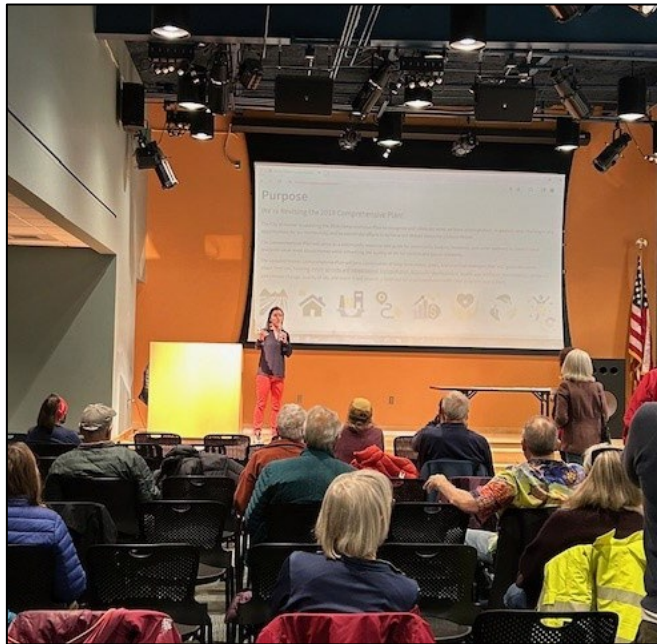




Homer Comprehensive Plan Rewrite: Summary of Community Visit Events March 26-29, 2024

Summary of Results



The planning team attended several events and conversations about the Homer Comprehensive Plan Rewrite project in Homer March 26-29, 2024. Below is a schedule of the events, with detailed notes below. Comprehensive notes from the Community Open House are attached.

Schedule of events:

-----Tuesday, March 26, 2024 -----

- Homer Steering Committee and Staff Meeting
- Homer Public Works Staff Meeting
- City Council and Planning Commission Joint Work Session

-----Wednesday March 27, 2024 -----

- Homer Chamber board and staff
- Homer Guiding Growth Meeting
- Homer Stormwater Working Group Meeting
- Port and Harbor Advisory Commission

-----Thursday, March 28, 2024 -----

- Port and Harbor Staff Meeting
- Homer Community Open House

-----Friday, March 29, 2024 -----

- Steering Committee Meeting
- Public Works Discussion

CITY OF HOMER Comprehensive Plan Rewrite



Community Open House Thursday, March 28, 6:00-8:00 PM Alaska Islands & Ocean Visitor Center

95 Sterling Highway #1, Homer, AK 99603

WE NEED TO HEAR FROM YOU, HOMER!

Help kick off a process that will **guide** Homer residents, leaders, organizations, and partners **over the next 10 years**.

Join us to:

- Share **what you value most** and **what could make life better** in Homer.
- Learn about the comprehensive planning process and how **your ideas will help shape the revised comprehensive plan** (find a link to the 2018 Plan on the project website: www.homercompplanupdate.com).



Contact Information

- **City of Homer Planner:** Ryan Foster, rfoster@ci.homer.ak.us, 907-299-8529
- **Project Consultant:** Shelly Wade, shelly@agnewbeck.com, 907-242-5326
- **Project website:** www.homercompplanupdate.com
- **City of Homer on Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/cityofhomerak>

Other March Events

- Joint Work Session with Homer City Council & Planning Commission, March 26
- Meeting with the Port & Harbor Advisory Commission, March 27
- Meetings with the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee
- Public sharing and feedback opportunities at local establishments
- Stakeholder interviews and meetings with local organizations



-----**Tuesday, March 26, 2024**-----

Homer Steering Committee and Staff Meeting

9 am - 11 am

Attendees: Ryan Foster, Kathy Carrsow, Shelly Erikson, Luke Rubalcava (RESPEC), Shelly Wade and Meg Friedenauer (Agnew::Beck)

Key takeaways and discussion:

- Next Steering Committing meetings will be April 17th and 29th, 3:00 pm - 4:30 pm
- Steering Committee members are invited to attend any meetings or discussions scheduled this week. Ideally members can attend the joint work session and open house events this week.
- Julie Engebretsen staffs the Economic Development Advisory Commission. Meg will work with Julie to arrange to attend a meeting with EDC.

