

Sand Lake Community Council

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Home Builders, Owners of Record,
Municipality Assembly,
Municipality of Anchorage Planning and Zoning Commission

To Whom It May Concern:

The intent of this letter is to express our deep concerns about the landscaping practices that are sometimes used on newly developed or renovated properties located within existing Sand Lake neighborhoods. We request that the impact on residents in the neighborhood surrounding new construction be considered when making decisions about excavation and landscaping.

This request has been prompted by the clear cutting done in September 2015 of 5 adjacent lots located within an existing neighborhood south of Sand Lake Road. These formerly wooded lots have been clear cut to allow for the construction of 5 duplexes. Although current code allows for this action, the community of neighbors have been very adversely affected by this significant loss of all natural habitat in this space.

The surrounding neighborhood is well-established, and consists mostly of homeowners who appreciate and value trees, shrubs and other natural habitat. These values are apparent due to the fact that the majority of these homeowners have retained or added back native trees and other vegetation on their properties and this sudden, unnecessary loss of virtually all native plant life on 5 lots has been both alarming and painful. The planned construction of a cluster of 5 duplexes that are quite large relative to the size of the lots they will be built on adds to our concern about this drastically altered area. The concerns of area homeowners include the potential negative effect on property values as well as the negative effect on the quality of our day to day lives. Our daily lives are profoundly affected in that many residents who are located immediately adjacent to the 5 lots clearly see the denuded land from their windows and yards; other neighbors drive, walk, and bike around this space regularly.

Our lives have also been affected by the loss of the benefits of living with native habitat within an urban environment. These benefits are well recognized and documented. Foremost might be the prevention of soil erosion as well as excessive water runoff. Other assets of healthy green spaces include the buffering of noise and wind, attracting birds and other wildlife, cleansing of the air, filtering water, as well as the reality that native vegetation is hardy and requires little if any maintenance. To borrow verbiage from the new Title 21, we want to “encourage use of native plants or provide landscaping that is compatible with the climate and natural setting of the municipality and can provide desired effects even during harsh urban and winter conditions” as stated in 21.07.080, A., number 7, (page 7-61).



Because of what we have experienced as described above, we feel the need to recommend the following:

- Any residential construction would include retaining some native habitat on wooded lots or add back some native trees and vegetation that would help restore the important benefits of wooded spaces. Careful excavation that retains some existing stands of trees and other habitat can be achieved through thoughtful planning.
- Recognize that there is inherent value and market appeal to new housing when some natural mature trees have been retained. The true cost of any action should be measured in more than simply dollars and cents.
- Give consideration and respect to the existing neighbors and the character of the neighborhood when making decisions about excavation and landscaping. Related to this, we support the intent as stated in the new Title 21 to “Integrate new or renovated development into the surrounding context of the community including its neighborhoods and street corridors.” 21.07.080, A., number 2, (page 7-61)

The larger overall goal would be to enhance the betterment of Anchorage as a desirable city in which to live by taking advantage of the value of native habitat integrated into new construction. We are fortunate in that our city is surrounded by beautiful mountains and contains several lovely lakes. It can only be further enhanced by the retention of native vegetation throughout its neighborhoods.

We therefore strongly recommend avoiding clear-cutting property and instead following the actions listed above as a standard of “best practices” for all residential construction in the Sand lake Community.

Sincerely,

Daniel Burgess

Sand Lake Community Council President