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Administration
Fire Suppression
Fire Investigation
Fire Training
Fire Prevention
Special Operations

MEMORANDUM

November 14, 2022

To: Bob Harrison
City Manager

From: Aaron Markham
Fire Chief

Re: Fire Inspection Fees

Mr. Harrison,

This memo is a proposal to increase the fire inspection fee charges beginning in January 2023. The City of Yakima began charging for fire inspections in January of 2017, after the City Council adopted an ordinance during its December 6, 2016, regular business meeting. The City Council approved an additional increase to the fire inspection fees during a regular business meeting on May 15, 2018. Since that time the fire inspection fees have not increased to cover the direct and indirect costs associated with supporting this division of the fire department. The proposed fee schedule shows several changes to the inspection fee table.

The first change in the schedule is to the occupancy types. There are now three groups of occupancy types versus two in the original table. The groups are now more associated with the complexity that is involved in conducting a Fire and Life Safety Inspection, with group one (1) occupancies being the least complex and group three (3) being the most complex. The more complex a fire inspection is, the more time it takes to complete.

The second change is the square footage of the building being inspected. Square footage is a direct correlation to the amount of time it takes to inspect a building. The larger the building, the longer it takes an inspector to get around to all the areas, therefore the fees increase as the square footage increases. We also changed the number of tiers going from three (3) tiers based on square footage to seven (7) tiers, each increasing in cost as the size of the occupancy increases.

The third significant change is to the compliance re-inspection fees. The first inspection after a notice of non-compliance has been issued is free; this is to allow an occupant time to resolve their fire code violation/violations after being informed of what those deficiencies are by inspectors. Our goal is to have fire code violations corrected with the least amount of impact to the business. If the corrections are not fixed after the first re-inspection visit, occupants and owners begin getting charged a compliance re-inspection fee which increases each time an inspector returns to the occupancy. If after six (6) visits the violations are still outstanding, the occupancy is referred to Code Enforcement for further compliance.

Our proposed changes also recommend a three percent (3%) inflationary factor that would be applied to the fee schedule at the beginning of each subsequent year. The inflationary factor was suggested by FCS in the recent fee study.

We believe these fee adjustments are fair and equitable across the occupancy classifications and sizes and will greatly improve cost recovery.

At this time, we do not have an estimate of the revenue these new fees will generate because of the following factors:

*We will provide all-risk emergency and non-emergency services to our community
We are committed to serving with courage and compassion as stewards of public trust
We shall leave a positive and genuine impact on all who call upon us*

- A complete list of occupancies by type and size for the newly created tiers has not been created to provide a more accurate estimate.
- Compliance re-inspection fees may decline as businesses become more educated on fire code violations and are able to keep them reduced.
- There is a difference in the amount of fire inspection fees that are billed versus the amount that is collected. The most accurate data would be pre-Covid before many occupancies were temporarily closed. In 2018 we collected 83% of billable charges and in 2019 we collected 92%. It is uncertain if significant fee increases will also increase the fees that are uncollected.

In 2019, during the budget adoption process we made some changes to fire department operations that directly affected this divisions workload. We unfunded the fire department's combat and non-combat reserve program which shifted the work that was previously done by these part-time employees to the Community Risk Reduction Specialists. They now assist with fire suppression activities on and off-duty by responding with the department's rehabilitation unit. This unit and staff refill self-contained breathing apparatus bottles used while fighting a structure fire. They also provide the necessary hydration refreshments to keep our personnel healthy and hydrated during these strenuous activities. These call outs come during all times of the day and night and take them from their inspection duties; however, this was the tradeoff for a more responsive crew that could get this apparatus out the door on a more consistent basis.

Respectfully submitted,

Aaron Markham
Fire Chief