



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
CITY OF CHICAGO

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

January 5, 2017

**CONTACT:**

Mayor's Press Office

312.744.3334

[press@cityofchicago.org](mailto:press@cityofchicago.org)

**MAYOR EMANUEL, CITY OF CHICAGO ANNOUNCE RIVERWALK CONCESSION  
PROGRAM OPPORTUNITIES**

*RFP issued after Riverwalk vendors earned more than \$8.5 million in gross revenues during  
2016 season*

After a record breaking 2016 season for Riverwalk vendors, Mayor Rahm Emanuel and the City of Chicago announced that they are advertising a Request for Proposals (RFP) today for concession operations for the Chicago Riverwalk. For the first time, the RFP will provide the opportunity for vendors to submit proposals for longer term contracts and to build permanent year round restaurants or amenities.

“The Riverwalk was a bustling hub of activity this year, offering a variety of venues and spaces for residents and visitors to eat, drink and play,” said Mayor Emanuel. “The riverfront investments we’re making throughout the City are increasing river access, increasing recreational opportunities and promoting economic growth.”

The RFP seeks proposals from vendors to operate anywhere between Lake Shore Drive to Franklin, which includes the recently completed section from LaSalle to Franklin, for 2017 and beyond, although it is likely that vendors will not be operational in the most recently completed section until the 2018 season. Vendors may propose three or 10 year proposals.

Proposals are due by 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, March 9, 2017 and will be reviewed by an Evaluation Committee. The Evaluation Committee is comprised of city personnel familiar with the Riverwalk and specialize in areas of finance, cultural affairs, construction and operations.

Contracts for the overwhelming majority of vendors who operated along the Riverwalk from Lake Shore Drive to LaSalle during the 2016 season has been extended for the 2017 season.

The City envisions a mix of recreational, cultural, entertainment, food and beverage and retail facilities on the Riverwalk, creating a vibrant area to be enjoyed by residents, tourists

and visitors alike. Based upon the positive reaction by Chicago's residents and visitors throughout the summer, the City expects to receive a large number of highly competitive proposals.

"Our 2016 season has seen unprecedented success, as vendor revenues are significantly higher as compared to last year," said Fleet and Facility Management Commissioner David Reynolds. "Riverwalk vendors pay a percentage of their revenues towards the federal loan used to construct the build-out between State Street and Lake Street. This innovative partnership was created under the Mayor's leadership and has established the Chicago Riverwalk as a recreational and entertainment destination."

The City is now seeking vendors to provide a variety of activities, events, and services in 2018. Examples of possible concessions include, but are not limited to: facilities for paddling, recreational or charter boat; sports rentals; food and beverage; retail, particularly of a cultural or environmental nature; educational facilities; entertainment venues; commercial boats docked along the seawall with food and beverage or associated with a food and beverage provider operating in the land adjacent; or any other type of family-friendly concessions. The Department encourages Respondents to propose other ideas to enhance the use and enjoyment of the Riverwalk and the Chicago River.

Throughout the summer, huge crowds visited the Riverwalk. Visitors were able to enjoy a tiki bar, wine bar, French bistro, specialty cocktails and BBQ and recreational options included bike rentals to kayak tours.

Vendors interested in participating in the 2018 Season on the Chicago Riverwalk are invited to attend a Pre-Proposal Meeting on Thursday, January 26 at 10:00 a.m. in Room 1103 in City Hall, 121 North LaSalle Street. City representatives will describe the program and answer questions during the pre-proposal meeting. The City also strongly encourages Respondents to visit the Riverwalk prior to attending the Pre-Proposal conference.

Vendors unable to attend the Pre-Proposal Meeting can submit questions to [Edward.anderson@cityofchicago.org](mailto:Edward.anderson@cityofchicago.org) with "Operation of Concessions of the Chicago Riverwalk, Specification No. 329656" as the subject. The deadline for questions is 4:00 p.m. on February 10, 2017. Questions will be responded to in an Addendum to the Requests for Proposals.

The existing Riverwalk vendors wrapped up the 2016 Season in October; however, the Island Party Hut remained open until December 19, selling 150 Christmas trees. 2016 vendors earned gross revenues of more than \$8.5 million, as compared to \$4.5 million for 2015 vendors.

"We couldn't be more proud to play a small role in the reinvention of Riverwalk," Tiny Hatt Owner Mark William Johnson said. "Our business exceeded even our most aggressive projections."

Fees from revenues generated from the concession program in 2016 are anticipated to be greater than \$700,000, up from almost \$400,000 in 2015. These fees are pledged towards repayment of the federal loan used to construct the build-out between State Street and Lake Street.

"Both tourists and the local neighborhood embraced us as a place to go to enjoy great drinks, great food and great music, all while being able to experience the wonderful sights and sounds of the Chicago River," Island Party Hut Owner Mark Stern said. "Business warranted Island Party Hut expanding, so we doubled our size. We were able to expand our menu, add more attractions, and add more games for adults and children alike to enjoy. We were also able to extend our season through December and sold Christmas trees while customers enjoyed a hot beverage. We look forward to an even better 2017 as more people experience the newly expanded Chicago Riverwalk."

The three newest sections, or "rooms," of the Riverwalk were completed in October of 2016 and include:

- **The Water Plaza:** A water feature for children and families to engage with water at the river's edge. (From LaSalle to Wells.)
- **The Jetty:** A series of piers and floating wetland gardens with interactive learning about the ecology of the river, including opportunities for fishing and identifying native plants. (From Wells to Franklin.)
- **The Riverbank:** An accessible walkway and new marine edge creates access to Lake Street and features a public lawn at the confluence. It provides an accessible route from lower to upper Wacker and Lake Street. The City is continuing to explore possibilities for how the room can be developed. (From Franklin to Lake.)

The first three rooms opened in May of 2015 and extended the Riverwalk from its terminus at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial at State Street. They include:

- **The Marina Plaza:** Restaurants and outdoor seating with views of vibrant life on the water, including passing barges, water taxis and sightseeing boats. (From State to Dearborn.)
- **The Cove:** Also includes a restaurant, a kayak information center, and docking for human-powered crafts enable physical connections to the water through recreation. (From Dearborn to Clark.)
- **The River Theater:** A sculptural staircase linking Upper Wacker and the Riverwalk offers pedestrian connectivity to the water's edge and seating, while trees provide greenery and shade. (From Clark to LaSalle.)

The six-block section of the Riverwalk was designed by a team of architects including Sasaki and Ross Barney Architects and was constructed by Alfred Benesch & Co. Engineers and Walsh Construction. The project is funded through the U.S. Department of Transportation's Transportation Infrastructure Finance Innovation Act (TIFIA) program which provided a loan of \$98 million. Additionally, the project received \$10 million in state funding.

For more information on the Chicago Riverwalk, please visit [www.chicagoriverwalk.us](http://www.chicagoriverwalk.us).

###