

Scheman Center Property Maintenance Public Forum Results from Comment Cards

Three specific questions were asked on one side of the comment card. The back side was formatted to solicit free form input and comment. The three questions were chosen because they are posed to cities that adopt the International Property Maintenance Code. Each community can amend the code sections to their preference. The answer selections are the most common answers found in cities that have adopted the IPMC. Some respondents chose to write in their own choices.

Summary of Comment Cards Questions

Question #1 – If the Ames City Council adopts a property maintenance code which includes a limit on grass height, what grass height maximum would you recommend?

- 7 inches
- 10 inches
- 13 inches

Twenty nine participants answered this question 29= (100%)

Seven chose the most conservative answer of 7 inches (24%)

Thirteen chose the middle selection answer of 10 inches (45%)

Eight chose the longest grass height of 13 inches (28%)

One respondent colored outside the lines and wrote 36 inches (3%)

Question #2 – Often communities with property maintenance codes establish an appeals board so residents can appeal the actions of City inspectors. Do you think Ames should establish a citizen committee to hear such appeals?

- Yes
- No

Thirty seven participants answered this question 37= (100%)

Thirty five said yes (95%)

Two indicated no (5%)

Question #3 – If Yes, what would be the optimal size for an appeals board?

- Three (3) members
- Seven (7) members

Thirty five participants answered this question 35= (100%)

Fourteen indicated there should be three members (40%)

Four wrote in there should be five members (11%)

Seventeen indicated there should be five members (49%)

Summary Of The Comments Section

On February 2, 2009, fifty individuals attended the public education and input session held at the Scheman Center. Thirty two of the attendees filled out comment cards. The comments listed below are verbatim from the cards.

1. Don't rely on a complaint-driven system.
Focus on issues that affect adjacent and neighborhood property (in addition to health and safety).
Consider the City Public Works Dept. taking over sidewalk replacement.
2. Property standards are crucial to maintain and grow property values. These standards should be enforced over time perhaps beginning with warnings that lead to fines if violations are not resolved.
3. Health and Safety – yes.
Maintaining property value and enjoyment of one's property – yes
4. It's not just low income people who will get hit.
Middle income people often make choices between home upkeep or children's doctor visits.
5. Ames should be very cautious in establishing codes. I firmly believe that the City should attend to safety and health issues and stay out of other issues as much as possible. Establishing arbitrary codes can cause greater problems for the City offices and personnel than no codes at all. A person's property and their ideas should not be replaced by the City mandates unless in the extremes.
6. Ames has more than enough rules and ordinances. The rules pertaining to health and safety need to be enforced but we have no right to tell people how to take care of their property. Offer to help people mow, shovel snow or trim trees if they are unable. Mostly live and let live.
7. Tread carefully!
8. Ames is not enforcing the laws we have in this regard. Calling the City on various violations has *not* yielded much help.
9. No comment
10. I'm in favor of a property maintenance code. I'm not in favor of requiring owners who occupy their properties to make them have hand rails, egress windows etc. like are required for rental property. Some repairs may not be possible due to costs. There are certain responsibilities that come along with owning a home. Some updates shouldn't be required if they aren't historically accurate
11. I feel the City's job is to protect and serve. We have codes for health and safety. We need not give people a bigger club to use on others.

12. I share the thoughts in the above paragraph.
13. A house is house. They all should be treated the same.
14. Support maintenance codes.
Want to see rental property recommendations adopted, regardless of decision regarding all properties.
Would support application to all properties. Many of the most egregious situations seem to be owner-occupied.
15. A house is a house – treat them equal.
Quit treating landlords like 2nd class citizens.
16. I want to keep my property in good shape but I don't want to lose my rights as a property owner. It's very difficult to get repairs done since repair men are limited
17. I wonder if we want to establish "Gestapo" tactics – we eliminated those in Germany with WWII. Now they're coming to Ames, IA through the Fire Dept. Why?
18. I am no longer a home owner. I am a renter; however, it is my belief that all homes in our community need to comply to property maintenance codes, for the property owners benefit and most certainly for our beautiful community. There are organizations to help individual homeowners.
19. What if people of property that falls under the property maintenance code, such as paint peeling and gross, do not have the money or capabilities of correcting the facilities. Do not pass property maintenance code. Vote to defeat it. We already have codes to cover what we need.
20. We do need a maintenance code. I would like to see a yard waste dump (free) all year long.
21. No comment
22. Since I've had remodeling materials in our yard of one sort or another for 35 years, I don't want a rule restricting remodeling materials stored in a yard.

Since our oak trees don't lose their leaves until December...maybe not until spring – we often have piles of leaves in our yard for 2 months or longer (frozen in) and I would not like a rule stopping storing of leaves, yard waste.

I think sidewalks which are on public land (right of way) should be the City's responsibility and ones on private non-rental property are the individual's responsibility.

I think most of the complaints, 1 per day, are handled by the property inspector and I think it is fine.

Main points: Leave to inspector as it is now. Update rules, e.g. *

*Not shine light into neighbors' house's windows – new lights should be down lights

*Remove rules against solar panels and wind turbines

This citizen added her own comments to questions on the back of the card:

Grass height – no limit. "prairie" grasses are lovely and absorb H₂O

23. You've got to be very careful with idea.
24. I believe the City should only exercise its police power where there is an overriding public interest. This would clearly include health and safety, but aesthetics and "property value" issues are much more subjective. Uniform enforcement is absolutely essential. Any decision to codify maintenance should be made knowing the difficulty of writing clear standards.
25. Clearly see what we now have!
26. I would like to think that as a property owner I have a right of expectation that if I keep my property looking "decent" and my neighbors don't (like junk cars, garbage, not kept up) that I'm not undemocratic if I made a complaint. There are more issues involved that people thinking neighbors may not appreciate complaints about strewn garbage but they do not come pick it up from my yard where it lands. I think enforcement is a big issue through owner and resident education. Ordinances are good – rules to live by – compliance is a big issue.
27. Don't make any regulations that make Ames less desirable for poorer people. If they must do repairs that they can't afford then the city should loan with no or low interest and help them get volunteers to make repairs or changes.

