



September 5, 2023

RE: Request for Proposals
Downtown Durham Blueprint 2035

To Prospective Firms:

Downtown Durham Inc., (DDI) is a 501(c)6 organization, formed in 1993 to serve as a catalyst for downtown revitalization. Working with the City of Durham and Durham County, DDI is seeking proposals from firms or teams to create a Downtown Durham Blueprint 2035 Plan that will articulate a set of actions for downtown's continued growth and development by addressing key and strategic objectives as defined by the community. DDI is specifically interested in collaborating with firms or teams experienced in master planning, urban planning, urban design, urban policy and development, and innovative public engagement for growing downtowns.

This planning process seeks to develop a cohesive vision for an expanded downtown Durham, setting a course of action for shared focus, goals, priorities, enabled by a collaborative leadership system comprised of public, private, and non-profit entities. The consultant team will work closely with DDI, the city and county, and the Downtown Durham Blueprint 2035 Plan Steering Committee and will engage with a variety of Durham stakeholders and community partners.

The successful candidate(s) will be expected to respond to downtown Durham's current and future planning and development needs. The candidate must provide evidence of a proven track record identifying public and private investment opportunities, demonstrating quality urban design practices, creating master plans, facilitating effective and innovative forums for public participation and engagement, and developing innovative land use, planning, activation, and development plans. In addition, there must be at least one member of the selected team who can speak fluent Spanish and an understanding that all communications and materials must be in both English and Spanish. It is estimated this effort will take twelve (12) to fourteen (14) months for completion and adoption.

Please review this RFP document and supporting materials that are enclosed and/or posted. Once responses have been submitted and reviewed, DDI will schedule interviews with selected firms that provide the strongest proposals. A final selection will be made once the interviews are complete. DDI reserves the right to select a consultant without an interview process.

We invite your serious consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nicole J. Thompson", is written over a faint, light-colored signature line.

Nicole J. Thompson
President/CEO



Request for Proposals

Downtown Durham Blueprint 2035

September 2023



PROJECT STATEMENT

Downtown Durham Inc., (DDI) an economic development nonprofit missioned with the vibrancy of downtown Durham, North Carolina, working with the City of Durham and Durham County, seek proposals from qualified urban planning firms or teams to create a Downtown Durham Blueprint 2035 Plan that will articulate a set of actions for future downtown growth and development.

This planning process seeks to develop a cohesive vision for an expanded downtown Durham, setting a course of action for shared focus, goals, priorities, enabled by a collaborative leadership system. The consultant team will work closely with DDI, the City and County, and the Downtown Durham Blueprint 2035 Plan Steering Committee. The consultant team will also engage with a variety of Durham stakeholders and community partners.

INTRODUCTION

DDI is seeking a qualified professional planning firm or firms to facilitate a community planning process that culminates in the development of a blueprint for downtown Durham. The selected consultant will facilitate the public outreach efforts, develop conceptual elements based on the input received through the public and key stakeholder participation efforts, and prepare recommendations for this blueprint plan.

PROCESS

The acquisition of professional services for this project will be a two-part process. The first will be an evaluation of qualifications. Review of the qualifications will be conducted by a team comprised of representatives from the city, county, DDI staff and board of directors, and key downtown stakeholder entities. Evaluation of the required submittal materials will be the basis for selection.

Upon initial selection of the most qualified offeror(s), the selected firms will be interviewed by the selection team, where engagement process and fee schedules will be a final determinant of whether a contract is awarded. DDI may elect to reject any and all bids for any reason whatsoever. The offeror is at risk for all costs associated with the bidding process.

ABOUT DOWNTOWN DURHAM

Downtown Durham is a .751 square mile area that is home to almost 10,000 residents, and 265 street-level restaurant, bar, retail and personal service businesses. With cultural icons like the Durham Performing Arts Center, Durham Bulls Athletic Park, the Historic Durham Athletic Ballpark and the Carolina Theatre, downtown attracts more than 9 million visitors per year.

From a collection of tobacco and textile factories built in the 1870s, downtown has grown into a hub of diverse industries with a particular concentration in technology and life science. It has more than 4.5 million square feet of office space, with more than a million square feet of lab space built or in the works.

