



CITY OF CREST HILL –  
COMMERCIAL PROPERTY  
IMPROVEMENT GRANT

Draft for Council Work Session – 6/22/2026

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Crest Hill Commercial Exterior Improvement Grant Program (“Grant”) was established to encourage high-quality, exterior building and site improvements to existing commercial properties. These improvements are sufficient in scope to produce visible changes to the building façades, commercial frontages, property access, and safety, thereby improving the overall appearance, functionality, and economic vitality of the community. Other program goals include:

- Encouraging private investment and reinvestment in existing commercial properties.
- Supporting business retention, expansion, and new business attraction.
- Enhancing the appearance and character of the City’s main commercial corridors.
- Promoting high standards of property maintenance and long-term sustainability
- Strengthening commercial vitality and increasing economic activity.
- Maintaining and enhancing property values within the project area and surrounding properties.
- Improving the overall customer, visitor, and business experience through upgraded building exteriors and site amenities.

The Grant is primarily intended to support improvements along the City’s major commercial corridors, which are highly visible, heavily traveled, and important to the community’s economic development efforts. Eligible target areas include, but are not limited to:

- Broadway Street (Illinois Route 53)
- Plainfield Road (US Route 30)
- Larkin Avenue/Weber Road
- Theodore Road
- Caton Farm Road
- Division Street

Additional commercial properties may be considered on a case-by-case basis if the proposed improvements further the goals and objectives of the Grant.

## ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for a Commercial Property Grant Program, a building must be used in whole or in part for commercial purposes, and preference will be given to those located within the target area and on aging commercial corridors. Properties with existing or proposed retail or restaurant uses are preferred. Tenants must have written permission from the property owner in order to engage in the program, and the City of Crest Hill must grant all appropriate permits and approvals before work can be done. A façade is defined as any building or structural elevation fronting a public roadway or viewable from a right-of-way (including alley and courtyard façades).

In general, work related to property maintenance violations or requiring regular repair is not eligible with the goal of improving properties, not just maintaining them to required standards.

Eligible activities include, but are not limited to:

- Architectural Facade Features - Repair and/or replacement of the original building's materials and decorative details that are deteriorated or missing.
- Large Structural Building Repairs - Repair on non-original materials that cannot be removed due to deterioration of the underlying original building material.
- Masonry Work - Tuck pointing, staining, paint removal, and large-scale masonry repair (painting of masonry is not permitted, nor is work on Stucco/EIFS work)
- Windows, Doors and Entrances - Replacement, improved, or additional entrances, doors, display windows, transoms, or second-story windows
- Awnings - Removal, repair, and/or replacement of existing awnings
- Ground Signs - New or replaced ground signs with a solid base (monument-style)
- Landscaping - Permanent landscaping (trees, bushes, and perennial shrubs) and hardscape improvements that are visible to the public and where landscaping is not otherwise existing or required
- Parking Lot End Islands - New landscaped parking lot end islands or property entrance improvements
- Parking Areas – surfacing of parking areas that are currently not paved or where gravel is present. Improvement must include the installation of curb and gutter. (Routine maintenance such as sealcoating and re-striping is not eligible)
- Outdoor Patios - Expanded or new permanent outdoor seating and patio improvements that include paving, fencing, collision protection, and landscaping. Eligible patios shall be elevated from any parking or drive aisle and comply with all other code requirements.
- Lighting - Permanent exterior building and site lighting improvements for exterior enhancement or improved public security
- Design Costs – Professional design costs for eligible projects
- Permit Fees - Permit fee waivers for eligible projects

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Non-eligible activities include:

- General repair or maintenance activities required and any work that is subject to property maintenance citations and fines
- Work on a building façade not visible from a public street (unless the improvement is part of contiguous work on a façade facing a public street)
- Work on a roof
- Purchase of property
- Construction of a new building
- Interior fixtures and equipment
- Business inventory
- Any and all work done before approval by the City Council for a grant
- Project cost **must exceed \$1,000** to be considered for a grant
- **Grant funds cannot be used to correct outstanding code violations, for property damaged by collision, acts of nature, or occurrences covered by insurance**

If the number of grant applications received exceeds the City's program budget, the following factors shall be taken into consideration to rank businesses for grant awards:

- Property vacancy history
- Building conditions that pose a threat to public safety or occupant health;
- Building conditions that create a negative impact on property values in the surrounding area
- Applicants must be able to address and explain circumstances that prevented investment in the property to mitigate deterioration of the building condition
- Presence of extraordinary redevelopment costs such as: environmental remediation, infrastructure expansion costs, required remodeling/demolition
- Improvement will result in an increase in employment or the opportunity for increased employment
- Quality of development and overall aesthetics that exceed current code requirements

Additionally, the following types of properties are not eligible for grant consideration:

- TIF-assisted or city-incentivized property or properties purchased from the City
- Currently tax delinquent or not paid on time property
- Property whose owner has any other tax delinquent property in the State of Illinois
- Property in litigation (public or private), condemnation, or receivership
- Tax-exempt property, including that owned by religious groups
- Properties on which taxes are paid but have nonprofit use, such as schools, charities, clubs, organizations, etc., utilizing more than 25% of the total commercial floor area
- Exclusively residential buildings

## APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS

Interested parties must schedule a pre-application meeting with City staff prior to preparing any materials for submittal. Following this meeting, the applicant may complete and submit a grant application form, available on the City's website or in the Building Department at City Hall. Submittal requirements are set forth on the application form. Two bids should be submitted for each item in the scope of work. The City may enlist the services of an architect or construction manager to provide an independent review of the bids and also to give an opinion as to whether the proposed costs are fair and reasonable. These expenses would be incurred by the City. In addition, City staff may request material samples to gain a better understanding of the proposed colors. Information provided by the applicant will be used as the basis for the preparation of the staff report to the City Council.

The City of Crest Hill retains the right to approve an entire request, to approve portions of a request, suggest and/or ask for changes/additions to a request before approving, or to deny any request or portion thereof. Staff will prepare a report offering a brief introduction to the project, a review of the various aspects of the proposal, and a suggested recommendation based on an evaluation of the proposed work against the City's signage ordinance.

City staff will determine if the application package that is submitted is sufficiently complete to review and will draft a recommendation to the City Council. The application package is expected two weeks before a Council meeting. The application package will be reviewed by the City Council to determine whether the project should receive a grant and determine the amount of the award. In making the determination, the City Council will consider the following factors and may give priority to projects that meet the following criteria:

- Is the project historic (local, national, or state) or otherwise significant?
- Will the project positively contribute to the City's redevelopment effort?
- Will the project substantially leverage more investments than the required matching amount of the grant?
- Will the grant result in an improvement that would not be made otherwise?
- Does the project comply with the City's ordinances?
- Is the property or business benefiting from the grant one that has not received prior City assistance?

Application packages must include enough documentation to illustrate the visual impact of the project and its costs. **Failure to provide required information will delay the review process.** The items submitted should include:

- A completed application form
- Written consent from the property owner permitting the proposed work
- Color photographs of existing conditions

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- Samples of materials and colors to be used
- Any other documentation necessary to illustrate the visual impact of the proposed project and the completion schedule
- A minimum of three competitive proposals from licensed and bonded contractors. These proposals should give detailed information about the work to be done, the costs, and the project completion schedule. Contractors who submit a competitive, detailed estimate may be used. **Contractors cannot be changed unless new proposals have been submitted and approved by City staff. The total amount approved by City Council cannot be increased without re-approval.**
- Sign proposals do not require submission of multiple bids due to the design work and contractor often being done by the same contractor and proprietary to the company.
- Owners or merchants who are licensed city contractors and intend to perform work on their own properties or businesses must furnish at least one proposal other than their own for the same work to be done.
- Owners and merchants may also perform work on their own buildings; however, they will not be reimbursed for time while acting as a contractor and/or installing material, only for the project materials themselves.

### Initial Processing:

1. Upon receipt of a complete application, with all the required attachments, staff will review the project as it relates to the code requirements and grant program requirements. Revisions or clarifications may be requested at that time.
2. A petition will be scheduled for the next available City Council work session meeting (at least 2 weeks in advance to allow a memo and processing). Work Sessions are the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Mondays of each month, and will forward the grant recommendation of approval to the next council meeting.
3. The City Council meets the first and third Mondays of the month and will approve a formal resolution.
4. Upon City approval, the applicant and City enter into a formal agreement, called a Commercial Exterior Grant Agreement, establishing the scope of work and approved reimbursement amount. The Agreement is signed by the City and the applicant after the City Council has approved the project. Grant project work may commence after the Agreement is signed and necessary permits are obtained.

## FUNDING GUIDELINES

Grants are available to make certain improvements to commercial properties and structures. The grant reimburses up to 50% of the total project's construction cost, not to exceed \$10,000 per project. However, the reimbursement amount is subject to City Council discretion, as well as budget availability. Rebates and other forms of economic incentives may be utilized as part of the grant reimbursement at the City's discretion. The funding amount can be influenced by the scope of the project, façade orientation, building use, and other factors.

While professional services by a licensed architect or landscape architect are encouraged, they are not required to participate in the program. The City reserves the right to require the services of an architect for projects with a significant scope of work (as required by the IBC), historic significance, or otherwise. If the City approves the project, the architect may provide bidding and construction plans and documents, as well as construction supervision. Only architectural services directly related to the approved grant improvements will be reimbursed (proof from the applicant of the relation to the work is required to be provided). The grant will provide reimbursement of 50% of City-approved architectural services not to exceed 10 percent of the eligible construction costs, with the amount included toward the \$10,000 funding cap for reimbursement of construction costs.

While properties can obtain multiple grants for different eligible projects, priority will be given to properties that have not participated in the program previously.

For larger construction projects or requests, those should be made in accordance with the city's process and policies. The City has an adopted Incentive Policy that guides the Council on how and when other incentives are provided, including property tax rebates, tap-on waivers, fee waivers, sales-tax reimbursement agreements, or TIF-eligible incentives.

## GRANT REIMBURSEMENT

Reimbursement shall be limited to no more than 50% of the total cost of eligible improvements, **not to exceed \$10,000 per project**. However, the reimbursement amount is subject to the City Council's discretion. If the costs exceed the original estimates, the property owner or tenant will be responsible for the full amount of the excess. The City cannot reimburse more than the total amount specified in the Agreement.

Any work commenced prior to City Council approval and signing of the Grant Agreement will not be eligible for reimbursement funding, as it will not have met need-based or bidding requirements. The applicant has one year to complete the work from the date of the approval. Owners or lessees may request a six-month extension, issued administratively, provided there is a demonstrated hardship and progress is ongoing at the time of the request.

In the event the improvements are not maintained, the City requires repayment of the grant or an amount necessary to restore the improvements by the applicant and/or property owner. Alternatively, the City may choose to place a lien on the property for said amount if reimbursement is not made.

The City of Crest Hill reserves the right to refuse reimbursements in whole or in part for work that:

- Does not conform to the program design guidelines
- Does not conform to the proposals submitted with the application and authorized by the City Council
- Are not commensurate with the workmanship and cost customary to industry
- Are not completed within one year from the date of approval (unless a six-month extension is granted)

Staff will inspect work to ensure that it complies with the approved plans. **Any changes to the approved plan will require a written request from the applicant and approval by the City Council in order to retain the grant approval.**

Grant reimbursement will occur upon completion of the improvements and after proof of payment to the contractor has been received. The contractor shall provide a letter stating all work has been completed and that there is no outstanding balance or liens. If the applicant is doing his/her own labor, funding will be reimbursed only for materials used. The City may enlist the services of an architect, construction manager, or other qualified consultant to provide an independent review of the construction costs to provide an opinion as to whether the costs are commensurate with prevailing construction costs and consistent with the contractor bids. These expenses would be incurred by the City.

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Once completed, the applicant must maintain and may not alter or change the improvements for a period of five years unless a request for modification is presented to the City Council and approved before commencing such work or that the grant amount is reimbursed to the city. The City will not reimburse for additional repair, replacement, or other alteration work completed through the Grant Program for a period of five (5) years.

Reimbursement can be expected approximately four (4) to six (6) weeks after all the following documentation has been submitted:

- Copies of all paid invoices, canceled checks (bank statements), and lien waivers for all of the work covered by the grant from all contractors that worked on the project. These must equal at least the required matching amount. All project expenditures must be paid by check, money order, or credit card. The invoices must be marked paid, signed, and dated by the contractors. Cash payments are not accepted.
- Lien waivers cannot be substituted for canceled checks or bank statements.
- Color photographs of the completed project.
- Properties that receive grants in excess of \$10,000 may have a lien placed on the property. This lien will remain in effect for seven years to ensure property improvements remain or are paid back if the property owner changes.

Reimbursement grants may be subject to Federal and State taxes and are reported to the Internal Revenue Service on Form 1099. Property owners and tenants should consult their tax advisors for tax liability information.