



City of Homer

www.cityofhomer-ak.gov

Planning

491 East Pioneer Avenue
Homer, Alaska 99603

Planning@ci.homer.ak.us

(p) 907-235-3106

(f) 907-235-3118

Memorandum

Agenda Changes/Supplemental Packet

TO: PLANNING COMMISSION
FROM: ZACH PETTIT, DEPUTY CITY CLERK II
DATE: MARCH 19, 2025
SUBJECT: SUPPLEMENTAL

10. PENDING BUSINESS

10. A. Draft Comprehensive Plan Review and Comments, Staff Report 25-014

1. Public Comment Received

Page 3

2035 Homer Comprehensive Plan Update Comments Due by March 14, 2025

High Level Comments

I appreciate the extensive work that has developed this draft plan. That said, this plan is filled with several suggestions/recommendations/strategies (many of which are advocated by special interests) for the City to be involved in areas that are clearly beyond what the City should be responsible for. Likewise, these strategies will become requirements in Phase 2 of the planning process, obligating the City and its residents to comply with requirements that much of the population doesn't have visibility to and likely wouldn't support if they knew the far-reaching implications and financial burdens of those strategies.

A large part of the population of Homer and the surrounding communities are working, raising families, caring for elders, volunteering, and engaged in other community activities—they don't have time to participate in the comprehensive planning process—consequently, their interests likely are not represented in the Plan. These people look to the City Council to watch out for their interests, make good decisions, prevent government overreach, and to protect them.

I encourage the City Council members to remember who pays for city salaries, programs, and activities. While there is fee for service funding for water, sewer and the Port and Harbor, a significant amount of funding for City Government comes from taxes on your constituents—especially property taxes—where your constituents are held captive to pay for unrealized gains on the property they already own, for the rest of their lives.

I encourage the City Council, to ask yourselves the following questions as you review this plan:

Am I looking out for the interests of those who have not been able to participate in the planning process?

Have I done everything possible to seek input from those members of our community?

What blind spots exist—have I sought out dissenting or contrary opinions?

Have I created an environment where those dissenting or contrary opinions can be brought forward without fear of bullying from those who believe otherwise?

How does this plan create obligations that can be used to take away liberties from the Homer citizens?

How does this plan expand the scope of government in ways that are clearly outside the City's mission?

Who pays—How does this plan take money out of the pockets of a broad population of Homer citizens to subsidize a narrow population of special interests?

Should the Homer citizens vote on key elements of the plan that will create financial obligations?

Detailed Comments

Using those questions as a basis for review, I offer the following comments:

- 1) Stay within the City Responsibilities: Focus on the Core Functions.

City of Homer Mission:

*Mission Statement: The City of Homer exists to provide quality services to all its citizens; to respond in the most appropriate, open, and fiscally responsible manner possible to citizens' needs and concerns; and to do so through the active participation of those citizens. **These services include police, fire, emergency medical service, parks, cemeteries, animal control, street maintenance, water, wastewater collection and treatment, port and harbor, airport terminal, library, planning and general administration.***

Consequently, the plan should focus on the core functions of City Government for which you are responsible. The mission of the City and core responsibilities DOES NOT include advancing social equity or climate change policies as suggested pervasively throughout the draft Plan.

One stated purpose of the plan, shown on page 2 is: *This comprehensive plan update is **Phase 1** of a two-phased project. In **Phase 2**, the project team will work closely with the City of Homer to update the City's zoning code, Title 21, to support the land use recommendations in the updated plan.*

In fact, the zoning code is referred to at least 57 times in the document, reinforcing how important this plan will be for updating the code.

This plan is filled with all kinds of strategies that are clearly beyond what the City should be responsible for. These strategies will become requirements in Phase 2 of the planning process, obligating the City and its residents to requirements that much of the population doesn't have visibility to and likely doesn't support. As noted previously, they don't have time to participate in the development of this Plan and are trusting on the City Council to make wise choices. A wise choice is to focus on the core functions.

- 2) Apply critical thinking to evaluate key terms used throughout the Plan document. Many of these key terms are freely and abundantly used without regard to a rigorous definition because "everybody knows what that means". Some of these terms are code for special interests to leverage their agendas that benefit their organizations and causes, to the detriment of the broad citizenry you represent. Examples include:

- a. Social Equity: The document does not define this term (yet it shows up three times) and thus it fails to be clear exactly what the authors are expecting what actions the City will take. This undefined term is loaded with ambiguity that is leveraged by special interests to transfer wealth, all in the interest of “the children” or any other targeted audience that they feel needs to be subsidized. Some who advocate for such things are typically funded by out of State national organizations who do not represent the whole Homer community. Failure to support this social agenda results in name calling and intimidation by the advocates. We have seen this play out in the lower 48. Do not let this occur here. The City has NO responsibility to pursue a vague divisive social equity agenda.

RECOMMENDATION: eliminate any mention of social equity (or substitution of similar concepts) from the Draft Comprehensive Plan and any newly created supporting documents.

- b. Resilience: Who can’t be supportive of resilience? However, its abundant use in the Plan is misleading and manipulative. The word “resilient or resilience” appears 54 times in the draft plan and is used 25 times prior to being defined on page 28. It is used 50 times in reference to climate change. The definition that the Plan uses is as follows:

Resilience: The ability of a community to anticipate, plan, and prepare for threats, persevere through stressful or disruptive events, and recover and adapt to new conditions.

This definition was Adapted from the Fairbanks North Star Borough Climate Action and Adaptation Plan, 2024. While this definition is a perfectly good generic definition, its repeated misuse throughout the process and in the Plan document is problematic in at least 3 ways.

- i. This definition has not actually been approved in the document it was taken from—it is an unapproved draft. Even if it was approved, does that mean that the City of Homer and its residents agree with its use here?
- ii. While it is used extensively in the draft comprehensive plan, and was used in surveys, it was not defined until now so people would know what it means.
- iii. As mentioned above, the definition is a good generic description of what Resilience can be, however, throughout the Plan document, the phrasing and use of Resilience is jargon that is typically used as a solution to climate change. Its use creates a pathway to make climate change the center piece of this document and the center of all decision making, while

ignoring our finite resources. Climate change is discussed in more detail later.

The bottom line: the generic definition of resilience has been misappropriated to be a climate change mitigation which opens the door to all kinds of special interests who may wish to influence and mandate future decisions of the City Council and Planning Commission regarding the zoning code and development (no matter what the cost) that may go against the wishes of the broader electorate.

RECOMMENDATION: eliminate any mention of resilience (or substitution of similar concepts) from the Draft Comprehensive Plan and any newly created supporting documents unless it is disassociated from climate change and is specifically descriptive of what the Plan is protecting against. Hardening the Spit and Harbor facilities to make them resistant to storm damage is an example of building resilience into the process of managing these important assets (helping them to persevere through disruptive events).

- c. Sustainability: Who can't be supportive of sustainability? However, its abundant use in the Plan is misleading and manipulative. Sustainable or sustainability are mentioned 95 times in the draft plan and is used 43 times prior to being defined on page 28. The definition that the Plan uses is as follows:

Sustainability: *The process of using our finite resources as a community to balance the goals of economic vitality, environmental stewardship, and social equity to ensure that we can meet the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*

This definition was Adapted from the Fairbanks North Star Borough Climate Action and Adaptation Plan, 2024. This definition, and its repeated use is problematic in at least 4 ways.

- i. This definition has not actually been approved in the document it was taken from—it is an unapproved draft. Even if it was approved, does that mean that the City of Homer and its residents agree with its use here?
- ii. While it is used extensively in the draft comprehensive plan, and was used in surveys, it was not defined until now so people would know what it means.
- iii. It leverages the term Social Equity and as mentioned previously, the City has NO responsibility to pursue a vague divisive social equity agenda.
- iv. Most importantly, Economic Vitality, appears only two more times in the draft plan aside from the definition of Sustainability, once on page 12 and once on page 30. In each case, Economic Vitality is listed on Goal A in the Sustainability, Resilience & Climate Change sections. In each case, the

underlying strategies listed have **NOTHING** to do with Economic Vitality. The phrasing of Economic Vitality is being used as jargon that allows the plan advocates to “check the box” that it links Sustainability with Economic Vitality.

In fact, economics is consistently separated from Sustainability throughout the document as shown in the Plan Purpose section on page 2: *The updated Homer Comprehensive Plan will be a combination of long-term vision, goals, and practical strategies that will: guide decisions about land use and environment, housing, public services and infrastructure, transportation, **economic development**, health and wellness, **sustainability**, resilience and climate change, and quality of life, and more.*

As shown here, sustainability is consistently used in the context of “sustainability, resilience, and climate change”. In fact, at least 80 of the 95 times Sustainability is used, it is either directly stating or indirectly inferring a link to climate or climate change thus demonstrating the bias of the real intended use of Sustainability—a pathway to make climate change the center piece of this document and the center of all decision making, while ignoring our finite resources.

The good news is that fiscal sustainability is mentioned about 9 times, mostly in the Governance section. However, throughout the process, when people were asked for their opinion, there never has been any mention of:

- our finite resources, or
- economically sustainable actions, or
- economic evaluation of actions deemed to be “sustainable”, or
- a limitation as to what can be done as it may not be economically sustainable.

The survey questions and presentations always centered on, “do you want us to do sustainable things?” Well of course we do!

The bottom line: lack of specific definition and liberal use of the word “Sustainable”, opens the door to all kinds of special interests who may wish to influence and mandate future decisions of the City Council and Planning Commission regarding zoning code and development (no matter what the cost) that may go against the wishes of the broader electorate.

RECOMMENDATION: eliminate any mention of sustainability (or substitution of similar concepts) from the Draft Comprehensive Plan and any newly created

supporting documents unless it is specifically descriptive of what the Plan is protecting against. Fiscal sustainability is an example: If the funding demand for desired projects exceeds the revenue available, spending for the desired projects will deplete the available funds. Insufficient funds will result in staffing reductions, benefit reductions and other cost cutting measures to fund the desired projects. This is an unsustainable business model as it will prevent the City from being able to perform its core functions.

- d. Climate Change: The word “climate” appears at least 56 times in the draft plan document, each time referring to climate change. Its use is so pervasive throughout the document, it’s not possible to point out all the ways it has been used to manipulate the survey and drafting processes in creation of the Plan.

Kaplan’s law of the instrument may be stated as follows: Give a small boy a hammer, and he will find that everything he encounters needs pounding. This principle can be applied to many of the special interests who have been involved in the development of this Plan. Climate is the center of their existence—both funding and philosophy—so they call everything climate change and seek to deploy any number of actions (which they financially gain from) to mitigate it. Mitigations include such items as greenhouse gas inventories, electric vehicles (EVs), EV charging stations, microgrids, solar, wind, and tidal electricity generating resources—no matter how little sense it makes. Consider three of these mitigations that are focused under Strategy 2, *Reduce the greenhouse gas emissions produced by City operations and encourage the reduction of emissions throughout the Greater Homer Area* (page 30):

- i. Greenhouse Gas (GhG) Inventory, page 30: ***“Maintain a staff position that can continue to produce annual basic inventory reports for all energy consuming and Greenhouse Gas (GhG) producing City sectors, including summaries of energy consumption, GhG, energy outputs, and costs; report should include both sector and individual facility totals for detailed year-to-year comparison”.***

A GhG inventory is an absolute waste of time and money. On page 28, the plan states, *“The City of Homer started this process in 2007 when it became the first community in Alaska to develop a Climate Action Plan (CAP), which asserted that action was necessary to prepare Homer for the impacts of climate change”.* Taking credit for being first to spend public money to develop a useless document is probably not something to brag about. GhG inventory generation, tracking, and analysis effectively takes credit for activities that would have been done anyway because they make economic sense (or provide public safety benefits) on their own. The inventory allows us to “virtue signal” or “pat ourselves on the back” for (maybe) reducing a miniscule amount of GHG’s on a global basis. All

the project details listed in the City’s 2022 status report on climate implementation strategies including HVAC improvements, interior and exterior lighting upgrades, digital controller upgrades and replacing pumps with high efficiency motors are examples of things that make economic sense, yet they are characterized as climate mitigation.

Our city leadership needs to ask itself, “How do the single parents, undernourished, elderly, homeless and others in need in Homer feel about spending \$100,000 per year for a fully loaded staff position (and untold funds devoted to contractors, consultants, and special interests) to inventory GhG’s so we can feel good about ourselves?

Recommendation: The City should not devote a staff position to production of GhG inventories or reporting.

- ii. EV Charging Stations, page 31, and page 51: *“Explore the development of a widespread EV charging network to support the transition to electric vehicles for residents and visitors and reduce transportation related GhG emissions”.*

This would be a typical recommendation in a comprehensive plan from 5 years ago. Today, virtually every major automobile manufacturer has dramatically scaled back, or flat out eliminated their Electric Vehicle (EV) manufacturing plans. EV’s just don’t make sense, especially in Alaska. This is one area in particular that the City has no business devoting any time and effort to. Additionally, even if manufacturers decide to reestablish plans to build EV’s, the City should not even consider contributing to develop a widespread EV charging network. There is no reason that the City should subsidize the roll out of charging stations when competitive market forces should do that on their own.

- iii. Advocate and invest in renewable energy sources, page 31: *“Work with partners such as Homer Electric Association, Homer Drawdown, and KPB to advocate for and invest more in renewable energy sources including hydroelectric, solar, wind, and tidal energy”.*

It’s not clear who Homer Drawdown is—there isn’t any information on their website denoting who they are affiliated with.

Recommendation: The City should not specify an action in this document that points to a partner who is not transparent as to their origin and ongoing funding.

Additionally, the City should neither advocate for, nor invest in renewable resources so we can feel good about ourselves. It should not come as a surprise that those who advocate for such solutions, particularly residential solar, wind, and tidal energy, have never published the analysis to demonstrate true cost and the miniscule GhG reductions these solutions will have if deployed in Alaska.

Recommendation: The City should not invest in renewable resources to offset City electricity costs unless a financial analysis justifies the expenditure. No consideration should be made for GhG offsets in the analysis.

The city should never invest in any solar, wind, or tidal energy project if the existing utility net energy metering tariff is in place. As currently structured, the net energy metering tariff is a transfer of wealth from those who don't have renewables (generally lower income households) to those who install renewables (high income households). The City would do a disservice to its residents to take money from low-income households to reduce the electricity cost in its buildings.

Recommendation: The City should not invest in renewable resources using the subsidies inherent in net energy metering.

- 3) Economics/Governance: The Governance section beginning on page 68 provides out of date background statistics. Why does the City of Homer not have expenses and revenue information more recent than the year 2022? Recommendations, particularly those that have financial impact, cannot depend on data that is over 2 years old.

Recommendation: Update this whole section to include the financial data and statistics through the year 2024.

- 4) Live within your means. Sources of Revenue:
Do not depend on State or Federal funding for any services. Do not establish long running programs/activities with one-time funding. This only creates the expectation that those programs/activities are necessary and must be continued at all costs. If there is a one-time funding that is used, the on-going funding need must be identified and mitigated, or the program/activity should not be done. The City's historical budget has demonstrated a dependence on Capital and Operating Grants. Are we prepared to live within our means WHEN these grant sources dry up? Too often the thinking is: "There's a federal grant available, so let's apply for it because it is free money". That money isn't free—it was taken from the City's constituents and others who are Federal taxpayers.

Recommendation: Develop a plan to provide only the basic services of City government that is not dependent on State and Federal grants.

Additionally, on page 72, the draft Plan notes:

Dependence on Sales Tax as a Primary Revenue Source

Sales tax remains the most significant revenue source for Homer, contributing 43 percent of total revenues in 2022. Sales tax revenue has grown at an average annual rate of 3.32 percent, but its reliance makes the city vulnerable to economic downturns and shifts in consumer spending.

This reinforces the need for the City to live within its means and to build a larger rainy-day fund to navigate the volatility of this revenue source.

Recommendation: Develop a plan that provides only the basic services of City government and grows a rainy-day fund to navigate the volatility of the sales tax source of revenue.

Once again, on page 72, the draft Plan notes:

Aging Population and Increased Property Tax Exemptions

Property tax revenue has remained stable but faces future risks due to the increasing number of senior citizens eligible for property tax exemptions. The share of tax-exempt property has grown, potentially impacting the City's ability to generate stable revenue from this source.

This statement is factually incorrect when it says the tax revenue is stable. By using the 2022 financial data, the draft Plan disregards the substantial increase in property taxes that have occurred due to dramatically inflated assessed property valuations over the past few years.

The narrative in the Adopted Biennial Operating Budget dated May 22, 2023, states:

Property Tax

*Property tax continues to trend upwards as real estate becomes more valuable and new structures are developed in Homer. Despite national trends in which housing starts have cooled slightly due to high interest rates, development interest in Homer has not subsided. In calendar year 2021, the City issued 62 zoning permits at a total estimated value of \$23.3 million. In calendar year 2022, those numbers grew to 66 and \$29.8 million respectively. When forecasting Property Tax revenues, we included modest year over year growth, **however, we expect the actuals will exceed our conservative forecasts.***

The fiscal year 2025 Budget published in the Amended Biennial Operating Budget dated May 28, 2024, documents an 8.8% increase in property tax revenues to \$4.2 million.

The City of Homer has benefited from growing (not stable) property tax revenue. In fact, these valuations (and associated taxes) based on unrealized capital gains, have grown so

dramatically, there is a movement afoot to change the property tax rules in the Kenai Peninsula Borough.

Recommendation: Develop a plan that provides only the basic services of City government and grows a rainy-day fund from the increased property tax revenues that are currently occurring to navigate the uncertainty of future property tax revenues.

5) Live within your means: Core services

Page 34 describes **Reliable and Affordable Services**

The City of Homer provides a range of services, including water, sewer, planning, road maintenance, community development, recreation, parks, port and harbor management, fire protection, law enforcement, and emergency services... All services provided by the City need to support quality of life, economic development, and safety by meeting the needs of all community members.

Nowhere in this description does it say the City is responsible for non-core services such as social equity or climate change mitigation.

6) Live within your means: Staffing

On page 18 in the Governance section, it notes key themes guiding the Plan. One item listed notes: *Staff Capacity Challenges Impacting Service Delivery.*

This draft Plan includes an expansion of city government projects and services which (if affordable) would exacerbate this staffing challenge.

Recommendation: Develop a plan that provides only the basic services of City government that is affordable. This plan will reduce the demand for expansive government services and limit the need to add staff thus reducing staff capacity challenges.

7) Live within your means: Parks

In the quality-of-life section on page 17, the following strategy is listed:

Outdoor Recreation

Care for and expand Homer's network of outdoor trails and parks.

Parks are mentioned 31 times in the draft Plan, and the general theme is to expand the quantity and quality of our parks and expand government as a result. On page 64, the following is stated, *"Reconfigure the City's organizational structure to provide park facilities and recreation services by establishing a dedicated Parks and Recreation Department and ensuring staff capacity is appropriate".*

There appears to be a lot of interest in adding parks and trails throughout the plan update, even though the City manages substantial park infrastructure. According to the City's Website:

"The City of Homer has 29 dedicated parks, with amenities ranging from undeveloped to playgrounds, ball fields, and picnic areas. There are 25 trails that cover almost 11 miles and complement our beautiful beaches which stretch 15.5 miles around town. We have multiple pavilions available to reserve for special events, or you can enjoy them for free whenever they are not reserved. We host six ball fields that cater to various needs of Little League and Softball user groups. Total park acreage is over 520 acres."

It would be good to understand the utilization of all these parks and trails before we consider additional ones. They all cost money to build and maintain—the maintenance of which can far exceed the initial cost. Questions to ask include:

- i. Are there third parties who advocate for these specific features who are willing to be financially responsible for maintaining them after they are built?
- ii. Are some of the existing trails under/unutilized and should they be abandoned or repurposed?
- iii. Is there an overall "traffic flow" plan for trails that establishes, at a high level what we want to do with trails?
- iv. What areas do we want to facilitate flow to/from (beaches/skyline/Diamond Ridge/East Hill/West Hill/East End)?
- v. Bikes/eBikes vs Pedestrian/Hikers vs perhaps snow machine/ATV's?

There should be consideration as to who uses the parks or trails proposed and who pays for them. Is this a case where many who never use those features pay for the few who do? The new parks or trails could be great ideas, but there needs to be a robust discussion of how they could be funded and managed within our existing city resources before any of this gets codified in the Zoning process.

Recommendation: The City should not add any additional park or trail responsibilities until an analysis is done to understand the true utilization and cost of the existing assets.

- 8) Live within your means: Homer Accelerated Roads and Trails (HART):
HART is a voter approved sales tax which dedicates funds to road and trail related projects in the City. There has been substantial lobbying for additional trails in the planning process. The draft comprehensive plan includes the recommendation (twice) on page 36 to renew the Homer Accelerated Roads and Trails Fund beyond 2027. The City Council should dig deep on the following questions:

- a. Can the City unilaterally renew this tax, or would it require a vote of residents?
- b. Are those who advocate for more trails, then seek funding for them, financially benefitting in some way?
- c. Are targeted trail pathways likely to infringe on property owners' rights?

- 9) Live within your means: Homer Accelerated Water and Sewer Program (HAWSP):
The Adopted Biennial Operating Budget dated May 22, 2023, states:
Like HART, HAWSP is a voter approved sales tax which dedicates funds to water and sewer related projects in the City. HAWSP also receives a significant amount of money from special assessment district loan repayments each year. Much of the HAWSP fund goes to the repayment of Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation loans which support water and sewer projects.

The draft Plan includes the following statement on page 37: *Maintain the Homer Accelerated Water and Sewer Program (HAWSP) to fund the design and construction of facilities that support new customers, with a focus on new water and sewer connections within the City limits (infill).*

Like HART, Can the City unilaterally renew this tax, or would it require a vote of residents?

- 10) Education: Stay in your lane

Education is mentioned at least 28 times in the draft Plan. Many of these mentions appear to be references to K-12 learning such as Strategy 7 on page 17: *Offer high-quality **K-12 education** in Homer and sustain lifelong learning opportunities for all residents.*

Page 34 of the draft plan states: *The City relies on other entities, such as the Kenai Peninsula Borough¹⁷, for other public services such as **education**, healthcare, and solid waste management.* Since education is the Borough's responsibility, it's not clear what the City is responsible for regarding education, or why any mention of it should be included in this Plan.

On page 66, the Plan is stating that it's the City's responsibility to **"Advocate for state-level increases to the Base Student Allocation formula"**. This is a very specific and narrow recommendation that doesn't begin to address why the State allocates among the highest level of funding for K-12 education yet continues to perform among the bottom level in results. Why wouldn't the City advocate for effective education performance results that would be consistent with the spending level that has been provided historically?

Recommendation: Eliminate this recommended advocacy action from the plan.
Recommendation: Review the draft Plan for any advocacy recommendations and eliminate them if they are not consistent with the core function of City government.

Closing comments

The comprehensive planning process has attempted to reach out to the community, to seek input on how to shape the future of the City of Homer. An enormous amount of work has been put into the development of the plan. Thank you for taking on this challenge.

However, like the development of the Climate Action Plan, this process has been hijacked by special interests who seek to codify obligations that the City must comply with. Those documented obligations benefit these special interests as it furthers their cause/beliefs/philosophies and holds the City (and its residents) hostage to implement their pet projects identified in the draft Plan. Don't fall for it. The City Government is here to provide core services, not to be a social equity and climate leader. City Government should focus on the blocking and tackling of providing core services in a safe, responsive, excellent, and economic fashion.

My review and comments to the draft Plan represents many hours of effort, yet it only scratches the surface. Many of my specific comments represent themes or areas that require further review needed to whittle down scope of this document. I encourage the City Council to view these comments as a challenge to do more to align the draft Plan with providing core City Government services.

Recommendation: The City Council and City Leadership must review the draft Plan with a critical eye, seeking to identify and eliminate (or use language to de-obligate) all the recommendations that are beyond the scope of the core business function that the City should perform.

Wednesday, March 5, 2024

Comments on the 2025 Draft Comp Plan from the Homer Housing Policy Workgroup

Mission: *The #1 priority for the Homer Community for the next 10-20 years—with 87 percent of community survey respondents believing that increasing the supply and accessibility of affordable housing is important per the Comp Plan Survey—is to “increase the supply and accessibility of affordable housing.” Our mission is to identify policy tools that can help achieve both affordable and attainable housing.*

Vision: *Homer is a place where every community member has a home that they can afford. Attainable housing is the bedrock of sustainable economies, and community, family, and individual wellbeing.*

A shared Project of MAPP and Guiding Growth, the Homer Housing Policy Workgroup has been meeting regularly over the course of a year to discuss viable policies (legal and consistent with local values) to improve accessibility of attainable housing. We recommend the following changes to the Draft Comprehensive Plan.

Key:

~~Strikethrough~~ means we recommend striking language.

underline Means we recommend adding language.

P. 21, Amendment to the language describing the scope and purpose of “Downtown Mixed Use Zones”

The urban core of Homer, allowing for a **mix of commercial, community, and high to medium density residential uses** (low lot size minimums, high lot coverage, reduced setback limitations and parking maximums) with adaptability to changing market needs. A focus on close proximities and a walkable, human-scale environment, enabling all-day and all-season use by all. This area ~~discourages/limits the construction of single family, market-rate, street level residences while promoting multifamily residential housing, in conjunction with commercial buildings, and offers affordable/attainable housing incentives.~~

Rationale: to achieve density, we must also discourage sprawl. Attainable housing is Homer’s top priority, so it is necessary to name the priority in zoning code, similar to how “walkability” is named here.

P. 21, Across all zones, particularly Downtown mixed Use, Commercial Mixed Use and Residential, identify the community-identified values of **walkability, recreational access, climate mitigation, and conservation of lands.**

Rationale: For development to be smart, we need to balance the community's values against one another: Within any given zone, we should not, eg. allow for development that cuts off access to a popular recreational site or significantly diminishes walkability, but should instead direct it to a place where that does not happen. Calling this out in the description of the zone can help planners and prospective buyers/developers weigh their options in advance of a purchase or permit application.

P. 24, 3. Add: **Incentivize long-term rentals and disincentivize proliferation of short-term rentals in neighborhoods.** Add * to indicate that code change needed.

Rationale: The percentage of the housing stock tied up in short-term rentals plays a significant part in the cost and availability of housing in Homer, as this plan notes.

P. 24, 3 c. Expand allowable housing types, including accessory dwelling units, ~~tiny homes~~, townhomes, courtyard homes, and manufactured and modular homes.

Rationale: Tiny homes, while often promoted as affordable housing, do not help achieve the goal of land efficiency in Homer. They typically require the same infrastructure connections (water, sewer, roads) as larger homes but house fewer people, leading to lower overall density. Additionally, tiny homes are not well suited to the needs of Homer's year-round working families who need more space.

P. 24, 3 d. Create development incentives, such as affordable housing initiatives, density bonuses, **core-area incentive zoning to encourage affordable and senior housing**, and public private partnerships for affordable and long-term housing development. Add * to indicate that code change needed.

Rationale: Incentive Zoning is a proven strategy that can help increase both housing density and affordability. In cities like Seattle, developers who include affordable housing or other community benefits are granted additional building

height or floor area beyond the base zoning limits. (seattle.gov) Homer has very little land it is able to offer as an incentive in a public-private partnership, but Homer's vertical space is a valuable asset that could be leveraged, while preserving more of Homer's lands and landscape.

Seniors living with or anticipating mobility difficulties often prefer to downsize into single-floor residences. The availability of ranch-style homes near Homer's in-demand medical district is limited and building more single-floor houses near Homer's central business district does not support density. Allowing the construction of taller buildings equipped with elevators would increase the supply of ADA-compliant single floor residences in Homer. This building type will support our senior community and ease demand on the single family home market, so it should be prioritized in the comp plan.

P. 24, 5 a. Partner with public and private entities to preserve existing open spaces, **establish lease agreements to increase access to trailheads on private land**, and create new green space connections that increase recreation activities and habitat value areas.

Rationale: Lease agreements provide a cost-effective mechanism for increasing public access to recreational areas, compared to land purchases. Many communities use lease agreements to secure trail access across private property while allowing landowners to retain ownership and control of their land. This strategy, especially with contributions from the Borough or State, could also allow Homer to increase access to trails in the greater Homer area.

P.40, Strike all references of "perceptions."

