

Curb Appeal Rebate Program

*****Applicants that have begun or completed construction prior to project approval from the SSA Commission are ineligible to receive Curb Appeal Rebate funds.*****

Overview

This Program provides incentives via a rebate for physical improvements to storefronts and facades along the public way. The goal of the Curb Appeal Rebate Program is to beautify and revitalize the Uptown SSA district, attract and retain businesses, enhance the streetscape, and provide design guidelines that enhance the character and qualities of the district. The Curb Appeal Rebate Program is subject to the approval of and is administered by Uptown United, the Uptown SSA Sole Service Provider agency, and under the oversight of the Chicago Department of Planning and Development.

Eligible Properties

Only properties within the boundaries of the Uptown SSA are eligible for rebates through the Program. See the description below and attached map. The boundaries include:

- Both east and west sides of North Broadway from Irving Park Road on the south to Foster Avenue on the north
- Both east and west sides of Sheridan Road from Irving Park Road on the south to Foster Avenue on the north
- Both the east and west sides of Winthrop Avenue from Argyle Street on the south to Foster Avenue on the north
- The west side of Clarendon Avenue from Montrose Avenue on the south to Lawrence Avenue on the north
- The east side of Clarendon Avenue from Wilson Avenue on the south to Lawrence Avenue on the north
- The south side of Foster Avenue from North Broadway on the west to Sheridan Road on the east
- Both the north and south sides of Argyle Street from North Broadway on the west to Sheridan Road on the east
- Both the north and south sides of Lawrence Ave. from Magnolia Ave. on the west to Clarendon Ave. on the east
- Both the north and south sides of Leland Avenue from Racine Avenue on the west to Sheridan Road on the east
- Both the north and south sides of Wilson Avenue from Clark Street on the west to Clarendon Avenue on the east
- Both the north and south sides of Montrose Avenue from Clifton Ave. on the west to Clarendon Ave. on the east
- Both the north and south sides of Buena Avenue from Kenmore Ave. on the west to North Broadway on the east
- The north side of Irving Park Road from Kenmore Avenue on the west to Clarendon Avenue on the east

Rebate Amounts

Approved applicants who make improvements that follow the guidelines of the Program may receive a rebate according to the following guidelines:

Façade, awning, and signage improvements, up to a 50% financial rebate for eligible exterior improvements with a maximum rebate amount not to exceed a total of \$5,000.

Eligibility is defined in more detail below, however the rebate:

- ***Cannot be granted before the application is approved***
- ***Cannot be used for improvements started before the rebate is approved***
- ***Cannot be awarded until improvements are completed in the allotted time, paid in full, and all necessary documentation has been submitted to Uptown United***

Applications will be considered in the order that they are received until all funding is disbursed for the fiscal year. If the list of applications received before the next SSA Commission review exceeds the amount of funding for the program, a lottery will be held to determine the order in which the projects will be funded and a wait list for funding should it become available. To maximize the number of eligible projects that receive assistance, the SSA Commission reserves the right to award a Rebate at an amount less than the allowable maximum.

Program Eligibility

1. *Rebate requests will not be granted for improvements that were started before the application is received and approved.*
2. *The application must be approved by the SSA Commission before construction can begin. If the applicant moves ahead with the project before receiving approval, the applicant accepts the risk that the project may not be approved for a rebate.*
3. *Applicant must fully and timely comply with all the requirements and deadlines set forth in the Application.*
4. *Applicants must be the entity paying for the improvements.*
5. *If applicant is a tenant, written consent of the property owner is required.*
6. *Only owners and tenants of street-level property located within the SSA boundaries are eligible for the Program.*
7. *The property must be free of liens and legal questions as to ownership of the property, excepting any mortgage liens.*
8. *Applicants must have proof of proper zoning and City permits for the improvements.*
9. *To the extent that the owner or tenant is supplying their own materials or labor for the improvements, profits and overhead are not eligible expenditures for the rebate.*
10. *Applications are considered on a rolling basis through the calendar year. There is no guarantee that funding will be available upon request of rebate.*
11. *If multiple applications are received before the next available SSA Commission review AND the combined rebate requested in all applications exceeds the available Program funding, a lottery will be held to determine the order in which the projects will be funded and a wait list for rebates as future funding becomes available.*
12. *The Department of Planning and Development has declared that SSA Commissioners are eligible to participate in the Curb Appeal Rebate Program, provided they meet all other Program eligibility criteria and abstain from reviewing and voting on ALL Curb Appeal Rebate Program applications during the period beginning when their application is submitted until their Rebate check is approved and processed.*
13. *If any change in ownership of the property or business participating in the Curb Appeal Rebate Program occurs during the improvements, eligibility for the Program will be suspended until a meeting with Uptown United staff and new ownership is completed and any changes to the original application are approved in writing. There is no guarantee that new ownership will be approved for the same rebate amount as the previous owner. All such applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis.*
14. *Properties that received a Small Business Improvement Fund (SBIF) grant in the previous 3 years or are currently enrolled in the SBIF program are limited to using the Curb Appeal Rebate Program for work items that are not included in the SBIF grant.*
15. *If the same improvement project already received funding from a different grant or incentive program, it is ineligible for additional funding through the Curb Appeal Rebate Program.*

Improvements eligible for the rebate must be:

1. Visible from the public right-of-way and have a positive impact on the building-front appearance
2. Completed in accordance with the specifications described in the approved application, following the scope in the application, reflecting submitted costs and by a contractor whose bid was submitted with the application

Eligible improvements include, but are not limited to:

- Tuck-pointing and masonry
- Exterior lighting
- Window/door replacements
- Landscaping
- New café corrals or full replacement of café corrals.
- Awnings
- New signage or sign graphics
- Parking lot landscaping, decorative fencing, and/or lighting visible from the street
- Improvements done to vacant buildings
- Improvements to residential structures

Ineligible improvements include, but are not limited to:

- Roofing improvements
- Interior improvements
- Rear, side, alley, or secondary improvements not visible from the public right-of-way
- New construction or additions
- Improvements that are considered regular building upkeep or maintenance
- Improvements planned for new buildings (constructed less than 5 years before application date), except for sidewalk cafes, awnings, and/or signage
- Flower boxes and planters
- Sidewalk café furniture considered temporary in nature, such as tables and chairs
- Parking lot improvements that face side streets, alleys or are not visible from the street.

Application Process

An application package must be submitted to Uptown United. Incomplete applications will not be considered by the SSA Commission. The package must include:

1. Completed application form, including the Summary of Cost Estimates form and signed Statement of Understanding;
2. Photographs of existing building and the proposed project area;
3. Detailed plans and specifications for the proposed project;
4. Detailed cost estimates from at least two contractors for each improvement task. Specify which contractor you prefer for each task. The Commission reserves the right to reject any questionable estimates, as well as implement such additional program rules and regulations as it deems reasonable. If the applicant plans to complete construction themselves, they must submit two estimates in addition to their own;
5. Owner's deed;
6. Tenant's lease, if applicable;
7. Current (within 90 days prior to the application date) lien report policy showing the property is free of liens, excepting any mortgage liens;
8. Certificate of Good Standings from the State of Illinois for all tenanted business
9. A list of applicable City permits to be obtained; and
10. Written consent from & contact information for the property owner, if the applicant is not the owner.

In addition, a signed agreement to maintain and adhere to safety and retail design standards will be required. These include, but are not limited to:

- Maintain generally clear and uncluttered display windows free of most obstructions;
- Maintain unhindered and clear lines of sight into the interior space from the exterior public way;
- Routine maintenance and upkeep of landscaping;
- Timely removal of faded materials or seasonal décor
- Lighting replacements;
- Cleaning of dirt from façades and awnings.

Review Process

Completed applications must be submitted prior to the next meeting of the SSA Commission. The SSA Commission meeting dates are posted on the Uptown United website.

After the completed application is received, it will be reviewed by the SSA Commission. This entity will review and accept or reject each application in its sole and absolute discretion. The applicant may be asked to clarify design elements if requested by the Commission. The application may be voted on in the first SSA meeting. If the Commission has questions about the application a vote may be postponed until a future meeting.

