

Agenda Parks, Art, Recreation & Culture Advisory **Commission Special Meeting**

Thursday, December 19, 2024 at 5:30 PM City Hall Cowles Council Chambers In-Person & Via Zoom Webinar

Homer City Hall

491 E. Pioneer Avenue Homer, Alaska 99603 www.cityofhomer-ak.gov

Zoom Webinar ID: 205 093 973 Password: 610853

https://cityofhomer.zoom.us Dial: 346-248-7799 or 669-900-6833; (Toll Free) 888-788-0099 or 877-853-5247

CALL TO ORDER, 5:30 P.M.

AGENDA APPROVAL

DISCUSSION TOPIC(S)



A. Comprehensive Plan

COMMENTS OF THE AUDIENCE (3 minute time limit)

ADJOURNMENT

Next Regular Meeting is Thursday, February 20th, at 5:30 p.m. All meetings scheduled to be held in the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska.

To: PARCAC

From: Janette Keiser, PE

Date: November 5, 2024

Re: Food for Thought about Comp Plan and Parks/Recreation

CONTENTS: This Memorandum contains excerpts from Homer's existing Comprehensive Plan related to parks, recreation and culture aspects. There is some language in Chapter 4 – Land Use as well as Chapter 6 – Public Services & Facilities. I have listed key phrases that describe community values pertaining to parks, recreation and culture aspects, as identified in the 2018 Comp Plan. Most, if not all, the community values identified in 2018, are the same community values we are seeing in the 2024 surveys and public forums.

This Memorandum also contains the specific Objectives and Implementation Strategies, which were established in 2018. Some of the Implementation Strategies have been accomplished; most have not.

It also contains Recommendations for the new comprehensive plan and code, intended to take the 2018 Implementation Strategies a step further in supporting the community's values.

PURPOSE: The purpose is to stimulate discussion and brainstorming by identifying what our current reality looks like and seed the ground with ideas for future action.

CHAPTER 3 – COMMUNITY VALUES

Here are some particularly relevant excerpts from the list of community values:

- Appreciation of Homer's spectacular natural setting...
- Desire for ready access to open space, parks and recreation
- Pride and support for local arts
- Interest in lifelong learning and opportunities for access to education
- Support for a diverse economy
- Retain the best of Homer's community character

CHAPTER 4 - LAND USE

GOAL 1: Guide Homer's growth with a focus on increasing the supply and diversity of housing, **protect community character**, encouraging infill, and helping minimize global impacts including limiting greenhouse gas emissions.

Objectives and Implementation Strategies do not address parks, trails or open space

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEW COMP PLAN & CODE

Incorporate space for parks, trails and open space into the City's development standards and codes.

- 1. Develop design standards that encourage use of green infrastructure and open space.
- 2. Develop a Parks Master Plan that identifies spaces that would be good candidates for parks and open space.
- 3. Update Homer's Non-motorized Transportation Plan to identify routes that would make good candidates for trails and paths.
- 4. Strengthen city code regarding when and how new developments are required to include trails, paths and sidewalks.
- 5. Develop new city code that specifies when and how open space needs to be incorporated into new developments.

GOAL 2: Maintain the quality of Homer's natural environment and scenic beauty.

Key phrases:

- Homer's natural setting provides many benefits but also creates significant constraints.
- Growth will need to be guided to meet Homer's concerns about protecting...the quality of the environment.

Objective A: Complete and maintain a detailed "green infrastructure" map for the City of Homer and environs that presents an integrated functional system of environmental features on lands in both public and private ownership and use green infrastructure concepts in the review and approval of development projects.

Implementation Strategies:

- Review how developments affect on- and off-site environmental functions.
- Support the preservation of green infrastructure

Implementation Strategies:

- Review lessons learned from the implementation of site development standards.
- Incorporate development standards that address environmental constraints, functions and best practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEW COMP PLAN & CODE

- 1. Do what we said we would do in 2018:
 - a. Create a "green infrastructure" map.
 - b. Support the development of green infrastructure.
 - c. Review lessons learned from implementation of site development standards and enforcement practices.

