

Staff Report

Campustown Façade Program

November 24, 2015

BACKGROUND:

The Campustown Façade Program is being developed to enhance the appearance of Campustown commercial buildings. Council accepted the approach of finalizing a Façade Program based upon the Idea Book and pilot projects. Upon completion of the pilot projects, staff promised to provide an assessment of the process and have Council give direction on proceeding with formalizing the Façade Program for continued use. The City hired Haila Architecture-Structure-Planning as consultant to assist in all phases of development the program.

City Council approved design concepts for façade enhancements in November of 2014, as embodied the [Campustown Façade Idea Book](#). The Idea Book focuses on five concepts. As presented in the Idea Book, the concepts are not prioritized and considered of equal importance. The concepts are as follows:

Transparent Campustown. Visual transparency invites pedestrians to patronize the businesses inside. Physical access promotes cohesiveness within the district. Promoting more glass and larger physical openings show the commercial offerings in the district and encourage people to spend more time there.

Social Campustown. Well designed outdoor gathering areas create a positive social atmosphere. Small, unused, visible spaces can be transformed to expand commercial opportunities. It is not the intent of the program to fund sidewalk dining or other uses of the public right-of-way, although improvements to the building that are part of any outdoor gathering area project would be eligible.

Diverse Campustown. The variety of building types and design styles contribute to the vibrancy, funkiness, visual interest, and diversity of businesses. Façades are encouraged to be distinct from their neighbors and unique in the district.

Identifiable Campustown. High quality signs, graphics, and other design features that express the unique identity of local businesses can be part of a distinctive design for façade improvements.

Historic Campustown. Some buildings in Campustown have potential to illustrate the historic development of Campustown over 100 years.

Projects can include removing cover-up materials, restoring original storefronts/entrances, and restoring masonry.

In the City's 2014-2015 Budget, the City Council included funding for a Campustown Façade Program, specifically to develop design guidelines for city façade grants and to carry out two pilot improvement projects. City Council budgeted \$32,000 for two pilot projects in the 2014/2015 fiscal year. In April 2015, Council approved two grant requests for two pilot improvement projects, West Street Deli and the Cranford Building, based on the concepts within the Idea Book.

Pilot Projects:

2812 West Street is the home of West Street Deli. The façade of this one-story building, which included wood siding, two large windows and a recessed raised entry, was changed while retaining and emphasizing the two different planes in the façade surface. The project was approved to be consistent with the *transparent* design concept through the use of the new front façade windows and removal of the window vinyl. It was also found to be consistent with the *diverse* design concept, due to the appearance being distinctly different from the darker wood siding on other buildings in the same block. Additionally, the project met the *identifiable* design concept with the option for a well lit business sign on the recessed surface of the façade, a new blade sign facing pedestrians on the walk, and potential graphics at the recessed entrance expressing the brand identity of the business. Consistent with the *social* design concept, this business will continue to offer sidewalk dining.

Cranford Building is a corner property addressed as 103 Stanton. The building contains Jeff's Pizza and The Singer Station along its Lincoln Way frontage. This building has historical interest because it was designed and constructed in 1922 by the first woman to receive an engineering degree from Iowa State and because it was funded by women faculty and graduate students as their residence. The street level retail façade was covered up by wood panels and had windows and doors of a variety of sizes. While it was intended that the original brick would be restored on the building, it was determined during the demolition phase that the wood panel was coated and could not be removed, therefore a new brick façade was installed over the existing materials to mimic the approved design of the project. The doors and windows have been replaced in a regular size and pattern consistent with the original design (there was some revision from the original approval concerning these openings). Wood trim, columns, kick plate panels and other wood elements were repaired where possible, or replaced if needed. By increasing the total area of openings, the façade project was consistent with the *transparent* design concept. Restoration of materials and replicating original fenestration patterns made the project consistent with the *historic* design concept.

Haila has provided a Final Report on the evaluation and results of the two pilot projects, including before and after pictures. The report includes a recap of the process to date, an evaluation of the Idea Book based on the final construction of the pilot projects, and offers opportunities for improvement on the Idea Book, the application review process,

and consideration of project modifications during construction of a grant project. The Final Report is included as a separate document.

