

**CSU Center for Public Deliberation  
External Property Maintenance and Rental Housing Codes Forum Report**

On April 21, 2008, the CSU Center for Public Deliberation hosted its Spring 2008 Community Issues Forum event at the Fort Collins Hilton. The event combines students from a class of graduating CSU undergraduates with community members to discuss a number of key issues. One of the five topics discussed at this semester’s forum was the proposed changes to the External Maintenance and Rental Housing codes which are currently being examined by the Fort Collins City Council. This document reports on the results of that community forum, and also includes some additional “third-party” analysis of the issue overall from perspective of the CPD director, Martín Carcasson and the three CPD student associates that worked on the issue.

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**Background**

The topic of this forum centered on proposed changes to current maintenance standards in Fort Collins. These were first discussed during an initial City Council work session on September 12, 2006, and were tied to the council’s goal of “Improving Neighborhood Quality.” The stated goal was to “provide the entire community an opportunity to participate in determining the look and feel of neighborhoods.” In general, proposals have been discussed in three categories: (1) dangerous buildings, (2) exterior maintenance codes, and (3) rental housing codes. The CPD forum focused on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, particularly because these will be further examined by City Council on this year (July 15<sup>th</sup>).

The External Property Maintenance Codes discussion was intended to gain insight regarding various perspectives on the proposed changes. The primary debate centered on the issue of personal choice versus neighborhood quality and aesthetics, with the biggest issues being dirt/dead yards and dilapidated fences. We were also attempting to gather input as to whether or not the code should be enforced through patrolling or complaints, or some sort of combination.

The Rental Housing Codes deliberation focused on whether or not the current codes are strict enough to ensure the safety of renters. Should the renters be expected to know safety guidelines ahead of time and enter at their own risk, or is it the landlord’s responsibility? The forum also examined the specific code proposals and discussed the merits of individual changes

Prior to the forum, CPD director Martín Carcasson and three CPD student associates working on this issue (Ben Prytherch, Courtney Stone, and Michelle Lessans) reviewed the issue and the public discussion surrounding it. Background information was obtained from a variety of sources. They watched tapes of relevant City Council sessions on the issue to determine what issues were most important. Information on current ordinances and the differences with proposed changes was gathered from local government pages. Facilitators also read articles from local papers (*The Coloradoan*) and examined comments left by community members on the on-line discussion forum. These all helped to better inform the facilitators on the specific parts of the issue, as well as tensions and tough choices that people are noticing and need to be faced.

### **Participants in the Forum**

The participants in this forum came from a wide variety of backgrounds, from age to occupation to salary. Most importantly, there were stakeholders from many of those groups who would be most involved in and affected by the proposed maintenance standard changes. There were several rental property owners, students who rent, homeowners who live in neighborhoods with HOA-like standards and those who do not. It was also very beneficial to have city spokespersons involved in the discussion—including Beth Sowder, the city of Fort Collins neighborhood services manager—they were able to explain the current rental standards more explicitly, as well as clarify the city’s purpose in proposing these new standards. There were several people who were explicitly against the standards and several who supported them, as well as a of the group who came to the discussion to find out more information about the issue majority. There were 19 surveys collected, although there seemed to be more than that in the actual discussion. From the surveys we collected, 72% of the participants were women, 53% were students and 47% from the community, and 83% selected “Caucasian” as their ethnicity. Political affiliation, income, and age were spread fairly evenly across the board.

