

COUNCIL ACTION FORM

SUBJECT: OLD EDWARDS SCHOOL SITE

BACKGROUND:

In August 2014, a new Edwards Elementary School was opened at 820 Miller Avenue. This school replaced the old Edwards Elementary School located at 3622 Woodland Street. The old school is currently vacant, and the Ames Community School District (ACSD) is planning to demolish the school and make the site “clean and green.” The ACSD has contracted with a company to do the demolition for approximately \$241,000. Per Attachment A, the ACSD’s Letter of Intent indicates the District’s desire to sell the land to the City for use as a park.

In Attachment B, the Edwards Neighborhood Association (ENA) is requesting a Letter of Intent stating the City will accept the Old Edwards School property and maintain it as a City park, provided the property is turned over in a “clean and green” condition. The ENA is currently fundraising to help offset a portion of the demolition costs. Thus far, the ENA has raised over \$80,000 which has been given to the ACSD for this purpose.

Staff has met with ACSD staff to discuss the “clean and green” condition for this site. ACSD is in agreement with the City’s request as to what stays and what should be removed. For example, since the City helped fund the playground equipment that is on the site, the City staff expects that this equipment will remain. In addition, the City staff has requested that both existing parking lots stay to provide off-street parking, as long as the lots are not damaged during the building demolition.

One issue the City has requested ACSD to address is the property line on the south edge of the school property (Attachment C). Currently, there is a fence that delineates the play area from the adjacent properties to the south. The item of concern is the school’s property line is 26-29 feet south of the fence. However, over the years the adjacent property owners have encroached onto School District property by installing sheds, fences, and landscaping. The City will ask the School District to address this issue prior to the City accepting the remaining land for use as a park.

A second issue of concern involves the statement in the ACSD’s Letter of Intent to sell the property to the City for use as a park. No specific dollar amount is listed in the document. It should be noted when the City accepted 1.3 acres of land that were developed into Roosevelt Park, the

City Council approved a resolution to accept the donated land from the ACSD. The City staff would assume this same arrangement would be made with the School District for this transaction.

At its April 2017 meeting, the Parks and Recreation Commission approved a motion recommending City Council agree to accept the Old Edwards School site at a future date if the above conditions are met.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Agree to accept a portion of the Old Edwards School Site at a future date for use as a City park if the following conditions are met:
 - a. The site is provided to the City by the Ames Community School District is “clean and green”;
 - b. The site is given to the City by the Ames Community School District at no cost; and
 - c. The land that is donated at no cost to the City by the Ames Community School District does not include the land on which private sheds, landscaping, and fences currently exist (the area south of the School District fence as depicted on Attachment C).
2. Do not agree to accept the Old Edwards School Site at a future date.
3. Refer this request back to staff for further analysis.

MANAGER’S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

When the ACSD announced plans to close a number of grade schools throughout the community, the City staff suggested that the City should convert these properties into City parks as long as the property was given to the City at no cost and the property was converted to a “clean and green” status. This would allow the City to redevelop land that was previously serving as a recreational area for the surrounding neighborhood into a City park. In this way, the City would be providing a new amenity for the residents to offset the loss of a neighborhood school. Action in support of the neighborhood association’s request would be consistent with this prior commitment.

The Old Edwards School site has long served the neighborhood with a school, playground, green space, and a gathering space. Although some of the neighborhood is covered by the Franklin Park service area, the entire neighborhood is not. In addition, Lincoln Way is a potential barrier for some individuals.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of the City Manager that the City Council support Alternative #1 and accept a portion of the Old Edwards School Site at a future date for use as a City park if the three conditions identified above are met.

ATTACHMENT A



Ames Community School District LETTER OF INTENT

District property at 3622 Woodland Street, Ames, Iowa, formerly Edwards Elementary School site, is currently owned by the Ames Community School District.

At the present time, the building is vacant as a new Edwards Elementary School was built and opened at 820 Miller Avenue in August, 2014. With no further use for the building and site, the Board of Directors of the Ames Community School District sought proposals from any and all parties interested in purchasing the property.

The party with the greatest interest is the Old Edwards Neighborhood Association. At the present time, the Old Edwards Neighborhood Association has expressed its desire to see the site, once the building has been demolished and site returned to clean and green status, be sold by the District to the City of Ames to then be developed into a park. In return, the Neighborhood Association is raising funds to offset the costs the District will incur to demolish the old school building.

At this point, the Ames Community School district is willing to make a non-binding agreement with the Old Edwards Neighborhood that the Board intends to demolish the Old Edwards building at 3622 Woodland Street, and eventually sell the site to the City of Ames to be used as a City park. In return, the Old Edwards Neighborhood will continue raising funds with a goal of \$250,000 to be donated to the Ames Community School District to defray some of the costs of demolition of the building and restoration of the site to playground status.

The Ames Community Schools also agrees to accept and hold in a revenue account donations made towards this effort. Donations made to the school district for the Old Edwards project will be tax deductible. The district's accounting office will provide written acknowledgement to the donor upon receipt and acceptance by the school board. The District also agrees to return those donations to the Neighborhood Association should the School District and Neighborhood Association fail to reach a mutually acceptable level for defraying demolition costs of the existing building.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Taylor', enclosed in a circular scribble.

Tim Taylor, Supt.
Ames Community Schools

March 27, 2017

ATTACHMENT B

To the Ames Parks and Recreation Commission and the Ames City Council,

The Old Edwards School building has been a big part of the surrounding neighborhood since the 1950s. Tucked into the middle of a mixed residential area, Old Edwards School served as a playground, green space, and gathering place to the surrounding neighborhood. When neighbors learned that the property would eventually change hands, we decided to come together and pursue a positive outcome for the area.

