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# CITY OF BIDDEFORD, MAINE

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## **Biddeford City Hall in the Running for \$150,000 National Grant to Repair Clock Tower**

**BIDDEFORD** — Biddeford, it's our time.

Biddeford City Hall's Clock Tower has been selected as one of only 20 Main Street landmarks nationwide to compete for \$2 million in restoration grant funding from American Express and the National Trust for Historic Preservation through the 2018 *Partners in Preservation: Celebrating Diversity on Main Street* campaign.

Partners in Preservation is a community-based partnership, created by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and American Express, to raise awareness of the importance of preserving historic places and their role in sustaining local communities. To date, it has committed over \$22 million in support of more than 200 historic sites across the country. Drawing on the success of the 2017 program, this year the campaign will award \$2 million in grants to historic sites on America's Main Streets. Each of the 20 sites featured in the campaign played a role in the development of a diverse nation or the struggle for equal rights.

In order for the clock tower to be awarded the grant funding, citizens across the country must show their support for the restoration project by voting at [www.voteyourmainstreet.org/Biddeford](http://www.voteyourmainstreet.org/Biddeford). After a simple registration process, you can cast up to five votes for Biddeford's Clock Tower Restoration Project each day between September 24 and October 26. The communities with the most votes at the end of the campaign will receive grants towards their projects.

Heart of Biddeford, who applied for this grant on behalf of the clock tower, has received an initial grant of \$20,000 to increase public awareness of the importance of the clock tower and build grassroots support for our Main Street district.

"Ever since the clock tower emerged as a priority in the community-created Heart & Soul Master Plan in 2011, HoB has watched for opportunities to honor and preserve this iconic, historic symbol of Biddeford," said Heart of Biddeford Executive Director Delilah Poupore. "Main Street programs are based in historic preservation because we know that our buildings are often intricately tied to our history, and that's something we never want to lose as we move forward and experience progress."

Biddeford City Hall, listed on the National Historic Register, was designed by renowned Portland architect John Calvin Stevens in 1895 to replace the previous City Hall building that was destroyed in a fire. The clock tower was added to Maine Preservation's annual list of the state's most endangered properties in 2014.

“This building that was so central to the “Proud City Rising Above the Falls” has been decimated by neglect,” Mayor Alan Casavant said at the September 24 announcement of the campaign. “What would those city fathers who oversaw the rebuilding of this facility in 1895 think if they saw the clock tower today in such a condition of disrepair? It is time that we embrace that historical pride and do what needs to be done to resurrect the tower to its former glory.”

Efforts to obtain funding to repair the clock tower have been ongoing for several years. A narrow majority of voters rejected a referendum to repair City Hall in 2015, with 1,828 supporting a \$2.27 million bond and 1,964 residents rejecting it. A \$3 million bond for the repairs had previously been rejected in 2012. The most recent short-term work on the structure was completed in 2009 when the city spent \$225,000 to prevent water leaking into the building and debris from falling off onto the street below.

“That preventative work in 2009 was supposed to be a temporary fix to last about five years, and with competing priorities and limited municipal funding here we are almost ten years later and haven’t been able to make significant progress,” said Phil Radding, the City’s Facilities Manager. “It would be amazing if we receive one of the \$150,000 grants. The money will be a big help in improving the structure and will serve to renew public interest in the need to preserve this wonderful piece of Biddeford’s history.”

The grant funding, if obtained, will be used to rebuild the four faces of extensive decorative work outside the clock room, including siding, panels, trim and paint. The clock and counterweights, which stopped working in 2012, will also be returned to working order. Radding has identified several other structural improvements that will also be necessary to preserve the clock tower for the long-term.

“We hope that residents will rally together and support this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to improve our City Hall and preserve the clock tower,” said City Manager James Bennett. “We’re very lucky that we might have found a solution to help save this landmark before it’s too late, but we really need your help to make it a reality.”

Biddeford’s restoration project will compete against 19 other communities around the country to obtain a share of the grant funding. Of this list of communities, which includes major metropolises such as Chicago and New York City, Biddeford is one of the smallest cities selected for the competition and is the only community in Maine to receive the honor.

“Because of our smaller size, it’s going to take an even bigger commitment from our citizens to win than it will in other communities, but I think we can do it,” said Casavant. “It’s part of Biddeford’s nature to be passionate and dedicated to bettering our community. We just saw it with Waterhouse Field and I think we’re going to see it again here.”

As part of the campaign, each community will hold an Open House on October 20 to exhibit the restoration project to the public. Biddeford’s Open House will feature tours of the inner workings of the clock tower, live theater and music, and more. Additional details will be released prior to the event.

For more information on this campaign, please visit [VoteYourMainStreet.org](http://VoteYourMainStreet.org), hosted by media partner National Geographic. For updates as the contest progresses, please follow the City of Biddeford and Heart of Biddeford on social media.

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### **About Partners in Preservation**

Partners in Preservation is a program in which American Express, in partnership with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, awards preservation grants to historic places across the country.

Through this partnership, American Express and the National Trust for Historic Preservation seek to increase the public's awareness of the importance of historic preservation in the United States and to preserve America's historic and cultural places. The program also hopes to inspire long-term support from local citizens for the historic places at the heart of their communities.

### **About American Express**

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### **About the National Trust for Historic Preservation**

The National Trust for Historic Preservation, a privately funded nonprofit organization, works to save America's historic places: [www.savingplaces.org](http://www.savingplaces.org).

### **About Main Street America**

Main Street America has been helping revitalize older and historic commercial districts for more than 35 years. Today it is a network of more than 1,600 neighborhoods and communities, rural and urban, who share both a commitment to place and to building stronger communities through preservation-based economic development. Main Street America is a program of the nonprofit National Main Street Center, Inc., a subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. [www.mainstreet.org](http://www.mainstreet.org)

### **About National Geographic Partners LLC**

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