



ZLRIGNITION
BRAND IGNITION EXPERTS

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MEMO

TO: Ames City Council

FROM: Louie Laurent, President
ZLRIGNITION

DATE: August 12, 2016

RE: Documents for review for the Ames City Council Workshop – August 16, 2016

Enclosed you will find the following documents in support of the **ZLRIGNITION** presentation which will review the following steps as proposed and approved in response to the request for proposal #2015-259 Integrated Brand Communication Plan.

- **Ignition Day**
 - Notes captured from Ignition Day held with Ames City Council
- **Brand Audit**
 - Final audit report
- **Issue Discovery Research**
 - Final research report



City of Ames

Ignition Day Agenda | December 1, 2015

Attendees:

Mayor Ann Campbell

City Manager Steve Schainker

Council Members:

Chris Nelson

Matthew Goodman

Gloria Betcher

Tim Gartin

Sam Schulte

Bronwyn Beatty-Hansen

ZLR Ignition - Louis Laurent and Tana Krumm

Objective

Attract young adults transitioning to families to relocate to Ames

Target audiences

Young, independent singles

Living along I-35 corridor between Ames and DSM and in cities around Ames

ISU grads

Strengths - overall

Good schools

Diverse community

Easy to get around

Recreational opportunities

Neighborhood structure

Connected community

Cultural opportunities

Jobs

Bring grandma – senior living opportunities

Active intellectual life

Vibrant college town

Entertainment

D1 sports



Strengths for audience – young, independent singles

Small business association

Young professionals

Low crime rate

Low cost

Low property tax

Easy commute

Healthcare access

Density of expertise

Biotech cluster/ag

State employers

Strengths for youth

Youth sports activity

Performing arts

Library

Water park

Parks

Opportunity to get involved

Sense of place/uniqueness

Community spirit

Community identity

Proximity to DSM

Convenience

Natural beauty

Art

Local music scene



Weaknesses

Not a distinct identity for Ames separate from ISU

Lack of incubator for young entrepreneurs

Challenge to connect outside of faith-based communities

Size

Perception of lack of things to do

No lofts

No nightlife

No entertainment district or real estate available for renewal/redevelopment for this

Central City

Lack of entry level housing

Jobs

Jobs for spouses

Expensive entry level housing

No one, singular entity selling Ames as a city

No trail connections – bike trails do not connect to anything

Affordable housing available doesn't meet the needs of the target audience

Opportunities

Represent Ames as a city to live in

Growing community

Educate audience

Leverage silo organizations

Use as a decision component

Connect Ames better physically

Companies can use

Differentiate from DSM and DSM suburbs



Threats

- Lack of buy in to brand**
- Allure of DSM community**
- Must encompass community**
- Not being unique**
- Industry leaving**
- Lack of long term commitment to plan and patience in seeing results**
- Iowa State University growing too big and dominating town**
- Federal/State funding cuts**

Possible strategies – recommend spending to strengths

- You can find your place here**
- City of Ideas**
- The next stage**
- Small town meeting urban**
- Don't lose yourself**
- Young spirit**
- Where new ideas come to life**
- Diverse experience**
- Come for the job; stay for the lifestyle**

Critical for success

- Follow through/budget**
- Citizens buy in**
- Show some success/results**
- Determine/agree on the measurement of success**
- Find what people want to 'buy'**
- True**
- Consensus**
- Attention grabbing**
- Original**
- Distinctive**

Next Steps

- ZLR and Vernon Research Group to review Ignition Day outcomes and provide recommended plan for research.**



CITY OF
Ames™

Brand Communications Audit
April 2016



Brand Audit

- **Audience:** The audit is conducted from the target audience perspective - young adults transitioning to families (millennials) who may be looking to relocate to Ames.
- **Research:** An ideal community in the mind of a millennial is primarily a place to grow as people and raise families, where they feel safe and protected, there are a variety of options of things to do and can provide a sense of community.

Brand Audit

- **Brand Audit:** An assessment of the City of Ames communication activity through a review of existing assets.
- **Goal:** To gain an understanding of existing communication channels and determine if the target audience is receiving the appropriate and intended content.

SECTION 1:

Printed Materials



Printed Materials

- The majority of printed materials reviewed were visually cohesive and followed the brand standards with complementary design elements used and consistent font usage.



Printed Materials

- Not all printed materials have been created following the brand standards and those stood out in comparison and appear outdated. While the logo and brand color is used, the fonts are outdated and the content isn't presented in an easy-to-read style which conveys the brand attributes.



BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT
BUSINESS ASSISTANCE STARTS HERE

You Have Questions....

- ☐ How do I obtain a map of my property?
- ☐ How can I estimate my property taxes?
- ☐ How do I protest my assessment?
- ☐ How can I obtain current assessment and tax information?

Does the City of Ames issue business licenses?
I would like to install an awning/canopy or a sign that extends past my property line into the public right-of-way. What type of permit will I need to obtain?
I will need a Liquor License for my business. What application, process and time-line will be required?
I want to run a business out of my home. What do I need to do?

What is the zoning designation of my property?
Is my proposed business allowed at this location?
Is there enough parking for my proposed use?
Is the property located in the floodplain?
What applications are required (e.g. Site Plan)?
What information is needed to schedule a pre-application Kick-off Meeting?

What City Codes are currently used for plan review?
What information do I need to submit for a building permit?
What automatic time extension? What manual time extension?

We Have Answers....

City Assessor
515 Clark Avenue, Room 256
Ames, Iowa 50010
Phone: 515.239.5370
www.CityOfAmes.org/Assessor

City Clerk
515 Clark Avenue, Room 238
Ames, Iowa 50010
Phone: 515.239.5105
www.CityOfAmes.org/CityClerk

Planning
515 Clark Avenue, Room 214
Ames, Iowa 50010
Phone: 515.239.5400
www.CityOfAmes.org/Planning

Building Inspections
515 Clark Avenue, Room 205
Ames, Iowa 50010
Phone: 515.239.5153
www.CityOfAmes.org/Inspections

Public Works/Stormwater
515 Clark Avenue, Room 212
Ames, Iowa 50010
Phone: 515.239.5160
www.cityofames.org/PublicWorks

Input (IA DOT, IA DNR, Army Corps of Engineers, etc.)?
I need. Who do I need to contact about the potential
e access/parking onsite or off site during construction?
Impacted during construction?

If my property during construction. Who do I contact?
for construction. How do I reserve them to be used only

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS

AMES ANNUAL OUTDOOR SCULPTURE EXHIBITION



Call for Entries

Sponsored by the Ames Public Art Commission and the Ames Main Street Cultural District

Entry Deadline: January 15, 2016

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT TOOLKIT
BUSINESS ASSISTANCE STARTS HERE



DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

The Ames Economic Development Commission (AEDC) stands ready to provide you with timely assistance in learning more about Ames and Story County as first-class locations for doing business. Whether it is site location assistance, packaging financial incentives, or demonstrating an available workforce, you can rely on the AEDC for all of this and more as you contemplate investment in new or expanding operations.

ISU PAPPAJOHN CENTER & SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER
www.SBDCcenter.org and www.IowaSEDC.org/regional-centers/ames.aspx

The ISU Pappajohn Center and the ISU Small Business Development Center (SBDC) work together within the ISU Research Park to provide a broad set of resources to entrepreneurs of all types. The Pappajohn Center focuses on the technology companies formed at the University. The Center provides direct service including market research and business plan development, and it connects prospective companies to a network of private sector expertise and resources. The SBDC provides business assistance to anyone interested in starting, expanding, retooling, buying or selling a traditional business, such as retail, restaurant, service, consulting or manufacturing.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR
Business Development Coordinator Tiffany Coleman is available to assist businesses with questions and accessing the multiple resources available.

Business Development Coordinator:
Tiffany Coleman, CEO
tcoleman@cityofames.iowa.us
515.239.5101

ZLRIGNITION
THE SINGERS, THE DANCERS, THE PRODUCERS

Printed Materials

- The use of photos and images lend to the personality of the brand, however in printed materials for residents, there are not many photos nor photos of community residents participating and interacting at events.

Neighborhood News

Quarterly Neighborhood Update

SPRING 2016

GET INVOLVED IN LINCOLN WAY CORRIDOR PLAN

The City of Ames is creating a Lincoln Way Corridor Plan, and public participation is key!

The Lincoln Way Corridor Plan will create a detailed plan for the corridor, the city's primary east-west roadway stretching 6.75 miles through the community. The plan will address land use, development, traffic and mobility, urban design, infrastructure, and more along the corridor, and will help guide decision-making and investment for the area for the next several years. The planning area includes the Lincoln Way Corridor, as well as a block north and south of the corridor, for the entire length of Ames from approximately I-35 on the east to the Boone County line on the west.

CITY OF AMES LINCOLN WAY CORRIDOR PLAN

The City Council will host a workshop on the Corridor Plan at 6 p.m. Tuesday, April 19, in the Council Chambers at City Hall. "Public involvement is important in all the Lincoln Way Corridor Plan activities," said Karen Marren, Planner for the City. The community is encouraged to attend the workshop. Learn other ways to be involved by visiting the City of Ames website at www.cityofames.org, under "In the Spotlight."

For more information, or to receive Lincoln Way Corridor Plan process updates, contact Karen Marren at kmarren@city.ames.ia.us or 515.239.5447.

YARD WASTE FREE DAY IN MAY

If your spring cleaning includes yard work, the annual spring Yard Waste Free Day will be held on a Saturday in May.

The annual free day event was moved out of April after the City's current vendor opted not to renew its contract. The spring and fall Yard Waste Free Days are being rebid, and a new vendor should be in place by May. The vendor name, event location and map, and specific date will be listed on the City's website at www.cityofames.org by the end of April.



Please remember that yard waste is not accepted at the Resource Recovery Plant and cannot be thrown into the garbage. Residents should contact their private garbage hauler for options for yard waste disposal or consider composting yard waste as another option.

OPEN STREETS EVENT COMING TO DOWNTOWN

An Open Streets event will take place from 1 to 4 p.m. on Sunday, April 24, in downtown Ames. Main Street will be closed from just east of Pearl Avenue to Douglas Avenue during this event, which promotes physical activity and aware Streets people and fitness attend.

Ames Park Department the event, Ames Park to bike, wa event.

For more in healthiest

BLOCK PARTY TRAILER RESERVATIONS OPEN

Street "n' Greet Block Party Trailer reservations for the 2016 season are available now online at www.cityofames.org/trailer, or by calling the Planning and Housing Department at 515.239.5400. The trailer is available free of charge to Ames residents for use at neighborhood parties, and may be reserved weekends from April until the end of October.



NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

For more information contact the Public Relations Office
515.239.5204
sgwiasda@city.ames.ia.us

IMPORTANT DATES

Tuesday, April 19
City Council Workshop: Lincoln Way Corridor Plan, 6 p.m.
City Council Chambers

Saturday, April 23
Water & Pollution Control Open House, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
WPC Facility, 56797 280th St.

Sunday, April 24
Open Streets, 1 - 4 p.m.
Downtown Ames

Saturday, April 30
Stash the Trash, 8:30 a.m. - 2 p.m., Reiman Gardens check-in

Saturday, April 30
City of Ames/Ames Foundation Tree Planting
South Campus Neighborhoods

Saturday, May 28
Furman Aquatic Center opens for season

Monday, May 30
Memorial Day, City offices closed

Thursday, June 23
City Council Night at the Bandshell with Simon Estes, 7 p.m.
Bandshell Park

For more events and meeting dates, visit www.cityofames.org.



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US Postage Paid
Ames, IA
Permit No. 7

Printed Materials

- Communications promoting resident involvement and amenities include photos without people or stock photos which do not convey a vibrant, active community.

Good Neighbor Guide
A City of Ames
Guide to Services




www.cityofames.org

Smart Choice

Ames Public Library

■ Register for a free Ames Public Library card for access to books, movies, music, and more. The Library also provides reference services, online research tools, programs for all ages, free use of meeting rooms, wireless internet access, a computer lab, and Bookmobile service to a neighborhood near you. For information, call 515-239-5656 or visit www.amespubliclibrary.org.



CyRide

■ CyRide is the city bus system for Ames. It is a collaboration between the City of Ames, Iowa State University, and ISU's Government of the Student Body.

■ CyRide operates 10 fixed routes, a Dial-A-Ride service for persons with a disability, and a late-night service called

CyRide

Moonlight Express. The fixed routes and Dial-A-Ride operate every day of the year except Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Labor Day, and Fourth of July. Moonlight Express operates on Friday and Saturday nights when Iowa State University is in session.

For routes, timetables, fares, and more information, call 515-292-1100 or visit www.cyride.com.

Did you know . . .

The Arnold O. Chantland Resource Recovery Plant (RRP) recycles 75 percent of waste it receives.

12, or local media to find out if the snow ordinance is in effect. If snow is expected overnight, please move your car ahead of time.

See the Ames City Code, Chapter 18, Parking Regulations at www.cityofames.org/municipalcode. To report a parking problem or concern, call the Police Department at 515-239-5133. To pay parking tickets, visit www.amesparking.com.

Getting Involved

City Council Meetings

■ Ames City Council meetings are public meetings and are held the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month. Those wishing to submit written requests to the Mayor and City Council may bring letters to the City Clerk's Office for delivery. A Mayor and City Council group e-mail is available at www.cityofames.org.



Boards and Commissions

■ If you are interested in volunteering to serve on one of Ames' many boards or commissions, contact the City Clerk's Office for an application or check the website. To learn who your Council representative is or to learn more about the different boards and commissions, call the City Clerk's Office at 515-239-5105 or check the website at www.cityofames.org.

Neighborhood Associations

■ There are 30 neighborhood associations in Ames. To contact your neighborhood association, call the Planning & Housing Department at 515-239-5269. To see a map of neighborhood associations, visit www.cityofames.org.

Printed Materials

- Materials designed using brand standards are visually more fresh, updated and modern.
- Continue to update printed materials which do not strictly adhere to the brand standards and add photos that include people.

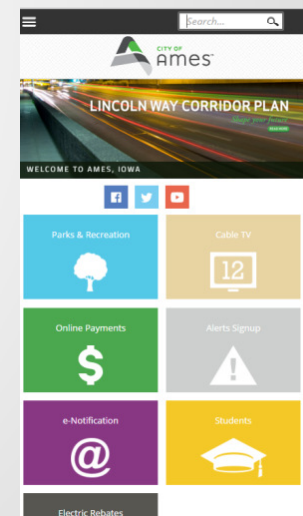
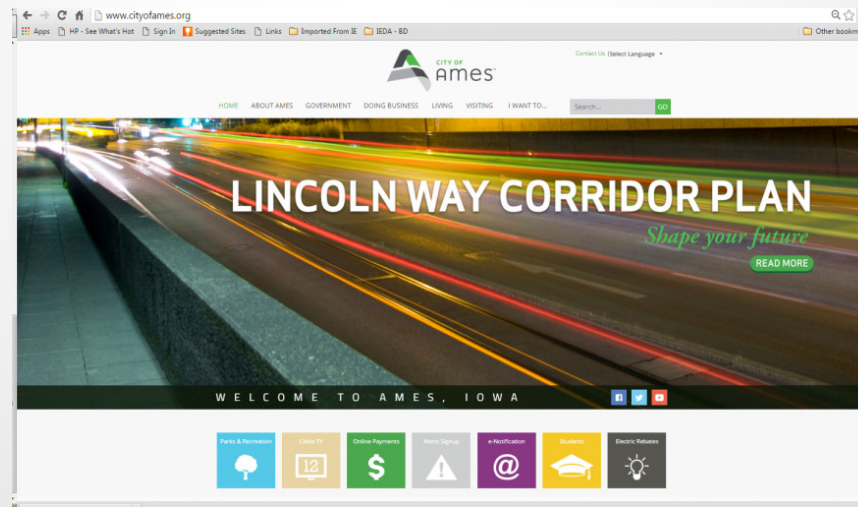


SECTION 2:

Website Homepage

Website - Homepage

- The City's website is new and responsive in design which appeals to the increasing use of mobile web users.
- A large, rotating hero image provides prime real estate for the City to communicate visually and impress upon the first time and returning visitor.



TION
GROUP PRODUCTIONS

Website - Homepage

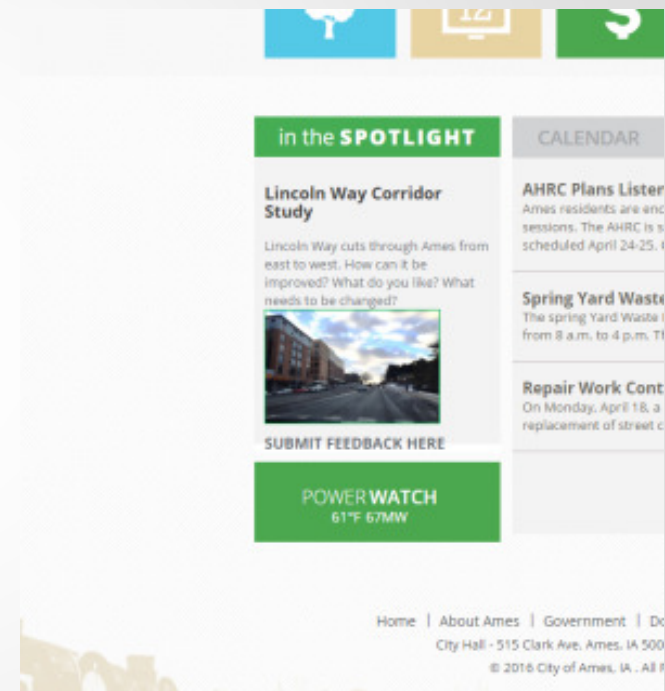
- The homepage is mainly organized and communicating to the current Ames resident.
- The hero images promote current or upcoming large projects and public notices.
- Images used do not include people interacting with each other or in public spaces.
- Social media icons are only on the homepage.



+ ZLRIGNITION
DIGITAL MARKETING & DESIGN

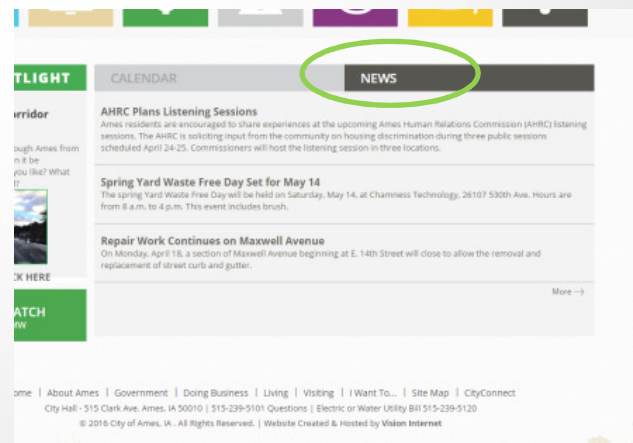
Website - Homepage

- The “In the Spotlight” feature is an opportunity to spotlight a new family, young professional, community volunteer and volunteer opportunities.



Website - Homepage

- The ability to toggle between the news and calendar is a quick, user-friendly way to get a feel for the community. The current calendar is being utilized by Ames as a resident notification communication tool.



SECTION 3:

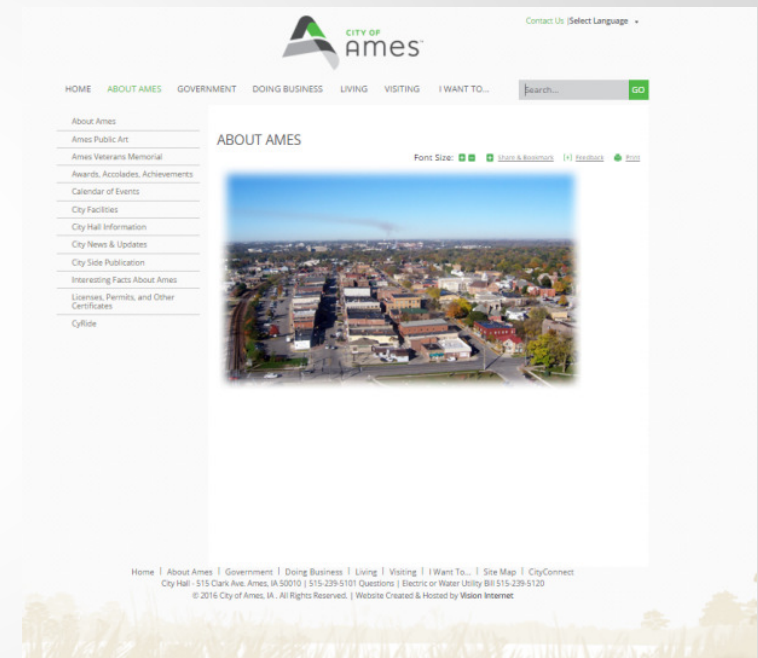
Website Interior Pages

Website – About Ames, Living & I Want To... Webpages

- For a prospective resident and young professional and family looking to relocate, the most relevant pages from the homepage navigation are the ABOUT AMES, LIVING and I WANT TO... pages.
- To appeal to millennials, pages need to be robust with vibrant visual elements as well as interactive and written content conveying the selling points and benefits of the community as provided in the research.

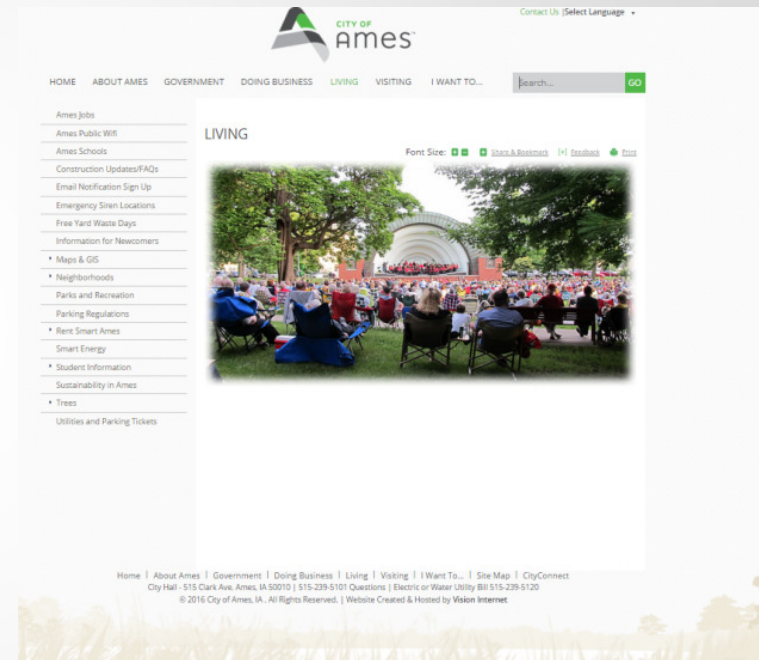
Website – About Ames, Living & I Want To... Webpages

- **ABOUT AMES** main page has a aerial photo of the city with no text.
- This is an opportunity to visually show all of the vibrancy going on in the city for young families with photos of these community events, compelling text covering the prime benefits of living in Ames and how to connect with Ames whether socially or the name and contact information for a welcoming community member who can answer any questions.
- Where applicable, text can be hyperlinked to the Main Street Cultural District, Ames Community School District, the LIVING page, etc.



