

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

INCENTIVES PROGRAM

ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY REPORT

November 24, 2020



**REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY
OF WOOD BUFFALO**

Table of Contents

Part 1: Summary	3
What We Heard	3
Part 2: Overview of Public Engagement	8
Overview	8
Engagement Tactics	8
Communication Tactics	8
Results – Online Survey (Participate Wood Buffalo)	10
One-to-One and Stakeholder Meetings	22
Part 3: Feedback Provided During Program Implementation.....	27
Overview	27
Comments.....	27

Part 1: Summary

This report summarizes public engagement feedback and other feedback provided by applicants and other stakeholders during the implementation of the *Downtown Revitalization Incentives Program*. The report summarizes the findings of two processes:

- Public engagement process undertaken between October 21 and November 10, 2020, including:
 - online survey (38 responses),
 - one virtual stakeholder discussion, and
 - three one-to-one meetings.
- Feedback compiled during the implementation phase of the Program, obtained from June 29, 2020 to November 17, 2020, including ideas provided by email, during pre-application meetings and by Administration.

The engagement summary report, including appendices and meeting minutes, will be available for download on the program webpage in December 2020.

What We Heard

The following themes or topic areas emerged from the above phases of the program. Further research will be required to identify potential solutions to these issues.

The following comments were received regarding the **general program requirements**.

Program Extension and Deadlines

- Feedback was in support of extending the program. Many businesses are still in recovery from the 2020 flood and dealing with the challenges of Covid-19. They require time to assess their situation before making investments.
- One view expressed that because many businesses unable to apply by current deadlines, the deadline could 'make or break' the program.
- Stakeholders from the arts community were concerned that the deadlines for project start and completion. They felt this did not allow time to commission a professional artist and thought three to six months should be the minimum time for an artist call for a large-scale project. They also considered longer timelines would provide the opportunity to engage the public and the arts community, resulting in a 'win' for the municipality. Involving the public in the selection process, would increase buy-in and excitement around the mural projects.

Timing and Amount of Funding

- Businesses have concerns with receiving funding after the project is completed. This places a financial burden on businesses.
- Alternative approaches to reimbursement should be considered, such as phased projects, installments, and progressive invoicing. Providing funding at project benchmarks may help applicants secure funding or project sponsors.
- Other stakeholders suggested:
 - Changes to the amount or proportion (for example, from 50:50 to 60:40) of the grant. Many businesses need these grants but do not their half of the costs.
 - Offering larger grants to fewer businesses, to create greater incentive to apply.
 - Need to provide grant payments quickly so contractors can be paid in a timely manner.
- Several stakeholders commented on a desire for retroactive grants:

- Applicants should be able to start construction before applying and getting approved, if they meet the requirements. However, applicant would be doing so at own risk.
 - Consider applications for improvements made prior to the program launch, within some timeframe.
- Some survey respondents identified challenges with the grants being allocated per building, as opposed to per business.

Professional Fees and Contractor Estimates

- Survey respondents report that obtaining professional drawings and plans, and two contractor estimates is challenging.
- The following challenges were identified around obtaining contractor estimates:
 - Contractors are busy and it can be awkward to request a second estimate when the contractor knows they are unlikely to do the work.
 - Obtaining quotes adds time to the application process
 - A suggestion received was to consider project pre-approvals without two contractor estimates. Then, once applicants attend a pre-application meeting, they could be pre-approved a certain amount.
 - Feels that a single quote is adequate. Businesses will seek out competitive pricing.
- Professional fees are limited to 15% of total project costs, which may be too restrictive.

Façade Improvement Grant

- Most survey respondents expressed an interest in a façade improvement grant that allows for less comprehensive projects. For example, for painting only.
- Incorporating five design elements in façade projects may be a challenge for struggling businesses. Stakeholders suggested:
 - Reducing the number of required design elements.
 - Breaking down the existing elements so it is easier to incorporate five. For example, being able to receive one element 'point' for each of 'Doors/Windows.'
- Businesses are reluctant to undertake a comprehensive façade upgrade given the uncertainty around flood mitigation/general cashflow /obtaining insurance.\
- There appears to be interest in expanding the grant to include apartment and condominium buildings.
- Suggestions for general clarification around this grant, including the eligibility of rear facades, roofs and the design elements.

Interior Improvements Grant

- Survey respondents had mixed opinions on the difficulty of selecting projects from the existing list of eight project types.
- Feedback demonstrates a desire for this grant covering additional works/projects. The following work was identified by stakeholders for consideration:
 - Additional accessibility improvements, such as touchless fixtures and change tables (adult and child).
 - Improvements to address emerging needs related to Covid-19, such as touchless fixtures.
 - Costs associated with finishing the space, such as appliances and equipment, which are currently ineligible as they are movable/non-fixed objects-

- More standalone improvements that are not associated with one of the major project types. For example, new flooring, interior painting, lighting, and interior wall treatments (decals/murals).
 - There is a need for artist studio space. Available spaces are not suitable (i.e., inadequate ventilation, lighting or soundproofing) or affordable for short-term use.
- Concern that in multi-tenant buildings, including plazas or malls, this grant benefits only a portion of tenants because it is allocated per building.

Patio Grant

- No specific concerns were raised by survey respondents.
- Stakeholders identified possible synergies between the existing grants. There is potential to support for more grant project overlap. Synergies include:
 - Patios and Murals.
 - Patios, Façades and Murals.
 - Patios with space for musicians and other performance artists.
- Other ideas surrounding patios include:
 - Promoting patios at the rear of premises, where they can beautify and increase laneway safety.
 - Supporting 'Box Parklets' (i.e., customizable shipping containers that serve as temporary patio spaces and seating areas).

Beautification Projects and Murals Grants

- Survey respondents felt that identifying a professional mural artist would be a challenge.
- Consider pre-approval for mural projects, with applicant submitting the final design prior to installation. At present, process requires applicant to submit design and artist information upfront.
- Stakeholders identified the potential of murals to not only add interest and vibrancy to the downtown, but to create economic benefits. This includes attracting residents and visitors to the downtown.
- Stakeholders spoke to the need to communicate how the arts create financial incentives for businesses and suggested:
 - Creating an information sheet to promote the economic benefits of investment in arts.
 - Expanding the scope of the grant to include other forms of art. For example, sculpture, performance art space such as musician space on a patio.
 - Identifying synergies between the existing grants.
 - Supporting creative funding arrangements and collaboration between businesses and building owners. For example, murals that straddle multiple buildings or murals sponsored on buildings owned by a third party.

The following comments were received regarding the **administration of the program**.

Program Administration

- Consider ways to make participation as easy as possible so that application process and submission is not onerous.
- Develop partnerships with businesses, consultants and suppliers. This may enable applicants to utilize local resources and apply quickly.

Satisfaction with Program Communication, Materials and Meetings

- Overall, survey respondents were somewhat satisfied to very satisfied with communication of the program, using the program webpage, making inquiries to staff and participating in a pre-application meeting.
- Survey responses suggest improvement can be made around application processing times.
- Survey respondents find the application form relatively easy to follow.
- There are some concerns that the program application is too onerous. This includes the required paperwork (i.e. application form and attachments, and grant-specific requirements)
- One department should manage the program (i.e., either CIP or Planning) to improve customer service.

The following comments were received regarding **potential new grant programs/streams**:

Ideas for new Grant Programs

- Survey respondents were most interested in expanding the existing façade program to include simpler projects (i.e., fewer design elements), followed by parking lot and landscaping improvements.
- Interest in façade grants for residential buildings was expressed by stakeholders for multi-family residential developments. The visual impact of their buildings may exceed some smaller commercial buildings. Considering including these as an eligible building type.
- Stakeholders shared a wide range of ideas for new programs, including:
 - Startups and new businesses.
 - Rent relief, possibly for building that have been vacant for some time.
 - Tax incentives, including for beautification and full annual tax breaks to building owners.
 - Downtown home-based businesses. For example, for signage.
 - Construction on vacant lots.
 - Conversion of single-family residential properties to commercial uses.
 - Residential properties, such as private amenity areas in multi-family residential developments and residential front yards and flood debris removal.
 - Demolition
 - Signage
 - Waterfront recreational equipment rentals.
- Stakeholders shared a wide range of ideas for specific costs which could be considered under existing programs:
 - Cultural and heritage features. Examples include heritage murals, sculptures, walkways, paintings, decor, facades, doorways, or signage.
 - Litter removal.
 - Interior accessibility (elevators).
 - Fire safety upgrades (fire sprinkler system).
 - Signage.
 - Lighting.

