



CITY OF HICKORY

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

ON-CALL PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERING SERVICES
WATER AND SEWER INFRASTRUCTURE

RFQ Number	27-009
Issue Date	9-16-26
Questions Due	10-8-26
SOQs Due	10-30-26
Point of Contact	William Hamblin, Public Utilities Director

Solicitation Summary

Item	Requirement
Owner	City of Hickory, North Carolina
Department	Public Utilities Department
Solicitation	On-Call Professional Engineering Services for Water and Sewer Infrastructure
Anticipated selections	One or more qualified firms, at the City's discretion
Qualification period	Three years beginning on the effective date of the applicable agreement
Submission method	Sealed hard-copy SOQ and electronic PDF, as specified in Section 5
Fee information	Do not submit fees, hourly rates, multipliers, reimbursable schedules, or other cost information

Notice of Request for Qualifications

The City of Hickory (the “City”), through its Public Utilities Department, invites qualified professional engineering firms and consultant teams to submit Statements of Qualifications (“SOQs”) for on-call planning, evaluation, design, permitting, bidding, construction-phase, and related professional services for the City’s water and wastewater systems.

The City intends to establish a pool of one or more qualified firms that may be engaged during a three-year qualification period. Selection under this RFQ does not award a specific project, guarantee any minimum amount of work, or obligate the City to issue a contract or task order. Each assignment will be authorized only by a separately negotiated and executed contract, task order, or amendment, subject to applicable law, appropriation, and required City approvals.

This solicitation is intended to implement qualifications-based selection under Article 3D of Chapter 143 of the North Carolina General Statutes. Firms will be evaluated on demonstrated competence and qualifications without regard to fee. After ranking, the City may negotiate scope and a fair and reasonable fee with the best-qualified firm for an agreement or assignment. If negotiations are unsuccessful, the City may terminate negotiations and proceed with the next best-qualified firm.

Procurement Schedule

Milestone	Date / Time
RFQ issued	9-17-26
Deadline for written questions	10-8-26 at 12:00 p.m. Eastern Time
Anticipated addendum / responses	10-15-26
SOQ submission deadline	10-30-26 at 12:00 p.m. Eastern Time
Shortlist / interviews, if any	“To be determined”
Anticipated selection	“To be determined”

The City may revise this schedule by written addendum.

Point of Contact and Questions

All communications concerning this RFQ must be directed in writing to:

William Hamblin, Public Utilities Director
City of Hickory Public Utilities
Email: whamblin@hickorync.gov
Telephone: 828-323-7427

Written questions must be received by the deadline above. Email subject line: “Water and Sewer Engineering Services RFQ Question.” Responses that materially affect the RFQ will be issued by written addendum. Oral explanations or instructions do not modify this RFQ. Firms are responsible for confirming receipt of all addenda.

Submission Addresses

By Mail	By Hand Delivery / Courier
City of Hickory – Public Utilities P.O. Box 398 Hickory, NC 28603 Attn: William Hamblin, Public Utilities Director	City of Hickory – Public Works 1441 9th Avenue NE Hickory, NC 28601 Attn: William Hamblin, Public Utilities Director

SOQs must be received—not merely postmarked—by the submission deadline. Late submissions will not be considered. Fax or email submissions are not accepted unless the City authorizes them by written addendum.

1. Definitions

- a. **Addendum** means a written modification to this RFQ issued by the City before the submission deadline.
- b. **City** means the City of Hickory, North Carolina, including its authorized officers, employees, and representatives.
- c. **Consultant** means a firm selected under this RFQ and, as applicable, its approved subconsultants.
- d. **Firm** means a person, firm, corporation, partnership, joint venture, or consultant team submitting an SOQ.
- e. **On-call agreement** means an agreement establishing terms under which the City may request and authorize specific services during the qualification period.
- f. **Project assignment** means a specific scope of services authorized through a contract, task order, amendment, or other written instrument approved by the City.
- g. **RFQ** means this Request for Qualifications and all addenda issued by the City.
- h. **SOQ** means a Statement of Qualifications submitted in response to this RFQ.

