

Business grant program brings Muddy Paws to downtown Norfolk

By *Hillary Smith* on March 17, 2016

Southsidedaily.com is your source for free local news and information in Virginia Beach



Muddy Paws will open Saturday as the first of the new business recipients of the Downtown Norfolk Council's grant program. (courtesy photo)

Granby Street is adding a dog washing and grooming business to its storefront roster, thanks in part to a grant program that seeks to fill vacant spots in downtown Norfolk.

Muddy Paws, a pet supply and service store, will open its second Norfolk location Saturday at 400 Granby Street, with grooming and self-service wash stations among its offerings. Muddy Paws Downtown will be the first recipient of the Downtown Norfolk Council's grant program, [Vibrant Spaces](#), to open its doors.

"It's a really wonderful position to be in," co-owner Maryann Jacobson said. "I hope this store location will support the people down there."

Vibrant Spaces, which launched in May 2015, offers businesses a \$20,000 kick-starter grant and in some cases 50 percent off rent for two years in locations the city is trying to fill. Existing downtown businesses also have a chance to snag some grant money – up to \$10,000 each – for improvements like revamping storefronts and adding sidewalk patios.

The program was created to draw unique designs and concepts to increase business in the commercial district. Nearly 100 people applied for the incentive program. The most compelling applications win grants from the program's \$180,000 budget.

Jacobson said the \$20,000 grant was instrumental in her decision to open a second location. She and co-owner Angela Owens have been in business for 10 years. The Vibrant Spaces funds helped significantly with construction build-out costs at the new spot, she said.

Two other businesses that have been awarded the \$20,000 grants are set to open on Granby Street in a few months: Lamia's Crepes and the screen-printing store Prince Ink. They will also get 50 percent off rent for two years. A few more businesses are in line to receive funding once details are worked out, said Mary Miller, president and CEO of the Downtown Norfolk Council.

Funding for the grant program comes from the additional taxes that are levied on property in Norfolk's Downtown Improvement District.

Vibrant Spaces has drawn a lot more attention to downtown, Miller said. There is \$50,000 left to award applicants this fiscal year while the program looks to fill three more locations. Miller said the council is in the process of establishing the budget for next fiscal year, which begins in July.

"It is our intent to have funds available," she said. "We just don't know that value at the moment."

Have a story idea or news tip? Contact Business reporter Hillary Smith at Hillary@SouthsideDaily.com or 757-490-2750.