Staff believes both projects have successfully embodied distinct concepts of the Idea Book. The most significant critique was the number of changes that went into the Cranford after its initial presentation to Council. Additionally, the Cranford is not quite done and has had a timeframe that has taken much longer than anticipated. The longer projects or projects with delays do become time intensive on staff to keep trying to move property owners along to be consistent with their grant agreements. The West Street building looks fresh and inviting with its rehabilitation and there were no issues once it started construction. We will want to monitor the long term success of the materials choices as the character of the clear coated cedar is the most significant feature of the façade ages.

As discussed in more detail by Haila, having design investigation with the Cranford may have resulted in a smoother project and it was critical to have Haila help guide the West Street project since it did not include a design professional in its proposal. Overall the two projects are successful and show the range of what could happen under the Idea Book.

Finalize Campustown Façade Program:

Presuming Council is satisfied with the results of the pilot projects, the next step is to consider policies necessary to establish a final program. Council has budgeted \$50,000 in the FY15-16 budget for the Façade Program. After the City Council provides direction regarding the issues mentioned below, staff will return with the final program in December with the intent to allow for a new round of façade applications this winter.

The purpose of a proposed Campustown Façade Program is “to improve the Campustown mixed use district by providing financial incentives to enhance the appearance of existing and proposed new buildings with commercial uses.” The goal of the program is “to encourage and maintain the diverse culture and uniqueness of Campustown, to create a vibrant and walkable Campustown, and to increase safety, security, and investment by property and business owners and to add to the vitality of Campustown”. Based on the Idea Book, the program should support enriching the individual detail and character of each building within the context of a pedestrian oriented commercial district.

In many ways the format and process of a Campustown Façade Grant program will follow the existing Downtown program administration techniques; however, in Campustown the goals of the project are broader with less specific guidance. Downtown has a more precise purpose of restoring facades to a more traditional and historic look that lends itself to clearer expectations of performance. **The Campustown Façade Program has a broad range of concepts for unique design, social spaces and transparency that could create unique issues and opportunities in its administration. While each façade will still need to be consistent with underlying zoning standards for design and materials, the Façade Program will not**

specifically look for a consistent design theme as the Downtown Façade Program does with Historic restoration.

Considering how the pilot projects worked and the broad goals of the Campustown Façade Program, staff has outlined a few issues that should be addressed regarding eligibility criteria, requirements for awarding grants, and administration of the program that Council should consider before establishing a formal Campustown Façade Grant Program.

Program Eligibility:

1) Building Use or Ownership

Eligibility for the program should include owners and/or tenants of buildings located inside the boundaries of Façade Program area (see attached Campustown Façade Program Map), which contain Office Uses or Trade Uses as defined by the Zoning Code. This is the same use eligibility as downtown. Ineligible participants for the grant program would include owners and/or tenants of residential structures and buildings owned by the government, churches, and other religious institutions. Under the proposed guidelines, grant funds could also be allowed for new building projects and additions.

2) Second Floor Facades

With the desire for the Campustown Facade Program to promote a social and walkable design aesthetic within a mixed use environment, Council will need to determine if grant funds should be applied to improvement costs associated with residential facades above the first floor when in combination with first floor commercial facades.

Within the Downtown Façade Program, façade grant funds would not apply to any improvement costs for second floor residential façade areas. Second floor façade grant funds have been applied toward areas of the second floor when the use of the second floor facade is a compliant commercial use (office or retail). Typically commercial tenant spaces in a mixed use building have applied for funds for a first floor commercial renovation only, such as the case with the Cranford renovation. **However, if it is believed that the design features of a building above the first floor contribute to the overall character of an area as an identifiable Campustown, even as a residential facade, then upper floors could be an eligible cost. The counterpoint to this argument is that façade areas above the second floor do not contribute to a pedestrian scale design and increasing transparency as are the main goals of the program.** Therefore it may not be in the City's interest to allow for grant funding for façade improvement costs above the second floor of any building independent of use.

Program Eligibility Areas:

As previously approved in November of 2014, City Council identified the designated Campustown Service Center (CSC) zoning district and neighborhood commercial (NC) area within the West University Impacted District overlay zoning (O-UIW) as the

program eligible areas. See Attachment A. Council should confirm the intended area of eligibility.

