



Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for Lead Development Partner

“4 Pack” // Columbus Downtown 2030 Plan

June 1, 2026

Introduction

During the creation of the Columbus Downtown 2030 Strategic Plan, the concept of “community” led the conversations. We want to create a downtown where people – residents, tourists, and businesses – want to be. We need to bridge existing gaps in development and support the existing spaces and places.

But how do we build an improved downtown in partnership with private development partners and maintain and enhance community? The Columbus Downtown 2030 Strategic Plan identifies numerous sites for potential development. Some are clustered together, like the properties surrounding 4th and Brown Streets, but most are sequestered from each other.

We want the properties to meet their best potential while contributing to the overall downtown and the Columbus Downtown 2030 Strategic Plan. For this reason, we want to introduce a concept for your inspiration: campus.

Traditionally, the term “campus” refers to a collection of buildings and spaces that serve an academic community, a cultural institution, a corporate entity, or other public serving entities. Our downtown serves as the campus for all of these. Government buildings and services are spread across multiple blocks. Our corporate partners – like Cummins – occupy several buildings. Every two years, our downtown becomes an art park. And IU Bloomington’s Eskenazi School of Art, Architecture, and Design’s J. Irwin Miller Architecture Program anchors our downtown. Add in our other businesses, institutions, residents, and visitors, downtown is already a vibrant campus!

Campuses are a collective; they act as one identifiable entity. But the buildings and spaces are purposely individualized. It is the coordination of these places and their commonalities that stitch them all together as a cohesive location.

To build on our “campus”, we are asking developers to think about individual solutions for these sites that connect with the other buildings and spaces across downtown in coordination with the Columbus Downtown 2030 Strategic Plan. We are pursuing a two-pronged approach through the Request for Qualifications and the Request for Information processes. In the RFQ, we are asking for partners who want to lead the development of properties around 4th and Brown Streets, also known as the “4 Pack” properties. In the RFI, we are asking developers to share their vision for other downtown sites and how they would execute their development.

Developers are welcome to submit to both the RFQ and the RFI; the submissions can be coordinated together as part of a larger development concept. But developers are also able to submit to one or the other. We will consider any idea you share based on its individual and collective merits.



Downtown Columbus is critical to our overall quality of life and economic strength and must reflect our community's best attributes and highest ambitions. These sites and their potential developments are vital to the continued growth and health of our "campus." They have the ability to impact the lives of our citizens, residents, and businesses, as well as on our ability to attract and retain a talented workforce for generations to come. Our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who takes the time to respond to the RFQ and RFI. Welcome to our community!

Purpose

As part of implementing portions of the recently completed Columbus Downtown 2030 Strategic Plan ("CD 2030 Plan"), the City of Columbus is seeking an organization or team to serve as the Lead Development Partner for a collection of properties collectively known as the "4 Pack".

The 4 Pack sites are located at the western terminus of 4th Street at Brown Street. They are identified in the CD 2030 Plan as "Catalytic Sites." In addition to private development, the 4 Pack includes the development of public sites and structures as part of the "Finish 4th" concept identified in the CD 2030 plan.

The City and its partners conducted planning and community engagement activities as part of the CD 2030 Plan and the subsequent City Implementation Action Teams work. While other properties and opportunities may be incorporated into the Lead Development Partner's work, the 4 Pack development is the City's priority. These properties can also be associated with the RFI for Development Partners for Opportunity Sites but it is not required. Submitting a response to the RFI is not a requirement of this RFQ.

The selected Lead Development Partner will undertake the redevelopment of the city-owned sites and negotiate with owners of non-city-owned sites for rights to redevelop. The Lead Development Partner can self-perform development, partner with other developers, act as a "master developer", or any combination. The Lead Development Partner is responsible for: contract negotiations, site due diligence, marketing, developer selection, tenant/end-user selection, infrastructure development, fundraising, public-private partnership agreement development, and other tasks required to meet the city's expectations for redevelopment as outlined in this RFQ, the CD 2030 plan, and other documents and agreements as identified.

Respondents should bring a creative approach backed by demonstrated results in redevelopment, planning, outreach and communications, financing and funding, collaboration, and public-private partnerships. Responses will underscore their approach in meeting the community's desires and building on the city's history in architectural design, placemaking, and innovative development.



