

Staff Report

HARRISON ROAD SURPLUS LAND NEIGHBORHOOD OUTREACH MEETING

May 14, 2024

BACKGROUND:

On December 19, 2023, City Council reviewed a staff report focused on infill housing areas identified as Redirection Areas within Ames Plan 2040, along with examples of scattered sites that could support smaller infill opportunities. **One site identified by staff as an infill option was the 1.8-acre City-owned site of unused Harrison Road right-of-way, at the corner of Harrison and Welbeck. Given the Council's goal of increasing diverse housing options and interest in infill development, the site could be utilized as a City-controlled test case for identifying a developer to construct small-lot style housing.**

Staff indicated that a neighborhood outreach meeting would be an appropriate first step before determining whether to proceed with an RFP for the sale and development of the site. Accordingly, a Neighborhood Meeting was held on April 11, 2024, to obtain input from property owners in proximity to this site.

Staff presented an overview of the site conditions and conceptual housing options. This report provides a summation of the public feedback and includes a discussion of possible next steps. The presentation from the outreach meeting is included as Attachment A. This presentation includes the location map and surrounding land use designations and zoning districts.

SITE CHARACTERISTICS:

The site itself is approximately 1.8 acres with frontage along Welbeck at the intersection with Harrison. The site widens out towards the railroad located at the west edge of the property. The site was originally created as an outlot with the Bloomington Heights Subdivision for the purpose of constructing an extension of Harrison Road as a crossing of the railroad tracks. However, when Northridge Heights was developed west of the railroad tracks, no corresponding outlot was established on the west to complete a crossing. Therefore, the Harrison/Welbeck outlot is surplus land.

There are three types of housing in the general area. Immediately abutting the site are traditional single-family detached homes on standard residential lots. Rear yards of these homes abut the surplus land site. Eastward along Harrison there is a Planned Unit Development (PUD) of a mix of small-lot detached single-family lots and bi-attached homes. Further to the east at Hyde Avenue is a medium density townhome development.

PUBLIC OUTREACH:

An in-person public meeting was identified as the most appropriate outreach option for this project. Postcards were mailed to 112 property owners, two weeks prior to the meeting. A one-hour meeting was held at Homewood Golf Course, beginning at 6:30 pm, with a presentation followed by discussion

and comments. Fifteen people attended the meeting, representing 11 different properties (Attendees indicated that others were interested that were unable to attend). **As discussed in more detail below, the participants did not support any of the presented development concepts. Details of the comments are included in Attachment B.**

DEVELOPMENT CONCEPTS:

The presentation included graphics illustrating various housing options and how they might fit on the site. The concepts focused on low density options consistent with the intent of Plan 2040 for infill that approximates densities of the surrounding uses but may include different housing types.

The total number of residences varied from 5-12. The concepts included a wide array of options including: Typical Low Density Subdivision with a cul-de-sac and 6000 sq. ft. single-family lots; Small Lot Development – lots for single family detached homes with attached garages utilizing a PUD and private street; Single-Family Attached Townhomes - similar to existing neighborhood examples in the Brickman and Westwind area utilizing a PUD and private streets; Pocket Neighborhood – a new concept to Ames of smaller clustered detached homes with central shared green space using a PUD and private street access.

After the presentation, participants were asked by staff to place a green dot on the illustration that they most favored and a red dot on the illustration that they least favored, along with comments on the drawing indicating what influenced their choice. Initially, none of the participants wanted to select any of the concepts as their preference was no development. After further discussion, they determined that they would only place red dots and that they would place them on all of the concepts. **Fifteen comment sheets were submitted. The overwhelming response was against development of this site for *any* housing.** The meeting participants described how their children use the site as open space. The actual comment sheets and results of the dot exercise are included as Attachment B. Here is a summation of the comments:

Top preferences for the site:

- Keep as a green space (12)
- Park for kids (12)
- No housing/ I'm not interested in infill development (12)
- Drainage/Storm water management – floods (8)
- Add Playground (6)
- Add Ball Diamond (3)
- Finish the sidewalk (2)
- Nature site (1)
- Community garden (1)

Other comments:

- Maintain integrity of neighborhood (no parking lots) (1)
- Increased traffic (2)
- Our kids use this space/Taking space from neighborhood; (4)
- Eyesore to existing houses (1)
- Lack of City maintenance - neighbors maintain; City doesn't clean drainage ditches (2)
- Should not be low-income.

