

Homer Comp Plan Public Workshop #1
4/25/2007
Synopsis

Approximately 65 people attended the first workshop for the Homer Comprehensive Plan Update held at the Homer High School Commons. The workshop was facilitated by Tanya Iden and Ellen Campfield Nelson of Agnew::Beck Consulting, LLC, as part of the Homer Comprehensive Plan process. In addition, five break-out sessions were facilitated as follows:

- . Land Use & Housing – Tamas Deak, KPB
- . Transportation & Walkability - Tom Brigham, HDR
- . Economic Development – Steve Colt, ISER
- . Environment & Open Space – Tanya Iden, Agnew::Beck
- . Public Services & Facilities – Beth McKibben, City of Homer

Following are the large themes and major points from each part of the evening’s program: group visioning, breakout sessions, large group discussion/wrap-up.

GROUP VISIONING:

Attendees were asked “What is your vision for Homer” and “What is it that makes Homer unique?” The workshop participants brainstormed the following:

- Be a Youth Friendly Town– In particular, desire was expressed for a youth center with good facilities and programs that really supports all ages of youth. An attendee responded that Superjacent is an existing facility for teens.
- Implement the Non-motorized Transportation Plan
 - Trails and sidewalks serve youth well
 - Winter trails create a challenge – who maintains, non-profit/city?
 - Look at Scandinavian countries as a model
- Develop Better Infrastructure
 - Stay ahead of, or at pace with, growth and development
 - Look at city as business and anticipate growth
 - Amenities improve our city
 - Subsidize infrastructure – low interest financing (think beyond just raising taxes)
- Effectively Implement Plans and Codes
 - Implementation of the Comp Plan and city policies is key
 - Taxes are necessary to support the city (city money is our money)
 - Town center development has not been supported by zoning. Development has been allowed on periphery – not conducive to compact downtown
 - Enforce zoning
- General/Broad Points
 - Increase density in downtown
 - Improve walk-ability
 - Use a watershed approach to land use planning – this is key to protecting sensitive habitats and water quality

- Develop newer character and identity for Homer that looks towards the future using environmental design – LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification
- Economic engines – support health field, recreation, education, tourism; all good industries
- Maintain integrity of older neighborhoods – citizens assume zoning protects you, will help the neighborhood maintain its character... but does not
- Preserve character of rural residential
- Explore Covenants vs. Zoning
- Homer is unique – maintain the small town feeling
- Friendliness – we take care of on another
- Look at the City and community as a household vs. Business
- Homer is like a family
- Need development that creates opportunities for kids to come back to. How will our kids fit into the future?
- Quality individuals choose to live here
- Clean development
- Need to see comparable studies from outside that incorporate progressive planning ideas
- Improvement and adding amenities drives up prices, changes demographics and property value

BREAK OUT SESSIONS

During this portion of the evening the group cycled through small group discussions around five key issue areas. Following is a summary of the main themes/ideas generated in the breakout sessions.

1. Land Use & Housing:

- Develop options for several types and price ranges of housing (affordable and diverse, student housing)
- Readdress current zoning
- Address the challenge of rural residential, “guy next door might subdivide”
- Better implement and enforce codes and zoning, no spot zoning
- Institute development standards “so the city doesn’t have to catch up and clean up later”
- Encourage CBD (Central Business District) in fill (parking, walk-ability) use incentives
- Promote environmentally sound development (look at carbon footprint and energy use)
- Incentivize smart growth
- Pair open space with new development
- Preserve small town feel; Homer to remain unique

2. Transportation:

- Develop consolidated parking – on street and E/W lots
- Plan now for later airport needs

- Implement roundabouts!
- Develop water and land transport that's desirable
- Decrease traffic speed within central areas
- Promote walk-ability, loop roads (Pioneer St., Main St., Beluga Lk.)
- Improve beach access
- Develop a safe system for bikes and pedestrians
- Analyze impact of development on rural roads, collectors

3. Public Services and Facilities:

- Optimize, maximize use of education facilities to house programs, serve various groups
- Develop infrastructure related to economic development
- Account for non-residents who are using Homer's public services
- Redevelop ice rink to create multi-use, multi-seasonal facility
- Foster good relationships between entities: programs, agencies, developers, etc.
- Inform the community in advance where infrastructure will go
- Dedicate and identify beach access sites
- Develop a public restroom in central business district (CBD)
- Consider spit as a seasonal annex of CBD
- Upgrade and redevelop older facilities
- Address the need for a mental and behavioral health facility
- Ensure adequate extension of water and sewer in timely fashion (anticipate development)

4. Environment and Open Spaces Summary:

- Identify and preserve important wetlands – no more development in wetland areas
- Implement strategies to increase density in order to preserve environment and open space
- Preserve visual quality of environment, require that visual impact of new development be assessed and identify important view sheds
- Preserve and improve beach access
- Connect trails and pedestrian corridors, loop systems
- Acknowledge potential impact of global warming (i.e.- ocean rising, beach impact)
- Determine methods for dealing with waste, specifically junk car clean-up
- Require development to factor in water run-off impacts
- Support renewable energy

5. Economic Development Summary:

- Capitalize on existing industries (education, health, tourism, commercial fishing)
- Address the need for livable wages and jobs for kids
- Develop affordable housing
- Pursue education as an industry (film school, maritime and adventure education)

- Promote Homer as a gateway to nature tourism in Kachemak Bay area
- Help Homer citizens develop skills for a modern economy
- Focus on “Green” development as a support to the economy and an efficient use of limited resources, specifically look at: renewable energy and resources, global climate change, small efficient housing, and promoting clean industry
- Reduce economic leakage
- Support the development of transportation infrastructure and entrepreneurial infrastructure
- Utilize volunteers and develop a volunteer system/network

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION/WRAP-UP

At the end of the evening the group came back together to hear the summaries of what was discussed in the breakout sessions as well as add/elaborate on any issues. Following summarizes comments made by the workshop attendees during this wrap-up session.

- Support early childhood education – good for kids, good for families, good for jobs and businesses
- Promote energy efficiency through smart choices for public facilities and using northern design principles
- Improve access for people with disabilities, especially in winter
- Keep public facilities to a manageable scale
- Encourage co-usage of public facilities to keep them affordable, well-used, for community (e.g. – churches)
- Address light pollution and preservation of rural skies (+ energy drain)
- Improve the pedestrian experience with separated ROW and landscaped “boulevards” in some places
- Promote slower, narrower streetscapes
- Consider restrictions on lit signage and acknowledge lighting as a visual impact
- Analyze the unintended consequences of everything you implement (e.g. – smaller footprints; senior housing, handicap access impact)
- Formulate a broad enough plan to be flexibility and allow for new expectations as the community changes and grows
- Ask “what would be the downside?” for every idea and goal
- Preserve vegetation: specifically large trees, native flora
- Analyze the cost impact of taxation on undeveloped land
- Give preference to native vegetation in parks, open space, buffers
- Address where to store typical Alaska items – kayaks, boats, 4-wheelers, etc. in suggested “small footprint” housing development
- Realize Implementation - “we need committed, motivated people on various levels working together over the long –term”
- Say “not only what can my city do for me, but what can I do for my city.”