Rationale: this is not a matter of perceptions but a verifiable reality. Cite data on rising cost of housing and percent-of-income stats and refer to rising cost of housing (see draft comp plan itself, as well as attached data from Homer real estate agents and links [here](#) and [here](#)).

p. 40, Add sections to the Housing Chapter:

The Pressure of Seasonal Tourism on Housing

The City of Homer experiences significant pressures from seasonal tourism. Commercial and residential housing stock becomes increasingly unattainable during the summer months as second/vacation homeowners return, seasonal staff arrive, and longer-term rentals are converted to short-term lodging. This convergence drives down the availability of housing and drives up the price of housing to unattainable levels for both year-round residents and seasonal workers. The downstream economic consequences can be detrimental to both residents and businesses. Locals have difficulty finding year-round rentals, neighborhoods become de facto “mixed use” zones, with absentee owners offering short-term rentals. Without sufficient housing stock for seasonal and year-round employees, businesses are forced to reduce hours of operation and services while increasing their labor expenses to offset the higher cost of living. These pressures can extend as far as impacting visitor satisfaction and even the ability of businesses to survive.

Additionally, Homer’s total available housing stock is augmented by a high rate of second homes, many of which are occupied for a portion of the summer, and then either sit vacant or are rented on a short-term basis the rest of the year. The US census estimates that 20 percent of homes in Homer are “vacant,” the great majority of these are second homes, with the Kenai Peninsula Borough Office of Land Management reporting that in 2024, 36% of homes in the Homer area are owned by out-of-area and out-of-state owners. As an aggregate, a high rate of second homes drive down availability and drive up cost. Policies that raise revenue from non-occupied homes to support year-round attainable housing are among the best tools available to ameliorate these pressures.

Short-Term Rentals

In the Homer Comprehensive Plan Revision Community Survey, about 18 percent of respondents identified vacation rentals as a barrier to housing, reflecting concerns about housing availability and neighborhood integrity. Data about the number of short-term rentals in Homer varies: the city identified approximately 326 short-term rental units in 2022 using now-discontinued city software. This represents 14.8 percent of the total housing stock, a notably high percentage compared to other communities in Alaska (see Figure 11). Kenai Peninsula Borough Land Management Department estimated 475+/- Airbnb, and 260 +/- VRBO offerings in the “greater Homer area” in its March 2023 Homer Housing Review. Growing support exists within the community for **prohibiting short-term-rentals on property that is not the operator’s primary**

residence, to preserve residential neighborhoods and ensure housing availability for long term residents and workers.

P. 41, Misleading to say that high building costs are “largely driven by shipping expenses to Alaska.” Alaska is part of a major national trend, [the cost of building homes and rent has gone up](#) across the nation. Homer and Alaska have an exaggerated experience of this national trend, due to the cost of shipping and labor (which in-turn is driven by increased cost of living) here.

P. 41, Misleading to say “available land does not seem to be a barrier.” Please note that many vacant parcels are vacant in part because of the high cost of development or untenable environmental conditions, related to the preponderance of wetlands, unstable slopes, steep slopes, lack of utilities, etc.

P. 44, 1. a) Update zoning regulations to support higher density and mixed-use developments, **where appropriate weighed against other community values of recreational access, conservation of lands and walkability**, facilitating the creation of multi-family housing, **mid-rise senior housing**, and affordable units.

Rationale: The community does not want dense growth everywhere. They want this value to be met alongside these other values.

Seniors living with or anticipating mobility difficulties often prefer to downsize into single-floor residences. The availability of ranch-style homes near Homer’s in-demand medical district is limited and building more single-floor houses near Homer’s central business district does not support density. Allowing the construction of taller buildings equipped with elevators would increase the supply of ADA-compliant single floor residences in Homer. This building type will support our senior community and ease demand on the single family home market, so it should be prioritized in the comp plan.

P. 44, 1. b) Remove regulatory barriers to compact and infill development, enabling denser housing projects that integrate well into existing neighborhoods, **where appropriate weighed against other community values of recreational access, conservation of lands and walkability**.

Rationale: The community does not want dense growth everywhere. They want this value to be met alongside these other values.

P. 44, 1.d) **Update Homer City Code to include the definition of both short term rentals and bed and breakfasts.** Add * to indicate that code change needed.

Rationale: As identified in this plan, short-term rentals are an important player in Homer's housing affordability crisis. They need to be defined in code.

P. 44, 1.e) **Update existing Homer City Code allowing bed and breakfasts only on the premises of the operator's primary residence in Rural Residential and Urban Residential residential neighborhoods to specify (a) that the code applies to both bed and breakfasts and short term rentals and (b) that it applies in new zoning area "Transition Residential".** Add * to indicate that code change needed.

Rationale: This is housekeeping. This is likely the single easiest and most impactful code step that the City can take regarding housing. It is a no-brainer considering the codes on the books prohibiting B&B's that are not on the premises of the operator's primary residence in neighborhoods (HCC 21.12.020), consistent with the same requirement for other "Home occupations" (eg. lawyers and seamstresses) in neighborhoods (HCC 21.51.100).

P. 44, 2. Develop incentives, **disincentives**, and public-private partnerships **in support of** affordable and long-term housing development.

P. 44, 2. a) Explore the creation of a local housing fund and implement targeted incentives to encourage **both the conversion of short-term rentals to long-term rentals and the development of affordable, year-round** housing.

Rationale: We need to target not only new development but transitioning existing STRs to Long-Term.

P. 44, 2. f) **Advocate for the establishment of a Kenai Peninsula Borough Bed tax and allocation of revenue to support attainable housing projects and incentives to convert short-term rentals into long-term rentals.**

Rationale: Any "incentive" offered for attainable housing or long-term housing needs a revenue source. The Alaska Municipal League has identified bed taxes as the best and cleanest source of funding for housing incentive programs in community's like Homer where seasonal tourism plays a significant role in housing affordability and availability

P. 44, 2. **g) Advocate for the creation of an Alaska Statute that would permit an “Empty Homes Tax” or “Speculation and Vacancy Tax,” such as that in British Columbia to increase the stock of available housing and raise funds to incentivise attainable housing for residents.**

Rationale: Any “incentive” offered for attainable housing or long-term housing needs a revenue source. The Alaska Municipal League has identified a tax on vacancy as one of the simplest and cleanest ways to create revenue for incentive programs.

P. 45, 4. a) Conduct a detailed Housing Needs Assessment to identify current and future housing needs, **as well as the factors limiting affordable housing accessibility, including the number of short-term rentals (both on operators’ primary residence premises and not) and second homes, to assess** numbers of units required to serve projected population growth and affordability ranges as well as support economic growth and industries. **Incorporate findings into an action plan.**

Rationale: Must include these major factors impacting the housing market for a full picture.

P. 45, 4. b) Complete a housing stock report, **including an assessment of the number of short-term rentals (both on operators’ primary residence premises and not) and second homes,** and buildable lands inventory, **incorporating limitations such as wetlands, drainages, slope, and accessibility.** **Incorporate findings into an action plan.**

Rationale: Must include these major factors impacting the housing market for a full picture.

P. 45 Housing Indicators Chart

Add:

Indicator: **Short Term Rentals**

Description: **Short term rental trends, both on operators’ primary residence premises and STRs that are not.**

What it tells us: **Percentage of housing stock available for full-time occupancy**

Sources: **Housing Need Assessment (see 4 (a) on p. 45)**

Indicator: **Second Homes**

Description: **Unoccupied or seasonally occupied homes with out-of-area and out-of-state owners.**

What it tells us: **Percentage of housing stock available for full-time occupancy.**

Sources: **Housing Need Assessment (see 4 (a) on p. 45). Vacancy data available from the US Census and percent out-of-area/state ownership available from the Kenai Peninsula Borough.**

Rationale: Must include these major factors impacting the housing market for a full picture.

Sincerely,

Homer Housing Workgroup,

A citizen workgroup, supported by MAPP and Guiding Growth



Thursday, March 13 2024

Homer Stormwater Workgroup Comments on Draft Comp Plan

Mission - *Our mission is to identify policy tools to work toward the Homer Community's priorities, identified in public surveys in 2024, including "Preserve open public spaces within the city from development," "Create a livable, walkable, vibrant downtown," "Increase access to recreational opportunities for visitors and residents," "Prepare for and address the effects of climate change on Homer" and where 77 percent of the 551 community survey respondents said that preserving open public spaces within the city from development was important and 34 percent of residents listed sustainable and resilient development as the single most important priority.*

Vision - *Homer is a place where high-value open spaces are preserved from development, people have access to a range of outdoor recreational opportunities, and we are efficiently preparing for and mitigating against the public hazards of landslides, flooding, drought, fire, and low water quality.*

The Homer Stormwater Workgroup is a group of citizens who have been meeting regularly for over two years with local experts on wetlands, peatlands, landslides, hydrology, water quality, planning, soils etc. to identify metrics and policy tools to support the Homer community's values of open space, outdoor recreation, and mitigating the hazards associated with climate change. We recommend the following changes to the Draft Comprehensive Plan.

Key:

~~Strikethrough~~ - recommend striking language.

underline - recommend adding language.

* - Code Needed

P. 18 "Development that Fits Natural Conditions"

Homer Planning Commission and Planning Staff are encouraged to do site visits to ensure proper planning in technically difficult and environmentally sensitive zones, such as in and around wetlands, creeks, bluffs, steep slopes, etc.

Rationale: The Planning Commission currently has an unwritten policy of not visiting sites, which is detrimental to sound decision making in sensitive and technically challenging areas.



P. 19 “Residents cherish Homer’s varied opportunities for recreation and subsisting, but they want more connections and protection of those opportunities ...”

Rationale: The word subsistence has an important technical definition with ADF&G—and Homer is not a community that qualifies for subsistence harvest because we are on the road system. Better to say something like “natural harvest” or “harvest”

P. 22, Table with Application Areas for Environmental Constraints:

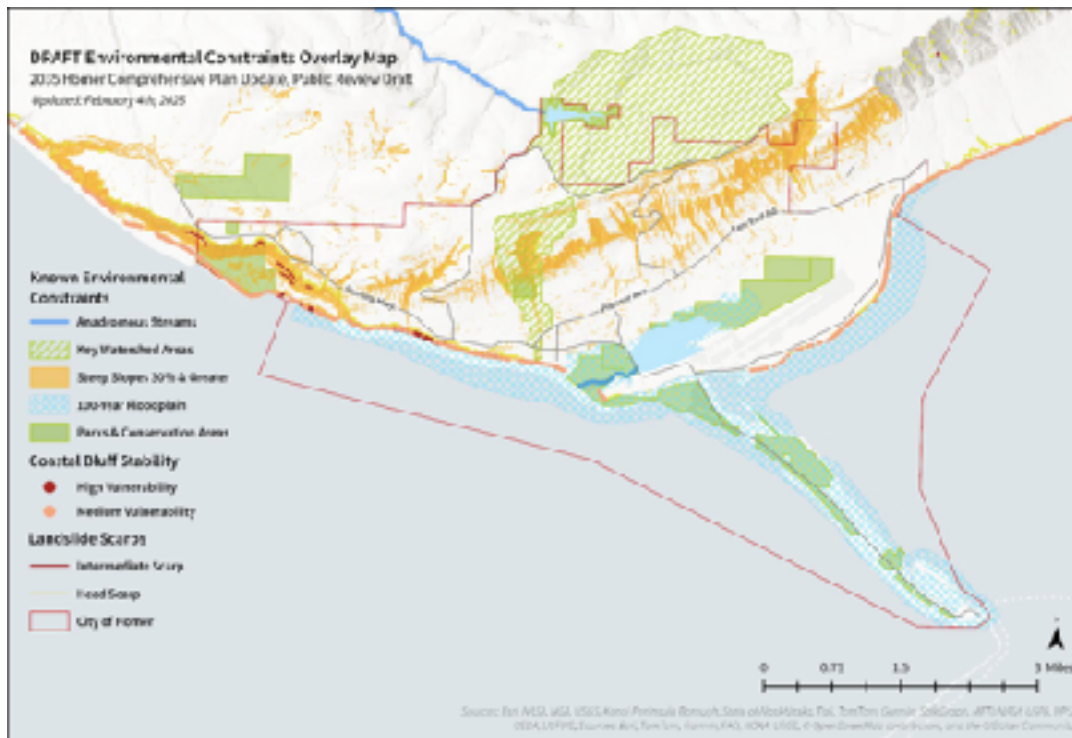
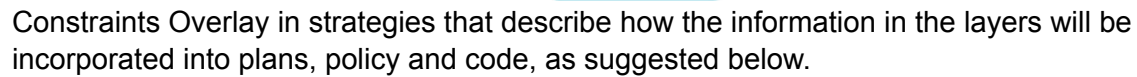
Airport Critical Habitat, Bridge Creek Watershed Protection District, the Diamond Creek Recreation Area, the Woodard Creek Watershed, Federal Emergency Management Agency flood zones, coastal and inland ~~bluff stability~~ **landslide hazard** areas, **landslide hazard** areas, ~~anadromous~~ streams, **wetlands, wooded lands**, and slopes 30 percent or greater.

Rationale: It is inappropriate to restrict overlay of creeks to anadromous waters, since there basically are none in Homer.¹ However, Homer has many important creeks and wetlands that need to be well managed to mitigate flooding and erosion concerns raised by the public, as well as habitat and open space values that are so clearly expressed in public surveys. Including these areas in the overlays that indicate environmental constraints is in keeping with the public’s value of “green infrastructure incorporation, open space preservation, and greater attention to development standards for both private development and public infrastructure” outlined in the plan. The EPA identifies stormwater buffers as a “Stormwater Best Management Practice,” defining them as areas of natural vegetation around waterbodies and wetlands that protect the slope stability and water quality of neighboring areas and waterbodies.

For landslides in particular, we need to see these layers to help explain to staff, council and the public the need for greater data collection, such as annual flights of LiDAR over unstable slopes to identify new areas at risk of landslides and to regularly monitor known unstable slopes.

With regard to mapping Environmental Constraints, Future Land Use Maps, and Zoning Code (a) **The Zoning Map and Future Land Use Map should zone for Conservation sensitive areas around Lampert Lake and in the wettest/deepest peatlands area in the Beluga Wetland Complex. The City should develop a revenue-generating mechanism to purchase these lands if necessary, for the public good.** (b) please ensure that the overlays on map of “Future Land Use” and “Environmental Constraints” are the same. (c) Move “Environmental Constraints” from the Appendix to the Core Plan. (d) GIS layers of constraints need to be made available on the City Website, overlaying parcels to inform citizens, potential land buyers, staff, and commissions. (e) Include mapping of wetlands and streams, and other important maps showing landslide risks, etc. as outlined below. (f) Refer to Environmental

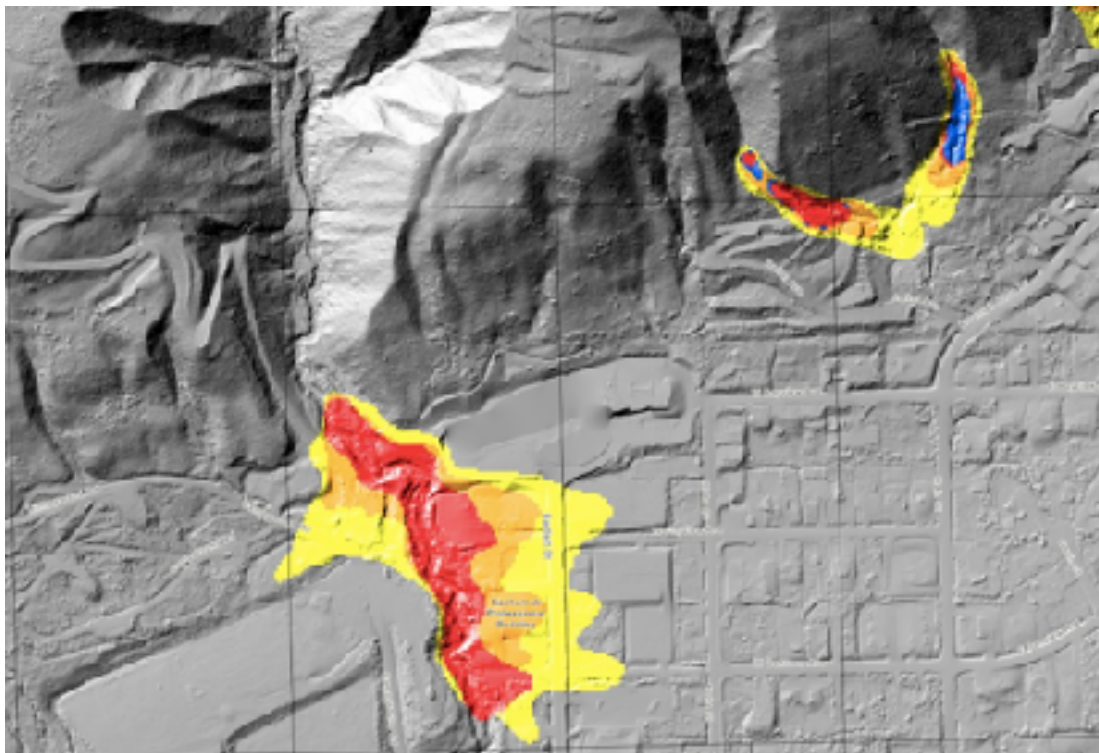
¹ <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/1a4eb07b42ff4ebb8c71ba45adaedf0c/>





In the appendix, include City of Homer Public Works Maps on water flow and drainages. Public Works has a lot of important data on flow, like expected future peak flow rate by basin, that should be integrated into the document and made available as GIS layers, overlaying parcels. They shared these layers with the team, but if they got lost in the shuffle, they can easily be accessed by your team. For an idea of what we're talking about see this City of Homer story map on peak flow: <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=2f427e99603a4c61979f5b4e64462096>, **GIS layers overlaying parcels need to be made publicly available to inform citizens, potential land buyers, staff, and commissions. Importantly, GIS layers allow for the addition of additional information as it is gathered, thereby keeping any regulations up-to-date.**

On the Environmental Constraints Overlay and in the appendix, Show DGGs Discharge Maps: https://dggg.alaska.gov/webpubs/dggg/ri/text/ri2022_005.pdf. **GIS layers showing coastal and inland landslide hazards overlaying parcels need to be made publicly available to inform citizens, potential land buyers, staff, and commissions. GIS layers will allow for the addition of additional information as it is gathered, such as new LiDAR over unstable slopes to identify *new* areas at risk of landslides and to regularly monitor known unstable slopes. The DGGs report is "just" the first unstable slope study for Homer and it did not even include field studies.**





On the Environmental Constraints Overlay and in the appendix, show the landslide hazard area around Bluff Point from the DGGs Report, <https://dggg.alaska.gov/pubs/id/31155>. GIS layers this hazard and the buffer line around it needs to be made publicly available to inform citizens, potential land buyers, staff, and commissions. This landslide hazard in particular needs special attention and rules must be promulgated to protect residents and infrastructure to try to keep folks out of harms' way.

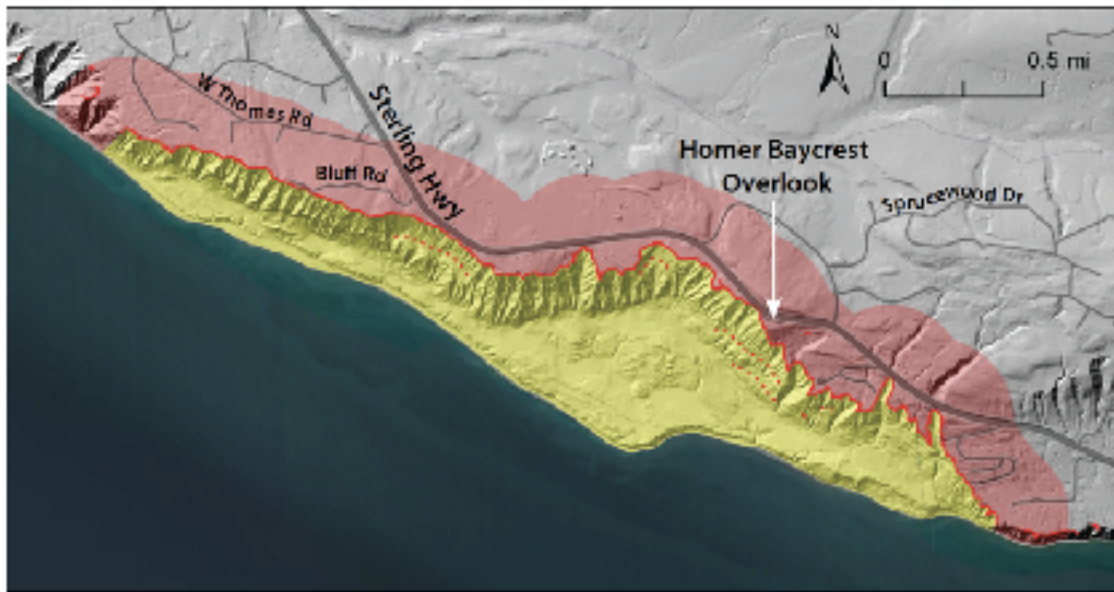
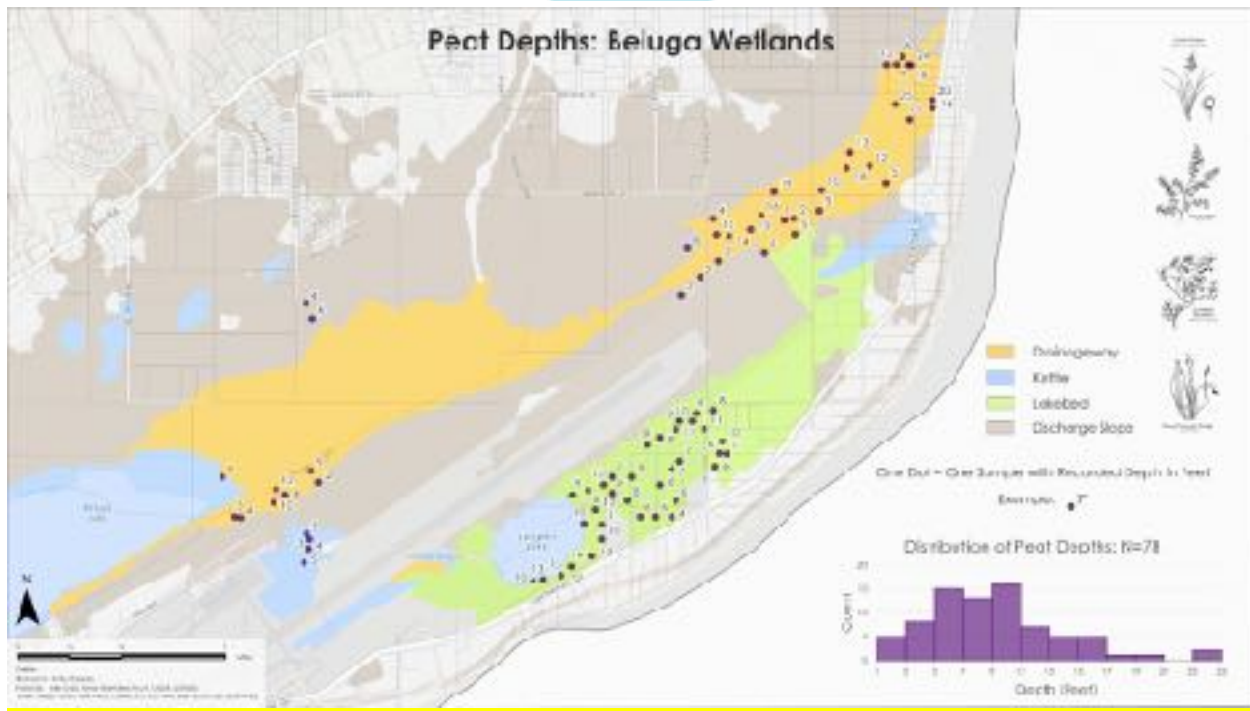


Figure 6. Deep-seated landslide susceptibility near the Bluff Point landslide (red polygon). The landslide body (yellow area, south of the red headscarp line) is the landslide deposit and is also susceptible to repeated failure.

In the Environmental Constraints overlay and in the appendix, show Peatland Depth Maps. These maps are vital indicators of the volume of water held in the peatlands, their viability as building sites, and their potential to cause flooding along Kachemak Drive if filled. These maps are available through the Homer Drawdown Group: <https://www.homerdrawdown.info/peatland-project/map>. GIS layers overlaying parcels need to be made publicly available to inform citizens, potential land buyers, staff, and commissions. Importantly, GIS layers allow for the addition of additional information as it is gathered, thereby keeping any prioritization or regulation up-to-date.



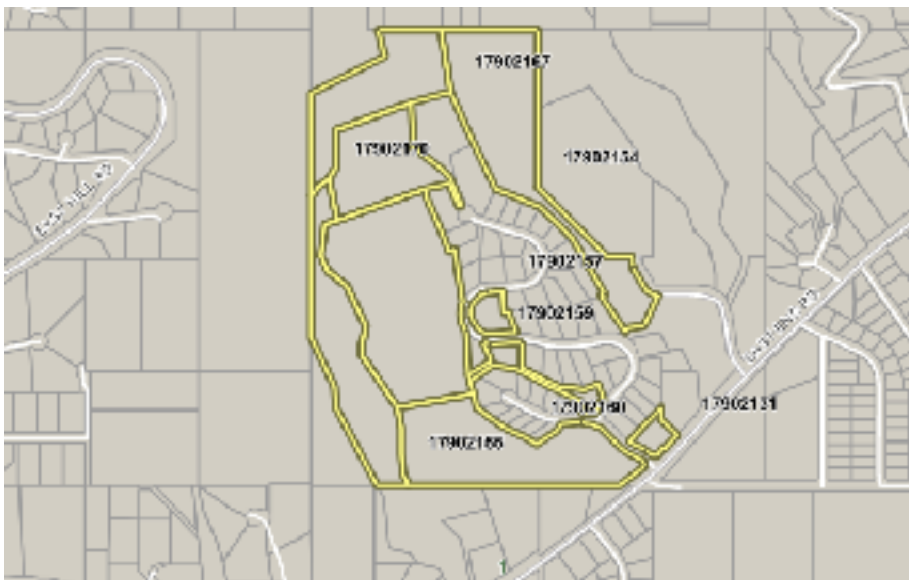
On the Environmental Constraints Overlay and in the Appendix, show wetland and water mapping, as it appeared in the 2018 Comp Plan. Available from Homer Soil and Water Conservation District. In addition to appearing in the plan, **GIS layers overlaying parcels need to be made publicly available to inform citizens, potential land buyers, staff, and commissions. Importantly, GIS layers allow for the addition of additional information as it is gathered, thereby keeping any prioritization or regulation up-to-date.** It is particularly relevant for zoning and rezoning considerations, as well as property valuations.



On the Environmental Constraints Overlay, in the Appendix, and in the Future Use and Zoning Maps show Conservation Lands Conserved by Kachemak Heritage Land Trust: Information available from the Land Trust and on the Kenai Peninsula Borough Parcel Viewer: <https://geo.kpb.us>. **GIS layers overlaying parcels need to be made publicly available to inform citizens, potential land buyers, staff, and commissions. Importantly, GIS layers allow for the addition of additional information as it is gathered (such as, in this case, additional purchases for conservation), thereby keeping any prioritization or regulation up-to-date.**



On the Environmental Constraints Overlay, in the Appendix, and in the Future Use and Zoning Maps, please show parks that are available to the public, owned by the Kachemak Bay Equestrian Association and Stream Hill Park Homeowners Association. These are important recreation sites that should be incorporated into Recreational Access and walkability planning. Available on the Kenai Peninsula Borough Parcel Viewer: <https://geo.kpb.us>. **GIS layers of conserved lands need to be made available overlaying parcels to inform citizens, potential land buyers, staff, and commissions. GIS layers allow for the addition of additional information as it is gathered (such as, in this case, additional purchases for conservation), thereby keeping any prioritization or regulation up-to-date.**



p. 24, 2. Update Homer City Code to better respond to existing and future opportunities for moderate, sustainable growth.

a) Implement zoning codes that allow for greater flexibility and adaptability, such as form-based codes that focus on building form and relationships rather than strict use classifications.

h). Ensure sustainable development through code that mitigates the hazards of landslides, flooding, and low water quality.*

i) Expand language describing the kinds of conditions that can be placed on Conditional Use Permits (Homer City Code, 21.71.040 Approval of conditional use) to include



measures maintaining riparian waterways, soil stability, woodlands, vegetation, wetland protection, and water quality.*

k) Improve continuity between strategies in the subdivision plan approval, and activities on individual properties within the subdivision.*

l) Set a codified backstop on the ability of the Planning Commission to rezone areas toward more intensive uses, using existing code on “variances” as a guide.*

4. Strategically align development code with natural hazard considerations and habitat values.

a) Use the City of Homer Hazard Mitigation Plan, Climate Action Plan, and create a Waterways Plan and a Landslide Plan to use as a guiding tools to inform land use policies and development regulations, ensuring ongoing updates reflect the latest hazard assessments and mitigation strategies.

b) Revise development regulations for steep slopes and sensitive sites to address grading, drainage, vegetation clearing, building setbacks, and footprints. Allow flexibility in road dimensions to minimize excessive grading. Require site-specific analysis or geotechnical reports for development on or above steep slopes, outfalls, landslide-prone lands and wetlands. Sensitive and hazard zones will be mapped in GIS overlays that are visible on all zoning maps and possibly overlays on KPB Parcel Viewer, trigger the need for outside analysis and engineering (like current traffic analysis requirements), and/or have appropriate Site Development Standards, Platting Requirements, Stormwater Management Plans.

c) Ensure Use best-management practices to to support healthy habitats, clean water and erosion mitigation to develop development setbacks for streams and sensitive watersheds align with Alaska Department of Fish and Game recommendations.