History

Founded in 1821, Columbus, Indiana, is centrally located on Interstate 65 between Indianapolis, Cincinnati, and Louisville. It is home to over 50,000 residents and is the Bartholomew County seat. Despite its size, Columbus generates significant out-of-state tourism, in large part due to its commitment to architecture and design. While situated squarely in the Midwest, the community is unique because 1 in 6 residents were born in another country.

Cummins Inc., a Fortune 200 company, was founded in Columbus in 1919 and continues to be headquartered in Downtown Columbus. Columbus and the surrounding region have become a central manufacturing hub, home to the headquarters and manufacturing sites of many other important companies such as Toyota Material Handling, Dorel Juvenile Group, and Enkei America. Healthcare, information technology, and tourism comprise the other key industry sectors of the local economy. In addition, Columbus serves as a regional retail and post-secondary education hub.

In the 1960s, Columbus community leaders articulated a clear and compelling vision: “We want to be the best community of our size in the country.” The community has devoted itself to achieving and maintaining that vision in all respects—educational offerings, economic strength, the design of public places, parks, and recreation facilities, and overall quality of life. In addition, the community strives to balance a heritage of Midwestern values with a tenacious practice of inclusivity for all who now live in and visit Columbus.

Today, visitors can walk through a compact downtown and see dozens of striking modern buildings, several of them National Historic Landmarks, all woven into a setting that still includes Victorian houses and traditional streets. This unusual concentration of high-quality architecture in such a small place has led Columbus to be ranked among the top American cities for design and nicknamed the “Athens of the Prairie.”

What makes the architecture of Columbus significant is not only how it looks, but what it represents. Through the Cummins Foundation, the community helped pay architects’ design fees for public projects, on the condition that respected designers be chosen, turning factories’ success into better schools, fire stations, and other civic buildings for everyone. Many of these buildings emphasize light, openness, and simple forms, making public spaces feel welcoming and useful rather than grand and intimidating. As a result, Columbus has become a kind of open-air classroom where residents and visitors can see how thoughtful architecture can shape daily life, strengthen community pride, and give a small city an outsized cultural identity.

Columbus’ downtown is the heart of our city, a central gathering place, our community’s “living room.” While the vibrancy of our downtown is a specific goal, it also contributes to our community’s success. Downtown Columbus is critical to our overall quality of life and economic strength and must reflect our community’s best attributes and highest ambitions.



Over time, the downtown has been the subject of a series of redevelopment efforts to ensure that downtown evolves to remain relevant and vibrant. The Columbus Redevelopment Commission, along with the City and private entities, has been instrumental in the development of Downtown Columbus.

The City also recognizes challenges in our downtown. In a post-pandemic world, the changes in return-to-work culture mean fewer office workers downtown. There are changes to the Cummins Inc. downtown campus, and large land parcels are becoming available for development and purchase. There was a fire causing significant damage to a block of historic buildings downtown, and there are fewer retail and experiential amenities downtown to attract residents and visitors. In addition, as available properties are developed, the aging infrastructure and barriers to entry must be addressed.

The City identified the following key questions from Columbus 2030 strategic development plan:

- How do we build a downtown where people want to be?
- How do we maximize the use of the spaces and places downtown?
- What gaps do we have downtown, and how do we address those gaps?

Our Columbus community has a long tradition of collaborating with many stakeholders to solve thorny problems. In keeping with this legacy, through this plan, we seek to cement Downtown Columbus firmly as the vibrant and engaging heart of a strong community.

Downtown Columbus is our community’s “living room,” comprising restaurant and retail establishments, arts and entertainment districts, educational opportunities, event venues, office space, and nonprofit organizations – all contributing to our Downtown fabric. Columbus is proud of its downtown programming, which provides additional opportunities for residents and visitors alike to come downtown. Mill Race Park and riverfront access are immediately adjacent to the downtown corridor. While the downtown may be the focus of this plan, it is just one of the centers of energy in our community.

Findings and Recommendations of the Columbus Downtown 2030 Strategic Plan

Through several phases of community listening, stakeholder engagement and public input, the research team identified a series of strategic objectives for the downtown, including making the downtown district a vibrant residential neighborhood, enhancing and expanding access to Mill Race Park, and diversifying downtown offerings.

