



City of Clearwater

Community Redevelopment Agency

Whitebox Grant Program

A. Program Overview

The purpose of the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) Whitebox grant program is to reduce vacancy in commercial properties by assisting property owners and tenants with funding to renovate vacant spaces for occupancy by long-term or short-term uses that generate significant pedestrian foot traffic in downtown. Grants may be awarded to property owners or tenants for exterior and interior improvements to commercial property within the CRA district. This program is intended for renovations and repairs that do not exceed a total project cost of \$100,000. Eligible improvements include exterior improvements for painting, signage, lighting, doors, windows, site improvements, and other minor exterior repairs. Eligible interior improvements include windows, doors, standard lighting and electrical, basic HVAC, concrete floor, ADA restrooms, fountain, and fire code improvements. The CRA will fund 100% of the cost of eligible improvements up to \$25,000 and provide a 50% match towards the total project cost up to a maximum of \$50,000 per application. The amount of grant funds for the program will be established by the CRA Trustees on an annual basis. All grant awards are subject to budget availability. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis. The application form is available at www.downtownclearwater.com.

The **Whitebox grant program** directly promotes goals and objectives of the 2018 Clearwater Downtown Redevelopment Plan, specifically:

People Goals (page 46) – Downtown shall be a place that attracts residents, visitors, businesses, and their employees and enable the development of community. The City shall encourage a vibrant and active public realm, recreation and entertainment opportunities and support the community and neighborhoods.

Objective 1E: Maintain Cleveland Street as Downtown's Main Street which is valued for its historic character and pedestrian scale.

Urban Design Goal (page 48) – Downtown will be a dynamic built environment of dense and livable patterns and active and attractive streets through quality urban design and architecture.

Objective 4D: Encourage renovation, restoration, and reuse of existing historic structures to maintain the character of Downtown's neighborhoods.

The Whitebox grant program's **objectives** are as follows:

- Reduce the number of vacant properties in Downtown Clearwater by bringing older, vacant properties up to current building and fire codes to allow occupancy

- Increase the number of commercial spaces suitable for “pop-up” uses to create new retail and cultural destinations in downtown
- Incentivize the attraction of new businesses that generate pedestrian foot traffic to occupy vacant spaces by reducing the costs of renovation

B. Program Eligibility and Activities

The Community Redevelopment Agency staff will administer the Whitebox grant program. Funding for this grant program is based on budget availability and will be considered on a first-come, first-served basis. Application submission does not guarantee approval. Applications will be reviewed for completeness and compliance with program criteria to determine eligibility for grant funding. Applications that do not comply with the program criteria and conditions will not be eligible for funding. No grants will be awarded for work completed prior to an executed grant agreement. The funding decision of CRA staff is final.

No more than one grant from this program may be awarded to the same property address or building unit within a 5-year period. Individual storefronts contained on one parcel will be considered eligible for funding if they have unique mailing addresses and entrances. Grants are limited to one grant per business.

All applications must meet the following criteria:

1. The subject property must be a commercial or mixed-use property located within the CRA. The applicant must be the property owner or a business tenant in the subject property. Existing business tenants or property owners must possess a current city of Clearwater Business Tax Receipt. New business owners must obtain a city of Clearwater Business Tax Receipt within 60 days of grant agreement execution.
2. Properties must be vacant at the time of application. The applicant must submit a scope of work with a minimum of two quotes from qualified vendors for completing the work. Every project must include interior improvements. No applications will be accepted with exterior improvements only. The *total project cost* is determined by the total costs of eligible grant expenses. Grant funds can only be used towards eligible expenses. Matching funds must be used towards eligible expenses. The maximum grant amount per application is \$50,000, which requires a total project cost of a minimum of \$100,000. Applicants may spend more than \$100,000, however the maximum grant will remain \$50,000.
3. The subject property must have an eligible business tenant(s) that will open for business once the building improvements are complete. Applicants must supply proof of a lease that identifies at least a minimum of a two-year term. If the applicant anticipates a “pop-up” use that has a shorter lease term, the applicant must show how the building will remain in use for at least two years. The CRA may require a property owner to secure the grant funding through a personal guarantee or other means to ensure the newly renovated building remains occupied for a minimum of two years from the execution of the grant agreement.
4. Grants funds must be used to attract the following kinds of businesses as defined in the Downtown Zoning code:
 - Retail and restaurant businesses
 - Personal Services Industries (e.g., barber and beauty shops, health spas, dance studios,

