

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

May 2011





Envision Soldotna 2030 Comprehensive Plan

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Approved by the Soldotna Planning and Zoning Commission, December 1, 2010 (Resolution 2010-032)

Adopted by the Soldotna City Council, January 26, 2011 (Ordinance 2010-038)

Approved by the Kenai Peninsula Borough Planning Commission, February 28, 2011

Adopted by the Kenai Peninsula Borough Assembly, April 4, 2011 (Ordinance 2011-05)



To the Citizens of Soldotna:

I am pleased to present to you *Envision Soldotna 2030*, the City's updated comprehensive plan.

The comprehensive plan is a tool for guiding the future growth and development of the City of Soldotna. As a comprehensive plan, *Envision Soldotna 2030* has far reaching implications and will help shape the character of the community and the quality of life. It seeks to create new and maintain and enhance existing elements that make Soldotna unique and define its heritage and identity. *Envision Soldotna 2030* will also help to improve the economic health of the community as it suggests new ways to attract business investors and guide them to suitable locations and types of commercial development within the City while promoting the creation of strong neighborhoods and cohesive community spirit. *Envision Soldotna 2030* will be used to help the City plan for future investments in public infrastructure including utilities, park facilities and other community improvements. The plan has a 20-year outlook, and is intended to be frequently revisited and updated as our community's needs change or unanticipated opportunities arise.

In summary this plan is :


- A statement of the City's development goals, objectives, policies and criteria for growth;
- A decision-making tool to help the Planning Commission and the City Council evaluate proposals for new land use with respect to the City's development goals;
- A means to identify, prioritize and plan capital improvement projects;
- A guide to coordinate and cooperate with the efforts of other public and semi-public agencies; and,
- The framework for zoning plans, ordinances and other regulations designed as tools to implement the goals of the comprehensive plan.



Public involvement was critical in developing *Envision Soldotna 2030*. During the process of preparing *Envision Soldotna 2030*, the City's planning team met with the public on several occasions, including a week-long work session where the public could drop in and give their thoughts and put on the planning process. Interviews were also held with key stakeholders and individuals and the document was developed in consultation with the Planning and Zoning Commission to ensure that all the needs, goals and desires of the public were incorporated into the plan.

During the development of this plan, we have gained a clearer understanding of the aspects of the City that people value and those that need to be directed in a different way. This plan is just the beginning of our journey, and we pledge to work hard to implement the goals and suggestions outlined in *Envision Soldotna 2030*. This is an exciting time for our City and I look forward to building even stronger neighborhoods, economic opportunities and community institutions to maintain our high quality of life and sustain the spirit of Soldotna that we are all proud to call home.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "A. Micciche".

Peter A. Micciche
Mayor of Soldotna





Mayor

Peter A. Micciche

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Stephanie Queen, City Planner
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ACRONYMS

AADT.....	Annual Average Daily Traffic
ADF&G.....	Alaska Department of Fish and Game
AK.....	Alaska
CARTS.....	Central Area Rural Transit Systems, Inc.
CPH.....	Central Peninsula Hospital
DEC.....	Department of Conservation
DLWD.....	Department of Labor and Workforce Development
DNR.....	Department of Natural Resources
DOT&PF.....	Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
FY.....	Fiscal Year
KPB.....	Kenai Peninsula Borough
KPBSD.....	Kenai Peninsula Borough School District
KPC.....	Kenai Peninsula College
LOS.....	Level of Service
NPDES.....	National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System
ROW.....	Right-of-Way
SF.....	Square Feet



Chapter One Overview

PURPOSE

The City of Soldotna lies in the heart of the Kenai Peninsula, located at the junction of two of the peninsula's major highways, and along the banks of the world-renowned Kenai River. The City is one of the most densely developed areas on the Kenai Peninsula and serves a key role as the seat of the Kenai Peninsula Borough (KPB) administration, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District (KPBSD), and Central Peninsula Hospital (CPH), as well as a major service area for the Central Peninsula.



