



**City of Buena Vista
Request for Proposals:
Downtown Revitalization Strategy**

Issued May 15th 2020

The City of Buena Vista
Attention: Tom Roberts
2039 Sycamore Avenue
Buena Vista VA 24416

Proposal Responses Due:
4:00 PM on June 18th, 2020

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
City of Buena Vista
Downtown Revitalization Strategy

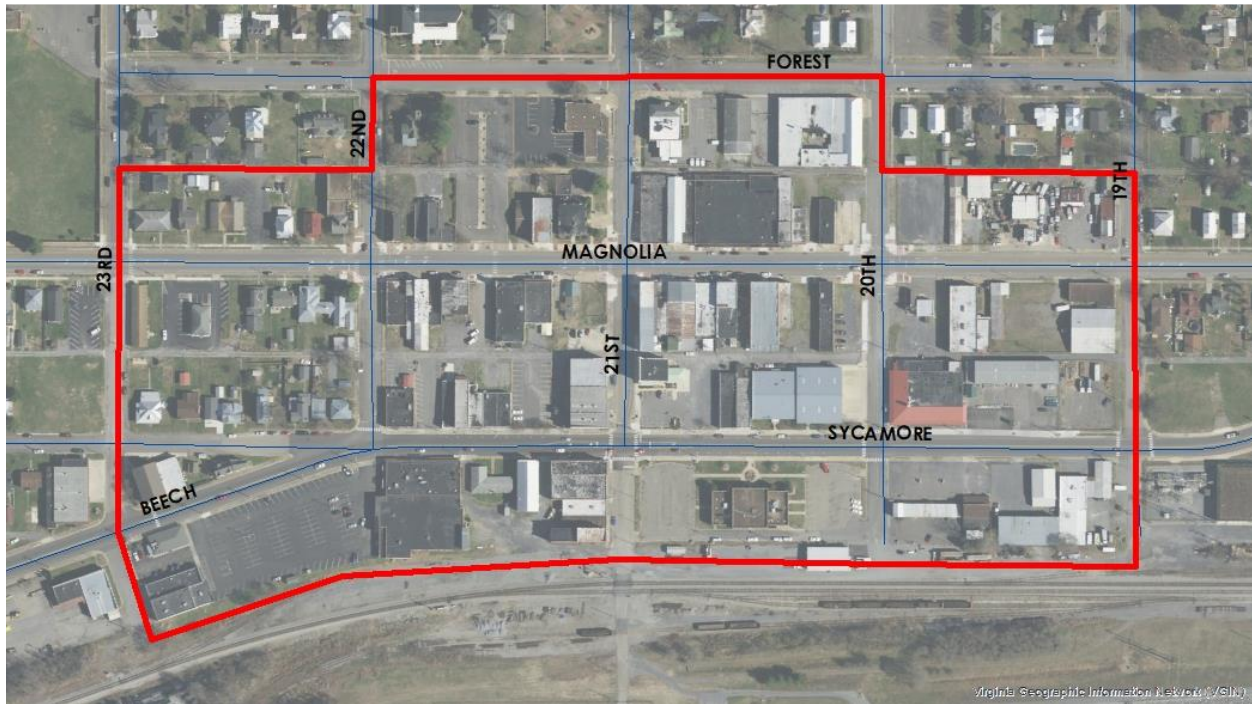
PURPOSE

The City of Buena Vista Department of Community & Economic Development is seeking proposals from well-qualified consultants to develop a comprehensive Downtown Revitalization Strategy to evaluate existing urban design and conditions, identify revitalization needs and priorities, develop a vision and improvement strategy, and create a marketing approach. The Downtown Revitalization Strategy shall include (1) an Economic Restructuring Plan, (2) Marketing Implementation Plan, and (3) a Physical Improvement Plan. These are components of a Business District Revitalization Planning Grant that the City has received through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program administered by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). All components will incorporate information gathered through a community engagement process. These planning grant activities will allow the City to complete the preparatory work necessary to pursue a CDBG Business District Revitalization Community Improvement Grant to implement the projects identified through the planning process.

BACKGROUND

The City of Buena Vista is home to just over 6,400 residents, as estimated by the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service. As its name implies, Buena Vista is a beautiful setting between the Blue Ridge and Allegheny mountain ranges, a ten-minute drive to the Blue Ridge Parkway, and is designated as an Appalachian Trail community and a Commercial District Affiliate of the Virginia Main Street program. Buena Vista is home to Southern Virginia University (SVU), a rapidly growing liberal arts institution. SVU has experienced tremendous growth over the past five years, resulting in a 50% increase of students. Enrollment is over 1,100 students.