Market research indicated the most promising short-term demand for downtown to be multifamily residential development, with medium-term demand for additional Hotel spaces and longer-term demand for Office and Retail space. From the research, three primary development objectives were identified: Expand & enhance 4th Street entertainment district; Activate historic Washington Street through strategic infill, redevelopment and public realm programming; and create an Avenue of the



Architects along the 5th street corridor that provides residential housing opportunities alongside further commercial and public realm development.

The findings provided a comprehensive framework for future development of Downtown Columbus with five clearly defined goals:

- Develop and redevelop sites throughout the downtown, embracing urban infill – with an emphasis on housing
- Concentrate active uses on the ground floor of three focus corridors: Washington Street, 4th Street, and 5th Street
- Forge stronger connections between 4th and 5th Streets and Mill Race Park
- Create new destinations along the three focus corridors and within Mill Race Park
- Connect and enhance elements of the public realm with a focus on a comfortable pedestrian experience

With these goals in mind, the plan outlines specific development concepts for a number of priority sites that have been identified as opportunities for near-term development, including many properties currently owned by the Columbus Redevelopment Commission. Alongside catalytic development, the plan also identifies policy initiatives, partnership opportunities, and supportive programming that will further enliven the downtown and make it a regional destination for residents and visitors alike.

View the Columbus Downtown 2030 Strategic Plan project website at:

<https://downtowncolumbus2030.com/>

Ongoing and recently completed efforts

Riverfront Redevelopment:

The East Fork of the White River runs alongside the Columbus downtown district and historic Mill Race Park. The riverfront area between the 2nd and 3rd Street bridges has long been identified as a priority site in need of revitalization and repair. Over many years and several iterations, the Our River... Our Riverfront project has sought to address the many safety and environmental concerns the area presents, including the failing low-head dam; barriers to emergency personnel access; erosion of the dam that risks exposure to a nearby delisted superfund site; and the challenging connection points between popular segments of the People Trail. After many years of delays due to permitting, rising construction costs, and an evolution of project scope, this vital project is now under way.

In 2025, Columbus Redevelopment oversaw a redesign of the project based on the recommendations from a community-led Guiding Team. The new concept addresses each of the above safety concerns,



while providing community value and economic stimulus through expansion of the area’s trail system, strengthening the connection between downtown and Mill Race for both residents and visitors alike, and by providing a new riverfront community gathering area with a new access point for in-river recreation.

<https://www.columbus.in.gov/redevelopment/riverfront-reimagine-project/>

Downtown Entrance Plaza

The Downtown Entrance Plaza, which encompasses the POW/MIA/Law Enforcement Plaza, Public Safety Plaza and Robert D. Garton Veterans Plaza, is undergoing a complete redesign. The original plaza was designed by Michael VanValkenburgh and Associates (MVVA) in 2000. The site is approximately 1.5 acres and encompasses two separate plazas at the north and south of State Road 46, which sees nearly 30,000 vehicles pass through daily. This area serves as a main entry into Columbus but has been overgrown and underutilized for years. The redesign and redevelopment of this site will integrate the Downtown Entrance Plaza into other current or future developments in the area.

<https://www.columbus.in.gov/redevelopment/downton-entrance-plaza/>

2nd Street Thoroughfare

The 2nd Street Thoroughfare Project is in response to a desire to extend the pedestrian-friendly experience downtown.

The project will feature several modifications to the existing conditions such as: Narrowing the traffic lanes as a traffic calming measure; integrating on-street parking; installing safety bump outs and buffers; creating an on-street connection to the Taylor apartments; installing pedestrian crosswalks; and, planting new landscaping.

<https://www.columbus.in.gov/redevelopment/projects/2nd-street-thoroughfare/>

1821 Trail

The 1821 Trail was announced as the seminal project for the Columbus Area Bicentennial in 2021. The “1821” Trail extension was constructed along First Street from the Haw Creek Trail, which ends at Lafayette Street, to Water Street. This trail extension includes architectural and art elements encompassing the 2021 Bicentennial theme of “Common Ground.” The 1821 Trail is a key addition to the Columbus Park Foundation trail system and connects our 26 miles of trail extending throughout the city. The Riverfront project will later complete the final piece from Water Street to Mill Race Park.



