

# **DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION**

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## **INCENTIVES PROGRAM**

**PROGRAM GUIDELINES FOR THE  
INTERIOR IMPROVEMENTS GRANT**

**May 2022 to April 2023**



**REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY  
OF WOOD BUFFALO**

## INTERIOR IMPROVEMENTS GRANT

### GRANT OVERVIEW

The Interior Improvements Grant provides funding to encourage property owners and tenants to make upgrades to the downtown's Commercial, Institutional and Mixed-use building stock. The grant focuses on improvement projects that:

- Reconfigure existing units to better meet current needs.
- 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.



### GRANT VALUE

The 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 the Program.

As a matching grant, the Municipality pays for half (50 per cent) of the eligible costs to the maximum allowed by the Grant. As a reimbursement grant, applicants receive funding after their projects are complete and verified by the Municipality.



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

## ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES

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 project must:

- Be an eligible project type listed in Table 1.
- 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.

### How the grant can be used:

- In multi-unit buildings, grants may be shared between units. For example, two or more tenants may each complete a renovation project, to a maximum of \$100,000 per building. Each application must be to a different unit/space and not exceed a grant of \$50,000.

### If your building received this grant previously:

- Single occupant buildings that received a grant previously are ineligible to re-apply.
- Multi-unit buildings that received a grant previously may be eligible to apply if funding remains.
- Please inquire if you are unsure of your building's prior participation.

## APPROVED USES OF GRANT FUNDS

Eligible improvement ideas are provided in Table 1. General eligible costs and ineligible costs are provided in Table 2. Grants shall be solely used for the project as described in the grant agreement. A pre-application meeting is strongly recommended.

**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 fixtures.
Plumbing upgrades	✓ Upgraded fixtures/hardware, touchless fixtures and hot water tanks.
HVAC/ventilation upgrades	✓ New furnaces, air conditioning units, make-up air units and associated ductwork.
Energy efficiency upgrades	✓ New doors and windows and solar panels.
General upgrades to the interior	✓ Basic improvements to improve function and aesthetics, including painting, drywall, flooring, ceilings, interior doors, finishes (trim, baseboards), millwork, and fixed cabinetry and countertops.

**Table 2: Eligible and Ineligible Costs**

Associated Eligible Costs	Costs not Covered by the Grant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Professional fees, including project management, design and engineering, to a maximum of 15 per cent of eligible project costs.</li> <li>✓ Municipal planning permit fees (development permits, building permits, and trade permits).</li> <li>✓ Direct project labour costs.</li> <li>✓ Interior demolition and landfill tipping fees.</li> <li>✓ Materials and supplies including shipping and freight.</li> <li>✓ Rental of tools and equipment.</li> <li>✓ Goods and Service Tax (GST).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Work considered to be routine maintenance</li> <li>✗ Insurance and warranties</li> <li>✗ Costs associated with time and/or labour performed directly by the applicant.</li> <li>✗ Non-specific costs, including overheads, profit and contingencies.</li> <li>✗ Costs associated with window treatments that obscure street-level windows, doors and entrances. Exceptions may be made for Restricted Commercial uses, and other uses at the discretion of the Municipality</li> <li>✗ Vinyl wraps, security bars and rolling shutters on windows and doors.</li> <li>✗ Incidental costs, such as gas, tools (purchases) *or other consumables</li> <li>✗ Costs associated with cost overruns.</li> <li>✗ Changes to the project scope that have not been pre-approved.</li> <li>✗ Structural repairs.</li> <li>✗ Finishings including displays, furniture, appliances, lightbulbs, window coverings, and other items that are moveable or non-permanent.</li> </ul>
<p>Costs that are not specifically mentioned may be considered at the discretion of the Manager of Planning and Development Department.</p>	

## GENERAL INFORMATION

The following information applies to all grant types in the Program

### Who Can Apply?

- Property owners.
- Tenants, with the authorization of the property owner(s).

### Grant Funding

- Funding is provided on a first-come, first-served basis.
- Buildings may receive grants under more than one grant stream. Separate applications are required.
- Grants are not retroactive. Cost incurred before applying and signing an agreement are not eligible. Some exceptions apply:
  - Professional fees related to the project if incurred after June 29, 2020.
  - Municipal planning permit fees (development permits, building permits and trade permits)
  - For the Beautification and Patio Grants, eligible costs incurred up to six months before applying. Any expenses incurred before an application is approved is done at the Applicant's risk.
- Recipients will enter into an agreement with the Municipality that sets out the terms and conditions of participation in the Program.