Grant Award/Process:

1) Application Timing

Similar to the Downtown Façade Grant program, it is anticipated the program would be funded to an amount as determined by City Council during the budget cycle and awarded in early spring for construction in the summer. Grants would be awarded after a set application period and evaluated based on a scoring system to determine which project(s) would be eligible for award. **Applications would only be solicited once a year with unspent funds planned to be rolled over to the following year.** This differs from Downtown which plans for an optional second cycle of funding for leftover funds. **The reason for the difference is that there are less eligible properties to use the funds and it would ease administration burdens on staff as it has been a challenge to consistently administer a second round of funding for Downtown.**

2) Scoring

All applications will be scored by staff with the applications and results presented to Council for award. Without direction otherwise, a project will be scored equally against all Idea Book Concepts rather than prioritizing scoring for a particular concept. Generally the scoring system would incorporate an evaluation of the façade project based on how many design concepts from the Idea Book are addressed within the project and how clearly the proposed project design incorporates those concepts, the degree of visual impact the project (size and appearance), and the financial impact of the project (leveraging additional investment). The project should identify compliance with one or more of the five Design Concepts from the Idea Book, however, it is not intended that the project meet all five of the design concepts.

3) Grant Awards

It is anticipated that grant awards would be limited to up to \$15,000 per award with an equal match of improvement cost by the applicant. An additional \$1,000 of funds could be granted for professional design services. These dollars figures fit the idea of the City being invested in roughly 35% to 50% of a typical renovation cost of standard storefront. These terms are in line with the existing Downtown program. However, Council could increase the incentive for professional design assistance by raising the \$1,000 to \$2,000 to help with initial investigations and designing details.

The City Council must decide whether or not to give multiple grants for one project per year. The primary issues with the number of grants awarded, is the balance of spreading investment out to multiple parties versus concentrating incentives in one project. Staff's review of typical storefronts in Campustown is between 15 and 30 feet, in some cases large stores may exceed 40 linear feet. With typical commercial storefronts averaging between 15 to 30 feet in width along Lincoln Way between Sheldon and Welch, the impact of such façade improvement for a small single frontage, depending

on design, seems to warrant only one grant award (\$15,000). Additionally, there is the consideration of corner buildings having multiple facades. These larger building frontages could do a lot more with design, which could then have a more significant impact on the aesthetic of the district and could potentially warrant a larger grant award.

Staff is recommending that a maximum of \$30,000 (two facades) with matching improvement costs from the applicant be allowed for any one building in any one year. This ensures that at least two applications could be funded each year.

Façade Improvements:

1. Scope of Work

The program should be intended to award grant funding for projects where an improvement is made to the design aesthetic of the building, not just maintenance of the façade, such as painting, brick tuck pointing, or simple window replacement. The program should also not be allowed for grant funding for just signage or non-permanent improvements. It should also be noted that grant money will not be eligible for facade projects where the existing façades of the building are already compliant with the guidelines. Signage may be part of the matching cost through the program when in combination with a façade improvement project.

2. Applying the Concepts

As the design concepts are defined in the Idea Book, there is a possibility that a project to meet more than one of the concepts and therefore, it is also possible that in meeting one of the concepts the project could be in conflict of another concept.

For example, a project that may meet the intent of the Diverse Campustown Design Concept with a unique front façade design, while aesthetically compatible for the district, may be inconsistent with a Transparent Campustown Design Concept by covering or reducing a majority of the front storefront glass. In staff's view, this example would be viewed as ineligible for grant funding due to violation of one or more of the design concepts.

If Council members disagrees with the above approach, you could set direction on prioritizing or weighting concepts regardless of their effect on other concepts. Staff believes that based on the five concepts in the Idea Book, that the transparent and social design concepts are regarded as more desirable for a project when determining compatibility with goals for Campustown. This would lower the importance of unique identity or promoting an eclectic façade look.

3. Improvements Beyond Facades

With the intent of the façade program to promote a mixed use Campustown pedestrian character with social enhancement, it is anticipated that façade improvement project may extend beyond just the physical walls of the buildings, while still on private property. It is foreseeable that projects may include streetscape elements that would

also enhance the design of the buildings, such as permanent planters, patios or outdoor dining/seating areas (not furniture), signage, and other pedestrian scaled permanent design features. This does not include any temporary or movable streetscape elements.