Rationale: ADF&G is only concerned with anadromous waters. Homer has many important creeks and waterbodies that are not anadromous. The EPA identifies stormwater buffers as a “Stormwater Best Management Practice,” defining them as areas of natural vegetation around waterbodies and wetlands that protect the slope stability and water quality of neighboring areas and waterbodies.

d) Strengthen erosion, and stormwater, and groundwater management standards to minimize bluff and shoreline erosion. Incorporate best management practices (BMPs) into development review processes, including improved surface water and groundwater management on around coastal and inland bluffs.

e) Institute regulation limiting or prohibiting development within the highlighted landslide risk area around Baycrest.

f) Landslides are one of the most significant hazards Homer faces and their likelihood goes up with increased development and climate change, and so the City must dedicate resources and energy to understanding this hazard better, particularly through LiDar and on-the-ground analysis. When this studies reveal areas where regulations promoting health, safety, and infrastructure are necessary, the City should promulgate them. In the meantime, it would be prudent to institute general regulations limiting vegetation removal within 100 ft of the coastal and inland bluffs.



- g) Protect lands with ~~limited development potential~~ **with high recreational, habitat, and/or hazard mitigation values** through strategic acquisitions, land trades, conservation easements, or other long-term protection tools.
- h) Collaborate with conservation organizations and regional partners (e.g., Homer Soil and Water Conservation District, Kachemak Heritage Land Trust) to identify and manage environmentally sensitive areas and critical natural systems. Explore Special Use Districts **and Area Plans, eg. Inland Bluff Area Plan** to coordinate infrastructure, drainage, and trail planning at a regional or watershed level. **Collaborate with local partners to offer environmental conditions workshops to the Planning Commission, Planning Staff, and Community Development. Workshops could include “Know your Water” or waterway “Waterways workshop,” covering topics from erosion to landslides to flooding.**
- i) **Ensure that environmental overlays are available as GIS layers on the City website and that they are required to be included in platting and permitting.**
- j) **Expand the definition of “Standing” in Homer City Code to accommodate for development impacts to the broader community, such as impacts to public lands, conservation lands, hazards associated with flooding, erosion, road or public property damage.**
- k) **Create a special management area around the Bluff Point landslide hazard.**
- l) **Join other Tree City USA communities in a commitment to a community that’s healthier, happier, and more livable.**
- m) **Modify code to indicate that large projects or projects in sensitive sites need comprehensive checklists and additional time for public participation with full public notice.**

5. Conserve open green space in Homer to protect environmental values, provide recreational opportunities, and enhance biophysical connectivity.

- a) Partner with public and private entities to preserve existing open spaces and create new green space connections that increase recreation activities and habitat value areas. **Explore and implement mechanisms for revenue generation to allow for municipal land purchases and easements, including but not limited to tools such as Stormwater Utilities, Drainage/Watershed Districts, Open Space taxes, and other strategic revenue generation strategies to support this important value for Homer.**
- b) Develop a strategic open space protection plan that prioritizes high-value lands for conservation, recreation, and habitat connectivity and **develops mechanisms for purchase and conservation**. Focus on areas with **high recreational, habitat, and/or hazard mitigation values** ~~limited development potential due to biophysical characteristics~~ and use tools such as land purchases, trades, conservation easements, and partnerships with land trusts and public agencies to secure long-term protection.
- c) Integrate green infrastructure and open space into development regulations by incorporating parks, trails, and stormwater management systems into zoning and subdivision standards to enhance resilience and livability.



d) **Implement** Explore conservation and public benefit requirements for large developments, such as dedicating land for open space, habitat corridors, stormwater management, or community recreational facilities.*

e) Identify opportunities **and tools** for trail and park expansion within city tidal lands, enhancing waterfront access and recreational connectivity.

P. 32

5. Protect and enhance wetlands and waterbodies to support stormwater management, water quality, recreation, and responsible development.

a) Develop a new **GIS** wetlands mapping inventory to inform a Wetlands Management Plan that can be used to help preserve the functions and values of important wetlands and manage the proper use of lower value wetlands. Use the wetland maps and Wetlands Management Plan to guide decision making.*

b) Enhance stream channels with the creation of ponds, wetlands, and different habitats that allow for trail systems, water bird habitat, overflow surface water and stormwater collection.

6. Protect and enhance open spaces for recreational and environmental benefits.

a) Inventory lands using geographic information systems (GIS) and develop a strategy for targeted open green space acquisition, **including generation of funds for the acquisition (lighting bolt)**.

b) Amend land use regulations and relevant plans to incorporate policies, procedures, and management standards for natural open space.***(lighting bolt)**

d) Promote and encourage the identification and conservation of open spaces including access to greenbelts, parks, coastal refuges, and state parks, e.g., Diamond Creek Recreation Site.

e) Create a strong alliance with the community, state and local governments, education, and the private sector to ensure that parks are accessible to people of all ages and abilities in the community.

f) Encourage public-private collaboration methods for natural open space protection, such as working with entities including the state and federal government, Homer Trails Alliance, Center for Alaskan Coastal Studies, and Kachemak Heritage Land Trust.

p. 37

5. Develop a long-range stormwater drainage and management plan to mitigate negative downstream impacts such as property damage, bluff erosion, and pollution and **maintain Homer's drinking water supply**.

a) Update and refine the Low-Impact Development Plan (also referred to as the Green Infrastructure – Stormwater Master Plan). The plan should consider water quality, inflow and infiltration, climate change, and erosion, and provide recommendations for implementing proactive stormwater management. The plan should also identify strategic locations for real



estate acquisitions to support green infrastructure **and the necessary mechanisms for revenue generation for purchase of Green Infrastructure lands purchases, including but not limited to Stormwater Utilities, Drainage/Watershed Districts, sales taxes and other strategic revenue generation strategies.**

b) Create an updated holistic, regional map of the stormwater network to ensure stormwater management decisions are made appropriately for each stormwater drainage basin for a system wide improvement. **Convert mapping to GIS layer to be included in plat and permitting.**

Sincerely,

Homer Stormwater Workgroup,

A Community and Local-Expert Project

Sponsored by the Kachemak Bay Conservation Society

DRAFT –Review of Draft 2035 Comprehensive Plan for Homer, Alaska

Public Comments by: Charles Barnwell, COH Planning Commissioner

3/14/2025

This Comprehensive Plan (“Plan”) represents considerable work by the project team—City of Homer (COH), Agnew Beck (AB), COH Planning Commission and others; as well as input from the Homer public. My background is as follows: a geologist with 15 years of field work in Alaska, with an B.S.in geology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison; an M.S. in Planning from University of Alaska; and 35 years of GIS work for ESRI, the Municipality of Anchorage, and various engineering companies in Alaska.

I followed these guidelines in my review of the Plan:

- If you don’t like something, provide an alternative, provide detail on what/how you would change,
- something is missing, or
- you have a better idea for themes or policies, say it.

My comments are as follows:

Document Review (Feb2025_2035HomerCompPlanUpdatePRD_Full.pdf):

General Comments:

- I think in general the layout and organization of the draft Comprehensive Plan (“Plan”) is well done. There are many excellent sections and good writing. However,I think some of the introductory paragraphs of the sections are limited and don’t explain enough the topic. I realize the Plan should be focused on policy and not on detail, but I would recommend some more explanation in some places (see comments below). I like the Plan's use of the icons (capital, code, etc.) next to strategies is a great idea to illustrate the needs in a simple, easy to read way.
- Missing in this Plan, is addressing the comparison of the 2018 Comprehensive Plan and this Plan. A summary of an audit of the 2018 Plan is needed. What didn’t get accomplished in the 2018 Plan? Where were there misdirections? What priorities in 2018 Plan are no longer valid? What was accomplished and what wasn’t from the 2018 Plan? how well was the 2018 Plan implemented? What items were missing or unaddressed? In my experience, few of the prior plans are audited and discussed in detail. This is unfortunate as we should learn from previous plans and improve on them. I would like to see a page here that summarizes say in table form what goals, objectives, strategies were present in the 2018 Plan and what of them were accomplished.
- A comprehensive plan is difficult to produce as it is wide ranging in its scope. A lot to consider. One of the biggest challenges is consistency throughout the sections in terms of policy, goals, and objectives. I think in many ways this Plan is fairly consistent, but in the Land Use area there are some serious inconsistencies. (see below).
- Implementation of the Plan: this is where the rubber meets the road: how do we implement the beast of a Comp Plan? I think functional plan components such as the Transportation Plan, and Hazards Mitigation Plan are key, and Area Plans, because otherwise there is so much to address in a Comp Plan. Leverage the functional plans and area plans. The other parts, e.g. strategies, will rely on City Code that hopefully is developed in line with Plan policies.
- Mapping and GIS usage in this Plan is mediocre, and given the effort and budget of this Plan, I am disappointed in the quality of the maps, and the lack of use of digital (online) mapping tools. See comments on maps below, See comments below on page 11. The Environmental Constraints mapping and discussion in this Plan is missing important information and explanation. See comments below on page 11.
- I was taught in my UAA grad school planning program the importance of environmental planning and its role in the Comprehensive Plan. My thesis advisor, Lidia Selkregg, a geologist and planner, believed in this approach wholeheartedly. I think this Plan has some good aspects along this integrative thinking, but falls short. In

Homer, especially, given its small size (25 sq.miles), the importance of environmental resources can't be overstated. For example, the wetlands/peatlands resources, and key watersheds.

What is a Comprehensive Plan? , P.2. This is a good description, especially the part about the Future Land Use Map, but I would add this verbiage:

"A comprehensive plan is a long-term strategic framework that guides the growth and development of a community. Key components include:

- Vision and Goals: A clear statement of the community's aspirations and objectives for the future.
- Land Use Planning: Strategies for how different areas of the community will be developed and used over time.
- Transportation and Infrastructure: Plans for transportation systems and public utilities to support growth.
- Community Engagement: Processes to involve residents and stakeholders in shaping the plan."

What is Zoning Code?, P.2.

Zoning Code: A lot of folks don't really understand what "code" is and why it is important. This is a good summary, but I would add the following verbiage. There has been lots of discussion on each of the points below:

City code should be explained, and it refers to the regulations and ordinances that govern land use, building standards, and other municipal activities. Key considerations of this code include:

- Zoning Regulations: Rules that dictate how land can be used and what types of structures can be built in specific areas.
- Building Codes: Standards for construction to ensure safety, accessibility, and environmental sustainability.
- Permitting Processes: Procedures for obtaining approval before initiating construction or development projects.
- Enforcement Mechanisms: Protocols for ensuring compliance with the city code and addressing violations.

Title 21 typically refers to a specific section of municipal code that outlines zoning regulations and land use policies. Key considerations include:

- Zoning Districts: Designations that determine allowable land uses and development standards in different areas.
- Density and Intensity Standards: Guidelines for the number of units or the scale of development appropriate for each zoning district.
- Special Use Permits: Processes for approving land uses that may not be allowed by right, requiring additional review.
- Variances and Exceptions: Mechanisms for granting deviations from established zoning regulations under certain circumstances

Homer by the Numbers, P.5, and P.6. A nice summary, good graphics.Same for the graphic on p.6.

P.8. Land Use and Environment.

This section starts with a good list of key themes. Missing, however, in the themes list is mention of the need for **conserving green open space**, a key priority in the 2024 public survey. Green, open space fits with not just outdoor access, but also with the strategies listed below on this page. Also, the strategies here should be consistent with strategies regarding wetlands and green infrastructure (see pages 12, 18, 31, 32).

Future Land Use Map Overlay Categories, P.10. A nice breakout and helps in understanding the Plan, *however*, I have the following comments:

Area Plan: it would be helpful to explain in more detail or with examples what an Area Plan is. As stated in the Plan policies need to be developed for specific areas. Area plans can help implement the Plan, and should be utilized. I lived

in Anchorage, and am familiar with many Area or District Plans there, notably the Hillside District Plan. Also, the Plan needs additional areas beyond just downtown and the Spit. West Homer, Hillside Homer, or East Homer where there are unique environmental and other issues in each of these.

Environmental Constraints: In addition to helping identifying places where more site analysis is warranted, Environmental constraints are critical factors that can influence planning and development processes, and can help achieve goals of preserving and conserving green open space. Missing in the Application Areas column for Environmental Constraints are key wetlands and peatlands, and areas of soils not favorable for development.

I think the Plan should add the following verbiage further explaining environmental constraints:

Environmental Constraints generally focus on:

- Wetland Protection: Areas classified as wetlands and peatlands require special attention to preserve biodiversity and water quality; and serve as carbon sinks reducing emissions of CO2.
- Coastal Erosion: Coastal areas may face risks from erosion, requiring careful management to protect infrastructure and ecosystems.
- Floodplain Management: Development in flood-prone areas needs to be minimized to reduce risks to life and property.
- Habitat Conservation: Protecting habitats for endangered species and biodiversity is essential to maintain ecological balance.
- Geohazards such as tsunamis, landslides, and other.

Future Land Use Map, P.11. This is a core and critical part of a comprehensive plan. As stated on P.8, a focus of this Plan is to “implement a future land use map.” This map should be described in more detail on this page. I am also concerned that the land uses shown in the map (Figure 3) are inconsistent with the Plan’s goals as stated in many sections. *See detailed comments below in the review of the Core Plan (pages 5 and 8 of my comments).*

Sustainability, Resilience and Climate Change, P.12,. A critical part of the plan given our timeframe. I think this section is generally well written and organized, however, it is not consistent with other parts of the Plan, for example, a key theme of preservation of Ecosystems and Open Space, and Goal B contradicts the Future Land use Map on page 11 that shows industrial use in critical peatland areas that serve as carbon sinks, green infrastructure, and habitat. Additionally, Point #5 on this page states "protect and enhance wetlands and waterbodies to support stormwater management..." This points again to the need to be consistent in the Plan about land use and other policies.

Public Facilities and Services, P.13, I think the goals listed here are excellent, and reinforce each other. Strategies also are good and support the goals.

Housing, P.14, This isn’t my area of expertise, but generally it seems this section is lacking specifics.

Transportation, P.15, In general, a good summary. I suggest the mention of the 2024 COH Transportation Plan for more detail. I think one thing that is missing is mention of the issue of a truck route for Homer, which the Transportation Plan does not fully address.

Economic Development, P. 16, A good summary, but seems to be missing mention of the Port and Harbor and its role. Maybe a strategy here that should be listed is development of a Port and Harbor Management Plan.

Quality of Life, P.17. I agree with all of the goals and strategies, however, think that with regard to outdoor recreation, there is not enough emphasis or mention of open space and green space expansion. These should be part of the strategies here.

Governance, p.18, This appears to be generally a good summary of goals and strategies.

DRAFT CORE PLAN AND APPENDICES REVIEW

Document: Feb2025_2035HomerCompPlanUpdatePRD_Core.pdf

Document: Feb2025_2035HomerCompPlanUpdatePRD_Appendices

Comments below are a bit redundant of comments above for the Full Plan version, but I'm providing them anyway as this document was provided for review.

How does the 2035 plan relate to 2018 Plan,P.8, In this paragraph there is no mention of whether or not an audit of the 2018 Plan took place, in other words, how well was the 2018 Plan implemented? What items were missing or unaddressed? This is unfortunate as we should learn from previous plans and improve on them. I would like to see a page here that summarizes in table form what goals, objectives, strategies were present in the 2018 Plan and which of them were accomplished.

Future Land Use Map, P.9, (see also p.23). This is a core and critical part of a comprehensive plan in my experience. In this Plan as stated on P.8, a focus of this Plan is to “implement a future land use map.” This map should be described in more detail. on this page. I think generally this is a well written and clear page describing land use relative to zoning.

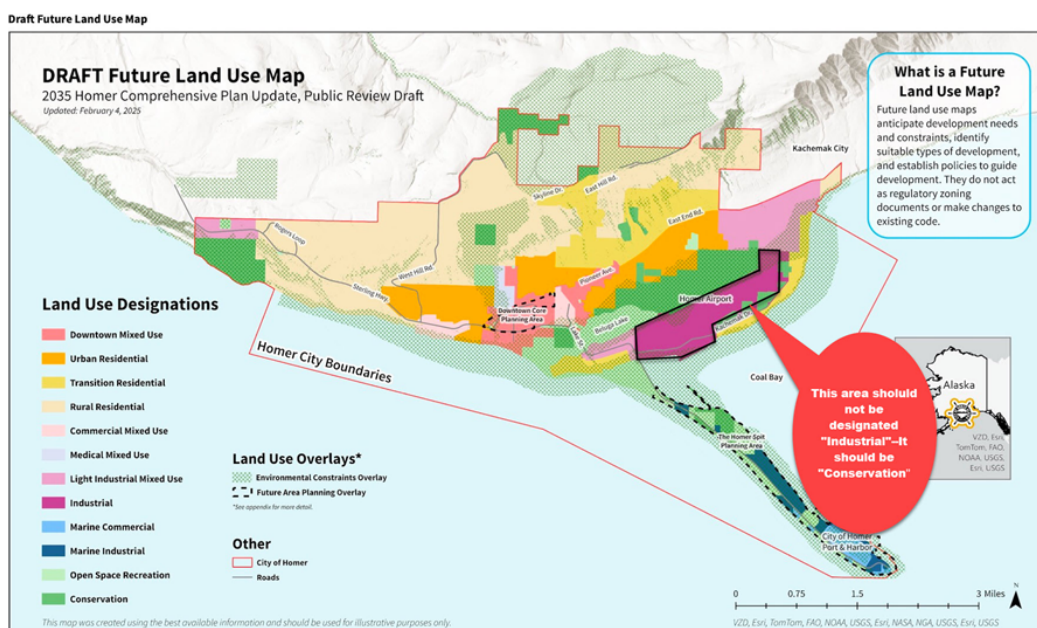
Suggested additional language for this section is as follows:

"The future land use map is a vital tool for guiding development and resource management. Key considerations include:

- Zoning Designations: Clear classification of areas for residential, commercial, industrial, and conservation uses.
- Compatibility with Existing Uses: Ensuring new land uses align with current neighborhood characteristics and infrastructure.
- Environmental Considerations: Incorporating natural features and constraints into land use planning to protect ecosystems.
- Community Input: Engaging residents in the planning process to reflect their needs and priorities in the land use designations."

Land uses as portrayed in the map are inconsistent with zoning, for example “industrial with “General commercial” zoning n Appendix F (Figure 4). See my comments on the “full” Plan above. The Green Infrastructure conservation plan as pushed by the COH for several years is not mentioned in the context of land use. The Drawdown Peatland project spent considerable time and effort focused on key land areas in east Homer, only to see this area apparently designated “Industrial. See Figure 1 below.

Figura 1. Future Land Use Map - issue



Development of the Plan and other Plan info, Pages 10—14, A nice organized, written summary of Plan development, timelines, etc.

Implementation, P.15-16. I think comprehensive plan implementation is difficult, and this section doesn't describe or explain implementation as well as it should be. As we have learned from other plans, if the Plan isn't implemented properly it is just another document on the shelf.

This section begins by explaining that the plan starts with identifying key themes, followed by goals, etc. This is acceptable; however, the roles of the various parts of the Plan need clarification. Functional plans and area plans should play a significant role in implementation. Figure 2 below is a very good depiction of how functional plans and area plans fit within the Comprehensive Plan.

Page 16, however, is a good, clear summary of land use actions.

The process of Plan implementation will cover a 10-year period, and this section on page 15 simply describes the initial process.

Implementation guidelines and specifications are missing in this plan. Should discuss implementation options. Need to be clear how the Plan will be implemented over the next 10 years. I suggest including the following language in the section on P.15 to clarify what is meant and faced in implementation of plans.

Examples of Successful Implementation Strategies:

1. **Community Engagement Programs:** Leveraging workshops and surveys to involve residents in decision-making.
2. **Phased Implementation:** Breaking down large projects into manageable phases to ensure gradual progress and assessment.
3. **Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaborating with local businesses to fund and support urban development initiatives.
4. **Performance Metrics:** Establishing clear indicators to monitor progress and make necessary adjustments throughout implementation.

Common Challenges Faced in Previous Implementations:

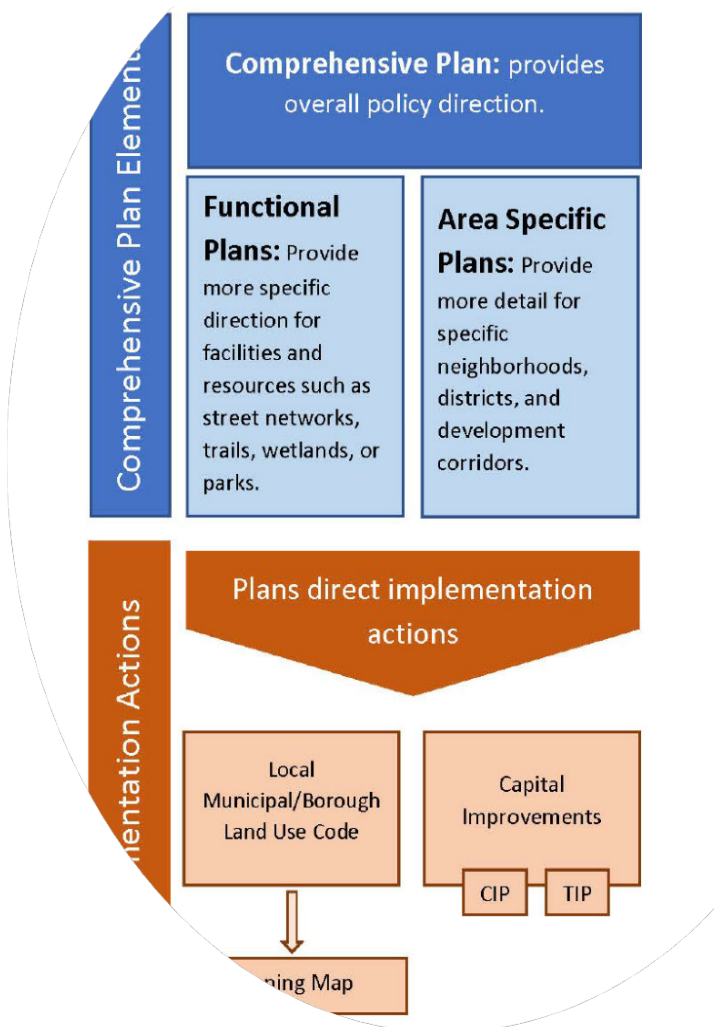
1. **Funding Shortfalls:** Insufficient financial resources can hinder project execution.
2. **Community Resistance:** Lack of public support or opposition to proposed changes can stall progress.
3. **Coordination Among Stakeholders:** Difficulty in aligning goals and responsibilities among various parties can lead to miscommunication.
4. **Regulatory Hurdles:** Navigating complex zoning laws and regulations can delay implementation.

The relationship of functional and area plans should be mentioned. See Figure 2 below. How can these be used as tools to implement the Comprehensive Plan?

With respect to functional and area plans I suggest including the following table:

Plan	Status
COH Transportation Plan:	Current, but there are unanswered questions.
Hazards Mitigation Plan	2022, needs updating
Stormwater Management Plan:	?
Port and Harbor Management Plan	?
Wetlands Management Plan.	No plan in place yet.
Area Plans:	Homer Spit Plan, needs updating Downtown ? Recommended others, e.g. DCRA 2013, needs updating.

Figure 2. Comp Plan and its relatives. Credit: Michelle McNulty, APA Alaska Chapter, 2021.



Land Use & Environment, p17, SEE ALSO COMMENTS ON LAND USE/ENVIRONMENT IN MY COMMENTS ON THE "FULL" PLAN ABOVE. This section needs a brief intro regarding the importance of land use and environment to the Plan. I suggest the following verbiage as a brief intro before going into Key Themes Guiding the Plan:

"Land use and environment in planning are critical aspects that ensure sustainable development and the preservation of natural resources. Key considerations include:

- **Land Use Compatibility:** Ensuring that various land uses (residential, commercial, industrial) coexist without negative impacts on the environment or community.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Integrating practices that protect ecosystems and promote resource conservation in land use decisions.
- =
- **Impact Assessments:** Evaluating potential environmental effects of proposed developments to inform planning decisions.
- **Regulatory Frameworks:** Implementing policies and zoning regulations that enforce environmental protections."

Suggested additional language for this section:

The future land use map is a vital tool for guiding development and resource management. Key considerations include:

- **Zoning Designations:** Clear classification of areas for residential, commercial, industrial, and conservation uses.
- **Compatibility with Existing Uses:** Ensuring new land uses align with current neighborhood characteristics and infrastructure.
- **Environmental Considerations:** Incorporating natural features and constraints into land use planning to protect ecosystems.
- **Community Input:** Engaging residents in the planning process to reflect their needs and priorities in the land use designations."

Development that fits Natural Conditions, P.18. An important section of the Plan, and one of the best written ones, addressing environmental constraints and development. In general, this is well written, but needs more elaboration on the items listed, namely steep slopes, wetlands, habitat, and "land with biophysical characteristics that make development challenging."

I think the key items to be elaborated on in this section include: Geohazards (slope, tsunami, erosion), soils, wetlands, peatlands, and habitat.

- With regard to **geohazards**, coastal bluff stability is an issue in Homer. Regarding **slope failure potential** (landslides) the coastal bluff in the Downtown area was identified by DGGs with a high instability score (p10 of their 2024 report). Unfortunately, this report did not examine this section of the bluff in detail with field observations. There are two and possibly three major slumps between West Hill Road and Bishops Beach. In January, the West Hill Road slump re-activated and lost another 800-foot slice off the bluff face. **Tsunami** risk or potential is another geohazard that should be mentioned here. (see map and DGGs report info).
- **Steep slopes:** the problem in Homer is not only a considerable amount of steep slopes (see Appendix F in Appendices), but poor soils (see COH LID Study), and this combination leads to slope failure potential.
- **Peatlands** are a soil type and have been mapped by NRCS in detail in the Homer area (see map). The peatlands serve many important environmental functions: water storage, carbon sinks, habitat, and in parts of Homer

identified for stormwater management. Habitat is a natural condition that seems missing in the Plan. Some brief description of key habitats here would be useful. Wetlands are an important land type in Homer, yet not described in the Plan at least briefly as to their importance. Other soil types are of concern with development. The COH LID study analyzed soil groups by watershed basin.

- **Wetlands** are mentioned on pages 12, 18, 31, 32 in the Plan, yet there is no brief description of wetlands in Homer: what type they generally are, where they are. Wetlands are present in key parts of Homer (see map), and generally should not be developed as they present good opportunity for green infrastructure related storm water management, and habitat. The problem the City has is that it has no jurisdictional tool at this time to manage wetlands.
- **Watersheds** vary in Homer as to their flood potential, drainage aspects, and landslide potential. Key watersheds should be briefly discussed, in particular Woodard Creek as it is located above downtown, and has been known to flood and landslide. The COH Land Impact Development (LID) report again identified and mapped Homer's watersheds, along with soils and other characteristics.
- **Floodplains and Coastal Erosion** should also be mentioned briefly in this section.

All of the above constraints can be illustrated with the use of maps—See comments below on page 11.

Addressing Gaps in Outdoor Access, P.19. This is a great section that relates to mention of open space, walkability, and other themes in the Plan. What is missing in the Plan (and in the Transportation Plan) are maps showing where known gaps are.

Targeted Planning for Unique Places, P.20. A good section and well written. Another word for this is “Area Plan” frequently used in comprehensive planning in the U.S. and abroad. Some mention should be made here of the need to develop Area Plans for these unique places. A reason for utilizing area plans also is that they can help take the burden of plan development and implementation off of City staff.

Strategies and Potential Actions, P.21-22. This is a very important part of the Plan. This needs to be carefully constructed and consistent with other parts of the Plan. Need a sentence on p.21, explaining the following table (Fig.7 (this should be a table, not figure). This table and accompanying map have to be correct and consistent. Of note, are some major question marks: namely on P.22 “industrial” which says the 2018 designation was “ commercial 2 and conservation. A major change.