<https://www.columbus.in.gov/redevelopment/1821-trail/>

Mixed-Use Development

In 2023, Flaherty & Collins Properties opened the Taylor, a 200-unit multi-family development at 2nd and Lafayette. Identified as a priority by the City and supported by the Columbus Redevelopment Commission, the development included 1 and 2 bedroom apartments, townhouse-style units, retail, and parking.

Two additional mixed-use developments are currently underway with support from the Redevelopment Commission.

The 11th and Washington Streets project with Rubicon Development Group will include: 120 units of multi-family housing, 10% of which are to be considered workforce housing at a 20% rent reduction; a 143-space parking garage; and, 5,300 sq. ft. of first-floor commercial and tenant common space.

The 6th and Washington Streets project with Flaherty & Collins will include: four to five-stories of construction; 10,000 square feet of commercial space on the 1st floor; and, 50 one and two bedroom apartments on the upper floors.

<https://www.columbus.in.gov/redevelopment/projects/overview/>

Columbus Downtown 2030 Strategic Plan Implementation

The City of Columbus and the Columbus Redevelopment Commission have identified community members and stakeholders from various backgrounds, expertise and roles to support the implementation of these recommendations. Led by a steering committee, each working group will focus on one specific area of the implementation plan: real estate & economic development, public realm & infrastructure, and programming & activation.

The implementation teams meet to prioritize recommendations, identify funding sources, timelines and partners for projects over the short, medium, and long-term. They collaborate with stakeholders to ensure a successful, collaborative community-wide effort to bring the vision of Columbus Downtown 2030 to life.

As part of the CD 2030 Plan's programming and activation working group's efforts, during the 2025-2026 winter season the Office of Downtown Development held the Seasonal Entertainment Arts Recreation Space (SEARS) Winter Market in the former Sears building. Supporting the CD 2030 Plan's goals, this pilot program reinforced a more vibrant, connected, and people-centered downtown. The market included a rotation of local vendors, live entertainment, a beer garden, food trucks, coffee drinks, art activities,



activities for families and youth, and art installations. The pilot program was considered a success and demonstrates the need for downtown programming and activation.

The CD 2030 Plan, frequently referenced, can be found here:

<https://www.columbus.in.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Printable-Final-Report-s.pdf>

Sites for Consideration

As part of the CD 2030 Plan implementation, the Real Estate & Economic Development working group identified the “4 Pack” redevelopment as a key priority. Through a selected Lead Development Partner, the working group wants to see the redevelopment of identified catalytic sites in a manner largely aligned with the CD 2030 Plan. The primary catalytic sites are the Sears Parking Lot, the Sears Building, and the Post Office. The Post Office site is not a part of this RFQ but is included in the RFI.

Sears Parking Lot Site: Building Development

The Sears Parking Lot site is owned by the Columbus Redevelopment Commission and includes 3.75 acres of land located between Brown and Lindsey Streets, north of 3rd Street, and south of the Hotel Indigo. The parking lot was constructed as part of the Commons and Courthouse Center development built in 1973 and included a separate building for a Sears automotive center.

Concepts for redevelopment are identified in the CD 2030 Plan (pages 64-65, 86-90, and 171). The primary concept suggests a 200 key mid-tier hotel, a 50,000 square foot conference center, and a 270 space parking structure. Alternative quantities are acceptable but respondents must include a hotel, a conference center with at least 25,000 square feet, and structured parking to accommodate the hotel and events. Hotel and conference center concepts may include additional uses and functions such as retail, residential, and mixed use developments. The temporary food and beverage and casual recreation venue (pages page 91) will not be considered as part of this RFQ.

Sears Parking Lot Site: Public Event Plaza and Structures

This site is also a key component of the “Finish 4th” concept identified on pages 64 and 65 of the CD 2030 Plan. Specifics of the concept can be found on pages 86-87, 169, and 194. Conceptually, 4th Street would extend to Lindsey Street from its termination at Brown Street but be dedicated to pedestrian and placemaking activities. The 2030 plan calls for an event plaza, a market hall, and a pedestrian bridge connecting 4th Street to Mill Race Park. Activations similar to the Seasonal Entertainment Arts Recreation Space (SEARS) Winter Market held during the 2025-2026 winter season would occur in the proposed event plaza and market hall. Ownership, maintenance, and operation of these public infrastructure components are negotiable but the construction of these are expected as part of the responses to this RFQ.

