

Homer Comprehensive Plan Update Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) Meeting #1
Monday, January 29, 2007; 6:30 p.m.
Cowles Council Chambers
Meeting Notes

Val McLay, Chairman of the Citizen Advisory Committee, began the meeting with a word about the importance of the Homer Comprehensive Planning Process. He emphasized it is essential the CAC remain open to all ideas – old ideas and new ideas.

Eleven of the twelve committee members and two interested community members were present at the meeting held at the Cowles City Council Chambers. The meeting was facilitated by Chris Beck of Agnew::Beck Consulting. Everyone in attendance self-introduced and shared some of their background and experience.

Attendance:

· Committee Members

Allegra Bukojemsky	Tina Day
Marianne Schlegelmilch	Michael McCarthy
Bill Smith	Val McLay
Christopher Story	Jim Henkelman
Hannah Bradley	Bob Howard
Anne Marie Holen	Barb Seaman - absent (out of town)

· Interested Community Members

Ray Kranich (Chair, Homer Planning Commission)
Walt Wrede (City Manager)

· Staff

Beth McKibben, City of Homer Planning Department
Chris Beck, Agnew::Beck Consulting
Tanya Iden, Agnew::Beck Consulting

Overview of the Planning Process:

The group quickly ran through the CAC Member Packet (which is posted on the Homer Comprehensive Plan website), briefly discussed the Planning Process and the roles and responsibilities of the Committee. Chris Beck described that the CAC has three key roles: 1) sounding board, 2) guiding body, and 3) ultimately, advocate for the Plan. The goal is to have a working consensus for the Plan – there may be a minority opinion on some components of the Plan, but for the most part it will ideally become something all CAC members can support.

There was discussion about the fact that public participation is critical to the success of the Plan. The Public is welcome to attend CAC meetings. Additionally, there will be well-publicized public workshops throughout the planning process and documents will be circulated for broad approval. Agnew::Beck's experience has been that the public must be involved in order to get better quality results and have a plan that gets approved.

Schedule (posted on-line) – Aiming for first public workshop in the middle of April in order to have time to get a better sense of the core issues the plan shall address. After the workshop Agnew::Beck

Consulting will draft a Framework plan which is a short, easy-to-read version used to get a lot of feedback from the community. Second workshop would take place after review of the framework plan. The entire planning process from beginning to final Plan shall take approximately one year.

Issues Discussion:

The group discussed issues associated with Homer's past and future growth, with a focus on the following general questions:

- What are the primary issues the plan should address?
- What is your vision of Homer in 10-15-20 years?
- What are the strengths/weaknesses of the existing comprehensive plan?

The following specific conversation points were generated through the issues discussion. Best efforts were made to capture the spirit of all comments. Note: these comments don't necessarily reflect the consensus of the full group; they depict what was said by different individuals.

- Wealthy retirees demand amenities and services but don't provide jobs except for a few...but we don't want to send them away either.
- Not all retirees are wealthy but they do contribute to the community in other ways such as buying goods and services.
- Retirees bring a lot of energy to the community, have time, want to volunteer, how to take advantage of the retiree resource.
- Definition of retiree has changed. More active, younger.
- Homer is going to grow and it will continue to be attractive to wealthy people. Need to ensure that there is affordable housing. There is a struggle between affordability and desirability and providing for the needs of both young and old people.
- Market determines the look and feel of the town; affordability of housing is and should be based on market forces.
- We do not want small lot sizes, they provide no access for service vehicles, no dedicated right of way.
- Perhaps we should not be afraid of density because it is a tool to prevent sprawl. Compact town/neighborhoods that are well-designed are more pleasant and more economical because they don't cost as much to maintain. Need to ensure that there is green space.
- Outside buyers do actually want high quality housing, not one on top of the other, etc.
- Don't want big condos blocking the view
- Infrastructure is extremely important as well as a reliable city staff and services
- We are going to grow and we need to have a clear path.
- Comp plan is more of a business plan to me...where are we going with infrastructure, water/sewer, something understandable needs to be developed.
- I'd like to see green/ landscaping commensurate with the amount of construction and paving that we do. General pollution and more paved/impenetrable surfaces is concerning.

- A walkable town is an important goal
- Hillside development can create erosion; beach bluff development is a problem. Need to manage our resources better.
- The example was given of a not particularly affluent area in Kodiak that started to become developed. In its original state, houses of moderate means had great views, then someone came and built pilings out into water and blocked the views with housing above the water. We don't want that.
- Hillside development was discussed, in particular some people have homes in higher areas so their view can't be blocked. It seems the only way a person can be guaranteed their view is to buy property in front of their house. Can't say "you can't build in front of me" - times change.
- Building and zoning codes are needed to make things predictable so that you know what might be able to happen on your neighbor's property. To have it unbridled leaves it hard for community. Need to allow you to predict potential behavior.
- Currently we have no mechanism in our zoning code to deal with site condos.
- Need a plan that says yes to the type of development that reinforces the qualities that brings people to our community.
- It is in the economic interest to try to maintain a character that is somewhat predictable and reasonable.
- You shouldn't have to be rich to live here. There are real Alaskans still here. Want people to not have to have plumbing if they don't want it.
- Need a better economy for young people...entice them to stay in Homer.
- Current jobs – fishing, construction, tourism, healthcare, mental health, education, federal gov, state, education. Tomorrow – Biology, marine sciences, geology, earth sciences, there are a lot of research organizations but mostly tied to outside large universities. 4 year college would make the town more attractive to young people.
- Local entrepreneurship – Homer has a reputation as a place where it's not easy to establish a business. Need to be more welcoming to business.
- Individual entrepreneurs are fine, but we need to entice bigger businesses (e.g., businesses that create up to 15 jobs).
- Some of us have spent many years trying to figure out how to entice larger companies. But maybe we don't want businesses that aren't locally based. For instance when the Icicle fish plant burnt down, they left town. However, when a local person's fish processing business burnt down- he rebuilt.
- Communications – Homer has great fiber optics capability, and the chance to market itself to the technology industry segment. High quality, fast communications.
- We can work anywhere we want and be productive.
- Banking headquarters – why not? Great medical facility already exists here.
- Tourism – it would be nice to see more of a focus on eco-tourism. Kayaking, bicycle rentals, whale watching, art, sport fishing, non-consumptive tourism. Winter tourism.
- Preserve the beauty, don't allow noise/light pollution and increased traffic issues.

- We were all drawn here for a reason – what kind of feeling do we want people to have.
- The town had more of a community feel in the past because there were fewer places to go – saw people at the same few places. Need more of a social hub. But need to balance the fervor/hub with the sleepy/mellowness.
- I like that you see people you know at the grocery store, safe, sense of community.
- Local people have designed and built the community. We haven't had tract homes, we haven't had big development. Nature of Homer is really determined by the sense of the people who live here rather than corporations.
- Homer isn't like other places, it doesn't have chain development. Homer's uniqueness is important, we don't want it to be like every other place.

As evident from the list of bulleted items, the three issues questions raised much discussion. After sorting through these comments in addition to ideas and issues raised at a multitude of meetings over a two day trip (January 29-30, 2007), Agnew::Beck organized what was heard by both the CAC and others into 11 general themes listed below. The CAC will need to review this information and confirm whether this synthesis is accurate and helpful. More specifically, this synthesis incorporates ideas and comments heard from the following people and groups: Dean Thoemke - Homer Volunteer Fire Department Assistant Chief, Carey Meyer – Public Works Director, Steve Dean – Port Director, Mark Robl – Police Chief, Economic Development Commission, CoHOST, City Council and Planning & Zoning Commission members, City of Homer Planning Staff, the City Clerk's office, and Walt Wrede – Homer City Manager.

11 Emerging Themes:

1. Changing demographics – “arrival of the retirees” (one local real estate office said that 85% of all their real estate transactions were with non Homer-based buyers) – new arrivals are changing land prices, changing expectations re services and facilities.
2. Location, patterns for new growth – need to provide room to grow, in a manner consistent with concerns about Homer's character, and also with concerns about sprawl & global warming. This issue is in turn linked to possible changes in the water and sewer service area, to the possibility of future annexations.
3. Need for more housing, particularly affordable housing – housing prices have increased approximately 20% annually for the last several years (according to MLS records); housing prices are driven by wealth at a level very difficult to match in Homer.
4. Housing density – as housing prices increase, there is a need to find ways to provide for higher density housing, while ensuring high quality. The process should provide information on examples of such housing, and of housing standards.
5. Walkability , trails and open space preservation
6. Road connectivity
7. Protection of natural environment – policies re drainage, erosion
8. Land use regulations – need to revise, clarify, update zoning code and related development standards (e.g., to address urban vs. rural residential, to address mixed use areas such as boat yard)
9. More (good) jobs – Homer needs a diverse, vibrant economy, that builds on and respects Homer's strengths and character (e.g., fish & ocean, tourism & conferences, infrastructure improvements to

reduce costs (e.g., container dock), education & research, health & medicine, art & culture, quality of setting as attraction for footloose businesses and entrepreneurs.

10. Public Services and Facilities/Fiscal health – need to match public resources generated with level of services required to maintain and improve Homer’s quality of life. Explore options for bed tax, for raw fish tax.
11. Summary – Increase jobs, increase housing, and keep Homer Homer – address issues above, find ways to expand the economy and housing and to hold onto those qualities that make Homer unique. Homer’s attributes include: views & beauty, access to natural world, a working town, small, “cosmic”, rural, friendly, authentic...

Final CAC Business:

- The group discussed potential times for Public Workshops. A 4pm to 7pm open house was popular with the group. The first round of public workshops is scheduled for mid April
- The CAC meeting in March will have participation via teleconference by Agnew::Beck Consulting
- There was consensus that the best time for CAC meetings is Monday night – 6:00 to 8:00
- Chairman Val requested agenda’s for CAC meetings be available about 4 days prior to meeting.
- A vice-chair was selected via consensus – Bob Howard

Tasks:

- Agnew::Beck Consulting will develop a flyer about the plan that CAC members can forward organizations of which they are a part.
- Agnew::Beck Consulting will work to find examples of successful planning initiatives – i.e., attractive medium density housing, successful site plan development. A lot of people can tell you what they don’t want but they don’t know what they want.

Good Suggestions/Things to keep in mind:

- Think broader than just the city limits. It was noted by the committee that everything we do in Homer effects people outside of city, need to look to the surrounding area as well.
- Can’t say no – need to say, how can we!