

**Hall, Renee**

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**From:** jennifer harris <harrisjennifer3@yahoo.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, October 17, 2024 10:46 AM  
**To:** Reynolds, Sheryl; Schainker, Steve; City Council and Mayor  
**Subject:** Re: 913 Carroll

[External Email]

Mr. Schainker, Mayor Haila, City Council, and Sheryl Reynolds,

First- thank you, Sheryl, for the time you have given this issue, I do greatly appreciate it and you have been helpful.

I wonder, even with the assistance you all have given, if there isn't more that can be done. In reply to Sheryl's email below, I want to counter that the city might not have code addressing the "existence" of abandoned buildings, but it does not allow for nuisance properties or for them to be in chronic violation of city code. Nor does it allow any property to violate the health, safety, and welfare of surrounding properties and their owners. Therefore, the city of Ames has an obligation to pursue the identification of abandoned properties. There is more than enough reasonable cause for the city to petition an inspection of 913 Carroll for abandonment.

State code takes into consideration a multitude of issues, in addition to those Sheryl listed below, including "Any other evidence the court deems relevant"(Iowa Code 2024, Chapter 657A (28, 0), 657A.10B). This seems to leave a pretty open pathway for interpretation when deeming a property abandoned. The presence of utilities, tax payments, abatement compliance, are not stand alone requirements for occupancy or fit for human habitation(as this vacant building is listed as a residence)And, while the simple presence of vermin is not a violation, it is listed as an issue to consider when deeming a property abandoned.

It is my understanding that the City of Ames does not currently have any codes or means of keeping a record of vacant and abandoned buildings and lots, so I urge our City Council to look into creating a platform for this. The current city codes, while appreciated, do not address the deeper and wide spread issues that blight creates. This problem not only affects immediate neighbors, but has consequences for the community as a whole.

My original inquiry was if the City of Ames would offer to purchase the building from the owner of 913 Carroll. My hope was that this would avoid the hassles of everything we have spoken of and hopefully be a much more positive, less invasive, and productive means of addressing the issue. I know these things take time, and I am waiting to hear back on any information or progress towards this.

I mentioned to Sheryl, and two other city employees, who recently came back out to look at the property, my alarm at the unknown individual walking by approximately a week prior, who inquired to my husband, the possibility of camping out on the property at 913 Carroll. That raised a major red flag to us and points to more evidence that the building is abandoned and creating a potentially dangerous environment. The safety of my family and neighbors is paramount and I am asking that everything possible be exhausted to address this property. Please do not take this concern lightly.

In a previous email I noted I was aware I may not be satisfied with results in response to my efforts, but I hoped to keep finding solutions with you. So, while I'm sure I sound frustrated, I do really hope we can continue to work together.

Maybe you are all familiar with the Center for Community Progress and their work helping communities address vacant and abandoned properties. If not, I will include a link. They are a non-profit organization that provides consultation and help to cities. They have so much good information, ideas, resources, and success stories. They recently held a Reclaiming Vacant Properties conference in St. Louis. There are some topics, like Land Banks, that go beyond local authority, but I hope, you will take these issues to our state legislators as well.

<https://communityprogress.org/about/>

Thank you again for listening, wanting to help, and providing the assistance you have. I appreciate all of you and your responsiveness. That is worth a lot. I love my neighborhood and Ames, as you all do. And as you work to always keep Ames welcoming, a place people want to live, or a destination spot, I want the same for my little corner of town.

With appreciation and hope,  
Jennifer Harris

On Monday, October 14, 2024 at 08:41:22 AM CDT, Reynolds, Sheryl <[sheryl.reynolds@cityofames.org](mailto:sheryl.reynolds@cityofames.org)> wrote:

Good morning, Jennifer,

I was able to confirm that there is not a recorded easement on the property. Many of the cable/telephone boxes are not in actual easements. I'm not aware of any prohibition against overgrown vegetation in an easement. The easement typically just grants a party guaranteed access and is not regulated any differently than the rest of the property.

8The Municipal Code does not prohibit abandoned properties from existing. The State has a process where cities can petition the court for title to a property if they deem it abandoned. These criteria typically include non-payment of taxes, unresponsive/deceased owner, lack of utilities, etc. In this case, we have been in contact with the owner and utilities are active.

We were unable to find code that would prohibit the presence of groundhogs or other vermin. This was something that was discussed during the creation of the Public Nuisance Ordinance, but City Council chose not to include it after much public input. You could certainly request City Council to revisit this and to maybe consider some sort of ordinance for vacant properties.

I reached the owner by phone. The owner has assured me the satellite dish, grill, and metal roofing materials will be removed from the exterior of the property by 10/25. We intend to move forward with the citation process if he does not comply with the timeline.

I'm very sorry that we can't be of more help. I understand the frustration of the situation and the impact it is having on your neighborhood.

Kind regards,

**Sheryl Reynolds**

Community Codes Liaison

Inspection Division



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**From:** jennifer harris <harrisjennifer3@yahoo.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, October 11, 2024 10:42 AM  
**To:** Reynolds, Sheryl <sheryl.reynolds@cityofames.org>  
**Subject:** 913 Carroll

[External Email]

Sheryl,

Sorry to email you again! So, that electrical "box" is a phone line and what connects us to the internet/wifi. So, I'm wondering if that area is an easement. Which, would mean there can't be overgrown vegetation growing there. What are your thoughts? And are you able to find out if that is an easement?

Also, I did mistakenly site the Ames Municipal code in my previous email. In the Code of Iowa Nuisance Abatement Manual, it states the presence of vermin, accumulation of debris, and uncut vegetation are part of the considerations a court could take when assessing if a property/building is abandoned. I can send you a screenshot later today if you want.

I know the City is not in an Abatement process, but as I have said, I believe that property is abandoned/vacant/unoccupied. Groundhogs would not be making a habitat in a spot that was routinely maintained and have human activity. Just my observation, but possibly another point to maybe consider as you look into this.??

Again, sorry to keep emailing you. Thank you for your time and help.

Jennifer