

Staff Report

I-35 ENTRYWAY SIGNAGE PROJECT

July 31, 2018

BACKGROUND:

During the preparation of the FY 2018/19 City Budget, the City received a request from The Ames Foundation to support the construction of entryway signage along the northbound I-35 corridor into Ames. The City Council allocated the \$20,000 requested to support the \$40,000 total sign project.

Since budgeting the requested funds, staff has met with the requestor to discuss project details and prepare an agreement authorizing the funds to be spent. Several steps need to take place now that a funding agreement has been prepared. City staff also requires direction from the City Council whether several of the proposed elements of the project are acceptable. Issues to be considered by the Council are outlined below:

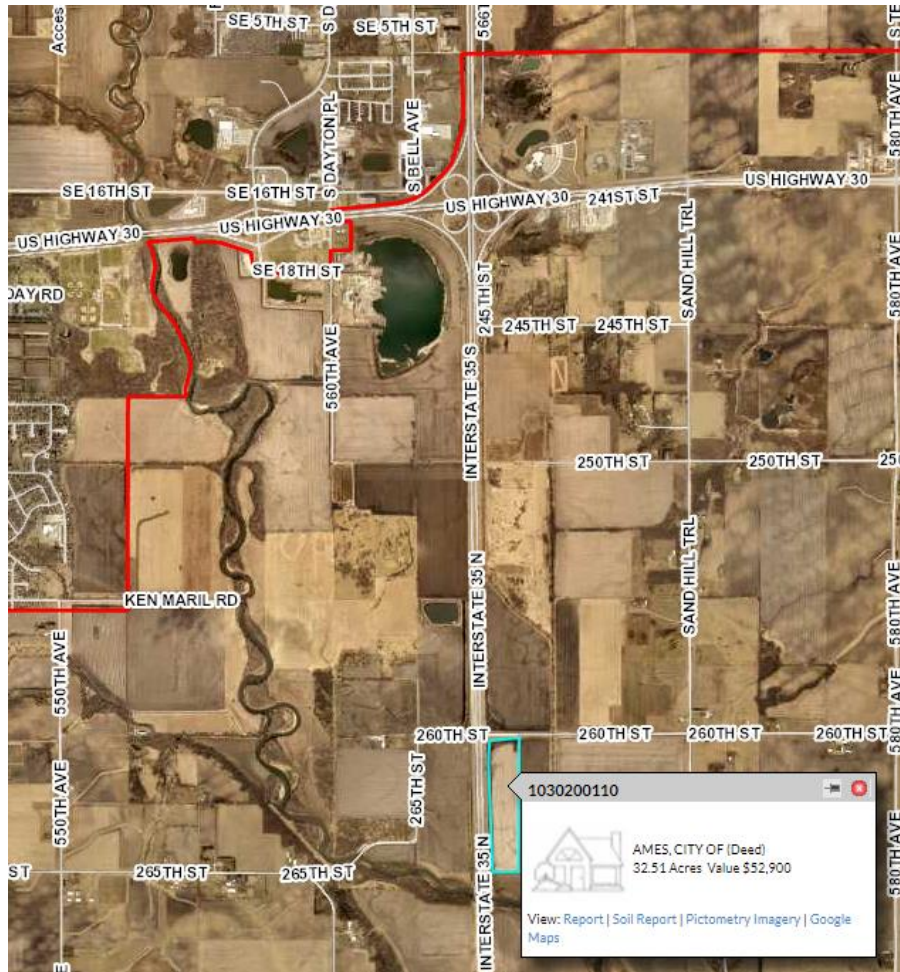
ISSUE 1 #: AGREEMENT WITH AMES FOUNDATION:

An agreement outlining the use of the \$20,000 budgeted by the City Council has been prepared and signed by The Ames Foundation. This agreement requires that The Ames Foundation will obtain approval from the City regarding the final design of the sign. The scope outlined in the agreement indicates the funds may be used to purchase materials, supplies and services to design and construct the sign and its adjacent landscaping. The City Council may choose from the following options:

1. Approve the proposed funding agreement with the Ames Foundation in the amount of \$20,000.
2. Direct staff to modify the proposed agreement.
3. Do not approve the proposed agreement.

