

Planning and Zoning Commission

February 2, 2026

Case #: **2026-0012**

Case Title: Review and Recommendation by Planning and Zoning Commission of a Draft Ordinance of the Anchorage Assembly amending AMC Chapters 21.06, Dimensional Standards and Measurements, and 21.10, Chugiak-Eagle River, to reduce the dimensional standards for minimum setback requirements in the R-6 and CE-R-6 Zoning Districts.

Agenda Item #: **G.3** Supplementary Packet #: **1**

X Comments submitted after the packet was finalized

Additional information

Other:

Public Comments: 2026-0012

Commenter	Email	Phone Number	Submitted
Hamilton Joint Revocable Trust	dickhamilton37@gmail.com		1/29/2026 1:05:56 PM
<p>To: Anchorage Planning and Zoning Commission</p> <p>Re: Case 2026-0012 (Setback Reductions) and Case 2026-0009 (Omnibus Amendments)</p> <p>From: Richard M.Hamilton (CoTrustee - Hamilton Joint Revocable Trust)</p> <p>Property Ownership: 051-301-31-000, 051-301-32-000, and 051-301-33-000</p> <p>Statement of Support:</p> <p>I am writing to express my strong support for the proposed amendments in Case 2026-0012 and Case 2026-0009.</p> <p>As the owner of three contiguous parcels on Old Glenn Hwy, I believe these changes are essential for the responsible and efficient development of the Chugiak-Eagle River community.</p> <p>1. Dimensional Standard Modernization (Case 2026-0012): The proposed reduction of front setbacks (from 20 feet to 15 feet on local streets) and side setbacks (to 5 feet) significantly improves the buildability of residential lots. For owners like myself with multiple adjacent parcels, these changes allow for more creative and cohesive site planning. By reducing these rigid constraints, the Municipality enables development that better follows natural topography and allows for safer, more modern driveway and parking configurations.</p> <p>2. Landscaping and Open Space Flexibility (Case 2026-0009): I specifically support the proposal to allow rooftop decks and balconies to count toward usable open space requirements. In "Mixed Residential" zones, this change encourages high-quality townhome designs that maximize functionality without sacrificing aesthetics. Furthermore, simplifying L1/L2 buffering requirements ensures that small-scale developers can provide necessary screening without the burden of "one-size-fits-all" costs.</p> <p>3. Commitment to Responsible Snow Storage: I understand the community concerns regarding snow management. By allowing for more flexible setbacks, property owners gain the ability to designate smarter, more localized on-site snow storage areas. As a holder of three adjacent lots, I am committed to a site design that keeps snow storage entirely on-site and away from public rights-of-way.</p> <p>These ordinances move Anchorage toward a more flexible, housing-friendly future while protecting the unique character of Eagle River. I urge the Commission to recommend approval of both cases.</p> <p>Sincerely,</p> <p>Richard M. Hamilton</p>			

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Commenter	Email	Phone Number	Submitted
Linda Kaye Harter 5950 Barry Avenue Anchorage , AK 99507	lkharter@gmail.com	907 346 1680	1/29/2026 5:11:44 AM
<p>Opposition to PZC Case 2026-0012 An ordinance amending Title 21.06 to reduce the dimensional standards for minimum setback requirements in R-6 et al, Zoning Districts.</p> <p>The stated rationale for this amendment in the zoning law is to reduce the number of variances sought. Per the department's proposal:</p> <p>" Over the past seven (7) years, twelve (12) of the last twenty-five (25) dimensional variance cases would not have been necessary if reduced setbacks had been in place. Minimizing the need for variances will reduce costs, delays, and administrative burdens for residents seeking to build, renovate, purchase, or sell property. "</p> <p>The city's justification is essentially we keep granting variances, so let's just shrink the setbacks. That is a weak planning rationale. Variances are meant to be exceptions, not evidence that the rule is wrong</p> <p>Setbacks serve valuable public purposes; reducing them weakens protections that benefit the entire neighborhood, not just builders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~Fire separation and emergency access ~Snow storage (very relevant in Alaska) ~Drainage and ice buildup between structures ~Light, air, and privacy ~Noise and dust buffering ~Utility access and maintenance ~Property value stability ~Allow for trees and other natural features <p>The obvious benefits of setbacks create a character and attractiveness of a neighborhood. It was for that very reason they were established.</p> <p>Variances exist specifically to address unusual lots, hardship, or legacy structures. Variances are meant to be exceptions, not evidence that the rule is wrong. These exceptions are best made after careful evaluation on a case by case basis by professional planning staff. Changing the law because exceptions were granted undermines the entire zoning framework.</p> <p>This penalizes compliant property owners, who purchased in their neighborhood with the qualities it evidenced at that time.</p> <p>~Most homeowners followed the rules, designed within setbacks, or limited additions accordingly. Reducing setbacks retroactively rewards nonconforming development pressure~while devaluing compliant properties.</p> <p>People who followed the rules lose, while those who pushed the limits benefit.</p> <p>Variances are often driven by design choices, not real hardship. Many setback variances happen because: a builder wants an oversized garage, a maximum-footprint home, or because of poor site planning, in sum, a preference for convenience over compliance</p> <p>A variance should be granted for hardship, not preference. Design convenience is not a planning hardship.</p> <p>Once setbacks are reduced:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~You cannot undo the loss of spacing ~Future developments will push even closer ~Neighborhood character changes permanently, and not for the better. 			

~Window-to-window sight lines
~ Shadowing and loss of sunlight
~ Noise transmission between homes
These quality-of-life impacts don't show up in zoning metrics but drive resident dissatisfaction.

Variances are reversible decisions. Code changes are not.

One-size-fits-all setbacks ignore lot diversity

Lots vary widely:

- ~Corner lots
- ~Irregular shapes
- ~Slopes
- ~Older platted neighborhoods

There are better alternatives than code change:

- ~Context-based variances
- ~Administrative flexibility for truly constrained lots.
- ~Design review conditions

Blanket reductions sacrifice quality for convenience.

The city has not shown actual harm from current setbacks

- ~No unsafe conditions
- ~No widespread inability to build
- ~Measurable housing shortages will be unaffected. Please confirm this w/ staff at the hearing. This adds zero housing.
- ~ No demonstrable economic harm

Zoning changes should be evidence-based, supporting sound planning principles, not anecdotal.

Reducing setbacks with such faint justification, sets a troubling precedent. If 12 variances in 7 years justifies reducing setbacks,

- ~How many variances justify height increases?
- ~Lot coverage increases?
- ~Reduced parking?
- ~Reduced open space?

This logic erodes zoning protections one exception at a time.

Zoning should be cautious, not reactive

Summary: Twelve variances over seven years does not demonstrate a broken setback standard. Variances are intended to address exceptional conditions, not to justify permanent code changes. Reducing setbacks affects fire safety, drainage, snow storage, privacy, and neighborhood character for every property owner—especially those who already complied with the rules. Permanent reductions based on anecdotal cases create irreversible impacts and reward design convenience over responsible planning.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. lkh