

## Program Overview

The Community Redevelopment Agency's (CRA) Commercial Facade grant program aims to improve commercial properties' visual appearance through small-scale exterior building enhancements and site improvements. Grants may be awarded to property owners or tenants for exterior improvements to a commercial property within the CRA district. This program is intended for exterior facade renovations and/or repairs that do not exceed a total project cost of \$25,000. The CRA will fund a 50% matching grant toward the total cost of the project up to a maximum of \$12,500. Applicants may spend more than \$25,000, however, the maximum grant amount will remain at \$12,500.

Grants may be awarded to property owners or tenants for exterior improvements to commercial property within the CRA district. Eligible improvements include painting, signage, lighting, doors, windows, site improvements, and other minor exterior repairs listed under Eligible Grant Expenditures. All exterior improvements must be approved by the CRA Director ex. Paint Color, Mural Designs, type of awning materials etc...

The Commercial Facade 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, and employees in addition to enabling the development of the community and continuing to support development, particularly its entertainment destination potential and adaptive reuse of buildings. The City shall encourage vibrant and active public realms, recreation, and entertainment opportunities to support the community neighborhoods and enhance the overall aesthetics of the area, especially the entrance corridors and public realm.

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

**Urban Design Goal** (pages 2, 6, 9, & 10) – The CRA's Downtown and North, South, East, and West Corridors will be a dynamic built environment of dense and livable patterns and active and attractive streets through quality urban design and architecture.

*Objective 4D:* Encourage renovation, restoration, and reuse of existing historic structures to maintain the character of the business community and neighborhoods.

The Commercial Facade Grant Program's **Objectives** are:

- Restoration and Improvement of the condition and appearance of historical commercial buildings in the Community Redevelopment District area.
- Increase the number of commercial properties that can attract and accommodate tenants in the CRA District.
- Increase commercial occupancy rates and property values by removing blighted and vacant structures.
- Increase walkability by providing a healthy and "Walkable area with public art, entertainment opportunities, and recreations.

### Program Eligibility and Activities

The Community Redevelopment Agency staff will administer the Commercial Facade grant program and will be accepted on a rolling basis. Funding for this grant program is based on budget availability and will be considered on a first-come, first-served basis. Application submission does not guarantee approval. Applications will be reviewed for completeness and compliance with program criteria to determine eligibility for grant funding. Applications that do not comply with the program criteria and conditions will not be eligible for funding. No grants will be awarded for work completed prior to an executed grant agreement. The funding decision of CRA staff is final. This grant program cannot be combined with any other CRA grant program for interior and/or exterior renovations. No more than one grant may be awarded to the same property address or building unit within a 5-year period. Individual storefronts contained in one parcel will be considered eligible for funding if they have unique mailing addresses and entrances.

All applications must meet the following criteria:

1. The subject property must be a commercial or mixed-use property located within the CRA District area (See Map). The applicant can be the property owner or a business tenant in the subject property. Existing business tenants or property owners must possess a current city of Bartow Business Tax Receipt. New business owners must obtain a City of Bartow Business Tax Receipt within 60 days of grant agreement execution.
2. Properties must be in fair or poor condition as determined by the CRA Director for application approval. The applicant must submit images of the proposed improvements and scope of work with a minimum of two quotes from qualified vendors for completing the work. The total project cost is determined by the total costs of eligible grant expenses. Grant funds can only be used toward eligible expenses. Matching funds must be used towards eligible expenses. The maximum grant matching amount per application is \$12,500, which requires a minimum of \$25,000 in total project costs.
3. The subject property must have an active tenant or a tenant that will open for business once the building improvements are complete. Applicants must supply proof of a lease that identifies at least a minimum of a one-year term or a plan to be approved for occupancy for a year from the time building improvements are complete. Existing tenants must provide proof of a lease that identifies a minimum of one year remaining in the lease term after execution of the grant agreement.
4. 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/county obligations must be current.

### Eligible Grant Expenditures

Grant funds must be used to make exterior improvements to the building and the site that reduce visual Blight and improve the appearance of the exterior property. Eligible properties must demonstrate exterior conditions rated as poor or fair, as determined by the CRA Executive Director, to qualify for program approval. Eligible exterior building improvements include:

- Windows- on the front, side, and rear of buildings that face the right of way
- Doors- on the front, side, and rear of building that face the Right of Way
- Painting (including murals)
- Signage- New Signage Only that meets city code
- General exterior surface repairs **excluding a roof**
- Siding Materials
- Shutters for storefronts
- Minor site improvements, e.g., driveway or parking lot repair, re-paving/stripping parking lot
- Demolition- removal of structures that are deemed unfit and unsafe for use
- Electrical- Exterior work directly related to exterior window lighting, security lighting or Illumination of signage.
- Awnings- installation of new awnings
  - **Excluded expenses are labor fees, fixtures, dumping fees, and equipment are all ineligible expenses.**

### **Eligible Properties**

All properties for grant approval must be located within the CRA District and demonstrate exterior conditions rated as poor or fair, as determined by the CRA Executive Director, to qualify for program approval. All decisions for approval are final.

### **Grant Process:**

Property owners or tenants must submit a complete grant application. If the applicant is a tenant, the property owner will be required to authorize exterior renovations in writing via a notarized letter. CRA staff will review the application for funding eligibility. Once an application is complete and in compliance with the grant program, CRA staff will provide a letter of approval and schedule an application and program review meeting to execute a grant agreement outlining the approved funding amount, total project costs, project timeline, and scope of work. The application form is available at [www.cityofbartow.net](http://www.cityofbartow.net).

### **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.

### **Application Submission**

1. Applications can be submitted via email, in person, or postal services. The applicant must meet with the CRA staff. Staff will provide the applicant with general guidance on the proposed project and if the project qualifies grant funds for submission. Incomplete applications will not be accepted and will be returned to the applicant within two weeks of review.
2. Each application will be reviewed according to the following criteria:
  - Consistency with the goals of the CRA's Redevelopment Plan
  - Feasibility of the proposed scope of services and timeline of the project for completion
  - Ability to meet the program objectives, legal and financial requirements of the grant program
  - Improves the property values and encourages redevelopment of existing properties.
3. If the application is, conditionally, approved by the CRA Director, the applicant shall sign and complete a funding agreement. After the funding agreement has been executed, the applicant may begin work on the project.

### **Project Timeline**

Exterior renovations must be completed within four months from execution of the grant agreement. For scopes of work that require a permit, permits must be obtained prior to the execution of a grant agreement. The CRA Director and approval by the CRA Board are required if such circumstances cause the project timeline is to exceed four months from the date of execution of the grant agreement.

### **Payment Process**

The Grant funds will be disbursed by the CRA to the grantee, or to the grantee's contracted vendor, 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. Applicants must submit an itemized list of expenses and an invoice for payment with proof expenses were incurred. The CRA Director has the authority to modify the payment process based on extenuating circumstances. CRA staff must review and approve all reimbursement requests. 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](https://irs.gov/form-w-9))
2. Copies of all required permits and occupancy certificates (if applicable)
3. Copies of canceled checks, certified checks or money orders of project costs, or credit card statements of project cost;
  - 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 invoice.
5. Once a reimbursement check has been issued, no further documents will be considered.

### **Next Steps**

If you are interested in learning more about the Commercial Facade Grant Program contact Cheryl Baksh at [cbaksh@cityofbartow.net](mailto:cbaksh@cityofbartow.net)