Like all of Durham, downtown is forward-thinking, but there is also a culture of embracing its history. This is evident in the adaptive reuse of former tobacco and textile factories like the American Tobacco

Campus, Brightleaf Square and Golden Belt Campus. It is also evident in recent efforts to right the wrongs of Urban Renewal that displaced African-American businesses and residents, and split the thriving Hayti neighborhood from a growing downtown with the construction of the Durham Freeway (NC Highway 147).

Since 1993, Downtown Durham, Inc. has been the entity responsible for managing the growth, safety, cleanliness and cultural vibrancy of Durham's thriving downtown. In 2012, downtown property owners requested, and the city approved, a small additional tax to fund enhanced clean and safe services, placemaking initiatives and marketing of downtown and its businesses, creating the downtown Business Improvement District.

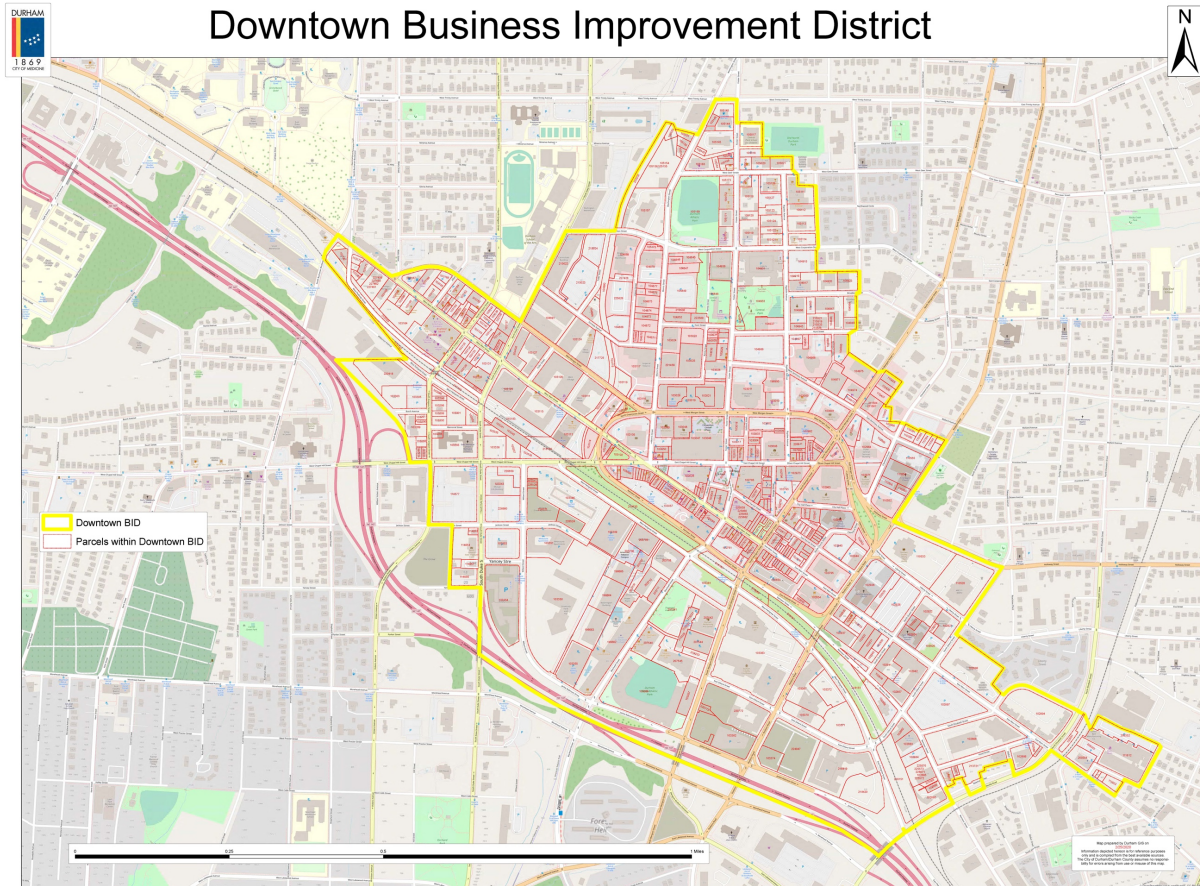
With this Blueprint, DDI seeks to provide a roadmap that will build on downtown's success by prioritizing future equitable economic growth and a vibrant cultural ecosystem for downtown Durham.

