

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)
DOWNTOWN 2050 PLAN UPDATE**

EVENT 1682

**CITY OF SAINT PAUL
1400 CITY HALL ANNEX, 25 WEST FOURTH STREET
SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA 55102**

JANUARY 26, 2026

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1. SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND

The City of Saint Paul Planning and Economic Development Department (PED) is seeking proposals from qualified firms to update the Downtown Development Strategy. The selected consultant will work collaboratively with city leadership, partner organizations, stakeholders, and community members to deliver a dynamic roadmap for the future of Downtown Saint Paul.

The purpose of this Request for Proposal (RFP) is to solicit proposals from various candidate organizations, conduct a fair and extensive evaluation based on criteria listed herein, and select the candidate who best represents PED's direction for this project.

With a population of approximately 310,000, Saint Paul is at the heart of the 3.7 million-person Minneapolis-Saint Paul metropolitan area. More than 80 languages are spoken in the city, with the four most common being English, Spanish, Hmong, and Somali. Our connected transportation system, walkable neighborhoods, and compact Downtown grid make it easy for people to get around on foot, by bicycle, on public transit, or in a vehicle. The 11-mile Green Line light rail connects the Twin Cities' downtowns, University of Minnesota, and MSP International Airport. Our award-winning parks system is consistently ranked among the top five in the nation.

Like many other cities, Saint Paul continues to adjust and adapt after the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting changes in work patterns and downtown population and activity. The profound impacts of the George Floyd's murder and related civil unrest resulted in a reconsideration of equity in development patterns and opportunities to reexamine our civic spaces. The more recent federal enforcement operation and changing federal policies may require modification to available outreach and implementation tools.

2. PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

The proposal must include the following sections:

Section 1 – Executive Summary: Summarize how the team will meet the timeline and project requirements.

Section 2 – Project Understanding: Affirm that the proposed team understands the complexity of the project, has identified key issues and opportunities, and has strategies to mitigate the key issues.

Section 3 – Scope: Explain how the team will complete the scope of work within the timeline. Include a schedule that shows major milestones and work tasks.

Section 4 – Team: Identify the project manager and describe the responsibilities and relationships among the team members and/or subconsultants. The project manager should be the primary point of contact for all financial items and for staff management. Include an organizational chart showing relationship between project manager and key subject matter

experts. Include team experts in urban planning and design, economics, placemaking, zoning, development, and public art.¹

Section 5 – Project Examples: Represent the team’s experience delivering political urban planning efforts, downtown plans, and urban design concepts in a minimum of three and maximum of seven project examples. List client references for each project. Indicate relevant team members and roles for each project.

Section 6 – Cost: Include all costs needed to perform the services listed. Submit the cost separate from the rest of the proposal.

3. PROJECT PURPOSE AND DESCRIPTION

Context

Downtown Saint Paul has historically been a year-round regional hub for events, entertainment, and culture. The variety of music and sports venues bring waves of activity to Downtown, helping to support a mix of food, beverage, and retail establishments. With a large supply of office buildings, Downtown has served as an employment center with growing residential communities in a range of housing types. Some residential growth is occurring on the fringes of the downtown core (e.g., Westside Flats, Lafayette Park), providing an opportunity to improve the synergy between Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods. Through the ongoing implementation of the Capital City Bikeway, multi-modal public realm improvements continue to improve connections to and within downtown.

This recent Downtown Investment Strategy, led by Downtown Alliance, builds on these opportunities and sets the following goals for Downtown evolution:

- Attract 20,000 more residents
- Create 20,000 more jobs
- Generate a 20% increase in visitation

The intent of this effort is to leverage the Downtown Investment Strategy, which sets the overall vision for Downtown, and update the plan for downtown (currently the Downtown Development Strategy) to provide clear land use and policy guidance necessary to implement this vision.

