

Oil City Main Street Program 2025 Main Street Matters

Façade Improvement Grant Program Guidelines



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Oil City Main Street Façade Improvement Grant Program Guidelines

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INTRODUCTION

It is the belief of those involved in the Oil City Main Street Program (OCMS) that building improvements will not only improve the physical property of the designated Main Street Program area but it will also result in a more viable community. Facade improvements will result in a more economically competitive business district. It has been proven across the nation that improving property improves business. Patrons of businesses are more likely to cross a business threshold when they feel welcomed through an appearance of an attractive storefront. Hence, by improving your façade, you improve your business viability.

The Oil City Main Street Façade Program provides funding to commercial building owners and business owners (with property owner approval) as well as non-profits, to encourage restoration of building facades within the targeted area. This is a matching grant program that requires a 50/50, dollar for dollar match by the applicant and is a reimbursable program.

All applicants must meet the general guidelines as well as any PHMC guidelines (if the building in which funding is being applied for is designated a historic building or contributing resource). The guidelines below are sought to enhance the historical beauty and integrity of the Oil City Business District. In doing such it is the intent of the OCMS Design Committee to ensure that improvements are consistent with scale, character and history of the downtown and the community as a whole.

It is of the utmost importance that whenever possible, the existing or original architectural elements be repaired and improved. When possible, the desire of the Main Street program would be to reverse past inappropriate architectural alterations.

These improvements do not need to be costly. Often a fresh coat of paint, a new sign, repairing or replacing an awning will greatly improve the façade of the building making a lasting effect on the area and for your business economically. These guidelines cannot cover every situation; therefore if you do not find the necessary information, please elaborate on your situation in your application. Each application is reviewed by the OCMS Design Committee and will take into consideration all situations as they are addressed.

PROGRAM GOALS / OBJECTIVES:

The Oil City Main Street Façade Program has the following goals and objectives:

1. Reduce or eliminate vacancies throughout the OCMS target area, and promote the adaptive reuse of commercial buildings.
2. Bring substandard building conditions into compliance with basic health, safety, and building codes while enhancing the visual appeal of the Main Street Businesses.
3. Encourage redevelopment and reinvestment as well as stimulate private investment, therefore enhancing commercial growth in the OCMS target area.
4. Assist with the preservation of the historic commercial buildings and assure that such buildings are rehabilitated in an appropriate manner.
5. Add significant physical improvements to the aesthetics of a Main Street property that is compatible with existing buildings and the historical era of Oil City.
6. To create a compelling image of the Oil City Downtown that will increase commerce, attract new business and foster a sense of community and civic pride in Oil City.
7. To assist in furthering the efforts of the City of Oil City Downtown Economic Development Strategic Plan.

SOURCE OF FUNDING AND FUNDING ALLOTMENTS:

The Oil City Main Street Program Façade Improvement Grant Program is funded by Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED). All grants are contingent upon the availability of state funding.

The maximum funding awarded to a façade grant applicant is 50% of the project cost (see limits per project description), not to exceed \$10,000 per application. While the total cost of the improvements may exceed \$20,000.00, the maximum reimbursement shall not exceed \$10,000.00.

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS:

Any person(s) or other legal entity owning property within the designated Oil City Main Street district (see maps on page 12-13) is eligible to apply. Business owners who lease buildings or parts thereof may apply if given permission by the property owner, as shown by their signature on the application.

A business owner or property owner may apply more than once for the same building. A property owner with multiple properties (different addresses) within the Main Street area may also apply more than once. OCMS maintains the right to limit the total amount of funding that may be awarded in order to allow other interested owners to apply.

If a property owner seeks and receives a grant, a tenant in the same building may also apply for a grant. A tenant can apply for the full amount, with the consent of the property owner.

All property owners must be current on their State, County, School District, and local municipal taxes. If a property owner is delinquent on their taxes, tenants located within the property are also ineligible to receive a façade grant.

ELIGIBLE BUILDINGS, STOREFRONTS & FACADES

To be eligible for a Façade Improvement Grant, a building must be located within the designated Oil City Main Street district. A building immediately adjacent to the district border may also be considered for a grant if deemed appropriate by the OCMS Design Committee.

