

Item 23-1085: Appleton Municipal Code, Chapter 6 Revisions for the Fire Department Safety and Licensing Committee

Wed, Sep 13, 2023, 5:30PM

Alderman Chris Croatt (District 14) 21:02

Moving on to fire department 23-1085, Appleton Municipal Code Chapter Six revisions for the fire department. A memo, revisions, and fee schedule. Chief Hansen. District seven is now on.

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 21:19

Thank you, Chair. It's that time to update the Municipal Code. One of the things that we're asking to do is to adopt the 2022 edition of the International Building Code—or excuse me International Fire Code. We're currently at the 2018 version. I believe it was about—

Alderman Chris Croatt (District 14) 21:40

That was a fire.

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 21:40

Guess I'm done.

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 21:41

I believe it was about three years ago when we actually requested to move to the '18 edition, the 2018 edition. So this is just the next step a couple years later, update the code. One of the, I guess, the bigger changes to the 2021 International Fire Code is the regulation and the codification of energy storage systems. So with the green energy that is being produced, either solar or wind, there are storage systems for those. We don't have a lot of those in the city of Appleton right now. But we are trying to be proactive so that they are installed correctly in the future.

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 22:27

Specific changes to our city ordinance would include basically an updating and a streamlining of the codes to make sure that we are only referencing one code, the International Fire Code, instead of having individual ordinances within our city ordinance that may conflict or may be older version of the code. So we did some of that cleanup. And that's all redlined within one of the documents that's attached.

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 22:58

There's some vocabulary changes within the ordinance to align with the International Fire Code. One specific is how they reference a residential structure from a single family to a one- and two-family dwelling and then multifamily. We want to make sure that our language isn't conflicting.

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 23:20

We have a miscellaneous fee clarification in the new ordinance, and that is something that's kind of important for us. You know, we just kind of heard Clerk Lynch talk about recovering fees and recovering costs. So for facilities that are built within the City of Appleton that have a fire protection systems, we actually have to send somebody out there to test that system to make sure that it works before you give occupancy. I'll use the Zuelke Building, for example. We had over 100 hours of staff time going through that building, making sure smoke detectors work, making sure the pump test that basically that building is ready for occupancy.

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 24:03

So when you look at miscellaneous fees, we didn't really have anything that clarified that. But now if we're going to have a larger structure like that, we could recover some of those costs. And again, our fees are not to the point where we're where we are recovering all of our costs. So it is definitely—we don't want to stifle economic growth, but we also want to, you know, cover some of our some of our costs.

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 24:29

Another item within the ordinance change is current ordinance requires the builders to supply us with paper copies of plans. And I'm not sure who uses paper anymore, but we've piloted—

Aldersperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 24:43

Yeah.

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 24:44

We've piloted a electronic version of plan review for the last 18 months, and in fact, the contractors actually prefer it over the paper because the paper is very expensive when you're printing off a two by three set of drawings for somebody. I mean, it's, it's fairly spendy.

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 25:06

The last item that we're asking for is a fee structure increase. Our—to the best of our knowledge, we can find that we haven't updated our fee structure in over a decade. So we are looking to increase those fees. We did use a pretty significant methodology to come up with our fee structure. Battalion Chief Derek Hanson reached out to multiple fire departments.

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 25:33

And it's a little difficult to compare apples to apples because the City of Appleton does something that really no other city does and that we—that is we do internal plan review. So when you look at our fees, they might be slightly higher than what some of our other comparable fire departments are doing, but they also require the contractor to send their plans to the state; they have to pay state fees. And then their turnaround time at the state is 45 to 60 days; ours is two weeks. So it's a great service that we're providing to our contractors within the city of Appleton.

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 26:16

So that's kind of a high-level overview. I know the memo is, you know, very long, and has a lot of details to it. So I'm happy to answer any questions that you may have on it.

Aldersperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 26:26

Okay. Thank you. I have a couple of questions. Let's get this on the table. Let's get a motion to get it on the table.

Aldersperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 26:31

Motion to approve.

Aldersperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 26:33

Second.

Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 26:33

Motion and a second to approve. Okay. So on the fee schedule (that's the one that kind of stood out to me, because some of these are substantial increases, especially on a percentage basis) you mentioned that we haven't looked at fees in 10 years. Is there a particular reason why that's not reviewed more frequently? I mean, I ask you for the for the same reason of you go 10 years, and you get this giant increase versus if it was every other year or every three years, you would have a lesser impact.

