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REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

Taconite Harbor Strategic Plan

Release Date: Monday, March 24, 2025

Proposals Due: Monday, April 14, 2025

Overview

The Cook County/Grand Marais Joint Economic Development Authority (EDA) (the “EDA”) seeks proposals from qualified consulting firms to facilitate the creation of a strategic plan for Taconite Harbor Energy Center (the “site”). Taconite Harbor is a retired coal fired power plant located in western end of Cook County in Schroeder Township, Minnesota, on the North Shore of Lake Superior.



Project Scope

The scope of this strategic planning project is provided as **Exhibit A** of this RFP. Exhibit A is the EDA's June 2024 Community Energy Transition Grant application narrative describing the anticipated project scope. The EDA looks forward to professional recommendations from strategic planning firms on how to best phase the project scope.

Project Priorities

- Elaboration of property owner responsibilities for remediation of the site
- Articulation of regulatory and stakeholder limitations for site development
- Detailed analysis of the site's current state, including existing structures, utilities, topography, and contamination
- Identify and engage stakeholders including potential developers
- Consideration of the economic viability of varied alternative uses and potential funding sources that could support their development

Selection Criteria

Proposals will be reviewed for experience with the following:

- 1) Sites impacted by fossil fuel-based power plant closures in MN or beyond
- 2) Sites located on the shores of the Great Lakes or other large bodies of water
- 3) Sites 100 acres or larger
- 4) Sites currently without natural gas

Additionally:

- Responsiveness to this RFP
- Recognition of the uniqueness of this site
- Organizational and managerial capacity to handle this project
- Past successes in working with public/private partners
- Experience & past performance of personnel as verified by references

Selection Team

Proposals will be reviewed and ranked by the EDA's 2025 Taconite Harbor committee members Dave Mills, Tracy Benson and Siri Anderson. Schroeder Township's Board Chair, Bruce Martinson, and Minnesota Power's Regional Development Representative, Mike Scharenbroich will also be part of the proposal selection team.

During the proposal evaluation process, the proposal selection team may request one or more firms to meet via Zoom to answer any questions regarding the firm's proposal.

Selection Timeline

The intent is for the selection team to choose the strategic planning consultant by May 5th. This would allow time to prepare a professional services contract between the EDA and the selected consultant to be considered for approval by the EDA at the May 20th Regular EDA meeting.

RFP Timeline

- Release Date – Monday, March 24, 2025
- Proposal Due Date – Monday, April 14, 2025
- Notification of Selected Firm – May 5, 2025

Requested Proposal Format

- 1) Narrative – Include a summary of the team’s approach and an anticipated timeline of the strategic planning process from start to finish.
- 2) Statement of Qualifications – Include descriptions of recent and similar projects.
- 3) References – Include references for previous projects.
- 4) Resumes – Submit a resume for each team member, highlighting relevant experience.
- 5) Signature Page – Complete & submit the next page.

Taconite Harbor Strategic Plan Proposal Signature Page

Today's Date: _____

Company Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Website: _____

Proposal Main Contact Person: _____

Main Contact Person's Direct Phone: _____

Main Contact Person's Email: _____

Main Contact Person's Signature: _____

The Signatory hereby represents upon all of the penalties of law for the purpose of inducing the Cook County/Grand Marais Joint EDA to review this proposal, that all documentation herein and attached are true and that all work herein described, if selected, will proceed in accordance with the Ordinances of Cook County and the laws of the State of Minnesota. Signatory also understands that all documents provided to the EDA may be considered public data, per Minnesota Government Data Practices Act.

The Cook County/Grand Marais Joint EDA reserves the right, at its sole discretion, to reject any or all submittals when, in its opinion, it is determined to be in the public interest to do so; to waive minor irregularities and informalities of a submittal; to cancel, revise, or extend this solicitation; and to select the proposal it deems is in the best interests of the EDA. The EDA reserves the right to request clarification of information submitted and to request additional information from any proposer.

This Request for Proposals does not obligate the Cook County/Grand Marais Joint EDA to pay any costs incurred by any respondent in the submission of qualifications and/or proposals or in making necessary studies for the preparation of any proposal, or for procuring or contracting for the services to be furnished under this Request for Proposals.

