

DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING
MAIN STREET INVESTMENT FUND
Frequently Asked Questions

Timelines and Deadlines

Q. When is the application deadline?

A. All applications are due (postmarked or hand delivered to DOH) by May 31, 2016 at 3:00 pm.

Q. When will the grant awards be announced?

A. This will depend on the number of applications that are received. The goal is to announce all grant awards by September 2016. Execution of a final grant agreement and the release of funds is contingent on approval of the grant by the State Bond Commission.

Q. How much time does a municipality have to complete a project funded by this program?

A. Each grantee will receive a Notice of Grant Award from DOH that provides a start and end time for each project based on the applicant's proposed schedule.

General Application Questions

Q. Who is eligible to apply?

A. Per MSIF statute, municipalities with populations of not more than thirty thousand (30,000) or that are eligible for the Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP) pursuant to CGS section 4-66g are eligible to apply.

Q. Who will review and decide which applications are accepted or declined?

A. DOH staff will review all applications and submit recommendations to the DOH Commissioner for final decisions.

Q. How many copies of the grant application and required attachments are required?

A. One original and one copy of all required materials must be submitted.

- In the case of a plan or supporting document that is part of a larger document, the applicant can submit a link to the document or a disk with the document on it.
- However, please identify the information requested from these larger document/s.

Q. Is there a scoring sheet that will be used to rate applications?

A. A scoring sheet is not planned at this time, but as stated in the MSIF Fact Sheet, DOH will use the Initial Criteria and Project Criteria to evaluate the applications and prioritize them for funding.

Q. What is the "legislative body" that must approve the submission of the application and the designation of the authorized person for this project?

A. It is the municipality's body of elected officials, i.e. the town council or board of selectman.

Q. What is the “governing body” which must have approved the plan?

A. Please refer to your town charter, which may define the governing body. Examples of the governing body are: an Economic Development Commission, Planning and Zoning Board or other municipal commission, etc.

Q. What constitutes a Town Commercial Center Plan?

A. Please refer to the program Fact Sheet, which discusses the elements of a good plan. Approved Plan of Conservation and Development (local POCD) alone will not be considered as “approved plan”. Examples of the Town Commercial Center Plan are downtown beautification plan or enhancement plan, façade improvement plan, building rehab plan, and improving pedestrian linkage plans, etc.

Q. What if the plan exists but has not been approved?

A. An approved plan is required. If the Town Commercial Center Plan exists but has not been approved by the governing body, it must be approved prior to submitting the application.

Q. What if the plan was adopted 20 years ago, would this be eligible?

A. The applicant will need to demonstrate that the plan is still valid. Applicants must submit a recent (within the last five years) governing body resolution approving the plan.

Q. What if a municipality has more than one plan that relates to the Town Commercial Center?

A. More than one plan can be used to come up with a single implementation plan. In the narrative the applicant should demonstrate how all the plans integrate and focus on the Town Commercial Center and this single implementation plan must be approved by the governing body.

Q. If a municipality received a grant in the past under this program, can it apply again?

A. Such a municipality may apply. However, it must meet the Initial Criteria and Project Criteria described in the Fact Sheet.

Q. Does a municipality need to comply with prevailing wage guidelines?

A. Yes, the municipality is required to comply with the prevailing wage guidelines. Municipal grantees must pay the prevailing wage rates on projects: (a) where the total cost of all work to be performed by all contractors and subcontractors in connection with new construction is \$400,000 or more; and (b) where the total cost of all contractors and subcontractors for remodeling, refurbishing, rehabilitation, and repair is \$100,000 or more (C.G.S. 31-53(g)). The State Department of Labor's Wage and Workplace Standards Division (860-263-6549) will assist the DOH grantee in determining the prevailing wage rate.

Financial Questions

Q. How much money is available in total?

A. DOH anticipates making up to \$5 million available.

Q. Are matching funds required?

A. No matching funds are required for the municipal project, but applications that have matching funds will be given higher priority as the matching funds will leverage the MSIF

funds. Legitimate in-kind expenses, such as the pro-bono work of an architect or the labor of municipal employees, can be included in the budget as matching funds that are not reimbursable.

However, it should be noted that the matching funds are required for reimbursement to owners of commercial private property as described in the MSIF Fact Sheet.

Q. Does Davis Bacon apply?

A. No.

Q. When will grant funds be dispersed?

A. Funds will be dispersed on a per project basis after the agreement between DOH and a successful applicant is executed by both parties and after the requisition for payment has been submitted by the applicant. An advance may be provided to start the project. Thereafter an applicant can request reimbursements as the grant is spent down in increments. The last payment will not be made until the project is complete and the completed final report is submitted.

Q. Can this grant be used with other public sources of funds?

A. Yes.

Eligible Reimbursable Costs/Projects

Q. Can the application be for more than one project or activities at different locations?

A. Applicant should submit one application. However, in some instances, there may be activities at different locations that relate to **one** coordinated Town Commercial Center Plan.

Q. Is the labor of municipal staff a reimbursable expense?

A. No, but the in-kind value of staff costs can be recognized in the overall budget for the project. This should be identified under the "Town Share" column in the budget.