2. Background and Purpose

The City owns and operates public water and wastewater infrastructure serving Hickory and surrounding service areas. The wastewater system includes more than 60 sanitary sewer pump stations of varying sizes, ages, and configurations, together with gravity sewers, force mains, treatment facilities, and related appurtenances. The water system includes treatment, pumping, storage, transmission, distribution, metering, and related facilities.

The City anticipates a continuing need for professional services relating to rehabilitation, replacement, expansion, regulatory compliance, asset management, and capital improvement delivery.

The purpose of this RFQ is to identify firms with the technical breadth, personnel, capacity, municipal experience, and responsiveness to support water and sewer assignments that may arise during the three-year qualification period. The City may select firms for all services or for particular disciplines or service categories.

3. Anticipated Scope of Services

Assignments may include any combination of the services below. The precise scope, schedule, deliverables, and compensation for each assignment will be negotiated before authorization. The list is illustrative and does not guarantee that any service will be requested. The consultant must include a completed Appendix A with categories they wish to be considered for. Appendix A does not count towards page limit.

Categories of Work

1. **Water and wastewater master planning:** capital improvement planning, asset management, condition assessment, risk and life-cycle analysis, and alternatives evaluation.
2. **Hydraulic and hydrologic modeling:** water demand, sewer flow, inflow and infiltration, capacity, pump selection, surge, transient, and system performance analyses.
3. **Wastewater pump stations and water booster pump stations:** evaluation, rehabilitation, replacement, consolidation, and design of pump stations, including mechanical, electrical, instrumentation, controls, SCADA, standby power, odor control, site, structural, and architectural components.
4. **Design of gravity sewer, force main, water transmission and distribution mains:** including valves, hydrants, meters, manholes, stream crossings, trenchless installations, and related appurtenances. Field investigations, records review, utility locating coordination, subsurface utility engineering, surveying, easement mapping, property acquisition support, and environmental services.
5. **Water and wastewater treatment process evaluation:** rehabilitation, optimization, and improvements.
6. **Geotechnical engineering, materials testing, and special inspections.**

Within these categories the requested services may include:

- a. Development of feasibility reports, technical memoranda, preliminary engineering reports, opinions of probable construction cost, design drawings, specifications, contract documents, and bid packages.
- b. Regulatory and funding-agency coordination and permitting, including coordination with the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality, Division of Water Resources, Division of Water Infrastructure, Duke Energy Lake Services, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, NCDOT, railroads, utilities, and other agencies having jurisdiction.
- c. Public engagement, stakeholder coordination, easement and right-of-way support, funding and grant assistance, and presentation of technical information to City staff, City Council, regulatory agencies, and the public.
- d. Bidding and procurement assistance, bid evaluation, contract award support, construction administration, resident project representation, construction observation, shop-drawing and submittal review, pay-application review, change-order evaluation, startup, commissioning, record drawings, and project closeout.

4. Contracting and Assignment Structure

4.1 Qualification Period

The qualification period will begin on the effective date stated in the applicable agreement and will continue for three years, unless earlier terminated. An assignment authorized before expiration may continue through completion under its governing contract or task order.

4.2 Multiple Selections and Nonexclusivity

The City may select one or more firms, divide selections by discipline or service category, make no selection, or conduct additional solicitations during the qualification period. Any agreement will be nonexclusive. The City may perform work with its own forces or obtain services from other consultants when the City determines that doing so is in its best interests or is required by law, funding conditions, schedule, specialized expertise, workload, or other circumstances.

4.3 No Guarantee of Work or Funding

Selection does not guarantee an agreement, task order, minimum fee, minimum number of assignments, or minimum volume of work. All work is contingent upon need, available funding, appropriation, negotiation, written authorization, and required approvals. A consultant proceeds at its own risk if it performs services before receiving written authorization.

4.4 Project Assignment Process

For a contemplated assignment, the City may request a scope, schedule, staffing plan, and fee proposal from the selected firm whose qualifications and availability best fit the assignment. The City and firm will negotiate a detailed scope and fair and reasonable fee. Nothing in this RFQ authorizes the City to bypass a qualifications-based selection process when a new or separate process is required by law, a funding agency, or City policy.

