



**Business Improvement Grant (BIG) Program
Guidelines and Application
FY 24/25**

I. INTRODUCTION

The City of Amarillo has established the Business Improvement Grant Program (BIG Program), which will provide technical and financial assistance to property owners and/or business tenants seeking to renovate or restore their exterior signage, lighting, and commercial building façades. This program is intended to serve as an economic development instrument, aimed at assisting property and business owners/tenants within the established neighborhood plan areas. The program guidelines will support the utilization of funds that may be made available from additional sources for projects. These sources may be specific to certain neighborhoods and may create opportunities for owners to receive additional matching funds. City staff will continually evaluate and analyze the successes and areas in need of improvement and may adjust guidelines so that future efforts are more effectual and practical.

Additionally, the BIG Program is designed to support local businesses in improving their properties that promote the expansion and development of new and existing business enterprises while improving the appearance and visual character of the community. The BIG program is *not* designed to subsidize corrections to building code violations that prolong the life of a substandard commercial property. Any BIG Program project should strive toward increases in sales and/or revenue for the occupant or property owner.

The BIG Program will provide up to a fifty percent (50%) matching grant with a cap of \$20,000 per grant (\$40,000+ total project cost) for the funding of well-designed exterior improvements that create a more attractive storefront while creating, if necessary, an accessible entrance for the public. This may include, but is not necessarily limited to, the restoration of architectural details, improved windows and doors, well-proportioned signage, free-standing signage, lighting, and paint.

Because economic development improvements are being pursued within the neighborhood plan areas, applicants may also be eligible for additional incentives through the City's Neighborhood Empowerment Zone (NEZ) waiver and rebate program. Fees may be waived for sign permits, demolition, building permits, plan review, etc. Depending on the level of investment by the applicant, property tax abatements and sales tax rebates may also be available. Such incentives will be

identified on a case-by-case basis by City staff and will require a separate application.

City staff will be available to assist applicants through the conceptual stage at no cost to the applicants. Applicants, however, will be responsible to hire licensed architects and contractors to refine this conceptual design depending on the scope of work.

Improvements made prior to written approval of a proposed design will not be funded.

II. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The following criteria must be met for participation in the BIG Program:

1. Applicants must be commercial property owners or commercial tenants whose business is within the boundaries of the established neighborhood plan areas (see attached map);
2. Businesses may not utilize funds from this program to abate any conditions for which the City or State has already identified as a violation; likewise, funds from this program may not be utilized to meet any contractual obligations, such as developer obligations identified in a Chapter 380 agreement;
3. Tenants must have written approval from property owners to participate in program. Such documentation shall be provided to the City to be retained in the project file;
4. Applicants wishing to pursue grant funds for a sign project must permanently remove any nonconforming signage on the property as part of the improvement;
5. Property owners must be up to date on all property and sales tax requirements prior to participation in the program;
6. Applicants must comply with all State and local laws and regulations pertaining to licensing, permits, building code and zoning requirements.
7. Understanding that the overall objective of the BIG Program is to improve the exterior, visibility, and presentation of a property, the City has the discretion to decline an application while suggesting enhancements that would enable future acceptance.
8. A property is eligible for only one grant under this program per year.

III. DESIGN PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES

Improvements to be funded by the program must be compatible with the character and architecture of the individual building as well as meet city standards with regard to construction and design. Buildings with significant architectural qualities are strongly encouraged to restore and maintain these features. Improvements for buildings not having such architectural features should still be carefully considered and be seen as an opportunity to substantially enhance the appearance of the buildings and their streetscapes.

Projects proposed for historic buildings and signs shall complete the work in such a manner that it meets the Secretary of the Interior Standards. Additionally, historic buildings and signs, for the purposes of this program, are defined as those listed on the National Register of Historic Places, contribute to a National Register Historic District, or are identified as a medium or high priority through recent historic

survey efforts.

A. Eligible Improvements/Expenses

Improvements should be oriented to the pedestrian and provide visual interest both day and night. Effort should be made to facilitate access into the store and to create a store identity unique to the respective neighborhood. The following improvements are encouraged:

1. Restoration of details in historic buildings and signs, and removal of elements which cover architectural details;
2. Exterior paint improvements;
3. Window display areas which are appropriately scaled;
4. Window replacement and window framing visible from the street which are appropriately scaled to the building.
5. Monument or freestanding signage, as defined in § 4-2-2 of the City of Amarillo Code of Ordinances;
6. Additional signage that is attractively integrated into the architecture of the building, awnings or canopies, and entryways;
7. Lighting that is visually appealing and appropriately illuminates signage, storefront window displays, and recessed areas of a building façade, as guided by § 4-2-9 of the City of Amarillo Code of Ordinances;
8. Awnings or canopies that can be both functional and visually appealing;
9. Curbing, irrigation, approved trees, landscaping beds (not including planting material) not to exceed twenty percent (20%) of the project budget;
10. Resurfacing and/or restriping of parking lots visible from street, not to exceed fifty percent (50%) of the project budget;
11. New storefront construction, appropriately scaled within an existing building;
12. Removal of architectural barriers to public accessibility.

