



Sign & Facade

RAPID RECOVERY
PROGRAM TOOLKIT

This toolkit has been made possible through technical assistance provided by the Baker-Polito Administration's Local Rapid Recovery Planning program.



The Local Rapid Recovery Planning (RRP) program is a key part of the Baker-Polito Administration's Partnerships for Recovery Plan, the strategy established to help communities stabilize and grow the Massachusetts economy as a result of the economic impacts brought on by COVID-19. The plan invests \$774 million in efforts to get people back to work, support small businesses, foster innovation, revitalize downtowns, and keep people in stable housing.

In addition to the planning program, recovery efforts include a Small Business Relief Program administered by the Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation. This program, which concluded in May 2021, provided more than \$687.2 million to over 15,000 businesses across the Commonwealth, with a focus on businesses located in Gateway Cities, among demographic priorities, or operating in sectors most impacted by the pandemic. Cities, towns, and non-profit entities are using Regional Pilot Project Grant Program funding for recovery solutions that seek to activate vacant storefronts, support regional supply chain resiliency, and create small business support networks. To promote recovery in the tourism industry and support the ongoing My Local MA marketing initiative encouraging residents to support their local economies by shopping, dining and staying local, another \$1.6 million in grants were awarded through the new Travel and Tourism Recovery Grant Pilot Program. Through April 2021, MassDOT's Shared Streets and Spaces Grant Program has invested \$26.4 million in municipal Shared Streets projects to support public health, safe mobility, and renewed commerce.

In support of the overall recovery strategy, the Administration made \$9.5 million in awards for 125 communities to create Local Rapid Recovery Plans, through the MA Downtown Initiative Program. These plans address the impacts of COVID-19 on local downtowns and small businesses by partnering with Plan Facilitators and Subject Matter Experts to pursue locally-driven, actionable strategies.

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Why This Toolkit?

Enhanced Environments Support Local Economy

Building and Site Improvements Draw Customers

A program to improve façades, storefronts, sites, and/or signage is a powerful tool to help communities support vibrant, engaging downtowns and village centers. These programs provide resources for small businesses and property owners to improve their buildings and sites. Such improvements contribute to a safe, welcoming, accessible environment that is attractive to visitors, local or regional, who can become customers of a community's downtown or village center.


This "How-to" guide will help your community develop such a program and set the stage in the planning process for successful implementation. A façade improvement program can be leveraged with other toolkits in this series, such as storefront activation, wayfinding, and marketing to create a comprehensive program for revitalization of your community's commercial centers and support for businesses who have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This toolkit, however, leads to a long-term strategy for communities who want to improve distressed properties and commercial centers.

This toolkit is designed both for municipal staff and for community members who may have heard about façade improvement programs, but are not sure how they work or how to get started. You do not have to be a professional planner or municipal official to use this document!

If you are starting from scratch, your community will need to accomplish the following:

- Identify capacity within the municipality to guide the program.
- Develop an appropriate level of guidelines for the improvements.
- Engage the businesses, property owners, and community to get buy-in for the program.
- Develop the criteria for application, approval, installation, and maintenance.
- Develop the funding and oversight structures.
- Identify participants, encourage applications, manage the distribution of funds, and check for compliance.

This toolkit will walk you through those steps, provide examples of other communities that have implemented a façade improvement program, and suggest some funding sources for your program.



A successful program to improve the physical environment reinforces a strong community identity and attracts visitors who can become customers.

Façade Improvements and the COVID-19 Pandemic

A façade improvement program provides direct assistance to small businesses and downtowns, and is an appropriate tool for helping your community recover from the negative economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The LRRP Program assisted 125 communities; of those communities, fifteen identified the need to address the storefronts, façades, and site design in their communities; four wanted advice about creating signage regulations and guidelines; and three had other related concerns: design guidelines, public realm design, and accessibility.

The following areas of concern, identified by the communities that requested assistance during the LRRP planning process, could be addressed by an active façade improvement program.

- Access compliant with ADA/MAAB requirements for storefronts with one or more steps. (MAAB is the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board.)
- Commercial areas that appear worn or deteriorating from a lack of maintenance and investment.
- Signage that is older, deteriorating, and/or visually confusing.
- Historic façades that have been maintained with inappropriate materials or design choices.
- Community Block Development Program (CDBG) requirements that small business owners find onerous, including the wage requirements of the Davis-Bacon and Related Acts.
- The need to address interior improvements, which are restricted when using CDBG funds.
- Lack identity for a commercial district.
- Lack of consistency in storefront design and treatment.
- Sites that need to be redesigned to allow outdoor dining and/or retail, both important strategies for survival during periods when social distancing is required.
- Lack of municipal capacity to administer an existing program.

As shown by the concerns above, a façade improvement program can be flexible, depending on the source of funds. Such a program could focus on storefronts or be expanded to address signage, lighting, and site improvements. However, façade improvement programs are not just a reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic. These programs are used to revitalize downtowns, attract customers, and increase sales for local businesses. You may need to present information about the benefits to your community to build support for the program. More information about the long-term benefits of façade improvement programs can be found below:

Facca, Amy, *How Façade Improvement Programs Can Benefit Your Community*, <https://plannersweb.com/2013/10/how-facade-improvement-programs/#return-note-10538-1>.

Spencer, Brenda *An Analysis of the Economic Impact of Physical Improvements on Retail Sales*, 1995, <http://hdl.handle.net/2097/36071>.

Welty, Errin, *Measuring the Economic Impact of Storefront Improvements*, <https://www.mainstreet.org/blogs/hl-admin/2017/05/11/measuring-the-economic-impact-of-storefront-improvements>.

Bill Ryan, Amy Greil, Dayna Sarver, Joe Lawniczak, Errin Welty, *An Analysis of Downtown Storefront Improvements: A Selection of Wisconsin Case Studies*, University of Wisconsin-Madison. (Note that this is a downloadable PDF, although you can also buy a physical copy from the publisher. The link to both is: <https://learningstore.extension.wisc.edu/products/an-analysis-of-downtown-storefront-improvements-a-selection-of-wisconsin-case-studies-p1745>).

Getting Started

Getting Started

How to use this toolkit

This toolkit provides guidance on how to develop, fund, and implement a façade improvement program. For the purpose of this toolkit, the term "façade improvement program" will also include programs that focus on improvements to façades, storefronts, signs/lighting/awnings, sites, or all of the above. This toolkit will help you consider what you can do to address the specific needs within your community.

A façade improvement program requires partnerships among municipal staff and officials and property and business owners. Such partnerships may also include third parties, such as historical societies, downtown business organizations, community development corporations, and/or redevelopment authorities. This toolkit will help you identify the available partners in your community and their roles.

These programs also require criteria for participation, implementation, and maintenance. This toolkit will help you define the components of the program applicable to your community. Examples of successful programs in other communities will help inspire your community with different possibilities.

Finally, a façade improvement program requires monetary support. Communities with Community Block Development Grants (CDBG) funds may use those funds as a source, but not all communities are eligible and those funds are not appropriate for every situation. This toolkit will provide alternative funding sources and methods to leverage different options for different needs.

Toolkit Checklist

The checklist that follows is a guide to the different parts of the process of developing a façade improvement program and is intended to be responsive to the different needs of the communities using this tool. For example, your community may already have a program in place, but it needs to be modified or expanded to address concerns that were raised during implementation. On the other hand, your community may be starting from scratch and need guidance for the whole process.

