

## STAFF REPORT

### Suggested Text Amendments – Parking/Landscaping

July 8, 2008

During a preliminary review of the layout of Fareway's proposed store at the intersection of Stange and Bloomington Roads, Fareway representatives noted that the City's parking requirement for grocery stores (i.e., 1 parking space per 150 square feet of floor area) is significantly higher than what their marketing practices require. They indicated that they were willing to meet this higher requirement, but said they would be willing to provide more landscaping in lieu of what they believed to be surplus parking if the City would allow it. Staff explained that there was currently nothing in the Code to allow this alternative, and that a text amendment would be required.

The staff was interested in Fareway's comments, because: (1) while the City's parking requirement for retail is relatively higher than most jurisdictions across the state of Iowa, it is significantly higher than the national average parking demand for shopping centers and supermarkets (approximately 1 space per 300 feet); (2) staff's personal experience administering parking requirements in other jurisdictions reveals that retail parking can be reduced to a 1/300 ratio and function efficiently; (3) reducing parking and increasing landscaping would facilitate better integration of retail into residential areas (e.g., Northridge Heights); (4) increased landscaping would greatly enhance the visual quality of commercial areas in the city; (5) enhancing the visual quality of commercial areas may encourage reinvestment into residential areas that abut or are directly accessed through commercial areas; and (6) reduced parking and increased landscaping would further the City's goals under the Cool Cities initiative in the following ways:

- i. Reduce heat-generating pavement.
- ii. Provide greater space for trees to shade and cool pavement.
- iii. Provide more space for trees to shade and cool buildings, thereby reducing energy consumption for air conditioning.
- iv. Reduce the number of lights needed to illuminate parking lots and thereby reduce energy consumption and facilitate Dark Sky objectives.
- v. Reduce stormwater runoff from impervious surfaces.

The City Manager is therefore requesting the Council's consideration of the following text changes:

- Eliminate reference to "minimum" parking, and instead call it "required" parking.
- Reduce parking requirement for all retail, shopping center, and grocery stores to approximately 1/300 sq.ft.
- Increase landscaping requirement for parking lots based upon square footage of building, using the difference between the current and proposed parking ratio to quantify the increase.
- Define "parking areas" to include associated drive aisles. This will address existing uncertainty as to whether required landscaping for parking lots encompasses the entire asphalt area.

The proposed standards could be applicable to all retail and grocery stores citywide, or they could be applied to select zones, such as the Convenience Commercial Nodes (staff confirmed that Fareway is yet very interested in this approach). However, given the potential benefits, and considering that the City of Ames parking standards are higher than the national average parking demand, the changes could result in significant improvements in both the visual quality and environment of the city of Ames.

If the City Council believes the above changes are worthy of consideration, the City Manager requests that the Council direct staff to have the Planning & Zoning Commission consider these changes and work with staff to develop Code language that would implement these changes.

CAF APPROVAL

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To be sent to: