

Staff Report

Campustown Zoning Requirement for Step-Back in Facade

March 26, 2013

Kingland Systems has purchased the property from the Champlin family that comprises the 2400 block of Lincoln Way from Welch Avenue east to the Cranford Apartments Building. (see Attachment A – Location Map) Kingland intends to remove the existing structures and to build new buildings for its expanding business, as well as to lease for retail and office use. Kingland does not intend to allow residential uses in these buildings.

City staff received a letter from Kingland Systems requesting a waiver or modification of the City's current zoning requirement for properties in that area. That requirement establishes a maximum height of 30 feet for those portions of buildings that are within 15 feet of the Lincoln Way and Welch Avenue right-of-ways. (See attached Kingland System request, which includes the excerpt from the Zoning Ordinance). **This report explains the “step-back” requirement, describes why the City Council chose to include it in the Zoning Ordinance, and provides possible options for Council to consider should it choose to give staff direction on preparing a zoning text amendment to accommodate Kingland's request.**

BACKGROUND

One of the primary objectives of land use policy in the area south of the University campus has been to guide new infill development so that it is compatible with existing development. The Land Use Policy Plan describes this area as being made up of districts, each with a distinct character, well defined by building use, type, scale, setting, intended activity level, and other characteristics. It further states:

At the core, in the Campustown Service Center, buildings will be the largest and residential densities will be the highest, supporting lively commercial activity at the street level. Building placement, design, and materials reinforce a dynamic, pedestrian-friendly neighborhood character. (P. 51)

The Land Use Policy Plan calls for compatibility standards to guide the design integration of new development with existing development. Compatibility standards address scale, height, exterior materials, rhythms, and other building elements.

These design standards, now in the Zoning Ordinance, are based on an inventory conducted in 2003 and 2004 of all buildings and property within the areas south and west of campus. The inventory and analysis identified a Center Commercial District

consisting of seven portions of blocks within the Campustown Service Center. In this Center Commercial District, 85% of all buildings were two stories or less in height and most were located at the right-of-way line with a zero set-back. It was determined that these characteristics contribute to the “pedestrian-friendly neighborhood character” of this commercial area. In other words, the buildings along the street form the boundaries of urban space of a size that promotes and encourages people to walk as a means to go from place to place within the district. (See Attachment B for a graphical summary of the findings and conclusions of the planning for this area.)

In the several years immediately prior to this sub-area planning effort, two large residential projects were built. These are the Cyclone Plaza at 200 Stanton and the Legacy Tower at 119 Stanton. Both of these buildings are seven stories tall, which was the maximum permitted height at the time; but through use of mezzanine levels, the Legacy Tower is 114 feet tall. Each project provides more residential units at higher densities than had ever been developed previously. Public input throughout the sub-area planning revealed that many people believe that these tall buildings significantly altered the physical character of the area. Furthermore, if this pattern development continued, it was feared that a “canyon effect” could result. In addition, experience from these new structures showed that people in the living units adjacent to the streets could throw objects onto pedestrians.

Public and stakeholders who provided input to the sub-area plan included neighborhood associations, ISU staff, Campustown business and property owners, students and the general public. Viewpoints from this input included the following perspectives:

- Support for the larger buildings,
- Concern that the capacity for new residential use in the area may have been reached due to traffic, parking and intensity concerns,
- Concern that tall buildings may change sun/shade and wind conditions, affecting the quality of the pedestrian environment,
- Concern that further height restrictions could reduce the feasibility of residential buildings, due to the relatively shallow depth from the street of some lots, and
- Some who feel the larger buildings are out of place.

In response, the sub-area plan states the following:

Along Lincoln Way between Stanton and Hayward Avenue and along Welch Avenue between Lincoln Way and Chamberlain Street, as building height increases to the maximum, the building face should step back from any street right-of-way line.

Since this standard would reduce the buildable volume available for each property, the Plan also stated that the maximum building height would be increased from seven stories to nine stories, approximately 115 feet.

In October 2005, a Staff Advisory Committee developed proposals for the specific zoning standards. This eight-person committee included business owners, property owners, a developer, a student, an ISU representative, a resident, an architect and a neighborhood representative. Among the Committee's findings was the following:

Purpose of Design Standards is, in an area that has traditionally contained mostly one and two-story buildings, to reduce the visual impact of new, taller buildings from the street.

Committee Recommended Guideline as to Height is to require any portion of a building over 50 feet in height to step back 25 feet from the street right-of-way line. After discussion about structural issues, retail space requirements, and a possible prohibition on outside uses of the roof space on the lower, front part of the building, most of the Committee agreed on 25 feet for the step-back. One of the developers felt that any number is too arbitrary without knowing the situation of each lot and building. The University representative believed that two stories is about the right maximum height at the street.

