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TO: Mayor and Ames City Council

FROM: Kelly Diekmann, Planning and Housing Director

DATE: October 23, 2018

SUBJECT: Request for Zoning Text Amendment to create front yard landscaping tree substitution standards for commercial/industrial sites

Justin Dodge of Hunziker Companies in a letter to City Council dated September 13, 2018 requested a text amendment to the current front yard landscape standards in Section 29.403 to allow for a substitution allowance to convert shrubs requirements to trees requirements. The intent of the request is to allow for use of additional trees in lieu of other landscaping requirements for shrubs or grasses.

Front yard landscaping requirements for commercial sites is a new standard created in with overall landscaping ordinance update in 2017. The intent was to promote visual interest with a variety of landscaping treatments through planting options. Front yard landscaping allows for substitutions of grasses and shrubs and tree types, but does not allow for crossover substitutions with only one category of plantings. The possibility of converting shrubs to trees was discussed amongst the workgroup members and staff in 2017. Ultimately the idea was not included in the standards.

However, the current standards do allow a property owner to pursue a custom landscape plan to address site preferences that could meet the intent of ordinance. A property owner could propose a tree based front yard planting option through an optional Major Site Development Plan review process. The proposed text amendment request for tree substitution could be addressed for the individual site through this process.

Should the City Council determine it is appropriate to direct staff to prepare a text amendment, staff would evaluate an appropriate substitution ratio or tree planting option for front yards that could be applied equally across the city. This would require an estimated 30 hours of time to prepare options, discuss with interested parties, and proceed with the public hearing process. City Council would need to consider this request in the context of other small scale zoning text amendment requests and whether it is priority at this time. Staff is not currently working on landscape ordinance changes as City Council recently determined not to prioritize similar requests.

Attachment A- Letter Requesting Text Amendment

September 13, 2018

Honorable Mayor and Ames City Council –

With the recent conversations about minor text amendments to the landscaping ordinance, we humbly request a minor amendment which should require minimal Staff time.

We are looking at our project on the site of the former Universal Harvester at the corner of Dayton and Lincoln where the parcel is over 10 acres. The first two buildings are set back over 250 feet from Lincoln Way with significant grade changes. Rather than planting lots of grasses and shrubs, we would prefer to plant trees. We believe it would make a more meaningful impact on a site of this size.

When we were working through the draft ordinance, the points system had a component that allowed for conversion from trees to shrubs to grasses. A portion of this system was adopted in the official ordinance for residential, but didn't make it on the commercial/industrial side.

We ask that you refer this letter to Staff to consider a minor text amendment that would allow trading out shrubs/grasses for trees. It would make a difference on this site and would likely be considered on future sites of this size. Staff already has the baseline for the conversions, so a change should require minimal Staff time. We also believe Staff is supportive of this minor text amendment.

Thank you for your consideration,



Justin Dodge
Hunziker Companies

CC:

Kelly Diekmann, Planning and Housing Director
Justin Moore, Planner