

Impacts of planned code changes described - ZONING: Faster project approvals for developers, new standards envisioned.

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Author: ROSEMARY SHINOHARA Anchorage Daily News ; Staff

Proposed changes to Anchorage zoning laws will mean developers can expect faster city approvals for many projects, a national consultant told Anchorage Chamber of Commerce members Monday.

But consultant Matt Goebel, representing Clarion Associates of Denver, said the speedier approvals will be balanced with new standards for creating parks, designing parking lots, building on slopes and the like.

Representatives of Clarion, hired by the city to help rewrite zoning code, are here to present a draft of one section. Meetings with citizens at large, Girdwood residents, and a bunch of city boards and commissions, including the Anchorage Assembly, are planned this week.

A draft revision of the entire zoning code is due to be completed by December.

In a Chamber lunch presentation, Goebel talked about the need for city rules to protect neighborhoods, such as by requiring more than a chain link fence between an industrial lot and a subdivision; the need to tighten up the general business district zone, which he characterized as a wide-open classification where anything goes; and the need to protect streams and open space.

Afterwards, in a written question, someone attending the Chamber lunch asked, "What about protecting businesses?"

"We understand the need to streamline" the regulatory process for businesses, Goebel said. The revised code will eliminate the need for public hearings in many cases, he said. That's because requirements will be spelled out, and city staff will be able to make decisions based on the rules, he said.

The Chamber doesn't have a position yet on the code rewrite, but zoning rules definitely need to be revised, said George Vakalis, Chamber board chairman. "The current code is way out of date and does not reflect all of the aspects of the comprehensive plan."

The city adopted a comprehensive development plan in 2001. It calls for such things as building design standards that reflect Anchorage's status as a northern city. One goal in rewriting the zoning code is to turn comprehensive plan guidelines into law.

The Anchorage Citizens Coalition, an independent watchdog group, plans to begin an extensive review of the proposed code changes this week, with a meeting Wednesday night at the Alaska Center for the Performing Arts.

"The review is pretty important in light of how excited people get about things happening in their neighborhoods," said Sheila Selkregg, a private planner who is helping to organize it. Selkregg

was city planning director while the comprehensive plan was being developed.

"If you're upset about site condos, this is where we fix it," she said.

Daily News reporter Rosemary Shinohara can be reached at rshinohara@adn.com or 257-4340.

For more information

Proposed changes to Title 21, the city zoning code, are on the Web at www.muni.org/Planning/

These public meetings are scheduled:

j A multi-session citizen review organized by the Anchorage Citizens Coalition begins 7 to 9 p.m. Wednesday at the Alaska Center for the Performing Arts, Discovery Theater. The coalition is a watchdog group for land use issues.

Several city boards meet jointly noon-2 p.m. Thursday in City Hall.

j A city-sponsored citizen advisory commission meets 6-8:30 p.m. Thursday at 4700 S. Bragaw St.

An Anchorage Assembly work session takes place 10:30 a.m.-noon Friday at City Hall.

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