



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-20-133
Meeting 20-27
November 18, 2020

AGENDA ITEM 4

AGENDA ITEM

Award of Contract to EDX Exhibits for the Administrative Office Interpretive Elements Project

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION *dem*

Authorize the General Manager to enter into a contract with EDX Exhibits for \$78,000 for interpretive planning and design of new public interpretive elements for the future Administrative Office at 5050 El Camino Real in Los Altos.

SUMMARY

On September 14, 2020, staff issued a request for proposals and qualifications to solicit interpretive planning and design services of new public interpretive elements for the future Administrative Office located at 5050 El Camino Real in Los Altos. Seven firms submitted proposals and after a competitive interview process, EDX Exhibits was deemed the most qualified firm based on their design quality and relevance, expertise and competency, commitment to accessibility and diversity, and overall cost. The General Manager recommends awarding a contract for a base amount of \$78,000 to EDX Exhibits. There are sufficient funds in the Fiscal Year 2020-21 (FY21) project budget to cover the cost of the recommendation.

DISCUSSION

5050 El Camino Real

Since purchasing the current 330 Distel Circle, Los Altos office building in 1990, the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District's (District) success in growing the regional greenbelt, restoring natural lands, and expanding public access has created the need for additional office space. As a forward-thinking and fiscally prudent public agency, the District planned for its long-term office space needs by setting aside general reserve funds. After exploring alternatives, purchasing and repurposing an existing, larger office building and selling the current building to offset costs emerged as the most cost-efficient, environmentally sound long-term solution.

At the July 2017 public meeting, the Board of Directors (Board) adopted a resolution to enter into a purchase and sale agreement for the building located at 5050 El Camino Real in Los Altos (R-17-90). Escrow closed on February 1, 2019. Construction to repurpose the building to meet District needs in fulfilling its mission and serving the public is scheduled to occur in 2021 and be completed in March 2022. This new office space presents multiple opportunities to enhance public awareness of the District and foster a deeper connection to the local natural resources and iconic Bay Area landscapes through informative and inspirational interpretive elements.

Opportunity to Connect Constituency to Open Space Values Close to Home

The new Administrative Office building at 5050 El Camino is scheduled to open in March 2022. In the course of carrying out its mission as a public agency, the District invites the public to attend regular Board and committee meetings at its office. People also frequently visit the office seeking information on the preserves and public programs. In addition, staff hold meetings with outside partners and consultants at the office. These public interactions present an opportunity to incorporate interpretive elements as part of the building experience that invite the public to further explore and engage with the District's mission and work, gain added knowledge and appreciation about the local biodiversity, and expand personal connections to the greater Bay Area region and natural landscapes.

Interpretation

Interpretation is a philosophy and practice of communication and education formalized many years ago by Freeman Tilden through his extensive work with the National Park Service. It is used by parks, museums, zoos and in many other applications, and is defined by the National Association of Interpretation as:

A mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and meanings inherent in the resource.

Interpretation is guided by a set of principles and professionally established methods. The chief aim of interpretation is not to instruct, yet rather to evoke curiosity and engagement. Interpretation can enhance a visitor's experience, leading them to develop appreciation for and meaningful personal connections to the subject being interpreted.

Examples of interpretive engagement that many people are familiar with include outdoor signage or wayside panels, visitor center exhibits and displays, guided interpretive hikes or tours, as well as publications and digital media. All of these engagement methods consider message, audience, resources and a desired outcome, communicated in compelling and relevant ways.

Staff and docent volunteers are provided foundational training to develop interpretive skills and use interpretative techniques on docent naturalist-led hikes, school field trips, at the Daniels Nature Center, and as part of ranger engagement with preserve visitors. Additionally, interpretive signs are posted in preserves. Interpretive displays and exhibits can also be found at the Daniels Nature Center.

Request for Proposals and Qualifications Process

Staff issued a request for proposals and qualifications to solicit interpretive planning and design services for the administrative office through:

- Distribution to the National Association for Interpretation's (NAI) list of approximately 80 commercial vendors who specialize in interpretive planning, design and fabrication
- Posting on NAI's local regional Facebook page
- Posting on BidSync
- Additional outreach to interpretive planning and design firms located primarily in California.

The RFQP identified the following areas as spaces and features where incorporation of interpretive elements and design features are desired.

Entry Lobby/Foyer

Visitors will enter the building through a ground-level set of doors into a foyer with approximate dimensions of 38 feet by 16 feet enclosed by windows with a high ceiling. There are two wall spaces available with approximate dimensions of 9 feet by 9 feet and additional floor and three-dimensional space.

Main Lobby/Atrium

The main building lobby has approximate floor-space dimensions of 38 feet by 23 feet. The lobby and atrium contain a 24-foot by 9-foot wall space identified for interpretive elements. The lobby will include a reception desk area and a visitor seating area and additional space for interpretive element or design feature placement. Considerations include:

- Large-scale wrap photo for the elevator shaft
- Backlit wall-size photo for hall divider
- Four framed photos or other art for upstairs hallway
- Large-scale photo near stairwell to second floor

Outdoor Areas

- Two to three interpretive panels along the walkway between the sidewalk at El Camino Real and the building's front door.
- Retaining wall adjacent to underground garage southern access with dimensions of 50 feet by 6 feet; possible location for a mural.
- Four large-scale banners on exterior of building with dimensions of approximately 20 feet by 5 feet.

Seven firms submitted proposals by the October 9, 2020 closing date, each providing a description of their proposed approach, team qualifications, prior project experience, hourly rates and a cost estimate.

