

TOWN OF NORTH BRANFORD

FAÇADE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

I. Purpose:

The purpose of the North Branford Façade Improvement Program is to provide owners and tenants of commercial buildings located in targeted areas financial assistance in the form of a grant in support of façade renovation and encourage reinvestment in developed areas. The program is intended as an incentive to improve the competitiveness of sites in the Town's primary commercial districts.

The objectives of the program are:

1. To stimulate efforts to improve the street appearance of eligible properties which will encourage the patronage of local businesses;
2. To provide an incentive for property owners and tenants to implement aspects of town plans and economic development strategies;
3. To retain existing merchants and services and to enthusiastically encourage additional merchants to locate to North Branford; and
4. To leverage private monies with these grant funds as part of a larger effort to encourage revitalization and enhancement to North Branford commercial areas.

II. Eligibility

A. Eligible Project:

The Façade Improvement Program is funded with grant proceeds from the State of Connecticut. As such, grant dollars may only be spent in areas approved by the State. To be eligible, businesses and business property owners must be located on Route 80, Route 17, Route 22, Route 139 and business zoned areas contiguous to these Routes.

B. Eligible Applicant:

1. Owners of occupied commercial buildings provided that all taxes and liens on the property are current as of the date of the application, and remain current through the project.
2. Realtors, tenants or representatives of the building owner, provided the owner of the building has given written approval of the proposed work and application for financial assistance through this program and that all town taxes, liens etc. are current.

C. Eligible Work:

Eligible work shall include the improvement of building façades, which enhance the appearance, function, or safety of a commercial property, provided such work is in accordance with all town design requirements. A façade is defined as that part of a building visible from a public thoroughfare. Eligible work includes such things as:

1. Repairs or alterations designed to enhance the immediate exterior environment of the property.
2. Painting, cleaning, and repointing of masonry.
3. Replacement of doors and/or windows.
4. Overall replacement of architectural elements, which have structural problems.
5. Correction of exterior building code violations.
6. Replacement of existing signs with new signage.
7. Repairs or alterations designed to enhance the exterior environment of the property. Landscaping and site improvements are eligible if visible from the street.
8. Other items having significant visual impact.

An allowance of \$750.00 will be provided for professional fees. This allowance will be a part of any whole grant offered to a successful applicant.

The above list is not meant to be exclusionary. Other exterior work may be permitted provided it meets the intent and purpose of the Façade Improvement Program and is approved by the Economic Development Commission.

III. Ineligible Work

Ineligible improvements include, interior improvements; routine maintenance; furnishings; equipment and supplies; operating expenses; merchandising signs relating to a tenant with no lease; refinancing of any debt; and payment for work done prior to final application approval. New building construction is not eligible for assistance.

IV. General Grant Conditions

The amount of the grant and any matching fund requirement will be a function of the applicant. The owner of a commercial plaza is eligible for a \$5,000 whole grant and an additional grant of up to \$1,500 per storefront, which requires a dollar-for-dollar match. Tenants in a commercial plaza are eligible for a whole grant of \$2,000 and an additional grant of up to \$1,500, which requires a dollar-for-dollar match. For example, a plaza owner will undertake a \$10,000 façade project. The Town will provide a \$5,000 grant and then a \$2,500 grant, which is matched by \$2,500 of the owner's funds.

Applicants utilizing a matching grant will be required to provide proof of other financing

prior to façade application approval. Such proof can be in the form of a bank check or a letter of commitment from a lending institution.

Façade improvements are meant to be executed by either tenants or owners. Grants shall not be provided to tenants if the owner has already utilized the program. Grants shall not be provided to property owners if the tenants have already utilized the program. Tenants and property owners are strongly encouraged to coordinate facility improvements in order to avoid a potential funding conflict.

Grants shall not be provided to the same applicant unless two (2) years have past since the last grant award.

Applicants must verify that there are no code enforcement actions currently active against the building or that work undertaken, as a part of the façade improvement project will mitigate code violations.

As this program is funded through a State grant, applicants must comply with certain requirements of the State of Connecticut as it relates to contracting and procurement. Applicants shall have no connection or financial interest in the contractor selected to perform the proposed façade improvements so as to create a conflict of interest as defined by the State of Connecticut in State Statute or Executive Order issued by the Governor.

