

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Overview

Homer is located on the northern shoreline of Kachemak Bay, a sheltered arm of lower Cook Inlet. Scenic views surround the city in all directions. The snowcapped mountains and glaciers of the Kenai Range are seen from Homer looking across Kachemak Bay. Its maritime location means that Homer is flush with fishing boats, marine life, and the sights, sounds and smells of the ocean. The city has a heritage of sturdy homesteaders who came to Homer and brought an adventurous, industrious spirit that helped shape the well-loved community that exists today.



The community's diverse, organic qualities trace back to these homestead origins. Homer residents continue to take initiative – starting small businesses, producing local art, volunteering for community activities. This has served to shape the look and feel of the town with diverse, albeit scattered businesses, eclectic residential housing styles, the community-supported Pratt Museum, the Islands and Ocean Center, many nonprofits and established churches, and an active Chamber of Commerce. The city government has also captured this spirit with its effective city government, array of services and facilities, and a tradition of active civic debate. Facilities within the city limits of Homer include the airport, the boat harbor, an ice arena, parks and ball fields and the Kachemak Bay Campus of the University of Alaska. Homer is also one of Southcentral Alaska's main hubs for fishing and tourism.

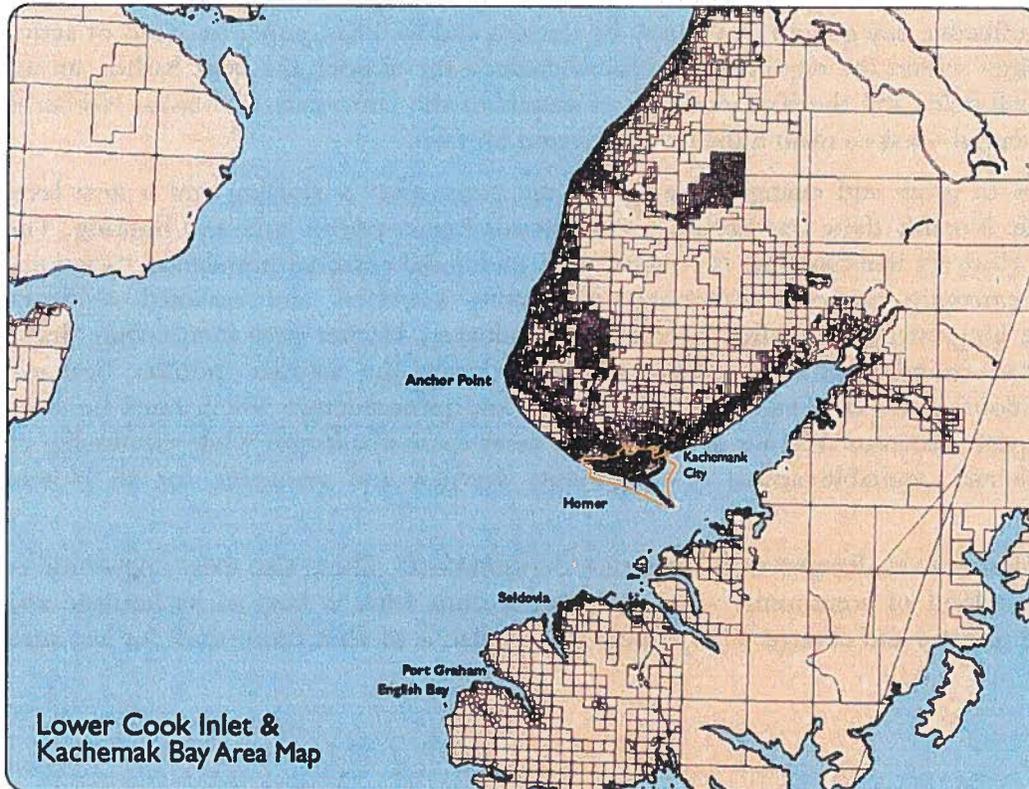
The city continues to grow and change. The age of the population is shifting and a new level of wealth is visible. Notably there has been a trend towards higher-priced land and housing. The general change in Homer's demographic is coupled with traditional seasonal population variations. A distinction is emerging between year-round community members and seasonal residents. In addition to the long-established influx of summer employees, Homer now increasingly draws residents who own second homes in Homer and visit during the warmer months. Seasonal population fluctuations create challenges for city services and infrastructure which must be sized to meet seasonal peak demands. Homer is working to meet these challenges while continuing to provide affordable and equitable access to community services and resources for all Homer residents.

