

Storefront Improvement Program Summary

The Storefront Improvement Program is a 50 per cent matching reimbursement grant program aimed at supporting storefront renovations to commercial buildings within the City's 13 Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) and two Council-approved Target Areas: Little Italy and Norwood Boulevard.

A midblock building is eligible for a maximum grant of up to \$25,000. A corner building is eligible for a maximum grant of up to \$50,000 if it has two active facades. If one wall that faces the street is blank (for example, a concrete block wall with no mural, no windows and one steel fire door) then the grant maximum is \$30,000. The grant is not meant for ongoing or deferred maintenance or vandalism repair.

Storefront applications are evaluated for grant funding based on the following:

- Contributes to an attractive main street
- Improves the functionality of a building
- Improves accessibility for everyone

Storefront application evaluations are completed by a Project Review Committee made up of City staff with expertise in Building and Development Permits, business support, Urban Design, Winter City design, Heritage, downtown revitalization and others as relevant.

The grant process is as follows:

1. Project application
2. Project review and approval
3. Storefront Improvement Program Grant Agreement signed
4. Permits issued and construction begins
5. Project reports completion and submits receipts and invoices showing the amount paid, and permit service reports showing the work is in compliance with City and provincial regulations
6. Reimbursement grant is paid

Storefront Improvement Program: History and Background

- 2002 - Downtown Retail and Commercial Complex Reinvestment Policy - C215 was approved.
- 2003 - the Storefront program began as a pilot introduced in the Downtown Business Improvement Area.
- 2006 - the Storefront Program was extended to all 13 Business Improvement Areas.
- 2008 - C216A Retail and Commercial Facade and Storefront Improvement Program Policy was approved.
- 2014 - C216B Facade Improvement Program Policy was approved.

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- 2014 - Amendments to City Policies C553 and C216A.
- 2015 - Corner Stores, Petrolia Mall, Little Italy and Norwood Boulevard were added to the Storefront Improvement Program as Target Areas.
- 2018 - the Storefront Improvement Program closed to new applications in February because the budget was oversubscribed. Applications resumed as normal in 2019.
- 2019 - Amendments to Policy C216B Facade Improvement Program, notably to change the name to the Storefront Improvement Program to increase clarity, and reduce the maximum grant amount from \$60,000 to \$50,000 for corner buildings and from \$30,000 to \$25,000 for mid-block buildings, in response to the previous year's program oversubscription.
- 2019 - the Storefront Refresh Grant was launched as a pilot program.
- 2026 - Amendments to Policy C216C Storefront Improvement Program (pending Council approval).

Storefront Improvement Program: Metrics (as of November 27, 2025)

Since 2002, the Storefront Improvement Program (and predecessor Facade Improvement Program) has:

- Signed 358 grant agreements
- Issued \$10.6 million in grant funding to leverage \$66.7 million in private investment into 304 buildings for storefront renovations
 - This is a project completion rate of 86 per cent
- Had 158 projects participating in the program either close, cancel or withdraw their application (30 per cent)
 - Projects could have been approved with no agreement signed, or approved with an agreement signed
 - Reasons for doing so were not always offered by participants, but anecdotally they most often included higher than expected costs and personal events that impacted the owners' capacity to undertake and manage a renovation project.
- Fifteen projects are currently underway for a total of \$448,497 in committed grant funding expected to leverage \$4.6 million in private sector investment upon completion. This leverage rate includes one downtown storefront project for a tower with a total estimated cost of \$3.1 million. The average estimated project cost for all other current projects is \$272,000.

Completed projects per Business Improvement Area:

Business Improvement Area	Number of Completed Projects	Per Cent of Total
124 Street and Area	32	10%
Alberta Avenue	38	12%
Beverly	8	3%
Chinatown and Area	37	12%
Downtown	56	18%
Fort Road and Area	1	0%
French Quarter and Area	8	3%
Kingsway	3	1%
North Edge	33	11%
Northwest Industrial	0	0%
Old Strathcona	49	16%
Target Areas	19	6%
Stony Plain Road and Area	16	5%
The Crossroads	10	3%
Total	310	100%

The level of program uptake in different Business Improvement Areas roughly reflects the overall economic investment in each area. Redevelopment and investment rates vary across the city. Interest in the program and investment into storefront exteriors also varies by year, depending on larger economic factors that impact business finances and confidence such as economic downturns and the impacts of COVID-19.

The more industrial Business Improvement Areas tend to see lower program participation as the urban form in these areas tends to be highly vehicle-oriented, which aligns less with the program’s goals of supporting walkable, attractive, vibrant main street areas.

Storefront Refresh Program Summary and Metrics

The Storefront Refresh Program was launched in 2019 as a pilot program aimed at supporting smaller, more maintenance-based improvements to commercial buildings that do not meet the larger and costlier scope of work needed for the Storefront Improvement Program. This includes improvements such as a fresh coat of paint, installing bike racks on private property, power washing and/or repair to

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existing awnings. The grant is not meant for vandalism repair.

The Refresh program is a 50 per cent matching reimbursement grant to a maximum of \$1,000. Projects require program approval before starting and must submit invoices and proof of payment at the end of the project to be eligible to receive a grant.

\$25,000 was allocated from the Storefront Improvement Program budget to support up to 25 Refresh projects per year.

- 2019: 3 completed projects
- 2020: 1 completed project
- 2021: 4 completed projects
- 2022: 1 completed project
- 2023: 1 completed project
- 2024: 2 completed projects
- 2025: 7 completed projects (4 more underway)

Program funding most often went toward a fresh coat of paint, new fascia signs, accessibility ramps, planter boxes and repairs to existing awnings. The majority of Refresh projects included multiple improvements to the building. Most Refresh grant funding was awarded to business owners rather than property owners. Over half of the businesses participating were in retail or hospitality.