

First Reading: July 15, 2025
Second Reading: July 22, 2025

ORDINANCE NO. 14254

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING CHATTANOOGA CITY CODE,
PART II, CHAPTER 10, SECTION 10-3 RELATING TO
AMENDMENTS TO THE 2018 INTERNATIONAL BUILDING
CODE REGARDING SINGLE EXIT STAIRWAYS.

WHEREAS, Tennessee state law was recently amended with Tennessee Code Annotated § 68-120-101(11)(A) to allow local governments to amend their adopted building codes to allow multifamily residential buildings up to six (6) stories to be served by a single exit; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to Tennessee Code Annotated § 68-120-101(b)(2)(C), local governments can adopt amended versions of the International Building Code as long as the provisions are “designed to afford a reasonable degree of safety to life and property from fire and hazards incident to the design, construction, alteration, and repair of buildings or structures within the jurisdiction”; and

WHEREAS, the conditions contained in this ordinance meet and exceed the state law requirements for fire safety; and

WHEREAS, the conditions contained in this ordinance require the installation of automatic sprinklers in all dwelling units, which the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) found to be operated and effective in 93% of home fires (including apartments) that were large enough to activate them. The NFPA found that in reported home structure fires (including apartments) where sprinklers were present, the fire was confined to the object or room of origin 96% of the time; and

WHEREAS, the ordinance further requires buildings to be of one hour fire-resistive construction to limit the potential for a fire to spread beyond the unit of origin; and

WHEREAS, the conditions contained in this ordinance require a shorter distance from unit to exit compared to the distance permitted in two stair structures; and

WHEREAS, the ordinance further requires that dwelling units open onto a corridor which is separated from the interior exit stairway by a fire-rated door; and

WHEREAS, the ordinance further requires interior exit stairways to be fire rated and pressurized to prevent smoke from entering the exit stairway; and

WHEREAS, the ordinance further limits the maximum number of dwelling units that can be served by a single stair by limiting the height of the structure to five stories and the number of units per story to four, permitting a maximum of twenty (20) dwelling units to be served by a single exit stairway; and

WHEREAS, a single-stair point access block is a desirable multi-family housing typology with several key benefits, including: enabling smaller-scale, “missing-middle” multi-family buildings, creating more economical and efficient floor plans with less space dedicated to circulation, and providing more appealing housing units with improved natural light and ventilation; and

WHEREAS, Tennessee Code Annotated § 68-120-101(11)(A) states that it “shall not prohibit less than six (6) stories of Group R-2 occupancy, as defined in the building code adopted by the Department of Commerce and Insurance, Division of Fire Prevention, to be served by a single exit” provided the conditions outlined in § 68-120-101(11)(A) are met.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. That Chattanooga City Code, Part II, Chapter 10, Section 10-3 regarding 2018 International Building Code amendments, be amended by adding the following as a new subsection (q) as follows:

- q. Section 1006.3.3 of the 2018 Edition of the International Building Code is hereby amended by adding a new condition 6 as follows:
 - 6. Not more than five (5) stories of Group R-2 occupancy are permitted to be served by a single exit under the following conditions:
 - (i) The building has not more than five (5) stories above grade plane;
 - (ii) The building does not contain more than four (4) dwelling units on any floor;
 - (iii) The building shall be of not less than one hour fire-resistive construction and shall also be equipped throughout with an automatic sprinkler system in accordance with Section 903.3.1.1 Residential-type sprinklers shall be used in all habitable spaces in each dwelling unit;
 - (iv) An interior exit stairway shall be provided. The interior exit stairway shall be of noncombustible materials. The interior exit stairway, including any related exit passageway, shall be pressurized in accordance with Section 909.20. Doors in the stairway shall swing into the interior exit stairway regardless of the occupant load served;
 - (v) A corridor shall separate each dwelling unit entry/exit door from the door to an interior exit stairway, including any related exit passageway on each floor. Dwelling unit doors shall not open directly into an interior exit stairway;

- (vi) There shall be no more than twenty feet (20') of travel to the exit stairway from the entry/exit door of any dwelling unit;
- (vii) Travel distance measured in accordance with Section 1017.3, shall not exceed one hundred twenty-five feet (125');
- (viii) Other occupancies are permitted in the same building provided they comply with all the requirements of this code. Other occupancies shall not communicate with the Group R-2 occupancy portion of the building or with the single-exit stairway. Exception: parking garages and occupied roofs accessory to the Group R-2 occupancy are permitted to communicate with the exit stairway;
- (ix) The exit serving the Group R-2 occupancy shall not discharge through any other occupancy, including an accessory parking garage;
- (x) There shall be no openings within ten feet (10') of unprotected openings into the stairway other than required exit doors having a one-hour, fire-resistive rating; and
- (xi) There shall be no more than one single exit stairway condition on the same property.

SECTION 2. BE IT FURTHER ORDAINED, That this Ordinance shall take effect two (2) weeks from and after its passage.

Passed on second and final reading: July 22, 2025


CHAIRPERSON

APPROVED: ☒ DISAPPROVED: ☐


MAYOR

PAN/mem/v2