

**Request for Proposals  
for  
Professional Planning Services  
for the  
Little Italy Neighborhood Revitalization Plan**

January 16, 2007



**Erie Redevelopment Authority**  
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## INTRODUCTION

The Erie neighborhood known as Little Italy for nearly a century has gone through significant changes and cycles since the city's beginnings. In the 1880's this neighborhood was populated by German immigrants who built many of the houses, commercial blocks, and churches in the neighborhood. With the proximity to Erie's significant manufacturing facilities, the neighborhood was populated with factory and mill workers who walked to the abundant jobs. The neighborhood was, and remains, close to Erie's central business district.

Italians immigrants started to arrive in Erie around 1900. The Italian immigrants in Erie settled chiefly in an area bounded by the busy Nickel Plate Railroad to the south (now West 19<sup>th</sup> Street), Sassafras and Cranberry Streets to the East and West, and by the factories that lined the mainline railroads on West 14<sup>th</sup> Street.

Many of the Italians took jobs in the mills while others began small businesses in their new neighborhood. The Germans migrated south and east of the neighborhood and the area gradually took on an Italian influence. An Italian church, St. Paul's, was constructed by the resident Italians while businesses catering to the needs of the Italians flourished.

After World War II, the neighborhood would change once again as people moved to larger homes in newer parts of the city. The affordability of automobiles, unnecessary for daily life in Little Italy, would hasten the outmigration of residents. With the departure of the Italian-Americans, other ethnic groups would move into the neighborhood to take factory and mill jobs, as well as to live in its inexpensive housing stock.

In the 1960's, the social fabric of the neighborhood started to deteriorate as the remaining Italians aged. The children of shopkeepers and other small businesses did not continue the family businesses that lined the West 18<sup>th</sup> Street commercial corridor. Competition from new automobile oriented shopping centers also contributed to the demise of local stores neighborhood residents upon which the neighborhood had grown to depend. With fewer residents and increased mobility of the remaining residents, many social clubs and restaurants closed and neighborhood churches lost congregation members to outlying churches. Private investment in the area all but evaporated.

In the 1970's attempts were made to resurrect the West 18<sup>th</sup> Commercial District by using the auto-oriented suburban model. Setbacks were changed to accommodate parking and many publicly-funded houses were built in suburban styles. During this time, the percentage of owner-occupied homes decreased as did the rate of investment and routine maintenance in the housing stock. To make matters worse, many of the once abundant manufacturing jobs within the neighborhood's factories and mills were lost to other parts of the country.

The neighborhood began to experience increased crime and drug problems, and by the 1980's and 1990's, housing stock began to succumb to time and lack of maintenance. Absentee landlords grew to dominate a neighborhood in which 20% of the families were

under the poverty level. The residents could not support neighborhood businesses and social service agencies gradually replaced stores and restaurants.

In 2002, efforts were made to demolish failing structures and encourage home ownership. A Weed & Seed program in conjunction with the Little Italy Neighborhood Watch has been successful in reducing crime. The Sisters of Saint Joseph Neighborhood Network has partnered with a non-profit affordable housing provider, the Housing and Neighborhood Development Service (HANDS), to rehabilitate houses and make them available to qualified homeowners.

The Erie Redevelopment Authority (ERA) has begun a \$900,000 project consisting of one mixed-use infill development project and one mixed-use rehabilitation project on West 18<sup>th</sup> Street. The ERA has also assisted several income qualified homeowners with rehabilitations in the area, and acquired several abandoned properties in the neighborhood. In addition, the ERA has provided Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds for several storefront improvement projects for businesses along the West 18<sup>th</sup> Street commercial corridor.

The recent actions in the neighborhood have served to stabilize the decline, but the neighborhood is still at the crossroads. The revitalization plan process will begin with data collection and a visioning session with neighborhood stakeholders. Following the visioning session, a retail & housing market analysis will be performed to determine the type of retail mix the neighborhood can support and the factors that can attract the different segments of homebuyers.

Once the goals of the neighborhood revitalization plan have been reasonably established through the visioning process and stakeholder focus groups and interviews, a design charette will be held and serve as the basis for a draft revitalization plan.

The planning team will introduce their market analysis results and the concepts from the draft revitalization plan at a series of public meetings and open houses. Once adequate comment is made a final plan will be compiled.

The Redevelopment Authority and its partners, the City of Erie, the Housing and Neighborhood Development Service, Erie, the Sisters of Saint Joseph Neighborhood Network, the Little Italy Neighborhood Watch, the Little Italy Business & Redevelopment Association, the Bethesda Trinity Center and several neighborhood churches have pledged their continued cooperation to make the plan a success.

