



Downtown Revitalization Incentives Program

Façade Improvement Grant
Program Guidelines
May 2024 to May 2026



REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY
OF WOOD BUFFALO

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INTRODUCTION

Thank you for your interest in the Downtown Revitalization Incentives Program (Program). The program supports the revitalization and transformation of the downtown into a safe and welcoming place where people want to spend time. The Program offers grants to eligible buildings to help improve exteriors (façades), interiors, and the surrounding premises areas (lands), and to install murals to create interest.

These guidelines include information on eligible projects, application details, and program requirements. Anyone interested in applying for a grant is strongly encouraged to book a pre-application meeting. Program staff will be able to help you navigate the application process, ensure projects are eligible, and answer any questions. To book a pre-application meeting, please contact Pulse (780.743.7000) or email: incentives@rmwb.ca.

Grant objectives

The Façade Improvement Grant provides a financial incentive for improvements to the façades of existing eligible buildings. The grant is intended to:

- enhance the aesthetic qualities of downtown buildings.
- create attractive and inviting business storefronts.
- promote accessibility and safety improvements as part of facade improvement projects.

Grant options

Funding is provided as a matching reimbursement grant. As a matching grant, the Municipality pays 50% of eligible costs up to the maximum allowed by each type of grant. As a reimbursement grant, applicants receive funding after projects are complete and verified by the Municipality. There are three (3) options depending on the scale of the improvements you are looking to make, with each option being associated with different grant amounts:

- Storefront Improvement Projects (see page 6)
- Simple Facade Improvement Projects (see page 7)
- Comprehensive Facade Improvement Projects (see page 8)

Supporting accessibility and safety

The Program supports applicants to include accessibility and safety (crime prevention) improvements. The Program also supports the Municipality's Age Friendly Work Plan's goal of "*establishing accessible and universal design of programs and facilities as a framework of best practices.*" Additional funding may be provided. Refer to page 9 for eligible projects and resources to help you assess, identify, and plan your project.



Project criteria

The building is:

- A commercial, institutional, mixed-use, or apartment building.
- Located in the program area. View the map at rmwb.ca/incentives.

The project:

- Meets the minimum design requirements outlined in these guidelines.



	Grant Value	Number of Major Improvements	Use of a Design Professional
STOREFRONT	Up to \$5,000 per storefront unit	No minimum	Optional
SIMPLE	Up to \$15,000 per building	1 or more 	Optional
COMPREHENSIVE	Up to \$65,000 per building	4 or more 	Required

Figure 1: Facade Project Design Requirements

Eligible and ineligible costs

Eligible costs include:

- Professional fees, including project management, design, and engineering, to a maximum of 15% of eligible costs.
- Municipal planning permit fees.
- Direct project labour costs.
- Rental of tools and equipment.
- Goods and Service Tax (GST).

Ineligible costs include:

- Routine maintenance.
- Labour performed by the applicant.
- Purchases of tools and consumables.
- Non-specific costs, profit, insurance, and warranties.
- Costs associated with overruns.
- Window treatments that enclose or obscure street-level windows. For example, tinted, frosted, and mirrored windows, vinyl wraps, security bars, and rolling shutters.
- Roof or structural repairs.
- Façades on accessory buildings
- Charges associated with ongoing security system monitoring and service fees.



General program requirements

Please review the key terms and conditions of the program as outlined in the Downtown Revitalization Incentives Program council policy (FIN-320): rmwb.ca/incentives.

