

CALL TO ORDER

Session 25-08, a Special Meeting of the Planning Commission was called to order by Chair Scott Smith at 5:31 p.m. on April 29th, 2025 in the Cowles Council Chambers in City Hall, located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska, and via Zoom Webinar.

PRESENT: COMMISSIONERS BARNWELL, VENUTI, S. SMITH, STARK & H. SMITH

ABSENT: COMMISSIONERS SCHNEIDER (EXCUSED) & CONLEY

STAFF: CITY PLANNER FOSTER & DEPUTY CITY CLERK PETTIT

AGENDA APPROVAL

Chair S. Smith requested a motion and second to approve the agenda as presented.

H. SMITH/STARK MOVED TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS PRESENTED.

There was no discussion.

VOTE: NON-OBJECTION: UNANIMOUS CONSENT.

Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENTS UPON MATTERS ALREADY ON THE AGENDA

Penelope Haas expressed her disappointment with the draft plan that's been developed and the Commission's attitude toward the public comments provided, specifically public comments addressing short-term rentals. She opined that there are issues within the plan regarding housing and climate change that need to be rectified.

Scott Adams, city resident, stated that the draft plan mentions nothing about the Bridge Creek Watershed Protection District. He suggested changes in the plan to address the Bridge Creek Watershed Protection District, noting that property owners are only allowed to use 4%-6.2% of their property when they want to develop. He provided that he's against the rezoning of the Hillside Acres Subdivision, adding that the property owners should be involved in that decision-making process.

Arn Johnson, city resident, stated that the property owners of the Hillside Acres Subdivision should be coming to the City for the rezone rather than vice versa. He provided the reasons he's against the rezone, claiming that the residents don't want to see a plethora of lots being built there, the water system can't supply enough pressure for the way it's built at this time, and noting the absence of a good drainage system. He requested that the City leave the Hillside Acres Subdivision property owners alone.

Linda Rourke, city resident, shared that she is a resident of the Hillside Acres Subdivision. She requested that the City honor the decision that was made two years ago to leave the Hillside Acres Subdivision zoned as Rural Residential, adding that everything to the north and west of the Subdivision is zoned as such.

Sara Faulkner, city resident, echoed the previous comments made requesting the City to allow the Hillside Acres Subdivision to remain Rural Residential. She pleaded with the Planning Commission to listen to the neighbors providing public comment on this topic.

Jan Keiser, city resident, encouraged the Commission to remember that this Comprehensive Plan is a plan for the future. She recognized that it might be necessary for denser development to the west of West Hill Road in the 10-20-year time frame, but not any time immediately. She spoke to the importance of the time frame that the comprehensive plan is addressing, further stating that not only should the plan highlight what the City is already doing, but to also better highlight what the City is going to be doing in the proposed timeframe.

Kathy Carsow, city resident, expressed her disappointment with the comprehensive plan and the fact that the public review process is going to take place at a time when a large portion of the community is unable to participate. She critiqued the plan for its lack of solutions and rather appearing as an accumulation of information. She suggested postponing the public hearing process until later in the year when more public input can be provided by those who will be out of town this summer. She shared her dissatisfaction about the plan not addressing short-term rentals, adding that there's already an ordinance that requires bed and breakfasts to be operated at an individual's primary residence isn't enforced.

Joshua Bregge noted that he was looking to purchase property in Homer, specifically in the Hillside Acres Subdivision. He stated that he was discouraged to see that the City is trying to rezone the area to Urban Residential, claiming that there are ample other areas in Homer that can continue to be developed instead. He added that he wouldn't be interested in purchasing property in the Hillside Acres Subdivision were it to be rezoned to Urban Residential.

Brandy McGee, city resident, questioned why this meeting was taking place at the same time as the Homer City Code Forum happening next door at the college. She added that she has no skin in the game, but that she found it interesting that these meetings were occurring at the same time. She thanked the Commission for their time and volunteer work in the Homer community.

