



King County

Dow Constantine

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September 9, 2021

The Honorable Claudia Balducci
Chair, King County Council
Room 1200
C O U R T H O U S E

Dear Councilmember Balducci:

This letter transmits a proposed Ordinance that, if enacted, would amend King County's building and fire code regulations for development occurring in the unincorporated area of the county. Approval of this proposed Ordinance will align King County's building and fire code regulations with current building and fire codes adopted by Washington State that went into effect in February 2021. The proposed legislation will also remove outdated code sections, adopt amendments to the Washington state energy codes to implement 2020 King County Strategic Climate Action Plan (SCAP) priority actions, and support greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reductions.

Updates to King County Code Titles 16 and 17 addressing current building and fire codes are overdue. Although some code sections have been amended as part of other legislation, Titles 16 and 17 have not been comprehensively updated since 2009. Highlights of the proposed Ordinance include amendments that:

- Extend the effective period of permits from one year to two years for building permits and 18 months for plumbing permits;
- Streamline requirements for manufactured and mobile homes;
- Remove code sections that are now unnecessary due to current Washington state law, including regulations addressing existing structures, disaster damage, unsafe structures, and swimming pools;
- Support the Puget Sound Emergency Radio Network (PSERN), which will begin replacing the current Emergency Radio Communications System in 2022; and
- Update regulations to reflect current, standard practices.

The proposed Ordinance also includes amendments to the Washington State energy code to support GHG emission reductions. Onsite natural gas combustion is responsible for over 30 percent of GHG emissions from buildings countywide. To address continued natural gas GHG emissions in unincorporated King County, space and water heating would need to transition to

electrical power; in turn, increased efficiency is recommended to offset the added electrical load from this transition. As such, the proposed Ordinance:

- Prohibits fossil fuel combustion for space heating in all commercial buildings and in multifamily buildings four stories tall and taller;
- Prohibits fossil fuel combustion for water heating in multifamily buildings four stories tall and taller, as well as hotel/motel and group residential buildings; and
- Increases efficiency requirements, including for lighting and window insulation levels.

As building codes apply to new construction, building additions, and some mechanical and building feature replacements, the effect of the proposed Ordinance would primarily be to reduce natural gas expansion in all commercial buildings, and multifamily buildings over three stories tall, thus helping to curb future GHG emissions. Additionally, the proposed ordinance anticipates the increasing need for clean energy generation to offset electricity use by requiring installation of solar panels for commercial and multifamily buildings and implementing "solar-readiness" for single family and multifamily buildings four stories tall and taller, which requires an unobstructed, unshaded area for a potential future solar panel installation

In developing the proposed Ordinance, the Permitting Division of the Department of Local Services sought input from the public and consulted with multiple stakeholders, including: the Regional Code Collaboration, the Master Builders Association of King and Snohomish Counties, Seattle King County Realtors, Seattle Building Trades, Puget Sound Energy, nonprofit stakeholders, and the Housing Development Consortium of Seattle-King County.

This proposed legislation furthers the King County Strategic Plan Healthy Environment objective of reducing GHG emissions by 50 percent by 2030. It also implements a priority action in the 2020 King County Strategic Climate Action Plan to propose strong green building codes in unincorporated King County. The proposed Ordinance also aligns with the environmental and climate justice goals of the King County Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan by supporting development that improves energy efficiency and increases access to clean renewable energy.

Thank you for your consideration of this important proposed Ordinance. This important legislation helps to address long-term sources of GHG emissions in our built environment, advancing our goals of addressing climate change emissions, and helping us build a more resilient and sustainable King County.


The Honorable Balducci

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If your staff have any questions, please contact Jim Chan, Director of the Permitting Division of the Department of Local Services, at 206-477-0385.

Sincerely,

 for

Dow Constantine
King County Executive

Enclosure

cc: King County Councilmembers
ATTN: Janine Weihe, Interim Chief of Staff
Melani Pedroza, Clerk of the Council
Shannon Braddock, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Executive
Dwight Dively, Director, Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget
Karan Gill, Director, Council Relations, Office of the Executive
John Taylor, Director, Department of Local Services
Jim Chan, Division Director, Permitting Division, Department of Local Services