

ITEM #: 15
DATE: 12-17-24
DEPT: P&H

COUNCIL ACTION FORM

SUBJECT: **FY 2024/25 FALL DOWNTOWN FACADE GRANTS**

BACKGROUND:

The Downtown Facade Grant Program was introduced in 2000 to facilitate private improvements to downtown retail and other commercial storefronts (Attachment A - Map). City Council has modified the program requirements multiple times within the past three years and has a fall and spring grant funding round with different funding priorities for the fall for new front facade grants.

The City Council now annually budgets \$75,000 as matching funds for eligible projects. The program has allowed for up to \$23,000 of dollar-for-dollar matching funds per front facade and up to \$2,000 for additional architectural services for standard facade grants. The program allows for the fall round an opportunity for a Historic Rehabilitation Grant of up to \$23,000. In September 2024, City Council directed staff to prepare additional program updates for rear facades and historic building maintenance to be available for the spring 2025 facade grant round of funding. For the 2024/25 fiscal year, the balance of the Downtown Facade program is \$179,665.

The program requires compliance with specified Design Guidelines that can be found on the [Planning Division website](#). The program requirements include a prerequisite of a ground floor use of office or retail trade. Additionally, grant eligibility includes a requirement for proposed improvements to retain the historic facade or for the removal of non-compliant elements consistent with the guidelines or to pursue eligibility under the other facade guidelines.

However, there is an allowance for historic rehabilitation of character defining features of contributing historic resources to the Downtown Historic District. Proposed improvements are intended to have a significant positive visual impact on the building and the overall district. If grant requests exceed the available funding, the program criteria for front facades includes preference for facades that have not received funding in previous rounds. Attachment B provides an overview of the intent and process for the facade grant program, and Attachment C outlines the scoring criteria. Attachments D, E, and F are the current applications.

GRANT APPLICATIONS RECEIVED:

The City solicited applications for the first round of FY 2023/24 funding in October 2024 after the Council discussion of future program changes in September. Four applicants applied and three grant requests are being considered for this first round. (One of the requests was for the replacement of existing awnings, which is not eligible for funding. This application is not included in the materials presented to City Council.) A project summary, location map, and project design illustrations are attached. The total requested grant funding is \$61,785.

Address	Business or Building Name	Amount Requested	Total Project
218 & 220 Main Street	Ames Silversmithing	\$17,960	\$42,140
502 Burnett Avenue	Great Harvest Bakery & Cafe	\$20,000	\$48,530
409 Douglas Avenue	Vacant (Formerly Heroic Ink)	\$23,825	\$78,300
TOTAL		\$61,785	\$168,970

220 Main Street:

The building at 220 Main Street is home to Ames Silversmithing. The subject structure was constructed in 1990 with subsequent additions, including the demolition of a small building directly to the west of the original Ames Silversmithing structure. The building is located in the National Register Historic District but is a non-contributing resource.

In October 2023, the owners of Ames Silversmithing purchased the one-story building to the east, 218 Main Street, with the intent of expanding the jewelry business. That building at 218 had previously been home to a boutique and, for many years before that, Hoshaw Fine Violins. After consulting with an architect, the owners determined that expanding the business into the existing structure was not feasible. Their intent is to demolish 218 and to add an addition with a facade that will match the existing design and materials. **The grant request is for the new building addition facade along Main Street.**

In 2004, Ames Silversmithing building received a facade grant for \$16,000. In 2007, the building at 218 Main Street, then Hoshaw Fine Violins, received a facade grant for \$2,140. There are no program rules for maintaining improvements funded by past grants that prevent demolition or alteration of improvements after the award. As a fall application, this request is for a new facade that has not received a grant previously once the demolition of the former Hoshaw building is complete.

The property at 218 is narrower at the front than at the rear. The narrowness accommodates a staircase that leads to the second story of 216 Main Street (Treats on a Leash is on the ground floor). The property at 218 once contained a second story and it is possible that the staircase led to both the second story of 216 and 218.

The current facade for 218 is unified for both the shop and the entryway to the second story. **The applicant is proposing to replace the facade of the shop with one that will match the facade of Ames Silversmithing. The proposal is to replace the facade for the stairway with one that will complement other Main Street facades. The parapet wall will be the same height as that of Ames Silversmithing, and the space above the entryway will have a simple design in brick that complements those on other parapet walls in Downtown Ames (Attachment D). The ZBA recently approved an exception to allow the 1-story building addition.**

The existing and proposed facades for Ames Silversmithing are red brick with generous display windows. This is topped by a wood parapet wall with proportions that reflect the massing and fenestration below.

WORK	ELIGIBLE COST ESTIMATES	TOTAL COST ESTIMATES
Facade	\$20,420	\$20,420
Awning	\$1,500	\$1,500
Parapet	\$7,500	\$7,500
Eligible General Work	\$2,500	\$2,500
Ineligible General Work		\$4,220
Total Before Design Fees	\$31,920	\$36,140
Professional Design Fees	\$2,000	\$6,000
Total	\$33,920	\$42,140

The City's match will be \$15,960 plus an additional \$2,000 for design fees for a total of \$17,960.

