City Facilities, Program, and Service Updates in Response to COVID-19

AMES, Iowa – The Ames City Council provided direction to City staff at Tuesday’s Council meeting about reopening City facilities, holding events, and offering various City programs and services. In making its decision, Council Members reiterated their top priority is to protect citizens and City employees by reducing opportunities to spread COVID-19 in Ames.

Council directed that City Hall and City facilities not reopen before Wednesday, July 1, 2020. City staff will continue working from their offices and in some cases from home. To prepare to open, physical barriers are being installed to protect the public and staff. Customers can conduct City business online or by contacting individual City departments directly. The Ames Public Library, 515 Douglas Ave., will follow the same reopening plan, and is also moving forward on a curbside pick-up program planned to launch in the coming weeks.

The Council delayed making a final decision regarding opening Furman Aquatic Center and/or the Ames Municipal Pool until its regularly scheduled meeting on Tuesday, May 26.

The Council delegated the possibility of opening the Ames/ISU Ice Arena to City staff and required the use of “decision-making criteria” that includes Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds’ directives, public health guidance, and other considerations. City staff developed the decision-making criteria process to evaluate factors such as the number of people involved, how densely crowded people will be, what type of protective supplies are available or provided, and whether social distancing is possible.

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The Council also directed staff to determine on a case-by-case basis the feasibility of offering recreation programming during the summer season, again requiring the use of the comprehensive decision-making criteria and thorough analysis of each program. Parks and Recreation Director Keith Abraham said he will follow national and state health guidelines, sports associations recommendations, consult with staff, and consider feedback from a user survey his department conducted in order to move forward.

The City Council considered a list of events, celebrations, and parades planned on City property through August 31, 2020. Organizers of some events, such as the Memorial Day Parade and Ceremony, have already notified City staff of cancellations. By using the decision-making criteria, the City Council cancelled the Fourth of July parade and pancake breakfast, Street ‘N’ Greet Block Party Trailer reservations, Ames Municipal Band concerts, and Rummage RAMPage. Additionally, the Council directed that approval for all other events on City property through August 31 be considered using the same guidelines. The City Council will evaluate whether it is possible to proceed with the Fourth of July fireworks at a future meeting.

“There are dozens of events planned each year that typically go through the City’s special events process. With this directive, our spring and summer events will be screened to consider factors like the numbers of attendees and whether the event complies with state regulations,” said Assistant City Manager Brian Phillips. “Ensuring safe event planning in the era of the COVID-19 is incredibly challenging, and we are going to be very cautious about approving events moving forward.”

Finally, the City Council voted to allow Ames Farmers Market to open in Downtown Ames with several conditions. Event organizers must follow the COVID-19 guidelines they presented earlier to the Council. There will be no food trucks, no food prepared on site (hot or cold), and no alcohol tasting. The organizers are responsible for enforcing safety guidelines and practices. Also, vendors must adhere to the Governor’s guidelines issued jointly by four state agencies on April 24 regarding farmers markets.

For additional information or concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic, call the City hotline at 515.239.5670 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday or email covid19@cityofames.org

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