

April 17, 2023

Honorable John Haila, Mayor
City of Ames
515 Clark Ave.
Ames, IA 50010

Dear Mayor Haila,

The Ames Chamber of Commerce & Economic Development Commission, on behalf of our Board of Directors, writes to encourage the City of Ames to consider how it can stimulate more housing in Ames.

The City of Ames 2040 Plan states there is a need for an additional 6,373 housing units by 2040, an average of 317 units per year. Last year, Ames saw fifty-six single-family housing starts. By contrast, Huxley issued permits for ninety housing starts in the same period of time. We are thrilled at the continued expansion of the Huxley housing market, but the largest community in our region, we believe, needs to get to a level where we can better align with the job growth we continue to see and more closely align with the projections of the City's Comprehensive Plan.

According to Iowa Workforce Development Labor Market Information the total number of people employed in the Ames Metropolitan Statistical Area (Ames MSA) in January of 2020 was 50,500. In contrast the number of people employed in the Ames MSA was 54,500 in January of 2023. The good news is that our regional economy is growing, albeit to the benefit of the communities south of the Ames MSA in Polk County. Anecdotally we continue to hear from local employers that the majority of their new hires are opting to live in the Des Moines area. We recognize that a variety of factors can play into where a person or family may choose to live, however, when it comes to inventory and a variety of housing choices, we are quite certain that the Ames market falls short of expectation.

We applaud the City of Ames for investing American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to extend utilities in certain parts of the community and believe that will have a positive effect. Yet, we believe more must be done to propel the housing inventory of the community to a level where there is ample choice for people as they take a job in the Ames market. Is tax abatement or the utilization of tax increment financing a reasonable approach for Ames like it has been in other communities in Iowa? What other resources should we be leveraging to exponentially increase housing units in the community?

We believe the best way to get this started is to establish a housing taskforce made up of city officials along with homebuilders, banks, and utility providers. We are open to facilitating this task force if it means we can move the needle forward collectively on a greater number of housing starts in the Ames community. We are hopeful we can count on the City of Ames to participate in this process.

People invest their incomes where they live and find community. We want people working in Ames to invest their incomes and find their community, here, in Ames.

We look forward to your reply.


Sincerely,



Michelle Vogel, Chair
Ames Chamber of Commerce



Reynolds Cramer, Chair
Ames E.D.C.



Dan Culhane, CEO
Ames Chamber/EDC

CC: Gloria Betcher, Ward I
Tim Gartin, Ward II
Anita Rollins, Ward III
Rachel Junck, Ward IV
Bronwyn Beatty-Hansen, At-Large
Amber Corrieri, At-Large
Tabitha Etten, Ex-Officio
Steve Schainker, City Manager