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Town of Acton

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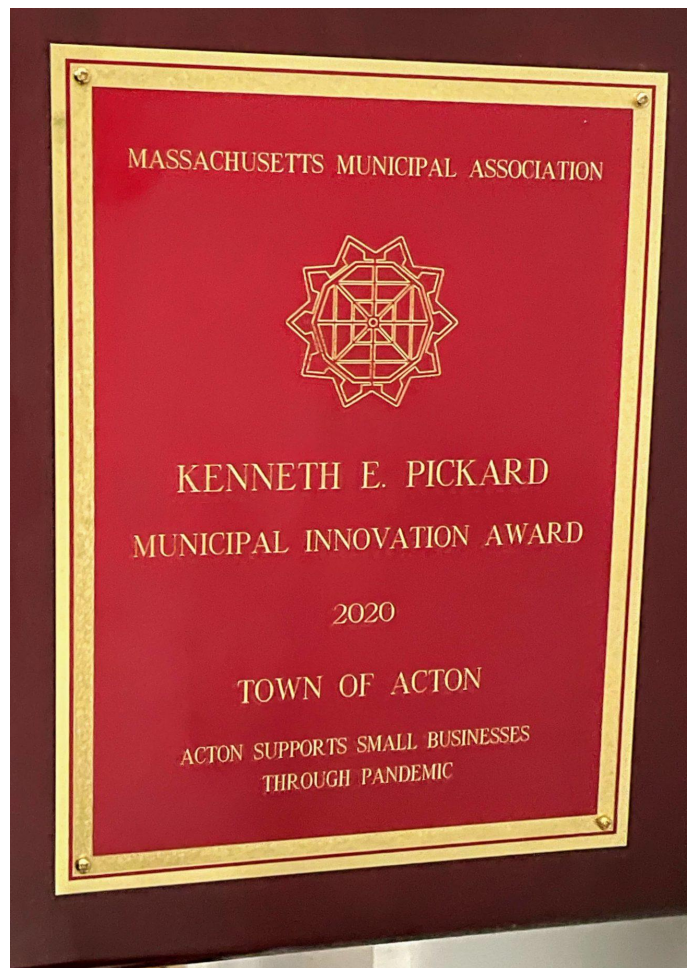
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Town of Acton Receives Massachusetts Municipal Association's Innovation Award for Work Supporting Businesses Throughout COVID-19



The Town of Acton was awarded the Kenneth Pickard Municipal Innovation Award by the Massachusetts Municipal Association in recognition of its widespread programs and initiatives that have supported local businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Photo courtesy Town of Acton)

ACTON -- Town Manager John Mangiaratti and Director of Land Use and Economic Development Matthew Selby are pleased to announce that the Town of Acton has received a municipal innovation award for its ongoing work to support local businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Town of Acton was awarded the [Kenneth Pickard Municipal Innovation Award](#) on Friday, Jan. 22 for its widespread programs and initiatives that have helped to support local businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. The award, given by the Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA), recognizes municipalities that have developed unique and creative projects and programs to increase the effectiveness of local government.

“This award is recognition of the hard work and dedication of Director Selby and our town employees who have found many creative and impactful ways to provide support

and assistance to our local businesses throughout the pandemic,” Town Manager Mangiaratti said. “I would also like to thank the Board of Selectmen for its leadership and strong demonstration of support for Acton businesses as we implemented these initiatives and programs.”

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, the Town of Acton has worked to assist local businesses by creating promotional campaigns, easing restrictions to assist business operations and offering funding programs.

When the first statewide order to close bars and restaurants for in-person dining went into effect in March 2020, town employees compiled a list of establishments still open for takeout and delivery. The Acton Restaurant Week website was re-purposed to include the list of establishments, their hours, takeout or delivery menus, contact information and more. The list was also shared in the daily COVID-19 update by Town Manager Mangiaratti.

In April 2020, the town launched a #TakeOutSelfie Challenge social media campaign to encourage residents to support local businesses. Customers were prompted to post a “selfie” with the #TakeOutSelfie hashtag and tag the Town of Acton’s social media accounts to help promote Acton’s restaurants.

The town also worked with the business community and the Middlesex West Chamber of Commerce on a buy local campaign. The campaign included banners placed across Route 27, sandwich boards and lawn signs across town that read: “Support your community. Shop local. Eat local.”

Earlier this month, the town shared its new Acton Video Tour which has been in the making for the past year. The video contains six parts that highlight the community and businesses -- a welcome message, Economic Development, History & Culture, Quality of Life, Community Organizations/Community Services and Resiliency -- and describes what makes Acton a vibrant and inviting community. [Click here to watch the video.](#)

In May, an emergency order was approved that allowed restaurants to sell groceries during the local state of emergency. Restaurants were also able to expand their outdoor dining areas to accommodate customers within health and social distancing guidelines. Liquor licenses were expanded for outdoor seating following Gov. Baker’s executive order on June 1 authorizing local licensing authorities to expand alcohol licenses for such a purpose.

The town also provided local establishments with a partial refund on their liquor licenses. Acton charges \$5,000 annually for an all-alcohol pouring license and \$2,000 for a beer and wine license. A total of 19 establishments with all-alcohol licenses and five establishments with a beer and wine license were given a refund of 25% for their 2020 licenses due to COVID-19 closures. The Board of Selectmen also waived 25% of the liquor license fees due in 2021.

The town also relaxed zoning bylaws related to temporary signage and waived permit fees for temporary signs.

After hearing significant comments about allowing expanded drive-up windows as a result of COVID-19, the Board of Selectmen directed staff and the Planning Board to conduct a public engagement process regarding the concept of allowing drive-up windows for pharmacies and restaurants. Acton currently allows drive-ups for banks only. Virtual public forums were held in October and December 2020 for Acton residents and businesses to discuss expanding drive-up windows in Acton. The Board of Selectmen is now considering feedback from the public forums and may decide to bring zoning changes to an upcoming Town Meeting.

In September 2020, Acton residents voted in support of a COVID Small Business Grant Program. The approximately \$165,000 grant program was funded using the town's free cash. Grants of up to \$4,000 each were provided to 43 small businesses to help cover rent and other fixed costs. The program targeted small, local businesses with less than 35 employees, less than \$1.5 million in annual revenue and that demonstrated a loss of 50% or more in revenue since the closures began in March 2020. The COVID Small Business Grant Program and how it came to be was featured in a video, which can be [viewed here](#).

The town also utilized its website and email lists to conduct extensive outreach to Acton businesses regarding additional local, state and federal grant opportunities. Through the recent Mass Growth Capital Corporation grant program, 17 businesses in Acton were awarded grants through the four rounds of this program. In total, \$890,000 was distributed to Acton businesses by the Baker-Polito Administration.

Earlier this month, the town launched a [micro-enterprise grant program](#) through a partnership with the Towns of Boxborough, Littleton, Maynard and Westford. The program will provide eligible businesses a one-time grant of up to \$10,000 to help cover costs such as rent, staffing and utilities. The program will be funded by a \$1.6 million Community Development Block Grant awarded to the Town of Acton as the lead for the

program.

“Local businesses contribute to our community in many different ways, and they were hit especially hard by restrictions brought on by the pandemic,” Director Selby said. “We’d like to commend the Acton business community on its resiliency and adaptability during the many significant changes and challenges it experienced during the greater part of the past year.”

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Town Manager John Mangiaratti takes a photo at Filho's Great Road in October 2020 as part of the town's #TakeOutSelfie Challenge social media campaign. (Photo courtesy Town of Acton)

A message from the Town of Acton

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