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St. Pete Mayor Kenneth T. Welch announces Historic Gas Plant District RFP for Tropicana Field site redevelopment

St. Petersburg, FL — St. Pete Mayor Kenneth T. Welch announced Wednesday, June 29 that the city is canceling the RFP issued in July, 2020 and launching a new RFP process.

The decision comes after careful consideration and extensive communication with City staff regarding city needs, current economic trends and changing workforce needs.

“As a County Commissioner, I was fully engaged in this process — attending meetings and presentations, speaking with the Kriseman administration and prospective development groups in my role as the County Commissioner whose district was based in St. Petersburg. I am impressed with the efforts from the two finalists in the current RFP process — Midtown Development and Sugar Hill Community Partners. They have listened to our community and have responded with their vision of the development of these 86 acres in accordance with our community needs in terms of housing, office space, meeting space, green space and impactful economic development, including inclusive opportunities for local and minority businesses. There has also been robust community engagement in developing a vision for this generational project,” said St. Petersburg Mayor Kenneth T. Welch.

“However, our environment has changed in many ways since the initial RFP was issued in July of 2020, and we must ensure the RFP meets our current environment and realities and incorporates the most up-to-date information.”

Among the new conditions that must be considered:

- The Pandemic has changed the way we work and has affected the potential need for office space.
- The cost of rental housing and home ownership has skyrocketed, bringing higher priority to the need for affordable and workforce housing.
- Supply chain and labor issues are impacting the cost of capital projects.
- The need for intentional equity and equitable development is highlighted by results of the city’s Disparity Study and Structural Racism report completed after the issuance of the original RFP.
- The community’s desire for equity is reflected in the Community Benefits model adopted by City Council last year.

This is also an important opportunity to bring certainty to the future of the Tampa Bay Rays in St. Petersburg. The Welch administration has spent significant time building and rebuilding relationships with key partners, including City Council, Pinellas County, members of the community and the Tampa Bay Rays. Significant progress is being made with our partners toward developing the right model for the Historic Gas Plant District redevelopment, focused on inclusive progress and equitable development for our entire city.

While the expiration of the Rays lease on Tropicana Field in 2027 represents a real time constraint, it is crucial that this generational project be done right. Emphasis must be placed on meeting the city’s needs, delivering progress for our residents and building a district that will be a world class destination to visit, live and work.

“I am optimistic we will choose that right path, one that will bring jobs, equitable and diverse business opportunities, meet our need for housing, meeting space and innovative economic drivers, and support a state-of-the-art home for the Rays for decades to come,” Mayor Welch said.

Mayor Welch has instructed staff to target the new RFP release for August. The city will also hold a series of community outreach events as the RFP is developed and through the decision-making process once the RFP has been issued. We will also be soliciting feedback online. A form to provide input is available on the city’s website at stpete.org/gasplant.

More information on the Historic Gas Plant District redevelopment process can be found at stpete.org/gasplant.

FAQs

- **Why was the original RFP canceled?**

- Much has changed in our city since first contracting with HKS Architects in 2016 to develop a conceptual site master plan, the concept including a new ballpark was completed in March 2017 and the concept without a new ballpark was completed in November 2018. From there, the city spent much of 2019 and early 2020 evaluating sustainable and equitable best practices for the site before opening the RFP in July of 2020. Since then, our city has suffered through the economic effects of a pandemic and is currently in the midst of a nationwide affordable housing crisis. These effects were not fully realized in the original plans. A new set of priorities and considerations should be given to the site with these new challenges and opportunities the city is facing.

- **Will a new process create delays? If so, how long?**

- We expect a new RFP process to be relatively quick. Based on previous public input, we understand much of what the community is looking for in a redevelopment plan, including access to high-wage jobs, affordable housing, recreation, economic activity, education, and inclusivity for the community displaced by the original stadium development. We will hold a series of public outreach events to receive input on citizens' vision and priorities. The original RFP process included a developer recommendation but did not progress further than that. The new process will include developer proposals and additional public input reflective of our current challenges, priorities, and opportunities. We expect the RFP planning, release, and selection process to move quickly.

- **Will a new process cause costs to rise considering construction prices have risen since the original RFP?**

- Supply chain challenges and inflation have indeed caused prices to rise, which will be reflected in new proposals. However, those cost increases would have been absorbed into the original RFP proposals, meaning a new process will not have any meaningful impact to the overall cost or city contribution to the project at the time of construction.

- **What priorities are you looking for in new proposals?**

- **Stadium model:** We are soliciting proposals containing a new baseball stadium, in lieu of including proposals that contemplate a site without one. We believe this model will provide certainty as it relates to the Tampa Bay Rays.

- **Affordable Housing:** As our population has increased, and with a new housing demand that is rapidly increasing property values and rents in our city, affordable housing must be a key component of any new development at the Historic Gas Plant District site.
- **Gas Plant Promise:** The site also must effectively recognize, honor, and support the community displaced due to construction of the original stadium, in an impactful and sustainable manner.
- **Support Community Pillars for Progress:** Further, the site should consider equitable access to all residents, visitors and stakeholders while continuing to pursue equitable opportunities for education, youth opportunities, economic activity and recreation. We are also mindful of any city subsidy and will consider that in all proposals.
- **Will the Rays be considered as a potential developer?**
 - This option is available to the Rays as they chart a path forward for continued Major League Baseball in St. Petersburg. The new RFP process will allow them to bid and/or partner, and any proposal they choose to participate in will be considered through the same lens as any other proposals. The overarching goal is to choose a site plan that advances the vision of our community for inclusive progress.
- **Did you have concerns with the development proposal recommended by former Mayor Rick Kriseman? If so, what were they?**
 - The decision to open a new RFP process is not related to former Mayor Kriseman's recommendation. Mayor Kriseman and his team considered community input and city needs within their criteria. However, the length of time since the RFP issuance, and our current environment and circumstances, warrant a fresh look. We recognize the prior administration's diligence and look forward to building on their foundational work.
- **Can you legally cancel the existing RFP and start anew?**
 - Yes. The RFP contains language that allows the city to cancel for any reason and start anew.
- **Do we expect legal challenges?**
 - Because it is clear the RFP can be canceled, there would be no basis for legal challenges.

- **What does the new RFP include?**
 - That will be determined during the 4-5 week RFP development process. We know that we will be soliciting proposals with a baseball stadium to provide certainty on the stadium question. We will also host a series of public outreach sessions and solicit public comment on our website seeking input on community priorities.
- **What is the new timeline for developer selection?**
 - We hope to have a selection by end of year.
- **Do we expect Sugar Hill and Midtown to reapply?**
 - Yes, and we encourage them to continue to engage in the process.