



# City of Homer

[www.cityofhomer-ak.gov](http://www.cityofhomer-ak.gov)

Office of the City Manager

491 East Pioneer Avenue  
Homer, Alaska 99603

[citymanager@cityofhomer-ak.gov](mailto:citymanager@cityofhomer-ak.gov)

(p) 907-235-8121 x2222

(f) 907-235-3148

## Memorandum

TO: Mayor Castner and Homer City Council  
FROM: Rob Dumouchel, City Manager  
DATE: April 19, 2023  
SUBJECT: City Manager's Report for April 24, 2023 Council Meeting

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### 2022 Visioning Update

I have been providing roughly quarterly updates to the Council priorities set in the 2022 visioning work sessions at the Pratt Museum. Accompanying this report is a memo providing updates on all priority items from 2022 and some additional commentary on projects that carried over from 2020.

### Coast Guard City Update

We have received word that the Commandant of the Coast Guard officially intends to approve our application to become a Coast Guard City. We are waiting for the end of the 30-day Congressional notification period to expire before we can become official. I expect that we should have exciting news to share at the second Council meeting in May.

### Goodbye to Rick Abboud, City Planner

After 15 years, and upwards of 300 Planning Commission meetings with the City of Homer, Rick is moving on to a new position with York County, South Carolina which is part of the Charlotte metropolitan area. Rick joined the City in 2008 after serving as the planning director for Bethel, AK. He jumped straight into the big job of wrapping up the 2008 Homer Comprehensive Plan and shepherding it through the Planning Commission, City Council, and the Kenai Peninsula Borough Assembly. During Rick's tenure with the City he has worked with staff, Planning Commission, and Council on projects that have touched every section of Title 21. He collaborated to make additions to code which include solutions relating to steep slope development, grading and filling, over slope development, wind energy, telecommunication towers, storm water, creation of the East End Mixed use District, allowances for accessory dwellings, marijuana businesses, flood hazard ordinances and maps, coastal setbacks, and the creation of the medical district. Working with legal counsel, Rick has diligently defended numerous decisions of the Planning Commission over the years – including some that have been sustained in the Alaska Supreme Court and have been used as subject matter in an Alaska Chapter of the American Planning Association Conference session titled "how to do it right". Rick has also been very active with MAPP, Rotary, the Kenai Peninsula Homelessness Coalition, and served a stint as interim-City manager before my arrival in Homer. Being City Planner is a tough job, and Rick has done a good job. I applaud Rick for his efforts here in Homer and wish him the best in York County.

In preparation for Rick's departure, I have Special Projects Coordinator Ryan Foster on deck to serve as interim-City Planner. Ryan has previously served as the Planning Director for the City of Kenai and as Principal Planner for Los Alamos County, New Mexico.

### State Legislature Check-Ins

After visits to Council by both Senator Stevens and Representative Vance, staff conducted follow up Zoom meetings arranged by our lobbyists at J&H Consulting. We largely talked about the Harbor Expansion study, the Municipal Harbor Grants Program, and each elected official gave us their analysis of the ongoing state budget process.



### Residential Fuel Spill

On April 2, 2023 Homer Fire received a call from Enstar Energy who was reporting a smell of fuel in the area of Crittenden and Hidden Way. At about 11:45am Chief Kirko responded to the area and met with an Enstar employee who stated he had been receiving reports from residents in the neighborhood for the past few days of a potential gas leak. Enstar had inspected the homes and utilities in the area and found all systems to be secure and functioning properly. As the Chief investigated the area he detected the scent of diesel in the air, however there was no obvious visual sign of a spill. Chief Kirko was able to track the scent to storm drain and then followed it back to a property on Hidden way. At that time the spill was reported the City's Water & Sewer team, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), and the Coast Guard. At approximately 12:20pm HVFD and the Water & Sewer team responded with crews to place absorbent boom and pads at culverts and storm drains to help mitigate the spread of fuel toward the bay. At approximately 1:00pm Coast Guard, MST2 John Fanelli arrived and conducted a survey and obtained witness statements. Through the statements and the investigation of the site it was determined that the fuel spilled was home heating fuel from a 300-gallon home heating tank. The total amount leaked is estimated at between 75-150 gallons. Chief Kirko met with Jade Gamble of DEC on site and briefed her on our mitigation activities. We also met with the son of the home owner to discuss the cleanup procedures and what the home owner responsibilities are when this happens. At this point, the Fire Department is no longer directly involved keeping this case open and DEC has taken over case management. Moving forward, we're going to try to take this event as an opportunity for public education regarding residential oil storage and spill

