

COUNCIL ACTION FORM

SUBJECT: CAMPUSTOWN FAÇADE DESIGN PROGRAM

BACKGROUND:

At its workshop meeting of November 18, the City Council reviewed design concepts for City grants to carry out two pilot improvement projects for a Campustown Façade Program. This new program is intended to enhance the appearance of Campustown commercial buildings, fulfilling the objective outlined by the City Council and by Iowa State University in their mutual goal of supporting Campustown. **The objective of the proposed Campustown Façade Program is to promote diverse building styles and increased activity and commercial use. The proposed program supports enriching the individual detail and character of each building within the context of a pedestrian oriented commercial district.**

The Program was developed through a two-step process. In 2013, the Campustown Action Association formed a focus group that examined the existing character of Campustown and identified valued characteristics that help make Campustown successful. In 2014, the City retained the design firm Haila Architecture Structure Planning to examine Campustown and its valued characteristics, as well as to propose design concepts for physical improvements to Campustown buildings. This process also involved a work group providing ideas and feedback. Together these two groups of Campustown stakeholders were represented by Campustown business owners, property owners, students, customers, neighbors, the University, and the Campustown Action Association.

The resulting design principles are in the form of an “Idea Book,” which identifies five Design Concepts accompanied by ten Project Examples from across the country. The Idea Book is intended to stimulate creative thinking and spark design proposals that will respect and expand the design characteristics that make Campustown special. The current draft of the Idea Book can be found on the Planning and Housing Department’s [webpage](#).

The five Design Concepts are as follows:

Transparent Campustown. Visual transparency invites pedestrians to patronize the businesses inside. Physical access promotes cohesiveness within the district. Promoting more glass and larger physical openings show the commercial offerings in the district and encourage people to spend more time there.

Social Campustown. Well designed outdoor gathering areas create a positive social atmosphere. Small, unused, visible spaces can be transformed to expand commercial

opportunities. It is not the intent of the program to fund sidewalk dining or other uses of the public right-of-way, although improvements to the building that are part of any outdoor gathering area project would be eligible.

Diverse Campustown. The variety of building types and design styles contribute to the vibrancy, funkiness, visual interest and diversity of businesses. Façades are encouraged to be distinct from their neighbors and unique in the district.

Identifiable Campustown. High quality signs, graphics and other design features that express the unique identity of local businesses can be part of a distinctive design for façade improvements.

Historic Campustown. Some buildings in Campustown have potential to illustrate the historic development of Campustown over 100 years. Projects can include removing cover-up materials, restoring original storefronts/entrances, and restoring masonry.

These Design Concepts will form the basis for city staff evaluation of the proposed façade improvement projects which seek grants. Staff will assess the pilot projects by determining:

- 1) how clearly the proposed design incorporates the Concepts,
- 2) the degree of visual impact the project will have in the context of Campustown,
- 3) how many of the Concepts are incorporated into the designs.

It is not proposed that projects awarded a grant must incorporate all five of the Concepts.

The Campustown Action Association Board of Directors, which includes representatives of all stakeholder groups described above, unanimously recommended approval of the Idea Book as the design principles for the Campustown façade pilot projects. The Board also recommended eligibility for projects located within the commercial area south of the ISU campus and of the area west of the ISU campus to Campus Avenue. **Under this recommendation, areas eligible for grants would include West Street neighborhood commercial and the Campustown Service Center areas.**

ALTERNATIVES:

1. The City Council can direct staff to seek applications for pilot projects to be located in Campustown Service Center zoning district and Neighborhood Commercial zoning district on West Street.
2. The City Council can direct staff to modify the design concepts or the boundaries of the eligible areas before proceeding with pilot projects.
3. The City Council can refer this item to staff for further information.

MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

The City Council has an established goal to support Campustown and an objective to create a Campustown Façade Program. The proposed Idea Book incorporates design concepts tailored to the Campustown area. The next step in the project is to find pilot projects and evaluate the success of the design concepts upon their implementation. With Council's direction to proceed, staff will work with CAA to find suitable candidates and return to Council for award of grants this winter. This will allow projects to occur in the spring. Upon completion of the pilot projects, staff will return with an evaluation of the process and recommendations on how to proceed with a formal Campustown Façade Program.

The need to support commercial façades and businesses near campus can be applied to two areas adjacent to the ISU campus. The more familiar Campustown is embodied in the commercial zoning south of campus centered upon Welch Avenue. West of campus is smaller neighborhood commercial area of similar scale to businesses south of campus. This area along West Street would be a suitable area, in terms of its context and building types, for the façade program in addition to the area south of campus.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of the City Manager that the City Council accept Alternative #1 as described above, thereby proceeding with pilot projects within either the West Street area or Campustown area south of Campus.