



Downtown Revitalization Incentives Program

Premises Improvement Grant Program Guidelines



REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY
OF WOOD BUFFALO

Contents

Introduction	3
Grant objective.....	3
Grant value	3
Project criteria	4
Eligible and ineligible costs.....	5
General program requirements	5
Eligible Projects	7
Landscaping improvements	7
Accessibility improvements	8
Safety and crime prevention improvements.....	9
Wayfinding improvements.....	10
Site amenities.....	11
Applying and Reimbursement	12
Step 1. Pre-application meeting	12
Step 2. Preparing your application	12
Step 3. Preliminary review	12
Step 4. Completing your application	13
Step 5. Funding agreement	13
Step 6. Permits	13
Step 7. Reimbursement.....	14
Contact.....	14
Resources	15



INTRODUCTION

Thank you for your interest in the Downtown Revitalization Incentives Program (Program). The program supports the revitalization and transformation of the downtown into a safe and welcoming place where people want to spend time. The Program offers grants to eligible buildings to help improve exteriors (façades), interiors, and the surrounding premises areas (lands), and to install murals to create interest.

These guidelines include information on eligible projects, application details, and program requirements. Anyone interested in applying for a grant is strongly encouraged to book a pre-application meeting. Program staff will be able to help you navigate the application process, ensure projects are eligible, and answer any questions. To book a pre-application meeting, please contact Pulse (780.743.7000) or email: incentives@rmwb.ca.

Grant objective

The Premises Improvement Grant is intended to help property and business owners enhance the areas surrounding their buildings. The grant's objectives are to:

- Enhance the aesthetic quality of properties through improved landscaping and placemaking initiatives.
- Make properties more accessible, safe, and pedestrian friendly.

The "Premises" is defined as the portion of the property surrounding buildings. It typically includes parking and landscaping areas associated with the development.



Grant value

Funding is provided as a matching reimbursement grant, which means that Municipality pays 50% of eligible costs to the maximum allowed by the grant. Applicants receive funding after projects are complete and verified by the Municipality. For example, a project valued at \$30,000 would be eligible for a grant up to \$15,000 if the premises measured 700 m².

The following funding is available:

- 50% of costs up to \$10,000 for premises less than 500 m²
- 50% of costs up to \$15,000 for premises between 501 and 1,000 m²
- 50% of costs up to \$20,000 for premises between 1,001 and 2,000 m²
- 50% of costs up to \$25,000 for premises between 2,001 and 3,000 m²
- 50% of costs up to \$30,000 for premises between 3,001 and 4,000 m²
- 50% of costs up to \$35,000 for premises between 4,001 and 5,000 m²
- 50% of costs up to \$40,000 for premises larger than 5,001 m²



The premises area (in square metres) is the area of the land minus the area of any buildings. It typically includes landscaped and parking areas. Refer to page 7 section for eligible projects.

Supporting accessibility and safety

The Program supports applicants to include accessibility and safety (crime prevention) improvements. The Program also supports the Municipality's Age Friendly Work Plan's goal of "*establishing accessible and universal design of programs and facilities as a framework of best practices.*"

Refer to page 7 for eligible projects and resources to help you assess, identify, and plan your project.

Project criteria

Applicants should be:

- Property owner or a tenant (with the property owner's permission).

Eligible buildings and their premises should:

- Serve an existing commercial, institutional, mixed-use building, or apartment building.
- Be located in the program area. View the map at: rmwb.ca/incentives

Projects must:

- Be selected from eligible improvements specified starting on page 7.
- Focus on the areas fronting public roads or adjacent to building entrances.
- Improve the functionality or aesthetics for users on a meaningful level.
- Be constructed in accordance with applicable Engineering Servicing Standards, Land Use Bylaw, Alberta Building Code or other safety codes, and approved construction specifications.
- Be kept in good repair for a minimum of five (5) years.

The following are ineligible:

- Improvements required as a condition of a development permit, such as required landscaping, bicycle parking, and seating. These must be provided and maintained for the lifespan of the development.
- Improvements associated with a landscaping security or other security that is being held by the Municipality.
- Improvements that would make the development non-compliant with respect to parking, landscaping, or another requirement of an approved development permit.
- Buildings that received a premises improvement grant previously.



Eligible and ineligible costs

Eligible costs include:

- Professional fees, including project management, design and engineering, to a maximum of 15% of eligible costs.
- Municipal planning permit fees.
- Direct project labour costs.
- Rental of tools and equipment.
- Goods and Service Tax (GST).

