

To: Mayor and City Council
From: Brian Phillips, Assistant City Manager
Date: March 27, 2018
Subject: Campus and Community Commission Report – Campustown Plaza

On September 12, 2017, the City Council directed the newly formed Campus and Community Commission (CCC) to initially work to investigate a prospective Campustown plaza or gathering space. Based on the Council's direction, the Commission has prepared the attached report and will be available at the March 27 Council meeting to discuss it. The Council is now being asked to consider the next steps:

1. Campustown Plaza Report

After reviewing and discussing the report, the Council must decide whether to accept the report or if this issue requires further study by the Commission. **If the Council feels further study is necessary, it should identify what questions the Commission should work to answer.**

2. Direction to City Staff

If the City Council accepts the Campustown Plaza report, it must decide what next steps to take regarding this concept. Does the Council wish to pursue this gathering space concept further? If so, City staff would return to the Council with next steps, which may include retaining a consultant to gather additional feedback and refine the concept for this area.

3. Provide Direction for CCC to Work on Next Issue

If the Council believes no further work is needed by the CCC regarding the Campustown Plaza topic, the next step for the City Council would be to identify the next issue for the Commission to pursue. At the September 12 City Council meeting, the Commission brought forth the following issues for the City Council to consider:

1. Parking in Campustown
- ~~2. Public Gathering Space in Campustown~~
3. Inclusive Community Principles:
 - a. Education of tenants/landlords
 - b. Welcoming/inclusiveness of Campustown/Downtown
 - c. Rent Smart Ames utilization
 - d. Retention of recent graduates
 - e. Connectibility between areas of Ames

The Commission Members may have additional thoughts they wish to share regarding the next steps during the meeting on March 27. The Council may choose to direct the Commission to begin addressing one the issues listed above, or may identify an alternative topic for the Commission to pursue. **In either case, it is important for the Council to provide clear direction regarding what should be provided in response to the Council's request (e.g., what questions to answer, whether there are specific groups the Council believes must be consulted, timeframe expectations).**

**Campus and Community Commission
Report to Ames City Council: Campustown Plaza
March 27, 2018**

Direction from City Council:

At the September 12, 2017, City Council meeting, the City Council met with the Campus and Community Commission to discuss potential projects for the Commission to address. The Council directed that the Commission should initially work to investigate a prospective Campustown plaza or gathering space. The City Council specifically mentioned the following components for the Commission to address:

1. Prepare a list of things that the City Council could consider accomplishing in a Campustown Plaza
2. Come back to the Council with the interests of various parties. Include discussion of how people, traffic, building services would get through the area
3. What is the dream for the space?
4. What are the critical features, particularly from students, to make this space useful (e.g., gathering space for music events)?
5. If this space was a gift to students, what should it have so they like the gift?

Recommendation:

After a number of meetings to discuss and gather input, the membership of the Campus and Community Commission recommends:

1. Securing a consultant to develop a program plan to create a gathering space at 204 Welch Avenue located on the southeast corner of Lincoln Way and Chamberlain Street (City Parking Lot Y and Campustown Court). This would expand east of the existing Cyclone Plaza and reallocate the parking area to the north of the former T-Galaxy Building.
2. It is also recommended, since this location is relatively small (55'x190', including the Cyclone Plaza), that the acquisition of the former T-Galaxy Building and lot receive consideration.
3. Two primary stakeholder groups were identified that should receive additional opportunity to inform the consultant:
 - a. Iowa State University students
 - b. Campustown business owners

Rationale:

The Commission investigated a variety of potential locations for a Campustown gathering space and has proposed locating it in the area at the corner of Welch Avenue and Chamberlain Street for the following reasons:

1. Most central to Campustown activities
2. Visibility issues are minimal, which improves safety of users of the space
3. Minimal impacts on adjacent properties by users
4. Lower cost for making improvements to the space (few infrastructure complications)
5. Larger, one-off and well-managed events have been held on and adjacent to this location with success
6. Loss of parking spaces is recognized, but the value added by this gathering space and adjacency of the under-utilized short-term parking at the Intermodal facility compensates for the loss of spaces

Space Utilization:

Through stakeholder discussions, the Commission has identified that the following are key characteristics of a gathering space to be considered:

1. General Activity/Flexible use space
2. Food Truck/Vendor space
3. Incorporate art, that as possible includes existing mural on T-Galaxy building (only if building retained)
4. Good lighting
5. Refuse/Trash solutions
6. Restrooms, if space allows. Noticeable signage to Intermodal Facility public restrooms may suffice
7. Greenscape components that soften the experience (e.g., hardy plantings, trees.
8. Suggest having a pick-up and drop off location on or adjacent to this space (to accommodate taxi, Lyft or Uber)

