

Staff Report

DOWNTOWN PLAZA VISION

November 24, 2020

BACKGROUND:

As early as 2005, the City first explored the idea of developing a gathering place in the Downtown Business District. City Council most recently discussed plaza options in November 2017. On February 25, 2020, the City Council established as part of their value to have a “fun, vibrant community that attracts and retains people” to begin construction on a downtown community space by 2021. To help accomplish this goal, a five-task process was approved by the City Council which included budgeting for the plaza, holding a Council discussion to determine the vision for this space, and convening public meetings by the staff to solicit input regarding desired features and location of the plaza.

In February 2020, the City Council took the first step by appropriating the following funds to support the construction of a Downtown Plaza.

2019/20 General Fund	\$1,100,000
2020/21 Design (Local Option Sales Tax)	\$ 200,000
2021/22 Construction (G.O. Bonds)	\$ 700,000
2022/23 Construction (G.O. Bonds)	\$ 700,000
Total Funding	\$2,700,000

REINVESTMENT DISTRICT INCENTIVE OPPORTUNITY:

As you know, the new development being proposed along the north side of Lincoln Way from Clark to Kellogg provides the City the opportunity to take advantage of the State’s Reinvestment District incentive. Unfortunately, the application deadline for this incentive program is February 15, 2021. Should the Council want to pursue this funding source, it is important that a site location for the plaza be determined as soon as possible.

QUESTIONS FOR THE CITY COUNCIL:

Before identifying the preferred site, hiring a consultant to design the space, and soliciting public input regarding desired amenities; it is important that the City Council members first express their vision for the plaza. Therefore, staff is seeking your thoughts regarding the following four questions.

1. What is Council's vision for this plaza?
 - a. A year-round attraction or is it just to be used in the warmer months
 - b. A hub for downtown activity
 - c. The space should be unique

- d. A space that does not compete, but rather complement other downtown amenities (i.e. Tom Evans Plaza, Bandshell Park)
 - e. A balance of green space versus hard scape (concrete, fountains, etc.)
2. What goals does Council have for this project?
 - a. Attract more people to the downtown area
 - b. Provide opportunities for residents and businesses to utilize
 - c. A space anyone can use at any time at no cost and/or a rental process for events
 3. What activities does Council wish to see happen at the plaza?
 - a. Special events (e.g. small musical events, individual performers, etc.)
 - b. Small gatherings (e.g. lunch dates, business meetings, etc.)
 - c. Play opportunities (e.g. spray pad, ice skating, etc.)
 4. What is the preferred site for the plaza?

After defining the vision for the space, it is important to identify the site(s) that accomplishes the vision. Because the City owns the property east of City Hall, it appears this site would offer the best option if we hope to complete a grant application on time. Although selecting this site expedites the application process, the question remains if this is the right location to meet Council goals for a downtown plaza.

Following are several pictures of what could be included in the plaza:



Spray features could be a play feature during the day and provide ambience in the evening for activities and/or special events



The above pictures show how a space could be a spray pad in the summer and converted to an ice-skating venue during the winter season



A more contemporary shade structure is shown on the left while a more traditional shelter structure is shown on the right

STAFF COMMENTS:

The downtown plaza is an opportunity to be a unique gathering space for Ames. It could provide residents and businesses a place to meet, conduct events, and just pass time. By Council providing direction as to what its vision is for this plaza, along with input from the public and businesses, the end product has a greater chance of meeting everyone's goals for this project.