

Downtown Community Improvement Plan Grant Programs



SAULT STE. MARIE

**Information Guide
2018 - 2021**

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Program Overview

Downtowns instantly tell the state of cities and speak volumes about their economic health, quality of life, pride, history, and social and cultural vitality. A healthy and strong downtown reflects a healthy and vibrant community.

As part of the City's Downtown Community Improvement Plan (DCIP), a number of incentive programs have been established to stimulate and leverage private sector investments. These programs are meant to act as catalysts to encourage private sector investment in the downtown area, and to spur future revitalization at both the neighbourhood and citywide level.

This Guide outlines the five incentive programs:

1. Building Activation Grant for Vacant Spaces.
2. Façade Improvement Grant.
3. Upper Floor Residential Grant.
4. Patio Conversion Grant.
5. Tax Increment Equivalent Grant.

Collectively, these grants build on the growing momentum of downtown investments and bring us closer to our vision by targeting aspects that will increase street vibrancy and activity, neighbourhood pride, architectural merit, housing options, and identity. Critical to this is the focus on the rehabilitation of vacant commercially-zoned properties.

Administration of Grants

The financial incentives programs offered through the DCIP will be administered by the Downtown Community Improvement Committee, with representation from the City's Planning, Building, and Finance Departments. All grant applications will be reviewed by this committee, with the final decision made by City Council.

General Eligibility

(Must be read in conjunction with program specific eligibility requirements).

- The property must be located within the boundary of the Downtown Sault Ste. Marie Community Improvement Project Area (CIPA).
- Proposals must demonstrate a comprehensive and significant improvement for the property/building's façade and/or interior spaces and/or patio spaces to be eligible.
- At time of application, properties in tax arrears, possession of outstanding Building/Fire code violations, or under an active assessment appeal will not be eligible.
- Only property owners or tenants who have received consent from property owners may be eligible.
- Only applications submitted prior to the commencement of any work will be considered.
- Applicants must agree to not file a property tax appeal while receiving a grant or rebate under this program.



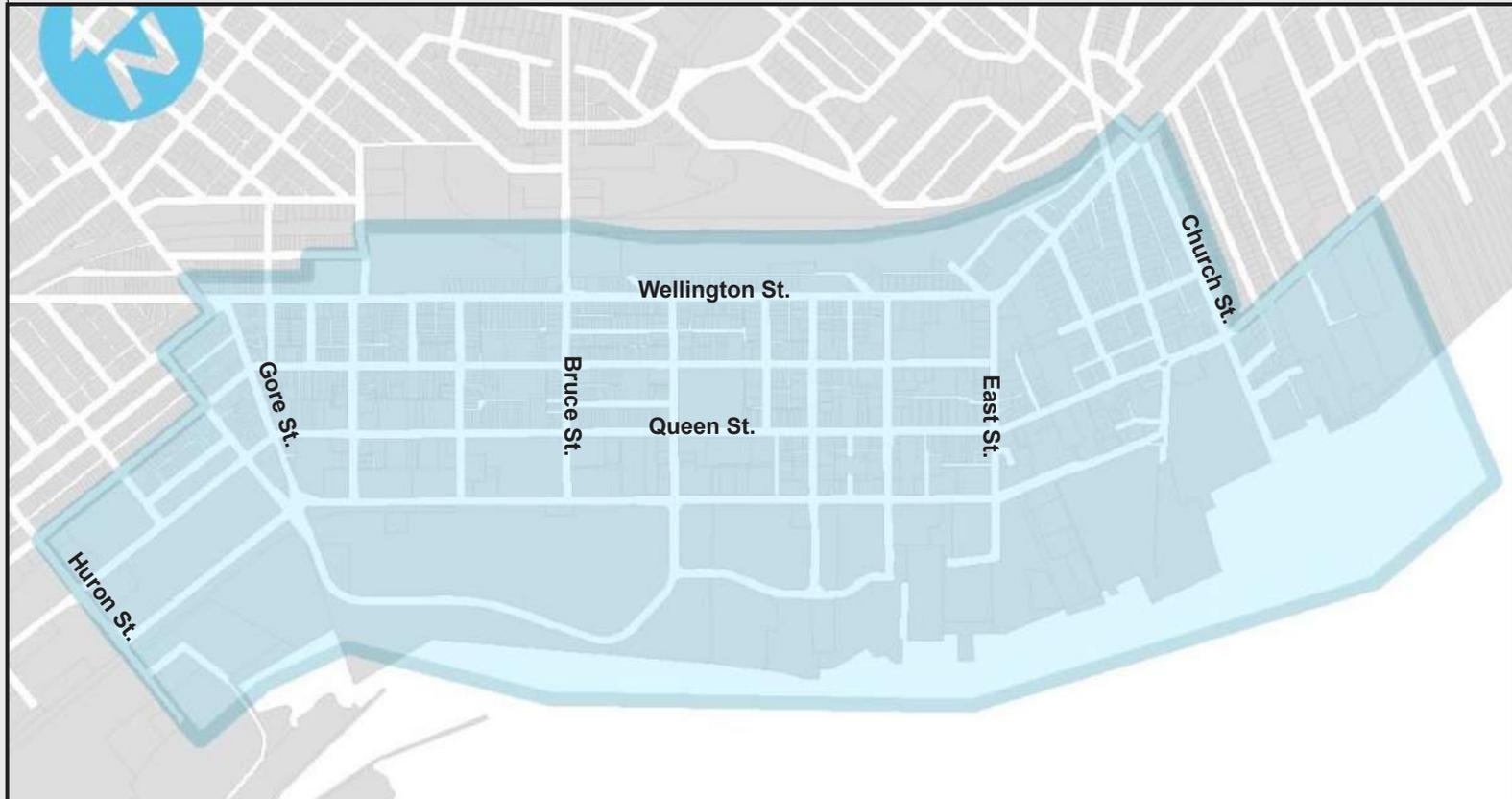
Community Improvement Project Area (CIPA)

