

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS  
CONSULTANT SERVICES TO DEVELOP THE CITY OF ALTOONA, PA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

RFP Issued by City Council:	January 9, 2023
Mandatory Virtual Pre-Application Meeting:	January 23, 2023 Zoom call registration deadline January 19, 2023)
Deadline for Questions:	February 27, 2023
RFP Due:	March 7, 2023
Interviews of Finalists:	Week of March 20-24, 2023
Anticipated Award:	April 10, 2023

**I. PURPOSE AND INTENT**

The City of Altoona (hereinafter “City”) is seeking proposals from qualified planning consultants to provide professional services to develop a new, long-term comprehensive plan in compliance with the latest edition of the PA Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) and guided by the planning principles and objectives set forth by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) regarding creating an implementable plan. The comprehensive plan will present a vision for the community’s future (through 2045) and a context for attaining its goals. The plan will be strategic and will outline workable action plans (focusing on the next 1 to 10 years), means of financing, and capacity to implement. The consultant to be hired will provide the full range of planning services necessary to undertake the comprehensive plan.

**II. PROPOSAL SUBMISSION**

All proposers are required to participate in a mandatory virtual pre-application meeting (see Section III below). Two (2) hard copies and one (1) electronic copy (thumbnail drive) of the proposal shall be submitted in a sealed envelope marked “**PROPOSAL FOR CITY OF ALTOONA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**” and addressed to:

City of Altoona  
Office of the City Clerk  
Department of Administration  
1301 Twelfth Street, Suite 100  
Altoona, PA 16601

The proposal must be received no later than **1:00 PM** Eastern Standard Time (EST) on **Tuesday, March 7, 2023**.

All parties are bound by the deadline and location requirements of this RFP. Incomplete submissions will not be accepted. Proposals must be mailed or hand delivered. Faxed or emailed proposals will not be accepted. All proposals shall remain effective subject to the City’s review and approval for a period of ninety (90) days from the deadline of submitting proposals and shall be signed by a duly authorized official. Proposals will be handled confidentially during the pre-award process. All documents/ information submitted in response to this solicitation may be available to the general public. The City

will not be responsible for any costs associated with the oral or written presentation of the proposals. The City reserves the right to reject any and all proposals, with or without cause, and waive any irregularities or informalities in the proposals. The City further reserves the right to make such investigations as it deems necessary as to the qualifications of any and all firms submitting proposals. The City reserves the right to re-solicit proposals.

### III. MANDATORY PRE-APPLICATION MEETING / REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

All inquiries concerning this RFP must be submitted in writing addressed to:

Diana White  
Director of Community Development  
City of Altoona  
1301 Twelfth Street, Suite 400  
Altoona, PA 16601  
814-949-2471  
[planning@altoonapa.gov](mailto:planning@altoonapa.gov)

There will be a mandatory pre-application virtual Zoom meeting on **Monday, January 23, 2023 at 10:00 AM EST**. Interested parties should contact Ms. White by phone or email no later than **Thursday, January 19, 2023 at 4:00 PM EST** to be registered for the Zoom meeting. No proposals will be accepted without participation in the pre-application meeting.

Deadline for inquiries is **February 27, 2023 at 12:00 PM EST**. Questions received will be compiled and a response will be issued in the form of an addendum that will be posted on the City website, <https://www.altoonapa.gov/compplan>, no later than **4:00 pm EST on March 1, 2023**. No verbal instructions or verbal information to bidders will be binding on the City. The written specifications will be considered clear and complete unless written attention is called to any apparent discrepancies or incompleteness before the opening of the proposals. Should any alterations to the specifications be made, written addenda will be posted to the website. Addenda will be faxed, mailed, or emailed upon request.

### IV. GENERAL INFORMATION REGARDING THE CITY OF ALTOONA

The City of Altoona is located 100 miles east of Pittsburgh at the foot of the Allegheny Ridge in southcentral Pennsylvania. It is surrounded by Logan Township, and borders Allegheny Township on the southern end of the City. The boundaries between Logan Township and the City are often indistinguishable, especially along the commercial corridors. While there are differences between the two entities politically and financially, they are intertwined economically and socially.

