

## COUNCIL ACTION FORM

**SUBJECT: SCORING CRITERIA FOR DOWNTOWN FAÇADE GRANTS**

**BACKGROUND:**

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 requests for grants have now exceeded the annual funding available for this important incentive. It is believed that the granting of this incentive based on a scoring system will provide a fair and objective method for the City Council to award available funds to the projects that best meet the objectives of the *Downtown Façade Improvement Program*.

Subsequent to that direction, on April 12, 2011, staff provided the Council with issues and options to consider in this scoring system. At that meeting, Council provided comments regarding criteria for a proposed scoring system. Following that discussion, staff also discussed issues and options regarding this program with the Main Street Cultural District's Design Committee, Business Improvement Committee, and Central Committee.

Based on all of this input, the staff is now presenting the attached proposed review system for City Council consideration for approval. The Downtown Façade Improvement Program, if approved, will consist of the three following sections:

- ***Requirements for all Façade Grants*** (most of which are already part of the grant guidelines)
- ***Program Logistics*** (the process to accommodate comparing projects at one time)
- ***Scoring Criteria***

For projects that encompass more than one 25-foot wide bay, Council expressed a preference for awarding more points over approving more than the usual \$15,000 grant amount. It does not appear that Council typically supports larger grant amounts. That preference has been expressed in the section *Requirements for all Façade Grants*, which states "No façade grant shall exceed \$15,000" and also under the Scoring Criteria category *Visual Impact* where additional points may be awarded for improvements to more than one 25-foot wide bay on one building façade.

Council also expressed a preference for awarding grants to worthy projects on facades that had not previously received funding over awarding a second or third grant for the same façade, even if the improvements meet the design guidelines. Similarly, Council seemed to favor a preference for providing grants for facades on Main Street compared to the backs of buildings or facades on other streets downtown. The need for a preference seems to be more pronounced when requests exceed available funding.

To respond to these preferences, the *Program Logistics specifies that* in the first grant application and award period in a given fiscal year, preference will be given to facades that have not received any previous funding and to facades on Main Street. If funding is

available for a second grant round in the same fiscal year, preference would still go to facades on Main Street and to facades for which grants have not previously been awarded. However, proposals that do not meet these two preference criteria, but otherwise comply with the general grant requirements, could also qualify for funding in the second round, if monies are still available in the fiscal year.

There are four categories of scoring criteria. In the ***Visual Impact*** category, the three criteria reflect Council's priority on projects with greater visual impact. This category is given a maximum possible 30 points to also give it greater weight, as does the 30 possible points for the ***Financial Impact*** criteria, which the Council also said is very important. In this category more points are awarded for projects that invest more money and for projects that invest in more enduring improvements that will extend for many more years the building's useful life and the financial investment. The criteria in the other two categories, ***Extent of Improvements*** and ***Historic Design***, are similar to the previous report. The Main Street Cultural District expressed the importance of these two categories, as well as of *Visual Impact*.

### **ALTERNATIVES:**

1. The City Council can approve the attached Review System for Downtown Façade Grant applications without modifications.
2. The City Council can approve the attached Review System for Downtown Façade Grant applications with specific modifications.

For example, this option should be pursued if the City Council does not agree that multiple grants should be offered for one façade, that multiple grants should be offered for one building, that grants should be offered for facades not on Main Street, etc.

3. The City Council can return the Review System for Downtown Façade Grant applications to staff for further revisions and/or information.

### **MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

The Downtown Façade Improvement Program has positive benefits for downtown and the entire community. It has leveraged many thousands of dollars in investments in long-lasting infrastructure. The problem of having more applications than available funding is evidence of the program's value. The review and scoring system will provide assistance to the City Council in awarding available funds in a fair manner that also benefits the community to the greatest extent.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of the City Manager that the City Council adopt Alternative No. 1, thereby approving the attached Review System for Façade Grant Applications. This action will allow staff to initiate the next grant application process by informing potential applicants of these criteria and process, and by working with applicants to bring the requests to Council for available funds in the current and future fiscal years.

# Downtown Façade Grant Review

## *Requirements for all Façade Grants*

- The building must be located downtown within boundaries established by City Council.
- The ground floor must be Office Uses or Trade Uses as defined by the Ames zoning ordinance.
- The façade design must comply with Downtown Design Guidelines.
- Improvements to historic facades shall include replacing non-compliant elements with compliant elements.
- Residential structures and buildings owned by the government, churches and other religious institutions are not eligible.
- No façade grant shall exceed \$15,000.

## *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. Two grant periods will be planned for each fiscal year.

### First Grant Period

For this first grant period, preference for grant awards will be given to:

- facades that have not received any previous grant funding
- facades on Main Street

### Action Steps:

- Staff will inform all property and business owners of grant availability, process, and deadlines.
- Staff will 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.
- Applications will be accepted in May and June.
- Staff will review and score applications and report to City Council in July or August for awarding grants.
- Projects may then start in the fall and be potentially completed before the holiday shopping season.

### Second Grant Period

If the entire budget is not committed in the first grant period in each year, a second grant period will begin in October for projects to be implemented the following spring. While facades on Main Street and facades for which no previous grants have been awarded will still receive first preference in this second grant period, all downtown grant requests will be considered and potentially approved if funds remain after all first-preference proposals are awarded.

### Conditions of Grant Approval

- Grant projects must be completed within one year from award of grant.

- Any required building code and/or safety improvements to a structure must be completed before grant work proceeds or before grant funds are paid.

## *Scoring Criteria*

For each category, the following criteria shall be used to award points:

### **VISUAL IMPACT**

**Maximum Score 30 Points**

- Improvements apply to more than one story on one facade
- Improvements apply to more than one 25-foot wide bay on one facade
- Improvements will create more visual significance because:
  - key, highly visual elements of the building are being improved
  - the building is prominently visible due to its location (E.g., it serves as a focal point from a street, is at a prominent intersection, or is larger than other buildings around it)

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

**Maximum Score 30 Points**

- Matching funds exceed the minimum dollar-for-dollar match
- The project includes improvements being made to
  - ensure public safety,
  - establish or preserve the building's structural integrity
  - resist water and moisture penetration
  - correct other serious safety issues
- The façade project is part of a larger project that improves other exterior or interior parts of the building
- The project helps to make use of space that has been unoccupied or used only for storage

### **EXTENT OF IMPROVEMENTS**

**Maximum Score 20 Points**

The number points granted in this category shall be based upon the number of elements from the Downtown Design Guidelines being improved. More improved elements deserve more points.

#### **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

**HISTORIC DESIGN****Maximum Score 20 Points**

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- Project includes historically appropriate materials and restoration techniques
- Project goes beyond basic rehabilitation and re-establishes a more historically accurate appearance than other projects

# Elements of an Historic Facade in Downtown Ames

