



REQUEST FOR GRAND RAPIDS EDA ACTION

AGENDA DATE: December 14, 2023

STATEMENT OF ISSUE: Consider approval of a professional service agreement with Economic Development Services, Inc. for assistance with the Downtown Organization Project.

PREPARED BY: Rob Mattei, Executive Director

BACKGROUND:

Janna King of Economic Development Services, Inc. has provided services as a sub-consultant that focused on the development of the economic development element of the Comprehensive Plan and the development of the Downtown Plan.

As we've discussed, a key objective within the Downtown Plan is to work with community stakeholders, many who participated in the Plan, to develop a sustainable organization with a sole focus of further building on the vitality of the Downtown.

Economic Development Services has proposed to facilitate that process. The scope of those services within the proposal generally includes:

1. Draft a **preliminary work plan** for the organization's initial two years based on the Downtown Grand Rapids Plan Update. Identify key areas of responsibility and capabilities that will be needed to implement the Grand Rapids Plan Update.
2. Work with the Community Development Director to **establish an Advisory Committee of downtown stakeholders** including business and property owners and anchor institutions in the community. The Advisory Committee members will be actively involved in helping shape a public-private downtown organization focused on long-term downtown vitality with the capacity to act strategically and respond to market challenges and opportunities. An in-person kick-off meeting of the Advisory Committee will be held focusing on the following elements.
 - Introductions
 - Why create a downtown organization?
 - Highlights of the Downtown Grand Rapids Plan Update and the expected role of a downtown organization in implementing the plan and sustaining a healthy downtown in Grand Rapids
 - Advisory Committee members responsibilities

- Preliminary timeline
- Discussion of possible “model” downtown organizations in regional center communities. Several possibilities will be suggested, and advisory committee members will be asked for additional suggestions.

3. The **consultant will do a preliminary evaluation of candidate downtown organizations** in regional center communities in Greater Minnesota that could serve as models for Grand Rapids and share the results with the Advisory Committee via Zoom. The preliminary evaluation will identify:

- Organization (i.e., structure, leadership, partnerships, “big picture” staffing, budget, funding)
- Market characteristics (i.e., size, seasonality related to tourism)
- Focus of downtown organization (e.g., strategy and business mix, physical revitalization, design and appearance, financing and technical assistance, marketing and promotion, activation, coordinating activities and events)

4. The **consultant will research the selected peer communities** gathering more information about

- Peer downtown challenges, accomplishments, and impact over time
- Strategy and elements considered critical by peer community stakeholders
- Additional detail on organizational structure, relationships with other development-related organizations (e.g., chambers, development organizations, visitors’ bureaus), staffing, budgets

5. The Consultant will further **expand upon the peer community research with the Advisory Committee** by facilitating:

- **Advisory Committee bus tour** (The tour could also be opened to other downtown stakeholders) Peer community findings would be shared with approximately 25 participants in a 2 night, 3-day bus tour. With this approach community stakeholders share the first-hand experience of seeing a variety of downtown challenges and solutions and learning directly from stakeholders in other communities. A trip gets community stakeholders “away” and creates an opportunity to build relationships, trust and shared understandings. A brief survey on the bus and an in person facilitated session following the tour will identify elements of the various models that would be appropriate for Grand Rapids.

6. The Consultant will **work with the Advisory Committee to refine the new organization’s workplan for the initial two years** based on peer community research and meet with community and economic development organizations serving Grand Rapids regarding their interest and capacity to partner and provide services to the downtown organization. The consultant will also work with the Advisory Committee to develop recommendations regarding three elements important to getting an organization up and running: bylaws (draft – subject to legal review), membership structure and location of the downtown organization’s offices.

7. The consultant will **prepare a draft report and recommendations** regarding the creation of a sustainable downtown organization appropriate for Grand Rapids. The draft will be shared with Community Development staff and Advisory Committee members for feedback and revisions.

8. The Consultant has also proposed to provide the following **additional tasks**:

- Explore the willingness of funders to provide financial support based on the report. Adjust report as needed to reflect realistic fundraising capacity.
- Prepare a job description that reflects the qualifications and responsibilities for leadership of a downtown organization serving Grand Rapids.

The proposed not to exceed total cost of the services outlined in the proposed contract is \$62,553.00, which does not include bus tour costs for transportation, lodging, and food.

REQUIRED ACTION: Pass a motion approving a professional service agreement with Economic Development Services, Inc. for assistance with the Downtown Organization Project.