Ames Public Library Board of Trustees
Ames Public Library
515 Douglas Ave.
Ames, IA 50010

Oct. 15, 2026

Dear Ames City Council members:

The Ames Public Library (APL) Board of Trustees requests the City Council adopt an ordinance to establish closed hours for library grounds, similar to existing regulations for city parks. While our facility welcomes thousands of patrons each week for research, literacy programs and community support, we are experiencing dramatic growth in overnight safety and health concerns on the exterior grounds that cannot be managed by library staff alone.

As trustees, we witness the high quality of service and marvel at the expertise, time and care the library staff provides its guests 70 hours per week. And on occasion, we take pause when we learn of the difficult situations these dedicated professionals tackle, increasingly often, with both dignity and compassion for patrons.

These challenges focus on increased disruptive behaviors fueled by mental health issues, substance abuse struggles, emotional dysregulation, housing instability, and poverty.

A Person in Charge (PIC) team of high-level library staffers formed several years ago to help frontline staff members manage these incidents while also maintaining a safe and welcoming environment for all visitors. These team members have undergone extensive training and use an online reporting system to document several aspects of these disruptive behaviors. In addition, outdoor cameras have been updated and repaired, signage now designates staff-only areas, graffiti has been removed, and benches have been repaired.

Still, troublesome activities outside the library during its closed hours continue to mount. In recent weeks and months, these behaviors have included individuals:

- sleeping at night behind the library's dumpster, in the dumpster, behind the electric transformers, or near book drop-offs. On occasion, these individuals, startled upon awakening, have pulled knives on staff members coming to work in the morning or have followed those employees to the library's doors.

- following employees on the street after staffers leave work.
- on-ground partying, drinking, suspected drug use and dealing, fights, climbing on library statues and ripping up landscaping.
- abusing library grounds via defecation and urination, vandalism and presence of garbage, food, cigarette butts, drug paraphernalia, needles, etc.
- stashing or abandoning personal belongings on grounds, posing potential hazards to staff members who need to retrieve them. Items have included filled shopping carts, backpacks, bicycles, bicycle trailer bags, sleeping bags, etc.
- stealing bikes.

Regardless of how unpleasant PIC team members' findings are during their daily morning cleanup walks on the outdoor grounds, these staffers remain courteous and respectful when dealing with offenders. If behaviors continue after repeated conversations, these offenders can be barred from the library for a specific amount of time.

Always searching for solutions, APL Director Sheila Schofer has met frequently with staff members from the Ames Police Department, City of Ames legal staff and city administration to seek support on these challenges. It is with the full backing of the APL Board of Trustees that Schofer, and we, request a city ordinance to set closed hours for library grounds. Our recommendation is that library grounds close from 10 p.m. to 8 a.m. daily, except for staff working during those hours or library patrons returning materials in the designated areas without loitering.

We thank you in advance for your consideration of this request. As aways, please feel free to contact Sheila Schofer or any trustee with further questions.

Sincerely,
Ames Public Library Board of Trustees

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