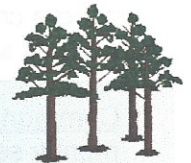


## Correspondence



### **RABBIT CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL (RCCC)** A Forum for Respectful Communication & Community Relations



**1057 West Fireweed Lane, Suite 100 / Anchorage, AK 99503**

Planning and Zoning Commission  
Municipality of Anchorage  
P.O. Box 196650  
Anchorage, AK 99519-6650

February 19, 2021

Dear Commissioners -

The Rabbit Creek Community Council (RCCC) has reviewed the proposed ordinance which would amend AMC 21.05.010E, Table of Allowed Uses of zoning districts to allow "Homeless and Transient Shelter" in the B-3 (general business) district as a conditional use. Currently such shelters are only allowed in Public Lands and Institutions (PLI) districts which do occur in the RCCC area. We appreciate that this zoning proposal is intended to implement a needed social service function. As such, we can agree with the recommended zoning change and associated requirements regarding separation of facilities, location near public transit or provision of alternate transportation, and ensuring secured access for residents' belongings.

However, we believe there are substantial issues associated with the process for determining homeless facility location and conditional use actions. Additional points are needed in the amendment to guarantee that essential further planning and involvement of neighbors occurs as future homeless facilities are proposed. Some of these points may be appropriate for the subsequent process around the required conditional use permit which will include a public hearing and multi-agency review for each proposed homeless or transient shelter. It seems that some of the public concern being expressed around the proposed amendment may be due to public lack of understanding around this many-phases process.

Our support for the proposed amendment includes knowing that the Planning and Zoning Commission: could deny a conditional use permit proposal or could approve it with specific management conditions; that permits would be revocable if permit conditions are not met; and that there will be opportunities for public input before permits are finalized. We are herein recommending that public involvement continue throughout the terms of these permits as described below. These comments were approved by a vote of 23 yays, 2 nays, and 4 abstained at our February 11, 2021 meeting.

Planning – Goals and Metrics: A provision supporting the Assembly in identifying a Homeless and Transient Housing master plan with goals and objectives specifying the required facilities, as well as timelines and an action plan would be helpful. Some of this planning exists, such as the October 2018 report, "Anchored Home - Strategic Action Plan to Solve Homelessness in Anchorage: 2018-2021"<sup>3</sup> that summarized research into this issue and "engaged over 700 community members, businesses and agency representatives through a community engagement and public review period." This report addressed community impacts and the desirability to spread facilities through the city rather than have them concentrated.

Steps that have been completed and for which we commend the Municipality and the Assembly include the Housing First<sup>1</sup> and Home for Good<sup>2</sup> initiatives that have been implemented, detailed surveys of our homeless population, and individualized consultations to identify needs for

housing/treatment/other services as was done when the homeless were being housed at the Sullivan Arena and Ben Boeke during the first many months of the pandemic. Those consultations were a critical step in providing detailed information regarding the population served and scope of needed services.

Community Engagement and Notifications - While we recognize that the proposed amendment merely sets in place a framework within which additional homeless facilities may ultimately be permitted, we also recognize the concerns of neighbors to know more about the process and ultimate conditions for these facilities. Points made in the "Anchored Home" report about the importance of community dialogue and involvement, as well as ways to measure progress and success should be requirements of any conditional use permits eventually proposed for homeless facilities. Another step that needs to be incorporated is to tie future potential real estate acquisitions to the categories (social goals and framework) described in that report. Given the long term consequences to existing neighborhoods, purchases should not be based on lowest dollar cost.

It would be helpful if the proposed amendment laid the groundwork for expanded public notice and public hearings about the purposes and scope for its implementation, including about the process and criteria for conditional use permits for new facilities. Information should be required in the permitting process about how a specific proposed facility helps meet overall objectives to decrease homelessness and meets the needs of those with mental health and addiction issues. We stress a need for adequate communication and community engagement as follows:


- 1) The affected community council(s) should be invited to send two or three members to the applicant's pre-application meeting with MOA agencies.
- 2) Notification of any conditional use proposal should be: to those within one-half mile; via postal mail, postings on the subject property, and notices through community councils; and provided at least 60 days prior to public hearings. Notifications should clearly state why this property was chosen, what segment of the 'homeless' population would be served and what services would be provided at the facility.
- 3) Early in the 60-day notice period there should be a pre-hearing community presentation or work session with the affected community council(s), prior to the public hearing. It should be led by Municipal Planning staff, with representation from the applicant. Detailed information on the plans should include at a minimum: type of facility, services to be provided, minimum and maximum number of clients, proximity to public transit routes or alternative transportation provisions, how and when safe storage facilities for residents will be accessed, rules for clients to check in and out of the facility, and a continued plan of engagement with the involved community council(s) and neighbors (business, resident, etc.).
- 4) The neighborhood around a proposed facility should have citizen representation during planning, implementation and operation of a facility. Community councils provide a reasonable partner for helping to disseminate information and identify individuals who could responsibly and knowledgeably participate in this process.
- 5) Any conditional use permit request should be clearly linked to the "Anchored Home" strategic plan and a masterplan for engagement with issues and populations identified as pertaining to a 'homeless' condition.

The RCCC recognizes the tragedy of homelessness. In response to pleas from Anchorage residents, the Municipality and Assembly have been working hard to understand and address the causes of homelessness, and provide safe shelter and treatment options. While several programs initiated in recent years have had some successes, our homeless population has been growing, is more and more visible to Anchorage residents in more areas, and has, at times, created conflicts, becoming unappealing neighbors for some businesses and homeowners. The tragedy of homelessness has only been exacerbated by the continuing COVID crisis of the past year. We appreciate the Assembly and Municipality work to date to address this complicated and difficult issue.

Sincerely,



Ann Rappoport, Co-chair  
[Rabbit Creek Community Council](#)



Carl Johnson, Co-chair  
[Rabbit Creek Community Council](#)

cc: John Weddleton, Assembly  
Suzanne LaFrance, Assembly  
Michelle McNulty, Planning Director  
Francis McLaughlin, Senior Planner  
Elizabeth Appleby, Senior Planner

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Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Institute for Circumpolar Health Studies, University of Alaska Anchorage. 2017.  
Evaluating Housing First Programs in Anchorage and Fairbanks, Alaska: Final Report Prepared for: The Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, The Alaska Mental Health Trust. Anchorage, AK  
<https://alaskamentalhealthtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/EvaluatingHousingFirstProgramsinAlaska-May2017.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.liveunitedanc.org/improving-lives/what-we-care-about/homelessness/leading-social-innovation-pay-for-success/>

<sup>3</sup> Anchored Home - Strategic Action Plan to Solve Homelessness in Anchorage: 2018-2021. 2018.  
<http://www.muni.org/Departments/Mayor/Documents/Anchored%20Home%201004018%20FINAL.PDF>