

## MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE AMES CITY COUNCIL

AMES, IOWA

SEPTEMBER 17, 2024

The Special Meeting of the Ames City Council was called to order by Mayor John Haila at 5:59 p.m. on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of September, 2024, in the City Council Chambers in City Hall, 515 Clark Avenue, pursuant to law. Present were Council Members Bronwyn Beatty-Hansen, Gloria Betcher, Amber Corrieri, Tim Gartin, Rachel Junck, and Anita Rollins. *Ex officio* Emily Boland was absent.

**CONSENT AGENDA:** Moved by Corrieri, seconded by Betcher, to approve the consent agenda.

1. RESOLUTION NO. 24-498 approving roadway easement with Iowa State University for South 16<sup>th</sup> Street reconstruction and widening projects subject to Board of Regents approval

Roll Call Vote: 6-0. Resolution declared carried unanimously, signed by the Mayor, and hereby made a portion of these Minutes.

**DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN CITY COUNCIL INPUT WORKSHOP:** Past President of the Ames Main Street Board of Directors Sam Stagg introduced Travis Toliver as the new Executive Director of Ames Main Street and Vice President of Downtown Development with the Ames Regional Economic Alliance (AREA). Executive Director Toliver introduced Ames Main Street Board President Nicole Rasmussen and Andrew Dresdner of Bolton & Menk as the consultant for the project. Past President Stagg recognized the importance of collaboration with many partners in the planning process before providing an overview of the history of visioning efforts which led to the current master planning process with Bolton & Menk. He presented the Vision Statement guiding the project: “Downtown Ames aspires to be a unique and vibrant destination to live, work, and play. As the historic focal point, Downtown Ames will serve as a hub of art, culture, retail, and entertainment for the entire Ames community.” Past President Stagg also shared that the focus areas of the master plan were 1) enhancing the gathering spaces in the Downtown District, 2) creating a stronger sense of Downtown ambiance, and 3) encouraging Downtown residential and commercial development opportunities.

Consultant Dresdner shared an overview of the planning process, intended outcomes, and approach to creating the master plan. Questions under consideration included what was next for Downtown, what was missing from Downtown, and what was needed to propel Downtown forward. Consultant Dresdner explained that systems of uses, spaces, and connections were being analyzed to identify potential initiative areas and shared several early observations arising from the master planning process: 1) there is a lot of development potential; 2) the ingredients for a great urban neighborhood are almost all there; 3) hospitality, entertainment, and event venues are curiously missing; 4) the arrival experience for many is disjointed and disorienting; 5) there is a strong sense of place on Main Street which can still be extended; and 6) Downtown can have more than one great street or place. He also noted that economic trends indicated that now was a good time to be pursuing the master planning process.

Next, Consultant Dresdner led the City Council in discussion about its vision for the future of Downtown Ames. The first question he asked was: “In a sentence or two, how would you like to describe Downtown Ames ten years from now? What would you, and believe the community, like

to experience? What do you see as its future?”

Council Member Betcher offered the following answer to the question: “In ten years, Downtown will be an area that all Ames residents see as the heart of the community, an active and walkable entertainment area where our history is honored and our future is secured through vibrant local businesses and creative housing opportunities in both new and historic buildings.” She discussed the importance of shifting student perceptions and of maintaining the historic ambiance and sense of place that was lost in the Campustown redevelopment efforts. Council Member Betcher also raised the importance of increasing available housing Downtown. Consultant Dresdner noted that a common benchmark for housing is for five percent of a city’s population to reside downtown, and Past President Staggs indicated that the current numbers for Ames are far below that mark.

Council Member Gartin answered the question with a focus on the need for more parking; restaurant options, including outdoor dining space; housing, including owner-occupied units; and support for entrepreneurs and startups, especially regarding access to affordable, smaller spaces.

Council Member Junck responded to the question with a vision of Downtown as the heart of Ames, somewhere where people of all ages gravitate towards. She emphasized the need for a variety of housing types and price points, restaurant options, and activities outside of shopping and eating.

