



## MEMORANDUM

**Date:** December 26, 2012

**To:** President, Vice-President, Council and Mayor

**From:** Jeff Naftal, Borough Manager

**Subject:** Selection of Comprehensive Plan Consultant

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### Background:

A Comprehensive Plan is a document that municipalities rely on to set the future direction of their community and is the required basis for zoning, subdivision and land use regulations. They are supposed to be updated every ten (10) years but the last time the Borough's Comprehensive Plan was updated was in 1995. On October 17, 2012, the Borough advertised a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a consultant to update the Borough's Comprehensive Plan. Proposals were due by November 16, 2012.

### Discussion:

The RFP called for detailed submittals with cost estimates to be sealed and opened at the end of the evaluation process. We received three (3) proposals by the deadline from:

The EADS Group – Altoona  
Environmental Planning and Design – Pittsburgh  
Interface Studio – Philadelphia

The evaluation of the proposals was done by Grant Shiring and Tom Bartnik who are members of the Planning Commission and me. Each of us reviewed the written proposals first. We then interviewed all three consultants and evaluated them again based on their presentations. Finally, we opened their sealed cost estimates and re-evaluated the proposals in light of their estimated costs.

We all ranked the proposals in the same way for all 3 phases of the evaluation, with Interface Studio first, Environmental Planning second, and EADS third. There were many reasons why Interface Studio came out on top. Among them are:

- **Outstanding graphic ability.** While the other 2 firms just listed recommendations and incorporated standard graphics like existing photos, charts and graphs, Interface Studio went well beyond that by employing an extensive use of graphics and illustrations to express the community's ideas. This will prove extremely beneficial when debating controversial topics and understanding complex ideas - like building façades and parking improvements - to foster community consensus.
- **Extensive toolbox of award-winning public engagement strategies.** All firms are putting social media and technology into their repertoire of public engagement strategies. But, Interface Studio appears to more effectively employ these tools and harness their full potential, not to just include them simply to stay with the times. They also incorporate on-the-ground public engagement activities to actively tap the community through personal interaction at multiple points throughout the process. The firm has been recognized by respected national organizations like APA and ASLA for this type of work.
- **Past work examples.** Interface Studios past work examples are extremely well-written and organized. The reader can follow a clear outline of specific visions, goals, objectives and recommendations that are supported by extensive research and public input. This is invaluable when attempting to implement the recommendations and delegate responsibility for certain tasks. It also helps when measuring our performance and completion of objectives. Their end product stood out compared to the other 2 firms.
- **Deliberate in their choice of projects.** Many firms do these types of projects too much; they become robots and simply go through the motions. Interface Studio convincingly stressed that they take pride in producing the best quality project and tailoring the process and end result to the place. They set a limit for the projects they take on. The evaluation committee felt that we can be assured that the Dormont Comprehensive Plan will remain a high priority for the duration of the process and the team will not set us aside and take on more clients than they can handle. They keep their current client list low to ensure the highest quality products for the clients at the time.
- **The plan created will function as a brand and marketing tool.** This is a turning point for Dormont. The physical environment (buildings, streets, etc.) is wearing out and in need of new life. To many but our residents, Dormont is the place you drive through on your way to Pittsburgh or Mt. Lebanon. But, that could and should change. Dormont has to invest in itself by retaining a top quality team with a proven track record of generating and implementing transformative community visions and initiatives that help set the community apart. Developing a community brand is what set Interface Studio far apart from the other 2 firms.

A copy of Interface Studio's Scope of Service is attached to this report. As you can see the scope of the services being provided is extensive and the items noted above, in particular the community outreach and branding and marketing do not come cheap. Therefore, we were not surprised when we opened the sealed prices and found Interface Studio to be not only more expensive than the other 2 firms but over our budget of \$80,000 as well. In fact, while their cost was more than their competitors, their hours were more than double the proposed hours of their competitors as well.

Their proposal calls for a cost of \$94,495 plus some direct costs to be determined at the end of the project for travel expenses. All three of us on the evaluation committee believe that it is in the Borough's best interest to pay the increased costs up front for the long term benefit of the Comprehensive Plan and community branding that Interface Studio will provide.

If Council selects Interface Studio, I would propose increasing the Planning Consultant line item in the Planning and Zoning Department budget to equal what the final cost for this project would be. Funds for this would come from the Contingency line item but the transfer would not occur until the project is completed. I would then come back to Council with a final cost, change order to gain Council approval for that final cost, and a request to transfer the funds necessary to pay for this project.

Recommendation:

I recommend that Council select Interface Studios to provide consulting services for the Comprehensive Plan update as outlined in the attached scope of services at a cost of \$94,495, subject to modification of costs when the project is completed.

JN

Attachments

Cc: Planning Commission