Relevant background information and related plans may be instructive to consultant teams:

- [Downtown Durham Master Plan](#) (2000)
- [Downtown Durham Master Plan](#) (2007)
- [Downtown City Center District: Creating an Environment for Retail](#) (2010)
- [Downtown Loop 2-Way Conversion Feasibility Study](#) (2010)
- [Downtown Durham Open Space Plan](#) (2014)
- [Downtown Durham SmART Vision Plan](#) (2015)
- [Downtown Durham Parking Study Final Report and Action Plan](#) (2017)
- [Downtown Master Plan: A Framework for the Future](#) (2017)
- [Business Diversity in Downtown Durham](#) (2018)
- [Durham Rail Train Master Plan](#) (2018)
- [Value of U.S. Downtowns and Center Cities: Durham, North Carolina](#) (2018)
- [Durham County Master Aging Plan](#) (2020)
- [Move Durham Transportation Study](#) (2020)
- [State of Downtown Durham](#) (2023)
- [Commuter Rail Feasibility Report](#) (2023)
- [Durham Draft Comprehensive Plan](#) (2023)
- [Durham Draft Transit Plan](#) (2023)
- [Durham Advisory Panel Report](#) (2023)

STUDY AREA

This Blueprint 2035 plan will focus on the boundaries of downtown Durham identified in the map below as well as adjacent areas and neighborhoods, most importantly to the south beyond NC Highway 147, recognizing the interrelationship between Durham's commercial core and its residential perimeter.



CRITICAL OBJECTIVES

There have been several plans and studies addressing individual components of the city and county of Durham and downtown in recent years (to include several large plans in progress). Over the past 23 years, there has been one overall downtown master plan (2000) which has had two updates (in 2007 and 2017). As we emerge from the pandemic, DDI realizes this is a crucial time to assess downtown Durham's current growth trajectory and address key objectives that will strengthen downtown Durham's future. This blueprint will address the most pressing issues that may limit downtown's diverse vibrancy, sustainable development and impactful growth. Through preliminary research and community engagement, DDI has identified and built an initial consensus of the most critical objectives which, if not achieved, will impede downtown's success.

KEY OBJECTIVES:

The DDI leadership and the Downtown Durham Blueprint 2035 Steering Committee agree the following objectives must be addressed through a comprehensive vision process resulting in a strategic action plan for the next 10 years.

1. There is a coordinated, coherent, and cohesive community vision for downtown.

Despite remarkable consensus among varied constituencies about the challenges downtown faces from two decades of growth and change, the key government, civic and private players need to step back and collectively develop a comprehensive action plan for the next decade. Through this visioning process, it may be necessary to look beyond the traditional downtown boundary (see map above) and consider the possibility that Durham's new downtown must include adjacent areas that have been intentionally removed from the downtown discussion. This must include how a reconnection between downtown and the Hayti community can be done by addressing NC Highway 147.

The success of this project, and especially this overall visioning piece, will be the engagement process used to develop a universally accepted vision. While Durham has a deep planning history with strong engagement, constituent groups are perceived by one another to have differing visions. This is, in part, a perception as most groups to a person seem to aspire for common outcomes. The successful applicant will need to design an engagement process short in time, deep in connection, and transparently integrated across all constituents.

Concepts to consider: Review public feedback and input from current and recently completed plans; non-siloed focus groups; multiple and creative techniques to gather public input to include electronic, in-person, social media; and in-depth analysis of how NC Highway 147 (to include overpasses, adjacent land) can be transformed from its current use to one that is more connected and a part of downtown

2. The public realm in downtown is perceived as safe.

The feeling by some is that, since COVID, anti-social behaviors might be on the rise in public spaces. Perception is reality for the safety reputation of downtown, and therefore this could lead to an inconsistent or unwelcoming pedestrian environment, deterring people from going downtown and exploring multiple areas in a single visit, which negatively affects the vibrancy of downtown.

