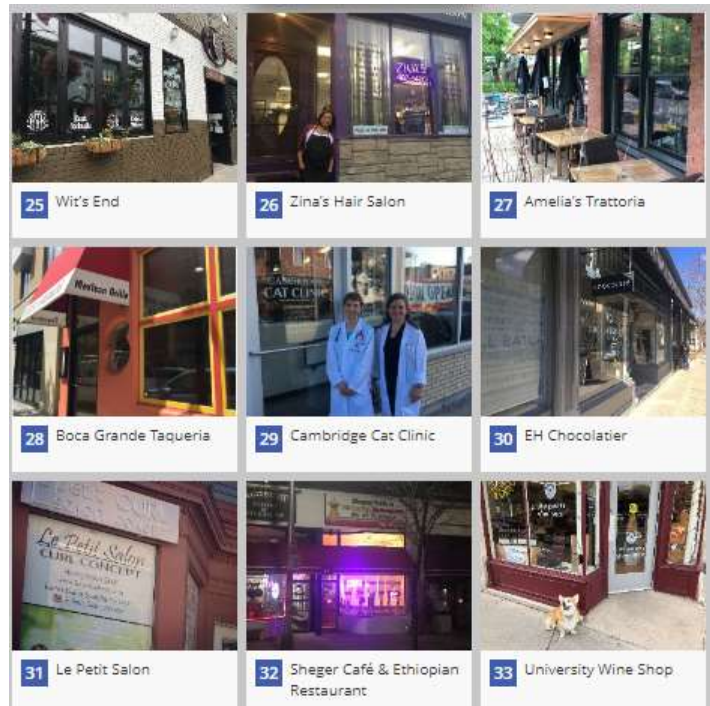


# Façade Improvement Program & Design Guidelines



1

"The revitalization of a neglected commercial district or residential neighborhood often begins with improvements to a single building or storefront."

- Façade improvement programs are frequently among the implementing actions of comprehensive plans, downtown revitalization strategies, and historic preservation plans.
- Incentive programs to encourage property owners and businesses to improve the exterior appearance of their buildings and storefronts.
  - Can be matching grants or loans, a tax incentive, and design assistance
- Economic benefits – strengthens local businesses which helps keep dollars in the local economy.

2

“The big “carrot” that makes a façade improvement program successful is, of course, the incentives the program offers.”

Most common sources for funding are:

- Federal and state grants for community and economic development
- Housing and downtown revitalization
- Municipal revenue

3

Some Key Aspects of Façade Improvement Programs:



**UPTON FAÇADE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM**

RECEIVE UP TO  
**\$15,000!**

**QUALIFYING IMPROVEMENTS:**

- New entrance/doorway
- Window display areas
- Attractive signage
- Awnings or canopies
- Exterior painting
- Other approved items (cleaning, etc.)

**LIMITED AVAILABILITY**

[WWW.UPTONMA.GOV](http://WWW.UPTONMA.GOV) FOR ELIGIBILITY INFO

The flyer includes a 'BEFORE' and 'AFTER' photo of a storefront and a QR code.

- A formal purpose statement that explains why the program was established.
  - A slogan for the effort
- A well-defined target area shown on a map or spelled out in clear language.
- Eligibility criteria and terms for participation which indicate who may participate in the façade improvement program

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“A successful program to improve the physical environment reinforces a strong community identity and attracts visitors who can become customers.”

**Determine what the eligibility (and ineligible) activities will be.**

- Historic rehabilitation
- Storefront improvements
- Awnings or canopies
- Signage and exterior lighting
- Gutters and downspouts
- Handicap accessibility
- Window and door repair or replacement

(Interior work, landscaping, and parking are often ineligible, but may be covered by other local incentive programs.)

- An emphasis on good design – including design review and approval
- An application and selection process.

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## Getting Started

- Clearly identify what you hope to accomplish
- Document conditions
- Build up inventory of photos for properties/structures, accessibility, safety

## Getting it Done

- Step 1: Identify your needs (building facades, signs, parking in front setbacks), document conditions
- What do you hope to accomplish?
- Accessibility and safety (ADA)
- Maintaining line of sight
- Excessive pavement, stormwater issues
- Condition of sidewalks
- Assessing storefronts – rating storefronts based on condition of doors, windows, transom, base, trim, interior display area, exterior lighting, sign(s) attached to building, awning

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Step 2: Bring others into the conversation – partners are critical to the success of your façade improvement program.

