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City of East Providence launches storefront improvement program - by Roberto DaSilva

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Roberto DaSilva

East Providence is offering vital funding to qualified businesses to enhance their storefronts utilizing funds awarded to the city by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Small businesses were hit especially hard by the pandemic and the ensuing changes to the retail industry. This initiative is part of a continuous plan to provide tangible long-term benefits to small businesses and key commercial corridors. Storefront grants are now being offered to both owners and tenants of commercial properties to improve or restore the original character of the business' building, increase its visibility, and increase foot traffic.

This program is part of a larger strategy to reinvest in our community's business corridors and the neighborhoods which surround them.

The hope of the program is to breathe new life into existing small businesses and the historic commercial corridors of the city. In addition, the city is striving to attract any new businesses looking for a place to call home to take notice of this program to choose East Providence. The program's intent is to provide business owners impacted by the pandemic with the opportunity to boost their visibility and increase in store visits. It will also help to restore the small-town look and feel with the understanding that East Providence is a growing city.

The goals of the program are to:

- Bring energy to the commercial corridors of our city;
- Improve foot traffic for the businesses in our city;
- Preserve and beautify our city's commercial corridors;
- Create a pleasant walking environment by improving the visual aesthetics of commercial buildings in our city.

Eligible commercial property owners and tenants can receive a grant up to \$40,000 for eligible storefront improvements. For grant requests over \$10,000, applicants are required to provide a 25% match of the amount over \$10,000. Grant amounts up to \$10,000 do not require a match.

This program covers window repair or replacement, doors, awnings, painting, siding, window stickers, re-pointing of brick, exterior lighting, decorative architectural details such as cornices/parapet walls, sidewalk planters, window boxes, landscaping, and signage. In addition, ADA compliant entryways, murals and the removal of excess asphalt to improve drainage are eligible expenses for this program.

Business sectors that are targeted for this program include entertainment; recreation; accommodation; food services; personal care services. Businesses located in Qualified Census Tracts are given top priority to receive funding from this program.

For more information on the Storefront Improvement Program please visit: www.eastprovidenceri.gov/store-improvement-program.

Roberto DaSilva is the mayor of the city of East Providence, R.I.

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