

Staff Report

**Request for Zoning Text Amendment to Remove the CSC Zoning District
Mid-Block 20-foot Setback Standard**

December 17, 2019

BACKGROUND:

On December 10th, City Council reviewed a request to amend the zoning standard regarding the need for a mid-block 20-foot break for each block face in Campustown (Ames Municipal Code Section 29.803(3)). *“In order to provide access for vehicles and/or utilities to the interior of the block, there shall be a twenty-foot-wide opening between buildings, at the approximate mid-point of each face of each block...”*. City Council directed staff to place the item on an agenda to explain what the text amendment might mean to the broader Campustown Service Center (CSC) Zoning District, if it is initiated by City Council. The individual making the request for the change is specifically interested in how the requirement would be applied to Lincoln Way along the 2500 Block.

The CSC district includes the 2300-2700 blocks on Lincoln Way and then continues south encompassing the primarily commercial district of Campustown. (Attachment A) CSC Zoning was initially adopted in 2006. **The mid-block standard is intended to address the variety of access and utility constraints that exist in Campustown while permitting for redevelopment of the area. This mid-block break standard has historically been applied only if necessary to serve the stated purposes of the standard for access or utility needs. This approach does create some ambiguity along with flexibility.** Currently, only the 2300 and 2600 block of Lincoln Way have at least one opening at some point along the block face, while the 2400 block and 2700 block do not have a break along Lincoln Way. Other block faces in Campustown have a mix of alley, easements, or neither to meet the standard.

The purpose of the Campustown Service Center (CSC) Zoning District is for development “...to be very dense with building coverage, large buildings in scale with the predominant building pattern in the Campustown commercial area, and buildings placed close together ...Building placement, the scale at the street, design and materials reinforce a dynamic, pedestrian-friendly neighborhood character.” Many of the redeveloped sites are in alignment with this desired development pattern and a break in buildings exists on many other block faces within the CSC district, with the exception of Lincoln Way.

OPTIONS:

Option 1: Amend the CSC Zoning requirements to remove the 20-foot mid-block break only along Lincoln Way.

Historically, the mid-block break has been applied only if necessary to serve developments in Campustown. This has provided some flexibility in the past. The most recent developments on the 2400 and 2700 blocks of Lincoln Way were not required to provide the break, as utility and vehicle access was available from other block faces. Staff believes that access from Lincoln Way as an arterial street is likely not desirable for any block face, however utility access is still possible from Lincoln Way. However, most streets in Campustown have utility options from adjoining streets that does not always necessitate access from Lincoln Way.

If the City Council were interested in removing the requirement for the mid-block only along Lincoln Way in the CSC district, it would allow for the redevelopment of 2516 Lincoln Way to make full use of the parcel from east to west, without sacrificing useable square footage. This change in text would also remove discretionary application by Staff along Lincoln without affecting possible future development. The standard would remain for other blocks.

Option 2: Clarify the CSC zoning language that the mid-block break is applicable when necessary as determined by the Planning Director

This option is designed to maintain the mid-block break in the CSC district along all block faces, but recognize the practice of making case-by-case determinations. The text amendment would add language to clarify that the break would applied if applicable. As part of development review Staff would evaluate utilities and access for proposed developments and how the break may or may not affect future development on and off-site. This change would be minor in nature and align the text with Staff's current application of the regulation.

Option 3: Comprehensive utility and planned access study within the CSC district.

This option would require a more in-depth assessment by affected departments of utility and access needs to create a master plan for Campustown to prioritize specific areas for service. Changing the standard for the broader Campustown area would be much more involved due to the varying arrangements of utilities and alleys. The zoning standard could then be changed to recognize the specific areas requiring a break or setback mid-block. **This would be a significant undertaking as a work plan priority. This process would take at least six months to coordinate and do outreach. Staff does not recommend taking on a utility master plan task at this time unless it is a high priority issue for the Council.**

