



Report to: Development Services Committee

Meeting Date: June 10, 2025

SUBJECT: Commercial Façade Improvement Grant Program - 2025
PREPARED BY: Peter Wokral, Senior Heritage Planner, ext. 7955
REVIEWED BY: Regan Hutcheson, Manager of Heritage Planning, ext. 2080
Stephen Lue, Senior Development Manager, ext. 2520

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1) THAT the June 10, 2025, Staff report, titled “Commercial Façade Improvement Grant Program - 2025”, be received;
- 2) THAT Council supports financial assistance representing \$15,000.00 in grant assistance for:
 - a. Paint Removal from the bricks of 4592 Hwy. 7 E. in Unionville and the re-conditioning of the original wooden window frames subject to the owner obtaining a Minor Heritage Permit for the proposed work;
- 3) THAT the eligibility requirements of the Commercial Façade Improvement Grant Program be revised to require Façade Easement Agreements for grants of more than \$7,500 instead of \$5,000;
- 4) THAT the Commercial Façade Improvement Grant Program be revised to make designated historic places of worship eligible for grant funding instead of requiring them to apply to the City’s Designated Heritage Property Grant Program and that the program be renamed the Commercial Façade and Historic Places of Worship Grant Program;
- 5) THAT the 2025 grants be funded through the Commercial Façade Improvement Grant Program Fund, Account 620-101-5699-25011
- 6) AND THAT staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

PURPOSE:

This report recommends the approval of grant assistance for commercial façade improvements at 4592 Hwy. 7 E. in Unionville, revising the eligibility requirements of the program to only require a Façade Easement Agreement for a grant in excess of \$7,500 starting in 2026, and allowing historic places of worship to be eligible for grant assistance through a re-named Commercial Facade/Historic Places of Worship Façade Improvement Grant Program.

BACKGROUND:

The grant program was created in 2004

Council approved the creation of the Commercial Façade Improvement Grant Program (the “Façade Program”) and the Commercial Signage Replacement Grant Program (the “Signage Program”) for commercial properties located in the City’s heritage conservation districts, and for individually designated commercial properties located outside of these districts.

The Programs provide financial assistance to motivate positive improvements

The purpose of the Façade and Signage Programs is to encourage and assist in the exterior improvement of privately-owned, commercial use buildings through joint public/private action and investment. Both heritage and non-heritage commercial properties in heritage districts are encouraged to apply. The Programs strive to address substantive improvements rather than short-term, cosmetic changes with the main goal being to help stimulate the revitalization of historic core areas.

Grant assistance is subject to eligibility requirements

Properties within the identified areas must have commercial uses to be eligible for grant assistance. The owner or their tenant (as an agent of the owner) can apply. The subject property must not be in default of any municipal taxes, local improvements, or any other monies payable to the City (fees or penalties). Also, the property must not be the subject of a by-law contravention, work order, or outstanding municipal requirements. Approved work completed since the 2024 deadline for applications to the program, may also be considered eligible for 2025 grant assistance.

A range of exterior façade improvements are eligible for assistance**a) Heritage Properties**

Eligible facade improvements on heritage properties may include the following:

- i. Repair or restoration of original features (cornices, parapets, eaves, other architectural features)
- ii. Repair, restoration, or replacement of windows and doors
- iii. Cleaning and repair of masonry
- iv. Removal of non-original siding or facing
- v. Installation of new signage in accordance with the Special Sign District policies of the City's Sign By-law

b) Non-Heritage Properties

Eligible façade improvements on non-heritage properties may include the following:

- i. Renovation of existing commercial storefronts in accordance with standard principles of traditional storefront design (fascia board for signage above storefront, appropriate display windows, removal of incompatible alterations, etc.)
- ii. Improvements to the principal facades of incompatible buildings provided such work is sympathetic and compatible with the historic character of the area and the policies of the heritage conservation district plan
- iii. Re-cladding in more traditional materials complementary to the district character

The maximum amount of grant assistance depends on the heritage status of the property

The maximum Façade Program grant is \$10,000 for non-heritage properties and \$15,000 for heritage properties. The assistance is in the form of a 50/50 matching grant that is paid upon completion of the approved work. An applicant can receive one grant per calendar year. As a condition of any grant of more than \$5,000, the property owner is required to enter into a façade easement agreement, in perpetuity, with the municipality. For 2025, Council allocated \$60,000.00 to this Program, as part of the 2025 Capital Budget process.

