



**Program Guidelines for the
Downtown District Ground Floor Retail
And Entertainment Façade Grant Program**

An annual program to help small businesses improve the exterior of existing commercial buildings and properties.

Program Description: The City of Tallahassee Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) Downtown Ground Floor Retail and Entertainment Façade Grant (DT GREF) Program provides CRA grant funds, matched by private investment, for improvements to the façade of commercial structures and properties located within the boundaries of the Downtown Community Redevelopment Area (DT District). Only commercial properties with an estimated value, following completion of improvements, of less than \$2 million and located within the Downtown redevelopment area are eligible to apply for grant funds under this program. Additionally, the property must have on-street frontage with a retail or entertainment use, such as a restaurant, store, or gallery; office use does not qualify.

Purpose:

The goal of the Downtown District Ground Floor Retail and Entertainment Façade Grant Program is to enhance the general appearance, support commercial and entertainment uses and improve property values in the DT District. To do this, the program assists commercial property owners and tenants in renovating the façade of their buildings/businesses and properties, improving the area's physical characteristics and enhancing the visual quality and attractiveness of the downtown area.

Grant funds are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis and are available throughout the fiscal year until all funds are committed. The maximum grant amount per parcel is \$50,000. Each request for grant funds requires a dollar-for-dollar match. For example, an applicant requesting \$40,000 in grant funds would need to make at least \$80,000 in exterior improvements to their building and/or property, thereby matching each dollar granted by the CRA.

The façade improvements must be consistent with the Downtown Community Redevelopment Plan and the regulations set forth in the City of Tallahassee's Comprehensive Plan and Zoning and Land Development Regulations, and other regulations, such as HPO designated properties, as applicable.

The funds may only be used for specific improvements to the building exterior or property on which the subject business is located. Improvements may include:

- Façade improvements, such as storefronts, display windows and exterior lighting, to retail and entertainment businesses;
- Removal of elements which cover original architectural design and details;
- New signage or replacement of existing signs;
- Addition and/or replacement of awnings/doors/windows;
- Overall replacement of architectural elements that have structural problems or extensive damage;
- Exterior painting of improvements directly related to the project renovations, such as new siding. Applications for exterior painting only are limited to a maximum grant matching grant of \$5,000;
- Electrical work directly related to the exterior of the building or the installation of approved signage or lighting;
- Site related improvements such as paving or parking improvements;
- The addition or replacement of basic landscaping and/or on-site drainage;
- Professional design and engineering services related to structural renovation and signage.

Prohibited uses include:

- Physical removal or visual obstruction of architecturally important features;
- Installation of aluminum or vinyl siding;
- Roofs
- Removable exterior furnishings, fixtures, and equipment (FFE) and all interior FFE;
- Permitting fees;
- Labor performed by a non-licensed contractor;
- Routine maintenance activities that are part of normal property ownership;
- The repair of any code violations;
- Improvements on a property that has any judgment liens, is not current on all mortgage and tax obligations, or has any code violations;
- Improvements to retail or entertainment businesses that are not open to the public (e.g. requires membership);
- Any interior improvements;
- Automotive and drive through businesses are not eligible if prohibited by current zoning code;
- Businesses whose primary sales are alcohol or tobacco (50 percent or more of sales from alcohol or tobacco).

Eligibility Criteria:

1. Property must be within the boundary of the DT District. If you are uncertain if a property is located within the boundaries of the Community Redevelopment Area, please contact CRA staff at 850-891-8357.
2. Applicants must demonstrate that all necessary financing required to complete the project has been secured.
3. The property must be a commercial, retail or entertainment use as defined in the City of Tallahassee Land Development Code.

4. Property must be free from any judgment liens, code violations and all mortgage and tax obligations must be current.

Criteria for Project Selection:

1. All necessary permits and approvals must be obtained from the City of Tallahassee Growth Management Department before any CRA-funded improvements can begin. All work is to be performed to the satisfaction of the City of Tallahassee Building Inspection Division.
2. A licensed contractor must perform the work unless the work performed is exclusively exterior painting.
3. Applicant must agree to maintain the improvements and property as a commercial use for at least 5 years. The grant funds will be treated as a deferred loan, with 1/60 of the loan forgiven each month. Depending on the amount of grant funds awarded, the deferred loan may be secured through both a mortgage and Notice of the Grant Agreement that will be filed with the Leon County Clerk of Courts. Please see "Grant Structure" below for more details.
4. There may be no more than one application for project funding per fiscal year. A "project" is defined as a single or set of enhancement/renovation activities for an eligible property/parcel. The maximum amount of grant funds available for any one property under this program is \$50,000. Any subsequent applications for the same property in future years will be treated cumulatively for purposes of determining funding eligibility.
5. Applications containing site related improvements such as parking, paving, striping of parking spaces, landscaping, and/or on-site drainage must have sign off approval from the City of Tallahassee Growth Management Department prior to submitting an application.
6. All landscape plans must be reviewed and approved by the City of Tallahassee Landscape Architect. All plants must be native and non-invasive. Drought resistant plants are highly encouraged.

Grant funds are limited to the funds approved by the CRA Board as part of the CRA's annual budget, and are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. In the event of competing applications for the limited funds, CRA staff will assess applications using the following criteria:

1. Consistency with the goals and objectives of the Downtown Community Redevelopment Plan;
2. Adjacency to a recent or proposed redevelopment project;
3. Project will result in the occupancy of a vacant building;
4. Amount of applicant match leveraged against CRA funds; and
5. Receipt of previous façade improvement grant awards (first time applicants will have priority over repeat applicants).

Application Process Summary:

1. Applicant submits a complete application to the CRA office (a complete application will include, as appropriate, the review and approval by the FAMU Small Business Development Center (SBDC), City of Tallahassee Growth Management and the City of Tallahassee Landscape Architect. If any of these reviews are required but not included in the application the application will be considered incomplete and will be returned);
2. CRA staff reviews application for completeness, accuracy and eligibility;
3. CRA staff presents recommendation to the CRA Executive Director and/or Board, as appropriate; and
4. Upon approval, the applicant will be notified in writing of the amount of the grant awarded, provided a grant agreement for execution and notified of the documentation that must be provided before funds are released.

Grant Structure:

1. All grants will be treated as five-year, zero interest, deferred loan, and will be subject to an agreement and restrictive covenant (the "Grant Agreement").
2. The amount of the deferred loan will be amortized in monthly installments over a five-year (60 month) period beginning one month after the receipt of a Certificate of Occupancy for the renovation/improvement from the City's Growth Management Department.
3. The monthly installments will be automatically forgiven without any action by either the Applicant or the CRA as they become due, as long as the property is maintained as a commercial structure. Should the character of the property change to something other than commercial in nature during the deferred loan period, the outstanding balance of the deferred loan will become immediately due and payable.
4. The deferred loan may be subordinate to other loan commitments made by the applicant, however, it may not be subsequently further subordinated after closing without the written approval of the CRA.
5. The property may be sold during the deferred loan period. However, if this occurs the remaining balance of the deferred loan will either become immediately due and payable or may transfer to the new owner, at the sole option of the CRA.
6. Any deferred loan of more than \$10,000 will be secured by a mortgage and Grant Agreement filed with the Clerk of Court. Prior to closing, the CRA, through the City Attorney's Office, will acquire mortgagee title insurance, the cost of which will be deducted from the grant proceeds to be disbursed to the applicant.

7. A deferred loan of less than \$10,000 is not required to be secured by a mortgage. Instead, a Notice of the Grant Agreement (restrictive covenants) will be filed with the Clerk of the Court. Prior to closing, the CRA will obtain an ownership and encumbrance report, the cost of which shall be deducted from the grant proceeds to be disbursed to the applicant.
8. All owners, authorized corporate officers, or partners must sign this application. A partner or officer must personally sign for the grant in the case where the applicant is a partnership, corporation or a professional association. This does not apply to recognized non-profit organizations.

Submitting an Application:

A property owner and/or tenant interested in participating in the Downtown District Ground Floor Retail and Entertainment Façade Grant Program must submit a signed and completed application, along with supporting documents, to the City of Tallahassee's Community Redevelopment Agency, 300 South Adams Street, Mailbox A-17, Tallahassee, Florida, 32301. Applicants are required to submit quotes from three (3) licensed contractors with the application.

Applications will be reviewed by CRA staff for completeness and compliance with program criteria. Applications that are incomplete may be returned for additional information. Projects that do not comply with the program criteria will not be considered for funding. The funding awarded will be based on the lowest qualified bid. The applicant may elect to choose a contractor other than the one with lowest qualified bid but shall be responsible for all costs exceeding the lowest qualified bid. In all cases, the contractor must be licensed (the only exception is for exclusive exterior painting projects), insured and have worker's compensation insurance.

It is recommended that applicants retain the services of a qualified contractor or design professional to prepare plans, drawings and construction specifications for their project. Grant requests for more than \$10,000 will require the submission of a rendering in a digital format that shows the anticipated façade improvements. The electronic rendering will help both the CRA staff and Board to better visualize the extent of the proposed improvements. The rendering does not have to be prepared by a registered architect, but must provide a reasonable representation of the proposed improvements. Fees for services provided by a registered architect or similarly qualified design professional may be counted towards the applicant's program match.

The CRA will not be responsible for the selection of a contractor. The applicant will bear full responsibility for reviewing the competence and abilities of prospective contractors and secure proof of their licensing and insurance coverage.

Applications can be obtained from the City of Tallahassee Community Redevelopment Agency located on the fourth floor of City Hall at 300 S. Adams St or from the City's website: www.talgov.com/ then selecting "Community Redevelopment", then "Downtown District Ground Floor Retail and Entertainment Façade Grant Program".

The CRA staff will review applications for completeness and provide a funding recommendation. The CRA Executive Director may approve grant applications of \$10,000 or less; applications in excess of

\$10,000 will be forwarded to the CRA Board for funding approval. Grant funds will be distributed upon completion of improvements, unless approved otherwise in writing by the CRA.

Pre-Application Meeting:

CRA staff recommends a pre-application meeting to review the applicant's conceptual plans in an informal setting, including discussion of the eligibility criteria, program requirements, proposed project scheduling, and consistency of the proposal with the intent of the program. At this stage, staff can offer assistance with the completion of the application form and provide limited technical and architectural guidance on the project proposal. After the pre-application meeting, staff will provide the applicant with a general determination as to whether the proposed project is likely to qualify to receive program funds and whether the applicant is sufficiently prepared to move on to the application stage.

Required Submittals: A more comprehensive list of the required submittals can be found within the application form. The items required for submission include:

1. A completed and signed application form.
2. Color photographs of the existing building exterior showing all sides of the building, with emphasis on the area to be improved. Digital copies are highly encouraged.
3. Sketches or conceptual drawings of the anticipated façade improvements. On applications requesting more than \$10,000 in grant funds, these sketches or conceptual drawings must be submitted in a digital format.
4. Three (3) bids from licensed contractors detailing the following:
 - a. Description of the materials to be used and the construction procedure;
 - b. Itemized cost estimate of the project;
5. A legal description of the property.
6. Proof of property ownership or, if a tenant, a copy of the lease agreement;
7. Tenants must provide written documentation verifying the property owner approves the proposed enhancements and will sign the Notice of Grant Agreement (restrictive covenants) and/or mortgage;
8. Documentation from all lending institutions verifying all mortgage payments on the property are current and that the lending institutions will provide updated information upon request by the CRA;
9. Documentation demonstrating all property tax payments are current;

10. If the property is locally designated as historic and is zoned under the Historic Preservation Overlay (HPO), the Certificate of Appropriateness issued by the Tallahassee-Leon County Architectural Review Board must be included in the application. For more information on the review of historic properties, please contact the Tallahassee Trust for Historic Preservation at 850-488-7334; and
11. Proof of property insurance.