The existing 2003 Downtown Development Strategy is a 10-year policy plan adopted as part of the Comprehensive Plan, initiated at the request of the Capitol River Council and sponsored by the Saint Paul Planning Commission. The Strategy has helped to guide the changing nature of Downtown in several key areas: arts and entertainment, living, working, movement, public realm, and parks and recreation. However, the Downtown Development Strategy was last amended in 2005 and as a 20-year-old document, it is at the end of its shelf life and in need of an update to respond to the Downtown Investment Strategy’s vision for

¹ Per Sec. 12.04 of the Administrative Code, the City of Saint Paul requires that a public artist be a member of the consultant team.

the future. Additionally, policies of the Land Use Chapter of city's 2050 Comprehensive Plan will need to reflect this vision.

Over the last 20 years, the Downtown area has experienced many changes, including the development of the Green Line Light Rail and the Saint Paul Saints Minor League Baseball stadium (CHS Field), investments in Lowertown and areas adjacent to the Grand Casino Arena, a rehabilitation of Union Depot and expansion of Amtrak service to Chicago, and market fluctuations due to the Great Recession and COVID-19 pandemic. Similar to other downtowns nationally, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a variety of new downtown challenges, particularly related to work patterns and the vibrancy associated with the presence of in-person professionals. Recent business, building, and skyway closures have been concerning to those supporting the overall health of the downtown economy.

Despite current challenges, project partners have set the stage for Downtown to grow and thrive through the following documents:

- Downtown Investment Strategy (Downtown Alliance, 2024)
- Reimagine Downtown Saint Paul: Transforming the Core (Downtown Alliance, in progress)
- Capitol Mall Design Framework (CAAPB, 2024)
- Downtown Streets and Sidewalks Plan (in progress)
- Citywide Economic Development Strategy (in progress)
- 2050 Comprehensive Plan (2026-2028)

This project will redefine a vision for Downtown that reflects shifting trends related to the COVID-19 pandemic and other changes over the last 20 years;

- Elevate Downtown as a long-standing regional hub for entertainment, culture, employment, and housing; and
- Establish Downtown as a well-designed, place-based destination that leverages its historic resources and proximity to the Mississippi River and Capitol.

Consolidating and Updating Out-of-Date Plans

Downtown Saint Paul is guided by numerous policies, investment strategies, and transportation initiatives. The City has adopted or approved over a dozen plans or guidelines related to the Downtown area in the past 30 years that are still in effect today. Other stakeholders, such as the Downtown Alliance and Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board (CAAPB), are currently undertaking efforts to guide the future of Downtown. Streamlining the policy framework is vital for community understanding, equitable development, and successful implementation. Working within the context of implementing the goals of the Downtown Investment Strategy, this project will consolidate policies that are still relevant from the various downtown plans, identify policy gaps, decertify outdated plans, and draft zoning code amendments.

The following plans have been successfully implemented and/or are no longer relevant to Downtown development policy, and may be decertified upon adoption of an updated Downtown 2050 Plan:

- Fitzgerald Park Precinct Plan (2006)

- Irvine Avenue Development Plan (2003)
- North Quadrant Precinct Plan (2000)
- North Quadrant Urban Village Design Guidelines (2000)
- 7 Corners Gateway Development Evaluation Tool (2007)

The following plans are outdated but still relevant to modern Downtown challenges and opportunities, can serve as a basis for the Downtown 2050 Plan update, and may be decertified or archived upon adoption of an updated Downtown 2050 Plan:

- Downtown Development Strategy (existing) (2003)
- Saint Paul on the Mississippi Development Framework (1997)

