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Final Report

Commission on Improving Relations
Among ISU Students,
The University, the City of Ames
And the Ames Community

November 30, 2004

**Commission on Improving Relations Among
ISU Students, the University, the City of Ames and the Ames Community**

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To President Geoffroy, President Magill, and Mayor Tedesco,

On June 10, 2004, the Commission on Improving Relations Among ISU Students, the University, the City of Ames, and the Ames Community received its charge – to assess current relationships, and develop recommendations for strengthening the quality of those relationships, with a view toward making Ames a single cohesive community. Nearly six months later, we are proud to return the results of our work. We believe this report has the potential to be a stepping stone to a new era of community in Ames. Our optimism stems from experience – in just six months our Commission has tackled a tough subject with dedication, and formed lasting connections as a result.

Our process started with taking a look at our overall community as viewed through statistical information, reports, and census data. We then spent time developing our ideal community, and how we would like to assess community members through focus groups. Many of our meetings were having a dialogue about specific topics which can be seen throughout our recommendations. It is important to note that we offered extensive time for community members to provide input and feedback during our meetings, as well as two formal public forums. Finally, we encapsulated all of our discussions through recommendations in the attached report. Literally hundreds of volunteer hours were invested in this effort by members of the commission.

The idea of One Community is central to all our recommendations. While some recommendations focus on University-student relations, others on relations between long-term neighbors (year-round residents) and short-term neighbors (students), and many areas in between, all can be applied to our community as a whole. It is this idea of One Community which, above all, we wish you to take from our report – the idea that a city as diverse as Ames can become One Community, just as the Commission as diverse as ours has done.

Our recommendations are broad in scope. In many areas, where relationships are strong, our recommendations focus on enhancing or promoting current programs. Yet, we also recommend the exploration of long-term programs to fully revitalize areas where community relationships have lagged. This diversity of recommendations will allow for immediate and measurable results, as well as outlets for dedicated community members to proactively improve relations.

All of our recommendations are important to the entire community. Therefore, the numbering of the recommendations is utilized for ease of reading, and does not necessarily mean any recommendation is more important than the others. The Commission is concerned about how we as One Community will implement the attached recommendations. We would encourage you to

set up a way to employ and develop an accountability system for the implementation of these recommendations. We recommend that you conduct an annual progress report on these recommendations at the proposed annual summit.

Lastly, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to serve our community. We hope you are as proud of our work as we are. We are confident that dedicated community members can be identified to help implement these recommendations. It truly has been a pleasure to work as a cohesive group of community members. We are confident that our relationships will continue far past the completion of our last meeting.

Yours in community,

Laura Bestler-Wilcox
Tri-Chair

Bob Kindred
Tri-Chair

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RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop and support the theme of “One Community”.

Rationale

In our discussions, we acknowledged that Ames has a long history of being defined by ISU. As Ames has grown and the university has become more cosmopolitan, the identity of Ames has expanded. It seems like an appropriate time to capture the essence of what Ames, as a community, is trying to be. For instance, it may be that we are truly an “education community” defined by the strength of our collective commitment to teaching and learning. If that self-definition can be developed, it could provide a foundation of shared values for our citizens and provide guidance for celebrations and cultural events.

ISU, the city and the community at large cooperate in a number of ways, and citizens generally benefit from this collaboration in ways that go well beyond economic impact. The broad and deep nature of this collaboration may be overlooked with discussing individual issues or specific problems. Providing documentation for the public as well as for the decision-making bodies will ensure that the extent of this cooperation is considered when discussing individual problems.

We acknowledged that our neighborhoods should be interacting with one another through various activities and events. We should develop intentional opportunities for interaction and pride to foster a shared sense of community and purpose amongst community members.

