

# Vacant Building Conversion and Expansion Grant Program Guidelines

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City of Owen Sound  
Community Services Department  
Planning & Heritage Division

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# 1.0 Program Goals & Purpose

The City's Official Plan highlights the Downtown as a focal point for commercial, social, and cultural activities in the City and as a major shopping destination in the area.

A key objective of the Official Plan is to maintain a clearly defined and visible River District that is vibrant, active, and attractive to users and maintains its heritage qualities (3.6.2.2). The policies of the Official Plan encourage a strong retail sector in this area and the provision of a strong street front retail shopping and compact pedestrian environment, primarily along 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue East and the adjacent blocks of 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Streets East.

In 2021, the City, in partnership with the Downtown Improvement Area (DIA), adopted the River District Action Plan (the "Action Plan"). The Action Plan encourages actions that will animate and active the City's River District and encourage the appeal for the area.

In the development of the Action Plan, it was identified that the downtown has notable vacant storefronts throughout the area, creating "gap teeth" for visitors and impacting their experience.

Specific actions identified by the Master Plan for increasing the approachability and creating a warm ambiance for the River District include encouraging targeted businesses to locate in or relocate to the River District and encouraging existing River District business owner and landlords to beautify their properties by leveraging Community Improvement Plan (CIP) programs.

The City intends to utilize the Vacant Building Conversion and Expansion Grant program as a means to achieving these goals and objectives of the Official Plan and the River District Action Plan by incentivizing the infilling of vacant sites along pedestrian retail frontages and revitalization of the Downtown and Harbour area.

**The purpose of the Vacant Building Conversion and Expansion Grant Program Guidelines is to** assist in the conversion of existing vacant space into a new or more suitable commercial use or a mixed use, as defined by the City's CIP.

## 2.0 Program Area

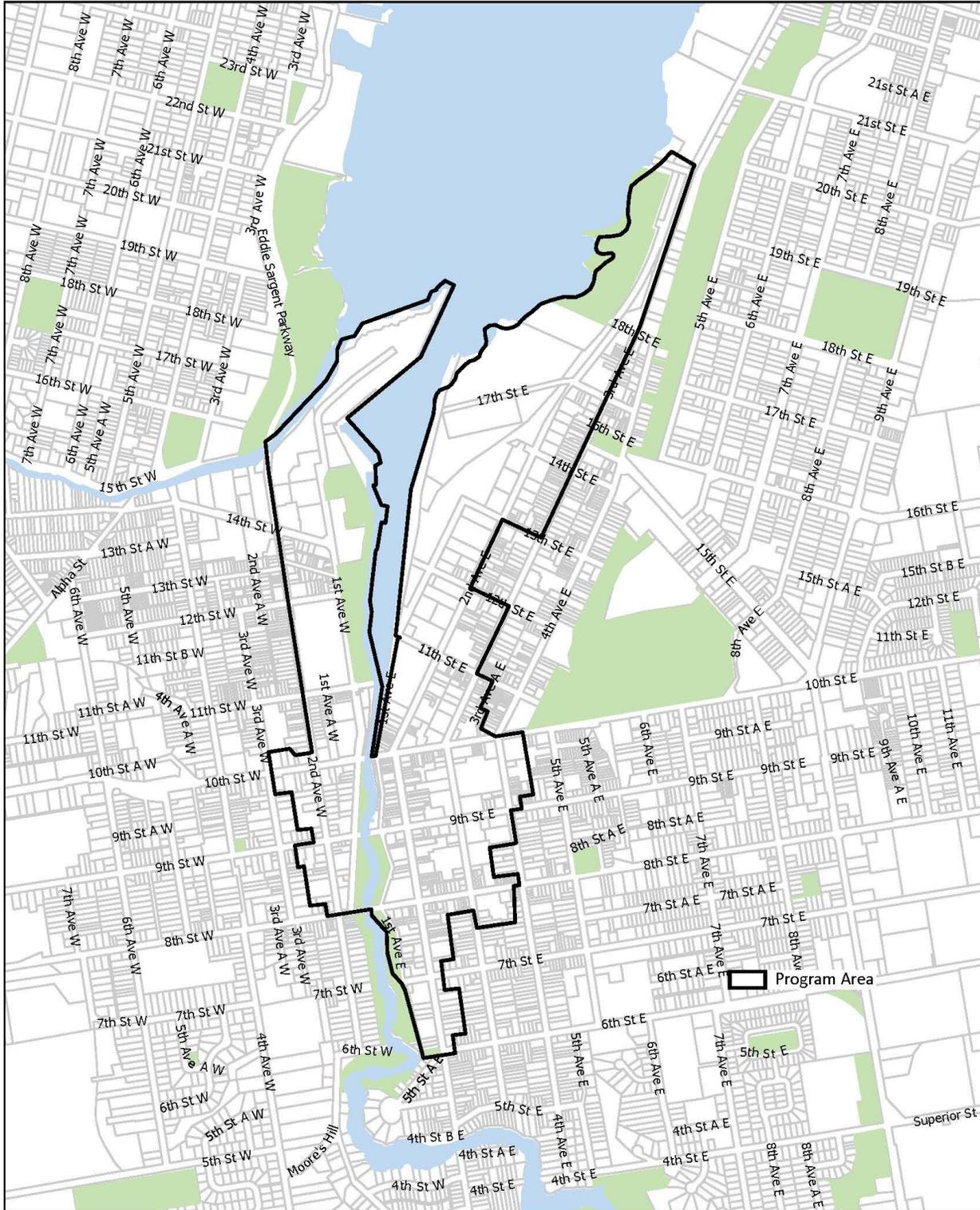
The Program Area establishes the boundaries for which the Vacant Building Conversion and Expansion Grant Program applies.

