



# Memo

City Manager's Office

TO: Ames City Council

FROM: Seana Perkins, Business Development Coordinator

DATE: February 28, 2012

SUBJECT: Semi-Annual Review of Business Development Coordinator Position

For several years the Ames Economic Development Commission (AEDC) has provided economic development services to the City of Ames under a contract of services agreement. During the FY 11/12 budget process, this service was expanded to include a shared position for business development and marketing. This position is jointly supervised by the City Manager and by the AEDC President.

The start date for this position was July 18, 2011. Through an internal goal setting process, the FY 2011-2012 Business Development Goals are attached, it was determined that a semi-annual report to the City Council would be appropriate. The semi-annual report allows a dialog with the City Council on past experience, current issues and future plans. Regarding the Business Development Goals, Goals one through 11 have been accomplished.

## **FEEDBACK**

Customer feedback is received in the following ways:

Survey: At the City Council's October 21, 2011 regular meeting, the Development Process Survey was presented. This survey was an anonymous survey that collected feedback from customers of the Planning and Housing Department and the Building Inspections Division who had a project processed within the previous year. From this survey, several continuous improvement themes were identified, as follows:

1. Maintain consistency among City staff members in regards to answering questions and Code interpretations
2. Improve timeliness of inspections, responses to inquiries, and approval decisions
3. Base decisions on the current code and not on personal preference or bias of a staff member
4. Clearly communicate expectations to customers at the beginning of the approval process so

- they can be relied on without bringing up new requirements later in the process.
5. Display a “Can Do” attitude by helping to identify solutions that facilitate the project’s approval
  6. Develop clarity and flexibility in City policies, rules, and local ordinances and change those that work against our goals.

It is anticipated that this survey will continue on an annual basis.

On-going Feedback: On-going feedback is obtained for industrial, commercial and multi-family projects. Once a project is finalized, for example the site plan is approved or a certificate of occupancy is issued, the project contact person and project location are forwarded from either the Building Inspections Division or from the Planning and Housing Department to the Business Development Coordinator. The listed contact person is then called to obtain feedback on their project and their experience with the City of Ames. Feedback is then forwarded to the City Manager, who then forwards the feedback on to the City Council. The feedback is also copied to the Assistant City Manager, the Department Director and the Division Manager, as appropriate. The feedback is then kept in a database that resides in the Ames Economic Development Commission system. The last step in the process is a thank you card, with the City of Ames logo, that is mailed to the contact person along with the Business Development Coordinator’s business card. The following is a list of the feedback received to date:

This customer has had a long career working in the construction field all over the United States. When asked for feedback, he stated that the City of Ames was the most agreeable and workable place to do business that he has ever encountered during his career. He further stated that everybody, from the front counter staff to the inspectors, were great to work with and took good care of him. When asked what he would suggest to improve the process, he stated that he couldn't think of anything. He said that there were no problems, so he wouldn't change a thing.

This customer has worked with the Inspections Department previously. When he works in the City of Ames, he feels that he is in partnership with the Inspections Department and often contacts them ahead of time to understand what the requirements are going to be. He stated that he is always treated nicely by the staff and he knows that if he is in a time crunch that he can rely on the Inspections Department for timely inspections. He stated that there were no surprises and that he doesn't have any suggestions on how to make the process better.

This customer has an existing relationship with the Inspectors, so he knows who to call and what the process is. When asked for process improvement ideas, he stated that Ames is so well known for technology that he is surprised that the City hasn't done more with it. His idea was an e-mail acknowledgment when a permit is received and when it is ready to be issued. He also mentioned that Ames should have a stronger online presence and that the applications haven't been updated since he has been working here, indicating that it has been a long time.

This customer utilized a local subcontractor, so he didn't have direct contact with City staff, however he said that there were no problems from a coordination or timing standpoint and that the process went really well.

This customer typically has an architect who handles all of the initial work and coordination. He had no concerns about the two projects that he was contacted about. He had one issue come up on one of the projects, but it was resolved satisfactorily. He stated that there has been some previous concerns

with the consistency in interpretation of plumbing code, however he hasn't heard anything recently and feels that it was due mainly to staff turnover.

