

Staff Report

SCORING CRITERIA FOR DOWNTOWN FAÇADE GRANTS

April 12, 2011

On March 1, 2011, City Council directed staff to develop concepts for a competitive grant process for the Downtown Façade Improvement Program. This is necessary because the interest in grants appears to have exceeded the funding available in one fiscal year. Staff has spoken to seven property owners who are considering applying for façade grants. Competitive grants based on a scoring system will provide a fair and objective method for the City Council to award the available funds to the projects that best meet the objectives of the Downtown Façade Improvement Program.

In the attachment, staff suggests five categories for review that would each earn a yet-to-be-determined maximum score. Scores would be based on a list of criteria reflected for each category that the Council would consider when reviewing proposals. These questions are based on the Downtown Design Guidelines, with some added elements from the criteria that the Main Street Iowa program uses for its Challenge Grants. The City Council may also suggest any additional criteria it deems important. **Based on the City Council's discussion and response to these questions at the April 12th meeting, staff will bring a evaluation proposal back to Council for approval at a future meeting.**

In order for the City Council to consider all eligible projects, the competitive grant process will require a more structured process than the past façade grant review. There will need to be some set deadlines for all applications to be received. It will also help people who are planning projects to know when the grants will be awarded. In the last part of this attachment staff outlines a possible application and review process, for City Council review and comment.

In order to establish decision making criteria, staff is seeking the City Council's feedback regarding the following questions:

Categories

The proposed program includes five categories (Impact, Extent of Improvements, Historic Design, Financial Impact, Previous Grants). **Are there any other categories that should be considered? Or, should any of the five categories being suggested be eliminated?**

Points Per Category

How many maximum points should be assigned to each of categories?

Weighting of Categories

Should all categories be given equal points, or some weighted more than others?

Downtown Façade Grant

Prerequisites for all Façade Grants

- Building located downtown within boundaries established by City Council
- Ground floor is Office Uses or Trade Uses as defined by the Ames zoning ordinance.
- Design complies with Downtown Design Guidelines.
- Improvements to historic facades include replacing non-compliant elements with compliant elements.
- Residential structures and buildings owned by the government, churches and other religious institutions not eligible.

Policy Questions for Scoring Categories

IMPACT	Maximum Score ?? Points
▪ Should façades not on Main Street be ineligible or should facades only on Main Street earn more points? This question explores the Council's interest in improvements to backs of buildings or those on Kellogg Ave. ▪ Should buildings with more stories be given more points? ▪ Should improvements to more than one 25-foot wide bay in one building be encouraged or given more points or given multiple grants? ▪ Should projects that also include improvements being made to ensure public safety, the building's structural integrity, resistance to water and moisture penetration, and other serious safety issues be given more points than those without these needs? ▪ Should more points be given to proposed improvements that are more visually significant in the context of how the whole building is intended to look when all improvements to the façade are complete? ▪ Should more points be given if the visual impact of the proposed improvements will be greater, given the prominence and appearance of the location? ▪ Should consideration be given to the impact on surrounding buildings and blocks if the project is not funded?	

EXTENT OF IMPROVEMENTS

Maximum Score ?? Points

The Downtown Design Guidelines address one set of elements for buildings with historic facades (see illustration attached) and another set of elements for all other buildings, as follows:

HISTORIC FACADES (such as Café Diem):

- Display windows
- Transoms
- Masonry (includes removing cover-up)
- Upper floor windows
- Parapet and cornices
- Awnings and canopies
- Entrance
- Kickplate

OTHER FACADES: (such as Wheatsfield)

- Quality materials
- Façade modulation
- Fenestration
- Roof
- Awnings
- Building entrances

- Should more points be given to projects that include more of these elements?
- Are some of these elements more important than the rest?

HISTORIC DESIGN

Maximum Score ?? Points

- Should projects that use more historically appropriate materials and techniques receive more points?
- Should more points be given to projects that go beyond basic rehabilitation and re-establish a more historically accurate appearance than other projects?
- Should more points be awarded to projects with historic features and techniques that can be replicated on other projects?

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Maximum Score ?? Points

- Should any project be awarded more than \$15,000?
- Should more points be given when the non-City funds to be spent on the project exceed the minimum dollar-for-dollar match?
- Should more points be given when the façade improvements are part of a larger project that improves other parts of the building or that includes other past or future phases of construction?
- Should more points be given if the project helps to make use of space that has been unoccupied or used only for storage?

- Should more points be given if the project is expected to increase the number of employees or residents in the building?

PREVIOUS GRANTS

Maximum Score ?? Points

- Should any one building be eligible to receive more than one grant?
or
- Should preference be given for buildings for which no previous grants have been awarded?

Scoring Considerations

Grant criteria have been grouped into five categories above. Are there additional categories or criteria to consider? A score could be given for each of the categories and then the total of all categories used to rank the projects. Should each category have an equal maximum possible score, or should some categories be given more weight by having a higher maximum possible score than other, less important, categories.

Proposed Program Logistics

The following process for review of applications for façade grants provides time to inform all potential applicants of the opportunity, to work with applicants, applicants to prepare submittals and for staff to review applications and report to City Council. Staff will set a firm deadline for all applications to be received. Since this process will take some time, staff proposes that this first competitive grant process award grants for both the current and upcoming fiscal year. If the entire budget is not committed in this grant cycle, another grant cycle could begin in October for projects to be implemented in spring 2012.

Grant Award Process

- One grant cycle for remaining FY 2010/2011 funds combined with FY 2011/2012 funds.
- Inform all property and business owners of grant availability, process, and deadlines.
- As in the past, work with applicants to define the project, ensure that it meets the guidelines, and assure that it is feasible and can be completed within the time frame.
- Accept applications in May and June.
- Review and score applications and report to City Council in July or August for awarding grants.
- Allows projects to start in fall 2011 and to be completed before holiday shopping

Implementing Projects

- Establish deadline for project completion one year from award of grant.
- Require needed building code and safety improvements before grant work proceeds of before grant funds are paid.

Elements of an Historic Facade in Downtown Ames

