

## Partnering with Soldotna businesses for a more vibrant downtown



PHOTO: CITY OF SOLDOTNA

Cars cross the David Douthit memorial bridge on the Sterling Highway in July. According to the State of Alaska DOT&PF, an average of 18,329 vehicles a day passed through our downtown in 2010.

# City Announces New Storefront Improvement Program

## Matching grants to fund exterior improvements to businesses on the highway corridors

In April 2011, the City adopted a new long-range plan, Envision Soldotna 2030. Among the many goals in the plan were several directly related to creating a more vibrant downtown, beautifying the highway corridors, and ensuring a healthy economy by supporting local businesses.

To achieve these goals, the City has initiated a new Storefront Improvement Program (SIP), intended to revitalize Soldotna's commercial core by stimulating additional private investment in our local businesses. By partnering with local businesses to fund exterior improvements, the program aims to boost traffic, increase property values, and improve the overall look of our community.

The SIP is a reimbursable grant, which can fund up to 50% of the cost of eligible

improvements, up to a maximum of \$5,000. Grant funds are paid as reimbursement upon completion of approved work.

The first year of the program will focus on businesses located on the Kenai Spur and Sterling Highways. Eligible participants include property owners and business lessees with written authorization from the property owner.

The SIP can fund a variety of improvements, including:

- storefronts;
- signs and graphics;
- windows;
- exterior lighting;
- canopies and awnings;
- painting and masonry work;
- permanent landscaping; and
- accessibility improvements.

Some properties - such as structures primarily in residential use and new construction less than 5 years old - are ineligible for the program.

For a full list of program requirements, please contact the City for the official program guidelines.

The application process is simple, and begins with the submittal of an application form and brief project description. A selection committee at the City will review applications on a first-come first-served basis, and select those projects they feel offer the greatest public benefit to the community. If selected, additional design assistance will be available for your use at no cost from one of several local design professionals.

If you would like more information about the program, or are ready to submit an application, please contact:

Stephanie Queen, Planning Director  
City of Soldotna | 177 N. Birch Street  
714.1240 | [squeen@ci.soldotna.ak.us](mailto:squeen@ci.soldotna.ak.us)





STOREFRONT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM APPLICATION

City of Soldotna Planning and Zoning Department 177 N. Birch Street Soldotna, AK 99669 907.262.9107 www.ci.soldotna.ak.us

Please fill in the information asked for below and return to the Planning Department

Applicant Information

Applicant Name: Property Owner Name: Mailing Address: Phone Number: Email: Name of business to be improved: Address of property to be improved:

Storefront Improvements

Describe the improvements you plan to make to your storefront:

Are you planning additional improvements to the property, which you will not seek reimbursement for through this grant? If so, please describe the total scope of work.

Estimated cost of the storefront improvements: Estimated cost of other work (if applicable): Total \$

Projected start date: Expected completion date:

Are you interested in 15 hours of free architectural assistance for your project? Yes No

Checklist. Please attach the following:

- Photos of your building, clearly showing all areas that will be improved.
- An illustration of the work you would like to do. Any of the following are acceptable:
  - A hand drawn sketch of the front of your building (does not have to be to scale)
  - A printed-out digital picture with written notes
  - A photo with post-it notes attached
  - An architects rendering
- Any other attachments you feel would help describe your project goals.

Certification by Applicant. I certify:

1. All information in this application, and all information furnished in support of this application, is given for the purpose of obtaining up to a 50% storefront improvement reimbursement grant and is true and complete to the best of my knowledge and belief.
2. The business and property owner(s) are current with all City obligations, including but not limited to taxes, licenses, water revenue billings, etc.
3. I have read and will comply with the requirements outlined in the Storefront Improvement Program Guidelines.
1. I understand that the City of Soldotna must approve the proposed exterior storefront improvements in order to be eligible for grant reimbursement funding. Certain changes or modifications may be required prior to final approval. A Commitment of Funds Letter will not be processed prior to the City’s receipt and approval of necessary bids for the approved work. Any work commenced prior to a Commitment Letter being issued will not be eligible for reimbursement, and any work deviating from the approved work must be *pre-approved* by the City in order for the work to be eligible for reimbursement.

