

City asks for help rewriting 'building bible' - TITLE 21: What do residents want in their land-use code?

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How often do you walk to the grocery store, and what keeps you from doing so?

Do you care if your garage faces the street?

How much of an increase in housing prices would cause you to consider moving out of Anchorage?

These are the kinds of questions the Anchorage Home Builders Association asked in 10,000 surveys mailed out earlier this month.

The association wants to know what people want and are willing to pay for. The survey comes while city planners are beefing up development standards that could raise the prices of homes.

Building industry leaders aren't convinced that politicians and planners want the same things residents do. The survey results may help the builders fight the changes if they have to, said Jim Jackson, association president.

The city's land-use code, the "building bible" called Title 21, is being rewritten to redefine zoning, design and development requirements in Anchorage.

The rewrite is taking longer than planned to accommodate more feedback from the public, but it is expected to be ready for Assembly consideration at the end of 2006.

The code update is supposed to conform Anchorage's development rules to its comprehensive plan, adopted in 2001. The comp plan is a blueprint for growth that seeks to make Anchorage more walkable and more physically attractive. It calls for more mixed-use neighborhoods and denser housing.

"We're trying to learn if we're building the right product," Jackson said. "We'll adjust what we're doing, whether we need more ... higher-density, like the mayor wants to see, and whether that will work or not."

Vicki Portwood, executive officer of the builders association, said, "We don't want to do high-density and high rises unless we know if we build it, they will come. That's our concern."

Portwood said Anchorage builders might have to consider building more multi-family homes because the city is running out of land on which it can build single-family subdivisions.

"We need to be creative in how we use the land we have left," she said.

Jackson said many buyers want entry-level homes that cost about \$220,000. Some of the

proposed rules could add costs to building, putting home prices beyond reach of some buyers and lowering the level of home ownership in Anchorage.

The proposed rules set higher standards. For example, they may limit how much of the front of a house is garage or require that developers retain a certain number of trees on a site.

The surveys were mailed to a random sampling of renters and homeowners, building association officials said. Integra Realty Resources of Portland, Ore., helped come up with the questions and will compile the responses. Results should be available on the association's Web page, www.ahba.net, in or after January.

The surveys are anonymous but ask for information about the person's household: number of people living there, what kind of home it is, what their incomes are.

It asks about what kind of transportation the residents use, what type of home they'd want in the future -- number of bedrooms, bathrooms and how much garage space -- and how they feel about private back yards versus public parks.

The association wants as many responses as possible and is providing surveys at the its office at 8301 Schoon St., Suite 200, near King Street and Dimond Boulevard.

Daily News reporter Anne Aurand can be reached at aurand@adn.com or 257-4591.

Public opinion urged in developing code

The city's land-use code, called Title 21, is being rewritten to redefine zoning, design and development requirements in Anchorage. Feedback from the public is encouraged, and there are several options for obtaining information and offering opinions.

ONLINE INFO: Documents and information about the rewriting of Title 21 can be found at www.muni.org/planning/prj_Title21.cfm.

CONTACT: Send comments on the proposed changes:

* E-mail: Title21@muni.org

* Fax: 907-343-7927

* Mail: Planning Department, P.O. Box 196650, Anchorage 99519

* By hand: Planning Department, Planning and Development Center, 4700 Bragaw St., Anchorage

DRAFTS: Hard copies of the work in progress are available at the Planning Department's public counter at 4700 Bragaw St. or at the city clerk's office on the second floor of City Hall, 632 W. Sixth Ave.

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