

SOUTHWESTERN COMMISSION

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Cherokee County

Andrews
Murphy

Clay County

Hayesville

Graham County

Robbinsville
Lake Santeetlah

Haywood County

Canton
Clyde
Maggie Valley
Waynesville

Jackson County

Dillsboro
Forest Hills
Sylva
Webster

Macon County

Franklin
Highlands

Swain County

Bryson City

November 19, 2007

Prospective consulting teams:

With this pilot project of the Mountain Landscapes Initiative, we are about to begin an historic planning process in the westernmost counties of North Carolina, and we invite your participation.

The following Request for Proposals outlines the scope of the project we envision: The creation of a published "Tool Box" to guide responsible development in our region, and analyses of representative growth management scenarios to illustrate application of some of the key tools. The RFP also provides context for this effort so respondents can understand our broader goals as well as the project's specific deliverables.

We believe a multi-day charrette planned and staged according to guidelines established by the National Charrette Institute is the most effective way to design our "Tool Box" and to address model scenarios. We expect respondents to be experienced with the intensely collaborative nature of NCI charrettes and to demonstrate they're prepared to use the process productively.

The deadline for replying to this RFP is December 31, 2007. We will quickly narrow applicants to no more than three top choices and invite in-person presentations from finalists as soon as possible. Please submit two (2) copies of your proposal to me at the address below.

While we have been as specific as possible about our intentions, we realize you may have questions. So here are contacts for Region A project team members who can speak directly to issues in key categories:

Communications and general coordination issues: Ben Brown, project communications director -- benbro@earthlink.net; 828-508-5002.

Mapping and regional resources for base data -- Ryan Sherby, RPO Planner, Southwestern Commission – Region A: ryan@regiona.org ; 828-586-1962 X-214.

Outreach and land use trend research – Dr. Gabriel Cumming: gcumming@email.inc.edu; 919-260-1891.

We look forward to your proposal.

Sincerely,

Vicki Greene

Appalachian Development District

Rural Planning Organization

Area Agency on Aging

Regional Revolving Loan Fund

Economic Development District

Workforce Investment Act

Mountain Landscapes Initiative: Region A Tool Box

A Request for Proposals

The Southwestern Commission, a regional council representing the seven westernmost counties and 16 incorporated towns of Western North Carolina (Region A), invites proposals from Consulting Teams to:

- Plan and manage a public charrette to produce a published “Tool Box” of guidelines for responsible planning and development in our mountain region;
- Demonstrate, during the charrette, how such tools may be applied to model scenarios selected to represent a range of development and growth management challenges.

Our goals build on our history and on the need to respond to change in our mountain region.

The Place-Based Economy

Since humans first migrated to the highlands of Western North Carolina, they have revered the landscape and valued its economic potential. The region’s mountains and rivers, its wildlife, and its fertile lowlands engendered a distinctive culture and a succession of economies.

For most of that history, the livelihoods of the region’s inhabitants had strong connections with place, beginning with farms in the valleys and evolving over time to businesses that prospered in hamlets, villages, towns, and metropolitan areas. In the late 1900s, the economies of many mountain communities were powered by seasonal visitors, followed by second-home builders, and more recently by migrating retirees.

For a time, the Industrial Revolution spawned industries not nearly so dependent upon place. These businesses could – and did – move across regional and, ultimately, international borders chasing cheaper labor, more lenient environmental regulations, and government subsidies and tax relief. As investment from these migrating industrial sectors declined, our region has refocused on the “place-based economy” linked with location and landscape. Our sense of place and quality-of-life advantages have once again become our primary economic development assets.

Now, however, these key assets are threatened by the unintended consequences of attracting so many people and so much development so quickly. Unparalleled growth and largely unregulated development have changed the look and feel of our landscape and our communities. They have strained commercial corridors, tightened access to affordable housing, and accelerated the rise in property taxes. Citizens justifiably fear a decline in the social, economic, and environmental attributes that define their quality of life and that attract and hold residents in the region. All of which has made land use planning the most hotly contested topic in Western North Carolina.