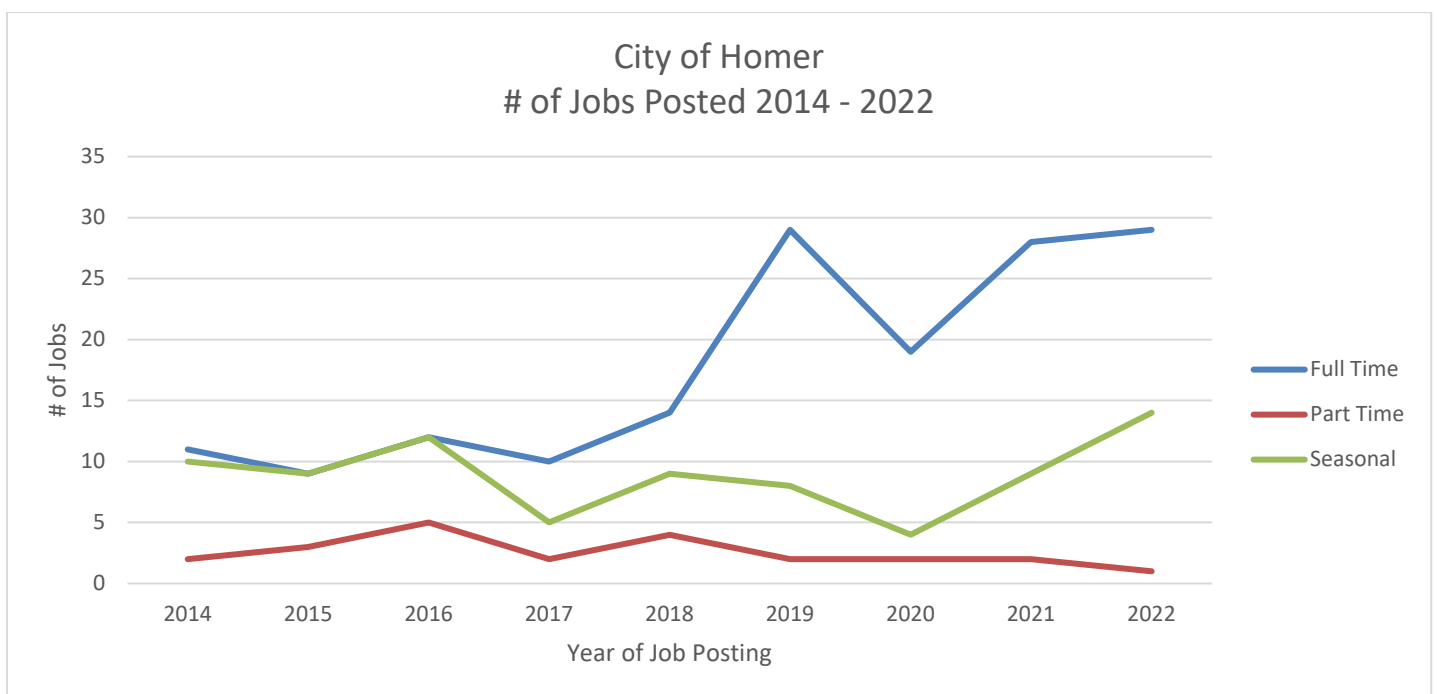
mitigation/response. Chief Kirko and Assistant to the City Manager Bella Vaz will be collaborating on that topic in the coming weeks.

