



**City of Panama City
Community Redevelopment Agency**

**Guidelines & Procedures
for
Commercial Sign & Security Voucher Program
Revised August 2021**

Please note that an application must be submitted and approved by the CRA BEFORE work begins. The applicant assumes all financial liabilities related to work that is completed prior to a ruling. Following a review of the CRA application, the applicant will be sent an official correspondence by the CRA Grants Coordinator.

Purpose:

Small business success is a key component of a successful and vibrant CRA District. Therefore, in an effort to increase local business awareness, safety, economic productivity, and aesthetics within Panama City's CRA Districts, CRA is providing a Small Business Sign & Security Voucher program to incentivize certain small business owners to improve business signage and/or adding exterior security cameras. Replacing existing older and outdated signage with more modern signage that is not only more aesthetically attractive for the residents and visitors in our community but increases the brand exposure of small businesses to improve the chances of new customer acquisition and repeat business. The addition of exterior security cameras provides an extra element of safety to not only the business owner, but to the pedestrians and community.

The Community Redevelopment Agency's Commercial Sign Voucher Program provides reimbursement up to \$5,000 to eligible business owners for signage improvements and/or installation of security cameras to commercial property located within Panama City's designated CRA districts. Matching funds are not required for this grant program. Grant funding is based on availability and will be provided on a first come, first served basis.

Applicants are reminded that grant awards are discretionary and should not be considered an entitlement. All grant criteria contained herein are guidelines, not guarantees for awards and successful Applicants may receive any amount up to the maximum award. Should an Applicant meet all grant criteria, a grant may or may not be awarded due to funding limitations, competing applications, and/or competing priorities.

Program Rules:

The following rules are intended to inform a potential grant applicant of the extent and scope of the program. The desired result will improve and upgrade the appearance of the area, stimulate economic growth, and facilitate and encourage redevelopment activity in the CRA districts.

1. The program is for commercial properties and businesses located within a CRA boundary. Non-profit and/or government owned properties are ineligible for this program. Business owners may apply for this grant. Copy of lease showing at least one (1) year remaining, along with written consent of the property owner is required if business does not own the property. **Applications for properties delinquent in payment of property taxes will not be accepted.**
2. The program is available only for property located within a CRA District.
3. Improvements must be consistent with applicable design guidelines and policies as outlined by the CRA Plan and the City of Panama City Neighborhood Plan.
4. All work **must** be done in compliance with applicable City of Panama City Codes and Planning Regulations. All professional work **must** be performed by a licensed contractor in good standing with the City of Panama City. **Improvements to properties that do not or cannot meet building and safety codes are ineligible.**
5. Eligible costs include purchase and installation of exterior security cameras; the removal of old signage and the design, production and installation of new signage; or substantial renovation of existing signage, including the installation of modern sign lighting, in compliance with current City codes. Exterior free-standing signs (permanent, fixed structure only), and Exterior wall signs (permanent, fixed structure only) are eligible sign types allowable under this program.
6. Grant funds will be reimbursed exclusively for approved costs, approved change orders and only for work that has been performed **after** being notified of grant approval by the CRA. Any work completed prior to receiving grant approval is ineligible for reimbursement.
7. Only one (1) Commercial Sign & Security Voucher application will be accepted per business, per annual grant cycle. The Commercial Sign & Security Voucher Program is only available to applicants that have not received previous grant funding for the same business in the last three (3) years.

Application Process:

1. An applicant seeking a Commercial Improvement Grant may apply online at <https://www.pcgov.org/604/Grant-Applications>
A checklist of required documents and forms can be found and uploaded within the online grant application.
2. Applications will be accepted no sooner than October 1, and no later than July 1 of each fiscal year.

3. The CRA Grants Coordinator undertakes the initial review of the application and determines if the application is complete. If the application is found incomplete, the applicant will be granted time to complete and resubmit the application. Once complete, application will be date-stamped as received. **Acceptance of completed application packet is not a guarantee of funding.**
4. Within two (2) weeks, or ten (10) business days, of receipt of the completed application, the CRA Grants Coordinator will conduct a full review to ensure compliance with the CRA Grant Program Criteria. The CRA Grants Coordinator will forward a recommendation to the CRA Program Manager, CRA Director and City Manager for final approval.
5. An official notification from the CRA Grants Coordinator will be delivered to the Applicant within two (2) weeks, or ten (10) business days, of recommendation, informing them of the approval or denial of the application and may include approval **with conditions**. Failure to comply to conditions in a timely manner may result in the revocation of grant approval.
6. All Grant funding decisions provided by CRA staff and Director are final. Applicants that are formally denied a CRA grant may appeal staff decisions in writing to CRA Director for review by City Manager and/or, finally the CRA Board if applicable.
7. Applicant must return the signed award letter to the CRA office in person or via email to CRAs@pcgov.org within two (2) weeks of notification of approval.

Project Implementation and Reimbursement Process:

1. Projects receiving funding must begin work within 90 days from receipt of grant approval notification and must be completed within one (1) year, unless a written request for time extension is received and approved by the CRA at least 30 days prior to project expiration. Non-compliance of these time frames may result in retraction of grant approval, and a new application would be required for consideration.
2. Reporting – By accepting the grant, applicant agrees to comply with monthly updates conducted by the CRA Grants Coordinator. These updates may be obtained via email, phone or site visits. Reporting may include, but not limited to, work schedules, reporting forms, and projected completion dates.
3. Site Visits – CRA staff will conduct a site visit before grant payment is made in order to verify that the business is in operation. Staff may also conduct unannounced site visits periodically in order to ensure compliance with the terms of the grant agreement.
4. Applicants will receive grant funding after the improvements are completed, inspected and all associated costs have been paid. It is the responsibility of the Applicant to maintain proper documentation of funds expended. Release of funds is subject to submission of this documentation to the CRA Grants Coordinator by the Applicant. The signage must be completed essentially as presented to the CRA Grant Coordinator and approved by the CRA Director in order to receive payment/reimbursement.

5. Award reimbursement shall be made upon completion of the sign improvements as approved. Submission of the following documentation is required for reimbursement of awarded project costs:
 - a. Pictures of completed sign.
 - b. Proof of payment in full for sign improvements as approved. Detailed invoices and paid receipts showing the name, address and phone number of licensed contractor or professional service used is required.
 - c. Copies of all required permits and final inspections.
 - d. Signed and completed W-9, as required by law, for the recipient of grant funds.
6. Requests for reimbursement of project costs not included in either the approved renovation plan or an approved Change Order shall not be considered for reimbursement.
7. The CRA reserves the right to verify any and all costs associated with design or renovation work for which reimbursement is requested.