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## Kiel taps into downtown potential

### *WEDC Secretary's visit highlights community-led reinvention of downtown historic space and support for small businesses*

**KIEL, WI. JUNE 4, 2025** – A thriving downtown doesn't emerge overnight or from a single project, but takes shared effort and collaboration from across the community. In downtown Kiel, that effort has brought together city officials, business owners, developers, and residents all working toward a common goal.

Now, their vision of reenergizing the heart of the city is taking shape through a mix of historic preservation, small business support, and creative transformation of underused spaces.

"Projects and programs like the ones in Kiel show the powerful impact of local vision combined with targeted investment and community collaboration," said Missy Hughes, secretary and CEO of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), the state's lead economic development agency. "By breathing new life into its downtown and supporting entrepreneurs, Kiel is building momentum for a stronger future and a more connected community."

Hughes and other WEDC leaders are visiting communities across Wisconsin this year to celebrate the successes in building an Economy for All, by creating communities where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. In Kiel, city officials and local economic development partners are working to capitalize on underused downtown spaces through loan fund support and the transformation of a vacant factory into a brewery and event venue.

Hughes was in Kiel Wednesday to learn how local leaders, business owners, and regional economic development partners are teaming up to inject funding into downtown.

The Yard 65 Brewery and event venue now operates inside the former Laun Furniture Factory, a 14,500-square-foot building in downtown Kiel that was largely unused for more than 20 years. With support from a \$250,000 Community Development Investment grant from WEDC in 2024, Jason and Jennifer Knuth transformed the space into a brewpub and event center for weddings, reunions, corporate gatherings, and everyday enjoyment.

With room to accommodate more than 400 people, the venue fills a long-standing need in the community for an accessible, centralized space for events.

While large-scale renovations like Yard 65 help anchor downtown revitalization, Kiel is also investing in the future of its small businesses through targeted financial support.

In 2025, the City of Kiel was awarded a \$60,000 Small Business Development grant to expand its Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) program, which provides low-interest loans between \$1,000 and \$30,000 to support building upgrades and entrepreneurial ventures. Loan recipients also

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receive personalized business counseling from Progress Lakeshore, a nonprofit dedicated to supporting local startups and small businesses.

A recent city survey identified 20 underused buildings, nine vacant properties, and 33 facades in need of aesthetic improvements in the downtown corridor. With targeted support and resources, Kiel officials and their economic partners hope to attract new businesses and invigorate investment in the heart of the city.

"We're going to be pretty wide open to any suggestion or opportunity as long as it shows there is a connection to the growth and vitality of the downtown and their business," Kiel City Administrator David Funkhouser said.

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#### **ABOUT THE WISCONSIN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION**

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