

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

AMES, IOWA

SEPTEMBER 15, 2020

The Special Meeting of the Ames City Council was called to order by Mayor John Haila at 6:00 p.m. on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of September, 2020. The Mayor announced that it is impractical to hold an in-person Council meeting due to the Governor of Iowa declaring a public health emergency because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this meeting is being held as an electronic meeting as allowed by Section 21.8 of the *Iowa Code*. Council Members Bronwyn Beatty-Hansen, Gloria Betcher, Amber Corrieri, Tim Gartin, Rachel Junck, and David Martin and *ex officio* Member Nicole Whitlock joined the electronic meeting. The Mayor described the options available to those who wanted to offer public input.

**RESOLUTION SETTING DATE OF PUBLIC HEARING AS SEPTEMBER 22, 2020 FOR VACATION OF PUBLIC UTILITY, STORM SEWER, SURFACE WATER FLOWAGE, SHARED USE PATH, AND OPEN SPACE EASEMENTS ON OUTLOT P, SUNSET RIDGE SUBDIVISION, 5<sup>TH</sup> ADDITION (5521 ALLERTON DRIVE):** Moved by Betcher, seconded by Beatty-Hansen, to approve the Resolution setting the date of public hearing as September 22, 2020 for vacation of public utility, storm sewer, surface water flowage, shared use path, and open space easements on Outlot P, Sunset Ridge Subdivision, 5<sup>th</sup> Addition (5521 Allerton Drive).

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

**DISCUSSION OF “THE ARTS IN AMES”:** Assistant City Manager Brian Phillips introduced Mike Sulzberger, a member of Story Theater Company Board of Directors, who had requested a workshop dedicated to the arts in Ames. He said Mr. Sulzberger and others will present regarding the arts.

Mr. Sulzberger said he has lived in Ames about 25 years and is a producer for NBC News, but his passion is working with Story Theater Company. He said he enjoys being a patron of all arts in Ames. He thanked the Council for scheduling this meeting. Mr. Sulzberger said the possibility of Stephens Auditorium closing is just the latest warning sign of the condition of the arts in Ames.

Mr. Sulzberger said in the 1980's and 1990's Ames was a hub for arts and culture. He said reliance on Iowa State University (ISU) for arts and culture in Ames is no longer serving Ames well, as there is less focus on arts and culture. He said the Ames Chamber of Commerce estimated over 20,000 people per day are commuting to Ames to work. He said the property tax base could be improved if even a small percentage of those people moved to Ames.

Jill Klindt, Vice President and Chief Accounting Officer at Workiva, told Council she has been an Ames resident since 1994. She said Workiva headquarters in Ames is able to recruit people to work in Ames from many places such as southern California and Hong Kong. Ms. Klindt said those people are fine with working in Ames but they don't settle in Ames; they live in Ankeny, Des Moines, or West Des Moines. She said they don't find enough activities and amenities to live in Ames even though they are happy to work here. She living in Des Moines or Ankeny puts them much closer to arts and culture.

Mr. Sulzberger said the problem is affecting businesses. He introduced Jennifer Drinkwater, Assistant Professor in the Department of Art and Visual Culture at ISU. Ms. Drinkwater said she is an artist, has lived in Ames since 2007, and teaches drawing at ISU. Ms. Drinkwater told Council of the ways she has been involved in the arts in the Ames community.

Ms. Drinkwater reviewed how arts impact economies, how Iowa and Ames compare to other areas, and how creative culture in Ames can be strengthened. She said this is the best time in the world to be a creative professional. She said as people work from home they are investing in artwork. She said Ames is very fortunate to have ISU (which has the largest public art collection in the United States), the ISU College of Design, a thriving Theater department, and a thriving English department. She said many of her students leave Iowa due to lack of opportunities and the cost of living. She said it would be wonderful to create an environment where graduates see creative opportunities and want to stay in Ames.

Ms. Drinkwater said the community has hitched its train to ISU for arts and culture. She urged Ames to step up and invest in the arts. She said creators are entrepreneurs and small business owners. She told Council that each dollar invested in the arts leveraged up to \$9 based on studies by Americans for the Arts. Ms. Drinkwater said the arts and culture sector comprises 4.2% of the Gross Domestic Product. She said in 2019, Stephens Auditorium brought in over \$4 million to the Ames economy. Ms. Drinkwater told Council that Minnesota Legacy Funds were created by the Legacy Amendment, which increased the state sales tax by three-eighths of a percent making the amount spent on the arts \$7.22 per capita compared to Iowa's 32 cents per capita.

