
TURNAGAIN COMMUNITY COUNCIL

c/o Federation of Community Councils
1057 West Fireweed Lane, Suite 100
Anchorage, Alaska 99503

TO: Members of the Anchorage Assembly and Planning & Zoning Commission

FROM: Turnagain Community Council

DATE: October 27, 2017

RE: **Case 2017-0095 — Comments on Proposed Amendments to Accessory Dwelling Units**

The following comments were approved by Turnagain Community Council at its October 5, 2017, meeting, with a vote of 10 Yes, 0 No.

Members of the Planning & Zoning Commission and Assembly:

Thank you for the opportunity for Turnagain Community Council (TCC) to provide written comments on the proposed amendments to the existing Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) Title 21 regulations. We understand the goal of these changes, proposed by the Anchorage Economic Development Corporation, would allow a potential increase in ADU residential housing units, including rental units, in the Anchorage residential community. While TCC generally supports the goal to create additional housing options, including additional ADUs, after our review of the proposed ADU Title 21 changes, **TCC has identified several areas of concern regarding the specific proposed amendments, and their potential impacts and unintended consequences on established neighborhoods:**

1. The changes to Title 21 include allowing ADUs to be created in single-family (R-1) neighborhoods. While not all homeowners would likely create ADUs on their lots, there is a real possibility that many will, **effectively turning an R-1 single-family neighborhood into one with many more housing units, more similar to an R-2 zoning area.** With the proposed amendments, TCC is concerned about how the character of single-family neighborhoods could change over time as well as potential loss in property value for adjacent homes next to those with ADUs.

Recommendation: *Reconsider allowing ADUs in R-1 zoning districts, or make more restrictive requirements for this zoning district. For example, retain existing larger setbacks, smaller maximum size or relative size, and require all off-street parking for the ADU residents.*

2. The changes to the existing ADU Municipal Code also include specific dimensional standards like setbacks (from 60 ft to 40 ft), maximum size (from 700 to 900 sf), size relative to the main housing unit (from 35% to 75% — a very significant increase), and keeping the existing height limit of 25 feet. In addition, the language requiring the ADU to look the same as the main house was also removed. TCC feels that the result of these changes, while they will give more flexibility for people with relatively small homes, could also result in ADUs that are much larger, taller, and/or closer to neighbors' houses than currently allowed. Rather than looking like a small addition to the main house, **these could effectively look like two main houses on the same property.** TCC is again concerned about the impacts on neighbors in single-family neighborhoods, where these kinds of structures are not common.

Recommendation: *Retain existing dimensional and architectural standards, or only include the changes if the standards can be applied without negatively impacting neighboring properties and the look of the existing, established neighborhood.*

3. Neighborhoods in the Turnagain area tend to be relatively older and built on narrower roads, or with narrow lots with few on-street parking spaces available to those without driveways or alleys. TCC is concerned about the potential increase in traffic and demand for parking in these neighborhoods, with the potential to allow two households on one parcel instead of one. The changes to Code eliminate the requirement that all parking spaces be provided off-street, and allow the homeowner to use an on-street space to meet the code requirements.

If multiple properties “count” the same street parking spaces, will this actually meet the parking needs? If many more cars are parking in the same neighborhood, this will likely have a negative impact on street traffic for other neighbors or on emergency vehicles access. In winter conditions, plowed snow along the curbs tends to create an even more challenging on-street parking and vehicle access environment.

Recommendation: Require owners of ADUs to provide all required parking spaces on their own property or with an off-street solution, rather than adding more resident parked cars on the street.

4. Similar to the concerns about parking, TCC’s older single-family neighborhoods were not necessarily built to accommodate a large increase in housing units, and we are concerned about potential strain on infrastructure to serve a lot of new units: the electrical and gas grids, water and sewer lines, and (for properties with their own systems) impacts on private wells or septic systems that could be overwhelmed or cause problems for neighbors if a spill occurs. Additional infrastructure to accommodate higher density in these older neighborhoods would cost the Municipality more, and cleanups are also expensive.

Recommendation: By essentially creating the potential for doubling the density of existing residential neighborhoods, before any proposed amendments are made to current ADU Code, TCC requests an analysis be conducted by the Municipality to assess potential impacts to infrastructure in older neighborhoods, and whether adding several new housing units in a localized neighborhood will put too much strain on these systems.

5. Like all land use issues, what one owner does with their property often affects their neighbors. The potential impacts of building new dwelling units in single-family neighborhoods, closer to the property line and larger than previously allowed in Code, could negatively impact other adjacent and nearby properties — and property values — if the new ADUs added to the neighborhood become problematic. What, if any, current review process is in place for a homeowner constructing a new ADU, and does this include notification of community councils and adjacent and surrounding homeowners?

Recommendation: If there is not currently a public notice requirement for an application of an ADU, TCC urges inclusion in the Code a mechanism for neighbors and the applicable community council to be informed about a proposed new ADU. This should include a public comment period — and if proposed in an R-1 lot, a requirement for the proposal to be presented at a community council meeting — to provide an opportunity for neighborhood/public input before consideration of approval of an ADU application by the Municipality.

Again, thank you for your consideration of our comments on this matter — please don’t hesitate to contact me if you have any questions regarding our input. While increasing the number of housing units in our community is needed, *TCC does not want the proposed ADU changes in Title 21 to sacrifice quality Work. Live. Play conditions in our established neighborhood environments.*

Sincerely,
Cathy L. Gleason
Turnagain Community Council Acting President
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