

City to partner with commercial property owners for revitalization

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Owners of Toppenish commercial property, particularly in the downtown core, may get financial help through city hall to improve the appearance of commercial buildings and related site elements.

At its July 12 regular meeting, Toppenish City Council heard a presentation from City Manager Bill Murphy about implementation of the Downtown Revitalization Program that has been funded in this year's city budget with \$200,000, for secured loans and matching-fund grants.

Murphy said the funds supporting the program are an accumulation of the repayment of housing rehabilitation loans over a number of years, and the money is regulated by the state Department of Commerce and its use is restricted to revitalization and rehabilitation.

The intent of the program is to stimulate investment and economic development and reduce blight.

The funding is to be used to transform "current commercial and vacant space into viable, attractive, and economical market places," according to the applicant guide for the program. Grants of up to \$25,000 and secured loans of up to \$25,000 are available per storefront, to include the building and the site.

The applicant must provide matching funds to equal the amount of the grant, however, low-interest loans are also available to meet the match requirement.

Eligible property owners may apply for one or more matching grants.

Applications will be carefully considered to ensure that the budgeted funds are widely distributed and used in a timely manner.

All owners of commercial property within the city limits are eligible for the program, however, preference will be given to properties in the downtown area.

The program defines the downtown area as follows: along W. First Avenue between S. Beech Street and Division Street; along S. Toppenish Avenue between the railroad tracks and 2nd Avenue; along S. Alder Street between Washington Avenue and W. 1st; along Washington Avenue between S. Toppenish Avenue and S. Alder Street.

All applications will be evaluated by the Finance Review Committee, which is made up of the City Manager, the City Finance Director, and the City Planner.

Examples of the improvements that may be considered for the program include rehabilitation, repair, or refurbishing of façade elements, painting or similar restoration of exterior architectural elements, repair and rehabilitation of second-story apartments for rental occupancy, and interior improvements to increase energy efficiency.

An example of projects that would not be considered is work on portions of buildings or sites that do not face prominent public streets, unless the area is highly visible or for similar reasons.

Murphy said initially the plan is to use half the available funds for grants and half for loans, but that ratio may be adjusted as it becomes clear where the money would be most useful to applicants.

He said funding that is not used in this budget cycle could be extended into the following budget cycle, if the City Council sets that policy.

This is the inaugural year for the program, and Murphy said he believes it will help improve economic conditions in the business community, which in turn will benefit the community in general.

"We hope (business owners) will look on it with favor," he said.

An applicant guide for the program, which includes grant and loan applications and step-by-step procedures, is available at city hall.

More information about the program is also available from Murphy at 865-6319, by email at wmurphy@cityoftoppenish.us, or by mail at The City of Toppenish, Attention: City Manager, 21 West First Avenue, Toppenish, WA 98948.