Altoona is a classic “rust belt” city, facing problems similar to other communities that powered the Industrial Revolution. Built as the western terminus of the Pennsylvania Railroad and once home to the largest railroad shops in the world, the City is located in close proximity to the world famous “Horseshoe Curve.” Despite the decline in passenger rail since World War II, which has heavily impacted the City, between 60-80 primarily freight trains travel through Altoona each day. Norfolk Southern continues to

operate shops in Altoona, and multiple railroad tracks create a manmade “river” that cuts through the City. Any planning effort must take into account the presence of the railroad infrastructure in Altoona.

Altoona’s population has been in steady decline since the 1940s, and currently stands at approximately 44,000, down by half from its zenith of 82,000 in 1930. The population is older (approximately 25% are 62 years plus). The average household income for the City is \$36,000 (\$59,000 for employed households). Primary employers are healthcare, education services, transportation, and retail.

Housing choices in Altoona are limited because the land is nearly fully developed. The majority of the housing stock consists of detached single-family structures built before 1960. In the historic core of the City, the vast majority of housing was built before 1939 on 25’ lots and reflect an era when residents mostly traveled by foot. The hilly terrain precluded the development of row housing with a few exceptions. As late as the last comprehensive plan, the majority of these properties remained owner-occupied. This trend is changing, with increasing pressure to convert the older housing stock to rental units. The City has established a Land Bank through the Redevelopment Authority which is currently being operationalized to catalyze investment in the community and discourage speculative rental acquisitions at tax sales. The City is home to a number of well-maintained subsidized housing developments owned by the housing authority, as well as both non-profit and for-profit entities.

The City offers a wide array of social services and educational opportunities, including Penn State Altoona (Ivyside campus and Downtown Center), a new branch campus of Saint Francis University, the Altoona Area School District Campus, two private high schools, numerous places of worship, and UPMC Altoona hospital and its affiliate physician practices.

The Downtown has become more vibrant in recent years mainly due to private investment, including the establishment of boutique retail stores, restaurants, breweries, special event venues, a hotel, and a corporate office. Private development is bringing upscale market rate rental housing to the Downtown, and within three years, there will be an indoor food market in a redeveloped commercial building, currently under construction. That being said, there are key commercial properties that are not being fully utilized, and there are problem properties as well. In addition to the traditional Downtown, Altoona has a second Downtown in Juniata, a former borough that was annexed by the City in 1928, as well as many other commercial areas, including Wehwood, the area near newly developed 55+ Grande Palazzo rental apartment complex, Eldorado, Plank Road and Pleasant Valley.

Altoona has passenger rail service connecting it to both coasts. The Downtown multimodal transportation center serves both bus and rail, and there is access to regional air travel within Blair County. The City no longer has trolley service as in the past, but it does have public transit bus service, as well as transportation for seniors and disabled residents. There is no cab service in Altoona, and ride sharing is inconsistent. Many sidewalks are in disrepair, with the City looking at ways to address this expensive but important infrastructure need in a planned, consistent manner. There is room for improvement with respect to the bicycling and hiking infrastructure and connectivity to routes within the county.

While there are provisions for landscaping and trees in the planning ordinance for new construction, the maintenance and landscaping trees and landscaping along public rights of way is inconsistent. Improvements in this area make the community more attractive for both visitors and residents. In addition, Altoona should find a means to celebrate its architecture in order to enhance attractiveness and preserve its assets.

Owing to its history as a major transportation hub, the City has a long history of supporting the arts, which it wants to continue to build upon. The Downtown's Heritage Plaza serves as a venue for a series of concerts and events, organized at the grassroots, as well as the Devorris bandstand. Because of the City's mountainous location, there are ample opportunities for outdoor recreation, and the City is within an easy drive to State College, Pittsburgh and Washington DC for events. Unlike most communities, events in the City are primarily volunteer-driven. While Altoona is looking to be a more integral partner in marketing the City's cultural opportunities and events, it recognizes the significant role volunteers have played in Altoona historically, and it plans to support – not replace – volunteer organizations and events in the community.