### **The Process**

The deliberation began with a brief introduction on the topics. A backgrounder handout was given to all of the participants (see Appendix A), which described what the current Fort Collins laws regarding exterior maintenance and internal rental housing standards are, as well as the proposed changes. Each participant was then invited to explain what aspects of the topic he or she had a personal stake in or found most important. From here the deliberation was fairly open-ended, with the moderator occasionally suggesting specific topics or questions for discussion, and the note takers recording the comments being made on large pieces of paper. The note taking was split up into “pro” and “con” comments, and each piece of paper was attached to the wall after it was full of notes to provide an ongoing record of the discussion. The discussion on exterior maintenance standards lasted about an hour and fifteen minutes, and was followed by about a half an hour discussion on rental housing standards. Once this was finished, the participants were handed opinion surveys. Some of the questions were about very specific aspects of the topic, and some were open ended. While the participants were filling out their surveys, each was invited to offer reflections on how the deliberation went and if they had a new perspective on the issues as a result. These reflections were also recorded by the note takers. Finally, the participants were given five sticky dots a piece and invited to place them by whichever of the statements, as recorded in the notes, that they felt were most important to the topic.

### **Suggested Use of the Data**

Considering the forum included only about 20 community members that self-selected to attend, the information provided should obviously not be considered representative of the community. However, the information provided here is different from data from a typical opinion poll or even community meeting. The goal of the forum was not to provide information or even collect public opinion, but rather to have a focused, facilitated discussion of the issue with the ultimate goal of helping improve the understanding of the issue and the quality of public discussion concerning it. The impartial “third party” facilitators from the CPD prepared for the forum by analyzing the issue and identifying key issues and tensions, and then structured the conversation to work through those issues. The information in this report, therefore, should help readers get a better sense of the issue overall and the numerous aspects involved. In particular, this analysis focused on point of common ground and key tensions on the issue, as well as trying to dispel some of the misconceptions that exist.

### **Analysis/Summary of the Discussion**

The notes from the forum and the placement of dots bring to light a few key issues. Overall, participants in the forums focused much more on concerns with the proposed maintenance codes rather than appreciations for them. The use of dots to identify key statements participants agreed with, for example, show a significant disparity, with 47 dots placed next to concerns and only 15 placed next to appreciations. In addition, five of the dots placed on appreciations—the most often chosen appreciation—were placed next to the following statement: “Would only support if resources were available for people who can't afford repairs.”

Despite the lack of dots, participants did express a number of appreciations of the proposed requirements. They noted that the law would primarily be for extreme situations where alternatives are not sufficient and the problems clearly impact neighborhood quality. They explained that older neighborhoods needed support due to the lack of HOAs, and that relying on neighbors to address the problems on their own could cause additional conflict. Participants also explained that the problems often arise from rental situations involving off-site owner/investors and temporary residents who may not have a strong concern for the neighborhood.

Concerns with the changes, however, were more strongly supported overall. Community members expressed the concern that many people may not be doing repairs due to lack of resources, and wanted to make sure that they would have some opportunities for help before they were fined. Several of the statements supported by dots addressed this general theme, tied either to low-income residents or students who may not have the necessary resources or tools for upkeep. Participants were also concerned that this law might take away from open communication between neighbors, which many people believed should be the first course of action. Others were worried that citations might be offered without a long enough time for compliance, and still others felt that city funds should be spent elsewhere. Another group of concerns focused on the impact the changes would have on personal preference and choice.

Although key fact questions about how the laws would work and current laws surfaced, representatives from the local government that are working on these policies were present to explain things. During the discussion, it seemed to boil down to the issue of non-compliance due to laziness vs. lack of resources or funds. Many seemed to agree that those who can afford repairs but are simply neglectful should be issued citations, but also believed that situation is not typical.

The rental housing codes discussion also brought forth a great deal of information. Participants appreciated the importance of safety, however there were a few key concerns. One of the most significant concerned informing renters. The codes are triggered by renter complaints, but many renters likely would not be aware of the codes. Participants felt that there would have to be a way to educate the community. They also wanted to make sure that responsibility would fall solely on the owners when it comes to repairs and costs, rather than the renters. Overall, there were far fewer key tensions when it came to these codes. Participants largely agreed with what the proposals were and felt that they had no potential for harm, although one participant felt strongly that renters should have the right to rent a dangerous location if they so choose. Participants were provided a list of all the proposed rental code changes and asked to identify which they supported (see question 12). Interestingly, support varied strongly depending on the option, with a high of 91% support for carbon monoxide alarms and a low of 32% for the minimum two electric outlets.

