

Title: Economic Development Grants

Resolution: 2024-0016, Jan 22, 2024

Revised:

Special Notes/Cross Reference:

Next Review Date:

Business License Bylaw

POLICY STATEMENT : The Town may, subject to budget approval and available funds, provide reimbursement-based grants to encourage continued investment in local businesses.

PURPOSE : To provide, in an impartial manner, incentives for eligible Town-based businesses and non-residential property owners to encourage them to invest in their business and/or property.

1. DEFINITIONS

1.1 *Applicant* – means the individual, organization, or business submitting an application for financial support through an Economic Development Grant Program.

1.2 *Application Date* – means the date in which the application was acknowledged as received by the Program Review Officer.

1.3 *Business* – means:

- a) a commercial, merchandising, or industrial activity or undertaking;
- b) a profession, trade, occupation, calling, or employment; or
- c) an activity providing goods or services

whether or not for profit and however organized or formed, including a co-operative or association of persons.

1.4 *Business License* – means a license issued pursuant to the Town of Westlock Business License Bylaw.

1.5 *Chief Administrative Officer* – means the Chief Administrative Officer of the Town of Westlock as appointed by Council.

1.6 *Council* – means the municipal Council for the Town of Westlock.

1.7 *Commercial Property* – means a Property identified for commercial uses as defined in the Town’s Land Use Bylaw.

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- 1.8 *Completion Date* – means the date by which all work on the proposed project must be completed to the satisfaction of the Program Review Officer.
- 1.9 *Eligibility Criteria* – means terms that specify who qualifies to receive support through the program and/or the actions necessary to qualify for the Program prior to the receipt of funds.
- 1.10 *Eligible Expense* – means those expenses related to an approved project as outlined in the Project Agreement.
- 1.11 *Greenfield Development* – means development on land or Property that did not have previous development. It does not require demolition or renovation of existing structures or facilities.
- 1.12 *Grant* – means a financial contribution where Eligibility Criteria and/or conditions are compulsory for the recipient, and there is a formal application/selection process and a future obligation is attached.
- 1.13 *Individual Units* – means a contained business with direct physical street-front access. Does not include businesses with street-front access through a shared entrance, common area, lobby, elevator, stairway, etc.
- 1.14 *Industrial Property* – means Property identified for industrial uses as defined in the Town’s Land Use Bylaw.
- 1.15 *Local Business* – means a Business that holds a valid Resident Business License pursuant to the Town’s Business License Bylaw and is located within Town limits.
- 1.16 *Multi-Unit Buildings* – means a building with multiple adjoining Individual Units.
- 1.17 *Non-Resident Business* – means a business which operates, in whole or in part, within the Town’s corporate limits, but does not maintain a permanent business premises within the Town.
- 1.18 *Personal Use* – means assets, equipment, initiatives, and/or property that is used for a purpose other than to directly benefit the business.
- 1.19 *Program* – means the economic development grants, which is a set of grants that establishes clearly defined objectives, terms, conditions, provisions, and eligibility criteria for a recipient to have access to public funds through an objective assessment and selection process.
- 1.20 *Program Agreement* – means a legal instrument documenting the terms and conditions under which an applicant receives public funds through the Program.

- 1.21 *Program Review Officer* – means a staff member representing the Planning & Development department.
- 1.22 *Project Inspection* – means the periodic inspection by the Program Review Office and/or appropriate Town staff to determine an Applicant’s qualification for the Program, review project progress, and to evaluate a completed project with respect to the Program Agreement.
- 1.23 *Property* – means a parcel of land described in a Certificate of Title and contained within defined lot lines.
- 1.24 *Small Business* – means a for-profit business with less than 50 employees.
- 1.25 *Storefront* – means the portion of the Property or business that enables direct physical and visual contact between the street and/or pedestrian zone and the interior of the building.
- 1.26 *Town* – means the Town of Westlock.

2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- 2.1 Funds available for Grants are allocated annually through the Planning & Development Department’s budget approved by Council, or from other sources identified by the CAO.
- 2.2 Council may choose to fund and/or eliminate any or all of the Grants at any time.
- 2.3 The provision of grants are based on objective evaluation of applications submitted by local business and/or property owners.
- 2.4 In no way shall Grants received from the Town be seen as an endorsement of products, services, or ideas of any Applicant.
- 2.5 Applications are considered based on the scope and nature of the project, and will be evaluated on their ability to achieve any or all of the following objectives:
 - a) creation of skilled, full-time employment opportunities;
 - b) significant property improvements, intensification, and/or beautification;
 - c) development of new products and/or services;
 - d) improvements in competitiveness, efficiency, and/or productivity;
 - e) contribution to the overall economic well-being and stability of the Town; and/or
 - f) economic diversification, including access to new markets.