Other Comments

- Several stakeholders commented on challenges with existing requirements around window coverings such as vinyl wraps, which are currently prohibited in projects at the street-level. Consider revising this policy and/or more exceptions.
- Some aspects of the Program are subjective. Program information could be clarified to remove subjectivity and increase certainty for applicants.
- Stakeholders voiced general concerns about the program, including its launch amid ongoing flood mitigation efforts and COVID-19, efforts to simultaneously develop north of the bridge, and that some property owners may disproportionately benefit from the program (multiple applications).
- Some survey respondents indicated a challenge with the program not covering flood-damage related work.

Part 2: Overview of Public Engagement

Overview

Public engagement was completed to obtain input on the Downtown Revitalization Incentives Program. Engagement was completed from October 21 to November 10, 2020. Public engagement, in the form of an online survey, stakeholder discussion and several one-to-one meetings, was intended to achieve the following objectives:

1. To determine the level of awareness of the program.
2. To identify barriers and solutions to accessing and applying for the DRIP (the program).
3. To identify areas of improvement for the program processes within the existing policy.
4. To identify recommendations for the program to be presented to Council in December 2020.

Engagement Tactics

Online survey (Participate Wood Buffalo)

From October 21 to November 10, 2020, the Municipality's online engagement portal Participate Wood Buffalo hosted an online survey to gauge awareness and obtain input on the program. The online survey received 38 survey responses.

Stakeholder Discussion (1)

Administration hosted a virtual group discussion on November 5, 2020 for representatives of community organizations, including the Fort McMurray Chamber of Commerce, BILD Wood Buffalo, Fort McMurray Real Estate Association, Wood Buffalo Economic Development Corporation and others. The purpose of the discussion was to understand where the program is working, areas for improvement and suggestions for potential future grant streams. Four individuals participated, representing four organizations. Two meeting times were originally offered, with participants opting to participate on November 5, 2020.

One-to-One Meetings (3)

Administration offered individuals and community organizations the option to participate in one-to-one discussions. Six individuals participated in three meetings.

Communication Tactics

To promote the online survey, the following approaches were used:

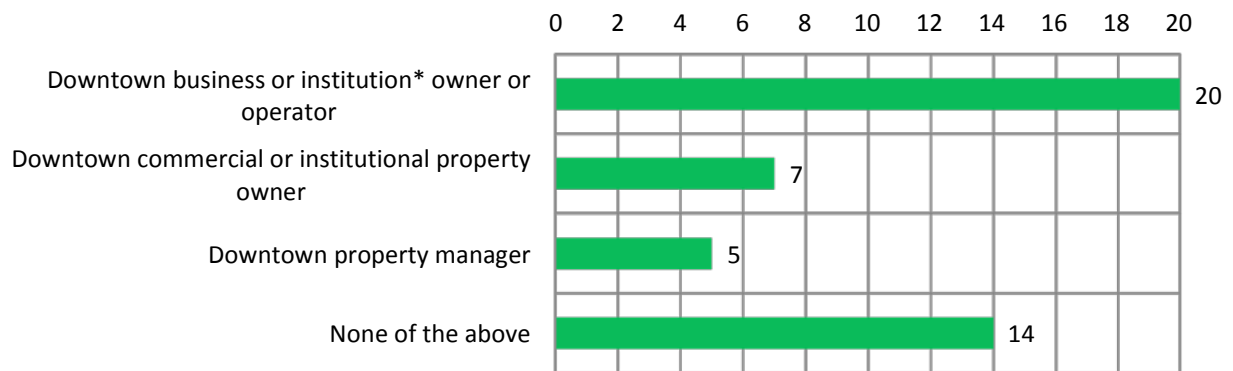
- E-newsletters
- Direct emails from Community Development Planning branch staff to individuals who:
 - Inquired to the Community Development Planning branch,
 - Participated in a pre-application meeting,
 - Were approved for a grant, and
 - Were invited to the November 2019 incentives workshops.
- Program webpage (www.rmwb.ca/incentives)
- Survey webpage (www.participate.rmwb.ca/downtownincentivesprogram)
- Press Releases
- Social Media (Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter)

To promote the meetings, the following approaches were used:

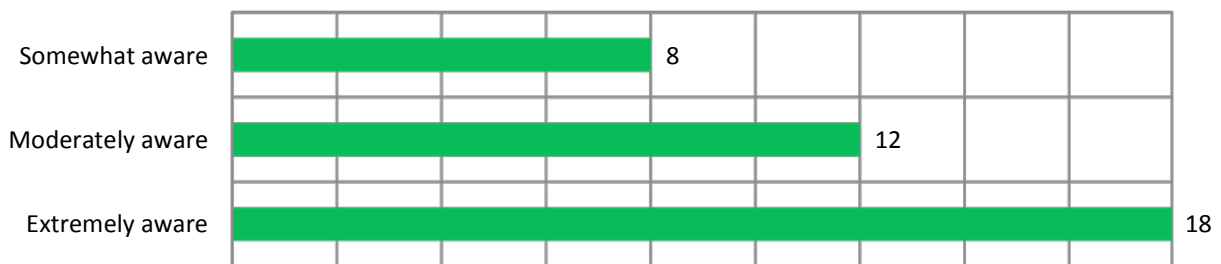
- The project webpage and survey webpage provided details for requesting a one-to-one meeting, and
- Community organizations were directly contacted to participate in a facilitated group discussion.

Results – Online Survey (Participate Wood Buffalo)

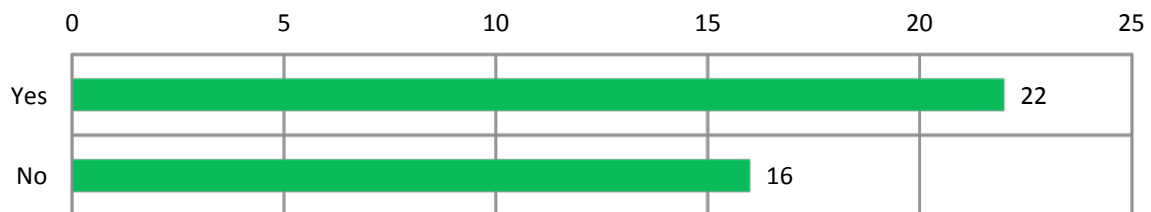
Question 1. Please indicate if you are any of the following:



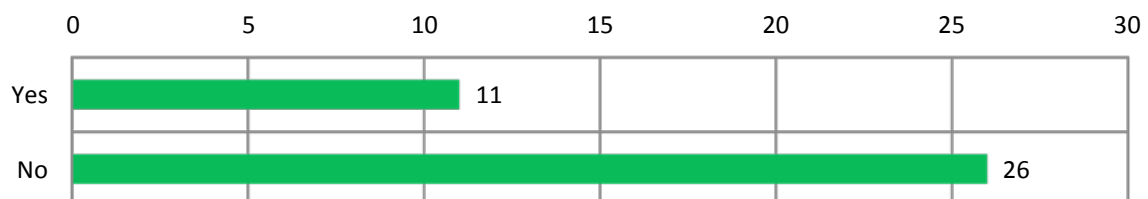
Question 2. Please indicate your level of awareness of the Downtown Revitalization Incentives Program.



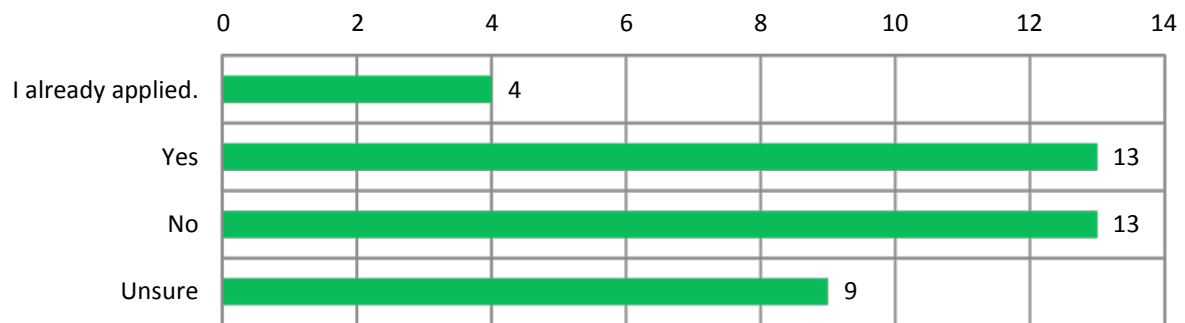
Question 3. Have you contacted the RMWB for information about the program?