5. Submission Instructions

- a. Submit three bound paper copies and one searchable PDF on a USB flash drive. The PDF must contain the complete SOQ as a single file.
- b. Use 8.5-by-11-inch pages, with no smaller than 10-point type. Up to two 11-by-17-inch sheets may be used and each sheet counts as one page whether single- or double-sided.
- c. Limit the SOQ body to 20 single-sided pages or 10 double-sided sheets. The cover letter (maximum two pages), front cover, table of contents, divider tabs, and required forms do not count toward the limit, but may not contain substantive information intended for evaluation. If submitting on multiple categories, and additional 5 single sided pages may be include for each additional category.
- d. Organize the SOQ in the order listed in Section 6 and clearly label each section.
- e. Place the firm's name and "Water and Sewer Engineering Services RFQ" on the sealed package.

The City may reject a submission that is late, materially incomplete, improperly delivered, or not responsive to this RFQ.

5.1 Prohibited Fee and Design Submissions

Do not submit fees, hourly billing rates, labor multipliers, overhead rates, reimbursable schedules, total or estimated design fees, or other cost information. Do not create or submit project-specific designs, renderings, plans, technical work product, or uncompensated design solutions. Firms may describe prior completed work and discuss their general concepts, methods, and approaches, including potential schedule impacts. Prohibited material may be disregarded and may render an SOQ nonresponsive.

5.2 Communications and Lobbying

From issuance through final selection, firms and their representatives must not communicate about this RFQ with members of City Council, evaluation committee members, or other City personnel except through the designated point of contact or at a City-authorized interview. This restriction does not prohibit ordinary-course communications unrelated to this procurement. A violation may result in disqualification.

6. SOQ Content Requirements

6.1 Cover Letter

- a. Identify the legal name of the prime firm and the office that will perform the work.
- b. Identify a primary and secondary contact with mailing address, email address, and telephone number. At least one contact must have authority to negotiate and bind the firm, subject to the firm's internal approvals.
- c. Briefly state the firm's interest and the principal reasons the firm is well qualified for the City's anticipated work.

- d. Acknowledge all addenda by number and date.
- e. Be signed by an authorized representative.

6.2 Firm and Team Profile

- a. Firm history, ownership, years in business, office locations, staffing levels, and principal service areas.
- b. Office location from which work will be managed and performed; local availability and response capability.
- c. Prime consultant and each proposed subconsultant, including roles, relevant disciplines, and prior working relationships.
- d. Confirmation that the firm and assigned professionals are or will be properly licensed and authorized to provide the required services in North Carolina.
- e. Disclosure of any actual or potential organizational conflict of interest known at the time of submission.

6.3 Key Personnel and Organization

- a. Organization chart identifying the principal-in-charge, program or contract manager, project managers, discipline leads, key staff, and subconsultants.
- b. Concise resumes for key personnel, including education, professional registrations, relevant experience, office location, proposed role, and current availability.
- c. Description of the proposed team's experience working together and the firm's process for maintaining continuity of key personnel.
- d. Current workload and capacity to initiate and support multiple or time-sensitive assignments during the qualification period.

6.4 Relevant Experience and References

Provide at least three and no more than six relevant projects substantially completed within the last seven years. Favor projects for North Carolina local governments and projects representative of the service categories in Section 3. For each project provide:

- a. Client, project name, location, completion date, and brief scope.
- b. Firm's role, services performed, key personnel involved, and whether any work was performed while personnel were employed by another firm.
- c. Original and final construction cost, engineer's opinion of probable construction cost, and a concise explanation of material variances, if applicable.

- d. Schedule performance, change-order experience, permitting or funding complexity, and notable outcomes.
- e. Client reference name, title, telephone number, and email address.

A firm may include up to three additional municipal references if needed to demonstrate breadth. Projects performed by an individual while employed by another firm must be clearly attributed. Misleading attribution may result in disqualification.

6.5 Understanding and Approach

Describe the firm's general approach to delivering on-call municipal water and sewer engineering services. The response should address:

- a. Rapid scoping, prioritization, and initiation of assignments of varying size and urgency.
- b. Evaluation of operating infrastructure while maintaining reliable service and planning cutovers, bypass pumping, redundancy, and risk controls.
- c. Project management, internal and subconsultant coordination, communication, decision tracking, and issue escalation.
- d. Schedule and budget management; development and validation of opinions of probable construction cost.
- e. Quality assurance and quality control for studies, calculations, plans, specifications, permits, and construction-phase services.
- f. Regulatory, utility, property-owner, funding-agency, and stakeholder coordination.
- g. The information, access, reviews, decisions, and other support the firm would reasonably request from the City.