- Funding is provided on a first-come, first-serve basis.
- Applying for a grant does not guarantee approval or that projects can obtain the necessary permits.
- Grants are not retroactive. Costs incurred before applying for a grant and signing an agreement are not eligible. Some exceptions apply:
 - Professional fees related to the project if incurred after January 1, 2024.
 - Municipal planning permit fees (e.g. development permits, building permits, and trade permits).
- If approved, recipients will enter into an agreement with the Municipality that sets out the terms and conditions of participation in the Program.
- **Construction must be completed within 18 months of the date of your agreement.** Requests for additional time must be received before the deadline has passed.
- Applicants may use the contractor(s) of their choice. Applicants are responsible for paying contractors and for verifying business license requirements.
- Please notify program staff if your project changes during construction or permitting. Changes must be approved and an amendment to the agreement may be required. Extensions and changes may be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- The following will be verified at the reimbursement stage:
 - Property taxes are current and paid.
 - Municipal utility bills are current and paid.
 - The applicant is not in a legal dispute with the Municipality.
 - All necessary permits and permissions for the project have been obtained.
- Reimbursement is provided upon the satisfactory completion of the project.



OPTION 1: STOREFRONT PROJECTS

The program supports the creation of welcoming and inviting storefronts that help showcase goods and services. A “Storefront” means a unit located at the street-level and having large windows for displaying goods and services available inside.

This option is intended for buildings containing multiple storefront units whereby each occupant (tenant) may wish to enhance their storefront area. In buildings that contain multiple storefront units, each unit may be eligible to apply.

Grant value

- 50% matching grant up to \$5,000 per street-level storefront unit. For example, a project valued at \$10,000 would be eligible for a grant of \$5,000.
- Projects that include accessibility improvements may be eligible for a further \$2,500 (50%).
- Projects that include safety (crime prevention) improvements may be eligible for a further \$2,500 (50%).

Project criteria

Applicants should be:

- The occupant (or tenant) of the unit. Property owner permission to apply is not required.

The building is:

- A commercial, institutional, or mixed-use building.
- Located in the program area. View the map at rmwb.ca/incentives.

The storefront unit is:

- Located at street-level with large windows for displaying goods and services available inside.

Projects must:

- Demonstrate a variety of improvements to achieve an inviting and welcoming storefront. Refer to page 9 for improvement ideas and page 16 for sample projects.
- Focus on the street-level portion of the building.
- At the time of reimbursement, your storefront must:
 - Be clean, tidy, and well-maintained.
 - Remove any obstructions (appliances, storage, vinyl wraps, etc.) from storefront windows.
 - Meet the Land Use Bylaw requirements for any window signs.



OPTION 2: SIMPLE PROJECTS

The Simple Façade option is intended for property owners looking to make one or more major improvements to their building, but which do not necessarily transform the whole building. For example, the installation of an accessible ramp or new lighting throughout the facade. The use of a design professional is encouraged but not required.

Grant value

- 50% matching grant up to \$15,000 per building. For example, a project valued at \$30,000 would be eligible for a grant of \$15,000.
- Projects that include accessibility improvements may be eligible for a further \$5,000 (50%).
- Projects that include safety (crime prevention) improvements may be eligible for a further \$5,000 (50%).

Project criteria

Applicant should be:

- The property owner.
- In a single occupant building, a tenant may apply (with the property owner's permission).

The building is:

- A commercial, institutional, mixed-use, or apartment building.
- Located in the program area. View the map at rmwb.ca/incentives.

Projects must:

- Focus on key facades that front the public road or contain the main entrance.
- Demonstrate **one (1) or more major improvements**. Refer to page 9 for improvement ideas and page 16 for sample projects.

Limits of participation:

- Buildings with a previously approved grant for a simple façade project may be eligible to upgrade to a comprehensive façade project.



OPTION 3: COMPREHENSIVE PROJECTS

The Comprehensive Façade option is intended for the property owner looking to make significant upgrades to their building. Projects must include four (4) or more major improvements and achieve a high impact. A design professional must be involved in the design of the project.

Grant value

- 50% matching grant up to \$65,000 per building. For example, a project valued at \$130,000 or more would be eligible for a grant of \$65,000.
- Projects that include accessibility improvements may be eligible for a further \$5,000 (50%).
- Projects that include safety (crime prevention) improvements may be eligible for a further \$5,000 (50%).

The program encourages collaboration. Where two different applicants with abutting buildings have demonstrated an effort to submit coordinated façade designs, the program may provide a bonus of 5% of project costs (or up to \$3,750) per application.

Project criteria

Applicant should be:

- The property owner.
- In a single occupant building, a tenant may apply (with the property owner's permission).

The building is:

- A commercial, institutional, mixed-use, or apartment building.
- Located in the program area. View the map at rmwb.ca/incentives.

Projects must:

- Focus on key facades that front the public road or contain the main entrance.
- Demonstrate **four (4) or more major improvements**. Refer to page 9 for improvement ideas and page 16 for sample projects.
- Incorporate improvements into a comprehensive design, rather than simply meeting a minimum number of major improvements. Projects will be reviewed for their quality. The information contained in these guidelines will be used to evaluate the project.
- Be designed by a qualified design professional.

Limits of participation:

- Buildings with a previously approved comprehensive façade grant are ineligible to receive further funding for simple or comprehensive façade projects. Individual storefronts may be eligible to apply under the Storefront Projects option.



ELIGIBLE PROJECTS AND DESIGN IDEAS

This section provides design guidance and potential improvement. Improvements are organized under:

- Ideas for any façade projects,
- Safety improvements,
- Associated project costs, and
- Major improvements.

Ideas for any project:

All façade projects can select improvements from this section. These include easy improvements to activate your storefront, improve safety, and general costs that your project may incur.



Ideas to activate your storefront

Small-scale improvements can help create unique and inviting storefronts and set your business apart from others. Activating your storefront starts with improvements that signal to passers by that the business is open and welcoming to new customers.

A combination of improvements should be considered to increase curb appeal.



Ideas to activate your storefront



Ideas to improve safety



Other eligible costs

Project Examples Could Include:

- Planters and hanging baskets (durable)
- A-board (sandwich) and menu board signs
- Small window decals (e.g., business name, hours of operation)
- Decorative lighting for storefront windows (e.g., holiday string lights)
- Bistro table and chair sets for exterior daytime use
- Amenities such as benches, and bicycle racks on private property





Ideas to improve safety

The Program recognizes that downtown safety and crime prevention are priorities. Well-designed façade upgrades can help contribute to a feeling of security and help enhance safety.

For information on what you can do to protect your business or property:

- Visit the RMWB webpage.
- Review the *Business Crime Prevention Kit* for tips.
- Register new security cameras on CAPTURE (Community Assisted Policing Through Use of Recorded Evidence).
- Email incentives@rmwb.ca to request a free visit from the RCMP to receive advice on your business or property.

For further information and links, see page 20.

Project Examples Could Include:

- New reinforced doors and door hardware that enhances security without impeding accessibility.
- Exterior security cameras (equipment only)
- Installing electronic access systems (equipment only). Examples include intercom systems, entry systems, and electrical lock release (or a combination of these)
- Installing shatter-proof security film on street-level windows or doors (films must be transparent)



Helping with other associated costs

Façade improvement projects may include additional costs, such as the use of a design professional. The Program recognizes this and supports other reasonably associated project costs.

Project Examples Could Include:

- Services of a professional designer (up to 15% of project costs)
- Removing window obstructions (e.g., displays, storage) and window films.
- Graffiti removal (if part of a larger project).
- Demolition costs and landfill fees.
- Preparation costs, such as power washing the façade prior to painting.

A note about window coverings

The program policy requires window treatments to be in accordance with the Land Use Bylaw. Street-level windows that remain clear and uncovered are preferred. However, window signs and coverings are permitted if they comply with the Land Use Bylaw.

Window coverings prevent people seeing into a building and may make them feel unwelcome. Window coverings also have a negative impact on the area and send a signal that it is unsafe and empty.

Non-compliant window coverings and any inside window obstructions (e.g., storage, appliances) must be removed upon completion of façade renovations. The program funds the removal of existing window coverings and the provision of clear shatterproof security films. New vinyl wraps, security bars, and rolling shutters are ineligible.



