

**Staff Report**  
**YOUTH SPORTS FACILITY IN GENERAL INDUSTRIAL ZONES**  
September 8, 2009

The City Council referred a request from Mike Espeset concerning his proposal to build a Youth Sports Facility in the General Industrial zoning district. Mr. Espeset has identified a parcel of land in the General Industrial Zone for such a facility. Staff had advised him that such a use currently is not allowed in the GI Zone but is allowed in all commercial zoning districts. The City Council has asked for background information related to this request.

Mr. Espeset provided a number of reasons why he feels that this type of facility is appropriate for an industrial setting. The following issues were listed in his June 23 letter to the Mayor and City Council.

*Scale* – A facility like this “will be in the 30,000-50,000 SF range and be tall” to support its intended use.

*Exterior Materials* – The likely materials that the financial model can support for a facility like this will be a good match for what is seen in a GI Zone.

*Reuse* – If this facility does not work out over time, the replacement use of the facility would likely be a currently permitted use in the GI Zone.

*Time of Use* – The heavy times of use will be evenings and weekends and run countercyclical to normal GI Zone uses which should not create traffic problems.

*Regional Draw* – Current GI land locations are close to major transportation routes and would be simple for people to find and access from throughout the region.

*Affordability* – Making affordable use of this type of facility will be key for the participants. The land and building costs in a General Industrial Zone will allow a facility like this to serve the needs of the patrons more affordably than if it were in a commercial zone.

**The Current Code Provisions:**

The proposed use, as described in Mr. Espeset’s letter, is an indoor youth sports practice and game facility for basketball, soccer, and batting cages. In the City of Ames’ zoning ordinance, such a use is described in our Trade Use Categories Tables (Table 29.501(4)-3) as Health Clubs and Gyms, a subcategory of Entertainment, Restaurant and Recreational Trade (defined as “facilities providing entertainment or recreation services and eating and drinking establishments).

Currently, such a use is not allowed in either of the City’s two industrial zoning categories, whose purpose is described below:

Each of these zones is intended to reserve appropriately located areas for predominantly industrial uses and to protect these areas from intrusion by dwellings and other inharmonious uses. The zones are intended to promote the economic viability of the City's industrial areas and to provide standards to assure safe, functional, efficient and

environmentally sound industrial areas and to provide standards to assure safe, functional, efficient and environmentally sound operations. Differentiation between the zones is intended to provide appropriate areas for industrial uses of different character, intensity or impact while minimizing potential conflicts among land users.

The Use Tables for General Industrial allow for, among other things, Office Uses, Retail Sales and Service, Automotive and Marine Craft (e.g., auto and boat sales), Wholesale Trade, Vehicle Service Stations (e.g., gas stations) and nearly all Industrial Uses. Uses that are excluded include, among others, Residential Uses, Entertainment-Restaurant-Recreation, Commercial Outdoor Recreation, and Major Event Entertainment. The use tables also show a pattern of excluding such recreation and sports facilities such as bowling alleys, health clubs, gyms, indoor firing ranges, swimming pools, and tennis courts.

The Use Table for all commercial zoning districts currently allows for the type of youth sports facility being proposed by Mr. Epeset, and all of the benefits cited for locating this use in industrial zones already exist in appropriate commercial areas as well.

**Issues to Consider:**

In the past, this type of request would be easier to accommodate than today, given the current land use situation. The development community has emphasized, and the City staff has verified, that there is very little land available to offer expanding industries already in Ames or industrial entities hoping to locate in our community. The availability of industrial land is a crucial component to our economic development strategy as we hope to not only expand our property tax base, but to also create high paying jobs to attract more people to live and shop in our city.

During the discussion of removing the minimum floor area ratio requirements for general industrial zones, the City Council noted that there is limited available land for industrial development within Ames. When it was noted at the time that office uses were allowed in general industrial zones, some questioned if these uses should be eliminated to make sure land in these zones not be diverted for other than industrial uses. The Council ultimately decided not to take any action to change the current policy. Nonetheless, there are other uses also allowed in the industrial districts that may be contrary to our intent to facilitate industrial development, e.g. retail sales & services and auto dealers. If this request is approved, the result would be to expand the possibilities for even more non-industrial uses in zones where there already is limited land availability.

Another issue to consider surfaced during recent discussions with local developers, who indicated that we should not expect the private sector to initiate the development of industrial land in the future given the significant costs involved with this type of project. Therefore, the City has stepped forward with the third phase of the Ames Community Business Park and anticipates participating in the new Bio-Tech Park to the east of Interstate 35 with the creation of Tax Increment Financing Districts to fund the infrastructure in these industrial areas. The purpose of this tax incentive is to assure a below market land cost to industrial entities who will expand or relocate to Ames with addition of high paying jobs. If health clubs and gyms (youth recreation facilities) are added to the list of permissible uses in industrial zones, recreational facilities would be eligible to receive the tax advantages of TIF financing that we had hoped to preserve for industrial uses only.