The Community Improvement Project Area (CIPA) includes properties generally bounded by:

- The Huron Central rail line to the north.
- Church Street to the east, including the former hospital site and properties in between.
- St. Mary's River to the south.
- Huron Street to the west.

Properties must be within the CIPA to be considered eligible for a grant.

The CIPA is illustrated in blue in the map below.



Application and Approval Process

Application Submission

1.

A pre-application consultation between the applicant and City staff will be required to determine program eligibility.

Applicants must submit completed application forms as well as other required supporting documents as specified.

The City is not responsible for any costs associated with the submission of an application.

Application Review and Evaluation

2.

The Downtown Community Improvement Committee reviews and evaluates applications to determine conformity with the Urban Design Guide and other program goals and objectives.

A site inspection will be conducted as part of the Committee's review.

A recommendation report is then sent to City Council.

Decision on Application

3.

When City Council approves an application, City staff then advises the applicant of any required conditions.

Upon confirmation of approval, the applicant can begin work on eligible improvements.

When not approved, the application is returned to the applicant.

Issuance of Grants

4.

The applicant must provide proof of project completion, including:

- a copy of the building permit,
- proof that all labour and materials have been paid.

City staff will conduct a site visit to ensure that all requirements have been met.

The grant is issued once these matters are addressed.

Accessibility Considerations

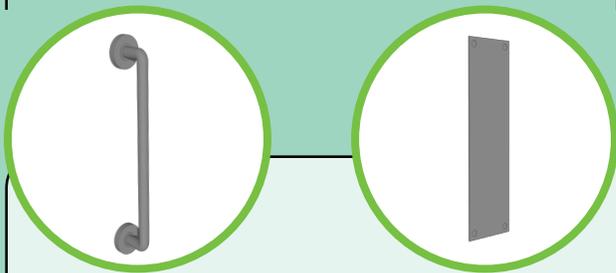
The City of Sault Ste. Marie is committed to creating a barrier-free community that is accessible for all users and in compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). Inclusive environments enhance the quality of life for all and promote acceptance. Pursuing exterior or interior building enhancements can provide opportunities to incorporate designs that create accessible spaces to the general public.

To learn more about accessibility practices and requirements for buildings, please contact the City's Accessibility Coordinator: Nancie Scott at **705-541-7310** – n.scott@cityssm.on.ca

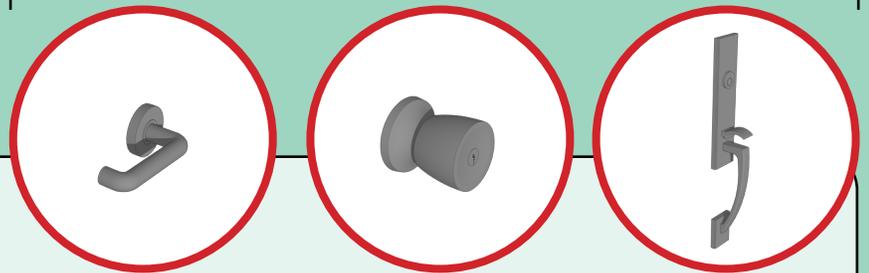
A document that provides guidance on how to identify, remove and prevent barriers is available online (***Access ON - A Guide to Integrated Accessibility Standards and Regulations***).

