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FACADE IMPROVEMENT GRANT PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

The City of Charlotte recognizes that strong urban business districts affect the overall health of our community by providing employment opportunities, amenities, goods and services. For this reason, a variety of business financial assistance programs that target corridor revitalization are part of the city's economic development strategy. Today these programs continue to provide innovative tools for small businesses and property owners in targeted business districts

PROGRAM

An attractive image is a key importance to the success of any commercial area. Façade and storefront improvements are one of the most effective ways of upgrading the image of individual businesses and the business district. The storefronts (the side of your building that faces the street) sell the business - and the business district - to customers and new tenants alike. An attractive appearance combined with quality products, competitive prices and good service creates a compelling image that will increase commerce, profits, and community pride.

The Façade Improvement Grant Program seeks to help property owners and tenants by removing blight, improving the appearance of buildings, and bringing parking, landscaping and signage into conformance with current codes. The program provides 50% - 60% reimbursement for expenses related to eligible architectural renovations to commercial property located within targeted business districts as identified in the Business Corridor Plan.

WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THIS GUIDE

This guide intends to help project owners know what the City eligibility requirements are and understand what it looks for and considers when reviewing an application. Knowing the eligibility and design aspects, can help develop the vision and scope-of-work for the project as well as aide in completing the grant application. An incomplete grant application will not receive consideration. The City recognizes that every project is unique and this guide does not attempt to cover every situation. Instead, it offers basic eligibility information and discusses what physical improvements have been effective in revitalizing commercial districts.

This guide is based on, among other things, the following design principles: to promote retail activity and enhance the experience of the pedestrian; to create an attractive and safe retail environment; to reinforce business district character and architectural design; and to use good design concepts and high-quality durable materials.

Project Owners are encouraged to work with an architect or other contractor with comprehensive knowledge in all aspects of design and build to develop a project scope of work.

THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN DEVELOPING A PROJECT SCOPE

Taking the time to consider and assess the property's current conditions to ensure any renovation will produce the desired esthetic outcome. Below are some things to consider.

Evaluate Current Conditions – Take time to consider the current building and site. Ask yourself what you do and do not like about the building's exterior and site conditions. What can you do to change the things you do not like? How can you enhance the things that you like? Identifying this is a good first step towards developing a renovation plan.

Building Use – Consider the intended use of the building. What type of image do you want to present? How do you want your clients to feel when they come to you?

Business District Character – Consider the overall character of the business district. For example, if the district is predominantly light industrial in nature you should consider staying away from a design with retail characteristics.

Proximity to Residential Use – If a residential area is near your property, ask yourself what you would want a business to look like if it were located adjacent to your neighborhood. This can help you identify opportunities that exist to make improvements and problem areas that need addressing.

Notice Other Buildings – Make an effort to notice surrounding buildings, especially those that are similar to your building. The more you begin to think about how to improve the appearance of the property, the more aware you will become of design elements and site conditions of the buildings around you. Notice things such as doors and windows, light fixtures, canopies, color schemes and paint patterns, decorative murals, landscaping details, handicap accessibility and site conditions.

Remember, if approved for participation in the program, the project will receive funding from Charlotte taxpayers. Consider work that will have a lasting impact through the improvement of the overall economic health of the business district but also the surrounding neighborhoods.

Eligible Expenses

- Approved architectural renovations to the building façade visible from the public right-of-way.
- Improvements to bring grandfathered non-conforming signage, parking and landscaping into conformance with current codes.
- 50% of architectural fees up to \$2,500. If architectural drawings are required by City staff, the City may reimburse its portion prior to project completion.

Maximum grant awards based upon building square footage:

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| • Up to 3,000 sq./ft. | \$20,000 |
| • 3,000-6,000 sq./ft. | \$30,000 |
| • Over 6,000 sq./ft. | \$40,000 |
| • Shopping centers up to 30,000 sq./ft. with 3 tenants | \$90,000 |
| • Shopping centers > 30,000 sq./ft. with 4 tenants | \$130,000 |

Eligible Businesses

- Owners or tenants of buildings that are used by and for for-profit business. Use of the building must conform to all current codes and ordinances; non-conforming uses of any kind are not eligible.
- Prohibited businesses include bars, nightclubs, tattoo parlors, body piercing shops, check cashing, adult businesses, businesses operating from residential property, and any non-conforming uses. Portions of buildings occupied by ineligible businesses of any kind, including non-profit entities, are ineligible for program funds.
- All individual businesses including tenants must have less than \$2,000,000 in gross sales for each of the last three years.
- Owners of vacant buildings shall be eligible if the owner's purpose is to rehabilitate the structure to attract eligible businesses. Expenses are reimbursed only after an eligible business occupies the space and opens to the public.
- Owners and tenants are eligible to re-apply until the maximum award is reached.
- Participants in this program are not eligible for participation in the Infrastructure Grant program.
- All real property taxes must be paid in full.