Applicant Signature	Print Name	Date
Property Owner Signature (if other than Applicant)	Print Name	Date

Please return your completed application to the program coordinator

Stephanie Queen  
 Director of Planning & Community Development  
 Phone: 714.1240 | Email: squeen@ci.soldotna.ak.us

The City of Soldotna will review applications for eligibility and conformance with the program goals. Projects that are selected will be entitled to up to 15 hours of free design assistance, if desired, to refine and finalize the design plan. The City will then require a contractor’s bid for each type of work involved, prior to issuing a Commitment of Funds Letter, which will serve as the legal commitment of both parties. Under no circumstances will grant funds be disbursed for work completed before a Commitment Letter is provided.

## SIP PROGRAM GUIDELINES - 2012

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Storefront Improvement Program (SIP) is to revitalize Soldotna's commercial corridors by stimulating additional private investment in our local businesses. By partnering with local business owners and lessees to share the cost of beautifying the exterior of a business, the program aims to boost traffic, increase property values, and improve the overall look and vitality of our city's commercial core.

The program was established to meet several goals of Envision Soldotna 2030, the City's long-range plan, including:

- Promoting development of our "downtown area" to attract both visitors and residents;
- Encouraging redevelopment of key areas, particularly along the river and major highways;
- Ensuring a healthy economy by supporting a diversity of local businesses; and
- Improving the streetscape along the Sterling and Kenai Spur Highways.

### **GENERAL INFORMATION**

The SIP is a reimbursement grant, which can be used for exterior improvements to businesses in the City of Soldotna. The amount available for each property is 50% of the cost of eligible improvements, up to a maximum of \$5,000. Matching grants are paid upon completion of pre-approved, applicant-paid work. Under no circumstance will grant funds be disbursed for work completed before a Commitment Letter is provided. The total amount of funding available for the 2012 program is \$10,000, therefore the City anticipates funding anywhere from two to five projects.

Funds are limited, and grants are reviewed on a first-come, first-served basis. Applicants interested in participating in this year's program should contact Stephanie Queen, the program administrator as soon as possible, to begin the process.

### **ELIGIBILITY**

**Eligible work:** Rehabilitation of building facades visible to the street, including: storefronts; signs and graphics; windows; exterior lighting; canopies and awnings; painting and masonry work; permanent landscaping; and accessibility improvements.

**Ineligible work:** Funds may not be used for improvements that are not permanent or mounted to the building, sidewalk, or parking lot. In addition, the following items are ineligible for funding: roofs; structural foundations; security systems; interior window coverings; vinyl awnings; personal property and equipment; sidewalks and paving (unless removing paving to install permanent landscaping).

**Eligible participants** include commercial property owners and business lessees with written authorization of the property owner, located within the targeted project area. For the 2012 SIP, only those properties with frontage on or that are visible from the Sterling Highway from Sharkathmai to K-Beach/Funny-River road intersection, or on the Kenai Spur Highway from Knight Drive to the 'Y' are eligible to participate (see attached map, '2012 SIP Targeted Area').

### **Ineligible participants:**

- Properties primarily in residential use (ex. apartments or condominiums);
- Structures not facing or visible from the right-of-way;

- Government offices and agencies (non-governmental tenants are eligible);
- New construction, less than 5 years old.

## **APPLICATION**

The first step is to submit a written application, which requires a short project description and rough cost estimate of the work. The City will select projects that will provide the greatest public benefit to the community, as determined by a selection committee. The City of Soldotna reserves the right to prioritize projects and reject applications. To select and prioritize the SIP projects, the selection committee may consider any of the following factors:

- Creative value of the project;
- Current condition of the building/façade;
- Code compliance issues;
- Feasibility of implementing applicant's goals within the specified budget and timeframe;
- Visibility of the proposed improvements; and
- The degree to which the project furthers the goals of Envision Soldotna 2030.

