

sprink04

February 26, 2003

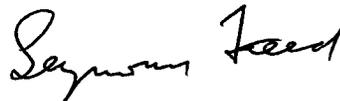
Ted Vaden
Editor and Publisher
The Chapel Hill News
505 West Franklin Street
Chapel Hill, NC 27516

Dear Sir:

A common thread runs through the Rhode Island nightclub fire, the NC jail fire, and the UNC fraternity house fire, as well as this week's fire at a Charlotte apartment complex. In all cases, the local Fire Code would have required sprinklers for these buildings if they had been newly constructed. In all cases, despite being unsprinklered, these buildings "complied with the minimum standards of the code in effect at the time of construction"(NC Fire Prevention Code §102.2 Applicability, or similar code).

The UNC fire resulted in a local law requiring sprinklers to be installed in all fraternity and sorority houses in Chapel Hill. On September 11, 2002, a faulty air conditioner at the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority house set off the sprinklers. The fire was out before the fire department arrived. No one was injured.

The lesson to be learned is that sprinklers save lives. Other than fraternity/sorority houses, older buildings in Chapel Hill are not required to be sprinklered. The town should consider upgrading the sprinkler law so that all buildings in Chapel Hill meet the "minimum requirements consistent with nationally recognized good practice for providing a reasonable level of life safety and property protection from the hazards of fire..."(NC Fire Prevention Code, §101.3 Intent). If sprinklers are required for a new building, they should also be required for an existing building with the same type of occupancy.



Seymour Freed
750 Weaver Dairy Road #234
Chapel Hill, NC 27514-1468

cc: Dan Jones, Chief, ✓
Chapel Hill Fire Dept.

-----Original Message-----

ATTACHMENT 6

-----Original Message-----

From: Laura Van Sant [mailto:lauravc@mindspring.com]

Sent: Monday, March 24, 2003 9:56 AM

To: Town Council

Subject: proposed sprinkler requirements

Due to a prior commitment I won't be able to attend tonight's public hearing on the proposed sprinkler rules, but wish to make a couple of points.

I am part of a group that owns a small building on Henderson Street housing a restaurant/bar on the ground floor and a pool hall upstairs. Like other property owners, we are concerned about the cost of sprinkler installation, which as you know is much higher for retrofitting than for new construction.

From what I've read in the newspapers, it is the fire chief's belief that the Rhode Island nightclub fire would have been quickly extinguished had that building contained a sprinkler system. Further, the fire chief believes that installing sprinklers in similar buildings in Chapel Hill would prevent such a tragedy from occurring here.

The fire chief is probably right. But from media accounts it seems that a number of other factors should have prevented the Rhode Island fire from turning out the way it did. The fire inspector who looked at the building just a few months earlier should have made an issue of the flammable soundproofing foam. The nightclub's manager shouldn't have allowed more people inside than the building's legal capacity. And someone should have exercised a shred of common sense and not considered setting off pyrotechnics inside a relatively small, crowded, low-ceiling building.

Had any of those things occurred, we wouldn't be having this discussion now. No one can argue against the notion that sprinklers save lives and property. But all risk-avoidance measures must be weighed against their costs. Chances are that none of you have chosen to install sprinklers in your homes, for instance, although doing so would make you less likely to lose property or family members in a fire. But if you've thought about the issue at all, you've likely concluded that the risk is so small as not to warrant the expense.

Please use similar logic when considering a requirement that other property owners spend considerable amounts of money to improve the safety of their buildings. We are in the best position to weigh costs against risks. Trust us to do so.

Laura Van Sant
8207 Reynard Rd.
Chapel Hill, NC 27516
929-1423

-----Original Message-----

From: NormanBullard@aol.com [mailto:NormanBullard@aol.com]

Sent: Tuesday, April 01, 2003 3:35 PM

To: Town Council; Manager; Linanne2003@aol.com; NormanBullard@aol.com; Masonbruce@aol.com

Subject: Input on sprinkler issue

-----Original Message-----

This email is from Lucy's Restaurant at 114 Henderson Street in Chapel Hill (80.E.1) The following is our input on the issue of sprinklers.

1. Lucy's objects to the proposal as currently drafted and suggests that further study be made of this issue so as to address the issue properly, but not to overreact or overreach.
2. If a proposal is going to be adopted tonight, than an exemption should be made for establishments which prohibit smoking and all pyrotechnic devices.
3. The Town should factor cost into the decision. Sprinklers cost much more that the cost estimates in the information included with the notice of hearing. It has been our experience that all construction costs end up between 200% and 250% of the initial estimates due to premium prices charged by contractors who routinely complain that the Town of Chapel Hill is "difficult."
4. If the Town of Chapel Hill justifies its position based on Public Interest, then it would be fair to require the Public to bear some or all of the costs of sprinkler installation. Alternatively, if the Town contends that sprinkler installation costs only 3 dollars PSF to install, and bases its decision on this estimate, then let the Town bear any expense over and above this amount.
5. Lastly, Lucy's feels that its rights are currently vested. Lucy's obtained a CO less that two years ago and has been approved for an expansion. Sprinklers were not required and we have acted in good faith reliance thereupon.

Thank you for your attention to this email. I wish that I could have been there in person but I did not receive much notice, and I am out of town.

Norman Bullard