

Huntley may snuff out fire sprinklers

By Jameel Naqvi

jnaqvi@dailyherald.com

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The Huntley village board may scrap an ordinance that requires all new homes in the village to have fire sprinklers, village officials said Tuesday.

Board members cited the cost of installing and maintaining the sprinklers, as well as the fact that few nearby towns require sprinklers, as reasons for the change.

Trustees who support the move want to make the fire sprinklers optional for single-family homes while keeping sprinkler requirements for businesses and multifamily housing.

But the Huntley fire department supports keeping the sprinkler requirement, saying fire sprinklers save lives and reduce injuries and property loss.

Huntley Fire Chief Jim Saletta plans to present the case for sprinklers at Huntley's village board meeting on Thursday night.

The board is not scheduled to vote on the issue Thursday but may revisit the sprinkler ordinance in coming weeks, village officials said.

The board adopted the current fire sprinkler requirements with little fanfare two years ago, but since then trustees have expressed doubts about the wisdom of that decision.

One reason, trustees say, is the cost of the sprinklers for new homeowners, estimated at \$2,500 to \$5,000.

"We think considering the cost ... it's a little heavy-handed of us to be requiring people to pay that," Trustee Paul Mercer said. "The homeowners themselves should determine if they want that type of protection."

Opponents of mandatory sprinklers in homes also cited the absence of the requirement in nearby towns. Neither Algonquin nor Huntley, the other towns in the Huntley Fire Protection District, requires sprinklers in new homes.

"The surrounding towns — we'd like to be on an even playing field with them," Village President Chuck Sass said. Sass said the cost of the fire sprinklers makes the home prices in Huntley less competitive.

But Saletta said fire sprinklers are a critical tool in fighting fires.

"They're the best tool that we have to prevent the injury and death of residents from fire," Saletta said. "As of yet, we haven't had a fire in a sprinkled home."

Saletta also cited a 20-year study of fire sprinklers in Scottsdale, Ariz. In that study, there were 13 fire deaths in homes without sprinklers and no fire deaths in homes with sprinklers.

The village board is not united in opposition to mandatory sprinklers in homes. Trustee Pam Fender said she is undecided.

"How do you say no to fire suppression?" Fender said. But, she added, "The price is much higher than anyone thought it would be."