The next page breaks the process down into specific questions that you may have about developing a façade improvement program. Use these questions as a guide to take you to the most relevant parts. If you are just beginning, the questions are in the correct steps to take from start to implementation. For others, you may find it easier to pick and choose sections based on your concerns.

Examples from other communities are provided at the end of this document in **How Others Are Doing It**. These examples are drawn from communities within Massachusetts and beyond, to provide inspiration and useful advice. The following section, **Overcoming Challenges**, identifies possible blocks to the success of the program and provides some strategies to address those blocks.

Key Resources, which includes more information about storefront design guidelines and funding sources, is the final section and should help you share additional information with your community about developing and supporting a successful façade improvement program.

Diagram: Toolkit Checklist

Action	Page
<input type="checkbox"/> We want to identify our needs .	10
<input type="checkbox"/> We want to bring others into the conversation .	12
<input type="checkbox"/> We want to develop the design guidelines .	13
<input type="checkbox"/> We want to develop our criteria for participation .	16
<input type="checkbox"/> We want to authorize our program .	18
<input type="checkbox"/> We want to fund our program .	19
<input type="checkbox"/> We want to sign up participants .	21
<input type="checkbox"/> We want to implement!	23
<input type="checkbox"/> We want to measure our success!	24

Getting It Done

We want to...

Step 1: Identify our needs.

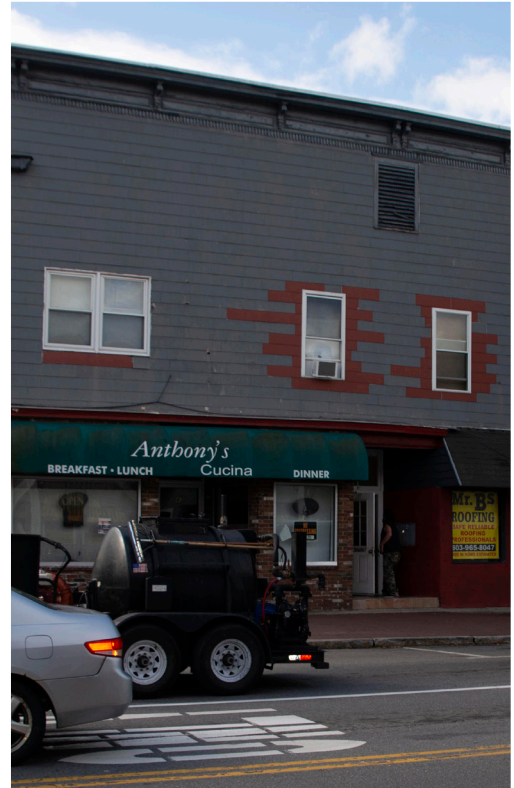
Your first step is to clearly identify what you hope to accomplish with a façade improvement program. In some commercial areas, the storefronts are generally dated and in disrepair; in others, a few buildings are in significant need of help, but others are in good condition. Some centers may have problems with the site rather than the building; for example, parking in front yard set-backs. Some communities are more concerned about the state of the signage than of the buildings. And some communities want to address all these issues!

A façade improvement program can be designed to reflect your specific needs. Start by documenting the conditions, building up an inventory of photographs. In addition to the visual quality of the area, consider questions such as **accessibility and safety**.

- Do the current conditions prevent people with limited mobility from entering stores or upper stories? This may require interior improvements,
- Are buildings in such poor condition that people have a negative perception of the safety of the area?
- Do building conditions create a hazard, such as falling masonry?
- Does the visual clutter of commercial signage prevent people from seeing important directional or traffic signage?
- Does signage block important lines of sight for pedestrians and drivers?
- Are safety components, such as lighting, missing?
- Do current site conditions, such as excess paving, contribute to flooding?
- Are private sidewalks and parking in good repair, or do they present a hazard?

Documenting these conditions will help you identify the type of façade improvement program you need. Understanding the problems will also help you identify who can manage the program, the levels of intervention – and therefore funding – required, and how long the program will last. A village center with a few buildings that need significant help will likely need higher levels of funding over a shorter time than a larger downtown with many properties in a general, but not critical, state of disrepair.

Once you have identified the need, the next step is to build a coalition of partners.



*Figure 1: Poor window signage and repairs.
Source: Innes Associates*

Getting It Done: Rating Storefronts

Sample form for assessing storefronts

Condition Rating	Poor	Good	Fair	Excellent	N/A
Storefront system	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Door	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Window(s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Transom	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Base	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Trim	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interior display area	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Exterior lighting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sign(s) attached to building	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Awning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The definitions below are based on the standards for determining slum and blight conditions for the Community Development Block Grant. Communities using CDBG funds should review the definitions in more detail (see the FY 2020 Application Guidance Information from DHCD for the Massachusetts CDBG program: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/cdbg-fy-2020-application-guidance/download>). Communities using other funds can modify these definitions as appropriate. The categories above may be modified based on the program needs; for example, adding site signs and lighting.

EXCELLENT

New or relatively new.

GOOD

Older and requires some repairs. No evidence of damage, leaks or structural deficiencies.

FAIR

At least 25% of the relevant component may be old and worn, including cracks, gaps, missing components and/or deteriorating surfaces.

POOR

At least 50% of the relevant component may be old and worn, including cracks, gaps, missing components and/or deteriorating surfaces.

We want to...

Step 2: Bring others into the conversation.

Once your community has determined that it is interested in a façade improvement program and has sketched out some of the needs you would like to address, it is time to bring in other partners. These partners can include the following people and groups, depending on your community:

- Municipal staff, including planning staff, economic development staff, building and zoning inspectors.
- Municipal boards (City Council/Select board, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Design Review Board, Economic Development Committee, Conservation Commission, and Historical Commission).
- Property and business owners.
- Downtown organizations, Chamber of Commerce, Historical Society, Community Development Corporation, Redevelopment Authority.
- Community members with knowledge or experience of architecture, landscape architecture, accessibility challenges, marketing.

Municipal staff can provide more information about the specific needs of the area. Elected and appointed officials can help build support within the community for the program and will have an important role in approving the program for implementation. Support from property and business owners is crucial to implementation, and local organizations may provide support for outreach and possibly administration of the program. Finally, knowledgeable community members can help define the details of the program, contribute information about community values for success, and garner support at critical decision points.

At this stage, it is important to build a broad coalition of people who can contribute to the development of the program. You have two goals: (1) build a program with a high likelihood of community support at adoption and funding and (2) identify property owners who are willing to participate in the first few projects.

To accomplish this goal, create a working group of representatives who can help you develop the criteria for the program, including the following:

- Which problems the program will address.
- How projects will be chosen.
- Appropriate funding sources for the program and funding levels for each project.
- Who will manage the program.
- How long the program will last.

Regular meetings of this working group will help keep the project on track. Working group members should expect to support the program when it needs to be approved by the relevant body in your community: City Council, Selectboard, or Town Meeting.

Broader public engagement will be important at later stages in the planning process, including developing the design guidelines for the program.



Partners are critical to the success of your façade improvement program.

We want to...

Step 3: Develop the design guidelines.

If your community already has design guidelines, they can be used as a base for the façade improvement program. However, the usefulness of those guidelines will depend on how tailored they are to the design of existing buildings, particularly storefronts. Some communities have design guidelines with a focus on new development rather than rehabilitation, which may be less appropriate for the needs of this program.

