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Program Guide

Storefront Improvement

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Storefront Improvement Grant

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Great storefronts support great businesses and help to create attractive, lively commercial main streets. The City of Edmonton encourages property owners to invest in exterior renovations to commercial storefronts by providing matching reimbursement grants to cover a portion of the eligible costs. Buildings must be located within Business Improvement Areas or other Council-approved Target Areas.

This document provides information on the program, how it works, and how to qualify.

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A mid-block building may be eligible for a reimbursement grant of up to 50% of eligible construction costs to a maximum of \$25,000.



A corner building may be eligible for a reimbursement grant of up to 50% of eligible costs to a maximum of:

- \$50,000 if both facades facing public sidewalks are active. Improvements must be to both facades facing the sidewalk (\$25,000 / facade)



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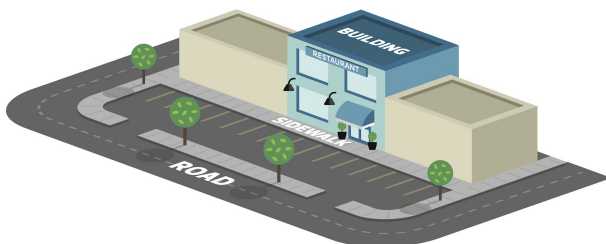
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- \$30,000 if one facade facing a public sidewalk is active (\$25,000 for the active facade, \$5,000 for the inactive facade)

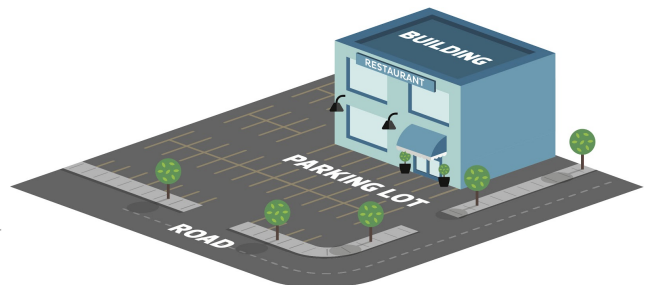


Properties with parking lots between the building and the sidewalk may be eligible if the parking lot is small, and if there are **significant improvements** to the parking lot to make it easier and safer for pedestrians to walk through.

Eligible to Apply



Ineligible to Apply



Eligibility

To apply to the Storefront Improvement Program, you must be the property owner or someone approved by the property owner to act on their behalf.

Eligible applications must answer **yes to all** of the following:

- Construction work has not started
- Property is located within a Business Improvement Area or other Council-approved Target Area
- Project will support commercial use on the main floor. Home based businesses do not qualify
- Property has not previously received a Storefront Improvement Grant/Facade Improvement Program Grant
- Project includes at least one critical improvement (see below for critical improvements)
- Building will have clear, unobscured street-level windows once construction is complete and for the 5 year maintenance period
 - Window tints, vinyl wraps, tinted or frosted glass, large window decals, and window perforations that obscure views in and out of the building are not permitted

Contact the Program Manager if you are unsure whether or not your building meets the eligibility criteria. Contact information is on page 13.

Eligible Work

An eligible project must include **at least three** improvements, including one of the following critical improvements:

- Redesign the storefront (i.e. enlarging, adding or moving windows and doors)
- Upgrade windows and/or doors
- Re-cladding the building with new materials (excluding paint or pressure-washing)
- Adding awnings or canopies
- Installing new permanent patios or other active streetfront uses on private property (does not include sidewalk cafes, which are located on road right-of-ways. See edmonton.ca/sidewalkcafes for more information.)
- Installing new accessibility features such as ramps or handrails
- Privately funded professionally installed murals that face the sidewalk

Other eligible work that may be reimbursed through the program includes design, construction and labour. Work must be performed or overseen by a general contractor with a valid City of

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Edmonton business license. If you wish to do the work yourself (no contractor) then only the cost of the materials is eligible for reimbursement. Eligible work can include:

