

COUNCIL ACTION FORM

SUBJECT: NEIGHBORHOOD STREET ART CONCEPT

BACKGROUND:

On July 14 the City Council referred to staff a request from Nitin Gadia asking that the Council allow citizens to work together to paint City intersections, thus creating community and fostering neighborhood building. The request was for the specific intersection of West Street and Wilmoth Avenue, although the concept could have much larger application within the community. A copy of the letter is attached.

An organization called "City Repair" in Portland, Oregon (<http://cityrepair.org/>) has developed a number of tools to help citizens take local public "spaces" (such as street intersections in local neighborhoods) and transform them into public "places." Mr. Gadia's proposal specifically relates to City Repair's concept of "intersection repair," which is described further on Attachment "A." In layperson's terms, this involves building consensus among a majority of neighbors to paint a permanent artistic design in the street, bringing neighbors closer together in the process and creating a local point of social connection.

Staff met with Mr. Gadia and members of the City's Public Art Commission to further explore this concept. Issues raised and responses are summarized below.

- *Would painting the street create public safety concerns?* It appears from the experience of cities in Oregon and Minnesota that painting the street surface on local residential streets does not create public safety concerns due to slippery surfaces or during the painting process. However, the streets do need to be blocked off during the painting event, and appropriate types of paint needs to be properly applied. Having a design painted in an intersection reportedly can serve as a traffic calming device.
- *Which intersections could be painted?* This program should be restricted to residential streets and exclude collector and arterial streets. This better supports social networking in small, localized areas; while lower traffic volumes allow the paint to last longer.
- *What maintenance is needed over time?* The paint needs to be refreshed after each winter season. Other cities place that responsibility upon the same group of neighbors who originally painted the street, which provides an annual opportunity for continued networking.
- *How is adequate neighborhood support demonstrated?* Other cities require that a petition be submitted showing a strong (though not unanimous) degree of support from neighbors within two blocks of the intersection. It is also important that all neighbors immediately adjacent to the intersection be supportive.

- *What controls are needed regarding the content of what is painted?* This determination requires a careful balance between artistic creativity and free expression on one hand, and a need to preserve the “public interest” on the other. Such a program would undoubtedly fail if public street surfaces were used to express offensive or inappropriate messages. Other cities have developed various approaches to address these concerns. The Public Art Commission could play a key role in developing and administering content standards for our community.

After researching this concept and visiting with representative from other cities, the consensus among the PAC members, Mr. Gadia and City staff is that this concept has true value for strengthening neighborhoods within Ames, and that there appear to be adequate ways to address each of the stated concerns. Both artistically and socially, such a program appears to support the City Council’s goal to *strengthen our neighborhoods*.

The City of Ames Public Art Commission discussed this concept with Mr. Gadia at their July 1 meeting. The Commission gave general support to the concept, subject to adequate resolution of concerns such as those addressed above. The Commission has indicated its willingness to be involved in such a program.

The City of Portland already has a program to facilitate and manage neighborhood painting of intersections. Their program provides a ready model for Ames. Portland’s ordinance summarizing how they administer this program is included as Attachment “B.”

Should Council choose to approve such a program, it will be staff’s recommendation that one neighborhood first be authorized to create such a neighborhood “place” using street art. Staff and the Public Art Commission could then evaluate how the program worked and bring back any needed changes to Council before other street art is authorized.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. The City Council can give conceptual approval to the painting of local street intersections by groups of neighbors, based on the Portland, Oregon model.
2. The City Council can decline to give conceptual approval to this concept.
3. The City Council can refer this concept back to staff, the Public Art Commission or Mr. Gadia for further information or recommendations.

MANAGER’S RECOMMENDATION:

The concept of encouraging a group of neighbors to work together to create a public “place” out of a local street intersection is appealing. Such efforts could nurture

connectivity between neighbors who might not otherwise interact, and could facilitate their creating an aesthetically pleasing neighborhood connection spot.

Based upon the experience of other cities, a properly designed and administered street painting program will not compromise public safety. Adopting proper controls over content may be the greatest challenge; but staff and the Public Art Commission should be able to develop appropriate standards and procedures to overcome that hurdle.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of the City Manager that the City Council approve Alternative #1, giving conceptual approval to the painting of local street intersections by groups of neighbors, based on the model set by Portland, Oregon.