These boundaries are set by the City's Community Improvement Plan, which establishes a framework for the City's support and implementation of programs to encourage private investment and promote the ongoing viability and revitalization of the River District and Harbour Area.

For the purposes of the Vacant Building Conversion and Expansion Grant Program, the Program Area includes the City's River District, the East Harbour Planning Area, and the West Harbour Planning Area, as shown in Section 2.1 of these Program Guidelines.

In addition, all heritage properties within the City boundaries are eligible for incentives under this program. For the purpose of these Program Guidelines, a "heritage property" includes properties listed on the City's Register of Properties of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest and designated under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*.

## 2.1 Map of the Program Area



### 3.0 Program Incentives

The Vacant Building Conversion and Expansion Grant Program provides up to 50 percent (50%) of eligible costs, to a maximum of \$10,000 (per project, per year), whichever is less.

An eligible property is not permitted to receive Vacant Building Conversion and Expansion Grant funding in combination with Start-up Space Leasehold Improvement Grant funding.

Applications to the Vacant Building Conversion and Expansion Program are processed on an intake window basis. The deadlines to apply are as follows:

<b>Application Deadline</b>	<b>Consideration by Community Services Committee</b>	<b>Consideration by City Council</b>
October 31	First meeting in February	First meeting in March
March 31	First meeting in July	First meeting in August

Projects must have a minimum cost of \$5,000 in order to be considered eligible.



## 4.0 Who is Eligible?

Property owners and authorized tenants of existing **commercial, industrial, mixed-use, and multi-unit residential properties**, as defined by the City's Community Improvement Plan (CIP), are eligible to apply to receive grant funding under this program. For clarity, single-detached dwellings and other residences are ineligible.

## 5.0 Eligible Projects

The following are examples of building conversions and/or expansions that are considered eligible for grant funding under this program. These examples are not intended as an exhaustive list. In all cases, applicants should discuss their respective project with City staff prior to submitting an application.

For the purposes of this program, "conversion" is generally considered to be the adaptation of an eligible building, or part thereof, for a new use. Generally, a building, storefront, or other eligible rental unit, should be vacant or contain a non-conforming use to be eligible for conversion.

"Vacant" is generally defined as a building, storefront, or other eligible rental unit being without occupancy for a minimum of two (2) consecutive years.

A building "expansion" by contrast, is considered to be the expansion or extension of a new or existing use within the floor area of an existing building, storefront, or other eligible rental unit. An eligible building is not required to be entirely vacant in order to qualify for expansion. For example, an existing ground floor office space that proposes to expand into existing vacant space at the rear of a rental unit, or within the upper storeys, may be considered eligible under this program.

### 5.1 Residential Conversions

The conversion of an existing eligible vacant building into one or more rental dwelling unit(s) is considered an eligible project under this program. This may include the conversion of existing vacant ground floor or upper-storey space within the River District.

Residential conversions must satisfy the provisions of the City's Zoning by-law in force and effect at the time of program application.

## 5.2 Commercial Conversions

The conversion of an existing eligible vacant building into a new, more suitable commercial use (e.g., retail to restaurant) is considered an eligible project under this program. This may include the conversion of an existing vacant ground floor storefront or vacant commercial space on the upper storeys within the River District.

