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MEMORANDUM

TO: Thomas A. Golden, Jr., City Manager 

FROM: Yovani Baez-Rose, Assistant City Manager/DPD Director

DATE: January 17, 2023

SUBJECT: ARPA Economic Development Programs Outline

The Economic Development Office has created a suite of programs that align with the City of Lowell's ARPA framework, which was endorsed by the Lowell City Council in October 2022. ARPA is intended to address the negative health and economic impacts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and these programs are tailored to the specific needs of Lowell's local economy. Details on each program are as follows:

1. Storefront Improvement Program (SIP): \$500,000
The Storefront Improvement Program provides matching grants to property owners or tenants seeking to renovate or restore ground-floor commercial building exterior facades. The Program seeks to increase accessibility into storefronts, improve the physical appearance of independent businesses, and enhance the commercial districts of Lowell.
This program provides:
 - A. 90% matching grant up to \$20,000 for ADA improvements to entrances, including ramps, lifts, doors hardware and automatic openers, accessible parking, and signage
 - B. 50% matching grant up to \$15,000 for other façade improvements, including better windows, paneling, architectural details and restoration of historic features
 - C. 50% matching grant up to \$2,500 for signage, lighting and awning improvements
2. Economic Resilience Grant Program (ERG): \$750,000
The Economic Resilience Grant Program is open to businesses located in Lowell that have a vision for their future and are seeking financial support to make it happen. The program will provide funds to a variety of businesses that were disproportionately impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Eligible project proposals must fit into one of four broad categories.
 - A. Placemaking: Projects that cultivate inclusive and inspiring exterior spaces through public art, communal gathering areas, façade improvements, collaboration with local artists, or other endeavors. Property owner approval required if applicant is a tenant.
 - B. Programming: Organizational growth through new or expanded programs or services.
 - C. Facilities and Infrastructure: Renovations to buildings or spaces to address public health concerns (for example, installation of protective barriers or renovations that allow physical distancing or improved air circulation), become more resilient to climate change (for example, weatherization, heat pump installation, native plantings, or composting), and/or support organizational expansion. Property owner approval required if applicant is a tenant.

D. Technical Assistance:

- Restaurants: Restaurant-specific one-on-one intensive business coaching in one of four categories: Finance, Metrics and Forecasting, Operations Management, Staff Management
- Marketing: Available to any business eligible for the grant program. One-on-one intensive business coaching in one of three categories: Social Media Marketing, Website Design and Development, and Email Marketing and Content Creation.

3. Project Pop-Up (POP): \$200,000

Project Pop-Up is an initiative created to revitalize Lowell's Downtown. By hiring a firm to curate a pop-up space in Lowell's central business district, this program will create a retail incubator space, creating a pipeline for more retailers to establish themselves in Downtown Lowell on a long-term basis.

4. Technical Assistance Workshops (TA): \$50,000

The Economic Development Office will hire consultants to host a series of workshops that will be open to any business owner located or interested in opening a business in Lowell. Workshop topics will be germane to local business and consumer demands, including Branding, Digital Marketing, and Financial Management.

Additional information, including detailed program descriptions, are available upon request.

To promote these programs, the Economic Development team has created a plan to roll them out citywide.

For the Storefront Improvement Grant and Economic Resilience Grant programs, Economic Development will prepare deployment immediately upon approval by having program descriptions and application materials translated into Spanish, Portuguese, and Khmer. Then, materials will be posted on our website, a newsletter will go out to our entire mailing list, and social media posts will be scheduled for routine distribution leading up to the application period with reminders about deadlines. A webinar will be scheduled this winter to describe both programs in detail for business owners. The webinar will be recorded and posted to our webpage, on social media, and distributed via our newsletter so people who could not attend the webinar can still benefit from the information. Working with partners in DPD and throughout the community, we will share this information to be distributed through other relevant channels (e.g., Greater Lowell Chamber of Commerce, CTI E-Center, LDFC/Lowell Plan, etc.).

Project Pop-Up planning will begin with program approval in the winter of 2023. We will initiate an RFP process to secure a consultant to run the pop-up while simultaneously searching for a retail location for the pop-up shop. Once a consultant has been hired and a location selected, we will work with consultants to recruit retailers and will promote the pop-up shop aggressively in collaboration with the consultants and participating retailers.

For the technical assistance programs, Economic Development will begin the procurement process to secure consultants immediately upon program approval. We would like to have a full bench of consultants on board by May 2023, when the Economic Resilience Grant awardees will be selected and one-on-one technical assistance can begin. In addition, we would like to run the workshop series in May, which is National Small Business Month. All webinars will be recorded and posted online for the benefit of people who could not make it to the scheduled date.

AC/ybr