

Ayer Office of Community & Economic Development

Monthly Report: November-December 2018

Respectfully submitted by Alan S. Manoian, Director of Community & Economic Development

Award of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Prospect & Oak St.

Infrastructure Improvement Project: The Ayer Office of Community & Economic Development (AOCED) & Ayer Public Works Dept. continue to administer, advance and engage Ayer's Grove Pond Neighborhood in preparation of the start of the Prospect St. & Oak St. Public Infrastructure Improvement Project scheduled for Spring-Summer 2019. In November, the Dir. of AOCED contacted, scheduled & conducted a group meeting & design review site walk with officials of the Ayer District Courthouse (including Judge Guzman) & Ayer Public Works officials in order to reach consensus on various street/parking/access design issues as relates to the operation of the Ayer District Courthouse. The meeting & site walk proved most beneficial to reaching agreement on design issues; we continue to work with our partners at the Courthouse throughout the entire design & construction process/project. An important Grove Pond Neighborhood Prospect & Oak St. Project Neighborhood Input & Review Session was formulated, scheduled, promoted & conducted on the evening of Monday, Nov. 26th at St. Andrews Episcopal Church Hall in the Grove Pond Neighborhood. The Neighborhood Gathering proved most successful & very well-attended; both Office of Community & Economic Development & Ayer Public Works officials facilitated the public session. Construction bid documents are finalized & the project will be going out to Bid in February 2019, with construction scheduled to begin in late Spring/early Summer 2019.

Pursuit of (Competitive) 2019 US Dept. of HUD Community Development Block Grant:

The (AOCED) is currently fully engaged in structuring, scheduling, formulating and administering the complex and highly competitive process of submitting a "winning" application to the Massachusetts Dept. of Housing & Community Development for a 2019 US Dept. of HUD Community Development Block Grant for the Town of Ayer. On the evening of Wednesday, Oct. 24th the (AOCED) scheduled, promoted and conducted the CDBG Block Grant "Public Engagement Hearing" in order to provide formal opportunity for the residents of Ayer to express their opinions and guidance with the CDBG project needs of the Ayer community; only two (2) Ayer residents attended this 1st Public

Engagement opportunity. The AOCED is currently working to formulate, schedule, promote and conduct a “CDBG Public Engagement Session” for the evening of Thursday, January 10th to be held at the Historic Ayer Central Fire Station Building on Washington Street. The (AOCED) believes that the most immediate & civic (2019) need for the application of CDBG Grant funds is to support and deliver additional affordable residential dwellings, in a walkable environment, in close proximity to public transportation (rail), and with access to job opportunities. The 2019 CDBG Grant application submission deadline is late February/early March; and as stated is highly-competitive. The AOCED will pursue a grant of approx. \$500,000.

Park Street Corridor Form-Based Code Formulation/Production Process

Schedule:

The Dir. of (AOCED) is in full production mode with the Park Street Corridor Form-Based Code zoning bylaw. The Park Street Form-Based Code zoning bylaw is proposed to be placed on the Agenda for a Special Town Meeting on June 10th, 2019. The Dir. of (AOCED) will be on the working agenda of the Ayer Planning Board (and in attendance) for all scheduled meetings between now and the scheduled June Town Meeting. The Dir. of (AOCED) has engaged the professional services of a Landscape Architect specializing in Form-Based Code formulation & production; Scott Collard of SNC DesignPresence of Parsonsfield, ME. The Dir. of (AOCED) will also be scheduling, promoting & conducting a series of Public Engagement Opportunities for the residents of Ayer to directly input on the design & production of the new Park Street Corridor Form-Based Code. The Dir. of (AOCED) is also launching an innovation local voter engagement platform whereby the Dir. of (AOCED) will conduct “Park St. Form-Based Code Design Input Neighborhood House Gatherings” for those residents who consistently demonstrate a high-level of civic responsibility by regularly attending Town of Ayer “Town Meeting

Ayer Commuter Rail Station “Historic Ayer Minton Tiles” Public Space Design Improvement Effort:

