

# DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

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## INCENTIVES PROGRAM

PROGRAM GUIDELINES FOR THE  
INTERIOR IMPROVEMENTS GRANT  
Phase 2 (April 2021 to March 2022)



REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY  
OF WOOD BUFFALO

## INTERIOR IMPROVEMENTS GRANT

### GRANT AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Interior Improvements Grant provides funding to encourage property owners and tenants to make upgrades to the downtown's aging building stock, commercial, institutional and mixed-use buildings. The grant focuses on improvement projects that:

- Reconfigure existing units to better meet current needs (including subdividing or combining units).
- Upgrade electrical, ventilation and plumbing systems to help meet the *Alberta Building Code*.
- Improve accessibility through the installation of barrier-free washrooms, lifts and ramps.
- Improve fire safety, through the installation of sprinklers or upgrades to fire separation between units.
- Increase energy efficiency, such as the installation of new windows and doors.
- Provide for general improvements to interiors, including painting, flooring, ceilings, millwork and cabinetry.

Looking for project ideas? See page 3.

### GRANT VALUE

The Interior Improvements Grant is a matching reimbursement grant that provides:

- A maximum of \$50,000 per building for eligible improvement projects.
- In multi-unit buildings, a further \$50,000 *may* be provided towards a different improvement project(s) for a unit(s) or space(s) not previously improved under this program.

This grant is provided as a 50 per cent matching reimbursement grant. A "matching" grant means that the Municipality will pay for half of eligible costs to the maximum allowed by the grant. A "reimbursement" grant means that applicants receive funding after their projects are complete and verified by the Municipality.

In the case of the Interior Improvements Grant, the grant is allocated to the entire building. In a multi-unit building, the grant could be used by a single applicant or shared by several applicants in the building. Where a building qualifies for a further \$50,000, each application must not exceed a grant request of \$50,000.

Each eligible building may also benefit from more than one type of grant. For example, a commercial building owner may apply to upgrade the façade, make exterior premises improvements and carry out interior improvements. Separate applications are required.



*2020 funded project. Project consisted of demising a vacant commercial space to create a new office. Photographs courtesy of Wood Buffalo Therapy.*

## ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES

### *Important things to know if your building received this grant in Phase 1 (2020)*

Work that is subject to an executed agreement (signed by the recipient and the Municipality) is not eligible for further reimbursement or new applications. In buildings with more than one tenant or occupant, the Municipality *may* accept applications for units or common areas not previously improved under the program.

If you are unsure about the eligibility of your project or building, please contact [incentives@rmwb.ca](mailto:incentives@rmwb.ca) to request a pre-application meeting.

### *Important things to know about the eligibility of flood-related projects*

While the Downtown Revitalization Incentives Program is intended to spur downtown revitalization, costs pertaining to the restoration of damage caused by the recent flooding are not eligible. For more information, see page 5. Assistance may be available through the Government of Alberta's Disaster Recovery Program.

The following must be met to be eligible:

#### **The building must:**

- Be located within the downtown, as shown on the Program Area Map on page 10.
- Be an existing commercial, institutional or mixed-use (ground-level commercial space only) building. Home businesses or occupations are not eligible. In the case of government buildings (municipal, provincial, federal), be a ground-level commercial space.

#### **The interior project must:**

- Be an approved project listed below under "Eligible Costs" (see page 3).
- In the case of an addition, a portion of the project costs may be eligible where these costs are associated with the existing building. Contractor estimates must itemize these costs separately.

#### **The following requirements apply to all grants in the program:**

- Property taxes must not be overdue.
- Municipal utility bills must not be overdue.
- The property must not be subject to an unresolved enforcement order, such as a Stop Order.
- The applicant must not be party to a legal dispute with the Municipality.
- All municipal permits and permissions have been received, closed and without deficiencies.

These will be confirmed at the time the applicant requests reimbursement for their project.

## ELIGIBLE COSTS

Grants shall be solely used for the project as described in the grant agreement.

#### **The following costs are eligible:**

- Professional fees, including project management, design and engineering, to a maximum of 15 per cent of eligible project costs.
  - Professional fees paid before there is an executed agreement are eligible if incurred after June 29, 2020, necessary to obtain contractor estimates or permits, and directly related to the project. This is done at the applicant's risk.
- Direct project labour costs.
- Materials and supplies including shipping, freight and the rental of tools and equipment.
- Municipal planning permit fees (development permits, building permits and trades permits).
- Goods and Service Tax (GST).