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 27:02

Yes. I believe it was just an oversight by us to review the fees and appropriately make increases. Our goal now is to look at them every year, every other year, and have small incremental increases than these big leaps and bounds. And, honestly, when we did some research and found out how far out of whack we were with our neighboring departments, we figured it was probably to our advantage to get comparable with them.

Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 27:36

Okay, other questions? Alderson van Zeeland.

Alderson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 27:38

Thank you Chair. The only issue I have with the fee schedule is for the open burning outdoor fireplace. Is that for residential permits? Just to make sure.

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 27:50

That would be. That's the—we're increasing the permit fee from \$30 to \$40, and that's any homeowner that wants to burn, I guess, in their approved firepit. So that would be a small increase. Historically on that, because I questioned that myself, historically, that used to be \$50.

Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 28:10

Yeah, it was.

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 28:11

And then I believe this committee or Council dropped it down to \$30. And we're looking for just a small increase of \$10 a year.

Alderson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 28:21

I think my concern with that is with the price of food and going out and things, we have people who are cooking at home, and we want them to be safe. And my concern is if we raise it, do we have people who just decide we're not going to go get a permit? You know, does that start to affect safety at some point? So that would be my only sticking point with the fee schedule.

Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 28:44

Related to that, what is the process for non-compliance on that?

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 28:49

Oh, well, there's a few options depending on what it is. You know, if it's somebody that was burning without a permit, well we just tell them to put out the fire and get a permit. If they're burning slightly outside of the parameters, then we say get inside the parameters. But if it's gross negligence, like they're burning a sofa, then that comes with other.

Aldersonperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 29:14

Yeah.

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 29:14

And I use that example because that does happen.

Aldersonperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 29:17

Yeah. Okay.

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 29:18

Well, you know, it really—it'll depend on the severity.

Aldersonperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 29:23

Yeah, I asked because there's some, maybe some younger, new homeowners that don't realize they need a permit. And they get one of those fancy solo things or something and they set it down and having a big friends over and a fire and don't realize that they need a permit. And if I remember right from the permit, it has to be a covered device?

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 29:44

Correct. There needs to be—

Aldersonperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 29:45

To keep stuff from flowing flying around.

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 29:47

Yes.

Aldersonperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 29:49

Sorry, I didn't mean to get in the weeds on that. But just wanted to understand that.

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 29:52

And if that was the case, and it's a new homeowner, we would just work with that homeowner and explain the city ordinance and then if they get a permit, you know, we won't fine them or anything like that. We're not—we're not that mean.

Aldersonperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 30:08

Okay, good. Education is key there too. Aldersonperson Wolff.

Aldersonperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 30:12

My question is about false alarm for fire first offense. Like the first and fourth went from \$25 to \$200, correct?

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 30:24

Correct.

Aldersonperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 30:26

Does that—I mean, you have discretion in whether or not we're charging people, right? Like, if a kid thinks his house is on fire, because he sees smoke, but it's not really on fire, we're not going to charge the family \$200

because the kid was like, "Oh, my God, I have to call 911." Right? We're not going to be like punishing a child for thinking that they have to...?

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 30:51

We do not. The false alarm fees are geared not towards the child pulling the alarm. It's more towards a business that has a known problem with the detection system, whether it's a bad smoke detector, etc. And then they choose not to fix it. So it's motivation for them to have a system that is fully functional.

Alderman Nate Wolff (District 12) 31:15

Thank you.

Alderman Chris Croatt (District 14) 31:18

Is the—just because I'm curious. Is the false alarm, multiple false alarm occurrences with businesses, a common thing?

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 31:30

You know, it's hit or miss. We had one business within the city that we had 26 alarms in six months to, and that was because their system was in disrepair, and they needed to—they needed a new system, but they weren't doing that. You know, back in 2021ish when parts and pieces were difficult to come by because of supply chain issue, we waived some of those fees, because we are, you know, we are empathetic to that. But we want to make sure that we have systems that are operating effectively.

Alderman Chris Croatt (District 14) 32:12

Okay, so there is some discretion in charging the fees. Okay.

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 32:15

Yes.

Alderman Chris Croatt (District 14) 32:16

Alderman Siebers.

