



**City of Clearwater
Community Redevelopment Agency
Façade Improvement Program**

A. Program Overview

Through the **Façade Improvement Program**, the City of Clearwater Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) seeks to help property/business owners and commercial tenants improve the attractiveness of the buildings in the Downtown Clearwater business district. The Façade Improvement Program has two separate components: *Façade Design Services* and the *Financial Incentive Program*. This funding will help you design a new, fresh, and appealing look for your building that adheres to the Downtown Design Guidelines while also helping you pay for the actual construction of the work.

With the updated 2018 City of Clearwater Downtown Redevelopment Plan, the CRA determined that it is important to actively work to reinvigorate the downtown area with direct investment and programs to encourage private investment. The plan called for further investment to create a “high quality public realm.” This plan builds on earlier studies from 2006 that called for the creation of a ‘Café District’ on Cleveland Street to encourage restaurants and merchants to create opportunities for outdoor dining and other activities on public sidewalks.

The ***Façade Design Services Program*** was created in 2007 and updated in January 2016 to provide Cleveland Street property owners professional guidance for how to improve the most prominent facades of their buildings. In 2018, it was expanded to include the Downtown Gateway. The CRA is hopeful that development of an architectural plan will lead to capital improvements, but subsequent construction is not a requirement of receiving design assistance. However, it is strongly encouraged that property owners proceed with the illustrated façade improvements.

The ***Financial Incentive Program*** was created in 2007, updated in January 2016 and amended in April 2018 to provide financial incentives to property owners that have participated in the CRA Façade Design Services program or are proposing to undertake a comprehensive Façade Improvement Program application. The CRA is aware that façade improvements can be a costly and time intensive investment. To reduce the cost to property owners, the CRA has allocated annual funding to offset some of the construction costs of façade improvements. This program is not intended to subsidize the costs of routine maintenance and repairs that are an ongoing responsibility for property owners.

The amount of grant funds for the programs will be established by the CRA Trustees on an annual basis. All grant awards are subject to budget availability. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis. The application form is available on the MyClearwater website or by clicking the link provided [CRA Grant Applications](#).

The **Façade Improvement Program** directly promotes goals and objectives of the 2018 Clearwater Downtown Redevelopment Plan, specifically:

People Goals (page 46) – Downtown shall be a place that attracts residents, visitors, businesses, and their employees and enable the development of community. The City shall encourage a vibrant and active public realm, recreation and entertainment opportunities and support the community and neighborhoods.

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

Objective 4D: Encourage renovation, restoration, and reuse of existing historic structures to maintain the character of Downtown’s neighborhoods.

B. Program Eligibility and Activities

The Community Redevelopment Agency staff will administer the **Façade Improvement Program**. 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.

Façade Design Services

Facade Design Services will be provided to select Property Owners through contracts with an architect that they select. The CRA will provide a grant of \$4,000 towards design services. As a requirement of the grant, the Architect will provide selected Property Owner(s) with the following services:

Scope of Services

1. Consultation(s) with the Owner to discuss needs, desires, and possible budget. City staff to be present at a minimum of one meeting.
2. Photograph existing building.
3. Provide either 2D Photoshop or hand-drawn concept of building street elevation showing suggested changes, preliminary colors, and possible signage. The final design must adhere to the City’s adopted Downtown Design Guidelines.

Cost of Services

1. Architectural services will be paid by the CRA as a grant of \$4,000.00.
2. Selected Property Owners are required to provide the Architect with the following items to facilitate their work and to assure a more usable design:
 - Existing floor plan(s)
 - Any historical photos of the structure
 - Budget for improvements
 - Images of architectural styles or features that the Owner likes or believes is appropriate for the structure.

C. Eligible Grant Expenditures

Façade Design Services are available to business and property owners within the designated area (Exhibit A) that have Cleveland Street or Gulf-to-Bay facing properties. Governmental entities are not eligible, nor will grants or loans be considered for prohibited uses in the Downtown District. Only one

application will be considered per address. Business owners must provide a notarized letter of the property owner's consent to participate in this program.

The CRA will set the amount of assistance available for the fiscal year in its Annual Budget. The maximum grant contribution per application for design services is set at \$4,000.00 per address. The CRA Board may raise or lower this amount at any time upon a majority vote of its members.

Applicants must meet with the Architect within sixty (60) days from the date that the CRA Director approves the Facade Design Services request, or the award will expire. Extensions may be granted by the CRA Director under extenuating circumstances.

Financial Incentive Program

1. Program Eligibility and Activities

The Financial Incentive Program is available to all commercial property owners within the designated area (Exhibit A). Governmental entities are not eligible, nor will grants or loans be considered for prohibited uses in the Downtown District. Only one application will be considered per address, which can include multiple facades if they are adjacent to a public right of way. The total grant award will be determined by the applicant's score based on CRA staff review and is subject to the approval of the CRA board for grants exceeding \$25,000.

2. Eligible Grant Expenditures

Financial Incentives will be available to property owners for improvements to their building facades that further the goal of creating a high quality public realm and improving the design and appearance of commercial buildings in the CRA. Any planned improvements that do not, in the judgment of the CRA, further the goals of the adopted Downtown Redevelopment Plan will be deemed ineligible. All façade improvements are required to remain for a minimum of 5 years through conveyance of façade easements, zoning agreements or other methods approved by the CRA Board. Grants may be awarded for up to 50% of the façade improvement construction cost. Grants \$25,000 and under may be approved by the CRA Director.