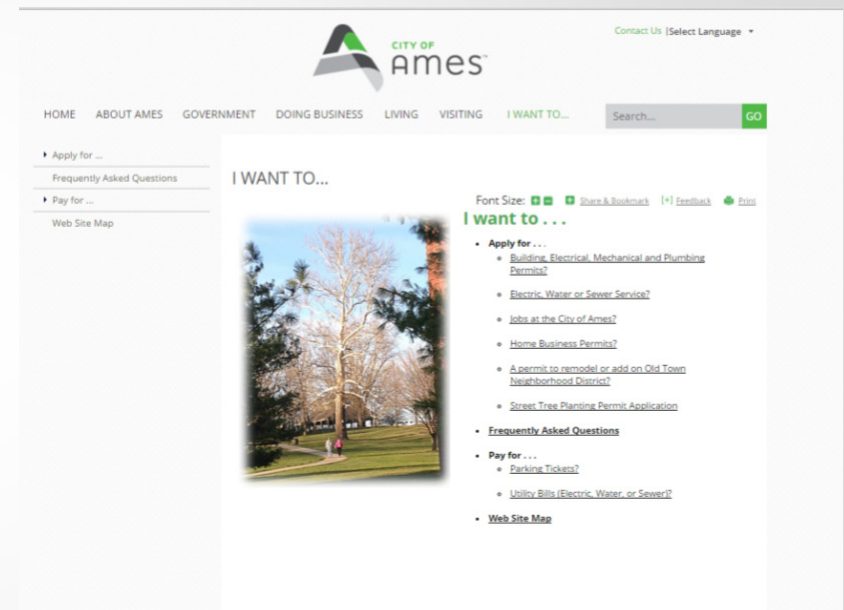
Website – About Ames, Living & I Want To... Webpages

- **LIVING** main page is prime real estate for showcasing what it feels like to live in Ames and provide that sense of community millennials are looking for in their ideal city. Another opportunity to show video, photos, social media feed, etc.



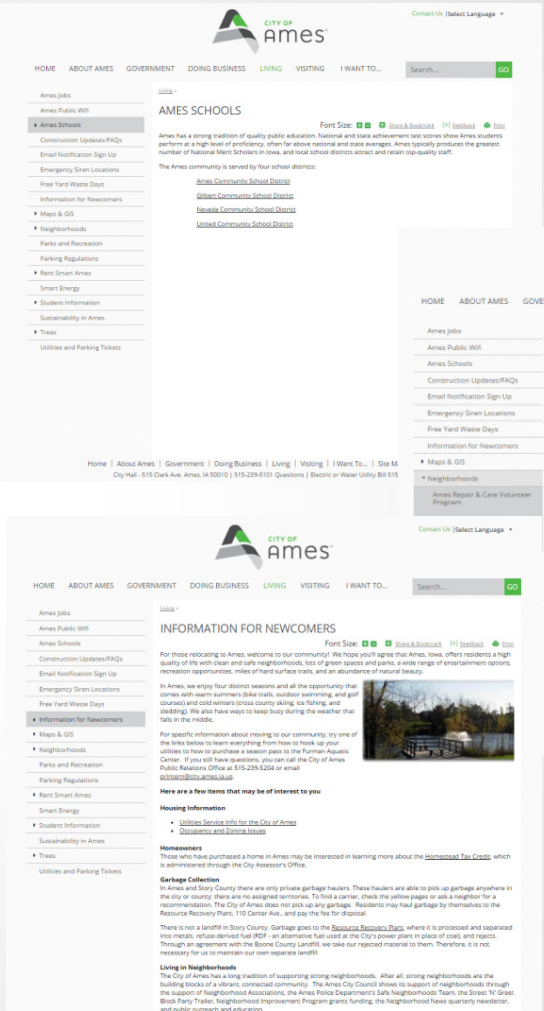
Website – About Ames, Living & I Want To... Webpages

- **I WANT TO...**page houses information specifically for current residents.
- There is an opportunity to cross post information from Ames' website and other community websites and include information about moving to Ames or link to ABOUT AMES and/or LIVING pages.



Website – Interior Pages

- Overall, the interior pages of the website are devoid of color, photos, videos or social media promotion.



Website

- The City of Ames website is the digital business card for all of Ames.
- It is currently being used as an online library for city documents and communicating notices for existing residents.

SECTION 4:

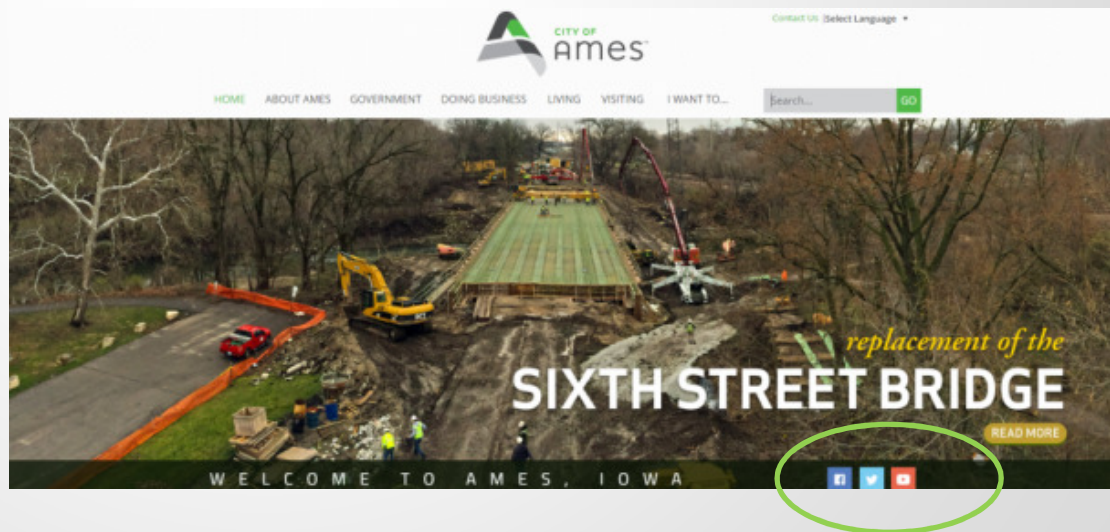
Social Media

Social Media

- In the age of social media, the lines have become blurred between government and community where social media channels were designed and expected to be just that - social.
- For the social media users, it is a place to digitally interact , be social and connect with others to expand their sense of community online.

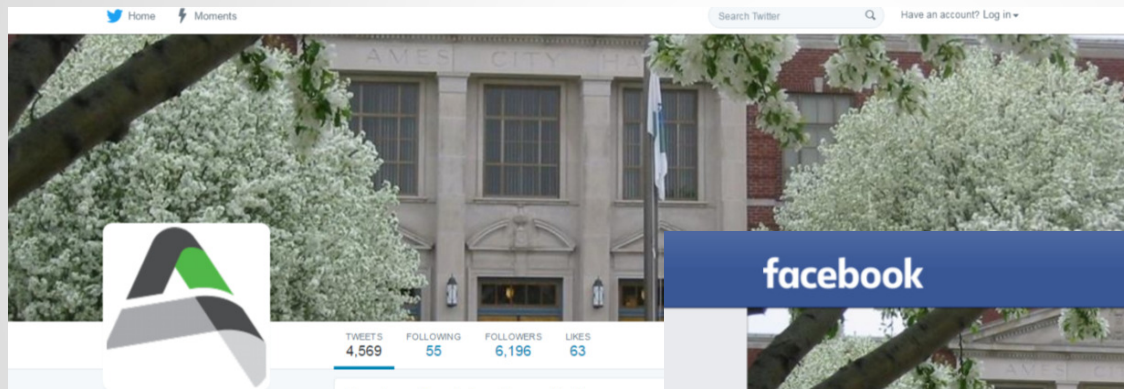
Social Media

- The City's presence on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are promoted on the homepage of the website only. There is an opportunity to have the icons be present on all pages of the website even if small icons are placed on the upper, right corner near the search bar.



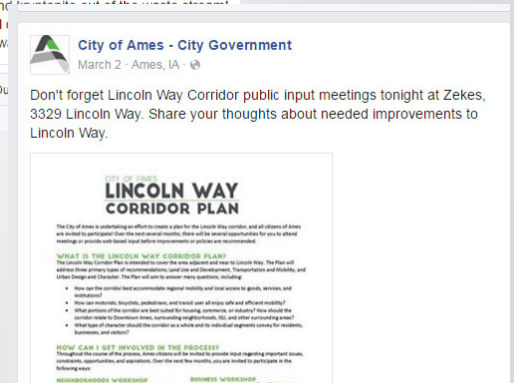
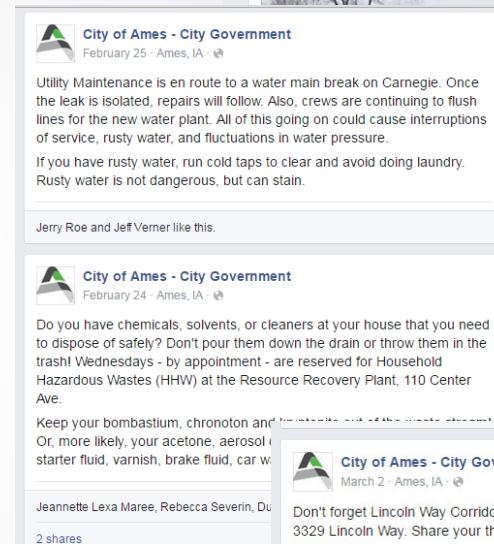
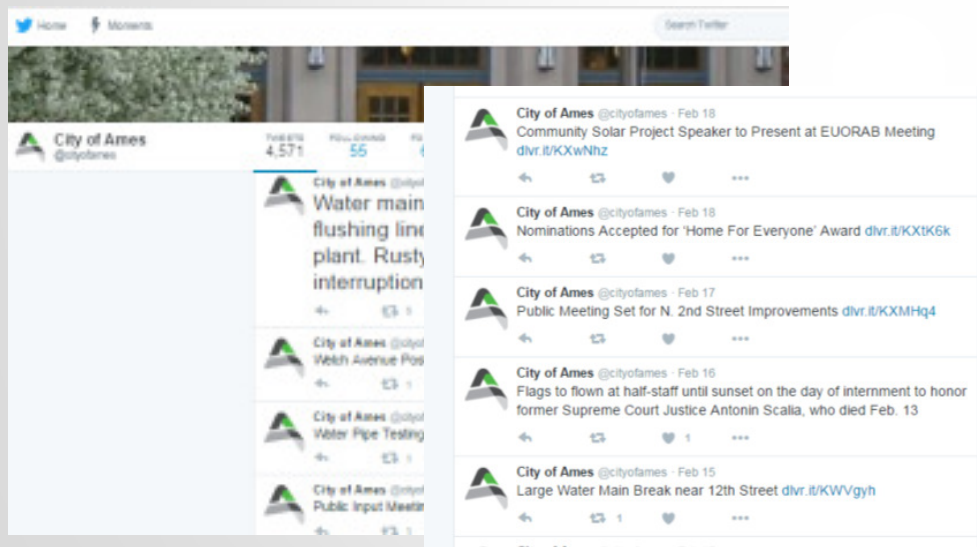
Social Media

- Facebook & Twitter header images are of the government building which does not change.



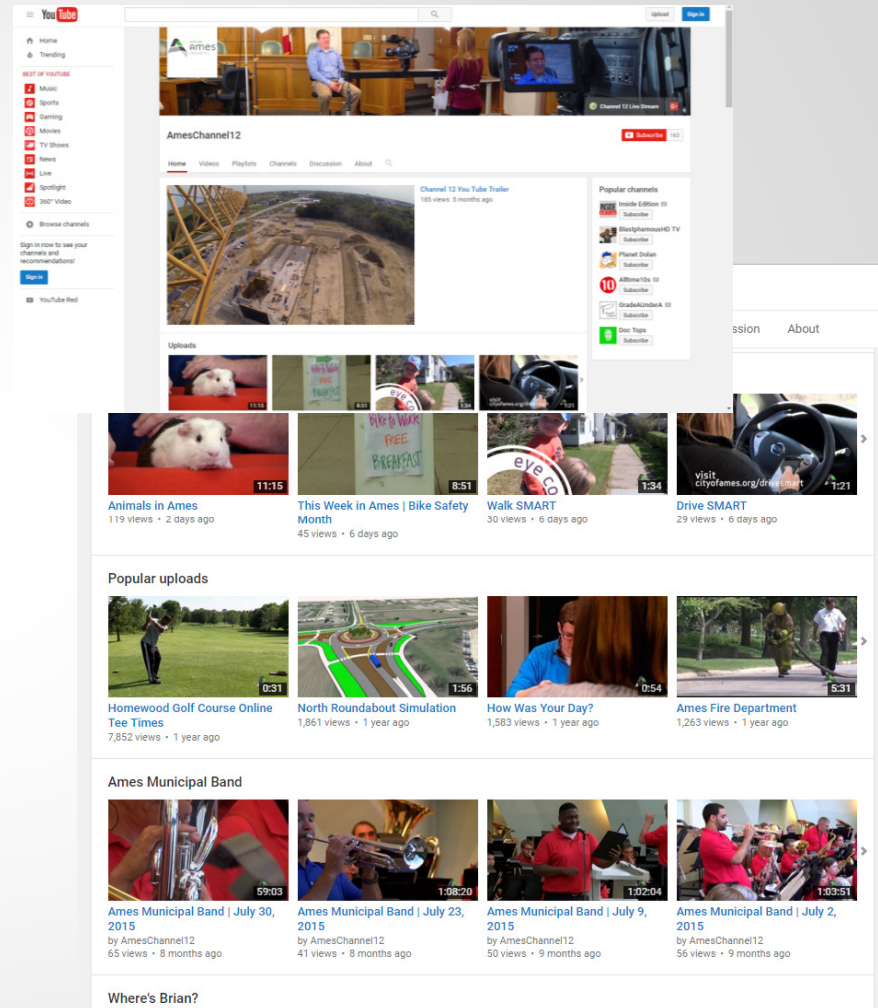
Social Media

- The content posted and shared on Facebook and Twitter is very resident-focused, informational and functional.
- Very few visual elements are used.



Social Media

- YouTube – a robust library of videos and an active channel. Videos are targeted to current residents and organized as such.
- The majority of the videos are lengthy and very few were developed for social sharing.
- There is an opportunity to expand the videos offered and organization of videos highlighting more features and benefits of Ames specifically for the target audience and prospective residents overall.



Social Media

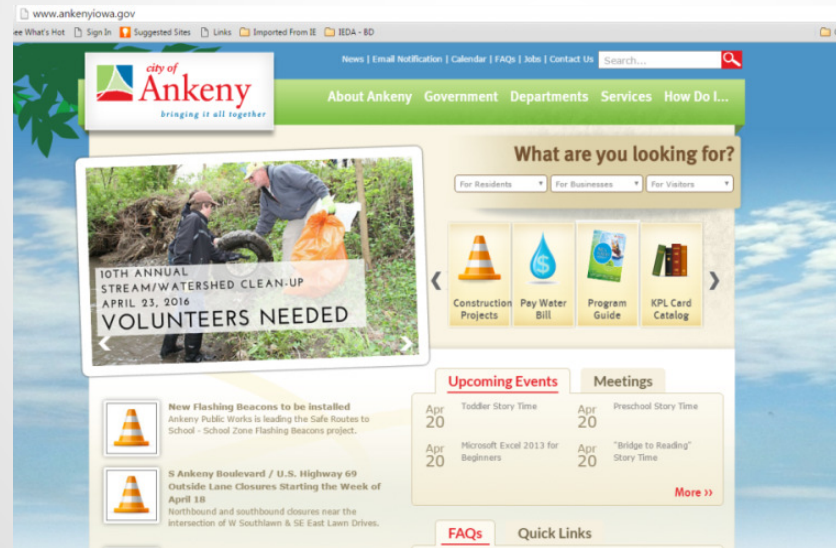
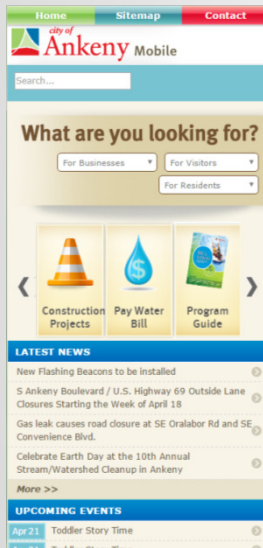
- On the City's social media channels more than any other, there is an opportunity to share the benefits and features of living in the community – values, family-friendly, volunteer and participation opportunities, outdoor activities, etc.
- Through thoughtful communications planning and creation as well as regular reporting and analysis of the activity on these channels, Ames can communicate, promote and encourage a sense of community.

SECTION 5:

Competitive Analysis

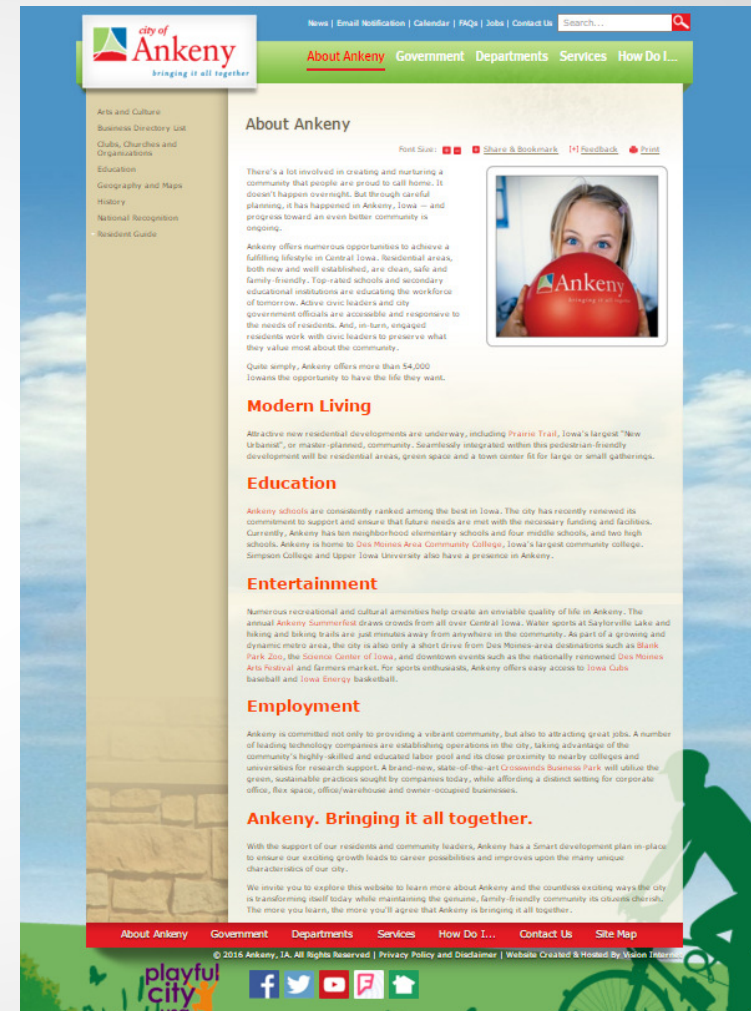
Competitive Analysis – City of Ankeny

- Ankeny's website is visually vibrant and it is consistent on all interior pages as well as on the City's social media channels. The City's website is responsive.



Competitive Analysis – City of Ankeny

- Specifically, the About Ankeny webpage is linked from the main navigation on the homepage.
- Information is well-organized, to-the-point and text is hyperlinked to promote the benefits and features of living in the community.



Competitive Analysis – City of Ankeny

- The sidebar navigation provides more opportunities for a perspective resident to learn more about Ankeny according to their interests – arts and culture, churches, clubs, and organizations, business directory, education, etc.



Competitive Analysis – City of Ankeny

- For new and prospective residents, the City of Ankeny offers a Resident Guide – strategically placed on the About Ankeny page.



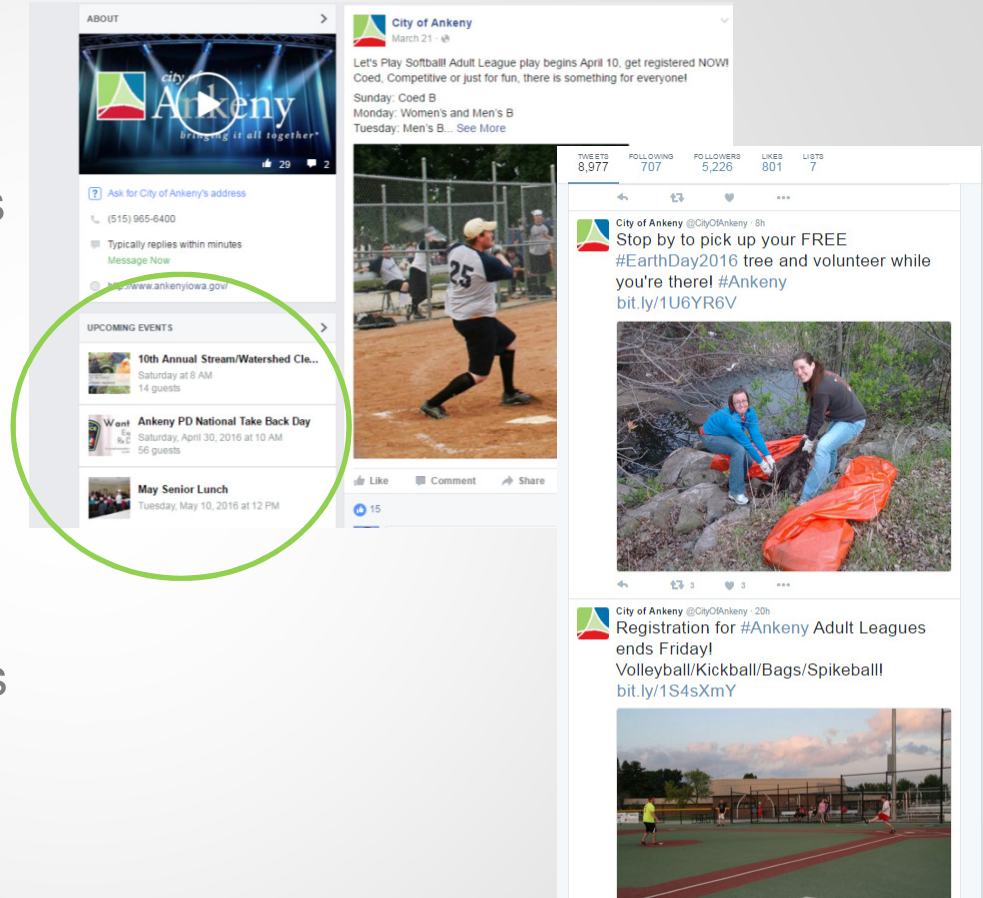
Competitive Analysis – City of Ankeny

- The calendar on Ankeny's website functions as a city-wide, community event aggregate center.
- Convenient for current residents and a promotional tool to inform prospective millennial residents of what type of events the city has to offer them – family-friendly events, outdoor activities, volunteer opportunities, cultural events, networking events etc.



Competitive Analysis – City of Ankeny

- Ankeny is active on the same social media channels as Ames – Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.
- Ankeny's social media posts include photos of the active community, promote city information and citywide events by creating events FB users can add to their calendar.



Competitive Analysis – City of Ankeny

- The City of Ankeny is using all online communication channels to promote the city as a whole. The events calendar is robust with activities for all residents and social media channels convey a rich, active community.
- All of these elements can easily and quickly be implemented by the City of Ames with a reasonable amount of resources invested.

SECTION 5:

Key Findings

Key Findings

- The City of Ames offers many of the things millennials are looking for in their ideal community – a place to grow as people and raise families, where they feel safe and protected, there are a variety of options of things to do and a sense of community.
- The City of Ames, nor any other city organization, currently promote the city as a whole in their communication channels.
- The majority of the communications, digital or printed, do not strongly promote, show or communicate the benefits and features Ames can offer to millennials.

SECTION 6:

Recommendations

Recommendations

- Millennials' ideal community is a place they can grow as people and raise families, where they feel safe and protected, with a lot of diverse things to do and provides a sense of community.
- Ames focus group participants felt that Ames satisfactorily met their ideals except for affordable housing and entertainment options.
- Des Moines focus group participants did not feel that Ames satisfactorily met their ideals perceiving the city as lacking the following :
 - stability to grow, personally or with one's family
 - affordable housing
 - high-quality activities, nightlife and entertainment options
 - welcoming and nourishing sense of community

Recommendations

- Millennials are natives of an electronics-filled and increasingly online and socially-networked world.
- According to Pew Research, millennials:
 - have the highest average number of Facebook friends
 - 55 percent have posted a selfie to social media sites
 - send a median of 50 texts a day

Recommendations

- Due to millennials' participation and experience with social media, their expectations of digital communications and high-level of interest in feeling a sense of community, it's imperative for Ames to increase the level of participation and communication in these channels.
- The website, social media channels and other communication tools will be a key piece to the success in Ames' effort to attract and retain millennial residents.

Recommendations

- Collaborate with Ames' community businesses, organizations, etc. to determine a process for promoting and listing all events open to the community on the City's website calendar and social media channels – specifically identifying and listing events and activities of interest to millennials.
- Increase the awareness of and promote the benefits ISU brings to Ames residents – education, sports, culture, family and adult events and entertainment acts.
- Increase communications and awareness of what efforts Ames and other businesses and organizations are doing to address the high cost of housing

Recommendations

- In all printed communications, include photos of the residents of the community in action to convey the activity and vitality of the community.
- Increase the interactivity online with more robust content refreshed regularly – embed photos of the community interacting, short videos and integrate social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, hyperlinked text, etc.
- Build a library of photos, video, graphics and other visual communication pieces including include color, activity and people within the community - young professional networking events, family-friendly events, outdoor events, etc.

Recommendations

- Overall, the city of Ames has an opportunity to change the perception in the minds of the audience by better using all communication channels to promote its offerings which appeal specifically to millenials.
- **Next steps** - Using the information gained in this brand communication audit, a brand communication launch plan will be developed for Ames including measureable goals and strategies to reach the target audience.



Comprehensive Qualitative Report

Prepared for



And



March, 2016

Purpose and Methodology

Purpose

ZLR Ignition and Vernon Research Group collaborated on a branding project for the City of Ames. Vernon Research Group is responsible for the exploratory research portion of the project.

Methodology and Sample

Qualitative research was performed in order to provide opportunities for the full range of issues to emerge, as well as to gauge the emotional aspects of topics. Insights from both external and internal perspectives were gathered.

First, researchers interviewed 18 community leaders in-depth in Ames via phone. Community leaders ranged from a variety of industries and professions, both in the private and public sectors. The average amount of time interviewees had lived in Ames was 25 years. Interviews took between 22 and 39 minutes, averaging 28 minutes each. What follows is a list of the community leaders interviewed for the study; identifying information has been removed from their responses wherever reported as a condition of the interview agreement and expectations.

- Mike Ruff, Executive Director of Bio R&D for Boehringer Ingelheim
- Jean Kresse, President and CEO at United Way of Story County
- Casie Vance, Executive Director at Ames Historical Society
- Jennifer Malone, Ames resident and business owner
- Dan Culhane, President/CEO of the Ames Chamber of Commerce
- Ron Hallenbeck, Executive Vice President with the AEDC Business & Industry Program
- Julie Weeks, Director at the Ames Convention Visitors Bureau
- Keith Abraham, Parks and Recreation Director
- Steve Carter, Director of the Iowa State Research Department
- Jeff Johnson, Alumni Director at Iowa State University
- Tim Taylor, Superintendent of Schools for the Ames Community School District
- Kris Brend, Executive Officer with the Central Iowa Board of Realtors

- Trevin Ward, Software Support Engineer for Workiva Incorporated
- Heather Johnson, Executive Director at the Octagon Center for the Arts
- Nancy Carroll, Executive Director of Heartland Senior Services in Ames
- Larissa Holtmyer Jones, President and CEO of the ISU Foundation
- Warren Madden, Senior VP for Business & Finance at Iowa State University
- Jonathan Wickert, Senior VP and Provost at Iowa State University

Additionally, two focus groups were conducted and moderated by a staff research analyst in order to assess the opinions of millennials with and without young families who currently live within Ames and surrounding communities. Each group ran for two hours.

An Ames focus group focusing on millennial Ames residents took place on Thursday, February 25. There were 12 participants in total, eight women and four men. Eight participants were between the ages of 21 and 29, and four participants were ages 30-39. Seven of the participants had children younger than four years of age, the other five participants planned to start a family within the next five years. Nine participants were currently married, and three participants were cohabiting or engaged. Ten participants had attended a four-year institution, and eight of those ten had attended Iowa State University. All participants were currently living in Ames.

A Des Moines focus group focusing on millennials living in or near Des Moines and its surrounding suburbs took place on Thursday, March 3. There were 11 participants in total, six women and five men. Four participants were between the ages of 21 and 29, and seven participants were ages 30-39. Eight of the participants had children younger than four years of age, the other three participants planned to start a family within the next five years. Ten participants were currently married, with one participant cohabiting or engaged. Ten participants had attended a four-year institution, and six of those ten had attended Iowa State University. Participants were currently living in and around Des Moines, with participants from Ankeny, Des Moines, Grimes, Urbandale, and West Des Moines.

Key Overall Findings

Triangulation of the qualitative data points to Ames' brand identity as follows:

- Ames is a medium-to-large community with a small-town vibe, underling the vast amount of resources and opportunities the city provides, while simultaneously fostering a safe, welcoming, and nourishing environment.

Other findings:

- People want the same basic things in an ideal community: a safe place to work and grow, things to do, and a nourishing environment. Ames is weakest with regard to "things to do."
- Ames is seen as a very safe community by nearly everyone. The safety and security that comes with living in Ames is an integral reason citizens continue to live and grow their families there.
- The city itself is not well distinguished as an entity apart from Iowa State.
- Overall, the presence of ISU should be considered a positive for the impact and gifts it gives to the community.
- However, ISU is also the chief driving factor of why millennials can't or won't live in Ames: the scarcity of appropriate and/or affordable housing.
- Ames can trade on the performance and reputation of its area schools.
- Ames fails to match Des Moines in terms of retail options, housing prices and availability, and the availability of affordable child care.
- Ames fails to match Ankeny in terms of retail options.
- Ames is seen as a fantastic place to work if you have experience in the right fields. Both insiders and outsiders perceive those fields as somewhat narrow.
- That said, the Research Park is considered one of the greatest things Ames can offer millennials, and it is expected to grow in size and influence over the next decade.
- Generally, Ames is positioned as well or better than communities of similar size with regard to what it can offer millennials and young families. The only aspect originally listed by interviewees as a strength of Ames that was perceived (by some) as stronger elsewhere is the availability of affordable child care.

- Gilbert is becoming part of Ames, Ames part of Gilbert. The positives and negatives of this melding of communities should be considered when identifying Ames' brand.
- Ames is perceived as dull or not as exciting as Des Moines, especially for single young professionals or millennials who don't yet have children.
- As for opportunities for family activities, especially outdoor family activities, Ames is seen as exceptional.
- However, the availability and affordability of child care options in Ames could be substantially improved.
- While there are pockets of diversity, Ames is generally not seen as very diverse.
- Ames does have cultural opportunities, but many of those opportunities are tied to the university or are offered via a short drive, to Des Moines.
- Ames is seen by most, and especially by insiders, as hesitant or resistant to change.

In-Depth Interview Findings

Interviewees who live in Ames, which was the large majority, were asked what they enjoyed about living in Ames. There was a large variety of answers beyond the obvious: Ames is where their friends, families, and jobs are located.

The largest theme that emerged was the breadth and depth of activities—cultural, athletic, entertaining—available to Ames residents. Interviewees both with and without school-aged children identified the strong educational system as a reason to enjoy living in Ames. The city was enjoyable for secondary reasons, as well: resident interviewees found it to be a safe, clean, friendly community, as well as noticeably diverse in areas. The university presence and Ames' proximity to not only Des Moines, but other large metropolises (Omaha, Minneapolis, Chicago, and Kansas City), was also noted as an enjoyable reason to live there. Many of these themes intertwined in some responses, which indicates that Ames has the resources of a large community, yet is able to still feel like a small town.

- *We like Ames. We like the school district. We like the opportunities that Ames gives us as far as like activities. We have a lot of friends here, and our business is here.*
- *Low crime. Good social events. ...I have close links to both the university as well as the federal research institutes in town. Good education system for my kids. Close to family. Low commute times. Clean air. Good water.*
- *Lifestyle. We use a lot of different amenities and facilities within Ames, and the proximity is important.*
- *I happen to live ...in what is a good residential, large, wooded area. I found a residence that fits my family lifestyle. It is convenient for my coming and going within the city, to the campus, getting on Highway 30 to go to Des Moines, which is part of my activity base occasionally.*
- *Quality of life, park infrastructure, proximity to Iowa State University.*
- *I raised my family here, and I feel comfortable here. I have friends, and I know a lot of people. And I think that I have a lot of opportunities to either stay home and hibernate, or there's lots to do in Ames. And there's—we're pretty close to everything. I mean if I want to go to Des Moines, I can. I don't go a lot. But just feels like we're in a central location. I love Iowa, so I'm not going to leave Iowa. I would rather stay here than any other community in Iowa.*
- *It's a very diverse community with the university and residents kind of split half and half. So there's a lot of—just a lot that the university offers from sports activities, athletics, to cultural events, to plays, to music. But also that kind of trickles down to what is offered throughout the community, as well. Those are a couple of things. A very friendly community. It's a hardworking community. It's just a nice place to live.*

- *Multiple reasons. One, quality of life. I like that it's a university community. I like that there are high expectations for city services and services in general. Again, it's just a very good, safe environment, low crime. Those are—high educational system through Ames Public School System as well as Iowa State University. Those general reasons.*
- *There are a lot of good reasons. It really relates to cultural experiences and diversity. Its education is the highest priority, obviously, with Iowa State University, and a lot of that is reflected back upon our students. I think that is the main reason why students do so well.*
- *I originally moved to Ames to attend Iowa State. I have continued to live here because of communal life.*
- *The proximity to other area, larger cities is kind of nice. It's an afternoon/day drive to Omaha, Chicago, Minneapolis, Kansas City. So it's a nice kind of middle vector location.*
- *I really like it here. I like that—I would say my favorite thing about Ames is that there's—it feels like a small town, but it's a little bit bigger so there's more opportunities for jobs and things to do and that kind of thing. But it still kind of feels like small town Iowa to me.*
- *The majority of my career, I lived in very large communities, and this was a welcome change, being smaller, very livable and with the university.*

Interviewees were asked to describe Ames as a community: a place to live.

Unsurprisingly, many of the answers parroted or deepened themes suggested as reasons interviewees, themselves, enjoyed living in Ames. The largest themes that emerged were that Ames is a friendly (and family-friendly) place to live, with good educational and occupational resources. Again, there was prevalence for the idea that Ames has a small-town feel with the resources of a much larger community.

Some respondents did express concerns about Ames as a place to live, however. A few respondents noted a lack of entertaining activities for singles and young professionals, while others mentioned the existence of a sometimes contentious and slow-to-change citizenry.

- *Excellent for what I'm looking for. It's a very open community, very diverse and you can find about almost anything you would want to do here.*
- *I find it to be very livable, and I say that on a regular basis. So we found the childcare to be accessible. We are in and out of Iowa State and athletic activities and other related activities on a regular basis. The drive time is easy. Accessibility to shopping and convenience items are easy. If anything, I would say the opportunities. It is very livable. I wish there were more restaurants, more diverse restaurants, and better shopping, but beyond that it's great.*
- *I think overall it is a very good community. The university, as I've mentioned, is a major activity. Sort of provides a core for what goes on in Ames. But overall the quality of life is generally good. The services that the city provides are good. Ames has the elements of a small town, and yet it offers the services, amenities and many of the programs that you would find in much larger areas without some of the challenges that a more urban environment provides. It's been recognized by a number of external entities as a number one place to live in lots of different evaluations and rankings. It's a good college community.*
- *Very friendly. Easy access. I just think it's a great place. I just think it's low-crime, friendly people. True Midwest, that's what I would say.*
- *I would describe it as extremely family-oriented. I see it as a small town that operates as a regional hub. Not necessarily in any capacity though as a destination other than maybe the university athletic events and so forth, but I separate that a little bit from Ames. You don't come here for your theater. You don't come here for your shopping from major parts of the country or world.*
- *There's just a high quality of life and it's safe. There's low crime. All the things I value that you want to live someplace where, again, there's a high quality of life, low crime, you feel safe. And Ames does that extremely well.*
- *I would describe Ames as a small-town community with kind of small city amenities. I'd describe Ames as a college town.*

- *I think it's pretty good. It seems pretty friendly. I know they've been trying to do more community outreach, trying to get to know your neighbors a little better. Despite having a population of 50,000, if you extract the university students, it's really closer to about 25,000. So it has kind of a micropolis feel, but yet it also has a small town feel to it also.*
- *We've got the number one public high school in the state, number one middle school, two of our elementary buildings are ranked in the top 10. Education is a high priority. We've got grand new facilities. There's cultural experiences, as well as athletics and a whole gamut of things. I think it's maybe one of the premier places in the Midwest to live.*
- *As a place to live, it's inviting for people that are married, retired or people with children. I think where there's a real gap in Ames is for that young professional or that single person at any age level that's looking for opportunities and things to do. There's plenty of jobs here. It's just a matter of do we give enough people the reason to say yes to live here?*
- *I think that Ames is a unique community. The influence of the university is significant. But it is—and for as large an institution as Iowa State is, Ames is still a small community.*
- *I think it's very dynamic, exciting, and has great cultural opportunities. It's a great place to live and work for those reasons.*
- *I think Ames is very family-friendly. It's very supportive of small businesses. The school districts are great. There's a lot of parks. There's a lot of cultural things to do.*
- *I think it's a good place to live. Like I said, it has a small town feel and small town values, but with more opportunities than a smaller town would offer.*
- *In that regard extremely positive in terms of traffic flow, basic and sometimes non-basic amenities, safe. An incredible degree of green space so you don't feel concreted-in. So it speaks to your mind and your body and your soul, physically and otherwise. It is very park-like, so there is this kind of openness and freedom.*
- *Well, it definitely is a college town and has a college feel to it. The community itself is open and progressive, with a strong link between town and gown. I would also say that as a community, at times, Ames is a bit fractured in its opinions as how to grow and develop, which hinders us little bit. [Moderator: Can you speak more to that fracture?] Sure. So it seems that in contrast to other communities where we're going to build an aquatic center, we're going to build a school or we're going to do whatever, the community tends to kind of rally around it and get it done and see it as a joint effort. In Ames, we tend to have factions or groups that see supporting of one effort as a loss to them. So there's always an extensive—and at times paralyzing—amount of debate and discussion that needs to go on. For example, some of our recent successful things—a new pool at some of the schools—took three or four votes to get done rather than just a single time, which many communities would have got done.*

- *I think the people that we interact with are very friendly. It's a very educated community. It's a very passionate community. And that can sometimes be a good and a bad thing. They're very passionate and they have a lot of opinions, but they want generally what's best for the community. Sometimes the struggle is that they're very—maybe some people are a little more narrowly focused on their opinions, and that sometimes makes it difficult. But people have good ideas, and they're willing to share them.*
- *I would say it's safe. I would say that it's got lots of opportunities to be involved in things. It's easy to get from one end to the other without a whole lot of problems, except for on game day. I think that—I know people in the community. I know who my banker is. I mean you're on a first-name basis with a lot of people. And it's pretty. I like being part of a university community. I think that that makes it even better. It's just there's lots of opportunities because of being a university community. I think people here are generous.*

Interviewees were asked to describe Ames as a community: a place to work.

Responses indicate that Ames is generally a very good place to work. Job opportunities are exciting and well-paying, with much credit for these facts going to the presence of—and local and national business ties with—Iowa State University. None felt that Ames was a bad place to work.

However, multiple interviewees suggested that employment-seekers in the area are highly competitive, with recent college grads and graduate students fighting for limited openings. The diversity of vocational fields was also a concern, with jobs outside of agribusiness, technology, and academia not highly available or in demand.

- *So from a work standpoint, I enjoy it as well because people are very friendly and easy to work with.*
- *I think there's quite a few opportunities for definitely growth in career components, as well as the university helps a lot too with opportunities.*
- *I think it is a good place to work. As I've mentioned, the university is the major employer. I am part of that. The community and the university work closely together on a majority of areas, and it provides benefits on both sides of the equation. The university is a source for a lot of resources. We have a lot of cooperative agreements on utilities and services. And much of the economic development in recent years is driven by the university growth and expansion. So I think it is a good community with good services.*
- *Great. Easy commute, good access to the airport. I mean people lament a 45-minute drive to the airport. But if you live in Chicago, you're going to drive that far as well because it's going to take you 45 minutes to park and get into the airport.*
- *We need to be more probably diversified, because we're heavy, of course, in government, be it at the national, state, local level of employers. Even federal. We've got all four. And though I do believe we're making inroads because the Research Park is expanding, I think we just need to continue to really emphasize the expansion of non-governmental jobs to bolster our tax base, and the private sector is where we're going to get the taxes from.*
- *I think pretty good. I have heard from other friends that with the amount of college students and grad students, that it can be competitive, which can be challenging to other people depending on the opportunities that they're trying to seek out. But I know that's one thing I've heard from other people is sometimes the students kind of suck up opportunities.*
- *I would say that Ames is a great place to work if you work in an agribusiness or a high tech sector or in academia. I'd say that it's a very difficult place to find a job if you don't work in one of those sectors.*

- *More than anything I've always told new teachers when they come into Ames that it is maybe the most wonderful place to work, but it does have a dual-edged sword. Number one, it's a great place because education is value. But the other edge of the sword is the expectations are extremely high, and our parents demand the best of us. I just wouldn't really want it any other way.*
- *For a small community, there is a strong and diverse economic base of job opportunities or employment opportunities—high-quality employment opportunities I should say.*
- *I think it's an exceptional place to work. You've got a wide variety of industries, and more specifically you've got a very vibrant research park and a tier-one research institution which provides very significant and meaningful employment opportunities. And there's enough amenities around the community for that worker, day in and day out to, I think, have a good working experience here in Ames.*
- *There's an entrepreneurial spirit of a number of the people. A lot of that's based, again, from the university, but a number of our businesses who were startups to begin with and they're maturing, they grow off new people looking at ideas.*
- *I think Ames has a lot of opportunities for people with higher education. There's a lot of corporations. It's also very supportive of the high school and college students finding employment.*
- *To work, it's fantastic. ...Business interaction is positive. The university and federal relationships and collaborations are very good. The Research Park is a very dynamic, growing and supportive institute for working growth. The city is supportive, although cumbersome. But I would never say that we haven't had support from the city. So I think, in general, the business is very good.*
- *I think we've got a great network within Ames. People know each other that are in the working community. I think we've got a diverse level of businesses. We've got things that are service-oriented and then we've got professionals. So I think we've got a—we got great opportunities for individuals to find jobs.*
- *I'd say it's a great place to work. I haven't really run into any problems working here. In my position... I have had meetings and contacts with a lot of people that work in Ames, and I think that a lot of people like working here.*

Interviewees were asked to specifically consider younger people, such as millennials just starting (or thinking about starting) a family, then describe Ames as a community: a place to live.

As with answers about people in general, interviewees suggested that Ames is a family-friendly place to live, with good educational resources; responses indicated that Ames is a great place to raise a family.

On the other hand, interviewees were also vocal about the lack of housing options available to millennials and young families, as well as the high costs of the few options that are available. Interviewees also acknowledged that Ames had a dearth of entertainment options that appealed to single millennials, which can make the city feel unfriendly or uninviting to that age group.

