

## September 2022

## **Background**

The City of Homer Economic Development Advisory Commission has an ongoing goal of defining what is positive economic growth for Homer, and how it leads to the quality of life and growth outcomes desired by the community. The Commission has begun working on this goal by conducting a SWOT analysis - strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats- for Homer's quality of life. There are four board categories included in this document: Business Climate, Built Environment, Natural Environment and Social Climate. As the Commission discovered, it's the people who make Homer, Homer. This analysis is offered as a gateway to a larger community conversation about Homer's future as a place to live, work and thrive as we proceed to Homer Comprehensive Plan.

## **Acknowledgments**

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## Strengths

- Small town feel and scale
- Eclectic businesses, buildings and people
- Wide variety of locally owned small businesses
- Integrated town with outdoor environment
- Connected community with vibrant cultural and business groups

## Weaknesses

- Lack of worker support: Housing, Childcare, Training.
- Difficulty for early to mid- career residents to thrive
- Some infrastructures is in need of repair (roads) or expansion - storm water + green infrastructure
- Local regulation is not resulting in the patterns and development the community would like to see.

# QUALITY OF LIFE

## Opportunities

- Encourage multi-family housing
- Increase ease of walking and biking
- Collaborate with community partners on habitat, climate, erosion and other natural environment issues that impact quality of life
- Find ways to keep young or returning residents in the community

## Threats

- Difficult to recruit new talent
- Poor retention of workers
- Loss of town/wildlife interface
- New residents may not become involved in the community; slow loss of volunteer run organizations, events and services; Risk of gentrification; becoming a community of empty households.
- Costs of living and doing business



## Business climate

<b>Strengths</b>	Variety of businesses and activities.	Working town with rich history.	Lots of jobs for entry level workers.	Small, locally owned business are the majority; few chains.	Vibrant cultural community that has rich opportunities for arts, sports, music, gathering, education, and entertainment.	Community that is growing and maturing, that is developing opportunities for families, businesses, visitors, but at a pace that does not create change so quickly that what is here is lost or displaced.
<b>Threats + Weaknesses</b>	Low availability of vocational training.	Not enough homes available for sale or rent to meet the demand. Affects the work force and tax paying residents.	Lack of year round affordable housing. Problem for entry level and low income workers, and also potential future middle income workers. Losing the potential to build up the work force due to entry/early hurdles.	Cost of living and doing business here is increasing. Harder to live and move here. (food, housing, development, energy costs).	Risk of over-regulation. Potential mismatch between level of local regulation and community desire for regulation.	Uncertain energy supplies and future prices (natural gas in Cook Inlet).
<b>Opportunities</b>	Tax breaks could encourage growth by certain groups that could improve commerce. A tax break to encourage certain business activities, such as construction of multi family homes.	Solicit developers (could be from outside of Homer) to build multifamily housing.	Keeping youth in the community and providing skills training to grow the local work force. Kachemak Bay Campus, voc tech training/apprenticeship programs , and partnerships with existing businesses such as NOMAR, Bayweld and other small manufacturing operations are all opportunities.		Promote policies that are favorable to economic growth (tax environment, seasonal labor initiatives, etc.).	Balance growth with cohesive town "feel."