The team reviewed preliminary data posters to be used at Thursday's open house. Comments and discussion included:

- How can data about Homer retirees be captured? It's a segment of the population that receives some tax exemptions, like property taxes, but they also desire city services.
- Homer seems to have unusually high home values/prices. Can that data be captured?
- Add median housing costs to compare median household income.
- Show effects of city's tax income compared to population.

Additional committee member comments:

- It's helpful for the Steering Committee to receive materials that will be reviewed at the meeting beforehand in the packets.
- Agnew::Beck will provide outreach materials for steering committee members to use in outreach for survey.
- Reach out to Senior Center to make connections with seniors. Mayor Castner may be able to assist with making connections with Senior Center staff.

Homer Public Works Staff Meeting

1:30 pm – 3:30 pm

Attendees: Dan Kort and staff, Luke Rubalcava (RESPEC), Meg Friedenauer (Agnew::Beck)

Key takeaways and discussion:

Biggest changes that affect public works department since last comprehensive plan update (2018) include:

- Personnel changes and turnover.
- Numerous new subdivision and extra manpower needed.

- Aging infrastructure.
- Acquired land for new public works center, but new center not yet designed or funded.
- Homer does not have a specific “parks plan.”

The group reviewed current comp plan actions and strategies and discussed progress on those actions and possible new actions for update.

City Council and Planning Commission Joint Work Session

3:30 pm – 5:00 pm

Meeting minutes and recording available at: <https://www.cityofhomer-ak.gov/citycouncil/city-council-planning-commission-joint-worksession-0>

The planning team met with the Planning Commission and City Council in a joint work session. Shelly Wade of Agnew::Beck provided an overview of the project schedule and goals. The Planning Commission and Council made individual comments about the comprehensive plan to start.

Key comments and questions from council and commission members included:

- Ensuring flexibility to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances like a future pandemic or natural disaster.
- Homer is not necessarily a “small town” but it has a role as a hub for the wider Kachemak Bay region and Kenai Peninsula Borough.
- Balancing infill and growth while preserving green space, drainage, and quality of life.
- Revitalizing downtown areas like Pioneer Avenue and creating a more walkable community.
- Being mindful of the workload of city staff during this process and when coming up with action items for the city.
- The comp plan work is especially important to prepare for phase two of the project, updating the zoning code.
- Considering the impacts of increased cruise ships or port activity on transportation needs.
- Assessing the appetite for different types of growth like tourism versus residential development. The book “Less is More; Degrowth Can Save the World” was cited as a resource about how to think differently about growth.
- Evaluating housing options like affordable units downtown versus large homes on the periphery of town.
- Incorporating existing plans for specific areas like the spit and medical district.
- Consider ADA compliance in recommendation, including an existing ADA transition plan.
- Managing increased development on sloped areas and its effects on downstream flooding.
- The comp plan cannot overlook the “day to day” responsibilities of the city and community, the infrastructure that needs to be maintained, even if these goals are mundane, they are important.
- A discussion of ensuring representation in public outreach and engagement efforts.
- A preview of the draft community survey that will be used to gather input.

- An overview of Agnew Beck's planned activities and community visits during the week in Homer.
- A review of roles and responsibilities outlined in the public participation plan.

Some of the key action items that came out of this meeting include:

- Revising the community survey based on feedback, such as potentially adding household size as a demographic question and adjusting the household income brackets.
- Ensuring representation of stakeholders like contractors and the senior center in outreach efforts.
- Exploring ways to visualize potential development scenarios, such as through maps or artist renderings.
- Considering how to address drainage and flooding issues related to development and growth.
- Engaging partners like the Kenai Peninsula Borough in the planning process given their role in the region.
- Involving the planning commission early in the process to allow for input.

-----Wednesday March 27, 2024 -----

Homer Chamber Board and Staff Meeting

10 am – 11 am

Attendees: Board members Joell Restand, Jim Anderson, Marcia Kuszmaul, Amanda Jerde and Executive Director Brad Anderson, Shelly Meg Friedenauer (Agnew::Beck)

The planning team met with members of the Homer Chamber of Commerce board member. Shelly Wade of Agnew::Beck provided an overview of the project schedule and goals.

