

## **CHAPTER 7 PARKS, RECREATION & CULTURE**

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**Vision Statement: Homer wishes to encourage a wide range of health-promoting recreation services and facilities, desires ready access to open space, parks and recreation, and takes pride in supporting the arts.**

### **Overview**

This chapter reviews existing parks, recreation and cultural facilities, and related programs in Homer and describes actions for needed improvements. Strategies for tourism, a related but separate topic, are covered in the Economic Development chapter.

### **City Services**

Providing a diverse, high-quality system of parks, trails, and sports and recreational facilities and programs is an important role for City government. These activities support the quality of life and help to attract and retain local businesses. In addition, quality recreational facilities and programs are a critical part of the nationwide effort to combat obesity and encourage more active, healthier lifestyles. The City shares responsibility for providing such programs and facilities with a number of partners, including the schools, the State and Borough, sports clubs, and community volunteers.

The Parks and Recreation division of Homer's Public Works department supports and maintains a number of integral Homer facilities. Parks and Recreation staff are responsible for daily operational duties associated with the City's summer campgrounds, parks, playgrounds, and cemetery facilities. Additionally, they monitor and collect parking fees at the Homer Airport.

The Parks and Recreation division also administers the Homer Beautification Project which ensures that City flower gardens are cared for, grass is mowed, streets are cleaned, and dump stations and restrooms are well-maintained. The City parks and recreation staff primarily deals with all of these maintenance tasks with limited support from volunteers.

In 2006, the City assumed responsibility for operating the Homer Community Schools program. The program is partially funded through class fees. The balance of the funding is provided by the City of Homer through tax dollars. The City has an agreement with the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District for use of equipment and facilities at several locations such as Homer High School and Paul Banks Elementary School. The Community Schools program works to promote community involvement and lifelong learning through educational and recreational opportunities for people of all ages. The Community Schools mission statement says that the program will "maximize usage of all community facilities and resources, while utilizing, expanding and uniting local business and school resources and expertise."

### **Community Service Providers**

The City and community of Homer augment City Parks and Recreation's efforts with an array of additional programs ranging from the Community Schools program to programs offered by the Boys and Girls Club. The City supports these community-based efforts. Homer has a hardworking sector of volunteer and nonprofit recreation organizations that also provide recreational activities.

Examples include the Homer Hockey Association, Kachemak Nordic Ski Club, Homer Little League, the Softball Association, and the Kachemak Equestrian Association. A particular challenge is ensuring residents from all sectors of the community have access to programs and facilities. Expanding events and sports programs is generally not a direct City function. These responsibilities largely lie with local schools and sports clubs.

### **Park Users**

Homer’s parks and recreational facilities are regularly used not only by residents from within city limits, but by users from adjoining unincorporated areas and visitors from outside the area. Maintaining Homer’s parks is a particular challenge in the summertime, when park use increases dramatically due to the visitor population. Goal 1 addresses the issue of how best to sustain and expand capacity and resources for ongoing park and recreation operations.

### **Desired Improvements**

Homer residents have expressed the desire to ensure that Parks and Recreation be given equal status with other community services. Currently Parks and Recreation is a division within the Public Works Department and the Community Schools program is under the Administration Department. The sense among residents is that the maintenance and creation of parks and recreation resources, activities, and programs holds critical importance to the quality of life and its economic vitality. Forming a Parks and Recreation department will give supporters the status, staff, and funding required to further improve Homer’s parks and recreation facilities and programs.

One desired improvement identified by many Homer residents is a multi-use, multi-seasonal community recreational facility, offering programs for youth, adults, and seniors. This community recreation center could host a variety of activities for all ages. The center could act as a community information center to publicize current regional activities and coordinate with other organizations. The center could also be a major tenant or attraction in the proposed town center.

Homer residents are eager to improve and expand the trail system and as described in the Homer Non-Motorized Transportation and Trail Plan. In this comprehensive plan, trails and other forms of non-motorized transportation are expanded upon in Chapter 5; however, they link to the discussion of parks and recreation.

Parks and recreation projects need to be organized to provide a clear and realistic implementation plan. Evaluating and prioritizing projects and capital improvement goals will help gain the support of the City and community. The creation of a Parks and Recreation Master Plan will provide clear guidance for support through the City’s Capital Improvement Program.

