



## Town of Winchester, Connecticut

### Facade Improvement Program

#### Facade Program Highlights:

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"The LHFIP will rebate 50% of the cost of approved exterior building façade and site improvements for the first \$30,000 of improvement, with a 20 % rebate for additional project expenses up to a maximum project cost of \$100,000. Thus, the maximum rebate that could be provided for a single application is \$29,000. The rebates apply to the expense of materials and wages for a renovation project and do not pertain to the cost of borrowing. The rebate will apply to projects that secure bank financing and to projects that are self-financed."

##### [Facade Application Form](#)

##### [Facade Program Discription](#)

#### Projects Awaiting Funding:

564 Main Street  
 398 Main Street  
 690 Main Street  
 101 N. Main Street  
 48 Center Street  
 210 Holabird Avenue  
 70 South Main

**CURRENT STATUS:** Limited funds are still available.

#### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

#### LITCHFIELD HILLS FAÇADE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

#### TORRINGTON AND WINCHESTER

**STATEMENT OF PURPOSE** - The Litchfield Hills Council of Elected Officials believes that the creation and maintenance of attractive building facades by area businesses is important to the economic health of the Litchfield Hills Region. First impressions are important. The condition, image and appearance of business buildings play a large part in the impression which businesses, residents, and visitors have of the regional area. When neglected, business buildings can create an image of a deteriorating economic base.

The intent of the Litchfield Hills Façade Improvement Program (LHFIP) is to strengthen the economic viability of the region's businesses through a comprehensive façade improvement program. By providing a financial incentive for improving the exterior appearance of business buildings, we hope to stimulate reinvestment in those buildings and facilitate local economic development.

**FINANCING DESCRIPTION** - The LHFIP will provide incentive financing to stimulate façade improvements and reinvestment to commercially owned real estate and eligible non-profit organizations in Torrington and Winchester.

\$500,000 from the Urban Action Program will leverage an estimated \$500,000 in private resources to achieve an estimated total pool of \$1,000,000 for rehabilitation investment in the two participating towns.

The LHFIP will rebate 50% of the cost of approved exterior building façade and site improvements for the first \$30,000 of improvement, with a 20 % rebate for additional project expenses up to a maximum project cost of \$100,000. Thus, the maximum rebate that could be provided for a single application is \$29,000. The rebates apply to the expense of materials and wages for a renovation project and do not pertain to the cost of borrowing. The rebate will apply to projects that secure bank financing and to projects that are self-financed.

A LHFIP rebate will be paid after the project is approved by the local and regional FIP Committees and construction is complete. In the case where a financial institution is involved, the rebate may be paid directly to the lender and used to reduce the loan principal. In the instance where a bank loan is not involved, the LHFIP rebate will be issued as a check to the applicant upon completion and approval of the rehabilitation and verification that the contractor has been paid.

An applicant who wishes to secure bank financing for their renovation project will be referred to area lenders to work out a financial package appropriate to the project's scope and customer's needs. Businesses/property owners may work with their lender to arrange suitable financing - be it a commercial mortgage, signature loan, home equity loan, and personal or business lines of credit. Alternatively, businesses may use a family loan, personal resources or business cash to pay for the renovation work. Businesses are not obligated to fund their renovation work through a bank loan.

**PROGRAM PRIORITIES** - The focus of the LHFIP is to improve and enhance the exterior visual appearance of existing commercial buildings. Funding priority will be given to commercial buildings that are historically and/or architecturally significant. Projects which enhance structures owned or operated by private, non-profit organizations are eligible provided they serve to enhance economic development (e.g. local historical society building which serves to attract tourists). Home-based businesses that are not assessed as commercial property, religious establishments, and municipal buildings are not eligible.

**OPERATIONAL MATTERS** - The Litchfield Hills Façade Improvement Program will work as a partnership with the two municipalities and their Local FIP Committees. The Litchfield Hills Council of Elected Officials will provide coordination and technical assistance.

The funds will be allocated to the participating communities according to a fair-share formula (see Attachment A). Each town will be allocated a base amount of \$87,500. Each town will also be allocated an additional amount based upon population. Any uncommitted funds remaining in a municipal allocation after two years of program operation will be re-allocated to a regional pool. Funds from this regional pool will be available to both towns. A modest percentage of the grant amount (1.6%) will be retained for DECD and regional administrative and technical assistance expenses.