The partners will strive to improve the neighborhood as an urban village by preserving its mixed-use nature and promoting infill development capitalizing on neighborhood assets such as history, culture, ethnic diversity, proximity to downtown, churches, restaurants, neighborhood employers, and parks.

The plan will help guide reinvestment strategy and market the neighborhood to residents and businesses that will contribute to a Little Italy Renaissance. With major projects and

initiatives surrounding the neighborhood, the timing of a neighborhood revitalization effort will be crucial to leverage the increased interest in this area of the city.

To the northeast of the neighborhood lies a 70-block Downtown Improvement District (DID) which just completed an extensive expansion plan. As a result the DID anticipates millions of dollars in both public and private reinvestment. South of the neighborhood, the Koehler Brewery Project and the St. Vincent's Hospital expansion will increase employment opportunities in the area. Additionally, with the demolition of a former foundry adjacent to neighborhood to the north, new industrial or manufacturing development can occur and create jobs for neighborhood residents. Within the neighborhood, the Lake Erie College of Medicine (LECOM) has purchased a building on West 18<sup>th</sup> with plans to bring its medical students into the neighborhood.

The proposed revitalization plan also dovetails with the goals stated for Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area (NRSA) recently submitted by the city of Erie to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The Erie NRSA includes Little Italy making the neighborhood eligible for HUD program funds.

## ORIENTATION

The “Little Italy” neighborhood study area comprises approximately 18 square blocks on the city’s near west side. The area is also identified as US Census track #12 in Erie County. The neighborhood has a population of approximately 2,728, and is home to a number of small businesses ranging from restaurants to bakeries to auto service. There are also a number of light and heavy industrial operations immediately adjacent to the neighborhood. The neighborhood’s housing, retail and industrial stock was built mainly between 1875 and 1920.

The number of owner occupied housing units has been reported at 30%. A full 19% of the housing in the neighborhood is vacant. The neighborhood is marked by a poverty rate of 25.8% for individuals and 20.4% for families.

The racial makeup of the neighborhood is diverse with 68% white, 19% black, and 13% Hispanic. Over 20% of residents speak a language at home other than English which can be attributed to the number of immigrants and refugees from the Ukraine, Bosnia, and other countries, as well as the Hispanic population.

The neighborhood is referred to as Little Italy due to the large number of Italian immigrants who settled there between the 1890’s and the 1920’s. The neighborhood’s institutions and businesses revolved around the needs of Italian-Americans for the better part of the 20th century. While 20% of the remaining neighborhood residents consider themselves Italian-American and several Italian restaurants and social clubs still remain, the neighborhood stakeholders seem more concerned about reducing crime and gaining retail and employment opportunities than expanding its identity as Little Italy.

The major objectives identified through previous initiatives are as follows:

- Increase the percentage of owner-occupied residential units;
- Increase employment opportunities for residents;
- Increase the number and quality of retail stores and service providers;
- Reduce crime;
- Form a neighborhood development corporation to facilitate grants and development;
- Remove blighted and dangerous properties;
- Build new market rate homes; and
- Capitalize on existing assets such as cultural and ethnic diversity, history, and geographic location

## **DETAILED WORK PLAN**

### **Months 1 and 2**

#### **Review of Documents**

- Review all existing studies performed for the Little Italy neighborhood including the 2005 downtown market analysis, 2004 Central City housing market analysis, 2006 NRSA plan, and the 2003 Downtown Erie Access and Circulation Study. The review also includes the city's recently updated zoning, building codes, and ordinances, as well as program information such as the Weed and Seed Program and the City's blighted properties list and property holdings of key project partners.

#### **Summary of Baseline Information**

- Data includes 2000 Census Data, neighborhood surveys, crime data, inventory and survey of neighborhood businesses, etc.
- Identify desirable characteristics of the West 18<sup>th</sup> commercial corridor.
- Identify desirable areas for market rate housing.
- Identify development plans by Saint Vincent's Hospital, the Lake Erie College of Medicine (LECOM), the Greater Erie Industrial Development Corporation (GEIDC) and other public and private entities for inclusion into the revitalization plan.

#### **Public Meeting #1 – Educational Stakeholders Meeting (Kickoff Meeting)**

- The first meeting of the stakeholders in this project will be held to gather general public input and an educational curriculum that will include urban design and streetscape concepts.

