

Guidelines

Downtown North Wilkesboro Building Improvement Grant Program

1. Purpose:

The Town of North Wilkesboro recognizes that a vibrant and economically productive downtown hinges upon a strong built environment capable of supporting business and residential growth. Achieving this requires significant commitment from private investors in building rehabilitation and construction. Addressing challenges such as aging buildings, fire suppression requirements, and outdated electrical systems is crucial for downtown revitalization. To stimulate additional private investment in downtown properties, particularly the rehabilitation of older, historic structures within Downtown North Wilkesboro's Historic District, the Town of North Wilkesboro and the Downtown North Wilkesboro Partnership (DNWP) have established this Building Improvement Grant Program (hereafter referred to as the "Program"). This Program aims to encourage appropriate redevelopment by supporting efforts to preserve building structures and cultural artifacts of significant historic, architectural, and economic value.

2. Program Goals:

The goals of this Program are to:

- Promote interior and exterior rehabilitation of commercial and residential use buildings in the downtown area.
- Preserve the special architectural and historic characteristics of downtown by assisting owners in making quality building improvements that foster a sense of place and a consistent overall image for downtown.
- Complement public and private revitalization efforts.
- Promote an attractive environment for new investment and business activity.
- Create opportunities for job creation and housing development.
- Increase the Town's tax base and overall interest in downtown North Wilkesboro.
- Enhance, upgrade, and stabilize vacant or underutilized properties.
- Promote the redevelopment and reuse of upper floors for apartments, lofts, condominiums, and other compatible uses to increase downtown living opportunities and expand the market base for downtown businesses.
- Encourage private investment that enhances the character and authenticity of downtown through the reuse of existing buildings.
- Provide desirable tenant space for new and existing retail, restaurants, and commercial businesses in downtown.
- Promote the installation of fire suppression systems to enhance life and property

safety and protect historic resources.

3. Eligibility Criteria:

To be eligible for the Program, applicants and their projects must meet the following criteria:

- **Property Location:** The property must be located within the defined Downtown North Wilkesboro's Historic District. (See map attached)
- **Property Ownership:** The applicant must be the legal owner of the property or have the legal owner's endorsement (proof of ownership or a pending sale contract/option to purchase is required).
- **Project Type:** Eligible projects include new construction and building rehabilitation projects, with a focus on projects that:
 - Create market-rate or workforce housing for long-term lease (residential units created as part of the project are eligible, even if the owner resides in one unit, provided at least one additional unit is created for separate lease/purchase).
 - Involve substantial renovations to existing abandoned units (unoccupied for >5 years) to create finished, occupancy-ready spaces.
 - Undertake historic building maintenance for repairs or replacement of roofs or windows to prevent water intrusion (priority given to contributing/individually listed National Register properties; roof repairs must be part of a larger project advancing historical significance and productive use).
 - Involve interior outfit and maintenance for repairs or restoration of original architectural/structural elements or build-outs to make the building retail-ready (permanent improvements such as display windows, new restrooms/changing areas, certain electrical/mechanical/plumbing work, and interior repairs to walls/windows/flooring are eligible; priority given to projects preserving/establishing historic architectural features).
 - Include capital improvements that enhance the functionality of the building (e.g., roof repair/replacement, electrical upgrades including HVAC, equipment repair/replacement, energy efficiency upgrades, restroom improvements, flooring, structural repairs, installation/repair of accessibility and fire safety features, interior up-fitting).
- **Prior Grant History:**
 - Priority will be given to buildings or business locations that have not previously received a Building Improvement Grant.
 - Buildings or businesses that have received a prior grant can only be considered for grant awards in increments of every three years and will only be considered during the fourth quarter of any fiscal year (April).

