



SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL
CENTRAL STAFF

SFD Dangerous Buildings Ordinance (Unintroduced)

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PUBLIC SAFETY
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Bill Subject: Unsafe Building Abatement

- Buildings that are vacant and
 - Derelict,
 - Unsafe, or
 - A public nuisance
- Over 100 buildings in the city meet this definition. Over 40 are both vacant and unsafe.
- SDCI administers City Vacant Building Monitoring Program, which requires monthly inspections (a) as a condition of a permit that includes a vacant building or (b) in response to a complaint. This program seeks to prevent neighborhood blight and health and safety risks.
- SDCI can currently declare a building “unfit for human habitation or other use” and require the owner to repair or demolish the building.
- SFD can currently issue orders to remove or remedy dangerous conditions related to a building. SFD can also refer a building to SDCI, which can declare it unfit. This declaration may lead to its demolition.

Proposed New Authority for Fire Code Official

- Ability to declare a building a public nuisance
 - Bill would define a public nuisance, in the Fire Code, as “one which affects equally the rights of an entire community or neighborhood, though the extent of the damage may be unequal.” (RCW 7.48.130)
- Abatement: When an owner, agent, operator, or occupant of a building has failed to correct unsafe conditions, FCO would have the ability to (1) abate and (2) recover the costs of abatement
- Summary Abatement: When conditions pose an imminent danger to life and property, FCO may (1) declare the building a public nuisance, (2) abate the conditions summarily, up to and including demolition, and (3) recover the costs of summary abatement.

Emergency and Immediate Effective Date

- The bill would have immediate effect. The City Charter requires the inclusion of emergency findings in the bill when “it is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety...”
- One bill finding is that a recent increase in vacant-building fires is “an escalating emergency requiring the city government’s action.”
- To become effective, the bill will require a 3/4 majority of Council votes.

Next Steps

- Public Safety Committee members will discuss and possibly vote on the bill at the May 14 meeting.
- SFD, SDCI, Mayor's Office, and City Attorney's Office staff will develop and implement protocols for summary abatement by FCO.
- The Executive will refine 2024 cost assumptions associated with the bill, and funding will be included in the 2024 Mid-year Supplemental Ordinance and 2025-2026 Proposed Budget.

Questions?