



LAND USE

Starting Framework

Many questions and concerns were raised regarding the Anchorage 2020 Plan, as it is to be used as the starting framework for the development of the Hillside District Plan. The main issues raised are listed below:

- When was the plan prepared, by whom, what authority does it have?
- What is the basis for the plan's recommendation that 4000-6000 new housing units be developed in the area between 2001 and 2020?
- How much of this "allocation target" already occurred? How much is in the pipeline?
(approximately 800 already occurred, approximately 1000 in the pipeline)
- Does the Hillside have the physical capacity to support the level of development called for in the 2020 plan?
(yes, based on an MOA planning department analysis, under existing zoning, and considering physical limitations for development, the Hillside currently)
- Does the HDP have to strictly follow the 2020 plan? *(Discussion of this issue in CAC meeting notes)*
- Doesn't the 2020 plan say there will be no neighborhood commercial on the Hillside?
(no, 2020 defers answers to that issue to the HDP)
- Does the 2020 plan set an "urban-rural" service boundary?
(Only in a very general way – the issue is to be addressed in the HDP)
- Do the Title 21 policies now being developed have to follow the 2020 plan? *(Discussion of this issue in CAC meeting notes)*

Define Hillside Character

Many comments were offered regarding the desirable characteristics of the Hillside. Some of the most frequent comments are listed below:

- Rural roads
- Quiet, tranquility
- Low traffic
- Wildlife
- Access to state park
- Open space
- Space between homes
- Trees
- Sense of being away from City, even though city is nearby, many services are available – best of both worlds
- Elbow room
- Good views
- Access to clean water (i.e wells)
- Rural lifestyle with horses, stables and ability to enjoy riding them

Accommodate Growth, but Maintain Hillside character

Suggestions for how the HDP could guide development included:

- Don't strip off all trees, especially on large developments.
- Keep trees.
- Use "orange fencing" to control erosion during construction.



- Control building style, height, massing.
- Set standards for building setbacks.
- Find a better solution for garages in higher-density housing – need an Alaskan solution.
- Develop standards for grading.
- Protect dark skies.
- Smaller houses, bigger lots.
- Plan **all** infrastructure (roads, schools, trails, energy, water, communications) with development.
- Place the burden of cost of development and mitigating its impacts on the developer.

Broad Land Use Policies

A number of interesting ideas were presented. Examples include:

1. Expand Roads and other Infrastructure Commensurate with growth – ensure that needed new roads, new schools, etc. are developed *prior* to new growth.
2. Promote interconnectivity between streets, trails; stop dead-end incursions into undeveloped areas (This point was emphasized for emergency access).
3. Trails/Planned Unit Development – explore a range of options for maintaining open space greenbelts, stream corridors and trails when land is developed. Most promising is the idea of planned unit developments, where a developer clusters units on a portion of the site and remaining land is set aside for open space. This approach can allow the developer to not lose development potential, while the public gains protection of open space values.
4. Trails – find ways for developers to dedicate land for trails. One attendee pointed out that developers are willing to dedicate land for trails, but this is resisted by the Muni due to issues related to liability and responsibility for ongoing maintenance.
5. Note that the Hillside is big, complex, varied – for example, land use issues on the lower Hillside are very different from the upper. The Hillside Plan will need to respond to this diversity, with different policies and different levels of attention to different parts of the area. The Upper Potter Valley and Bear Valley areas – where the majority of the Hillside’s remaining vacant land is located – in particular will require more attention than other areas where nearly all the land is already subdivided and developed.
6. Moderate priced housing – portions of the Hillside should provide housing that is more affordable to people other than the wealthiest portion of the Anchorage population. (Other views: “moderately priced housing, neighborhood commercial – that’s not part of my vision for the hillside”)
7. Prepare a SE plan not a Hillside Plan.
8. Provide access to State Park and maintain green infrastructure corridors that link habitats and hydrological functions, put open space to common ownership.
9. Maintain visual character, by requiring infrastructure to be developed underground.



Land Use Density

Many people offered views on the issue of desired densities. The majority called for retaining the low density character of the Hillside, and explicitly stated that the HDP should maintain low and very low densities in the upper Hillside, as is generally called for in the 2020 plan. A number of people pointed out that developers need to be more responsive to retention of local character and local land values. As one person stated – “instead of big houses on small lots, we want small houses on big lots.”

A smaller number of people offered the perspective regarding “market realities” that the kind of development in projects like Prominence Pointe reflects what many new homebuyers are seeking. The counterargument was that these kind of developments do not integrate into the larger Hillside context and character, regardless of the developer’s genuine attempt to mitigate land clearing, drainage, infrastructure and building design impacts.

Neighborhood Commercial

The majority of those commenting oppose neighborhood commercial. Views included:

- Won’t reduce trips
- Driving is part of the Hillside lifestyle
- People need to plan trips “off the hill”
- Can’t guarantee the kind of pleasant businesses envisioned
- Will inevitably grow, metastasize into bigger project, lead to change in zoning of surrounding areas
- Will devalue surrounding residential uses

Some stated that limited commercial uses could be beneficial if done right. Beneficiaries would be kids, the environment (less driving), and the community (the chance to socialize with neighborhood).