Typically these types of features would not be considered a façade element; however in the context and goals of the proposed Campustown grant program, if incorporated into a façade improvement project, a design benefit could be attributed to one or more of the design concepts from the Idea Book. If Council agrees, secondary design features could be considered as matching grant funding on a project if they were permanent design features that add to the context of the overall building design. These types of features would not be eligible for funding independent of a building façade project or as part of a façade project not along a street frontage.

4. Street Facing/ Side/ Rear Facades

One of the goals is to create usable space and activity in Campustown. In some situations entrances or patio areas could be on a side or rear of a façade. This is a similar condition to Downtown. The Downtown program only supports front façade work or a secondary façade along a public space, e.g. a plaza. **Staff recommends that it be clear in the Façade Program that same standards are applied to Campustown.**

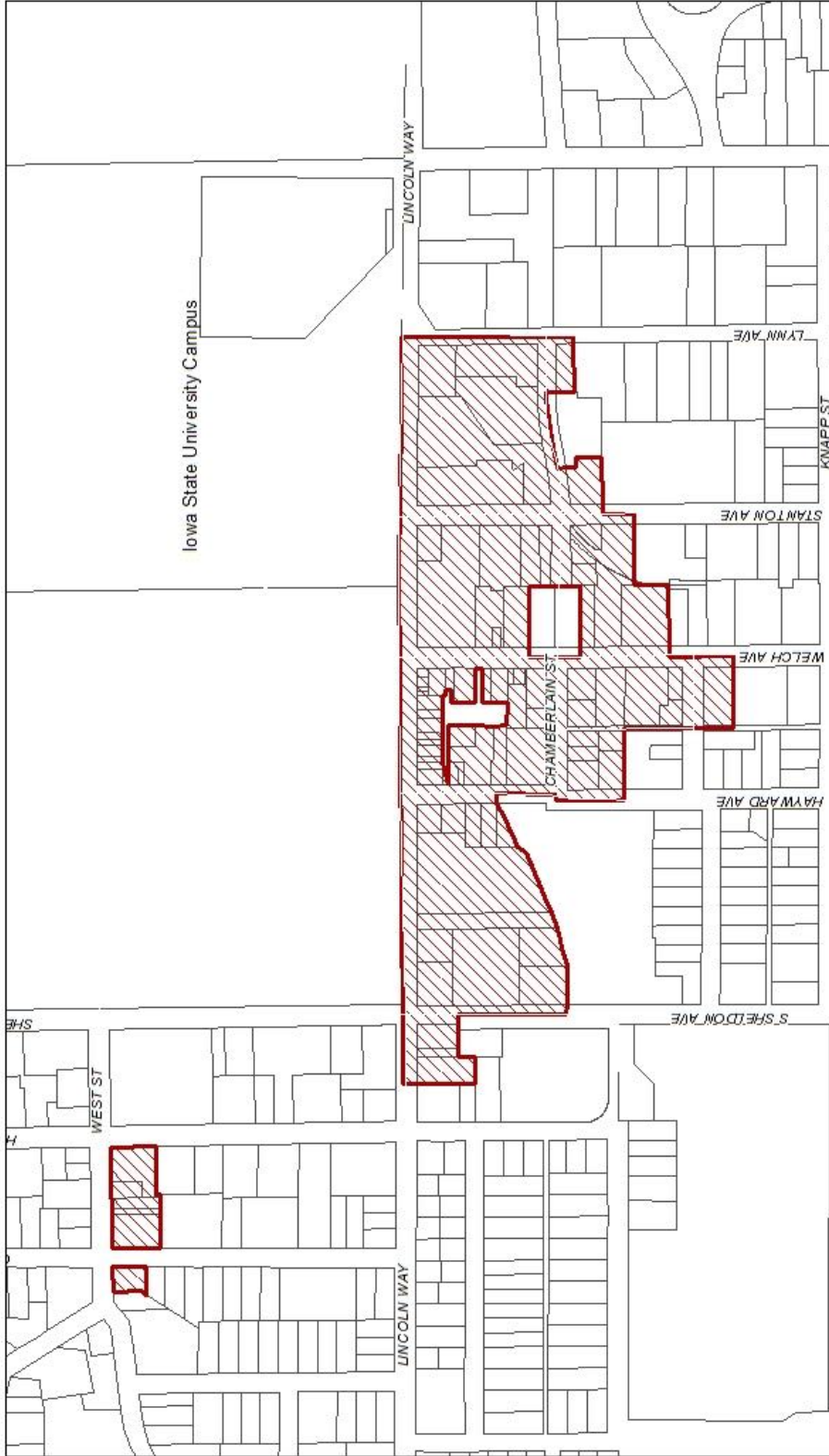
STAFF COMMENTS:

The City Council has an established goal to support Campustown and an objective to create a Campustown Façade Program. The proposed Idea Book incorporates design concepts tailored to the Campustown area. Staff believes that the proposed principles and the “Idea Book” approach reflect the characteristics of Campustown, will encourage the creativity that those characteristics call for, and can form the basis for a manageable façade grant program.

It’s likely that staff will need to work with potential future applicants to prepare design proposals that are consistent with Council’s expectations and priorities for the program. Supporting the use of design professional to help take the concepts from the Idea Book to reality is probably an important part of the program since staff will not be equipped to spend significant amounts of time within individual projects.

With the issues described above, there only needs to be general direction given on most issues for staff to formulate a final plan. With direction to proceed we will return in December to provide final program rules and guidelines to administer the program in anticipation of the first round of Campustown Grant funding starting in the next few months.

Campustown Facade Improvement Program



 Campustown Facade Grant Eligibility Area



November 20, 2015
Map prepared by Ames Planning and Housing



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Campustown Facade Grant Program

Pilot Year Final Report

November 2015

HAILA Architecture | Structure | Planning Ltd.



Pilot Year Final Report

Campustown Facade Grant Program

Summary

This report is a brief account of the pilot year of the Campustown Facade Grant Program, a grant program sponsored by the City of Ames. The program is intended to enhance the appearance of Campustown commercial buildings, fulfilling the objective outlined by the City Council and by Iowa State University in their mutual goal of supporting Campustown. The program is also intended to increase the vitality of the area and encourage more economic development through private investment.

In three (3) phases over the past year, the City of Ames contracted with HAILA Architecture | Structure | Planning Ltd. of Ames, Iowa, to:

1. Develop design guidelines that embody the intent of the program
2. Assist the City in reviewing applications as well as provide feedback to pilot project applicants for adherence to program design guidelines.
3. Review the pilot projects at the end of construction for adherence with program design guidelines as well as provide a report to the City; giving a brief account of the pilot year as well as suggestions for program improvement in future years.

Phase 1: Design Guideline Development

The design guidelines of the Campustown Facade Improvement were born out of several meetings with a variety of stakeholders, including Campustown tenants, property owners, Iowa State University officials, students, and residents of the South Campus Area Neighborhood. With the goal of maintaining the unique aspects of Campustown and enhancing the appearance of the district, five primary concepts were agreed on as guiding principles of the program; **Transparent, Social, Diverse, Identifiable, & Historical**

Ultimately, the intent of these guiding principles was communicated through an "Idea Book," a compilation of national and international projects that demonstrate one or more of the five primary concepts of the program. Each entry was illustrated with graphics, photos, and text to describe how the project was exemplary for its design approach as related to the five primary concepts of the Campustown Facade Improvement Program.

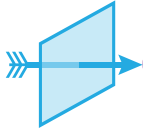
The Idea Book was completed in the late Fall 2014 and distributed to interested applicants as well as posted as a PDF of the City website.

Opportunities for Improvement: The Idea Book was a positive first step in developing non-rigid guidelines for businesses and property owners to understand the intent of the program. However, in contrast to the Downtown Facade Improvement Program where a specific historical time-period and/or style is desired, the Campustown Facade Improvement Program is much more amorphous. As such, some flexibility should be afforded in how the intent of the program is communicated through regular updates to the Idea Book. Recommendations for improvement include:

- Periodic review and replacement of Project Profile Sheets to reflect contemporary trends in architecture and design principles.
- Include an additional section of completed Campustown Facade Improvement Projects as a direct illustration and documentation of program intent and history.
- Make the Idea Book a "live document" in that it has the ability to be ever changing and updated, either through multiple authors on a collaborative platform (i.e. Google Doc, Dropbox, Evernote, etc) or through social media outlets such as Pinterest, Houzz, or Porch.com.

