

## IS "BEIGE FUNGUS" INVADING YOUR COMMUNITY?

# MASONRY ORDINANCES BRING QUALITY TO CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

More city planners are managing urban sprawl's effect on their communities' commercial buildings and housing quality through building ordinances that require more masonry in new construction.

Communities hit hardest — where quality materials have been sacrificed for lower-cost materials or more square footage — are now increasing the amount of brick, stone, or concrete masonry as part of their overall strategy to help prevent endless rows of "cookie-cutter" housing and commercial buildings that also work against a stable tax base.

"We experienced a housing explosion in the southeast part of town, and we're already starting to see deterioration," said David Whitely, a senior planner for the City of Arlington, Texas.

The city revised an ordinance last December increasing masonry requirements from 65 percent on the first floor for homes 1,600 square foot or less to 100 percent masonry (regardless of square footage) to the top floor of the entire house.

*The reality is that the builder owns the home for a few months, the new home buyer may own it for a few years, but the community will own it forever . . . . .*

"The planning and zoning commission looked at single-family housing design standards overall," said Whitely, whose department worked with the Southwest Brick Institute. Their charge was to increase quality and useful life of the home and decrease maintenance. The masonry was just one aspect," he said.

The City of Aurora, Colorado, learned their east Denver suburb had been named

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"Saudi Aurora" due to shoddy construction and run-down neighborhoods. "During a rapid expansion of our city in the 1970s, many areas were developed with minimal or no aesthetic construction standards," said City of Aurora Council Member and ordinance leader Ingrid Lindermann. Many of those developments are showing their age and frankly, look tacky. The council wanted more quality development, but staff had a continual battle with developers to get them to upgrade their designs," she said. "Developers countered staff's requests with 'its not specified in the code,' so I decided to codify a masonry requirement.

Aurora passed its first masonry ordinance on August 5, 2001, requiring a minimum of 50 percent masonry on the exterior of new single-family homes, and 60 percent masonry on all new multi-family buildings. "The city came to us in major distress," said Ann Sullivan, executive director, Rocky Mountain

Masonry Institute, who worked with Aurora from planning through execution. "They were at ground zero for growth, and they were battling with builders every day about what materials to use and how to make the homes higher quality," she said. "They were tired of beige houses and sprawl. They wanted better houses, but didn't know how to get them."

Lindermann said the ordinance benefits include better-looking developments, easier maintenance for the homeowner, and more durable housing.

"We spend a great deal of time master planning our communities to ensure they are developed according to very high design standards," said Aurora Mayor Paul Tayer. "We are creating unique neighborhoods with a sense of place in Aurora - the masonry ordinance is one of the design tools we have established to accomplish that goal."

The Chicago suburbs have been one of the country's most prolific ordinance areas. An Orland Park, Illinois ordinance requires 100 percent masonry for commercial construction, 90 percent masonry for residential construction, and 50 percent masonry for multi-family construction.

"The reality is that the builder owns the home for a few months, the new home buyer may own it for a few years, but the community will own it forever," said Charles Ostrander, executive director, Masonry Advisory Council. "What that house looks like in ten to twenty years will have a direct effect on the community's image and tax base."

Although some builders, developers, and architects say housing affordability — or lack thereof — is a central issue, masonry organizations counter with the long-term cost issues of alternative building materials.

The Heartland Brick Council, a Midwest coalition led by the Masonry Institute of Iowa says an "all-brick home costs only 7 percent more than the same house clad in vinyl, and that the initial costs are offset by homeowner savings in maintenance costs, lower insurance rates and an average 6 percent premium on resale over a non-brick home."

The Heartland Brick Council, led by Jeff Patterson, has created a "City Planner's Toolkit" to help policy makers evaluate and implement masonry ordinances for their communities. The CD-Rom and related online version at [www.buildingwithbrick.net](http://www.buildingwithbrick.net) includes case studies of effective ordinances developed and enacted in various cities around

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