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## Funds available to spruce up Highland businesses

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Highland business owners who'd like to spruce up their storefronts can get a financial boost from Highland's Downtown Development Authority.

The DDA has designated matching funds of up to \$5,000 for improvements to three buildings' facades in the Highland Station area and up to \$1,500 for three business owners who want to upgrade signage in 2009.

Tim Colbeck, DDA director, said he suspects people don't know about the money because there has been only one taker - Mike Aretha - since it was made available in 2007. Aretha owns Floor Studio, formerly Carpet Classics, on Milford Road in Highland. Aretha used the funds to help pay for new windows, a front door, siding, new paint and lights this year.

"It's something I wanted to do for a long time. (The funds) gave me the push in the right direction," said Aretha, who has owned the business for about 10 years. "We needed a face lift, and this is a big improvement. And the feedback I've been hearing is really good, no doubt."

Money for the improvements comes from the Highland Station districts's Tax Improvement Financing. TIF is a method that captures the increase in property tax revenue that is generated from improved sites in a specified district, then channels the funds toward other improvements.

Buildings eligible for the facade grants and sign grants must be at least 50 years old, have commercial uses on the first floor and be in the Highland Station district. Building owners interested in the funds must go through an application process - which Colbeck said is "fairly straightforward" - and the proposed improvements are reviewed by the township's design committee to make sure they meet certain standards outlined for the Highland Station area to maintain its historical nature.

Aretha said the design committee was "very easy to work with."

"They loved all my ideas. It wasn't like they dictated to me what they wanted," he said. "A lot of people might be afraid of this part of it, but it really isn't that kind of township."

Colbeck added that Highland Township has access to design assistance and advice as one of the 12 downtowns chosen so far for the Main Street Oakland County project. MSOC is an economic development program that targets historic commercial districts.

More information on eligibility requirements for the facade and signage grants and applications are available at [www.highlanddda.com](http://www.highlanddda.com), or by calling (248) 887-7200.

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