Comments and questions from council and commission members included:

- The current comp plan is too generalized. There is no sense of what the community looks like or its character. The comp plan should be a practical tool and road map for the community.
- The business community is interested in providing input. This could be done through a specific survey for businesses. The Chamber could help distribute the survey through its network.
- There is interest in diversifying the economy of Homer, including through the arts and recreation opportunities, and supporting entrepreneurs.
- A priority is to revitalize downtown areas like Pioneer Avenue, making the retail areas more business and visitor friendly and accessible. Can the comp plan help answer, “what and where is Homer’s ‘anchor’ area?”
- Alaska Small Business Development Center has one part time employee located in the Chamber office and stays very busy.

Homer Guiding Growth Meeting

1:00 pm – 2:30 pm

The planning team met with members of the Guiding Growth Group. Shelly Wade of Agnew::Beck provided an overview of the project schedule and goals.

Discussion, comments, and questions from the working group included:

- Impacts of nonprofits are often underestimated; how can that be captured in the comp plan data? MAPP is an important connection in this regard.
- Guiding Growth developed in part to address, “What is driving change in Homer?” Some people are concerned about the fast pace of growth and development in the community. Others emphasize isn’t about “pro” or “anti” growth but about the rate of growth.
- There are different takes on “social status” in Homer. Some people give more merit to people who have lived in Homer longer.
- One dimension of growth is the demographic of who is moving to Homer. It impacts the kind of growth that occurs, i.e., recent growth concerns include the rise of large homes that sit empty for part of the year. That kind of growth is not conducive to most families or young people needing affordable housing.

- The community has limited ability to manage growth and land development. “We’re focused on individual lot development, not community development.”
- Can the comp plan expand the community’s tools to *guide* growth? Can it help the community understand how individual land development affects the community at large?
- There were some good goals in the 2018 comp plan but little work to establish how city code can support those goals.
- The 2018 plan doesn’t address fiscal funding strategies to address and accomplish goals.

Homer Stormwater Working Group Meeting

3:00 pm – 5: 00 pm

The planning team met with members of the Stormwater Working Group. Shelly Wade of Agnew::Beck provided an overview of the project schedule and goals.

Discussion, comments, and questions from the working group included:

- History of water management challenges in Homer dating back to the 1980s, and lack of progress on implementing recommendations from past plans and studies.
- Issues related to erosion, water quality, flooding, habitat connectivity, and their impacts on infrastructure and private property.
- Development pressures exacerbating existing problems by increasing impervious surfaces and altering natural drainage patterns.
- Gaps in city regulations and authority to adequately address stormwater management, wetland protection, erosion control, and downstream impacts.
- Opportunity to strengthen policies and codes through the comprehensive planning process to support green infrastructure and low impact development.
- Importance of interagency coordination between the city, local organizations, Kenai Peninsula Borough, state and regional landowners on solutions.
- Need for education around wetland delineation, regulatory authorities, and landowner responsibilities related to water.
- Potential community conversation on water management issues to gather broader public input.

Potential next steps that were discussed include:

- Identifying code revisions and policies to better regulate stormwater management, wetlands protection, and erosion control.
- Prioritizing "low hanging fruit" regulatory changes that could be implemented more quickly
- Exploring opportunities to work with the Kenai Peninsula Borough on coordinated planning and regulations.
- Hosting a community water management conversation to get public input on these issues.

Port and Harbor Advisory Commission

5:30 pm – 6:30 pm

Meeting minutes and recording available at <https://www.cityofhomer-ak.gov/phac/port-harbor-advisory-commission-regular-meeting-58>

The planning team met with the Port and Harbor Advisory Commission. Shelly Wade of Agnew::Beck provided an overview of the project schedule and goals.

Discussion, comments, and questions from the working group included:

- Setting up a work session with Agnew::Beck and the steering committee to discuss the comprehensive plan update process in more detail.
- Discussing the spit comprehensive plan and harbor strategic plan and how to incorporate them into the city comprehensive plan update.
- Ensuring commercial fishing and marine trades perspectives are well represented in the comp plan update.
- Ensuring effective communication and opportunities for public input throughout the comprehensive plan update process.