DRAFT Future Land Use Map, P.23. Figure 9. See my other comments in my review (pages 3 and 5). Graphically and in terms of layout, this important map is acceptable. However, a significant inconsistency is found in the “environmental constraints overlay,” which is generally acceptable but inconsistent in the Homer Airport area. The “industrial” land use in this area does not align with the “critical airport habitat” or “conservation” land uses as designated in 2018 or in other locations. This should also be consistent with #5 on P.25, which states, “conserve open green space in Homer to protect environmental values, provide recreation opportunities, and enhance biophysical connectivity.” The designation of “industrial” land use and commercial zoning is fundamentally inconsistent with this goal/strategy.

Additionally, the application of the “environmental constraints overlay” in the Diamond Creek area is questionable. I support the protection of this area as an open space/parks area, but I am not sure it fits into the environmental constraints category.

Strategically align development code with natural hazard considerations and habitat values, P.25. #4. An important strategy. I agree with all of the sub- strategies, and they align with the rest of the Plan.

Conserve open green space in Homer to protect.....#5., P.25. I suggest putting a "code" icon here and probably should be as it will take funding to do some of these items, e.g. strategy 5b, develop an open space protection plan, or 5e, identify opportunities for trail and park expansion.

Develop Policies for specific community areas, P.27. A "code " icon is needed here, given the mention of the need to update codes, and other. As mentioned above I suggest the use of Area Plans as a tool for development of policies.

Sustainable and Resilient Development, P.29. In general, a nicely written section, but the verbiage in this section mentions tsunamis, landslides, and erosion, which as suggested above, should be clearly explained in the Plan (suggest doing this in the Development that Fits Natural Conditions section—see above). The map figures here are nice, but should more appropriately be in the Development that Fits Natural Conditions section.

Goals, P.30. A very nicely written, thoughtful, succinct set of goals and strategies.

Stormwater management, P.31, #4.. A critical strategy that ties into the Green Infrastructure initiatives, and various studies, such as the COH LID Study. See strategy 4d which states "update green infrastructure mapping to identify and retain natural drainage channels and important wetlands that serve drainage functions." This statement should be supported and consistent with other policies in the Plan such as retention and conservation of key wetlands, e.g. Beluga Lake area.

P.32. #5, Wetlands. This strategy is very important to the City, and is well worded, but as above this strategy has to be consistent with other parts of the Plan. Mention should be made here in terms of inventory, the Drawdown Peatlands mapping and data that should become part of a Wetlands Management Plan. Also, a capital icon should be shown on this as it will take funding to develop a new wetlands inventory and wetlands management plan. Again, a map showing generalized wetlands should be in the Plan.

P.33. Public Facilities and Services. A good section, and well worded parts here, e.g. Vulnerability to Natural Hazards. Reference should be made to a map (see suggested Geohazards map below). Also, perhaps reference should be made to the Public Works Campus Task Force Report of 2021.

P.34. Reliable and Affordable Services. This too should be consistent, and mention for example the need to move the Public Works Campus out of the tsunami zone to ensure reliable services.

P.36. Facilities. #1: This should have a capital funding icon next to it. Well worded otherwise.

P.37. #4. Include a sentence here speaking to need for Collaborate with DOT&PF on traffic bottleneck solutions in the FAA Drive/Ocean Dr. intersection.

P.38. Port and Harbor. There should be more detailed information and explanation in this section, given the huge investments that are being considered. At the least, carefully check this language here so that it is consistent with current COH and Corps language and projects.

P.40. Housing. An acceptable summary, but this section needs to also provide options for how to address the challenges (p.41). The survey summaries on Fig.12 are good, but more discussion is needed on these top five community areas.

An inventory of developable land targeting housing potential should be mentioned and perhaps even provided in this Plan. For example, looking at downtown Homer, there are key tracts of vacant land that could serve as housing areas, e.g. the tracts shown below:

In general, I find the Housing section lacking in terms of discussing options and alternatives, key components in social planning.

P.45. Consider Sustainable Development and Creative Solutions. A great title and section here. How well is this consistent with the rest of the Plan? There are a number of items to add to this section: such as “inventory land in the COH area that could serve as affordable housing locations” , and other.

P.47. Transportation. A nicely laid out and written section focused on walkability, which I personally love. However, missing is discussion of the key dilemmas in transportation planning in Homer: a truck route, the bottleneck zones, such as the entry to Homer Spit. The TransportationPlan is supposed to provide the detail on these aspects but doesn’t, and this is important to this Plan.

P.63. Health Care. A good summary, but lacking. A capital icon is needed here, as I painfully know seeing the Hospital (SPH) bond fail in 2024. I realize a Comp Plan is not the place to solve SPH or health care problems, but a little discussion is needed here in terms of SPH importance to the Community. Hopefully, those knowledgeable about SPH will provide comment.

p.65. Youth and Childhood (#6) A good summary. This is critical if we want our community to grow in a healthy manner.

p.66. Some more detail on public safety is needed. The Fire Department is in need of help these days beyond physical aids.

Review of Maps in the Plan and Appendices

Comments on Maps in the Plan and Appendices:

Maps are a critical part of any Comprehensive Plan. I think the maps as in this Plan need to be improved.

In summary:

1. Graphically, the maps are not of high quality, with the exception of Fig.16 on page 48. Figure 6 is interesting use of data, and illustrates the point well.
2. Themes are sometimes mixed e.g. land use and constraints
3. The important aspects of environmental constraints are not clearly depicted
4. The importance of geohazards are not clearly depicted.
5. Slopes >30% are not easy to see on the Plan map
6. Land ownership, land inventories are not depicted well in the Plan. In my experience, this was a key part of any planning effort. Figure 2 of land ownership: check data as COH parcels along Kachemak Dr. are missing.
7. Important constraints such as peatlands, tsunami zone, wetlands are not depicted or are not clear.
8. Habitat is not properly portrayed.

Appendix F. Figure 5: Environmental Constraints Map. This map is well intended but its main issue is that it lumps various constraints and layers together making it not clear to see the constraints. Wetlands are present in the Homer area; however, they do not seem to be depicted at all, despite being an important environmental constraint in this Plan. Having lived in Anchorage, where there is detailed and extensive use of wetlands mapping in permitting, I understand that Homer lacks detailed and updated wetland mapping, making the KWF wetlands map unsuitable for jurisdictional permitting uses. However, a map showing at least general wetland areas should be included in this Plan.

Habitat is not depicted well; for instance, the moose tracks are not an adequate representation of habitat. If there is habitat data for Homer, it should be shown on a separate map.

Topography is also not depicted well, which is important in Homer. Additionally, parks and conservation areas should not be included as environmental constraints on this map.

I suggest breaking out the Environmental Constraints maps into 4 separate maps (showing layers listed):

1. Geohazards

- Slope failure vulnerability
- Slopes >30%
- Tsunami inundation line
- Coastal Erosion zones

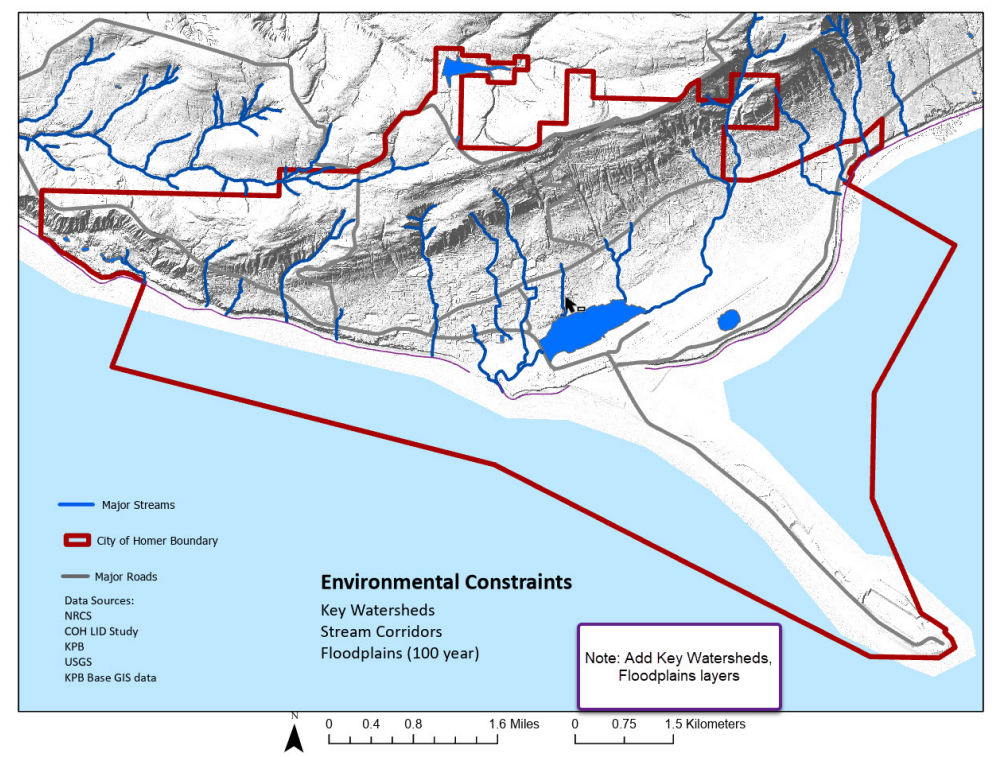
2. Peatlands

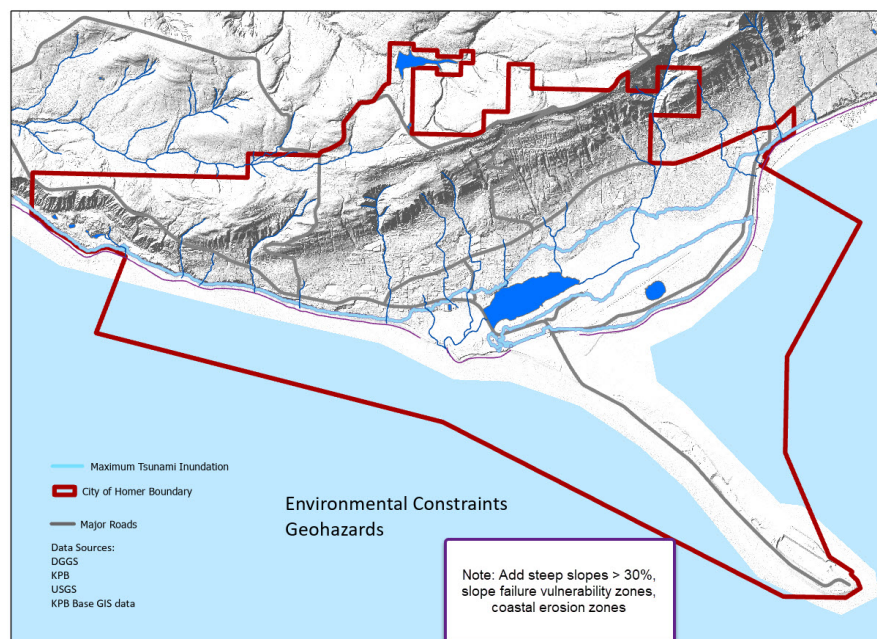
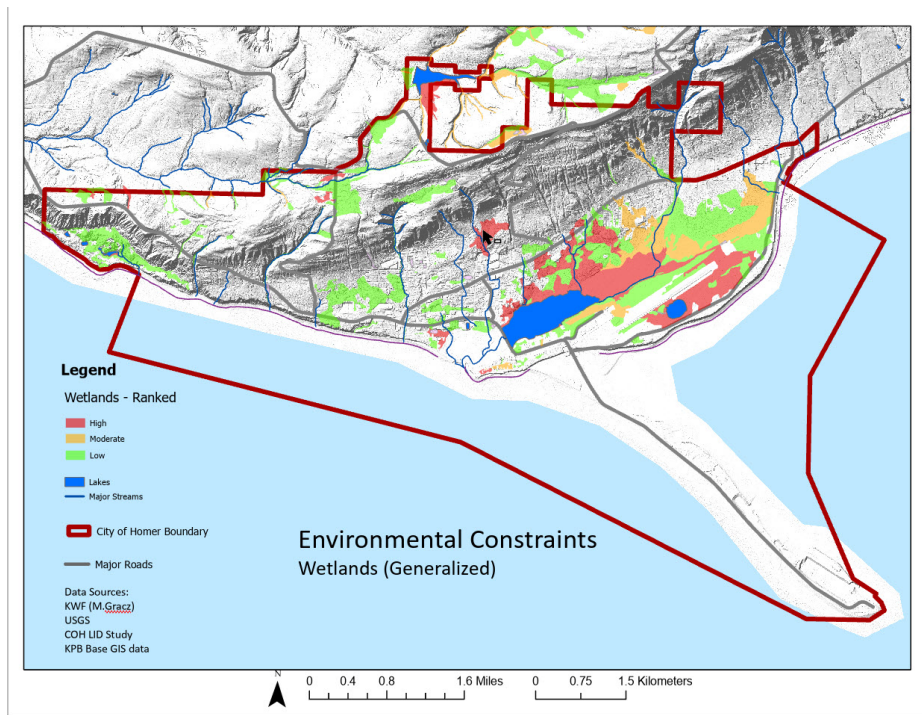
- Peatlands as mapped by NRCS soils (Note: Drawdown has extensively mapped these areas in the Beluga Lake area)
- Note: this map deserves its own map given the importance of peatlands to groundwater, habitat, as a carbon sink, stormwater.

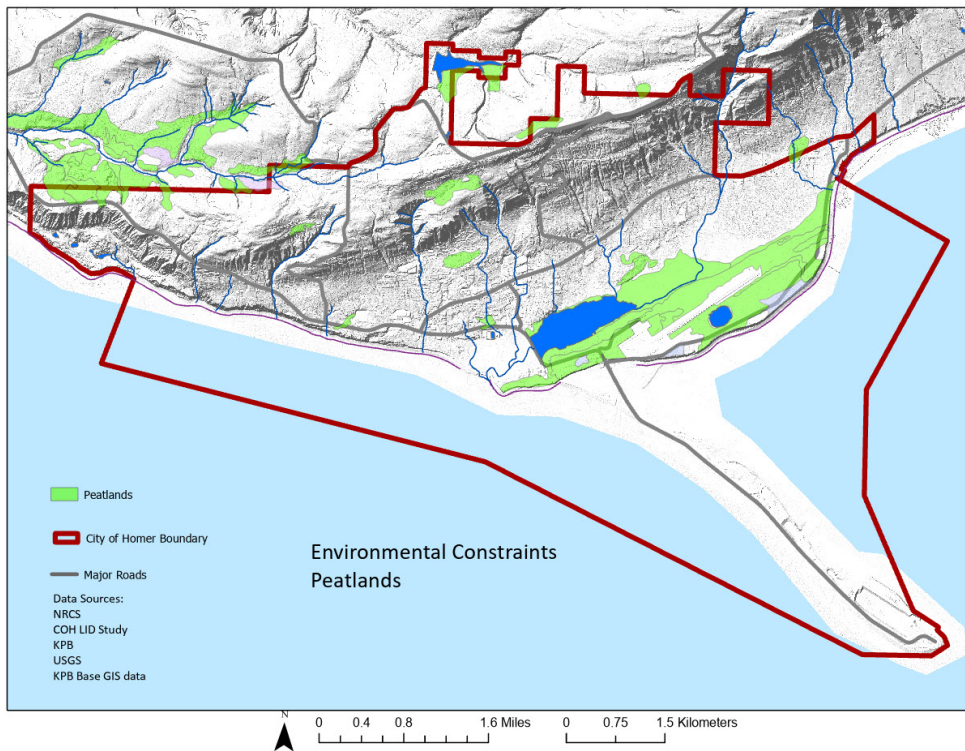
3. Watersheds and Floodplains

- Streams (major ones)
- Key Watersheds
- Floodplains

4. Wetlands (non-jurisdictional)







P.24—27: Overall, a very well written and consistent set of goals and strategies. Check for consistency.

P.29: The hazards and constraints shown on this page are not consistent really with the topic of sustainability, perhaps resiliency. I would suggest putting these maps in a separate section under land use called “Geohazards”.

P.30—32. As with previous pages, a good summary, nicely written and organized. Check for consistency with other parts of the Plan.

From: [Renee Krause](#)
To: [Zach Pettit](#)
Subject: FW: Comments on the Draft Comprehensive Plan update
Date: Tuesday, March 18, 2025 2:54:28 PM

Include this email as well

Renee Krause, MMC
City Clerk/ADA Coordinator
City of Homer
491 E Pioneer Avenue
Homer, AK 99603
907-235-3130
907-235-3143 Fax
Rkrause@ci.homer.ak.us

"Listen to the wind, it talks. Listen to the silence, it speaks. Listen to your heart, it knows."

– *Ojibwe Prayer*

PUBLIC RECORDS LAW DISCLOSURE: Most e-mails from or to [this](#) address will be available for public inspection under Alaska public records law.

From: Michael Jones <mljhea9@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, March 14, 2025 4:05 PM
To: Donna Aderhold <DonnaAderhold@ci.homer.ak.us>; Mayor Email <Mayor_Email@ci.homer.ak.us>; Department City Manager <citymanager@ci.homer.ak.us>; Department Clerk <clerk@ci.homer.ak.us>; Jason Davis <JasonDavis@ci.homer.ak.us>; Bradley Parsons <bradleyparsons@ci.homer.ak.us>; Caroline Venuti <CarolineVenuti@ci.homer.ak.us>; Storm Hansen <StormHansen@ci.homer.ak.us>; Shelly Erickson <ShellyErickson@ci.homer.ak.us>; mljhea9@gmail.com
Cc: Ryan Foster <rfoster@ci.homer.ak.us>
Subject: Re: Comments on the Draft Comprehensive Plan update

CAUTION: This email originated from outside your organization. Exercise caution when opening attachments or clicking links, especially from unknown senders.

Council Member Adderhold, (And others)

i discovered a typo in my email below...if **39% reside within the City of Homer limits, (that means 61% of the respondents reside outside the City Limits).**

The fact that 61% of the respondents reside outside the City Limits prompts a few questions to consider:

Sorry for the error...

Michael L. Jones

From: Michael Jones <mljhea9@gmail.com>

Sent: Thursday, March 13, 2025 11:19 PM

To: Donna Aderhold <DonnaAderhold@ci.homer.ak.us>; mljhea9@gmail.com <mljhea9@gmail.com>; mayor@ci.homer.ak.us <mayor@ci.homer.ak.us>; citymanager@cityofhomer-ak.gov <citymanager@cityofhomer-ak.gov>; clerk@cityofhomer-ak.gov <clerk@cityofhomer-ak.gov>; JasonDavis@ci.homer.ak.us <JasonDavis@ci.homer.ak.us>; BradleyParsons@ci.homer.ak.us <BradleyParsons@ci.homer.ak.us>; CarolineVenuti@ci.homer.ak.us <CarolineVenuti@ci.homer.ak.us>; StormHansen@ci.homer.ak.us <StormHansen@ci.homer.ak.us>; Donna Aderhold <DonnaAderhold@ci.homer.ak.us>; shellyerickson@ci.homer.ak.us <shellyerickson@ci.homer.ak.us>

Cc: rfoster@ci.homer.ak.us <rfoster@ci.homer.ak.us>

Subject: Re: Comments on the Draft Comprehensive Plan update

Council Member Adderhold,

Thank you for taking the time to consider my comments to the Draft Comprehensive Plan and providing your email reply today.

I am including the other members of the City Council in my reply to keep us on the same page.

I may provide you with a more detailed response in the next week or so, but I wanted to make sure you had the benefit of this reply prior to any upcoming discussions you (and the other Council Members) may be involved in.

I'm concerned about using the term "aspirational" because that term isn't actually used in the Draft Plan, and according to the Merriam-Webster on-line dictionary, "aspiration" is defined as "**a strong desire** to achieve something high or great" and "aspirational" is defined as "of, relating to, or characterized by aspiration". I'm concerned that the term "aspirational" overstates the importance of some ideas thus diluting the focus we should have as we lay out the City's future.

Based on my past experiences, ideas that are categorized as "aspirational" are likely to be used by parties to **REQUIRE** implementation of principles, projects, and design features in the future, thereby **OBLIGATING** City Commissions and the City Council to take actions and spend money. "We say right here in the document produced by the City that we aspire (or desire) for XYZ to happen,

therefore, WE MUST DO XYZ”.

The Comprehensive Plan should distinguish between what is “gotta do” and what is “nice to do” (needs versus wants) regarding City Government. The Draft Plan fails to make those distinctions. This failure to distinguish results in a long, unfocused document that is not actionable by City Government.

Consistent with my comments previously submitted, the City should focus (and make it very clear in the draft plan) on the CORE FUNCTIONS City Government must execute and the funding mechanisms that allows for that execution. Those CORE FUNCTIONS and how they will be facilitated by zoning (as it exists today, or as it should be changed) should be laid out clearly in the base document. This should act as a roadmap for City Leaders, staff, and residents so they can have a “North Star” to guide their decisions over the years, no matter who is in the leadership role.

Aspirations should be clearly laid out in an appendix with an appropriate lead in paragraph that says something like:

“The purpose of this appendix is to capture and distill down the feedback received from the community during the planning process. This feedback helps to shape potential visions of where the City of Homer may be in 10 to 20 years. The ideas, principles, themes, and strategies included in this appendix provide insight and context, at a point in time, for ways to navigate over the next 10 to 20 years; however, they are not all inclusive nor binding in any way and shall not be used to obligate the City to act or cease from acting as it executes its responsibilities”.

On a final note...I thank you for prompting me to look at the Draft Plan once again. There is a lot to digest there. It seems I come away with new insights every time I review it.

Page 3 lists the top 3 themes that emerged from the community survey stating what respondents value the most, find the most challenging, and described as the ideal Homer 20 years from now. This simple page may serve as an excellent North Star to focus our efforts as we navigate forward. I expect about

10% of the Draft Plan has direct actions that focus on these thematic areas.

That said, page 4 has the following statement at the top of the page:

Who responded to the 2024 Community Survey?

556 people participated in the survey, exceeding our goal of 500 participants. 224 comments were received on the interactive map. Of the 556 survey participants:

- *70% have lived in Homer more than a decade.*
- *91% live in Homer year-round.*
- *39% reside within the City of Homer limits.*

The fact that 39% of the respondents reside outside the City Limits prompts a few questions to consider:

1. Is a substantial part of the Comprehensive Plan influenced by those who live outside the jurisdiction of the City?
2. Are the themes on page 3 representative of the values of the residents of the City?
3. Would these themes look different if only data from City residents was used?
4. Are the ideas and associated financial obligations in the Draft Plan proposed by people who don't have any financial responsibility?
5. Will the people who live outside the jurisdiction of the City benefit from expenditures made by City residents?
6. Is this consistent with a "user pays" principle?

It would be fruitful to have further analysis that answers these questions, just to validate if the page 3 themes are accurately representative of Homer residents who will be financially responsible for the operation of the City's Government actions.

I look forward to continuing to participate in this process.
Thank you for your time and consideration.

Michael L. Jones

From: Donna Aderhold <DonnaAderhold@ci.homer.ak.us>
Date: Thursday, March 13, 2025 at 1:32 PM
To: Michael Jones <mljhea9@gmail.com>
Subject: Re: Comments on the Draft Comprehensive Plan update

Dear Mr. Jones,

Thank you so much for taking time to engage with the comprehensive planning process so thoroughly, your careful review of the plan, and taking time to articulate your specific comments. I am sure that city staff and the consultant will take each of your comments into consideration.

I will note that the comprehensive plan is aspirational for where the community wants to be in 10-20 years. It does not obligate the city to do anything or spend any money. As a member of city council, I do consider the budget as we make decisions and agree with you that we need to live within our means and rebuild our reserves.

Again, thank you for dedicating your time to the comprehensive planning process.

Take care,
Donna

Donna Robertson Aderhold (she/her)

Homer City Council
491 E. Pioneer Ave.
Homer, AK 99603

907-244-4388

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On Mar 11, 2025, at 2:13 PM, Michael Jones <mljhea9@gmail.com> wrote:

CAUTION: This email originated from outside your organization. Exercise caution when opening attachments or clicking links, especially from unknown senders.

Mayor of Homer, City Council Members, City Manager,

Community Development Director

Thank you for your Leadership efforts to make Homer a wonderful place to live, work, and recreate.

I have submitted two packages of comments for consideration in the Draft Comprehensive Plan update process.

For transparency, I'm providing those comments to you in this email.

I have devoted countless hours to this planning process in meeting participation, draft reviews, and comments—something that many of our Homer constituents cannot devote themselves to.

I love living in this community. I have seen what poor city governance and never-ending government growth looks like.

It is with this background that I offer the following comments.

Comments submitted on March 6 to Ryan Foster, City of Homer (in text below and the attached PDF):

High Level Comments

I appreciate the extensive work that has developed this draft plan. That said, this plan is filled with several suggestions/recommendations/strategies (many of which are advocated by special interests) for the City to be involved in areas that are clearly beyond what the City should be responsible for. Likewise, these strategies will become requirements in Phase 2 of the planning process, obligating the City and its residents to comply with requirements that much of the population doesn't have visibility to and likely wouldn't support if they knew the far-reaching implications and financial burdens of those strategies.

A large part of the population of Homer and the surrounding communities are working, raising families, caring for elders,

volunteering, and engaged in other community activities—they don't have time to participate in the comprehensive planning process—consequently, their interests likely are not represented in the Plan. These people look to the City Council to watch out for their interests, make good decisions, prevent government overreach, and to protect them.

I encourage the City Council members to remember who pays for city salaries, programs, and activities. While there is fee for service funding for water, sewer and the Port and Harbor, a significant amount of funding for City Government comes from taxes on your constituents—especially property taxes—where your constituents are held captive to pay for unrealized gains on the property they already own, for the rest of their lives.

I encourage the City Council, to ask yourselves the following questions as you review this plan:

Am I looking out for the interests of those who have not been able to participate in the planning process?

Have I done everything possible to seek input from those members of our community?

What blind spots exist—have I sought out dissenting or contrary opinions?

Have I created an environment where those dissenting or contrary opinions can be brought forward without fear of bullying from those who believe otherwise?

How does this plan create obligations that can be used to take away liberties from the Homer citizens?

How does this plan expand the scope of government in ways that are

clearly outside the City's mission?

Who pays—How does this plan take money out of the pockets of a broad population of Homer citizens to subsidize a narrow population of special interests?

Should the Homer citizens vote on key elements of the plan that will create financial obligations?

Detailed Comments

Using those questions as a basis for review, I offer the following comments:

1. Stay within the City Responsibilities: Focus on the Core Functions.

City of Homer Mission:

*Mission Statement: The City of Homer exists to provide quality services to all its citizens; to respond in the most appropriate, open, and fiscally responsible manner possible to citizens' needs and concerns; and to do so through the active participation of those citizens. **These services include police, fire, emergency medical service, parks, cemeteries, animal control, street maintenance, water, wastewater collection and treatment, port and harbor, airport terminal, library, planning and general administration.***

Consequently, the plan should focus on the core functions of City Government for which you are responsible. The mission of the City and core responsibilities DOES NOT include advancing social equity or climate change policies as suggested pervasively throughout the draft Plan.

One stated purpose of the plan, shown on page 2 is: *This comprehensive plan update is **Phase 1** of a two-phased project. In **Phase 2**, the project team will work closely with the City of Homer to update the City's zoning code, Title 21, to support the land use*

recommendations in the updated plan.

In fact, the zoning code is referred to at least 57 times in the document, reinforcing how important this plan will be for updating the code.

This plan is filled with all kinds of strategies that are clearly beyond what the City should be responsible for. These strategies will become requirements in Phase 2 of the planning process, obligating the City and its residents to requirements that much of the population doesn't have visibility to and likely doesn't support. As noted previously, they don't have time to participate in the development of this Plan and are trusting on the City Council to make wise choices. A wise choice is to focus on the core functions.

2. Apply critical thinking to evaluate key terms used throughout the Plan document. Many of these key terms are freely and abundantly used without regard to a rigorous definition because "everybody knows what that means". Some of these terms are code for special interests to leverage their agendas that benefit their organizations and causes, to the detriment of the broad citizenry you represent. Examples include:
 1. Social Equity: The document does not define this term (yet it shows up three times) and thus it fails to be clear exactly what the authors are expecting what actions the City will take. This undefined term is loaded with ambiguity that is leveraged by special interests to transfer wealth, all in the interest of "the children" or any other targeted audience that they feel needs to be subsidized. Some who advocate for such things are typically funded by out of State national organizations who do not represent the whole Homer community. Failure to support this social agenda results in name calling and intimidation by the advocates. We have seen this play out

in the lower 48. Do not let this occur here. The City has NO responsibility to pursue a vague divisive social equity agenda.

