

Mid-Iowa News

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City will negotiate for downtown project

By: Laura Millsaps

The Ames City Council gave City Manager Steve Schainker the nod to pursue negotiations with the McKel Group for a mixed retail and public venue development downtown, but it asked for more investigation into infrastructure costs for a proposed parking garage.

Russ McCullough and David Keller on Tuesday night presented the council with a development proposal that would remodel the Town Centre building at 328 Main St. to hold a restaurant/bar, a live music and convention venue that could hold up to 700 people, retail space, a patio area adjoining Tom Evans Plaza, and public restrooms. The McKel Group has the property under a contract to purchase.



Illustration by Roseland Mackey Harris Architects PC

A view of the proposed Town Centre renovations, looking southeast on Main Street.

McCullough said they took their design proposal guidelines from the downtown catalyst project supported by the council in 2006, which targeted the site for a development that would spur further economic growth in the downtown area.

"We took that as a general guide," McCullough said.

Though the proposed project does not include residential space as in the original catalyst project, the McKel Group does propose to historically preserve the existing building instead of razing the property as originally planned. The costs of the initial phases of the development are estimated to be \$3 million.

McCullough presented the council with a picture of the building dating from 1955.

"We hope to bring that back to life," McCullough said of the original brick façade and stair-stepped roofline.

The proposal also plans a "gateway to Main Street" from the rear of the building with a parking structure that would add an additional 150 parking spaces to the downtown area and a plaza area.

The McKel Group is requesting assistance from the city in the form of up to \$230,000 in grants for proceeding with improvements to the exterior of the building and a loan for \$200,000 to cover initial timing delays in historic tax credit financing.

A requested tax increment finance agreement, Schainker said, would go to help the city pay for public improvements in the parking structure, estimated to cost about \$2 million. Schainker also said the proposed plaza was not included in the cost estimates for the project.

Support for the project seemed cautiously optimistic. Council members expressed concern for both the actual costs and scope of the parking improvements, but recognized the importance of parking to the success of the project.

Councilmen Ryan Doll and Matthew Goodman expressed a need to more precisely define "destination tenants," and the council voted to include this in future negotiations with the developer.

In other business:

* The council approved the preliminary plat for the Walnut Ridge subdivision located at 3503 Lincoln Way, the

site of a former mobile home park. The subdivision will be developed into commercial property along Lincoln Way and single-family homes accessed from Story Street and Crane Avenue.

* The council approved a resolution exempting the Hunziker Youth Sports Complex from parking lot paving requirements.

* The council approved the contract for a route selection study for the electric transmission line project from Ames to Ankeny. The council also approved the hiring of outside legal counsel for representation at the Iowa Utilities Board.

The meeting will be rebroadcast on the city's cable channel 12 at 7 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 11.

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