At the November 13th Ayer Board of Selectmen’s Meeting the Dir. of (AOCED) was afforded the opportunity to make a case for the approval of an appropriation of \$6,000 in UDAG funds to deliver the Ayer Commuter Rail Station “Historic Ayer Minton Tiles” Design Improvement Project. The Ayer Board of Selectmen authorized the funding, and therefore, we will be able to proceed with incrementally & affordably transforming the Downtown Ayer Commuter Rail

Station area from a place with very little design-quality & low-visual appeal to a place that presents a more high-quality design experience for our valued commuters, visitors and customers in Downtown Ayer and the Town of Ayer as a whole. The design approach will introduce a backdrop “Art Wall” composed of an innovative Fence Wrap product upon which digital images of the magnificently beautiful and often un-noticed Historic 1873 Robert Minton Taylor Ceramic Tiles (manufactured Near Fenton at Stoke upon Trent in England) that line the cornice & gables of the (1876) Ayer Town Hall. In order to properly & professionally photograph the Historic Ceramic Tiles high upon Ayer Town Hall the Dir. of (AOCED) engaged the services of a drone photographer; on December 4th the Historic Ceramic Tiles were photographed by drone. The Dir. of (AOCED) is currently working with graphic design professionals at J&S Printing in Downtown Ayer to prepare the images for digital transference to the Fence Wrap product which when completed will be affixed to the 6ft tall, black-colored chain link fence recently funded & installed by the MBTA at the request of the Town of Ayer. In addition, the Dir. of (AOCED) is currently engaged in intense historic research on the English-manufacturing/imported 1873 Robert Minton Taylor Tiles and the original architects (Weston & Rand) of the historic Ayer Town Hall Building in order to compose and install an “Interpretive Heritage Panel” as part of the Fence Wrap Design project, so that rail commuters, visitors to Downtown Ayer, and the general public can have a more memorable & meaningful experience learning about and appreciating the rich and fascinating history/heritage of Downtown Ayer and take some great “selfies” in front of the grand Robert Minton Taylor Tile Panels at the Downtown Ayer Commuter Rail Station; this is known as the “Economics of Place”. We all look forward to the comprehensive and long awaited (federally-funded) Ayer Commuter Rail Parking Deck & Depot Square Improvement Project becoming a reality in 2019; however the (AOCED) will continue to advance incremental, affordable, & HIGH-QUALITY public space design improvements to what was once Ayer’s “Town Square/Town Common” – Depot Square. Let’s make it Ayer’s (LIVING) Public Square once again!



**Ayer IDFA Commercial Lending Program New Products & Promotion/(Proposed)
New Ayer Commercial Building Façade & Signage Improvement Loan Offering:**

INTRODUCTION

This program is offered with funding provided through the Ayer Industrial Development Finance Authority (IDFA) & administered by the Town of Ayer Office of Community & Economic Development (AOCED).

The Ayer Commercial Building Façade & Signage Improvement Loan Offering provides funding to Ayer commercial property owners and business tenants seeking to renovate their building facades/storefronts and/or signs. The main

purposes of this program are to improve building facades located on Ayer's Commercial Corridors and to encourage business-owners and commercial property-owners to install attractive, high-performing & high-quality commercial signage in accordance with the Town of Ayer's municipal Sign regulations contained in the Ayer Zoning Bylaw.

The program will provide:

- Signage Improvement Matching Loans of up to \$3,000;
- Commercial Building Façade Improvement Matching Loans of up to \$15,000;
- At a highly-competitive 3.5% Lending Rate;
- Seven (7) Year Repayment Term;

Commercial properties must be located within Ayer's Downtown Business Zone and/or General Business Zones (see attached map).

Eligible work includes, but is not limited to:

- Fabrication and installation of new signage and/or awnings;
- Repair of existing signage and/or awnings;
- Painting of exterior building facades and trim;
- Repointing/cleaning of brick or stone work;
- Refurbishment of storefront lighting;
- Replacement of exterior doors and windows.

The Ayer IDFA's Loan Program will not fund any improvements made prior to a formal vote of the Ayer IDFA Board of Directors to fund the proposed project, and prior to receiving a loan commitment letter from the Ayer IDFA (for both Sign Loans & Building Façade Loans).

