

COUNCIL ACTION FORM

**SUBJECT: TRIENNIEL UPDATES TO BUILDING, ELECTRICAL, MECHANICAL,
PLUMBING AND FIRE CODES**

BACKGROUND:

In 2003, an ad hoc citizen committee recommended the City update local building, electrical, mechanical, and plumbing codes at three year intervals to coincide with release of updated editions of the model codes (International Building Codes, Uniform Plumbing Code, and National Electrical Code). The Insurance Services Office (ISO), a nationally recognized risk rating organization, recommends adoption of model codes within one year of publication. The codes are updated and published on three year cycles. The 2003 codes were adopted by Council in 2004, the 2006 codes were adopted in 2007, and the 2009 codes are now being brought forward for adoption.

The proposed 2009 codes were reviewed with all members of the Building, Electrical, and Mechanical/Plumbing Boards during seven monthly public meetings of the combined boards' membership. Specific local amendments to the model codes were analyzed, evaluated, and unanimously approved for inclusion or exclusion by the twelve Board Members. Where random, outdated, or confusing text was discovered, appropriate improvements were discussed and developed by staff and approved by the Boards. The Boards' decisions were communicated to their local constituencies through such formal groups as the Ames Homebuilders' Association, and less formally through the local network of architects, engineers, educators, contractors, and tradespersons who regularly find the subject of local building regulations a part of everyday conversation in offices, at restaurants, project sites, and supply houses.

For the first time, the 2009 edition of the International Residential Code (IRC) contains a sprinkler system requirement for new, single family homes. This requirement has provoked heated national discussion. Opposition from Iowa's Home Builders successfully halted the State from adopting the home sprinkler requirement. After lengthy discussion in Ames, it was decided to recommend removal of the requirement by means of a local amendment until further state and national trends are identified. With the sprinkler requirement removed, there appears to be no local opposition to adoption of the remaining elements of the 2009 ICC codes with local amendments.

The proposal presented here is consistent with the model codes and standards for commercial, industrial, and residential building, electrical, mechanical, and plumbing construction work adopted by the State of Iowa. It is also consistent with the standards in effect in all large and small communities in Iowa which have adopted local building codes.

Subsequent to the completion of the code review by the combined boards, the City Council received at the April workshop citizen input regarding code issues that present barriers to remodeling second story areas in Ames downtown buildings. These issues are not addressed by the codes being brought forward for Council consideration at this time. As a follow up to the workshop, more discussion could be held between the City staff and developers/builders to identify means to address these code concerns. It is important to note that it is within the Council's authority to identify areas of the community for revitalization and to amend our code sections that are deemed barriers to revitalization.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Set August 10, 2010 as the date for public hearing to approve the proposed changes to Ames Municipal Code by adopting the 2009 editions of the International Building Code (IBC); International Fire Code (IFC); International Residential Code (IRC); International Existing Building Code (IEBC); International Mechanical Code(IMC); International Fuel Gas Code (IFGC); Uniform Plumbing Code (UPC) and local amendments.

In addition, it is recommended that Council direct staff to convene an ad hoc group of developers, design professionals, and City staff to consider alternatives for the removal of code barriers to the revitalization of the downtown area, and potentially for other existing retail and commercial areas of our community.

2. Direct staff to work with the appropriate board(s) to develop further local amendments to the recommended codes.

MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Adoption of the current editions of the International Codes is a routine action performed by the City at regular three year intervals. By adopting the 2009 Codes, the City of Ames continues to share the same minimum building, electrical, mechanical, and plumbing codes as most other local, state, and county governmental jurisdictions throughout the nation. Citizen input has been solicited through a series of seven monthly public meetings with combined members of the City's Building, Electrical, and Plumbing and Mechanical Boards, at which significant code changes and specific related local amendments were discussed. It appears that this action has the full support of all members of these Boards.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of the City Manager that the City Council adopt Alternative No. 1, thereby setting August 10, 2010 as the date for public hearing to approve the proposed changes to Ames Municipal Code. It is also recommended that Council direct staff to convene an ad hoc group to explore alternatives to code barriers for redevelopment of the downtown business district, and potentially of other business areas in the community.