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## Staff Report

**RDA ITEM** 16

**To:** Lemoore Redevelopment Agency Board  
**From:** Judy Holwell, Redevelopment Project Manager  
**Date:** March 9, 2011  
**Subject:** RDA – Commercial Façade Improvement Program

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### Discussion

On January 18 and again on March 1, the Board was asked to consider changes to our Redevelopment Agency (RDA) Commercial Façade Improvement Program. The following summarizes the discussion and recommended changes:

- 1) That an additional \$3,000 be granted for each project so that the applicant could hire a licensed architect. The benefit of enlisting the expertise of an architect is to obtain better facade designs (requiring less time for Site Plan Review) and to provide oversight of the project throughout construction (making sure the job gets done right).

A discussion ensued regarding the amount for the architect and that it would be less confusing if the amount was equal to the Micro Enterprise Grant Program, which is \$5,000, with the understanding that an equal amount of services would be provided by the architect. It is important to note that the Micro Enterprise Grant Program is a one time infusion of grant funds from the State of California to assist small, low income businesses that meet the Targeted Income Group category (owner of business must be low income and the business must have five or fewer employees). The \$5,000 amount was established to make sure there was enough money allocated for an architect so that the applicants would not have any out-of-pocket expense. The Micro Enterprise Grant Program will end December 31, 2011, whereas the RDA Façade Program is expected to be an ongoing program.

Staff's recommendation to grant an additional \$3,000 so the applicant could hire a licensed architect is meant to be an incentive and it may be enough to pay for the entire cost of the architect. If the architect's fee is greater than \$3,000, the applicant would be responsible for paying the remainder. However, any additional out-of-pocket expense would count toward his/her 25% grant match.

- 2) That RDA would pay the City for the cost of the Design Review Fee (currently \$260).
- 3) That the applicant could select a local contractor whose bid is within 10% of the lowest bid. A local contractor was defined as any licensed contractor with a physical presence/address in Kings County.
- 4) That the Board determine the amount of match required by the applicant. Following a lengthy discussion, the majority of the Board was in favor of keeping the match at 25%.
- 5) That the applicant pay an upfront amount of \$3,000 to be put in an escrow account to ensure project completion. The upfront amount would count toward their 25% match.
- 6) A discussion was also brought up that the RDA should pay 100% of the brick stamping, which is required in the downtown district for beautification and to connect irrigation and electrical. This item was not listed as a requirement in the original RDA Façade Program Guidelines approved by the Board. However, brick stamping has recently become a City requirement when any property in the downtown area is improved. This requirement has been the cause of several contentious discussions during the City's Architectural Design Review process.

Close to ten years ago, a variety of streetscape improvements were performed downtown, including brick stamping in various locations. Since that time, it appears that no other property has been required to install brick stamping until this past year when The Body Shop, Lucy's Hair Studio, and Lemoore Food Locker did construction and façade improvements projects. Other property improvements were done downtown in which brick stamping was not installed during façade upgrades such as, Techi's Day Spa and Maria's Furniture on Heinlen and Lemoore Furniture on D Street. In addition, no brick stamping was installed during the Antlers Hotel renovation, skate park or depot/arbor projects. The attached map identifies the current location of brick stamping downtown.

Staff is recommending that this item be presented at an upcoming Council meeting as a City discussion to exempt the property owners/businesses from having to include brick stamping as part of their property improvements. This item would be better suited as an overall downtown streetscape improvement project instead of being piecemealed one project at a time. A downtown-wide brick stamping, irrigation, and lighting project could then be brought back to the RDA Board for approval at a later date.

Again, changes to this program are recommended so that businesses and/or property owners will be encouraged to remove existing blight by improving their storefronts. The Board is asked to consider all of the recommended changes listed below.

#### **Budget Impact**

None. The \$3,000 increase in assistance to projects utilizing the design services of an architect will be paid out of the existing RDA Budget for the Façade Program.

## **Recommendation**

That the Agency Board:

- 1) Approve an additional \$3,000 be granted for each project toward the hiring of a licensed architect.
- 2) Approve payment of the Design Review Fee to the City.
- 3) Approve allowing the applicant to select a local contractor whose bid is within 10% of the lowest bid.
- 4) Confirm the amount of match required by the applicant to remain at 25%.
- 5) Approve an upfront deposit of \$3,000 to be used toward the applicant's match.
- 6) Direct staff to present the brick stamping requirement at the next regularly scheduled Council meeting and ask for temporary relief on the brick stamping requirement for all façade projects, regardless of funding source, while RDA researches a downtown-wide brick stamping, irrigation, and lighting project.