

VILLAGE OF SOUTH ORANGE STOREFRONT IMPROVEMENT GRANT 2019 GUIDELINES

What is the purpose of the Storefront Improvement Grant?

The Storefront Improvement Grant Program has been created to provide financial assistance to the business and property owners of South Orange as an incentive for the improvement of their building facades, such as signs, awnings, lighting, exterior painting, new storefronts, etc. This financial assistance consists of grants to be matched by the recipient and to be utilized only for facade improvements as described herein. The objective of the program is to improve the viability of the business as well as improve the appearance and historic character of the Village.

Where does the money come from?

The matching grant money is provided by the Village from general revenue.

How does the program work?

The Storefront Improvement Grant is managed by the Design Review Board (DRB) of South Orange Village and is administered by the staff of the South Orange Village Center Alliance (SOVCA). You must work with the DRB and SOVCA in order to receive matching funds.

Existing South Orange businesses and property owners who wish to renovate their storefront can apply for a grant not to exceed \$2,500 per storefront, with an obligation to match the grant dollar for dollar through their own resources. No more than \$7,500 will be allocated in grants toward storefront improvements in any one building in any given calendar year. Preference will be given to property and business owners who collaborate in order to encourage consistency within any given building.

There is a limited amount of grants to be distributed each year through the Storefront Improvement Grant which is determined by the Village Board of Trustees (BOT).

Only renovation and remodeling projects will be eligible to receive funds. Storefronts that are part of any new construction are ineligible.

Are there strings attached?

Just a few. Applicants must meet all of the following prerequisites:

1. The proposed projects must be a commercial storefront located within one of South Orange Village's commercial business districts.

2. The proposed projects must comply with all the terms of this “Village of South Orange Storefront Improvement Grant Guidelines” as established by the Design Review Board of South Orange Village Center.
3. Applicants are required to match dollar-for-dollar the funds granted to them, and to meet all other additional expenditures required to complete their project, through their own resources.
4. Storefront Improvement Grants are reimbursements and will be received by applicant only after work is completed and original receipts and proof of payment are provided.
5. Applicants must be business and/or property owners.
6. Grants will not be awarded more than once to the same property within one year.

What kinds of projects are eligible?

Applications for grants may be submitted for one or any combination of the following renovation projects:

- Installation of new and/or repair of old storefronts, exterior walls
- Restoration of original facades
- New awnings
- New signage
- New entrances
- Exterior lighting
- Exterior painting
- Other projects on approval

Fees paid to design professionals for their services related to the improvement may also be included. All eligible improvements must be visible from a public street or parking area.

What criteria will be used in determining if a project receives funding?

All projects will be judged based on the following criteria:

1. Positive impact of the project on the business of the applicant
2. Positive impact of the project on the aesthetic appearance of the building
3. Positive impact of the project on the aesthetic appearance of the commercial district
4. Preservation and enhancement of the architectural integrity of the building
5. Adequacy of documentation submitted
6. Improvements must be above and beyond general maintenance

In addition, applicants should consider the following when proposing a project:

1. Projects should be tastefully executed using colors and design elements recommended by the Design Review Board
2. Projects should use materials compatible with the historic quality of the building, the surrounding buildings and the Village in general
3. Improvements, especially signs and awnings, should be of a size appropriate to the pedestrian nature and scale of the Village
4. Improvements should not attempt to “cover up” existing signage or other unsightly building features; these items should be removed prior to installation of the improvement
5. Projects must be in compliance with the Zoning and Building Codes of the Township of South Orange Village, or obtain any required variances.

Does the Design Review Board provide free technical guidance?

Yes! The Design Review Board shall make every effort to facilitate the process of approvals by the applicable authorities of the Township of South Orange Village, and to provide contacts and technical information, guidance and recommendations on appropriate design, colors, materials, lighting, etc.

How to apply for a grant

To assist you in applying for a grant, a member of the Design Review Board or staff member of the South Orange Village Center Alliance will be assigned as your liaison. This person will contact you to discuss your project and answer any questions. Applicants then complete pages 1-4 of the application package (including application and Letter of Agreement). Please return the Application, together with all requested documentation (see page 2), to the South Orange Village Center Alliance office in Village Hall (76 South Orange Avenue, 3rd Floor). Be sure to carefully read and sign the letter of agreement (Attachment 1). Applicants must provide at least one quote from a licensed contractor/design professional in order to be eligible for the grant award. The Village reserves the right to require the submission of one or more additional quotes.

What happens after the application is submitted?

Members of the Design Review Board will review applications upon receipt and select grant award recipients and allocate the amounts awarded on a rolling basis, subject to the availability of funds. Applications received after the budgeted annual funds have been exhausted will have priority for the following year's funds. The Village Administrator/Treasurer will be notified of the recipients, and of the improvements they will be making. The award of grant funds to the projects selected is conditional to the subsequent approval of the project by the appropriate authorities of the Township of South Orange Village.

The applicant or their contractor must obtain all necessary permits from the appropriate authorities of the Township, then proceed with the implementation of the project as per the drawings and specifications approved by the Design Review Board, and following the approved schedule.

How and when do I receive my grant award reimbursement funds?

Grant recipients must keep and submit all original invoices and receipts for payments of eligible expenditures (costs of labor and materials), description of work performed, original invoices and proof of payments made on the project. These must be attached to the 'Notification Letter' of completion of the project. This letter must be sent to the South Orange Village Center Alliance no later than 3 months from the dated permit approvals from the Village. If, due to unforeseen circumstances, the project cannot be completed within 3 months, the Grant Recipient must request approval of an extension of the deadline.

No payments shall be made to a grant recipient until the project is completed. Upon inspection and verification of these documents, a member of the Design Review Board or a staff member of SOVCA shall inspect the work performed and, if properly completed, will request that payment from the Village of South Orange be made to the Grant Recipient. (This process can take over 30 days, depending on when during the month the request is made.) The applicant should receive the grant payment no later than 60 days after receipt of a 'Notification Letter' from the applicant. (Sample notification letter attached).

LIABILITY WAIVER

The responsibility for conformance with all the applicable building codes, ordinances and regulations for any given project sponsored by the Storefront Improvement Grants lies entirely with the property and/or business owners, recipients of the grant, and their architects/engineers. An approval granted by the Design Review Board applies only to compliance with the eligibility guidelines for the award of the grant. Under no circumstance shall the Design Review Board, the Village of South Orange or the South Orange Village Center Alliance, Inc., and/or any individual representing these organizations, be held liable for building code errors and/or omissions, property damages and/or personal injuries to any individual or entity, during and after construction.