Overall, the most important message that people seemed to want taken away from the forum discussion was to make sure not to single out the low-income families of Fort Collins by creating codes that they are unable to comply with, and to make sure the community is as educated as possible when it comes to what is expected of them.

Turning to the survey questions, some interesting points can be made. The first few questions connected to some of the broader philosophical questions that are related to this issue. The answers were remarkable for their spread. Question 1, for example, asked whether participants would be willing to sacrifice personal choice for community aesthetics. 36% of the participants in the forum answered “Not sure,” which tied as the most often chosen option with “strongly disagree.” 28% answered either agree or strongly agree. So almost 1/3 agreed, just over a 1/3 strongly disagreed, and just over a 1/3 could not answer. A similar pattern emerged with question 2 which asked if residents should be able to do what they wish with their property even if it reduced property values. 41% were “not sure,” 23% agreed or strongly agreed, and 37% disagreed or strongly disagreed. These numbers show that at least for many in the room, these broader questions represent difficult issues for the community that warrant additional discussion.

### **Posted Easel Notes from the Forum**

(#s represent the number of dots placed on that statement by the participants)

#### **Stated Appreciations for the External Property Maintenance Codes (15 total dots)**

Would only support if resources were available for people who can't afford repairs	5
The law is about extreme situations and will not nitpick on every violation (focus is on compliance)	2
Older neighborhoods have never had the option of HOA's - some residents might want them	2
Government can mediate between neighbors so that there is less personal conflict	1
People want to live in neighborhoods where they feel comfortable and not threatened by neighbors	1
Helps "when all else fails"	1
Would keep irresponsible landlords from profiting by not maintaining their property	1
Landlords could be required to offer supplies to their renters to maintain their lawn	1
Property values affect everyone	1
Enforcement (when using government patrols) is largely uniform	
Encourages neighbor communication/cooperation	
Time will be given for preparing and education the community about the new standards	

Addresses people that are purposefully neglectful of maintaining their property  
 Takes the burden off of landlords if their renters do not take care of the lawn  
 Doesn't mandate having grass  
 Dirt yards present safety concerns (dirt runoff into streets)

**Concerns for the External Property Maintenance Codes (47 total dots)**

- Open communication between neighbors should be the first way to regulate maintenance 5
- Students/low income families don't always qualify for aid and cannot afford to grow/maintain lawns or fix fences 5
- True efforts should be made to gain compliance before issuing citations 5
- Some prospective buyers like having less codes 4
- Spend the money elsewhere - this is not a priority when our budget is already stretched 4
- Volunteers can help with repairs without government involvement 4
- Not everyone can afford to comply with these standards 3
- What services do we have to give up for the city to pay to enforce the new codes? 3
- Doesn't allow for personal choice, especially with environmental concerns 3
- People aren't enabled to fix problems with their neighbors - automatically go to government 2
- Not everyone can afford the tools to maintain their lawn - could landlords provide these to renters? 2
- Some neighbors could be overzealous about complaining 2
- Where do you draw the line? How much do lawns affect the property value of neighboring homes? 1
- Current standards seem unreasonable - we don't need more 1
- Fences/yards don't put health at risk 1
- The ends don't justify the means 1
- "I don't want to spend money so my neighbors can make money selling their property" 1
- People can choose to live in HOA neighborhoods - shouldn't apply to an unwilling community
- Can't please everyone - there will always be people complaining about other people's property
- Dirty alleys aren't regulated - why should lawns be?
- How do you differentiate between those who cannot (because of physical or financial difficulties) maintain their property from those who have the means to maintain their property but choose to neglect it?
- Work it out with the neighbors
- Pits neighbors against neighbors (if enforcement were based on complaints only)
- Code on fence should apply only in extreme cases (not just one slat)
- Standards don't take climate and environmental conservation into account
- There is not enough time allowed to fix the problem