Due to the limited availability of façade improvement funds, they cannot be approved for structures with significant structural, mechanical, electrical, and/or plumbing violations, or significant fire safety and/or codes violations, as determined by the Fire Chief and/or Director of Code Administration, that would prohibit the building's intended use and pose a danger to the general public.

The façade is the part of the building facing the street and includes the entire face of the building from the ground up. In cases where more than one storefront exists within the same façade, each storefront can receive its own grant for eligible grant activities, but must not exceed the total allowable amounts. A storefront shall be defined as having its own unique entrance, interior space, and display window.

The project may include the front façade or any side or rear façade which is accessible and/or visible from a public right-of-way or parking lot. The OCMS Design Committee will entertain requests for additional facades which are, in the opinion of the committee, visually significant.

ELIGIBLE PROJECTS / IMPROVEMENTS:

Facade Improvement awards are based on project merit and not financial need. Projects must achieve visible results that enhance the downtown's image, marketability and economic vitality, and will be evaluated in terms of quality, design compatibility and level of visual impact. Only exterior improvements are eligible for funding. OCMS has the right to deny any application for any reason.

Improvements must comply with all state/federal laws and City of Oil City building code and zoning requirements. All necessary permitting must be completed by the applicant at the applicant's expense.

Eligible activities are the repair, rehabilitation, and restoration of building facades located in the designated Main Street area. Eligible activities include, but are not limited to:

- **Brick and Stone Masonry:** Structural repairs, cleaning, and re-pointing.
- **Architectural Metals:** Repair, cleaning, refinishing, painting, duplication, and restoration of exterior building components, e.g. cast iron, pressed tin.
- **Doors and Upper Story Windows:** Maintenance, repairs, replacement, and restoration of window sashes, and exterior doors. Installation of storm windows is also eligible in conjunction with other significant façade improvements.
- **Exterior Woodwork:** Maintenance, repair, rehabilitation, and restoration of sills, windows and doorframes, bulkheads, storefront and roof cornices, window hoods, decorative moldings.
- **Storefronts:** Removal of inappropriate coverings and additions, maintenance, repair, rehabilitation, and restoration of display and transom windows and lighting.
- **Signage:** Installation, maintenance, repair, removal, and replacement.
- **Painting:** Surface preparation, cleaning, painting.
- **Awnings:** Installation, repair, and maintenance of fabric awnings.
- **Lighting:** External lighting fixtures both for signage and building lighting. Also storefront window lighting clearly visible from the street, enhancing the façade.
- **Design Assistance:** architectural consultation, renderings, and/or drawings.

INELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES:

- Building permit fees and related costs;
- Title reports and legal fees;
- Extermination of insects, rodents, vermin and other pests;
- Sidewalk replacement or repair;
- Acquisition of land or buildings;
- Air conditioning and/or heating facilities;
- Plumbing; Sprinkler systems- interior and exterior;
- Building security systems- interior and exterior;
- Electrical wiring or service upgrade, except electrical work necessary to illuminate an eligible sign;
- Elevator repair or installation;
- Interior floor, wall, flooring and/or ceiling replacement or repair;
- General repair/maintenance work not contributing to the overall exterior visual appearance of the building;
- Landscaping, fences, retaining walls;
- Site improvements, paving, parking lots, roof work not contributing to the appearance of the Main Street façade;
- Use of vinyl siding; or vinyl replacement windows
- Neon signs

- Improvements not specifically listed as eligible or ineligible are subject to review as to their eligibility by the Main Street Design Committee at their sole and exclusive discretion.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Generally, the following principles should guide an applicant in determining how to approach the design of a project. If there are questions or a need for clarification, please contact the Oil City Main Street Manager of such issues in writing. Comments will then be forwarded to the Design Committee for review at their next meeting. A criteria for the grant is for you to have reviewed our voluntary Design Guide as it relates to your building, which you can find it at the Library, City Hall, or online at OilCityMainStreet.org

Character: The Oil City Downtown enjoys a variety of architectural styles. It is the goal of this design program to see that each building is presented in its most appealing form and that the original character of the building is preserved and enhanced.

