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## City OKs funds for jobs, highway beautification

By Bob Zientara

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Two recent actions by the Ames City Council will enable a new local industry to tap into needed funds for employee salaries and will assist local businesses in bringing a major city beautification project a step closer to reality.

The council agreed Jan. 13 to sign for \$75,000 in government and economic development loans for Renewable Energy Group, 416 S. Bell Ave.

Council action in December assures about \$640,000 in state Department of Transportation money will be available this year to build the "Southeast Entryway" along the north and south sides of U.S. Highway 30 between the Dayton Avenue bridge and Interstate 35.

For Renewable Energy Group, obtaining a city of Ames loan for \$50,000, repayable at 1.6 percent, and getting \$25,000 more in a forgivable loan, based on job creation and other criteria, are signs that REG is living up to its end of the bargain, chief operating officer Daniel Oh said.

"We told the city that we are delivering on our promises and performing according to what was agreed," Oh said.

The money was first approved in April 2007, City Manager Steve Schainker said.

REG research and development manager Glen Meier said getting the money was a step in a five-year process that began when the company moved to Ames from its former headquarters in Ralston.

The company also got direct assistance and tax credits totaling \$450,000 from the Iowa Department of Economic Development, according to the city. It was based on the number of high-pay "head-of-household" jobs REG said it could create.

The company now has 28 employees with Ames addresses and between six and 10 others who live elsewhere in Story County or other nearby communities, said Alicia Clancy, REG marketing director. Most are high-quality, good-paying positions, Oh said.

The company has 132 employees across the United States who work in Iowa locations including Ames, Ralston, Wall Lake, Newton, Farley (in Dubuque County), Washington and Algona, and out of the state in Glenville, Minn., Danville, Ill., and Houston.

On the Southeast Entryway beautification project, some work has already been done,

said Corey Mellies, city civil engineer. But the bulk of the funding, including a \$638,000 Iowa Department of Transportation grant, became available when the city OK'd an agreement with the state Dec. 16.

It has been a long wait for members of the South Ames Business Neighborhood, who put up \$106,000 of their own money along with \$187,000 in city funds to leverage the state grant, business owner Monte Parrish said in an interview last August.

One of the delays was a federal rule requiring projects like this to be bid out, even though proponents had already chosen David Dahlquist, a Des Moines architect and artist, to design lighted columns that will flank the highway and exit and entry ramps.

But the city found a way to get a federal OK for the project as written, and the council action may make it possible to send the project out for bids as early as this August, Mellies said.

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