



**UT** THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE  
**RESEARCH PARK**  
AT CHEROKEE FARM™

## Request for Information

Hotel/Conference Center Development

Issued: Monday, April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023



## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UT) is developing the 150-acre property known as Cherokee Farm into the UT Research Park, a state-of-the-art science, technology, and medical, innovation campus.

The UT Research Park (the “Park”) serves as a gateway for collaboration between the University and both public and private sector partners, leveraging our strongest research and innovation assets, our incredible faculty and student talent and our world-class research prowess. The Research Park is home to a growing number of privately developed commercial office, laboratory and medical buildings. Major research foci include advanced materials and manufacturing, mobility, clean energy, translational medicine, and artificial intelligence.

Continued growth at the Park creates demand for additional gathering/meeting spaces and a place for stakeholders and partners to stay overnight or for more extended periods as they collaborate with UT and other colleagues. To address this need, the Cherokee Farm Development Corporation (CFDC) is issuing this RFI to invite letters of interest from private developers to finance, design, construct, operate and maintain a new hotel/conference center.

The Park is interested in creating gathering places for university, industry and other partner colleagues to meet, and a place for collaborators/visitors to spend their evenings, for periods of one night to several weeks. Building hotels and appropriately-sized conference rooms for collaboration is a growing trend among leading research parks across the country, many of whom are embracing the notion of transitioning from traditional office parks to *live, work, learn, play* environments that nurture a sense of community and establish and sustain trusted partnerships. These contemporary research parks support the development of dynamic research, workforce and community development programs that create inclusive economic opportunities for communities in the regions they serve.

## 1.1 BACKGROUND

### **UT Research Park Overview**

The UT Research Park (“Park”) at Cherokee Farm is located just across the Tennessee River from UT’s flagship campus in Knoxville. The Park offers an ideal location for companies and entrepreneurs to collaborate with talent at UT, and supports a strong ecosystem to foster success.

The Park has established some real momentum over the past three years despite the global pandemic. There are currently three buildings in operation at the Park:



The headquarters of the UT Institute for Advanced Materials & Manufacturing (IAMM), a 144,000 SF facility, houses more than 100 UT faculty, staff, and students as well as promising high-tech start-ups, who are advancing science and developing technologies that will inform and power the industries of tomorrow (<https://research.utk.edu/iamm/>).

Innovation North, a 44,000 SF facility, is home to the Volkswagen Innovation Hub, Civil and Environmental Consultants, RegScale, and the new UT Medical Center (UTMC) Nursing Scholars Program (<https://partnersinfo.com/innovation-north/>).



The UTMC Orthopaedic Institute is a 94,000 SF ambulatory surgery center that combines outstanding orthopaedic clinical and surgical knowledge with a UT-UTMC translational research initiative to address the growing needs of the Knoxville community (<https://www.utmedicalcenter.org/centers-of-excellence/orthopaedic-institute>).

In January 2023, CFDC announced the closing on financing for Innovation South, a 85,000 SF facility that will house additional UT materials and manufacturing research programs, as well as commercial space for collaborators such as the U.S. Forest Service, EDP Biotech, and the UT-led Institute for Advanced Composites Manufacturing Innovation (IACMI). Groundbreaking is scheduled for later this month and occupancy is expected in mid-2024.



Additionally, the Park is home to the Spark Innovation Center, a nationally recognized high-tech incubator and accelerator program that currently serves 15 promising startups each year, mostly originating from UT or the Oak Ridge National Laboratory. CFDC is developing plans to create a stand-alone Spark Innovation Center in the near future at the Park.

One of the Park's unique features is that 80 of its 150 acres are preserved in perpetuity because of their incredible archaeological significance. Located along the shores of the Tennessee River, indigenous Native American tribes considered this site home for centuries. In fact, artifacts have been discovered on the site dating back to 10,000 B.C. Existing amenities include a 2.2-mile greenway along the shoreline connecting to downtown Knoxville, beautiful open green spaces and an outdoor amphitheater.



The Park is working on several other projects to celebrate its unique heritage and its prime location along the Tennessee River, including a UT student-designed Outdoor Cultural and Recreational Center, which will be constructed immediately adjacent to the recommended hotel/conference center site. This \$7 million project is on the current list of capital projects submitted to the State of Tennessee, and received a \$500,000 pledged contribution from the City of Knoxville.

## **Knoxville Overview**

Knoxville is the county seat of Knox County in the State of Tennessee. As of July 1, 2019, Knoxville's population was 187,603, making it the largest city in the East Tennessee Grand Division, and the State's third largest city after Nashville and Memphis. Knoxville is the principal city of the Knoxville Metropolitan Statistical Area, which had an estimated population of 869,046 in 2019. The Knoxville MSA is home to Oak Ridge National Laboratory, a multiprogram basic sciences research laboratory managed by UT-Battelle for the US Department of Energy. The laboratory is located on the Oak Ridge Reservation, a 30,000-acre tract of land about 20 miles west of downtown Knoxville.