Below are examples of simple yet effective solutions that can improve accessibility.

Encouraged



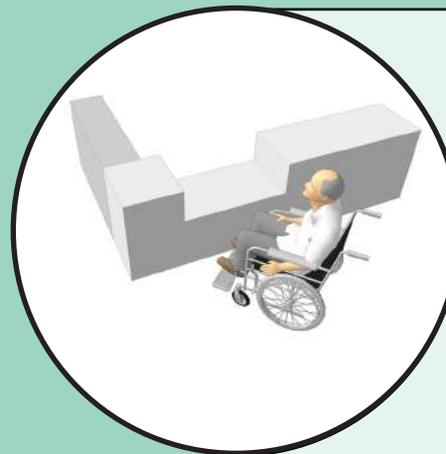
Discouraged



Entrance doors not requiring much grasping, twisting or forcing open, such as pull bars and push plates are encouraged. Lever handles, knobs, and thumb-latch handles are discouraged.



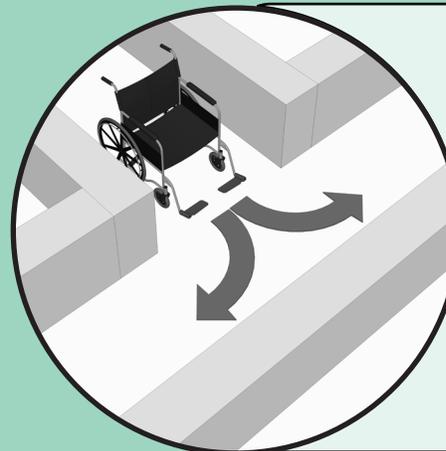
Wide door clearances and entrance ramps can mitigate limitations imposed on people who depend on walking aids, such as canes, walkers, wheelchairs, and scooters.



Sales and service counters should have a segment low enough for people in wheelchairs to conduct business.



Accessible washrooms are easier and safer to use for people experiencing physical limitations. Wide door stalls, ample floor space for a wheelchair to rotate, and a grab bar all enhance accessibility.



Interior pathways should be wide enough and free from obstacles to enable a wheelchair to pass through and maneuver freely.

Tax Increment Equivalent Grant (TIEG)

A TIEG is a financial incentive program that provides the opportunity to redevelop buildings or lands. Redevelopment typically increases the assessed value of a property. To offset a portion of the municipal property tax increase, eligible property owners may receive grants in instalments over a maximum four-year period.

The owner is responsible for the up-front remediation and redevelopment costs. Before the issuance of a grant, all work must be completed and there must be an increase in the assessed value of the property, with an associated increase in property taxes post-development.

Eligibility requirements:

Applicants must demonstrate an investment of at least \$500,000 in the development or redevelopment of a commercially zoned property in the Downtown Community Improvement Project Area (CIPA), as well as a resulting increase in municipal assessment.

A comprehensive design strategy and layout/concept plan developed by a certified design professional must be submitted, in addition to cost estimates and a proposed timeline for the project.

How does the grant work?

The value of the TIEG is equal to 100% of the tax increase in the first year of project completion. Thereafter, it is provided on a declining rate basis until the fourth year (see chart).

The grant would be paid annually by the City to eligible applicants following the full payment of property taxes.

Years since project completion	Percentage of the tax increment that is rebated
1 st year	100%
2 nd year	75%
3 rd year	50%
4 th year	25%
5+ years	0%



The former Plummer Hospital, now Riverwalk Condominiums, is pictured above. A TIEG may provide the necessary financial incentive to redevelop blighted properties.



The former PUC building on Queen Street East was fully renovated and now serves as a place of business in the downtown area.



Riverwalk Condominiums - a TIEG supported project.

Façade Improvement Grant

A façade improvement grant encourages commercial building owners to invest in façade renovations and storefront improvements. The program provides matching grants to cover a portion of renovation costs.

Grants cover up to \$20,000 for significant exterior renovations to commercial properties to promote attractive designs, better business exposure and first impressions, inviting streets, and improved marketability of the local business area.

Eligibility requirements:

Privately owned and commercially zoned properties that are located in the CIPA may be eligible for the grant. Façade improvements should be comprehensive and designed to have a significant

impact on the public realm by adding visual interest and a high level of aesthetic to the streetscape, all while respecting the character of the street and historical features of the building.