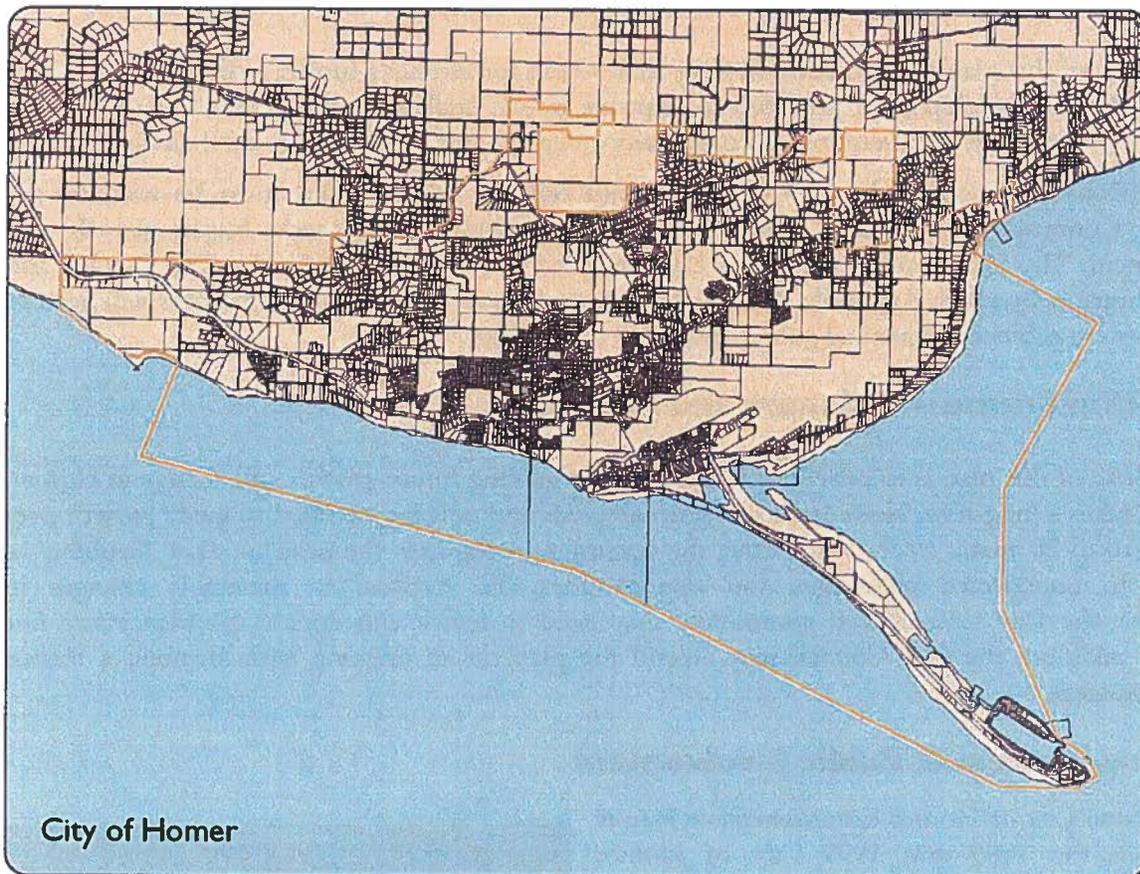
The character of Homer is challenged with these new developments. There also exist opportunities to emerge as a new kind of community – one that holds onto what is best of its heritage and embraces the need to grow and change. The purpose of this plan is to set a framework for just such a strategy.

Overview of Community Boundaries and Setting

Homer lies on the north shore of Kachemak Bay on the southwest edge of the Kenai Peninsula. *See Kachemak Bay area map below.* It is the southern-most point of the road system connecting the Kenai Peninsula with Anchorage, which lies 227 road miles north of Homer. Homer is approximately 59.6° north latitude and 151.6° west longitude. Homer's city boundaries encompass a total area of approximately 25 square miles (15 square miles of land and 10 square miles of water). *See City of Homer map on the following page.* Since the last drafting of the Homer Comprehensive Plan, the city's boundaries and population have grown. In 2002, Homer annexed 4.58 square miles of land. According to the Alaska Department of Community, Commerce, and Economic Development (DCCED), in 2007 Homer's population was estimated at approximately 5,500 people.

Homer has a close relationship with many nearby communities, both along the road system and the marine highway system. Kachemak City, incorporated in 1961, is Homer's closest neighbor, located just east of the city. Its population is approximately 470 (467 in July 2007) people and many of its residents are employed in Homer. Anchor Point, with approximately 1800 residents, is 14 miles northwest of Homer along the road system, and like Kachemak City, many of its residents are employed in Homer. Homer also helps to service the needs of communities across Kachemak Bay, notably Seldovia, Port Graham and Nanwalek (formerly English Bay). The Alaska Marine Highway ferry service connects Homer to Seldovia.