In all cases, commercial conversions must be supported by the City's Official Plan and permitted by the City's Zoning By-law in force and effect at the time of application.

## 5.3 Commercial Expansions

The expansion of an existing commercial use to increase the gross floor area within the footprint of the existing building is considered an eligible project under this program.

## 5.4 Non-conforming Uses

Conversion of a non-conforming use (i.e., not permitted by the City's Zoning By-law) into a new permitted commercial use or a mix of permitted uses is considered an eligible project under this program.

## 5.5 Adaptive Reuse

Adaptive reuse generally refers to the process of taking an existing building or site and repurposing it for a use other than for its original design. Adaptive reuse is often related to the revitalization and conservation of historic buildings.

## **Some benefits of adaptive reuse include:**

### **Maintaining Cultural Heritage**

Adaptive reuse is a form of historic preservation. It restores culturally significant sites that would potentially otherwise be left to decay or be demolished.

### **Intensification**

Often existing buildings and structures worthy of adaptive reuse are located within urban areas that have access to existing services, transit, and amenities. Adaptive reuse supports development and intensification that is cost effective and efficient as opposed to greenfield development.

### **Sustainability**

The adaptive reuse of existing buildings and structures creates less waste from construction materials and reduces carbon emissions associated with the construction process, such as the manufacture and shipment of materials.



Projects that employ the adaptive reuse of an existing eligible building are considered eligible. The adaptive reuse of a vacant heritage building that is listed on the City’s Heritage Register or designated under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*, is highly encouraged, and will be given priority under this program.



## 6.0 Eligible Costs

This section provides examples of eligible costs that may be incurred as part of an eligible vacant building conversion or expansion project.

### Electrical, Plumbing & Heating

- Installation, repair or reinstallation of electrical wiring or fixtures, plumbing, heating, cable, telephone, fibre, and other service-specific installations, including costs associated with retaining a qualified tradesperson, are considered eligible.
- For clarity, incidental fees for these services (e.g., bills, set up fees, shipping) are not considered eligible.

## Partitions, Ceilings & Rooms

- Installation, alteration, repair and/or restoration of permanent partitions or rooms and the installation or repair of ceilings and walls is considered eligible.

## Painting

- Painting or re-facing of interior platforms, walls and surfaces is considered eligible.
- A list of colours and finishes are required to be included on all plans when submitting an application.
- Painting previously unpainted masonry (brick or stone) will not be considered eligible.

## Flooring

- The installation or repair of flooring is considered eligible. The repair or restoration of flooring original to the construction of a building is highly encouraged.

## Masonry & Woodwork

- The installation, repair or restoration of interior masonry (stone or brick) or woodwork is considered eligible. The repair or restoration of original architectural features, having heritage value, is highly encouraged.

## Millwork

- The installation or repair of fixed cabinets and other structurally permanent elements and fixtures (e.g., guards and handrails) is considered eligible.

## Equipment

- Machinery and equipment that is bolted to the floor or “permanent” in any other sense (e.g., commercial kitchen appliances) are considered eligible.

## Demolition & Removals

- The demolition or removal of fixtures not original to the construction of the building and removal of hazardous materials (e.g., asbestos) is considered eligible.

## Plans & Studies

- It is highly recommended, and in some cases be required, that professional plans and studies be prepared by a qualified person (e.g., engineer or architect). Costs incurred for retaining a qualified person for the preparation of professional plans or studies will be considered eligible costs under this program.



## 7.0 Ineligible Costs

The following types of costs are considered ineligible for grant funding under this program:

- Any non-permanent or removable fixtures.
- Any furnishings, including office furnishings, computers, and art.
- Any intangible assets, such as software, human resources, or outsourced services.
- Any consumables, such as mats, office supplies, stationary, or plants.
- Corrections to comply any Building Code, Fire Code or Property Standards orders.
- Taxes, levies, interest, permit fees not charged by the City, or other incidental fees (e.g., bills, set up fees, shipping).

## 8.0 Contact Information

For further information on the Vacant Building Conversion and Expansion Grant Program or to discuss your project with a City staff member, please contact:

**Community Services Department**  
**Planning & Heritage Division**  
808 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue East  
Owen Sound, ON N4K 2H5  
Phone: 519-376-4440 ext. 1250  
Email: [planning@owensound.ca](mailto:planning@owensound.ca)