A conceptual drawing from a registered design professional demonstrating colours, materials, signage, lighting, windows and doors must be submitted.

How does the grant work?

The grant is administered on a matching funds basis, to a maximum of \$20,000. For additional information on the distribution of grants, please refer to the FAQ section of this guide.



Façade improvements on Queen Street: before and after.



Arturo Ristorante façade improvement.

Building Activation Grant for Vacant Spaces

This grant provides developers and property owners with financial support to convert and/or rehabilitate vacant commercial properties into viable commercial and/or residential uses for prospective tenants.

Eligibility requirements:

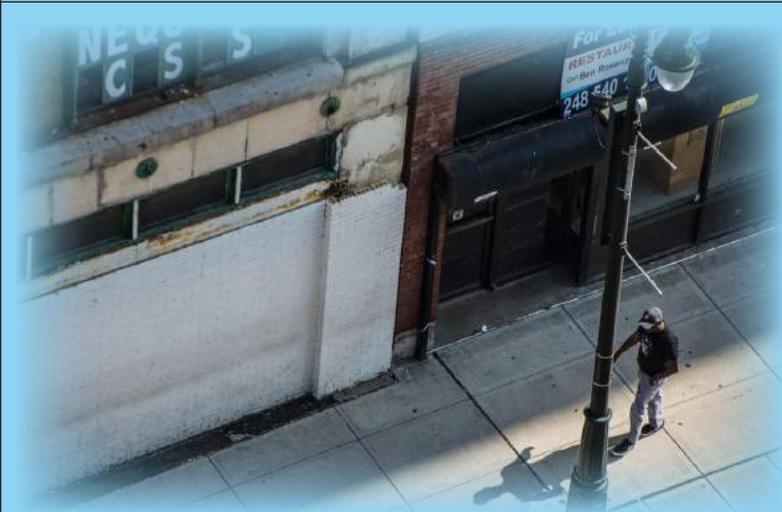
Properties must be commercially zoned, vacant and located in the CIPA. Properties are considered vacant if they qualify for a vacant unit rebate, indicating that the building has been unoccupied for 90 days.

The focus of this grant is to transform interior spaces to attract long term residential or commercial tenants. Cosmetic and other minor improvements will only be eligible if they are part of a major renovation.

Applicants are required to demonstrate how their project proposals promote the re-use of buildings, use of second floors for commercial or residential uses, and how they are creating sustainable buildings capable of providing a competitive location for commercial activity.

How does the grant work?

The grant is administered on a matching funds basis to a maximum of \$20,000. For additional information on the distribution of grants, please refer to the FAQ section of this guide.



Vacant and neglected properties negatively affect adjacent business owners, current or potential tenants, and overall downtown revitalization efforts.



Business-ready after substantial renovation.



Reclamation of vacant properties can be a catalyst for new housing and business markets.

Upper Floor Residential Grant

This grant assists property owners with the cost of building improvements required to convert upper-storey non-residential units to residential dwelling units.



An upper residential floor on Queen Street.

Eligibility requirements:

Properties must be located in the CIPA.

The grant can only be applied towards upper-storey non-residential units.

Prior to submitting an application, a consultation meeting with Planning and Building Division staff must occur to identify the scope and any remediation studies required to facilitate a residential conversion.

How does the grant work?

The grant is administered on a matching funds basis, to a maximum of \$15,000. For additional information on the distribution of grants, please refer to the FAQ section of this guide.

Patio Conversion Grant

The purpose of this grant is to encourage businesses to capitalize on underutilized privately owned space by establishing permanent patio infrastructure.