The applicant will have sixty (60) days from the date of Final Grant approval to begin work on the project (i.e. the final plans and work specifications are complete, a contract with a company or companies has been signed, and/or construction has begun on the subject property). If no work, as defined above, has begun within sixty (60) days, the façade grant will be de-obligated and made part of the program fund balance.

The Economic Development Commission can extend the sixty-day (60-day) period by thirty (30) day increments up to a maximum of sixty (60) days. Approval will be by majority vote and on a case-by-case basis. Requests for an extension must be submitted to the Town Manager, in writing, by the applicant and state the reason(s) for the extension request.

Grant funds will be released on a reimbursement basis only.

V. Application Process

1. Completed application is submitted to the Town Manager's Office. Applications shall include a current photograph of the property to be improved, drawings of proposed improvements (if applicable), written description of proposed improvements, including materials and colors, and a preliminary estimate of costs based on three (3) quotations, which shall be attached to the application. Quotations shall only be from contractors licensed by the Department of Consumer Protection and registered with the Secretary of the State's Office.

2. Town staff will review application for the eligibility of the applicant, completeness of the application and planned scope of work. Other eligibility criteria that may be considered include the impact of the project to improve the appearance of the building and surrounding structures in the business corridor; leveraging additional economic activity; furtherance of the general goals of the Façade Improvement Program; and furtherance of other town studies and plans, with a particular emphasis on area studies covering the location of the site or business.
3. The Town Manager, Town Planner and other appropriate Economic Development staff will meet with the applicant to determine project scope and estimated cost.
4. The property owner is notified by the Town Manager's Office of preliminary application acceptance or denial based on meeting the basic eligibility criteria described above.
5. Successful preliminary applications are forwarded to the Economic Development Commission which makes the final decision on which projects will be provided grants.
6. The applicant is notified by the Town Manager's Office of final application acceptance or denial. If a project is awarded, the notification includes the dollar amount of the grant and a letter of agreement to be executed by the applicant. In the case of awarded projects, the following steps are taken.
7. Applicants are responsible for obtaining all necessary governmental permits, including building permits.
8. If necessary, the project design is submitted for approval by the applicant to required Town commissions which could include, the Planning and Zoning Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, etc.
9. Any project cost that exceeds \$50,000 must be formally bid through the Town. Projects that require bidding must have a complete set of construction specifications prepared and submitted to the Town Manager's Office following all necessary land use approvals.
10. The Town will authorize reimbursement payment after completion of the project in accordance with the approved project. The Town will not contract to perform any of the work, but will reimburse the applicant for approved expenses. Proof of payment is required for reimbursement.
11. Staff will be permitted to inspect the project to ensure conformance with the agreed upon project scope. The Building Official shall issue a final sign-off at the time of project completion and a certificate of completion shall be issued when all program requirements have been fulfilled by the Applicant.

VI. General Program Guidelines

A façade is defined as a separate face of the building including parapet walls. An eligible

façade under this program must be visible from a public thoroughfare. A storefront is that portion of a ground floor building front occupied by a use, which is separate from other adjoining buildings and at which a major entrance is located.

Applications will be reviewed and awarded on a first come first served basis. All project work must be completed within one hundred and twenty (120) days from the date of execution of the Façade Improvement Program Letter of Agreement. Extensions may be granted by the Economic Development Commission, on a case-by-case basis, depending on the project scope and reason for the delay.

By accepting grant funds, the Applicant commits to properly maintain all improvements and to keep storefronts, as well as sides and back of buildings clean and presentable for a minimum of four (4) years at the Applicant's own cost and expense. Any damage to the façade is to be repaired immediately by the Applicant so that the building remains in good condition and positively contributes to the business area.

No funds will be granted to any applicant who has outstanding debts to the Town of North Branford including fees, taxes, etc...

VII. Program Administration

Each grant application will be evaluated in terms of consistency with the façade program guidelines, the economic feasibility of the request, the availability of program funds and other review criteria as established by the Economic Development Commission.

No member of the Economic Development Commission can benefit either directly or indirectly from this program.

The North Branford Economic Development Commission reserves the right to amend these regulations as experience may dictate. Such amendments could include, but not be limited to: match requirements; dollar amount per project available through the program; and/or restructuring of the program from a grant program to a loan program.

The Town reserves the right to terminate this program at any time.

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