

 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Council Communication</b> Office of the City Manager</p>	<b>Date:</b> June 24, 2013
	<b>Agenda Item No.</b> 15A <b>Roll Call No.</b> [ ] <b>Communication No.</b> <u>13-308</u> <b>Submitted by:</b> <b>Phillip Delafield,</b> <b>Community Development Director</b>

**AGENDA HEADING:**

Amend the Des Moines’ 2020 Community Character Plan to incorporate the Gray’s Lake Neighborhood Plan as an element.

**SYNOPSIS:**

The Gray’s Lake Neighborhood Association (GLNA) was selected to participate in the Neighborhood Revitalization Program in November 2011 as a “Transitional Neighborhood”. City staff has been working with the neighborhood since March 2012 on the creation of a neighborhood plan. The plan highlights strategies to improve the housing stock, SW 9<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor, sidewalks, infrastructure, parks, and trails in the neighborhood. Once approved, the plan will become an amendment to the City’s 2020 Community Character Plan.

**FISCAL IMPACT: NONE**

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

The GLNA was selected to participate in the Neighborhood Revitalization Program in November 2011 as a “Transitional Neighborhood”. In March 2012, City staff met with the GLNA Planning Committee for the first time. On April 5, 2012, the planning committee and staff held a neighborhood-wide input meeting at the First Unitarian Church. Input from this meeting helped the Planning Committee establish and prioritize issues to address during the planning process. A second neighborhood-wide meeting was held on May 7, 2013 to present the goals and strategies of the plan to neighborhood residents.

At the neighborhood plan kick-off meeting, residents prioritized areas of strength and opportunities for improvement in the neighborhood. Based on this input, the planning committee prioritized the following issues for discussion: infrastructure, housing, parks and trails, sidewalks, land use along the SW 9th Street Corridor, traffic and schools.

**Housing**

The Gray’s Lake Neighborhood has the most diverse housing stock in the City. Unlike most neighborhoods, there is no dominant housing style or time period of neighborhood development. After an initial examination of the neighborhood, it was determined there was a significant difference in the home characteristics east and west of SW 14th Street. The housing stock west of SW 14th Street is significantly larger, newer, and has significantly higher values than homes east of SW 14th Street. The

average home west of SW 14th Street is assessed at \$316,000, while the average home east of SW 14th Street is assessed at \$87,000.

The housing improvement/enhancement strategies differ for the different parts of the neighborhood. One strategy for promoting the west side of the neighborhood is to market the area to prospective homebuyers and other stakeholders. This area is competing with the suburbs for homebuyers and it is an area that many people are unaware of. By working with Realtors and potential homebuyers the goal is to make the neighborhood a place where people continue to want to live.

Homes on the east side of the neighborhood are more modest in size and amenities. This area has not fared as well during the economic downturn. Home sale prices have fallen by almost 30% since 2007. This compares to approximately 20% Citywide. The plan outlines several strategies to address this concern. The first strategy is utilization of the Neighborhood Finance Corporation. Gray's Lake has been included in the NFC lending area since July 2012, and thus far there have been 12 loans closed in the neighborhood. Improving these numbers will help to enhance the housing stock. The GLNA is also going to work with realtors to promote the many benefits of living in the neighborhood and the availability of NFC lending in the area.

Ensuring that all properties meet the City's Junk and Debris Ordinance is another priority. The GLNA has identified a volunteer to build a relationship with the City's Code Enforcement Inspector to help streamline junk and debris complaints in the neighborhood.

### **Infrastructure**

In 2012, approximately \$665,000 in Neighborhood Infrastructure Reinvestment Program funds were allocated to the Gray's Lake Neighborhood. To allocate these funds, the Public Works Department completed an analysis of the streets, curbs, and sidewalks throughout the neighborhood. Based on the analysis, approximately \$1.7 million of needs were identified. The planning committee prioritized improvements along SW 14th Street, Bell Avenue (near Lincoln High School), and SW 12th Street. Curb and overlay improvements were prioritized by the committee since they are the least likely to be funded in the City's Capital Improvement Program. The planning committee decided against using NIRP funds to improve sidewalks in the neighborhood, as they believed that private property owners should be responsible for sidewalk maintenance.

### **Parks and Trails**

The Gray's Lake Neighborhood features two parks - Gray's Lake Park and Mac Rae Park along with the Meredith Trail, a major regional trail. Gray's Lake Park is considered one of the premier parks in the country. The GLNA hopes to work with the City and other park stakeholders to ensure the park continues to be one of the best in the nation.

While Mac Rae Park has several amenities, the planning committee believes there are opportunities to improve the park. The Planning Committee along with the SW 9th Merchants Association is forming a committee to examine improvements to the park. The group kicked off the initiative with a park clean-up day in April. The Parks and Recreation Department has committed to providing cost estimates for park improvements which will allow the neighborhood to fundraise park enhancements.

