



**To:** Ames City Council

**From:** Seana Perkins, Business Development Coordinator

**Date:** December 11, 2012

**Subject:** Business Development Coordinator - Update

Discussion about the Business Development Coordinator position occurred at the February 28, 2012 City Council meeting. At that time, feedback, process improvement, research, toolkit, involvement, education and future plans were highlighted. Since the February 28<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Business Development Coordinator position has continued to conduct outreach, request feedback from the Planning Division and Inspection Division customers, complete the Business Development Toolkit and to initiate the update of the Economic Development portion of the City's website.

### **FEEDBACK**

Customer feedback is received in the following ways:

Survey: At the City Council's December 11, 2012 regular meeting, the 2012 Development Process Survey will be presented. This survey is an anonymous survey that collected feedback from customers of the Planning and Inspection Divisions who had a project processed within the previous year. From this survey, several continuous improvement themes were identified, as follows:

1. Improved technology to enable online permit application submittal, payment and inspection scheduling.
2. Review and update online applications and information to make it easy to understand.
3. Continue to work toward timeliness of inspections, responses to inquiries, and approval decisions, including a proactive approach to solving development dilemmas.

4. Clearly communicate the Planning process and the anticipated timeframe.
5. Display a “Can Do” attitude by helping to identify solutions that facilitate a project’s approval.
6. Improve the internal communication and cooperation within and between City Departments when reviewing projects to help streamline the process.

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 Inspection Division or from the Planning Division 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 from February 28, 2012 to date:

This customer has worked with the Inspections Division on two projects recently. He stated that both of the projects were completed without any concerns. He also stated that he and his staff will often contact Inspections early in the project to bounce ideas off of them so that there are no surprises later on. He said that the Inspectors are good to work with. When asked what we can do to make his job easier, he suggested that an on-line inspection request program that would allow his office to schedule inspections several days in advance would be very helpful.

This customer stated that all of the Inspections staff were "excellent to work with" and he had no problems. He is an out of town contractor and this was his first experience working in Ames. He had three suggestions: 1. Better signage on the interior and exterior of the building. He stated that it was difficult to identify City Hall on the north and south sides of the building when he was driving by in his vehicle and once he got inside, he was unsure where the Inspections Division was located. 2. Suggested a pamphlet that explains the process and the expectations to contractors who are new to Ames. 3. Suggested an inspection lead time that is less than 24 hours. He stated that since he is from out of town and some of the work only takes four to six hours until an inspection is needed, that it is difficult to keep his crew busy. He also mentioned that the Inspections Division provided flexibility in

the inspection lead time knowing that he was not aware of the required 24 hour notice and he was very appreciative of that.

This customer stated that there weren't any major concerns with his project. He shared the following feedback: 1. It would be beneficial if staff could clarify when a site plan is needed for the entire site and when a site plan for just the modified area is allowed. It is important to know when the full site plan is needed since it adds cost and time to the project. 2. It would also be beneficial to be allowed to submit applications with an electronic version of the property owner's signature rather than the hard copy of the actual signature. He understands the need for an original signature on legal documents that will need to be recorded, however for applications such as a Minor Site Development Plan, it seems reasonable to accept an electronic version of the property owner's signature. 3. Staff has allowed him to submit electronic revisions for review and approval prior to making hard copies of the full plan sets. Reviewing the revised pages electronically saves time and cost.

This customer stated that the process was easy and everything went fine. The only concern was at the final inspection when a previous inspection hadn't been inputted into the system. This was quickly and easily remedied by the Inspections staff. He does a lot of work in Des Moines and West Des Moines and stated that the City of Ames is much better to work with.

This customer has no concerns on his project and stated that the Inspections Division has been, and continues to be "reliable, professional and accommodating". He feels that they are "doing a great job". When he gets into a timing problem, he can contact Inspections and they will be flexible and accommodating. He further mentioned that Inspections is even contacting him after an inspection to let him know how it went. He does not have any suggestions on how to improve his experience.

This customer thought that the project went fairly well. She did think that the communication could be better. She felt that there was some lost time in waiting two weeks for a response on submittals and resubmittals. Also, there was a miscommunication regarding a process/procedure that she felt could have been averted if someone would have contacted her about it as soon as it was identified. This would have allowed her to provide the needed clarification and would have saved time and significant stress from her staff and her client. When asked how we can improve the process she stated that it would be beneficial if we could simplify the online information (i.e. forms and process checklists) so that it is easier to understand.