Council Member Corrieri envisioned Downtown as “a vibrant area where residents, workers, and visitors can gather and connect; a thriving hub of commerce, culture, and community, a destination of choice and a model for communities of our size of the concept of live, work, and play.” She agreed that owner-occupied housing would be important and hoped that Downtown could be a place where someone could spend an entire day. She also emphasized that the City Council needs to find ways to say yes to projects. Consultant Dresdner introduced the concept of an 18-hour downtown, noting that it came with challenges and opportunities. Mayor Haila added that retail spaces extending evening store hours would be an important component, and Executive Director Toliver noted that a larger population living Downtown could help with the foot traffic to justify longer hours. Council Member Gartin emphasized the importance of affordable housing options for the retail workers who would be crucial in making longer hours possible.

Council Member Rollins replied to the question by sharing that she envisioned Downtown being a place that people would say that visitors cannot miss. Adding to discussion about housing options, she suggested including options with sustainability and climate action in mind. Council Member Rollins echoed the support for creating startup space, noting that such spaces would be desirable for arts-based businesses as well. She also emphasized that part of making everyone feel welcome should be embracing cultural specificity and offering options that made people from a variety of cultures feel at home. Council Members Gartin and Betcher affirmed the importance of celebrating a variety of cultures, noting that it made good business sense as well.

Council Member Beatty-Hansen answered the question by discussing having businesses open later and on Sundays, making housing as affordable as possible, maintaining the authenticity cultivated by small and local businesses, and enticing students to spend more time Downtown.

Mayor Haila responded to the question with the hope that the Vision Statement would be fully

accomplished with all residents, including students, enjoying all Downtown has to offer and seeing it as the epicenter of the community and the experience year-round festivals and celebrations. He encouraged the planning team to consider pushing the boundaries of Downtown and agreed with the idea that the City Council needed to find ways to say yes.

Consultant Dresdner then posed the second question to the City Council: “In a sentence or two, do you have any concerns as we embark on this planning process, future plan implementation, and how can we collaborate to overcome them together?”

Council Member Beatty-Hansen emphasized the importance to keep spaces for startups and smaller businesses. She also spoke to the need for measurable progress in the master planning process to keep it moving toward fruition.

Council Member Rollins spoke to the importance of consistent communication among the partners in the master planning process to maintain investment and avoid surprises.

Council Member Corrieri focused on timing, making measurable progress, and pushing partners in the process to be responsive.

Council Member Junck noted that creative financing would be required given the increasing constraints put on city budgets by the Iowa legislature. She emphasized the need for broad public input in the master planning process, especially from stakeholders in marginalized communities and those not already involved Downtown.

Council Member Gartin recognized the challenges in determining which Downtown buildings to preserve for historic value and which could be demolished to make way for new development. Echoing Council Member Junck’s concerns about the increasing budget limitations imposed by the state legislature, he pointed out that Downtown development could help build the City’s tax base. He also discussed the importance of the arts to successful developments.

Council Member Betcher echoed the calls for measurable progress and follow-through in the master planning process. She noted that pushing toward an 18-hour downtown could require increases in some City services, which would put further pressure on the budget. She also concurred with the need for the City Council to streamline its part in the development process to make it easier for projects to move forward.

Mayor Haila concluded the responses to the second question by reframing concerns as opportunities and expressing the importance of a positive, can-do approach. Consultant Dresdner noted significant convergence across both the visions and concerns shared by the City Council.

Next, Mayor Haila invited the presenters to share about their outreach to date and plans for public outreach moving forward in the master planning process. Consultant Dresdner identified the primary source of input as the steering committee, adding that input from two listening sessions conducted in the past was included in the data under review. President Rasmussen shared that two recent focus groups included Downtown business and property owners, developers, bankers, and representatives from Iowa State University. She reported that the group planned to gather broad

public input further along in the process through a QR code. The City Council Members advised the presenters to gather big-picture input early in the process, to incorporate lower-tech opportunities for feedback to be more inclusive, and to actively reach out to students and other populations who were not already engaged in Downtown. Executive Director Toliver shared that residents could sign up for updates on the master planning process on the Downtown Ames website.

**COUNCIL COMMENTS:** Council Members Betcher and Gartin expressed thanks for the fruitful discussion and Council Members Junck and Rollins expressed excitement for the future of Downtown Ames. Mayor Haila shared that the groundbreaking event for the Nutrient Reduction Modifications Phase I Project at the Water Pollution Control Facility was successful.

**ADJOURNMENT:** Moved by Gartin, seconded by Betcher, to adjourn the meeting at 7:53 p.m. Vote on Motion: 6-0. Motion declared carried unanimously.

---

Jeremy Neefus, Principal Clerk

---

John A. Haila, Mayor

---

Renee Hall, City Clerk