

UPTOWN

Community Improvement Plan

2026



Table of Contents

Uptown Community Improvement Plan	4
Introduction	4
What is a Community Improvement Plan (CIP)?.....	4
Legislative Context	4
City of Waterloo Policy Context	5
How to Use this Manual	6
Uptown CIP Project Area	6
UPTOWN INCENTIVE PROGRAMS.....	8
Purpose	8
. Commercial and Heritage Façade Improvement Grant Program	9
. Fee and Study Grant Program	10
. Accessibility Enhancement Program	10
. Sustainability and Climate Resilience Program	11
. Commercial Interior and Vacancy Improvement Program	11
. Major Activity Grant Program	11
General Requirements: Applying to all Programs.....	12
IMPLEMENTATION.....	14
How to Use This Manual	14
Before You Apply	15
Funding Available	15
Application Process.....	15
Review Process.....	15
Payment	16
Monitoring and Reporting.....	16
How We Track Success.....	16
Program Changes.....	17
CIP PROGRAM DETAILS	18
Commercial and Heritage Façade Improvement Grant Program.....	18
Purpose:	18
Funding:.....	18
Program-Specific Requirements:.....	18
Eligible Expenses:.....	18

Fee and Study Grant Program.....	20
Purpose:	20
Funding:.....	20
Program-Specific Requirements:.....	20
Eligible Fees:	20
Eligible studies:	20
Accessibility Enhancement Program	22
Purpose:	22
Funding:.....	22
Program-Specific Requirements:.....	22
Eligible Expenses:.....	23
Sustainability and Climate Resilience Program	24
Purpose:	24
Funding:.....	24
Before You Start.....	24
Program-Specific Requirements:.....	24
Eligible Expenses:.....	25
Commercial Interior and Vacancy Improvement Program.....	26
Purpose:	26
Funding:.....	26
Program-Specific Requirements:.....	26
Eligible Expenses:.....	26
Ineligible Expenses:	27
Major Activity Grant Program.....	28
Purpose:	28
Description:.....	28
Municipal Land Development Opportunities: Property Acquisition, Disposal, Investment and Improvement Program.....	30
Criteria.....	31
Appendix A.....	32
Major Activity Grant Program (Tax Increment Equivalent Grant).....	32

Uptown Community Improvement Plan

Introduction

Uptown Waterloo is the heart of the city - a vibrant economic, cultural, and residential hub where people live, work, study, and gather. Central within the Uptown Urban Growth Area in proximity to multiple Major Transit Station Areas (MTSAs) and well served by transit, makes the Uptown a priority area for economic growth and investment in Waterloo. Uptown Waterloo is a local and regional centre for services, recreation, finance and technology, retail, entertainment, arts, educational and institutional uses, and is a vibrant place where people live.

This Community Improvement Plan (CIP) aims to strengthen the Uptown core through targeted incentives. The CIP encourages commercial and office building improvements, office development, and heritage preservation while advancing environmental sustainability, climate resilience, and community accessibility.

What is a Community Improvement Plan (CIP)?

Community Improvement Plans (CIPs) help municipalities attract investment and support urban development and redevelopment in defined project areas. Where the Official Plan includes enabling policies, Section 28 of the Planning Act authorizes municipalities to use a CIP as the legal basis for offering financial incentives. The purpose of a CIP is to provide for the implementation of community improvement initiatives within a defined project area.

A municipality may make grants or loans to registered owners, assessed owners and to tenants of lands and buildings within a community improvement project area, as well as to anyone assigned the right by such an owner or tenant, to pay all or part of eligible project costs that are intended to achieve the stated CIP objectives. Eligible costs may include expenses related to development and redevelopment, construction and reconstruction, site preparation, building rehabilitation or improvements, enhancing energy efficiency, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving accessibility, encouraging affordable housing, as well as other improvement and safety-enhancing projects.

Legislative Context

The Ontario Planning Act (Section 28) allows municipalities to adopt a Community Improvement Plan (CIP) as a tool to direct funds and implement policies intended to encourage revitalization initiatives and/or stimulate economic development or redevelopment. Through community improvement plans, municipalities can focus public attention on local priorities and municipal initiatives, target areas in transition or in need of repair, rehabilitation and redevelopment, facilitate and encourage community change in a coordinated manner and stimulate private sector investment through municipal incentive-based programs. Part IV of the Planning Act states that Council may identify a CIP project

area through By-law, provided their Official Plan contains provisions relating to Community Improvement.

The *Ontario Heritage Act* (Section 39 and 45) allows municipalities to pass by-laws that provide for loans or grants to owners of properties designated under the *Ontario Heritage Act*. The purpose of the grants and loans are to pay for all or part of the costs of alterations to such designated buildings, consistent with terms and conditions that may be set out by the municipality. The bonusing rule included in the *Municipal Act* does not apply to grants or loans made under this Section of the *Ontario Heritage Act*.

City of Waterloo Policy Context

The City of Waterloo Official Plan contains comprehensive policies designed to direct the form, nature and rate of growth and change within the municipality. The City of Waterloo Official Plan provides the necessary framework to establish a Community Improvement Project Area in the city, and outlines the goals and objectives for a Community Improvement Plan, to achieve one or more of the following Official Plan objectives:

- Preserve and enhance the Uptown Waterloo Urban Growth Centre as a major focal point and destination for investment in institutional and region-wide public services, regional-serving land uses and activities such as recreational, social, cultural, entertainment, office, tourism, and significant employment uses;
- Improve environmental, social, cultural, economic development, or safety conditions;
- Promote and focus public and private sector investment into maintenance, rehabilitation, and redevelopment activities that improve the living and working conditions in the City; and
- Encouraging private sector renovation, repair, rehabilitation, redevelopment or other improvement of lands and/or building, including environmental remediation, development, redevelopment, construction and reconstruction of lands and buildings for rehabilitation purposes, or for the provision of energy efficient uses, buildings, structures, works, improvements or facilities.

