



CITY OF SPRINGFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS

Mayor Domenic J. Sarno

Storefront Improvement Program



Program Guide v5.0

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Applications must be completed online. Apply to the Storefront Improvement Program online using the following link: [Storefront Grants: Planning & Economic Development, City of Springfield, MA \(springfield-ma.gov\)](#)

After completion of a grant application, notify the Program Administrator via email or telephone.

Introduction

The Storefront Improvement Program is intended for ground-floor, for-profit businesses in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) eligible areas, located in the City of Springfield. The goal of this program is to make visible, aesthetic exterior improvements to help improve business sales and provide an improved neighborhood streetscape.

This program is funded by the United States Department of Housing & Urban Development, under the CDBG Program. The program is administered by the City of Springfield Office of Planning & Economic Development (OPED), and the Community Development Department (CD).

As such, all federal requirements including on-site project construction monitoring, environmental review, access and review of all project files, submission of project receipts and proof of payment, and completion of all required forms will be strictly enforced. Federal requirements include utilizing **Davis-Bacon/prevaling wages in the required bids, which should be made clear to contractors writing bids.** Awardees that do not adhere to all project requirements will be required to reimburse the City of Springfield for all awarded funds.

Program Guidelines

Program Goals

- To assist the growth of small, ground floor, for-profit businesses in Springfield, and to specifically create and retain jobs.
- To preserve special characteristics of neighborhood shopping areas by helping small businesses become successful, to foster a sense of place, and attract visitors to the area.
- To promote an attractive environment for new investment and business activity in the City of Springfield.
- To foster the economic revitalization of the commercial corridors through increased sales and increased valuation of properties.

Funding Limit: Business owners may apply for up to \$25,000 per storefront. Property owners may apply for up to \$25,000 per storefront, for a total of three (3) storefronts, for a maximum grant amount of \$75,000. Applicants who are both business owners and property owners may apply as a business owner if they meet the following criteria:

1. Both the business owner and the property owner are legally separate business entities.

AND

2. The business owner pays rent as a tenant to the property owner, and can provide a copy of their lease.

No single storefront will be awarded more than \$25,000. Note that single storefronts with frontage greater than 50 ft in length may be eligible for additional grant funding. No single property/ project shall be awarded more than \$75,000 in storefront grant funding.

Reoccurring Applicants: A property address, business owner, or property owner may only receive project funding from this program once every five (5) years. Property owners involved in multiple ownership organization types (LLC's, etc.) will be considered a single owner.

Disbarred Applicants: Applicants who have defaulted on past City of Springfield business loans/grants, and/or currently have active code violations are ineligible to apply. Applicants must also be current for any city, state, or federal taxes, fines, or fees prior to applying. Applicants that have defaulted in any HUD loans, grants or fees are also ineligible for the program. If the property owner, if different than the business owner, have active violations or owe any fees/taxes, the business owner is not eligible for the program as well. Before applying to the program, reach out to the program administrator or City Clerk's office to confirm that they are up to date with City taxes. If during the contracting process the program administrator finds that the awarded business owes City taxes/HUD fees or have any current violations, funding awards will be withheld until tax payment receipts are submitted to the program administrator.

Project Design: The City maintains final approval on design of all improvements. No commitments should be made to contractors prior to city design approval. Design guidelines are provided further in

the application on page 12. While it is not required to provide architectural sketches, applicants should include as much detail about the planned designs as possible, including but not limited to materials and appearance. Without enough/any details about the design, the review committee cannot move forward with application review. For businesses located in historic districts, it is highly encouraged to acquire renderings and as much detail about the project as possible from their contractors for the Historical Commission to review at their meetings. If the Historical Commission feels that they do not have a proper understanding of the project, they may require more information and require the business owner to reappear before them at a later meeting.

Project Start: The City will not fund or reimburse projects that have already begun construction prior to a contract being executed. Do not start any project construction without receiving a fully executed contract and notice to proceed in writing from the City of Springfield.

Project Changes: Once under contract, no project may change project scope or contractors without the prior notice and approval of the program administrator. **Changes of scope and/or contractors without notification, review and approval from the program administrator will result in the project being placed in default, the funding award must be returned, and the project must be cancelled.**

Types of Businesses Eligible:

- Ground-floor, active commercial establishments (i.e. retail, shops, restaurants, taverns/pubs/bars with food service.)
- Service establishments, including:
 - Professional services (e.g.: insurance, accountants, architects, doctors, lawyers, etc.)
 - Personal services (e.g.: barber shops, hair/ nail salon, dry cleaners, laundromats, etc.)
 - Certain repair services (e.g.: office equipment, radio/television, bicycle, furniture, locksmith, etc.)
 - Business services (e.g. advertising, office management, retail, etc.)