Other improvements beyond the above may be considered with written approval if they meet the objectives of the BIG Program.

B. Ineligible Improvements/Expenses:

1. Exterior improvements located on the sides or rear of the building not visible from a public right-of-way;
2. Interior improvements;
3. Playground or recreational equipment;
4. Structural changes;
5. Burglar bars;
6. Security Alarm System;
7. "In-Kind work";
8. New construction;
9. Furniture;
10. Architectural or other professional fees;
11. Asbestos testing, removal, abatement, or remediation; or
12. Improvements for which insurance funds are received.

C. Prior Improvements

Alterations and improvements made prior to receiving a "Notice to Proceed with Improvements" are not eligible for reimbursement.

D. Alterations

The applicant must agree not to change or alter the improved façade without prior written approval from the City for five (5) years from the date of the rebate check issued under the BIG Program, except in cases where routine maintenance (such as resurfacing a parking lot) is the original improvement. In cases involving historical and/or Route 66 preservation activities, the project may be subject to a preservation easement and/or additional stipulations assigned by the Texas Historical Commission.

IV. PROGRAM ASSISTANCE

A. Financial Assistance

Funding offered is a matching grant in which the BIG Program reimburses the applicant up to fifty percent (50%) of total project costs, up to a \$20,000 maximum match (\$40,000+ total project cost), for exterior improvements. However, architectural design fees may not be included in the total cost of eligible improvements.

The applicant's match may be in the form of other financial aid (i.e. grant or loan) received from other agencies, entities, or banks, but may not be "in-kind." The BIG Program will only reimburse applicants after the applicant has paid his/her architect, contractor and vendor(s) in full and after the project is determined to have been completed in accordance with program guidelines by City staff.

Exceptions to the reimbursement policy may be approved by the City Manager on a case-by-case basis. The City Manager may also approve payments to be made directly to an approved contractor. Such exceptions shall be made in writing and signed by all parties involved.

B. Technical Assistance

City staff can provide guidance on façade improvements specific to individual storefronts. The applicant will have a choice of hiring his/her own licensed architect to work on the project from start to completion or requesting that city staff assist first with the conceptual design of the façade. If the latter option is chosen, the applicant will still be expected to hire his/her own licensed architect, if necessary, to carry forth this conceptual design to completion of construction. City staff will also monitor the progress of the project to ensure compliance with the guidelines and standards set forth in this program and all applicable City Ordinances.

Early meetings with City staff are mandatory in order to help avoid misunderstanding as to the eligibility of proposals.

C. Application and Information

If you wish to participate in the BIG Program, please contact the City of Amarillo Assistant Director of Planning, Drew Brassfield at (806) 378-5241 office or by e-mail: drew.brassfield@amarillo.gov.

V. PROCEDURES

All prospective applicants must follow the procedures in the order outlined below. *Please note: applications will be reviewed on a “first-come, first-served” basis until funding is expended.*

1. Applicant contacts City staff to receive program application packet and determines which project(s) they wish to pursue.
2. Applicant meets with Planning Department staff for pre-application conference. Conference may include personnel from additional departments, depending on scope and content of proposed project.
3. A complete application is submitted through one of the methods listed on the application.
4. Complete applications that meet program criteria and development regulations will be reviewed and recommended for funding by City of Amarillo staff. The Neighborhood Planning Oversight Committee will serve as the Advisory Committee based up recommendations by staff scoring. The final funding decision will be made by the City Manager.
5. After approval, Planning Department staff sends applicant a “Notice to Proceed with Improvements” (NTP). Any work completed prior to receiving the NTP will not be reimbursed.
6. Applicant has sixty (60) days from receiving the NTP to begin implementation of approved improvements. Extension requests will be considered on an individual basis and must be submitted in writing. Approval or denial decisions rest solely with the Planning Department staff and will be provided in writing to the applicant.
7. Applicant notifies Planning Department staff once project is completed. Applicant must provide city staff with copies of all building permits and certifications received from improvement project. Architect and/or Planning Department staff certifies that the improvements comply with the final drawings and specifications.
8. Beginning with the 24/25 funding cycle, Applicants will be required to upload their business’ IRS Form W-9 into the City’s PaymentWorks system. Applicants must provide a valid email address where they will receive an invitation to upload the required documents. This step must be completed before reimbursement through this Program can processed.
9. The applicant must submit to the Planning Department staff copies of all paid invoices. The Planning Department reserves the right to require letters from the architect and/or contractors acknowledging full payment by the applicant. In the event an exception to financial assistance has been made, the signed, written agreement must also be submitted.

