



Downtown Portland Welcomes Seven Revitalized Facades in 2026
Downtown Portland is poised to see seven building facades revitalized in 2026, thanks to a combination of Facade Improvement Incentive recipients and independent property owner investments. We cannot thank our downtown property owners enough for choosing to reinvest in our community in such a meaningful and impactful way. Their commitment continues to strengthen the character, beauty, and economic vitality of our historic downtown.

This year, the Facade Improvement Incentive Program originally received only two applications at four days before the deadline. Prior to review by the approval committee, one applicant voluntarily withdrew, expressing a desire for the available funding to benefit other projects.

At this point, a local builder and contractor approached five property owners to help them envision the possibilities for their buildings. Concept renderings were created, bids were prepared, and applications were submitted at the property owners' request. Without that initiative and forward-thinking effort, there may have been only two projects competing for funding this year.

Of the remaining six applicants, one project was asked to provide additional information and make specific adjustments to move forward but ultimately declined. Another applicant, eligible for a 25% matching grant, chose to withdraw with plans to pursue a larger project in the future.

While the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) does not recommend or endorse specific contractors, property owners are free to select the contractor of their choice.

A Thorough and Transparent Evaluation Process
Thursday night's Facade Pitch Competition came down to four outstanding projects presenting their vision for downtown reinvestment. To ensure a fair and objective selection process, the presentations were evaluated by a panel of six judges, with three independent tabulators cross-checking and verifying all scoring calculations.

Projects were evaluated in four weighted categories:

- Historic Character and Redevelopment Impact (x2.2858)
- Project Completeness – (x1.4587)
- Investment Commitment and Feasibility – (x0.9871)
- Presentation and Vision – (x0.5714)

To minimize potential bias, the highest and lowest score in each category for every applicant were removed before final calculations were made for rankings.

2026 Facade Improvement Incentive Recipients

- 🏆 1st Place - Chocolate Moose – 116 Bridge Street
- 🥈 2nd Place - Lewanski Glass Studio – 170 Kent
- 🥉 3rd Place - Mann Bros. Perennial – 112 Kent
- ★ Honorable Mention - Service Group – 144 Kent

The Momentum Continues

One of the most exciting outcomes of this year's program is the additional investment it inspired. Three additional downtown property owners have announced facade improvements, bringing the total number of planned facade projects to seven in 2026.

Planned improvements include updates to both entry facades of the **Simon Insurance (Peake) Building**, restoration of **Studio 176** closer to its original historic appearance, and an exterior paint upgrade at **RiversEdge Grill**.

Together, these projects reflect growing confidence in Downtown Portland's future and a commitment to preserving its historic character, with over \$100,000 invested by property owners and \$26,500 from the DDA. Congratulations to all participants, and thank you to the property owners, judges, volunteers, and community members helping create a stronger, more vibrant downtown.



FEATURED BUSINESS: OPERA BLOCK PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

WRITTEN by: KURT FEDEWA

Young people who dream of a future in the performing arts need look no further than Portland, where creativity, discipline, and encouragement come together at The Opera Block Performing Arts Center.

The studio offers dance and performing arts instruction for students ranging from age three through high school. Owned by Timothy Fuller, Opera Block has become a welcoming place where young performers can develop both their artistic talents and personal confidence. Among the studio’s instructors is dance teacher Gina Budman, whose passion for teaching shines through in every class.

“Opera Block specializes in many forms of dance, including ballet, jazz, lyrical, and competitive dance,” Gina explained. The studio’s offerings extend beyond dance. “In select seasons, classes in other arts, such as video storytelling, are offered,” added Timothy.

At Opera Block, students learn the technical foundations of the performing arts while also growing as individuals. “Along the way, we help them build character and improve their morale,” said Gina. “We do this in a way that allows them to truly enjoy the process.” For Gina, the students are much more than pupils. “There is a lot of love present in our studio,” she said. “The students feel like family to me.”

Timothy shares that philosophy. “Our company is much more than a studio,” he said. “We help shape young people’s character.” Opera Block employs six dance instructors, with additional performing arts teachers brought in as needed. The studio is also home to a competitive dance team that travels throughout Michigan and has earned impressive recognition. “Two of our competitive dance team members were recently crowned Michigan Grand Champions,” Timothy said. “A third dancer earned Michigan Runner-Up Grand Champion.”

Both Timothy and Gina bring extensive experience to the studio. Timothy has worked on theater productions throughout Michigan, while Gina’s dance background brings energy and enthusiasm to her teaching. Together with their staff, they create an atmosphere that combines professionalism with encouragement.

“We care about the craft, and we care about the kids,” Gina said. “Opera Block has a caring and nurturing culture that brings out the best in young people.”

Opera Block will soon be enrolling in its five-week July Summer Session, and its nine-month fall season begins in September. Follow Facebook for more information. Interested? Contact owner Timothy Fuller at **(517) 666-0490**.

HOURS M - TH 4pm - 9pm 140 Kent St. See Facebook and website for news and additional info

For Details on these Events & More, Visit MiPortland.org/events

