

Community Focus Statement E: Improve the appearance of the community.

Action Statement E.5: Establish a façade and sign improvement program.

E.5

Benchmark: A façade and signage improvement matching grant program is established for commercial buildings, including grant guidelines to ensure the program continues to function for a period of at least three years.

Champion: Volunteer group or person or can be identified by the community

Estimated Cost: \$1,000–\$200,000



The City of Santa Rosa offers loans to assist the renovation of downtown commercial buildings for façade improvements. The Downtown Façade Improvement Program assists with the expense of the following types of improvements: painting, awnings, windows, doors, trim, fascia, exterior lighting, tile, stucco, signage, canopies, and historic elements. Photo source: City of Santa Rosa

Enhancing the appeal of the downtown and commercial areas is vital to recruiting new businesses and bringing more customers into the area to strengthen locally owned businesses. Attractive and well-maintained businesses demonstrate pride of ownership and will draw in more visitors to invest in the community.

Running a business is becoming increasingly expensive, and the costs of day-to-day operations often inhibit business owners from making improvements. As a result, the façades of buildings in mature business districts are often run down, not carefully maintained, or have an aesthetic inconsistent with other businesses in the area. However, the Hilltop communities are eager to thrive again. By maintaining and improving properties, the Hilltop communities can contribute to the appearance and success of downtown areas.

By establishing a façade and sign improvement grant program, the Chamber of Commerce can assist property owners in making needed physical improvements to the exterior of their businesses. Such a program could be an excellent resource to assist in creating beautiful, impactful, and safe business façades in the Hilltop communities. The program can provide grants for a range of renovation improvements, including painting storefronts, replacing windows, shopfronts, and signs, or installing awnings and lighting. The grant could fund the entire proposed project, match the property owner's or business owner's investment, or cover design services with partner designers. The program should identify a list of guidelines or eligibility criteria for properties to meet in order to receive the grant. Projects can be selected based on the current condition of the façade, proposed improvement, and eligibility. The Chamber of Commerce could consider allowing either matches from property owners in the form of financial support or labor power, if the business or property owner can show that they have the labor resources available.

The program should establish public-private partnerships involving local banks, property owners, business owners, and others to offer a façade and sign improvement program to existing and future businesses. The Chamber of



Commerce could partner with other groups including the nonprofit organization Rebuilding Together Mountain Communities, which provides labor services to property owners for improvements and trash removal. Funding could be provided by the County's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), which is administered by the San Bernardino County Economic Development Agency's Community Development Division.

The Chamber of Commerce could also consider offering financial assistance to full-time residents for residential properties. Improving the appearance of the residential neighborhoods will have a number of positive and immediate benefits, such as beautifying the area, raising property values, enhancing the sense of community pride, and increasing public safety. A common tool is the creation of a matching revolving loan program for residential buildings to help private property owners complete rehabilitation projects that alleviate blight and enhance building safety. Examples of common projects include bringing buildings up to code or replacing a deteriorating foundation or roof.

Action	Action Leader	Timeline	Resources
1. Establish a façade and sign improvement matching grant program to secure funding for the program.	Champion with Running Springs Area Chamber of Commerce	Months 1 – 3	Running Springs Chamber of Commerce http://www.runningspringschamber.com/ City of Santa Rosa http://ci.santa-rosa.ca.us/news/Pages/CommRehabLoanProgra
2. Develop a target area, grant matching criteria, matching ratio, an application process, and façade design guidelines for commercial properties.	Façade Team	Month 4	PlannersWeb, How Façade Improvement Programs Can Benefit Your Community http://plannersweb.com/2013/10/how-facade-improvement-programs/ Minneapolis façade matching program guidelines http://www.minneapolismn.gov/www/groups/public/@cped/documents/webcontent/wcms1p-105530.pdf http://www.minneapolismn.gov/www/groups/public/@cped/documents/webcontent/convert_286603.pdf
3. Reach out to local banks, property owners, business owners, and others to inform them of the new program and encourage them to take advantage of grant matching funds.	Façade Team	Month 5 – on-going	How façade matching programs can benefit your community http://plannersweb.com/2013/10/how-facade-improvement-programs/
4. Process applications and provide ongoing support to commercial properties that have received grant funding, such as construction resources, permit procedures, etc.	Façade Team	Month 5 – on-going	Knoxville Façade Improvement Program http://www.knoxvilletn.gov/government/city_departments_offices/community_development/facade_improvement_program/ Rebuilding Together Mountain Communities http://rebuildingtogethermountaincommunities.org/contact/ Dublin (California) Façade Improvement Program http://dublinca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1712