Sustainability

What is “sustainability”?
One of the simplest and most often cited definitions of sustainability refers to practices that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

In Homer, where commercial and sport fishing constitute a major segment of the local economy, this concept is easy to understand. A sustainably managed fishery is one that sets limits as necessary to maintain a healthy supply of fish year after year, decade after decade. Likewise, efforts are made to ensure a healthy environment for fish so they will not be contaminated by pollutants or fall prey to disease.

For local governments, sustainability typically means taking action to reduce the use of non-renewable fossil fuels and thinking long-range/big-picture to create the kind of community that will provide a healthy environment and quality of life for future generations as well as current residents.

In recent years, the City of Homer has engaged in a number of sustainability initiatives. These include:

- Established a Global Warming Task Force in 2006.
- Joined ICLEI—**Local Governments for Sustainability**.
- Developed a local **Climate Action Plan** in 2007, the first in Alaska. The CAP included an inventory of greenhouse gas emissions from City facilities and community-wide (2006 data), set targets for reduction, and presented strategies for reducing emissions.
- Developed the **Money, Energy and Sustainability guidebook** for City employees, with guidelines for reducing energy use and waste in local government operations. To our knowledge, the City of Homer is the first local government in the U.S. to develop such a guidebook. It has since served as a model for others.
- Followed up on the Climate Action Plan with a more detailed **Climate Action Plan Implementation Report** that updated the 2006 energy use inventory, created an energy use monitoring system, and made further recommendations to reduce fossil fuel energy use.

- Established a **Revolving Energy Fund** to provide a revenue stream for projects that will reduce energy use in City buildings and facilities.
- Utilized the Revolving Energy Fund and other funding to conduct **energy audits** at 16 City buildings and accomplish energy efficiency improvements that will significantly reduce costs along with greenhouse gas emissions.
- Submitted an application to the Alaska Energy Authority for funding to study the feasibility of tidal power in Kachemak Bay. This resulted in an agreement between AEA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to look at tidal power potential in a broader area (Cook Inlet).
- Approved an ordinance allowing **wind turbines** on private property, with restrictions. This is the first such ordinance sponsored by a local government in Alaska.
- Developed a **Non-Motorized Transportation and Trail Plan** aimed at making Homer more pedestrian and bicycle friendly.
- Developed the Homer **Town Center Development Plan wind turbines** which embraces “smart growth” principles of compact development, mixed uses, and walkability.
- Developed a new **Comprehensive Plan** that likewise embraces smart growth principles and includes an “Energy Plan” chapter.
- Developed a new **economic development plan** that points to the need for resilience in the face of "bigger world" factors such as peak oil, climate change, and ocean acidification.
- Built a new Homer Public Library to LEED-Silver standards. The LEED program (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) provides third-party verification that a building was designed and built with attention to energy savings, water efficiency, CO_2 emissions reduction, improved indoor environmental quality, and stewardship of resources.
- Participates in community events such as energy fairs, climate change and ocean acidification forums, and electronics recycling events.

Many other organizations in Homer are also actively promoting sustainability. Two that have been particularly active in bringing community members together are **Sustainable Homer** and the **Kachemak Bay Research Reserve Coastal Training Program**.

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