The City seeks an approach—not project-specific design work product.

6.6 Required Statements

- a. Statement that the SOQ remains valid for at least 120 days after the submission deadline.
- b. Statement of ability to satisfy the insurance requirements before commencing work.
- c. List of material claims, litigation, arbitration, professional disciplinary actions, or contract terminations involving the firm within the past five years that relate to professional services of the type contemplated, together with a concise explanation; or state "none."

- d. Statement identifying any exceptions to the RFQ or anticipated contract terms. Silence will not waive the firm’s right to negotiate a final contract, but material exceptions may be considered in evaluating the firm’s suitability.

7. Evaluation and Selection

7.1 Evaluation Criteria

Criterion	Points
Relevant firm and team experience with municipal water and sewer systems	25
Qualifications, roles, availability, and continuity of key personnel	25
Understanding and approach to on-call assignments	20
Past performance, references, cost-estimating accuracy, and schedule control	15
Regulatory, permitting, funding, and interagency experience	10
Responsiveness, organization, and clarity of SOQ	5
Total	100

The City may consider other lawful, relevant information bearing on demonstrated competence and qualifications. Fee will not be considered during ranking. Any reciprocal resident-firm preference required by N.C.G.S. § 143-64.31(a1) will be applied as provided by law.

7.2 Review Process

- a. City staff or an evaluation committee will review SOQs for responsiveness and evaluate qualifications.
- b. The City may request written clarifications, verify references, consider documented past performance, and establish a shortlist.
- c. The City may conduct interviews. Interview topics may include the firm’s qualifications, relevant experience, staffing, availability, and general concepts or approaches. The City will not require or consider project-specific design work product or fee information during ranking.
- d. The City will rank the most qualified firm or firms and document the selection consistent with applicable law and City procedures.
- e. After ranking, the City may negotiate an on-call agreement or a project-specific scope and fair and reasonable fee with the best-qualified firm. If negotiations are unsuccessful, the City may terminate them and proceed with the next best-qualified firm.

The City may make multiple selections only to the extent consistent with qualifications-based selection requirements and the City’s intended contracting and assignment process.

8. Solicitation Terms and Conditions

8.1 City Rights

To the extent permitted by law, the City reserves the right to reject any or all SOQs; waive immaterial informalities; request clarification; verify information; cancel, postpone, or amend the RFQ; modify the anticipated scope or schedule; select one, multiple, or no firms; conduct interviews; negotiate with ranked firms; and obtain services through another lawful method when in the City's best interests. The City is not obligated to explain or defend its exercise of these rights except as required by law.

8.2 Costs and Ownership

Each firm bears all costs of preparing, submitting, clarifying, and presenting its SOQ. Submitted materials become the City's property and will not be returned, subject to applicable public-records law.

8.3 Public Records and Confidential Information

Records received by the City are subject to the North Carolina Public Records Act. A firm should not mark its entire SOQ confidential. Information claimed to be confidential or proprietary must be clearly identified and limited to material the firm in good faith believes is protected from disclosure by law. The City will determine disclosure obligations and does not guarantee confidentiality. By submitting, the firm agrees to defend and indemnify the City from claims arising solely from the City's reasonable reliance on the firm's designation, to the extent permitted by law and included in the final agreement.

8.4 Addenda and Conflicts

Only written addenda issued by the City modify this RFQ. If an addendum conflicts with the original RFQ, the addendum controls. Firms must acknowledge all addenda.

8.5 Equal Opportunity and Minority-Firm Outreach

The City encourages participation by minority-owned, women-owned, historically underutilized, and small businesses. The City will use good-faith efforts to notify minority firms of this opportunity as required by N.C.G.S. § 143-64.31. The selected consultant must comply with applicable federal, state, and local nondiscrimination requirements and any funding-agency requirements identified for an assignment.

8.6 No Collusion; Accuracy

By submitting an SOQ, the firm represents that the submission was prepared independently and without collusion and that the information provided is true and complete to the best of its knowledge. The City may reject an SOQ or terminate negotiations or an agreement for a material misrepresentation.

