

**Testimony of the International Code Council before the Connecticut Task Force to  
Examine Procedural Problems in Addressing Blight at the Municipal Level  
October 29, 2013**

Members of the Task Force,

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to offer comments regarding the International Property Maintenance Code. My name is Dorothy Harris, Vice President, State and Local Government Relations for the International Code Council. With me is Roland Hall, Senior Manager of Government Relations.

The International Code Council is a non-profit membership association dedicated to building safety and fire prevention. It exists to develop the model codes, which become adopted and implemented to guide the construction and maintenance of residential and commercial buildings across our nation.

The vast majority of U.S. cities, counties and states that adopt codes choose the International Codes developed by the International Code Council (ICC). It is the mission of the ICC to provide the highest quality codes, standards, products, and services for all concerned with the safety and performance of the built environment.

The citizens and businesses of Connecticut currently benefit from building safety and efficiency requirements by using model construction codes developed by the ICC. These codes are developed by the nation's leading building scientists, fire and life safety officials, home builders, contractors, commercial builders, architects, structural and mechanical engineers, building owners and product manufacturers. They include the International Building, Residential, Fire, Mechanical, Plumbing, Existing Building and Energy Conservation Codes.

We also develop the International Property Maintenance Code, which establishes the minimum and most essential standards for the health, safety and general welfare of the people who live and work in a community. The International Property Maintenance Code is in use or adopted in 36 states and the District of Columbia (map and list of state and local adoptions is attached). Taking a proactive rather than reactive approach to property maintenance stabilizes and maintains the viability of aging building and housing stock and reduces the number of building demolitions.

The International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC):

- Is a tool communities can use to correct and prevent conditions that can adversely affect quality of life, accelerate building deterioration and breed slums, blight and crime.

- Prevents the overcrowding of dwelling units by putting limitations on the number of persons who can occupy a dwelling.
- Maintains property values by protecting the character and stability of all buildings.

Advantages of using the International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC) are:

- The IPMC contains a complete set of code provisions in a single source, covering all aspects of interior and exterior property maintenance for residential and nonresidential buildings. This eliminates the need for a handful of separate laws and ordinances.
- Adopting the IPMC gives jurisdictions the authority to take immediate action to temporarily safeguard buildings that are in imminent danger to the public and to secure vacant buildings when an owner has failed to do so. The cost incurred to perform such work can be recovered from the owner of the premises.
- Enforcement of the IPMC can ensure that every occupied building meets minimum standards for light, ventilation and heat necessary for the physical, mental and social well-being of the occupants.
- The IPMC contains provisions for the proper maintenance of mechanical and electrical facilities and service, as well as plumbing facilities and fixtures. It also provides fire safety requirements for the installation of smoke detectors, the proper maintenance of existing fire protection systems and the maintenance of a safe, unobstructed path of travel for every building in case of fire.
- The IPMC addresses these common code enforcement problems:
  - Graffiti
  - Illegal motor vehicles
  - Infestations
  - Overcrowding
  - Swimming pools
  - Tenant vs. landlord responsibilities
  - Unsafe structures
  - Unsanitary conditions
  - Vacant structures
  - Weeds and trash

Common public concerns are addressed by the IPMC, including:

- The IPMC affirms that the public's right to privacy is protected by law. The code official's authority to make inspections is subject to constitutional restrictions.
- The code does not seek to require retroactively that new construction requirements be met for existing buildings or when making minor repairs. This is often a concern in communities with older buildings or historic districts.

- The code authority has the authority to vary from a strict application of the code, provided the spirit and intent of the code have been met.
- The goal of every code enforcement program is compliance. The person given the authority by the jurisdiction to enforce any code must observe due process when issuing any notice of violation and allow for a reasonable length of time for compliance of the notice. Extensions of time are routinely granted if sufficient work is in progress.

Jurisdictions enforcing the International codes can take advantage of numerous support services for those codes, including the IPMC. These include:

- Training and education programs, both on-site and webinars
- Certification programs for code enforcers
- Code commentaries
- Technical support, including code interpretation opinions
- Electronic versions of codes for computers and hand-held devices

Prior to joining ICC's staff, I was the Deputy Secretary of State for the State of New York. In that position, I managed the update from New York's unique homegrown code, to the adoption of the International Codes which included the IPMC. Since that adoption in 2002, New York has continued to update the codes and continues to enforce the IPMC (the state is in the process of updating to the 2012 I-Codes). Therefore, I have included the contact information of code officials representing both the state and local government level (Capital City and large Town). Each, can provide you with specific information on the adoption and enforcement aspects of administering the IPMC.

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I personally spoke to each abovementioned contact about their enforcement ability of the IPMC. All agreed it was their most effective tool in enforcing minimum safety requirements as well as addressing complaints or other blight related concerns, especially in older cities found in the northeast.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony regarding the State's potential adoption of the IPMC. Please do not hesitate to contact me or Roland if you would like any additional documentation. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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