

SOUTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS WATER TAXI SERVICE OPERATOR FOR THE THAMES RIVER HERITAGE PARK

INTRODUCTION

The Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG), acting on behalf of its member municipalities of City of Groton, Town of Groton, and City of New London, and in conjunction with the Thames River Heritage Park Steering Committee, is soliciting proposals from Licensed Commercial Tour Boat Operators to provide Water Taxi Service shuttling among at least three points linking the cultural and historic sites of the planned Thames River Heritage Park (TRHP) in the lower Thames River estuary and operating on a schedule. It is anticipated that Water Taxi Service would be provided on weekends gradually increasing over time to a daily schedule. The contract will be a three-year contract with the potential for one renewal period of an additional three years.

The following three sites would be required to be part of the Water Taxi route in 2015: Waterfront Park – Historic Waterfront District, downtown New London; Fort Trumbull State Park in New London; and Fort Street Water Taxi Dock on Thames Street in Groton. Subject to the approval by the Secretary of the Navy of the installation of a floating dock at the Submarine Force Museum (USS Nautilus), it is projected that at a future date, a docking facility at the USS Nautilus would be added.

THAMES RIVER HERITAGE PARK DESCRIPTION

The Thames River Heritage Park, designated in 1990, is a heritage based educational and recreational attraction, which, similar to Boston's Freedom Trail, links together existing cultural and historic resources in New London and Groton. The basic concept of this project is to provide and promote a comprehensive and cohesive linkage of historic and cultural visitor attractions. By providing another major attraction in the region, tourists will be encouraged to extend their stay, creating additional economic opportunities for regional businesses. Studies have shown that heritage tourism is among the fastest growing segments of the tourism market and that visitors within this segment spend more than their non-heritage counterparts. The Thames River Heritage Park Steering Committee, under the auspices of the Avery-Copp House in Groton, has contracted with the Yale Urban Design Workshop (YUDW) to capitalize on this phenomenon. The YUDW will be presenting a plan to develop the Thames River Heritage Park into a product that can be easily marketed by Thames River Heritage Park sites and regional and state tourism groups. In addition to the water-related sites, there are many land-based attractions for the visitor to enjoy as part of the Thames River Heritage Park experience. The attractions in Groton include Fort Griswold State Park, Avery-Copp House, the Groton Bank National Register Historic District, Ebenezer Avery House, USSubvets World War II National Memorial East, and the historic Bill Memorial Library. On the New London waterfront, in addition to the Fort Trumbull State Park there is the Custom House Maritime Museum, Shaw Mansion, Union Station, Garde Arts Center, Hempstead Houses, Nathan Hale School House, Waterfront Park and the National Register Historic Waterfront District. In addition, the US Coast Guard Academy, Connecticut College, and

the Lyman Allyn Art Museum are located adjacent to or within a short distance from the water.

SCOPE OF SERVICES

The Operator shall provide at least one fully-licensed vessel and crew offering scheduled water taxi service to the three water taxi stops cited above. The vessel(s) should be capable of carrying a minimum of 25 passengers and should have the ability to provide service with scheduled runs on an hourly basis as a minimum. In addition the vessel(s) must be handicapped accessible and capable of protecting passengers from inclement weather. Additional capacity will be required for weekends when special events are being held (i.e. Sailfest, Connecticut Maritime Heritage Festival).

The contract will be three (3) years in duration with the potential for one three-year renewal. The Water Taxi Service will be made available according to the following schedule:

- 2015 - July 3 through September 13, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays with the first run starting at 10:00 am and the last run starting at 9:00 pm.
- 2016 - May 27 through September 18, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays with the first run starting at 10:00 am and the last run starting at 9:00 pm.
- 2017 – Daily service from Memorial Day Weekend through to September 17 with the first run starting at 10:00 am and the last run starting at 9:00 pm.

Docks or tie-ups are available at the following sites for the 2015 season:

Waterfront Park Historic Waterfront District, New London
Fort Trumbull State Park, New London
Fort Street Water Taxi Dock, Groton

Subject to the approval by the Secretary of the Navy, at a later date an additional dock will be available at the Nautilus Museum. When submitting proposals please provide two budgets for the 2017 season – one with a stop at the USS Nautilus and one without.

The Water Taxi Service Operator shall be responsible for providing a boarding device to accommodate the height differences between the vessel and the docking facilities. The dock will comply with the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Visitation:

The Water Taxi is a start-up service for the TRHP. Therefore, no use records or potential demand statistics are available. Attendance figures for 2013 at anchor sites are:

	<u>May-Sept. 2013</u>
Fort Griswold	55,990
Fort Trumbull	54,572
Submarine Force Museum	120,000

In 2014 a demonstration project was run on two weekends – September 6 and 7, and September 13 and 14. During that time free service was offered between the hours of

11:00 am through 9:00 pm. Ridership totals for those days ranged from 860 passengers to 1,383 passengers.

