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**TO:** Mayor and Ames City Council

**FROM:** Kelly Diekmann, Planning and Housing Director

**DATE:** July 29, 2021

**SUBJECT:** Reduce Parking Requirements for Auditoriums and Theaters

City Council received a request from Jerry Nelson asking for the City Council to consider eliminating parking requirements for theater and event venues in Downtown. (See Attached Letter). It is the requestor's intent to rehabilitate and reuse the existing Ames Tribune building as a theater and event space. The requestor believes eliminating parking requirements would be desirable to keep other lots available for possible redevelopment rather than committing to provide for private parking.

Most uses in the Downtown Service Center Zoning, (DSC) do not have off-street parking requirements. The developer's desired use as an event space, which would be categorized as Entertainment and Recreation Trade, does not require off-street parking. **However, the proposed 200 seat theater use does require off-street parking at a rate of 1 space per 4 seats or 10 spaces per 1,000 square feet, with a minimum of twenty spaces in DSC zoning, the same as CSC zoning.**

Parking must be located on the same lot or provided through remote parking agreements. A remote site must be within 300 feet, approved by City Council, and available for the user in perpetuity. It is possible to provide some remote parking for approximately 20 spaces on property that the requestor already owns, but they would need to find 30 more spaces for remote parking under the current regulations.

The applicant requests the parking requirement be eliminated for this use by allowing a text amendment to the Zoning Ordinance that does not require parking for a theater use, which would be consistent with most other uses permitted in the DSC zoning district.

Staff believes elimination of the off-street parking requirement would not negatively impact the greater downtown area due to the timing of the need for parking in the evenings and the general availability of public parking downtown. However, Campustown has less public parking than Downtown and it could be more impactful to the surrounding streets in that setting. It is possible, but unlikely, a larger venue

providing these types of entertainment venues would locate Downtown or Campustown in the near future.

Additionally, staff believes a large venue would likely require designated parking to market the facility appropriately. Depending on the comfort level of removing all parking requirements for this use entirely, it could be addressed as follows:

**Options:**

**Option 1: Eliminate all Parking Requirements for Theaters within DSC and CSC Zoning.**

There is no discernible breakpoint in needing on site parking or not for smaller venues if parking is not required for all uses. Therefore, City Council could eliminate the zoning requirement for providing off-street parking for the category of use that includes theater, auditoriums, stadiums and arenas in the DSC and CSC Zoning Districts. This option provides the most flexibility to performance venues.

**Option 2: Eliminate Parking Requirements for up to 200-Seat Venues within DSC and CSC Zoning**

Staff believes small venues can be absorbed into the existing parking environments of Campustown and Downtown. Adding a cap on the size of the venue provides some insurance that a larger user would not exceed public parking capacity. Off-street parking would be required for any capacity over 200 and still allow for remote parking to compliment onsite parking.

**Option 3: Make Changes to Parking Requirements for Only DSC Zoning**

**Council could choose to limit the scope of any change described in Option 1 or Option 2 to only DSC Zoning. This would maintain the current parking requirements within CSC zoning.**

**Staff Comments:**

Should the City Council desire to facilitate additional entertainment options, staff suggests limiting any parking requirement change to Downtown (Option 3). City Council could choose to put the item on an agenda for discussion as soon as August 10, 2021. At that meeting Council can determine whether to or how to proceed with any changes regarding parking for theaters. This type of change is minor and can be accomplished in a relatively short amount of time.

If City Council is not interested in pursuing changes at this time, then no further action is needed.

July 19, 2021

RE: DSC Parking related to Theater User Parking Requirements

Dear Mayor and Council:

I am writing to you again in regards to parking in the DSC zoning area. We are in the process of negotiating with a tenant for the old Ames Tribune Building at 317<sup>th</sup> 5<sup>th</sup> Street to turn the building in to a 200-seat performance art space and co-located event venue.

Through the DRC process we learned that while there are no parking requirements in the DSC for almost all uses, one exists specifically for theater space. This means that a 200-seat restaurant would have no parking requirements but a 200-seat theater would.

Under these rules would require us to provide 40 parking spaces, either on site (which is not possible) or via a remote or joint parking agreement. We are able to provide 12 and potentially 18 spaces via a remote parking agreement at 307 5<sup>th</sup> Street, which we also currently own but the remaining 22 spaces are problematic in that we would need to identify and successfully negotiate an agreement for these parking spaces.

We do not believe that a remote or joint parking agreement is a long-term answer to solve this issue as it would lock that surface parking in to servicing this space, underutilizing precious space in downtown as well adding risk to the project in the longer-term if redevelopment of parking under the agreement is to be redeveloped.

While this issue affects a very limited number of projects (likely this one), it is absolutely preventing an investment in downtown both monetarily as well as culturally.

As a result, we respectfully request that Council refer a request to staff to add an agenda item to a near-term Council Meeting agenda to consider a text amendment to allow for this use without a parking requirement in the DSC.

Thank you for your consideration.



Jerry Nelson  
Intelligencer Investments