

**Real Estate Task Force Testing Workshop Report,  
November 30, 2004 to December 4, 2004  
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December 9, 2004 Revised December 16, 2004**

**I. Overall issues and observations:**

The workshops were conducted in a very professional and organized manner. The participants brought a problem-solving attitude to the work, and made a consistent effort to balance the goals of the design standards against the current local development conditions and problems. Many of the promising ideas will require further thought and discussion, but overall, the workshop has significantly advanced the chances for finding that middle ground where real improvements to development quality is achieved while preserving housing products and commercial building types that meet Anchorage's market.

The following are the major issues that I heard presented by designers, builders and developers:

1. The combined impact of the public open space requirement, coupled with private common open space requirement and tree retention
2. Garage width to width of house limitation, may eliminate a marketable affordable housing type.
3. Slope requirements; limitations on cut, height of retaining walls, tree retention and other elements relative to the preservation of essential hill-side characteristics balanced with the minimum amount of development necessary to provide a reasonable return on investment.
4. Possible increased costs of proposed standards:
  - Land costs rising.
  - Affordable housing market is still strong. Anchorage is not an affluent town.
  - Low builder's profit margin: 3-5%
  - High costs of importing building materials – particularly brick.
5. Snow storage impact on parking space.
6. Competition with 'valley' where costs of construction are unaffected by regulations
7. Short construction season requires streamlined permitting process with less need for special staff reviews and variances:
  - Fewer variances / alternative compliance requests mean less suspicion that the developer is trying to get away with something, therefore less concern and opposition from the neighborhoods.
8. Short growing season means landscaping doesn't mature quickly:
  - Climate limits many species.
9. Enforcement serious problem:
  - Not enough people, hard to attract people.
10. Running out of green fields within city boundary.
11. HOAs don't maintain landscaping once it has been provided.

## II. Commercial Tests

### Eagle River – Fred Myers: suburban big box retail building type

#### A. Issues:

1. Existing or proposed landscaping doesn't sufficiently mitigate visual appearance of parking lot.
2. Snow plowing needs to have clear areas; lots of landscaped islands scattered throughout don't work.
3. Ends of parking bays need to be defined by something that can be seen under a lot of snow.
4. On-site snow storage costly; increases parking lot area or unlandscaped area.
  - Land costs high.
  - Commercial uses must truck snow away in order to stay in business.
5. Preserving some trees is very hard to do with big-box building type.
6. 2-3% slopes on parking lots is the maximum because of ice – may require extensive grading, higher retaining walls.
7. Use of railings as prescribed by standards to reduce the width of the perimeter parking lot landscape zone is unrelated to site, and scale of big box.
8. Four-sided architecture requirement unrelated to site, function of big box, context.
9. Utility easements don't count against landscape requirement.
10. Landscape plant material requirement within parking lot landscape islands may be overdone.
11. Likelihood that parking lot lighting would not meet proposed lighting requirements.

### Eagle River – Fred Myers: suburban big box retail building type

#### B. Recommendations:

1. Concentrate landscaping into 1 or 2 linear landscape zonings between parking rows to break up the lot into smaller visual segments.
2. Reduce the quantity of landscaping within the islands and other areas from the proposed standards, but provide more than the existing standards.
3. Allow alternative of snow removal rather than on-site storage for commercial/industrial/institutional uses because they have to have a usable parking lot to stay in business.
4. Reduce tree retention requirement or focus on specimen tree preservation.
5. Relate tree retention requirements to locations that have impact or purpose: e.g. buffer areas, parking lot screening or amelioration. Allow tree retention to count for equal amount (or more if in the right place) of required new landscaping.
6. Reduce 4-sided architecture requirement relative to context – nature of adjoining properties, visibility from street or parking lot.
7. Add non-railing narrower parking lot screening option.
8. Allow utility easements to count some against landscape requirements depending on type and amount of landscaping provided in them.

9. Eliminate retroactive replacement of existing lighting that would be non-conforming under the proposed new lighting standards.