Action Items

- Work with all elements of the Ames community to establish a sense of “One Community”
- Develop and maintain a web-based inventory of city-university collaboration.
- Create a sense of neighborhood by utilizing terminology that shows an appreciation of all members of “One Community.” Language using short-term neighbors and long-term neighbors should be utilized rather than community members and students.
- Consider the development of a collaborative public art project that would incorporate the Chamber of Commerce, Iowa State University’s College of Art and Design, along with Ames Community Arts Council and Public Arts Commission.
- Continue to investigate a way to connect the Main Street, Campustown and University community areas with a mass transit link system (similar to The Dinky).
- Develop a promotional image which captures the Ames and Iowa State University “image” and enhance the promotion of this image through community-wide advertising:
 - Develop a strategy to capture the “self-image” of this community
 - Emphasize “One Community” (Flagstaff/NAU example)
 - Many interests - One Community
 - Many backgrounds - One Community
 - Many faces - One Community
 - Many ages - One Community

Many people - One Community

“Who is Ames?” “You are!”

“Who is ISU?” “You are!”

- A Welcome Wagon greets off-campus and on-campus students. Bags of information/coupons/goodies would welcome the students to the community.
- Yard signs will be displayed all over town saying “Welcome Home Students” during the Welcome week.
- Website and publication developed in partnership by the “One Community”. These public relation pieces will discuss the educational, social, cultural, accountability and community standards for the entire community.
- Public Services Announcements promoting “One Community” on various cable stations.

2. Strengthen communication and interaction between short-term neighbors (students) and long-term neighbors (year-round residents) in local neighborhoods.

Rationale

It is clear that tension exists between short-term neighbors (students) and long-term neighbors (year-round residents). While these two groups are not mutually exclusive, differences in lifestyle and values seem to be contributing to these concerns. These differences manifest themselves in calls to the police about loud parties or other noise violations, over-occupancy, trash collection, and other “quality-of-life” issues. The South Campus Area Neighborhood group has demonstrated the value of a neighborhood association as a mechanism for identifying concerns and strengthening connections and communications at the neighbor-to-neighbor level.

Ensuring that neighbors have a chance to meet each other and form a relationship prior to a conflict will help some of these complaints. Exploring the creation of a neighborhood dispute resolution mechanism may also assist in addressing these concerns. Finally, development of a leadership cohort for the neighborhoods will enhance the on-going efforts of these groups.

Action Items

- Develop social venues for neighborhood relations.
- Improve neighborhood dispute resolution; engage short-term neighbors (students) and long-term neighbors (year-round residents) in solving problems that emerge as neighborhoods change (student-to-student advocacy, accountability, etc.).
- Strengthen communication within the neighborhoods by developing a neighborhood leadership communication structure for skill building, networking, round tables, and peer advice. The coalition could involve the community’s short-term neighbors (students) and long-term neighbors (year-round residents).
- Explore the feasibility of strategies that can improve the connection between students and the commercial centers in Ames.
- Investigate the creation of Neighborhood Resource Coordinator positions with responsibilities such as:
 - Create neighborhood relationship activities (block parties, forums, etc.).

- Go door-to-door during the beginning of fall semester to introduce themselves to permanent and student neighbors – welcome students back to campus
- Assigned to a sector of homes within the neighborhood.
- Connect neighborhood resource coordinators to long-term and short-term neighbors to help build relationships.
- Work closely with existing neighborhood association leaders
- Potential opportunity for landlords to hire a neighborhood resource coordinator for their respective dwellings.
- Coordinators could assist with conflict resolution following appropriate training.
- This role (recommended through Michigan State University).
<http://www.nrc.msu.edu/default.htm>
- Utilize “study circle” model as provided by Study Resource Center. A study circle is a group of 8-12 people from different backgrounds and viewpoints who meet several times to talk about an issue. In a study circle, everyone has an equal voice, and people try to understand each other's views. They do not have to agree with each other. The idea is to share concerns and look for ways to make things better. A facilitator helps the group focus on different views and makes sure the discussion goes well.
<http://www.studycircles.org/>
- Enhance/promote existing opportunities for interaction, such as FACES
- Invite long-term neighbors to residence hall and Greek chapter meetings.
- Have neighborhood associations participate in Off-Campus Housing Fair.
- Support the efforts of the newly created Campustown Student Association, a registered student organization at Iowa State University, to develop a formalized election process; organization constitution and bylaws; and to be representative of the students within the Campustown area.
- Encourage the development of other student organizations within community neighborhoods to work in conjunction with area neighborhood associations. (In order for student organizations to receive appropriate benefits from Iowa State University they will need to register through the Student Activities Center).