Sears Building Site

Bound by 3rd, 4th, Brown, and Jackson Streets, the Sears Block is the last remaining portion of the 1973 Commons and Courthouse Center development design by architect Cesar Pelli. The 2.3 acre site is home to the Yes Cinema, a non-profit independent cinema and conference center. The building also hosted the S.E.A.R.S. Winter Market in 2025 and 2026. The building and site are owned by the Columbus Redevelopment Commission.

The CD 2030 Plan identifies a primary concept and two alternative concepts on pages 64-65, 80-85, 157, and 163. Development may incorporate any of the concepts. Other alternative developments may be considered but must be identified during this RFQ process.

There are two priorities for this site:

- 1.) Activation for most of the street level frontage on 4th, Brown, and Jackson Streets is a requirement. This can include restaurants, bars, and entertainment venues.
- 2.) Yes Cinema remaining on site is desired. Concepts ideally allow the opportunity for Yes Cinema to expand up to 20,000 square feet to accommodate additional screens. Ownership and/or lease rates of this portion of the site is negotiable.

While the building was originally designed by an internationally recognized architect, it is understood that what remains is a small portion of the original design and does not provide the same contribution to the city's architectural legacy that it once incorporated. The city does not have any historic preservation requirements as part of the redevelopment requirements. However, opportunities for recognition of the building's history and contributions, either through adaptive reuse or the creative incorporation of design elements or existing building components, would be welcome.

If developed in a manner that establishes public spaces, such as the courtyard and connecting alleys identified in the concept on page 81, the construction of these sites are expected as part of the overall site redevelopment. However, the ownership, maintenance, and operation of these public infrastructure components are negotiable.

Infrastructure Improvements

Pedestrian-focused infrastructure is vital for the redevelopment sites. The CD 2030 Plan (pages 64-67 and 184) identifies infrastructure improvements as part of the Finish 4th concept. In particular, it calls for pedestrianized streetscape and activation on 4th Street including festival lighting. Also in the CD 2030 Plan are corridor improvements as part of the Avenue of the Architects concept.

The selected Lead Development Partner is expected to contribute to the infrastructure and amenities improvements as well as the branding initiatives. These contributions are applicable at varying scales on all public right-of-way adjacent to the sites but the greatest investments are expected along 4th and 5th



Streets. The design and construction within the public right-of-way will be coordinated with the City and its departments.

In addition, the City may pursue the designation of a rail quiet zone downtown as recommended in the CD 2030 Plan (see PR-15 on page 191). If pursued, the selected Lead Development Partner is expected to support the city's pursuit of this development.

Additional Site for Consideration

The City and the Columbus Capital Foundation will consider inclusion of additional sites as part of the Lead Development Partner agreement. The Lead Development Partner may reference its response to the RFI for Development Partners for Opportunity Sites without providing a duplicate copy. Including a copy of the RFI in the RFQ response will make it public record.

Developer Considerations

Permits and Plans

All projects must obtain all local, state, and federal licenses and permits as identified in ordinances, laws, regulations, and codes. Local resources related to construction and development can be found at:

<https://www.columbus.in.gov/planning/development-building-services/>

Covenants

There are no known environmental or historical covenants on the properties specifically identified in this RFQ.

Historic Preservation

While this RFQ suggests adaptive reuse, the properties are not subject to historic preservation regulations.



Design Requirements

All sites are subject to local zoning and land use regulations, including requirements regarding design and layout. In addition, the CD 2030 Plan has design recommendations that should be considered as a requirement of the offered sites.

Public Incentives

The Lead Development Partner may pursue public incentives but the selection of a Lead Development Partner through this RFQ does not guarantee the receipt of public incentives. Public incentives processes are identified under “Project Incentives” at:

<https://www.columbus.in.gov/planning/development-building-services/>

Property Transfer

The transfer of properties controlled by the Columbus Redevelopment Commission is subject to IC 36-7-14-22 regarding requirements and procedures of the public sale of real properties.

The transfer of properties controlled by the Columbus Capital Foundation is subject to foundation board approval.