FIRM	LOCATION	COST
Haley Sharpe Design*	Toronto, Canada	\$90-\$145 per hour / \$44k total
IQ Magic	Santa Monica, CA	\$75-\$180 per hour / \$51k total
The Sibbet Group	San Anselmo, CA	\$135-\$185 per hour / \$60k total
David Price Design	Salinas, CA	\$60 per hour / \$65K total
EDX Exhibits*	Seattle, WA	\$70-\$135 per hour / \$78k total
Mele-Watershed*	St. Louis, MO	\$95-\$155 per hour / \$132k total
Digital Globe Systems*	Coursegold, CA	\$150 per hour/\$60k / \$136k total

* *Interviewed*

A consultant-selection panel composed of staff from the Visitor Services, Public Affairs and Engineering and Construction departments reviewed and rated the proposals using criteria to evaluate each proposed project team on their expertise, approach, qualifications, relevant experience and quality of relevant work samples.

On October 19 and 21, 2020, the consultant selection panel interviewed four firms. The selection panel unanimously determined EDX Exhibits to be the most qualified firm based on their:

- **Design Quality and Relevance**

The designs and images of relevant projects that EDX Exhibits shared with staff were outstanding and curated extremely well to demonstrate their understanding of the District's project needs. Their high-quality renderings were particularly noted by staff as an effective way to clearly communicate with and garner consensus from multiple decision-makers throughout the project.

- **Expertise and Competency**

EDX Designs' well-established expertise and experience with integrating interpretive elements, architecture and natural resource knowledge gave staff confidence in their ability to deliver a high-quality project on schedule. Their staff of eight includes professional architects, certified interpretive planners, graphic and exhibit designers. They articulated a strong understanding of design and fabrication process alignment and how project milestones need to intersect.

- **Commitment to Accessibility and Diversity**

EDX Exhibits was the only responding firm to explicitly address diversity, equity and inclusion in their proposal and interview, and expressed the importance and showed examples of designing interpretive elements that are accessible and relatable to the largest range of people of diverse backgrounds and abilities. This is firmly in line with the District's Board-approved strategic goals and objectives and the Board's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policy.

- **Overall Cost**

EDX Exhibits' hourly cost range was very competitive with the other proposals, and their estimated total cost was below the average total cost (\$80,000) of all proposals. Because some of the lower cost proposals would have required significantly more staff time for coordination, content creation and oversight, EDX Exhibits' proposal presented a set of services at a fair and reasonable price that accounts for staff capacity and expertise in this area.

FISCAL IMPACT

At each major milestone, the District presents a revised cost estimate to ensure that the overall administrative office project remains within the May 2019 Board-approved project budget of \$27.4 million (R-19-64). The latest 100% project cost estimate is approximately \$26.8 million, below the Board approved project budget.

Funding sources for the project include using *Committed for Infrastructure* reserve funds, any future additions to the reserve, rent income, parity bond proceeds, and interest earned from the parity bonds. Partial reimbursement will also come from the future sale of the current 330 Distel Circle office (R-20-117).

The administrative office interpretive elements project is divided into two phases:

- Phase 1: Planning and design, which is the scope of recommended contract
- Phase 2: Fabrication and installation of the approved interpretive elements (future phase)

The FY21 adopted budget includes \$8,488,000 for the New Administrative Office (AO) Facility project #31202. Staff has identified \$200,000 within the Board-approved project budget to cover both phases of this project. There are sufficient funds in the project budget to cover the recommended action and expenditures through the end of the fiscal year for the Phase I scope of work. Funding for future year budgets will be requested as part of the annual Budget and Action Plan process.

New Administration Office (AO) Facility #31202	Prior Year Actuals	FY21 Adopted	FY22 Projected	FY23 Projected	Estimated Future Years	TOTAL
Acquisition:	\$31,742,406	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$31,742,406
**Planning/Design/Construction:	\$1,744,869	\$8,402,000	\$17,305,058	\$0	\$0	*\$27,451,927
***Move-in and Closeout:	\$0	\$86,000	\$1,000,000	\$0	\$0	\$1,086,000
Total Budget:	\$33,487,275	\$8,488,000	\$18,305,058	\$0	\$0	\$60,280,333
Acquisition and associated costs Spent-to-Date (as of 10/28/2020):	(\$31,742,406)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	(\$31,742,406)
Spent-to-Date (as of 10/28/2020):	(\$1,744,869)	(\$18,214)	\$0	\$0	\$0	(\$1,763,083)
Encumbrances:	\$0	(\$498,120)	\$0	\$0	\$0	(\$498,120)
EDX Exhibits Contract:	\$0	(\$78,000)	\$0	\$0	\$0	(\$78,000)
Budget Remaining (Proposed):	\$0	\$7,893,666	\$18,305,058	\$0	\$0	\$26,198,724

*Amount includes Board approved project budget of \$27.4M

**FY22 Projected budget overstated by \$519,942, already stated in prior year actuals due to acceleration of the project

***This is a placeholder value. Final costs will be reviewed and approved by the Board

The recommended action is not funded by Measure AA.

BOARD COMMITTEE REVIEW

This item was not reviewed by a Board committee. Given full Board interest, future study sessions will be held in 2021 to review interpretive goals and programming, proposed content and design styles, and design options.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act and additionally to the administrative office interested parties list.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

Award of contract is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act.

NEXT STEPS

If approved, the General Manager will execute the contract for interpretive planning and design consulting services with EDX Exhibits.

Responsible Department Head:
Korrine Skinner, Public Affairs Manager

Staff contact:
Leigh Ann Gessner, Public Affairs Specialist II

Prepared by:

Leigh Ann Gessner, Public Affairs Specialist II

Renée Fitzsimons, Interpretation & Education Program Manager