

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE AMES CONFERENCE BOARD

AMES, IOWA

FEBRUARY 24, 2026

REGULAR MEETING OF THE AMES CONFERENCE BOARD

The Regular Meeting of the Ames Conference Board was called to order by Chairman John Haila at 5:00 p.m. on February 24, 2026. Present from the Ames City Council were John Haila, Bronwyn Beatty-Hansen, Gloria Betcher, Amber Corrieri, Tim Gartin, Rachel Junck, and Anita Rollins. Lisa Heddens and Linda Murken represented the Story County Board of Supervisors. Art Baumgartner represented the Ames Community School District Board of Directors. The Gilbert Community School District Board of Directors, Nevada Community School District Board of Directors, and United Community School District Board of Directors were not represented. Also present were Shari Plagge, City of Ames Assessor, and Kenneth Baker, Deputy Assessor as Recording Clerk.

MINUTES OF MARCH 11, 2025: Chairman Haila stated that he was present at the March 11th, 2025 Conference Board meeting but not included in the minutes. He asked that the minutes be amended to list him as present. Moved by Murken, seconded by Betcher to approve the amended Minutes of March 11, 2025 meeting of the Ames Conference Board. Vote on Motion 2-0. Motion declared carried unanimously.

ANNUAL REPORT FROM SHARI PLAGGE, CITY ASSESSOR: Plagge introduced herself and Baker and provided an overview of the duties of the Assessor as prescribed by Iowa Code.

Plagge provided an annual update on the Assessor's Office. She stated that Baker was appointed as Deputy Assessor in May 2025 and has received his Iowa Certified Assessor (ICA) designation.

Plagge stated that the Assessor's Office will be fully staffed by March 2026, for the first time during her term.

Plagge highlighted public outreach efforts conducted by the Assessor's Office. She stated that the Assessor's Office has created four explanatory videos for the public and that she has conducted two speaking engagements, with a third scheduled at the Sixty Forward Center in April.

Plagge summarized the progress on her office's reappraisal review project. She stated that she has five staff members working on the project. The project is more than 50% completed and will be finalized in time for the 2027 assessment year.

Plagge summarized the Assessor's Office's priorities for upcoming years. She stated that goals for the next two years include finishing the 2027 reappraisal project, obtaining a CEAA designation from the IAAO, finalizing a procedural manual for data collection, creating productivity outcomes, and conducting an audit of all exempt properties. She

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stated that longer-term priorities include creating a strategic plan, updating office procedures and review schedules, continuing to develop staff for internal leadership roles, increasing the availability of assessment data on Office's website, and regularly reviewing the Office's technology needs.

Plagge shared the 2025 Abstract of Assessment, highlighting valuation updates for industrial and commercial properties due to market changes.

Plagge shared assessment-related statistics such as long-term housing price trends, parcel counts, sales volume, and residential sales ratios.

Plagge summarized appeal information for the 2025 assessment year. She stated that the Assessor's Office handled 267 informal reviews and 441 Board of Review protests. 36 appeals advanced to PAAB or District Court, 22 of which are still pending. She summarized the outcomes of the 14 appeals decided as of 2/24/2026 and highlighted the tax dollars retained, even after appraisal and testimony costs.

Betcher asked when changes to the Homestead and Military Exemptions began. Plagge stated that Homestead Exemption for those 65 and older was created in 2023 and that the value of the Military Exemption was increased in the same year. Betcher asked how many individual exemptions were filed. Plagge responded that she could not provide a precise number without research, but that the number was likely several thousand.

Betcher also asked for an explanation of the increased number of property sales in 2021. Plagge confirmed that COVID-19 had influenced the market, leading to more sales and also to more improvements and additions to existing homes.

Betcher asked whether appellants who lost their property appeal cases would have to cover the legal costs of the Assessor's Office. Plagge affirmed that Iowa Code could force the appellant to cover legal costs in certain cases, but that she would need to consult the City Attorney.

BOARD OF REVIEW MEMBERS AND APPOINTMENT: Chairman Haila explained the composition and function of the Board of Review. He stated that Board of Review member Park Woodle had submitted his resignation after the Board completed its work in 2025.

It was moved by Heddens, seconded by Rollins, to accept the resignation of Park Woodle. Vote on motion 2-0. Motion declared carried unanimously.

