

Program Overview

The Community Redevelopment Agency's (CRA) Commercial Enhancement Grant Program aims to reduce the number of vacant commercial properties and improve commercial properties by assisting property owners to support future tenants with funding to renovate a commercial space for short or long-term occupancy. The intent of the renovations to a commercial property is to generate significant pedestrian foot traffic to the CRA District and its businesses.

Grants may be awarded to property owners for interior and exterior improvements to commercial property, and the project must include interior improvements for grant approval. **The renovations are for first-floor ground-level improvements for the property's interior.** This program is intended for interior and exterior renovations that do not exceed a total project cost of \$100,000. The CRA will fund a 50% matching grant for the total cost of the project up to a maximum of \$50,000 for reimbursement. Applicants may spend more than \$100,000 on their project, however, the maximum grant amount for reimbursement will remain \$50,000. Eligible improvements can include exterior improvements for painting, signage, lighting, doors, windows, site improvements, and minor exterior repairs. Eligible interior improvements include windows, doors, standard lighting, electrical, basic HVAC, concrete floor, ADA restrooms, fountains, Interior historical restoration, and fire code improvements.

The Commercial Enhancement Grant Program directly promotes the goals and objectives of the [Updated 2021 Redevelopment Plan](#), specifically:

People Goals (page 2): The communities within the CRA district area shall be a place that attracts residents, visitors, businesses, employees and enables the development of the community, and continue to support commercial development, particularly its entertainment destination potential and adaptive reuse of buildings. The City/CRA shall encourage a vibrant and active public realm, recreation, and entertainment opportunities to support the community neighborhoods and enhance the overall aesthetics of the area, especially the entrance corridors to the city.

Objective 1A: Maintain Bartow's Main Street as Downtown's Main Street is valued for its historic character and pedestrian scale.

Urban Design Goal (pages 6, 9, 10, & 24) – The CRA district will be a dynamic built environment of dense and livable patterns and active and attractive streets through quality urban design and architecture.

Objective 2B: Encourage renovation, restoration, and reuse of existing historic structures and commercial buildings to maintain the character of CRA neighborhoods.

The Commercial Enhancement grant program's **objectives** are as follows:

- Reduce the number of vacant or unoccupied commercial properties by developing the property to the current building and fire codes to allow occupancy
- Increase the number of commercial spaces suitable for "pop-up" uses to create new retail and cultural destinations in downtown and the CRA commercial areas
- Incentivize the attraction of new businesses that generate pedestrian foot traffic to occupy vacant spaces by reducing the costs of renovation

Program Eligibility and Activities

The Community Redevelopment Agency staff will administer the Commercial Enhancement Grant Program. Funding for this grant program is based on budget availability and will be considered on a first-come, first-served basis. Application submittal does not guarantee approval for funding. All applications will go through an approval process to determine the decision for grant funding. Applications that do not comply with the program criteria and conditions will not be eligible for funding. Grants will not be awarded for work completed prior to the executed grant agreement between the CRA and the property owner. All funding decisions are final.

Applicants can only apply for one grant per property address or building unit(s) within a 5-year period and cannot be combined with any other CRA grant. Individual storefronts are limited to one parcel and will be considered eligible for funding if they have a unique mailing address and entrance that faces a right-of-way. Grants are limited to one grant per building.

All applications must meet the following criteria:

1. The subject property must be a commercial or mixed-use property located within the CRA District. The applicant must be the property owner.
2. Properties must be vacant at the time of application. The applicant must submit a scope of work with a minimum of two quotes from vendors qualified to complete the scope of work. Applicants' project must include interior improvements, applications for exterior improvements will not be accepted. Grant and subsequent matching funds can only be used toward eligible expenses. The total project costs are determined by the total costs of eligible grant expenses. The maximum grant amount for a 50% match towards the total project costs is \$50,000, which requires a project cost of \$100,000. Applicants may spend more than \$100,000, however, the maximum grant amount will remain \$50,000.
3. The subject property must have an eligible business tenant(s) that will open the business once the building improvements are complete. Applicants must supply proof of a lease that identifies at least a minimum of a two-year term once the renovations are completed. If the applicant anticipates a "pop-up" use that has a shorter lease term, the applicant must show how the building will remain occupied and in use for at least two years consistently. The property owners' tenants must possess a current City of Bartow Business Tax Receipt or obtain a City of Bartow Business Tax Receipt within 60 days of the execution of a lease.
4. Grant funds must be used to attract businesses as defined in the Downtown Zoning code:
 - Retail Business or Restaurant Business
 - Personal Services Industries (e.g., barber and beauty shops, health spas, dance studios, photography and art studios, tailoring, and other similar services)
 - Galleries, theaters, and other cultural and community gathering types of businesses
 - **Note: Management Offices, Medical, Educational, or Legal Business are excluded**
5. Prior to the execution of a grant agreement, the subject property must be free from any liens (except mortgage liens), judgments, or encumbrances (except easements) of any kind, and all city obligations must be current.

