

PROPERTY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM
City of O’Neill, Nebraska

Program Guidelines

The City of O’Neill encourages private investment in primarily commercial areas of O’Neill and proposes the utilization of a Property Improvement Program to improve building facades and property lots within O’Neill. Under the Improvement Program, property owners or tenants are eligible to apply for grants equal to one-half of the cost of such improvements, with certain limitations. These grants are provided to create positive impact that individual renovations or demolition can have on the overall appearance and image of the community and spur area re-development. The proposed yearly budget for the Property Improvement Program is \$100,000; allocated from the Sales Tax Fund of the City of O’Neill.

Types of Assistance/Eligible Improvements

For commercial properties, the Property Improvement Program supports exterior business improvements, from minor renovation and historical façade painting to complete façade renovations and structure demolition. Residential properties are only eligible for demolition activities. *Eligible improvements include, but are not limited to:*

Commercial Properties:

- Replacement or addition of:
 - Awnings
 - Signage
 - Graphics
 - Window display areas
 - Exterior lighting
 - Concrete/Sidewalk
- Painting (Historical in Nature)
- Restoration of original architectural features
- Other improvements which are visible from the street and have a positive impact on the appearance of the building
- Structure demolition

Residential Properties:

- Structure Demolition

The rear and sides of commercial buildings that are visible from **major** travel corridors and sidewalks may also be eligible on a case-by-case basis. Professional, legal, design, and City permit fees may be included in the total storefront improvements cost.

All proposed improvements, rehabilitation, and demolition work will be subject to design review and approval by the Finance Committee. The Finance Committee reserves the right to judge all applications on a case-by-case basis. Applications will be approved based on graded priorities of: anticipated aesthetic improvement to the area, historical benefit, restoration vs. maintenance efforts and the perceived ability of applicant to pay for improvements on their own.

All improvements must conform to all City of O’Neill zoning and building code requirements, and are encouraged to follow basic design guidelines.

Approved property owners or tenants who install at least \$1,500 of improvements or demolition items will receive a grant equal to one-half of the cost of the work, up to a maximum of \$5,000 per storefront. Owners or tenants of buildings, which include two or more separate storefronts, may apply for grants of up to \$5,000 for each storefront, subject to approval by the Finance Committee on a case-by-case basis. Grants will be forwarded to the City Council for approval and funding.

Approved property owners or tenants have **one year** to complete the work detailed on the applicant’s Property Improvement Program application. If the applicant cannot complete the work detailed on the application within one year, they have the ability to request **one** extension from the Finance Committee to complete the work.

Ineligible Improvements

No property improvement application will be considered if any portion of the improvements are started, constructed, or completed before the Finance Committee reviews and approves the rebate application. The following improvements are ineligible for rebates under the Property Improvement Program.

- Interior remodeling (except window display areas).
- Purchase of furnishings, equipment, or other personal property, which does not become a part of the real estate.
- **Improvements completed or expense incurred *prior* to notification of approval and notice to begin construction from the Finance Committee**
- **Improvements related to new construction.**

Eligible Applicants

Although owners of commercial property within O’Neill are eligible to participate in the Property Improvement Program, funding priority will be given to businesses that are within the Redevelopment Area of the City of O’Neill. Those businesses who are tenants of commercial buildings are also eligible if the building owner’s consent is shown in writing.

Funding priority for residential property owners will be given to applications that have specific re-development plans following demolition activities.

Process

1. Pre-application Conference

Prior to making a formal application, the prospective applicant should meet with the Director – Holt County Economic Development & Finance Committee. The pre-application conference familiarizes the applicant with the Program and its procedures. An application form may be obtained at this time.

2. Development of Preliminary Design

The applicant and Director should then meet to discuss the needs and ideas of all parties, design alternatives, and develop cost parameters. Following this meeting, a cost estimate should be prepared by the applicant.

3. Application Process

Applications should be completed and submitted to the Director. If more applications are received than current-funding levels can accommodate, the Director will prioritize them on the basis of the date of receipt of the completed application.

4. Approval of Project by the City

Following review of the preliminary design two additional approvals will need to be obtained. First, the Finance Committee must approve the scope of the project. Once the cost parameters and work for the project have been established, the applicant must receive all applicable permits and approval from the City of O'Neill. A building permit may be required for certain improvements.

If the decision is to proceed, the applicant should secure the services of the appropriate contractors needed to complete the rehabilitation work. All contractors should be properly registered and licensed as required by law. The contractors selected must secure all required building and construction related permits from the City and will be expected to complete the rehabilitation project in accordance with the approved plans, all applicable codes and ordinances, and standard building practices.

5. Begin Work

After the Property Improvement Agreement has been executed, a "Letter of Approval and Notice to Proceed" will be sent to the applicant by the Director, including an estimate of the total grant reimbursement amount the applicant is eligible to receive.

Assuming the City has issued all necessary permits, work may begin. Although there is a one year time limit, projects are expected to not take longer than 120 days to contract for, commence, and complete. Prior to, or during construction, any on-the-job changes to design notes must be reviewed and approved by the Director.

6. Completion of the Job

Upon completion of the project, the work is to be approved for compliance with the original design drawing and design notes, including initialed changes, City building codes, zoning ordinances, and sign ordinances. Only that work for which the permit was issued will be inspected.

7. Payment of the Grant

After the rehabilitation work has been inspected and certified as to its completion and plan compliance, a reimbursement invoice will be submitted to the City of O'Neill for payment during the first regularly scheduled Council meeting of the month. The City Council of the City of O'Neill must approve the invoice prior to payment being made.

8. Re-Payment of Grant to Façade Improvement Fund

If the work completed under the Property Improvement Program is of such a personalized nature that it would limit the use of a subsequent property owner, the Finance Committee reserves the right to seek 75% repayment of that specific improvement grant award if the property is sold within 7 months of final City of O'Neill payment. The Finance Committee reserves the right to judge instances of such re-payment on a case – by – case basis.