Haila stated that the Board of Review now needs a member to fill the vacancy and complete a term from 2026 to 2032. Haila asked the Conference Board to contact anyone who might be interested in the position. Plagge clarified that Board of Review members are

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paid for the time they spend in trainings and meetings. Lisa Heddens stated that she knows a realtor who may be interested.

Betcher asked what had already been done to contact possible Board of Review members. Plagge stated that a mass email was sent out to possible members using information from the Ames Regional Economic Alliance website. She stated that she has not received any responses yet.

DISCUSSION OF CITY ASSESSOR'S PROPOSED BUDGET FOR 2026-2027: Plagge referred to Attachment D and explained that Beacon, Story County GIS, ESRI, Pictometry, Tyler, and Energov expenses are all shared with either the City of Ames or Story County. She stated that the Management Services fee is paid to the City of Ames for space and services in City Hall. She also explained that phone expenses are no longer a separate line item and that they now fall under IT instead.

Plagge then referred to Attachment B and Attachment D. Plagge mentioned that postage expenses will be lower after the reappraisal project is completed. She stated that the 2026 Appeals and Court budget item was adjusted due to the 22 upcoming appeals that will require appraisals if they are not settled. She also stated that \$45,000 was moved to the Special Projects budget item for new desks.

Plagge referred to Attachment C, showing salaries and benefits. She stated that the 8% increase in healthcare costs was estimated by the City Finance department and that costs were also increased by two employees switching from single to family plans. Staff costs are also higher due to the full staff and 3.5% raises for staff, the same increase as that received by employees for the City of Ames. Plagge discussed the increase in the Deputy's salary, stating that it was in the proposed 2026 budget and based on salaries in comparable jurisdictions. She clarified that the Conference Board sets the salary for the Assessor and Deputy individually, while the salary for full-time staff comes from a single pool. Plagge stated that the two temporary employees will work until 2027 and that the Assessor's Office will remain at eight full-time staff from then on.

Gartin affirmed that Beacon is a useful investment for Ames residents and asked whether it would be possible to enable name-based searches on the Beacon site. Plagge responded that Beacon is shared between her office and the Story County Assessor, so both offices would have to agree on any changes. She stated that there may also be compliance issues with the Back the Blue Act and Iowa's Safe at Home program, which would require name redaction. She emphasized that the Story County Assessor would be unlikely to allow name search, so the City Assessor would need to purchase a separate Beacon site. Gartin stated that he supports name redaction, but that public records should be easily

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accessible to promote transparency. He asked the City Assessor to discuss the issue with the Story County Assessor. Plagge stated that she will speak with the Story County Assessor. Haila asked about the impact a new Beacon site would have on the current budget. Plagge stated that it would likely require a budget amendment. Haila asked Gartin about his desired timeline for enabling name search. Gartin stated that the best situation would be to come to an agreement with the County Assessor. If an agreement cannot be reached, he stated that the next step would be to explore the cost of a separate Beacon site. Plagge stated that she would discuss the matter with the County Assessor and inquire with Beacon about possible costs.

Plagge stated that the proposed levy rate for the Assessor's Office is .30062 and that the total budget is increasing by 1.85%. Haila asked about the Office's reserves. Plagge stated that the office is just under 30% of the prior year budget, but that she expects to be slightly over 30% by July 1st since not all the money allocated for appraisals may be needed.

Gartin moved to receive the proposed budget. Murken seconded the motion. Vote on motion 2-0. Motion declared carried unanimously.

Heddens moved to set the public hearing date for April 14, 2026 at 5:30 p.m. Seconded by Betcher. Vote on motion 2-0. Motion declared carried unanimously.

Rollins moved to approve and publish the proposed budget. Seconded by Murken. Vote on motion 2-0. Motion declared carried unanimously.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: No unfinished business was brought forward.

NEW BUSINESS: Haila stated that Plagge's term expires on December 31, 2026, and that she would like to be reappointed. Haila stated and Plagge confirmed that the Assessor cannot be reappointed prior to 90 days before the expiration of a term. Haila stated that the Conference Board will hold a meeting in October to consider Plagge's reappointment.

ADJOURNMENT: Moved by Rollins, seconded by Heddens, to adjourn the Ames Conference Board meeting at 5:48 p.m.

Vote on motion 2-0. Motion Declared unanimously.



Shari Plagge, Ames City Assessor &
Conference Board Clerk



John A. Haila, Conference Board Chairman