

KELLOGG-CLARK CORRIDOR STUDY

August 24, 2010

Background

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On October 14, 2008, City Council approved a resolution providing for the boundaries of the Downtown Façade Grant Program to expand south of the Union Pacific Railroad along the Kellogg and Clark Avenue corridors, after the rezoning of that area is considered. The purpose of this change was to encourage investments that promote the economic vitality of the Downtown and the Kellogg corridor and strengthen visual connections between Lincoln Way and Main Street.

The façade program and the rezoning are linked in this case because of differences in the land use policies and zoning development standards that apply to the two areas. The zoning north of the railroad is Downtown Services Center, which allows building at the property lines, requires buildings to be at least two stories in height and prohibits parking in front of the building. These standards are consistent with the character of the traditional downtown, including storefronts at the sidewalk, buildings next to each other with no side setbacks, two stories with office or residential uses above, and common parking areas. The historic design standards for the façade grants are based on these characteristics of the existing urban form. (See Figure 1: Current Zoning)

In contrast, the zoning south of the railroad is Highway-Oriented Commercial, which requires buildings to be set away from the property lines, requires on-site parking, and allows that parking to be in front of the building, which usually results in one-story buildings. In short, the current zoning prohibits the urban form required by the historic design standards for the façade grants. Therefore, if the Downtown Façade Grant Program, with its historic design guidelines, is to be extended south of the Union Pacific Railroad, the Land Use Policy Plan Map and the zoning should first be changed to Downtown Services Center.

The Downtown Façade Grant Program does include alternative standards for non-historic, stand-alone buildings, but there are nonetheless significant differences between those standards and the zoning development standards south of the railroad.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine if:

- the zoning south of the railroad should be changed to be more consistent with the historic design standards for the Downtown Façade Grant Program, or
- if the Downtown Façade Grant Program should be extended south of the railroad and apply only the alternative standards for non-historic buildings, or
- if the Downtown Façade Grant Program should not be extended south of the railroad.

Thus far in this study, City staff has:

- Collated and analyzed data about the buildings and properties on Main Street and in the area bounded by the railroad, Lincoln Way, Duff Avenue and Clark Avenue (“study area”).
- Examined possible future redevelopment in the study area under both the Highway-Oriented Commercial and Downtown Service Center zoning development standards.
- Identified the implications of these possible future redevelopment possibilities.
- Heard feedback at a public meeting to which all property owners and business owners in the Downtown Service Center zoning district and the study area were invited.
- Met with the Main Street Cultural District General membership, Central Committee, Design Committee and Business Improvement Committee.

(All of the detailed information and analysis on which this report is based are available at the City’s web site under [What’s New](#) at the [Planning Division](#) page.)

This analysis compares the study area to the area north of tracks. (See Figure 2: Study Area) The study area is within the larger Urban Core, which includes four distinct and highly interrelated neighborhoods (See Figure 3: Neighborhoods in the Urban Core):

- Ames downtown, identified as the [Main Street Cultural District](#) in 2004, was designated by State of Iowa Cultural Affairs Department as a Certified Cultural District and accepted into the Iowa Main Street program as the Ames Main Street Cultural District.
- The convenience of services that the Downtown offers and the street/sidewalk grid provides strong links to the Old Town Historic District (National and Local) to the north and the rest of the Old Town Neighborhood north to 13th Street.
- The railroad tracks make for a strong south boundary of the Downtown, due to three at-grade crossings and 60-90 trains per day. South of these tracks is the Lincoln Way commercial corridor, with primarily retail businesses providing direct vehicle access and convenient parking. It is on U.S. Highway 69, which is one of the City’s major streets, carrying over 20,000 vehicles per day.
- To the south of the study area is the South Lincoln Neighborhood, an area with a mix of uses including around one thousand apartments and 60 detached residences housing over two thousand people. The Ames Land Use Policy Plan designates most of the South Lincoln Neighborhood as part of the Downtown, with objectives to create a more cohesive district and provide greater access and circulation. The Lincoln Way commercial corridor and the Downtown offer convenient services to these residents.