Jon Faulkner, city resident, shared his opposition for the Hillside Acres Subdivision to be rezoned as Urban Residential. He urged the Commission to insert a statement into the comprehensive plan documenting exactly what it is that has occurred to avoid leaving it subject to interpretation in the future. He reiterated past public hearings where the vast majority of the residents in the Hillside Acres Subdivision testified against the rezone. He voiced that the City seems to be imposing external wishes onto the residents of the Subdivision. He encouraged the Commission to tie this recommendation to findings of fact, and to note what the civic or government purpose is behind the rezone. He thanked the Commission for listening and for their volunteer work.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Draft Comprehensive Plan Comments Review, Memorandum 25-21

Chair S. Smith introduced the item by reading of the title and deferred to Shelly Wade of Agnew::Beck. Ms. Wade and the Commission reviewed the Draft Comprehensive Plan comments, discussing the following items in depth:

- Working schedule to finalize and adopt the comprehensive plan
- Summary of comments
 - How comments are organized
 - Who responded to the comments
 - Comments per chapter
 - Positive feedback on the plan
- Technical improvements and corrections
 - Consistency, corrections, usability (adding a glossary with definitions)
- Proposed structural revisions
 - Elevating City-led strategies
 - Implementation planning
 - Removal of the “Quality of Life” chapter (redistributing the themes and strategies into other existing chapters)
 - Eliminate redundancies
- Proposed substantive revisions (chapter specific)
- Timeline and next steps for revision/adoption

Chair S. Smith called for a 10-minute recess at 7:40 p.m.

Chair S. Smith called the meeting back to order at 7:49 p.m.

COMMENTS OF THE AUDIENCE

Jan Keiser, city resident, shared her appreciation for the service of the Commissioners, and commended Ms. Wade of Agnew::Beck for her work. She suggested the plan delve further into the details of short-term rentals, reasoning that the Borough’s Tourism Working Group report only speaks to tourism with respect to the Borough as a whole. Recognizing that the Comprehensive Plan is a tool that the Planning Commission and City Council will use to guide review of future developments, she suggested that the plan needs to have an implementation strategy in addition to being easier to reference. She mentioned the need for a reference to the Borough’s Transportation Safety Plan, highlighting that projects can be referenced easily when applying for grants. She stated that food security is an important issue in Homer that should be addressed in the comprehensive plan. She warned the Commission to be careful of what it does with the airport in the comprehensive plan in order to protect the intent of the surrounding areas. She suggested the creation of an appendix of GIS layers that identify conservation areas and other areas alike. Lastly, she stated that there needs to be a way to hold the City accountable for implementation.

COMMENTS OF THE STAFF

City Planner Foster thanked everyone for their hard work and noted that it was a great meeting. He added that this conversation will be helpful in refining the draft plan and moving on to the next stages.

Deputy City Clerk Pettit noted that it was a good meeting with some good conversations. He said that he was looking forward to seeing everyone at the next meeting.

COMMENTS OF THE MAYOR/COUNCILMEMBER (If Present)

COMMENTS OF THE COMMISSION

Commissioner Venuti thanked Shelly Wade and his fellow Commissioners. He shared his condolences for the friends and family of former Planning Commissioner Roberta Highland, noting that she will be greatly missed.

Commissioner H. Smith gave his condolences to the friends and family of former Commissioner Highland, adding that she left a footprint in the community. He stated that it's great to be here and talk through the comprehensive plan. He shared his appreciation for Ms. Keiser's comments about implementing a report card to reflect back on the progress that's been made after the adoption of the plan. He thanked his fellow Commissioners for their time.

Commissioner Stark thanked Ms. Wade for her excellent work and commended her on her substantial endurance. He also gave thanks to Ms. Keiser for her input, City Staff, and his fellow Commissioners.

Commissioner Barnwell thanked Ms. Wade. He noted how big of an impact former Commissioner Highland had on the community. He suggested Agnew::Beck investigate the airport land ownership before applying blanket airport designation to the entire area. He agreed with the need of a report card to reflect back on progress that's made with implementation of the new comprehensive plan. He thanked his fellow Commissioners for their service and shared his appreciation for City Planner Foster's work.

Commissioner S. Smith gave his condolences to the friends and family of former Commissioner Highland, noting that she was a champion of Homer, wetlands and the environment. He thanked the constituents from Agnew::Beck and Ms. Keiser for her public input.

ADJOURN

There being no further business to come before the Commission, Chair Scott Smith adjourned the meeting at 9:24 p.m. The next Regular Meeting is scheduled for **Wednesday, May 7th, 2025 at 6:30 p.m.** All meetings are scheduled to be held in the City Hall Cowles Council Chambers located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska and via Zoom Webinar. Meetings will adjourn promptly at 9:30 p.m. An extension is allowed by a vote of the Commission.

Zach Pettit, Deputy City Clerk II

Approved:_____