

City of Lowell Façade Improvement Guidelines and Grant Program

Objective and Purpose

As a result of a strong measure of public input, the City of Lowell has adopted as a primary goal the improvement of the appearance and livability of Lowell. As part of that effort, the City of Lowell has developed Façade Improvement Standards to provide direction to businesses and property owners in maintaining and improving the appearance of building facades in the City of Lowell .

The rehabilitation of structures in Lowell should respect and reflect the architectural integrity and history of the entire building and retain those elements that enhance the building. Facades should be in harmony with the character of the and in coordination with the color and design of adjacent structures.

As a means of encouraging the maintenance and improvement of building facades, the City of Lowell may consider appropriating funds from time to time to a structured competitive grant program to provide financial assistance to owners of buildings in the City of Lowell. Awards through the City funded grant program shall comply with the following provisions, requirements and guidelines.

The purposes of the program are to:

- Promote storefront rehabilitation in the designated areas. See program map for eligibility.
- Preserve the unique character of the historic buildings;
- Encourage aesthetic compatibility for improvements to facades of non-historic structures;
- Encourage the use of quality materials, good design, and workmanship in the rehabilitation of properties;
- Make improvements that make a highly visible contribution to Lowell.

Guidelines

1. All rehabilitation funded through grant awards under this program must be performed in accordance with the City of Lowell Development Ordinance and these guidelines in making façade improvements under this program. Any building or property classified as “Historic” in Gaston County Historic Preservation Commission must receive approval for the proposed work prior to applying for the Façade Grant Program.

2. Approved types of rehabilitation include:

- a. Safe cleaning of brick/stone fronts or wall surfaces (chemical stripping, water wash, or scraping, no sand blasting is allowed)
- b. Masonry repair, mortar joint repair, re-pointing of brick.
- c. Re-painting and patching of façade walls.
- d. Repair/replacement of windows and/or doors.
- e. Removal of siding and exterior false facades and metal canopies.
- f. Repair, reconstruction, and/or replacement of original architectural details.
- g. Installations of canvas-type awnings.
- h. Structural and cornice repair and/or replacement.
- i. Railings, ironwork repair or addition.
- j. Historic reconstructions, rehabilitation or compatible reconstruction of a store front.
- k. Landscaping including sidewalks and plantings.

- l. Murals.
- m. Installation/replacement/repair of exterior lighting and appropriate signage including structures or frames that contain or hold sign, if performed in conjunction with a full façade rehabilitation.

3. Ineligible projects include:

- a. Improvements made prior to grant approval.
- b. Interior rehabilitation/improvements
- c. Construction of false fronts.
- d. Blocking up of windows or installing storm/vinyl windows and doors.
- e. Demolition of historic features.
- f. Roof and chimney repair and construction of mansard roof.
- h. Materials that are inappropriate to the original structure or nearby structures.

Priorities

1. Priority in funding will be given to rehabilitations projects that notably and visibly improve facades.
2. This program is to aid substantial investments to improve the aesthetic qualities of a building as well as protect for the future.
3. Colors used should be compatible with other buildings and that are true to the style and age of the structure.
4. The City reserves the right to withhold approval of grant application if color, design, sign design or other façade component is not deemed appropriate to the historic integrity of the structure and/or the as a whole.

Eligibility

1. A façade is defined as an individual storefront or commercial building side which faces a public right-of-way or is otherwise visible to the general public.
2. Commercial buildings must be located within the designated areas (see program map.)
3. Owner or tenants of buildings are eligible to apply; however, the owner must sign the application.

Grant Award

1. Grant awards and amounts are at the discretion of the City Council.
2. Decisions may be based upon such factors to include size and scope of project, potential positive impact on the appearance of the area, project costs, and the availability of funds.
3. Qualifying projects are eligible for a grant at a minimum of \$500 and a maximum of \$2,500 per façade, on a 50/50 matching, reimbursement basis.

4. At least two project cost estimates must be submitted with the application. If both estimates are deemed equal in regards to quality of materials used, etc., only fifty percent of the lowest estimate will be considered in the amount of the award, regardless of which bid is accepted by the building owner.
5. The grant amount shall be determined at the time of application approval and paid when the project is completed.
6. The work must be completed within four months of application approval, but the owner may request one extension for two additional months based upon compelling reasons for the delay.

Decision Making Process

1. Prospective applicant are urged to meet early in the process with City Staff to ensure the completeness and competitiveness of the application by the application deadline.
2. After the submittal deadline has passed, all applications that have been received and determined to be complete will be forwarded to the Lowell Community Committee for review and evaluation.
3. Applications determined by staff to be incomplete will be returned to the applicant. In such cases City Staff will work with the unsuccessful applicants to help ensure a complete application for the next application period or grant cycle.
4. Contact will be made with all successful applicants notifying them of the potential grant award.
5. For approved applications, an agreement/contract must be approved between the City, the applicant and the owner before work may begin.
6. Applicants must obtain necessary zoning and building permits if applicable.
7. Upon completion of work, applicant must submit adequate documentation that all contractors have been paid for work performed and that no outstanding issues of any kind remain regarding the project.
8. When the City is satisfied that all work has been completed in accordance with the approved application and that all expenses have been paid by the owner or applicant, the City will reimburse the applicant for one half of the actual project cost or the amount of the grant award, whichever is less.