

**April 5th, 2024**

Ames City Mayor

John Haila

Ames City Council

Amber Corrieri, Anita Rollins, Bronwyn Beatty-Hansen, Gloria J. Betcher, Jeff Clark, Rachel Junck, Tim Gartin

RE: Zoning Ordinance Assistance for Ames Rock Climbing Gym

**Dear Honorable Mayor and City Council Members,**

My name is Brian Doscher. My business partner, Keith Rosenliao, and I hope to open a climbing gym called Bluestem Boulders in Ames. We have identified a viable location for the gym; however, the building is located in a General Industrial Zone. We are writing to request an expedited zoning adjustment to permit establishing our gym at 525 E 2nd St. Mr. Rodd Mumm, the facility's owner, strongly supports our initiative, but he cannot reserve the facility indefinitely. An expedited zoning adjustment will enable us to secure 525 E 2nd St.

Below, we outline our experience in the climbing industry, explain why this facility is ideal for a successful climbing gym, describe similar businesses located in industrial zones, and discuss benefits to the Ames community. We are happy to provide our business plan upon request.

### **Owner Qualifications**

Keith and I are experienced operators in the climbing industry. Together, we have 12+ years in management and ownership roles in climbing gyms. I currently serve as the Director of Route Setting at a climbing gym in Des Moines. Keith owns Cayuga Climbs, a successful rock climbing gym he opened in Ithaca, New York in 2021. We met at Cornell University, where Keith earned his MBA while I worked as a manager and instructor at Cornell's climbing wall. Now, Keith and I have partnered to open a climbing gym in Ames, a community to which I have strong ties. My spouse grew up in Ames, where both she and I graduated from Iowa State University, and my in-laws are active members in the community. We are committed to building a business that benefits the city and its residents.

### **Location requirements**

Climbing gyms require facilities typically found in General Industrial zones. At a minimum, we need 14-foot ceilings, 5000+ square feet of open space, and at least a 6-inch concrete pad foundation to support the climbing walls. These are minimum requirements rarely found in commercially-zoned spaces, but which are necessary for a safe and enjoyable climbing environment. One climber requires at least 30 square feet of space; therefore, a climbing gym cannot safely accommodate the density of customers that typical commercial spaces (e.g.

restaurants, retail stores) are designed to hold. Furthermore, commercially-zoned buildings typically include features that increase aesthetic value and rent price but do not add value to a climbing gym.

After six months searching for a location that meets the above criteria, we have identified 525 E 2nd St. as an ideal space for a climbing gym. During that time, we have not found a commercial space available at a price point that would allow an independent climbing gym to be sustainable. We have spoken with representatives that manage commercial spaces at North Grand Mall and the pad sites at S 16th St & Buckeye Ave. At the time of writing this letter, 525 E 2nd St. is the only suitable and affordable location listed on [Ames available properties](#).

### **Examples of climbing gyms in industrial and manufacturing zones**

Climbing gyms often are located in areas zoned for industrial and manufacturing businesses. Cayuga Climbs is located in a “Light Industrial” zone ([Dryden Zoning Lookup](#), parcel: 502489-52.-1-4.122). Since opening in 2021, Cayuga Climbs has served over 6,000 local customers, with a 4.9 rating from over 50+ unprompted reviews on Google Maps, bringing rock climbing to a city where no commercial climbing facility existed previously. Another example is Vertical Adventures, located at 6513 Kingsmill Ct, Columbus, OH 43229 in a “Manufacturing” zoned area. Climbing gyms throughout the world typically operate in warehouses in industrial zones.

### **Benefits to the Ames Community**

A commercial climbing gym will benefit Ames. This amenity will offer a novel, year-round, healthy activity and space where Ames community members can connect. Climbing is a social sport that encourages teamwork and discussion; it serves as a third place for many climbers. Keith recently spoke to a member at his gym who told him “Cayuga Climbs has pretty much become my social life.” While Iowa State University has rock climbing facilities, they are not easily accessible to the public. As a result, Ames residents often drive to Des Moines to climb. Bluestem Boulders will be a place for Ames residents to engage face to face.

Climbing debuted in the 2020 Olympics and its popularity as a competitive youth sport is growing. Bluestem Boulders will offer youth camps and school-year programs for parents and children. I am certified as an USA Climbing Level 2 coach with experience coaching competitors on a national level. At Cayuga Climbs, Keith has expanded the youth climbing community to include a recreational team and an advanced team that competes regionally. Keith and I look forward to leveraging our experience to develop this popular youth sport in Ames.

Commercial businesses near our proposed location will benefit from proximity to Bluestem Boulders. Our gym will bring in regular visitors who will look for dining options after climbing. Within a half-mile radius of 525 E 2nd St. are taco shops, bars, and restaurants that climbers will enjoy.

Keith and I will build a successful, financially sustainable business at 525 E 2nd St. Bluestem Boulders will offer a new, increasingly popular amenity to the Ames community, benefiting residents and nearby businesses for decades to come. We are community-focused operators who wish to start a small business in the only facility that is currently suitable. We request your support for a zoning adjustment at 525 E 2nd St. With an expedited adjustment, we can open to the public as soon as this Fall. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Brian Doscher".

Brian Doscher

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Keith Rosenliao".

Keith Rosenliao