**Stewart Title: urban commercial infill**

**A. Issues:**

1. 30% of building of frontage to be located within maximum and minimum setback zone.
2. Snow storage.
3. Maximum parking requirement related to expected parking needs of use.
4. Separation of building/parking lot by required landscaping from adjoining parking lot/property.
5. Railing requirement for narrower landscape perimeter zone.
6. Impact of mixed-use zone requirements on land use.
7. Lack of good pedestrian environment within R.O.W. for street oriented building requirements to reinforce.
8. Inability of landscaping within utility easements to count against requirements.
9. Inability of landscape zones less than 10 feet wide to count against requirements.

**Stewart Title: urban commercial infill**

**B. Recommendations:**

1. Increase maximum parking limitations for high turnover uses and special conditions. (Shift changes, etc.)
2. Reduce landscape requirements for perimeter/parking lot screening between on-site parking lots and adjoining off-site lots in order to encourage connectivity and sharing of lots.
3. Ensure that an adequate sidewalk system exists in the R.O.W. before requiring (or as part of requirements for redevelopment) building placement next to the street.
4. Broaden requirement for the orientation of the building's front door to the street to include locations clearly visible from the street, but which could be on the side of the building. Coordinate with perimeter landscape requirements so that they do not screen the view of the front door.
5. Allow interior landscape zones to be as narrow as three or four feet for them to count against landscape requirements.
6. Allow landscaping within utility easements to count against some of the landscape requirements depending on their landscaping.
7. Allow alternative of snow removal rather than on-site storage for commercial/industrial/institutional uses because they have to have a usable parking lot to stay in business.

**Stewart Title: urban commercial infill**

**C. Other:**

1. Eliminate the requirement for mixed uses within individual properties/developments in a new mixed-use zone. Provide incentives for mixed uses by property tax abatement, public improvements, public participation in the development, relief from other standards, or possibly greater density.
2. Focus tighter building-to-street relationship requirements to specific areas, not broad-brush over many commercial zones.

### III. Residential tests: Multi-family

#### 7<sup>th</sup> Place, urban multifamily residential infill

##### A. Issues:

1. Location
  - If in CBD, design standards are exempted.
  - If not in CBD, then standards apply.
2. Tree retention would render site unusable for dense, compact development.
3. Private comment open space requirement conflicts with desire for urban, compact development.
4. Driveway slope requirement would require the building to be raised, conflicting with height limit.
5. Masonry/brick material requirement doesn't include other alternatives.
6. Alternative compliance needs more definition.
7. Early tree removal constraint may impede access and geo-technical investigations.
8. Adherence to design standards by other agencies, particularly utilities.
9. Parking requirements may not be an issue in CBD, but in other commercial districts, this project would not meet the requirements.
10. Snow storage may be an issue for the outside portion of the parking.

#### 7<sup>th</sup> Place, urban multifamily residential infill

##### B. Recommendations:

1. Map areas within the City where less tree retention is necessary. Determine what that reduced percentage would be. Tree retention may be more appropriate in R3 and R4 Districts.
2. In lieu of tree retention, provide a payment to a tree retention fund option.
3. Eliminate private common open space requirement in denser and compact areas.
4. Rewrite menu for materials, include other material choices. Create a two-tier menu, where the first tier is composed of the most desirable materials and from which at least one must be chosen.
5. Allow steeper driveway slopes if provided with a snow-melt system.
6. On-site snow storage shouldn't be required where the majority of the parking is covered either in a parking structure or below grade.
7. Educate other agencies and utilities on the intent and scope of the design standards and their relationship to the other agencies' standards and procedures.

#### Town Square, infill multifamily residential

##### A. Issues:

1. Tree retention would require the loss of at least two buildings.

2. Can't count tree retention in utility easements against requirements.
3. Early tree removal would seriously constrain geo-technical testing.
4. Tree protection during construction would eliminate more trees because of needed construction space around the building, often determined by the turning radius of an excavator.
5. Private common open space requirement would further reduce the number of buildings by one.
6. Building materials are not very durable – hardboard panels.
7. While individual buildings have sufficient variation in form, they are repeated without variation, giving the overall impression of anonymity and standardization, rather than individuality and differentiation.
8. Snow storage not accommodated in the parking lot layout.
9. Parking lot landscaping provision may be hard to meet unless site interior landscaping can be also counted for parking lot landscaping.
10. Dead-end access off of a cul-de-sac may be hard for emergency vehicles to negotiate particularly without snow storage.

