



*Where Life is Sweet*

Members of the Planning Commission  
**STAFF REPORT**  
For the Meeting of February 8, 2023

**Title/Subject**

Revisions to the scoring criteria and match for facade grants are proposed.

**Summary and Background**

The planning commission requested that staff review the scoring criteria for façade grants. Commissioners have expressed dissatisfaction with the current criteria in the past. Complaints center on the overall vagueness and subjectivity of the criteria. Some of the subjectiveness is intentional, requiring value judgement on the part of the scorer. However, it is desirable to analyze the scoring criteria and evaluate if rewording is necessary or even if different criteria should be considered. This report lists the current criteria and suggests modifications where necessary.

- 1. Are the proposed improvements consistent with type of architectural features found in the existing historical buildings in the district*

Commentary: This item causes the most difficulty in scoring. The historic buildings in the downtown urban renewal area are historic, but not particularly distinctive. The Carnegie Building and HID Building utilize stucco facades, while the others all utilize brick. Columns, ornate windows, signage, grand entrances, and other features are all absent. Since historic preservation is not one of the goals of the downtown urban renewal area, perhaps this criterion should be eliminated entirely.

Suggested edit: **Eliminate and use five criteria instead of six.**

- 2. Does the proposed improvement contain features designed to contribute to aesthetic enhancement?*

Commentary: This question is relatively straightforward. Is the proposed façade improvement a visual improvement over what is in place on that site today? A window replacement would not score as high as new siding or additional signage. In essence, pure maintenance projects should score lower than a project where the applicant is making an effort to go above the bare minimum for architectural features. New construction will always score highly in this category since the baseline is low.

Suggested edit: **Does the proposed improvement add new aesthetic elements beyond the existing improvements?**

3. *Will the proposed improvements contribute not only to the enhancement of the commercial use, but the downtown as a whole?*

Commentary: This question also causes difficulty in scoring. Is the proposed improvement making an overall contribution to the downtown, not only aesthetically, but economically? An improvement adding outdoor seating, similar to what was funded for Yo Country's outdoor tables, creates an environment that encourages people to visit and linger downtown. The goal of the downtown urban renewal area at its essence is to build up the economic health of the downtown. The façade grants are intended to reduce visual blight on aging buildings. The underlying logic is that improved facades will encourage other nearby properties to also wish to upgrade so as not to fall visually behind.

Suggested edit: **Will the proposed improvements enhance the economic well-being of the downtown as well as the site?**

4. *Are the proposed improvements compatible with the overall downtown character?*

Commentary: There is a lot of overlap between this criterion and criterion #1. The intent is to consider how the proposed façade improvements fit in with the existing neighborhood. However, the overall character of the downtown is quite mixed. There are single-family, duplex, and multi-family residential users. There are standalone commercial uses as well as common wall attached commercial uses. Some commercial uses are auto oriented, and some are focused on pedestrian customers. To create a score based on such a varied character is difficult. This question should be reworded to focus on more objective aesthetic elements which can be considered on a case-by-case basis. The suggested edit below adds a scaling element to consider but could be limited to color and materials as well.

Suggested edit: **Are the proposed elements scaled properly for the site and of compatible color and materials for properties within 300 feet?**

5. *Are the proposed improvements designed to contribute to the long-term health of the district? For example, landscape improvements are not as durable as masonry.*

Commentary: This question is again straightforward. It is intended to be a somewhat objective judgement on the part of the scorer as to how long the improvement will last and benefit the property and the downtown. A façade grant could be given to buy hanging flower baskets for parking lot lighting, but they will only last a season. Building a new retaining wall and regrading a landscape bed will be an improvement that lasts for decades.

Suggested edit: **Are the proposed improvements designed to contribute to the long-term health of the site and district? For example, landscape improvements are not as durable as masonry.**

6. *Will the proposed improvements enhance the value of the property and provide a good return on investment for the district?*

Commentary: This question is subjective on the part of the scorer. However, no edits are suggested at this time. It is a value judgment which will be relative to each scorer.

Suggested edit: **None**

Staff offers the following revised scoring criteria for discussion to the planning commission:

1. Does the proposed improvement add new aesthetic elements beyond the existing improvements?
2. Will the proposed improvements enhance the economic well-being of the downtown as well as the site?
3. Are the proposed elements scaled properly for the site and of compatible color and materials for properties within 300 feet?
4. Are the proposed improvements designed to contribute to the long-term health of the site and district? For example, landscape improvements are not as durable as masonry.
5. Will the proposed improvements enhance the value of the property and provide a good return on investment for the district?

Scoring is proposed to retain the 1-10 value for each question, giving a total of 50 total points.

41-50 points: 50% match

31-40 points: 40% match

21-30 points: 30% match

11-20 points: 20% match

1-10 points: 10% match

Staff also reported in November that discussions with local contractors determined that \$10,000 was inadequate for a match under most circumstances. The planning commission agreed at that time that potentially upping the match amount to \$20,000 is desirable and appropriate.

### **Tie-In to Council Goals**

NA

### **Fiscal Information**

Increasing the match amount will decrease the number of grants available each year. Under the urban renewal plan, a maximum of \$500,000 is available over the life of the district. Expending 100% of funds may result in termination of the program or reallocation of funds from other projects.

### **Alternatives and Recommendation**

#### Alternatives

The planning commission should discuss proposed revisions to the scoring criteria and matching cap. A consensus on new criteria should be developed.

Recommended Action/Motion

Motion to recommend adoption of revised criteria to the urban renewal board

Motion to recommend increasing the matching cap to the urban renewal board

**Submitted By:**

Clinton Spencer, Planning Director