Any proposal accepted by the EDA shall be subject to formal approval at the regular meeting of the EDA on May 20, 2025 at 4:00pm at the Cook County Courthouse.

Questions regarding this RFP should be directed to: Heidi Krampitz, EDA Executive Director

Email: director@cookcountymneda.org

Phone: 218-264-9696

RFP Exhibit A

The following project scope narrative was submitted by the Cook County/Grand Marais Joint Economic Development Authority (EDA) in its June 2024 application to the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) for a Community Energy Transition Grant.

Taconite Harbor Strategic Plan Project Scope

Northeastern Minnesota has a rich history in timber harvesting and mining due to the mineral-rich and heavily forested lands. With the expansion of iron ore mining, forestry/paper industries, grain exports and shipbuilding on Lake Superior post World War II; power plants, including Laskin Energy Center, Taconite Harbor Energy Center and Boswell Energy Center were built to help accommodate an increasing industrial load. Built in 1957 as part of Erie Mining Company, Taconite Harbor was essentially its own little town; a two-block community with pre-fabricated homes and amenities like a playground, sport courts and community center for plant employees and their families. In the early 1980s, the taconite industry suffered and the workforce at Taconite Harbor was reduced to about 100 employees. By 1986, remaining residents were notified they would have to leave the community. By 1990, any remaining homes and buildings were removed. Minnesota Power acquired Taconite Harbor Energy Center in 2001 and employed approximately 43 staff at the height of employment. Units 1 and 2 were idled in 2016 and coal fired operations were retired in 2021. Closure eliminated skilled positions in Cook County, many of which left the area, and has once again created a sense of unknown for the site's future.

In 2023, Minnesota Power began site decommissioning with closure and removal of the coal pile, which included site grading and establishment of vegetation. In April 2024, MN Power awarded a contract to begin dismantling of the facility. Currently, the contractor is removing regulated materials in preparation for building demolition, which is scheduled to be completed in Summer 2025. While Minnesota Power is taking lead on these efforts, they've been in close contact with Cook County stakeholders and elected officials, signaling their continued commitment to work alongside our community on future redevelopment efforts.

The plant site is approximately 172 acres, with parcels along the shore of Lake Superior and above Highway 61. With mixed ownership between Minnesota Power and Cleveland Cliffs, the site has railroad access, dock facilities and a switching station. The sites topography, historical uses, limited utility access and joint private ownership presents redevelopment and environmental challenges, but through informed research and a robust strategic planning process, Cook County hopes to position the site for future economic activity and recovery from past closures. Grant funding from MN DEED will allow Cook County to solicit proposals from qualified firms with experience in economic development, redevelopment and community engagement. Scope of consultant services may include, but are not limited to:

Research & Analysis

- Comprehensive review of past plans and redevelopment efforts conducted by MN Power
- Study and inventory of existing local and regional economic and community development plans and studies
- Regional industry and market discovery and analysis
- Regional labor study

Land Use Analysis

- Land use study and analysis
- Utility connection capacity analysis and mapping
- Analysis of existing infrastructure (roads, buildings, railroads, dock, waste management capacity)
- Wetland and site topography mapping and analysis
- Permitting considerations (water discharge, rail line, redevelopment, environmental)
- Phase I Environmental Site Assessment

Stakeholder Engagement

- Coordination with current land owners (MN Power and Cleveland Cliffs)
- Stakeholder interviews, engagement and workshops
- Community-wide visioning and engagement
- Consultation with potential commercial, residential, industrial users

Strategy Development & Implementation

- Development of strategic planning scope and timeline
- Marketing & Attraction

Final Report

- Final strategic report addressing phased redevelopment opportunities

Charting a course for the future requires strategic engagement, input, and support from many stakeholders across a spectrum ranging from real estate developers to County residents. Our desire is to create a strategic plan that will help Cook County and current property owners establish the framework to shape future development in a way that is tailored to market realities and civic goals. With a better sense of development potential, Cook County and local/regional stakeholders can advocate for investment and attraction of future uses that encourage tax base growth, employment opportunities, economic diversification and resiliency.