

# Land code rewrite critical for future

Chris Stephens  
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The rewrite of Anchorage's land use and development regulations is moving forward. This rewrite is long overdue and desperately needed. Local people who care about how their city looks, how neighborhoods can be developed or what can happen to any land they might own need to be paying attention now.

The rewrite of Title 21 of the Municipal Code will continue to be controversial, and it should be controversial. After all, it is setting new government rules about use and development of our land. Anchorage mirrors Alaska's independent mind-set and aversion to "government telling us what to do," particularly with our land. Plus, undeveloped land is practically gone in Anchorage, which makes land use a particularly important issue.

At the same time, land use strongly affects the community's future -- how it grows, its economic opportunities, quality of life and values. Anchorage is a young city whose rapid growth has outstripped the current land-use regulations, which were written 37 years ago.

The current regulations are hard to read, interpret and use. They are not aligned with the city's Comprehensive Plans approved by the Assembly. Development regulations don't accommodate modern innovative building designs and development. For example, infill development and redevelopment of developed land will occur more often because Anchorage does not have enough land, yet neither of these is adequately provided for in the current Title 21.

Drive around town and look critically at how the city has developed. While the spectacular natural beauty around Anchorage would make any city pale in comparison, there is no question we can do better. This rewrite has to get it right because the resulting regulations will be the foundation for all Anchorage land use and development for the next 30 years.

A critical and very important part of the rewrite is revision of the Land Use Plan Map, which defines future land uses and guides zoning. The map is supposed to ensure adequate and appropriate land for all the different, competing uses -- housing, business, government, institutional, recreation, and so forth.

A concept Land Use Plan Map showing changes from current zoning is available for review at [www.muni.org/iceimages/Planning/Density\\_Lansuse\\_changes\\_11x17.pdf](http://www.muni.org/iceimages/Planning/Density_Lansuse_changes_11x17.pdf) , or at the municipal offices, 4700 S. Bragaw St. Written public comments are being received through March 24. The concept Land Use Plan Map will be discussed and possibly approved by the Assembly with the rewrite of Title 21 at the end of this year.

Much of the Land Use Plan Map simply recognizes current uses, which do not conform to current zoning that should be changed. But it also contains changes of use for some land. If you own commercial property or undeveloped residential land, I strongly recommend you study the concept Land Use Plan Map to see if the plan affects your land. Be sure to submit comments before the deadline.

The rewrite of Title 21 started in 2002. The first draft was released in 2004 and met with howls of protest. Critics said it was impractical, too costly and did not adequately take Anchorage's unique needs into consideration. A revised schedule for the rewrite provided for three drafts, with Assembly approval in late 2006. Each draft will be open to public and professional review and comment.

At this time, the second draft of the Title 21 rewrite is out for public comment through March 3. Information on the plan can be found at the city offices, or at [www.muni.org](http://www.muni.org) (click Departments, then Planning).

Draft 2 will be followed in May by a Public Hearing draft. Public hearings on that draft will be in June and July, and the Assembly and Planning Commission will jointly review the draft during August and September. The Planning Commission will send the draft with recommendations to the Assembly for deliberation and consideration during November and December. By the end of the year there should be a new Title 21 and Land Use Plan Map.

This rewrite of Title 21 is critically important. It is going to have a significant effect on Anchorage's future and our lives here. Even if you have no knowledge of real estate, take a moment and go to the city's Web site noted above. Look at the maps and documents, the schedule for public input, comments others have made, and possibly send a message to the city with your comments or attend a public meeting. Now is the time to add your thoughts and comments.