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TO: Ames City Council and Mayor

FROM: Kelly Diekmann, Planning and Housing Director

DATE: December 10, 2019

SUBJECT: Request for a Zoning Text Amendment to remove a CSC Zoning District Mid-Block 20-foot setback standard.

City Council referred to staff at its November 19th meeting a request for a Zoning Text Amendment from Nathaniel Shea, with Tanek, Inc to remove the language regarding the need for a mid-block 20-foot break for each block face in Campustown. (Zoning Section 29.809(3)). Campustown Service Center (CSC) development standards state that *“In order to provide access for vehicles and/or utilities to the interior of the block, there shall be a twenty foot wide opening between buildings, at the approximate mid-point of each face of each block...”*. Mr. Shea represents a group interested in acquiring the site at 2516 Lincoln Way in Campustown that is at a mid-block location.

This standard has been interpreted by staff as applying to situations where it is necessary to provide for utilities or access as described in the standard. **It has not commonly come into play with recent redevelopment projects that had alternative means of meeting the requirements for access or utilities.** Hence, the lack of midblock breaks with 122 Hayward and the 2400 block (Cranford and Kingland buildings) and the 2700 block (the Union) of Lincoln Way, since their utility access from another block face adjacent to the site.

In meeting with the prospective buyer, staff expressed that a driveway was not needed for the 2516 Lincoln Way site, but their potential plans for a utility extension serving the middle of the block could necessitate a minimum of a 10 feet of the required 20 feet for the setback standard. The applicant feels that the mid-block break requirement would compromise the design of the building and the intended urban environment along the street. The break would become an unoccupied section that would create a potentially unsafe pathway with no connectivity to any desirable active space and it would be a financial burden to development of the site by removing useable square footage.

The purpose of the Campustown Service Center (CSC) Zoning District is for development "...to be very dense with building coverage, large buildings in scale with the predominant building pattern in the Campustown commercial area, and buildings placed close together ...Building placement, the scale at the street, design and materials reinforce a dynamic, pedestrian-friendly neighborhood character." Many of the redeveloped sites are in alignment with this desired development pattern and a break in buildings exists on many other block faces within the CSC district, with the exception of Lincoln Way.

STAFF COMMENTS:

This mid-block break standard has historically been applied only if necessary to serve developments in Campustown, which does create some ambiguity along with flexibility. Staff considered removing the standard for the entire CSC District, but there are not as many opportunities for utility connections given the existing development pattern and future possible developments. No change to the standard would continue to require staff to discern the need for future utilities in regards to all block faces in Campustown, including Lincoln Way, and make case-by-case determinations.

If the City Council were interested in removing the requirement for the mid-block only along Lincoln Way in the CSC district, it would allow for the redevelopment of 2516 Lincoln Way to make full use of the parcel from east to west, without sacrificing useable square footage.

A change only affecting Lincoln Way would be a minor adjustment to the CSC zoning standards and remove staff discretion on whether to apply the standard to a redevelopment or not. Staff believes that allowing the text amendment as proposed would have no negative impact on existing or possible future development along Lincoln Way within the Campustown. **Note that if this change were to occur it would not prohibit breaks needed to comply with specific utility code or building code requirements. The change would remove the mandate to set-aside space regardless of its use.**

Changing the standard for the broader Campustown area would be much more involved due to the varying arrangements of utilities and alleys. To change the standard for all of Campustown would require a more in-depth assessment by affected departments of utility and access needs to create a master plan for Campustown to prioritize specific areas for service. Staff does not recommend taking on a utility master plan task at this time.

If the City Council wants to facilitate this request related to 2516 Lincoln Way, it is time sensitive to the prospective buyer and, therefore, this issue should be placed on the December 17th agenda.