- Applicants are ineligible if grant funds would duplicate a previously funded project.
- **Documentation:** Applicants must provide sufficient documentation to understand the project, including (but not limited to): building plans, architectural/electrical/plumbing/mechanical plans, business development plans, photographs, pending or executed leases, contractor scopes of work, and pricing. Staff will determine when sufficient documentation is provided.
- **Price Quotes:** Prior to awarding the grant, at least three price quotes from licensed commercial contractors for the grant-funded work are required. A single quote may be accepted after due diligence by the applicant or if the work/equipment is proprietary or not reasonably available. No grant money will be awarded for work performed personally by the owner/tenant or by unlicensed parties.
- **Legal Standing:** Applicants and Property Owners must not be engaged in illegal activities, must adhere to the Town Code and all legal permitting processes, and must be in good standing with the Town, County, and the State of North Carolina (no back taxes, civil penalties, or delinquent fees owed).
- **Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation:** For projects involving historic buildings, proposed work should adhere to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation to maintain the historic integrity of the property. Eligible costs related to historic rehabilitation must align with these standards.
- **Upper Floor Occupancy (Application Information):** The application will inquire whether the upper floors of the building are currently occupied.

4. Eligible Costs:

Grant funds may be used for the following eligible purchases and improvements:

- Interior improvements (flooring installation/repair, wall renovations/installations, interior demolition, fire suppression systems, ADA improvements, ceiling installation/repair, plumbing, electrical, kitchen/bar installation or build out).
- Capital improvements as part of substantial upgrades or larger renovation projects (roof replacement, electrical work including HVAC upgrades, equipment repairs/replacement, energy efficiency upgrades, restroom facilities, flooring, structural repairs, installation/repair of accessibility and fire safety features, interior up-fitting including lighting, wall modifications, stairways, and elevators).
- Historic building maintenance that would otherwise be neglected or ignored due to cost (repairs or replacement of roofs or windows to stop water intrusion; repair/replacement of architectural or historic interior building elements, where applicable and approved).

5. Ineligible Costs:

The following project costs are **not** eligible for grant funding:

- Improvements made prior to grant approval.
- Routine maintenance (excluding routine maintenance associated with historically significant elements, which may be considered). Routine maintenance includes inspecting, cleaning, or servicing existing systems, structures, cosmetic applications, and/or machinery.
- Interior décor, furnishings, or other personal property that does not become part of the real estate.
- Property acquisition.
- Working capital.
- Inventory acquisition.

6. Grant Award Amount and Requirements:

- The amount of funding allocated annually to the grant program is limited. No additional applications will be accepted once all funds are expended in a given fiscal year. Annual funding is determined by the Town of North Wilkesboro budget and may vary from year to year.
- All grant years stand alone; an application submitted and not funded in any given year must be resubmitted with new quotes for consideration in subsequent years.
- Grant applications will be considered on a rolling basis.
- The maximum grant amount an applicant can receive will be \$12,500.
- No applicant will be eligible to receive a grant award more than once every three years.
- Grant awards will be based on the lowest of at least three qualified bids or quotes obtained and submitted by the applicant and shall not exceed 60% of the total project cost, up to \$12,500.
- The owner/applicant may choose a contractor other than the lowest bidder, but will be responsible for all costs exceeding the lowest qualified bid. The selected contractor must be licensed and insured in North Carolina and meet all requirements of the Town of North Wilkesboro Code and the Finance Department's vendor qualifications. The owner/applicant is responsible for verifying contractor competence, licensing, and insurance.
- All grants are on a reimbursement basis. The Town will reimburse the applicant after inspection and approval of the completed work, or may reimburse the contractor directly with the applicant's written approval.
- Unless otherwise agreed in writing, all work must be completed within 180 days of

the grant award.

- Grant-funded improvements shall be maintained in good condition for a minimum of five years following project completion.

7. Historic Tax Credits:

Applicants undertaking substantial rehabilitation of certified historic structures may also be eligible for state and federal historic tax credits, which can provide significant additional financial benefits. This Program is separate from and does not preclude applicants from pursuing historic tax credits. Applicants are encouraged to research and explore these additional funding opportunities in conjunction with this grant program. Information on historic tax credits can be obtained from the State Historic Preservation Office and the National Park Service. Town staff would be pleased to connect you with the appropriate entity for your project and provide any additional resources about the tax credit process.