Altoona is rich in natural resources including one that will be of growing importance over time: water. The City has ample access to public water with well-developed facilities for both water and sewer, with the water system – a legacy of the City's steam railroad past – being one of the five most complex and in the world.

With an operating budget of approximately \$35 million, Altoona recently emerged from PA Act 47 Distressed Status after only four years, and its leaders have worked to address its community and economic development needs in a pro-active, forward-thinking manner while still remaining cost-conscious. The City has taken great strides to address flat tax revenues and declines in population by supporting business in the downtown and city-wide, restructuring finances, enforcing permitting and other fees and sources of revenue, as well as looking for ways to bring underused properties back onto the tax rolls (for example, via a land bank.) The City is thinly staffed, with most employees carrying out multiple functions. Economic development and workforce competitiveness is important for the future of the community.

This overview provides a very generalized overview of Altoona. A virtual tour can be viewed on the City website: [https://www.elocalink.tv/m/v/player.php?pid=Q9zpa6Q3&fp=paalt16\\_wel\\_rev3\\_iwd#](https://www.elocalink.tv/m/v/player.php?pid=Q9zpa6Q3&fp=paalt16_wel_rev3_iwd#) Interested firms are encouraged to visit the City prior to submitting a proposal to gain a first-hand understanding of the City's built and cultural environment.

As Altoona moves forward with the current comprehensive planning effort, it seeks to identify visionary and holistic strategies and solutions that will utilize limited resources in innovative ways to move the City successfully into mid-century.

## V. FORMAT OF PROPOSALS

Submissions should be made in the following format:

1. Cover sheet with Firm name, Address, Contact information, and Project Title.
2. Letter of Transmittal.
3. Executive Summary (1 page).
4. Consultant firm's experience and references, including Comprehensive Plan (as defined by the PA Municipalities Planning Code) experience and knowledge of Federal, State and local code and regulations.
5. Key Personnel to be utilized on this project and their expertise in developing comprehensive plans, as well as capacity to complete the project in a timely manner. (Provide key personnel resumes as Appendix at the end of the proposal.)

6. Narrative addressing the consultant's understanding of the scope of service/activities to be provided.
7. Timeline, including meeting schedule. Approach to public engagement. Schedule of meetings with the Planning Commission/Steering Committee and City Council.
8. Technical and price proposal of services to be provided, including but not limited to estimated time per activity, wages, travel, copies, etc.
9. Certificate of insurance detailing the amounts of all insurance coverage.

Further detail can be found in section "IX. Proposal Submission Requirements."

## VI. SCOPE OF SERVICES

The consultant or consulting team will provide the planning services necessary for the completion of an implementable Comprehensive Plan for City of Altoona. The following sections describe the scope of work and specific deliverables. The consultant/consulting team may submit suggestions on how the scope of work can be enhanced and/or amended, plus additional details of approach, methods, etc. for carrying out the project. The successful person/firm shall be responsible for completion of the project up to and including adoption of the Comprehensive Plan.

### A. Public Engagement and Participation

Attendance and presentations at public meetings, the Altoona City Planning Commission (ACPC) meetings, ACPC Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee meetings, and Altoona City Council meetings is required throughout the process. Additional advisory/work group meetings should also occur during the process. While attendance can often be virtual to save time and travel costs, the consultant shall assist in organizing two city-wide meetings, and attend a minimum of two ACPC meetings, two City Council meetings and one public hearing before Council in person.

There should be a concerted effort to stimulate and obtain public input and response during the preparation of the draft and to involve appropriate elected officials and municipal staff. The public participation process should be designed to engage as broad an audience as possible and provide real-world challenges and issues that the Comprehensive Plan will address. The consultant shall describe its proposed strategy for public participation and outreach. The public participation plan should at a minimum include:

- a scientific survey of City residents in collaboration with City staff
- a series of neighborhood public meetings
- a series of focus group meetings directed at specific stakeholders
- broad outreach efforts to the City's young people and Penn State Altoona students

Creativity in outreach efforts is encouraged, including use of the City website and public access television. In consultation with the ACPC or its designees/subcommittees, the consultant shall develop press releases and may be required to engage local media as part of the public participation process. Public engagement efforts should target stakeholders in throughout the City in various settings, such as at community events or social gatherings. Feedback gathered from the public will be summarized and incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan.

