



# COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

CITY COUNCIL of SALT LAKE CITY

**TO:** City Council Members

**FROM:** Nick Tarbet, Policy Analyst

**DATE:** October 6, 2020

**RE: Text Amendment: Chapter 18.44 Fire  
Prevention and International Fire Code -  
PLNPCM2019-00938**

## **PROJECT TIMELINE:**

Briefing: August 18, 2020  
Set Date: August 18, 2020  
Public Hearing 1: Sept 15, 2020  
Public Hearing 2: Oct 6, 2020  
Potential Action: Oct 6, 2020

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## **PUBLIC HEARING SUMMARY**

One person spoke during the September 15 public hearing.

They expressed opposition to the proposed changes, saying there should be no flexibility in relaxing firefighting standards in high-rise buildings.

The Council closed the public hearing and noted the second public hearing would be on October 6.

***The following information was provided for the September 15 public hearing. It is provided again for background purposes.***

## **WORK SESSION SUMMARY**

During the August 18 work session, the Council did not raise any significant concerns about the proposed rezone.

One question was raised about the language in item #3 being potentially confusing:

3. The structure has a compartmentalized design that includes two-hour fire walls extending from the ground to the roof, automatic smoke detectors, and areas of safe refuge

The possibility of referencing other sections of the code to provide additional clarity was proposed.

Council staff followed up with Planning staff on this request. Planning staff suggested it would be preferable to create a handout with references instead, since the city does not have control over the fire code and any future changes to it.

Providing this clarity in a handout instead of referencing it in city code would ensure future text amendments to City code not have to be made when there are changes to the fire code.

The public hearings are set for September 15 and October 6.

***The following information was provided for the August 18 work session. It is provided again for background purposes.***

### **ISSUE AT-A-GLANCE**

The Council will be briefed about a proposal that would make modifications to Chapter 18.44 to provide alternatives to the proximity to building requirements found in Appendix D section 503.1 of the International Fire Code.

The existing regulations have limited developers' ability to construct buildings over 30 feet in height in various locations due to the constrictive access requirements.

This proposal is intended to provide some flexibility for the Salt Lake City Fire Department in administering the International Fire Code when determining the distance range that an aerial fire access road can be from a building. It applies to new construction and major additions.

This proposed change was initiated because of impact the existing regulation has on the built environment and barriers to implementing adopted master plan policies the regulations are creating. Due to limitations placed on the City by State Code provisions that adopt the International Fire Code, the proposal is narrow in scope and intended to address the specific problem.

The Planning Commission forwarded a positive recommendation to the Council.

### **PUBLIC PROCESS**

- Downtown Alliance Development Committee presentation - September 26, 2019
- Early notification process for this proposal was initiated - November 21, 2019
- Open House - December 1, 2019
- Historic Landmark Commission - February 6, 2020
- Planning Commission public hearing on February 26, 2020

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

#### **Proposed Changes Summary**

The proposed changes would create an optional path to use the public rights of way for aerial access. This option would allow a reduction in how close the aerial fire road can be to the building from fifteen feet to ten feet and allow the maximum distance the road can be from the building to increase from thirty feet up to fifty feet if the building includes increased fire safety construction features.

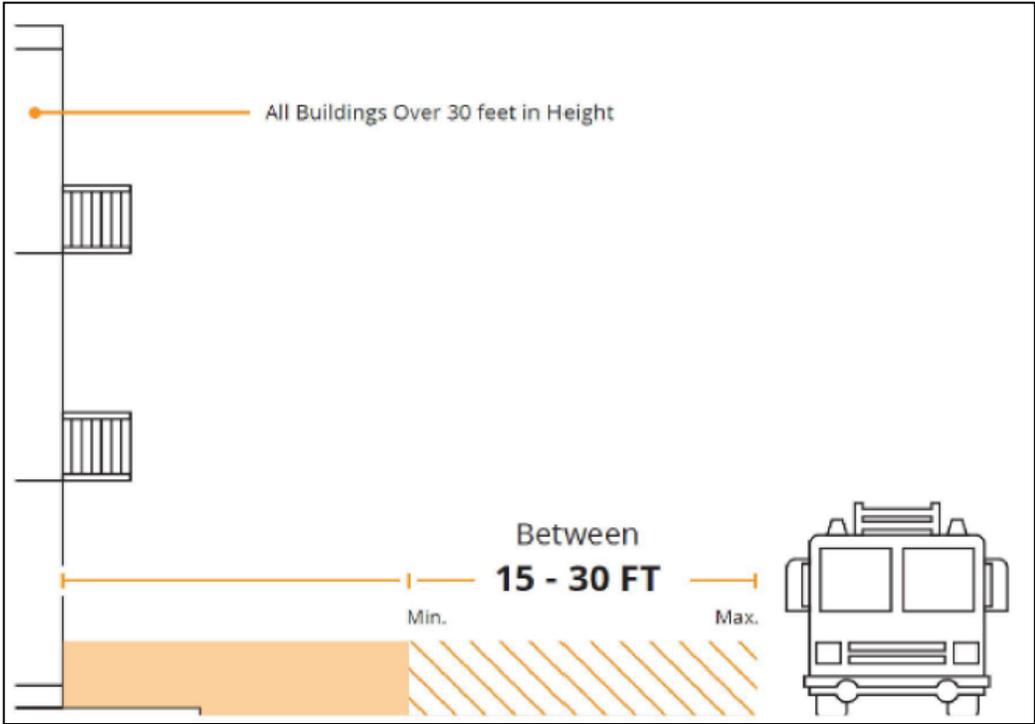
In order to be eligible for the relaxed access road requirements under the proposed amendments, a building must include at least one of the following features:

1. The structure is a Type I (tall buildings made with concrete or steel) or Type II (typically new or remodeled commercial buildings where the walls and ceiling are noncombustible materials) as defined in the International Building Code;
2. Stairwells and common corridors have a two-hour fire rating;
3. The structure has a compartmentalized design that includes two-hour fire walls extending from the ground to the roof, automatic smoke detectors, and areas of safe refuge;
4. The structure provides enhanced smoke detection in addition to fire sprinkler systems. This includes detection systems in all corridors and common spaces connected to the fire alarm panel;
5. The aerial fire apparatus road(s) are positioned parallel to the entire long axis side of the building; or
6. Buildings with a total height ranging from 30 to 75 feet in height have an enclosed stairway(s) equipped with a pressurized air system.

