



Ontario Association of Architects

December 12, 2019

Mayor Brian Bigger  
City of Greater Sudbury  
Tom Davies Square  
PO Box 5000, Stn A  
Sudbury ON P3A 5P3

Via E-mail: [mayor@greatersudbury.ca](mailto:mayor@greatersudbury.ca)

**Re: Request for Proposal Contract CA019-180 Consultant for Architectural and Engineering Services Library Main Branch and Art Gallery of Sudbury**

Mayor Bigger,

The Ontario Association of Architects (OAA) has recently been made aware of the City of Greater Sudbury's Request for Proposal (RFP) for architectural and engineering services for a new main library branch and art gallery. This is certainly an exciting endeavour for the City and one of significant public impact. However, I am writing to share concerns that have been raised by some of our members regarding the RFP and, more specifically, the procurement and selection criteria it sets out.

In an article in the [Sudbury Star](#), it was noted that the City staff responsible for the project reported the RFP would be "Best in Class." However, "best in class" simply is not possible when hiring an architect based on lowest price. Under this type of procurement, architects are encouraged to focus on how to minimize fees in order to 'win' an assignment rather than how to add maximum value to the project.

I understand that the City's RFP for consultant services stipulates that professional fees will account for 30 per cent of the selection criteria. It has been further noted that the mechanics of the scoring used for this procurement will in fact award the highest number of points to the lowest bid, with all others scoring significantly less.

It is very unfortunate that the RFP is really a price-based process. Ultimately, it narrows the City's options to identify the most suitable firm to bring its project to fruition. I have heard from at least one major architectural practice that it will not be responding, and I believe other well-qualified firms will also follow suit due to procurement processes that erroneously focus on lowest price rather than design excellence or best value for the client.

The OAA is among dozens of professional associations throughout Canada representing hundreds of thousands of members who support the use of Quality-Based Selection (QBS) as the competitive procurement model. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) identifies QBS as the best practice for selecting an architect. In a jointly published *InfraGuide* document, "[Selecting a Professional Consultant](#)," FCM and the Government of Canada argue that the "[lowest bid] approach is not appropriate for professional consulting services."

QBS is a competitive procurement process that facilitates the selection of an architect on the basis of qualifications, experience, competence and other factors related to the particular assignment. The approach does not preclude the consideration of price, but simply places the subject of fees in a more meaningful context by bringing that discussion in *after* the scope of work has been jointly established. If an agreement on price cannot be secured, then the client is free to move on to the next highest ranked proponent.

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I appreciate that it is often the perception that the public interest is best served when low price is a determining factor in the selection process, particularly for publicly funded projects. Too often, the lowest price is mistaken for 'best value.' According to the FCM, "best value for a client is most likely achieved when the focus is on finding the most effective, long-term solution to a problem, not the cheapest design." QBS ensures that architects can provide the best possible design solutions that meet the needs of the client while also ensuring the safety and well-being of the public.

Thinking specifically of excellent examples of high-quality architecture in Sudbury, both Science North and the Vale Living with Lakes Centre at Laurentian University immediately come to mind. It is my understanding neither of these projects employed a price-based RFP process to select the architects—in fact, one explicitly used a QBS model.

I am excited to note that the OAA will be holding its 2023 Annual Conference in Sudbury. Our decision to do so was certainly in part due to distinct and exciting architecture in the area, including the new McEwen School of Architecture at Laurentian University, which has been noted as an exemplary, award-winning building.

In order to achieve excellent, high-quality buildings and infrastructure, I recommend the City of Greater Sudbury reconsider the procurement and selection project set out in its RFP—especially in light of the stated objectives for this civic landmark. On behalf of the OAA and Ontario's architecture profession, I urge the City to adopt the best practice recommended by the FCM—Quality-Based Selection—not only for this project, but for all its procurement of consulting services.

As you may know, the OAA is the licensing body and professional association for Ontario architects. Established under the *Architects Act* to regulate the practice of architecture in the public interest, the OAA is dedicated to promoting and increasing the knowledge, skill and proficiency of its members to serve and protect the public. This is achieved by a number of means, including the publication of information, tools and resources that support clients in the procurement of architectural services.

If the OAA can be of further assistance in this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me directly. I would be happy to discuss the QBS model further at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Kurtin, Architect  
OAA, FRAIC  
President

