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City Manager's Office

Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR
AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: William L. McDonald
Fire Chief

SUBJECT: BREATHING AIR SYSTEMS

DATE: May 2, 2013

Approved

Date

5/2/13

INFORMATION

On May 15, 2012, Council approved a set of incentives for Downtown high rises included in the recommendations from the Administration contained in a memorandum dated April 23, 2012 and additional incentives contained in a memorandum from Mayor Reed and Councilmember Liccardo dated May 9, 2012. The links for these two memorandums are provided at the end of this document. One of the incentive options proposed by the Administration was to direct the City Attorney to draft an ordinance to eliminate the Firefighter Air Replenishment System (breathing air system) requirement from the City of San José Municipal Code. There has been expressed concern that the requirement is a deterrent to future high-rise development within the City. These concerns include the cost of the breathing air system and difficulty in obtaining competitive bids.

Breathing air systems provide a built-in method of refilling a firefighter's self-contained breathing apparatus cylinder on every third floor of a high-rise building. The incorporation of the refilling station within a building would reduce and/or eliminate the need for firefighters to shuttle empty cylinders to the ground floor to obtain replacement air cylinders during an extended above-ground fire operation. When a fire is within a high-rise building, the breathing air system could reduce the time needed to refill cylinders. Refill time reductions as a result of the system are generally dependent upon the height of the building, size of the fire, number of floors involved in a fire and how high the fire is above street level.

On January 25, 2005, Council approved Ordinance No. 27341, which amended the San José Fire Code to require the installation of firefighter breathing air systems in high rise buildings. On October 26, 2010, as part of the local adoption of the 2010 California Building Standards, Council approved an amendment to the local breathing air systems requirements by allowing alternatively for the construction of a designated firefighter elevator that contains additional protections over standard elevators. Effectively, the local San José requirements have not mandated a breathing air apparatus since the 2010 introduction of the elevator alternative.

Staff does not recommend modifying the Municipal Code at this time because an alternative to the breathing air system requirement has already been provided since 2010.

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Link to Staff Memorandum dated April 23, 2012

(http://www.sanjoseca.gov/clerk/Agenda/20120515/20120515_0402.pdf)

Link to Memorandum from Mayor Reed and Council Member Licardo dated May 9, 2012

(http://www.sanjoseca.gov/clerk/Agenda/20120515/20120515_0402att2.pdf).

This Information Memorandum was coordinated with the Department of Planning, Building & Code Enforcement and the City Attorney's Office.

/s/

WILLIAM L. MCDONALD

FIRE CHIEF

For questions, please contact William McDonald, Fire Chief, at (408) 794-6951.