

# CITY *of* BOSTON

## REQUEST FOR IDEAS

*Activation of 555 Columbia Road*



Mayor's Office

**IMAGINE** BOSTON  
2030



Neighborhood Development



boston planning &  
development agency

## **OBJECTIVE**

The City of Boston is seeking ideas and a potential operator for the short-term activation of 555 Columbia Road in Upham's Corner (formerly the Bank of America).

## **INTRODUCTION**

In July 2017, Mayor Walsh released Imagine Boston 2030, the first citywide plan in more than 50 years. One area highlighted in that plan is Upham's Corner. Specifically, the plan envisions an enhanced neighborhood through investments in housing, small businesses, and transportation. The plan also calls for the creation of the city's first Arts Innovation District in Upham's Corner.

The City is currently on a path to make that vision a reality through our Upham's Corner Implementation Process (UCI). The City and several partner organizations own and control many important physical and cultural assets in the neighborhood. This has allowed us to work collaboratively on a transformative and community-led process that will guide the building of a new library, enhancements to the Strand Theater, development of affordable housing, and support for arts and small businesses.

While we are focused on long-term improvements to the neighborhood, we are also looking for ideas that we can implement now. The City and our partners own several parcels that are unused or empty. This is a great opportunity to ask: **how can we activate those spaces for the short-term?** We invite you to respond to this Request for Ideas with your ideas about how to activate a particular space, **555 Columbia Road** (*the activation space*), the location of the future brand-new branch of the Boston Public Library.

This activation space, previously the Bank of America which closed in 2014, had remained empty until the launch of Imagine Boston 2030 in July 2017 when it was used as a pop-up space. We are hoping to activate it again as a short-term project (12-18 months, starting Summer 2018). This *activation* is part of a neighborhood-wide short-term activation strategy to build community and opportunities [prior to any RFP contract as a part of UCI] for local artists to showcase their work, platforms for small businesses, and/or spaces for small community gatherings and events.

The activation space will be **delivered as is**. It is required to be used for the public and community benefit -- as a community space for arts, innovation, and/or small business operations. For example, the user would not be able to make a profit from the space (i.e. charging a fee for entry), but could potentially sell products or services (i.e. their art). We are interested in hearing how you would activate the space, and if your idea is compelling enough, you may be able to operate the space for a short-term activation!

To be clear, this Request for Ideas **is for information and planning purposes only** and allows the City to explore new ideas without committing resources to a particular concept. Responses will inform conversations about how this building can be used to enhance Upham's Corner. This Request for Ideas does not replace or interrupt the normal community process. If a selected operator is selected after the RFI, appropriate permits may need to be obtained by the selected operator for the proposed use. This RFI shall not be construed as a solicitation or as an obligation on the part of the City to enter into any contract or issue any Request for Proposals. The City, in its discretion, may decide in the future to enter into a contract or contracts or issue an RFP or RFPs based on information obtained as a result of the Request for Ideas.

**Thank you for your interest, and we look forward to hearing from you!**

## **SHORT-TERM ACTIVATION STRATEGY**

The City of Boston believes that a **short-term activation** of empty spaces in Upham's Corner will help foster a more thriving community and reinforce the area as an Arts Innovation District. To do this, the City of Boston, in partnership with several community organizations, will launch a series of programmed activities in the Upham's Corner neighborhood starting in Summer 2018 through the closing of any space for construction. While this RFI specifically concerns the property at 555 Columbia Road, there are a number of other spaces in Upham's Corner where we envision increased programming or activation.

### **Activations may include, but are not limited to:**

- Guided historic walking tours
- Boston Artist in Residence work-space and artist resource space
- Community engagement spaces
- Market for food, resources, and arts/artisan/small businesses

## **THE SHORT-TERM, TEMPORARY ACTIVATION of 555 Columbia Road**

As part of the Upham's Corner activation strategy outlined above, the City is interested in releasing space in an Upham's Corner building (the "Activation Space" 555 Columbia Road) owned by the Boston Redevelopment Authority (d/b/a the Boston Planning and Development Agency) and managed by the City of Boston for community activation and other public uses. **Here's what you need to know:**

### **PROGRAMMING:**

The City of Boston is interested in finding a partner with ties to the Boston community to program the Activation Space. Roxbury, Dorchester, and Upham's Corner ties are highly recommended.

The Activation Space should:

- Serve the public
- Include arts, innovation, small businesses, and/or community groups
- Begin programming in the Summer of 2018, actual date to be determined by all parties, and end upon any development of the space, in alignment with UCI.

### **THE BUILDING:**

The Activation Space is currently configured as a bank and is in good, working order. The building will be **delivered as is** and any modifications to the space would be the fiscal responsibility of you, the selected operator. This will include any costs associated with bringing the building into code compliance for the proposed use.

***The selected operator will be restricted to programming the first floor for public use only. The second floor is available for operational use as office space only upon agreement with the City of Boston.***

### **PARTNERSHIP REQUIREMENTS:**

- Provide monthly reports of all programming and events to the City of Boston
- Attend all relevant meetings regarding the Upham's Corner Activation Strategy with the City of Boston and partners
- Participate in any marketing and visibility associated with the greater Upham's Corner Activation Strategy

**ASSOCIATED COSTS:**

The City of Boston will offer the Activation Space at no cost to the selected operator. The costs associated with the space for the selected operator may include, but are not limited to: utilities, permitting costs, regular maintenance, decor, operations, and programming.

The awardee will be responsible for all operation and maintenance costs, including cleaning, utilities, security, and other day-to-day needs. It is the intention of the City of Boston to activate this space at minimal costs to the operator.

