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# City of Cambridge Community Development Department STOREFRONT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM GUIDELINES & APPLICATION

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The City of Cambridge Community Development Department (CDD) established the Storefront Improvement Program to provide technical and financial assistance to property owners or business tenants seeking to remove architectural barriers, renovate the commercial building façade and enhance exterior signage. The Program's objectives are to improve accessibility and physical appearance of independent businesses and enhance the commercial districts.

The Program will provide a matching grant for the funding of well-designed improvements that will coordinate all the important features of the storefront into a more attractive image while creating an accessible entrance for the public. This may include removal of physical barriers, restoration of architectural details, better windows and doors, and well-proportioned signage and lighting. Past matching grants have ranged from \$2,500 to \$35,000 with **ADA upgrades getting 90% reimbursement** based on scope of work and available funds. Grants vary each year so contact CDD for further information.

A consultant retained by the City will be available to provide assistance to applicants through the conceptual design stage at no cost to the applicants. Applicants, however, will be responsible to hire licensed architects and contractors to refine this conceptual design depending on the scope of work.

**Improvements made prior to a signed face improvement contract will not be funded.**

## **II. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA**

The following criteria must be met for participation in the Program:

1. Applicants must be property owners or commercial tenants whose storefronts face onto a Cambridge street;
2. Preference will be given to independent businesses not required by contractual arrangement to maintain standardized décor, architecture, signs or similar features.
3. Tenants must have written approval from property owners to participate in program;
4. Billboards on property, if applicable, must be permanently removed as part of the improvement;
5. Property owners must be up to date on all municipal taxes prior to participation in the program;
6. Applicants must comply with all State and local laws and regulations pertaining to licensing, permits, building code and zoning requirements.

The City of Cambridge reserves the right to apply additional criteria before accepting project if program demand exceeds budgeted resources.

### **III. DESIGN PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES**

Storefronts should be oriented to the pedestrian and facilitate access into the store; provide visual interest both day and night and create a store identity unique to Cambridge and/or the respective neighborhood. Improvements funded by the program must be compatible with the character and architecture of the individual building and, to the extent appropriate, with other buildings along the street. Buildings with significant architectural qualities are strongly encouraged to restore and maintain these features. Improvements for buildings not having notably historic or architectural features should be seen as an opportunity to enhance the appearance of the building and their streetscapes.

#### **A. Eligible Storefront Improvements**

The following improvements are encouraged:

1. Accessible parking spaces and path of travel on private property for retail use (i.e., signage, curb ramps, paving, sidewalks, etc.)
2. Accessible entrance into storefront (i.e. ramps, lifts, etc.) and accessible doors (i.e., automatic door openers, ADA-compliant hardware, etc.)
3. Restoration of details in historically contributing or significant buildings, and removal of elements which cover architectural details;
4. Window display areas which are appropriately scaled and which facilitate night viewing, window replacement and window framing visible from the street which are appropriately scaled to the building;
5. Signage that is attractively integrated into the architecture of the building, including the window area, awnings or canopies, and entryways;
6. Lighting that is visually appealing and appropriately illuminates signage, storefront window displays, and recessed areas of a building façade;
7. Awnings or canopies that can be both functional and visually appealing;
8. Landscaping features attached to the building where appropriate, such as window boxes or planters;
9. New entrance and storefront construction, appropriately scaled within an existing building; and
10. Other approved items (i.e. painting, cleaning, repointing, etc.) necessary to achieve the overall improvement.

For examples of barrier removal, please see “The Americans with Disabilities Act Checklist for Readily Achievable Barrier Removals” at <http://www.ada.gov/racheck.pdf> and “ADA Guide for Small Businesses” at <http://www.ada.gov/smbusgd.pdf>.

## **B. Prior Improvements**

**Alterations and improvements made prior to receiving a signed reimbursement contract or a “Notice to Proceed with Improvements” are not eligible for reimbursement.**

## **C. Alterations**

The applicant must agree not to change or alter the improved facade without prior written approval from CDD for five (5) years from the date of the rebate check issued under the Façade Improvement Program.

## **IV. PROGRAM ASSISTANCE**

### **A. Financial Assistance**

Funding offered is a matching grant in which the City would reimburse the applicant ninety percent (90%) for accessible storefront improvements, up to \$20,000.00, and fifty percent (50%) for other improvements, up to \$15,000.00. Any projects requesting reimbursement for more than \$2,500 must have an accessible storefront. Architectural design fees may be included in the total cost of eligible improvements but cannot exceed \$5,000 of the total reimbursement. The Program will only reimburse applicants after the applicant has paid his/her architect, contractor and vendor(s) in full and after the project is determined to have been completed in accordance with the contract between the City and applicant.

Grant levels are determined at the beginning of the fiscal year based on program funding and vary from year to year. Please contact Christina DiLisio at (617) 349-4601 or [cdilisio@cambridgema.gov](mailto:cdilisio@cambridgema.gov) for information on available funds and reimbursement grant limits.

