

COUNCIL ACTION FORM

SUBJECT: **REVIEW OF PLANNING & HOUSING DEPARTMENT
 PROGRAM OF WORK**

BACKGROUND:

During the City Council’s review of the proposed budget on February 6, staff presented a spreadsheet showing the City Council’s many goals and referrals assigned to the Planning and Housing Department. An updated spreadsheet showing additional information requested by the City Council is attached.

Presented below is a brief description of the 26 long-term planning projects currently assigned. A more in-depth explanation of each assignment will be provided at the February 11 Council meeting.

Line #	Planning Project	Background / “Why?”
1	LUPP update	Experience has shown that major updates to the plan are needed. A “LUPP 101” work session will first be held on existing goals and policies. Based on Council’s direction, a work plan for the update will then be prepared and a consultant hired to help with outreach and completion of the plan.
2	Zoning code evaluation to improve housing stock affordability	Identify and remove zoning code impediments to improving the city’s existing housing stock at lower costs.
3	Parking standards changes to improve storm water management	Initial staff report will research parking rates and design requirements. Follow-up includes preparing text amendments and public outreach. (May coordinate with line #16 project on landscaping.)
4	Investigation of ways to increase affordable housing availability	Prepare background report for affordable housing definitions; then prepare report on national examples of housing strategies. Based on Council’s direction, additional steps may then follow.
5	Eastern industrial park	Work with AEDC, Story County, Gilbert, and other stakeholders to amend Urban Fringe Plan; facilitate annexation, zoning and subdivision within area.
6	Economic development policy	Initial step is to prepare a report summarizing the City’s existing policy. Based on Council’s direction, help revise and update the policy.
7	Exploring ways to increase availability of all	Initial step is to prepare background report for the City’s housing needs and housing stock.

Line #	Planning Project	Background / "Why?"
	housing types	
8	Developing neighborhood engagement process to proactively address community issues	Initial step is to help develop a comprehensive report summarizing the City's existing code requirements and less formal processes to engage citizens.
9	Campustown façade grant program	Initial step is to work with CAA and a design consultant to design requirements and program guidelines. Second step is to administer the pilot project.
10	Chapter 31 historic preservation chapter update	Staff and the Historic Preservation Commission have been working on this update for over two years. Remaining work is to prepare draft text amendments, and to conduct public outreach and education.
11	Long Range Regional Transportation Plan update	This plan must be updated every 5 years. Planning provides needed land use and growth assumptions for modeling used in the updated plan.
12	Updating requirements for Right-of-way & infrastructure improvements outside of subdivisions	Many public improvements (including sidewalks, multi-purpose trails, turn lanes, street lighting, traffic signals, etc.) can be required under subdivision or zoning approvals. These may not currently be required, however, when site plans for single lot developments are approved.
13	Downtown historic district nomination	Staff, an outside consultant and the Historic Preservation Commission have been working on this project for three years. When completed, most of the Main Street Cultural District will be eligible for state and federal tax credits. This will be an added incentive for rehabilitation in this historic area.
14	Airport tall building text amendment	Under FAA regulations, this amendment is required before the City can apply for state airport funding this summer. This will codify existing City practice.
15	Greek house parking requirements	This referral begins to address the situation where additional parking would need to be developed when fraternities or sororities expand, or are replaced by a new building.
16	City-wide landscaping standards update	Long-term feedback from both developers and City staff indicate that many of the City's current site landscaping requirements are ineffective. Various alternatives were presented at a Council workshop, including eliminating current landscaping requirements and/or modifying the requirements to be more effective and/or to address modern

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		methods of stormwater management. A focus group of local stakeholders was established. Next steps are to use this group to consider the effectiveness of current standards and examples of alternatives, to prepare needed text amendments, and to conduct public outreach. (May coordinate with line #3 project on parking standards.)
17	Sign code update (digital signs & billboards)	The City's sign code is quite outdated and does not address modern digital signage. The billboards section of the code is unclear.
18	Urban Fringe Plan update with Story County & Gilbert	Story County asked Ames and Gilbert to devote staff resources to update the Urban Fringe Plan's land use classifications and future growth areas, and to identify any recommended changes.
19	Office parking standard text amendment	To reduce the required parking for office uses to be consistent with the City's retail parking regulations. Immediate application relates to commercial property at Sixth Street and Grand Avenue.
20	Commercial drive-through standards	Citizen-initiated request to review these standards' appropriateness in high pedestrian commercial areas.
21	Airport protection area expansion	To consider the land use compatibility for areas outside the City in consideration of a future runway expansion and meeting FAA requirements.
22	Lighting standards update	The City's lighting code standards are very dated, and new technologies would provide for better light control (both for off-site glare and for dark skies). Limited modifications to the City's lighting requirements were made for the Deery Brothers auto dealership, but additional effort is needed to modernize those standards city-wide.
23	Parking requirement reduction for existing buildings	Many older buildings have non-conforming parking. There are limited exceptions in the Code for re-use or expansion of these buildings. This referral would look at reducing parking requirements for existing buildings.
24	Hotel floor area ratio amendment (FAR)	Recent developer request desiring to build a four-story business class hotel in the HOC zoning district. Unlike other commercial zones, HOC restricts all buildings to a 50% FAR limit. This may require a hotel to acquire more land than is customary to meet site development requirements.
25	Flood protection standards regulatory	Exploration of amended floodplain regulations beyond the current 3' elevation requirement was