**Appreciations for Rental Housing Codes**

- No one's life/safety should be put in jeopardy 2
- Only enforced by complaints from tenants, so inspectors won't invade your privacy 1
- Many people may not be aware of the safety risks in their own homes 1
- Cutting costs can lead to long-term repercussions 1
- Risk-management
- Renters don't have the right to modify their property - landlords have to take care of it
- Forces landlords to maintain basic safety standards

**Concerns for Rental Housing Codes**

- How will the city educate tenants about these codes, especially if they will be only be enforced by complaints? 6

Responsibility falls on the homeowner to fix these codes 2  
 Using 3-unrelated to inspect the house - is this a violation of privacy? 1  
 Tenants might not complain about substandard housing to avoid an increase in rent 1  
 People should be able to choose what standards they want to live in if it's cheap  
 How will owners be notified of changes?  
 Costs of repairs get passed to renters - can people afford more expensive rent?  
 Cost of changing the house every time the code changes  
 Common sense vs. government involvement  
 Accept responsibility if you put your life at risk

**Reflections**

Can't single out low-income families by making laws with which they can't comply 3  
 Most students are not aware of their rights 1  
 Safety is KEY! 1  
 Is there help for students? 1  
 Don't hear enough that students really matter in this city 1  
 Government shouldn't regulate things that only put your own health at risk 1  
 Appreciative of knowledge gained and opinions shared  
 Thank You to Mike and Beth for being in the "hot seat"  
 Both sides have valid points - it's a tough decisions  
 Changes should be common sense but have to address the fact that this won't apply  
 Agreed more with interior standards (Rental Housing Standards)  
 Glad that there are good landlords out there like Delores  
 Surprised that all landlords don't offer tools to maintain lawns  
 There are always statistics for both sides of the issue that we haven't heard  
 Should be more issues discussed with community and students TOGETHER

**Survey Results**

**Student?**

Yes: 53% (10)  
 No: 47% (9)

**Q1: I would sacrifice personal choice for community aesthetics/neighborhood quality**

S Agree:	5% (1)	Disagree:	0% (0)
Agree:	23% (5)	S Disagree:	36% (8)
Not Sure:	36% (8)		

**Q2: Residents should be allowed to do what they wish to their property, even if it lowers the property value of neighboring homes**

S Agree:	9% (2)	Disagree:	23% (5)
Agree:	14% (3)	S Disagree:	14% (3)
Not Sure:	41% (9)		

**Q3: Current housing standards should be more strongly enforced**

S Agree:	0% (0)	Disagree:	29% (6)
Agree:	38% (8)	S Disagree:	10% (2)
Not Sure:	24% (5)		

**Q4: Anything that lowers surrounding property values should be subject to regulation**

S Agree:	0% (0)	Disagree:	27% (6)
Agree:	32% (7)	S Disagree:	27% (6)
Not Sure:	14% (3)		

**Q5: External maintenance problems are primarily caused by lack of resources or ability of the homeowners**

S Agree:	0% (0)	Disagree:	18% (4)
Agree:	55% (12)	S Disagree:	9% (2)
Not Sure:	18% (4)		

**Q6: External maintenance problems are primarily caused by lack of concern or effort by residents**

S Agree:	9% (2)	Disagree:	37% (8)
Agree:	23% (5)	S Disagree:	9% (2)
Not Sure:	23% (5)		

**Q7: A voluntary community-based program to assist violators will be sufficient to limit external maintenance programs**

S Agree:	5% (1)	Disagree:	18% (4)
Agree:	50% (11)	S Disagree:	14% (3)
Not Sure:	14% (3)		

**Q8: What is the best way to monitor exterior maintenance standards?**

Complaints only:	45% (10)
Proactive patrols:	0% (0)
Both:	55% (12)

**Q9: Rental housing codes should be enforced only through tenant complaints**

S Agree:	14% (3)
Agree:	23% (5)
Not Sure:	32% (7)
Disagree:	27% (6)
S Disagree:	5% (1)

