



Downtown Improvement Grant Application

PROGRAM GUIDELINES

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The primary objective of the Downtown Improvement Grant (DIG) is to provide incentives to improve the exterior of buildings within the Main Street District of Athens. This program will encourage the improvement of downtown buildings, the improvement of commercial sales and, as a result, local sales tax collection in downtown, the enhancement of the marketability of the downtown buildings, and the attraction of new businesses and shoppers to the downtown area.

Eligible Properties

Conforming service, retail, or mixed-use properties with an active ground floor area* that are accessible to the street and are located within the Main Street District are eligible for the DIG. Eligible buildings must be at least 50-years old to receive grant funds for façade improvements. The boundary for the district is illustrated as Exhibit A on the following page. Non-conforming structures and buildings with non-conforming uses are not eligible for the grant program.

Timeline

Applications will be available on **Friday, April 24, 2026**, and will be accepted for review until 4:00 pm on **Friday, May 15, 2026**. Completed grant applications will be considered and awarded no later than **Monday, June 15, 2026**. Incomplete applications will not be reviewed. Partial funding may be awarded due to funding limitations; thus, applicants should prioritize phases within their application. Only one application per building will be accepted. All proposed work must be able to be completed no later than **Monday, June 11, 2027**.

Only apply for this grant if you are committed to completing all aspects of the project and requesting reimbursement by the designated deadline and using the entirety of the match requested in the application.

PROJECT REQUIREMENTS

The level of funding for each grant will be based upon the availability of funds and the scoring of each project. Eligible properties will be considered for reimbursement at 75% of the cost of renovations associated with eligible DIG improvements. Grant funds may also be used toward the expenses of architectural or engineering design work needed for the appropriate rehabilitation of the exterior at 75%.

Only work that begins after an award and a DIG agreement has been executed will be eligible for financial reimbursement.

Grants will be evaluated based on the project need, existing facade condition, and other related impacts associated with the building and its proposed restoration.

Grantees must comply with the City of Athens purchasing policy, which may require a competitive bid process, which means the grantee may have no control over the contractor selected for the project.

Eligible Activities

- Masonry repairs and repointing bricks
- Repair, replacement, or preservation of historically significant architectural details
- Removal of the reconstruction of false fronts
- Exterior painting and stucco (only includes currently painted, excluding murals)
- Installation, replacement, & repair of awnings and canopies
- Windows, signage, door, or cornice repair or replacement
- Repair or replacement of gutters and downspouts
- Decking and stairs
- Design or architectural fees
- Visible electrical /mechanical equipment enclosures
- Signage that meets the requirements set forth by the City sign ordinance
- Safety and stability improvements (i.e., roofing and sprinkler systems) are eligible.

Ineligible Activities

Any improvements made before the grant award • Landscaping • Parking lots • Interior renovations • Temporary, portable, or non-permanent improvements • New construction • Property acquisition • Expansion of building areas • Conversion of use • Working capital • Any labor completed by the property/business owner, unless supported by a second quote • The refinance of existing debt • Payment of delinquent taxes • Mechanical/HVAC systems • Security systems • Trash/mechanical enclosures • Projects not meeting design guidelines

* Active ground floor area (for the purposes of this policy) shall be defined as the ground floor of a building that encourages interactions with sidewalk users on a pedestrian level through the use of large facade windows with displays or workers available for public viewing, sidewalk merchandise or cafe areas, or having the main public entrance on the street and unlocked to the public during open hours. Example businesses include retail, entertainment, personal or business services (excluding offices).



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APPLICATION & PROJECT PROCESS

Step 1: Complete the DIG application form and submit all required attachments, including photos of the existing building façade, any available project designs, renderings, or sketches, and an estimated total cost of improvements (estimates only; formal quotes are not required).

Step 2: Submit application online or return a hard copy to Athens City Hall at 815 N. Jackson Street, Athens, TN 37303. **Complete all information requested on the grant application attached. Failure to provide complete and accurate information shall disqualify an applicant from the DIG program.**

Step 3: The application will be evaluated, and notification of approval will be given on or before Monday, June 15, 2026. Additionally, all projects must meet TNECD’s design guidelines, and all projects will be reviewed for compliance.

Step 4: All work affiliated with the grant must be completed by Monday, June 11, 2027. Any changes necessitated while the project is under construction must be approved by the City of Athens prior to installation. All construction must be done in accordance with applicable codes. It is the responsibility of the building owner, tenant, or their designee to obtain any applicable building permits. All construction management shall be the responsibility of the applicant. The purchasing policy of the City of Athens will take precedence with this grant.

Step 5: The improvements will be inspected by the City of Athens to verify that the submitted plan has been followed and construction completed satisfactorily. All work must be performed in a professional and workman-like-manner. All work must meet the design guidelines as approved. The City reserves the right to withhold reimbursement payment should the final inspection reveal that the work performed was not completed in a professional and workman-like-manner, has not successfully passed all applicable inspections, and/or has not been completed to the extent that had been proposed in the grant application.