Existing policies and previous planning reports have recognized the strong interrelationships between the Main Street Cultural District, the Lincoln Way commercial corridor, and the South Lincoln Neighborhood and the value of access and connections among them. Both the Land Use Policy Plan and the South Lincoln Sub-Area Plan emphasize that the connections across both Lincoln Way and the railroad are challenging. Both plans call for streetscaping and intersection improvements to make the Lincoln Way crossing at the Clark and Kellogg intersections more prominent. However, design study concurrent with the traffic signal replacement project at Kellogg and Lincoln Way revealed that there is not sufficient space on any of these corners to make any entryway features that will be visually prominent enough to compete with all of the existing signs, buildings and utilities.

It can be difficult to see and find the Downtown from Lincoln Way, not only because of the distance, but also because the development of the Lincoln Way commercial corridor blocks views to the Downtown and because its physical character is so different from the traditional downtown. The exception is the Kellogg corridor, where the buildings are placed as in a traditional downtown – at the sidewalk without spaces between. To address these difficulties, both the Land Use Policy Plan and the Downtown Plan (1995) call for the study area to be an expansion area for the Downtown.

The history of development in the study area illustrates the reasons for its physical form. In early times, businesses that needed large properties and railroad access, such as lumber, coal, and grain, developed along the south side of the railroad. By the early 1900's, houses filled both sides of "Boone Road" to the south. The designation of Boone Road as the Lincoln Highway in 1913 provided the traffic and setting for a new type of commercial development that accommodated and served people with automobiles. Over time this auto-oriented commercial development replaced the residences along Lincoln Way. At the same time, on Kellogg and a in portion of the area east of it smaller lots were platted for more retail-oriented commercial uses, similar to the lots on Main Street. (See Figure 4: Smaller lots on Kellogg and to the east) Therefore, development on Kellogg was in the traditional downtown style, as on Main Street. Along the Clark corridor, the wholesale uses, such as lumber, coal, gas and oil, remained for a longer period of time.

Thus, the study area now contains a wide variety of uses and lot sizes. As a whole the products and services offered on Kellogg and Clark are consistent with the downtown and the Lincoln Way commercial corridor. But it appears that these corridors on their own do not provide a significant variety of retail goods and services. It is not clear that employees in these areas cross the railroad to shop during breaks and after work.

Some uses in the Downtown are the same as in the study area and some are different. For example, the study area contains fast-food restaurants, but all of the restaurants in the Downtown are sit-down. However, the differences in uses allowed by the different zoning designations are not significant. The significant differences in zoning standards north and south of the railroad pertain to the physical development in each zone, such as setbacks and parking standards.

In the Downtown, building placement, scale, and façade design invite people to walk, stay a while and shop. Such compact development provides a lot of activity – and a lot of opportunity – in one place. Physical development south of the railroad is less compact, serving people in automobiles. One indicator of compactness is floor area ratio. The maximum floor area ratio in the study area (Highway-Oriented Commercial zoning district) is 0.5. The majority of the properties in the study area have a floor area ratio consistent with this standard, including the Clark corridor. The exception is the Kellogg corridor. The compactness of development on Kellogg is non-conforming with respect to zoning and it indicates that the Kellogg corridor has a different character than the Clark corridor. (See Figure 5: Floor Area Ratios greater than 0.50)

The location of off-street parking is another element of the existing urban form. In the Downtown, parking for all properties is provided in large, centrally located parking lots. This allows the compact arrangement of larger buildings with many uses that create a pedestrian environment for shopping and events. In the study area south of the railroad, parking is provided at each building and owned and maintained by that building owner. This creates a dispersed pattern of smaller buildings with fewer uses with parking in front, beside and/or behind each building.