Eligible Geography

- Business, office and industrial zoned properties located in the City's Business Services Program Geography

How does the program work?

- An inter-departmental team of City staff reviews proposals **quarterly**.
- Staff bases eligibility decisions on the following criteria: (1) improvement to the appearance of the site, building, and business district (2) creation of jobs (3) reduction of crime (4) leveraging of additional economic activities (5) provision of needed services and (6) geographic distribution of funds. Applicants must submit an application to the Economic Development Office. Upon approval, the City enters into a contract with the applicant setting forth, among other things, the scope of work as approved by the review team.
- Applicants are responsible for obtaining all necessary governmental permits and authorizations, including building permits.
- Staff will be permitted to inspect the project to ensure conformance with the grant contract.
- The City does not reimburse for work done prior to application approval and contract signing.
- The City will authorize reimbursement payment after, among other things, completion of the project in accordance with the approved plan as set forth in the contract, together with occupancy of the building by eligible tenants. The City will not contract to perform any of the work, but will reimburse the applicant for approved expenses. Proof of payment is required for reimbursement.
- Approved projects should be completed within 90 days or funds may not be guaranteed

Architectural Renovations

- **Building Renovations:** Buildings should fit in their environment. This program is available to businesses in historic, industrial, and strip shopping areas. These environments are different and the requirements for funding may vary for projects in different areas.
- **Windows and Glazing:** Visual access into retail stores is important. Storefronts should not be boarded up, nor should window space be reduced. Retail frontages should be a minimum of 50% glazed. Mirrored or heavily tinted glass is discouraged. If windows are the only expense being requested it will be considered eligible only if there is an increase in window size.
- **New Materials:** Materials used for renovation should match or be compatible with the original materials and design. Imitations of materials (especially for historic buildings) are discouraged. Repair or replace all damaged or decaying storefronts, display windows, entrances, signs, etc.
- **Brick and Stone:** Due to brick and stone's porous textures, sandblasting is prohibited. Masonry surfaces should be tuck-pointed with mortar compatible with the color, texture and form of the original mortar.
- **Accessibility:** Renovated façades should be accessible to the handicapped. Renovations or additions that bring a building's façade and/or entrance into conformance with ADA standards (e.g., ramps, doorway dimensions, etc.) are eligible expenses.
- **Awnings:** The addition of awnings is an eligible expense. Those proposed to be installed above public right-of-ways must receive encroachment agreements from the Department of Transportation. Awnings shall not have rounded ends at their horizontal terminations. Permanent awning materials such as metal, is recommended, over other awning materials.
- Painting will only be eligible when triggered by the renovation.
- Pressure washing must be done in conjunction with other renovation items to be determined eligible.

Signage

- Expenses relating to the removal of non-conforming grandfathered signs and subsequent construction of new signage conforming to the ordinance are eligible.

Parking Lots and Landscaping

- Only parking lots visible from the public right-of-way are eligible.
- Only expenses relating to bringing a grandfathered parking lot into conformance with current parking and landscaping codes are eligible.
- Landscaping will only take place during the planting season (November - March).

The City reserves the right to consider additional principles and guidelines when reviewing application for project eligibility.

Building Design Guidelines

Business District Characteristics

When considering the scope of work, take into consideration the existing characteristics of the surrounding business district. Design elements that you choose should be in line with the character of the area. For instance, retail districts will have a very different look from light industrial districts. Districts that are more contemporary may allow creative elements, such as, murals or mosaics but a historic district would not. Lastly, the buildings should fit in and complement their environment.



Storefronts and Entrances

Buildings with multiple storefronts should be unified with architecturally compatible materials, colors, awnings, signage and lighting. Storefronts should not be boarded-up or covered with signage of any kind, nor should window space be reduced. Visual access into retail stores is important, mirrored or heavily tinted glass is discouraged. Where security concerns exist, consider using break-in resistant glass or interior roll-down bars, but try to avoid exterior bars.

