

# **Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Interpretive Center**

## **Request for Proposals**

### **Project Purpose:**

The City of Niagara Falls (City) is seeking a statement of qualifications and cost proposal from a qualified consultant or consultant team (consultant) for services relating to the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Interpretive Center (Center). Requested services shall be provided in three phases, as described in this RFP. Phase I involves “thematic development” and includes the development of an Interpretive Plan. Phase II involves the preparation of an Operations Plan that, among other things, will recommend steps to achieve its goals and objectives and to provide a vision for interpretation, education, and visitor experience opportunities. Phase III focuses on the design of exhibits and the preparation of specifications for bidding to fabricators or contractors. Phase IV addresses exhibit fabrication and installation and is not part of this RFP. The Center will be located on the first floor of the Niagara Falls US Customhouse (Customhouse), located at 2245 Whirlpool Street, Niagara Falls, NY

### **Background:**

Over the last decade following the City of Niagara Falls Strategic Plan, efforts have been made to bring a new era of economic prosperity to the City of Niagara Falls and Niagara County. The steady, albeit slow, progress includes a new focus on tourism generally, and heritage tourism specifically. As part of this strategy, local, state and federal government officials have embraced physical and cultural resource development. Two important components of this progress include the designation of a national heritage area and a state heritage area.

On May 8, 2008, President Bush signed Public Law 110-229, designating the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area (NFNHA). A federal commission will manage the Heritage Area, with initial assistance from the National Park Service. Work on the Management Plan for the NFNHA has begun; a consultant team has been hired and commenced work in the fall of 2009.

On July 21, 2008, Governor Patterson signed Chapter 372 of New York State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Law, designating the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Area. The State Law also established a Commission to prepare and implement a management plan. That plan will focus on documenting and interpreting the community’s history relative to the Underground Railroad, abolitionists, and other reform related activities.

The City of Niagara Falls has a unique connection to the history of the Underground Railroad. There is documented evidence that Harriet Tubman used the city’s Suspension Bridge to make her first crossing into Canada with other Freedom Seekers. In addition, because of its proximity to Canada, the entire Bi-National Niagara region shares a strong historical connection to the

Underground Railroad. The City wants to tap into this history and make it accessible to its 8 to 10 million annual visitors.

During this past decade, the City has moved ahead on an International Railway Station/Intermodal Transportation Center (IRS/ITC) Project. This municipality-led \$40 million project seeks to relocate the Niagara Falls Amtrak station and establish federal border inspection facilities within a consolidated railroad intermodal facility adjacent to the Whirlpool-Rapids Bridge Plaza and North Main Street on the U.S. side of the Niagara River. One goal and the first phase of the IRS/ITC Project is to restore and reuse the historic Niagara Falls US Customhouse, which is located at this site. Plans call for the US Customs and Border Protection to be located in the Customhouse building, with a portion of the first floor reserved for the Center.

The IRS/ITC and Customhouse site is located 1.25 miles from the American side of the falls, and lies within the Niagara River Greenway. The establishment of the federal and state heritage areas has presented a fortuitous opportunity for developing an authentic heritage tourism asset and attraction at the Customhouse site.

### **Project Phases:**

The Customhouse restoration, the International Railway Station/Intermodal Transportation Center, and the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Interpretive Center will need to intersect seamlessly in order to provide both transportation services and a viable, visitor-ready facility to tell the Niagara region's Underground Railroad story. The City expects this project to be undertaken in four distinct phases; only the first three phases are contained in this RFP.

#### **Phase I.**

**Interpretive Plan & Thematic Development**

#### **Phase II.**

**Interpretive Center Operations Plan**

#### **Phase III.**

**Exhibit Design, Script, and Specifications**

#### **Phase IV.**

**Exhibit Fabrication and Installation (not part of this RFP)**

## **Phase I. Interpretive Plan & Thematic Development:**

The consultant will be responsible for working with the Project Team, stakeholders, and the community to carry out the following components of this Phase:

1. Project Consultation
2. Public Information Plan
3. Heritage Resource Inventory and Analysis
4. Assessment of Relevant Plans and Commissions
5. Draft and Final Interpretive Plan and Thematic Development

The interpretive plan should outline the authentic history of the Underground Railroad and related stories relevant in telling Niagara's stories. These interpretive stories and themes should be used as the basis for the exhibit designs of the Interpretive Center and should be compatible with the interpretive themes of the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Area and the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area.

