

Title 21 concerns prompt forums

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Alaska Star

This article published in The Alaska Star on Thursday, October 14, 2004.

Community leaders have planned public forums to help Chugiak-Eagle River residents wade through proposed changes to Anchorage's land-use code.

Community council presidents, Chugiak-Eagle River Chamber of Commerce officials and both of Chugiak-Eagle River's Anchorage Assemblywomen are among those who will attempt to inform homeowners and small business owners, many of whom are wary about what they can and cannot keep on their property once the new code takes effect.

In 2002, the Municipality of Anchorage Planning Department hired a consulting firm from Denver to rewrite the code. The reason, according to the municipality's Web site, was to modernize Anchorage's land-use regulations to include the latest development techniques and design standards, to make the code more useable and easier to understand and to implement recently adopted plans and policies.

Planning Director Tom Nelson said the rewrite should be completed in fall 2005. He said that between now and then the draft code will be subject to further revision based on public comment.

Deborah Luper, president of the Eagle River Community Council, said the council would discuss the matter at tonight's meeting in the Municipal Meeting Room in the Valley River Center at 7 p.m.

The Birchwood Community Council also has the item on tonight's agenda. The group meets at Birchwood ABC Elementary School at 7 p.m.

The Chugiak-Eagle River Chamber of Commerce has planned a meeting for 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. in the Municipal Meeting Room Wednesday.

Luper said homeowners would benefit from learning more about the project.

"The proposed changes to Title 21 as presently proposed constitute major changes to how Anchorage and Eagle River residents will have to address land use," wrote Luper in an e-mail. "Even landscaping and what types of vegetation you will be allowed to plant is on the firing line. If you want to

clear vegetation on your property so that you can build a home, you will need approval from the Planning Department."

Luper said changes would not only inconvenience residents, but could lighten their wallets.

"Each of these approvals will cost you lots of money, time and effort," she said. "Home prices will increase even more as a result."

The Birchwood Community Council approved a resolution asking that the department make sure that the Title 21 changes comply with each individual area's comprehensive plan - namely the Chugiak-Eagle River Comprehensive Plan.

Birchwood council president Bobbi Wells said she feels the proposed Title 21 changes impose too many regulations on the area, which has always prided itself in its diversity.

"It pretty much changes the way of life for more rural areas," said Wells.

She cited another ordinance, which has been pulled out of Title 21 and is being dealt with separately. The large animal ordinance would limit the number of horses and other large animals that can be on a property without a conditional use permit to eight on a three-acre lot, establishing a number limit for the first time. That could present a problem to people such as Jon Nauman, owner of the Horse Drawn Carriage Company in Peters Creek.

He has six of his own horses and offers boarding to eight more. He said his business could not survive the ordinance.

"The way the ordinance is written now, it would certainly put me out," he said.

Nauman said he doesn't make much money with the business and the \$4,000 to \$8,000 that a conditional-use permit would cost would likely put him over the edge. He said that would mean the end of a business that has been operating carriage rides in downtown Anchorage since 1983.

"I'd like to think we add value to the city," Nauman said. "I'm not sure where I stand on this movement to secede from Anchorage, but if this keeps up I'd be the first one to get in line" to support it.

Nelson said residents need to understand that the documents being looked at now are a starting point.

"These modules have been put out as a community discussion draft," he said. There is "still plenty of opportunity for people to become involved."

Nelson said a second draft would be released in February after all the public comments have been reviewed. Comments about that draft will be used to make a public-hearing draft, which Nelson said will have extensive opportunity for public comment.

Susan Gorski, executive director of the chamber, said the group has been soliciting comments but there are still more questions than answers, especially dealing with existing uses.

"We are trying to review what information has come in," she said. "Until we know about grandfather (rights) we don't have the information we need."

Luper said residents need to keep an eye on the process and make sure to stay involved.

"We are not California," she said. "Alaskans are reasonable, logical folks who can, for the most part, make appropriate choices for their neighborhoods."

Visit www.muni.org/planning/prj_Title_21.cfm for more information.

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