

Ames City Council delays vote on sprinkler systems

By Tara Flockhart / Daily Staff Writer | Wednesday, March 29, 2006 2:00 AM CST

The issue of high costs versus safety weighed heavily on the Ames City Council on Tuesday night as the debate raged on whether to require sprinkler systems in Ames buildings, including greek houses.

Unhappy with the choices laid before them, councilmembers delayed the first of three votes on the proposed ordinance, asking for a revision involving an amended timeframe.

"Not supporting this ordinance would be like not supporting baseball or apple pie," said Ryan Doll, 3rd Ward representative. Doll, however, voted to dismiss the ordinance altogether, stating that the benefits do not outweigh the costs.

Three building structures are included under the proposed ordinance, including dormitories and greek housing, high-rise buildings and residences with occupants that have impractical evacuation capabilities, such as nursing homes.

Fire Chief Clint Petersen stressed the importance of sprinkler systems in these structures, which have had the greatest number of fire incidents in past years - initially with hopes that other buildings will follow in stride in future years.

The cost of retro-fitting a sprinkler system ranges from \$50,000 in smaller houses to more than \$600,000 for concrete structures such as university apartments.

Jennifer Plagman-Galvin, director of greek Affairs, voiced her support on behalf of the greek community if given a 10-year time period to raise the necessary funding. She also asked for a proposed tax abatement that might help to diffuse the cost.

Dick Horton, afficiate with Theta Delta Chi fraternity, argued on behalf of smaller fraternities, asserting that 10 years was not enough time to raise the required funds, especially for chapters lacking national affiliation.

"This would be a no-brainer if we were remodeling from the inside out," he said. "It's hard not to argue that sprinklers are good, but this could potentially be another nail in the coffin aimed at greek systems."

Since 1979, greek houses at Iowa State have suffered nine serious fires. The most recent was in 2004 at the Delta Upsilon.