**The following project types are eligible:**

The Interior Improvements Grant supports specific types of renovation work as listed in **Table 1**.

**Table 1: Eligible Project Types**

Eligible projects	Project examples
Reconfiguring an existing unit(s)	Subdividing or combining units, demising new rooms
Accessibility upgrades	Barrier-free washrooms, grab/handrails, ramps and lifts
Fire safety upgrades	Sprinkler systems, fire rating and fire separation and fire-rated doors
Electrical upgrades	New electrical panels, relocating outlets and interior lighting
Plumbing upgrades	Upgraded fixtures/hardware, touchless fixtures
HVAC/ventilation upgrades	New furnaces, air conditioning units, make-up air units and associated ductwork
Energy efficiency upgrades	New doors and windows
General upgrades to the interior: painting, drywall, flooring, ceilings, interior doors, finishes (trim, baseboards), millwork, and fixed cabinetry and countertops <b>(New in Phase 2)</b>	Basic improvements to improve function and aesthetics, upgrades to flooring to meet health requirements, reception counters and staff kitchenettes (if permanent)

**The following costs are not eligible:**

- Costs associated with time and/or labour performed directly by the applicant.
- Work considered to be routine maintenance.
- Incidental costs, such as gas, tools (purchases) or other consumables.
- Insurance and warranty.
- Non-specific costs, including profit and contingencies.
- Cost overruns or changes to the project scope that have not been pre-approved.
- Costs associated with window treatments, including tinted, mirrored or windows. Exceptions may be made for Restricted Commercial uses and others uses, at the discretion of the Municipality. A pre-application meeting is strongly recommended.
- Vinyl wraps, security bars and rolling shutters.

**Important things to know**

- Interior demolition and landfill tipping fees associated with the above projects is eligible.
- Costs to decorate or otherwise finish the interior are not eligible. This includes displays, furniture, appliances, lightbulbs, window coverings, interior signage and other items that are movable or non-permanent.
- Applicants must identify projects not associated with flood-restoration. Applicants must demonstrate how the project constitutes an improvement over pre-flood conditions.
- In the case of exterior window replacements, new windows should remain transparent at the ground-level. This is intended to encourage visibility into storefronts. However, where a non-transparent window is necessary for a restricted commercial use or other use, the Municipality may consider these costs at its discretion. A pre-application meeting is strongly recommended.
- Costs that are not specifically mentioned may be considered at the sole discretion of the Manager of Planning and Development.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

The following information applies to all grants in the program:

- Funding is provided on a first-come, first-served basis.
- Grants are not retroactive (costs incurred prior to signing the agreement with the Municipality are not eligible), with the following exceptions:
  - Professional fees, as described on page 3.
- Recipients will enter into an agreement with the Municipality that sets out the terms and conditions of participation in the program.
- Recipients may use the contractor of their choice. Contractors must hold a valid municipal business licence and insurance. The Municipality encourages applicants to use local contractors and trades people. Where practicable, at least one estimate should be provided by a local contractor. A local contractor is one located within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.
- Reimbursement is based on the lower of the two contractor estimates submitted and/or the final invoice (if lower).
- Recipients are responsible for all payments to contractors or suppliers.
- Recipients are expected to maintain their projects, display program recognition (e.g., certificate), and participate in program monitoring activities such as surveys.
- The Municipality reserves the right to determine applicant eligibility on a case-by-case basis.

### **Important information about flood-impacted buildings**

- The program is not intended to replace personal insurance or provincial disaster recovery assistance, or cover losses or damages caused by the 2020 Spring Flood. For example, the costs for clean-up, demolition, landfill tipping fees, and returning buildings to pre-existing conditions.
- Where buildings have been damaged:
  - Applicants must demonstrate that projects constitute an improvement from pre-flood conditions.
  - Applicants shall not submit an application for improvements they know will be, or likely to be, recovered entirely by personal insurance proceeds, provincial disaster recovery assistance or similar recovery funding.
  - Applicants shall advise the Municipality if they receive personal insurance proceeds, provincial disaster recovery assistance or similar recovery funding that would render the grant redundant.
- The Municipality reserves the right to reimburse 50 per cent or the balance of project costs, whichever is less, where an applicant confirms that they received insurance proceeds, provincial disaster recovery assistance or similar funding that renders the grant or a portion of the grant redundant.