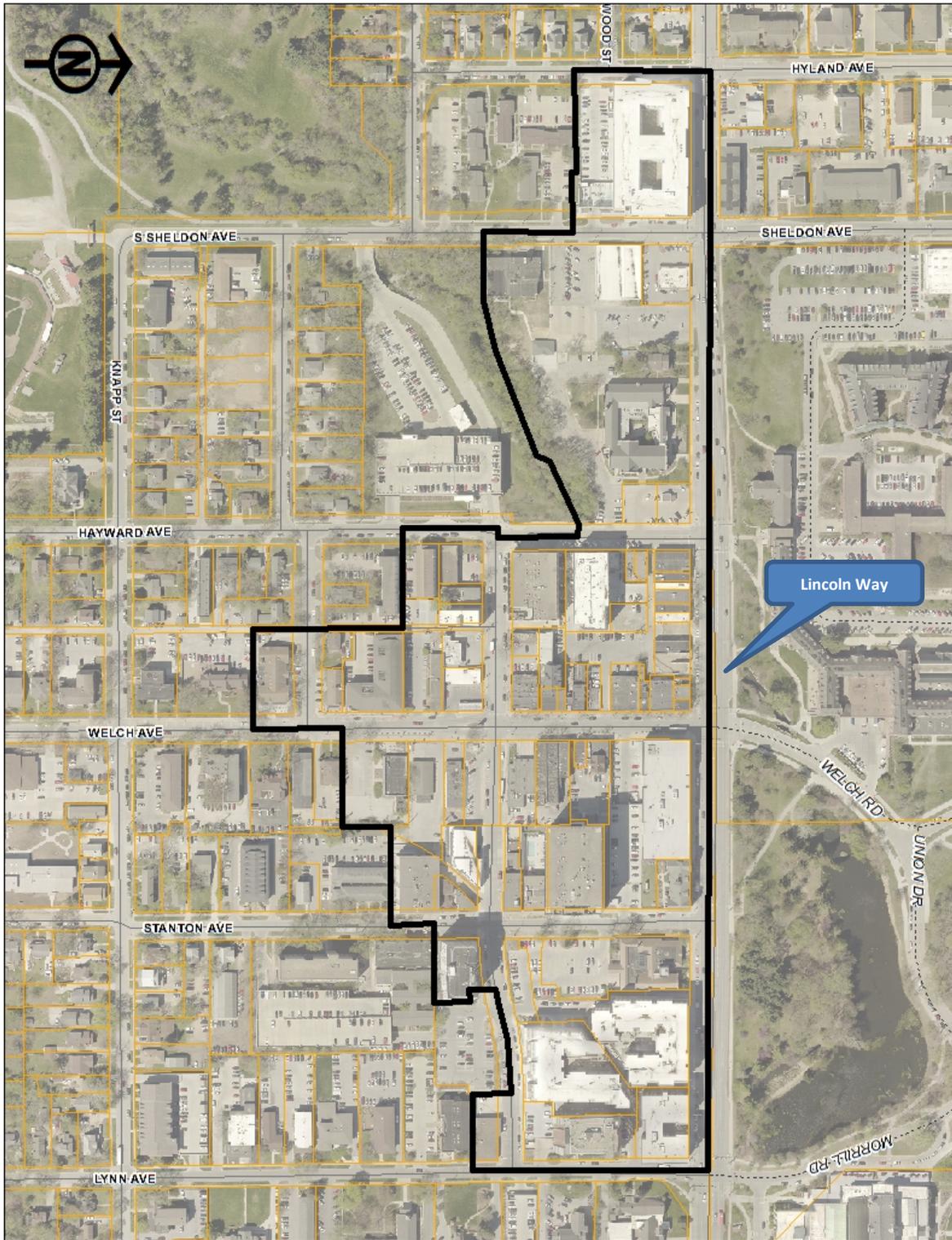
STAFF COMMENTS:

A consideration for the proposed removal of the mid-block break for utility access requirement is how it may influence future redevelopment within the CSC district. Altering the language would not prohibit a break to be incorporated into the design project if desired by a developer or if needed in order to meet building code requirements, it would remove the mandate.

The request from change came from an interest in redeveloping the property at 2516 Lincoln Way that would be subject to the break standard. Any of the three options provided would serve their needs. Choosing to proceed with Option 1 or Option 2 would have the least impact to the CSC district and staff's workload. Changing this zoning standard would not alter building, plumbing, fire or electric code requirements. Proceeding with Option 1 or 2 would not include public outreach and would take approximately eight weeks to complete the public hearing process for the amendment.

If City Council takes not action on the request to initiate the requested text amendment, staff would continue to apply the standard on a case-by-case as needed basis for all block faces.

ATTACHMENT A



Campustown Service Center (CSC) Zoning Boundary