



District of Houston

Business Façade Improvement Program

2024 Guidelines

Program Purpose and Goals

The purpose of the Business Façade Improvement Program in the District of Houston is to encourage business owners and tenants to invest in façade and storefront improvements. A more inviting appearance to residents and visitors will help build civic pride, increase assessed property values, and stimulate the local economy. A healthy business district plays an essential role in the vitality of a community. Each application will be reviewed to determine eligibility for approval.

Funding for the District of Houston Business Façade Improvement program is provided by Northern Development Initiative Trust.

The Program

These program guidelines are intended to maximize the program benefit for improving aesthetics of commercial areas.

The District of Houston will provide a maximum of 50% reimbursement grant up to a maximum of up to \$5,000 per project to improve the facades of commercial buildings.

Each building is eligible for an annual grant to a maximum of \$5,000. Each year a building may access the Business Façade Improvement program for new/incremental façade improvements.

Projects must have a minimum total cost of \$1000.00.

Application deadline is May 31, 2024

The Business Façade Improvement program is offered by the District of Houston with funding provided by Northern Development Initiative Trust.

Eligible Areas

Façade improvements should focus on the physical appearance of the building within the improvement area. The project should align with the District's Development Permit Process. The guideline sets out policies to organize 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 the continuity of the downtown character. Designs should soften the visual effect of the streetscape to promote comfort for prospective shoppers.

Eligible Applicants

- Applicant 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)
- Non-profit and enterprising non-profit organizations (tenants)
- Home based businesses which are zoned commercial, have a storefront and are within the specified area
- Home based businesses without a commercial storefront (eligible for wayfinding signage only)

- Property taxes pertaining to the property are fully paid and current
- Current, valid business licenses for the property (unless otherwise exempt)
- No outstanding building permits, stop work orders, or development permit condition requirements outstanding
- Subject building has not received a previous grant under this program for the proposed improvements

Ineligible Applicants

- Residential homes located in the commercial area
- Apartment buildings
- Government owned buildings (municipal, provincial or federal, even if they have business tenants)
- Properties outside the specified area (as defined in Eligible Areas)
- Empty buildings or businesses that are not operating (exception if the business is renovating or doing improvements to the building in anticipation of re-opening)

Eligible 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 (only if part of larger enhancements, no stand-alone entrance/doorway replacement)
- Awnings
- Signage (permanent on applicant property)
- Wayfinding signage (sign located on the business property i.e. at the bottom of a driveway).
 - Signs are eligible for 50% to a maximum of \$500 and must adhere to any signage bylaws and regulations
- Accessibility improvements (ramps, wider doors etc.) to the outside of the building only
- Patios

Ineligible Façade Improvements

The following improvements are ineligible:

- Routine maintenance
- Structural repairs
- Roofs
- Non-permanent fixtures (benches, planters, patio heaters etc.)

- Landscaping
- Paving
- Fencing
- Interior/internal improvements
- Improvements not visible from the public right of way
- Construction of additions, accessory buildings or new buildings
- Improvements that have been started prior to application approval
- Improvements deemed inconsistent with redevelopment purposes and design guidelines

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
- Shipping and/or freight
- PST

Ineligible Costs/Expenses

- Staff wages and/or benefits
- Purchase of construction tools or equipment
- Operational costs including utilities (hydro, gas etc.)
- Duties
- Permit fees
- Expenses related to improvement to the building façade not visible from the public right of way
- Façade improvement expenses started prior to application approval
- GST

Design Guidelines

To be eligible for this grant, the applicant must submit designs and costing for the project.

The Business Façade Grant will be awarded on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Designs need to clearly outline the proposed improvements to allow the review committee to accurately evaluate the project and clearly see that the finished product looks like what was intended during the application process.

Projects must be as consistent as possible with the general form and character of the design guidelines set out for the area.

Please refer to the District of Houston's Development Permit Process on the website under Department & Services, Planning and Development Services, Development Permits.

Building, sign and/or other permits may be required based on the extent of the improvements to be completed. These requirements are not waived by approval for the Business Façade Improvement Program and should be applied for prior to or concurrently with application for this program.

Business Application Process

Applications can be dropped off at the Houston & District Chamber of Commerce office or emailed to manager@houstonchamber.ca.

Submitting an application does not necessarily mean your project or a specific grant amount will be approved. All project proposals are subject to a comprehensive review, must meet high quality standards, and must reflect the spirit and intent of the Business Façade Improvement Program Guidelines.

