REQUEST FOR INFORMATION
CITY OF NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

BUTTONWOOD ZOO PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

RFI # 20121018

July 22, 2019

Jonathan F. Mitchell
Mayor

Office of the Mayor
133 William Street
New Bedford, MA 02740
INTRODUCTION

The City of New Bedford is seeking information pertaining to a contemplated shift of primary operating responsibility of the Buttonwood Park Zoo away from the City of New Bedford to a private nonprofit entity (the “RFI”). The City is issuing this RFI in order to receive vital information concerning the management and operation of the Buttonwood Park Zoo from parties potentially interested in providing services, as detailed herein. The City intends to use this RFI to assist it in developing a comprehensive set of evaluation criteria and relevant terms and conditions. Pending the quality of the information and apparent feasibility of this potential public private partnership, the City may, in its sole discretion, utilize that information to issue a Request for Proposal (“RFP”).

Complete submittals in accordance with the terms of this RFI must be submitted to the attention of Susan Bruce, Director of Purchasing no later than Friday, November 15, 2019, by 11:00 am. The submittals shall be labeled “Buttonwood Zoo – RFI Submittal # 20121018” and addressed to Susan Bruce, Director of Purchasing, City of New Bedford, 133 William Street, Room 208, New Bedford, MA 02740. Emailed submissions will not be accepted.

The issuance of this RFI and all responses submitted hereto are non-binding.

NOTE: Responses to this Request for Information will be reviewed for informational purposes only and will NOT result in the award of a contract. Any request for cost information is for City of New Bedford’s budgetary analysis purposes only. Vendors submitting answers to this Request for Information are not prohibited from responding to any related subsequent solicitation, but providing a submittal to this RFI is not required for vendors to submit on any related subsequent solicitation and will not be used as a basis upon which to select the successful respondent to a subsequent solicitation.

BACKGROUND

The Buttonwood Park Zoo was established in 1894 and is the 12th oldest zoo in the United States. The Zoo is nationally accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (“AZA”). In the AZA’s 2003 accreditation report, the team of zoo professionals who visited the Zoo called Buttonwood Park Zoo, “one of the finest small zoos in the United States.”
The Zoo has over 100 species and 280 animals in over 30 habitats on just over seven acres. Located at 425 Hawthorn Street, in the west end of New Bedford, the Zoo is in the center of Buttonwood Park. Zoo facilities on the premises include:

1. Zoo Train
2. Zoo Carousel
3. Front Service and gift shop
4. Bears Den Café
5. Educational Center
6. Animal Hospital and Commissary Building
7. Natural Play Area
8. Zoological park displays

The Bears Den Café, the Northwoods Gift Store, the zoo train and the wildlife carousel are currently operated by the Buttonwood Park Zoological Society (“Society”).

The City intends for the Zoo to continue as a significant contributor to the New Bedford community by promoting tourism, recreation and conservation of natural resources both at home and throughout the world. The Zoo is dedicated to preserving the future of wildlife by creating engaging and educational experiences that connect the community to the natural world. Its mission also includes:

- Being known for the excellence of its collection, animal care and exhibits;
- Being recognized for the excellence of educational programming that is not only informative but inspirational, with a strong conservation focus;
- Serving as a showcase for the City of New Bedford’s environmental efforts and acting as a community resource and example of sustainable green living;
- Conducting scientific research that supports conservation, at the Buttonwood Park Zoo, locally, and throughout the world; and
- Linking the City of New Bedford to the global conservation community.

The City remains committed to its mission and its continued support of the Zoo, financial and otherwise. City officials, however, believe that its mission might be more readily accomplished if operation and maintenance of the Zoo are transferred to a nonprofit entity through a public-private partnership whose sole focus is on maintaining and operating the Zoo.