Growth management issues fuel bitter debates, generate front-page news stories, divide communities, and dominate the agendas of public meetings. Decision-makers on every level, from elected officials to developers and individual property-owners, are often perplexed by what seem to be competing demands from long-time landowners, newcomers, farmers, developers, realtors, environmentalists, property rights advocates, builders and contractors. These myriad demands need not be mutually exclusive, especially when we recognize that we all have stakes in preserving and enhancing the region’s quality of life and its place-based economy. But our citizens and policy-makers need help.

They need access to effective tools for sorting through alternatives and for implementing approaches that support a healthy economy, strengthen our mountain communities, and assure quality of life for all citizens for generations to come.

Planning from a Regional Perspective

Our seven-county region is as complex as any in America. We have the highest mountains in the East and some of the most pristine river valleys. We have rich agricultural land where it is still possible to grow valuable cash crops. We have historic towns seeking an identity in an era of change. And we have a suburban and exurban building boom that, in most places, is largely unregulated.

We are home to the Eastern Band of the Cherokee, to vast tracts of National Forests, and to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the most visited National Park in the U.S. We have a native population that traces its roots back for centuries, and we have new arrivals anxious to begin second careers or new lives in retirement.

We know the challenges that face us are interconnected, which means they require comprehensive approaches. If we only restrict development on mountain slopes, we may force suburban-type sprawl into the farm land and open space in the valleys. Forcing developers to shoulder the costs of growth without strategies for broadening housing alternatives is likely to widen the affordability gap. Ignoring the relationships between healthy downtowns and protected rural landscapes will complicate the survival of both.

We need to talk about new roads, long-term access to water, storm water management, waste disposal policies and infrastructure, farmland preservation, revitalizing downtowns, and enabling affordable living across broad income ranges -- all at the same time. So we expect our consultant partners to offer integrated approaches and to bring cross-disciplinary experts (economic development specialists, environmental scientists, and transportation engineers, as well as designers) into the planning discussion.

Background for this Tool Box Pilot

Beginning in the fall of 2006 and continuing throughout the first six months of 2007, The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina (CFWNC) convened a task force of academics, federal and state agency staffers, planners, environmentalists, and others to develop a strategy for creating growth and development guidelines for the region. On June 28, 2007, at the request of its Board, the Southwestern Commission staff and partners -- including members of the CFWNC's task force -- delivered a "Growth Management Challenges Workshop" for more than 50 local officials in the seven western counties. We surveyed attendees and consider their concerns a first draft of an agenda for our Tool Box effort. (See Addendum No.1: "Executive Summary of the June 28 Workshop").

We also see this specific effort, the Region A Tool Box project, as a pilot effort with broader regional implications. While we want to focus on the specific concerns and opportunities of the towns and counties in Region A, we realize their issues are representative of those facing others in the North Carolina mountains. So we expect our partner consultants to help us structure this project in ways that serve that broader perspective and create models worth replicating in our sister towns and counties.

Key to that ambition is the need to coordinate approaches in Region A with the Mountain Landscape Initiative goals of The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, which is one of our primary project funders and the convener of the wider regional planning discussion.

A Commitment to Public Engagement

We are convinced that it's crucial not only to listen to citizens' visions and concerns but also to design the charrette and the Tool Box production process to demonstrate we are responding to what we hear. Because of that emphasis on listening and responding, we are contracting separately with outreach consultants to engage broad cross-sections in the region before the charrette and to help focus the range of concerns that will set the charrette's goals.

The scope of this outreach effort is outlined in a section below called "Work of Others." We intend this pre-charrette public engagement process to establish clear paths for design during the charrette itself. And we cannot overstate the requirement that consultants responding to this RFP be prepared to adjust their assumptions, approaches, and products as necessary to connect their work with the hopes and concerns recorded and refined during the outreach efforts.