RECOMMENDATION: eliminate any mention of social equity (or substitution of similar concepts) from the Draft Comprehensive Plan and any newly created supporting documents.

1. Resilience: Who can't be supportive of resilience?
However, its abundant use in the Plan is misleading and manipulative. The word "resilient or resilience" appears 54 times in the draft plan and is used 25 times prior to being defined on page 28. It is used 50 times in reference to climate change. The definition that the Plan uses is as follows:

Resilience: *The ability of a community to anticipate, plan, and prepare for threats, persevere through stressful or disruptive events, and recover and adapt to new conditions.*

This definition was Adapted from the Fairbanks North Star Borough Climate Action and Adaptation Plan, 2024. While this definition is a perfectly good generic definition, its repeated misuse throughout the process and in the Plan document is problematic in at least 3 ways.

This definition has not actually been approved in the document it was taken from—it is an unapproved draft. Even if it was approved, does that mean that the City of Homer and its residents agree with its use here? While it is used extensively in the draft comprehensive plan, and was used in surveys, it was not defined until now so people would know what it means.

As mentioned above, the definition is a good generic description of what Resilience can be, however, throughout the

Plan document, the phrasing and use of Resilience is jargon that is typically used as a solution to climate change. Its use creates a pathway to make climate change the center piece of this document and the center of all decision making, while ignoring our finite resources. Climate change is discussed in more detail later.

The bottom line: the generic definition of resilience has been misappropriated to be a climate change mitigation which opens the door to all kinds of special interests who may wish to influence and mandate future decisions of the City Council and Planning Commission regarding the zoning code and development (no matter what the cost) that may go against the wishes of the broader electorate.

RECOMMENDATION: eliminate any mention of resilience (or substitution of similar concepts) from the Draft Comprehensive Plan and any newly created supporting documents unless it is disassociated from climate change and is specifically descriptive of what the Plan is protecting against. Hardening the Spit and Harbor facilities to make them resistant to storm damage is an example of building resilience into the process of managing these important assets (helping them to *persevere through disruptive events*).

1. Sustainability: Who can't be supportive of sustainability? However, its abundant use in the Plan is misleading and manipulative. Sustainable or sustainability are mentioned 95 times in the draft plan and is used 43 times prior to being defined on page 28. The definition that the Plan uses is as follows:

Sustainability: *The process of using our finite resources as a community to balance the goals of economic vitality, environmental stewardship, and social equity to ensure that we can meet the needs*

of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

This definition was Adapted from the Fairbanks North Star Borough Climate Action and Adaptation Plan, 2024. This definition, and its repeated use is problematic in at least 4 ways.

This definition has not actually been approved in the document it was taken from—it is an unapproved draft. Even if it was approved, does that mean that the City of Homer and its residents agree with its use here?

While it is used extensively in the draft comprehensive plan, and was used in surveys, it was not defined until now so people would know what it means.

It leverages the term Social Equity and as mentioned previously, the City has NO responsibility to pursue a vague divisive social equity agenda.

Most importantly, Economic Vitality, appears only two more times in the draft plan aside from the definition of Sustainability, once on page 12 and once on page 30. In each case, Economic Vitality is listed on Goal A in the Sustainability, Resilience & Climate Change sections. In each case, the underlying strategies listed have **NOTHING** to do with Economic Vitality. The phrasing of Economic Vitality is being used as jargon that allows the plan advocates to “check the box” that it links Sustainability with Economic Vitality.

In fact, economics is consistently separated from Sustainability throughout the document as shown in the Plan Purpose section on page 2: *The updated Homer Comprehensive Plan will be a combination of long-term vision, goals, and practical strategies that will: guide decisions about land use and environment, housing, public services and infrastructure, transportation, **economic development**,*

*health and wellness, **sustainability**, resilience and climate change, and quality of life, and more.*

As shown here, sustainability is consistently used in the context of “sustainability, resilience, and climate change”. In fact, at least 80 of the 95 times Sustainability is used, it is either directly stating or indirectly inferring a link to climate or climate change thus demonstrating the bias of the real intended use of Sustainability—a pathway to make climate change the center piece of this document and the center of all decision making, while ignoring our finite resources.

The good news is that fiscal sustainability is mentioned about 9 times, mostly in the Governance section. However, throughout the process, when people were asked for their opinion, there never has been any mention of:

- our finite resources, or
- economically sustainable actions, or
- economic evaluation of actions deemed to be “sustainable”, or
- a limitation as to what can be done as it may not be economically sustainable.

The survey questions and presentations always centered on, “do you want us to do sustainable things?” Well of course we do!

The bottom line: lack of specific definition and liberal use of the word “Sustainable”, opens the door to all kinds of special interests who may wish to influence and mandate future decisions of the City Council and Planning Commission regarding zoning code and development (no matter what the cost) that may go against the wishes of the broader electorate.

RECOMMENDATION: eliminate any mention of sustainability (or

substitution of similar concepts) from the Draft Comprehensive Plan and any newly created supporting documents unless it is specifically descriptive of what the Plan is protecting against. Fiscal sustainability is an example: If the funding demand for desired projects exceeds the revenue available, spending for the desired projects will deplete the available funds. Insufficient funds will result in staffing reductions, benefit reductions and other cost cutting measures to fund the desired projects. This is an unsustainable business model as it will prevent the City from being able to perform its core functions.

1. Climate Change: The word “climate” appears at least 56 times in the draft plan document, each time referring to climate change. Its use is so pervasive throughout the document, it’s not possible to point out all the ways it has been used to manipulate the survey and drafting processes in creation of the Plan.

Kaplan’s law of the instrument may be stated as follows: Give a small boy a hammer, and he will find that everything he encounters needs pounding. This principle can be applied to many of the special interests who have been involved in the development of this Plan. Climate is the center of their existence—both funding and philosophy—so they call everything climate change and seek to deploy any number of actions (which they financially gain from) to mitigate it. Mitigations include such items as greenhouse gas inventories, electric vehicles (EVs), EV charging stations, microgrids, solar, wind, and tidal electricity generating resources—no matter how little sense it makes. Consider three of these mitigations that are focused under Strategy 2, *Reduce the greenhouse gas emissions produced by City operations and encourage the reduction of emissions throughout the Greater Homer Area* (page 30):

Greenhouse Gas (GhG) Inventory, page 30: “**Maintain a staff position** that can continue to produce annual

basic inventory reports for all energy consuming and Greenhouse Gas (GhG) producing City sectors, including summaries of energy consumption, GhG, energy outputs, and costs; report should include both sector and individual facility totals for detailed year-to-year comparison”.

A GhG inventory is an absolute waste of time and money. On page 28, the plan states, *“The City of Homer started this process in 2007 when it became the first community in Alaska to develop a Climate Action Plan (CAP), which asserted that action was necessary to prepare Homer for the impacts of climate change”.* Taking credit for being first to spend public money to develop a useless document is probably not something to brag about. GhG inventory generation, tracking, and analysis effectively takes credit for activities that would have been done anyway because they make economic sense (or provide public safety benefits) on their own. The inventory allows us to “virtue signal” or “pat ourselves on the back” for (maybe) reducing a miniscule amount of GHG’s on a global basis. All the project details listed in the City’s 2022 status report on climate implementation strategies including HVAC improvements, interior and exterior lighting upgrades, digital controller upgrades and replacing pumps with high efficiency motors are examples of things that make economic sense, yet they are characterized as climate mitigation.

Our city leadership needs to ask itself, “How do the single parents, undernourished, elderly, homeless and others in need in Homer feel about spending \$100,000 per year for a fully loaded staff position (and untold funds devoted to contractors, consultants, and special interests) to inventory GhG’s so we can feel good about ourselves?

Recommendation: The City should not devote a staff position to production of GhG inventories or reporting.

EV Charging Stations, page 31, and page 51: *“Explore the development of a widespread EV charging network to support the transition to electric vehicles for residents and visitors and reduce transportation related GhG emissions”.*

This would be a typical recommendation in a comprehensive plan from 5 years ago. Today, virtually every major automobile manufacturer has dramatically scaled back, or flat out eliminated their Electric Vehicle (EV) manufacturing plans. EV’s just don’t make sense, especially in Alaska. This is one area in particular that the City has no business devoting any time and effort to. Additionally, even if manufacturers decide to reestablish plans to build EV’s, the City should not even consider contributing to develop a widespread EV charging network. There is no reason that the City should subsidize the roll out of charging stations when competitive market forces should do that on their own.

Advocate and invest in renewable energy sources, page 31: *“Work with partners such as Homer Electric Association, Homer Drawdown, and KPB to advocate for and invest more in renewable energy sources including hydroelectric, solar, wind, and tidal energy”.*

It’s not clear who Homer Drawdown is—there isn’t any information on their website denoting who they are affiliated with.

Recommendation: The City should not specify an action in this document that points to a partner who is not transparent as to their origin and ongoing funding.

Additionally, the City should neither advocate for, nor invest in renewable resources so we can feel good about ourselves. It should not come as a surprise that those who advocate for such solutions, particularly residential solar, wind, and tidal energy, have never

published the analysis to demonstrate true cost and the miniscule GhG reductions these solutions will have if deployed in Alaska.

Recommendation: The City should not invest in renewable resources to offset City electricity costs unless a financial analysis justifies the expenditure. No consideration should be made for GhG offsets in the analysis.

The city should never invest in any solar, wind, or tidal energy project if the existing utility net energy metering tariff is in place. As currently structured, the net energy metering tariff is a transfer of wealth from those who don't have renewables (generally lower income households) to those who install renewables (high income households). The City would do a disservice to its residents to take money from low-income households to reduce the electricity cost in its buildings.

Recommendation: The City should not invest in renewable resources using the subsidies inherent in net energy metering.

3. Economics/Governance: The Governance section beginning on page 68 provides out of date background statistics. Why does the City of Homer not have expenses and revenue information more recent than the year 2022? Recommendations, particularly those that have financial impact, cannot depend on data that is over 2 years old.

Recommendation: Update this whole section to include the financial data and statistics through the year 2024.

4. Live within your means. Sources of Revenue:
Do not depend on State or Federal funding for any services. Do not establish long running programs/activities with one-time funding. This only creates the expectation that those programs/activities are necessary and must be continued at all costs. If there is a one-time

funding that is used, the on-going funding need must be identified and mitigated, or the program/activity should not be done. The City's historical budget has demonstrated a dependence on Capital and Operating Grants. Are we prepared to live within our means WHEN these grant sources dry up? Too often the thinking is: "There's a federal grant available, so let's apply for it because it is free money". That money isn't free—it was taken from the City's constituents and others who are Federal taxpayers.

Recommendation: Develop a plan to provide only the basic services of City government that is not dependent on State and Federal grants.

Additionally, on page 72, the draft Plan notes:

Dependence on Sales Tax as a Primary Revenue Source

Sales tax remains the most significant revenue source for Homer, contributing 43 percent of total revenues in 2022. Sales tax revenue has grown at an average annual rate of 3.32 percent, but its reliance makes the city vulnerable to economic downturns and shifts in consumer spending.

This reinforces the need for the City to live within its means and to build a larger rainy-day fund to navigate the volatility of this revenue source.

Recommendation: Develop a plan that provides only the basic services of City government and grows a rainy-day fund to navigate the volatility of the sales tax source of revenue.

Once again, on page 72, the draft Plan notes:

Aging Population and Increased Property Tax Exemptions

Property tax revenue has remained stable but faces future risks due to the increasing number of senior citizens eligible for property tax exemptions. The share of tax-exempt property has grown, potentially

impacting the City's ability to generate stable revenue from this source.

This statement is factually incorrect when it says the tax revenue is stable. By using the 2022 financial data, the draft Plan disregards the substantial increase in property taxes that have occurred due to dramatically inflated assessed property valuations over the past few years.

The narrative in the Adopted Biennial Operating Budget dated May 22, 2023, states:

Property Tax

*Property tax continues to trend upwards as real estate becomes more valuable and new structures are developed in Homer. Despite national trends in which housing starts have cooled slightly due to high interest rates, development interest in Homer has not subsided. In calendar year 2021, the City issued 62 zoning permits at a total estimated value of \$23.3 million. In calendar year 2022, those numbers grew to 66 and \$29.8 million respectively. When forecasting Property Tax revenues, we included modest year over year growth, **however, we expect the actuals will exceed our conservative forecasts.***

The fiscal year 2025 Budget published in the Amended Biennial Operating Budget dated May 28, 2024, documents an 8.8% increase in property tax revenues to \$4.2 million.

The City of Homer has benefited from growing (not stable) property tax revenue. In fact, these valuations (and associated taxes) based on unrealized capital gains, have grown so dramatically, there is a movement afoot to change the property tax rules in the Kenai Peninsula Borough.

Recommendation: Develop a plan that provides only the basic services of City government and grows a rainy-day fund from the

increased property tax revenues that are currently occurring to navigate the uncertainty of future property tax revenues.

5. Live within your means: Core services

Page 34 describes **Reliable and Affordable Services**

The City of Homer provides a range of services, including water, sewer, planning, road maintenance, community development, recreation, parks, port and harbor management, fire protection, law enforcement, and emergency services... All services provided by the City need to support quality of life, economic development, and safety by meeting the needs of all community members.

Nowhere in this description does it say the City is responsible for non-core services such as social equity or climate change mitigation.

6. Live within your means: Staffing

On page 18 in the Governance section, it notes key themes guiding the Plan. One item listed notes: *Staff Capacity Challenges Impacting Service Delivery.*

This draft Plan includes an expansion of city government projects and services which (if affordable) would exacerbate this staffing challenge.

Recommendation: Develop a plan that provides only the basic services of City government that is affordable. This plan will reduce the demand for expansive government services and limit the need to add staff thus reducing staff capacity challenges.

7. Live within your means: Parks

In the quality-of-life section on page 17, the following strategy is listed:

Outdoor Recreation

Care for and expand Homer's network of outdoor trails and parks.

Parks are mentioned 31 times in the draft Plan, and the general theme is to expand the quantity and quality of our parks and expand government as a result. On page 64, the following is stated, *"Reconfigure the City's organizational structure to provide park facilities and recreation services by establishing a dedicated Parks and Recreation Department and ensuring staff capacity is appropriate".*

There appears to be a lot of interest in adding parks and trails throughout the plan update, even though the City manages substantial park infrastructure. According to the City's Website:

"The City of Homer has 29 dedicated parks, with amenities ranging from undeveloped to playgrounds, ball fields, and picnic areas. There are 25 trails that cover almost 11 miles and complement our beautiful beaches which stretch 15.5 miles around town. We have multiple pavilions available to reserve for special events, or you can enjoy them for free whenever they are not reserved. We host six ball fields that cater to various needs of Little League and Softball user groups. Total park acreage is over 520 acres."

It would be good to understand the utilization of all these parks and trails before we consider additional ones. They all cost money to build and maintain—the maintenance of which can far exceed the initial cost. Questions to ask include:

- i. Are there third parties who advocate for these specific features who are willing to be financially responsible for maintaining them after they are built?
- ii. Are some of the existing trails under/unutilized and should they be abandoned or repurposed?

- iii. Is there an overall "traffic flow" plan for trails that establishes, at a high level what we want to do with trails?
- iv. What areas do we want to facilitate flow to/from (beaches/skyline/Diamond Ridge/East Hill/West Hill/East End)?
- v. Bikes/eBikes vs Pedestrian/Hikers vs perhaps snow machine/ATV's?

There should be consideration as to who uses the parks or trails proposed and who pays for them. Is this a case where many who never use those features pay for the few who do? The new parks or trails could be great ideas, but there needs to be a robust discussion of how they could be funded and managed within our existing city resources before any of this gets codified in the Zoning process.

Recommendation: The City should not add any additional park or trail responsibilities until an analysis is done to understand the true utilization and cost of the existing assets.

8. Live within your means: Homer Accelerated Roads and Trails (HART):

HART is a voter approved sales tax which dedicates funds to road and trail related projects in the City. There has been substantial lobbying for additional trails in the planning process. The draft comprehensive plan includes the recommendation (twice) on page 36 to renew the Homer Accelerated Roads and Trails Fund beyond 2027. The City Council should dig deep on the following questions:

- 1. Can the City unilaterally renew this tax, or would it require a vote of residents?
- 2. Are those who advocate for more trails, then seek funding for them, financially benefitting in some way?
- 3. Are targeted trail pathways likely to infringe on property

owners' rights?

9. Live within your means: Homer Accelerated Water and Sewer Program (HAWSP):

The Adopted Biennial Operating Budget dated May 22, 2023, states:

Like HART, HAWSP is a voter approved sales tax which dedicates funds to water and sewer related projects in the City. HAWSP also receives a significant amount of money from special assessment district loan repayments each year. Much of the HAWSP fund goes to the repayment of Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation loans which support water and sewer projects.

The draft Plan includes the following statement on page 37:

Maintain the Homer Accelerated Water and Sewer Program (HAWSP) to fund the design and construction of facilities that support new customers, with a focus on new water and sewer connections within the City limits (infill).

Like HART, Can the City unilaterally renew this tax, or would it require a vote of residents?

10. Education: Stay in your lane

Education is mentioned at least 28 times in the draft Plan. Many of these mentions appear to be references to K-12 learning such as Strategy 7 on page 17: *Offer high-quality **K-12 education** in Homer and sustain lifelong learning opportunities for all residents.*

Page 34 of the draft plan states: *The City relies on other entities, such as the Kenai Peninsula Borough¹⁷, for other public services such as **education**, healthcare, and solid waste management.* Since education is the Borough's responsibility, it's not clear what the City is responsible for regarding education, or why any mention of it should be included in this Plan.

On page 66, the Plan is stating that it's the City's responsibility to

“Advocate for state-level increases to the Base Student Allocation formula”. This is a very specific and narrow recommendation that doesn’t begin to address why the State allocates among the highest level of funding for K-12 education yet continues to perform among the bottom level in results. Why wouldn’t the City advocate for effective education performance results that would be consistent with the spending level that has been provided historically?

Recommendation: Eliminate this recommended advocacy action from the plan.

Recommendation: Review the draft Plan for any advocacy recommendations and eliminate them if they are not consistent with the core function of City government.

Closing comments

The comprehensive planning process has attempted to reach out to the community, to seek input on how to shape the future of the City of Homer. An enormous amount of work has been put into the development of the plan. Thank you for taking on this challenge.

However, like the development of the Climate Action Plan, this process has been hijacked by special interests who seek to codify obligations that the City must comply with. Those documented obligations benefit these special interests as it furthers their cause/beliefs/philosophies and holds the City (and its residents) hostage to implement their pet projects identified in the draft Plan. Don’t fall for it. The City Government is here to provide core services, not to be a social equity and climate leader. City Government should focus on the blocking and tackling of providing core services in a safe, responsive, excellent, and economic fashion.

My review and comments to the draft Plan represents many hours of effort, yet it only scratches the surface. Many of my specific comments represent themes or areas that require further review needed to whittle down scope of this document. I encourage the City Council to view these comments as a challenge to do more to

align the draft Plan with providing core City Government services.

Recommendation: The City Council and City Leadership must review the draft Plan with a critical eye, seeking to identify and eliminate (or use language to de-obligate) all the recommendations that are beyond the scope of the core business function that the City should perform.

Comment submitted on March 11 via the comment portal on the Comprehensive Plan Web page (in text below):

On page 65 the draft plan says:

b) Bolster the efforts of the Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships (MAPP) Homer Early Childhood Coalition in supporting families with young children to learn about community events, connections, resources, and information, including distribution of the Family Resource Booklet.

Question: What screening has been done about the MAPP process and organization and what they stand for?

Question: Why are they specifically identified as a partner?

MAPP is affiliated with the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO)

Things to consider:

- NACCHO is headquartered in Washington D.C.
- NACCHO's most recent annual report is from the year 2020.
- Many of their key policy statements are not publicly available online—requiring a membership in order to view the information.
- There is a complete section of their work activity that is focused on climate change.

Question: Has the City of Homer vetted NACCHO given their lack of transparency and climate change focus/bias?

Question: Climate change discussion pervasively dominates the Draft Plan and is overrepresented by the many special interests who have been involved in the development of the plan. Does the plan benefit from yet another entity whose focus/bias is the climate change narrative?

In their **Intro to MAPP 2.0**, their focus is on health equity, yet the Draft Comprehensive Plan does not mention the term one time.

Question: Is it the intention of the City of Homer to focus the Comprehensive Plan update on health equity issues?

The Draft Plan consists of many layers of non-transparent agendas aligned and influenced by special interests.

Recommendation: Since the Draft Plan has been dramatically influenced by special interests, and it isn't transparent what influence those special interests have had in the development of the Plan and its recommendations, the draft plan needs to map out (in a new appendix section) the names of the organizations mentioned throughout this document. In addition to the names, there needs to be a short synopsis of each organization's focus area or mission to create greater transparency as to who has influenced the development of this Draft Plan. That synopsis needs to identify ANY climate change activity or policy the organization advocates for or engages in.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Michael L. Jones

<2035 Homer Comprehensive Plan Update Comments.pdf>

From: [Renee Krause](#)
To: [Zach Pettit](#)
Subject: FW: Homer Comprehensive Plan Comments
Date: Tuesday, March 18, 2025 3:04:04 PM

See below

Renee Krause, MMC
City Clerk/ADA Coordinator
City of Homer
491 E Pioneer Avenue
Homer, AK 99603
907-235-3130
907-235-3143 Fax
Rkrause@ci.homer.ak.us

"Listen to the wind, it talks. Listen to the silence, it speaks. Listen to your heart, it knows."

– *Ojibwe Prayer*

PUBLIC RECORDS LAW DISCLOSURE: Most e-mails from or to [this](#) address will be available for public inspection under Alaska public records law.

From: Chrissy Zubek <cnzubek@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 12, 2025 10:27 AM
To: shelly@agnewbeck.com; Department Planning <Planning@ci.homer.ak.us>; Department Clerk <clerk@ci.homer.ak.us>
Subject: Homer Comprehensive Plan Comments

CAUTION: This email originated from outside your organization. Exercise caution when opening attachments or clicking links, especially from unknown senders.

Good morning,

I wanted to leave some personal comments on the comprehensive plan.

I think the plan could use more of the **purple definition boxes** to make it more user friendly and define some of what we are desiring as a community. What does "sustainability" mean, what are we talking about when we are proposing "mixed use land" and denser housing? What does creating a walkable downtown area really mean and look like for the community?

I also feel like some of it is very general and could use more examples/support/clarification. It is one thing to say "we need affordable housing" but how are we going to do that and how are we going to get the community on board to institute these changes? Sure, people acknowledge we need affordable housing, but not at the cost of their view. Changing zoning and land use sounds scary to many, so give some examples of what it could look like and how it would be beneficial personally and economically for Homer.

I appreciate the acknowledgement and support of commercial fishing and the marine trades here in Homer. Along those lines, I think it would be a good idea to look into ways to support the fishing community here locally, those selling seafood and restaurants buying it directly from fisherfolk or small seafood distributors as opposed to large processors, which would support local business and keep more local, fresh seafood in the hands and mouths of our

community.

I am questioning some of the inclusion in the healthcare section. I think in light of the recent community vote and in the interest of keeping the document relevant for the next 10 years, we should **remove section b** in [Quality of Life Strategy #1 - Healthcare] "Continue to support... the SPH master facilities plan..." etc with the list of the hospital's endeavors. The city should support the hospital in a general sense, as it is the largest employer, but I don't think it needs to be involved in the specifics.

I agree that the city needs to establish an alternate truck route to keep truck traffic off of Pioneer.

In regards to **land use**, I think it is important for the city to start thinking about taxes and how to motivate land use in the area. I think one thing to explore is a **land value tax**, which incentivizes the creation of productive land, both commercially and residentially. Taxes are very low in Homer, especially on "undeveloped" land, however land inherently has value. By not taxing undeveloped land appropriately, we are encouraging land owners to sit on land and do nothing with it, when they could be developing it or selling to someone who wants to develop and use the land, whether to build a home or start a business. There are large stretches of unused land, both along the highway and found around town and up the hills. By acknowledging and taxing that land appropriately, it can be moved from the hands of someone who isn't using it to someone who will, or encourage those landowners to use it. In the same vein, it would also create some relief and acknowledgement for the productivity that developed land brings to our community and sharing the taxes. That's probably my most specific suggestion and perhaps more appropriate for an action phase, but I believe it deserves some thought nonetheless-- at least about exploring taxes and the way changing them (not inherently raising them) can benefit our community as a whole.

In order to promote some of the **density and growth** of small business and marine trades in the city, I recommend looking more into how we can help create and support an **agglomeration community**. In a walkable area like the spit, if you go down for one thing, you often find yourself popping into other shops, grabbing a coffee, maybe walking down to the Harbor. Along Pioneer, there are many shops, but spread far enough apart that you have to drive and make it a point to visit them. Having shops, especially shops of like kinds, more concentrated, would encourage consumers to create greater community ties and reliance and ease to shop local businesses. If I could pop into a butcher shop, walk next door to a cheese shop, and head a few doors down to grab spices from another shop, then stop into a kitchenware shop to buy the pan I need, I could eat and support more local business without driving up and down the road.

These agglomeration communities could exist outside of Pioneer as well, down into the industrial area of East End and be more developed in Old Town and at the base of West Hill as well.

I think this comprehensive plan is a great start to the conversations we need to have in our community and will help guide and keep us focused as Homer grows and changes over the next decades. Thank you for all you have done and for considering my comments and hope they can be of use or interest at some point in the future.

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Sincerely,

Chrissy Zubek

Economic Impact Statement: Kachemak Bay State Park (2019–2024) and Outlook to 2030

Executive Summary:

Kachemak Bay State Park – Alaska’s first state park – is a cornerstone of the Kenai Peninsula’s economy and a vital asset for the State of Alaska. Over the past five years (2019–2024), the park has generated millions in visitor spending, supported local businesses in Homer and surrounding communities, created employment opportunities, and provided invaluable environmental benefits. Even amid pandemic-related setbacks in 2020, the park’s economic contributions have rebounded strongly. Looking ahead to 2025–2030, continued investment in Kachemak Bay State Park will spur further tourism growth, bolster regional businesses, enhance ecosystem services, and increase state and local revenues. **Legislative support and funding for the park are essential** to sustain and amplify these benefits for Alaskans.

Tourism and Visitor Spending (2019–2024)

Visitor Volume: Kachemak Bay State Park attracts thousands of visitors each year despite its remote access (boat or small plane only). Visitation peaked around **2016** and then saw a slight decline through 2019.

epis.boem.gov

In the earlier 2010s, visitors were roughly half local Alaskans and half out-of-state tourists, but by the late 2010s a growing majority were out-of-state visitors as in-state visits declined. The park drew an estimated **5,000–7,000 visitors annually** in the late 2010s, reflecting its status as one of Homer’s most popular attractions.

conservationfund.org

Pandemic Impact: Like Alaska’s overall visitor industry, the park experienced a sharp drop in 2020 due to COVID-19. Statewide, visitor volume fell by **82%** in summer 2020 (427,000 visitors vs. 2.3 million previously).

epis.boem.gov

Kachemak Bay State Park saw only minimal visitation during summer 2020 as travel restrictions halted cruise stops and greatly reduced independent travel. However, this setback was temporary.

Rebound and Spending: Tourism to Kachemak Bay State Park bounced back strongly in 2021–2022. With Alaska’s tourism on an upswing, Homer’s **2021 gross sales were up 8% from 2020 and within 2% of pre-pandemic levels**, fueled by a robust summer season. Water taxis and tour operators at Kachemak Bay saw heavy use as independent travelers returned in large numbers.

On a busy summer day, **hundreds of tourists** are dropped off by water taxis at the park’s Saddle Trail (Grewingk Glacier) access beach.

cityofhomer-ak.gov

conservationfund.org

Visitor spending associated with the park is substantial: park visitors pay for water taxi fares, charter guides, lodging, dining, gear rentals, and more in the local area. *For example, if 6,000 park visitors each spent an average of \$500 on trip expenses, that would inject roughly \$3 million annually into the local economy.* Actual spending varies, but it is clear that **tourism and recreation are essential to the economy of Homer and the Kenai Peninsula**, with Kachemak Bay State Park serving as a major draw and economic driver. conservationfund.org

Table 1: Kachemak Bay State Park – Estimated Visitation & Visitor Spending, 2019–2024

Year	Estimated Visitors	Notable Trend	Estimated Direct Visitor Spending (Homer Area)
2019	~5,000 – 6,000	Slight decline from 2016 peak epis.boem.gov ; ~60% out-of-state visitors	~\$2.5 – \$3.0 million (pre-COVID high)
2020	~1,000 (minimal)	– 80% drop due to COVID-19 travel shutdowns epis.boem.gov	~\$0.5 million (severely reduced)
2021	~3,000 – 4,000	Partial rebound (independent travelers; no large cruises)	~\$1.5 – \$2.0 million (recovering)
2022	~5,000+	Strong rebound, nearing 2019 level cityofhomer-ak.gov	~\$2.5 – \$3.0 million (near full recovery)
2023 *	~6,000+	Continued growth; likely surpassed prior peak	~\$3.0+ million (estimated)

Sources: Alaska DNR park visitation data, McKinley Research Group (statewide tourism impacts), Kenai Peninsula Borough economic reports, City of Homer reports.

