

Staff Report

WESTWOOD VILLAGE LANDSCAPE PLAN AMENDMENT

April 8, 2014

BACKGROUND

Westwood Village is a Planned Residential Development (PRD) located in west Ames on the north side of Lincoln Way and on the west side of Marshall Street (see Attachment A Location Map). The property includes a grove of mature oak trees on the east and north sides. The current Major Site Development Plan was approved in 2006 and includes a two-story apartment building within the east portion of the oak grove. In December of 2013 the site was the subject of a PRD Major Amendment request to move and enlarge the final building to be constructed on the site. After extensive input from abutting neighborhood members, City Council decided to not approve the amendment. Following that action, the applicant began construction of the plan as originally approved in 2006.

The approved 2006 Landscape Plan for the Westwood Village Planned Residence District provides for the removal of four oak trees for the new building and of a number of trees immediately adjacent to the new building. (See Attachment C – Current Approved Landscape Plan) As of March 6th, ten oak trees had been removed. Staff contacted the owner's representatives and informed them that in a PRD zoning district trees to be removed are to be shown on the plan. A revised Plan must be approved before additional trees can be removed.

The owner then submitted a Revised Landscape Plan showing the ten trees already removed and four trees to be removed (See Attachment D Proposed Landscape Plan):

- a) Four oak trees shown on the approved Plan to accommodate the new building (already removed)
- b) One oak tree southwest of the proposed building and two oak trees east of the proposed building (already removed)
- c) One oak tree that is close to the projected east foundation wall (already removed)
- d) Two trees in the parking loop identified as diseased and/or hazardous in September 2013 according to Mark Gleason, ISU Professor in Plant Pathology & Microbiology (already removed)
- e) Two oak trees that will be too close to the projected south foundation wall to remain healthy after construction, according to Professor Gleason in March 2014
- f) Two trees with severe internal decay (heartwood rot) according to Professor Gleason in March 2014. These two trees are located at the north driveway by Story Street.

According to Ames Municipal Code Section 29.1203(9), staff can approve changes to a Major Site Development Plan if the changes do not change the overall landscape design of the project. (See Attachment B) Before a change is approved, a revised plan must be provided. In this case, a revised plan was not provided before the trees were removed. It is regrettable that significant, irreplaceable trees were removed without approval of the City, particularly those

that were shown on the plan as to remain, but then removed due to the proposed building. A case-by-case evaluation should be applied to significant trees that are viewed as marginal in quality or health and not only be considered for removal due to convenience. However, staff believes that trees should be removed if that is the recommendation of a qualified tree expert subject to consideration of remaining useful life, potential hazard, and replacement trees.

Staff requested a revised Landscape Plan that includes the following changes:

- Show all of the trees that have been removed or are yet to be removed based on Professor Gleason's recommendations.
- Add three new oak trees to be planted between the proposed building and Marshall Avenue and at least 20 feet from the right-of-way of Marshall Street (in addition to the six Serviceberry shown to be planted here).
- Add three new oak trees to be planted south of the new building, between the building and the existing drive.
- Add 13 new oak trees to be planted in a new grove west of the proposed building.
- These trees are in addition to the four new oak trees already shown on the 2006 plan.
- All of these trees are to be burr oak or white oak trees at least two-inch caliper in size.
- Retain the two heartwood diseased oaks at the Story driveway until a present hazard exists. At time of future removal, plant two additional oak trees.

The total planting will be 23 oak trees and six Serviceberry trees at this time, with two additional trees planted upon removal of the driveway oaks. Staff is recommending a small to medium size of replacement tree. Smaller oak trees tend to adapt better to their sites than trees that are larger when planted, resulting in higher survival rates. Planting larger trees requires more equipment and greater disturbance, which can damage existing mature oak trees. However, oak trees grow slowly and will take a long time to mature. Even with good maintenance, some can be expected to die due to disease, pests or damage. Therefore, staff is requiring the number of replacement trees to be more than 150% of the number of trees removed to help perpetuate the oak grove. In some instances with different species and different landscape plans, staff may request larger trees for a more immediate visual impact and to mitigate tree removal.

Since the trees within the footprint of the proposed building had already been removed and a building permit had been issued, construction of the building can proceed. Staff has confirmed on the site that adequate fencing is in place to protect the remaining oak trees.

If Council agrees with staff's assessment of the changes to the landscape plan it can accept this report. Staff will then complete the minor amendment process and do a site inspection after construction is complete to ensure consistency with the landscape plan. Occupancy would not be permitted until landscaping has been installed per the plan or deferment until the next growing season is approved by staff, as permitted in the Zoning Code.

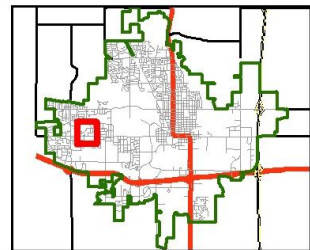
If the City Council concludes that the overall landscape design of the project has changed with the tree removals and therefore does not consider these changes to be a minor amendment to the approved Major Site Development Plan, it can direct staff that the applicant must make application for an amended Major Site Development Plan. This will be processed in the same manner as a new Major Site Development Plan – including Development Review Committee review, Planning and Zoning Commission recommendation, mailed and posted public notice, and City Council approval.