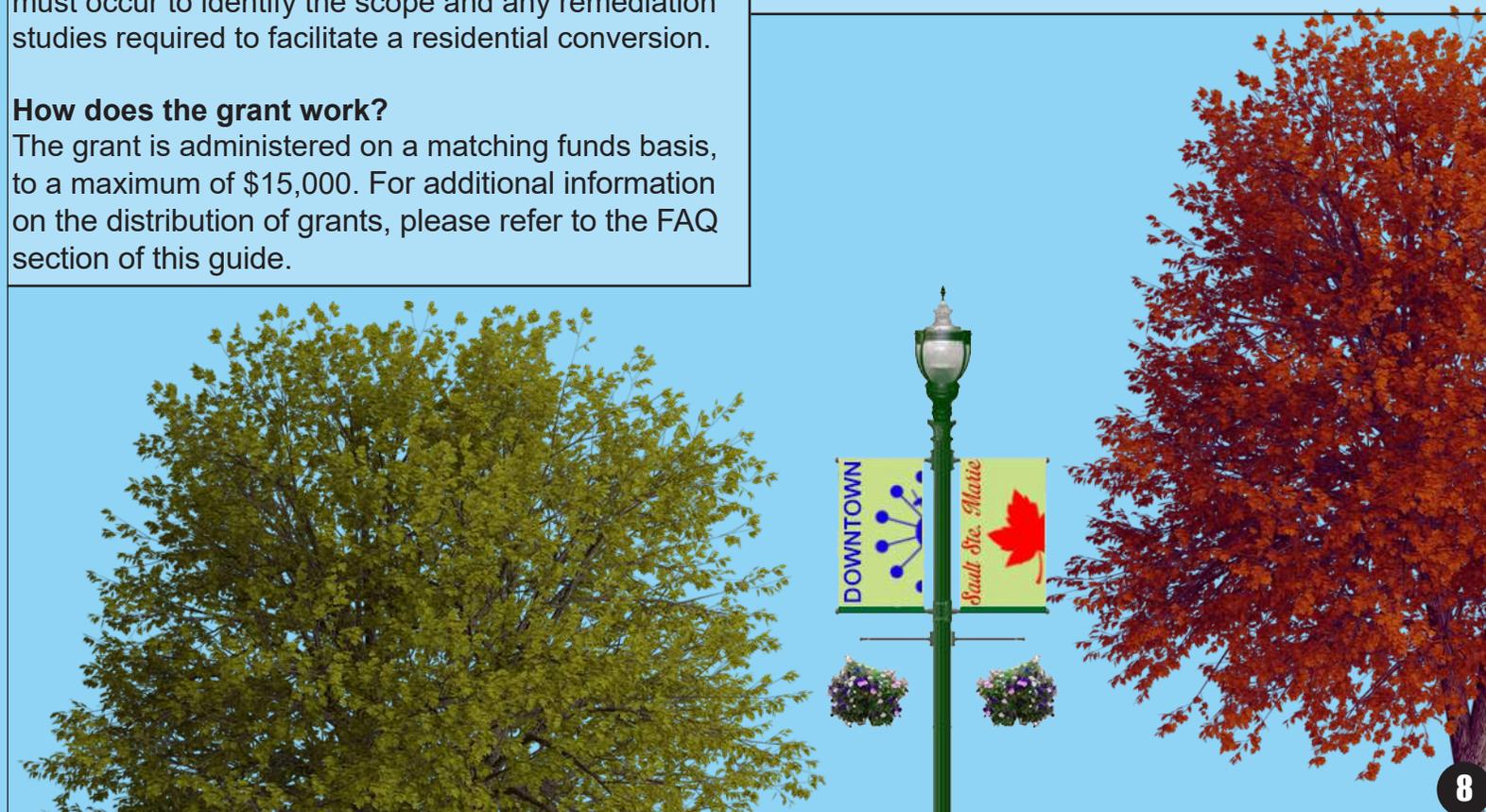
A rear yard patio.

Eligibility requirements:

Patios on City property are not eligible.

How does the grant work?

The grant is allocated on a matching funds basis up to \$5,000. For additional information on the distribution of grants, please refer to the FAQ section of this guide.



Q: How do I apply for a grant?

Prospective grant applicants must submit a completed application as well as other required supporting documents.

The online application form is available on the City website and attached to this guide.

Q: Do I need to meet with anyone before submitting an application?

A pre-consultation meeting with Planning Staff is required prior to submitting an application or commencing any design associated with the proposed project.

Q: Will I automatically receive a grant if I meet the eligibility criteria?

Eligibility does not mean automatic approval. Applications will be reviewed by the Downtown Community Improvement Committee and evaluated based on how well it meets the intent and purpose of the program goals.

Q: My application was approved for a grant, do I still need a building permit?

Improvements made to buildings or lands still require a Building Permit and must comply with the Ontario Building Code and applicable Zoning requirements.

Q: What type of proposals will be recommended for approval? (For Façade Improvement Grants and Building Activation Grants).

The key goals of the program are to achieve:

1. Transformational interior renovations.

A transformational interior renovation is considered to have taken place when a substantial amount of a building's interior has been removed or replaced to accommodate a new commercial use leasing a previously vacant space.

(Continues onto next column.)