Municipal staff  
Municipal boards  
Property and business owners  
Downtown organizations, Chamber of Commerce, historical society, Community development corporation, redevelopment authority  
Community members (knowledgeable)

**Goals:**

- Build a program with a high likelihood of community support at adoption and funding
- Identify property owners who are willing to participate in the first few projects
- Create a working group of representatives to develop criteria for program
- Which problems will the program address?
- How will projects be chosen?
- What are appropriate funding sources for the program and funding levels for each project?
- Who will manage the program? (has town considered a Main Street Program?)
- How long will the program last?

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Step 3: Develop the design guidelines – consider comments on survey

**Considerations**

- Is area within a Historic District? Does it include a significant number of historic buildings?
- Is storefront condition a primary concern?
- May only require cleaning up, painting, signs – consider minimal restrictions for minor work. Still, establish expectations.
- Is condition of the site a primary concern?
- Stormwater issues
- Introduce art into the building and sites
- Safety for pedestrians and vehicles

Given the mix of building styles and ages, can design guidelines be developed that allow for these differences?

- Design Guidelines for improvements must be specific to make compliance easier.

**Goals of Design Guidelines:**

- Address concerns identified in Step 1 to produce consistent results in the physical and visual quality of the area.
- Provide clear and specific information about how the guidelines can be met to aid in implementation.
- Use graphical examples.
- Pre-existing storefronts may remain. Consider if Design Review will be required.
- Awnings

On transparent storefronts: “They are the link between the pedestrian and the business.”

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## Step 4: Develop criteria for participation

### Demonstrated need:

- Deteriorating physical conditions
- Energy efficiency

### Desires:

- Outdoor dining
- Community preferences
- Types of assistance
- Funding strategy (CDBG, Mass Development, Barr Foundation)

## Step 5: Authorize the program – approval at Town Meeting

- Public presentation of the program, its components, and implications
- Before-and-after photos showing types of improvements
- One-page fact sheet for Town Meeting
- An online PDF and/or video to explain the program

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## Step 6: Funding our program

- American Rescue Plan Act funding – if still available – must be encumbered or committed by December 31, 2024 but have until December 31, 2026 to be expended.
- CDBG, if eligible – need to be designated as a slum and blight area
- Massachusetts Downtown Initiative
- Commonwealth Places (match to crowd-sourced funds for placemaking)
- Low-interest loans or loan forgiveness program.
- Fundraising

“Funding sources will depend on your community’s resources, the type of program, and your desire to leverage grants.”

- Community Preservation Act funding (if eligible).
- Redevelopment Authority when there is significant deterioration
- More complex improvements, including safety concerns and deterioration or lack of accessibility may benefit from leveraging funds from multiple programs such as the following:
  - Massachusetts Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (Massachusetts Historical Commission)
  - Underutilized Properties Program (Mass Development)
  - Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (Massachusetts Historical Commission)
- Your community could also sponsor program that could provide funds to address issues that accompany deficiencies in façades, storefronts, and sites. Options include the following:
  - Municipal Vacant Storefronts Program (Economic Assistance Coordinating Council).
  - Downtown Management Entity
  - Redevelopment Authority

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## Step 7: Sign up participants

- Identify buildings that need the most help and identify owners who should be approached
- Encourage program as a way to fund building code violation repairs

## Step 8: Implement

- Who is your project Manager? Municipal staff? Or another organization? Volunteers, CDC?
- What is the permitting process? Building permit, zoning, site plan review, SP? Consider streamlined permitting process.
- Are your legal agreements in place? That outline obligations, timelines and requirements for construction, maintenance, penalties for not following requirements, liens and bonds, and whether funds are a grant or a loan.
- Who is tracking and documenting the process? Track data, document process with before, during and after photos.
- How are you celebrating? Awards ceremony? Social media to promote the process, Online database of finished projects? Ribbon cutting?

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## Step 9: Measure your success!



- Number of applicants over a certain amount of time
- Number of facades, storefronts, and/or sites improved within a specific timeframe
- Increase in visitors to the area
- Increase in sales at businesses that were improved
- Ability to extend program to other commercial areas in the community

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## Case Studies

Municipal Case Studies			
	Funding Source	Design/TA?	Construction?
Brockton, MA	CDBG	Yes	Yes
Lowell, MA	CDBG	Yes	Yes
Southampton, NY	CDBG	No	Yes
Ashland, MA	Municipal	No	Yes
Brookline, MA	Municipal	Yes	Yes
Cambridge, MA	Municipal	No	Yes
New Britain, CT	Downtown District	No	Yes

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## Brockton, MA

### Types of Improvements:

Renovation or restoration of architectural details, installation of energy efficient windows and entrance systems, removal of roll down grills, and eligible signage, awnings and lighting for facades of commercial properties.

**Managed by:** Brockton Redevelopment Authority

**Type of Funding:** Interest deferred loan administered by a Redevelopment Authority, requires matching funds

CDBG, up to \$55,000 plus \$2,500 for architectural services



<https://brocktonredevelopmentauthority.com/home/programs/facade/>

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## Lowell, MA

### Types of Improvements:

Improve business exteriors, bring properties into compliance with zoning, signage.

**Managed by:** Lowell Department of Planning and Development

**Type of Funding:** Small grants – max \$2,000 per storefront, or \$2,000 for each storefront where there are multiple tenants. Lowell encourages leveraging other grant and loan programs



Note: Some uses are disqualified from program including gun shops, pawn shops, liquor stores, smoke shops, tattoo parlors, certain adult only businesses, mail shops and dollar stores.

<https://www.lowellma.gov/769/Sign-Facade-Program>

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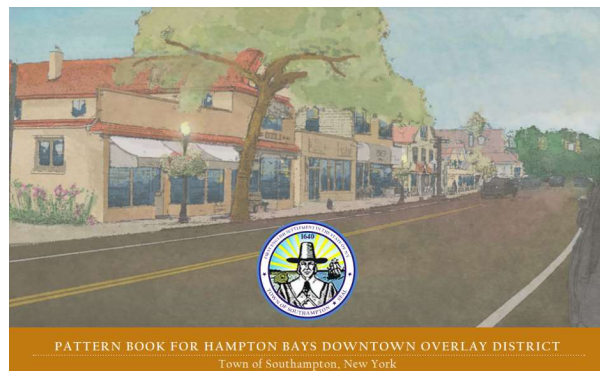
## Southampton, NY

### Types of Improvements:

Preservation of historic elements, deferred maintenance, and accessible access. Any code violations are required to be addressed before Sign & Façade Program Agreement is signed.

**Managed by:** Southampton Housing and Community Development

**Type of Funding:** Small grants – max \$2,000 per storefront, or \$2,000 for each storefront where there are multiple tenants. Lowell encourages leveraging other grant and loan programs



PATTERN BOOK FOR HAMPTON BAYS DOWNTOWN OVERLAY DISTRICT  
Town of Southampton, New York

<https://www.southamptontownny.gov/DocumentCenter/View/16054/Town-of-Southampton-Sign--Facade-Program>  
<https://www.southamptontownny.gov/1221/CDBG---Sign-Facades-Improvements-Program>

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## Ashland, MA



## APPLICATION FOR SIGN & FAÇADE PROGRAM

**Types of Improvements:** Accessibility improvements, signs, awnings, lighting energy conservation for windows & doors, painting, surface parking lots, planters and landscaping, correction of Code violations.

**Managed by:** Town of Ashland, Economic Development Advisory Group

### Type of Funding: Municipal funds

Using the Commonwealth's Home Rule petition process in two separate years, funding was approved at Town Meeting. In the first year, an annual appropriation of \$60,000 for the program, and in the second year, Ashland created a revolving fund which could accept gifts and grants in addition to the municipal fund. Projects must be in certain geographic area. Town provides a 50% matching grant up to \$5,000. The Town also partners with Needham Bank for a two-year no-interest loan program for target businesses.

<https://www.ashlandmass.com/669/Business-Incentive-Programs>

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## Brookline, MA

### Types of Improvements:

Uses a weighted score where streetscape enhancements are 40% of the score, and Creating Positive Lasting Community Impacts such as energy efficiency, accessibility that exceed the minimum required by the MA Architectural Access Board (MAAB) standards is 60% of the score.

**Managed by:** Brookline Economic Development and Long Term Planning Division

**Type of Funding:** Revolving loan fund (up to \$10,000) funded by municipality. Design fees limited to 10%.

<https://www.brooklinema.gov/1564/Facade-Loan-Program>

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**Excellent.** Scope of work goes above and beyond category requirements (i.e. multiple energy efficient upgrades, significant investments in accessibility that exceed MAAB standards, and/or multiple façade improvements which substantially improve upon visual aesthetics, streetscape and commercial area identity including, new signs, awnings, building restoration, paint, lighting, window/door replacement or modification, minor landscaping.

3

**Good.** Scope of work includes multiple improvements, including investments in accessibility that exceed MAAB standards, some impacts on visual aesthetics, or street scape or commercial area identity including, new signs, awning repair/replacement, paint, lighting, minor landscaping

2

**Satisfactory.** The scope of work only slightly improves upon existing façade with few if any impacts on visual aesthetics, or streetscape or commercial area identity. This may include a new storefront sign and some paint work).

1

**Minimum.** The scope of work qualifies for funds, but does not impact visual aesthetics, streetscape or commercial area identity). Work includes sign replacement with little to no other alterations/improvements made to the façade.

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# Cambridge, MA

## Types of Improvements:

Program encourages leveraging funds from other grants and tax credits.

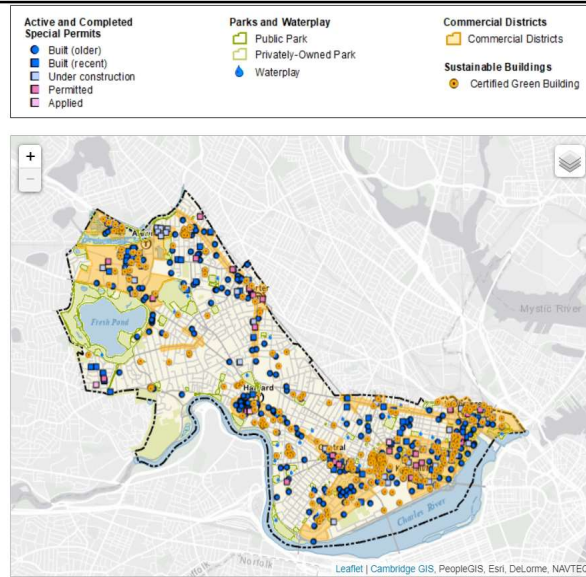
**Managed by:** Brookline Economic Development and Long Term Planning Division

**Type of Funding:** Municipally funded, tiered grant program:

90% matching grant for ADA (up to \$20,000)

50% matching grant for other façade improvements up to (\$15,000)

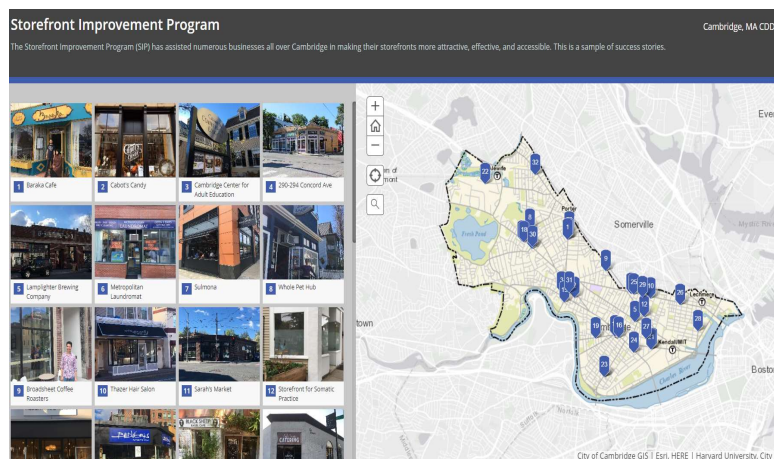
50% matching grant for improvements to signage, lighting, and awnings (up to \$2,500)



<https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/econdev/smallbusinessassistance/smallbusinessprograms/storefront>

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## Cambridge interactive map of completed projects



<https://cambridgegis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Shortlist/index.html?appid=06eeadff8b9d48879d8d6e7ddd8bddf4>

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## New Britain, CT

**Types of Improvements:** Exterior code violations, restoration of historic elements, remove security grates, signage, lighting, visibility of entries, display windows, painting, power washing, and more.

**Managed by:** Sponsored by New Britain Downtown District

**Type of Funding:** District will provide a 50% matching grant up to \$5,000. Applicant can apply for more than one grant as long as total does not exceed \$10,000. Limited funding results in a low number of storefronts that can be improved. Funding limited to members of Downtown District

<https://www.downtownnewbritain.com/about>



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## Main Street America

### Main Street America

A program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation  
Focus is on revitalization of historic and older commercial areas.

Sponsor two programs:

- Façade Improvement Grant

- Historic Commercial District Revolving fund



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Questions?