Each of the two participating communities will establish a local Façade Improvement Program Committee appointed by the municipality's Board of Selectmen or City Council. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the local

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55 Walnut Street  
49 Center Street

FIP Committee to operate the program at the local level. The duties of the local FIP Committee are to:

- Appoint a committee chairperson.
- Designate a committee member as the local FIP Coordinator
- Select a location/office as the primary contact point for program information (e.g. First Selectman's office)
- Develop rehabilitation design guidelines to use for application review in order to help assure good renovation design (the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, or booklets on storefront renovation from the National Main Street Center, may be adopted).
- Establish local program priorities. These should address location, scope and type of renovation work, type of building, design quality, minimum funding commitment per project, etc.
- Determine whether licensed contractors are required.
- Determine local application scheduling - one initial deadline; first come, first served; quarterly reviews, etc.
- Establish local timetable requirements/performance standards for the FIP Committee and applicants regarding application processing, length of time which applicant has to secure financing, begin construction, complete project, etc.
- Promote the program; sponsor informational briefings; contact eligible applicants, distribute brochures, etc.
- Provide on-going technical assistance to applicants throughout the process.
- Review and act upon funding applications.
- Maintain communication with applicant, lender and Regional FIP Committee.
- Monitor renovation to ensure project proceeds as planned.
- Upon completion, review project paperwork and recommend final rebate amount to regional FIP committee.
- Maintain all appropriate records and documents.

Membership on the Local FIP Committee may include:

- 1 or more architects with experience/knowledge in historic preservation, commercial architecture, and storefront renovation;
- Commercial realtor;
- Engineer and/or building contractor experienced in renovation projects;
- Representative from the local historical society and/or historic preservation organization;
- Town planner or a liaison with the Planning and Zoning Commission;
- Economic development official or a liaison with the Economic Development Commission;
- Liaison with local Architectural Review Board or Historic District Commission;
- Representative of the downtown development organization or local merchants association;
- Local building official;
- Municipal attorney;
- Representative of the Connecticut Historical Commission (appropriate for communities with National Register historic districts);
- Chief elected official or appointee thereof.

At the regional level, the Litchfield Hills Council of Elected Officials shall appoint and authorize a Litchfield Hills Façade Improvement Program Committee to provide the necessary administrative oversight to the program and serve as a quality control check in approving projects and issuing funds. The Litchfield Hills FIP Committee will:

- provide technical assistance to the participating communities in developing their program/operating procedures, design guidelines, application forms, etc.

- approve each town's overall program operating plan/operating procedures, etc.
- review and act on applications forwarded by the communities.
- authorize funding distribution.
- assure that all renovation projects are initiated and completed in accordance with program guidelines.
- maintain contact with DECD for reporting and accountability.

Membership on the Litchfield Hills FIP Committee may include:

- LHCEO representative;
- Northwest Chamber of Commerce representative;
- Financial institution representative;
- Architect;
- Representative from the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development.

**ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS** - Owners or tenants of existing commercial structures, located within Torrington or Winchester, are eligible to apply for funding under the Façade Improvement Program.

Private, non-profit organizations (such as arts/cultural agencies or historical societies) which own or use property within Torrington or Winchester are also eligible if the facility is open to the public and building use is consistent with local revitalization goals.

If a business tenant is an applicant, the property owner must provide written authorization for the proposed renovation project.

Properties that are exclusively residential in nature (apartment buildings), home-based businesses that are not assessed for commercial use, religious institutions, and municipal buildings are not eligible.

Mixed-use projects with commercial space on the ground floor and residential space above are eligible applicants.

**ELIGIBLE EXTERIOR/FAÇADE IMPROVEMENTS** - Eligible expenses include materials and wages for improvements to the front, rear and side facades of buildings that are visible from a public street or parking area. The buildings proposed for façade improvements must be owned or used by eligible applicants. Eligible work includes repair, renovation, reconstruction and restoration as follows:

- Carpentry
- Storefront construction
- Awnings
- Painting
- Signs (when done in conjunction with other façade improvements)
- Masonry cleaning and repair
- Window repair/replacement
- Doors/entryways
- Lighting
- ADA improvements in conjunction with façade work
- Roof repair/replacement (when done in conjunction with façade improvements and when the roof is a distinctive element of the façade and is visible from the street)
- Other work as deemed appropriate by local FIP committee.

**ELIGIBLE SITE IMPROVEMENTS** - Site improvements are allowed when done in conjunction with exterior façade improvements. Eligible site improvement work includes:

- Landscaping

- Lighting
- Pedestrian amenities
- ADA improvements
- Sidewalk construction/replacement
- Parking lot improvements (may be limited by local FIP Committee to a % of total project cost)
- Other work as deemed appropriate by the local FIP committee

**ELIGIBLE PROFESSIONAL AND SERVICE FEES** - Fees for architecture, design, engineering services, and construction management.

