



Agenda Item #: 6

Project Title: Facade Grant Program Policy Updates

Legistar File ID #: 71985

Members Present: Cliff Goodhart, Chair; Lois Braun-Oddo, Shane Bernau, Jessica Klehr, Christian Harper, Rafeeq Asad and Russell Knudson.

Prepared By: Jessica Vaughn, AICP, UDC Secretary

Summary

Rebecca Cnare of the Planning Division gave a presentation on the history of the Façade Grant Program, as well as some possible modifications being considered. The program has been in existence for 20 years and granted over 100 grants, but in that time it has not changed any dollar amounts. Before this is drafted into a Resolution for Common Council consideration, as an approving body of these grants, the Urban Design Commission is asked to weigh in on the potential changes to the program. These changes are being looked at through three lenses: equity (contracts, fees, match requirements, especially for many underrepresented groups); the process improvement lens (when has it been smooth/difficult, where are hang ups); and what are the program objectives. Considerations are being given to the following:

- Remove the \$100 application fee.
- Change the complicated contract over to a purchase order for less hoops after everything has been approved.
- Open up the program to a larger area of the City. The map shows the program mostly concentrated downtown and on highly pedestrianized streets. Consider more transit-oriented development, the BRT line, neighborhood nodes; where are other areas we could do this? Changing these areas from “eligible” to “emphasis.”
- Look at the match requirement to facilitate those equity goals by creating a tiered grant program where \$10,000 (which is currently the maximum) would now be considered a mini-grant.
- Raise the current maximum to \$20,000 per street façade, and only requiring full architectural drawings for those larger dollar amounts.
- Provide an administrative approval process for the smaller projects, always having the UDC available to work out any issues.
- Limiting the extra approvals to get some of the money in the hands of your young, start-up businesses sooner.
- Focus on economic development, business building and helping our entrepreneurs.
- Remove the Common Council approval as the UDC has always been the advisory body.
- Retain the program as first come, first served.

The Commission discussed the following:

- It was really moving to look through this presentation of images, it’s phenomenal. I am very much in support of everything you’re describing. I’m passionate about seeing some of these places with adaptive reuse, the sustainability aspect of rehabbing these façades is really exciting. I’m in total support, the map makes sense, allowing it to expand to these little commercial centers sprinkled around the city. I really enjoyed the presentation, thank you very much for what you’re doing.
- Is that map a hard boundary? Would we make an exception for one block away?

- Yes absolutely, that is the change from “eligible” to “emphasis,” especially with the future BRT.
- I appreciate the tiered system you’re proposing, taking away the application fee, not needing architectural drawings or a match, all of it to make it more accessible and approachable to more and more people.
- You’re proposing to simplify the process by removing the UDC from approvals under \$10,000, but still approving anything \$20,000 or greater. Anything in between those?
 - Anything over \$10,000 would come to you, at that point it wouldn’t be a mini-grant anymore. We’re still working on the match, figure out matching over that \$10,000.
- All the photos, great job, big improvement.

Action

Since this was a discussion item, no formal action was taken by the Commission.