Exclusive rights to operate:

The Operator shall have exclusive rights to operate a water taxi at the Thames River Heritage Park water taxi landings pursuant to a contract to be negotiated, using the “Thames River Heritage Park” name and logo, for the term of the contract. Nothing in the terms of this RFP or the contract should be construed so as to grant the operator an exclusive right of access to these sites otherwise. The Operator may not leave water taxi vessel(s) at the site locations overnight. TRHP sites remain the property of their respective owners and may be used by them for any reason whatsoever. The Operator may not have exclusive use of other docking facilities at the TRHP site locations.

The operator shall comply with any and all conditions and requirements of the CT DEEP for use of the landings at Forts Trumbull and Griswold, with any and all conditions and requirements of the Secretary of the Navy for use of the landing at the USS Nautilus and Submarine Force Museum, and with any and all conditions and requirements of the City of New London and/or its Port Authority for use of the landing at Waterfront Park Historic Waterfront District.

The Operator may not use the docks at the TRHP for excursions or functions not related to the Water Taxi Schedule unless negotiated with the owner of the facility. The Operator should note that, from time to time the City of New London utilizes Waterfront Park for large functions and festivals. This may require the Operator to relocate to another pier. Every effort will be made to accommodate the Operator so as to ensure business is not interrupted. Details will be made final during negotiations.

The TRHP is located in a Security Zone. The United States Coast Guard or the United States Navy may close all docks/sites without notice in cases where National Security levels warrant.

In the event that the USS Nautilus becomes a TRHP site, the operator will only be permitted access to the facility during operating hours of the USS Nautilus and Submarine Force Museum, which are subject to change without notice. Moreover, the U.S. Navy reserves the right to suspend or terminate its participation in the TRHP without prior notice for any reason. Prospective operators should bear this in mind when submitting a proposal.

SELECTION CRITERIA

The selection of the Operator will depend on submission of all requested material and a demonstration of the ability to successfully operate and market a tourism-related water taxi service. The Operator must also demonstrate the ability to comply with all requirements prior to the commencement of operation. Other selection factors may include, but not be limited to, the following: Water Taxi schedule, vessel capacity, style of vessel, and references.

INFORMATION FOR PROPOSAL

The proposal should include, but not be limited to, the following information:

Business Information:

1. Name and address of Company/Corporation
2. Name and address of Principal Owner of Business
3. Contact person with Business Phone, Fax and Email
4. Number of years in business
5. Business Plan for a Water Taxi Service

Vessel information:

1. Size of vessel(s) gross tons
2. Age of Vessel(s)
3. Passenger Capacity of vessel(s) as determined by USCG
4. Description of vessel(s) including length
5. Photographs of vessel (s)
6. Selected Operator will be required to provide copies of valid USCG Licenses and Certifications

Personnel:

1. Number of crew who will work on vessel
2. Names of crew and the experience and qualification of each.
3. Does your business/company have an Affirmative Action Policy?
If “yes”, provide copy.
4. Does your business/company have a Sexual Harassment Policy?
If “yes”, provide copy.

Operational Issues:

1. The Operator shall provide information as to how on-board emergencies (medical and non-medical) will be handled.
2. The Operator shall provide information as to how stranded patrons will be addressed.
3. The Operator shall provide information on a contingency plan should mechanical or other issues render the vessel inoperable.
4. The Operator shall provide information concerning how individuals with disabilities will be accommodated.
5. The Operator shall provide information on how fluctuating capacity would be handled, particularly for event weekends.
6. The Operator shall provide a plan for marketing and promotion of the service.
7. The Operator shall provide information on procedures related to cancellations due to inclement weather or other circumstances.

Experience:

Describe any experience the company or staff has had in operating a water taxi service or related service as well as experience in the tourism-related industry and/or customer service field.

Schedule:

SCCOG is interested in the broadest range of service to the public possible while ensuring the Operator's financial viability to operate the water taxi in the TRHP.

The Operator shall provide as part of this RFP a proposed schedule of operation for:

- 2015 - July 3 through September 13, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays with the first run starting at 11:00 am and the last run starting at 9:00 pm.
- 2016 - May 27 through September 18, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays with the first run starting at 10:00 am and the last run starting at 9:00 pm.
- 2017 – Daily service from Memorial Day Weekend through to September 17 with the first run starting at 10:00 am and the last run starting at 9:00 pm.

