

## **Ground rules - Task force examines effect of new land-use code on structures NEW CITY REGULATIONS GET PRACTICAL LOOK**

Anchorage Daily News (AK) - Sunday, December 5, 2004

Author: ANNE AURAND Anchorage Daily News ; Staff

Eagle River's new Fred Meyer looks good enough to meet the city's proposed tougher development standards but would need more landscaping and room to put snow.

The Seclusion Bay subdivision in South Anchorage couldn't be built under a new standard that would limit how much garage can face the street.

The new Town Square apartments at DeBarr Road and Lake Otis Parkway are plain and boxy. That would be OK, but new standards would require more trees and open space.

Those three developments were among several a task force of consultants and people in the real estate business studied last week to figure out how the city's proposed development standards would work on the ground.

"Everyone here wants a better community," said developer Connie Yoshimura, who helped spearhead the effort. "The debate is how to do that and what it should look like."

The city is rewriting its land-use and development code, called Title 21, to fit modern conditions and the city comprehensive plan, adopted in 2001. One of the plan's objectives is to make Anchorage more physically attractive.

"You have as many stamped-out, monotonous buildings (in Anchorage) as anywhere in the country, and people have said, 'Let's do something about that,' " said Chris Duerksen, a Denver-based consultant hired to help rewrite Title 21.

But another consultant from Denver, Dick Farley, warned that the tougher standards won't guarantee good taste.

People in the development business, including real estate agents, landscape architects, developers and engineers, wanted a say in revising the standards. They persuaded Mayor Mark Begich to help; he granted \$25,000, and the task force has raised more than \$25,000 for the effort.

### **EAGLE RIVER FRED MEYER**

The tour started Tuesday in the slippery parking lot of the Eagle River Fred Meyer, built in 2002 under upgraded standards on big-box stores. The tan exterior, enlivened by touches of green, decorative trim and staggered roof lines, meets the proposed aesthetic requirements.

But the new standards, if applied then, could have added between \$500,000 and \$2 million to the development cost for more parking lot landscaping and snow storage, said Tim Potter, a former city planner now with Dowl Engineers.

One of the biggest hits on commercial projects is a proposal that 20 percent of parking areas be set aside for snow storage, he said.

That is intended to stop property managers from pushing snow onto the landscaping and ruining it, planner Erika McConnell said. Destroyed landscaping is supposed to be replaced, but the city doesn't really enforce that.

The sides and the back of the Fred Meyer building don't meet the stricter design standards. Potter thinks requiring loading docks, for example, to be attractively designed would unnecessarily add to the cost. And that, he said, could trickle down to increasing the cost of groceries or other products.

But Lee Huskey, an economics professor at the University of Alaska Anchorage, said retail prices are more responsive to supply and demand than added building costs.

Land owners could be affected most, he said, because some stores might not buy the land in the first place if tougher design standards would reduce profits.

Existing developments won't have to upgrade when the regulations are adopted; the higher standards won't be retroactive.

## SECLUSION BAY

This subdivision between Southport and Bayshore drives has more than 100 look-alike, two-story homes where two-car garages dominate the front of the house and side roads end in cul-de-sacs.

Proposed regulations say garages can't take up more than 40 percent of the building front or more than 50 percent of the lot front.

"You couldn't build this house," said engineer Jim Sawhill, president of Lounsbury and Associates, while standing in front of a 1,500-square-foot, three-bedroom model home selling for \$263,000.

He added that he's not a big fan of this kind of development: "There's not as much architectural diversity as there needs to be. ... The garage door is so overpowering."

However, he said, the homes in Seclusion Bay are wildly popular. They sell faster than homes on bigger lots or condos.

The proposed development standards also intend to scrap cul-de-sacs and push for grid systems that connect neighborhood streets to other roads.

Consultant Farley, who owns an urban-design firm in Denver, said these so-called snout houses, lacking yards, discourage interaction with neighbors and detract from a sense of community. Another consultant, local landscape architect Terry Schoenthal, responded: "Are we trying to

social engineer through regulations?"

With narrow lots --- 34 feet across, in this case -- and a strong demand for garages in this winter city, there aren't many options, Schoenthal said.

One option is to build alleys and put the garages around back, Sawhill said. But building alleys on boggy land requires more excavating and backfilling with gravel, an expense that would be passed on to the buyer.

## TOWN SQUARE APARTMENTS

Ten plain, two-tone brown buildings house 90 apartments at Lake Otis and DeBarr. The consultant called this complex monotonous, but the exteriors comply with the proposed design regulations.

Harvey Prickett, with Dean Architects of Anchorage, said this design is acceptable to him. New standards, he and other task force members said, should prevent the "worst" development -- such as the "barrack-style" duplexes along Muldoon Road, an example used by several in the group.

"(Town Square) meets the requirements, but it isn't adding aesthetic attributes," he said.

And it wouldn't comply with vegetation and open space requirements.

The site was once a healthy stand of trees, but the developer cut all but a few of them, Prickett said. The new regulations would require preserving 30 percent of the "existing canopy," a standard many on the task force criticized as too vague.

More trees, open space and parking would take the space of two buildings, he said, and would have made the project financially unworkable.

Yoshimura said landscaping is the key to making development more attractive. College Gate in East Anchorage and the Park Place condos near City Market downtown are examples she gave of spots where mature trees and well-blended exteriors make unexceptional housing desirable.

Some of the exterior materials required in the new standards, such as using some brick on exteriors, would jack up the price of multifamily housing, Yoshimura said, and the market doesn't support high enough rents for fancy facades.

She offered an alternative: "If every multifamily project had a public-review process, I guarantee you we wouldn't need this discussion." Developers would make their projects look nice if they knew their plans had to endure public scrutiny, she said.

But local developer Glenn Gellert disagreed. He said he'd rather use clear guidelines to design projects. He's been through public reviews before, and they can drag out the time it takes to get an approval.

## NEW REGULATIONS

After the task force, other groups and the general public submit comments on the proposed design standards, due in January, they will be revised again. The Assembly is scheduled to see them in late 2006.

The new regulations come too late, said Bob Mintz with Carr Gottstein Properties. There's not that much land left to develop in Anchorage.

But there are still swaths of undeveloped land in Eagle River and Girdwood, city planner Jerry Weaver said. And the regulations will apply when vacant lots are filled in, when buildings are torn down and rebuilt, or in areas such as Mountain View, which is going through a revitalization phase.

"Anchorage is redeveloping," he said. "That's what this is all about."

Daily News reporter Anne Aurand can be reached at [aurand@adn.com](mailto:aurand@adn.com) or 257-4591.

LAND USE: For more information on the Title 21 rewrite process, to read the draft plans or to comment on them, follow the links at

[www.adn.com/links](http://www.adn.com/links)

Caption: Photo 1: [ADNLinks\\_120504.jpg](#) Photo 2: [RealEstate2\\_120504.jpg](#) Photo 3: [RealEstate\\_120504.jpg](#)

Photos by BILL ROTH / Anchorage Daily News Tim Potter, center, a planning director at Dowl Engineers who helped take the Fred Meyer project in Eagle River through the large retail "big box" review process, spoke to a real estate task force that was touring recent projects and evaluating how the proposed land-use regulations would have affected them if already in place. The task force toured the Town Square Apartments, a low-income housing project recently finished at the corner of Lake Otis Parkway and DeBarr Road.

Edition: Final

Section: Alaska

Page: B1

Record Number: 661771612/05/04

Copyright (c) 2004, Anchorage Daily News