In addition, the City of Waterloo Strategic Plan promotes programs that are intended to support the overall economic vitality of the city, including:

- Supporting a Diversified Economy and innovation ecosystem
- Investing in accessibility and inclusion to enhance belonging
- Becoming leaders in sustainability practices and climate action – working together with organizational and community champions to align activities and achieve climate action mitigation and adaptation to create a more resilient community.
- Developing Complete Communities to achieve a high quality of life for all residents and overall community vibrancy through strategic density, diverse housing options and equitably available parks, public spaces and other recreational and cultural amenities
- Implementing the Affordable Housing Strategy

How to Use this Manual

This manual outlines the Uptown CIP program framework and the financial assistance programs available to property owners and tenant businesses in Uptown Waterloo. Each program has specific requirements and funding limits. Before applying, please review the General Program Requirements in addition to the program-specific requirements. Always consult with the City to determine if any permits and/or planning approvals may be required such as a building permit, heritage permit, and/or a sign permit.

Important Note: All programs are subject to available funding as approved by City Council. Applications are reviewed on a first-come, first-served basis. Tax Increment Equivalency Grant Programs are subject to Council approval.

Uptown CIP Project Area

The Uptown Community Improvement Project Area (also referred to as the “Project Area”), is shown in Figure 1, and encompasses the Uptown Waterloo Urban Growth Centre, and the MacGregor/Albert Heritage Conservation District. The Uptown Waterloo Urban Growth Centre (Uptown) comprises a substantial portion of the CIP Project Area and continues to serve as a major focal point and destination for investment within the City, with a target of 200 residents and jobs per hectare. The Uptown Growth Centre serves as a focal point transit-oriented development, pedestrian oriented streetscapes and higher density to encourage a diversity of commercial, cultural and employment opportunities, and concentrating growth to make efficient use of existing infrastructure. The City’s Official Plan identifies this area as a destination within the community as well as fulfilling a local service and administration function for surrounding neighbourhoods. Properties within the MacGregor/Albert Heritage Conservation District have been designated under Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act, and properties in the district require a heritage permit to make alterations that may change heritage features. This program is intended to provide supports to help owners of heritage properties in this district offset costs of preserving or restoring the exterior heritage features.

UPTOWN INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

Purpose

The purpose of this Community Improvement Plan (CIP) is to support the ongoing transformation of Uptown Waterloo into a vibrant, inclusive, and economically resilient Urban Growth Centre by enabling targeted financial incentives that attract private investment, encourage strategic redevelopment, and advance the City's goals for intensification, affordability, employment growth, and complete community building. This CIP enables the City to offer a suite of financial incentive programs to encourage private-sector investment aligned with these goals.

Specifically, the CIP aims to:

- Facilitate the redevelopment of underutilized buildings, to promote intensification and improvement in the Uptown
- Encourage repair and adaptive reuse of existing building stock
- Create and retain employment opportunities and attract new businesses to occupy vacant buildings
- Attract new businesses to locate in Uptown and support existing businesses
- Improve accessibility of Uptown businesses and buildings
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support climate adaptation measures and align with municipal climate targets and future green building standards
- Help small businesses modernize interiors
- Conserve built heritage resources
- Create new office employment opportunities
- Incentivize affordable housing
- Improve building safety and security
- Enhance public realm and streetscapes
- Increase the value of land and buildings within the Community Improvement Project Area

Uptown Community Improvement Plan (CIP) Toolkit

The Uptown Community Improvement Plan (CIP) Program has been in place since 2016. The program had realized a number of minor amendments, and it was time for a comprehensive review to reflect new strategic priorities. As part the review, City policy goals were reviewed, along with best practices. The public and past program participants and partners such as the Uptown Waterloo BIA were consulted to understand priorities, missing program areas and opportunities to streamline the program.

The CIP is comprised of a suite of tools intended to foster economic activity in the core area to encourage redevelopment and adaptive reuse of existing buildings, modernization of existing buildings through improved sustainability and/or accessibility enhancements, enable businesses to modernize interiors to help them compete, encourage the occupancy of vacant commercial units, encourage affordable housing, as well as to support new commercial businesses. The CIP is intended to support private investment in the Uptown by using financial mechanisms such as grants and tax-increment grants (TIG) to reduce the

cost of improvements, development and redevelopment for owners and tenants of commercial, institutional and mixed-use buildings, as well as owners of designated heritage properties.

Incentive Programs in the ‘toolkit’ include a suite of tools is outlined for building owners and businesses to help support strategic investments in the core area of Waterloo. The list of CIP programs within the toolkit can be found in Figure 2 and include:

- Commercial and Heritage Façade Improvement Grant Program
- Fee and Study Grant Program
- Accessibility Enhancement Program
- Sustainability and Climate Resilience Program
- Commercial Interior and Vacancy Improvement Grant
- Major Activity Grant Program
- Municipal Land Development Opportunities Program

An applicant may apply to more than one program and is eligible for a total cumulative grant of up to \$25,000. It should be noted however that the TIEG programs can not be combined with any other program listed in this toolkit.

Figure 2: CIP Toolkit - Overview of Programs

PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION
<p>Commercial and Heritage Façade Improvement Grant Program</p>	<p>Purpose: To encourage commercial or mixed-use commercial property owners and tenants to rehabilitate and improve the appearance of the streetscape and buildings in the Uptown project area, as well as to support conservation of heritage properties and buildings.</p> <p>The Façade program will provide a grant equal to 50% of the cost of eligible exterior building maintenance and property improvement works to buildings, up to a maximum of \$10,000 per street-facing façade, and a maximum of \$15,000 where improvements occur on both facades on a corner lot. Improvement of façades may include signs, lighting and other security features. Outdoor decks and patios may be eligible for Façade Improvement Grants. An additional \$5,000 is available where a property is designated under the Ontario Heritage Act.</p>

<p>Fee and Study Grant Program</p>	<p>Purpose: To offset the costs for studies and fees required for permits and applications required under the Planning Act, Building Code, or to achieve heritage or sustainability goals and/or fire compliance that are required for approved projects under this program.</p> <p>The Fee and Study Grant program will provide grants equal to 50% of the fees paid on City planning/development applications such as Minor Variances, Site Plan, minor Zoning By-law amendments to expand the range of permitted employment uses, as well as building, demolition, heritage and/or sign permits.</p> <p>The program may also provide a grant for up to 50% of the cost of preparing professional studies required to obtain a license or permit or to apply for a planning application. These may include professional architectural/engineered drawings, fire assessments/studies or plans, energy audit, accessibility audit or other required study. Combined fees and studies cover up to a maximum of \$5,000 per project.</p>
<p>Accessibility Enhancement Program</p>	<p>Purpose: To encourage commercial or mixed-use commercial property owners and tenants to improve the interior and exterior accessibility of their building façades.</p> <p>Grant equal to 75% of the cost of eligible building improvements made by existing businesses and/or to retrofit a commercial building, up to a maximum of \$15,000 per project. In exceptional cases, applicants may request a grant of up to 100% of eligible expenses by making the request at the time of application and outlining the reasons supporting the request.</p>

<p>Sustainability and Climate Resilience Program</p>	<p>Purpose: Promote sustainable design, energy efficiency, reduced carbon emissions and climate resilience through existing commercial and mixed-use commercial building upgrades.</p> <p>The sustainability and climate resilience grant is up to 50% of the cost of eligible improvements or retrofits to existing commercial buildings - to a maximum of \$10,000 per project. The program supports projects that contribute to greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction, enhance climate resilience, and/or improve energy efficiency.</p>
<p>Commercial Interior and Vacancy Improvement Program</p>	<p>Purpose: To help cover the costs of interior construction and renovations to facilitate occupancy of vacant commercial units, to support new businesses to succeed by reducing the impact of start-up leasehold improvements.</p> <p>Provides a grant of up to 50% of the costs to improve vacant commercial space up to a maximum of \$10,000, including eligible material and labour costs. The grant will also support major renovations by long-standing businesses required to enhance the customer experience and to modernize their restaurant/store.</p>
<p>Major Activity Grant Program (Tax Increment Equivalent Grant)</p>	<p>Purpose: To promote major redevelopment projects that create a substantial amount of employment or affordable housing land uses as a priority, while supporting development that includes heritage conservation and/or sustainable buildings.</p> <p>Provides an annual grant equal to a percentage of the increase in municipal property taxes for up to 10 years after project completion. Amount of the grant is</p>

	<p>tied to as-built project performance, with an increased grant available to projects that meet sustainability and/or heritage conservation criteria.</p>
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Note: Additional details on the evaluation of applications for the Major Activity Grant Program are provided in Appendices C and D. The appendices to this CIP do not form part of the formal CIP and may be revised or updated from time to time, as required, without formal amendment to this Plan.

General Requirements: Applying to all Programs

All financial incentive programs contained in this CIP are subject to the following general requirements as well as the individual requirements specified for each program. These program requirements are not intended to be exhaustive, and the City reserves the right to include other reasonable requirements and conditions as deemed necessary on a project-specific basis. Please reach out to CIP program staff with any questions.

- 1) Location: Projects must be fully located within the CIP Project Area
- 2) Retroactive Funding: Works started prior to submitting an application are ineligible. Depending on the project scope of work, city staff may grant permission to an applicant to commence certain types of project work after submitting an application but is subject to approval on a case-by-case basis. It should be noted that any works undertaken in advance of an application decision would be done at the applicant's risk and does not negate any requirements for permits
- 3) Who can apply: Registered property owners, may apply as well as tenant businesses or an assignee/agent with the written consent of the property owner
- 4) Business licensing: Applicants must hold a current City of Waterloo Business License where required or be exempt under the City's Business Licensing By-law
- 5) Taxes: Property taxes and other municipal obligations and licenses must be in good standing
- 6) Municipal Compliance: Proposed, approved and as-built works must conform to all relevant municipal by-laws, standards, policies and procedures including (but not limited to) the City of Waterloo Official Plan, Zoning By-law and/or site plan and engineering standards
- 7) Legislative Compliance: All approved works and improvements shall conform to relevant Federal and Provincial legislation including but not limited to, the Environmental Protection Act and the Ontario Building Code
- 8) Scope: All project works must match the approved scope and drawings unless amended with City approval
- 9) Application completeness: Applications must include all plans, drawings, photographs, studies, estimates, and any required permits (e.g. building, sign,

- heritage) as outlined in the program guidelines. Applicants may be asked to provide additional information to demonstrate a business' financial track record
- 10) Project Funding: The grant reimbursement shall not exceed \$25,000 across all programs. The total grant reimbursement percentage will be calculated based on the estimate stated in the approval letter, or the actual expenses submitted (whichever is lower)
 - 11) Review & approval: City staff evaluate applications against program eligibility, project scope and built performance criteria to make a recommendation for project approval. In the case of a conflict in the provisions, the most stringent requirements shall apply
 - 12) Partial Funding: The City reserves the right to approve a portion of the grant requested based on availability of funds and the ability of a proposed project to meet program goals
 - 13) Decision: CIP Review will endeavour to provide a decision to an applicant within four (4) weeks of complete application, or final issuance of required permits (whichever is later)
 - 14) Timing: Proposed improvements are to be completed within one year to be eligible for payment. A one-year extension may be authorized by the Executive Director of Economic Development if an applicant has extenuating circumstances that would warrant an extension
 - 15) Outstanding orders: Any outstanding work orders and/or requests to comply from the City must be satisfactorily addressed and resolved prior to issuing any approval, extension or payment of financial incentive
 - 16) Agreements: Applicants of the TIEG programs will be required to enter into a grant agreement (which may be registered on title), setting out terms, duration, default and termination provisions of the program
 - 17) Evidence & audits: Applicants must keep all required documentation of the approved project including estimates, photographs (before and after), contracts, approval letters, invoices, and paid receipts, Applicants must submit documentation as required to form a complete application and to validate the completion of the approved project. Applicants must provide photographs of completed works outlined in the project scope of work
 - 18) Inspection: The City reserves the right to inspect the property that is the subject of a financial incentive program, prior to approval and releasing any grants
 - 19) Multiple Program Limits: Applicants may combine CIP programs (where eligible). The maximum funding that will be provided to one property is \$25,000 which is the combined total of across all CIP incentives
 - Tax Increment Equivalent Grants may not be combined with other Uptown CIP programs
 - Eligible expenses may only be submitted to one program.
 - The City of Waterloo CIP may be combined with other Provincial or Federal Grant programs to a combined total contribution of no more than 100%, for any eligible project cost.
 - Total assistance from all sources (including other government and nonprofit funding) must be declared.
 - The City reserves the right to reduce the total amount of grant monies issued

- 20) Payments & City liability: Grant reimbursement for demonstrated eligible expenses will be paid after project completion has been demonstrated and verified. The City is not responsible for any costs incurred before approval/agreement execution or in anticipation of a grant
- 21) Default, discontinuation & repayment: If an applicant is in default of general or program specific requirements, the City may delay, reduce or cancel its financial incentive approval. Should the owner or tenant of the approved eligible project default on any condition in the agreement or by-law, the grants plus interest will be payable to the City in full
- 22) Discontinuation of the Program: The City may discontinue any of the financial incentive programs at any time with Council approval. Notwithstanding this any approved outstanding project grants continue subject to all requirements
- 23) Affordable unit security: Where grants relate to affordable housing, the City may require security (e.g. registration on title) to ensure affordability for the defined period
- 24) Transfer & sale: Grants are awarded to the original agreement holder and are not transferable unless approved by the City. If a property is sold during the eligibility period the City may (upon request) and at its discretion, transfer a remaining grant to a new owner subject to a new agreement
- 25) Demolition: Any situation that may result in the demolition of a property that is the subject of a TIEG will result in discontinuation of the program and may require repayment of the benefit received
- 26) Funding Availability: The City of Waterloo is not bound to accept any application. Funding is available on a first come, first served basis. Eligibility for a program does not guarantee approval
- 27) Additional Evaluation: The City may require a more comprehensive evaluation in situations where estimated project costs exceed \$1,000,000 and/or where the financial request includes a Tax Increment Grant. All TIEG grants are subject to Council approval
- 28) Subsequent Applications: A property that has been the successful recipient of an Uptown CIP may not apply the same grant unless five (5) years has passed. If the owner has received less than the \$25,000 program maximum, they may apply for subsequent works up to the program maximum

IMPLEMENTATION

How to Use This Manual

This manual outlines financial assistance programs available to property owners and businesses in Uptown Waterloo. Each program has specific requirements and funding limits. Before applying, please review the General Program Requirements that apply to all programs, consult with CIP program staff and other City departments regarding any permit or license requirements.

Important Note: All programs are subject to available funding as approved by City Council. Applications are reviewed on a first-come, first-served basis.

Before You Apply

- 1) Review the General Program Requirements
- 2) Confirm your project meets the specific program criteria
- 3) Schedule an initial meeting with CIP program staff by emailing cip@waterloo.ca
- 4) Consider consulting with relevant experts (architects, engineers, electricians, accessibility, heritage, etc.)
- 5) Check if you need any additional City or agency permits or approvals for your project

Funding Available

All programs are subject to available funding. Early application is recommended.

Application Process

The applicant will be required to submit a completed application along with required supporting documentation in accordance with the process outlined below. If an application is not complete staff will contact the applicant to request the necessary information. The following is an outline of the process:

- 1) Pre-consultation meeting with City staff to confirm program eligibility and required supporting application materials and additional required permits.
- 2) Submit a complete application online with required supporting documentation (e.g. drawings, estimates, photos, studies or assessments and permits (when required).
- 3) Typical supporting documentation may include:
 - Description of business/project and justification for the project
 - City of Waterloo Business License (if applicable)
 - Minimum of one estimate for proposed project works
 - Drawings and studies as may be required (e.g. energy audit)
 - Copy of any permit applications made
 - Property owners must provide a copy of proof of ownership of the property where the CIP project will be taking place
 - Tenants of a property must provide a copy of a dated lease to the property being rented (minimum 3 years; new and/or existing businesses). Applicants who have a lease term of less than 3 years must obtain confirmation of an extended lease to the tenant through the property owner
 - Photos of the project area before any work
 - Other information to assess applications

Review Process

- Review is undertaken by staff for completeness and eligibility.

- Priority - Applications are reviewed on a first-come, first-served basis, subject to available funding to the CIP. Funding levels are set annually by Council, and the City is not obligated to fund all eligible applications. Programs may be paused or discontinued at Council's discretion. TIEG applications are subject to Council approval.
- Decision and Agreement - The Executive Director of Economic Development or their delegate will make the final approval of an application. The service standard for a decision to an applicant within four (4) weeks of complete application, or final issuance of required permits (whichever is later).
- A TIEG Application will have an extended approval period due to the complexity of the application and requirement for Council approval. The target service standard for a TIEG application will be three (3) months from the application date.
- Once the application is approved the conditions of approval, the amount awarded, additional documentation and agreements will be required and signed and the expected process for payment upon completion will be outlined.
- Permits and Licenses: all required licenses and permits must be obtained before commencing any works.

Payment

Upon project completion, the applicant must submit all required documentation to demonstrate completion of the project in accordance with the approved grant.

Typical supporting documentation will include:

- Invoices and proof of payment (e.g. receipts signed by the company, cancelled cheque images or credit card/bank statements showing payment)
- Copies of all required permits outlining terms and conditions (e.g. heritage permit, sign permit, building permit)
- Demonstrated fulfillment of any permit conditions
- Photos of the complete project and a project testimonial
- Declarations
- Other documentation requested by the City to demonstrate compliance

The City will review all documentation provided and will issue payment upon all conditions being met. Payments may take at least 30 (thirty) days from the date that staff provide verification of project completion and submit payment request to Accounts Payable.

Monitoring and Reporting

This CIP is not intended to be a static document. It is intended to be a proactive and responsive plan to support development and targeted core-area improvements within the Project Area.

How We Track Success

The City will monitor these programs by tracking:

- Number of applications
- Employment space created or renovated
- Affordable housing units created
- Property tax assessment changes
- Number and value of grants provided
- Total private investment leveraged
- New office or commercial units added
- New businesses attracted (where possible)
- Number of buildings with accessibility enhancements
- Number of vacant units occupied

Program Changes

The Council of the City of Waterloo may discontinue programs or make minor revisions to the Uptown Waterloo CIP without formal amendment to this Plan. Council will approve budget for this program in alignment with City of Waterloo budget (1 and 3 year). Council will approve TIEG applications through a report to council.

Minor changes for the purpose of effectively administering the program (e.g. application process, intake windows, forms, website content, legal agreements, contracts and minor adjustments to clarify eligibility) may be adjusted without Council approval or amendment to this Plan.

Significant changes to the CIP may trigger requirements under the Planning Act, including public notice, Council approval and Ministry approval. Some changes that alter the intent, scope or legal structure of the CIP may be deemed to be significant may include: changes to CIP boundaries, introduction of new financial programs, changing the purpose or goals of the CIP, substantially altering eligibility criteria (e.g. removing categories of properties or expanding types of projects from exterior to include interior).

Be sure to check the City website for the most current information on the CIP.

CIP PROGRAM DETAILS

Commercial and Heritage Façade Improvement Grant Program

Purpose:

Help businesses and commercial or mixed-use commercial property owners and tenants to improve the exterior of their buildings and storefronts to improve the aesthetic appeal, historic character and overall vibrancy of Uptown streetscapes.

Funding:

- Grant equal to 50% of eligible costs
- Up to \$10,000 per street-facing façade; or
- Up to \$15,000 for properties improving both street-facing façades on a corner lot
- An additional \$5,000 for heritage designated properties

Program-Specific Requirements:

In addition to complying with all general requirements, an application may require some additional program-specific requirements, as determined by the project scope of work:

- Eligible façade works must be street facing.
- Back-of-house safety upgrades and alleyway activations listed above may be eligible even if not visible from the street
- Any patio infrastructure must align with the City of Waterloo Patio Program requirements (in addition to all permits/approvals required).
- For properties designated under the Ontario Heritage Act, all eligible works must also conform to the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada and City of Waterloo Urban Design Guidelines.
- Colour selections/designs for alleyway activation must be reviewed and approved by City staff.
- Signage and/or any work that constitutes a mural must comply with the City's Sign By-law (Sign Zone F – Uptown). Murals specifically may require:
 - An application to the Sign Variance Committee; and
 - A variance through the City's IPPW department and approval by the City's Public Art Committee
 - Applicants are encouraged to hire local artists, when possible

Eligible Expenses:

- Painting, repair, rehabilitation or replacement of exterior façade materials and/or treatments
- Replacement/repair of exterior materials (brick, masonry, cladding)

- Repair/replacement of doors, windows, porches
- Repair/replacement of architectural details such as cornices, parapets, soffit/facia, eaves
- Storefront upgrades (display windows, canopies, awnings, entrances)
- Permanent hard landscaping (walkways) up to 15% of the grant
- Signage (that conforms to the sign by-law) up to a maximum of \$3,500
- Commercial safety/CPTED improvements to reduce crime and improve security (e.g., exterior lighting, smash-resistant doors/windows, or alleyway activation through vibrant, bright colour façade painting)
- Permanent patio infrastructure that abuts a street or alleyway (e.g. concrete barriers, patio deck infrastructure and/or fencing). *Note: patio chairs, tables, umbrellas, heater and other temporary fixtures are not eligible*
- Other exterior repairs/improvements as approved by the Executive Director of Economic Development or their delegate
- In the case of heritage properties - residential heritage-designated properties may be eligible

Fee and Study Grant Program

Purpose:

The purpose of the fee and study grant program is to support renovations and small expansions that facilitate energy efficient, accessible, historically appropriate and high-quality design by offsetting City application fees and the cost of professional studies/drawings for Uptown commercial or heritage restoration construction projects.

Funding:

- Grant covers up to 50% of eligible City application/permit fees and/or other site-specific plans, documents, design and/or feasibility studies needed to support a potential CIP project/improvement, to a maximum of \$5,000 per property/project.

Program-Specific Requirements:

In addition to complying with all general requirements, an application may require some additional program-specific requirements, as determined by the project scope of work:

- Eligible projects must be associated with a project approved under another CIP program listed within this guide (Commercial and Heritage Building Façade Improvement Project, Accessibility Enhancement, Sustainability and Climate Resilience or Commercial Interior or Vacancy Grants)
- Eligible projects must be within a commercial, mixed-use or heritage building and required to support the proposed improvement, and must contribute to a larger eligible improvement
- Studies/drawings must directly support the CIP-funded project and reflect the final scope submitted for approvals
- All studies/drawings must meet applicable City standards/guidelines and be submitted electronically for City review and records
- This program is not intended to support ongoing licensing and/or fees such as for a business, AGCO and/or patio licenses

Eligible Fees:

- Committee of Adjustment (consent, minor variance)
- Site Plan Application Fee (Major or Minor)
- Rental Housing Protection Act (Condominium Conversion)
- Building Permit (including permits for façade improvements and patio installation)

Eligible studies:

All studies must be prepared by a qualified professional acceptable to the City and be required to undertake a proposed CIP project. All studies must be submitted in electronic pdf format. For a study to be eligible it must be approved as acceptable to the City by the reviewing department/division:

- Urban design studies/drawings

- Professional architectural or engineered drawings required for building permits
- Engineering Assessments (including structural assessment)
- Heritage Impact Assessment
- Energy audits or Greenhouse Gas (GHG) assessments
- LEED and/or CAGBC Zero Carbon Building Standard Certification Fees
- Accessibility audits
- Fire Safety Plan
- Community Prevention Through Environmental Design (CEPTD) Audit

Accessibility Enhancement Program

Purpose:

Many of the City's older buildings pre-date current accessibility standards. The Accessibility enhancement program is intended to encourage commercial or mixed-use commercial property owners and tenants to improve exterior accessibility of their business, and to encourage commercial businesses to improve interior spaces by pursuing accessibility improvements through universal design standards.

Funding:

- Grant covers 75% of eligible costs
- Up to \$15,000 per project
- Subject to approval, applicants may request a Notice for Consideration (email/letter) before project completion requesting coverage of up to 100% of approved expenses

Program-Specific Requirements:

In addition to complying with all general requirements, an application may require some additional program-specific requirements, as determined by the project scope of work:

- Applicants must consult with appropriate City departments to determine if their CIP project requires any approvals, permits (e.g. building, heritage, signage) or clearances from the City or external agencies
- Eligible projects include improvements to existing commercial business, a change in use to commercial, adaptive reuse of an existing building to facilitate accessibility retrofits to existing commercial, institutional and mixed-use buildings
- All accessibility improvements undertaken under this program must comply with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and Ontario Building Code (OBC) requirements and City standards in force and effect at the time of application
- Projects that propose the demolition or removal of heritage attributes will be considered ineligible
- Project meets the assessment to be barrier-free and confirmed during building permitting stage
- For properties designated or listed under the Ontario Heritage Act, works must also follow the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada and obtain any required heritage permits or approvals
- Program staff may consult with Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC) or City of Waterloo Accessibility staff to support project assessment

Tip: Consider consulting local accessibility experts/organizations when planning improvements (e.g. physical layout, fixtures, universal washrooms, signage, and wayfinding.)

The document's General Program Requirements apply to this program.

Eligible Expenses:

- Barrier-free entrance to property (widening doors and modifying entrances, ramps, and automatic door openers)
- Adaptive solutions such as widening doors, electronic doorbells, installing guards and/or handrails and visibility strips
- Non-slip surfacing at entrances/paths to the business
- Interior bathroom accessibility upgrades including improvements such as installing automatic door openers, lowering sinks, installing grab bars or accessible fixtures (existing bathrooms only)
- Installation of specialty equipment such as elevators, accessible lifts
- Installing anti-glare window treatments
- Braille or tactile signage, directional/wayfinding signage
- Other barrier-removal works that improve accessibility, as approved by the City

Sustainability and Climate Resilience Program

Purpose:

Promote sustainable design, energy efficiency, and climate resilience upgrades in existing Uptown commercial and mixed-use commercial buildings. The Sustainability and Climate Resilience program supports projects that reduce GHGs, improve resilience, and/or lower energy consumption.

Funding:

- Grant covers up to 50% of eligible costs
- Up to a maximum of \$10,000 per project

Before You Start

- Check the appendices to reference your type of project for some idea of projects that may require additional permits from the City or other agencies. Please consult with City of Waterloo Building, Planning departments prior to starting your project to determine specific requirements and if the project will require a Building permit.
- This program is not intended to replace but to complement any Provincial or Federal government programs that support energy efficiency improvements such as the Save On Energy program (Save on Energy for Small Business, Save on Energy for Restaurants, and Save on Energy Instant Discounts for Commercial Lighting at participating dealers). Applications to this program must report if the applicant is pursuing any additional funding programs to cover and/or go towards expenses outlined within the CIP project scope.
- Any awarded funding during the CIP project lifecycle must be reported to the City. Approval of additional funding from other programs will result in any approved CIP funding to be adjusted accordingly.

Program-Specific Requirements:

In addition to complying with all general requirements, an application may require some additional program-specific requirements, as determined by the project scope of work:

- Upgrades must be permanent and directly support GHG reduction, climate resilience, or improve energy efficiency
- Solar and EV projects must acquire the necessary permits and electrical approvals (e.g. ESA approvals) from external agencies and/or contractors
- Solar projects may require city building permit approvals, as determined by the project scope and structural capacity of the building (size of the project to the building and load bearings)
- For properties designated or listed under the Ontario Heritage Act, works must also follow the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada and obtain any required heritage permits or approvals

- For energy-efficiency projects that require an energy audit, applicants must submit it as part of the CIP submission process as a condition prior to receiving approved CIP funds

Eligible Expenses:

Clean Energy & Energy Efficiency Improvements

- Energy-efficient windows and doors – verified Energy Star certified models
- Electric heat pump conversion projects
- Insulation upgrades to achieve updated building performance requirements
- Retrofitting heritage windows with dual or triple-paned glass, re-glazing windows or storm windows to improve heritage windows for thermal performance
- Air sealing improvements
- Heat recovery measures
- Electrical upgrades for the purposes of installing heat induction measures
- On-demand electric water heater
- Smart thermostats/controls and energy management technologies to improve efficiency (excluding LED lighting upgrades)
- Installation of on-site renewal energy systems, including rooftop solar photovoltaic systems or solar thermal systems

Other Climate Resilience, Environmental and Resource Sustainability Improvements

- Reflective (white) roof membranes to reduce heat gain/heat island effect
- EV chargers (Level 2) within non-accessible designated parking spots available to the public
- Secured bicycle parking (staff and/or public)
- Other upgrades/improvements as approved by the Executive Director of Economic Development or their delegate.

Commercial Interior and Vacancy Improvement Program

Purpose:

The purpose of the Commercial Interior and Vacancy Improvement Grant Program is to stimulate the reactivation of vacant or underutilized commercial spaces by providing financial assistance for leasehold improvements and interior retrofits that support the establishment of new businesses. By reducing upfront renovation costs for property owners and tenants, the program aims to accelerate business attraction, enhance the vitality of uptown by turning under-utilized spaces into commercial uses.

Funding:

- Grant covers up to 50% of eligible costs
- Up to a maximum of \$10,000 per project

Program-Specific Requirements:

In addition to complying with all general requirements, an application may require some additional program-specific requirements, as determined by the project scope of work:

- A pre-application inspection may be required to confirm the scope and eligibility
- Upgrades must be permanent and convert vacant commercial interior space to enable a new commercial use or to rehabilitate an existing commercial space for continued commercial use
- Applicants must be compliant with any municipal/provincial/federal permit requirements (e.g. building permit, Electrical Safety Authority Permit) that may be required
- Any changes proposed within a commercial heritage-designated property must conform to the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada and obtain any required heritage permits or approvals
- Residential and/or proposed office uses are not eligible

Eligible Expenses:

- Structural or Building Code compliance upgrades required for occupancy
- Electrical and plumbing system upgrades including panel and wiring upgrades, new plumbing, addition of new (accessible) washrooms. The bathroom does not have to be accessible if there is an existing accessible washroom
- Construction of interior walls (including framing, drywall and painting)
- Interior structural repairs
- Interior finishes such as flooring and/or new ceilings
- Built-in millwork (e.g. counters, display units, shelving)
- Commercial Kitchen improvements for food-related uses (built in cabinets, fire suppression hoods)

- Fire-compliance upgrades (e.g. sprinkler systems, wired in emergency lighting, fire separation)
- Demolition (when part of a larger eligible project and does not exceed \$2,500)
- Other permanent interior improvements at the discretion of the Executive Director of Economic Development or their delegate

Ineligible Expenses:

- Lighting fixtures
- Appliances
- Clothing racks
- Furnishings or removable fixtures
- Equipment (POS systems, refrigerators etc.)
- Improvements to non-commercial or residential units

Major Activity Grant Program

Purpose:

To promote large reurbanization projects that include affordable housing uses and/or non-residential uses that include an office employment component. This program is also intended to support and off-set the costs associated with compliance with environmental sustainability and, where applicable, heritage conservation criteria. This program provides a financial incentive that reduces the property tax increase that can typically result from reurbanization projects and is also designed to assist in securing project financing.

Description:

The Major Activity Grant Program provides that a tax increment equivalent grant (TIEG) would be offered by the City. A TIEG is a grant equal to the full amount, or a portion of the amount of the estimated property tax increase after a property is redeveloped and reassessed. The increase in taxes, or ‘tax increment’, is calculated by subtracting the municipal portion of property taxes before reassessment from the municipal portion of property taxes after reassessment. The City may provide a grant equal to any proportion of the increment for any length of time that Council deems is appropriate. The tax increment does not include any increase/decrease in municipal taxes due to a general tax rate increase/decrease, or a change in assessment for any other reason.

The Major Activity Grant Program will provide for a TIEG on a “pay-as-you-go” basis. The approved applicant would first construct and complete the reurbanization project. This program will then provide an annual grant equal to a percentage of the municipal property tax increase for up to 10 years following completion of an eligible project where that project creates an increase in assessment, and therefore an increase in property taxes. The grant will be paid annually once the eligible project is complete, building inspection has taken place, the property has been reassessed, and the new property taxes have been paid in full for the year

The availability of the grant and the amount of the grant to be paid out by the City on an approved project is tied to as-built project performance of that project. As-built performance of a project is evaluated by the City using criteria as set out in Appendix “D” of this CIP, including:

- The inclusion of affordable housing land uses or office employment land uses as a component of the development;
- LEED certification or other sustainable design/construction standards recognized by the City; and,
- Where applicable, conformity with Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada

The City may elect to establish a maximum grant that can be paid under this program per application/project.

Program Requirements:

Applicants are eligible to apply for funding under this program, subject to meeting the general program requirements, the following program requirements, and subject to the availability of funding as approved by Council:

- a) The following types of projects are considered eligible to apply for funding under this program:
 - i. Repair, renovation, expansion or redevelopment of existing buildings where said activity results in an increase in the assessment value and taxes on the property; or,
 - ii. New buildings on vacant lots where said activity results in an increase in the assessment value and taxes on the property; and
 - iii. Said activity referred to in either item i) or item ii) above results in a minimum of 5,000 square feet of new or renovated building floor area, provided further that:
 - A minimum of 10% of the residential units are provided as affordable rental or ownership housing, with no fewer than 10 affordable units provided; and/or
 - The building floor area provided for office employment uses within the building has a minimum Floor Space Ratio (FSR) of 1.

- b) If during the grant period, a building receiving a Tax Increment Grant is demolished, all grant payments shall cease and the City reserves the right to require immediate repayment of the grant payments

Municipal Land Development Opportunities: Property Acquisition, Disposal, Investment and Improvement Program

As outlined in the Municipal Incentives Toolkit section of this CIP, there is a set of specific grant programs designed to incent private sector development, redevelopment and revitalization in the Project Area. The purpose of the Municipal Land Development Opportunities program is to complement the incentives toolkit by establishing a general, high-level framework that allows the City to directly participate in and lead development, redevelopment and revitalization initiatives that reinforce and improve the economic vitality of Uptown as a thriving business centre and innovation hub with strong employment and residential growth.

Under Section 28(6) of the Planning Act:

“For the purpose of carrying out a community improvement plan that has come into effect, the municipality may,

- (a) construct, repair, rehabilitate or improve buildings on land acquired or held by it in the community improvement project area in conformity with the community improvement plan, and sell, lease or otherwise dispose of any such buildings and the land appurtenant thereto;
- (b) sell, lease or otherwise dispose of any land acquired or held by it in the community improvement project area to any person or governmental authority for use in conformity with the community improvement plan.”

Description of the Strategy

Under the Municipal Land Development Opportunities Program, the City may utilize a range of options to acquire or to attract key investment and may include public-private ventures. The City may acquire, invest, improve or dispose of municipal property to support key CIP objectives of this plan.

The Municipal Land Development Opportunities Program may include community improvement projects that address the goals of this CIP and the Official Plan that seek to advance Uptown as a major focal point and destination for investment in institutional and Region-wide public services, as well as residential, commercial, employment, social, cultural, entertainment, recreational, and accommodation purposes. Such projects may include but are not necessarily limited to:

- Facilitate development or acquisition of community, cultural, or public-serving facilities that contribute to economic or social vitality
- Facilitating the creation of a community arts hub that could include uses such as museums, theatres and/or studio and incubator space for artists
- Facilitating the creation of an innovation hub that could include space to support start-up businesses in key target sectors such as technology (quantum, AI) finance,

health and health technology, aerospace or other target sectors as defined by the City of Waterloo Economic Development Strategy

- Developing parking structure(s)
- Developing tourism generating infrastructure (e.g. conference centre)
- Land acquisition and disposition tools may be used to support the remediation and redevelopment of brownfield sites, including possible public-private partnerships or discounted land transfers.
- Supporting a range of housing types that are affordable to a range of income groups, including affordable housing
- Supporting the conservation and adaptive re-use of cultural heritage resources
- Supporting the development of open spaces that are accessible to the public and may be located on public or private lands

Consistent with the provisions of section 28(3) and 28(6) of the Planning Act, Council may undertake any, or a combination of, the following after the CIP has been approved and comes into effect:

- Acquire, hold, clear, grade or otherwise prepare land;
- Construct, repair, rehabilitate or improve buildings on land acquired or held by the City;
- Sell, lease, or otherwise dispose of any land and buildings acquired or held by it in conformity with the CIP

To facilitate the Municipal Land Development Opportunities CIP program, upon approval of this Plan, the City may use all of its powers under the Municipal Act, 2001, and other applicable statutes and regulations, in order to lead or participate in the initiatives outlined in this program and consideration of the anticipated public benefit of the proposed development, its alignment with CIP goals, and its ability to proceed within a reasonable timeframe. Projects will assess a number of key criteria that may include:

- Demonstrated need or viability gap
- Strength of development concept (design, land use, sustainability)
- Community or economic benefit (e.g., job creation, public access)
- Project readiness and timeline for delivery
- Partnerships with non-profit or institutional sectors

Criteria

To achieve a land transaction for the purpose of carrying out the Community Improvement Plan, the municipality may sell, lease or otherwise dispose of land and buildings acquired or held by it at its disposal, and on such terms as it considers desirable. Any such transactions will be subject to Council approval and must be tied to clear performance outcomes through development agreements or other legal mechanisms. In determining eligibility, the City will consider the anticipated public benefit of the proposed development, its alignment with CIP goals, and its ability to proceed within a reasonable timeframe.

Appendix A

Major Activity Grant Program (Tax Increment Equivalent Grant)

Grant Application Evaluation Matrices

Table D-1 Employment Uses

As-Built Project achieves a minimum overall building floor area of 5,000 square feet; AND	Amount of Grant as (Percentage of Municipal tax increment associated with employment uses)	Duration of Grant
<p>Level 1 Building floor area for office employment has a minimum Floor Space Ratio (FSR) 1.0</p> <p>(no designated heritage resource and no sustainable design/construction certification)</p>	80%	6 years
<p>Level 2 Building floor area for office employment has a minimum Floor Space Ratio (FSR) 1.0</p> <p>AND</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes either a designated heritage resource; OR, • Achieves LEED certification or other sustainable design/construction standards recognized by the City 	90%	8 years
<p>Level 3 Building floor area for office employment has a minimum Floor Space Ratio (FSR) 1.0</p> <p>AND</p>	100%	10 years

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes a designated heritage resource; AND, • Achieves LEED certification or other sustainable design/construction standards recognized by the City 		
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Table D-2 Affordable Housing Uses

As-Built Project achieves a minimum overall building floor area of 5,000 square feet; AND	Amount of Grant as (Percentage of Municipal tax increment associated with all residential units included in the building)	Duration of Grant
<p>Level 1 A minimum of 10% of residential units provided in a residential or mixed-use building are affordable as defined by this CIP, with no fewer than 10 affordable residential units</p> <p>(no designated heritage resource and no sustainable design/construction certification or standards)</p>	50%	6 years
<p>Level 2 A minimum of 10% of residential units provided in a residential or mixed-use building are affordable as defined by this CIP, with no fewer than 10 affordable residential units</p> <p>AND</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes either a designated heritage resource; OR, • Achieves LEED certification or other 	50%	8 years

<p>sustainable design/construction standards recognized by the City</p>		
<p>Level 3 A minimum of 10% of residential units provided in a residential or mixed-use building are affordable as defined by this CIP, with no fewer than 10 affordable residential units</p> <p>AND</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes a designated heritage resource; AND, • Achieves LEED certification or other sustainable design/construction standards recognized by the City 	<p>50%</p>	<p>10 years</p>