If this alternative is approved, staff will prepare an appropriate policy or ordinance for approval by Council, and will work with the Public Art Commission to develop a recommendation for appropriate content and aesthetic standards and procedures.

(Text of letter to City Council from Nitin Gadia)

Several families and short term residents around the intersection of Wilmoth and West Street have expressed enthusiasm about engaging in a community project called a *city repair*. The objective is to paint the entire intersection with the goal of active and positive participation in our public spaces. Developed by a nonprofit in Portland, Oregon, a city repair generates community creatively, while aiding in slowing down traffic, and giving people a sense of accountability to the area. While a common fear is that a city repair would indirectly condone negative use of public property, it in fact encourages positive behavior, as it gives an outlet of expression.

On July 1st, I met with councilman Matthew Goodman and Assistant City Manager Bob Kindred, who both liked the idea, and said it would be best if the project went forward with some guidelines attached, particularly that it remains safe and nonoffensive. Such a framework can provide a structure for the city repair to take place, and similar project in the future. The same day I met with the Ames Community Arts Council, where everyone expressed interest, and requested more information for them to develop guidelines for it to take place. I am not requesting any financial resources, rather that the Ames City Council allows the city repair and future projects take place under such guidelines, and that it be referred to the city staff, who will determine what would be necessary for it to take place. Once we get approval, residents of the area will hold a meeting, where we will design the project together, and then raise the necessary resources to do it together on a date we choose with city staff.

The impact that this project may have on people in the area and around Ames cannot be underestimated. While government has done its part in laying out and maintaining them for their practical purposes, our public spaces are essential to the human interaction around which we form meaningful communities. When communities have developed organically, they did around central common spaces, from which the arrangement of public and private spaces radiated outwards. As everyone was invested in public spaces, they embodied their mutual respect in a democratic accountability that was implicit. In resting all accountability of our common needs on government, the form of our communities, our streets and the arrangement of our public and private spaces, have been built only around their most practical function. While we employ a government to represent us, it cannot embody the meaning we hold in our lives. We need to do our part with our government in making our public spaces more than practical conduits. Given that communities are gridlocked, and planned in a top-down fashion, reaching a balance will take a great deal of creativity. In our context, a city repair is perhaps the best way that we can transform our public spaces into places.

*I have attached the framework that Portland developed, titled "Conditions of Revocable permit to Modify City Intersections". While the concept was developed, as we are trying to do here, with one local community, in the case of Portland, the ordinance was passed much later to streamline the process.

*Also attached is a presentation that I used to approach people around the intersection

*For further information, visit:

www.cityrepair.org

*Also, the following video is well worth watching

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qVq0exoGySc>

Please contact me with any questions, comments or concerns.

Thank you,
Nitin Gadia
515-451-6464

ATTACHMENT "A"

From <http://cityrepair.org/how-to/placemaking/intersectionrepair/>

Intersection Repair is the citizen-led conversion of an urban street intersection into public square. Streets are usually the only public space we have in our neighborhoods. But most all of them have been designed with a single purpose in mind: moving cars around. With an Intersection Repair, that public space is reclaimed for the whole community. The intersection of pathways becomes a place for people to come together. The space becomes a Place - a public square.

How do you create a public square out of an intersection?

The community works together to make the place special. They make it a place where people want to go to, where they feel safe and welcome. They make it beautiful and interesting. They make it meaningful, an expression of their own local culture.

Is it just painting the street, or something more?

Each Intersection Repair project is the work of neighborhood residents. It is the people who live in the neighborhood who decide that they want the public square, what it will look like, how it will function and how it will develop. One neighborhood may paint a giant mural on the intersection and stop there. Another may go through many phases: painting the street, installing a community bulletin board, building a mini-cafe on a corner, reconstructing the intersection with brick and cobblestones, opening businesses to make it a village center... and on and on!

Does this close the street to cars?



No. Many public squares throughout the world are in fact shared by cars and pedestrians. These spaces are designed in ways that make drivers move more slowly and expect pedestrians.

Why would a neighborhood want an Intersection Repair?

It depends - each one is different. Maybe people want a focal point for their neighborhood, a place for community interaction and seasonal celebrations. Maybe they want to slow down traffic, and let pedestrians share the public space of the road equally with cars.

Who makes a project happen?

