To: Yi-An Huang, City Manager

From: Iram Farooq, Assistant City Manager for Community Development

Date: July 31, 2024

Subject: Update on the Request for Information (RFI) for 84 & 96 Bishop Allen Drive

The City, in partnership with the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority (CRA), is preparing to issue a Request for Information (RFI) for potential development on the City-owned properties at 84 & 96 Bishop Allen Drive. This is one of the early action items from the Central Square City Lots Study completed in February 2024. The study identified a strong preference for these parcels, that are currently municipal surface parking lots, to be transformed as a mixed-used development that includes affordable housing, affordable commercial space, public parking, open space, and a welcoming gathering space for arts and culture activities similar to Starlight Square.

The purpose of the RFI is to seek information from potential development partners on the role a public-private partnership could play in advancing the community’s vision for the lots. Prior to advertising the RFI, the City made the draft RFI available for public comment and review. The comment period was open from June 25th to July 12th. During that period, the City received 17 email comments; two of which were from developers. This level of response is typical for a draft RFI. A summary of the comments and how the RFI was modified are included below.

**Comments on draft RFI**

Most comments (12 of 17, or 70%) were about individual preferences for how the two sites will be developed. Several comments indicated support for redeveloping the lots for mixed-income housing and cultural space, and emphasized the importance of sustainable design, incorporation of green space, and public parking for small business support. Two comments oppose any residential development and prefer the sites remain as surface parking lots. Two comments stated a preference for 100% affordable housing and opposed the approach to finance the redevelopment with profit-generating uses. These comments on desired future uses of the site will help guide the next phase of this project.

At this current RFI stage, the City is gathering information from potential partners to better understand trade-offs. Information learned from the RFI will be shared with the City Council and the public. The City will engage the community with this additional information to refine the community’s shared vision and priorities for the 84 & 96 Bishop Allen Drive sites. The comments about preference for future uses will be useful at this stage. Findings from the community engagement will inform any future solicitation.

Five of the 12 comments (30%) sought clarification about the procurement process, City goals and expectations, and/or developer analysis of the current market. The table below lists the comments and how the draft RFI will be amended.

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| **Comment** | **Response/RFI Revision** |
| When does the City expect to release the RFP in relationship to the ongoing Central Square Rezoning process? | The RFI does not commit the City to issue a solicitation. If this project advances to a solicitation step, an RFP would be released after the Central Square Rezoning process is concluded and a community engagement process is conducted to refine development objectives for 84 and 96 Bishop Allen Drive. The current Central Square rezoning schedule anticipates a zoning petition filed in April 2025 with a vote in June/July 2025 (see the timeline at the end of this report). |
| What does City mean by long-term private public partnership? | Edited RFI to clarify that the City is interested in understanding the type of agreement and the potential terms under which a development partner could provide the strongest set of community benefits. The City plans to retain ownership of the property and has been considering a 50-year lease structure. (*Pg. 37. Structuring Public Private Partnerships Section 2.1)* |
| Clarify City’s financial commitment | Edited RFI to state the City plans to commit the land at no cost. (*Pg. 38. Structuring Public Private Partnerships Section 2.2)* |
| Discuss depth of housing affordability that is sought | Edited RFI to ask respondents to specify the level of affordability that can be delivered on-site (below 30% of AMI, 30-50% of AMI, 50-80 of AMI, and 80-100% of AMI) and describe influential factors (*Pg. 34 under Housing Alternatives Section 3.2)* |
| What types of uses can be considered for subsidizing desired public benefits? | Edited RFI to make clear that the City is interested in learning from potential development partners about different uses that could enhance the economic feasibility of a project conforming with allowed uses and community goals for Central Square. (*Pg 33. Unlocking Site Potential Section 1.5*.) |
| Describe any existing coordination with abutters that may affect development | Edited RFI to state that the City has a strong history of providing abutting commercial properties access to service and loading areas. (*Pg. 5 Project Summary*) |

**Next Steps**

The City plans to advertise the revised RFI in early August with responses due October 4, 2024. We expect to receive two to three responses from potential development partners. After reviewing submissions, the City will prepare a summary of responses, share findings, and discuss desired next steps with the City Council and community. If a private-public partnership is determined to be desirable, staff will prepare a Request for Proposals (RFP) from developers. We anticipate that the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority (CRA) will continue to be an integral partner in the process. A timeline of the proposed schedule is included below:

