

MEMORANDUM



TO: City Council
Ray Towry, City Manager
Interested Parties

FROM: Blair Larsen, Community and Economic Dev. Director

DATE: October 16, 2020

SUBJECT: Proposed Amendments to the Commercial Exterior Improvement Program Documents

On the questionnaires distributed at the Economic Development Workshop held in August, a majority of the Council identified continuing and improving the Commercial Exterior Improvement Program (CEIP) as a high priority. The intent of this memo and the attached amended CEIP documents is to respond to this Council priority and propose changes to the program in order to make it more effective.

The intent of the Commercial Exterior Improvement Program is to make the City more inviting to visitors and more appealing to residents by encouraging property owners to make improvements that will beautify their buildings and exterior spaces. Notable improvements that received awards from this program include the Rio Theatre, Thriftway, O&M Tire, Moneyman, and others.

The current program covers all commercially zoned properties within the City, and allows a maximum award of 50% of the project cost up to \$5,000, unless a larger amount is recommended by the review committee and approved by the City Manager. Staff believes that these provisions weaken the program in two ways. First, improving commercial properties is very expensive, and \$5,000 doesn't go as far as it would for a residential property—to get the results the Council wants, a larger amount should be considered. Second, including all commercial areas in the City spreads out the effects of the program, making it harder to have an impact on visitors.

Proposed Changes

Staff recommends increasing the maximum grant award to 50% of the project cost up to \$10,000 to \$15,000. Less than \$10,000 limits the grant to smaller, less impactful projects, while more than \$15,000 will likely deplete our available funding too quickly. Staff recommends retaining the ability for the committee to recommend a higher grant award for projects that have a greater impact.

Staff also recommends limiting the eligible areas in order to focus the impact of the program. It is often said that you never get a second chance to make a first impression. Staff believes that Sweet Home's "first impression" area is the western edge of town, our "gateway" area, followed by the downtown core. Most visitors to the City come from the west along US 20. Limiting program eligibility to this area will focus the effects of the program to the areas that visitors see first and see the most. See the attached map.

Finally, staff recommends requiring grant recipients to place a City-provided sign in a conspicuous place upon completion stating that the improvements were funded in part by a grant from the City of Sweet Home. The public deserve to know where public funding is being spent, and the City deserves some credit for the improvements that the program is helping to fund.

Other Potential Changes

When considering these amendments to the program, Staff recommends that the Council review the entire program to ensure that the improvements eligible for grant funding will have the desired impact. As you can see from section 4.2 of the program Main Document, several different types of improvements are covered, from awnings and façade enhancement to parking lots and roofing. Important questions to consider include:

- Will this improvement make it more likely for visitors to stop or return to Sweet Home?
- Will this improvement make it more enjoyable for residents to walk around our downtown?
- Will this improvement have the visual impact the Council is seeking?
- Will this improvement encourage neighboring properties to invest in their buildings?

Conclusion

These amendments are in draft form and are intended to provoke discussion. Staff is happy to make adjustments or consider additional changes.