Major improvements

Simple and comprehensive projects must demonstrate a minimum number of **major improvements** from this section:

- Simple projects: one (1) or more.
- Comprehensive projects: four (4) or more.
- Storefront projects: optional.

1 Major improvement: enhancing accessibility

Accessibility improvements benefit all members of our community. The following are eligible and may qualify for additional funding:

- New power-assisted entrance doors.
- New entrance doors that are wider than the previous doors, including power-assisted hardware.
- Add power-assisted hardware to existing doors.
- Upgrading existing power-assisted hardware for greater functionality.
- Adding or substantially renovating an exterior ramp at the building entrance.
- Replacing the concrete immediately adjacent to the entrance to provide a level (smooth) surface into the building.

For further information and links, see page 20.

- 1 Enhancing accessibility
- 2 New business or building signage
- 3 Providing outdoor dining patios
- 4 Upgrading the building finishes
- 5 Enhancing lighting
- 6 Providing weather protection
- 7 Enhancing landscaping
- 8 Windows and doors upgrades
- 9 Demonstrating excellence in design



2 Major improvement: new business or building signage

Signage is important for business branding and for building identification. Funded signs should be permanent, be located on the façade, and be compliant with the Land Use Bylaw. Signs may or may not be illuminated. However, digital signs are ineligible.

Eligible improvements include:

- Provide a new business sign. For example, a sign cabinet or custom channel letter sign.
- Provide a building sign to identify the name of the building and address.

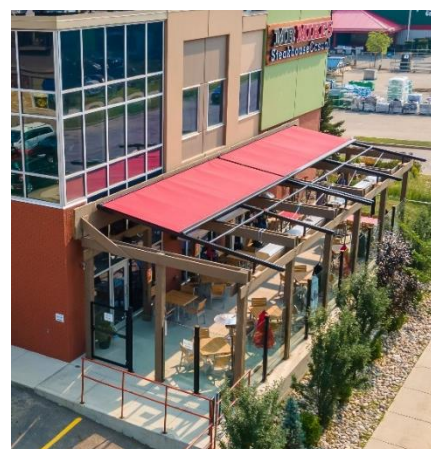


3 Major improvement: providing outdoor dining patios

Outdoor dining patios contribute to a lively street scene by providing an outdoor extension of a food establishment, such as a restaurant or café. Because patios typically involve permanent structures, new patios will be supported on private land where space allows.

Eligible improvements include:

- Costs associated with the construction of the patio, or substantial renovations to an existing patio, including paving and decking, partitions, and permanent weather protection.
- Patio tables and chairs, heaters, and similar items.



4 Major improvement: upgrading the building finishes

New building siding (cladding) should be selected to enhance the visual look and feel of the building while also prioritizing durability. Building siding is a significant investment and contributes to overall building longevity. Choosing the right finishes is as much an aesthetic exercise as it is functional.

Eligible improvements include:

- Providing new or replacement siding, including hardiboard, stucco and masonry, on key facades. Building code requirements may apply (i.e., commercial-grade materials). Painting is supported on side and rear facades.



- Painting may be supported on key facades where the creative use of paint colour and accents is proposed. Like-for-like or solid-colour repainting is not supported.

5 Major improvement: enhancing lighting

Lighting improvements enhance building aesthetics and may help deter crime.

Eligible improvements include:

- New or replacement lighting fixtures to provide decorative/accents, to emphasize signage, and serve to provide a greater sense of safety. The replacement of fixtures is supported where all or a substantial portion of fixtures are upgraded.

The following may qualify for safety funding:

- Lighting improvements that specifically address a deficiency, such as poorly illuminated entrances. This includes motion-sensor lighting.



6 Major improvement: providing weather protection

Weather protection along a building's façade creates a more comfortable environment for pedestrians and helps accentuate entrances and enhance the façade.

Eligible improvements include:

- New or replacement awnings, canopies, or similar structures.

Please be advised that structures that pose an overhead development on/above municipal land may require authorization.



