

SUGGESTIONS TO PROMOTE AFFORDABLE HOUSING---DRAFT-4

Developers Report – January 14, 2013

City of Juneau Assembly,

As professionals in the Juneau housing industry, we believe the best way to improve housing availability is for the City to allow the private sector the freedom necessary to fill market needs. We earnestly offer the following suggestions (not listed in any priority).

1. **Eliminate City Plan Review.** In addition to paying for building permits, builders must also pay for a plan review by the City staff. However, when a licensed architect or engineer is involved in a project, the City plan review is nothing more than a redundant cost to the home buyer (or renter). It makes no sense to pay City reviewers to second-guess licensed design professionals for whom developers have already paid to create plans in conformance with codes and regulations. Furthermore, the design professionals stand financially responsible for their work while the City does not. For smaller projects without architects or engineers, State law requires contractors to be licensed residential administrators fully capable of, and responsible for, code compliance. In addition to reducing housing costs, this idea would also eliminate one or two redundant City staff positions.
2. **Allow Detached 0-Lot Lines.** The code currently requires zero-lot-line structures to be joined by a minimum of 15' of wall. There is no practical purpose for this requirement. If the common wall requirement were eliminated and the zero setback retained, more design options would be available which would allow this type of housing to be developed aesthetically and economically on a wider range of lots.
3. **Seek Zone Change Suggestions.** The Planning Director can initiate zoning changes at any time and should actively solicit suggestions for zoning changes from the undersigned and others.
4. **Parking.** Formula-driven parking requirements should be eliminated. Parking requirements should reflect the actual parking load of a development. This applies to downtown especially.
5. **Cut Permit Fees.** Anchorage is offering reduced building permit fees to encourage dwelling construction. Juneau should do the same.
6. **Private Inspectors.** Builders should be able to retain licensed engineers or certified professionals bonded for inspections in lieu of City inspectors.
7. **City Be Responsible.** The City should accept financial responsibility for its inspection oversights just like any other industry professional. No more dispensing authority with zero responsibility.
8. **Simplify Variances/Permits.** The director should be given discretion for variance and allowable use approvals to reduce the time, effort and cost of obtaining such permits which are otherwise routinely approved by the commission. These director would poll neighbors for comments before making such approvals (which would be appealable).
9. **Infill Proposals.** The City should seek proposals for downtown infill such as building condos on top of the library or other public or private buildings.

- 10. Efficiency Units.** Single-room occupancies with no parking should be encouraged downtown that could be used by tourist workers in the summer and legislative staff in the winter.
- 11. Abate Inventory Lot Tax.** Property taxes on unsold lots in new subdivisions should be held in abeyance until lots are sold
- 12. Incentive for Amenities.** Amenities such as meeting, picnic, recreation, or playground areas in residential developments should be encouraged by making the value of these assets exempt from property tax.
- 13. Incentive for Green Areas.** The value of green or planted areas of residential developments should be property-tax exempt.
- 14. Caution to City Involvement.** The City should be extremely cautious about financing housing projects with public funds to the extent that they compete unfairly with tax-paying private developers. Public housing should only target market segments for which private enterprise is unable to serve.
- 15. Tax Incentive.** New multiplex apartments could have declining property tax abatement for the first five-years of existence.
- 16. Redundant Ordinances.** If an ordinance is duplicates state or federal regs then remove it from the City books. Let other government entities enforce their own regs. Example: stream set-backs.
- 17. Take Advice to Heart.** This item is the most important. The City should make a policy determination to listen to and take seriously the advice of those listed below who have collectively developed literally thousands of units of housing in Juneau.
- 18. Redefine 3-Story Structures.** The City recently “closed a loophole” by which builders could install earth embankments against a building in order to define the first floor as a daylight basement (not a countable floor). The City should be creating more “loopholes” to promote building rather than closing them.