

Monday, Feb. 2
Public Input Session – Scheman Building
50 attendees

Questions about Property Maintenance Codes:

1. Is it easier to get compliance with a policy such as IPMC in place?
2. Why are we adding more laws when we're not enforcing the ones we have?
3. How many more staff will be needed to enforce new codes?
4. Is there evidence from other communities that their standards have led to faster and/or more effective enforcement?

Comments from Public (numbers in parentheses indicate approximate number who agreed with comment)

- I don't believe the City has reasonable answers to address these issues
- We need to get rid of problems with (current) enforcement
- Anonymous complaints are not right. We should know who is complaining
- A design manual should be created to show how to remodel a house, plus the City should provide a 10-year tax abatement similar to the Longfellow Neighborhood in Minneapolis (25)
- Where would the money come from to provide abatements?
- Residents need to be educated and informed on current codes. They need to be put in a format where you don't have to read the entire code. Property owners just need access to the codes, not new codes (25-35)
- The Rental Housing Committee has overstepped its bounds (12-15)
- The Committee made suggestions to the Council as it was asked to do (12-15)
- How many problem properties were owned by the elderly, low-income people? Is there a way to help those dealing with financial issues (25+)
- Landlords should be kept to a higher standard on profits made. I'm not making money off my owner-occupied property.
- Write as narrowly as possible and in limited situations. Assume that money is not available for extras. We are operating in difficult economic times.
- For low-income homeowners, there is already help available.
- First, you improve all rental housing inspections. Now it is owner-occupied exteriors. Soon, it is invading privacy. This is America, and we are heading in the wrong direction. (12-15)
- It is perfectly fair to have two standards—my home is not for profit.
- Rentals: There are incentives to NOT keep up.
- Here's a new slogan: Ames, less fascist than the rest of the Big 12
- This is overstepping—not a fairness issue. (10)
- Put up IPMC on Website
- My key concern is the process. Our neighborhood has ombudsman. Perhaps the neighborhood groups would elect an ombudsman for complaints by police.
- Complaints should NOT be anonymous
- Complaints SHOULD be anonymous
- Should the city do something or not? When should the city react? When health and safety is a concern. We have codes, although maybe not the best. But, if the City does something, can it write a usable code? Can the code be enforced? When does a chip of paint push a person over the line?

- When neighborhood issues are complaint-driven, especially with sidewalk shoveling, then the rules are enforced only when someone complains. It needs to be equitable with clear standards, uniform enforcement (not just when there is a complaint).
- Standards can not be subject to interpretation – must be narrowly written.
- Curb appeal needs to be addressed. My mother-in-law’s house sold \$30-40K less than others because she was next to a problem property (25)
- Lead paint removal and vinyl siding impact the neighborhoods. They also impact the historic Ames district.
- A complaint-driven system does not create a uniform standard. To submit anonymously is a must—retaliation can happen. Complaints also create bad feelings in neighborhoods. Laws/ordinances need to be enforced uniformly, even if it means adding extra staff.
- A complaint-driven system rewards those who have power and a proven influence in the community.
- Need to see what’s on the books now. (25)
- Of the 370 complaints the City received, how many were resolved?
- Add a feedback mechanism so the City calls the initial caller back so they know the status of the case. It’s a problematic enforcement situation – more laws, but the current laws are being ignored.
- Should do away with the ability to file complaints, they just need equity across town – regardless of what the neighbors think.
- From Realtor – sells 40 properties each year. Significant changes in the code causes the cost of building homes to increase. Problems are created in regard to sales. We have IBC – 09, all new homes to be sprinklered.
- Don’t need this code. We have enough to enforce already. The delays are in the court system, not the code, so leave as it is.
- Invasion of rights in non-rental property in a neighborhood without covenants. This is increasing financial burdens for people who probably comply fairly well.
- What countries subscribe to the “international” in IPMC.
- Anything done should go through the process of evaluating what is there now. Make sure to use the same language for all the codes. Anything done, the first priority should be safety and health and apply to everything. Also, accessibility, visibility, clean space, etc. Enforce safety issues on corner properties. All codes should be evaluated so they have common language and should apply to everyone.
- Let Ames residents know and give scrutiny and input – the same process the rental housing code is getting. In-depth approach to study and understand and make code clean for enforcement. Enforcement is the key.
- Council decides if this is moving forward. If so, it shouldn’t take codes that came up. This should be the same as the rental housing code process.
- City need to be cautious in doing this with codes. It must be careful when making policies that are difficult to operate. Health and safety are legitimate issues, but be cautious about property rights.
- Statistics show when flowers are planted, crime goes down. I’m a single, first-time homeowner who bought a quality home. If there were no standards, I could have purchased a nightmare. I had to put money in to improve my home, and I’d like to get a return when I sell. Neighbors with bad properties nearby will have an impact on my property.
- The City could consider only factors that “affect adjacent properties” rather than look at aesthetic issues.