1. Owner/Tenant contacts the Houston & District Chamber of Commerce to determine if the building qualifies for the Façade Improvement Program, discuss your project, and obtain the Program Guide and Application.
2. Owner/Tenant submit a complete application with designs. All required supporting materials and documents (including owner authorization) must be received prior to be considered complete.
3. Staff reviews the application and proposed façade improvements to ensure that improvements meet the applicable Design Guidelines and Business Façade Improvement Program Guidelines.
4. Applications are reviewed and a decision to accept or reject the application is made.
5. Applicant is advised of the decision by email and mailed letter.
6. For successful applications, a Letter of Understanding is sent to the applicant which must be signed by the owner/tenant and a representative of the Municipality.
7. Owner/Tenant acquires any required permits and completes the renovations.
8. Owner/Tenant provides verification of expenses and proof of payment (including invoices or other confirmations of payment) and submits their totals on the provided expense tracking sheet.
9. Owner/Tenant provides a Certification of Completion signed by the applicant or contractor, indicating that all work described in the application/approval and has been paid in full, as well as before and after photos (matching) and any other supporting documentation.
 - a. Owner/Tenant acknowledges they may be contacted by the Municipality or Northern Development to supply a testimonial about the value of the supported façade improvement to the business.
10. Owner/Tenant provides proof that the improvements have passed final inspection for municipal permits (where required) and meet all building standards and codes (where required).
11. Staff verifies that the renovations meet the Letter of Understanding requirements and approves reimbursement.
12. Applicant is issued a cheque.

Please note:

Approved projects must be completed by Year End (December 31).

Evaluation/Selection Process

Owner/Tenant submits the application (Appendix 2) with designs (and an approval letter from the owner if applicable). The application and proposed façade improvements will be reviewed to ensure that improvements meet Business Façade Improvement Program guidelines. *(See the application for a list of required application documents.)*

The Project Review Committee will consist of 3 members, including two members from the District of Houston Staff and one Houston & District Chamber of Commerce Staff. All Eligible Projects will be evaluated using the following ranked criteria:

- Does the project for which the funds are being sought meet the applicable Design Guidelines?
- Will the project once complete have a noticeable impact on the streetscape?
- Will the renovation offer a noticeable improvement to the streetscape?
- Was a professional designer or architect used?

Approval or rejection of the application will be communicated to the applicant by email or mail. Decisions will be made no later than one month after receiving the application.

The Houston & District Chamber of Commerce is responsible for confirming the expenditures and that the project was completed in accordance with the approved plan.

Evaluation of projects will be based on the following criteria:

- Conformance with the Business Façade Improvement Guidelines.
- Age and condition of the building. For example, buildings in poorer condition have a greater likelihood of project approval.
- Impact of the improvements on the streetscape.
- Use of a professional designer/architect and
- Location of improvement Area

Additional Information

- Appendix 1 Business Façade Application
- Appendix 2 Reimbursement Checklist

Appendix 1

District of Houston

Business Façade Improvement Program Application

Applicant Name: _____

Business Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Postal Code: _____ Phone: _____

Building Address: _____

Email: _____

If you are applying as the tenant of a building, please provide the following information and attach a letter of consent from the owners stating that you are allowed to make these changes the building.

Owner's Name: _____

Address: _____

Postal Code: _____ Phone: _____

Project Description

Describe the proposed project: (attach any extra sheets, photos, designs, samples, Etc.)

Planned Start Date: _____

Planned Completion Date: _____

Estimated Total Project Cost: _____

Total Project Cost: \$_____ attach quote from contractor(s)

Eligibility Checklist:

- _____ Property taxes paid.

- _____ Utility fees paid.

- _____ Business License fees current

____ You are the building owner, or you have a signed letter from the building owner.

____ Required permit applications completed, for example, development, building or sign.

Attach to the application:

____ Photos of the existing facade – digital is preferred.

____ A detailed listing of facade improvements to determine the eligibility of all project components. Please read Eligible and Ineligible expenses on pages 3 & 4 of the Business Façade Improvement Program Application Form

____ Cost estimates/quote from the contractor – separate the cost of facade improvement elements if it is part of a larger project. The reimbursement is only for costs directly associated with improving your façade.

____ Drawings of improvement – does not have to be professionally drawn (street view)

____ Material and colour choice – see Developmental Guide (attached to application package)

____ Building Owner Authorization Letter (if required)

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 2

District of Houston
Business Facade Improvement Program
Reimbursement Checklist:

To receive reimbursement from the Business Façade Improvement Program, you must provide the following:

Name of Business: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Contact Person: _____

Phone Number: _____

_____ After Photos – digital is preferred.

_____ Invoice to the District of Houston for eligible expenses.

_____ Proof of Payment to Contractor of eligible expenses (cancelled cheques, visa receipts)

_____ Testimonial from the recipient – say how the program has assisted your business. Would you have taken on the project without funding? A mention of Northern Development Initiative Trust because they are the organization that provides the reimbursement funds. Two or three sentences are enough.

All documentation must be submitted for reimbursement must be submitted prior to January 10, 2025. Upon completion of the required documentation, reimbursement shall be made within thirty (30) days of receipt.