### Guiding Growth Conversation Series

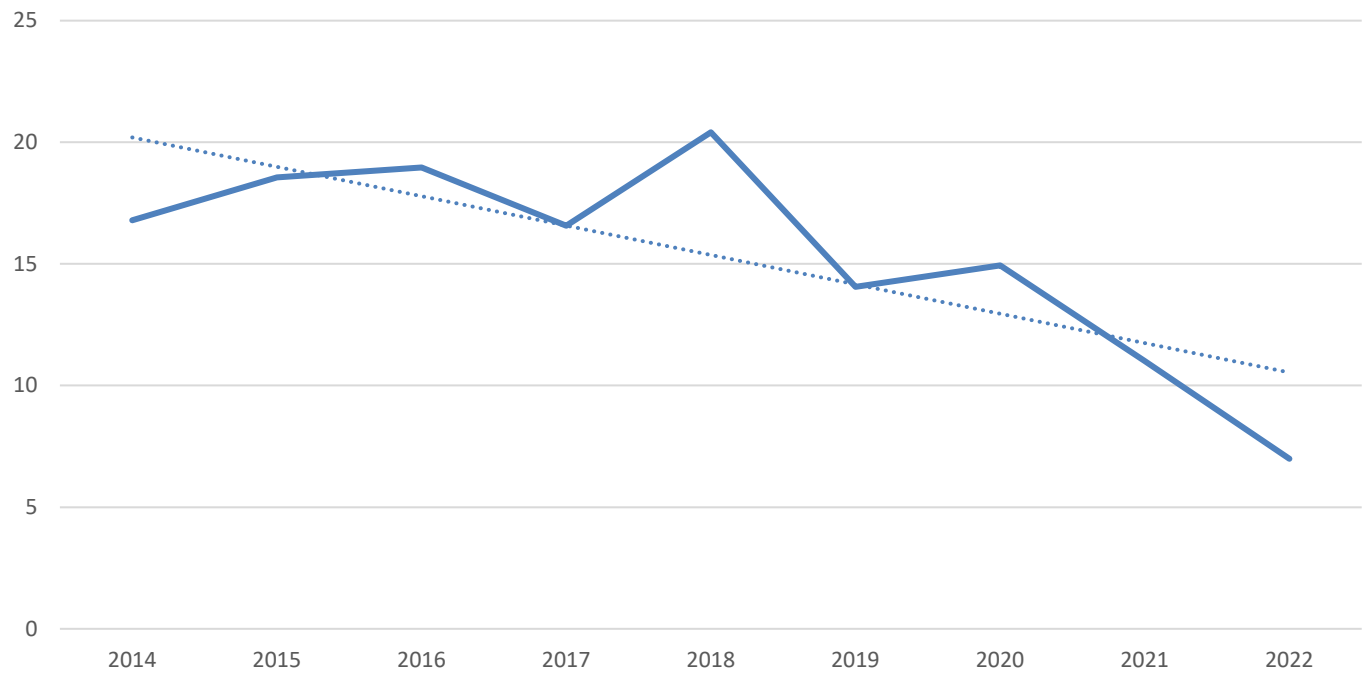
Guiding Growth is a conversation series developed by community members to explore growth opportunities and shared community values. Participating community members are unaffiliated and anyone is invited to help brainstorm, implement, and participate in the discussions. Through civic discourse, good conversation, and relevant resources the group hopes to help guide the vision of how the Homer community develops. The first discussion is on April 29, 4:00 pm at Christian Community Church. Mercedes Harness will present newspaper clippings about how Homer was growing forty years ago--and how many of our concerns and shared values have remained consistent. Tom Kizzia, who edited the Homer News in the mid-1970s, will provide deeper context. Community members will be invited to share their insights and ideas.

### Job Applicant Data

I occasionally field questions from Council, other Cities, and local employers about how successful our recruiting efforts are at this time. The general perception is that the volume of job applicants has decreased and it has been more difficult to hire quality candidates. Wanting to see if reality backs that perception, I pulled some data from our online job application system and saw a declining volume of interest. I then turned it over to Special Projects Coordinator David Parker for a deeper dive. A couple trends have emerged. Since about 2019, we've been posting more job opportunities. We have also seen fewer applicants per listing starting in 2019. As one would anticipate, there are a large number of factors that play into the dynamics that drive interests in municipal positions – the types of jobs available, the pay ranges, the local housing market, how aggressively we market positions, etc. Despite lower numbers, we have had some very successful recruitments which landed talented and experienced new hires. At the same time, some positions have taken many months to fill with a qualified and interested person. If Council approves the proposed funding of a review of Personnel Regulations and Salary Schedules included in the Capital Budget, we will be able to dig deeper into potential internal barriers to recruitment and retention and develop solutions that will assist our ongoing modernization and improvement of human resources practices.