**Town Square, infill multifamily residential**

**B. Recommendations:**

1. Reduce tree retention requirements, perhaps focusing on preserving specimen trees.
2. Reduce private common open space requirement.
3. Allow interior landscape requirement to count for some of the parking lot landscape requirement.
4. Better define the functions of the private common open space requirement.
5. Provide incentives for better building materials. Perhaps increase the menu choices with two-tier hierarchy – one from Menu I, no matter what, which contains the most desirable materials. An example of such menus might be:

*Materials menu: May choose any number from Type I & II menus, but must choose at least one from the Type I menu.*

*Type I (must choose at least one)*

- a. *Masonry wainscot entirely around the base of the building at least 3 ft 4 in. high.*
- b. *Masonry used on a significant portion of the building's facades. ('Significant' defined as at least one-third), Masonry is defined as:*
  - *Specially-treated CMU (texture and color).*
  - *Brick*
  - *Stone*
  - *High quality artificial stone.*
  - *Architectural pre-cast concrete with texture and reveals.*
- c. *Horizontal lap siding (at least 50% of all facades), horizontal boarding, wood, hardboard, cement board, vinyl, and vinyl-coated hardboard.*
- d. *Vertical board and batten with battens a maximum of 12" o.c. (At least 50% of all facades)*
- e. *Other types: glass-reinforced plastic panels, cementitious panels, etc.*
- f. *Ceramic or masonry tile*

*Type II*

- a. *Textured plywood panel (T III)*

- b. *Textured hardwood panel*
- c. *Metal panel (not highly reflective)*
- d. *Aluminum siding not (highly reflective)*

*Materials not included in either Type I or II for multi-family development*

- *EIFS, untreated or painted 'natural concrete block', site cast concrete panels*

6. Require better internal pedestrian connections.
7. Require some variation between buildings in form, materials and/or color for multi-family developments of, three, or more buildings.
8. Require snow storage areas because, contrary to commercial uses, the economics of multi-family development isn't likely to naturally force snow removal.
9. Modify early tree removal so that geo-technical access can be done.
10. Provide credit for tree retention if adjacent to preserved off-site tree canopy.

**Lakeridge: multi-family townhouse infill**

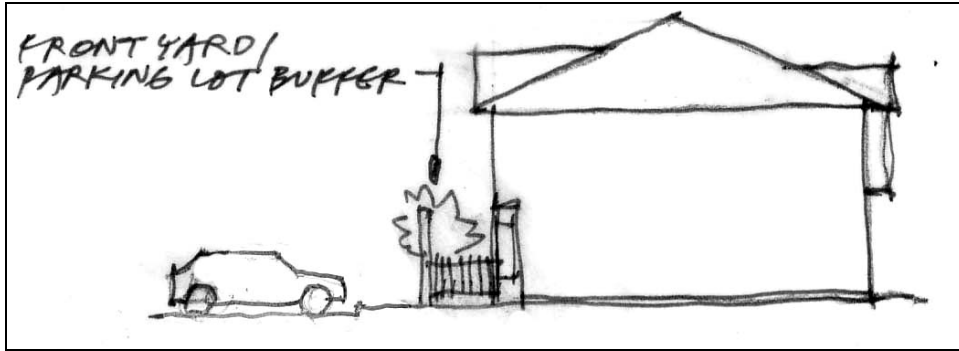
**A. Issues:**

1. Tree retention reduces number of possible buildings.
2. Early tree removal affects geo-technical access.
3. Private common open space reduces number of possible buildings.
4. Uniform, unvaried buildings.
5. Lack of buffer between the front door and the parking lot..
6. Unclear whether Parking lot landscape standards and interior site landscape standards are both required, or whether one can substitute for the other.
7. Snow storage.
8. Lack of purpose for private common open space.

**Lakeridge: multi-family townhouse infill**

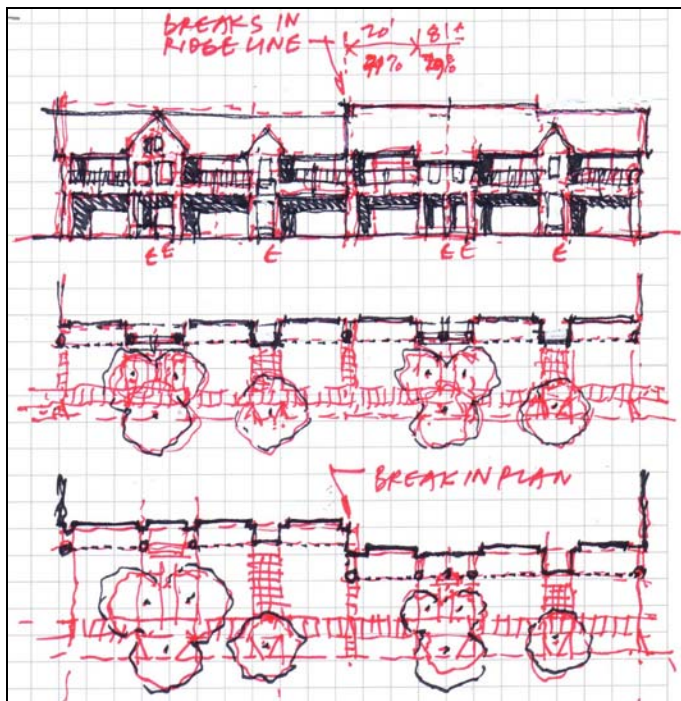
**B. Recommendations:**

1. Reduce tree canopy requirement or focus on specimen trees. Allow private yards to count for some private common open space requirement.
2. Allow credit for nearby off-site preserved tree canopy.
3. Modify early tree removal requirement so that geo-technical access can be done.
4. Clarify purpose of private common open space requirement, particularly for children.
5. Require some spatial and landscape buffer between a unit's front door and a parking lot/drive, where parking is in a lot (no garage).(Figure 1)



(Figure 1)

6. Allow a landscaped buffer zone between the front door and a parking lot to count for some interior parking lot landscaping.
7. Cluster entries between garage doors so as to form a larger porch, pedestrian / landscape zone between driveways. (Figure 2)



(Figure 2)

8. Recess garage doors under a balcony.
9. Require on-site snow storage, or possibly require a bond to allow the city to plow and remove and charge back the owner?
10. Require some variety between buildings in form, material and/or color. Add to the building variety menu list. (See Town Square B5) (Figure 3a & b)



(Figure 3a)



(Figure 3b)

11. Provide incentives for better materials.
12. Require better internal pedestrian connections.
13. Allow landscape elements close to buildings such as fences, gates, pergolas, to count for building variety requirements.

#### IV. Residential tests: Single family

##### Seclusion Bay: Suburban small lot single family infill

###### A. Issues:

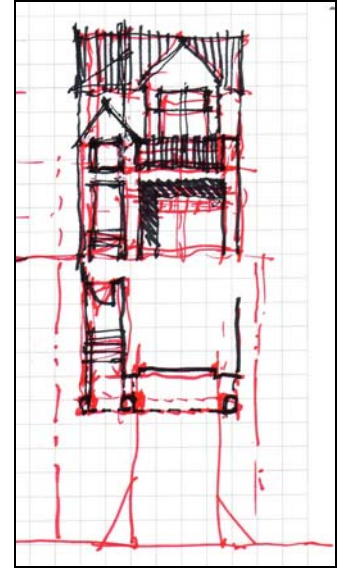
1. Garage door proportion of front façade. May eliminate this small lot single family building type which has a popular market.
2. How to provide incentives for small lot single family housing that is not garage dominated, or where the garage is recessive.
3. Front yard landscaping.
4. Architectural variety.
5. Purpose of private common open space.



