



REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

MASTER PLAN FOR DOWNTOWN CHESTERTOWN

Main Street Chestertown [MSC] is seeking qualification statements in the form of a Request for Qualifications [RFQ] from interested consultants to provide professional planning and related design services to prepare a Master Plan for Downtown Chestertown, MD [Project].

Proposal should be emailed to office@mainstreetchestertown.org.

Proposals with all requested supplementary information must be received by 5:00 p.m. EST, November 30, 2023 in digital format only. All questions must be received via email (office@mainstreetchestertown.org) by November 15, 2023.

It is the intent of MSC to contact all prospective consultants on or by December 31, 2023. For shortlisted firms, additional information and direction will then be provided.

MSC reserves the right to reject any or all proposals, or accept any proposal determined to be in the best interest of MSC to fulfill its goal in creating the desired master plan.

Request for Qualifications packets may be obtained from the Main Street Chestertown website. Available upon request are a timeline, maps, reports, correspondence, photographs and related information to familiarize prospective consultants with the scope and context of the Project. A site visit to Chestertown is highly recommended, with tours being held on **September 28, 2023** and **October 4, 2023**. All interested parties are encouraged to attend. To participate in the site visit, please RSVP to office@mainstreetchestertown.org.

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1. Background

Chestertown has a long and rich history dating back hundreds of years owing to its location at the head of the navigable waters on the Chester River and being selected by England in 1706 as one of six royal ports of entry into Maryland. To a large extent, this facet is responsible for its thoughtful early planning, a rich tapestry of historic and stately buildings, public spaces, brick sidewalks, tree-lined streets and river vistas. As Maryland's center of economic growth shifted to Baltimore and the western shore of the Chesapeake in the 19th and 20th centuries, Chestertown was largely bypassed as a location for new construction, fortuitously allowing the preservation of many of its historic structures. In Maryland today, Chestertown is second only to Annapolis in its number of existing 18th and early 19th century buildings.

These features and more have created a unique and organic ambience and sense of place not shared by many colonial era towns on the Delmarva Peninsula. Consequently, the Town boasts a high quality of life for its residents, which fuels a robust real estate market, and is a destination for tourists and those seeking a richer shopping and dining experience in a beautiful and charming setting. The Town sponsors many special events throughout the year to engage the community and promote visitor foot traffic. Additionally, the Town was certified in 2015 as an Arts and Entertainment District, thereby highlighting the importance of visual, performing and literary arts to the community with the added benefit of attracting visitors to support local businesses. Chestertown has seen the rise and fall shared by many small river towns and is fortunate to have had citizens who saw the potential to preserve and promote the town by the firm and steady implementation of a vision for the future in balance with its rich past.

The diversity of the Town is also a relevant facet of its rich history. Notable efforts have been made to highlight the achievements and contributions of the African American community. During the mid-1700's, the farmers of Kent County adopted slavery to keep pace with their expanding land holdings, markets and fortunes. By the late 1700's, a portion of the waterfront was home to a large number of free African-Americans, with many owning their own homes and offering skills as trained tradesmen. By the mid 1800's, there were more free than enslaved black people in the county and both volunteered for the Civil War joining the Union Army. After the war, these veterans organized the Charles A. Sumner Post No. 25 of the Grand Army of the Republic. They eventually built a meeting hall that stands today as only one of two such halls in the U.S. During the 1900's, many African American businesses were established within their own business district. A legendary facet of the African American community was the Uptown Club once located at the corner of Calvert Street and College Avenue. It was a highly popular bar and dance hall in the 1950's and 60's attracting visitors from near and far.

The Town's historic center is characterized by a variety of commercial and civic properties and a thriving business community. The business district is dominated by local merchants and offices at street level with some residences above, particularly along High Street. The Town is the seat of Kent County and is home

to the County Courthouse Complex, County Offices, Chestertown's Town Hall, Town Offices, Police, Emergency Response Services, Library, and Post Office. Stately churches occupy prominent locations, contributing to the historic ambience and punctuating the landscape with soaring, elegant steeples. Chestertown is a fine example of a friendly walking and shopping town with strong potential to grow the business district.

