



Summary of Public Comment on the Hillside District Plan Framework Alternatives

This summary includes feedback gathered at the Hillside public workshops of April 23 and 24 and the comments submitted in writing as of May 16, 2008. These comments will be addressed through the Draft Hillside District Plan.

Summary of Public Comments

The meetings were well attended, with approximately 75 people each night. Approximately 35 individuals and organizations also submitted comments through other means.

While there were many questions raised on specific issues, as outlined in the remainder of this document there was broad agreement on many of the options presented in the Framework document. Important points of apparent general agreement included:

- Use of conservation subdivisions and a “built/green infrastructure” approach, to create an integrated system of drainage, open space
- Contraction of the maximum perimeter of public sewerage in R1A area in Potter Valley
- System of primary and secondary roads and trails
- Groundwater protection program
- Need for improved drainage standards, and for addressing drainage on a watershed basis
- Need for locally controlled service districts to generate funds to pay for necessary drainage, roads, trails improvements, and management
- New means to fund Chugach State Park access (capital projects and management of trails and trail heads), based on

The remainder of this paper provides more details:

General Comments

There is a general concern about the lack of a separate parks and open space section of the document. In particular, people feel that wildlife corridors and habitat have been inadequately addressed and called for the Plan to go further in identifying opportunities for greenbelt acquisition.

There is a related concern that significant environmental features (e.g. Potter Marsh, creek corridors) are not adequately protected by or integrated into the Plan’s recommendations; stronger, clearer, more specific language is desired. Several comments voiced support for addressing Potter Marsh in particular. Suggestions include:

- preparing or calling for a master plan of the marsh area,
- giving more attention to the drainage effects of the entire watershed on Potter Marsh,

- developing the recreation potential of the surrounding area (e.g. Old Seward Highway). Related concerns were voiced about the nature and volume of traffic on Old Seward in relation to the marsh, given unknowns about possible road upgrades.

Some concerns remain about whether the Plan will adequately address a few issues such as:

- the Urban-Rural Service Area Boundary
- Firewise/fire safety planning
- possible view-impacting installation of antenna farms and wind energy turbines

Land Use

Lower Hillside – Furrow Creek

The response to the Lower Hillside-Furrow Creek option was mixed. Many like the conservation subdivision approach and the idea of planned development for remaining undeveloped land, but most do not support an increase in density. Several comments called for the Plan to count accessory dwelling units in density estimates (i.e., treat allowed accessory units as 2DUA instead of 1DUA).

A question was raised about conservation subdivisions: who owns and pays property taxes on the undeveloped areas? Would the Municipality propose to purchase these from the developer? Would smaller lot sizes actually decrease the value of each lot? A related concern was raised that setbacks and easements create a situation where the property owner must pay property taxes on land he/she cannot use. If used, would conservation easements come with tax breaks? A developer might prefer to donate land to the Municipality.

Lower Hillside – BLM Lots

The reaction to the Lower Hillside-BLM Lots option was likewise mixed. Many like the conservation subdivision approach and the idea of planned development for remaining undeveloped land, but most do not support an increase in density.

The opposition to increased zoning and possible extension of water/sewer/other infrastructure was much stronger for the BLM area than for the Furrow Creek area. A number of comments stated that the BLM area should not be included in the “Lower Hillside” sub-area for the purposes of the Plan, for reasons including: the different environmental character of the BLM area, concerns about seismic vulnerability of Rabbit Creek Canyon and the difficulty of road connectivity due to the creek.

Upper Hillside

There is general support to rezone the area currently zoned R1A to R-6. A suggestion was made to further limit allowable density for the R10-SL zoning designation. There is also general support for the green infrastructure concept and associated development standards, although questions and concerns remain regarding implementation and enforcement.

Bear Valley Commercial

There is mostly broad opposition to the Bear Valley commercial option. Comments included concerns that:

- the proposed standards could not guarantee the proposed type of commercial development,
- even with clear and compete development standards, the Municipality cannot be trusted to adequately enforce standards, and prevent unwanted commercial expansion – “a country store is just the nose of the camel under the tent,”

- that allowing the commercial development would open the Hillside to a type of development that is adamantly unwanted,
- actual trip generation would not reduce (or significantly reduce) vehicle miles traveled,
- the market is not there for such a commercial establishment.

Rabbit Creek Commercial

General response to the Rabbit Creek Commercial option was mixed. While comments expressed a general acceptance of existing commercial zoning, there were a number of concerns about commercial activity operating at that location, including:

- safety and traffic issues along Rabbit Creek Road,
- whether the market would support such development,
- whether actual trip generation would reduce (or significantly reduce) vehicle miles traveled.

A suggestion was made to limit the existing commercial potential of the area to a smaller physical area and to certain types of commercial uses, as well as to tie limited commercial activity in this area to recreational improvements along Old Seward and at Potter Marsh.

Other

Some alternatives for Hillside commercial development were suggested including:

- Develop special Hillside standards for existing non-residential uses (e.g., churches, schools, stables), which could be tied to AWWU hook-up.
- Allow commercial activities near the Potter Marsh boardwalk for birders/recreationalists, which might reduce vandalism by having more activity.
- Link limited commercial development to Section 36 as a way to raise funds for Parks.

The public voiced a strong belief that any rezoning (to allow commercial or higher densities) should not occur until *after* the infrastructure is in place to support them (e.g., road upgrades, pedestrian connectivity, etc.), or at least fully designed, funded and under construction. A related concern was raised that the traffic impacts of proposed zoning changes have not adequately analyzed and presented to the community. Support was expressed for lot coverage being addressed with residential development standards in addition to drainage standards.

