

Reaction mixed on city design rules - PLANNING: Sweeping new rules would affect parking, lights and garages.

Anchorage Daily News (AK) - Saturday, July 17, 2004

Author: ROSEMARY SHINOHARA Anchorage Daily News ; Staff

City consultants this week pitched wide-ranging changes proposed for Anchorage's zoning and land-use code as "right in the moderate mainstream."

"There's not anything here on the bleeding edge," said Chris Duerksen, managing director of Clarion Associates of Denver, the city consultant, at one of several meetings with citizens, business interests and political leaders.

Nonetheless, the recommendations are stirring skepticism and even alarm as well as enthusiasm in some quarters.

The city adopted a new comprehensive plan in 2001. Now it is rewriting the laws, and in some cases writing whole new laws, to make the plan work.

The design standards cover landscaping, parking lots and the appearance of commercial and residential buildings. They affect lighting, northern design, snow storage, trash bins and many other elements that go into building, operating and living in a city.

The proposed rules include limits on how much of a house front can be devoted to a garage and a requirement that developers preserve a certain amount of old-growth trees when they build on a lot. The standards would also require subdivision developers to set aside 10 acres of open space for every 1,000 residents.

"There's intense and widespread interest," Anchorage Assemblywoman Debbie Ossiander said Friday, after an Assembly work session on Title 21.

Ossiander represents Eagle River and Chugiak. She will head an Assembly committee to examine the proposals.

She has already talked to some Eagle River business people who are, she said, "really paranoid."

She's heard from representatives of the Anchorage Home Builders Association, who are paying visits to Assembly members. "And they are super paranoid."

Assemblyman Ken Stout said he's been hearing from people too, particularly the home builders. "If we suddenly come up with an odd configuration to build garages, we're going to be limit the amount of housing," Stout said.

Home builders vice president Harley Sudsbury said leaders of his group are meeting with the Assembly "just to establish some open lines of communication."

"I don't know if 'paranoid' is the word," he said. "We just don't want to see the regulation at the

level where the buyers can't afford to buy the products that sell."

He pointed to a proposal that up to 40 percent of the trees covering a lot be kept. "When we're talking lots of the size we're building in Anchorage, there's not much left," he said.

Assemblyman Dan Sullivan said he would like to see how a person could design a subdivision de-emphasizing garages and still have the same number of houses.

He invited the consultants to his neighborhood to take a look at a new set of houses.

"It can be done," said Duerksen. "It really takes more thoughtful site planning, is what it boils down to."

Duerksen said the new code would allow for different types and styles of housing, offering people choices. In his own life, he's moved from a house with a yard to a place without one in downtown Denver, he said.

Large rural lots would still exist under the revised code, but there would be new land-use districts where housing and commercial businesses would be mixed together, maybe even in the same building. That would be for people who want to walk places.

Assemblywoman Pam Jennings said Anchorage needs more housing diversity.

Stout said a lot of people came to Alaska for the unique lifestyle. People here have campers and snowmachines and need room to keep them, he said.

Jennings said, there is nothing unique about "snout houses," a derogatory term for homes where the garage dominates the side facing the street.

Duerksen said to get a real feel for whether the proposed regulations are workable, the city and some builders should test them on some projects recently approved. That way they could see how the projects would be different -- whether they could be done and at what cost.

Tim Potter of DOWL Engineers made the same suggestion earlier in the week at another meeting.

Ossiander said she hasn't made up her mind about the merits of any individual proposals. But, she said, "I don't want a big firestorm. I want this to be manageable."

The design standards under debate this week are the third section of the land-use code, Title 21, to be rewritten. The first two sections laid out administrative procedures and defined zoning districts.

City planning director Tom Nelson said his department is working on a proposed land-use map that would make it more clear what restrictions would apply where. That will probably go to the Assembly before the rewrite of Title 21, which is still in draft form, he said.

The city planners and the consultants are accepting comments on Title 21 before putting the three sections together in one document.

The complete draft, taking into account some of the comments, is due out early next year. Then it will be set for formal public hearings.

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

ZONING AND LAND USE: Read the proposed new rules and public comments:

www.adn.com/links

THE ANCHORAGE CITIZENS COALITION is holding a series of meetings to review the proposals. They are at 7 p.m. in City Hall on these dates: July 28 and 29; Aug. 11, 12, 25 and 26; and Sept. 8 and 9. The coalition can be reached at 783-0244.

Caption: Graphic 1: ADNLinks_071704.pdf

Edition: Final

Section: Alaska

Page: B1

Record Number: 552635407/17/04

Copyright (c) 2004, Anchorage Daily News