

## Background Summary

**DANGEROUS BUILDINGS WORKSHOP**

April 19, 2011

Recently Council received a request for action from a neighborhood seeking City help in dealing with an abandoned house. Council members have also inquired regarding what action is proposed for the truck stop south of Highway 30 by Interstate 35. Staff are at various stages or enforcement actions on a variety of buildings that are abandoned, in transition, and/or under foreclosure.

At the April 19<sup>th</sup> City Council workshop, staff will present slides showing examples of problem buildings within our community. These can best be categorized as **commercial, private residences, and hoarding situations**. Each category presents unique enforcement challenges requiring differing approaches. In the presentation, staff will describe their procedures for dealing with these three categories of dangerous buildings. Council will also have an opportunity for input and inquiry so that present practices and techniques can be affirmed or modified.

**Commercial properties** in Ames often require a careful Code-based approach. Commercial endeavors are very important to the community, and when maintained in a safe manner, they continue to receive support at various levels of City government. However, when these structures come into disrepair, a systematic approach of evaluation and identification is utilized. This may often involve the use of consulting engineers with an expertise in building construction. Ames is fortunate that, in most cases, voluntary compliance has been reached through the cooperative efforts of the owners and Inspections Division staff.

**Private residences** that have degraded to the point of posing a danger to occupants and visitors, although sometimes simpler, often still take a period of months or years to effectively mitigate. It is the policy of the Inspections Division to work with property owners to gain voluntary compliance over a seemingly long period of time. Only in the most dangerous situations is prompt enforcement mandated. Unlike many other large cities in Iowa, Ames has not historically budgeted funds to facilitate forced demolition and removal of dangerous residences.

The problem of **hoarding** has become more prevalent in our community as it has in the nation as a whole. Hoarding becomes a problem when it spills out into the exterior of the property, thereby affecting neighboring property values and neighbors' appreciation for the aesthetics of their neighborhood. Often hoarding is brought to the attention of the Inspections Division staff as a result of other inspection activities or through the report of a family member. The current approach to dealing with these potentially dangerous situations involves lengthy attempts at seeking voluntary compliance. The length of time is often contrary to the wishes of surrounding neighbors.

A common thread between these three examples of dangerous buildings is the question of private property maintenance and the degree of involvement the City chooses to undertake.