## B. Focus Areas

The City of Altoona is dedicated to continuing to build a vibrant, attractive and sustainable community with a high quality of life for all. The Comprehensive Plan should focus on how to achieve this while meeting the requirements of the MPC. Specific focus areas shall include:

- 1. Maintaining the Momentum** – Since the last Comprehensive Plan was developed in 2012, Altoona has overcome significant challenges, notably Act 47 distressed status, a number of management changes and Covid 19 shut downs, with resulting impacts on revenue. Despite these challenges, the City is experiencing significant growth and redevelopment through private investment. Examples include the redevelopment of vacant buildings in the Downtown by local developers and businesses as described in the background section, as well as the redevelopment of a defunct hospital building into a large 55+ market rate apartment complex just outside the Downtown. The Comprehensive Plan should describe methods to enhance business attraction in order to maintain and build momentum in order to ensure financial sustainability well into the future. Specific recommendations should list target dates to complete actions and improvements over the short-term (next 2 years), mid-term (3-5 years) and long-term (5-10 years).
- 2. Build on Assets** – The City of Altoona has numerous assets that it seeks to leverage in order to retain and attract population and viability well into the future. The City offers amenities normally available only in larger cities such as museums, arts programming, theater, and professional sports. It is relatively compact, with few traffic congestion issues. It is a civic-minded community, with a history of volunteerism and involvement through benevolent societies such as the Shriners. There is a myriad of educational opportunities, whether a student is interested in trades and services, business or professions. Altoona is located close to the mountains and the natural resources and recreation opportunities they offer. The City is served by broadband, allowing for telecommuting, and it borders an interstate, providing accessibility to large urban centers within a two hour drive. The City is interested in promoting these assets, attracting and retaining younger people and families, serving the needs of its older citizens, and providing an attractive alternative to those who want to enjoy the amenities of city life without the hassle and expense it entails. The Comprehensive Plan should provide specific recommendations on marketing Altoona as a desirable community to live in and to visit. Community engagement strategies should be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan to provide recommendations on how the municipality can engage with residents, with consideration of the evolving digital world.
- 3. Supporting Development through Modernized Practices** – Given its history as an older, developed community, the City of Altoona recognizes that its policies and procedures impacting development no longer reflect the modern standard. Developers have noted that requirements are in place that are no longer in existence in other areas, such as licensed trades, and this has a detrimental effect on attracting construction. Moreover, existing development standards are mostly based upon post war dependence on automobile transportation and suburban construction ideals. The City recognizes that it is time to reconsider these policies to meet the needs of its citizens as it moves toward the mid-21<sup>st</sup> Century: less car dependent, more walkable, healthier, and reflecting integrated uses. Altoona is interested in how to accomplish this in a realistic way. In addition, the City is interested in how to adapt ordinances to best redevelop its older neighborhoods, which typically have smaller building lots, smaller setbacks,

and multi-story design. Finally, the City recognizes that it is part of the greater region, and desires to enhance coordination and compatibility with regional assets to support the success of the region as a whole. The Comprehensive Plan should consider the City's ordinances and policies, and make recommendations as to how the City can accomplish this goal, with an emphasis on the built environment. Specific recommendations should list target dates to complete actions and improvements over the short-term (next 2 years), mid-term (3-5 years) and long-term (5-10 years).

#### C. Identify, articulate and prioritize goals, objectives, strategies, and performance metrics

The consultant's work and the comprehensive plan document will be organized based on the City of Altoona's priorities or related focus areas or goals that emerge from the planning process, not based on a traditional template of land use plan, housing plan, transportation plan, etc. The plan document should be efficient in words, avoid jargon, and be written for use by City Council, the planning commission, City staff, partner groups, and citizens who will implement the plan after completion. The plan should provide workable action plans for focus areas and goals – a series of strategic projects, programs, and initiatives – that emerge from the planning process. The plan should set priorities and a timetable for action based on expected results and ability to finance and implement. Action plans should include reasonable depth and detail – specific action steps, responsible parties, proposed means of financing, and measurements of performance – to facilitate implementation after the plan is completed. The consultant is asked to include some immediate action recommendations that would provide short-term, visible results and motivate further implementation of the plan.

