

## **FOWLER REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY**

### **STOREFRONT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM GUIDELINES**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Storefront Improvement Program (SIP) is designed to stimulate building improvements and upgrade the appearance of commercial properties in Downtown Fowler. The storefront rebates are provided in recognition of the extremely valuable impact these investments have on the vitality of Downtown Fowler. The objective of this program is to encourage exterior revitalization of existing commercial structures and replacement of nonconforming signs within the Downtown Area portion of the redevelopment project area.

All storefront improvements must be consistent with the design guidelines established for Downtown Fowler ("Downtown Design Guidelines"). The administration of this program will be the responsibility of the Fowler Redevelopment Agency ("Agency").

These guidelines present basic elements of the SIP with specific emphasis on the eligibility criteria for applicants, types of improvements, and reimbursable expenditures. Details of the necessary documentation for processing rebates under the SIP are outlined in the procedural steps.

#### **ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS/AREA BUILDING CODE COMPLIANCE**

##### **A. Applicants**

Owners and tenants of commercial property are eligible to apply for assistance. Tenants are required to provide documentation of the property owner's consent to the improvements at the time of initial application. Written consent may either be in the form of a lease indicating the lessee's authority for property renovation and repair or written documentation of the property owner's agreement to the proposed rehabilitation. The Owner will also need to approve the required Facade Easement and Maintenance Covenant, a copy of which will be provided with the SIP application ("Application"). There is a section on the application for the tenant to have the property owner sign granting authorization to do the rehabilitation work and agreeing to execute the Facade Easement and Maintenance Covenant. A Notary Public must sign the authorization letter.

##### **B. Eligible Area**

Commercial properties which are located in the Downtown Redevelopment Area are eligible for SIP Funds. The Downtown Redevelopment Area is generally bounded by Golden State Boulevard on the west and 4<sup>th</sup> Street on the east and Tuolumne Street on

the north and Main Street on the south. *This area also includes the properties which front both sides of the boundary streets.*

### **C. Building Code Compliance**

An application for a SIP rebate will be summarily rejected if the improvements are proposed for a building in which the building or associated property is not in compliance with applicable Municipal Codes, including building, neighborhood preservation, and nuisance ordinances. An exception may be made where the proposed improvements will bring the building into compliance with the Municipal Code. A building and property inspection will be required before approval of an application.

### **REBATE AMOUNT**

Approved property owners and merchants who install at least \$500 of improvements per storefront are eligible for a rebate of up to 100% of the costs subject to a maximum rebate of \$25,000 per storefront for all approved improvements. If a building has several storefronts, each storefront may be eligible for a rebate of up to \$25,000 not to exceed \$50,000 per building or business. The Agency may rebate 100% of the cost to remove non-conforming signs. Sign removal will not be included in the \$25,000 maximum rebate allowance. The availability of rebates will depend upon budgeted funds for the fiscal year.

### **ELIGIBLE TYPES OF IMPROVEMENTS AND REIMBURSABLE EXPENSES**

Eligible improvements include storefront renovation; signs; doors; windows; awnings; minor exterior electrical; landscaping; painting; and other capital improvements which the Community Development Director determines is important to incorporate as an integral part of the total storefront improvement design.

For this program, "storefront" is defined as follows:

The entire exterior front surface of a business, from grade to the roofline. Where one or more businesses occupy the same building, whether adjacent, above, or below another business, each business shall be considered one storefront.

Improvements above the storefront level, including roof repairs and roof replacement, are only eligible when performed in conjunction with storefront improvements.

Where a building abuts two streets and/or an alley, empty lot, parking area, or open space, such building may have other faces considered storefronts if visible from the main commercial strip.

Decorative fencing and landscaping of vacant parcels adjacent will also be considered on an individual basis at the discretion of the Community Development Director.

Although not required, it would generally be expected that all storefronts within a single building that are in need of improvements will be improved concurrently and, if appropriate, applications for rebates made simultaneously.

Architectural fees may be included in the total storefront improvement costs. All improvements must conform to the City of Fowler building codes and the Downtown Design Guidelines. Proposals will be subject to design review and approval by the City of Fowler Planning Department.