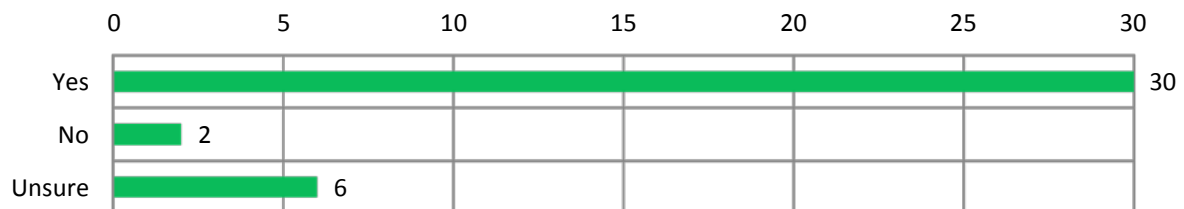
Question 4. Have you participated in a pre-application meeting with RMWB staff?



Question 5. Do you plan to apply for the grant program?

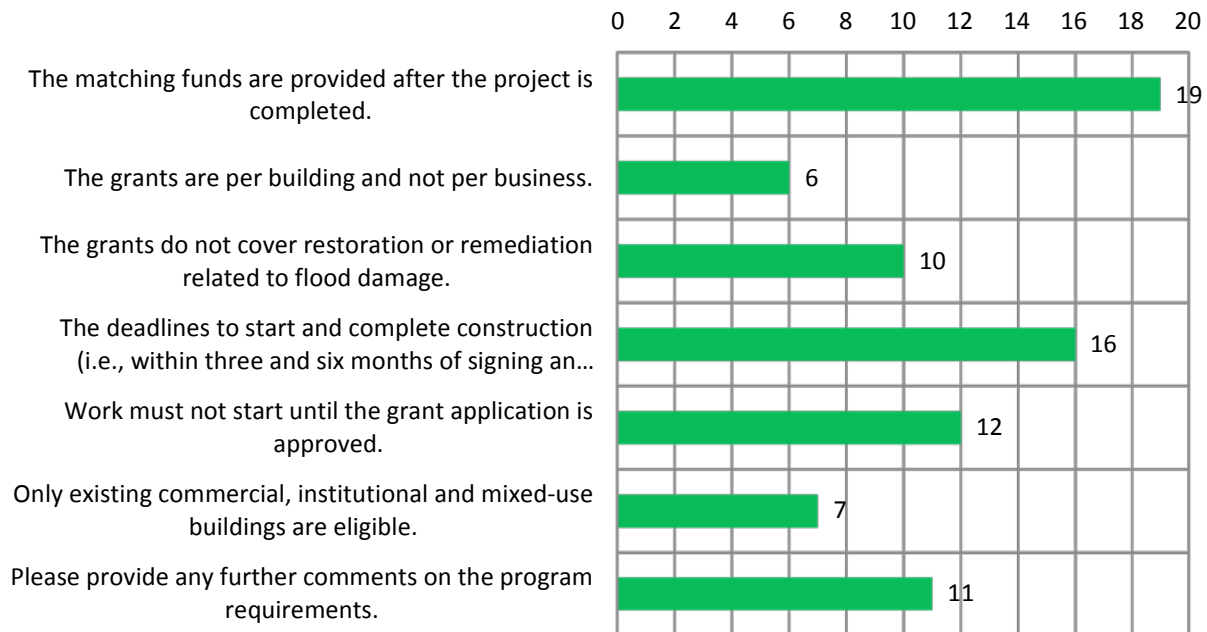


Question 6. Would you like to see the program extended past December 31, 2020?



As we look forward to potentially offering this program again next year, pending council approval, what are some things we can do to make the process better?

Question 7. Please indicate if you would like to see any changes to the following requirements:



The following comments were provided to the open-ended portion of this question:

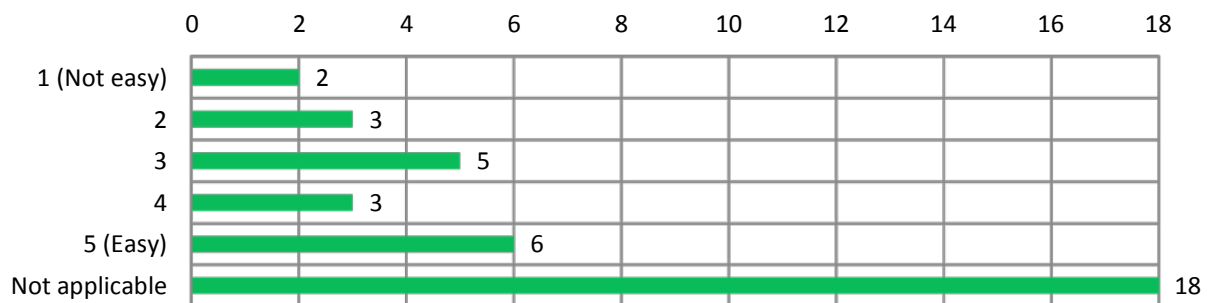
Date and Time Received	Comment
2020-10-28 14:55:16 - 0600	Professional artists often charge a fee in order to create design ideas. This presents a barrier to businesses that are trying to apply for the mural portion of the grant. Likewise, selecting an artist and design prior to application presents a hardship for the artist if the grant application is unsuccessful. The timeline of this grant only allows for commissioning an artist directly as it doesn't provide enough time for a thoughtful application process. Three to six months should be the minimum time for an artist call for a large-scale project. The opportunity to engage the public and the arts community with longer timelines would be a huge 'win' for the municipality. There is an opportunity to have the public involved in the selection process, thereby increasing buy-in and excitement around the mural projects. As a professional artist myself, I also don't understand putting a limitation on what the artist and/or consultation fee can be. More money spent on materials doesn't ensure a better product and asking the artist to 'hide' their fee as additional labour or the like seems counter to a positive working relationship.

Date and Time Received	Comment
2020-10-28 15:46:54 - 0600	May want to consider reassessing the matching funds piece and increase the municipal contribution over fewer grants. Many businesses need these grants but don't have half the funding to cover their half of the costs. While this is a direct benefit to businesses, it's also a benefit to the municipality for businesses to stay open, reinvigorate the downtown, and beautify the community. The municipality will also see a return on this investment down the road through property taxes and retention of residents in the community.
2020-10-29 06:23:14 - 0600	Not retro active to renovations that were made prior to the grant program being released but within a time frame that would show a business was attempting to improve their downtown exposure through their own means. Feel there needs to be some flexibility in this regard considering the circumstances facing our region, ie. Flood, Covid 19
2020-10-29 16:14:54 - 0600	None at this time
2020-10-30 18:10:42 - 0600	You must not require an artist to be chosen during the initial application process. Just set the framework for approvals generally and let the market do the rest. You should reduce the number of improvements required to qualify i.e. just make it 2 not 5. Just give businesses money for improvements and trust that they will make the best improvements.
2020-11-04 15:57:10 - 0700	Like to see start and completion times to be more flexible
11/6/2020 13:04	Stop wasting our money on downtown!!!! Try listening to the citizens of fort McMurray for once
2020-11-09 12:26:02 - 0700	What about downtown residents, should they/we not have an opportunity to improve our front showcase yards from the flood mess. Support would be appreciated
2020-11-09 14:13:24 - 0700	As a multifamily 32 unit apartment owner, I think that it would do the community well to have included multifamily apartments into this grant as the streetscape of my building is as important and as large if not larger than most buildings which this grant is attracting. Specifically due to the large number of units in this building, for mortgage and insurance reasons, we are considered "Commercial" not residential.
2020-11-10 12:42:53 - 0700	We would like to see a way to provide parklet options to the program which would then be utilized by many of the restaurant organizations who need them when they need them. Creating a broader program may allow for us to economize our products and services and provide them to an array of businesses who will need them in the spring. We suggest having these assets

