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Avenues of Hope American Rescue Plan Act Grant Program

Avenues of Hope Initiative

The URA's **Avenues of Hope Initiative** is a place-based, people first approach that intervenes across all layers of successful, healthy, and sustainable main street development. This initiative focuses on seven major business corridors, in which the goal is to invest in existing small businesses and residents, supporting the inclusive growth of the neighborhoods. The Avenues of Hope corridors are:

- Chartiers Avenue (Elliott, Sheraden, Windgap, Chartiers City)
- Perrysville Avenue (Perry Hilltop, Observatory Hill)
- Homewood Avenue (Homewood)
- Larimer Avenue (Larimer)
- Second Avenue (Hazelwood)
- Centre Avenue (Hill District)
- Brownsville Road/Warrington Avenue (Knoxville, Mt. Oliver, Beltzhoover, Allentown)

The URA is working with the City of Pittsburgh to focus on workforce connectivity, commercial corridor activation, façade renovations, and other impactful MWBE and small business investments to support inclusive growth in these communities.

Avenues of Hope American Rescue Plan Act Grant Program

Through the Avenues of Hope Initiative, the **Avenues of Hope (AOH) American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Grant Program**, administered by the URA's Business Solutions Unit, is designed to award grants to advance eligible projects/programs that both support the mission of the AOH Initiative and align with the Federal ARPA Final Rule. Projects/Programs that receive funding from the AOH ARPA Grant Program must be located within the seven (7) AOH neighborhood commercial corridors and satisfy other eligibility requirements as set forth below.

Program Funding

This AOH ARPA Grant Program is funded through the URA's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding allocation from the City of Pittsburgh, specifically designated to AOH communities. This federally funded program was dispersed to Cities and Counties throughout the nation to aid in rebuilding and recovering from the losses experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The AOH ARPA Grant Program will support COVID-19 recovery on a neighborhood scale. Please note that if a grant is awarded, a portion of the grant amount will be awarded upfront, based on need and discussions with the awardee. Grantees CANNOT spend ANY funds on the awarded project until the project contract/grant agreement is signed by both the URA and the grantee and any other conditions required by the URA are satisfied.

Community engagement and feedback related to the AOH ARPA Grant Program is still being collected as it relates to each specific corridor. The following program guidelines may be subject to change, upon written approval of the City of Pittsburgh, to best meet the needs of each AOH corridor.

A portion of the AOH ARPA Grant Program's funding allocations may be used to fund up to 10 Avenues of Hope Storefront Façade Grant applicants and up to 7 Commercial White-Boxing Program projects within the corridors. Any such Storefront Façade Grant or Commercial White-Boxing Program projects to which ARPA funds are allocated must also meet the eligibility requirements set forth below.

Eligibility

The following criteria will be used to determine whether an applicant is eligible for the AOH ARPA Grant Program:

- 1) **Area Eligibility:** A project must be located within one of the seven (7) AOH neighborhood commercial corridors to be eligible for the AOH ARPA Grant Program. The AOH Neighborhoods are as follows: Centre Avenue, Chartiers Avenue, Homewood Avenue, Second Avenue (Irvine Street), Larimer Avenue, Perrysville Avenue, and Warrington Avenue/Brownsville Road. Projects that are located within residential areas that are adjacent to AOH business district corridors will also be considered. Projects that are located within one quarter of a mile of any AOH corridor will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis as per the needs of each AOH community. Information about Avenues of Hope, including maps, can be found [here](#). As discussed in 3. below, the determination of whether a proposed project is located within a Qualified Census Tract, an area that was otherwise disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, or an area that was impacted (but not disproportionately impacted) by the COVID-19 pandemic may impact which activities are eligible for AOH ARPA Grant Program funds.
- 2) **Eligible Grantees:** AOH-based non-profits, community development corporations (CDCs), business district organizations, small businesses, and individuals such as business owners, property owners, and partnering private entities. A non-profit receiving ARPA funds must be a nonprofit organization that is exempt from federal income taxation and is described in either 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(19) of the Internal Revenue Code. Small businesses receiving ARPA funds must meet the following two requirements: (i) have no more than 500 employees or, if applicable, the size standard in number of employees established by the administrator of the Small Business Administration for the industry in which the business concern or organization operates; and (ii) be a small business concern as defined in section 3 of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 632).
- 3) **Other Eligibility Requirements:**
 - a) Owner occupancy is not required. Approval of tenant-initiated projects, however, will be contingent upon the property owner's agreement to adhere to program requirements.
 - b) Community Advisory Committees within AOH corridors will be assembled to provide guidance and advice on development investments. See 'Evaluation and Selection' below.
- 4) **Eligible Activities:** The AOH ARPA Grant Program will fund proposals for AOH-related place-based initiatives that accomplish any of the following and comply with federal requirements for use of ARPA funds: assists in the revitalization of commercial corridors that were impacted by the pandemic; makes improvements to vacant and/or abandoned commercial spaces and/or public infrastructure in disproportionately impacted communities; provides commercial corridor support for recovery of COVID-19 pandemic hardships; and invests in AOH neighborhoods to improve health outcomes in disproportionately impacted communities, specifically through the creation and/or improvement of parks and open spaces near or within the commercial corridor.

