



AGENCY: City Council
MEETING DATE: November 12, 2024
DEPARTMENT: City Manager's Office
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AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

TITLE: Discussion and Approval of 2024/25 Business Support and Economic Development Initiatives for the City of Fort Bragg

BACKGROUND:

As identified in the [City's Strategic Plan 2024-2028+](#) *Invigorate Economic Opportunity and Community Vibrancy* fostering a "**Business Friendly City**" is a top priority for the Fort Bragg City Council. Staff has identified several projects that align with these priorities. These projects aim to stimulate economic growth, enhance the community's aesthetic appeal, support local businesses, and create a more navigable and welcoming environment for residents and visitors alike. The repurposing of the America Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds provide a unique opportunity to implement these initiatives.

In October, the City Council approved re-purposing the use of \$1,744,000 of ARPA funding to community priorities such as Housing of \$800k, Business support \$800k, public safety \$40k and \$104k technology upgrades.

ANALYSIS:

The following projects have been identified for funding under the ARPA Business Assistance Allocation:

1. Fort Bragg Business Boost Fund: Loan Program \$650,000

Cultivating Local Enterprise and Employment

The Fort Bragg Business Boost Fund aims to strengthen the local economy by supporting business retention, expansion, and job creation. Leveraging \$650,000 of the City's ARPA allocation, the program provides low-interest loans to small and medium-sized businesses, addressing critical challenges in accessing capital.

Small and medium-sized businesses often face significant barriers when seeking financing, including high-interest rates, stringent qualification requirements, and limited availability of traditional lending options. These challenges are exacerbated by the current economic climate, where rising costs and tightened credit markets disproportionately affect smaller enterprises. For many businesses, access to affordable capital is the determining factor between growth and stagnation—or even closure. The Business Boost Fund aims to fill this gap, providing a much-needed resource for businesses striving to thrive in a competitive and evolving marketplace.

This initiative builds on the success of the City's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Business Assistance Program, which demonstrated the transformative impact of

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targeted economic investments by funding six local businesses, creating or retaining 13 jobs, and driving local economic activity.

Loan Program Details:

- Interest Rate: 2.5% + Loan Underwriting Fees
- Repayment Terms: 2–5 years
- Loan Amounts: Minimum \$10,000 Maximum \$200,000

Goals of the program:

- Addressing barriers to capital that inhibit growth and innovation.
- Attracting businesses to establish or relocate within Fort Bragg city limits, further strengthening the City’s economic base.
- Encouraging entrepreneurship and the diversification of the local economy.
- Retain and expand local businesses.
- Support job creation.
- Assisting businesses in recovering from pandemic-related impacts.
- Establish a self-sustaining revolving loan fund for long-term business support.

Eligibility Requirements:

To qualify, businesses must:

- Be physically located within Fort Bragg city limits.
- Hold a current Fort Bragg business license.
- Be in good standing with the City (e.g., no open code violations, up-to-date on TOT reporting).
- Have only one location apply if operating multiple sites.
- Be current on sales tax reporting.
- Not have received previous Small Business Assistance grant funds from the City

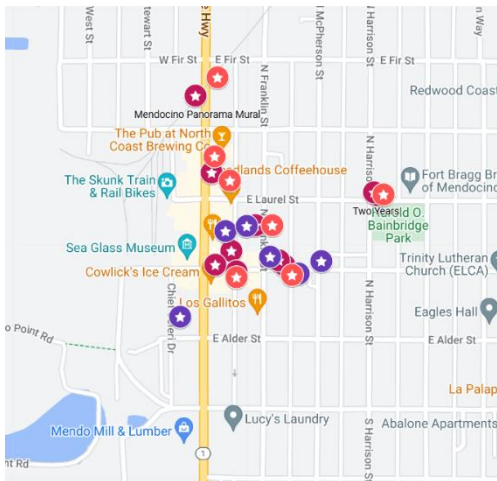
Administration:

The program will be managed and by Jeff Lucas, the City’s CDBG loan consultant, with oversight from a loan committee comprising representatives from two local banks and the City Manager. Applications will be accepted beginning December 1, 2024, pending program approval.

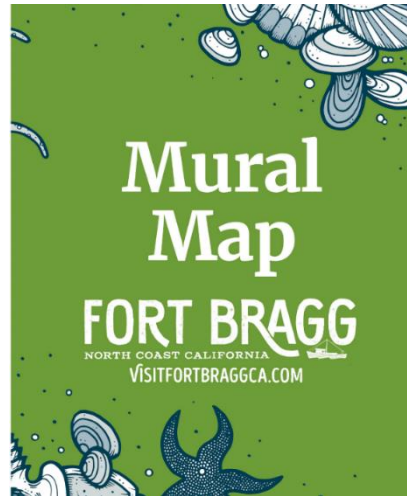
Timeline and Promotion:

- If approved, applications will open on December 1, 2024.
- Staff will promote the program over eight weeks via the City’s Business e-newsletter, Economic Development website, social media, and translated materials in Spanish.

