



Request for Interest (RFI) for the Ayer Road Corridor Vision Plan and Form-Based Code; Harvard, MA

Issued: August 28, 2020

Proposals Due: September 28, 2020; 12:00 Noon EST

Pre-Submission Meeting (Zoom): September 4, 2020 @ 11:00 am (Registration Required)

**Planning Board
Town of Harvard, MA**

Executive Summary

Through this Request for Interest (RFI), the Town of Harvard Planning Board, on behalf of the Town of Harvard, is seeking statements of interest from highly qualified consultant teams for the development of a three-part corridor planning program including a zoning solution for the Town of Harvard's Ayer Road commercial corridor. Presently, the corridor is primarily zoned Commercial but there are a number of separately owned parcels and many are already developed with typical suburban-scale low-density development with an age ranging from the 1960's to the early 2000's. The current permitted development density is a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 0.1. There are significant unprotected open spaces and water resources in the area and a single major arterial highway serving the area. The Town of Harvard has long viewed this area as the only serious opportunity for commercial development in the town. However, since no cohesive long-range vision for the corridor has been developed, there is a lack of local support for developing the corridor. Therefore, the Harvard Planning Board seeks a cohesive vision for Ayer Road and a more unified zoning solution to encourage commercial development following the New England rural village style. The Board feels that the time is right to move forward with such a project, as the below referenced Ayer Road Corridor Planning Framework document notes in greater detail.

The focus of this solicitation is on statements of interest and associated information for a project approach, the qualifications of the consultant team, and a preliminary scope outline and budget range. Those interested in submitting a statement of interest in response to the RFI should, at a minimum, address the Submittal Requirements outlined on page 7 of this RFI. Responses are due at the Assistant Town Administrator's office no later than the day at time listed on the cover sheet and addressed to:

Ms. Marie Sobalvarro, Assistant Town Administrator, 13 Ayer Road, Harvard, MA 01451, 978-456-4100 x.330 or msobalvarro@harvard.ma.us

Reference to Planning Framework and Goals

A comprehensive policy planning document entitled, "Ayer Road Corridor Planning Framework" has been developed and updated regularly which serves as the guiding text that should inform this RFI and the response from proposers. Some of the explanatory information in this RFI has been gleaned from this document. The latest version of the "Ayer Road Corridor Planning Framework" or ARCPF, is dated August 27, 2020 and linked below.

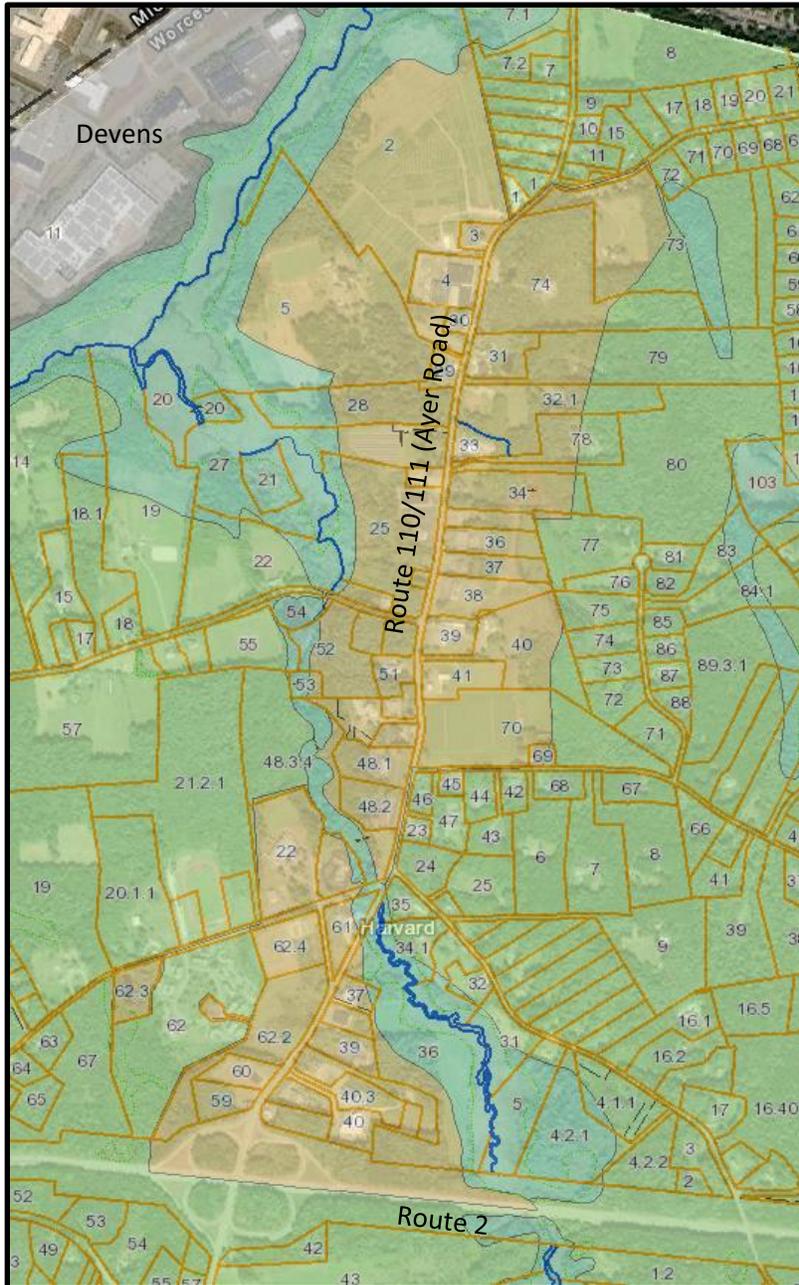
Link: https://www.harvard.ma.us/sites/g/files/vyhlf676/f/uploads/ayer_road_planning_2019_draft6.0.pdf