Alderman William Siebers (District 1) 32:17

I think you answered the question. I'm not sure. Is there a one time—let's say, a business has a false alarm one time? Do they get charged that? Okay.

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 32:29

No.

Alderman Chris Croatt (District 14) 32:33

Alderman Schultz.

Alderman Alex Schultz (District 9) 32:35

I mean, I could probably sit here and ask a dozen questions based on some of these numbers. But I guess just one question out of curiosity. Is the increase for the tents or supported devices or canopies—can you explain why that increase is significant? And what does it what does it entail to go out and inspect those tents, canopies and air devices?

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 32:55

Yeah, the tents and canopies anytime they're put up for large events, we have to send a staff member out there, arrange a time and appointment, and then they have to do a walkthrough to make sure it's safe and that, you know, that is an approved tent cover like canopy cover, and that they have fire extinguishers, etc. in places they're supposed to have.

Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 33:19

Is there a minimum size? I assume there must be a size—a threshold where you have to go and something under a certain size you don't.

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 33:26

There is but I couldn't tell you the exact dimension of that. I can get that for you if you'd like.

Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 33:31

Just curious.

Alderson Chris Croatt (District 14) 33:33

Okay, any other questions on the fee schedule or the changes to the ordinance? Alderson van Zeeland.

Alderson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 33:40

Thank you, Chair. I recall a couple of years ago discussing how some of—there were local businesses that were understaffed that were calling the fire department for help with a residence—I want to say like old folks homes, places like that. Is that reflected in here? Is that something that would be separate?

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 34:01

That would be a separate fee. That would be considered—what we've toyed around with is a lift assist fee, where if we go to somebody, and they just need help getting up, they're not injured. It's almost like a medical emergency. So we talked about doing that at one point city wide. So if you were a homeowner and you just fell in your house and you needed help getting up or—the fire department would come and do that. And then we also toyed around just doing it for like community based residential facility or a nursing home that does not have the appropriate staff to help a patient up. And at that discussion with both my staff and the mayor, we decided not to go down that road right now. It's not a major problem.

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 34:51

I will say that we reached out to Green Bay fire department. They had a nursing home that was calling them 60-70 times a year for that. They implemented a fee, and it went down to two.

Alderson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 35:04

Okay.

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 35:05

So and I see that as a victory, because the whole point behind the fee is it's not that we don't want to go out and help residents or business and industries. It's trying to keep that that emergency vehicle available for an emergency and not for something that they probably shouldn't be going on.

Aldersonperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 35:23

Right, right. I mean, it's a business's job to be staffed appropriately, and I guess I have an issue with charging homeowners 10 more dollars to cook outside when we have businesses that are calling for assistance for things that they should have staff to handle. Thank you.

Aldersonperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 35:42

Any other questions or comments? Aldersonperson Wolff.

Aldersonperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 35:46

Is there a fee for saving kittens out of a tree? **[Note: This was a joke.]**

Fire Chief Jeremy Hansen 35:50

No fee.

Aldersonperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 35:50

Good. Good.

Aldersonperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 35:52

Any other questions or concerns?

Aldersonperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 35:55

I think I'd like to make an amendment, Chair. If I could amend this to remove the...

Aldersonperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 36:04

Increase on the burning?

Aldersonperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 36:05

The increase in the open burning outdoor fireplace for the—only for the annual fee. So to remove that rate increase of \$10.

Aldersonperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 36:15

Okay. So the amendment is to leave it at 30.

Aldersonperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 36:18

Correct.

Aldersonperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 36:18

Is there a second?

Aldersonperson Alex Schultz (District 9) 36:20

Second.

Aldersonperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 36:21

Okay, motion and a second to change the annual fee—or keep it the same at \$30 instead of increasing it to \$40. And any comments on that? I don't think it's a major impact to the fire budget. I'm okay with it. I think it's a good message to send to the community. So, any other comments? Okay, all those—on the on the amendment, all those in favor signify by saying aye. Aye. All opposed? Who were the nays? Okay, three, two. That amendment passes.

Aldersperson Chris Croatt (District 14) 37:00

So now we have the item as amended. Any other—any final comments? Questions? Okay, all those in favor signify by saying aye. All Opposed? Okay. Five zero on the amended—all of it. The fee schedule, the revision revisions, and the code. Okay.