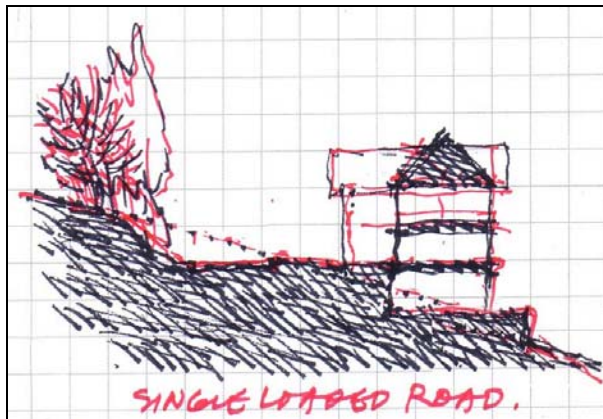
**Seclusion Bay: Suburban small lot single family infill**

**B. Recommendations:**

1. Mitigate impact of garage door by recessing it behind a porch-like extension in front of it, possibly with a balcony over the garage door and extend the front door access into this porch-like zone. (Figure 4)
2. Create a garage door menu/front door menu with at least one choice from a short list of desired elements:
3. Provide incentive for alleys (so that garage doors are at the back of the house rather than the front) by: (Figure 5)
  - Allowing narrower streets.
  - Reducing front yard setbacks.
  - Not requiring or reducing private common open space.
  - Not requiring snow storage.
  - Allowing attached sidewalks or walking in the streets.
  - Green courts without street in front, only alleys behind.
  - Not requiring tree canopy preservation.



(Figure 4)



(Figure 5)

**Golden View: Suburban medium / large lot single family**

**A. Issues:**

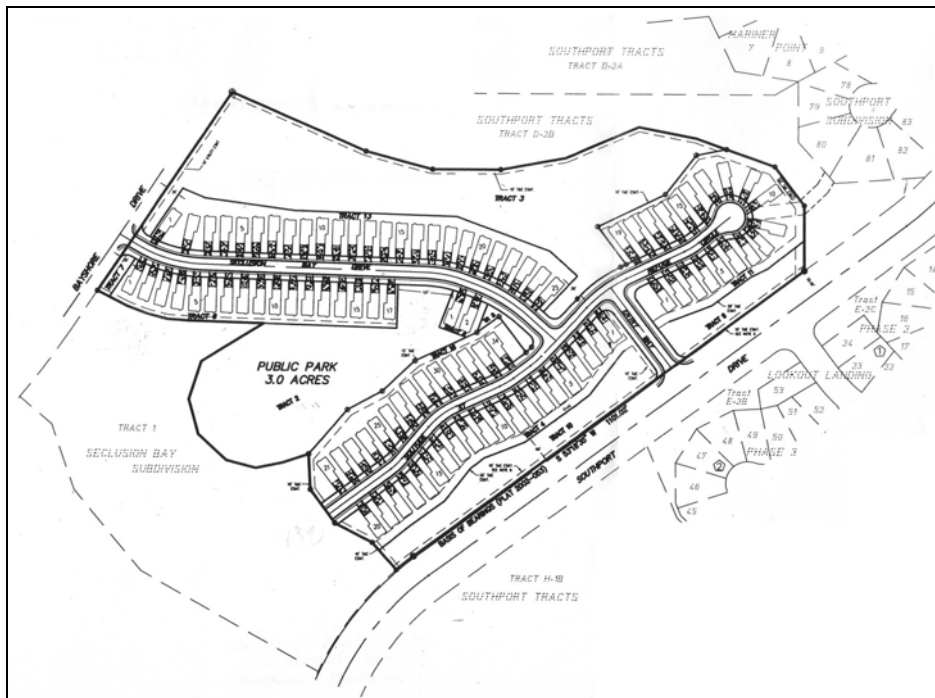
1. Private open space requirements plus public open space requirements reduce lots significantly.
2. Slope requirements mostly impact through retaining wall height limits.
3. Garage door proportion to the length of the front façade.
4. Tree canopy requirements.