- d. Incorporate environmental concerns & best practices into development standards, code and enforcement practices.
- 2. Revise code to incorporate review of green infrastructure in permitting and land use decision making.
- 3. Incorporate Green Infrastructure Projects into City's capital plans and budgets.

Objective C: Provide extra protection for areas with highest environmental value or development constraints.

Implementation Strategy:

Support acquisition of environmentally sensitive land for preservation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEW COMP PLAN & CODE

- 1. Do what we said we would do in 2018; that is, support acquisition of environmentally sensitive land for preservation as open space
- 2. Provide property tax relief for undevelopable land preserved for public benefit.
- 3. Use Conservation and Open Space designations more liberally to include undevelopable or environmentally sensitive land.

Objective D: Collaborate with jurisdictions outside the City of Homer, as well as state and federal agencies, to ensure that environmental quality is maintained.

Implementation Strategy:

• Support practices that preserve and maintain environmental quality outside the City of Homer.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEW COMP PLAN & CODE

- 1. Do what we said we would do in 2018; that is, support practices that preserve and maintain environmental quality outside the City of Homer.
- 2. Work with governmental and non-governmental organizations to designate and protect sensitive areas.

CHAPTER 6 - PUBLIC SERVICES & FACILITIES

GOAL # 1 Provide and improve city-operated facilities and services to meet the current needs of the community, anticipate growth, conserve energy and keep pace with future demands.

Objective E: Identify resources needed to operate parks, recreation facilities and programs, enhance City and community-sponsored year-round recreational facilities and programs to serve people of al ages, and support citizen efforts to maintain environmental quality and public use of beaches through the Beach Policy.

Key Phrases:

Need secure funding

- Endowment fund
- Better coordinate all efforts through combined Parks and Recreation Department
- 4.73 FTEs budgeted for Parks
- 1 FTE budgeted for Community Recreation (programming)
- Hardworking sector of volunteers
- Multi-use Community Recreation Facility

Implementation Strategies:

- Seek out strategies that enhance facilities and programs
- Pursue partners to maintain and expand recreational opportunities
- Consider the ability of the City to support a Community Recreation Center
- Implement and review beach policies

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEW COMP PLAN & CODE

- Have a separate chapter for Parks
- Have a separate chapter for Community Recreation
- Update and separate the tasks set forth in the 2018 Comp Plan's Parks and Recreation Project List into a Parks list and a Community Recreation list and incorporate into their respective chapters.
- Incorporate action items from PARCAC's Strategic Plan
- Expand the Parks Chapter by:
 - Incorporating appropriate language from the Land Use Chapter about open space and non-motorized transportation
 - Incorporating appropriate language from the Transportation Chapter about non-motorized transportation
 - Incorporating appropriate language from the Economic Vitality Chapter about the potential for parks to contribute to Homer's economy.
 - Expand the Community Recreation Chapter by Incorporating appropriate language from the Economic Vitality Chapter about the potential for parks to contribute to Homer's economy.
- Build an organizational connection between Community Development Department and Parks so there is better coordination and communication regarding issues involving both land use, open spaces and non-motorized transportation
- Integrate PARCAC into discussions with the City Council's Recreation Champions

CHAPTER 7 – ECONOMIC VITALITY

Goal 3: Identify and promote industries that show a capacity for growth.

Objective C: Promote recreation, the arts, and non-government organizations as a complement to tourism and as an export industry.

Implementation Strategies:

- Consider and review zoning for opportunities that support the arts industry.
- Support sustainable recreational facilities and opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEW COMP PLAN & CODE

- Strengthen the language about how Parks and Community Recreation can contribute to Homer's economic development.
- Build collaboration between the Economic Development Commission and PARCAC
- Build an organizational connection between Community Development
 Department, Parks Division and Community Recreation so there is better
 coordination and communication regarding issues related to economic
 development, parks and community recreation.