8. Application Process:

Interested applicants must complete and submit the official Downtown North Wilkesboro Building Improvement Grant Application form, which will require the following information:

- **Applicant Information:** All contact information, including the length of ownership of the property.
- **Property Information:** Property address.
- **Project Description:** A detailed narrative description of the construction or rehabilitation work to be performed, including proposed uses.
- **Designs and Plans:** Any designs, schematic site plans, drawings, or renderings, including floor plans indicating gross square footage of residential space and the square footage protected by any fire sprinkler system (if applicable).
- **Photographs:** Depicting the current condition of the property.
- **Project Timeline:** Estimated timetable for completion of work, including permitting and construction schedules.
- **Cost Estimates:** At least three itemized project cost estimates prepared by contractors or design professionals, and material schedules for residential units (if applicable).
- **Proof of Ownership:** Documentation demonstrating ownership or, if a sale is pending, a contract for sale to the applicant or an option to purchase.
- **Owner Endorsement:** If the applicant is not the owner, proof of endorsement by the legal owner.
- **Upper Floor Occupancy:** Indication of whether the upper floors of the building are

currently occupied.

9. Application Review Process:

- Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis, beginning after July 1 of a new fiscal year. Applications will be reviewed by the DNWP Board and appropriate staff for completeness, eligibility, alignment with Program goals, consistency with zoning, occupancy, and use requirements.
- Applicants may be asked to provide additional information or documentation during the review process.
- Eligible applications will be evaluated based on the Program's scoring criteria and considered based on factors including:
 - Investment and economic impact.
 - Visibility.
 - Housing creation.
 - Historic preservation and design.
 - Street-level activation (priority for retail trade, accommodation/food services, professional/healthcare offices with 10+ employees; strong preference for opening/relocating retail/restaurant, relocating upper-story offices for main street retail/restaurant, and creating upper-level residential units).
 - Contribution to increased employment/earnings, property tax revenues, and sales tax revenues.
 - Meeting a desired or unique niche in the marketplace for economic diversification.
 - Applicant is leveraging multiple funding sources.
 - Improvement of vacant properties.
 - Accessibility improvements.
 - Consideration of parking and pedestrian-oriented development.
 - Fire protection and public safety.
- Funding approvals will be made based on application scores, project readiness, and available funding. Approval of an application does not authorize construction or exempt the applicant from any permitting, zoning, or code requirements.

10. Grant Agreement and Project Implementation:

- Upon approval by the DNWP board, successful applicants will be required to sign a Grant Agreement outlining the grant's terms and conditions.
- No work can commence until the Grant Agreement is fully executed.
- Grant funds are provided on a reimbursement basis, and applicants are responsible for securing all necessary permits, approvals, and contractor services. Upon completion of the project, the Town will verify compliance with the approved scope

Adopted by the Town of North Wilkesboro Board of Commissioners on June 25, 2026.

of work and grant requirements before reimbursing.

- Projects must generally be completed within 180 days of award unless an extension is approved in writing. Failure to comply with program requirements or the executed Grant Agreement may result in forfeiture of grant funds.

11. Reporting and Compliance:

- Grant recipients may be required to submit progress reports.
- The Town reserves the right to inspect completed projects for compliance.
- Failure to comply with the Grant Agreement may result in forfeiture of funds.

12. Disclaimer:

The Downtown North Wilkesboro Partnership and the Town of North Wilkesboro reserve the right to modify, suspend, or terminate this Program at any time. All grant awards are subject to the availability of funds.

13. Contact Information:

Taylor Berry
Community Development Director
Town of North Wilkesboro
832 Main Street
North Wilkesboro, NC 28659
Office: 336-667-7129 ext 3021
Email: downtown@northwilkesboronc.gov
Websites: www.north-wilkesboro.com or www.downtownnorthwilkesboro.com

Application

BUILDING IMPROVEMENT GRANT APPLICATION

1. Applicant Information

Applicant Name: _____

Business/Entity Name (if applicable): _____

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ **State:** _____ **Zip:** _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Length of Property Ownership: _____

- ☐ I am the legal property owner
 - ☐ I have a pending sale contract/option to purchase (attach documentation)
 - ☐ I am not the owner, but have written owner endorsement (attach documentation)
-

2. Property Information

Property Address: _____

Parcel ID: _____

Current Use of Property: _____

If vacant, how long has this property been vacant? _____

Is the property located within the Downtown North Wilkesboro Central Business District?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Are upper floors currently occupied?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, please describe use: _____

Has this building previously received a Downtown North Wilkesboro Building Improvement Grant?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes (Year Received: _____)

Has this building received any other economic development incentive from the Town (excluding façade grants)?