The Committee considered an alternative to the step-back height requirement that allowed the use of materials; building form; placement of windows and doors; and details in the bottom two or three stories to create interest at the street level and pedestrian scale. The Committee agreed that, if such architectural standards were to be required, an architectural review committee would be needed to respond to the variety of localized conditions in the area. Some of the issues involved in implementing an architectural review committee include its membership, authority, and scope of review. Specific guidelines would need to be established in advance to express the intent and objectives for its review. There would also be a significant cost in staff time for administering such a Committee. The time and cost of the applicant would likely be even more than for the City staff review.

Based upon this input, in March of 2006 the City Council approved the current zoning development standards for the Campustown Service Center that require a step-back of 15 feet for a building to be taller than 30 feet, or two stories, and a maximum height of 115 feet.

POSSIBLE OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Revitalization of Campustown has been a priority for the City Council for many years. The Council's policy is to intensify the area closest to Iowa State University in a manner that is compatible with those characteristics that make Campustown a favorite place of current and past residents of Ames. The Kingland Systems project is the largest major development project to be proposed since the current zoning standards for building height were enacted. **Before moving ahead with the project, the staff needs direction regarding the zoning requirement for building height step-back.**

Option 1

The City Council can choose to leave the current standard in place. The very valid concerns that Kingland System raised in its letter to Council were acknowledged at the time that the zoning standards were approved. A mandatory build-to line requiring buildings to be at the street right-of-way was considered, but was not adopted. Kingland Systems can avoid the cost of the step-back by placing the front of the building 15 feet from the right-of-way. It should be remembered that the permitted building height was increased to compensate for the loss in potential value of a project.

This option appears to satisfy the safety and scale issues associated with tall buildings at the street right-of-way.

Option 2

As an alternative to the step-back requirement, the City Council can consider design standards for the building façade that create interest at the street level and pedestrian scale. This approach recognizes the differences between each project and, with general standards and architectural review, can both allow needed flexibility for buildings that are not as tall or do not have residential units. This approach could replace the step-back standard or be an option for projects where the step-back standard is not appropriate.

Option 3

The City Council can consider deleting this standard for the block face *along Lincoln Way only*. With the width of Lincoln Way and the open space of the University on the north side of the street, the character of the urban space is quite different from Welch Avenue and other streets within Campustown. To promote compatibility with existing buildings in the area, design standards as described in Option 2 could also be required.

Option 4

The City Council can consider revising the step-back standard by increasing the allowable height to allow a maximum of three stories without a step-back. Also included in this option could be a requirement that no residential units be allowed on the third floor. The 15 foot step-back requirement would be maintained for buildings over three stories.

The current requirement of a step-back for buildings over 30 feet, or two stories, is based on the predominant building height in the core area. There is no “correct” height standard. Rather, the principle is to limit the height at the street face so that it is not excessively greater than the right-of-way width, which on Welch Avenue is 66 feet.

This option appears to satisfy the safety and scale issues associated with tall buildings at the street right-of-way.

Option 5

The City Council can consider other options or combinations of options to modify the current step-back requirement.

NEXT STEPS

If the City Council chooses to consider a specific change to this standard, staff could be directed to draft the appropriate zoning text amendment, seek input from Campustown stakeholders, and hold a public hearing before the Planning and Zoning Commission. In that case, staff would work to bring the text amendment back to Council for adoption on first reading in May.

If the City Council chooses to explore multiple options, staff could be directed to seek input on those options from Campustown stakeholders and the Planning and Zoning Commission. Staff would then bring that input back to Council in May, at which time Council could initiate the formal amendment process. This process would take an additional month or so to accomplish.