Submission Requirements

At a minimum, proposals should contain the following:

- A description of the consultant's understanding and approach to the project outlined above, including a projected timeline and anticipated project deliverables;
- A detailed outline for planning and staging a multi-day, public charrette according to guidelines established by the National Charrette Institute (www.charretteinstitute.org). (Excluded from those requirements are responsibilities for the outreach and communications efforts contracted separately and listed below under "Work by Others");
- A strategy for collaborating with regional experts and existing resources, including faculty and staff from our community colleges and universities; staff experts from participating towns and counties; specialists in appropriate state and federal agencies; and other consultants named by Region A project managers. (We will provide contacts for connecting to these resources.)
- An explanation, which can be integrated into various components of the proposal, of how elements of this specific project serve the goals of establishing models worthy of replication in the broader region;
- A description of the type and level of additional support the consultant will require/expect from Region A project managers. (See below for support Region A project managers expect to provide);
- An explanation of how the consultant intends to shape the charrette agenda and production phases to respond to issues and concerns uncovered during outreach efforts outlined below under "Work of Others.";
- Names, roles, and backgrounds of key team personnel. Since one of our primary goals is to build capacity for planning follow-through in the region, we will give special weight to proposals that include qualified sub-consultants from North Carolina in general and from the mountain region in particular;
- Examples of comparable projects completed in the past three years, with references for each;
- An estimated budget based on the scope of services and the proposed approach, detailing the time and budget allotted to each consultant and sub-consultant by task. While Region A officials and their partners will attempt to help a Consulting Team minimize costs, consultants responding to this RFP should include in their budgets provisions for: food, travel, and accommodations for all team members during pre and post-charrette visits and during the charrette itself; printing and copying equipment; plus all charrette supplies, etc. Region A Project Managers will provide, at no charge, a suitable charrette studio site with 24-hour access and wireless broadband. For more guidelines, see "Services Provided" below.

The Budget

Region A Project Managers and The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina are estimating a budget for the project outlined in this RFP to be \$250,000. That does not include the Outreach and Communications components contracted separately and listed below in “Work by Others.” Nor does that amount include the costs of printing and distributing the Tool Box publication. Respondents to this RFP should gauge their proposals accordingly.

Deliverables: The Tool Box

Our Tool Box publication will be designed to be of immediate use to property owners, contractors, and developers committed to site preparation and to building according to best practices for the unique conditions in our mountains and watersheds. It will also provide guidelines for effective long-range planning at the town, county, and regional levels.

Below are potential Tool Box topics that have emerged in discussions over the last year. While consultants responding to this RFP should not consider these as required categories, the list might serve as a context-setter and as an aid for projecting time, personnel, and budget allocations. The actual agenda for the Tool Box will be shaped during the pre-charrette outreach phase and the charrette itself.

A Tool Box Table of Contents might include:

- How-to explanations and illustrations of comprehensive approaches to development that preserve farmland, protect environmental assets, and allow for appropriate density in a diverse range of human habitat, from the most rural to the most urban landscapes.
- Guidelines for integrating land use planning with regional economic development concerns.
- Strategies for maximizing community accessibility, including both the physical (Universal Design, etc.) and the economic (affordable housing) dimensions.
- Explanations, illustrations, and resource listings for proven best practices for: A) developing infrastructure (roads, water, sewer, septic, etc.);and B) building structures in a wide range of soil conditions and slopes.
- Guides to siting and building with watershed protection in mind, with explanations on appropriate stream buffers, etc.
- An explanation of how to integrate transportation and transit planning policy into desired development patterns. (Dealing with the DOT)
- An examination, including region-appropriate recommendations, of the roles of codes, subdivision ordinances, comprehensive plans, HOAs, architectural guidelines and other methods for encouraging desired development patterns and building practices.
- An introduction to tried-and-true architectural approaches in the region, possibly leading to a future Pattern Book of region-appropriate architecture for different scales, locations (rural to urban), and site conditions. (We understand that the scope and budget of this project does not allow for the production of a complete Pattern Book, but we think it’s important to suggest how such a product might be useful.)

- A green building primer with guidelines that apply not only to individual buildings but also to conservation development clusters in rural and suburban settings and to master-planning hamlets, villages, and town neighborhoods.
- A resource listing of appropriate government agencies and non-profits ((Land trusts, watershed councils, Preservation NC, etc) that might offer advice or assistance to individuals and to communities.

We expect delivery of a digital file, using professional publishing software to be mutually agreed upon, with all copy, lay-outs, illustrations, etc. edited, approved, and ready for printing within six weeks of the closing presentation of the charrette. The costs for printing and distributing the published Tool Box will not be the responsibility of the consulting team. But consultants responding to this RFP should include in their time and budget estimates all responsibilities associated with researching, designing, writing, illustrating, and editing a Tool Box manuscript approved by Region A project managers.