7 Major improvement: enhancing landscaping

Landscaping may be included in a façade project where it is complementary to the façade project. The Municipality may direct applicants to apply for the Premises Improvement Grant where substantial landscaping improvements are proposed.

Eligible improvements include:

- New shrub and planting beds (to a FireSmart standard) located close to the building entrance(s) rather than dispersed across a site.



8 Major improvement: window and door upgrades

The Program encourages the creation of welcoming and inviting storefronts, which may include providing new windows and doors. Vibrant storefronts help activate the street and create opportunities for displaying goods and services. New street-level windows and doors should be clear and transparent. The intention of this element is that new façades will have all windows or doors replaced in a way that ensures a consistent look. This element is not intended to support the replacement of single windows that result in an inconsistent façade.

Eligible improvements include:

- Replacing blank street-level walls with new windows and doors.
- Enlarging existing storefronts by adding larger windows and doors.
- Replacing existing windows and doors for a consistent look and feel.

The following may qualify for accessibility funding:

- Refer to power-door operators and other improvements described under Major Improvement 1.

The following may qualify for safety funding:

- Reinforced doors that do not impede accessibility (i.e., have power-door operators).



Did you know? Transparent window contribute to a lively street scene and promote safety through greater visibility both in and out of businesses.



9 Major improvement: demonstrating excellence in design

Projects may incorporate other unique design improvements that contribute to design excellence.

Eligible improvements include:

- Construction of a faux façade for added façade height (see image).
- New or replacement architectural details. For example, restored cornices and columns.
- Other approaches to change the visual impact of the building that is contextually appropriate and exciting.



PROJECT EXAMPLES



Figure 2: Storefront Facade Example

Major Improvements (optional):

- 2** New business signage

Activating Your Storefront (mix and match)

- 1** Planters
- 2** Decals



Figure 3: Simple Facade Example

Major Improvements (simple projects – 1 or more):

- 2** New business signage
- 4** Upgrading the building finishes (painting)



Figure 4: Comprehensive Facade Example

Major Improvements (comprehensive projects – 4 or more):

- 4** Upgrading the building finishes (siding)
- 5** Enhancing lighting
- 6** Providing weather protection
- 7** Enhancing the landscaping (planters)
- 8** Windows and doors (new)



APPLYING AND REIMBURSEMENT

The following section outlines the steps to applying. The Program now provides a two-stage approval. A partial application may be accepted before applicants provide pricing. If approved, a conditional approval will be issued, which holds the funding for your project. Applicants will then have 90 days to submit pricing for review and full approval. If your building has received a grant previously, or if you are unsure, please inquire to confirm eligibility.

Step 1. Pre-application meeting

- A pre-application meeting is strongly recommended.
- At the pre-application meeting, a program administrator will review program requirements with you to ensure your project meets the spirit and intent of the Program.

Step 2. Preparing your application

- Prepare and submit the following as part of your application:
 - Completed application form (rmwb.ca/incentives)
 - Letter of intent
 - Photos showing the existing conditions
 - Façade drawings
 - Certificate of Title
 - Corporate search for the applicant
 - Letter of Authorization (for simple or comprehensive façade applications made by tenants). Where a Letter of Authorization is not required, tenants are responsible for obtaining permission from the property owner to undertake improvement projects.
- Refer to the application form for further details. The application form is available at: rmwb.ca/incentives. A blank letter of intent and letter of authorization are included with the application form.

Step 3. Preliminary review

- Program staff will review your application to confirm it meets basic eligibility requirements and the intent of the Program. Proposals may be referred for further internal review.
- Comments may be provided to you for information or to be addressed by your proposal (where a response is required, please respond within two weeks).
- If your project concept is approved, a **conditional approval letter** will be provided to you. The letter will:
 - Provide any comments received on your proposal.
 - Stipulate any conditions that must be met.
 - Identify the documents for you to submit or resubmit.
 - Provide the deadline to fulfill the conditions.
- You will have 90 days to submit the remainder of application documents, including pricing for your project.
- **Please note that applications that remain incomplete after 90 days will be automatically rejected and you need to reapply (subject to program deadlines and funding availability).**