3. Strengthen communication between formal decision-making authorities: City Council, University Administration and University Student Government.

Rationale:

The processes we use to make important decisions generally are tied to the city council, university administration and/or student government. While each of the entities has a distinct scope of interest, there need to be some mechanisms for the exploration of shared concerns and community priorities. Particularly during tight budget times or periods of change, these discussions are important. The decision-making authorities are defined as City Council members, University Administrators, student leaders within University Student Government (Government of the Student Body, Graduate Professional Student Senate).

This may also be an area where “less is more”. In this case, it may be valuable to arrange an annual “summit”, where key decision makers and community leaders meet on an annual basis to present and discuss the goals of each group for the coming year. This could have the effect of focusing efforts and reassuring constituents that this work was being done.

Action Items

- Formalize this relationship by creating an annual summit with key leadership. This will be an opportunity to discuss goals, priorities, challenges and successes within the community. The scope of this summit would include:
 - How communication channels could be strengthened
 - Progress report on specific long and short-term goals.
 - Progress report for Commission Recommendations
 - Public forum for input feedback.
 - Focus groups
- Assess methods of communication and collaboration in decision-making.
- Foster collaboration between City of Ames and Iowa State University to develop and offer City Government 101 for community members (students and long-term residents). This course should be available for University credit.
- Examine the extent to which constituent input could be enhanced—some decisions that rely on public hearings or formal public input may be suffering from lack of participation.
- Explore mechanisms for all three representative bodies to obtain information from and about common constituents.
- Explore the possibility of a permanent full-time Community Relations Coordinator.
- Encourage the Government of the Student Body to consider the Off-Campus Senator to be from the Campustown area. (VEISHEA Task Force)

4. Involve students in city government and provision of city services.**Rationale**

Students are a major consumer of city services. They will be better informed and better served if they have a chance to become involved in providing these services.

Action Items

- Internships should continue to be systematically developed and offered by city departments. Internships should be available for University credit.
- Continue to utilize student employment wherever possible for city staffing. The University should investigate how student employment work-study could be utilized for these opportunities.
- Investigate how the city can increase student participation on City Commissions – explore options such as two-year terms, or a spot reserved for students.

5. Enhance social opportunities for students.**Rationale**

Off-campus parties and Campustown bars provide one focus for student social activity. Students would benefit from the development of additional social and cultural opportunities. Student government can capture student input and assist all parties in developing social activities that appeal to student interests and enrich the university, city, and surrounding

community. This strategy should capitalize on the diversity of opinions and interests represented in Ames and ISU.

Action Items

- Encourage businesses to consider extending local dance clubs. Whether it is an alcohol establishment or not, it was recognized by many of us on the visioning group that young people don't necessarily want to stop socializing at 2:00AM. Extending hours somewhere, whether in existing bars or new locations run by and for young people, would provide an outlet to "see and be seen."
 - Work within a partnership of "One Community" to develop additional social experiences within the community (i.e. 18 years and older night club, all ages night club, etc.).
 - Continue to fund programs that will provide social opportunities for the community:
 - Memorial Union Events
 - ISU After Dark activities and events
 - Cultural Events –Ames, ISU Center, Chamber of Commerce and others
 - Ames Park and Recreation programs
 - Student activities (clubs, organizations, events, music venue, etc.)
 - Develop ways in which the community and university can work collaboratively on events such as VEISHEA, the FACES Festival, Winter Festival, Fourth of July Parade, Octagon Arts Festival, etc.
 - Creatively utilize facilities such as ISU Parking Deck south of the Gerdin Building for controlled outdoor programs.
 - Greater effort to reach out to and involve international students, and to be involved in international events.
6. **Continue the development of a community-wide character based program for all citizens (e.g. Character Counts).**

Rationale

A character based program would encapsulate the community standards, civic duty, problem solving, partnerships and accountability necessarily for "One Community".

