DOWNTOWN
Rochester, Minnesota

Façade Improvement Grant Program

Presented by the
Rochester Downtown Alliance (RDA)
and City of Rochester

© 2025 Rochester Downtown Alliance. All rights reserved

Rochester Downtown Alliance (RDA)
Façade Improvement Program

- **Up to $100,000 is available annually (upon City Council approval) for the Façade Improvement Grant Program.**
    - Business and property owners may apply to the program per property per year; except that for a building with multiple tenants at the street level, up to two businesses may apply.
    - The RDA is responsible for tracking the total amount obligated per year, not to exceed $100,000 per year.
    - The RDA is responsible for documentation of final grant amount approved, obtaining receipts and proof of payment, and submitting payment request to the city.
    - RDA works with property/business owner to set deadline dates for project and payment:
        - Project start date (within 90 days of approval) and completion date
        - All receipts submitted by date (within 60 days of project completion date)
        - Payment within 30 days of receipt submission (no partial payments)
    - The City is responsible for payment to the property owner.
    - The City Council will need to approve the budget each year.

- **Application Process includes the following:**
    - The property and/or business owner will meet informally with the RDA to discuss project eligibility, design guidelines, and appropriate documentation.
    - The property and/or business owner prepares documentation (and illustration as appropriate) of planned project and submits to RDA.
    - RDA identifies if project meets eligibility requirements and, if so, will facilitate design review and approval process.
    - Upon approval, RDA will establish timeline for project and payment deadlines, obtain receipts, and submit for reimbursement to City. An Award letter will be issued by the RDA.
    - The RDA provides all documentation, including eligibility, design approval, grant amount, receipts, and timelines for payment.
    - No applications will be accepted for retroactive projects.

If interested, please contact:

Rochester Downtown Alliance
sfagan@downtownrochestermn.com
507-216-9882

Façade Improvement Grant Program Guidelines

Purpose

The City of Rochester and the RDA recognize the importance of a high-quality retail and business environment to the continued success of Downtown Rochester. The Façade Improvement Grant Program is intended to help encourage investment and bring facades of business properties in Downtown Rochester more in tune with Urban Village Design guidelines. The program is offered as an incentive to Downtown property owners.

Eligibility

Any property or business owner whose property lies within the Special Services District (Downtown Rochester) is eligible for the program. Buildings constructed within the last 3 years are ineligible.

Use of Funds

The funds may be used to pay for up to 50% of the costs associated with the design and construction of improvements to a building's facades. Grant funds will be provided as a reimbursement to the business or property owner.

The funds will not be available to projects seeking assistance for signage only. The RDA Design Review Committee will consider signage based on the long-term improvements to the property and signage that is deemed as architectural signage.

Grant Amount

Property and business owners may apply for grant assistance of up to 50% of the cost of improvements, not to exceed $12,000. Grant funds will be made available on a first come first serve basis.

Design Assistance

An additional $1,500 may be granted to procure a licensed design professional/architect for the RDA Design Review process (matching funds are not requirement from the applicant). **It is highly recommended that applications include a professional rendering of the project from a licensed design firm (see list of design firms).** This funding is outside of the max amount of $12,000. Thus, a project may receive a max amount of $13,500.

Steps in the Process:

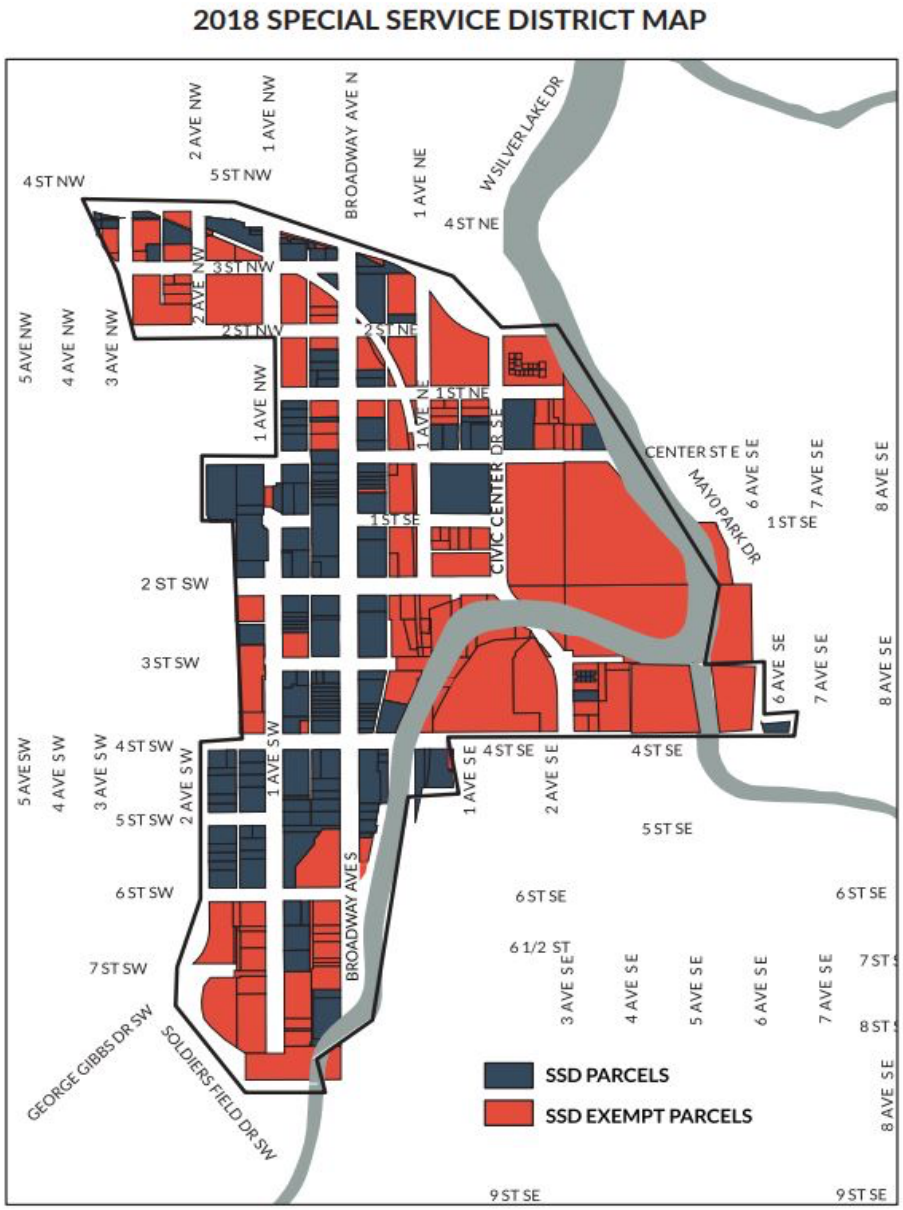
1. The property and/or business owner will meet informally with the RDA to discuss project eligibility, design guidelines, and appropriate documentation.
2. The RDA connects with the city and determines if project meets eligibility and funding requirements and, if so, facilitates the design review and approval process.
3. The property or business owner prepares an application, including plans and specifications, at an appropriate level of detail, and submits to RDA. If the applicant is not the owner of the property where the improvements will be made, they must obtain a letter of approval from the property owner authorizing the improvements.
4. Upon review and recommendation by the RDA Design Review Group, the applicant and RDA finalize grant negotiations. If grant funds are awarded, a letter will be issued by the RDA to the applicant.
5. If the applicant is on the Design Review Group, the application goes to the RDA Board of Directors for approval (with recommendation coming from the Design Review Group. Additionally, if a sitting RDA Board Member applies for the grant, the RDA Board will be made aware of the application via email.

6. Business or property owner makes approved façade improvements and pays all invoices related to the improvements. Lien waivers are to be provided to the RDA.
7. Applicant submits request for reimbursement to RDA, providing documentation that the work was completed in accordance with the approved plans and specifications, and provides receipts for all work completed.
8. RDA submits funding request and documentation to the city.
9. The city issues check to the applicant.