On a related note, future changes to City Ordinances (i.e. signage, lighting, building materials, codes, etc) should be noted and reflected in the Design Guidelines.

Primary Concepts



Transparent Campustown
Ground level transparency
Blend public / private space
Flexible design



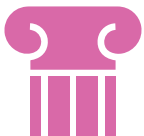
Social Campustown
Public space improvement
Park-like gathering spaces
Well lit public areas



Diverse Campustown
Eclectic environment
Vibrant & interesting
Integrated public art



Identifiable Campustown
Well articulated signage
Exterior communication



Historic Campustown
Historically oriented when
necessary or applicable

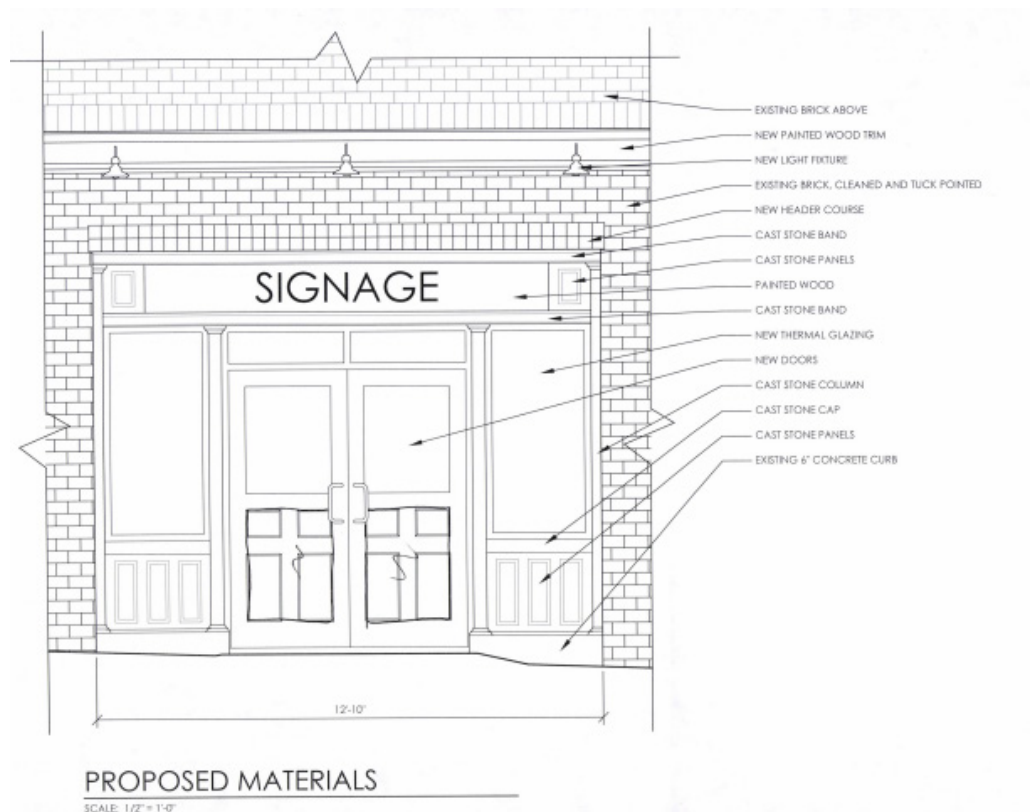
Phase 2: Application Review & Feedback

The second phase of the pilot year of the Campustown Facade Grant program focused on reviewing applications for the grant as well as providing feedback to the applicants on how to make their grant applications stronger and better aligned with the program intent.

The two properties that applied for the grant program were:

1. The Cranford Building - First Level Front Facade Renovation, 2402-2408 Lincoln Way
2. West Street Deli - Front Facade Renovation, 2810 West Street

Representatives from the City, Campustown, and HAILA Architecture met with each property owner separately after their initial application to discuss ways to make their grant application stronger and better aligned with the program intent. For example, the West Street Deli initial application sketch did little to enhance the appearance of the building as it proposed to reduce the facade to single plane of stucco with a cedar plank wainscot. In the second iteration, the variation of planes and three-dimensional geometry of the existing building were maintained, and pedestrian oriented signage, as well as new lighting were indicated, greatly improving the strength of the grant application.