Types of Businesses Not Eligible:

- Home-based and web-based businesses
- Banks, savings and loan associations
- Most non-profit uses (exceptions stated under Requirements)
- Auto repair shops, auto retail establishments, and auto/transportation related businesses
- Gas stations
- Adult entertainment establishments
- Liquor stores
- Night clubs
- Bars with no food service – for bar applicants to become eligible, they must submit documentation showing that at least 50% of their gross sales are food-related. Businesses may submit documentation submitted to the Department of Revenue showing the liquor and food sales of the bar.
- National franchises and International franchises
- Properties used entirely for residential purposes
- Properties with no active tenants
- Businesses with no public outdoor exterior storefront, interior mall based businesses, and/or

businesses with street frontage beyond 50 feet from a street.

- Business located in upper stories
- Businesses with exterior roll down/steel doors (funds may be used for removal)
- Businesses with exterior security/steel window bars (funds may be used for removal)
- Cannabis related businesses

Project Uses Eligible:

- Business signs and/or awnings
- Exterior painting of storefront
- Doors/window glass
- Façade improvements to storefront
- New trees/new plantings (limited in scope to new plantings and not to include maintenance of existing)
- Lighting (related to façade/sign)
- Removal of existing steel roll down doors and replacement with interior security gates
- Removal or existing exterior security/steel window bars

Project Uses Not Eligible:

- Improvements not visible from the public street
- Roofing
- Asphalt/paving/parking lots
- Standard maintenance work
- Interior lit plastic/box signs
- Plastic material awnings/interior lit awnings
- Security/steel roll down doors
- Exterior security/steel window bars

Requirements

- The business must be located in a CDBG eligible area. Before submitting an application, notify the program administrator to determine the business's eligibility.
- Applications may be submitted by property owners and/or tenants; however, if a tenant submits an application, the property owner must provide written permission for the work to be completed. Both the property owner and the business owner's signature on page 9 of the Storefront Improvement Application can count as written approval.
- Both the tenant and property owner must agree to maintain the improvements in good condition for **one (1)** year following issue of the grant. The business must also remain fully open for at least one (1) year following the issue of the grant. Businesses that do not remain open must return awarded funding.
- This grant is intended only for commercial ground-floor storefronts. This program is not intended for non-profit organizations or upper story tenants. On a case-by-case basis,

funding may be awarded to non-profit organizations. Non-profit applications will require additional review from the program administrator based on the retail activity of the applicant to determine their eligibility.

- Businesses must remove any existing exterior roll-down security gates and remove existing exterior security/steel window bars in order to receive funding. Removal of these security systems is eligible for funding under this grant program and may be included in the project scope.
- Expenditures that exceed the approved project costs shall be the sole responsibility of the applicant.
- Grant applications will be accepted and screened for basic compliance (i.e., location, property eligibility, intended improvements, etc.). Applications will then be evaluated on their individual merits and compliance with program goals. Applications with significant exterior work will also be reviewed by a city sponsored professional architect for recommendation and approval.
- As a requirement of the federal funding source, each project needs to complete an “Environmental Review,” a state-level historic construction review that begins when the project is approved. This is the responsibility of the city and not the applicant, however it does take time. This process does not do environmental testing on properties; rather it is a larger review on project impact and can include items such as historic preservation impact. The city Program administrator will provide you with more information on the timeline of that process. Environmental Review can take up to four (4) weeks or more, but during this time, the awarded businesses can compile their contract documents.
- The subject property may not have active code enforcement actions. Properties/businesses with active code violations are not eligible for the program and if the program administrator discovers violations during the contracting process or during the contract period, the City will withhold funding or require the business to return the funding.
- The subject property must be structurally sound and in compliance with applicable building codes, sanitary codes, and zoning regulations.
- The subject property may not have delinquent taxes, including property taxes, and neither the tenant nor the property owner may have other delinquent taxes outstanding. Property owners or tenants with delinquent taxes, fines or fees will be ineligible to apply for this grant funding until they are current.
- Applicants must comply with all state and local laws and regulations pertaining to licensing, permits, building code, zoning requirements, environmental requirements, etc. **OPED approval of the project does not include license/permit approval.**
- Applicant is responsible for all associated permitting and fees. Additional information on permit applications and fee schedule can be found on page 15 of this guide as well as online at:

<https://www.springfield-ma.gov/code/index.php?id=forms0>

- Applicant must confirm with City Clerk's Office on need to register as a business in the City of Springfield.
- Applications for building(s) with multiple storefronts are strongly encouraged to prepare a joint application, to ensure a consistent quality of work and design continuity, although grants within the broader application may be awarded on an individual storefront by storefront basis.
- Work must be conducted by properly licensed contractors. The City encourages the use of Springfield based contractors. Contractor licenses must be submitted with bids submitted with application
- This program requires compliance with Davis-Bacon wages for all construction projects, and will require city monitoring of all construction activity. As such, each applicant will need to produce at least two (2) prevailing wage competitive proposals from licensed and bonded contractors. **Submitted quotes must indicate on the quotes that the contractor is using David-Bacon wages. If the contractor working on the site is not paying prevailing wages, the applicant will be forced to stop work and pay back the awarded funding.**
- The two (2) provided quotes must have nearly identical scopes regarding materials, services, and anything else required for the project. If quotes with dissimilar scopes of work are submitted, the applicant will be asked to provide more quotes.
- If the applicant provides quotes for different parts of the proposed project, a minimum of two (2) prevailing wage quotes must be provided for each aspect. This means that if the applicant submits a quote for glasswork and a quote for façade work, there must be a minimum of two (2) quotes each for glasswork and façade work.
- Of the two (2) submitted quotes, the applicant must select the cheaper quote per the regulations set by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. Applicants may select the more expensive quote if they can provide significant documentation showing that the less expensive contractor is unable to complete the project (i.e. non-responsiveness, scheduling issues, etc.). The program administrator can only make this exception if the applicant has provided two (2) quotes with Davis-Bacon wages clearly showing the same scopes of work.
- Project shall comply with CDBG Section 3 requirements. For more details, please refer to the following link: <https://www.hud.gov/section3>
- To go the contract with the City, awardees are required to list the City as additionally insured on their liability insurance. The City must be listed as additionally during the entirety of the contract period or until the project is completed. Certain limits must also be

maintained. Contact the program administrator for a list of the required limits. Awardees unable to maintain the limits and list the City as additionally insured cannot receive funding.

Design Guidelines

Projects should reflect principles of good design. The city shall have final determination on project designs based on their individual and relative merits. No project should begin construction prior to receiving final approval by the city and a notice to proceed in writing. Design guidelines are detailed further in this guide on page #.

Additional Review

Properties within a Local Historic District or of other historic significance will need prior approval by the Springfield Historical Commission. Properties located in an approved urban renewal district may require review and approval by the Springfield Redevelopment Authority.

Historic Preservation

The city encourages property owners to restore historic elements of properties when possible. Businesses located in any historic district is required to appear before the Historic Commission for project approval prior to contracting. In 1939, a photo of each property in the city was taken and many are available at the City of Springfield Building Department. Many are now scanned online at: <https://springfieldpreservation.org/wpa/>.

Application Process

It is important that applicants do not start any work until a contract between the city and applicant has been fully executed.

Step 1: Interested applicants should contact the program administrator and provide basic project information, business information (address, etc.), and interest in program. Program administrator confirms eligibility for program based on business address and project scope.

Step 2: Applicants should then go to the following link to complete the online application:

<https://www.springfield-ma.gov/planning/business-assistance/storefront-grants>

You will need the following attachments:

1. W9 Form with the legal business name and information
2. Vendor Maintenance Form
3. Copy of construction bids from at least two (2) licensed and insured contractors that comply with Davis-Bacon wage rates.
4. Copy of your lease if you are a tenant.
5. Written confirmation of property owner approval for tenant businesses. The City provides this form.
6. Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) – this is a federal identification number that businesses contracting with public entities must acquire to go to contract. Directions and assistance with acquiring this number is available if requested.

A blank copy of attachments 1, 2 & 5 can be found using the online application or can be found at the end of this document. During the quote acquisition process, the Program Administrator cannot be the point of contact for contractors; communication with contractors must be solely done by the applicant.

Step 3: Once application is fully complete, including all attachments, and submitted online, the program administrator shall review the application, and contact the applicant about additional questions/clarifications about the project.

Step 4: The program administrator shall notify the businesses if their application was selected or not selected for funding. If selected for funding, the business will enter into the city contracting process, where the program administrator shall provide the required contract documents. No business shall begin improvements until a contract is fully signed by all parties and the program administrator provides a notice to proceed in writing.

Step 5: The program administrator will coordinate with appropriate city departments to complete the required Environmental Review. This process is required, and may take **30 days** or longer depending on site characteristics.

Step 6: The program administrator will contact applicant to notify them that the contract is fully

executed and the project may begin.