Strong standards would be required:

- Strict limits on size
- Buffering
- Traffic issues
- Appearance
- Right location, location, location
- Access to neighborhood center by alternate modes of transport

Improve process for development

Many people expressed frustration with the current development review and approval process, and with enforcement of rules. Many people stated strongly that they do not trust the Municipality, have a complete lack of faith in land use regulations to control future development on the Hillside, and consequently have to fight every proposed new project, and every proposed infrastructure expansion. At the same time, a number of developers commented that the process is very costly, slow and unpredictable.

Resident perspectives:

- Rezoning happens too easily, too often.
- Too many variances.
- Muni is backing away from 2020 policies.
- Lack of connection between development and needed infrastructure (e.g. improvements to roads).



- Frustration with Title 21 policy – if Title 21 offers policies of greater or lesser restriction than what is proposed in 2020, Title 21 will apply.
- Rules too lax; consequently not followed.
- Developers will get their way as the implementation process is not in tune with larger planning concepts.
- Allow mechanisms for alternative development plans to go through process.

Developer perspectives:

- Rules are complex, unpredictable.
- Process is very slow, very costly.

Possible solutions:

- Provide more public resources (money, staff) to review and approve development.
- Improve enforcement by establishing stronger penalties.

Overall Hillside Vision

While it is clear what kinds of changes many people do not want, more thought is needed to articulate a comprehensive, positive vision for accommodating planned growth on the Hillside. Some general suggestions, as starting points for discussion:

- Gradient from lower to higher densities – use buffers between older and newer development
- Use planned unit developments to save open space for trails, drainage and wildlife; tailor development accordingly by accommodating slightly higher densities in a smaller footprint.
- Maintain existing densities, infill vacant land

Other Reoccurring Comments

- Who is on the Assembly is key to the future of the Hillside.
- Need money, need resources to deliver on Hillside goals, e.g., trail maintenance.
- “We don’t want the mom and pop stores, it’s the concept you (the planners) want.”
- “Wanting low density is not being exclusive.”
- “Only one person is first in one area; we have to accommodate people coming in after us.”

TRANSPORTATION

Safety, connectivity, and provision of trails were the resounding comments the public gave at the transportation component of the first workshop series held in March 2007.

Safety issues that need to be addressed on existing roads include sight distance, cresting over roads, and design of steep-graded roads. Sight distance is poor in a number of locations, including Abbott Road near Sahalle, Birch and Abbott Road, Birch and Huffman, and Birch and Whispering Spruce. One of the most unsafe intersections according to Hillside participants is Goldenview Drive and Rabbit Creek Road.

The development of north/south access towards the city center is of some concern to those that see increased traffic impacting neighborhoods. Attendees are concerned that the introduction of the Bragaw connection will drastically increase traffic volumes and cut through traffic for neighborhoods that front onto Abbott Road in particular.

Residents want roadway connectivity, but in doing so, neighborhoods should not be degraded. As for design, residents don't want faster and wider roads. Five-lane roads are disliked because a larger right-of-way is needed and pedestrian crossing is more difficult. Many residents said Elmore Road was an example of good road design. Residents are frustrated because it seems like traffic patterns are generated by developers and are not planned. Residents are concerned that development is driving road building, whereas the roads should be planned concurrently or before large blocks of development are approved. Specifically, road infrastructure/connectivity on the south Hillside, near Goldenview, needs to be addressed and planned for.

Trails are needed between and within neighborhoods, as well as along major existing roads. The issue of who (the Municipality, Road Service Areas, neighborhoods) should maintain trails once they are constructed was discussed. Preserving access points to the Chugach State Park is another concern. Residents said the trail along Birch Road at Crestview is a good example of trail design.

DRAINAGE

Glaciation was the most common concern voiced at the workshops, followed by runoff from upstream property causing road maintenance issues or other property impacts (e.g., glaciation, flooding).

A related issue that was mentioned frequently was the clearing of land and its affects on runoff. Many expressed support for ordinances that limit the amount of clearing allowed on private property.

Prominence Point Subdivision, a relatively recent subdivision uphill from Goldenview Drive, was mentioned by many as an example of what should not be done. The site was completely cleared, the existing stream channels filled and drainage rerouted to the edge of the development boundary. Residents of this subdivision who were present stated that they have serious glaciation and flooding issues. They had no warning of this when they purchased their homes.

Drainage issues are costly. Goldenview LSRA has spent over \$80,000 on ice-related road maintenance issues this winter, and Bear Valley has spent \$8,000 (of its \$10,000 total annual road budget) on icing this winter. Both issues were caused by upstream development. There was a strong recognition that drainage issues are very difficult to resolve once created and that it is better to avoid creating them in the first place.

New development should not create new problems, and drainage solutions should not end at development boundaries.

The relationship of development density to drainage issues was often discussed. People suggested limiting density if the area could not be developed without creating additional drainage problems.