502 Burnett Avenue:

The building at 502 Burnett Avenue is home to Great Harvest Bakery and Cafe. The building was originally constructed as a garage (the central opening was a roll-up garage door). The building to the south was once the location of a filling station. Historic Sanborn maps show the building not present in 1926 and existing in 1947.

The building facade is brick with plain design elements, reflecting the utilitarian purpose for which it was constructed. The facade is largely in its original condition regarding brick materials and the openings for windows and the doors, although the roll up door was replaced with a modern entryway when Great Harvest opened. The only alteration to the facade is a spot on the north of the facade where what was possibly a vent was located (this is visible in the color change on the facade today).

The applicant is requesting to modify the facade with the addition of stone, an altered roof line, and awnings (Attachment E). This facade is considered an "other" and not a traditional Main Street style storefront for consistency with Design Guidelines. As a non-historic facade there is no removal of non-compliant feature for eligibility of a grant since the materials and openings already conform to guidelines, the grant request is focused on adding contemporary design elements as an "other" facade. The Downtown Design Guidelines for "other" facades require that at least 50% of the facade be brick, which the proposed design will meet by retaining existing materials. It will also include contemporary commercial design elements that are required to be applied to the whole facade. **The applicant is proposing to add stone and extend the parapet wall up to emphasize the entrance and to allow for a logo for the restaurant. Matching awnings will extend over the windows and entrance.**

The building sits right at the property line with the public right-of-way. **Approving this grant will also require a right-of-way encroachment permit to be obtained to allow for four inches of stone to project into the ROW.** Encroachment is discouraged but has been approved in some cases for facade improvements with the understanding that the encroachment is subject to City maintenance and insurance policies at the risk of the property owner. The Public Works Department will need five feet of sidewalk clear from obstruction, which will need to be taken into account with the future permit.

WORK	ELIGIBLE COST ESTIMATES	TOTAL COST ESTIMATES
Eligible General Work	\$3,100	\$3,100
Awnings	\$11,500	\$11,500
Stone	\$19,500	\$19,500
Parapet	\$1,900	\$1,900
Ineligible General Work		\$9,530
Total Before Design Fees	\$36,000	\$45,530
Professional Design Fees	\$2,000	\$3,000
Total	\$38,000	\$48,530

The City's match will be \$18,000 plus an additional \$2,000 for design fees for a total of \$20,000.

409 Douglas Avenue:

The building at 409 Douglas Avenue was awarded a facade grant in 2020, which has since lapsed without the owner initiating the proposed project. The ground floor was previously home to Heroic Ink Tattoo but has been vacant since that business moved to another location downtown. The second story contains an apartment. Records state that the building was constructed in 1902. The building at 409 and the adjacent building (originally the Masonic Temple, now the Octagon Center for the Arts) have a unified facade, though these structures were built independently. Records show the Masonic Temple was constructed in 1916.

Photographs from the 1900s show a different facade from the present one: A picture from 1928 shows the present facade when the building housed Tilden's Grocery. The building at 409 may have changed facades when the adjacent building was constructed. Another unique feature of the building is the wrap of the entry around the alley corner with its two separated entrances for the retail space and second floor apartment.

The building at 409 is a contributing property to the Ames Main Street National Register Historic District and maintains its historic integrity of original building materials and architectural design features. Notably, the building has original prism glass transom in place. The transom glass is secured in place by a transparent plastic covering to protect the transom in its current condition that needs rehabilitation.

The transom windows are original to the facade: they are leaded, prism glass windows and the glass appears to be in good condition. Leaded glass windows do require repair over time-the lead weakens and the glass panes begin to shift. Leaded windows were used for transoms to accommodate the prism glass, which worked to reflect light into the interior of the store. Maintaining these windows is considerably more expensive than replacing them, as the work to restore them is specialized and labor intensive.

The present application is substantially the same as the previous application from 2020. The applicant

proposes to replace the wood bulkhead under the plate glass windows with brick, in accordance with the Design Guidelines. The plate glass windows will be replaced in conjunction. The proposal also includes replacing the second story windows with windows that fit the openings; the present windows are too small for the opening and are surrounded by wood to fill the gap. The applicant also proposes an optional awning across the top of transom.

The proposed facade work is the first project staff believes could take advantage of the Council's recent amendment to the Downtown Facade Grant Program to make restoration of historically significant, character-defining features eligible for grant funding. In the fall round of funding, a facade is eligible for a traditional grant (compliance with the Design Guidelines) and for an additional grant for the restoration of historically significant, character-defining features. **These windows qualify for this restoration grant, which was created in part with these types of original transom windows in mind. However, after discussing with staff the prospect of retaining the transom glass, the applicant has not chosen to seek this additional grant funding.**

The applicant intends to remove the transom windows and replace them with frosted/translucent glass which is a similar treatment to other buildings that replaced filled-in transoms. A matching grant of \$23,000 is available for the facade and an additional \$23,000 for the restoration. The applicant has stated that he does not have the funds at this time to restore the transom windows, but he would like to keep the windows and restore them when funds become available.

