

CALL TO ORDER

Session 24-04 a Regular Meeting of the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee was called to order by Chair Kathy Carssow at 3:45 p.m. on March 18, 2024 at the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska and via Zoom Webinar.

PRESENT: COMMITTEE MEMBERS CARSSOW, DAVIS, ERICKSON, & KIM

ABSENT: COMMITTEE MEMBER BARNWELL

STAFF: DEPUTY CITY CLERK PETTIT

CONSULTING: CITY PLANNER FOSTER

AGENDA APPROVAL

DAVIS/ERICKSON MOVED TO APPROVE THE AGENDA.

There was no discussion.

VOTE: NON-OBJECTION: UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENTS UPON MATTERS ALREADY ON THE AGENDA

Mayor Castner took to the podium to say that he's been giving a lot of thought behind the policy on where the City is going to go with the comprehensive plan, and how the City is going to take all of the ideas and input that's outlined within the plan and consolidate them in order to create a very solid base of information moving forward. He added that it seems like it hasn't been determined what is going to be changing from the existing comprehensive plan. He used an example of a three-legged stool to suggest that when assembling the comprehensive plan, items should be sorted into three divisions: quality of life, economic demand and growth regime, and what Homer already has (a very extensive physical plant). He reaffirmed that the comprehensive plan needs to have elements that relate to all three legs of the stool. His closing thoughts were that Homer does things as a town together because that's the efficient way of doing it.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. Steering Committee Meeting Minutes of March 4, 2024

DAVIS/ERICKSON MOVED TO APPROVE THE MARCH 4, 2024 STEERING COMMITTEE MINUTES.

There was no discussion.

VOTE: NON-OBJECTION: UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

Motion carried.

VISITORS/PRESENTATIONS

REPORTS

PENDING BUSINESS

A. Updated Public Participation Plan

Shelly Wade of Agnew::Beck informed the Committee that Agnew::Beck has updated the Public Participation Plan to include all previous discussions and input from the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee. She reminded everyone that this will be a living document, and assured the Committee that as they proceed and implement different components of the plan, they will continue to update and reflect any relevant changes. There were lengthy discussions regarding the identification of a “most preferred alternative,” as well as three development scenarios/alternatives.

Chair Carsow shared that she was concerned that the Planning Commission hadn’t seen any iteration of the Public Participation Plan. City Planner Foster assured Chair Carsow that the Planning Commission has received updates regarding the Public Participation Plan, but that the Steering Committee is really the group that’s focused on this as a task for the project.

B. Project Website: <https://homercompplanupdate.com>

Ms. Wade noted the photos on the project website had been updated at the request of the Committee to better represent the community of Homer. Other updates to the project website included the addition of the Steering Committee members, their roles and an updated schedule. Chair Carsow suggested including meeting dates and times on the website for the Steering Committee so that the public can visit the website to see the scheduled meetings. Ms. Wade next exhibited the updated project flyer, as well as the flyer that’s been developed specifically for the open house event.

A point of clarification was made by Committee Members that the website lists the project as a project over the next 10 years, whereas they were under the impression that it was going to be a 20-year project. The Committee requested that the website list the project as a 20-year project.

C. Draft Community Visit #1 Framework

Ms. Wade began review of the Draft Community Visit #1 Framework. The framework for the first community visit is scheduled as follows:

- Monday, March 25th: Agnew::Beck travel to Homer.
- Tuesday, March 26th: 9:00-11:00 a.m. – meet with staff and the Steering Committee to prepare for the week and confirm roles, 3:00-4:50 p.m. – Joint Work Session with Council and Planning Commission, 6:00 p.m. – City Council Regular Meeting.
- Wednesday, March 27th: potential stakeholder interviews in the morning, 1:00-2:30 p.m. – Guiding Growth Conversation at Kenai Peninsula College, 3:00-5:00 p.m. – Stormwater Working Group at Homer Soil & Water Office, 5:30-6:30 p.m. – Port and Harbor Advisory Commission Meeting.
- Thursday, March 28th: potential stakeholder interviews in the morning, 1:00-2:00 p.m. – Port and Harbor staff meeting at the Port and Harbor Office, 6:00-8:00 p.m. – Community Open House at Islands & Oceans Visitor Center.
- Friday, March 29th: 9:00-10:30 a.m. – morning debrief with City staff and/or Steering Committee, and potential stakeholder interviews in the afternoon before Agnew::Beck returns to Anchorage in the evening.
- Additional Meetings: Wednesday, March 20th – Library Staff meeting, Thursday, March 21st – Interview with KBBI.

Commissioner Kim emphasized the importance of having clear data to work on the Comprehensive Plan with, reasoning that the Comprehensive Plan should be as data-driven as possible.

