



## **Additional Public Comments on Framework Alternatives - Received May 19, 2008**

### **General**

Kudos to the Consultants and Citizens Advisory Committee for doing an excellent job of framing the many difficult issues facing current land use, transportation, etc. on the Hillside and options for future growth, no-growth, etc. As a nearly 23-year resident of the Hillside, I heartily concur with the overall goal for the Hillside District Plan (Plan), and with the goals expressed for each issue (p. 19). The Plan thoroughly acknowledges the qualities that make the Hillside special and addresses residents, including my, strong beliefs that we need to maintain these qualities (e.g., p. 13 last para – p. 14 para 1) – but the difficulty will be in the details and in ensuring the plan is institutionalized with teeth that are followed by the Muni’s Planning and Zoning and Platting Commissions. One huge problem is already in-progress and platted developments that are contrary to the goals expressed in this plan (e.g., Legacy Pointe). Other comments: There should be a chapter on Parks/Open Space/Wildlife as these are such important attributes to the Hillside. Maintenance of Open Space and Wildlife habitats/corridors, and provision of Parks and green belts/(unpaved) trails are critical to achieving the goal of the overall plan. Protection of Potter Marsh, a State Refuge and Critical Habitat area should also be a goal of the plan. Approximately half the water of the Marsh comes off currently undeveloped lands owned by Heritage Land Bank and the proposed Legacy Pointe developers. We need to ensure we maintain water quality and quantity in the Potter Marsh watershed. Potter Marsh is undergoing a multi-million dollar upgrade in visitor and education facilities and is a jewel for Anchorage and thousands of resident and non-resident visitors. In addition to the aesthetic, positive mental health, birding, and recreation values it offers, there are innumerable economic benefits from tour buses and other visitors drawn to this area. Please note - the detailed, knowledgeable comments of the Rabbit Creek Community Council, HALO, and Planning and Zoning Commissioner Nancy Pease are excellent and should be given particularly close attention and consideration!!!

### **Land Use**

Moderate increases to Lower Hillside may be warranted in limited areas bordering main roads as long as a buffer of new, larger lots borders existing larger-lot neighborhoods to better retain the area’s rural character. I could support the Controlled Growth alternative but with a lower ultimate number of homes – perhaps no more than 700-1000. I agree with the proposal to reduce residential densities in the R1-A area of Potter Valley – the R1-A density never should have been approved years ago! It did not account for the area’s steep slopes, need to protect important watersheds, and rural area with its existing high wildlife and watershed values. I agree with the built/green infrastructure option as this should better maintain the waterways, greenways, naturally-vegetated buffers, and wildlife that make the Hillside the special place it is. Again, there needs to be transitions between larger lot areas and any new smaller lot areas so that the new development areas include naturally vegetated buffers and larger lots adjacent to existing larger lots. There should be restrictions on house sizes relative to lot sizes – so many huge houses have been built on the Hillside, it’s time to provide more opportunities for smaller homes – particularly where lots may be smaller – smaller homes will be less

