

South Addition Community Council Executive Committee

John Thurber, Daniel Volland, Cathleen Hahn, Patrice Parker, Fran Durner, Tamas Deak, Harry Need
C/O John Thurber, southadditioncommunitycouncil@gmail.com

October 15, 2021

Long Range Planning Division
Planning Department
Municipality of Anchorage
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Attn: Tom Davis (davistg@muni.org), (907) 343-7916

RE: R-2 Zones Height and Bulk Amendment Project 2021 Public Hearing Draft

Tom,

First and foremost, on behalf of the South Addition Community Council, we would like to express our sincere thank you for your efforts in contemplating and discussing this project during numerous coordination meetings, presentations and direct dialogue with our neighbors. It is hard to believe that it has been three years since we offered our last formal comments to the Planning Department regarding the previous version of this effort. Cheryl Richardson always reminds us that we would have little to say if the current code did an adequate job protecting South Addition's neighborhood. While true, what we included in this letter will be strictly focused on the project referenced above.

It would be remiss of us if we did not share with you some process background. You are reading is the SACC response to your R2 project draft approved by the SACC Executive Committee during its regularly scheduled meeting on October 14, 2021. There were a few amendments to the draft we brought forward that are incorporated herein.

Your presentation to the South Addition Community Council occurred on September 23, 2021. It was followed by coordination with individual members and then a topical, in-depth discussion with executive committee members, John Thurber, Patrice Parker, Tamas Deak present on October 5, 2021, as part of your public outreach efforts. You requested formal comments in a timely manner so they can be included in the Planning and Zoning Commission information packet prepared for their November 1st public hearing.

As you can see this timeline is not conducive to fully completing our public process at SACC. The SACC Executive Committee voted to approve these comments. We will also present a resolution to approve the comments during the SACC general meeting scheduled for October 28, 2021. We will send you the outcome of that agenda item as soon as we can.

We hope this clarifies our process, and with that please, find our comments and observations included within this letter as approved by the SACC Executive Committee.

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John Thurber coordinates our planning group, so you can reach us through him or by addressing any questions you may have to me as well. (Tamas Deak, tdeak@kparchitects.com.)

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Foreword to Recommendations

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

Little has changed in the past three years in what our council members value in our neighborhoods. There is no change in the overwhelming sentiment about the preservation and enhancement of the physical character of our traditional neighborhood being crucial for the social and emotional well-being of our current and future residents. Preservation and enhancement remain essential guiding principles for any development that occurs within South Addition.

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

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

People value the organic balance between the areas devoted to personal yards, green spaces, various of gardens and hard-surfaced functional spaces, all connected in the context of the generally low speed and low traffic volume streets. The exceptions are the large arterials, each with its own set of challenges.

People value the economic benefits the neighborhood provides with its proximity to downtown businesses. They value the smaller scale yet diverse buildings and enjoy consistently stable and favorable property values despite their scale.

People value that individuals and families want to live in South Addition for its inherent characteristics and friendly people. 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 or rehabilitation.

People value that still, somehow, these new neighbors are mindful and careful that they seamlessly fit in the neighborhood context. They enhance their property and the commons proving that the rising tide does lift all boats.

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We acknowledge that you have made improvements to the original proposal from three years ago. Several of these reflect on the Planning Department's effort to listen to the plurality of voices and stakeholders.

We recognize your attempt striving to find better and more refined solutions to complex land use issues. The notable improvements are notwithstanding, there is still room to address opportunities for improvement and we offer a few comments/recommendations for your consideration.

Comments/Recommendations

Because of the significant value our community places on neighborhood character and the identity it carries, SACC would like further consideration given to the issues below before it is presented for decision by the Planning and Zoning Commission.

1. The SACC endorses the proposed change to include lot size limitations under 21.06.030.D7.b.i to create a by right implementation of height increases. However, we believe that the unique "old-school/traditional" development pattern of traditional neighborhoods like South Addition lends itself better to make the lot size limitation to one half-block area. A half-block size allows the development project to be enclosed by public rights-of-way and removing adverse effects on neighboring parcels. South Addition would welcome a developer with the know-how and resources to create another project like Park Place on West 13th. Good design, thoughtful site layout, quality building and landscape improvements resulted in a three-story high-density project everyone loves. And it provides a dwelling unit type that is not on the market otherwise.
2. The SACC understands the purpose and intent to allow by right three-story construction on a transitional site and generally concurs with the validity of the concept (21.06.030.D.7.b.ii.) Our concern is with the implementation of this strategy in South Addition. We neither believe that the B-1A districts are suitable triggers for the transition sites nor can we identify those transitional zones in South Addition without a map or descriptive definition. SACC contends that the development patterns in South Addition – particularly in the core area of South Addition – do not offer transition zones. This tool is much better suited for the more extensive R2 zoned areas where more developable land is available for more housing.
3. A significant concern for SACC is the exception process proposed under section 21.06.030.D.7.e. We do believe that exceptions for height are necessary in some cases. Still, the proposed process allow an exception on any lot if approved through administrative site plan review. This exception places an undue burden on the planning department by having to process, review, coordinate, decide for each case, without the benefit of public information. Why burden the planning team with a site plan review process and not offer any public input to help advise their decision? We strongly believe that an exemption process must include a public hearing site plan review, if implemented. (One way to eliminate the need for the exemption process is to make it easier to allow three story development where appropriate and not let it occur where it is not appropriate. A minimum land area at a half-block in South

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Addition, as proposed in recommendation 1, removes the need for an exemption process.)

4. We eluded to the notable improvements the planning department made in refining the ordinance amendments. Many of these while important, they are not at the crux of our concern. We believe that proposing transparent parapets above a certain height, eliminating certain appurtenances like penthouses, requiring different approaches to stepping back buildings, modifying the requirements regarding elevator "enclosures", and addressing the heights of dormers are efforts in the right directions to address undesirable shading.

The members of the South Addition community welcome the collaboration the planning department - and you personally - offered to date on these amendments. We want to continue to lend support, so Anchorage can achieve its housing development goals in a context sensitive manner that also respects South Addition Community Council's goals. We welcome new neighbors who bring new compatible development to the neighborhood and support the remarkable renaissance of remodeling, additions, and accessory units.

Please, contact SACC President John Thurber or I, if you have any questions.
Thank you.

Sincerely,



Tamas Deak, Member-at-Large
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