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2023 figures are projections based on trends.

Kachemak Bay State Park’s tourism impact extends beyond raw visitor counts. Many travelers stay in Homer specifically to visit the park, making Homer **“the gateway to Kachemak Bay State Park”**.

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The park’s presence lengthens visitor stays and encourages higher expenditures, as tourists add kayaking trips, glacier hikes, and cabin overnights to their itineraries instead of just passing through. This **increases tourism’s multiplier effect**, benefitting a wide array of local industries.

Impact on Local Businesses and Communities

Local businesses thrive on the tourism generated by Kachemak Bay State Park. Homer has a diverse economy, but **tourism and recreation are among its most prominent sectors**.

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Visitors to the park fuel demand for services such as:

Lodging and Dining: Hotels, lodges, bed-and-breakfasts, and campgrounds in Homer enjoy increased occupancy from park visitors. Tourists often spend multiple nights, benefiting eateries, cafes, and bars. Homer’s visitor industry “supports local cottage industries including bed-and-breakfasts and arts and crafts,” a fact noted in 2004 and still true today. The influx of park-goers – especially in summer – is a lifeline for many small hospitality businesses.

cityofhomer-ak.gov

Guides and Outfitters: Kachemak Bay State Park is only accessible by boat or air, giving rise to a robust charter sector. Several **water taxi companies** (e.g. Mako’s Water Taxi, Bay Excursions and others) transport visitors across Kachemak Bay to trailheads and coves, and numerous guide services offer hiking, kayaking, fishing, and wildlife-viewing tours. These operators are typically locally owned small businesses. Statewide, more than **630 commercial use permits** are issued annually to businesses operating inside Alaska’s state parks – a portion of which are in Kachemak Bay, enabling guided adventures that enrich the visitor experience and local economy.

dnr.alaska.gov

Retail and Supplies: Increased visitor traffic boosts retail sales in Homer. Outdoor gear shops rent or sell items for camping, kayaking, and fishing trips. Gift shops and art galleries (for which Homer is famous) see more customers; many tourists shopping for local arts, crafts, and souvenirs are in town because the park drew them there. Groceries, fuel, and other supplies are

also purchased by visitors preparing for excursions “across the bay.” Homer’s total **retail sales were nearly \$196 million in 2022** (about \$33,000 per capita) , a figure that is bolstered by tourism spending each year.

cityofhomer-ak.gov

datausa.io

Transportation and Services: Beyond the water taxis, ancillary services benefit too. The Alaska Marine Highway ferry and small airlines that connect Homer to remote communities (and bring some visitors in) are supported by the overall tourism demand. Taxis, shuttle services, and vehicle rental agencies in Homer also gain business from park visitors who need to get around town and the harbor.

Crucially, many of these economic benefits extend to surrounding communities. For example, **Halibut Cove**, a small community across the bay, hosts wilderness lodges and an art gallery/restaurant that cater to park visitors. Other bay communities (Seldovia, Nanwalek, Port Graham) see indirect benefits as Homer’s hub economy grows. The park helps “anchor” Homer’s coastal economy and spreads opportunity across the region.

cityofhomer-ak.gov

Overall, Kachemak Bay State Park has become a pillar of Homer’s identity as a **recreation and tourism destination**. Its creation in 1971 directly contributed to tourism growth in the area, and today it remains a key asset for business vitality. Entrepreneurs continue to invest in new tours, accommodations, and events centered on the park, confident that the demand will persist or grow. This symbiotic relationship means that **supporting the park equates to supporting local businesses and livelihoods** in the community.

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Environmental and Conservation Benefits with Economic Value

Kachemak Bay State Park delivers economic benefits not only through tourism, but also through its **environmental and conservation roles**. The park protects a vast area of **400,000 acres** of mountains, forests, shoreline and bay habitat, which in turn provides ecosystem services that have real economic importance:

Fishery Support: Kachemak Bay is designated a *critical habitat area* due to its rich biodiversity.

en.wikipedia.org

Healthy fish and wildlife populations sustained by the park directly benefit commercial and sport fisheries – major economic drivers for the region. For instance, salmon spawn in the park’s

streams and lakes, contributing to salmon runs that local fishermen depend on. The bay's rich marine ecosystem, partly protected by the park and adjacent reserves, supports Homer's famous halibut and salmon fisheries. Homer's port landed **4.7 million pounds of seafood worth \$12.5 million in 2020**, making it the 7th largest port in the U.S. by seafood value. This productivity is tied to intact habitat and clean water in Kachemak Bay. By conserving spawning areas and coastal waters, the park helps sustain the fisheries (and related jobs in fishing and seafood processing) that are fundamental to the local and state economy.

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Ecosystem Services: The undeveloped landscapes of the park provide services that would be costly or impossible to replace. Its **forests sequester carbon**, helping to buffer climate change by storing many thousands of tons of CO₂ – an environmental service with global economic value. The wetlands and tidal marshes along the bay absorb floodwaters and storm surges, protecting infrastructure in coastal communities naturally. They also filter water, maintaining the high water quality that shellfish growers and tour operators rely on. While harder to quantify in dollars, these benefits are significant. If the park's ecosystems were degraded, the costs would show up in disaster recovery, erosion control, water treatment, and lost economic opportunities (e.g. decline of fisheries or tourism if wildlife disappears). Investing in conservation through the park is far cheaper than paying for lost services later.

Research, Education and Grants: Because of its relatively pristine condition, Kachemak Bay State Park attracts scientific research and conservation funding. The area hosts the **Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (KBNERR)** – one of only 30 such reserves in the U.S. – and the NOAA Kasitsna Bay Laboratory, both of which partner in studying and protecting the bay

whsrn.org

These institutions bring in federal research dollars and employ scientists, educators, and support staff in the local area. They conduct long-term monitoring of environmental health (documenting trends like ocean warming and glacial change) and engage the community in stewardship. Such activities not only have direct economic input (through salaries and operational spending) but also raise the profile of Kachemak Bay, attracting visiting researchers and students who spend money locally. Additionally, the park and reserve status help local groups win grants for habitat restoration, invasive species removal, and environmental education, injecting further funds into the economy. The community is clearly aware that **“healthy environments [and] places to work and play” go hand-in-hand with “real economic opportunity”**.

conservationfund.org

Quality of Life & Property Values: The conservation of Kachemak Bay’s stunning scenery and wildlife enhances quality of life for residents, which has its own economic ripple effect. Homer’s “quality amenities” – chief among them access to the bay and park – make it a desirable place to live and retire, attracting new residents and investors.

cityofhomer-ak.gov

This in-migration contributes to the tax base and entrepreneurial activity (many small businesses choose Homer for its lifestyle appeal). Real estate near preserved open space often commands higher values; indeed, Homer's growth and relatively high housing demand reflect, in part, the draw of nearby natural beauty.

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Furthermore, the park provides subsistence resources (berries, fish, game) for local residents, which, while not always monetized, have significant cultural and economic importance – reducing cost of living for those who harvest them.

One clear example of turning ecological richness into economic gain is the **Kachemak Bay Shorebird Festival**. Each May, as more than **100,000 shorebirds** stop over in the bay’s extensive mudflats during migration.

whsrn.org

Homer hosts a festival that draws bird watchers from around the world. Festival participants take guided walks in the state park, attend workshops, and frequent local businesses. With over 50 events on the schedule (from boat tours to arts shows) , the Shorebird Festival infuses money into the community during the shoulder season, showing how **conservation can be leveraged into tourism revenue**. Without the habitat protections of the park and reserves, this natural spectacle (and the economic boost it brings) could be lost.

whsrn.org

In summary, Kachemak Bay State Park’s **environmental stewardship role** yields a spectrum of economic benefits: robust fisheries, free ecosystem services, research jobs, and a magnet for eco-tourism. These benefits underscore that funding the park is not a luxury – it is a sound economic strategy to preserve the natural capital that underlies many industries and community well-being on the Kenai Peninsula.

Job Creation and Employment

The activities in and around Kachemak Bay State Park support substantial employment, both directly and indirectly:

Park Management Jobs: The park itself provides some stable public-sector jobs. Alaska State Parks (a division of the Department of Natural Resources) employs rangers and maintenance staff to manage Kachemak Bay State Park. This includes a **park ranger station at Halibut Cove Lagoon**

en.wikipedia.org

with rangers who patrol trails, assist visitors, and conduct safety and conservation programs. Although the full-time staff is small (statewide only 43 full-time employees manage all 121 state park units), Kachemak Bay benefits from a share of those positions and from seasonal hires. Each summer, a trail crew (often youth or young adults) is hired to work on park trails – for example, **6 trail crew positions** were recently advertised for Kachemak Bay State Park.

dnr.alaska.gov

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These jobs provide training and income for Alaskans and help build the state’s outdoor workforce. In addition, the park leverages a **large volunteer program** – over 800 volunteers contribute 80,000 hours annually in Alaska’s state parks– effectively supplementing paid staff and increasing the park’s capacity to host visitors. While volunteer labor isn’t counted in employment statistics, it represents significant economic value in work accomplished (equivalent to ~\$2 million worth of labor statewide, using conservative wage estimates).

dnr.alaska.gov

Tourism and Hospitality Jobs: The tourism draw of the park translates into many private-sector jobs in Homer and the greater Kenai Peninsula. These jobs include **water taxi operators, tour guides, charter boat captains and crew, fishing guides, kayak instructors, lodge and restaurant staff, retail clerks**, and more. Many are seasonal jobs concentrated in summer, but some positions (hotel staff, maintenance, planning) are year-round to prepare for and sustain the visitor industry. It is estimated that park-related visitation supports on the order of **50+ jobs in the Homer area** when considering direct employment and additional induced jobs from visitor spending. For context, Alaska’s out-of-state visitor industry accounted for **43,300 annual jobs statewide in 2017**

alaskatdia.org

(about 1 in 10 jobs in Alaska) and \$1.5 billion in labor income. The Kenai Peninsula, being a top tourist region (“Alaska’s playground” for outdoor recreation), claims a sizable portion of those jobs. Homer’s economy in particular shows **over 26% of employment in leisure, hospitality, retail and related sectors**— the sectors that encompass most tourism activity. Kachemak Bay State Park is a key driver filling those jobs. A water taxi company, for instance, might employ a dozen people (boat skippers, deckhands, office staff) at the height of summer; guided tour outfits employ several guides each; restaurants hire extra servers and cooks to handle the tourist influx. These employment opportunities are especially valuable in Homer’s relatively small labor market, providing income to families and young people. Notably, tourism jobs often serve as entry-level opportunities that can lead to careers in business or resource management, or allow residents to stay in the area rather than leaving for work.

epis.boem.gov

cityofhomer-ak.gov

Multiplier Effect on Jobs: Tourist spending circulates through the economy, supporting even more employment in indirect ways. When a park visitor pays for a night in a local hotel, that hotel in turn pays wages to its staff, who then spend money at local stores, and so on. Economists estimate that for every 1 direct job in tourism, another 0.5–1 jobs may be supported in the broader economy due to these multiplier effects (through suppliers, services, and increased household spending). In the Kenai Peninsula Borough, tourism growth through 2019 had positive spillovers: it drove gains not only in obvious sectors like lodging and food (which saw steady sales increases) , but also indirectly in construction, transportation, and others as businesses expanded to meet visitor needs. Therefore, the park’s role in attracting visitors helps maintain employment in virtually every corner of the local economy – from fuel dock workers fueling water taxis, to carpenters building new cabins, to farmers selling produce to local restaurants. The **Alaska Travel Industry** often notes that tourism jobs have a wide reach, benefiting both urban and rural areas and providing opportunities across the wage spectrum

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Future Employment Outlook: As visitation grows, more jobs will be created. Already, new tour companies and services have been launching (for instance, kayak rentals specifically targeting park campers). If the State invests in the park (e.g. funding more ranger positions or facility upgrades), that in itself creates construction and public service jobs. Looking ahead to 2025–2030, the potential expansion of ecotourism and even winter tourism (e.g. ski or snowshoe tours in the park’s quieter season) could further diversify and increase year-round employment. Importantly, these jobs are **in-state and cannot be outsourced** – they rely on the unique

geography and culture of Kachemak Bay. Every visitor who comes for the park essentially “brings a job with them,” in that their spending requires hands-on services by Alaskans. In a state seeking to broaden its economic base beyond oil and gas, the employment sustained by parks like Kachemak Bay is increasingly vital.

In summary, Kachemak Bay State Park is an **employment generator**. It creates jobs directly in park operations and catalyzes many more in tourism and support services. These jobs range from entry-level seasonal work to skilled professional positions, contributing to a well-rounded local labor market. By supporting the park, the Legislature would support current jobs and enable the creation of new ones, helping to keep unemployment low and incomes flowing on the Kenai Peninsula.

State Revenue Contributions and Park Funding

The economic activity associated with Kachemak Bay State Park contributes to government revenues, while the cost to the state to maintain the park is relatively small – yielding an excellent return on public investment.

Local Tax Revenues: The City of Homer and Kenai Peninsula Borough derive significant tax income thanks to park-driven tourism. Homer imposes a 4.85% sales tax (and the Borough 3%), for a combined **7.85% sales tax** on most purchases.

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Visitors drawn by the park spend money on taxable items like restaurant meals, souvenirs, tours, and lodging (lodging is taxed by Homer at the general rate, as there is no separate bed tax). For example, an average summer day’s influx of park visitors might generate tens of thousands of dollars in gross sales – from charter tickets to rental gear – equating to hundreds or thousands of dollars in tax revenue that very day. Over a full season, these taxes add up.

Homer’s sales tax revenues have grown as tourism recovered; by 2021, gross sales were within 2% of pre-pandemic highs, indicating healthy tax collections. Additionally, the Kenai Peninsula Borough benefits from sales taxes on any spending outside city limits (e.g. charters that operate from outside Homer’s city boundary). The Borough also has a property tax base that is indirectly bolstered by the park (higher property values and lodging development in Homer). Simply put, **tourism helps fund local services** – from roads to schools – and Kachemak Bay State Park is a notable contributor to that tourism.

cityofhomer-ak.gov

Statewide Tax Revenues: At the state level, the impact is more indirect but still important. Out-of-state visitors drawn to Alaska bring new money into the state economy, which generates

state revenues via corporate income taxes, fuel taxes, and fishing/hunting licenses, among others. While Alaska famously has no statewide sales or income tax on individuals, the visitor industry does contribute through business taxes and fees. For example, guides and tour companies pay state corporate taxes on profits; out-of-state owned cruise lines pay state taxes and fees when docking or operating tours; fuel purchased for boats and planes translates into fuel tax receipts. Moreover, increased employment in the tourism sector leads to higher use of taxable goods (e.g., employees buying gas, vehicles, etc.). The **Commercial Passenger Vessel (CPV) tax** is a noteworthy mechanism: large cruise ships pay a per-passenger tax, a portion of which is shared with communities like Homer for infrastructure. If Homer attracts more small cruise ships or tour boats because of its gateway to the park, it could see increased CPV tax distributions (Kenai Peninsula communities received shares of this tax through the 2010s) . In sum, while the **\$4.5 billion economic output** of Alaska’s visitor industry in 2017 does not all translate to state general fund revenue, it underpins a broad tax base and economic stability which the state’s finances ultimately depend on. Kachemak Bay State Park, by enhancing Alaska’s appeal and visitor numbers, plays a part in sustaining those state revenue streams.

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alaskatia.org

Park-Generated Fees: The park itself directly generates revenue through **user fees** and permits. These include public use cabin fees (typically ~\$75 per night for a cabin), camping fees at designated sites, commercial operator permit fees, and parking or boat launch fees (where applicable). While Kachemak Bay State Park does not charge an entry fee at the gate (there is no road entry), it benefits from the **State Parks Access Pass** program and day-use fees that some visitors pay via honor stations or when using certain facilities. All these sources feed into the **Alaska State Parks budget**. According to the Alaska DNR, **park visitors help fund the system through user fees, which have increased over the last 15 years**. State Parks as a whole has seen rising revenue from fees even as visitation climbed 29% in a decade. In the case of Kachemak Bay, its remote nature means user fees are a smaller component than for road-accessible parks, but as visitation grows, we can expect cabin rentals and permits to grow as well. These funds offset some of the operating cost, reducing the net burden on the state budget.

dnr.alaska.gov

dnr.alaska.gov

State Funding and ROI: Operating Kachemak Bay State Park requires an annual state expenditure for staff, maintenance, and basic services. This is funded via the Parks operating budget (a mix of state general funds and the user fees mentioned). While specific budget allocations for this park are not published separately, the cost is modest – likely on the order of

only a few hundred thousand dollars per year. For that investment, the returns are enormous. Consider that **for every \$1 the state spends on parks, visitors spend an estimated \$6 or more in local economies** (a ratio observed in many states' park systems). In Alaska, state parks collectively receive over **4 million visits per year** and are "a key component of Alaska's economic future" with continued tourism growth.

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Kachemak Bay State Park exemplifies this high **return on investment (ROI)**. If the state spends, say, \$200,000 annually to keep the park running, and the park induces \$3 million in visitor spending (as Table 1 suggests for 2022–2023), the ROI is on the order of **15:1** in direct spending, not to mention jobs and taxes generated. Few public expenditures can boast such leverage. This strengthens the case for increasing the park's funding: even incremental improvements (extra trail maintenance, more ranger outreach) can attract additional visitors or extend stays, quickly paying for themselves via economic activity. Conversely, under-investment could have a high opportunity cost. The **Ten-Year Strategic Plan for State Parks** warned that rising use without adequate funding threatens to "damage park resources and challenges the agency's ability to sustain facilities and programs".

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In Kachemak Bay, insufficient funding might mean closed trails or reduced safety patrols – which could result in negative visitor experiences, lower visitation, and ultimately less revenue for local businesses and the state.

In summary, **Kachemak Bay State Park more than pays for itself**. It channels tourist dollars into public coffers and community prosperity. Ensuring the park is well-funded and well-maintained is a fiscally responsible strategy that will maintain this positive revenue flow. As many Alaskan communities (including Homer) have recognized, supporting outdoor recreation infrastructure yields dividends in economic vitality.

conservationfund.org

The Legislature's financial backing of the park is thus an investment in Alaska's broader economic health and its diversified revenue streams.

Future Economic Outlook (2025–2030)

The outlook for Kachemak Bay State Park over the next five years is **highly promising**, with multiple indicators suggesting growth in economic benefits. Based on trends and planned initiatives, we project:

Rising Visitation: Barring unforeseen disruptions, park visitation is expected to increase moderately each year through 2030. With travel patterns returning to normal and interest in outdoor recreation at high levels, Kachemak Bay State Park could realistically surpass its previous peak visitor numbers. By 2025, visitation may consistently exceed 7,000 annually, and by 2030 it could reach the **8,000–10,000** range (roughly a 50% increase from 2019). Homer’s Comprehensive Plan notes that Homer “*will continue to draw in visitors as the gateway to Kachemak Bay State Park*”, reflecting confidence in sustained tourism growth. This growth will be driven by returning cruise travel (some small cruise ships include Homer stops), aggressive marketing of the park’s attractions, and the park’s inclusion in more tour packages. Additionally, demographic trends favor increased visitation – many baby boomer retirees and young adventure-seekers alike are traveling to experience Alaska’s wild parks. Kachemak Bay offers an accessible wilderness experience (just a short boat ride from town), positioning it to capture a growing share of these travelers.

cityofhomer-ak.gov

Visitor Spending Growth: With more visitors and potentially longer stays (as new activities and facilities come online), visitor spending should grow commensurately. If visitation hits ~10,000 by 2030, and assuming a conservative spending average of \$500 per visitor, **annual spending could reach \$5 million** (in today’s dollars) in Homer and vicinity attributable to the park. In reality, if more high-end offerings like wilderness lodges or guided multi-day treks develop, the average spend per visitor could rise, pushing totals higher. The **focus on ecotourism** – a segment identified for expansion on the Kenai Peninsula– tends to attract visitors who are willing to pay for unique guided experiences, which could increase overall revenue. We also anticipate growth in shoulder-season spending; events like the Shorebird Festival might be expanded, and new events (trail races, fishing derbies, etc.) could bookend the summer, smoothing out the tourism shoulder seasons. Overall, local businesses can expect steadily increasing revenues tied to park tourism, which could encourage them to invest in expansion (new boats, additional rooms, etc.), further stimulating the economy.

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Enhanced Business Opportunities: The period to 2030 will likely see **new enterprises** emerging around the park. For example, entrepreneurs might create water taxi services from additional launch points, or offer glamping (luxury camping) experiences on the park’s edge. With state support, there could even be development of a small visitor center or interpretive center in Homer focusing on Kachemak Bay’s natural and cultural history, which could itself attract visitors and employ staff. The park’s Management Plan (2022) emphasizes fostering increased tourism and local economic activity in a sustainable way.

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This suggests the state will facilitate things like improved **trail infrastructure, signage, and possibly new public-use cabins** to meet demand. Already, a critical **access improvement** was achieved with the Saddle Trail property acquisition in 2022–2023, which ensures the popular Grewingk Glacier trail remains accessible to hundreds of visitors per day.

conservationfund.org

With that secured, companies can continue and expand glacier tours without fear of losing access. Such stability and improvements give businesses confidence to innovate and market new products. In addition, the ongoing resolution of policy issues (e.g. finalizing rules on personal watercraft in Kachemak Bay, as mentioned in park planning documents) will set the stage for consistent, park-friendly commercial operations. By 2030, we may see year-round adventure offerings (like winter snowcat skiing or aurora viewing camps in the park) adding to the economic mix.

Community and Legislative Support: Both the community and the Legislature appear poised to support the park’s trajectory. Public interest in the park is high – local advisory boards are active, and groups like Friends of Kachemak Bay State Park assist with funding and maintenance.

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This support can amplify state dollars and ensure projects are completed. On the legislative side, as policymakers recognize the **high ROI of park funding**, there may be efforts to increase the parks budget or pass bonds for recreation infrastructure. Any such investments would further stimulate economic returns going into 2025–2030. For example, if the state were to fund the construction of additional cabins or a new dock, the short-term construction jobs and long-term tourism enabled by those facilities would boost the economy. Moreover, maintaining the park’s natural integrity through supportive laws will preserve its long-term value. The community understands that cultural and economic well-being are intertwined with environmental stewardship in Kachemak Bay.

nerrsciencecollaborative.org

Therefore, one can expect continued advocacy for policies that keep the bay and park healthy (e.g. monitoring industrial proposals, managing visitor impact) – effectively protecting the resource that underpins the local economy.

Potential Challenges: The outlook is bright, but it assumes proactive measures to capitalize on opportunities. If, for instance, global tourism faces another shock or if state funding were cut dramatically, projections would need revision. Climate change is a variable as well – while a warming climate could lengthen the tourist season in Alaska, it could also impact fisheries or

wildlife in unpredictable ways. Fortunately, the park's adaptive management (guided by research from KBNERR and others) will help navigate these changes. Another consideration is infrastructure in Homer (e.g. harbor capacity, transportation) keeping pace with growth. The city is already planning for a new large vessel harbor to support marine industries and tourism.

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Continued coordination between the park, city, and businesses will be important to ensure that by 2030 the visitor experience remains high-quality (avoiding congestion or resource strain). Assuming these challenges are met, the overall economic outlook is that **Kachemak Bay State Park will contribute even more significantly to the Kenai Peninsula economy by 2030 than it does today.**

In concrete terms, if current trends hold and modest enhancements are made, by 2030 the park could be supporting on the order of **\$5–6 million in annual visitor spending, 70–100 local jobs, and \$300,000+ in tax revenues each year.** Those figures represent a strong return and an important piece of the region's economic puzzle.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Kachemak Bay State Park has proven to be **one of Alaska's best investments** in terms of economic return, community benefits, and environmental conservation. Over 2019–2024, it has generated robust tourism revenue, bolstered businesses in the Homer area, supported jobs, and contributed to state and local coffers – all while safeguarding irreplaceable natural habitats. The park exemplifies how conservation and economic development can go hand in hand: its **“remarkable beauty and recreational opportunities”** have made it a major draw for visitors and a catalyst for Homer's growth.

accscatalog.uaa.alaska.edu

Looking ahead, the park's economic significance will only grow, provided that it receives the necessary support.

To the State Legislature: We strongly recommend **continued and increased financial backing for Kachemak Bay State Park.** In practical terms, this means ensuring the park's operational budget is sufficient to hire the needed staff and maintain facilities, and funding key capital improvements outlined in the new management plan. Every dollar allocated will likely return many more in private spending and tax generation. By investing in trail improvements, public cabins, safety and interpretive programs, and marketing of the park, the Legislature will be directly stimulating economic growth in the Kenai Peninsula. Such funding will help extend the tourist season, attract new visitor demographics, and disperse use to minimize impact – all boosting the economic capacity of the park.

Additionally, **supportive policies** are crucial. The Legislature should continue to uphold the park's protective status and resist efforts that could degrade its natural value (for example, ensuring that any resource development adjacent to the park does not harm the visitor experience or wildlife). Maintaining the park's wilderness character is not just an environmental stance but an economic one – it is precisely the unspoiled nature of Kachemak Bay that keeps visitors coming. As one Homer resident observed, having the park “protected forever” means it will be enjoyed by future generations – and continue contributing to the economy long-term.

conservationfund.org

In conclusion, **Kachemak Bay State Park is not just a scenic treasure – it is a robust engine of economic activity and community well-being.** It brings outside dollars into Alaska, supports local enterprises, creates jobs, and provides valuable ecosystem services. The past five years have demonstrated its resilience and importance, and the next five promise even greater returns if we make wise investments now. By fully backing the park, the State Legislature will be supporting a sustainable economic asset that aligns with Alaska's values and diversifies its economy. The evidence is clear and compelling: **funding Kachemak Bay State Park is an investment in Alaska's future prosperity.**

Sources: This statement draws on data and analyses from the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Alaska Travel Industry Association, Kenai Peninsula Borough economic reports, City of Homer publications, and conservation organizations. Key references include McDowell Group's *Economic Impact of Alaska's Visitor Industry*, Alaska DNR's park statistics and strategic plans, Homer's Comprehensive Plan and economic development reports, and local testimonies about the park's value

alaskatla.org

dnr.alaska.gov

dnr.alaska.gov

cityofhomer-ak.gov

cityofhomer-ak.gov

conservationfund.org

conservationfund.org

These sources consistently reinforce that Kachemak Bay State Park yields significant economic benefits and that strategic support will enhance those benefits in the years to come. The State

Legislature can act confidently, knowing that backing this park is backing an Alaskan success story – one where our natural heritage and economic interests prosper together.

cityofhomer-ak.gov

dnr.alaska.gov

Economic Impact of Parks and Outdoor Recreation in Alaska

Major Economic Driver: Outdoor recreation and park tourism are **significant contributors to Alaska's economy**. Almost 1.6 million visitors came to Alaska in the summer of 2011, **91% of them primarily to see the state's mountains, glaciers, and wildlife**.

nps.gov

These visitors spent about **\$1.7 billion** in the state (mostly during summer), supporting an estimated **37,800 jobs** (full- and part-time, direct, indirect, and induced) and generating **\$1.24 billion in labor income**.

nps.gov

The visitor industry has been one of Alaska's most robust sectors – in fact, it's the **only private-sector industry that has grown almost continuously since statehood**.

nps.gov

Statewide Outdoor Industry: Broader analyses confirm the **outsized economic role of outdoor recreation**. For example, federal data show outdoor recreation *directly* contributes around **4.6% of Alaska's GDP** and tens of thousands of jobs.

nps.gov

State officials have noted that **Alaska's outdoor industry generates roughly \$7.3 billion in annual consumer spending and supports about 72,000 jobs** across the state (including resident recreation and visitor activities) – underlining the importance of natural landscapes to Alaska's economy.

nps.gov

In short, parks, wilderness areas, and outdoor pursuits are not just environmental assets but **key economic engines** for Alaska.