STAFF COMMENTS

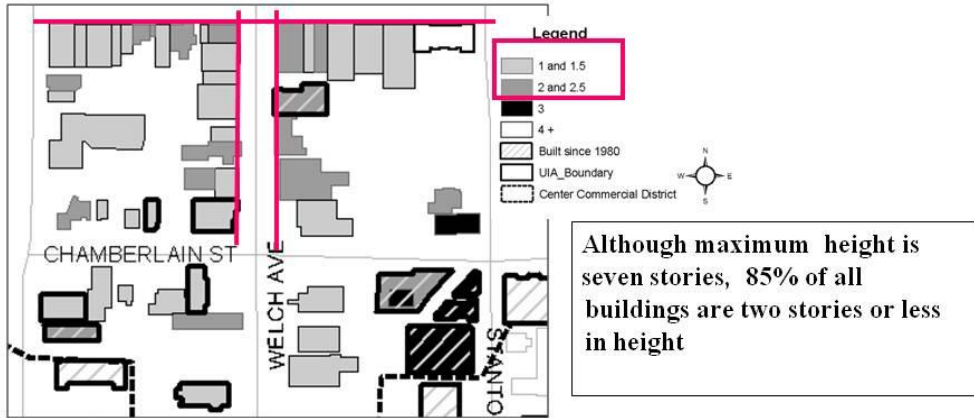
It appears that Option 4 1) results in the change in the Zoning Ordinance in the least amount of time, 2) allows the Kingland System project, as proposed, to move forward, and 3) maintains the goals of the City regarding safety and scale in Campustown.

Attachment A - Location Map

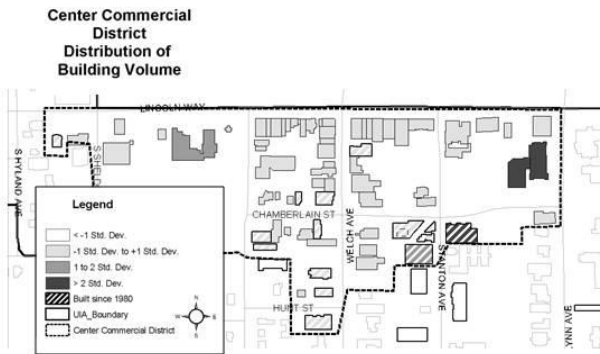


Attachment B – Summary of Building Height and Step-back Standards

Building Height in Center Commercial District



These buildings, placed at the street rights-of-way create a distinctly pedestrian scale at the center of this district.



