

Meeting Minutes

In attendance:

Steven McDaniel

John Hofelich

Ann Marie Mitchell

Julius Ballanco

David Kaufmann

Timothy DeRuyscher

Tom White

Staff:

Ray Andrews,

Miriam McGiver

Catherine Karp

Motion to accept meeting minutes from Julius, seconded by Ann Marie, unanimous to accept.

The DOS Department of Code Enforcement and Administration website will add information from this Task Group (i.e. meeting minutes and documents submitted by group members) to the Residential Sprinkler Committee web pages.

Ray mentioned information received from the builders regarding housing starts in New York from the U.S. Census. Ray noted our permit numbers from the Codes Division's Annual Report are a little higher.

Ann Marie had sent in technical questions about sprinkler installation. Tim and Julius volunteered to answer her questions. They discussed issues such as how to install sprinkler pipes in heavy timber frame that is placed 4 feet on center, insulated panels, cathedral ceilings and roofs steeper than 8 in 12. She was given some answers, but the solutions all had costs, and she said these added cost make a new home significantly more expensive than an existing home.

John asked questions about how to pressure test piping and how does one know if sprinkler heads are faulty? There were also questions on holding tanks for sprinkler water, pipe materials, maintenance and cost per square foot for residential sprinklers.

Ray asked if potential home buyers for the most part don't want to buy a sprinkler system when they buy a new home? Are there New York builders who have offered them in areas that do not require them and places where there are more restrictive local laws requiring sprinklers?

There was discussion of whether an architect or engineer must design a residential sprinkler system. The homebuilders said electrical, mechanical, plumbing, and sprinkler contractors do the design based on code requirements, not architects or engineers.

There was discussion about additions to life safety in residences in the last few decades and concern that homeowners would mistakenly damage the sprinkler system. Julius said there have also been changes in construction that make firefighting more hazardous. He also noted there were two deaths due to antifreeze being flammable, and NFPA changed the requirements in response to those incidents. There was also discussion of maintenance requirements of residential sprinkler systems.

Ray stated that the issues brought up were interesting but would not on their own assist the Code Council in making a determination regarding adopting residential sprinklers in New York State. He wanted to redirect the discussion to other concerns besides technical ones, such issues as a weak economy and acceptance being needed by the public. AnnMarie asked how many houses are being built with sprinkler systems in communities that do not require them. John said he would work on obtaining that information. Julius described a development with half of the houses sprinklered which cost \$5,000 more than the other houses, and the sprinklered houses sold faster than the non-sprinklered houses. Steve said people weren't asked about the smoke detectors and CO alarms. Ray noted those items were required by legislation and did not significantly affect the cost of a house. Tom White was of the opinion that sprinklers would protect people from their own stupidity based on his experience. He gave several examples like calling a relative instead of the fire department when a house was on fire.

Ray asked each group member to provide him with the top three issues to give to the Code Council regarding sprinklers. He explained the background for the committee and task group. The Code Council adopted the 2007 ICC code for New York's 2010 Uniform Code and at that time decided not to adopt the appendix requiring sprinklers in the IRC but requested a committee look into the issue. This Task Group is a continuation of that committee.

Ray's questions for the group:

1. Is there an issue with the 2012 IRC code text regarding town houses and Section 2904? He noted that NY currently requires sprinklers for three story one and two family dwellings so having the text would be helpful for three story residences at a minimum.
2. Do task force members recommend a sprinkler mandate for all one and two family dwellings and /or townhouses, and if so, why?

3. Should there be an effective date for sprinklers to be required sometime after the adoption of the next version of the Uniform Code? If so, what would the specific ideas to implement it be?
4. Is now the time to require residential sprinklers in New York and why?

Ann Marie was of the opinion that the housing industry has not recovered from the recession and thus this is not the time to require sprinklers.

Ray brought up the idea of adopting sprinklers, but allowing time before the regulation goes into effect. The general consensus of the group was that if sprinklers were adopted that a ramp up is a good idea, if not a necessity. Steve was concerned about liability during the open period. John said there were issues other than cost and that people should have of option of requesting sprinklers, they should not be mandated. Ray noted that codes mandate requirements by their very nature, they don't offer options. Julius was of the opinion that a one year ramp up was appropriate, Ann Marie three or four years. Tim mentioned that New York is two versions behind the ICC codes and the 2009 IRC allowed two years with additional provisions.

Ray said the Code Council would want to know the groups thoughts about adopting, delaying or rejecting sprinklers. Julius recommended immediately requiring two story townhouses to be sprinklered and give one and two family dwellings a longer grace period.

Ray asked the group to consider townhouse sprinkler requirements for the next meeting. Tim added that residents in townhouses are dependent on their immediate neighbors for safety, so sprinklering for this housing type should require sprinklers as soon as possible.

Ray said again that intangibles of residential sprinklers may be more important than technical facts for the Council. It takes the public time to embrace new concepts and be willing to pay for life safety improvements like seatbelts and airbags in cars. Has the public embraced residential sprinklers at this time?

Ray said he would forward any information that group members send him. The next meeting is January 17 from 10 am – noon and a fourth meeting was set up for Feb. 4 from 10 am – noon. Ray requested the group think of questions the Code Council may ask and provide answers. Issues to include such items as timing of requirements, cost and the economic state of the state.

John asked Ray to describe the State Administrative Procedures Act which is required for any regulation. He did and said the schedule had the next Uniform Code of New York State adopted by May of 2014.