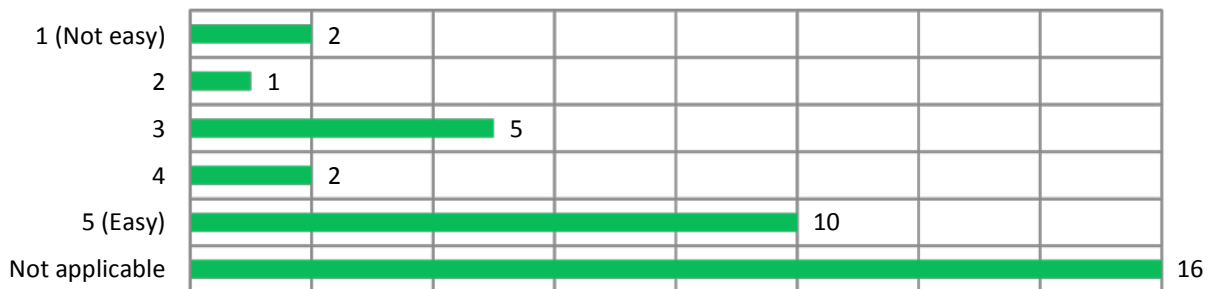
Date and Time Received	Comment
	readily available for the businesses and then having their contribution as a final piece to secure them for an installation in the spring.
11/10/2020 13:21	what is being done to insure the municipality is supporting the business community in the safe keeping of the DT properties.

Question 8. On a scale of 1 (not easy) to 5 (easy), how easy are the following application requirements?
(Select all that apply)

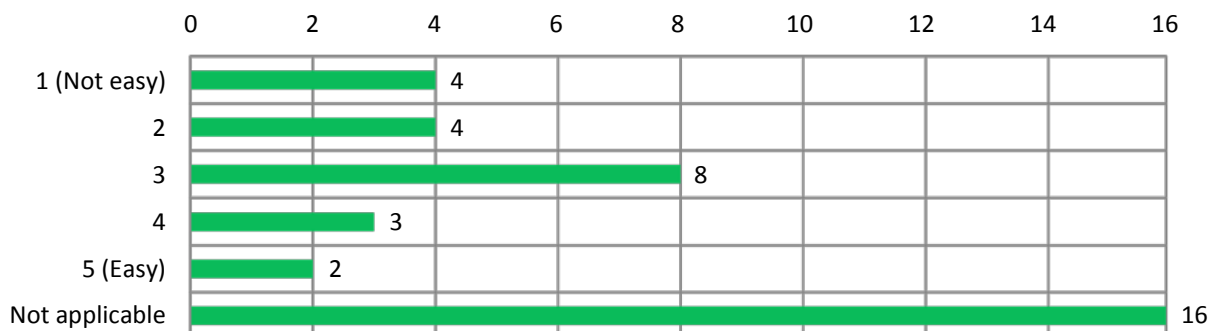
Using the application form



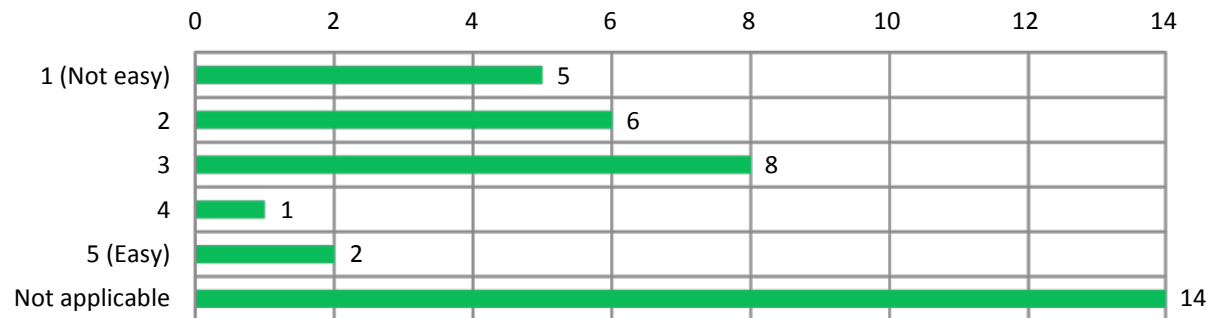
Participating in a pre-application meeting



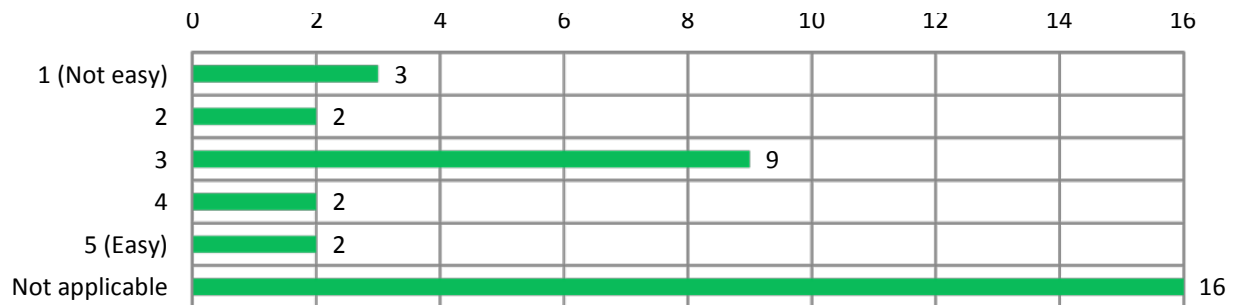
Obtaining professional drawings and plans



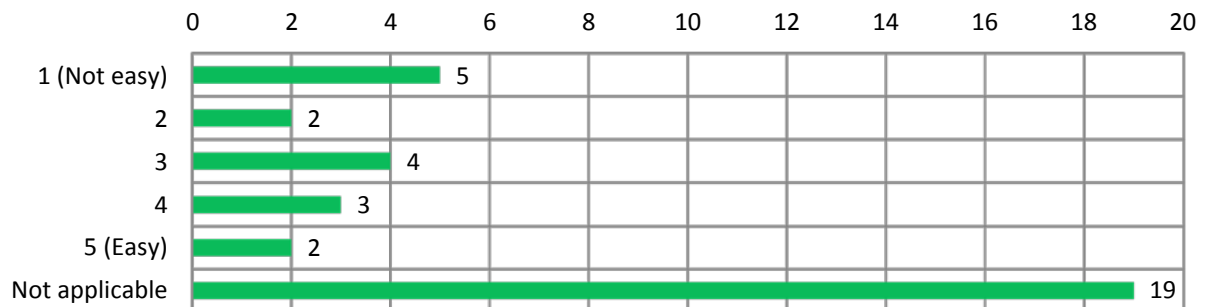
Obtaining two contractor estimates



For interior improvement projects, selecting projects from the list of eligible projects