### **Arts and Culture**

Homer’s arts and cultural scene is something to boast about. For a town of its size, Homer offers an impressive variety of arts and cultural opportunities including the Pratt Museum, Pier One Theater, Kachemak Bay Campus, numerous restaurants and bars offering live entertainment, and a thriving community of artists who sell their work in an array of local galleries. Homer has a robust festival season



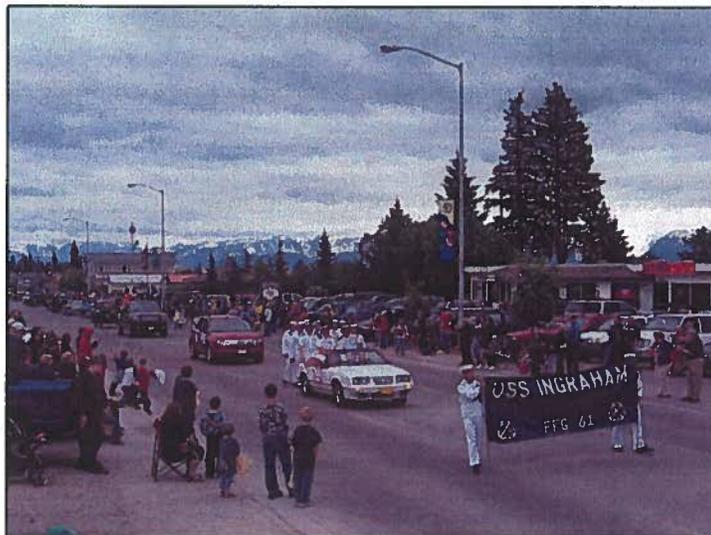
as well. Kachemak Bay also has a rich Alaska Native history whose early culture is shared through exhibits at the Pratt Museum. Continuing support for Homer's arts and culture network benefits Homer's economy and quality of life. Community comments expressed during the process of preparing this plan showed strong support for supporting arts and cultural opportunities in Homer. Some of these objectives are best carried out by the City, while others are best undertaken by local arts groups and tourism marketing organizations with City cooperation and encouragement.

### **1% for the Arts Program**

Homer has a tradition of fostering arts and cultural activities that contribute to quality of life and provide economic benefits to the community. See *Chapter 8, Economic Vitality*. While the City is not the primary party responsible for continuing and expanding cultural activities, it can be a helpful partner. The City has a "1% for Art Program" that aims to foster culture and the arts in the community through the purchase and commissioning of works of art for municipal buildings.

### **Desired Improvements**

Through this comprehensive planning process, a number of people have suggested the benefits of establishing a multipurpose community arts and cultural facility located in the downtown area, near restaurants, shopping, art galleries, bars and other complementary business activities. Homer's downtown will benefit from being able to offer an expanded range of arts and cultural programs. These activities would help draw visitors to specific events, who then might choose to linger and spend time and money at local restaurants and shops. The Homer Town Center Development Plan emphasizes the importance of civic facilities and institutions as providing the "critical mass" needed to bring the area alive. The Plan mentions the need to pursue "a centralized Town Square that includes a cultural center" in addition to "other civic institutions such as a courthouse, civic center or conference center." While developing such a facility would clearly have benefits, it would be costly to construct and operate.



Fourth of July Parade

## Summary of 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.

## Goals & Objectives for Parks, Recreation & Culture

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

**Objective A:** Expand resources available to manage and maintain facilities and programs.

### Implementation Strategies

Staff, volunteer, and financial resources for park maintenance need to grow, particularly as new parks are developed.

1. Research the year-round and seasonal staff needs to maintain and operate city park facilities and programs. Increase staffing or volunteer involvement as needed to provide basic City services.
2. Work with volunteers and service organizations to expand the local park maintenance workforce. Consider an "adopt-a-park" program in which local businesses, service organizations, or youth groups choose or are assigned to care for a particular park. One drawback to the program is that it may require an additional City staff person to implement and administer.

3. Establish a park endowment fund with the Homer Foundation. This sets up an initial fund and then allows private citizens to donate to it for the ongoing maintenance and improvement of the City's park system, thereby relieving some pressure from the City for parks.

**Objective B:** Explore options, costs, and benefits of combining the Community Schools program and the Parks and Recreation division to establish a new, stand-alone Parks and Recreation department.

#### Implementation Strategies

1. If supported by a cost benefit analysis, create a unified Parks and Recreation Department that includes the Community Schools program.

### **GOAL 2:** Create a Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

**Objective A:** Identify City owned or offered park and recreation needs.

#### Implementation Strategies

1. Determine geographic layout of parks, where more are needed, and develop a park dedication ordinance.
2. Identify the program gaps and needs for Community Schools.

**Objective B:** Pursue financial strategies that leverage City tax dollars to build public recreation facilities, and support private efforts.

#### Implementation Strategies

1. Use the Capital Improvement Plan, city budget, bond measures and partnerships with other organizations (such as Little League) to lobby, fundraise and build public recreation facilities.

