

From: [Grand Avenue Business Association](#)
To: [HRAHearing \(CI-StPaul\)](#)
Cc: [#CI-StPaul_Ward2](#); [Chris Jensen](#)
Subject: Commercial Corridor Grant Draft Proposal
Date: Wednesday, November 20, 2024 7:31:47 AM
Attachments: [GABA Support of HRA Grant fund 11.19.24.pdf](#)

You don't often get email from info@grandave.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

Dear Chair Noecker and HRA Commissioners,

On behalf of the Grand Avenue Business Association (GABA), I am writing today to express support for the HRA's proposal to create a Commercial Corridor flexible grant fund for business support organizations citywide.

Overall feedback:

Thank you very much for recognizing the challenges that business associations face in identifying funds needed to organize and support local businesses, create and promote vibrant community spaces, and expand employment and commercial tax base. This work is important, and it is exciting that the City is exploring additional ways to support commercial corridors and business districts in an increasingly challenging landscape. Generally, the eligible activities listed in the proposal would meet the needs GABA has identified, and the initiative overall feels responsive to our community's requests.

What would make this grant more workable?

Many neighborhood business associations like ours run mostly on volunteer power and limited staff, so we appreciate the simplicity of the proposal and encourage continued streamlining of the application process, disbursement, and reporting requirements.

We'd also encourage funding to be very flexible and allow for both capital and operational costs. Growing staff capacity to manage expanded programs, marketing, and events would be vital to the program's success.

Additionally, multi-year awards that offer consistent funding to grow capacity is an idea that would help achieve sustainable, long-term results. If funding cannot be counted on from year to year, then organizations may not be able to build programs that support long-term transformation.

What should be the maximum grant amount?

I would hesitate to place a maximum, particularly if some business support organizations hope to create a sub-grant program or engage in building or land acquisition. Operationally, GABA has identified a more than \$75,000 gap between its programming needs to revitalize the corridor and budget abilities within our membership and event sponsorship financial model.

What additional or alternative activities should be eligible for funding?

The list of proposed eligible activities is aligned with GABA's needs and goals for the corridor. In addition, we would recommend these activities be eligible as well: operational costs to manage new and eligible activities; and hiring consultants to provide services such as planning, design and community engagement services.

How to ensure funds are distributed equitably?

On one hand, the City should direct funds where the organizational infrastructure and plans already exist to ensure meaningful impact. However, there are many areas of St. Paul that lack business community organizing infrastructure but need and deserve this support. One idea could be to create a limited capacity building grant program to help initiate a new or revived organization with strategic planning support, in order to develop a long-term and sustainable structure. I would be happy to think through this more in partnership with the HRA.

Thank you again for reaching out to GABA to provide input into this proposal.

Sincerely,

Kim O'Brien
Executive Director, Grand Avenue Business Association
info@grandave.com | 651-276-4696
www.grandave.com

--



Grand Avenue Business Association
1041 Grand Ave
#535
St. Paul, MN 55105
www.grandave.com
info@grandave.com