Homer Comprehensive Plan Rewrite Growth Scenarios Report Card Results

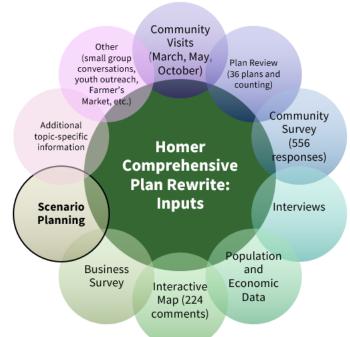
Draft for Steering Committee review, November 26, 2024

Introduction

The City of Homer is <u>updating the 2018 Comprehensive</u>

<u>Plan</u>. As part of this process, three scenarios were developed to explore what a desired future Homer could look like. These exploratory scenarios can help navigate uncertainty about the future by using data and community input to illustrate what a desired future Homer could look like. The scenarios can also:

- **Build education** and awareness around issues faced by Homer now and in the future.
- **Build consensus** around possible solutions.
- Define a strategic direction for the plan by identifying variables and key drivers of change
- Clarify plan goals, strategies, and actions to guide Homer toward its desired future.



The Details

- **Timing**: The scenarios debuted at the October 22, 2024, Community Work Session at the Islands & Ocean Center, where over 90 Homer residents provided feedback. The Story Map-based online version of the scenarios and report card were available on the project website during the first two weeks of November 2024.
- **Design and Promotion**: The growth scenarios Story Map and report card were designed and promoted with assistance from the City of Homer planning staff and Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee members. The in person work session and virtual report card were promoted via e-blasts to the project listserv, social media, radio announcements, an ad in the Homer Times, and the event flyer was included in packets for all City committees and commissions.
- Responses: The report card received 123 total responses from both the the Community Work Session
 and the online growth scenarios Story Map. Some individuals may have completed both the in-person
 work session and online report cards.
- In-person versus online: The wording and numbering on the report cards was minimally modified between the in-person meeting and the online Story Map. In addition to the report card, in-person attendees were able to fill out comment forms with no prompting questions, the responses to which were included in Question 9 for analysis.

Scenarios Overview

Input from the public through the community and business surveys, interactive comment map, interviews, and small group conversations strongly guided the direction of the three scenarios. There were three scenarios that Homer residents considered:

- **Status Quo:** Maintain current trends, keep current zoning and land use policies.
- **Enhance**: Increase density minimally through minor code modifications and focus on current economic drivers.
- Amplify: Increase density moderately through major code modifications and encourage new economic drivers aimed toward young families.

View the three potential growth scenarios here.

Key Takeaways

Overall, the **Enhance** and **Amplify** scenarios were preferred by Homer residents over the **Status Quo** scenario.

- Over 75% of respondents said that the Enhance (34%) or Amplify (41%) scenario best aligned with their vision for Homer in 2035 (Question 1).
- While the Amplify scenario was preferred by the largest group when thinking about a vision for Homer in 2035 (Question 1), in the more detailed grading, Enhance received the most A and B grades and the fewest D and F grades out of all three scenarios (Question 2), showing more consensus around Enhance than Amplify.
- Many respondents preferred Enhance or Amplify but identified elements of the other scenario that they
 also liked. Responses to questions 3-5 shed some light on this dynamic:
 - 1. For **Density & Housing Attainability**, Amplify received more A and B grades than Enhance (54% vs. 49%).
 - 2. For **Sustainability & Resilience**, Enhance received more A and B grades than Amplify (52% vs. 47%)
 - 3. For **Parks & Open Space**, Enhance and Amplify were nearly tied in terms of A and B responses, with Enhance receiving only 1% more than Amplify.
 - 4. For **Economic Opportunity**, Amplify received 15% more A and B grades than Enhance, showing a clear preference among respondents.
 - 5. For **Financially Sustainable Infrastructure**, Enhance received more A and B grades than Amplify (54% vs. 46%).
- The top 3 biggest priorities identified by respondents for the next 10 years were (Question 6):
 - 1. Suitable/sustainable development (34%)
 - 2. Financially sustainable infrastructure (20%)
 - 3. Attainable housing (19%)
- In response to questions about policy changes, respondents frequently mentioned support for increased density, environmental protection, and strategies to increase housing affordability. There is also broad support for updating the City's Title 21 Zoning Code. Opinions on economic development vary, but the consensus appears to be that development should prioritize the needs of local residents and small business owners and support the growth of the working population in Homer.

