

Memorandum

City of Lawrence

Planning & Development Services

TO: David L. Corliss, City Manager

FROM: Scott McCullough, Director

Date: January 24, 2013

RE: Upholstered Furniture

You have requested a memo on the options related the sprinkler requirement associated with upholstered furniture.

The City code requiring sprinklers in buildings when the display or sale of upholstered furniture is present was adopted on January 1st 2011 with the 2009 ICC family of codes. Prior to this, mercantile uses were required to be sprinklered based on triggers that were not related to upholstered furniture (max of 12,000 sq. ft. for example). Most furniture stores containing such furniture were not required to be sprinklered. The 2009 code revised the standard, requiring that spaces of any size containing upholstered furniture be sprinklered. Upholstered furniture is viewed by fire science experts as being particularly harmful to firemen, the buying public, and property given the amount of "fuel" contained in their material and the temperatures at which they burn.

The 2012 ICC code, currently under consideration by the City Commission, proposed to relax the standard by allowing 5,000 sq. ft. of mercantile use to contain upholstered furniture without sprinklering. As staff processed the 2012 code, the Fire Code Board of Appeals was presented with a staff request to reduce this area to 2,500 sq. ft. to increase the fire protection above what the 2012 stock ICC code provided. The Board discussed the matter at length and concurred with staff. The 2012 code in the process of being considered by the City Commission would relax the standard from the requirement in the 2009 code to sprinkle any amount of area containing upholstered furniture to permitting up to 2,500 sq. ft. of space that contains such furniture.

Essentially, if the 2012 code is adopted, a separate fire rated space no greater than 2,500 sq. ft. could be constructed in order to forego the sprinklering requirement. This could be a room that meets the code standards for being separated (fire-rated ceiling, walls, doors, etc.) from other areas of a larger furniture store. Upholstered furniture would be permitted to be maintained throughout the 2,500 sq. ft. of separated space but not the other non-protected space of a larger store.

Mr. Terry Clark has discussed with us his desire to not meet this code standard for a 10,000 sq. ft. building located at 1040 Massachusetts Street. Mr. Clark has the following options to design and construct his project:

1. Advocate for and wait for adoption of the 2012 ICC code, which allows for 2,500 sq. ft. of upholstered furniture without sprinklers and design the space accordingly; or
2. Request that the City Commission consider an amendment to the Code (both 2012 and 2009 Codes) reverting to the 2006 Code requirement which allows for upholstered furniture to be present without sprinklers, up to 12,000 sq. ft. Staff recommends directing the Fire Code Board of Appeals to review and make a recommendation on the matter; or
3. Sprinkle the entire space and maintain upholstered furniture throughout the building.

It should be noted that this memo addresses only the fire sprinkler issue. Other code standards related to HVAC, ADA access, structural, etc. would also need to be discussed and addressed during the building permit process.