Soldotna Location Map



Welcome to Soldotna sign on the Sterling Highway

This comprehensive plan is designed to provide the City with guidance on how to shape development of the City's land resources over the next two decades. Although Soldotna is not growing as rapidly as it has in previous decades, the population and economy of the City have changed significantly since the last comprehensive plan update in 1995. The growth of the health care industry, current demographics, and the increasing competition for retail sales are issues that will affect the demand for and financing of City facilities and services. This plan is designed to address how future development and City investment can move the City toward the vision of its residents.

Realizing that Soldotna's existing comprehensive plan was over 15 years old, the City determined that a new plan was needed to identify the City's current vision and goals for the future, and to develop policies which build on the City's many strengths to move toward that vision.



COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

The authority for land use regulation in Alaska is detailed in the Alaska Statutes Title 29, Municipal Government. The State requires most boroughs to implement land use regulations throughout the Borough (including inside cities), but also provides for the Borough's ability to delegate these powers to cities upon request. The KPB delegated zoning powers to the City of Soldotna in 1985. Platting authority, or control over the subdivision of land, has not been delegated to the City; therefore, the KPB continues to have the final authority for subdivision of land within the City.

Chapter 40 of Title 29 provides more detail on land use regulation and specifies that land use regulations must be "in accordance with a comprehensive plan" and "in order to implement the plan." Thus, the comprehensive plan is the basis for the City's ability to regulate land use and development. Land use regulations control the types of uses that can occur in various areas, as well as provide rules for how these areas can be developed. Regulation can slow or speed development, result in dense development and low costs for providing public services, or widespread low-density development with higher costs for providing public services. Regulations can also affect traffic generation and circulation, and can be used to make areas more vehicle-friendly or more pedestrian-friendly.

A comprehensive plan is a policy document that guides the long-term physical, social and economic development of a community. As suggested by the word "comprehensive" – it looks at a variety of issues that contribute to or are affected by land use development patterns. The comprehensive plan outlines the City's vision and goals, and explores policies intended to guide decision making by the City government. A comprehensive plan should be incorporated into every-day decision-making, as the City Council decides what infrastructure to fund and construct, as the Planning Commission decides whether to approve a rezone or variance, as private

developers construct new facilities in accordance with the plan and local land use regulations based upon the plan.

The typical comprehensive plan is based on a 20-year horizon and is intended to be flexible enough to adjust to unanticipated changes in social or economic conditions, while providing sufficient guidance to move the community in the desired direction.

Envision Soldotna 2030, the comprehensive plan for the City of Soldotna, outlines the City's vision for the Soldotna of the future. The goal of *Envision Soldotna 2030* is to explore implementable policies – based on goals identified by the community – that will shape and direct new growth and development and enhance existing development in a manner that promotes the health of the Kenai River, the quality of the built environment, and the operational and fiscal efficiency of providing transportation, utilities, other public infrastructure, and community services. It will not make specific decisions about individual properties or facilities, but will offer guidance on major development issues to allow the City to move toward its long-term goals.

VISIONING PROCESS

A vision statement summarizes what the community wants their city to be in the future. It is the basis for the goals of the comprehensive plan and the policies adopted in the plan to regulate growth and development in a manner that moves the community toward that vision.

The City of Soldotna began work on the vision statement for *Envision Soldotna 2030* in early 2009. The City established a website for the plan update, providing information on the process for visioning and other components of the plan. A survey was developed to identify those issues that the community felt most strongly about, including the top three land use/development/planning issues facing

Soldotna. Residents shared their vision of Soldotna in 20 years, and provided feedback on the vision statement from the previous comprehensive plan. The survey was available online via the project website and hard copies were available for pick-up at Soldotna's City Hall. In addition, a postcard promoting the survey was sent out as part of Soldotna's April 2009 utility bills. Survey results were compiled and distributed to the project team. A presentation on the comprehensive planning process was given to the local Chamber of Commerce in March 2009, encouraging the business community to provide input into the planning process. To obtain more direct and personal input, planners met one-to-one with over 50 individuals in Soldotna that play key roles in development of the City, including the Chamber of Commerce, small business owners, realtors and developers, homestead families, KPB representatives, university representatives, environmental interests, City workers, Planning & Zoning Commissioners, and elected officials. Phone interviews were conducted for those who were not available for personal interviews. The issues discussed during these interviews were similar to those on the survey described above.



May 2009 Public Visioning Charette

After gathering information via the survey, the project team scheduled a week of meetings and open workshops in Soldotna during the first week of May 2009. The planning team was available throughout the week for people to drop in and discuss the plan. Members of the community were also invited to attend a Friday evening Vision and Goals Workshop and a Saturday Project Open House on May 8 and 9, 2009. At the work sessions and open house, the team provided background information on the City's economy, land use and development, transportation and recreation. Additional information was gathered from the community primarily focused on the community vision, as well as planning issues to be addressed and specific goals in various areas.

These meetings were advertised via flyers mailed to all street and post office box addresses in Soldotna, via e-mail to a long list of interested parties, by paid advertising in the local newspapers, and by newspaper and radio interviews on the project. As part of the effort to promote *Envision Soldotna 2030* as a community-centered project, Soldotna students from kindergarten through sixth grade were asked to participate in various classroom projects related to the comprehensive planning and visioning process. These projects involved students drawing and/or writing about their favorite places in Soldotna and/or their favorite things to do in their community. The students' work was displayed during both the *Envision Soldotna 2030* Vision and Goals Workshop and the Project Open House.

Following these public meetings, City staff and the Planning & Zoning Commission held additional focus group meetings to supplement the information from the workshops and go into more detail on areas of interest. City planners also attended City Council meetings to update them on the input from the community.

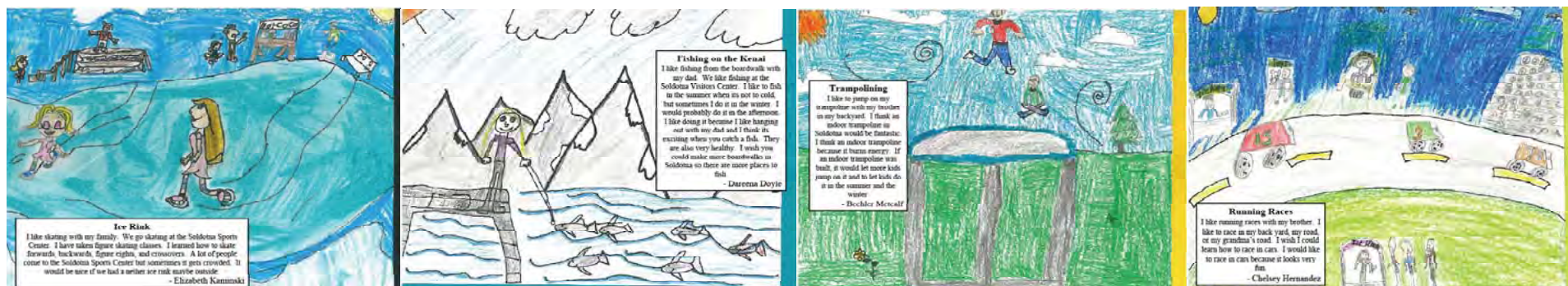


Based on the input from the community, the following vision statement was developed:

Soldotna is a vibrant community in the heart of the Kenai Peninsula, providing a high quality of life through care and attention to both the natural and built environment and cherishing its past while reaching out to the future.

Envision Soldotna 2030 is designed to move the City toward this vision. It documents the City's goals and outlines policies designed to achieve those goals. It serves as the basis for future land use regulations and investment of public funds in services and infrastructure. Although this plan is designed to be flexible enough to accommodate a variety of future scenarios in terms of population and economic development for the next 20 years, the plan should be reviewed and updated periodically as conditions change.

Working with the community, the Planning & Zoning Commission has suggested a vision for several planning areas of interest. These areas of interest have been used to organize this comprehensive plan with each one addressed further in Chapter 3. The vision for each of these areas is provided below.



Student Art Work and Essays: First and third graders at Kalifornsky Beach Elementary completed projects describing their favorite place in Soldotna

Economic Development

Soldotna will encourage economic development by expanding health care and educational opportunities; year-round tourism and recreation opportunities; quality commercial development; and by incorporating the Kenai River as a marketable asset and resource. Economic development will promote pedestrian-friendly retail opportunities and the development of a more focused downtown. Soldotna will strive to maintain its tax base while continuing to provide an extraordinary quality of life to its residents.

