

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE
AMES CONFERENCE BOARD**

AMES, IOWA

JANUARY 26, 2021

REGULAR MEETING OF THE AMES CONFERENCE BOARD

Mayor Haila announced that it was impractical to hold an in-person Council meeting due to the Governor of Iowa declaring a public health emergency because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, limits have been placed on public gatherings, and this meeting was being held as an electronic meeting as allowed by Section 21.8 of the *Iowa Code*. The Mayor then provided how the public could participate in the meeting via internet or by phone.

The Regular Meeting of the Ames Conference Board was called to order by Chairman John Haila at 6:00 p.m. on January 26, 2021. Present from the Ames City Council were Bronwyn Beatty-Hansen, Gloria Betcher, Amber Corrieri, Tim Gartin, Rachel Junck, and David Martin. Linda Murken, Lisa Heddens, and Latifah Faisal represented the Story County Board of Supervisors. Other members in attendance were as follows: Joe Anderson, Nevada School Board of Directors; and Jennifer Britt, United Community School Board of Directors. Gilbert School Board of Directors and Ames School Board of Directors were not represented.

MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 25, 2020: Moved by Murken, seconded by Betcher, to approve the Minutes of the February 25, 2020, meeting of the Ames Conference Board.

Vote on Motion: 3-0. Motion declared carried unanimously.

DISCUSSION OF CITY ASSESSOR'S BUDGET PROPOSALS: Acting City Assessor Brenda Swaim reviewed the City Assessor's 2021-2022 Annual Report. Ms. Swaim pointed out that there are two vacancies on the Board of Review as one term concluded at the end of 2020 and another member decided to retire at the end of 2020. One of the vacancies must be filled with a real estate or construction expert per *Iowa Code*. It was noted that since the City Assessor retired, the Examining Board met and requested the Register from the Department of Revenue.

Ms. Swaim mentioned that updated tables were emailed earlier today, and she asked the Conference Board to focus on Tables 1 and 3 as those tables were correct. Table 1 showed that the assessed values were up by 3.2% and table 3 showed that the taxable values were up 4.7%.

Council Member Betcher inquired as to what accounted for the lower percentage from what the Board had for Table 2 as opposed to what they now see in Table 3. Ms. Swaim explained that Table 2 had last year's information in it as the old information was brought forward and not updated. The Mayor wanted to know if new tables would be sent out. Ms. Swaim mentioned that she would have to get that information together and could send it out if the Conference Board wanted them. Mayor Haila stated it would be helpful to have the updated information. If for any reason she is unable to obtain the data to send out, he asked that she send a note to the Board to that effect.

It was noted that the Ames City Assessor's Office has two vacancies. Ms. Swaim noted it was her

hope that the hiring of a new Ames City Assessor would be swift. She pointed out that on Attachment C of the Report, it showed the Residential Sales Quarterly Report; and when looking at new construction sales, the quantity decreased, but the price per square foot remained steady (the median was up by 2.8%). Existing house sales were very active with the quantity up by over 9%. Ms. Swaim pointed out that the price per square foot as well as the median price were also up from last year.

Page 6 of the Report was a summary of the Assessment notices that were mailed out for 2020. Page 7 showed the number of Informal Hearings along with Board of Review Hearings. Ms. Swaim explained that a question had come up from the Mini Board wanting to know the actual number of Board of Review cases; and it was noted that of the 183 residential cases, 144 were two condominium regimes held by a single owner. Ms. Swaim pointed out that, on Page 8 of the Report, there was a list of appeals that were pursued beyond the Board of Review, either in District Court or the Property Assessment Appeal Board (PAAB). Some of the cases have been settled, but many are still active as the District Court and PAAB systems are backed up due to COVID-19.

The Mayor questioned if the 183 residential appeals was an average number of appeals that are received each year. Ms. Swaim answered that the number was very low compared to other years. Mayor Haila then wanted to know if the number of cases going to the District Court and PAAB was comparative to previous years. It was pointed out that, while there are multiple cases, some of them are related to one project.

Story County Board of Supervisor Lisa Heddens wanted to clarify the Board of Review cases that show “number upheld,” and if that meant the homeowner won or the Board did. Ms. Swaim noted that cases where the appeal was upheld (meant that the petition of the property owner was granted).

Ms. Swaim explained that she had found a few errors on the Budget Proposal and had made the corrections. When Ms. Swaim was completing the Report for the Department of Management, she had noticed that no money had been allocated for the vacancies in the Office for the remainder of the fiscal year. Ms. Swaim had to increase the projected expenses for the Assessor and Staff line items. In FY 20-21, it was originally budgeted for a 5% increase and that is what the corrected amount is, but what was in the Report was modified. It was noted that the City Assessor’s Office tries to mirror what the City of Ames does for increases, when possible. When the City only got 4% those were the numbers shown. She wanted to make sure the Board knew that even though they had expenses available for 5%, staff was able to stay below the 4% budget amount. The Mini-Board was also able to help Ms. Swaim trim a few line items in the Report. It was pointed out that the total percentage of change between the proposed and current budget is only 2%.

Mayor Haila asked if the expected budget included the vacancy of the position. Ms. Swaim explained that she did take that into consideration along with the accrual pay out to the previous City Assessor. The Mayor wanted to know if the Assessor’s office is actively searching for an Administrative Assistant. Ms. Swaim mentioned that she is not sure, but knows that a few other items need to be taken care of before they can hire anyone.

Supervisor Linda Murken questioned when the last time was the Board of Review's salaries were increased. Ms. Swaim explained that it had been a long time; maybe over 15 years. The Mayor mentioned that in the budget proposal it is being recommended that the Board of Review salary change from \$17.50 per hour to \$35.00, and wanted to know if staff had checked with other municipalities to see if the \$35.00 was a common rate. Ms. Swaim mentioned it was discussed briefly during the Mini Board as there was a salary survey done from other cities and; that was the basis used for determining salaries for the Board of Review. Staff wanted to increase the salary with the hope of attracting and maintaining qualified members.

Moved by Gartin, seconded by Murken, to approve the recommendations of the City Assessor's Report.

Vote on Motion: 3-0. Motion declared carried unanimously.

Moved by Heddens, seconded by Corrieri, to receive the proposed budget.

Vote on Motion: 3-0. Motion declared carried unanimously.

Moved by Faisal, seconded by Betcher, to set 6:00 p.m. on February 23, 2021, as the date of public hearing on the proposed FY 2021/22 City Assessor's budget (adoption of budget will occur after hearing is held).

Vote on Motion: 3-0. Motion declared carried unanimously.

CONFERENCE BOARD COMMENTS: Council Member Martin asked, when the Conference Board moves into the next phase with a new City Assessor, would the Conference Board want to change any of the structure. He gave an example of adding more structure to the Mini Board or establish a procedure for formal evaluation of the City Assessor. He inquired as to how to move forward with those things if the Conference Board was interested.

Moved by Martin, seconded by Corrieri, to place the topics of the Mini Board structure (chair, vice-chair, and secretary) and the question of how the Conference Board would evaluate the Assessor's performance after the appointment of a long-term Assessor on the next Conference Board Agenda.

Council Member Gartin explained that he is supportive of the motion, but wanted to know if they could ask the City of Ames staff to come up with some proposals for the Conference Board to consider. He mentioned that he was nervous about having a "blank slate" and wanted to know if Council Member Martin would be in favor of adding that to his motion. Council Member Martin stated that is a great consideration as he is unaware of how to evaluate the City Assessor. Mayor Haila mentioned that would be a great idea and they could ask the City Manager who on staff would be able to help come up with some proposals for the Conference Board. The Mayor stated that it would be the understanding of the Conference Board that this would be included in the original motion and a new motion would not be needed.

Vote on Motion: 3-0. Motion declared carried unanimously.

The Mayor asked Council Member Corrieri to give an update on the process for hiring a new City Assessor. Ms. Corrieri mentioned that the Examining Board met a few weeks ago to establish the formality of the Examining Board, and she will be serving as Chair of the Board. The Board had officially requested the registry of names from the Department of Revenue. The registry list had been received and there were approximately 160 names on the list, but of those, 60 were retired. The City of Ames Human Resources Department is going to be assisting with the initial application and vetting process. Bethany Jorgensen, Human Resources Director, and Brian Phillips, Assistant City Manager, will be putting together a formal job description and will have the position posted to the City of Ames website in the next couple of weeks. A formal letter will then be sent to the names on the registry that the recruitment is open and invite them to apply. Ms. Corrieri explained that they are looking at having the position open indefinitely because the last recruitment only had one applicant and they are not sure how many people will apply. Supervisor Heddens inquired, process-wise, if the Examining Board would meet after the City has vetted the list. Ms. Corrieri explained that it would depend on how many people there are on the list, if there are a lot, the City of Ames will vet out some of the candidates, but if there are only a few then those will go directly to the Examining Board. Once the Examining Board reviews the applications, they will invite the finalists for a full-day interview process to meet with everyone and end on a public presentation. The Examining Board will make a final recommendation to the Conference Board for appointment.

Supervisor Linda Murken stated that she understood that the 2005 Report was going to be updated. She wanted to remind the Mayor and City Administrator if the City would be willing to take over the payroll for the City Assessor's office. Ms. Murken commented that the payroll is currently being done by Story County. Everyone already thinks of the City Assessor's office as City employees as staff is on the City benefit plans, deferred compensation, and for Human Resources, and that it doesn't make sense for Story County to do the payroll and just wanted to remind everyone that this issue had been brought up. Mayor Haila mentioned that he will follow-up with City Manager Steve Schinker to get that question answered, and if needed, will bring it back to the Conference Board.

ADJOURNMENT: Moved by Heddens to adjourn the Ames Conference Board at 6:29 p.m.