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One of the purposes of government is to provide predictability for citizens, business, and for local government. Periodically, say at least every 10-20 years, cities and boroughs ask their citizens “Where do we want to go?” Government asks citizens to participate in a planning process that results in a document called the Comprehensive Plan. It truly is a blueprint that encompasses most aspects of government operations and future actions. How will we pay for water and sewer improvements? How should we improve the City parks? What are the financial priorities? And of course a hot topic, what are the land use goals?

Just as we enter the eleventh hour of the 2008 Homer Comprehensive Plan, we seem to be struck with a lot of anxiety and tribulation regarding parts of the document, specifically the land use chapter. The opinions vary widely, with the most vocal being those who wish to see their unfulfilled suggestions come to light. Many believe that we have gone to far from the intent of the Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) draft; others see it as too much regulation. Some feel that they were left out of the process that has been on-going for nearly three years.

One thing that most all of us may agree upon (I say ‘most’ because as far as I can tell there is nothing that all in Homer can agree upon) is that change will come and has come over the past decade especially. The economy, staff and elected officials will come and go. While no one will be able to accurately predict all that may come, we still need to plan for the most likely scenarios. The comprehensive plan is an attempt to provide guidance for the future. It should be general in nature, flexible and reviewed for revision when necessary.

The plan itself explains much; “The Comprehensive Plan establishes broad goals and strategies for land use, transportation, public services and facilities, and economic development. Overriding goals of the plan include balancing needs for development and conservation, and coordinating private and public development. Plan policies help organize the complex relationships between people, land, resources, services and facilities, to meet the future needs of citizens and to protect the community’s natural environment and quality-of-life.”

The 2008 Homer Comprehensive Plan includes a map of proposed future land uses. The map shows approximate areas the community would like to have certain activities, like businesses or housing. The comp plan has a written description of these zones, which loosely describe how the community has changed and how it could grow in the future. During the last few years, many people were surprised and dismayed at the development that occurred in their neighborhoods; while at the same time the business community viewed this growth as an opportunity. The reality is, people like to move and live here. They are here, and more are probably going to come over the next 10-20 years. Where will they live? Where will they work or build businesses? The goal of the map and the plan is to more fully show what parts of town may become more dense, and those where large lots will remain the norm.

Each proposed zoning district considers many factors. Consideration has been given to existing development, infrastructure, and needs of local neighbors as well as the larger community. Many districts have subtle differences that give consideration to traditional activities of the neighborhoods. This is meant to be a realistic portrayal of the type of development that one might expect and what has occurred. Currently, activities can be a bit uncertain. You may live in a quiet Rural Residential District and the neighboring property owner can install water and sewer lines and create an urban environment.

Evaluating the many considerations is a difficult task and there are no magic formulas. The City of Homer needs to provide a wide range of services and opportunities to be successful. We are land constrained. Natural features and processes need to be considered next to the need to provide opportunity for economic growth. The plan does try to provide something for everyone while not going too far astray in either direction.

The Proposed Land Use Map found in the plan is just that. Before any change in zoning, everyone will have a chance to have input on zoning regulations, and on the size and makeup of the zone. The map and the Comp plan are not the final decision on where we will be. They give us a predictable vision of the future so investors and property owners will have a good idea of what will happen around them. Homer's economy and people will change over time; the Comp plan is the roadmap the community has created for city government to travel.

Finally, this is not the Planning Department's plan; it is the community's plan. Many opportunities have been provided for comment and participation including 2 public workshops, 10 Citizen's Advisory Council (CAC) meetings, and 23 times as an agenda item of the Homer Advisory Planning Commission. This total does not include opportunities at other commissions, committees, the City Council and other presentations. The City Council will hold another public hearing on the whole plan on Monday, January 25th. Copies of the plan are available at the Homer Public Library, or on the city web site under the Planning and Zoning Department. Additional history regarding the early public participation and plan formation can be found at <http://www.homercompplan.com/>. Remember that we are also working on the Homer Spit Comprehensive Plan and a first draft of that plan should be available in early February.