

Staff Report on
Public Outreach Plan for
Proposed Property Maintenance Code Application to
Owner Occupied Residences
December 9, 2008

On November 18 the City Council met with the ad hoc Rental Housing Advisory Committee in a roundtable discussion on proposed changes to the City's Rental Housing Code. At the conclusion of that meeting, Council directed staff "to proceed with rental housing changes and a residential property maintenance ordinance simultaneously by modifying Chapter 13 and adding an additional chapter to the Municipal Code dealing with residential property maintenance, with the caveat that public input will be received regarding the items concerning all residential properties; then all issues be put together for final approval."

In response to that directive, the City Attorney has begun drafting of the appropriate code sections.

Staff has prepared this report to outline steps to educate and receive input from the greater community regarding adoption of property maintenance code items that may be applied to all residential properties, including owner occupied homes. The planned approach endeavors to address the following four goals:

1. **Increase public awareness** about a potential Residential Property Maintenance Code applying to owner occupied properties
 - a. Explain **what** is being proposed regarding residential property maintenance
 - b. Explain **why** this is being proposed for our community at this time.
2. Outline the **strategies for public education and public input**
3. Outline the plan to **evaluate and report citizen feedback** on the proposed Residential Property Maintenance Code back to the City Council.
4. Lay out a plan to **implement this public education, input and outreach quickly** so that action on the Rental Housing Advisory Committee's recommendations are not delayed.

Background

Through months of working with the volunteers who comprise the Rental Housing Advisory Committee (RHAC), Inspections Division staff learned that the idea of a property maintenance code may initially elicit a negative connotation to those who are directly impacted. However, RHAC members reacted much differently to the concept after being educated on property maintenance and viewing photographs of at-risk properties in the community. It is important to remember that exploring property maintenance codes began with a grassroots effort of neighbors who brought the issue to the attention of staff and City Council members. Explaining the history of this issue, educating residents on property maintenance codes, providing visuals of the type of problems we are experiencing, gathering

public opinion, and forwarding that information to the City Council for consideration are all steps that must be taken before moving forward.

Increasing Public Awareness

As with any policy decision, educating Ames residents about the concept of a residential property maintenance code is the first key step of this process. Residents will be interested in the purpose of property maintenance codes, what criteria may be included, and how a policy would be implemented. Additionally, residents will be interested in why the City is exploring the issue at this time. Staff is recommending a two-pronged approach where public awareness and education precedes the solicitation of community input.

Public Education and Input Plan

The educational outreach and public input effort will begin immediately and conclude in April 2009. Various vehicles to increase public awareness have been discussed including traditional methods of information dissemination and new concepts the City has not used in the past. In addition to accessing local media (television, radio, newspaper, and on-line news), we will take advantage of existing City of Ames resources such as City Side, Channel 12, Neighborhood News and www.cityofames.org to reach out to residents. Neighborhood Associations will be used as conduits for information, and speakers will be provided to service clubs and civic groups. Direct mail pieces and advertising will also be used where appropriate. Several open houses will be scheduled. These methods are primarily educational, but some will be used to gather input.

Two innovative features of this process will be (1) the utilization of a focus group to evaluate awareness, support of, or opposition to property maintenance codes, and (2) the development of a Web-based survey. By working with Iowa State University Extension, the City will host a small number of focus groups in specified neighborhoods to gather neighborhood-specific data. This effort should result in additional information of value to the educational outreach meetings and should give Council additional information for its deliberations. Furthermore, to encourage dialogue, questions, comments, and the exchange of opinions, the City will develop a web-based survey for utility customers to access. Finally, a City Council roundtable will be scheduled as an additional way to gather information.

The collection of citizen input will occur through a variety of means, culminating with a staff report to Council.

Proposed Schedule

It will be a challenge to accomplish this ambitious plan within the next several months. To do so, the following schedule is suggested:

December 9 th	Council presentation on public outreach and input plan
December 15 th – 16 th	Inspection Division staff in process of writing combined chapter 13 with Rental Housing Advisory Committee’s 78 alternatives.

Dec. 15 th – Jan. 30 th	Focus group participants identified, meetings conducted, results collected
Dec. 20 th – Jan. 12 th	ISU winter break
Dec. 20 th – Jan. 30 th	Legal Department preparing Rental Housing Code ordinance
January 2009	City Side article distributed with utility billing describing property maintenance proposals and public input opportunities
January 5 th – 9 th	Press releases and newspaper articles
January 12 th – 16 th	Channel 12 programming begins to air City's website regarding property maintenance up and running Web-based survey site up and running
Mid to late January	Mailing to all privately owned single family dwellings within community
February 2009	Presentations to service clubs and community organizations
February 2 nd – 6 th	First public education/input open house
February 9 th – 13 th	Second public education/input open house
February 17 th	Staff report on public awareness input City Council round table Council policy direction on proposed property maintenance code
February 24 th	Rental housing ordinance complete and available to public
Feb. 25 th – March 13 th	Staff prepare final written report for Council Final report made available to public
March 24 th	Council decision/adoption/first reading on proposed rental housing code Council decision/adoption/first reading on proposed property maintenance code

This public education and input-gathering process will have a cost of approximately \$5,000. This will cover additional postage, printing and advertising, as well as the focus group cost.

Evaluate and Report Feedback to the City Council

City staff anticipates gathering all the data from the scheduled educational campaign and input strategy and presenting it to the City Council at the March 24 City Council meeting. In addition to including input and feedback, staff will analyze the data collected and make a recommendation to the City Council regarding the direction of an Ames Residential Property Maintenance Code.