

**City of Markham
Commercial Façade Improvement
Grant Program**

January 2024



**Planning and Urban Design
Heritage Section**

Commercial Façade Improvement Grant Program

1.0 Purpose of the Program

The purpose of the program is to facilitate a physical upgrading of privately owned buildings in commercial use located within the City of Markham's heritage districts or individually designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act. The objectives of the program include:

- To encourage the restoration and improvement of commercial building facades in the heritage districts/ main street areas;
- To provide financial assistance to both heritage and non-heritage buildings in commercial use;
- To encourage substantive improvements rather than short-term, cosmetic "patch-ups":
- To help stimulate the revitalization of the central historic core areas in the municipality.
- To promote joint public/private action and investment, which will complement and enhance streetscape and other municipal service improvements being carried out by the City and other groups.

2. Eligibility

2.1 Eligible Areas

Commercial properties located in the City's Buttonville, Markham Village, Thornhill and Unionville heritage conservation districts, as well as properties outside of these districts individually designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act in commercial use are eligible for the program.

2.2 Eligible Applicants

Owners and tenants of commercial property are eligible to apply for assistance. Tenants are required to provide documentation of the property owner's consent to the improvements. Written consent may be either in the form of a lease indicating the lessee's authority for property renovation and repair, or written documentation of the property owner's agreement to the proposed rehabilitation.

2.3 Eligibility Requirements

- The subject property must not be in default of any municipal taxes, local improvements or any other money payable to the City (fees or penalties). The property must not be the subject of a contravention, work order or outstanding municipal requirements (subject to the satisfaction of the Commissioner of Development Services). A contravention is defined as "an offence under a municipal by-law, Act or regulation for which enforcement proceedings have been commenced that relates specifically to the building or land for which a grant is sought or given".

- **Only proposed work, and work already approved by the City commenced between January 1, 2024 and the current year’s deadline may be considered eligible for grant assistance.**
- Existing use of property must be in conformity with applicable zoning by-law regulations and other relevant planning controls.

3.0 Grant Information

3.1 Amount of Grant Assistance

The assistance is in the form of a 50/50 matching grant, which is paid upon completion of the previously approved work. Approved applicants who undertake at least \$500 in improvements are eligible for a grant of up to 50% of the costs with a maximum limit of \$10,000 per property for eligible work. Buildings identified as heritage structures would be eligible for an additional \$5,000 in matching grant assistance.

Two separate estimates for the same scope of work are to be provided by a professional/licensed contractor other than the owner. The grant will be calculated based upon the lowest estimate, and will not address cost increases or over runs.

3.2 Frequency of Grant

A commercial establishment may receive one grant per calendar year. If a grant is provided, the work must be completed and inspected before another grant is considered by the municipality.

3.3 Completion of Work

Grant commitments are valid for one (1) year and expire if the work is not completed within that time period. This timeframe may be extended at the discretion of the municipality.

3.4 Protecting the Public’s Investment

As a condition of any grant of \$5,000 or more, the property owner will be required to enter into a façade easement agreement, in perpetuity, with the municipality. Recipients of public financial assistance will be required to guarantee the conservation of the subject property by accepting this form of legal protection.

4.0 Eligible Improvements

For this program, “façade” is defined as follows:

“The entire exterior front surface of a building which abuts the street from grade to eave or fascia line. Improvements above the storefront level, including roof repairs and roof replacement, are only eligible when performed in conjunction with storefront improvements.

Where a building abuts two streets or an alley, empty lot, parking area or open space, such building may have other faces considered facades if the City, at its sole discretion, determines they are highly visible”.

In the City of Markham, a number of former residential buildings have been converted to commercial uses, such as in the core area of old Unionville. These forms of buildings are also considered eligible for assistance under this grant program.

4.1 Heritage Properties

Eligible facade improvements on **heritage properties** may include:

- Repair or restoration of original features (cornices, parapets, eaves, other architectural features)
- Repair, restoration or replacement of windows and doors
- Cleaning of masonry in a sensitive manner where proven necessary (excluding sandblasting)
- Re-pointing of masonry in a traditional manner
- Removal of non-original siding or facing
- Removal of inappropriate signage
- Repair or restoration of authentic historic storefront treatment
- Painting in original or period colours
- Exterior lighting improvements
- Awnings
- Installation of new signage in accordance with the City’s Sign By-law for Special Sign Districts
- Structural improvements necessary for continued use
- Other capital improvements which the City, in its sole discretion, determines are important to incorporate as an integral part of the total façade improvement design

4.2 Non-Heritage Properties

Eligible façade improvements on **non-heritage properties** may include:

- Renovation of existing commercial storefronts in accordance with standard principles of traditional storefront design (fascia board for signage above storefront, appropriate display windows, removal of incompatible alterations, etc.)
- Improvements to the principal facades of incompatible buildings being sympathetic and compatible with the historic character of the area and the policies of the heritage conservation district plan
- Re-cladding in more traditional materials complementary to the district character
- Installation of traditional awnings

- Other capital improvements which the City, in its sole discretion, determines are important to incorporate as an integral part of the total façade improvement design

4.3 Ineligible Projects

The following types of work are not grant eligible:

- Manufacture of commemorative plaques
- Insulation
- Restoration or renovation of building interiors
- Structural works to the exterior to accommodate modern renovations
- Sandblasting of brick
- Security systems
- Interior window coverings
- Non-permanent fixtures
- Murals

4.4 Eligible Expenses

Eligible costs shall be the cost of materials, equipment and contracted labour to complete eligible improvements, as supported by invoices to the satisfaction of the City. Labour provided by the applicant or tenant of the building will not be an eligible cost. Other reimbursable expenses include professional, legal and architectural/ design fees, to a maximum grant of \$1,000.

