



A Better City

Request for Qualifications

Urban design proposal for the pedestrianization of Birch Street in Roslindale

December 13, 2018

Responses preferred by January 8, 2019 at 11:59pm Eastern Time



Request for Qualifications

Issue information:

Organization	A Better City
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PURPOSE OF PROCUREMENT

A Better City is seeking a professional consultant to provide urban design and landscape architectural services for the pedestrianization of Birch Street in Roslindale, Boston. The urban design proposal produced by the design consultant will serve as the basis for the transformation of Birch Street into an interim pedestrian plaza within the next two years. This plaza will be one of the first semi-permanent pedestrian plazas to be installed in Boston, Massachusetts.

The target number of design firms for this contract is one. The expected duration of contract is four months. The contract will be with A Better City, but Roslindale Village Main Street and the City of Boston, particularly their Public Realm Director, will be fully involved throughout the development process.

About A Better City

A Better City advances Greater Boston's economic health, access, sustainability, and quality of life through applied research, planning, targeted services, and advocacy. In pursuit of its mission, A Better City brings together work in three core program areas: transportation and infrastructure, land use and development, and energy and the environment. Since 2015, our organization has been involved with the development of the Public Realm Plan for Go Boston 2030, an initiative developed in partnership with the City of Boston and Barr Foundation. The Plan focused on devising placemaking strategies and policy solutions to improve the public realm of Boston's streets and reclaim underused roadways for people. In November 2019, the City of Boston adopted the [Tactical Public Realm Guidelines](#) produced by our project team through the Public Realm Plan for Go Boston 2030 process. The manual introduced urban design guidelines and procedures for the implementation of interim pedestrian plazas, parklets, outdoor cafes, and pavement murals in Boston. With the generous support from the Barr Foundation, A Better City has been piloting these guidelines by supporting the installation of a series of interim placemaking projects in Boston in partnership with community organizations and local businesses. One of these projects includes supporting the transformation of Birch Street in Roslindale into an interim pedestrian plaza, through a partnership with the Roslindale Village Main Street and City of Boston.

PEDESTRIANIZATION OF BIRCH STREET

Roslindale Village Main Street and local business owners have the vision to transform the north, short business section of Birch Street into a permanent, fully landscaped, useable, and pedestrianized community space. As a first step in this process, they are looking to reclaim incrementally this segment of the street by closing it to vehicular traffic and installing a semi-permanent pedestrian plaza.



As property owner for the right of way of Birch Street, the City of Boston is fully supportive of this project and will be providing funding for its construction. The construction process for this project will be put out to bid by the City of Boston after the design is finalized. The City's Public Realm Director, the dedicated staffer from the City of Boston to walk this project through the approval process highlighted in the [Plaza Section](#) of the [Tactical Public Realm Guidelines](#), is part of the project team.

Background

The closure of Birch Street to vehicles is not a novelty to the businesses and residents of Roslindale. In 2018 there were 7 closures of the street to vehicular traffic. Six of these were on weekends (4 on Saturdays and 2 on Sundays), and one on a Thursday night.

Two of these closures have been driven by Roslindale Village Main Street (RVMS), to highlight the potential of Birch Street as a pedestrian plaza and to provide economic stimulus to businesses neighboring Birch Street: the Saturday closures in June 2018 (to run simultaneously with the RVMS Farmers Market), and the closure on the first Thursday in December for the RVMS Holiday Market. Other closures of the street have been for entertainment purposes (Roslindale Business Group Fall Festival) and an annual staging of a 5K running race (The Emerald Society).

The RVMS Holiday Market on Birch Street has been running on the first Thursday evening of December since 2016, and is modelled after European Christmas Markets. RVMS closes Birch Street from 1 pm until 9 pm, with the event running from 4 pm until 8 pm. RVMS provides space for novel vendors, activities, and music. Individual businesses stay open late and provide outdoor festive events, including wine tastings, cheese dishes, and cocktails to encourage people to come out and enjoy the festivities. Birch Street, itself, acts as an activity space as well as a hub and conduit for visitors, as they move around between the various shops and spots of interest. Each year the Holiday Market has been a success with several hundred people filling the area — despite the cold — using Birch Street as a gathering space, and filling the restaurants, bars and shops, to make it one of the busiest days of the year. It should be noted that the Holiday Market captured many visitors from outside of Roslindale, although it is unclear whether they specifically came to the Market, or got involved in general festivities as they conducted other business.