Funds will be available to property owners and must be matched on a \$1:\$1 (dollar-for-dollar) basis by the applicant or property owner for improvements to the façade that contribute to a high quality public realm. Construction must improve the storefront area of the building (e.g., signage, lighting, entryways, windows and other cosmetic or structural work associated with the first floor where customers interact directly with the building) or (2) be in concert with first floor façade improvements as described in (1) above but that may extend vertically to the upper areas of the façade. Isolated building improvements that are not directly connected to improvements at the street level façade are not eligible for funding. Routine maintenance or improvements that do not directly impact the pedestrian experience are not eligible for funding.

The CRA will set the amount of assistance available for the fiscal year in its Annual Budget. The maximum grant contribution per application is set at 50% of the total façade improvement construction cost. All CRA grants will be paid out on a schedule established by the CRA Director and the grantee. The property or business owner must agree to leave the completed project in its approved design for a period of five (5) years from the date of completion to receive this funding.

Applicants must undertake construction of improvements within one hundred twenty (120) days from the date that the CRA approves the commitment or the award will expire. Extensions may be granted by the CRA Director under extenuating circumstances.

D. Grant Process

Façade Design Services & Financial Incentive Program

1. Qualified applicants must schedule an appointment with the CRA Representative prior to preparing an application for submittal. The CRA Representative's office is located on the sixth floor of City Hall at 600 Cleveland Street, Clearwater, Florida 33755. Appointments may be made by emailing Vickie Shire at Vickie.Shire@myclearwater.com. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis and grants will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis.
2. Within ten (15) business days of application submittal, the CRA Representative will review the application for completeness. A post-application submittal meeting will be held with the Applicant to discuss any deficiencies or issues with the application. At this time, the CRA Representative may request that the Applicant provide additional information.
3. Within ten (15) days of receiving the completed application, the CRA Representative will review the application against the review criteria and prepare a recommendation for the CRA Director. Applicants will also be sent a copy of the recommendation.
4. The CRA Director will determine if the application is approved or denied with or without conditions. Applications for funding may be approved on a contingent basis while the property owner awaits approval from the Planning & Development Services Department.
5. The Applicant will be notified in writing of the CRA Director's decision within twenty (20) business days of application submittal for a request of a grant in the amount of \$25,000 or below to be approved by CRA Director. If the applicant is requesting more than \$25,000 the item will be brought to the next available CRA meeting. The CRA Director will provide a Notice to Proceed or denial within fifteen (15) days of CRA Board approval.

E. Application Submission

Façade Design Services & Financial Incentive Program

1. Applications can be submitted via email, in person, or postal services. Staff will provide the applicant with general guidance on proposed project and if the project qualifies for grant funds for submission. Incomplete applications will not be accepted.
2. Each application will be reviewed according to the following criteria:
 - a. Consistency with the goals of the Downtown Redevelopment Plan
 - b. Feasibility of the proposed scope of services and timeline
 - c. Ability to meet the program objectives, legal and financial requirements of the grant program.
3. If the application is 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.
4. Must provide photographs of the existing building and the proposed project area.

F. Project Timeline

Façade Design Services & Financial Incentive Program

For scopes of work which require a permit, permits must be obtained prior to the execution of a grant.

G. Payment Process

Façade Design Services & Financial Incentive Program

Grant funds will be disbursed by the CRA to the applicant on a reimbursement basis for eligible project expenses. CRA staff must review and approve all reimbursement requests. Applicants must submit paid invoices as proof of payment. Projects requiring a building permit will need to submit proof of a Certificate of Occupancy or Completion prior to requesting reimbursement. The CRA Director has the authority to modify the payment process based on extenuating circumstances.

H. Next Steps

If you are interested in learning more about the Façade Improvement Grant program, please click on the link provided [CRA Grant Applications](#) or contact Vickie Shire at vickie.shire@myclearwater.com.

Program Tips

- A. Start early. Funds are allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. Only one design grant and/or one construction grant shall be awarded for per property.
- B. Use the Design Guidelines detailed in the Clearwater Downtown Redevelopment Plan. The plan was created with the help of your neighbors and with the advice of talented architects and urban planners.
- C. Work with your architect of choice and provide them with this application to ensure your architect understands the application and approval process. They will work with you to develop designs that can be approved in a smooth and expeditious manner. The architect will be your personal project advisor. He/she knows how to create and get approved a design that will satisfy regulators and make you and your customers happy.
 - a. Save and show-off your building's architectural features (such as accessories, awnings, and signs); harmonize them with neighboring structures. No grant monies or matching monies shall be used to perform general repair, structural, or habitable work or otherwise to meet code to occupy the building.
 - b. Choose color schemes that follow the Downtown Design Guidelines and that accent your building and harmonize with adjacent buildings. The Downtown Plan (available on the City's website at www.myclearwater.com) is your guide.
 - c. Work with your architect/project advisor to create and agree on a façade improvement plan for your building. The plan should include descriptions and drawings of changes. Use the attached checklist as a guide.
- D. Assemble your façade Improvement packet. Include the following:
 - a. Technical materials and images.
 - b. Notarized written consent from the building owner if you are a merchant applying for funds. Your City licenses (Business Tax Receipt) must be up to date.
 - c. Hold Harmless Agreement.
 - d. Obtain construction estimates from registered contractors with sufficient experience, insurance and bonding.
- E. Submit your application to the CRA office. The CRA may want you to present your proposed changes at a meeting.
 - a. Expect to match each grant and loan dollar with a dollar of your own investment. Funds up to 50% of construction cost will be awarded upon grant approval.
- F. Wait for your 'notice to proceed' before beginning work. Work that begins without this notice may not be eligible for reimbursement.
- G. Make the planned changes to your building.
- H. Submit a copy of the paid bills for reimbursement. Any unapproved changes will void the grant. If design changes are necessary during construction, coordinate the work with the architect and the CRA Representative.

The CRA reserves the right to grant or loan additional money to targeted projects that they believe will have a significant positive impact on the area.