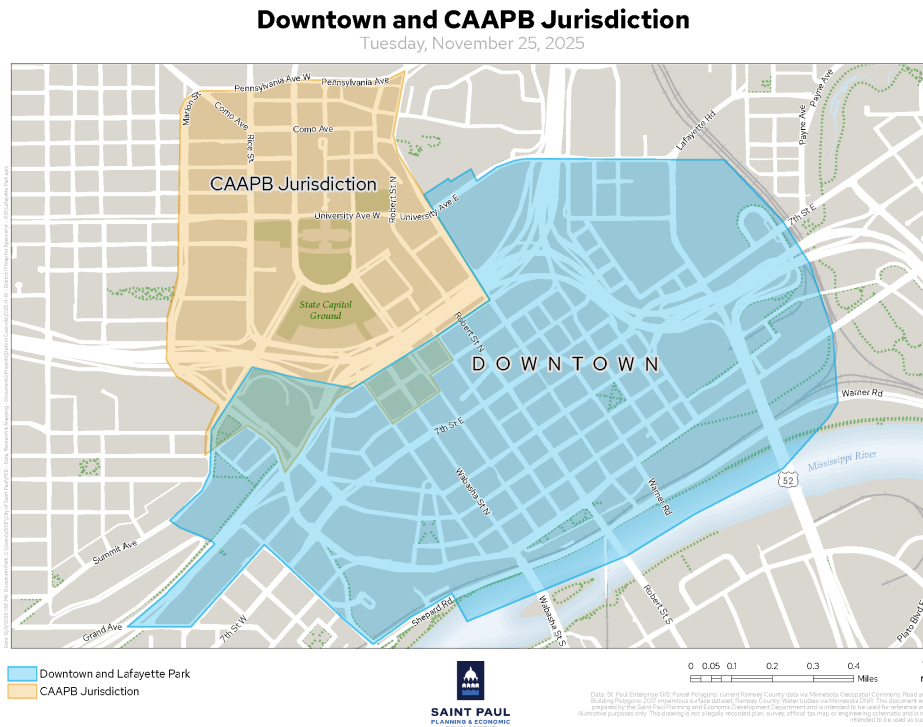
The following plans are generally still relevant, calibrated to modern challenges and opportunities, and/or are currently under development by the City or another stakeholder:

- Downtown Commons (MnDOT)
- River Balcony Master Plan (2017)
- Capital City Bikeway: Network Study and Design Guide (2016)
- Greater Lowertown Master Plan (2012)

Project Area

For the purposes of the Downtown 2050 Plan update, the project area will be initially defined as the Planning District 17 boundary, exclusive of most of the area controlled by Capital Planning and Architectural Board, and in addition to the area known as “Lafayette Park,” as depicted below. This boundary is set for scoping purposes and may be reviewed and adjusted at the discretion of the City project manager.

(Figure 1: Draft Project Boundary)



4. PROJECT SCOPE

This Scope of Work outlines tasks to complete the primary deliverable, an updated Downtown 2050 Plan. This effort will be guided by a City project manager.

Task 1: Project Management

Develop a project schedule, including timeline, communication plan, and final scope in conjunction with City project manager. Consultant schedules meetings, keeps records of meetings, and generally supports staff as needed. City staff will lead community engagement activities, but the consultant may assist and participate in collaboration with staff, as needed.

Task 2: Policy Analysis and Development

Consultants will evaluate existing policies, identify policy gaps, and draft new policies for relevancy to establishing broad policies for the 2050 Comprehensive Plan and implementing the Downtown Investment Strategy. This task will be organized in three sections that will inform the organization of Task 3. The three sections are as follows:

1. Vitality (Task 2A) – This section focuses on making Downtown a welcoming activity center.
2. Placemaking (Task 2B) – This section focuses on improving the public realm year-round.
3. Resiliency (Task 2C) - This section focuses on Downtown adapting to changes in climate and economy to be more resilient to shifts in the future.

Task 2A: Vitality Policy Development

Assess Downtown's role as a cultural and art destination, entertainment hub, and general activity center, and prepare policies that envision future vitality. Leverage Downtown's importance as the intersection of a diversity of uses and cultures with a strong history as an evolving center for the regional creative economy. An essential element of Downtown is being a magnet for events and people. The residential population of Downtown has been growing for decades. Museums and theaters have drawn people here for ages. Many generations of Minnesotans remember supporting family and friends at state high school tournaments held in Downtown. Hospitals bring a consistent mix of generations from around the region into Downtown. Buildings like the Landmark Center, Union Depot, and districts like Lowertown draw people in and anchor Downtown as a hub of activity.