Enhancing trail connectivity is a priority for the neighborhood. One pending improvement is the Quiet Street initiative, which connects Gray's Lake Park and the Blank Park Zoo along Casady Drive to SW 14th Street and south along SW 14th Street to West Street. The GLNA strongly supports the

completion of this project, which is scheduled for Spring 2014. A trail connection connecting the Meredith Trail to Mac Rae Park is scheduled to be completed in 2015.

### **Sidewalks**

The lack of pedestrian connections throughout the neighborhood was one of the key concerns voiced at the neighborhood kickoff meeting. Specifically the planning committee felt that SW 12th Street, SW 14th Street, and Casady Drive should be prioritized for new sidewalk installation. Currently, the GLNA is working with property owners to gauge interest in pursuing this project. The GLNA will be responsible for obtaining neighborhood and political support for any new sidewalks in the neighborhood.

### **Land use and Zoning/ SW 9th Street Corridor**

The current land use map for the neighborhood shows the majority of the Gray's Lake Neighborhood is residential in nature and character. However, there were two areas where the planning committee believed a more in depth examination of the land use and zoning were necessary - the industrial area along Bell Avenue/Thomas Beck Road, and the SW 9th Street Commercial Corridor.

There was significant discussion about the future land use of the industrial land near Gray's Lake Park along Bell Avenue/Thomas Beck Road. At one time this area was completely industrial in nature with a rail yard running along Gray's Lake. However, in recent years, with elimination of the rail yard, there is some question as to the future land use of this area. As a part of the neighborhood plan implementation, City staff will work with the GLNA, business, and property owners to examine the future land use plan in this area as part of the next Citywide update to the future land use map.

SW 9th Street is a major corridor that stretches along a five (5) mile area from the Highway 5 bypass to the downtown Des Moines. Small lot sizes and an overall excess supply of commercial land use have lead many of the properties to decline in appearance in recent years. Because this corridor impacts many neighborhoods and is a major arterial connecting the south side to downtown, the neighborhood plan recommends a more comprehensive study be completed along the SW 9th Corridor to determine how to enhance and redevelop the area.

### **Traffic and Transportation**

There are two (2) significant future transportation enhancements that will impact the neighborhood. The first is the Southwest Connector. The City's priority is the completion of the Southeast Connector. The current route runs along the south side of Gray's Lake on the old abandoned railroad right-of-way through the neighborhood. However, the City's first priority is the completion of the Southeast Connector. The second enhancement is the possible widening to SW 9th Street. The neighborhood will work with city staff and other stakeholders to ensure these future improvements enhance the neighborhood.

Speeding was a concern of neighborhood residents. Specifically residents were concerned with speeding along SW 14th Street and SW 12th Street. The proposed Quiet Street along SW 14th Street should alleviate some of the excess thru traffic in this area and the enhancements are designed to slow down traffic along this corridor. The planning committee specifically asked City staff to reduce the speed limit along Park Avenue between Fleur Drive and SW 14th Street from 35 mph to 30 mph. Other speeding complaints will be addressed to the Police Department's Traffic Unit.

**Schools**

The planning committee felt it was important to include the information on the world-class educational opportunities in the neighborhood. Neighborhood children attend Park Avenue Elementary, Brody Middle School, and Lincoln High School. Both Park Avenue Elementary and Brody Middle School feature the world class International Baccalaureate Program. Park Avenue Elementary is currently undergoing a \$2.4 million renovation. Lincoln High School is a neighborhood institution. While there are no major changes currently planned for Lincoln High School, the school will seek the input of the GLNA when future changes to the campus are proposed.

**PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION(S):**

Date: November 21, 2011

Roll Call Number: [11-1964](#)

Action: [Approving](#) designating three new neighborhoods to be included in the City's Neighborhood Revitalization Program: Gray's Lake, Lower Beaver, and Martin Luther King Jr. Park. ([Council Communication No. 11-700](#)) Moved by Hensley to adopt. Motion Carried 7-0.

Date: June 9, 2008

Roll Call Number: [08-977](#)

Action: Recognition of the following Neighborhood Associations:

- (A) [Gray's Lake](#). ([Council Communication No. 08-355](#)) Moved by Hensley to adopt. Motion Carried 7-0.

Date: August 7, 2000

Roll Call Number: 00-3381

Action: On proposed 2020 Community Character Plan Land Use Plan amendments, to replace the Des Moines 2000 Land Use Plan. Moved by Vlassis to adopt. Motion Carried 7-0.

**BOARD/COMMISSION ACTION(S):**

Board: Neighborhood Revitalization Board

Date: June 5, 2013

Resolution Number: N/A

Action: Approved the adoption of the Gray's Lake Neighborhood Plan.

Board: Plan and Zoning Commission

Date: June 6, 2013

Resolution Number: N/A

Action: Amend the Des Moines' 2020 Community Character Plan to incorporate the Gray's Lake Neighborhood Plan.

**ANTICIPATED ACTIONS AND FUTURE COMMITMENTS: NONE**

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