- design/engineering fees (the program may reimburse up to 20% of the total grant),
- Project management and administration costs (the program may reimburse up to 10% of the total grant)
- labour
- new paint or cladding
- adding new or replacing existing windows or doors
- electrical and light fixtures
- signage
- landscaping
- repairing or upgrading canopies and awnings
- permanent patios on private property
- bike racks and/or benches
- brick power wash cleaning



A note on rolling shutters and security bars

Rolling shutters and security bars are sometimes used to reduce vandalism and break-ins, however they also have a negative impact on a neighbourhood. They send the signal that a neighbourhood is unsafe or empty. Additionally, rolling shutters mean that intruders won't be seen from the outside and can take their time in your building. **We strongly encourage clear security films over windows and doors instead of bars or rolling shutters. Bars and shutters are not an eligible cost and will not be reimbursed through the Storefront Improvement Program.**

Rolling shutters and/or interior security bars over windows **may** be allowed on a case-by-case basis if a building is able to meet the following criteria:

- Police reports from the last 2 years documenting break-ins or broken windows
- Interior bars must meet at least two of the following:
 - A decorative design other than bars, squares or diamonds,
 - Painted to match the building's colour scheme or to minimize the appearance from the outside
 - Are retractable and can be removed during the day when the business is open
- Rolling shutters **must** have a valence *and* be painted with a mural

Ineligible Costs

Examples of ineligible costs include permit fees, insurance, gas, tools, consumables, cell phone fees and other incidental costs.

The below improvements are **not permitted** by the Storefront Improvement Program. If your building currently has any of these elements or they are included in the proposed design, they must be addressed through the project in order to be eligible to apply to the program.

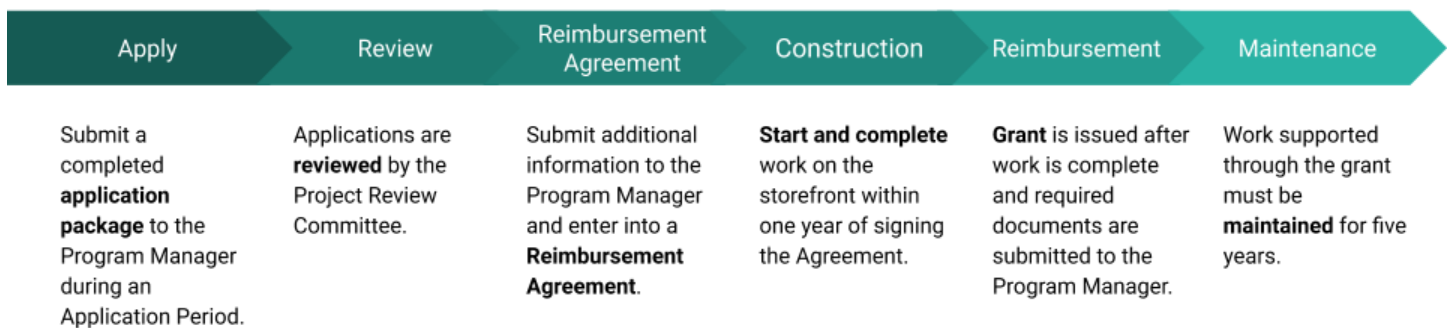
- Reducing transparency by removing storefront windows or filling them with glass blocks
- Mirrored, frosted or tinted windows or doors, or windows or doors with vinyl wraps, advertisements or other obstructions and/or visual clutter
- Digital screens, flashing signage, backlit box signage
- Radically altering the design of a building with the potential for heritage designation
- Removing ramps, curb cuts or other accessibility features

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Program Process

There are six steps in the Storefront Improvement Program process:



Step 1: Apply to the Program

The property owner or someone approved by the property owner to act on their behalf may apply for the Storefront Improvement Program Grant.

1. Contact the Program Manager to confirm eligibility. The Program Manager will visit your site to discuss your plans and help you plan for a successful project.
2. Complete an application package and submit it to the Program Manager during an application period:
 - a. Application form
 - b. Building elevations showing design and materials
 - c. Conceptual drawings or renderings to support the building elevations
 - d. Site plan that shows the property line

Step 2: Application Review

Completed applications received during an application period are reviewed by the Project Review Committee against the design principles and intent of the program (see page 10 for the design principles). This review usually takes four to five weeks.