Neighborhoods

Soldotna neighborhoods will be attractive, vibrant, clean, safe and desirable. They will be well-maintained, provide for mobility, and be well-connected to the larger community. The City will encourage neighborhood interaction and a sense of community.

Natural Resources/Environment

Soldotna will protect and maintain the general health of the Kenai River while showcasing its assets to ensure a quality experience.

Parks, Trails And Recreation

The City will continue to invest in its parks, trails, and other recreational opportunities for year-round enjoyment for both residents and visitors.

Arts, Education, And Culture

Soldotna will encourage the arts and cultural services and facilities to preserve and promote the area's history, and to provide adequate public access to art, music, and other cultural activities.

Public Infrastructure And Services

Soldotna will continue to devote resources to capital improvements which meet and anticipate the needs of our developing community. The City will continue to expand and maintain an integrated, cost-effective system of municipal improvements and public infrastructure.

Highways And Transportation

Soldotna will be pedestrian-friendly and aesthetically pleasing, and will give motorists a reason to slow down and stop in the City. The City's motorized and pedestrian transportation network will be safe, efficient, and well-maintained year-round.

Regional Growth And Development

Soldotna will develop a forward-looking approach to regional growth and development, and will coordinate with neighboring communities and landowners to identify common interests and goals. The City will explore opportunities to share infrastructure and public spaces with neighboring jurisdictions.

General Land Use

Soldotna will plan and manage its lands to promote the social and economic vision of the community and to maintain a high quality of life in the community.







Chapter Two

Existing Conditions

HISTORY

The history of the City of Soldotna begins with homesteading that occurred in the late 1940s, although Native Alaskan Athabaskan peoples had lived and used the areas around the Kenai River for many thousands of years prior to the City's establishment. After World War II, veterans were given priority in homesteading in this area and settlement began to grow. The construction of the Sterling Highway from Anchorage and the Kenai Spur Highway occurred in the 1950s, resulting in increased settlement in the area. A post office for Soldotna was established in 1949. Oil was discovered at the nearby Swanson River area in 1957, giving the population and economy of the area another major boost. Soldotna's location at the junction of the Sterling and Kenai Spur highways resulted in the area becoming a major location for retail trade, services and government on the Kenai Peninsula.



Kenai River Bridge, 1950s

The City of Soldotna incorporated as a fourth class city in 1960 with 332 residents and an area of 7.4 square miles (4,723.4 acres). Although the major highways were constructed in the 1950s and oil had been discovered in 1957, the population of the area at the time was relatively small. After the Borough was incorporated in 1964 and selected Soldotna as the Borough seat, the City reorganized as a first class city which provided the residents of the City more authority to manage and finance the rapid growth that was occurring.

The City's central location on the Kenai Peninsula and the development of the oil industry on the peninsula and other parts of Alaska resulted in rapid population growth in the City's first three decades (1960 to 1990). As the City and the oil industry have matured, population growth has slowed. Soldotna was mostly built up and already near its current population by the end of the early 1980s building boom.

The City's pattern of growth has been confined and shaped by natural and man-made features. The Kenai River, local wetlands, and the natural terrain have concentrated development in the western portion of Soldotna, while the three major highways (Sterling Highway, Kenai Spur Road, Kalifornsky Beach Road) have resulted in a linear pattern of commercial development stretching out from Soldotna into the unincorporated areas.

SOLDOTNA TODAY

Soldotna is a great place to live. It is a tight-knit community with high-quality education, health care and recreation available in a family-friendly environment. It is an ideal place for families, attracting both younger professionals and older retirees, and for businesses.

Tourism plays an important role in the City, with visitors drawn to the area to fish on the Kenai River and experience the great Alaskan outdoors. Soldotna is ideally situated along the route between



Anchorage and Homer. This makes it an ideal location for service and retail businesses, including large-scale retail development. However, there is increasing competition for major retail developments from neighboring communities and unincorporated areas of the Borough along the highways. The City often faces decisions on how to deal with the business and residential growth occurring outside city limits and their impact on the City.

