

City Hall Courtyard Renovation

March 24, 2009

The interior courtyard of the City Hall was newly landscaped during the renovation of the building from 1988 to 1990, and has remained mostly in its original design, with a few plants being added, removed, or replaced over the years. However, over those 20 years, the landscape has developed numerous problems, has lost its attractiveness, and is not providing as inviting or pleasing a site for our citizens and employees to enjoy and use.

The Story County Master Gardener's Association (SCMGA), headed by Lisa Harmison, has volunteered to renovate and re-landscape the entire area. They, along with Dr. Jeff Iles, Chair of the Horticulture Department at ISU, have investigated the conditions in the area and have reported the following findings to staff. The trees have either been infected by disease or insects, or have matured and are no longer appropriately sized or situated, and thus dominate some areas with too much shade. The lower plants and shrubs have also matured and overgrown their sites. Some were not located properly or have died from lack of sunshine. The ground in a large area of the south end has become barren and unusable due to total shade and tree sap, and remains wet and muddy much of time. The entire courtyard has been determined to have its own micro-environment because it is protected by the building on all four sides; which creates some extreme temperature changes and protects it from the wind.

SCMGA has developed a conceptual plan to renovate the courtyard to revitalize the area by using appropriately sized and types of perennial trees, shrubs, and plants with height, color, and interest, to recreate an inviting space that can be enjoyed while being either in the area or from inside of City Hall. More paths will be installed to provide access to the different areas and plantings. The courtyard is surrounded by windows on all four sides on both levels, so this new landscaping can be seen and enjoyed even more.

A copy of the conceptual plan is attached, and Ms. Harmison will be available to answer Council's questions about the plan. This plan will also incorporate low maintenance plant materials and little or no turf grass. However, if any turf grass is installed, it will be a special variety that requires minimal mowing or watering once established.

This project will begin in late April or May 2009, when the weather allows; and will continue through the 2009 planting season until it is completed. Prior to that, the City's Parks Maintenance division will remove the existing trees to prepare the area. Two thousand dollars of City Hall maintenance funds from FY 08/09 and \$2,000 from FY 09/10 are available to purchase the trees, shrubs and mulch for this project. All other plant materials and labor are being donated by SCMGA members and their associates or sources.

Plant identity signs also will be placed around the area, and a complimentary sign of appreciation will be strategically placed to recognize SCMGA for their tremendous efforts and this gift.

No action is being requested of the City Council as this time. However, staff believes it is important the Council is aware of these landscaping changes and has an opportunity for input before work is commenced.