2. Façade improvements that create positive visual impact.

Examples of eligible façade improvements include:

- removing an existing façade and replacing it with more attractive designs and materials.
- a major restoration of a historic façade encompassing substantial masonry work, windows, decorative lighting, awnings, signage, and façade accents that are consistent with the building's original façade characteristics.

Routine maintenance, one-off projects, repairs or minor cosmetic improvements, do not meet the key goals. This also includes partially completed projects.

Q: What are the eligible costs that can be submitted for a grant?

Eligible costs for grant submission can include all design, labour and material costs related to approved work that has been completed after the application has been submitted and approved by Council. In addition, up to \$2,500 in pre-application design work can be submitted as an eligible cost towards the maximum grant amount.

Work on projects can commence once an application has been received and determined complete by the City's Planning and Enterprise Services department. However, grants will only be disbursed once the project has been approved by Council and completed (i.e. new façade, a leasable commercial space, a new residential unit ready to be rented or a new patio ready for service). Partially completed projects will not receive a grant.

If construction work is to be completed by the applicant his/herself, only costs associated with materials can be considered eligible for the grant.

Only before-tax costs can be submitted for grant submission.

Frequently Asked Questions (2 of 2)

Q: How soon after approval do I need to complete the project?

Projects must be completed within one year of City Council's approval. Extensions to the completion period may be granted under special circumstances.

Q: Is this a competitive or a first-come, first-serve process?

Applications will be accepted until funds are exhausted. Priority will be given to applications that can demonstrate a comprehensive proposal that aligns with program goals and objectives.

Q: What if the completed project deviates from the grant agreement?

If the applicant decides to change the project after approval, they must immediately contact the Planner for additional review.

Any unapproved changes to the project will void the grant and result in non-payment of funds.

Q: How long will this program last?

Applications will be accepted and evaluated until July 31, 2021, or until funds are exhausted.

Q: Can a project receive funding from multiple grant programs under this and other Community Improvement Plans?

Yes, provided that the total amount of assistance does not exceed eligible costs.

Q: Where can I find more information?

The Downtown Development website contains information regarding program goals, objectives, design guidelines, and more.

You may also contact the Planner for this program:

Steve Turco, RPP

Senior Planner

5th floor, City Hall

99 Foster Drive, Sault Ste. Marie, ON P6A 5X6

Phone: 705-759-5279

Email: s.turco@cityssm.on.ca

Website: saultstemarie.ca/downtowndevelopment



Over 700 businesses and organizations have been identified in the downtown core!

Application Form for Sault Ste. Marie's Downtown Development Initiative Grants

1. Grant programs:

- (a) Tax Increment Equivalent Grant (TIEG) for Major Developments.
- (b) Façade Improvement Grant.
- (c) Building Activation Grant for Vacant Spaces.
- (d) Upper Floor Residential Grant.
- (e) Patio Conversion Grant.

If you selected (c):
Has the subject property been
unoccupied for 90 days or more?

Yes
No

2. Applicant's information:

Name

Address

Telephone

Fax:

Email

3. Registered property owner's information:

Name

Address

Telephone

Fax:

Email

4. Registered owner's signature:

**5. All mail should be
directed to:**

Applicant
Property owner

**6. Civic address
of property:**

11. Describe how the proposed works will improve the site or building (i.e. how will the works address aesthetics, functionality, energy efficiency, building or fire code improvements, barrier free improvements):

12. Describe the benefits this project will have on your business and the Downtown (e.g. new permanent and short-term jobs created, more entertainment or cultural activities to do downtown, new residents or commercial tenants to Downtown, aesthetics from the street, etc):

13. Project budget:

EXPENSES (before tax)	AMOUNT	FUNDING SOURCES	AMOUNT
Consultant/contractor fees		Applicant	
Materials (construction projects only)		Public sector contribution (50% of eligible costs) to a maximum per program	
<u>TOTAL</u>		<u>TOTAL</u>	

Note: Include copies of all project cost estimates and design plans.

14. Consultant/contractor information:

Name of consultants/contractors to be used for construction projects (if known):

Labour:

Design:

Other:

Note: If labour or design work is being done independently by applicant, any costs associated with work are not eligible for grant reimbursement.

15. Have you previously applied for a financial incentive grant? If yes, please provide details:

16. Required attachments:

Applications will not be reviewed unless all required attachments are received. A copy of each of the following is required:

Quotes for all projects

All relevant studies/drawings

Proof of ownership of property

By checking this box, I certify that the above required attachments are included and true and accurate to the best of my knowledge.