-----Thursday, March 28, 2024 -----

Port and Harbor Staff Meeting

1:00 pm – 2:00 pm

Attendees: Bryan Hawkins, Matt Clarke, Aaron Glidden, Amy Woodruff, Luke Rubalcava (RESPEC), Shelly Wade and Meg Friedenauer (Agnew::Beck)

The planning team met with Port and Harbor staff. Shelly Wade of Agnew::Beck provided an overview of the project schedule and goals. The group discussed how to incorporate the Homer Comprehensive Spit Plan into the comprehensive plan, infrastructure and programs the department oversees, the ongoing expansion project, and other topics and considerations for the comprehensive plan.

Homer Community Open House

6:00 pm – 8:00 pm at Islands & Ocean Visitor Center

Description of activity:

The planning team and city planning staff hosted a community open house attended by 70-80 people. The planning team opened the meeting with an overview of the comprehensive plan update process, purpose, and timeline. Participants were then invited to visit the posters with their ideas or *checkmark* those topics they agreed with.

See attached detailed meeting notes.

-----Friday, March 29, 2024 -----

Steering Committee Meeting

9:00 am – 11:00 am

Meeting minutes and recording available at: <https://www.cityofhomer-ak.gov/bc/comprehensive-plan-steering-committee-regular-meeting>

Key takeaways from this meeting include:

- There was positive feedback on the progress made with the community engagement so far.
- The committee discussed strategies for effective outreach during the busy month of May, including pop-up events and distributing materials at various community gatherings.
- Having face-to-face meetings with stakeholder groups like the Planning Commission was emphasized as still being important.
- Gathering input from underrepresented groups like indigenous people and working classes was highlighted as a priority.

The main action items from this meeting include:

- Finalizing the community survey based on feedback and testing it out.
- Scheduling Agnew Beck's next visit to Homer week of May 13
- Continuing community outreach and engagement through events in May to share preliminary survey results and gather more input. Agnew::Beck will provide “meeting in box” materials for events that may include:
 - Luke and Julie will work together on outreach events at SBS and Kachemak Gear Shed.
 - Meg to ask Julie about comp plan materials for health fair.
 - Meg to work on outreach to school.
 - Luke and Meg to work on outreach to Marine Trades group.
 - Shelly to work on outreach to Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee.

Public Works Discussion

3:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Attendees: Dan Kort, Jan Keiser, Luke Rubalcava (RESPEC), Meg Friedenauer (Agnew::Beck)

This meeting discussed topics from a fact sheet provided by Jan.

Homer Community Open House

Detailed results from poster exercise

Attendees were asked to answer the questions on the top of posters. They could also place a checkmark next to ideas they agreed with. The responses are grouped by themes, with the specific answers below and the number of responses listed in the right column.

What do you value most about living in Homer?

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Natural areas, natural beauty, recreational opportunities | 85 |
| Natural areas green space that is natural (not lawn) | 15 |
| Access to nature, animals | 14 |
| The natural beauty | 14 |
| To make a prosperous living in a safe and beautiful environment | 9 |
| Bike and hiking trails | 8 |
| Ecosystems that are (mostly) still functioning well to support diversity of life | 7 |
| All policies to consider health safety and environment including fish, bird, wildlife, and food web | 6 |
| Wildlife and moose | 6 |
| My life with others as well as the flora and fauna | 5 |
| Access to wilderness | 1 |
| Community, small-town feeling, and size | 84 |
| Small town | 15 |
| Not big box stores | 13 |
| Small businesses | 12 |
| Ease of getting involved, volunteerism | 10 |
| Not too many neon/large signs | 10 |
| Access to the harbor and ocean beyond | 7 |
| Small town feeling | 6 |
| Knowing or recognizing a high number of our folks. Community. | 4 |
| non-stereo type people - open minded locals. | 4 |
| We haven't paved everything into strip malls yet. | 2 |
| It's far from anguish (Anchorage) | 1 |
| Values of people and nature over money making...a reasonable life in which people care about each other and allow diversity - compassion, open mindedness | |

What is challenging about living in Homer?