The consultant will collect and update relevant policies from existing plans provided by the City and use techniques such as SWOT analyses, interviews, market trends evaluations, and consideration of implementation metrics, etc. to identify strategies and policy gaps to support Downtown as a dense hub of housing, employment, and entertainment framed by the goal to generate a 20 percent increase in visitation. Consider event management strategies, alignment with public safety strategies, multi-modal approaches to connect Downtown, as well as day-to-day curbside management, ensuring that the Downtown economy prospers from all types of activity.

Key questions to address:

- How do we build on unique assets to continue to make Downtown more fun and vibrant as we add more residents and businesses?
- What are the barriers holding Downtown back?

- What are opportunities to build on Downtown’s competitive advantages?
- How might entertainment uses complement housing and office uses?
- How can curbside street use be organized to support changing living and working patterns?
- How can we build on seasonal activation strategies?
- What policies should be in place to support lively streets?

Deliverable: Memo summarizing policies and interventions to cultivate vitality in the city center. Memo should outline strategies for linking various uses in a complementary way. Memo will inform Task 3.

Task 2B: Placemaking Policy Development

Assess Downtown urban design conditions and how they relate to the public realm. Downtown’s public spaces are vital to its success because they provide the connective tissue where community interaction takes place. The annual Winter Carnival and the skyway system are responses to Minnesota’s cold winters, but they impact the public realm in very different ways.

The consultant will incorporate relevant policies and recommendations from the Downtown Streets and Sidewalks Plan and other plans, as appropriate. Analyze both ground level conditions (CPTED principles) and skyways in addition to connections to parks and interface of building frontages with right of way (streets, sidewalks, and alleys) to identify additional strategies and policy gaps related to urban design and form. Prioritize State Capitol and Mississippi River connections and viewsheds. Create illustrations and exhibits as necessary to determine urban design policy priorities and demonstrate outcomes of implementation.

Key questions to address:

- What is the interaction between private buildings and the public realm?
- How should Downtown relate to the river, Capitol, Cathedral, or other landmarks?
- How does Downtown connect to adjacent neighborhoods?
- How might the skyways better connect to or complement street level activity?
- How does the skyway system impact urban design? How can it create unique design opportunities?
- Are there barriers to reinvestment in Downtown parks?
- What are the recreation opportunities for the growing downtown population?
- Are open spaces accessible to all Downtown users?
- What zoning and land use changes could lead to more effective urban form?
- How should development incentives and/or design requirements be linked to activating the public realm?

Deliverable: Memo summarizing policies and strategies to achieve activity, vibrancy, and a sense of place Downtown. Memo will inform Task 3.

Task 2C: Resiliency Policy Development

Downtown Saint Paul is uniquely positioned to be one of the most sustainable neighborhoods in the region. Its access to transit and jobs, district energy, and opportunity to grow the population through building reuse are all huge assets. Building on this to prioritize strategies that commit to a more environmentally and economically resilient future will help Downtown thrive over the coming decades. Effective adaptive reuse in Lowertown and the Rice Park areas of Downtown has set a precedent for other areas to follow.

The consultant will incorporate relevant resiliency and environmental sustainability policies considering the changing climate, the trend toward more extreme weather events, and the associated impacts on urban spaces for future functionality. Identify policy gaps by assessing Downtown's resiliency as an aging urban core aiming to evolve into a thriving, active neighborhood future. Review historic and heritage preservation sites and opportunities for creative adaptive reuse. Build on existing unique assets, such as geothermal utilities, to suggest other future Downtown green infrastructure opportunities (e.g., solar panel arrays, electrical charging infrastructure, etc.).

