



Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor



Building
Codes
Division

Department of Consumer
and Business Services

Chair Marsh, Vice Chairs Andersen and Breese Iverson, and members of the committee,

Thank you for taking time to consider this important issue. I ask you to support the -2 amendments to HB 3505, which represent a narrow fix designed to promote housing construction by removing an unintentional disincentive to install residential sprinklers in some communities.

The construction of any home requires, among other things, a calculation to determine the anticipated impact on the water system, to determine system development charges. The calculation is based on a variety of factors and varies by community. In some communities, the calculation is based on the size of the water meter. Often, when a residential fire sprinkler system is installed in a home, a larger water meter is calculated as necessary. The sprinkler system has no daily impact on the water system overall, but the calculation requires it be included as if it would need to go off while there is other instantaneous demand on the system from other appliances or sources.

In some municipalities, because the size of the water meter for a home directly determines the cost of the water system development charges, the cost of residential fire sprinklers significantly increases the cost to build homes that include NFPA 13D fire sprinkler systems. This higher cost is unnecessary in situations where the sprinkler system is the only reason for the larger water meter.

This is a narrow but important issue to address for two reasons:

- Residential fire sprinklers are sometimes required for some of the exact housing we are trying to build in Oregon: dense housing, like our new stacked attached duplex provisions; homes with sleeping lofts; and homes with fire access and water supply issues, to name a few. As we have less buildable land, we need to make the most of what we do have, which means building on more difficult lots, and also building more densely.
- The second reason is that sprinklers are the gold standard of fire life safety. Having more of them in our communities is a positive thing. Residential sprinklers can pull off of existing plumbing and are a highly effective and relatively inexpensive tool. They also use far less water and are less impactful on both the environment and water systems than when firefighters fight a fire using water from a fire hydrant or other source.

I do want to be clear that there is no intention here to expand fire sprinkler requirements. Instead, this amendment would remove an unintentional impact of system development charge methodologies in some communities.

I also want to clarify that nothing here prohibits local governments from charging for the water meter itself. Additionally, this is only where the system development charge is only for the residential fire sprinkler. Nothing here would prohibit local government from charging if a customer would need the larger water meter for other purposes, such as addition of fixtures or landscape sprinklers or other items. Finally, this is only for the difference in system development charge for the larger water meter, it does not prohibit charging system development charges at all for the home.

While this is a narrow issue, addressing these kinds of impacts, when taken as a whole with all of the other work to promote housing production, is a step in the right direction for housing affordability. Thank you to the committee and all of the stakeholders who engaged on this topic to help remove the disincentive to residential fire sprinklers and help make housing more affordable and safe in Oregon.

Sincerely,

Alana Cox
Administrator
Building Codes Division
Department of Consumer and Business Services