ISSUE #2: PROPOSED LOCATION:

The requestor has identified that the project would ideally be located on the east side of I-35 just south of 260th Street. This is approximately two miles south of the U.S. 30/I-35 interchange. The sign would be visible on the right as motorists travel north towards Ames. This property is owned by the City of Ames, and serves as farmland where biosolids from the City's Water Pollution Control Facility are spread through a contract with a local farmer.



The area where the sign would be located would require fill and grading, which would remove some WPC farm land from agricultural production. Staff from the Water and Pollution Control Department indicates that the area to be taken out of production would need to be identified prior to the farmer purchasing seed for the next growing season. Additionally, the City's 161 kV electric transmission line runs through this area. A joint access easement for the City of Ames and the Iowa DOT extends from the interstate to approximately 25 feet east of the 161 kV electrical line. The sign would need to be situated so as to not conflict with the easement.



View of I-35 from 260th Street, looking south

Staff would like City Council’s direction as to whether the proposed location is acceptable to the City Council.

ISSUE #3: WHO MAINTAINS THE SIGNS?

It should be noted that there is no desire on the part of the Ames Foundation to have an ongoing responsibility for the structure or associated elements. Therefore, the Council must consider whether the City should be responsible for the maintenance, repair, or reconstruction of the sign into the future.

It should be noted the “AMES” signs installed last year along the U.S. 30 corridor as part of a Leadership Ames project were located on private property. Other than providing a portion of the construction funds, the City had no involvement in the construction or maintenance of those signs.

ISSUE #4: DESIGN CONCEPT:

When originally proposed to the City Council, the concept for this sign off I-35 was to be a larger version of the “AMES” signs located recently constructed along U.S. 30 at the entrances to the community (pictured below).



After funds were budgeted for this project, the requestor discovered an existing design concept (See below) for a gateway sign that they would prefer to be used instead of constructing a larger version of the U.S. 30 signs. This design incorporates a reference to Iowa State University and includes elements similar in style to ISU entryway signs along University Boulevard. The Ames Foundation has reported to staff that this design concept has received approval from Iowa State University.



This design concept incorporates brick and other architectural features that differ from the original plan. These elements add cost and complexity to the project, although the City is not currently being asked for additional funding to support the project. **Staff requests that the City Council provide guidance regarding whether this new design concept is acceptable. Additionally, several specific questions regarding landscaping and lighting are below:**

Landscaping

The Ames Foundation has not presented staff with a specific proposal regarding the landscaping. **Because the sign would be located on City property outside the community (and therefore would be more difficult to access), the City Council should consider whether it is the expectation that the City would be responsible for landscaping maintenance.**

If City staff would be responsible for landscaping maintenance, it is staff's recommendation that any landscaping require minimal maintenance. If plants are desired, perennials should be used, and varieties planted should only require maintenance once per year or less. Ornamental grasses and rock, which require little to no maintenance, are preferable to turf that requires mowing.

Lighting

The Ames Foundation has reported to staff that there is a desire to light the sign so it is visible at night. The sign location is outside the Ames Electric Services territory and is served by Consumer's Energy, a rural electric cooperative. Staff has evaluated options for providing electricity to the sign. One option is to connect lighting to the electrical grid. **In this option, the Council must consider whether the City is willing to take on the ongoing cost for electricity, which could potentially be \$10-\$25 per month. Additional costs would exist for lamp and equipment maintenance and replacement.**

There is electrical infrastructure near the proposed sign location which staff believes could connect to a lighting system for the sign. Staff estimates the cost for this is approximately \$5,000, although it is not known whether the electricity provider would pay for some of the infrastructure costs.

Alternatively, lighting could be provided from a small standalone solar system. This would not require a lengthy service drop or monthly energy costs. Electrical Services staff estimates a system with enough energy to power lights for the sign could cost approximately \$1,000 to \$2,000. Such a system may require long-term maintenance and replacement. The City Council should consider if the intent is that the City will bear that cost. **Should the Council agree to light the sign, staff would prefer that the sign be lit by solar.**

Staff desires direction from the City Council regarding whether the Council is willing to assume the cost for ongoing lighting and maintenance costs, or if an indication should be provided that lighting should not be provided.

NEXT STEPS:

Once Council direction is provided regarding the issues indicated above (approval of the funding agreement, authorization to use City property, approval of the design concept, and expectations for ongoing maintenance, landscaping, and lighting), staff will work with the requestor to ensure the proposed project meets the Council's expectations. Follow-up reports will be provided as additional details regarding the proposal are developed.