Considerations for design guidelines include the following:

- **Is this commercial center either part of an historic district or does it include a significant number of historic buildings?** If so, your design guidelines for the program may focus on the restoration of historic architectural details on the façades. Implications for the façade improvement program could include removal of inappropriate changes, restoration of damaged or missing features, and requirements for color schemes that are appropriate to the building style(s) and era(s).
- **Is the condition of the storefronts a primary concern?** If so, your design guidelines may want to address the classic three parts of the storefront: the base, the windows, and a header, which could include an awning or sign band. Implications for the façade improvement program could include colors, materials, window transparency, signage, lighting, and window boxes.
- **Is the condition of the site a primary concern?** If so, your design guidelines may address the location, amount, and condition of paved surfaces, non-building lighting and signage, and appropriate locations for outdoor dining and/or retail display or activities.

Figure 2: Inappropriate replacement windows. Source: Innes Associates



Design guidelines for a façade improvement program should achieve two goals:

- Address the concerns identified in Step 1 to produce consistent results in the physical and visual quality of the area in a manner that is consistent with community values and identity.
- Provide specific information about how the guidelines can be met so that implementation of those guidelines is clear to the property owner, business owner, program manager, and municipal staff.

If the community does not have an existing set of guidelines, this step is a **good opportunity to reach out to a broader base of community members to discuss values around the appearance and condition of the physical environment**. Such discussions can help supplement the earlier inventory of conditions. For example, a community member who regularly uses a wheelchair can provide more information about the difficulty of navigating stores that have one or more steps to enter the front door. An older resident might remember or have documentation of the original condition of an historic building that was badly maintained in recent years. Community members may be very aware of the problems with signage, lighting, and site conditions.

Community engagement can discuss the potential areas of focus: components of a storefront, the entire storefront, the entire façade, all façades, and/or the site. Other decisions include whether signage, lighting, awnings, and/or interior improvements to address accessibility be included. Improvements to the HVAC systems and other components to address energy efficiency and interior air flow may have implications for the appearance of the façade and the community may wish to consider how these components will be included in the design guidelines.

Some communities have local historic districts that already govern the rehabilitation of older buildings and general appearance of newer ones; although your community may not need or want such specificity, the structure of those guidelines may help you draft your own.

Guidelines to address site conditions can draw from best practices for stormwater management and circulation patterns that are safe for pedestrians and vehicles. The COVID-19 pandemic forced businesses and communities to be creative about the location of outdoor dining and retail; the options that worked best for your community could become part of your guidelines. If public art is important to you community, guidelines for the integration of art into the building and sites may also be a component of your guidelines.

Your community may only want to clean up storefronts with new paint, minimal restrictions on signs, and minor repairs. Such programs have fewer restrictions but should still establish the expectations for improvements funded by the program. Other communities may have more detailed requirements, but not have the staff or volunteer resources necessary to create these guidelines. Those communities may need technical help from someone with experience in developing the guidelines; the **Key Resources** section identifies a grant that can help pay for such technical assistance.

Criteria for participation is a parallel component of this program and developing the design guidelines may help you identify potential project types. More targeted outreach to business and property owners is appropriate when identifying the specific components of the program, as discussed in Step 4.



Design guidelines for improvements must be specific to make compliance easier.

Getting It Done: Storefront Design Guidelines

STOREFRONT DESIGN GUIDELINES
12

BUILDING PARTS DISPLAY WINDOWS

Display windows are the link between the pedestrian and the business. They are the character-defining element of a retail or commercial building and their original size, division, and shape should be preserved when possible. Neglecting windows that are broken or boarding them up for any period of time results in a negative image for both the business and the commercial district.

DO

- Use transparent glass instead of tinted or textured glass. Neighborhood business district zoning requires 70% of your storefront be clear glass.
- Create a cohesive storefront appearance by aligning window heights and unifying window sills.
- Consider mullion patterns, thickness and spacing in relationship to existing or historical building elements/design.
- Identify and preserve historic features such as frames, special glazing and decorative molding.
- When using aluminum storefronts and windows use the best quality aluminum to insure thermal insulation and to prevent condensation.
- When using wood frame windows take advantage of the ability to add detail and color.

DON'T

- Cover or block a display window by filling it with non-transparent material like cases, files, advertising or non-product items.
- Fill a window opening with glass block that does not allow views into the business.
- Cover or obscure existing window trim with metal or other materials including sign backing boards.
- Remove historic windows or window components.
- Insert new lowered ceilings inside that block windows or modifying exterior.
- Use Plexiglas instead of glass.

DID YOU KNOW?

Massachusetts State Building code requires safety glazing in hazardous locations, including glazing of swinging doors and adjacent to walking areas, like the front glass window on the storefront.

The minimum transparency requirements for storefronts and windows are regulated by the Boston Zoning Code.

When people can clearly see into your business they are more interested in coming in to shop or use your services.

Clear windows with good displays inside the windows are good marketing.

Figure 3: Sample of storefront design guidelines for accessibility. Source: Boston Main Streets, Office of Business Development, City of Boston. See [Resources](#) for link.

Figure 4: Sample of storefront design guidelines for accessibility. Source: NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission. See [Resources](#) for link.

B.7

Accessibility

- Entrances, including doors, recesses and steps leading up to the storefront infill, may be modified to accommodate barrier-free access, as long as the design intent of the new, original or historic storefront is maintained.
- Steps or entryways containing cast iron vault lights may not be modified, except that one tread and riser may be removed to accommodate barrier-free access if the tread is reinstalled flush at the entry.
- Ramps without handrails can typically be approved by the staff.



You should also make sure that the design meets the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and all applicable local, state and federal laws, rules and regulations.



The examples above show approved storefronts with accessible entrances. **Example 01:** 433 Broome Street, SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District, shows the removal of a step in order to provide barrier-free access. **Example 02:** 3 Greene Street, SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District, shows a minimal ramp without handrail.

We want to...

Step 4: Develop our criteria for participation.

As the working group begins to develop the design guidelines for the façade improvement program, it should also start to consider the criteria for participating in the program. This process should refer to the initial documentation of conditions. Criteria for participation may be dependent on the funding source (for example, CDBG funds or funding for historic preservation may have specific requirements). Outreach to property and business owners at this stage will help you understand which criteria will work best in your community to create incentives for participation and a stronger base for successful projects.


Other criteria could include the following:

- **Demonstrated need:** This may include deteriorating physical conditions, lack of accessibility, improvements to energy efficiency, or options for permanent outdoor dining.
- **Community preferences:** Your community may want to address older signage, provide more permanent space for outdoor dining, or develop a consistent look for storefronts.
- **Length of time that the improvements are maintained:** Eligibility for the program may depend on the willingness of the property owner to maintain the improvements for a certain amount of time. Maintenance requirements could be tied to the length of the tenant's lease, if the assistance is provided to a commercial tenant. Enforcement could also include a lien on the property for a specific time.
- **Type of assistance:** Your community may choose to fund technical assistance to develop a design for an updated storefront or façade. The community could provide funding for some or all of the improvements. Or you may wish to fund both in exchange for additional control over the final design and implementation.
- **Funding strategy:** Funds could be one or more of the following: grant, loan, forgivable loan, or percentage match. Loans could be forgiven when certain criteria are met; for example, maintaining the improvements for a specified length of time. Loans might allow the community to set up a revolving fund to assist more properties over an indefinite period.