- 2.6 Applications requesting funding are reviewed by the Program Review Officer prior to being forwarded to the CAO for final approval.
- 2.7 Applications are to be reviewed in an impartial manner, and the Program Review Officer may utilize necessary staff from each of the following departments as deemed necessary: Finance, Planning & Development, Legislative Services, and Operations.
- 2.8 Grants are only available to local businesses. Non-Resident Businesses are not eligible for funding under these programs.
- 2.9 Grants will only be provided for assets, equipment, initiatives and property that are exclusively for the operation of the business, and not for Personal Use or benefit.

3. GRANTING ALLOCATIONS & REIMBURSEMENT

- 3.1 The maximum amount available under each Grant is as follows:
 - a) \$5,000 per application for the Signage Grant
 - b) \$10,000 per application for the Storefront Improvement Grant
 - i. In the case of Multi-Unit Buildings, the maximum amount available is \$10,000 per individual unit, not to exceed \$30,000 for the entire building.
 - c) \$2,500 per application for the Business Development Grant
- 3.2 Grants require matching funds to be provided by the Applicant. The amount awarded shall not exceed 50% of the total eligible costs submitted by the applicant as part of their grant application.
- 3.3 Successful applicants will be required to enter into and abide by a binding Program Agreement.
- 3.4 Grant funding will only be provided as a one-time lump sum reimbursement at the completion of the project and only after the Applicant has submitted sufficient documentation to verify that all of the conditions of the funding have been met to the satisfaction of the Program Review Officer.
- 3.5 Applicants must demonstrate, to the satisfaction of the Program Review Officer that they have the resources necessary to complete the project/initiative as outline in their application.
- 3.6 Projects and initiatives that involved property and/or building improvements, must adhere to all applicable requirements of the Land Use Bylaw, Alberta Building Code, and any other municipal standards to be eligible for reimbursement.

- 3.7 Applicants who receive a Grant will be published in the annual report, at a minimum of once per calendar year.

4. PROGRAM RESPONSIBILITIES

- 4.1 The CAO or designate shall:

- a) approve, within signing authority, Program Agreements between the Town and recipient; and
- b) identify sources of funds.

- 4.2 The Program Review Officer shall:

- a) serve as the Town's primary contact for the receipt of applications;
- b) review and evaluate applications for funding requests in an objective manner;
- c) seek additional information when necessary to make an informed decision on an application;
- d) establish the terms of the Program Agreements;
- e) maintain records of decisions and prepare appropriate schedules and documentation;
- f) conduct Project Inspections of the projects as necessary; and
- g) evaluate the Grant Programs annually and make recommendations to the CAO regarding their continuation, cessation, and/or ongoing implementation;

- 4.3 The Applicant shall:

- a) provide all documentation required by the application and requested by the Program Review Officer;
- b) adhere to the stipulations and conditions of the Program Agreement;
- c) obtain all necessary permits and licenses;
- d) provide all necessary reports and documentation at the conclusion of the Project;
- e) ensure the project is complete by the Completion Date stated within the Project Agreement;
- f) ensure general upkeep and maintenance of the Property pursuant to the Town's Community Standards Bylaw; and
- g) not submit documentation that is false, incomplete, incorrect or misleading.

5. GRANT GUIDELINES & ELIGIBILITY

5.1 SIGNAGE GRANT

a) PURPOSE

- i. The purpose of this Grant is to assist business and property owners to install new or updated exterior signage on the exterior of a commercial or industrial building.

b) ELIGIBILITY

- i. The applicant shall possess a valid Business License
- ii. Owners or tenants (with a lease agreement and written permission from the owner) are eligible to apply for funding
- iii. Applicants must be in good standing with the Town and not be in arrears on taxes, utilities, fees, fines, or other amounts.
- iv. Applicants shall not have any pending enforcement issues with the Town.
- v. The Property shall be located within Town limits and be located within one of the following Land Use Districts as per the Town's Land Use Bylaw:
 - C-H – Highway Commercial District
 - C-MP – Commercial Multi-Purpose District
 - I-L – Industrial Light District
 - I-H - Industrial Heavy District
 - DT-MU – Downtown Mixed-Use District
 - DT-T – Downtown Transitional District
 - R-NC – Residential Neighbourhood Commercial District
- vi. The proposed sign(s) must be installed on a façade or in a yard facing a public street.
- vii. The proposed sign(s) should fit the architectural design of the building, reflect the nature of the business and the ambience of the neighbourhood.
- viii. Eligible sign types include:
 - Fascia/wall signage
 - Projecting signage
 - Banner/canopy signage
 - Freestanding, permanent signage
- ix. Ineligible sign types include:
 - Temporary portable signage
 - Flag signs
 - Inflatable signage
 - Vinyl banner signage

