

Downtown Grant - Questions and Answers

What is the grant for?

This grant is intended to aid in the prevention or elimination of slums and/or blight by improving public infrastructure and elimination of conditions which are detrimental to health, safety, and public welfare.

This grant has been established for use in three areas as follows:

- The clearance or demolition of buildings and improvements, or the movement of structures to other sites (each building must be individually approved by DCEO and the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA))
- The rehabilitation of exterior building facades for commercial buildings (each building must be individually approved by DCEO and the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA))
- Planning costs

How is this work being paid for?

This work is being paid for using Federal Community Development Block Grant funds provided by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and administered by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) under their flexible opportunity grant program. The grant is for \$675,000 and will be matched with \$100,000 in local funds. Grant funds will be drawn down through progress payments as the work progresses. Individual pay requests and quarterly reports must be filed with DCEO.

Is it required that this money is spent downtown?

Yes. The funds must be spent within the limits identified in the original grant application. This area is composed of 25 blocks bounded by Logan Street, Decatur Street, Hamilton Street, and Delavan Street.

When will this project be complete?

The grant period extends through the end of 2013. Work must be completed on planning and any design and/or construction by that time.

How will the planning process be reviewed?

A steering committee has been established to determine the study scope and make recommendations on how the remainder of the grant funds will be expended. The steering committee will continue to be involved to review the progress and recommend changes as needed throughout the completion of the grant. Members of the steering committee are: Barb Blackburn, Patrick Doolin, Seth Goodman, David Lanterman, Bob Neal, Marty Neitzel, and Keith Snyder.

How will the money be spent?

A steering committee has been appointed by Mayor Snyder to determine how best to allocate these funds. The committee is currently recommending that the city proceed with the initial project planning and historical surveys as included in the grant application. These items include approximately \$226,000 of effort and include:

- **A Downtown Revitalization Plan** which will recommend improvements to downtown streets & sidewalks, bikeways, lighting, utilities and greenspace. This plan will include conceptual design of a revitalized streetscape and improve the safety, accessibility, and aesthetics of Downtown Lincoln
- **A Traffic and Parking Study** which will address traffic safety and parking supply and will improve the accessibility of Downtown Lincoln for downtown employees and visitors
- **A Historical Resources Survey** which will update the inventory of historical buildings within the downtown Historical Business District
- **A Façade Analysis** of approximately 130 downtown historical buildings to recommend future improvements and assist property owners with making improvements to their properties
- **The Development of Historical Preservation Committee** to recommend buildings and other infrastructure for historical landmark status and to develop historical ordinances and guidelines to address improvements to historical downtown buildings. This will also allow the City of Lincoln become a Certified Local Government and become eligible for future funding for downtown historical buildings.

The committee is recommending that additional plans for downtown also be developed. These additional items will cost approximately \$112,000 and will include:

- **A Downtown Redevelopment Plan** which will outline long term goals and objectives for development, revitalization, and general improvements to downtown Lincoln. This plan will include the development of a strategic vision for downtown Lincoln, market and economic analysis of opportunities for business growth, land use planning, and an implementation plan.
- **A Parks and Courthouse Square Conceptual Plan** similar to the plan recently developed for the APEX site which will recommend specific improvements to the existing county parks and the courthouse square. These improvements will focus on making these public spaces more attractive and improving safety.

Can these funds be used to paint or repair my building façade?

The City included in our grant application for these funds the development of a revolving loan program for façade improvements. When DCEO awarded the grant, they did not include a provision for a loan program and expressed a directive that these funds cannot flow from the City to private property owners. Instead, the City would be required to prepare construction documents and competitively bid the improvements to ensure compliance with federal regulations. This work must comply with all applicable state and federal regulations including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Illinois Historical Preservation Act, state and federal prevailing wage acts including the Davis Bacon Act, state and federal environmental requirements including Title X of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1992 requiring lead based paint abatement. ***In addition, all other improvements to the building, whether funded with federal funds or not, may be required to comply with the above provisions for a period of time.***

Can this money be used to pay for street repairs?

No. The purpose of this grant fund is for the elimination of slum and/or blight, not for transportation issues. It is possible that streetscape improvements (sidewalk replacement, pedestrian lighting, landscaping, benches, bike racks, trash receptacles, etc.) that could serve to revitalize the downtown area could be completed under this grant; however, using the fund in this way would require a grant modification and would be subject to DCEO approval.

