

COUNCIL ACTION FORM

SUBJECT: REQUEST FROM AMES MAIN STREET FARMERS MARKET TO RECONSIDER SUSPENSION OF MARKET

BACKGROUND:

On February 25, 2020, the City Council approved requests to facilitate the annual Main Street Farmers' Market. The Market was scheduled to operate on Saturdays from May 9 through October 17 (except July 4).

In response to the ongoing COVID-19 public health crisis, on March 16, City staff ordered the suspension of all events held on City property, including streets and sidewalks. The City Manager is empowered by Municipal Code to withdraw permission for temporary obstructions to be placed on public streets and sidewalks. Temporary obstructions are required for events that place barricades, tables, booths, stages, or other objects on streets and sidewalks. **This suspension of events on streets and sidewalks is in effect through May 15.**

On April 24, the Governor announced changes to her disaster proclamation related to public health measures. **Among the changes, the Governor's proclamation now indicates that farmers markets are not prohibited mass gatherings as outlined in prior disaster proclamations, provided the markets comply with the following precautions:**

- Vendors may only sell farm products or food
- Entertainment activities are prohibited
- Common seating areas are prohibited
- Vendors are to be spaced at least six feet apart
- Markets must also implement social distancing, hygiene, and public health measures in accordance with guidance from state agencies.

Other gatherings of people in excess of 10 people remain prohibited by the Governor's order as of the date of this writing. On April 27, the order banning large gatherings was extended through May 15. However, the Governor has the power to revise such an order before the expiration date.

In a letter to the City Council dated April 20 (attached), the Ames Main Street Farmer's Market Manager requested permission to proceed with hosting the Market on May 9. The letter indicated that the Market was willing to abide by guidelines established by the State of Iowa (such as those outlined in the Governor's proclamation, above). **It should be emphasized that the typical procedure would be for the City Council to refer**

this letter to staff for a response at the next City Council meeting. However, doing so would have resulted in the City Council being unable to consider this request until after the originally scheduled opening day of the Market. Therefore, City staff elected to place discussion of this issue on the City Council agenda for April 28.

Although the Governor's proclamation now exempts farmers markets from the list of prohibited large gatherings, the City still retains control over whether events take place on City property. This control would not exist if the Market was to take place on private property.

With the fluid nature of the public health situation, City staff is not yet certain whether it will be necessary to extend the local suspension of events and facility closures beyond May 15. City staff intends to bring a discussion related to city facility closures and events on city property to the City Council on May 12.

The Council should note that as the weather has warmed in recent weeks, the City has received an increasing number of calls for service related to social distancing complaints. The Farmers' Market's initial application indicates an average daily attendance of 2,500 patrons, although it is reasonable to assume the actual attendance would be somewhat lower at the beginning of the season and with fewer vendors participating.

If the City Council agreed to allow Farmers' Market to operate on City streets, it would be important to know whether there are any additional expectations for social distancing and hygiene precautions as a condition of approval. Should volunteers and staff be required to be at each vendor booth location to enforce rules? What are the consequences if participants do not meet these expectations?

Normally, City staff would provide a list of precautions that could be required by the City Council as a condition of approval. However, City staff has no experience with what would make for a safe and successful event of this nature amid an infectious disease outbreak. The City Council must therefore weigh whether it is comfortable with any risk posed by proceeding with the event.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Do not grant the request to hold Main Street Farmers' Market on May 9, and address the status of this event at the same time City Council considers how to proceed with other events on City property.
2. Grant Main Street Farmers' Market permission to hold its market beginning May 9, with additional restrictions and conditions as outlined by the City Council.
3. Approve the Main Street Farmers' Market to begin on May 9 as requested, and require adherence only to the health and safety requirements approved by state authorities.

CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

City staff is evaluating how to handle special events, public services, and City facilities once the City's current restrictions and closures end May 15. This discussion will be brought to the City Council for a comprehensive discussion on May 12. The outcome of the discussion may be to 1) reopen City facilities and begin hosting events and providing services, 2) allow some activities but not others, or 3) to extend the closures and service reductions further into the spring. At this time, it is not yet known whether the state restrictions regarding public gatherings will be lifted (farmers' markets excluded), even if the City wished to allow those other events to proceed after May 15.

The Farmers' Market representatives would suggest that their request should be approved because 1) the Governor has now approved this activity and 2) by agreeing to eliminate all activities at the event not connected with food sales (eliminating all entertainment venues, craft exhibitors, and food trucks), they are no different from grocery stores that have been allowed to remain open from the beginning of the declaration of the state emergency.

In reviewing special events such as Farmers' Market, however, City staff emphasizes safety and mitigating risk. The current public health crisis is unprecedented, with guidance changing on a daily basis. Therefore, City staff is not entirely confident all the potential risks can be mitigated for this event. The least risky course of action would be to not approve the Farmers' Market's request to use Main Street until the public health conditions improve. Doing so would allow the City Council time to develop a uniform policy for approving special event requests.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of the City Manager that the City Council adopt Alternative No. 1 as described above.



