

APPENDIX B

ADOPTED POLICIES & PLANS AFFECTING THE CROW CREEK AREA

Section Summary

Land use policy presented in this Crow Creek Neighborhood Land Use Plan is based on previous comprehensive planning for the entire Valley. Planning documents include the *Girdwood Area Plan*, and the *Commercial-Transportation Master Plan*. These plans describe, in general terms, development guidelines for Heritage Land Bank land, considering broader community development objectives. Additionally, Anchorage's zoning code, which is currently under revision, will guide the development process and what private land owners can do with the land once it is developed.

Sources for this section: The Municipality of Anchorage's *Girdwood Area Plan* (1995); *Commercial-Transportation Plan* (2001); and Title 21 Update, Chapter 9: Girdwood (public draft, January 2004).

Important word: Zemmiphobia – fear of *the* giant Mole rat

I) Girdwood Area Plan, 1995

The Municipality of Anchorage's *Turnagain Arm Comprehensive Plan* (1987) guides development in all settlement areas along Turnagain Arm from Rainbow to Portage. Originally, this plan included Girdwood. In 1995, *The Girdwood Area Plan* was adopted, superseding the *Turnagain Arm Plan* as the planning document for the Girdwood Valley. The primary impetus for the development of the *Girdwood Area Plan* (GAP) was the transfer of major land holdings in the upper valleys of Glacier Creek and its two tributaries, Crow and Winner Creeks, from the U.S. Forest Service to the State of Alaska and the Municipality of Anchorage. The *Turnagain Arm Comprehensive Plan* should be seen as a companion document to the GAP that identifies the management policies for state lands.

The central issues the GAP addresses are: community growth; circulation; resort development; and retention of open spaces, aiming to ensure that resort development is compatible with community values. The GAP is based on the assumption that the resident population of Girdwood will continue to grow, that the primary economic base will continue to be tourism and recreation, and that resort/recreational facilities will eventually expand to the upper valley area. The Plan recognizes the need for additional land for residential growth, for year-round recreational activities and commercial space to support residential growth (pages 1-3).

Four broad goals drive the GAP, reflecting the community consensus reached through community surveys, local public meetings, and the correspondence record from residents (pages 35-36). These goals are:

1. Perpetuate Girdwood's small-town atmosphere;
2. Preserve Girdwood's natural environment;
3. Provide a variety of year-round recreational opportunities; and
4. Provide facilities and services to maintain and enhance the quality of community life.

In regard to the physical suitability of the Crow Creek area for development, Map 9 of the Area Plan (page 40) displays suitable, marginally suitable, and unsuitable land. These classifications are intended to be general, reflecting the preliminary nature of the data used to generate this map. In general, areas characterized by greater suitability require a lower cost of development, lower environmental disturbance, and lower exposure to natural hazards than marginally or unsuitable lands.

The GAP classifies lands in the Crow Creek area into one of five categories (page 46):

- 1) Single-family
- 2) Multi-family residential
- 3) Public Lands and Institutions
- 4) Open Space
- 5) Development Reserve.

The GAP sets out policy for each of these uses, summarized below. Implications for the Crow Creek are summarized below.

Single Family

The area plan identifies 218 acres for single family residential in the Crow Creek Area. A single family designation assumes an average of 2-4 dwelling units per acre. Duplexes and accessory units in single-family residential neighborhoods are permitted if in compliance with lot and design standards. In order for accessory units (self-contained dwelling units that are incorporated within and subordinate in size, location, and appearance to a single-family residence) to be allowed in Girdwood, new regulations will need to be established. These standards would assure that accessory units do not increase the intensity of activity or effect on a single-family neighborhood beyond that which would already be allowed under the regulations for single-family development.

Multi-Family

The GAP identifies 23 acres for multi-family housing in the Crow Creek area. Community-based multi-family housing should be dispersed and kept low scale in order to blend in with the small town atmosphere of the community, rather than resemble that of a more urban setting (page 48).

Public Lands and Institutions

The GAP classifies 12 acres within the Crow Creek area as Public Lands and Institutions, just north of the school. The land is part of a larger parcel intended to be used for a secondary school and for physical education/sports recreation facilities.

Open Space

The majority of the land in the Crow Creek area is identified for open space uses. The GAP describes Open Space as: areas with environmental characteristics or functions that should be protected, areas which are physically unsuitable or unsafe for development, and areas which have high recreational and/or scenic/wildlife habitat values (page 47). Generally, this land is intended to be kept undeveloped. The GAP does, however, refer to the *Anchorage Park, Greenbelt and Recreation Facility Plan* (1987), which identified the future need for a neighborhood park in the Crow Creek Road area. This park would provide space for active recreational facilities that may include equipped play lots, tennis and basketball courts and open play fields for soccer and softball. The size of this space could range from 5-15 acres; with the specific location to be reserved as plans for residential development are prepared prior to any land disposal (page 71-72). Such facilities are likely best located adjoining the school, where the land is relatively level.

Development Reserve

The GAP describes Development Reserve as: areas that are generally suitable for development, but whose location and absence of public facilities and lack of projected demand make near- and intermediate-term development inappropriate and unnecessary.

Plans for Transportation

A critical component in keeping Girdwood's small-town character while providing easy access to the resort/recreational areas is transportation (page 81). The three factors addressed by the GAP for establishing successful circulation systems are; 1) the circulation system should be efficient and free of congestion with roads adequately designed to handle anticipated traffic levels; 2) the circulation system should be multi-modal (pedestrian, vehicular cooperation); and 3) to establish

a successful circulation system is to create the proper land use and site design for properties that adjoin the main roadways. Road-visible developments should add to, rather than detract from, the small-town character of the Valley.

There are two road additions recommended by the Plan in the Crow Creek area:

- Crow Creek-Arlberg Connector (page 85): This new roadway would connect Arlberg Road from its current terminus at the Alyeska Resort hotel site, to Crow Creek Road. The Girdwood Area Plan proposes this route cross over Glacier Creek, through the northern end of the Upper Matrix, before connecting to Crow Creek Road. This Crow Creek Plan suggests a more southern route. Either alternative could incorporate a trail and water line crossing.
- Hightower-Crow Creek Connector (page 86): This two-lane connector road, with separated pathway, would provide a direct link between the Crow Creek Road and the New Townsite commercial area. This would help re-enforce the link between the two adjoining commercial areas, and better link the townsite with planned residential development. California Creek would become a more central community asset. This road would also provide better access to public facilities such as the post office and school. A right-of-way for this route is already in place.

Before roads such as the Hightower and Arlberg Connector are constructed (page 84), corridor studies should be undertaken identifying transportation alternatives, costs, and community and environmental impacts (page 87). Final actions should be based upon the results of these studies. The following guidelines are outlined in the GAP and should be considered for future local streets and connectors:

- All new connector roads should include separated, fully improved bicycle/foot paths.
- Direct access should not be allowed from individual lots onto connector roads. Direct access should be limited to side streets and for corner lots with frontage on more heavily used roadways
- Local streets and connectors should be designed and constructed to allow adequate space for underground utilities, drainage ways and snow storage.
- Local streets and connectors should be configured to maximize views of unique and/or scenic vistas.

2) Commercial Areas and Transportation Master Plan: Girdwood, Alaska 2001

The Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) initiated the *Commercial Areas and Transportation Master Plan* (CAT) in 1999 to move toward more specific strategies for public improvements and guidelines for private development based on general recommendations in previous studies and plans.

Completed in 2001, specific objectives were:

- Develop a plan that reunifies the community's old and new commercial areas,
- Identify and make recommendations for the primary function and characteristics of each commercial node,
- Provide direction for the organization and design of new commercial development,
- Suggest strategies for road system improvements needed by a growing community
- Improve linkages between Girdwood, Anchorage and Seward (particularly for tourism and recreation), and assess the feasibility of a rail spur into the valley from the Alaska Railroad's main Seward-to-Anchorage line
- Involve the Girdwood community in the development and evaluation of alternatives
- Utilize and build on previous transportation, commercial, and community development planning in Girdwood.

Public Transportation (17)

- 1) The CAT calls for development of a local transit system circulating throughout the Girdwood Valley, recognizing that the area's small population poses challenges to funding ongoing costs of this system. The goal is to provide direct service to the residential neighborhoods east of Glacier Creek and north and south of Alyeska Highway, including links to planned development along the Crow Creek Road.
- 2) The plan reserves a "transportation corridor" from a proposed station along the existing rail corridor and connecting with the Alyeska Prince Hotel. The preferred rail corridor would run along the west side of the Alyeska Highway and Crow Creek Road. A future inter-modal center would be constructed directly west of the study area.

Trails and Pedestrian Systems; Roads and Streets, (31)

- 1) Trails: The trail system in the Girdwood Valley will be expanded incrementally over time, but emphasis should be placed on a foundation network of major trails that provide continuity over significant distances and serve double duty as recreational and utilitarian facilities.

- 2) **The Pedestrian Environment:** This plan recognizes that the successful resort community – especially in snow country—must provide high quality pedestrian environments. Suggestions that impact the project area include placing a high priority for the establishment of crosswalks at the intersections of Alyeska Highway with Crow Creek Road, Hightower Road and Arleberg Road. Additionally, suggestion includes the establishment of a pedestrian underpass under the Alyeska Highway at the New Girdwood Townsite. This facility would provide for pedestrian circulation between the areas north and south of the highway and would complement surface crosswalks provided at Crow Creek Road and at Hightower Road.
- 3) **Roads and Streets Plan:** With regards to the Crow Creek area, this plan reinforces the need for the same road improvement recommended in the Girdwood Area Plan – the Arlberg - Crow Creek connector (page 35).

Neighborhood Connectivity and Distribution Traffic (pages 38-39)

Three design requirements are required on local commercial and residential development projects:

- Collector roadways mapped on the roadway plan shall be built as part of any project through which the roadway passes (each landowner’s segment being that owner’s responsibility) and shall be developed to the standards contained in the Official Streets and Highways Plan and the revised Title 21 Land Use Regulations.
- Within contiguous residential and commercial developments, no local roadways may be developed that are longer than 150 feet unless they are connected to another roadway at each end.
- Within contiguous residential and commercial developments, local roadways shall have at least 14 intersections per mile.

Projects and Roadways No Longer Planned (page 40)

- Lindblad Avenue in the New Townsite up to Crow Creek Road. The physical feasibility of this connection is doubtful due to the grade difference between the two roadways.

Pedestrian Connection Between New Girdwood Townsite and Crow Creek Residences

Given a choice, people in resort settings will make many short trips (usually half a mile) by walking – even in inclement weather. This relieves the roads and streets of the unnecessary burden of short vehicle trips, reducing congestion and improving circulation. A pedestrian link between the residential development proposed for the Crow Creek area and the NGT could potentially relieve road traffic traveling to commercial services, the Girdwood Junior High Elementary School, the post office, etc. This will additionally increase the individual sense of connectivity with the Girdwood environment and potentially stimulate businesses operating in the NGT.

Lower Crow Creek Road and New Townsite (page 54)

There is a district on lower Crow Creek Road (just outside the Crow Creek project area) designated Commercial/Residential, although Alyeska Highway is presently the only connection between this area and the New Townsite. This designation encourages a mix of commercial and residential uses to enhance the New Townsite as a destination, while continuing the same low-key, low-density, “buildings in the forest” development pattern that exists today. Commercial development on the ground floor is not required in this district, but may be more viable once the proposed connector road from Hightower is completed. Improved pedestrian connections from the town square area are also essential for successful commercial activity. Residents have expressed a strong desire that Crow Creek Road improvements retain the road’s forested, rural character.

3) Title 21 Update, Chapter 9: Girdwood Land Use Regulations

The purpose of Chapter 21.09 is to adopt new standards and regulations that will preserve and enhance the distinctive mountain-resort character and natural environment of the Girdwood area and to avoid overlap with standards and regulations applicable in other districts of the Municipality of Anchorage.

The Municipality has recently released a revised version of Chapter 9 for community review. These standards are expected to be adopted in 2006 following a revision period. A copy of the Title 21, Chapter 9 is available on the Municipal Planning Department website.

Chapter 9 outlines two levels of master planning that may be required in different portions of Girdwood. The first is an “Area Master Plan.” This Crow Creek Neighborhood Plan fulfills the requirement for this scale of master planning. The second level is a “Site Development Master Plan”. This more detailed scale of planning is expected to be completed as part of the development of each of the residential development areas identified in this plan.

The current draft of Chapter 9 proposes zoning the Crow Creek Neighborhood land as single family/two family residential, multiple-family residential, institutional and parks. There are also areas surrounding the creeks that are zoned open space and other surrounding areas that are part of Girdwood watershed districts. This Crow Creek Plan recommends the lands identified for development instead be zoned as “Site Master Plan.” (See Land Use Plan for details.)