

To: Public Works Commission, Plan Commission

CC: Mayor McFarland

From: Mason Becker, Strategic Initiatives and Development Coordinator

Date: November 20, 2023

Re: Downtown River Corridor Opportunity Analysis

Commission members,

In keeping with its key priorities of facilitating quality downtown development and working to attract projects to the downtown area, the Board of the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Watertown (RDA) has unanimously decided to take up planning and redevelopment of the Downtown River Corridor as its next major project, following the successful completion of the Bentzin Family Town Square earlier this year.

I am providing this memo to make you aware of this plan, and to seek your input into the Request for Proposal (RFP). The RDA will be paying for an initial “Downtown River Corridor: Opportunity Analysis and Strategic Development Plan” after soliciting proposals from third-party firms. Please find attached a similar plan the City of Hartford had done in 2016, which includes planning and design elements, including visual renderings, like those we are looking for.

As you may recall, the City of Watertown has conducted past analysis and design work for its downtown riverfront, including work done by Ayres to design plans for a downtown riverwalk in 2016 (see included draft). Previous to this, the City also had Vandewalle & Associates conduct an analysis of the downtown riverfront area in 2003, and Redevelopment Resources also created a “Watertown Riverfront/Downtown Redevelopment Initiative” proposal in 2014.

Items from the 2014 initiative that were completed or are ongoing include the creation of the Town Square, the creation of a commercial Revolving Loan Fund, the general elimination of blight, increased downtown programming, a parking study, streetscape improvements, working with Watertown Main Street and the Chamber to reduce vacancies, elimination of the CDA and creation of the RDA, and the upcoming traffic study, as well as upcoming reconstruction of the Main Street (Cole) Bridge. The 2014 plan also calls for further development of the riverwalk. The RDA seeks to take this planning up as part of its strategic redevelopment goals, which will enhance the local economy and quality of life for Watertown’s residents, businesses, and visitors.

As the above-mentioned studies were done quite a few years ago, a new, updated plan is needed to tie together various areas of need in the Downtown River Corridor. This will also be a natural extension of the Landscape Architect work recently completed by Vandewalle & Associates for the upcoming 2028 Main Street Reconstruction Project.

The project’s overall goal will be to enhance the aesthetic, economic, and recreational potential of the Downtown River Corridor area along the Rock River and build upon other recently completed downtown projects. The study area is roughly defined as encompassing the riverbank on both sides of the downtown area between the

Milwaukee Street Bridge and the Cady Street Bridge, and extending up to Fannie P. Lewis Park, as well as an approximate two-block area extending east and west from either side of the Rock River.

The selected firm will be responsible for performing a comprehensive analysis of the area, updating design work for a downtown riverwalk, proposing enhancements to amenities, evaluating the current seawall, docks, and waterfront facilities, facilitating public engagement sessions, identifying specific redevelopment sites and proposing suggested uses, and creating a final “Downtown River Corridor: Opportunity Analysis and Strategic Development Plan” document that will be made available to developers, businesses, and members of the public.

The proposals should provide a detailed methodology outlining how the firm plans to approach the project, including a timeline for each phase. The selected firm will be given a timeline for the study and fieldwork, with anticipated completion before the end of 2024.

The RDA would welcome any additional feedback on what items the Plan Commission and Public Works Commission feel should be included in this RFP.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Mason T. Becker".

Mason T. Becker
Strategic Initiatives and Development Coordinator