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## STAFF REPORT

Proposal: Façade Improvement Program Renewal  
Location: 2101 O'Neil Ave Room 205  
Date: January 18, 2024  
Staff Contact: Irene Parsons

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### Introduction

The DDA's Façade Improvement Program promotes the historical and physical revitalization of Downtown by stimulating private investment through enhancements that improve the appearance and attractiveness of Downtown. Across the country, downtown professionals testify to the fact that historic building stock is a key component in celebrating local character and uniqueness. To help increase downtown's economic competitiveness, the Façade Improvement Program (FIP) offers matching grant funds to property owners within the DDA District boundaries through a reimbursement-based process. The Façade Improvement Program demonstrates a dedication to the protection of, and reinvestment in, the Downtown as an important historical community resource. Successful FIP projects are catalysts for additional investment into the Downtown core and demonstrate a commitment to the historical features of downtown Cheyenne.

Under this program, grant funds are focused on historically appropriate exterior improvements to building façades and must be visible from the public right-of-way. They must improve the building's condition and appearance when seen from public streets. Consideration for grant approval may lean towards properties listed as "contributing" to the Cheyenne Historic District and/or National Register for Historic Places.

### Background of the Design Committee:

For the purposes of the Façade Improvement Program (FIP), the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) historically had a Design Committee that "...assisted the DDA Board in establishing guidelines, policies and programs related to physical improvements and development within the DDA District and to administer the Façade Improvement Program (FIP) as directed and funded by the DDA Board. In addition, the Design Committee served as an advocate for quality design of physical improvements within the DDA District.

In acknowledgment of comments and concerns shared by Board Members at the Downtown Development Authority Board Meeting of August 17, 2023, adjustments to the purpose and functions of the Design Committee are set forth for discussion. To support the overall purpose of the Façade Improvement Program, administered through the Main Street Program of the Cheyenne DDA, the Design Committee shall:

- Be comprised of three (3) DDA Board Members, one (1) representative from the Cheyenne Historical Preservation Board (CHPB) and one (1) representative from the State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO).
- Review recommendations for approval of FIP Grant Applications from DDA/Main Street Program staff that have been successfully vetted through the review process and meet the adopted historical integrity and design guidelines of the FIP. The review process will be outlined in the FIP Grant Application.
- If any FIP Grant Application is not recommended for Board approval by the Design Committee, the Committee will identify areas of concern or questions that need to be answered, in order for the application to move forward in the approval process.
- Make recommendations to the DDA Board for final approval of FIP Grant Applications. The recommendation will be made under one of the following Award Categories
  - \$50,000 Restoration (In compliance with NPS standards) 60% Board/40% match up to max.
  - \$25,000 Major Maintenance (In compliance with NPS standards) 60% Board/ 40% match up to max.
  - \$10,000 Minor repairs, painting, cleaning, sign removal (In compliance with NPS standards) 60% Board/40% match up to max.
  - \$5,000 Sign installation (in compliance with NPS Standards) 40% Board/60% match up to max
- Coordinate, manage and evaluate FIP Grant Program as necessary, with the goal of achieving a FIP Program that effectively meets the review criteria and leads to a historically enhanced and appealing downtown district

**Analysis:**

The previous FIP application was a paper application, it was hard to understand, and posed difficulty with staff tracking the status of each phase of the application. We are proposing to develop a new application on-line, available through OpenGov, which allows the applicant and staff to see the progress of the application in real time. Documents are easily shared, and this helps with retaining records tied to the application, its funding, and the property location for any future research purposes.

The DDA will seek to renew its relationship with the Historical Preservation Board (HPB). This relationship will help the DDA get an architect on retainer to help applicants, if they don't have one already (applicant is not required to use provided architect). The HPB would write and receive a grant from SHPO Certified Local Government for this. The application for this SHPO grant opens in November with a final contract signing in January. Upon procurement of an architect, the grant cycle would open and that would likely be at the start of March. The application cycle would be open from March to October or until funds are expended. This would hopefully create a competitive application process and incentivize property owners to jump on the opportunity.

The process starts with a preliminary discussion with the DDA office regarding interest in a FIP grant application. We then proceed to a Pre-app meeting with DDA, City Planning, Building, and any other City entities that may be needed, depending on the preliminary discussion the DDA has with the applicant. The Pre-app meeting is meant to help applicants and staff get on the same page prior to starting their project, and we can notify the applicant of additional requirements from other City Departments, if there are any. This streamlines the entire process for applicants and helps to avoid complications prior to application submittal. Approved grant applications will stipulate a 12-month or 24-month completion period, depending on the extensiveness of the project. If a

proposed project does not meet the historical or other criteria of the FIP, we can refer the applicant to other DDA administered programs, such as the Capital Improvement Grant (CIG) or other incentive programs through the City.

Upon submittal of application, DDA staff, with the assistance of relevant City staff, would determine if all necessary documents are uploaded. If applicable documents are all there, then the applicant is notified they are in line for funding. Through OpenGov, the applications would then be routed out to a review of applicable people with a two week turn around (DDA, Planning, Building, Engineering, etc.).

With complete review of submittal, DDA staff will create a Staff Report. The Staff Report summarizes the application, states how much funds are left in the FIP account, then goes through the applicable review criteria to verify those are met. DDA staff will then make a recommendation to the Design Committee. The Design Committee will either approve, approve with conditions, postpone, or deny the recommendation (if not consistent with staff recommendation, the Design Committee will state a reason for not acting with staff, (i.e. funds availability, concerns about meeting criteria, questions needing clarification, other)

Review Criteria examples (to be finalized at a later day by DDA) will include:

- The project is within the DDA District boundary
- Project complies with NPS Secretary of the Interior standards for historical integrity
- There is budgeted money available to fund this project
- It complies with the goals of the Plan of Development
- Any other criteria deemed necessary by the DDA

Grant applications approved for recommendation by the Design Committee will be presented to the DDA Board for final approval.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion, the DDA has identified the value of reinstating the Façade Improvement Program, with amendments to the program that address Board concerns voiced in August 2023, and that improve the overall effectiveness and functionality of the program. The FIP is strategically focused on preserving historical value of the Downtown district while improving the overall aesthetic appeal of Downtown Cheyenne.

**Recommendation:**

Staff recommends the DDA Board approve the assignment of the Design Committee. in support of reinstating the Façade Improvement Plan as an integral resource in the historical preservation and investment of Downtown Cheyenne.