



MEMO

To: Town Council
From: Sarah Nurmela
Date: 3/3/2026
Subject: Sprinkler Options and Staff Recommendation

On October 28, 2025, Town Council continued the hearing for Ordinance No. 032-2025 that would remove the requirement for automatic sprinkler systems in one- and two-family dwellings and townhouses. Town Council asked that staff evaluate whether the Town should, as an alternative, require builders to offer sprinkler systems as an option. This memo summarizes the research into requiring an option, key stakeholder input, and staff's recommendation to move forward with the proposed ordinance and no required builder option.

BACKGROUND

In May 2025, Town Council asked staff to bring forward an ordinance amending the adopted 2021 International Residential Code (IRC) to remove the automatic sprinkler system requirement for one- and two-family dwellings and townhouses. This request was made in response to potential action items identified in a December 2024, roundtable with builders and developers active in Erie.

Discussion at the hearing in October 2025 included input from the Mountain View Fire Protection District (MVFPD), representatives from the building industry and Home Builders Association (HBA), and sprinkler system installers. During the hearing, Town Council asked staff to evaluate whether a required builder option for sprinkler provision might be an alternative to removing the requirement entirely. The hearing was continued to March 24, 2026, to allow staff time to evaluate options.

SUMMARY OF STAFF RESEARCH

Staff held multiple in-depth discussions with the MVFPD, HBA, Town staff, and other municipalities to identify and test options for residential sprinkler requirements. These options included:

1. Sprinkler Ready Home:

- Requires 1-inch water service line installation for all neighborhoods with Single Family Detached and Attached residences.
- Requires design and installation of sprinkler infrastructure within the home but not activation of the system.

2. Sprinkler Ready Infrastructure:

- Requires 1-inch water service line installation for all neighborhoods with Single Family Detached and Attached residences.
- Builders must offer sprinkler systems as an option.

3. Builder-Required Option Only:

- Builders must offer sprinkler systems as an option.

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- Sprinkler systems would be designed to meet ¾-inch water service lines, utilizing a tank and pump system.

As outlined in greater detail in *Attachment 1: Sprinkler Option Comparison*, each option is compared against retaining or removing the sprinkler system requirement. The considerations for each option include input from the MVFPD, HBA, and Town staff.

Additionally, staff researched other Colorado jurisdictions that have adopted a required “builder option” approach to automatic sprinkler system provision.

Commerce City

IRC Sections R313.1 and R313.2 require builders to provide the option for an automatic residential fire sprinkler system for all new townhome and one- and two-family dwellings. No additional detail is outlined in the code. Commerce City staff reported that since approval of this code change four months ago, only one single family building permit has included a system. Staff highlighted:

- Difficulty with enforcement once the requirement becomes optional.
- Water meter sizing and related infrastructure complications.
- Broader challenges associated with changing established code requirements.

Centennial

IRC Section R313.2 requires builders to provide the option for an automatic residential fire sprinkler system for all new one- and two- family dwellings. Centennial staff reported that no single-family permits have been received with a sprinkler option.

KEY STAKEHOLDER INPUT

The **HBA** supports either removal of the requirement or the Sprinkler Ready Infrastructure option, but noted limitations:

- Builders build approximately 20% to 50% of their homes speculatively and would request that these “spec” homes not be subject to the option requirement. Retrofitting after construction would not be cost-effective.
- Since sprinkler systems would be ordered individually, builders would charge between \$20,000 and \$25,000 to homebuyers for the option.

The **MVFPD** supports retaining the current sprinkler requirement based on life safety and operational considerations. Death and injury in a structure fire decreases significantly for both civilians and fire fighters when sprinklers are in place. Additionally, fire suppression by sprinklers increases overall water system resiliency, reduces demand on the water system during small- and large-scale fire events, and reduces environmental impacts to the stormwater system that is regulated by CDPHE. And, while fire detection systems are beneficial, suppression through sprinklers remains critical to life safety outcomes.