**GOAL 3:** Enhance areawide recreational trail systems. Improve connections between residential areas, downtown, schools, institutional areas, and recreation areas.

**Objective A:** Implement the Homer Non-Motorized Transportation and Trail Plan and other policies to improve pedestrian connections. *Also see Chapter 5.*

#### Implementation Strategies

1. Document where trails are locate.
2. Create incentives and requirements for an interconnected system of trails, biking networks, and pathways.
3. Create public trail easements rather than trails within right of ways.

4. Enhance existing trails by adding landscaped buffers in particular parts of town, such as more urbanized areas.
5. Encourage businesses to participate in the development of landscaped buffers.
6. Support the adoption of policies and dedication of staff to implement the Non-motorized Transportation and Trail Plan.
7. Develop a plan to ensure new trails are maintained.

*See Goal 1 – Objective A this section for discussion of the Parks division. Additionally, this goal is more thoroughly addressed in the Transportation chapter.*

**GOAL 4:** Identify recreation resources, key open space areas, and future parks as part of green infrastructure mapping.

*The Land Use Chapter – Goal 2, Objectives A and B, encourages the development of a “green infrastructure” system for Homer.*

**Implementation Strategies**

1. The green infrastructure system should include consideration of functional environmental features such as waterways that support drainage, and aquifer recharge zones, as well as key recreation and open space resources. The system needs to work at multiple scales – from regionally significant features such as the Homer Spit and the associated bike trail to smaller local facilities such as pocket parks and small swaths of green space in existing neighborhoods.
2. Encourage the use of Green infrastructure mapping to help identify and protect significant open space and recreation resources and to help ensure the goals in this chapter are met. *See Goal 2 of the Land Use Chapter.*

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

**Objective A:** Continue to maintain and improve city parks and open spaces.

**Implementation Strategies**

1. Continuously assess whether available park and recreation facilities and programs are meeting demands, from inside and outside city limits.
2. Expand capacity to maintain facilities and offer programs. *See Goal 1.*
3. The City should follow a systematic approach to maintaining and improving Homer’s park system, including the following:
  - a. Identify an integrated “green infrastructure” system for the entirety of Homer, including parks, trails and open spaces. *See the “green infrastructure” section in Goal 2 of the Land Use Chapter, and in Goal 4, for details.*

- b. Establish regulations that facilitate the creation of parks as part of the development process.
  - i. Encourage developers to show existing or potential trails and open space resources on their development plans and demonstrate how they will retain these values in their projects.
  - ii. The City should consider developing a park dedication ordinance. These regulations require that new development either designate a certain amount of useable land for parks and trail access or pay into a park fund in lieu of land dedication.
- 4. In conjunction with a park ordinance, create park landscaping standards to find a balance between natural and manicured park development.
- 5. Develop a City greenhouse to better implement the City beautification program.

**Objective B:** Support and enhance City and community-sponsored year-round recreational facilities and programs to meet the needs of Homer’s youth, adult and senior populations.

### Implementation Strategies

In developing this comprehensive plan, a specific set of priority park-related projects and programs was identified, based on input from the community residents. These are discussed below.

- 1. Partner with other organizations. In addition to continuing to provide programs and facilities for which the City is directly responsible (e.g., campground, trails) the City could partner with schools, nonprofit organizations, and other community groups. Example include providing and helping to maintain land for parks and other recreational facilities.
- 2. Improve Access to Recreation Programs and Facilities.
  - a. Removing barriers to participation is important, particularly for youth and seniors. Suggested means to removing barriers to citizen participation in existing recreational activities include:
    - i. Offering transportation to/from facilities and events
    - ii. Sliding payment scales for participation in sporting activities and equipment purchase
    - iii. Providing facilities with a range of hours of operation
    - iv. Providing small facilities in a variety of locations throughout town
- 3. Establish Community Recreation Center.
 

The City’s role in a community recreation facility, if determined as a priority, includes providing political support for the establishment of the facility and assisting to secure space in an existing building or a site for the proposed facility.
- 4. Determine needed recreational facility improvements and programs using the following steps:
  - a. Conduct an inventory of parks and recreational facilities and programs. Identify key gaps and shortfalls.

- b. Work with user-groups to conduct a community survey to prioritize parks and recreation needs.
- c. Develop a priority recreation facility and program needs and assessment list.
- d. Identify funding sources.
- e. Use this list to raise and direct funds.

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

### Implementation Strategies

A number of major initiatives may be needed to allow the town center to fully and sustainably develop. Plans for downtown are covered in the Land Use Chapter under Goal 4 – Objective A. A short summary of recommended actions include the improvements listed below. A more comprehensive list can be found in the Town Center Plan.