2. Fort Bragg's Public Art: Enhance the City's Mural Project in Collaboration with the Fort Bragg Alleyway Arts Project \$25,000



Mural's in Fort Bragg



The Fort Bragg Mural Project, in partnership with the [Alley Way Arts Project](#), seeks to enrich the city's visual landscape by adding vibrant and culturally relevant murals to the Central Business District and other key locations. This initiative will celebrate Fort Bragg's unique history, culture, and values while enhancing the aesthetic appeal of the city.

The project will engage local artists and community members to create murals that reflect Fort Bragg's character, fostering community pride and supporting local talent. Proposed funding of \$25,000 will be used to cover materials, artist stipends, and other project costs, with a goal of completing four to five murals by the summer of 2025.

Benefits of the Mural Project:

- Enhance Fort Bragg's public spaces with vibrant, culturally significant art.
- Promote the city's unique identity and character through visual storytelling.
- Engage local artists, providing them with opportunities to showcase their talents.
- Foster community involvement and pride in public art initiatives.
- Boost tourism and economic activity by creating visually compelling attractions.

The following businesses have expressed interest in hosting murals:

- Pack and Ship
- Splendiferous
- Community First Credit Union
- North Coast Brewery
- Bainbridge Park Bathroom- North side

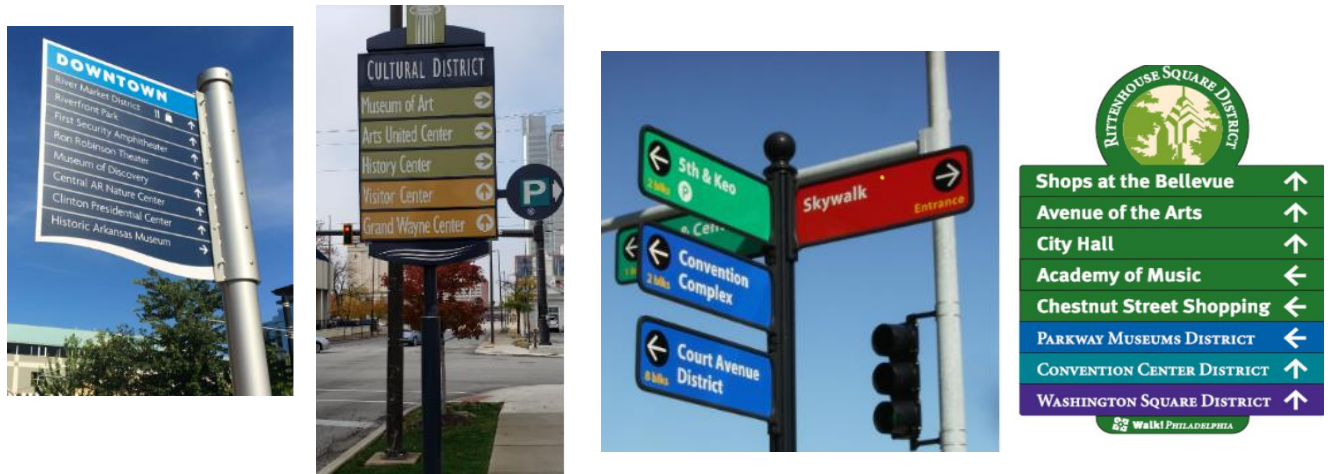
The Fort Bragg Mural Project represents an investment in the city's cultural and economic vitality. By enhancing public spaces with meaningful artwork, this initiative supports local artists, strengthens community identity, and attracts visitors to the area. Staff recommends approval of the \$25,000 allocation to advance this project.

3. Way-Finding Signage for Main Street and Central Business District \$20,000

The City of Fort Bragg plans to implement directional way-finding signage throughout the Central Business District (CBD) and along Main Street. This initiative aims to improve navigation, enhance the downtown experience for visitors, and increase accessibility to key attractions, businesses, and public amenities.

Way-finding signage plays a critical role in creating a cohesive and user-friendly environment, encouraging foot traffic, and supporting local businesses by guiding visitors to points of interest. A prior [study completed](#) in 2015 by City staff outlined a framework for incorporating way-finding signs into the City, which will serve as the foundation for this project.

Here are some examples of these signs. In 2015, a study was completed by Staff to incorporate way-finding signs into the City- attached.



