

Staff Report

TENNIS FACILITY

January 23, 2017

Chuck Winkleblack, representing Ames Tennis Friends LLC, has requested the City Council review the circumstances related to siting of an indoor tennis facility within the Iowa State Research Park along Collaboration Way. The letter, Attachment A, was referred by the City Council on December 12th for staff to review the proposed concept and for City Council to discuss as an item on future agenda.

The proposed location is within a unique Research Park Innovation District (RI) zoning district that allows for industrial uses and limited commercial uses to meet employment needs in the Research Park within the Hub Activity Area. Additionally, the area is within an Urban Renewal Area with Tax Increment Financing (TIF) for the construction of the public infrastructure in support the expansion of the ISU Research Park. The City Council approved the Urban Renewal Area in November 2014. The rezoning of the area was approved in September 2015 with approximately 83 acres as employment/industrial land and 26 acres as “Hub Activity Area” for either employment/industrial uses or commercial uses serving the needs of employees of ISU Research Park companies.

Representatives of the Ames Tennis Friends LLC attended a staff Development Review Committee (DRC) meeting on December 15th to review a concept for use of approximately 2.0 to 2.5 acres of land for indoor and outdoor tennis courts within the Hub Activity Area of the RI zoning district. The site would be set back some distance from Collaboration Way with a landscape buffer. Staff reviewed the concept and provided preliminary comments on the proposed plan for conformity to zoning, utility, stormwater, and fire codes. If found to conform to the zoning standards, approval of the project would require a Plat of Survey to adjust property lines to incorporate the use with the Ames Fitness Club property and a Minor Site Development Plan approval and building permits.

Planning staff highlighted concerns at the DRC meeting with zoning conformance for the proposed tennis facility. **The primary set of issues relate to conformance to zoning standards for the Hub Activity Area. The RI zoning district (Section 29.903) includes a minimum two-story building height requirement and design guidelines for architecture. The proposed indoor facility would not meet the two-story height requirement in that there is no second floor area within the tennis building and that the design of the building with the use of fabric/synthetic “bubble” covering**

would not meet architectural guidelines for architectural interest, high levels of glazing, or building massing. Additionally, staff did not find the proposed use was consistent with the intended commercial uses for the Hub Activity Area and its potential displacement of development area that was desirable for more intense uses. Staff does not believe such a recreational amenity is directly related to meeting the needs of the Research Park, but is more of a general community-wide attraction.

STAFF COMMENTS:

Staff doesn't believe the proposed use materially improves the attractiveness of the Research Park for locating new companies and does potentially has drawbacks on reaching our goals for intensification and expansion of industrial uses within the Research Park. Although the Hub Area does allow for certain service, retail, and recreational uses to support the overall Research Park, the proposed facility does not appear to be consistent with the commercial intent for the area or efficient use of land. Staff also does not believe that the potential displacement of two or more acres of developable area for a recreational amenity is consistent with our TIF infrastructure investment goals as well.

If the City Council is in agreement with Staff's current assessment of the policies for development in RI and its zoning standards, then no action is needed in regards to the referral request. The Ames Tennis Friends LLC would then need to identify an alternative location for their use in a commercial zoning district rather than an industrial area.

In the event the City Council believes the tennis facility is an accessory use consistent with the recreational trade uses intended for the Hub Activity Area and has an interest in allowing for the proposed facility to proceed, then Council may want to consider options for alternative locations and zoning standards in relation to the request.

Option #1- Location

Staff has a concern about the usability of the lot along Collaboration Way with the construction of a tennis facility prior to development of a site plan for other permitted uses. The tennis facility could be tucked behind other principal buildings without significantly impacting development areas, but without first knowing the layout and design of desired principal uses along Collaboration Way staff believes constructing the tennis facility could detract from reaching the primary goals for development in the Hub Area.

If City Council is interested in facilitating the facility in conjunction with Ames Fitness Club as an accessory use, it may be more appropriate to consider alternative locations that are further away from Collaboration Way. This would likely mean considering areas to south of the existing Ames Fitness Club. South of the Club is another industrial lot that is situated in a less sensitive location than Collaboration Way and could potentially be a more suitable location.

As with the Collaboration Way location, the Research Park would need to consider the impact on the ability to develop the land to the south before proceeding with a boundary line adjustment to modify property lines for adding a tennis facility.

Option #2- Modify Design Standards

The current zoning standards apply to all buildings within the RI zoning district. Staff believes the current standards are appropriate for the desired principal uses within the Hub Activity Area and for the Research Park overall and do not need to be changed in general. If the indoor tennis use was to be allowed as accessory it could be held to conform to the requirements of the zoning with no changes to the standards, but this would be a substantially different design than intended by the Ames Tennis Friends LLC. Some or all of the design standards for number of stories and architectural features would need to be modified to allow for the proposed indoor facility with a bubble enclosure.

The most suitable option for a change would be to create an exception for ancillary buildings related to a principal use. Such an exception would likely apply to other accessory types of structures that do not include a principal use, such as storage buildings or garage buildings. This approach would still require that a principal building exist on the site and that the principal building would meet the design requirements of the zoning before an accessory building could be constructed. Staff has some reservations about creating general exceptions and would need to consider how a broad exception could impact other buildings that may be developed on other sites in the RI zoning district. **City Council would need to initiate a zoning text amendment for staff to consider revisions to the RI zoning standards and design guidelines to allow for the indoor tennis facility as proposed with a bubble enclosure design. This assignment will need prioritization within the Planning and Housing Department's program of work.**

Attachment A

Date: December 8, 2017
To: Honorable Mayor and Council
From: Chuck Winkleblack, Ames Tennis Friends, LLC
RE: Indoor Tennis facility at the research park

The Ames Tennis Friends, LLC was established to help facilitate indoor tennis in Ames. As of this fall Ames has only 2 indoor tennis courts for public use. For the past several months this group has been working with the Ames Fitness Center to add 4 indoor courts and 2 outside clay courts adjacent to the new Ames Fitness Center in the research park.

This project will be a joint venture between the Ames Tennis Friends and the Ames Fitness Center. Our request is NOT for financial support for the project rather we need to enlarge the lot that the fitness center is currently on. In talking with the city planning director he did not feel it was an appropriate use of the commercial land. Our group has worked with the research park board of directors on approving our preliminary site plan and we believe that we have their support for the project. The proposed facility would set on approximately 2 acres of the 4.5 acres of the property located at 1726 Collaboration Place. The facility would set back away from Collaboration Place and have a substantial landscaping buffer.

My request is for you to refer this matter to staff to work through the outstanding issues with our group and bring it back to council as an action item.

Our group believes this is the most realistic opportunity to have an indoor tennis facility in Ames as well as adding a great amenity to the research park.

Thanks in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Chuck Winkleblack, Ames Tennis Friends, LLC