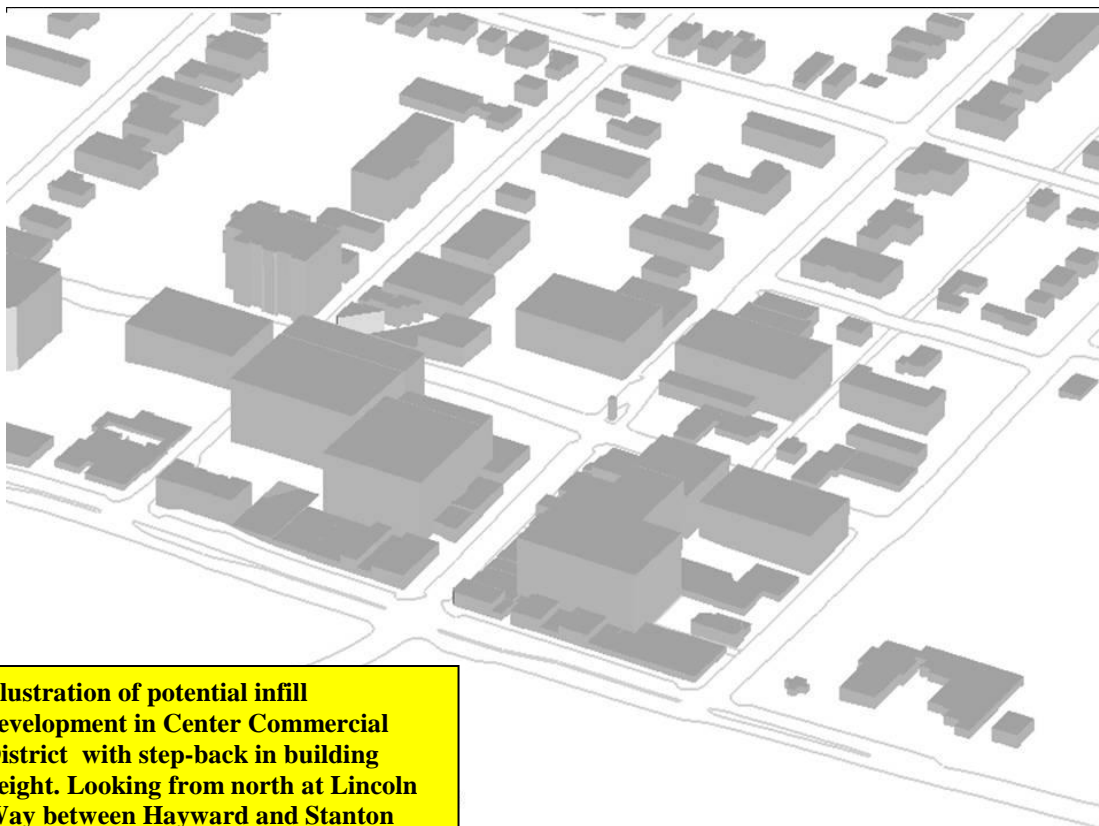
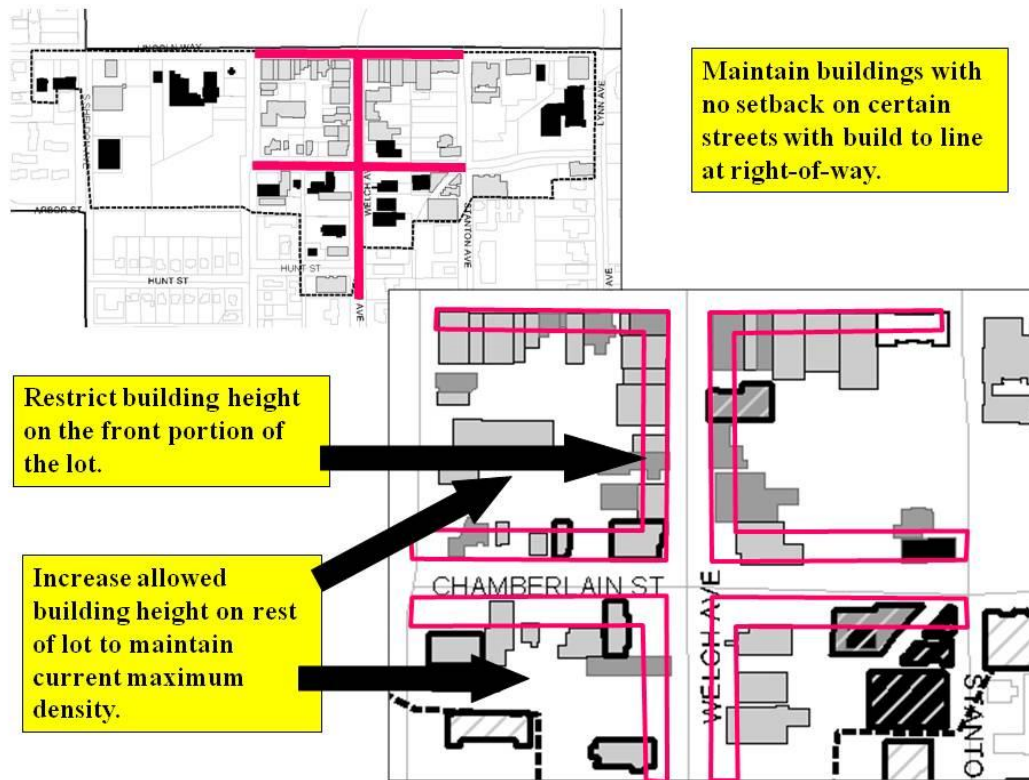
Recent and future development consistent with the city's land use and zoning policy will continue to significantly alter the physical character of the district.



The primary goal in the Center Commercial district should be to preserve and extend those characteristic that make it an active, lively pedestrian-oriented place with a variety of uses and spaces.



Attachment B – Summary of Building Height and Step-back Standards



Attachment B – Summary of Building Height and Step-back Standards



Example of building with step-back in height in Champaign, Illinois

Alternative: Use of materials, building form, windows, doors, and details in the bottom two or three stories should create pedestrian scale and encourage activity.





March 8, 2013

City of Ames
Mayor & City Council
City Hall, 515 Clark Avenue
Ames, IA 50010

Dear Mayor and Members of the City Council:

We are excited to work with the city of Ames on our construction project in Campus town and have had great support from the city staff as we move from concept to reality. We are writing the City Council with a request for waiver of the maximum height of 30 feet within 15 feet of the right-of-way lines of Lincoln Way and Welch Avenue per Municipal Code Chapter 29, Section 29.809, Table 29.809(3) Campustown Service Center Zone Development Standards (see attachments).

Our project is to construct a new 3-story building on the 2400 block of Lincoln Way that will host expanded retail and office space. It will significantly increase the usability of the existing space and could provide workspace for as many as 300 – 400 people, in addition to nearly 14,000 square feet of retail space. The maximum height restriction results in a requirement for a 15-foot setback on the third floor of our project and results in a significant burden on the construction that is proving to be a major impediment for us to proceed. The setback would require us to add an additional line of columns and beams along the entire east-west wall, increasing structural costs by as much as 25%. If the 15 foot setback is required, the building foundation system cost would also increase about 25%. The setback also increases snow loading and drifting on the structure, further increasing costs. This waiver would further allow our project to capture 5,000 square feet of leasable space. The increased costs and loss of leasable space results in necessary lease rates which are unacceptable to potential tenants of this office space.

