

ITEM #: 18
DATE: 01-28-25
DEPT: P&H

COUNCIL ACTION FORM

SUBJECT: DOWNTOWN FACADE GRANT PROGRAM UPDATES FOR OTHER/REAR FACADE AND MAINTENANCE GRANTS

BACKGROUND:

On September 10, 2024, Council directed staff to prepare updated program documentation for the Downtown Facade Grant Program to reflect newly approved program eligibility pertaining to contributing historic buildings. Council directed staff to: 1) modify existing facade improvement eligibility grants to include all facades of an historic building along a public right-of-way, including City parking lots, and 2) create a new maintenance grant for historic buildings, specifically for roofs, exterior walls, and foundations based upon the eligibility criteria reviewed at the September meeting.

Eligible properties for these new grant categories are only those that are contributing resources to the Downtown Ames National Register Historic District. The boundaries for the eligibility area for the traditional facade grant are in Attachment A. The boundaries of the National Register Historic District are in Attachment B.

GRANTS FOR OTHER FACADES:

The Council directed staff to prepare guidelines for "Other Facades" that will now be eligible for grants. The "Other Facades" are those at the rear or side of a building not facing a street. These have previously been ineligible for the traditional facade grant.

The following eligibility requirements were approved by City Council in September:

- Eligible facades are only those along rights-of-way, including alleys or the CBD parking lot, and only for contributing buildings to the Historic District.
- "Other Facade" grants are only allowed in the spring application round.
- "Other Facade" improvements are to follow eligibility requirements of a regular front facade improvement grant, meaning the project must remove non-compliant elements on the facade and improve the facade to its historic character (same as the front).
- Only buildings with ground floor commercial, office, and trade uses are eligible (same as the front).
- The Design Guidelines were written for building storefronts and other building improvements, such as opening up windows and doors (filled in with wood, brick, or glass block) and restoring characteristic features. These guidelines will apply to proposed rear changes, but the program will not require a storefront improvement as would be the case in the front (same as the front, to extent practicable).
- Grant awards will be prioritized for those facades that are readily visible from public streets and

the municipal parking lots north of the railroad tracks; any building face distant from a street would be a secondary priority, as it is lacking public use and general visibility.

- Due to the lack of defined guidelines, each proposal will be evaluated on case-by-case basis for its visual significance and general improvement of its historic character. A final determination will be made by City Council for consistency with the intent of the program. As is the case with all current grant requests, there is no guarantee in any one year that a grant will be awarded for a rear facade improvement.

Attachment C indicates the timing for each type of grant, and updated scoring priorities are included as Attachment D. Scoring priorities emphasize significant visual improvements. Ultimately, awarding a grant up to the maximum value (\$23,000) is at the discretion of the City Council, and Council will consider the proposed scoring guidelines to assist in making decisions as to the awarding of grants.

GRANTS FOR MAINTENANCE:

City Council determined in September that the following items be included as "maintenance" that is eligible for funding, for any facade of a contributing historic building:

- Repair of exterior walls - external repair only. This includes the repointing of brick walls and structural repair
- Foundation repairs
- Roof repair/replacement - external repair only

Ineligible maintenance work described in September includes: internal building activities (including plumbing, electrical and HVAC systems), external work for signage, paint, window replacement, lighting, external stairways, or facade redesigns are not otherwise eligible as an improvement grant project.

For example, replacement of a compliant window would not be eligible for an improvement grant nor for a maintenance grant as it does not have visual significance and does not relate to the general maintenance of the structural conditions of the building. However, if a compliant window is an original window, a rehabilitation grant to repair it may apply. Separately, if the window is non-compliant as a blocked-in window it may be eligible for a traditional improvement grant to remove non-compliant elements.

An application requirement for a maintenance grant requires assessment of the structural conditions of the building to ensure that an adequate scope of work is proposed to ensure the work has lasting value supporting the integrity of the building. Up to \$2,000 for structural evaluation is available this program.

ADMINISTRATION:

The grant program has two distinct application periods: fall and spring. Fall and spring have historically had two different eligibility requirements with new facade improvements allowed in the fall, and the spring would allow for second grants. **Additionally, Council recently created a category of rehabilitation grants that can only be applied for in conjunction with a traditional facade grant in the fall, but can be applied for independently in the spring.** The different periods of eligibility are

designed to facilitate new front facade improvements with a priority of access to the grant funds in the fall and for the spring round to utilize unspent funds, if any, to do additional projects.

Per Council's direction from September, the proposed changes to Other Facades and to Maintenance will only be available in the spring, maintaining the program priority for front facades in the fall.

After consideration of the proposed changes, staff has decided to break out the applications for fall and spring into separate applications for ease of use. Each application will relate only to the time period of the request. The building maintenance grant will also have a separate application, as its requirements are so distinct.

Staff believes the approach of having multiple applications will assist the property owners in understanding the types of facade work that can receive a grant and the timing to apply for each type.

Attachment C outlines the funding periods for which each category of grant is available.

Staff has not proposed any policy change regarding requesting successive grants. There is no limit for applying in successive years for a new grant, but the priorities state a consideration of priority for buildings that have not had a grant within the past five years. Because grants are to be implemented with 6-12 months of approval, a property owner cannot stack or bank grant awards over multiple years for the same project.

PUBLIC OUTREACH:

Staff provided a preliminary draft to the Ames Main Street Executive Director January 16 in anticipation of the Council meeting date for January 28. Staff asked specifically for input regarding the scoring priorities and any additional comments regarding implementation of Council's direction from September.

Staff consulted with the Executive Director of Ames Main Street, Travis Toliver, about the program changes and made updates in response to his suggested clarification. A statement from him is attached (Attachment E).

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Approve the changes to the Downtown Facade Grant Program for eligibility and timing
2. Approve, with modifications, the changes to the Downtown Facade Grant Program
3. Deny the changes to the Downtown Facade Grant Program.

CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Over time, owners of Downtown buildings have requested that funding be made available to facades not facing a street and for building maintenance.

The attached revised guidelines and program eligibility criteria respond to the direction provided by the City Council to expand eligibility to non-front facades and to allow for certain maintenance activities to be eligible. Therefore, it is the recommendation of the City Manager that the City Council adopt Alternative No. 1, as described above.

ATTACHMENT(S):

Attachment A - Facade Grant Eligibility Area.pdf

Attachment B - National Register Historic District.pdf

Attachment C - Projects by Grant Application Round.pdf

Attachment D - Grant Scoring.pdf

Attachment E - Ames Main Street Letter of Support.pdf

Attachment F - Updated Facade Grant Eligibility & Terms.pdf

Attachment G - Maintenance Grant Eligibility & Terms.pdf