This customer sent an e-mail stating the following: *...the building department they were the most responsive, understanding and helpful building department I have every worked with. I used to be a contractor and have worked with building departments in Oklahoma, Kansas and Florida and this was truly a great experience as a comparison. The young ladies in the front were extremely kind and helpful, all of the inspectors were professional and friendly and the time for getting the permit and getting inspections completed was extremely fast. We are thankful to be a part of this community and look forward to giving back in as many ways as we possibly can.*

This customer was very complimentary toward staff. He stated that they are helpful and professional. He said that the overall experience was good. He also stated that it helps that he has gone through the process several times with the City, so that he knows what to expect. He stated that he wants to focus on the positive to improve the process. He feels that, although the experience was positive, that bringing back the process schedule/calendar would be very helpful. He understands that the initial review might take a week longer at the front end, but feels that the timeline and process steps are difficult to understand unless it is in a calendar format. He stated that he understands that the City is not promising that he will be on a certain agenda, however the calendar was extremely helpful when scheduling a project and feels that it would be helpful to City staff as well. We also discussed the timeline between the Commission and the Council. He stated that previously a project that went before the Commission could progress to the Council the next week, but it appears to take a longer time now. He appreciated the quick turnaround that had occurred before. The last thing that we discussed was the Development Review process and how important it is to catch as many of the items as possible in the initial review, so that there are no surprises in the resubmittal

This customer stated that the business owner had submitted the project proposal to Inspections staff prior to his involvement which he said helped. When he submitted the building permit, the Inspections staff were already familiar with the project. He said that the process was pretty smooth. The staff that he worked with were professional and respectful and they were open to solutions. He did not have any suggestions for improving the existing process.

This customer stated that everything went very well from the beginning right through to the end. He goes into a lot of towns the size of Ames that are typically disorganized, however he was surprised at how organized Ames is. The inspectors that he worked with were knowledgeable and nice. When I asked what we could learn from the other jurisdictions that he works in, he stated that we are just starting to place tags after an inspection is done so that other inspectors know that it has been signed off. He suggested more of that. He also stated that most jurisdictions provide a "red-lined" set of plans that are placed at the job site and Ames doesn't do that. Overall, he had a good experience.

This customer has 30 years of experience and has constructed over 100 fast food restaurants. He had heard that Ames is difficult to work with, however he found that the Inspections staff was reasonably responsive and relatively easy to work with. He found that inspections staff were able to discuss solutions with him to situations that came up during construction. Inspections staff offered proactive suggestions to assure that the Final CO was issued in a timely manner. Also, Inspections staff were able to visit the site to do a courtesy inspection prior to having the trades come in to make sure that they were on the right track. He suggested that this is unusual. Overall found that the staff were cordial, friendly and forthcoming with information. The difficult part of the project was the relationship between the City and the DOT. There was an issue with the highway and a sanitary sewer line where the process was difficult to understand and seemed to be conflicting. He also couldn't fill out the paperwork, so he had to hire an engineer to do that for him. That was his one complaint, was working with the DOT.

This customer was pleased with the process and did not have suggested changes.

This customer has mixed emotions about the project. He stated that all of the planning staff were

“super professional and supportive” of his project in all of the preliminary discussions and at the start of the project. He stated that staff was very helpful and enthusiastic, but that it took forever to get their final approval. He guessed that it was two to three months longer than what he had expected. He stated that the staff told him what he wanted to hear at the onset of the project, so it was a surprise that it took so long. He suggested a more dynamic process so that changes can be approved in a more expeditious manner. He stated that some changes that were proposed on his project took weeks to receive approval and now that he has approval he is concerned about how long it will take for any future changes.

This customer stated that the Inspections staff was timely in responding and professional. He stated that his experience recently has been so much better than 8-9 years ago when he felt that the attitude was much more of an "us against them". Now the staff works with his team to find solutions. The only suggestion that he had was to notify customers of expected changes that would affect either their current projects or future projects. A possible way to do this would be to send out a notification e-mail with the changes identified and a contact person.

This customer stated that Planning staff furnished information in a timely and professional manner. The one thing that he would suggest is that the Board of Adjustment appeared to not have reviewed the information prior to the meeting. He understands that they are a volunteer board and appreciates all of the work that they do, however he said that it was clear that they had not had the opportunity to read through his submittal.