We are sensitive to the primary reason for the setback for ensuring that large monolithic structures do not create an un-pleasing canyon effect of streetscapes. To guard against that we have undertaken specific design considerations that will break up the structure and present an appearance of multiple buildings, with a variety of façade materials that are compatible with surrounding architecture. Our plans also include variety on the east-west lines of the façade, as well as the vertical wall of the buildings to provide for a variation from straight lines. We would also point to the fact that our third floor roof height will still be lower than the building to our east, and that this area of Lincoln Way is broad and

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completely open to green-space on the north side of the road, which also eliminates a potential for a tunnel-like view of the streetscape. We also want to confirm that we have no plans to expand our project beyond three floors at a later point and that this project is not expected to include a residential use.

We encourage the council to refer this request to city staff to analyze the appropriateness of a waiver or modification of the set-back requirement for our project in order that we can close on construction costs and deliver a project which will significantly benefit the area and increase the usability of the space. We look forward to your assistance in this matter and are available for questions. Please direct any questions to either our facilities manager, Jeff Gorbali, who may be reached at 641 355 1005 or via email at jeff.gorbali@kingland.com or our CFO, Todd Rognes, who can be reached at 641 355 1014 or via email at todd.rognes@kingland.com.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Todd Rognes", with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Todd Rognes
CFO

Sec. 29.809. "CSC" CAMPUSTOWN SERVICE CENTER.

(1) **Purpose.** The Campustown Service Center (CSC) zone is intended to provide high-density development within an area of the city adjacent to Iowa State University. A broad range of uses is allowed to serve the needs of people who wish to be near ISU, including students and staff, and their families. Development is intended to encourage lively commercial activity in the building at the street level and pedestrian activity, with a strong emphasis on safe, vital and attractive streets.

Development is intended to be very dense with high building coverage, large buildings in scale with the predominant building pattern in the Campustown commercial area, and buildings placed close together, while also conserving and preserving existing valuable characteristics by assuring compatibility between existing and new development. Building placement, scale at the street, design and materials reinforce a dynamic, pedestrian-friendly neighborhood character.

**Table 29.809(3)
Campustown Service Center (CSC) Zone Development Standards**

DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS	CSC ZONE
Minimum FAR	1.0 (1)
Minimum Lot Area	No minimum, except for mixed uses, which shall provide 250 sf of lot area for each dwelling unit
Minimum Lot Frontage	No minimum, except for mixed uses, which shall provide 25 ft.
Minimum Building Setbacks:	
Front Lot Line	0
Side Lot Line	0
Rear Lot Line	10 ft.
Lot Line Abutting a Residentially Zoned Lot	10 ft.
Minimum Landscaped Area	No minimum
Landscaping in Setbacks Abutting an R Zoned Lot	5 ft. @ L3. See Section 29.403
Maximum Building Coverage	100%
Openings between buildings	In order to provide access for vehicles and/or utilities to the interior of the block, there shall be a twenty foot wide opening between buildings, at the approximate mid-point of each face of each block. In addition to this mid-block areaway or drive, any lot without other means of access from a public street or alley may have one driveway from the street of up to 20-ft in width.
Minimum Height	25 feet
Maximum height in portions of CSC bounded by:	115 feet
Lincoln Way	
Stanton Avenue	
Hunt Street	
Hayward Avenue	
Maximum height within fifteen (15) feet of the right-of-way lines of:	30 feet
Lincoln Way from Hayward Avenue to Stanton Avenue	
Welch Avenue from Lincoln Way to Chamberlain Street	
Maximum Height in all other locations	75 feet
Parking Allowed Between Buildings and Streets	No
Windows	More than 50% of the area of primary or secondary façade between the ground line and the second floor line shall be windows that allow views into the interior space or be a display window.
Building Materials	Clay brick shall comprise more of the exterior wall surface of the building than any other material. Exterior surface does not include windows or doors or their trim. This requirement does not apply to additions to buildings which do not have brick as an exterior material.
Entrance	There shall be at least one functional pedestrian entrance facing a street.
Balconies	There shall be no exterior balconies above the third floor.
Site materials	No rocks, brick fragments or other hard, loose material over ¾-inch in size shall be used.
Drive-Through Facilities Permitted	Yes
Outdoor Display Permitted	Yes, See Section 29.405
Outdoor Storage Permitted	No
Trucks and Equipment Permitted	Yes