



## **City of Westminster Façade Improvement Program Overview and Guidelines**

### **What Is the Façade Improvement Program (FIP)?**

The program offers matching grant funds to downtown property owners in the Sustainable Communities designated area in order to improve the appearance of individual building facades and/or signs and awnings. The goal of this program is to leverage private improvements while making revitalization efforts affordable, creative, and community based.

The City of Westminster's Economic Development Manager or a Staff member of the Community Planning and Development Department will administer the grant and the City of Westminster Historic District Commission will review and recommend awards.

The program is designed to assist as many qualified projects as funds allow. The grant will be offered on an ongoing basis as funding permits. The grant award amount is based on available funds, the number of qualified applicants, and other evaluation criteria. Grant money will be allocated at the sole discretion of the City of Westminster, subject to approval of submitted applications, the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, and the Maryland Historic Trust.

### **Who Can Apply For the Matching Grant Funding?**

Any building owner or store proprietor/tenant with authorization from the building owner can apply for funding. Properties must be zoned commercial (or residential properties changing use to commercial) and be located within Westminster's Sustainable Communities designated area.

### **What Types of Improvements Are Eligible For Funding?**

- Exterior cleaning, painting and/or paint removal
- Masonry repair and repainting
- Repair and replacement of architectural details or materials
- Window repair or, in certain cases, replacement
- Rehabilitation or compatible reconstruction of storefronts
- Removal of metal siding and exterior slip covers (surfaces)
- Removal of inappropriate or out-of-date signage and installation of new signage.
- Rehabilitation or installation of awning.

## **Ineligible Expenditures:**

- IMPROVEMENTS MADE PRIOR TO GRANT APPROVAL
- Refinancing of existing debt
- Inventory
- Payment for applicant's labor
- General business operations expenses (payroll, taxes, utilities, etc.)
- Interior renovations

## **How Are Projects Selected for Funding?**

Applications will be ranked and selected based on a clear and documented set of evaluative criteria. Depending on the number of applications, the Historic District Commission may assign “waiting list” status to projects that qualify for selection, but do not rank as high as other applications selected for funding.

NOTE: It is important to note that this is an **up to 50% reimbursement** grant program. This means that the applicant must have the improvements completed and fully paid for themselves, with up to 50% reimbursement made after successful completion of the work and satisfactory submission of all required documentation.

The evaluative criteria are as follows in order of importance:

1. the estimated increase in property values after the FIP project is completed,
2. the extent of historic preservation made to the building,
3. the percentage of private investment vs. public investment,
4. whether the FIP project will be completed within a six month timeframe, and,
5. if you are a first-time FIP grant applicant.

## **Are There Any Design Guidelines?**

Yes, the City has adopted Standards for Renovations regarding historic preservation projects in the historic downtown area.

The Historic District Commission is looking for projects that protect the historic integrity of the building and improve the overall appearance of the downtown area, particularly as it relates to exterior façade projects.

Projects must consider the impact on the preservation of the historic fabric and character of the building. Are original features being retained and repaired? Are historic materials being used?

For example, we would not support the installation of vinyl siding where there was no vinyl siding originally, but would support the repair and repainting of original wood siding.

Projects should draw upon the history and architecture of the building, but should reflect the current use. We are trying to draw upon the architectural and historic distinctiveness of the downtown area. We strongly encourage creative new uses for the existing building stock.

### **How Does The Application Process Work?**

Grant funds are disbursed on an up to 50% reimbursement basis and cannot be issued until the proposed project has been fully and successfully completed in accordance with the contract.

Step 1. Meet with the Program Administrator prior to submitting the application to discuss the project.

Step 2. Follow up on progress of application and all related documents or ask questions for help.

**FY26 GRANT PROGRAM UNAVAILABLE AT THIS TIME - ONLY ACCEPTING INTEREST FORMS.**

Step 3. Deadlines:

[REDACTED]

Step 4. The Historic District Commission will review and rank the applications, vote on approval, and submit its recommendations to the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) within 30 days of receiving the applications. Every effort will be made to expedite this process.

Step 5. DHCD will forward applications to the Maryland Historic Trust for project approval.

Step 6. The applicant will be notified by phone and in writing, whether their project will receive matching funds, and to what level. The applicant can then proceed with the necessary permitting and review process.

### **What Happens After Project Is Selected for Funding?**

1. Upon project approval, renovation/rehabilitation work must begin within two (2) months and be completed within six (6) months. If additional time is needed, please seek approval from Program Administrator. Certain circumstances may require additional extension from this timeline, but a conversation and determination needs to occur.
2. The applicant is responsible for obtaining all building permits and any other required permits to complete the work. The applicant is responsible for conformance with all applicable safety standards and conditions.
3. The applicant agrees to maintain the property and improvements.
4. The City of Westminster Façade Improvement Program may promote an approved project, including, but not limited to, displaying a sign at the site, during and after construction, and using photographs and descriptions of the project in marketing materials.

## **How Do I Get Reimbursed for My Project?**

Funds will be released to the applicant as quickly as possible upon satisfactory completion of the project and satisfactory submission of all required documentation. Other reimbursement requirements:

1. Submission of paid invoices/cancelled checks and “after” photos.
2. Confirmation that the FIP project is completed as submitted on the application.

**NOTE: The City of Westminster reserves the right to make changes in the conditions of the FIP as warranted.**