

ITEM #: 57
DATE: 05-14-24
DEPT: P&H

COUNCIL ACTION FORM

SUBJECT: TEXT AMENDMENT TO INCLUDE ROCK CLIMBING FACILITIES AS A MISCELLANEOUS USE WITHIN GENERAL INDUSTRIAL (GI) ZONING DISTRICT BY SPECIAL USE PERMIT

BACKGROUND:

At the meeting on April 9, 2024, City Council reviewed a request from Brian Doscher and Keith Rosenliao, who are requesting an allowance within the Zoning Ordinance to operate a rock-climbing gym facility in the General Industrial (GI) zoning district (see Attachment A). Although gyms of all types are allowed in commercial zoning districts, rock climbing gyms require large indoor spaces with tall ceiling heights, more commonly found in General Industrial areas rather than in commercial zoning districts.

This request is similar to the one made by Savage Gymnastics in 2023, which resulted in Sports Practice Facilities being added as an allowable use in the General Industrial Zone subject to the special use permitting process. However, because of the definition of a sport practice facility for team practices, the proposed climbing gym did not qualify as a sports practice facility. As a result, the City Council directed staff to proceed with the process for consideration of a zoning text amendment for a rock-climbing gym as a special use permit within the General Industrial (GI) zoning district.

The applicant has described the requirements they have for a facility as “14-foot ceilings at a minimum and a minimum of 5,000 sq. ft. of open space with at least a 6-inch concrete pad to support the climbing walls.” According to the applicant, “these are minimum requirements rarely found in commercially zoned spaces, but which are necessary for a safe and enjoyable climbing experience. One climber requires at least 30 square feet of space; therefore, a climbing gym cannot safely accommodate the density of customers that typically commercial spaces are designed to hold.” The applicant also states, “commercially zoned buildings typically include features that increase aesthetic value and rent price but do not add value to a climbing gym.”

ZONING AMENDMENT:

General Industrial Zoning (GI) zoning is designed to accommodate primarily industrial manufacturing, warehouses, services, and office uses. GI zoning is the most common industrial zone in the City, compared to Planned Industrial, Research and Innovation, and Intensive Industrial. GI zoned land exists primarily to the east of the Skunk River, but also includes an area west of the Skunk River and north of Lincoln Way extending to Borne Avenue.

The purpose of General Industrial zoning is described below.

Sec. 29.901. states the following about the purpose of the General Industrial Zone:

(1) Purpose. This Zone is intended to provide a limited development review procedure, involving only developer- and staff-coordinated efforts to satisfy the planning and permitting requirements. This District applies to those areas where there is a need to provide a desirable industrial environment and

to promote economic viability of a type generally not appropriate for or compatible with retail sales areas. A site plan review process is required in order to assure such development and intensity of use in a way that assures safe, functional, efficient and environmentally sound operations.

GI zoning allows for a few limited options for uses that are not standard industrial uses (see Attachment B). It allows for retail and service uses over 3,000 square feet via a special use permit, but it does not allow for “Entertainment, Restaurant and Recreation – General,” the category that includes “Health clubs and gyms,” of any size. These types of entertainment uses have traditionally been prioritized for designated commercial areas. You will note that some instruction-based fitness uses are classified as retail and service and not as recreation and entertainment and these have been permitted in GI.

Similar to the allowance for “Sports Practice Facilities,” “Rock Climbing Facilities” could be described as a specialized facility and considered a Miscellaneous Use within GI zoning, Table 29.901(2). Parking would also be applied at the same rate as that used for “Sports Practice Facilities,” which is 2 spaces per 1,000 square feet of area.

Currently, there is not a definition for Rock Climbing Facilities and the proposed amendment creates a definition of the use to go along with adding it to the GI allowable use table.

"Facilities dedicated to training and development of athletes and novices of all ages in rock climbing skills. Facilities may include individual drop-in, group appointments, classes, and scheduled events. Ancillary uses may include offices, sales area, and other related training facilities and equipment."

The text amendment, if adopted, will apply to all areas having a General Industrial zoning district area in the City and therefore will not be specific to one site.

The applicant has a desired location on East 2nd Street/Borne Avenue that is a tenant space consisting of 8,200 square feet, which will meet their needs for a rock-climbing facility. The proposed text amendment could allow them to consider other sites as well. However, the desired East 2nd Street site has similar attributes to commercially zoned areas that may support its use as Rock Climbing Facility.

The land use designation of the East 2nd Street site within Ames Plan 2040 is “General Commercial.” The General Commercial land use designation is intended as a hybrid of commercial and industrial uses. Ames Plan 2040 directs a new zoning district to be established in the future, in support of this hybrid of uses. However, this new zoning district does not yet exist. Therefore, it remains that the preferred site is located within the GI zoning district. **If the proposed text amendment is approved, the Zoning Board of Adjustment will review the actual special use permit application and determine if the use is appropriate for the site.**

Staff believes that adding this use as a Miscellaneous Use creates a niche option that does not broadly change the allowable uses within GI. Additionally, the special use permit process will emphasize the intent of industrial compatibility and that adding a recreation use does not hamper other industrial business uses in the area of a specific proposal (see Attachment C).

PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

At a regular meeting of the Planning and Zoning Commission on May 8, 2024, the Commission voted unanimously 6-0 in support of the request.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Approve first reading of an amendment to Table 29.501(4)-7 and the General Industrial (GI) Zoning District allowable uses in Table 29.901(2) to permit Indoor Rock-Climbing Facilities by a Special Use Permit.
2. Approve first reading of an amendment to Table 29.501(4)-7 and the General Industrial (GI) Zoning District allowable uses in Table 29.901(2) to permit Indoor Rock-Climbing Facilities with modified standards.
3. Take no action regarding this request at this time.

CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

The City has an interest in maintaining industrial land for a variety of employment and processing activities that meet a diverse set of economic development needs for the City. **By opening up industrial property to other uses, there is the potential to erode the land set aside for this important economic function.** The City does not allow entertainment recreation uses in this GI zone. However, the City does allow for limited amounts of retail and personal service uses, including requirements for larger facilities with a Special Use Permit, and other uses such as daycare that are not traditional uses within industrial areas.

Due to the unique requirements for a rock-climbing gymnastics facility, industrial buildings are well-suited to host their use due to large open areas within their floor plans and high ceiling height. It is unlikely that any significant changes will be made to an industrial building by a rock-climbing gymnastics facility that would prevent a return to an industrial function. While special equipment will need to be installed, these do not require physical alterations to the structure. Review of the individual plans for a site would occur with a Special Use Permit.

The GI zoning district is the most common industrial district within the City. The properties zoned GI in some parts of the City tend to have older, smaller buildings sizes that would suit the needs of a rock-climbing facility due to the open floor space and ceiling heights. These types of buildings are uncommon within the City's commercial zones.

While an industrial zone is not an ideal location for a sports use in many instances, the applicant's goals could be accomplished with minimal impact to the City's industrial base through review of a Special Use Permit.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of the City Manager that the City Council adopt Alternative No. 1, as described above.

ATTACHMENT(S):

[Attachment A - Letter to CC.pdf](#)

[Attachment B - Uses Allowed in General Industrial \(GI\).pdf](#)

[Attachment C - Special Use Permit Review and Criteria.pdf](#)

[Attachment D - placeholder fo ordinance.pdf](#)

[Ordinance ZTA Rock Climbing Facilities.PDF](#)