Ineligible costs include:

- Routine maintenance.
- Labour performed by the applicant.
- Purchases of tools and consumables.
- Non-specific costs, profit, insurance, and warranties.
- Costs associated with overruns.
- Paving not primarily intended to improve pedestrian accessibility.
- Landscaping improvements that replace soft landscaping with hardscaping.
- Scope of work that is already funded by another municipal grant.

General program requirements

Please review the key terms and conditions of the program as outlined in the Downtown Revitalization Incentives Program council policy (FIN-320): rmwb.ca/incentives.

- Funding is provided on a first-come, first-serve basis.
- Applying for a grant does not guarantee approval or that projects can obtain the necessary permits.
- To prevent municipal funds from being used multiple times for the same projects, projects that receive other municipal funding for the same scope of work are no longer eligible for DRIP grants.
- To help keep applications moving forward, program staff may close or withdraw inactive applications after 4 weeks of no communication from the applicant. This ensures funding is directed toward active and ready-to-proceed projects.
- Grants are not retroactive. Costs incurred before applying for a grant and signing an agreement are not eligible. Some exceptions apply:
 - Professional fees related to the project if incurred after January 1, 2024.
 - Municipal planning permit fees (e.g. development permits, building permits, and trade permits).
- If approved, recipients will enter into an agreement with the Municipality that sets out the terms and conditions of participation in the Program.
- **Construction must be completed within 18 months of the date of your agreement.** Requests for additional time must be received before the deadline has passed.
- Applicants may use the contractor(s) of their choice. Applicants are responsible for paying contractors and for verifying business license requirements.
- Please notify program staff if your project changes during construction. Changes must be approved and an amendment to the agreement may be required. Extensions and changes may be considered on a case-by-case basis.



- The following will be verified at the reimbursement stage:
 - Property taxes are current and paid.
 - Municipal utility bills are current and paid.
 - The applicant is not in a legal dispute with the Municipality.
 - All necessary permits and permissions for the project have been obtained.
- Reimbursement is provided upon the satisfactory completion of the project.



ELIGIBLE PROJECTS

This section outlines the types of projects that the Premises Improvement Grant may be used for. Advice and further reading resources are also provided to assist with project planning.

Landscaping improvements

Landscaping projects must enhance existing landscaped areas or provide new landscaped areas to a FireSmart standard. FireSmart is a national program that helps prevent or reduce the risk of wildfire.

The replacement of landscaped areas (sod, shrubs, and trees) with hard surfaces (paving, stones) is not supported by the program. All plants must be installed to municipal standards. Refer to the Engineering Servicing Standards and Development Procedures (Landscape and Park Development Standards section).

When planning your project, consider the size of trees and shrubs when they are mature. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principals recommend that plantings allow for views/surveillance into sites. Shrubs should not grow taller than 1.2 meters at maturity and deciduous trees are preferable to coniferous trees.

Further reading:

- RMWB Fire Smart webpage.
- RMWB FireSmart Guide to Landscaping.
- RMWB Engineering Servicing Standards and Development Procedures (2021).
- Business Crime Prevention Kit (2024).

For links to the above references, see page 15.



Eligible projects include:

- New or upgraded planting beds (perennial flowers and shrubs).
- New trees.
- Tree removals and replacements (when supported by a one-to-one replacement).
- Permanent planters or raised garden boxes.



Accessibility improvements

Accessible access means a site, building, or other facility that has appropriate features that allow it to be used by people, including those with physical, sensory, or cognitive differences in ability. Projects must enhance the accessibility and functionality of a site. Walkways, lighting, signage (wayfinding), and amenities can all be upgraded to improve accessibility for everyone.

Improvements such as ramps require a building permit and must meet Alberta Building Code requirements, at a minimum (e.g., for slope, handrail design). However, improvements may also meet the higher national standards set out by the Canadian Standards Association (CSA).

For information on what you can do to make your business or building more accessible, visit the Municipality's webpage [RMWB.ca/accessibility](https://rmwb.ca/accessibility) to:

- Learn more about the benefits of becoming age-friendly and accessible.
- Complete the RMWB Accessibility Checklist for ideas.
- Consider obtaining an Accessibility Audit (an eligible cost) from a qualified professional.

Further reading:

- Alberta Building Code (2023).
- CSA/ASC B651-23 Accessible Design for the Built Environment (2023).
- Engineering Servicing Standards and Development Standards (2021).
- RMWB Accessibility Checklist. (2024).

For links to the above references, see page 15.