Project goals include the following:

1. Create a development framework for the Ayer Road Commercial Corridor that embodies Smart Growth and sustainability;
2. Create a vision for a series of village-scale clusters surrounded by public open space and connected with walking trails and shared use paths;
3. Attract a range of uses, preferably a mixed-use scheme, that includes retailing and services that are in demand in Harvard and can also serve as an attractant to external markets;

Area Description and Location Information

The area is located on the north side of the Town of Harvard approximately 4 miles west of Interstate 495, approximately 19 miles from Route 128, and approximately 34 miles to the center of Boston. Harvard is also 10 miles to Leominster, MA, 20 miles to Nashua, NH, and 29 miles to Worcester, MA.



Harvard is defined as a “Developing Suburb” with a sub-type description as a Country Suburb. This type of community is typified with *very low density, room to grow, country character* (Massachusetts Community Types, MAPC, 2008). While Harvard does not fully embody all of the characteristics of this

typology, the potential for higher population growth through the proliferation of conventional subdivisions is a distinct possibility, although not widely supported as noted in the 2016 Master Plan.

Site Dimensions

The project area is approximately 344.5 acres along a +/- 1.2 mile stretch of Ayer Road (Route 110/111) extending from the Route 2 interchange to 1/3 mile south of the Ayer Rotary. See map on the following page (Figure 1) for a recent zoning assessment of the study area (the lands zoned Commercial or C).

Project Summary

Ayer Road, with its Commercial zoning district, is unquestionably the single best opportunity that the Town of Harvard has in developing even a modest commercial tax base and offsetting the residential and agricultural tax burden. However, the approach must be measured and sensitive to the desires and expectations of the citizens of Harvard. Therefore, the Harvard Planning Board recommends and is seeking to execute a 3-phase project for achieving a successful planning and regulatory outcome in order to “set the table” properly and in an orderly manner, for the ultimate development and re-development of the Ayer Road Corridor. Thus, the following steps are recommended, in specific order:

1. **Market Analysis and Fiscal Impact Analysis** – This shall provide data regarding the types and scales of uses that the market area can support. The fiscal impact analysis will show how much this development could contribute to local municipal revenues. From this base data, several scenarios will be developed which show, with differing tax models and levels of development intensity and type, the optional development scales that would be most appropriate for Harvard.
2. **Corridor Vision Plan** – This will be a comprehensive plan for a specific area, the Ayer Road commercial corridor, which will include traffic and transportation network analysis, land use and zoning analysis, design analysis, public and stakeholder outreach, and other criteria relevant to studying the commercial objectives of the town while preserving and protecting what is important to the town’s character as the Town moves forward. It is expected that this vision plan would include sophisticated plan graphics to depict vertical, oblique, and elevation perspectives of the corridor plan. An optional add-on element for the vision plan is water and sewer study depicting the various locations that both water and sewer can be extended to the corridor, cost and financing options, and management and ownership of said utilities.
3. **Zoning and Regulatory Tools** – A desired result of the Corridor Vision Plan is a recommendation to significantly improve the zoning and other regulatory tools that govern the C district along Ayer Road. The Town envisions a form-based zoning code solution as one of the better ways to convey to citizens what a developed corridor will look like and to give them a voice in designing the district. Once these tools are on place and other facets of the Vision are achieved, then the desired type and scale of development can commence with much less concern over the outcome and impacts. It should be noted up front that water and sewer infrastructure should *not* be available for corridor lands until this regulatory framework is in place.