Again, the exception is Kellogg, where there is little parking associated with each building. The parking that serves the Kellogg corridor includes on-street parallel parking, parking spaces behind some of the buildings and accessed by alleys, a private parking lot, and a public parking lot. The 143 total parking spaces are 35% fewer than what is now required for Highway-Oriented Commercial zoning. However, although the parking arrangement is similar to the Downtown, the urban form of the Kellogg corridor does not provide the same pedestrian environment found in the Downtown. Only two buildings are two-story, there are several gaps between storefronts where buildings have been removed, and the corridor is only one block long. The separation created by the railroad between this Kellogg corridor and Main Street is a significant and permanent impediment to connecting a pedestrian-oriented environment along the Kellogg corridor to the pedestrian-friendly setting of the Downtown.

Property improvement and redevelopment have been frequent in the study area, but some properties are less suitable for redevelopment than others. One suitability indicator is whether or not a property can be redeveloped for its current use under current zoning standards. Existing conditions that make this difficult for 40% of the properties in the study area include floor area ratio greater than 0.5, lot width narrower than 60 feet, or lot sizes smaller than 10,000 square feet. When such properties cannot be combined with adjacent properties, redevelopment is difficult. Half of such properties are on Kellogg, comprising more than half of the total property area on Kellogg. (See Figure 6: Lots with impediments to redevelopment under existing zoning) To preserve the potential revenue from their properties, some owners on Kellogg have purchased vacant properties to use for parking, which improves the parking problem, but also preserves gaps in the storefront streetscape, negatively affecting the retail pedestrian environment. This is particularly evident on the west side of Kellogg.

Investment in property improvement has been ongoing within the study area on a lot by lot basis. The 2006 renovation creating a new Starbucks coffee shop is one example.

Two buildings on Clark were built in 1999 and 2001. Several buildings on Kellogg have been improved in the last few years. The street sidewalk and lighting on Kellogg were all replaced in 2009. Decorative paving and lighting included in that project have extended some of the visual elements from the Cultural District streetscape. In 2009, a major electric power interconnect line was installed overhead through the north part of the study area. This line, which follows the north side of Gilchrist, helps to provide reliable power for the entire community and is a critical element in the regional electrical network. In the next few years, plans call for the repaving of Gilchrist.

Stakeholders Input

A public input meeting was held for this study on Monday, March 15, 2010, at 7 p.m. in City Hall. This meeting also covered the related topic of new standards to preserve existing historic facades downtown. Invitations were sent to all of the property owners in the Cultural District and the study area, as well as to all of the businesses that do not own their buildings. Twenty people attended. Four people listed addresses in the Kellogg or Clark corridors, and the rest were associated with a business, property or organization in the Cultural District.

The above information and conclusions were presented as well as two alternative future scenarios described below for the Kellogg corridor. Concerns and comments included:

- Investment has been made in the past and recently in both the Kellogg and Clark corridors, which has had a positive effect.
- Expectation that change in the Kellogg corridor will continue to be incremental, because it is difficult to assemble enough property to do any complete redevelopment with a new building on a site under current standards.
- The Highway-Oriented Commercial zoning standards are a major barrier to redevelopment because of parking requirements and setbacks. These make the future redevelopment in the Kellogg corridor under the current zoning unlikely.
- Some of the existing businesses on Kellogg do not make a positive impression as an entryway into the Cultural District. The adult business and the quick loan/pawnshops were mentioned. However, it was also noted that the larger quick loan business had recently done a major facelift.
- General support for changing the zoning in the Kellogg corridor to Downtown Service Center was expressed.

Staff Conclusions

Strong interconnections among the various areas that make up the Urban Core of Ames are important for the economic vitality, visual character, and quality of life of the community. The various types of commercial and residential land uses support each other. Major streets and mass transit routes bring people to and from the core from all over the community. The continual reinvestment in and improvement of the Lincoln Way

commercial corridor is one reflection of the vitality of the area. This development helps bring traffic close to the downtown.

Although the 100 block of Kellogg Avenue is in the heart of this commercial corridor, it is clearly different. With buildings at the back of the sidewalk and few gaps between buildings, it looks more like a downtown than a commercial corridor. Although there have been investments in the buildings and in the street and utilities on this block, it still is not the type and scale of redevelopment as those properties with frontage on Lincoln Way, with a Lincoln Way address. However, the Clark corridor is very similar to the Lincoln Way commercial corridor, with lot sizes similar to the surrounding commercial corridor and most buildings set back from the street with parking in front.

