



Downtown Redevelopment Authority: 2026 Façade Improvement Grant Program Overview

I. Program Overview

The Economic Development team of Downtown Houston+ (“DTH+”) is pleased to announce the relaunch of the Façade Improvement Grant Program (“Program”), available to owners of buildings located within the boundaries of TIRZ #3 in Downtown Houston. The Program is funded by the Downtown Redevelopment Authority TIRZ #3 (“DRA”) and provides financial assistance to complete facade improvements, certain exterior repairs, and, where applicable, aid in historic preservation. Through this work, DTH+ aims to create a more inviting urban environment, enhance property values, and drive new economic activity in Downtown Houston.

The DRA Façade Improvement Grant, managed by DTH+, will provide grants within the boundaries of TIRZ #3 to undertake eligible projects. These improvements may include repair of façade materials, signage upgrades, new shade structures, and lighting installations. The target improvement area within this Program is a building’s street-facing façade. Projects that are more focused on individual at-grade storefronts may be better suited for the separate Thrive Storefront Program administered by DTH+ and the Houston Downtown Management District.

II. Program Benefits for Downtown

Capital improvements to enhance the economic vitality of Downtown Houston through the Façade Improvement Grant Program will bring many benefits beyond aesthetic enhancements. The

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program aims to create a more vibrant and inviting environment where businesses thrive, property values appreciate, and residents and visitors alike can take pride in their downtown experience.

Intended specific public benefits include:

- Increased Economic Activity: Attractively restored buildings attract better tenants, see more foot traffic, boosting sales for the local economy.
- Increased Property Values: Improving individual facades can lead to increased property values, benefiting property owners and the local tax base.
- Job Creation and Community Engagement: A well-maintained commercial district fosters business growth, job opportunities and community involvement.
- Improved Public Safety: Well-maintained facades with adequate lighting and clear signage enhance public safety, encouraging more people to visit and spend time in the area.
- Preservation of Historical Character: Downtown Houston is home to numerous historic properties, containing many of Houston's oldest structures. Preservation of Houston's historic facades is an intended outcome of the Program.

III. Measurement of Success

Metrics of success fit into two broad categories: Physical improvements and economic activity.

- Physical improvement metrics include the number and linear front footage of total facades improved, an assessment of the physical and visual impact, and the quality and permanence of the restoration efforts and improvements made.
- Economic activity metrics are many and include: quantified pedestrian activity, new retailer establishments opened, occupancy rates of street-level spaces, business owner feedback, surveys and interviews, and other input provided by the community.

IV. Eligibility Criteria

The Façade Improvement Program welcomes applications from property owners and ground lessees within the boundaries of Downtown Houston TIRZ #3. Ground lessees must submit a letter of support from the property owner of record affirming their consent and support for the proposed façade improvements.

- Eligible Properties: To qualify for the Façade Improvement Program, properties must meet specific criteria:
 - Location: Properties must be situated within the designated boundaries of Downtown Houston TIRZ #3.
 - Above-Grade: Funds must be used for improvements to a building's above-grade façade.
 - Use: Eligible buildings include those utilized for office, retail, or residential purposes.
- Criteria of Eligible Projects: For projects to be eligible and consonant with the DRA Board's Capital Improvement Guidelines (and the law) requires:
 - (1) "But for" Requirement: The grants to go toward projects that would not have occurred "but for" the grant assistance.
 - (2) Public Purpose: Projects must retain a public purpose, meaning that the public retains some element of ownership over the improvement. In this case, that ownership is an easement given to the DRA that requires the owner of the property

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to receive DRA permission to change the improvement that DRA submitted public money to build. This is not a high bar, but it is a criteria.

- Ineligible Applicants and Properties: Not all applicants and properties will meet the eligibility criteria:
 - Exclusion Zone: Properties located outside the defined boundaries of Downtown Houston TIRZ #3 are ineligible.
 - Below-Grade: Projects below-grade, including those within Houston’s tunnel system, are ineligible.
 - Past Recipients: Properties that have previously received a DRA Façade Improvement Grant are not eligible for another façade grant in 2025.
 - Non-Commercial Use: Properties primarily serving as parking structures without street-level commercial activities are not eligible for the program, which focuses on enhancing the public-facing aspects of Downtown Houston’s built environment.

These eligibility criteria ensure that the program targets properties and stakeholders aligned with its objectives of preserving historic integrity, enhancing public realm aesthetics, and stimulating economic vitality within the designated area.

V. Grant Details

The Downtown Redevelopment Authority has allocated an initial funding pool for the Façade Improvement Grant Program of \$1,000,000. The DRA may have varying funding support for the Program in future cycles. The maximum grant award is \$250,000 per project. To be eligible for reimbursement, applicants must demonstrate a significant financial commitment to their projects. As such, the program requires a matching fund ratio of 1:2, meaning applicants must match grant funds at a minimum ratio of one dollar invested by applicant for every two dollars provided through the grant program.

VI. Improvement Specifics and Qualifying Improvements

The Façade Improvement Grant Program aims to preserve and enhance the architectural integrity, visual appeal, and economic vitality of Downtown Houston. Eligible improvements are aligned with these goals, focusing on permanent improvements:

- Facade Restoration: Repair or replacement of deteriorated materials on the exterior of the building, such as bricks, stones, or decorative elements.
- Structural Reinforcement and/or Stabilization: Strengthening or repair of load-bearing walls, beams, or columns to ensure the structural stability and safety of the building.
- Architectural Detailing: Repair or replication of ornamental details, moldings, cornices, and other architectural features that may define a building's character.
- Flood Proofing Measures: Implementation of flood mitigation strategies, such as elevating utilities, installing flood barriers, or waterproofing street level spaces.
- Window and Door Upgrades: Installation or restoration of windows and doors.
- Accessibility Improvements: Modifications to improve accessibility such as ramps or building entrance enhancements.

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- **Energy Efficiency Enhancements:** Installation of energy-efficient technologies such as insulation, solar protection, or increased efficiency lighting.
- **Signage and Lighting:** Restoration or installation of signage and lighting fixtures that enhance visibility and safety.
- **Cooling and Shade Devices:** Awnings, shades, fans, and other installations that reduce solar gain on interior spaces and reduce temperatures on outdoor areas.

Please note: Painting and surface treatments are not eligible costs under this program.

Ineligible Improvements include:

- **Routine Maintenance:** Regular upkeep tasks that do not involve significant alterations or improvements to the building's structure or appearance.
- **Interior Renovations:** Renovations more than 36" from the building's exterior glazing regardless of their visibility from the exterior.
- **Non-Permanent Fixtures:** Installations that are temporary, easily removable, or not considered part of the permanent structure of the building.
- **Landscaping without Structural Impact:** Landscaping installations that do not include significant improvements or modifications to the building's facade or adjacent public areas. Examples include potted plants and annual flowers.
- **Inferior Materials:** EIFS and other low-quality façade materials.
- **Deferred Maintenance:** Projects that primarily address existing deterioration due to lack of regular upkeep, rather than implementing new enhancements or restorations.

VII. Process and Timeline

Key steps in the application and reimbursement process include application submission, initial review, design approval, project commencement, and completion. DTH+ intends to disburse funds within 30 days from final project completion, contingent on meeting all program requirements.

Specific process milestones and deadlines include:

- ***Applications are due by 5:00 p.m. October 23, 2026.***
- Initial Review Period and Contingent Approval Notifications (within 45 days of submission)
- Final Design Submission of Construction Documents (no later than within 180 days after initial submission)
- Final Design Approval (no later than 30 days after final design submission)
- DTH+ will deliver DRA Facade agreement to all awardees within 3 business days.
- All Awardees will execute the contract within 30 days from receipt of the agreement.
- On-Site Project Commencement Deadline (the later of 30 days from final design approval or 30 days after receiving building permits)
- Mid-Project Site Visit Progress Report (no later than 180 days from On-Site project commencements)
- Project Completion and Final Approval Submission Deadline: (no later than 365 days from On-Site Project Commencement). This deadline is firm to prevent projects from encumbering future years' funding allocations.
- Project Completion and Final Approval Submission Deadline including a copy of a Certificate of Occupancy or other relevant city approval document (no later than 365 days from On-Site Project Commencement)
- Disbursement of Funds: Disbursements will not happen until after project completion.

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- Disbursement of Funds (no later than 30 days from final approval)

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VIII. Review and Approval

Applications undergo review by a committee of DTH+ staff, evaluating criteria like public benefit, project impact, feasibility, aesthetic enhancement, and economic contribution. Applicants receive notifications based on their application's status within specified timelines. After staff review, each application's final consideration is performed by the Downtown Redevelopment Authority / TIRZ#3 Board of Directors.

- Evaluation Criteria: While not having a set formula for evaluation, DTH+ will consider projects that best align with the stated project benefits in Section II of this document. Broadly, the following criteria will be used for determining which applicants will receive funding:
 - Alignment with DTH+'s vision and program goals
 - Impact on aesthetics and historical merit
 - Contribution to economic development
 - Feasibility and sustainability
- Notification of Approval or Denial:
 - DTH+ reserves the right to deny applications that do not meet the stated criteria, do not provide completed applications, or do not meet the stated program goals.
 - Timeline for Decisions: DTH+ will notify applicants of their award status on the timeline stated above in Section VII.