These three phases, described in more detail below, have been identified as critical because meticulously building a convincing argument for the type and scale of development that could be of immense value to the Town of Harvard is a required prerequisite. This argument requires hard data on

marketability as well as net positive fiscal impact. It requires significant public input into design and outreach regarding development impact. Finally, it requires a predictable tool for both citizens and the developer to assure that the vision developed in the corridor plan is achieved. It is important to note that the analysis, planning and potential creation and adoption of zoning tools to achieve the desired outcomes constitutes a critical public process. Inherent in this process is continuous public outreach and feedback.

Phase 1: Fundamental Market Analysis and Fiscal Impact Analysis (ARCPF, p. 12)

This component of the project would engage an experienced real estate market analyst to conduct a complete marketability analysis of the collective property area of the Commercial (C) zoning district along the Ayer Road corridor as part of a fundamental market analysis. Specifically, this component should include a local and regional market overview, trade area delineation, an inventory of each market sector, gap and leakage analysis, primary data collection including local interviews, demand forecasts, supply analysis, subject area capture (\$ and s.f.) translated into buildable s.f., and SWOT analysis of study area.

Using the data collected during the market analysis, a consultant with experience in fiscal impact analysis will develop a fiscal impact analysis of additional uses contributing to tax base. The written report of findings would include the criteria noted on p. 14 of the Ayer Road Corridor Planning Framework, Version 6.0 (August 2020). The fiscal impact assessment would be applied to all of the uses deemed feasible at a variety of levels intended to illustrate how various thresholds of development would contribute to the local tax base. Further, a range of different tax rate scenarios including a single- versus split-tax and other potential options for assessment and valuation to provide the Town with informed choices for a desired future commercial tax base. Each would include the key data points (ARCPF, p. 15) for commercial and residential uses.

Phase 2 Corridor Vision Plan (ARCPF, p. 16)

The Ayer Road Corridor Vision Plan phase is intended to develop a future vision for the corridor and a master plan to achieve the vision. Some of the initial key questions likely informing study could include:

1. How can we transform the Ayer Road corridor into a preferred place to live, work, shop, and visit?
2. What are the range of possibilities?
3. What are the limitations?
4. What is the vision?
5. How can the Town make this happen?
6. Can this be a smart growth model for other small New England towns to emulate?

Elements of the Corridor Plan shall include an existing conditions analysis, a community and stakeholder input plan, development of themes and principles, incorporation and update of SWOT analysis, visioning and developing a graphic depiction of vision, alternatives analysis, goal and action development, and an implementation plan (ARCFP, p. 17). A full-scale water and sewer study is one optional item for consideration.

Ultimately, Harvard is not looking for a 150-page volume that very few people will read. Rather, the preferred consulting team will propose a compelling visual format that balances critical data with the

preferences of the community and a range of maps, graphics, and illustrations that clearly depict the vision. It must be emphasized, however, that the planning process is intended to be sufficiently intensive and comprehensive and a public process is a very critical element in Harvard. Citizens are demanding and have high expectations and standards, and they value their history and landscapes very much.

Phase 3 Zoning Tools to Implement Vision Plan (ARCPF, p. 19)

Subsequent to the adoption of the Vision Plan and, of course, contingent upon whether one of the recommendations of the Plan were to proceed in this direction, the next phase would be to develop and adopt sophisticated zoning tools to facilitate the kind of development that Harvard citizens and stakeholders want to see, actually come to fruition. The initial expectation for the type of zoning tool appropriate to the task is to employ a Form-Based Code.

While the entire Ayer Road corridor may not be suitable for a Form-Based Code application, it is likely that there are areas along the corridor in which it can be successfully applied. Since a Form-Based Code includes illustrative graphics so that users (and others) can see precisely the siting of buildings on parcels as well as massing and façade elements that would be developed *prior to any applications being made*, it is seen as the most likely type of zoning tool that citizens of Harvard would find acceptable for such an important area of town.