Knoxville is the home of UT's flagship campus, whose sports teams, the Tennessee Volunteers, are popular in the surrounding area and throughout the region. Knoxville is also home to the headquarters of the Tennessee Valley Authority, and houses the corporate headquarters of several national and regional companies. As one of the largest cities in the Appalachian region, Knoxville has positioned itself in recent years as a repository of Appalachian culture and is one of the gateways to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Knoxville has high demand for hotel rooms and meeting space, and ranks in the top three for revenue per available room index growth from 2022 to 2019 in the top 50 supply market.<sup>1</sup>

Knoxville is also an increasingly popular tourist attraction. According to Visit Knoxville, Knoxville had 6.8 million overnight visitors in 2021 and a 2022 occupancy rate of 68%.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [Industry Health Dashboard — Kalibri Labs | Revenue Strategy | Next-Gen Hotel Benchmarking | Real Estate Investment Report](#)

<sup>2</sup> [https://assets.simpleviewinc.com/simpleview/image/upload/v1/clients/knoxville/Dashboard\\_2022\\_2023\\_c8fac991-1756-458a-8983-14e002610487.pdf](https://assets.simpleviewinc.com/simpleview/image/upload/v1/clients/knoxville/Dashboard_2022_2023_c8fac991-1756-458a-8983-14e002610487.pdf)

## **Property Information**

The 150-acre Park sits on a bend in the Tennessee River a mile-and-a-half southwest of downtown Knoxville. Alcoa Highway, a state scenic highway that forms the eastern property boundary, links the Research Park to the greater Knoxville region, and McGhee Tyson Airport is ten miles to the South. Major improvements are underway to reconfigure the Alcoa Highway interchange that will serve the Park and UTMC.

UTMC is located directly across Alcoa highway from the Park, and is the region's Level 1 Trauma Center. UTMC has 710 patient beds and more than 6,000 employees. Last year, UTMC reported over 34,000 patient admissions and more than 370,000 outpatient visits.

## **1.2 PURPOSE OF RFI**

The purpose of this RFI is to determine interest in private development of a hotel/conference center with an optional retail component. We envision a medium-sized hotel (50-100 rooms) with extended stay options. Amenities could include kitchenettes in some rooms, conference/meeting space, a full-service restaurant, possibly with a rooftop lounge to serve not just guests but Park employees, a fitness center and a business center. CFDC does not plan to specify the number of rooms or amenities; the developer's market research should define the scope of the development.

The development should provide for all parking onsite.

The developer will finance, design, construct, and maintain the development under a long-term ground lease, and will be responsible for leasing of the retail space, subject to CFDC approval of uses.

While the preferred arrangement is described above, CFDC will consider other alternatives that meet the objectives outlined in this RFI.

CFDC may request additional information from those providing responses to this RFI.

The UT Research Park Master Plan and Development Guidelines were revised in 2021 and provide the planning principles and design guidelines that reinforce the University's vision for the campus. They can be found at <http://www.tnresearchpark.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/UT-Research-Park-Master-Plan-Guidelines.pdf>.

A proposed location for the hotel/conference center is Building Site A at the northeast corner of the property adjacent to Alcoa Highway (see map below). This site offers exceptional views of the Tennessee River and access to the proposed outdoor recreation center. Respondents may also propose the development of alternative sites at the Park.

Proposed Hotel/  
Conference Center  
Site



Proposed Hotel/ Conference Center Site - Property at the Park is available via ground lease. An initial term of 50 years is available with potential renewal terms.

### 1.3 RFI RESPONSE REQUIREMENTS

A concise, complete, and well-written response to the RFI to help assess the respondent's level of interest, capability, experience, and commitment to the proposed development.

The response should contain the following information:

#### 1. Company Information

- Provide the legal/registered name of the company.
- Provide a brief description of the company and website.
- Identify the primary contact (including address, email address and telephone number), responsible for all questions/responses.
- Identify the office location that this development would be served from.
- If this were a joint venture, include all partners, firm names, the type of services provided by each company and the primary contact for each.

#### 2. Project Development /Concept

- Describe the approach to the project, including operation of the hotel/conference center and long-term maintenance of the building.
- Provide a projected number of hotel rooms and square footage of conference space.
- Describe the amenities that would be included in the development.
- Identify considerations needed to achieve the desired objectives of the development.
- Discuss benefits to the Park and any revenue sharing opportunities.
- Provide a timeline for development of the proposed site, considering all due diligence.

- Describe relevant experience and qualifications, including similar successful projects. Of special interest are projects in similar size and scope.
- Discuss financial capability to complete the project.