- *That is an area where the community needs to make some improvements. As a college community we offer I think the kind of activities and programs that the 18 to 22 or 23-year-old college student wants to have. And the community has large segments of student housing, which both meets a need and, at moments, can present some challenges.*
- *I would say that Ames is a place where—it's a great place to raise a family. There's great community organizations for those with children. I'd say that Ames is a place where the entertainment and nightlife tends to be focused towards college students rather than young professionals. But the vicinity to Des Moines kind of mitigates some of that challenge, because that's not the case in Des Moines.*
- *I guess I would assume that those folks are going to want things like bike trails and vibrant downtowns and diversity in terms of bars and restaurants. There's great arts and entertainment if you like sports or you like art or whatever it is. That is all, in my mind, built into Iowa State. But I think the community could do more in terms of downtown vibrancy, outdoor activities, outdoor kinds of infrastructure. There's some. I think there could probably be more.*
- *Expensive. Apartments are expensive and homes are expensive.*
- *Safe. Great educational opportunities. Access to a world-class university and its research. The opportunity to live and study with children who have access to those kinds of parents who are high achievers academically. So if they get pushes—I'm going to push my kids. I also feel that there is vibrancy here because you are bringing in young families because you're a university. And so you don't always know who lives here or who is visiting, but there's just always youth and vitality in the community.*
- *There is a lot for college-age individuals to do here, and there is a lot to do if you have a family, regardless of their age, and there is a lot to do if you're a retiree. But I think where we miss it is if you're a young professional or young professional couple without children.*

- *It would be a great place to live if you could afford it. The two things that come into mind right off the bat when you mention that, especially when you use the word millennials or young families, is that there is an extreme lack of affordable housing for young families. Most of the development here has been in the white-collar, upper age range where kids are either older or graduated, and younger families just can't afford them. The other thing that I would point out is I am not really certain that there are enough activities outside of what comes from Iowa State University with concerts and athletics that would attract millennials to stay in Ames. So it is the housing and it really comes back down to activities and entertainment.*
- *I'm sorry, living, there are limited opportunities. I think Ames is an expensive community with a limited housing stock.*
- *I think Ames, for the millennials, as a town offers them a tremendous amount, both in terms of social events, interactions and potential starts for a new family. However, having said that, it is also apparently very unaffordable. We recently had a situation where we relocated 25 people to Ames, a vast majority of which were millennials, and only a fraction of those chose to live in Ames because of cost of living and housing options.*
- *I think we've got a great park system. I think there's lots of opportunity to be outdoors with your kids. I think we've got a great public library. I think that's important. I think with the university there are some benefits as far as things that come to the university at—for entertainment. I think there are some kid-friendly things. I think if you look—if you're a young family and you look hard enough, you will find a network of other young families.*
- *I think it's a really good place to live. I'm actually—we're expecting our first child, and we just bought a house this year. Obviously we chose to start our family here. The school districts are really great. There's lots of parks that are up-kept really, really well by the city. I think it's a great place to raise a family.*
- *For my two children who are millennials, they would think Ames is a very closed community, not very friendly and does not have a lot to do.*
- *I think the housing is really priced out. Unless they get a really good paying job, housing is kind of expensive in Ames. And so it would be hard to really get established in a neighborhood, as opposed to just being able to rent. And so then you're kind of more surrounded by students. For starting a family, I think the school system is a good system. Depending on where you live in Ames, it's one of a couple school districts. It's either the Ames School District or it's the Gilbert School District. Both of them are doing well. They have just updated their facilities, all the school facilities, so they're up-to-date technology-wise. They're not way behind. So if I'm just starting a family, I think that's something I'm looking for.*

Interviewees were asked to specifically consider younger people, such as millennials just starting (or thinking about starting) a family, then describe Ames as a community: a place to work.

As with answers about people in general, interviewees suggested that Ames is generally a very good place to work. However, job opportunities—and especially well-paying jobs—are not as available to millennials and younger workers in the area.

While some interviewees felt that job opportunities were relatively ubiquitous in Ames, regardless of age, other interviewees underscored previous assertions that employment-seekers in the area are highly competitive, and younger workers looking for low- or entry-level positions—even in the areas of agribusiness, technology, and academia—are not in high demand.

Again, interviewees cited the lack of housing options available to millennials and young families, as well as the high costs of the few options that are available, as detractors from working/looking for work in Ames.

- *I think we lack the critical mass of things to do to really be inviting to people that are taking their first job out of college. I just think we lack that critical mass that a larger metro area like Des Moines would have.*
- *To work, I think it's pretty good, especially if you can jump on the job quickly. Like I said, I think—I know it's very competitive because there are so many smaller towns around us that relies on careers in and around Ames. So I know that it has been very, very competitive.*
- *I think emphasis needs to continue for that age group to have the private sector infusions of good paying jobs.*
- *I would say that as far as working, there is many opportunities. One of the biggest issues that we have is the housing for that specific segment. A lot of those millennials have come out of the university and been in student housing. They definitely want to have something different. They're not ready to go out and immediately buy a home. They're very much looking toward renting.*
- *The opportunities are improving. There are more opportunities—the job opportunities are improving daily. I mean it continues to grow, and in different levels of income, too. It's not all white-collar. It's not all blue-collar. Both are expanding.*
- *I think there are a lot of white-collar jobs in the community because of the university, the city of Ames, Mary Greeley, McFarland Clinic. Then there are a handful of blue-collar jobs, as well. So there's a lot of—DoT is here. So there's a lot of opportunity. There's low unemployment, so it's easy to find jobs.*
- *I do believe Ames provides pretty diverse, high-quality employment opportunities, though somewhat limited in number.*
- *I don't know that my comments would change for millennials. I think that if you are looking for a job in a high tech or agribusiness sector, it can be a great place to live. For*

others, it can be challenging. Outside of the university environment, there isn't a lot for someone with a humanities background to find a job.

- *There's plenty of work here. And the Iowa State Research Park has brought in a lot of great industry, especially in the areas of technology and microbotics and things of that nature. So it's a great place to work, and they've got great jobs available. It's just I think the living environment is not as conducive to young families as it needs to be, with the real emphasis on the lack of affordable housing.*
- *I think it's very good relative to work. There's a variety of different options in terms of industries and business, whether it's private, university or federal. I would rate it relatively high.*
- *I think that there are jobs out there. I think the competition is high, especially seeing as we have the lowest unemployment rate. It wasn't shocking when I learned about that in the news. And, again, just starting out to work, you're kind of at the bottom of the payroll totem pole. Again, it is rather expensive as far as housing.*

Interviewees were asked to specifically consider younger people, such as millennials just starting (or thinking about starting) a family, then describe what opportunities are and are not available to them in Ames, compared to other places.

With the exception of Iowa State University and the specific research jobs it helps provide, no interviewees believed that millennials in Ames had opportunities that were not likewise provided by similar-sized and larger cities.

As to opportunities that millennials in Ames might be missing out on, interviewees returned to the themes of affordable family housing and an entertaining nightlife, neither of which they believed Ames provides. Additionally, some interviewees believed that shopping options were poor in Ames, and that millennials would likely be provided better shopping options in many other places.

- *It seems primarily affordable housing. So the folks that have younger kids or are considering starting families, if you're willing or want to live in an apartment, Ames has a variety of apartments of different costs and scales. Ames meets that. But when you get to the entry-level housing, even though we have world-class schools, it seems that for the money you can get so much more house or house features in other locations, that they oftentimes choose other communities.*
- *T there's not a district or a place—the streets pretty much roll up, from what I can tell, pretty early unless you're in Campustown, which as a young professional you don't want to be in.*
- *I know one thing that can be very challenging right now is housing that I've heard a lot. It's very—even for younger—people trying to start a family, it's—with the amount of college students, it's very hard to find an affordable living that isn't already being spoken for almost a year out because of college students. So I know that is one thing I've heard over and over again is the difficulty in affordable housing for young families.*
- *As a young professional, you don't want to go to the college bars. At least, I would hope not. So where do they congregate? I honestly can't answer that question. But my perception—when I was in that category, I wanted to be more anonymous. We chose to live in Des Moines. I wanted to be able to go out to bars, restaurants, places in Des Moines with other young professionals that were outside of my work.*
- *Well, I think one thing right now is an indoor aquatic center. I think those facilities are lacking. Boy, there is—I'm just thinking. When I go to other places, I don't say to myself, "Boy, I wish Ames had this. I wish Ames was thinking"—I would say maybe one thing that some communities do have that Ames doesn't is a nice continuous bike path. But those are just a couple of things.*
- *Our shopping as a whole lacks a little compared to other communities. Our mall is not the best in the world, so it forces people to drive to Ankeny.*

- *The affordable housing aspect. I know that there are many communities that are developing or maybe even renewing sections of town that can create a nightlife that might be attractive to them. We don't have that in Ames at all.*
- *Maybe affordable housing might be something that is lacking that sometimes other communities have. There is sometimes maybe a lack of chain restaurants that people might be used to, like an Olive Garden or some other of those types of restaurants that some other communities have. Maybe a shopping mall, now that I'm thinking about it. We do have a very small mall. It's very limited. Some of the commercial development area, if you've been to Ankeny along Delaware, with everything that's all right there. We have a little bit on South Duff, but nothing like they have on Delaware.*
- *Consistent entertainment opportunities. So while there's some things to do, you can only do them once in a while when they're scheduled or when an event comes to town. You can't do them day in and day out.*
- *Well, I would think—I'm not much of a partier or like going to bars and stuff, but I've heard people complain that it's not as—like there's not as much to do as there would be if you lived in Des Moines or somewhere bigger. But I think that just comes with the size of the town.*
- *In larger communities, there would be a wider variety, particularly in housing. I think there would be more affordable opportunities.*

Interviewees were asked to describe the culture of Ames. The term "culture" means many things to many people, and—as such—when we ask this question, we leave it purposefully vague, allowing the interviewees' initial responses to guide us toward the top-of-mind issues, if any, present in the target population.

Several interviewees discussed Ames as a diverse location, one that has become increasingly diverse in recent years, and this increased diversity was seen as a benefit. Here, as well as elsewhere in the interviews, we heard mentions of "pockets" of diversity within Ames that tend to stick together and not always integrate with the larger community, and this was commonly seen as a concern.

The image of Ames as either a culturally-progressive or a culturally-conservative city changed from person-to-person, with at least one interviewee proffering the idea that Ames has strong pockets of both, much like its pockets of insular diversity. The progressive-and-conservative duality was discussed as a reason that Ames has a slow-to-change attitude.

- *Well, I think that there's a lot of cultural opportunities. Even free opportunities. I think the library and some of the other non-profit groups are—what am I trying to say? I think there's a lot of groups out there that are really trying to bring a lot of culture to Ames, and a lot of it's either free or inexpensive. I think that's a good thing.*
- *I think it's—especially in the last 10 years, I think it's increased, as well as the awareness hopefully with there being multiple cultural entities that are trying to team together. The new library is great. I know it's increasing its opportunities for different programs. And I think too with the various art centers and cultural programming that's going on, I think it's—hopefully people have seen that it's been growing in the last 10 years.*
- *I think we have a pretty diverse culture. I think we have a lot of opportunities for many different cultures. I think the college town encourages—I mean that's helped with that.*
- *The culture of Ames is what I would consider very white-collared and educationally focused.*
- *I would describe Ames as, culturally, fairly conservative. ...The nightlife scene is relatively limited. There aren't very many venues to go see live music in Ames. There is very limited—there's fairly limited theatre outside of that provided by the university. I think that's about it.*
- *I think a majority of the town is progressive. I would say the culture is progressive in terms of they see Ames as a growing, dynamic town that is really built around the university and what the university offers. I think the culture is one that as a community we have a difficult time finding a common vision and moving ahead without excessive delays and dialogue.*
- *I think it has small town values. And small town values are a good thing.*

- *We have a lot of good museums and cultural organizations. I think the downtown is really great. It's really vibrant. There's a lot happening. There's not a lot of empty storefronts or anything. There's a ton of non-profit organizations helping make the community better.*
- *[Ames is] relatively diverse for a community of this size, and yet—how am I going to define—what I'm getting at, there are pockets of diversity, but I think they tend to associate with one another as opposed to a broadly interactive community. So there's insular pockets of diversity.*
- *From my standpoint, it has a very positive culture. ...There is a slight division and has been maybe in Ames for a little while. But the culture has really been very positive, and I see it now turning more towards trying to become vibrant to grow to attract millennials. We've had several discussions along that line, and I think efforts are there to try and come up with ideas that maybe are not only affordable but also would ultimately be potentially attractive for millennials. On the other hand, there still is kind of an older generation that I would say is very happy to leave things just as they are where—as you probably are aware even from your job in your research, that there are some people who are just not excited about change. And so because of that, there has kind of been a division, but I see that older generation where they're more inclined to keep things the way they are is kind of diminishing a little bit.*
- *A lot of highly educated people that have high expectations. A lot of—frugal. I think the long-standing Ames resident is a very frugal person. I think they want and talk about having increased quality of life things, but if it takes a bond issue to pass it, that can be very difficult at times to accomplish, because again they're frugal.*
- *If you're just looking at—I think it's really kind of two cultures because you have the university and 35,000 students and then the professionals. Some live here and some don't. Then you have the residents. So you've got the student culture, the Campus Town, that whole area and the younger crowd, so to speak. Then on the flipside, you have the residents, which anywhere from young families to established families to older generations.*
- *I would say it's diverse. I think it's a friendly community. I think it's a hardworking community.*
- *I would say it's diverse. It's very much liberal and conservative—there's just big pockets of each. Some of that comes out of people who have worked at the university and may have retired. The business community, I would say, is more forward-thinking. And the community as a whole, I would say, looks at having the amenities like parks and bike trails and that. That transcends all groups.*

Interviewees were asked specifically to discuss whether Ames was a community with diversity.

Opinions were split, though general opinion was that—at least—Ames could or should be more diverse than it currently is.

While several interviewees thought that Ames had good diversity, they mostly couched that argument in terms of relative diversity throughout the state of Iowa. Additionally, the lion's share of the diversity in Ames was attributed to Iowa State University's presence, specifically its international students and faculty, not the general citizens of Ames, itself. Again, the topic of "pockets" of diversity was discussed by more than one interviewee.

Other interviewees simply did not think that Ames was a diverse community, with several referring to it as predominantly Caucasian. One interviewee chose to focus on the lack of gender diversity in Ames' community leaders, while a few interviewees chose to focus on the comparative lack of socio-economic diversity in Ames, compared to its surrounding communities.

- *Yes. Very diverse. Especially more surrounded by the Iowa State. I think that it may be less diverse if you're more in the sector of Ames that isn't related to Iowa State. Just because I think Iowa State employs a lot of different minorities, and also there's a lot of minority groups in Iowa State that kind of support the students that are coming from different cultural backgrounds.*
- *I would say overall it is very good. A lot of that is the university.*
- *It's all relative. Ames is more diverse than the majority of the state, but I don't know that I would say that Ames is diverse compared to Chicago. ...It's certainly more diverse than the community I grew up in. And that's one of the things we like about it.*
- *I would not say Ames is a very diverse community. ...We have—while there is some diversity, it's probably more diverse than some Iowa communities. Even some of the smaller segments may stick to themselves more so. If you have a certain religion or a certain nationality, they tend to maybe live and work and do the same things.*
- *If you're talking diversity of color, I would say, university, yes. If you're talking diversity of color for the community of Ames, no. If you're talking diversity in cultural opportunities, diversity in housing, kind of, but not really, no.*
- *We tend to recruit and attract the same kind of people as we always have to boards and different commissions that we put together. As an example, I don't think I've got anybody on any of our boards that has a piercing on their face, as an example, or a tattoo on their neck or—I mean in terms of that kind of diversity, we tend to have the same kinds of people at our tables. And that would include things like I just cited, but it would also include people of color and people of mixed ethnicity.*
- *With the higher population with the university, that definitely increases it.*
- *I think we can sometimes be kind of stereotype—typically type people, just because predominantly it's white. So I think sometimes that, when other cultures come into our*

community, I think it causes concern. I don't think we're necessarily racist. I think we're just kind of sheltered in the Midwest.

- Definitely diverse, yeah. International, across Iowa, male/female. We're able to attract different geographies across the U.S. Especially if Iowa is your baseline; Ames is probably one of the more diverse communities in all of Iowa. It is probably very average on a national level, but within Iowa it would be above average.*
- I would say that culture in Ames probably mirrors the rest of the state as far as diversity. I think we have—we pride ourselves in the fact that we have a diverse community because of the university. I don't know if we feel like we're as melded into many cultures as we think we are, as we claim we are.*
- I don't think it's as diverse as it could be.*
- I would not say Ames is diverse.*
- I think, to be honest, I think we still have—like a lot of other communities—a good ol' boy network in our community. So there's some things that happen maybe behind closed doors with a wink and a handshake. I don't mean that to be mean or bad, because some of the good—some good things have come out of that good ol' boy network. I think it might be harder for the—for a woman in the good ol' boy network, but it certainly isn't as bad as some communities.*
- While there's a good mix of international students at Iowa State, and there's diversity amongst the student population, and there's some diversity amongst the professional population of this community, there is not a lot of diversity when it comes to some of the folks that have moved here for housing vouchers and things like that. And that's presented a problem in the past for the Ames community. I think Ames, as a city, has worked through that quite well. But, at the end of the day, while we've got good diversity on campus, I think as a community we're probably more open and more welcoming to diversity than a lot of the places in Iowa, but I wouldn't call it highly diverse in terms of—if you look at our Board of Directors, it's predominantly gray and white-haired men on our boards, as an example. And we try to cultivate and bring new leadership in, but we've got one person of color on one of our boards.*
- We're getting—it's still populated by Caucasian, a certain number of Afro-American, but the international student level is growing tremendously. I think we're eight percent international right now. And for being in the middle of Iowa, that's pretty good.*
- I think it's a pretty homogeneous community, so it's probably lacking a little bit in diversity. Some of that is brought in by the university. But I think without the foreign exchange students and stuff being here, it would be pretty lacking in diversity.*
- I oftentimes say that there are two prejudices or biases, however one wants to label it, in both the State of Iowa, but very, very evident in the city of Ames. And those two biases are economic and education, and what I mean by that is this is a very highly*

educated community. I don't have the right stats in front of me, but basically we have very little truancy, very low dropout, high graduation rate. I think that a percentage of families that live in Ames, Iowa have a high school diploma, and then you start going up in terms of two-year, four-year and so forth education. Most of the jobs that we have in Ames are white-collar jobs. They're mostly high tech. So if you're working for the DOT or the Animal Disease Center or the Ames Lab or the University or the Hospital. The agencies of employment, outside of fast food, we don't have a lot of jobs that one would label as "dirty jobs," so very little manufacturing. But even the people who work for Sauer-Danfoss and so forth, or Barilla, which has a plant here, it's very high tech. And so if you have a job, say, for the physical plant or you work for a lawn service or you are a maid or a service worker, a lot of those people don't actually live in the community. They live in surrounding communities.

- *A lot of what I'm trying to say "is not here" is actually here. It's just that in some cases there is not enough quantity of it, so you can almost say there is none here. But, for instance, I will give you a couple of examples. You go to certain communities and you can find the black community, the Hispanic community, the Jewish community, the socio-economic community. Those are hard to find in Ames because there's so few. So it doesn't mean they don't exist. You're just not going to be able to just stumble on it. So somebody would have to tell you, "I know seven families that live over here, and I know eight families that live over here," or, "Here are examples of things that we do for young people," but they don't stand out strong enough on their own in quantity. But yet when you find out about them, they are very, very high quality.*

Interviewees were asked to describe Ames' greatest cultural strength. The expectation was that most would choose Iowa State University, and many did.

Other interviewees focused on Ames' personality and small-town feel as its greatest cultural strength. Along these lines, and combined with the acknowledgement of the cultural strength the university provides, Ames' town-and-gown relationship was also an item mentioned as its greatest cultural strength.

Interestingly, Ames' proximity to Des Moines (and *vice versa*) was described as its greatest cultural strength by one interviewee, with the rationale being that the Des Moines-Ankeny-Ames corridor allowed for rapid and recurrent transmission of culture both ways. Residents of Ames can quickly and easily partake of the larger cultural events that Des Moines brings to the area, while Des Moines residents can quickly and easily partake of smaller, more niche cultural events that Ames and Iowa State University often provide.

Finally, one interviewee pointed to the aforementioned pockets of diversity, as well as the learning and growing opportunities they provide, as Ames' greatest cultural strength.

- *[Ames] has an incredible town-gown relationship. So if you want to go find or create your niche, this is probably the safest, most embracing town to do that.*
- *Biggest cultural strength I would say university. Hilton Coliseum, Fisher Auditorium.*
- *Well, it kind of goes back to the university. I think that—having a university here draws a lot more people from various backgrounds that otherwise may not reside here. Whether it's to teach at the university or attend the university, I think without that it would be a totally different community.*
- *I would say the cultural strength that Ames has really comes from being a relatively small community, and the ability to—people are friendly, people are welcoming.*
- *Obviously, once you get into the cultural experiences that are provided by Iowa State University. Outside of that, the other cultural strength that I think is—if you're really talking about behaviors and attitudes—is the importance of education.*
- *The university. Both the population that it provides, the infusion of young people, the social—so the cultural, athletic, social events, all of those things.*
- *This is kind of a strange answer, but it's related to Iowa State, but it's also related to proximity. So Des Moines is close, and so that Ames-Ankeny-Des Moines corridor I think positions us extremely well to be able to look at what can we do within Central Iowa culturally. We can look at it as a region. You can get to Des Moines and Des Moines can get to Ames pretty easily. And certainly if you drop in Iowa State in the middle of that, I think that offers some unique opportunities, and perhaps we haven't really capitalized on that entirely.*

- *I think Iowa State brings a lot of cultural events. We have events that are at Stephens Auditorium, and there's other groups that provide cultural opportunities in Ames. I think the one thing that I have noticed is that sometimes it's hard—as much as is going on, I think that sometimes it's hard to find a centrally located area where you can find out about those events. I think a lot of times I find out things from word of mouth or friends that have been involved. But I think that sometimes it's hard to find out what is going on.*
- *Cultural strengths would be that there are these different pockets of culture. And there are opportunities to participate in those, again, on occasion.*
- *I'd say community pride, harmonization of town and gown. We do a really good job of leveraging resources and shared opportunities between Iowa State, sometimes even private business and the town. I think Ames has a great school system. Once you get people here, it is very easy to attract and recruit people to the community.*
- *Well, I think one of the things—and I kind of mentioned this earlier—it is a very passionate community about whatever they're—individually what they're passionate about. Whether it's bicycling, whether there's parks, whether it's theater, whether it's music. So there's a lot of passion throughout the community for whatever their cause is.*
- *Well, I think that the strength would be we do have the university, and so we are exposed to different cultures as far as ethnic cultures. I think that that's a plus. I think that's a strength. So when we do participate in opportunities that we would be—expose ourselves to other cultures. I think that's a good thing.*
- *We have a lot of good museums and cultural organizations. I think the downtown is really great. It's really vibrant. There's a lot happening. There's not a lot of empty storefronts or anything. There's a ton of non-profit organizations helping make the community better.*
- *I do think Ames is very open and receptive to people. I think it's very welcoming. Now, let be fair, I think if you are a professional and you are a minority, you will be welcome with open arms in this community. If you run a business or you own a business or whatever it might be, I think that may be different for a minority who comes to town to work at a factory. I don't know that for a fact, but my sense is that there's a quick point of entry in the business community if you are a minority. And so I think, in that regard, we're quite open, and the same would go for a faculty member at Iowa State.*

Interviewees were asked to describe Ames' greatest cultural weakness.

There were, again, mentions of the lack of dining, shopping, and entertainment options, with Ames' lack of a core or central meeting place also defined as a weakness. Additionally, an aversion or reticence to change was also defined as a cultural weakness.

- *I would say we have different parts of town that each have their own unique place but Ames, as a culture, we don't have a central hub that brings everybody together in one location. So we've got a north end with the mall. We've got a campus town. We've got a downtown. We've got north Ames, west Ames. But as a central area that everybody would come to, other than the football stadium, there is no central core to Ames.*
- *I don't know specifically if they're lacking. I just think that maybe they're having a hard time getting the word out of what their opportunities are culturally.*
- *Nightlife, theatre, live music, restaurants. A large portion of that scene in Ames is devoted and targeted towards the overwhelming college audience.*
- *Outside of the university, cultural diversity is limited. And things like shopping, restaurants, music, those are things that tend to be associated with the university as opposed to the community at large.*
- *Sometimes the old guard tends to be a little bit more vocal, where 10 voices sound like 10,000, and it tends too many times to put a damper on some very interesting and enthusiastic ideas that come forward.*

Interviewees were asked to identify the positive impacts of Iowa State University's presence in Ames.

The primary positive impacts identified were the economic stability and infusion the students provide, the jobs it creates both within and near the institution, the cultural and entertainment options it attracts and provides, and the youth and vibrancy the students bring to the overall community. It also increases the relative diversity of the city of Ames.

- *It basically doubles our population, which is a good thing, at least in some respects, because that brings in more businesses. The university provides a big workforce of people coming out of it every year, which also attracts a lot of industry here, which I think is good. It kind of puts us on the map in some ways because of the ag research and all of the things the university is working on.*
- *I think the positive is it's a great job opportunity for those. It provides a lot of additional entertainment that we wouldn't normally have. I think it's just a good community builder. I think it's a great thing.*
- *With an institution of 36,000 students, you're going to get diversity, you're going to get energy and vibrancy. And it is good for businesses because students are consumers in the community, etc. So it creates a vibrant community.*
- *It's a major employer. It's a major activity base. We provide much of the community's culture and entertainment programs, whether it's intercollegiate athletics, which we're part of the Big 12 which is one of the major national five athletic conferences. Much of the culture is present. The community's cultural entertainment facility—Stephens Auditorium, Fisher Theater, these are facilities that bring in world-class entertainment and events.*
- *It's so different in the summertime. I'm always happy when the students leave, and I'm always happy when they come back. It's a much slower pace in the summertime, but that energy definitely goes back up in the fall when they come back.*
- *It's a large job center for the community. Outside of the university, Ames is somewhere around 25,000-30,000 people, so it does bring—The university's presence and the presence of students brings amenities to Ames that wouldn't be in a community of that size without the university. It does bring a liveliness and kind of vibrancy to some areas. In particular, Campustown is an area, is a district that wouldn't exist without the university. And it does provide a fair bit of economic stability to the city of Ames as an institution that is fairly resilient to economic challenges.*
- *Positives, I think it brings a lot of great special speakers to town that I've personally attended through the university that otherwise would not have that chance to travel—wouldn't have a chance to see them or attend it. So I think that's great. And, like I said, I think that it helps to quantify the diversity that it brings through—whether it be attendees that are coming to college here or the professors that are going to teach there, I think that helps the community a lot.*

- *Well, the major positives for me is everything from lectures to theater events to sporting events to youth-related activity. What I'm going to call "vibrancy." Because there's camps happening around here all the time whether it is insect camps or they may play a weekend of volleyball or they may have mom and dad weekends with the coaches.*
- *Well, I think there's the economic impact, bringing a lot of people into the community. I think it does bring a youthful sense to the community. The programs and activities, again with the athletics, the music, theater. Those things are a positive impact to the community. For a number of businesses, it brings employees. A lot of those individuals are looking to work within the community. That's a positive impact.*
- *I think for the most part people would tell you that Ames really revolves around ISU, and I think that that is probably very true. They're the big elephant in town, number one employer. Of course with the cultural activities that they provide, concerts and fine arts, it is truly the big dog in town.*
- *The positives are the age that does reside here. Having 30-some-thousand 18 to 20 years old brings vitality and energy to this community every day, all day. I would say the university also brings the whole economic stimulus in Ames's economy. Everyone's shopping and buying stuff. Educationally, you have smart people that work at Iowa State University, employs thousands of individuals who are professors and faculty. They're smart. They live in Ames, they're involved in city government, have high expectations. So all of those of things are highly valued. Another positive is all the cultural, athletic events that Iowa State brings to this central Iowa base.*
- *There's always a reason to come to Ames and have what one would term the celebrities. Because we don't have professional sports in Iowa, so the university is an incredible attraction, even with the caucuses. You can bet those political figures are going to be—so we get to see, touch, interact, even invite in speakers and lecturers on national and world issues.*
- *ISU's presence brings economic vitality. It brings entertainment. It brings leisure sport, entertainment opportunities*
- *The economic vitality from the spending of the students to the different stores and the different retail outlets, the different restaurants, the different fast foods. All those types of things I think are possible because of Iowa State University.*
- *Iowa State is really the hub of the town, so when Iowa State either supports or doesn't support things, the whole community is impacted. A recent example would be we have an event center in town called the Scheman Building. That's a facility that's outdated and needs to be remodeled. We tried to, as a community, gather support to do an upgrade, and the bond issue failed. But Iowa State decided that it was important enough to them that they are going to go ahead and proceed with a scaled-back version of the project on their own. So because of that, we will now have an enhanced—it isn't perfect or what we probably really need, but still an enhanced event center. When it*

comes to swimming pools and things like that, at times if Iowa State has the opportunity, they will contribute in a city effort, make it a joint deal.

- *Certainly the Research Park, which is a university not-for-profit-supported deal, there are currently now thousands of people employed because of the university startup here. So I think Ames is a college town, and Iowa State at the heart of that.*
- *Well, positively, I think it does bring a lot of diversity. I think our workforce is definitely—because they come from a higher education background or desire to get a higher education, I think that brings a great resource to businesses. Definitely it brings a lot of money into Ames. Being a business owner, we have so many new restaurants. And I just really feel like there are just so many things, businesses that are coming to Ames because we do have Iowa State there.*
- *It's just the whole idea of having educated people all in the same community is huge. I think we've got a lot of bright people working and living in Ames because of the university. And then you add the students to that, and I think that it brings energy and excitement and some opportunities to our community for entertainment, as well as just having a great source of volunteers in the student body that we see at Iowa State.*

Interviewees were asked to identify the negative impacts of Iowa State University's presence in Ames.

By far, the primary negative impact most identified was on housing, with the bulk of current housing efforts aimed at accommodating students. The negative effects on traffic patterns, especially during collegiate sporting events, was also mentioned as a negative. The "party atmosphere" and number of businesses that cater exclusively or predominantly to college-aged patrons, while offering little interest to older patrons, was another identified negative impact.

- *I think the biggest impact, being a non-Iowa State person, is just what it has done to our housing. Our housing market is really high because we have such an influx of students. High in pricing. So there's high demand, low availability, so the price is really high.*
- *Negatives, definitely like I mentioned, the housing market I know is greatly affected by that, as well as job opportunities, too.*
- *In 10 years time, the institution has grown by 40 percent, and so there's less apartments being constructed and there's just constraints. There's strain on facilities and infrastructure on campus and throughout the community.*
- *I think probably a little bit of competition between what is the heart of the community is. When you look at—you've got a Campustown district that is being revitalized, but then you've also got this downtown area that I think is really important to the community as well. And I think we struggle a little bit with the balance of what those two areas and districts are and do and how they are connected or not. So that's it.*
- *The large institutional growth has put pressure on housing. The student marketplace—there are 36,000-plus students at Iowa State, and we house 12,000 to 13,000 of them on campus in university-operated housing. But the rest of them, they don't all live in Ames, but large numbers do. So it's put real pressure on housing. It makes housing prices higher than they might be because students, as they rent and occupy spaces, are willing to pay prices that drive up housing. It has made housing for low to moderate income people harder to find places to live. Starter homes and the beginnings of young millennials, as you describe them, starting out wanting to buy their first house, that becomes much more challenging in Ames. One of our problems is that's pushing people out to the smaller communities around Ames and to communities like Ankeny, which have a major development initiative going on down there.*
- *Transportation I think is a problem for some people. The students create traffic challenges on some streets. Ames does not have a very good north/south/east/west road infrastructure when you really look at the place. And so getting across town can be a challenge in the campus. It was an issue.*
- *I don't have issues with students, but some do. I mean sometimes the respect of the properties, the rentals and things like that are a little bit more of a struggle than I think maybe they experience in other places. But sometimes respect for just property in*

general might be an issue, but it's really not terrible here in Ames by any means. Just I come from the rental and housing side, so I think I probably hear those things maybe more than others do. It's probably not any different than any other university town.

- On the negative side is because the university impact is so big, the economic cycles—that is the seasonality of the university is so—fall and spring semesters are busy, busy times. Lots of people, lots of activities. Summer, that changes. That has an impact on small business. That has an impact on the opportunities available.*
- Campustown, which is going through a major redevelopment right now, is a plus at one level, but it has also been a historical challenge area where we have had student disturbances and riots and some things that go down there. The student lifestyle is not consistent always with family. And other students, their social process and the hours they keep don't always fit in with the rest of the community. The alcohol issues crop up as you deal with a student body, and that presents some challenges.*
- The only one really that I can think of is the increase in student housing. It's just daunting. I believe now it's teetering on unacceptable. It's dominating the community of Ames. It is outreach where it could have—it's footprint being able to be, or chosen to be on campus, they've poured out now into the community. And it has to stop. It's unacceptable. Really that is the only negative influence I can say. But it's out of control.*
- I would say the university, because of its relative size to the remainder of the community, does have an outside influence to the rest of the community. And that can be challenging for residents that aren't a part of the university. It draws a large—a younger population that's transient. And therefore their investment in the city of Ames, whether it be for beautification or improvement of the culture, their transient-ness leads to some difficulties. Cultural norms are less stable as a large body of the population comes and goes and brings their own cultural norms into Ames and leaves with them when they're gone.*
- I think just getting around the community. If you are—if you've been here long enough, you know when not to go through campus. And on game days you know when to go to the grocery store, or back to school time you know when to go to Target. So I think that if you embrace that and say that that's great, then you can get around all of that. If you don't, then that would probably be a negative.*
- It's a negative when you're trying to get from point A to point B and you forget it's a game day, and you try to get there and you're behind traffic. And traffic means a lot to different people. But if you wait more than 10 minutes through an intersection, I guess you feel like it's a traffic jam.*
- Whether it's perceived or real, the party scene. Now they've canceled VEISHA, but there was that whole thing that people just didn't want to be around that weekend because of potential riots and just that kind of stuff.*

- *It draws on sometimes—the traffic, I will say that. It increases the traffic in the community when all the students are here. It makes it a little more difficult to get around. I don't want to say it's a disrespect, but it's interesting—and more so when I'm on campus—how they're oblivious to traffic. They can just walk right out in front of a car while they're looking at their phone and not even know that a car was coming to them. Some of those are maybe some negatives.*
- *I think there are challenges because there are so many students here. It provides a different dynamic, because half the population is college-aged kids. I think there's definitely a lack of housing. Especially if you're looking for an apartment, there's pretty much none that are aimed at young professionals or older people. They're mostly all aimed at college-aged. That's probably the biggest thing.*
- *Also, all the extra cars that are on the road. And especially if there's an event that comes—like if there's a basketball game or football game, there's just parts of town that you just can't go to if you're not going to the game, because there's just no way to get through the traffic.*

Interviewees were asked to discuss the current housing situation in Ames.

Interviewees reiterated previous assertions that there was not enough affordable housing available for new and young families, nor were there appropriate levels of apartments and condos for rent for single millennials. Interviewees were unanimous in their agreement that there did not currently exist enough quality, affordable housing for young families and/or millennials. This is one of—if not the single greatest—deterrent for young families and/or millennials when considering Ames proper as a place to live.

Additionally, Iowa State University's impact on the rental calendar, causing almost all leases in town to be yearly, beginning on or near August 1, was a hassle for renters, millennials, young families, and others who are not undergraduates.

- *Full is what I would describe it. Within our department we have hired a couple of younger individuals starting families, and I know it was a real struggle for them to find housing in their price range, what they considered affordable. It took a little while to be able to find something.*
- *[Housing is] limited and expensive.*
- *I've heard that it's a little more expensive than what people would like to pay compared to other communities. As well as I've heard taxes too, property taxes.*
- *I would say that the rental market in Ames is very tight. I'm someone that just purchased a home, and the large impetus for that was wanting to get out of the rental market. Because of the university's impact and the academic year that that kind of imposes, the rental market can be very difficult for those that don't live on an academic year because almost all leases in Ames start on August 1st and end on July 31st.*
- *I would say that the affordable housing market is also quite constrained, partially because the rental market forces people into the housing market potentially earlier than they otherwise would consider. That is definitely the effect for myself.*
- *Tight. We have very few homes for sale. We have over 200 agents on our MLS, and we don't even have a hundred homes for sale right now in Ames.*
- *Well, it depends on how much money you have. What I would tell you is that most of the new development, which is happening north of town, involves some very expensive homes in the \$300,000 range and above. The other thing that I've noticed over the last almost seven or eight years is the vast number of mega apartments that seem to be going up, which overall are being inhabited by college kids. So I think a lot of the premium land that could have been used for more affordable housing for younger families right now has pretty much disappeared.*
- *Extremely tight. It's quite expensive because of, in large part, supply and demand. There's very little supply, and there's a very high level of demand. At the same time, while we're seeing more and more housing options being developed here in town, it's*

still predominantly that apartment for student living or that single family home or a married—for someone to buy, and that price range is probably \$289,000 to—and up. And so that takes a lot of people out of the market that might want to live here. And while some of those things are being addressed about alternative living or call it millennial housing and things like that, we're still not seeing that happen as quickly as we need it to.

- I believe [younger people] choose—if they want to live in Ames, they can find a place to live, if they have young families. Millennials, probably not. I don't think there's enough—there's probably too much student housing than a millennial market for housing. And I would separate that from a young family.*
- [Our millennial-aged, expecting our first child family] just bought a house, and there was pretty much nothing in our price range. There's just really low inventory right now for houses. Then also I've moved apartments a couple of times in the last few years, and it's hard to find an apartment, too. So I think that just overall there's not very many choices for housing.*
- Well, I think family housing is expensive. And I think student housing—because they don't have enough student housing on campus, they're kind of outsourcing it into the community. And that extra influx I think is also making just apartment life hard. For the students that I know, it's just expensive.*
- I would say in prebuilt houses, the selection is very limited. When houses go on the market, they tend to sell very quickly. I do know that there are three or four large developments that have opened up land for new building, mainly on the north end of town, which could and should help. But I think the inventory is limited.*
- I'd say we have probably a housing shortage overall. ...There's not enough housing for the young families who are just starting out. And so that might be anywhere from \$175,000 to \$250,000 houses. We don't have enough housing available for individuals who are on the—are 200 percent of federal poverty line and below, because they end up spending more of a percentage of their income on housing. So we're short in that area.*
- I perceive that it's pretty tight, but I just—I'm not terribly informed. I see lots and lots of apartment construction, but there's a lot of housing construction as well. The reality though is a lot of the housing is being built north of the Ames, which is technically the Gilbert School District.*

Interviewees were asked whether they felt the current housing situation in Ames would improve over the next few years. Roughly half of the interviewees did not feel they had enough expertise to answer this question.

Of the interviewees answering this question, most of them felt that little progress would be made in the coming years to address the previously-defined housing problems in Ames. While they see construction continuing at a rapid pace, the worry is that the majority of this construction is still targeted toward alleviating the high demand for college apartments, as well as building high-end, even luxury houses that would be well outside the price range for those planning or beginning to plan families, let alone single young professionals. They also have concerns about where new construction for affordable family housing could even be placed, as several interviewees believe that areas amenable for non-college-based housing are already highly limited.

One interviewee expresses hope in Ames' housing outlook, saying that multiple studies were being done or have been commissioned to examine how best to address current housing needs.

- *Well, I would say that there are a number of things that we are looking at as far as what we need to bolster the housing in that area. I'd say multiple studies are going on right now, especially in our downtown area, to be able to see how we can attract more of the millennials there.*
- *The increase in rental properties will relieve some of the constraints that encourage people to purchase, and thus make some affordable housing more available. However, with limited development happening in the core of Ames, no, I don't see many of the structural factors changing.*
- *I think there's efforts to try to make it get better. The major problem that we have within the school district is that the developable land is pretty much drying up, and now it's starting to expand beyond our city limits and beyond our district limits, especially to the north. But that's what I—I don't know that—I think there's efforts to try and address it, but I don't think it is going to last very long because there just isn't land to do it.*
- *People are building all the time. We kind of got stuck in that middle there because people were—the builders weren't building because of—well, maybe because of liquid or just for fear of it not selling. But I think that that's better now, but now it's a matter of them keeping up. And we don't have a lot of lots that are affordable. We have a lot of Iowa State-owned property around us, so that makes some of the housing a little bit more difficult. But lots are expensive here in Ames.*
- *I see minimal progress. Again, there's three or four large developments that are opening. Unfortunately, I think most of those are very high-end housing, not affordable housing.*
- *I believe that—depending on how you look at it, I believe it will get worse. And by that I mean my own experience in the job that I am at, I see a substantial number of people*

*and families making the decision to live outside of Ames, though they work here.
...They can get—a young family that's just starting out, maybe has one young kid or has their first kid on the way, they can just get more house by going outside of Ames than they can in Ames. And more choices. Rental, purchase, townhomes, condominiums. There are a lot of choices.*

Interviewees were asked what they believed the trendier places to live in Ames were, places that would attract young professionals, millennials, and those planning to start or who have recently started a family.

Interviewees identified the northern areas of town, especially for young families, and the western edge of town, especially for single millennials and young professionals.

- *That's a good question. Trendy areas? Well, definitely I think families are moving more north. And also between Gilbert and Ames. It seems like there's a lot of new housing development that's going that way, and probably more expensive housing development. I know the land is pretty expensive up there.*
- *Most people go towards new construction, which, as I mentioned, is often north of Ames. Gilbert is perceived to be—there's certain schools that are perceived to be better. Some of those schools draw in from north Ames. So there's definitely, in my mind, a perception that north is more elite. So if that's what you're looking for, a lot of families move in that direction.*
- *In Ames I would say Northridge. Clearly, the northern part of the community.*
- *To the north, North Ridge Heights. There's a lot of subdivisions that are going up. I'm amazed at how many big houses are going up. It's kind of north. North Ames seems to be kind of the trendy area where people are building and things are continuing to explode. There are some other little pockets to the southwest, but that's pretty much it.*
- *I've heard the Somerset area is kind of thriving now. Also I've heard off of Oakwood area, just kind of like south of Ames there's a lot of new structures being built.*
- *Probably Somerset comes to mind as probably the trendiest place. ...Everything north Ames and even going the Gilbert School District is probably the strongest trendiest family location. For millennials, it would be some of the condos in the Somerset area. And that's really about it.*
- *Absolutely north of Ames there is an area called Northridge, and beyond that to the north is where all the new homes are going up. So that's extremely trendy right at this point.*
- *Somerset, which is on the north side of Ames. It's probably the trendy place to live if you are—well, even if you're in college, but if you're a young professional and you've got that first job, you might look at something in Somerset. To a much, much, much lesser degree, there's a few apartments above businesses in downtown Ames that I think are pretty attractive to people like that, too. But that would be the two places that I would offer are probably trendy, if you will, here in Ames.*
- *Yeah, especially with the millennials, the millennials seem to be migrating to West Ames. I think the more established senior people all tend to be going north.*

- *I think that Somerset is a trendier place to live. And then Northridge Heights I think would be a trendier place to live.*
- *I think probably one of the trendier places is in north Ames by Somerset.*
- *Depends on what market you are. If you have lots of money, you live in the north. If you are a student, you live in the west edge of town in the apartments there. I mean it's—if you have money and you're a student, then you can live close to campus.*

Interviewees were asked what significant positive changes Ames had undergone over the last decade.

Interviewees identified the population boom of students and the associated economic impact as the most significant change. This impact has led to a likewise boom in new construction and new businesses, which has made Ames a more vibrant and diverse community than it was a decade ago. In turn, the Research Park, as well as the large corporations both it and the Iowa State University attract, have made sizable investments in the community, which exacerbated the previously-mentioned number of new businesses and new construction. Finally, and related somewhat to the population boom, Ames has made a significant investment in its school system over the last ten years, which has helped it rise from a noticeably good school system to one of the best in the state of Iowa.