Preservation: Any existing or historical character of a property should be retained and preserved to the extent that it is feasible. The removal of historical materials or alterations of features and spaces that characterize a property should be avoided.

Change: It is recognized that many properties have changed over time. Those changes that contribute to the significance of the Designated Area's architectural character in their own right should be retained and preserved.

History: Each property should be recognized as a physical record of its time, place and use. Changes that create an inaccurate sense of history or architectural elements from other buildings will not be favored. **Please refer to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings at <http://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/rehabilitation/rehab/stand.htm>** or upon request.

Details: Distinctive features, finishes and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property should be treated with respect.

Repairs: Features that have made a property unique and recognizable should be repaired, when they have deteriorated, rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature should match the old in design, color, texture and other visual qualities and, where possible, material. Replacement of missing features should be substantiated by documentary, physical or pictorial evidence.

Surface Cleaning: Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials are not favored. The surface cleaning of structures, if necessary, should be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.

Alterations: New additions, exterior alterations or related new construction should not destroy any historic materials that characterize a property. The new work shall be compatible with the size, scale and architectural features that protect the characteristic integrity of the property and its environment.

Signage: Signs play an important role in how a business is initially perceived. Not only are they a marketing tool, but they also set the appearance from a roadway. Signage should project an atmosphere that is welcoming and inviting to members of the community and visitors. Consistent signage adds to the character of the area in which it is placed, and should be considered to be a unifying factor in a town. Lighting should

be external, using spotlights directed onto the sign. Lighting temperatures is an important consideration when using LED light bulbs.

PROJECT CRITERIA

Awnings and Canopies

Awnings as well as canopies are both functional and decorative. Not only are they a marketing tool, but also set the appearance of the business from the roadway. An added feature of an awning or canopy is that they bring the tremendous appeal of color, not only to the building but to the entire streetscape. It is because of this that in order for funding to be used for awnings or canopies, the color scheme of these should be complementary to the surrounding area. Funds are available for cleaning, repair, or removal and replacement of existing awnings and or canopies, as well as installation of new. If replacement of awnings or canopies is requested rather than repair, evidence that repair is cost-prohibitive or not possible must be demonstrated.

Awnings and canopies shall be placed in such a way that they avoid covering or overwhelming architectural details such as cornice, trim, windows, decorative brickwork or other unique structural characteristics. In order for an awning or canopy to be eligible for funding it cannot contain the name of the business, but may contain the street address on the actual awning and or canopy.

Please note: not only must the awning or canopy design be approved by the Main Street Design Committee, but it also must be approved by Oil City Code and Zoning and meet all state and local requirements and codes.

Signs

Signs can be one of the most important parts of a storefront. Signs have a dramatic impact on the overall image of your business and our City. A sign can cause an individual passing by to become a potential customer. Signs that are properly sized, attractively designed, constructed of appropriate materials, and properly located, enhance the image of the business and again the City. Signs should be designed to complement the façade of the business.

Please note not only must the sign design be approved by the Oil City Main Street Design Committee, but it also must be approved by Oil City Code and Zoning and meet all state and local requirements and codes. Signs should be sized to balance, not hide or overwhelm the structure.

Interior window signs shall not be eligible to receive Main Street Façade Funding.

The Oil City Main Street Design Committee recommends:

- The use of display windows for creative signage.
- The use of three-dimensional individual lettering on a structure itself to recreate the feel of an earlier era to the time of construction of the building.
- Locating signs to avoid covering or overwhelming architectural details such as cornices, trim, windows, decorative brickwork or other unique structural characteristics.
- Orienting signs to pedestrians, not vehicular traffic. Signs should be detailed so as to appeal to someone proceeding slowly at close range. However, readability to occupants of vehicles passing through town is also a consideration in well-designed signage.
- Sign material(s) and design(s) that reflect the period of the building and the design of the storefront along with sign colors that complement the paint scheme of the storefront façade.
- Artisan-crafted signs and quality sign materials manufactured specifically by the sign industry for handcrafted signs such as wood, metal, and urethane.

- Colors should complement the paint scheme of the storefront to distinguish the type of business and create interest without losing community appeal.
- The lettering of the sign should be kept to a minimum and, likewise, the message brief. A logo or illustration may be substituted to communicate the nature of a business.
- Avoid using multiple signs where one sign would be sufficient.
- Internally-lit panel or “box” signs are not recommended by our Design Committee, and will generally not be funded.
- Removal of obsolete signage may be an approved use of grant funds.

The total funding request for signs should not exceed \$5,000.00. However, the Design Committee has the ability to award a matching grant up to \$10,000.

Funds are also available for repair, cleaning, refinishing, painting, and restoration of exterior woodwork and trim, architectural sheet metal and/or decorative brick elements. This category includes exterior masonry repairs, restoration, painting (in the case of brick, only if originally painted or has been painted over time and can not be cost-effectively removed), low-pressure water or steam cleaning or best recommended manner in which to clean the specified material.

Commercial cornices, parapets and other decorative elements may be repaired and reconditioned. Replacement of cornice and trim elements will be permitted when they are severely deteriorated and cannot be repaired. Missing decorative elements can be replaced utilizing existing examples found elsewhere on the building, period photographs, or, in the absence of both, examples of similar buildings in Oil City. Roof repair or replacement is not eligible for funding.

Color Selection:

Painting is one of the final, and most important visual elements of building restoration or renovation, and it is the thing most visible to the community. The selection of colors can be challenging and should be given time and attention as an integral part of your overall design. When choosing paint colors, it is important to take into account the architecture of your building and the surrounding environment. Sometimes, a pre-selected color palette from the paint store may be appropriate, but more often, those might be considered as a starting point for inspiration. While paint colors are important, the proper placement of colors is equally significant.

The OCMS design committee will review selected colors for appropriateness to the architecture of your building and your setting. In your initial meeting, general design guidance will be offered for color consideration and proper placement of colors. It is recommended that you consider the inclusion of a color design consultation in the scope of your project budget.

Windows and Doors

Funds are available for painting, rehabilitation, reglazing and reconditioning of existing windows (including display, ornamental, upper-story windows), doors and exterior shutters when they are original to the building. Funds are also available for the replacement of non-original existing windows, doors and exterior shutters that are out of character with the building.

Grant funds will **not** be available for replacement of original windows, doors and exterior shutters or those elements when they are in character with the building, unless they are severely deteriorated and cannot be rehabilitated.

Window Guidelines:

The Oil City Main Street Design Committee encourages the preservation of original wood windows wherever possible, fiberglass windows have become a very acceptable option in Historic preservation, and discourages the use of new vinyl, or metal windows where such replacements would lead to the removal and destruction of historic wood windows that could be saved are very costly. Although the Oil City Main Street Design Committee may determine eligibility for funding on a case-by-case basis, window-related projects will generally be evaluated according to the guidelines below.

Window-related activities that may be eligible for funding include:

1. Restoration and repair of original wood sash and frames.
2. Addition of quality storm windows, or replacement of existing storm windows, if undertaken as part of an effort to retain original wood windows.
3. Addition or replacement of appropriate weather-stripping to existing wood windows, if undertaken as part of an effort to restore and retain original wood windows.
4. Replacement of original wood windows with comparable new wood windows or high-quality alternatives.
5. Replacement of existing non-wood or non-original replacement windows with new non-wood replacement windows, where the older windows are deteriorated or otherwise of inferior quality and the newer windows result in a significant visual improvement.

Window related activities that may **not** be eligible for funding include:

1. Replacement of existing wood windows with vinyl or other non-wood windows where comparable improvements in appearance may be achieved by painting or otherwise repairing existing wood windows.
2. Replacement of existing wood windows with vinyl or other non-wood windows for the sole purposes of energy savings or convenience of maintenance.

When considering whether to repair or replace wood windows, applicants are encouraged to review two informative Preservation Briefs on the subject, available online at:

“The Repair of Historic Wood Windows” www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/briefs/brief09.htm

“Conserving Energy in Historic Buildings” www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/briefs/brief03.htm

These briefs conclude that *“the repair and weatherization of existing wooden windows is more practical than most people realize, and that many windows are unfortunately replaced because of a lack of awareness of techniques for evaluation, repair, and weatherization. Wooden windows which are repaired and properly maintained will have greatly extended service lives while contributing to the historic character of the building. Thus, an important element of a building's significance will have been preserved for the future.”*

When there is no other alternative but to replace severely deteriorated windows, the Oil City Main Street Design Committee encourages property owners to consider the following options:

1. To maintain the original architectural character and structure of the building, replacement windows should be sized to fit the original opening and be consistent with the style and detail of the original building.
2. Consider using colors other than bright white when choosing replacement windows for brick buildings or other facades that are not white. Many manufacturers offer colors suitable to the architecture in our community. The Design Committee can assist with the evaluation of the options.

3. Limit the use of snap-in interior grilles where possible. Replacements with single-paned sashes or those with a double-paned sash and a single wider vertical bar will often appear more authentic than those with grids of four, six, or nine divisions.
4. Visit regional showrooms to consider all the different replacement windows available and seek professional design assistance.

Design Assistance

Funds are available for architectural, historic façade research, preservation, and/or graphic design services by a design or architectural professional.

Lighting

The Main Street Design Committee recommends externally lit fixtures rather than internally lit plastic fixtures and spotlights. Sign lighting should be directed only on the sign itself and not on the surrounding area. Lighting fixtures, if visible, should be compatible with the period of the structure. Lighting should be placed to cast light in a downward direction. Bulbs are not to be visible from the street. **When using fixtures that use LED lighting, it is essential to consider the Kelvin temperature of the bulbs installed, in addition to the brightness (wattage). The Design Committee will expect you to have this information in the application.**

APPLICATION PROCESS/PROJECT AWARD

Applications will be accepted throughout the year. Applications are due by the last working day of the month to allow time for review by the Oil City Main Street Design Committee during their regularly scheduled meeting of the following month. Should our funding be depleted before the end of the fiscal year, applicants will be advised and may have the choice to keep their application active until the following year funding has been received.

Applicants are encouraged to be present during the review of their application in order to answer any questions that the Design Committee may have. Please verify the time and location with the Main Street manager in advance. Application(s) approved by the Design Committee will then be presented to Oil City Council for final approval.

Upon final approval, the applicant will receive a Letter of Commitment stating the reimbursement grant amount, terms of the improvements, conditions for construction and any other provisions related to the project. The Letter of Commitment must be signed by the applicant and returned within 15 calendar days of the notification of the award. The applicant can then obtain the necessary building permits and any other applicable review processes.

Grants are made on a cost reimbursement basis. Applicants should NOT start improvements before he/she receive written notification of approval by the Oil City Main Street Manager, as well as the Letter of Commitment is signed and building permits are issued. Any work performed, materials purchased or contracts entered into prior to approval and a completed Letter of Commitment will **NOT** be eligible for grant assistance. **It is a requirement of our grantor, and we are unable to make any exceptions.**

Grants are made on a cost reimbursement basis, following a process of application, design, review, approval, construction and proof of payment in full. The applicant must submit documentation to the Main Street Manager that substantiates that the agreed upon work is **complete and has been paid for in full** in order to receive the reimbursement check.

All work must be completed within 120 days from the Letter of Commitment Date; **(unless otherwise written in your agreement)** otherwise the grant may be forfeited. Applicants may request an extension through the Design Committee for their approval. An extension cannot exceed beyond an additional 90 days.

Reimbursement will be based upon the Scope of Work submitted as part of the application. Any and all Project Change Orders must be requested in writing to the Oil City Main Street Manager who will make recommendation to the design committee to initiate approval of modification to any part of the executed Commitment Letter. Approval must be obtained prior to conducting activities that in any way modify the agreed to scope or cost of said activities. Failure to obtain approval from the Oil City Main Street Design Committee before the commencement of work relieves Oil City Main Street from any obligation to make any payments to the Approved Applicant. Any expenditure made by the Applicant which is not in accordance with the terms of the Commitment Letter may be disapproved, and payment to the applicant adjusted accordingly.

Reimbursement to the applicant requires the submittal of documentation that substantiates the work is complete as well as total and final cost for work. This documentation shall include photographs of the completed project, final invoice(s) and or receipts, and cancelled check(s) or confirmations of payment in full and proof of completed volunteer hours. In addition prior to reimbursement, the work completed must be approved by the Design Committee or Main Street Manager through an actual on-site inspection of work done to ensure the consistency of initial approval to the end project, along with all necessary approvals by the City of Oil City.

VOLUNTEER SERVICE HOURS

The Oil City Main Street Program is a volunteer-based community revitalization program. All Façade Improvement Grant Recipients are required to complete a minimum of 5 hours of community service within the Main Street District prior to receiving their project reimbursement. Hours must be completed on or after the date on the Letter of Commitment, but not before. Please be sure to read the Volunteer Hours Criteria in your information packet for complete details.

Additionally, property and/or business owners are expected to maintain their building and regular property appearance through weed control, trash removal, cleanliness, and overall care. Failure to do so may result in denial of future grant requests.

SUMMARY

While these guidelines may not address each and every situation, they are intended to be a helpful guide and may be updated from time to time according to the needs of our community. Please feel free to contact the Oil City Main Street Manager at (814) 677-3152, ext. 101 if you have questions or would like to discuss your ideas.

Application/Grant Procedures

Planning:

- ☐ Contact the Main Street Manager at (814) 677-3152, ext. 101 and/or schedule a meeting with the Design Committee to discuss your plans
 - ☐ Create a rudimentary sketch of desired improvements
 - ☐ Bring a current photo of your property
- ☐ Obtain an Information Packet and Façade Grant Guidelines. Read them.
- ☐ Learn/understand your property's historical architecture
- ☐ Contact Oil City Code Administration at 678-3003 and Zoning Office at 678-3016 to discuss any necessary permits.

Complete Your Application:

- ☐ Gather/attach written, itemized cost estimates, drawings, samples, color swatches, etc.
- ☐ Gather/attach proof of current taxes (city, school and county) and insurance
- ☐ Include photos: close-ups of work needed and "whole building" shots from a distance.
- ☐ Complete all sections of application – please print legibly!
- ☐ Sign all required sections (both business and property owner).
- ☐ Submit your complete application to the Main Street Office before the last day of any month.

Review/Approval:

- ☐ OMCS Design Committee will review applications at their regular meeting by appointment. Be ready to email your complete application a few days prior to the meeting.
- ☐ Main Street Manager issues Letter of Commitment to applicant (must be signed & returned within 15 days). DO NOT PROCEED until this letter is signed by both parties.

Execute Project:

- You may now begin your project; and begin working on your 5 hours of volunteer service (must occur in the Main Street District, on or after the date of your Letter of Commitment but not before).
- Notify the Main Street Manager when work will begin. If possible, take photos of work in progress.
- Your façade improvement project must be completed with 120 days of approval (or request an extension in writing).

Reimbursement:

- Submit proof of payment in full (zero-balance statement and/or cancelled checks) and proof of completion and any required inspections to the Main Street Office. **NOTE: CASH PAYMENTS TO CONTRACTORS/VENDORS ARE NOT ACCEPTABLE AND WILL NOT BE REIMBURSED.**
- Allow approx. 90 days for reimbursement. The Main Street Manager will contact you when your reimbursement is ready.
- Work not completed in accordance with approved project description may be denied payment.

Ongoing:

- Your project may be featured in the overall publicity of the Façade Improvement Grant Program via "in-progress" signage, before & after photos, media announcements, etc.: we appreciate your cooperation and assistance.



A building must be located inside of the red shaded area in order to be eligible for a Main Street Façade Improvement Grant.

