

# Storefront Improvement Program

## Soldotna, AK

By Neha Bhatt and Michael Ryan

Situated at the convergence of two state highways, the town of Soldotna, AK wanted to present a better first impression for passersby and create a more vibrant commercial core as part of its “Envision Soldotna 2030” long-range plan. In 2012, the city approved the Storefront Improvement Program, which provides matching grants to business owners for fixing up storefronts in the downtown area.

Soldotna’s Storefront Improvement Program is an example of how small public investments can create attractive places on a business corridor. The reimbursable grants fund up to 50% of a project’s costs with a maximum of \$7,500.



**Storefront improvement at the Orange Poppy.**  
Image from [www.ci.soldotna.ak.us](http://www.ci.soldotna.ak.us)

Applications are accepted on a rolling basis and evaluated based on creativity, current facade conditions, code compliance, visibility of the storefront, feasibility of proposed improvements, and overall cost. Grants may be used for improvements in signage, windows, exterior lighting, permanent landscaping, masonry, etc. Selected projects must commit to maintaining the improvements for five years. Residential buildings, government owned property, storefronts not visible from the town’s two main thoroughfares, and buildings less than five years old are not eligible.

The inaugural year of the program was so successful that it won the “Best Practices” award at the Alaska State Planning Banquet. In the three years since the program began, the city has provided grants for seven projects at a total cost to the City of \$36,975. This public investment leveraged an estimated \$212,500 in matching private dollars, according to the program brochure (link below).

### **Soldotna’s ordinance to increase program’s funding level:**

<http://archives.ci.soldotna.ak.us/WebLink8/DocView.aspx?id=132298&searchid=ee047344-c11e-4296-b8ba-ea6d97626332&dbid=0>

### **Soldotna’s Storefront Improvement Program Guidelines:**

<http://www.ci.soldotna.ak.us/pdf/storefront/2014%20SIP%20guidelines.pdf>

### **Soldotna’s program brochure:**

[http://www.ci.soldotna.ak.us/pdf/storefront/brochure\\_8.14.pdf](http://www.ci.soldotna.ak.us/pdf/storefront/brochure_8.14.pdf)

Introduced By: City Manager  
Date: April 17, 2012  
Public Hearing: April 25, 2012  
Action: Enacted  
Vote: 5 Yes, 0 No, 1 Absent

CITY OF SOLDOTNA  
ORDINANCE 2012 -007

AN ORDINANCE INCREASING ESTIMATED REVENUES AND APPROPRIATIONS BY \$10,000 IN THE GENERAL FUND AND \$27,500 IN THE SMALL CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS FUND FOR THE STOREFRONT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

WHEREAS, \$10,000 is included in the FY12 Planning and Zoning approved operating budget to fund the new Storefront Improvement Program; and

WHEREAS, this program is being supplemented by \$7,500 from the Planning and Zoning Department's Contracted Services account to provide professional design assistance to selected applicants; and

WHEREAS, due to number of applications received and the significant improvements being proposed by applicants, the selection committee is recommending an additional \$10,000 be appropriated toward this program; and

WHEREAS, this additional appropriation is in recognition of the positive impact these improvements will make to the community by beautifying the highway corridors; and

WHEREAS, because these projects may not be complete by the end of the fiscal year and this program is intended to be ongoing, Administration is requesting that funding for the Storefront Improvement Program be transferred to a non lapsing fund; and

WHEREAS, it is in the best interest of the City of Soldotna to appropriate funds for this project.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SOLDOTNA, ALASKA:

Section 1. That estimated revenues and appropriations be increased as follows:

General Fund

Increase Estimated Revenues:

Appropriation of Fund Balance \$ 10,000

Increase Appropriations:

Nondepartmental — Transfer to Capital Projects \$ 27,500

Decrease Appropriations:

Planning & Zoning — Miscellaneous (10,000)

Planning & Zoning — Contracted Services ( 7,500)  
\$ 10,000

Small Capital Projects Fund

Increase Estimated Revenues:

Transfer from General Fund \$ 27,500

Increase Appropriations:

Storefront Improvement Program \$ 27,500

Section 2. This ordinance takes effect immediately upon its enactment.

ENACTED BY THE CITY COUNCIL THIS 25th DAY OF APRIL, 2012.

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Peter A Micciche, ayor

ATTEST:

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Teresa Fahning, City Clerk

Ayes: Sprague, Anderson, Hartman, Daniels, Fisher 12ORD007

Noes: None

Absent: Bagley

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City of Soldotna TWO

177 North Birch Street ■ Soldotna, Alaska ■ Phone (907) 262

MEMORANDUM

To: Larry Semmens, City Manager

From Stephanie Queen, Planning Director °. ra

Date: Monday, April 02, 2012

Subject: 2012 Storefront Improvement Program

In January, we began advertising the City's new Storefront Improvement Program, and the business community's response has been tremendous. To date, the City has received eight applications, for work ranging from landscaping and new signage, to complete building facelifts. Although each grant is limited to \$5,000 of city funds, the eight projects have proposed more than \$300,000 of exterior improvements to their businesses along the Sterling and Kenai Spur highways.

A selection committee met last week to review the applications. The committee - which included Councilwoman Brenda Hartman, Planning Commission Chairman John Czarnecki, and staff from the Building and Planning departments - evaluated the applications according to several criteria including: current condition of the building, visibility of the proposed improvements, and creative value of the project. After ranking them, the committee recommended funding six projects at various levels, ranging from \$1,000 up to the maximum :\$5,000. In order to fund the six projects, I am seeking an additional \$10,000 appropriation for the current fiscal year. The total cost of the program is outlined below.

\$10,000 Original budget appropriation in General Fund

\$10,000 Request for additional funding (appropriation of fund balance)

\$7,500 Design assistance contract with local architects, to provide 15 hours of free assistance to selected projects. Funded from Planning Department 'Contracted Services' account, already appropriated in General Fund.

\$3,715 Funds left over from FY2011 highway landscaping program already appropriated in Capital Projects Fund

\$31,215 Total

I do not anticipate this level of interest every year, and will be requesting \$15,000 in the FY2013 budget for next year's program. For the current year, however, I feel there is an opportunity to fund several worthy projects, and get the program off to a great start. Should the Council decide against the additional appropriation, we would remove two of the six projects from this year's program, and encourage them to reapply next year.

The attached ordinance also would move the funding for the program out of the Planning and Zoning department's operating budget, into a non - lapsing Capital Projects Fund. This is important because it would allow any funding not used in a particular fiscal year to roll forward and stay with the program.

Thank you for your consideration.