- *Well, I think the way it's changed is that the landscape has changed significantly. We've got a number of new job creators in this market that have greatly enriched the Ames community. At the same time, the university has grown by somewhere upwards of 9,000 students. In that same timeframe there's been an enormous amount of capital investment on campus, in Campus Town, in the Research Park, throughout the business community. We've seen hundreds of homes and apartments built in the last 10 years. So as a result of that, in many ways Ames is much more vibrant than it was 10 years ago.*
- *Well, there's definitely growth. And you see that in a number of different ways, again, through apartments, both in and around Campustown, as well as less—certainly the Campustown area most recently is kind of getting a—I'm going to call it a face lift. But new businesses, new presence, lots of construction. Which gives it—it has a completely different look and feel now which is terrific, but it also causes strain for some of the smaller businesses that have been there for a long time and who really now can't afford it. So there's much consternation over that, but I think it's just part of what happens when there is growth and development.*
- *Whatever they're doing to attract new businesses here that normally otherwise you would think they would end up in Chicago or Des Moines, they're evidently trying really hard, whether it's through tax incentives or something else. I think the economic development component has been pretty well done in the last 10 years.*
- *There has been substantial growth, in particular in the student body. That has led to a substantial increase, or that has led to an increase in the rental properties. A lot more apartment buildings and larger buildings in Ames. That has brought along with it some additional nightlife than what was here 10 years ago. That's about all I can think of. My perspective is very different now versus when I was a student 10 years ago.*
- *It's grown. I think business opportunities are probably the biggest thing that I would say has grown. We have a business park that's developed that just keeps growing. We have a company here that's a technology company that they've added on three times because of its growth. So I think that that—I would say something that's improved, I would think—I think that the jobs here and opportunity have improved.*

- *Well, if we're really looking at the city, ISU has grown, but one of the things that has really been pretty dramatic over that time has—there's two things. One, I think the rise of mega apartment buildings has been very noticeable all over town. And I think the other thing that I would probably point out [is] in the last six years [we have] built six new elementary buildings trying to provide better education for our kids.*
- *I think there is an enhanced recognition that there are—of neighborhoods and regions within the community. So the northern part and the neighborhood and a growing commercial center that is in that area, and recognition that the importance of the downtown commercial area. There's been significant—I should say there has been significant improvement and change along Campus Town and along Lincoln Way and Welsh Avenue, in that region. That has significantly changed and improved.*
- *Well, we finally got an aquatic center. That was a biggie. I wanted that when my kids were little, and that took a lot. I think the Research Park has really made an even bigger investment in Ames, and I think that those companies that are out there have made a bigger investment in Ames. I would say that about Campus Town, there's a couple businesses too that have made a huge investment. I think the whole concept of Somerset and the restaurants being within walking distance has made a positive change.*
- *Well, definitely we have a better Main Street district. It's very vibrant. In fact, it's even hard to park when you want to be downtown. Parking can be a problem certain times of the day. And I think the amount of restaurants that we have has really multiplied, especially the chain restaurants. We got a Starbucks. Well, now we have two or three Starbucks, which 10 years ago they weren't even thinking about coming to Iowa, much less Ames.*
- *The growth. The Research Park has substantially expanded and the whole development on the south edge of the community has changed significantly. The university enrollment has gone up 40 percent I think in that period of time, roughly. So the population growth in the community has been exceeding any of the planning projections. That has presented challenges in maintaining an adequate infrastructure to service the community.*

Interviewees were asked what significant negative changes or stagnations Ames had encountered over the last decade.

Interviewees identified the population boom of students and the associated economic impact as a double-edged sword, naming it one of the most negative changes, specifically with regard to the changes it has forced upon the local housing markets (prices have been driven up, availability of non-college housing has become exceedingly tight, etc.).

Shopping and restaurant options have become more numerous, but many interviewees feel that many of these options are just "more of the same" and that the local shopping experience—especially the downtown district and the mall—has been stagnant or on the decline in the last decade; this conclusion by interviewees might be magnified by the boom of shopping options that have taken hold in Ankeny, as well as the heavy developments of both Jordan Creek and downtown Des Moines.

Traffic and infrastructure was a third major area where interviewees identified stagnation or decline. While population has noticeably increased, roadways, bike lanes and trails, and over/underpasses that avoid Ames' heavy railroad traffic have not kept adequate pace. Multiple interviewees mentioned dealing with traffic congestion on a regular basis, even during non-collegiate sporting events, as well as the fact that bike trails—while numerous in the area—do not connect with one another to allow for easy commuting.

- *Well, I know—it's kind of a catch-22 because I know quite a few young people too that have still been moving out of the area—kind of like what you hear "brain drain"—because of the competitive careers and housing. So I mean it's great that new businesses are coming in, but also with the university town you have that many more people trying to apply for the jobs.*
- *I would say in the city in allowing all of the off-campus apartment housing complexes.*
- *Downtown has kind of stayed status quo, in my opinion. There have certainly been some freshening and some activity over time, but it is pretty much the same. It has just got some different shops that have come in and out. But there is not, in my opinion, been a whole lot of change to what occurred in downtown.*
- *Well, I would say an area of stagnation is in some of our neighborhoods in that people don't want to see them change. You talk to the people and they think that if you change or you consider altering the neighborhood maybe some new in fill of housing or something like that, they feel that you're taking homes away from the downtrodden.*
- *I can point out two things for sure. One is lack of shopping areas that would also be very important for millennials. We had one very large mall. There was an effort at one time to build a newer shopping mall. That one failed. I don't know whether it would ever succeed again right now, but the existing shopping mall has kind of become pretty stagnant. It seems to be that a lot of businesses come in and then they leave, and it kind of seems to be turning over quite a bit that way. So the shopping is not very good. I think most people would leave Ames and do their shopping probably in Des Moines or*

in Ankeny to the south. The other thing that is different is that we seem to be attracting—there's really not a nice place in Ames other than maybe one place or two, but there's really not a nice place in Ames to just take your wife and your family and go out for a really nice dinner. Most of the places in Ames would be more chain restaurants that seem to focus a little bit more on the faster kind of foods.

- I'm a year-round bicyclist, and I would say that the infrastructure for bicycling, both recreational and for commuting, has been relatively stagnant in that time period. Some of the structural problems with housing availability have gotten worse.*
- The biggest change has been the growth of Iowa State University, where it is now significantly larger than the base population of the city of Ames. The city of Ames's population used to be larger. Within the last 10 years, that has totally flipped, which has caused a lot more housing for students to be the priority than housing for Ames's residents. ...While the growth of the university has been positive, the growth of student housing I think is a negative.*
- But where we have changed—and it's very noticeable and one could say that that is a small negative—is that the traffic, because of the growth of the student population—the university has gone from 28,000 students in four and a half years to 36,000 students. It is projected to be 37,400. We have the same size streets. We have a shared busing system that is called CyRide. And so the city residents as well as the student residents are all trying to use that same service, which has had to expand out into the city more.*
- So what I oftentimes see too is we have more green space. I'm not real sure though that we've changed our employment to take care of all that space. And then as we become more about bicycles, interconnected transportation modes, people want to get on a bike trail and not have to walk across a green space to reconnect with that bike trail. They want to see it interconnected with the other communities. So I think those are things that we have been slow to be responsive to.*
- I would say probably the greatest stagnation has been in commercial activity. So the North Grand Mall is not much different than the North Grand Mall 10 years ago. There's some marginal improvement, but relatively—the downtown is pretty much still the downtown.*
- I think Ames is somewhat landlocked. It doesn't have the ability to grow much, and there has not been what I would call a lot of internal growth in the city of Ames. All of the growth has really come on the university side.*
- From a transportation standpoint, the mobility of people through this community, the last 10 years we've regressed. Because as the student population has expanded, as the business community has expanded, our infrastructure has not kept pace. And that infrastructure can be relative to bicycling, to walking or to driving an automobile. Lack of turn lanes, lack of well-coordinated stoplights can make for a lot of frustration when trying to move around this community. Now, I'll grant you, this is not Chicago. We don't have traffic stops like Chicago. But I think there's an expectation in a market of 65,000*

people, you'll be able to move around more freely than you can. Additionally, the railroad and the train running through here 70 to 90 times a day create some havoc, as well. And while the city has in the past tried to fund an underpass or an overpass on Duff Avenue, that was met with resistance by some people in downtown Ames, which is greatly unfortunate. Because now, if they had done that 15 years ago, we'd be accustomed to it, we'd be better off for it. I think where we've really regressed is from a transportation standpoint.

- *I think one of the areas that Ames still has challenges with are our policies in standards of construction are slow and cumbersome compared to other communities. I wouldn't say it's worse than it was 10 years ago, but it hasn't improved much either. ...For example, I'm in a brand new 52,000 square foot building here. In order to get that building done, if we have a building that holds 100, the city requires us to put parking in for 200. We had a landscaping plan that was \$100,000. The city required us to do \$200,000 of landscaping. We wanted to have an additional wing on the building, but we couldn't because the city required us to build a large retention pond. If we would have built this building anywhere else, we wouldn't have had to do that.*
- *Yeah, I think our infrastructure for traffic flow is—it hasn't changed, and so I think that that's made it—I mean we're growing, we're embracing growth, but it's still a grid and we still don't have a good alternative to going from north to south of the community. I think that the businesses on South Duff—we've got a lot of fast food restaurants and things like that. I think that makes it—it makes you want to avoid that area because of the traffic flow.*
- *The mall. The mall is really lacking. Considering we have so much investment in food, you would think that we would have more investment in retail, which we don't, which I think is kind of odd.*
- *There hasn't been much retail growth. And even some of the independent retailers that have come in, we've seen a lot of them just come and go. I don't know if that's because a lot of people are just still going down to Jordan Creek because everything is in one spot. Whereas some of the boutiques that have come in and left, they're kind of scattered throughout. There isn't a good centrally located retail location, which I think is really what Ames needs.*
- *I think one of the things with the Ames Community School District is because of all the growth to the north, some of the shift from people that were in the Ames School District are now in the Gilbert School District. Bloomington Road is kind of the divider. There's been a lot of development that's going up that way, and those people are all going to the Gilbert School District. So the enrollment from within the schools has been kind of stagnant for a while. It's kind of leveled off, but has been on a decline. I think that's maybe a negative.*
- *In the last 10 years, there was an individual that wanted to develop right along I-35 and 13th Street. Right there, wanted to develop a bigger commercial area, a mall, and there was some resistance from the community and there were some council members that*

got on just from a smart growth standpoint and not wanting to lose the small town identity. That person went elsewhere, and that's kind of where—Ankeny has just boomed in those last 10 years. Now, if we could have had some of that up here, it really would have helped the community because of the commercial tax base.

Interviewees were asked what significant changes they expected to see in Ames over the next decade.

Interviewees expect both the overall population and Iowa State University's enrollment to keep increasing over the next decade. Some felt it might taper off, while others saw no sign of waning. As such, opinions were divided on whether current housing issues would be properly addressed or become worse. Several interviewees mentioned that Iowa State University might need to succeed less if the city of Ames was to succeed more—or at the very least, catch up to the university's progress.

The Research Park is expected to continue to grow and attract top-level applicants and corporations, and the city, by dint of necessity, is likely to begin to work on improving infrastructure and traffic issues. Multiple interviewees expect the dual expansions of Ames toward Gilbert and Gilbert toward Ames to continue unabated, and the two communities might fully touch by the end of the next decade.

- *I don't expect a lot of change.*
- *I would expect to continue to see more businesses coming in, and with that then you've got to add cultural and outdoor activities, etc. So I expect we will see growth there. The question I have is where will it be? Is it that we focus on downtown? How do we connect downtown and Campustown? I don't know those answers. But will there be growth? Yes, I think there will be.*
- *I think the population will have continued to expand. And although the university enrollments themselves may start to level off in the next 10 years, the Research Park and these other opportunities will grow. So I will think you will see a more diversified economy that includes both more public and private sector organizations.*
- *Dealing with housing going north, and the synergy between Ames and Gilbert. Punching out over to the east side of I-35, going to Nevada to help stimulate our economy base. Research Park continuing to be enhanced and further developed to bring in more high-paying jobs. More quality of life features, again, to address the people that want to retire to Ames. We have to find things in the next several years, both for older adult housing as well as quality of life. They want to age well, and we don't have the physical facilities to help people age well in that 60-plus that want to retire to Ames.*
- *Well, I would expect that they would somehow come up with a better formula for housing concerns for its residents. And come up with a way to keep the younger families in town that they want to—that want to stay here but otherwise are not able to now for one reason or another. So I hope for—or I shouldn't even say hope, expect that that's—that they are working on that and they can see that it has been an ongoing issue right now.*
- *I would expect to see continued growth in Campustown in Ames, near the university. I expect to see continued growth along the northern part of Ames, between Ames and Gilbert, because of the school district boundaries there and the advantages.*

- *I think the community will change. I think that we'll either be so close as far as the next 10 years in building out because of the way that our land is created. I think that we're landlocked a lot of places with Iowa State. I think we'll be so close to the outlying communities, like Gilbert or Huxley, I think that you'll see a lot of connection there because there's not a lot of space between us right now, especially Gilbert.*
- *To be honest, I see 10 more years of the same, partly because I think we will remain a highly educated community. There will just be more of us. I think we'll have some intentional diversity. I think that is simply because the workforce that we need to attract here can't come from one race, and so therefore there will be an ethnic reality but it will still be an educated populace.*
- *I think with the growth of our Research Park, I think we will attract more young people. I think they will have to take responsibility though for creating the young scene, if one wants to call it that, that needs to be here because our Campus Town is where it is, our downtown is where it is.*
- *I would expect that they are going to try and do some renovation of the downtown area to make it more attractive for younger families. I think that they would also—I would expect that they will be using some of the existing buildings and trying to build loft apartments for attracting millennials.*
- *I think there will be growing pressure for the community to expand and provide more diverse housing, shopping. I think transportation systems will change. That is, there will be more multi-modal, walking, biking, kinds of things that need to accommodate. I think that there will be recognition that there doesn't have to be just one center of commercial activity. That there will be multiple centers, and that those can be encouraged and diverse.*
- *Well, the pessimistic side of me thinks that Iowa State will have to stop growing at some point, and that will be a negative for all of Ames because Ames does not have its own economic driving engine. So once the university stops growing, it'll become fairly stagnant. All of the housing will sort of stop at that point in time, and business will stop growing at that point in time. So unless Ames has some development of its own, I don't think it'll change much in the next 10 years, if the university stops growing.*
- *I think you'd see enhancements in Campus Town that would better represent the Ames community and Iowa State University. I think you'd see the Lincoln Way corridor between campus and downtown greatly enriched to where that was an inviting link between campus town and downtown. And I think you'd see the Lincoln Way corridor in downtown greatly enhanced, because currently it's unremarkable and there's plenty of room for redevelopment and new investment there as well. And so I think 10 years from now, if we could see that, we'd be far better off.*
- *I think you'll see an expanded Research Park, even beyond what it is today. I think you'll see 5,000 people working in the Research Park in 10 years. I think you'll see industrial development on the east side of town along the Lincoln Way corridor between Barilla*

and the DuPont cellulosic ethanol plant, which will provide employment opportunities to another segment of the population. And I think you'll hopefully see certainly enhancements to the Highway 30 entrance into Ames off of Interstate 35, which currently sits in a state of mediocrity with some of the infrastructure and the lack of aesthetics that are out there.

- I think there will be more developments around the edges. I think they're always building more houses and expanding and getting more land and all that. That'll probably be the biggest change. It's hard to tell if enrollment at Iowa State will even out in the next 10 years. It's been growing every year for the last few, and so that's really what has changed the housing situation. I think if it does even out, that maybe more affordable housing will be available in 10 years. So Iowa State has to stop being so profitable so that people can actually have places to live. [Laughter] I don't want to say like I wish they wouldn't keep getting higher enrollment, but it's just hard to keep up with it, I think.*
- think that there's going to be this merging between Ames and Gilbert, where it's like you're not even going to be able to tell you've left one and gone into another. I just see the two cities moving in that direction.*
- Housing is just going to continue to be an issue. I just don't see—with Iowa State getting more and more students every year, I don't think they're ever going to put a cap on the amount of students that they will have. And so if higher education becomes more available—and I really think that there's more of a push culturally on having higher education—and just the opportunities that students and families have here in central Iowa, I just think that Iowa State's going to become bigger and bigger. And I think that's going to put increasingly pressure on our housing situation. So I see that as a continued problem even 10 years from now.*

Interviewees were asked what causes or motivates people to move to Ames. "Employment opportunities" was the expected and obvious answer, so we take careful note when the obvious and expected answer is not the first response or is not mentioned at all.

Several interviewees mentioned schools—not Iowa State University, but the public school systems in and near Ames—as one of the main reasons people choose to move to Ames. Others mentioned that many people come to Ames for college and simply never leave, preferring to live in the community instead of looking for employment options anywhere else. Finally, several interviewees made mention that retirees are beginning to move back to Ames, choosing a location with strong community and culture, as well as a place where they likely made fond memories earlier in life.

- *Employment opportunity. There are more people moving to Ames, but I don't know—older folks, retiring folks.*
- *I've heard a lot that it's the pretty good schools. They have a lot of opportunities in the events component for their kids, whether it be athletics or curricular activities or, like I said, different opportunities through their school as well as proximity to other larger towns as well. And it's getting—in the last year, Ames has gotten quite a few accolades for top places to live for all sorts of various reasons. Whether it's the healthiest or career driven, it's gotten quite a few accolades, so I think that's also been something that people are aware of.*
- *I will say livability and jobs.*
- *I think the university is a critical driver of that. Because of the jobs and because of the education. I think both. The jobs and growth of enrollment are attracting people.*
- *University communities are becoming retirement hubs, and we have seen some of that already. I think we will see more of that. Part of that is driven by the access to the cultural and entertainment activities the university brings, and also to the high quality medical care that most university communities have and we certainly have in Ames. And then longer life spans obviously are contributing to that. So we need to expand the workforce, and the young millennials you're talking about are part of where we need to be addressing some of that.*
- *Job or they graduated here, they went to college here and they've come back, just because they liked it when they came to school here. ...Not necessarily retirement age. Just think it's a good place to raise a family. They come back for that, or they grew up in Iowa and so this is a—Ames is kind of the center of the state, so that makes it really handy.*
- *Almost everyone I know that has moved to Ames has come here for school or a job. ...I would say that my experience, as someone that actually does hire people in my current job, would be that we have more people that come for school and stay than come specifically because they found a job here.*

- *I think two things. One, there are a lot of job opportunities, or there were. I think we have the lowest unemployment rate maybe nationally. It's like .2 percent. So there's lots of opportunities here to attract people. And I've got to throw a pitch in here for what I do for a living. We're providing a quality education for kids. And I'm going to be a little biased and say we're providing the best education in the state of Iowa. And I think for young families that certainly is something that attracts people to Ames, and I do believe Iowa State and some of the cultural experiences also attracts people.*
- *I think most people that I know of either came here for college and then decided to stay or came here because their significant other got a job at the college or in town somewhere. Since the college is here, there's a lot of industry. Like in ISU Research Park, there's a lot of big research businesses going in. And so that's a lot of jobs that brings people in, too. So it's mostly jobs and people that just come for college and never leave.*
- *Schools, jobs and usually something related to Iowa State University.*
- *So Ames has an extremely good school system, all the way from elementary up. They've invested in nice facilities and continue to upgrade facilities. Ames School is always ranked as a top high school and receives high rankings, National Merit scholars. Kids that come out of Ames High are very much prepared for college. A lot of times they actually graduate from high school with high levels of college credit.*
- *Beyond jobs? I don't think we're—well, the university, obviously. I guess that's an obvious one. I don't think we have a lot of people saying, "Oh my gosh, I think the schools are great. Let's move to Ames." If they are—if they come to this area for a job, they might choose Ames because the schools rather than living in Boone, for example. So I think they might choose Ames because of the jobs—or the schools.*
- *I think job opportunities, for sure. I think we're continuing to grow white-collar jobs. Bringing more businesses, startups to Ames. Iowa State definitely brings people. And it's just a great town to raise a family.*
- *I think there's other people who are moving who might work in Ames, but they might live outside of Ames just because it's cheaper. The amount of housing you can get 20 minutes outside of Ames is amazing compared to what you can afford in Ames.*
- *If you're retired and you had a good experience as a student here years ago, there's a good chance you'll buy a home here or you might buy a condo here to be here part of the time because you want to be close to that great university. If you're a researcher or you're a company executive and you've got a research relationship with someone at Iowa State, there's a good chance you'll locate a business here to be closer to that institution. In large part, I think that's why farmers from Central Iowa and around the region tend to retire in Ames. They send their child or children to Iowa State. That was a good experience. Or maybe they went to Iowa State. And Ames is an inviting and invigorating place. I don't care what age you are; I think everyone wants to be around people, and young people in particular. The university certainly has plenty of those. And*

as a result of all the things that the university provides to this community, from Big 12 athletics to cultural events and the arts, this is great place to live.

- *The perceived quality of life, that it's safe, that their children might not work here and the baby boomers that are retiring want to be closer to their children and grandchildren and so they're relocating here to do that. The cultural things, again, that Iowa State University brings, the educational opportunities for even older adults.*

Interviewees were asked what causes or motivates people to leave Ames. "Employment opportunities" was the expected and obvious answer, so we take careful note when the obvious and expected answer is not the first response or is not mentioned at all.

Few interviewees did not mention job opportunities as the main reason for people leaving Ames. The combination of the expensive Ames housing market with a relatively high cost-of-living was the other major factor seen to be driving people out of the community.

One interviewee identified Ames' lack of nightlife and entertainment options as a reason for flight, while another interviewee mentioned that Ames had a shallow dating pool, though this appears to have been a hasty generalization based on a close-to-the-vest example; this aspect was never mentioned by any other interviewee during responses to this or any other question.

