



Municipality of Anchorage
Planning Department
Memorandum



Date: October 4, 2024
To: Lance Wilber, Executive Director of Community Development
From: Craig Lyon, Planning Director
Subject: Proposed Planned Unit Development reform ordinance (AO 2024-83)

Planning leadership has conducted a brief review of AO 2024-83, which proposes to amend the regulations for Planned Unit Developments (PUDs). The Planning Department supports changes to our PUD standards, but we do have some initial recommendations and several questions about the specifics of this ordinance.

As proposed, the ordinance is largely intended to improve the PUD process. If passed as is, we do not anticipate major negative consequences. However, we have not reviewed the ordinance in depth. If you were to choose to refer this ordinance to the Planning and Zoning Commission, the Planning Department could conduct a more thorough review that would help to prevent any unintended consequences. We would be eager to work with the Sponsors to improve the ordinance to achieve our shared goal, which is to remove regulatory barriers to compact residential development, and have thoughtful, purposeful, and meaningful residential development standards.

Section 1.

Page 2, Line 39-Page 3, Line 11 - This would eliminate several review criteria specific to PUDs including preservation of natural features, mixing of compatible land uses, function and configuration of utilities, vehicular circulation, and parking facilities. These criteria are applied in addition to the criteria used to evaluate a conditional use permit. These criteria are similar enough to those evaluated through the conditional use process and could be removed without significant consequence to the review process. However, we would recommend keeping these criteria because they are not mandatory but do allow us to factor in creative design and site function.

Page 2, Lines 19-21 – This amendment would eliminate the requirement that PUDs also obtain variances. Both PUDs and variances exempt developments from rules that otherwise allowed in the same district. When PUDs grant exceptions from general applicable rules, the Planning Department believes those exceptions deserve a separate evaluation through the variance standards in AMC 21.03.240. As written, we do not support this change, but we would welcome further discussion to help us understand the intent and reasoning behind it.

Page 2, Lines 25-34 – This would reduce the minimum area size for a PUD from 2 acres to 1 acre. We generally understand that the intent of this amendment is to increase the number of eligible parcels that can be developed under the PUD process. This would in turn increase the likelihood of

more residential development. However, we have not been able to fully evaluate the potential benefits or impact of this change, or the original reasoning behind the current two acre minimum. With additional time, we could evaluate the impacts of this amendment.

Page 3, Line 36-Page 4, Line 38 - This removes a requirement that PUDs reserve portions of the site as private open space. We recognize that the current requirements generally limit the number of housing units that can be built, which is inconsistent with the purposes of the PUD process and our shared goal of increasing housing production. However, the PUD open space regulations exist to provide residents with usable outdoor spaces that can be accessed by individuals of varying abilities and interests by setting standards for minimum slope, minimum width, and disqualifying motor vehicular circulation areas, ditches, swales, and snow storage areas from consideration. We support revisions to the open space regulations so they result in usable outdoor spaces that do not pose a significant impediment to development, but we do not support an outright removal of the standards as proposed.

Page 4, Line 40-Page 5, Line 27 – This portion of the ordinance removes internal and perimeter landscaping requirements, as well as internal pedestrian walkway requirements between residential and nonresidential uses. Upon initial review, these rules appear to be duplicative of other standards in code, and may be overburdensome. Further review is necessary to confirm.

Page 5, Lines 46-Page 6, Line 8 – This change does not appear to be a significant departure or change to the existing language. It may not be necessary to achieve PUD reform, and could be removed to simplify the ordinance. But we would welcome clarification from the drafters on the purpose of this change.

Page 6, Line 16-Page 7, Line 13 – This change would allow greater densities in PUDs. Increasing allowed density can help a development's financial viability. But the rationale for chosen numbers is not clear from the ordinance itself. Planning would like the opportunity to explore the rationale in more detail and assess whether the chosen numbers are appropriate.

Page 6, Line 18-Page 7, Line 13 – This amendment would remove leniency afforded to PUD developments to increase allowed height and additional uses otherwise not allowed in the underlying zoning district. Removing this leniency would be contrary to the intent of a PUD and we do not support it in whole. However, we do support the removal of the prohibition on the use of mobile homes called out in AMC 21.07.110G.3.b.

Section 2.

This section waives Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) review. Although within the Assembly's powers, we recommend using the PZC review process for this ordinance. PZC is the body that ultimately approves PUDs, so their input would be valuable. The PZC review process is the appropriate mechanism to allow Planning staff to conduct a full Staff Report on a proposed action. That additional time would allow us to improve the ordinance and address any unintended consequences.

We expect that the PZC review could be completed in the next three to four months, with a hearing in early January allowing the ordinance to return to the Assembly for a vote in February.