



Town of Stow
**PLANNING
DEPARTMENT**

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Date: May 19, 2023

To: Prospective Bidders and Others

From: Valerie Oorthuys, Planning Director

Subject: Response to Bidder Questions – Consulting Services for Comprehensive Plan Update

This response to bidder questions includes all comments received at the May 15, 2023 Pre-Proposal Conference and via email.

Pre-Proposal Conference Attendance List:

| | |
|--------------------|-------------|
| Jef Fasser | BSC Group |
| Martin Smith | WGI Inc. |
| Katherine Heighway | WGI Inc. |
| Taylor Herman | Desire Path |

1. Please clarify the funding process.

Annual Town Meeting recently approved \$100,000 allocated to the Comprehensive Plan. Staff will apply for a grant through the Community One Stop for Growth, which are in the range of \$75-100,000. Given that grant awards are anticipated to be announced in October, it would be acceptable to have a Proposer offer a phased approach to the plan.

2. Please elaborate on any specific goals or vision for the Comprehensive Plan.

Climate resilience/ sustainability and equity are key topics to weave throughout the Plan chapters. This update to the Comprehensive Plan should be compiled so that the Town may use it as a 'living plan' for future updates. For example, when a new Open Space and Recreation Plan is approved, this should be able to be inserted easily into the Comprehensive Plan. Further, the Town would like to increase transparency around the progress of the Implementation Plan.

3. Has there been any surveying of the public thus far?

The Town published an initial Comprehensive Plan framework survey in the winter, which is still available for residents to respond to. The Town has initiated other public surveys for recent efforts, such as the Open Space and Recreation Plan (currently in draft form), the Stow Acres Climate Resilience Master Plan project, and recent zoning amendments. Results from these and other projects can be made available to the consultant.

4. Are there any specific pain points or areas of concern from residents that are expected to come out through the Comprehensive Plan process?

Areas of concern that staff expect to be discussed through this process include:

- The Town's lack of public water and sewer infrastructure, and its impacts on both private homeowners and commercial development;
- Strain on natural resources, including our aquifers;
- Concern for growth, balanced with an interest in integrating a diversity of housing options so that Stow is more welcoming to young families and residents wishing to age in place;
- Stow's response to planning for alignment with the MBTA Communities legislation (which will be handled through a separate planning process though should be discussed and described in the Comprehensive Planning process);
- Quantity and quality of municipal services

5. Does the Town expect that the Comprehensive Planning process will work to satisfy the Town's MBTA Communities requirements?

No, the Town's response to MBTA Communities will be handled through a separate planning process. The Town is currently undertaking a Housing Production Plan update, intended to be complete around the end of the calendar year. The HPP will help introduce the subject to residents. The Comprehensive Planning process should coordinate with staff to ensure that the Plan accurately reflects the Town's process. However, for example, a Comprehensive Plan public forum on housing should not avoid the subject.

6. Will the selected consulting firm be able to review drafts of the Housing Production Plan prior to its completion?

Yes. The background data gathering and analysis will be conducted over the summer, with drafts of sections likely available in late fall.

7. Would the Town allow consulting teams or subconsultants to work together on the Comprehensive Plan? What is the Town's sense of firms' interest in this project?

Yes, the Town is willing to work with consultants coming together as a team to work on this project. It is difficult to gauge interest at this point, though now that the Town has allocated funds through Town Meeting we expect there to be more interest.

8. Are there any areas of interest or themes other than those specified in the RFP that the Town hopes would be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan?

Yes, it would be useful to review village or neighborhood level planning, as there are a number of distinct areas in Town that have unique concerns, such as Gleasondale Village, Town Center, Lower Village, and the Lake Boon neighborhood.

9. Do you anticipate any coordination with surrounding Towns as a part of the Comprehensive Plan?

This is certainly possible and it would be interesting to hear more about how a consultant would recommend coordination. Stow is seeing the benefits of having good relationships with surrounding Towns on topics such as housing, transportation, and watershed management. In addition, the plan should be in alignment with MAPC's regional plan, MetroCommon 2050.

10. What did you have in mind for a "Project Management Plan" under Task 1? Do you have any examples that you'd like to model this after?

This is intended as a document to provide timelines for all tasks, including major milestones and scheduling of public forums. This should be used to better communicate progress to the Comprehensive Plan Committee. Otherwise, we are open to consultants' suggestions.

- 11. We typically prepare a public outreach and engagement plan during phase I, however this was not included as a deliverable (only an “ongoing outreach plan,” under Task 1 which would seem to include less than we would normally provide in a public outreach and engagement plan). Is this something the Town would like included in the scope?**

Yes, this is intended to be included in the scope. The Comprehensive Plan must have a robust public outreach and engagement plan. The consultant and Comprehensive Plan Committee should use the Planning Board's working draft Community Engagement Guidelines as a basis for creating the appropriate outreach and engagement plan.

- 12. Per Task 2(a), would you envision a build-out analysis being part of this task? A build-out analysis has limitations and will not depict the town at a specific time because it assumes that everything that can be built will be built at each property's highest and best use at the time of the study. So, it would not depict Stow in 2045. Complex market factors will shape development beyond the zoning framework and environmental constraints. Please clarify what is anticipated for this analysis. Do you have any examples you'd like to model this task after?**

Yes, this is intended to refer to a typical build-out analysis. It is our hope that this assists the Comprehensive Plan Committee in understanding what changes may need to be made in Stow's Zoning Bylaws and other policies and regulations in order to guide and direct development to preferred areas of Town.

- 13. Per the Task 2 deliverables, the RFP states that the final report (the Existing Conditions Report) will be seamlessly incorporated as a component of the final plan. Would the Existing Report as a separate stand-alone baseline document with a high-level summary in the final Comprehensive Plan be acceptable rather than incorporating the full Existing Conditions Report into the Comprehensive Plan report?**

Yes, this sounds like an appropriate way to present the Existing Conditions Report.

- 14. Per Task 4, the RFP lists the components envisioned as part of the Comprehensive Plan per the statute (land use, housing, economic development, etc.). Would the town be open to a more integrated approach where the visioning process is used to identify core themes that weave these components together and that then provide the basis for the comp plan framework (rather than having a chapter for each statutory component)? This type of framework would include all components within the core themes and would still meet the statutory requirements.**

The Town is open to consideration of creative approaches to Comprehensive Plan development. One goal of this process is for the Comprehensive Plan to be more easily updated in-house on a regular basis as needed. For example, we imagine that as we update plans such as the Housing Production Plan, the Town could review the Comprehensive Plan's comments on Housing to ensure alignment and reengage residents in a brief update to the Comprehensive Plan. This way the Comprehensive Plan created through the 2023 RFP process would be treated as a 'living plan'. Proposers' approaches should take this goal into consideration.