Application Approval:

The CRA Executive Director will approve or deny grant applications of \$10,000 or less. Projects in excess of \$10,000 will be forwarded to the CRA Board with a recommendation from CRA staff for funding approval or denial. All applicants will receive written notification regarding approval or denial of their application. If an applicant's proposal is approved the applicant will also receive a funding agreement listing the amount of matching funds that are approved and the terms of the approval. An application may be denied at the sole discretion of the CRA Executive Director or the CRA Board if it is not consistent with the Downtown Community Redevelopment Plan and/or the vision of the DT District.

Documentation of Applicant's Required Match:

The applicant will be required to document the type and source of his/her matching funds on the application submitted to the CRA. Verification of the funding sources will be required before final approval of the grant application. At the sole discretion of the CRA Executive Director or the CRA Board, structural repairs directly related to the building's façade that were completed within six (6) months prior to the submittal date of the grant application **MAY** be used as part or all of the applicant's required match. However, CRA grant funds cannot be applied against these improvements.

Construction Start:

After the funding agreement has been executed, the applicant may award the construction contract and secure all necessary construction permits. The owner/tenant must issue a "Notice to Proceed" to the contractor and apply for a building permit within 60 days of executing the funding agreement. Construction must begin within 90 days of the funding agreement and be completed within 12 months of the agreement. Extensions may be granted at the sole discretion of the CRA Executive Director, contingent upon the applicant demonstrating just cause for such an extension.

Modifications to the approved final plans or changes to the construction documents which produce visible differences in the approved façade design will require review and approval by CRA staff and/or Board. Failure to receive such approval shall invalidate the funding agreement and the agreement will be deemed terminated. In the event the agreement is terminated, and if any grant funds have been disbursed to the applicant by the CRA as provided below, the disbursed funds shall become immediately due and payable to the CRA.

Disbursements:

Generally, approved applicants will receive reimbursement funding upon completion of the project. For projects where the applicant cannot secure full funding for the improvements, the CRA Executive Director may approve the partial payment of grant funds once a project has reached agreed-upon milestones. In these cases, the applicant and the CRA will reach an agreement before construction begins on the terms and conditions of the milestones and the amount of the partial payment. However, grant funds cannot be used to reimburse the applicant for any work done on the building prior to date of a fully executed Grant Agreement between the applicant and the CRA.

Funds will be disbursed by direct deposit payable to the applicant (1) upon certification of completion by the City Building Inspector and/or City Landscape Architect, or as agreed to with the CRA Executive Director, and (2) CRA staff verification that the work was completed as proposed in a satisfactory and professional manner. Funds will not be disbursed on projects that are not in accordance with the approved plans.

The City's Growth Management Department, Building Inspection Division will make the final determination as to when the project is complete. Applicants must provide verification, satisfactory to the CRA, of all project costs, including contractor invoicing, and evidence of payment of funds for reimbursement and match, before grant funds can be disbursed.

Disclosures:

The CRA expressly reserves the right to reject any or all applications or to request additional information from any and/or all applicants. The CRA retains the right to amend the program guidelines and application procedures without notice. The CRA also retains the right to display and advertise properties that receive grant funds.

The closing costs associated with the grant (title search or title insurance and recording fees) will be deducted from the disbursement amount of the approved grant amount, which will be based on the lowest price quote. At the option of the applicant, the applicant may pay these closing costs directly.

Contact Information:

Questions on how to complete the application form or the appropriateness of a proposed project should be directed to **CRA staff at (850) 891-8357 or via email at CRA@talgov.com.**