All costs associated with responding to this RFI will be the responsibility of the respondents participating in the RFI response and not the City of Boston.

**RFI:**

This RFI is not a solicitation for proposals or quotes. This RFI is for information and planning purposes only and shall not be construed as a solicitation or as an obligation on the part of the City to issue a Request for Proposal. The City, in its discretion, may decide in the future to enter into a contract or contracts or issue an RFP or RFPs based on information obtained as a result of the RFI.

## **SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS**

**Do you have an idea of how to activate 555 Columbia Road? Please share your idea with us!**

### **INSTRUCTIONS:**

Respondents to this RFI are required to **ONLY** submit an electronic copy of their response. This submission should be in Adobe PDF format, although Microsoft Office file formats (Word, Excel, Powerpoint, etc.) are also acceptable.

### **Respondents should submit their responses to:**

Natalia Urtubey, Executive Director of Imagine Boston 2030 at  
[natalia.urtubey@boston.gov](mailto:natalia.urtubey@boston.gov) or [imagine@boston.gov](mailto:imagine@boston.gov)  
by **May 4, 2018 no later than 5:00 p.m.**

### **TIMELINE:**

- |   |                                |
|---|--------------------------------|
| • RFI is released                             | <b>April 6, 2018</b>           |
| • Activation Space walkthrough                | <b>April 12, 2018 (3-7pm)</b>  |
| • Activation Space walkthrough                | <b>April 18, 2018 (8-11am)</b> |
| • Last date to submit questions about the RFI | <b>April 20, 2018</b>          |
| • Responses to questions                      | <b>April 25, 2018</b>          |
| • RFI submissions due                         | <b>May 4, 2018 by 5pm</b>      |

### **RESPONSE REQUIREMENTS:**

Ideas should be specific and concise. We strongly prefer efficiently worded and substantive responses to lengthy responses containing more general, boilerplate language.

#### **A. QUALIFICATIONS**

Please provide information on the following (no more than 3 pages total):

- a. Organizational background, including years in operation, community ties, and mission and vision statements
- b. Team leadership profiles, including staff and board if applicable
- c. Experience in community building and/or organizing
- d. Existing or future partners
- e. Summary of financial evidence of the Respondent's capacity to realistically secure the financial resources to execute the proposed project

## **B. RESPONSE**

Please provide a two-page summary that includes:

- a. The overall approach to achieving the goals of the RFI
- b. A programming strategy for the space, including tentative hours of operation, events, and uses that are open to the public
- c. A description of any key partnerships

## **QUESTIONS:**

We will make every effort to respond to questions within 5 business days. To ensure timely responses, please submit questions no later than **April 20, 2018**. Questions and responses will be emailed to all planholders.

**Questions about this RFI may be directed to: Natalia Urtubey, Executive Director of Imagine Boston 2030. Email: [natalia.urtubey@boston.gov](mailto:natalia.urtubey@boston.gov)**

## **ABOUT UPHAM'S CORNER IN IMAGINE BOSTON 2030**

Upham's Corner is a pilot initiative in the City of Boston's citywide plan, Imagine Boston 2030, called *enhanced neighborhoods*.

Imagine Boston's enhanced neighborhood approach builds on Upham's Corner's biggest strengths – a diverse and engaged population of residents, historic fabric, prominent physical and cultural assets, and a burgeoning arts community. It identifies actions to address local needs for affordable housing and commercial space, improve access to jobs and quality transportation, and strengthen new and existing cultural infrastructure.

Key Actions include:

- City-catalyzed investments and policies to promote dense walkable areas around transit stops
- Policies and strategic land acquisition and development to ensure affordable housing and commercial space
- Improved connections, frequency, and user experience on the Fairmount/ Indigo Line
- Support of local businesses, artists, and entrepreneurs
- Fostering the creation of an arts innovation district with artist housing and resources
- Improved Upham's Corner Branch library and spaces
- Investments in Columbia Road as a green and active corridor

Investments in Upham's Corner will strengthen the community's historic main street fabric, enable economic mobility and local innovation, and support a vibrant arts and culture hub. Investments will also preserve affordability and prevent displacement.

## **UPHAM'S CORNER IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS**

The *Upham's Corner Implementation* ("UCI") process will build on goals established by the community and outlined in both Imagine Boston 2030 and the Upham's Corner Station Area Plan of the Fairmount Indigo Planning Initiative. The Implementation process will focus on putting those plans into effect by developing strategic parcels in the neighborhood. Other planning initiatives whose principles will inform this process include Go Boston 2030 and Boston Creates.

The Community Vision from the Upham's Corner Station Area Plan states specifically that Upham's Corner should be defined as "a revitalized commercial, cultural and community center that is a celebration of diversity and an arts and cultural anchor of the Fairmount Indigo Corridor."

The UCI process is a City of Boston partnership with DSNI designed to create a community-led vision that will inform conditions for any development that will redesign and develop areas of Upham's Corner.

### **For more Ideas on the Upham's Corner Implementation process:**

- <http://www.bostonplans.org/planning/planning-initiatives/uphamscorner>

### **For contributing planning documents:**

- **Imagine Boston 2030:**  
[https://imagine.boston.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Ib2030%20BOOK\\_Spreads.pdf](https://imagine.boston.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Ib2030%20BOOK_Spreads.pdf)
- **Fairmount Indigo Planning Initiative:**  
<http://www.bostonplans.org/planning/planning-initiatives/fairmount-indigo-planning-initiative>
- **Upham's Corner Station Area Plan:**  
<http://www.bostonplans.org/documents/planning/community-planning/fairmount-indigo-planning-initiative/upham-s-corner-station-area-plan-executive-summary>
- [Go Boston 2030](#)
- [Boston Creates](#)