Saturday, Feb. 7
Second Public Input Session – Scheman Building
31 attendees

Questions about Property Maintenance Codes:

1. What image do we want to project as a community?
2. Is there anything learned from the snow and ice removal process that can be applied to this topic?
3. How much does the City charge to remove snow or mow weeds?

Comments from Public

- Snow removal - work on arterial streets and complaint driven enforcement on sidewalks isn't effective.
- Is the City effective in enforcing snow removal? Other items should be handled the same way. If the property owner doesn't do it, the City should.
- When trying to walk around town, she found a business on Lincoln Way had removed the snow, but the City pushed it back up on sidewalk. The City is a prime offender.
- This is a complex problem. Fears are involved. Maybe work on one issue at a time and get to the root of the cause. Clarify the City's intent.
- Can habitat for humanity help needy persons? The City should help.
- Government is bound to regulate for health and safety; this is the foundation. Example: house numbering. Example: dead tree on neighboring property that could damage adjacent property. Visual conformity is NOT included in health and safety.
- Most would agree safety issues. What is a nuisance? E.g.: his rental property at 203 S. Sherman. Safety issues are okay, but not aesthetics. There must be a "middle ground". This needs further discussion.
- The City should expand rental housing rules to owner-occupied and consider adopting the IPMC.
- IPMC is a positive thing for communities. He's familiar with two small Iowa towns that adopted and have seen significant improvements in properties. Other towns in this region have adopted the IPMC for rental and owner-occupied residences. The City should not accept anonymous complaints. IPMC deals with health and safety issues.
- Has tall cultivated vegetation for privacy, likes it, never waters, and hopes the City won't adopt a requirement for grass height. The City should have programs to accept and dispose of old appliances and rocks. There needs to be a place in the City to dispose of broken bricks, rocks, etc. A neighbor who demolished an old garage can't replace it now because they have to have a three foot strip of grass to maintain. The neighboring rental hasn't been mowed or vegetation cut in years.
- Property values/rights as owner affect neighbors. It is hard to quantify effects. Not mowing is different than cultivating various vegetation. It is neglect. The biggest concern is the effect on a neighbor's property values.

- She lives in the area, is a gardener, and has lived in other college towns. She was surprised when she came to Ames to see the rundown rental areas. She thinks it's good to have one code. Give a handout to homeowners. She loves Ames, but thinks Ames should have a property maintenance code.
- If conditions are dangerous, it is okay for the City to act. Otherwise, it is not. Example: neighbor had dandelions and couldn't/wouldn't spray. The neighbors volunteered and paid for spraying and mowing. The City should provide resources to assist needy people. They should also have tools to address dangerous buildings.
- What has been the effect of the IPMC in other communities that adopted it? Did it have the hoped for impact? Were those cities pleased with the results?
- If not a health and safety issue, the rules should take a long time to enforce; we shouldn't have 'appearance' rules.
- There are massive amounts of stuff on the curbs after moving out. Owner should only have five days to remove.
- She hates to see usable stuff in the garbage. Asked whether the City should have a role in recovery of this stuff?