4.5 Eligibility Considerations

The following considerations will apply when reviewing all applications for grant assistance:

- a) The project must comply with the policies and guidelines of the area's heritage conservation district plan;
- b) Preference will be given to applications proposing work on heritage properties;
- c) On heritage properties, conservation and restoration of original architectural features will occur to the extent possible;
- d) There will be a monetary participation by the applicant (for eligible work) equivalent to that being requested from the City;
- e) The grant program should not reward poor stewardship;
- f) Preference will be given to first time applicants to the program

5.0 Application Details

5.1 Application Deadline

Grants are to be awarded on an annual cycle following a request for applications within an established deadline. Applications for this program will be due on or before **Friday April 5, 2024**. No exceptions.

5.2 Application Requirements

1. Application Form

The applicant is required to fill out an application form available from the Planning and Urban Design Department (Markham Civic Centre). The applicant is encouraged to engage a professional (architect, engineer or designer) to assist with decisions on façade improvements and provide the necessary drawings.

2. Information to Accompany Application

The application must include all the details necessary for a full understanding of the proposed work, and is to include:

- a) A professional scaled drawing of the building showing the proposed improvements, including any specific details as may be required by the Planning and Urban Design Department. Depending on the nature and extent of the work, a building permit and the required drawings may be required.
- b) Samples of proposed materials or colours, and any product information.
- c) Two (2) professional estimates of the costs of the proposed improvements.

5.3 Application Process

The Commercial Façade Improvement Grant Program will be administered by Markham's Planning and Urban Design Department. Given that eligible properties are either individually designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act or are commercial properties in the heritage districts, the Heritage Planning Section will co-ordinate the program.

Step 1. Determine if you are eligible (pre-application consultation)

Prior to submitting a formal application for financial assistance, it is recommended that the following steps be undertaken:

- a) Determine if the property is eligible to receive funding. Contact the Heritage Section.
- b) Discuss any restoration or rehabilitation proposal with the Building Department to determine any zoning or other building regulations.
- c) Discuss any restoration or rehabilitation proposal with a Heritage Section staff member
- d) If an application appears advisable, consider reviewing it with Heritage Markham for feedback purposes.
- e) Secure a grant application form from the Development Services Counter, online or by contacting Heritage Section staff and complete and return it with the necessary documentation.

This pre-application consultation stage should help to avoid ineligible proposals.

Step 2. Submit your application

Submit a completed application with all required materials before the deadline date. Required information includes 2 estimates from licensed contractors for the same work, proper drawings of the work to be undertaken, and a photograph of the building's façade(s).

Step 3. Staff Review

The application will be reviewed to ensure that it meets all the eligibility requirements, including confirmation that no municipal requirements are outstanding.

Step 4. Grant Review Committee

The review of all grant applications will be undertaken by a grants review committee comprised of Planning and Urban Design staff. All applications will be forwarded to Heritage Markham for its consideration and recommendation. The grants review committee may recommend one or more applications to Council for approval, through the Development Services Committee. The submissions will be reviewed against a set of criteria, and grants will be recommended for the most deserving project(s). The focus of the program is to encourage substantive improvements rather than short-term cosmetic "patch-ups".

Step 5. Approval by Council

All grants will require approval by Council, through the Development Services Committee.

Step 6. Notification/ Legal Agreement

Applicants who secure grant approval will be required to enter into a Grant Agreement / Letter of Understanding with the municipality. This agreement establishes a formal arrangement between the applicant and the City and outlines the amount of the grant, and the project completion date. The agreement must be signed and returned to the City. If an application is unsuccessful, a letter will be sent confirming that a grant will not be issued.

Step 7. Undertaking the Improvements

Nothing contained in the grant application procedures or approval relieves the applicant from obtaining all necessary municipal planning and building department approvals. All work must be carried out in accordance with the requirements of the Ontario Building Code and municipal by-laws.

The applicant is required to contact the municipality concerning any changes to the project which are proposed during the course of the work.

Step 8. Issuing the Grant

Grants will not be payable until such time as all work has been completed to the satisfaction of the City. When the work to the building's façade has been

completed, the applicant must submit copies of all paid invoices for approved work as well as photographs of the new façade.

Heritage Section staff will be responsible for the inspection of all grant-assisted properties to ensure that works have been completed in accordance with the terms of the application as reviewed by Heritage Markham and approved by Council.

If the cost of the completed work is less than the approved amount, a cheque will be issued for 50% of the new costs.

The City reserves the right to reduce the amount of the grant upon completion of the project where it is of the opinion that unapproved modifications diminish the beneficial effects of the project.

6.0 General Information

6.1 Funding Availability

Funding for this grant program will be considered on an annual basis by Markham Council as part of its overall annual budget process. Individual grants are approved subject to the availability of funding.

6.2 Continuation of the Program

The City, in its sole discretion, may change or discontinue this program at any time.

For further information, please contact:

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