



## **REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)**

### **Downtown Planning and Development Consultant**

*Virginia Main Street's Downtown Survey and Property Inventory in the ARC Region*

**Proposal Release Date: Monday, January 7, 2025**

**Proposal Due: Friday, February 7, 2025 at 12:00 pm EST**

*Responses received after this time shall not be considered and will not be opened*

## **PROJECT OVERVIEW**

Friends of Southwest Virginia, in partnership with the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) office and Virginia Main Street, is launching a project to advance economic development across the ARC region. We are seeking a consultant to conduct a comprehensive Downtown Survey and Property Inventory of 10 Virginia Main Street (VMS) communities within the Virginia ARC region.

The Downtown Survey and Property Inventory, utilizing Main Street America's Building Opportunity on Main Street (BOOMS) application, will provide a detailed inventory of available downtown properties, offering both new and experienced developers critical insights that reduce investment risks and accelerate development. This effort is designed to support Virginia ARC ARISE efforts by identifying areas of strength, opportunity, and potentially catalytic results within each of the ten communities with respect to small developer and development ecosystems. The findings will serve as a foundation for an upcoming grant focused on fostering a new generation of real estate developers and investors, addressing the region's housing and economic growth needs.

By aligning with broader regional planning efforts, this project will contribute significantly to the economic revitalization and growth of the Virginia ARC region, supporting sustainable development and long-term prosperity.

## **PROJECT TIMELINE**

- **RFP Open Date:** January 7, 2025
- **RFP Proposal Due Date:** February 7, 2025
- **Consultant Selection Date:** February 28, 2025
- **Contract Period:** March 1, 2025 – September 30, 2025

## **PROJECT BACKGROUND**

### ***About the ARC Region in Virginia***

The Appalachian Regional Commission defines Appalachia as a 205,000 square-mile region along and around the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi. It includes all of West Virginia and portions of: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. More than 25 million people live in Appalachia and reflect a diverse collection of cultures, economies, and demographics.

The scope of this project is limited to selecting Appalachian counties in Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia. Much of the project region historically built economies and communities reliant on extractive industries largely related to energy. As the national and global energy economy shifts, Appalachian communities have increasingly begun to explore diversified economic strategies to address the challenges they face, including high and persistent rates of poverty, poor public infrastructure, limited human capacity, and negative population growth. Over time, some Appalachian communities have experienced success in their diversification efforts, while others continue to grapple with multiple and intersecting challenges.

### ***About Friends of Southwest Virginia***

Friends of Southwest Virginia is an organization dedicated to advancing economic development, cultural preservation, and community vitality across the southwestern region of Virginia. As a nonprofit entity, it collaborates closely with various stakeholders, including local governments, businesses, and community organizations, to foster sustainable growth and enhance quality of life in the area. The organization is deeply committed to promoting the unique cultural heritage and natural assets of Southwest Virginia, while also supporting initiatives that build a competitive workforce, foster entrepreneurship, and improve infrastructure. Through strategic partnerships and innovative projects, Friends of Southwest Virginia strives to create a vibrant and resilient community that thrives economically and celebrates its rich cultural identity.

### ***About Virginia Main Street***

Virginia Main Street is an initiative designed to revitalize and sustain the economic and cultural vitality of Virginia's downtowns and commercial districts. Managed by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, the program provides communities with resources, training, and support to foster vibrant, economically thriving Main Streets. By focusing on historic preservation, economic development, and community engagement, Virginia Main Street helps localities leverage their unique heritage and character to attract investment, stimulate business growth, and enhance the quality of life for residents. Through its comprehensive approach, the program aims to build strong, resilient communities that celebrate their historical assets while driving forward modern economic opportunities.

### **IMPORTANCE OF CONSULTANT**

A consultant is crucial to this project for several reasons. First, their expertise and experience in conducting comprehensive surveys and property inventories ensure that the data collected will be accurate, detailed, and actionable. This specialized knowledge is vital for identifying and analyzing downtown properties effectively, which will provide invaluable insights into the local real estate landscape. Second, a consultant brings an objective, outside perspective that can uncover strengths, opportunities, and gaps that internal stakeholders might overlook. Their ability to apply best practices and innovative approaches enhances the quality and reliability of the findings. Lastly, a consultant's involvement helps streamline the process, ensuring that the project stays on track and meets its goals efficiently, thereby setting the stage for successful implementation and long-term economic development in the ARC region.

The consultant will collaborate directly with Friends of Southwest Virginia and Virginia Main Street to lead and complete the study.

