SUPPORT EFFECTIVE BUILDING CODES

KEY POINTS

- ❖ HB 1618 proposes a minor fee increase, with legislative approval for future increases.
- ❖ State building fees have not been updated in 24 years.
- ❖ SBCC is responsible for all codes related to building safety, efficiency and accessibility.
- ❖ SB 5378 would increase code compliance costs and expose WA to new liability.
- ❖ WA needs to adhere to the national model code cycle of 3 years.
- ❖ A 3-year code cycles allows for greater code flexibility to adjust to needed public safety standards.
- ❖ Architects work in multiple states and rely upon consistent base codes to be effective.

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SUPPORT ADEQUATE FINANCING FOR BUILDING CODE DEVELOPMENT

(HB 1618, Sponsors: Reps. Ormsby, Morris, Takko, Hunt, Liias, Tharinger, Fitzgibbon, Fey, Moscoso, Ryu)

The State Building Code Council is responsible for developing Washington's life safety and related building codes. Every citizen relies upon these codes to ensure buildings are designed and built to withstand earthquakes, prevent the spread of fire, provide accessibility, meet life-safety requirements, and are energy efficient.

The SBCC is fully fee supported by a fee of $4.50 per building permit, which has not changed in 24 years. If it receives no additional funding, the SBCC is on track for insolvency by 2015.

HB 1618 would adopt a minor increase for residential permits to $5.50 and commercial permits to $8.00. This is compared to project costs of hundreds of thousands of dollars for a home or millions of dollars for commercial projects.

HB 1618 would also allow a 6-month contingency with capacity for 3-months' worth of the contingency to be used for code training to jurisdictions and builders/designers. It would allow energy code alternatives and economic impact studies on proposed codes as well as legal fees charged to the agency. Subsequent fee revisions would be indexed to inflation at five-cent increments (for accounting simplicity) up or down – as recommended by the SBCC and approved by the legislature.

OPPOSE WEAKENING OF THE CODE DEVELOPMENT CYCLE

(SB 5378, *Sponsors*: Senators Benton, Schoesler, Bailey, Carrell, Becker, Holmquist Newbry, Sheldon, Ericksen, Dammeier)

Washington State adopts national model codes as the basis for its building and related codes. All of the national code development organizations utilize a 3-year cycle for updating their codes. SB 5378 proposes to take Washington off of the current 3-year update cycle and put our state on a 6-year cycle. Putting Washington out-of-sync with the national standards would weaken our codes and expose our architects, engineers, designers and contractors to new liability.

For instance, Washington enjoys safe harbor from accessibility-related lawsuits from the American with Disabilities Act and the National Fair Housing Standards, provided we use the latest model codes. Extending the code development cycle would put Washington out-of-sync with the federal standards and, thus, remove our safe harbor.

Extending the code cycle to 6 years would mean more expensive leaps in standards instead of modest adjustments every 3 years. Certification and training programs are developed nationally and would not be applicable in Washington, increasing training costs.

Architects work in multiple states and nearly all of the US states use the same base model codes. Moving Washington out-of-sync with other states and national standards would increase costs to comply with outdated codes in WA.