We asked the question, "How can we best manage drainage on the Hillside?" and suggested the potential of management by watershed boundaries instead of road or political boundaries as one alternative. The practicality of this idea was favorably received but most people were unclear about how to get there. LRSAs have limited authority outside of their area and the idea of a "political" management boundary was rejected.



People were frustrated because problems occurred only after development happened—they felt little was done on the planning and permitting side to eliminate drainage problems before they occurred. There were numerous questions regarding what codes/regulations existed to prevent developers from causing drainage issues. The follow-up question typically was “Who enforces these regulations?” Participants identified the need for additional enforcement and meaningful fines. With a perceived lack of adequate enforcement, citizens want to be empowered to enforce “good neighbor” rules. “Developers always do what ever they want” was heard often.

Ideas proposed were:

- Create a fund for developers to offset drainage impacts as part of a watershed or district approach (e.g. mitigation bank or cap-and-trade program).
- Establish bonding or other financial repercussion for developers in case future problems develop.
- Need an impartial, independent, licensed inspector onsite throughout the process (or more code enforcement staff).
- People should be empowered to enforce policies (incentive to act). For example, the Administrative Procedures Act—it doesn’t have to be an after-the-fact system. Create a remedy provision with a group to enforce the rules.
- Developers need to have public meetings with neighbors as part of the planning process.
- Government should serve as coordinator of watershed management (but it can’t be political).
- Create a permitting restriction so that drainage plans fit neighborhood conditions.
- Plan for future drainage upgrades (no changes in peak flow).
- Use natural creek beds (don’t move channels).
- No development should occur on class A, B, or C wetlands.
- Larger setbacks are needed for larger creeks (the larger the creek width, the larger the setback).
- Width of required right-of-way causes excessive clearing and resulting drainage issues. Need a better definition of “drainage plan.”
- Need accountability for unintended consequences.
- Command and control versus performance-based codes—need to go to performance-based.
- Write the plan and codes in “homeowner” speak, not lawyer- or engineer-speak.
- Drainage ways should have the same protections as creeks.
- Define a specific percentage on each lot for development and a certain percent to keep existing vegetation. Use only what you need for development.
- Early and continuous consultation should occur between developers and managers.

ONSITE WATER AND WASTEWATER

Overall, we got the feeling that Hillside residents enjoy the area with the rural environment it provides and do not want that to change significantly.

We heard a lot of concern about having to tie in to Municipal public utilities and the expense that would require. Many people voiced their concerns about reducing the minimum lot size of 40,000 ft² associated with onsite wastewater systems. There were several who commented on concern for regulation enforcement with regard to construction techniques about onsite wastewater systems. People were looking for more information on innovative designs for wastewater disposal. Many had no complaints about their onsite systems.



With respect to water wells, we frequently heard that the water is plentiful and of sufficient quality, though many commented on hardness and the presence of iron and manganese. There were some questions about how much is actually known about the Hillside aquifers and the impacts of further development.

PUBLIC WATER AND SEWER

Public water and sewer on the Hillside includes AWWU service, Potter Creek Water Company (PCWC), community water systems, and community sewer systems. Those who associated public water and sewer with high-density development always pointed to the AWWU system. A few made the same association with PCWC. No one made the association with community systems, even though some of the community systems are extensive, allow lot sizes of ½ acre or less, and allow large buildings with large areas of land clearing to develop.

Workshop attendees concerned with public and water and sewer fell into three broad groups characterized by the following statements:

1. Existing public water and sewer boundaries should not change;
2. Existing public water and sewer boundaries could change for appropriate reasons; and
3. More information is needed about the regulations governing the location of public water and sewer boundaries before decisions can be made.

Most fell into the third group. Generally, those who attended the workshops did not know of the Hillside Wastewater Management Plan, what it was, or how it regulated sewerage on the Hillside. They also knew little of the other DEC regulations, MOA ordinances, or AWWU policies governing where public water and sewer can serve and how the design, construction, and operation of these systems are regulated.

People perceived that extension and construction of public water and sewer would be costly. People often asked how much such extensions would cost and wanted to know the cost of such service before the service is moved into their neighborhood. Several commented that the cost of such service would be difficult to pay for, even if it were paid for over several years.

Some people expressed that extending public water and sewer would result in immediate increases in the density of development on the Hillside. Others, however, reasoned that because much of the area was built out at current zoning, increased residential density might not occur with public water and sewer. For them, the issue of development density as it relates to public water and sewer was focused on larger tracts of undeveloped land that are more common in the southern portion of the planning area. In these areas the connection between development density and public water and sewer was seen as a clearly connected relationship, but was understood to be more complex in the built-out areas.

Interest was expressed by some people in alternative sewage collection systems such as VGES, STEP, and others. They thought these could be installed at lower costs in a large-lot subdivision and be a better system for Hillside's needs. They suggested that the ordinance requiring AWWU design criteria be either amended to allow other technologies, or AWWU DCPM be modified to allow the use of such systems.