

Planning document will guide growth

Anchorage Daily News (AK) - Sunday, July 10, 2005

Author: TOM NELSON ; Commentary

How Anchorage should grow and what our city should look like in the future is the subject of one of the most significant overhauls of the municipality's regulations governing land development. Known as "Project 21," it involves the rewrite of Title 21 of the Anchorage Municipal Code as well as creation of a Land Use Plan for the Anchorage Bowl area.

The project also encompasses an update of the 12-year-old Chugiak-Eagle River Comprehensive Plan, in order to properly address their community issues in the Title 21 rewrite. Additionally, land use and design standards for Girdwood are being addressed in a separate chapter of Title 21 and will be considered for adoption by the Anchorage Assembly this year, separate from the rest of the code.

Title 21 is that portion of the municipal code that regulates the use of land. The land use plan is a series of maps that guide the locations of uses such as residential, commercial, industrial, parks and institutions in the Anchorage Bowl.

The current Title 21 was adopted in 1969. That was the year President Nixon took office, Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, Jimi Hendrix played at Woodstock and "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid" was the summer movie hit. Back then, Anchorage had a little over 100,000 residents with almost the same number of registered vehicles. Less than a thousand building permits were issued annually. Today, our community is a growing city approaching 300,000 residents with 323,000 vehicles and more than 2,600 building permits issued each year.

In 1969, more than one-half of the land area in the Anchorage Bowl was undeveloped and available for use. Today, less than one-tenth is available.

For the sake of Anchorage's economic health and quality of living, it is imperative the community continues to attract new development. Due to the shortage of undeveloped land, most future development will be redevelopment -- the reuse of those lands where older structures or uses are at the end of their useful life or lands are being underutilized, and in-fill development -- the use of parcels skipped over or bypassed as the surrounding area developed. These types of development require a change in the land use regulations, as well as a need for more and better design standards.

This is what Project 21 is about -- how that growth should take place, where it should go and what it should look like. Whether it's determining how much parking is required for an office building or restaurant, how to keep parking lot lighting from spilling over into a nearby residential neighborhood, how much open space should be provided with a multifamily housing development, how and where to blend a mix of residential and commercial use, or how to make safer, more efficient pedestrian connections between the home and school/park or bus stop and store entrance, these are just a few examples of what Project 21 will address.

Hundreds of Anchorage residents already have spent thousands of hours proposing changes to an

initial community discussion draft of Title 21. The Planning Department staff has worked with consultants in preparing a new full draft based upon what we heard and read, and now we are encouraging the community to review it, along with the draft of the Anchorage Bowl Land Use Plan.

At 572 pages, Title 21 is a detailed document. But as the municipality's planning director, I encourage Anchorage citizens to take a look. In the long run, it will affect Anchorage's future more than any single project.

There are plenty of opportunities to get involved. Over the next two and half months, the public can review the draft, make comments and attend public meetings. You can access a copy of the draft Title 21 and Land Use Plan, or information about the project at www.muni.org. The first public meeting to discuss it is scheduled for 6-8 p.m. July 14 in the Wilda Marston Theatre at Loussac Library.

To guide Anchorage's growth requires community participation. Please let us know what you think.

Tom Nelson is the planning director for the Municipality of Anchorage.

Caption: Graphic 1: tom nelson_071005.eps

Edition: Final

Section: Ideas

Page: D2

Record Number: 830104907/10/05

Copyright (c) 2005, Anchorage Daily News