

# South Addition Community Council Neighborhood Plan Steering Committee

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October 31, 2018

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RE: Comparable-Scale Infill Housing (R-2 Zones) Project (CIHP) Community Discussion Draft

Tom,

Please find our comments to the September 27, 2018 draft included within this letter. Cheryl Richardson coordinates steering committee work, so you can reach us through her as a group or concerned individuals/neighbors from South Addition. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

## **Foreword to Recommendations**

The South Addition Community Council (SACC) has been pursuing a Neighborhood Plan (NP) as part of Anchorage 2040 process since the fall of 2016. Part of the NP work has been the gathering of insights from South Addition community members regarding neighborhood character. That insight is relevant to your current effort to amend R-2 zoning districts in the land use code and it is summarized below.

The overwhelming sentiment in South Addition is that the maintenance and enhancement of physical character as it currently exists in our well established and fully developed neighborhood is crucial for the social and emotional well-being of its current and future residents and is an essential guiding principal for any development that occurs within it.

People value the ability to walk or to commute by other means on well-developed and well-maintained sidewalks/roads among a variety of diverse, yet compatible residential or small-scale commercial buildings in terms of their height and bulk.

People value that there are mature trees in yards and streets, that there is a clear hierarchy and organization of street functions due to the blessing of alleys, the consistency of physical features that make a street appealing.

People value that there is an organic balance between the areas devoted to personal yards, green spaces, a variety of gardens and other hard-surfaced functional spaces while all of them are connected to the context of the generally low speed and low traffic volume streets, the exceptions being the large arterials with their own set of challenges.

People also value the economic benefits the neighborhood provides with its proximity to downtown and its smaller scale buildings that yield consistently favorable property values.

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People value that individuals and families want to live in South Addition and they value that the neighborhood continues to attract new generations of caring people who purchase older houses and invest in them by incremental remodeling or by a single leap of a new addition. People value that still, somehow, they are being mindful that they want to fit in the context and enhance their own place as well as the commons. The rising tide lifting all boats concept.

## Recommendations

Because of the significant value the community places on neighborhood character and the identity it carries, the steering committee believes that there are a few major considerations still to be adequately addressed in the CIHP before it advances further in the process.

1. The CIHP - fairly or unfairly - may be viewed as a solution looking for a problem. The current land use regulations do not and had not stifled development in South Addition. Most lots have been developed with a two-story building pattern and the resulting neighborhood character is greatly valued. South Addition is a small lot patterned traditional neighborhood for the most part, where no single large tracts of R2 zoned land are being considered for redevelopment. The 2.5 story limitation is a potential shortcoming of the zoning code for larger lots where all structures on a lot would have to comply without the neighborhood compatibility context present. If the proposed zoning amendments were to be implemented in the future, the recommendation is that all areas shown as Traditional Neighborhood Design in the 2040 plan (on page iii in the draft) remain exempt. Another solution may be to apply the rules presented here only on larger lots, f.e. lots over 20,000sf in area.
2. The CIHP is too limited in scope to be successful in mitigating contextual issues that can and likely will severely impact neighborhood character. This fact is acknowledged in a somewhat cursory way on page iv of the CIHP draft under the fifth bullet. However, this does not make it acceptable. The recommendation is to extend the project to include changes to other parts of the code together with the proposed changes in the draft. This is crucial for the acceptance and the success of this process. Specific amendments regarding changes in the code affecting neighborhood character are included below. We have been calling them "neighborhood beef" because they cut to the bone of the greatest concerns from residents. They are noted with, well, a slice of beef. It is shaped like the lower 48 to emphasize the ubiquitous nature of these concerns around the country. Recent neighborhood polling reinforces these findings.
3. The CIHP proposes to use an excellent planning tool with the floor-area-ratio (FAR). The sophistication of the housing sector of our building industry will require that the municipality has the resources to provide expertise in place for its wide implementation at the Building Safety department. It would be a disservice to builders and to the entire community to have such a powerful development tool fail in Anchorage because the implementation was not in place for its success.

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## Recommendations for code changes to be included in the CIHP. (The beef)



The primary concern of South Addition residents is preservation of its unique character. The steering committee recommends no changes to the land use code as proposed without additional and concurrent changes that protect neighborhood character as described in the following sections.

### Section 21.07.090.H.e.iii

The steering committee recommends including new or modifying existing language to address protection of R-2 lots in the Traditional Neighborhood Design areas to protect their valued neighborhood character as follows:

Delete all sentences after the first sentence and replace with: Residential developments up to four units abutting an alley on R2-M, R3 and R4 zoned lots shall be exempted from this subsection if parking areas are proposed with the usable portion of the alley as circulation/parking isle space. The traffic engineer has the authority to exempt multifamily dwellings up to four units on lots not abutting an alley on low volume streets, dead-end streets and cul-de-sacs.

Add a sentence at the end of 21.07.090.H.8.d.i to read: The land use code governs over the municipal driveway standards for this subsection in case of a conflict of interpretation between governing documents.

*Note: the current web-published version of the land use code references the driveway width section incorrectly (21.07.110.G..)It should read as 21.07.110.F.3.*

### Section 21.07.110.F

The steering committee recommends including new or modifying existing language to address protection of R-2 lots in the Traditional Neighborhood Design areas to protect their valued neighborhood character as follows:

Add the following section: 21.07.110.F.3.b.iv. This section also applies to residential driveways accessing a street from any R-2 lot abutting a platted alley.