### **Month 3**

#### **Vision and Goals Development**

- This phase will involve the shareholders responses to wants and needs in the neighborhood after careful review and discussion of the baseline data. Based on stakeholder information, data gathered, and existing Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code requirements, the overall vision for the neighborhood revitalization with long and short term goals and action steps will be developed in conjunction with the project partners.

## **Public Meeting #2 – Community Visioning Session**

- The stakeholders and the public will be invited to a visioning session to gather crucial feedback and establish priorities and goals for the future of the neighborhood.

\*As part of the required educational element in the work program, elected officials, municipal officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations will be invited to observe the visioning and design charette sessions. Project consultants will meet with this group to discuss how the process can be used to obtain valuable information and gain the trust of the public.

## **Months 4 and 5**

### **Complete Commercial and Housing Market Analysis**

- Analyze the potential of the neighborhood to absorb new market rate residential properties using existing market data and trends as well as considering emerging markets and needs.
- Analyze the potential of the neighborhood to support basic retail services. Analysis will also gauge the potential for the neighborhood to capture the segment of the retail and restaurant market that seeks out ethnic related businesses.

### **Land Use and Community Design Alternatives**

- The design team will formulate plans for new infill development along the West 18<sup>th</sup> commercial corridor with respect to market conditions and existing urban design.
- Streetscape and gateway treatments will also be identified.
- Discussion and strategy for calming traffic on the West 18<sup>th</sup> Street corridor.

## **Months 6 and 7**

### **Prepare a Draft of the Little Italy Neighborhood Revitalization Plan**

- Creation of a workable draft of the revitalization plan that address all of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) requirements in cooperation with the City of Erie's various departments including Economic and Community Development, Engineering, Traffic, Zoning, and Property Maintenance.

- The stakeholders will review the Draft Revitalization Plan and provide comment.

### **Public Meeting #3 – Presentation of the Draft Revitalization Plan**

- The Little Italy neighborhood and the general public will have an opportunity to see the preliminary results of the public input and market analyses as draft plan concepts and drawings will be unveiled.

### **Final Draft of the Revitalization Plan**

- Revisions to the plan will be incorporated.
- Project partner will review the Final Draft Plan and consider improvements

## **Month 8**

### **Public Meeting #4 – Final Presentation and Approval of the Neighborhood Revitalization Plan**

- Neighborhood Revitalization Plan will be presented to the neighborhood and stakeholders and the media.
- Plan will be posted on the Erie Redevelopment Authority website, and also distributed to stakeholders, project partners, interested groups, and potential developers and business owners.

## **Months 9+**

### **Implementation**

- As first steps toward implementation, Erie City Council, the Erie Planning Commission, the Erie Redevelopment Authority, and other organizations for review and adoption as the plan for neighborhood reinvestment and revitalization.
- Project partners begin implementation of projects and activities prioritized in the planning process.

## **Little Italy Neighborhood Revitalization Plan**

### **Project Schedule and Key Milestones**

<b>Months 1 and 2</b>	<b>Review of Documents Preparation of Baseline Information and meeting Notes Educational Stakeholders Meeting (Kickoff Meeting)</b>
<i>Deliverable #1</i>	<i>Baseline Information &amp; Meeting Notes</i>
<b>Month 3</b>	<b>Vision and Goals Development Stakeholder Meeting #2 – Community Visioning Session</b>
<i>Deliverable #2</i>	<i>Vision and Goals Draft &amp; Meeting Notes</i>
<b>Months 4 and 5</b>	<b>Commercial and Housing Market Analysis Land Use and Community Design Alternatives</b>
<i>Deliverable #3</i>	<i>Vision and Goals &amp; Meeting Notes</i>
<i>Deliverable #4</i>	<i>Commercial and Housing Market Analysis</i>
<i>Deliverable #5</i>	<i>Land Use and Community Design Analysis</i>
<b>Months 6 and 7</b>	<b>Preparation of Draft of the Little Italy Neighborhood Revitalization Plan Stakeholders Meeting #3 Public Presentation of the Draft Revitalization Plan</b>
<i>Deliverable #6</i>	<i>Draft of Revitalization Plan</i>
<b>Month 8</b>	<b>Final Presentation of Revitalization Plan Stakeholder Meeting #4</b>
<i>Deliverable #7</i>	<i>Distribution of the Revitalization Plan and Strategic Plan</i>
<b>Months 9+</b>	<b>Approval of the Neighborhood Revitalization Plan</b>

