

**MINUTES OF THE CONSERVATION SUBDIVISION AND LOW-IMPACT  
DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP OF THE AMES CITY COUNCIL**

**AMES, IOWA**

**JULY 17, 2007**

The Ames City Council met in special session at 7:00 p.m. on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2007, in the City Council Chambers in City Hall, 515 Clark Avenue, pursuant to law with Mayor Pro Tem Riad Mahayni presiding and the following Council members present: Doll, Larson, Popken, and Rice. Council Member Goodman was absent. *Ex officio* Member Luttrell was also present.

**CONSERVATION SUBDIVISIONS AND LOW-IMPACT DEVELOPMENT:** Mayor Pro Tem Riad Mahayni introduced Planner Seana Perkins, joined by Planning and Housing Director Steve Osguthorpe and two consultants, Pat Sauer of the Iowa Association of Municipal Utilities and Iowa Stormwater Education Program; and Doug Adamson, principal of Site+, a landscape architecture and planning firm. Ms. Perkins reviewed the referrals given to staff by Council at the November 21, 2006 workshop on conservation subdivisions. The referrals were: 1) to reconfigure a conventionally developed subdivision as a conservation subdivision to ascertain what difference, if any, there would be in density; 2) to ask developers for their opinions; and 3) to e-mail developers with information on the re-broadcast times of the workshop. The subdivision chosen to be reconfigured as a conservation subdivision was Northridge Heights. Ms. Perkins stated that this workshop is to further discuss these referrals which have been completed by staff. She distributed a change to the staff report which replaced Attachments B and D.

Ms. Sauer presented examples of conservation subdivisions she visited last summer in the Twin Cities area. The application of this type of development to Iowa would involve converting agricultural land which would be drained, then plowed up to be replaced with a more sustainable residential alternative including estate lots and housing densities that include open space. These examples of conservation subdivisions include native landscape, open spaces, trails, and biofeatures for stormwater management into the development. Council Member Popken asked what the government structure is that they are built under. Ms. Sauer answered that, of her examples, one is under County government, the others are under City government. Council Member Rice wondered about the wastewater facility during winter. Ms. Sauer described that it does not freeze because of its composition including gravel and plants. Council Member Larson asked who owns vegetation and filtration systems. Ms. Sauer stated that the Homeowners' Association owns them, and hires consultants to manage native prairie areas.

Mr. Adamson presented the conservation subdivision comparison he had prepared using Northridge Heights as the example. He explained a map of Northridge Heights' 225.2 acres which he had mapped in color by types of soils, hydric to least moist. What Site+ presented for comparison is the higher points as roads, the low points for open space and stormwater management, and lots in between. A comparison slide showed that with the conservation subdivision option, single-family large lots would decrease by 92, single-family medium lots would increase by 40, and single-family attached lots would be the same. Total, the subdivision would lose 52 lots. There would be one mile less of road, which could save an estimated \$1-1.5 million. Council member Larson asked what would be saved on that mile in maintenance costs. Public Works Director John Joiner stated that it costs approximately \$850-1,000 per lane mile per year for maintenance. Gross density for the entire development would decrease by .2. Council Member

Larson stated he would be interested in knowing if there was a difference in taxation or assessed value living near open space instead of owning the land individually. Council Member Popken asked for the differences in stormwater management costs and infrastructure. Mr. Adamson stated once the system is installed, it is fairly sustainable and costs go down over the long term.

Ms. Perkins presented staff perspective and what staff has learned from the presentations. Assistant City Manager Bob Kindred stated for all advantages, there is also a flipside. Ms. Perkins stated that among the pros is a higher net density, but more land is needed to produce these types of subdivisions. Council Member Rice wondered if fences could go up against the open space. Ms. Perkins suggested that could be in the subdivision covenants, but as of current standards, fences would be allowed on property lines. Ms. Perkins added that low-impact development techniques can be applied to standard subdivisions. Mr. Osguthorpe stated that normally they would choose a grid format rather than cul-de-sacs, but for this type of development, cul-de-sacs would be a necessary component. Council Member Larson questioned this because of recent activity to move away from cul-de-sacs.