Washington College, chartered in 1782, maintains a significant presence within close proximity to the downtown area; its campus and student housing are within a short walk of downtown. Outside the downtown historic core, the Town is characterized by relatively small amounts of suburban development that includes medium and low density residential development and a mix of commercial and residential development along arterial corridors that include Washington Avenue, Morgnec Road and the continuation of High Street to the west.

The Town's beautiful river waterfront is a tree-lined two-block walk from the center of town. The Town-owned marina houses 60 slips and a waterfront restaurant and is a destination for local and transient boaters. Two blocks of the waterfront are lined with imposing 18th century merchant's homes. The iconic view of these homes and the Chester River bridge as one approaches from the south leaves a lasting impression with first-time visitors and is revered by locals.

Route 213 (also known as Washington Avenue and Maple Avenue) bisects the town, dividing the predominantly post WWII residential portion to the east from the historic center and the main campus of Washington College to the west. This route serves as a major commercial corridor that runs generally from south to north connecting many smaller towns or hamlets on both sides of the Chester River. In 2021, Route 213 was named an "All American Road," which is a subset of the National Scenic Byways program administered by the Federal Highway Administration. The Chesapeake Country Scenic Byway is one of only two All-American Roads in Maryland.

High Street, running east to west, is the spine of the business district with a variety of shops, restaurants and businesses located in distinctive buildings within an intimate and engaging setting. High Street was planned as a double-wide boulevard based on the planning of Philadelphia and includes wide sidewalks for strolling, socializing, dining and window gazing. The town was established on a grid pattern, with the inclusion of green spaces and a town square. Cross Street, another important commercial corridor, connects to Rt. 213 (Maple Avenue) and provides short and direct access to downtown. Cross Street becomes Quaker Neck Road upon its exit from downtown. This well-traveled road runs southerly along the west side of the Chester River past the Chester River Yacht and Country Club and residential developments and single family riverfront homes and onward through a landscape of farmland, which characterize the outskirts of Chestertown and Kent County.

The Town occupies 2.9 square miles and has seen moderate changes over the years. The Town's population is approximately 5,532 according to the 2020 census, increasing slightly by 5.3% between 2010 and 2020. Demographically, 72.5% of the population is White, 21.8% Black, 2.9% Hispanic and 2.6% Asian. Persons 65 and over represent 25.4% of the population. The median household income was \$44,665 and the median value of housing units was \$267,800. Those with a high school education or higher was 88.4% and those with a bachelor degree or higher was 42.3%, while those with a professional or graduate degrees was 26.8%. It is generally agreed that affordable housing for the local workforce, young professionals working remotely, and first-time purchasers is limited within the downtown area and diminishes Chestertown's marketability to new residents. Further, an increased downtown housing stock would promote an increased business presence and productivity and justify extended business hours and prolonged use of the downtown during evening hours, which is currently underutilized.

2. Moving Forward

The Town is currently guided by a 2015 Comprehensive Plan, which states a "General Commercial Goal" of "maintain the vitality of the central business area as a prosperous commercial center," but does not add a vision, strategy, plan, projects, or responsibilities related to this goal. No downtown master plan has been attempted since at least the 1960's.

The current MSC organization was formed in early 2017, with a 12 member Board and a part-time Executive Director (ED). The ED position was made full-time in 2021, and a part-time Assistant ED was added in 2023.

MSC has a six-year track record of successfully planning, funding and executing projects that have improved Chestertown's physical streetscape, business prosperity, and cultural activities. These include facade improvements, wayfinding signage, landscaping and streetscaping, pedestrian lighting, purchase of a mobile stage, COVID recovery assistance, small business consultancy, launch of a signature holiday festival, and many more. While critical to Chestertown's current vitality, these projects lacked an overriding vision and strategy.