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Town staff in Public Works and Utilities noted that the increased sizing of infrastructure to 1” lines could result in less efficiency in water use to single family detached and attached homes due to the ability for a 1” line to deliver roughly double the flow of a typical ¾” inch line. This can negatively impact the Town’s water conservation efforts and ability to minimize water use for single family homes. This impact is currently offset by the benefit of public safety and potential environmental impacts to the stormwater system.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

After evaluating the three options and considering feedback from Council, the HBA, MVFPD, Town staff, and building officials from other jurisdictions, staff do not recommend the builder option requirement. Staff recommend Council continue consideration of the proposed ordinance for removal of automatic fire sprinklers previously presented in October 2025.

Key findings of this recommendation include:

- The “Sprinkler Ready” model carries nearly equivalent costs without delivering immediate life safety benefits.
- The “Sprinkler Ready – Infrastructure”, while requiring less builder cost than “Sprinkler Ready”, still results in increased water service sizing and less control over irrigation and peak water demand for residences.
- The optional approach in the two study communities has not resulted in meaningful sprinkler installation in peer communities.
- The adopted optional language has limited legal enforceability and minimal practical impact.
- MVFPD, as the Town’s fire protection agency, strongly supports maintaining the requirement due to demonstrated life safety and operational benefits.

If Council should desire, Town staff can prepare and notice the builder-required option for the March 24, 2026, meeting. Additionally, staff are available to meet individually with Council Members to discuss this analysis and recommendation further.

ATTACHMENT 1: COMPARISON OF AUTOMATIC RESIDENTIAL FIRE SPRINKLER OPTIONS

OPTIONS	Considerations					
	HOME OWNER/ OCCUPANT	HOME BUILDER	SAFETY IMPACTS	DESIGN REQUIREMENTS	TOWN WATER SYSTEM	COSTS
KEEP CURRENT CODE REQUIREMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likely increased cost to home • Reduced home insurance cost (minimal reduction varies by policy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased cost to build 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximized safety for homeowner, neighborhoods, and fire district 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced fire separation requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More resiliency for water system with less fire risk and potential line breaks and water quality during events • Fewer fire hydrants to install/maintain. • Less strain on system during water supply shortages, mainline breaks and plant failures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$7-15,000 as reported from Erie builders. • Increased cost of 1” water lines in development (\$1,000/home per builders)
SPRINKLER READY – HOME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased cost to home as it requires all piping to be installed. Building the system into the home is essentially the same cost as the full system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased cost to build, similar to installation of full system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar to no sprinklers—no benefit overall to fire district, Town, or neighboring residents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would require design and installation of sprinkler infrastructure without a connection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased line size allows for more flow and is counter-productive if sprinkler is not installed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could increase demands for irrigation and other high flow uses. • Worth potential demand increase for life-safety (sprinklers) otherwise not advised. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant cost still needed up front, similar to sprinkler option.
SPRINKLER READY – INFRASTRUCTURE (1” LINE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home would have to be on a vacant lot—spec built homes would be built without 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spec built homes would not provide the option (according to builders). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar to no sprinklers—no benefit overall to fire district, Town, or neighboring residents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire separation requirements for setbacks and wall construction for attached homes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased line size allows for more flow and is counter-productive if sprinkler is not installed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$1,000/home to home builder to install 1” line. • \$18-20,000 cost to homeowner of the

OPTIONS	Considerations					
	HOME OWNER/ OCCUPANT	HOME BUILDER	SAFETY IMPACTS	DESIGN REQUIREMENTS	TOWN WATER SYSTEM	COSTS
	sprinkler infrastructure. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor delay of home delivery to buyer due to additional permits and inspections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of spec built homes ranges 5-50% of units, depending on builder. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could increase demands for irrigation and other high flow uses. Worth potential demand increase for life-safety (sprinklers) otherwise not advised. 	system (according to builders)
BUILDER-REQUIRED OPTION ONLY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full cost of the system, with the addition of tank and pump system (\$7,500 – 20,000+) Similar concerns as Sprinkler Ready-Infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased cost to build, similar to installation of full system Similar constraint around spec built homes as the Sprinkler Ready Infrastructure option 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Similar to no sprinklers—no benefit overall to fire district, Town, or neighboring residents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fire separation requirements for setbacks and wall construction for attached homes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ¾” water lines would serve homes; tank and pump system would need to store excess water at all times to manage water needs for system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significant cost still needed up front, similar to sprinkler option.