

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE AMES CITY COUNCIL

AMES, IOWA

NOVEMBER 27, 2007

The Ames City Council met in special session at 7:00 p.m. on the 27th day of November, 2007, in the City Council Chambers in City Hall, 515 Clark Avenue, pursuant to law with Mayor Ann Campbell presiding and the following Council members present: Doll, Goodman, Larson, Mahayni, Popken, and Rice. *Ex officio* Member Luttrell was also present.

DISCUSSION ON THE CHANGING CULTURAL FACE OF AMES: Guest speakers were Vanessa Baker-Latimer, City of Ames Housing Coordinator; Dr. Linda Beyea, Superintendent of Ames Public Schools; and, Dr. Chuck Cychosz, Ames Chief of Police.

Mayor Ann Campbell welcomed everyone in attendance and thanked them for their obvious desire to make our community the best it can be. She described the intent of the meeting as learning together, and meshing facts with perceptions. Mayor Campbell stated that welcoming new people to Ames is not anything new to Ames, and Ames is made privileged by its diversity, and said the recent change of population in Ames is a picture of what is going on in other places as well. Mayor Campbell described the format of the meeting, and introduced the first speaker, Vanessa Baker-Latimer, City of Ames Housing Coordinator.

Ms. Baker-Latimer thanked the audience for attending and thanked her staff for their work. She introduced one of the largest programs the City administers, the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program for low- to moderate-income families. This program consists of 2.1 million “tenant-based” units and 900,000 project-based units. Iowa is home to approximately 21,700 of those units.

Ms. Baker-Latimer explained that housing choice vouchers assist low-income families, elderly, and disabled to afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing. The eligible participant may choose housing that meets the program requirements. Eligible families may move anywhere in the United States that operates a Section 8 program, giving participants portability. This feature of the program prevents concentration of low-income families in public housing complexes, which has proven not in the best interest of families in the past.

Ms. Baker-Latimer said that the waiting list for vouchers is eighteen months in Ames currently, in comparison to waiting lists eight to ten years long in other places. Other reasons new residents are choosing Iowa and Ames include better and less crowded schools, better access to health care and service needs, and an increased quality of life. Ms. Baker-Latimer said that the program is not able to help every family on the waiting list and provided examples of the strict eligibility guidelines of the City of Ames housing authority that must be met in order for a family to be eligible for a voucher. Ms. Baker-Latimer said that the City of Ames housing authority administers this program under fair housing laws based on qualifications, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) scrutinizes the administration of the program every year. The City of Ames continues to administer the program because of the values with which it is administered.

Dr. Linda Beyea, Superintendent of Ames Public Schools was introduced. Dr. Beyea presented figures to the audience, including numbers of students that have transitioned into or out of, or both, the Ames Community School District (ACSD), the number of homeless children identified, the number of children identified as at-risk, and numbers of children who qualify for free or reduced lunch in the Ames schools this year and last year. Dr. Beyea described these children as coming from all backgrounds, all family status types, all races, and all ethnic groups, each child with a different story.

Dr. Beyea stated that all parents want opportunities for their children, and education is seen as an equalizer. Dr. Beyea suggested the community listen and learn from one another and described ways the ACSD has been working to address needs recently, including training for teachers, hiring an instructional strategist for the district, and adding elementary guidance counselors.

Dr. Beyea challenged all in attendance to become full participants in these molding opportunities, and to move forward with gratitude for the opportunities placed directly in our lap to make a difference in the life of a child

Ames Chief of Police Dr. Chuck Cychosz addressed the crowd and spoke of the tradition Ames has of assimilation and inclusion of people into the community, specifically faculty, students, and new community members. Dr. Cychosz said the police department plans and educates for that process, hoping that all people can enjoy Ames and the way of life here.

Dr. Cychosz spoke of the late summer spike in very serious crime, noting seven specific incidents that occurred between August 25th and October 21st that were related by geography and the compact time frame. It was noted the response has been vigorous, and progress has been made, with issued warrants in five out of the seven cases cited. Of the seven serious crimes during this time frame, four of them are tied to Chicago with some connection of victims or suspects. Dr. Cychosz further stated that the common thread between these cases is the criminal activity, not any link to Chicago.

Dr. Cychosz explained that police response has included vigorous investigations and altered patrol strategy in areas of patterned crime. He said traffic stops and interviews sometimes create bad feelings and asked that the community would please seek to understand the investigation and the effort to maintain safety in the community by the police department. Dr. Cychosz said that the department is working on cultural competency, is utilizing a Party Response Team with the mission to establish rapport with students and educate new renters of ordinances and policies in order to build trust, and utilizing a Community Safety Team in the core of the community. He also explained a new partnership program between the police department and property managers. Property managers would be trained from a crime prevention perspective by learning how to make properties safer. Dr. Cychosz challenged all in attendance to join the police department in reaching out by getting to know their neighbors, which is what has always made Ames a special community, and also to value differences, new people, and new residents.

Moderator Don Broshar challenged the audience to listen with interest and to use respect during the discussion. Mr. Broshar called the first speaker, Marilyn Krocheski of 1315 Coconino Drive. Ms. Krocheski asked if the police would come out to meet with a group at her residence. Dr.

Cychosz said the police department would enjoy meeting with them, and also gave the non-emergency number of 239-5130 for reporting non-emergency situations.