### **1 Project Consultation:**

The consultant will be required to carry out the following tasks during this project.

- A. Coordinate with the Project Team: City Department of Planning & Economic Development and Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Area Commission representatives to finalize project objectives, formalize project schedules, deadlines and meetings, clarify issues, and establish points of contact. Full cooperation between consultant and City staff, particularly Kevin Cottrell, the City's Project Coordinator, is key to successful completion of this project.
- B. Consult with interested and involved stakeholders, as needed: NYS Office of Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) and State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO); National Park Service; NYS Department of State; public/private committees representing individual academic institution, such as Niagara University, State University at Buffalo, Niagara County Community College; and the Niagara Falls Public Library Local History Department.

**Deliverables:** Consultations with relevant partners and others as appropriate and documentation of such consultation. A schedule approved by the Project Coordinator relating to consultations and summaries. An Agreement on process and procedures for completing subsequent task listed herein below, including next steps, responsibilities, and assignments.

## **2. Public Participation Plan:**

The consultant will design and implement a public participation plan, including public sessions and other forms of appropriate communication that will ensure the public is aware of and engaged in the development of the Interpretive Center. A draft public participation plan shall be discussed with the Project Team and approved by the City prior to completion of a final public participation plan and implementation.

The plan should include a minimum of three (3) public sessions or focus groups, a proposed schedule for such sessions, as well as a description of all methods to be employed in collecting, assessing and incorporating public input.

**Deliverables:** Draft public participation plan; final public participation plan; and implementation of such plan, including documentation of comments received throughout the entire project period.

## **3. Heritage Resource Inventory and Analysis:**

- A. Inventory, analyze, and assess relevant Underground Railroad historical reference materials.
- B. Inventory, analyze, and assess local heritage resources, collections, and historic sites that relate to the potential Interpretive Center interpretive themes, exhibits and programs.
- C. Inventory, analyze, and assess Underground Railroad research of relevant academic authors and experts, and interview if possible.

## **4. Assessment of Relevant Plans, Tourism Information, and Commissions:**

- A. Inventory, analyze, and assess all relevant local and regional plans to properly contextualize the possible relationships between those plans and the Center. At a minimum, this includes the following documents: Achieving Niagara Falls Future (2002); City of Niagara Falls Strategic Plan (2004); Western Erie Canal Heritage Corridor Management Plan (2005); NPS Niagara Falls National Heritage Area Reconnaissance Study (2005); City of Niagara Falls Comprehensive Plan (2009); Niagara River Greenway Plan (2006).
- B. Inventory, analyze, and assess the relationships among regional commissions, particularly as they relate to the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Area Commission and its eventual management plan. At a minimum, this includes the following entities: Niagara River Greenway Commission, Niagara Falls National Heritage Area Commission, and Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor Commission.

- C. Inventory, analyze and assess current Underground Railroad marketing efforts planned or underway in Niagara County, Erie County and Ontario, Canada.
- D. Inventory, analyze, and assess tourism surveys, studies and market analysis produced locally or generally available from industry sources that are relevant to this project.
- E. Provide profile of potential target audiences, including, but not necessarily limited to, city and county residents, school groups, tourists and, in particular, international tourists. Profile should include descriptions of each target audience, including demographic and psychographic information.
- F. Provide trend analysis and attendance figures for all Underground Railroad interpretive centers/museums equal to or larger in size than this project.  
Provide visitation projections for the Center for the first year of operation (2012), through the fifth year of operation (2017).

**Deliverables for 3 and 4:** Compilation of all research and data into a report focused on the most applicable findings relative to the development of the Interpretive Plan, Operations Plan, Exhibit Design, Space-programming, Script and Specifications for the Interpretive Center.

