



*Caring People ♦ Quality Programs ♦ Exceptional Service*

# MEMO

**To:** Mayor and City Council

**From:** Kelly Diekmann, Planning & Housing Director

**Date:** June 14, 2024

**Subject:** Request for a Text Amendment to allow Social Service uses within the “O-SFC” (Single Family Conservation Overlay District)

## **BACKGROUND:**

On May 28<sup>th</sup>, the City Council referred to staff a request from Matt Mitchell, Founder and Board Member of the Ames Romero House (see Attachment A – Letter to City Council). **The request is to direct City staff to prepare a zoning text amendment to the “O-SFC” (Single Family Conservation Overlay District) to facilitate allowing by Special Use Permit establishment of new Social Service uses that are currently not permitted within the Overlay. This request is principally for the purpose of expanding the Romero House to a second property at 702 Clark Avenue.**

Ames Romero House has been operating as a non-profit organization at 709 Clark Avenue since September 2020. In 2021 there was correspondence with staff about use of the single-family home at 709 Clark and its limitations of use related to the rental code and household living for a single-family dwelling. At that time, the use was not defined as a social service provider based upon staff understanding of the activities and nature of the use for overnight stays.

The operator of the Romero House now describes the operations of their existing site and desired to expand to second location at 702 Clark as follows:

The property at 709 Clark Avenue houses five men as the live-in staff for the Ames Romero House. The property at 702 Clark Avenue is proposed as the location where the hospitality services would be provided and relocated from 709 Clark Avenue.

They offer hospitality services to those who seek assistance in Ames. The services include daytime hospitality through the provision of food, a shower, winter clothes, and laundry facilities between the hours of 1:00 pm and 4:00 pm, Monday through Friday, and from 10:30 am to 4:00 pm on Sundays. They have in the past also had religious services or larger gatherings at 709 Clark, which is not proposed to occur in the future.

**Upon review of the Romero House's current activities at 709 Clark and their planned use of 702 Clark, staff has determined the Ames Romero House operations are not a Household Living use and more like a Social Service use, which is not permitted in the O-SFC. Thus, the request by the Romero House for a zoning text amendment.**

Both the current site and proposed site, are zoned as "RM" (Residential Medium Density) with two zoning overlays. One overlay zone is the "O-SFC" (Single Family Conservation Overlay Zone). The other is the "O-H" (Historic Preservation Overlay Zone). The limiting factor of use for social services is the O=SFC, which allows:

- Dwelling – Single Family;
- Dwelling – Two Family;
- Bed & Breakfast Establishment; and,
- Vacation Lodging.

Apartment dwellings are permitted upon a determination by the City Council that certain standards have been satisfied by the proposed apartment dwelling.

**The O-SFC was established in the 1990s in response to the erosion of the neighborhood to primarily non- one- and two-family homes and to include single family design features with new construction.**

#### **STAFF COMMENTS:**

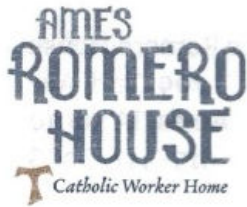
**As currently written, the Zoning Ordinance does not allow non-residential uses in the "O-SFC" Overlay Zone. The regulations do not accommodate Romero House, or any of the other Social Service Providers as allowed uses. The existing social service providers in the area, such Youth and Shelter Services (YSS) are considered nonconforming uses established prior to the current zoning standards. After discussion with Romero House representatives and review of the zoning requirements, staff believes there is a only single option to address the request by the Ames Romero House if City Council wants to consider accommodating their text amendment request.**

A text amendment could be crafted that would allow their uses through the approval of a Special Use Permit (SUP) by the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA). Support for this permit process would be due to the unique nature of social service providers, and it would be difficult to craft specific standards to monitor or regulate this type of use.

This zoning text amendment would apply to the other Social Service Providers located in the “O-SFC,” as well. A SUP would include specific criteria that must be satisfied for approval of the use by the ZBA. The SUP would allow for site specific evaluation of each individual request. Alternatively, if the City Council does not support the establishment of non-residential uses in the “O-SFC,” no zoning text amendment is needed at this time.

**If City Council decides to proceed with this request, it should be referred to a future agenda to discuss initiating a text amendment.**

## Attachment A – Letter to City Council



Ames Romero House  
709 Clark Ave  
Ames, IA 50010  
515-337-8088

24 May 2024

Dear Ames City Council Staff,

Please consider this letter the Ames Romero House's official request for the City Council direct staff to prepare a zoning text amendment to the Single-Family Conservation Overlay District. During our meeting with Planning and Zoning staff, the Ames Romero House was told this zoning text amendment would be necessary in order for us to provide further service to the community within the SFCOD at 702 Clark Avenue.

The Ames Romero House (ARH) is a 501c3 non-profit organization and volunteer operated community providing hospitality services to those who seek assistance in Ames. We offer daytime hospitality through the provision of food, a shower, winter clothes, laundry facilities, and positive community between the hours of 1 pm to 4 pm Monday to Friday and from 10:30 am to 4 pm on Sundays. Additionally, our live-in staff and volunteers act as advocates and shepherds for those who need help contacting other local services for clothing, housing, or government assistance. The ARH is operated entirely by the goodwill and private donations from its community members.

Currently, the ARH homebase is located at 709 Clark Ave. and acts as an office, hospitality home, and housing for our live-in staff. As of 22 May 2024, the ARH closed on the house located at 702 Clark Ave with the intention to use it specifically for hospitality and an office, thus making 709 Clark Ave. a space for our live-in staff to reside. The layout of 702 Clark Ave. directly matches the needs of our service mission, and the Ames Romero House looks forward to the ways in which this 702 house will further help serve the needs of the City of Ames and of our fellow Ames neighbors who are often without a physical home.

We sincerely thank you for receiving our request and eagerly anticipate your decision.

Blessings,

Matt Mitchell

Ames Romero House  
Founder, Board Member

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