**Q10: Strengthening rental housing codes will increase costs of rent**

S Agree:	45% (10)	Disagree:	0% (0)
Agree:	37% (8)	S Disagree:	0% (0)
Not Sure:	18% (4)		

**Q11:** People should have the right to live in a somewhat dangerous environment if it's at the right price

S Agree:	9% (2)	Disagree:	23% (5)
Agree:	41% (9)	S Disagree:	14% (3)
Not Sure:	14% (3)		

**Q12.** Which of the following proposed additions to the rental code do you support?

Carbon monoxide alarms for dwellings with gas appliances:	91% (20)
Security locks on exterior windows & doors:	68% (15)
Expanded basement bedroom emergency escape/rescue:	68% (15)
Smoke alarms in all bedrooms:	64% (14)
Permanent heating capable of maintaining 68 degrees F:	50% (11)
Bathroom ventilation to mitigate mold:	45% (10)
Insect screens available from May 1 - Nov 1:	37% (8)
Minimum 2 electrical outlets:	32% (7)

**Q13:** How satisfied are you with the conversations you had today?

Very Satisfied:	36% (8)	Somewhat Dissatisfied:	0% (0)
Satisfied:	50% (11)	Dissatisfied:	0% (0)
Somewhat Satisfied:	5% (1)	Very Dissatisfied:	0% (0)
Neutral:	9% (2)		

**Q14:** Do you feel you now have a clearer or deeper understanding of the issue than you did before the forum?

Certainly:	41% (9)
Somewhat:	55% (12)
No:	5% (1)
Not Sure:	0% (0)

**Q15:** Did you hear ideas or see new possibilities for dealing with the issue that you had not considered before the forum?

Certainly:	29% (6)
Somewhat:	52% (11)
No:	19% (4)
Not Sure:	0% (0)

**Q16:** How likely are you to attend the 2008 forum?

Very Likely:	32% (7)
Somewhat Likely:	27% (6)
Not Sure:	18% (4)
Not Likely:	14% (3)
Depends on Topics:	5% (1)
Depends on if I still live here:	5% (1)

## **Conclusion: Overall Key Issues and Tensions to Consider**

In this concluding section, the analysis ranges beyond the specific forum and summarizes key issues that arose during the forum as well as analysis of the broader public discussion on this topic. They represent additional key issues we believe should be addressed or considered in order to improve the quality of the public discussion of this issue, and ultimately lead to a better decision on the matter.

Perhaps the most critical issue to consider is the cause of the problems. Those on different sides of this issue tend to focus on different basic sources of the problem. Proponents of stricter codes assume the problems are due primarily to neglect (particularly neglect by owners of rental properties that do not live in the neighborhoods), whereas opponents believe the problems are due to lack of resources. We believe this difference in perspective is fueling much of the disagreement and misunderstanding surrounding this issue. Survey questions 5 and 6 addressed this issue, and the answers were varied, with 55% agreeing that problems were primarily caused by lack of resources or ability, and 27% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. 32% agreed or strongly agreed that problems were primarily caused by lack of concern or effort, and 48% disagreed or strongly disagreed with that statement. Overall, considering some of the primary concerns with the codes were connected with its impact on those that can't afford to fix the problems, participants in the forum leaned more toward a resource explanation. A third perspective that came out in the forum that should also be considered was personal choice, particularly concerning lawns, which have connected environmental concerns (see more about this below in the discussion of lawns). This represents a broader philosophical issue that warrants further discussion as well. Should homeowners have the right to do what they choose with their property even if that negatively impacts neighborhood quality? Where can the line be drawn?

On a related note, there is significant common ground across perspectives concerning not wanting to punish or make things more difficult for those residents that have these problems due to lack of resources. There is similar common ground around the notion that enforcement should focus on fixing the problems, not punishing residents or raising money for the city. As a result, most seem to argue for allowing significant time for residents to alleviate the problem before any fines are actually levied, as well as helping residents find assistance. Some argue that the city should provide the assistance, whereas others disagree that such assistance would be a legitimate government function.

