

Committee agrees old law must go - Title 21: Group was formed to give ideas for new zoning rules.

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Neighborhood activists, builders and environmentalists agree that Anchorage's land use and zoning law, Title 21, is out of date and has been changed so many times that it's hard to use, according to members of a citizens committee. They support an effort, now under way, to rewrite the law.

"It's horrible," said Jim Fergusson, who has spent 30 years in the construction industry. "You have to go about 25 places in the code to get any answers."

Beyond that point of agreement, people have many different ideas about what the revised law should say.

Architect Scott Sandlin of Livingston Slone says he likes the idea of using incentives to improve the designs of large buildings. "Nothing is more harmful to the appearance of the community than these big-box stores surrounded by seas of asphalt."

Fergusson is leery of legislating the appearance of big stores. "It's awfully hard to try to define beauty. I don't believe the city should put itself in the place of being beauty police."

Pat Redmond, head of the Turnagain Community Council, says the city law should not go so far as to regulate house designs, but "if you do a new development, there needs to be parkland included -- trails, not just a sidewalk. Something that looks good ... so people want to use it."

Fergusson, Sandlin and Redmond are members of a citizens committee formed to give the city reaction and ideas for new zoning rules. The committee includes members of city commissions and representatives of home builders, commercial contractors, architecture and planning firms, the Anchorage Center for the Environment, the Anchorage Citizens Coalition, and Chugiak-Eagle River groups.

Fergusson got picked because he's a vocal critic of Title 21, he said. "I represent the construction market. My owners (clients) want to know why they have to spend \$100,000 in landscaping."

His job is to help business clients get contractors, architects and permits to build things.

The role of government, Fergusson said, should be to worry about safety and zoning.

Some planners and designers complain of house and subdivision designs in which big garages dominate the view from the street. "They say put the garage in the back on an alleyway. Think about that. That doubles the amount of snow removal," Fergusson said. "If it was economical and wanted, I'm sure your builders would be putting garages in the back."

Redmond wanted to be on the Title 21 committee because, after all the work that went into

creating a comprehensive plan for the city, she thinks the plan should be followed. That means updating the laws.

"I'd like to see areas of town where people feel comfortable walking to the grocery store. Or parking and walking to stores in that area," Redmond said. "Something like towns used to be."

Sandlin became a Title 21 critic because he was president of the Alaska chapter of the American Institute of Architects when the committee formed.

Like Redmond, he'd like to see what some people call town centers, with residences, leisure activities and shopping close together, "where people don't have to rely so much on their car to get from place to place."

"We can do a lot with land use in Anchorage," Redmond said. "I don't want it to get any worse than it is."

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