This customer stated that his initial proposal included a cul-de-sac and through the review process, which was lengthy due to waiting for ISU input, the cul-de-sac was changed to a through street. He had initially proposed a cul-de-sac with a pedestrian connection because he felt that the connectivity of a through street could be created by utilizing existing streets. He further stated that cul-de-sacs are attractive to many home buyers and are appropriate in certain circumstances. His project planner knows what he is doing and always takes time to explain processes/procedures/Codes.

This customer stated that this was a straight forward Site Plan, however the landscaping standards associated with this site were different than with the site located directly to the south. Landscaping was a concern on this site due to the conflict with wanting to retain several existing healthy street trees along the frontage, yet needing to comply with the required on-site landscaping. Although the existing trees are street trees, their canopy extends significantly into the front yard. Further, this site is subject to the regular landscaping standards as well as the landscaping standards in the overlay district, which is confusing to determine which standards to use. This customer was pleased with the process and did not have suggested changes.

This customer had an opportunity to schedule a kick-off meeting early on with City staff. He stated that the kick-off meeting and the overall early involvement really helped to streamline the process. He stated that there were a couple of "hiccups" toward the end of the project, but that they were all resolved. This customer's firm works all around the upper Midwest and he shared that the initial Kick-off meeting is unique and very helpful. Most jurisdictions that he works in do not allow this initial discussion to occur.

This customer said that he has nothing to complain about, and he stated that he would if there was anything. He is very pleased with his inspector. His inspector is very accessible and timely on his inspections. The inspector also has gone out of his way to remind him when he has outstanding inspections or when a permit is about to expire. This customer further stated that the plans examiner is a great source of information which really helps when he is trying to estimate project costs.

This customer didn't have any concerns or particular feedback regarding this specific project, however he does have a concern with how the permit fees are determined. He typically works as a general contractor and he started doing work in Ames in 1994. He stated that as a general contractor he is required to obtain a permit for the entire project and the permit fee is based upon the valuation of the entire project. He further stated that his subcontractors are also required to take out permits, e.g. Electrical Permit, and pay a fee in addition to the permit that he took out for the entire project, which seems like a duplication of fees. He stated that he doesn't think that this is typical in other towns.

This customer stated that everything went well.

This customer stated that his project involved a Code amendment to the City's parking requirements. He felt that the Code change will benefit the community overall.

This customer stated that this is one of the few projects in the last couple of years that did not include a Code amendment. This was a straight forward project without any surprises.

This customer needed a Zoning Confirmation letter which required a Site Plan to legalize the entire site. This project was straight forward. He did not have any other specific feedback.

This customer explained that the property owner has been approved for a one year extension on parking lot improvements, therefore the Final CO cannot be issued until the required parking has been constructed. The customer had complied with all of the Inspections Division requirements, however he is obligated since he took out the building permit, to pay the monthly Temporary CO fee. As soon as the Inspections Division realized this they were able to remedy it and he stated that he couldn't ask for anything more. He was thankful for the quick resolution to this issue. He also stated that through his building permit, all of the inspectors were great to work with. He stated that it was a great experience and he is looking forward to doing more work in the Ames area.

This customer said that the process was extremely fast and that he has no complaints. He also stated that the City can view these projects as examples of what we can accomplish when we work together and that we can get things done in a timely manner.

This customer stated that everything went fine overall. She suggested that it would be helpful to have a checklist of items that are typically missing from plans for certain types of projects. This would assist the City to confirm that everything is on the plans prior to construction and would alert the architect of what is typically missing from a set of plans.

This customer works on projects all over the United States. He said that the Inspections Division was very professional and good to work with. When I asked how we can improve, he responded that he couldn't think of anything.

This customer said that from the first meeting, everything was set-up and all of the questions were answered, so there were no surprises during the process. Everything went very well and the project was well coordinated between the Planning and the Inspections Divisions. It helped that the main staff who were working on the project has some background on his project. The project planner left employment with the City midway through the project, however since the project was so well coordinated between the departments early on, this transition did not cause any problems.

This customer stated that the project went fine and Inspections did a good job. They communicated well and were professional.

This customer stated that the project went really well and that our Inspections staff were easy to work with. He felt that they worked together to get the job done. He didn't have any concerns or suggestions for improvement.

This customer stated that everyone was helpful at Inspections. Someone always answered the phone and was courteous. The inspections were timely and the inspectors worked with his team to find solutions. He was very impressed and looks forward to coming back to Ames in the future. He also was impressed that we contacted him for feedback.

This customer stated that the Inspections staff is always very helpful. He stated that he works in a lot of City's and has found that his interaction with

the Ames Inspections Division is a collaborative effort to figure out how to get a project done.

This customer stated that everything went fine and that there were no concerns.

This customer stated that it went very well. He has worked with the Planning Department on Final Plats before, so he understands the process.

