

FIRE COMMITTEE MINUTES

September 7, 1999

The Fire Committee of the City of Mesa met in the lower level meeting room of the Council Chambers, 57 East 1st Street, on September 7, 1999 at 9:30 a.m.

COMMITTEE PRESENT

Dennis Kavanaugh, Chairman
Jim Davidson
Keno Hawker

COMMITTEE ABSENT

None

STAFF PRESENT

C.K. Luster
Jan Amdahl
Dennis Compton
Linda Crocker
Bob De Leon
John Friedline
John Geier
Mike Hutchinson
Dorinda Larsen
Sandy Mason
Tom Mattingly
Chuck Monroe
Ellen Pence
Bryan Raines
Andrea Rasizer

STAFF PRESENT (Cont.)

Jenny Sheppard
Kim West
Paul Wilson
Others

OTHERS PRESENT

Dian Gilmore
Spencer Kamps
Barrett Marson
David Palmer
Others

Chairman Kavanaugh welcomed the members of the audience to the meeting and advised that following staff's presentation, an opportunity will be provided for speakers to present input.

1. Discuss and consider the adoption of the 1997 edition of the Uniform Fire Code (UFC) to include the Uniform Fire Code Standards with the 1998 and 1999 UFC Supplements and nine major amendments.

Fire Chief Dennis Compton addressed the Committee regarding this agenda item and introduced Assistant Fire Chief Bob DeLeon, Fire Marshall Chuck Monroe and Management Assistant Dorinda Larsen to the Committee. Chief Compton stated that it is staff's recommendation that the Committee vote in support of recommending to the Council that the 1997 edition of the Uniform Fire Code (UFC) to include the Uniform Fire Code Standards with the 1998 and 1999 UFC Supplements and amendments which will be discussed during the presentation be adopted. Chief Compton pointed out that staff is recommending seven (7) amendments at this time rather than nine (9) amendments as listed in the agenda title. Chief Compton noted that a major element of the Department's proposal is an amendment to require the installation of automatic sprinkler systems in all new buildings in the City of Mesa.

Chief DeLeon noted that the Department currently operates in accordance with the 1994 UFC and explained that the UFC is a model code that is utilized on a nationwide basis by a variety of agencies and which contains input from the private and public sectors. Chief DeLeon noted that the cities of Phoenix, Glendale, Scottsdale and Chandler have already adopted the 1997 UFC and added that adoption of the 1997 UFC is pending in the cities of Tempe and Peoria and for the State of Arizona.

Discussion ensued relative to proposed amendments which include improving the Department's fire permit procedures for processes and/or activities that require further control or tracking; clarifying the requirements for personnel who use and handle fireworks and pyrotechnic special effects; providing a method to ensure adequate radio coverage for City emergency services workers by installing an 800 megahertz radio system; revising Article 77 relative to the manufacture, storage and handling of explosives in collaboration with local industry; obtaining authority to remove personnel in unsafe excavations or confined spaces and to cite when education and awareness methods have failed and compliance is necessary; requiring adult care homes to provide an automatic sprinkler and fire alarm system when residents are no longer ambulatory and cannot exit their homes, and establishing new requirements for automatic fire sprinklers in all new commercial and residential buildings.

Assistant Fire Chief Paul Wilson also addressed the Committee and responded to questions relative to the anticipated results of the 800 megahertz radio system, retro-fitting buildings, and the importance of ensuring that provisions are in place for all new buildings to ensure that the best possible signal reception is available.

Fire Department staff presented a video for the Committee and audience entitled "Fire Power," which illustrated the life-saving benefits of installing automatic sprinkler systems in all new residential and commercial buildings.

Discussion ensued relative to the fact that over the past ten (10) years, 3,298 significant structure fires have occurred in Mesa, resulting in 35 fatalities, the fact that 18 of the 35 fatalities would have been prevented if an automatic sprinkler system had been installed, the fact that the majority of structure fires occur in one and two-family homes, current sprinkler requirements in effect in the City, the fact that older homes would not be required to install or add the systems to new construction on their existing homes, benefits that would be realized by the homeowners, including insurance discounts, the cost of installing automatic sprinkler systems and the fact that the technology is affordable, the effects of fires on commercial buildings, and staff's recommendation that the Committee support staff's recommendations.

Chief Compton recommended that if approved by the Committee and the Council, the changes become effective on May 1, 2000 to allow sufficient preparation time for both the home building industry and the City. Chief Compton added that only projects that receive building permits after May 1, 2000 would be subject to the proposed revisions.

Chairman Kavanaugh encouraged members of the audience to provide input at this time.

