

COUNCIL COMMUNICATION

	Number:	26-205	Meeting:	June 8, 2026
	Agenda Item:	35	Roll Call:	26-0682
	Submitted by:	Carrie Kruse, Economic Development Administrator		

AGENDA HEADING:

Authorization to Issue Request for Proposals for the Adaptive Reuse and Redevelopment of Former Fire Station 4 at 917 University Avenue.

SYNOPSIS:

The City of Des Moines Office of Economic Development proposes issuance of a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the adaptive reuse and redevelopment of the former Fire Station 4 property at 917 University Avenue. The former fire station was decommissioned following construction of a new, modern fire station approximately one mile to the northwest. Fire Department operations have ceased at 917 University Avenue, and the City no longer has an operational need for the property.

The former Fire Station 4 property represents a rare opportunity to reposition a solid, well-kept, midcentury civic building and highly visible University Avenue site for continued use and public benefit. The building was constructed in 1959, contains approximately 8,600 square feet, and includes former apparatus bays, office and common areas, a commercial-style kitchen, overhead doors, a hose tower, and other features associated with its fire station use. The property totals approximately three-quarters of an acre, spans the block between 9th and 10th Streets along University Avenue, includes 18 on-site parking spaces, and sits within the River Bend Local Historic District.

The RFP is intended to identify a respondent with the experience, capacity, and redevelopment vision necessary to adaptively reuse the building and transform the site into an active, economically productive, community-serving asset. The City anticipates sale and transfer of the property to a selected developer, although lease options may also be considered if a proposal demonstrates strong public benefit, financial feasibility, and alignment with City redevelopment goals.

FISCAL IMPACT: NONE

No immediate fiscal impact associated with issuance of the RFP.

Future financial implications may include sale proceeds, lease revenue, future property tax generation, or potential City financial assistance depending on the selected proposal. Any future property disposition, development agreement, incentive agreement, or other legally binding commitment will return to City Council for consideration and approval.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- The building was constructed in 1959 and is a one-story, brick-on-masonry, midcentury civic structure totaling approximately 8,620 square feet.
- The property includes approximately 3,940 square feet of former apparatus bay/garage space and approximately 4,680 square feet of office, storage, lounge, locker room, kitchen, and circulation areas.
- Unique building features include three (3) front-facing overhead doors, one (1) rear-facing overhead door, a commercial-style kitchen, a hose tower, former dispatch room, locker rooms, original terrazzo flooring in portions of the building, and sealed concrete floors in the apparatus bay.
- The property totals approximately 32,869 square feet, or approximately three-quarters of an acre, and is located along University Avenue between 9th and 10th Streets.
- The property includes 18 on-site parking spaces. Additional on-street parking is available in the surrounding area, and the site is located along a high-frequency transit corridor with access to nearby bicycle and trail infrastructure.
- The property currently sits within the River Bend Local Historic District. Exterior site or building alterations will require review and approval by the City's Historic Preservation Commission.
- The City intends to pursue designation of the former Fire Station 4 as a Local Historic Landmark and individual listing on the National Register of Historic Places.
- The City is undertaking a process to rezone the property from P2 to MX2. MX2 is a mixed-use commercial zoning district intended for major corridors and properties accessible through multiple transportation modes.
- Potential uses allowed in the MX2 district include, but are not limited to, animal services, assembly and entertainment, consumer maintenance and repair services, personal services, studio/instructional services, day care, restaurant, retail sales, sport and recreation, and certain artisanal or limited production uses. Certain uses may require additional review or conditional use approval.
- Preservation and adaptive reuse of the existing building are key redevelopment goals.
- Future redevelopment should honor and incorporate the property's civic and neighborhood history, including its origins as part of Nash Park and its long-standing role as a public safety facility.
- Future redevelopment should activate the building and the University Avenue corridor, generate regular activity, support pedestrian, bicycle, transit, and neighborhood access, and contribute to a more active and engaging corridor environment.

- Future redevelopment should support neighborhood-serving economic activity, small business development, entrepreneurship, workforce development, education, commercial activity, or other uses that contribute to long-term community benefit.
- The site is located near several neighborhood and institutional anchors, including Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC) Urban Campus, Drake University, MercyOne Des Moines Medical Center, Evelyn K. Davis Center for Working Families, C Fresh Market, Reichardt Community Recreation Center, and nearby trail infrastructure.
- The City's ongoing University Avenue Corridor Study is evaluating safety, mobility, and corridor function along University Avenue between 9th Street and East 14th Street. Future redevelopment of this site should consider how the project can contribute to a more active, accessible, and neighborhood-serving University Avenue corridor.
- Community input has been central to development of the RFP. City staff gathered feedback through meetings with Near Northside Neighbors, one-on-one conversations with adjacent property owners, two public open houses, and an online survey.
- More than 100 attendees participated in the public open houses held in April 2026. Participants toured the building, reviewed historical materials, engaged with City staff, and provided feedback on potential future uses.
- Community feedback showed strong interest in active, visible, economically productive uses that contribute to daily neighborhood life, including small business and entrepreneurial space, food and beverage uses, flexible community-oriented commercial space, childcare and family-serving services, recreation, wellness, and youth-focused uses.
- Community feedback also identified concerns about additional concentration of social services in the surrounding area, auto-oriented or traffic-intensive uses, demolition of the building, and uses disconnected from neighborhood needs.
- The RFP anticipates that the selected respondent will purchase, redevelop, manage, and operate the site. However, the City may consider a long-term lease or other structure if the proposal demonstrates strong public benefit, financial feasibility, and alignment with redevelopment goals.
- The current fair market value of the property is \$640,000. Fair market rent is estimated at \$7.56 NNN per square foot and may be subject to change depending on the proposed use mix and market conditions.
- Respondents will be required to demonstrate redevelopment vision, team qualifications, financial approach, design approach, proposed development timeline, community engagement, and capacity to implement the proposed project.
- Evaluation criteria include development team track record and capacity, long-term value added to the property and surrounding area, physical quality and scope of development, historic preservation sensitivity, proposal detail, project program/use mix, community engagement, and community facility concentration and neighborhood impact where applicable.

- The RFP response deadline is Thursday, December 31, 2026, at 11:59 p.m.
- Staff anticipate selection of a preferred developer in early 2027, subject to the quality and responsiveness of proposals received.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION(S): NONE

BOARD/COMMISSION ACTION(S): NONE

ANTICIPATED ACTIONS AND FUTURE COMMITMENTS:

- City Council consideration of rezoning the property from P2 to MX2.
- City Council consideration of Local Historic Landmark designation, if advanced.
- City Council consideration of any future sale, lease, development agreement, incentive agreement, or other legally binding agreement associated with redevelopment of the property.
- Historic Preservation Commission review of exterior site or building alterations.
- Urban Design Review Board review if Tax Increment Financing (TIF) or other applicable incentive assistance is proposed.
- Additional City review and approval processes as required based on the selected proposal, including zoning, site plan, building permit, historic preservation, financial incentive, and property disposition approvals.

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