



CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

TO: Community Development Committee **DATE:** January 5, 2026
DEPARTMENT: Administration/Community Development
PREPARED BY: Marie Jones Consulting
PRESENTER: Marie Jones, Consultant

AGENDA TITLE: Receive Report, Discuss and Provide Direction Regarding an Ordinance Modifying “CHAPTER 15.06 Automatic Fire Sprinkler and Alarm Systems” of the Municipal Code to Change the Threshold Requirements for the Installation of Automatic Fire Sprinkler and Alarm Systems.

BACKGROUND

One of the City Council’s key goals in the 2024-2028 Strategic Plan is to: ***Invigorate Economic Opportunity and Community Vibrancy***. To support these goals, the City established a dedicated Economic Development Department in July 2024. Under the direction of the City Manager, the department’s efforts are guided by the BEAR framework—Business Expansion, Attraction, and Retention—which serves as a foundational pillar of the City’s economic development and downtown revitalization strategy. To further explore strategies that support this goal, the City Manager engaged Marie Jones Consulting to evaluate potential policy options, which were brought forward to the City Council in August of 2025. The City Council directed staff to come back to the Council with a revised fire sprinkler ordinance that would implement the following policy goal: “Aligning Fire Safety Regulations with Downtown Revitalization Goals.” Staff brought this item forward to the City Council for a hearing in November 2025, and the City Council voted 4 to 1 to support revising the ordinance as attached. However, since approval of the ordinance the Mayor directed staff to bring this item back to the Community Development Committee, prior to the second reading, for a more detailed discussion because the new ordinance would require all remodels above 5,000 SF to install sprinklers regardless of the building permit valuation, and this has resulted in a concern that more buildings undergoing a remodel would be required to be sprinklered under the new ordinance.

The prior fire sprinkler ordinance required all businesses to install fire sprinklers if they undertook more than \$120,000 worth of improvements in any given 3-year period, regardless of building size.

The fire sprinkler ordinance has been revised at least four times since it was adopted. Each revision process has been contentious because the ordinance protects building

AGENDA ITEM NO. XX

and firefighter safety while increasing the cost of remodels and changes of use that require sprinkler installation.

The attached ordinance has been crafted to consider both sides of this important issue. It supports minimum fire safety by requiring state-of-the-art hardwired fire alarm systems while reducing the costs associated with significant remodels by eliminating the requirement to install fire sprinkler systems based on remodel valuation. However, the Community Development Committee might want to revisit the elimination of the building remodel valuation criteria.

As part of the City's efforts to foster a more business-friendly environment and address long-term commercial vacancies downtown, the City Manager, Consultant, and Fire Marshal met to discuss fire sprinkler requirements and developed preliminary recommendations, which were revised at the City Council meeting to require all remodels of more than 5,000 SF, regardless of building permit valuation, to obtain sprinklers. The rationale for each change is noted in *blue italics*:

1. Retain the sprinkler requirement for all new commercial and industrial buildings. *Sprinkler installation for new construction projects is relatively inexpensive and is required for many projects by the California Building Code.*
2. Continue to require automatic Fire Sprinkler Systems in remodels under the following conditions:
 - a. In any building with a substantial remodel, which includes:
 - i. All remodels of a building of more than 5,000 SF, regardless of building permit valuation. *This would allow most medium and small buildings in the downtown to be remodeled without triggering fire sprinklers, while larger downtown buildings, and hotels and retail stores outside of the downtown would be required to install sprinklers.* The Community Development Committee could re-establish a building permit valuation criterion if desired.
 - ii. For buildings of less than 5,000 SF: 1) the removal or demolition of more than 50% of the exterior or interior weight-bearing walls; 2) or the removal of the roof structure or ceiling, thereby permitting installation of overhead piping; or 3) the removal of interior tenant improvements, reducing the building to a “shell” condition. *Sprinklers are relatively easy to add when this level of deconstruction and remodel is completed.*
 - b. An automatic fire sprinkler system shall be installed in any addition when the existing building is already provided with an automatic sprinkler system. *It is relatively inexpensive to add sprinklers in a new addition when the building already has fire sprinklers.*
3. A substantial new addition to any building shall require the installation of a fire sprinkler system. A substantial new addition is defined as an increase of floor area by 2,500 square feet or more. *This is a large enough addition to make installation of a sprinkler system cost-effective, and it improves firefighter safety for larger additions.*

4. Require a state-of-the-art fire monitoring alarm system for all remodels, regardless of cost;
5. Require sprinklers for existing buildings where the occupancy changes from a low risk to a more fire-risky occupancy, regardless of the cost of renovations; and
6. Eliminate any City fees associated with a building permit for the installation of fire sprinkler systems in existing buildings (e.g. permit review fees, business license fee, General Plan Maintenance Fee).

City Council could provide direction if staff should proceed with the development/negotiation of a revised fire sprinkler ordinance and if so, what triggers/requirements you would like to see included in the ordinance.

FISCAL IMPACT/FUNDING SOURCE

The estimated \$2,500 in costs associated with these regulatory changes would be borne by the ARPA funding to support Economic Development. These funds would be used to publish hearing notices and for staff and consultant time.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

This ordinance is exempt from CEQA.

STRATEGIC PLAN/COUNCIL PRIORITIES/GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY

This effort would align with the economic development priorities of the City's Strategic Plan.

ALTERNATIVES:

City Council can choose to undertake the following alternative actions:

1. Retain existing fire sprinkler ordinance.
2. Provide Direction to further revise the ordinance.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. An Ordinance to Amend "Chapter 15.06 Automatic Fire Sprinkler and Alarm Systems" of the Fort Bragg Municipal Code to Amend the Requirements for the Installation of Automatic Fire Sprinkler and Automatic Fire Alarm Systems In New Buildings and Remodels.

NOTIFICATION:

The following "Notify Me" lists:

- Economic Development
- Fort Bragg Downtown Businesses