### **Community Futures**

The Municipality has partnered with Community Futures Wood Buffalo. Community Futures is a non-profit organization that provides business supports to small businesses. Applicants who need project financing but do not qualify from funding from a financial institution are encouraged to contact Community Futures at 780.791.0330 or <http://woodbuffalo.albertacf.com>.



*2020 Program participant. Before renovations (above) and after renovations (below). Photographs courtesy of Red Arrow Motor Coach.*

## KEY DATES AND TIMELINES

- Complete applications must be received on or before **4:30 PM on March 31, 2022**.
- Projects must complete construction within 12 months of the date on the executed agreement.
- The Municipality may consider extensions to the above timeframes if recipients demonstrate that delays are due to circumstances beyond their control and/or seasonal construction limitations. Recipient must submit requests for extensions prior to the deadline.
- Recipients must notify the Community Partnerships and Initiatives (CPI) Branch when their project is complete.
- Recipients must provide documentation to begin the reimbursement process within three months of completing construction.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

For questions, pre-application meetings or to apply, please contact:

### **Community Partnerships and Initiatives (CPI) Branch**

Community and Protective Services Department  
Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo  
9909 Franklin Avenue  
Fort McMurray, AB, T9H 2K4  
[incentives@rmwb.ca](mailto:incentives@rmwb.ca)  
780.743.7000 (PULSE LINE)

For general permitting inquiries, please contact:

### **Community Development Planning Branch**

Planning and Development Department  
Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo  
309 Powder Drive  
Fort McMurray, AB, T9K 0M3  
[current.planning@rmwb.ca](mailto:current.planning@rmwb.ca)  
780.799.8695

# APPLICATION PROCESS

## STEP 1: PLANNING YOUR PROJECT

- Before applying, please contact the CPI Branch to confirm project eligibility.
- Applicants are **strongly encouraged** to participate in a pre-application meeting to obtain early advice on the eligibility of their projects. Virtual meeting options are available.

To schedule a pre-application meeting, please contact [incentives@rmwb.ca](mailto:incentives@rmwb.ca)

### *Important things to know*

- Applicants (property owner or tenants with authorization) may authorize a designated contact to manage their applications.
- Allocate time to plan your project. Expect delays in obtaining contractor estimates around holiday times.
- Contractor estimates must be comparable, itemize all portions of the project and include professional fees, labour and materials costs. Lump-sum estimates will not be considered.
- 75 per cent of approved applications in 2020 involved a pre-application meeting. Nearly half of refused applications did not involve a pre-application meeting.

## STEP 2: APPLYING

- Only complete applications will be accepted by the CPI Branch.
- See the ***Interior Improvements Grant Application Form*** for the application checklist.
- Email the application form and supporting information to: [incentives@rmwb.ca](mailto:incentives@rmwb.ca).

### *Important things to know*

- A complete application contains all the documents listed on the application form.
- Where buildings or units were impacted by the 2020 Spring Flood, please ensure your application clearly demonstrates how the project will be an improvement rather than a return to pre-flood building conditions.
- Where projects are undertaken simultaneously with an addition to the building, contractor estimates should itemize the work so that staff can identify eligible costs (i.e., existing portions) from ineligible costs (i.e., new portions).

## STEP 3: APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

- The CPI Branch will review your application for general completeness and quality. Applications will then be referred to Planning and Development for detailed review.
- Planning and Development will contact applicants if revisions or additional information is required.
- The final decision to award or refuse an application is made by the Manager of Planning and Development.
- The CPI Branch will inform applicants of the decision. Applicants who are awarded a grant will be provided with an agreement that sets out the terms and conditions of participating in the program. Applicants must sign and return the agreement to the CPI Branch within 20 business days. Extensions may be granted if recipients require more time to secure financing.

### *Important things to know*

- All decisions are final. There are no appeals.
- Application acceptance by the CPI Branch does not guarantee that the project will receive municipal permits at the construction stage.

## STEP 4: OBTAINING YOUR PERMITS

- Before construction may begin, applicants must obtain all necessary permits and authorizations.

- Applicants may apply for permits before, during or after applying for a grant.
- The following permits and authorizations may be required:
  - ☐ **Development Permit** – A development permit may be required. A development permit (change of use) is required if the building use will change. Development permits are issued by the Community Development Planning Branch in Planning and Development.

Note: All development must adhere to the *Land Use Bylaw*, even if permits are not required.