- photography and art studios, tailoring, and other similar services)
- Galleries, theaters, other cultural and community gathering spaces

5. Prior to execution of a grant agreement, the subject property must be free from any liens (except mortgage liens), judgments, or encumbrances (except easements) of any kind, and all city obligations must be current.

Eligible Grant Expenditures

Grant funds must be used to make interior only OR exterior and interior improvements to the building, that remain with the building and the site that reduce visual blight and prepare the building for occupancy. The CRA's general rule for improvements that qualify towards a property owner's match is that the improvement should remain with the property. Eligible interior and exterior building improvements include:

- ADA requirements
- Window/Doors
- Interior Water Fountains
- Florida Fire Protection Code Requirements
- Mechanicals and HVAC systems
- Plumbing and electrical, including utility connections and upgrades
- Structure stabilization (repair and replacement of foundations, footers, load bearing walls, roofing systems)
- Room and space reconfiguration including wall relocations
- Energy efficiency improvements
- Windows and Doors (Interior or Exterior)
- Outdoor hardscape improvements and lighting
- Signage- New Signage Only that meet city department requirements
- Painting (including murals)
- General exterior surface repairs, new roof, or roof repairs
- Siding Materials
- Minor site improvements, e.g., driveway repair, re-striping parking lot

C. Grant Process:

Property owners or tenants first complete a grant application. CRA staff reviews the application for funding eligibility. Once an application is determined complete and in compliance with the grant program, CRA staff will execute a grant agreement that outlines the approved funding amount, total project costs, project timeline and scope of work. The application form is available at www.downtonclearwater.com.

Application Submission

1. Applications can be submitted via email, in person, or postal services. The applicant must meet with the CRA staff. Staff will provide the applicant with general guidance on proposed project and if the project qualifies for grant funds for submission. Incomplete applications will not be accepted.
2. Each application will be reviewed according to the following criteria:
 - Consistency with the goals of the Downtown Redevelopment Plan
 - Feasibility of the proposed scope of services and timeline

- Ability to meet the program objectives, legal and financial requirements of the grant program

3. If the application is approved by the CRA Director, the applicant shall sign and complete a funding agreement. After the funding agreement has been executed, the applicant may begin work on the project.

Project Timeline

For scopes of work which require a permit, permits must be obtained prior to the execution of a grant agreement. Any work requiring a permit must be performed by a licensed and insured contractor and comply with the Downtown Design Guidelines of the City of Clearwater Code of Ordinances. Renovations must be completed within one year from execution of the grant agreement. The CRA Director has the authority to extend time limits for project completion based on extenuating circumstances. Grantees must request an extension in writing and if approved, an amendment to the grant agreement will be executed.

Payment Process

Grant funds will be disbursed by the CRA to the applicant on a reimbursement basis for eligible project expenses. CRA staff must review and approve all reimbursement requests. The CRA Director can approve grant reimbursements up to \$50,000. Applicants must submit paid invoices as proof of payment. Projects requiring a building permit will need to submit proof of a Certificate of Occupancy or Completion prior to requesting reimbursement. The CRA Director has the authority to modify the payment process based on extenuating circumstances.

D. Next Steps

If you are interested in learning more about the Whitebox grant program please visit www.downtownclearwater.com or contact Howard Smith at howard.smith@myclearwater.com