

Memorandum

To: Selectboard, Greg Duggan
Cc: Aaron Martin, Director of Public Works
Caitlin Corless, Essex Free Library Director
Thomas Richards
From: Katherine Sonnick, Community Development Director
Re: Consider approval of a consultant for 80 / 90 Upper Main Street planning project
Date: March 26, 2024

Issue

The issue is whether the Selectboard will approve the preferred consultant for the Upper Main Street municipal site planning project.

Discussion

Following the purchase of 80/90 Upper Main Street in November 2023, the Selectboard was presented with the next steps and timeline for the future development of the parcels in January 2024. While it is anticipated that the 32-acre site will include municipal offices and a fire station, it still needs to be determined what other uses should be on the site, the timing of development, project costs and funding, utilities needed, and site layout. In order to determine these elements, an extensive planning process needs to occur. It is important to involve the public to make this a community-wide process and to gain the support for the development that Essex residents want to see at the center of their town.

A Request for Proposals (RFP) was widely distributed on February 2, 2024, and responses were received by Stantec and Weiman Lamphere Architects (WLA), with WLA receiving supporting services from Vanasse Hangen Brustlin (VHB). Staff reached out to several consultants who we thought might submit and they were either too busy to take this on or were unable to find consultants to partner with to do this work. In-person interviews were held during the week of March 4, 2024, with staff Caitlin Corless, Aaron Martin, Tom Richards, Katherine Sonnick, and consultant Gail Henderson-King after reviewing their proposals. The interview team followed up with questions to the consultants during the weeks of March 11 and 18. The team agreed that Stantec is the preferred consultant.

While both teams presented a public engagement process, Stantec has a team of multiple planners, urban designers, and architects dedicated to this very important task of engaging the public in the development of the master plan for the whole site and conceptual design for the municipal facilities. There is no project like this in Vermont and Stantec has worked on similar mixed-use projects out of state. For example, Stantec worked on a development in Stafford County, VA, where a master plan was developed for a 30+ acre site owned by the county to create a downtown that was lacking in the area. The master plan included infrastructure changes, public gathering spaces, and mixed uses. This project also included the development of public-private partnerships. Stantec also helped the Concord, NH create a master plan for a large site with mixed uses, including open space amenities, residential and commercial uses. Their written response to the RFP included two examples of municipal structures recently designed, specifically a fire station and library complex. During their interview, they explained that they have architects that specialize in designing municipal facilities, including fire stations and libraries.

With their large team that has done work outside of Vermont, they bring a fresh perspective and different outreach methods to our project. Stantec has one of the two project leads operating out of the company's South Burlington Office. Their proposal and interview showed their commitment to gaining public support in the development of the community's vision for the site through a robust public engagement process. This part of the project is the foundation for how this site will be developed. Staff expects the site to become a cornerstone of the Town Center, and it will be crucial to allow residents to help create a Town Center that reflects the community's vision. If the master plan and conceptual design processes are not conducted well, the Town will not have the support from the public we need moving forward with any stage of development on this site. We feel Stantec has a greater capacity to meet the goals of the RFP and associated timeline by dedicating a larger project staff with significant depth of staff knowledge.

Stantec offers a more robust and detailed public engagement process that is interwoven throughout the project. They will lay out a Public Engagement Plan (PEP) after the first public meeting, a kick-off workshop. This PEP will include offering at least four in person meetings to develop and refine the master plan and conceptual design. Also included are interviews with stakeholders throughout the process, surveys, and other outreach activities to be determined by the Selectboard and project team.

WLA's proposed budget is \$152,000. Stantec's initial project budget was reduced after our interview with them and follow-up conversations. With a better understanding of our needs, the budget was revised to \$194,335. They did this by trimming out tasks that are either unnecessary or do not need the level of detail or time they initially proposed. These include a market study, due diligence work we already did prior to purchasing the site, and less detail on the concept and master plans, specifically landscape architecture and urban mobility disciplines. They did not trim out any time from the public engagement tasks listed above.

The Town's Purchasing Policy states that for professional services, price will not be the primary factor in the proposal selection. Other factors in the Purchasing Policy's "Criteria for Bid" section that are relevant to this project all support Stantec as the preferred candidate. These selection criteria are the bidder's ability to perform within the specified time limits, bidder's experience and reputation, quality of the materials and services specified in the bid, nature and size of bidder.

Cost

Stantec's proposal is \$194,335. The funding for this project will come from the ARPA account, which has a balance of approximately \$310,000.

Recommendation

Staff recommends the Selectboard approve Stantec as the consultant for the Upper Main Street Planning project and authorize the Town Manager to execute a contract.

Attachments:

1. Stantec Response Essex Town RFP_Final
2. Stantec Addendum_240318
3. Town of Essex - WLA Proposal