City of Homer Applicants/Job 2014 - 2022





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## Memorandum

TO: Mayor Castner and Homer City Council  
 FROM: Rob Dumouchel, City Manager  
 DATE: April 17, 2023  
 SUBJECT: 2022 Council Visioning Follow Up #4

Staff continues to work diligently to achieve 2022 Council visioning priorities. This is the fourth installment of what are intended to be roughly quarterly updates on project progress.

### 2022 Council Priorities

Fiscal Policy Improvements					
Comprehensive Plan Fast Forward		Zoning Code Modernization		Building Code Adoption and Implementation	
Expansion of Sidewalks and Trails			Water and Sewer Expansion		
Housing Challenges			Emergency Preparedness and Training		
Public Safety Conversations	Volunteer Action Plan	Coast Guard City Designation	Harbor Float Replacements	Recreation Priorities and Planning	Cybersecurity Improvements

- Fiscal Policy Improvements** – We have developed and introduced the FY24/25 Operating and Capital Budgets and the FY22 Audit is nearly complete. Administration is using the budget as a device to provide a lot of baseline information to Council on different funds and future needs of the City. I see this as the foundation for the fiscal planning objective. The next layer is inventorying and expanding our fiscal policies as they relate to the various funds, our desires for reserve amounts, what funds can be used for, etc. Matched with that is a continued improvement to reporting methods. As financial policy improvements underpin virtually everything we do here at the City, we’re trying to take a very comprehensive approach to this process.
- Comprehensive Plan Fast Forward** – This project is being re-imagined. Council approved Ordinance 23-11 which appropriated \$650,000 for the comprehensive plan and zoning code update. That item was subsequently line item vetoed to reduce the appropriation to \$250,000. This dramatically changes what we are capable of achieving in relation to this Council priority. Standby for what will likely be a summer work session to get Council buy-in for the path forward.

- **Zoning Code Modernization** – This item was split into two pieces, pre- and post-comprehensive plan. With the comprehensive plan project up for re-imaging, the pathway of the zoning code modernization is somewhat unclear. We have had successes with what were intended to be pre-comprehensive plan items which included the West Hill rezone (Ordinance 22-35) and the conditional use permit reform project (Ordinance 22-68(A)). Ordinance 22-68(A) has been challenged in Court and our legal team is addressing that complaint.
- **Building Code Adoption and Implementation** – We submitted an application in late December for the BRIC (Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities) Grant Program through FEMA as a possible source of funding to get our building program off the ground. The response to this application, not expected until June at the earliest, will have a large influence on how we proceed to the next steps. In the meantime, we're also working on permitting concepts for grading, dirt work, and burning which impact the same general stakeholders.
- **Housing Challenges** – The Special Projects Team had been planning a housing forum of some sorts when we became aware of some other entities within the community looking to do the same thing. We joined forces with South Peninsula Hospital Foundation, Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District, Homer Chamber of Commerce, Choosing Our Roots, and MAPP to host a community conversation facilitated by Denali Daniels. Upwards of 100 people came to the meeting and others completed associated surveys. I expect Council to receive a report from the event soon. More information available here: <https://ddaalaska.com/homer-housing-solutions/>
- **Water and Sewer Expansion** – Public Works has been putting significant effort into the general concept of expanding our utilities for the last two years. Expect more detailed updates in the future as we work to secure funding for significant expansion opportunities. We especially need to have future discussions regarding the financing of water and sewer expansions. We currently have access to frequent loan opportunities through ADEC. Special Projects has been looking at potential updates to the special assessment district process as well.
- **Expansion of Sidewalks and Trails** – The Main Street sidewalk has been completed and the Master Transportation Plan has made significant progress. In November, Council passed Ordinance 22-42(S-3) which creates new specifications for when new streets are required to provide for non-motorized transportation. The proposed FY24/25 Capital Budget has \$1.7M for the construction of a Ben Walters Sidewalk. We have also heard that our State Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) grant application for the Homer All Ages and Abilities Pedestrian Path (supported by Resolution 23-013) is a big hit with AKDOT and has a high likelihood of success.
- **Emergency Preparedness and Training** – The All Hazards Plan has been completed and accepted by Council. We've used that document to create a monthly feature on a different hazard within the City's newsletter. The tsunami brochure design project with UAF has been completed and printed copied distributed. There remains much work to do related to the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) and future training opportunity development. I have staff actively looking for funding opportunities related emergency preparedness. Chief Kirko and I attended a Tsunami Operations Workshop in Kodiak in March 2023. We learned a lot of valuable information from the various state and federal agencies present. We're also hoping to leverage those connections into some in person training for staff in the not too distant future.
- **Public Safety Conversations** – The Volunteer Fire Department hosted an open house in October which brought the public inside the fire hall for a discussion about fire and EMS services here in