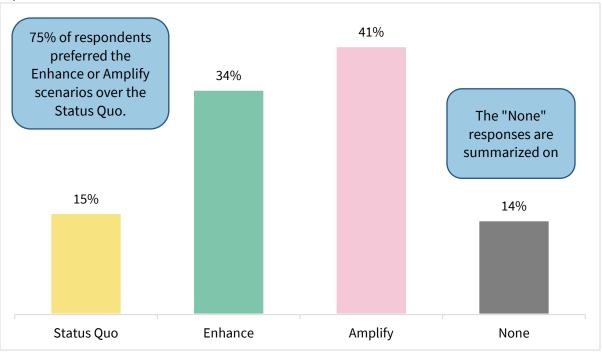
Index of Results by Question

| 1: Overall, which scenario aligns most with your vision for Homer ten years from now? | . 4 |
|---|-----|
| 2: Please grade each scenario on how well it achieves your vision for Homer | . 5 |
| 3–5: Please rank Status Quo's / Enhance's / Amplify's ability to achieve your vision in specific categories | . 6 |
| 6. My biggest priority for Homer over the next 10 years is: | ۱1 |
| 7 and 8: What action or policy change will help achieve your priority? What is the barrier to implemention? . 3 | ۱1 |
| 9: What other comments, questions, or concerns do you have for the project team? | 16 |

Survey Results

Question 1: Overall, which scenario aligns most with your vision for Homer ten years from now (i.e., Homer in 2035!)? Please check the box.

Answered: **91**. Multiple choice question. Respondents who answered "None" were prompted to provide an explanation.



Key themes from the explanations given for the "None" responses:

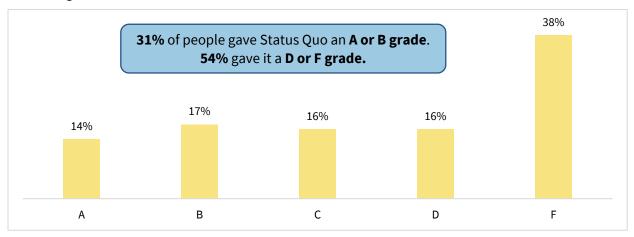
- Comments indicating an overall preference for Status Quo in terms of growth (prefer no growth or "natural"/unguided growth), coupled with a desire for the sustainability & resilience, parks & open spaces, and nonmotorized transportation policies from other scenarios. Arts, education, and healthcare are also mentioned.
- The City should focus on revising the zoning code and ordinances.
- Management of city water is key.
- Green spaces, wetlands, and other critical natural environments should be protected.

Question 2: Please grade each scenario on how well it achieves your vision for

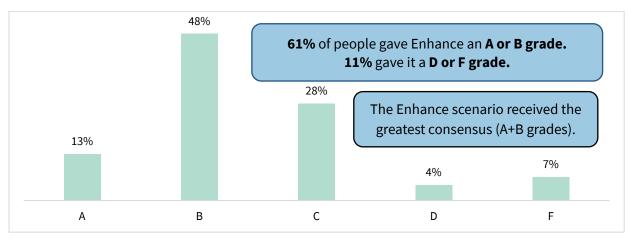
Homer. "A" = Very well; "C" = Neutral; "F" = Not at all

Answered: 96. Multiple choice question.

