



Downtown Revitalization Incentives Program

Interior Improvements Grant Program Guidelines



REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY
OF WOOD BUFFALO

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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 objectives

The Interior Improvements Grant is intended to help property and business owners upgrade the inside of their buildings. The grant's objectives are to:

- Support the reuse of vacant units and buildings.
- Encourage existing businesses to make general changes to provide a refreshed or more accessible or safe space that can be appreciated by employees and patrons.

Grant value

Funding is provided as a matching reimbursement grant. As a matching grant, the Municipality pays 50% of eligible costs up to the maximum allowed by each type of grant. As a reimbursement grant, applicants receive funding after projects are complete and verified by the Municipality. For example, a vacant storefront could receive a grant of \$40,000 for renovations costing \$80,000 or more.

The following options are provided:

1. Vacant storefront units

- 50% matching grant up to \$40,000 per street-level storefront unit.
- A "Storefront" refers to a unit that is located at the street-level and has large windows for displaying goods and services available inside.
- Vacant for at least six (6) months. For units vacant less than six (6) months, see option 2.

2. Vacant non-storefront units (or if vacant less than six (6) months)

- 50% matching grant up to \$20,000 per unit.

3. Occupied units

- 50% matching grant up to \$20,000 per unit.
- Renovations that make a visual impact on the space (e.g., flooring, painting, etc.).

4. Common areas in multi-unit buildings

- 50% matching grant up to \$20,000 per building.



- Renovations that make a visual impact on the space (e.g., flooring, painting, etc.).

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.*" Additional funding may be provided.

- 50% up to \$5,000 per unit for projects that address accessibility.
- 50% up to \$5,000 per unit for projects that address safety and crime prevention.

For example, applicants may be eligible to increase their funding from \$20,000 per occupied unit to \$25,000 per unit where accessibility improvements are demonstrated. Refer to page 7 for eligible projects and resources to help you assess, identify, and plan your project.

Project criteria

Applicants should be:

- the property owner or a tenant (with the property owner's permission for any improvements made to common areas).

Buildings must be:

- An existing commercial, institutional, or mixed-use building.
- Located in the program area. View the map at rmwb.ca/incentives.

All projects must:

- Support existing or proposed businesses (or activities) that comply with the intent and policies of the *Downtown Area Redevelopment Plan* (2023). Land uses that do not comply are ineligible for funding. The Plan can be viewed at: <https://www.rmwb.ca/en/permits-and-development/downtown.aspx>

Projects in vacant units:

- Must be occupied by a business once construction is complete. If the application is made by the property owner, the new business must be arms-length (unaffiliated) from the property owner.
- May receive all eligible interior renovations, including upgrades to building systems (e.g., electrical, ventilation, etc.), general upgrades (e.g., flooring, painting), and accessibility and safety improvements specified in these guidelines.

Projects in existing businesses or common areas:

- Are limited to general upgrades (e.g., flooring, painting), and accessibility and safety improvements specified in these guidelines.



Limits on participation:

- Units and common areas that received the interior improvements grant previously are ineligible for further applications.
- A maximum of three (3) applications for non-storefront units and common areas will be considered in multiple occupant buildings. There are no limits on the number of storefronts that may apply.
- The Municipality reserves the right to decline applications in buildings with visible exterior neglect until issues are remediated. Visible neglect may include excessive graffiti, broken or boarded-up windows, and unmaintained properties.

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.
- Window treatments that enclose or obscure street-level windows. For example, tinted, frosted, and mirrored windows, vinyl wraps, security bars, and rolling shutters.
- Finishing and decorating. For example, movable objects and non-permanent fixtures, window coverings, furniture, appliances, light bulbs (when not part of a new fixture), and merchandise displays.
- Charges associated with ongoing security system monitoring and service fees.
- 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 Interior Improvements Grant may be used for. Advice and further reading resources are also provided to assist with project planning.

- Projects in **Vacant units** are eligible to make improvements listed in **Table 1** to **Table 4**.
- Projects in **existing (occupied) units or common areas** are eligible to make improvements from **Table 1**, **Table 3**, and **Table 4**.

Table 1: General upgrades and refreshing your space

General Category	Eligible Expenses and Projects
General upgrades	• Painting. • New flooring and baseboards. • New cabinetry and countertops. For example, staff kitchenettes, counters, vanity units, retail counters, reception desks. Cabinetry must be fixed (non-movable). • New lighting fixtures and ceiling tiles.

Table 2: Renovations available in vacant units

General Category	Eligible Expenses and Projects
Reconfiguring an existing unit	• Subdividing or combining units to meet tenant/occupant's needs (e.g., framing, drywall, doors, etc.).
Installing new or upgrading electrical systems	• New wiring, circuits, outlets, and fixtures. • New or moving existing junction boxes. • Providing emergency lighting.
Installing new or upgrading plumbing systems	• New piping and fixtures.
Installing new ventilation systems	• New ventilation systems including duct work, furnaces, and air conditioning units.
Installing new or upgrading fire safety measures	• Sprinkler systems. • Upgrading interior spaces (fire rating and separation standards). • Installing fire-rated doors.