After research and consultation with sister Maryland Main Street programs, MSC committed to leading the development of a Chestertown Downtown Master Plan. It was recognized that this initiative will require the engagement of a professional urban planning and design firm. On May 2, 2022, the Town's Mayor and Council voted unanimously to support this initiative and to provide partial funding. In May 2023 the Council increased their funding commitment.

3. Project Overview

This project recognizes the importance of forethought and community engagement and the effect pre-planning has on greater future outcomes. The Downtown Master Plan will include a vision for Chestertown's future and a strategy for growth and development that reflects, respects, enhances, and complements the existing qualities of the Town and advances the interests of all citizens and the business community. The Plan will continue Chestertown's heritage of preserving the uniqueness and charm that make the Town so special to many, while at the same time ensuring ongoing development is holistic, sustainable, robust, and cohesive. The Plan will be the guiding document for all future major downtown decisions, as well as a beacon for private owners and investors to utilize as they prepare to market their properties or plan investments.

A result of a well-organized public outreach campaign that will seek and receive input from a variety of stakeholders, the Vision shall recognize defined guiding principles, including the following:

- Promote a people-first, walkable downtown environment that encourages and enhances planned as well as impromptu social interactions.
- Translate strategic goals into executable plans and designs that are responsive to the complex set of economic, regulatory and community requirements and considerations;
- Incorporate physical design and planning solutions that recognize the relevant link to the historic, cultural, diversity and environmental context of the community;
- Recognize the need for and outline a strategic planning process with Town residents, business leaders, the art community and a multi-disciplinary team to unlock the full potential of a viable and self-sustaining business district;

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- Advocate for the protection of valuable natural resource areas, and address issues such as sustainability, resiliency, and climate change challenges;
- Incorporate action plans that aim to steer future growth into areas where adequate infrastructure already exists and take advantage of currently underutilized and/or vacant properties, parking areas, etc.;
- Address improvements to public infrastructure, including above and below-ground utilities to promote enhanced resilience
- Promote beautification of the downtown business district with an array of improvements, including the removal and/or relocation of utility poles and exposed services.

4. Scope of Work

Geographically, the project scope is defined as the Downtown Historic District, which is similar to the MSC District. Please see map in packet.

As a starting point for the scope of work, MSC has outlined a three-phase project, as follows:

Phase 1: Visioning

- Tasks: conditions analysis; market analysis, needs assessment, community visioning, etc.
- Output: foundational document, priorities list, predesign studies, stakeholders list and engagement, preliminary community design options, potential funding strategy, etc.

Phase 2: Design

- Tasks: zoning analysis, select engineering studies, community design, square foot costing, resiliency measures, etc.
- Output: conceptual designs, interfacing with relevant agencies, rough order-of-magnitude costs, etc.

Phase 3: Full Master Plan

- Tasks: feasibility studies, project list selection, sequencing, cost estimates, timelines, etc.
- Output: community-driven multi-component plan, delivery logic, partnerships, funding plan, etc.

This RFQ is for the work of Phase 1, although it is anticipated the same planning/design firm will likely be used for all three phases. It is a given that the scopes of work for Phases 2 and 3 will depend on the outcome of Phase 1. This scope of work outline is seen as a case of progressive elaboration, with the input of the eventual planning/design firm.