PEOPLE AND ECONOMY

Population Trends

The population of the City at incorporation in 1960 was 332 residents. The City population increased over the next 40 years, reaching a population of 3,759 in 2000. Population growth has slowed from an average annual growth rate of over 9% in the 1970s, to 5% in the 1980s, to a more recent rate closer to 1%. The State estimates that Soldotna's population reached 4,021 in 2009, an increase of 7% over the 2000 census population estimate (DLWD 2010). Although no long-term population projections are available for Soldotna from the State, growth is likely to continue at a rate of just under 1% annually over the next 20 years with the projected population in 2030 in the range of 4,674 (Figure 2-1).

Although the population of the City has increased significantly over its history, the City's boundaries have changed little, resulting in Soldotna having a high population density compared to other mid-sized cities



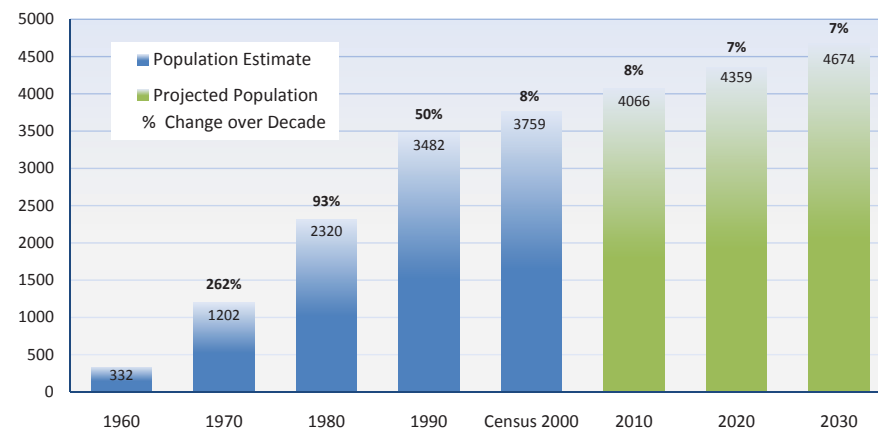
Soldotna, 1959



Soldotna, 1978



Soldotna, 2009



Source: U.S. Census, DOWL HKM

Figure 2-1 - Soldotna Growth and Projections 1960 - 2030

in Alaska and the Borough. In 2009, Soldotna's population density was estimated at 545 residents per square mile, one and a half times more dense than Homer (367/square mile), more than double the density of Kenai (232/square mile) and three times as dense as Seward (196/square mile). This relatively high density has both advantages and disadvantages. High density development increases demands on public facilities and services, but it can also make provision of these facilities and services more cost-effective as some of the fixed costs are spread over a higher number of people.

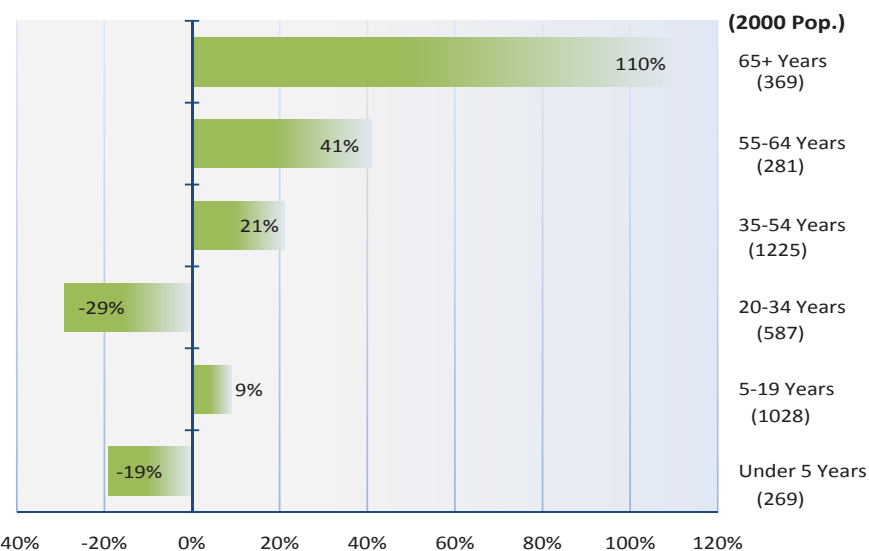
The composition of the City's population has also changed over time. Soldotna's population is aging, with a significant increase in the

percentage of the population over 65 years of age. The percentage of the population under five years of age decreased between 1990 and 2000 (Figure 2-2).

