



March 31, 2025

Adoption of Building Codes

Dear Reader:

The following document was created from the CTAS website (ctas.tennessee.edu). This website is maintained by CTAS staff and seeks to represent the most current information regarding issues relative to Tennessee county government.

We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with county government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other CTAS website material.

Sincerely,

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Adoption of Building Codes

Reference Number: CTAS-616

The county legislative body may enact a resolution that adopts by reference any prepared building, plumbing, gas or fire prevention code. At least 90 days before the adoption of a resolution incorporating a code by reference, at least one copy of the code must be filed in the office of the county clerk. No resolution that adopts a code by reference will be effective until it is published in a newspaper of general circulation. T.C.A. § 5-20-102. Any code adopted by reference must be retained on file as a public record. T.C.A. § 5-1-116. These provisions apply only to the unincorporated area of a county and to those incorporated cities and towns within the county that do not elect to adopt their own codes regulating the same subject areas. T.C.A. § 5-20-106.

The adopting resolution may also incorporate by reference the administrative provisions of any code, or may include in the adopting resolution any suggested administrative provisions found in a code. If a code does not contain administrative provisions, the administrative provisions of another code may be adopted and included in the resolution. However, the penalty clause contained in such a code may not be incorporated by reference. T.C.A. § 5-20-105(a). Any official within the existing framework of county government may be charged with enforcing the code, including but not limited to officials who administer zoning regulations. T.C.A. § 5-20-103. A violation of any code is a misdemeanor. T.C.A. § 5-20-105(b). Additional enforcement power is vested in the county attorney or other designated county official who may, in addition to other remedies provided by law, obtain an injunction to prevent violation of any provision of the code. T.C.A. § 5-20-104.

Pursuant to T.C.A. § 68-120-101(a)(8), if a local government seeks to require sprinklers in residential construction, such requirements must be adopted by a 2/3 vote only after reading such ordinance or resolution in open session of the legislative body at meetings specially called on two (2) different days that are no less than two (2) weeks apart. Also requires that mandatory sprinkler requirements shall be voted on in an ordinance or resolution separate from any other ordinance or resolution addressing building construction safety standards.

The state fire marshal will recognize and accept certification of state, county and municipal employees from the National Fire Protection Association or the International Code Council, as satisfying the standards and qualifications for fire prevention and building officials. A county or other employing governmental entity must have all newly employed applicants for fire safety and building inspectors certified within 12 months of employment. T.C.A. § 68-120-113. Additionally, 2007 Public Chapter 582 enacted T.C.A. § 68-120-118, which requires that all persons entering into employment after July 1, 2008 as inspectors to enforce plumbing, mechanical and fuel gas codes be certified by the state fire marshal. Inspectors hired after July 1, 2008 have up to 12 months from their date of employment to obtain certification; those who were already employed on July 1, 2008, are deemed to meet the certification requirements for 3 years from the date of certification, but will have to meet the requirements upon re-certification at the end of the initial 3 years. All certifications must be renewed every 3 years. The state fire marshal is directed to issue rules and regulations regarding standards and qualifications for certification, as well as a form application for certification.

Effective October 1, 2024, persons are authorized to engage third party inspectors and plans examiners rather than local jurisdictions. T.C.A. § 68-120-101.

Source URL: <https://www.ctas.tennessee.edu/eli/adoption-building-codes>