Applications will be approved, approved with conditions, or refused.

- If an application is **approved**, the applicant may enter into a Reimbursement Agreement.

- If an application is **approved with conditions**, the applicant must change the design to meet the conditions in order to be eligible for funding.
- If an application is **refused**, the applicant may change the design and re-apply during the next application period.

Key things to know about the review process:

- Decisions by the Project Review Committee are final and cannot be appealed.
- Due to limited funding, not all projects that apply to the program and meet the eligibility criteria and design principles will receive a grant, or the maximum grant amount.
- Approval by the Project Review Committee **is not** a formal plans review and does not guarantee that projects will be approved for Development or Building Permits without alterations to the design. If you have questions about permits, please visit the Service Centre for a preliminary review of the proposal (second floor, Edmonton Tower 10111 104 Ave).

Step 3: Reimbursement Agreement

Applicants must send the following documents to the Program Manager within three months of the date on the approval letter.

- Two quotes for the eligible scope of the work
- A cost breakdown from the chosen contractor(s)
- The City of Edmonton business license number of the general contractor, or subcontractors if there is no general contractor
 - If you (the building owner or company) are doing the work yourself, only materials will be an eligible cost
- An overall budget summary of the project
- A copy of all permit applications

The City of Edmonton will pull the Land Title and Corporate Registry Search for the property to confirm the legal address and property owner.

These documents are used to create a draft Reimbursement Agreement. The Reimbursement Agreement is a standard form contract identifying the maximum grant amount, the approved project design and the eligible improvements that the applicant may seek reimbursement for once construction is complete.

If this documentation is not provided within three months of the approval letter, the project file will be closed and the funding reallocated. You may reapply to the program during the next

application period provided that no construction has begun, and with the understanding that funding is not guaranteed.

Step 4: Construction

Projects have one year from when the Reimbursement Agreement is executed to complete construction in order to be eligible to receive the Reimbursement Grant. Changes to the design during the construction phase must be approved by the Program Manager.

As soon as the project is complete, email the Program Manager.

Step 5: Reimbursement

The Program Manager will visit the site to ensure that the project complies with the terms of the Reimbursement Agreement. Deficiencies will be noted and must be addressed to the satisfaction of the City before the grant is issued.

Applicants must send the following documents to the Program Manager:

- All invoices and proof of payment for eligible work identified in the Reimbursement Agreement. All contractor invoices must be paid in full. Purchase orders will not be accepted as proof of payment.
- City of Edmonton business license numbers for all subcontractors
- A cost summary for the work
- The most recent property tax notice showing the property is current on municipal property taxes
- Permit service reports showing that the work has been completed to the satisfaction of the City of Edmonton. You can arrange for an inspection by calling 311. Please have your permit number ready.

Documentation must be submitted in a timely manner. If documentation is not submitted within 30 days after completion of the project, the project file will be closed and grant funding reallocated. It usually takes three to six weeks to issue a reimbursement cheque.

Step 6: Maintenance

All storefront renovations supported by the Storefront Improvement Program must be maintained for 5 years. This includes general maintenance, graffiti removal, and keeping windows and doors clear of clutter, vinyl wraps and security bars or shutters. If the owner fails to maintain the building, they may be required to repay up to 50% of the grant.

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Important to Know

The Storefront Improvement Program team is here to support you through the program process, however there are some key things to understand about the program in order to be successful.

- If you start work before the Reimbursement Agreement is signed, the project will not receive a grant-- even if it was approved by the Project Review Committee.
- It is your responsibility to manage contactors and keep track of invoices.
- It is your responsibility to obtain all required permits, such as electrical, mechanical, plumbing, gas and building permits.
- It is your responsibility to request approval from the Program Manager for any changes in design after the Agreement is signed. Changes may require further review from Development and Safety Codes. Projects with a finished design that does not comply with the Agreement may not be eligible for grant funding.
- It is your responsibility to be aware of deadlines. If you miss the deadline to submit documentation, the program file will be closed and the grant funding reallocated.
- Grant amounts will not be increased due to changes in project scope or cost overruns.

