

COUNCIL ACTION FORM

SUBJECT: **TEXT AMENDMENT TO MATERIAL STANDARDS FOR OFF-STREET PARKING AREAS AND DRIVEWAYS FOR AGRICULTURAL EQUIPMENT IN THE RESEARCH PARK INNOVATION DISTRICT ZONE**

BACKGROUND:

At the [August 26 meeting](#), City Council authorized the Iowa State University Research Park (ISURP) to apply for a text amendment to introduce an exception to paving requirements within the Research Park Innovation District (RI) Zone. A map showing the extent of the RI Zone is attached.

The City's current standards require that all vehicle parking and maneuvering areas be paved per the City's Improvement Standards for Off-Street Parking Areas and Driveways (see attached).

The requested paving exception is for parking and maneuvering areas that serve agricultural equipment in addition to other vehicles. For example, agricultural equipment may be stored on a site and maneuvered between buildings to a test track area and/or adjoining fields for testing. These areas may also be used by other vehicles and would otherwise be required to be paved. ISURP indicated that due to the large amount of maneuvering area on sites that involve agricultural equipment testing, there would be substantial cost savings between concrete and rock surface.

TEXT AMENDMENT:

The proposed amendment would modify the RI District Development Standards to introduce a paving exception approved by the Planning Director for areas used for agricultural equipment. Other heavy equipment uses would not be eligible. If an exemption were granted, the site access and parking would still be required to be paved.

The proposed new standard would also require that:

- Unpaved areas are located behind principal buildings
- Unpaved areas are accessory to a principal use on the site (e.g., equipment testing areas for Research and Development Facilities and Laboratories); standalone areas would not be permitted
- The Municipal Engineer approves the surface material (e.g., rock depth)
- Current requirements for landscaping related to loading areas apply (landscaping of an area equivalent to 10% of the loading area and adjacent to the loading area). The Planning Director may require additional screening or buffering.

The full text of the proposed amendment is attached.

PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:

The Planning and Zoning Commission reviewed the proposed amendment at its October 1, 2025, meeting. The Commission asked if a setback had been considered for gravel areas. Staff noted that the paving exception only applies to areas behind principal buildings and as an accessory use negated the need for a setback. Parking areas between buildings and the street would be required to be paved and meet current landscaping requirements. A gravel lot would not be permitted without a building on the site.

No members of the public spoke at the meeting. The Commission voted (5-0) to recommend the City Council approve the paving exception as recommended by the City staff.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Approve the first reading of an ordinance amending paving requirements to introduce an exception in the RI Zone for agricultural equipment, subject to approval by the Planning Director.
2. Approve the first reading of an ordinance with modified language.
3. Do not approve the proposed text amendment.
4. Request additional information from staff.

CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

The proposed ordinance maintains the design and landscaping requirements of RI and is designed to only allow a paving exception in low visibility areas and as an accessory use to a principal building. Standalone unpaved storage areas would not be allowed to ensure that the land is efficiently used for the intended office and R&D uses and not as low intensity site improvements for general industrial storage type uses.

These standards ensuring allowing for larger nonpaved areas are not counter to the original intent of RI zoning to facilitate higher quality site design for research and development, office, and small manufacturing uses rather than lower intensity industrial uses.

The authorized amendment is the narrowest option for a paving exception that was presented to City Council when it authorized the amendment. It only applies to one zoning district, RI, and to agricultural equipment. Other industrial uses relying on heavy trucks or other equipment, or in other zones, would not be eligible. Therefore, it is the recommendation of the City Manager to adopt Alternative No. 1.

ATTACHMENT(S):

[RI Zone Map.pdf](#)

[Zoning Current Paving Standard.pdf](#)

[Ordinance \(Surface Material Standards\).PDF](#)