Action Items

- Consider utilizing a program such as "Character Counts" which includes these six pillars: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. Additional information may be found online: <http://www.charactercounts.org/>
- Consider utilizing resources and assessment programs from the Search Institute. Search Institute is an independent nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide leadership, knowledge, and resources to promote healthy children, youth, and communities. To accomplish this mission, the institute generates and communicates new knowledge, and brings together community, state, and national leaders. <http://www.search-institute.org/>.
- Encourage community-wide involvement through all venues and organizations (City government, residence halls, student organizations, non-profit organizations,

businesses, Greek Community, high school, middle schools, elementary schools, youth groups, citizen organizations, social organizations, etc.).

- Have the City of Ames, and long-term neighbors utilize the Iowa State University orientation program and Destination Iowa State to introduce community standards to new neighbors (incoming students).
- Develop ways in which to communicate community standards to all short-term neighbors.
- Encourage off-campus students, not living in the Greek Community, to remain involved on campus within organizations, and/or programs that will connect them to Iowa State University on a regular basis outside of class.
- Promote the community-wide character based program through the school district and campus programs ClubFest and WelcomeFest.

7. Encourage community involvement through community service and neighborhood programs.

Rationale

Emphasize community service on how being a part of “One Community” is working side-by-side to improve our community and serve the less fortunate among us. In order for all community members to feel a sense of connectivity the creation of neighborhood connections and programs within neighborhoods will help grow our community. Because of the lack of resources, community service programs are important for the overall effectiveness of our community.

Action Items

- Examine the feasibility of a city “neighborhood services day” each fall. This would be an opportunity to work together to improve the local neighborhood. Activities could involve yard work, street work, painting a house, and general clean-up; and could potentially be a part of the National “Make a Difference Day.”
- Adopt a student/family program would give families and students a way to be connected through semester programs and projects to work on together as a team. The Iowa State University Parent’s Association in collaboration with community organizations could work to develop the program.
- Create a comprehensive and inspirational program for volunteers for developing the community service programs. In particular working with the vast numbers of students willing to volunteer at Iowa State University. Fund an additional full-time staff member at Iowa State University to work with the Story County Volunteer Center staff members.
- Encourage community organizations and businesses to involve students within their respective advisory boards and committees.
- Involve short-term members in community-based social/interest organizations and long-term neighbors in student organizations – investigate possibilities for long-term neighbors to serve as informal advisors to student groups.
- Encourage the development of a small grants program for community service projects.

- Utilize volunteer reward programs such as (i.e. <http://www.10000.hours.org>).

8. Investigate a resolution facilitator to serve the community.

Rationale

Identify ways in which the community has a proactive role in regards to conflict management.

Action Items

- Create a specific position(s) and/or service(s) that serve in the capacity of Ombudsperson(s) who benefit to the community as a whole. Resources that will help maintain, facilitate city services, build and strengthen relationships within the community.
- Encourage short-term neighbors (students) to play an integral role in the development of these position(s) and/or service(s).
- Consider utilizing and helping publicize the existing community agencies and services in dispute resolution (e.g. Student Legal Services, Center for Creative Justice).
- Develop a training mechanism for being proactive in aggressive situations on how to handle conflicts.
- Explore a “neighborhood concerns line.” This service would assist callers to navigate through an unfamiliar directory of services to ask a question or raise a concern. This vehicle could also enhance education of new citizens and serve as a bellwether of neighborhood concerns.
- Publicize existing resources, such as student assistance, Bias Incident Report Forms, and Breaking Down the Barriers.

9. Continue outreach by law enforcement/judicial agencies to improve understanding and respect for roles (both community members and law enforcement).

Rationale

Communication and outreach is vitally important for the development of a stronger community relationship between law enforcement and community members, and community-wide understanding of expectations. This outreach will help foster a community investment in the care, safety, and appreciation for everyone.

