



Program Information and Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Ellicott City Façade Improvement Program?

The Ellicott City Façade Improvement Program (FIP) is a program administered by the Howard County Department of Planning and Zoning to aid building and business owners in the repair and restoration of commercial buildings within the Ellicott City Historic District. All FIP applications must first be reviewed and approved by the Historic District Commission. Planning and Zoning staff administering the FIP will review applications concurrently with the HDC. Funds are available on a “first-come first-serve” basis. For more information on the application process, see ***‘How does the application process work?’*** on page 2 of this document.

How does this program work?

The Façade Improvement Program provides up to \$10,000 in matching funds for façade repair and restoration. Buildings and business owners can apply for up to 50% of the cost of their project. The maximum grant contribution by the Façade Improvement Program is \$10,000. **Work completed prior to Historic District Commission approval and a FIP Letter of Commitment is not eligible for funding.** The goal of this program is to encourage building restoration, historic preservation, and improved economic vitality by improving building facades.

How is the Façade Improvement Program different from the Historic Property Tax Credit Program?

The Façade Improvement Program is not a tax credit. A check for 50% of the cost of the project will be issued once the work is completed and verified. The Historic Property Tax Credit Program is a separate program and is a deduction reflected on the following year’s property tax bill.

Who can apply for Façade Improvement Program funds?

Any property owner or tenant, with authorization from the property owner can apply for funding. The area of eligibility is within the boundaries of the Ellicott City Historic District and is limited to commercial buildings only. For a map of the Ellicott City Historic District, please visit:

www.howardcountymd.gov/historic_preservation.htm.

Can I still apply for the Historic Tax Credit Program?

Building owners are still eligible for the Historic Tax Credit Program in addition to the Façade Improvement Program. For more information on the tax credit program, please visit:

www.howardcountymd.gov/historic_preservation.htm.

Tenants may apply for the Historic Tax Credit on behalf of the building owner, but certain rules and regulations apply. The Historic Tax Credit is deducted from the property bill, so tenants will not be compensated if they do not own the building.

What type of repair and restoration work is eligible for Façade Improvement Program funds?

- Painting
- Awnings
- Lighting
- New signs, sign repair and restoration
- Masonry repair
- Door and window repair (replacement only if with an all wood window and door)
- Removal of inappropriate or incompatible exterior finishes
- All repair or restoration work that uses traditional building materials and is shown to be an original feature of the building

If a contractor hired to perform the work, they must be MHIC licensed. Price quotes are required as part of the application process – a set amount will be approved and cannot be changed, even if the project ends up costing more once completed.

What type of work is not eligible for Façade Improvement Program funds?

- New construction and additions.
- Replacement with modern materials when traditional historic materials currently exist on the building.
- Adding features that are not original to the building’s design.
- In-kind replacement with modern building materials.

Are there any design guidelines?

Yes, the project must conform with the Ellicott City Design Guidelines and the Façade Improvement Program Guidelines. The Guidelines are available on the County website: www.howardcountymd.gov/historic_preservation.htm. For questions concerning the Guidelines, please contact Samantha Stoney, Historic Preservation Planner, at 410-313-4428 or sstoney@howardcountymd.gov.

How does the application process work?

1. The process will be very similar to the Historic District Commission process. Applicants must submit 12 copies of the application form and supplementary materials to the Department of Planning Zoning Historic Preservation Planner. The Historic District Commission (HDC), Planning and Zoning Staff administering the Façade Improvement Program, and the Maryland Historical Trust will review applications. Applications must be received 22 days before the monthly Historic District Commission meeting. **Applicants are encouraged to meet with Staff prior to submitting, to ensure the application package is complete and complies with the Historic District and Façade Improvement Program guidelines.** For questions concerning the application process, please contact Samantha Stoney at 410-313-4428 or sstoney@howardcountymd.gov. A schedule of meetings and deadlines can be viewed on the County website at: www.howardcountymd.gov/Historic_District_Commission.htm.
2. Planning and Zoning Staff will also forward the application to the Maryland Historical Trust (MHT) as required by the State of Maryland. MHT has 30 days to review the project. The MHT review will take place at the same time as the Historic District Commission and Planning and Zoning Staff review, to avoid delays.

3. Planning and Zoning Staff will issue a Letter of Commitment when MHT and HDC approval is granted. The letter will include the specific amount granted and any conditions of approval. The amount of the grant award is set out in the Letter of Commitment and will not be changed after project initiation. **Work completed prior to a Letter of Commitment is not eligible for funding.**

Where can I download an application and which one do I use?

FIP applications are available from the County website at:

http://www.howardcountymd.gov/historic_applications.htm.

For general work to the façade, please fill out:

- 'Ellicott City Façade Improvement Application'.

If you are applying for a sign, please fill out:

- 'Sign Application – Façade Improvement Program.'

However, if your scope of work includes several other items, in addition to a sign, please fill out the 'Ellicott City Façade Improvement Application' and include page 2 from the 'Sign Application.'

How is the Façade Improvement Program application process different than the normal Historic District Commission process?

The two processes are very similar and will take place concurrently. However, the FIP application process differs from the typical HDC process because:

1. The Maryland Historical Trust will review all applications for FIP funds because the grants are from the State of Maryland. Otherwise, they do not normally review HDC applications.
2. Contractor estimates and project costs are required for the initial approval. The amount awarded will be based on these estimates. Typically the HDC does not look at project costs, unless tax credits are applied for. Even then, costs are not required until a Final Tax Credit is applied for.

What happens after my project application is approved?

The project must be completed within six (6) months. The six-month time period will begin after all HDC, MHT and FIP approvals, as well as any required permits have been issued. The Applicant is responsible for obtaining all building permits and any other County approvals for the work to be done. The Applicant is responsible for conformance with all applicable safety standards and conditions. The Applicant also agrees to maintain the property and the improvements.

What happens if my final project costs more or less than the initial estimates?

If the final project costs more than the initial estimates, the funding amount will remain as initially approved. Funding cannot increase because it will impact funding for other Applicants. However, if the final project cost is less than originally approved, you will receive 50% of the lower cost. This will allow us to use funds for other projects.

How do I get reimbursed for my project?

Grant funds are issued on a reimbursement basis and cannot be issued until the project has been completed. Before a check is cut, Applicants will need to submit proof of payment for completed work and Planning and Zoning Staff must review the completed project to determine that the work performed is consistent with the work approved. Once the work is approved, Planning and Zoning will process a reimbursement check. The State generally takes between 30-60 days to process a reimbursement check.