

Mesa Heights Visual Improvement Program “VIP”

A program for small businesses in the Mesa Heights Neighborhood

City of Yuma
Department of Community Development
Neighborhood Services Division
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Policies and Guidelines

General Provisions

The Mesa Heights Visual Improvement Program, “VIP,” provides financial assistance to business/property owners who wish to make enhancements to the exterior of commercial buildings in the Mesa Heights Neighborhood. A component of the Mesa Heights Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy, this program is intended to revitalize the commercial corridor, stimulate private investment, and improve the visual aesthetics of the neighborhood, which will, in turn, entice customers to the locally owned businesses.

The City of Yuma Neighborhood Services Division will provide a grant to eligible business/property owners for 80% of the cost of the exterior building enhancements. The business will contribute the remaining 20% of the cost. Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development funds the program. As such, certain federal requirements will apply.

Qualifying Structures

To be eligible for the program, structures must be:

- Located in the Mesa Heights Neighborhood (see map on page x)
- House a for-profit commercial enterprise
- Have a façade that is visible from the street

Eligible Applicants

The owner(s) of the building or the business operator (tenant) may apply for the assistance. Tenants must have the written consent of the building owner(s) and express permission to make building alterations.

Individuals, partnerships, corporations, and other legal for-profit entities may apply for assistance. Property owner(s) is any person(s) or legal entity that holds title to the subject property. In the case of multiple ownership, the signature of each title holder is required on all appropriate documents. Neighborhood Services will verify property ownership and require all persons currently on title to give written consent

A Condition of Title report is required and will be obtained by Neighborhood Services. This report will identify all owners of the property and ensure all owners are in agreement with the proposed building improvements. The Title report will also identify unpaid taxes or similar liens that could affect ownership of the building.

The following are not eligible to participate in the VIP Program:

- Residential buildings. Mixed-use commercial/residential building are eligible, but improvements must be limited to the commercial portion of the building.
- Home-based businesses.

Funding Sources

VIP projects will be funded by CDBG funds or other grants that may become available. Acceptance of projects is contingent upon the availability of funds.

Cost Sharing

The cost of the project will be shared by the Neighborhood Services Division and the applicant. Neighborhood Services will pay 80% of the cost of the project, and the property owner or tenant will pay 20%. The applicant must deposit the portion of the project cost into an escrow account at an eligible Title Company, approved by the City, prior to award of the construction contract.

Eligible Building Improvements

The project may include improvements to the exterior of the building, on those sides that are visible from the street. In some limited cases, interior modifications to abate significant violations of City of Yuma Building Codes will be allowed. Work performed under this program shall meet all applicable City zoning ordinances and building codes. City staff will recommend specific improvements, based on site analysis or architectural design recommendations and all components of the project must be approved by the Department of Community Development. Exterior improvements may include:

- Exterior painting and attached exterior lighting
- Rehabilitation of exterior facades to recover or preserve historical and architectural features of the structure
- Signs integrated into the architecture of the building
- Siding and trim treatments including attached awnings and planter boxes
- Doors and windows
- Removal of barriers to access for people with disabilities
- Soffit and fascia repair
- Decorative improvements

In order to qualify for this grant, construction activities must occur after execution of an agreement between the applicant and Neighborhood Services.

Ineligible uses of funds include:

- Parking lots and/or paving

- Landscaping
- Equipment and furnishings
- Property acquisition
- Expansion of the building area
- Signage or lighting that is not attached to the building

Program Procedures

Application and Construction Procedures

1. Application & Supporting Documentation Submission

Property owners/business owners must submit a completed application to the Neighborhood Services Division. Application forms and other related documents are available online at <https://www.yumaaz.gov/government/community-development/neighborhood-services>, or can be obtained directly from Neighborhood Services. Applications will be reviewed in the order in which they are received and in accordance with the availability of funding. Neighborhood Services will maintain a waiting list for all prospective participants.

Incomplete applications will not be reviewed. An application must include the following:

- Project description and supporting documentations including written description and photographs of the areas of the building to be improved.
- Estimated budget. Applicant should include any available information about the estimated cost of the project and the amount of investment planned for the building.
- Signage proposal. Signage must be attached to the building. The application must include a description that includes size, placement and content. Signage laws and ordinances will comply, in consideration of and compliance with the First Amendment. Signage enhancements must be approved by the Department of Community Development.
- Lighting proposal. Lighting must be attached to the building exterior. Lighting to illuminate parking areas is not eligible.
- If the project involves significant property rehabilitation, plans drawn to scale must be included.
- If the applicant is a tenant, a letter of support and consent from the property owner(s) must be included.

The City will verify all information and reserves the right to request additional documentation if necessary

2. Application Review

The Neighborhood Services staff will review applications in the order in which they are received and offer recommendations of approval. A preliminary site inspection will be required to fully assess the project. Approval or denial of the project will be based on the criteria included in these procedures. However, the Director, or designee, reserves the right to deny any project that is not in the best interests of the City, the community, or its citizens. Applicants will be notified in writing regarding eligibility status. If the applicant is determined to meet preliminary eligibility requirements, a Title Report will be ordered as described above and a property inspection will be scheduled.

3. Inspection

Neighborhood Services staff will conduct a site inspection to determine the feasibility of the project and to assist the applicant in identification of eligible activities. Photographs of the property will be taken, and a report prepared of the recommended property improvements.

The inspection report will be presented to the owner/applicant for review and a scope of work will be developed. Neighborhood Services will estimate the cost of the work, and if all parties concur, the project will proceed to execute the necessary agreements.

4. Agreements

Following approval, the applicant will be required to enter into and execute the Grant Agreement with Neighborhood Services to establish terms, conditions, and requirements for program participation.