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	options	one of three thrusts growing out of the Comprehensive Floodplain Study completed in 2013. Council may give further direction in this area after a work session on February 18.
26	Campustown zoning standards for access corridors	Developer request to reconsider the need for mandatory mid-block building openings in Campustown.
27	Future referrals	???????

The City Council faces a key decision regarding the time frame within which staff can accomplish the above tasks. As the attached spreadsheet demonstrates, staff will be unable to accomplish all of these tasks within the next two years. (Remember, it was Council's desire to accomplish the tasks associated with your goal in two years.) This task completion timeline becomes even more difficult when Council considers the likelihood of its giving additional referrals to staff over the upcoming months. In addition, several of the priorities listed on the spreadsheet only estimate the time needed for the initial action step (e.g., a background report), which could readily be followed by many more hours needed to further pursue each goal.

Council can address this challenge in the following two ways:

I. One is to **eliminate or scale back existing goals and referrals** to better fit the available time. This would also need to include a significant reduction in future referrals over the next two years. A variation on this approach would be to reallocate staff time away from current planning projects, which would extend the time needed to process development applications and reduce our customer service.

II. The second approach is to **add additional resources** (time) to accomplish Council's goals and referrals more quickly. Staff has identified three options to achieve this.

a. The first option is to attempt to **contract on a temporary basis with a planning professional over the next two years**. This option would provide staff with the resources to work on Council's priorities and to maintain existing service levels in Current Planning while still devoting time to carry out the Land Use Policy Plan update. When the LUPP update is completed, this contract would then be terminated.

This option is dependent upon staff's ability to identify an experienced planner who would work on either a part- or full-time basis. Funding to contract with this individual could come from \$47,000 already included in the 2013/14 adjusted budget for outside contractual services, as well as \$10,000 currently budgeted for a planning intern. Assuming such an individual can be identified, additional funding during 2014/15 could be taken from the \$200,000 included in the 2013/14 adjusted budget for contractual assistance with the LUPP update. Since

replacement funding will likely be needed for the LUPP update, staff is confident that additional funding can be identified later this year to backfill that need. The main challenge with this option is the uncertainty of finding a qualified individual in our area who is interested in part-time and/or temporary contractual work.

b. The second option is to **hire one additional, full-time professional planner** to help accomplish Council's goals and referrals. Staff estimates that this action would require an additional expense of \$84,773, which could be reduced by also using the \$10,000 budgeted for an intern. This would equate to a 3 to 4 cent increase in the 2014/15 general property tax levy. Staff has no concerns regarding our ability to attract a qualified professional to fill a full-time position. On the other hand, this approach is more costly than the first option, and the City could potentially need to lay this person off after the LUPP update is completed.

c. A final option is for the City to **contract with a large consulting firm** to assist with some of Council's referrals and goals. Annual funding of anywhere between \$50,000 and \$100,000 (or more) could be budgeted for these services, depending on the firm's capabilities and the urgency of Council's goals. The two disadvantages of this approach are (1) a higher cost, and (2) that a great deal of staff time would need to be redirected to bring the firm up to speed on each referral and to guide and direct the firm's work. Overall, this does not appear to be the most cost-effective option, either in terms of dollars spent or in terms of staff's time.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Direct staff to contract on a temporary basis with a planning professional to help accomplish Council's goals and referrals over the next two years.

Initial funding for this purpose could come from \$57,000 already included in the 2013/14 adjusted budget; and additional funding would be taken as needed from the \$200,000 currently allocated to begin the LUPP update.

2. Authorize one additional full-time equivalent (FTE) position in the 2014/15 budget, and direct staff to hire one additional, full-time professional planner to help accomplish Council's goals and referrals.

A net addition of \$74,773 would need to be added to the 2014/15 general property tax levy to fund this position.