## Built Environment - Town buildings and infrastructure

<b>Strengths</b>	Eclectic, organic feel to the town. Human scale buildings.	Integrated town with the outdoors - can observe wildlife (moose, eagles) and be in nature.	Small town feel and scale.	Multiple economic zones; Homer Spit, spit trail & boardwalks, Pioneer Ave, Old Town, Ocean Drive, East End Road.	Wild spaces - less manicured yards, trails in town, remote access opportunities to the back country and across the bay.	Unique houses, not cookie cutter.
<b>Threats + Weaknesses</b>	Lack of mechanisms to pay for growth or balance the pace of change.	Infrastructure - road system in need of repair, limited access options. Storm water management is a growing issue.	Lack of housing including multi family housing and creative ideas for seasonal housing.	Low density can cause sprawl; cost of utilities and infrastructure increases as a result.	Lower levels of energy efficiency, at risk for pricing swings in energy prices.	Cookie cutter buildings/strip mall.
<b>Opportunities</b>	Accommodate population growth with zones of increased density & reduced commute. Encourage ADU's (Accessory Dwelling Units).	Use the City HART Fund wisely to address roads maintenance + trails.	Increase walkability/biking. Promote an easy flow of people whether they walk, bike or drive within the community, with wayfinding. Plan for all transportation modes to keep the small town feel and the opportunity to meet.	Manage growth wisely, such as road and infrastructure planning with new subdivisions, planning for pedestrian and storm water drainage, and rezoning to allow more housing and tiny homes.	Collaborate with the Homer Chamber of Commerce to help maintain focus towards building up our local small businesses across sectors.	Aesthetics: Use some natural living landscape to break up box store type look. Blend built environment with nature.

## Natural Environment

<b>Strengths</b>	Natural beauty	Community connection to outdoors, nature, skiing and beaches in the same day.	Coastal living - maritime culture of sport and commercial fishing and water based activities	Abundant and pristine natural resources.	Large areas of park and public lands surrounding Homer.
<b>Threats + Weaknesses</b>	Human affect on natural environment. Pollution, overfishing, lack of crab in K Bay, warming climate.	Development of lands without consideration of wildlife/habitat corridors, wetlands (salmon habitat, water connectivity) + groundwater + storm water flow channels.	Destruction of built and natural environment. Storm drains and roads based on 1970's planning and engineering ideas.	Oil + gas lease sale potential in lower cook inlet.	Fisheries: closure of lowed CI salmon fishery, other declining or poorly managed fisheries. Large vessel trawl fleets. (threat to marine economy, wealth + culture).
<b>Opportunities</b>	Local potential for use of alternative energy sources from Tidal energy to household heat pumps.	Study groundwater to increased understanding of this local resource and the ability to plan for the natural environment.	Collaborate with partnerships to create connected greenspace for trails, water management, and wildlife. Purchase or preserve key habitat locations.	Identify wildlife and habitat corridors, and take steps to maintain the health of local fish and wildlife within these corridors.	Fisheries: City could be participating more in partnerships that aim to identify solutions to bycatch issues.

## Social Climate

<b>Strengths</b>	Community has many social connections between residents, and also with the natural environment.	Small business and small non-profit, integrated nature of the community (fundraising, meeting community needs).	Community feeling: People are here by choice at the end of the road.	Eclectic nature of the town and people	Safety - low crime	Diverse and rich heritage.	"Work from Anywhere" trends increasing nationally to benefit novel living locations.
<b>Threats + Weaknesses</b>	Cost of living does not support middle/low income work. Median income 60K, Median House costs of \$20K/year	Many young families need to work outside of Homer to live year-round. Childcare difficult to obtain.	How to entice mid-career small business owners to move to Homer, and have all new residents embrace Homer culture.	Explosive growth (outside wealth outpacing local population) second homes, short term rentals, rapid change.	Addiction education - need for resources, outreach, networking.	Risk of losing the full character of Homer. Not talking to enough people about Homer's future.	Not a very age - diverse population. Unbalanced demographics. 20% of the population over 65. Increasing rate of snowbirds.
<b>Opportunities</b>	Provide education on what government does. Highlight what makes Homer a unified community.	Educate the community on how decisions will impact taxes, utility rates, and cost of living as Homer grows.	Use social appeal to support businesses in obtaining out of area workers. Resource in helping get H2B & vetted workers.	Art/murals/ landscaping as a draw for downtown, in a thoughtful way. Could encourage more businesses participation, cost sharing	Partner w NTC or SVT on community health, well being & cultural heritage. They have other funding streams not available to the City.	Revisit the Parks, Art Rec+ Culture needs assessment, and potential city partnerships with other organizations	Provide a spectrum of housing for all residents: housing first.