Projects located with within a Qualified Census Tract or an area that was otherwise disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, as defined in 31 C.F.F. § 35.6(b)(2)(iii), may be eligible to receive assistance for the following eligible Activities:

- a. Rehabilitation of commercial properties;
- b. Storefront and façade improvements;
- c. Technical assistance to small businesses to assist with business planning needs:
 - a. Small business counseling;
 - b. Business incubators;
 - c. Online presence for commerce and marketing;
- d. Assistance for small businesses that were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as:
 - a. Additional costs associated with COVID-19 mitigation tactics;
 - b. Assistance for businesses that were in the start-up and/or expansion phase in early 2020, and had to put their plans on hold due to pandemic hardships; and
- e. Programs or services to support micro-businesses, including:
 - a. Financial or transportation support to operate the business.
- f. Vacant, blighted and/or underutilized property reclamation and stewardship to make vacant or abandoned lots safer for the surrounding community by:
 - i. Rehabilitation;
 - ii. Renovation;
 - iii. Maintenance;
 - iv. Costs associated with acquiring and securing legal title of vacant/abandoned properties;
 - v. Other costs to position the property for current or future productive use;
 - vi. Demolition or deconstruction of vacant or abandoned buildings (including residential, commercial or industrial) paired with greening or other lot cleanup; and
 - vii. Greening or clean-up of vacant lots;
- g. Construction of the following public space and neighborhood infrastructure improvements:
 - i. Streetscape improvements that enhance health outcomes of the neighborhood(s);
 - ii. Rehabilitation of vacant or abandoned commercial buildings;

- iii. Parks and open space improvements within the commercial corridor to improve health and safety outcomes.
- h. The following programming and projects that support the AOH initiative as it relates to COVID-19 recovery:
 - a. Adapting programming to fit into changing COVID-19 standards (outdoor and online venues); and
 - b. Upgrades to interior spaces to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19, such as kitchen and bathroom renovations.

The following are of eligible activities regardless of whether a project is located in a Qualified Census Tract/Disproportionately impacted area:

- a. Upgrades to HVAC systems to mitigate the spread of COVID-19; and
- b. Assistance to small businesses (as defined in 31 C.F.R. § 35.3) that were impacted by the pandemic (as demonstrated by decreased revenue or gross receipts, financial insecurity, increased costs, lack of capacity to weather financial hardship, or challenges covering payroll, rent or mortgage, and other operating costs) in the form of:
 - i. Funding for operations and maintenance of existing equipment and facilities, such as rent, leases, and utilities to mitigate financial hardship and in an amount that is proportional to the hardship suffered.

Ineligible Activities:

- Projects not located in the City of Pittsburgh.
- Projects not located within the boundaries of Avenues of Hope corridors.
- Residential projects that have no commercial component and are not part of a mixed-use development.
- Improvements or projects that are proposed to occur within a City of Pittsburgh right of way that have not been coordinated with and approved by the City of Pittsburgh.
- Improvements or projects that do not have site control of the proposed property.
- Any project which the URA believes, in its sole discretion, will not result in AOH ARPA Grant Program funds being spent by December 31, 2026.

Parameters of the Grant

The maximum grant request is \$200,000.00

There are two (2) tiers of the AOH ARPA Grant Program:

- **Tier 1 – \$0 to \$50,000**
 - No match required.
- **Tier 2 - \$50,000.01 to \$200,000.00**
 - Matching requirement: See below.

Matching Requirements for Grant Tier 2: Matching requirement of 10% (of the total project cost) cash equity investment by the applicant. Applicants (excluding private entities) may use prior investments/services to cover up to half (5%) of the 10% investment. In kind services that take place over the grant contract period will also be accepted. Matching funds from URA and City sources are eligible for this program.

The URA may disburse a portion of the total grant award at the beginning of the contract period, based on project readiness and need of the applicant. The remaining funds will be disbursed when the project is completed, following the submission of a detailed final project report to the URA.