- *They have a better job opportunity. Other than that, I don't think they really do. Once they get here, they love Ames.*
- *Obviously job opportunities elsewhere. I think we still have problems with spousal accommodations. We have some problems with ethnic and racial diversity. Individuals who want to be in larger communities where they have a bigger opportunity.*
- *Employment opportunities. ...And the opportunity to—for housing, more affordable housing and probably smaller school districts, just wanting to be in a smaller community than Ames. You can live very close to Ames and enjoy everything that Ames has to offer without actually being a resident of Ames.*
- *Definitely career. I mean it is—if you can get one here and keep it, that's great. It's the number of positions that are available are fewer than what—the residents that are looking.*
- *I would say that a good deal of people I know that have left Ames and not chosen to stay have left because they're looking to live in a community that did have more job opportunities outside of academia.*
- *They left because they wanted to go somewhere with more nightlife, more amenities for those in their upper 20s to low 30s, relative to people in the college audience. I'd say many people leave simply because they don't want to live in a college town. They came here for some particular reason and living in a college town, they've come to see as a negative.*
- *I think a lot of it is a better opportunity, like maybe a promotion within. So maybe they started out here and they have another opportunity to go someplace, because many of the places here have connections in other areas across the United States. And leave? I don't know. I always hear the stories of, "I always thought I'd be here a couple years, and I've been here 30." Opportunity. I would say primarily opportunity. Employment opportunity?*

- *Affordable housing. But cost of living is part of that too with the affordable housing. I'm not certain about the city tax rate, how it ranks in the state, but I think it's up there pretty good.*
- *Well, I think the job market is tight, and I think there's probably people who get their education and then go somewhere else. Or maybe that they tend to maybe want to move to a bigger city like Des Moines or Minneapolis, Chicago.*
- *Trailing spouse's jobs, cost of living. I'd say the housing. They can buy a starter castle in Ankeny, and they live in a slum in Ames.*
- *Well, they lose their job or they graduate. ...But I think the other thing is, if they are currently in a position where they want to purchase a house and they can't find it, they might go to Huxley or Story City. So I think it's the housing. If they're still in Ames as far as working, but they can't live here anymore.*
- *I would say the few people that I know that have moved out moved because they got a job somewhere else. Just better jobs.*
- *Well, the student population, they're leaving because they're going to go start their career someplace, and at the same time we're trying to keep as many here to start their career. You've got the typical, that your job takes you someplace else.*
- *A shallow dating pool. I think a good example is we had a young professional woman here in town. She bought a condo and was ready to get rolling. And she put it on the market after a year or so and said, "I got to move to Des Moines. There is nobody here for me," meaning she was trying to find a husband or find someone to have a meaningful relationship with, and she said, "I'm in Des Moines all the time." She ended up taking a job down there and relocating. And she was a shining star that we really leaned on at the Chamber to say, "Hey, if this person could be here and be successful, you can be, too." But she moved. I think that's a limitation. If you're single and you're looking for a significant other, the opportunities aren't as plentiful here unless you want to drop down into the college ranks.*
- *In almost every instance that I know of it's been a job. One of the two spouses has had a different opportunity.*

Interviewees were asked if the motivators to move to or leave Ames differed for millennials and young families, as opposed to the general population.

Some interviewees felt that the motivators were similar for all age groups, while others felt the chief motivators identified as reasons people leave Ames were especially prominent for people in their late 20s and early 30s. Job opportunities and housing remained the biggest reasons cited for people leaving, but several interviewees added the lack of nightlife and entertainment options to their list of motivators for flight when asked to think specifically about millennials.

- *No. I think it's the same.*
- *Late 20s, early 30s. It's probably because they've gotten a job here. I'm not thinking necessarily—they don't yet at that age appreciate how safe and how good of a education, how good of health industry we have in Ames. I think you have to be in your late 30s to have lived other places, have kids, and then say, "Wow, I've now identified how good Ames would be for a family to live in, not an individual or a single necessarily." Again, that goes back to we need to do more—we need to put more energy for that age group downtown, Campustown and Somerset for fun things to do, the cultural stuff again.*
- *I think there's a—whenever you're talking about age groups, I think there's a family-related question. So, again, I would make the argument that I think Ames is very livable for families, but the cost of living here is higher than it is in other places. And we have a number of people who commute from Boone and Huxley and other areas because homes are just so much cheaper in those areas and they're not a terribly long drive. And that means their kids are in school in those places as well. But they're shopping and being consumers, I guess. They are part of the community here at least part of the day.*
- *I think they're very similar. The younger ones may be more of the career driven, whereas the 30 year olds may be more family-oriented.*
- *I think there is a little bit of a cost-of-living issue. But overall I would say that, for young people, it is going to be that single or couples phase when you don't have children. And in that phase, I think Ames is probably somewhat less desirable. And so we can add some additional options for nightlife, etc. But once you have a family, I think it offers a great deal and is very competitive and tough to beat at that point.*
- *I would say that many of them are similar. However, I would say that the deficit in nightlife and entertainment in Ames is a big reason why people leave in their late 20s.*
- *I think there are probably a greater percentage of those who do it. There are social opportunities. That they're looking for a greater social and cultural diversity and a larger number of opportunities. And then the other factor that plays into this is spousal accommodations. So I've seen lots of people who one spouse works in Ames, but the other spouse works in Des Moines. They live in Ankeny. That's a—well, I can't think of the word. It's a compromise. It's a commuting compromise.*

- *Well, even in your 20s and 30s, I would think it would revolve first and foremost around the employment opportunity. And then the next one for 20 or 30 year old is going to be my social activities. "Where are my friends living? Where are the people that I want to hang out with, live, etc.?"*
- *I think they're different. I think the demographic that has young kids— and maybe limited salaries or developing salaries—they're trying to buy a piece of the American Dream and get all they can, and I think a lot of those are double-income houses and families. And so they may have a spouse that works in Des Moines or Ankeny, and so other communities become kind of middle ground for transportation, but also bigger, fancier houses. I think the more established people choose Ames because it is Ames, and the finances are less of an issue.*
- *I think they're probably more likely to leave Ames in that age group, just because—a lot of it because of the housing. I mean you can afford so much more housing. And the schools are still pretty good outside of Ames. So maybe if you want your first home, it's probably not going to be in Ames. It might be in Slater, Huxley, that area.*
- *I think people are kind of wanting to get more land, maybe do things where—like grow chickens or kind of have a garden. Be able to do things that you can't really do in town. But because we're so close to town, you can move 15 minutes away and you can have chickens and a garden. You don't have to move way out into the country.*
- *I think they're different than they're 20s and 30s. Well, I don't know what your age is, but I know for me, I'm settled, so I'm not going to leave. But the 20's and 30's, they're in the position where they're growing their career, and if they've done everything they can in this area, they're probably leaving because of a job. I would not—I'm of the age now that I would not leave the community for another job. I will retire from this position.*

Interviewees were asked to identify and enumerate the three biggest strengths of Ames with regard to what it could offer young people planning to start a family or those who already have very young children. Based on the number of mentions a specific strength receives, as well as that strength's relative position in the list of three, we can approximate the ranked importance of these strengths, overall.

By far, interviewees singled out the school system in Ames as its greatest strength with regard to what it could offer young people planning to start a family or those who already have very young children.

Safety, followed by overall quality-of-life, economic and job stability, and the number of family-friendly events and activities were secondary strengths of Ames.

Tertiary strengths highlighted by interviewees included the welcoming, small-town atmosphere, the presence of Iowa State University, the parks, the availability of affordable child care, the relative diversity of the community, the presence of a quality medical center, and Ames' general drivability and commutability.

- *One is the school system. Two is parks. And three is things to do, like going to museums, doing Parks and Recreation, classes, that kind of thing. There's a lot of stuff to do with kids.*
- *Iowa State University is a big strength for young millennials to come here to be able to access all of the things that it provides. I think the Ames public school system is a very good strength for people that have young families and want their children to be educated in a high quality area. And then I think overall an aggregate quality of life in this area. Ames is a small town that offers large community services and support.*
- *So, number one, I'm going to say access to affordable and flexible childcare. And I think you can always improve that, but we found very good options here, and I think that is a huge strength. Ease of work/life balance. And, three, great school systems.*
- *Oh, great. Well, I've heard good things, like I said, about the schools. But also very challenging things, too, about the different elementary schools, too. So I mean that's kind of like where schools can be a positive and a negative. So kind of I think depends on where the family ends up and their whole experience. And then I think number two is definitely the opportunities for extracurricular activities, like great athletic soccer programs. And the ...fitness programs that are offered through the city or other venues I know have been highly praised. Number three? I mean we have quite a few parks and—way more than I even knew when I read an article back a year or so ago. So I know that has been great as well for having the opportunity to just be outdoors and promote movement and time with the family.*
- *The overall quality of life. The educational system of the community of Ames, K through 12. And it's safe.*

- *I'm going to tell you number one is quality of education that their kids are going to get in Ames. Number two is kind of a bias of mine, so it would depend, but I know a little bit that this kind of works that way, is that Ames also provides diverse cultural experiences. We're not as homogenous as most communities. In Ames we're running about 22 to 23 percent diverse, and that involves all races. And because of that, there are many that are educated, and as a result the cultural experiences and the diversity I think is very important for young kids. And three, I'm going to throw Iowa State University in there. I think, again, the community tends to revolve around ISU, and I believe that that's a great attraction also.*
- *I would say that the welcoming, small-town atmosphere of Ames is probably number one. Ames is very—I would say number two would be the economic stability that Ames has experienced is something that's very welcome for someone that's looking to start a family and a home. And I would say number three would be safety. Ames has the perception of being a very safe place. A deserved perception, but a perception nonetheless.*
- *Safe environment, a quality education and a relatively diverse community.*
- *They have a great school system, but we don't have great childcare. So it's not a place for a starting family, but it's a great place if you already have a family. So school system, number one. Number two would be the opportunities for children, not only within the school system, but for clubs and associations. There is an organization or club for almost every interest that kids would want to be in, whether it be educational, cultural or sports or recreation-related.*
- *One, I think it's a safe community. Two, I think the job opportunities that are available. And three, I would say location, because it's convenient to many places. You're not on one end of the world or on the other end of the—you're not East Coast, you're not West Coast, but you're in the middle. And I think that that's handy.*
- *Quality of life opportunities. School system. So those two, quality of life, schools. I think employment opportunities.*
- *And the third one would be the proximity to where you work, whether it's in Ames or in the general central Iowa area. It's pretty easy to get around and get to.*
- *A great medical center. So that's number one. The second one is a strong academic offering in terms of K through 12 with great interface and partnering with the university, so you're going to get a world-class education. And then third, I would say, is truly our—how would you term this—would be what we do in recreation. Our parks district is second to none. So if you are an outdoors/indoors, physically fit, want to be physically fit, creative, you're going to find a huge sense of variety to keep your children and your family entertained.*
- *Schools would be one, easy. High-tech jobs. Whether it's at Iowa State or the Research Park or whatever, there's high-level employment. And then I would just say*

environmental things; it's clean, safe for families. There's plenty of biking, low crime, stuff like that.

- *I think—important to me—I think we're a safe community. Crime, as far as that goes. I think we're a friendly community. And I think that there are opportunities to do things with your family in this community. There could be more probably, but I think that those three things are great.*
- *So I think the three biggest strengths, one is our school. I think the second is the community that really embraces that age group, as far as the things that a young family it can offer. It has great parks, it has a great library, just educational programs that it offers young families. So that's two. I think, besides the things the city offers, I think that people in Ames are just very family-friendly. Because it is mostly families, it's easy to get connected to your neighbors. It's easy to just feel a sense of community and pride that Ames has, and people get involved in their community to make it better, neighborhood associations, school boards, that kind of stuff. I think there's a lot of pride and a sense of community with that, as well. So I have schools, basically community, and family-friendly network.*

Half of the interviewees were asked to compare the strengths they listed for Ames to those of Des Moines. The other half were asked to compare to Ankeny.

Des Moines fails to match Ames with regard to safety, small-town feel, university presence, and general drivability and commutability. Ankeny fails to match Ames with regard to university presence and small-town feel.

Ames fails to match Des Moines in terms of retail options (which was not a strength of Ames listed by interviewees), housing prices and availability (not an Ames strength), and the availability of affordable child care. Ames fails to match Ankeny in terms of retail options (again, not an Ames strength). Summarily, the only aspect originally listed by interviewees as a strength of Ames that was perceived (by some) as stronger elsewhere is the availability of affordable child care.

Des Moines Fails to Match Ames:

- *And so, from my vantage point, Des Moines is much more difficult from a work/life balance and just a livability perspective in terms of getting kids to school, getting kids to daycare, and still getting to work and being present at your job. There's a huge advantage to being in Ames.*
- *I don't think the security is. I don't think the safety is as much as it is here in Ames. I wouldn't say it's unsafe. I just don't think it's as safe as Ames.*
- *We've got the college. Even though they have colleges down there, they don't really have a university like we do. I think the Research Park. They don't have as many government—we have USDA and we have DOT and we have the college. They just don't have those government jobs like we do here.*
- *Well, I think one strength would be people feel like it's more of a smaller community-based, where you have more chance to run into people you know at the stores and walking around town. So I think they like that smaller community feel, even though it is a university town.*

Ankeny Fails to Match Ames:

- *Clearly the university, with the town-gown relationship and all the amenities that come with that. And, secondly, most of our restaurants that we have in Ames are homegrown and are literally world-class. And so while we have chains here, we have an inordinate amount of local, homegrown restaurants that, if we really want to entertain someone, we can give you variety.*
- *No, the quality of life is better in Ames because of Iowa State University. And the synergy that we have between the town-gown relationship that Ankeny doesn't have,*

Iowa State University, we do. And if you're a young family, that's huge, the influence again in a positive way that little children love all the stuff that Iowa State brings to Ames each and every day that you can feel a part of because of just—all the mascots and all that stuff that Ankeny doesn't have. So, no, I think Ames is better in that regard.

- I would say that there is much less of a small town or really even established city feel in Ankeny. It's really a community that has grown very quickly just recently. I would not say that the economic stability factor is present in Ankeny. Ankeny is distant from most jobs. Almost everyone that lives in Ankeny has to drive to get to their employment. The housing market has shown a lot more volatility than Ames's housing market has. I would say the safety one is probably available in Ankeny.*

Ames Fails to Match Ankeny:

- Variety of retail.*
- There are some retail establishments that are more available in Ankeny. Ames does not have—proximity to Des Moines is greater in Ankeny than in Des Moines, and therefore accessibility to nightlife and entertainment. I would say that that is probably all that I would say that Ankeny has to offer over Ames.*
- Some of the kinds of retail services and box stores and all of that, they make decisions about where to locate based on how they analyze markets. So there are some things down there that aren't in Ames. Now, whether those will come to Ames I think depends on how this community continues to develop and evolve.*

Ames Fails to Match Des Moines:

- Probably shopping opportunities. I'm not a shopper, but probably—I mean people say they go to Jordan Creek. I personally don't see the attraction. I think the other thing is probably more restaurant choices. So shopping and restaurants?*
- I think Des Moines has much greater shopping opportunities, much greater entertainment value, and certainly it has affordable housing.*
- The advantage of Des Moines that I would see even for a young family would be the availability of childcare. The next one would be the availability of shopping. The retail, the diverse retail that's available there for a family. And I believe that they still have strong educational opportunities as well.*
- Diversity of shopping, dining, those things that are a function of size.*
- No, that's okay. A few things come to mind. Housing, their housing is cheaper down there than it is here, and more available. I mean I hear lots of stories how people have*

bought down in Ankeny because they couldn't find anything here in Ames, or it was that much cheaper. So that's frustrating.

- *Housing and shopping. I mean they have choices. Ankeny has expanded so much, and it has—I work on the south side of Ames, and I can be to Ankeny and have 10 times more choices in an additional five minutes as compared to driving through town and going up to North Grand Mall, which has limited choices. So I think that your shopping has—you're just more choices down there. Even if it's not a mall, you still have more choices.*
- *Well, I hear a lot about retail. People still wishing there were other retail opportunities in town that they still go to Des Moines for. So I think that's one thing that I hear quite a lot.*

Interviewees were asked to identify and enumerate the three biggest weaknesses of Ames with regard to what it could offer young people planning to start a family or those who already have very young children. Based on the number of mentions a specific weakness receives, as well as that weakness' relative position in the list of three, we can approximate the ranked importance of these weaknesses, overall.

The availability of affordable, family-appropriate housing and the associated costs-of-living in Ames were mentioned as weaknesses over four to five times more than any other weaknesses, as well as more than all other weaknesses combined. This underscores findings present throughout the conversations up until this point, but moreover highlights just how significant this weakness is in terms of dissuading the target audience away from Ames as a consideration.

Secondary weaknesses include a perceived lack of child care options, which was discussed as a main weakness by multiple interviewees. Additionally, the collective lack of quality shopping, dining, and nightlife options could be considered a secondary weakness.

Tertiary weaknesses include a perceived lack of family activity options (including a dearth of outdoor trails and options) and a perceived fragmented community. Also mentioned was the lack of diverse employment opportunities, those beyond the white-collar technology and agribusiness sectors, and this could be considered another tertiary weakness.

- *Housing, housing and housing.*
- *Probably the lack of quality daycare, and having diversity that is not just daycare during working—traditional working hours. We need to start to have excellent daycare also evenings and weekends. Let's see, what else? I would just says continuation of more quality of life things, trails and bike trails, those types of things that we don't have enough of yet. I don't know. Those are the two that come to mind, just what young families want. And housing that is affordable for that. Again, I'm talking affordable in that \$150-\$250,000 range. I'm being realistic here.*
- *I can't really think of three full weaknesses. I'm going to say housing is a weakness because we just don't have it. I mean I think we have good schools. I think we have good daycare. And I think they have a—they have great programs in place for a lot of children. I don't really have anything else other than the housing that's expensive.*
- *One, again, would be that ability to find a carved-out neighborhood where you can know that two out of every three houses had children or young people or they match who you were. The second one that you're looking for amenities that deeply cater—we don't have Disney World here. So if you're looking for, like in Des Moines, a science center—so while we have youth programs, it's funny how many of those are so, again, inter-related with the university as a university offering or Parks and Rec offering and not a stand-alone entity that caters to that market. I'm thinking about Chicago, when you go to the science museum or the Museum of Science and Industry. And then my third one would be shopping. There not being a variety.*

- *I think it's very clearly number one is the affordable housing. I'm going to have trouble finding three I think right off the top of my head that really make a lot of sense. I know affordable housing is very huge for young families that are coming in. Because it's not there, I think that we have a vast number of people who live outside of Ames that commute in because they can find that experience. So the three biggest weaknesses are affordable housing, affordable housing and affordable housing. I would put them as one and two for sure. And I do think that the whole nightlife and—millennials are a different kind of breed of people. And we're doing some things here with bike paths and that, but we really don't provide any kind of a nightlife that would be attractive to them. So that would be third, probably. Affordable housing, affordable housing and lack of nightlife for young families.*
- *Well, from personal experience, a really, really huge factor is daycare. It is a amazing how much I learned that the amount of people that are waiting lists, whether through daycare centers or in-home. It is absolutely nuts, the lack of daycare opportunities in town. And number two, I would definitely say housing again. And number three, maybe just the retail. Kind of that's not as available as in Des Moines.*
- *I think the single greatest weakness that I have seen in Ames is the diversity of employment. One spouse might have found a job in Ames, but for someone else having to commute to Des Moines, sometimes that can be very challenging for a second spouse. I would say that the availability of affordable homes for new families is number two. And I would say that nightlife and entertainment's number three.*
- *I think affordable housing would be one. Maybe the lack of blue-collar jobs, potentially, depending on what people—their education level is and what their professions are. That could be a drawback. And then I think maybe just a higher cost of living.*
- *Well, I think we don't have good childcare services. So that would be one. I really can't just run out and pick up stuff for my kids if they need it, shopping. I just can't run to the mall and get what they might need for school tomorrow or something. You have to really think about that, and it may or may not be in Ames. So lack of childcare options and lack of shopping options, so that's two. The other one would be we have like one dumpy movie theater. So if I want to take the kids to a movie or something on the weekend, I just don't have that type of entertainment opportunity.*
- *Affordability, diversity of shopping opportunities, diversity of employment opportunities.*
- *Cost of living, and housing. And then I think again maybe, because the community is—I wouldn't say fragmented, but certainly it doesn't have a common hub that brings everybody together—I think at times it feels like it's a smaller town than it is, where I think other communities have more of a central area where people can connect. And I think the young people sometimes struggle with that.*
- *I would say the housing would be the big one. And maybe the perception is that there isn't enough to do in the shopping and the eating out restaurants. We can count shopping and restaurants as two and three.*

- *Let's see. So I think—well, housing I think is a big thing. And then also, if you're having housing insecurity, you tend to be in apartments, and so therefore you're not surrounded by other families. And I just think that there's that problem with community then. So you don't have that neighborhood community that maybe other small families would have because they're not around in those apartments.*
- *I think things tend to be a little bit more expensive in Ames. So maybe families that don't make a lot of money may not have the same opportunities as families that do make more money. Kind of more young people that maybe aren't quite established in their career and that kind of stuff.*

Interviewees were asked to put themselves in the position of an outsider, someone who knows of Ames, but does not live there. They were then asked what they felt an outsider's perceptions of Ames were.

Opinions were somewhat divided as to whether interviewees believed outsiders had positive or negative views of Ames. Some responses indicated that perceptions were positive where the truth might be negative, and *vice versa*. Some interviewees thought Ames was perceived as more progressive than it really is, while others felt the opposite: that Ames is perceived as more conservative than it really is.

Multiple responses indicate distress that the city of Ames is not thought of apart from or outside of the context of Iowa State University—that Ames is a college town, nothing more.

Some responses indicated that Ames is considered white or homogenous, with one interviewee worried that Ames might even be perceived as slightly racist.

- *I would say that Ames does have a perception of being fairly progressive, but in my experience and the experience of others I know that have moved to Ames from outside of Iowa, it is actually a fairly conservative community.*
- *A really positive town or a university community. That it would be a great place to retire to. We hear that all the time, that again people want to come and live here. And I think those families would. We already talked about, if there was probably—because we're known for having good education, K through 12. Again, the safety. I think all people value that. And they love that we are Iowa State.*
- *I would say that we're, I think, perceived as a conservative Midwest community. In contrast, I think Iowa City is seen as a more liberal. So I think people can make a differentiation. If you want to be—if you are personally more liberal, you're probably going to go move to Iowa City, and if you're more conservative, you're probably going to want to come to Ames. Because, again, you're in that—looking for jobs or retirement.*
- *That Ames is a college town. I honestly don't know that I could say much more about the perception of Ames.*
- *I think that we don't have a lot of blacks here, and now that we have more I think sometimes people get—I think that maybe—I don't know if we're—I don't know. Sometimes I feel like we tend to segregate a little bit more because of that maybe. I would think that someone who wasn't white might feel that way, that we might be—that Ames might be a bit racist. Especially towards blacks, I would say, more than anybody.*
- *I think there might be a perception that the community as a whole is much wealthier than it is. We have our lower socioeconomic status, and many of our kids are starting to reflect that within our schools. But I think that they see us as having more money, being wealthier than we probably are.*

- *I'm not certain that they're aware of the housing shortage for younger families, especially I think they are aware of the more expensive homes, because I know a lot of people have looked here to do that. Those are the things that pop in my mind.*
- *I think most people out of Ames think highly of it. Usually if you say you're from Ames, that invokes a positive response. I don't think people outside of Ames maybe appreciate that Ames doesn't live up to its full potential like the people that live here do.*
- *So I think people outside of Ames mostly just see us as the place where Iowa State is versus actually being in the community. I know that there's more to the community than that. I think that's the biggest perception that people outside of Ames have.*
- *I think people do regard Ames as a fairly homogenous community. But the truth is that it's more diverse than people outside of the community realize.*

Time permitting, interviewees were asked to choose between disparate descriptors regarding how they think Ames is perceived by outsiders.