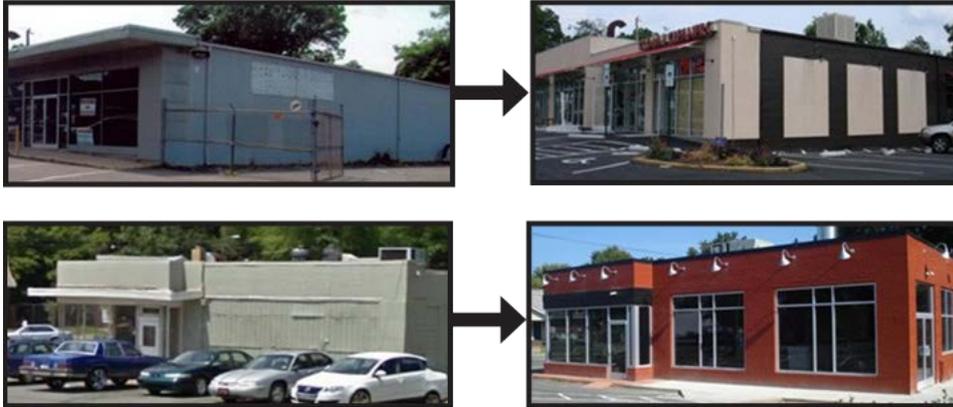


Wall Materials

Wall materials such as brick and stone should be repaired and maintained. When individual pieces of brick or stone are beyond repair they should be replaced to match originals in terms of size, color, finish and texture. Masonry surfaces should be properly tuck-pointed to avoid moisture and excessive wear on the masonry. While less durable materials are not recommended, those materials can still be considered.

Blank Walls

Blank walls that are visible from the public right-of-way should be treated in a manner that will add interest to the wall. This can be achieved by adding non-structural architectural elements, introducing color, installing windows and incorporating decorative lighting. Blank wall mitigation does not include standalone landscaping to hide the wall, however, a trellis attached to a wall with climbing vegetation (living or green façade) may be considered.



Windows

Storefront windows should allow views into the building. The use of clear glass is encouraged over tinted, spandrel, mirrored or opaque glass. Glass blocks may be considered as an accent application.

Furthermore, window openings should not be reduced in size. If original openings have previously been altered or filled in, the openings should be restored to their original size and configuration to every extent possible. All broken and missing windows should be replaced with new glass. Window frames and sashes should also be repaired.



Awnings

When new awnings are being considered, durable materials should be used, whenever possible. This will enable the project to have a positive impact on the business district for a longer period of time. Permanent awning materials such as metal are preferred over other materials. There are many innovative metal canopy styles available today that can complement every project. Existing awnings that are faded, stained or torn should be replaced. Awnings should be mounted in a location that

respects the original design of the building, for instance, storefront bays and following window/door patterns. Awnings proposed to be installed over a public right-of-way, such as sidewalks, must receive encroachment agreements from the appropriate governing authority, i.e. Department of Transportation.



Lighting

Decorative lighting elements can have a big impact on improving the appearance of the building. The use of accent lighting to illuminate building façades is highly encouraged and may be done with projecting or concealing light fixtures. Such fixtures should be compatible with the building's design. In general, the entire façade should not be washed in bright light but lighting should be used to accentuate individual building features.

When submitting your grant application, be sure to identify where new lighting fixtures will be located on the building and please provide sample pictures of the proposed fixtures.



Signage

The major purpose of a commercial sign is to identify a business and its merchandise and services. Signs should not be large and overbearing or cluttered with excessive information. They should be simple and coordinated with other neighboring signs. Randomly located signs, excessively large signs and an excessive number of signs can make neighborhood shopping difficult. Simple signs with a consistent size and location from one storefront to the next make locating a business simpler.

Signs on the same building should have a consistent location, size and pattern and be compatible with one another. Signs should be constructed of durable high-quality materials and should be well maintained. Plywood, plastic and styrofoam should not be used. Electrical transformer boxes, conduit and raceways should all be concealed from public view. If a raceway cannot be mounted internally (on the inside of the building), the exposed metal surfaces should be finished to match the background wall

or integrated into the overall design of the sign. Unused electrical equipment should be removed, along with signs from prior businesses, illegal signs, roof signs, billboards and unused structural sign supports.

Replacing non-conforming grandfathered signs with new, conforming signage is an eligible expense under the program. For example, many older urban shopping centers often have too many signs but if an applicant voluntarily removes all grandfathered signs and replaces with new conforming signs, these expenses may be eligible for reimbursement. Often, the City will ask about sign design and color scheme, in order to determine if the new signage fits with the overall scope of work.

