

March 4, 2019

To the Members of the Ames City Council, City Manager, and Mayor of Ames,

I am the owner of Pheasant Run Apartments and originally built the apartments on South 16th Street nearly forty years ago. Late last year I was contacted by Ryan Gurwell of A & R Land Services, and was informed that he represented the city in the Grand Avenue extension project, and that the city would be putting in sidewalks all along the south side of South 16th Street from Copper Beach to Duff Avenue. At the time I raised my own objections to this project with him.

Since that time I have talked with Mayor John Haila, John Joiner, and Hafiz Ibrahim about the project and expressed my concerns with each of them. I have ultimately been referred to the city council. That is my reason for writing to you on this issue.

One of my concerns is the difficulty of shoveling snow and maintaining another 200 feet of sidewalk in front of Pheasant Run, and also accepting legal liability for the sidewalks. Another concern is that another sidewalk along South 16th Street seems unnecessary. I am out at Pheasant Run nearly every day and have noticed that hardly anyone uses the large path directly across the street (on the north side). I have seldom seen more than one or two people use the pathway at any time and most of the time no one is using it. Years ago the DOT used to hire people to count cars at various places to determine use and to project future needs. If the city ever stationed anyone on South 16th Street, you would be able to confirm that very few people use the existing pathway on the north side. Even fewer would use a new sidewalk on the south side of the road. If someone wants to use a sidewalk on South 16th Street, they can simply walk across the street.

I have been told that it is city policy to install new sidewalks when a new project is involved, but implementing a policy for the sake of the policy without any regard to how it affects existing landowners is misguided. We have all heard of the proverbial bridge to nowhere. This is what this project reminds me of. I spoke with one city employee and expressed my concerns that no one would use the new sidewalk, and they replied that it didn't really matter if anyone used it, because the city wanted a sidewalk there. In practical consideration, can you imagine a student at Copper Beach saying, "Let's walk over to WalMart and get some stuff." People don't walk to South 16th Street to do business. Have any of you ever walked out to Dublin Bay to eat?

Currently the area near the entrance to 612 South 16th Street has a snow pile between 6 and 8 feet deep. Can you visualize clearing a path for a sidewalk through snow that deep? The city plows currently throw snow all along the area on which the proposed sidewalk would be located. I have been told that this would not happen if a sidewalk was there, but where would the snow disappear to? I also have property on Knapp Street and the snow plow sometimes covers the sidewalk with snow as deep as one foot after I have shoveled it, so I know that things like this happen.

I understand that the city has a policy that exempts sidewalks from being put in when an industrial area is involved. The area along South 16th Street is about as close to an industrial area in Ames as you can get. All of the property owners on the south side of the road operate businesses or lease their buildings to businesses. All have parking lots to accommodate their clients. I am almost certain that few, if any, get walk in business.

There is precedent for sidewalks not being constructed in various parts of Ames. Ross Road has no sidewalks. Bloomington Road has a pathway on one side of the road and no sidewalks on the other side. The newly completed construction project on Dawes has a pathway on one side of the road and no sidewalks on the other side. My point is that exceptions have been made before, and there is no reason that they could not be made again for the property owners on South 16th Street. Why would the city want to spend many thousands of dollars on something, which is not going to be used?

I was also told that the city needed to plan for future development and this was a reason for the sidewalks. There is very little land left to develop along South 16th Street. That which is still left is commercial property on the north side of the road which does not affect the south side of the street.

All residents are concerned about snow removal. The city of Ames has had issues with snow removal this winter, particularly after the February 24th storm. The affect this has on Pheasant Run is to nearly double the amount of sidewalk space to be cleared. We are the business most affected by this proposed project. It may not look like a difficult thing on paper, but it is. What if the city of Ames had to plow double the number of roads it does now? Would that be a simple task? We all know it would not be simple.

I am not a lone voice in my concerns with this project. Another business owner has expressed their concerns to me as well. Both of us are troubled about the seeming lack of necessity of the sidewalk project and the undue hardships it will place on property owners. We are also concerned about the way this matter has been handled by Ryan Gurwell. For one, he has threatened legal action against me. From my perspective, he has acted in a totally unprofessional manner and is not a credit to the city of Ames.



Bill Nichols
Pheasant Run Apartments