

FIRE COMMITTEE MINUTES

May 17, 2004

The Fire Committee of the City of Mesa met in the lower level meeting room of the Council Chambers, 57 East 1st Street, on May 17, 2004 at 3:04 p.m.

COMMITTEE PRESENT

Claudia Walters, Chairman
Dennis Kavanaugh

COMMITTEE ABSENT

Mike Whalen

OFFICERS PRESENT

Mike Hutchinson

Chairman Walters excused Committeemember Whalen from the entire meeting.

1. Discuss and consider proceeding with adoption of the International Fire Code (IFC).

Assistant Fire Chief Bob DeLeon acknowledged the service of Vice Mayor Kavanaugh and expressed appreciation for his assistance with Fire Committee issues. He added that the Committee has provided outstanding leadership and direction to the Fire Department.

Interim Assistant Fire Chief Dan Stubbs advised that staff recommends the adoption of the 2003 International Fire Code, and that staff also seeks approval to begin the technical review and amendment process. He provided the Committee with the following information regarding the process:

- Building Safety Division and Fire Department staff members began a review of the Building Code in January 2003, but several conflicts were identified in the area of sprinkler requirements. Adoption of the Building Code would not have included any baseline sprinkler requirements resulting in the Building Code becoming obsolete immediately following adoption of the Fire Code. In February 2003, the City Manager concurred with staff that the Fire Code adoption process should be completed prior to reviewing the Building Code.
- Staff committees, chaired by the Fire Department with staff support from the Fire Department and the Building Safety Division, conducted a side-by-side comparison between the 2003 International Fire Code (IFC) and the National Fire Protection Association 1 (NFPA1) Fire Code. Rather than operating separately and discussing the adopted codes at a later date, the Fire Department and the Building Safety Division cooperated in a joint effort to develop the codes. As a result, staff members in each area are fully aware of the reason

that an amendment or a procedure is in place, and the individuals responsible for plans review, building inspection and maintenance are interacting with each other.

- Staff is recommending the IFC based on a review of the usability of the two Codes, the existence of a smaller amendment package, and the ability to blend the IFC with the proposed Building Code. Some language differences did exist, but the technical aspects of the codes were virtually identical. Staff determined that the IFC was more usable due to the fact that the NFPA Code would require a larger number of amendments. A majority of Valley communities have elected to utilize the IFC, and the City of Phoenix is still in the process of reviewing the issue.
- The current amendment package, including the sprinkler amendments, would be included in the IFC. No new, major amendments are proposed except for the possibility of an air rescue design applicable for high-rise rescue situations, which the City of Chandler has already adopted and the City of Phoenix is in the process of adopting. The design provides for replacement air packs on every other floor of new high-rise buildings to enable Firefighters to replace the air packs without leaving the building.

In response to a question from Chairman Walters, Chief Stubbs stated that the technical definition of a high-rise building is one that has more than seven stories, but other jurisdictions may consider any building greater than four stories as a high-rise building.

Committeemember Kavanaugh stated that the Council has received emails suggesting that sprinkler systems are not required for smaller, commercial buildings, and he asked for assurance that staff's recommendation does not change the existing regulations that require sprinkler systems for new, commercial buildings.

Chief Stubbs confirmed that staff's recommendation does not change the current regulations regarding sprinkler systems for new commercial buildings, and that the existing sprinkler system requirements would be included as part of the 2003 Fire Code. He noted that the City of Mesa was on the cutting edge in the year 2000 when the sprinkler requirements were adopted, but Mesa is now in the middle range of other Valley cities relative to sprinkler requirements.

In response to a question from Chairman Walters regarding the higher standards of other communities, Chief Stubbs stated that the Valley communities that exceed Mesa's sprinkler standards have established requirements for new residential properties in excess of 5,000 square feet. He explained that many communities establish sprinkler requirements in new residential areas that do not have fire stations. Chief Stubbs advised that provisions presently exist in Mesa's Fire and Building Codes that could require a sprinkler system based on the residential structure's size and the structure's distance from the road. He continued the presentation as follows:

- The proposed Code clarifies that sprinkler systems are not required for shade and accessory structures.
- A matrix that outlines the requirements based on building use has been in place as a policy for approximately two years, and this matrix is proposed to be included in the Code.

- A current policy that permits a one-time addition to an existing building without triggering the requirement for a sprinkler system would be placed in the amendment package.
- Staff is making an effort to ensure that changes in the Fire Code are being blended into the Building and/or Electric Codes as appropriate so that applicants and plans review personnel are well informed regarding the requirements.

Chief Stubbs outlined the timeline during which staff hopes to finalize the Codes:

- The technical review of the IFC should be completed within the next 30 days.
- The proposed amendments to the IFC could be presented to the Committee in late June.
- Staff would present the IFC and all of the Building Safety Codes to the Council in early July to enable adoption of all of the codes at the same time.

It was moved by Committeemember Kavanaugh, seconded by Chairman Walters, that staff's recommendation to adopt the International Fire Code be forwarded to the full Council for consideration with a recommendation for approval.

Committeemember Kavanaugh stated that he has enjoyed serving on the Fire Committee and working with staff for the past eight years. He also expressed the hope that the City will adopt a mandatory residential sprinkler requirement at a future date.

Chairman Walters expressed appreciation for Committeemember Kavanaugh's years of service as a member of the Committee.

In response to a question from Chairman Walters, Chief Stubbs advised that staff plans to eliminate by amendment any redundant Code items that do not impact life safety or the City's current business practices. He cited Building Code references to "snow loading" as an example of an item that would be removed from the Code.

Chairman Walters suggested that staff's presentation to the full Council include information to justify the fact that sprinkler requirements begin at zero square feet for commercial buildings. She also commended City staff for their spirit of cooperation in working together.

Upon tabulation of votes, it showed:

AYES - Walters-Kavanaugh
NAYS - None
ABSENT - Whalen

Chairman Walters declared the motion carried unanimously by those present.

2. Adjournment.

Without objection, the Fire Committee Meeting adjourned at 3:28 p.m.

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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 17th day of May 2004. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that a quorum was present.

BARBARA JONES, CITY CLERK

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