

■ EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION (Chapter 1)

This plan was prepared with extensive public involvement. This included a series of meetings with the citizen advisory committee, interviews with Homer residents, and two well-attended community workshops, in April and November 2007. The plan builds from the 1989 City of Homer Comprehensive Plan and its 1999 Update as well as other Plans adopted by the Homer City Council, including the Capital Improvement Plan (2006), Water and Sewer Master Plan (2006). Three existing components of the Comprehensive Plan were also consulted: the Town Center Development Plan (2006), the City of Homer Non-Motorized Transportation and Trails Plan (2005), and the Transportation Plan (2005). This Comprehensive Plan provides the City and the community with broad goals and direction for the next 10-20 years. Effective plan implementation requires the City Council to develop new ordinances and update the City's zoning code consistent with the policies of this document.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION (Chapter 2)

Homer's population is changing. Homer continues to grow at a steady pace. The age of the population is shifting and a new level of wealth is visible. Notably a trend has developed toward an increased population of retirees and more second homes leading to higher-priced land and housing. The general change in Homer's demographic is coupled with seasonal population variations. This change presents Homer with opportunities and challenges. Some are listed below:

- Growth will need to be guided to meet Homer's concerns about protecting community character and the quality of the environment.
- Seasonal population fluctuations create challenges for providing city services and facilities. Seasonal peak infrastructure demands force increases in capacity without necessarily providing a commensurate increase in funding.
- The outward expansion of the city affects demand for and costs of roads, water and sewer, schools and other public services, and also presents challenges for protecting open space.
- An aging population and growth in the retiree population creates demands for expanded access to health services and for increased recreational opportunities.
- New arrivals, while contributing to increases in the prices of land and housing, also create a range of jobs and local economic opportunities.
- Retirees can be a resource with the ability to volunteer their time and talents to community organizations, nonprofit agencies, and their service on boards and commissions.

These changes present challenges to the character of Homer and opportunities to emerge as a new kind of community – one that keeps the best of its character *and* embraces the need to grow and change. The purpose of this plan is to establish a framework to reach this ambitious goal.

COMMUNITY VALUES (Chapter 3)

This chapter briefly lists Homer's community values as defined through community input in the Comprehensive Plan process. The overarching theme throughout is to "Keep Homer a lively, vital community that effectively responds to change and growth while retaining what is best about Homer's character."

LAND USE (Chapter 4)

The Land Use chapter of this Comprehensive Plan seeks to respect the past, to recognize the current realities of building and living in Homer, Alaska, and to create a new paradigm for a new century. Befitting the aspirations of a unique and vibrant city, Homer seeks to further develop as a city which respects the environment, is wonderful to live in, and inspiring to visit. Specific goals of the chapter are listed below; the remainder of this section gives an overview of some of the most important policies in this chapter.

GOAL 1: Guide Homer's growth with a focus on increasing the supply and diversity of housing, protect community character, encouraging infill, and helping minimize global impacts of public facilities including limiting greenhouse gas emissions.

GOAL 2: Maintain the quality of Homer's natural environment and scenic beauty.

GOAL 3: Encourage high-quality buildings and site development that complements Homer's beautiful natural setting.

GOAL 4: Support the development of a variety of well defined commercial/business districts for a range of commercial purposes.

GOAL 5: Maintain high-quality residential neighborhoods; promote housing choice by supporting a variety of dwelling options.

GOAL 6: Develop a clear and open public process for future changes to City of Homer boundaries. Explore a planned, phased possible expansion and initiate and establish regional planning processes with the Kenai Peninsula Borough.

The chapter outlines strategies for building a compact, walkable community core, partly in response to concerns regarding energy use and global warming. New ideas for maintaining the functional benefits of the natural environment are presented in this chapter's green infrastructure map (Goal 2). Other, more traditional motivations support compact development, including reduced infrastructure costs. Close neighbors sharing resources and looking out for their neighborhoods may hark back to an earlier time, but this also offers an attractive and practical model for the future.

Throughout this chapter, you will find prescriptions for encouraging more compact residential development and better walkability. The intent is to remove regulatory barriers to compact development in a way that enables the private sector to develop denser housing, particularly infill housing that is attractive, well-built, and fits well with existing homes.

