



LAUREN PIERCE | THE JOURNAL

Dave Kerfoot works recently at Keowee Brewing Company. Owners Alex and Allison Butterbaugh said Seneca's two downtown incentives were "monumental" in their decision to renovate an old, vacant building for use as a brewery on the east side of Main Street.

Incentives spur downtown growth in Seneca

BY NORM CANNADA
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Just after 8:30 a.m. on Aug. 1, 2018, Alex Butterbaugh walked into Seneca City Hall with completed applications for two new incentive programs city administrator Scott Moulder had just announced the night before.

Butterbaugh and his wife, Allison, purchased a building at the corner of Walnut and Main streets, now known as Keowee Brewing Company.

"It is almost paramount right now that the incentive program is in place because it is such a large investment for our family," Butterbaugh said

at the time. "With this incentive program that the city is doing, I think it will only spur more activity down there."

He was right.

From August 2018 until the final grants were approved late last month, officials said the Commercial Building Improvement Program (CBIP) and the Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP) have achieved their goals of beginning downtown revitalization. A dozen buildings have been or are in the process of being

rehabilitated for businesses and nine new businesses have made commitments to locate downtown, with six of those already open.

The Seneca Improvements Corporation, which oversaw the recently closed program, has approved nearly \$600,000 in incentive grants for building improvements and new businesses. Business and property owners estimated in their applications for the CBIP program they would invest nearly \$4 million on those

properties, according to numbers provided to the property owners in the applications.

"It's exceeded my expectations in the two or three years that it's been in

place," Moulder said. "I foresaw a future where this would actually be in place for five or six years. I think it really served as a catalyst to kick-starting downtown redevelopment and we're seeing the dividends and benefits of that program.

"You're seeing almost \$4 million invested downtown because of this program," he added. "I think that's a huge indicator of how beneficial it was."



OUR VIEW

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CBIP - Approved

Requestor	Amount	Total Investment*	Date Approved	Status
34N82W	42,000.00	280,000.00	9/28/21	Recently approved
Redmond Boys Market	21,000.00	140,000.00	9/28/21	Recently approved
Papa Julio's	75,000.00	500,000.00	9/28/21	Completed - waiting on receipts
Sebastian & Michela Bickel	147,300.00	1,087,000.00	9/28/21	Recently approved
Mary Tannery's building	75,000.00	500,000.00	10/23/19	Completed - waiting on receipts
G's Pizza	53,276.18	255,000.00	5/6/20	Waiting on contract to be finalized
	\$ 413,576.18	\$ 2,762,000.00		

CBIP - Paid

Requestor	Amount	Total Investment*	Date Approved	Date Paid
Keowee Brewing	95,713.96	600,000.00	8/22/18	11/13/19
Salon K	6,587.10	75,000.00	7/24/19	10/23/19
One Community Church	3,835.47	86,851.00	10/23/19	6/10/20
Shipley's	9,660.45	84,161.05	1/16/19	6/12/19
Mayberry's	27,883.13	350,000.00	2/5/20	7/21/20
DelMarco	1,817.25	12,115.00	10/10/18	5/21/19
	\$ 145,497.36	\$ 1,208,127.05		

* total investment figures were pulled from CBIP applications and are estimates

EDIP - Approved

Requestor	Amount	Date Approved	Status
Shipley's	5,000.00	1/16/19	Completed - waiting on receipts
Mayberry's	6,500.00	2/5/20	Completed - waiting on receipts
Salon K	3,000.00	5/6/20	Completed - waiting on receipts
Redmond Boys/Clay Market	4,000.00	9/28/21	Recently approved
	\$ 18,500.00		

EDIP - Paid

Requestor	Amount	Date Approved	Date Paid
Keowee Brewing	\$ 9,959.07	8/22/18	9/24/20
Keowee Brewing	\$ 14,653.32	8/22/18	9/29/21
	\$ 24,612.39		

Seneca Mayor Dan Alexander said he and council developed the vision "that we wanted to make downtown a community where community could come, shop, walk and have a good time with their families." He said Moulder bought into that vision after becoming administrator in May 2018.

"There is lots of excitement in the downtown and the Seneca area," Alexander said. "We're seeing lots of development all over."

"The incentive program was something the council and I wanted to try," he added. "We said, 'What did we have to lose?' I do think the incentives were a major factor in people saying 'Let's try this.' It's proven to be very successful."

THE INCENTIVES

The CBIP offered grant funding for two years, including up to 100 percent of utility connection fees and building permit fees and up to 15 percent of construction costs up to a maximum of \$150,000. The EDIP worked to encourage new business development downtown by providing reimbursements of 6 percent of utility payments and 25 percent of water user fees for each of the two years a business participated in the program. It also provided up to 100 percent of the amount equal to the business license paid for each of the two years for which the grants are sought, and up to 100 percent of the amount equal to hospitality and/or city accommodations taxes collected by that business for the first year of the grant funding.

THE IMPACT

Butterbaugh said he and his wife invested about \$640,000 on the building rehab, a little more than the \$600,000 he originally estimated in his application to the city. He said the total investment made into the brewery was "more than I'm willing to admit."

He called the incentive programs "monumental" in the effort to rehab the old building.

"The cost of remodeling and revitalizing this building would have been pretty

cost prohibitive without the incentive program," Butterbaugh said.

He said the brewery has become an "anchor" that has attracted others to the eastern side of town, including G's Pizza, Crown and Crest Events Center and a planned European bistro in a former dress shop on East Main Street across from the brewery that owners Sabastian and Michela Bickel said would likely begin its renovations next year.

"This is exactly what we were hoping for," he said. "We saw the potential of what could be downtown with the success of Ram Cat Alley. We knew the potential was there. We wanted to be on this side of downtown and were hoping to be an anchor on this side and help fill in and that's exactly what we're seeing. We're hoping it continues."

Butterbaugh added the business has grown faster than anticipated.

"We've been able to do more things that we didn't think we'd be able to do at this point," Butterbaugh said. "We have started offering health benefits to our full-time employees and hiring more employees than we thought we'd have at this point."

The brewery is planning to expand with the purchase of the former Bantam Chef for kitchen space and to use the greenspace there for more outdoor seating and entertainment.

CITY COMMITTED TO DOWNTOWN REDEVELOPMENT

Seneca officials are also involved in other ways to enhance downtown with a pilot loan project that allowed Vangeli's to reopen with more space after a roof collapse at the Ram Cat Alley site. The city also owns the former Harper's Five and Dime and Kimbrell's stores across from City Hall. Both are being renovated for commercial and entertainment use, including a park.

Moulder said the city will remain committed beyond those programs, including a plan to restripe East North 1st Street that is currently being consid-

ered by the S.C. Department of Transportation.

"This will be a long-term partnership between the city and the downtown merchants and building owners," Moulder said. "East North 1st Street will be our next project. We'll move on to continue our efforts to beautifying East North 1st Street, improving traffic flows there and then go beyond that."