**Golden View: Suburban medium / large lot single family**

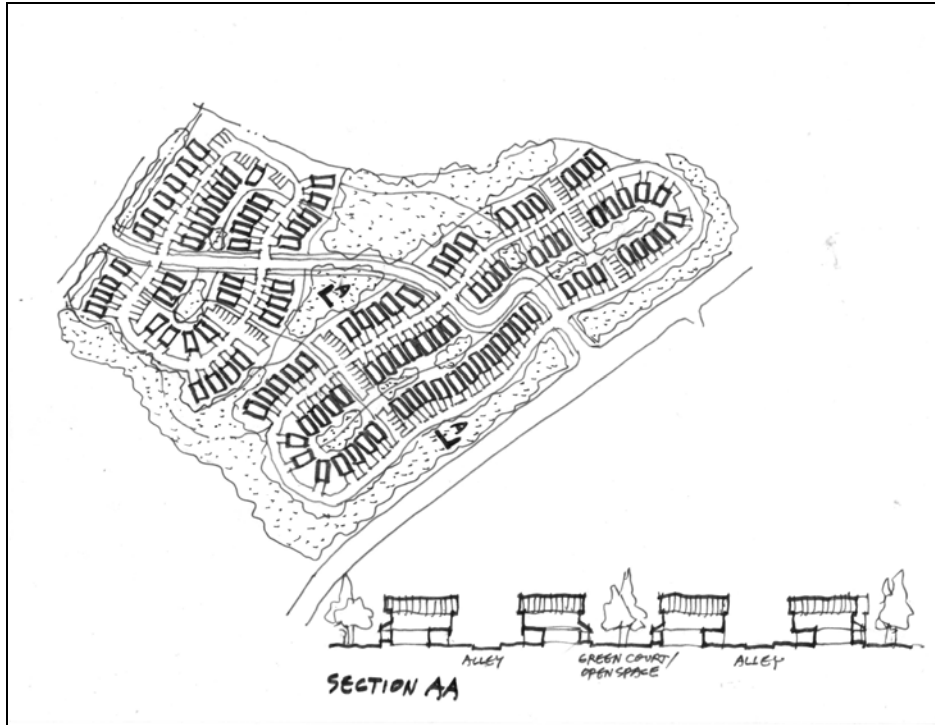
**B. Recommendations:**

1. Increase height of retaining walls with possible new material requirements.
2. Allow stepped retaining walls.
3. Develop a more-inclusive garage / garage door menu, such as:
  - Third car garage door stepped back from first / second car door;
  - Garage doors under a balcony the full length of the door;
  - Recessed doors
  - Painted doors;

- Material or color variation
  - Windows in doors;
  - Special paving patterns in driveways
  - Enhanced landscaping
  - Curb cut narrower than combined driveways
  - Streetscape
4. Possibly relate garage door proportion to the entire area of the front façade, as well as to the length of the façade.
  5. Provide incentives for single loaded streets/lots on a slope or discourage lots that cut deeply back into the slope. (Figure 6a & b)



(Figure 6a)



(Figure 6b) – Example of green courts at Seclusion Bay.

6. Reduce or eliminate private open space requirement.
7. Reduce or eliminate tree canopy requirement or focus on specimen trees for retention.

#### IV Other issues and recommendations not necessarily raised by the development tests

1. The state of non-conforming uses, and their ability and motivation for renovation, and reinvestment into the existing structures.
  - Thresholds for the application of new standards
  - When the new standards apply
  - Retroactive replacement of existing conditions to new standards
2. Pedestrian improvements in the street R.O.W.
3. Provide incentives rather than required mixed uses.
  - The effects of attempts to 'force' the market.
4. Increased density
  - Increasing perceived land value beyond the foreseeable market.
  - Offering meaningless density increases in the face of market realities
5. Priorities in the zoning code / standards remedies.
  - Not trying to improve everything that could use improvement.
6. Overly complicated / sophisticated processes.
  - Lighting performance standards versus simple height, type, and illumination standards