Buena Vista has many of the ingredients of economic and community success: gigabit fiber throughout downtown; thriving manufacturers; a growing university; proximity to I-81 and rail service; low crime rate; low housing costs; and outdoor recreation assets. However, it lacks a vibrant downtown with restaurants, music, entertainment, shops, and other amenities that give life and identity to a small town and make it a desirable place to live, work, and visit. Among other factors, a lack of clear vision and strategy has contributed to the decline and underutilization of the downtown. A map of the City of Buena Vista's Downtown Business District, the project area, is shown below:



Project Area – Buena Vista Downtown Business District

The City of Buena Vista has undertaken several activities during the past couple of years that support revitalization efforts. These include the following:

- The City of Buena Vista received a CDBG Opportunity Zone Planning Grant to identify and market investment opportunities within its Opportunity Zone. The entire city is a designated Opportunity Zone. Consultant proposals were received in April and are under review. A consultant decision is expected in May 2020.
- A well-known developer purchased 13 downtown properties in 2018. A two-day work session was hosted by the developer in April 2019 to discuss preliminary project ideas and to connect Buena Vista community leaders with regional, state, and federal revitalization partners. The developer’s revitalization initiative is known as Go BV.
- In early 2019, a team of citizen and local government leaders from Buena Vista attended a three-day intensive course in Shepherdstown, WV entitled, “Balancing Nature and Commerce in Rural Communities,” and identified the need for a healthier Buena Vista in six different functional areas: economically, mentally, physically, environmentally, socially, and spiritually. A Healthy BV group was formed and is tapping into existing networks to increase quality of life by orchestrating events to address each of these areas.
- Healthy BV hosted a facilitated community summit in March 2020 to explore the City’s civic infrastructure. The outcome of the meeting was a big-picture sense of Buena Vista’s civic infrastructure and organizations’ roles and contributions to the community.
- Buena Vista is one of three localities that makes up the Rockbridge Area Outdoor Partnership. The Partnership’s mission is to work collaboratively to advance a network of trails, parks, water trails, bikeways, and other outdoor recreational activities that support economic, stewardship, and community health and wellness goals. The coalition was

instrumental in a \$1.3 million grant award to replace a pedestrian bridge over South River along the Chessie Trail. Additionally, it is facilitating development of unified signage program.

- City representatives were part of a regional team that attended the Virginia Department of Health's Walkability Action Institute in 2019. This led to grant funding for new park maps and trail signage.
- Buena Vista is participating in a Regional Economic Development Innovation (REDI) technical assistance grant through USDA Rural Development to develop an economic development strategy for the Rockbridge region, including workforce development.

In addition to the initiatives listed above, the following work has been performed as initial activities of the CDBG Business District Revitalization planning grant:

- A Project Management Team was formed. The Project Management Team is a group of twelve City, community, and business leaders. The Project Management Team guides grant activities, communicates information between the team and the broader community, considers the big picture, and ensures the timely completion of grant activities.
- A public meeting was held in August 2019 to familiarize the community with the CDBG planning process and activities. The planning process has become known as ConnectBV.
- A survey of properties was completed within the mapped business district. The following data was gathered:
 - Addresses and tax map numbers using GIS;
 - Building square footage, year built, and assessed value from City real estate assessment database;
 - Windshield survey to complete conditions assessment, use determination, and photograph inventory of exterior of buildings and vacant properties

Proposals should enhance work already completed or underway in support of business district revitalization.

DELIVERABLES

It is expected that the consultant will work with the Project Management Team to develop a comprehensive Downtown Revitalization Strategy that includes the following components and deliverables:

Public Engagement & Visioning Process

The consultant will conduct strategic thinking/visioning activities to gather information and engage residents, businesses, and community groups in the planning process for a downtown revitalization strategy. Community visioning activities will develop consensus community priorities and desired project outcomes. The results of these activities will inform and guide the economic restructuring, marketing, and physical improvement components of a comprehensive

downtown revitalization strategy.

A unifying vision for what a modern-day Buena Vista might look like is an essential component of this project. Its importance cannot be overstated. A lack of a common vision and framework for downtown revitalization has resulted in a stalled revitalization process. There are many who urgently want it to happen, but have no idea how to start the process, or even what it would mean to be successful in this endeavor.

A formal visioning process will gather much needed and desired community input through the lens of an overarching vision that emphasizes downtown but also reflects the greater community. Buena Vista residents and stakeholders are eager to express their ideas and hopes for the City. This public engagement and visioning process will provide the mechanism for community input and downtown planning as well as a framework of the City's assets, improvement opportunities, and attainable next steps for moving the needle forward on a thriving downtown Buena Vista and a community that residents are proud to call home.

Economic Restructuring Plan

The Economic Restructuring Plan will identify the means by which the City may implement economic improvement strategies that will drive and direct the actions that best ensure true economic revitalization and long-term vibrancy of the downtown and broader community. The outcome of the plan will be a framework around which the City may strengthen and spur resources to attract investment and re-energize the community. Specifically, the Economic Restructuring Plan will:

1. Examine the City of Buena Vista's current economic climate;
2. Analyze local and visitor markets;
3. Develop a vision for the downtown business district;
4. Reflect business and community input;
5. Identify strategies to enhance the downtown environment, remove barriers to business growth, and promote increased visitation and tourism;
6. Establish and prioritize both near-term and long-term goals and strategic initiatives to include specific projects for the City to undertake. Near-term goals should focus on taking advantage of Buena Vista's existing opportunities and assets. Long-term goals should provide the foundation for new employment opportunities and the attraction of expanded business and industry; and
7. Provide cost estimates for prioritized projects.