Figure 5: Outdoor dining on private parking area. Source: Innes Associates

Getting It Done: Criteria for Participation



City of Cambridge

Community Development Department

STOREFRONT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

FY22 GUIDELINES

I. INTRODUCTION

The City of Cambridge Community Development Department (CDD) established the Storefront Improvement Program (SIP) to provide financial assistance to property owners or retail 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 retail establishments and enhance commercial districts.

The program provides a matching grant, in the form of a reimbursement, for the funding of well-designed improvements that 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, window and door improvements, and well-proportioned signage and lighting. Past matching grants have ranged from \$2,500 to \$35,000 with **accessible design upgrades receiving 90% reimbursement** based on scope of work and available funds. Grants vary each year, so contact CDD for further information.

Applicants are responsible for hiring licensed architects, contractors, and sign fabricators. An eligible retail tenant is defined as a commercial establishment selling goods or services directly to members of the public for personal use and whose use is not solely for re-sale purposes (wholesale). Included in this definition are food and creative for-profit businesses.

Improvements, or payments to a vendor, that are made prior to a signed SIP contract with the City/CDD are not eligible for reimbursement and will not be considered.

II. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The following criteria apply to all Storefront Improvement Program (SIP) applicants and prospective projects:

1. Applicants must be property owners or commercial retail tenants whose storefronts face onto a Cambridge street.
2. Commercial retail tenants must offer goods or services that are open to the public.
3. Preference will be given to independent businesses not required by contractual arrangement to maintain standardized décor, architecture, signs, or similar features.
4. Preference will be given to businesses owned by historically disadvantaged persons (women, people of color, veterans, individuals that are disabled, and members of the LGBTQ+ community).
5. Preference will be given to commercial retail tenants in a commercial district or corridor.
6. **Tenants must have written approval from property owners to participate in SIP and must have a current lease that is for a minimum of one year and with an option to renew.** Month-to-month leases will not be accepted.

7. Proposed improvements must be permanent and physically attached to the storefront (e.g. Sandwich board-style signs for the sidewalk and patio furniture are not eligible).
8. Billboards on property, if applicable, must be permanently removed as part of the improvement.
9. Property owners must be up to date on all municipal taxes prior to participation in the program.
10. Applicants must comply with all federal, state, and local laws and regulations pertaining to licensing, permits, building code, accessibility regulations, and zoning requirements.
11. Past participants of the Storefront Improvement Program, who have completed awarded projects and been reimbursed per the terms of their contract, may apply to the program again after five (5) years from the date of first grant contract.
12. Past participants may request to apply to the program again prior to the passing of five (5) years from the date of the first contract, but these requests will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and only if program funds are not oversubscribed at the time of receiving a complete application. To be considered for access to funds before five (5) years, applicants must demonstrate one or more of the following:
 - The applicant has relocated and any previously funded items under the Storefront Improvement Program are unable to be re-used due to space constraints.
 - The applicant has opened an additional location in Cambridge and the additional location is requesting access to funds.
 - The applicant is experiencing a hardship due to an emergency or natural disaster (e.g., a fire, flood, break-in, COVID-19) and construction is required to mitigate circumstances (e.g., windows or doors that open for increased circulation or ease of customer payment transactions, new siding on the front of the business, replaced windows or doors). The program will not cover construction required to safely close the businesses such as boarding up windows or doors.

Storefront Improvement Program Guidelines & Application

Page 1

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

Figure 6: Sample of eligibility requirements.
Source: City of Cambridge. See [How Others Are Doing It](#) for link.

We want to...

Step 5: Authorize our program.

The approval process for your program will depend on the structure of your municipality and, in some cases, the funding source. For CDBG communities, the authority to expend funds for a façade improvement program may already exist and you may simply need a votes of the executive body (City Council or Selectboard) to authorize updates to your program.

Other communities may be using different funding sources that require appropriation by the correct body. In a Massachusetts town, Town Meeting will need to authorize an appropriation and specify whether the funding source is an appropriation from municipal funds and whether grants and gifts can be used to fund the program. The Town will need to designate a department and board or committee who are authorized to expend the funds. One possibility is to create a revolving fund with an initial or ongoing appropriation and the ability to accept additional gifts or grants. This may involve a Home Rule petition to the legislature. However, such a fund could create a longer-term program that could also raise funds to support the continuation of the program.

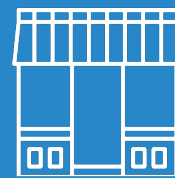
Town Meeting may have an advisory board, finance committee, or other committee who provides recommendations to Town Meeting members. Their support, and the support of the Selectboard and Planning Board, will be critical to the success of a Town Meeting vote. The members of the working group established in Step 2 and participants in any public outreach should also provide support. Testimony from business and property owners about the need and their enthusiasm for the program is important.

In a city, a façade improvement program will require the approval of City Council and possibly of its finance and/or ordinance subcommittee. Again, the support of members of the working group, property and businesses owners, and community members will be critical for the successful adoption of the program.

Other elements that can help build support for adoption include the following:

- Public presentation of the program, its components, and implications.
- Before-and-after illustrations of the types of improvements supported by the program to help people understand the benefits of the program for their downtown or commercial center.
- A one-page fact sheet for Town Meeting members or City Councilors to summarize the program components and benefits.
- An online PDF and/or video to explain the program. Testimonials from members of the working group, residents concerned about accessibility and safety, and property owners and businesses in the downtown or village center could be very helpful. If your community has already identified the first participants in the program, having them explain the benefits could be a powerful message.

Depending on your municipal structure, adoption of the program and providing funding may be part of the same vote. Other communities may want to adopt the program first and then apply for grants to fund or supplement funding resources.



Is your community a town or a city? This will determine the approval process for your program.

We want to...

Step 6: Fund our program.

Your community has several options for funding a façade improvement program. Communities with access to CDBG funds often use those, however, the program has specific restrictions that will be addressed in **Overcoming Challenges**.

Funds from the American Rescue Plan Act can be used to directly support small businesses, which could work as the funding component of an improvement program focused on storefronts or site improvements to allow outdoor dining and retail display. Both of these are appropriate responses to the impacts suffered by businesses, particularly retail and restaurant, during the COVID-19 pandemic as a result of the social distancing requirements. These funds must be encumbered, or committed by December 31, 2024, but may be expended by December 31, 2026.

In Massachusetts, other appropriate funding sources will depend on the purpose and scale of the program. The Massachusetts Downtown Initiative provides resources for developing the program, including the design guidelines and criteria for participation. Depending on the type of improvements, funding may come from a combination of sources, including Commonwealth Places (match to crowd-sourced funds for placemaking), low-interest loans for property owners from community banks, and fundraising if the improvements are part of expressing community pride. Where possible, property owners should contribute to the program, either by taking out a loan, matching grant funds, or providing sweat equity into the project.

Some communities may need more complex improvements to address serious safety concerns from deterioration or lack of accessibility. Programs in these communities may benefit from **leveraging funds** from multiple programs to address more serious issues. These sources could include one or more of the following:

- Massachusetts Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (Massachusetts Historical Commission)
- Underutilized Properties Program (MassDevelopment)
- Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (Massachusetts Historical Commission)

Your community could also sponsor program that could provide funds to address issues that accompany deficiencies in façades, storefronts, and sites. Options include the following:


- Municipal Vacant Storefronts Program (Economic Assistance Coordinating Council).
- Downtown Management Entity
- Redevelopment Authority

Finally, communities may wish to take a direct role in addressing more significant issues. A community that has adopted the Community Preservation Act could use the funds to develop housing and/or preserve a historic building that could act as a catalyst for private property owners to take advantage of the program. In areas with significant deteriorating conditions, a community with a Redevelopment Authority could use the regulatory controls and development actions within an urban renewal plan to rehabilitate properties with significant deterioration. More information about leveraging programs are provided in **Key Resources**.



Funding sources
will depend on your
community's resources, the
type of program, and your
desire to leverage grants.

Getting It Done: No-Interest Loan Application



APPLICATION FOR INTEREST FREE LOAN FUND PROGRAM

Purpose:

The Interest Free loan fund allows companies to secure interest free financing for up to 2 years when banking with Needham Bank. The funds are provided through a partnership between the Town of Ashland and Needham Bank and are used exclusively for the development and expansion of businesses in Ashland.

The Interest Free Financing funds can be used towards:

- Leasehold improvements
- Operating capital
- Acquisition of land and buildings
- New construction
- Façade and building renovation
- Landscape and property improvements
- Machinery and equipment purchases
- Soft cost expenses related to real estate development

The Interest Free Financing funds will be open to target businesses such as:

- Breweries/Restaurants
- Manufacturing
- Medical
- Engineering
- Professional Services

Eligibility Guidelines:

Potential borrower/participants must be the owner of a business operating or intending to operate in the Town with evidence of available capital and creditworthiness. The Town will refer eligible businesses to the Bank to undergo standard bank loan approval and underwriting. The purpose of the Loan Fund will be to assist in a significant portion of such business' launch or expansion in Ashland by offsetting start-up or similar business costs. The Bank and the Town will absorb imputed accrued interest in an amount of up to \$10,000 per Borrower or individual loan. Potential borrowers must be credit worthy and may be required to receive financing through Needham Bank's SBA program, all subject to the Bank's underwriting criteria for similar loans.

Figure 7: Sample of loan application as part of a partnership with Needham Bank.

Source: Town of Ashland.

See **How Others Are Doing It** for link.

Process:

Before the Bank commits to a loan, potential borrowers shall be required to provide to the Town and the Bank standard underwriting information including but not limited to:

- Business plan
- Evidence of business and business management experience
- Credit history and 3 years' financial statements, both personal and business
- Sufficient collateral and/or evidence of cash flow in the Bank's sole discretion

As a public investment instrument, the Program is expected to result in public goods and projects contributing to economic growth and community revitalization. Borrowers therefore, must address performance measures established by the Town of Ashland's Economic Development such as:

- Number and type of jobs created or retained
- Projected increase in tax revenue
- Acceptable ratio of private funding to public investment in the Town's sole discretion
- Benefits to low and moderate-income citizens, from business ownership to job opportunities.

Instructions:

Please fill out the entire application and submit it with attachments either via email or in hard copy to:
Beth Reynolds, Economic Development Director
101 Main Street, Ashland, MA 01721
breyolds@ashlandmass.com

We want to...

Step 7: Sign up participants.

Congratulations! Your community has adopted a façade improvement program and you have secured your funding source(s). Now it is time to get property owners and businesses to sign up, not just state their support.

This may be a significant challenge for your community: no one likes to be told that their building does not meet community standards or the building code. Some local owners may be aware of the deficiencies and be either unwilling to make the investment or embarrassed about their lack of resources. Other owners may be holding the property at no cost and have little to no concern about its deteriorating condition. The hardest to reach may be out-of-town or out-of-state landlords.


The working group members can help you define the buildings that need the most help and identify the owners who should be approached. The process of identifying projects must be transparent, especially if funds are limited. Creating an application process and a review committee even if the funding is not competitive is a good idea; such a committee could check to make sure the design guidelines and program requirements are followed, including any maintenance agreements.

Some owners may need encouragement. Tying funding for improvements to addressing building code violations may help encourage property owners to participate. Providing help to apply for other funding sources, such as grants for energy improvements, may also increase participation as would a low interest loan or loan forgiveness program. Think about outreach as you are designing the program components in Step 4.

Figure 8: Temporary Art Display in Vacant Storefronts. Source: Innes Associates



Getting It Done: Sample Application



Mayor Robert Sullivan
City of Brockton
Brockton Redevelopment Authority
Dept. Planning & Economic Development
FAÇADE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

Property Location:
Address: _____

Property Owner Information
Name: _____
Address: _____
Phone: _____
Email: _____
Website: _____

How long have you owned this property? _____ Copy of Deed: Attached ☐

Number of businesses in building: _____ Types of businesses: _____
Total number of employees (of businesses): _____
General description of work to be completed:

Photographs of existing conditions (building and surrounding area) - attach on page 3
Estimate of design costs by contractor or architect, etc. \$ _____
Design firm, architect: _____
Address: _____ Contact: _____
Estimated cost of façade improvement: \$ _____
Estimated date of completion: _____

I understand that this is a preliminary application. Upon approval of the tentative application I will be asked for detailed information including financials, estimates of cost, details of improvements and schedules. I have read and reviewed the term sheet for the Façade Improvement Grant and understand the terms.

Applicant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Submit completed application to:
Brockton Redevelopment Authority 50 School St. Brockton, MA 02301

Property Address: _____

Existing Conditions _____

Figure 9: Sample application.
Source: Brockton Redevelopment Authority.
See **How Others Are Doing It** for link.

BROCKTON STOREFRONT FAÇADE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

Property Address: _____

Existing Conditions _____

Photo One Street in front of building facing North	Photo Two Facing the building straight on
Photo Three Facing the building from left vantage point	Photo Four Facing the building from the right vantage point

Latitude: _____ Longitude: _____ Date: _____

We want to...

Step 8: Implement!

You are now ready to implement your façade improvement program! Implementation requires a few extra components to consider as you design the program. You should not wait until your funding is secured to think these through:

- **Who is your project manager?** Is municipal staff or another organization taking the responsibility (such as a Downtown Management Entity, volunteer-based organization, Community Development Corporation, or Redevelopment Authority)?
- **What is the permitting process?** Depending on the extent of your projects and your local regulations, some of these projects may require a building permit, zoning variance, site plan review, or even a special permit. Consider creating a streamlined permitting process for any permits required to implement this program and bring representatives from the Building Department, Planning Board, and Zoning Board of Appeals to discuss options early in the process. Such a process might also attract more participants.
- **Are your legal agreements in place?** Before you sign any documents or disburse any funds, make sure you have Town Counsel or the City Solicitor review all document. You want the obligations of both parties, including timelines and requirements for construction and maintenance clearly spelled out. Document the penalties for not following an approved application, requirements for liens or bonds, and whether funds are a grant or a loan and the terms for repayment.
- **Who is tracking and documenting the process?** Step 9 provides metrics to help determine whether the process is successful but someone should be tracking the data and documenting the process with before, during, and after photos.
- **How are you celebrating?** Consider the best way to communicate the success of the program: consider an awards ceremony for annual recipients of the grants, social media of the process from start to finish, a ribbon-cutting for successful completion, and/or an online database of finished projects. A façade improvement program represents a significant investment of community resources, including time and money. Celebrating progress helps people understand the impacts of the program on their downtown or village center and lets them compare the original condition with the improvements.



We want to...

Step 9: Measure our success!

Improvements as a result of a façade improvement program include safety, accessibility, pedestrian comfort, and aesthetics. Over time, upgrades to façades and sites contribute to a perception that an area is vibrant, safe, and attractive to businesses and their customers. The increase in value attracts investment and contributes to a higher tax base.

Your community could track the following metrics to gauge success over the length of your program:

- Number of applicants over a specific timeframe.
- Number of façades, storefronts, and/or sites improved within a specific timeframe.
- Maintenance of the improvements after a set number of years.
- Increase in visitors to the target area.
- Increase in sales at the property/business improved and within the target area.
- Ability to extend the program to other commercial areas within the municipality (if appropriate).

If anti-displacement measures are included in the program:

- Number of local businesses within improved properties that are still there after a specific length of time.
- Number of new local businesses that have started or relocated to the target area within a set time.

Figure 10: Consistent facade style with outdoor seating, planters, and creative signage. Source: Innes Associates



Getting It Done: Tracking Success



Figure 11: Example of Program Tracking; Image Source: City of Cambridge. See [How Others Are Doing It](#) for link.



Figure 12: Example of Program Tracking; Image Source: Town of Brookline. See [How Others Are Doing It](#) for link.

How Others Are Doing It

How Others Are Doing It

Case Studies

This section provides case studies for several communities in Massachusetts, a few outside our borders, and a national program. The case studies vary by funding source, purpose of grants, responsible entity, and level of funding.

The funding source you use may determine important aspects of your program. The use of municipal funds for the program provides more flexibility in how those funds can be applied to the needs of the specific community than other funding sources (see **Overcoming Challenges**). However, many municipalities have limited resources, and funds for a façade improvement program may compete with other needs.

An option used by several communities in these case studies is to leverage the façade improvement program with other grants and tax credits to address projects with greater needs. For example, the façade improvement program can address the storefront, while historic tax credits can address the remainder of the building's exterior. Other opportunities to leverage funds for larger projects include addressing accessibility/ADA/MAAB compliance, upgrading to energy-efficient doors, windows, and HVAC systems, and site improvements that can address stormwater management, lighting, and signage.

Finally, each program has different requirements and in some cases, a specific focus. The programs in this section are provided to give a sense of the variety of options available for a façade improvement program.

Municipal Case Studies

	Funding Source	Design/TA?	Construction?
Brockton, MA	CDBG	Yes	Yes
Lowell, MA	CDBG	Yes	Yes
Southampton, NY	CDBG	No	Yes
Ashland, MA	Municipal	No	Yes
Brookline, MA	Municipal	Yes	Yes
Cambridge, MA	Municipal	No	Yes
New Britain, CT	Downtown District	No	Yes

Brockton, MA

Key Difference: Interest deferred loan, administered by a Redevelopment Authority

<https://brocktonredevelopmentauthority.com/programs/facade/>

The Brockton Redevelopment Authority administers Brockton's Storefront Façade Improvement Program. The loan is an interest-free deferred loan which must be repaid under three conditions:

- Change in title ownership
- Mortgage refinance
- Death of property owner

The allowable improvements are similar to the other programs in this section and include the following:

- Renovation/restoration of architectural details
- Energy-efficient improvements to doors and windows
- Removal of roll-down grills
- Updates to signage, lighting, and awnings

Unlike some of the other programs in this section, Brockton's program does not address accessibility.

The program will provide \$2,500 for architectural cost assistance and a maximum of \$55,000 for the improvements. The funds must be matched by the business owner.

Other interesting requirements include the following:

- Buildings within certain geographic districts must follow specific design guidelines.
- Properties with priority for funding include those that are on or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places; those that are on the same block as another completed project for current application; and those that have been deemed a priority by the Mayor and the Review Committee.

The priority for projects on the same block is an interesting one for commercial areas that have experienced a decline. This prioritization could lead to a block-by-block transformation over time.

Lowell, MA

Key Difference: Small grants; online application

<https://www.lowellma.gov/1130/Sign-Facade-Grant-Program>

Lowell's Sign & Façade Grant Program is focused on commercial building façades in Qualified Census Tracts. One interesting component of the program is that the following uses are disqualified from participating in the program:

- Gun shops
- Pawn shops
- Liquor stores
- Smoke shops
- Tattoo parlors
- Sexually-oriented businesses
- Nail shops
- Dollar stores

Franchisees are also ineligible.

Lowell's maximum grant is \$2,000 per storefront, although property owners with multiple tenants may apply for \$2,000 for each storefront.

Like Cambridge, Lowell also encourages leveraging other grant and loan programs with the Sign & Façade Grant Program. This includes a historic sign grant administered by the City and two loan programs administered by the Lowell Development Financial Corporation. One of these is a Neighborhood Improvement Loan and the other is a local for energy efficiency upgrades.

The Lowell Development Financial Corporation is a nonprofit development corporation authorized by the Chapter 844 of the 1975 Acts of the General Court of Massachusetts and is an example of a non-municipal entity as a partner in a façade improvement program.

Lowell's application can be completed online: <https://www.lowellma.gov/FormCenter/Economic-Development-18/Sign-and-Facade-Grant-Application-102>

Southampton, NY

Key Difference: Pattern book for design

<https://www.southamptontownny.gov/1221/CDBG---Sign-Facades-Improvements-Program>

Southampton's web page for their Sign & Façade Improvements Program is very informative, and includes the following information:

- Two-page brochure about the program.
- PDF of the full program.
- Link to the application form.
- Clear description of the application process on the web page.

Unlike the other case studies in this document, Southampton has a 75%/25% match for the cost of materials for a maximum of \$30,000 per business.

The Town identifies improvements that are eligible and ineligible. Eligible projects address preservation of historic elements, deferred maintenance, and accessible access.

Other interesting provisions include requiring that all building code violation be rectified before the Sign & Façade Program Agreement is signed and requiring a five-year lease or lease extension for sign and awning projects for current tenants.

Finally, projects in certain areas are required to comply with local design guidelines. This includes the *Hampton Bays Downtown Overlay District Pattern Book*. For the purposes of their Sign & Façade Improvements Program, the rules in the pattern book will affect transparency, awnings, signs, and the design components of different storefront types.

Ashland, MA

Key Difference: Program funded by municipal funds

<https://www.ashlandmass.com/669/Business-Incentive-Programs>

Ashland's sign and façade improvement program is funded by an innovative two-step process. Town Meeting used the Commonwealth's Home Rule petition process in two separate years: the first year established an annual appropriation of \$60,000 for the program and the second year created a revolving funds which could accept gifts and grants in addition to the municipal funds.

The written application defines the geographic area and examples of eligible improvements. The Town provides a 50% matching grant up to \$5,000. The applicant is responsible for requesting at least three bids and choosing the lowest (Cambridge also has this requirement). In common with other communities, Ashland also requires a letter from the property owner providing permission for the work to be done.

Ashland prohibits the use of funds for interior improvements and improvements to sidewalks or other public walkways. However, accessibility improvements, planters and landscaping, corrections of code violations, and improvements to parking lots are all eligible for this program.

The Town of Ashland partners with Needham Bank for a two-year no-interest loan program for target businesses.

Brookline, MA

Key Difference: Weighted score; publicly tracked results

<https://www.brooklinema.gov/1564/Facade-Loan-Program>

The Town of Brookline limits their loan to \$10,000 per project. The loan is a zero-interest loan and is paid back in four annual installments. Design fees are limited to 10% or less of the eligible project costs.

This program is a revolving loan fund and is funded by the municipality. Applicants must go through three rounds of approval: Planning Board Façade Design Review, Economic Development Advisory Board, and Select Board. A building permit is also required.

To determine whether the project will be funded, the Town uses a weighted score. The form notes that project scopes will be scored on a scale of 1-4. Streetscape enhancements are 40% of the score and Creating Positive Lasting Community Impacts is 60%. These community impacts include energy efficient upgrades and improvements to accessibility that exceed Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB) standards. The form (available at the link above) provides a breakdown of the scoring process which is shown in the box to the right.

4

Excellent. Scope of work goes above and beyond category requirements (i.e. multiple energy efficient upgrades, significant investments in accessibility that exceed Massachusetts Architectural Access Board standards, and/or multiple façade improvements which substantially improve upon visual aesthetics, streetscape and commercial area identity including, new signs, awnings, building restoration, paint, lighting, window/door replacement or modification, minor landscaping.

3

Good. Scope of work includes multiple improvements, including investments in accessibility that exceed Massachusetts Architectural Access Board standards, with some impacts on visual aesthetics, or street scape or commercial area identity including, new signs, awning repair/replacement, paint, lighting, minor landscaping

2

Satisfactory. The scope of work only slightly improves upon existing façade with few if any impacts on visual aesthetics, or streetscape or commercial area identity. This may include a new storefront sign and some paint work).

1

Minimum. The scope of work qualifies for funds, but does not impact visual aesthetics, streetscape or commercial area identity). Work includes sign replacement with little to no other alterations/improvements made to the façade.

Cambridge, MA

Key Difference: Tiered grants; publicly tracked results

<https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/econdev/smallbusinessassistance/smallbusinessprograms/storefront>

The storefront improvement program in Cambridge shares some features with other communities. Like Lowell's program, it encourages leveraging this program with other grants and tax credits; like Ashland's program, it is municipally funded.

However, the program has some key differences which are models for anyone considering a façade improvement program. An innovative component of the program is an interactive map which allows users to click on an icon and view an image of the improved storefront with a short description of the improvements completed. This allows everyone to track how the program has worked over time.

The second innovative component of this program is the use of different tiers of matching grants to address different priorities. For example, the City currently has a 90% matching grant for ADA improvements (up to \$20,000), a 50% matching grant for other façade improvements (up to \$15,000), and 50% matching grant

for improvements to signage, lighting, and awnings (up to \$2,500). This tiered structure is a clear communication of City priorities.

The City's program also highlights the eligibility of updates to doors and windows to address restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to the summary on their website, the City provides a link to an application form and a more detailed description of the guidelines for the program, including eligible improvements and text-based design guidelines.

Cambridge also identifies programs that can help leverage this program for additional improvements, including federal and state tax credits, the federal disabled access tax credit, and the City's own Cambridge Energy Alliance for improvements to increase energy efficiencies.

New Britain, CT

Key Difference: Sponsor is a Downtown District

<http://www.newbritaindd.com/facade-improvement/>

The sponsor for this façade improvement program is the New Britain Downtown District, rather than the municipality itself. The funds are limited and therefore the number of storefronts that can be addressed in a given year is lower.

The New Britain Downtown District will provide a 50% matching grant up to \$5,000; however, an applicant can apply for more than one grant as long as the total does not exceed \$10,000. Grants for signage improvements are also provided as a 50% match but are limited to \$1,500. The program is limited to business and property owners that are members of the Downtown District, and the funds are provided as part of the District's annual budget.

The website lists the eligible improvements, including exterior code violations; restoration, rehabilitation, or preservation of historic elements; and removal of security grates. Improvements must meet the design guidelines developed by the New Britain Downtown District. These guidelines are specific to storefronts and list what is considered acceptable or unacceptable for each defined component of the storefront.

In general, the design guidelines focus on the preservation of historic elements; the consistency of architectural treatments and materials; the placement of signs, awnings, and ligating; and the visibility of entries and the contents of display windows. The design guidelines also identify the need for maintenance of the storefront.

Main Street America

The focus of Main Street America is on the revitalization of historic and older commercial areas. It is a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The organization has many years of experience in using historic preservation to strengthen economic development. Their case studies may be useful for you as you consider different options for your downtown or commercial areas. In addition, they sponsor two programs which can act as role models for your own program.

Façade Improvement Grant

Main Street America's façade improvement grant program is an example of using historic preservation funds, such as CPA funds, to create a façade improvement program that would address the historic buildings in a target area. This may be a useful model for a local program.

The site provides a link to each of the communities chosen for this program. The awards are expected to be \$25,000 per project, and the site includes preservation covenants, grant agreements, and two webinars which may be informative.

<https://www.mainstreet.org/ourwork/projectspotlight/facadeimprovements/npsgrant>

Historic Commercial District Revolving Fund

This is an example of a program that could serve as a model for communities with a significant number of historic buildings in their commercial centers.

The Texas program includes a PDF of before-and-after pictures, the scope of work, and the cost for each building.

This program also serves as a reminder that historic photos of a downtown can be used to as a base for developing design guidelines for the program, reinforcing characteristics specific and unique to each community.

<https://www.mainstreet.org/ourwork/projectspotlight/facadeimprovements/hcdrf>

Overcoming Challenges

Program Risks

General Risks

Your risk level depends on your community and the relationships of the property owners with the municipality. The highest level of risk occurs in conversations with property owners; for various reasons, the owners of the most distressed properties may be reluctant to participate. Once funding is secured and a few projects have been successfully completed, this risk level is likely to drop. Early engagement with property and business owners will also reduce this level of risk.

Façade improvements can also be about community values relative to the physical space; another level of risk occurs within the community conversations around the design standards for the program. In some communities, a façade improvement program may be an implementation step in an earlier planning process. In others, developing a community vision for the area before creating the program will be necessary to receive support for the program.

The final risk is the displacement of smaller businesses as property values, and rents, increase to match the upgrades to the physical environment. Since many smaller businesses are often also local businesses who may have fewer resources than national chains, improvements without protection for those small businesses may result in attractive, but empty, storefronts. Municipalities should consider structuring the criteria for participation in their façade improvement programs to reduce the risk of displacement, perhaps by requiring a certain length of continued tenancy as part of the participation requirements.

Specific Concerns: Use of CDBG Funds

Communities who receive funds from the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program may use those funds for a façade improvement program. CDBG funds must meet certain national objectives; depending on the format and geographic area of your façade improvement program, it may benefit low- and moderate-income persons and it may also prevent or eliminate slums and blight. However, a façade improvement program using CDBG funds must meet certain restrictions, including documentation of how the program meets the national objectives, documentation of the improvements, compliance with the Davis-Bacon and Related Acts for wage provisions, and restrictions on where the funds can be used (primarily the exterior of the building).

Some communities in the LRRP indicated that owners may not want to participate in programs funded by CDBG funds because of the number of requirements. Communities using these funds should consider helping with the paperwork and providing a list of local designers and contractors who meet the program's eligibility requirements.