Local participation

The Lead Development Partner will commit to efforts that will promote the utilization of local development partners, contractors, and vendors. Potential Lead Development Partners will share a plan prior to a finalized Lead Development Partner selection.

Local companies and organizations interested in engaging potential Lead Development Partners can make their interest known by email (send to mary.krupinski@jsheld.com) and/or attending the pre-submission information session. Interest made known by Monday, July 13 will be shared with potential partners through an addendum.



Submission requirements

Responses to this RFQ shall consist of the following

1. Cover letter
 - a. Include the name and address of the primary point of contact
2. Lead Development Partner Team Organization
 - a. Identify all companies and organizations that comprise the Lead Development Partner's teams
 - i. Include firm name, business address, phone number, and email address
 - ii. Identify type of ownership and name and location of parent company and subsidiaries, if any
 - iii. List number of full-time employees, Part-time employees, and consultants routinely engaged by each team member
 - b. Share an organizational chart identifying the individuals involved
 - i. Include name, employer, title, business address, phone number, and email address
 - c. Share the resume/CV of the project manager and other key personnel
3. Qualifications and Experience
 - a. Describe recent experience relevant to this project with emphasis placed on projects managed by the key personnel to be assigned to this project.
 - b. Submit three references with names, addresses, and phone numbers of those familiar with the consultant's ability, experience, and reliability in the performance and management of projects of a similar nature.
4. Initial Plans for Development
 - a. For each property and component, identify the following
 - i. Anticipated redevelopment scope including uses, functions, sizes, and quantities
 - ii. Team members/partners participating in redevelopment
 - iii. Anticipated split between private, public, and philanthropic funding sources
 - iv. Anticipated timeline for project development
 - v. Post-development operation/management plan
5. Anticipated agreements
 - a. Share draft/sample agreements expected with development
 - b. Do not include fees, commissions, or other financial information

Responses to the RFQ should not exceed 20 pages single sided (not including anticipated agreements). Responses should be delivered electronically to mary.krupinski@jsheld.com. PDF's should be limited to 10 MB.



Evaluation Criteria

Responses will be evaluated by a team made up of the CD 2030 Plan Project Manager, the Columbus Redevelopment Director, the Columbus Community Development Director, a representative of the Columbus Capital Foundation, and a mayoral appointee of the CD 2030 Plan Real Estate & Economic Development working group.

Considerations in the evaluation will include, but is not necessarily limited to, the following:

1. Qualifications of the firm and key personnel
2. Similar projects completed by the team
3. Understanding of the project and the community of Columbus
4. Development plans for each site
5. Commitment to design
6. Commitment to local participation
7. Development schedule
8. Completeness of submitted proposal with all elements required by the RFQ

RFQ Timeline

A pre-response information session will be held at the former Sears located at 323 Brown Street, Columbus, IN, on Tuesday, June 23 at 1p.

Questions regarding the RFQ are required by Monday, July 13 at noon. All questions must be submitted via email at mary.krupinski@jsheld.com.

Responses are due by 12pm Eastern on Friday, July 31, 2026. All responses will be submitted electronically. Delivered printed copies or electronic devices (i.e. thumb drives) will not be accepted.

Shortlisting of respondents will occur in early August 2026 with interviews to follow.

Proposals from selected respondents will be requested and received in September 2026.

A Lead Development Partner will be recommended in October 2026.

Contract negotiations and execution with a selected Lead Development Partner will occur in the fourth quarter of 2026.

Statements and Restrictions

The publishing of this RFQ and the receipt of responses is not a guarantee that a contract will be offered or executed. The City and its partners may reject any and all responses.



The respondents are responsible for their own expenses. There are no monetary obligations from the City or its partners.

All submission are subject to the Access to Public Records Act (APRA) as identified in Indiana Code 5-14-3. Respondents should not expect confidentiality of submitted information.

The City and its partners reserve the right to remove properties from consideration.

Communications prior to submission of RFQ responses shall be limited to Jason Larrison (jlarrison@jsheld.com) and Mary Krupinski (mary.krupinski@jsheld.com). Respondents should not contact the mayor, the redevelopment director or their staff, the community development director or their staff, the city council, the redevelopment commission, evaluation team members, or the Columbus Capital Foundation board.