Add the following section: 21.07.110.F.3.c.iv. Residential driveways referenced above under 21.07.110.F.b.iv of this section shall be 12' or less in width measured anywhere along their entire length.

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Add sentence at the end of section 21.07.110.F.3.d. as follows: The traffic engineer shall not have the authority to change the standards above under 21.07.110.F.3.c.iv.

Modify the section under 21.07.110.F.4.a to remove exemptions and simplify the section to read: Access to parking for residential uses on any residential lot abutting an alley shall be from the alley with the exception of a single driveway of 12' width or less along its entire length on one street frontage of the lot.

## Section 21.07.110.C

The steering committee recommends including new or modifying existing language to address protection of R-2 lots in the Traditional Neighborhood Design areas to protect their valued neighborhood character as follows:

Add the following section: 21.07.090.C.2.e. The requirements of Section 21.07.090.C.8.f.,g and h shall apply to any residential development in all R-2 zoning districts in the Traditional Neighborhood Design areas.

## Section 21.07.060.E

The steering committee recommends including new or modifying existing language to address protection of neighborhood character by maintaining existing street infrastructure in the Traditional Neighborhood Design areas.

Add the following section: 21.07.060.E.2.h Existing sidewalks on public streets in all R-2, R-3 and R-4 zoning districts shall be maintained with their original longitudinal grade and a maximum 2% cross-slope at all proposed driveways and curb cuts. Any conflicts with the standards of the DCM or MASS shall be resolved in favor of this section.

## **Detailed Comments for the Community Discussion Draft**

### Section 21.04.020.F.2.b

The position of the steering committee is that the elimination of the 2.5 story restriction should not apply in Traditional Neighborhoods. They should be exempt. See notes for 21.06.020 Table 21.06-1 on this later in this document. The language of this section is fine for Traditional Neighborhood Design areas and the steering committee does not support changing it without their exemption.

The reduction of the length of structures does not appear to solve any problems known by the steering committee. It, however, can have the effect of excluding a single 8-unit structure from development, which is inconsistent to allowing such structure under 21.04.020.F.2.a.

### Section 21.06.020.A Table 21.06-1

The proposed changes affect the 2A, 2D, 2M districts mostly by introducing the elimination of the 2.5 story limitation. The steering committee recommends a modification that states: Principal: 30', not to exceed two and a half stories in Traditional Neighborhood Design areas only.

Another option is to exempt lots of 20,000sf and greater from the 2.5 story limitation as simple district wide solution.

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The Floor Area Ratio concept is a good planning tool to provide the design flexibility for different designs and the steering committee supports its introduction into the R-2 districts. The FAR numbers listed are generally reasonable, however, some developments notably, the multifamily townhouse style developments will result in completely pervious lots (buildings + access drives/garage access) that is not compatible with the already developed Traditional Neighborhood Design areas. This needs further work.

## 21.06.030.E.2 and 3

The changes regarding measurements for FAR seem reasonable and are supported by the steering committee.

The changes regarding maximum floor area ratios are housekeeping related and are supported by the steering committee.

## 21.12.040.C

This is a necessary housekeeping change regarding potential non-conformities and is supported by the steering committee. The existing section references setbacks and that may need to stay as well. The topic discussion referenced 21.10.040.C, but that appears to be a typo and not a reference to the Chugiak code.

## 21.14.040

The steering committee generally supports the proposed changes as they are code coordination changes with the exception of deleting the one-half story reference since the recommendation is to keep the two and a half story limitation in the table for the Traditional Neighborhood areas.

## 21.06.030.D.6.c

The proposed changes under this section seem reasonable for i, ii and iii.

There are serious concerns with allowed heights under section 21.06.030.D.6.c.iv.(D) There is no technical reason why an elevator tower needs to exceed 10' or even 15' beyond a top floor elevation. No-one should plan for 10' diameter flywheels operating an elevator in 2018 without a very specific reason. If such design becomes the desire of any builder in the future the variance process is available to accommodate it. An elevator tower height is reasonable to be capped at 5' over allowed building height.

21.06.030.D.6.c.iv.(F) should consider allowing 2' over allowed height for parapets in all R-2 districts, so a continuous wall surface is pursued by builders rather than a combination of potentially unsightly solutions that are sought for transparency. The extra foot allows roof assemblies that have higher insulation value without forcing the parapet into a variance.

## 21.06.030.D.6.e.

This is a new section that deals with dormers that have not yet been included in the land use code. The intent and technical details are reasonable to guide dormer design and this section is supported by the steering committee.

## 21.04.020.F.2.c

This is a new section that provides guidelines to promote compatibility of new, now three-story, development with an already existing context. In general, the aim and direction of this new section is supported by the steering committee, with the caveat that removal of 2.5 story requirement is not supported in the Traditional Neighborhood Design areas of

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Anchorage 2040. One shortcoming of this section may be a potential perception of undue complexity.

### 21.10.040.C.6.

(Please, note: this reference appears to be misidentified in the handout as B.6)

This is a modification of the Chugiak land use code to remove a conflict that is created if the proposed changes are implemented. The steering committee acknowledges this change as necessary if the proposed changes are adopted.

End of detailed comments.

Please, contact the members of the steering committee if you have any questions.  
Thank you.

Sincerely,



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