

ITEM #: 18
DATE: 11-28-23
DEPT: ADMIN

COUNCIL ACTION FORM

**SUBJECT: AMES MAIN STREET PROPOSED SCOPE OF SERVICES FOR A
DOWNTOWN AMES MASTER PLAN WITH A REQUEST FOR 50% CITY
FUNDING MATCH**

BACKGROUND:

At the City Council meeting on July 11, 2023, the Council referred to a future agenda a letter from Ames Main Street outlining the organization's proposed effort to pursue a visioning process to develop its long-term program of work (attached). The letter indicated that Ames Main Street desired to retain a design firm to lead this project, which Ames Main Street now refers to as a "Downtown Ames Master Plan."

Ames Main Street proposed that the City participate in the consultant selection process and that the City provide funding for up to 50% of the cost of the consulting contract. Two firms were identified by Ames Main Street to provide presentations regarding their proposed approaches to the project. The presentations were attended by the Assistant City Manager and the Planning and Housing Director, who then provided feedback to Ames Main Street leadership.

AMES MAIN STREET'S PROPOSED SCOPE OF SERVICES:

City staff discussed the anticipated scope of services with Ames Main Street leadership, and provided suggestions based on the City's experience with other area-specific consultant studies and plans. The scope of services has been refined by Ames Main Street and is attached to this report. The scope identifies three main areas of focus:

1. Enhance the gathering spaces in the Downtown District
2. Create a stronger sense of Downtown ambiance, and
3. Encourage Downtown residential and commercial development opportunities.

There are a number of specific opportunities to be explored within these focus areas, which are listed in the scope of services. The consultant is asked to evaluate the feasibility of these opportunities (where appropriate), and ultimately to develop a cohesive plan that can guide future infrastructure improvements and development initiatives. The specific opportunities listed are:

1. Main Street Streetscape
2. Burnett Avenue Pedestrian Way/Connection to the new Schinker Plaza
3. Redesign/renovation of Tom Evans Plaza
4. Enhancements to Cynthia Duff Plaza
5. Douglas Avenue Pedestrian Mall and Event Space

6. An "Art Walk" along the mid-block alley north of Main Street
7. Enhanced gateway entry points
8. Reimagining the potential uses for the CBD Lots south of Main Street
9. Pathways to, from, and between Downtown destinations

The scope of services identifies a Self-Supporting Municipal Improvement District (SSMID) as a potential mechanism to finance improvements. However, a SSMID relies on a petition process that is not guaranteed to be approved. The consultant is asked to identify other potential funding opportunities for the project components that are evaluated.

The plan development process includes a review of existing related plans and policies (Lincoln Way Corridor Plan, Downtown Ames Plaza Master Plan, Ames Plan 2040, and Downtown Ames Downtown Facade Design Guidelines, Draft Bike, Walk, and Roll Plan, 2019 Walker Parking Study), a kickoff meeting with the steering committee, and stakeholder meetings to understand the landscape. From these meetings, concepts will be developed and refined for presentation to the public for comment. Public engagement would include online surveys, an open house, and a community event. The public and stakeholder input would then be used to prepare a draft plan for presentation to Ames Main Street Board. City representative will be part of the stakeholder group and there will be a City staff technical advisory committee.

TIMELINE:

With City Council's support, Ames Main Street expects to select a consultant this winter. The selected consultant will begin the project in the spring of 2024 and the project will be concluded by December 2024.

CITY INVOLVEMENT AND FUNDING:

It is important to note that the consultant selection and the development of this plan are being directed by Ames Main Street rather than the City. Therefore, the City Council is not being asked to modify or formally approve the scope of services. Instead, the question for the City Council is whether the City wishes to pay Ames Main Street to undertake such a process.

The completion of a plan such as the one described could provide a coherent direction for future planning efforts, which City staff believes would provide value for the Downtown. However, since the preparation of the plan would be under Ames Main Street's direction, the City Council would have to decide whether it agrees with any of the conclusions identified in the plan once it is approved by Ames Main Street. The Council could choose at a future date to adopt the plan just like any other area-specific planning tool.

Staff should caution that the completed plan is likely to result in proposed improvements with significant capital costs. Although the scope of services suggests that SSMID and other financing mechanisms will be explored as a way to pay for these improvements, it is possible that implementation relies on considerable City funding. In future years, the Council would have to weigh such improvements with other demands on the City's budget and Capital Improvements Plan, and prioritize how to proceed. Although it is not a City project, it is important the concepts and plan produced by the

consultant are not just the property of Ames Main Street but also that the City has the right to use the concept images and drawings as well and this will be part of an agreement.

Ames Main Street's letter from earlier this year requests that the City pay for up to 50% of the cost of the study. It is estimated that the scope of services for this project should cost no more than \$50,000 to complete. Therefore, staff would suggest that any City financing be in the form of a reimbursement to Ames Main Street for a completed plan, in an amount not-to-exceed the lesser of \$25,000 or 50% of the completed cost of the plan. Funds are available from the City Council Contingency account, the Hotel-Motel Fund available balance (which is used for economic development projects), or from the FY 2023/24 adjusted City Budget using General Fund Savings.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Allocate \$25,000 from the City Council Contingency account for a Downtown Master Plan, and approve an agreement with Ames Main Street to reimburse 50% of the actual cost to produce a Downtown Master Plan, up to an amount not-to-exceed \$25,000.
2. Do not approve funding for a Downtown Master Plan to be produced by Ames Main Street.
3. Refer this item to City staff for further information.

CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

A Downtown Master Plan would provide needed direction regarding the improvements that Downtown Ames stakeholders wish to see in this vital core area of the community. Ames Main Street has offered to take on the work of preparing the scope of services, selecting a consultant and managing the consulting contract. Once complete, the City Council may decide whether it wishes to approve or pursue any of the improvements that are envisioned in the plan.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of the City Manager that the City Council adopt Alternative #1, as outlined above.

ATTACHMENT(S):

[Stagg-Davis - AMS Enhancing Downtown letter .pdf](#)

[Ames Main Street - Downtown Master Plan.doc](#)

[Ames Main Street Draft Scope of Service_update 11-22-23.docx](#)