

Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required: Majority

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors
From: Steve Monowitz, Community Development Director
Subject: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Adoption of the 2019 California Building Standards Code and Amending the San Mateo County Ordinance Code, Division VII (Building Regulations)

RECOMMENDATION:

Introduction of an ordinance adopting the latest editions of the 2019 California Building Standards Code, repealing and replacing the San Mateo County Ordinance Code, Division VII, Building Regulations, and repealing Chapter 3.84 of the County Ordinance Code, by making the required findings in Attachment A, and waiving the reading the ordinance in its entirety.

BACKGROUND:

The State of California updates California Building Standards (Title 24) every three years. These standards consist of twelve specific codes, including the residential, building, fire, plumbing, electrical, mechanical, and energy codes. Local jurisdictions must enforce the most current version of these codes, and may establish more restrictive building standards, to address local conditions. The San Mateo County Building Regulations establish the procedures and requirements for administering these codes, the new versions of which go into effect on January 1, 2020.

DISCUSSION:

In addition to amending the current Building Regulations to apply the new building code standards adopted by the State, the County intends to supplement the standards to increase energy efficiency, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and provide increased fire safety. The Planning and Building Department is working with the Office of Sustainability, as well as fire service agencies within the unincorporated areas, to finalize the specifics of these supplements, commonly referred to as “reach codes”. We anticipate that these new reach codes will be presented to the Board in early 2020.

In the meantime, staff recommends that the Board re-adopt the building standards supplements [UN1]it approved as part of the last building code update, so that these existing supplemental standards, such as the one that requires the installation of fire sprinklers for residential additions based on a fire safety score, remain in place when the new state building code takes effect.

The primary issues associated with the previous update to the Building Regulations involved fire sprinkler requirements and plumbing materials. As in prior cycles, staff proposed to supplement base code requirements by specifying when fire sprinklers must be installed within existing buildings. However, rather than providing, as we have in the past, that fire sprinklers must be installed if the value of a proposed remodel or addition equals or exceeds one half of the value of the existing residence (sometimes referred to as the “50% rule”), staff proposes a requirement based on a fire safety ranking system. This eliminated often extended communications between staff and applicants in attempting to apply the 50% rule, as well as the greater burden that the 50% rule placed on smaller as compared to larger homes. Additionally, it created a clear and objective standard that is based on fire safety, as opposed to application of an arbitrary percentage. The findings regarding the local conditions that justified this former amendment, and will be retained in the current update, are found within the staff report.

With regard to plumbing materials, the previous update to the County’s Building Regulations eliminated the prior ban on the use of plastic pipes. The Uniform Plumbing Code contained in California’s Building Standards, has allowed, and continues to allow, plastic pipes within single family residential development since 1972. Since this change was consistent with State code requirements, no special findings were required for the previously approved amendment, which will be carried over into the current update.

Other aspects of the previous amendments to the County’s Building Regulations that will be carried over into the current update include changes that simplify and streamline the methods by which the Department administers California Building Standards. For example, wherever possible, the Regulations provide a direct reference to the code language adopted by the State, which results in greater consistency with other neighboring jurisdictions. All other changes recommended by this set of amendments simply replace the references to, and citations of the 2016 Building Code with references and citations to the 2020 Building Code.

FISCAL IMPACT:

None

ATTACHMENT:

A. Recommended Findings and Action