### **B. Technical Assistance**

Program staff can provide guidance on facade improvements specific to individual storefronts. The applicant will have a choice of hiring his/her own licensed architect to work on the project from start to completion or requesting that the City-hired architect assist first with the conceptual design of the facade. If the latter option is chosen, the applicant will still be expected to hire his/her own licensed architect, if necessary, to carry forth this conceptual design to completion of construction. **Early meetings with Program staff are necessary in order to help avoid misunderstanding as to the eligibility of proposals.**

### **C. Application and Information**

If you wish to participate in the Storefront Improvement Program, please contact EDD, (617) 349-4601 (voice) or 617-349-4621 (TTY). The City of Cambridge will provide auxiliary aids and services, written materials in alternative formats, and reasonable modifications in policies and procedures to persons with disabilities upon request.

## V. PROCEDURES

All prospective applicants must follow the procedures in the order outlined below.

1. Applicant meets with Program staff for initial project discussion and files an application. Additional meetings with Program staff may be necessary to discuss building program and design alternatives, depending on proposed scope of work.
2. Program architect prepares and submits conceptual designs and budget estimates to applicant and Program staff for review. A meeting will be set up to discuss these plans.
3. If necessary, Applicant's architect prepares final design drawings and submits them to Program staff for review and final approval.
4. Upon approval of final designs by Program's Design Review Committee, the Applicant has thirty (30) days to solicit three written bids from the contractors necessary to complete the improvement scope of work. **Bids from each contractor must be itemized so that a cost is associated with each task or material to be installed.** (Copy the Program on all solicitations for bids.)
5. Upon approval of submitted bids by Program staff, the Applicant will enter into a contract for reimbursement with the City of Cambridge. The maximum funding amount indicated on the contract will be based upon the lowest bid for proposed improvement project and program grant limits.
6. A pre-construction meeting takes place between the Applicant, Program staff, selected contractor, and project architect.
7. Program staff sends applicant a "Notice to Proceed with Improvements" or signed contract. **Any work completed prior to receiving the "Notice to Proceed with Improvements" or signed contract will not be reimbursed.**
8. Applicant has sixty (60) days from the execution date of the contract to begin implementation of approved improvements. Applicant must provide Program staff with copies of all building permits and certifications received for improvement project.
9. Contractor constructs project improvements as specified in the final design. Any changes previously agreed upon and contracted must have prior approval of Program staff. It is up to the applicant to notify the Program of these changes in writing.
10. Applicant notifies the Program staff once project is completed.
11. Architect and/or Program staff certifies that the improvements comply with the final drawings and specifications.
12. The architect and/or contractor(s) must submit letters to the Program staff acknowledging full payment by the applicant. The applicant must submit to the CDD copies of all paid invoices and copies of cancelled checks or credit card statements;
13. Program staff submits invoices for City of Cambridge to issue rebate check.

The Storefront Improvement Program reserves the right to make adjustments regarding conditions and parameters outlined in these guidelines.

## VI. TERMINATION

The City of Cambridge has the right to terminate any agreement under the Storefront Improvement Program if a participant is found to be in violation of any conditions set forth in these guidelines or if the project has been started prior to an executed agreement with the City of Cambridge.

## **VII. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Visit the Cambridge Community Development Department website for information about additional business development resources:

[www.cambridgema.gov/business](http://www.cambridgema.gov/business)

### **SMALL BUSINESS ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM**

The Small Business Enhancement (SBE) Program reaches out to Cambridge retailers and restaurant owners seeking to improve their establishments' interior appearance, marketing, advertising, and operations. The City hires expert retail consultants to share best practices in the industry with participants. Components of the Program include free workshops covering such topics as best practices in interior design, marketing and management. In addition to the workshops, the program offers individual in-store consultations and grant assistance. A business must meet eligibility requirements to participate in individual in-store consultations and the grant program. The Program's goal is to assist business owners with technical and financial assistance to build a stronger customer base and boost sales.

For more information on eligibility requirements for the SBE Program, please contact Pardis Saffari at 617/349-4654 or via email at [psaffari@cambridgema.gov](mailto:psaffari@cambridgema.gov).

### **BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS**

The Economic Development Division works with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and local organizations to provide business development programs and services to Cambridge residents, entrepreneurs, and businesses. The Economic Development Division maintains a calendar of educational workshops on our website or contact Rona Abrahams at [rabrahams@cambridgema.gov](mailto:rabrahams@cambridgema.gov) or 617/349-4637 for more information.

### **THE CAMBRIDGE ENERGY ALLIANCE**

The Cambridge Energy Alliance is a city-sponsored nonprofit group created to save you money on utility bills and maintenance expenses, while reducing Cambridge's carbon footprint and creating jobs in the city. The innovative CEA program offers practical solutions that will lead to comprehensive results. For more information about the CEA, please visit the Cambridge Energy Alliance web site at <http://www.cambridgeenergyalliance.org>

## **INVESTMENT TAX CREDITS**

Federal historic preservation tax incentives are available for any qualified project that the Secretary of the Interior designates as a certified rehabilitation of a certified historic structure.