5. Procurement

Regulations of the CDBG program require competitive bidding for the selection of a contractor. Neighborhood Services staff will work with the property owner/applicant to ensure federal procurement and labor relations requirements are followed. Contractors cannot be promised work before the required bid process has finished. Federal Regulations require the project be awarded to the lowest, responsive bidder.

6. Construction Contract and Payment Procedures

The applicant and the Neighborhood Services Division will jointly execute a contract with the contractor selected through the procurement process. The applicant will deposit their portion of the total project cost into an escrow account at an eligible Title Company,

approved by the City, before a Notice to Proceed will be issued. The construction work will be monitored and inspected by the Department of Community Development. Contractors will apply to Neighborhood Services for progress payments, in accordance with the construction contract, and both the applicant and the City must authorize payment. Neighborhood Services will make all payments to the contractor, drawing from both CDBG funds and the Escrow Account.

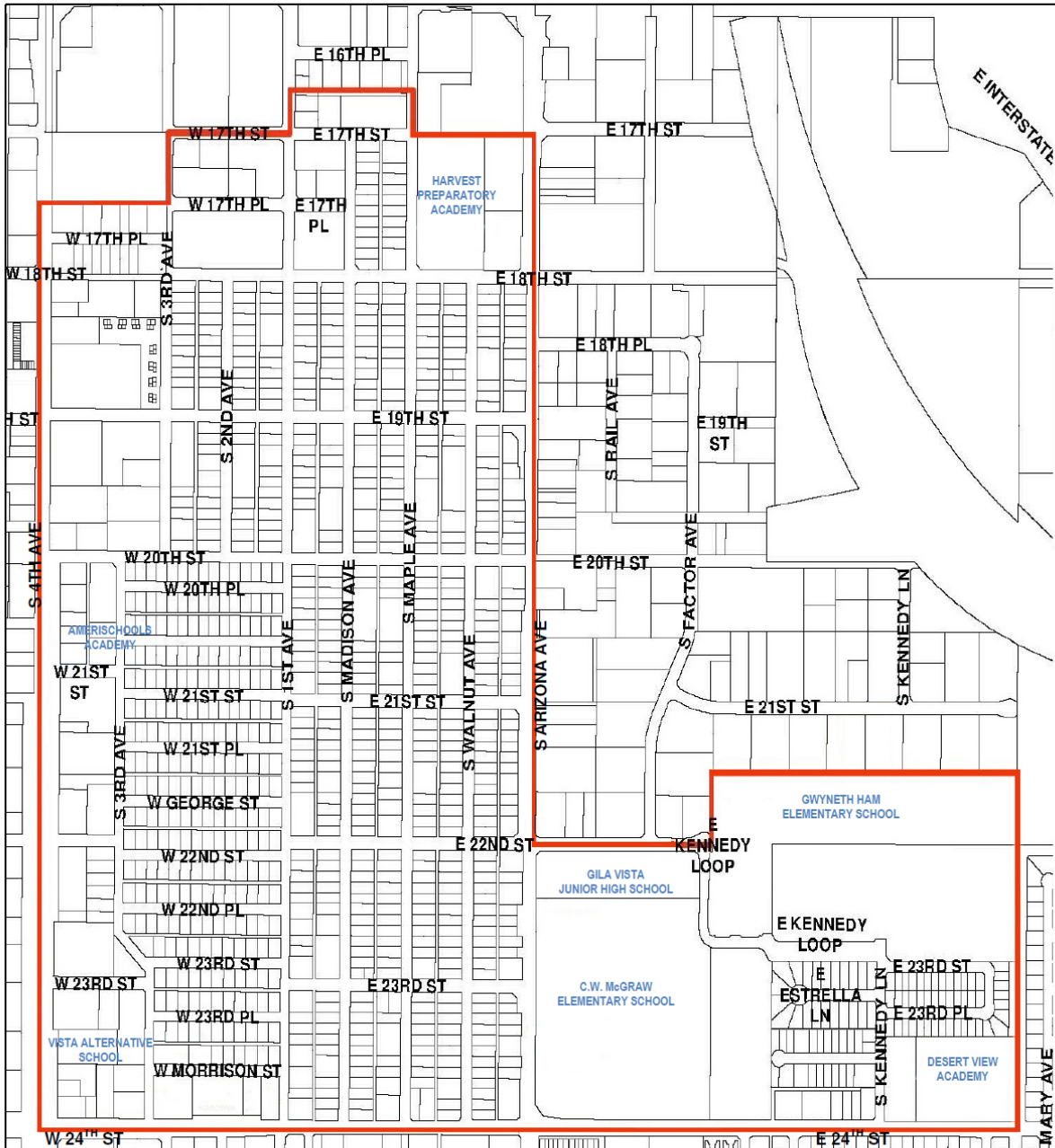
7. Close out and Final Payment

Upon completion, both the applicant and Neighborhood Services must agree that the work is satisfactory and in accordance with the construction contract. The project must pass all inspections required pursuant to the building permit, and the applicant and/or building owner must certify acceptance of the work and authorize Neighborhood Services to make final payment.

Other Program Requirements

- Environmental. In accordance with federal regulations, Neighborhood Services will perform an environmental review before the project commences. In some cases, this review will include consultation and concurrence from the State Historic Preservation Officer who may require the inclusion of design elements that preserve or protect the integrity of historically significant building features.
- Projects are required to comply with Davis-Bacon and Related Acts.
- Projects must comply with lead-based paint and asbestos safety regulations.
- Applications will not be accepted for improvements already underway.
- All properties enhanced under this program must be in compliance with applicable permitting, licensing, code requirements, and zoning regulations of the City of Yuma.

Figure 1.1 Mesa Heights Boundaries



Source: City of Yuma, Department of Community Development