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BIDDING PROCESS FOR U.S. BORDER-WALL CONSTRUCTION BEGINS

Requests for proposals are latest steps in push to fulfill campaign promise – despite significant legal, logistical challenges

By Dan Frosch
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LOS ANGELES – U.S. Customs and Border Protection officially opened the process to accept bids to design and build a wall “physically imposing in height” along the southern border with Mexico.

The requests for proposals, posted online Friday night, are the latest steps in the Trump administration’s push to fulfill a campaign promise – despite significant legal and logistical challenges.

The documents say the government will consider proposals for two separate designs for the barrier: a solid concrete wall, and a wall made of alternative material.

Both requests call for the wall along the southwestern border – from San Diego to Brownsville, Texas – to be a minimum of 18 feet high. The requests add that the government’s “nominal concept is for a 30-foot high wall.”

The requests say the structure should include anti-climbing fixtures to make it impossible to scale, and be sturdy enough to at least temporarily withstand a variety of tools – such as chisels, battery-powered devices and torches – that could be used to breach it.

In its bidding documents, Customs and Border Protection also said the wall should run at least 6 feet below ground level to prevent tunneling.

The government noted that including a “see-through” component to the barrier would be ideal, and said the wall should include “sliding gates” to allow cars and pedestrians to pass through.

The bidding requests also take into account the physical appearance of the wall – at least on the U.S. side of the border.

“The north side of wall (i.e. U.S. facing side) shall be aesthetically pleasing in color, anti-climb texture, etc., to be consistent with general surrounding environment,” the requests state.

President Donald Trump has said constructing a wall is needed to better secure the U.S.’s nearly 2,000 mile border with Mexico.

But some who live along the border – including Republican supporters of Mr. Trump in Texas and Arizona – have said a contiguous wall is impractical because of varied terrain or would strain economic partnerships with Mexico.

Some favor a more targeted approach that would include additional fencing, more surveillance technology and additional Border Patrol manpower.

In its request for an alternative design, Customs and Border Protection didn't specify what other material might be used to build the border wall, saying only that it was seeking "designs that are alternatives to solid concrete walls."

Financial details on how the project will unfold are still unclear.

In his budget request to Congress last week, Mr. Trump asked for \$4 billion to begin planning and building the wall, far short of the \$21 billion the Homeland Security Department has estimated the entire wall would cost.

"Through the construction of prototypes, CBP will join with industry to identify the best means and methods to construct (the) border wall before making a more substantial investment in construction," Customs and Border Protection said in statement.

Since the department first issued in February a preliminary notice that it would be seeking bids to build the wall, some 700 companies have listed themselves as interested vendors on the federal contracting website where the notification was posted.

By Saturday afternoon, several dozen companies had listed themselves as interested in submitting bids for the formal requests for proposals.

Customs and Border Protection said it wants interested bidders to submit paperwork showing their qualifications and concepts by March 29.