Design Principles

Customers prefer to spend time in places that are interesting and attractive. The Storefront Improvement Program supports this by encouraging renovations to existing commercial buildings that are beautiful, functional and accessible.

The Storefront Improvement Program **design principles** identify the features/characteristics of a building that will support more functional, attractive and accessible businesses in existing commercial buildings. The principles should guide the design of a storefront renovation and are used to review applications to the program.

Applications should strive to meet or exceed as many of the design principles as possible. We encourage you to explore ways to fulfil the design principles that go beyond the examples listed here. Be creative!

Check out the Ten Tips for Storefront Renovations at the end of this Guide for more ideas.

The design principles are:

Improvements contribute to a lively pedestrian experience.

Renovations to the building should improve how pedestrian friendly and lively the commercial main street is by adding or improving things for shoppers or visitors to do.

Ways to meet this principle could include:

- transparent, uncluttered windows for window shopping;
- expanded or new windows or doors,
- patios, walk-up counters or other commercial activities that “spill out” onto the street, and/or
- benches, bike parking, or other things for people to do or interact with.

Improvements support the business(es), building and Business Improvement Area.

Building design should help to market the building to prospective tenants, or help communicate to customers what the business tenant offers. Ways to meet this principle could include:

- overall building design and/or colours that support business branding and the overall commercial character of the Business Improvement Area,
- improved signage for the tenants,
- adding adaptable signage infrastructure should businesses change,
- improving the useability of the building by adding entrances or adding/widening windows or adding space for window displays.

Improvements are focused on people, not cars.

Buildings should feel comfortable and interesting for people walking by. This means avoiding long, uninterrupted storefronts and walls, and making business entrances obvious.

- storefronts should create visual interest through regular entrances, varied articulation, and visual permeability,
- making sure the main entrance(s) are easy to identify,
- signage can be easily read from the sidewalk, and/or
- lighting plans should be attractive, avoid overspill, and be dark sky compliant.

Improvements address all four seasons.

Renovations should make the building more functional and attractive throughout the year, and should be comfortable for customers in all kinds of weather. Ways to address all seasons might include:

- using durable materials such as natural stone or brick,
- adding landscaping that looks great in summer and winter,
- adding permanent patios in sunny locations,
- adding/repairing awnings/canopies, and/or
- use lights and colours to make buildings stand out.

Improvements support accessibility.

Some people use canes, crutches, wheelchairs, strollers and other aids to get around. The more people who can enter your building means more customers overall. Ways to support accessibility may include:

- ramps in front of doorways,
- handrails,
- large address numbers,
- wide entrances,
- adding automated doors, and/or
- easy to read signs.

Improvements contribute to safe streets.

People feel safer when they can clearly see what is happening on the street and inside the building. Ways to meet this principle could include:

- lighting that illuminates alcoves and street fronts without being blinding,
- landscaping that clearly identifies where people should and should not go,
- landscaping that supports clear sight lines,
- encouraging the uses you want to see in front of your building, and/or
- see-through fencing.

Improvements should increase the energy efficiency and climate resiliency of the building.

Renovations to the building should result in operational energy savings and greenhouse gas emissions reductions. This should also reduce your utility bills. Ways to meet this principle could include:

- Hiring professional services to model the buildings potential energy savings as part of project planning, and implementing some (or all) of the recommendations.
- Building envelope improvements use high-performing, energy efficient materials that are insulative and air tight. Examples could include upgrading existing wall systems to achieve R20 or higher after accounting for thermal bridging, Low E/triple-glazed windows, or fast acting doors.
- The design could plan for extreme weather conditions, including impact-resistant glass and/or cement board siding to protect from hail, or sun shades or awnings to help reduce sun and heat.
- Lighting fixtures should be high-efficiency LED and make use of exterior occupancy sensors where appropriate.
- Landscaping includes LID (Low Impact Design) principles such as rainwater harvesting, rain gardens, and local plant varieties.

Properties with off-street front parking lots must improve the connection and safety for pedestrians between the building and the sidewalk.

