

Portage Façade Improvement & Landscaping Grant Program Fiscal Year 2025-2026

Awards and Funding

The Portage Façade Improvement & Landscaping Program will provide matching funds from \$5,000 to \$25,000 for improvements to the building facades of non-homestead (retail, office, service) properties. Grants require a minimum 50% match from the applicant for all eligible expenses. Hard costs associated with interior improvements at the site that will be undertaken concurrently with the grant project will also qualify as a grant match (grant funds may not be used for interior improvements however). **Projects that have already begun are ineligible for participation in the Portage Façade Improvement Grant Program, including project elements that comprise a grant match.**

Architectural design funding assistance is available as part of a grant submittal for up to \$2,500 with no match required for approved projects. Funding is provided on a competitive basis.

Total funds budgeted for the project through June 30, 2026, are \$300,000 through the City of Portage, with grant funding on a competitive basis, and there is no guarantee that funds will be allocated in the following fiscal year.

Eligible Improvements

Significant upgrades or alterations to building exteriors visible from public streets are eligible. Whenever possible upgrades to the rear façade (if facing a road) and green building treatments are highly encouraged. When performed by a licensed and insured contractor, all material and labor costs that adhere to these guidelines are eligible expenses.

Property or business owners cannot charge labor for their own time, or volunteers', employees', or unlicensed independent laborer time. However, "do-it-yourself" expenditures on materials are eligible.

1. All improvements must be compatible with applicable zoning codes, satisfy permit requirements, and conform to any other regulatory restrictions.
2. Individual storefronts should be clearly defined by architectural elements, such as pillars, piers, or separations of glass.
3. Building character could be emphasized by a unified treatment of the storefront that is compatible with, and visually supports, the upper façade.
4. Alterations over time that have acquired significance, e.g., art deco facades, should be preserved.
5. If a building has historic or aesthetic merit, improvements should be designed to reveal the building's original style, form, and materials, whenever possible.
6. Existing windows and doors should not be covered.
7. Entrance character should be enhanced to become a strong element of the front and rear facades.
8. Recessed entryways and/or alcoves shall be maintained for existing street level storefronts.

9. The use of high quality, traditional materials, such as brick, wood, concrete, or tile, is encouraged.
10. Colors of all exterior materials shall be coordinated / matched / complimentary.
11. All glass and window areas shall be clear, not tinted or glass block.
12. Building lighting should be provided with directional and recessed lighting.
13. Storefront improvements will require compliance with ADA/barrier free design requirements. Exterior ADA/barrier free compliance improvements are qualified project elements for applicants with legal non-conforming properties.
14. Outdoor gathering spaces, plazas, seating, and other hardscaping improvements that are consistent with placemaking best practices, encourage pedestrian activity and interaction, and lend to the traffic calming effect are eligible project elements. Sidewalk linkages in the public right of way are encouraged.
15. Landscaping is a permitted expense with priority on street trees, shrubs, perennials and planter bed treatments, in that order. Annuals are not an eligible cost item. All landscaping must be guaranteed for a three-year time period.
16. Cloth and metal awnings, period/themed lighting, and wall signage that is not interior lit / backlit are all considered qualified improvements. Every sign should be of high quality, respect the architecture of the building, and adhere to all city signage requirements.
17. Decorative murals or architectural panel systems/ veneers on street-facing side walls, especially when applied to blank cinder block walls, are eligible. Please carefully review the Prohibited Improvements or Elements section below as well as City Ordinance [Sec. 42-138 - Murals](#).
18. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)-based improvements will be considered, including exterior security cameras, new windows, and lighting improvements.
19. Painting of brick is only allowed if the brick was previously painted. Painting of cement block is allowed. Please see 20 below.
20. Painting, roof work, and/or parking lot improvements may be included with other qualified project components, provided their combined costs comprise 49% or less of the overall grant. For example: a \$50,000 project with \$10,000 in awnings, \$10,000 in lighting, \$25,000 in roof work, and \$5,000 in repainting would be eligible for a \$19,999 grant (\$10,000, or 51%, toward the awnings and lighting and \$9,999, or 49%, toward the roof work and repainting).

Prohibited Improvements or Elements

1. Repair or application of aluminum siding, T-111, or vinyl siding, Dryvit™, or similar slipcovers that cover the original façade.
2. Covering of original windows and bays.
3. Mirrored glass, tinted glass, glass block, window decals, or window LED light strips.
4. Permanent window and door security bars, including sliding gates or roll-down panel systems.
5. Awnings made of shiny, high-gloss, and translucent materials such as vinyl or plastic.
6. Awnings that cover distinctive architectural features of the building.
7. Interior lit awnings or signs.

