

Submitted by: Chair of the Assembly at the  
Request of the Mayor

Prepared by: Dept. of Law

For reading: November 4, 2025

**ANCHORAGE, ALASKA**  
**AO No. 2025-128**

**AN ORDINANCE AMENDING ANCHORAGE MUNICIPAL CODE CHAPTERS 21.05 AND 21.15 TO MAKE SHELTER UNITS ALLOWABLE STRUCTURES FOR DEVELOPING PARTICULAR LAND USES, TO INCREASE THE TIME ALLOWANCE FOR TEMPORARY USES DEVELOPED WITH SHELTER UNITS, AND WAIVING PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION REVIEW.**

(All Community Councils)

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**WHEREAS**, one of the Goals of the 2020 Comprehensive Plan is for a forward-looking approach to community growth and redevelopment; and

**WHEREAS**, the Municipality, in collaboration with the Anchorage Community Development Authority and other partners, seeks to explore opportunities for innovative and lower-cost forms of small or temporary housing and shelter; and

**WHEREAS**, the Assembly recently amended the building code, Title 23, to make it easier to build small shelter units; and

**WHEREAS**, Central Lutheran Church's "In Our Backyard" project has used that increased flexibility to build five small shelter units with demonstrated success, showing that these types of small units can provide a decent, private, lower-cost housing option for individuals exiting homelessness; and

**WHEREAS**, the "In Our Backyard" project has also shown that pairing supportive services with these small shelter units, including behavioral health care and case management, is appropriate and effective; and

**WHEREAS**, current Title 21 standards for habilitative care, transitional living, and homeless shelters do not allow those facilities to be developed using small shelter units; and

**WHEREAS**, temporary use permitting allows for flexibility in trying new development approaches or pilot projects, especially for housing or shelter, while also retaining adequate land use controls to mitigate impacts; and

**WHEREAS**, temporary uses by the Municipality of Anchorage on public lands (the PLI zone) are currently limited to 90 days, which creates a barrier to investing in more significant, but still temporary, projects such as small forms of shelter; and

**WHEREAS**, temporary uses in residential zones are limited to 90 days (which this ordinance would not change) and temporary uses in non-residential zones are limited to 180 days; and

**WHEREAS**, there is considerable community interest in replicating the success of

the “In Our Backyard” project with similar pilot projects on private property; and

**WHEREAS**, recent weather-related disasters in Western Alaska have led to the Governor of Alaska making a disaster declaration on October 9, 2025, and these events may increase the need for the provision of small forms of housing and shelter in Anchorage quickly; and

**WHEREAS**, Mayor Suzanne LaFrance signed an emergency proclamation on October 17, 2025 to respond to needs related to the State’s ongoing emergency response to former Typhoon Halong in Western Alaska; now, therefore,

**THE ANCHORAGE ASSEMBLY ORDAINS:**

**Section 1.** Anchorage Municipal Code section 21.05.020 is hereby amended to read as follows (*the remainder of the section is not affected and therefore not set out*):

**21.05.020      Generally applicable use standards.**

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**C.      Uses developed with shelter units.**

Shelter units, as defined in AMC 21.15.040, are an allowed structure only as specifically provided in this chapter as a use-specific standard.

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(AO 2012-124(S), 2-26-13; AO 2013-117, 12-3-13; AO No. 2016-3(S), § 8, 2-23-16; AO No. 2020-38, § 6, 5-28-20)

**Section 2.** Anchorage Municipal Code section 21.05.030 is hereby amended to read as follows (*the remainder of the section is not affected and therefore not set out*):

**21.05.030      Residential uses: Definitions and use-specific standards.**

This section defines the general residential use categories and specific residential use types listed in Table 21.05-1. This section also contains use-specific standards that apply to specific use types. The use-specific standards apply regardless of whether the use type is permitted as a matter of right, or subject to a site plan or conditional use review process.

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**B.      *Group living.*** This category is characterized by residential occupancy of a structure by a group of people who do not meet the definition of "Household Living." The size of the group may be larger than a family. Generally, structures have a common eating area for residents. The residents may receive care, training, or treatment, and caregivers may or may not also reside at the site. Accessory uses commonly include recreational facilities and vehicle parking for occupants and staff. Specific use types include:

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3.      Habilitative care facility.