Grant recipients must enter into a Letter of Understanding with the municipality

The Letter of Understanding establishes a formal arrangement between the applicant and the City, and outlines the amount of the grant, the work to be done, and the project completion date.

The Commercial Façade Program is not being fully utilized as expected

Over the past several years, the demand for Commercial Façade Improvement Grants has been relatively low compared to the uptake of the City's Designated Heritage Property Grant Program. This may be due to the program requirement of owners of commercial property having to enter into Heritage Façade Easement Agreements for grants exceeding \$5,000.00, and it may also be due to the fact that historic places of worship, which are not considered to be commercial properties, have only been eligible for funding from the City's Designated Heritage Property Grant Program, which primarily has provided assistance to residential properties.

In the past, several owners of commercial properties who were awarded grants by Council in excess of \$5,000 have requested that they only receive a grant of \$5,000 to avoid having to enter into a Façade Easement Agreement.

Also, since the creation of the Designated Heritage Property Grant program in 2010, there have been a total of nine applications from historic places of worship requesting a total of \$38,259.00 which could have potentially been funded through unused funds in the Commercial Façade Program.

OPTIONS/ DISCUSSION:

The City received one commercial property application by the deadline of April 4, 2025

The application is requesting the maximum available grant of \$15,000.00 as summarized in Table 1 with further details provided in Appendix "A".

| Table 1: Summary of Grant Requests and the Amount Recommended by Staff | | | |
|---|--|--|---|
| Address | Grant Request by Owner ½ of Lowest Quote Provided | Staff Calculation of ½ of Eligible Work | Grant Amount Recommended by Staff based on \$60,000.00 available |
| 4592 Hwy. 7 E. Unionville | \$15,000.00 | \$15,000.00 | \$15,000.00 |
| TOTAL | | | \$15,000.00 |

Specific criteria are used to evaluate the grant requests

Heritage Section Staff and Heritage Markham, Council's heritage advisory committee, are required to review the grant applications based on the following criteria:

- The project must comply with the policies and guidelines of the area's heritage conservation district plan (if applicable).
- Preference is given to applications proposing work on heritage properties.
- On heritage properties, conservation and restoration of original architectural features will occur to the extent possible.
- Projects must obtain municipal approval to qualify.
- The assistance should not reward poor property stewardship.
- Substantive improvements rather than short-term cosmetic patch-ups should be given priority.

- g. Whether the property has received grant assistance from the program in previous years.

Upon evaluation, the current application is considered by Heritage Planning staff to meet the eligibility requirements, subject to conditions. Heritage Markham supported the grant request on May 14, 2025. (See Appendix "B").

The grant application is supportable

Staff recommend that Council support the identified grant based on the \$60,000.00 available from the 2025 budget.

The grant program may be better utilized if a Façade Easement Agreement was required for grants in excess of \$7,500 and historic places of worship were made eligible for grants

Staff suggest that the funds available for the Commercial Façade Improvement Program would be more fully utilized if the following revisions were made to the eligibility requirements of the program.

If the minimum grant amount requiring an owner to enter into a Façade Easement Agreement was raised from \$5,000 to \$7,500, staff anticipate that demand for this program would increase, as commercial façade improvements are typically more costly and some commercial property owners appear disincentivized to accept a heritage easement agreement in exchange for a \$5,000 grant.

Staff also recommend that historic places of worship designated under the Ontario Heritage Act be made eligible for funding as part of this program. There is a demonstrated demand for grants to conserve historic places of worship through the City's Designated Heritage Property Grant Program, and the work required to conserve these buildings is often greater in scope, challenging, and expensive due to the larger scale of these buildings. The maximum matching grant of \$5,000.00 available through the Designated Heritage Property Grant program is often considered insignificant relative to the costs associated with preserving these buildings.

