



# City and Borough of Sitka

100 Lincoln Street • Sitka, Alaska 99835

*Coast Guard City, USA*

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** John Robert Smith, Smart Growth America  
Chris Duerksen, Clarion Associates

**CC:** Keith Brady, Municipal Administrator  
Chris Spivey, Chair of Planning Commission

**From:** Michael Scarcelli, Director, Planning and Community Development

**Subject:** Progress Report  
Smart Growth America Technical Assistance – Sustainable Land Use Code Audit

**Date:** August 3, 2018

### SGA – Sitka Wins Land Use Code Audit Workshop and Technical Assistance

Smart Growth America—a national nonprofit that advocates for better cities, towns, and neighborhoods—announced in November 2016 that Sitka was among 6 winning communities that were to receive a free smart growth technical assistance workshop in 2017. Through the program, Sitka received hands-on assistance from national experts on Sustainable Land Use Code Audit during a September 12-13, 2017 Smart Growth America workshop. This workshop was invaluable to the completion of Sitka’s Comprehensive Plan 2030, and to progress made on several recommended code changes that have been endorsed by the Director and the Planning Commission and are awaiting adoption by the City Assembly.

### Initial Next Steps Game Plan

In mid-November 2017, our Department received the “Next Steps” memo from SGA that detailed the three topic areas, gave a brief overview of challenges and opportunities, and made formal recommendations, including implementation strategies.

### **The following is a CBS Staff Summary of SGA’s Recommendations:**

- I. Housing Choices**
  - a. Promote accessory dwelling units
  - b. Regulate and track short-term rentals
  - c. Reduce lot size and revise development standards
  - d. Off-street parking reductions
  
- II. Downtown Development**
  - a. Explore increasing height maximum and setting a height minimum
  - b. Incentives for multi-residential mixed use development
  - c. Design standards

- d. Create bike and walk friendly downtown
- e. Create master plan for downtown

### **III. Economic Development**

- a. Address nonconforming lots, setbacks, and development standards (explore contextual standards)
- b. Study parking and explore various options
- c. Create master plans for Jarvis/Price/Smith, Katlian, Downtown, Sheldon Jackson Campus, etc.
- d. Update planned unit development standards
- e. Protect commercial and industrial uses and areas

#### **CBS' Initial Game Plan – December 2017**

Staff reviewed the recommendations and presented this information to the Planning Commission and Administrator. In December 2017, the Director had suggested the following broad 9 month game plan to address some issues quickly (low-hanging fruit) that could have major positive impact but also offer less negative impacts, controversy, or major dedication of time or other resources. In essence, were the short-term, easier means to make some powerful changes. This plan was open-ended and each topic will be more fully vetted and will include City Assembly discussion and ultimate approval. The following had received the blessing of the City Assembly, Planning Commission, and the City Administrator.

##### 1. January - February 2018:

###### **a. Title 21: Subdivision – Required Monumentation of Plats.**

- i. This is a proposed amendment to Title 21 that would reduce and simplify the monumentation and flagging requirements for subdivisions. This could save a developer anywhere from \$1,000 to \$10,000 for most subdivisions, while also adequately ‘marking’ surveys and property lines. This would reduce the cost of developing land without material impact to property rights or survey quality.

###### **b. Title 22: Zoning Code Administration (Due Process – Required Notice)**

- i. This is an amendment to administrative provisions of Title 22 concerning due process notice requirements that aim to reduce advertising costs, increase use of social media, and increase overall notice to community and affected properties of proposed developments or actions. This would decrease costs to the City by about \$10,000 a year and increase notice through various media including newer media such as websites, email, and various social media.

##### 2. February - March 2018:

###### **a. Title 22: Development Standards.**

- i. Reduce **lot size and setbacks** in various zones to meet more realistic lot size and create a **formulaic setback** (slightly different from recommended “contextual setback”) for existing nonconforming lots of record. This will reduce lot development costs, increase density, promote affordable housing, compact design, and will save a lot of staff time that can be refocused on other community development topics.

###### **b. Parking Survey.**

- i. Staff would conduct a parking code audit and parking survey of downtown, present potential code changes for various zones and uses, and other options to promote sustainable use and development.
  - 1. The Title 22 zoning parking standards will be suggested to be reduced for ADUs, multi-family, and overall reduction and simplification of parking

requirements per type of use and gross floor area. This will increase the highest and best use of limited land resources, reduce development costs, and increase property value.

