

***Voice of the Times -
Revamping Title 21 provides critical . . . new guidelines***
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THE PUBLIC has until mid-September to comment on a draft of the proposed, and long-overdue, update of Anchorage's land-use rules.

The draft released Tuesday was put together by city consultants and includes input from residents and developers, and the public comment period lasts until Sept. 16. It is the first of three drafts that will be offered for comment before the regulations are sent to the Assembly and Planning and Zoning Department for hearings and then to the Assembly in the fall of 2006 for final approval. The second draft is expected in November of this year.

The overhaul of the Municipal Code's Title 21 land-use rules is very much needed. The original Title 21 was crafted in 1969, and in the intervening 36 years, it has been nipped here and tucked there until it is just about impossible to find needed information. When you do find it, there is a good chance it will be obsolete or written so only a lawyer can understand.

Developers, homeowners and anybody needing information can find themselves frustrated and confused. The current Title 21 does not even have a table of contents. Zoning requirements and classifications in some cases are complicated, redundant, and too often, virtually ignored.

None of that is good in a city where expectations of how land will be used is changing as large tracts are taken off the market and the amount of available land shrinks.

The update aims to streamline and uncomplicate the review process for development to make it user-friendly. It also protects neighborhoods and deals with the kinds of development we are likely to see as a city in the future -- redevelopment of smaller tracts, in-fill

development aimed at using smaller, unused spaces, mixed-use development and building designs aimed at eliminating Big Box stores in favor of structures more compatible with their surroundings.

The Title 21 revamp, when all is said and done, is to implement the city's already approved comprehensive plans, which provide guidelines for growth in the coming decades.

There will be those in the coming months who will complain the changes are unnecessary, or that too much land is set aside for parks, or not enough, or that the new Title 21 gives away much too much to developers, or conservationists or the city. There will be months and months to voice opinions, polish and correct the plan or argue to scrap it in favor of something else.

What is important is that Anchorage residents who hold the key to the city's future get involved, read the plan, understand and discuss its merits and shortcomings and make known their views about this complex attempt to make needed changes. It is important. This is, after all, a possible blueprint for the city our great-grandchildren may call home.

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