



MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE

ASSEMBLY MEMORANDUM

No. AM 121-2022

Meeting Date: February 15, 2022

1 **FROM: MAYOR**

2
3 **SUBJECT: AN ORDINANCE AMENDING ANCHORAGE MUNICIPAL CODE**
4 **TITLE 21 CHAPTERS 21.03, REVIEW AND APPROVAL**
5 **PROCEDURES; 21.04, ZONING DISTRICTS; 21.06**
6 **DIMENSIONAL STANDARDS AND MEASUREMENTS; 21.07,**
7 **DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN STANDARDS; AND 21.15,**
8 **RULES OF CONSTRUCTION AND DEFINITIONS, IN ORDER TO**
9 **AMEND THE TWO-AND-ONE-HALF-STORY LIMIT AND**
10 **RELATED DIMENSIONAL STANDARDS IN THE R-2A, R-2D,**
11 **AND R-2M ZONING DISTRICTS, FOR PROMOTING HOUSING**
12 **OPPORTUNITIES COMPATIBLE WITH THE INTENDED SCALE**
13 **OF R-2 NEIGHBORHOODS.**

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16 On November 1, 2021, the Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) held a public
17 hearing for Case No. 2021-0111, the Public Hearing Draft of the R-2 Zones Height
18 and Bulk Amendments ordinance. Based on its review and findings on December 6,
19 the Commission recommended approval of the R-2 Zones Amendments, as stated in
20 PZC Resolution No. 2021-037 (Exhibit A).

21 **OVERVIEW**

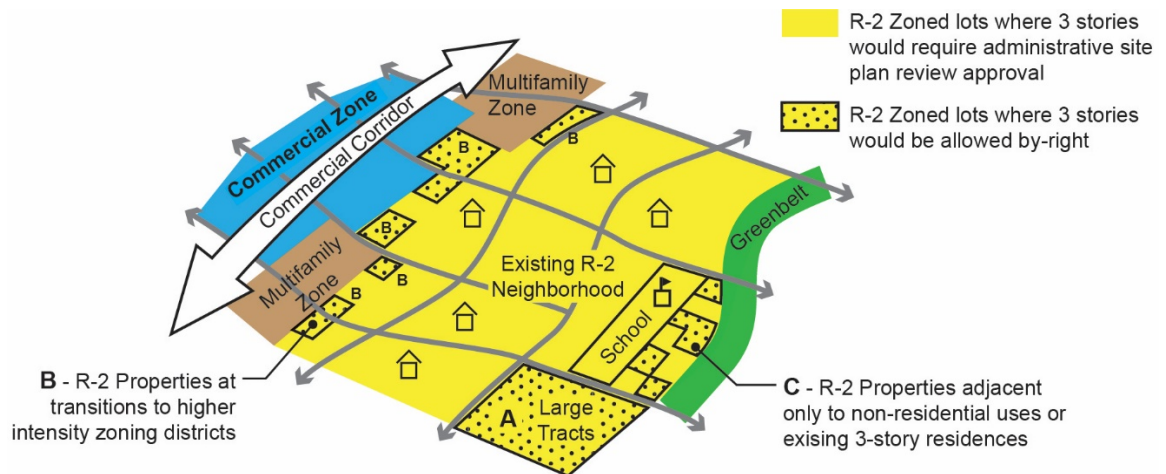
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24 The *R-2 Zones Height and Bulk Amendments* ordinance is a text amendment to
25 Anchorage Municipal Code (AMC) Title 21 building height and bulk regulations in the
26 R-2A, R-2D, and R-2M residential zoning districts (R-2 zones). It is an amendment to
27 the two-and-one-half-story (2½-story) height limit in the R-2 zones. It proposes to
28 allow for 3-story buildings in certain locations and situations, while minimizing potential
29 height and bulk impacts on adjoining properties. It is intended to support more efficient
30 housing development in the R-2 zones, by making it more feasible to fit the allowed
31 number of units on larger sites, reducing costs, and increasing design flexibility.

32
33 This amendment helps carry out Actions 4-4 and 4-10 of the *Anchorage 2040 Land*
34 *Use Plan (2040 LUP) Goal 4: Neighborhood Housing*, the associated Action 7-2 of
35 *2040 LUP Goal 7: Compatible Land Use*, and other related Goals and Policies of the
36 *Comprehensive Plan*, as described in Exhibit C, on pages 3 and 4.

37
38 An overview of the proposed Title 21 text amendments, as provided in the draft AO
39 and shown with annotation in Exhibit B, includes the following:

- 1 1. Allows 3-story buildings by-right in strategic and peripheral locations that are
 2 most likely to provide housing opportunities and minimizes height and bulk
 3 impacts within existing neighborhoods, including:

- 4
 5 A. Large development sites $\frac{1}{2}$ acre or more in size;
 6 B. Transitional sites located adjacent to commercial or multifamily zones; and
 7 C. Sites adjacent only to non-residential uses or 3-story residential uses.
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2. Requires the 3-story buildings on the strategic and peripheral sites to provide transitions in height and bulk to adjacent residential properties, as follows:

- 15 A. Provide a height *step-back* in building form, or additional yard setback
 16 in building footprint, from adjacent residential lots; and
 17 B. Limit the building sidewall length along the side lot line facing adjacent
 18 residences.

3. Enables discretionary administrative approval of 3-story residences on other R-2 lots (in the yellow “Existing R-2 Neighborhood” area in the diagram above), via the Title 21 Administrative Site Plan Review entitlement procedure.

4. Reduces the side setback for small multifamily structures from 10 feet to 5 feet, to have the same setback as for a duplex or townhouse, provided:

- 27 A. The multifamily building’s sidewall must be similar in length to a typical
 28 new home or duplex; and
 29 B. 3-story buildings must still be stepped back from the side lot line as
 30 discussed in item 2.A. above.

5. Reduces the height exceptions for rooftop appurtenances such as stairwell towers, and revises the definition of “half story,” to mitigate taller buildings.

Exhibit C pages 23–25, outline these amendments in more detail and provide cross-references to the specific code amendment language in Exhibit B.

BACKGROUND

The R-2A, R-2D, and R-2M zoning districts (R-2 zones) are distributed across the Anchorage Bowl, as shown on Map 1 on page 6 of Exhibit C. They make up approximately one-third of the urban residentially zoned land in Anchorage.

The R-2 zones have a unique function among Anchorage’s residential zones. They provide the moderate scale, intensity, and desired features of a single-family neighborhood, and also accommodate a diverse range of compact housing types—including attached single-family, duplexes, townhomes, and (in the R-2M zone) small multifamily structures. This combination distinguishes R-2 zoning from R-1 single-family zoning on the low end of the density spectrum, and from R-3/R-4 apartment zoning on the high end of the density spectrum, as illustrated on page 17 of Exhibit C.

The *Anchorage 2040 Land Use Plan* found that, as of 2016, approximately one-fifth of Anchorage’s additional housing capacity was in the R-2 zones. Many R-2 neighborhoods have “infill” and “redevelopment” lots. The R-2 zones also have some larger tracts of land. The *Anchorage 2040 Plan* also found that more than two-thirds of the buildable acres and additional housing capacity in the R-2 zones were on the larger parcels one-half acre or more in size.

History of R-2 Zones Height and Story Limits

Exhibit C (page 19) documents that, from the 1940s through the mid-1980s, housing built in the R-2 zones was subject to a 2½-story height limit. A 2½-story building consists of two stories above ground plus a third-floor attic living space tucked into the pitched roof form. Title 21 called this attic living space a “half story.”

Buildings were also subject to a 25-foot height limit. The 25-foot, 2½-story dual height limit governed until the end of Anchorage’s oil and construction boom in 1985, when the 2½-story limit was deleted, leaving only the 25-foot height limit. In practice, this still limited most buildings to 2½ stories. In 1999, the 25-foot height limit was increased to 30 feet to allow steeper roof pitches and taller ceilings. In 2013, the 2½-story limit was restored in response to concerns about construction trends toward bigger, 3-story townhouses with flat roofs, parapets, and stairwell towers. Exhibit C, page 21, summarizes and illustrates concerns with 3-story, flat-roofed buildings, including an 8- to 25-foot *increase* in building sidewall height.

Problems with the 2½-Story Limit

As discussed in Exhibit C, pages 19-20, the current 2½-story limit and several other R-2 zone dimensional standards have led to the following problems:

- Constraining the number of housing units that can fit on some development sites;
- Increasing the costs of adding third-story living spaces, as attics or basements;
- Prohibiting administrative relief or flexibility to respond to site characteristics; and
- Allowing excessive height exceptions for stairwells and other rooftop enclosures.

The proposed ordinance addresses these problems and mitigates the potential height and bulk impacts of 3-story flat-roofed buildings, to meet the R-2 Amendment project objectives listed in Exhibit C, on page 22.

WHAT THIS AMENDMENT DOES NOT DO

Following is a list of things this R-2 Zones Amendments ordinance does NOT include:

- Does not change the 30-foot height limit, or the 40 percent lot coverage limit.
- Does not change the minimum lot size required per housing unit or per type of housing unit. In other words, it does not increase the number of dwelling units, or change what kinds of housing types are allowed, on a given lot.
- Does not propose rezonings or changes to zoning boundaries.
- Does not change height limits or setbacks in the Chugiak-Eagle River R-2 zones (CE-R-2A, CE-R-2D, or CE-R-2M zoning districts).

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SUMMARY

The Public Hearing Draft was released for agency and public review and comment on September 3, 2021, for the November 1, 2021, Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) public hearing. The document was posted on the Planning Department website and distributed for review and comment to community councils, agencies, and other interested parties. The public hearing schedule was announced on the municipal Public Notices web page. Comments received were included in the PZC case packet as provided in Exhibit C. An issue-response memo with recommended amendments to the draft ordinance was provided to the PZC in response to all comments and questions from the public and commissioners, as shown in Exhibit D.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Assembly approval is requested of the Public Hearing Draft ordinance, which reflects the recommendations in November 1, 2021, PZC Staff Packet (Exhibit C) and December 6, 2021, Issue-Response Memo (Exhibit D), as adopted in Planning and Zoning Commission Resolution No. 2021-037 (Exhibit A).

THE ADMINISTRATION RECOMMENDS APPROVAL.

Prepared by:	Tom Davis, Senior Planner, Planning Department
Approved by:	Craig H. Lyon, Planning Director
Concur:	Adam Trombley, Community Development Director
Concur:	Cheryl Frasca, OMB Director
Concur:	Patrick Bergt, Municipal Attorney
Concur:	Travis C. Frisk, CFO
Concur:	Amy Demboski, Municipal Manager
Respectfully submitted:	Dave Bronson, Mayor

Attachments: Exhibit A—Planning and Zoning Commission Resolution No. 2021-037
 Exhibit B—Annotated Zoning Code Amendment Language
 Exhibit C—Planning and Zoning Commission Staff Packet (11/1/2021)
 Exhibit D—Planning Department Issue-Response Memo (12/6/2021)
 Exhibit E—Planning and Zoning Commission Meeting Minutes