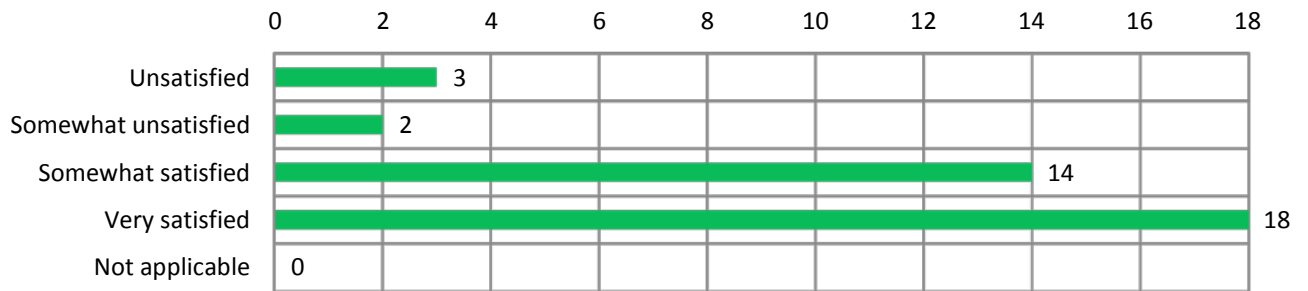


For mural projects, identifying a professional artists

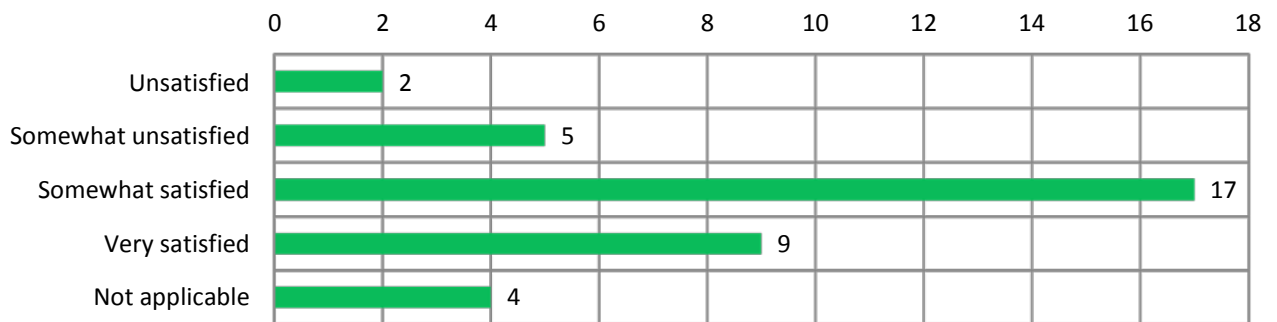


Question 9. Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the following:

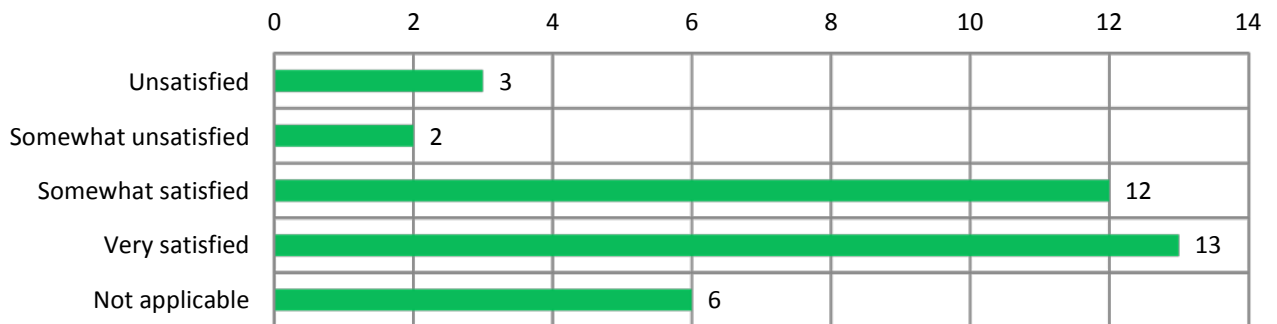
Communication of the program to community



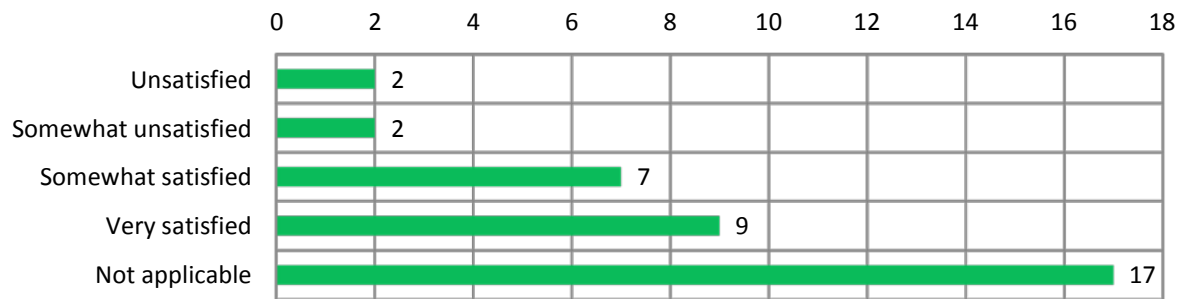
Navigating the program webpage (rmwb.ca/incentives)



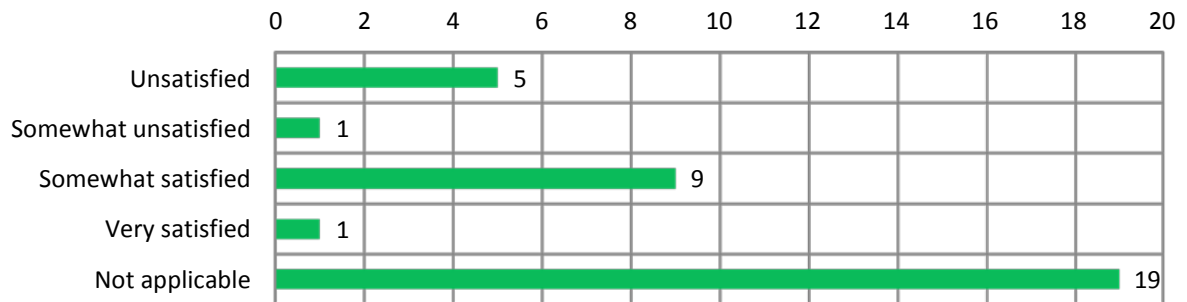
Program inquiries with RMWB staff



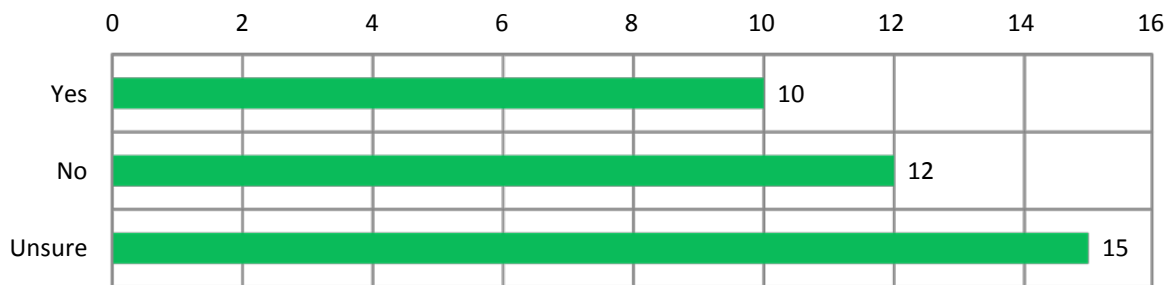
Attending a pre-application meeting with RWMB staff



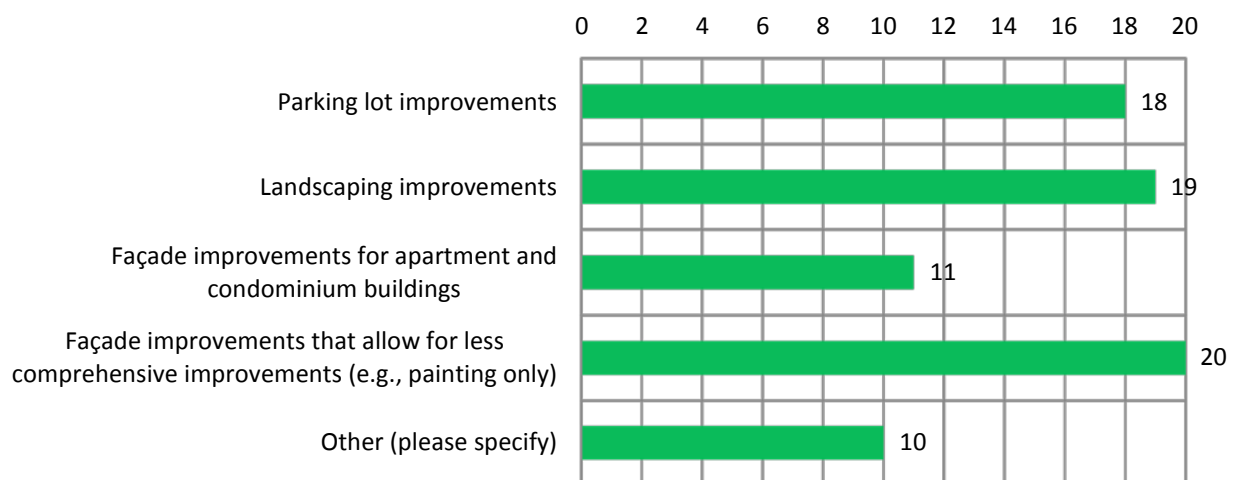
Application processing times



Question 10. Do the existing grants cover the types of improvements you want or need to do?