Dian Gilmore, representing the Southeast Regional Association of Realtors, stated that following a review of staff's proposal, the Association of Realtors requests that the Committee vote in opposition to staff's recommendation to require automatic sprinkler systems in all new residential and commercial buildings in Mesa. Ms. Gilmore stated the opinion that homebuyers should retain the choice of whether to install a sprinkler systems in their homes and added that the sprinkler requirement will financially impact churches within the community.

Committeemember Davidson responded to Ms. Gilmore's concerns regarding negative impacts on churches and noted that existing churches will not be required to be retrofitted.

Chief DeLeon emphasized that existing commercial buildings will not be subject to new requirements and explained that the only time commercial buildings would have to be retrofitted for a sprinkler system is when an addition of 90,000 square feet or larger is added. Chief DeLeon noted that this requirement is currently in existence.

Chief Compton added that in accordance with current requirements, all commercial buildings over 5,000 square feet are required to install an automatic sprinkler system.

Committeemember Hawker stated that he would prefer a proposal that requires builders to offer new homebuyers the option to purchase an automatic sprinkler system for their homes and allow the buyer to make the final decision.

In response to a question from Committeemember Davidson, Ms. Gilmore stated that her organization supports the recommendation that the installation of sprinkler systems be optional rather than mandatory. Ms. Gilmore added that the City should consider offering incentives such as utility credits to residents in an effort to encourage citizens to install the systems.

Spencer Kamps, representing the Homebuilders' Association of Central Arizona (HACA), informed the Committee that HACA currently complies with extensive fire codes and expressed concerns regarding costs, affordability and actual ordinance implementation.

Mr. Kamps stated the opinion that a majority of fires occur in older homes rather than in new construction and added that improvements in the building industry have resulted in safer homes. Mr. Kamps reported that a survey conducted by his organization determined that 75% of new homeowners indicated that they would prefer that the sprinkler system be optional rather than mandatory. Mr. Kamps commented that system/installation costs will be borne by the homeowners and said that this added feature may disqualify some potential homeowners.

Committeemember Davidson expressed the opinion that the additional cost for a sprinkler system would have minimum impact of mortgage amounts and encouraged the builders to absorb a portion of the costs to enhance safety and protect citizens.

Mr. Kamps informed the Committee that HACA would support the recommendation to offer the installation of an automatic sprinkler system in new homes as an option but spoke in opposition to requiring new homeowners to install the systems.

David Palmer, representing the Farnsworth Companies, commented that his company is supportive of the fact that the sprinkler systems have been proven to save lives but expressed concerns regarding actual versus estimated costs associated with the installation of the systems. Mr. Palmer stated the opinion that the proposed costs are inaccurate and that actual costs would be significantly higher.

Chief Compton commented that implementation of the proposed recommendations will require the efforts of both the private and public sector and emphasized the fact that automatic fire sprinkler systems save lives and prevent property loss. Chief Compton informed the Committee that the proposed technology has been implemented by a number of cities across the nation and added that this affordable life-saving system represents the establishment of a higher level of fire protection.

It was moved by Committeemember Davidson, seconded by Chairman Kavanaugh, that the Committee recommend to the Council that staff's recommendation to adopt the 1997 edition of the Uniform Fire Code (UFC) to include the Uniform Fire Code Standards with the 1998 and 1999 Supplements and seven (7) amendments, including clarifications relative to inspections and testing, effective May 1, 2000, be approved.

Committeemember Hawker stated that he will not support the motion based on the fact that he is opposed to mandating that all new homes/commercial buildings be required to install automatic sprinkler systems. Committeemember Hawker commended staff on their efforts to develop the recommendations and said that if the addition of sprinkler systems in new homes was offered by the builders as an option, rather than mandated as a requirement, he would support staff's recommendations. Committeemember Hawker also expressed concerns regarding the "open-endedness" of the 800 megahertz radio system proposal.

Chairman Kavanaugh said that he supports staff's recommendations. Committeemember Kavanaugh added that in the future Mesa will be faced with tremendous residential growth and expressed the opinion that the

proposed recommendations will allow the City to positively impact the quality of life for our citizens. Chairman Kavanaugh commented that although a significant amount of the City's infrastructure is already in place, opportunities will exist in the future to review the City's residential development standards and propose recommendations for improvements. Chairman Kavanaugh noted that the technology is proven, reliable and affordable and expressed appreciation to staff for their efforts in this matter.

Upon tabulation of votes, it showed:

AYES - Davidson-Kavanaugh
NAYS - Hawker

Chairman Kavanaugh declared the motion carried by majority vote of the Committee.

Chairman Kavanaugh thanked the speakers and staff for their input.

2. Adjournment.

Without objection, the Fire Committee Meeting adjourned at 11:20 a.m.

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the minutes of the Fire Committee Meeting of the City of Mesa, Arizona, held on the 7th day of September, 1999. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that a quorum was present.

Dated this ____ day of _____ 1999

BARBARA JONES, CITY CLERK