



MEMORANDUM

TO: Deschutes County Planning Commission

FROM: Kyle Collins, Senior Planner
Will Groves, Planning Manager

DATE: December 3, 2025

SUBJECT: Work Session and Public Hearing: Text Amendments for Wildfire Mitigation Building Codes

The Deschutes County Planning Commission (Commission) will conduct a public hearing on December 11, 2025, to consider amendments to the Deschutes County Code (file no. 247-25-000703-TA). The amendments are intended to adopt discretionary wildfire mitigation residential building code standards that have recently been made available to local jurisdictions. This proposal does not cover defensible space standards, as any future amendments to address defensible space will be covered in a future project at the Board of County Commissioners' (Board's) direction.

Attached to this memorandum are the findings (Attachment A) and proposed text amendments (Attachment B) summarizing the changes. Within the proposed amendments, added language is shown underlined, and deleted language is shown as ~~strikethrough~~.

All record materials can be found on the project website: <https://bit.ly/0703TA>

I. BACKGROUND

During the 2021 state legislative session, Senate Bill (SB) 762¹ was passed to help modernize and improve wildfire preparedness across Oregon. SB 762 was subsequently modified by the passage of SB 80² in 2023. These pieces of legislation were developed to address wildfire issues through three key strategies: creating fire-adapted communities, developing safe and effective responses, and increasing the resiliency of Oregon's landscapes.

¹ <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2021R1/Downloads/MeasureDocument/SB762/Enrolled>

² <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2023R1/Downloads/MeasureDocument/SB80/Enrolled>

One of the primary components of SBs 762 and 80 was the creation of a comprehensive Statewide Wildfire Hazard Map (Hazard Map) to guide new wildfire regulations for residential development. Under SBs 762 and 80, once the Hazard Map was finalized, properties included in **both** a designated Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) boundary and classified as high hazard would be subject to additional development regulations. SB 80 required that, at a minimum, local governments ensure that properties meeting both of these classifications would be subject to:

- 1) Home hardening building codes as described in Section R327 of the Oregon Residential Specialty Code (ORSC).
- 2) Defensible space standards as determined by the Oregon State Fire Marshal.

However, due to public concern the state legislature repealed the Hazard Map and all associated requirements in June 2025 with the passage of SB 83³.

At the local level, Deschutes County previously went through an exercise in 2019-2020 with the collaborative Wildfire Mitigation Advisory Committee (WMAC) to determine if changes were warranted to the Deschutes County Wildfire Hazard Zone⁴ and whether additional mitigation standards should be considered for new development. That process ultimately concluded with a report summarizing recommendations from the WMAC⁵ as well as an outreach report gauging public interest in new wildfire mitigation standards⁶. Ultimately, the Board decided the Deschutes County Wildfire Hazard Zone should remain unchanged. Prior to continued discussions regarding potential new wildfire mitigation standards, SB 762 was passed and largely removed local discretion on new mitigation standards until present.

II. OVERVIEW OF BUILDING CODE AMENDMENTS

The proposed text amendments would institute Section R327 of the ORSC in Deschutes County for all new residential development, including certain residential accessory structures. The Section R327 standards do not allow for piecemeal adoption, and all standards must be adopted in whole if building officials wish to mandate any portion within their jurisdictions.

³ <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2025R1/Downloads/MeasureDocument/SB83/Enrolled>

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https://www.deschutes.org/sites/default/files/fileattachments/community_development/page/17911/ordinance_2001-024.pdf

⁵

https://www.deschutes.org/sites/default/files/fileattachments/community_development/page/17911/2020-04-17_wmac_final_report_complete.pdf

⁶

https://www.deschutes.org/sites/default/files/fileattachments/community_development/page/17911/wildfire_mitigation_outreach_summary_report.pdf

As currently proposed, the amendments are limited to Deschutes County Code Title 15⁷, which captures general building safety and construction standards. As such, the proposed amendments are not subject to the more standard Post-Acknowledgement Plan Amendment (PAPA) process for land use amendments, which requires noticing to the Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) and addressing the applicable 19 Oregon Statewide Planning Goals.

These new building code standards would apply to newly constructed dwellings and their accessory structures. Section R327 broadly covers the following structural components of these developments to minimize the risk of wildfire ignition:

- **Roofing:** In accordance with specific building code standards, roofing shall be asphalt shingles, slate shingles, metal roofing, tile, clay or concrete shingles, or other approved roofing that is deemed to be equivalent to a minimum Class B-rated roof assembly. Wood shingle and shake roofs are not permitted on structures.
- **Exterior walls:** Exterior wall covering or wall assembly shall comply with one of the following requirements:
 - Noncombustible material.
 - Ignition-resistant material.
 - Heavy timber assembly.
 - Log wall construction assembly.
 - Wall assemblies that have been tested in accordance with the test procedures for a 10-minute direct flame contact exposure test.
- **Glazing:** Exterior windows, windows within exterior doors, and skylights shall be tempered glass, multilayered glazed panels, glass block, or have a fire-resistance rating of not less than 20 minutes.
- **Ventilation:** All ventilation openings shall be covered with noncombustible corrosion-resistant metal wire mesh, vents designed to resist the intrusion of burning embers and flame, or other approved materials or devices. Ventilation mesh and screening shall be a minimum of 1/16-inch and a maximum of 1/8-inch in any dimension.
- **Gutters and Downspouts:** Where provided, gutters and downspouts shall be constructed of noncombustible materials and be provided with an approved means to prevent accumulation of leaves and debris in the gutter.
- **Eaves, Soffits, and Cornices:** Ventilation openings shall not be installed on the underside of eaves, soffits, or cornices.

