

SUMMARY and FISCAL NOTE

Department:	Dept. Contact:	CBO Contact:
Seattle Fire Department	Karen Grove	Ramandeep Kaur

1. BILL SUMMARY

Legislation Title: AN ORDINANCE relating to unsafe building abatement; amending Section 111 and Section 202 of the 2018 Seattle Fire Code as adopted by Section 22.600.020 of the Seattle Municipal Code and as regulated and allowed by the State Building Code Act, Chapter 19.27 of the Revised Code of Washington; declaring an emergency; and establishing an immediate effective date; all by a 3/4 vote of the City Council.

Summary and Background of the Legislation:

There are currently more than 40 derelict and potentially unsafe buildings in Seattle that the Seattle Fire Department (SFD) is tracking, many of which have had multiple fires and pose risk. To address this issue, the legislation amends the Seattle Fire Code to clarify the Fire Chief's authority to demolish or otherwise remedy the unsafe building conditions. This legislation also allows SFD to place a lien against property titles to ensure Seattle taxpayers are reimbursed for the City's building abatement costs.

2. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

Does this legislation create, fund, or amend a CIP Project? ☐ Yes ☒ No

3. SUMMARY OF FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Does this legislation have financial impacts to the City? ☐ Yes ☒ No

3.d. Other Impacts

Does the legislation have other financial impacts to The City of Seattle, including direct or indirect, one-time or ongoing costs, that are not included in Sections 3.a through 3.c? If so, please describe these financial impacts.

This legislation is focused on expanding the Fire Chief's authority to remedy unsafe buildings and allows the City to place liens against property. The legislation does not provide any new appropriation, but it does have some indirect financial implications. The City may incur costs to fence properties or complete demolition of derelict or fire-damaged structures that are unsafe and dangerous to human life and public welfare. Depending on the degree of damage, the size of the building, the construction type and materials, presence or absence of asbestos, critical areas, and other site-specific conditions, fencing and demolition costs will vary significantly. The City will develop a blanket contract with several vendors through an invitation to bid process, to identify and approve the contractors who will perform this work. The costs could range from \$350,000 to

\$500,000 this year. Summary abatement or demolition will not occur without approval from the Mayor's Office. SFD will work with Law, CBO, and the MO in implementing summary abatement protocols, if there is a chance the City might have to pay for an abatement up-front. Any additional appropriation needed for these costs will be included in future legislation.

The City would be reimbursed for these expenditures by the building owner and the City would have the ability to place a lien against the property title if the property owner fails to reimburse the City. Revenues may not be received in the same fiscal year as expenditures occur, and could require multi-year support until reimbursement is received. There is not currently a guarantee of financial recovery.

If the legislation has costs, but they can be absorbed within existing operations, please describe how those costs can be absorbed. The description should clearly describe if the absorbed costs are achievable because the department had excess resources within their existing budget or if by absorbing these costs the department is deprioritizing other work that would have used these resources.

This program achieves greater public safety in neighborhoods. The legislation as written is focused on expanding the Fire Chief's ability to address harms caused by derelict buildings in Seattle. The ability to levy liens will hold property owners accountable for costs incurred by the City; however, revenues may not be received in the same fiscal year as expenditures occur.

At this time, SFD and Law will not need to request additional administrative support for this program beyond their current services. Depending on the response to this program and other services, the Fire Marshall's office and/or Law may need additional resources in the future to issue liens, track cost recovery, inspections, etc.

Please describe any financial costs or other impacts of *not* implementing the legislation.

In 2023, three residents died in unsafe building fires in Seattle. Fires in unsafe buildings also put neighboring properties, families, and first responders at risk. Without sufficient legislative authority to abate dangerous and derelict buildings, the City is expected to experience additional fires in derelict buildings in the coming months and years which could result in civilian casualties and possible fire fighter injuries or death. These derelict buildings can cause property damage to adjacent safe buildings and harm public property.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

a. Please describe how this legislation may affect any departments besides the originating department.

This legislation has been coordinated with the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections (SDCI). SDCI leads the City's Vacant Building Monitoring Program and issues demolition permits. Staff have not identified any new costs to SDCI as a result of this legislation.

- b. Does this legislation affect a piece of property? If yes, please attach a map and explain any impacts on the property. Please attach any Environmental Impact Statements, Determinations of Non-Significance, or other reports generated for this property.**

No.

- c. Please describe any perceived implication for the principles of the Race and Social Justice Initiative.**

- i. How does this legislation impact vulnerable or historically disadvantaged communities? How did you arrive at this conclusion? In your response please consider impacts within City government (employees, internal programs) as well as in the broader community.**

When vacant or derelict buildings have experienced multiple prior fires, and when unauthorized use of the buildings continues despite efforts to secure the buildings, these buildings create hazards for neighbors and the public as well as first responders. The data collected by SFD shows that most of the derelict buildings are concentrated in areas with higher levels of racial diversity and lower median incomes. Seattle residents living in the City's more vulnerable neighborhoods are more likely to be at risk from dangerous buildings. This program helps ensure that dangerous buildings in all neighborhoods are more quickly abated to help ensure public safety in all our communities.

- ii. Please attach any Racial Equity Toolkits or other racial equity analyses in the development and/or assessment of the legislation.**

SFD is working to add dangerous building locations into our mapping of Seattle neighborhoods that depict variations and disparities in demographic characteristics such as income, ability/disability, age, and race.

- iii. What is the Language Access Plan for any communications to the public?**

SFD will provide materials for neighbors and property owners in multiple languages regarding options for residents to report concerns with dangerous buildings in their neighborhood, as well as options and responsibilities of property owners.

- d. Climate Change Implications**

- i. Emissions: How is this legislation likely to increase or decrease carbon emissions in a material way? Please attach any studies or other materials that were used to inform this response.**

This legislation should have a small but beneficial impact in reducing carbon emissions and air pollutants by reducing the number of building fires experienced in Seattle.

- ii. **Resiliency:** Will the action(s) proposed by this legislation increase or decrease Seattle’s resiliency (or ability to adapt) to climate change in a material way? If so, explain. If it is likely to decrease resiliency in a material way, describe what will or could be done to mitigate the effects.

No effect on resiliency.

- e. **If this legislation includes a new initiative or a major programmatic expansion:** What are the specific long-term and measurable goal(s) of the program? How will this legislation help achieve the program’s desired goal(s)? What mechanisms will be used to measure progress towards meeting those goals?

The Fire Chief already has authority in the Seattle Fire Code to require abatement of unsafe buildings. This legislation clarifies the authority and the financial responsibilities for such abatement. This legislation does not introduce a new program. SFD already tracks the number of dangerous and derelict buildings as well as enforcement activity and demolition to measure our effectiveness in mitigating this unsafe situation.

5. CHECKLIST

- ☐ Is a public hearing required?
- ☐ Is publication of notice with *The Daily Journal of Commerce* and/or *The Seattle Times* required?
- ☐ If this legislation changes spending and/or revenues for a fund, have you reviewed the relevant fund policies and determined that this legislation complies?
- ☐ Does this legislation create a non-utility CIP project that involves a shared financial commitment with a non-City partner agency or organization?

6. ATTACHMENTS

Summary Attachments: None