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Council trims list for project *At least 3 firms to submit plans*

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Before the Chapel Hill Town Council narrowed the list of developers to potentially oversee a major downtown project Monday, three of the five firms remaining said they still are interested in the project.

Grubb Properties of Charlotte with LeylandAlliance LLC of Tuxedo, N.Y.; Pizzuti Cos. of Columbus, Ohio; and Ram Development Co. of Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., all said they would respond to the town's request for funding proposal for the project's first phase - which will include the construction of a mixed-use facility on lot 5, across from University Square, and the expansion of the Wallace deck on Rosemary Street.

East West Partners Management Co. Inc. of Chapel Hill, the only remaining local developer, said that although its intention is to apply, it would not make a final choice until it reviews the RFP documents from the town and project consultant John Stainback.

Representatives of Opus South Corp. of Alpharetta, Ga., were unavailable for comment Monday.

The council's unanimous move to create a short list Monday comes after the council's committee on lots 2 and 5 recommended last week to narrow the field to the five highest-scoring developers, based on Stainback's evaluations of responses to the request for qualifications proposals sent by the town in December.

Pizzuti Cos. Executive Vice President Joel Pizzuti said he is enthusiastic about responding to the RFP. "We think this is a good opportunity."

Macon Toledano, vice president of planning and development for LeylandAlliance, said Stainback's rankings encourages the company to submit a proposal.

The cost of submitting a proposal could fall between \$100,000 and \$150,000, Stainback estimated.

"It really depends on how much level of detail and effort they put into it," he said.

Pizzuti said his firm hadn't determined the potential cost of submitting a proposal yet. He now is working with Stainback elsewhere - the firm has submitted a proposal on an ongoing Winter Park, Fla., project on which Stainback is acting as a consultant and expects to hear

results from him soon.

Pizzuti said he is pleased with the thorough list Stainback drafted in the Chapel Hill project.

The collaboration between Grubb and LeylandAlliance topped the list with what Stainback called "a home run" RFQ response.

The committee decided to drop Federal Chapel Hill Associates LLC after seeing Stainback's scores, citing potential issues with the firm's financial capabilities.

"He holds developers' feet to the fire," Pizzuti said. "The right developers get short-listed."

But East West President Roger Perry expressed disdain for Stainback's evaluations. Stainback initially had called for East West to be dropped from the list, but the committee decided to keep it in the running.

"I thought Stainback handled it poorly, but the town has rectified his mistake," Perry said.

After the council finalizes the request for proposals document, the ball will be in the developers' court until May 2, the deadline for responding to the proposals.

Stainback and the committee are finishing the RFP document for the March 7 council meeting.

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