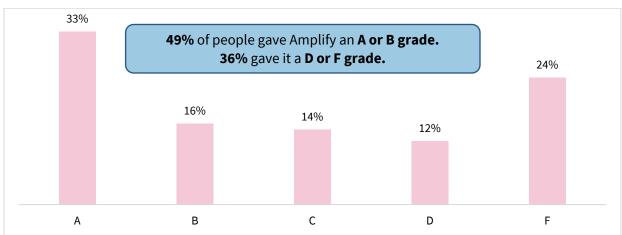
Status Quo



Enhance

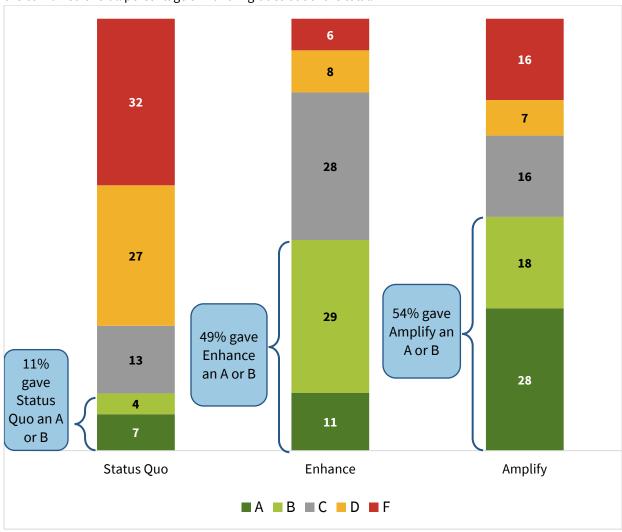


Amplify

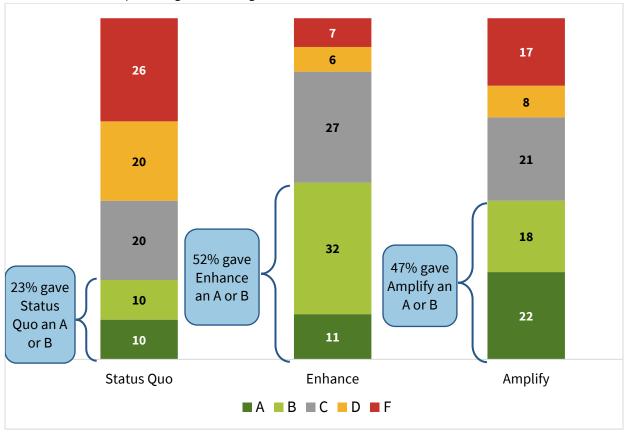


Questions 3–5: Please rank *Status Quo's / Enhance's / Amplify's* ability to achieve your vision for Homer in specific categories. Please circle one grade per scenario/per category. "A" = Very well; "C" = Neutral; "F" = Not at all