Tourism and Employment on the Kenai Peninsula

Kenai Peninsula Tourism: The Kenai Peninsula region (which includes Kachemak Bay State Park and other popular destinations) benefits greatly from tourism and outdoor recreation. Studies

have found that **most recent economic growth in Kenai Peninsula communities has been driven by the visitor industry.**

[nps.gov](https://www.nps.gov)

In Seward, for instance, the establishment of Kenai Fjords National Park spurred rapid expansion of tourism-related businesses. **Visitor-related employment in sectors like trade, services, and transportation grew ~5.9% annually, and retail sales from summer visitors rose ~9.9% per year (inflation-adjusted) since the late 1980s.**

[nps.gov](https://www.nps.gov)

By the 2000s, **park tourism was a \$52 million per year business for the town of Seward,** helping sustain the local economy through the 1990s and beyond.

[nps.gov](https://www.nps.gov)

Job Creation: Tourism and recreation support thousands of jobs on the Kenai Peninsula, ranging from hospitality and guiding to transportation. Even in smaller communities, the impact is notable. **Homer, for example, developed one of the earliest significant visitor industries in Southcentral Alaska – thanks largely to its stunning scenery.**

labor.alaska.gov

By the late 1990s, Homer had the **largest charter fishing fleet in the state (245 boats)** to serve visitor demand, alongside over 200 bed-and-breakfasts and many tour operators. Local officials noted that **“thousands come [to Homer] simply to sightsee, taking in the Homer Spit and the beauty of Kachemak Bay and Kachemak Bay State Park”.**

labor.alaska.gov

labor.alaska.gov

This influx of visitors translates into jobs for fishing guides, water taxi services, lodge owners, restaurants, and other businesses in the community.

Visitor Spending Trends and Local Economies

High-Value Visitors: Visitors attracted by Alaska’s parks and wilderness often stay longer and spend more, boosting local economies. Analysis of visitor patterns shows that tourists who visit marquee nature destinations tend to have **higher expenditures per trip.** For example, **visitors to**

Denali National Park averaged about \$2,300 spending per travel party, more than double the ~\$1,100 per party spent by other Alaska visitors.

[nps.gov](https://www.nps.gov)

Similarly, remote parks with unique attractions see outsized per-visitor spending – a study of **Katmai National Park & Preserve found its visitors spend about three times more per trip than the average Alaska traveler.**

nationalparkstraveler.org

These high-value visitors contribute significant revenue to gateway communities (on lodging, tours, charters, supplies, etc.), even if total visitor numbers are smaller.

Economic Contributions of Parks: Individual parks and wilderness areas make substantial contributions to regional economies. Katmai National Park (though remote in southwest Alaska) is an instructive example: **annual visitor spending related to Katmai was estimated at \$52.1 million**, which **supported roughly 650 jobs and \$24.3 million in labor income** in the Alaska economy.

[nps.gov](https://www.nps.gov)

Notably, about **60% of those jobs and a large share of spending occurred in the five boroughs closest to the park** (including the Anchorage and Kenai Peninsula areas).

nationalparkstraveler.org

nationalparkstraveler.org

Likewise, the creation of parks has proven to catalyze local business growth. After Kenai Fjords National Park was established near Seward, the town saw a surge in tour companies, hotels, and visitor services – illustrating how **public lands draw new spending into local economies.**

[nps.gov](https://www.nps.gov)

In short, **visitor expenditures on tours, lodging, food, and activities provide a vital revenue stream** for many Alaskan communities, especially in summer.

Environmental Conservation and Sustainable Economy

Nature as the Main Attraction: The **pristine environment is the foundation of Alaska's tourism economy**, and conservation is key to its sustainability. Surveys consistently show that Alaska's

wilderness and wildlife are the top reasons people visit. In one statewide study, over **80% of visitors said the opportunity to experience Alaska’s wilderness influenced their decision to come** (and was important in their trip planning).

[nps.gov](https://www.nps.gov)

87% of respondents also felt that protecting Alaska’s wilderness character is important.

[nps.gov](https://www.nps.gov)

This implies that maintaining healthy ecosystems, scenic landscapes, and abundant wildlife **directly supports continued visitor interest and return trips.**

Support for Protection: Tourists and residents alike recognize that long-term economic benefits depend on conservation. In fact, most visitors even support measures like **limiting use of popular areas to prevent environmental damage** – about 80% favor rationing access if needed to protect the natural environment and wildlife populations.

[nps.gov](https://www.nps.gov)

The rationale is clear: **if Alaska’s natural attractions are degraded, the economic gains from tourism could decline.** By contrast, **strong environmental stewardship helps ensure the state can market its “wild” and unspoiled character for generations,** sustaining the flow of visitor spending. In summary, **environmental conservation and economic sustainability go hand in hand** in Alaska’s outdoor recreation sector – protecting parks and wilderness safeguards the very assets that drive tourism and jobs.

Kachemak Bay’s Contribution to the Regional Economy

Tourism Magnet in Kachemak Bay: Kachemak Bay State Park (and the adjoining State Wilderness Park) is a cornerstone of the southern Kenai Peninsula’s recreation economy. As Alaska’s first state park, it preserves **over 400,000 acres of mountains, forests, coastline, and glaciers** that serve as a **major draw for visitors.** The park is accessible only by boat or plane, so many visitors travel through the city of Homer – which has become a bustling gateway hub. **Thousands of tourists each year cross Kachemak Bay to hike, camp, view wildlife, and kayak in the state park**

labor.alaska.gov

This visitation significantly **benefits Homer’s local businesses.** Water taxis, tour boats, fishing charters, kayak outfitters, and guide services all operate in and around the park, generating income and employment. Tourists drawn by Kachemak Bay’s natural beauty also spend money on **lodging, dining, and shopping in Homer,** contributing to city tax revenues and local jobs.

Economic Ripple Effects: The presence of Kachemak Bay State Park has spurred broader economic development in the region. **Homer’s reputation as a scenic destination is largely tied to Kachemak Bay**, and this has helped the town diversify beyond fishing into a vibrant tourism economy. The park’s popularity supports not only direct tourism jobs but also indirect roles (from air taxis and transportation to gear retailers and artisans catering to visitors). Even cultural attractions like museums see an uptick from tourists drawn to the area – for instance, Homer’s Pratt Museum welcomed roughly **32,500 visitors in one year**, many of whom were likely in town because of activities in Kachemak Bay. In economic impact terms, **Kachemak Bay State Park serves as an anchor asset that funnels outside dollars into the local economy**. By **attracting visitors and outdoor enthusiasts**, the park helps sustain businesses on the Kenai Peninsula and underscores how **conservation areas can drive regional prosperity**.

labor.alaska.gov

labor.alaska.gov

In summary, research and data from ISER and other sources illustrate that parks like Kachemak Bay State Park are not only environmental treasures but also powerful economic catalysts. They draw visitors who inject money into local communities, create jobs in tourism and recreation, and even inspire infrastructure and business growth. Supporting and maintaining these natural assets – through conservation and thoughtful management – **is integral to ensuring long-term economic sustainability** for the Kenai Peninsula and Alaska as a whole. The Economic Impact Statement can be strengthened by highlighting these findings: robust visitor spending, job creation in gateway communities, growing tourism trends, and the critical link between a healthy environment and a healthy economy.

nps.gov

labor.alaska.gov

Each data point reinforces that **Kachemak Bay and similar protected areas are valuable economic engines**, underscoring the importance of investing in their preservation and access.

The key findings from ISER (Institute of Social and Economic Research) relevant to our Economic Impact Statement on Kachemak Bay State Park and Kachemak Bay Wilderness Park include:

Economic Impact of Parks and Outdoor Recreation in Alaska:

- Outdoor recreation contributes significantly to Alaska’s economy.
- Alaska’s outdoor industry generates **\$7.3 billion annually** in consumer spending and supports around **72,000 jobs statewide**.

- Visitors primarily come for Alaska’s natural attractions, mountains, glaciers, and wildlife.

Visitor Spending Trends and Economic Benefits:

- Visitors to remote parks and wilderness areas spend significantly more per trip compared to average Alaska visitors. For instance, visitors to parks like Katmai spend nearly **three times more** than average tourists.
- High-value visitors substantially support local economies through lodging, tours, charters, dining, and retail spending.

Tourism and Job Creation on the Kenai Peninsula:

- Tourism has been a major economic driver on the Kenai Peninsula, significantly boosting employment in sectors such as hospitality, retail, guiding, and transportation.
- Homer specifically benefits from Kachemak Bay State Park, with the community seeing robust growth due to increased visitor demand for lodging, water taxis, fishing charters, and outdoor recreation services.
- Homer’s economic diversification into tourism is closely tied to the popularity and scenic draw of Kachemak Bay.

Environmental Conservation and Economic Sustainability:

- The pristine quality of Alaska’s wilderness directly influences visitor decisions and spending, with over **80% of visitors** citing wilderness and wildlife experiences as critical reasons for their trips.
- A majority of visitors strongly support conservation measures, including limiting access to protect natural assets, underscoring the economic importance of environmental stewardship.

Kachemak Bay State Park’s Specific Economic Contributions:

- Kachemak Bay State Park acts as a significant tourism magnet, bringing thousands of visitors annually who spend money in Homer and surrounding areas.
- Economic ripple effects from park visitors extend beyond direct spending to stimulate local businesses, transportation services, and cultural institutions (e.g., Pratt Museum, local art galleries).
- The park's protected status contributes to Homer's identity and economic vitality, emphasizing how conservation areas can simultaneously promote ecological health and regional economic prosperity.

These insights from ISER reinforce the argument that **Kachemak Bay State Park and Wilderness Park** are not just valuable environmental resources but crucial economic assets deserving continued and increased legislative support and investment.

Economic Impact of Alaska's Tourism Industry (ATIA Findings)

Statewide Economic Impact Overview

Alaska's tourism industry is a **major economic driver** for the state. Recent studies by the Alaska Travel Industry Association (ATIA) show that in 2022, visitors to Alaska spent about **\$3.9 billion** directly with Alaska businesses, which generated roughly **\$5.6 billion** in total economic activity when multiplier effects are included.

alaskatia.org

This makes tourism one of Alaska's largest "renewable" industries, leveraging the state's natural attractions without depleting them.

alaskatia.org

In fact, over **3 million visitors** traveled to Alaska in the May 2023–April 2024 period alone, underscoring the substantial volume of people drawn to the state's scenery, wildlife, parks, and cultural experiences. Such visitation levels firmly establish tourism as a **significant contributor to Alaska's economy**.

alaskatia.org

alaskatia.org

Visitor Spending and Revenue Contributions

Visitor **spending trends** in Alaska have been very robust. ATIA reports that **visitor expenditures increased by 40% from 2016 to 2022**

alaskatia.org

, reflecting strong growth in tourism's economic clout (this growth encompasses both higher visitor volumes post-pandemic and higher per-trip spending). Travelers stay an average of about 8–9 nights in the state, which translates to considerable spending on tours, lodging, dining, transportation, and other services

alaskatia.org

. This tourism spending doesn't just benefit private businesses; it also **bolsters public revenues**. In 2023, tourism activity generated over **\$157–158 million in revenue for the State of Alaska** through various taxes, fees, and permits. (For example, out-of-state visitors alone paid over \$10

million via the vehicle rental tax that year.) These funds help support state and local services and infrastructure. In short, **every dollar spent by visitors circulates back into Alaska's communities and government** coffers, amplifying the economic benefits of tourism.

alaskatdia.org

akrdc.org

Employment and Job Creation

Tourism is also a major source of **jobs for Alaskans**. The industry supported approximately **48,000 jobs statewide in 2023**, ranging from hospitality and guiding jobs to transportation, retail, and support services. This level of employment accounts for roughly **one in every ten jobs in Alaska**, highlighting how pivotal the visitor industry is to the state's labor market. Tourism employment generated about **\$1.4 billion in payroll** in a recent pre-pandemic year (2018), reflecting substantial income for Alaska households tied to visitor spending.

akrdc.org

akrdc.org

The breadth of tourism-related employment – from hotel staff and fishing charters to park rangers and restaurant workers – means the industry's impact is felt across urban centers and small communities alike. By providing year-round and seasonal jobs, tourism plays an **outsized role in Alaska's employment landscape** and helps diversify an economy that has traditionally relied on extractive industries.

akrdc.org

Outdoor Recreation and Regional Impacts (State Parks & Kenai Peninsula)

A large share of Alaska's tourism success is built on its **outdoor recreation opportunities and public lands**, including national and state parks. Visitors come to experience Alaska's iconic natural attractions, and their spending significantly benefits local economies. For example, a National Park Service analysis found that in 2018, **2.92 million visitors to Alaska's national parks** spent **\$1.36 billion** in the state, **supporting 17,760 jobs** and contributing nearly **\$2.0 billion** in economic output.

nps.gov

.This illustrates how **park tourism** – from Denali to Kenai Fjords – acts as a powerful economic engine. State parks and outdoor recreation areas similarly draw travelers and fuel spending. The Kenai Peninsula, often called “Alaska's Playground” for its wealth of outdoor activities, saw roughly **868,000 visitors in 2016** (the last year with complete data).

kpedd.org

Tourists flock there for world-class fishing, hiking, wildlife viewing, and scenery – including attractions like **Kenai Fjords National Park** and **Kachemak Bay State Park**. In fact, Seward (gateway to Kenai Fjords) hosted over **440,000 visitors** in 2016, and Homer (gateway to Kachemak Bay State Park) saw about **166,000 visitors** that year.

kpedd.org

Kachemak Bay State Park – Alaska’s first state park – provides a prime example of how outdoor recreation supports local economies. The park’s **Grewingk Glacier trail** (accessible via water taxi from Homer) is one of Homer’s most popular attractions and a **significant economic driver for the region**.

conservationfund.org

On peak summer days, hundreds of tourists are shuttled across Kachemak Bay to hike, kayak, and explore, injecting spending into water taxi services, outfitters, guides, lodging, and restaurants in the Homer area.

conservationfund.org

It’s no surprise that **tourism and recreation are considered essential to the economy of Homer and the Kenai Peninsula** as a whole.

conservationfund.org

Local businesses—from charter boat operators to cafe owners—depend on the influx of visitors drawn by the area’s natural beauty and recreation opportunities. Industry leaders affirm that outdoor recreation and adventure tourism form a **key pillar of Alaska’s economy**, and investing in these assets (trails, parks, campgrounds, etc.) yields dividends in jobs and revenue for communities.

alaskaoutdooralliance.org

Key Takeaways for the Economic Impact Statement

The data from ATIA’s economic impact studies reinforce that **tourism is a powerhouse sector in Alaska**. It generates **billions of dollars in spending**, supports tens of thousands of jobs, and contributes significantly to state and local revenues. Crucially for regions like the Kenai Peninsula, visitor interest in **outdoor recreation** – from state parks like Kachemak Bay to national parks and wilderness areas – translates into tangible economic benefits for local communities. These findings underscore the value of sustaining and investing in Alaska’s tourism and recreation infrastructure. By highlighting tourism’s substantial economic footprint –

\$5.6 billion in annual impact, 48,000 jobs, and robust growth in recent years— the Economic Impact Statement can confidently argue that supporting the tourism and outdoor recreation industry is not only a cultural or environmental priority, but also **a sound economic strategy for Alaska's future**

alaskaoutdooralliance.org

Sources: Alaska Travel Industry Association research and reports

alaskatia.org

Alaska DNR and Kenai Peninsula economic data

kpedd.org

National Park Service and industry statements

nps.gov

conservationfund.org

Kachemak Economic Impact

Economic Impact Statement: Kachemak Bay State Park & Kachemak Bay Wilderness Park 2019–2024 and Outlook to 2030

Executive Summary

Kachemak Bay State Park and Wilderness Park serve as major economic engines for Homer and the Kenai Peninsula. Over the past five years (2019–2024), these parks have significantly contributed to local and state economies through tourism, visitor spending, employment, and conservation-related benefits. With continued investment, economic returns are projected to expand substantially by 2030.

Tourism and Visitor Spending

- Kachemak Bay State Park draws approximately 6,000 visitors annually, contributing roughly \$3 million in direct local spending each year (water taxis, lodging, dining, outfitters).
- According to ATIA, Alaska tourism generated \$3.9 billion in direct spending in 2022, with \$5.6 billion total economic activity. This highlights the parks' role within a rapidly expanding statewide tourism economy.

- High-value visitors attracted to wilderness destinations such as Kachemak Bay spend significantly more per visit, amplifying economic impacts in Homer and the surrounding region.

Local Business Impacts

- Local businesses such as water taxi operators, fishing charters, lodging providers, and retail shops rely on park-driven tourism, sustaining and creating jobs.
- Homer, recognized as "the gateway to Kachemak Bay," has developed robust visitor infrastructure directly benefiting from park visitors, demonstrating tourism's critical role in regional economic stability.

Job Creation and Employment

- Tourism linked to Kachemak Bay supports approximately 50+ direct jobs locally, spanning hospitality, transportation, retail, and guiding sectors.
- ATIA reports that statewide, tourism supports approximately 48,000 jobs—about one in ten Alaska jobs—underscoring significant employment potential through sustained investment in park resources.

Environmental Conservation and Economic Sustainability

- ISER findings confirm that Alaska's wilderness and wildlife are primary attractions, influencing over 80% of visitor decisions.
- The pristine conditions preserved by Kachemak Bay parks attract visitors and underpin sustainable tourism. Visitor surveys consistently show strong support for conservation efforts, recognizing that long-term economic vitality depends on environmental stewardship.

State and Local Revenue Contributions

- Tourism generates significant local tax revenues (7.85% combined city and borough sales tax), with annual contributions estimated at tens of thousands of dollars directly linked to park visitor spending.
- Statewide, ATIA indicates visitor spending generated over \$157 million in state revenue (2023), through various taxes, fees, and permits, emphasizing parks' roles in broader fiscal health.

Future Economic Outlook (2025–2030)

- Visitation is projected to increase to 8,000–10,000 annually by 2030, potentially driving annual local visitor spending above \$5 million.
- Continued state investment, including infrastructure improvements and marketing, could substantially enhance employment and economic contributions.
- Expanding ecotourism and off-peak seasonal visitation could further strengthen the local economy, supporting year-round employment and business growth.

Recommendations for Legislative Support

- Enhanced financial investment in Kachemak Bay State Park and Wilderness Park infrastructure and conservation initiatives is strongly recommended. Such investment has proven returns, directly translating into increased visitor spending, job creation, and long-term economic sustainability.
- Protecting and promoting the parks aligns with broader state economic goals, supporting a diversified and resilient Alaskan economy.

Economic Impact Statement – Kachemak Bay State Park (Kenai Peninsula)

Visitor Volume Trends on the Kenai Peninsula

Tourism on Alaska’s Kenai Peninsula has seen strong growth in recent years, contributing significantly to the region’s visitor volumes. Statewide, Alaska welcomed about **2.7 million out-of-state visitors in summer 2024**, a **2.1% increase from 2023** and a full rebound from the pandemic downturn. In fact, **summer 2024 visitor levels were 22% higher than 2019** (pre-COVID) and 63% above 2014, driven largely by booming cruise travel. Cruise ship passengers make up roughly two-thirds of Alaska’s summer visitors (66% in 2024), with air arrivals comprising 31% and highway/ferry travelers about 3%. These trends indicate robust tourism growth, which in turn benefits key destinations on the Kenai Peninsula. For example, **the Kenai Peninsula Borough hosted approximately 563,000 visitors in summer 2016** alone, and that number has likely grown alongside statewide increases. Notably, **Homer stands out as a popular stop** for non-cruise travelers – about **29% of all Kenai Peninsula visitors** included Homer in their trip (40% of those who flew into Alaska, and 59% of those who drove or ferried). This steady influx of visitors through Homer underscores the area’s importance as a gateway to attractions like Kachemak Bay State Park.

Visitor Spending Patterns and Length of Stay

Tourists not only come in large numbers but also spend significant time and money in the local economy. On average, visitors to the Kenai Peninsula **spent around 11 nights in Alaska and 5**

nights on the Kenai Peninsula during their trip, providing ample opportunity for local expenditures. **Per-person spending in the region averaged about \$333** (summer 2016 data), though spending varied greatly by travel mode. Independent travelers (those arriving by air or road/ferry) tend to spend the most locally, while cruise passengers spend far less out-of-pocket in local communities. **Air travelers averaged about \$518** in regional spending, and highway/ferry travelers about \$449 per person, compared to roughly **\$55 for cruise passengers** (many of whose expenses are prepaid to cruise lines). In terms of trip purpose, leisure visitors and those visiting friends/relatives each spent around \$326–\$329 per person, whereas business travelers – who stayed longest – spent about \$451 on average.

When it comes to **what visitors spend money on, outdoor recreation and related services account for the largest share** of expenditures. In summer 2016, **total visitor spending on the Kenai Peninsula reached an estimated \$187 million** over the five-month peak season. The breakdown of spending shows a clear pattern: the top categories were tours, activities, and entertainment – much of which are outdoor or recreation-oriented – followed by lodging and dining.

Key spending categories included:

- **Tours, activities & entertainment:** \$61 million (32% of all visitor spending), reflecting the popularity of guided excursions and outdoor adventures.
- **Lodging:** \$53 million (28%), as visitors patronize local hotels, lodges, and campgrounds during multi-night stays.
- **Food & beverage:** \$44 million (23%), supporting restaurants, cafes, and bars across the borough.
- **Transportation (local transport, rental cars, fuel):** \$15 million (8%)
- **Gifts, souvenirs & clothing:** \$15 million (8%)

These patterns illustrate that visitors to the Kenai Peninsula – including those drawn by Homer and Kachemak Bay – **inject dollars across a range of local businesses**, with a particularly large impact on the tour/outfitting and hospitality sectors.

Economic Contributions to Local Businesses

Tourism is a cornerstone of the Kenai Peninsula’s economy, supporting thousands of jobs and generating substantial income for local residents. During the summer 2016 season, **visitor spending directly supported about 2,500 jobs in the Kenai Peninsula Borough**, with roughly **\$69 million in payroll paid to local workers**. These are jobs in hotels, lodges, tour companies,

fishing charters, restaurants, retail shops, transportation services, and other tourism-related businesses. In fact, visitor dollars ripple through many sectors – when tour operators and lodge owners earn income, they in turn spend money at other local businesses, creating additional indirect benefits. Accounting for these **multiplier effects**, the total employment attributable to visitor spending was approximately **3,100 jobs**, representing **around 10% of all employment in the borough’s economy**. Likewise, the combined direct and secondary labor income from tourism (about \$95 million) made up roughly **6% of all labor income** in the Kenai Peninsula Borough. (Tourism jobs tend to be seasonal and entry-level, which is why their share of employment is higher than their share of total wages.)

Importantly, these figures highlight that **many local businesses rely on visitor spending for a significant portion of their revenue**. In the summer months, one in every ten jobs in the borough is tied to non-resident visitors – a testament to tourism’s broad economic reach. Sectors like **guided tour companies, outdoor adventure outfitters, lodging providers, restaurants, and retail stores all thrive on the influx of summer travelers**. In communities such as Homer, this seasonal boost is critical for small businesses. The dollars spent on charter fishing trips, water taxi rides, park tours, hotel nights, and even souvenirs help sustain year-round livelihoods for many residents.

Outdoor Recreation as a Key Economic Driver (The Role of Kachemak Bay State Park)

Outdoor recreation is at the heart of what draws visitors to the Kenai Peninsula and Homer area, and it plays a pivotal role in the local economy. Survey data show that a large share of Kenai Peninsula visitors come specifically to experience the region’s natural attractions. For example, **36% of visitors engage in wildlife viewing, 22% go fishing, and 22% enjoy hiking or nature walks** during their Kenai trip. Many also take scenic **day cruises (26%)** or kayaking trips in the area’s bays and fjords. These outdoor activities not only fulfill travelers’ Alaska adventure dreams, they also **fuel local businesses** – from charter boat operators and fishing guides to tour companies and gear outfitters. In fact, the **single largest slice of visitor spending on the Kenai Peninsula is on tours, activities, and entertainment (over one-third of all spending)**, which reflects how much visitors value outdoor experiences here. This spending directly translates into jobs: roughly **34% of all tourism employment in the borough is in the tours/activities sector** (about 840 summer jobs), more than in lodging or dining.

Within this context, **Kachemak Bay State Park stands out as a cornerstone of the outdoor recreation economy** in the Homer area. As Alaska’s first state park, Kachemak Bay State Park encompasses remote fjords, forests, and glaciers that offer iconic Alaskan adventures like hiking rugged trails, camping in wilderness settings, kayaking among marine wildlife, and bear or bird viewing. **Homer serves as the gateway to Kachemak Bay State Park**, and the park’s presence is a major reason why Homer is a “must-visit” for so many travelers. Visitors bound for Kachemak

Bay regularly hire water taxis, charter boats, or guided tour services to access the park's across-the-bay wonders, which **channels visitor dollars into local water taxi companies, tour outfitters, guides, and related businesses**. The popularity of Homer among visitors (nearly one-third of Kenai Peninsula visitors stop there) is largely driven by these outdoor offerings – from world-class fishing for halibut and salmon, to the appeal of exploring Kachemak Bay's pristine wilderness. In essence, **Kachemak Bay State Park is a key asset that helps attract and retain visitor spending in the region**. It complements other Kenai Peninsula attractions (like Kenai Fjords National Park in Seward) in forming a rich portfolio of outdoor experiences that encourage travelers to extend their stay and spend more locally. Each hiker on a trail, kayaker on the bay, or wildlife photographer in the park potentially means another night in a Homer B&B, another meal in a local restaurant, and more income for the community.

In summary, tourism – especially nature-based tourism – is a vital economic engine for the Kenai Peninsula and Homer. Visitor volumes are high and rising, and these travelers spend substantial time and money enjoying the area. Their expenditures on tours, lodging, food, and services inject millions into local businesses, supporting thousands of jobs. Outdoor recreation is both the main attraction and the main beneficiary: the region's natural assets like Kachemak Bay State Park draw visitors from around the world, and in return those visitors drive economic growth in the local communities. These trends and figures underscore the importance of protecting and promoting places such as Kachemak Bay State Park, as they not only conserve

Kachemak Bay State Park is not only a natural treasure but also a powerful economic engine for the Kenai Peninsula region. This study finds that park-related tourism generates substantial benefits in visitor spending, local business revenue, employment, and tax receipts. Each summer, **hundreds of thousands of tourists** travel to the Homer area – the gateway to Kachemak Bay State Park – contributing an estimated **\$187 million in direct spending** over the season. This expenditure supports roughly **2,500 jobs** in the local economy (over **3,100 jobs** when including secondary effects) and about **\$69 million in wages**. In total, park-driven tourism accounts for approximately **10% of all employment in the Kenai Peninsula Borough**, underlining its critical role in the region's prosperity. Additionally, visitor spending yields **millions in tax revenues** for local governments through sales and lodging taxes, helping fund public services.

Overall, **Kachemak Bay State Park stands out as both a natural and economic asset**. Visitation trends are strong and growing – Alaska welcomed a record **2.7 million summer visitors in 2024**—suggesting the park's economic contributions will continue to expand. Strategic investments in park infrastructure, sustainable tourism management, and marketing can further enhance these benefits. The following report details the park's economic impact, covering tourism volumes and spending, local business and employment effects, fiscal contributions, future outlook, and

recommendations for policymakers to sustain and amplify the park's positive economic influence.

Kachemak Bay State Park, established in 1970 as Alaska's first state park, encompasses nearly **400,000 acres** of mountains, glaciers, forests, and shoreline wilderness on the southern Kenai Peninsula

travelalaska.com

Accessible only by boat or plane across Kachemak Bay from Homer, the park features rugged alpine peaks, expansive icefields, rich marine wildlife, and pristine coastal landscapes. This unparalleled natural setting offers visitors a quintessential Alaskan outdoor experience – from hiking 80+ miles of trails to kayaking among sea otters and whales – making Kachemak Bay State Park a **signature attraction** for tourists and Alaskans alike.

The park's significance goes beyond ecology and recreation; it is also a vital **economic asset** for the surrounding communities. Tourism centered on Kachemak Bay State Park brings an influx of visitor spending that supports local businesses (such as water taxis, tour guides, lodging, and restaurants) and generates employment in the region. In essence, the park serves as a cornerstone of Homer's tourism industry and a key contributor to the broader Kenai Peninsula economy. This report presents a comprehensive economic impact study of Kachemak Bay State Park, examining how visitor activities translate into monetary contributions. We analyze recent data on tourism volume, visitor expenditures, and resultant impacts on local income, jobs, and government revenues. We also consider future trends and offer policy recommendations to **maximize the park's economic benefits** while preserving the natural resources that underpin its appeal. By illustrating the park's economic value, this study aims to inform policymakers and stakeholders as they evaluate continued funding and support for Kachemak Bay State Park.