Currently, it is the City’s intent, if the City were to move forward with a formal RFP, to have an entity manage and operate the Zoo under an operations and management agreement. The terms and conditions thereof will be further informed by responses to this RFI. There will be no transfer of real property under the intended arrangement. If interested vendors believe there is a mutually beneficial alternative arrangement, it should be explained in the response.
GOALS

The City of New Bedford is seeking information pertaining to a public-private partnership that would:

- Generate significant private philanthropic investment in the capital exhibit and Society Endowment Funds by creating an opportunity for donors to fund an independent entity rather than giving to a public-run facility. An independent entity rather than giving to a publicly run facility. A strong fiscal management and sustainable business model could afford donors an increased “bang for their buck” as a private enterprise;
- Create an entrepreneurial and business approach to management and operation of the Zoo, enabling greater innovation and creativity;
- Foster a guest-centered culture and environment where the visitor and guest services are the highest priority;
- Provide flexibility in staffing to respond to zoo trends and visitors’ needs and establish a strong streamlined organization structure with greater accountability across all staff and management levels and better coordination and communication in planning and implementation of initiatives;
- Maximize earned revenue opportunities through greater coordination, promotion and cross-selling of memberships, concession sales, programs and attractions, as they would operate under a single organization;
- Enable a more effective and timely purchasing and contracting process;
- Set a smooth path for employees to transition from the current structure to the new structure;
- Bring about improved cost efficiencies and economies of scale by combining purchasing and business operations under a single entity;
- Allow for market-based pricing strategies that best reflect the value offered; Provide enhanced fiscal responsibility and a clearer understanding of true income, costs, and capital investment, thereby improving accountability to donors, the community and all stakeholders; and
- Establish a more controlled, consistent, and defined investment by the City in one of its most recognized assets and amenities, thereby minimizing the risk to the public of escalating costs.

The City of New Bedford believes that moving towards a public-private zoo relationship could help accomplish the following objectives:

- Allow the Zoo to continue to implement professional zoological standards;
- Expand and strengthen educational programming and enhance conservation efforts through increased funding opportunities; and
- Assure upkeep of the facilities and provide a funding structure to support future growth.

EXISTING OPERATIONAL MODEL AND STAFF
The City currently operates and maintains the Zoo. A Memorandum of Understanding (“MOU”) between the City and Society provides for the generation of certain amenities (café, gift store, train, and carousel) by the Society. There is also a Concessionaire Agreement between the City and the Society for the Society’s operations and management of all food and other concessions available at the Zoo. Under the Concessionaire Agreement, the Society has full responsibility for staffing and operating all concessions at the Zoo and retains 100% of the profits. All other funds from the Zoo go to the City to offset the City’s contribution to the operational budget. The Society has also established Capital Exhibit and Society Endowment Funds for future capital needs and educational programming development, respectively.

The staff at the Zoo are employed either by the City or the Society. The City currently employs the following staff at the Zoo:
- Animal Care – 13
- Education – 2
- General Operations – 2
- Guest Service – 2
- Maintenance – 2
- Marketing – 2
- Security – 4
- Senior Administration – 2

The following staff members are employees of the Society:
- Administrative – 4
- Education – 1
- Events – 1
- Fundraising – 2
- Gift/Food Service/Rides – 2
- Maintenance – 1
- Marketing – 1
- Senior Administration – 2
- Volunteer – 1

The 44 total positions listed above do not include seasonal/part-time staff hired to operate the café, gift store, rides, educational programs and special events.

**SCOPE OF THE WORK**

Services to be provided by the nonprofit entity would include, but would not be limited to:
- Providing any necessary upkeep to maintain all facilities at the Zoo in good working condition.
• Implementing a long-term Capital Asset Maintenance, Construction, and Financing Plan which will reflect expansion and deferred maintenance projects, which shall be done in collaboration with, and subject to approval of, the City.
• Operating the Zoo in a manner as to provide for the safety of humans, both staff and visitors, from injury and disease, and that is consistent with any and all standards for operations published by the AZA.
• Maintaining an appropriate, safe, and quality existence for animals kept in a captive environment, meeting or exceeding AZA Animal Welfare Standards.
• Maintaining accurate and complete animal and medical records.
• Caring for the animals by professionally trained personnel.
• Providing species appropriate diets and nutrition.
• Providing 24-hour facility security.
• Ensuring wellness and veterinary care.
• Supporting the conservation of wildlife mandated by the AZA.
• Operating all concessions available to visitors.
• Adhering to the minimum or greater guidelines in the AZA animal care and enclosure standards.
• Providing its own administrative support services in the zoo operations, including, but not limited to, information technology, accounting, and human resources.
• Maintaining all financial records and preparing annual audits of zoo operations for submission to, and review by, the City.
• Establish performance standards and benchmarks, including, but not limited to, fundraising targets, quality of visitor experience based on entity’s operations, annual O&M budget performance, attendance rates, results of accreditation reviews to the extent applicable, commitment to maintenance, which would allow the City to return the zoo to municipal operation in the event of failure to meet standards and benchmarks.

