an old auto service station into an event center, and a rehabilitation of a historic building into a bookstore and wine bar.

"These projects are instrumental in the success of the city and businesses with the city because they show investment and appreciation in older buildings," Harris said. "They embrace the history of our community instead of just razing the old and constructing new. These projects also inspired teamwork and a community mindset, created a snowball effect with other businesses in the area, and have created a feeling of pride in the area."

In Gilman, Hughes also visited a Vibrant Spaces project that transformed a downtown lot into a patio and park space that now hosts the farmers market and other community events and a former nursing home that has been redeveloped into 17 residential units with the assistance of an Idle Sites Redevelopment Grant from WEDC.

"We want people to see a vibrant Main Street that welcomes you in," Grunseth said. "We learned from our Design WI event last year that a vibrant Main Street offers a variety of services, activities, employment, and housing in a setting that celebrates the unique culture and history of the community."

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