8. Temporary signs, including banners.
9. Tree removal is discouraged unless unusual circumstances warrant the measure.
Annual plantings are not eligible landscape grant costs or match costs.
10. Routine maintenance or deferred code compliance elements that are the responsibility of the owner/operator. A new owner occupant or landlord owner who acquires a non-compliant property and who is unrelated to the previous owner, may be considered for eligible project elements that are currently in non-compliance with City codes and ordinances.
11. Permit fees, extermination, title reports, engineer plans, legal fees, etc. as well as any interior improvements, acquisition costs, debt refinancing, and sweat equity are not eligible for grant reimbursement. Materials for sweat equity projects are eligible expenses. Hard costs associated with concurrent interior improvements are eligible grant match costs.

Threshold Criteria

If "no" is selected for any of the following questions, your project is not eligible for funding from any of the facade improvement programs. These questions are repeated in the application. If you have questions about this, please email Jonathon Hallberg at hallberj@portagemi.gov.

- ***Is the project located at a non-homestead or mixed-use property that includes retail, office or service uses?***
- ***Will the proposed grant funds be used exclusively for the improvement or restoration of an existing building's front or rear façade which faces a public road, or for other eligible improvements indicated above? Funding will also be considered for façade related improvements incorporated into a new construction, adaptive reuse, or re-build under the same conditions.***
- ***Have all applicable city permits been filed, or have you spoken with the city about the permits necessary to complete your project?***

If you need assistance with the building permitting process, please contact the Community Development Dept. at (269) 329-4477.

- ***Has it been more than 18 months since you received a previous façade improvement grant?***
- ***Is applicant current on taxes, mortgage and insurance?***

Evaluation Criteria

1. Proposals shall not be considered if they:
 - a. Are not in compliance with the zoning ordinance or city code.
 - b. Are for renovation to properties that are in substantial disrepair and are deemed unsalvageable, a financial loss, or are deemed in dangerous condition by the Building Official.
 - c. Are for work to correct a code enforcement violation or citation.
2. Preliminary Evaluation: will be at the staff level (grant administrator, building inspector, planning staff, zoning/signage compliance personnel) and will be based on compliance with the City of Portage Code of Ordinances, application completeness, and adherence to the evaluation criteria.
 - a. The Department of Transportation & Utilities may be consulted if the project impacts upcoming road or infrastructure improvements.
 - b. Applicants not meeting the threshold criteria shall be notified in writing.
 - c. The cost of the project must be clearly provided by a contractor who is qualified and experienced for the work. The City will not approve expenditures that exceed the market rate for the work. The City may require additional documentation of reasonable costs including additional quotes if necessary.
 - d. The Chief Development Officer may waive threshold criteria or application requirements and approve an application submittal to the Review Committee when it is determined to be in the best interest of the city.
3. Formal Evaluation: The Review Committee shall meet to evaluate proposals either quarterly or when three (3) submittals have received Preliminary Evaluation approval, whichever is sooner. Formal Evaluation shall be based on the Façade Improvement Grant Program Application Scoring Sheet. Priority is on a marked improvement in the street-facing façade after the grant is complete. Properties on arterial and collector roads shall be given higher priority than properties on neighborhood streets.
4. The Review Committee reserves discretion to:
 - a. Approve transformational projects that may fall outside these guidelines.
 - b. Award partial approval of applications that do not warrant a 50/50 match for all requested expenses.
 - c. Award conditional approval, contingent on verification of project financing.

Submittal for Award

Prior to Commencing Work

Award of a Façade Improvement Grant does not comprise approval of any permitting at the municipal level. Grant awardee shall;

1. Submit a signed grant agreement.
2. Show verification that the grantee has registered as a vendor on City of Portage BS&A platform.

3. Submit a fully executed IRS Form W-9 Request for Taxpayer Identification Number and Certification.
4. Submit proof that permits (construction, soil erosion, signage, electrical, plumbing, etc. as appropriate) have been paid for, submitted by the selected contractor.
5. Share proof of project financing if applicable.

While awardee is responsible for the above items, the contractor may provide any of the above materials on the grant awardee's behalf.

