

# Wethersfield Façade Improvement Program

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## **Commercial Façade Improvement Program**

### **Program Summary**

This façade improvement program was established by the Wethersfield Economic Development and Improvement Commission (EDIC) in 2005 to provide an incentive for property owners to invest in improvements to the exterior of existing commercial buildings located throughout Town. Additionally, the program was established to attract quality commercial tenants, fill vacant storefronts and provide the impetus to generate further investment.

The Town of Wethersfield is supportive of improving the visual quality of its commercial districts and the redevelopment of existing buildings. Some commercial buildings require exterior architectural improvements and repairs. Other buildings would benefit from painting, cleaning and repointing of masonry. Additional landscaping would help in many areas. Signage improvements and improved lighting would also be attractive. Funding approval will depend in part on a project that improves the overall appearance of a property, not just routine or deferred maintenance.

Property owners and tenants have the opportunity to submit a funding request to the Economic Development and Improvement Commission (EDIC) and may receive up to \$50,000 in grant funding to be matched by an equivalent amount of private investment. The program is designed to reimburse property owners or tenants for eligible façade improvements. The following information provides further detail on the program.

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## Section 1. - Procedural Requirements

1. The Program is managed and administered by Staff from the Town's Planning and Economic Development Department.
2. Funding requests are subject to the approval and discretion of the Economic Development and Improvement Commission (EDIC).
3. Applications will be referred to the Design Review Committee for comment and approval.
4. Properties located in the Old Wethersfield Historic District will require approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness by the Historic District Commission.
5. The Economic Development and Improvement Commission oversees this program and the Commissions Finance Committee ("Committee") will review each application to assure that the work proposed will accomplish the goals set by the Commission. All grants will require majority approval by the Commission in order to obtain assistance.

## Section 2. - Evaluation Criteria

1. Generally, projects having the greatest aesthetic impact will be given funding priority. Funding will be awarded based upon the following weighted rating system and criteria as determined at the discretion of the EDIC:
  - a. Projects that strive to address the entire façade, including signage and other exterior issues that reflect the building as a whole, or are part of a larger revitalization plan for a property. (20%)
  - b. Properties that are unsightly or are in need of improvements that address deteriorating or substandard property conditions or blight. (20%)
  - c. Projects that present a high return on investment. (20%)
  - d. Restoration of the historic façade, features and look of a building. (15%)
  - e. Buildings improvements which will result in new commercial occupancy or the retention of commercial businesses. (15%)
  - f. Compatibility with the Silas Deane Highway or Old Wethersfield Master Plans. (10%)

## Section 3. - Eligibility

1. All Wethersfield commercial property owners or tenants are eligible to apply for the program.
2. If a tenant applies to the program written permission from the property owner must be submitted.
3. If the applicant is not the owner of the building they must possess a fully executed lease with a minimum of five (5) years remaining in the term from the submittal date of the application.
4. Individuals, partnerships, corporations, nonprofit corporations and other legal entities may apply for assistance. Property owner(s) shall be construed to be any person(s) or legal entity that holds title to the subject property. In the case of multiple owners, the signature of each titleholder is required on all appropriate documents. The Town will verify property ownership and require all persons

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currently on title to give written consent to all work proposed to be performed on the property prior to initiating such work.

5. Applicants must be in good standing with Wethersfield Tax Collector. Any business, individual, partnership, corporation, property owner, lessor or lessee who will directly benefit from participation in this program, whether or not they are the applicant, must be current and up to date on all taxes with the Town of Wethersfield.
6. Façade grant funds are available only for structures located in commercial zones and containing compliant commercial uses.

## Section 4. - Eligible Improvements

1. Facades are defined as the portion of a building or site that faces a public right-of-way. Funding is available for exterior improvements only, and may be applied to the front, side or rear façade provided the façade is visible from a public street.
2. Examples of eligible expenses include, but are not limited to (materials, equipment and labor):
  - a. Complete façade reconstruction,
  - b. Awnings and canopies,
  - c. Repairing or Replacing Doors and windows, (only if part of larger enhancements, no stand-alone entrance/door replacement);
  - d. Lighting,
  - e. Stucco treatment
  - f. Masonry repairs and construction,
  - g. Scraping, priming, sandblasting, power washing and painting that is part of a more comprehensive package of façade and site improvements,
  - h. Trim and metal repair,
  - i. Demolition and associated cleanup,
  - j. Decorative elements,
  - k. Sidewalks and walkways,
  - l. Electrical work associated with exterior lighting or sign illumination,
  - m. Signs,
  - n. Historic restoration,
  - o. Wood framing associated with exterior wall improvements,
  - p. Permanent landscaping elements,
  - q. Repair and replacement of worn, damaged or broken exterior details,
  - r. Gutters and downspouts,
  - s. Visible roof improvements,
  - t. Screening of utility and trash enclosures,
  - u. Decking and stairs,
  - v. Parking lot improvements are eligible for funding under this program only in select cases that result in a safer and more aesthetically pleasing environment, and are part of a larger project that includes improvements to a building façade and subject to the discretion of the Commission,

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- w. Other permanent improvements as determined at the discretion of the Commission necessary for the project.