**INELIGIBLE EXPENSES** - Ineligible expenses are those not specifically stated under eligible expenses such as, but not limited to, the following items:

- Rehabilitation expenses incurred prior to application submittal, review and approval;
- Property acquisition/mortgages
- Mortgage refinancing
- Cost of borrowing (loan interest & fees)
- Site plan, building permit or sign permit fees
- Construction of new buildings or additions to existing structures
- Wages paid to the applicant, employees of the applicant, or members of applicant's family for construction work
- Interior renovation expenses
- Any portion of expenses for which the applicant pays a contractor in merchandise or service in lieu of cash.

#### **APPLICATION, APPROVAL AND PAYMENT PROCESS**

1. Interested business/property owners contact the local FIP Coordinator for program information, application forms and design guidelines. The Local Coordinator meets with prospective applicants (if necessary) to provide information, explain process, review recommended design guidelines, and advise the applicant that there may be other local or state approvals/permits required (building permits, wetlands, zoning, CT Historical Commission, local historical district commission, sign permits, etc.). It is the applicant's responsibility to secure any and all needed permits.
2. Business prepares and submits application to Local FIP Coordinator with all necessary documentation including a color photograph of the existing façade; the renovation design plan with paint colors, awning and material samples (as appropriate); status report on securing any required local/state permits/approvals; documentation (e.g. certified mail receipts, facsimile transmission reports, bid submissions) that a minimum of three written cost estimates for each component of the project was requested by the applicant; and the applicant's preferred vendor(s) for the project. No construction work is to occur prior to project approval by the local and regional FIP Committees.
3. The Local FIP Committee meets to review applications. The Committee may invite an applicant to the meeting to discuss their renovation plans and answer questions. If the application is complete, the project is eligible for a rebate, and the Committee is receptive to approving the application, the Committee forwards the application to the CT Historic Commission for review and comment. The CHC will have a maximum of 30 days to provide any comments on the application.
4. Once the Local FIP Committee makes a final decision on an application, it issues a letter to the Regional FIP Committee stating the committee's decision and funding commitment - approved, approved with minor conditions, denied as presented but with guidance for modifications, etc. A copy of the complete application packet is also provided to the Regional FIP Committee.
5. Regional FIP Committee meets to review application and recommendation of Local FIP Committee. Regional FIP Committee issues a decision letter to the applicant with a copy to Local FIP Committee.
6. If approved by the Local and Regional FIP Committees, and the bank if appropriate, the applicant moves on to the next step. If denied or if the bank commits to a reduced project cost, the business works with Local FIP Committee to modify the project accordingly and resubmit the revised plans, reduced scope of work, new cost estimates, etc.
7. The business and Local FIP Coordinator hold a pre-construction meeting to finalize project details, if necessary. The FIP Coordinator, who may refer a decision to the entire Committee, must authorize any modifications to the originally approved renovation plans in writing. Project modifications must be within the

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limits of the Local FIP Committee's original funding commitment. Any proposed expenses in excess of the original funding commitment must be reviewed and acted upon by the Local and Regional FIP Committees and the participating lender. The Local FIP Coordinator authorizes the applicant to proceed with construction.

8. Renovation project commences. Local FIP Coordinator monitors construction for on-going compliance with the approved renovation plans.

9. Applicant provides FIP Coordinator with complete documentation that the approved renovation expenses are paid. Documentation will include both a cancelled check or invoice marked "paid in full" and the contractor or sub-contractor's waiver of lien & claim.

10. FIP Coordinator conducts an inspection of the project, with assistance from local building official if necessary. The FIP Coordinator prepares a project report that summarizes the actual project expenses and recalculates the rebate amount accordingly. The Local FIP Committee meets to review the project accounting and recommend a final rebate amount to the Regional FIP Committee.

11. Regional FIP Committee meets to review final paperwork and authorize distribution of money to business.

**DESIGN GUIDELINES** - Projects approved for the Façade Improvement Program shall comply with their community's rehabilitation/design guidelines and all applicable municipal ordinances. Each local FIP Committee is responsible for establishing and adopting some basic rehabilitation/design guidelines to encourage historic preservation and rehabilitation work that is compatible with the community's commercial architecture, character and history. Resource materials from the U.S. Secretary of the Interior and National Main Street Center will be made available to the communities to help in developing local rehabilitation/design guidelines.

Depending upon the scope of the proposed rehabilitation, an applicant may need to secure a building permit for their project. Some renovations may require site plan approval by the local planning and zoning commission as well. If the proposed renovation project is located in an historic district as designated by the National Register of Historic Places, approval from the Connecticut Historical Commission may also be required.

**PROGRAM TIMETABLE** - Depending upon the timing of contracts with DECD, we expect the local FIP Committees to begin accepting funding applications by September 2007. The two communities will have a two-year period to promote the program and accept funding applications. At the conclusion of this two-year period, any uncommitted funds remaining from their original allocation will revert to a regional pool which will then be available on a first come, first served basis for a one year period for renovation projects in both communities.