- \*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*
- b.      Use-specific standards.
- i.      An habilitative care facility may only occupy a type of household living structure that is permitted in the zoning district.
- ii.      Habilitative care facilities constructed after January 1, 2016, shall comply with the applicable residential design standards in section 21.07.110, Residential Design Standards.
- iii.      Habilitative care facilities shall comply with the dimensional standards in Tables 21.06-1, 21.06-2, 21.10-6, and 21.10-7 of the applicable residential structure type.
- iv.      If the elements of the facility that are not directly related to residential uses, such as administrative offices, classrooms, auditoriums, and the like, exceed 20 percent of the total gross floor area of the habilitative care facility, then the facility shall require conditional use approval.
- v.      Habilitative care facilities developed using shelter units, as defined by AMC 21.15.040, are allowed for this use and do not need to comply with i. - iv. above.
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5.      Transitional living facility.
- a.      Definition. A facility providing temporary housing with services to assist homeless persons and families and persons with special needs to prepare for and obtain permanent housing within twenty-four months. The facility provides 24-hour a day, seven days a week programmatic assistance or services for self-sufficiency skills to its tenants, and may provide services such as, but not limited to, on-site assistance in learning independent living skills (shopping, cooking, financial budgeting, preparing for job interviews, preparing resumes, and similar skills), and referral to off-site education and employment resources (GED completion, job training, computer training, employment services, and the like) to assist the tenants in becoming financially self-sustaining.
- b.      Use-specific standards.

- i. Shelter units, as defined in AMC 21.15.040, are an allowed structure type for this use.

(AO 2012-124(S), 2-26-13; AO 2013-117, 12-3-13; AO No. 2014-58, § 1, 5-20-14; AO No. 2015-133(S), § 4, 2-23-16; AO No. 2017-160, § 1, 12-19-17; AO No. 2018-118, § 2, 1-1-19; AO No. 2020-23, § 2, 3-10-20; AO No. 2020-24, § 1, 3-10-20; AO No. 2023-103(S), § 2, 1-1-24; AO No. 2023-87(S-1), § 5, 6-25-24)

**Section 3.** Anchorage Municipal Code section 21.05.040 is hereby amended to read as follows (*the remainder of the section is not affected and therefore not set out*):

**21.05.040 Community uses: Definitions and use-specific standards.**

This section defines the general community use categories and specific community use types listed in Table 21.05-1. This section also contains use-specific standards that apply to specific use types. The use-specific standards apply regardless of whether the use type is permitted as a matter of right, subject to an administrative or major site plan review process, or subject to the conditional use process.

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- C. Community service. This category includes uses of a public, non-profit, or charitable nature providing a local service to people of the community. Generally, such uses provide the service on-site or have employees at the site on a regular basis. The service is ongoing, not just for special events. The use may provide special counseling, education, or training. Accessory uses may include offices, meeting, food preparation, parking, therapy areas, and athletic facilities.

Specific use types include:

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5. Homeless and transient shelter.

- a. Definition. A facility designed to provide minimum necessities of life, including overnight accommodation, on a limited, short-term basis for individuals and families during periods of dislocation or emergency pending formulation of longer-term planning. Facility elements may include providing the physical care required, including shelter, food, and necessary medical and clothing needs, directly or by referral to appropriate agency; and planning for more permanent housing and employment, including contact with community resources.

- b. Use-specific standards.

- i. Homeless and transient shelters shall be located more than 500 feet from other homeless and transient shelters.

- ii. Homeless and transient shelters shall be located within one-quarter mile of a public transit route or have a plan to provide transportation to guests. Commuter routes shall not be counted as public transit routes for this standard.
- iii. Secure storage for both personal belongings and bicycles shall be provided on-site for guests.
- iv. In the B-3 district, a homeless and transient shelter may not serve more than 150 overnight clients. A variance pursuant to section 21.03.240 is required for a site to exceed the 150 overnight client restriction, and the fee for such variance application shall be waived.
- v. Shelter units, as defined in AMC 21.15.040, are an allowed structure type for this use.

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(AO 2012-124(S), 2-26-13; AO 2013-117, 12-3-13; AO No. 2015-142(S-1), § 4, 6-21-16; AO No. 2018-59, § 1, 7-31-18; AO No. 2019-11, § 3, 2-12-19; AO No. 2021-54, § 2, 6-22-21; AO No. 2021-89(S), § 21, 2-15-22; AO No. 2024-24, § 3, 4-23-24; AO No. 2025-53, § 1, 5-20-25)

**Section 4.** Anchorage Municipal Code section 21.05.080 is hereby amended to read as follows (*the remainder of the section is not affected and therefore not set out*):

**21.05.080 Temporary Uses and Structures**

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**B. General Temporary Use Standards**

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**3. Other Uses and Structures Allowed**

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**e. Other Allowed Temporary Uses**

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- v. In the PLI district, temporary licensed commercial uses and associated temporary structures, for not more than 90 days total duration within a 12 month period. The temporary use may be in operation 90 continuous days or any combination of days in intermittent operation. This provision does not apply to the use of construction trailers on an active construction project or shelter units as defined in AMC 21.15.040.