Eligible Grant Expenditures

Grant funds must be used to make interior or exterior improvements to the building, that remain with the building and the site that reduce visual Blight and prepare the building for future occupancy. The CRA's general rule for improvements that qualify toward the applicant's match is that the improvement should remain with the property. Eligible interior and exterior building improvements include:

- ADA requirements (Interior & Exterior)
- Window/Doors (Interior)
- Interior Water Fountains
- Florida Fire Protection Code Requirements
- Mechanical and HVAC systems
- Plumbing and Electrical, including utility connections and upgrades
- Structure stabilization (repair and replacement of foundations, footers, and load-bearing walls)
- Room and space reconfiguration including wall relocations
- Energy efficiency improvements
- Windows and Doors (Exterior)
- Outdoor hardscape improvements and lighting
- Signage- New Signage only that meets city code requirements
- Painting (including murals)
- Flooring (Permanente) Tile, Hardwood (Glue down), or Concrete
- General exterior Facade surface repairs or enhancements excluding roofs
- Siding Materials
- Minor site improvements, e.g., driveway repair and re-stripping parking lot
 - Excluded expenses are labor fee, fixtures, dumping fees, and equipment are all ineligible expenses.

Grant Process:

Property owners must first complete a grant application and submit all documents to review and the applications. If the project requires a permit, all permits will need to be submitted with application for review and approval.

CRA staff reviews the application for funding eligibility. Once an application is determined to be complete and in compliance with the grant program, CRA staff will execute a grant agreement with applicable parties that outlines the approved funding amount (grant funding amount will be based on the lower of the two cost estimates), total project costs, project timeline, and scope of work. The application form is available at www.cityofbartow.net

Application Submission and Review

1. Applications can be submitted via email, in person, or postal services. The applicant must meet with the CRA staff to discuss general guidance and project eligibility requirements. Incomplete applications will not be accepted.
2. Each application will be reviewed according to the following criteria:
 - Consistency with the goals of the Updated Downtown Redevelopment Plan

- Feasibility of the proposed scope of services and timeline
- Ability to meet the program objectives, legal and financial requirements of the grant program
- If the application is approved, the applicant shall sign and complete a funding agreement. After the funding agreement has been executed, the applicant may begin work on the project
- Two written cost estimates from licensed and insured contractors itemizing the scope and the costs of work for eligible improvements

Project Timeline

If a permit is required for the scope of work, it must be obtained prior to the execution of a grant agreement. Any work requiring a permit must be performed by a licensed and insured contractor and comply with the Redevelopment Design Guidelines and the City of Bartow Code of Ordinances. All renovations must be completed within one year of the execution of the grant agreement. The CRA Director and approval by the CRA Board are required if such circumstances cause the project timeline to exceed one year from the date of execution of the grant agreement.

Alternations and Maintenance

The improvements will be maintained in accordance with City policies, codes, and any other applicable requirements identified by the City of Bartow, CRA, or other agencies for a period not less than five (5) years, or upon written approval by the CRA Director.

Payment Process

The Grant funds will be disbursed by the CRA to the grantee upon completion of the project on a reimbursement basis for eligible project expenses. Disbursements for matching grants will be issued at the match rate multiplied by the balance of each paid invoice/expense submitted. CRA staff must review and approve all reimbursement requests. Applicants must submit an itemized list of expenses and an invoice for payment with proof expenses were incurred. Reimbursement of an expense(s) for work completed prior to the executed grant agreement is not reimbursable. The CRA Director has the authority to extend time limits for project completion based on extenuating circumstances. The CRA Director has the authority to modify the payment process based on extenuating circumstances. The finding of project completion will be granted when the CRA has received the following package:

1. Written notification that the project is complete along with a signed W9 form (irs.gov/form-w-9)
2. Copies of all required permits and occupancy certificates.
3. Copies of canceled checks, certified checks, or money orders of project costs, or credit card statements of project costs for:
 - Detailed invoices and paid receipts signed, dated, and marked paid in full
 - Name, address, telephone, and a unique invoice number, etc
 - Photographs of the project (before and after photos)
4. The CRA disburses funds to grant recipients within 30 days of an approved and completed reimbursement invoice
5. Once a reimbursement check has been issued, no further documents will be considered.

Funding Exclusion Clause

CRA financial assistance, financial incentive awards, and project funding grants are subject to lawful appropriation and are matters of administrative discretion. Not all qualified applicants will receive financial assistance, a financial incentive award, or a funding grant. Notwithstanding anything in this program description, applicants must demonstrate to the CRA that proposed projects will meet the mission and vision of the CRA as articulated by this program description and by the CRA's Community Redevelopment Plan and will preserve and enhance the tax bases of the City of Bartow, Florida and Polk County, Florida. Applicants who have been awarded CRA financial assistance, a financial incentive award, or a funding grant in previous years, whether by self, by relative, or by corporate affiliate, regardless of time, may be deemed ineligible for funding under this program. The CRA reserves the right to deny funding for any proposed project located on the same property or redevelopment site as a previously funded CRA project. The CRA further reserves the right to require project completion

within a reasonable time and to withdraw an award of financial assistance, a financial incentive award, or a funding grant in the event an awardee does not comply. This clause and these provisions are intended to ensure equitable access to CRA financial resources by prioritizing new applicants and expanding the overall impact of CRA investments within the district. All funding decisions made by the CRA are final.

Next Steps

If you are interested in learning more about the Commercial Enhancement Grant Program please visit www.cityofbartow.net or contact Cheryl Baksh at cbaksh@cityofbartow.net