Concepts to Consider: Identify all users of downtown and how they currently interact with and within downtown: provide an assessment of current (and potential) gaps and dead zones that impact the

pedestrian experience in downtown; analyze how the changes in daytime pedestrian activity due in part to the changing nature of work (remote/hybrid) may be impacting downtown's vibrancy; analyze how consistent physical and programmatic connectivity throughout downtown can address vibrancy; provide clarity and ideas on how to empathetically provide intensive, proactive and life-changing services and resources to unhoused and mentally challenged individuals; create a framework for how public safety (fire, police, sheriff, EMS, HEART) is involved in downtown's growth and vibrancy; and identify existing convening, gathering and open spaces and assess effectiveness and needed improvements, as well as assess the need for new open spaces that could be added as downtown grows.

3. Downtown Durham is welcoming to people of color, to families, and to those with low to moderate economic means.

As downtown has grown, that growth has been seen as catering to young, educated professionals. This has led to the perception by some that people of color, people of modest means, and families are no longer welcomed in downtown. Durham's Black and Latino communities – especially those of lower income – feel downtown is “no longer for us” or is, at the very least, more responsive to a newer, wealthier and less diverse population that may not fully know or appreciate the rich and diverse history of Durham. Durhamites pride themselves on having a community that is welcoming to all. In many instances, it is tolerance for diversity which led people to locate in Durham.

Concepts to consider: Based on input from Durhamites, but with a specific focus on BIPOC, families, and low- and moderate-income individuals, identify what assets (cultural, commercial, workforce, housing, activities, spaces, engagement) might create a culture and perception of inclusivity, and provide a prioritized list of ideas to begin to address these; and identify transformational opportunities that showcase or build upon Durham's unique and diverse history.

4. The area is connected both within downtown and to nearby neighborhoods, and to citywide assets and other institutions.

Poor transit policies in the past – from destructive highways that profoundly divide the city to neglect of walkable networks within the city – have severed not only physical but also cultural and community links between downtown and the rest of Durham. Successful activity nodes within downtown exist within a less successful multimodal network of transportation connections.

Concepts to consider: Identify antiquated infrastructure that has created physical barriers that have disconnected and divided neighborhoods from the downtown (e.g. the loop, the rail line, multiple one-way roads and NC Highway 147); identify improved multi-modal routes and infrastructure that allow downtown to connect within downtown and to adjacent neighborhoods (e.g., sidewalks, bus service, scooters, alternative transit options like trolley, e-bus); and inform how downtown should connect to the rest of the region (e.g., commuter rail, BRT) for commerce and employment.

5. Downtown Durham's unique assets and authenticity are well known throughout the region and are highlighted and celebrated.

Independent restaurants and retailers, including Black-owned businesses; its thriving, diverse and homegrown arts scene; and its reputation for one-of-a-kind architecture are all threatened by rising costs and the absence of governmental strategies to protect downtown's distinctive qualities.

Durham's character and cool factor are being diluted by uninspired infill development, causing it to lose its proud, distinctive vibe. Virtually all cherish Durham's inclusive values, and yet many fear that recent growth has put Durham at risk of losing cultural connection to Black and Brown people, independent

businesses, artists, young people, children and families. There is a general consensus that the character of what makes Durham *Durham* is beginning to be lost.

There is an understanding that part of Durham's distinctiveness is architectural and design-related, and that steps must be taken to protect that, especially with respect to new construction. Durham's competitive niche appeal within the Triangle region and North Carolina was long cultivated by an embrace of arts and culture which is increasingly threatened with rapid growth. Many homegrown festivals and community celebrations which instill community pride are being poached or displaced due to rising costs of doing business. Concerns exist that cumbersome event and permitting requirements have resulted in the loss of recent festivals and events, as well.

Concepts to consider: Identify all public-owned land and assets (publicly owned buildings), analyze current land value, prioritize public assets that have potential for catalytic and transformational development or redevelopment or expansion (and associated land value); review potential public and private programs that provide assistance to support homegrown and minority-owned businesses in downtown; retail analysis; analyze current festivals and downtown's ability and limitations to host and support events and festivals, and what size or niche should be considered; and identify cultural activation and projects and the key partners that play on and uplift Durham's history, heritage and values.

6. As it grows, downtown Durham will continue to become even more inclusive, accessible, and affordable to all.

Durham's remarkable success – which grew from its diversity, grit, quirkiness and distinctiveness – is creating market pressures that threaten those same qualities. Left unchecked, these forces may cause Durham to lose its inclusivity and accessibility.