The plan's proposed land use recommendations map clarifies intended types of uses. These recommendations include more diverse housing areas and higher density mixed use residential office and commercial areas. The proposed designations would encourage a mix of development types while reducing conflicts by setting out standards for allowable densities and the character of development. This creates a spectrum of housing and commercial options to accommodate income and lifestyle diversity in Homer. Through zoning code amendments, the community will further develop these zoning concepts with clear regulations and guidelines for balancing development and open space.

The plan proposes development of an integrated system of green spaces that benefits the community aesthetically and functionally, by protecting corridors for trails, storm water management, wildlife habitat, and viewsheds. Changing land use designations recognizes the environmental constraints to development that were not apparent when some areas were initially zoned. Suggested changes correspond to the realities of the character of the land and provide ways to create guidelines and incentives to create balanced development and protect environmentally important areas.

Recognizing the inevitable growth within and adjacent to the City, a process is outlined for recognizing when boundary changes may be needed, and assessing that need with an open public process and proceeding appropriately.

Overall, an effort has been made to consider rural cold climate challenges, environmental understanding and economic opportunities as we work to ensure Homer remains Alaska's "cosmic hamlet by the sea."

TRANSPORTATION (Chapter 5)

As Homer continues to grow and change, the community needs to consider transportation alongside all other aspects of community growth and development. Challenges related to circulation will likely grow, including parking, highway congestion, maintenance, and bicycle and pedestrian safety.

Plan goals and associated policies, summarized below, will improve the range and quality of Homer transportation options, to better serve current needs and respond to projected growth.

GOAL 1: The street system should be configured to include arterial, collector, and local streets. Through-street connections should be encouraged, while maintaining the integrity of existing neighborhoods.

Goal 1 stresses the importance of creating a more complete circulation system in Homer. Policies described under Goal 1 propose the early identification of collector and arterial roads as well as methods to pay for right of way acquisition and road building and to ensure that connectivity occurs in a way that protects neighborhood character. Specific recommended road improvements are listed.

GOAL 2: The transportation system, including streets, trails, docks and airports, should support future community economic and population growth.

This goal identifies the need for Homer's transportation system to keep pace with growth and economic development. Strategies to reach this goal include working collaboratively with the State, Borough, and other landowners to develop a more complete street network and corridor preservation program as well as to provide alternatives to the automobile. The goals of the Homer Airport Master Plan are supported by this transportation goal.

GOAL 3: Homer's transportation system and services should be developed in a manner that supports community land use, design, environmental and social goals.

Homer's transportation system can work to support broad community goals. Policies outlined under this goal encourage implementing the Homer Non-Motorized Transportation and Trails Plan, developing street, sidewalk, and trail design and landscaping standards, and improving downtown parking. Goal 3 also encourages transportation decisions to create a more concentrated town center. This goal stresses the importance of providing transportation options for Homer residents of different ability levels and ages.

GOAL 4: The trail and sidewalk network should provide an alternative to driving, provide enhanced recreational opportunities, and create auto-free connectivity throughout the community.

This goal supports the creation of a trail and sidewalk network that offers Homer residents a viable alternative to driving. Specific trails and sidewalk improvements are listed as well as methods to ensure that seniors and disabled people can fully participate in the non-motorized transportation system.

PUBLIC SERVICES & FACILITIES (Chapter 6)

The City of Homer provides a range of quality public services and facilities. In addition to those provided directly by the City as an independent entity, services and facilities are provided by the Kenai Peninsula Borough, the State of Alaska, and in collaboration with a variety of nonprofit organizations and community groups. Chapter 6 outlines three goals for maintaining and improving these services and facilities.

GOAL 1: Provide and improve city-operated facilities and services to meet the current needs of the community, anticipate growth, conserve energy, and keep pace with future demands.

As Homer continues to grow and change, work will be needed to maintain and upgrade existing fire, emergency services, law enforcement, water, sewer, and harbor services. The plan looks at the current status, as well as near and long-term priorities for each area of service delivery. Other services and facilities the plan addresses include parks and recreation development, storm water control, maintaining the library and adequate City administrative offices.

GOAL 2: Seek collaboration and coordination with service providers and community partners to ensure important community services are improved upon and made available.

The City is an integral partner in supporting and encouraging Homer's arts and cultural activities, health care services, senior and youth activities and services, educational opportunities, visitor attractions and services and environmental conservation activities. Although not necessarily the primary party responsible for these areas or activities, the City should provide assistance and leadership in these efforts.