This customer's project was recently approved through the Planning Division. He said that staff was great. He really needed to get the Final Plat recorded and when he realized that he needed a bond, staff provided him the bond amount, he provided the bond the next day and staff was able to keep the Final Plat on the same City Council agenda. This customer then sold 1/3 of the available lots within three weeks of having the plat recorded and noted that the subdivision is in the Ames School District.

This customer stated that the process went fairly well and that staff were good to work with. The only suggestion that he had was to move toward accepting plans and applications electronically.

This customer shared that the project went really well and that his staff planner did a fantastic job!

This was this customer's first experience working with the Ames Planning Division on a project. He was unsure of the process/procedure, however City staff were able to get his project back on track and approved so that his contractor could start work. Everything proceeded in a timely manner and everyone was good to work with. Jim had no suggestions of how to improve his experience.

This customer stated that the City staff were pleasant to work with. She also mentioned that the site plans were minor modifications to recently approved Site Plans and that she was surprised that she was required to go through the entire process for the minor changes. She also mentioned that she had received a phone call from City staff asking why she was going through this process again and asking what the changes were. She stated that it would be great if there was a minor modification process that could be utilized in the future to be more efficient with staff time and with overall resources.

This customer didn't have any concerns pertaining to the Planning process.

This customer specifically wanted to state that his project planner is always good to work with and really figures out how to get the project done within the constraints of the Code.

This customer stated that the project went just fine and that he didn't have any concerns or suggestions on how to make the process better.

This customer said that he does do business in Ames a lot, but also works in the Des Moines metro area. He said that he doesn't have any problems working with our Inspections Division. The Inspections Division has a quick

and easy process that is more user friendly than other cities. He further stated that the greatest benefit is how accessible our staff is. He rarely feels that way in the other jurisdictions that he works with.

This customer shared that his project planner was helpful and good to work with. Everything went fine and there were no concerns stated.

This customer's experience was positive and he wanted to share that he always enjoys working with his staff planner. He stated that his staff planner knows what he is doing and is great to work with. When asked what the City can learn from his experience on this project, he responded that the City process can run quickly when needed and his client appreciated it very much.

### **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. Please note that improvements are also occurring within the individual divisions and within the Development Review Committee.

### **TOOLKIT**

The Business Development Toolkit was introduced at the February 28, 2012 City Council meeting. At that time, the Toolkit had been created, but not deployed. The Toolkit has been revised to reflect the current City of Ames branding requirements and has been provided to all of the listed Departments and Divisions. Further, the Business Development Coordinator has worked with the Departments and Divisions to obtain the correct answers to the listed questions, so that we can move onto the next step of including the Toolkit on the website with the associated answers and links.

### **WEBSITE**

Revision of the economic development portion of the City's website is underway. Content is being created and designed to provide the business community with resources and links to information that is beneficial to business development.

### **INVOLVEMENT**

The Inspections Division and the Planning Division 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) and is acting as the facilitator when available.

## **FUTURE PLANS**

The Business Development Coordinator will continue to work toward the update of the economic development portion of the City of Ames website. Updating and confirming correct information on an on-going basis will be needed as we move forward.

As feedback is obtained and process improvement opportunities arise, the Business Development Coordinator will continue to work with the applicable Division or Department to effect needed changes.

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 TOOLKIT

City of Ames, IA *Smart Choice*

*You have*

## QUESTIONS!

- How do I obtain a map of my property?
  - How can I estimate my property taxes?
  - How do I protest my assessment?
  - How can I obtain current assessment and tax information on a property that I am interested in?
- 
- 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?
- 
- 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 (e.g. Site Plan)?
  - What information is needed to schedule a Kick-off (pre-application) meeting?
- 
- 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 stormwater concerns need to be addressed on this site?
  - Will there be impacts to the Ames Municipal Airport?
  - Are there any other regulatory agencies that will need to provide input (Iowa DOT, Iowa DNR, Army Corps of Engineers, etc.)?
- 
- What City Codes are currently used for plan review?
  - What information 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 business? (food service uses)
  - For food service, what other requirements do I need to be aware of?
  - What type of signage is allowed?
  - If there is an existing fire sprinkler system that serves the building, does it have backflow protection?
  - Do I need an automatic fire sprinkler system?