- x. The Applicant shall ensure all required municipal approvals are in place prior to commencement of the signage project.
- c) ELIGIBLE FUNDING & COSTS
- i. The maximum funding allowed under the Signage Grant Program shall not exceed 50% of eligible costs, to a maximum of \$5,000 per application.
 - ii. Eligible costs include:
 - Professional services (ie. design)
 - Permit fees
 - Direct labour costs
 - Sign purchase & materials
 - iii. Ineligible costs include:
 - Insurance and warranty
 - Cost overruns
 - Any costs incurred prior to the application with the exception of professional services (ie. design)
 - iv. Work must commence within six (6) months of approval and shall be completed within 1 calendar year from when Grant approval is received.
 - v. Extensions may be considered and granted where justified, at the discretion of the CAO or designate.
- d) APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS
- i. Applications submitted under the Signage Grant Program must include the following submittals:
 - a completed application form;
 - project costing, detailing eligible expenses the Applicant is seeking support for;
 - photographs of the current property and renderings/drawings of the expected results;
 - written permission from the Property Owner if the applicant is a tenant of the building;
 - copy of their current lease agreement if the applicant is a tenant of the building;
 - the Program Review Officer may request additional information to verify that the Applicant possesses the resources to complete the project as outlined (this can include but is not limited to a list of similar projects completed, financial statements, letter of credit, etc.); and
 - all contractors performing work on the project must be licensed by the Province of Alberta and possess a valid Business Licence issued by the Town. They must also carry all required insurances.

5.2 STOREFRONT IMPROVEMENT GRANT

a) PURPOSE

- i. The purpose of this Grant is to help property owners improve the exterior appearance of their building as part of a complete and coordinated exterior design.
- ii. This program does not cover general maintenance costs of existing buildings or piecemeal repairs or enhancements.

b) ELIGIBILITY

- i. The applicant shall possess a valid Business License
- ii. Owners or tenants (with a lease agreement and written permission from the owner) are eligible to apply for funding
- iii. Applicants must be in good standing with the Town and not be in arrears on taxes, utilities, fees, fines, or other amounts.
- iv. Applicants shall not have any pending enforcement issues with the Town.
- v. The Property shall be located within Town limits and be located within one of the following Land Use Districts as per the Town's Land Use Bylaw:
 - C-H – Highway Commercial District
 - C-MP – Commercial Multi-Purpose District
 - I-L – Industrial Light District
 - I-H - Industrial Heavy District
 - DT-MU – Downtown Mixed-Use District
 - DT-T – Downtown Transitional District
 - R-NC – Residential Neighbourhood Commercial District
- vi. The project shall not be part of a Greenfield Development.
- vii. Individual Units within a Multi-Unit Building will be treated as individual Applicants.
- viii. Government buildings/property, residential property without a ground-floor commercial use, churches and other religious institutions will not be eligible.
- ix. The Applicant shall ensure all required municipal approvals are in place prior to commencement of the improvement project.
- x. Eligible exterior work shall face a public street and may include:
 - Repair/replacement of windows, doors, storefronts, awnings, canopies, cornices, eaves, parapets, and other architectural details that front the street;
 - Painting of existing painted surfaces visible from adjacent streets and public walkways including resealing of brick to maintain the existing brick exterior, but not unpainted brick;

- Modifications to improve accessibility, including wheelchair accessibility;
- "Hard" landscaping such as walkways and planters that front the street, but not including driveways and parking areas;
- Soft Landscaping, for street side of the building, including plant material and pavers;
- Signage (as permitted by the sign by-law, but not including back-lit plastic signs); and
- Such other similar repairs/improvements may be considered at the discretion of the Town.

xi. Ineligible exterior work shall include:

- Projects which are only maintenance, including painting, plumbing work, flooring repair and upkeep, electrical repairs and heating and air conditioning system maintenance are not eligible for funding;
- Hard landscaping for driveways and parking areas; and
- Applications exclusively for signage.

c) ELIGIBLE FUNDING & COSTS

- i. The maximum funding allowed under the Storefront Improvement Grant Program shall not exceed 50% of eligible costs, to a maximum of \$10,000 per application.
- ii. Eligible costs include:
 - Professional services (ie. design)
 - Permit fees
 - Direct labour costs
 - Sign purchase & materials
- iii. Ineligible costs include:
 - Insurance and warranty
 - Cost overruns
 - Any costs incurred prior to the application with the exception of professional services (ie. design)
- iv. Work must commence within six (6) months of approval and shall be completed within 1 calendar year from when Grant approval is received.
- v. Extensions may be considered and granted where justified, at the discretion of the CAO or designate.

d) APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

- i. Applications submitted under the Storefront Improvement Grant Program must include the following submittals:
 - a completed application form;
 - a detailed explanation, written and graphic, of the project to be undertaken;