☐ No

☐ Yes (Explain): _____

3. Project Description

Provide a detailed narrative describing the proposed project, including:

- Scope of work
- Proposed building uses (commercial/residential/mixed-use)
- Number of residential units created (if applicable)
- Square footage (commercial and residential)
- Historic features to be preserved or restored
- How the project supports downtown revitalization

Narrative Description:

(attach additional sheets as necessary)

Check all that apply

- ☐ Interior Upfit (Retail/Restaurant Ready)
- ☐ Upper-floor residential development
- ☐ Historic building maintenance or rehabilitation
- ☐ Roof repair/replacement
- ☐ Window Repair/Replacement
- ☐ Electrical/HVAC upgrades
- ☐ Fire suppression system installation
- ☐ Accessibility (ADA) improvements
- ☐ Structural repairs
- ☐ Energy Efficiency Upgrades
- ☐ Other (describe): _____

4. Residential Component (If Applicable)

Number of residential units to be created: _____

Type:

- ☐ Market-rate
- ☐ Affordable/Workforce
- ☐ Mixed-income

Total residential square footage: _____

Square footage protected by fire sprinkler system (if applicable):

5. Job Creation (If Applicable)

Estimated number of part-time jobs created: _____

Estimated number of full-time jobs created: _____

6. Photographs (Attach)

- ☐ Front façade
- ☐ Rear façade
- ☐ Interior (first floor)
- ☐ Interior (upper floors)
- ☐ Roof condition
- ☐ Other: _____

7. Project Timeline

Estimated Start Date: _____

Estimated Completion Date: _____

Provide a summary schedule including permitting and construction phases:

8. Project Budget

Total Estimated Project Cost: \$_____

Itemized Cost Breakdown:

Description

Estimated Cost

\$

\$

\$

\$

\$

Amount of Grant Funding Requested: \$ _____

Other Funding Sources (check all that apply):

- ☐ Owner Equity – \$ _____
- ☐ Bank Financing – \$ _____
- ☐ Historic Tax Credits
- ☐ Other Grants – \$ _____
- ☐ Other (specify): _____

9. Contractor Information

(Attach at least three itemized bids from licensed contractors.)

Contractor Name: _____

License Number: _____

Phone: _____

(Attach additional contractor information as needed.)

10. Historic Status (If Applicable)

Is the building:

- ☐ Individually listed on the National Register
- ☐ Contributing structure in a historic district
- ☐ Not designated

Will the project adhere to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not Applicable

11. Required Attachments Checklist

Please confirm the following are attached:

- ☐ Proof of Ownership or Contract to Purchase
- ☐ Owner Endorsement (if applicant is not owner)
- ☐ Photographs of Current Property Conditions
- ☐ Architectural or Schematic Plans
- ☐ Floor Plans with Square Footage
- ☐ Fire Sprinkler Coverage Plans (if applicable)
- ☐ Cost Estimates (minimum three)
- ☐ Business Development Plan (if applicable)
- ☐ Leases (pending or executed, if applicable)
- ☐ Historic Preservation Documentation (if applicable)

12. Legal Standing Certification

By signing below, the Applicant certifies that:

- The Applicant and Property Owner are in good standing with the Town of North Wilkesboro, Wilkes County, and the State of North Carolina.
- No back taxes, civil penalties, or delinquent fees are owed.
- The Applicant is not engaged in illegal activity.
- No work has commenced for the portion of the project seeking grant funding.
- All work will comply with Town Code and permitting requirements.
- If applicable, work will adhere to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

Applicant Signature: _____

Printed Name: _____

Date: _____

For Staff Use Only

Application Received: _____

Application Complete: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Staff Review Completed: _____

DNWP Decision: ☐ Approved ☐ Denied Date: _____

Grant Award Amount: \$_____

Grant Agreement Executed: _____

Rubric

Downtown Building Improvement Grant Project Evaluation Scoring Rubric

Applications will be scored on a 100-point scale. Projects receiving the highest scores will be recommended for funding, subject to available grant funds. Applications must score at least 60 points to be considered.