Signs in Charlotte require sign permits. Learn more about Charlotte's sign ordinance by visiting <http://nbs.charlottenc.gov>.



Security Grilles

Security grilles, screens and enclosures should be as inconspicuous as possible and compatible with other elements of the storefront. All window and door security bars and gates visible from the public right-of-way or parking areas should be installed on the side face of doors and windows.

If a building currently has exterior bars and gates, they should be relocated to the interior, as part of the renovation. Any exposed portions of the grilles, screens or enclosures should be painted. If exterior grilles are preferred, consideration should be given to installing roll-down or scissor gates for greater aesthetic impact. However, less obtrusive devices and alarm systems are preferred.



Accessibility

Renovated façades should be accessible to the handicapped. Expenses related to exterior ADA accessibility are eligible for reimbursement under the Façade Improvement Program. This includes ADA parking spaces, signage, walkways, ramps, and doorway dimensions.

Handicap ramps should have a solid base such as concrete with metal railings; wooden ramps and railings are discouraged.

Project owners are encouraged to explore the possibility of additional tax incentives for ADA improvements by visiting the U.S. Department of Labor website at www.dol.gov.



Rooftop Mechanical

Rooftop mechanical items, such as HVAC units, that are visible from the public right-of-way shall be screened, whenever possible. This can be accomplished by adding a parapet or other treatment to the roofline or by enclosing the mechanical units with a screening feature.

Electrical Boxes & Conduits

Electrical Boxes and other conduits should be painted to complement the building color or screened from the public right-of-way.

Decorative Elements

Making small changes to your building can have a big impact. Do not be afraid to be creative and think “outside of the box.” Murals, mosaics, unique architectural elements and paint schemes should be considered.



Maintenance

Generally speaking, maintenance alone is not eligible for participation in the façade grant program unless it is part of a larger qualified project. Replacing a roof, repairing broken glass, replacing rotten wood and repainting a building are considered general maintenance activities and not eligible for participation in the grant program. Repairs that are required to meet minimum building code standards are also not eligible for participation in the program. If, however, exterior building repairs and maintenance are part of a larger renovation project they may be given consideration. For example, a project that involves a complete renovation of the exterior of a building including adding new storefront windows and doors while at the same time repairing broken windows (maintenance) is eligible to apply for consideration. Every project is unique and will be evaluated on its own merits.

If you believe that the project only needs general maintenance work, consider other design elements that could improve the appearance of the building. Things like adding exterior decorative light fixtures, installing a metal canopy and planting trees can make a difference. Again, every project is different and will be evaluated on its own merits.

SITE CONDITIONS

Parking Lots

Repaving, repairing, sealing and/or restriping a parking lot are not eligible for participation in the grant program unless it is part of a larger renovation project.

Expenses relating to bringing grandfathered parking lots into conformance with current parking and landscaping codes are eligible for reimbursement. Most often, this will involve one or more of the following:

- Removing parking from the setback
- Installing trees and shrubs that meet the current tree and zoning ordinance requirements
- Screening parking from the right-of-way
- Adding sidewalks



Landscaping

When it comes to landscaping, installing trees and shrubs to meet current codes is eligible for reimbursement. Although installing annual or perennial flower garden may improve the appearance of your site, unless they are required by current codes, costs associated with this type of landscaping are generally not eligible for grant funds.

Examples of eligible landscaping expenses include:

- Planting trees within the required distance of parking spaces
- Planting shrubs to screen parking
- Planting trees and/or shrubs as buffers to residential property



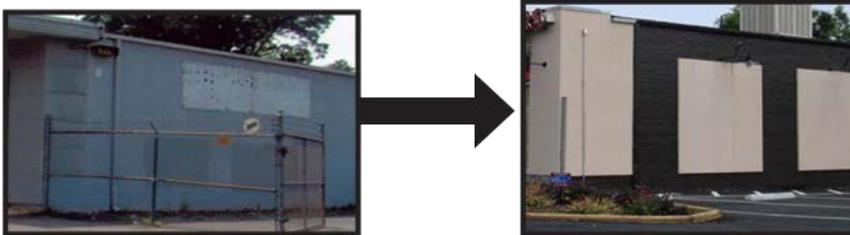
Pedestrian Amenities

When developing a project, think about how pedestrians get to the building from their cars and from the street. If you currently have no sidewalk, consider adding one. If parking spaces are located directly behind a public sidewalk at the street, consider adding a planting strip to create a buffer between pedestrians and cars.