3. March - April 2018:
  - a. **Promote ADUs.**
    - i. Propose amending ADU code to allow those in more zones as a permitted use, and remove barriers of 14 pre-conditions. This would including amending parking standard for ADUs. This change will increase potential for ADUs, reduce housing costs, increasing housing choices, and reduce staff time and municipal costs.
4. April - May 2018:
  - a. **Horticulture in Industrial zone and Small Animal Codes.**
    - i. The industrial zone appears to be a place perfect for horticulture and it will be recommended to add this use to this zone as a permitted use (not agriculture that includes animals). While not a recommendation of SGA, staff feel this code change will promote local food production that will have various positive impacts to a sustainable community.
    - ii. In addition, there is the need to revisit our small animal code to address existing issues and attempt to provide a reasonable local food production options that work for Sitka's community, while addressing potential negative impacts.
5. May - June 2018:
  - a. **Review of CBD and Public Lands Zoning Districts and Uses**
    - i. Propose adding temporary uses such as **Community and Pop-Up Type Uses.**
      1. Staff would like to present options for temporary conditional uses such as 1 day farmer's/artisan markets on Lincoln, temporary pop-ups, other community uses of core community space that would create vibrant downtown experiences and provide entrepreneurial development opportunity.
  - b. **Explore options for STR and LTR tracking, monitoring, and enforcement.**
    - i. Staff have already begun tracking STR as best as current data can provide. Staff will explore changes to administration of STR and LTR that would assist in future tracking and enforcement as well as provide better information to decision makers regarding STRs and the potential impacts.
6. July - August 2018. **Review of Business, Commercial, and Industrial Zoning Districts and Uses**
  - a. Staff will make suggestions for adoption to promote business development, protect commercial and industrial uses, and address disharmony of uses between residential, mixed use, and higher commercial/industrial uses (i.e. CBD, C-1, C-2, I, and GP zoning districts).
  - b. This may entail greater study and master planning of the Jarvis/Price/Smith area.
7. **September 2018. Master Plans/Complex Planning Topics**
  - a. Staff will begin laying out strategy and timeline to address the following complex topics:
    - i. Downtown Master Plan and Proposed Changes to Development Standards and Uses
    - ii. Sheldon Jackson Master Plan
    - iii. Review and Amend PUD standards and incentives
    - iv. Katlian Avenue/Marine Street Master Plan

## **Actual Progress Made**

Since December 2017, much has changed in the Planning Department. Our Department did make major progress in completing Sitka's Comprehensive Plan 2030. We received endorsement of new Accessory Dwelling Unit standards that reduce regulatory barriers and Development Standards. These will positively impact housing, promote walkability, economic development, and a vibrant downtown. These code changes seek to make ADUs a more viable option for private landowners, and to promote smaller lot and higher density development. Together, these code changes will reduce development costs, create jobs, and provide a more sustainable development pattern. However, there is more work to be done and this is a work in progress.

The following is the list of items that have been completed or endorsed (recommendation of approval from Planning Commission to City Assembly or to Department to adopt/pursue):

1. October 2017 – March 2018: Community discussions supporting the pursuit of a sacred/cemetery zone to address past community wrongs, to honor these sacred places, and to promote cultural preservation, which will have various community benefits.
2. March 2018: support for an amended notice code that's intent is to allow new, 21<sup>st</sup> century means to give notice to the community and interested parties on development projects and planning issues, while also saving money.
3. April 2018 – Adopted Monumentation/Subdivision Code subdivision that makes the subdivision process more streamlined and monumentation requirements less costly, which will support more affordable development.
4. April 2018: recommendation to Assembly to adopt new planning fee schedule. This will address existing fees that lead to subsidization of development projects that cost more to review than what current fees charge. In addition, new fees will dissuade variances and ideas that are not well vetted and thought out, which would preserve staff time to work on more important community development issues.
5. April 2018: recommendation to Assembly to adopt new accessory dwelling units standards that open up ADUs to more zones and remove half a dozen regulatory barriers, including allowing more ADUs as a matter of right with less restrictions (e.g. reducing parking space requirements).
6. April 2018: recommendation to Assembly to adopt new development standards inline with SGA recommendation to reduce minimum lot standards to 6,000 square feet in many zones. In addition, setbacks are recommended to be dramatically reduced.
7. May 2018 – Adoption of the Comprehensive Plan, which lays out a variety of action steps to further meet the goals and objectives that have been recommended by SGA and the community.
8. Dec 2017 – ongoing: Community discussion on addressing the need for transitional housing, and homeless support for the local community.

## **Gunalchéesh/Thank you**

CBS staff and the Sitka Community are appreciative for the opportunity to work with Smart Growth America and their assistance they provided, which was made possible by funding through the US EPA. While the list is not done and is a work in progress, Sitka has embraced the majority of recommendations given and supported by SGA and are interested in continuing to pursue those actions as time and resources allow. We thank you for your assistance and we look forward to continuing to reach for "Smart Growth" in our community.