Enhanced Fire Protections for Multi-family Buildings

March 12-13, 2025

Overview Current Code

- Applies to apartment and condominium buildings built with combustible materials
- Requires additional fire safety standards – generally two-hour fire resistance rating; Sec. 8-91
  - Enhanced sprinkler protection
  - Enhanced exit enclosures (doors, staircases, platforms, etc.)
  - Enhanced walls enclosing vertical openings
  - Enhanced corridor protection
  - Enhanced building separation
  - Range tops require extinguishing system
  - Enhanced roof cladding

Overview Current Code

- No exemptions for ownership units.
- No exemption based on height.
- No exemption based on square footage of buildings.
- Currently only city in Georgia having restrictions on wood-frame construction.
- In practice, the requirements are cost-prohibitive. Instead of complying, High Street chose to build mid-rise apartment buildings as light steel-framed units to avoid the code. These units have the same appearance.

Sandy Springs (formerly Sec. 105-19)

- Applied to all new buildings over 100,000 sf of gross floor area (GFA) and/or more than three stories in height.
- Required Type I or Type II construction. Type I and II are noncombustible concrete and steel construction.
- Link to former code

Cost Comparison

- Wood-frame construction (Type 5 construction) tends to be significantly cheaper due to the use of wood instead of concrete and steel
- Average construction cost estimates per square foot are $221.32 for construction type IA (concrete and steel) and $148.28 for construction type VB (wood framed).
- For a 1,200 sf two-bedroom apartment, the cost difference is $87,648; for an 800 sf one-bedroom apartment, the cost difference is $58,432 (2024 IBC Estimates).

Current Code Impacts

- Increases construction cost for low- and mid-rise apartment and condominium projects by approximately 50 percent.
- No impact on single-family and high-rise multifamily buildings.
- Large impact on “missing middle” projects.
- New developments generally need to obtain rezoning approval through the City Council at which conditions can be added.

Proposed Code Amendments

- Mid-term: Review enhanced fire protection requirements holistically as part of the new development code (expected 2026).
- Short-term: Exempt smaller buildings.
  - Four stories or less, plus basement if applicable
  - 100,000 square feet GFA or less

Appendix – Specific Code Sections

Enhanced sprinkler protection

(1) 2012 NFPA 101 Life Safety Code. Delete subsection 30.3.5.2 in its entirety and substitute in its place the following:

- "30.3.5.2 Where an automatic sprinkler system is installed, the system shall be installed in accordance with Section 9.7.1.1 (1) NFPA 13, Standard for the Installation of Sprinkler Systems, as modified by 30.3.5.3 and 30.3.5.4."

(2) 2013 NFPA 13 Standard for the Installation of Sprinkler Systems. Delete subsections 8.15.7.1, 8.15.7.2, 8.15.7.3, 8.15.7.4, and 8.15.7.5 in their entirety and replace with the following subsection:

- "8.15.7.1 Sprinklers shall be installed under all occupiable exterior projections."

Enhanced exit enclosures

(1) 2012 NFPA 101 Life Safety Code. Delete subsection 30.2.2.1.2 in its entirety and substitute in its place the following:

- "30.2.2.1.2 Exit enclosures shall have a minimum 2-hour fire resistance rating, and doors shall have a minimum 1½-hour fire protection rating."

(2) 2012 NFPA 101 Life Safety Code. Add subsection 30.2.2.3.1.1 to read as follows:

- "30.2.2.3.1.1 Each stair, platform, landing, guard, and handrail, regardless of building construction type, shall be of noncombustible material throughout."

(3) 2012 NFPA 101 Life Safety Code. Add section 30.2.2.3.2 to read as follows:

- "30.2.2.3.2 Enclosure pressurization. Exit enclosures shall comply with 7.2.3.9."

Enhanced walls enclosing vertical openings

(1) 2012 NFPA 101 Life Safety Code. Delete subsection 30.3.1.1.4 in its entirety and substitute in its place the following:

- "30.3.1.1.4 Walls enclosing vertical openings shall have a minimum 2-hour fire resistance rating, and the doors shall have a minimum 1½-hour fire protection rating.“

Enhanced corridor protection

(1) 2012 NFPA 101 Life Safety Code. Delete subsections 30.3.6.1, 30.3.6.1.1, and 30.3.6.1.2 in their entirety and replace with the following subsection:

- "30.3.6.1 Corridor walls shall have a minimum 2-hour fire resistance rating, and the doors shall have a minimum 1½-hour fire protection rating."

Enhanced building space separation protection

(1) 2012 NFPA 101 Life Safety Code. Delete section 30.3.7 and subsections 30.3.7.1 and 30.3.7.2 in their entirety and replace with the following section:

- "30.3.7 Subdivisions of building spaces. Dwelling units shall be separated from each other by walls and floors constructed as fire barriers having a minimum 2-hour fire resistance rating."

Enhanced range top cooking surfaces protection

(1) All range top cooking surfaces shall be protected by an extinguishing system tested and approved to UL300A standards.

Enhanced roof cladding protection

(1) All roof assemblies shall comply with the 2012 International Building Code section 1505.2 Class A roof assemblies.