## **5. Draft and Final Interpretive Plan and Thematic Development:**

Produce a draft and final interpretive plan for the Center that will inform and guide the design and content of educational programs, exhibits, publications, interior and exterior signage, and its relationship to other sites and heritage resources relating to the history of the Underground Railroad in the Niagara region. All interior and exterior aspects of this facility and the exhibits, media, and programming shall meet ADA standards and other applicable State laws. At a minimum, the interpretive plan should include the following components.

- A. Mission statement, vision statement, and interpretive goals and objectives.
- B. Overall interpretive direction, unifying thematic statement, primary themes, and supporting themes.
- C. Primary and secondary interpretive periods.
- D. Conceptual exhibit plan, exhibit themes, and visitor experience, to be presented through an interpretive storyboard, visitor experience narrative, or other such similar method. Special attention should be paid to visitor orientation functions and visitor amenities such as restrooms and seating and including suggestions to meet the needs and interests of different types of visitors such as children, senior citizens, international visitors and repeat visitors.

- E. Suggested interpretive media to meet interpretive goals and objectives. Considerations should include, but not necessarily be limited to, graphic panels, interactive exhibits, computer based exhibits or programs, audio/cell phone/podcasts, guided walks, publications, on-site and off-site interpretive lectures, programs and special events, and social media (such as Facebook, twitter, etc).
- F. Suggested space-program for the interior of the Center and an experiential “script” for moving into and through the Center.
- G. Suggestions for inclusion of artifacts in Center exhibits, including explanation of the pros and cons of the inclusion of either permanent or temporary artifacts care and maintenance considerations, accessioning requirements, loan agreements, etc.
- H. Suggestions for temporary or rotating exhibits, given the physical space available.
- I. Document relevant educational content standards in accordance with New York State curriculum requirements, if any.
- J. Suggested gift shop space and related revenue opportunities.
- K. An outline of physical and programmatic relationships with the proposed future tenants at the Customhouse site.
- L. Identification of aspects of the interpretive plan that may have special concerns or significant operational or architectural consequences.
- M. Physical, programmatic, and/or marketing connections to other sites in the immediate vicinity, as well as, to regional strategic links.
- N. Suggested methods of evaluation of Center exhibits and programs to be utilized in the first five years of operation.
- O. Projected implementation costs.
- P. Executive Summary containing major recommendations of the Interpretive Plan and desired outcomes for the Center.

**Deliverables:** Preliminary, Draft, and Final Interpretive Plan which includes all the above. Following an iterative process and period for review and comment, the consultant shall incorporate comments and produce a Draft Interpretive Plan and produce the Final Interpretive Plan.

The Consultant shall be responsible for generating photo-ready graphics, drawings, and written materials necessary to complete this task. The consultant shall supply up to 25 color copies of the draft plan, final plan, and the principle graphics in an appropriate size and format intended for public display and/or viewing by a large audience. The Consultant shall also supply electronic copies on CDs in standard editable formats.

## **Phase II. Interpretive Center Operations Plan:**

Based on input from the City and Project team, the consultant shall develop an Operations Plan for the management and operation of the Center. The Operations Plan should include the following components:

1. Comparative analysis of at least two comparable start-up facilities focusing on best practices.
2. Legal and management structure for Center operations including any possible leasehold arrangements.
3. Start-up and ongoing operational issues and challenges and recommendations on how they may be addressed.
4. Generic operating policies with as many specific recommendations as possible (dependent in part on input from City).
  - Proposed hours of operation
  - Proposed staffing needs, including paid and volunteer labor
  - Proposed maintenance needs
  - Proposed security, including capital costs and operation and maintenance costs
5. Revenue and expense projections for first five years of operation, including special start-up costs in first year of operation, and annual costs thereafter. Projections should address both personal and non-personal services.
6. Recommendations for implementation (in phases if necessary).

**Deliverables:** Draft Operations Plan, which includes all the above. Following an iterative process and period for review and comment, the consultant shall incorporate comments and produce a Draft Operations Plan and produce the Final Operations Plan.