April 20, 2020

Mayor and City Council
City of Ames
515 Clark Ave
Ames, IA 50010

Dear Honorable Mayor Haila and City Council,

Thank you all for your hard work during this challenging time. We support and respect the current restrictive measures on event gatherings and social distancing protocol. I have been notified that the Ames Main Street Farmers' Market special event permit for the month of May has been cancelled, along with all other City events for the month of May, and I respectfully ask for your reconsideration.

The Ames Main Street Farmers' Market is more than an event, it is an essential activity that is an integral part of the local food supply. As the market manager, I ask for your consideration to allow the Ames Main Street Farmers' Market be held on Saturday mornings beginning May 9 as previously scheduled, while adhering to current social distancing standards.

Across the country, farmers markets vendors are reporting double and triple the normal sales volume. Many are selling out of produce, bread, meats, eggs, and canned items, and markets are reporting customers purchasing more food plants than normal. Business from the Iowa Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) customers are being reported at a higher than average as well.

We want to proactively take any steps we can to protect our markets' and vendors' abilities to serve our community. Here is why:

- **NECESSITY:** Purchasing food is a non-optional activity that should not be made scarce. Closing a farmer's market would only redirect farmers market customers toward online, or enclosed-space grocery stores, over-burdening those spaces, and further hurting the local economy of local food and farm vendors. In 2019, the Women, Infants, & Children (WIC) Farmers Market Nutrition Program and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program combined provided over \$675,000 to Iowa producers of fresh fruits and vegetables at over 120 farmers markets and 90 farm stands throughout the state. Additionally, the Double Up Food Bucks program doubles SNAP benefits so our neighbors with limited food budgets are able to provide more fresh and nutritious food for their families. Last year this program witnessed \$154,236 in sales using Double Up Food Bucks at more than 30 participating sites across the state, including farmers markets, farm stands and retail grocery stores. These programs are essential, now more than ever, to help them make ends meet.
- **OPEN AIR:** We enjoy optimal fresh air ventilation, direct sunlight, and are not in confined spaces using recycled air systems. Outdoor spaces with airflow and natural UV spectrum light are less hospitable to viruses.
- **TIME FRAME:** The Ames Main Street Farmers' Market will operate from 8am-1pm once a week, keeping it very manageable to maintain frequent disinfecting and cleanliness. The week-long gap between each market gives the opportunity for any infected surface to no longer be active by the following week.
- **TRAVEL DISTANCES:** Because our products travel 100 miles or less this greatly diminishes the risk of spreading a virus into, or out of, the immediate region. The direct system of farmers' markets is the least circulated, most direct farm-to-table food available to eat, after your own backyard garden.



- IMMUNE BOOSTING: The food available at farmers' markets is more densely nutritious than largely industrialized sources (this is highly studied and documented). It is widely believed that immune responses are best served by the intake of fresh fruits, vegetables, and fungi harvested and eaten at the peak of their freshness.

Not only do we believe our market is as safe or safer than shopping in a conventional grocery store, but we are also, in many cases, one of the few direct outlets many of our fifty vendors have to make ends meet, not only during this time but year-round.

That is why we are contacting you. Please, if there is a discussion of the safety or importance of farmers' markets during this time, we want you to know: we take the safety of our vendors and customers very seriously. Below are the guidelines we will put in place to protect our vendors and help keep customers safe; these are the same guidelines that were sent to the State from the Iowa Farmers' Market Association. If additional guidelines come out that are recommended by the State of Iowa, we would add them to our guidelines as well.

- Vendors will be spaced out, leaving a space between vendors.
- Vendors will be asked to wear gloves which they will change every hour during the Market.
- No reusable bags will be allowed. Vendors will only use new, clean plastic bags in which to package their products to the customer.
- No food sampling.
- Require all vendor surfaces be frequently cleaned with disinfecting wipes and other standard cleaners before, during, and after each market.
- Streets will be marked for social distancing in front of vendors
- No music at the market
- No special events or children's activities, such as Petting Zoos, Face painting, Cooking Contests and etc.
- No tables and chairs will be set up.
- 3 hand washing stations will be set up for the customers to use: one at the east entrance, west entrance and in the middle of the Market.
- Vendors who are ill and unable to vend on market days due to will not be charged booth fees for that day.
- Strongly encourage all customers who are not feeling well to stay home and to send a proxy to shop on their behalf.
- Offer an online ordering option for folks who prefer to pre-order and "drive-by" for car delivery.

In an additional effort to help facilitate the sale of locally grown food and product, the Ames Main Street Farmers Market and the Ames Chamber of Commerce are developing an Online Ordering System for the Ames Main Street Farmers' Market. Through this virtual marketplace, customers would order online and the staff and volunteers would load into the trunks of the cars as they drove through a pick-up point. This service will allow our vendors to provide their products to the customers that are not comfortable with coming to shop on the street. This process will also help control the number of customers that would otherwise be on the street to shop.



I would ask that you allow us to start the Market on our Opening Day of May 9 under these guidelines and not be labeled as an event. According to the Iowa Farmers' Market Association AD HOC advisor to the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Paul Ovrom, the Governor's Proclamation on April 2, 2020 that prohibits mass gathering of more than ten people does not apply to farmers markets at this time.

Thank you for your time in considering this request. I would be happy to visit with you at any time if you have questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Lojean Peterson
Ames Main Street Farmers' Market Manager
515-520-0702