

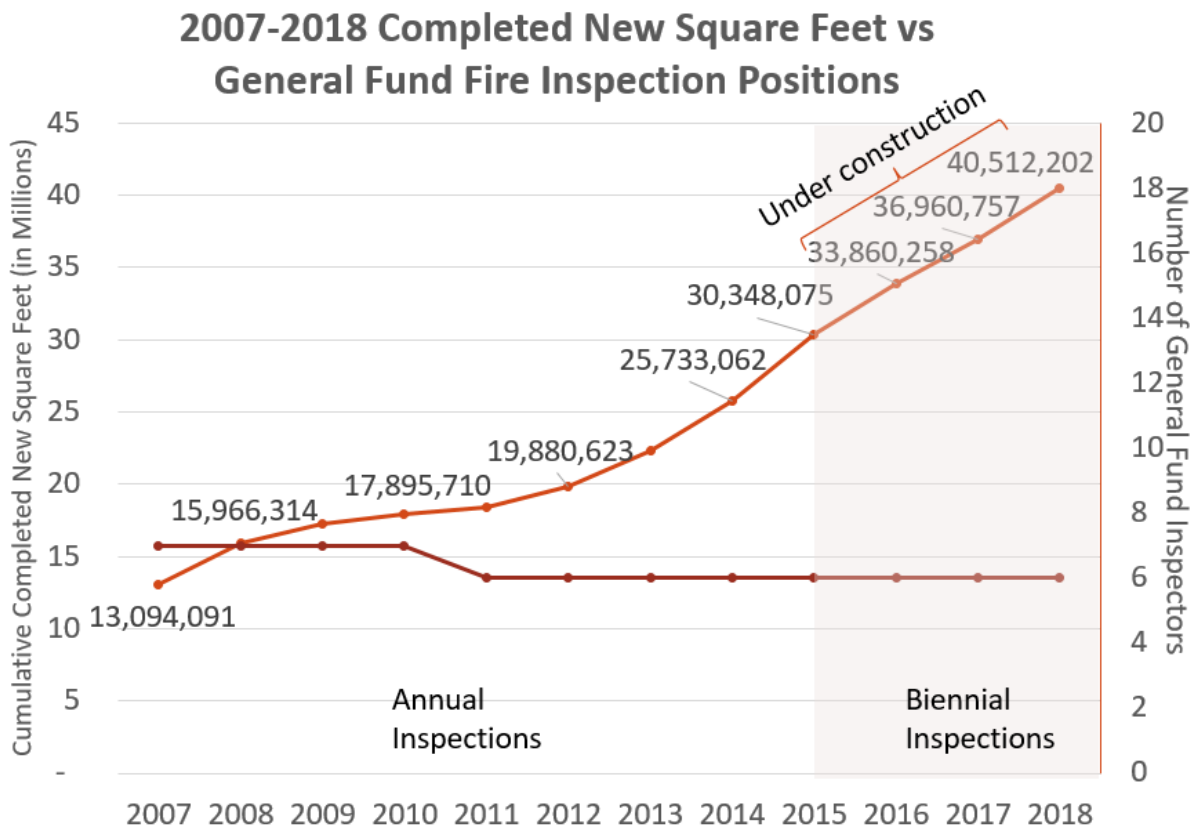


FIRE INSPECTION FEE FAQ

Monday December 3, 2018 Bellevue City Council approved the 2019/20 budget that among other things added two additional Fire Prevention Officers. In addition, City Council passed an ordinance that requires assessment of a Fire Inspection fee beginning **January 1, 2020**.

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING NOW?

In terms of growth and development, Bellevue is on the move! Our city has added millions of square feet of new building space each year. This new space provides additional room for people to work, live, dine, and recreate in our city. Our ability to inspect these spaces has fallen behind. We need new Fire Prevention Officer's to address this gap. Over 27,000,000 square feet of new building space has been added since 2006 and the Fire Prevention Division staffing level has not kept pace. In fact, they have one less inspector than 2006. As our city continues to grow and prosper; particularly in the Central Business District, the Spring District, and the Crossroads neighborhood, our challenge becomes more pronounced.



This graph depicts the annual square footage of new construction commercial and residential high rise inspections performed by Prevention Inspectors not pre-existing buildings.

WHAT IS HAPPENING?

Two additional Fire Prevention Officers were requested as part of our budget development process. A new fire inspection fee was approved to fully recover the program cost.

HOW HAS THIS WORK BEEN FUNDED IN THE PAST?

Entirely by the general tax payer.

It is important to note that Fire Prevention currently has two funding sources:

1. Development Services Enterprise Fund – this fund supports Fire Department Plan Review & Inspection activities associated with development permits.
2. General Fund – the fund supports Fire Department maintenance inspections and fire investigations.

WHAT GETS INSPECTED, WHY AND HOW OFTEN?