Why do we need to do this much planning? Could this money be used to build something instead?

We will be completing a broad range of planning to a level of detail to determine that the plans are feasible and able to be implemented. Many grants the City can apply for are for design and/or construction only, but to be competitive for those grant funds, the City must show that their plans have been studied and are feasible. In addition, planning to this level of detail will allow us to spend wisely the much more expensive construction dollars in the future. Developing a comprehensive and complete plan will be the basis for a successful downtown revitalization.

The grant funds have strict limitations as to where and how they can be spent. They can be used for some construction projects, such as building demolition to improve public safety.

That being said, those types of projects can be very expensive when complying with state and federal requirements such as the American's with Disabilities Act, the Illinois Historical Preservation Act, state and federal prevailing wage acts including the Davis Bacon Act, state and federal environmental requirements including Title X of the Housing and Community

Development Act of 1992 requiring lead based paint abatement. Planning costs are largely exempt from the above regulations and therefore planning costs are not increased by using federal funds over what they ordinarily would be.

How can we make sure that all of this planning will be implemented and not just sit on the shelf and gather dust?

By completing the planning process, we will identify what needs to be done, how to do it, what it will cost, and how to fund improvements. We will go through the entire planning process to develop a well-defined plan that can be implemented. This is why we feel it is important to spend this amount of grant funding on the planning process – so planning is complete and the next steps are clearly identified and determined to be feasible. We will be investigating details with the planning process, and potential hindrances to implementation will be addressed. We will also be investigating and outlining funding sources for implementation. Making sure we are going far enough with the planning to make the next step implementation, is the reason why we are spending the amount we are on planning.

What other things could we do with this grant money?

This grant has been established for use in three areas as follows:

- The clearance or demolition of buildings and improvements, or the movement of structures to other sites
- The rehabilitation of exterior building facades for commercial buildings
- Planning costs

It is also possible that this grant could be amended to acquire property for public purposes or for improvements to streetscapes or landscaping within the defined downtown area.

This grant CANNOT be used for:

- Construction of buildings, or portions thereof, used predominantly for the general conduct of government (e.g., city halls, courthouses, jails, police stations).
- General government expenses.
- Improvements to facilities used predominately for the general conduct of government (e.g., city halls, courthouses, jails, police stations)
- Costs of operating and maintaining public facilities and services (e.g., mowing parks, replacing street light bulbs).
- Servicing or refinancing of existing debt

What will the City do with the \$430,000 remaining grant and matching funds?

This has not been fully determined yet, but several possibilities have been discussed. Any façade renovation and demolition projects will need to be individually approved by DCEO and IHPA, and that has not yet occurred. The following list includes several possible alternatives.

- Demolition of the City garage on Delavan Street between Chicago and Kickapoo Streets.
- Restoration of the barrel roof on the Arcade Building.
- Restoration of the Latham Park bandstand.
- Preparation of construction plans and specifications for the first phase of streetscape improvements.
- Preparation of construction plans and specifications and construction of improvements to Latham and Scully Parks, and possibly any new parks or greenspace proposed outside of existing street right-of-way in the downtown area.
- Purchase of lighting, benches, planters, bike racks, trash receptacles, etc. that can be used in streetscape construction.
- Demolition of vacant buildings near the intersection of Pulaski and Sangamon Streets.

Any of the above items, or new ideas that may be proposed, will need to be approved by the City, DCEO and IHPA prior to any work being done.

How will the public and downtown property owners have an opportunity to participate in the planning process?

Public input into identifying problems that exist in the downtown, and potential solutions to them, is critical to the success of the downtown redevelopment and revitalization plans.

At the beginning of the planning process, workshops for key stakeholders consisting of downtown property owners, community leaders, and elected officials will be held. A public input meeting will be held immediately prior to the stakeholder workshops, and another public information meeting will be held immediately following the workshops. From this point, creation of the various plans will begin based on the input received in the public meetings and stakeholder workshops.

A website will be developed specific to this project to keep the public informed as to what is happening in the planning process, and to gain input from community members and visitors throughout the process.

Towards the end of the planning process, two public information meetings will be held to present each of two comprehensive plans: the Redevelopment Plan and the Revitalization Plan.