

FACADE RENOVATION PROGRAM

What is the Facade Renovation Program?

In Pittsburgh's tight-knit communities, small businesses often serve as the hubs for entire neighborhoods, though many lack the resources to maintain or upgrade their storefronts. To help these businesses thrive, PAF's Facade Renovation Program pairs volunteer architects with small business owners to facilitate a collaborative partnership that makes the rehabilitation process a reality. These collective and collaborative efforts uplift small businesses, revitalize local economies, and elevate Pittsburgh's diverse neighborhoods through access to high-quality design.



Alma Illery Health Center in Homewood



Architect's rendering of design for Alma Illery Health Center's updated facade

ABOUT THE PAF

Established in partnership with the Pittsburgh chapter of the American Institute of Architects, the Pittsburgh Architecture Foundation (PAF) is dedicated to serving communities throughout Western PA by promoting and facilitating sustainable and equitable design. We believe that—through the power of design—architects can create transformative spaces that encourage civic engagement, foster economic prosperity, and better the wellbeing of our region's residents.

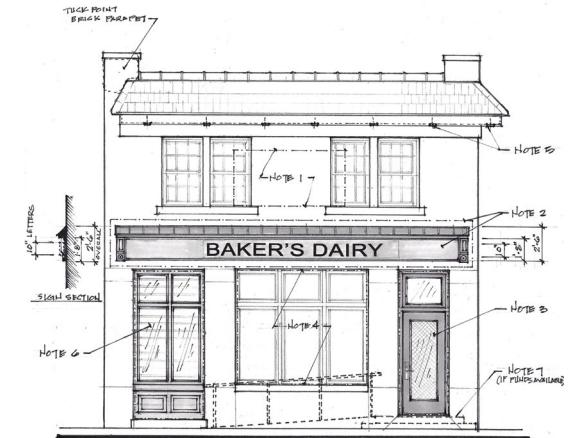
Community Need

When locally owned businesses fall into disrepair, the whole community suffers. Low-income and marginalized communities are the most at risk of losing vital small businesses—along with the local jobs, tourism, community investment, and community identity they provide.

Renovating the “face” of a business means much more than applying a new coat of paint; it requires a holistic approach that takes into account the business’ goals, the building’s history, sustainable strategies, and the unique needs of the surrounding community in order to design facades that are beautiful, safe, cost-effective, energy-efficient, and long-lasting. These services are ever-more urgent in light of the Coronavirus pandemic, when many businesses are forced to change their operations while working with increasingly tight profit margins.



Baker's Dairy in Pittsburgh's Homewood neighborhood



Drawings from the charrette for Baker's Dairy

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How Does it Work?

Working alongside community leaders to assess the needs of different neighborhoods, the Facade Renovation Program pairs local business owners with teams of volunteer architects who guide them through every step of the process. Each project is jump started with a preliminary charrette—a participatory workshop during which architects collaborate with business owners to develop a concept for their building’s facade. Based on these conversations, PAF’s volunteers work within each business’ predetermined budget to produce drawings and provide design direction. These documents are vital in empowering businesses to seek grant funding, attain permits, and work with construction companies.



Our volunteer architects collaborate with business owners to create beautiful and feasible facade designs.

Promising Results: Pilot Program

In 2019, PAF worked together with Neighborhood Allies and the Urban Redevelopment Authority to conduct a pilot of the Facade Renovation Program that included three rehabilitation projects in Pittsburgh's Homewood neighborhood. This pilot program resulted in three unique and highly successful collaborations, which provided these businesses with the necessary tools to seek funding and initiate construction.

“The community engagement was a perfect opportunity for me to collaborate with professionals with the same passion as mine and apply my training to find design solutions that can enable a community to thrive.”

—Prerana Paliwal, Volunteer Architect



A rendering of D&C Sandwich Express's future facade.

How to Get Involved

SMALL BUSINESSES

Think your business might be a candidate for the Facade Renovation Program? Email us at foundation@aiapgh.org for more information.

ARCHITECTS

Interested in volunteering your services? Reach out to us at foundation@aiapgh.org to get involved.

SUPPORT

Help us continue to create vital community partnerships with a tax-deductible donation to the Pittsburgh Architecture Foundation at aiapgh.org/foundation/donate/.

Up Next: Facade Renovation Toolkit

Building upon the positive results from the pilot program, PAF aims to further streamline the facade renovation process by teaming up with a variety of organizations to create a free, accessible toolkit that can be used as a resource for small business owners, volunteer architects, and community partners as they approach neighborhood revitalization projects. The Facade Renovation Toolkit will include a collection of guides that covers all steps of the process—from developing a charrette, to selecting sustainable materials, finding and applying for funding, creating timelines, and fostering partnerships. The result will be a flexible and comprehensive resource that enables community groups, volunteers, and potential partners to best apply their skills and expertise in this collaborative process.