There is significant common ground on regulating issues that are directly tied to safety, which is seen as a legitimate function of government, and much less common ground on addressing aesthetic issues, even if those issues may impact property values.

There seems to be public misconceptions about some of the issues related to external maintenance. From public commentary, it seems that many are not aware of the current process for addressing violations, and that a high majority of claims are resolved before a fine is actually imposed. Many perceive the codes as either a form of punishment or control, or even a funding resource for the city, rather than a tool for neighborhood quality. When the codes are discussed as a mechanism for the city to be able to address extreme problems that alternative means could not, there tended to be much more agreement and support for the codes. The fact that few violations lead to fines should be emphasized more often during public discussion of this issue.

The connection of this issue with HOAs is an interesting one. Some commentators support these codes particularly to help older neighborhoods that were established before HOAs were the norm so they can compete with the newer neighborhoods and maintain neighborhood quality. Others argue that residents have the option to join an HOA controlled neighborhood or not, and some that choose a non-HOA neighborhood may do so precisely because of the freedom they provide. Passing stronger citywide codes would take away those choices.

Another point of disagreement, evident both in the broader discourse and the forum, concerns the ease of neighbors simply addressing this issue on their own without government assistance. Many argue that such codes are unnecessary because neighbors should simply deal with these issues as neighbors. During the forum, for example, the point was made that such codes encourage neighbors to go to the government rather than address the issues themselves, and thus further degrade the sense of community. From this perspective, the codes are an overreach of government responsibility, and having neighbors deal with such issues together would build community and social capital. Others argue that having neighbors simply work with neighbors on such issues is not as easy as it sounds. They explain that approaching a neighbor about a problem with their property can be uncomfortable, and could cause additional problems. From this perspective, relying on neighbors to address the issue creates more conflict and can harm the sense of community. Neighbors working with neighbors would be particularly difficult in the extreme cases where the neighbor has resources but simply is not concerned with the problems, or if the neighbor is a renter rather than an owner. Even in situations where the problem is lack of resources and neighbors nonprofits, or volunteers offer help, due to issues with pride or embarrassment, residents may be resistant to such appeals. In sum, the question of whether having the city government involved helps or harms the sense of community in neighborhoods is unclear and warrants additional discussion.

The city's own analysis showed that the majority of the problems with exterior maintenance involved dirt lawns. Dirt lawns have a number of issues specifically related to them that should be considered apart from issues tied to peeling paint or dilapidated fences. For example, "fixing" a dirt lawn would require a significant one time expense that would also involve time and effort, as well as an ongoing expense in time and money to keep it alive. Dirt lawns, in other words, would be a particularly difficult issue for those with low resources to "fix" easily. Dirt lawns are also unique in that there is an environmental angle to them not present with the other issues. Individuals may be choosing to keep a dirt lawn because of how much water lawns in Fort Collins require, particularly because many lawns consist of non-native grasses. This environmental connection may open up new options for addressing this issue, as local environmental groups or landscaping companies may be willing to help residents to develop xeriscaping options. Lastly, dirt lawns are also qualitatively different from other external maintenance issues because they can go beyond an "aesthetic" issue. During strong rains, dirt lawns can cause a hazard in the street, dirt lawns lead to an increased number of particles and dust in the air that could affect others, and dirt lawns are likely to have significant weed growth that can also spread to other yards.

Please direct any questions about this report to Martin Carcasson, Director of the CSU Center for Public Deliberation at [cpd@colostate.edu](mailto:cpd@colostate.edu) or 970-491-5628.

## Appendix A: Handout used at forum

# What should we do about maintenance, health, and safety standards on housing in Fort Collins?

Discussion guide for Spring 2008 Community Issues Forum  
Hosted by the CSU Center for Public Deliberation

### **Background**

An initial council work session was held on September 12, 2006, focused on minimum property and building maintenance standards.\* It was tied to the Council's stated goal of "Improving Neighborhood Quality," and "providing the entire community an opportunity to participate in determining the look and feel of neighborhoods." Proposals generally have been discussed in three categories: (1) dangerous buildings, (2) exterior maintenance codes, and (3) rental housing codes.