Purpose of the Plan

The purpose of comprehensive planning is to promote the type of environment – both built and natural – that a community desires. The City of Homer has a robust planning history, especially when compared to many Alaskan communities. Early efforts to create a comprehensive plan date to 1954 with area residents documenting existing conditions and making recommendations for growth and development. The 1989 City of Homer Comprehensive Plan, updated in 1999, currently guides the City's growth and development.

In Alaska, comprehensive plans are mandated of all organized first and second class boroughs by Title 29 of the Alaska State Statutes. The key elements of the statute (Sec. 29.40.030) are summarized below:

The comprehensive plan is a compilation of policy statements, goals, standards, and maps for guiding the physical, social, and economic development, both private and public, of the municipality, and may include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Statements of policies, goals, and standards;
- Land use plan;
- Community facilities plan;
- Transportation plan; and,
- Recommendations for implementing a comprehensive plan.

A comprehensive plan provides a method to analyze past development, current issues and community views, and to use this information to establish policies guiding future development. Key

components of this plan include a broad, long-term vision for Homer’s future; policies to guide land use, growth, and development; priorities to improve public facilities and services; and policies to promote economic development, retain community character and protect the natural environment.

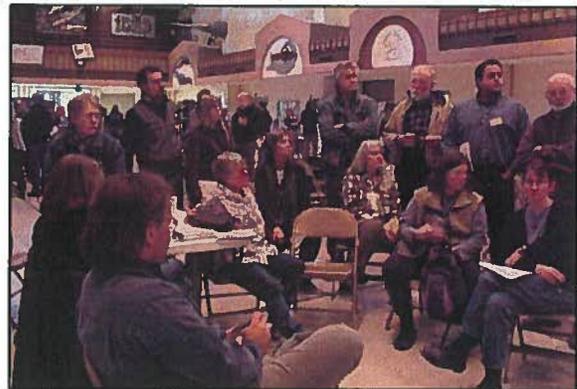
To be effective, the comprehensive plan must not only be adopted, but must be used by the Planning Commission and City Council to guide decisions on Homer’s future growth and development. The first step in creating an effective plan will be adoption by the City Council and Kenai Peninsula Borough Assembly. After adoption, the City of Homer and its partners will need to take actions to achieve the general goals established by the plan.

Plan Time Frame – Visionary and Practical

The purpose of this plan is to provide a framework for guiding future growth and change in Homer. The plan takes a long-term view, establishing broad goals and policies intended to guide growth over the next 10 to 20 years. At the same time, the document recognizes the need to allow flexibility to respond to unexpected challenges and opportunities. To respond to inevitable changes in conditions, the City Council and community may need to revisit and update the plan every five years. In addition, the City Council may amend the plan on an ongoing basis through a formal revision process.

Planning Process & Public Involvement

This updated City of Homer Comprehensive Plan is built from the 1989 and 1999 City of Homer Comprehensive Plans and other plans adopted by the City of Homer, including the Town Center Development Plan (2007), Capital Improvement Plan (2006), Water and Sewer Master Plan (2006), City of Homer Non-Motorized Transportation and Trails Plan (2004) and the Homer Area Transportation Plan (2005). Additional contributions include work with members of the Homer community, the Homer Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC), City staff and City department heads. Agnew::Beck Consulting assisted the City in this process.



The following table summarizes the process in preparing this comprehensive plan.

Date	Activity
January 29 & 30, 2007	Initial meeting between planners, City liaison and staff
January 29, 2007	First CAC meeting to discuss process, issues & goals
January–April	Interviews with City of Homer Department Heads, CAC meetings to flesh out issues and goals

Date (continued)	Activity (continued)
April 25, 2007	First Community Workshop to gain broad public input on comprehensive plan goals
May – September 2007	Series of CAC meetings to review draft plan chapters, including Land Use, Transportation, Public Services and Facilities, Parks and Recreation, plus introductory chapters and informal meetings with various stakeholder groups
Late September	Completion of Internal Review Draft
Early October	Release of Draft Plan for Public Comments
October 18, 2007	Community Workshop to review the Draft Plan
Winter 2007-08	Further meetings with CAC to make final revisions to the plan in response to public comments

Once the draft plan is finalized, the following steps will occur to complete the review, refinement and adoption of the plan. The City of Homer shares responsibilities for approval of the comprehensive plan with the Kenai Peninsula Borough.

Date	Activity
Fall 2008, Winter 2009 Summer 2009	Review and Approval by City Planning and Zoning Commission
Fall 2009 Winter 2010	Review and approval by City Council
Spring 2010	Review and approval by Kenai Peninsula Borough (KPB) Planning Commission; review and approval by KPB Assembly

