

Subject: Concerns Regarding Mandatory Sprinkler Systems for New Houses

Raymond Planning Board

401 Webbs Mills Road

Raymond, Maine 04071

Date: April 10, 2024

Dear Members of the Raymond Planning Board,

My name is Jeff Soules, owner of Lot 5 on Woodstone Way, and I am writing this letter as an appeal against the requirement of a sprinkler system in the construction of our new house on the aforementioned lot. While I understand the importance of fire safety, I believe there are valid reasons why this requirement should be reconsidered.

**Current Ordinance:** The Town of Raymond currently has a Fire Protection Ordinance (Updated in 2021) which states that all new construction with gross square footage of 4,800 or greater requires a NFPA 13D sprinkler system. Our house, including the basement, is only 2,850 square feet. From a conversation with Wayne Jones, I learned that it is the Subdivision Ordinance (Article 5, Section 2, Sub-Section B, 24) that gives the Planning Board the authority to require a sprinkler system regardless of the parameters set in the Fire Protection Ordinance. In a more traditional subdivision where the houses are built much closer together and there is a chance of fires spreading from one house to another, I could understand having additional water needs and a lower bar for houses to have a sprinkler system. Given that our house sits on a 25-acre lot and there is virtually no possibility of a house fire spreading to neighboring properties, I believe the Planning Board should revert to the guidelines in the Fire Protection Ordinance. The language in the Subdivision Ordinance states “ensuring adequate on-site water supply for fire suppression” which leaves room for interpretation by the Planning Board. If a single home, less than 4,800 gross square feet on 25 acres lot not in a subdivision is considered to have adequate water supply, I would argue that that same house being in a subdivision does not change the amount of water needed.

**NFPA 13D:** NFPA 13D sprinkler systems, per the National Fire Protection Association, are designed for “Life Safety” only and have no purpose for property protection. There is no mention of their use in aiding in “adequate water supply”. Given the purpose is simply to

create more time for residents to exit the home in the event of a fire, I believe the Planning Board should, again, revert to the Fire Protection Ordinance in determining the need for a house within a subdivision to have a sprinkler system. In the design of our house, we have five doorway egresses and window more window egresses on the first floor alone. Exiting our house in the event of a fire would not be an issue.

**Cost Burden on Homeowners:** Installing a sprinkler system in a new home is a significant financial burden for homeowners. The upfront costs include equipment, installation, and ongoing maintenance. For families already stretching their budgets to afford a new home, given the rise in building and labor costs, this additional expense can be daunting. We are looking at an additional \$15,000 expense that was not originally planned for.

**Low Fire Risk in Residential Homes:** Residential fires are relatively rare, especially in well-constructed homes. Modern building codes already incorporate fire-resistant materials, smoke detectors, and other safety features. The likelihood of a catastrophic fire breaking out in a new single-family home is minimal. I believe the decision should be left to the individual homeowner on the types of systems they would like to include in their home.

**Maintenance Challenges & Potential Failures:** Sprinkler systems require regular inspections, testing, and maintenance. Homeowners must bear the responsibility of ensuring that these systems function properly. Failure to maintain them could lead to false alarms, water damage, or even system malfunctions during an actual emergency. Even after all the cost and maintenance of a system, there is still the potential that the system fails when needed most. In the most recent house fire in Raymond, it is my understanding that the house had a sprinkler system, which failed because the house had no power during that storm. Does this mean that the next update to the ordinance will be to have an automatic generator that kicks on to run the pump? This could again add tens of thousands of dollars to new construction costs.

In light of these considerations, I urge the Raymond Planning Board to reevaluate the requirement for us to have a sprinkler system in our new house.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I appreciate your dedication to community safety and thoughtful decision-making.

Sincerely,

Jeff Soules

Woodstone Way, Lot 5