Because of the expanded illustrative responsibilities of a Tool Box effort, we expect the successful consulting team to be especially well-staffed with specialists in visual depiction of best practices, alternative planning scenarios, etc.

Deliverables: Model Scenarios

Consultants responding to this RFP should plan for enough capacity to assign team members to selected demonstration projects to illustrate the application of planning tools and best practices to representative parcels, neighborhoods, or sectors.

Teams will not be expected to provide the level of analysis common in a master plan or a code calibration for a specific client. Rather, these projects will be chosen to illustrate broad or first-step approaches to common growth management challenges in the seven-county region.

Scenarios may include:

- A gateway commercial corridor to public lands (National Forests and the Great Smoky Mountains National Park) and to Tribal Lands of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians. Challenges: Rapid growth without design guidelines, regulating plans, etc.
- The interface of rural farmland and rapid, unregulated suburbanization. Challenges: Farmland/open space preservation, regulating plans appropriate to rural regions, etc.
- One or more historic downtowns. Challenges: Frontage design, architectural guidelines, lot size, density, slope development in an urban setting, etc.
- Clustering development in rural areas. Challenges: Conceptualizing density for re-emerging hamlets and villages, conservation easements, appropriate regulating plans, etc.
- Integrating land use planning with transportation planning. Challenges: Working with the DOT on long-range planning, appropriate road design, transit potential, etc.

Once the successful consulting team is chosen, we will work with team leaders to focus model projects and to refine the scope of work possible under time and budget constraints.

Services Provided

Consultants responding to this RFP can assume Region A project managers will supply:

- A suitable site for the charrette studio and public meetings, with 24-hour access and wireless broadband.
- Staff and volunteer support for GIS-related base data collection;
- Communications and Outreach efforts as outlined below in “Work by Others”;
- Printing and distribution expenses for the Tool Box;
- Additional staff and volunteer support from regional experts in such areas as soil erosion, mountain geology, water quality, flood plain mapping, and water and sewer infrastructure.

Work by Others: Communications

Region A Project Managers will contract separately with a Communications team to manage:

- Design and content for a Mountain Landscapes Initiative website that will provide continuous public engagement during pre-charrette outreach, charrette, and post-charrette implementation phases;
- Media relations throughout all stages of the process;
- Coordination between the Consulting Team, Region A Project Managers, The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, and staff support people and volunteers from the region;
- Support, subject to separate negotiations, for the design and content of the Tool Box publication;
- Coordination between the Consulting Team’s Tool Box designers and content providers and the selected Tool Box printing and distribution groups.

Work by Others: Outreach

Region A Project Managers will contract separately for an Outreach Team to manage an intensive data gathering and public engagement process. Outcomes and findings from this process will set the agenda for the charrette. The Consulting Team should be prepared to adapt their work plan as this agenda evolves.

The goals of the pre-charrette outreach and data gathering process are:

- To gain an understanding of key values, concerns about growth, and visions for the future shared by residents of Region A. The charrette will be designed to respond to these values, concerns, and visions.
- To ensure that citizens of the region are familiar with the Tool Box project, are confident that the process will respond to their needs, and have ample opportunities to participate in the process.
- To engage key groups of professionals—e.g. realtors, local officials, and environmental advocates—in the design of the Tool Box.
- To collect and summarize pertinent data about landscape change in the region.

The following methods will be employed to achieve these goals:

- In-depth interviews will be conducted with forty individuals and eight groups across Region A. Interviewees will be chosen to represent all participating counties and to encompass a diversity of stakeholder populations.
- Excerpts from the interviews will be incorporated into a video documentary that presents the prevalent values, concerns, and visions interviewees expressed regarding the local landscape. Interview data will also be presented through the press, website, and additional publicity materials.
- Available geospatial and demographic data will be collected and summarized in order to understand and convey the landscape change trends and issues facing the region.
- Citizen response to the interview and landscape change data will be solicited through a series of facilitated public conversations and listening sessions across the region.
- Extensive coverage in print and broadcast media will accompany the outreach process and build awareness of the charrette.
- Public input and landscape change data collected through the preceding steps will be represented through a summary report, a revised version of the video documentary, and visual displays for use during the charrette.

