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RIBA testimony helps ease first code restrictions

December 13, 2012 - Rhode Island

Prompted by ongoing testimony on behalf of small businesses, especially by the Rhode Island Builders Association, the Rhode Island Fire Safety Code Board of Appeal and Review (FSCB) has decided to ease up on some of the state's more costly fire code regulations, especially when it comes to alarm systems.

According to Eric Wishart of Civil CADD Services Inc., a member of the association's legislative committee, RIBA was the only business group to testify at the recent hearings.

Convinced that revisions can be made without compromising public safety, the FSCB made these major changes:

- * Increased thresholds for alarm requirements. This basically involves the s/f in which an alarm system is required. This has risen from 2,500 to 10,000. Thresholds for requiring direct connections of alarm systems to fire stations have also increased.
- * Property owners who installed alarm systems under the older, more restrictive requirements will no longer have to maintain them as previously mandated, eliminating the need for frequent inspections.
- * Those with municipally connected alarm systems installed under the old rules will be granted relief from the sprinkler requirements.
- * The requirement threshold for municipally connected alarm systems in apartments has gone from eight to 12 units.

One change that RIBA hoped for did not happen. The legislature in 2011 passed the 2010 National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) code (the alarm and signaling code), allowing alarm-wiring systems to be installed without conduit, and allowing third-party alarm-monitoring services. When this came to the fire code board for re-consideration this year, labor interests blocked both provisions.

In 2004, the FSCB reacted to the Station nightclub fire of 2003 by severely tightening restrictions when it came to businesses, especially in the area of alarm systems.

The general assembly approved these and they took effect, making Rhode Island's fire code one of the toughest in the country. More recently, the General Assembly gave the FSCB the authority to make changes to the code on its own, without legislative approval.

RIBA representatives, notably executive director John Marcantonio, along with legislative committee co-chair Edgar Ladouceur of the Stormtite Co., Wishart, and committee member Stephen Olson of DePasquale Bros. Inc., testified at two separate hearings since July.

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