The percentage of Investment Tax Credits (ITC) are 20% credit for rehabilitation of certified historic structures and a 10% credit for rehabilitations of other buildings first placed in service before 1936.

You may be eligible for ITC if your commercial or income producing property is listed individually, qualified to be listed, or is a contributing building within districts in the National Register of Historic Places.

To qualify for the tax incentives and prior to beginning work on the property, property owners must complete a Historic Preservation Certification Application available from Massachusetts Historical Commission. The Massachusetts Historical Commission will review your application and submit it to the National Parks Service. A detailed description of the proposed rehabilitation work is part of the application. All rehab work must be done according to the Secretary of the Interiors Standard for Rehabilitation with Guidelines for Rehabilitation Historic Buildings. The underlying concern expressed in the Standards is the preservation of significant historic materials and features of a building in the process of rehabilitation. Certification is based on whether the overall project meets the Standards.

Upon completion of the rehabilitation the owner must submit a Request for Certification of Completed Work. A project does not become eligible for tax incentives until it is completed and designated by the National Parks Service.

For further information call the Massachusetts Historical Commission at (617) 727-8470.

## **DISABLED ACCESS TAX CREDIT**

The 1990 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act created a federal income tax credit for small businesses to help offset the costs of modifying buildings in order to comply with the accessibility requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The credit will cover 50% of eligible cost that exceed \$250, but do not exceed \$10,250. An eligible small business is one whose gross receipts do not exceed \$1,000,000 or whose workforce does not consist of more than 30 full-time workers. Examples of eligible access expenditures include the necessary and reasonable cost of removing barriers, providing auxiliary aids, and acquiring or modifying equipment or devices.

The Internal Revenue Code also allows a deduction of up to \$15,000 per year for expenses associated with the removal of qualified architectural and transportation barriers.

For further information contact the Internal Revenue Service by visiting their website at [www.IRS.gov](http://www.IRS.gov) or by calling (800) 829-4933. Additional information can be found by visiting the American with Disabilities Act website at [www.ada.gov](http://www.ada.gov) or calling the ADA Information Line at (800) 514-0301 or TTY (800) 514-0383.



**City of Cambridge  
Community Development Department  
STOREFRONT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM  
APPLICATION FORM**

**DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**I. APPLICANT INFORMATION**

1. Applicant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone Number(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
Fax Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Web Site: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Business Organization of Applicant:  
 Corporation (d/b/a)    or     Partnership    or     Sole Proprietorship  
Business Name: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Relationship of Applicant to the storefront to be renovated:  
 Owner:    Attach copy of latest tax bill and proof of payment.  
 Tenant:    a) Attach copy of Cambridge Business Certificate, and  
                  b) Attach written permission from building owner to participate in ADA  
                  Upgrades Improvement Pilot Program, including expiration date of  
                  present lease.

**II. PROPOSED PROJECT INFORMATION**

1. Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Describe the scope of work for the proposed Storefront Improvement Project: (Check all that apply and/or describe improvement ideas.)

<input type="checkbox"/> Accessible Parking Space	<input type="checkbox"/> Awning or Canopy	<input type="checkbox"/> Exterior Signage
<input type="checkbox"/> ADA & Directional Signage	<input type="checkbox"/> Entrance–Ramp	<input type="checkbox"/> Exterior Lighting
<input type="checkbox"/> Paving/Grading/Curb Ramp	<input type="checkbox"/> Entrance–Lift	<input type="checkbox"/> Storefront Windows
<input type="checkbox"/> Automatic Door Openers	<input type="checkbox"/> Entrance–New Door/Doorway	<input type="checkbox"/> Additional Details:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. *If known*, please indicate the estimated project cost or the total amount budgeted for improvements. The City's consulting architect takes into account the project budget when creating the designs.

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ **Total Project Cost or Total Budget**

4. *If known*, please provide information on the architect responsible for your drawings, plans, and permits:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone No. \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Website: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Are you interested in financing options for your ADA Upgrade Improvement Program project?

- No       Yes      (If yes, we will forward your contact information to Cambridge commercial lenders that are familiar with this Program.)

### **CERTIFICATION**

The undersigned hereby represents and certifies to the best of his/her knowledge and belief that the information contained on this statement and any exhibits or attachments hereto are true and complete and accurately describe the proposed project, and the undersigned agrees to promptly inform the City of Cambridge Community Development Department of any changes in the proposed project which may occur.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Building Owner

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Tax ID #

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Commercial Tenant (if Applicant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Tax ID #

### **RETURN COMPLETED APPLICATION**

Deliver, Mail, E-mail or Fax Completed Application to:

Economic Development Division      Cambridge Community Development Department

Attention: Christina DiLisio, Storefront Improvement Program Manager

City Hall Annex, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor

344 Broadway, Cambridge, MA 02139

Telephone: (617) 349-4601

FAX: (617) 349-4638

E-mail: [cdilisio@cambridgema.gov](mailto:cdilisio@cambridgema.gov)

Web: [www.cambridgema.gov/CDD](http://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD)