



DeFUNIAK SPRINGS COMMUNITY REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY

Guidelines & Procedures for Commercial Site and Building Improvement Grant Program

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Please note that an application must be submitted and approved by the CRA BEFORE work begins. The applicant assumes all financial liabilities related to work that is completed prior to a ruling. Following a review of the CRA application, the applicant will be sent an official correspondence by the CRA Executive Director.

Purpose:

The primary objective of this matching grant program is to encourage redevelopment and revitalization of commercial structures and properties by offering limited financial and technical assistance. The overall objective is to stimulate reinvestment in the CRA district and to preserve or revitalize the homes that create the unique character of the community. This assistance grant is in compliance with the CRA Master Plan Site Building and Development Assistance Program and the overall goal of eliminating blight within the CRA district [FSS Chapter 163.335] through enhancing the appearance and condition of structures and properties.

Commercial Property owners may qualify for this matching grant program which provides up to 50% reimbursement of the total project cost, up to a maximum of \$15,000, to pay for the implementation of eligible improvements to existing commercial structures within the CRA District. All disbursements of grant funds are made following the completion and final inspection of the improvement project. Funds are appropriated annually in the CRA Budget and are available on a first come-first served basis. The program is subject to the availability of allocated funds in that CRA budget.

Applicants are reminded that grant awards are discretionary and should not be considered an entitlement. All grant criteria contained herein are guidelines, not guarantees for awards and successful applicants may receive any amount up to the maximum award. Should an applicant meet all grant criteria, a grant may or may not be awarded due to funding limitations, competing applications, and/or competing priorities.

Program Rules:

The following rules are intended to inform a potential grant applicant of the extent and scope of the program. The desired result will halt deterioration, stabilize property values, improve and upgrade the appearance of the area, and facilitate and encourage redevelopment activity in the CRA district.

1. The program is for commercial properties only. The property owner must be the applicant or have approval from the property owner. Subject property must be the current or planned occupancy of applicant. Applications for properties delinquent in payment of property taxes will not be accepted.
2. The program is available only for property located within the CRA District.
3. Improvements must be consistent with any applicable guidelines and policies as outlined by the CRA Plan.
4. Eligible improvements for this program include (this list is not exhaustive):
 - Fees – Site design; engineering; permitting
 - Landscaping Expenses (design fees; installation; material purchases; irrigation)
 - Exterior Repair, Stucco and Painting
 - Roof Repair and Replacement
 - Exterior lighting and related electrical work
 - Exterior Signage
 - Awning Installation/Repair/Replacement
5. All work must be done in compliance with applicable City of DeFuniak Springs and Walton County Codes and Planning Regulations. All professional work where permitting is required must be performed by a licensed contractor in good standing with the City of DeFuniak Springs and Walton County. Improvements to properties that do not or cannot meet building and safety codes are ineligible.
6. Historic buildings shall be designed, revitalized, and maintained to complement and accent the original architectural features of the building.
7. Grant funds will be reimbursed exclusively for approved work, approved change orders and only for work that has been performed after being notified of grant approval by the CRA. Any work completed prior to receiving grant approval is ineligible for reimbursement.
8. Only one (1) Commercial Site and Building Improvement Grant application will be accepted per property, per annual grant cycle. The Commercial Site and Building Improvement Grant Program is only available to applicants that have not received the maximum grant award in the last three (3) years.

Application Process:

1. An applicant seeking a Commercial Site and Building Improvement Grant application may find them Online at <https://www.defuniaksprings.net/cra>. A checklist of required documents and forms can be found within the Online grant page.
2. Applications will be accepted no sooner than October 1, and no later than July 1 of each fiscal year without the approval of the director.
3. The CRA Executive Director undertakes the review of the application and determines if the application is complete. If the application is found incomplete, the applicant will be granted time to complete and resubmit the application. Once complete, application will be date-stamped as received. **Acceptance of completed application packet is not a guarantee of funding.**
4. Applicants may not have any outstanding City of DeFuniak Springs liens against their property. CRA grants will not be awarded until the complete satisfaction of any City of DeFuniak Springs liens.
5. Within two (2) weeks, or ten (10) business days, of receipt of the completed application, the CRA Executive Director will conduct a full review to ensure compliance with the CRA Grant Program Criteria and will make a decision for final approval.
6. An official notification from the CRA Executive Director will be delivered to the Applicant within two (2) weeks, or ten (10) business days informing them of the approval or denial of the application, which may include approval **with conditions**. Failure to comply to conditions in a timely manner may result in the revocation of grant approval.
7. All Grant funding decisions provided by CRA Executive Director are final. Applicants that are formally denied a CRA grant may appeal staff decisions in writing to the CRA Board.
8. Applicant must return the signed award to the CRA office in person or via email to CRADirector@DeFuniakSprings.net within two (2) weeks of notification of approval.
9. By accepting the CRA grant award, applicant understands and agrees to:
 - a. Maintain the improvements made in accordance with this agreement for a period of three (3) years.
 - b. Not to alter, modify, or remove the improvements made in accordance with the agreement for a period of three (3) years without CRA approval.
 - c. Maintain ownership of the property in accordance with the agreement for a period of three (3) years. **Receipt of grant funding to improve property for sale is prohibited.** Sale of subject property prior to completion of improvements will result in the revocation of award approval.

Failure to comply may result in:

- a. Code Enforcement action
- b. Repayment of all CRA funds received by applicant for the subject property.

Project Implementation and Reimbursement Process:

1. Projects receiving funding must begin work within 90 days from receipt of grant approval notification and must be completed within one (1) year unless a written request for time extension is received and approved by the CRA at least 30 days prior to project expiration. Non-compliance of these time frames may result in retraction of grant approval, and a new application would be required for consideration.
2. Reporting – By accepting the grant, applicant agrees to comply with monthly updates conducted by the CRA Executive Director. These updates may be obtained via email, phone, or site visits. Reporting may include, but not limited to, work schedules, reporting forms, and projected completion dates.
3. Site Visits – CRA staff will conduct a site visit before grant payment is made to verify that the work has been completed. Staff may also conduct unannounced site visits periodically to ensure compliance with the terms of the grant agreement.
4. Applicants will receive grant funding after the improvements are completed, inspected and all associated costs have been paid. It is the responsibility of the Applicant to maintain proper documentation of funds expended while completing the project. Release of funds is subject to submission of this documentation to the CRA Executive Director by the Applicant. The project must be completed essentially as presented and approved by the CRA Executive Director to receive payment/reimbursement.
5. Award reimbursement shall be made upon completion of the improvements as approved. A final inspection and approval by the City/County are required. Submission of the following documentation is required for reimbursement of awarded project costs:
 - a. Pictures of completed project and all work funded by the CRA grant.
 - b. Proof of payment in full for all work included in project as approved. Detailed invoices and paid receipts showing the name, address and phone number of licensed contractor or professional service used is required.
 - c. Copies of all required permits and final inspections.
 - d. Signed and completed W-9, as required by law, for the recipient of grant funds.
6. Requests for reimbursement of project costs not included in either the approved renovation plan or an approved Change Order shall not be considered for reimbursement.
7. The CRA reserves the right to verify any and all costs associated with design or renovation work for which reimbursement is requested.