Although the development on the Kellogg corridor looks more like Main Street, most of its physical characteristics violate the current development standards that apply to it. With lot sizes like Main Street, rules like Lincoln Way and addresses on Kellogg, redevelopment is very difficult. In contrast, most of the existing development on Clark conforms to the current zoning standards.

Changing the land use and zoning of the Kellogg corridor so that it is the same as Main Street would be a better fit with lots and buildings as they are. This would better preserve the existing visual character that is so similar to Main Street. This would entail changing the land use designation and zoning to Downtown Services Center. The size and arrangement of lots and buildings in the Clark corridor do not call for changes to the land use designation and zoning standards.

These changes would facilitate continued reinvestment and make commercial uses more viable in the Kellogg corridor. It would also make the Kellogg corridor eligible for Downtown Façade Grants. However, this raises the question as to whether or not changing the land use and zoning will accomplish all of this. Even with redevelopment following the Downtown Services Center zoning, will connections from the South Lincoln Neighborhood be stronger, and will more people find their way Downtown from Lincoln Way? Will this change in land use contribute significantly to the viability of Downtown and the Urban Core?

In order to analyze these possibilities and questions and to illustrate future impacts of different policies and standards, the following three future development scenarios have been prepared. **Because of the observations noted above, none of the recommended alternatives involve changing the zoning in the Clark corridor.**

- Maintain current land use and zoning on the Kellogg corridor. This future possible development of the Kellogg corridor is based on its current Highway-Oriented Commercial zoning. This scenario illustrates the corridor as a commercial area similar to Lincoln Way and South Duff Avenue.
- Change land use and zoning on the Kellogg corridor to Downtown Service Center. This future possible development of the Kellogg corridor is based on Downtown Services Center zoning. This scenario illustrates filling in the gaps

between buildings and improving the facades making this Downtown entry corridor more consistent with Main Street.

- Change land use and zoning for the area between Kellogg and Clark to Downtown Service Center. This future possible development of a larger portion of the study area is based on Downtown Services Center zoning. This scenario illustrates a more visible and substantial redevelopment project on Lincoln Way that could support a more vital downtown and South Lincoln Neighborhood.

These scenarios models are mainly visual in nature and therefore will be presented at the City Council meeting, along with some of the pros and cons of each scenario. It is important to note that City staff has prepared these scenarios only to study the implications of possible land use policies. No developer has made any proposal for this area, nor has any developer been involved in preparing these scenarios. **It should be emphasized that the City of Ames is not proposing or initiating any redevelopment in the study area.**

Next Steps

A next step in this process could be to invite input from stakeholders and the public on these three scenarios. Staff would also present this study to the Planning and Zoning Commission at a public hearing on a change to the Land Use Policy Plan for its recommendation to the City Council.

Staff does not want to proceed with policy options of this magnitude without first informing City Council. If the Council does not desire to further consider these scenarios, it can direct staff to not pursue changes at this time. However, if the Council would like public input and the Planning and Zoning Commission's recommendation regarding these policy options, it can direct staff to take the next steps outlined above.

