

Planning Comments on AO 2024-104

“Establishing a Moratorium on Residential Design Standards in AMC 21.07.110C. of Title 21”



Memo



Municipality of Anchorage

Planning Department

Memorandum



DATE: December 9, 2024
TO: Planning and Zoning Commission
THRU: Mélisa Babb, Planning Director *MB*
FROM: Daniel McKenna-Foster, Senior Planner, Long-Range Planning Division
SUBJECT: Information on AO 2024-104, Establishing a Moratorium on Residential Design Standards in AMC 21.07.110C. of Title 21

Overview

AO 2024-104 was introduced at the Assembly's October 22, 2024 meeting and is scheduled for public hearing at the Assembly's January 7, 2025 meeting. The ordinance would suspend the existing design standards for multifamily and townhouse residential as listed in AMC 21.07.110C., with the exception of screening requirements for mechanical and electrical equipment. The Assembly sponsors have waived a Planning and Zoning Commission review; AO 2024-104 and the information presented below is for informational purposes for the Commission. This is not a public hearing item, and the Planning Department will not be providing a formal staff report to the Commission or the Assembly beyond this memorandum.

Policy Guidance and Community Priorities

The *Anchorage 2020—Anchorage Bowl Comprehensive Plan* (Anchorage 2020) includes design standards as an essential strategy for 33 of its 100 policies. The *Anchorage 2040 Land Use Plan* (2040 LUP) includes policy guidance mentioning compatibility, appropriateness, scale, neighborhood character, or neighborhood characteristics in 8 of its 94 implementation actions. Neither of these documents provide clear and actionable support for removing design standards, nor do they outline a highest-priority focus on housing production at the expense of other values.

However, goals 1-4 of the 2040 LUP policy do call for new residential construction in a mix of housing types and infill development.¹ Recent housing production in Anchorage has been abnormally low, with housing costs for consumers are at the least affordable level in 20 years. While demand is high, production of market-rate multifamily is consistently failing to meet that demand.² In response to the changing conditions, the Assembly has passed a number of resolutions (AR 2022-136, AR 2022-416, AR 2023-45, and AR 2023-260(S)) which provide support for reducing regulatory barriers to housing production.

- Memo dated December 9, 2024
- Provided to PZC for December 9, 2025 meeting
- On Assembly Agenda at the January 7, 2025 Meeting

