

The Uptown Improvement Program Guidelines

OVERVIEW

The Uptown Improvement Program is designed to stimulate private investment in high-quality building improvements that contribute to the overall character of the Uptown District. The program will share the costs of improving commercial building exteriors and publicly used amenities, thereby promoting joint public/private action and investment that will complement and enhance the Uptown District. The Westerville Industry and Commerce Corporation (WICC), the City of Westerville's community improvement corporation, will provide matching grants to property owners or tenants of commercial buildings who would otherwise not be able to make these improvements without financial assistance. The intent is to assist in the restoration and/or proper renovation of Uptown District commercial buildings in strict compliance with the Uptown Westerville Design Guidelines.

ELIGIBILITY

Commercial and mixed-use structures within the boundaries of the Uptown District (see *Uptown District Location Map*) are eligible for funding. Buildings used solely for residential purposes are not eligible, nor are projects involving the conversion of residential buildings to non-residential uses. However, buildings originally constructed for residential use but that were converted to non-residential uses prior to December 31, 2011 are eligible. Government properties are not eligible for funding from this program.

GRANT AMOUNT

Grants are available to cover up to **50% of the total eligible project costs, not to exceed \$30,000**. An applicant must use private, non-City funds to match the City's grant. Grantees will be reimbursed after completion of the project, after certification of project costs and verification of compliance with the approved plans. WICC may consider grants of up to \$50,000 for economically significant projects (high investment, job creation, positive community impact, significant preservation and/or restoration, etc.).

WHO MAY APPLY

Applicants can be property owners or tenants. Tenants must have written approval from property owners to participate in the program. Applicants must be current on all municipal taxes, utility bills, City Codes (occupancy permits on file) and property maintenance relating to the business and/or building prior to participation in the program. Additionally, the property owner must agree not to change or alter any improved façade for five (5) years from the date of the reimbursement unless prior written approval is granted.

ELIGIBLE PROJECTS

The intent of the program is to help fund **significant** improvements to eligible buildings and sites. Routine repairs or maintenance are not eligible unless the repairs represent major improvements that could contribute to the structural longevity of the building. Projects must comply with the Uptown Westerville Design Guidelines. The use of a qualified architect or

design professional with expertise in historic architecture is encouraged. Architectural, legal and other professional fees are eligible costs but may not exceed 10 percent of the total project cost unless prior written approval is granted by WICC. Priority will be given to projects that would result in comprehensive restoration or substantial improvement to the entire building or the building's façade. WICC recognizes that the Uptown District contains buildings of different scales and levels of detail. In some cases a small improvement may result in significant impact on the character of a certain building.

Projects that solely consist of routine maintenance (e.g. repainting, replacing awning fabric, new sign panels, etc.) are not eligible for grant assistance.

Below is a general list of the eligible improvements*:

- Uncovering and restoration of historical façades
- Replacement/repair of cornice, parapets, shutters and other architectural features
- Removal of inappropriate façade materials
- Addition of appropriate detailing which leads to a substantially enhanced appearance
- Site and landscape improvements in areas that are open and accessible to the public
- Improvements to the backs or sides of properties
- Restoration of original doors or windows
- Window repair or replacement – if being taken back to original historical character
- Door repair or replacement – if being taken back to original historical character
- Installation and improvement of signage
- Storefront restoration or renovation
- Fire suppression and fire line capacity fees
- Parking improvements (striping, paving, signage, etc.), new parking additions and shared parking arrangements

*WICC may consider additional improvements not listed as “eligible improvements” that contribute to the overall character and historic preservation of Uptown on a case-by-case basis.

INELIGIBLE PROJECTS

The costs of new construction or work that only involves routine maintenance are not eligible under the program. An exception may be made in the case of repairs if they will support the health, safety, and preservation of the Uptown structure. Projects that commence prior to WICC and URB approval are not eligible.

DECISION CRITERIA

Applications will be given priority in the order that they are received. Once the eligibility of each application is established, the amount of grant funds requested will be compared to the amount of available funds. Projects with the highest rankings will be awarded the grant. If the total requested amount exceeds the available funds, then the WICC Board of Trustees will rank the applications based on the criteria listed below. WICC's final decision is not appealable by

applicants. WICC reserves the right to reduce grant awards if project activities are ineligible or the amount of grant requests exceed available funding. WICC may consider projects outside of the application review window if funding is available.

