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## Grants Offered to Dixieland Restaurateurs

### The neighborhood's redevelopment agency is prepared to help businesses.

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THE LEDGER

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LAKELAND | Dixieland is courting restaurants and redevelopment officials are offering enticements.



The Dixieland Community Redevelopment Area advisory board has approved a grant program that will allow potential restaurateurs to be reimbursed up to \$15,000 to improve the interior of a Dixieland building.

Tamara Sakagawa, the city's CRA projects manager, said a business person wouldn't have to open a full-service restaurant in the Lakeland neighborhood to receive the matching grant.

She said coffee shops, bakeries, grocery stores, produce markets, health food stores and other specialty food stores can also qualify for assistance.

Drive-through restaurants, bars and nightclubs won't be eligible.

There is about \$50,000 available in grants from the CRA until Sept. 30, the end of the fiscal year, Sakagawa said. Next year, there will be \$60,000 available. The money will come from CRA funds.

She said businesses that qualify for interior improvements can also receive grants for the exterior of their building.

Items the grant will pay for include grease traps, venting systems, sprinklers and electrical upgrades.

"Costs add up," Sakagawa said. "We're hoping someone will look to Dixieland as a viable option."

Dixieland's business district stretches south along South Florida Avenue from Walnut Street, on the edge of downtown, to Ariana Street. Businesses are also located on side streets to the east and west off South Florida Avenue.

There are 10 buildings considered potential sites for restaurants, including the former Grassroot restaurant, on the 1200 block of South Florida Avenue, and the former Vito's on the 1000 block.

Parking, which has been a problem at Dixieland businesses in the past, isn't a major concern at the 10 sites.

Sakagawa said the city is still fine-tuning the grant and plans are to talk with business owners of the 10 buildings in the coming days. She said people should be able to apply for grants in the coming weeks.

Currently, Sakagawa said, the Dixieland CRA is in preliminary discussions with two independent restaurants.


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Mary Smith, president of the Dixieland Neighborhood Association, said Thursday she was excited about the grant money.

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She said the Neighborhood Association had recently talked to Dixieland CRA officials about ways to attract Southeastern University and Florida Southern College students to the area.

"I really credit the CRA for listening to us," Smith said.

Smith said she would like an affordable restaurant or coffee shop that caters to the college crowd come to Dixieland.

"Downtown may be a little too pricey," she said. "Right now we have a lot of teens who have nowhere to go."

A grocery store would be as appealing as a restaurant, Smith said.

"Something like a Fresh Market or a Whole Foods (Market)," Smith said.

For more information about the grant, check [www.lakelandcra.net](http://www.lakelandcra.net) in a couple of weeks.

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