The aim of the program is to encourage attractive, pedestrian-friendly mainstreet commercial areas through investment in existing commercial buildings. The program supports buildings to become as street oriented as they can be. Examples may include:

- new sidewalks, walkways or crosswalks connecting the building with the public sidewalk,
- new patios in parking stalls,
- adding traffic calming such as painted markings, bollards or speed bumps,
- adding landscaping between the sidewalk and parking, including rain gardens or bioswales, and/or
- curb cuts or other improvements to support universal accessibility.

Who Does What?

<p>The Applicant is responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reading and understanding this Program Guide ● Completing the application package ● Obtaining all Development Permits/Building Permits ● Providing all required documentation to the Program Manager in a timely manner ● Completing the approved renovations as per the Reimbursement Agreement ● Submitting all invoices and proof of payment in a timely manner ● Ensuring all contractors have a City of Edmonton business license ● Post-construction building maintenance for 5 years 	<p>The Program Manager is responsible for:</p> <p>Answering questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identifying application periods ● Provide advice for successful applications ● Reviewing submitted applications for completeness ● Performing site visits ● Presenting completed applications to the Project Review Committee ● Creating Reimbursement Agreements ● Issuing reimbursements at the end of a project ● Managing overall Program finances ● Ensuring that projects supported by the program contribute to program outcomes
<p>The Project Review Committee is made up of City of Edmonton staff with expertise in urban design, accessibility, heritage, and construction, as well as Business Improvement Area (BIA) Executive Director with projects within their BIAs. The Review Committee is responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reviewing completed applications 	

Contact the Program

Contact us today to discuss your project.

Storefront Improvement Program
 Email: storefront.improvement@edmonton.ca
www.edmonton.ca/storefrontimprovement

Ten tips for a well designed storefront renovation

The following 10 tips will help you design your new storefront to support your business and fulfil the Storefront Improvement Program design principles. This will result in a better design for your business, a stronger application to the program, and a more attractive commercial main street.

1. Choose a good designer and contractor.

Most storefront renovation work will need a permit from the City. Choose a designer and/or contractor who knows the regulations, bylaws and processes so your project is completed safely, quickly and legally.

2. Does your storefront sell your business?

As a property owner, what kind of tenants do you want to attract? Will your building support the branding and business image of your tenants through architectural style and colours? Does your building add to the experience for people walking through the Business Improvement Area?

3. Think about signage.

Signage supports brand awareness and helps customers find your business. Can you easily see your signage when you're standing on the sidewalk? Can you change the signage if the business tenant changes? Blade signage is easy for pedestrians to see and relatively low cost.

4. Where is the door?

Make it easy for customers to visit your business. Use colour, lighting, signage, cladding and architectural details to make it obvious where the main entrance(s) are. Visually break up long buildings using colour, texture and materials so you can easily spot individual businesses.

5. Make it easy for people to get inside.

Customers can't buy your product or service if they can't visit your building. What can you do to welcome people with mobility challenges into your place of business?

6. Support window shopping.

An attractive window display or a glimpse of the interior of your building is often the first impression a customer will have of your business. Large, clear windows also promote safety because employees can keep an eye on what's happening outside on the street.

7. Attract customers all year round.

Customers stay longer when they're not running from the weather. Consider installing awnings for sun and weather protection, patio heaters for spring and fall, and adding bright colours, winter-friendly landscaping and creative lighting to draw attention to your building in the darker winter months.

8. Take pride in your investment.

Inappropriate cladding breaks down more quickly, especially in our winter climate. Where will the cladding material be located? Will it need to withstand shovels, bikes, or high traffic areas? Consider including brick, natural stone, metal panels or stucco instead of vinyl or composite materials in high traffic areas. The Storefront Improvement grant only applies to a building once so make the most of it!

9. Think about safety.

A welcoming and well cared for storefront discourages crime. Lighting and landscaping can be decorative and help keep your building safe and secure. Use light to illuminate alcoves and nooks. Security films are a more attractive alternative to security bars and shutters.

10. It's more than the storefront.

Design doesn't have to end at the storefront. Blur the line between your business and the sidewalk. Adding patios, benches, window counters and landscaping makes your storefront lively and attractive.