

ITEM #: 21
DATE: 01-28-25
DEPT: P&H

COUNCIL ACTION FORM

**SUBJECT: TEXT AMENDMENTS TO CHAPTER 29 ARTICLE 12 FLOATING ZONES
LOT AND BLOCK DESIGN REQUIREMENTS AS FURTHER
IMPLEMENTATION OF CONSERVATION SUBDIVISION ORDINANCE
CHANGES**

BACKGROUND:

On November 12, 2024, the Ames City Council initiated a text amendment to the City's Conservation Subdivision standards. The ordinance changes were to incorporate several issues raised by the AEDC Short-Term Housing Taskforce, including street lengths and design.

A hearing concerning the proposed amendments to Chapter 23, Subdivisions, was held on January 14, 2025. **At the hearing, it was noted that a future amendment to the Chapter 29 Floating Suburban Development Standard (Table 29.1202(6)) was needed related to block lengths and mid-block connections to align it with the approval of changes to the Subdivision Code that now allow for dead-end streets and longer block lengths to conserve natural resources.**

The Subdivision Code has street and block standards for all subdivisions; however, the Zoning Ordinance has additional standards related to street and block lengths and mid-block connections/crossings that apply to subdivisions of Suburban Residential Low Density (FS RL) and Suburban Residential Medium Density (FS RM) Districts. These are the zoning districts typically applied to new single-family residential development and are the zoning districts most likely affected by the Low Impact Conservation Subdivision ordinance standards.

Per the Floating Zoning standards, block face lengths over 660 feet are currently required to have a mid-block walkway connecting through a block and for the crossing of blocks. This walkway is required for all blocks, including those that did not have an opposing block to connect with or other features such as open space that made a crossing and connecting walkway desirable. It should also be noted that the current language contains grammatical errors, which at times causes interpretation issues about how the standard applies.

The proposed ordinance involves three changes to the standard. The full draft ordinance is attached:

- 1. Language is clarified to require the walkway to extend through a block and not solely as a mid-block crosswalk.** This eliminates the grammatical errors of the section and matches the intent of improving overall connectivity within a development, not just the crossing of a residential street. **Additionally, an exception is introduced exempting providing a mid-block walkway when a block face does not have an opposite block face or is not opposite an accessible open space.** For example, a dead-end cul-de-sac that does not have the ability to connect to other development blocks can be exempt from this requirement of a walkway (currently at least an internal crosswalk would be required even if there is no other walkway connection). This change applies to all types of subdivisions.
- 2. To encourage walkways through a block within outlots rather than in easements, a new**

provision for reduced side setbacks is also introduced. When a mid-block walkway is required and is placed in an outlot that is at least eight feet in width, the side setback can be reduced by three feet to mitigate the reduction in lot width to create an outlot. A setback of six feet for one-story structures and eight feet for two-story structures would otherwise apply. Outlots are preferable to easements in the eyes of staff due to issues of maintenance and encroachments by HOAs. This change applies to all subdivisions.

3. **An exception is introduced to the requirement to have a mid-block walkway for Low Impact Development and Conservation Design Subdivisions.** This allows for loop streets and other longer street connections to be exempt from mid-block crossings and walkways connecting through to other streets. This is due to the requirement in Chapter 23 that these subdivisions have set-aside natural areas and are to provide pedestrian connectivity distributed throughout a subdivision.

PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

The Planning and Zoning Commission reviewed the proposed amendment at its December 18, 2024, meeting as part of its review of changes to conservation subdivision standards. The Commission's discussion mainly focused on the other amendments to Chapter 23 and the impacts of the changes to Ada Hayden Lake. They did not specifically discuss the exception to the mid-block walkway standard. No members of the public spoke at the meeting. **The Commission voted (5-0) to recommend the City Council amend the Conservation Subdivision standards as recommended by the City staff.**

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Approve first reading of an ordinance amending Table 29.1202(6) Suburban Residential Floating Zone Suburban Regulations 23 of the Ames Municipal Code as shown in the attached ordinance.
2. Approve the first reading of an ordinance with modified language suggested by the City Council.
3. Do not approve the proposed text amendment. Request additional information from staff.

CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

The proposed ordinance is related to a set of larger amendments to the City's Conservation Subdivision standards. The package of amendments generally removes or reduces strict numeric requirements and offers more flexibility in development design. This allows for increased development intensities while enhancing standards to protect natural resources.

The proposed ordinance similarly introduces enhanced development flexibility by introducing exceptions for mid-block walkways where they are not desirable or otherwise necessary and reduced setbacks for adjacent residential lots where they are required. The changes also clean up grammatical issues with the current wording and clarify the requirements for walkway connections through blocks. Therefore, it is the recommendation of the City Manager to adopt Alternative #1, as described above.

ATTACHMENT(S):

[Ordinance Lot-Block Design Conservation Subdivisions.PDF](#)