The Commission also received feedback regarding attributes that would be incompatible or less desired in a gathering space. These include:

1. 24-Hour operation. Close at certain times to reduce post-bar closing loitering.
2. Targeted activities for young children
3. Garden or high maintenance green space
4. Large night events
5. Limited amplified music events
6. Kegs/uncontrolled alcohol consumption

Process to Reach Recommendation:

All City-owned properties in the Campustown boundaries were evaluated for feasibility. The Commission also consulted with members of City staff to identify opportunities and challenges with potential sites. Alternatives evaluated and comments regarding each are indicated below:

1. 115 Welch Avenue (City Parking Lot X) (located west of the storefronts along the 100 block of Welch Avenue)
 - a. Significant utility infrastructure exists in the space, making modifications expensive
 - b. Access and egress for business purposes (currently and into the future) conflict with pedestrian usage in this area
 - c. Poor lines of sight and visibility for safety and security
 - d. Noise concerns for adjacent properties

2. 134 Welch Avenue (Fire Station #2)
 - a. Will be operated as a fire station for the foreseeable future

3. 2320 Chamberlain Street (City Parking Lot Z)
 - a. Located east of Campustown core
 - b. Lot tucked between 3 buildings
 - c. Only open on street side
 - d. Limited lines of sight creates safety issues
 - e. Noise concerns for adjacent properties

4. 204 Welch Avenue (City Parking Lot Y) – Recommended site. See above.

Supporting Materials:

Focus Group Meeting Minutes Excerpt (January 22, 2018):

Campustown Plaza Focus Group:

The Commissioners, staff members, and invitees introduced themselves. Invitees in attendance included: Chad Watkins, Sarah Huffman, Marsha Miller, Tim Hoekstra, Katie Holmes, George Micalone, Anthony LoCerto, Marilyn McNamara, and Bridget Williams.

Tom provided some background information regarding the concept of the Campustown Plaza. He outlined the process the group would use to discuss the potential ideas for the use of the space. In addition to what the group thought the space should be, the group would be asked in a second round of idea-generation what they think the space should not be.

The group's suggestions for what the space should be were:

- Event pre-space to see what works and what people suggest for the space
- Public hammocks
- Flexible space
- Space to serve for communication between City and students
- Shade
- Something that can't be destroyed
- Tables/game tables
- Art space/music space
- Reservable space
- Information center
- Campustown map
- Ice rink
- Dog poop bags
- Rain barrels
- Study space
- Community garden
- Workshop gatherings
- Benches, flowers, and trees
- Bike tire fill-ups
- Skateboard rink
- Art
- Music stage with a shell
- Moveable planters
- Restroom facilities
- Food area
- Adjustable lighting
- Make the space bigger (acquire T-Galaxy Building)
- Lighting to safety and aesthetics
- Green space for Campustown events
- Green space for everyday use (studying, sitting, etc)
- Electricity
- Public restrooms
- Food carts

- Public restrooms
- Information center
- Lighting
- Security
- Parking
- Art area
- Small market
- Reservable shelter/pavilion
- Stage and electricity
- Food vendor area with seating
- Public garden (not a shared community garden)
- Benches
- Public park with benches/picnic tables
- Interactive art space
- Food truck or food cart space
- Community garden space or green space
- Amphitheater with permanent seating
- Table seating
- Small shelter
- Public art display
- Designated food truck space
- Parking
- Maker space
- Police outreach center
- Food trucks
- Seasonal space (ice arena in winter, beach in summer)
- Parking

These ideas were grouped into similar themes. These themes were:

1. Utility Infrastructure
2. Information
3. Amenities
4. Music
5. Art Area
6. Study Space
7. Environmental Design/Green Space
8. Mobile Vendor Area
9. Reservable

The attendees then voted for the ideas and themes they supported.

Tom led the group through an idea generation session regarding what the group thought should not be involved in the potential space.

The group's suggestions for what the space should **not** be were:

- Foam or paint parties
- Kids' sandbox
- Water feature
- Open all hours

- Kegs
- Inadequate trash receptacles
- Garden
- Poor stormwater system/plan
- Large night events
- Kid stuff
- Paved space
- Copycat space
- Parking
- Fencing
- Space intended for small children
- Things that can be easily destroyed/stolen
- Music-making things
- Things that need people to coordinate (e.g., stage)
- Parking
- Apartments
- VEISHEA 2014
- Poor lighting
- Small kids
- Events that cause traffic clogging
- Loud music at night
- Taking down the mural

Tom asked for further discussion regarding these ideas for things the space should not be. There was clarification that the comments regarding children were meant that there should not be playground equipment. It was noted that the existing space could generate negative loitering and gathering, which was a concern of some regarding a re-developed space.

The attendees then voted for the ideas and themes they felt should not be part of the project.