Step 6: The applicant must submit to the City all project receipts and proof of payment. The City will submit to the State for reimbursement. Turnaround should be within 30 to 45 days, but this is not guaranteed.

When filing reimbursement:

- Provide the City color photographs of all completed work;
- Submit to the City all receipts and/or canceled checks as proof that contracted improvements have been paid. All paid receipts must include name, address, phone number, and license number of the contractor. The City reserves the right to verify all costs associated with renovation work for which reimbursement is requested; and
- Request an inspection by City staff to ensure that all work conforms to the work proposed and is completed as approved.

PROPERTY LIEN & RELEASE

To prevent the owner from selling the property and profiting from the DIG-funded improvements, the owner acknowledges that he/she must repay the program if the property is sold within five years. A deed restriction document will be recorded at the McMinn County Register of Deeds. Part of the owner’s obligation is forgiven each year as follows:

TIMELINE	REPAYMENT
0-12 Months	100% Repayment
After 1 Year	80% Repayment
After 2 Years	60% Repayment
After 3 Years	40% Repayment
After 4 Years	20% Repayment
After 5 Years	Release of Lien



Downtown Improvement Grant Application

PROJECT APPLICATION | DUE MAY 15, 2026

APPLICANT INFORMATION

Applicant Name _____

Address _____

City _____ **State** _____ **Zip** _____ **Years Owned** _____

Phone _____ **E-Mail** _____

Current Use of Building _____

Applicant Signature _____

PROPOSED IMPROVEMENT COSTS

Please include **one** contractor's written estimate and supporting documentation with this application. It is suggested the estimate be increased by 20% when determining the total project cost to allow for contingency.

Must submit a separate application for every property

Total Project Cost _____

Grant Request (maximum \$50,000 or 75% of total cost) _____

Matching Funds (minimum 25% of total cost) _____

**Submit the completed application in hard copy format to the address below.
Projects must meet all eligibility requirements to be scored.**

CONTACT

City of Athens

815 N. Jackson Street
Athens, TN 37303
423.744.2700

athensmainstreet@gmail.com

423.333.0329



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PROJECT APPLICATION | DUE MAY 15, 2026

Project Information

Complete the below questions. Additional pages may be attached.

A. Provide a detailed description of your proposed project.

B. Will the project address existing facade deterioration? If so, please describe the existing condition(s) of the structure and your proposed method of correction.

C. Will the project preserve any exterior historic architectural elements or restore architectural elements to be removed? If so, please describe how (including preservation elements to be utilized).



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D. Summary of type of improvements proposed (check all that apply):

- Awnings Repainting Paint Removal Storefront Windows
- Doors Exterior Cleaning/Repainting Signage Cornice/Parapet
- Roofing Sprinklers Other (specify) : _____

E. Historic Impact

- **Approximately what year was the building constructed?** _____
- **Can you provide a brief history of the building including any major modifications since construction? For example: prior uses, significance in city history, prior significant owners, etc.**

F. Financial Commitment

- **Do you have the ability to provide a minimum of 25% of renovation cost as the match? Yes ___ No ___**
- **Grant recipients will be expected to maintain their properties in the future. What is your plan to ensure the building exterior remains in good condition?**

G. Is your business a Main Street Athens member? Yes _____ No _____

H. Did you previously apply for the Downtown Improvement Grant? Yes _____ No _____

Required Attachments

- A. Proof of Owner Permission for Project attached (if the applicant is not property owner): _____ Yes _____ No
- B. Color photo(s) of existing and improved (after) Building Exterior attached: _____ Yes _____ No
- C. Color Samples & Product specifications attached: _____ Yes _____ No
- D. Cost Estimates from three contractors: _____ Yes _____ No
- E. Sketch or drawing of the project (stamped drawings required for structural changes): _____ Yes _____ No
- F. Proof all taxes, insurance, and mortgage payments are current: _____ Yes _____ No



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Project must meet all eligibility requirements, and application must be complete to be scored. Incomplete applications will not be scored.

Statement of Understanding and Certification

I, (We) as applicant /owner of record make this application to the Downtown Improvement Grant Program for matching funds to be used for improvements to the building listed on this application. I agree that I understand the following requirements and guidelines regarding my application:

- Participation in the program requires me to follow program guidelines that govern improvements made under the program, including those improvements made with my portion of the project cost.
- I am willing to comply with the program guidelines and timelines and provide required documents and materials.
- I understand that the guidelines are in addition to, and do not override, local, state, and federal regulations.
- I further declare that I understand that this is a reimbursable grant program, meaning that successful applicants must undertake and incur the costs for grant-funded projects prior to receiving actual grant funds.
- I understand that work must be completed and consistent with the approved scope of work prior to reimbursement.
- I understand that all improvements I make must be in compliance with city code, adopted building code, zoning regulations, and Historic District Guidelines/TNECD's Design Guidelines.
- I understand that, if required, I must comply with the City of Athens purchasing policy, which may require my project to be competitively bid. I understand this may mean I have no control over the contractor selected to complete my project.

Building Owner Signature(s):

Date:



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EXHIBIT A - MAIN STREET ATHENS BOUNDARY MAP