The list above is not exhaustive, but covers the major components of home construction that would be affected by the proposed amendments.

Major exceptions to the Section R327 standards include the following:

- Nonhabitable detached accessory structures with a floor area of not greater than 400 square feet located not less than 50 feet from all structures on the lot that contain habitable space.
- Structures exempted by ORS 455.315 (i.e. – agriculturally exempt structures).
- Detached accessory membrane-covered frame structures.

Section R327 also previously contained several provisions which were modified by SB 83:

- Repairs or replacements of existing components (i.e. – roofs, siding, etc.) and additions to existing dwellings are not mandatorily subject to R327.
- Removes requirements for local government to identify specific geographic regions for implementing any adopted wildfire mitigation standards. Previously, Section R327 and associated mitigation requirements were required to be implemented through the establishment of a locally adopted “Wildfire Hazard Map.” This requirement has been removed, and jurisdictions have been granted broad latitude to determine where to implement any locally adopted standards.

III. **PROJECTED COSTS**

A repeated question from community members and decision makers regarding Section R327 is what, if any, anticipated cost increases can be expected from applying the standards to new construction. Staff notes the difficulty in providing a succinct answer, as there are significant variables that can dramatically impact final cost outcomes, including:

- The design choices made by the landowner, as these choices may or may not be covered under Section R327
- The proposed size for any particular development
- Homeowner Association (HOA) standards
- Labor costs and contractor familiarity with materials

Despite these variables, staff has attached several items to this memo which attempt to provide broadly applicable estimates for typical residential construction.

Two of these attachments were prepared by the Oregon Building Codes Division (BCD) in 2019 as the state anticipated mandating Section R327 standards statewide. At the time, BCD reported that R327 standards could **add approximately \$2,500-\$3,000** to the existing costs of a typical 1,200 square foot detached single-family dwelling. This increase includes the costs of labor and materials to comply with the new provisions. However, BCD also

references reports from third parties which found that costs could increase by up to 11%, and in at least one case study from Montana, the implementation of these standards decreased construction costs by 2.4% over traditional methods.

The final attachment was prepared by Headwaters Economics in 2025 and is based on estimated construction costs in southern California. Given the location assumed in the report, these estimates may have limited applicability in Deschutes County, however it has been included to provide at least some objective analysis in estimating costs. The report concludes that incorporating wildfire-resistant building materials can be achieved at a relatively modest increase in cost compared to traditional construction. For a one-story, 1,750-square-foot mid-range home valued at \$500,000, total construction costs may **increase by 2-3%** over a traditional home.

Finally, BCD notes that the Oregon Home Builders Association submitted estimates when Section R327 was first adopted in 2019. It estimated that the cost of a high-end home would increase by \$12,500, the cost of a production 1,200 square foot home would increase by \$7,800, and the cost of a production 2,200 square foot home would increase by \$10,800. The home builders estimated that current (2019) increased construction costs would lead to a cost increase on a 1,400 square foot home of \$8,200⁸. Staff notes it is unclear what assumptions and methods the Builders Association used to generate these estimates, but they are included here for reference.

Given the wide range of estimates and variables to consider, it is likely impossible to provide a definitive answer to the question of cost effects. Based on the information that is available, at this time staff conservatively estimates that costs **may increase somewhere in the range of 2-11% over the cost of traditional construction**, but also points out the following issues to consider:

- Many of the materials and methods covered under Section R327 are commonly utilized by contractors and developers in the region, particularly for some of the highest value items such as roofing, fiber cement siding, and windows.
- New residential construction is largely developed with 30-year mortgages or similar financing options. This means that any additional costs are more accurately considered when amortized over the timespan of any loan in question.

IV. RECOMMENDATION AREAS

There are two primary areas for the Commission to consider when preparing its recommendation to the Board:

1) Should the Section R327 standards be adopted?

⁸ <https://records.sos.state.or.us/ORSOSWebDrawer/Recordhtml/12709721>

2) If yes, where should the Section R327 standards be implemented?

If the Board ultimately determines that new mitigation standards are warranted, a key decision point will be the geographic scope where standards would apply. While the standards can technically be targeted to specific geographic regions of the County, staff would caution that this approach presents the following challenges:

- Any discrepancy in the applicability of new mitigation standards may create community friction, as previously seen during the State Wildfire Hazard Zone mapping process.
- Local fire protection officials have repeatedly expressed the broadscale community risk from wildfire in Deschutes County, regardless of specific location. Equal application of these standards presents the greatest opportunity to begin mitigating wildfire impacts to residential development.
- Should mitigation standards be targeted to specific geographic areas, then any proposed amendments will need to be evaluated under a land use process, which has distinct procedural requirements that must be addressed. This would require restarting the current review process to apply these new procedures, potentially delaying the project by several additional months.

V. AGENCY AND PUBLIC COMMENTS

No public comments have been received to date.

VI. NEXT STEPS

At the conclusion of the public hearing, the Planning Commission may:

- Continue the hearing to a date certain; or
- Close the hearing and leave the written record open to a date certain; or
- Close the hearing and set a date for deliberations; or
- Close the hearing and commence deliberations.

Attachments

- A. Proposed Findings
- B. Text Amendments
- C. 2023 Oregon Residential Specialty Code Amendments (Section R327 Wildfire Mitigation Standards)
- D. 2025 Notice of Temporary Rule from the Oregon Building Code Division (BCD)
- E. BCD Cost Estimate Fact Sheet for Home Hardening
- F. 2025 Headwaters Economics Report - Construction Costs for Wildfire-Resistant Homes