Accessibility

Projects that include the following accessibility renovations may be eligible to increase their grant by up to \$5,000 (50%). Accessibility improvements must meet the requirements set out in the Alberta Building Code. However, applicants may refer to the higher national guidelines and standards for accessible design (refer to the Canadian Standards Association (CSA/ASC B651:23)). Applications must demonstrate how existing conditions will be upgraded to meet a higher standard.

For information on what you can do to make your business or building more accessible:

- Complete the *RMWB Accessibility Checklist* for ideas.
- Consider obtaining an accessibility audit (an eligible cost) from a qualified professional.
- Visit the municipal webpage to learn about the benefits of becoming age-friendly and accessible.

Table 3: Renovations to increase accessibility

General Category	Eligible Expenses and Projects
Reconfiguring an existing unit	• Widening hallways and internal doorways to an accessible standard. • Installing new handrails on ramps and stairs, and guard rails and protective barriers around open areas where there is a change in the floor level. • Provision of a dedicated (marked) quiet room. This is useful for a range of people. For example, nursing mothers or people of different faith backgrounds.
Elevators and ramps	• Providing a new or substantially updated elevator or lift. • Installing ramps for smooth transition between different levels.
Electrical installations	• Installing dimmer lighting and switches to enable lighting to be adjusted to the user's needs. For example, people with low vision may need a brighter light than people with normal vision. • Positioning light switches and sockets so that they can be reached by people in wheelchairs. • Installing induction loops to support people with hearing aids in spaces with background noise.
Washrooms	• Installing a barrier-free or universal access (gender-neutral and barrier-free) washroom. • Upgrading an existing washroom to barrier-free or universal access. • Associated washroom accessories, grab bars, vanities, fixtures and hardware, and infant and adult change tables.
Doors (interior)	• Upgrading existing interior doors with power-assisted door openers. • Replacing existing doors with more accessible doors. For example, wider doors, light-weight doors, easy to open with levers handles, and doors painted in contrasting colours to assist those with visual impairments.
Painting	• Choosing a colour scheme that provides a high contrast when painting doors, door frames, and walls to assist those with visual impairment. Improvements



General Category	Eligible Expenses and Projects
	should be based on standards or best practices. For example, see the CSA Accessible Design for the Built Environment.
Flooring	• Installing firm, slip-resistant, anti-glare flooring, including on stairs. • Carpeting should be fitted and with a low pile. Area rugs and carpets can be a tripping hazard, and long pile carpets can cause difficulties for people in wheelchairs or that have reduced mobility. • Use tactile flooring and/or contrasting colours, and warning strips to indicate changes, such as coming up to stairs, doorways or emergency routes.
Interior wayfinding signage	• Installing wayfinding signage for building circulation, exit routes and directions. Signs should be positioned where they can be easily read by people in wheelchairs and use clear lettering and contrasting colours.

Further reading:

Alberta Building Code 2023 (National Building – Alberta Edition) (2023).

Barrier Free Design Guidelines (5th edition). (2017).

CSA/ASC B651 –23 Accessible Design for the Built environment. (2023).

RMWB Accessibility around the RMWB (2024).

RMWB Accessibility Checklist. (2024).

For links to the above references, see page 14.



Crime prevention

Projects that include the following safety and crime prevention renovations may be eligible to increase their grant by up to \$5,000 (50%). Applicants must demonstrate how existing conditions will be updated to enhance safety and improve crime prevention measures.

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

- Visit the municipal webpage to learn about crime prevention strategies.
- 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.

Table 4: Renovations to increase safety and crime prevention.

General Category	Eligible Expenses and Projects
Security systems	• Security cameras and alarms systems (equipment purchase only). • Electronic sensors for people entering or leaving the building.
Doors and windows	• Install hardware to improve security. For example, new deadbolts, door viewers in rear security doors, and height markers. • Install shatterproof window film (must be clear).
Lighting	• Interior motion sensor lighting.
Other	• Relocate cashier counters to the front of the store for visibility. • Install partitions and glass around cashier areas. • Install vestibules or turnstiles to manage access into the business. • Install security mirrors.

Further reading:

Business Crime Prevention Kit. (2024).

RMWB Crime Prevention webpage.

For links to the above references, see page 14.



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
 - Floor plans
 - Certificate of Title
 - Corporate search for the applicant
 - Letter of Authorization (for applications to common areas made by tenants). Where a Letter of Authorization is not required, tenants are responsible for obtaining permission from the property owner to undertake improvement projects.
- 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)
- 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.
- Program staff may contact you to arrange a site visit to view the 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

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