

Building Code Update Frequently Asked Questions

Why do we need to update our building codes?

Building codes are like the “rules of the road” for construction. They help make sure homes and buildings are reasonably safe, strong, and energy efficient. Updating these codes helps keep our community in line with the latest safety standards and construction practices, not to mention keeping the standards of our city in line with our peer jurisdictions in the region.

What is the city hoping to accomplish with this update?

Building codes create a baseline for *minimum standards* for construction in our community, allowing the public to have a minimum expectation for what should be done for a building in the city. Current building codes assist in protecting property values and supporting long-term growth.

How often do codes get updated?

Most codes and standards are updated on a *three-year cycle*. Discussion, debate, and adoption of modifications to the code happen many years prior to the publication of each edition. Said another way, by the time a new version of the code is available, there have already been a number of new updates, case studies, and construction developments that have occurred. The State of Kansas operates as a home-rule state, allowing each jurisdiction to decide for itself when to adopt them. It’s up to each community and their elected officials to gauge when an update is appropriate so the community doesn’t fall too far behind. Typically, communities adopt new codes on an every-other year cycle, therefore making the period between the current codes and the proposed new codes six years.

How will this benefit our community?

Building code updates serve to establish *clear expectations* for those building in our community from the do-it-yourself homeowner all the way up to a large-scale developer. Clear expectations yield good results from construction. The building code addresses not only life safety items, but other items such as energy conservation, extension of useful life, ease of repair, basic sanitation, and indoor environmental quality.

Will this make it more expensive to build?

While there’s no clear answer to the question of added expense since every project is unique, the construction industry has made significant process improvements that have allowed for efficiencies in the installation process. These efficiencies have made what was once a very expensive building process into a much more affordable way to accomplish building to these higher standards. The building code serves as a minimum or a floor for construction rather than a ceiling.

Do these changes affect my current home?

No. Existing homes or buildings usually don’t have to meet the new code unless there’s a major remodel, addition, or a big change in how the building is used. There are separate codes that outline the requirements of the minimum housing requirements that will still apply to existing structures, and there are no changes to those provisions of the municipal code associated with this building code update process.

How will the city roll out these changes?

City staff, elected officials, appointed work group members and third parties have reviewed the updated codes, adjusted them to fit our community, and have shared information along the way with

builders and developers through a focus group. There will be additional chances for residents, contractors, and business owners to learn about the changes and ask questions once the proposed building code updates and amendments are shared with the City Council but prior to adoption.

What about the effect on builders and contractors?

They'll need to follow the new rules for new projects. The city will provide training and resources to help make the transition smooth. Select builders who have been involved in work in our community have been consulted on their input during this process and the proposed final version of these codes reflects their feedback.

What are the implications of the updates to the energy code provisions?

The energy code is often where the biggest concerns come up. Things like upgraded insulation, windows, and heating/cooling systems can add upfront costs. However, these updates are designed to save money over the life of the home or building by lowering monthly utility bills. The goal is to strike a balance: keep new homes affordable to build while also making sure they're comfortable, efficient, and less costly to live in long-term. In many ways, the market and the expectations for new home buyers (such as anticipated utility bills) has already driven up the minimum energy provisions for new homes in the KC metro.

How does this help me as a resident?

As our community redevelops, it is important to clearly outline the updated requirements for new construction, renovation, and repair for structures in our community. There is a part to be played by all stakeholders in the community to do their part in raising the bar for structures in our city.

Where can I learn more or share my thoughts?

You'll find updates on the city website, at public meetings, or by contacting the city directly at info@westwoodks.org. We welcome your feedback!