### **SCOPE OF WORK**

The consultant will undertake a comprehensive survey and assessment of properties within 10 (ten) Virginia Main Street districts, encompassing both publicly and privately owned lots and structures. Using the BOOMS application, the survey will detail each property's condition, use, ownership, zoning, square footage, and rental rates. Following the survey, the consultant will identify and prioritize properties based on their potential for development or redevelopment, guided by market assessment recommendations.

A thorough market assessment will be conducted for each community to determine the highest and best use for the prioritized properties. The consultant will prepare a detailed report for each community that includes the survey findings, market assessment, and identified priority properties. This report will also offer recommendations for marketing these properties, securing qualified developers, and reviewing potential developer incentives.

Additionally, the consultant will conduct virtual meetings with each community to present and discuss the report and recommendations.

**Deliverables:**

1. **Comprehensive Property Survey:** A detailed survey of all properties within the ten Virginia Main Street districts, including lots and structures. Using the BOOMS application, the survey will document each property's condition, use, ownership, zoning, square footage, and rental rates.
2. **Prioritized Property List:** Identification and prioritization of surveyed properties best suited for development or redevelopment, based on market assessment recommendations.
3. **Market Assessment Report:** A thorough market assessment for each community that provides recommendations on the highest and best use for the prioritized properties. This report will guide future development and investment decisions.
4. **Detailed Community Reports:** Individual reports for each community that include the survey data, market assessment findings, prioritized properties, and specific recommendations for marketing these properties, securing qualified developers, and evaluating developer incentives.
5. **Marketing and Incentive Recommendations:** Recommendations for marketing the identified properties and strategies for soliciting and securing qualified developers, as well as a review of potential developer incentives.
6. **Virtual Meeting Presentations:** Virtual meetings with each community to present and review the findings, reports, and recommendations, allowing for feedback and discussion.
7. **Final Project Report:** A comprehensive final report summarizing the overall findings, including all surveys, assessments, recommendations, and any other relevant information.

These deliverables will ensure that each community receives a thorough analysis and actionable recommendations to support their economic development goals.

**PROPOSAL EVALUATION**

Friends of Southwest Virginia and Virginia Main Street will select a consultant through a competitive process based on the evaluation of proposals using the Virginia Public Procurement Act's definition of "best value," meaning "the overall combination of quality, price, and various elements of required services that in total are optimal relative to a public body's needs." As defined in Section 2.2-4301 of the Code of Virginia's Virginia Public Procurement Act.

- Strong, demonstrated ability to facilitate, motivate, and track multiple, interconnected, remote groups;
- Clear and effective verbal and written communication skills;
- Ability to organize and synthesize key takeaways from large discussions;
- Comfort with remote and/or cloud-based working tools including Zoom, AI notetaker, Microsoft programs, etc.;
- High attention to detail;
- Experience with federal grant requirements, reporting, and project management;
- Comfort with providing thoughtful, balanced, and firm guidance and support for project participants and lead partners as needed;

- Understanding of issues of equity, community engagement, and inclusivity in an Appalachian context;
- Experience in community and economic development; and
- Experience working with Appalachian and/or rural and/or economically distressed communities.

**INSTRUCTIONS TO SUBMIT A PROPOSAL – PLEASE FOLLOW LAYOUT INSTRUCTIONS**

All responsible bidders/offerors should submit the following documents and information:

**1. Narrative (8-10pages) describing:**

- **Work Plan:** A detailed plan outlining how you will address all aspects of the scope of work and complete the project by May 2025.
- **Approach to Market Assessment:** A description of your methodology for conducting the market assessment and the data sources you will use.
- **Experience and Qualifications:** Evidence of previous successful projects similar to this one, including sample reports and documents. Provide resumes or biographies of key project team members.
- **Deliverables:** A summary of the proposed deliverables, including the property survey, market assessment report, prioritized property list, and recommendations.
- **Project Management:** Approach to project management and proposed milestones to accomplishing this work.

**2. Budget** that defines deliverables, rates and proposed payment schedule (please note that the budget cap for this scope of services over the six (6) month period, including all expenses, is \$120,000.

**3. Resume(s) for key personnel.**

**4. Two references**, including:

- Name, Title, Organization, and Contact Information

Please submit responses via email no later than Friday, February 7, at 12:00 p.m. EST to Kim Davis, Executive Director of Friends of Southwest Virginia at [kdavis@myswva.org](mailto:kdavis@myswva.org) with the subject line: "Downtown Planning and Development Consultant."