A second work session was held on August 14, 2007, on all three of the issues listed above. Staff was directed to develop options for consideration, as well as to complete a study on the extent of the problems. A third work session was held on February 26, 2008, focused on External Property Maintenance Codes (EPMC), and a fourth on March 11, 2008, focused on rental housing codes and dangerous buildings, though some discussion of EPMCs occurred on March 11<sup>th</sup> as well. Originally four new items were being discussed to add to the EPMC—dirt/dead yards, dilapidated fences, excessive chipping/peeling paint, and deteriorated roofs and gutters. The city staff study of the northwest quadrant of town revealed 138 potential violations that related to these four issues, with 106 of the 138 being dirt and dead lawns (76% of the total).

The issues are slated for first reading at the city council meeting scheduled for **May 20<sup>th</sup>**. At that meeting, **city council will consider adding dirt/dead yards and dilapidated fences to the Exterior Property Maintenance Code (see handout B) and several additions to the Rental Housing codes (see handout C)**, as well as some changes to the Buildings Code covering dangerous buildings. At the March 11<sup>th</sup> work session, city council instructed staff to move the issues of chipping/peeling paint and deteriorated roofs/gutters from the EPMC proposal to the "Building conditions" (or dangerous buildings) code, to be regulated only when the structural integrity of the building is being compromised by the elements.

Tonight's forum will focus primarily on the proposed additions to the External Property Maintenance Codes, as well as proposed new Rental Housing codes. The goals of tonight's forums are to:

- Increase understanding of various perspectives and thereby reduce misconceptions
- Identify points of common ground
- Clarify key differences (*We are not seeking consensus*)

Notes from tonight's discussion, with additional analysis by students and staff from the CPD, will be posted online on our website and provided to the city council and city staff.

- *Streaming video, background information, and minutes of these various city council meetings are available online at [www.fcgov.com](http://www.fcgov.com). Tonight's handouts were all derived from material from that website.*

*(page 2 of handout used at forum)*

### **Tonight's Discussion Questions**

1. One key tension we saw in the discussions is between the interests of personal choice and the interests of those who are affected by the choices of others. How much does personal choice concerning exterior maintenance affect things like property values, the overall quality of neighborhoods and their appeal to prospective buyers, especially young families, and homes shifting from owner-occupied to rentals? Do these impacts justify curtailing individual choice and institutionalizing government regulations?
2. During our analysis, it seemed that a main area of contention with this issue focused on the primary cause for deteriorating maintenance in Fort Collins neighborhoods. In general, there were two competing beliefs. One is that some people are unable to maintain their property because of life circumstances (e.g., financial difficulty, physical disability, etc.) while others suggest that some people are willfully neglectful of maintaining their property, whether that involves residents simply not being concerned with aesthetics—perhaps student renters in particular—or investors who do not live at the property. What are your views on this issue? How do your beliefs about the cause of external maintenance issues affect your preferred solution to the problem? Do different causes justify separate remedies?
3. Current exterior maintenance codes regulate parking on lawns, excessive trash, high grass and weeds, and unshoveled sidewalks (see handout A). The new codes would involve dirt lawns and dilapidated fences (handout B). Are the newly proposed codes of a similar nature to the old ones, or are they substantially different? In particular, it would seem that an argument could be made that the new codes involve remedies that would be more expensive for residents, and could involve ongoing costs in the case of lawn care, whereas the previous codes involve less costly, one-time remedies. Would you agree? And if so, how might these distinctions impact the policy?
4. If passed, what would be the best way to enforce maintenance codes? Should they be through complaints only, pro-active patrolling, or both? Should they be based on what is visible from the street, or what is visible from any public right of way and neighboring properties?
5. Much focus has been placed on community-based solutions for external maintenance issues (see handout F for the analysis completed by staff). Whether through public-private partnerships, the utilization of non-profit agencies, or encouraging a “neighbor helping neighbor” approach, what are some of the concerns and appreciations you see with focusing more on community remedies than governmental regulation in addressing violations of the proposed standards?
6. Additions to the rental housing codes are also being considered (see handout C for specifics). Do you support these additions even if they increase the cost of some housing?
7. (If time allows) What key aspects of this issue have not been discussed that you believe should have been discussed?

