

A Historic Opportunity

We come to the City of East Lansing with a bold proposal: to combine strong community input with world-class development credentials to transform the Park District post City Center II into a source of pride and desirable use. We believe that such collaboration is the logical approach to not only address the financial issues that now face East Lansing residents, but also the best way to develop something meaningful from the present collection of empty and underutilized buildings scattered across multiple parcels.

A major, nationally reputed developer known for transformative mixed use projects has taken an active interest in the MSU market. This interest was piqued through the Capital Gateway/Red Cedar Golf Course project, but there is potential for additional development in downtown East Lansing. No promises are made, but the interest and intentions are genuine.

However, as any developer with an honest interest in the Park District would acknowledge, the RFQ/P is lacking much of the necessary information to make a detailed proposal, and the situation is in too much flux to determine at this time exactly what development components would be both financially feasible for the developer and attractive for the community.

Developing the Park District in the aftermath of City Center II is a historic opportunity, but it is also challenging on multiple fronts. The parcels of land in question—both publicly and privately owned—are arguably as strategic to the future of East Lansing as any in the entire city. However, it's not clear at the present time which parcels will ultimately be available for development—the only certainty is that there will likely be numerous changes in the scope of any project in the future. Successful development will require patience, proven access to institutional capital and the capital markets, and the ability to work in partnership with the citizens of East Lansing and with East Lansing government.

Our proposal takes a two-step approach: Step One creates an ongoing process of rebuilding trust, building consensus and community support; Step Two looks to leverage the expertise and financial capabilities of this world-class developer with extensive experience in complex mixed-use projects—often in academic settings.

Our road map for the East Lansing RFQ/P mirrors that of the Capital Gateway project in Lansing, where grassroots input has been integral to the development process, and where this involvement was rewarded with approval in a public vote.

We believe that the citizens of East Lansing deserve their own collaborative community/developer venture, one which uniquely reflects the specific options that ultimately present themselves. We strongly believe East Lansing is as desirable a place for a highly reputable national developer to invest as any university community in the country, given the opportunity and encouragement. Unlike many other university towns, East Lansing residents, including those who opposed City Center II, want development

and progress. They just want it to be smart, successful development that respects the values of all the stakeholders in, and is not a financial drain on, the community.

With its strong neighborhoods, East Lansing proudly retains something of a small town feel much valued by its permanent residents. But, there is no reason East Lansing cannot capture the 'elegant balance' that make other university communities, such as Chapel Hill, Austin, and Palo Alto, magnets for people of all ages and economic backgrounds. We sincerely believe the community is poised to take the next step in the evolution of downtown, and that it can attract something more than the usual housing and businesses targeting the undergraduate demographic. But for this to really happen, not just be hoped for, involvement by a developer with substantial and patient capital is needed, along with the experience to deal with real world, often changing, market complexities, all the while not losing sight of what the community wants.

The East Lansing RFQ/P should be more than just a costly salvage operation of the wreckage of an abandoned project. The right path forward, even though it will take time, should be around a new vision—one that brings together the wisdom, experience, and desires of East Lansing stakeholders, who know their community best, and world-class developers with proven expertise and ample access to institutional capital.

The Parkside Project is that project.

Christopher Jerome

Proposed Process

- 1. Continue the process of seeking community input and support begun in creating the RFQ/P.**
 - Organize forums mirroring the Red Cedar Community Conversation held in Lansing.
 - Forums run by citizen groups, with participation from the business community and MSU.
 - Candid discussion of realistic options under market conditions
 - Create Summary Report of options reflecting goals of community and financial realities.
 - Engage in an iterative process of ongoing discussions based on evolution of Project.

- 2. Engage owners of adjacent private parcels.**
 - Explore acquisition of air rights to historic East Lansing Post Office Building (Dublin Square).
 - Acquisition of empty adjacent parcels.

- 3. Create conceptual rendering and project pro forma.**
 - Public discussion of initial project acceptability and financial feasibility.
 - Extensive public discussion on financial model
 - Evaluation of sources and uses of capital
 - Clear plan to address outstanding debt tied to city-owned parcels

- 4. Coordinated process with City for public vote on sale of properties (per charter).**
 - As with the Red Cedar Golf Course sale, this would legitimize the project with the public.

- 5. Negotiation of Development Agreement between City & Developer.**

- 6. Formal approval by East Lansing City Council**

The Parkside Project Vision: Preliminary Concept Summary

- **Mid-rise or high-rise mixed use development**
 - Distinguished design that respects community businesses and neighborhoods.
 - Multiple structures likely
 - Ability to build in stages
 - Competitive bidding opportunities for local firms
 - Construction reflecting environmentally friendly practices
- **Financially Sound and Low-Risk for the City**
- **Respect for Valley Court Park Green Space**
 - Protect and enhance the charm of Valley Court Park
- **Respect for quality of life in adjacent residential neighborhoods**
 - Emphasis on potential noise, traffic, sunlight, and parking issues
 - Pedestrian and bike friendly design
- **Respect for MSU**
 - Enhance downtown East Lansing in manner that positively impacts MSU
 - Create new options for faculty, staff, and alumni, in addition to permanent residents
 - Create new options to enhance recruiting faculty to East Lansing
- **Respect for historic buildings and their architectural status in Community**
 - People's Church
 - Historic East Lansing Post Office Building (Dublin Square)
- **Connect Valley Court Green Space with Downtown Business District**
 - Project should connect these areas via design and mixed use elements
- **Patience and Sufficient Financial Resources**
 - A potentially lengthy process
 - Community seeks thorough and ongoing discussion of options
 - Options will likely evolve over time
 - Ability to fund acquisition of other parcels
 - Ability to potentially underwrite public infrastructure costs
 - Demonstrated ability to execute complex projects crucial to success

Development Entity

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