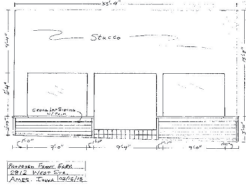
Cranford Building Initial Application & Feedback

The new doors were changed from a panelized door to a full glass door to provide greater transparency. Also, the cast stone wall elements below the glazing were clarified to explain that the design intent was to emulate the historic character of the original building.

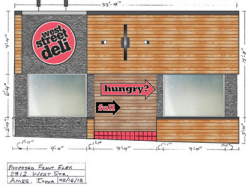


Phase 2: Application Review & Feedback (cont.)

Opportunities for Improvement: The application review and feedback process was critical to the success of the pilot year of the Campustown Facade Grant Program. It gave the City of Ames the opportunity to communicate the intent of the program. Both property owners were very receptive and responsive to the feedback which made their final application submissions much stronger.



With only two applications being received for the pilot projects, we can only speculate as to how the City will administer the grant in the future if there is greater competition for funding. Considering the rather open ended and conceptual criteria for the grant, selecting applications objectively could be challenging in the future, especially if there are many more applications than there is funding available. One idea would be to turn the application and selection process into a “Design Competition,” where City Staff, a Design Review Board, or the General Public could vote on their favorite design.



Another issue that arose was the lack of architectural and engineering investigation prior to the application process that led to changes and/or missed opportunities during the construction phases, which is outlined further in the next section of this report. The lack of investigation was due primarily to the relatively narrow window of time between the grant program’s advertisement and the grant application deadline, which should remedy itself in the future as potential applicants will be able to plan further in advance to the application deadline. However, measures can and should be taken to ensure that there are few “surprises” during construction that necessitate major scope and/or material changes to construction.

West Street Deli Second Application Iteration

In the second iteration, the variation of planes and three-dimensional geometry of the existing building were maintained, and pedestrian oriented signage, as well as new lighting were indicated, greatly improving the strength of the grant application.

One idea would be to require a licensed architect and/or engineer to sign an “Intent to Comply with Program Guidelines” form at each phase of the design and construction. A responsible architect or engineer would not likely sign off on a conceptual design if they haven’t performed some level of investigation of existing conditions.

Another measure that could be taken to help owners think through their facade renovation are prompts or checklists, either in the Idea Book or the Grant Application itself to remind applicants to inquire with an architect, engineer, and/or contractor regarding critical issues (i.e. structural considerations, moisture and water infiltration, historical considerations, constructibility, etc.).

Phase 3: Final Constructions

The third and final phase of the pilot year of the Campustown Facade Grant program is nearly complete as both pilot projects are done/nearly done with construction and a second year of projects will be under consideration in the coming months. The new facades certainly meet the intentions of the program in that they greatly enhance the appearance of their respective buildings and contribute to increased vitality and economic development through private investment of the area.

The only issue that arose during the construction phase of the program was at the Cranford Building where assumptions regarding the material condition of the existing masonry were found to be incorrect during demolition and material changes were made to the project; an additional wythe of new masonry was added in lieu of cleaning/tuck-pointing original masonry and cast stone details were changed to painted wood.



Cranford Building Final Construction

The final construction of the Cranford Building is a great improvement from the former deteriorating stucco facade along Lincoln Way. The large storefront windows contribute to greater transparency between pedestrians and the interior commercial spaces, the painted wood details provide pedestrian scale visual interest at the street level, and the new lighting will contribute to a friendly walking pedestrian experience at night.

Phase 3: Final Constructions (cont.)



West Street Deli Final Construction

The final construction of the West Street Deli Facade is very similar to the application submission. The variations in material/plane were maintained from the previous facade, the new stucco and cedar siding are very handsome additions to the streetscape, and the new signage and lighting contribute to a pedestrian oriented and friendly building front.

Opportunities for Improvement: The material changes of the Cranford Building highlight an important reality of construction; that scope and material changes are common to renovation projects. How project changes are handled in the future should be carefully considered to maintain the integrity of the Grant Program's intent. One suggestion would be to require applicants to amend their original application with changes to project scope and/or materiality, so that City Staff can be made aware of and have the opportunity to discuss any changes before they are constructed.