1. Build a town center plaza/town square in the town center area.
2. Build a public restroom in the town center.
3. Maintain a sense of the natural environment in the area through retention of streams and vegetation. Include park areas with a predominately natural feel, as well as more “urban” public spaces.
4. Continue to improve the existing city zoning ordinance to better meet town center goals.
5. Establish routes and right-of-ways for trails and sidewalks; create new north-south and east-west access roads.
6. Encourage new private business development required for a successful town center.

**GOAL 7:** Support public beach access.

**Objective A:** Support citizen efforts to maintain environmental quality and public use of beaches through the current Beach Policy.

The City of Homer has an adopted beach policy. As new challenges and opportunities arise, this document will need to be updated and the city will need to fund any plan implementation strategies. The Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission is the advisory body which makes recommendations to the City Council on beach issues. This objective is intended to empower Homer citizens to work with the Commission to make recommendations to the City Council on how to manage problems.

### Implementation Strategies

1. Support the policies and recommendations of the Beach Policy document.
2. As the need arises, update the beach policy and implement the recommendations.

## **Objective B: Maintain and Enhance public beach access**

### **Implementation Strategies**

1. Discourage right-of-way and public access easement vacations to the beach.
2. When opportunities arise, enhance or improve public access to the beach at public access points.

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

**Objective A:** Establish mixed use zoning that accommodates art studio activities and residential living. *See Land Use Chapter.*

**Objective B:** Prepare a Homer Comprehensive Art and Cultural Assets and Needs Plan, including inventorying facilities, documenting future needs, and setting priorities for action such as fundraising, marketing and facilities.

The Economic Vitality Chapter also discusses how Homer can build from its existing strong art and culture base.

### **Implementation Strategies**

1. Prepare a Homer Arts and Cultural Assets and Needs Plan. The City is not the organization to take the lead in this effort, but can be a partner. Key players include the Homer Council on the Arts, the Pratt Museum, the Islands and Ocean Center, as well as downtown and Old Town businesses. This plan could inventory current facilities, activities, and programs, as well as identify near term and longer term strategies to accelerate development of cultural resources. Strategies should be developed to find ways to maximize the community benefits of these developments.
  - a. The plan should address how to improve access to and the availability of arts and cultural activities to people of all ages. In addition, an arts and culture planning effort would be the first step in facilitating Objective C below.

**Objective C:** Evaluate the development of a new, multi-purpose cultural and community facility in Homer's downtown.

### **Implementation Strategies**

1. In the near term, continue to rely on existing facilities and a collaborative approach to host performing arts events, cultural activities, community meetings, conferences and conventions. The Islands and Ocean Center, Mariner Theater, library and high school currently provide facilities that can support many such uses.
2. As part of the City Hall/Town Square programming and design process, explore options to maximize the use of these new facilities to support a range of cultural, performing arts, conference and meeting activities. A new City Hall might allow for moderately sized community cultural and art events.

3. Design the Town Square to support a range of outdoor and/or partially covered community cultural and art events.
4. Define what is needed as part of this facility, what gap it will fill, what purpose it will serve; e.g., a performing arts space, exhibition hall, meeting facility?
5. Investigate options for creating the facility in downtown. In 2005, the City completed a feasibility assessment of a possible conference and convention facility and concluded that while such a facility would be valuable, there may not be enough demand to sustain its operations without significant public subsidy. In the future, as statewide demand for meeting and conference space expands, along with continued growth in the size of Homer and its capacity to cover costs, developing such a facility may become a practical, sustainable project.

### Parks, Recreation and Culture Implementation Table

Project	Timeframe			Primary Responsibility
	Near Term	Mid Term	Longer Term	
Design, fund, and build Town Center/Town Square.		x		City, community
Increase staffing at Parks & Recreation and determine if a merger with Community Schools would be appropriate.		x		City
Conduct parks inventory and needs assessment; establish a park dedication ordinance.		x		City, nonprofits
Establish, implement park landscaping standards.	x			City
Build a City greenhouse to support the Homer beautification program.			x	City
Improve access/remove barriers to using parks and recreation facilities.	x			City
Develop a community recreation facility.			x	City, nonprofits
Establish park endowment fund.		x		City
Develop public restrooms in downtown.	x			City
Support implementation of the Non-motorized Transportation Plan.	x			City, community
Investigate multipurpose arts and cultural facility.		x		City, nonprofits
Develop Arts and Culture Plan.		x		Nonprofits
Create a Parks and Recreation Master Plan.	x			City
Conduct a parks and recreation inventory to identify gaps and shortfalls in community offerings and facilities.	x			City, nonprofits
Update the Beach Policy.		x		City