To determine what projects warrant the rebate, the following are the criteria for review:

- Proposed projects meet the program guidelines
- Project provides a positive impact on the beautification of the public way
- Projects that demonstrative the greatest need of public assistance
- The size of the requested rebate
- Projects that have not previously been funded.
- Applicants who demonstrate that the funding assistance will enhance the improvements
- Buildings throughout the Uptown SSA boundaries in order to accomplish geographic diversification of limited funding

Within 10 (ten) business days of the Commission meeting at which the application was voted upon, the applicant will be sent a conditional approval letter in the mail stating the rebate amount he/she can expect to receive for the proposed project (the “Approval Letter”) or an explanation of why the application was not approved.

Construction

Once the application has been submitted and necessary permits have been obtained from the City of Chicago, the applicant may proceed with the improvements in accordance with the plans and specifications submitted in their application. However, if the applicant moves ahead with the project before receiving the Approval Letter, he/she accepts the risk that the project may not be approved for a rebate.

To ensure a timely project construction period, and to ensure the awarded funds are distributed within the same calendar year as the project is approved, **all improvements should be completed within the same calendar year of the date of the Approval Letter**. Failure to complete such work within the same calendar year shall, notwithstanding anything to the contrary elsewhere in the Application or related program materials, constitute a material breach of the program requirements resulting in the withdrawal of funding for the applicant’s project without further notice of any kind. Requests for deadline extensions must be made to Uptown United in writing before the end of the calendar year, per Section 9, Emergency Amendment and Extension Process (below).

Emergency Amendment and Extension Process

If unforeseen circumstances are to arise during the construction process that would result in the improvements not being completed an extension to the deadline may be granted. If the applicant does wish to request an extension if a project is not completed or a request for reimbursement is not sent within the same calendar year due to: delays in construction, unforeseen circumstances, or changes to project scope, contractors, or costs the applicant must submit an explanation in writing to Uptown United requesting approval for changes. Changes to the approved scope, contractors, and award amount, as well as deadline extensions may require approval by the SSA Commission. Construction deadline extension requests must be submitted with an estimated date of completion. The SSA Commission's decision as to grant an extension or changes to previously-approved work shall be in its sole and absolute discretion. If the applicant moves ahead with the project before a vote is made, he/she takes the risk that the project may no longer be eligible for a rebate.

Rebate Request and Distribution

Once the improvements have been completed, the applicant must request the rebate by submitting the following documentation to Uptown United in writing (the "Rebate Request"):

1. Written verification that all agreed-upon work has been completed correctly
2. Before and after photographs showing the completed work
3. Copies of all required City permits
4. Copies of all paid invoices from the selected vendor(s)
5. Copies of the cancelled checks or credit card receipts for all eligible work that shows all work has been paid for in full.

After the rebate request has been received, a member of the SSA Commission or Uptown United staff will inspect* the project to verify compliance with the program guidelines and pre-approved plans. A rebate check will be sent within 60 days after the final inspection has taken place, provided the inspection confirms compliance, and pending fiscal year availability of funds. In some cases, applicants who complete work in the later part of the fiscal year may not receive funds until the first part of the following fiscal year.

****The SSA Commission member's inspection is limited to a review of the completed improvements only in connection with the applicant's application under this program, and in no way shall be deemed an inspection as to whether or not the repairs were completed in good order and satisfactory condition. It shall be the applicant's responsibility to verify adequacy of all repairs, and applicant's failure to verify the repairs shall not relieve applicant of any expenses or responsibilities resulting from such failure, nor shall the SSA or its representatives have any liability or obligations to applicant arising from such failure***

******Applications may be submitted for the following calendar year during the fourth quarter of the current calendar year, for example, an application can be submitted on October 2nd, 2025 and reviewed and approved that month for a 2026 calendar year rebate.******

Design Guidelines

These guidelines are intended to ensure that improvements funded by the SSA will benefit the public way by improving the physical appearance and the sidewalk appeal of commercial streets within the SSA's boundaries. The design guidelines seek to enhance the pedestrian environment, emphasize historic building elements, reduce non-transparent facades, and reinforce community identity through harmonious design while still allowing individual businesses to assert their unique presence and identity on the street.

Storefronts/Windows

No storefront may be covered or filled in and window openings should not be reduced in size. If original openings have been previously filled in, they should be restored to their original size and configuration.

