

## MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE AMES CITY COUNCIL

AMES, IOWA

DECEMBER 15, 2009

The Ames City Council met in special session at 7:00 p.m. on the 15<sup>TH</sup> day of December, 2009, in the City Council Chambers in City Hall, 515 Clark Avenue, pursuant to law with Mayor Ann Campbell presiding and the following Council members present: Doll, Goodman, Larson, Mahayni, Popken, and Rice. *Ex officio* Member Keppy was also present.

### **POWER PLANT DISTRIBUTIVE COMMUNICATION CONTROL SYSTEM UPGRADE:**

Motioned by Mahayni, seconded by Popken, to reject the bid.

Vote on Motion: 6-0. Motion carried unanimously.

Motioned by Rice, seconded by Goodman, to approve RESOLUTION NO. 09-566, approving preliminary plans and specifications and setting December 30, 2009 as a bid due date and January 12, 2010 as the date of public hearing.

Roll Call Vote: 6-0. Resolution declared adopted unanimously, signed by the Mayor, and hereby made a portion of these minutes.

**NEIGHBORHOOD SUMMIT:** Mayor Ann Campbell acknowledged one of the City Council goals, to strengthen neighborhoods, and said at this annual summit, several presenters will be updating the Council on progress made.

City Planner Jeff Benson said that progress has been made in the last year to get neighborhoods together and create and sustain relationships. Mr. Benson introduced Clint Sloss, Neighborhood Intern, who has been working on a program to allow neighborhoods to work together more effectively, improving the relationships and quality of life in the neighborhood. Mr. Sloss thanked the group for convening, and said he is a graduate student in Community and Regional Planning at Iowa State University, and has been working for the City since June, 2009.

Mr. Benson said that there are currently 20 existing programs that support stronger neighborhoods already in place, and that a comprehensive list has been developed to characterize the programs available.

Mr. Sloss said the City has a web section *In Your Neighborhood*, which will be changing to *Strong Neighborhoods* as an umbrella for the programs available. Mr. Sloss showed the group how to access the City website. By clicking on *In Your Neighborhood*, access to program information is there, and divided by categories: Organized Neighborhoods, Attractive Neighborhoods, Connected Neighborhoods, Involved Neighborhoods, Safe Neighborhoods, and Green Neighborhoods.

Mr. Benson said that neighborhood associations are many times created but do not always sustain themselves without follow-up. He said to establish and maintain relationships among neighbors and the City by communication is the goal, so that when issues do arise, contacts have already been established.

Mr. Sloss described the process of creating a Neighborhood Association. Mr. Benson described the benefits of Neighborhood Associations. An annual report requirement is now being asked of the

associations to verify that the associations are still active and responsive. Mr. Benson said the report will assist City staff in communicating with associations that still desire to be active.

Council Member Larson asked how during the application process, it is known that the people applying are really representing the neighborhood, and not just one or two homes. Mr. Benson said that strict criteria has not been set, but after the application is filed, a meeting is set up and everyone within the boundary is invited. At that point, it is hoped that staff can tell if the group is collectively wanting to become an association, because of a collective desire for neighborhood involvement.

Council Member Popken asked what the benefits of forming a Neighborhood Association are. Mr. Benson said that City programs available are not limited to associations, but benefits would include being a known entity before issues arise, and Notices of Public Hearings are sent to neighborhood representatives for awareness. Mr. Popken said it doesn't seem like information is getting to the neighborhoods like it used to, and he would support keeping the bar low for associations.

Mr. Osguthorpe said that this program does not preclude other groups from forming, but encourages interaction between the City and its neighborhoods.

Ken Kruempel, 2519 Timberland Road, Ames, said it is very easy to see what is going on since he receives the Neighborhood News Quarterly Newsletter.

Dilys Morris, 535 Forest Glen Street, Ames, said she believes it important that the bar is kept low since not everyone likes to be really involved. She said important information is distributed when their neighborhood association gets together, but it doesn't happen often.

Council Member Popken discussed groups formed around issues that are not geographically located together. Mr. Benson said it is possible to keep groups informed that are not neighborhoods.

Council Member Larson spoke to the importance of the geographic area since the goal is stronger neighborhoods.

Mr. Benson discussed a new program being started in Ames called *Ames Repair & Care*, which will assist those who are unable to do required maintenance and repair to private residential properties due to age, disability, or lack of financial resources. Mr. Sloss described the limited services that could be performed by volunteers as: removing yard debris, trimming trees and shrubs, mowing tall grass and controlling weeds, removing snow, minor painting, and repairing or installing exterior handrails and guardrails. Mr. Sloss described the different options for residents who qualify for this assistance as receiving help from volunteers identified by the Volunteer Center of Story County, neighbors, or clubs that have registered with the Volunteer Center of Story County.

Public Relations Officer Susan Gwiasda said it is very important to communicate to residents in different ways. She described the print newsletter that was started in 2007 and is direct-mailed to members of 13 of the most active neighborhood associations. She said residents can sign up to receive it online, and that it is emailed to several residents as another option.

Ms. Gwiasda explained that the City website will be changing soon, and said the capabilities will be expanded in many ways. She also said that the City has a Facebook page, and a Twitter page for

those who like to receive information in those ways. Ms. Gwiasda asked for suggestions on communication methods.

