

DISTRICT OF HOUSTON



District of Houston

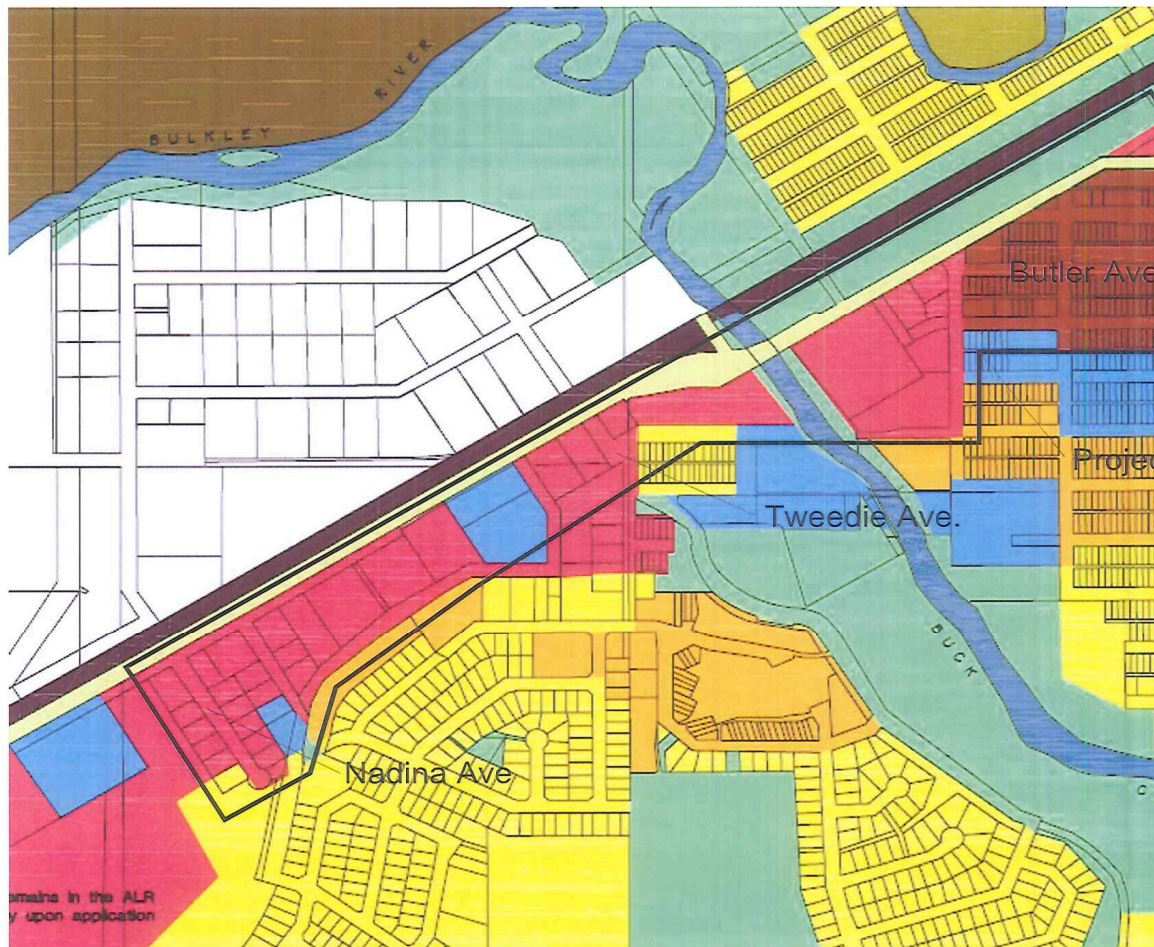
A program designed to encourage commercial building owners to invest in façade improvements to enliven the downtown core.

Program Purpose

The Business Façade Improvement Program is designed to encourage commercial building owners to invest in façade and storefront improvements by accessing a grant to cover a portion of eligible costs. Improvements will encourage pedestrian traffic and mobility in the downtown core by enticing shoppers to engage the urban realm. Diversity of storefronts, access to the street, and walkable environments enliven the business sector. A healthy business district plays an important role in the vitality of a community. The District of Houston (District) will encourage property owners and tenants to access this program to accentuate the downtown form and character.

The program provides a reimbursement grant of up to 50% of eligible costs to a maximum of \$5,000 per façade, a minimum project size of \$2,000 is required. The building must be located within the Phase 2 target area. The eligible area has been expanded from the 2014 application. Many businesses outside the Phase 1 area wanted to participate in the program.

Phase 2 has been expanded because a number of businesses wanted to apply to the program in 2014, however their businesses was not located in the phase 1 area.



Program Goals

The goal is to support downtown revitalization initiatives to:

1. make shopping areas interesting and inviting to shop and work in;
2. promote the viability of the commercial enterprises by enticing those “passing through” to stop;
3. contribute to increased civic pride through private investment;
4. assist complex owners to attract tenants;
5. increase property values; and
6. support the economic viability of small businesses in the target area.