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Lack of ease for biking, walking, parking concerns, and lack of public transportation | 54 |
| More and better bike trails | 12 |
| Not very safe for biking | 9 |
| Walking or bicycling around town and having to fear of getting run over by inattentive or inconsiderate drivers not looking both ways or following correct driving protocol i.e., running stop signs or yielding at marked crosswalks...yipes! | 8 |
| No public transportation | 8 |
| Public transportation | 6 |
| Parking at spit in summertime for locals (and overall traffic) | 4 |
| Turning left in summer | 3 |
| Lack of public parking and public transport | 3 |
| When walking/biking getting safely from point A to point B | 1 |
| Bad summer traffic | |
| Housing concerns | 43 |
| Affordable housing | 14 |
| Affordable housing | 12 |
| Need for senior housing | 7 |
| Bringing together a couple ideas I've already seen a bunch: sustainable, affordable, well-organized housing in walkable, family friendly neighborhood | 5 |
| Lack of enough high-density, affordable housing | 5 |
| Lack of or threats to green space, over development | 42 |
| Open green space going away | 20 |
| Over development | 7 |
| Not having walkable shopping, big empty spaces in downtown | 4 |
| Too much concrete without natural green areas | 4 |
| Lack of regulation to preserve balance between natural and build environment | 3 |
| Development/housing builds that clear cut | 3 |
| Not enough wilderness | 1 |
| No greenspace in parking areas | |

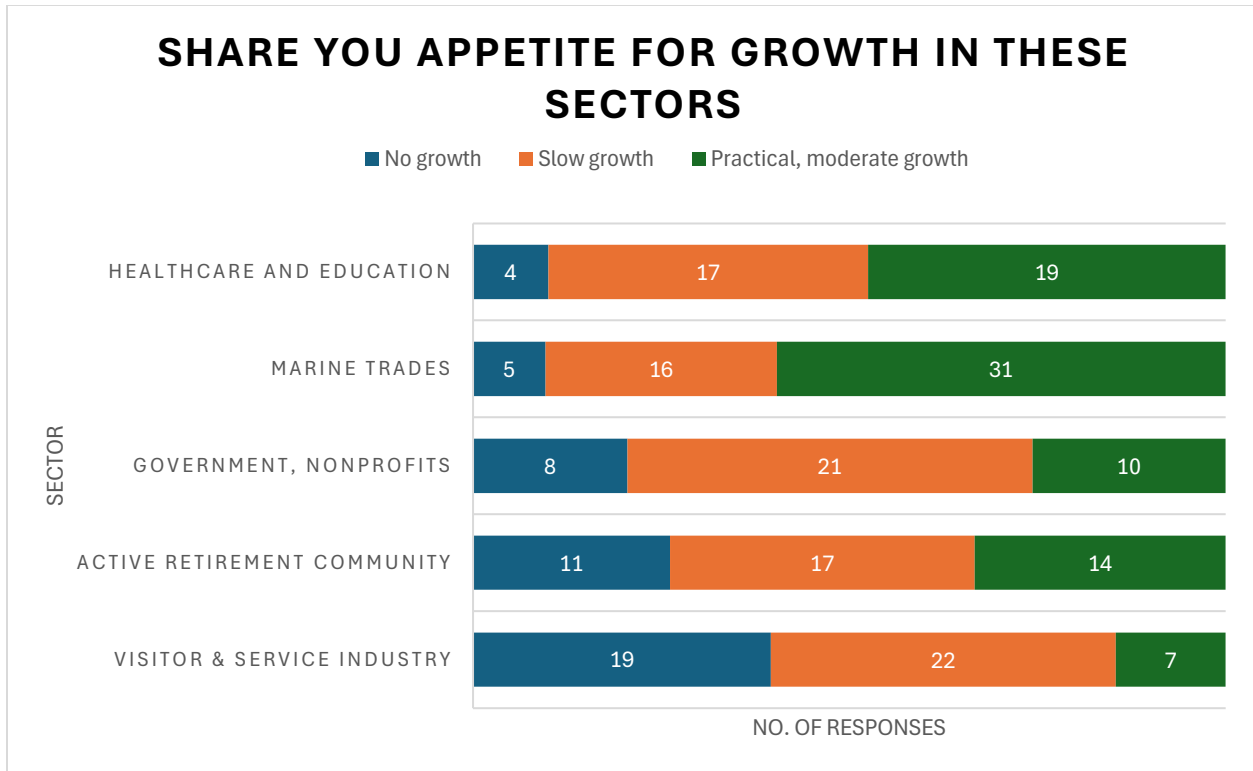
| Concerns about tourism | | 9 |
|--|--|----------|
| Overtourism | | 6 |
| Overrun with tourism, especially cruise ship days special summer days/holiday | | 2 |
| Future growth/overgrowth of less desirable tourism (cruise ships) that overwhelm the community - the spit in summer is extremely crowded | | 1 |
| Other challenges | | |
| Non-resident landowners - empty vacation homes | | 14 |
| Unhappy with legislative representation | | 10 |
| Walkability - it's getting better | | 10 |
| Very difficult for young families to make it in Homer | | 10 |
| Pressure on resources - fisheries, open land | | 6 |
| Lack of youth focus for youth activities and non-academic lifestyles | | 5 |
| Senior property tax exemption means more burden on young families | | 5 |
| High energy costs | | 5 |
| Recreation center needed | | 5 |
| How spread out "town" is | | 4 |
| Not enough employment opportunities that make living in Homer accessible/attainable | | 3 |
| Two economies - the have-much's and the have-nots. Less and less in between | | 3 |
| The dust in the spring from sand used on winter roads | | 3 |
| Road conditions/maintenance | | 3 |
| No convention center for group meetings of 50+ folks | | 2 |
| City serves a much wider population than those that live within city limits | | 2 |
| Finding affordable child/day care | | 1 |
| Bring exemption to current housing market levels | | 1 |
| East End Road - increased traffic and speed | | 1 |
| Flush of non-resident home owners since COVID | | 1 |
| Space for large number of people to gather/eat (weddings) | | |
| Parking is not shared and if there is room allow others to park there no complaining | | |
| The properties that are easy to develop are gone. Everything left has challenges and is expensive to build | | |