### **Phase III. Exhibit Design, Script Writing and Specifications:**

The consultant shall design, script-write, and provide graphic services for the Center's exhibits and interior space changes. These professional services will include production of "camera-ready" or "shop-ready" exhibit specifications to be used to fabricate as well as to install exhibits (Phase IV). Script-writing will tie the interpretive themes and exhibits into an understandable experiential narrative.

All design and specifications will be prepared in cooperation with, and be approved by, the City and the Project Team.

The Center occupies approximately 1720 sq ft. on the first floor of the Customhouse. See Attached Floor Plan.

#### **Components of Phase III include, but may not necessarily be limited to:**

- Exhibit design and story line development based on the Interpretive Plan developed in Phase I
- Interior space and design planning including exhibit space allocation and visitor circulation into and through the Center.
- Development of draft exhibit design and script selection of exhibit visual components
- Development of final exhibit script and design
- Development of "camera-ready" exhibit specifications and installation instructions

The consultant will provide up to 25 hard copies of all materials to the City and in a readily accessible and editable electronic format. The specific stages of review and approval during this Phase will be finalized in the project schedule between the consultant and the City.

**Deliverables:** Preliminary draft exhibit design and script; draft exhibit design and script; final exhibit design and script; camera-ready exhibit specifications and installation instructions.

### **Project Schedule:**

The City anticipates opening the Underground Railroad Interpretative Center for the summer of 2012. The consultant is expected to provide with their proposal a schedule that facilitates the projected opening date.

### **Project Budget:**

Not to exceed: \$200,000

## **SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS:**

Please provide your responses in the order listed below.

### **A. Contact Information:**

1. The lead consultant or individual name.
2. The lead consultant's contact person.
3. Contact information for lead consultant and all firms or individuals included in this submittal including mailing address, email address and telephone, fax, and wireless numbers.
4. License or certification information, if applicable, of lead consultant and all individuals included in this project.
5. The type of work or specialty and size of all firms included in this submittal, including the year the firm(s) were established.
6. The MBE/WBE status of the firms included in this submittal (Minority-owned Business Enterprise or Women-owned Business Enterprise as certified by New York State).
7. The signature of the lead individual, and the date of signature.

### **B. Methodological Approach:**

1. A description of how the consultant intends to address the overall scope of work as set forth in this RFP.
2. A description of how the consultant will address each of the phases as set forth in this RFP including project management and planning methodologies, analytical techniques, models, etc. that would be employed.

### **C. Experience and Personnel:**

1. A description of experience that highlights the consultant's unique strengths, philosophy, sensitivity to the public realm, breadth of knowledge and management experience relevant to the project as set forth in this RFP.
2. Descriptions of completed work similar to that requested in each phase as set forth in this RFP.

3. Resumes of the consultants and staff who will work on each phase of this project and a description of their specific roles in each phase.
4. At least two references for the types of work requested in each phase of this RFP. References may be the same for more than one phase but such overlap should be fully explained. Provide full contact information for each reference, the nature of the work performed, and the size and complexity of the project.
5. At least two writing samples similar in nature to the type of work to be produced in each phase and descriptions of the specific role of the consultant in the production of the samples. Also, provide photos or color copies of completed work on projects similar to the type of work to be provided in Phase IV.
6. Any other information that would highlight consultant work relevant to this project.

#### **D. Proposal Submission:**

The City of Niagara Falls reserves the right to reject all proposals for any reason, and to disqualify any proposal that is late or otherwise does not comply with these instructions. Once submitted, proposals will not be returned and will become the property of the City.

Each proposal should be typed or printed on 8 1/2" x 11" paper. **Proposals must be received by 3:30 pm on May 25, 2010.** Four (4) copies of the proposal should be submitted to:

Kevin Cottrell  
City Hall, Room #35  
745 Main Street  
P.O. Box 69  
Niagara Falls, New York 14302-0069

Any questions regarding this RFP should be directed to Mr. Cottrell at (716) 286-4421; Cell: (716) 471-1344; or e-mail: [kevin.cottrell@niagarafallsny.gov](mailto:kevin.cottrell@niagarafallsny.gov).

A pre-bid meeting will be held at City Hall on May 10, 2010 at 10:00 A.M. in the City Council Chambers. Immediately afterwards, an on-site inspection of the project site will be provided. Interested parties are encouraged to attend.

It is the intention of the City of Niagara Falls to select and contract with one Consultant based solely on this RFP and on the quality and value of the proposals received (sub-consultants and/or joint ventures are permitted). Top ranked firms may be requested to prepare and give an oral presentation before a city selection committee. Selected and non-selected firms will be notified in writing. The selected firm should be prepared to begin work immediately upon execution of an agreement.

1. A separate cost estimate must be provided for Phase I, Phase II, and Phase III, of this project. Cost proposals shall be submitted in sealed envelopes.
2. Provide the normal hourly rate of each principal and staff member whose resume is provided or whose job category may be required, and the rate used in the proposal.
3. Provide a list of anticipated reimbursable expenses and the rate charged for each.
4. Provide any reduced fees offered to municipalities, governmental entities, economic development or nonprofit organizations, and civic organizations.
5. State whether the bidder is willing to agree to a price cap.

**E. Non-Discrimination Policy:**

All bidders shall submit a copy of their non-discrimination or affirmative action plan or a statement of their commitment to equal opportunity and affirmative action from their chief executive officer.

**CRITERIA FOR SELECTION:**

The City will conduct a comprehensive, fair and impartial evaluation of all submittals received in response to this bid. Criteria to be evaluated include the following Technical Requirements and Cost Proposal Requirements.

**All information and documents requested must be included or addressed in the submission. Proposals not containing this information will not be considered for award.**

**Technical Requirements:**

1. Methodological approach to overall scope or work as set forth in this RFP.
2. Methodological approach to each phase as set forth in this RFP.
3. Demonstrated experience and ability to provide services for projects of similar scope, complexity and visibility as described in Phase I (Interpretive Plan).
4. Demonstrated experience and ability to provide services for projects of similar scope, complexity and visibility as described in Phase II (Operations Plan).
5. Demonstrated experience and ability to design and write interpretive exhibits to tell compelling, sensitive and accessible stories as described in Phase III (Exhibit Design, Script and Specifications).

6. Demonstrated experience and ability to develop effective processes for involving and responding to a wide variety of stakeholders throughout this project.
7. Demonstrated experience and ability in providing services to municipalities, economic development organizations or other governmental entities.
8. Quality of work as demonstrated in submitted work examples.
9. Evaluation of References.

### **Cost Proposal Requirements:**

A complete cost estimate must be provided for Phase I, Phase II, and Phase III.

**REMINDER:** Proposals shall be submitted in sealed envelopes.

### **PROPOSAL SCORING:**

Upon receipt of the submittals, the evaluation team will review all submittals and judge according to the following point system:

#### **Technical: 45 points**

- a. Methodological approach to overall scope or work (15)
- b. Methodological approach to each phase (15)
- c. Quality of work as demonstrated in submitted work samples (15)

#### **Management and Staffing: 20 points**

- a. Project schedule (10)
- b. Efficiency of management plan (5)
- c. Breakdown of staff and labor (5)

**Company Qualifications:** **75 points**

Demonstrated experience with projects of similar nature, scope and complexity including:

- a. Interpretive Planning (15)
- b. Exhibit Scripts (15)
- c. Exhibit Design and Specifications (15)
- d. Operations Planning (15)
- e. Evaluation of references (10)
- f. Completeness of resumes; extent of education and experience  
of personnel designated to work on the project (5)

*If subcontractors are used, the above company  
qualifications apply* **(75)**

**Cost:** **60 Points**

**Phase I:**

- a. Reasonableness of fee (10)
- b. Thoroughness of cost breakdown (10)

**Phase II**

- a. Reasonableness of fee (10)
- b. Thoroughness of cost breakdown (10)