RESPONSE FORMAT AND SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS

Responses to this Request for Information must be typed, formatted to follow the paragraphs in this section, and contain the information identified below. Additionally, an in-person presentation may be requested following the response. Responses must include five (5) total paper copies and one (1) electronic copy. The electronic copy must also include a redacted version of your response suitable for public release, if the respondents deem anything within their response to be proprietary.

Based on the goals listed above, your response should provide the following:

A. Vendor’s Proposed Approach
1. Describe your overall proposed approach to the operation and management of the Zoo in narrative form, including attachments and supplements as the vendor believes is useful for the City's purposes.

2. Describe the characteristics of the public private partnership that best maximizes revenue and reduces the Zoo's dependence on financial support from the City.

3. Describe the characteristics of the public private partnership that will enhance the visitor experience and that will foster growth and expansion.

4. Describe the qualifications that the City should be looking for in an applicant to achieve the "Goals" stated herein.

5. Describe the basis for your confidence in achieving the goals stated herein, were the City to adopt the operation and management model described in item "1" above. Please reference specific management/organizational strengths, demonstrated fundraising capacity, and any existing technical expertise in animal care.

6. Provide a high-level proposed business model for the nonprofit entity that manages the Zoo that addresses the following items:
   
   - Term of the agreement;
   - Division of responsibility, if any, between the City and the nonprofit entity for maintenance, repairs and capital projects;
   - Ownership of personal property acquired after commencement of the agreement;
   - Flow of Zoo's revenue;
   - Anticipated funding contribution from the City;
   - A proposed board composition for the nonprofit entity including a description of governance mechanisms/structure and all obligations (financial or otherwise) of board members.
   - Staffing plan and organizational chart, including shift coverage, hours of operation, and job classifications. Please assume that all workers at the Zoo will be employees of the nonprofit organization, not the City or the Society.
   - Projected profit and loss statement for the first five years of operation, listing specifically the source of revenue, including contributions by individual benefactors.
   - A long-term capital asset maintenance, construction and financing plan.
   - Other important business terms anticipated by vendor through vendor's relevant experience.

7. Provide proposed performance measurements that should be included in the contract awarded to the nonprofit entity that will manage the zoo, including, but not limited to,
those relating to fundraising targets, attendance targets, audit results, accreditation reviews, quality of visitor experience, and maintenance of the Zoo.

B. Vendor Background

1. Provide a brief history of your organization including the year organized, locations, affiliated companies, and the total number of employees. Include any additional information not already included elsewhere in your response that you consider most relevant to the City of New Bedford.

2. Submitter Qualifications and Experience: Include a description of your organization's relevant experience.

3. References: If applicable, provide the contact information for any public entity for whom the vendor is currently operating and managing a zoo.

5. Response Date

Submittals are due no later than Friday, November 15, 2019 no later than 11:00 am.

6. Proprietary Information

Any portion of the submitted response which is asserted to be exempt from disclosure under any Massachusetts law, shall be clearly marked "exempt", "confidential" or "trade secret" (as applicable) and shall also contain the statutory basis for such claim on every page. Pages containing trade secrets shall be marked "trade secret" as defined by Massachusetts General Laws. Failure to segregate and identify such portions shall constitute a waiver of any claimed exemption and the City of New Bedford will provide such records in response to public records requests without notifying the respondent. Designating material simply as "proprietary" will not necessarily protect it from disclosure.

7. Vendor Costs

Vendors are responsible for all costs associated with the preparation, submission, and any potential demonstration or meeting to discuss their response to this Request for Information. The City of New Bedford will not be responsible for any vendor related costs associated with responding to this Request for Information.