Key questions to address:

- How can Downtown contribute to equitable housing diversity?
- What policies can ensure emerging and diverse developers are included in the process?
- How can Downtown transition to the most sustainable and resilient neighborhood in the region?
- How can equitable development be incentivized?
- Is the skyway system the most effective strategy for climate adaptation and accessibility considerations?
- What innovative green infrastructure opportunities exist Downtown?
- What Downtown sites and resources are historic or hold historical significance?
- How can historic resources be creatively reused in a modern Downtown core?

Deliverable: Memo summarizing policies and goals for resiliency Downtown, consistent with the Climate Action and Resilience Plan. Memo will inform Task 3.

Task 3: Final Policy Framework

Develop the final planning documents:

- Downtown policies for *2050 Comprehensive Plan*, which updates the overarching policies related to land use, transportation, housing, and other relevant categories that will guide Downtown for the next 20-year comprehensive plan.
- *Downtown 2050 Plan Policy Framework*, which details the policies, strategies, and implementation metrics to implement the Downtown Investment Strategy based on work completed in all preceding tasks.

Ensure each policy memo from previous tasks includes actionable implementation steps with responsible parties and potential zoning or funding tools. Incorporate the summaries of the process, engagement findings from City staff, and technical analysis and recommendations in appendices. Organize policies based on three major categories: vitality, placemaking, and

resiliency. Work with the City project manager to ensure the framework is ready for inclusion in the City’s Comprehensive Plan update.

Deliverable: Annotated Outline, Policy Framework, Appendices

Task 4: Zoning Analysis, Diagnosis & Amendments

Review vitality, placemaking, and resiliency policies, strategies, and metrics to consider zoning interventions that could lead to effective implementation. Analysis should include review of zoning districts and height districts, and potential regulatory constraints and opportunities for the key opportunity sites and Downtown overall. Current regulations allow for bonus densities for Mid-20th Century design elements as well as height regulations from 100 years ago. Regulations are permissive in terms of use and form, while pedestrian oriented districts elsewhere in the city have more stringent design requirements. Current zoning also assumes a “service area” circling Downtown, which is based on an auto-orientated Downtown, focused on workers commuting to Downtown for work and leaving in the evenings.

Conduct a diagnosis of the existing Zoning Code related to the Business Districts, focusing primarily on B4 Central Business, B5 Central Business-Service, and any other standards that may impact Downtown, including the Downtown height districts. Evaluate allowed land uses and development in zoning districts and relevant overlay districts. Determine impediments to development and restrictions within the regulatory framework. Review other regulations such as sign regulations that may be an impediment to achieving plan goals. Develop recommendations to remedy the challenges that would provide zoning and regulatory flexibility in alignment with and to achieve the goals of the updated policy framework in the Downtown 2050 Plan and Comprehensive Plan. This task will be completed concurrently with previously listed tasks.

Deliverable: Zoning Code Analysis and Amendments Memo

5. REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL AND PROJECT TIMELINE

Proposal Timeline

- RFP Release: January 26, 2026
- Question Open: January 26, 2025
- Question Close: February 10, 2026
- Response to Questions: February 17, 2026
- Proposal Due: February 25, 2025
- Notice of Selection for Interview: Week of March 9, 2026
- Interview (if needed): Week of March 23, 2026
- Consultant Selection: Late March 2026

Project Timeline

This project is anticipated to occur over 12 months between March 2026 and March 2027.

Key milestones:

- Project Kick-Off: April 2026
- Complete Policy Development (Task 2): December 2026
- Complete Final Policy Framework (Task 3): March 2027
- Complete Zoning Analysis (Task 4): May 2027

6. BUDGET

The budget for this Scope of Work is not to exceed \$250,000. All proposals must include proposed costs to complete the tasks described in the project scope. Provide estimates of hours and fee anticipated by task, displayed by key employee or employee type. Include assumptions used in determining overall project hours and costs. Identify any contingency within the cost estimate.

7. PROPOSAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

The City of Saint Paul will evaluate all proposals based on the following criteria. To ensure consideration for this Request for Proposal, your proposal should be complete and include all of the following criteria:

Project Understanding (Section 2): Responders will be evaluated on how well the team understands and communicates the complexity and key challenges of the project.	25
Scope (Section 3): Responders will be evaluated on whether the Scope of Work as proposed is complete and will result in a quality product and process. Teams that bring more value or scope within the allocated budget will score higher.	30
Team (Section 4): Responders will be evaluated on whether the team members have the experience, capacity, and interest to be successful, and whether the team structure is feasible and applicable to this project.	20
Project Examples (Section 5): Responders will be evaluated on whether the project examples: are relevant to the project, are lead and/or produced by the team proposed in Section 3, and show a diversity of experience in urban planning and design, economics, placemaking, zoning, development, and political downtown projects.	15
Cost: Responders will be evaluated on the cost of their solution(s) based on the work to be performed in accordance with this Scope of Work.	10
Total Point	100
Interview (if needed)	20
Total Point (Possible)	120

A staff committee will review the proposals against the criteria in this RFP and score proposals. One interview may be given to the highest scoring proposal teams after the evaluation of qualifications by the selection committee.

The City requires that the project manager and any other key individual(s) for the project participate in any interview process. Proposers will be expected to pay for any costs they incur for the interview process along with any costs associated with preparing and transmitting proposals.

The City reserves the right to ask for additional information or clarification of the submission from any or all proposers.

The final contract award will be conditioned upon the successful proposer's complying with all terms and conditions, mutual agreement about the final work plan, and completion of a contract agreeable to all parties.

8. PUBLIC INFORMATION

Data submitted by a business to the City in response to a Request for Proposals are private or nonpublic until the responses are opened. Once the responses are opened, the name of the responder is read and becomes public. All other data in a responder's response to a Request for Proposals are private or nonpublic data until completion of the evaluation process.

"Completion of the evaluation process" means that the City has completed negotiating the contract with the selected vendor. After the City has completed the evaluation process, all remaining data submitted by all responders are public with the exception of trade secret data as defined and classified in Minn. Stat. § 13.37. A statement by a responder that submitted data are copyrighted or otherwise protected does not prevent public access to the data contained in the response. Proposals submitted in response to an RFP become the property of the City and will not be returned.

If all responses to a Request for Proposals are rejected prior to the completion of the evaluation process, all data, other than that made public at the response opening, remain private or nonpublic until a re-issuance of the Request for Proposals results in completion of the evaluation process or a determination is made to abandon the purchase. If the rejection occurs after the completion of the evaluation process, the data remains public. If a re-issuance of an RFP does not occur within one year of the proposal opening date, the remaining data become public.

9. PROPOSAL REJECTIONS

This Request for Proposal (RFP) does not obligate the City of Saint Paul to award a contract or complete the proposed project and each reserves the right to cancel this RFP if it is considered to be in its best interest. Proposals must be clear and concise. Proposals that are difficult to follow or that do not conform to the RFP format or binding specifications may be rejected. Responding Vendors must include the required information called for in this RFP. City of Saint Paul reserves the right to reject a proposal if required information is not provided or is not organized as directed.

The City of Saint Paul also reserves the right to waive minor informalities and reserves the right to:

1. Reject any and all proposals received in response to this RFP;
2. Select a proposal for contract negotiation other than the one with the lowest cost;
3. Negotiate any aspect of the proposal with any Vendor.
4. Terminate negotiations and select the next most responsive Vendor for contract negotiations.
5. Terminate negotiations and prepare and release a new RFP.
6. Terminate negotiations and take such action as deemed appropriate.

Any decision to cancel or reject any and all proposals is in The City of Saint Paul's sole discretion. The City of Saint Paul also reserves the right to change the evaluation criteria or any other provision in this RFP by posting notice of the change(s) on the www.stpaulbids.com. Vendors should check the site daily for updates (e.g. amendments, responses to questions) and are expected to review information on the site carefully before submitting a final proposal. Such changes or updates above constitutes written notice to each Vendor.