



Snohomish County Council

Committee: Planning & Community Development

Analyst: Ryan Countryman

ECAF: 2023-0319

Proposal: Ordinance 23-032

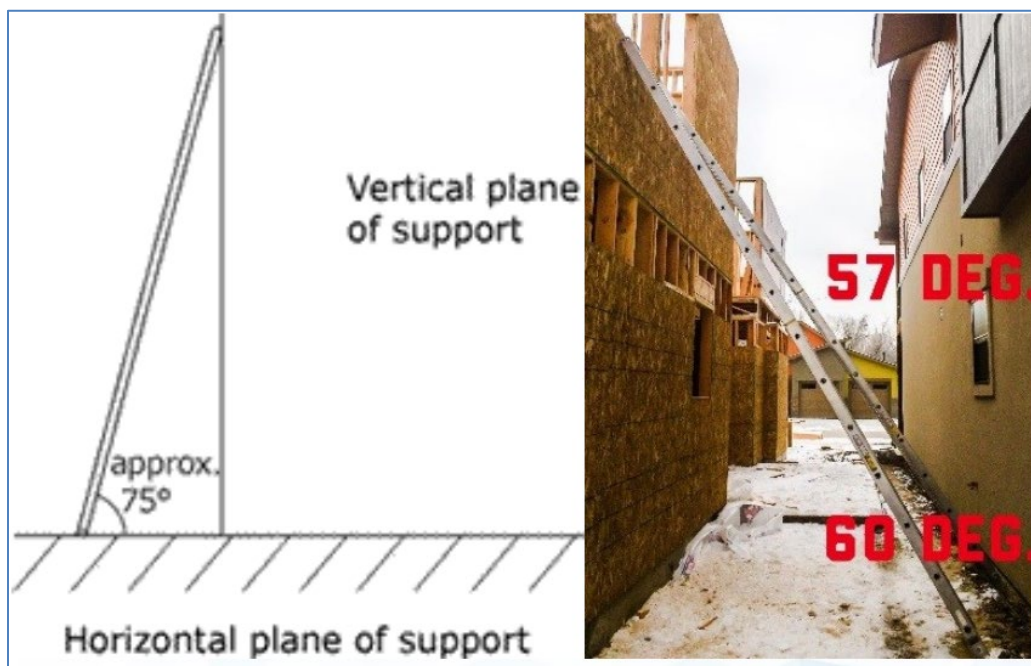
Date: April 18, 2023

Consideration

Proposed Ordinance 23-032 would amend Snohomish County Code (SCC) 30.23.300 relating to building separation requirements.

Background and Analysis

Ordinance 23-032 seeks to improve fire safety and emergency response to three-story homes. To meet fire code requirements, one- and two-story single family and duplex structures must be at least 10 feet apart. Firefighters can safely place ladders to a second story window even if there is a fence in the middle (or five feet from buildings separated by 10 feet) because the maximum safe angle is 75 degrees. See Illustration below.



Angle Illustration by Planning and Development Services

(December 13, 2022 Presentation Materials to the Snohomish County Planning Commission)

For three-story buildings that are 10 feet apart, a fence or other obstruction such as a rockery wall can hinder placement of ladders at a safe angle to third story windows. Dwelling units equipped with approved NFPA 13D automatic sprinkler systems can still meet fire code requirements without guaranteed ladder access to third story windows.

Most fences do not require buildings permits. If three story dwelling units receive approval without sprinkler systems and the buildings are only 10 feet apart, the addition of a fence between buildings may mean that they no longer meet fire safety standards. There would be no permit to notify the Fire Marshal of the potential issue.

SCC 30.23.300 currently says that three story buildings should normally have 15 feet of separation (which is enough to safely place a ladder even if there is a fence). It allows reduction to 10 feet of separation if the buildings have either approved automatic sprinkler systems (subsection (2)(a)) or topography that allows ladders to reach the third story (subsection (2)(b)). The topography subsection is confusing and meaningless if residents build a fence. Ordinance 23-032 would strike the topography section (and make other non-substantive stylistic changes). This would leave as standard a 15-foot separation for three story buildings without sprinklers and continue to allow for a 10-foot separation if the buildings have automatic sprinkler systems. Striking the topography subsection eliminates the scenario where homes can only maintain safe third story window access by not building any fences.

Current Proposal

Scope and Summary: Ordinance 23-032 would amend SCC 30.23.300 as described above to improve fire safety and emergency response to three-story homes.

Fiscal Implications: None

Handling: Normal

Planning Commission: Approve

Risk Management: Approve

Finance: Approve

Approved-as-to-form: Yes

Executive Recommendation: Approve

Request: Move to General Legislative Session on April 26th to set time and date for a public hearing. (Suggested hearing date is May 17 at 10:30 am.)