

Our land is not your land

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A rewrite of the Municipality of Anchorage's land-use code referred to as Title 21 will not be completed until Chugiak-Eagle River can update its own comprehensive development plan, Mayor Mark Begich said last week.

Local officials said the mayor's decision should calm the fears some residents have that Chugiak-Eagle River's rural lifestyle will be swallowed up by Anchorage as a result of the Title 21 revision.

Begich said as the rewrite of the 700-page Title 21 moves forward, it has become clear to him that Chugiak-Eagle River's own development plan and the municipality's overall land-use codes should be complementary.

Chugiak-Eagle River's comprehensive plan has not been altered since 1993.

"The Eagle River comp plan, it's time to be reviewed," said Begich. "We may find just minor tweaking or we can find significant things."

Anchorage Assemblywoman Debbie Ossiander of Chugiak said she has been pushing for a rewrite to the Chugiak-Eagle River Comprehensive Plan since being elected in April and she was pleased Friday that an assembly work session was held to announce the draft schedule.

"Title 21 is basically the language that allows the comp plan to be implemented," Ossiander said. "For that, we need an updated comp plan."

Ossiander said much of the language in the Title 21 draft seems to fit Anchorage better than Chugiak-Eagle River. That will change with a rewrite of the comprehensive plan because the development it calls for must be reflected in the updated land-use code.

"The comp plan is going to be a real safeguard for us if it's done right," she said. "I don't think there is a real recognition in the differences in rural lifestyles and the differences between Chugiak-Eagle River and Anchorage."

She said having an updated comprehensive plan would force officials to recognize the difference.

Begich said as a final budget for 2005 is moving forward, he is trying to secure funding for additional staff to complete the plan's update, along with an update to the Anchorage Central Business District Development Plan.

If funds are appropriated for the 2005 budget cycle, work on the update could begin as early as December, according to a new timeline developed by the planning department. The update is slated for completion by December 2005.

That will leave plenty of time to adjust Title 21 accordingly, said Begich. According to a new Title 21 timeline, the code will likely not be before the Anchorage Assembly until September 2006. By the end of 2005, the second public draft will still be under review.

That is a change from the original idea of having a code to adopt in 2005.

"We're a year-and-a-half out probably," said Begich of a final look at what the new Title 21 will include. "We recognize a little more time - breathing room - for the public is important."

Ossiander said although people should not ignore the Title 21 rewrite, residents would be able to understand the process better and how their own land will be affected by following the comprehensive plan rewrite.

"The best way to really get your point across is the comp plan," she said. Ossiander said not only will the comprehensive plan rewrite guide the conditions in the new land-use code, but it is also less than 200 pages, compared to the 700-page Title 21.

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