

Staff Report

DISCUSSION OF COUNCIL CONNECT OPPORTUNITIES

March 25, 2025

BACKGROUND:

"Valuing Communication and Engagement with the Public" remains a priority goal of the Ames City Council. In an attempt to accomplish this goal, the Mayor and City Council members individually engage with the public in a variety of ways, including meetings, emails, social media, public hearings, community outreach events, speaking engagements, and more. At times, the elected officials may also conduct outreach together in small groups through events such as WelcomeFest, Juneteenth, the July 4th parade, and others. Council Members can participate through staffing a table, volunteering to assist at an event, or attending as a participant with a focus on networking.

COUNCIL CONNECT - PARTNER EVENTS:

Beginning in 2025, staff began branding these organized Council outreach activities as "Council Connect" events. The Ames MLK Celebration Event on January 20, 2025, was the first event when this new brand was used. Three Council Members and the Mayor were available on site an hour before the celebration began and were available to engage with attendees.

Continuing with this practice, staff will keep Council Members informed about known community events where elected officials can be present to engage with the public. Staff will also help coordinate Council Member participation and market these as "Council Connect" opportunities. Beginning this year, staff will focus on including events in which Council has not traditionally participated, especially if the attendees are expected to be part of the hard-to-reach populations and/or underrepresented groups. (Hard-to-reach demographics are defined as groups often less engaged in local government including low-income residents, people of color, immigrants, people with disabilities, young people, or those with language barriers.)

Some upcoming potential partnering events include:

- Fifth and Clark Fridays Concert Series at the Ames City Auditorium – Friday, March 28, April 11, and April 25
- International Friendship Fair at the Ames Public Library – Saturday, March 29 from 10:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
- Earth Day tabling event at Iowa State University – Tuesday, April 22 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- Ames Repair Café at Ames Public Library – Saturday, April 19 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Water Treatment Plant Open House – Saturday, April 19 from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

The Communications and Outreach Division headed by Susan will communicate and coordinate partner event outreach opportunities with the Ames City Council.

COUNCIL CONNECT HOUR:

While partner events are an effective way to bring elected officials and community members together, City Council members may also want to explore providing an alternative format for engagement. Therefore, staff is proposing that, if Council is interested, the Council could pilot informal listening sessions (one or two hours at a time) where residents are invited to meet with their Council Member(s) on topics of the residents' choosing. The Council could conduct these in groups of two to three.

Possible host locations include coffee houses, public gathering spaces/parks, 60Forward Center, Ames Public Library, civic group locations, and other sites. Staff will try to focus on scheduling meetings where hard-to-reach or underrepresented populations may already be gathering, such as food pantries, sport games, faith-based organization sites, play pals, community organizations, and others.

The days/times could be varied to attract a wide demographic of residents but planned in advance to allow for coordinating and marketing the outreach opportunity.

If this option is desired, it would be appropriate for the City Council to make a motion to direct staff to coordinate an outreach schedule where Council Members are available for informal listening sessions, and to identify the frequency of the offerings.

STREET "N" GREET BLOCK PARTY TRAILER:

As a reminder, towards the end of the summer in 2024, the Street 'N' Greet Block Party Trailer provided the option for applicants to request a Council Member to attend their event, if available. The neighborhood trailer has historically provided an option to request the presence of the Police and/or Fire department. In 2024, the trailer was reserved 31 times, with 13 requests for Police and 14 requests for Fire to attend.

AMES HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION (AHRC) MEET AND GREETs:

The AHRC currently conducts meet and greets with the community on a quarterly basis. Going forward, Council will be invited to join their meet and greet activities.

CITY COUNCIL SUGGESTIONS:

There may be other public engagement ideas that City Council members have in mind for connecting with residents that are hard to reach that staff can help support. This would be the time to share any suggestions.

ATTACHMENT(S):

[Council Connect Logo.png](#)