Robin Parlade, 494 West Riverside Road, asked what happens to families receiving a housing voucher that slip up with drugs or criminal activity. Ms. Baker-Latimer responded that under HUD regulations, the family must be checked for drug and violent criminal activity.

Tracie Pugh, 3811 Tripp Street, commented that she will be leaving the meeting very pleased with the information given, especially the information about the Ames Police Department reaching out and being seen.

Mechelle Williams, 3911 Tripp Street, told how she has become a resident of Ames, established a home, and is now self sufficient. She agreed with Dr. Cychosz that instead of the Chicago label being given, this activity should be labeled as criminal.

Krystal Williams, 229 Washington Avenue, #2, said that an assault case happened at her residence. She said that she is on the Section 8 program and abides by the rules, and feels that stereotypes are out of hand.

Keith Denner, 201 South 5th Street, told of the success of a program similar to what the Ames Police Department is beginning with property managers. Sun Prairie, a residence property in West Des Moines, has just received a national award for crime free property.

Edna Clinton, 1610 Carroll Avenue, said that she was extremely encouraged by the meeting. She suggested more could be done to accommodate students coming from different backgrounds, behavior, and socialization skills, and suggested Ames has a lack of empathy and understanding toward new residents.

Heidi Pitt, 220 Washington Avenue, stated that she believes Ames is a safe community. She challenged all in attendance to recognize opportunities to give time and give of self.

Phil Propes, 1008 Burnett Avenue, described his life as a child in a housing project in New York, and expressed appreciation that the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program is moving away from concentration of low-income families in public housing complexes. He also said the police department is essential in helping assimilate new residents into a community.

Sarah Parsons, 2804 Arbor Street, commented on the demeaning name-calling happening at the schools by children of all races.

Geoff Verkade, 2233 Knapp Street, commended the police force for their superior work in bettering Ames.

Vic Moss, 225 South Kellogg Avenue, stated that the changing population in Ames is happening incrementally, and as prosperity is growing, poverty is also growing. He said he wants opportunities to be available for everyone.

Lois Smidt, 58236 280th Street, invited everyone to a dinner that is hosted every Thursday evening by Beyond Welfare at Collegiate Presbyterian Church where everyone could “sit down together, break bread together, and make friends together.”

Joanna Muggli, 1033 Gaskill Drive, said that she came to the meeting with much concern, and thanked Ms. Baker-Latimer for her presentation, which caused her concern to vanish.

Anita Rollins, 4811 Idaho Circle, said that cultural sensitivity training for police staff needs to be a higher priority with the increased diversity of the Ames population.

Gail Johnston, 830 Brookridge Avenue, thanked the presenters and reminded everyone that donating to the United Way campaign is an opportunity to help children succeed, which requires the work of the entire community.

Jim Partridge, 3808 Bridgeport Drive, told of his experience making a way for himself out of the projects in California and said that he believes the response of residents to the spike in crime and any new residents from Chicago are being confused because of fear, not because of intolerance.

Velvet Barney, 715 Wilson Avenue, said she doesn't feel like the police are on her side, and said they could make a change to communicate better and be more friendly.

Marvin Lewis, 537 ½ Main Street, told of how he came from Chicago to Ames as a part of the crime world. He spoke of people like himself, with a criminal background, who want a change, and a way out. He offered himself as a testimony that people can and do change.

Desmon Turner, 405 South 5th Street, wondered if there was a way to report bad experiences with police officers. Police Chief Chuck Cychosz invited him to come in and speak with him about the incident.

Venerable Hong Yang, 3115 Roy Key Avenue, spoke of her feelings that she had been seen and heard in the community, but not included. She encouraged tolerance of all community members.

Chris Rehmann, 3121 Almond Road, represented A Mid-Iowa Organizing Strategy (AMOS), a committee dedicated to creating a community where all can succeed. He stated that to create communities where all can succeed, building relationships is key.

Katryna Stackhouse, 715 Wilson Avenue, said that she came to Ames from Chicago for a better life. She said she was concerned and discouraged because she felt as if her husband was victimized by police while trying to file a complaint.

David Digby, 613 Clark Avenue, spoke of his love for this community and his frustration at dwindling resources and inability to help people in need. He asked for help in declaring war on poverty and clamping down on predatory lenders.

Letitia Wright, 815 Pinon Drive, Apt. 203, said she moved to Ames from New York, and does not believe the community is welcoming to people of color.

Cherie Wandling, 2024 Prairie View East, asked that the Ames community stop labeling every African American as a person from Chicago.

Kit Grandon, 802 6th Street, said he values diversity and has seen instances of people of color being treated differently by police for no apparent reason.

LaDonna Davis, 823 Burnett Avenue, spoke of her feelings of being harassed by police because of criminal activity that happened at her complex.

Mediator Don Broshar thanked everyone present for their cooperation and participation. He said that changes resulting from the meeting will not be overnight, but as we all take responsibility and action, each can make a difference individually and collectively.

Mayor Campbell thanked attendees for their courage in coming forth to discuss these issues. She said that the meeting laid good groundwork by learning from one another, and proposed that a similar meeting would be called in a few months to hear of successes and further information.

COMMENTS:

ADJOURNMENT: The meeting adjourned at 9:19 p.m.

Diane R. Voss, City Clerk

Ann H. Campbell, Mayor

Erin K. Thompson, Recording Secretary