

campustown
action
association

January 7, 2020

Ames Mayor and City Council
515 Clark Ave
Ames, IA 50010

Dear Mayor Haila and Members of the Ames City Council,

From their inception, the purpose of the City of Ames Downtown and Campustown Façade Grant Programs have been to spur development and improvement of properties in Downtown Ames and Campustown. All would agree that the programs have been successful to this end, with dozens of facades restored and renovated over the years. The programs have spurred millions in private development in Downtown Ames and Campustown and have positively contributed to both commercial districts.

This being the case, Ames Main Street and Campustown Action Association ask that the City consider making a few improvements to the programs, which will ensure they are best serving the end user and being used in the most impactful and mutually beneficial manner possible. The proposed changes for Downtown Ames include:

- **Increase the overall annual allocation to \$85,000 for Downtown** - This increase would allow the individual project allocation to increase from \$15,000 to \$25,000, as well as increase the Professional Design Fees allowance to \$2,500. This will allow the program to fully fund three (3) total applications in Downtown Ames during a given application period. This change will also adjust the program to reflect the inflation that has taken place since its inception in 2000. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index, prices have increased 48.99% in that time, but no adjustment has been made.
- **Expand the scope of the program to include historic preservation improvements** - In the past, these types of repairs have fallen under the category of "maintenance" and would not normally be eligible for grant funds. However, now that Downtown Ames has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places, we feel that it is in the City's best interest to protect these historic resources by encouraging and incentivizing historic preservation efforts. To be considered eligible, applicants will have to prove that the elements they are requesting assistance for are historically relevant and significant to Downtown Ames. We suggest that the City's Historic Preservation Commission be brought in on a case-by-case basis to review applications that request assistance for historic preservation improvements.
- **Clarify the intent of providing assistance to upper story façade improvements under the current program** - There has been some confusion over the 20-year history of the program as to what kinds of upper story facade improvements are eligible. We ask that City staff clarify the intent of the grant program guidelines and update grant application

materials on the City's website to reflect updates/clarifications to the guidelines.

- **Create a separate, but related, program for rear facade assistance Downtown-** There is significant interest from property/business owners to renovate rear facades, especially those that face the public parking lot to the south, but many are reluctant to move forward with improvements due to cost considerations. Safety and security improvements, as well as beautification and accessibility upgrades to rear facades, are commonly cited as desired projects. We ask that Council direct staff to work with the Main Street Design Committee in developing appropriate criteria and a scoring system to expand the scope of Downtown Facade Grant Program to include rear facades.

Proposed Façade Grant changes for Campustown include:

- **Increase the individual project allocation to \$25,000** – An increase from \$15,000 to \$25,000 would make the program more appealing to those considering projects in Campustown; increasing both the quantity and quality of applications submitted. This would also allow for better use of funds previously allocated to the Campustown Façade Grant Program.
- **Expand the scope to allow improvements not currently eligible** – Expanding the scope to allow items such as signage, art, or landscape features of a permanent nature, would provide two major benefits. The first benefit would be the positive affect these features would have on the vibrancy of the Campustown district, which is listed among Council Goals. The second major benefit is the increased interest this would bring to the Program. We feel this could also improve the overall merit of project applications submitted.
- **Increase eligibility to include non-street-facing facades** – Allowing projects that involve highly visible areas, such as rear or side facades open to public parking lots, entrances, or alleys would greatly increase the number of project opportunities in the Campustown district. These projects could be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, and allowed when annual funds have not been allocated to projects with street-facing facades.

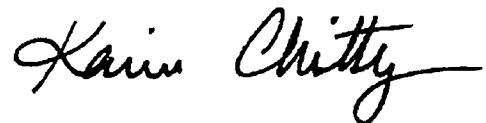
We hope the Council will refer these items to staff and direct them to work with Ames Main Street and Campustown Action Association to develop a proposal that addresses these items in a mutually beneficial manner. Once developed, this proposal can be presented to Council for them to ultimately determine how to best proceed in updating both programs.

We thank you for your consideration and look forward to working with the City to improve these critically important programs.

Sincerely,



Drew Kamp
Executive Director
Ames Main Street



Karin Chitty
Executive Director
Campustown Action Association