CATEGORY	POINTS AVAILABLE
Economic Impact	20
Historic Preservation & Design	20
Housing Creation	15
Property Activation & Occupancy	15
Private Investment Leveraged	15
Public Safety & Accessibility	10
Strategic Community Benefit	5
TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS	100

1. Economic Impact (20 Points)

20 Points

- Creates substantial new taxable investment in the property.
- Results in the creation of new full-time jobs or significant employment opportunities.
- Introduces a new business, business expansion, or business sector that is currently underrepresented in Downtown North Wilkesboro.
- Supports retail, restaurant, lodging, entertainment, or other customer-facing businesses that increase downtown visitation and spending.
- Creates a significant positive economic impact through redevelopment of a vacant or underutilized property.

15 Points

- Supports business expansion, additional employment, or increased commercial activity.
- Improves a property in a manner that strengthens an existing business or attracts new tenants.
- Contributes to downtown economic diversification or increases the long-term viability of a commercial property.

10 Points

- Supports existing business operations or moderate economic growth.
- Improves building functionality, marketability, or tenant readiness.
- May result in modest increases in employment, occupancy, or taxable value.

5 Points

- Provides limited economic impact beyond building preservation, maintenance, or code compliance.
- Primarily benefits the property owner without creating significant economic activity, jobs, or occupancy opportunities.

0 Points

- No measurable economic impact.

2. Historic Preservation & Design (20 Points)

20 Points

- Preserves or restores significant historic features and follows the Secretary of the Interior's Standards.
- Rehabilitates a contributing or individually listed historic property while maintaining or restoring its historic character.
- Removes inappropriate alterations and restores original architectural elements.

15 Points

- Preserves and rehabilitates existing historic features while incorporating compatible new improvements.
- Improves the building's appearance and integrity using historically appropriate materials, designs, and construction methods.

10 Points

- Includes design improvements that are compatible with the building's historic character and the surrounding downtown environment but involve limited restoration of historic features.

5 Points

- Includes minimal historic preservation or design enhancements, or involves a non-historic building with improvements that complement the character of downtown.

0 Points

- No preservation or design enhancement component.

3. Housing Creation (15 Points)

15 Points

- Creates multiple new residential units.

10 Points

- Creates one new residential unit.

5 Points

- Improves existing residential units.

0 Points

- No residential component.

4. Property Activation & Occupancy (15 Points)

15 Points

- Activates a vacant storefront, upper floor, or long-vacant building.
- Creates new occupancy-ready retail, restaurant, lodging, or entertainment space.
- Relocates office uses from street-level spaces to upper floors to allow for retail or restaurant occupancy.
- Creates new upper-floor residential units.

10 Points

- Expands, renovates, or improves an occupied building in a manner that increases occupancy, functionality, or economic activity.
- Creates occupancy-ready professional or healthcare office space with the potential to support 10 or more employees.
- Improves a currently underutilized commercial or residential space.

5 Points

- Primarily focused on building stabilization, maintenance, or improvements that preserve future occupancy opportunities but do not immediately result in activation of additional space.

0 Points

- No increase in occupancy or activation.

5. Private Investment Leveraged (15 Points)

15 Points

- Private investment exceeds \$200,000.

10 Points

- Private investment between \$100,001 and \$200,000.

5 Points

- Private Investment between \$25,001 and \$100,000.

3 Points

- Private investment up to \$25,000.

6. Public Safety & Accessibility (10 Points)

10 Points

- Includes major fire suppression, life safety, structural stabilization, or ADA improvements.

5 Points

- Includes moderate code, safety, or accessibility upgrades.

0 Points

- No safety or accessibility improvements.

7. Strategic Community Benefit (5 Points)

Projects may receive up to five bonus points for advancing community priorities such as:

- Significant contribution to downtown vibrancy.
- Filling a targeted business or service gap identified by the Town or DNWP.
- Elimination of significant blight, deterioration, or code-related concerns that negatively impact the surrounding area.
- Improvement of a property that serves as a gateway, landmark, or highly visible community asset.
- Demonstrated partnership with other public, private, nonprofit, or community organizations.
- Incorporation of unique features, amenities, or uses that enhance the overall visitor, resident, or business experience downtown.
- Exceptional alignment with adopted downtown plans, redevelopment strategies, or community priorities.