When the City gets complaints maybe they should notify owner of complaint and give them a list of resources to help such as service clubs or other volunteers. Encourage change but don't threaten action. Be more helpful. Ask them what is needed to improve property. Any code should be on all properties if done.

28. First priority – safety & health
Aesthetics ONLY WHERE & WHEN it relates to health & safety
Corner properties need to keep the clear space clear – Example Phoenix St & N. Dakota
29. Health and safety issues should be top concerns.
Important to know why maintenance issue exists – lack of resources, lack of knowledge, etc.
Resources should be available to help homeowners who need help.
Strengthening neighborhoods could help solve problems.

30. Maintenance should be addressing health and safety issues. Not aesthetic. What is this going to cost the City? How will it be enforced? Will increased costs to elderly residents with fixed incomes drive them from their homes? If I have to get rid of yard waste within 7 days how will the City assist in this endeavor?
31. Time limit on dumpsters. There is a dumpster on McKinley Ct. that has been there for almost 5 years on the driveway with various levels of waste.
32. No comment

On February 9, 2009, thirty-one individuals attended the public education and input session held at the Scheman Center. Fourteen of the attendees filled out comment cards. The comments listed below are verbatim from the cards.

33. I would like to be a member of the oversight board for the International Property Maintenance Code.
34. It makes sense to consolidate existing rules, but I worry about new rules and their interpretation. How much grass length is too much? How much peeling paint? How picky are others going to be about my property?

I believe that it is government's place to look out for public safety at large but it is an individual's responsibility to look out for personal safety. The grey zone is difficult so having a more well advertised appeals process for those caught up in the rules but are still doing things reasonably would be good. (I.e. What if I specifically planned landscaping to have a "natural" look but my neighbor perceives it as unkept? What if I want to compost food waste to be more environmentally friendly?)

We need a way to exchange usable items rather than throwing out (or storing on property) usable items that would otherwise be thrown away.

If homeowner is doing something that is a real physical threat to surrounding neighbors (i.e. trash attracting dangerous animals or leaking toxic materials into the water) then rules make sense.

Trying to legislate taste is not possible, we all have different aesthetic values. Neighborhoods should be able to set (or not set) their own rules and people should be encouraged to talk with neighbors.

The public needs more and better education on the existing codes. There are many codes already existing that I didn't know about and what they mean.

35. I think something has to be done to update laws. I also think some of the above issues need to be addressed faster than dealing with these issues for years
36. More laws aren't always the answer. IPMC is fine. Closing loopholes would be better. Especially for safety and extreme cases.

37. I strongly agree that we should establish IPMC to make Ames a safer and more pleasant place for its residents.
38. I believe maintenance codes can prove to be of value when the focus is public safety. Going beyond the well-being of the public and into imposing tastes and preferences on others is when I begin to question code value.
39. Construction debris should have to be removed before permit is signed off on. Parking should only be allowed on paved surfaces (non-permeable). City needs to write its own code. I think it's important to address all the items above. Maintenance codes should be enforced for all properties, regardless of use. In an urban environment, the actions of property owners impacts many others and they should not have the right to create a negative environment for others. I have a ton of specific comments and input and would really like to participate more in this. Thanks for your time and including the public in the process.
40. City need to have well defined property maintenance expectations that are uniformly addressed and administered.

A citizen/City appeal process must also be included in City code.

Neighbors have a right of other neighbors maintaining their property in a "like condition" without allowing others to degrade their value.

How is parking within a paved drive handled? With vehicles (stored) long term is the Greek system and other large student housing treated similarly?

41. Sounds like clarification of ordinances and legal/admin process should be top of the list.
Sticky wicket – different areas have diff expectations
Alternatives to "standard", e.g. bright and maybe clashing colors or accessories like Virgin Mary statues may reflect culture or religion. Additionally, moving away from mono crop turf grass is, generally, an improvement in terms of environmental impact and habitat (which may include snakes).
Affordability is no doubt also part of the challenge for some people.
Landscape options should readily accommodate native plantings, shrubs, rain gardens, etc.
Focus should be health and safety not curtains and lace.
42. Property maintenance for private property should be tightened up. I would encourage you to adopt the Int. Prop. Maint. Code with modifications.
43. I do not wish the City of Ames to enforce maintenance, because there is no way of drawing the line. It is a free country, isn't it? Please no fascist methods. The City may intervene if there is a health danger because of toxic material storage
44. I don't know what you mean about garbage collection. If you mean people are keeping their garbage containers in plain sight, I don't think it is the City's business. I don't feel the City has any business telling people to paint or reside their homes unless the City is paying for it. Same with garage or shed maintenance. Safety

issues with stairs and decks are different and I feel resident's should be warned about these conditions.

45. I can see the need to keep garbage under control but I don't see the other things.
Who decides what is excessive peeling or grass
What is going to pay for this
What if residents can't afford compliance will the property be condemned
Some houses would need repainted every three years
How many inspectors will be needed
Who will pay or what cuts will be needed to pay for insp
46. No semi trailers or tractors in town except on pick up or deliveries. Obnoxious weed not mowed more then once a month. A building that is a danger to inhabitants. Be condemned. Vehicles in yard be hauled after 1 year. Danger to neighbor is a no no, Graffiti cost 5-10 grand