Memo overview



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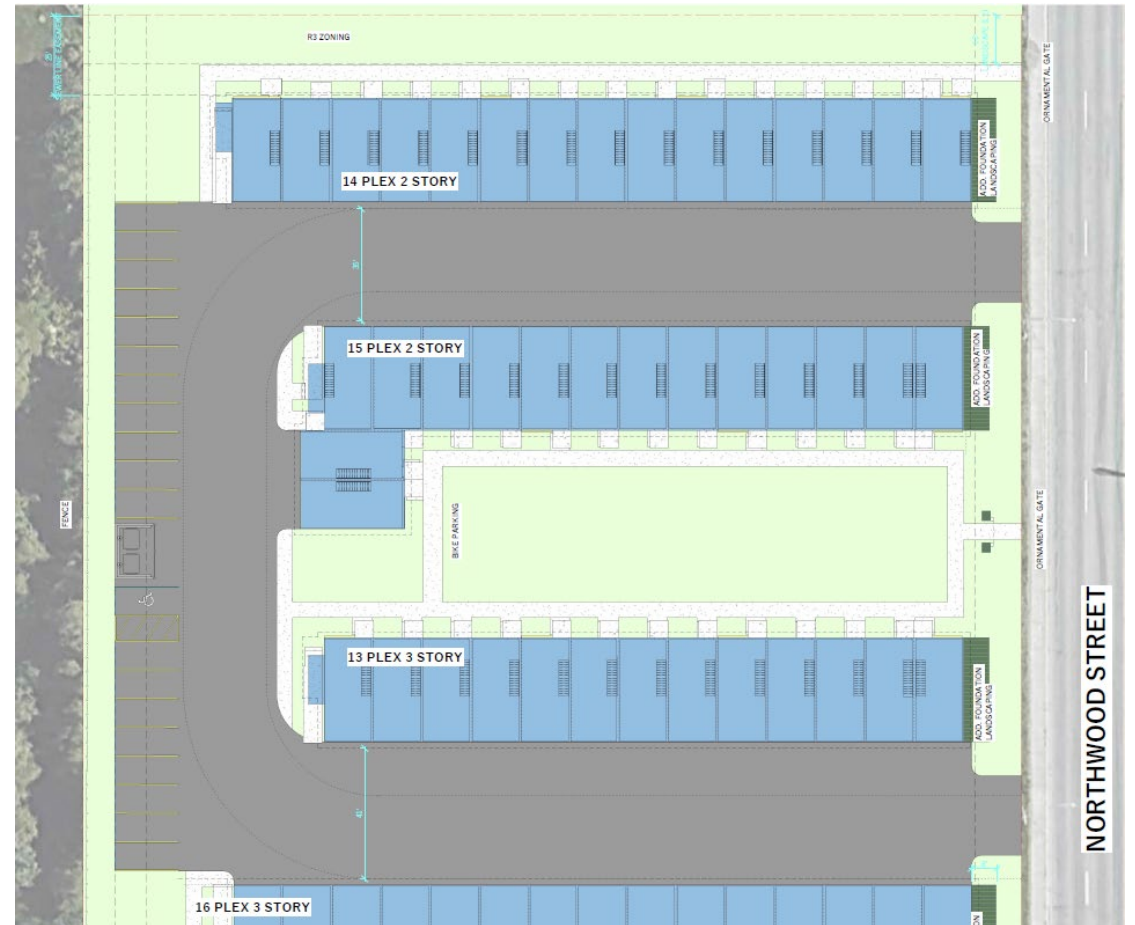
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- There has been a lot of discussion about design standards since before Title 21 was changed in 2014.
- Plan policies/actions support design standards.
- Design standards have been mentioned as an obstacle in various reports such as ACDA's "*Incentives for Market Rate Attainable Housing*" and the CDBG Consolidated Plan
- The Planning Department has received feedback from both market builders and non-profit builders that design standards have been an impediment to their projects.

Developer's preference: 71 units



Development Reality: 58 units



Stated reasons for fewer units:

- Site access provisions
- Residential design standards
- Large fire truck turning radii
- Private open space provisions
- Large setbacks for landscaping, parking, and different zoning districts

