

ITEM #:	<u>37</u>
DATE:	<u>06-23-26</u>
DEPT:	<u>P&amp;H</u>

## COUNCIL ACTION FORM

**SUBJECT: TEXT AMENDMENT TO MODIFY THE NORTHEAST GATEWAY OVERLAY DISTRICT (O-GNE) STANDARDS**

### BACKGROUND:

The City Council has directed Planning Division staff to amend the Northeast Gateway Overlay (O-GNE) in response to a request from R-Pact Holdings, LLC & Jordan Elwell Properties to facilitate streamlined zoning for future commercial development. The proposed changes are a companion item to the recently approved rezoning action removing the Contract Rezoning Agreement and Masterplan for property at 3299, 3312, 3699 East 13th Street and 1699 570th.

The O-GNE requirements in the Zoning Ordinance were created in 2005 to create a unique overlay district that expanded upon the Planned Regional Commercial base zone to guide specifically how malls and large shopping centers would be expected to be designed. Significant elements of the Overlay include multiple public hearing approval processes, enhanced building requirements, interconnected “lifestyle center/mall” site improvement requirements, and environmentally sensitive design requirements that did not apply to other parts of the City.

A specific element of the O-GNE are standards for buffering of Ketelsen Marsh to the north of the site that is in rural Story County and managed by Story County.

The O-GNE was specifically created to help guide and dictate design with a planned regional mall concept that was approved in 2007 as part of the development agreement process, that has now been rescinded by recent Council action. O-GNE currently has both general guidelines and specific mandatory standards. An extensive Masterplan is required to address a number of specific issues which include, but are not limited to:

- easements,
- access to this and surrounding property,
- lighting limitations,
- how green spaces and plantings will interconnect with the full site,
- multi-modal circulation patterns,
- signage,
- architectural styles,
- environmental mitigation.

Once the overall Masterplan is approved by City Council, individual Site Development Plan approvals by the City Council are also required for each building.

## **PROPOSED CHANGES:**

One of the main goals of the changes for the property owner are to simplify the Master Plan process and streamline the expectations of the overlay for design. The rationale is that the current standards are based upon a mall concept that will never be built by the owner and an interest to provide more general standards to allow for future development that is as of yet undetermined.

The overall approval process has been streamlined in terms of general approval and building specific approvals. **The new standards (See Attachment A) keep a Master Plan process for projects in the O-GNE in order to address the broad range of uses and large site sizes of the area. However, the required level of detail is simplified to focus on general layout and uses, with some expectation of an architectural style/theme. Actual building details will be subject to Site Plan review primarily by staff, but could be referred to Council if required during the Master Plan process.**

The new Master Plan expectations will maintain a design requirement of vehicular and pedestrian interconnectivity, native landscaping, building façade design materials and some elements of lighting and signage.

**Design standards are being rewritten to still identify important design elements for this highly prominent entry point “gateway” to the City. However, they are more general than the current language and fall back to some general zoning standards that apply citywide, such as stormwater management and lighting controls that did not exist in 2005.**

At the time of approval of the mall project, there was public input about concerns of trash and other pollution impacting the Marsh area. A buffer and design requirements were then included with the Overlay. Notably, protection of the Ketelsen Marsh area to the north with an appropriate buffer, similar to the current protection buffer is being maintained. **Staff added to the O-GNE language a 20% variability option to reduce the buffer size based upon information from a qualified biologist about potential wetland conditions and compatibility with the Marsh to the north.**

The combination of requirements are intended to support an overall development on either the south or north side of E 13th Street with thoughtful cohesive design while eliminating some requirements that can otherwise be reviewed during the Staff level review process.

The process provides more flexibility during the review process, primarily at the Master Plan level in order to adapt to future projects while identifying City priorities up front in the standards. Staff also notes a minor cross reference in Section 29.406(18) is being amended to address a supporting cross reference to these new criteria.

## **PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION ACTION:**

At the May 20 Planning & Zoning Commission meeting the Commission considered the Text Amendment proposal. Staff explained the proposed changes. The Commission had no significant comments. The Planning & Zoning Commission voted 6-0 to recommend Council approve the text amendment.

**PUBLIC NOTICE:**

Public notice was provided only as a publication. As a text amendment, no property owner notice is required. Staff also listed the change on its Planning Division website project list. No comment has been received about this site.

**ALTERNATIVES:**

1. Approve on first reading the ordinance related to amendments to the O-GNE Northeast Gateway Overlay as shown in the attached draft ordinance.
2. Approve amending the O-GNE Northeast Gateway Overlay Standards with modified standards.
3. Do not amend the O-GNE Northeast Gateway Overlay Standards.
4. Defer action on this item and request more information from staff.

**CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

**Staff believes that the revisions to the O-GNE are consistent with the original intent and purpose for this highly prominent location. Maintaining an O-GNE zoning district is consistent with goals of Ames Plan 2040 for maintaining an expectation of quality development within the overlay and addressing the unique attributes of this location. Expectations for cohesive attractive building aesthetics and well thought out commercial areas are reinforced and can be achieved through the proposed revisions and new Master Plan process.** Therefore, it is the recommendation of the City Manager that the City Council approve Alternative #1.

**ATTACHMENT(S):**

[DRAFT ZTA for O-GNE Standards.pdf](#)