1. **Request for Qualifications.** The Erie Redevelopment Authority (ERA) requests qualification packages for professional planning and design services for the Little Italy Neighborhood Revitalization Plan. *Sealed proposals must be received by the Authority no later than 4:00 PM on Friday, February 16, 2007.* Provide five (5) copies of the proposal package. Proposals shipped or mailed to the Authority should be in a sealed envelope within the mailed package and clearly marked “Proposal Enclosed.”
2. **Little Italy Neighborhood Revitalization Plan.** Preparation of this plan is a joint project between ERA, the City of Erie, and the Sisters of Saint Joseph Neighborhood Network. The purpose of this planning project is to clearly identify a course of action for the project sponsors and their partners in neighborhood revitalization.
3. **Study Area.** The study area is the Little Italy Neighborhood in the City of Erie, specifically Sassafra Street to Liberty Street (east to west) and 19<sup>th</sup> Street to 16<sup>th</sup> Street (north to south).
4. **Project Funding.** The cost of this project is not to exceed \$40,000. The Little Italy Neighborhood Revitalization Plan will be funded through the following sources: LUPTAP Grant from the Pennsylvania DCED to ERA (pending), Erie Community Foundation Grant to SSJNN, and St. Vincent Hospital grant funding to SSJNN.
5. **Contracting Requirements.** The selected Professional Service Provider (PSP) will enter into a professional service agreement with ERA. The PSP will be required to comply with applicable state and federal regulations relating to bidding, employment, and work practices.
6. **Scope of Professional Design and Planning Services Requested.**
  - a. **Intended Outcomes** of the Little Italy Neighborhood Revitalization Plan address Physical Planning, Redevelopment Strategy, and Access and Circulation.
    - **Physical Planning.**
      1. Identify development and redevelopment areas, describing character, market potential, and links that exist between them.
      2. Describe the historic character of the neighborhood along with identifying historic structures and sites.
      3. Propose codes or guidelines for new development within the West 18<sup>th</sup> Street Commercial Corridor and adjacent areas.
      4. Propose land use changes and physical improvements to improve links to Downtown Erie (Central Business

District), the 12<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor (US 20), the former Central Mall (located between Sassafras and Peach Streets), and the Saint Vincent's Hospital campus.

5. Develop design standards for public space improvements (e.g. streetscape design standards).
6. Develop a prioritized list of streetscape projects, including gateway treatments, with order-of-magnitude cost estimates.
7. Through a visioning session and related design charettes that involve a cross section of the community and other stakeholders, assist in determining common goals for the neighborhood.
8. With the results of the visioning process, create concept drawings and sketches.

- **Redevelopment Strategy**

1. Collect and present market data needed to accurately assess the market condition of the neighborhood.
2. Identify opportunities for infill development and reuse of vacant and underused buildings.
3. Describe opportunities for redevelopment afforded by existing and proposed investments (e.g. St. Vincent's Hospital).
4. Identify mechanisms and interventions to encourage revitalization the central retail area on West 18<sup>th</sup> Street (e.g. zoning changes, incentive programs, and recruitment /clustering strategies).
5. Enumerate funding sources for redevelopment activities proposed.

- **Access and circulation**

1. Analyze transit, pedestrian, bicycle, and parking needs within the planning area. (The intent of this study is NOT to perform extensive traffic data collection, modeling, or analysis).
2. Identify needs for pedestrian amenities and facilities such as enhanced street crossings, benches, and lighting.
3. Identify locations where parking shortages adversely affect redevelopment, recommending strategies.
4. Identify improvements needed to support physical planning and redevelopment strategy recommendations.
5. Focus on supporting and enhancing existing street patterns to encourage pedestrian-scale development.