Open Birch 2018, was designed as a proof of concept test for a fully pedestrianized Birch Street. Birch Street was shut to traffic on busy Saturday mornings in June and an attractive pedestrian-oriented space was created with tables, chairs, activities and music. This provided an option for the significant crowds who populated the concurrent RVMS Farmers Market. These Saturdays allowed observation of the effects (positive or negative) on abutting businesses due to the closure. The events were successful: Birch Street became filled with hundreds of people, who enjoyed the activities, music and space. Visitors also brought increased economic activity in neighboring businesses, and many were disappointed that the closure was only temporary.

Design Considerations

Conversations with local businesses owners and residents have produced the following guidance for the design:

1. North and south entrances to Birch Street must look appealing, and mark the significance of the change of the nature of use.
2. Use of greenery and plant material to break up urban feel.
3. Use of benches, tables or parklets to provide seating areas for visitors.
4. Alteration of street so that current division between pedestrians and vehicles is lost, with ownership of Birch Street transferred to pedestrians.
5. Open space for street vendors/vendor carts.

6. Open and raised (or otherwise identified) space for musical or other performance events (likely at Belgrade Ave end).
7. Recognition of Roslindale as transportation hub, with bicycle racks or repair station.

Figure 1: Photo of Birch Street



Figure 2: Aerial photo shows site for urban design proposal



Stakeholders

Roslindale Village Main Street, whose mission is to promote Roslindale Village as an appealing destination and a dynamic center, is a key partner in the program. The Office of the Chief of Streets (City of Boston) is also an instrumental partner in the implementation of this initiative. Although numerous businesses are in proximity to Birch Street, key stakeholders include those businesses on Birch Street, as well as the building owners which directly abut Birch Street.

SCOPE OF SERVICES

1. Urban design proposal for the pedestrianization of Birch Street

The urban design proposal will showcase how Birch Street can be transformed into an interim pedestrian plaza that serves both abutting retail activities and the larger community of Roslindale.

Deliverables:

- I. Construction drawings for installing a semi-permanent plaza;
- II. One rendered floor plan;
- III. At least one elevations;
- IV. Three rendered perspectives;
- V. 250-word project description; and
- VI. Site analysis.

2. Insight into construction process

In order to support successful implementation, the consultant should produce a high-level implementation plan that provides insight into the potential construction cost of the proposal and a phasing plan.

Deliverables:

- I. Ballpark cost estimate of construction; and
- II. Phasing plan explaining how the urban design could be implemented in three phases.

3. Creative community and stakeholder engagement process

Our team values participatory design processes. Therefore, we are looking for a consultant team able to design and implement a creative community engagement process that goes beyond the traditional community meeting format. Stakeholders that are key to the success of this initiative do not often have time and/or means to attend after-hour community meetings or traditional design charrettes. We are looking for a consultant interested in ensuring meaningful participation of the local community throughout the entire design process and who is proficient at devising creative modes of stakeholder engagement.

Deliverables:

- I. a minimum of ten hours of direct engagement with local business owners and other stakeholders on the design process; and
- II. a minimum of ten hours of in-person and phone coordination meetings with project team, including A Better City, Roslindale Village Main Street, and City of Boston.

SUBMITTAL CONTENT

Submittal Content should include:

- Cover Letter (one page)
- Section 1: Identify your firm, including name, address, phone number and contact person regarding this RFQ (one page)
- Section 2: Provide an organizational chart identifying disciplines, specific personnel, and role of those who will be assigned to this project (one page)
- Section 3: Describe your approach to the urban design proposal and creative stakeholder engagement process (two pages)
- Section 4: Firm's capacity (e.g. number of full-time licensed professionals). Provide resumes and workload for people assigned to this project. Please refer to staff listed in Section 2. (maximum one page per person)
- Section 5: Detail firm's quality control process with regard to design, document control, and construction administration (one page)



- Section 6: Firm’s litigation history (one page)
- Section 7: Copy of your firm’s current professional liability or errors and omissions insurance (one page)
- Section 8: List firms last three (3) similar projects including size, location, and contact person (maximum 5 pages)
- Section 9: Describe what makes your firm uniquely qualified for this project (one page)

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SUBMISSION OF RESPONSES

Questions about this RFQ should be sent via email to Irene Figueroa-Ortiz at ifigueroa@abettercity.org.

All responses must be submitted via email to Irene Figueroa Ortiz with the subject “Birch Street RFQ.”

ESTIMATED TIMELINE

RFQ release date	December 12, 2018
A Better City will start to review applications	January 9, 2019
A Better City will start contacting frontrunner(s)	January 15, 2019
Ideal contract start date	January 28, 2019 – February 28, 2019