Step 4. Completing your application

- Submit the remaining documents to complete your application.
 - Two (2) contractor estimates.
 - Any other information identified in the conditional approval letter.
- Please note that **contractor estimates** must:
 - Provide an itemized breakdown (lump-sum estimates may not be accepted).
 - Be provided by independent companies and arms-length from the applicant.
 - Be prepared on business letterhead, including company name and contact information.
 - Include all project costs (permits, project management).
- The Municipality reserves the right to request additional estimates.
- Some expenses are not eligible. Please refer to page 4 for eligible and ineligible costs.
- Program staff will review the application information to determine the grant value the project may receive.

Step 5. Funding Agreement

- After your project and pricing are approved, a grant agreement (contract) setting out the terms and conditions of participating in the program will be offered.
- **The agreement must be signed by the applicant within 30 calendar days. Please note that agreements that remain unsigned after 30 days will be automatically revoked.**
- Once the agreement is signed by all parties, you may apply for permits (if not already done so) and begin construction.

Step 6. Permits

- Permits must be applied for and approved before construction begins. You are responsible for ensuring all permits are obtained for your project.
- Many projects require permits. Your project may require:
 - Development permit
 - Building permit
 - Trades permits (e.g., electrical permit)
- If you are advised that your project does not require a permit, please provide written confirmation from the Municipality.
- For permitting advice, please contact RMWB Planning and Development Services:

Jubilee Building

Main floor, 9909 Franklin Avenue, Fort McMurray

Hours: Monday to Friday, 8:30 am to 4:30 pm

current.planning@rmwb.ca

780-743-7000 (Pulse)

Step 7. Reimbursement

- Please contact incentives@rmwb.ca once your project is complete. A copy of the Reimbursement Application Form will be provided.
- All work that requires a building permit must be inspected and the permits must be closed before reimbursement can begin. Partial reimbursement will not be provided.



- Gather your documents and submit a single email to incentives@rmwb.ca with the following:
 - Completed reimbursement application form.
 - A letter or email from the applicant confirming that the project is complete and requesting reimbursement.
 - Photos that show the completed project.
 - Invoices and receipts, including proof of payment.
 - Permit numbers or copies of all permits associated with the project.
 - A valid business license number for the operating business.
- Program staff may contact you to arrange a site visit to view the improvements. Please be advised that some exterior improvements such as landscaping must be inspected during the construction season (May 1 to October 31). Reimbursement may be delayed if the Program is unable to view improvements due to weather.

CONTACT

Downtown Revitalization Incentives Program

Planning and Development Services
Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo
9909 Franklin Avenue
Fort McMurray, AB, T9H 2K4
incentives@rmwb.ca
780.743.7000 (Pulse)



RESOURCES

Business Crime Prevention (2024).

<https://www.rmwb.ca/en/fire-and-emergency-services/crime-prevention.aspx>

CPTED Canada. (n.d.). Welcome to CPTED Canada. <https://cptedcanada.com/>

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CSA Group. (2023). CSA B651-23 Accessible Design for the Built Environment.

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Government of Canada. (2023). National Building Code – 2023 Alberta Edition (Alberta Building Code). <https://nrc-publications.canada.ca/eng/view/ft/?id=0316d953-0d55-4311-af69-cad55efec499>

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RMWB. (2021). Engineering Servicing Standards and Development Procedures.

<https://www.rmwb.ca/en/permits-and-development/engineering-servicing-standards.aspx>

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<https://www.rmwb.ca/en/fire-and-emergency-services/resources/Documents/FireSmart-Guide-to-Landscaping-Brochure.pdf>

Safety Codes Council and Government of Alberta. (2017). Barrier Free Design Guidelines (5th edition).

<http://open.alberta.ca/dataset/barrier-free-design-guide-fifth-edition/resource/4c80d928-85ba-4a75-ac90-12a92ce61b05>