## Section 5. - Ineligible Improvements

1. The following types of improvements are not eligible for reimbursement:
  - a. New construction and additions,
  - b. Ordinary maintenance or repair that does not involve a change of existing design, exterior materials or outward appearance
  - c. Exact replacement of existing architectural and site features.
  - d. Improvements to the rear or side of any building that are not visible from the street,
  - e. Non visible roofing,
  - f. Non visible equipment enclosures
  - g. Interior renovations,
  - h. Properties used entirely for residential purposes,
  - i. Fencing,
  - j. General maintenance and repairs to parking lots,
  - k. HVAC/mechanicals,
  - l. Plumbing,
  - m. Permit Fees,
  - n. Temporary, portable or non-permanent improvements,
  - o. Costs associated with drawings, design, legal fees, closing costs, cost estimates and project management,
  - p. Improvements that have been completed or in progress prior to grant approval.
2. Properties that are not current with property taxes are not eligible for the Program.
3. Property that has received façade improvement funds within the past five (5) years (unless change of use is significant enough to warrant change in façade).
4. Properties used exclusively for residential use.

## Section 6. - Mixed Use Buildings

1. Mixed use buildings are eligible for funding under this program but are subject to a different reimbursement schedule when compared to buildings that are entirely (100%) occupied by commercial uses.
2. The reimbursement schedule for mixed use buildings that contain apartments, condominiums or residential rentals will follow a formula that allows for reimbursement for façade improvements based solely on the percentage of square footage applicable to the commercial use of the mixed use building. The Commission, based on certain circumstances, and its discretion, may consider additional reimbursement for mixed use buildings.

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## Section 7. - Local Contractors

1. Whenever possible, applicants are strongly encouraged to use local contractors to complete all tasks associated with façade improvement projects. This will not only help garner local support to continue this program, but more importantly will help boost the local economy.

## Section 8. - Program Benefits

1. This program provides participants the opportunity to receive a reimbursement in the form of a grant upon the acceptable completion of the façade improvement project. The reimbursement is based upon a formula whereby participants may receive up to fifty cents (\$.50) for every one dollar (\$1.00) spent on the project up to the maximum grant amount.
2. Grant recipients are required to provide a documented and paid match of 50% of eligible project construction costs.
3. The grant is offered at an interest rate of 0%.
4. The minimum grant that is eligible for this program is \$10,000 (\$20,000 project minimum).
5. The maximum grant available to any one specific project shall not exceed \$50,000.
6. No grant repayment is required if all terms of the grant are successfully fulfilled.

## Section 9. - Reimbursement Terms and Conditions

1. Any reimbursement made by the Town under this program shall not be made until all of the work as approved has been completed, all of the improvements have been inspected and approved by the Planning and Economic Development Department, and other Town code officials and all payments for said work have been made to all contractors, material suppliers and vendors. Upon receipt of all required payment documentation The Town will reimburse the applicant the funds the project is eligible for.
2. The applicant is responsible for payment of all contractors. The Town will not pay the contractors directly.
3. The grant is assigned under the terms that the property owner continues to own the renovated property for a period of 5 years from the date of the receipt of the reimbursement.
4. These grants do not have to be repaid to the Town provided that the property owner continues to own the property for five (5) years and all other conditions of the grant have been satisfied. The grant will be prorated and forgiven in equal percentage increments on a monthly basis such that at the end of five years there will be a zero balance and the grant is forgiven.
5. If an owner sells the property within the first two (2) years after the grant has closed, the entire grant amount is due immediately upon closing.
6. If the owner sells the property after two (2) years and before the end of the fifth (5) year after the grant closing, the remaining prorated share of the grant is due and payable upon the sale of the property.

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7. The façade grant may not be assigned unless the assignment is made to a business that had occupied the building at the time the grant was closed and the Commission approves of the assignment.
8. The façade improvement project will be secured by a mortgage on the real estate.
9. Additionally, the grant recipient agrees to maintain the property in good condition and not to remove or significantly alter the façade improvements funded through the program unless otherwise approved by the Planning and Economic Development Department for a period of five (5) years.

