



Municipality of Anchorage

Watershed & Natural Resources Advisory Commission

AGENDA

Wednesday, April 24, 2024

12:00 Noon – 1:30 p.m.

Regular Meeting
(Hybrid format)

In-Person Physical Location

Planning Conference Room 170
Planning and Development Center
4700 Elmore Road
Anchorage, Alaska

or

Via Microsoft Teams

[Join the meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: 257 692 952 645,

Passcode: 6zzbL3

Or call in (audio only): +1 907-519-0237

Phone Conference ID: 802 292 200#

I. CALL TO ORDER

- A. Establishment of Quorum
- B. Disclosures

II. SPECIAL ORDER OF BUSINESS

- A. None

III. MINUTES

- A. February 7, 2024
- B. March 27, 2024 Summary (Work Session)

IV. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- A. MOA Wetland Permitting Program

V. NEW BUSINESS

- A. HOME Initiative Presentation ([PZC Case 2024-0006](#))

VI. PERSONS TO BE HEARD (3-minute limit)

VII. OTHER BUSINESS/STAFF REPORT

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Next Meeting: Wednesday July 24, 2024



Municipality of Anchorage

Watershed & Natural Resources Advisory Commission

Wednesday, February 7, 2024

12:00 Noon – 1:34 p.m.

Planning Conference Room 170

4700 Elmore Road

Commissioners Present	Staff	Guests
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emily Creely, Chair• Tamás Deák, Vice Chair• Kevin Jackson• Holly Kent• Matt Nemeth• Nic Kinsman• Maddie Halloran• Lee Cruise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Daniel Mckenna-Foster, Senior Planner, Long-Range Planning• Ryan Yelle, Long-Range Planning Manager• Kyle Cunningham, PME Watershed Management• Kenna Billups, PME Watershed Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Miaja DiSalvo, Mat-Su Planning & Land Use Development

I. CALL TO ORDER

A. Establishment of Quorum. Established.

B. Disclosures

II. SPECIAL ORDER OF BUSINESS

A. Election of Officers

III. MINUTES

A. December 21, 2023, Action Summary. Commissioner Deák moved; Commissioner Jackson seconded. No discussion. Approval by unanimous consent.

IV. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Rules of Procedure for the Watershed & Natural Resources Advisory Commission

- Discussion of term limits, communication with Mayor's Office or staff, discussion of watershed rules vs. municipal code, and the timeline for approving changes to the rules of procedure.
- Discussion of monthly vs. quarterly meetings, and potential changes to notice.

- Overall agreement on changes:
 - Change public notice requirements to 1 week.
 - Change sending out the agenda to 1 week in advance (COB Friday at the very latest).
 - Clarify how communication should work: commission communicates with staff, etc.
 - Clarify if there is a way to pass a resolution with a less-than-5 quorum, emergency powers situation.
 - Meet quarterly for now; see how things go in terms of agenda items/workload.

B. MOA Wetland Permitting Program: Staff reported on the status of the MOA wetlands permitting program. Items of discussion:

- Whether or not MOA could apply to the Army Corps of Engineers for some sort of pre-jurisdictional determination guidance program, and which department might do this. Questions about any other mapping resources to help the public predict whether something is likely to be jurisdictional or not.
- How involved the Watershed & Natural Resources Advisory Commission might be in reviewing applications: Would it come to the Commission if over 1 acre, 5 acres, etc.?
- General agreement to add discussion or review of MOA wetlands applications.
- The **Chair** recommended using the Army Corps permit application as a starting point and improving on it if possible.
- The application should be complete by the end of the summer of 2024.
- One major question: Will there be mitigation requirements?
- The Commission agreed to a work session to discuss further in March 2024, possibly with specific examples.

V. NEW BUSINESS (*none*)

VI. PERSONS TO BE HEARD (3-minute limit) (*none*)

VII. OTHER BUSINESS/STAFF REPORT: Staff reviewed notes from the meeting.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT: **Commissioner Kinsman** moved; **Commissioner Kent** seconded. All voted in favor, and the meeting was adjourned at 1:34 p.m.



Municipality of Anchorage

Watershed & Natural Resources Advisory Commission

Work Session Meeting Summary

Wednesday, March 27, 2024

12:00 Noon – 1:30 p.m.

(Hybrid format)

**Planning Conference Room 170
4700 Elmore Road**

Commissioners Present	Staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kevin Jackson (online)• Holly Kent• Matt Nemeth (online)• Nic Kinsman• Maddie Halloran• Lee Cruise(online)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Daniel Mckenna-Foster, Long-Range Planning• Ryan Yelle, Long-Range Planning Manager• Kyle Cunningham, PME Watershed Management• Kenna Billups, PME Watershed Management• Kristi Bischofberger

1. Introductions

2. MOA Wetlands Permitting Process

Ryan Yelle: Provided an overview of the state of wetland permitting, how we get through the process, and what we do next. Discussion. Emily Creely and Tamás Deák not here and are who are generally considered the reigning experts on this subject.

Commissioner Halloran: What happens after the application gets submitted? Does there need to be an additional layer of review? How many applications might we see per year?

Ryan Yelle: The 1 acre was initially what came to mind as a nice predictable threshold, but we could certainly discuss lowering that. Typically, more than 2 applications per year. Previously we saw around 5 per year.

Commissioner Kent: What does watershed think about it?

Kyle Cunningham: When it's our question to answer whether or not something is developable, what standards are we going to apply?

Criteria 1 & 2 in the draft application is intended to account for reasonable use of the land, is the site design accounting for environmental/ecological impacts. "Trying to not just say no, but we do want people to take a separate approach."

Kyle Cunningham: Hard to predict long-term effects years later.

Discussion of specific examples

Discussion of larger questions of values and discussions, political aspects of development.

Use new standards that are above and beyond corps standards—showing connection to the water course.

Kyle Cunningham: What would the standards be? All Class A?

Ryan Yelle: Area threshold, regardless of what class

Kyle Cunningham: Any wetlands that show any sort of connectivity (including underground) there is a value of flood attenuation.

Holly Kent: Does watershed have quantifiable standards for high value, mid value, flood attenuation, wildlife corridor, etc.

Kyle Cunningham: We only see these at subdivision, not at building permit. But someone could subdivide without having to do a wetland determination. We have limited data about precise locations/characteristics of streams, etc.

Holly Kent: Is it true that we can't figure out a way to avoid problems down the road?

<no resolution on this>

Holly Kent: Now A & B wetlands are being considered because we need more housing. 12:39. We completely rely on the creeks for flood management, and we really rely on the wetlands as well. If we don't have those, we need to start building an LA aqueduct and stormwater infrastructure. I wish we could think about things in advance.

Kyle Cunningham: The easiest answer would be that every development in a wetland requires a variance and then the Commission makes the decision.

Ryan Yelle: That's an option, but the way variances are set up now, all criteria must be met. ZBEA just doesn't have the expertise that this Commission has.

Commissioner Kinsman: Just issues of volume and blame trade that could occur in various sticky situations.

Commissioner Nemeth: It sounds like one of the purposes is to discuss the process, and then at some point that will go to the Watershed Commission. Is the application for the wetland permit also in play for revision <yes>.

- Would the ADFG anadromous waters catalog fit into this? RY—that could come in under criteria 3. And Criteria 4 mentions aquatic resources, etc.
- There may be some special circumstances in Anchorage that are different from some of the models used elsewhere (we have massive snowmelt inputs) and we have a lot of anadromous fish—I don't see a lot of that in it. What if it is a wetland connected to a stream, but not part of the stream proper?

Kyle Cunningham: Some of that permitting might go through ADFG or the Corps. Also, a larger question of connectivity—it is all connected in preserving quality for the Salmonids.

Kristi Bischofberger: I don't think that planning or the watershed is going to be enough to stop the steamroller once it gets moving. But there is an opportunity for this group to say "Ok, this wetland has been providing some function in terms of attenuation for this city, we require a study, a good honest analysis for what level of water management has this been doing so that the developer would then be on the hook for creating the pathway of that water once it hits the surface."

Holly Kent: I feel that is an appropriate use of the Commission. The onus is on the developer in requiring that there be further studies.

Kristi Bischofberger: There needs to be a precedent set. There's full out development, but then there's also alternative uses of the wetland. Solar array strawberry bog example—we would be lucky to have that in comparison. Another example would be snow sites, when wetlands are functional, etc.

Kyle Cunningham: It might be an interesting idea that some sites would be eligible for certain types of development but not those with more coverage.

Discussion about how to do practical development.

Next steps—better picture for what would trigger permit review.

Holly Kent: I don't see that we have a heavy workload.

Nic Kinsman: One thing we talked a lot about last time was the confidentiality part—if the commission is asked to review a permit, and it becomes public.

Matt Nemeth: Does the city have a nexus with ADFG to ask if they would have any comments on this application? [Will connect Ryan with ADFG habitat person]

Discussion of having a guest expert.

@DMF—Ryan's planning on having this as a topic of discussion at our next meeting, please send comments back to us



DANIEL VOLLAND
DISTRICT 1 | NORTH

ANNA BRAWLEY
DISTRICT 3 | WEST

MEG ZALETEL
DISTRICT 4 | MIDTOWN

INVITATION: LET'S TALK ABOUT THE **HOME INITIATIVE!**

DATE March 5, 2024

SUBJECT **HOME Initiative (AO 2023-87 S): Public Engagement Process, Upcoming Meetings, Request for Feedback & Conversations**

Dear Anchorage Community Group,

We want to talk about housing, and how we can improve our residential zoning code!

The 3 Assembly sponsors of the HOME Initiative (Volland, Brawley, Zaletel) are reaching out directly to make sure you have the information about our ordinance to simplify residential zoning code in the Anchorage Bowl, upcoming meetings and public hearings scheduled as it moves through the process, and to request some time with your leadership and/or members at a future meeting. There are 2 goals for our outreach meetings:

1. We want to share what's being proposed and why, and answer your questions.
2. We want your feedback on this idea, and what residential zoning rules should be.

More about our **meeting request** is below. This letter also includes:

- **Details about the HOME Initiative**, AO 2023-87(S) and detailed draft code changes
- Information about our upcoming **informational webinar on Monday, March 4**
- Details about how you can participate in the **Planning and Zoning Commission Hearing scheduled for Monday, March 18**, including how to submit written public comments
- How you can **contact us** to learn more.

Meeting Request: Presentation and Conversation about HOME

In addition to our webinar and the Planning and Zoning Commission hearing, we are scheduling a series of meetings with stakeholders across Anchorage to talk about the ordinance in the next few months – ***we want to meet with you!***

We understand you may have monthly or regularly-scheduled meetings, and would ask for time on your agenda to give a brief overview of HOME, with time for discussion, anytime from March to May. If you don't have regular meetings, or would like to schedule a one-

time special meeting to allow for more time on this topic for your members, your executive board, a committee, etc. - we are happy to work with you!

Please reach out to Legislative Services to request scheduling, or contact the sponsors (our e-mails are at the end of this letter).

[Learn More about HOME at our Webinar on March 4!](#)

The sponsors will host a [webinar on Monday, March 4 from 6 – 7:30PM](#) on Microsoft Teams.¹ (No registration is needed, just use the link to connect.) We will present an overview of the ordinance, and also a walk-through of the proposed zoning rules for each new district, compared with current zoning. While we will have limited time for questions, we will also be collecting questions and preparing an FAQ to share back.

The webinar will be recorded for later viewing and posted to the [Muni's YouTube channel](#),² where you can also find Assembly and committee meetings. We will also post the slides.

First Public Comment & Testimony Opportunity: Planning & Zoning Commission

IMPORTANT: The first official public comment opportunity is to the Planning & Zoning Commission (PZC)! Please see below for how to submit comments to PZC.

The sponsors will present the latest version of [AO 2023-87 \(S\)](#) to the Planning & Zoning Commission on Monday, March 18 at 5:30PM, followed by a PZC public hearing at 6:30PM. Both meetings are open to the public and, during the public hearing, the Planning & Zoning Commission will hear public testimony on the HOME Initiative, [Case 2024-0006](#).³ To testify in person, please arrive by the start of the meeting (or attend the work session and stick around for the meeting to start).

Planning and Zoning Commission HOME Initiative Work Session and Public Hearing

Monday, March 18, 2024 | Work Session 5:30PM | Public Hearing 6:30PM

Location: Loussac Library Assembly Chambers (1st floor), 3600 Denali Street, Midtown

To submit comments on the proposed ordinance to the Planning & Zoning Commission, submit using the CityView Portal: [click here for online comment page](#).⁴

¹ Web link: <https://www.muni.org/PublicNotice/Pages/HOME-Initiative-Webinar.aspx>

² Web link: <https://www.youtube.com/@municipalityofanchorage9648>

³ Web link: <https://www.muni.org/CityViewPortal/Planning/Status?planningId=17913>

⁴ Web link: <https://www.muni.org/PZComments/?casenum=2024-0006>

If you have any trouble using the CityView Portal, please direct comments to staff contacts in the MOA Planning Department:

- Tom Davis, tom.davis@anchorageak.gov
- Ryan Yelle, ryan.yelle@anchorageak.gov

NOTE: The sponsors always welcome comments to us, and you can always send public comments on any topic to the full Assembly. Because this ordinance is being heard by PZC, you need to submit comments through the CityView portal if you would like the commissioners see your comments and they are included in the packet.

What Happens After Planning and Zoning’s Recommendations?

Once the Planning & Zoning Commission votes on their findings and recommendations (on or after the March 18 meeting), the ordinance will move out of PZC and back to the Assembly and is scheduled to come back for a public hearing at the Assembly’s regular meeting on June 11.

The sponsors will send out a press release and brief update to stakeholders about the timeline at that point, with more details. In the meantime, we want to give a general timeline, and why we are looking to schedule community meetings in April and May, well in advance of the anticipated public hearing before the Assembly.

Background: What is the HOME Initiative, and What’s Happened So Far?

Late last summer, we introduced an ordinance called the HOME (Housing Opportunities in the Municipality for Everyone) Initiative, introduced as AO 2023-87(S). It proposes reorganizing and simplifying residential zoning districts (part of Title 21 or AMC 21, our city’s zoning code), to give more flexibility to property owners what they can build or develop on their land, to make the code somewhat easier to understand and use for developers and builders, people trying to figure out what they can build on their property, and also reduce administrative burden on staff by simplifying code.

What Does the HOME Initiative Propose?

AO 2023-87(S) puts forward a general policy: reduce the number of residential zoning districts in the Anchorage bowl⁵ from 15 to 5, ranging from large-lot houses (like Hillside) to dense urban neighborhoods (like Downtown). The 5 zoning districts proposed:

1. LLR – Large Lot Residential
2. STFR – Single Family and Two-Family Residential

⁵ The proposed changes do not impact zoning rules for Girdwood and Chugiak/Eagle River, which each have their own separate zoning chapter in Title 21.

3. CMRL – Compact Mixed Residential, Low
4. CMRM – Compact Mixed Residential, Medium
5. URH – Urban Residential, High

The original ordinance does not address all of the details necessary to enact these change: there are more detailed code changes needed to convert existing zoning districts into the new set listed above. This is what the sponsors, along with their technical consultant and advisors, worked through to prepare for the 2024 public process. The draft new code accompanying the original ordinance is our first-draft proposal of how to fully implement the policy changes first put forward in the HOME Initiative in 2023.

Guiding Principles for Policy Choices proposed in the HOME Initiative

When reviewing current residential zoning districts and how they can be simplified, the sponsors followed these guiding principles for policy decisions in the draft code:

1. Make the code shorter, simpler, consistent with the intent of the Comprehensive Plan & 2040 Land Use Plan, for policies related to housing and neighborhoods.
2. Define residential zoning districts that follow the general intent of the land use designations in the 2040 Land Use Plan.
3. Keep the least restrictive dimensions & policies of zones being consolidated, as much as possible and feasible.
4. For dimensional changes (lot setbacks, etc.), use dimensions consistent with those in the equivalent existing zones.
5. While other parts of AMC 21 are impacted by this ordinance, retain or relocate other parts of code in this ordinance; revisit potential further changes at another time.
6. Make the zoning code more flexible and easier regulatory structure to administer, interpret, and update over time.

Process So Far, from Introduction to Next Steps

The Assembly postponed this ordinance to summer 2024, because the sponsors proposed taking time to work through the details to bring back to the public: what would the dimensions (setbacks, height limits, etc.) be for each new district? What other parts of code need to be looked at, and updated with these new districts? Will this require any amendments to the comprehensive plan, which often happens when there are zoning changes? The ordinance was referred to the Planning and Zoning Commission in March 2024, and scheduled to come back to the Assembly in June 2024.

After taking time to work through the detail with technical consultants and advisors, the sponsors have brought back a new draft set of code changes with our proposed answers to these questions: this full draft included in the PZC packet, along with the original ordinance. The Planning and Zoning Commission will review this packet, including the details to implement the changes, and adopt their findings and recommendations in the form of an advisory resolution to the Assembly.

The sponsors will then work with staff to prepare a new draft ordinance, incorporating all the proposed code changes in a single ordinance, as well as an ordinance with any necessary amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and 2040 Land Use Plan, which typically accompanies any proposed changes to zoning, when it also requires a plan amendment. This full package is what will be brought back before the Assembly for consideration and approval in summer 2024.

Consistency with the 2040 Land Use Plan

The sponsors are engaging in this process according to the following policies in the 2040 Land Use Plan (LUP):

1. **LUP 1.4:** Use the 2040 LUP and area-specific plans in conjunction with other elements of the comprehensive plan to determine appropriate zoning in the Bowl, and evaluate proposed changes to land use regulations (pg. 16).
2. **LUP 1.8:** Engage Anchorage residents, businesses, and property owners in predictable and transparent process leading to the adoption of plans that guide growth. Engage affected communities when making long-term land use decisions, with particular communities that are historically underrepresented (pg. 17).

Sponsor Contacts

Daniel Volland, District 1

daniel.volland@anchorageak.gov

Anna Brawley, District 3

anna.brawley@anchorageak.gov

Meg Zaletel, District 4

meg.zaletel@anchorageak.gov