Figure 1: Current Zoning

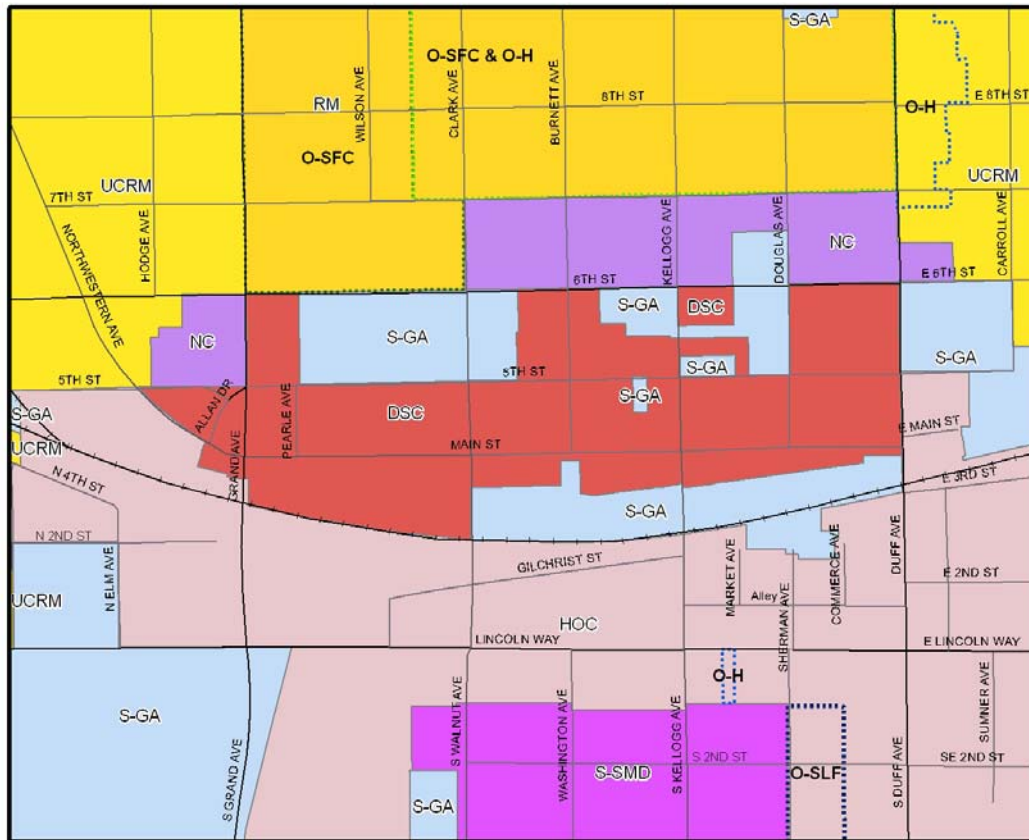


Figure 2: Study Area



Figure 3: Neighborhoods in the Urban Core



Figure 4: Smaller lots on Kellogg and to the east