- b. **Planning Process.** A public planning process will include the formation of a project steering committee and the completion of a visioning process. The planning process will also capitalize on existing initiatives and databases that have been developed by the ERA and its partners in the neighborhood. The ERA will act as the primary conveners of the public process and use its existing network of committed stakeholders and task-oriented subcommittees to work with the PSP. These organizations and their subcommittees will accomplish tasks to leverage the consultant's efforts, lead the public involvement program, and promote consensus building.
  - c. **Deliverables.** The final version of the Little Italy Neighborhood Revitalization Plan will be clear, concise, and visually appealing. Strong graphic presentations including photographs, illustrative plans, and renderings are extremely important. The Little Italy Neighborhood Revitalization Plan will outline specific actions for implementation, including realistic schedules and specific tasks for stakeholders. Provide two (2) full-size copies of all presentation graphics and provide twenty five (25) copies of the final report. Digital copies (.pdf format) must be provided for all final report documents.
7. **Project Schedule.** The following proposed project schedule is based upon a detailed work plan submitted as part of the LUPTAP application (attached as appendix A to this RFQ).
- a. **Qualifications Packages Due – Friday, February 16, 2007**
  - b. Review of qualifications packages – February 2007
  - c. Interviews with top candidates and announcement of selection – March 2007
  - d. Notice to Proceed – April 2007
  - e. Work Plan Months 1 & 2 – April – May 2007
    - Review of Documents
    - Prepare Baseline Information
    - Educational Stakeholders Meeting
  - f. Work Plan Month 3 – June 2007
    - Vision and Goals Development
    - Stakeholder Meeting #2 – Community Visioning Session
  - g. Work Plan Months 4, and 5 – July - August 2007
    - Commercial and Housing Market Analysis
    - Land Use and Community Design Alternative Development
  - h. Work Plan Months 6 and 7 – September - October 2007
    - Prepare Draft of Little Italy Neighborhood Revitalization Plan
    - Stakeholder Meeting #3 (Public Presentation of Draft Plan)
  - i. Work Plan Month 8 – November 2007
    - Final Presentation to Stakeholders
  - j. Project Close-out/Implementation – Month 9 - December 2007

8. **Project Advisory Committee.** The ERA will assemble a Project Advisory Committee (PAC) which will organize public involvement and provide input to the PSP as needed. While the PSP will report directly to the Authority on all matters relating to satisfaction of the professional service agreement, the Authority will facilitate periodic meetings between the PAC and PSP for project updates and information exchange.
9. **Public Involvement.** Public involvement will include focus groups, public meetings, and public presentations. The PAC will be responsible for:
  - a. Forming focus groups and committees as necessary to provide public input requested by the PSP.
  - b. Promoting, arranging, and facilitating public meetings. The PSP will identify desired inputs from the public process and plan the meetings accordingly. The PSP will attend up to 5 public meetings and make presentations of the study findings at those times.
  - c. Distribution of project information, including intermediate and final reports.
10. **PSP Team Qualifications and Organization.** The PSP team may include one or more sub-consultants. A team organization chart should be provided, designating a project manager, experienced and knowledgeable in various aspects of work required, to serve as a primary point of contact for the Authority. The PSP team qualifications will be evaluated based on both the team members' education/experience and firm(s) experience.
11. **Qualifications Package.** The successful qualifications package will address the following:
  - a. **Understanding of the Project.**
    - Understanding the project area.
    - Understanding of the project scope.
    - Proposed work plan.
    - Commitment to the project schedule.
    - Contractual requirements associated with funding sources.
  - b. **Firm(s) Experience and References**
    - Project descriptions for four to eight (maximum) projects illustrating successful completion of work including elements similar to those requested in this RFQ. Past projects should demonstrate sensitivity to urban context and relevance to small/mid-sized post-industrial cities.
    - Three or more owner references for previously completed projects of similar scope.
    - Approach to quality control.

- c. **Team Member Experience/Education and Team Organization**
  - Resumes for key team members
  - Commitment of senior team members
  - Team organization chart
  
- d. **Pricing**
  - Provide estimated hours and lump-sum cost estimates for tasks in the work plan.
  - Total project cost cannot exceed \$40,000.

**12. Qualifications Package Evaluation.**

- a. Qualification packages will be opened privately after the time and date specified in Part 1 above.
- b. Submissions will be evaluated by a five-member selection committee, called by the ERA. The Qualifications packages will be ranked considering the four elements of the qualification package described above; the elements will be weighted as follows:
  - Understanding of the Project and Proposed Work Plan (40%)
  - Firm(s) Experience and References (25%)
  - Team Members' Experience/Education and Team Organization (25%)
  - Pricing (10%)
- c. The results of the qualifications package evaluations will be compiled and reviewed by the selection committee. All PSP candidates will be contacted, and the top-ranked candidates will be invited to make presentations to the selection committee.
- d. The combined results of the proposal evaluations and interview results will result in PSP selection.
- e. The Authority reserves the right to reject any and all proposals in the best interest of the Authority and partner funding agencies.

**13. Questions.** If you have questions in preparation of the proposal, please contact Tom Maggio, Project Manager, at (814) 453-4505, extension #310 or [maggio@redeveloperie.org](mailto:maggio@redeveloperie.org) no later than 4:00 PM on Friday, February 9, 2007. Questions submitted after that time may not be answered prior to the qualification packages due date.