Priority will be given to projects that result in comprehensive restoration, high visibility and impact on public streets and for projects. The criteria listed below (in no particular order) will be taken into account:

- Instances where an immediate renovation would stop serious deterioration of the building's façade and where historic or architecturally significant features contributing to the building's character are in danger of being lost
- Projects that would restore the historic features of a building
- Projects that would improve the architectural integrity of a building
- Projects that would result in significant new investment and the creation of jobs in the Uptown District
- Projects involving buildings with vacant or underutilized spaces where the overall marketability of the building would be improved
- Applications that demonstrate the applicant's capacity to complete the project including performance on previous applications
- Applicant's ability to commence the project in six months or less

GRANT REQUIREMENTS

The applicant shall comply with all applicable provisions of the Westerville Codified Ordinances and the Ohio Building Code. By submitting an application to the program, the applicant agrees to allow the City to inspect the interior and exterior of the building for code compliance.

Code violations discovered after project acceptance will not result in disqualification from the program, but corrections of such violations shall be incorporated into the project. WICC retains the right to withhold reimbursements from the applicant until such violations are corrected to the satisfaction of City Staff.

Applicants must file an application with the Uptown Review Board (URB) within 60 days of the project being accepted by WICC. With approval of the WICC Chair or WICC Vice-Chair, an extension may be granted, not more than six months, if the Applicant can develop a reasonable timetable seeking URB approval. All necessary board approvals must occur before a project begins. No funds will be awarded if the project begins before application approval.

Applicants are granted 180 days thereafter to complete the projects to the satisfaction of Staff. Extension to the 180-day completion period may be granted for inclement weather, or the ordering of special building materials. Applicants shall obtain necessary building permits. The applicant must request an extension in writing. WICC will notify the applicant in writing of its approval or denial.

Larger projects may be phased into smaller, more manageable projects for the applicant to complete. This does not guarantee that a duplicate application for continuation of the project in the future will automatically be approved by WICC. The purpose of the grant is to provide benefits to the entire district.

Applications and grant agreements are not transferable without written consent from WICC.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Step 1 – Pre-application Meeting

Applicants are encouraged to schedule a pre-application meeting with City Staff to review the scope of work prior to having architectural drawings completed and/or prior to submitting an application. To request a preliminary meeting, please contact Jason Bechtold or Bassem Bitar.

Bassem Bitar, AICP
Senior Planner
City of Westerville
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(614) 901-6658

Jason Bechtold
Economic Development Director
City of Westerville
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Step 2 – Façade Improvement Application Submittal

The applicant shall submit:

- Completed WICC Uptown Westerville Improvement Program Application
- Estimated budget with **detailed line items** and financing options
 - Applicants should include a contingency of up to 10% for each line item
- Pictures, site plans, architectural renderings and/or other visual representations of the proposed improvements.

Staff will review the information and make preliminary determinations as to whether the proposed project meets program requirements. If Staff determines the initial information provided meets program criteria, the project will be allowed to continue to WICC for approval.

Step 3 – Project Approval Process (WICC & URB)

The WICC Board will accept the applications based on the criteria listed under the “Decision Criteria” section above. Funding will be reserved for projects with the highest ranking, contingent on URB approval. A dated decision letter will be sent to all applicants immediately following the WICC meeting.

Applicants will submit an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness to the URB within 60 days of receipt of the WICC acceptance letter. The URB will then review the applications for compliance with the Uptown Westerville Design Guidelines and consistency of the proposed modifications with the character of the Uptown District. After issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness by the URB, the final project scope and budget will be reviewed by WICC. The applicant must enter into incentive agreement with WICC, which outlines the terms of the

program and the criteria for receiving the grant. Applicants that begin the project after receiving URB approval but have not executed an incentive agreement with WICC do so at their own risk.

Projects are expected to begin construction within 60 days of URB approval and completed within 180 days as stipulated under *Grant Requirements*.

Step 4 – Project Completion & Grant Reimbursement

City Staff will conduct a review of projects upon completion for compliance with URB approval. Projects that have been completed to the satisfaction of Planning and Development Staff will be issued a signed Certificate of Project Completion. The City will review projects for compliance within 30 days of notification of project completion by the applicant.

For a project to be considered complete and eligible for reimbursement, the applicant must:

- Obtain all applicable building permits and pass all building inspections relating to the Project. Tenants are required to have a Certificate of Occupancy;
- Obtain a Certificate of Project Completion from the City of Westerville Planning & Development Staff confirming that the project was completed in compliance with the application and URB approval;
- Submit a completed W-9;
- Submit third-party receipts or invoices to WICC that match the project description and final budget. If other building improvements were made in conjunction with the façade improvements, separate cost summaries related to the façade improvements must be provided. In-kind contributions are not eligible unless prior written approval is provided by WICC.

Uptown District Location Map