10. Planning Department staff processes request for reimbursement. Recipients will receive up to the amount detailed in the NTP letter, based on final paid invoices and within the limits set forth herein. Projects must be completed and reimbursement requests must be received by the City of Amarillo no later than one year after the date of the Notice to Proceed (NTP) letter.

The City of Amarillo reserves the right to make adjustments regarding conditions and parameters outlined in these guidelines.

VI. TERMINATION

The City of Amarillo reserves the right to terminate any agreement under the BIG Program if a participant is found to be in violation of any conditions set forth in these guidelines or if the project has been started prior to receiving the NTP from City staff.

If improvements, as presented in this application, are not completed within the stated timeline, the agreement is considered terminated and will result in the loss of granted funds.



Business Improvement Grant Program Application

Applications will be reviewed as they are received during the current application window and will only be processed once all required aspects are completed and submitted. If you have any questions regarding this application or process, please contact Assistant Director of Planning, Drew Brassfield at (806) 378-5241 or by email at drew.brassfield@amarillo.gov. **All fields must be completed prior to submission.**

- Applicant Name _____ Date _____
- Business Name _____
- Mailing Address _____
- Contact Phone _____ Email Address _____
- Building Owner (*if different from applicant*) _____
- Historical/Current Building Name _____
- Building's Physical Address _____

- Type of Work: (*check all that apply*)
 - Sign Exterior Painting Awning/Canopy Parking Lot/Resurface
 - Restoration of Arch Details Storefront windows/doors Exterior Lighting
 - Removal of Barriers to Public Accessibility Add Architectural Details
 - Historical/Route66 Preservation Effort Other: _____

- Please attach a separate narrative explaining the details of the planned improvements and provide digital "before" photographs of effected areas/features to be improved. Three written, itemized quotes/estimates must be included, as well. If the minimum three cannot be obtained, please explain, in detail, as part of the narrative.

- List Project Contractor/Architect (*attach copies of original quotes/estimates*):
 1. _____ Phone: _____
 2. _____ Phone: _____

- Total Estimate Cost of Proposed Grant Project: \$ _____

- Total Amount of Grant Funds Requested: \$ _____

Certification

The undersigned hereby represents and certifies to the best of his/her knowledge and belief that the information contained on this statement and any exhibits or attachments hereto are true and complete and accurately describe the proposed project, and the undersigned agrees to promptly inform the City of Amarillo Planning Department of any changes in the proposed project which may occur.

Signature of Building Owner

Date

Printed Name of Building Owner

Signature of Tenant (if same as Applicant)

Date

Printed Name of Tenant

Social Security Number or Tax ID Number of Applicant

Return completed application and all necessary documentation to:

By Mail:

City of Amarillo Planning Department
Attn: BIG Program
P.O. Box 1971
Amarillo, TX 79105-1971

By Email:

drew.brassfield@amarillo.gov

In-person:

Planning Department, 2nd floor
Simms Municipal Building
808 S. Buchanan
Amarillo, TX 79105

For Official Use Only

Date Received

Reviewer

Date Presented to Oversight Committee

Recommended for funding: Yes No

Approved by City Manager or designee

Date

Denied by City Manager or designee

Date



BIG Program Process Checklist

Use this form as a cover sheet and checklist to follow all steps needed to complete the BIG Program Application to receive approval.

- Contact City of Amarillo Planning Department to receive program application packet and determine which project(s) you wish to pursue.
- Schedule and meet with Planning Department staff for a conference prior to submitting application. Multiple meetings may be necessary. *Regular contact with City staff is required throughout the entire process.*
- Obtain itemized estimates/quotes from qualified architects/contractors. A minimum of three (3) are required. In the event the minimum number cannot be obtained, provide a detailed explanation as part of the narrative portion of the application.
- Complete the application and submit completed packet utilizing one of the methods listed on the application. A complete packet will include:
 - Application with all applicable blanks filled in.
 - Separate, attached detailed narrative of planned improvements.
 - Digital “before” pictures of effected areas/features to be improved.
 - Copies of three (3) original quotes/estimates.
 - All necessary signatures.
- City staff will review all documentation submitted and will forward all information to the Neighborhood Oversight Committee. If recommended for funding, information will be sent on to City Manager for final approval.
- Once final approval is obtained, City staff will send a “Notice to Proceed with Improvements” (NTP). Once the NTP is received, applicant must begin work within 60 days. All work associated with the project (including reimbursement requests) must be completed within one (1) year of receiving the NTP.
- Upon completion of the grant project, applicant will furnish all receipts/paid invoices and any requested documentation (i.e. letter acknowledging full payment from architect/contractor) with a completed Reimbursement Form.
- Applicants will receive an invitation to upload their business’ IRS Form W-9 into the PaymentWorks system to the email address provided on the application. Once received, City staff will process the reimbursement request within the established limits.