Eligible projects include:

- New walkways to provide a more direct route.
- Replacing an existing walkway to provide a wider, more accessible path.
- New painted crosswalks (when done as part of a larger project), tactile strips, items that increase navigability of the site, or other improvements outlined in general standards and guidelines.
- New or substantially renovated ramps and the associated handrails.
- New handrails and guardrails for steps.
- Seating and rest areas adjacent to building entrances.
- New or replacement signs (placards) for designated accessible, senior, or family parking areas/stalls.
- New wayfinding signage to identify building entrances (non-advertising) that is designed based on general standards and guidelines for appropriate font sizes, colours and materials.



Safety and crime prevention improvements

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) uses the design and management of built and natural environments to reduce crime and minimize the fear of crime. Lighting, wayfinding (signage), and landscaping improvements can help contribute to safety and crime prevention.

- Well-lit premises help improve the customer experience, while providing comfort and security for staff and residents.
- Wayfinding signs help users locate entrances and other site features.
- Landscaping and the location of internal walkways can be used to direct users around a site.

For information on what you can do to protect your business or property,

- Visit the municipal website.
- Review the RMWB *Business Crime Prevention Kit* for tips.
- Register new security cameras on CAPTURE (Community Assisted Policing Through Use of Recorded Evidence).
- Email incentives@rmwb.ca to request a free visit from the RCMP to receive advice on your business or property.

Further reading:

- Business Crime Prevention Kit (2024).
- Engineering Servicing Standards and Development Procedures (2021).
- RMWB Crime Prevention webpage.

For links to the above references see page 14.



Eligible projects include:

- New lighting. For example, lamp standards, in-ground lighting, and illuminated bollards. Refer to the Engineering Servicing Standards and Development Procedures for the placement of new lighting.
- Upgrade existing lighting fixtures with LED, vandal-proof fixtures, motion sensor, and programmable lighting.
- Building name and address signage for territorial reinforcement.
- Lockable garbage enclosures.
- Security cameras.
- Removal of solid window film and vinyl wraps to maintain clear visibility from the store to the street.



Wayfinding improvements

Wayfinding can be used to not only enhance a property's aesthetic appeal, but contribute to its accessibility and safety by helping users navigate around and locate building entrances and other key features.

Wayfinding is not intended for advertising. Rather, it is *"a series of visual cues to help someone understand where they are and where they are going. Wayfinding enhances sense of place and creates a shared regional identity with colour, graphics, designs, and public celebration of culture and history"* (Wood Buffalo Wayfinding Strategy, 2023).

Wayfinding signs may include directional information. For example, signs pointing to building entrances, parking areas, and other amenities, or incidental signs that speak to the site's or building's history and cultural importance.

Further reading:

- Accessibility Checklist (2024).
- Barrier Free Design Guidelines. (2017).
- Business Crime Prevention Kit (2024).
- CSA B651-23 Accessible Design for the Built Environment (2023).
- Wood Buffalo Downtown Wayfinding Plan (2023) for ideas on different wayfinding styles.
- Wood Buffalo Wayfinding Strategy (2023) provides general guidance.

For links to the above references, see page 15.



Eligible projects include:

- Wayfinding signs used to identify building entrances and other features.
- Wayfinding signs used to direct movement through a site.
- Dedicated parking signs/placards for accessible or family parking stalls.
- On a larger site, the use of a cohesive wayfinding design theme for a development (e.g., Peter Pond, Stone Creek Village, etc.) is encouraged.



Site amenities

Providing amenities, such as seating and rest areas, can make a site more comfortable for users.

New amenities, such as bicycle racks and playground equipment, should be commercial-grade and installed per manufacturer specifications. Refer to Canadian Standards Association (CSA) for required standards for playground equipment.



Eligible projects include:

- Bicycle racks.
- Benches and permanent seating areas.
- Waste and recycling bins.
- Electrical charging stations that meets requirements provided in the Alberta Building Code.
- CSA certified playground equipment that is installed by a qualified professional.



APPLYING AND REIMBURSEMENT

The following section outlines the steps to applying. The Program now provides a two-stage approval. A partial application may be accepted before applicants provide pricing. If approved, a conditional approval will be issued, which holds the funding for your project. Applicants will then have 90 days to submit pricing for review and full approval. If your building has received a grant previously, or if you are unsure, please inquire to confirm eligibility.

Step 1. Pre-application meeting

- A pre-application meeting is strongly recommended.
- At the pre-application meeting, a program administrator will review program requirements with you to ensure your project meets the spirit and intent of the Program.