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The following criteria will be considered by the Ayer IDFA when awarding funding for either façade work or signage:

1. Preference will be given to small business owners who are not required by contractual arrangement to maintain standardized décor, architectural, signage or similar features. Notwithstanding the preference, funding may be awarded to owners with such contractual arrangements.
2. The commercial building must be located in Ayer's Downtown Business Zone and/or General Business Zone;

4. Commercial tenants must have written approval from their property owners in order to apply for and receive funding.
5. The owner of the commercial property which is the subject of the application must be up to date on all municipal financial obligations at the time of application submission. Such obligations include real estate and personal property taxes, and water and sewer charges.
6. Applicants must comply with all State and local laws and regulations pertaining to licensing, permitting, Building Code and zoning requirements.

DESIGN GUIDELINES & REQUIREMENTS

Any alteration, purchase or improvement made prior to receiving from the Ayer IDFA a written loan commitment letter (for both Sign Loans & Building Façade Loans) will not be eligible for funding through this Program.

Signage (Design Standards & Design Assistance)

- The proposed new sign/s shall be designed with a darker-colored background or field (blue, black, red, green, etc.) with white, gold or other light-colored lettering;
- The proposed new sign/s if located in the Downtown Business Zone shall not be internally illuminated, but rather externally illuminated;
- The proposed new sign/s if located in the General Business Zone may be internally illuminated, with a darker-colored background or field with the internal light projecting through the sign lettering;
- Proposed new awning/s must have a darker-colored background or field (Black, blue, red, green, etc.), and the text/symbols must be white, gold, silver, or another light-colored lettering. The awning must be made of woven acrylic fabric and treated with a water-resistant solution.
- Signs and awnings must be aesthetically & architecturally appropriate for the commercial building (especially historic buildings located in the Downtown Business Zone) in terms of color, design, and style.
- Sign Design Assistance: The Director of the Ayer Office of Community & Economic Development will provide professional signage design assistance for all loan applicants.

The Ayer IDFA will give lending preference to the following types of signs:

- Replacement of a sign which was installed before the current Sign Regulations (Section 9.5 of the Town of Ayer Zoning Bylaw) was adopted;
- Replacement of a non-conforming sign with a sign that conforms to the Town of Ayer Zoning Bylaw;
- A sign installation which is part of an overall storefront facade restoration;

- A sign designed to complement or enhance the architectural features of a building.

The following are sign-related lending eligible costs:

- The removal and disposal of a non-compliant or obsolete sign, including the disposal of any hazardous or other materials used in the sign which require special handling;
- The sign design costs, if design is by a licensed architect or engineer;
- The fabrication of the sign by a qualified sign company;
- The installation of the sign, including minor repairs needed to the sign field or other building element.

Commercial Building Façade Improvements

The program offers commercial loans up to \$15,000 per building. Loans are offered at a highly-competitive Interest Rate of 3.5% and due and payable seven (7) years from the date of the loan commitment letter or upon sale or transfer of ownership of the property, whichever occurs earlier.

Applications for funding must be approved by a majority of Ayer IDFA Board of Directors. Formal design fees associated with a Building Façade Improvement Project may be included in the project cost up to a maximum of \$3,000.

All proposed façade work, whether funded with a loan from this program or by the owner/tenant, must be compatible, to the extent appropriate, with the character and architecture of the building as well as with other buildings on the street.

Owners/tenants of buildings with significant architectural details and features are strongly encouraged to restore and maintain these features as part of the proposed work.

Elements of work to be funded by the program must be visible from either a public way or a public parking lot. The following are examples of façade-related work that is eligible for inclusion in the loan program; (other project types may also be eligible for funding):

- Restoration of architectural details on an historic building and/or removal of elements which cover architectural details;
- Window and door replacement;
- Cleaning, repainting or re-siding of building facades;
- Replacement of storefront and signage lighting that is energy-conserving and visually appealing;
- Installation of street grade entrances where none exist or the removal of architectural barriers to public accessibility;

- Other improvements, if they are deemed in keeping with the objectives of the Program and approved by vote of the Ayer IDFA before being undertaken;

Participants in the loan program for Building Facades will be required to sign a Commercial Promissory Note and a Security Agreement. Awardees will be responsible for maintaining the work completed as presentable and in good condition until the commercial loan is repaid;