Ms. Perkins reviewed the means of implementation, stating that if Council would decide to implement conservation subdivisions, a conservation subdivision code and development standards would need to be created. Council Member Popken stated that he didn't see many differences from suburban residential other than cul-de-sacs and open spaces. Ms. Perkins stated that NPDES will require the water quality component be utilized for all new development. Council Member Larson wondered if storm sewer could be eliminated in particular areas if stormwater is being retained on the site. Mr. Joiner expressed that Public Works would not want to forego curb and gutter because of reasons such as snow removal. However, there are other low-impact development techniques that could be used such as a stormwater system which would let down into a low-impact stormwater quality feature. Manager Schainker asked if Mr. Joiner could foresee some techniques being required post-construction. Mr. Joiner stated that statewide standards for quality guidance are being created to provide City staff with low-impact development techniques to manage the quality and quantity of stormwater, which would be brought before Council in the fall. Council Member Doll asked if conservation subdivisions would include any low to moderate-income housing. Ms. Sauer answered that her presentation did not include any, but an example in Wisconsin is purposefully incorporating low-income housing.

Manager Schainker suggested that conservation developments could be an option in environmentally sensitive areas such as the Ada Hayden Heritage Park area, and this information could be a tool in the future for the City and developers. Council Member Popken asked if there would need to be creation of new zoning. Mr. Osguthorpe stated that these conservation developments are a possibility, not mandatory. If its just left as an option, then there is not much that would have to be done.

Mayor Pro Tem Mahayni invited developers to express their insight. Chuck Winkleblack expressed the need for education to the public about these conservation developments if they are used, because of mosquitoes that would inhabit shallow bodies of water and the open spaces which would consist of many weeds for the first few years. He stated that he has received complaints regarding these matters in the past, and reiterated that an educational component should be a part of introducing these types of developments. Mr. Winkleblack also stated that the Assessor typically looks at land value after the house is built, and that he applies a flat amount toward open

space by square foot. He was not sure if there would be a gain or loss of property value. He informed the Council that newer Homeowners' Associations make it mandatory to belong because of more common areas, and he guessed that dues would be significantly higher because of all the open space within a conservation subdivision. Council Member Larson asked if the 12% less lots would be recoverable to a developer. Mr. Winkleblack guessed no, but stated an engineer would be able to make a model.

Bob Friedrich, Jr. offered his insight, commenting that he has seen several of these developments, not including entry level and affordable housing and questioned if this fits in with the direction of Ames.

Susan Franzen, a resident living adjacent to Ross Road stated that she is aware of the advantages of lots next to open space. She described open space, even if not contiguous to your home, as an advantage.

**UPDATE ON WATER USAGE:** John Dunn, Director of Water and Pollution Control, updated the Council on water demand. He reviewed the growth in peak demand, showing the history over the last three years. The monthly peak demand for 2007 is 9.35 million gallons per day (MGD), which is up 11% from last year. The City is not asking customers to stop watering their lawns, but to use water smartly. Mr. Dunn asked the media to continue to help spread the message. If action were to be taken, the first option would be limiting outdoor watering to even or odd days based on the resident's address.

**COMMENTS:** Moved by Popken, seconded by Rice to refer to staff an email from Russ McCullough regarding a tax abatement for changing a fraternity to a Bed and Breakfast. Vote on Motion: 4-0. Motion declared carried unanimously.

Moved by Popken, seconded by Larson to refer to staff a request from Stumbo & Associates for a property line adjustment. Vote on Motion: 4-0. Motion declared carried unanimously.

Moved by Larson, seconded by Popken to refer to staff a request for the City's participation in paving the alley between Sherman and Kellogg from 2<sup>nd</sup> Street to 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. The City would pay 50% and do a special assessment on the other 50%. Vote on Motion: 4-0. Motion declared carried unanimously.

Manager Schainker stated that making edits to the Urban Fringe Plan is complex because of all the entities involved. Council Member Larson suggested coming up with a common form between the entities for submission of requests for change. Mr. Osguthorpe stated that will be among the items to be discussed when the City meets with the County.

**ADJOURNMENT:** Moved by Doll, seconded by Larson, to adjourn the meeting at 8:43.

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Diane R. Voss, City Clerk

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Ann H. Campbell, Mayor

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Erin Thompson, Recording Secretary