

STAFF REPORT

To: Mayor & City Council Date: March 8, 2016

From: Todd Okolichany, AICP, LEED AP ND
Planning & Urban Design Director

Via: Gary Jackson, City Manager

Subject: Process for City-Owned Properties at 68-76 Haywood Street and 33-37 Page Avenue

Summary Statement: The consideration of a (1) resolution authorizing the City Manager to enter into an agreement with the Asheville Design Center for professional services related to a community visioning process for city-owned properties located at 68-76 Haywood Street and 33-37 Page Avenue in the city's Central Business District (CBD); (2) a budget amendment in the amount of \$15,000, from unassigned fund balance to contracted services, for the facilitation of a community visioning process for the aforementioned properties; and, (3) approval of an Advisory Team for this initiative.

Review: At its December 12, 2015 meeting, the City Council directed staff to review alternatives for a potential process for the future use and design of two city-owned properties located at 68-76 Haywood Street (see attached map). The two subject properties – which measure approximately 0.55 acres in total - are located on the southern side of the intersection of Haywood Street and Page Avenue. One of the properties is currently being leased to a company for construction staging purposes. The lease runs through July 31, 2016.

The Haywood Street properties have a long and well documented history of potential development opportunities. Their location within the city's CBD make them very desirable as urban infill sites. The property was acquired for the purpose of constructing a parking garage with adjacent private development. The property was then proposed for a hotel development that did not occur. In the past year, the Economic Development Coalition solicited offers from developers for the purpose of developing an office building with an adjoining pocket park.

Many community members have expressed interest in a public space at this location, especially as the downtown continues to grow. A public process will be undertaken as part of the city's efforts to update its Comprehensive Plan in 2016-2017 in order to effectively sort through conflicting expectations, values and ideals for downtown parks and other types of public spaces in general; however, there is a current desire by the City Council to engage the public in an open process for a future vision for the Haywood Street properties so that these properties can begin to contribute to the downtown's dynamic environment and vibrancy.

In an effort to define the scope of the process, city-owned property located at 33/35 and 37 Page Avenue have been included. These properties are located just southwest of the Haywood Street parcels, directly across Battery Park Alley (see attached map), and are currently being used as a surface parking lot (37 Page Avenue) and a vacant building (33/35 Page Avenue). The property at 33/35 Page Avenue, a part of the original plan for a parking garage at Haywood Street, was acquired to provide alternate access to the rear of properties on Haywood Street and Page Avenue. Currently these properties are served by an alley between the property at 68-76 Haywood Street and 37 Page Avenue. When combined with the city-owned Haywood Street

properties and the surrounding rights-of-way, the Page Avenue properties create a larger study area and potential larger master planning opportunity for this area. It should be noted that Council direction on 33/35 Page Avenue is being sought under a separate memorandum and item on the March 8, 2016 Council meeting agenda.

Proposal: The Asheville Design Center proposes to work with city staff to facilitate a community visioning process for city-owned properties at 68-76 Haywood Street and 33-37 Page Avenue in downtown Asheville (see attached for proposed scope of services). The outcomes will be designed to inform future actions on the subject sites and surrounding rights-of-way, which may include a design competition and/or a Request for Qualifications/Proposals (to be completed under a separate phase and as determined by City Council).

The project's scope will include strategic planning and coordination with an Advisory Team, key stakeholders, as well as the broadest community interests who express a desire to participate in an open, democratic "town hall" process of consensus building. The Asheville Design Center will work with City staff to form an Advisory Team for the public visioning process and implementation plan. The Advisory Team will have representation, at minimum, from the following organizations (in no particular order), plus three at-large members:

- City of Asheville Recreation Board;
- Asheville Downtown Commission;
- Historic Resources Commission of Asheville & Buncombe County (HRC);
- Public Art and Cultural Commission (PACC);
- Buncombe County liaison;
- Asheville Downtown Association;
- The Basilica of St. Lawrence;
- Friends of St. Lawrence Green;
- Grove Arcade;
- Battery Park Hotel/Vanderbilt Apartments representative(s);
- Downtown Asheville Residential Neighbors (DARN);
- Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce;
- and/or others as agreed upon by City staff and Asheville Design Center.

Engagement with local stakeholders and property owners will inform a long-term vision for the properties, while also serving to identify opportunities for temporary installations to enliven the space now and suggest appropriate permanent uses on the site over time.

The Asheville Design Center will also conduct site visits to existing nearby Downtown public spaces, including Pritchard Park and Pack Square Park, in order to review existing programming and design elements, while observing best practices and potential impediments to successful placemaking (see attached map of Downtown parks).

The Asheville Design Center proposes to undertake the following major tasks over the course of approximately seven months:

- Task 1: Initial Project Analysis Tasks
- Task 2: Information Gathering and Synthesis
- Task 3: Public Engagement
- Task 4: Final Visioning Documentation and Presentations

Prior Reviews/Recommendations: On January 26, 2016 and February 16, 2016, Planning and Urban Design staff presented a recommended process for the city-owned properties at 68-76 Haywood Street and 33-37 Page Avenue to the Planning and Economic Development Committee. The committee recommended the process contained in this memorandum, including the hiring of the Asheville Design Center to conduct a community visioning and public engagement process for the study area. The Planning and Economic Development Committee deferred the decision to include 33/35 Page Avenue to City Council.

At its November 4, 2015 retreat, the Downtown Commission also made a recommendation to City Council that they initiate a meaningful public process that is transparent to develop a plan for the Haywood Street property and surrounding rights-of-way. The Downtown Commission requested that the city engage the Asheville Design Center to facilitate the process with the public.

Fiscal Impact/Resources: The contract with Asheville Design Center would have a financial impact of \$15,000 to the city. The overall project cost is \$30,000, which includes the city's financial commitment plus the following additional funding sources:

- \$5,000 from the Asheville Downtown Association
- \$5,000 from Friends of St. Lawrence Green
- \$1,500 anonymous donor
- \$500 Michael McDonough
- \$200 DARN
- \$2,800 (pending funds from other sources)

For the city's \$15,000 commitment, a budget amendment, from unassigned fund balance to contracted services, is required.

City staff resources would also be required to manage the project, coordinate with the consultant team, participate in the public engagement and visioning process, provide relevant information and data on existing plans, maps, utility and roadway information, etc., coordinate press releases and updates on the city's website, and coordinate/provide potential meeting locations for the public. Staff resources are anticipated from the following departments: Planning and Urban Design, Parks and Recreation, Community and Public Engagement, Transportation, Community and Economic Development, Public Works and Legal Services.

Unless directed otherwise, the proposed visioning process would take approximately seven months to complete. As noted, the outcomes of the visioning process will be designed to inform future actions for the study area, which may include a design competition and/or a Request for Qualifications/Proposals (to be completed under a separate phase and as determined by City Council). Funding for design, construction and maintenance are not currently in the city's budget.

Recommendation: City staff recommends that City Council (1) adopt a resolution authorizing the City Manager to enter into an agreement with the Asheville Design Center for professional services related to a community visioning process for city-owned properties located at 68-76 Haywood Street and 33-37 Page Avenue; (2) authorize a budget amendment in the amount of \$15,000, from unassigned fund balance to contracted services, for the facilitation of a community visioning process for the aforementioned properties; and, (3) approve the Advisory Team for this initiative.

Attachments:

- (1) Map of Study Area
- (2) Proposal from Asheville Design Center

- (3) Map of Downtown Parks
- (4) Resolution
- (5) Budget Amendment