All prospective Loan Program participants must follow the procedures outlined below:

1. In cases where the applicant is the tenant and not the building owner, applicant must obtain the property owner's permission to apply for funding and to perform the work included in the loan application to be submitted;
2. Applicant must consult with the Town of Ayer Building Inspector and Ayer Office of Community & Economic Development to confirm the proposed sign/s and/or building façade construction will meet local zoning regulations and Building Code requirements, where applicable;
3. Applicant files a completed Loan Application packet (attached) including all required forms and attachments;
4. The Loan Application is reviewed by the Ayer IDFA Board of Directors and approved/disapproved within thirty (30) days of submission. If the application is approved, the Ayer IDFA will forward a loan commitment letter to the applicant. Any work undertaken before receiving a formal loan commitment letter is ineligible for funding;
5. Applicant has the Sign installed and/or has the Building Façade work completed;
6. Ayer Building Inspector/Code Enforcement Officer & Director of Ayer Office of Community & Economic Development (AOCED) inspects the completed installation/work;
7. The applicant submits (a) a letter indicating satisfaction with the completed work; (b) and all applicable vendor invoice/s.

APPLICATION AND APPROVAL PROCEDURES

The Ayer IDFA Board of Directors reviews the commercial lending request and formally votes to either approve or deny the loan application;

The Ayer IDFA reserves the right, without further notice, to amend by majority vote of its members, the program's policies, guidelines or terms, to establish priority or waiting lists, or to suspend program operations or deny applications

when deemed in the interest of the program and/or the Ayer IDFA & the Town of Ayer, MA.

Applicants wishing to participate in this program or those who would like additional information should contact Alan S. Manoian AICP, Director of Ayer Office of Community & Economic Development, at Ayer Town Hall at 978.772.8206 and/or amanoian@ayer.ma.us. Applications should be submitted by regular mail or hand-delivery to:

Ayer Town Hall
Office of Community & Economic Development
Attn: Dir. Alan S. Manoian AICP
1 Main Street
Ayer, MA 01432

Improved Ayer Movie/Film Production Application Form & Standards:

The Dir. of (AOCED) scheduled & conducted a municipal team meeting on Dec. 19th at Ayer Town Hall to present a DRAFT "Improved Ayer Movie/Film Production Application Form & Standards" which was produced by the (AOCED); which serves and is responsible as the Town of Ayer Filming/Movie Administrative Office. The group discussion reviewed & commented on many Ayer-based Movie/Film Production issues, practices, requirements, etc. including Fee Schedules, Public Notification Practices, Film Production & Municipal Offices Intercommunication, Traffic & Parking Management, Legal Requirements, Regulatory Requirements, etc. The Dir. of (AOCED) will process the results of the group discussion and compose/produce the 2nd DRAFT for final review and advance with the issuance of a new & improved Town of Ayer Movie/Film Production Application Form & Standards in January 2019.

Community Development Program Manager:

Within the Housing Rehab portion of this grant the office is working with two emergency cases. One property has been approved and evaluated by the Towns Housing Rehab Specialist. We will be going out to bid by the end of this month or early next month. The office has been tracking the ADA Transition Plan, planning grant and it is hoped we will hear on this any day now. With the help of Heather Hampson of the Building Department the office submitted a 2017 update on housing unit development for the U.S. Census Bureau through

the University of Massachusetts, Lowell. This will be helpful when we submit our application for Housing Choice Designation.

The AOCED reviewed and made recommendations regarding the proposed 40B residential development off Washington Street (so-called Ayer Solar II site). From an affordable housing prospective this could be a beneficial location for family-housing and affordable quality housing in immediate proximity to Ayer's two largest employers, Nashoba Valley Medical Center & Ayer/ Shirley Regional School Campus. Should the project go forward the office is putting together a list of requirements that would make this a good project for the Town's Subsidized Housing Goals. In January the department will be closing out the FY 18 Drug Court grant.