## Section 10. - Construction Schedule

1. All work for which applicant requests reimbursement must be started within six (6) months of grant commitment and completed within one (1) year of grant commitment, except that the EDIC in its discretion may extend such timeframes for good cause. When it can be demonstrated that circumstances clearly beyond the applicant's control prohibit completion in one (1) year, the EDIC may grant a one-time six (6) month extension upon a written request of an applicant.
2. Failure to complete the project in compliance with the timeframes noted above will result in the cancellation of the funding commitment by the Commission.

## Section 11. - Application Requirements

1. The application shall be filed with the Planning and Economic Development Department.
2. The applicant may be required to provide all of the following information (depending upon the type of improvements proposed):
  - a. Completed and signed application form.
  - b. Copy of executed lease if applicant is not the owner.
  - c. Letter of consent from property owner if applicant is not owner.
  - d. Building construction and/or site plans detailing proposed improvements, (include written description of improvements).
  - e. Architectural drawings or renderings of the proposed improvements.
  - f. Color photos of the portions of the building proposed for improvement (electronic).
  - g. Paint chips, color board, samples or specifications of the proposed improvements.
  - h. Design Review Advisory Committee or Historic District Commission approval.
  - i. List of all improvements that are proposed.
  - j. An itemized estimate of project costs.
  - k. Estimated development/construction schedule.
  - l. Copy of deed to property.
  - m. Copy of mortgage on property.
  - n. Completed tax affidavit.
3. There is a \$500 application fee which is due and payable upon application to the program. The funds will be deposited in an escrow account until the application is reviewed. Upon approval of the grant the \$500 will be applied to the owner's match at the time of final reimbursement. If the applicant does not elect to proceed, any project costs (i.e. staff or legal costs) will be deducted from the application fee and any balance returned to the applicant.

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## Section 12. - Application Procedures

1. STAFF REVIEW – Applicant consults with Town Staff to discuss eligibility for Façade Program.
  - a. Staff will explain the program and discuss the basic terms of the facade program: (Preferably on-site of the façade project)
  - b. Review the client’s plans for exterior façade improvements to discuss eligibility.
  - c. Discuss the client’s funding sources for the match of the improvements not covered by this program
2. FINALIZE PLANS/PRELIMINARY COST ESTIMATE
  - a. Applicant provides plans and specifications for property improvements including a preliminary budget estimate for project.
3. DESIGN REVIEW/HDC APPROVAL
  - a. Obtains appropriate permits for project which may require (PZC, Inland Wetlands, Historic District Commission).
4. APPLICATION SUBMISSION
  - a. The applicant prepares and submits all of the necessary information to Town staff.
  - b. Inform the committee that the package is ready for review. (Within two weeks of all required information being received, the loan committee will meet and a decision will be rendered).
5. APPLICATION REVIEW
  - a. The EDIC Finance Subcommittee meets to review the application and forward recommendation to the full EDIC.
  - b. The applicant may be required to attend Committee meeting to present plans.
  - c. If additional information is needed, application may be tabled by the Committee at its discretion pending further review.
  - d. If committee recommends approval, staff prepares a recommendation letter informing the EDIC of the recommendation.
  - e. EDIC meets to review and vote on application.
  - f. If not approved, a letter explaining the decision including guidance for re-applying for funds.
6. FUNDING COMMITMENT
  - a. If approved, Town prepares and sends out commitment letter to the client. Commitment letter includes basic terms and payment amounts and amortization details.
  - b. Client signs commitment letter and returns it to the loan administrator.
  - c. Client agrees to the promotion of the project before the project commences.
7. BIDDING
  - a. The applicant is solely responsible to invite bid proposals.
  - b. Provide three (3) construction bids for project costs to Town staff.

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- c. The applicant is not required to select the low bid, however, If the low bid is not accepted, the applicant must provide reasonable justification to the Commission for accepting the higher bid proposals.
8. PRE-CONSTRUCTION REVIEW
    - a. A pre-construction review meeting is required prior to the commencement of construction to go over the scope of the project. It is helpful if the contractor is present.
  9. CONSTRUCTION COMMENCES
    - a. Construction must begin within 6 months of grant commitment.
    - b. If the improvements require a building permit the applicant must obtain this permit.
    - c. Initiate construction phase for project.
  10. CONTRACTOR PAYMENT/INSPECTION
    - a. Requests final inspection of improvements to loan administrator.
    - b. Construction must be completed within 1 year of grant commitment.
    - c. Provide copies of project invoices documenting project expenses. Including documentation of applicants 50% match for approved project expenses.
    - d. Send grant agreement to attorney and request the preparation of all the closing documents.
  11. REIMBURSEMENT/CLOSING
    - a. Requests closing date to be scheduled.
    - b. Provides documents required for closing (See checklist/agenda)
    - c. Amortization schedule to be provided as well as potential payment instructions to the client.
    - d. Schedules closing with Attorney.