Staff suggest that it is appropriate to make historic places of worship eligible for this grant program because they represent significant local landmarks, provide a valuable community service, and the maximum matching grants of up to \$15,000.00, would make it easier for congregations to conserve the heritage attributes of these buildings. Staff recommend the program be renamed the Commercial Facade and Historic Places of Worship Grant Program.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The requested grants are funded through the Heritage Façade/Signage Replacement Project Account 620-101-5699-25011, which has a 2025 allocated budget of \$60,000.00. The total sum of the grant assistance recommended by staff for allocation through the Facade and Signage Programs for 2025 is \$15,000.00.

HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS

Not Applicable

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Assisting with the costs of restoring and improving commercial properties individually designated under the *Ontario Heritage Act* and commercial properties in heritage conservation districts

promotes private investment, increases property values, and property tax revenue, while strengthening a sense of community and civic pride.

BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:

Heritage Markham reviewed and supported the grant request as well as the proposed changes to the program. (see Appendix B- Heritage Markham Extract of May 14, 2025). Finance staff has also reviewed this report.

RECOMMENDED BY:

Giulio Cescato, MCIP, RPP
Director of Planning and Urban Design

Arvin Prasad, MCIP, RPP
Commissioner of Development Services

ATTACHMENTS:

Appendix 'A' Summary of 2025 Commercial Façade Improvement/Signage Grant Requests
Appendix 'B' Heritage Markham Extract of May 14, 2025

Appendix ‘A’
Summary of 2025 Commercial Façade Improvement/Signage Grant Requests

4592 Highway 7 E., Unionville

Status: Designated under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act and subject to a Heritage Conservation Easement Agreement



| Proposed Work | Quote 1 | Quote 2 |
|--|---------------------------------|---------|
| Removal of paint from brick and re-conditioning of historic wooden window frames | Holt Construction Services Ltd. | NA |
| Total Cost | \$37, 290.00 | NA |

Appendix 'B'

Heritage Markham Extract of May 14, 2025



HERITAGE MARKHAM EXTRACT

Date: May 23, 2025

To: R. Hutcheson, Manager of Heritage Planning

P. Wokral, Senior Heritage Planner

EXTRACT CONTAINING ITEM # 6.6 OF THE FIFTH HERITAGE MARKHAM
COMMITTEE HELD ON MAY 14, 2025

6. PART FOUR - REGULAR

6.6 2025 COMMERCIAL FAÇADE IMPROVEMENT GRANT PROGRAM

**4592 HIGHWAY 7 E., UNIONVILLE
REVIEW OF 2025 GRANT APPLICATIONS (16.11)**

File Number:
N/A

Extracts:
R. Hutcheson, Manager, Heritage Planning
P. Wokral, Senior Heritage Planner

Regan Hutcheson, Manager, Heritage Planning, advised that one application for the 2025 Commercial Façade Improvement Grant Program was received to remove paint from the brick and restore the original windows at 4592 Highway 7. Staff recommended approving the grant for up to \$15,000. Staff are also recommending: 1) that the threshold for requiring a façade easement agreement be raised from \$5,000 to \$7,500 due to rising project costs; and 2) that historic places of worship be included under this grant program to allow them to be eligible for larger grants.

The Committee discussed the following in relation to the Commercial Façade Improvement Grant Program:

- The channels used to promote the grant program to eligible applicants and the challenge of no longer having a local newspaper to promote the program.
- That applicants can reapply for additional grants in future years but cannot apply for guaranteed multi-year funding, noting first time applicants are prioritized each year.



The Committee approved the Staff recommendation as presented.

Recommendation:

That Heritage Markham supports a matching grant of up to \$15,000.00 for the removal of paint from the brick and re-conditioning of original window at 4592 Highway 7 East provided the owner obtains a heritage permit for the most appropriate method of paint removal and a second quote for the work;

That Heritage Markham supports revising the eligibility requirements of the Commercial Façade Improvement Grant Program to only require the owner to enter into a Façade Easement Agreement with the City for grants exceeding \$7,500.00 beginning in 2026;

And That Heritage Markham supports making historic places of worship eligible for a revised Commercial Façade and Historic Place of Worship Grant Program.

Carried