American Superconductor & Local education Institutions "Innovation Technology Apprenticeship Program" Development:

The Dir. of (AOCED) contacted, coordinated, scheduled and facilitated the first meeting between representatives of Nashoba Valley Technical School and officials of American Superconductor in order to formulate, structure and launch the new and exciting "Innovation Technology Apprenticeship Program" between both Ayer/Shirley Regional School District & Nashoba Valley Technical School in partnership with American Superconductor; the first meeting was conducted on Thursday, October 25th at the new & beautifully renovated Global Headquarters of American Superconductor at 114 East Main Street (former Cains Plant). The (AOCED) thanks the representatives of the Nashoba Valley Technical School for responding promptly and enthusiastically to the new technological/educational partnership opportunity advanced through the (AOCED) and the Town of Ayer. The (AOCED) outreached to both the Ayer/Shirley Regional School District & Nashoba Valley Technical School at the same time; and we are hopeful that the Ayer/Shirley Regional School District will also soon be able to engage with our partners at American Superconductor early in 2019. The first meeting between Nashoba Tech & American Superconductor was followed up by a visit to Nashoba Valley technical School by American Superconductor officials; this is the start of a great & promising educational/economic development partnership in Ayer.

Implementation of the Ayer Master Plan:

In response to the Ayer Town Manager's directive for all municipal departments to take action in advancing the departmental Objectives & Goals contained in the Implementation Plan section of the Ayer Master Plan, the Dir. of (AOCED)

immediately responded by demonstrating leadership & initiative in formulating, proposing and advancing the “Ayer Implementation Plan Luncheon Roundtable Sessions” platform. This concept was prepared and forwarded to the Office of the Town Manger on October 22nd for consideration and directive. At the monthly November & December Municipal Dept. Head Meetings the Town Manager authorized this approach and directed Dir. of (AOCED) to proceed with the proposed Implementation Plan initiative. Therefore, the 1st in a series (twice a month) of scheduled Implementation Plan municipal team sessions will begin on Wednesday afternoon January 9th at Ayer Town Hall. The Dir. of (AOCED) will also be inviting our state & regional development partners (MRPC, MART, NRWA, MassDOT, etc.) as well as members of Ayer municipal boards & commissions to actively engage in this important municipal process. The 2018 Ayer Master Plan will not “rest on a shelf”!

Ayer Master Plan “Off-the-Shelf”

Municipal Implementation
Luncheon Roundtable Series
Wednesday Afternoons
12:30PM-2:00PM
Ayer Town Hall

- Wednesday, January 9th – “Transportation & Circulation Goals”
- Wednesday, January 23rd – “Resources Goals”
- Wednesday, February 6th – “Municipal Services & Facilities Goals”
- Wednesday, February 20th – “Land Use Goals”
- Wednesday, March 6th – “Housing Goals”
- Wednesday, March 20th – “Economic Development Goals”
- Wednesday, March 27th – “Infrastructure Goals”

Each week the “Luncheon Roundtable Group” will focus their attention, perspective, resources, contributions and guidance to (support fellow departments & municipal colleagues) in working together to achieve the GOALS adopted in the 2018 Town of Ayer Master Plan.

Proposed Invitees:

- Town of Ayer Municipal Departments/Staff
- Town of Ayer Boards/Committees/Commissions
- Town of Ayer Neighborhood Representatives

- Town of Ayer Civic Organizations
- Town of Ayer Business/Commercial Organizations
- Local & State Elected Officials
- State/Regional/Federal Agency Officials

The Ayer Office of Community & Economic Development will provide a delicious light luncheon each Wednesday afternoon from a different local Ayer eatery/restaurant for our “Luncheon Roundtable Group” – so we can “dig-right-in” to Implementing the Ayer Master Plan.

Transportation & Circulation

Wednesday, January 9th

Facilitator: Dir. AOCED

Lead: Dept. of Public Works

Municipal Participants:

- Office of the Town Manager;
- DPW Municipal Engineer;
- DPW Foreman;
- Town Planner;
- Municipal ADA Administrator
- Ayer Police Dept.;
- Dir. AOCED;
- Ayer Fire Dept.;
- Ayer Council on Aging Representative;
- ASRSD Student Transportation (Dee Bus);
- Ayer Bicycling Community Representative;
- Devens Shuttle Representative;
- MRPC Representative;
- MART Representative;
- MassDOT Representative;
- Ayer Commuter Rail Advisory Comm. Representative;
- Ayer-Regional Trucking Company Representative;