Specific Concerns: Municipal Capacity and Resources

Smaller communities may not have the staff or monetary resources to manage and fund a façade improvement program. These communities can be creative about partnerships, for example, facilitating the creation of a business-led volunteer organization that can manage the program and partnering with local banks to provide low- or no interest loans for the work. Over time, these partnerships can be expanded into more formal organizations, such as a Business Improvement District, a Community Development Corporation, a community partnership or economic development nonprofit, or other organization focused on the needs of the community's commercial districts.

Key Resources

Key Resources

Design Guidelines

Communities who are starting a façade improvement program for the first time may not have the necessary experience for all the components required for such a program. The box below provides additional information about how to think about storefront design, which can be a specialized field, and historic preservation, for communities with historic assets in their downtowns or commercial areas.

Guidelines for Storefront Design

The following guidelines for storefront design are provided as options for inspiration for creating your own guidelines. These cities may have more resources than your community, and the out-of-state examples may have different regulations, but the layout, images, and thought process should be helpful to you as you develop your own program and guidelines.

Document	Link
Commercial District Design Guidelines, Boston Main Streets, Office of Business Development, City of Boston	https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/embed/m/ms_designguidelines_ph3.5.pdf
<i>thrive: A Guide to Storefront Design in the District of Columbia</i> , Office of Planning, District of Columbia	https://pedshed.net/documents/DC_Storefronts_Complete.pdf
<i>Guidelines for Storefront Design in Historic Districts</i> , NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission	https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/lpc/downloads/pdf/LPC%20Guidelines%20for%20Storefront%20Design.pdf
<i>Uptown: Guide to Good Storefront Design</i> , Uptown United Business Partners	https://exploreuptown.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Uptown-Guide-to-Good-Storefront-Design.pdf

Some property management firms also have guidelines for storefront design; these may be useful to review to understand how retail developers think about design for their developments.

Historic Preservation

Compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation is required for historic tax credits; the standards are also useful as guidance.

Resource	Link
Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation	https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/rehabilitation.htm

Key Resources

Funding Sources and Leveraging Programs

The funding sources on the next two pages provide a variety of options to address your community's needs. As noted in **Getting It Done**, there are a variety of programs that can either fund your program or be used to leverage your façade improvement program to address components that your program cannot fund. The table below provides some ideas about how to accomplish this.

The next page includes a list of resources and where to find more information about each.

Examples of Leveraging Resources		
OUR PROGRAM Addresses the store-front systems, signs, and awnings.	BUT WE ALSO NEED Help with deteriorating historic buildings.	CONSIDER THIS CPA as a municipal pilot program. Historic tax credits to address structural needs and adaptive reuse for private buildings.
OUR PROGRAM Addresses the commercial buildings.	BUT WE ALSO NEED Placemaking to help draw people to the area.	CONSIDER THIS Massachusetts Downtown Initiative Commonwealth Places Mass Cultural Council
OUR PROGRAM Addresses buildings and site landscaping.	BUT WE ALSO NEED Help with vacant buildings and ground floors.	CONSIDER THIS Underutilized Properties Collaborative Workspace Programs Municipal Vacant Storefronts Program

Funding - Grants & Tax Credits

Technical Assistance for Developing Your Façade Improvement Program

Name of Funding Source	Link	Agency
Massachusetts Downtown Initiative	https://www.mass.gov/service-details/massachusetts-downtown-initiative-mdi	DHCD (assistance limited to \$25,000)
Municipal Funds	Not applicable	City/Town

Funding for Improvements

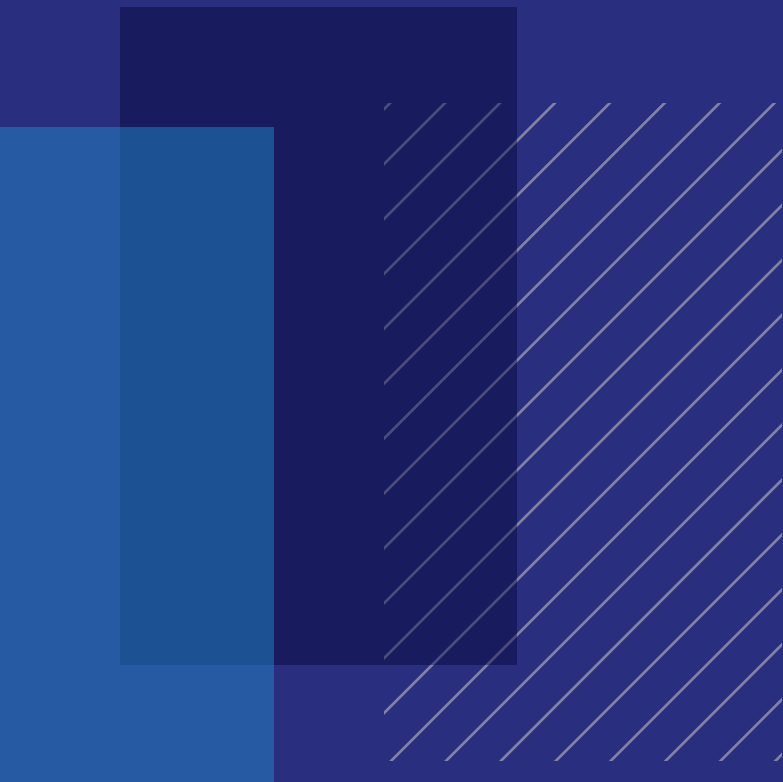
Name of Funding Source	Link	Agency
Community Development Block Grant	See Brockton, Lowell, and Southampton in How Others Are Doing It.	US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) (Eligibility varies)
Municipal Funds	See Ashland, Brookline, and Cambridge in How Others Are Doing It.	City/Town
Local Low- or no-interest bank loan	See Lowell and Ashland in How Others Are Doing It.	Community Bank
District assessment or tax increment program	See New Britain (Downtown District) and Brockton (Redevelopment Authority) in How Others Are Doing It.	Downtown Organization, Community Development Corporation, Redevelopment Authority

Programs to Leverage Your Façade Improvement Program for Larger Projects

Name of Funding Source	Link	Agency
Community Preservation Act	https://www.communitypreservation.org/about	Municipality
Public Programming Grants	https://massculturalcouncil.org/organizations/cultural-investment-portfolio/projects/	Mass Cultural Council
Underutilized Properties Program	https://www.massdevelopment.com/what-we-offer/real-estate-services/underutilized-properties-program	MassDevelopment
Collaborative Workspace Program	https://www.massdevelopment.com/what-we-offer/financing/grants/collaborative-workspace-program	MassDevelopment
Commonwealth Places	https://www.massdevelopment.com/what-we-offer/real-estate-services/commonwealth-places/	MassDevelopment
Municipal Vacant Storefronts Program	https://www.mass.gov/service-details/massachusetts-vacant-storefronts-program-mvsp	Economic Assistance Coordinating Council
MassSave Programs for Small Business	https://www.masssave.com/en/saving/business-rebates/	MassSave
Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund	https://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhcmppf/mppfidx.htm	Massachusetts Historical Commission
Massachusetts Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit	https://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhctax/taxidx.htm	Massachusetts Historical Commission
Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit	https://www.nps.gov/tps/tax-incentives.htm	National Park Service
Disabled Access Credit	https://www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-form-8826	IRS

Private Grants

Name of Funding Source	Link	Firm
Hometown Grants	https://www.t-mobile.com/brand/hometown-grants	T-Mobile



For more information, visit:

www.mass.gov/info-details/rapid-recovery-plan-rrp-program

If you have questions about the RRP program, contact:

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