

FAQ | AO 2024-104(S)

Residential Design Standards Moratorium Proposal

Sponsored by Vice Chair Meg Zaletel & Member Anna Brawley

On October 8, 2024, Assembly Members Brawley and Zaletel introduced [AO 2024-104](#) to **pause multifamily residential design standards** for a two-year period. In December, the MOA Planning Department [submitted a memo](#) to the Planning & Zoning Commission reviewing the proposal.

The sponsors have since introduced a [substitute \(S\) version](#), which increases the pause period to **three years**. On January 22, 2025, Assembly Member Brawley [presented the proposal](#) to community members through the [Federation of Community Councils'](#) Local Lens series. This item will be presented to the Assembly Community and Economic Development Committee and at an Assembly worksession before the public hearing on this item opens on February 11, 2025.

SPONSORS' RESPONSES TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

The following section offers the sponsors' responses to comments, questions and concerns frequently asked by community members during public circulation of the proposed moratorium.

1. What specific design requirements would be paused by this ordinance?

Although there are many ways building and site design are regulated in code - from building heights and setbacks, to spacing between buildings, to where front doorways can be placed in relation to the street, to the number and types of treatments (siding, stone, stucco, etc.) are required on a façade - this ordinance touches pieces of Anchorage Municipal Code (AMC) Title 21.07, a chapter broadly called "Residential Design Standards." Only the sections named in the ordinance would be subject to this 3-year moratorium.

Specifically, AO 2024-104(S) temporarily suspends the following parts of Chapter 7 for multi-family housing projects (5+ units):

- AMC 21.07.110 C: requirements for building articulation (facades), building spacing, a menu of sunlight design features, and some limited landscaping requirements.
- AMC 21.07.110 D: requirements for subdivisions of mixed-density housing, site design
- AMC 21.07.110 E: requirements for site design for multiple buildings; major site plan review required for large projects.
- AMC 21.07.060 F: requirements for site access and pedestrian frontage standards, such as placement of doors and windows.

This ordinance would not permanently change or delete the underlying code, nor would it change building code and other health and safety requirements, nor would it change existing private regulation of land through covenants or homeowner association rules.

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2. What types of housing developments would this moratorium impact?

Because the current requirements apply to properties with 5+ units, the sponsors intend to help market-rate projects and workforce housing design projects become economically viable and easier to secure a loan to construct. This will also help organizations who develop affordable housing, allowing more flexibility in how to meet existing requirements and standards, and make cost-efficient choices.

In addition to new construction, some requirements also apply to existing buildings, so large-scale renovations can also trigger significant additional work (and cost) required to comply with current codes. The sponsors believe pausing these requirements would likely reduce the cost of required retrofits for existing multi-unit properties.

3. Do any of these rules also apply to single-family houses, and are those being paused?

Only one section in AMC 21.07.110 applies to single-family houses in mixed-housing neighborhoods, when they are laid out as a subdivision. These rules require a mix of housing styles and have a cross-reference to the pedestrian standards. Additionally, houses on lots over 20,000 square feet are already exempt from these requirements and are not affected. Rules regarding site access and pedestrian frontage standards may still apply to other types of housing but are also currently paused (see bottom of #1).

4. Is this ordinance consistent with the Anchorage 2020 Comprehensive Plan and Anchorage 2040 Land Use Plan?

Our comprehensive and land use plans call for attractive, well-designed neighborhoods and balancing our growth needs with our values for good quality of life. The Anchorage 2020 Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2001, with the Title 21 Rewrite as an implementation action of that plan. The 2040 Land Use Plan was adopted later (2017) and has several policies calling for zoning changes to increase flexibility and create more compact housing to our projected needs.

Anchorage 2020 goals include:

"A balanced, diverse supply of affordable, quality housing, located in safe and livable neighborhoods with amenities and infrastructure, that reflect Anchorage's varied social, cultural and physical environment."

"A built environment based on design standards that sustain long-term economic viability and growth, and that promote affordable residential, commercial, and industrial development."

Anchorage 2040 goals include:

"Anchorage achieves residential and commercial growth, which improves community resiliency and citizens' quality of life as it supports their vision for the future expressed in

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the Comprehensive Plan.”

“Anchorage’s neighborhoods provide a range of places to live, meeting housing needs of residents at all income levels, household sizes, interests, ages, abilities, races and ethnicities.”

Testimony from experts, including local builders, economists, and planners, indicate that Title 21.07 rules are not meeting our plans’ intent. The standards have been reported to be inflexible, difficult to apply on a site-specific basis without negative impacts to project viability, and often leading to counter-intuitive design choices that do not benefit residents.

The sponsors aim to propose a common-sense, responsive solution to bring our codes more in line with what our plans envision: to pause what isn’t working, encourage new building projects with these standards as a guide, not a mandate, and utilize this real-world data to inform how to improve the codes to work better for both developers and neighborhoods.

5. Why was Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) review waived for this ordinance?

The ordinance waives PZC review to elevate the need to act quickly to address our housing crisis, respond to local barriers to housing construction, and expedite the process of changing code by starting with a pause. Introduced on October 22, 2024 and scheduled for public hearing on January 7, the sponsors intentionally set a timeline to allow for community input and review before the first public hearing.

After it was introduced, the sponsors shared the ordinance with the Planning Department and Commission (PZC), providing time for PZC to potentially schedule this item for discussion and comments from the Commission. The substitute (S) version was introduced on December 3, 2024. At the January 7 meeting, the Assembly continued the public hearing to February 11, 2025, affording more time for community review.

The Planning Department prepared a memo dated December 9, 2024 to PZC, with a summary and analysis of the ordinance, recommendations that it be approved with some modifications, and opportunities for commissioners to provide individual input.

6. How will this help housing affordability, given the high cost of construction?

Like any local policy action on housing, this is one of several steps the Assembly can take to address housing construction costs and affordability. Developers who utilize these and other requirements in our zoning code have shared that these requirements are difficult to comply with when designing projects, can add costs or require building fewer units than the underlying zoning would allow, and often require additional time and iterations working through the permit approval process to ensure the projects fully comply. These factors can make the difference between a project being approved and completed, or abandoned, which is the difference between adding new units to our community or not.

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The sponsors believe these changes are likely to help both market-rate developments, apartments or condos designed for market-level rents, and affordable housing that requires significant public subsidy to be able to be constructed. Assuming new construction housing will likely be market-rate projects, new units for rent (or sale) provides more options for residents to vacate an existing unit. To the extent these rules also apply to renovations of existing buildings, which end up being much of our affordable housing stock (either already subsidized, or lower rent simply because they are older units), fewer requirements to retrofit existing buildings to meet current zoning codes also reduces cost burdens.