A suggestion was also made that a view-shed analysis be included in the Plan, or supplementary documents.

Transportation

Road Connectivity

Responses to increasing road connectivity on the Hillside are mixed. Some responses indicated that it is not always clear what constitutes different levels of roads in the hierarchy set out in the Framework Alternatives (e.g., How many lanes? How much traffic? What are the projected traffic volumes? What are the design speeds?). Some specific proposed road connections, extensions, and classifications are not supported.

There is an acknowledged need for road improvements, although some concerns remain about enforcement and developer accountability.

Trails & Chugach Access

While there is general support for trails, trail and pedestrian connections and access to Chugach State Park, concerns remain about the potential for negative impacts from poorly-managed trails and trailheads (e.g., trash, vandalism, off-leash dogs, illicit party activity).

There is a strong belief that existing Hillside parks, trails and open space need to be better managed and maintained before acquiring more. Many also recognize that much of the existing open space on the Hillside is privately owned and subject to future development, making it important to start planning for and identifying areas for possible public land acquisition or securing public easements.

Because much of the trails and open space on the Hillside, particularly Chugach State Park, are viewed as Anchorage-wide resources, suggestions were made that trail-related recommendations in the Hillside District Plan be explicitly subordinate to the Anchorage Bowl Service Area Plan, Chugach State Park plans, and other regional trail and park plans.

Other

Some additional points that were expressed:

- desire to upgrade Old Seward to a country lane with paths for bikes and pedestrians,
- desire to minimizing additional traffic on many Hillside roads,
- desire for Hillside road standards that allow a greater slope than currently exists,
- concern that transit is not included in discussion,
- concern that trails would be imposed on subdivisions where local, country roads could suffice for bicycle and pedestrian routes with less cost for construction, maintenance and liability.

Drainage

Bear Valley Pilot Project

There is general support for addressing drainage issues on a watershed basis, although some concerns remain about enforcement and developer accountability.

Potter Valley

There is general support for addressing drainage issues on a watershed basis, although some concerns remain about enforcement and developer accountability.

Drainage Standards

Comments revealed a general acknowledgement that something must be done about drainage on Hillside due to the many drainage problems being experienced across the district. There is general support for standards to control runoff from individual parcels.

Water & Wastewater: On-site and Public systems

Groundwater Protection Plan

There is general support for the Groundwater Protection Plan, but some concerns remain about implementation and enforcement. Support exists for improved monitoring and testing in order to maintain well and septic systems.

OWS Standards

Most support standards for individual onsite systems, yet there are some concerns regarding specific recommendations regarding inspection and enforcement, and the cumulative cost of the consultant's recommendations. The local professional community in particular expressed concerns regarding some of the suggested standards.

Use of Neighborhood Systems

Generally, there is a strong preference for individual septic systems rather than neighborhood systems or sewer. Between the non-individual-onsite alternatives, support for neighborhood systems versus sewer systems appears to be roughly equal. People like that the neighborhood systems would be less expensive than sewer, but there are some concerns about the lack of an established local performance history, the ability of neighborhoods to create and manage an onsite system properly, and whether there is enough land to serve as drain-fields in areas that currently experience problems with individual septic systems.

Boundaries of Maximum Perimeter of Public Sewerage

Generally, there is a strong preference for individual septic systems rather than public sewer systems. People oppose extending sewer because it is expensive likely increase land-use densities. A small group of people voiced strong support for sewer (probably in areas that experience frequent problems with septic systems). Some raised the question of whether it is possible to extend sewer to Elmore (and possibly even further east) without a change in density. Others remarked that the Plan should remain silent on the issue of extending the boundary of maximum perimeter of public sewerage and let neighborhoods that want sewer service petition AWWU to extend the boundary to their neighborhood on a more incremental basis.

Other

There was some concern voiced about the "Challenged Subdivision Areas," mostly related to the potential impact of being labeled a "Challenged Subdivision" on property values. A concern was also voiced about groundwater supply limits given the changes in density proposed in the Land Use section.

Funding and Management Options

Option 1 – District-wide service area

Most support a combined district-wide service area for roads, trails and drainage, with a strong belief that this is the most practical and effective option.

Option 2 – Separate district-wide service areas

Some people acknowledged that although the combined district-wide service area would be the more effective option, separate service areas for roads and drainage may be more politically feasible. A few prefer this option because they would be interested in joining a district-wide or watershed-wide drainage service area or district-wide road service area, but not both.

Chugach Park Access – separate Hillside park district(s)

No clear opinion was voiced regarding a Hillside park district. The point was raised that a park service district could allow the purchase of key wetlands, addressing somewhat the concern about protecting wildlife habitat.

Chugach Park Access – Anchorage Bowl-wide service area/bond

There is strong support for an Anchorage Bowl-wide service area or bond, with the belief that the whole Bowl should contribute since many users of Chugach Park are from other parts of Anchorage.

Other

The comments also revealed a clear call for better understanding of how policies and Plan recommendations will be implemented and paid for. A suggestion was made that the plan present recommendations in phases to demonstrate the ability of the Municipality/Service areas to maintain and upgrade existing infrastructure and/or other facilities before new ones are proposed, designed, and/or constructed. Related concerns exist about enforcement and developer accountability. A suggestion was made to include a sunset clause with the district-wide roads, trails drainage service area(s) to evaluate the effectiveness of the chosen approach after some years.