This outreach and data-gathering process will provide a picture of core values shared by the citizens of Region A, the critical growth challenges the region faces, and local visions for the future. Elements of the Tool Box crafted during the charrette must demonstrate a direct connection with this information. So the Consulting Team should plan to engage early with the Outreach Team and to remain engaged throughout all phases of the process.

The Timeline

We are planning to conclude the charrette no later than June 1. And with that in mind, we have reserved space suitable for a charrette studio at Western Carolina University in Jackson County for these alternative dates: March 19-24; May 12-19; May 13-20; May 14-21.

We intend to begin publishing and distributing our Tool Box no later than six months after beginning Phase 1 of a three-stage process that includes: A pre-charrette communications, outreach, and data gathering stage; the public charrette itself; and a post-charrette implementation phase.

Region A project managers and The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina have established a timeline and measures of success for the broader Initiative. (See Addendum No.2: “Measuring Success”) While consultants responding to this proposal should not consider each of these measures contract deliverables, they should frame their proposals with the idea of helping us advance those goals in the time allotted.

Addendum No. 1

Growth Management Workshop, June 28, Franklin, NC

Executive Summary

Of the estimated 50 Western North Carolina leaders and staff experts at the June 28 Growth Management Workshop, more than 60 percent (32) completed two-page questionnaires about their concerns and about the questions they most wanted answered.

There was a clear undercurrent of support for a regional approach that addresses multiple challenges at the same time. The top two challenges listed by attendees were related to current hot-button topics: development on unstable slopes and the protection of rivers and streams. But “dealing with a combination of concerns while nurturing a strong local and regional economy” was a strong No. 3.

The most frequently mentioned questions that attendees wanted answered:

- What are the best models/strategies for informing/engaging/achieving buy-in from the broadest cross-sections of our communities? These cross-sections must include the general public, real estate development professionals, non-profit advocacy groups, government staffers, and elected officials.
- How can we effectively compile, organize, and distribute land use trend data that can aid decision-making? These data must include the latest thinking on the land’s “carrying capacity” with regard to slope development, watershed protection, septic tank permitting, etc.
- What are current best practices/models for planning and building in ways that:
 - Grow the region while protecting watersheds, slopes and ridge tops, rivers and streams, farmlands, and other critical assets?
 - Harmonize long-range planning with long-range economic development strategies?
 - Encourage a range of housing choices to match a range of incomes?

Addendum No. 2

Measuring Success on the Region A Scale

Within six months of the launch of the Initiative, we will have:

- Completed a regional charrette to produce content for a Tool Box to be published and distributed widely in 2008;
- Staged at least three charrettes-within-the-charrette to demonstrate how such a process can create master plans or inform regulating codes for specific parcels and specific jurisdictions;
- Improved data inventories for most jurisdictions in our region, giving planning staffs, developers, and property owners firmer bases for making decisions;
- Created demonstration models for displaying land use trend data to aid scenario planning;
- Illustrated alternative policy models to address inquiries by planning boards and elected officials;
- Collected a representative sample of concerns from policy-makers and citizens about land use trends and desires for the future;
- Established a website for archiving all data and for communicating, in as close to real-time as possible, the progress of the Initiative;
- Begun working with real estate professionals and jurisdictions on ways to use data, techniques, and processes demonstrated in Phases 1-2 on more community-specific projects;
- Undertaken an initial evaluation to measure the following: progress in line with broader Initiative goals; impacts to date of each program component and of the overall project; and strengths to reinforce and potential improvements to be made in order to increase the Initiative's effectiveness and utility as a replicable model.

Within a year, in addition to the benchmarks above, we will have:

- Published and begun distribution of the Tool Kit/Pattern Book;
- Facilitated discussions with local realtor and builder associations and with community colleges about using the Tool Box as a standard for professional training and credentialing;
- Assisted in the planning follow-up workshops and charrettes for developers, citizens and policymakers to apply principles from the Tool Box;
- Engaged with at least one governmental jurisdiction to enact policies in line with Tool Box models and research;
- Advanced all databases in all jurisdictions;
- Completed and applied evaluations of products and processes from Phases 1 and 2 to improve strategies for ongoing programs in Phase 3.