



July 19, 2009

Reagan: Façade grants available to business owners

One aspect of the Portland Main Street program that is often overlooked is our ability to help business owners with building façade improvements. A question that I am often asked by building and business owners is, "What can the Main Street program do to help out the look of my building?" The answer is always, "Quite a bit!" The Portland Main Street program and its district businesses have continuous access to state grants and services. The Portland Downtown Development Authority (DDA) also offers local matching grants for façade rehabilitation.

Each Michigan Main Street community is eligible for Community Development Block Grants that focus on historic façade rehabilitation. These are typically large-figure grants that match, dollar-for-dollar, whatever the building owner spends for historically rehabilitating the outside of his or her building.

For example, if a building owner spends \$15,000 on historically rehabilitating a façade, this grant will provide \$15,000 of equal funding for that work - for a total project cost of \$30,000. Total project grants (district-wide) can range from as low as \$20,000 to a cap of \$200,000. Eligibility is based on historic preservation and job creation, thus bringing both a great look and employment to downtown Portland.

The Michigan Main Street program also offers design services to each participating Main Street community. Portland Main Street is offered three "Design Services" each year by the Michigan Main Street Center and the Michigan Historic Preservation Office. Although competitive, applying for these services is a simple process. First, Main Street building owners must attend a presentation by Kelly Larson - the Michigan Main Street Architect - on the basics of historic design and fill out an application for these services. The applications are then reviewed by the Portland Main Street Design Committee, and up to three businesses may be chosen yearly. These services, valued at anywhere between \$2,500 and \$5,000, come with a professional schematic of the building and estimated material costs, as well as material samples.

The Portland DDA offers a local façade grant to downtown building owners, as well. Allotted in matching amounts up to \$5,000 each, these grants help to further facilitate historic preservation in our community. The 2008-2009 grant award winner was the Around the Block Quilt Shop. Owners repainted their building while also adding a new awning onto their Maple Street entrance. Two such grants are available each year from the Portland DDA. Any Main Street building owner that would like to know more about these grants and services is urged to call the Portland Main Street office at (517) 647-5027 for more information. The goal of the Portland Main Street program is to actively revitalize Portland's vibrant, charming, and unique downtown in to a gathering place-one that uses broad-based community support to (1) provide opportunities to entrepreneurs; (2) sustain a strong economic foundation for the region; and (3) safeguard history, tradition, and a sense of community for residents and visitors.

For more information on how you can be part of this mission, visit our Web site at www.portlandmainstreet.org.

Patrick Reagan is the Main Street manager/DDA director for the City of Portland.