



Legislation Text

File #: ID#21-8885, Version: 1

SUBJECT/RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the Whitebox grant program to assist owners and/or tenants with renovating commercial spaces to attract businesses that generate pedestrian foot traffic and authorize the appropriate officials to execute same.

SUMMARY:

The Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) is recommending approval of a Whitebox grant program as part of the CRA's two-year strategy to reduce vacancy and encourage private investment in downtown. The CRA staff spent 18 months in conversation with tenants, property owners and other city departments to understand how to develop partnerships with the community that will fill vacant, older commercial spaces.

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.

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

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

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 exterior improvements include 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. This program provides the CRA Director with the authority to approve applications, execute grant agreements and provide reimbursements up to \$50,000 for eligible grant expenses. CRA staff recommends establishing a one-year budget of \$300,000 which will cover six properties at the full grant amount.

The proposed grant program balances the legal requirements for the use of CRA funds, meets the goals of the downtown redevelopment plan and provides a partnership opportunity for property owners and/or tenants who wish to invest in downtown.

APPROPRIATION CODE AND AMOUNT:

Funds are available in CRA project code 3887552- R2003 ED-City and 3887552-R2004 ED-County.