



TO: Elizabeth Pauli, City Manager
FROM: Teresa Green, Fire Department Manager, Finance and Planning/Fire
James P. Duggan, Fire Chief
COPY: City Council and City Clerk
SUBJECT: Ordinance – Proposed Amendments to Chapters 3.06 and 3.09 TMC – November 13, 2018
DATE: October 24, 2018

SUMMARY:

An ordinance amending Chapters 3.06 and 3.09 of the Municipal Code, related to alarm systems and fire code permits and fees, by adding a new Section 3.06.005 entitled “Fire False Alarms” and adding or increasing fees for commercial fire protection systems compliance and building inspections.

STRATEGIC POLICY PRIORITY:

- Strengthen and support a safe city with healthy residents.
- Assure outstanding stewardship of the natural and built environment.
- Encourage and promote an efficient and effective government, which is fiscally sustainable and guided by engaged residents.

The proposed amendments include a one-time increase to business inspection fees because the allowed annual inflation-based fee increase has been insufficient to keep up with actual expenses. The proposed amendments also will help ensure timely compliance with certain provisions of the fire code and will discourage false alarms.

BACKGROUND:

As part of its proposed 2019-2020 proposed budget, the Tacoma Fire Department (TFD) is proposing amendments to Title 3 of the Tacoma Municipal Code (TMC) intended to increase community and firefighter safety and enable TFD to operate more effectively by addressing issues that take valuable emergency resources out of availability for non-emergent purposes.

TFD is proposing the creation of a new section in the TMC to allow for the assessment of fines for residential or commercial fire false alarms. The call volume of the department is increasing every year, and the cost of providing vital emergency response is increasing. Unintentional or preventable activations and system malfunctions create costly emergency response for non-emergent conditions. In the absence of financial penalties for false fire alarms there has been no incentive to reduce their occurrence.

TFD is proposing language that would authorize TFD to contract with private agents to assist in enforcing provisions in the fire code for timely testing and repair of commercial fire protection systems. By implementing a third-party compliance system, TFD expects to increase system compliance which will greatly improve the safety of the citizens and businesses within the City of Tacoma. Tacoma is currently at 50% compliance on all commercial fire protection systems, meaning only about one-half of the systems have complied with the requirement to be tested and submit their confidence test reports. Other municipalities, such as Seattle, Bellevue, Redmond, and Los Angeles have improved their compliance rating with confidence testing by contracting with a third-party compliance vendor.



Finally, TFD is proposing a one-time 15-20% fee increase for building inspections in 2019, and then the fee schedule will revert back to CPI-based annual increases thereafter. The lowest occupancy risk groups (Groups 1 and 4) would increase 15% and the higher risk occupancy groups (Groups 2 and 3) would increase 20%. The current allowable CPI-based increase has not been sufficient to keep up with the increasing cost of the department to run the inspection program. Inspection fees have increased 12.8% since charging for the program began in 2015, however department costs have increased 36.6%. The proposed fee increase aims to help close that gap. TFD uses the adopted fire code to determine which businesses and commercial buildings will be inspected and annual inspections are one of the lowest-cost ways to protect a property and its employees and visitors.

ISSUE:

Shall Chapters 3.06 and 3.09 of the TMC be amended as proposed by the Fire Department to add and increase certain fees and fines intended to increase community and firefighter safety and make TFD services operate more effectively.

ALTERNATIVES:

TFD could choose not to propose the identified actions, in which case the fire false alarm fine would not be implemented, no change would be made to the compliance enforcement of commercial fire protection systems and building inspection fees would increase only to match the regional inflation rate. However, false alarms needlessly increase safety risks to the public and TFD personnel and they are a drain on community resources; in the absence of financial penalties for false alarms there has been no incentive to reduce their occurrence. Only about one half of the City's existing commercial fire alarm systems currently receive timely testing and maintenance. The annual COLA adjustment for Fire fees has not kept pace with the actual increase in the cost of TFD services.

RECOMMENDATION:

TFD recommends amending Chapters 3.06 and 3.09 of the Tacoma Municipal Code to add and increase certain fees and fines for work performed by the Department, effective January 1, 2019.



FISCAL IMPACT:

EXPENDITURES:

FUND NUMBER & FUND NAME *	COST OBJECT (CC/WBS/ORDER)	COST ELEMENT	TOTAL AMOUNT
0010 – General Fund / Fire	252000	Wages & Benefits	\$284,400
0010 – General Fund / Fire	252050	Wages & Benefits	\$162,000
TOTAL			\$446,400

REVENUES:

FUNDING SOURCE	COST OBJECT (CC/WBS/ORDER)	COST ELEMENT	TOTAL AMOUNT
0010 – General Fund / Fire	252000	4321010	\$333,000
0010 – General Fund / Fire	252050	4342250	\$270,940
0010 – General Fund / Fire	253000	4360000	\$488,750
TOTAL			\$1,092,690

POTENTIAL POSITION IMPACT:

POSITION TITLE	PERMANENT/ PROJECT TEMPORARY POSITION	FTE IMPACT	POSITION END DATE
Customer Service Representative, Technical	Permanent	1.0	N/A
Fire Lieutenant, 40 hr	Permanent	1.0	N/A
TOTAL		2.0	

FISCAL IMPACT TO CURRENT BIENNIAL BUDGET: N/A; all proposed fees/fines and position changes are part of the 2019-2020 Proposed Budget.

ARE THE EXPENDITURES AND REVENUES PLANNED AND BUDGETED? All expenditures and revenues are part of the 2019-2020 Proposed Budget.