Q. Are soft costs (consultant, design and engineering fees) eligible?

A. No. All design and engineering work must be paid with other funds or be in-kind. An application can be submitted without having incurred any soft costs, but the applicant must be able to demonstrate that the estimates of projects costs are accurate. Also the cost of consultants to assist with the MSIF application or the project is not an eligible cost. Municipal staff time and a property owner's own labor are not eligible costs for reimbursement. The cost of Traffic Control is also not eligible for reimbursement.

Q. What is the difference between normal repair and maintenance and improvements that will "contribute to the economic success of the municipality" and therefore be eligible expenses for this grant?

A. Per statute, eligible expenditures exclude any renovations that are solely the result of ordinary repair and maintenance. For example, replacement of the sidewalk that is broken or damaged would not qualify if it were not part of a Commercial Center Plan that meets the goals of the statute. Another example is, if the building siding is damaged, this constitutes ordinary repair and maintenance and therefore will not be eligible for façade improvements. Basically, there has to be an overall plan encompassing various activities that will lead to economic success of the municipality.

Q. Are property acquisition and easement costs eligible grant expenses?

A. No.

Q. Is the demolition of a building an eligible cost?

A. No, building demolition is not an eligible cost.

Q. Is public art an eligible cost?

A. It depends on how this fits into the overall Town Commercial Center Plan and whether it is a permanent installation or not (non-permanent amenities, nonpermanent structures, furnishings, etc. are not eligible). However, if other sources of funds are available for activities like public art, DOH encourages applicants to seek those funds for this portion of the project.

Q. Are parking, wayfinding and public amenities like benches and bus shelters eligible?

A. Yes, if the application can demonstrate how these improvements meet the Project Criteria listed in the program Fact Sheet and the program goals. If these are part of ordinary repair and maintenance, they are not eligible.

Q. Can grant funds be used to close the gap in a larger project that is underway or planned?

A. Yes, this can be considered as leveraged funds. However, the MSIF funds can only be used for eligible activities under this program and activities that are part of an approved plan.

Q. Is landscaping an eligible cost?

A. Yes, it can be an element of the overall project but cannot be the majority of the project cost. It must be part of an approved plan.

Q. Can the project happen in a state right of way?

A. Yes, but the applicant must submit written proof from the CT Dept. of Transportation (CONNDOT) that the project will be allowed to remain in place on a longer term basis and there are no foreseeable plans for major changes to the right of way that may undo the work performed under this program. Also, the applicant must ensure that it has all the necessary approvals from CONNDOT for this work.

Q. Can one application include requests for both a private property and for improvements to municipal-owned property?

A. Yes.

Q. Are nonprofit property owners eligible for funds?

A. Yes, non-profit property owners are eligible if the property is "commercial" property.

Q. Is there a requirement that a façade cannot be completed without the remainder of the building meeting code compliance? For example, what if a multi-story building received a façade grant but only the first floor was code compliant for any occupancy?

A. It is the responsibility of the municipality to make sure that proper permits are issued for the work to be reimbursed with MSIF funds and that all the inspections are conducted by the local authorized building official. DOH will review the application on a case by case basis. DOH will look to make sure that the façade improvements are not undone due to the

building code compliance issues later for the remaining floors, there is a plan to occupy the remaining floors, etc.

Q. Will projects be subject to a review under CEPA?

A. The determination of CEPA applicability is made on a case-by-case basis. It is highly recommended that if the building proposed for façade improvement is historic, that the applicant contact the State Historical Preservation Office prior to submitting the application for MSIF funding. It is also recommended that the applicant secure appropriate permits from all applicable state and or federal agencies. DOH recommends that applicants propose projects that will not trigger CEPA review as it may cost additional funds and delay the project.

Private Property Applications

Q. Is there a limit on the number of private properties that can be funded?

A. No, but the maximum grant amount is \$500,000.

Q. Can grant funds be used for projects that have been completed prior to this application?

A. No. Work already completed prior to the application submission date will not be reimbursed.

Q. Is the property owner's own labor ("sweat equity") a reimbursable expense?

A. No, but the labor of a licensed contractor hired to perform eligible activities is eligible.

Q. If a business that is renting from a private property owner is doing the improvements to the property, can the business be reimbursed for its expense?

A. No.

Q. Is there a time limit that a private property owner must continue to own the property after it has received any reimbursement for improvements to the property?

A. No. However, it is expected that the improvements made to the building that are reimbursed by the state must be long-term improvements (i.e. won't be undone in a short time frame)

Q. Must the private property be identified in the application?

A. Yes. The application must include a statement from the private property owner that it is committed to doing the project and have all the necessary funds to undertake the project if the grant is approved.

Q. What is DOH's definition of a façade, i.e does it include a new roof?

A. Per statute "structural exterior building improvements" are considered eligible expenditures provided it meets the other criteria. A roof is not eligible as it will be considered part of ordinary repair and maintenance.

Q. If façade improvements are proposed, must the municipality enter into an agreement with each property owner requiring that funded improvements will be preserved even if a new property owner buys the property and/or a new tenant moves in?

A. It is expected that the municipality will enter into binding agreement to make sure that the state funded improvements will not be modified or undone in short time frame.

Q. Is State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) approval required?

A. Yes, if the building is on the state or federal register of historic places, or a contributing building is in a district that is on the state or federal register of historic places, then SHPO approval is required.

Q. Are other state agencies permits or approval required?

A. It is the applicant's responsibility to get any and all permits and approvals required to undertake the project.