

Building Code Updates: A Practical Roadmap for Kansas Municipalities

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About Your Presenter



- Joe Kmetz, PE - Building Code Services Lead, GBA
- Licensed Professional Engineer, Fire Protection (Kansas)
- Nine years as a plan reviewer, inspector, and design engineer
- Building official and third-party reviewer for Kansas cities
- Supported Edgerton, Basehor, Roeland Park, Westwood and Spring Hill on code adoptions
- Roeland Park Planning Commission; ICC MetroKC Member; JOCO Building Officials Association Member

Today's Roadmap

- Why communities update their codes
- How adoption works, and who should be in the room
- What Kansas law requires
- What changed under SB 418
- A practical, regional path forward
- Three checkpoints where I will ask for your input

Quick Poll: Where Is Your City?

- Raise your hand if your city updated its codes in the last five years
- Keep it up if you adopted the full code family, not just one code
- Who has local amendments no one can explain the origin of?
- Who heard about SB 418 from a builder before hearing it from staff?
- Who has one person doing plan review, inspections, and permits?
- Whose permit fee schedule is older than the code it supports?
- [Hold that last answer - we will come back to it]

What Building Codes Actually Do

- Set **minimum standards** for life safety and structural stability
- Govern fire protection, building systems, and sanitation
- Establish **accessibility** and **energy** efficiency requirements
- Provide a framework for alterations to **existing buildings**
- Codes are minimum standards, not design manuals
- They create predictable expectations for owners, designers, contractors, and inspectors
- They protect current occupants and future owners

The Code Family Tree

- IBC: Commercial and multifamily buildings
- IRC: One- and two-family dwellings and townhouses
- IFC: Fire prevention and operations
- IEBC: Existing buildings
- IPC, IMC, IFGC: Plumbing, mechanical, fuel gas
- IECC: Energy conservation
- NEC / NFPA 70: Electrical | ISPSC: Pools and spas
- IPMC: Property maintenance after the permit closes

After the Permit Closes

- The building code governs until the certificate of occupancy
- After that, the Property Maintenance Code is your authority
- IPMC: failing roofs, blocked egress, unsafe vacant property
- Adopt it in the same cycle, not as a later emergency ordinance
- Pair it with dangerous-building and nuisance enforcement
- Without it, staff take the call with nothing to cite
- Who has been asked to act on a bad building with no code to cite?

Why Update Instead of Staying Put?

- New construction technology and materials
- Updated fire and life-safety knowledge
- Emerging hazards: batteries, energy storage, alternative fuels
- New provisions for CO detection, EV charging, A2L refrigerants
- Better existing-building options
- Greater regional consistency and clearer expectations
- Smaller, less disruptive future code jumps

Kansas: A Local- Adoption State

- Kansas cities adopt and administer model codes locally
- K.S.A. 12-101: Municipal and home-rule authority
- K.S.A. 12-3009: Adoption of a model code by reference
- K.S.A. 12-3302: Procedures in 12-3009 through 12-3012
- K.S.A. 12-741 et seq.: Planning and zoning authority
- Zoning: where and what may be built
- Building code: how it is built and maintained

Other State Requirements

- Local adoption does not eliminate other state requirements
- K.S.A. 31-133: State Fire Marshal rules for fire, explosion, and hazardous materials
- K.S.A. 31-134a: When compliance with recognized building codes satisfies the Kansas fire prevention code
- K.S.A. 31-150: Separate requirements for school construction, reconstruction, and renovation
- State accessibility, elevator, licensing, floodplain, health, and environmental rules may also apply
- Adopting a local code does not displace every state agency or state requirement

A Practical Adoption Process

- Inventory existing codes, amendments, and forms
- Select the proposed model-code editions
- Compare existing and proposed requirements
- Coordinate building, fire, planning, legal, and administration
- Develop locally justified amendments
- Engage contractors, designers, owners, and residents
- Draft, review, adopt, and publish the ordinance
- Train staff, implement, and evaluate after launch
- Refresh the permit fee schedule in the same pass

Smart Moves: Build a Task Force, Not a Memo

- What works in real Kansas code updates:
- Phase 1: research changes, draft amendments, first task force session
- Phase 2: builder feedback session, then a governing body work session
- Phase 3: revise, adopt, then train staff and the public
- Add virtual stakeholder meetings when people cannot travel
- Publish an FAQ as a public resource before adoption
- Who would you put on your task force? Name three people

Share the Load: A Regional Approach

- A small city should not rest a code update on one inspector
- Larger communities can staff task forces and volunteer review panels
- Neighboring cities can split research and share amendment drafts
- A regional body such as RPOs could publish model recommendations
- Consistent amendments across city lines help contractors and reviewers
- An active ICC chapter is where that sharing already happens
- **Q:** Would your city join a shared regional code review?

The Amendment Test

- What specific local condition does the amendment address?
- Is it more restrictive, less restrictive, or merely administrative?
- Does it conflict with Kansas law?
- Can staff explain and administer it consistently?
- Does the benefit justify the added complexity?
- Is it coordinated with nearby jurisdictions?
- Will it still make sense during the next code cycle?
- Show of hands: who knows why every amendment in your code exists?

What Could Go Wrong?

- Transition rules matter as much as the code itself
- Set the effective date and the length of any transition period
- Decide how submitted and substantially designed projects are treated
- Decide whether optional early compliance is allowed
- Identify which edition governs additions and alterations
- Require applicants to document the applicable code
- Unclear rules create competing code years, rework, and delays

SB 418: High-Level Overview

- Signed April 7, 2026: the By-right Housing Development Act
- 1. By-right approvals: deemed approved in 30, 60, or 90 days
- 2. Third-party review: optional, and only if you opt in by ordinance
- 3. Small homes under 2,500 sq ft: a 2018 IRC option, one-car garages, 3,000 sq ft lots
- 4. Zoning: residential land now also counts as single-family
- LKM has a great resource on this!

A Sustainable Code-Update Cycle

- Do not treat adoption as a once-a-decade emergency
- Review model-code cycles regularly (usually every other)
- Keep an amendment log: what, and why
- Track legislation through an active ICC chapter
- Budget for staff training and public education
- Revisit permit fees with every adoption

Off Cycle Has a Price: ISO

- Begin the next review before the edition goes stale
- ISO grades code currency, and it reaches residents' insurance rates
- Get reviewed on a five-year-old edition and you get dinged
- Know your ISO review year and adopt ahead of it
- Caught off cycle? Appeal to extend the score and re-align
- Offer a grace period, and measure success the morning after

Questions to Take Home

- When was your last coordinated building code update?
- Do you know which local amendments are still necessary?
- Who owns your adoption timeline?
- Is your permit system ready to track multiple residential code paths?
- What is your city's next concrete step?

Questions/Discussion