Grant Disbursement Process

There are two (2) ways grant funding can be disbursed to awarded businesses. Typically, the City awards grants on a reimbursement basis where businesses provide payment confirmation documentation, preferably in the form of cancelled checks, for either part of or the entirety of the project. For each round of submitted payment confirmations, awarded businesses must submit invoices showing the work completed with the payment as well.

The City recommends the following steps for grant disbursement:

1. Complete the project after receiving the notice to proceed from the program administrator
2. Pay contractors for services and acquire cancelled checks/other documentation for the payment confirmation
3. Submit the cancelled checks/payment confirmations and contractor invoices to the program administrator, who will start the payment process. Additional documentation may be requested (i.e. bank statements)
4. If submitted payment confirmation is approved by project manager, in approximately 2 weeks after the payment confirmation is submitted a check for the full reimbursement will be available. If the payment confirmation covered only part of the project costs, then the business owner will repeat this process for the remainder of the funding.

The City will not reimburse project costs without documentation, so business MUST NOT pay contractors in cash. Submitted cancelled checks **must** include the front and back of the checks.

The City is also able to make upfront payments for the grant, which will typically be completed in at least two (2) payments. To demonstrate the necessity of an upfront payment, contractor quotes should note that to begin work, they require a deposit/upfront payment or the contractor must provide a statement confirming the deposit requirement. Once the program administrator has this documentation, businesses will complete the following steps:

1. Pay their contractor, utilizing the entirety of the first check – the City will not provide another payment until the first payment is completely spent with payment confirmations
2. Acquire cancelled checks/payment confirmations and contractor invoices totaling the first check amount and send to the program administrator
3. The program administrator will begin the payment process, potentially requesting more documentation
4. The next check will be disbursed to the business owner upfront, and to acquire more funding, the business will send the program administrator the same documentation. Business owners are required submit cancelled checks/payment confirmations for their final payment as well – **if the business owner does not submit the payment confirmation within a reasonable amount of time, the business must return the grant funding and will be barred from applying to CDBG-funded City grants in the future**

Post Loan Award Requirements

Following the award of a grant, the applicant will be monitored periodically by City staff to ensure compliance with the CDBG program. Therefore, the grant recipient shall agree to make company records and payroll available to the City upon request. The city will also schedule on-site monitoring visits and may ask to interview contractors and employees working on the project.

The business must remain in compliance and in operation for one (1) year from the date of contract. Should the business cease operations or significantly alter the improvements funded through this grant within one (1) year of the date the contract was signed, repayment to the City of for the entire grant amount will be

required.

Design Guidelines

The Storefront Grant Guidelines outline the standards, which must be followed when renovating buildings using a storefront grant. These design guidelines take into consideration a building's historic significance in determining what would be an appropriate treatment. Projects that affect city-designated historic buildings also require a separate review by the City of Springfield Historic Commission. While renderings are not required for the application, applicants with businesses in historic districts are highly encouraged to provide renderings and as much detail as possible about the proposed changes.

Storefront

The Storefront is defined as the entire exposed exterior surface of a building that fronts a public street and contains the building's principal entrance. Any elevation not containing the main entrance but fronting on a public street exposed to public view will be considered a secondary elevation. Secondary elevations may also be eligible for storefront grants.

Storefronts Design/Windows/Glazing

It is the intent of these guidelines that most buildings should have storefront-type glazing facing the street. When alterations are made to the first floor levels of buildings that presently have more opaque wall treatments, the storefront improvement program will usually require that storefront type glazing be installed that could accommodate retail uses in the future.

If an existing storefront is to be replaced, the new storefront should be traditional in character and include an appropriately designed bulkhead panel; large, undivided areas of clear glass display windows; a glazed transom surmounted by a storefront cornice; and a traditional, fully glazed storefront floor. The new storefront should fill the full height of the original masonry opening. Display windows should be of clear glass in pieces as large as is practical. Only clear low-E glass is permitted. The display windows should not be divided into small panes of glass; unless historic documentation exists that indicates this is the original design. Tinted or reflective glazing is not permitted.

For historic buildings, all structural and decorative elements should be repaired or replaced to match or be compatible with the original materials and design of the building to the greatest extent possible. Buildings, that are an integral element of a historic streetscape, should reflect and complement the character of the surrounding area to the greatest extent possible. In 1939 a photo of each property in the city was taken and many are available at the City of Springfield Building Department. Many are now scanned online at: <https://www.springfieldpreservation.org/wpa/>

Masonry

Unpainted brick, stone or terra cotta *should not be painted or covered*. Previously painted masonry may be painted. If it is necessary to remove paint or clean unpainted masonry, use the most moderate methods possible. Sandblasting and other abrasive cleaning methods are prohibited. Repaint defective mortar by duplicating the original in color, style, texture and strength. Repair or replace deteriorated masonry with new masonry that duplicates the old material as closely as possible. Trim and Ornamentation
Retain and repair or replace character giving trim ornamentation including, but not limited to, window

caps, carved stone work, ornamental plaques, storefront cornices and eaves cornices. Replacement should match the design, dimensions and material of the original trim and ornamentation.