This customer said that he feels that timeliness is the key and the Inspections staff met all of his expectations. He said that he has nothing that he would have changed or would suggest for the future.

This customer has worked on numerous projects in Ames and feels that we have a great Inspections division. He stated that when he does work in other jurisdictions that he uses Ames as a positive example. He stated that the Inspections division was going through some growing pains ten years ago, but that he now feels that it is a team effort to find solutions that work for everyone. The Inspections division is timely and accommodating. He also stated that his company initiates each project with a pre-application meeting with Inspections staff to try to catch any concerns ahead of time. He stated that it feels great to go into a project as part of a team. When asked if there is anything that we can improve upon in the Inspections division, he stated that he could not think of anything.

This customer has worked in a variety of municipalities. He said that the building permit process was painless. He had no problems with the inspectors and thought that they were good to work with. When asked how we can improve, he did not have any suggestions.

## **PROCESS IMPROVEMENT**

As feedback is obtained from the customer and forwarded to the individual department, opportunities are created for process improvement to occur. Much of the feedback is positive, however there have been some instances where we have been able to provide clarification of process, Code standards, and timelines for the customer on individual projects and for future projects.

## **RESEARCH**

The Business Development Coordinator is utilized as an information resource. Several customer requests that are outside of the feedback process involve research into processes and requirements. Research topics vary widely and can be anything from the process to install a temporary water meter to understanding if a grease interceptor is required. Typically, these research requests involve businesses that have an end goal in sight, but they do not know how to resolve a specific, unexpected, issue. In an effort to identify these “issues” earlier in the process, a Development Toolkit has been created.

## **TOOLKIT**

There have been instances, primarily involving research requests, in which customers have stated that they

are unsure of what questions to ask and whom they need to ask them of. A toolkit has been created to help identify the main departments that are likely to be utilized and some of the most commonly forgotten questions. Department locations and contact information are also included, along with contact information for the Business Development Coordinator, the AEDC and the Small Business Development Center. A copy of the proposed Development Toolkit is attached.

### **INVOLVEMENT**

The Building Inspections Division and the Planning and Housing Department staff involve the Business Development Coordinator in site visits for courtesy inspections and kick-off meetings (pre-application meetings). The City staff also forwards new business information to the Business Development Coordinator for follow-up and provides opportunities to attend other informational meetings. The Business Development Coordinator is also involved in the Development Review Committee (DRC).

### **EDUCATION**

Initial meetings have occurred to educate the Business Development Coordinator on the different City Departments and the responsibilities of the individual staff members to understand who customers need to go to for their specific need. These meetings also provided the ability to discuss the new position with City staff. Since the Business Development Coordinator is a new position in the City, outreach efforts, as previously mentioned, are ongoing.

### **FUTURE PLANS**

Once the Development Toolkit is deployed, it is anticipated that more specific toolkits will be created, such as a restaurant/bar toolkit and a retail toolkit. This will allow greater detail to be included for those specific uses.

The Business Development Coordinator will assist with the update of the economic development portion of the City of Ames website. Assisting with the website update will provide a confirmation of consistency of information between the City of Ames and the AEDC websites. This will also allow the information contained in the toolkits to be added to the website content.

Continued community education about the Business Development Coordinator position and the assistance offered will be on-going. This information will be provided through attendance at meetings and providing additional information on the City's website and on-going feedback contacts.

## Business Development Goals - FY 2011/12

1. Establish a method to identify new and expanding businesses as they begin the regulatory process.
  - a. Focus on small to mid-sized businesses without a corporate consultant team.
  - b. Contact business owners who are planning new construction or expansion projects with an initial phone call and possible meeting. As needed contact throughout the regulatory process. Follow-up with a phone call for feedback and thank you note after a Final Certificate of Occupancy, or other final approval, is issued.
2. Establish a method to identify when businesses receive their Final Certificate of Occupancy or equivalent.
3. Establish a process to send thank you letters to contacts.
4. Establish a process to track and contact new and expanding business owners to garner feedback.
5. Establish a process to track business contacts, issues addressed and feedback obtained.
6. Establish a process to forward the feedback received to the City Manager and to the related Department(s).
7. Create a new business toolkit which should include typical issues, contacts and other relevant information.
8. Create a report bi-annually of business contacts, issues addressed and feedback obtained for management staff and City Council.
9. Attend DRC meetings as much as practical to better understand issues relating to business development and retention.
10. Meet with Ames Departments/Divisions, County and State agencies to obtain information about processes and procedures affecting new and expanding businesses.
11. Assist with project collaboration and tracking as needed.
12. Coordinate the modification of the economic development portion of the City website.



# DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT

## *Whom do I talk to and what questions should I ask?*

**Building Inspections**  
515 Clark Avenue, Room  
205 Ames, Iowa 50010  
Phone: 515.239.5153  
Fax: 515.239.5261  
[http://www.cityofames.org/  
index.aspx?page=131](http://www.cityofames.org/index.aspx?page=131)

- What Codes are currently used for plan review?
- What do I need to submit for a building permit?
- What permits are required?
- What permit fees will I incur?
- What is the permitting process and how long does it take?
- Do I need an architect or an engineer?
- What portions of the building need to be brought up to Code for my proposed use?
- Is a grease interceptor required for my use? (food service uses)
- What other requirements do I need to be aware of for food service?
- What type of signage is allowed?
- Do I need an automatic fire sprinkler system?
- If there is an existing fire sprinkler system that serves the building, does it have backflow protection?

**City Assessor**  
515 Clark Avenue, Room  
256 Ames, Iowa 50010  
Phone: 515.239.5370  
Fax: 515.239.5376  
[http://www.cityofames.org/  
index.aspx?page=99](http://www.cityofames.org/index.aspx?page=99)

- I would like to obtain a map of my property.
- I would like to estimate my property taxes.
- I would like to protest my assessment.
- I would like to obtain current assessment and tax information on a property that I am interested in.

**City Clerk**  
515 Clark Avenue, Room  
238 Ames, Iowa 50010  
Phone: 515.239.5105  
Fax: 515.239.5142  
[http://www.cityofames.org/  
index.aspx?page=105](http://www.cityofames.org/index.aspx?page=105)

- Does the City of Ames issue business licenses?
- I would like to install an awning/canopy or a sign that extends past my property line into the public right-of-way. What type of permit will I need to obtain?
- I will need a Liquor License for my business. What application, process and timeline will be required?
- I want to run a business out of my home. What do I need to do?

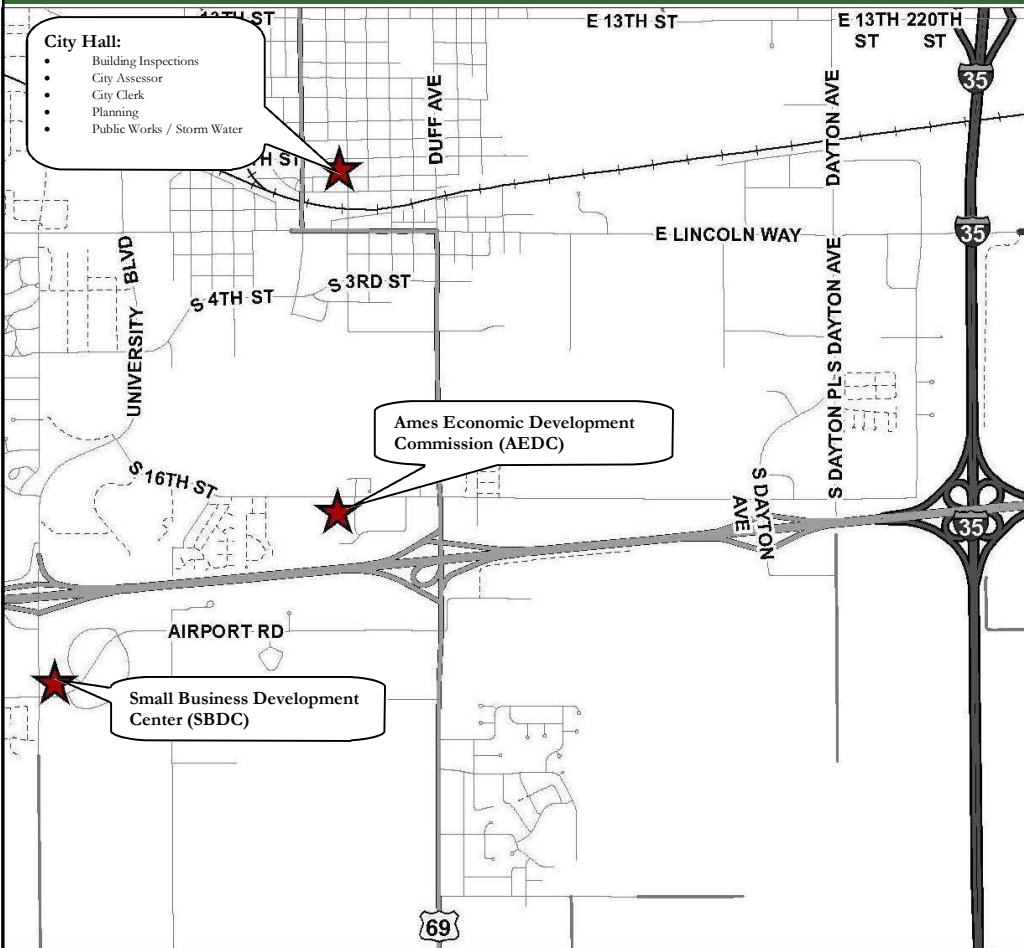
**Planning**  
515 Clark Avenue, Room  
214 Ames, Iowa 50010  
Phone: 515.239.5400  
Fax: 515.239.5404  
[http://www.cityofames.org/  
index.aspx?page=154](http://www.cityofames.org/index.aspx?page=154)