Fencing

Fencing that is visible from the public right-of-way should be decorative in nature. Chain link, barbed and razor wire fencing is discouraged. If a building currently has such fencing visible from the public right-of-way or abutting residential property, it should be removed or replaced with decorative fencing as part of the renovation project. If new fencing is proposed to be installed, visible from the public right-of-way or abutting residential property, it should be decorative. For projects with abutting residential property, proper screening materials and buffers should be considered.



Dumpsters

Dumpsters and grease traps on the site should be screened with sustainable material such as brick, concrete masonry block or vinyl as part of the proposed renovation project. Standard wood for privacy fencing is discouraged.



Bicycle Parking

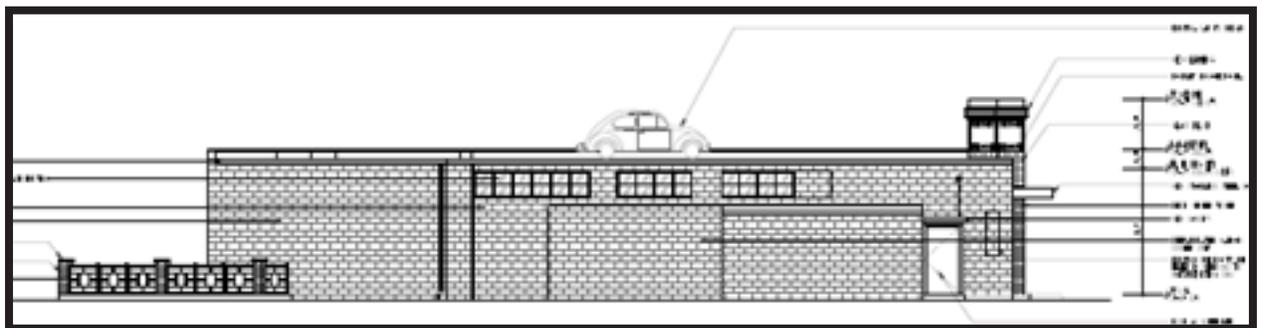
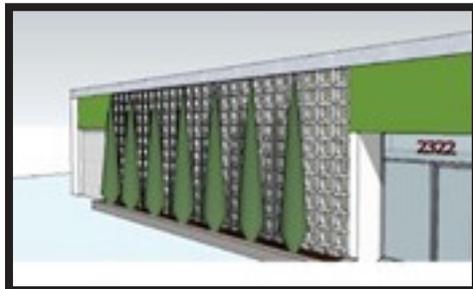
Adding bicycle parking is highly encouraged.



To learn about special bike rack programs and for help identifying the proper location to install a bike rack, contact the Charlotte Department of Transportation at 704-336-2278.

Drawings

Although small projects may not require a formal rendering (also referred to as an elevation), most often a drawing will be required for your project. Keep in mind that to give your application full consideration, the Façade Grant Review Team needs to understand definitively what you are proposing to do to your building and site. Having a conceptual drawing, and particularly one in color, will assist with this and will help facilitate the review and approval of your application.



Permits

BUILDING PERMITS

Permits are required for all additions, alterations and new construction, as well as many types of repair work. For example, replacing window frames & windows, or a change in the number of doors and windows, requires a building permit.

Building permits must be clearly displayed at the construction site.

Building permits are issued at the Hal Marshall Building, 700 S. Tryon Street, Charlotte, NC. For small projects, permits can be obtained online at <http://webpermit.mecklenburgcountync.gov>.

LAND DEVELOPMENT REVIEWS & PERMITS

Projects involving site work or a change-of-use may require additional permits.

Visit

<http://development.charmeck.org> to learn more, or call 704-336-6692.

SIGN PERMITS

All new signs and most sign alterations require a permit. Frequently Asked Questions about sign permits can be found on the Zoning Code Enforcement page at <http://nbs.charlottenc.gov>. Sign permits are issued at the Hal Marshall Building, 700 S. Tryon Street, Charlotte NC. Call 704-336-7600 for more details.

FIRE PREVENTION INSPECTIONS

Fire inspections are encouraged for all projects and may be required for your specific project. Project owners are encouraged to schedule the inspection before work commences and particularly if the building has not been inspected in the last 12 months.

Contact the Fire Prevention Bureau at 704-336-2101 to schedule an inspection.