### **REQUEST FOR REBATES**

Rebates will be provided for improvements started and completed after the Agency's authorization to proceed and will be made after improvements are completed in accordance with the approved plans. Receipt of the rebate is conditioned upon completion of the improvements and when all permits have been finalized. The rebate will be issued after an inspection by Agency staff and upon submission of the following:

1. Approved SIP Application;
2. Invoices and/or contracts from a licensed contractor who performed the work. Note: The applicant is required to obtain at least three (3) bids from licensed contractors before proceeding with the work;
3. The applicant's cancelled checks or receipts, showing that work has been paid in full;
4. A statement from the City of Fowler Planning Department affirming that the completed improvements are in substantial compliance with the original approved design;
5. A copy of the approved final building inspection;
6. Releases and/or waivers of all contractor's liens;
7. A photograph of the building after completion of the improvements; and,
8. The signed, notarized, and recordable Facade Easement and Maintenance Covenant requiring that the improvements and property be maintained for a period of ten years.

### **CRITERIA FOR APPROVAL**

#### **A. Minimum Criteria.**

All exterior modifications including painting (color) must be in keeping with the Downtown Design Guidelines. All signs covered under this program should be either painted on the building, carved wood, sandblasted wood, individual metal letters, or window signs. Plastic signs are not covered under this program.

Landscape improvements require detailed information on the types and sizes of plant materials and the irrigation system.

To obtain funding a proposal must at a minimum meet the following:

1. Result in the removal of all nonconforming signs, sign brackets, mounting frames or sign structures that do not conform to the present ordinance or are in excess of the applicants needs.
2. Represent a standard of design that is consistent with Downtown Fowler atmosphere and utilizes quality materials.
3. Where painting is required, repaint buildings with colors approved by the Agency.

**B. Priority Funding.**

Where multiple applications for rebates are made and there is insufficient funding for all eligible applicants, priority for approval will be based upon the following criteria as applied in the discretion of the Community Development Director:

1. Applications to improve an entire building.
2. Applications for existing businesses and businesses with tenants scheduled to open after the improvements are completed.
3. Improvements that result in returning a building to its historically correct appearance, which may include the addition of canopies.

Any disputes over application of these criteria shall be resolved by the City Manager.

## **STOREFRONT IMPROVEMENT GRANT PROGRAM** **PROCEDURES**

- STEP 1: Initial contact is made with the applicant. Agency staff will conduct this step. The initial contact should determine whether the project is located within the eligible area and if the proposed activities are within the Downtown Design Guidelines. A copy of these SIP Guidelines, Downtown Design Guidelines, the Application, and the Facade Easement and Maintenance Covenant will be provided to the potential applicant.
- STEP 2: Merchant or property owner fills out Application and sends Application to the Agency with:
- a) A photograph of the storefront
  - b) If tenant is making the application, authorization from the property owner to perform the renovation work and agreement to execute the Facade Easement and Maintenance Covenant.
- STEP 3: Application is reviewed by Agency staff to determine whether the activities are within the SIP Guidelines and Downtown Design Guidelines.
- STEP 4: Inspection of building and property is made by the City of Fowler Building and Planning Departments.
- STEP 5: Preliminary plans, color samples, awning designs (if included), and cost estimates are submitted for exterior site plan review and approval by the City of Fowler Planning Department. Sign Permit Application must also be submitted to the Planning Department for approval. Planning Department staff will inform the applicant of the level of City review necessary for project approval and submission materials needed for this review.
- STEP 6: Upon approval of the preliminary plan, the applicant should prepare and submit final plans, specifications and detailed cost estimates to the Agency. Agency staff will review the application to determine eligibility and approval. The applicant is responsible for providing at least three (3) bids from licensed contractors for completion of the improvements. The applicant shall select from the list of bidders or, with the consent of the Agency, solicit additional bids. If the lowest bidder is not selected, the applicant shall satisfactorily demonstrate to the Agency why selection of a different contractor is appropriate. The actual rebate amount will be contingent upon the actual costs associated with the final approved plans.
- STEP 7: Upon approval by the Agency, an approval letter indicating the rebate amount will be sent to the applicant. If the improvements require building permits, the applicant must submit final plans to the Building Division.
- STEP 8: After completion of the work, the applicant can request payment by submitting:
- \* Invoices and/or contracts;
  - \* Cancelled checks or receipts, showing that the work has been completed in full;

- \* Statement from the City of Fowler Planning Department affirming that the completed improvements are in substantial compliance with the original approved design or any approved change order;
- \* Copy of the approved final building inspection;
- \* Releases and/or waivers of all contractor's liens;
- \* Photograph of the building after completion of the improvements; and,
- \* Signed, notarized, and recordable Facade Easement and Maintenance Covenant

STEP 9: After receipt of complete documentation, Agency verifies that the work has been completed in compliance with the SIP Guidelines.

STEP 10: Agency records the Facade Easement and Maintenance Covenant

STEP 11: A rebate check is sent to the applicant within thirty (30) days of the Agency's receipt of complete documentation.

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