Following the meeting, planning staff sent out emails thanking the participants for coming and attaching a copy of the presentation. Staff has not received any follow-up correspondence. As promised at the meeting, staff has also sent an email to let participants know of that this report would be on the May 14, 2024, agenda. **Staff expects neighborhood members to be present at the May 14 Council meeting to comment on potential development of the site.**

PRIOR NEIGHBORHOOD INPUT REGARDING THIS SITE:

City staff has previously explored an opportunity to use this surplus land. In 2022, this site was the subject of a neighborhood meeting held by Parks and Recreation staff to ascertain input from residents about a possible community garden at this site. Postcards were sent to 243 residents in the area and was attended by approximately 15 participants. At that time the public input was overwhelmingly against a community garden with a desire for no change to the property. As a result, the City did not move forward with any planned improvement to the property. A summation of those comments is included as Attachment C.

OPTIONS:

Option 1 - Direct staff to proceed with preparing a Request for Proposals (RFP).

Given Council's goal of increasing diverse housing options and interest in infill development, the Council may wish to proceed with an RFP for development of the site. The intent would be to select a private developer through the RFP process to subdivide the site and construct housing. The City would not act as a developer for the property.

If the City Council determines to proceed with the RFP, staff would draft an RFP outlining City Council expectations for density and housing types. City Council could determine with the RFP evaluation criteria if it has preferences for certain housing types, such as a pocket neighborhood design. The RFP would require a concept layout depicting the developer's intent for the site. Once a developer is selected, the developer would work through the zoning and development approval process.

Option 2 - Direct staff to engage in further public input, before Council determines how to proceed.

Staff has reached out to the public and invited public comment. Staff believes that the comments received represent an array of interests and that additional public outreach is not needed. However, the City Council may determine participation is lacking from specific interests and that additional input should be captured and considered before proceeding with a decision on issuing an RFP. If so, the City Council should direct staff as to the entities to be contacted for additional input.

Option 3 - Do not proceed with a Request for Proposals (RFP) at this time.

Given the strong public input against housing, the City Council may determine that they do not wish to proceed with an RFP for housing on this site at this time.

STAFF COMMENTS:

With City Council's strong interest in supporting housing construction and variety within the city, staff initially presented this Harrison Road surplus land site to Council due to its size and ability to accommodate various housing types in a compatible manner with the neighborhood. As City controlled land, the City Council would be able to exert a greater amount of influence on the housing choice and design options than other private development sites making it quality option to demonstrate infill development. There is also no other planned use for the site that constructing housing would displace.

The public input process provided a robust outcry from meeting participants against any housing development on this site. The participants value the land as open space for informal use by the residents. The participants in the outreach meeting expressed concern about drainage issues in the area but provided no specific suggestions on use of the site for housing.

Despite the input regarding the neighborhood's value of the informal open space, the site was not ever planned or intended to be open space as it was designed as a collector street extension. Lloyd Kurtz Park serves as the nearest neighborhood park; the properties in the neighborhood that are furthest north of the Harrison/Welbeck outlot are within Lloyd Kurtz Park's 1/2-mile service area radius. This is the standard distance used by Parks and Recreation staff for park planning purposes. **Staff believes that the site is well suited to addressing Council's goal of adding infill housing to the community, and it can be compatible with the neighborhood in scale and density regardless of the preferred housing type.**

If City Council chooses Option 1, staff believes that moving forward with an RFP expeditiously in June would be ideal. This timing would allow a developer to be selected and work to begin towards entitlements this fall, with housing able to be constructed in Spring 2025. The Work Plan would allocate time towards the RFP process, but the development of the site would be a current planning project that does not require work plan prioritization.

ATTACHMENT(S):

[Attachment A - Neighborhood Mtg Presentation 04-11-24.pdf](#)

[Attachment B - Participant Comments.pdf](#)

[Attachment C - Prior Neighborhood Input on this Site.pdf](#)