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**CITY OF WESTMINSTER**  
45 West Main Street  
Westminster, Maryland 21157

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**TELEPHONE:**  
Local (410) 848-9000  
Baltimore Line (410) 876-1313  
[www.westminstermd.gov](http://www.westminstermd.gov)

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## **City of Westminster Façade Improvement Program Overview**

### **What Is The Façade Improvement Program (FIP)?**

The program offers matching grant funds (and in certain cases design assistance) to businesses in the Westminster Main Street area in order to improve the appearance of individual building facades. The goal of this program is to leverage private improvements while making revitalization efforts affordable, creative and community based.

The City of Westminster's Main Street Manager and the Main Street Design Committee administers the FIP. The Committee is made up of volunteers, including business and property owners, and residents, some of whom have design expertise and others who just want to improve the physical appearance of the community and facilitate economic revitalization of our downtown.

The goal is to assist as many qualified projects as funds allow. The grant will be offered on an ongoing basis as funding permits. The grant award amount is based on available funds, the number of qualified applicants and other evaluation criteria. Grant money will be allocated at the sole discretion of the Main Street Design Committee subject to approval of submitted applications, the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development, and the Maryland Historic Trust.

### **Who Can Apply For the Matching Grant Funding?**

Any building owner or store proprietor/tenant with lease authority or authorization from the building owner can apply for funding. Properties must be commercial properties (or residential properties turning commercial) and be located within Westminster's designated Main Street area. Tenants must have a minimum of two years remaining on their lease or an option to renew.

According to the State of Maryland's requirements for the matching grant, we cannot provide assistance to properties owned and/or occupied, in whole or in part, by any of the following businesses or uses: adult bookstore, adult video shop, or other adult entertainment facility; check cashing facility; church or other religious or sectarian organization or use; college or university; community hall; fire station; gambling facility; gun shop; hospital; liquor store; massage parlor; multifamily or single-family housing development including the development of rental properties; nursing home, assisted living facility, crisis care center, group home, transitional housing, homeless shelter, or transient living facility; pawn shop; tanning salon; or tattoo parlor.

## What Types of Improvements Are Eligible For Funding?

- Exterior cleaning, painting and/or paint removal
- Masonry repair and repainting
- Repair and replacement of architectural details or materials
- Window repair or, in certain cases, replacement
- Rehabilitation or compatible reconstruction of storefronts
- Removal of metal siding and exterior slip covers (surfaces)

## Ineligible Expenditures:

- IMPROVEMENTS MADE PRIOR TO GRANT APPROVAL
- Refinancing of existing debt
- Inventory
- Sweat equity (payments for applicant's own labor)
- General business operations expenses (payroll, taxes, utilities, etc.)
- Interior renovations
- New awnings or the rehabilitation of existing awnings
- Signage

## How Are Projects Selected For Funding?

Applications will be ranked and selected based on a clear and documented set of evaluative criteria. Depending on the number of applications, the Main Street Design Committee may assign “waiting list” status to projects that qualify for selection, but do not rank as high as other applications selected for funding.

NOTE: It is important to note that this is a **50/50 reimbursement** grant program, meaning that the applicant (i.e., business/property owner) must have the improvements completed and fully paid for themselves, with 50% reimbursement made after successful completion of the work and satisfactory submission of all required documentation.

The evaluative criteria and their anticipated respective weights are as follows:

- **Impact (50%):** – Overall impact of the project in the Westminster Downtown area. Are inappropriate design elements removed? Will the project eliminate what was previously a liability for the commercial district? Does the project seek to restore the historical or architectural significance of the building? Will the project contribute to the retention or addition of a business downtown? Will increased pedestrian traffic result?
- **Financial Leverage (25%):** – Percentage of private investment will be used for this project? While we offer 50% matching grants, projects that leverage more private investment will be evaluated higher.
- **Sustainability/Permanence (12.5%):** – How permanent are the improvements (signs are more changeable than new glazing, for example) and is there a maintenance plan for improvements? Does the business own the building? If not, how much time remains on the lease?