expensive to heat and more in keeping with current smaller family sizes, and will undoubtedly attract more people. They can be just as attractive (and possibly even more attractive) than the McMansions that are sprouting on the Hillside. Conservation subdivisions are a great concept! The plan should include possible incentives for encouraging these – perhaps a break on taxes in the areas set aside? Such incentives should also be provided for subdivisions with narrower roads and fewer impervious surfaces. For the Southeast Hillside, note should be made that our high winds seem to be increasing in frequency as one aspect of global climate change. I support the Green Infrastructure alternative as a viable approach for maintaining the Potter Marsh watershed and corridors and open spaces essential to the wildlife that are a particularly special feature of the Hillside. In addition to decreasing housing density in Potter Valley, the plan should recommend that as other large tracts are proposed for development, incentives for retaining more natural vegetation and ensuring open spaces, parks, riparian buffers are included in any project. Apparently the 100-acre Legacy Pointe property is or will soon be for sale again – this is a prime opportunity to reevaluate development plans there and institute a lower-density plat as preferred by area residents. Suggested new development standards (pp 33-34) should become requirements for in-progress and future Hillside developments. Additional policies should include a requirement to retain pedestrian access-ways between adjoining neighborhoods, and recognition that such trails do not have to be paved – this will enhance neighborhood connectivity and provide needed connections for kids and people walking or biking. While the photos of a charming country store and suggestion that we’ll reduce the number of 10-mile roundtrips to get a forgotten item at the store are intriguing, I am skeptical that we need the two suggested neighborhood commercial projects. Parking associated with either is likely to be an ugly eyesore and add to congestion. I believe most of us visit our neighbors when we run out of milk or realize we’re missing an ingredient on an in-progress meal – thereby preventing any trips to a store, near or far (and this situation is not likely to change with increased gas prices that are unlikely to be reversed). Additionally, nearly every household travels out past commercial areas while heading to school or work every weekday which affords amply opportunity to stop by a store for needed items. I also fear we would end up with a “convenience store” stocked with the typical sodas and chips and other fast-food items that result in trashy wrappers in adjacent parking and road areas. John Weddleton’s photo essay and accompanying text on this subject provides an excellent analysis of the subject. The plan should also include an upper limit on the size of a non-residential use – for example – we do not need any larger churches than already exist, otherwise the associated parking and traffic will be too great for the residential neighborhoods in which they occur. Overall, I oppose the Bear Valley site for commercial development. Further discussions and careful planning might result in an appropriately small, very tightly controlled commercial development at Rabbit Creek and Old Seward, if the following caveats are included: (1) use the existing B1-A site currently For Sale there (Chuck’s Backhoe); and (2) convert at least half of that site to a neighborhood park with playground equipment and revegetation. A small coffee shop with some fresh foods or possibly bike rentals might be a viable option – if a trail is provided along Old Seward behind Potter Marsh (see Transportation comments). But this option will need a lot more discussion before it should be approved. If this does occur, there will probably be need to add a signal at Rabbit Creek and Old Seward Highway.

## **Drainage**

The HDP needs to recognize the importance of Potter Marsh and that any drainage aspects of the HDP and subsequent area developments need to account for the importance of Hillside waterways such as Little Survival Creek and Rabbit Creek to the Potter Marsh watershed. Potter Marsh is a state critical refuge and habitat and is appreciated and enjoyed by thousands of Anchorage residents and visitors. It provides habitats to fish, birds, and wildlife that are enjoyed by thousands of people and are an important part of the ecosystem and what is special about Anchorage, and in particular the Hillside. The Watershed Planning Approach is the best alternative regarding this issue. The

Municipality is beginning to develop watershed management plans for other waterways in the Municipality and these are excellent models for what is needed for Hillside waterways (e.g., see the recent Little Campbell Creek Watershed Plan). I concur with the proposal to create a new service area or district utility to manage drainage on the Hillside and this entity needs to be able to make enforceable rules for developers. Developments should not be platted or permitted unless they include a plan for protecting waterways and not negatively affecting existing neighborhoods. There have been significant problems and long-standing homeowners have unnecessarily suffered as newer, poorly designed developments have exceeded the carrying capacity of the Hillside slopes and other natural features. For example, homeowners just north of Prominence Point have had septic systems back up, and flooding and glaciation occurred just south of Goldenview Park when those newer, denser developments were built and appropriate planning was not in place. It seems obvious that these newer developments exceeded the area's carrying capacity as the Hillside's slopes and other natural features do not lend themselves to developments denser than R6. Where problems like these have occurred, the Municipality should not continue to give permits to those developers and those developers should be fully liable for fixing the downstream and downslope problems they have caused – better yet, the HDP needs to ensure the Hillside remains at low density. This chapter includes many good ideas (e.g., p. 47, Runoff Controls and p. 48, Watershed-based Drainage Planning). However mechanisms for paying for needed culvert replacements, ditch rehabilitation, and construction of storm water detention ponds need to be better explored and discussed. Regarding the need for a drainage system along 164th Ave, the developer of Goldenview Park should be held accountable for this issue and made to pay for the fix! Note, not all Hillside areas have been fully mapped for their waterways and wetlands – for example, wetlands had not been mapped in detail until the proposed Legacy Point development was fairly well along and neighbors had repeatedly testified about the area's wetlands and springs. Regarding the discussion of Rate Studies (p. 50, item 4), it is important to put the burden on the careless developers to fix the problems they have created!

### **Onsite Systems**

Onsite water and wastewater systems continue to be a viable option for much of the Hillside and as such, support the need for R6 or larger lot developments.

### **Public Water & Sewer**

Before additional developments are added to the public water and sewer services in the lower Hillside, the Muni needs to ensure the system can handle this additional burden, or upgrades need to be made and supported by the developments which require them. Many folks notice the smell of sewage near the Rabbit Creek/Old Seward Highway pump station, so it seems doubtful the current system can support much additional use without appropriate upgrades.

### **Transportation, including Trails**

The plan has adequately recognized the importance of existing, low use dirt roads as “trails” used by area residents for exercise and to get out and enjoy the outdoors. Consequently, these roads are particularly important in an area where trails are so limited. The summary (p. 52) does a good job of recognizing the need: for trails in the hillside, to improve the connectivity in the area (but not at the expense of existing neighborhoods), and to establish new standards specific to the Hillside (e.g., in limited areas it may be reasonable to have roads steeper than the desired code due to the natural topography, but these need to be low use roads). Additionally, new developments need to provide pedestrian links to adjacent neighbors to maximize connectivity of neighbors and for kids walking and riding bikes to and from schools. Using a green infrastructure approach to plan trails and roads in coordination with protection of natural waterways and habitat corridors is essential! Where transportation congestion is a concern, only at limited times of the day (e.g., tied to school traffic), we

do not need major new roads to alleviate the problem. What we do need is for commuters to alter their schedules by 20 minutes, thereby relieving the congestion, and we do not to add an elementary school a mile down Goldenview where the road is already overly congested and there are few practical alternatives for alleviating traffic. I agree that public transit is likely not an easy option for much of the Hillside. However providing convenient “Park and Ride” areas at both the Huffman Carrs center and at the Abbot Loop commercial district, along with increased buses to and from mid-town and downtown, could be an attractive alternative with the huge increases in gasoline prices that have occurred and are likely to continue for some time. I support the idea that roads and drainage be managed separately. We live in a lower Hillside area south of Rabbit Creek road where our neighborhood arranges and pays for road maintenance and it works great! Our roads are often plowed before Municipality roads and our share of the cost is quite reasonable. Regarding who should fund and be responsible for acquisition, development, management and maintenance of an improved trails system – the State should be primarily responsible for access to Chugach State Park and the Muni should be responsible for access to local trails with developers sharing in the cost as new developments need to provide for trails and access to open areas. This will only increase the value of these new developments. The Anchorage Bowl New Service Area may be the best of the suggested options, as long as the State is a fully involved and contributing partner as Chugach State Park is a State jewel and it and other parts of the Hillside are enjoyed by so many from around the Muni and State. Attention should be given to maintaining the Moen Homestead Trail in its current location and NOT removing it as currently shown in Map II. 3C. Relocating the Moen trail was opposed by nearly everyone who spoke at hearings on the proposed Legacy Pointe development – the Moen trail is well established, widely used by walkers, x-country skiers, horse riders, and mountain bikers and is ideally situated for the area terrain, soils, and vegetation. Note – one important trail connection that is lacking from the HDP is the need to develop a trail along Old Seward Highway, behind Potter Marsh. This area is heavily used by walkers and joggers in the winter, and by bikers as well once the snow melts. Yet because it lacks shoulders and is hilly, there are numerous blind spots that make it extremely dangerous for the bikers and drivers who cannot see them until it may be too late. This is a fabulous route for exercise, views, and access (Potter Marsh parking areas provide parking for bikers; and the area is easily accessible to Hillside residents!). Also note, transportation maps available at public meetings on the HDP include some erroneous roads that either do not exist or are completely illogical for increased use. Feodosia and Betty (south of Rabbit Creek and west of Goldenview) are narrow, hilly roads that service only a few houses and as such cannot be widened and cannot support increased use beyond what they now do. Any notion of using these roads to access potential new developments in these areas needs to be eliminated! Moreover, using Tideview as a connection to any potential new development and crossing Heritage Land Bank-designated open space is another idea that should be dropped. And finally, 172nd ends at Belarde – to the west is a powerline easement that is much too steep to support any traffic. Unfortunately, some older maps of Anchorage incorrectly show this as an existing connection to Feodosia. This connection needs to be removed from Muni maps!