*We have*

## ANSWERS!

### City Assessor

515 Clark Avenue, Room 256  
Ames, Iowa 50010  
Phone: 515.239.5370  
Fax: 515.239.5376  
[www.cityofames.org/assessor](http://www.cityofames.org/assessor)

### City Clerk

515 Clark Avenue, Room 238  
Ames, Iowa 50010  
Phone: 515.239.5105  
Fax: 515.239.5142  
[www.cityofames.org/cityclerk](http://www.cityofames.org/cityclerk)

### Planning

515 Clark Avenue, Room 214  
Ames, Iowa 50010  
Phone: 515.239.5400  
Fax: 515.239.5404  
[www.cityofames.org/planning](http://www.cityofames.org/planning)

### Public Works/Stormwater

515 Clark Avenue, Room 212  
Ames, Iowa 50010  
Phone: 515.239.5160  
Fax: 515.239.5404  
[www.cityofames.org/publicworks](http://www.cityofames.org/publicworks)

### Building Inspections

515 Clark Avenue, Room 205  
Ames, Iowa 50010  
Phone: 515.239.5153  
Fax: 515.239.5261  
[www.cityofames.org/inspections](http://www.cityofames.org/inspections)



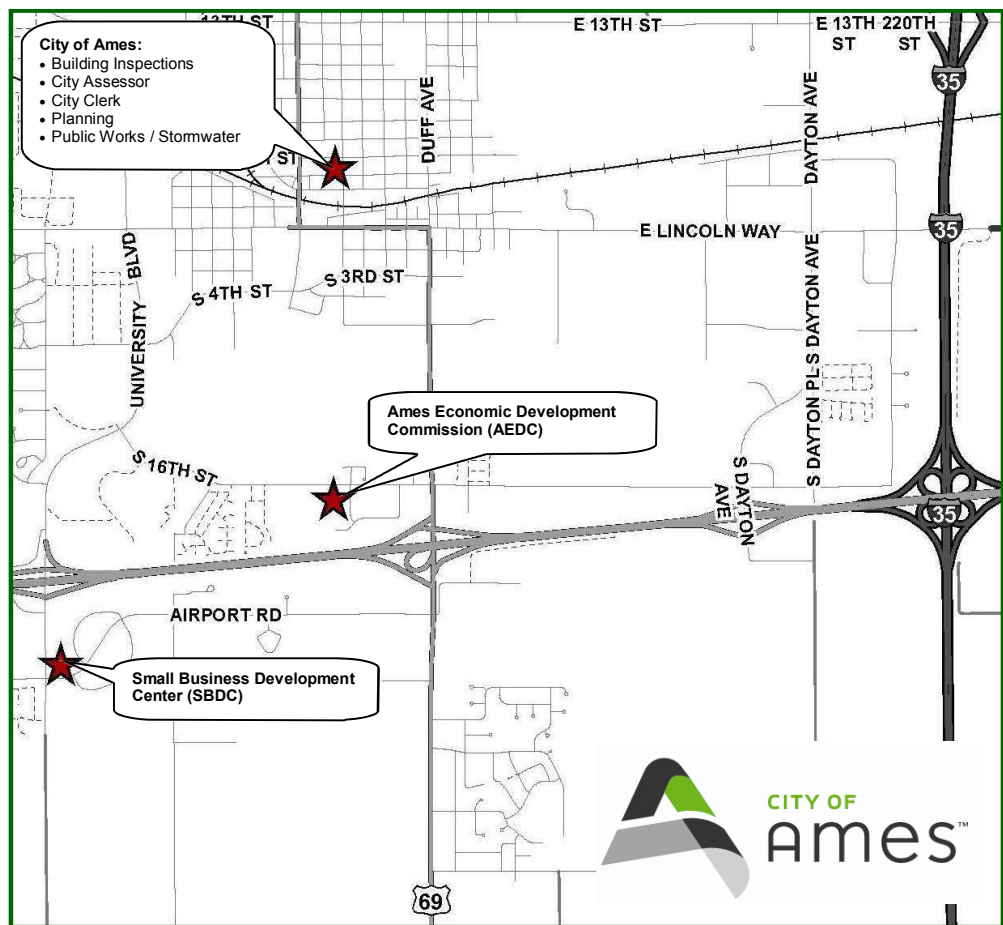
# BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT

City of Ames, IA *Smart Choice*

## BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR

The Ames City Council has introduced a new position to assist in business development. Business Development Coordinator Seana Perkins is available to assist at any point in the process.

**Business Development Coordinator:**  
Seana Perkins  
[sperkins@city.ames.ia.us](mailto:sperkins@city.ames.ia.us)  
515.239.5101



## OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

### *Ames Economic Development Commission (AEDC)*

The Ames Economic Development Commission (AEDC) stands ready to provide you with timely assistance in learning more about Ames and Story County as first-class locations for doing business. Whether it is site location assistance, packaging 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 getting the business started including grant and loan opportunities.

<http://www.iowasbdc.org/regional-centers/ames.aspx>

**City of Ames**  
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>