- ☐ **Building Permits and Trades Permits** – Building permits and trades permits may be required. Permits are required for most major construction projects, including renovations, alterations, repairs, relocations, demolitions or the change of use in an existing building. Trades permits are required for electrical, plumbing or venting work. Permits are issued by the Safety Codes Services Branch in Planning and Development.
- ☐ **Business Licence** – All businesses operating in the Municipality require a valid municipal business licence, unless exempt. Business Licences are issued by the Community Development Planning Branch in Planning and Development.

### **Important things to know**

- Applicants must contact the CPI Branch if their project changes as a result of permitting or construction. A revised agreement may be required.
- Professionally-prepared plans (above what is required under the program) may be required to obtain development permits and building permits.

## **STEP 5: CONSTRUCTION**

- Construction may begin once the agreement is executed (signed by the Municipality and recipient) and permits are received.
- Construction must be completed in a timely manner. For deadlines, see page 6.
- Once construction is complete (including any inspections), applicants must notify the CPI Branch.

## **STEP 6: REIMBURSEMENT**

- Applicants must contact the CPI Branch to initiate reimbursement within three months of project completion.
- Separate documentation is required for each grant application.
- Applicants must provide the following information to the CPI Branch:
  - 'After' photos,
  - Original detailed invoices,
  - Permit numbers, and
  - Any other documentation required by the agreement.
- The Municipality will:
  - Complete a site visit to confirm that the project is complete.
  - Verify that property taxes and utility bills are current and paid, that the property is not subject to an unresolved enforcement order, and that the applicant is not subject to a legal dispute with the Municipality, and
  - Verify that all necessary municipal permits were received and are closed and without deficiencies.
- The Municipality will reimburse applicants for eligible costs in accordance with the agreement once the terms and conditions of the agreement have been satisfied. The Municipality reserves the right to determine final qualification upon the final inspection of the completed project.

### **Important things to know**

- Applicants are reimbursed for eligible costs based on the lowest estimate and/or final invoice.
- The Municipality will only reimburse applicants for eligible costs.

## DEFINITIONS

**Agreement** means the agreement between the Recipient and the Municipality that sets out the terms and conditions for participating in the Program. The Agreement must be executed (i.e., signed by the Recipient and the Municipality) before any Grant-related works begin.

**Applicant** means a property owner or a tenant (with the property owner's permission) who submits an application.

**Commercial** means a building intended to accommodate the buying or selling of goods and services. Commercial developments include establishments used for the purposes of offices, retail stores, personal services, business services, food and beverage, and entertainment such as theatres and cinemas.

**CPI Branch** means the Community Partnerships and Initiatives Branch (Community Investment Program (CIP)) of the Community and Protective Services Department, which is responsible for the financial administration of the Program.

**Downtown** means the area identified on the Program Area Map on page 10.

**Downtown Revitalization Incentive Program** ("the Program") means a short-term grant program for property owners and businesses in Downtown. The Program is intended to encourage and support the Downtown's revitalization.

**Grant** means a transfer of monies from the Municipality to a Recipient for a project or purpose according to the requirements outlined in the Downtown Revitalization Incentives Program Administrative Procedure Phase 2 FIN-320-P01 ("Administrative Procedure").

**Institutional** means a building developed to serve a community's social, educational, health, cultural, faith and recreational needs.

**Mixed-use** means a building with Commercial uses at-grade and Residential uses above.

**Municipality** means the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.

**Phase 1** means the initial pilot project of the Program commencing June 29, 2020 with an end date of December 31, 2020.

**Phase 2** means the updated and extended Program commencing April 2021 with an end date of March 31, 2022.

**Program** means the Downtown Revitalization Incentives Program (Phase 2).

**Program Guidelines** means a document or documents that provides a detailed explanation of the Program to guide Applicants through the application process. The Program Guidelines provide an overview of the Program and Grants, and sets out eligibility, application and assessment processes, and design standards, where applicable.

**Recipient** means an Applicant that is approved by the Municipality to receive a Grant.

**Residential** means a building that is regularly used by its occupants as a permanent place of abode, which is made one's home as opposed to one's place of business, and which has housekeeping and cooking facilities for its occupants only.

**Restricted Commercial** means a Commercial use that may involve alcohol, nudity or gambling. Restricted Commercial includes, but is not limited to, adult entertainment facilities, casinos, cannabis retail stores, drinking lounges and nightclubs.

# PROGRAM AREA MAP