### Contractors and Estimates

- The Municipality encourages applicants to use local contractors. Visit [www.rmwb.ca/incentives](http://www.rmwb.ca/incentives) for a list of community resources.
- Where two contractor estimates are required, the lower of the two will be used to determine the grant value.
- Recipients may use the contractor of their choice to undertake their projects.
- Selected contractors must hold a valid municipal business licence.
- Recipients are responsible for all payments to contractors and suppliers.
- Contractor estimates must be comparable and itemize all portions of the project (e.g., professional fees, labour, materials, and permits). Lump sum estimates will not be considered.

### Projects in Flood-impacted Buildings and Properties

- The Program is not intended to replace personal insurance or provincial disaster recovery assistance, or cover losses or damages caused by the 2020 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 apply for improvements they know will be, or likely to be, recovered entirely by personal insurance proceeds, provincial disaster recovery assistance or similar recovery funding.

### Reimbursement

- Reimbursement is based on the lower of two contractor estimates and/or the final invoice (if lower).
- The following will be verified by the Municipality once the project is complete:
  - Property taxes must be current and paid;
  - Municipal utility bills must be current and paid;
  - The property is not subject to an unresolved enforcement order, such as a Stop Order;
  - The applicant is not party to a legal dispute with the Municipality; and
  - All municipal permits and permissions have been received, are closed and are without deficiencies.

### Key Dates and Timelines

- Complete applications must be received on or before **4:30 PM on April 30, 2023**.
- 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 Program 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:

### **Downtown Revitalization Incentives Program**

Planning and Development Department  
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**

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)  
780.743.7000 (PULSE LINE)

# APPLICATION PROCESS

## STEP 1: PLANNING YOUR PROJECT

- Applicants are **strongly encouraged** to participate in a pre-application meeting to obtain early advice on project eligibility. Virtual meeting options are available.
- To schedule a meeting, email [incentives@rmwb.ca](mailto:incentives@rmwb.ca).

### *Important things to know*

- Allocate time to plan your project. Expect delays in obtaining contractor estimates around holiday times.
- To-scale and legible drawings are required. Improvements must be clearly marked all drawings.

## STEP 2: APPLYING

- Only complete applications will be referred for review. A complete application contains all the documents listed on the application form.
- See the application form for the document checklist. Forms are available at [www.rmwb.ca/incentives](http://www.rmwb.ca/incentives).
- Email the application form and supporting information to [incentives@rmwb.ca](mailto:incentives@rmwb.ca).

## STEP 3: APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

- Applications are reviewed on an ongoing basis and in the order received. For current processing times, please inquire to [incentives@rmwb.ca](mailto:incentives@rmwb.ca).
- Applicants will be contacted 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 Department.
- All decisions are final. There are no appeals.
- Application acceptance 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.
- 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 (Planning and Development Department).  
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 (Planning and Development Department).
  - 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 (Planning and Development Department).

### *Important things to know*

- Applicants must contact the Program if their project changes substantially during permitting or construction. A revised agreement may be required.
- Professionally prepared plans (above what is required under the Program) may be required to obtain permits.

## **STEP 5: CONSTRUCTION**

- Construction may begin once the agreement is executed (signed by the Municipality and Recipient) and permits are obtained.
- Once construction is complete (including any permit inspections), applicants must notify the Program.

## **STEP 6: REIMBURSEMENT**

- Applicants must contact the Program to initiate reimbursement within three (3) months of project completion.
- Separate documentation is required for each grant application.
- Applicants must provide the following information:
  - 'After' photos
  - Original detailed invoices and receipts/proof of payment
  - Permit numbers
  - Any other documentation required by the agreement
- The Municipality will:
  - Complete a site visit to confirm that construction 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, 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 inspection of the completed project.



## DEFINITIONS

**Agreement** means the agreement between the Recipient and the Municipality that sets out the terms and conditions for participating in the Program.

**Apartment Building** means development comprised of three or more dwelling units contained within a building having shared entrance facilities, in which the dwellings are arranged in any horizontal or vertical configuration, and which does not conform to the definition of any other Residential use.

**Apartment or Extended Stay Hotel** means a business that complies with the Income Tax Act and provides self-contained living quarters contained within a building or a part of a building having a principal common entrance. The living quarters are suitable for use by one or more persons, and are furnished, include cooking facilities, and dishes and linen. Maid service, telephone service, or desk service is provided. Check-in facilities are usually provided off-site, at a partner Hotel.

**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, Hotels, Apartment or Extended Stay Hotel, and entertainment such as theatres and cinemas.

**Downtown** means the area identified in the Program Area Map (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 FIN-320-P01 ("Administrative Procedure").

**Hotel** means a business that complies with the Income Tax Act and provides rooms and suites for short-term, temporary, sleeping accommodation. A Hotel has an on-site check in facility, and generally offers guests a range of complementary services and amenities such as parking, accessory eating and drinking establishments, meeting rooms, personal service shops, and general retail shops.

**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.

**Property** means a single titled lot or multiple adjoining titled lots owned by the same individual or entity.

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

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

# PROGRAM AREA MAP