GOAL 3: Encourage the broader community to provide community services and facilities by supporting other organizations and entities that want to develop community services.

Developing strong partnerships between the City and community partners will expand the ability of citizens to be self-sufficient and provide services and facilities beyond what the City can achieve on its own. Strategies to improve services include: opportunities for increasing net revenues, providing technical assistance to community organizations, and creating incentives for organizations to take a lead in developing and providing services.

Efficiency and sustainability are key elements to the successful implementation and operation of any infrastructure, public facilities or services, whether provided by the City or by its many partners throughout the community.

PARKS, RECREATION & CULTURE (Chapter 7)

The plan identifies the need to maintain and improve public parks and open spaces throughout the community. As the amount and intensity of development increases, this will help keep Homer a desirable place to live, work and visit. A system of open spaces is particularly important as housing densities increase.

This chapter outlines policies to protect and improve recreational facilities, parks and open space; to expand resources needed for sustainable operations; and to find funding to implement recreational and cultural components of the Homer Town Center Plan. As set out in the land use chapter, the plan creates a green infrastructure system to take advantage of aesthetic, functional and economic benefits of open space. Additionally, this chapter describes the need to reserve and improve trails and sidewalks, consistent with the Homer Non-Motorized Transportation and Trail Plan. The eventual system of trails will connect key public and recreational areas, and is linked to the green infrastructure plan. To achieve these aims, the chapter establishes the following goals:

GOAL 1: Explore resources needed to operate parks and recreation facilities and options for expanding parks and recreation programs.

GOAL 2: Create a Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

GOAL 3: Enhance areawide recreational trail systems, and connections between residential areas, downtown, schools, university, institutional areas, and recreational areas. See *Transportation Chapter*.

GOAL 4: Identify recreation resources and key open space areas as part of green infrastructure mapping. See *Land Use Chapter*.

GOAL 5: Maintain, improve, and create new citywide parks and recreation facilities and Community School programs to offer year-round opportunities for residents and visitors.

GOAL 6: Implement the recreation and cultural components of the Homer Town Center Plan for downtown.

GOAL 7: Support public beach access.

GOAL 8: Continue to improve local arts and cultural opportunities and Homer's reputation as an art-and-culture-friendly community.

To meet the goals of this chapter, new ordinances must be developed including a policy to dedicate public parks as part of the private development process. Working with community groups, existing parks, recreation and cultural facilities will be inventoried and gaps and needs identified and prioritized. Other possible projects and programs identified in this chapter include construction of a City greenhouse to meet the need for landscaping and park maintenance, expansion of a local volunteer park maintenance program managed by dedicated City staff, and the establishment of a Parks and Recreation Department within the City. Also suggested is the creation of a park endowment fund with the Homer Foundation to assist in department operations and maintenance.

The Parks, Recreation and Culture chapter supports implementation of the Homer Town Center Development Plan, with a focus on the plan's cultural and recreational components. Key elements of this plan include a new City Hall, town square, landscaped east-west and north-south access roads, a conveniently located public restroom, landscaped parking areas, and pedestrian trails. These actions will encourage new private business development and improve community quality of life. Community organizations, in collaboration with the City, will develop an "assets and needs" assessment for Homer's art and cultural opportunities. This assessment will explore means to maximize the value of existing facilities and also investigate options for a new, larger capacity community venue, possibly a civic or cultural center.

The actions and policies contained in this chapter are meant to improve and enhance Homer's reputation for parks, recreation and culture as both the demand, and our capacity to meet it, increase.

ECONOMIC VITALITY (Chapter 8)

Economic vitality in a community is essential to provide the means for citizens to meet their basic needs and enjoy leisure time activities, and to provide resources for community needs. Many aspects of community and government operations affect the economy. Some of those are covered in more detail in other chapters; key points included in this chapter are summarized here. The goals established in the Economic Vitality chapter follow.

The idea that there is a state called happiness, and that we can dependably figure out what it feels like and how to measure it, is extremely subversive. It would allow economists to start thinking about life in far richer terms, allow them to stop asking, "What did you buy?" and start asking "Is your life good?"

Bill McKibben
(from Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future)

GOAL 1: Define and encourage economic development that meets the desires and interests of Homer residents and positively supports the unique character of the community.