NOTE: Property owners must be willing to rent at an affordable rate as part of the grant. All grant funds are subject to a funding cap that will be determined based on project eligibility by an internal review committee process.

Evaluation and Selection Process

To best address and meet the needs/desires of each community individually, Community Advisory Committees will be established within each AOH neighborhood. The purpose of these committees is to establish a fair and equitable review process that is community centered while determining feasibility and impact of each project. The Committee may consist of URA representatives, representative(s) from corresponding neighborhood community group(s), community leader(s), business owner(s) from each neighborhood, and other City agencies as needed. To ensure a transparent and ethical selection, it is recommended that Committee representatives recuse their participation in the Community Advisory Committee if/when their respective organization submits a project application for that given quarter. The URA will endeavor to recruit a sufficient number of Committee members so that a recusal will not prevent the Community Advisory Committee from evaluating to recommend project applications. Should the project application be recommended by the Community Advisory Committee, the level of the representative’s recusal will be communicated to the Community Advisory Committee, URA Review Committee and the URA board. Bias stipulations will be implemented if needed. The Community Advisory Committees will make preliminary recommendations to the URA Review Committee and will meet quarterly.

The URA Review Committee will consist of representatives from the URA, Department of City Planning, Mayor’s Office, Office of Management and Budget (“OMB”), and other City agencies as deemed appropriate. Upon receiving preliminary recommendations from Community Advisory Committees, the URA Review Committee will first work with OMB to determine whether recommended projects are ARPA eligible. The URA Review Committee will then select from among ARPA eligible projects and make recommendations for funding to the URA Board of Directors. Should the URA Board approve but request changes to a project, the URA will notify OMB and the project will be subject to an additional eligibility review by OMB. Subject to the provisions of this paragraph, the URA Board has discretion to accept or deny funding and funding recommendations. The URA Review Committee will meet quarterly.

Timeline

Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis with quarterly deadlines. Informational webinars and in-person application assistance will be held before the application round opens and throughout the open application period. Applications will be presented during the Community Advisory Committee meeting to gather input before the Community Advisory Committee recommends applicant awards to the URA Review Committee (Only basic project information from applications will be presented. No personal information will be shared with the Community Advisory Committee). This process will continue with recorded webinars available, quarterly in-person application assistance, and re-occurring quarterly Community Advisory Committee meetings, if necessary, until the funds are depleted for each corridor.

Quarter 1 Schedule

February 1, 2023 <i>Information Sessions</i>	Quarter 1 funding round opens. <i>Schedule to be announced.</i>
April 30, 2023	Applications for Quarter 1 are due.
May 2023	Community Advisory Committee and URA Review Committee meetings.
June 2023	Quarter 1 funding awards announced, contracting process begins.

Quarter 2 Schedule

May 1, 2023 <i>Information Sessions</i>	Quarter 2 funding round opens. <i>Schedule to be announced.</i>
June 30, 2023	Applications for Quarter 2 are due.
July 2023	Community Advisory Committee and URA Review Committee meetings.
August 2023	Quarter 2 funding awards are announced, contracting process begins.

Quarter 3 Schedule

July 1, 2023 <i>Information Sessions</i>	Quarter 3 funding round opens. <i>Schedule to be announced.</i>
September 30, 2023	Applications for Quarter 3 are due.
October 2023	Community Advisory Committee and URA Review Committee meetings.
November 2023	Quarter 3 funding awards are announced, contracting process begins.

Quarter 4 Schedule

October 1, 2023 <i>Information Sessions</i>	Quarter 4 funding round opens. <i>Schedule to be announced.</i>
December 31, 2023	Applications for quarter 4 are due.
January 2024	Community Advisory Committee and URA Review Committee meetings.
February 2024	Quarter 4 funding awards are announced, contracting process begins.

Waiver of Provisions

The Board of Directors of the URA may waive certain provisions of these guidelines based on a determination of the private and public benefits of the project.

Notification

The URA reserves the right to:

- 1) Reject any and all applications.
- 2) Notify the appropriate community-based organization of applications received from businesses in their neighborhoods.
- 3) Announce all awards publicly.

ARPA Guidelines

Applicants must comply with all federal and state guidelines and requirements applicable to use of the funds, including federal procurement guidelines, the Pennsylvania Steel Products Procurement Act, the Pennsylvania Prevailing Wage Act, and ARPA requirements, including reporting requirements.

For additional information, please email: AOHgrant@ura.org or Talia O’Brien, tobrien@ura.org