- **Community Contribution (12.5%):** – Is the applicant a good neighbor? Is the area around the business kept clean and free of debris on a consistent basis? Does the applicant actively promote downtown and their own business?

### **Are There Any Design Guidelines?**

Yes, the Main Street Design Committee is looking for projects that protect the historic integrity of the building and improve the overall appearance of the downtown area, particularly as it relates to exterior façade projects. The goal is to return the building facades in the downtown area to their appearance following their initial construction. We also recognize that some buildings may have a different period of architectural significance that supersedes the original construction appearance.

Projects must consider the impact on the preservation of the historic fabric and character of the building; are original features being retained and repaired, are historic materials being used? For example, we would not support the installation of vinyl siding, but would support the repair and repainting of original wood siding.

Projects should draw upon the history and architecture of the building, but should reflect the current use. We are trying to draw upon the architectural and historic distinctiveness of the downtown area as a means to move Westminster into a vibrant future. We strongly encourage creative new uses for the existing building stock. We also encourage modern yet compatible awnings, signage, lighting and other fixtures to enhance the appearance of storefronts and downtown.

### **How Does The Application Process Work?**

Grant funds are disbursed on a 50% reimbursement basis and cannot be issued until the proposed project has been fully and successfully completed in accordance with the contract. **WORK COMPLETED PRIOR TO LETTER OF COMMITMENT IS NOT ELIGIBLE FOR FUNDING.**

### **Application and Selection Process**

1. Meet with the Main Street Manager prior to submitting the application. The Design Committee may also invite applicants to discuss their project plans at a Design Committee meeting.
2. Complete grant application in full, including:
  - Illustrations of the proposed work or architectural drawings
  - Color photos (minimum 2) of the site and its relationship to adjoining sites
  - Color samples and texture of finish materials, where applicable
  - Contractor proposals on contractor's letterhead.
  - All building construction plans as may be required by the Planning and Zoning Administrator.
3. The Main Street Design Committee will review and rank the applications, vote on approval, and submit its recommendations to the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) within 30 days of receiving the applications. Every effort will be made to expedite the process.
4. DHCD will be forwarded approved applications to the Maryland Historic Trust for project approval, if necessary.

5. The applicant will be notified, in writing, whether their project will receive 50/50 matching funds, and to what level. The notification will outline the specified amount of the grant with information on any other requirements. The applicant can then proceed with the necessary permitting and review process.

### **What Happens After A Project Is Selected For Funding?**

1. Renovation/rehabilitation work must begin within two (2) months and be completed within six (6) months of approval. Depending on the scope of the project, extensions may be requested. The City of Westminster reserves the right to cancel this agreement in the event of failure to comply with this schedule.
2. The applicant is responsible for obtaining all building permits and any other required permits for the work to be done. The applicant is responsible for conformance with all applicable safety standards and conditions.
3. The applicant agrees to maintain the property and improvements.
4. The City of Westminster Façade Improvement Program may promote an approved project, including but not limited to, displaying a Main Street sign at the site, during and after construction, and using photographs and descriptions of the project in Main Street's materials.

### **How Do I Get 50% Reimbursed For My Project?**

Funds will be released to the applicant as quickly as possible upon satisfactory completion of the project and satisfactory submission of all required documentation. Other reimbursement requirements:

1. Submission of a financial summary report, including copies of paid invoices/cancelled checks and waivers of lien from contractors (and subcontractors, if applicable), and photos and/or drawings of the completed project.
2. A Design Committee member(s) will inspect the property for compliance.
3. Photos and drawings will be submitted to the Maryland Historic Trust to insure compliance of work, if necessary.
4. Funds will be dispersed only after verification that the work has been completed in accordance with the contract.

**NOTE: The City of Westminster reserves the right to make changes in the conditions of the FIP as warranted.**