Question 11. The Municipality is exploring other grants that may contribute to the downtown's revitalization. Please select any that are of interest to you:



The following comments were provided to the open-ended portion of this question:

Date and Time Received	Comment
Oct 21 20 09:21:59 pm	Funding for new startups and businesses
Oct 28 20 03:46:54 pm	what about some kind of culture or heritage grants. If there were ways of incorporating culture and heritage into their business decor, this would add to the character of the community as well as businesses. Examples include heritage murals, sculptures, walkways, paintings, decor, facades, doorways, or signage.
Oct 28 20 05:14:55 pm	Demolition Grant
Nov 06 20 01:04:35 pm	Stop wasting money on a flood zone unless it's to fix the problem
Nov 09 20 09:57:12 am	More litter clean up, more garbage bins available and emptied (including private business areas). Better walking accessibility overall, more sidewalk tie ins. Better sidewalk management during construction and winter.

Date and Time Received	Comment
Nov 09 20 12:26:02 pm	Residential front yards
Nov 09 20 02:13:24 pm	Interior accessibility (elevator) and fire safety upgrades (fire sprinkler system)
Nov 09 20 08:36:04 pm	I want a program to help people paint murals on there fences in Beacon Hill
Nov 10 20 12:42:53 pm	Parklet grant, a supplied parklet that could be installed during the spring, summer, and fall, and moved in colder months. Businesses would apply for the parklet as part of an annual program.,
Nov 10 20 01:21:47 pm	funding downtown functions and business incentives to set up DT ONLY

Question 12. Do you have any other feedback on the program?

Date and Time Received	Comment
2020-10-21 21:21:59 - 0600	More grants for new businesses as traditional loans etc in a pandemic are difficult. Invest in our start ups and niche markets like the arts and food production
2020-10-28 14:55:16 - 0600	Meeting with municipal staff pre-application was very helpful. They were knowledgeable and seemed really eager to make the process work. I would suggest from an efficiency standpoint that ensuring the matching funding was secured is more important than securing an artist and design pre-application - this question was not asked in the meeting or on the application form. The RMWB has final approval on the image and it is very unlikely that a business would select an offensive design, so is it really necessary to pre-decide? However, if the business goes through the process of applying, administrative staff reviews the application and determines its viability, then it is approved by Council, then the business can't secure matching funds, everyone's time has been wasted. The municipality isn't responsible for where the money comes from, but should ensure that money is available. Also, if this is an incentive for struggling businesses, providing the funds through reimbursement after the project is complete is probably not very helpful. Could there not be a process of instalment payments being made as milestones are reached?
2020-10-29 08:53:28 - 0600	No feedback really. Staff was helpful and great. We are a small business and it didn't really apply to us. It's was a bit of work to start the application and apply. Our efforts are more focused on insurance and rebuilding. Funds are limited as well, as we understood that we need to spend money on a specific type of sign, and then receive the grant. So we are still left paying out of pocket for a chunk of the project. Wonderful idea overall, we just don't have the spare funds for a project that will meet the requirements.
2020-10-29 10:04:19 - 0600	I would like to see the application process extended. Due to COVID we have been busy with other priorities and would to see the program application extended into 2021

Date and Time Received	Comment
10/30/2020 16:34	<p>For approved grants, it would be encouraging if the construction, and accordingly grant payments, are phased out, since many business & property owners are not able to finance the project and then receive the grants after 100% construction completion during this challenging time.</p> <p>Furthermore, openly adopting a collaboration initiative with local engineering firms, to potentially support business owners for related engineering and likely administration needs, will boost this project.</p>
2020-10-30 18:10:42 - 0600	Please keep it. Until downtown looks and feels better. Include lighting.
2020-11-02 20:51:52 - 0700	Out of the 11 grants how many are for [redacted in accordance with Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, s.17(1)] Are his "New" businesses on Franklin getting the new front view at city taxpayer expense?
11/3/2020 10:19	An extension would be helpful. It is time consuming trying to set up meetings with RMWB, getting permits, and meeting with contractors/artist to finalize a project.
2020-11-03 12:42:10 - 0700	I still think you are missing the mark that would drive citizens to the downtown core. You are asking us to reinvest in very turbulent times while you continue to approve new major commercial development away from downtown in Parsons Creek, In Stone Creek and the Eagle Ridge Area. You are building a park downtown on prime real estate seriously who is going to drive downtown to sit in a park??? Big Mistake!! Communities that have seen growth have provided businesses with no taxes for x amount of years (Kamloops being one of them) in the downtown core. This is what is needed to encourage people to develop downtown. Right now why would anyone want to be downtown ??
2020-11-05 16:30:03 - 0700	<p>I feel if businesses decide to start before approved that should not impact whether they get approved as long as they meet all other requirements. If they don't then that was their choice.</p> <p>Doing all 5 elements on exterior can be a challenge financially at such a difficult time already for struggling businesses.</p> <p>I think one team should have been setup for this program between CIP and Planning. This way as a business you dealing with one group.</p> <p>Need to get funds into hands as fast as possible after paid out to contractors. Example: by the time I pay the first contractor and the last contractor for doing the 5 elements and requesting reimbursement, it could take 4 months before I see any funds back from the program. For struggling businesses they can't wait? Contractors also can't wait to get paid.</p>

Date and Time Received	Comment
2020-11-05 21:48:42 - 0700	None
11/6/2020 13:04	Stop patting yourself on the back and giving yourself raises
2020-11-09 10:05:19 - 0700	We completed some lighting projects and we renovated a sign prior to application- it would be nice to be able to apply for the funding for the projects already completed.
2020-11-09 14:13:24 - 0700	The admin working this program have been great. I admire council and admin/management for having the foresight to create and deliver a program which will be advantageous for many many years to the downtown of RMWB
2020-11-09 16:31:00 - 0700	It is important to make the process easy and not put a large burden on business's for example having to submit 5 different ideas/looks for a planed improvement, let us submit and get feedback on our intended improvement. it is more important to ask the business what they feel would look and work best for them as opposed to making that decision for them.asking for two prices, business's will make the smartest and best decision as they are paying out of their pocket as well in many cases.
2020-11-09 20:09:39 - 0700	No
2020-11-10 08:59:49 - 0700	No
2020-11-10 12:42:53 - 0700	<p>We think the program is great, however gauging that amid the pandemic it will be difficult for businesses to adopt and implement due to to other challenges they have faced in 2020, Covid + Flood.</p> <p>Allowing for the program to have park spaces on demand which can be installed seasonally may allow for more flexibility in applicants as well as more uptake on business and neighborhood improvements and thus seasonal ammenities.</p> <p>Thanks for requesting our feedback,</p>
11/10/2020 13:21	Graffiti is getting out of control. Also, properties affected by the flood need assistance in clean up and regain curb appeal. Garbage left on the side of the streets since April 27 is unacceptable.

Question 13. If you would like to receive more program information and updates, please provide your contact information here.

Personal information omitted for FOIP reasons.

One-to-One and Stakeholder Meetings

Between November 5, 2020 and November 12, 2020, three one-to-one meeting meetings and one Stakeholder Discussion were held. At each of these engagement sessions, a brief presentation on the program was provided. Participants were then asked about to provide input the program's general requirements, the application and administrative processes, and share ideas for potential new grant streams. Conversations were framed around:

- What's working?
- What's not working?
- Which aspects could be improved?

Feedback is organized below by theme or topic areas. Comments may appear under multiple themes or topic areas.

