

Vacant and Underutilized Properties Conversion/Expansion Grant Program Guidelines

1.0 Grant Details

The purpose of the Vacant and Underutilized Properties Conversion/Expansion Grant is to encourage property owners with vacant lands and/or buildings to convert and revitalize the spaces to serve new purposes. This grant will help property owners overcome financial barriers related to the development of vacant land and the renovations, improvements, refurbishment or expansion of existing buildings. The Municipality will fund 50% of the total project cost (excluding taxes) up to \$7,000.

2.0 Usage of Funds

The applicant must be the owner of a vacant or underutilized property zoned for commercial, industrial, or institutional purposes. Improvements must demonstrate an economic and/or social benefit to the community. Agricultural properties are eligible provided that they represent value-added agricultural facilities, on-farm diversified uses, and/or agri-tourism.

3.0 Eligible Projects for Vacant and Underutilized Properties Conversion/Expansion Application

- Professional fees to study the feasibility of conversion to a new use
- Conversion of vacant building space into new commercial, mixed-use, secondary uses, and other eligible uses;
- Upper story space conversion into residential units;

- Conversion of existing ground floor commercial space to better suit new commercial and/or residential use (must adhere to Huron East's Zoning By-Law);
- Remediation of a brownfield site;
- Professional services (e.g. architect, engineer) to assist with the project's design;
- Conversion of a vacant or underused agricultural building to permit value-added activities, such as food processing or agri-tourism; and
- Conversion of an existing storefront into a more suited commercial space (e.g. from retail to restaurant).

4.0 Eligible Items for Vacant and Underutilized Properties Conversion/Expansion Application may include:

Structural Improvements such as improvements to:

- Footings
- Foundation
- Floor Joists
- Ceiling Joists
- Rafters/Trusses
- Walls
- Main Beams

Life Safety Improvements such as improvements to:

- Exit signage
- Emergency lighting
- Fire/CO2 Alarms
- Extinguishers
- Firewall Separation
- Fire Doors
- Sprinklers
- Siamese Connection
- Removal of hazardous material; such as, asbestos

Usable and Efficient Floor Space improvements:

- Increase ceiling height
- Architectural restoration/retention
- Accessible washroom
- Renovate commercial space

Brownfield remediation:

- Phase 1
- Phase 2
- Site Specific risk assessment
- Record of site condition

- Monitoring program

Energy Efficiency:

- New furnace/cooling technology
- Low flow fixtures
- Graywater recycling
- Solar technology
- Alternative energy
- Rainwater harvesting

Other improvements may be eligible if they provide economic and social benefit to the community.

5.0 Items that are ineligible for Vacant and Underutilized Properties Conversion/Expansion Funding

- Restoration, renovation or improvement to residential buildings
- Non-permanent or moveable components, such as appliances, furnishings, interior signage and non-emergency light fixtures

6.0 Eligibility Criteria

1. Applicants must be a property owner of a property zoned for commercial, industrial, institutional or agricultural purposes within the Community Improvement Project Area.
2. For the purposes of this program, buildings are considered vacant if they have been unoccupied for at least twelve (12) months.

3. Applicant must complete a pre-consultation with the Community Improvement Program Administrator prior to submitting an application.
4. Only grant applications that comply with municipal by-laws will be considered.
5. Improvement projects within Commercial Focus Areas will be prioritized.
6. Applicants may be eligible for one Vacant and Underutilized Properties Conversion/Expansion grant per property. Applicants may additionally apply for the Façade and Signage Improvement Grants, Accessibility Improvement Grant and the Agri-Business Innovation Grant if requirements are met.
7. The subject property shall not be in a position of tax arrears and not have any outstanding orders or non-conformity with zoning.
8. Outstanding work orders (building, fire, zoning, etc.) must be satisfied prior to grant approval.
9. Improvements to buildings that are designated under Part IV or Part V of the Ontario Heritage Act must be approved by the Huron East Heritage Committee.
10. Projects may require a Building and/or Sign Permit. Permits must be issued before the project commences. Applicants that have commenced work prior to obtaining a Building Permit, acknowledge that their project may be deemed ineligible for funding. Approval of a grant will not guarantee that a Building or Sign Permit will be issued.
11. Improvements requiring a variance will not be considered unless unique circumstances (not caused or created by the applicant) exist.
12. Improvements must not interfere with sidewalk maintenance and pedestrian safety; which include proper height and allowable encroachment onto the sidewalk.

13. Projects should not have commenced prior to the awarding of the requested grant. Applicants that have commenced work prior to obtaining approval for the requested grant, acknowledge that their project may be deemed ineligible for funding.
14. Projects must be completed by the approved deadline. Extensions are not granted unless prior approval has been received.
15. Applicants must provide a minimum 50% cash contribution towards the total cost of the project for which they are applying for a grant.
16. Taxes are the full responsibility of the applicants.
17. Eligible project costs must be actual cash outlay to third parties acting at arms' length and which can be documented through original invoices or proofs of payment. An exception may be granted for a property owner that wishes to do the work themselves; however, eligible project costs may only include material costs and not labour.
18. Projects within a Commercial Focus Area must demonstrate a contribution to the overall quality of the streetscape of the community.

7.0 Review Criteria

The Municipality of Huron East Improvement Program Committee will review applications against the following criteria:

- date/timing of the application
- balance of funding available and any previous applications made at the time of application
- project's potential to provide long term economic benefit to the Municipality

- evidence of the applicant's ability to fulfill responsibilities related to the project installation and maintenance
- project's location in relation to the Commercial Focus Areas
- project's "fit" with the objectives of the Community Improvement Plan
- project's "fit" with the character of the building and its' surroundings

8.0 Application Process

Applicants must complete an application in order to be given grant consideration. Incomplete applications cannot be accepted. If approved, funds will be allocated following completion of project and proof of eligible expenditures.

- Applications require the following:
 - Property owner name
 - Contact information
 - Detailed project description including colours/materials that will be used
 - Sketches, rendering and/or pictures of proposed project (must include "before" photo)
 - The proposed timeline for the work (start date, completion date)
 - Quote(s) of the project cost
 - Proposed project costs (taxes not included)
 - Grant request

Applications to this Program are available at the Huron East Municipal Office or online on the Municipality's website: <https://www.huroneast.com>.