Ms. Wade noted that Agnew::Beck is hoping to interview each Planning Commissioner and City Council Member one-on-one to do a deeper dive. She added that she's hopeful to confirm with both the Planning Commission and City Council that there will be standing agenda items on both bodies' agendas where Agnew::Beck will have a chance to update both bodies regularly with the progress that's being made.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Community Survey – Draft Framework

Ms. Wade stated that she wanted to approach the community survey similarly to how the group approached the flyer. She added that Agnew::Beck planned to share some draft questions with the Committee in the near future, giving the Committee a chance to provide initial feedback so that the two groups can collectively come together on Tuesday the 26th to review feedback, look at proposed revisions, questions and concerns, and be able to finalize the survey together while Agnew::Beck is in Homer. Some of the sample questions mentioned included:

- What do you find most valuable about Homer?
- What do you find most challenging about Homer?
- How do you describe your community?
- What are the top five most important things?
- What are the areas that you would like to see preserved and for what purpose?
- What is your view of Homer in the next 20 years?

There were also discussion of questions pertaining to individual demographics and economics.

Committee Member Erickson shared her concern that the question topics seemed too “touch feely and all about the environment.” She suggested talking to people about how to sustain a business and affording to live in Homer, emphasizing that they need to be talking about the “nuts and bolts” of living in Homer. She added that the questions can't be leaning too heavy to one side, it needs to be an even, unbiased survey.

Committee Member Kim suggested the idea of report cards to evaluate where the 2018 Comprehensive Plan did well and where it failed. He added that doing so might provide good context for how people provide input into the process.

B. Comprehensive Plan Examples – Successes & Challenges

Ms. Wade listed some common challenges that she and Agnew::Beck have experienced with communities they have worked with in the past:

- **Timing:** timelines that are too fast or timelines that drag on.
- **Transparency:** lack of documentation and consistent communications about the process/plan (including implementation progress).
- **Public Participation:** overrepresentation of specific voices and perspectives; politicized processes; limited or no public engagement.
- **Community/Partner Education:** lack of education on what the plan can and cannot do, including role of municipality in development/implementation.

- **Municipal Leadership & Staff Investment/Engagement:** as the mandated body (Title 29), lack of awareness, participation, support for the process/plan.
- **Plan Length/Content/Usability:** documents that are hundreds of pages long (inaccessible/digestible to residents).
- **Follow Through & Adaptability:** lack of implementation plan or some sense of plan priorities; roadmap that sustains administrative, leadership, staff changes.

She then went on to list some successes from other Alaskan communities:

- **Kenai Peninsula Borough (2019):** this plan won an award for the best community engagement.
- **Big Lake (2008, 2010):** this plan won an award for the best comprehensive plan.
 - Ms. Wade noted that there was a large proposal to do a bypass, but that the Big Lake Community had identified the idea of a town center. The comprehensive plan played a key role in directing away from the idea that the bypass would go through the future downtown Big Lake.
- **Fairbanks North Star Borough Salcha-Badger Road Area Plan (2019, 2020):** this plan won an award for best comprehensive plan.
 - Ms. Wade noted that there was a tremendous amount of community input regarding a specific area for recreation use, and that when the rezoning occurred to change the said area to outdoor recreation it actually protected the public recreational use for that property.
- **Northwest Arctic Borough:** what was initially a public safety goal in the comprehensive plan ultimately turned into an actual public safety strategic plan. A series of conversations with the State Troopers, the Village Public Safety Officer Program, local police, and behavioral health providers helped to develop a robust strategic plan.

INFORMATIONAL MATERIALS

COMMENTS OF THE AUDIENCE

Mayor Castner noted that Title 29 requires that municipalities go through this process with their comprehensive plans. He added that it's a tiered process, and that at some point the City needs to involve Robert Ruffner (Kenai Peninsula Borough Planning Director) to show that the City is working in conjunction with the Borough's comprehensive plan. Mayor Castner emphasized to the Committee Members that the language in the comprehensive plan should be first-person language, rather than third-person. He made it clear that the new comprehensive plan will affect taxation, density, zoning, safety and security, safe water, recreation, and public works. He added that it will not affect health, education or commercial promotion, noting that those aren't things that the City does. In terms of a survey, he suggested asking sample types of questions, in addition to asking the public what questions they want to see being asked on the survey. His closing thoughts were that moving forward, City legislation should include comprehensive plan citations, making the work of the Planning Commission much easier in the future.

COMMENTS OF THE CITY STAFF

City Planner Foster noted that there was a front page article in the Homer newspaper last week regarding the comprehensive plan. He added that the event taking place at the Islands and Oceans

Visitor Center on the 28th is scheduled for seven days of public service announcements, three times a day on KBBI and also PRG which hosts several stations.

COMMENTS OF THE TASK FORCE

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Committee, Chair Carssow adjourned the meeting at 5:27 p.m. The next regular meeting is Friday, March 28, 2024 at 9:00 a.m. All meetings are scheduled to be held in the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers and via Zoom Webinar.

ZACH PETTIT, DEPUTY CITY CLERK I

Approved: _____