The Edwards Neighborhood Association has worked alongside the Ames School Board and Ames City Staff for the last several years to secure a positive transition of the Old Edwards property. We have set a goal of raising up to \$250,000 in donations paid to the Ames Community School District, which will help offset the building demolition costs the school district is facing. If the neighbors are able to meet their fundraising goals, the school district will demolish the building and render the property "clean and green" so it can be deeded over to the City of Ames and maintained as a city park.

The Old Edwards site has functionally served as a city park for decades. On any given day, you will see neighborhood children and families making use of the playground equipment and green spaces. This site sees steady traffic because there are no other city parks available to residents in this area (Franklin Park requires users to cross Lincoln Way, and Emma McCarthy Lee Park requires users to access through a dirt path). Functionally, this park will be the primary city asset for residents between North Dakota Avenue and Hyland Avenue, and Oakland Street and Lincoln Way.

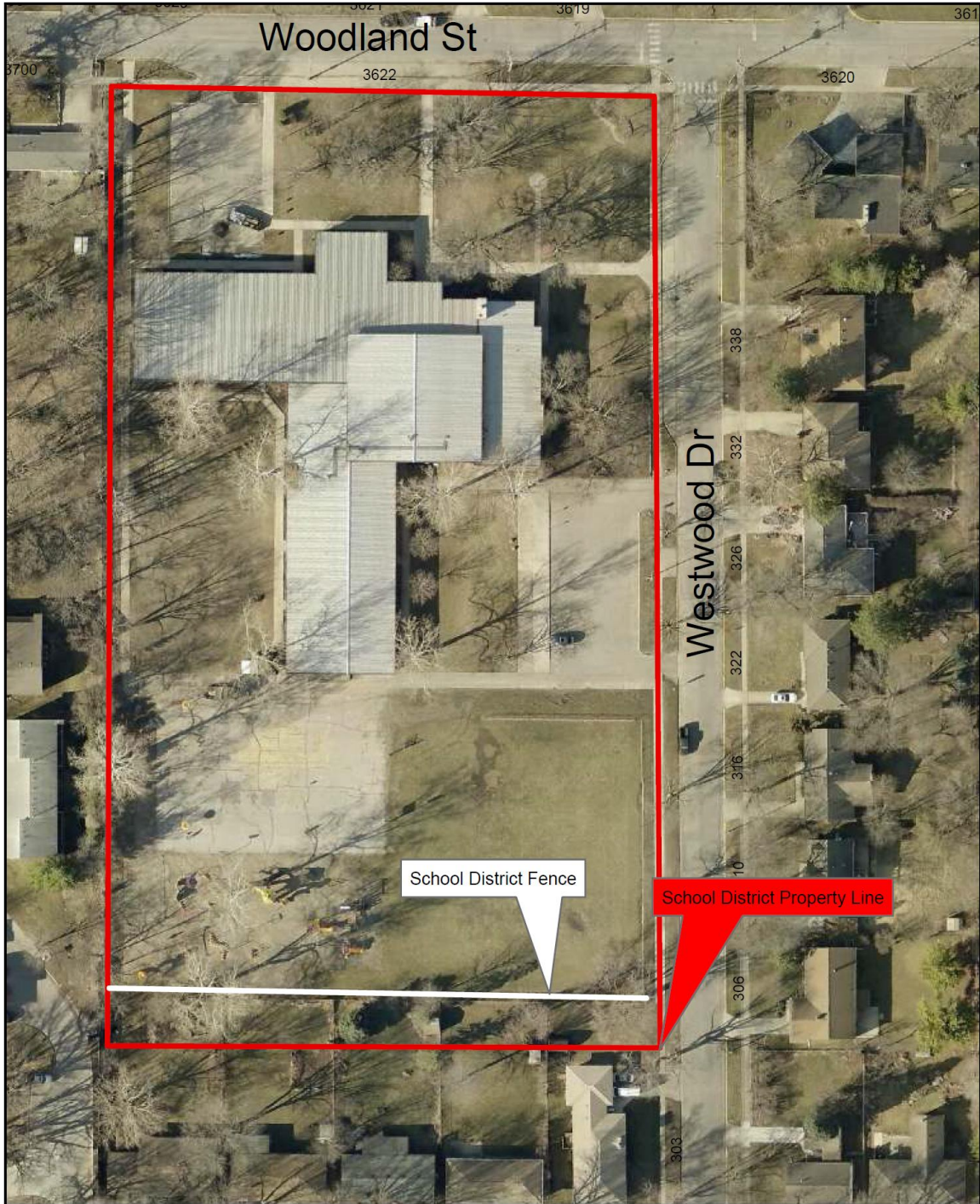
The school district has made public a letter of intent to lay out the plans for the Old Edwards property. The details of that letter represent a collaboration between school district officials and City Staff including Julie Gould, Keith Abraham, and Steve Schainker. In order for the neighborhood to continue fundraising, we request a corresponding letter of intent be passed by the necessary representatives of the City of Ames. We ask that this letter states that the City will accept the Old Edwards School property and maintain it as a city park, provided that the property is turned over in a "clean and green" condition.

Area neighbors have poured time and money into this project because we truly see it as the best possible outcome for the neighborhood, which will ultimately benefit the school district and City of Ames. Thanks for your time and consideration, we look forward to your support of this project.

Regards,

Joel Barbour & Kathy Schnable
Edwards Neighborhood Association

ATTACHMENT C



Edwards School Site



1 inch = 83 feet
Date: 4/18/2017