

COUNCIL ACTION FORM

SUBJECT: CAMPUSTOWN FAÇADE PROGRAM APPLICATION DEADLINE CHANGE

BACKGROUND:

The Campustown Façade Program was established in 2015 with the intent to enhance the appearance of Campustown commercial buildings. An approved Idea Book lays out specific design focus that the City would like to promote by building off of the existing character by focusing on five concepts: Transparent, Social, Diverse, Identifiable, and Historic. This program supports enriching the individual detail and character of each building within the context of a pedestrian oriented commercial district.

This program has one round of façade grant awards per year. The grants are for up to \$15,000 of matching funds at a 1 for 1 ratio of applicant expense to City expense. Each project may be awarded up to two façade grants when there are multiple facades with a project. The program also includes the allowance for up to \$2,000 in additional funding for design fees when a project includes a licensed design professional. Façades eligible for funding must be street facing and improvements must be permanent improvements to the façades. Full program documentation can be found at this link- [Campustown Façade Program](#).

City staff solicits grant applications for this program typically in February of each year. An invitation for grant applications is sent to all eligible property and business owners in the façade program area and has also been publicized by Campustown Action Association and other media outlets. No applications were submitted, but only one application was complete enough to meet the criteria.

City Council budgets \$50,000 each fiscal year for the Campustown Façade Program. Staff typically sees no more than two applications submitted annually and it is rare that more than one application makes it through staff review to City Council approval. The last two years there has not been any façade grant applications submitted.

In February of 2022, City Council agreed to let the application period become a rolling application at the request of the Planning Director during review of the Planning & Housing annual work plan. While staff acknowledges there is a substantial number of existing properties for possible future projects that could benefit from this program, the frequency of applications does not create a competitive application window for available funds. **Staff believes that by allowing a Campustown Façade Grant application submitted at the convenience of the property or business owner will not be detrimental to the intent of the program or the availability of funds.**

Staff would still do an annual outreach and mail postcards to the businesses and property owners promoting the façade grant program. Additional outreach through the Ames

Chamber of Commerce and their affiliate groups and other media outlets will be done as well. With a change in messaging the promotional messaging will state that façade applications will be taken throughout an entire fiscal year as long as funds are available. Staff would bring complete applications that are consistent with the Façade Programs guidelines to City Council for approval on an as needed abasis.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. The City Council can approve a change to the Campustown Façade Grant to allow for applications to be submitted year-round based upon the availability of funds.
2. The City Council can leave the application timeline as is by soliciting applications in the spring of each year.
3. The City Council can refer this request back to staff or the applicants for additional information.

CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

The Campustown façade program and the Campustown Idea Book are designed to enhance the appearance of the buildings and add to the social and design character of Campustown. The Program also contributes to increased vitality and economic development through private investment in the area. Changing to a rolling application period is intended to make the program more accessible and promote more applications.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of the City Manager that the City Council accept Alternative #1 as stated above.

Attachment A