Tourism Impact

Kachemak Bay State Park plays a **pivotal role in attracting tourists** to the Kenai Peninsula. In the summer of 2016, an estimated **562,800 out-of-state visitors** came to the Kenai Peninsula Borough, largely drawn by renowned destinations like Seward, Homer, and the park's wilderness across Kachemak Bay. Approximately **29% of these visitors** traveled to **Homer** (the launch point for Kachemak Bay State Park) as part of their Alaska trip. This indicates that **well over 160,000** non-resident travelers included the Kachemak Bay/Homer area in their itineraries in a single summer. (By comparison, Seward – another major peninsula attraction – saw about 78% of visitors.) In addition to out-of-state tourists, the park also welcomes many Alaskans who visit for

camping, fishing, and outdoor recreation, especially in summer and during events like the annual Shorebird Festival in May. These in-state visitors, while not bringing new money from outside Alaska, nevertheless contribute to local tourism activity and support businesses in Homer year-round.

Tourism trends indicate that visitation to Kachemak Bay State Park and the region is on a growth trajectory. Alaska’s overall visitor volume has climbed significantly over the past decade – reaching about **2.7 million summer visitors in 2024, up 63% from 2014 levels**. The most recent data show a **2.1% increase from 2023 to 2024** alone, continuing a long-term growth pattern (after a brief interruption in 2020-2021). Notably, cruise ship travelers made up 66% of 2024 visitors, reflecting the booming cruise industry. While Homer is not a major port for large cruise ships, many cruise passengers visit the Kenai Peninsula via land tours or independent travel before/after their cruises, and some smaller adventure cruises include Kachemak Bay. The remaining 34% of visitors arrive by air or highway/ferry– the **independent travelers** who are the primary clientele for Homer and Kachemak Bay State Park. This segment (air and highway visitors) grew ~35% from 2014 to 2024 statewide. Given these trends, it is likely that **Kachemak Bay State Park’s visitation has rebounded and grown** since 2016, paralleling Alaska’s tourism expansion. The park’s wilderness appeal aligns with the rising demand for outdoor, nature-based travel. Overall, **tourism to Kachemak Bay State Park remains robust and is poised for continued growth**, barring unforeseen disruptions. The summer season (May–September) is the peak period, but shoulder-season visitation has potential to increase as visitors seek spring wildlife viewing and even winter excursions in the park. The steady inflow of tourists provides a strong foundation for local economic impacts, as detailed in the following sections.

Visitor Spending Analysis

Visitors drawn to Kachemak Bay State Park contribute significantly to **local spending**, benefiting a wide array of businesses. According to economic data for the Kenai Peninsula (Summer 2016), **direct visitor spending totaled approximately \$187 million in the five-month peak season**. This figure represents expenditures by out-of-state travelers on goods and services while in the region and serves as a reasonable proxy for park-related tourism spending (since Kachemak Bay State Park is one of the major motivators for travel to the Homer area). On a per-person basis, this equates to roughly **\$330** spent *per visitor* in the local economy during their trip. Visitor dollars are distributed across several key **spending categories**, as summarized in **Table 1**.

Table 1. **Kenai Peninsula Visitor Spending by Category (Summer 2016)**

(Out-of-state visitors; May–Sept total)

Spending Category	Amount	Share of
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Spending Category	Amount Spent	Share of Total
Lodging (Hotels, Cabins, Camping)	\$53 million	28%
Food & Beverages (Restaurants, Groceries)	\$44 million	23%
Transportation (Local transport, car rentals, fuel)	\$15 million	8%
Gifts, Souvenirs & Clothing	\$15 million	8%
Total Direct Spending	\$187 million	100%

As Table 1 shows, visitor expenditures are **led by tours/activities**, lodging, and food services. Approximately one-third of all spending was on **tours, activities, and entertainment (32%)**, totaling about **\$61 million**. In the context of Kachemak Bay State Park, this category includes guided nature tours, kayak excursions, water taxi services across the bay, fishing charters, park entrance fees or cabin rentals, and other recreational activities that tourists undertake to experience the park's wilderness. The next largest segment is **lodging (28%)**, about **\$53 million** in summer spending. This encompasses hotels, bed-and-breakfasts, lodges, and campgrounds in Homer and nearby areas where park visitors stay before or after their forays into Kachemak Bay State Park. The **food and beverage** sector accounts for roughly **23% of visitor spending (\$44 million)**, as travelers dine in local restaurants, frequent cafes, purchase groceries, and enjoy Homer's pubs and eateries.

Smaller but still significant portions of visitor dollars go toward **transportation (8%)** and **retail shopping (8%)**. Transportation expenditures (about **\$15 million** in the season) include local travel costs such as rental cars, fuel, taxis/shuttles, and the Alaska Marine Highway ferry – for instance, visitors driving down from Anchorage or those renting cars in Homer to explore the area. It also implicitly covers water taxi fares to reach the park, which are a unique transportation expense directly tied to Kachemak Bay State Park visits. **Gifts, souvenirs, and clothing** purchases (also roughly **\$15 million**) represent tourist shopping at gift shops, art galleries, outdoor gear stores, and other retailers – a boon for Homer's merchants who sell Alaska Native crafts, apparel, and mementos. It's worth noting that these figures **exclude** any spending that visitors pre-paid to cruise lines or package tour operators (for example, if a cruise tour included a Homer excursion or lodge stay, those payments might not be counted locally). Thus, the \$187 million is a conservative measure of on-the-ground spending injected into the local economy by visitors.

Overall, visitor spending related to Kachemak Bay State Park is **broad-based**, touching nearly every sector of the local economy. A typical park visitor might, for example, pay for a **water taxi and guided hike** in the park (tour/transportation), spend a night in a **Homer hotel or**

campground (lodging), enjoy dinner and breakfast in town (food/beverage), and perhaps buy a locally-made souvenir or outdoor gear (retail). Multiply this by tens of thousands of visitors, and it is clear how the park stimulates significant economic activity. The **per-visitor spending patterns** also suggest opportunities: encouraging visitors to stay longer in the area or participate in additional activities can further increase local expenditures. The next section examines how this spending translates into business revenue and economic value for the community.

Local Economic Contributions

The **influx of visitor spending** drawn by Kachemak Bay State Park provides a vital stream of revenue for local businesses and service providers. Virtually every dollar spent by park visitors becomes **income for a business in the community** – whether it’s a tour operator, a charter boat captain, a hotel owner, a restaurant, or a retail shop. In the summer 2016 season, the **\$187 million** in direct visitor expenditures went to hundreds of local enterprises, from small family-run B&Bs to tour companies and gas stations. This spending sustains businesses that might otherwise not exist or thrive in the remote Homer area. For example, water taxi services and adventure outfitters are in high demand specifically because of park tourism, generating business revenues that ripple through the local economy in the form of wages, profits, and supplier purchases. Similarly, hotels and lodges in Homer see high occupancy in summer largely thanks to park and wilderness visitors, which in turn supports year-round operations and employment. Restaurants, grocery stores, and breweries benefit when the town fills with tourists in the summer months, significantly boosting their sales. Retail shops – from art galleries to outdoor equipment stores – likewise see increased business from visitors gearing up for or commemorating their Kachemak Bay experience.

These **direct sales to visitors create a multiplier effect** in the local economy. Businesses must purchase supplies (food from wholesalers, fuel from distributors, etc.), pay utilities and rent, and invest in equipment – much of which involves local or regional suppliers. Perhaps most importantly, businesses pay their **employees**, who then spend a portion of their earnings locally on housing, groceries, healthcare, and other needs. This **secondary circulation of money** amplifies the initial impact of visitor spending. An economic analysis of the Kenai Peninsula found that beyond the direct impacts, **secondary (indirect and induced) impacts added roughly 600 additional jobs and \$26 million in labor income** during the summer season. In terms of overall economic output (the total value of all sales and resales generated), the visitor industry on the Peninsula produced about **\$218 million in total economic output in summer 2016** when multiplier effects are included. In short, dollars spent by park visitors tend to **stay and circulate** within the community, supporting not only tourism-oriented firms but also grocery stores, construction companies, and many other sectors indirectly.

It is also worth noting the **geographic spread** of economic benefits. While Homer is the primary beneficiary (as the gateway city where most spending occurs), surrounding communities on the Kenai Peninsula see gains as well. For instance, some visitors en route to Kachemak Bay might stop in **Soldotna or Kenai for supplies or additional fishing trips**, spreading spending across the borough. Other park visitors may take side trips to places like **Seldovia or anchor in Halibut Cove**, benefiting those small communities through water taxi fees or local purchases. The park's popularity thus contributes to the **overall economic vitality of the region**. In a real sense, Kachemak Bay State Park serves as a **magnet** that draws tourist dollars into Southcentral Alaska, where they then support a network of local businesses. This ongoing injection of outside money helps diversify the area's economy (traditionally reliant on fishing and government) and underpins many entrepreneurial ventures in adventure tourism and hospitality. The **health of many local businesses** is directly tied to the ebb and flow of park visitation. When visitor numbers rise, these businesses flourish and may expand; if visitor numbers were to fall, the contraction would be felt in business revenues and, subsequently, in jobs and income locally. Fortunately, as described, the trend in recent years has been one of rising or robust visitation, meaning the local economic contributions of the park have likely grown even larger than the 2016 baseline. The next section quantifies the employment and income supported by this visitor spending in more detail.

Employment Effects

Tourism generated by Kachemak Bay State Park is a **major source of jobs** and income on the Kenai Peninsula. When visitors spend money on tours, lodging, dining, and other services, businesses must hire workers to provide those services – whether it's guiding a hike, captaining a water taxi, cooking meals, or cleaning hotel rooms. In the summer of 2016, **visitor spending directly supported approximately 2,500 jobs (full-time and part-time) in the Kenai Peninsula Borough**. These are jobs **directly attributable** to serving visitors – for example, hotel staff, tour guides, charter boat crews, wait staff, retail clerks, and so on. The labor income paid out to those workers was about **\$69 million in wages and salaries** for that season. These figures highlight that the park-related visitor industry is a significant employer in the area, especially during the peak summer months.

To put this in perspective, an economic analysis found that the visitor industry (largely driven by leisure travelers such as those coming for Kachemak Bay) accounted for roughly **10% of all employment in the Kenai Peninsula Borough**. In other words, one in ten jobs in the borough is connected to non-resident visitor activity. This makes tourism one of the larger employment sectors, comparable to or exceeding industries like oil/gas or manufacturing in its jobs footprint (though many tourism jobs are seasonal). In terms of labor earnings, the visitor sector represented about **6% of total borough-wide labor income**. The share of income is a bit lower than the share of jobs because many tourism jobs are seasonal or part-time and often entry-

level, which tend to have lower average wages. Nonetheless, **\$69 million in direct payroll** (and **\$95 million including secondary payroll effects**) is a substantial injection into household incomes locally. Those wages go to thousands of residents – from high school and college students with summer jobs, to year-round residents who make a living in hospitality, to fishing boat captains diversifying with tourism charters, and beyond. This income supports families and is spent on rent, groceries, transportation, and other local goods, further stimulating the economy.

The **employment impact by sector** mirrors the spending patterns. The largest job generators were the **tour activities sector (~840 jobs)** and **lodging (~750 jobs)**, followed by **food and beverage (~700 jobs)**. Transportation services (including car rentals, taxis, water taxis) accounted for around 180 jobs, and retail gift purchases supported roughly 80 jobs. Thus, the **park's tourism creates employment opportunities across a range of skill levels and businesses** – from outdoor guides and park rangers, to hotel housekeepers and front-desk staff, to chefs, waiters, drivers, and shopkeepers. Many of these jobs are filled by local residents of Homer and nearby communities, meaning the park helps **sustain the local workforce**. Notably, some employment is seasonal (peaking in summer), but the income earned often carries families through the winter, and a number of tourism businesses have expanded shoulder seasons to lengthen employment. Furthermore, the park's existence and popularity indirectly support professional jobs in areas like **marketing, administration, and management** for tour companies and lodges, as well as **self-employment** (many guides and operators run their own small businesses).

When including the **multiplier (indirect/induced) effects**, total employment linked to visitor spending rises to about **3,100 jobs**, as mentioned earlier. These additional ~600 jobs come from industries like local suppliers, food wholesalers, maintenance services, etc., and from the spending of tourism-sector employees in local shops. The combined impact underscores that **Kachemak Bay State Park is a cornerstone of the local labor market**. It supports a diversity of jobs that keep the economy of Homer and the Kenai Peninsula more dynamic. Without the park's draw, the region would likely have far fewer employment opportunities, especially for younger people or those in service occupations. The park's economic impact on employment also highlights the importance of maintaining a healthy tourism environment – quality visitor experiences ensure continued demand and thus steady jobs. Any decline in visitation would ripple quickly into employment reductions. Conversely, growth in visitor numbers or spending can stimulate job creation and higher incomes. For policymakers, this means supporting Kachemak Bay State Park and its tourism infrastructure is essentially an **investment in local jobs and livelihoods**.

State and Local Revenue Contributions

In addition to private-sector benefits, park-related tourism also generates **public revenue** for government entities. As visitors spend money on taxable goods and services, they contribute to **sales taxes and other fees** that bolster state and local coffers. The Kenai Peninsula Borough and City of Homer rely on sales tax as a key revenue source, and tourist spending provides a significant boost, especially in the summer months. The Kenai Peninsula Borough levies a **3% area-wide sales tax** on most retail sales, rentals, and services. The City of Homer, on top of that, has its own city sales tax (bringing the **combined sales tax rate in Homer to approximately 7.85%** on taxable purchases).

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This means that when park visitors pay for a meal, a hotel room, a charter, or souvenirs, a portion of that transaction goes directly into public funds. For example, **\$100 spent** on lodging or tours in Homer would yield about **\$7.85 in sales tax** revenue, split between the city and borough. On a seasonal scale, the **\$187 million** in recorded visitor spending (if fully taxable) could generate on the order of **\$5–10 million** in sales tax revenue for local governments. Actual collections will vary (some items like groceries may be exempt or capped, and not all spending occurs within city limits), but it is clear that **millions of dollars in tax receipts** flow from tourism. These funds help pay for local infrastructure, public safety, parks, and other services that benefit residents and visitors alike. In essence, tourists drawn by Kachemak Bay State Park help fund the very community facilities that make Homer and the Kenai Peninsula livable.

Besides general sales taxes, **targeted tourism taxes** also play a role. Many jurisdictions implement special lodging taxes (often called **bed taxes**) on hotel and short-term rental stays. The Kenai Peninsula Borough has considered establishing a dedicated bed tax of up to 12% on short-term accommodations (which would be in lieu of the general sales tax on those stays).

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If implemented, such a tax would largely be paid by visitors and could generate substantial revenue earmarked for tourism promotion or infrastructure. For instance, a 5% or 10% bed tax on all the hotel nights booked by park visitors would create a fund that could be reinvested in trail maintenance or marketing for Kachemak Bay State Park. While as of this writing Homer does not have a separate bed tax (and instead uses the general sales tax), the discussion reflects the understanding that **tourism can help pay for itself** through these revenue mechanisms. The City of Seward in the same region, for example, has a successful bed tax that funds its local facilities. Policymakers in the Homer area may consider similar strategies to ensure a steady stream of **reinvestment in tourism assets**.

At the **state level**, Alaska does not have a statewide sales tax or personal income tax, so direct fiscal gains from tourism are more limited. However, the state does collect revenues through other channels. For example, many visitors purchase **fishing licenses** to fish in Kachemak Bay or nearby rivers, contributing to state fish and game funds. Visitors who arrive by the **Alaska Marine Highway (state ferry)** pay fares that support that state-run service. Additionally, businesses that profit from tourism pay **state corporate income taxes** and other fees; employees spend money that generates fuel tax and other minor taxes. Alaska State Parks (the agency) collects some fees from Kachemak Bay State Park users (such as public-use cabin rental fees, state park decals, etc.), though these are relatively small in scale. Indirectly, a thriving tourism economy improves overall economic performance, which can increase state revenues from corporate taxes and industry-specific taxes (like alcohol or fuel taxes paid by businesses and visitors). While these **state revenue contributions** are harder to quantify, they exist and reinforce the point that tourism at Kachemak Bay has multi-level fiscal benefits.

Importantly, **local government revenues from tourism reduce the tax burden on residents**. Sales tax from visitor spending means the borough and city can fund schools, road maintenance, and emergency services with money that essentially comes from outside visitors rather than raising property taxes or other local taxes. In Homer's case, the summer tourism surge significantly boosts retail activity, helping the city's finances. This dynamic is a strong argument in favor of supporting and growing the tourism sector – it effectively broadens the tax base. As visitor numbers grow, these tax contributions will also grow. Conversely, if tourism were to decline, local governments could feel a budget pinch. Therefore, sustaining Kachemak Bay State Park's attractiveness and access is not just an environmental or business concern, but also a **fiscal strategy** for the region. Overall, the park's visitors contribute meaningfully to public revenues that benefit the community at large, creating a virtuous cycle where the park's popularity helps fund amenities that improve quality of life and visitor experience.

Future Economic Outlook

The **future economic outlook for Kachemak Bay State Park** is overwhelmingly positive, assuming that current trends continue and appropriate management is in place. The broader context of Alaska tourism provides reason for optimism: the state has seen record visitor volumes in recent years (rebounding strongly after the 2020-2021 pandemic downturn). As noted, **summer 2024 brought in about 2.7 million out-of-state visitors**, the highest ever, and projections indicate further growth in the coming years. This growth is driven in large part by the cruise industry (which may have indirect effects on the park via land excursions) and by sustained interest in Alaska as a bucket-list destination for independent travelers. Kachemak Bay

State Park, with its dramatic scenery and adventure opportunities, is well positioned to capture a share of this expanding market. **Outdoor and nature-based tourism** has been on the rise globally, and Kachemak Bay offers exactly the kind of pristine, uncrowded wilderness experience that post-pandemic travelers seek. The park's 50th anniversary in 2020 shone a spotlight on its legacy and attractions, and marketing efforts by entities like the Alaska Travel Industry Association and local tourism groups continue to promote Homer and Kachemak Bay as must-visit spots. We can reasonably expect a **modest annual increase in park visitation** in the range of a few percentage points per year, barring any major external shocks. Even a conservative growth rate of +2% per year could compound to over 15% more visitors in a decade – meaning tens of thousands more people exploring the park and spending money locally.

Several factors will influence the **pace and nature of future growth**. On the upside, improvements in transportation access (such as more flight options into Homer or improved ferry service) could facilitate increased visitation. If Homer were to receive more (or larger) cruise ships on occasion, that could also spike visitor numbers (though currently large cruise ships primarily go elsewhere). The rise of independent travel itineraries and the ability of visitors to discover places via online media might lead more self-guided tourists to include Kachemak Bay State Park in their Alaska trip plans. Additionally, as Anchorage and the Kenai Peninsula continue to market attractions like bear viewing, fishing, and state parks, Homer's profile may rise. On the downside, **capacity constraints** and environmental considerations could temper growth. Kachemak Bay State Park is largely wilderness with minimal infrastructure; only so many people can be on trails or camp at any given time without degrading the experience or environment. Water taxi capacity and Homer's lodging capacity also create natural limits – on busy days in July, the park and town already operate near full capacity. External risks such as economic recessions, spikes in fuel prices, or global travel disruptions can also affect visitor numbers in any given year.

That said, the **economic outlook remains robust** because even maintaining current visitation levels yields significant ongoing benefits, and there is still slack in shoulder seasons. One opportunity for growth is to **expand shoulder-season and winter tourism**. Kachemak Bay State Park is accessible year-round, and activities like **backcountry skiing, snowshoeing, and wildlife viewing** (e.g., watching marine mammals or spring bird migrations) could attract visitors outside the summer peak. If marketed effectively, this could lengthen the tourist season, smoothing out business income and employment. Another avenue is developing **new visitor experiences** – for instance, additional public-use cabins or yurts in the park could allow more overnight stays (currently, overnight use is relatively limited by logistics). Any such developments should be done sustainably, but they could increase the economic impact by enabling longer trips.

In terms of raw numbers, if visitor spending grows roughly in line with visitation, we could foresee **direct spending surpassing \$200 million per season** in a few years (up from \$187

million in 2016), with total economic output perhaps reaching \$250+ million when multipliers are considered. Employment supported by tourism would rise correspondingly – potentially adding a few hundred more jobs over the next decade if growth continues. These are not pie-in-the-sky figures; they simply extend the trajectory we have data for. It will be important to manage this growth so that the **quality of visitor experience remains high** – nothing would jeopardize the park’s economic value faster than reports of overcrowding or environmental degradation. Thus, the outlook ties closely to careful stewardship. Assuming that is achieved, **Kachemak Bay State Park’s economic contributions are likely to grow and remain a cornerstone of the local economy for the foreseeable future.** The park’s appeal is enduring, and interest in authentic nature experiences is unlikely to wane. With climate change and other global issues, Alaska may actually become even more attractive as a pristine destination. In conclusion, the park’s economic future is bright, contingent on strategic actions to sustain and capitalize on its popularity.

Policy and Investment Recommendations

To **maximize the economic benefits** of Kachemak Bay State Park while preserving its natural integrity, several policy and investment measures are recommended for consideration by state and local policymakers, park managers, and community stakeholders:

- **Invest in Park Infrastructure and Maintenance:** Increasing funding for trails, campsites, cabins, and sanitation in Kachemak Bay State Park will enhance the visitor experience and enable the park to handle growing numbers sustainably. Well-maintained trails and facilities encourage longer stays and return visits. For example, constructing additional public-use cabins or improving trail signage and safety features can make the park more accessible to a broader range of visitors. Such investments act as a force multiplier on economic impact – satisfied visitors are more likely to spend in the local economy and recommend the destination to others. Dedicating a portion of tourism-related revenues to a **Park Improvement Fund** could ensure ongoing maintenance of the park’s natural assets, which directly underpin its economic value.
- **Enhance Access and Transportation:** Work with transportation providers to improve access to the park. This could include supporting the Homer **water taxi operators** through infrastructure upgrades (e.g. better dock facilities or landing craft improvements) or coordinating schedules to ensure visitors can reliably get to and from the park. Exploring options for **expanded ferry service or air links** during peak season may also attract visitors who do not rent cars. Easier access translates to higher visitation and spending. Any access enhancements should be done in consultation with park officials to manage environmental impact, but overall, smoothing the transit “last mile” to the park will make it more appealing. Additionally, ensuring the **Homer Airport**

continues to offer robust flight connections (and possibly marketing Homer as a direct fly-in destination for park adventure) can support tourism growth.

- **Marketing and Promotion of the Park:** Policymakers should continue to support marketing efforts that highlight Kachemak Bay State Park as a unique destination. This includes partnering with the **Alaska Travel Industry Association**, local tourism boards, and travel media to promote the park's experiences (hiking, kayaking, wildlife viewing) in target markets. Special focus could be on attracting niche segments like eco-tourists, adventure travelers, photographers, and birdwatchers who tend to spend more and stay longer. Creating itineraries or packages that bundle the park with other Kenai Peninsula attractions (for instance, a "Kenai Wilderness Tour" that includes Kachemak Bay State Park, Kenai Fjords, and fishing charters) can disperse visitor flows and increase overall regional spend. Marketing should also leverage the park's status as **Alaska's first state park** and its wilderness character – these storytelling angles resonate with visitors and can draw heritage or conservation-minded tourists.
- **Extend the Tourism Season:** Encourage and develop **shoulder-season tourism** products to reduce the extreme seasonality of visitation. For example, local organizations and businesses can be supported (through grants or joint marketing) to create events or packages in May and September, such as guided spring wildflower hikes, fall photography workshops, or expanded programming around the **Kachemak Bay Shorebird Festival**. In winter, promoting activities like backcountry skiing, snowshoe treks to glaciers, or even guided snowmachine (snowmobile) tours in permitted areas could bring a smaller but meaningful number of visitors. Extending the season helps businesses employ staff for longer, stabilize income, and make better use of infrastructure, thereby increasing the annual economic impact of the park. Policymakers could assist by adjusting any seasonal regulations if needed and by ensuring year-round maintenance of access points (for instance, keeping trailheads or docks in serviceable condition in spring/fall).
- **Support Local Business Development and Training:** The quality of visitor experience (and thus their spending and likelihood to return) depends greatly on the services provided. Investing in **workforce development programs** – such as hospitality training, wilderness safety training for guides, and visitor service workshops – can help elevate the skill level of those employed in the park's tourism sector. Local colleges or vocational programs could be incentivized to offer courses relevant to outdoor tourism and hospitality. Policymakers might also provide small business support (low-interest loans, grants, or mentoring) for entrepreneurs looking to start or expand businesses that relate to park tourism, such as equipment rental shops, eco-tours, or cultural tourism ventures. Strengthening the ecosystem of local businesses ensures that the economic benefits of

the park stay local and grow. It also fosters innovation in the kinds of experiences available to visitors, which can increase spending and satisfaction.

- **Ensure Sustainable Tourism and Resource Protection:** It is crucial that economic gains do not come at the cost of the park's long-term health. Policymakers should implement and enforce **sustainable tourism practices**. This could include instituting visitor capacity guidelines in sensitive areas, requiring commercial operators to follow Leave No Trace principles, and funding environmental monitoring in the park. By protecting wildlife, habitats, and the overall wilderness character, the park will continue to be an attractive destination for future visitors. Consider developing a **carrying capacity study** for Kachemak Bay State Park to determine optimal visitor numbers and inform any necessary permit or quota systems for high-use trails or camping areas. Proactively managing impacts will prevent degradation that could reduce the park's appeal. Sustainable practices themselves can be a selling point – many travelers are drawn to destinations that balance use and conservation. Thus, conservation policy is integral to sustaining the park's economic engine.
- **Leverage Tax Revenues for Reinvestment:** As discussed, tourism in the Homer area generates significant tax revenue. Policymakers should consider mechanisms to **reinvest a portion of these revenues back into tourism infrastructure and promotion**. For example, if a **borough lodging tax** is enacted in the future, earmark a percentage of it for park maintenance, trail building, or visitor facilities (restrooms, visitor kiosks) that directly support Kachemak Bay State Park. Even without new taxes, allocate some of the existing sales tax income during peak quarters to fund grants for tourism marketing or park conservation projects. This creates a virtuous cycle: tourist dollars fund improvements that in turn attract more tourists. Transparent use of these funds for tourism-related purposes can also build public support for the visitor industry by showing residents that hosting tourists yields direct improvements to community assets.

In summary, **policy actions and investments should aim to sustain growth, improve visitor experience, and safeguard the natural environment** that is the source of the park's economic value. By improving infrastructure, access, and marketing – and doing so in an environmentally responsible way – Kachemak Bay State Park's economic impact can be amplified. The recommendations above are designed to help the park reach its full potential as a driver of sustainable economic development on the Kenai Peninsula. Policymakers are encouraged to treat the park and its tourism industry as a strategic asset: one that, with wise management, will continue to provide **jobs, income, and community funding** long into the future. By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can ensure that Kachemak Bay State Park remains both a **wild jewel of Alaska** and a source of prosperity for its people.



Roberta Highland and Robert Archibald

P.O.BOX 2460, Homer, AK. 99603

March 18, 2025
City of Homer Planning Commission
491 E. Pioneer Ave.
Homer, AK. 99603

Dear Planning Commissioners,

In general there are many positives about the new Plan. However, we have three main comments on the most recent draft of the Homer Comprehensive Plan Update:

1. **Land Use:** The "Future Land Use Map" as shown in the new Plan (Page 11 in the "Full" version of the Plan) has a grave issue: the "Industrial" land use shown to the west of Kachemak Drive. This has to be changed. We can't have an Industrial land use designation on top of critical habitat and important peatlands/wetlands. This is inconsistent with the strategies laid out in this Plan (see paragraph 2 below). This wetlands area has been a focus for Homer conservation groups, not to mention recreational users, for more than 25 years; and a part of the City's Green Infrastructure planning for at least the past 5 years.
2. **Wetlands:** The 2018 Comp Plan which we worked so hard on, and had lots of expert input, had a wetlands map and acknowledged the importance of wetlands to Homer. Wetlands is mentioned in a number of places (pages 12, 18, 31, 32) in this Plan with good suggestions, but this Plan has no wetlands map! This has to be changed so that at the least the Kenai Watershed Forum generalized wetlands are shown on a map in the Plan, along with text explaining wetlands in Homer, and their importance.
3. **Green Infrastructure:** It's a disappointment to see the no green infrastructure maps in this new Plan. Green Infrastructure was a big part of the 2018 Plan, and a great deal of City of Homer effort put into green infrastructure planning, including the expenditure of substantial funds. Maybe a map isn't needed, but this new Plan needs to address or update green infrastructure, and identify priorities that have arisen since 2018.

Roberta Highland

Former City of Homer Planning Commissioner

Robert Archibald

Parks, Art, Recreation & Culture Advisory Commission