8.7 Conflicts of Interest

Firms must disclose actual or potential conflicts of interest and promptly supplement that disclosure if circumstances change. The City may require mitigation, decline an assignment, or disqualify a firm when a conflict cannot be adequately addressed.

8.8 Governing Law

This RFQ and any resulting agreement will be governed by North Carolina law. Venue for any action will lie in a court of competent jurisdiction serving Catawba County, North Carolina, subject to the terms of the final agreement and applicable law.

9. Anticipated Contract Requirements

The items below summarize anticipated requirements and remain subject to negotiation and City approval. If this section conflicts with an executed agreement, the executed agreement controls.

9.1 Standard of Care and Professional Responsibility

The consultant will perform services with the professional skill and care ordinarily provided by competent professionals practicing under similar circumstances at the same time and locality. The consultant remains responsible for its services and for coordinating its subconsultants. City review, comment, approval, or provision of data does not relieve the consultant of professional responsibility.

9.2 Key Personnel

The consultant will assign the key personnel identified in its SOQ or approved substitutes of substantially equivalent qualifications. The consultant must give prompt written notice of anticipated changes and obtain the City's written approval before replacing key personnel, except when immediate replacement is reasonably necessary due to circumstances beyond the consultant's control.

9.3 City-Furnished Information and Software Compatibility

The City may furnish information in its possession and provide reasonable staff assistance. Unless expressly stated otherwise, City-furnished information is provided without warranty as to completeness, accuracy, or compatibility with the consultant's systems. The consultant must timely identify apparent discrepancies and is responsible for ordinary conversion and software costs necessary to perform its services.

9.4 Cooperation with Others

The consultant will coordinate and cooperate with City staff, other consultants, contractors, utilities, agencies, and stakeholders. The consultant must not knowingly interfere with work performed by others and must promptly identify coordination conflicts.

9.5 Compensation and Invoicing

Compensation will be established only after qualifications ranking and successful negotiation. The agreement or task order will state the basis of compensation, not-to-exceed amount if applicable, reimbursable expenses, deliverables, and invoice requirements. Payment is subject to satisfactory performance, receipt of a proper itemized invoice, appropriation, pre-audit requirements, and applicable law.

9.6 Insurance

Before commencing work, the selected consultant must provide certificates of insurance and endorsements acceptable to the City. Final limits and terms will be stated in the agreement. The City currently anticipates at least the following minimum limits, subject to confirmation by the City's risk manager:

Coverage	Anticipated Minimum
Workers' compensation	Statutory limits
Employer's liability	\$100,000 each accident / disease limits, or City-required limits
Commercial general liability	\$1,000,000 per occurrence; \$2,000,000 aggregate

Automobile liability	\$1,000,000 combined single limit, including owned, hired, and non-owned vehicles
Professional liability / errors and omissions	\$3,000,000 per claim and aggregate

The City may require additional insured status, waiver of subrogation, primary and noncontributory coverage, completed-operations coverage, notice of cancellation, extended reporting, or other customary protections, as appropriate to an assignment.

9.7 Termination; No Waiver of Governmental Immunity

The final agreement is expected to permit termination for cause and for the City's convenience upon written notice, with payment for authorized services properly performed through the effective termination date. Nothing in this RFQ or any agreement will be construed as a waiver of the City's governmental immunity or other defenses except to the extent expressly authorized by law.

9.8 Compliance Requirements

The selected consultant must comply with all applicable laws and assignment-specific requirements, which may include professional licensure, E-Verify, nondiscrimination, records retention, audit access, federal funding clauses, debarment and suspension certifications, Iran divestment restrictions, and other state or federal requirements. Applicable clauses will be incorporated into the final agreement or task order.

Appendix A – Proposed Categories of Work

City of Hickory Public Utilities

On-Call Engineering Services

Company Name: _____

Name of Authorized Representative: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Email: _____

Select the Categories of Work in which the Firm wishes to be considered in the SOQ:

1. _____ **Water and wastewater master planning**
2. _____ **Hydraulic and hydrologic modeling**
3. _____ **Wastewater pump stations and water booster pump stations**
4. _____ **Design of gravity sewer, force main, water transmission and distribution mains**
5. _____ **Water and wastewater treatment process evaluation**
6. _____ **Geotechnical engineering, materials testing, and special inspections**