For larger projects, grant awardees shall conduct on-site progress meetings with the Façade Improvement Grant Administrator at least every two months.

After Completion of the Work

Grant awardee shall;

1. Submit proof of payment (limited to copies of canceled checks and/or credit card receipts to contractors, vendors, and/or consultants).
2. Submit executed and witnessed contractors' lien waivers for work performed.
3. Submit a finalization document demonstrating that city inspectors have granted inspection approval for any work requiring inspection (provided by Façade Improvement Grant Administrator).
4. Submit digital photos of all project improvements post-completion.

All grant reimbursements shall be made to the grant awardee via ACH.

As shall be outlined in the grant agreement, grant awardees may not remove or alter grant funded improvements without the express written consent of the Chief Development Officer (or designee) for a period of three (3) years after project completion. All landscape treatments will be guaranteed by the applicant and/or their contractor for a period of three (3) years. Unauthorized removal or alteration shall mandate the repayment of grant funds based upon the extent of removal/alteration. Grant awardees who vacate / sell the property within one year of project completion shall be required to repay 100% of grant funds unless the requirement is waived by the Chief Development Officer (or designee).

City of Portage Façade Improvement & Landscaping Grant Application

Applicant Information

1. Applicant Name(s):

2. Business/Organization Name:

3. Applicant's Email: _____
4. Applicant's Phone Number: _____
5. If the applicant is not an individual, indicate the type of organization. (LLC etc.)

6. EIN#: _____
7. Identify the applicant's interest in the property (% ownership, tenant, etc.):
☐ Property owner having title / ☐ land contract vendee / ☐ purchaser by option or
☐ purchase agreement / ☐ lessee / ☐ other (please list)

8. Property Address: _____

9. Parcel Number: _____

If you do not know your parcel number, you can find it on your property tax bill or by opening FetchGIS from this link: [GIS / City Maps | Portage, MI \(portagemi.gov\)](https://gis.portagemi.gov)
10. Current use of property

11. Proposed use (if different from current use)

12. Property is currently: ☐ **vacant** ☐ **occupied**
13. Number of floors in building: _____
14. Total linear frontage area (lot): _____
15. Current or future tenant(s) (if known): _____

16. Will applicant be conducting their own work (only eligible for materials-only grants)?
☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**

Materials-only applications shall not include work that requires permitting by a licensed contractor. All contractor projects will require three competitive quotes from licensed and insured contractors for identical project elements.

Project Information

1. Total project cost: \$ _____
2. Amount requested for reimbursement (grants are available from \$5,000 to \$25,000 + up to \$2,500 in grant-related architectural fees):
\$ _____
3. Match Amount (minimum 50%, no match required for architectural fee portion).
\$ _____
4. Estimated completion date: _____
(Applicant that the project will be complete within 12 months of award).
5. Please describe the details of your project. Include all information related to grant match expenses. (Note: You may submit additional project information under separate cover with this form if desired.)

6. Describe how the project benefits the area and how it furthers the goals of the municipal plans (such as subarea plans or the new Portage Forward Together Plan) and zoning updates. ***Elimination of nonconformities to the zoning ordinance is strongly emphasized.***

7. Project Architect (if applicable):

Attachments

Please submit all the following additional details under separate cover:

1. ☐ Photos of existing conditions.
2. ☐ Project Budget based on the Contractor Estimates.
3. ☐ Project Renderings/Concept Plans.
4. ☐ Estimate from licensed and insured contractors covering all components of the grant and the match. For materials-only applications, materials shall be commercial grade.
5. ☐ Owner approval letter (if applicant is not the owner).
6. ☐ Evidence of occupancy, such as a tenant business lease, letter of intent to occupy the space (signed by both parties, including rental rate and term), or statement of self-occupancy by the building owner (include name of business, “doing-business-as” certification, and corporate structure).
7. ☐ Copy of commercial building insurance policy.
8. ☐ Proof of financing/match capital; commitment letters from lender (lender letters that are contingent on grant approval are acceptable) or account statement showing available funds.

Applicant Certification

The undersigned hereby request that the City of Portage aid with the project described in this application for the express purpose described above. The Applicant affirms and acknowledges the following:

1. That the Applicant has legal interest in the property as described in the above application.
2. That the offer of assistance will only be effective upon execution of a written agreement between the Applicant and the City of Portage.
3. That the answers and statements contained in this application and the attachments are in all respects true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Applicant signature: _____

Date: _____