The National Register Historic District does not come with restrictions regarding modifications to any structure, even those buildings that are contributing resources. Downtown is not within a local historic district, which would likely come with greater restrictions on modifications. The facade program itself intends to assist in restoring traditional historic downtown character, but it does not directly address situations like this where a proposal meets design requirements but also removes substantial historic features. The program relies on an incentive to encourage the facade grants rather than mandatory design restrictions to enhance downtown. As such, the City cannot prevent the owner of 409 Douglas Avenue from removing the transom windows if they are taking the actions on their own.

As an incentive program it is discretionary for Council to award grants and to determine what conditions or scope of work the grant applies to in terms of meeting the intent of the program. Although on rare occasions grants have been denied or conditioned based on lack of visual impact or consistency with mandatory elements of the guidelines, there has not been an instance such as this with a significant preservation issue that staff is aware of. **Council could choose to award the grant as request, decline to award or modify the award due to removal of the historic features, or approve with the condition of retaining the prism glass transom and award additional historic rehabilitation grant funds up to the maximum amount.**

WORK	ELIGIBLE COST ESTIMATES	TOTAL COST ESTIMATES
<i>Materials</i>		
Second Story Windows	\$15,200	\$15,200
Bulkhead	\$1,600	\$1,600
Storefront Windows	\$7,200	\$7,200
Awning	\$3,500	\$3,500
Other		\$18,200

<i>Labor</i>		
Second Story Windows	\$2,400	\$2,400
Bulkhead	\$1,600	\$1,600
Storefront Windows	\$2,400	\$2,400
Awning	\$1,500	\$1,500
Other		\$12,800
Construction Management	\$8,250	\$8,250
Ineligible Construction Management		\$1,650
Total Before Design Fees	\$43,650	\$76,300
Architectural Design Fee	\$2,000	\$2,000
Total	\$45,650	\$78,300

The City's match will be \$21,825 plus an additional \$2,000 for design fees for a total of \$23,825.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Approve the Downtown Facade Improvement Grants as proposed by the applicants for:
 - a. 220 Main Street for up to \$15,960 in estimated eligible costs for a new facade and \$2,000 in design fees.
 - b. 502 Burnett Avenue for up to \$18,000 in estimated eligible costs and \$2,000 in design fees with the condition of approval of obtaining an encroachment permit prior to staff's approval of a Notice to Proceed.
 - c. 409 Douglas Avenue for up to \$21,825 in estimated eligible costs and \$2,000 in design fees (*No additional conditions*)
2. Approve the Downtown Facade Improvement Grants as described in Alternative #1, **but place conditions on the 409 Douglas Avenue grant to require preservation of the transom windows, incorporate them into the current facade improvement project, and provide an updated scope of work and budget with an allowance for up to an additional \$23,000 of an historic rehabilitation grant, prior to receiving a Notice to Proceed from staff.**
3. Modify the award amounts, conditions, or decline to award a grant to any or all of the applicants based upon the finding that any of the proposed projects do not meet the intent of the program or its requirements.
4. Defer action and ask staff or the applicant(s) for additional information.

CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

The Downtown Facade Grant application solicitation has resulted in three requests for a total of \$61,785. City staff has determined that the proposed Downtown Facade Improvement projects for the buildings at 220 Main Street and 502 Burnett Avenue comply with the requirements of the program.

The project at 409 Douglas with its improvements can also be found consistent with program guidelines, but the proposal also brings up the question of intent of the program regarding character defining historic features and their preservation. The leaded, prism glass transoms at 409 Douglas Avenue present a conundrum to the City. Council recently both increased the grant award amount and expanded eligibility to include the restoration of historically significant, character-defining features, but at the same time did not define any specific preservation expectations within the program.

There is adequate funding available for the requests and there is there is also available funding to add a historic rehabilitation grant to 409 Douglas. **Assuming the Council finds the three proposed projects are consistent with the design requirements and the intent of the program, it is the recommendation of the City Manager that the City Council approve Alternative #1, as described above.**

If Council believes the Facade Program intent should emphasize historic preservation with the financial incentives for facade grant approvals, particularly for 409 Douglas, it would approve Alternative #2.

ATTACHMENT(S):

[Attachment A - Map.pdf](#)

[Attachment B - Program Overview.pdf](#)

[Attachment C - Scoring Criteria.pdf](#)

[Attachment D - 220 Main Street.pdf](#)

[Attachment E - 502 Burnett Avenue.pdf](#)

[Attachment F - 409 Douglas Avenue.pdf](#)