You and your neighbors do! You and your neighbors start the idea, get your community involved, create a design, and install it at your intersection. The City Repair Project is here to help you navigate the process, work with your neighbors, connect with skilled people in your community, raise funds, and meet City requirements.



Does all this cost anything?

The City Repair Project charges no fees for the work we do with neighborhoods - we are a nonprofit organization, and are supported by individual donations and limited grant funding. Project expenses - paint, materials, etc. - must be covered by the neighbors, however.

How do I get started?

It all starts with a potluck. Have some of your neighbors over to share food and conversation. Find out what your concerns and dreams are for your neighborhood.

If your group has both the desire and the energy to work together to do something, schedule another potluck with more of your neighbors - and invite The City Repair Project. We'll give a short slide presentation on Intersection Repair, help you identify neighborhood goals and resources, and talk with you about next steps for a neighborhood project.

When you're ready, [contact us](#) to discuss your idea and set up a plan for action!

APPENDIX "B"

City Ordinance No. 175937 passed by Portland, Oregon City Council 09/19/01

Conditions of Revocable Permit to Modify City Intersections

- (1) The permittee shall hold the City of Portland, its officers, agents, and employees free and harmless from any claims for damages to persons or property, including legal fees and costs of defending any actions or suits, including any appeals, which may result from permitted activity.
- (2) The intent of a proposed project and the likely outcome of such project shall be consistent with the goals of the Portland City Council.
- (3) The two streets must be classified as Local Service Streets and carry less than a combined 2,500 vehicles on an average day.
- (4) The applicant for a permit must provide to the City Traffic Engineer a petition of support for the proposed intersection modifications. The support petition must have signatures from each of the adjacent residents and at least 80 percent of the residents on the project street frontage(s) within two standard city blocks of the proposed project. The City Traffic Engineer shall have the authority to modify the petition boundaries when considered appropriate. The City Traffic Engineer shall certify the accuracy of the petition.
- (5) The applicant for a permit must provide the City Traffic Engineer with a written description of the proposed changes, including diagrams depicting how the intersection will look when completed. The applicant must demonstrate how the project will improve, or at least maintain, traffic safety and the safety of individuals at or in the vicinity of the intersection.
- (6) The City Traffic Engineer may approve a revocable permit authorizing construction and maintenance of the project as described and shown in the submitted diagrams, subject to any changes that may be required by the City Traffic Engineer.
- (7) The permit shall be for use of the public right-of-way only, and does not exempt the permittee from obtaining any license or permit required by the City Code or Ordinances for any act to be performed under this permit. Nor shall the permit waive the provisions of any City Code, Ordinance, or the City Charter, except as stated herein.
- (8) The permit shall not exempt any party from complying with all applicable traffic laws, including laws regarding pedestrians.
- (9) The permittee is not authorized to do any excavation, except as specifically identified in the project plans. The permittee shall be responsible for protecting all public and private facilities placed in the public right-of-way, including underground utilities.
- (10) The permittee shall notify all households and businesses within four standard city blocks of the proposed project at least 30 days before the project installation date.
- (11) The permittee shall obtain a Block Party Permit to close all legs of an intersection, for up to one block distance, in order to install the intersection modifications. Permittee shall use Type III barricades and STREET CLOSED signs as provided in the *Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices*. No street shall be blocked for more than 12 hours in any 24-hour period unless specifically allowed by the City Traffic Engineer.

- (12) Repair, maintenance, or installation of existing or future utility facilities in the right-of-way may require the permittee to reconstruct, move, or remove the project, or portions of the project, with all costs borne by the permittee.
- (13) The permittee shall work with all affected neighbors to resolve any concerns that may arise regarding the project. The inability to resolve such concerns may be grounds for revocation of this permit by the City Traffic Engineer.
- (14) The permittee shall maintain, at no cost to the City, all aspects of the project during the term of the permit. If any nuisance condition is allowed to exist in the area of the project, the City may summarily abate such nuisance. The existence of a nuisance in the area of the project may be grounds for revocation of the permit.
- (15) All permits shall be revocable by the City Traffic Engineer. The City Traffic Engineer may revoke a permit for any cause. The City Traffic Engineer shall immediately revoke a permitted project no longer meeting the intent of City Council goals.
- (16) The permittee shall, at no cost to the City, remove all aspects and/or features of a project when either the permit expires or is revoked.

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