



**CITY COUNCIL  
COMMUNICATION:**

**ITEM \_\_\_\_\_**

**OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER  
CITY OF DES MOINES, IOWA**

**99-139**

**SYNOPSIS -**

**AGENDA:**

APRIL 5, 1999

**SUBJECT:**

PEDESTRIAN AND  
SKYWALK CROSSINGS  
IN COURT AVENUE  
AREA

On January 25, 1999, the City Council received the report and recommendations of the Ad-Hoc Committee on the Court Avenue pedestrian access/skywalk and referred the report to boards and commissions for review and comment. The boards and commissions have reviewed the report and have submitted recommendations to the Council. On the April 5, 1999 City Council agenda are resolutions relating to the issues of pedestrian and skywalk crossings for Court Avenue.

**TYPE:**

**RESOLUTION**  
ORDINANCE  
RECEIVE/FILE

- The first is a resolution that receives and files the recommendations from various boards and commissions regarding the report of the Ad-Hoc Committee for Pedestrian Access in the Court Avenue area.
- The second is a resolution to adopt the report and to direct staff to prepare a general schedule, scope of services, and a budget that would detail the City to undertake basic streetscape improvements on Court Avenue as described in the Ad-Hoc Committee's report. The improvements-the City's portion of the Court Avenue streetscape on the public right-of-way between 3rd and 5th Streets and an enhanced pedestrian **on-grade** crossing of Court Avenue in the Saddlery Building area-would be designed in conjunction with the proposed improvements to the Saddlery Building outdoor access from the skywalk to the ground level. The report will be completed for Council consideration at its April 26, 1999 meeting when the loan contract documents for the Saddlery Building improvements, including the vertical access, are before the Council for its approval.

**SUBMITTED BY:**

RICHARD CLARK  
DEPUTY CITY  
MANAGER

Andrea Hauer, Office of Economic Development, and Debra Smith, Community Development Department, served as

staff to the Ad-Hoc Committee.

### **FISCAL IMPACT -**

- A. Adoption of the Ad-Hoc Committee recommendations and the various board and commission recommendations does not commit the Council to any fiscal expenditures.
- B. Adoption of the resolution authorizing staff to prepare information on the costs and timing of undertaking the public streetscape improvements for the April 26, 1999 Council meeting.

### **RECOMMENDATION -**

**Approve the Ad-Hoc Committee's report and recommendations contained in the report. The major recommendations are:**

- **A skywalk bridge across Court Avenue is not recommended at this time in part because no developer or property owner on the south side of Court Avenue has a pending request; and in part, because a skywalk system extension would be inconsistent with the expanding street-level retail/entertainment character of the area.**
- **It is appropriate to preserve the options for the skywalk to cross Court Avenue in the future. Possible locations for the skywalk crossings are:**
  - **NW corner of 2nd Avenue - the Court Avenue Public Parking Ramp.**
  - **Mid-block between 3rd and 4th Streets - the Saddlery Building.**
- **Major improvements are needed to the current skywalk access and street level interface at the Saddlery Building.**
- **Court Avenue should be crossed with an on-grade pedestrian path with design elements such as lighting, paving, signage, and other improvements to provide a clear walkway across Court Avenue.**

- **Additional improvements to the pedestrian system will be needed as the Court Avenue area develops.**

**This report advocates that the public and private improvements should be undertaken concurrently so the overall design and construction coordinate. The Saddlery Building will be renovated this year, which will include the privately funded construction of an exterior stairway and walkway from the current skywalk leading to the Court Avenue sidewalk.**

**The resolution also directs staff to prepare a general schedule, scope of services, and a budget that will identify the resources needed by the City to undertake basic streetscape and pedestrian access improvements for the Court Avenue right-of-way areas in conjunction with the proposed Saddlery Building improvements. This report is to be presented to the City Council for its consideration at its April 26, 1999 meeting.**

## **BACKGROUND -**

### Committee Background

During discussion of the Court Avenue Entertainment Center proposals, the issue of skywalk access to the area south of Court Avenue was brought up. The City Council directed the City Manager to recommend a process to facilitate recommendations on how to provide pedestrian access to Court Avenue and the area south of Court Avenue.

In order to involve as many representatives of the stakeholders in this issue as possible, an Ad-Hoc Committee was appointed by the Council. The Ad-Hoc Committee was comprised of individuals representing the following interests: property owners along Court Avenue, the Downtown Partnership, the Urban Renewal Board, the Skywalk Commission, Des Moines Development Corporation, downtown property owners/developers with skywalk experience, a representative of the Downtown Housing Team, the Court Avenue business community, and the City. The Committee members were: Randy Africano, Richard Brannan, Richard Clark, William Dikis, David Feehan, Marcia Grant, James Hubbell III, William Knapp II,

Ed Mattis, and George Milligan.

The completed report was presented to the Council at its January 25, 1999 meeting. The Council requested comments and recommendation from other City boards and commissions.

#### Board and Commission Recommendations

When the City Council received the Court Avenue Skywalk Ad-Hoc Task Force report recommendations on January 25, 1999, direction was given to present the report to the appropriate boards and commissions for comment. City staff has presented the report to the Architectural Advisory Committee, Historic District Commission, Plan & Zoning Commission, Skywalk Commission, and Urban Renewal Board. Presentations were made by Debra Smith, Associate Urban Designer in the Community Development Department who also assisted as part of City staff support to the Task Force.

A brief summary of each board or commission's comments follows.

#### **Architectural Advisory Committee (AAC)**

Endorsed the Task Force Report with the following comments:

1. Strongly endorsed upgrading the vertical access at the Saddlery Building to be an easy to find, dynamic, inviting addition to downtown.
2. Recommend the vertical access should be an enclosed area with stair and elevator access, which enhances the district image and presence with high quality design.
3. Recommend NO structure cross Court Avenue, ornamental or otherwise.
4. Recommend the vertical access be designed as an important public space and public monies expended for its construction and maintenance.
5. Architectural imagery should be left to the final design team.

#### **Historic District Commission**

Endorsed the Task Force Report with the following comments:

1. Concern was expressed that little historic background on Court Avenue was contained in the report. The Commission's belief was that first and foremost this area is a historic area; development and improvements should not overwhelm the historic aspects of the District.
2. Recommend NO structure should cross Court Avenue, see AAC Point #3.
3. Recommend vertical access should be enclosed; see AAC Point #2.
4. Recommend vertical access should be designed and developed as an important public space, see AAC Point #4.
5. Recommend any final design proposals should be brought to the Historic District Commission as early as possible.

#### **Plan and Zoning Commission**

Endorsed the Task Force Report with the following comments:

1. Disagreed with the AAC's comment regarding NO structure cross Court Avenue, ornamental or otherwise.
2. Agreed with the other AAC recommendations (summarized above).

#### **Skywalk Commission**

Endorsed the Task Force Report with the following comments:

1. Recommend NO structure cross Court Avenue, ornamental or otherwise.

#### **Urban Renewal Board**

Endorsed the Task Force Report with the following comments:

1. Believe highly visible street-skywalk connections are appropriate and needed throughout the downtown, beginning with the Court Avenue vertical access project.

2. Recommend NO structure cross Court Avenue, a decorative arch or other structure.

3. Supports a high quality design that conveys a festive, exciting, and pleasant feeling that draws people into the area.

4. Supports proceeding with the basic streetscape improvements in the vicinity of the Saddlery Building within the next year.