There was extremely high or unanimous agreement that Ames is considered young (not old), clean (not dirty), growing (not dying), intellectual (not blue collar), and expensive (not affordable).

There was slight disagreement on the perception of Ames as progressive (not conservative), and this confirms findings uncovered by the previous question and its responses. Roughly a quarter of interviewees responded that Ames is likely seen as conservative, especially when compared to nearby places like Des Moines and Ankeny.

There was high disagreement on the perception of Ames as exciting (not dull), with half of the responses indicating that Ames was probably perceived as dull by outsiders. This perception ties back to the perceived lack of entertainment, shopping, and nightlife options, as well as how readily the options of Ames can be compared to those of nearby locations, such as Des Moines and Ankeny. Additionally, a few responses indicated that, while Iowa State University is probably perceived as exciting, the city of Ames itself was likely considered dull.

Conservative, Not Progressive:

- *Conservative. Let me clarify that, though. I think if you look at the voting records of this marketplace, it's very, very progressive. But I think as a city, as a city it's very conservative, yet there's lots of progressives that try to stimulate the conversation in this community. But in general it's a fairly conservative community.*
- *Conservative. I think we didn't—we've had chances like to create the mall, and we didn't do that. Part of it is that a lot of our land is tied up with Iowa State, so you can't develop the way people think that we should, but they don't understand the whole reason why we can't do that. I think we're pretty conservative. I think we're better than we used to be. But if you look down at Ankeny and see how progressive they have been and compare us to that, we are way behind the times.*

Dull, Not Exciting:

- *Dull, I think. I would say my experience has been, those I know that live outside of Ames and commute to Ames for work, nightlife and entertainment has been a large part of why they chose to move to Des Moines typically.*
- *Dull. And let me clarify just so I make myself feel better. I really like Ames. I like the things that Iowa State offers. If I was not an Iowa Stater and I moved here from someplace else to take a job at one of our companies, I might find Ames somewhat dull. But I love Iowa State. I love the things it provides, and so I find it fairly invigorating and*

exciting. But I think, in general, this is not a place where you come to spend a weekend.

- *Dull? I think that varies by season. So if in fall and spring, when the university is in session, I think it's seen as exciting, and in the summer not so much.*
- *I think some people would say dull. We've actually had functions here, and there's just not a lot for a visitor to do. And I think that there are community things at the college, but if you don't do—if you don't like sporting events or musicals—well, we don't have concerts here very often.*
- *That's interesting, because I think most people would view Ames as exciting, but I think they associate that more with Iowa State than they do with the city. So Ames is dull, Iowa State is exciting.*
- *Maybe dull. I think just because of our proximity to Des Moines. Since it's so much bigger and has so many more things, being right next to it, we look kind of boring.*

Interviewees were asked to distill, in one or two sentences at most, the single best argument for convincing people in their late 20s and early 30s to move to the city of Ames.

Arguments heavily favored job and career opportunities available within Ames. Following that, interviewees interconnected several ideas into the overarching statement: Ames provides a high overall quality-of-life and a safe, family-friendly, vibrant, and culturally-sensitive atmosphere wherein parents can raise children and send them to good schools.

Additionally, responses touched upon the idea that Ames has a small-town feel, city-sized resources.

- *I think it's a great place to begin. I think it's a great, safe community for raising a family. And that's just the—the multitude of job opportunities.*
- *If you want to be part of trying to help transform a city, as well as work with highly educated, cutting edge technology, research and development, and you believe in being in a safe and invigorating community, Ames is a place for you.*
- *We're going to provide their children with the best public education in the state of Iowa. We're also going to provide their children with diverse cultural experiences that are going to prepare them for the future along with the things that we're doing with technology in our schools to prepare kids for the 21st century.*
- *Come live in Ames because you can get a great job and it would be a safe place to raise your family.*
- *Job opportunities and quality of life.*
- *When we recruit, we recruit around quality of life, focused on schools, clean, safe environment, and the variety of cultural events that are generally tied to Iowa State. Those are the three things we recruit on.*
- *Well, I think their chance for opportunity is great, even though it may be a little more competitive.*
- *I would say that Ames is a small community that you can really become a part of and really have an impact in.*
- *That we have good paying jobs. That it's just one of the nicest, cleanest college communities, as well as once you—if you do happen to transition into having a family, there's no place better to live potentially in the country than Ames, Iowa.*
- *Ames is an up-and-coming community that is very family-friendly, diverse, high energy with a lot of big city amenities in a reasonably small community that makes it very accessible and livable.*
- *There are high-quality job opportunities available.*

- *You [can] trust that your kids will be safe.*
- *It's a friendly, small town atmosphere, progressive community with lots to offer.*
- *So Ames is a somewhat decent-size city but has small town values, so there are opportunities here.*
- *Access. If you want to be engaged and be involved in a community, a university town like Ames provides you wonderful access to all levels of leadership opportunity.*
- *I can get it down to one word: opportunity.*

Combined Focus Group Findings

Ideal Communities:

Attendees were asked to create collages that would represent a community in which they would like to live for the next ten years of their lives. We were interested in the emotional reasons attendees chose these pictures, as well as the frequency with which pictures and themes were selected.

The attendees in both focus groups showed a high degree of thematic overlap in what they desire in their ideal communities:

- Primarily, attendees wanted a place they would be better off in five to ten years from now. They are looking for a place they can grow as people and raise families. They want to feel safe and protected, as well as know there are opportunities for them that do not require leaving the community. A place where people feel—and where they feel their families are—safe was a paramount consideration. Without the feeling of safety, the expectation could not be for people and families to grow.
- Second, attendees wanted a place where there were things to do. They wanted to be able to eat at nice restaurants, shop at nice stores, see live music and sports, go dancing or participate in other fun nightlife events. One picture and topic that received a lot of attention was that of craft beers and craft breweries; breweries and wineries were of nearly unanimous interest to the group. Related to this, attendees wanted options for outdoor activities, such as farmer's markets, bike and jogging paths, and well-kept parks, as well as accessible camping, fishing, hiking, and hunting options. Additionally, they wanted options for affordable gyms, self-improvement classes and other education, and life events (painting, pottery, etc.).
- Third, attendees wanted a sense of community. Religion was important to several attendees, as was the ability to participate in charitable causes, community events, and volunteer organizations. Sustainability practices were mentioned, as well, along with a fostering community environment. While related to the primary desire of attendees (to be better off in five and ten years), this idea of a cohesive, welcoming, and nourishing sense of community is a distinct desire. This idea encompasses the presence and acceptance of diversity.

Approximately half of those currently living in Ames stated they felt like Ames accurately reflects what they would consider their ideal community. Among the half of Ames respondents who stated that Ames does not meet their ideals, there were no concerns that Ames was not a safe community. Some felt that the opportunities for professional growth were limited, specifically by the types of jobs available in and through Iowa State University and the Research Park. Additionally, there was stated dissatisfaction with the nightlife and entertainment options available in Ames, specifically live music. There were no stated issues regarding Ames' sense of community.

Des Moines focus group participants generally did not feel that Ames satisfactorily met their ideals. Slightly, attendees did not feel that Ames was a stable place to grow, personally or with one's family, over the following decade; this was tied mainly to the expense of living in Ames, though also the narrow sectors where jobs are available. More noticeably, however, was attendees' beliefs that Ames does not offer enough or high-quality activities, nightlife, and entertainment options. Perhaps surprisingly, Des Moines focus group attendees generally did not feel that Ames offered a cohesive, welcoming, and nourishing sense of community. This was particularly true in terms of "welcoming."

Erica: [0:48:28] I think from, if you look at it with the university, it meets some of the needs in terms of diversity and culture and some of the things that the college does bring. It doesn't meet my need for a strong community identity. When I think of a city center, community identity outside of the university, I can't really think of an identity for Ames, I guess. I know it has some outdoor activity, especially in the [Inaudible] area.

Matt: [0:50:05] I think it would not meet my needs in the terms of diversity. It might be diverse during the school year, but outside of that I think that it's a homogenous culture. I think that they have disc golfing courses all over. There are definitely things to do outside. There's not a lot of outdoor festivals. I don't think it has a very pretty skyline or anything that's really recognizable at Ames. So I say it would generally not meet my collage.

Jenna: [0:52:48] ...I know this from growing up around there, that the cost of living there is not really ideal. So that's not really welcoming to me in a sense that, "Yep, I'm going to go live in this unwelcoming community and pay a fortune to live there."

Jessica: [0:53:05] ...We've decided to drive 30 and 40 minutes to work, because Ames is extremely expensive. You can't live there—again, it's because of the college, because demand is so high.

Ames focus group attendees were then asked if they had ever lived or visited a location that did meet their ideals. Nobody had, indicating that, for this group, Ames either already was their ideal community or was very close to it.

Des Moines focus group attendees were also asked if they had ever lived or visited a location that met their community ideals. Many attendees stated that they had come close once or twice, but they had never found a place that met all of their ideals. Interestingly, one attendee mentioned that Ames had once fit her ideals as a community, though this was no longer the case. The reasons for this matched closely what was said by Ames focus group attendees.

Gretchen: [0:24:49] When I was in college, I lived in Ames, and I felt like at the time, at that time in my life, it met all my needs.

Moderator: [0:24:56] Do you think it would meet your needs now?

Gretchen: [0:24:57] No. [Laughter]

Moderator: [0:24:59] What's missing?

Gretchen: [0:25:04] I think that—well, I don't know. I don't live there now, so I can't tell you exactly what is missing. But I think that what I know from what it was 10 years ago when I lived there, they are missing more of an upscale nightlife and more refined restaurants. Some of the big city amenities, I guess, that we have in Des Moines that they don't necessarily have.

Another Des Moines focus group attendee mentioned that no place in Iowa would likely meet her ideals because diversity was important to her, and Iowa, in general, lacks diversity.

Jenna: [0:26:47] It's kind of hard to describe this, but I feel like growing up in Iowa, you don't—it's not lack of culture, because there's definitely culture, but it's not very diverse. That would be what I would say is missing. Because a lot of my friends have moved out of Iowa. Their kids are interacting with more diverse children, and I feel like that's something we're lacking in Iowa. And I think that's the way the world is going. We all need to be more accepting of that, and I feel like that's missing where I live.

This was important to other Des Moines focus group attendees, as well.

Erica: [0:28:34] Yeah. I think it just makes for a more enriched community. Lots of different backgrounds and people coming together. And thinking about my children, I don't want my child to grow up in a community where he never sees anybody that's different from him, and has that exposure to a rich background of different cultures and ethnicities.

Both focus groups were asked if people in their age groups have different expectations for what they want in their communities, as well as what those differences were. Consensus in both groups was that people in their 20s and early 30s definitely did have different expectations, with older generations caring much less about aspects like diversity and mobility. The following are responses from the Ames focus group:

Stephanie: [0:33:43] I think some older people, a lot of the older people that I know, diversity is not a big deal for them. That's not how they grew up. They haven't necessarily been exposed to it. So maybe that's not as important. Or the variety of—like having a variety of different restaurants or more exotic restaurants. Like craft breweries is not—and like a place to go see rock shows and stuff isn't necessarily as important to older people as opposed to like our age group.

Jase: *[0:34:54] I kind of agree that the older generations want to kind of settle down and be more comfortable where they're at, whereas I feel like our generation is very willing to travel or try new things or be more drawn to bigger cities with more excitement. I guess that probably doesn't really apply to me so much. I really like the smaller town feel. But I think that in general the younger generations want to live somewhere that there's a lot of excitement.*

The groups also agreed that dining and entertainment options were things everyone looks for in their ideal communities, though even this aspect's importance will vary from millennial-to-millennial, depending on their family unit. One attendee from Des Moines summed this up well:

Erica: *[0:34:33] I think I'd agree so far with what's been said. For me, I think the big differentiator—and we're actually blessed that we have multiple generations of my family in this area from my nieces and nephews, who are getting into college, and my parents and my in-laws. So I see—we want a lot of the same things, but I think the big differentiator is kids and kids that need stuff to do. So for us, it's really important to have kid-centric activities.*

For my parents, it's more important for them to have activities that are going to get them out as a couple now that they're empty nesters. And kind of the same thing for my older nieces and nephews. They want nightlife, where I'm not maybe that excited about a new club coming into town. But I'd be super pumped if somebody would put like a bounce house in my neighborhood. [Laughter] So I think that activity piece is important. I think it just kind of depends on what time of day is naptime.

Attendees in both groups acknowledged that, as they begin or continue to grow their young families, what they want out of their ideal communities is likely to change and continue to change. Education, which had been touched on only briefly—and almost exclusively by parents—as an important aspect in an ideal community, came much more to the forefront of both groups' discussions. For Ames attendees exclusively, however, the increasing desires for a safe community and a sense of community became apparent:

Lucas: *[0:38:44] Well, I recently just had a kid, so that kind of puts a lot of things into perspective as well. We want to stay in a small community. Before I wanted to get out and go move somewhere else. But now that I'm having a kid, it makes me kind of think about everything a little bit more. I want that small community still, the good education that's around here, the family atmosphere that's around here. It all plays a part now more than it did before.*

Jase: *[0:41:22] I think that now that I have kids, living in a neighborhood where I feel comfortable as they get older, being able to go to the park by themselves or being able to walk to school safely is kind of a big*

deal. Before I had kids—I'm a big guy, and I'm not really worried wherever I am. No one's going to mess with me. And so that wasn't super important to me. But now that I have kids, letting them play out in the yard and not having to worry about who's going by or whatever, I think that's important.

Defining and Describing Ames as a Community – Ames Participants:

Ames focus group participants were asked to come up with a set of descriptors for Ames. These participants were overwhelmingly positive in their selections of descriptors for the city. Clean, smart, college town, international, diverse, adventurous, exciting, active, fun, outdoorsy, athletic, friendly, caring, interactive, safe, relaxing, calm, comfortable, and convenient were consensus descriptive terms used for Ames by this group. The group also described the city as "expensive," due to high housing costs and the general cost-of-living, though they also generally felt that experience of living in the community justified the price. A large number of participants coalesced on the idea of Ames as a "large small town," considering this a very positive description.

Scott: [0:54:27] I mean there's a lot of opportunity, but it's not like a huge town. Like you've got a lot of the same things—because of the college town, I think it pulls in more things without being huge. You've got the events around. Just you have to cater to a larger diversity of people.

Katy: [0:54:48] I agree. I lived out on the East Coast for about almost a year, and it was the same size as Ames, but it just didn't feel very friendly or exciting. Not much to do.

Jase: [0:55:27] I think safe goes along with that. I think small towns tend to feel safer. And Ames has a small town feel, so I feel safe.

Ames focus group participants were also asked to come up with a set of descriptors for Ankeny. These descriptors were compared and contrasted with those already defined for Ames. Participants were, again, relatively positive in their selection of descriptors. They agreed that, like Ames, Ankeny is generally clean, smart, diverse, exciting, active, fun, outdoorsy, athletic, friendly, safe, relaxing, comfortable, and convenient. They added that it was sprawling, busy, and competitive, as well as wealthier/snootier than Ames. The city was also described as a go-between or commuter town, where people choose to live, rather than work.

When asked what would make someone moving to Iowa choose to live in Ankeny instead of Ames, the answers were housing prices, blue-collar jobs, and not having to live near or surrounded by college students.

When asked what would make someone moving to Iowa choose to live in Ames instead of Ankeny, the answers were culture and diversity. These answers were couched in the idea of Ames as a large small town, and specifically mentioned the presence and impact of Iowa State University.

Defining and Describing Ames as a Community – Des Moines Participants:

The Des Moines focus group participants were also asked to come up with a set of descriptors for Ames. Des Moines focus group participants described Ames as a college town, overtaken by Iowa State University, descriptions with both positive and negative aspects. More negatively, they described it as sometimes rude, looking rundown, and overly-conservative. On a more positive note, they also described Ames as agriculturally-minded, environmentally-minded, diverse, growing, safe, friendly, commutable, connected, and heavy with opportunities. Like the Ames focus group participants, the Des Moines focus group participants described Ames as being a large small town.

- Alex: *[0:42:20] Well, they're a university, so they obviously have little fingers of people all over the world. That's a horrible way to describe it, but they have access to lots of things that other communities wouldn't, like million-dollar research machines.*
- Erica: *[0:44:37] I guess it ties back to kind of that small town atmosphere. It's a pretty tight-knit community. Even the campus feels pretty safe and open and well-lit. You don't run into a lot of areas where you feel like you need to clutch your purse or feel uncomfortable walking around.*
- Jessica: *[0:45:06] I just had a comment that I had heard from somebody in Iowa State. That a parent from out of state had come two days early and drove every single road in Ames to find the slums, the bad parts, and he said that—he's like, "It's Mayberry. It's so safe." He's like, "I'm totally fine with my kid coming."*

Des Moines focus group participants were also asked to come up with a set of descriptors for Des Moines. These descriptors were compared and contrasted with those already defined for Ames. As they did for Ames, Des Moines focus group attendees described Des Moines as young, agriculturally-minded, environmentally-minded, diverse, growing, safe, friendly, commutable, connected, and heavy with opportunities. As with Ames, they felt that Des Moines was perhaps too conservative, though decidedly less so than Ames, and with much stronger progressive pockets than Ames. In stark contrast to Ames, they felt Des Moines was affordable, not expensive. Additionally, they found Des Moines to be entertaining, innovative, new, and fresh—none of which were said of Ames. They did not, however, feel that Des Moines matched the large small town vibe of Ames, labeling Des Moines as decidedly "city-like."

When asked what would make someone moving to Iowa choose to live in Des Moines instead of Ames, there were two large reasons: (1) generally, there are more jobs available in Des Moines, as well as more blue-collar jobs, specifically, and (2) there are more options for almost everything you can think of, from schools to shopping to restaurants, but especially with regard to nightlife.

- Alex: *[1:25:48] You just have more options for literally everything.*

When asked what would make someone moving to Iowa choose to live in Ames instead of Des Moines, the answers were to study at (or live near) Iowa State University and the safe, small-town feeling that Ames provides.

Jessica: [1:26:23] I was going to say, being an outsider, someone may feel that Ames—all the [Des Moines] suburbs can have some type of stigma because of a bigger metropolitan area city, so maybe they don't know it's very relatively safe. Ames, you get that smaller town feel and you're more removed so you feel like, "Oh, I'm safer." Less is happening. Some people like that.

Greatest Strengths and Weaknesses of Ames:

Both focus groups were given the task of defining the three greatest strengths of Ames with regard to what the city could offer young people planning to start a family or who already have very young children. The Ames focus group was then asked to do the same for Ankeny; the Des Moines focus group was similarly asked to do the same for Des Moines.

The Ames focus group identified Ames' greatest strengths to be its educational system (including Iowa State University's presence and impact), diversity, safety, strong economy, parks and recreational offerings, family-based entertainment options, values, and sense of community. Taking away strengths that attendees felt were similarly offered in Ankeny, Ames' strongest arguing points were: its educational system (including Iowa State University's presence and impact), strong economy, parks and recreational offerings, values, and sense of community.

Leslie: [1:38:16] Well, I said before I didn't think Ankeny is very diverse. And I know a couple people who live there, and they say that don't have as many parks as Ames does.

Scott: [1:38:56] Like she said earlier, you drive through Ankeny and there's not really a main street district. It's a lot of big chains and all that. Whereas you drive through Ames, and it's a lot of local family-owned businesses.

The Des Moines focus group identified Ames' greatest strengths to be its small-town feeling, job opportunities, educational system (including Iowa State University's presence and impact), parks and recreational offerings, access to child care/babysitters, and high-quality water. Taking away strengths that attendees felt were similarly offered in Des Moines, Ames' strongest arguing points were: high-quality water, and—to a marginal extent—Ames' small-town feeling and educational system.

Both focus groups were also given the task of defining the three greatest weaknesses of Ames with regard to what the city offers young people planning to start a family or who already have very young children. The Ames focus group was then asked to do the same for Ankeny; the Des Moines focus group was similarly asked to do the same for Des Moines.

The Des Moines focus group attendees identified the following weaknesses as present in Ames but not Des Moines: high housing costs, limited K-12 options, lack of family entertainment options, lack of affordable day care, general lack of available day care, general lack of culture, and no definable community identity apart from Iowa State University.

The Ames focus group attendees identified the following weaknesses as present in Ames but not Ankeny: high housing costs, lack of blue-collar (or non-Research Park) jobs, a community resistance to change, and the presence of a large college-aged populace.

Greatest Arguments for Moving to Ames:

For the final question of the focus groups, attendees were asked to distill the single best argument they would make when trying to convince someone in their late 20s or early 30s to move to Ames. Attendees of the Ames focus group focused their arguments heavily around the theme that Ames is a medium-to-large community with a small-town vibe, underlying the vast amount of resources and opportunities the city provides, while simultaneously fostering a safe, welcoming, and nourishing environment.

- Dana: [1:48:35] I would tell people to live in Ames because you have the safety of a small town with the options and excitement of a big city. Also, your kids will have the best free education in the state and you'll become a part of the Cyclone family.*
- Katy: [1:49:07] Mine was pretty much the same thing, that there's a lot of entertainment and variety, but you're close to other things. If Ames doesn't have it, you can go and get it. And that small big town feel where you feel safe.*
- Jase: [1:49:33] This is going to sound really unique and interesting. I said that you have the community and safety of a small town with the opportunities for growth of a large city. [Laughter]*

Attendees of the Des Moines focus group also focused their arguments heavily around the theme that Ames is a medium-to-large community with a small-town vibe, underlying the vast amount of resources and opportunities the city provides, while simultaneously fostering a safe, welcoming, and nourishing environment.

- Charles: [1:44:07] Maybe just that since it's kind of a smaller town, but it has more opportunities thanks to the university that you wouldn't find in a town that size. So if you want to be in a smaller town, you can do that and also get some more cultural opportunities and events.*
- Erica: [1:44:29] I think that's just it. You get the benefits of a small town community, but you're still getting Big 12 sporting events, major*

recording artists coming onto campus. Just some of those huge things that wouldn't come in normally to a town that has 30-50,000 people. I don't know how many people are in Ames. That's my pitch.