Successful growth within downtown Durham, like many cities, results in affordability challenges. Current by-right regulations coupled with minimal public sector involvement in innovative land development strategies has produced uninspired development which does not meet the affordability or accessibility needs of Durham. The city is challenged to leverage its approximately 50% public owned property to deliver needed community benefits unattainable through pure market forces.

Concepts to consider: Identify creative community benefits agreements to be used with new developments that target Durham's values such as affordability (commercial and residential), small and locally-owned business support and workforce development objectives: identify catalytic developments that highlight Durham's uniqueness, solidify its authenticity, and demonstrate creative funding options and partnerships like P3s; and review current zoning and development regulations as well as governmental ordinances to identify policies and language that are counter to Durham's values, and suggest new language that drives more innovation and transformational projects.

7. There will be engaged, enthusiastic and collaborative leadership, coordination, and accountability from all leaders (public, private and civic) ensuring that this blueprint is prioritized and achieved.

Devising a coherent, consensus-driven action plan to address these challenges will not be enough. Understanding that DDI will be responsible for ensuring the objectives are met, it is unreasonable to assume that one entity among the public, private or civic sectors is capable of implementing the Blueprint 2035 alone. Systems for accountability and collective action must be built into the plan to ensure that all the relevant players work together to make sure markers become milestones and words become actions.

Concepts to consider: Clearly identify all stakeholders (public, private, civic) and users (residents, employees, visitors, unhoused) and assign specific tasks and roles or ways to maintain engagement in the implementation schedule; recommend and provide examples of resolutions, MOUs, and other mechanisms to solidify continued involvement and participation of stakeholders; and identify key national speakers to present on major initiatives introduced during the formulation of the blueprint to demonstrate solid examples and ideas that Durham can explore and replicate as appropriate.

SCOPE OF WORK

DDI seeks a qualified urban planning, architecture or urban design firm to facilitate a community engagement process and develop a Downtown Durham Blueprint 2035, a tool to inspire and shape future investment. The plan should set forth shared aspirations for downtown Durham's growth and development while clearly articulating focused priority actions necessary to achieve the vision. The final project scope is to be proposed by the applicant. While firms are invited to use the outline below as the framework, this RFP seeks to learn how the consultant or team believes innovative approaches will best lead to achieving the stated objectives. DDI expects a more detailed project scope that highlights the consultant or team's strengths and capabilities.

Of great importance is an innovative community engagement process that goes beyond the traditional focus groups, town hall meetings, surveys and workshops. While these tactics can be used, it should be understood that there are numerous master plans that have just recently been completed (Durham Comprehensive Plan) or are currently being conducted (Durham Destination Plan, Durham Cultural Roadmap, Open Spaces, etc.) and Durham residents are exhausted with traditional community engagement tactics. DDI is looking for creative and unusual, but effective, tactics that get deep and intentional input and feedback quickly and concisely. This plan should also find ways to engage all potential downtown stakeholders, with a focus on including frequently under-represented constituencies.

- Conduct a current assessment, including a review of existing and concurrent planning, design and development efforts, as well as existing zoning regulations that apply to the study area. Identify areas that contradict and/or impede sustainable and transformational development and growth.
- Design and, in partnership with DDI staff, facilitate a thoughtful community engagement process using traditional and unconventional tactics. The engagement and discovery phase should recognize and leverage prior and concurrent community engagement and planning efforts in Durham. It should recognize and prioritize *all* stakeholders within downtown Durham and seek to clarify their roles in advancing and implementing the vision.
- Prepare a coherent vision statement and guiding principles that will serve as organizing elements of the Downtown Durham Blueprint 2035 Plan and operate as guideposts for Durham's continued evolution.
- Develop specific goals and strategic recommendations that align with the vision statement and guiding principles. Identify catalytic development opportunities, with a focus on publicly owned assets, and, where appropriate, illustrate concepts with renderings or images and provide innovative funding mechanisms and strategies (P3, TIF, etc.).
- Recommend an implementation strategy to achieve short-, near- and long-term objectives of the plan. Go deep....identify obstacles and challenges that could impede implementation of these actions.
- Deliver a final plan document and summary presentation. Participate in targeted presentations to DDI stakeholders, which could include the DDI board of directors, special events, press conferences, media interviews, and presentations to policymakers.