Storefronts in the same building should have a consistent design and relate to the entire building as a whole. Display windows, entrances, signs, lighting, and other improvements should be compatible and harmonious with the original scale and character of the structure. Clear glass should be used for storefront windows. Glass block, tinted, spandrel, mirrored, or opaque glass should be avoided. Funding exterior security gates is discouraged. If existing exterior security gates or bars are present, they should be removed. Window signage, graphics, or other design elements should not obstruct the transparency of the storefront; a minimum of 60% of the street-facing building façade between 4 feet and 10 feet in height must be comprised of clear, non-reflective windows that allow views of indoor commercial space or product display areas.

Parking Lots

Lots facing streets and serving adjacent properties may be eligible for landscaping, signage, lighting, and/or decorative fencing along the edges that screen or buffer the area from pedestrian shoppers and produce a more harmonious pedestrian environment.

Awnings

There are three typical types of awnings: retractable, straight fixed, and curved fixed awnings (“bubble” awnings). Curved “bubble” awnings are not eligible for funding from the program. Awnings should be made of woven cloth or linen fabric, not vinyl or plastic.

Signs

Signs that are simple and compatible with each other make it easier for people to locate businesses in a commercial district, while contributing to the character of the district. Creative signage design and “theater district” style signage are encouraged. Signs should be designed as a permanent storefront element with the purpose of identifying a business and what it does and should be designed for both drivers and pedestrians. Signs should not be overbearing or cluttered with excessive information or marketing/advertising messages. Signs for previous businesses must be removed as part of any improvements. Portable or temporary signs, large signs on upper facades, rooftop signs on or above the parapet or cornice of the building, billboards, and other outdoor advertising signs painted or mounted on structures, except as otherwise described, are prohibited under the program. Exceptions of an aesthetic or historic nature shall be considered for approval on a case-by-case basis.

Wall Murals and Graphics

Wall murals and graphics can be an attractive addition to a building and also to an overall shopping area. Murals and graphics also can help establish a unique identity. If the side of a building proposed for a graphic or mural is highly visible from the main shopping street such artwork may be considered an eligible improvement.

Sidewalk Cafes

Sidewalk cafes are a way to bring more activity to the public way and contribute to a more vibrant street life. Sidewalk cafes should be located in coordination with the neighboring businesses in order to minimize obstructions to pedestrians.

Historic Buildings

Historic buildings are an important part of a neighborhood’s identity and character. Facades and storefronts of historic buildings should be repaired, and original features and materials should be maintained or replaced to match the originals. Improvements planned for Chicago Landmark buildings, buildings rated Orange or Red by the Chicago Historic Resources Survey (CHRS), and buildings listed in the National Register of Historic Places, must be completed in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings

www.nps.gov/tps/standards/rehabilitation/rehab/index.htm

A listing of historic buildings may be found at webapps1.cityofchicago.org/landmarksweb/web/home.htm. Applicants planning improvements for historic buildings are to seek advice from the Historic Preservation Division staff at the Chicago Department of Planning and Development when planning projects.

Resources

Information on permits is subject to change. Please consult the City of Chicago and/or a licensed architect/contractor for official information about permits. Uptown United and its agents accept no responsibility for information that is no longer accurate.

www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/bacp/sbc/building_permits.html

Building Permits

Building permits are issued by the Department of Buildings, City Hall, Room 900, 121 N. LaSalle St. 312-744-3600. To apply for and access permits online, visit:

www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/bldgs.html

Barricade Permits

Construction that will impact the public way requires a permit issued by the Chicago Department of Transportation. For more information, visit:

www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/cdot/supp_info/regulations_for_constructioninthepublicway.html

Awning Permits

Awnings and canopies that extend two feet or more over the public right-of-way require a Public Way Use permit from the Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection, 121 N. LaSalle St., 8th Floor, (312) 744-6060. A permit for an awning that extends LESS than two feet over the public right-of-way can be issued by the Department of Buildings. For more information, visit:

www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/bacp/provdrs/public_way.html

Sidewalk Café Permits

A permit is required to operate a sidewalk café during the sidewalk café season of March 1 to December 1. For more information, visit:

www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/bacp/provdrs/public_way.html

Electrical Permits

Electric permits are issued by the Department of Buildings, Electrical Inspections, City Hall, Room 900, 121 N. LaSalle St., 312-744-3400.