#### D. Minimum MPC requirements shall be met

The consultant will ensure the comprehensive plan meets minimum requirements of the PA Municipalities Planning Code (MPC). The consultant may have to address minimal subject matter not addressed in analysis and recommendations presented for the City's focus areas. The concentration should remain on utilizing the planning tools authorized by, and elements required by, the MPC to address the City's focus areas. The consultant will attend all public hearings required for the adoption of the plan.

### VII. PROJECT COORDINATION

Throughout the project, coordination will be maintained between the City of Altoona and the consultant.

The consultant's approach and method must include, at a minimum:

1. An initial meeting with the planning commission, the steering committee and City staff to review the project scope and establish the project delivery schedule and public engagement program.
2. Regular meetings with the City of Altoona Planning Commission or subcommittees.
3. Gathering of input from the public through a variety of techniques to include but not necessarily limited to public workshops and surveys that will result in a wide cross section of people having been consulted.
4. At a minimum, monthly project review meetings/conference calls with key staff.

5. Preparation and presentation of draft and final plans.
6. Presentation of the final plan to the public and the City of Altoona Council and participation in a public hearing to formally present the plan for approval and adoption if necessary.

## VIII. DELIVERABLES

The consultant shall submit the following products to the City of Altoona in accordance with the approved Project Completion Schedule:

1. Twelve (12) printed and bound color copies of the final comprehensive plan and executive summary.
2. Ten (10) Complete Electronic Copies of the final plan in PDF format. Files shall be indexed for simplified review. Copies shall be on individual thumb drives and shall be unlocked in order that the plan can be copied and distributed.
3. The consultant will be responsible for providing all necessary materials including drafts of the Comprehensive Plan at all meetings, workshops and charrettes. The consultant shall submit electronic copies of all materials, research, data, GIS shapefiles, maps, etc. developed or collected over the course of plan development to the City in editable formats for the City's future use. The software packages used will be agreed to prior to any work being produced. Maps should be developed for easy integration into the municipality's ArcGIS Online system.

## IX. PROPOSAL SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

The proposal must include the following information:

- 1. Letter of Interest:** A brief cover letter summarizing the key points of the applicant's proposal and confirm an understanding of the Scope of Work. The letter shall provide the applicant's full name, mailing address, phone number, primary contact person, and email address. The letter should include a statement that the proposal is in response to the City of Altoona Comprehensive Plan RFP.
- 2. Experience and Qualifications:** Brief organizational profile (no longer than one page), including background and experience of the firm(s). Location of office from which the project management will be performed. Project organization chart including key staff to be assigned and their roles in the project. Resumes, including any sub-consultants, should be attached as an appendix to the end of the proposal. Listing, description, and link to similar projects that have been completed in the past 5 years by the prime consultant and/or proposed subcontractors. Reference list (minimum of three) that may be contacted by the City for recently completed similar projects. A statement shall be included indicating current workload of assigned staff and their capacity to undertake this project in a timely manner.
- 3. Work Program:** Overall project approach and process to be employed. Listing of proposed deliverables for each work step. Include any proposed changes/revisions to the scope of services of deliverables in order to meet project objectives. Note that the procedure for comprehensive plans as outlined in the MPC must be followed. Consultants must provide a work program for all tasks within each phase of the project.

**4. Timeline and Schedule:** Proposed project schedule including timeline of major milestones, deliverables, and completion. The project timeline should be counted in weeks or months from the date of contract award. Work may commence upon contract award and must be completed within the Contract Activity Period.

**5. Estimated Costs:** The Proposal shall include a lump sum fee as well as a detailed budget. The consultant's bid must also include any related expenses, such as travel. The budget for this project shall not exceed \$200,000.00. The proposal shall be held valid for up to 90 days from the due date. The budget must include an hourly rate schedule and estimated number of hours to be performed by each staff member assigned to the project. If any work is to be subcontracted, the Proposal should reference the specific areas and costs. Costs for GIS services and all costs related to meetings shall also be specifically broken out. Any reimbursable expenses must be clearly indicated, and an estimate provided.