Up to 2015, all structures except single family buildings received an annual inspection. Currently, our higher hazard buildings (multi-family buildings that have no fire alarm or fire sprinkler system) are inspected annually, all other buildings are inspected every other year. Best practice is “annual inspection”. We have fallen behind and want to change that.

HOW MUCH DO INSPECTIONS COST, WHO PAYS AND WHAT HAPPENS WITH THE FEES?

For a single tenant building, the occupant would be responsible. In a multi-tenant building the building owner would be responsible for common areas and each tenant for their areas. An example of various tenant costs is provided below:

Sample Inspection Fee by type of business

<u>Entity</u>	<u>Square Footage</u>	<u>Fee</u>	<u>Comments</u>
Church (A Occupancy)	10,000	\$1080	Exempt (non-profit)
Doctor's Office (B Occupancy)	500	\$0	Exempt – less than 1,000 s.f.
WA State Patrol HQ (B Occup)	33,050	\$540	Exempt (Government)
Bakery (F Occupancy)	2,145	\$540	
Retail Store (M Occupancy)	2,800	\$180	
Mini-City Hall (B Occupancy)	1,500	\$180	
Single Occupancy High Rise	176,400	\$3240	
High Rise Tenant	2,000	\$540	

The fire inspection fee is a function of three factors:

1. Base rate
2. The degree of difficulty required to conduct the inspection
3. The square footage of the area to be inspected

There are three exemptions:

1. Nonprofit organizations exempt from federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code
2. Buildings or occupancies less than 1,000 square feet
3. Recognized federal, state, and county buildings/tenants

The fees will be utilized to support the Fire Inspection Program.

HOW WAS THIS PROPOSAL DEVELOPED?

The City of Bellevue is moving to a cost recovery model and has implemented cost recovery efforts for a number of departments. The inspection fee was developed with this in mind after a review of other cities that charge for Fire Inspections and tailored to reflect our cost recovery objectives.

WHY DO FIRE INSPECTIONS MATTER?

- Every fire inspection provides an opportunity to identify and eliminate a fire and/or life/safety hazard and educate occupants on the importance of addressing those issues
- Proactive investment in the community's safety
- Best practice to minimize risk to occupant safety

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF BELLEVUE CHOSE NOT TO IMPLEMENT THIS PLAN? IN OTHER WORDS, WHAT IS THE COST OF DOING NOTHING?

As we did in 2015, the frequency that the inspections are conducted would have to be adjusted. Some classification of buildings/occupancies would have to move to a 3-year inspection cycle. If additional resources are not added to the Fire Inspection program in the future and the City continues to grow, the inspection frequency will continue decrease and/or not performed at all.

HOW DO WE KNOW THAT OUR PREVENTION EFFORTS ARE WORKING?

Fire inspections are not mandated but are recognized as a best practice. Preventing a fire from occurring saves lives and properties and is much more cost effective than responding to a fire.

Our staff routinely identify issues during inspections that may prevent fires and/or mitigate the impact if a fire were to occur. These are all recent examples of issues that our staff have identified during maintenance inspections:

- 2 commercial buildings with large scale operating spray booths installed without permits. These booths utilize flammable liquids and the potential for explosive results for the operators of the spray booths and occupants in the area.
- Construction of mezzanines in two separate buildings without permits and obviously under designed creating the potential of a collapse for the mezzanine occupants and those below.
- Dumpsters stored inside buildings and too close to buildings without benefit of fire sprinkler protection creating the potential of fire and rapid fire spread to multi-family buildings.

- The owner of condominium unit relayed to our inspector how thankful she was for the smoke alarms that were installed in her unit's bedrooms as a result of our inspection. Just a few days after the smoke alarm was installed, the alarm in her son's room activated due to smoke triggering the device when combustibles were located too close to a baseboard heater. She moved the combustibles that were smoldering and kept her family safe. Due to the alarm activation and her quick response, she saved her son's bedroom, her unit, her building and all the occupants from a potentially large, dangerous fire.
- 836 recalled fire sprinkler heads identified and replaced in a large commercial building. In the event of a fire, these sprinkler heads may not have operated, or as intended which could have led to a large-scale loss in our CBD.

The Bellevue Fire Department is evaluated on a regular basis by two separate independent agencies – Washington Survey & Rating Bureau (www.WSRB.com) and the Center for Public Safety Excellence (www.CPSE.org) to include our Fire Inspector program and we are one of only two Fire Departments in the State of Washington to hold a Class 2 Rating (WSRB) and Accreditation (CPSE).

While it is difficult to directly correlate fire prevention activities to outcomes, there are three specific outcome areas that the department tracks and benchmarks:

1. Fire incidents/1,000 population
2. Residential fires/100,000 population
3. Residential cooking fires/100,000 population

In each of these benchmarks Bellevue's outcomes are better than the national averages.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

- [Ordinance](#) requiring Fire Inspection Fees
- Building and Tenant Informational Sheets
- Bellevue Fire Marshal at kcarlson@bellevuewa.gov or (425)-452-6874.