



## **Architectural Design Services and Façade Improvement Guidelines**

### **PROGRAM PURPOSE**

**Architectural Design Services and Façade Improvements** is an economic incentive program of the City of Gastonia that offers financial assistance to eligible new and existing business and property owners within the City's Municipal Service District (MSD) to restore/rehabilitate the exterior character defining features of the property. The MSD is roughly bounded by Chester and Broad Streets on the west and east and Third and Walnut Avenues on the south and north. A map of the exact MSD area is available upon request.

### **PROGRAM FEATURES**

- The program offers incentive grants, in the form of reimbursement up to \$10,000 for façade improvements and/or \$1,500 for architectural design services, meeting the program's eligibility and location requirements. The façade grant is a 1:1 matching grant and the scope of work must be approved by the program administrator before any work begins.
- Funding for the program comes from revenue generated by the MSD property tax levy and is limited in any fiscal year to the program budget approved by City Council. Funding awards are merit-based and subject to funding limitations.
- The Gastonia City Council shall have final authority and discretion over the award of all incentive grants, and may continue, alter, or discontinue funding for any portion of or all of the program at any time.

### **ELIGIBILITY**

- To be eligible for funding assistance, the following criteria must be met:
  - Property must be located within the established MSD of the City of Gastonia. The property owner must be an MSD taxpayer.
  - Any façade or signage changes must be approved by the City's Central Business District Design Review Committee before they are submitted to the façade grant program administrator for review. No reimbursement will be considered for work done before approvals from the Design Review committee and the façade grant program administrator.
  - Non-profit organizations are eligible to apply for grants as long as the organization or the property owner from which it will be leasing space are MSD taxpayers.

- Business must be open to and serve the general public on a non-discriminatory basis. Property owners must lease to tenants on a non-discriminatory basis.

## **INCENTIVES**

### **➤ ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN SERVICES**

- Following the application process and City Council approval, grant recipients are eligible to receive up to \$1,500, which is payable upon submittal of documentation of actual expenses or services rendered and proof of payment.
- Design services should generally be related to the production of architectural renderings, elevations, floor plans, schematics, concept drawings, up-fit specifications including MEPs (mechanical, engineering and plumbing drawings), provided by a licensed architect or associate and/or cost-estimates associated with any such building improvements, alterations, or up-fit. Architects will, preferably, be based in Gaston County.
- Either the property owner or an eligible tenant or prospective tenant may apply for and be granted this incentive, as long as the product of any services acquired remains accessible to and useable by the building owner whether or not the design services actually result in the leasing or renovation of the space in question.
- Payment of architectural services grants shall be made either to the designated architect or firm or to the applicant upon submittal of documentation showing the detail of architectural services rendered and proof of payment. Services must be those described in the application and/or outlined in the required supporting estimates or invoices.
- Building owners who own multiple buildings in the MSD may be granted or benefit from multiple grants. One building with multiple storefronts shall be granted only one grant.

### **➤ FAÇADE IMPROVEMENT**

- Facades must meet established Central Business District design standards as outlined by the City's Unified Development Ordinance. The applicant must receive approval from the City's Central Business District Design Review Committee for the planned façade changes and/or improvement. The City's Planning Department can provide information on the Design Review process and the appropriate review application.
- No reimbursement will be considered for work done before approvals from the Design Review Committee and the façade grant program administrator. No reimbursement will be considered for work done that has not been done in accordance with the plan approved by the Design Review Committee and the façade grant program administrator.
- Following the application process and City Council approval, grant recipients are eligible to receive no more than 50% of incurred expenses, up to \$10,000, which is payable upon submittal of documentation of actual expenses or services rendered and proof of payment. Expenses and/or services must be those described in the application and/or outlined in the required supporting estimates or invoices.

- Façade grant payments shall be available to recipients within 30 days following the submittal and approval of required documentation. Reimbursement requests must be submitted within 12 months of completion of façade improvement.
- Residential projects (developed for the purpose of leasing) are eligible for grants; however, applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Individuals renovating living space for personal use are not eligible for grants.
- Improvements must be on the façade of the building facing the primary street orientation or if on a corner lot, the façades facing the two streets of primary orientation.
- Eligible Façade Items:
  - Removal of false fronts (such as aluminum panels)
  - Repair or replacement of windows, doors, parapets and cornices
  - Repair or replacement of façade materials (brickwork, plaster, wood)
  - New awnings
  - Exterior lighting
  - Exterior painting (when associated with a larger rehabilitation effort)
  - Roofing (when associated with part of the façade. In a larger rehabilitation effort roof work can be used as part of the grant match)
  - Pavement improvements, landscaping and fencing along the front public right of way
- Not Eligible Façade Items:
  - Signage (unless restoration of historic signage or mural)
  - Alarm systems
  - New building construction
  - Any interior work
  - Electrical work that involves more than providing service to the facade
  - Any items not allowed by the City of Gastonia Code
  - Parking lots and parking lot striping

### **APPLICATION AND SELECTION PROCESS**

- Applicants must submit a completed application and the following associated supporting documents to be considered for grants:
  - Detailed scope of work with contractor estimates
  - Letter of intent to lease or signed lease (if new tenant)
  - Floor plan sketch of areas used by the business (if requested)
  - Written approval of façade improvement plans from the City's Central Business District Design Review Committee
  - Detailed personal, financial and business history and experience (if requested)

- The selection process will include a review of the application and accompanying support data by the Economic Development Staff.
- The application reviewer(s) summarize the assessment of the applicant's eligibility and the viability of the business and forwards the findings to the City Council's Central City Revitalization and Housing Committee (CCRHC). The CCRHC reviews the application and the staff findings and considers the application in an open public Committee meeting. The CCRHC makes a determination on the grant request and makes a formal recommendation to the full Council. The full Council reviews the CCRHC's recommendation in a regularly scheduled Council meeting and votes to approve, not approve, or amend the CCRHC's recommendation. No application is final until the full City Council has reviewed and approved the request.
- All amounts due to the City of Gastonia, including but not limited to utilities and property taxes, must be current before any payments are made to the grant recipient.
- Applications are considered based on merits of the request and the applicant's business' contribution to the overall success of downtown development. Council can determine the amount of the grant based on the business' value to downtown development and how much it attracts visitors and business to downtown as a whole. Other criteria used for determining the amount of a grant: number of similar existing businesses, uniqueness of business to downtown, amounts historically given to similar kinds of business, etc.

### **REIMBURSEMENTS**

- Applicant must submit copies of paid invoices and cancel checks or debit/credit card statements as proof of payment.
- The paid in full invoices must be from the contractor/company who submitted the estimates. Updated estimates can be submitted to the façade grant program administrator prior to work beginning. No paid invoices will be considered for reimbursement that do not match an approved estimate. No blank sheet of paper signed indicating cash received as payment will be accepted for grant reimbursement.
- Applications may take up to 30 days for processing reimbursements.