This schedule will be negotiable. The schedule must take into consideration operating hours of the TRHP sites. Once established by agreement with the Operator and SCCOG, any alteration of the schedule must be approved.

The Operator shall be required to post the schedule at each docking facility in a location approved by the site manager. The wording and appearance of the signage shall be approved by SCCOG.

Budget:

The Operator shall submit a projected budget for each of years 2015, 2016, and 2017. For 2017, there shall be an alternate budget which would include scheduled stops at the Nautilus.

Fares:

SCCOG reserves the right to determine a fare schedule. Should a fare be established, the Operator shall be responsible for clearly posting the fare schedule at each docking facility and for providing an account of all ticket sales, a count of passengers, and the accounting of fares. The Operator should describe the process which would be used to collect, record, and account for fares.

OPERATOR REQUIREMENTS

The following shall be required to operate a Water Taxi Service as part of the Thames River Heritage Park and should be considered an integral part of the RFP.

1. Insurance requirements:

The Operator shall secure public liability insurance in the amount of no less than \$1,000,000 to cover all aspects of the Operator's use of the docking facilities listed in this Contract prior to the commencement of operation. The United States Navy, State of Connecticut, the Town of Groton, the City of Groton and the City of New London, the Thames River Heritage Park Steering Committee or

successor, and SCCOG shall be named as additional insured. A copy of the policy must be on file SCCOG with prior to operation.

The Operator shall carry property damage insurance to repair damages to Federal, State or Municipal docks caused by the operator in the process of docking, undocking or while made fast to the dock.

2. U. S. Coast Guard requirements:

The Operator's vessel shall meet and maintain all Licenses, Certifications and Requirements of the United States Coast Guard to operate a commercial passenger vessel.

The Operator shall have on board at all times a Captain and First Mate who shall meet and maintain all Licenses, Certifications and Requirements of the United States Coast Guard to operate a vessel of the tonnage used in this concession contract.

3. Loading/unloading of passengers:

The Operator shall insure that staff assists passengers when embarking and disembarking.

4. Handicapped issues:

The Operator shall insure that individuals with disabilities are provided a means to board the vessel and disembark the vessel at all sites.

5. Security of the sites:

- a) Gates to the Docking facilities at Fort Trumbull and Fort Griswold shall be secured by the Operator after each arrival and departure.
- b) In the event the Nautilus becomes part of the Thames River Heritage Park, the Operator shall cooperate with the Department of the Navy, the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, or other law enforcement entities in ensuring the security of Navy facilities and personnel. Such cooperation may include, without limitation, requiring crew members to undergo security background checks and permitting inspection of vessels, crew or passengers whether on or off Navy property. The Operator understands that the Navy may restrict the access of certain persons and vehicles to Navy property based on security concerns or postures, and that operations of the water taxi may be suspended as a result.
- c) The Water Taxi Service schedule shall be posted with the Naval Submarine Base Port Operations Department. Port Operations procedures shall be followed when docking and undocking from the Nautilus pier.

6. Trash:

The Boat Concession Operator shall provide a trash receptacle aboard the vessel and shall be responsible for disposal of same.

7. Storage of supplies:

No storage of materials or supplies relating to the Water Taxi Service Operation shall be allowed at or on docking sites.

8. Disclaimer:

All information is provided for informational purposes and does not constitute all or part of a contract. The information is designed to assist the potential Operator in determining whether to proceed with the submission of a proposal. While the information herein is believed to be correct, it is the responsibility of the proposer to perform due diligence.

NOTE: The awarding of a contract for this Water Taxi Service is contingent upon the receipt of a State grant or some other source of funding that will pay for the Operator's proposed fee and any other associated costs.

9. Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments discretion:

The SCCOG, at its sole discretion, may reject any or all proposals for any reason.

The selected Operator will be required to sign a contract with SCCOG. The Operator shall not be allowed to assign the contract. SCCOG and the Operator shall be the sole and exclusive parties to the contract, and the contract shall in no way be construed as to give rise to a contractual obligation on the part of the United States Government or the Department of the Navy.

SUBMISSION OF RFP

Six (6) copies of the proposal should be submitted to:

James S. Butler, AICP, Executive Director, Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments, 5 Connecticut Avenue, Norwich, CT 06360.

Proposals must be received by SCCOG no later than Friday, March 13, 2015, at 4:00 p.m. EST. Proposals received after this deadline will not be considered.

Inquiries or questions regarding this RFP may be emailed to jbutler@seccog.org.