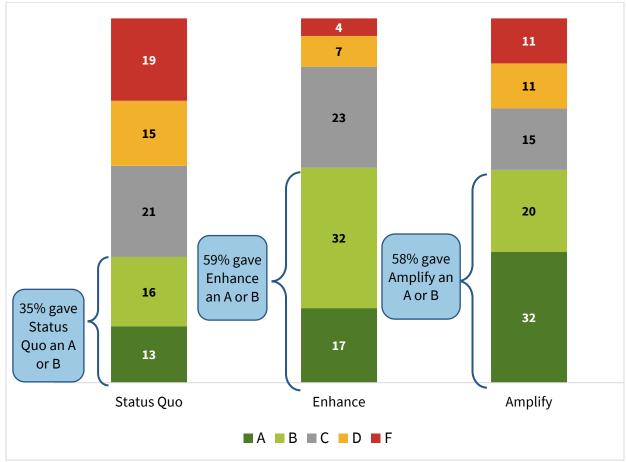
Density & Housing Attainability



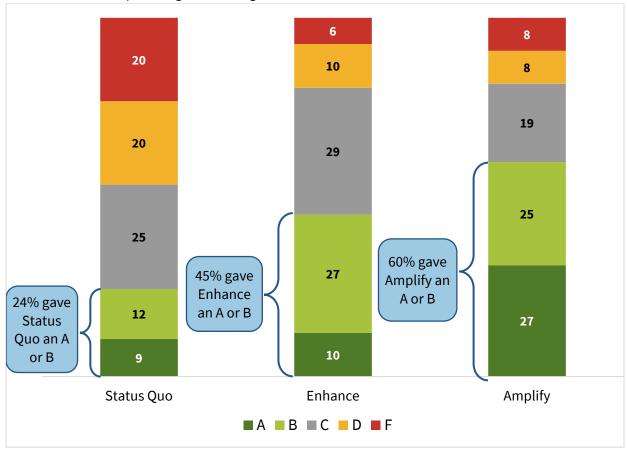
Sustainability & Resilience



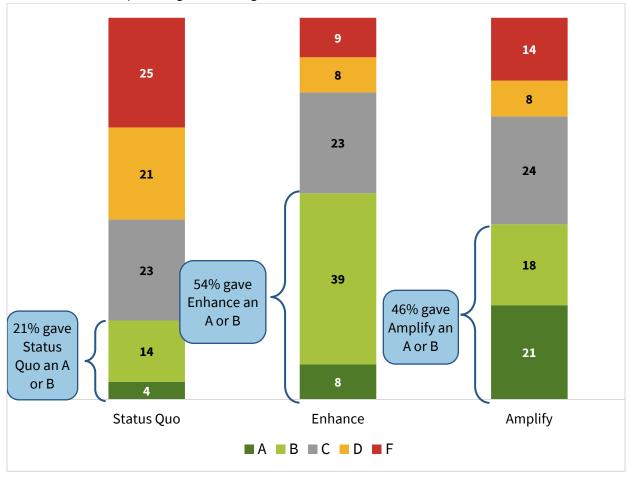
Parks & Open Space



Economic Opportunity

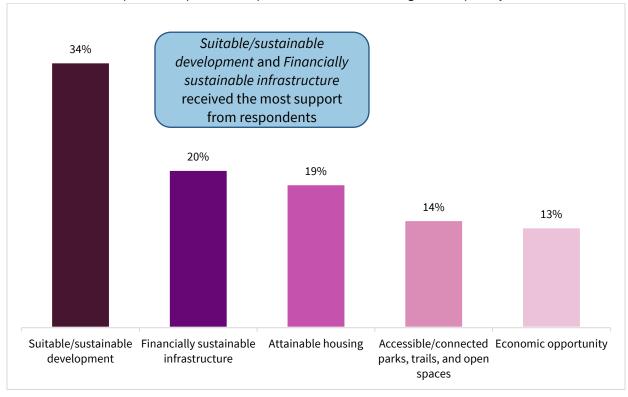


Financially Sustainable Infrastructure



Question 6: My BIGGEST PRIORITY for Homer over the next 10 years is:

Answered: 108. Multiple choice question. Responses sorted in descending order of priority.



Questions 7 and 8: What SINGLE ACTION or POLICY CHANGE will help achieve your biggest priority from the previous question? *AND* What is THE BIGGEST BARRIER to implementing the action/policy you've described above?

Answered: **100** (Question 7), **94** (Question 8). Open-ended question coded for themes, organized in descending order by frequency of mention. Some responses had multiple themes, so the count is higher than the total number who answered. The tables include themes that were repeated at least four times. For tables that had fewer than 4 comments, all themes represented in more than one comment are included.

Suitable/Sustainable Development

ACTION OR POLICY CHANGE

| Themes | Count | Representative Quotes |
|--|-------|---|
| Change zoning code | 8 | Zoning for infill, smart parking Change zoning to allow increased density and lot coverage in central business district |
| Incentivize desired development/housing types | 6 | Expand walkability & density in city center. Avoid urban sprawl, preserve green spaces outside town. LESS single family homes. |
| Enforce zoning code and implement comprehensive plan | 6 | Don't make exceptions to code, hold developers etc. to spirit of sustainable growth Require city planners to guide development according to goals in comp plan |

| Prioritize the natural environment | 5 | Control and manage growth along environmentally sustainable and culturally supported lines Policies and regulations need to be strengthened to control growth and protect wetlands, streams, rivers, aquatic habitat, etc. |
|---|---|---|
| Update permitting process and building code | 5 | Strict/environmentally sound building code and land use Building permit process w/ qualified personnel + codified environmental considerations |
| Maintain small town character/limit growth | 4 | Limit Homer's exponential growth Keep the longtime character of Homer, which we are already losing in the last 10-15 years. Do not allow development to change this into a different place |
| Tax or restrict short-term rentals and vacation homes | 4 | Minimize out of town short term rental ownership. Limit Airbnb and Sedona home millionaire expensive housing |
| Promote infill and higher density | 4 | Development of core area. Infill of vacant, underutilized lots. Revisit the Town Center concept and encourage public/private partnerships to develop the heart of Homer. |