Ms. Drinkwater discussed City funding spent on the arts in Ames. She said Dubuque was recently a pilot study for the American Center for the Arts, and now has a full-time Arts and Cultural Affairs Department Coordinator. She said arts and culture aid in increasing inclusivity and strengthening the economy, and said a full-time arts coordinator position should be created. After hiring this person in Dubuque, that city has received over \$50,000 in grants for art and cultural funding for Dubuque.

Examples of partnerships were reviewed by Ms. Drinkwater, including an artist relocation program in Paducah, Kentucky, where they invested \$12 million into the community. She said 60 artists moved to Paducah, and there was a \$10 million increase in tourism, and \$14 million was infused into construction industries. Ms. Drinkwater also told of Oil City, Pennsylvania, where the local economy was reinvented after several oil companies left that city. It restructured zoning and invested \$175,000 for six years, which created an estimated \$1.3 million in revenue. She also described The Fertile Ground Project (Jackson, Mississippi) funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies Public Art Challenge.

Mr. Sulzberger said Ames is spending \$268,000 and peer cities are spending over \$1 million annually. He said post-COVID-19, companies may realize they don't need such expensive real estate, and if people can live anywhere to do their jobs, then Ames would be competing with every city to attract people. He said Ames will have to be the best place to live in Iowa. He said there are already great parks and great schools to attract people here, and if a thriving arts and culture

community is added, people will be attracted to Ames. Mr. Sulzberger said hiring an arts and culture director would be the best place to start, and ideally this position would supervise the Auditorium, Bandshell, and possibly the School District Auditorium as well as be the contact for Commission on the Arts (COTA) and a liaison to the Ames Community Arts Council. He said this person would be available to answer questions about arts and culture. Mr. Sulzberger said there are grants that only cities can apply for, so this person would also look for and apply for grants. He said this person would not belong to the Parks & Recreation Department, but would be its own department. He also said having an initial pool of funds between \$50,000 - \$100,000 available for seed money is important, and the amount spent on the arts every year must be increased.

Mr. Sulzberger wondered if a portion of the increase in sales tax funds because of internet sales could be considered for the arts. He said the additional sales tax approved a few years ago included community enrichment funds, and noted Polk County passed an additional tax and has an amount earmarked for the arts. He also suggested a portion of the Hotel/ Motel Tax collected going to Ames Convention and Visitors Bureau could be directed toward the arts.

Mr. Sulzberger said he has heard three ideas recently: Story Theater Company moving to the Radical Hospitality model, having a film festival, and using vacant storefronts to house pop-up art installations. He said he knows preparing the budget is even more uncertain than usual, but feels the arts budget should be looked at as a blank slate.

Mayor Haila thanked Mr. Sulzberger and Ms. Drinkwater for their preparation and suggestions. Ms. Beatty-Hansen wondered if there are zoning changes that would be beneficial. Ms. Drinkwater said low-cost studio space for artists is in high demand in Ames. She said Reliable Street has opened a few very low-cost studio spaces, and if graduates from ISU had access to low-cost studio space, they would be more likely to stick around. Mr. Sulzberger said an arts and cultural director is the first thing Ames needs. Ms. Drinkwater said that new person could start researching things like zoning and available property. Mayor Haila said it would be helpful to understand what roles that person would be playing. Mr. Sulzberger said the person would be in charge of the Auditorium, Bandshell, and possibly the Ames High School Auditorium; head of COTA, and liaison to the Ames Community Arts Council and any new arts initiatives. Ms. Drinkwater said, in Dubuque, the arts and cultural director coordinates the \$250,000 budget dispersed to programs, builds liaisons with private investment, writes grant applications, and starts new programs. She said that person has done so well beefing up economic development that they will be moving her into the health and wellness area to utilize art. Mayor Haila asked about public/private partnerships to creatively begin this position. Ms. Drinkwater said she's sure there are communities doing that and anything is better than nothing.

Mr. Sulzberger said Craig Kaufman, Manager of the Bandshell, Auditorium, and Community Center, would be a possibility for this new position. Ms. Drinkwater said Mr. Kaufman would be great for the position. Council Member Gartin thanked Mr. Sulzberger for all he has done for the arts in Ames. He said Story City Theater Company has done a phenomenal job at making sure all kids have an opportunity to experience the arts. Mr. Sulzberger said Story Theater Company has never turned anyone away who wants to be a part. He said Boys and Girls Clubs of Story County has partnered

with them, and their work and outreach with the LGBTQ community has benefited many children. Mr. Gartin said he's thankful for the many attendees following this meeting on Zoom.

