



CITY OF IOWA CITY MEMORANDUM

Date: August 13, 2015

To: Tom Markus, City Manager

From: Stan Laverman, Senior Housing Inspector
Tracy Hightshoe, Neighborhood Services Coordinator

Re: Housing Code enforcement changes to support neighborhood stabilization.

The City of Iowa City's Housing Code was amended in 2003 to address neighborhood stabilization issues when regulations were added to address tenant nuisance behavior (e.g., disorderly house, disorderly conduct, assaults, etc.) and it has been very effective in dealing with 'party house' type activity. Again in 2008, the Housing Code was amended to address neighborhood stabilization with the prohibition of storage and use of indoor furniture outdoors. The storage and use of these indoor items outside contributes to the appearance of overall property neglect, has been a fire hazard and provides habitation for vermin.

Two goals of the 2014-15 Strategic Plan are to foster healthy neighborhoods and a strong urban core. In the spring of 2015, the staff, mayor and mayor pro-tem toured the University impacted neighborhoods to determine other possible enforcement changes that would assist with neighborhood stabilization. Outlined below are ongoing and new 'targeted' enforcement efforts as well as proposed code amendments to address the items of concern.

Ongoing 'targeted' enforcement efforts:

- Investigate nuisance complaints (weeds, snow on sidewalk, occupancy, trash)
- Continue spring clean-up enforcement following the University of Iowa's spring break.
- Conduct monthly "couch patrol" in assigned neighborhood quadrants.
- Fall move-in patrols in assigned neighborhood quadrants.
- Follow-up nuisance code inspections of single family rental houses cited for disorderly house by the police department.

New 'targeted' enforcement efforts(starting fall 2015):

- Create March and August listening post events for College Hill, Northside, and Goosetown neighborhoods. March and August are key months regarding Spring and Fall code enforcement issues and these meetings should help staff 'target' code enforcement efforts.
- Expand the use Iowa City's 'Nextdoor' neighborhood web-site to create additional information opportunities.
- Conduct a walking survey concerning exterior conditions in the University impacted neighborhood areas. This survey will involve documentation of existing building/property maintenance conditions (both rental/owner occupied) by University of Iowa planning students with the help of City staff. Staff will provide follow up code enforcement of any documented violations.

- During the regular systematic inspection of rental properties in the University impacted areas Rental Inspection staff will place greater emphasis on verifying the condition of public sidewalks and require repairs as needed.
- Conduct monthly Nuisance Code inspections in the University impacted neighborhoods.
- Increase the enforcement of off street parking regulations (e.g. parking on grass, etc.). As many of these parking/vehicle storage violations happen outside of the typical work week, Iowa City Police Department Community Service officers will be asked to document off street parking violations using the ICgovXpress mobile application. Housing Inspection staff will follow up with enforcement.
- Consider the suspension of rental permits for up to 6 months when rental property/units are found to be over-occupied. This would be stepped up enforcement for repeat offenders of the Zoning Code's residential occupancy requirements. Fines (\$750) have not been found to be effective in changing behavior.

Housing Code Amendments

1. ***The storage and use of furniture on surfaces 30" above grade without guardrails.***
This change is being recommended to regulate and prohibit furniture on roofs of residential dwellings while still allowing their use on properly designed exterior areas. Furniture placed/used on a roof is unsafe and contributes to the appearance of overall property neglect.
2. ***Exterior Surfaces.***
 - a. Exterior painted surfaces would be required to be painted in a uniform, color consistent, and complete fashion. All painted surfaces would be required to be properly prepped to allow for paint to adhere and remain painted regardless if items are subject to decay or deterioration. This change would raise the minimum maintenance standard for the exterior appearance of residential properties and would protect against their decay and deterioration.
 - b. All exterior surfaces, regardless of material composition, would be required to be maintained in a good, safe, and sanitary condition. Currently the Iowa City Housing code is silent on this issue and this change would allow staff to address maintenance issues as it relates to decay and deterioration (e.g. siding covered in mold/mildew would be required to be cleaned).
 - c. In historic and conservation districts bare treated lumber would not be an approved finish for wood surfaces visible from the street. Approved coverings for lumber would include colored stains and paints. This change would bring consistency with existing building & zoning codes as they pertain to historic and conservation districts.
3. ***Exterior Screening.*** Porches and decks less than 5' off grade visible from the right of way, in historic and conservation districts, would be required to have under porch and under deck screening. The screening would be required to be complementary to the dwelling as approved by the City. Areas under decks and porches have a tendency to collect trash, debris and incidental storage. Proper screening will help with the control of this nuisance.
4. ***Solid Waste Facilities Screening.*** All dumpsters/ recycling facilities located on existing multi-family dwelling sites would be required to be screened with materials that are complementary to the dwelling and as approved by the City. This is a new requirement for existing uses and would mirror the current Iowa City zoning code screening requirements for new development. This proposed change would bring older multi-family

sites into compliance with current screening standards. Enclosing dumpsters and recycling facilities will contain trash and debris in a controlled area and reduce the amount of nuisance litter in a neighborhood. This requirement would be enacted in tandem with the anticipated changes in Iowa City's solid waste ordinance, which will require recycling facilities for all multi-family dwellings, over a two year period.

5. **Outdoor Storage.** The storage of landscaping and construction material would not be permitted in areas visible from the street facing right of way.
6. **Exterior Area Maintenance.** Fences, screening, and retaining walls would be required to be maintained in a safe & structurally sound manner. All wood or painted surfaces would be required to be painted and or stained in a uniform, color consistent, and complete fashion. All other surfaces would be required to be maintained in a uniform, color consistent, and complete fashion. This change would raise the minimum maintenance standard and address the issues of dilapidation, decay, and deterioration. Landscaping timbers and other related items as approved by the City would be exempt from this regulation.

The Iowa City Housing Code applies to both owner-occupied and rental residential properties. However, the Housing Code exempts owner-occupied properties from the requirement of systematic code inspections and are only inspected on a 'complaint' basis. The proposed 'stepped up' code inspection program is designed to systematically focus equally on **all** properties located in the University impacted neighborhoods. Systematically requiring both owner-occupied and rental properties to be Housing Code compliant would be a significant change and not without controversy.

Recommendation:

Staff recommends amending the Housing Code and implementation of the proposed stepped up 'targeted' neighborhood inspection program. Both of these changes are designed to address the goal of neighborhood stabilization in the City's University impacted neighborhoods. Also, staff will work with the Apartment Owners Association concerning changes.

Finally, these changes can be implemented at this time without adding additional rental inspectors. However, it must be noted that because of the continued growth in new multifamily rental units, the growth in rental inspections and with the increasing demand to have a more proactive neighborhood inspection programs, adding a housing inspector will soon need to be considered.

cc: Doug Boothroy, Director Neighborhood and Development Services