

Staff Report

CITY USE OF AMES COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT PROPERTIES

November 27, 2012

On October 9, 2012, the City Council directed staff to provide information regarding whether or not there are any opportunities for the City to utilize any of the properties that are being offered for sale by the Ames Community School District.

As a result of this request, the staff considered the buildings (old middle school, Edwards, Roosevelt, and Wilson-Beardshear) and determined there was no interest in pursuing these facilities for City operations because 1) their current internal configurations were not conducive to our work needs, 2) locations in single-family neighborhoods make them inappropriate for City uses, and 3) significant expenditures needed to convert to usable space makes it cost prohibitive to transform to our needs.

Rather than utilizing these existing buildings, staff would like to express support to transform portions of two properties (Roosevelt and Edwards sites) to neighborhood parks. We are not recommending that we utilize the Wilson-Beardshear site in the same way, since it is located within a few blocks of Bandshell Park which adequately serves this neighborhood with open space and play equipment. We, however, are willing to meet with the neighborhood association adjacent to the Wilson-Beardshear school site to discuss this issue further.

Because of the challenging financial times we find ourselves in, City staff traditionally has been hesitant to add smaller neighborhood parks which are more costly to maintain within our parks system. However, with the recent decision by the Ames Community School Board to dispose of a number of elementary schools, staff believes this is important opportunity for the City step up to support the impacted residents as these important amenities are removed from their neighborhoods. This staff recommendation seems appropriate since elementary schools historically have doubled as neighborhood parks during non-school hours.

The City staff has already expressed this position to representatives of the Ames Community School District. It was emphasized, however, that this support was subject to the School District satisfying the following three conditions: 1) that the property for the park be donated free to the City, 2) that the property for the park be cleared of any structures, including foundations, and 3) that the property for the park be returned to a grassed condition before it is given to the City. In other words, the property should be "clean and green."

Contrary to what you might have heard, in our discussions with School District officials the City staff did not place any size restriction on the amount of land that we would accept from the School District. We had previously understood it was their desire to develop these sites for single-family housing in an effort to attract more students with the associated State revenues to the District. Therefore, staff emphasized that it should be left up to school officials to decide how much land to donate to the City for park purposes.

Furthermore, it was made very clear that ultimately it would be the City Council's decision whether or not to develop these sites for City parks. To date, there has been no formal request by either party to pursue this option, although this approach has been mentioned publicly by the School Board during previous public discussions about the future of these sites.