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**D. General Requirements for All Temporary Uses and Structures**

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**3. Unless otherwise stated in this title:[,]**

- a. I[T]emporary uses in residential districts shall last no**

longer than 90 days.

b. Temporary uses in nonresidential districts shall last no longer than 180 days, with possible 180 day extension, in accordance with AMC 23.10.104.

c. Notwithstanding a. and b. above, uses permissibly developed with shelter units as defined in AMC 21.15.040, where all structures are without permanent foundations, may occur for a duration of up to one year. The director may approve additional one-year extensions at their discretion.

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(AO 2012-124(S), 2-26-13; AO 2013-117, 12-3-13; AO 2024-24, 4-23-24)

**Section 5.** Anchorage Municipal Code section 21.15.040 is hereby amended to add a new term, as follows (*the remainder of the section is not affected and therefore not set out*):

**21.15.040 Definitions.**

When used in this title, the following words and terms shall have the meaning set forth in this section, unless other provisions of this title specifically indicate otherwise.

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**Shelter Unit**

As used in this title, "shelter unit" is defined in the same manner as in AMC 23.10.104.16.A and must meet all the limitations of AMC 23.10.104.16. If there are any discrepancies, the definition in Title 23 shall govern.

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**Section 6.** Pursuant to AMC subsection 21.03.210C., this ordinance shall not require Planning and Zoning Commission review prior to Assembly action, and the 21-day published notice requirement of AMC subsection 21.03.020H.4. is waived; this ordinance shall comply with Charter § 10.01(b) notice requirements.

**Section 7.** This ordinance shall be effective immediately upon passage and approval by the Assembly.

PASSED AND APPROVED by the Anchorage Assembly this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2025.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chair of the Assembly

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Municipal Clerk



# MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE

## Assembly Memorandum

AM No. 826 - 2025

Meeting Date: November 4, 2025

**FROM: MAYOR**

**SUBJECT: AN ORDINANCE AMENDING ANCHORAGE MUNICIPAL CODE CHAPTERS 21.05 AND 21.15 TO MAKE SHELTER UNITS ALLOWABLE STRUCTURES FOR DEVELOPING PARTICULAR LAND USES, TO INCREASE THE TIME ALLOWANCE FOR TEMPORARY USES DEVELOPED WITH SHELTER UNITS, AND WAIVING PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION REVIEW.**

In alignment with the Municipality of Anchorage's commitment to innovative and adaptive approaches to housing and community development, this ordinance proposes targeted amendments to Anchorage Municipal Code (AMC) Chapters 21.05, 21.08, and 21.15. These amendments are designed to facilitate the use of small shelter units—as previously defined in AMC 23.10.104.16—as allowable structures for specific land uses, including habilitative care facilities, transitional living facilities, and homeless and transient shelters. The proposed changes are informed by the demonstrated success of local pilot projects, such as Central Lutheran Church's "In Our Backyard" initiative, which has effectively paired shelter units with supportive services to provide dignified, lower-cost housing options for individuals transitioning out of homelessness.

The ordinance allows shelter units to be used temporarily on public land and in non-residential zones. Under current code, temporary uses on public lands (PLI zoning) are limited to 90 days, and temporary uses in non-residential zones are limited to 180 days. This ordinance amends Title 21 to allow habilitative care facilities, transitional living facilities, and homeless and transient shelters to be developed from small shelter units and to operate for up to one year by right, with the possibility of additional one-year extensions at the discretion of the Planning Director. These provisions are intended to support more meaningful investment in temporary shelter infrastructure while maintaining appropriate oversight.

Moreover, the recent disaster in Western Alaska has highlighted the need for the Municipality of Anchorage to be able to respond quickly and flexibly to provide emergency housing. Given the need for quick action to respond to this emergency, the ordinance waives Planning and Zoning Commission review, allowing for expedited implementation.

Overall, these amendments represent a proactive and pragmatic response to both ongoing housing insecurity and emergent community needs.

Pursuant to AMC 2.30.053, this ordinance has no significant economic effects,  
and a summary of economic effects is not required.

**THE ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDS APPROVAL.**

Prepared by: Graham Downey, Deputy Chief of Staff, and Allison B.  
Lang, Assistant Municipal Attorney

Approved by: Susanne Fleek-Green, Chief of Staff

Concur: Mélisa R.K. Babb, Planning Director

Concur: Eva Gardner, Municipal Attorney

Concur: Ona R. Brause, OMB Director

Concur: William D. Falsey, Chief Administrative Officer

Concur: Rebecca A. Windt Pearson, Municipal Manager

Respectfully submitted: Suzanne LaFrance, Mayor