



Request for Proposals

Camera Obscura Building

1450 Ocean Avenue
Santa Monica, California

Introduction

The City of Santa Monica ("City") is seeking proposals from qualified café operators, hospitality professionals, and food and beverage concessionaires to program and operate up to 2,000 square feet of café and small warming kitchen space within the iconic Camera Obscura Building at 1450 Ocean Avenue. The café is part of a larger renovation of the Camera Obscura Building that includes approximately 2,000 square feet of exhibition space programmed by the City's Cultural Affairs Division, as well as new outdoor deck and gathering spaces.

This Request for Proposals (RFP) is intended to identify and select an experienced operator, obtain market feedback, and inform the City's final operating model and interior design.

Project Background

The Camera Obscura project supports the City's broader vision for activating parks and public spaces through high-quality concessions, programming, and visitor-serving amenities. In alignment with the Parks and Recreation Department's 2025 Vision Plan, the City seeks to partner with concessionaires that can enhance the public experience, increase activity in City parks and open spaces, and provide high-quality food, beverage, hospitality services, and experiences that complement public programming and community use.

The Camera Obscura Building is undergoing significant capital improvements to transform the facility into an active public destination serving residents and visitors through cultural programming, community events, private rentals, and visitor-serving amenities. The building occupies a prominent coastal location overlooking Palisades Park and Santa Monica Beach.

The City anticipates that the renovated facility will include:

- Café with indoor seating
- Outdoor deck and wraparound patio seating
- Warming kitchen
- Flexible event and gathering spaces
- Community meeting and cultural programming areas

Renovations are expected to be completed, with the building ready for operations, in summer 2027. From approximately June through September 2028, the Camera Obscura Building will serve as Switzerland's official hospitality, cultural, media, and event venue during the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Following the Games, the City intends to continue operating the facility as an active community destination with year-round cultural programming, events, and visitor-serving amenities.

Desired Operator: The City seeks an experienced operator capable of creating a destination café that advances the City's Parks and Recreation Vision Plan, complements the civic and cultural purpose of the Camera Obscura Building, and supports a diverse calendar of public programming, community activities, and private events, as necessary.

The ideal operator will bring a high-quality hospitality experience and demonstrate relevant experience in one or more of the following areas:

- Café operations
- Catering and event food service
- Hospitality management
- Cultural venues
- Museums or visitor attractions
- Public facilities

Scope of Services: Selected operator may be responsible for:

- Daily café operations*
- Events and catering
- Coordination with City-sponsored programming
- Maintaining high-quality customer service
- Activating the facility throughout the year

*Alcohol subject to regulatory approval.

The City welcomes innovative concepts that enhance the visitor experience.

Design Collaboration: Because the project remains in the design phase, Operator input may help inform final building improvements. The City is interested in receiving operational recommendations regarding:

- Kitchen layout
- Equipment needs
- Customer circulation
- Storage
- Patio/outdoor seating
- Event support
- Accessibility, including loading and deliveries
- Utility requirements

Term: Negotiable

The City is open to proposals for short-term operators (e.g. one year or less) as well as long-term operators (e.g. 3-5 years plus potential options) and may also consider a hybrid approach (e.g. up to LA28 with potential to transition to a long-term operational partnership thereafter).

Financial Structure: Negotiable

Respondents are encouraged to provide proposed financial structure, including:

- Desired lease term
- Proposed base rents (including but not limited to Minimum Annual Guaranteed Rent, Percentage Rent based upon Gross Receipts, or combination of)
- Proposed capital investments
- Equipment contributions
- Revenue sharing for catering and event services
- Desired renewal options

Proposal Submission: Interested operators should submit an introduction cover letter and complete the City's application: [Add Link to app and create app with boxes that seek the following info.](#)

1. Company overview and relevant operating experience
2. Description of café concept including proposed hours of operation, menu(s) and pricing
3. Experience operating within public facilities or event venues – reference examples (location).
4. Preliminary operational approach
5. Proposed rental rate, term and other financial considerations
6. Proposed capital investment, if any.
7. Interest in supporting City events and private rentals

Evaluation: Proposals will be evaluated based upon:

- Relevant experience
- Quality of concept
- Financial capability
- Operational expertise
- Compatibility with City objectives

Procurement Process: Following review of proposals, the City may:

- Conduct interviews
- Engage negotiations
- Modify or discontinue this process at any time

Open House (Optional):

An open house will take place at the site on Tuesday, September 1, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Question & Answer Period:

Please email all questions to econdev@santamonica.gov by 9/3/2026. Answers will be compiled and posted to the City's commercial real estate webpage at bit.ly/CSMRE on 9/7/2026.

RFP/Application Timeline:

Release of RFP:	8/20/2026
Questions Due:	9/3/2026
Question Responses Issued:	9/7/2026
Proposal/Application Due:	10/01/2026

Decision Timeline:

An initial review of applications will tentatively take place on 10/5/2026. Follow-up interviews may be conducted by invitation, if necessary, prior to operator selection. The City will enter negotiations with the selected operator, and final lease execution is subject to approval by City stakeholders.