Memo Recommendations



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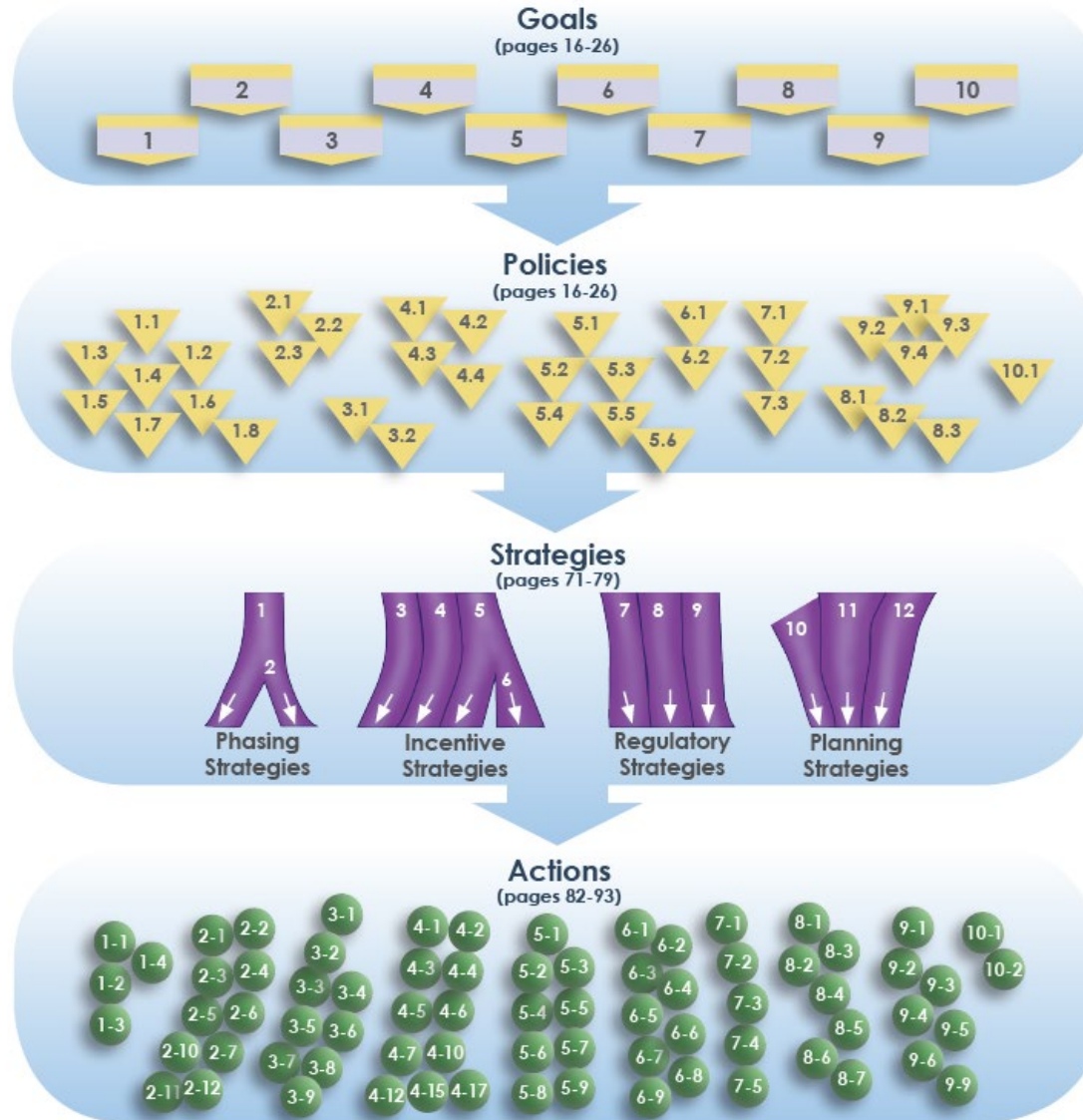
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- 1. Extend the suspension from January 31, 2027, to May 31, 2028, or until such time as new or revised standards are adopted, to provide more time for the full course of design, from concept to completion, for large projects.**
- 2. For future action by the Planning Department:** Convene a working group to explore and test revisions to 21.07.110C. and similar portions of 21.07.110.D., 21.07.110E., and 21.07.110F. per the recommendation letter by CIHA and Debenham, Inc., dated November 20, 2024. and regarding “AO 2024-104, Multi-Family Residential Design Standard Moratorium.”
- 3. For future action by the Planning Department:** Update policy guidance in the Anchorage 2020 and the 2040 LUP to better align with current trends, data, and best planning practices regarding multifamily residential construction. This effort could be a part of the 10-year plan targeted update process.

Goals: the main point of the plan

Figure 1-14. Goals, Policies, Strategies, and Actions



Goals: What we want to get to

Policies: statements of principles or guidelines that direct decisions and actions toward achieving the goals

Strategies: pathways or mechanisms to implement the Policies and often operate over a long term as a means for accomplishing stated goal

Actions: specific measures to carry out the Policies and Strategies to achieve the Goals.

The existing design standards in Title 21 may be keeping us from meeting the goals of the 2020 Comprehensive Plan & 2040 Land Use Plan

Things to consider

- **The plan goals support the production of more housing and “*A forward looking approach to community growth and redevelopment.*”**
- **2020 Plan policies and a few 2040 LUP actions support design standards, but they do not specifically call for the current standards that exist in Title 21.**
- **Design standards are complex because they are difficult to measure.**
- **Design standards are difficult to tie to purposes of health, safety, & welfare.**
- **Any new ways to collect data on how regulations are functioning can be useful and the moratorium could help us figure out what is or isn't working.**

Questions?

Thank you