Signs

New signage should be traditional in character to complement the architecture of many of the older buildings in Springfield neighborhoods. There are many types of traditional signs that are appropriate for use on older storefronts. Below is a list of types of signs that may be appropriate for your project.

Sign Boards

A flat signboard with hand painted raised lettering is the most appropriate type of sign for older commercial buildings. These signs should be placed in the narrow band above the storefront. *Modern internally lit box signs are **not permitted**.*

Awning Signs

Awning signs have lettering on the edge flap or skirting of the awning that remains visible when the awning is either retracted or opened. *Lettering/phone numbers on the main part of the awning are generally not permitted, nor are plastic awnings.*

Display Window Lettering

Another common type of storefront signage is lettering that is painted on or etched into the interior side of display windows and glazed entry doorways. These signs should consist of lettering and/or a logo, should not cover more than 1/5 of the area of the glass panel, and should not obscure the display area.

Hanging Signs

Hanging signs are signs that project from a building's wall and are supported by metal brackets. These signs can come in all shapes and sizes and are sometimes made in the likeness of objects or symbols associated with an actual type of business. These signs should project no more than 4ft from the face of the building and should not obscure the signage of other nearby businesses. The signs and brackets should be designed to complement the architecture of the building and mounted into the mortar joints of masonry buildings. All projecting signs should be hung within the base zone of the building or parallel to the second story window, and be externally lit. Internally lit and moving projecting signs are **not permitted**. These signs may require minimal insurance coverage if projecting over the public way.

Transom Signs

A transom sign is made of leaded glass letters that are built into the transom above the storefront display window or door. This can be illuminated at night with backlighting or illuminated from the lower interior part of the store lights. These signs can be made today by leaded glass craft workers and can be made as easily to remove panels.

Neon Signs

Neon signs first became popular in the late 1920s and 30s, and are seeing a renaissance in popularity today. There are many neon sign artists who can design new signage that will compliment old storefronts. Exterior neon signs are most appropriate for post 1920s commercial buildings while neon signs that are mounted within a display window can be successfully adapted for use on all types of commercial structures.

Awnings & Entrance Canopies

If storefront awnings are to be used, they should be of a tradition tent style. Internally illuminated, half round hoop, and truncated wedge shaped awning will generally not be approved. Awnings should be made of canvas or neoprene impregnated fabric instead of shiny vinyl. Awnings with soffit panels should not be used to allow the structure on the underside of the awning to be exposed. Custom awnings may be approved if sensitively designed to enhance a new storefront design.

Entrance canopies extending out to the curb may be permitted if they are traditional in design, fabric covered and sized to complement the proportions of the storefront. Fixed, metal, asphalt shingle or mansard type canopies are **not permitted**.

Security Gates and Bars

The installation of exterior, permanent or retractable security gates or bars is **not permitted**. They are out of character with most building architecture; create a perception that the area is unsafe, and ultimately detract from business. Less obstructive retractable interior security gates, security devices, alarm systems or unbreakable glazing material are preferred alternative security measures. The city may consider funding projects that remove exterior gates to replace them with an interior gate that not visible from the exterior.

Exterior Lighting

Spot or flood lighting to highlight the architectural detailing of a building should be inconspicuous and blend with the wall on which it is mounted. No lights should move, flash or make noise. Lighting for signs should be exterior illuminated, such as gooseneck lighting. Signs should not be illuminated from the interior. Downtown Springfield has many examples of exterior uplighting of buildings through a program sponsored by the Springfield Business Improvement District. Some channel letter signs may be approved on a case by case basis.

Landscaping & Fencing

In some projects landscaping and fencing will be considered. New landscape plantings, trees, etc. are eligible expenses. Maintenance of existing landscaping is ineligible.

Simply installing fencing around a parking lot or a portion of the parking lot will not qualify for a storefront improvement grant. If fencing is part of a larger renovation project, it will be considered only if the fence has extraordinary architectural character or would be making a significant visual improvement. Common fences such as white vinyl or standard silver aluminum chain link *would generally not be eligible* for a storefront improvement grant. Fences with barbed wire will **not** be eligible.

Planter or retaining walls should be built of materials of the adjacent buildings. Generally, brick or other suitable masonry units would be considered while certain types of interlocking concrete block, landscaping timers, sidewalks and curbs would **not** be eligible.