## **DESIGN**

Projects that are selected for funding have the option utilizing additional design assistance if desired. The City of Soldotna has several local design professionals on retainer to provide up to 15 hours of free design assistance for each selected project. By involving local architects, landscape architects, designers, etc. the City aims to provide you with the resources necessary to make the most of this opportunity and get the most 'bang for your buck.'

## **BIDDING**

The City of Soldotna requires that you get one (1) bid for each type of work you are doing. All contractors must be licensed by the State of Alaska, and all construction contracts will be between the applicant and contractor. Owner labor will not be reimbursed under the program.

## **LETTER OF COMMITMENT**

Once the design is finalized, the next step is to submit the plan and all contractor bids to the City for final review. The contractor bids will be considered by the City in determining the final funding amount for the project. The City will then draft up a 'Commitment Letter,' which will outline additional terms and conditions of the matching grant, and will serve as the legal commitment of both parties as to the scope and quality of work and the amount of funds committed. Once a commitment letter is signed, the applicant will have one year to complete the improvements, otherwise the reimbursement will be forfeited.

## **BUILD IT**

After the letter of commitment is signed by the City and applicant, you may proceed with construction of your project. Please retain all invoices and material receipts during the project, as you will need these later when you request reimbursement from the City. Please also remember that only those improvements outlined in the Letter of Commitment are eligible for reimbursement.

## **REIMBURSEMENT OF FUNDS**

Prior to reimbursement of funds, all completed work will be reviewed by City of Soldotna staff as to compliance with the Letter of Commitment. Receipts and invoices will be verified, and the City will issue a

reimbursement check to the owner for the amount indicated in the agreement, or 50% of the actual project cost (if less than the amount indicated in the Letter of Commitment).

The City of Soldotna has the authority to determine eligibility of proposed work and confirmation of completed work. Certain work may be required or precluded as a condition of funding. Participants will be responsible for obtaining necessary regulatory approvals, including those of the Planning and Zoning or Building Departments when applicable. All work must comply with city, state, and federal regulations.

### **GENERAL CONDITIONS**

The following general conditions apply to all projects:

- Improvements funded by the grant shall be maintained in good order for a period of at least five (5) years; graffiti and vandalism will be dutifully repaired by the applicant during this time period.
- Borough property and sales tax must be current, and participants shall have no debts in arrears to the City when the Commitment Letter is issued.
- Eligible properties qualify for a maximum of \$5,000. You may apply more than once as long as the building doesn't exceed the maximum grant amount in a 5-year period. If a property is sold and the new owner wishes to apply for the grant, the five-year time frame still applies. The five-year time frame begins at the date the improvements are completed.
- The applicant must complete, sign and submit a W-9 in order for disbursement of funds.
- Property must be developed, and structure(s) must be at least five (5) years old.

