

2013 Reading Building Façade & Signage Improvement Program

I. INTRODUCTION

The Reading Economic Development Committee (EDC) has established a Building Façade & Signage Improvement Program (BFSI) which offers technical and financial assistance to property owners and tenants seeking to improve their building facade, signage, and exterior lighting.

The EDC oversees the Downtown Improvement and Events Trust (DIET) which provides specific funding for downtown and gateway improvements.

The BFSI objectives are as follows:

- Enhance the physical appearance of the building's façade, and the overall streetscape;
 - Install and/or update signage and lighting; and
 - Contribute to the overall appeal of downtown and gateways, creating "curb appeal"
- Drive continued economic commerce to individual stores in the downtown and gateway area.

II. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Building Façade & Signage Improvement Program provides grants and/or low interest loans to building and business owners. Grants will be up to 50% of the total project cost with a maximum of up to \$10,000.

The Reading Co-Operative Bank has partnered with the EDC to provide loan funds to aid businesses and building owners participating in the program. The Reading Co-Operative Bank will offer a loan term for up to 5 years, loan amounts from \$5,000 to \$25,000, and a loan rate and APR at 5%, with no closing costs*¹.

The EDC has also secured volunteer technical design assistance from local architects and collaborated with Boston architectural colleges to provide co-op opportunities for architectural students (the EDC supports this work by providing transportation and food stipends). Further, a permitting process has been established that streamlines the process, to the extent possible, and utilizes the volunteer designer to facilitate approvals, thereby minimizing time spent by the business owner on obtaining permits and project approvals. Furthermore, the Town of Reading has enthusiastically agreed to waive permit fees for all approved projects.

Targeted Improvements

For the duration of the BFSI Program, the EDC may grant a specific amount of the Downtown Improvement and Event Trust (DIET) for a targeted improvements. In 2013 the EDC allocated (amount TBD) for blade signs. All business owners during the calendar year 2013 are eligible for up to 50% reimbursement (up to \$500) of blade signs after they have filled out a sign permit application and provided a drawing of their blade sign. The EDC will review the application at their next regularly scheduled meeting and determine a grant award.

¹ Please see Reading Co-operative Banks' Commitment Letter

III. ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for the program, commercial buildings must be located within or close to the downtown area. The 2013 application process will open on September 3, 2013 and close on October 2, 2013. The selection of façade improvement projects will be based on the buildings' distress level and other factors. Applications will be reviewed and submitted to the BFSI committee for consideration. This Committee will consist of two members of the EDC, two members of the Community Planning and Development Commission (CPDC), and one member of the Board of Selectmen. If a chosen building is listed on the Historical Register, a member of the Historical Commission will be asked to consult.

Building owners and businesses leasing space are both eligible for the program funding. Tenants of commercial property must be able to provide documentation of the building owners consent for the improvements at the time of application. Tenants will also be required to provide a copy of their lease agreement, which indicates the lessee's responsibility for property renovation and repair prior to initiation of construction.

IV. ELIGIBLE TYPES OF IMPROVEMENTS

All improvements must be compatible with the character and architecture of the individual building, as well as the streetscape. All projects should adhere to the Design Guidelines of the Town of Reading Downtown Smartgrowth Overlay District as applicable.²

Eligible improvements may include, but are not limited to:

- Exterior cleaning and painting
- Removal of old signs, awnings, and other exterior clutter
- Application of new exterior plaster
- Repair of exterior brickwork or clapboard
- Installation of new entry doors and trim
- Installation of display windows and trim
- Installation of new canvas awnings over windows and entries
- Installation of new signage (including Blade signs)
- Installation or upgrade of exterior lighting (i.e. goose neck lighting)

Note: No interior improvements are eligible for the program.

V. PROCEDURE

The following process has been created to establish a cooperative effort between the town, the applicant, and program volunteers to most effectively facilitate the goal of the program, an improved Downtown Reading.

- Applicant files an application with the EDC by October 2, 2013
- Applicant meets with the BFSI Committee to review the proposal
- Upon project initiation the BFSI Committee will arrange a meeting between the applicant and the program designer architect. The applicant will work with the architect, who will develop schematics and a description of the proposed façade, signage/awning improvement work, and prepare preliminary cost estimates.

² Available at: http://www.readingma.gov/sites/readingma/files/file/file/adopted_design_standards.pdf

Upon completion of the preliminary design the designer architect will meet with the BFSI Committee for a complete review of the proposed façade project and approval of the final design³.

With the approval of the design, the designer architect and BFSI committee will work with town departments for the submission and approval of the required permits (such as sign permit/approval, minor site plan approval, and/or building permits). It is anticipated that due to the limited scope of the building façade projects, business owner involvement in the approval process will not be needed. In some cases, however, more extensive permitting may be required; this additional permitting will be identified prior to completion of the final design. Applicant enters into agreements(s) with the contractors to carry out design. These particular agreements are solely between the applicant and contractors(s)/vendors and are not the responsibility of the BFSI Committee or Town.

The Applicant shall secure a building permit by April 1st and the project must be completed no later than June 30th. A longer project initiation schedule is possible with approval from the BFSI. Applicant notifies Staff Planner once project is completed and shall file for reimbursement. Chair of EDC approves. The agreed upon grant amount and project initiation payment refund will be paid to the Applicant via the Downtown Improvements and Events Trust upon approved completion of the project and approval of the reimbursement for including all project documentation (invoices, receipts, photos of completed projects) and submittal of full payment to all contractors and vendors.

The BFSI Committee reserves the right to make adjustments regarding conditions and parameters outlined in the guidelines.

VI. TERMINATIONS

The BFSI Committee has the right to terminate any agreement under the 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 an executed agreement with the BFSI Committee.

VII. APPLICATION AND INFORMATION

If you wish to participate in the program and would like to set up a meeting with the BFSI Committee or if you would like additional information, please email the Economic Development Committee at EDC@ci.reading.ma.us.

³ Final designs for signage projects will include location, sign dimensions, sign support details, sign color schemes and materials and sign renderings. Final designs for lighting proposals will include type(s) of lighting, fixture color (s), fixture location (s), fixture illumination intensity and fixture catalogue sheets. Final designs for other project types will include sufficient information to receive relevant permit approvals.