The consultant/consulting team may submit suggestions on how the scope of work can be enhanced and/or amended, plus additional details of approach, methods, etc. for carrying out the project.

#### X. INTERVIEW

The Planning Commission, steering committee and/or City staff expects to schedule interviews with any or all of the applicants submitting a proposal, as agreed upon by both parties. Although interviews are expected, the proposal should be comprehensive and complete on its face. The City reserves the right to request clarifying information subsequent to submission of the proposal.

#### XI. SELECTION CRITERIA

The City of Altoona will competitively evaluate the proposals, and will select a consultant based on the following criteria, amongst others:

- Overall quality and experience of the firm. Municipal planning experience with emphasis on preparing comprehensive plans in conformance with the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code. (20%)
- Relevant qualifications and experience of the assigned personnel in preparing implementable municipal comprehensive plans and meeting objectives outlined in this RFP. Personnel shall include at least one AICP. Experience working in similar communities in Pennsylvania. (30%)
- Understanding of the Scope of Services, existing conditions, and the objectives of the project. Creativity of ideas and suggestions submitted to enhance and/or amend the scope of work and additional details of the approach and methods to carry out the project. Quality of work plan and organization structure with identification and prioritization of measurable goals, estimated costs and potential sources of financing, actionable timeline, quality of products and support materials. Participation plan reflecting commitment to gaining buy-in from the community and City Council. (30%)
- Proposed costs, with elements clearly defined and priced. Cost-saving techniques. (15%)
- Proximity to the City of Altoona. (5%)

## XII. FUNDING AND PHASING

All work on the City of Altoona Comprehensive Plan will be funded by Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) entitlement funds distributed by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. As such, any consultant to whom some or all of this project is awarded must comply with all applicable CDBG and HUD regulations, including Section 3 of the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968 (as amended [12 U.S.C. 1701u, 24 CFR part 135]). To this end, the consultant and the City must document that any employment or business opportunities generated by this project must benefit, to the greatest extent feasible, public housing residents, other low-income persons (particularly recipients of government housing assistance), and business concerns that provide economic opportunities to low- and very-low income persons. The packet, General Conditions: Federal Requirements, is included as Appendix A. Note that contractors must also have a UEI (Unique Entity Identification) number under the federal System for Award Management (SAM.gov). This project is intended to be funded in phases, with approximately \$100,000 being spent in any Federal program year (Phase 1 ending June 30, 2023 and Phase 2 beginning July 1, 2023). Thus, responses with prices over \$100,000 should be broken into more than one phase, each covering a Federal program year. Note that each bidder must provide certification the bidder is not included on any state or federal list of ineligible contractors. Each bidder must agree to comply with the provisions of the Pennsylvania Nondiscrimination Clause and the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 (see Appendix B).

## XIII. ANTICIPATED TIMELINE

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| 1. RFP authorized by Altoona City Council     | January 9, 2023  |
| 2. Mandatory Virtual Pre-Application Meeting  | January 23, 2023 @ 10 AM EST<br>(Registration deadline January 19 by 4 PM EST) |
| 3. Deadline for questions                     | February 27, 2023 @ Noon EST   |
| 4. Proposals due                              | March 7, 2023 by 1 PM EST  |
| 5. Interviews of top qualifying firms         | Week of March 20-24, 2023  |
| 6. Anticipated contract award by City Council | April 10, 2023   |

## XIV. RFP DISCLOSURES

The City of Altoona reserves the right to reject any or all proposals, to waive any non-material irregularities or information in any RFP, and to accept or reject any item or combination of items. The City assumes no responsibility or liability for costs incurred by Proposers in responding to this RFP or in responding to any further request for interviews, additional data, etc. Following award of the contract by City Council, all RFP submissions are considered public records that are subject to Pennsylvania's "Right to Know" laws. Materials considered confidential by the Consultant must be clearly identified and include a statement of why said records should not be considered public records.