At a minimum, the chosen consultant shall provide the following deliverables for the conclusion of Phase 1:

- Facilitation of a multi-faceted “public consensus” process that results in a vision for downtown Chestertown for the next five to ten years, designed to provide a basis for future public and private investments in the community
- A foundational document that captures and articulates:
 - the outcome of research and analysis of historic, economic, and demographic studies, data, and other sources relevant to the above vision;
 - the outcome of stakeholder and constituent interviews and analysis;
 - a community consensus for the vision of downtown Chestertown in five and ten years;
 - a listing and description of key projects necessary and sufficient to accomplish the vision;

- a high-level, phased strategic plan for the practical and orderly advancement of the above projects, including a checklist for the purpose of guiding the efforts and resources of MSC and other partners;
- a preliminary funding strategy, indicating potential funding sources and strategic partners; and
- a set of preliminary and illustrative community design options, with graphics showing potential streetscape enhancements.
- A set of documents and materials to be used to communicate the above vision and strategic plan to all partners and stakeholders for the purpose of gaining necessary buy-in for the advancement of the plan.

Beyond these deliverables, the specific scope of services and fee shall be negotiated subsequent to selection of a consultant as outlined in the Selection Procedure below.

5. Project Goals

Specific long-term project goals will depend on the outcome of Phases 1 and 2. However, there has been, not surprisingly, ongoing public discussion of potential project goals among various groups of stakeholders. For illustrative purposes, the following is a partial list:

Economic and Business Initiatives:

- Provide for infill development to enhance and grow the business district;
- Promote improvements targeted to attract leisure marine traffic and to enhance the Town as a destination;
- Recommend inclusion of a mixing of uses that include but are not limited to cultural, social, entertainment, and retail at the west end of High Street to anchor the business district and to celebrate the diversity of the area

Housing Programs:

- Promote the highest and best use of vacant and underutilized buildings;
- Examine local and regional housing trends to determine future housing needs best suited for the business district;
- Promote the inclusion of additional residential units with infill development, capturing spaces above existing shops and businesses and adding new space above single floor buildings;

Infrastructure Enhancements:

- Address aging infrastructures, in particular water and sewer lines
- Improve stormwater management and eliminate periodic flooding;
- Provide an infrastructure analysis to support the master plan with improvement recommendations
- Decrease water runoff and air pollution through the efficient use of land, rain gardens and protection of natural resources;

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- o Develop and implement a strategy to address the resiliency of the Town's waterfront in the face of rising sea levels.
- o Examine creative options for additional building areas such as elevated structures over off-street parking lots;
- o Address removal of all utility poles and lines within the designated business district with relocation of all removed and other unsightly services underground and/or out of sight from main streets and walkways

Transportation Initiatives:

- o Promote memorable and aesthetically sensitive improvements for traffic control lights, crosswalk signals, paving, lighting, signage, pathways, portals, historic markers and plaques, landscaping patterns both formal and informal, plant materials, fencing, receptacles, benches, bike racks, etc.
- o Recommend improvements and enhancements to Maple Avenue (Rt. 213) between Spring Avenue and the Chester River bridge to create a gateway experience to the Town that is reflective of the character, charm, and scale of Chestertown
- o Provide a comprehensive vehicle and pedestrian circulation analysis with emphasis on traffic-calming measures, decentralized parking, and pathways that provide options and enhance the walking experience for visitors and residents
- o Provide improvements to encourage the use of bicycles in the downtown area, and to enhance the experience of bikers

Arts and Entertainment Programs:

- o Promote long-term growth and stability of the economic base including provision of hospitality facilities for events;
- o Identify options to enhance and expand the arts community within the district including a 'working and making' component;
- o Preserve, enhance, and add outdoor social, entertainment and gathering spaces;

Historic Preservation Initiatives:

- o Promote the historical settlement pattern of the Town of a dense developed core and rural outlying areas;
- o Preserve historic properties and encourage their rehabilitation, with uses that are relevant and contribute to a vibrant downtown;

Environmental Protection:

- o Protect identified natural resource areas particularly the Chester River and wildlife zones;

Architectural Standards:

- o Building guidelines for windows, doors, siding, roofing, awnings, signage, color schemes, etc.