**Phase II**

- a. Reasonableness of fee (10)
- b. Thoroughness of cost breakdown (10)

**Maximum Total:** **200 Points**

## **CONTRACT TERMS AND REQUIREMENTS:**

The contents of the proposal prepared by the successful consultants, with any amendments approved by the City, will become part of the contract that is signed as a result of this RFP process. The terms outlined throughout the RFP should be considered all-inclusive. The selected consultant will be required to:

1. Maintain accurate accounting records and other evidence pertaining to costs incurred in providing services, and on the City's request, make such records available at all reasonable times during the contract period and for six (6) years after the date of the final payment to the consultant under the contract.
2. Assume sole responsibility for the complete effort as required by the RFP, and be the sole point of contact with regard to contractual matters.
3. Refrain from assigning, transferring, conveying, subletting or otherwise disposing of the contract or its right, titles or interest therein or its power to execute such agreement to any other person, consultant, partnership, company or corporation without the prior consent and approval in writing of the City of Niagara Falls.
4. Comply with applicable laws governing projects initiated or supported by the City of Niagara Falls.

The City reserves the right to terminate any contract entered into as a result of this RFP at any time, provided that written notice has been given to the consultant at least thirty (30) days prior to such proposed termination.

## **MISCELLANEOUS CONDITIONS**

### **A. Obligation Only on Formal Contract:**

The issuance of this RFP, the submission of a response by any consultant, and the acceptance of such response by the City, does not obligate the City in any manner. Legal obligations will only arise on the execution of a formal contract by the City and the consultant(s) selected by the City.

### **B. City of Niagara Falls Reservation of Rights:**

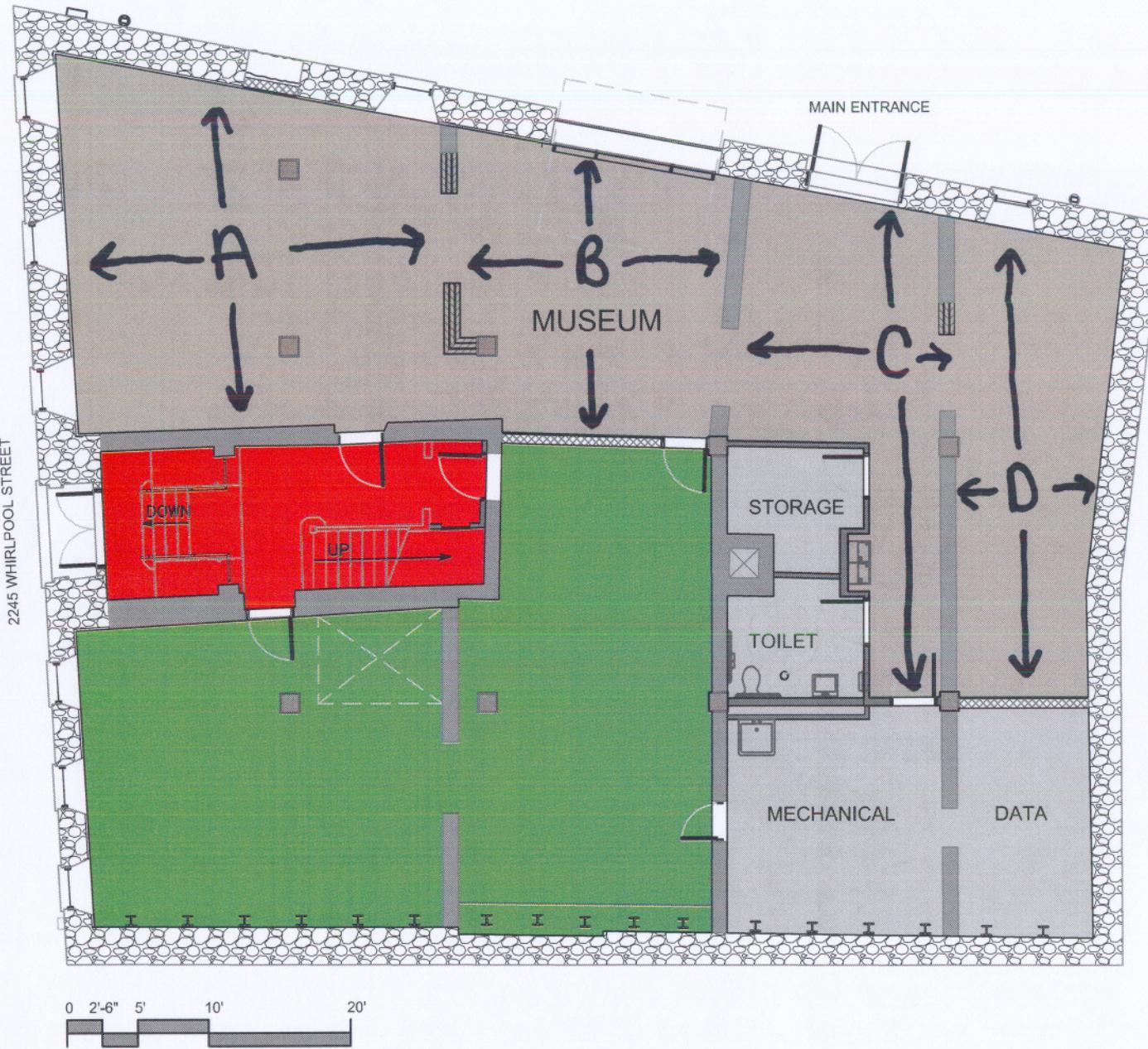
The City of Niagara Falls reserves the right to:

1. Amend, modify, or withdraw this RFP
2. Revise requirements of this RFP
3. Require supplemental statements or information from any consultant
4. Accept or reject any or all responses hereto

5. Extend the deadline for submission of responses thereto
6. Cancel this RFP, in whole or in part, if the City deems it in its best interest to do so. The City may exercise the foregoing rights at any time without notice and without liability to any proposing consultant or any other party for their expenses incurred in the preparation of the responses hereto or otherwise.

**C. Nondiscrimination and Affirmative Action Policies:**

It is the policy of the State of New York and the City of Niagara Falls to comply with all federal, state and local laws, policies, orders, rules and regulations which prohibit unlawful discrimination because of race, creed, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, disability or marital status, and to take affirmative action in working with contracting parties to ensure that Minority- and Women-Owned Business Enterprises (M/WBEs), Minority Group members and women share in the economic opportunities generated by the City's participation in projects or initiatives, and/or the use of City funds. The selected consultant(s) shall be required to use best efforts to provide for the meaningful participation of United States M/WBEs, Minority Group Members and Women in the execution of this contract.



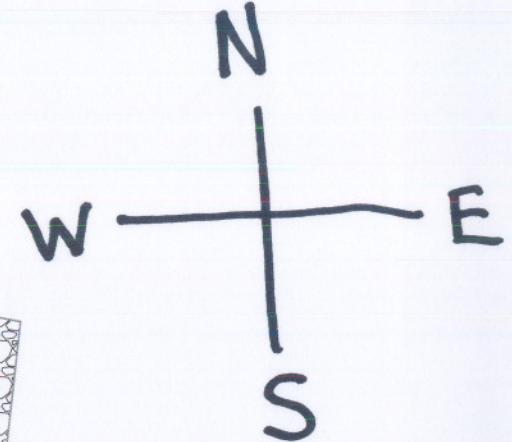
FIRST FLOOR PLAN

U.S. CUSTOMHOUSE HISTORIC RESTORATION PROJECT

MARCH 15, 2010

CITY OF NIAGARA FALLS  
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WENDEL DUCHSCHERER  
ARCHITECTS & ENGINEERS  
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LEGEND

MUSEUM	1740 SF
SUPPORT	560 SF
CIRCULATION	275 SF
FUTURE DEVELOPMENT	1140 SF



## Photos

[Section A](#)

[Section B](#)

[Section C](#)

[Section D](#)