



CITY OF LONG BEACH

DEPARTMENT OF FIRE

925 Harbor Plaza, Suite 100 • Long Beach, CA 90802 • Telephone (562) 570-2500 • FAX (562) 570-2506

DAVID W. ELLIS
FIRE CHIEF

Date: April 3, 2007

To: Members of the Public Safety Committee

From: David W. Ellis, Fire Chief *DW*
Suzanne Frick, Director of Planning and Building *SF*

Subject: Report Update on Fire Suppression and Fire Alert Requirements

DISCUSSION

As a result of the devastating Paradise Gardens Apartment fire of December 8, 2006, the City Council requested the Fire Marshal and the Building Official to complete an evaluation of the current fire and building code requirements pertaining to fire sprinklers and fire alerting systems within the City of Long Beach.

A presentation with recommendations was presented to the Public Safety Committee on January 30, 2007 at which time the Public Safety Committee directed staff to investigate possible funding sources for the installation of fire sprinkler and fire alerting systems. The attached report documents the findings.

This letter was reviewed by Deputy City Attorney Gary Anderson and Budget and Performance Management Bureau Manager David Wodynski on March 27, 2007.

TIMING CONSIDERATIONS

Council action on this item is not time critical.

FISCAL IMPACT

The estimated cost to install fire sprinklers and alarm systems will vary by project for affected property owners. There is no immediate cost to the City. However, increased staffing for plan review and inspections could be required in future years, but would be offset by user fees.

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE COMMITTEE:

Concur with the proposal, refer report to the City Council and recommend that the City Council approve the recommendations.

APPROVED:


GERALD R. MILLER
CITY MANAGER

ATTACHMENT

DWE:HT

Q:\Administration\City Council letters\Fire Sprinkler Report\Fire Suppress-Alert PS April 07.doc

**REPORT ON FIRE SUPPRESSION AND FIRE ALERT
REQUIREMENTS/FUNDING INFORMATION**

April 3, 2007

A staff report with recommendations was presented to the Public Safety Committee on January 30, 2007 by the Fire and Planning and Building Departments. Upon completion of the presentation, the Public Safety Committee directed the City Manager's Office to investigate possible funding sources for the installation of fire sprinkler and fire alerting systems. The following report documents the findings.

Historical Background

The requirements for fire sprinklers and fire alerting systems have historically been the responsibility of individual owners and developers of a property or occupancy. The installation of fire protection systems is required due to the hazards associated with the type of building constructed and or the use of the occupancy.

The cost of fire protection systems will fluctuate due to a number of variables such as: construction type, square footage, availability of adequate water supply, and logistical issues that will vary on a case-by-case basis.

The responsibility for both regulatory and financial requirements is typically placed upon the owner or operator of the occupancy.

Jurisdictional Funding Comparison

A survey was conducted of other jurisdictions and the practice of providing financial support for the installation of fire protection systems. A total of 41 jurisdictions were surveyed regarding any incentives in the matter of loans, grants, or reduction in fees for the installation of fire protection systems.

The investigation discovered that over 90% of the jurisdictions surveyed do not offer any financial assistance or allow for the reduction or waiving of fees for service.

City Funding Potential

City Departments were requested to investigate the possibility of providing financial assistance or reducing fees for the installation cost of fire protection systems. The following findings were noted:

Financial Management

Current fees for service, including Fire Plan Checks and Inspections and Business License Fees are used to support the current level of ongoing services provided by the City. Any exemption or waiver of these fees may create a subsidy and a negative impact to the budget.

The City has salary commitments to the Police Officer's Association in place that will require a substantial portion of known growth in anticipated revenue. In addition, several future fiscal obligations that the City must plan to address include upcoming negotiations with Miscellaneous employees and firefighters, GASB 45 retiree health care liabilities and possible seismic improvements to City Hall. Therefore, any growth in fee-based revenue will be needed to continue to fund the growing cost of existing related services.

Therefore, with continued dedication of current revenue sources to current services, it is not possible to commit to subsidizing property owners' compliance with the proposed Fire Code amendments unless other decisions are made to maintain the structural balance of the General Fund.

Community Development

The Community Development Department has considered the issues related to the proposed fire suppression and alert requirements but does not anticipate the use of Community Development program funds for these purposes.

Water Department

The Water Department is currently investigating the possibility of the reduction of fees for installing fire protection systems. However, the reduction of fees may need to be passed on to other users in order to cover operating cost.

Insurance Industry

No identified financial assistance was discovered. Any financial assistance to owners or developers is usually reflected in the reduction of property insurance rates.

Fire Safety Organizations

A number of private fire protection organizations were contacted including the National Fire Protection Association, Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition and the National Association of Fire Sprinklers; none of the organizations provide financial assistance.

Community Outreach

In an effort to educate the public on the proposed recommendations, City staff has attempted to meet with a variety of civic groups to provide education and information on the proposed fire sprinkler and fire alerting recommendations.

A number of outreach meetings were held at various locations throughout the City for stakeholders to communicate the proposed fire safety recommendations.

The meetings provided valuable feedback from the affected parties including the Apartment Association and the Downtown Long Beach Association.

A number of concerns were raised regarding adopting the regulations such as:

- Cost of the systems for existing buildings
- Possible asbestos removal when present
- Possible lead paint removal when present
- Tenant relocation due to installation logistics

The majority of the concerns were related to the cost of fire protection systems and the requirements to retrofit fire sprinklers in *existing* buildings.

Cost Estimate Model

The cost associated with the installation of fire sprinklers in existing buildings will vary greatly. For example, an apartment building has an estimated cost of \$4 – \$5 per square foot. The cost estimates provided below have been chosen as a representation of buildings within the City:

10-unit residential occupancy = \$50,000

25-unit residential occupancy = \$100,000

50-unit residential occupancy = \$195,000

High-rise residential (10 story)= \$600,000

Indirect costs related to fire protection systems may include maintenance, testing and certification as well as inspections fees. The cost for such services will vary, dependent upon the type and size of the building.

Other City Assistance

In lieu of financial incentives, assistance can be provided by way of other services that can assist applicants with the installation of fire protection systems. Examples of such services are:

- Expedited Plan Review Service
Fire sprinkler and fire alarm system plans can be expedited for systems that are required for existing occupancies due to the adopted retrofit ordinance.
- Fire Department Liaison
Staff can be made available to assist with fire code issues and assist in the code review process thereby expediting the approval process.

Public Education

A number of community groups requested increased public education for residential occupancies. City staff agrees on the importance of public education and fire safety and the impact that fire safety education can provide.

It is proposed that additional public education in fire safety include:

- Partnership with the owners/organizations to assist in the distribution of fire and life safety educational materials.
- Increase the number of Public Service Announcements for fire safety in residential occupancies.

It is anticipated that in concert with fire protection systems, public education in fire safety will greatly assist in the reduction of fire related incidents.

Fire Alarm Recommendation Adjustment

During the presentation to the Public Safety Committee on January 30, 2007, it was requested that the upgrading of fire alerting systems be amended to include convalescent type facilities.

The original recommendation has been amended to include the upgrading of an existing fire alerting systems for convalescent occupancies when such systems are no longer operational.

Conclusion

It is recommended that the cost for the installation of fire sprinklers or fire alerting system be the responsibility of the owner or developer. The cost associated with the installation of fire protection systems has historically not been subsidized by cities or jurisdictions.

The installation of fire protection systems has proven to save lives, which should be the **primary** consideration when determining financial cost. Indirect cost saving in reduced insurance rates and the reduction of property loss in case of a fire are an added benefit of fire protection systems.