Thus, the recommendations of the Vision Plan can be articulated and advanced by the Form-Based Code so that the values of residents can be realized predictably. The development of such a code is anticipated to be a fairly quick process but we understand that it tends to be intensive and often expensive due to the intense time required by a team of architects and urban designers. The challenge for Harvard will be to find a suitable design team that appeals to local expectations.

Request for Interest – RFI

It is the Town of Harvard intent to receive Letters of Interest for the Three-Phase planning for the Ayer Road Corridor. Upon receipt of the RFI the Town shall have Review and recommend approximately three (3) firms to move into a Request for Proposal Phase with formal presentations and a graded selection process.

REQUIREMENTS FOR REQUEST OF INTEREST

The Town understands that there are several distinctive skill sets and areas of knowledge required to cover all three phases of this project. Therefore, we fully expect that a team of multiple firms may combine to respond to this request.

The RFI response shall display clearly and accurately the capabilities, knowledge, experience and capacity of the respondent to meet the requirements of the project and the subsequent RFP. Respondents are encouraged to utilize methods they consider appropriate in communicating the required information. At a minimum, this will include submission of the information requested below:

Submittal Requirements

Interested consultant teams shall submit three (3) hard copies and one electronic (pdf) version of the submittal, which shall contain the following information:

1. Statement of Interest

- Cover letter and Introduction: Tell us about your company or companies and what makes you a good fit for this kind of project and for Harvard specifically.

2. Statement of Qualifications

- Business location or locations and the firm's officers.
- Email address of contact person(s) for this project.
- Past experience with conducting projects of the type depicted in this RFI, with reference contact names and telephone numbers.
- Evidence of general knowledge in city or town planning, environmental analysis, transportation planning, real estate market analysis, fiscal impact analysis, infrastructure planning, zoning (particularly form-based codes), public participation, and other relevant professional work. Please demonstrate knowledge of Massachusetts State enabling legislation and laws.
- Resumes of project team
- A list of work performed for public entities for the past five (5) years the submitter would consider innovative or that employed innovative techniques. Include a brief description of the work and your reasoning as to why you consider it innovative or distinct.
- A list of at least three (3) public entities of similar projects (all phases) over the last five (5) years including contact names and telephone numbers and contract prices.
- Examples of past work performed with similar projects shall include examples of graphics including project renderings (vertical, oblique, and elevation drawings along with project photographs for any completed projects).
- Service delivery experience and analysis strategy including a brief description or outline of the planning approach used by your firm.
- Estimated budget and example schedule.

Evaluation

In evaluating responses, the Town will consider how the proposed project advances the Project Goals described in this RFI. The Town may request additional information and conduct interviews with responders as part of the evaluation process. This RFI may lead to one of the following outcomes:

- The issuance of an RFQ or RFP open to all potential development teams.
- Cancellation Withdrawal of this RFI without the issuance of an RFQ or RFP.

NOTE: The RFI process is being undertaken to gauge the interest of highly qualified consultants and other interested parties in the development of the described deliverables. It is also intended to provide the Town with additional information that will inform the development of a Request for Proposal and the securing of all funding required for this project.

However, no award will be made at the conclusion of this process and no respondent will be given priority or advantage with respect to the subsequent RFP. All proposals will be reviewed for the purpose of determining how best to develop the RFP which will be issued in accordance with the requirements of

M.G.L. 30B, sec. 16 and shall be open to all in accordance with the requirements of the RFP and applicable law.

Additional Information

Information supplemental to this RFI will be posted to the project website which is:

<https://www.harvard.ma.us/economic-development/pages/ayer-road-planning-framework-project>

This will include zoning information, the full Protective (Zoning) Bylaw, the 2016 Master Plan, the Ayer Road Corridor Framework document, and other useful resources for respondents.

Disclaimer

Please be advised that this RFI is not a pre-qualification for developers and thus not a requirement for participation in a subsequent RFP or RFQ. In order to be considered, all requested information shall be submitted to:

Marie Sobalvarro, Assistant Town Administrator
Town Administrator's Office
Town of Harvard
13 Ayer Road
Harvard, MA 01451

By no later than 12:00 noon EST, September 28, 2020.

The Town of Harvard anticipates notifying the firms selected to move to Request for Proposal. Please note that there will be a Pre-Submission Meeting (Zoom) scheduled for Friday, September 4, 2020 @ 11:00 am (Registration Required). Please contact Christopher Ryan below for meeting log on information.

For additional information or questions, please contact Christopher Ryan, 978-456-4100 x.323 or email at cryan@harvard.ma.us