GOAL 2: Encourage the creation of more year-round, higher-wage jobs.

GOAL 3: Encourage the relocation of Federal and State Government jobs and training programs to Homer.

GOAL 4: Encourage technology related businesses such as information science, software development, and the entertainment industry.

GOAL 5: Strengthen the arts, education and entertainment industries.

GOAL 6: Strengthen the marine trade, mariculture, and shipping industries.

GOAL 7: Support regional renewable and non-renewable energy exploration and production.

GOAL 8: Strengthen Homer as a tourism destination.

GOAL 9: Provide affordable housing.

GOAL 10: Maintain Homer's quality of life as a principal economic asset.

Many of the factors that create "quality of life" for Homer residents also serve as economic assets. These include Homer's spectacular natural setting, outdoor recreational opportunities, arts and culture, and small town character. Dimensions of this character include the variety of locally owned businesses, friendly people, human-scale architecture, and a lack of urban problems that often plague larger towns (e.g., blight, traffic congestion and crime). While growth is inevitable in Homer and could change Homer's distinctive character, many cities have found ways to grow and maintain their character, through careful attention to development, including economic development.

Specific components of economic development where local government has a large role include creating a more vibrant downtown district (by implementing the Town Center Development Plan); adopting land use policies that contribute to compact, sustainable, and attractive development; and ensuring development of a balanced transportation network including non-motorized transportation and public transportation, which will become more critical as Homer grows and as global energy challenges become more pressing.

Tourism, education, and the arts contribute significantly to Homer's economy now and hold potential for future growth. Because of its potential to be disruptive, tourism should be guided to help sustain the qualities of the community that attract both residents and visitors. Collaboration between local government and other organizations will help ensure positive development in tourism and the arts.

Homer must maintain existing core industries such as fishing, marine trades, tourism, health care and construction, and seek new ways to promote more higher-wage jobs and to maintain a diverse economy, which reduces the risk of drastic economic downturn. Homer is fortunate to possess a relatively diverse economy currently and should seek to enhance this diversity. Another objective is to encourage year-round economic activity, which can be enhanced by promoting entrepreneurial small business ventures and “footloose” professional activity, along with expanded college programs.

Finally, Homer should look ahead to the challenges facing all communities in a “carbon-constrained world” and seek to enhance local self-reliance in agriculture, sustainable energy production, and other aspects of community life. Indeed, if Homer can develop expertise in these areas, that knowledge itself could be exported, further enhancing the local economy.

ENERGY PLAN (Chapter 9)

Homer understands the necessity of conserving finite energy resources. Reducing the use of fossil fuels and solid waste leads to the reduction of greenhouse gasses. The conservation of resources is not only a benefit to Homer taxpayers, but also contributes to the creation of a sustainable society. The creation of an energy plan situates Homer to be a leader in responsible stewardship. The energy plan positions the community to take advantage of new opportunities to strengthen the local economy, improve public health and improve community livability. The goals listed provide the framework for this stewardship.

- GOAL 1:** Establish and implement an energy plan with emphasis on long term sustainability and affordability.
- GOAL 2:** Implement waste reduction, reuse and recycling program.
- GOAL 3:** Use technologies and operating practices that promote energy efficiency for all new and existing buildings and energy-using projects.
- GOAL 4:** Support renewable-energy research and development.
- GOAL 5:** Reduce dependence on fossil fuels used for transportation.
- GOAL 6:** Encourage industrial and commercial users to be energy efficient, to use renewable resources, and to make energy by-products available for use elsewhere in the community.

As we enter the twenty-first century, the need to contribute to a sustainable society is even more evident. The increased use of renewable energy sources represents an opportunity to benefit the environment, community and the economy, locally, regional and globally. Homer wishes to position the community to take advantage of funding opportunities to participate in the forefront of new technologies.

This energy plan dovetails upon several other city documents. Homer has adopted a Climate Action Plan and an employee sustainability handbook, addressing many of the goals presented here. Additionally, many concepts supporting the goals of this chapter may be found in various chapters.

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION (Chapter 10)

The value of a plan will ultimately be determined by the extent to which it is used. Chapter 10 of the plan summarizes specific strategies for carrying out plan goals and objectives, and lists priority projects for implementing the plan. The actual timing of the implementation of any specific projects will be determined by the City Council; this summary is intended to capture today's views about priorities.