**Response Requirements**

- Submissions should not exceed a total of 20 pages.
- The response should include concept(s) on how the site would be used for this development.
- The original PDF response must contain the signature and printed name and title of the person authorized to represent the firm.

**Send responses to:**

Cherokee Farm Development Corporation

Attn: Angelee Day

Chief Operating Officer

2641 Osprey Vista Way

Knoxville, TN 37920

angelee@tnresearchpark.org

Responses must be received by 2:00 p.m. EST on Tuesday, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023

**RFI Questions and Responses**

Questions regarding this RFI shall be submitted in writing by email to Angelee Day at [angelee@tnresearchpark.org](mailto:angelee@tnresearchpark.org). Verbal questions will NOT be accepted. Questions will be answered by responding to questions via public posting on the UT Research Park website. Accordingly, questions should NOT contain proprietary or classified information. All questions must be received by Thursday, May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2023 at 2:00 p.m. EST. Responses to questions will be provided by Wednesday, May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023 by close of business unless otherwise indicated. All questions and responses will be posted to <https://www.tnresearchpark.org/move-to-the-park/>

**Schedule of Key Activities**

RFI Issued	Monday, April 10 <sup>th</sup> , 2023
Pre-proposal Meeting	Tuesday, April 25 <sup>th</sup> , 2023 at 1:00pm EST
Deadline for Questions	Thursday, May 4 <sup>th</sup> , 2023
Posting of Answers to Questions	Wednesday, May 16 <sup>th</sup> , 2023
Proposal Submission Deadline	Tuesday, June 6 <sup>th</sup> , 2023, by 2:00 p.m. EST

**Addendum**

Any clarification or additional information that may substantially affect responses to this RFI will be provided in the form of a written addendum. All addenda will be posted to <https://www.tnresearchpark.org/move-to-the-park/>.

The RFI is intended solely for CFDC to gauge interest and obtain information that the CFDC may use to develop a strategy for the potential project.

If any information provided is believed to be confidential and proprietary, please mark it accordingly [and transmit it separately].

## 1.4 PRE-PROPOSAL MEETING

Pre-proposal Meeting – a pre-proposal meeting will be held on Tuesday, April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2023 at 1:00 p.m. EST via Zoom:

Join from PC, Mac, Linux, iOS or Android: <https://tennessee.zoom.us/j/94363897310>

Or iPhone one-tap (US Toll): +16468769923,94363897310# or +16469313860,94363897310#

Or Telephone:

Dial:

+1 646 876 9923 (US Toll)

+1 646 931 3860 (US Toll)

+1 301 715 8592 (US Toll)

+1 305 224 1968 (US Toll)

+1 309 205 3325 (US Toll)

+1 312 626 6799 (US Toll)

+1 719 359 4580 (US Toll)

+1 253 205 0468 (US Toll)

+1 253 215 8782 (US Toll)

+1 346 248 7799 (US Toll)

+1 360 209 5623 (US Toll)

+1 386 347 5053 (US Toll)

+1 507 473 4847 (US Toll)

+1 564 217 2000 (US Toll)

+1 669 444 9171 (US Toll)

+1 669 900 6833 (US Toll)

+1 689 278 1000 (US Toll)

Meeting ID: 943 6389 7310

International numbers available: <https://tennessee.zoom.us/u/aeIM2KxXW3>

Or an H.323/SIP room system:

H.323: 162.255.37.11 (US West) or 162.255.36.11 (US East)

Meeting ID: 943 6389 7310

SIP: [94363897310@zoomcrc.com](mailto:94363897310@zoomcrc.com)

Attendance is not mandatory for submitting a response to this RFI.

### **Disclaimer**

This is a Request for Information (RFI), not a solicitation for proposals, and will not result in a contract, but may be used by CFDC for informational and planning purposes related to future procurements. CFDC does not guarantee that a formal solicitation will be issued as a result of this RFI.

Entities submitting a response to the RFI are not prohibited from responding to any related subsequent solicitation. Not responding to this RFI does not preclude participation in any future procurement, if any is issued.

The original and revised 2021 UT Research Park Master Plan and Development Guidelines contemplated the construction of a hotel/conference center at the Research Park. Planning for the Research Park was incorporated into the UT Knoxville



Master Plan approved by the UT Board of Trustees in February 2023. The scope of this RFI is a hotel/conference center at the Research Park and is not associated with any other hotel(s) contemplated in the UT Knoxville Master Plan. If and when a decision is made to move forward with those hotel(s), a separate RFI and/or RFP will be issued in accordance with University and State Building Commission guidelines and policies.

UT Knoxville Master Plan Website: <https://masterplan.utk.edu/>

Link to Master Plan Presentation: <https://masterplan.utk.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/33/2023/01/2023-01-24-UTK-MP-Town-Hall.pdf>

Respondents are responsible for all costs associated with the preparation and submission of this RFI. CFDC will not be responsible for any respondent's related costs associated with responding to this request.