

CharlevoixVillage

ASSOCIATION

February 20, 2019

Housing & Revitalization Department (HRD)

Re: Request for Qualifications (RFQ) Islandview Selection Committees

We are writing this letter in the hopes of addressing some major concerns we have regarding the RFQ Selection Committees for projects in the Islandview and Greater Villages area. Several issues have been raised by long-term residents - who will be disproportionately impacted by these developments - pertaining to the accessibility and transparency these committees. While these select committees are part of HRD's attempt to be more intentional and inclusive about community-engagement we believe that they have missed the mark, and in fact continue to prevent long-term residents from having a meaningful say in what is happening in the community.

Firstly, residents are not city employees. They have their own lives and careers. RFQ Selection Committee meetings have been normally held during normal business hours. Requests by long-term residents serving on select committees have asked if meetings can be scheduled later in the evening have not been met. As a result, two long-term residents selected to be on committees have not been able to attend any meetings and the process has proceeded without them. It seems that HRD views this as not an issue so long as members of the select committee are kept updated via email. But we do not.

Secondly, no real attempt has been made to bridge the gap between the expertise of city officials and the working-class, black residents who make up a majority of Detroit and IVGV. Meeting facilitators have not even taken the basic step of defining technical terms and industry jargon. Rather, everything is catered to the developers and the wealthier white residents who typify the ideal new citizen of Detroit that city officials are desperate to attract. This includes the time-frame for this process, which we might add has never been clearly spelled out. In order to properly bridge the gap that means committing more time for residents to process information so that we can have an informed opinion about these issues.

Both of these issues are failures of accessibility and transparency in terms of access to the process and access to information. **Therefore the RFQ Selection Committees, as currently run, do not represent community engagement.** It does, however, make clear the implicit biases, both racist and classist, held by the city administration in dealing with long-term residents of Detroit. Even when long-term residents are invited to the table we seem to be merely decorations, rather than citizens being engaged.

We hope that this letter can serve a constructive purpose for those who claim a desire to do more meaningful community engagement. Although the current implementation of the RFQ Selection Committees has been a failure of community engagement, we offer some actions that can be taken to resolve the aforementioned issues.

- RFQ Selection Committee meetings must be public.
- RFQ Selection Committee meetings must be held after normal business hours (no earlier than 5:30pm) to ensure that working members of the community can attend.
- RFQ Selection Committee meetings must be held no more than once a month.
- A discussion with city staff, including RFQ Selection Committee meeting organizers and facilitators, about how to bridge the gap between development / planning / real estate professionals and lay people that ensures accessibility.

We urge the city to halt the RFQ selection process until the RFQ Selection Committee meetings have been appropriately restructured to resolve the issues surrounding accessibility, transparency, and the implicit racial and class biases which permeate the process. Until such a restructuring has occurred, we cannot support the RFQ Selection Committees, and view any of its decisions as void of community input and engagement.

Sincerely,

Charlevoix Village Association