The Planning Commission Staff reports notes that only one of the options would have to be included in order to decrease or increase the proximity to building requirements. Buildings within the existing proximity range (between 15 and 30 feet), would not have to include any of the additional requirements. The proposed modification would only apply to buildings located either closer than fifteen feet or further than thirty feet from the aerial access road.

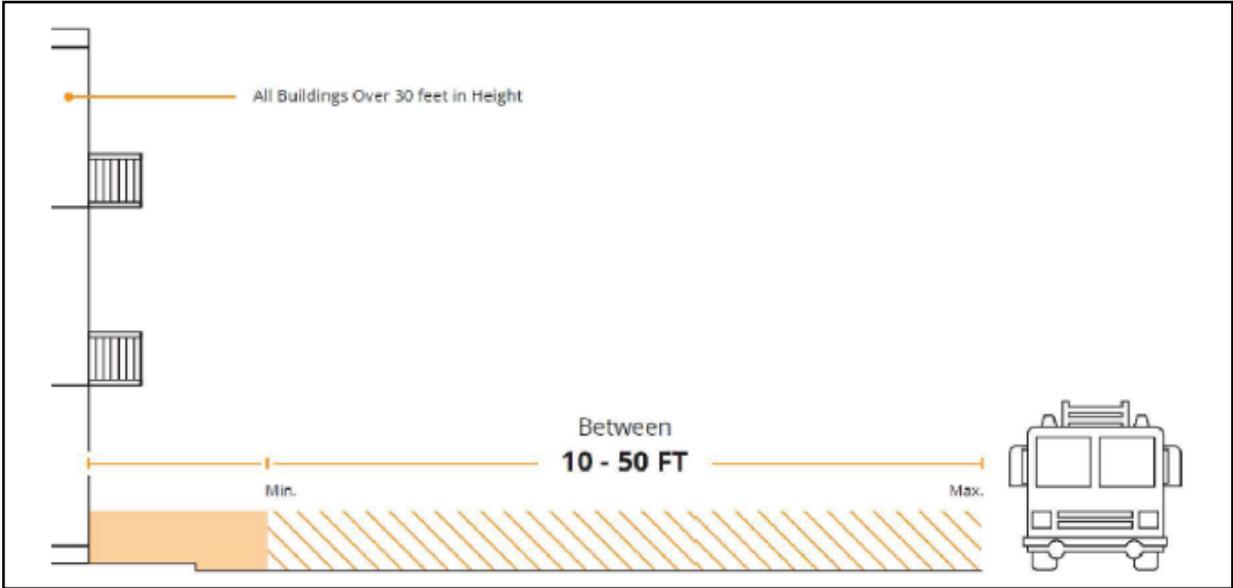
## **Existing Proximity to Building Requirements**

*Page 2 Planning Commission Staff Report*



**Proposed Proximity to Building Requirements**

*Page 3 Planning Commission Staff Report*



**KEY ISSUES**

Pages 3-6 of the Planning Commission staff report includes an in-depth analysis of the Key Issues. A short summary is provided below. Please see the Planning Commission staff report for full analysis.

### **1. Impact on City Goals**

- The existing proximity requirement is a barrier to implementing adopted master plan policies.
- The current proximity to building requirement in the fire code described above prevents thousands of properties from being used for mixed use development over thirty feet in height without costly and unnecessary changes to the existing rights of way or construction of expensive fire access roads.
- New housing, office buildings, restaurants, and stores are usually funded, designed, and built by the private sector. When existing streets cannot be used to satisfy the aerial access requirements, the necessary access is created in one of two ways:
  - i. it is located on private property through the use of wide driveways,
  - ii. the curb line in the city street is moved closer to the property line, effectively widening the paved area of the street.
- When the aerial access road is built on private property, other fire code requirements are triggered that make it difficult for a property owner to have an economic return on their development, thus decreasing the likelihood of the property being developed

### **2. Public Safety**

- According to the Fire Department, this proposal does not negatively impact public safety in emergency response situations because the additional required building features result in a safer building and facilitate an effective response from the Fire Department in the event of an emergency.
- Buildings constructed under the proposed changes would have a higher level of fire security, and the fire fighters and equipment will not be placed within the collapse zone of buildings that are engulfed in flames.

### **3. Safety of Building Occupants**

- The occupants of buildings that may be constructed under the proposed code would not be impacted because the building would contain other safety features based on the option selected by the developer.

### **4. Impact to Staff Workloads**

- Under the current proximity to building requirements, the Fire Department is routinely asked to consider alternatives to building an aerial access road. This request, called an "alternative means and methods" in the fire code, triggers reviews by multiple city departments and divisions, particularly to Community and Neighborhoods.
- This proposal would reduce this workload because it establishes an adopted and acceptable alternative to relocating a curb line. This reduces the amount of time City staff would spend reviewing the proposal, which in turn reduces the amount of time it takes to have an alternative approved.