ATTACHMENT A



**Location Map
Westwood Village
145 Marshall**

0 200 400 800 Feet

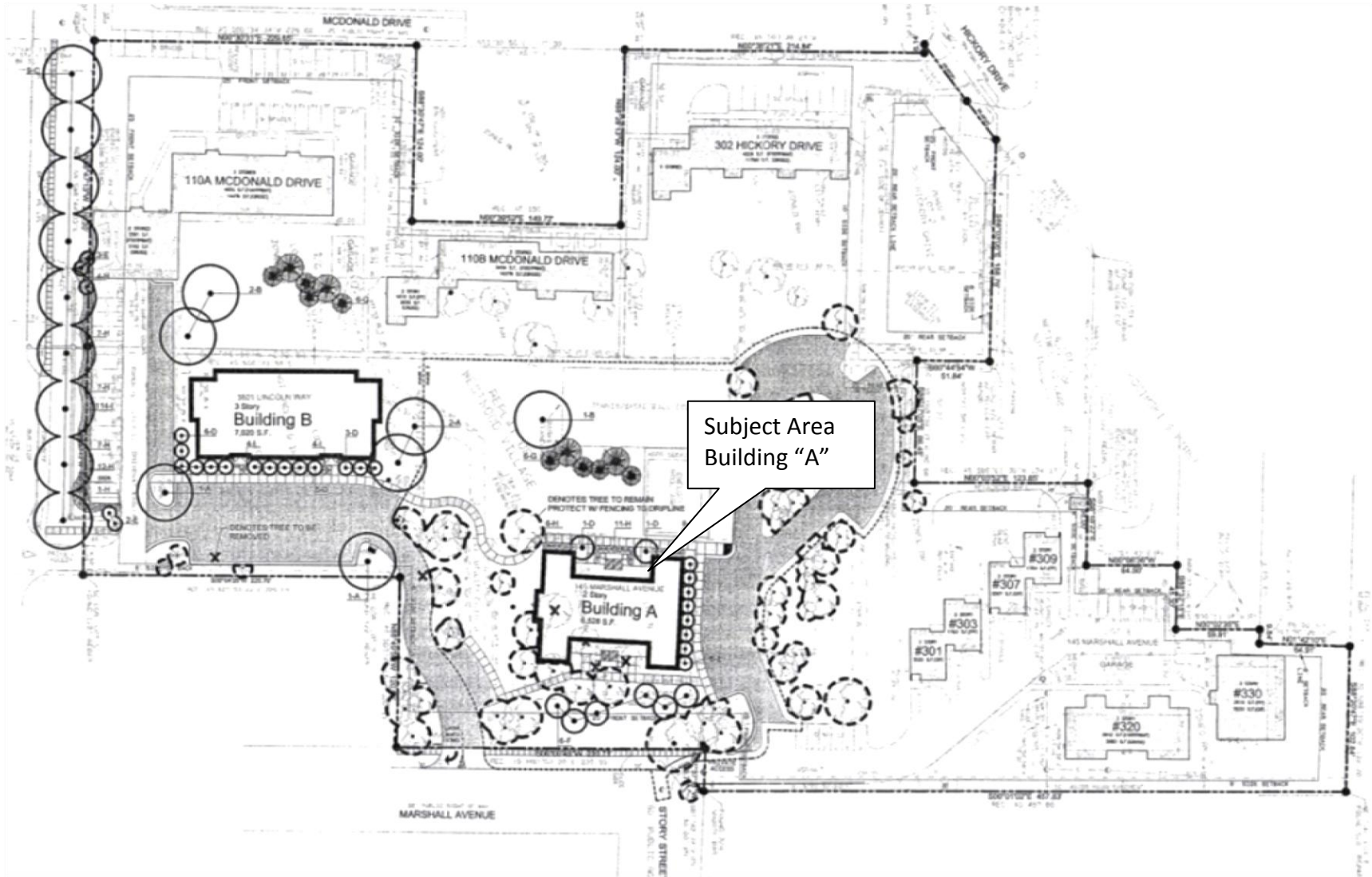


ATTACHMENT B
Ames Municipal Code Section 29.1203(9)

(9) **Minor Changes.** Minor changes to the approved Site Development Plan Major may occur after staff of the Department of Planning and Housing has determined that the proposed changes are minor in nature, and revised plans have been provided to the Department for purposes of keeping the Site Development Plan Major current. Minor changes are defined as changes that:

- (a) Do not constitute a change in the land use of the project; or the overall layout and design;
- (b) Do not increase the density or intensity of use, and the number of buildings or a change in dwelling unit types;
- (c) Does not change the overall landscape design of the F-PRD project; or
- (d) Change the height or placement of buildings, or other major site features.

ATTACHMENT C
Current Approved Landscape Plan



ATTACHMENT D
Proposed Landscape Plan



ATTACHMENT E
View of Site from East Down Story Street