What could improve the quality of life in Homer?

| | |
|---|------------|
| Attention to nature, green space, beach access, recreation, and parks | 103 |
| Continued attention to trails and pedestrian connections in town | 15 |
| Protecting creeks and natural waterways | 14 |
| Make the Lake Street/Ocean Drive safer for walkers/bikes (think Farmers Market) | 14 |
| Keep Bay Ave. beach access | 12 |
| Maintain beach access - deliberate greenspace plan and implementation | 11 |
| Get easements to connect walking and hiking trails, sidewalks, etc. | 9 |
| Concentrate housing so less sprawl. Keep open, natural spaces | 9 |
| Learn to live in harmony with others and the environment | 7 |
| More trees and wildlife habitat - pocket parks | 6 |
| Natural infrastructure use ecosystem services like rye grass protection buffers between building lots natural not lawns | 3 |
| Include a recreation, service district | 2 |
| Prohibit clear-cutting of properties - requires vegetation retention | 1 |
| Trails, connect, increased green space, parks | |
| Zoning and regulation enforcement | 40 |
| No building higher than 35 feet | 12 |
| More housing options, denser, at a variety of price points | 12 |
| No building over 70,000 sq ft | 10 |
| Zoning enforcement | 3 |
| Zoning enforcement | 3 |
| Zoning | |
| City should take over regulation and enforcement of development of wetlands, like it used to do | |
| Regulatory measures that preserve balance between natural and built environments | |
| More housing | 15 |
| Senior housing | 6 |
| Small projects, small houses | 6 |
| FBC student housing | 3 |
| Less dense new housing areas | |