Homer. The Homer Police Department has had success engaging the public with women's self-defense classes and a talk about social media that Lt. Browning has given multiple times here in town, once at the State legislature, and a number of other communities in Alaska.

- **Volunteer Action Plan** – Due to demands related to other projects, the Volunteer Action Plan has been on a bit of a hiatus. I'm looking at having it resume activity shortly with significant help from Economic Development and Community Recreation.
- **Coast Guard City Designation** – The Coast Guard Commandant has indicated her intent to approve our application to Congress. If no objections are filed during the 30-day notification period, our status as a Coast Guard City will become official. If all goes according to plan, this will happen at our second meeting in May.
- **Harbor Float Replacements** – Council passed Ordinance 22-19(A) which made \$56,540 available from the Port Reserves Fund for grant and engineering assistance related to a harbor float replacement project. At the second meeting in April, Council will have an opportunity to pass a resolution supporting the City's submission of a Port Infrastructure Development Grant that would help fund float replacement.
- **Recreation Priorities and Planning** – While this is a bigger conversation than the HERC/Pioneer Gateway Redevelopment Project, much of the general recreation conversation is occurring in parallel to those work sessions/discussions. We did host a presentation by Community Recreation Manager Mike Illg on August 22 that covered the City's recreational relationship with the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District. Further discussions have been part of the FY24/25 operating budget discussion.
- **Cybersecurity Improvements** – In late 2022 we filled an open IT position created by Ordinance 22-20, and in early 2023 we brought on a new lead for IT which gave us a full three person IT team for the first time since the third position was created. The lead IT position's job description was rewritten by the Library Director and I to function as a Chief Technical Officer (CTO). The new team, paired with the institutional knowledge and experience of Network Administrator Tomasz Sulczynski, has been making up a lot of ground on necessary updates and improvements. You'll see in the FY24/25 proposed operating and capital budgets that are increased funds for cybersecurity operations and a number of systems upgrades funded as capital projects.

## 2020 Highlights

- HERC Demolition – demolition of the smaller HERC building hit a snag in permitting related to hazardous materials, specifically PCBs. Council approved a task order to do testing for PCBs, and the results will drive the next step in the process.
- Stormwater Management Plan and Implementation – we have a grant pending to support the portions of the Kachemak "sponge" stormwater plan. Ordinance 23-16(S) accepted a grant and appropriated funds to support the Beluga Slough stormwater treatment system.
- Climate Action Plan – the CAP was intended to be integrated into the Comprehensive Plan for which funding was largely vetoed; a new path forward needs to be developed
- Wayfinding – Plan was adopted by Council, next steps will involve testing designs and installing prototypes around town. FY24/25 Capital Budget includes \$50,000 for implementation.

- Procurement Policy – Has been rolled into 2022 goal of financial policy improvements; looking at finishing the project with a finance term contract holder
- Reserve Funding; Election Code; Council Operating Manual; Funding for Large Vessel Harbor Study – Largely complete

**2020 Council Initiated Priorities**

HERC Demolition/Community Recreation Center		Stormwater Management Plan and Implementation		
Climate Action Plan		Wayfinding/Streetscape		
Water and Sewer Policy	Reserve Funding (Water and Sewer)	Election Code	City Council Operating Manual	Procurement Policy
Funding for Large Vessel Harbor Study				



# GUIDING GROWTH

What makes Homer a special place to live?

Attend an open forum to share ideas, history and growth opportunities for Homer.

Come see historical newspaper photos and articles, share stories.

Discuss who we are and how Homer is changing.

**Location: Christian Community Church  
3838 Bartlett St A, Homer**

**Time: 4-5:30 pm, Saturday, April 29**

**With Mercedes Harness and Tom Kizzia**