### **TAX INFORMATION**

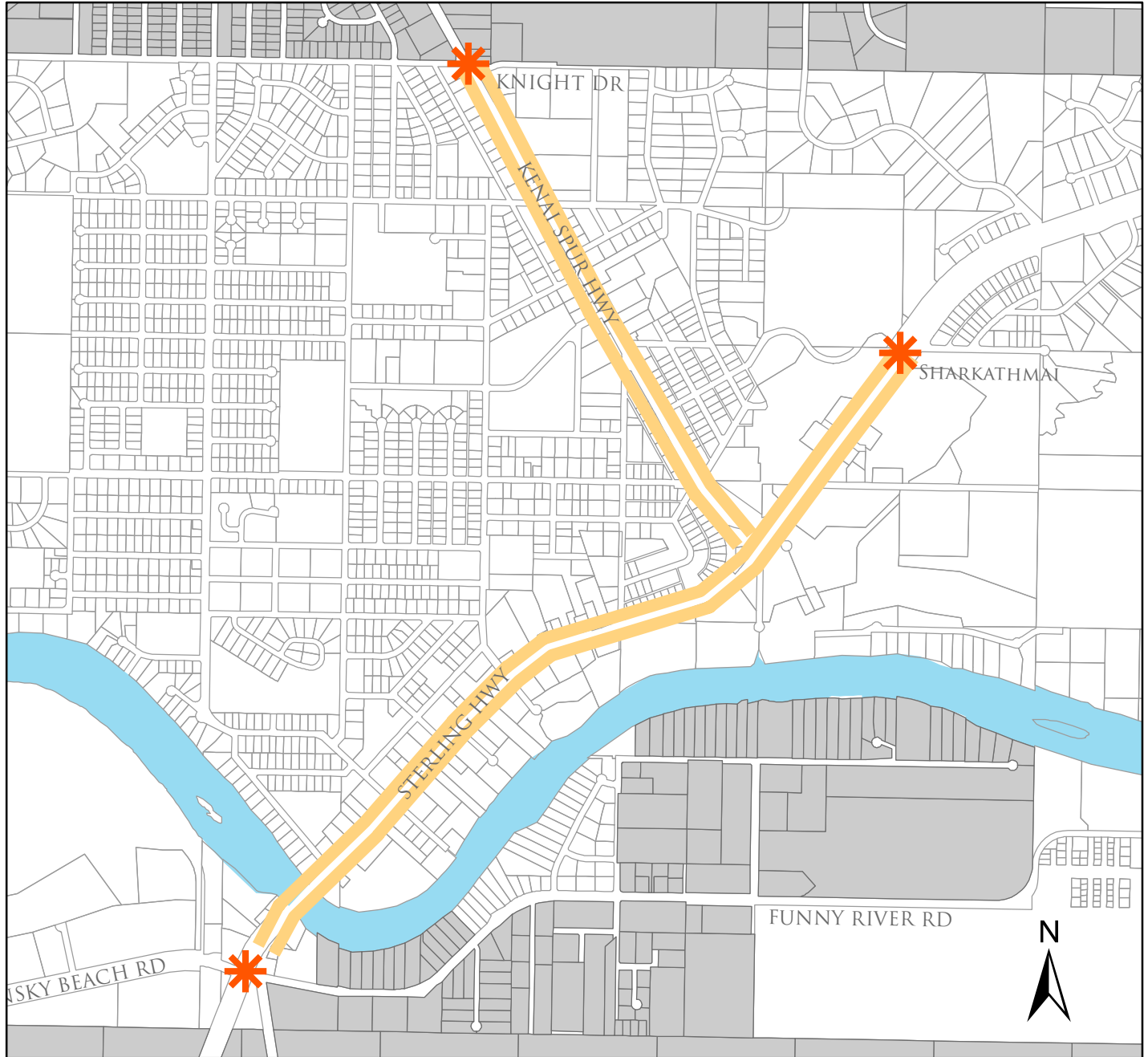
You are urged to consult your tax advisor concerning the taxability of grants. The City of Soldotna is not responsible for any taxes that may be imposed as a result of your receipt of this grant payment (directly or indirectly). Grants may be reported on IRS Form 1099. A completed Form W-9 (Request for Taxpayer ID Number and Certification) is required for selected projects prior to issuing a Commitment Letter, to help determine if Form 1099 will be issued by the City of Soldotna.

For more information, please contact:  
Stephanie Queen, Director of Planning & Community Development  
(907) 262-9107 | [Squeen@ci.soldotna.ak.us](mailto:Squeen@ci.soldotna.ak.us).

The City of Soldotna reserves the right to make minor exceptions to the program guidelines. Application forms are available at Soldotna City Hall or on the City's web site at.

# 2012 SIP TARGET AREA

STERLING HWY  
SHARKATHMAI TO K. BEACH / FUNNY RIVER  
&  
KENAI SPUR HWY  
KNIGHT DR. TO THE "Y"



The information depicted hereon is for graphical representation only from the best available sources.

The City of Soldotna assumes no responsibility for any errors on this map.

 TARGETED AREA