Design Guidelines

Façade improvements should focus on making the building friendly to pedestrians. The project should follow the District’s Development Permit Guideline. The guideline sets out policies to organize the diverse architectural styles in the target area. Façade improvements should include materials and colours found in traditional wood structures and buildings, similar to the Leisure Centre. Lighting, brickwork, and wood are encouraged to reinforce continuity of the downtown character. Designs should soften the visual effect of the streetscape to promote comfort for pedestrians. For example, canopies over sidewalks are encouraged to enhance streetscape and provide weather protection, important in the northern climate.

Applicants must submit a project design and project budget. Designs do not need to be completed by a professional architect; however, applicants are encouraged to seek professional assistance as grants are awarded based on the merits of the visual impact on the streetscape. Project design documentation should clearly show the funding approval committee what the finished project will look like. Projects should address the physical appearance of the building with a focus on pedestrian and street appeal. The project should align with the District’s Development Bylaw and guidelines.

Eligibility Requirements

Eligible Applicants:

- You must be either the property owner or business owner (if the applicant is the business owner, the property owner must approve the application in writing and confirm that all improvements are to be paid for by the applicant);
- Not for profit organizations (building tenants) are eligible to apply for this program;
- Home base businesses, located in the specified are, may apply for way-finding signage (sign located on the business property i.e. bottom of drive way, directing customers to the business.) Signs are eligible for 50% to a maximum of \$500 and must adhere to the District’s signage bylaws.

- All property taxes pertaining to the property are fully paid and current;
- There must be a current, valid business licenses for the property (unless otherwise exempt);
- There must be no outstanding building permits, stop work orders, or development permit condition requirements outstanding; and
- You have not received a previous grant under this program for the subject property.
- The property must be located within the Phase 2 Target area.
- Application must be submitted by July 31, 2016. All work must be completed before December 31, 2016.

Ineligible Applicants:

- Residential homes located in the designated commercial area are not eligible; exception if the home is commercially zoned and has a storefront
- Municipally owned buildings (even if they have business tenants);
- Properties outside the specified area (as defined in the community's program guidelines);
- Non-operating business (the business must be in operation); and

Eligible and Ineligible Reimbursement Costs

Eligible Costs/ Expenses

- Direct project labour costs
- Design, architectural or engineering fees (related to facade only);
- Contractor fees
- Rental of tools and equipment
- Project related materials and supplies

Ineligible Costs/ Expenses

- Staff wages and/or benefits
- Equipment purchased;
- Expenses related to improvement to the building façade not visible from the public right of way
- Utilities (hydro, gas etc.)
- Shipping cost
- GST/PST
- Duties
- Permit fees
- Façade improvements expenses started prior to application approval

Eligible and Ineligible Façade Improvements

Eligible improvements may consist of but are not limited to:

- Exterior lighting (new but not replacement)
- Exterior architectural features
- Exterior surfaces and details (decorative details, moldings, trims etc.)

- Windows (only if part of larger enhancements, no stand-alone window replacement)
- New siding
- Façade painting
- Entrances and doorways (if part of larger enhancements)
- Awnings
- Signage (affixed to the building)

The following are improvements are ineligible:

- Routine maintenance
- Structural repairs
- Roofs
- Patios
- Non-permanent fixtures (benches, planters, patios, patio heaters etc.)
- Landscaping
- Paving
- Fencing
- Wheelchair ramps
- Interior improvements
- Any improvements not visible from the public right of way
- Construction of additions, accessory buildings or new buildings
- Any improvements that have been started prior to application approval

Application Process

Grant Allocation

Funding will be allocated on a first come, first served basis until the budget is spent for the year or the program is completed. Submitting an application does not guarantee a grant.

Application Preparation

- Contact District of Houston representative to determine whether the building is in the Phase 2 Target area and to obtain a Façade Improvement Program guide and application form.
- Fill out application, which will a minimum include:
 - I. Project design document
 - II. Budget
 - III. Quotes
 - IV. Schedule for project completion – project must be completed by December 31, 2015
- Submit application to the District for review

The Project Review Process

- The application will be reviewed by a committee of 3 to 5 community members and District staff. The committee will review the application for eligibility, which may include a site visit. The

committee will determine acceptance or denial of the application. The grant amount available for the project will be determined.

- Applicant will be informed in writing whether the application has been approved, approved with conditions or denied.
- If approved, the Applicant must enter into a Reimbursement Contract with the District of Houston.
- Once the contract is signed by both parties, the applicant may start the project.

Reimbursement Process

- Once the project is completed, applicant must provide a reimbursement application including:
 - Copy of invoice(s)
 - Copy of cleared cheque(s) /bank statement/visa statement confirming payment of expenses.
 - A letter of completion signed by the applicant and contractor.
- Committee meets to confirm the work complies with the Reimbursement Contract. Committee approves the applicant's reimbursement application.
- Project acceptance letter is prepared and a cheque is issued to the project applicant. The District will not pay contractors directly.
- Businesses are to provide the District with before and after pictures of the façade as well as a testimonial of the program.

Appeal Process

An applicant may request a meeting with the committee to discuss the application and to seek input to modify the application to meet program guidelines. The application may be resubmitted for consideration at the discretion of the applicant.