

Draft RCCC comments to Assembly Reps on proposed P&Z Changes to T21
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Submitted to Dick Tremaine for revision

Rabbit Creek Community Council requests that you respect the ten-year public process for rewriting Title 21 that involved thousands of residents. Our Council members invested in that process. We supported several aspects of the Hillside District Plan on the assurance, reflected in the language of the HDP, that the provisionally-adopted Title 21 would implement specific standards. Therefore, we ask you as our elected representative to give final approval to Provisionally Adopted version of Title 21 and to reject the numerous radical changes proposed by the Planning and Zoning Commission.

At the time the Hillside District Plan was approved, Rabbit Creek Community Council placed faith in the assurances that the Title 21 re-write was in final form. Key elements of the HDP gave deference to what was soon to be the provisionally adopted version of Title example, Policies 2-A and 2-C are intended to guide the character of Hillside development by leading to new Title 21 standards for grading, drainage retention of vegetation and stream setbacks.

The opinion column by long-time realtors (published in the Anchorage Daily News July 7, 2012) warns that numerous proposed P&Z Commission would reduce public safety and living conditions for future residents. Anchorage realtors Bill and Clair Ramsey cite ten examples in which the PZC's proposed revisions will diminish safety or quality of development.

While objecting to the P&Z eleventh-hour re-write in total, RCCC specifically objects to several proposed P&Z Commission changes to Title 21. We request your support in Title 21 for several standard that, if changed by PZC, would have a lasting and irreversible effect on the property values, natural setting, and quality of life held important by our neighborhoods:

1. Standards affecting watersheds and well water resources.
 - A 50 foot setback for streams is a common nationwide land use planning standard; in fact 100 feet is considered a necessary setback in many communities. It is particularly critical on the Hillside, where steep gradients and shallow bedrock cause rapid run-off; and where the creeks in steep ravines would receive little buffering from a proposed 25' setback.
 - 21.08.030H3a Subdivisions on slopes. Current subsection H3a exempts subdivisions if they have even one lot under 40,000 sf. This should include a site disturbance and drainage plan for all lots and subdivisions on slopes, including those under 40,000 feet. The HDp calls for drainage-related standards to reduce run-off from individual lots and subdivisions and protect water quality; which

may include increasing retention of vegetation, using rain gardens, and retaining natural stream corridors. This is especially important, as noted in HDP Policy 8-A, for steep slopes, areas above timberline, lots with an unusually high percentage of developed impervious area, and important recharge areas.

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- 2. Buffering from large institutional or commercial uses. Several types of large or intensive uses are allowed by-right, without public hearing, in the large-lot residential areas. Therefore, Title 21 must include the provisionally adopted standards for buffering to protect the property values and character of adjoining homes and residential neighborhoods.
- 3. Road connectivity. Reinstitute 21.08.030 H8 vehicular route standards for subdivisions on slopes. RCCC has seen the effects of radical alteration of steep hillsides for road-building. RCCC supports the original language of this subsection, which is to limit disturbance of the natural landscape when roadways are built in alpine areas..

4. Pedestrian connectivity.

4A. Delete 21.08.030 F6d which exempts developers from putting pedestrian facilities on cul-de-sacs. Many of our subdivisions have long cul-de-sacs (by right, up to 900' long) that have pedestrian connections or potential connections through to adjoining subdivisions. It is not acceptable to force pedestrians to go "the long way around" on connecting roads. The distance from one subdivision to the next via roadways may be substantially more than the pedestrian connections from a long cul-de-sac into an adjoining subdivision because the pathways can be on steeper terrain than the roads. Therefore, the pedestrian connectivity on cul-de-sacs should be the rule, and elimination should be the exception.

4B. Pedestrian pathways on both sides of the roads. Paths on both sides should be the standard in urban areas. Urban roads generally have high traffic volumes and or high traffic speeds: therefore, pedestrian crossings are limited. It is important for public safety and congestion management to provide pathways on two sides in most urban settings. This is important in school zones within one mile of all schools, whether in urban or rural settings. RCCC has repeatedly supported schools which students and neighbors can safely reach by walking or biking.

4C Access to Chugach State Park, Community Use Areas, and Natural Resource Use Areas

Retain the carefully crafted language of the Provisionally Adopted Title 21 with regard to pedestrian easements to the edge of Chugach State Park, which is as follows:

The platting authority shall require the dedication of a public pedestrian easement for a trail designated on adopted municipal plans, for connectivity with

a trail or access point to a large Community Use Area or Natural Resource Use Area (as defined in the Anchorage Bowl Park, Natural Resource, and Recreation Facility Plan or the Chugiak-Eagle River Comprehensive Plan), and for connectivity with a trail or access point identified in the most current Chugach State Park Access Inventory. If the platting authority approves an alternate location for a trail easement as a substitute for an existing easement, the existing unused easement shall be vacated, unless the property owner agrees otherwise. The platting authority may modify the alignment, width, and scope of trail easements as necessary to integrate trail and subdivision designs, so long as the resulting trails are of comparable gradient, directness, and utility, and reflect the general locations and patterns of existing public access routes. An acceptable pedestrian easement shall be at least 20 feet wide, centered on an existing, recognized, new, or relocated trail.

Specifically, RCCC opposes the PZC attempt to change this platting to an option for the platting authority rather than a requirement; and RCCC opposes reducing the minimum width of an easement to 10 feet. The access to Chugach State Park is one of the cherished values of our neighborhoods. The concept of walkways at frequent intervals instead of roads benefits the neighborhoods and the developer; the developer comes out with more developable land by platting a ped easement instead of a road. However, 10 feet is not adequate for designing a sustainable, safe trail that can handle two-way multi-use traffic and wildlife. 30 feet would allow best practices: 25 feet ought to be the minimum width for an easement.