**POST FORUM QUESTIONNAIRE – Maintenance and rental standards group  
Spring 2008 CPD Community Issues Forum**

Are you a current CSU Student?  Yes  No

<b>The first eight questions concern external maintenance standards</b>	
I would sacrifice personal choice for community aesthetics/neighborhood quality	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Not Sure/Depends <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree
Residents should be allowed to do what they wish to their property, even if it lowers the property value of neighboring homes	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Not Sure/Depends <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree
Current housing standards should be more strongly enforced	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Not Sure/Depends <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree
Anything that lowers surrounding property values should be subject to regulation	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Not Sure/Depends <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree
External maintenance problems are primarily caused by lack of resources or ability of the homeowners	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Not Sure/Depends <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree
External maintenance problems are primarily caused by lack of concern or effort by residents	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Not Sure/Depends <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree
A voluntary community-based program to assist violators will be sufficient to limit external maintenance problems.	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Not Sure/Depends <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree
What is the best way to monitor exterior maintenance standards?	<input type="checkbox"/> Complaints only <input type="checkbox"/> Proactive patrols <input type="checkbox"/> Both
<b>The following four questions concern rental housing codes</b>	
Rental housing codes should be enforced only through tenant complaints	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Not Sure/Depends <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree
Strengthening rental housing codes will increase costs of rent	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Not Sure/Depends <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree
People should have the right to live in a somewhat dangerous environment if it's at the right price	<input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Agree <input type="checkbox"/> Not Sure/Depends <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree <input type="checkbox"/> Strongly Disagree
Which of the following proposed additions to the rental code do you <b>support</b> :	<input type="checkbox"/> expanded basement bedroom emergency escape/rescue; <input type="checkbox"/> smoke alarms in all bedrooms; <input type="checkbox"/> permanent heating capable of maintaining 68 degrees F (up from 60) <input type="checkbox"/> carbon monoxide alarms for dwellings with gas appliances; <input type="checkbox"/> minimum 2 electrical outlets (up from 2 or 1 and 1 light fixture); <input type="checkbox"/> insect screens available from May 1 - Nov 1; <input type="checkbox"/> bathroom ventilation to mitigate mold; <input type="checkbox"/> security locks on exterior windows & doors.

If you had the chance to communicate one thing about this issue directly to the city council, what would you tell them?

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What key areas of common ground do you feel was present in your group?

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What were some key areas of tension or conflict that existed (either between participants, or areas in which you are conflicted or unsure how to move forward)? What “tough choices” did your group uncover or struggle with?

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What actions would you most strongly support in the community to address the issue?

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How satisfied are you with the conversations you had today?

Very Satisfied  Satisfied  Somewhat satisfied  Neutral  Somewhat dissatisfied  Dissatisfied  Very Dissatisfied

Comments:

Do you feel you now have a clearer or deeper understanding of the issue than you did before the forum?

Certainly  Somewhat  No  Not sure

Comments:

Did you hear ideas or see new possibilities for dealing with the issue that you had not considered before the forum?

Certainly  Somewhat  No  Not sure

Comments:

What voices or perspectives were not present in your small group that needed to be?

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If we were to host an additional forum on the specific topic your small group addressed, what should we focus on? What questions should we address?

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Please add any additional comments or suggestions you have concerning today’s forum:

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The Fall 2008 Community Issues Forum is scheduled for November 17 , 2008. How likely are you to attend that forum?

Very Likely  Somewhat likely  Not sure  Not likely  Depends on topics  Depends on if I still live here

What topic suggestions do you have for the Fall 2008 Community Issues Forum?

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