Ms. Betcher asked what impact closing Design on Main has had on the arts community in Ames. Ms. Drinkwater said many were heartbroken because there's nothing else like it. Graduate students loved being Downtown and now they have to work in a basement or their apartments. Ms. Betcher said one of City Council's goals is to increase civic engagement and outreach, and Council approved an allotment of \$10,000 to the arts community with the idea of pop-ups or start-up funding. Mr. Phillips said those funds were added to the adjusted budget for 2019/20 and will be carried over. He said it has not yet been determined what the money could be used for. Mr. Phillips said it will need to be determined if COTA would administer the funds. Ms. Betcher asked if ideas could be sent before the purpose of the money is determined. Mr. Phillips concurred.

Council Member Martin mentioned the comment regarding Ames relying too much on ISU for the arts and said he would like to quantify that. Ms. Corrieri said many of these discussions happened during the Healthy Life Center discussions. She said the Council desires to make Ames even more special. Ms. Junck said the economic development position is a partnership between the City and the Chamber and maybe a similar partnership is possible since art is essential to keeping young people in Ames. *Ex officio* Council Member Whitlock said there's a lot to do in Ames for children, but not much to do for adults, and not many opportunities for ISU students to connect with the community.

Mayor Haila asked what would attract employees of Workiva or other companies to Ames. Music venues, performing venues, event/performative spaces, and anything to do after work, such as looking at art, going to concerts, and listening to live music at restaurants were mentioned. Ms. Drinkwater said the Music Walk was great. She said Reliable Street is huge in Ames and is a great model of an organic community building if it's made easy for people to initiate ideas. Ames Collaborative Art was also mentioned. Ms. Drinkwater said for things to get started, a little money is needed as well as community members saying yes to certain spaces. Mr. Sulzberger said there has to be a reason for people to come Downtown after work.

Ms. Betcher said, when looking at population demographics, Ames has a much lower median age than Dubuque. She said 47% are college students who may not have much disposable income, which makes it challenging to see what's needed for entertainment. She suggested leveraging local money in Ames could be more like in a small community since the percentage of residents working and building wealth is smaller. Mr. Sulzberger talked about Perry, Iowa, and the amazing things going on. Ms. Drinkwater said there is a huge grassroots effort happening in Perry as they recognize how the arts community has attributed to the recent growth. Mr. Sulzberger said a point person for arts and culture is key. Mayor Haila asked what kind of investment is needed for an art plan. Ms. Drinkwater said sometimes communities get tired of the effort that goes into creating a plan and end up with a massive document.

Ms. Betcher asked if the role of the City should be creating an environment and getting out of the way, or trying to guide what is happening in the arts. Ms. Drinkwater said a little of both is ideal. Mr. Sulzberger agreed both roles are appropriate and said currently organizations need to know what is going on a couple years in advance to apply for funds, so if someone gets an idea for something to do in the next couple months then funding is a problem.

Mayor Haila asked how the arts community would spend \$250,000 with a portion of that amount going toward salary. Mr. Sulzberger said it would be spread out and used to encourage a film festival and become a co-producer to bring shows to the Auditorium. Ms. Drinkwater said funds could go to theaters, music festivals, existing arts organizations, Ames Community Arts Council space, and to better fund Maximum Ames. Mr. Sulzberger said an emphasis on getting people to Ames and getting people Downtown is important.

Mr. Sulzberger requested this conversation continue to move forward. Ms. Betcher said she hopes the Council will vote to put more money into a grant program to create more opportunities for art. Council Member Gartin said this presentation had been very helpful.

**DISPOSITIONS OF COMMUNICATIONS TO COUNCIL:** City Manager Steve Schainker said an email was received regarding speeding on Ash Avenue; that could be reviewed by the traffic engineer.

Moved by Betcher, seconded by Beatty-Hansen, to request staff to look into the speeding on Ash Avenue.

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

Mayor Haila said a letter was received from Chamber of Commerce CEO Dan Culhane regarding the City of Ames' sponsorship of the 2020 Virtual Symposium on Building Inclusive Organizations.

Moved by Betcher, seconded by Junck, to put this item on a future agenda.

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

Mayor Haila said he wrote a letter to Dickson Jensen to thank him for the generous offer to donate gift cards relative to the Face Coverings Ordinance.

**COUNCIL COMMENTS:** None.

**ADJOURNMENT:** The meeting adjourned at 7:48 p.m.

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Diane R. Voss, City Clerk

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John A. Haila, Mayor

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Erin Thompson, Recording Secretary