

April 28th, 2028

To: City of Winooski

From: Downtown Winooski

RE: Winooski COVID Recovery Business Grants Program Guidelines

Summary:

In January of 2022, the City of Winooski designated Downtown Winooski as the COVID Recovery Evaluation Committee as part of the city's effort to allocate \$100,000 in American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) State and Local Fiscal Recovery funding to businesses in Winooski impacted by the pandemic. Downtown Winooski's role is advisory in nature, and subject to the discretion of the City Council. In coordination with City Staff, Downtown Winooski has taken the following three steps to collaborate on this effort and act as the Evaluation Committee:

1. Provided the City feedback on the application process and timeline.
2. Helped promote the availability of the program funding.
3. Providing the City with our Board's feedback on the applications for the program.

The City provided Program Guidelines that outlined eligible purposes for use of funds, eligibility criteria for applicants, a list of eligible/ineligible activities, and an evaluation rubric. Downtown Winooski's Board convened as the Evaluation Committee on Wednesday, April 20th.

Prior to reviewing applications for assistance, Downtown Winooski confirms that City Staff was asked to 1.) perform the required financial review of the applications to ensure they met minimum financial eligibility requirements and 2.) remove business identifying information from the applications to assist with making the review impartial (as required in the Council-approved Program Guidelines).

Recommendation:

Downtown Winooski is recommending the City move forward with funding two of the applications (A & B) based on the information provided. Downtown Winooski recommends the third application (C) be tabled, but that they should be funded without further review if they can meet certain conditions shared below.

While we understand the intent of the applying the evaluation criteria rubric, we wanted to note that in the process of considering these applications, our board had a few reflections that will be helpful as context the evaluation criteria outcomes:

- The criteria related to financial analysis will be “NA” for each criteria review due to three factors:
 - We were not provided sufficient information to determine whether applicants had positive balance sheets pre-pandemic.
 - We are not aware of a publicly available index, nor were we provided with one, to determine what the “median pandemic losses in Winooski for business type”.
- We believe many of the types of businesses impacted by the pandemic are not benefited from having a formal MBE or WBE designation status (Minority or Women Owned Business). Unlike organizations that regularly compete for federal funding or contracts, having that designation may not provide a financial or business-related benefit in exchange for applying for/maintaining the designation. We recommend allowing business owners to self-identify as being minority or women owned, and remove the formal certification requirement.
- The board believes each of the business types adds vibrancy, vitality, and provides services/goods/jobs to the community. We also found it challenging to identify specific business types as being “under-represented”. The Board decided to leave each of those scores as an “NA” as a result of those factors.

While one of the applications scores relatively “low” on the scale (applicant C scored a “1”), the ambiguity caused by not being in a position to apply the criteria above was limiting to each of the applicants. Assuming the financial challenges applicant C and each of the applicants represented are accurate, we believe each of them is a eligible and worthy investment of funds from this relief program.

Applicant A

Criteria	Score**
Business can demonstrate positive balance sheet pre-COVID (2019 year end)	N/A
Retains jobs in Winooski	1
Business employs Winooski residents	2
Revenue loss percentage aligns with median pandemic losses in Winooski for business type (+/- 5%)	N/A
Retains business types currently under-represented or lacking in the City and desired/needed by the community	N/A
Certified MBE or WBE (Minority Owned Business or Women Owned Business) or Certified LGBTQIA+	1
Total Score	4

** Scoring:

- 0 – Does not meet criteria
- 1 – Meets minimum level of criteria
- 2 – Meets high level of criteria

Recommendation - approve grant

Applicant B

Criteria	Score**
Business can demonstrate positive balance sheet pre-COVID (2019 year end)	N/A
Retains jobs in Winooski	2
Business employs Winooski residents	1
Revenue loss percentage aligns with median pandemic losses in Winooski for business type (+/- 5%)	N/A
Retains business types currently under-represented or lacking in the City and desired/needed by the community	N/A
Certified MBE or WBE (Minority Owned Business or Women Owned Business) or Certified LGBTQIA+	0
Total Score	3

** Scoring:

- 0 – Does not meet criteria
- 1 – Meets minimum level of criteria
- 2 – Meets high level of criteria

Recommendation - Approve Grant

Applicant C

Criteria	Score**
Business can demonstrate positive balance sheet pre-COVID (2019 year end)	N/A
Retains jobs in Winooski	1
Business employs Winooski residents	0
Revenue loss percentage aligns with median pandemic losses in Winooski for business type (+/- 5%)	N/A
Retains business types currently under-represented or lacking in the City and desired/needed by the community	N/A
Certified MBE or WBE (Minority Owned Business or Women Owned Business) or Certified LGBTQIA+	0
Total Score	1

** Scoring:

- 0 – Does not meet criteria
- 1 – Meets minimum level of criteria
- 2 – Meets high level of criteria

Recommendation – we would like the city to check-in with applicant's proposed usage of funds to confirm it meets the Council's eligible use guidelines. Subject to that check-in, we suggest approving the grant without further review from the Evaluation Committee.