- What is the zoning designation of my property?
- Is my proposed business allowed at this location?
- Is there enough parking for my proposed use?
- Is the property located in the floodplain?
- What applications are required (i.e. Site Plan)?
- What information is needed to schedule a Kick-off (pre-application) meeting?

**Public Works/Storm  
Water**  
515 Clark Avenue, Room  
212 Ames, Iowa 50010  
Phone: 515.239.5160  
Fax: 515.239.5404  
[http://www.cityofames.org/  
index.aspx?page=163](http://www.cityofames.org/index.aspx?page=163)

- Where are the public utilities located? (Water, Sanitary and Storm Sewers)
- When is a traffic signal/traffic study required?
- What improvements will I need to make to my street frontage prior to opening a business at this location?
- What storm water concerns need to be addressed on this site?
- Will there be impacts to the Ames Regional Airport?
- Are there any other regulatory agencies that will need to provide input (Iowa DOT, Iowa DNR, Army Corps of Engineers, etc.)?

*Business Development Coordinator:* The Ames City Council has introduced a new position to assist in business development. Seana Perkins is available to assist at any point in the process. Please feel free to contact Seana directly by e-mail at [Seana@ameschamber.com](mailto:Seana@ameschamber.com) or by phone at 515-232-2310.



## DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT

**Ames City Hall**  
 515 Clark Avenue  
 Ames, IA 50010  
 Phone: 515.239.5101  
 Fax: 515.239.5142  
[www.cityofames.org](http://www.cityofames.org)

**Ames Economic Development Commission (AEDC)**  
 1601 Golden Aspen Drive  
 Suite 110  
 Ames, IA 50010  
 Phone: 515.232.2310  
 Fax: 515.232.6716  
<http://www.amesedc.com/>

**Small Business Development Center (SBDC)**  
 2625 N. Loop Drive, Building 2,  
 Suite 2610  
 Ames, IA 50010  
 Phone: 515.296.7828  
 Fax: 515.296.6714  
<http://www.iowasbdc.org/regional-centers/ames.aspx>

### Ames Economic Development Commission (AEDC)

## Other Opportunities?

The Ames Economic Development Commission (AEDC) stands ready to provide you with timely assistance in learning more about Ames and Story County as a first-class location for doing business. Whether it is site location assistance, packaging of financial incentives, or demonstrating an available workforce, you can rely on the AEDC for all of this and more as you contemplate investment in new or expanding operations.  
<http://www.amesedc.com/>

### Small Business Development Center (SBDC)

The Small Business Development Center (SBDC) helps individuals looking at new businesses and guides them through the questions and issues on how to get the business started including grant and loan opportunities.  
<http://www.iowasbdc.org/regional-centers/ames.aspx>