Marketing Implementation Plan

Informed by the community vision and economic restructuring analysis, the consultant will develop an initial Marketing Plan for the City of Buena Vista which includes recommendations and implementation strategies for the following:

- Branding, including creation of a message strategy and positioning statements;
- Public relations;
- Signage, including wayfinding signage to and within downtown;
- Promotional materials;
- Review of current citywide events and how to better incorporate downtown businesses into those events;
- New events and activities to promote the district;
- Schedule of events and/or calendar of activities;
- Website information and social media recommendations and strategies; and
- Other related marketing recommendations and strategies.

The implementation strategies should include a prioritization and/or phasing plan. Recommendations on the best method of implementation, the organization with the greatest capacity to lead the strategy, should be identified. The City is looking for a planned multimedia approach implemented in several phases to accommodate current budgetary considerations.

Physical Improvement Plan

The Physical Improvement Plan will address physical blight. The consultant will:

1. Identify priority projects for downtown revitalization efforts, including improvements to blighted properties, facade enhancements, improved public spaces and accessibility, signage, and layout in business district (sidewalks, intersection improvements, etc.)
2. Prepare a Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) providing details regarding necessary infrastructure upgrades, replacements or improvements within the designated project area. The PER will be submitted to, reviewed and approved by the appropriate State agency(ies) prior to the submission of any Community Improvement Grant application.
3. Complete research, documentation, and notification to satisfy the Environmental Review Record and Section 106 requirements associated with the potential or perceived outcomes of investments in the project area.
4. Prepare images of urban design ideas to inspire and guide future development. Develop streetscape concepts and facade renderings for at least four (4) downtown buildings, selected in coordination with the Project Management Team. These images may be included during the community engagement process to facilitate the development of a downtown vision.

TIMELINE & BUDGET

All work is to be completed no later than December 10, 2020. This contract is supported by a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Business District Planning Grant administered through the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). The budget for the project is limited to CDBG Planning Grant funds of approximately \$30,000.

PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Deadline for Receipt

Proposals are due by 4:00 PM EDT on Thursday, June 18, 2020. Proposals received after the deadline will be rejected.

Submittal Requirements

Consultants shall submit one (1) digital copy of the proposal by email to:

Thomas Roberts
Director of Community and Economic Development
City of Buena Vista
troberts@bvcity.org

Proposals shall not exceed a total of twenty (20) pages.

At a minimum, the following information should be included.

1. Responding firm's name;
2. Firm's address and contact information;
3. In narrative form, describe your approach to completing the deliverables for the Buena Vista Business District Revitalization Plan;
4. Names, roles, and qualifications of personnel who would be working on the project;
5. Timeline for the proposed work;
6. Examples of at least three completed projects with similar deliverables;
7. Three references (name, address, phone number, email address); and
8. Budget of services to be provided. The cost of completing each deliverable should be calculated separately.

All inquiries for information should be in writing and directed to: Thomas Roberts, Director of Community and Economic Development, City of Buena Vista; 2039 Sycamore Avenue, Buena Vista, VA 24416; (540) 261-8607.

All Offerors shall abide by all applicable State and Federal laws.

This public body does not discriminate against faith-based organizations, in accordance with the Code of Virginia, §2.2-4343.1 or against a Bidder or Offeror because of race, religion, color, sex, national origin, age, disability, or any other basis prohibited by law relating to discrimination in employment.

REVIEW OF PROPOSALS

Evaluation Criteria

A subcommittee of the Project Management Team will serve as the Review Committee. Generally, the Review Committee will consider the firm's overall suitability to provide services

within the time, budget, and operational constraints that may be present and the comments and/or recommendations of the firm's previous clients, references, and others.

Proposals shall be evaluated by the Review Committee using the following criteria:

- Experience of the firm with similar fund development plans;
- Understanding of the project, familiarity with business district revitalization programs and downtown marketing;
- Clarity of the proposal;
- Approach to the economic revitalization strategy;
- Demonstrated ability to write clearly and in lay language;
- Credentials and roles of personnel assigned to the project;
- Cost of proposal;
- Ability to meet specific timelines;
- Ability to coordinate with concurrent Opportunity Zone planning efforts; and
- Approachability and willingness to work collaboratively with City of Buena Vista staff and its community partners.

Statement of Intent

The City of Buena Vista reserves the right to reject any or all responses to this Request for Proposals. The City of Buena Vista will not reimburse costs of preparing consultant proposals. The City of Buena Vista may ask for clarification in the proposal should the need arise.

The City of Buena Vista may amend and extend the selected consultant's contract, as agreed upon by both parties, for CDBG project implementation should the City be awarded a CDBG Business District Revitalization Community Improvement Grant.