| Decrease impacts of tourism | | 13 |
|--|--|-----------|
| Less tourists | | 7 |
| De-emphasize tourism as our economic base - maintain tourism as a viable industry but manage the impact and monetize their visits so we can pay for the impacts | | 6 |
| Other | | |
| Ensure American Disabilities Act is followed in all businesses | | 4 |
| Accessibility vs just compliant | | 1 |
| Bed tax | | 9 |
| Shelter from sun in parking lots | | 8 |
| Large, comprehensive community recreation building | | 6 |
| Limit short term rentals to only owner/operator premises | | 6 |
| More emphasis on quality of life than on purely economic measures of progress | | 6 |
| Don't blow road snow into the Beluga Slough lots | | 5 |
| More focus on creating incentives for young families to thrive in Homer | | 5 |
| Diversify tax base | | 4 |
| Plan for climate change - more snow - warmer | | 4 |
| Public transportation | | 4 |
| Small is beautiful | | 4 |
| Banning miscreants no matter how rich or theologically connected they are | | 3 |
| Define what growth means - growth that is measured by measures that include preservation of nature with all humans in mind | | 3 |
| Adult day activities | | 2 |
| Let youth have more say in the development of Homer | | 2 |
| Big Brothers/Big Sisters org | | 1 |
| Create a blue zone (geographic area with low rates of chronic disease and increased life expectancy) | | 1 |
| Consider ocean/fishing failure | | 1 |
| Youth employment program | | 1 |
| More access roads | | |
| Support for youth teen spaces | | |
| More emphasis on small, quick, pilot-project type fixes (>\$10,000) over huge money (>\$100,000.) i.e., point a crosswalk, use removable bollards, find traffic slowing methods instead of building \$1.2 million sidewalks. | | |

Appetite for Growth



| Additional ideas for economic development | |
|---|---|
| Community solar, wind, tidal | 5 |
| Senior housing | 5 |
| Music, arts, and film school | 3 |
| Public transportation | 3 |
| Adult day care | 3 |
| Young people housing | 3 |
| Senior housing | 2 |
| Railroad or bus from Home to Anchorage airports through North Kenai | 2 |
| Being accessible, not just compliant | 2 |
| Small business incubation | 2 |
| Educational training: plumbers/electrical schools the teach carpenters/tradespeople | 2 |
| More agriculture | 1 |
| Growth in Agriculture, high tunnels, farming, food production | 1 |

| | |
|--|--|
| Growth in Construction | |
| Growth in Repair/industrial: auto, hydraulics, marine trades, dirt work | |
| More summer camps for adults and kids | |
| Remove barriers to having small business in residential areas? | |
| Walkable city | |
| Keep destination for gateway to recreation, ocean, and arts small business | |
| Showcase energy self-sufficiency and retention of small business with that outside of city connections to agriculture, food production, unique diverse community: small houses, agriculture, solar, wind off grid lifestyle, unique experiences on small scale, art education destination, marine trades education (including college and high school) | |
| Later generational/co-housing | |
| Turn local "trash" into more recycle energy | |
| Art coop | |
| non driving housing | |



Additional comments from map posters

Port and Harbor of Homer Alaska 2016 map

Bigger Harbor

Make sure port and harbor upgrades and expansion are ADA compliant and accessible

Make harbor clean energy generator with vertical tidal generation

Tidal energy that takes advantage of up and down motion of dock infrastructure

Add water access for non-motorized watercraft (kayaks, small sailboats) on outside of harbor.
Allow good access at all tide stages. Reduce safety issues in harbor.

City of Homer Topography & Wetlands

Structure tax that does not force residents to sell large parcels

No clear cutting

City of Homer Land Ownership Map and Homer Spit inset map

Limited gravel parking. No asphalt or concrete. Let spit drain.

Use wood bollards with chain to cordon off parking

Protect the bands of rye grass on the spit. No net loss. This holds the spit together

Define industrial. Non-polluting industry safeguards put in place to accommodate environment

Acknowledge there is no more parking (on the spit). Adjust congestion not adding parking

Share available parking to accommodate other business needs.

Give incentives to homesteaders with large acreage or lots so they are not forced to sell to pay taxes. Structure tax base that holds larger properties in trust until they subdivide.

Develop a connecting trail from Reber up the powerline along W. Hill

Comprehensive Plan Land Use Recommendations Map

Add zoning category for high-density housing (condo/townhouse0apt) and encourage downtown development that includes efficient parking, open walkable areas, etc.

Trail extension to Diamond Creek

I would like to see less restrictions on residential code, setbacks, lot size, min/max structure, and less restrictions on housing/small biz in residential areas

Charging parking, could change the “feel” and walkability of downtown, thinking of Pioneer Ave. Not all parking in front of businesses?

Bring code up for hotels and larger building city wide

Less parking minimums