General Program Requirements

Source	Comment
Program Extension and Deadlines	
One-to-One Meeting (November 5, 2020)	Majority of businesses are still working through flood restoration. They will not be in a position to apply until this is addressed and they have a clearer picture of the situation.
One-to-One Meeting (November 6, 2020)	Support extension of program into 2021, with 2022 being better. December 2021 may be too soon for some businesses to apply, and some will only be interested after seeing other projects completed.
One-to-One Meeting (November 6, 2020)	(Murals) Artist selection prior to applying is a challenge.
One-to-One Meeting (November 9, 2020)	Construction deadline is too short. (6 months of Agreement) 12 months would be better.
One-to-One Meeting (November 9, 2020)	Overall removing deadlines and restrictions could help reduce obstacles that hold applicants back from applying.
One-to-One Meeting (November 9, 2020)	Support extension of program past December 31, 2020. Many businesses unable to apply by current deadlines. Thinks this could 'make or break' the program.
Timing and Funding	
Stakeholder Discussion(November 5, 2020)	Businesses have concerns with projects being funded entirely upfront, then being reimbursed. Receiving funding after the project is completed is a challenge for many. Loans were discussed.
One-to-One Meeting (November 5, 2020)	Timing of funding is a challenge. It is a burden on businesses to receive no funding until after project is completed
One-to-One Meeting (November 5, 2020)	Suggested phasing of payments, installments, or progressive invoicing. Financial institutions are not necessarily giving loans for the work covered by the program.

Source	Comment
One-to-One Meeting (November 6, 2020)	Timing of funding is critical and receiving funding after the project is complete is a challenge – it is a burden on businesses to not receive any funding until after the project is complete
One-to-One Meeting (November 6, 2020)	Suggest providing funding at project benchmarks, including some funding up front. This may help the applicant secure funding i.e. sponsors.
One-to-One Meeting (November 6, 2020)	Application forms could include space to describe how the applicant plans to fund the other 50%. This could save time on reviewing applications where funding has not been secured.
One-to-One Meeting (November 6, 2020)	Could different funding structures be used for the grants? For example, offer fewer grants to increase competition, or higher amounts with a great portion (matching 60:40) reimbursed to recipients.
Eligibility Requirements	
One-to-One Meeting (November 5, 2020)	Concerned with ineligibility due to unresolved legal disputes. Do not feel this should impact eligibility and dispute may not be relevant to the project.
One-to-One Meeting (November 5, 2020)	Being current with property taxes makes sense.
Other (Use of Targets)	
Stakeholder Discussion (November 5, 2020)	Did the program have targets for the [number of] approved grants?
One-to-One Meeting (November 6, 2020)	Murals program could set targets. For example, 20 murals with 5 having built environment theme, 5 natural environment themes, etc.

Application Requirements

Source	Comment
Using the Application Form	
Stakeholder Discussion (November 5, 2020)	Businesses have concerns that the program is too onerous. This includes the paperwork i.e. application form and attachments
Obtaining Professional Drawings/Plans	
One-to-One Meeting (November 6, 2020)	Graphic artists and mural artists customarily charge for preliminary designs/concepts. This must be accounted for in the process and eligible costs. Concepts are not inexpensive.
One-to-One Meeting (November 6, 2020)	Suggest allowing more than 15% of project costs towards artist fees. These can be a more substantial portion of project costs as design selection can be time consuming, relative to actual installation. Clarify the eligibility of professional fees and labour costs.
Obtaining Two Contractor Estimates	
Stakeholder Discussion (November 5, 2020)	Contractor estimates are a challenge. General agreements that the challenge is the added time it takes to contractors to provide estimates, rather than an inability to obtain them

Source	Comment
Stakeholder Discussion (November 5, 2020)	Suggestion – offer projects pre-approval without two contractor estimates. Once applicants attend a pre-application meeting, they could be pre-approved a certain amount.
Other	
One-to-One Meeting (November 5, 2020)	Discussed providing a template for the Letter of Authorization, to ensure the letter contains the information that the Municipality is looking for. Form should include space for the legal name of the applicant/business and any 'operating as' names.
One-to-One Meeting (November 9, 2020)	Some aspects of the Program are subjective. Need for clarity to provide certainty. For example, what happens if the final project does not match that proposed in the Application?

Existing Grants

Source	Comment
Façade Improvement Grant	
One-to-One Meeting (November 5, 2020)	<p>Façade Improvement Grant Design Elements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Five elements might be too many. Maybe three elements would be better. Can the existing 'Doors/Windows' element be broken down so applicants can receive one point for each?
Interior Improvements Grant	
One-to-One Meeting (November 6, 2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a need for artist studio spaces. Existing spaces are not suitable. For example, inadequate ventilation, plumbing (can't handle paint), fire separation (i.e., for welding work), lighting or soundproofing. [Artist space] Rentals remain expensive, even to just display artworks in the window. Few short-term space options (3 months).
One-to-One Meeting (November 6, 2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Covid-19-related improvements: touchless doors, lights, taps, etc. <i>Interior Improvement Grant</i> could cover additional accessibility items; for example, Touchless access, and Adult and infant changing tables
Beautification Projects and Murals Grants	
One-to-One Meeting (November 6, 2020)	Could there be a property tax exemption for beautification?
One-to-One Meeting (November 6, 2020)	Economic potential of murals needs to be highlighted; for example, City of Lacombe's heritage murals are used to promote walking tours. Need to communicate how the arts create financial incentives for businesses. Consider creating an info sheet.
One-to-One Meeting (November 6, 2020)	Consider expanding eligible forms of artwork and more art options (e.g., sculpture, performance art space such as musician space on a patio).

Source	Comment
One-to-One Meeting (November 6, 2020)	<p>Possible synergies between the existing grants. For example, there is a synergy between patios and murals that could be exploited. Can the program support more project overlap? For example, façade upgrade with a patio and mural, or murals/patios at the rear of buildings where they can contribute to beautification and safety in laneways.</p> <p>Could the Municipality commission some artist designs for inspiration? For example, what a façade and patio project could look like.</p>
One-to-One Meeting (November 6, 2020)	<p>Murals: Consider the use of themes. This may help reassure applicants that their proposed murals will be a good fit. It may also allow applicants to take advantage of other grant funding e.g. provincial heritage grants.</p> <p>Consider having murals in laneways.</p> <p>Mural collaboration – grants are currently provided per building, but more creative arrangements could be considered. For example, a mural that extends onto a neighboring property, a large mural straddling multiple building, an applicant sponsoring a mural on a building they don't own, etc. This will lead to questions about how many applications to submit, how much is the project eligible to receive, etc.</p>

New Grant Program Ideas

As in the on-line survey, ideas for new grant programs were presented to the virtual stakeholders group discussion and to the stakeholder(s) engaged one-to-one.

Source	Comment
Parking Lot Improvements	
One-to-One Meeting (November 5, 2020)	Believe there is interest in parking lot improvements
Landscaping Improvements	
One-to-One Meeting (November 5, 2020)	Believe there is interest in landscaping improvements
Façade Improvements for Apartments and Condo Buildings	
One-to-One Meeting (November 5, 2020)	Condominium corporations might be interested but take more time to make decisions. Believes it could take 6 to 12 months for a corporation to apply because there are so many stakeholders involved.
One-to-One Meeting (November 9, 2020)	<p>Include multi-family apartment and condo buildings as eligible building in the DRIP Program</p> <p>Consider other possible improvements to general premises, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Landscaping. • Amenity areas. • Parking lot – safety and security.

Source	Comment
One-to-One Meeting (November 9, 2020)	<p>Future grants need to be clear about what is residential and eligible.</p> <p>From the owner's perspective, a building with more than 6 residential units is treated as commercial when applying for financing and insurance.</p> <p>Using the term "multi-family apartment/condo" might be better. Alternatively, define eligibility by the number of suites/units the building must contain.</p>
Other	
One-to-One Meeting (November 5, 2020)	Do the grants cover new construction and vacant lots? Discussed that current program excludes new construction due to ongoing development of a new downtown area redevelopment plan. A downtown commercial tax exemption program was launched this year for new commercial developments.
One-to-One Meeting (November 6, 2020)	General discussion around opportunities for home-based businesses. For example, business signs so locations are more visible (within signage requirements for home businesses in the Land Use Bylaw).

Part 3: Feedback Provided During Program Implementation

Overview

Between June 29 and November 17, 2020, the Community Investment Program (CIP) branch received approximately 130 inquiries about the program. This led to 60 pre-application meetings (including several follow-up meetings or site visits). The purpose of pre-application meetings is to confirm applicant eligibility, review program requirements and answer applicant questions. Meeting minutes were taken by staff and provided to applicants. In some instances, suggestions or challenges were noted. Excerpts from these minutes are provided here.

The feedback received during these interactions is recorded in the following tables, using the broad similar themes set out in the on-line survey.

Comments

General Requirements

Source	Comment
Program Extension and Deadlines	
Stakeholder feedback September 10, 2020	Will it be possible to accept applications that are not fully complete on or before December 31 or grant an extension to next June/July if there are little or no applications for some grants?
Timing and Funding	
Pre-Application Meeting July 24, 2020	Questioned about funds being paid in advance
Pre-Application Meeting August 25, 2020	We discussed some challenges applicants might face with the program, including difficulty funding their 50% portion. High rents in the downtown continues to be a challenge
Stakeholder feedback August 30, 2020	Concern about ability of small businesses to participate due to lack of capital. Could grant be provided in phased approach (i.e., 3 phases) whereby funds are advanced to cover next phase. Amanda explained prior research on upfront grants and the challenges of securing them to property tax. Similar issue encountered with advancing funds, although the risk is lower.
Stakeholder feedback August 31, 2020	Investigating phasing and use of loans from Community Futures Wood Buffalo.
Stakeholder feedback September 10, 2020	Interpret the policy and/or program guidelines to allow building owners flexibility to begin or continue demolition/flood recovery work and possible incentive program work prior to program approval without disqualifying them for grants.
Stakeholder feedback September 11, 2020	Consider retro-active funding similar to other CIP grants (i.e. provide owners an opportunity to complete work and submit receipts within 6 months).
Pre-Application Meeting September 30, 2020	Challenges: tenant reluctance to return to the downtown, /general cashflow /obtaining insurance.
Stakeholder feedback October 7, 2020	Allow for retroactive funding back to the start of the program so that projects can start and still be accepted as part of the program.

Source	Comment
Stakeholder feedback October 7, 2020	Provide full annual tax breaks to building owners. Encourage them to use the money save to invest in building upgrades etc.
Stakeholder feedback October 7, 2020	Consider accepting eligible projects that have been completed or are in process since 2020 (or even since the motion was passed to accept this program). Of course, projects would still have to meet the eligibility criteria;

Application Requirements

Source	Comment
Using the Application Form	
Stakeholder feedback September 14, 2020	What is the rationale behind why individual applications are required vs. a single, multi-building application? – Explained how application info is necessary for agreement. However, applicants can submit very similar applications (e.g., single set of drawings showing multiple buildings) to streamline submission process.
Pre-Application Meeting September 26, 2020	Clarity needed for payment of professional fees before the agreement is signed. Drawings may be needed for estimates. (Note – changes have been made to Administrative Procedures to clarify and allow for payment before the Agreement is signed) Need more information about how much detail of the scope of work is needed when filling in forms.
Obtaining Two Contractor Estimates	
Pre-Application Meeting September 24, 2020	Challenges with getting two contractor quotes. Contractors are busy and it is awkward to request quotes when contractor knows they are unlikely to do the work
Other	
Stakeholder feedback September 11, 2020	Consider ways to make participation as easy as possible for applicants (i.e. create online templates, identify community partners/potential program suppliers etc. so that people who are interested can act quickly and while they have an interest.
Stakeholder feedback September 24, 2020	Thinks businesses are aware but may not understand the components of the program. Recommended increasing promotion efforts.
Stakeholder feedback October 7, 2020	Businesses are aware of the DRIP and are currently doing (or have completed) renovations this year. Some were aware of the program and some inquired, but they didn't want to wait for the approval process to start their projects. Paperwork and wait time seem to be barriers
Pre-Application Meeting October 16, 2020	Need for Clarity -re: window coverings as film is allowed on second floor (and above) windows.

Existing Grants

Source	Comment
Façade Improvement Grant	
Pre-Application Meeting July 30, 2020	Façade Grant (should) apply to rear of buildings - visible from a laneway
Pre-Application Meeting August 4, 2020	Roofing not eligible for grant funding (Façade grant)
Pre-Application Meeting September 1, 2020	Clarity needed – does the Façade Grant apply to all of a mixed use building or the commercial portions only?
Pre-Application Meeting September 30, 2020	Challenges: tenant reluctance to undertake a comprehensive façade upgrade given the uncertainty around flood mitigation /general cashflow /obtaining insurance.
Stakeholder feedback October 7, 2020	Review the portion of the grant that requires 5 changes and reduce the number and type of changes required. (Façade Grant)
Interior Improvements Grant	
Pre-Application Meeting July 24, 2020	Interested in using grant for purchasing bottling equipment and new flooring in dining area. Neither projects are considered eligible, under current grant criteria.
Pre-Application Meeting September 21, 2020	Reconfiguring space to create 4 office units (from 2 units). Complex project - timelines imposed may be an issue - although grant recipients may apply for an extension. For interior grants – consider guidelines including recommendation to arrange a walk through with Safety Codes, as well as a pre-app meeting.
Pre-Application Meeting November 9, 2020	Interior grant - If grants are shared, there may not be much funding for each business in multi-tenant buildings.
Patio Grant	
Pre-Application Meeting July 30, 2020	Patio at rear of premises - must serve food establishment
Pre-Application Meeting October 13, 2020	Review patio guidelines to include implications for parking may be a consideration
Pre-Application Meeting October 22, 2020	Update Patio Guidelines to include Box Parklets
Beautification Projects and Murals Grants	
Pre-Application Meeting September 1, 2020	There was a detailed discussion on the kind of acceptable window treatments under the (Beautification) grant. Projects that include Vinyl wraps or treatments that deter viewing inside the store are ineligible. The vision for downtown is to have higher visibility and eyes on the street. The only exception to this rule is where windows are mandated to be screened by other legislation, for example, cannabis stores. Additionally, under the beautification grant, vacant storefront may have some display artwork by hanging artwork from inside to be viewed from the window (not vinyl wrapping or tinting)

Source	Comment
Pre-Application Meeting September 21, 2020	Murals - may need to reconsider process to allow time for REOI and public engagement
Other	
Inquiry July 8, 2020	<p>The one issue I constantly hear about is the high cost to lease space in the downtown area from many small business owners. Despite the decrease in real estate values, many of the lease holders have maintained their rates, making new business in this community very unattractive.</p> <p>My concern is that if the leaseholders are receiving these grants to improve their buildings, that it will further raise lease rates for our small business owners and if given tax breaks, that again it will only benefit the leaseholders.</p>
Inquiry November 9, 2020	Window coverings - ineligible criteria - may determine whether a business applies for a grant - needs to clarify re: what is this policy trying to achieve.

New Ideas

Source	Comment
Parking Lot Improvement	
Pre-Application Meeting September 10, 2020	Use of (private) car park spaces for seasonal patio area - LUB implications
Inquiry November 9, 2020	Interested in improvements to the parking lot
Pre-Application Meeting November 9, 2020	Parking lot paving in rear of property is needed (i.e., loading areas)
Other	
Inquiry July 27, 2020	Building eligibility (Hardin Street)- Home Business
Pre-Application Meeting August 4, 2020	<p>New signage is eligible if signage includes decorative features. Indigenous design elements were discussed and agreed would meet this requirement.</p> <p>Signage will require development permit and is subject to Land Use Bylaw regulations (e.g., sign types, dimensions, copy area, etc.).</p> <p>Consider Signage Grant</p>
Pre-Application Meeting October 17, 2020	Grant to include Interior Murals

Source	Comment
Pre-Application Meeting October 13, 2020	<p>Discussed challenges with identifying a restaurant franchise. Renovations are intended to help existing tenant attract franchise or operate independently.</p> <p>Discussed tenant challenges paying full rents at this time. Flooding and covid-19 have created a situation whereby most tenants need rent relief.</p> <p>Discussed challenges with exterior beautification as landscaped areas adjacent to Franklin are often trampled by pedestrians.</p> <p>Discussed other ideas for the downtown: waterfront recreation equipment rentals (private or RMWB).</p>
Pre-Application Meeting September 1, 2020	You suggested a few additional items which are not currently contemplated by any of the grants. I've noted them here as feedback for our team: fencing or tree removal might be something you would be interested in.
Pre-Application Meeting August 25, 2020	<p>Discussed the eligibility of houses converted to commercial properties. These would be eligible, but applicants should obtain a Development Permit (Change of Use) prior to applying. This is necessary to confirm that the use is commercial since residential buildings are ineligible.</p> <p>We discussed some potential opportunities for future grants, including grants for parking/paving upgrades (i.e., repainting stalls), and landscaping upgrades for residential properties (condos).</p>