SUBMITTAL PROCESS

At a minimum, each submission must be arranged according to the following outline:

1. Title Sheet: The title sheet must provide the name(s) of the team(s) submitting with the name of the primary contact clearly identified.
2. Letter of interest: Letter should address the firm's interest in the Downtown Durham Blueprint 2035 Plan and an understanding of the services needed and topics addressed in this RFP.
3. Table of Contents
4. Provide a list of current active projects, including the name, type of project, location, firm's role in the project and status of the project.
5. Summary of firm's background and focus. If there are multiple firms, a summary of each firm's background and focus.
6. Provide a minimum of three (3) and a maximum of five (5) representative completed projects, completed in the last five (5) years, preferably plans of similar scale or in a similar context that speak to the firm's ability to fulfill the requirements outlined in the scope of work. Each past performance project should contain:
 1. Location
 2. Client, to include contact name, email and phone number
 3. Date of project involvement
 4. Project description including illustrative materials, and a written description of why this example is relevant to this downtown master plan project
 5. Cost and scope of the project
 6. Specific services performed by the firm
7. Public engagement approach. List at least three (3) innovative public engagement activities utilized in past projects.
8. Team Composition: Provide names, firms, titles and qualifications of individuals who will be assigned to the project. This section of the responses should include descriptions of the respective roles that will be played by team members and identify those members of the team who speak fluent Spanish. Discuss the experiences of team members on the example projects referred to above. An abbreviated resume (no more than one-page in length) should be included for key team members in an addendum to the response.
9. Professional References: List a minimum of three (3) references for each firm (in addition to references provided under #6). For each reference list the contact's name, address, phone number and relationship to the firm.
10. Statement of Philosophy and Project Understanding: Provide a one page statement outlining the philosophy of the team in approaching projects of this nature and the team's grasp of issues and goals to address in the study.
11. Draft of typical professional services agreement terms and conditions (exclusive of pricing information).
12. Proposed work plan and timeline, including an estimated kickoff date, project milestones and estimated completion timing for each task.
13. A detailed proposed fee structure for the blueprint to include itemized, not-to-exceed cost breakdowns. Respondents are encouraged to provide as much detail as possible.
14. Any additional information relevant to this project not requested elsewhere in this document.

PROPOSAL SUBMISSION:

Request for Proposal responses shall not exceed 50 pages. Resumes of professionals and draft agreement are excluded from the page count. Two hard copies and a digital copy on a USB drive should be postmarked by Oct 27, 2023 and sent to:

Nicole Thompson
President & CEO
Downtown Durham, Inc.
307 W. Main St. Suite 102
Durham, NC 27701
919-682-2800
blueprint@downtowndurham.com

Teams of two or more firms are acceptable and encouraged, and should submit one package.

SELECTION SCHEDULE:

Sep 5, 2023	RFP released
Sep 18, 2023 @ 5PM ET	Deadline for submittal of questions by 5PM ET (sent by email to blueprint@downtowndurham.com)
Sep 19, 2023@ 1PM ET	Information session and Q&A. To register, send name and contact information to blueprint@downtowndurham.com by 5PM ET on Sep 18
Oct 27, 2023	RFP responses due
Nov 27, 2023	Interviews begin
Dec 22, 2023	RFP awarded
Jan 2, 2024	Kickoff meeting
Oct 1, 2024	Draft report
Dec 2024	Final presentation to DDI and steering committee
Jan 2025	Adoption by City and County

EVALUATION CRITERIA:

Upon receipt and review of the proposals, DDI shall determine which respondents meet or exceed the criteria outlined below. Submissions will be reviewed by DDI's President and an ad hoc selection committee comprised of city and county staff, DDI board, Downtown Durham Blueprint 2035 Steering Committee, and other downtown stakeholders. Below are the evaluation criteria that will be considered when selecting the strongest proposals.

- Proposed approach, scope of work, and deliverables demonstrating an understanding of challenges to be addressed in the planning process.
- Project team qualifications and related experience
- Capacity and available personnel
- Proposed workplan and timeline
- Proposed fees and costs
- Demonstrated familiarity with national trends and local context
- Commitment to an inclusive public engagement process
- Overall fit and approach as a partner

All proposals submitted will become the property of Downtown Durham, Inc. All candidates will be notified of status, regardless of outcome. DDI will consider all applicants based on qualifications and without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, marital status, disability, or any other legally protected status.