Action Items

- Involve new student and transfer student orientation programs.
- Involve in neighborhood projects and programs.
- Continue to increase the involvement of students and other community members in the Ames and ISU Citizen Police Academies. This course should be available for University credit.
- Help to solve problems through informing people of the community standards.
- Commit additional funding for the Ames and ISU Citizen’s Police Academies.

10. Support the development of balanced zones and plans for neighborhoods.

Rationale

The commission recognizes the value of careful planning in maintaining good relationships. Transitions between neighborhood types (community and university) should be planned rather than allowing abrupt differences to exist. Planners should cooperate to ensure that university and city staff has a forum for discussion of concerns. Continue to develop a balance between short-term and long-term community members within neighborhoods. Intentionally creating balanced neighborhoods will only enhance the "One Community" concept.

Action Steps

- Integrate more transition areas within the community (city and university).

11. Encourage the University, in conjunction with institutions and higher education communities, to examine alcohol regulations and control measures.

Rationale

This is an ongoing challenge with many viewpoints therefore a series of studies should be conducted for the purposes of:

- Developing an understanding of under age drinkers "social construct" of drinking (in what ways does it socialize the student and in what ways, if any, is it considered anti-social behavior);
- Developing an understanding of the motivations/rationalizations of under age drinkers to drink despite the penalties of getting caught;
- Determining the student perception of alcohol policies/laws (university, city and state);
- Investigating how university alcohol policies, city ordinances and state laws, impact the overall community (e.g. examine the "social and psychological effects" of the current legal drinking age);
- Continue developing enforcement policies and protocols; and
- Determining appropriate alternative leisure time activities for those under age students.

Action Items

- **Encourage the University to explore alternatives to advertising/selling alcohol at athletic events.**
- **Explore programs for teaching responsibility when community members do decide to drink.**

12. Enhance University approved housing (Department of Residence or Greek Community) to attract traditional age students.

Rationale

Many of our commission discussions revolved around the culture of inclusion in Ames. With the number of new residents joining our community each year there is no better way to quickly develop this than in the University approved housing (ISU Department

of Residence and/or Greek Community. Chapters in the Greek Community must meet a set of minimum programmatic, student-conduct and housing standards prescribed by the University to be “recognized” or approved by the University. Research in the book "Involving Colleges" looked at ISU and why students here seem to get involved in their community at a high rate. The University approved housing plays a huge part in this. The large halls, group bathrooms, long halls, and double (+) rooms have been shown again and again as community building and citizenship training grounds.

13. Conduct on-going community assessments to determine the pulse and direction of the One Community.

Rationale

Investing in a focus group to determine the perceptions, needs and challenges will enhance the overall community. The research obtained will assist in knowledge based decision-making, as well as cornerstones for maintaining and creating programs within the community.

Action Steps

- Utilize work developed by the Commission on Improving Relations Among ISU Students, the University, the City of Ames and the Ames Community to help guide the focus group discussion.
- Consider utilizing Iowa State University’s research offices (e.g. Research Institute for Studies in Education (RISE)) to conduct the focus groups.
- Coordinate community surveys (Iowa State University, City of Ames) in order to accomplish the appropriate goals.
- Coordinate focus groups with annual summit.

Conclusion

Following the April 18, 2004 events the Commission on Improving Relations Among ISU Students, the University, the City of Ames and the Ames Community was convened by President Geoffroy, Iowa State University; President Magill, Government of the Student; and Mayor Tedesco, City of Ames; to consider all elements that affect and celebrate our community relations. Over the last six months, we discussed how to improve our relationships, and how our community celebrates together throughout the year. We regularly discussed all of the positive relationships that are formed from the true tradition of the VEISHEA celebration. Specifically, we noted how VEISHEA has played an integral part in bringing our “One Community” together for over eighty years. Therefore, we believe our thirteen recommendations in conjunction with building upon and preserving the true tradition of VEISHEA will strengthen, celebrate and enhance relationships within our “One Community.” This preservation is made with high respect to the VEISHEA Task Force’s recommendations to continue VEISHEA. We believe that vigorous effort to strengthen our sense of community can help reclaim the rich and valued tradition of VEISHEA.