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Five developer groups submit for LaSalle Station redevelopment project

Jonathan D. Epstein

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This is the LaSalle Station of Metro Rail.

Buffalo News file photo

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t least five developer groups are vying for the right to redevelop the city-owned

A LaSalle Metro Rail station and seven acres of surrounding property, in what is shaping up to be a competitive bid to remake a prominent corner of Buffalo.

Four local real estate sources say teams led by or including Generation Development Group, McGuire Development Co., Uniland Development Co., Ciminelli Real Estate Corp. and Savarino Companies have submitted preliminary bids and other materials to the city's Office of Strategic Planning, in response to a "request-for-qualifications" that City Hall and the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority issued in early May.



The goal is to advance the development activity underway along Main Street, put the acreage to more active use and take advantage of the proximity to public transportation by turning the site into a mix of housing and first-floor retail, with an attractive streetscape. The solicitation asked for developers who would be interested in taking on such a project, and who have the expertise, financial capacity and background to make it happen.

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The city did not specify any requirements for the exact nature of any project or the type or number of housing units. Instead, it focused on creating "an equitable transit-oriented development" that would include "affordable and/or mixed-income housing units" and "an activated first floor." The Metro Rail station would remain and would be integrated into the project, without the drab beige cement structure that currently exists.

The larger LaSalle Station property – including the building and the adjacent Park-and-Ride lot – covers six parcels at 3000, 3010, 3018, 3030 and 3036 Main, plus 447 Beard Ave. Three are owned by the city and three by the NFTA.

The deadline for submissions was June 3.

Ciminelli spokesman Andrew Schwartz said he could not comment, but noted that the firm's work has focused on similar transit-oriented development recently, particularly the 201 Ellicott project with over 200 affordable housing units and an urban grocery.

Generation officials were not available for comment, while Uniland spokesman Ryan Weisz also declined to comment. "When we think there's an opportunity to get involved, we do," he said.

But David Von Dereau, president of McGuire, confirmed that his firm put in a "detailed proposal," working with SAA-EVI and Utah-based Blackfish Investment, as well as Elev8 Architecture, Dirtworks Landscape Architecture and Buffalo Construction Consultants.

Eric Ekman, vice president of development and acquisitions for McGuire, said the firm's "preliminary vision" called for a multiphase development, with affordable and market-rate apartments, and first-floor retail space.

"We feel the site has tremendous potential with its direct access to the Metro Rail and bus lines, as well as the North Buffalo Rails to Trails," Ekman said. "We are also strong proponents for the area."

He also noted that McGuire and Blackfish are already teaming up for another transit-oriented development project at 2929 Main, dubbed Rails on Main, which will add 312 apartments, retail space and offices in both new and renovated buildings. Buffalo Construction Consultants will be leading the work, which is expected to start this month and last two years.

Additionally, Philadelphia-based **Pennrose**, a 50-year-old affordable housing developer, and **MSquared**, a women-owned real estate development and impact investing firm, are working with Savarino and New York City-based architectural firm **Marvel**.

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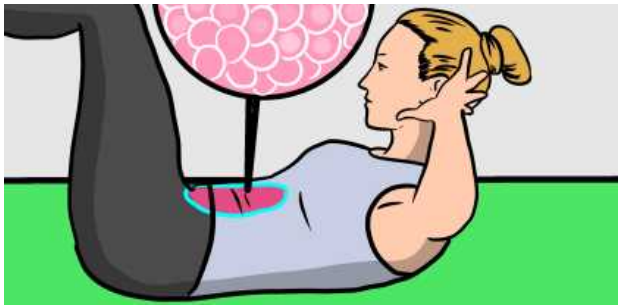
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I've been a business reporter at The Buffalo News since 2004, now covering residential and commercial real estate and development amid WNY's resurgence. I'm an upstate native, proud to call Buffalo my home, and committed to covering it thoroughly.