3. Budget funding to contract with a large consulting firm to assist with some of Council's planning-related referrals and goals, and direct staff to send out a request for qualifications (RFQ) to initiate that effort.

4. Cut back on both existing and future goals and referrals, and prioritize the remaining referrals, so as to accomplish Council's highest priorities using existing resources.

MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

The first question Council needs to answer regards whether there are goals and/or referrals which it is willing to eliminate from or delay within the Planning and Housing Department's program of work. Further, Council should also determine whether or not it wishes to curtail future referrals in order to accomplish its highest priorities.

The second issue relates to whether or not Council is satisfied with the extended time frame needed to accomplish the tasks related to the Council's goals and other referrals. If so, no additional action is needed, and staff will continue to address these items in whatever priority order the City Council establishes.

If, however, Council desires to accomplish its priority goals and referrals within the next two years, additional resources will be needed. In that event, the most prudent approach will be **Alternative #1, which is to direct staff to contract, on a temporary basis, with a planning professional to help accomplish these tasks.**

The initial funding for this purpose could come from \$57,000 already included in the 2013/14 adjusted budget. Additional funding would also be taken as needed from the \$200,000 currently allocated for the LUPP update. Depending on the scope of this work, the LUPP funding might need to be replenished during next year's budget cycle.

In the event that staff is unsuccessful in identifying and contracting with a qualified planning professional, Council may be asked to authorize a permanent, additional FTE during the coming year. In that case, the same funding sources shown above would be used to cover this expense, and additional funding will need to be included in the 2015/16 General Levy to continue that position.

Regardless of which direction the Council chooses to proceed, it is important that the City Council prioritize the above tasks, along with any future assignments. Staff envisions working with the Council at a future meeting to help with this prioritization.

Line#	Council Goal Rank/Priority	Date Initiated	Planning Projects	Type	2014 January-June	2014 July-December	2015 January-June	2015 July- December	2016 January-June	2016 July-December	Total Hours	Departments	Project Comments
1	1	14-Jan	Examine the LUPP for relevancy and effectiveness	Council Goal		20	400	580	300		1300		Worksession on current goals and policies, prepare work plan for update, consultant for outreach and plan
2	2	14-Jan	Reevaluate building and zoning codes to determine if changes should be made to improve the existing housing stock at a lower cost	Council Goal			30				30	Inspections	Prepare Memo summarizing codes and outreach (additional hrs required for amendments and outreach)
3	3	14-Jan	Explore options for parking standards that improve storm water management	Council Goal		50	60				110		Staff report with research on parking rates and design requirements, prepare text amendments and do public outreach (may coordinate with Landscaping referral)
4	4	14-Jan	Investigate ways to increase availability of affordable housing	Council Goal	60	60					120	Housing	Prepare background report for affordable housing definitions, prepare report on national examples of housing strategies (additional hrs required for amendments and outreach)
5	5	14-Jan	Pursue the industrial park opportunity	Council Goal	40	40					80		Urban Fringe Plan amendment to 590th
6	7	14-Jan	Review and update the economic development policy	Council Goal			10				10	City Manager	Prepare memo summarizing existing requirements
7	9	14-Jan	Explore ways to increase availability of all types of housing	Council Goal		80					80		Prepare background report for housing needs and housing stock
8	10	14-Jan	Develop a process for neighborhood engagement to proactively address community issues	Council Goal		10					10	City Manager	Prepare memo summarizing existing requirements
9	14	14-Jan	Develop a facade grant program for Campustown	Council Goal	120	60					180		Work with CAA on design guidelines and program requirements
10	High	11-Jan	Chapter 31 and Historic District Update	Staff Initiated	180	150					330		Prepare draft text amendments, conduct outreach and education
11	High	14-Jan	Support Public Works in preparation of the Long Range Regional Transportation Plan Update	Staff Initiated	50	80	40	40			210		Provide land use and growth assumptions for modeling
12	High	14-Jan	Right of Way and infrastructure requirements outside of subdivisions	Staff Initiated	150	75					225	PW	Complete research and prepare draft text amendments for public outreach
13	High	2011	National Register Nomination for Downtown Main Street	Council General Interest	80	80					160		Issue RFP, prepare final application
14	High	12-Apr	Prepare an Airport Tall Building Text Amendment	Staff Initiated	30						30	PW	Draft text amendment in support of grant application for terminal expansion to codify current practice
15	High	14-Jan	Memo review of Greek Fraternities and Sororities Parking requirements	Developer Initiated	20						20		Prepare memo on current standards (additional hrs required for amendments and outreach)
16	Medium	11-Nov	Landscaping Standards text amendment with consultation of a working group	Staff Initiated/developer interest		160	110				270		Create work group to consider effectiveness of current standards and examples of alternatives, prepare text amendment
17	Medium	11-May	Sign Code for Digital Signs and Billboards	Staff Initiated				0	150		150	Inspections	Complete research on display types, prepare text amendments for standards and performance requirements
18	Medium	13-May	Memo Ames Urban Fringe Plan Review with Story County and Gilbert on potential update land use classifications and future growth areas	Council General Interest	40						40		Meet with staffs, identify common interest and report back for direction on any updates.
19	Medium	14-Jan	Office Parking standard Text Amendment	Developer Initiated	25						25		Prepare text amendment to reduce parking rate consistent with retail use.
20	Low	13-Nov	Request for review of drive through standards in commercial zones with high levels of pedestrian activity	Citizen Initiated			20				20		Memo on current standards (additional hrs required for text amendments and public outreach)
21	Low	12-Apr	Expand airport protection area for land uses outside of the city	Staff Initiated						100	100	PW/Story Co.	Assess land uses around airport within the counties and create mutual ordinance for limitation of land use
22	Low	12-Aug	Lighting Standards text amendment to modernize down-lighting and glare standards	Staff Initiated				120			120		Prepare text amendment modernizing lighting standards within Dark Sky standards.
23	Low	12-Jan	Text amendment to reduce parking requirements for existing buildings with non-conforming parking	Staff initiated			30				30		Prepare text amendment to potentially reduce parking for existing buildings.
24	Low	14-Jan	Hotel Floor Area Ratio (FAR) Text Amedment	Developer Initiated	10						10		Memo to CC concerning FAR limits effect on hotels in HOC Zoning
25	Low	13-Dec	Provide regulatory options for additional food protection standards of new development.	Council General Interest	20						20		Workshop February 2014 (additional hrs required for any text amendments and public outreach)
26	Low	13-Nov	Consider request to modify Campustown Service Center zoning standards for 20-foot access corridor requirement for each block.	Developer Initiated	0						0		Memo review of mandatory building opening requirement for access and utility corridors at mid-blocks in Campustown.
27			Future Referrals		??	??	??	??	??	??			
28													
29			Long Range Total (6 month projection of 850 hours available)		825	865	700	740	450	100	3680		

