

Title 21: We're at fork in road

These are exciting times for Chugiak-Eagle River, or should I say times to get excited about! As a community, we are now being forced to make decisions on the nature of the development that is coming to Chugiak-Eagle River. Most of us have already seen the first steps of what could be. But only a few of us are privy to what is being planned on a large scale.

The immediate threat to Eagle River and Eagle River Valley is high-density housing with an Anchorage Bowl configuration. This means small lots with single-family housing packed close together or multi-family housing at densities up to three times what we are already seeing, and a lot of both! The intent is to keep pace with the growth rate of Anchorage. We are expected to absorb ever-increasing numbers of people. One side is calling this inevitable and necessary. The other side is taking a hard look and doesn't see either one.

The more rural areas of Chugiak-Eagle River are not immediately threatened with the encroachment of high-density housing. That type of development can only come with the extension of city water and sewer. The rural areas are faced with the restrictions that come with the new urban regulations and zoning districts that do not recognize or protect the traditional uses that we have enjoyed and should be allowed to continue to enjoy.

The draft of Title 21 that is out for review is not only more "urban" in its approach to regulation, but is also so stilted in favor of development that safeguards to protect the landscape we love have been stripped away. Developers in conjunction with the Municipality Planning Department are being given the green light to "go for it!" without regard for the open space, the parks, the trails and wild lands that are part and parcel to our lives here.

Ask yourself, what is it that I value about living here? And then ask, what am I willing to do about it? Collectively, with a united voice, we can direct development down a different course, down a different fork in the road. We can protect our traditional uses and our existing neighborhoods that are under threat.

How? It is not too late! The high-density housing that is being planned does not have to happen. The map that shows these things, and is being kept from the public, is in draft form only. The densities that are shown can be swept away just as easily as they were shown. What we must have are regulations that fit our vision for Chugiak-Eagle River. That vision statement has already been created in our Guidelines for Growth of the Chugiak-Eagle River Comprehensive Plan and is available to everyone.

Title 21 of the municipal code, which has the force of law, are the regulations that govern. These regulations are under going rewrite as well and can contain specific provisions for Chugiak-Eagle River. Girdwood has already forged ahead and provided the language they need to direct development along Turnagain Arm. Chugiak-Eagle

River can do the same thing. We can have our own chapter in Title 21 that will guide and direct development in our area and protect our traditional uses.

Efforts are underway in each of our community councils to bring about this very thing. In fact, the Birchwood, South Fork, and Eagle River Valley councils have already passed resolutions that would mandate, if possible, a separate chapter in Title 21 for Chugiak-Eagle River. The Eagle River council will be taking up the matter at their next session at 7 p.m. above Garcia's on Nov. 10. Chugiak has formed a committee to look into the matter (and I don't know what the Eklutna council is doing). These are our immediate avenues for action.

Beyond that we have, of course, our Anchorage Assemblywomen. Debbie Ossiander is on the committee working on the Title 21 rewrite, and Anna Fairclough is chair of the assembly. We have a unique opportunity, given the standing of our two reps, to affect the course of future development. If we choose to let them know what needs to be done, they will stand with us. If we choose to go to that next community council meeting, find out what is happening, make our voices heard, and vote when it counts, the road we take can be the road to responsible development, and a Chugiak-Eagle River that will grow and still preserve those qualities we cherish. It's not going to be short or easy, given the force on the other side, but it is a battle that has to be fought.

Together we can do it!

Andrew Brewer is a member of the South Fork Community Council.

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.daneprairie.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.