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DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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YURTS

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ISSUED September 25, 2020

ISSUE:

Several manufacturers produce and sell a cloth/membrane tent known as a “yurt”. These structures have been advertised as an economical means of housing, among other uses. What are the limits and permissible uses of a yurt in Chelan County?

RELEVANT CODE CITATIONS:

When discussing allowable uses for yurts and permitting considerations, the code sections presented below would apply:

Chelan County Code 11.88.280 Yurts.

The use of a yurt that meets the following criteria may be allowed as a single-family residence when consistent with the following:

- (1) Shall be placed on a permanent foundation or pad;
- (2) Is not a camping unit or recreational vehicle as defined in Chapter 14.98;
- (3) Meets the current building code and Chelan-Douglas Health Department requirements.

From the 2015 International Building Code (IBC) Washington State Amendments:

108.1 General. The building official is authorized to issue a permit for temporary structures and temporary uses. Such permits shall be limited as to time of service, but shall not be permitted for more than 180 days. The building official is authorized to grant extensions for demonstrated cause.

Exception: The building official may authorize unheated tents and yurts under 500 square feet accommodating an R-1 occupancy for recreational use as a temporary structure and allow them to be used indefinitely.

From the 2015 International Building Code (IBC)

310.3 Residential Group R-1. Residential occupancies containing sleeping units where the occupants are primarily transient in nature, including: Boarding houses (transient) with more than 10 occupants; Congregate living facilities (transient) with more than 10 occupants; Hotels (transient); Motels (transient)

From the 2015 International Residential Code (IRC):

R101.2 Scope. The provisions of the International Residential Code for One- and Two-family Dwellings shall apply to the construction, alteration, movement, enlargement, replacement, repair, equipment, use and occupancy, location, removal and demolition of detached one- and two-family dwellings and townhouses not more than three stories above grade plane in height with a separate means of egress and their accessory structures.

R107.1 General. The *building official* is authorized to issue a *permit* for temporary structures and temporary uses. Such permits shall be limited as to time of service, but shall not be permitted for more than 180 days. The *building official* is authorized to grant extensions for demonstrated cause.

R107.2 Conformance. Temporary structures and uses shall conform to the structural strength, fire safety, means of egress, light, ventilation and sanitary requirements of this code as necessary to ensure the public health, safety and general welfare.

R303.10 Required heating. When the winter design temperature in Table R301.2(1) is below 60°F, every *dwelling unit* shall be provided with heating facilities capable of maintaining a minimum room temperature of 68°F at a point 3 feet above the floor and 2 feet from exterior walls in all habitable rooms at the design temperature. The installation of one or more portable space heaters shall not be used to achieve compliance with this section.

From the 2015 Washington State Energy Code (WSEC):

R101.2 Scope. This code applies to *residential buildings* and the buildings sites and associated systems and equipment. This code shall be the maximum and minimum energy code for residential construction in each town, city and county.

ANALYSIS:

Reviewing the above reference code citations, in context, several things are clear:

1. Yurts (cloth/membrane type) are a form of a tent.
2. The building codes address permanent and temporary use of structures in general and, more specifically, yurts and membrane structures.
3. The intent of the IRC is to provide minimum safety standards for construction of residential structures.
4. Structures used for human habitation require a minimum level of heating.
5. The WSEC contains minimum energy code requirements for residential occupancies.
6. While provisions for “temporary” structures exist in the code, there is typically a finite amount of time attached to their use. Additionally, they are required to meet the same basic minimum life safety, structural, and efficiency requirements of permanent structures.

POLICY:

Cloth/Fabric yurts may be installed permanently within Chelan County and used in accordance with one of the following provisions:

1. Installation and use of yurts, less than 500 square feet, as a camping or similar recreational tent are allowed as an R1 occupancy, after applying for a permit, as allowed per WAC 51-50-0108. This use is limited to occupants that are “transient” in nature and would include campgrounds and similar small for rent recreational facilities. The structure and supporting platform are provided with an WA State stamped engineered design showing capability of resisting all required design loads (seismic and wind).
Use on a residential lot (1 or 2 family) would not be allowed under these provisions.
2. Installation and use of yurts, larger than 500 square feet, as camping or similar recreational tent are allowed as an R1 occupancy when a permit is applied for, and approved. The structure and supporting platform are provided with an WA State stamped engineered design showing capability of resisting all required design loads (seismic and wind).
 - a. R1 occupancies greater than 500 square feet will require an approved automatic fire suppression system.
3. Installation and use of an unheated yurt on a one- or two-family residential property is allowed provided:
 - a. The use is limited to storage only.
 - b. A permit is applied for, and approved:
 - i. The projected roof area shall not be greater than 400 square feet.
 - c. The proposed structure is shown to comply with the structural design requirements. The structure and supporting platform are provided with an WA State stamped engineered design showing capability of resisting all required design loads (seismic and wind).
4. Installation and use of a yurt on a one- or two-family residential property for living, camping, sleeping, office space, and other similar habitable uses, is allowed provided following conditions are met:
 - a. A permit is applied for, and approved.
 - b. The structure and supporting platform are provided with an WA State stamped engineered design showing capability of resisting all required design loads (seismic and wind).
 - c. The yurt is provided with an indirect heat source that meets the minimum heating requirements described in IRC R303.10, with the following conditions:
 - i. Installation of a direct heat source is prohibited. (Wood/pellet stove, propane stove, electric radiant heat and/or similar).
 - ii. Any indirect heat source must first be approved by the Building Official.
Examples would include radiant heat tubing in the tent platform with the primary heat source a minimum of 10 feet away from the yurt, forced air with the main unit 10 feet away from the unit, or other approved alternatives.
 - d. **OR;** The yurt is modified to comply with all current energy codes mandated by the state for residential occupancies.

5. Installation of any yurt is subject to compliance with all other applicable codes, laws, rules, and land use regulations.

The Building Official may make modifications to this policy at any time.