

City Council Laydown Items

Monday, August 25, 2025





MEMORANDUM

Status of the 2025-2045 Homer Comprehensive Plan and Title 21 Zoning Code Re-write

Item Type: Informational Memorandum
Prepared For: Mayor Lord and Homer City Council
Date: August 25, 2025
From: Ryan Foster, City Planner
Through: Melissa Jacobsen, City Manager

The intent of this memorandum is to provide the City Council the latest status on the 2025-2045 Homer Comprehensive Plan and Title 21 Zoning Code Re-write.

2025-2045 Homer Comprehensive Plan

The Homer Planning Commission held a public hearing on August 20, 2025 for the 2025-2045 Comprehensive Plan. The Commission has postponed to their next meeting on September 3, 2025 to provide their recommendation and comments to City Council. The next step in the process is to schedule a public hearing for City Council. After Council approval, the plan will be submitted to the Kenai Peninsula Borough Planning Commission and Assembly for review and adoption. The City of Homer holds zoning powers as delegated by the Kenai Peninsula Borough, but the Borough has retained area wide planning powers. Therefore, Borough approval is required as the final step in adoption.

Title 21 Zoning Code Re-write

City staff are currently reviewing a draft version of the new zoning code; it is anticipated a public review version of the new zoning code will be presented to the Planning Commission at their October 15, 2025 meeting for their review and comments. A public open house for review and comment of the draft code is scheduled for October 22, 2025.

The Missing Links on Our Waterfronts

How port infrastructure underpins innovation, quality and the success of the independent harvester



THE QUALITY LINE
AUG 25, 2025



Share

By Hannah Heimbuch

When people think about what makes seafood “high quality,” many imagine what happens on the boat—how the fish is handled, chilled, and bled. Or maybe they consider the route the fish took to get to them—did it come as direct as possible or were there many stops and re-freezes along the way? As a commercial fisherman, I know those details matter. But there’s another piece that is often invisible to consumers, and even policymakers: the infrastructure we depend on once the fish leaves the deck.



Docks, cranes, ice machines, processing facilities, cold storage, cold transport, even the road or runway out of town—these are not luxuries. They are the connective tissue that allows fish to move from the water to the market while still fresh, traceable, and fairly priced. They also provide the platform for community-based harvesters and processors to innovate around quality and market access, and retain more of the harvest's value in the community.

Without port facilities, all the care we take at sea can be wasted. A harvester can pour endless effort into putting up a quality product, but without a market to match, they lose the ability to prioritize quality and retain the value of that work.

Invisible Lifelines: Shore-Side Infrastructure in Fishing Communities

I fish in the Gulf of Alaska, where communities are small and spread across vast stretches of coastline. Over my lifetime, I've watched local facilities close—ice machines turned off, processing lines mothballed, docks left to the steady erosion of salt water. The reasons are complicated: seafood markets are volatile, upkeep is

expensive, and consolidation pushes activity toward larger hubs. But the result is simple: fewer places to land fish, fewer buyers, fewer options for fishermen, and fewer opportunities for communities to benefit from their own resources.

Just a ten minute skiff ride from my extremely remote fishing operation, sits a 120 year old seafood processor with an incredible amount of infrastructure. At one point housing hundreds of seasonal workers, this once booming facility hasn't processed fish since 2020. All that remains are the two year round caretakers, the occasional support crew catching up with critical maintenance, and the quiet bulk of ice machines, processing lines, bunk houses and machine shops now gathering dust.



When infrastructure disappears, market access goes with it. Fishermen may have to run longer distances before offloading, or struggle with ice and supply access. They lose negotiating power when there's only one buyer left on the dock. And communities lose commerce as well as critical infrastructure that serves more than industry operations. In our case, the closest market is 120 miles away. Our buyer has moved mountains of ice from down down to our remote sites so we can still prioritize quality but the logistics and cost leave little margin for error or upheaval. And little to no room for innovation.

When the Facilities Fade: Erosion, Closures, and the Cost of Remotene

While Alaska's remoteness makes these challenges sharp, I've learned through my work with harvesters across the country that the pattern repeats itself. Rural coastal towns in Maine, tribal villages in Washington and small boat ports in Oregon, even working waterfronts near major cities like Boston and Santa Barbara—each face their own version of the same problem.

Infrastructure doesn't vanish overnight. It erodes slowly, a dock piling at a time, until suddenly it's gone. And once it's gone, rebuilding is almost impossible without massive public investment. That's why so many independent harvesters describe infrastructure as their number one concern—not just boats and permits, but the shore-side systems that allow them to keep fishing in the first place.



These gaps don't just affect fishermen. They affect every person who values high-quality, nutritious seafood. If fishermen can't access ice, cold storage, or timely shipping, that fish isn't making it to your plate in top condition. If fishermen are forced to consolidate into fewer, larger ports, markets get less competitive—and seafood gets less affordable, less diverse, and less local. Its value is increasingly

exported from the communities that harvest it. Infrastructure is the bridge between ocean and table. When it crumbles, so does consumer choice.

Bridges, Not Barges: Community Solutions and Policy Paths Forward

The good news is that communities are innovating. Cooperative cold storage projects, direct-to-consumer models, and public investments in working waterfronts are helping to fill the gaps. There are promising developments around solar-powered cold storage for rural fisheries that signal a new generation of seafood harvest and supply both possible and progressing. But these efforts need support—policy that values small- and mid-scale harvesters, funding that prioritizes rural and tribal communities, and recognition that seafood infrastructure is as fundamental to our food system as roads and bridges.



As fishermen, we do our part on the water. We need strong, resilient infrastructure shore to ensure that the care we take with our catch isn't lost along the way. If we want to keep eating American seafood—real, local, traceable, wild seafood—we have to invest in the places and people that bring it to shore.

Thanks for reading! Subscribe for free to receive
new posts and support my work.

Hannah Heimbuch is a commercial fisherman and fisheries advocate based in Palmer, Alaska. She fishes on Kodiak Island and is a contributing author to The Quality Line.

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Discussion about this post

Comments Restacks



Write a comment...

To: Mayor Rachel Lord and Homer City Council
From: Scott Smith, Chair Homer Planning Commission
Date: August 25, 2025
Re: HPC Meeting Report from August 20, 2025

Attending: In Chambers: Commissioners S. Smith, Barnwell, Schneider, Harness and H. Smith; Commissioner Venuti via Zoom; Deputy City Clerk Zach Pettit and City Planner Ryan Foster. Councilmembers Aderhold and Venuti in audience.

REGULAR MEETING

Agenda: Approved as Presented.

Public Comment: Jan Keiser offered comments about recommendations to not omit portions of the Draft Comp Plan. Her comments were also submitted in writing.

Reconsiderations: None.

Consent Agenda: Motion to move Item A under Plat Considerations (Staff Report 25-39) to be presented before Reports (to not keep applicants waiting through the Comp Plan discussion). Passed Unanimously. Consent Agenda as Amended Passed Unanimously.

Reports: City Planners Report, Staff Report 25-36. City Planner Foster briefly covered the long-awaited Public Review Draft Comprehensive Plan has been released to the Public, various Commissions and City Departments.

Public Hearings:

- A. A Request To Vacate The 66-Foot-Wide Section Line Easement Across Lot 2 Arno Subdivision, T 6S R 14W Sec 13 Seward Meridian HM 2001078 Arno Sub Lot 2 That Portion Lying Inside Homer City Limits, Known As 1145 Diamond Ridge Rd, Staff Report 25-37.** City Planner Foster presented the report. Applicant representative Katie Kirsis gave a brief explanation of the request and fronted questions. Questions about how the split lot vacation could impact tax structures and regulations, was there a need for a 60-foot setback to allow for potential pedestrian access. Ms. Kirsis clarified that 60-foot setbacks were for highway applications only. Motion Passed unanimously.

Plat Consideration:

- A. Tulin Terrace Subd. West Terrace Unit 1 Floyd 2026 Replat, Staff Report 25-39;** consolidation of Lot 55 and Lot 56 into Lot 55-A through vacation of common lot line. Mr. Foster presented the report. Questions surrounding the relocation of the new

30' Easement were fronted by the Planner and Ms. Kirsis. Motion as presented passed unanimously.

Public Hearings (Cont'd)

B. An Ordinance Of The Homer City Council Adopting The 2025 Homer Comprehensive Plan and Recommending Adoption By the Kenai Peninsula Borough, Memorandum PL 25-038

Shelly Wade of Agnew/Beck presented a brief timeline and activity leading to this point of the process, and comments related to the benefit of the Future Land Use Map. Commissioner H. Smith presented a possible option to the Introduction statement. He was encouraged to do some wordsmithing and resubmit his sentence. Ms. Wade offered that part of what Mr. Smith thought was missing is stated in subsequent portions of the Plan. Commissioners presented questions and comments about ADA requirements and their placement, environmental constraints overlay map, resilience and realities of affordable housing. Motion to continue this topic in the next meeting was presented and passed unanimously.

New Business:

Officer Election: Commissioners Charles Barnwell and Scott Smith were reelected respectively as Vice Chair and Chair.

Comments of the Commission: Along with other comments, Commissioner S. Smith encouraged all commissioners to go through the Comp Plan Draft and bring back written responses for a more streamline discussion at the next meeting.

August 25, 2025

A multi-purpose rec center has been a top priority of the City Council's for many years now. Movement forward, however, has been challenging to say the least. I believe that we have a tremendous amount of relevant information gathered over many years that we can effectively build from. I propose we have monthly reports at Council meetings on progress, a Council worksession in November, and then again quarterly, at a minimum.

I'm throwing out a list of activities over the next few months for the Council to consider, with some of my thoughts thrown in.

Fall 2025

- Assemble background documents on the HERC, Recreation, and Town Center to include past studies, surveys, task force minutes, conceptual designs, etc.
 - Council: Any specific requests?
- Affirm a Council vision statement and goals for the purpose of the project, with feedback from the community
 - This could be drafted in October based on the extensive history in the background documents, additional input from Council and community, and reviewed at our November worksession.
 - There's no rush to finalize this - but it will be helpful to refine and reaffirm the goals of the project.
- Conduct a Funding, Site, and Cost Assessment
 - Understand bond bank rates & budget implications for ranges of debt service
 - Moving target over time, but a snapshot would be helpful
 - Review recent community-scale projects for scope and facilities, costs, funding, timelines, lessons learned:
 - Soldotna Field House
 - Others?
 - Site Selection:
 - Understand land acquisition budget and appetite from the Council
 - Reviewing the decades of Town Center planning and vision, consider the benefits and costs of opening Town Center for further development through increased access and utilities
 - Develop a Council-agreed cost ceiling to work within for planning and development
 - Police Station was set by the Council at \$7.5M, with \$2.5M cash and \$5M bonded.
 - The land matters, but so does the structure & overall budget. This can run alongside the site selection process.
 - Consider a broader conversation for a regional service area, if there is interest in that direction?