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30													
31			Development Review and Current Planning Projects (6 month projection of 2350 hours needed)		2350	2350	2350	2350	2350	2350	14100		
32			Current Planning Application Projections										
33			Subdivisions		536	536							
34			Minor Site Plans		435	435							
35			Master and Major Site Plan		131	131							
36			Rezoning		133	133							
37			LUPP Amendments		89	89							
38			Annexation		32	32							
39			Downtown Façade		67	67							
40			Customer Service/Boards/General Support		280	280							
41			Neighborhoods/Bus. Associations		78	78							
42			ZBA Variance/Special Use		190	190							
43			Flood Plain/Zoning Letters/MISC		54	54							
44			Other Hist./URP/Tax Abatement		142	142							
45			Kick Off/Courtesy Review		158	158							
46			The following are a subset of current Development Projects subject to Council Initiation										
47		Ongoing	Downtown Façade Program	Council General Interest	67	67							Solicit annual applications, adminster grants
48		13-Nov	ISU Research Park Expansion area annexation, zoning, subdivision, and urban renewal plan	Developer Initiated	120	120						City Manager	Nine month process for project components
49		14-Feb	Annexation Request South Ames for Wessex Expansion	Developer Initiated	40	30							Council initiation and outreach for additional south annexations
50		13-Dec	Support Public Works with coordination of the Duff Traffic Signal and Median study	Council General Interest	25	25						PW	Traffic Signal property owner outreach and coordination of commercial shopping center opportunities
51		14-Jan	Northern Growth Area property rezoning and subdivision	Staff Initiated/Developer	40	180						PW	Consider rezoning requests with master plans and conservation subdivision reviews
52		13-Oct	Breckenridge LLC request to amend the LUPP and Rezoning of low density for the North Parcel along Lincoln Way to commercial and medium density and negotiate considerations for contract rezoning.	Developer Initiated	100	100							Master Plan and subdivision review for three sites
53		14-Jan	LUPP Amendment for S 17th Stree t to High Density Residential from Highway Commercial	Developer Initiated	10								Memo to CC on initiating the amendment. (additional hours for process of application)
54		14-Feb	Ames Golf & Country Club Request for Waivers of Subdivision Requirements	Developer Initiated	50							WPC,PW	Rural subdivision review without City water and sewer, covenants, conservation subdivision