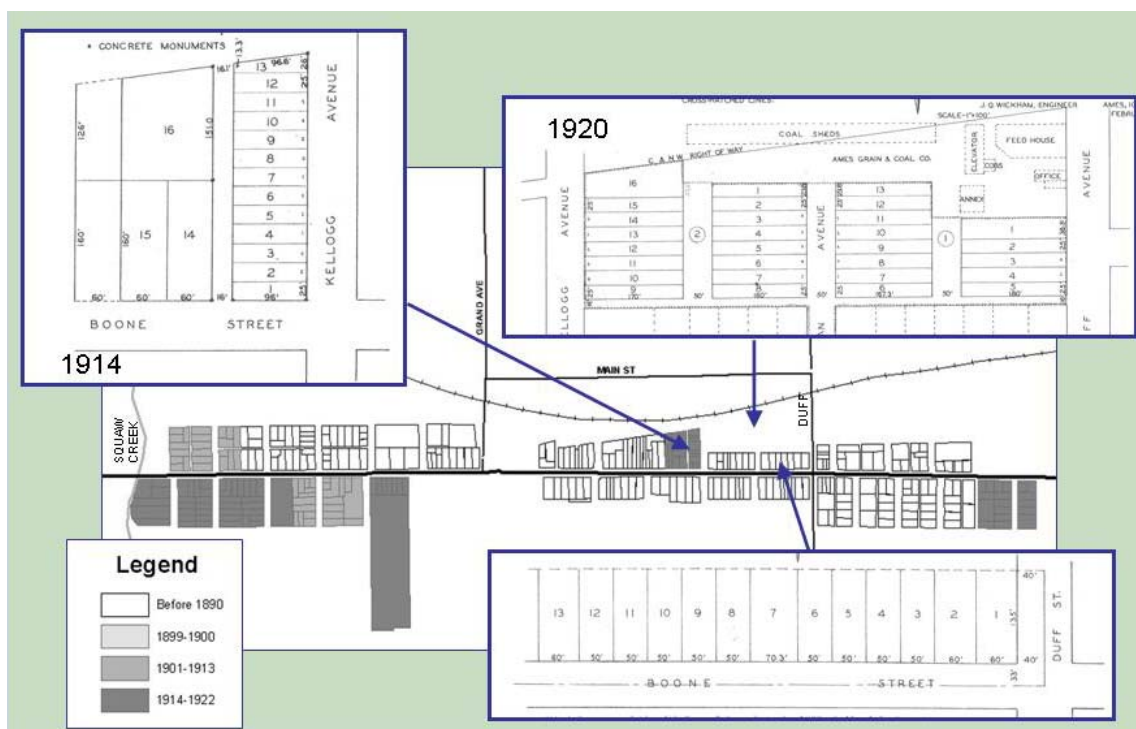


Figure 5: Floor Area Ratios greater than 0.50

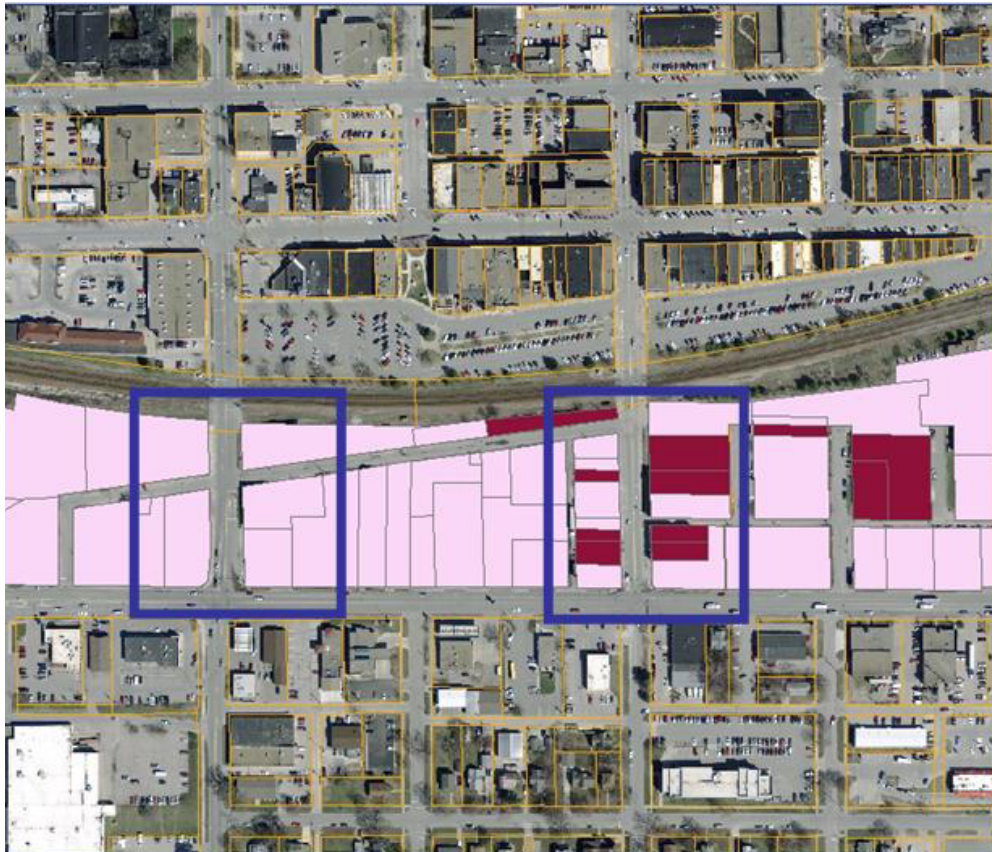


Figure 6: Lots with impediments to redevelopment under existing zoning