Cross-Initiative Support:

- o Identify natural, regulatory, and other constraints impacting the strategy;
- o Provide estimated costs for the implementation of the strategy including both Project 'hard and soft' costs

6. Project Partners

The following list represents the official boards, committees, and organizations that have or will be invited to actively participate in the development of the Master Plan. It is anticipated that the consultant will interface to a larger extent with the primary group entities.

Primary Groups:

Chestertown Mayor and Council
Planning Commission
Historic District Commission
Utilities Commission
Downtown Chestertown Association

Secondary Groups:

Chestertown Equity Advisory Committee
Environmental Committee
Tree Committee
Kent County Planning, Housing, and Zoning
Eastern Shore Land Conservancy
Shore Rivers
Kent Cultural Alliance
Public Arts Committee
Zoning Board of Appeals
Chestertown Police Department
Chestertown Emergency Responders
Washington College
Delmarva Power and other utilities

This list is not intended to exclude any stakeholders and it is anticipated that local business owners, Chestertown residents, and other community stakeholders will actively participate in the formulation of the Vision Statement and strategic actions to achieve the vision. Therefore, the list may be subject to revisions.

7. Proposal Requirements

The following outlines the information required to be submitted as part of the RFQ.

- A brief description of your firm with focus on suitability for the Project.
- A list of the employees that will be assigned to the Project including a resume detailing their qualifications and background.
- Organizational flow chart of the project team including all subcontractors.
- A list of similar projects completed by your firm in the past ten (10) years with the list of employees involved with those projects.
- Names, addresses, telephone numbers, e-mail addresses, and contact persons of two to three (2-3) clients for which your company has performed similar services during the past five (5) years.

- Estimated work schedule including a bar-chart schedule or timeline for completion of the project work identifying key milestone activities which shall further reflect the firm’s strategy to fulfill the project requirements.
- A description highlighting your ability to facilitate public involvement including information gathering such as questionnaires, interviews, charette sessions, etc.
- List of outside consultants anticipated with description of expertise, relevant experience and employees for assignment with resumes detailing their qualifications and background
- Estimated fee range based on projects of a similar nature including identifying the phases for invoicing.
- Personnel hourly rate schedule for the Firm and retained consultants with reimbursable billing.
- Example of form of contract in the event an instrument of engagement is not provided by MSC.
- A summary of your cost estimating capabilities with representative examples prepared for similar projects.
- Representative examples of typical deliverables produced for similar projects including those used for public presentations, grant submissions, marketing and informing the public.

8. General Conditions

Requests for Information

Any Firm contemplating submitting a response to this request that is in doubt as to the meaning of any part of this RFQ, or finds a discrepancy in or omission from this RFQ, may submit to MSC a written request for interpretation, clarification, or correction thereof. Any interpretation, clarification or correction of documents will be made in writing and issued to any firm that received this RFQ. MSC will not be responsible for any explanations or interpretations of the documents other than those made in writing.

Contract Award

The selected Firm shall enter into a written contract with the binding of all terms, conditions, and provisions of the proposal, and other terms, conditions and provisions negotiated prior to award of the contract. The master plan consulting services will be funded by a state grant combined with funding from the Town. For coordination purposes relating to the contract, a window for receipt of the funds and executing a contract is being established for a period of six months. MSC will move forward with the interview and selection process, negotiations, selection of the consultant, contract finalization and coordination of subsequent activities during this period of time.

Any contract resulting from this RFQ must be approved by the Town and MSC if applicable, and is subject to receipt of funding.

MSC’s Use of Material

All material submitted shall become the property of MSC, unless it is clearly marked as proprietary information. MSC reserves the right to use any ideas presented in the submission, without compensation paid to the Firm. Selection or rejection of the submission shall not affect this right.

Insurance Requirements

The selected Firm shall procure and maintain, for the duration of the contract, insurance against claims which may arise from or in connection with the performance of the work by the Firm, its agents, representatives, or employees. Proof and coverage amounts of such insurance shall be received and approved by MSC prior to execution of the contract.