Step 2. Preparing your application

- Prepare and submit the following as part of your application:
 - Completed application form (rmwb.ca/incentives)
 - Letter of intent
 - Photos showing the existing conditions
 - Site plan
 - Certificate of Title
 - Corporate search for the applicant
 - Corporate search for the property owner (for applications made by tenants)
 - Letter of Authorization (for applications made by tenants).
- Refer to the application form for further details. The application form is available at: rmwb.ca/incentives. A blank letter of intent and letter of authorization are included with the application form.

Step 3. Preliminary review

- Program staff will review your application to confirm it meets basic eligibility requirements and the intent of the Program. Proposals may be referred for further internal review.
- Comments may be provided to you for information or to be addressed by your proposal (where a response is required, please respond within four weeks).
- If your project concept is approved, a **conditional approval letter** will be provided to you. The letter will:
 - Provide any comments received on your proposal.
 - Stipulate any conditions that must be met.
 - Identify the documents for you to submit or resubmit.
 - Provide the deadline to fulfill the conditions.
- You will have 90 days to submit the remainder of application documents, including pricing for your project.
- **Please note that applications that remain incomplete after 90 days will be automatically rejected and you need to reapply (subject to program deadlines and funding availability).**



Step 4. Completing your application

- Submit the remaining documents to complete your application.
 - Two (2) contractor estimates.
 - Any other information identified in the conditional approval letter.
- Please note that **contractor estimates** must:
 - Provide an itemized breakdown (lump-sum estimates may not be accepted).
 - Be provided by independent companies and arms-length from the applicant.
 - Be prepared on business letterhead, including company name and contact information.
 - Include all project costs (permits, project management).
- The Municipality reserves the right to request additional estimates.
- Some expenses are not eligible. Please refer to page 5 for eligible and ineligible costs.
- Program staff will review the application information to determine the grant value the project may receive.

Step 5. Funding agreement

- After your project and pricing are approved, a grant agreement (contract) setting out the terms and conditions of participating in the program will be offered.
- **The agreement must be signed by the applicant within 30 calendar days. Please note that agreements that remain unsigned after 30 days will be automatically revoked.**
- Once the agreement is signed by all parties, you may apply for permits (if not already done so) and begin construction.

Step 6. Permits

- Permits must be applied for and approved before construction begins. You are responsible for ensuring all permits are obtained for your project.
- Many projects require permits. Your project may require:
 - Development permit
 - Building permit
 - Trades permits (e.g., electrical permit)
 - Authorization for developments on or above municipal land. For example, a license of occupation or a boulevard crossing permit.
- If you are advised that your project does not require a permit, please provide written confirmation from the Municipality.
- For permitting advice, please contact RMWB Planning and Development Services:

Jubilee Building

Main floor, 9909 Franklin Avenue, Fort McMurray

Hours: Monday to Friday, 8:30 am to 4:30 pm

current.planning@rmwb.ca

780-743-7000 (Pulse)



Step 7. Reimbursement

- Please contact incentives@rmwb.ca once your project is complete. A copy of the reimbursement application form will be provided.
- All work that requires a building permit must be inspected and the permits must be closed before reimbursement can begin. Partial reimbursement will not be provided.
- Gather your documents and submit a single email to incentives@rmwb.ca with the following:
 - Completed reimbursement application form.
 - A letter or email from the applicant confirming that the project is complete and requesting reimbursement.
 - Photos that show the completed project.
 - Invoices and receipts, including proof of payment.
 - Permit numbers or copies of all permits associated with the project.
 - A valid business license number for the operating business (if applicable).
- Program staff may contact you to arrange a site visit to view the improvements.
- Please be advised that some exterior improvements such as landscaping must be inspected during the construction season (May 1 to October 31). Reimbursement may be delayed if the Program is unable to view improvements.

CONTACT

Downtown Revitalization Incentives Program

Planning and Development Services
Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo
9909 Franklin Avenue
Fort McMurray, AB, T9H 2K4
incentives@rmwb.ca
780.743.7000 (Pulse)



RESOURCES

Business Crime Prevention (2024).

<https://www.rmwb.ca/en/fire-and-emergency-services/crime-prevention.aspx>

CPTED Canada. (n.d.). Welcome to CPTED Canada. <https://cptedcanada.com/>

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CSA Group. (2023). CSA B651-23 Accessible Design for the Built Environment.

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Government of Canada. (2023). National Building Code – 2023 Alberta Edition (Alberta Building Code). <https://nrc-publications.canada.ca/eng/view/ft/?id=0316d953-0d55-4311-af69-cad55efec499>

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<https://www.rmwb.ca/en/permits-and-development/engineering-servicing-standards.aspx>

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Safety Codes Council and Government of Alberta. (2017). Barrier Free Design Guidelines (5th edition).

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