Installation of these way-finding signs would:

- Install clear, attractive directional signage throughout Fort Bragg to improve navigation for residents and visitors, facilitating access to key locations, including parks, historical sites, local businesses and business districts.
- Improved navigation increases foot traffic to local businesses by guiding visitors to a wider range of shops, restaurants, and attractions within the CBD.
- Wayfinding signage can highlight historical sites, murals, and points of interest that may otherwise go unnoticed, enhancing the city's appeal as a tourist destination. A well-implemented wayfinding can positively impact sales, as visitors who can navigate easily are more likely to visit multiple businesses.
- Customized signage aligned with Fort Bragg's branding can reinforce the city's identity and make a lasting impression on visitors. Consistent, branded signage contributes to a cohesive aesthetic that sets Fort Bragg apart as a distinct destination.
- The signage project will enhance wayfinding, reduce visitor confusion, and improve the overall visitor experience. Signage will be strategically placed in our central business district.

4. Downtown Improvement Grant Program: \$80,000

The proposed Downtown Improvement Grant Program is designed to enhance the overall economic viability and appearance of downtown Fort Bragg by assisting in the funding of improvements that will lead to additional business activity in the downtown. The Grant Program is designed to revitalize Fort Bragg's commercial districts by enhancing the exterior and interior appearance of storefronts and other highly visible building features. The program aims to make these areas more attractive and inviting for residents, visitors, and potential investors, thereby boosting foot traffic and fostering economic growth.

Purpose and Benefits:

The program seeks to:

1. Improve the aesthetic appeal of Fort Bragg's commercial districts.
2. Encourage reinvestment into older buildings, preserving their character and utility.
3. Support place making efforts to create vibrant, welcoming public spaces.
4. Enhance property values and strengthen neighborhood characteristics.
5. Attract more visitors and shoppers, stimulating the local economy.

Grant Details:

- Grant Amounts: \$2,000 to \$25,000.
- Matching Funds: Grants over \$2,000 require dollar-for-dollar matching contributions from applicants up to \$25,000.
- Eligibility: Building and business owners within Fort Bragg's commercial districts.

Eligible Improvements:

Grants may be used for projects that enhance or restore the appearance of businesses or buildings. Eligible improvements include:

- Exterior painting
- Fire Sprinklers System installation or upgrade
- Storefront signage and branding
- Landscaping and planter boxes.
- Exterior lighting
- Interior renovations that enhance customer-facing areas
- Security systems
- Fire Alarm systems
- Awnings, canopies, roofs, and storefront features.
- Masonry work
- Window and door replacement
- Restoration of historical façade features
- ADA-compliant access ramps and other accessibility improvements
- Public amenities such as benches, bike racks, and seasonal flower planters
- Murals to contribute to place making and beautification
- Public amenities like benches and bike racks.

Example Scenario of Match and Funding Requirements for Illustration Purposes

The following is an example used to illustrate a hypothetical business applying for funding under the Commercial Façade Improvement Grant:

Carson Restaurant ABC is located on and is facing Franklin Street. The business owners are looking to invest \$10,000 in new windows, doors, paint and other eligible exterior storefront improvements. The business owners apply to the Program and submit all required documents.

The City's Economic and Community Development Department then reviews and confirms that Carson Restaurant ABC is eligible for funding. Carson Restaurant ABC enters into Improvement Agreement with the City. The Agreement is fully signed by both parties, and now Carson Restaurant ABC is eligible to receive funding. *Carson Restaurant ABC* completes the work totaling \$10,000 and provides evidence to the City that work has been performed and paid to the contractor. The City reviews the evidence and approves the reimbursement payment of \$5,000 (i.e. dollar-for-dollar matching) to the Carson Restaurant ABC. The dollar-for-dollar matching requirement is met.

Implementation and Administration:

The program will be administered by City staff, who will promote the initiative to eligible business and building owners, manage the application and review process, and oversee grant disbursements. Staff will provide technical assistance as needed to help applicants design and execute their projects.

Timeline:

Upon approval, the program will be launched with an initial outreach campaign to raise awareness and encourage participation. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis or until allocated funds are expended.

The Improvement Grant Program will enhance the visual and economic appeal of Fort Bragg's commercial districts. By incentivizing property and business owners to invest in their buildings, the program will contribute to a vibrant, welcoming atmosphere that attracts residents, tourists, and new businesses alike.

This initiative represents an important investment in the economic vitality and visual character of Fort Bragg. Staff recommends approval of the \$80,000 allocation for the Commercial Façade Improvement Grant Program.

5. Re-establish a Downtown Business Coalition Led by Business owners to launch in January 2025

The City of Fort Bragg seeks to re-establish a Bi-monthly Downtown Business Coalition to promote collaboration among business owners, foster economic growth, and enhance the vibrancy of the downtown area. This initiative, led by local business owners, will provide a platform for businesses to collectively address challenges, share ideas, and create opportunities that benefit the community and the local economy.

Purpose and Benefits:

The re-establishment of the Downtown Business Coalition aims to:

- Strengthen relationships among downtown business owners to encourage collaboration and shared success.
- Address common challenges such as marketing, events, parking, and other shared priorities.
- Foster a unified voice for advocating business needs and priorities to the City and other stakeholders.
- Promote downtown Fort Bragg as a destination for residents and visitors alike, enhancing foot traffic and economic activity.
- Encourage the creation of initiatives, events, and marketing campaigns that support downtown businesses.

Key Features:

- **Business-Led Initiative:** The Coalition will be spearheaded by downtown business owners to ensure its direction and activities are aligned with their needs and interests.
- **Supportive Role of the City:** The City will provide initial support, such as facilitating early meetings, sharing resources, and offering guidance, but the coalition will remain a business-driven entity.
- **Focus Areas:** The Coalition may explore areas such as joint marketing efforts, downtown events, façade improvements, and advocacy for business-friendly policies.
- **Regular Meetings:** Establishing a consistent meeting schedule to provide a forum for discussion and collaboration.

Implementation Steps:

1. Outreach: Conduct outreach to downtown businesses to gauge interest and identify key stakeholders.
2. Initial Meetings: Facilitate initial meetings to establish goals, structure, and leadership for the Coalition.
3. Structure and Governance: Support the Coalition in creating a clear governance structure, including leadership roles, committees, and operating guidelines.
4. Ongoing Support: Provide resources such as meeting space, promotional assistance, and access to city staff for advisory purposes.

Re-establishing a Downtown Business Coalition represents a significant opportunity to empower local businesses, strengthen the downtown economy, and enhance the city's appeal as a destination. Staff recommends moving forward with outreach efforts and initial facilitation to support the formation of this business-led initiative and quarterly reports be brought back to the City Council or Community Development Committee.

6. Launch of Business Support Website <https://www.fortbraggbiz.com/>

The City of Fort Bragg is preparing to launch **FortBraggBiz.com** in December 2024. This new business support website will serve as a comprehensive resource hub for local businesses, providing essential tools, guidance, and information to assist at every stage of their growth—from start-up to expansion. The website aims to:

1. **Simplify Access to Resources:** Offer a centralized platform with information on permits, licenses, funding opportunities, grants, and other business-related services.
2. **Support Business Growth:** Provide tailored resources and technical training to help businesses start, operate, and expand successfully. (SBA, West Company, EDFC .etc.)
3. **Encourage Entrepreneurship:** Empower entrepreneurs with the tools they need to establish and grow their ventures.
4. **Promote Economic Development:** Strengthen the local business ecosystem by fostering collaboration and innovation.

The City will promote the website through:

- Social media campaigns.
- Business e-newsletters.
- Press releases and announcements at community events.
- Direct outreach to local businesses, entrepreneurs, and economic stakeholders.

The City of Fort Bragg's investment in the proposed business initiatives and economic development reflects a strategic commitment to fostering a resilient, vibrant local economy. By supporting local businesses through targeted programs, access to funding, enhancing public spaces, and providing valuable resources like the Fort Bragg Biz website is creating an environment where businesses can thrive, residents can enjoy a more dynamic community, and visitors are drawn to Fort Bragg's unique character. These initiatives position the City for sustainable growth and long-term economic success.

These initiatives align with Council's goals and the City's long-term economic development strategy of Invigorate Economic Opportunity and Community Vibrancy.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

Provide direction regarding the proposed initiatives or offer additional feedback to refine and enhance their alignment with City goals.

ALTERNATIVE ACTION(S):

Request additional information, analysis, or adjustments to the proposed initiatives to address specific concerns or priorities.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Funding for the program will utilize funds received from the City's ARPA allocation have been accounted for in a special Fund. The proposed initiatives will utilize \$800,000 in ARPA funds, as follows:

- Business Assistance Loan Program: \$650,000
- Mural Project Enhancement: \$25,000
- Way-Finding Signs: \$20,000
- Downtown Improvements Grants \$80,000
- TBD: \$25,000

The establishment of the Business Roundtable and website will be conducted using existing staff resources, with no additional financial impacts.

CONSISTENCY:

The proposed initiatives is consistent with the City Council Goal on Fostering a Business Friendly City and Goal: 1 of the City's Strategic Plan of *Invigorate Economic Opportunity and Community Vibrancy*

IMPLEMENTATION/TIMEFRAMES:

Depends on direction provided. The initiatives highlighted will be implemented in December 2024.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Fort Bragg Business Boost Loan Guidelines
- Way-Finding Signage 2015 Study
- Downtown Improvement Program

NOTIFICATION:

- Economic Development Planning
- Fort Bragg Downtown Businesses
- Tourism and Marketing