Hold Harmless

The selected Firm shall indemnify and hold harmless MSC, the Town and its officers, officials, employees and agents from and against all claims, damages, losses and expenses including attorney's fees arising out of performance of the scope of services included herein, caused in whole or in part by any negligent act or omission of the Firm, their officers, employees, agents, representatives or subcontractors, except where caused by the active negligence, sole negligence, or willful misconduct on the part of the Town or MSC.

Affirmative Action and Fair Employment Practices

Any firm responding to this RFQ, including subcontractors, shall make proactive efforts to represent individuals from certain protected classes in the workplace at levels comparable to those of unprotected groups, and further, shall comply with the Maryland Fair Employment Practices Act that prohibits discrimination in employment because of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, or disability (*MD State Governmental Code Sec. 20-606*).

Submission Ownership and Costs

Upon submission, responses become the property of MSC. The cost of preparing and submitting a response is the sole responsibility of the Firm and shall not be chargeable in any manner to MSC now or in the future. MSC will not reimburse any Firm for any costs associated with the preparation and submission of a response or expense incurred in making a visit to prepare a response, a presentation, participation in an interview, or negotiating a contract with MSC.

9. Selection Procedure

Submissions will be evaluated based on, but not limited to, the following criteria:

- Responsiveness of the entire submission
- Engagement description and approach
- Qualifications and experience: prior experience on engagements similar to this request
- Methodology to be used to accomplish the work
- References and quality of services and work product on similar projects
- Project schedule and demonstrated commitment to the Project and its overall success
- Fee projections, rates and invoicing procedures

In response to the proposals, MSC may select one or more Firms for interviews and an oral presentation. The submission of a response shall not guarantee an opportunity for an interview. Shortlisted firms will

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be required to provide five (5) colored copies of all requested supplemental items listed under Proposal Requirements in the RFQ at least two (2) weeks prior to the date of interview.

MSC anticipates a period of four (4) weeks to review all proposals and develop the shortlist.

MSC will select a Firm based upon the written response, oral interviews, contact from previous engagements, and any other pertinent information deemed necessary by MSC. Subsequently, MSC will negotiate a contract, specific scope of services, and fee with the selected Firm. MSC reserves the right to request substitution of any provider identified by the Firm as part of its team. If an agreement cannot be reached with the selected Firm, MSC retains the right to terminate negotiations with that Firm without notice and open negotiations with the next ranked Firm. The compensation discussed with one interested Firm will not be disclosed or discussed with another Firm.

No work shall begin until the Firm and MSC has executed a contract and a notice to proceed has been provided by MSC.

Acceptance or Rejection of Responses

The contract may be awarded to the Firm that most closely satisfies the needs of MSC and is deemed to be the most advantageous to MSC and hereby reserves the right to accept or reject any item or group of items in a response. MSC also reserves the right to waive any informality or irregularity in any response.

Additionally, MSC reserves the right to reject any and all responses, or portions thereof, received in response to the RFQ, to negotiate separately with any source whatsoever, in any manner necessary, to serve the best interest of MSC and may, for any reason, decide not to award an agreement as a result of this RFQ.

Non-acceptance of any response shall not imply that the proposal was deficient. Non-acceptance of any response shall mean that another response was deemed to be more advantageous to MSC and/or more closely satisfied the needs of MSC, or that MSC decided not to enter into an agreement as a result of this RFQ.

Examination of Proposed Materials

The submission of a response shall be deemed a representation and warranty by the Firm that it has investigated all aspects of the RFQ, that it is aware of the applicable facts pertaining to the RFQ process and its procedures and requirements, and that it has read and understands the RFQ. No requests for modification in the provisions of the response shall be considered after its submission on the grounds that the Firm was not fully informed as to any fact or condition. Statistical information, which is contained in this RFQ or any addendum thereto, is for informational purposes only. MSC disclaims any responsibility for this information that may subsequently be determined to be incomplete or inaccurate.

END OF REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS