



City of Soldotna

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MEMORANDUM

To: Mark Dixon, City Manager
 Through:
 From: Stephanie Queen, Dir. of Economic Development and Planning
 Date: February 26, 2014
 Subject: Envision Soldotna 2030, 3-year progress report

This memo presents a progress report on implementing the goals and objectives of Envision Soldotna 2030, our comprehensive plan. ‘Envision’ was formally adopted on April 4, 2011, and I am happy to highlight significant accomplishments in the past several years.

The table below contains goals from the plan (in the left-hand column), along with comments on our actions (on the right). This is not a complete list of goals and objectives; for those, please refer to Chapter 3 of the plan. But it is an excerpt to highlight those goals we have focused on in recent years and made some progress towards accomplishing. The boxes shaded in red indicate a ‘High Priority’ goal, as identified by Chapter 4 (Implementation) of the plan, and those in yellow are considered ‘Secondary’ in the document.

Economic Development Goals

<p>1. Promote development of a “downtown area” that attracts both visitors and residents.</p>	<p><i>A committee of the Economic Development Council is researching gateway signage, and has developed a specifications sheet for new Sterling Highway gateway signs to both ‘welcome’ and say ‘thank you’ for visitors entering and leaving our downtown.</i></p>
<p>2. Encourage reuse and/or redevelopment of key areas, particularly along the river and the major highways.</p>	
<p><i>b.</i> Evaluate the use of incentives to encourage existing land uses to come into compliance with the new standards, such as tax credits, grants or low cost loan programs.</p>	<p><i>Created Storefront Improvement Program, a reimbursable grant, which has already been used to bring a non-conforming sign into conformance with current standards (2012). Exploring ways to expand use of Storefront funds, possibly to assist with business relocation and/or expansion projects which</i></p>

		<i>must address existing non-conformities.</i>
	c. Promote the use and redevelopment of vacant retail spaces by non-profits or government services to provide a more vibrant atmosphere and bring more foot traffic through key retail areas.	<i>During construction of the library expansion project, the Soldotna public library leased space at Peninsula Center Mall.</i>
3. Ensure a healthy economy by supporting a diversity of local businesses and services and providing a diversity of employment opportunities to retain and attract young people to the City.		
	a. Evaluate the need for a staff position focused on economic development.	<i>1 additional FTE was added to the Planning Dept, and the Dir. position was re-classified to focus on Economic Development.</i>
	b. Work with the Soldotna Chamber of Commerce, KPC management, and health care industry leaders to develop a Soldotna Economic Development Committee to identify opportunities and constraints for new and expanding businesses.	<i>The Soldotna Economic Development Council consists of leaders from CPH, KPC, KPB, KPBSD, the Chamber, business owners, and lending institutions. The group developed a strategic action plan in Sept. 2013, and meets monthly to track implementation.</i>
	g. Support KPC in developing student residences on the Kenai River Campus.	<i>KPC residence halls opened for 2013-2014 school year. City is currently supporting the Residence Life program and its summer conferencing capabilities, through its involvement in the Economic Development Council.</i>
4. Investigate the potential for a Convention Center to draw visitors throughout the year and provide meeting facilities for local events and organizations.		
	a. Work with the Visitor Center and Chamber of Commerce to evaluate the feasibility of a convention center.	<i>The Chamber has engaged a consultant to evaluate the programming and costs of a new visitor center with conferencing capabilities.</i>
	b. Evaluate potential locations for a convention center to ensure that its location supports local retail and lodging businesses and has convenient pedestrian connections to businesses and the river (Figure 3-2).	<i>See explanation above.</i>
6. Identify opportunities and plan for the Kenai River to play a prominent role in the expansion of economic development opportunities within the City.		
	b. Consider acquisition of land to develop a convention center on riverfront property with a design that focuses on the river.	<i>City Council authorized the purchase river-front property adjacent to Soldotna Creek Park, for potential future development (ordinance 2013-022). The environmental assessment is currently pending.</i>

7. Encourage development of off-season tourism based on outdoor recreation.	
a. Work with local organizations to organize additional winter events – similar to the Peninsula Winter Games – with activities in a variety of city parks and open spaces. Increase advertising and media attention to these events throughout the KPB, the Anchorage area, and beyond.	<i>Economic Dev. Council has a committee focused on Event Planning, and trying to coordinate additional winter events.</i>

Neighborhood Goals

2. Develop subdivision regulations to ensure that developers provide adequate infrastructure for their developments.	
a. Develop subdivision infrastructure requirements to ensure adequate consideration of lighting, pedestrian and vehicle circulation, stormwater collection and treatment, street design, and retention of natural vegetation.	<i>Consultant has provided a draft of recommendations, and is working with staff to finalize them. Project expected to be complete by April 2014.</i>
5. Provide for increased connectivity throughout Soldotna for both vehicular and non-motorized access.	
c. Provide for a safe non-motorized connection between Soldotna Creek Park and the north side of the Sterling Highway to facilitate non-motorized access to this key community resource. Strive for eventual development of a grade-separated connection.	<i>The Birch Street intersection improvements are scheduled for 2014/2015 by AK DOT&PF.</i>
3. Encourage “active neighborhoods.”	<i>The City obtained a grant and hired a consultant to develop a Safe Routes to School plan, to evaluate the City’s infrastructure and provide recommendations on improvements, to promote safety and encourage children to walk to school. Joint work session of P&Z and the City Council to review the draft scheduled for 3/19/14.</i>

Natural Resource Goals:

2. Develop a Watershed Improvement Plan that evaluates and addresses measures to better collect and treat stormwater and	<i>A Stormwater Master Plan will be developed in conjunction with the Water and Sewer mast plans (see Public Infrastructure Goal #1, below).</i>
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other river discharges.	
5. Evaluate the existing City stormwater system to identify and prioritize improvements to stormwater collection, detention and treatment.	<i>See explanation above.</i>
10. Continue to pursue upgrades to the wastewater treatment system and study the potential for a long-term alternative to river discharge of treated wastewater.	<i>A sewer master plan will begin development in 2014.</i>

Park and Recreation Goals

1. Develop a Recreation Master Plan for Soldotna that:	<i>Parks and Recreation Master Plan was adopted by City Council on Jan. 8, 2014 (Resolution 2014-004).</i>
a. evaluates the demand for a variety of recreation opportunities and facilities;	<i>Included in the plan.</i>
b. inventories and documents available recreation resources to meet the demand identified for various recreation opportunities and facilities;	<i>Included in the plan.</i>
c. establishes a level of service (LOS) for various recreation opportunities and facilities; and	<i>Included in the plan.</i>
d. develops a list of recommended improvements to meet the LOS for each type of recreation opportunity and facility.	<i>Included in the plan.</i>
4. Consider expanding the Adopt a Park program to include adoption of trails for maintenance by volunteer groups and other organizations. Use this program to support street and trail cleaning and maintenance in both the winter and summer seasons.	
	<i>Rotary recently adopted Arc Lake through the adopt a park program.</i>
5. Consider the expansion of boardwalks along the river as proposed in the 2001 Roads & Trails Master Plan (See Natural Resource Goal #4).	<i>Centennial Park trail connection project behind sports center is currently underway. New Parks and Recreation Master Plan also addresses areas for trail expansion.</i>
7. Incorporate recreation facilities into the City's economy.	
b. Promote fall and winter activities in City parks and open spaces. These activities could include hiking, bird	<i>In 2013, City began limited maintenance of ice at Arc Lake for skating.</i>

	watching, rafting, canoeing, snowshoeing, skiing, and ice skating.	<i>Soldotna Creek Park improvements contain pedestrian lighting throughout, and possibility of year-round restroom facilities.</i>
	c. Provide better signage directing visitors to river access, local attractions, recreational opportunities, parking, retail areas and other sites. The signage should be used as an opportunity to bring an iconic “branding” to Soldotna.	<i>A new City logo is under development. This logo can then be implemented in a coordinated branding strategy, to include the new website, new gateway signage, etc.</i>
11.	Invest in outreach and improvements geared toward youth, such as improvements at the bike/skate park, and establishment of a teen center.	<i>The Boys and Girls Club opened a Teen Center in Soldotna in Dec. 2013.</i> <i>City constructed a new BMX track at the skate park.</i> <i>City helps with a community-sponsored ‘Bike Skate Scoot’ challenge, which has become an annual event to highlight local athletes competing at the skate park.</i>

Arts, Education and Culture Goals

1. Continue to support a broad range of cultural services and facilities including:		
	a. Expansion of the public library;	<i>Grand opening for the expanded Joyce K. Carver public library Jan. 18, 2014.</i>
2.	The City should coordinate with other public entities and non-profit organizations to co-sponsor a lecture series on Soldotna area history, natural resources and other topics.	<i>City is helping KPB Planning Dept. coordinate a lecture series, with the first speaker on February 28th.</i>

Public Infrastructure Goals.

1.	Update the City’s water and wastewater master plan.	<i>Secured a grant from EPA to fund a portion of a Water and Wastewater Master Plan and Capital Improvement Plan, with a total estimated project budget of \$590,000. City is developing RFP to secure a consultant, and expects to have one selected for the Water, Sewer, and Storm water master plans by summer 2014.</i>
3.	Design public improvements to allow for future expansion of infrastructure, such as	<i>Recent street improvements, such as the Sterling Street project, provides paving and a sidewalk, but</i>

utilities, roads, paving and lighting.	<i>also the conduit and infrastructure necessary to add street lighting if desirable at a later date.</i>
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Highways and Transportation Goals

1. Improve the streetscape along the Sterling and Kenai Spur Highways.	
b. Develop the highway entrances into the City as gateways, with coordinated signage and landscaping. To establish a sense of place, development along the highway corridors should have interesting design features and signage.	<i>Committee of the ED Council is researching community gateways. Expect to seek funding in FY15.</i>
2. Improve connectivity to the surrounding communities.	
b. Develop alternate routes connecting the Sterling Highway with the Kenai Spur Highway and Keystone Drive, to be used as secondary egress during emergencies.	<i>Turnbuckle Terrace now provides an emergency bypass route between the Sterling and Kenai Spur Highways.</i>
3. Improve motorized and non-motorized transportation routes throughout the City.	
iii. Consider development of green boulevards along major cross-town roads (Figure 3-8).	<i>Binkley Street redesign project is taking this concept into consideration, with the inclusion of neighborhood gateway features, additional landscaping, and improved pedestrian facilities.</i>
4. Address the safety and efficiency of non-motorized circulation near and across the Sterling Highway and Kenai Spur Highway.	
b. Provide for a well-marked and well-lit non-motorized crossing of the Sterling Highway near Soldotna Creek Park, and of the Kenai Spur Highway. Strive to install a grade-separated crossing in the future.	<i>The Birch Street intersection improvements are scheduled for 2014/2015 by AK DOT&PF and will provide enhanced safety for pedestrians crossing the highway to Soldotna Creek Park.</i>
6. Continue to implement goals of the 2004 airport master plan.	<i>Many goals from the Airport master Plan have been completed, including the land acquisition adjacent to the airport for additional growth opportunities, and re-alignment of Funny River Road to eliminate the sharp "S" curve, and creation of area for additional lease lots.</i>
7. Evaluate the City's parking code and revise if necessary.	<i>The City amended the zoning code to reduce on-site parking requirements for several types of commercial uses (Ord. 2011-008).</i>

General Land Use Goals

2. Establish a more concentrated commercial zone along portions of the primary highways.		
	a. Restrict low-density residential uses in the commercial zone.	<i>Ord. 2010-033, adopted 10/27/10, removed low-density residential as principal permitted uses in the Commercial district. Mixed-use developments (commercial below with residential above or behind) are still permitted. Low-density residential allowed through conditional use process, instead of 'by-right.'</i>
9. Prioritize the establishment of key greenbelt/trail/green boulevard connections to link key elements of the City.		
	c. Identify key north-south and east-west streets to serve as "green boulevards". These streets would incorporate special design features to enhance pedestrian use of them to access key locations and greenbelt trail systems.	<i>Binkley Street redesign project is taking this concept into consideration, with the inclusion of neighborhood gateway features, additional landscaping, and improved pedestrian facilities.</i>
10. Review and revise the sign ordinance.		
	b. Evaluate the potential to provide incentives for businesses to bring existing signs into conformance.	<i>One Storefront Improvement Program grant was used to bring a non-conforming freestanding sign into conformance.</i>