Ms. Gwiasda discussed Census 2010. She said that making sure an accurate count is taken is very important, as \$400 billion annually is distributed among communities, and averages between \$1,200-\$1,600 per person. She said every person will receive census information in the mail, which will consist of ten questions. She said it is extremely important, safe, and easy to complete.

Housing Inspections Supervisor Ed Gillott described the Inspections Division's work and support of neighborhoods. He said that minimum standards for rental properties have been increased. He discussed communicating this to the public, inspecting properties with the new standards, and ongoing communication with property owners.

A neighborhood representative asked about a property that has been a rental for about 4 years in his neighborhood. He wondered if there was any way to make sure the City knows that certain properties are rental properties. Mr. Gillott said to call the Inspections Division, or check the Story County Assessor's website to determine the owner.

Neighborhoods Inspector Natalie Herrington said she has processed about 375 cases since January, 2009. She said she works on both proactive and reactive cases, the reactive cases being complaint-driven. She said that she is working hard to do more proactive work, providing education to residents. Ms. Herrington showed the group pictures, and said that the top complaint received is regarding furniture in yards. She also discussed tall grass, brush piles, and otherwise not maintained yards; garbage complaints; junk vehicles; and outdoor storage issues. Ms. Herrington said that one pending case is being worked through using the *Ames Repair & Care* program.

Dilys Morris, 535 Forest Glen Street, Ames, asked about an abandoned house in her neighborhood. Ms. Herrington said they are beginning to work on abandoned houses, which includes steps that must be taken per the Dangerous Buildings Code. She said this particular house has been boarded up and secured, and is still being worked on.

Building Official David Brown described his work with Neighborhood Associations in the past, and thanked the neighborhood representatives. He said he knows that property maintenance is very important to neighborhoods in the community, and that he also very much values his work.

Mr. Brown discussed the Private Residence Property Maintenance Committee, who was charged with the task to develop a recommendation to City Council concerning 23 items being suggested as requirements for private property maintenance.

Pat Brown, 3212 West Street, Ames, said some communities have a demolition program funded by Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), and wondered if this would be an option for some properties. Mr. Brown said he is aware that funds of this type are available, but have not been used in the past.

Council Member Doll asked if the City has any authority over other governmental entities, referencing the old Middle School. Mr. Brown said the department would not initiate any action on such a building without a complaint.

Pat Brown, 3212 West Street, Ames, thanked City Council for the work that went on last year involving the Code. She said it is strong, fair, and said she can see many changes already. Ms. Brown asked the Council to see that the funding for this program is maintained. She also said that her neighborhood is concerned about the increase in crime, and wondered how her neighborhood could assist the Police Department with their Crime Free Housing program.

Gloria Betcher, 531 Hayward Avenue, Ames, said that the Historic Preservation Commission recently had their Plan approved by the City Council, and the Commission is now setting priorities for the upcoming year. She said the Commission is going to begin surveying neighborhoods for preservation possibilities, and invited the group to the next meeting on January 11, 2010.

Merle Hilson, 420 25<sup>th</sup> Street, Ames, asked about street repair. He said the east end of their street is crumbling. City Manager Steve Schainker reviewed the process and system in place to rate and prioritize improvements to streets.

Marla Miller, 825 Clark Avenue, Ames, and of the Old Town Neighborhood Association, thanked the City for the many programs available to neighborhoods, many of which their association has used. She said there are concerns of safety and traffic in their neighborhood. She also said there are many historic properties, and rental houses in her area, and she asked if there are funds available to convert rental properties to owner-occupied properties. Mr. Schainker said there are CDBG funds that will be available, and one program would provide money to rehabilitate homes.

Ken Kruempel, 2519 Timberland Road, Ames, said a concern for his area is the narrow street, and the deer in his neighborhood. Police Chief Chuck Cychoz described the Urban Deer Task Force, which brings together the concerned about deer, and those who enjoy the deer. He said the City of Ames, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and Parks and Recreation have worked together to allow some urban deer hunting, and study of the deer population. He said this program is growing slowly, and that the amount of deer harvested is increasing. This last fall, the Task Force recommended that private owners open up their land for more control.

Mr. Cychoz introduced the Community Resource Officer, Heath Ropp, and described current efforts by the department within the community. He also described a program for rental property owners called Crime Free Housing, which includes an 8-hour educational program, civil rights information, and a crime prevention survey of their property with some suggestions from the Police Department.

Carol Anderson, 1136 Northwestern Avenue, Ames, asked about property owners attending Crime Free Housing. Mr. Cychoz said smaller property owners are less likely to participate. He encouraged neighbors to call the police department to keep them apprised of neighborhood troubles and concerns.

Dilys Morris asked when the spike in crime occurred. Mr. Cychoz said the spike was 2007, and that major crime is actually decreasing, but the attention is still heightened.

Council Member Goodman referenced United Ames, and said he appreciates involvement in groups such as this.

Council Member Larson introduced Tom Wacha, a new Council member beginning his term on January 1, 2010. He encouraged the group to contact their Council member with any concerns they might have.

**COMMENTS: There were no comments by the Council.**

**ADJOURNMENT: The Special Meeting adjourned at 9:15 p.m.**

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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**