If a Project is Not Approved

- If the Design Review Committee feels that a project does not meet the established criteria to receive funding, the applicant would be provided detailed feedback regarding the decision.
- Denied applicants may choose to make suggested adjustments to their application and resubmit to the RDA for re-review by the Design Review Committee.
- **Please note:** application to the Façade Improvement Grant Program does not guarantee approval of funding.

Special Service District



RDA Design Review Committee Overview

Role

To review design elements for projects requesting funding as part of Façade Improvement Grant. So, an additional purpose of the practice is to gain experience with the concept of design review, and to educate local design professionals and building owners as to the content and mission of the Design Guidelines. For review,

Group Purpose

- To ensure that RDA/City improvement money is used to make properties more consistent with Urban Village Overlay Zone Design Guidelines.
- Consult with the RDA to apply Urban Village Overlay Zone Design Guidelines to project proposals and render an opinion on whether the project meets the guidelines. Design Guidelines are purposely non-specific in areas, thus are best interpreted by design professionals.
- Provide evaluation of façade applications to ensure conformance to the Urban Village Overlay Zone Design Guidelines for approval.
- Facilitate timely review, as well as provide assistance to building owners who need professional design or project input.
- Encourage local design professionals and owners to become familiar with Urban Village Overlay Zone Design Guidelines and agree with the guidelines and overall vision for downtown Rochester.
- Serve as ambassadors in promoting the Façade Improvement Grant Program to Downtown property owners and highlighting key successes to the community.
- Stay up-to-date on emerging design trends, concepts, or updates regarding the Destination Medical Center initiative.

Funding, Organization, and Process

- RDA to call group to action and provide needed documentation for review, applicant response, and final review documentation as appropriate.
- Group will be asked to complete the Façade Grant Application Review Form and render a “yes” or “no” opinion, along with supporting comments.
- The RDA will record Design Review Committee decision and comments, with each Façade Improvement Grant Application on the RDA’s private server for tracking purposes.

Committee Membership

- The Design Review Group should be comprised of five members and one RDA staff facilitator.
- Applicants must commit to a 2-year term minimum.
- Applicant must provide or demonstrate their qualifications for reviewing design proposals.
- Applicants must be able to review design proposals for their compliance with the Urban Village Overlay Zone Design Guidelines and respond with a vote and commentary within 5 business days of notification by RDA.
- Members of the Design Review Committee are allowed and encouraged to confer and communicate between themselves before rendering a decision.
- Any Design Review Committee member who becomes engaged with a client applying for a Façade Improvement Grant must recuse themselves from a project proposal vote.
- Information shared by the RDA for the purposes of evaluating proposals is to remain int Design Review Committee.

DOWN TOWN
Rochester, MN

RDA Façade Improvement Grant Application

1. Name of Applicant(s): _____
2. Mailing Address of Applicant: _____
3. Telephone Number(s): _____
4. Proposed Business Address: _____, Rochester, MN _____
5. Does the Applicant Own the Building? ☐ Yes ☐ No
   (If the answer to question #5 is "No", please attach a letter from the building owner evidencing a commitment to the applicant.)
6. Estimated Total Project Cost: $
7. Total Private Loan Being Obtained: $
8. Total Financial Assistance Requested: $
9. Proposed Project Start Date: _____
10. Proposed Project Completion Date: _____
11. Legal Name of the Borrower/Grantee: _____
12. The Borrower/Grantee is:
    - ☐ Individual
    - ☐ Corporation
    - ☐ LLC Partnership
13. Checklist of Required Attachments for Façade Improvement Grant Application Submission:
    - ☐ Completed RDA Façade Improvement Grant Application with illustration of all design improvements (see attached example).
    - ☐ Copies of all estimates for services from licensed contractor performing improvements.
    - ☐ A brief narrative description of the business.
    - ☐ Letter of approval authorizing leasehold improvement from the property owner, if not owned by the business (if applicable).

The Undersigned Applicant Affirms:

1. The information in this application is true and accurate.
2. The applicant has read and understands the program guidelines and conditions which are incorporated here by reference.
3. The Rochester Downtown Alliance Design Review Committee reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to reject this application.

Date: _____

Signature of Applicant(s):

_____

Tax ID# of business: _____

When completed submit to:

Shawn Fagan, Executive Director
sfagan@downtownrochestermn.com