

Opinion

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New zoning

We can get better development without breaking the bank

Some experts took a look at key proposals to improve Anchorage's zoning code, and concluded the city could set higher standards for several kinds of development without driving up costs.

This is a powerful argument for the city to move ahead with an update of the zoning code that promises to make Anchorage more attractive and a more desirable place to live.

Here's why it would cost about the same for greener, prettier site development:

Current zoning code requires more parking than is needed for commercial and industrial developments.

The proposed new code calls for more landscaping and features like plazas, and adds a new requirement for pedestrian connections to the public sidewalks.

If you take out some parking spaces and add in the new requirements for a better landscaped site, the savings on parking wipe out the extra costs for landscaping.

The study on costs of development under the proposed new zoning code was presented last week by national consultants Development Strategies of St. Louis, Mo.

It looked at site development costs for business districts, industrial districts and multi-family housing districts under the new and old code.

The net effect, said Development Strategies executive Robert Lewis, is "it would not be bad at all."

As examples, the consultant took three existing buildings and figured out the costs of site development, excluding the buildings themselves, under the existing rules and the proposed new rules.

For Alaska USA Federal Credit Union at 36th Avenue and Centerpoint Drive, site development is estimated at \$2.2 million under current zoning, and between \$1.8 million and \$2 million under proposed zoning.

The Park Place II Apartments at 16th Avenue and A Streets would get major savings from decreased parking allowed under the proposed zoning. Site development would decrease from \$9.3 million now, to between \$5.2 million and \$6.4 million.

Site development costs for the Carr-Gottstein Distribution Warehouse off C Street near West 68th Avenue would drop from \$2.3 million to between \$1.7 million and \$1.9 million.

The study didn't answer all the economic questions that concern local developers, but it galvanized a group of developers and city officials to figure out what else they want to know.

Now the city's going to answer those remaining questions: How would single family homes be affected? What about retailers like the Sears Mall? What is the added cost of raising design standards to get more attractive buildings?

But already, the Development Strategies study means the new code is making real progress. And that's a good sign for our city's future.

BOTTOM LINE: Good news for Anchorage: The nicer site plans we should be getting from developers don't necessarily cost more.

Caption: Photo 1: Alaska Notebook_032408.jpg Photo 2: 24edit pg1__032408.jpg
Photo courtesy of Municipality of Anchorage Property development for the Park Plaza II Apartments on A Street would have cost much less, even with more landscaping, under a proposed new zoning code.

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