- project costing, detailing eligible costs the Applicant is seeking support for (if necessary the Program Review Officer may request a minimum of 2 quotes to verify project costing);
 - photographs of the current property and renderings/drawings of the expected results;
 - written permission from the Property Owner if the applicant is a tenant of the building;
 - copy of their current lease agreement if the applicant is a tenant of the building;
 - the Program Review Officer may request additional information to verify that the Applicant possesses the resources to complete the project as outlined (this can include but is not limited to a list of similar projects completed, financial statements, letter of credit, etc.); and
 - all contractors performing work on the project must be licensed by the Province of Alberta and possess a valid Business Licence issued by the Town. They must also carry all required insurances.
- ii. If multiple applications are received, applications which meet the following design criteria will be prioritized:
- Sensitivity to existing streetscape with respect to proportions, materials, color, signage, and architectural detail;
 - Restoration to original façade (i.e. glazing, doorways); restoration or replacement of windows to original style;
 - Use of traditional or original materials;
 - Cleaning, repainting, replacement of original brick as required.
 - Preservation, restoration of architectural detail; and
 - Well-designed signage in proportion to building, sensitive to the appearance of the entire streetscape.

5.3 BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT GRANT

a) PURPOSE

- i. The purpose of this Grant is to assist businesses to improve the quality and effectiveness of their marketing, including the development of a marketing plan and associated marketing materials.

b) ELIGIBILITY

- i. The applicant shall possess a valid Business License
- ii. Applicants must be in good standing with the Town and not be in arrears on taxes, utilities, fees, fines, or other amounts.
- iii. Applicants shall not have any pending enforcement issues with the

Town.

- iv. The Business shall be operated from the Town of Westlock
- v. The applicant shall not have received this particular grant previously.

c) ELIGIBLE FUNDING & COSTS

- i. The maximum funding allowed under the Business Development Grant Program shall not exceed 50% of eligible costs, to a maximum of \$2,500 per application.
- ii. Eligible projects and their related costs that can be funded include, but are not limited to:
 - development of a marketing plan
 - development of marketing materials and/or advertising for the implementation of a marketing plan or strategic marketing project
 - marketing and promotion of online presence
 - e-commerce and web development (specific to e-commerce)
- iii. Ineligible costs include:
 - Advertising fees
 - Web hosting and maintenance fees
 - Staff salaries
- iv. Work must commence within six (6) months of approval and shall be completed within 1 calendar year from when Grant approval is received.
- v. Extensions may be considered and granted where justified, at the discretion of the CAO or designate.

d) APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

- i. Applications submitted under the Signage Grant Program must include the following submittals:
 - a completed application form;
 - detailed description of project;
 - project costing, detailing eligible expenses the Applicant is seeking support for;
 - detailed description of how the project will be utilized by the Applicant and how it help them reach a broader market; and
 - the Program Review Officer may request additional information to verify that the Applicant possesses the resources to complete the project as outlined (this can include but is not limited to a list of similar projects completed, financial statements, letter of credit, etc.

6. APPLICATION PROCESS & REVIEW

6.1 Applicants are encouraged to consult with the Program Review Officer prior to

submitting an application.

- 6.2 Completed applications shall be submitted to the Program Review Officer.
- 6.3 The Program Review Officer shall acknowledge receipt of the application and record the Application Date.
- 6.4 Costs related to the project that are incurred prior to the Application Date, with the exception of professional design services and permit application fees, will not be eligible for funding.
- 6.5 Grant applications are received and reviewed from March 1 to September 30 in each calendar year, and are reviewed and awarded in the order in which they are received.
- 6.6 All completed applications shall be reviewed and evaluated by the Program Review Officer.
- 6.7 The Program Review Officer will recommend to the CAO approval, modification, or refusal regarding the decision to enter into a Program Agreement regarding any application.
- 6.8 The Program Review Officer will determine whether an application is in compliance with this Policy.
- 6.9 The Program Review Officer will determine the eligibility of costs/expenses, and the allocation of funds depending on the nature and scope of the project, relative to this Policy.
- 6.10 Approvals are based on Eligibility Criteria and each applications alignment with this policy.
- 6.11 There is no method of appeal for the decision of the Program Review Officer and CAO.

7. FUNDING DISQUALIFICATION


- 7.1 Applicants found to have falsified documents and/or reports, or submit information that is false or misleading, shall immediately reimburse the Town of any funds received from a Grant.
- 7.2 Projects which are not completed within the timelines of each Project Agreement risk loss of grant allocation.

8. MUNICIPAL CONTROL

- 8.1 Council may choose to eliminate any of the Grant Programs at any time.
- 8.2 The delivery of grant funding is subject to the terms of each Project Agreement.
- 8.3 Submitting an application does not commit the Town into entering a Project Agreement.
- 8.4 The acceptance of an application does not constitute approval, or that a Program Agreement will be entered into by the Town.



Mayor, Jon Kramer



CAO, Simone Wiley