BARRIER

| Themes | Count | Representative Quotes |
|--|-------|--|
| Lack of time/political will | 15 | Folks who desperately need affordable housing have little voice and visibility. Political will to adopt + pay for the infrastructure it would take to put this system in place |
| Lack of planning or regulations | 14 | Plats are issued and development is approved without restriction resulting in exponential growth Homer is growing too fast due to lax regulations allowing anyone to build large monster homes anywhere |
| Lack of sustainable development policy | 6 | Pro-development, no taxation mindset It [suitable/sustainable development] doesn't seem to be required at this time. It seems looked on as a guide that can be ignored. |
| Lack of funding | 6 | Growth outside the city depends on city services, city lacks funding to support growth outside city Anything that requires significant funding needs to start with stating who is willing to pay for it |
| Current zoning code/building code | 4 | Lack of policy and zoning Commitment to single family housing, laissez-faire approach to expansion |

Financially Sustainable Infrastructure

ACTION OR POLICY CHANGE

| Themes | Count | Representative Quotes |
|--------------------------------|-------|---|
| Reduce barriers to development | 5 | Reduce housing and development regulations to make utilities more affordable Reduce cost and regulation of development and improve existing infrastructure |

BARRIER

| Themes | Count | Representative Quotes |
|--------------------------|-------|--|
| Lack of political will | 7 | Financial and representative support from city council Political will, proper "marketing" to voting public, and disciplined approach with "public interest" (vs "private interest") as top priority |
| Lack of funding/capacity | 5 | The city needs the funding to be able to support growth |

Attainable Housing

ACTION OR POLICY CHANGE

| Themes | Count | Representative Quotes |
|---|-------|---|
| Incentivize desired development/housing types | 7 | Incentivizing the development of denser housing to increase the availability of year round rentals + starter homes Please stop the single family home zoning |
| Tax or restrict short-term rentals and vacation homes | 6 | Bed tax on Airbnb's + incentivize year-round rentals There needs to be something fundamentally done about the short-term rental units in Homer if we want to see new families and residents actually growing the city. |
| Promote long-term rentals | 4 | Provide tax breaks for 5-10 years to anyone building a duplex or larger to rent >1 year leases to allow them the ability to keep rent low Landlord/renter laws improvement. Restrictions on monthly rentals. |
| Update permitting process and building code | 4 | Simplification of permitting for development, particularly for affordable housing developments Build using universal design |

BARRIER

| Themes | Count | Representative Quotes |
|---|-------|---|
| High cost of living/cost of development | 6 | Zoning that prevents the building of multi-family units |
| | | Expense + time of permitting process |
| Community pushback/lack | 6 | NIMBYism. It is common to be reluctant to change |
| of understanding | | Community pushback and lack of funding |
| Current permitting process | 4 | Shorten building permits to 2 years or require |
| and building code | | builders to meet current code |
| Lack of funding/partnerships | 4 | Public/private partnerships & visions |

Accessible/Connected Parks, Trails, and Open Spaces

ACTION OR POLICY CHANGE

| Themes | Count | Representative Quotes |
|-------------------------|-------|---|
| Invest in parks and | 3 | Create a centralized location that connects the |
| recreational facilities | | community that is accessible to everyone |
| | | We need to attract more families to Homer by |
| | | investing in our education and recreation |
| Develop, fund, and | 3 | Develop & implement park specific maintenance |
| implement a park | | plans to validate preventative maintenance |
| maintenance program | | Support parks + rec. including more support for |
| | | nonprofits, e.g., bike, ski, trail clubs |
| Protect environmentally | 2 | Safeguard stream setbacks, don't build on steep |
| sensitive areas | | slopes prone to landslides, don't build in the Homer |
| | | Sponge |
| Plan for green/open | 2 | Focus on open space, connectivity, and recreational |
| spaces | | opportunities |