IX. Reporting, Accountability, and Grant Disbursements

Recipients must adhere to reporting timelines, including construction document submissions, mid-project and final site visits, and proof of occupancy post-completion, to maintain grant eligibility.

- Disbursement of Funds: Disbursements will not happen until after project completion.
 - Disbursement of funds is contingent upon:
 - Approval of final project plans.
 - Completion of required documentation.
 - A final inspection by DTH+ verifying the work is completed to the quality specified in the approved application.
 - Verification that all laborers and vendors have been compensated fully.
 - Funds to be released to projects that have received Final Approval within 30 days of notice of Final Approval being provided to the grant awardee.
 - Because this is a DRA funded project and not a City project per se, DTH+ will sign-off on the quality of the work prior to disbursement.
- Public Benefit and Easement: As part and parcel of the “public benefit” the improvement becomes property of the public so far as an easement upon the improvement by the DRA, requiring the owner to apprise the DRA of changes from the grant supported project through a request to make those changes.

X. Contact Information

For further information, contact Marlon Connley, Manager of Small Business Support Programs at Downtown Houston+ (email: marlon.connley@downtownhouston.org). Additional resources can be found

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through: <https://downtownhouston.org/do-business/incentives-programs>

XI. Terms and Conditions

The following terms and conditions outline the legal framework and operational guidelines governing the Façade Improvement Program administered by Downtown Houston+, ensuring transparency and compliance throughout the grant application and disbursement process.

- **Program Authority:** The Façade Improvement Grant Program ("the Program") is administered by Downtown Houston+ ("DTH+"), authorized by the Downtown Redevelopment Authority TIRZ #3 ("DRA").
- **Eligibility and Applications:** Applicants must meet eligibility criteria as outlined in Section IV of this document. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis, with specific deadlines and submission requirements detailed in Section VII.
- **Selection Process:** Applications will be evaluated based on criteria including but not limited to public benefit, visual impact, historic preservation standards, economic impact, and feasibility. The decision of the DRA board members is final. Since these awards are all likely above \$50,000, only the Board can approve. Staff can review / recommend.
- **Grant Disbursement:** Grant funds will be disbursed following final approval of project plans and compliance with all program requirements. Disbursement will be made within 30 days of project completion and submission of required documentation and inspection of work in alignment with application. Funds will not be disbursed until after project completion & due inspection of work in alignment with application.
- **Compliance and Reporting:** Grant recipients must adhere to all local, state, and federal regulations, including historic preservation guidelines and building codes, where required. Recipients are required to submit progress reports, undergo site inspections, and provide proof of compliance with program terms.
- **Modification of Terms:** DTH+ reserves the right to modify program guidelines, eligibility criteria, or funding availability as necessary. Any modifications will be communicated to applicants and stakeholders through official channels.
- **Legal Compliance:** Participation in the Program constitutes agreement to comply with all applicable laws and regulations. DTH+ retains the right to withhold or reclaim funds in the event of non-compliance or misuse of grant funds.
- **Indemnification:** Applicants and grant recipients agree to indemnify and hold harmless DTH+ and DRA, its officers, employees, and agents from any claims, liabilities, damages, or expenses arising out of or related to participation in the Program.
- **Governing Law:** The terms and conditions of the Program are governed by the laws of the State of Texas. Any disputes arising from the Program shall be resolved in the courts of Harris County, Texas.

XII. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

- Who is eligible to apply for the Façade Improvement Grant Program?
 - Property owners within the boundaries of TIRZ #3 that meet the stated criteria within this program overview.
- What types of improvements are eligible for funding?

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- Eligible improvements include façade renovations, signage upgrades, lighting installations, accessibility enhancements, and other permanent improvements that provide public benefit by enhancing a facade and surrounding pedestrian safety and vibrancy. See Section VI for a comprehensive list of eligible improvements.
- How much funding can I apply for?
 - Grant amounts vary based on the scope of the project and available budget. Specific funding details are provided in each grant cycle announcement. Refer to Section VII for information on grant funding and application procedures. Grant awards are made at the full and final discretion of DTH+ via DRA Board action.
- How are applications evaluated and selected?
 - Applications are reviewed by the DTH+ staff based on criteria such as project impact, feasibility, adherence to program goals, and alignment with Downtown revitalization objectives. See evaluation criteria provided throughout this document.
- Can grant funds be used for maintenance, operational expenses or personal use?
 - No, grant funds are strictly designated for physical improvements outlined in the approved project scope and budget.
- Is there a matching funds requirement?
 - Yes. Applicants must match grant funds at a minimum ratio of one dollar invested by applicant for every two dollars provided through the grant program.
- What happens if my application is incomplete or missing required documentation?
 - Incomplete applications will not be considered for review. Applicants are encouraged to carefully review these guidelines for detailed application requirements and ensure all necessary documentation