



# City of San Antonio

## Agenda Memorandum

**File Number:**15-5126

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**Agenda Item Number:** 2.

**Agenda Date:** 10/7/2015

**In Control:** Criminal Justice, Public Safety and Services Committee

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**DEPARTMENT:** SAFD

**DEPARTMENT HEAD:** Charles N. Hood

**COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED:** City Wide

**SUBJECT:**

Update from the feasibility study for fire sprinkler requirements in existing high-rise buildings including recommendations from the San Antonio Fire Department to adopt an ordinance requiring all high-rise buildings to have fire sprinklers installed within 12 years.

**SUMMARY:**

The San Antonio Fire Department will an update to the City Council Criminal Justice, Public Safety and Services Committee with the results of the stakeholder group studying the feasibility of a retro-active sprinkler system requirement for all high-rise buildings in the city. The San Antonio Fire Department (SAFD) will also provide recommendations for the adoption of a fire code amendment requiring all high-rise buildings to install fire sprinklers.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

In February 2015, the (SAFD) requested approval of the Public Safety Committee to establish a stakeholder group to study the feasibility of a retroactive fire sprinkler requirement for high-rise buildings following the tragic events at the Wedgewood Apartments in Castle Hills. With the committee's approval, the group was established and met a total of five times with the kick-off meeting held on April 15, 2015. The stakeholder group consisted of multiple entities including, but not limited to; the San Antonio Housing Authority, the San Antonio Apartment Association, representatives from the Building Owner and Manager's Association, insurance industry representatives, sprinkler contractor representatives, various fire protection engineers, condominium owner's groups, and others.

The SAFD surveyed a list of high-rise buildings to determine how many did not have fire sprinkler systems installed. Approximately 36 buildings were ultimately identified as those that were classified as high-rise buildings, yet did not have sprinkler systems installed. Twelve (12) were partially sprinklered. High-rise buildings are defined by the fire code as having an occupied floor 75 or higher above the lowest level of fire department vehicle access. Another 14 buildings without fire sprinklers, but of marginal height (6 and 7 stories), *may* also meet the code definition a high-rise.

Through the stakeholder process, it was determined that a retroactive fire sprinkler requirement is possible for all high-rises, commercial and residential, by amending and adopting an appendix of our existing code. The costs associated with fire sprinkler retrofits were the greatest concern in the stakeholder process. The SAFD proposes to phase in the installation over the course of 12 years, as recommended by code, thus allowing building owners time to better manage the costs associated with the retrofit. Costs are estimated to be approximately \$2.50-\$4.00 per square foot of the building depending on existing features. The SAFD also proposes an exemption for individually owned units of condominiums. Common areas of condominiums would be required to provide sprinkler systems in the SAFD proposal but individually owned units of condominiums would not be required to install sprinkler systems. The SAFD encourages individual units to install sprinkler systems on a voluntary basis.

#### **ISSUE:**

Through the FY16 budget process, the SAFD received an additional fire inspector to inspect all high-rise buildings on an annual basis. The inspector will assist the Fire Prevention Division in the management of the high-rise program including the inspection of all high-rise buildings regardless of whether or not the building has a fire sprinkler. This inspector will ensure existing life safety systems are maintained along with all safety features of the building. An annual fee is required for all high-rise buildings under the program. This inspector will also assist the SAFD Fire Prevention Division with enforcement of House Bill 3089 that became law on September 1, 2015. The law will require retroactive fire sprinklers in four (4) residential high-rises in San Antonio that do not have fire sprinklers and have at least 50% elderly, disabled, or mobility impaired residents. The law allows 12 years for full compliance, similar to the SAFD proposal. Condominiums are exempt from the law.

#### **ALTERNATIVES:**

Without the addition of a high-rise fire sprinkler ordinance for all high-rises, only four of the non-sprinklered high-rises in San Antonio will be subject to the State Law. Existing high-rises may be required to install fire sprinklers as part of building modifications and construction through the City's adopted International Existing Building Code based on the level of alteration of the building. The fire sprinkler installations will only be in the portion of the buildings that are undergoing the modifications.

#### **FISCAL IMPACT:**

There is no fiscal impact for the proposed amendment.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

The SAFD recommends taking to City Council in November an ordinance to amend the existing fire code and require fire sprinklers in all high-rise buildings with full compliance within 12 years of adoption.