CURB APPEAL REBATE PROGRAM APPLICATION FORM

Proposed Project Address

Number and Street Name (include unit or suite number)

City, State, Zip

Applicant Contact Information

Applicant's Name (individual / business / association / organization)

Contact Name

Address (if different from above)

Daytime Phone

Cell Phone

Evening Phone

Email Address

Has the property or applicant received a Small Business Improvement Fund (SBIF) grant in the previous 3 years or are currently enrolled in the SBIF program?

Property Owner Contact Information

Property Owner (individual / business / association / organization)

Contact Name

Number and Street Name (include unit or suite number)

City, State, Zip

Daytime Phone

Cell Phone

Evening Phone

Email Address

Project Description

Describe the project and attach all necessary photos, plans and permit applications as outlined. Tenant applications must attach written authorization from property owner.

QUOTE #1 TOTAL: _____ 50% REBATE AMOUNT: _____

QUOTE #2 TOTAL: _____ 50% REBATE AMOUNT: _____

PREFERRED CONTRACTOR: _____

TOTAL AMOUNT: _____ REBATE AMOUNT: _____

Statement

Describe why this proposed improvement and funding is necessary to your business and the community. If your preferred contractor's quote is a higher amount, please explain why.

Has this property received any rebates through any other program before? ____ Yes ____ No

If yes, please describe details, including years, scope of work and granting organizations:

Statement of Understanding

The applicant (undersigned) agrees to fully and timely comply with the guidelines and procedures of the Uptown United Curb Appeal Rebate Program and the outlined specifications as agreed to by the applicant and the local SSA Commission. It is understood by the applicant that two cost estimates, copies of building permits, contracts, insurance, and invoices are required documentation, and that they have read the entire Curb Appeal Rebate Program Guidelines and Application and agree to be fully bound by their terms and conditions. **APPLICANT RELEASES AND AGREES TO DEFEND AND INDEMNIFY UPTOWN UNITED (TOGETHER WITH THEIR OFFICERS, DIRECTORS, AND AGENTS), THE LOCAL SSA COMMISSION, AND THE CITY OF CHICAGO FROM ALL CLAIMS AND CAUSES OF ACTION OF ANY KIND (KNOWN OR UNKNOWN) IN CONNECTION WITH THIS CURB APPEAL REBATE PROGRAM.**

Applicant Signature

Date

Applicant Name and Title (please print)

Applicant's SSN or Company's FIN #

*****If the applicant is not the property owner, the following must be completed by the property owner:***

I certify that I and the owner of the property located at _____, and hereby authorize the applicant to apply for and receive a rebate under the Uptown United Curb Appeal Rebate Program, and to undertake the approved Improvements outlined in this application package.

Property Owner Name _____

Property Owner Signature _____
Date

Application Checklist

Please use the checklist below to verify that all required materials are included in your application:

- ☐ Completed Application Form
 - ☐ *Project Description*
 - ☐ *Photos of Existing Building*
 - ☐ *Project Plans*
 - ☐ *Cost Estimates, at least 2 contractors.*
 - ☐ *Supplemental Documents (if necessary)*
- ☐ Owner's Deed
- ☐ Tenant's Lease (if applicable)
- ☐ Owner's Written Consent (if applicable)
- ☐ Lien Report showing property is free and clear of any Liens
- ☐ Certificate/s of Good Standing
- ☐ Applicable City Permits
- ☐ Zoning Approval (If Applicable)

Curb Appeal Rebate Program Timeline

Below is an outline of steps describing the process and timeline for the Curb Appeal Rebate Program.

- STEP 1: Applicant submits completed application and all required documentation to Uptown United.
- STEP 2: Uptown SSA Commission reviews application, and, if funds are available, conditionally approves (or denies) the rebate project and amount of rebate.
- STEP 3: Uptown United sends applicant conditional approval letter (or denial).
- STEP 4: Applicant begins work on conditionally approved project, including required permitting.
- STEP 5: Applicant informs Uptown United upon completion and sends proof of payment for the project with photo of completed project.
- STEP 6: Uptown SSA Commission reviews completed project (including proof of payment) and approves (or denies) distribution of rebate funds.
- STEP 7: Uptown United distributes approved rebate funds to applicant.

Uptown Special Service Area