BARRIER

| Themes | Count | Representative Quotes |
|-----------------------|-------|--|
| Lack of funding/wrong | 4 | Utilizing funds in the right way versus disbursing out |
| funding priorities | | for several different parks or trails |
| | | Lack of funding and education for available |
| | | opportunities |

Economic Opportunity

ACTION OR POLICY CHANGE

| Themes | Count | Representative Quotes |
|---|-------|---|
| Update permitting process | 3 | Less restrictive code for new development Diding size verticals. |
| and building/zoning code Attainable housing | 2 | Building size restrictions |
| Attainable flousing | 2 | Housing for locals and a diversified economy |
| Expand Homer/develop | 2 | Expand Homer to include Kachemak City |
| commercial areas | | |
| Support business growth | 2 | Allowing more businesses to come to Homer |

BARRIER

| Themes | Count | Representative Quotes |
|---------------------|-------|--|
| Current zoning code | 6 | Property being zoned in a way for so few units Large lots sizes in subdivisions is a big barrier to more affordable housing |

Question 9: What other comments, questions, or concerns do you have for the project team?

Answered: 88. Open-ended question coded for themes. Some responses had multiple themes, so the count is higher than the total number who answered. These results include responses to the comment forms that were available during the in-person public meeting.

| Themes | Count | Representative Quotes |
|--|-------|--|
| Thoughtful economic development | 29 | Make Homer a good place to live & it will be a good place to do business Tourism needs to be scaled to what maintains local ownership A diverse economy is a healthier economy |
| Need for action to promote housing affordability | 25 | Homer cannot continue to develop by means of single family houses in clear cut fields You can't have affordable housing without higher density units Affordable housing developers would benefit from a simplified process with the city |
| Sustainable development | 19 | Unless Homer embraces change and alters the status quo, we will experience more of the sprawl model of development that we are already witnessing Instead of developing outward into untouched spaces, develop upward and efficiently, while leaving those beautiful spaces alone |
| Infrastructure improvements | 18 | Sewer and water must be available for all existing city lots City needs to control infrastructure (roads, sidewalks, etc.) we care about All options need to go "green" for service development, modification, maintenance |
| Public spaces and parks | 15 | Consider the concept of creating dedicated (new or modify existing funding stream) funding for Recreation, Parks, Culture and Arts services with voter advisory/approval I believe that encouraging density must go hand in hand (1) with intentional and strategic conservation of open space and (2) with a plan for how you ensure that the density you are creating is attainable housing |
| Walkability and transportation | 13 | We need a town center. I believe while we increase density minimally, we should pursue many of the policies of the Amplify model: develop more green infrastructure, greater |

| | | resiliency, best parks and recreation master plan ambitious policies for infrastructure, and a robust non-motorized system. |
|--------------------------------|----|---|
| Youth and recreation | 12 | Youth should be considered when making decisions. Caring for their needs will serve the community as it ages. |
| Clarity and accessibility | 10 | I did not get a good sense of what is being considered and evaluating between them [the scenarios]. Feel like I need to read through this a couple times and work to interpret the graphics better. |
| Environmental conservation | 10 | The focus is on human activities without consideration of potential environmental impacts of the scenarios. |
| Zoning and land use | 8 | Multigenerational housing and neighborhoods. Wildlife corridors. Walkable. Consideration for water conservation. Preservation of wild spaces that mitigate impacts of climate change. |
| Community health and wellbeing | 6 | Make decisions like your children need to live here, and then their children |
| Governance and leadership | 6 | Hopes for a strong plan, well designed that can survive changes in city leadership over coming years |
| Economic resilience | 5 | Homer needs to grow and offer homes for younger people and families starting out or there will be no one to work in the service industries |