

TO: Mayor and City Council

FROM: Kelly Diekmann, Planning & Housing Director

DATE: February 14, 2023

SUBJECT: Vehicle Charging Stations within Setbacks

Ames Electric Services is working with vehicle charging companies on locating equipment for Level 1 fast chargers on existing commercial sites within the City. We also have installed our own Level 2 chargers in various location around the community. Zoning standards regulate placement of equipment in relation to setbacks and landscaped areas.

While locating chargers seems to be a minor issue within a parking lot, in fact there is a substantial amount of infrastructure and equipment needed to power Level 1 Fast Chargers. Commonly, the charging company will need to deploy new infrastructure, including transformers, to be able to power the new chargers. Below is an example of a large fast charging station in Altoona that depicts the amount of equipment necessary to support such an installation. In some cases, there can be a fewer number of cabinets depending on the manufacturer.



When this equipment and chargers are located internal to a site, there are no conflicts with current zoning standard of a 20 foot setback. However, on existing sites we have had requests to place equipment in front yards, which is prohibited by the zoning standards. Many existing commercial sites only have 5 to 10 feet of front yard area. The amount of equipment could easily take up all front yard area.

Realizing that the City Council is in support of adding vehicle chargers in our community to promote the use of electric cars, you might wish to discuss this issue concerning placement of equipment and if any projections into setbacks should be allowed. **Planning staff believes that we should allow for chargers themselves within parking lots, but should maintain minimum expectations for yards and landscaping related to larger pieces of equipment.**

To do this, the City's Zoning Ordinance would need to be amended to address charging stations specifically as an exception to setback standards or as a permit for the Zoning Board of Adjustment to approve. Staff recommends Council refer this request to a future agenda to discuss creating allowances for chargers within parking lots, while applying landscaping and setbacks to other related equipment. Ultimately, City Council would need to initiate a zoning text amendment to make any specific allowances for chargers within setbacks.