



# Storefront & Streetscape Improvement Program

## Description & Guidelines

Administered by:  
Houston Downtown Management District

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## **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

The Storefront and Streetscape Improvement Program provides funding to business and/or property owners to enhance the exterior of their buildings and the streetscapes located adjacent to their buildings. The program will provide dollar for dollar matching grants from \$500 up to \$20,000 on a reimbursement basis only. Funding for the Program is provided by the Houston Downtown Management District.

## **PROGRAM GOALS**

- 1) Revitalize and improve the appearance of downtown buildings to positively impact the aesthetics, marketability, and perception of the downtown area.
- 2) Activate the downtown environment by improving the pedestrian experience.
- 3) Stimulate private investment, while at the same time encouraging a higher level of quality and design of retail storefronts.

## **APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY**

Applicant must be a tenant or property owner of a street level business with street front presence and access. **New businesses are only eligible to apply for one HDMD grant program.** If the applicant is a tenant, the business will need to have the property owner's express consent for the proposed improvements. Property taxes must be current, and participants must represent that to the best of their knowledge they have no debts to the City. Further, the applicant must certify that there are no current code enforcement actions pending against the property that would not be mitigated by the project. Preference will be given to businesses located in the Key Retail Zones (Historic District, Shopping District, and Theater District, and along the Main Street Corridor connecting the three districts- see Attachment A). Preference will be given to following types of businesses:

- Restaurant/Café/Purveyor of Food
- Apparel/Shoes/Home Furnishings & Other Soft Goods
- Grocery/Food & Floral Market/General Merchandise
- Art Galleries/Museums
- Live Music/Theater & Other Performing Arts Venues
- Bars/Pubs/Nightlife Establishments

## **ELIGIBLE COSTS**

Labor, design, and material costs are eligible costs. Further, permit fees associated with the proposed renovation/rehabilitation and fees for architectural design and engineering for the project are eligible program costs. Costs incurred for alternations or improvements completed prior to receipt of formal written approval by HDMD are not eligible for reimbursement. Funds cannot be used to correct outstanding code violations or for property damaged by caused acts of nature.

HDMD will provide dollar for dollar matching grants from \$500 to \$20,000 to property/business owners who present eligible projects that will activate the streetscape using high-quality, pedestrian-oriented design elements. Projects must exceed \$1,000 to be considered for a grant.

Criteria in which eligible projects will be determined include:

- Need for/impact of proposed improvements
- Design quality of proposed improvements
- Compatibility with design of surrounding buildings and neighborhood
- Degree to which it meets the streetscape objectives relative to future projects
- Location in retail priority zone (see attached map Attachment A)

## **QUALIFYING IMPROVEMENTS**

New, repairs, restoration, replacement, or removal of:

- Murals, siding/trimming, and bricking
- Lighting
- Painting
- Inappropriate or incompatible exterior finishes or materials
- Historical architectural elements
- Doors/windows
- Awnings and canopies
- Balconies
- Signage
- Sidewalk cafes, outdoor furnishings in connection with sidewalk cafe
- Planters and plant life in connection with a sidewalk cafe

## **DESIGN REQUIREMENTS**

All improvements must conform to applicable City of Houston building codes, local, state and federal laws and to the Houston Downtown Management District Storefront Design Guidelines. Improvements to properties within historical designation or located in the Historic District must obtain a Certification of Appropriateness from the City of Houston Historical Planning Commission.

## **APPLICATION PROCESS**

The applicant will consult with HDMD's Retail Development Coordinator and Planning & Design Coordinator, before an application is submitted, to determine applicant and project eligibility. If applicant is determined eligible, the applicant will be required to submit the following attachments:

- Completed application (See Attachment B)
- Color photographs of existing conditions
- A written statement of what the project will involve and why improvements are needed. Provide as much detail as possible, including what you are changing or replacing, type of new materials to be used, color, location on building, etc.
- If the applicant is a lessee, written consent from property owner giving permission to conduct improvements
- Architectural drawings and/or renderings of the improvements, reflecting placement, materials and colors to be used . Some minor projects may only require pictures of materials
- At least one proposal from a licensed contractor reflecting work to be preformed, costs and completion schedule. Any contractor that has submitted a competitive, detailed estimate can be used. Contractors cannot be changed unless new proposals have submitted to HDMD.

Grant applications will not be reviewed by the Committee until all the requested information is submitted. HDMD's Review Committee will meet monthly to review applications, unless no applications have been submitted. The applicant need not be present for the Committee meeting. The Committee has the right to deny the application if, in its sole opinion, it does not meet the goals, requirements, or design standards of the program. If the Committee determines that the project meets the criteria of the program and should move forward, a recommendation is made to the HDMD Board of Directors, which also meets on a monthly basis. Generally, an award decision will occur within 45 days of submittal of the complete application.

## **UPON APPROVAL**

Applicants will be notified in writing as to whether his/her application has been rejected or approved. Upon approval, the applicant must enter into a legally binding agreement with HDMD regarding the terms and conditions of his/her participation in the program. The agreement will include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Project scope, property location and specific improvements to be undertaken
- Amount of the grant
- Work commitment period, so that if funds are not used within that period, program funds can be reallocated for other eligible projects
- Maintenance requirements and operating standards, which will vary based on nature of establishment
- Acknowledgment of the reimbursement claim procedures and supporting documentation needed for reimbursement
- Monitoring and right of final inspection by HDMD
- Acknowledgment of change order procedures
- Compliance with applicable local, state, and federal laws
- Promotional rights of HDMD for the project
- Repayment penalty for removal of improvements
- HDMD's standard contract terms and provisions (e.g., liability, indemnification, termination, and insurance requirements)

Upon the date of HDMD board approval, the applicant has 30 days to enter into the above noted agreement with HDMD and six (6) months to begin construction. If the work does not begin within the 6-month period, the applicant will be notified in writing that the grant will lapse and the grant agreement will be terminated. Once construction has started, the applicant has one year to complete the improvements. If the improvements are not complete at the end of the one year period, the applicant will be notified in writing that the grant will lapse and the grant agreement will be terminated. If an approved project is nearing the one year lapse point, an opportunity will be provided for the applicant to request an extension. One extension may be granted at the discretion of the Retail/Economic Development Committee depending on the project's circumstances and the future needs of the program. If an approved grant does lapse and is terminated, the applicant may re-apply on a first-come-first-served basis. There is no guarantee that a resubmission will be approved, and the project will be re-evaluated based upon the established criteria detailed above.

After approval, any changes to the project, no matter how minimal, must be approved by HDMD. Grant recipients will work closely with HDMD's Retail Development Coordinator to communicate the project progress and resolve any issues or questions. Funding will be provided on a reimbursable basis after satisfactory project completion and submission of project receipts to HDMD. Further, reimbursement payment will not be issued until the applicant has paid for the improvement work in full. Reimbursement claims must be accompanied by the following supporting documents: proof of payments (e.g., cancelled checks, paid invoices/receipts of eligible expenses), statements from architects, contractors and/or subcontractors acknowledging that all payments have been received.