

Grass and Weed Enforcement

January 9, 2023

City of Des Moines



History of Grass and Weed Enforcement

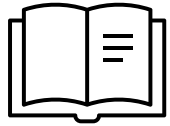
- This program historically has been owned and operated by Polk County.
- Polk County Board of Supervisors would pass a resolution every year allowing the County Public Works Department authority to take enforcement action.
- Current Iowa Code does not require the County Weed Commissioner to enforce action on anything outside of specifically identified noxious weeds.
- Polk County has historically provided this service to the City of Des Moines at no-cost.
- The current height standard set and enforced by the County is 12".

Changes to the Grass and Weed Enforcement Process

- Polk County is no longer going to conduct tall grass and weed enforcement as they have in the past.
- Polk County approached the City of Des Moines with its changes on November 28th, 2022.
- Below are the reasons Polk County provided for dropping the program:
 - Nearly all previous enforcement was conducted within City limits.
 - Polk County was not able to staff seasonal mowing crews. This required Polk County to pull full-time employees off their assigned duties to conduct nuisance mowing.
 - Polk County was not obligated to handle any portion of the process.

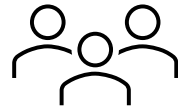
Breakdown of Upcoming Challenges

Below is a breakdown of the four most significant challenges the City faces in taking over this program



Policy

Creating/updating policy for the program



Staffing

Determining the best options to staff the program



Mowing

Efficiently operating the program



Priorities

Prioritizing the operational aspects of the program

Upcoming Challenges: Policy

Currently, there are no provisions in City Code that give us the authority to take enforcement action. Additional language will need to be created in Chapter 42 for us to take action.

- Below are items to consider for the policy:
 - Determine the allowable length of grass
 - The allowed time for compliance
 - A procedure for handling habitual violators
 - Different standards for different zoning classifications (residential, commercial, agricultural, etc.)

Upcoming Challenges: Staffing

- Neighborhood Inspection Division (NID) currently does not have the bandwidth to effectively take on the additional duties at the current staffing levels.
- Below are the bare minimum requirements needed to handle the administrative portion of the program if we plan to operate at the same level as other code enforcement cases:
 - One supervisor
 - One clerical staff
 - A minimum of two inspectors

Recommendation: direct staff to begin staffing a team to manage this program.

Upcoming Challenges: Mowing

Currently, there are two options for mowing:

- The City currently has five mowing contracts: Fire, Public Works, Real Estate, WRA, and Parks.
- Based on the contract size and the requirements that are needed for mowing we would not want to request that the current vendors take on any additional work and have the contracts for these services to diminish for each of the departments that currently have vendors in place to provide these services. We would want to make sure that the vendor(s) have the adequate resources to take on additional work. By bidding it out, we are opening up the vendor pool and we are not causing any hardships with our current contracts.

Recommendation: direct staff to begin putting together specifications to contract out the mowing portion of the program

Upcoming Challenges: Priorities

NID's primary goal, unless directed otherwise, is to focus on safe and secure rental housing (>65,000 units).

NID territory inspectors would continue to handle health and sanitation/junk and debris cases in their territories as well.

- Other programs currently housed in NID:
 - Blitz on Blight
 - Odor
 - Mosquitos
 - Vehicle Impounds
 - Vacant Monitors

Next Steps and Options

- Present at the Council work session on January 25 to discuss specifics of what the Council envisions this program looking like.
- Discussion topics for January 25:
 - Staffing
 - Policy
 - Height requirements
 - Code update
 - Mowing contract



QUESTIONS