This trend is consistent with the normal overall aging of the population on the Kenai Peninsula and the State as a whole. The KPB School District student projections are consistent with this trend, showing the student population peaking in the late 1990s and projecting decreased student populations in the near future. This recent decrease is believed to be a reflection of the aging of baby boomer offspring. Despite the uncertainties associated with projecting new births in future years, State population projections do not expect this decrease in school age children to persist beyond 2015, although the increase in the population over 65 does show a continued increase through 2030 (DLWD 2007).

The population in group quarters (such as nursing homes) in Soldotna grew 70% from 1990 to 2000 (US Census Bureau 1990, 2000). Although reporting methods changed, the percentage of the population reporting some type of disability also increased during this time period. The City's growing health care industry is likely to continue to attract retirees to the area as the state and regional populations age. The increase in population over 65 will result in a need for more supportive living choices in the future.

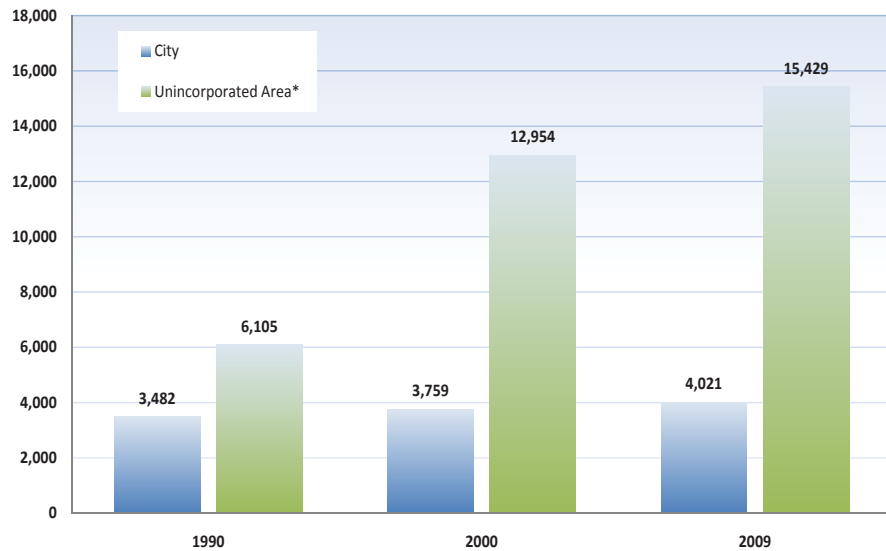
This population information highlights challenges and opportunities for the City. The City will be challenged to address the types of housing, facilities and services that will be needed for an older population. This means the City will need to attract young professionals and technicians to provide the health and social services required by the aging population. Over 27% of the City's 2000 population was in the 5 to 19 age group. This younger population will provide a labor force for the City to support local schools and other organizations and to keep the City strong socially and financially for the long term.



Source: U.S. Census

Figure 2-2 - Percent Change in Soldotna Population Age-Groups, 1990-2000

Although the City's population growth has averaged approximately 1% annually over the last several years, the population of the KPB increased at a slightly higher rate, with much of the population growth occurring in unincorporated areas of the Borough. To the north and east of Soldotna, the communities of Sterling and Ridgeway have increased in population by just over 1% annually since 2000. To the south of Soldotna, Kasilof and Kalifornsky Beach areas increased between 3 and 4 % annually over that period. Altogether, the population of the unincorporated areas around Soldotna increased over 19% between 2000 and 2009, while the City population increased 7%. The greater Soldotna area (including Kalifornsky, Kasilof, Ridgeway, Soldotna and Sterling) accounted for over 35% of the total Borough population in 2009. Four out of five residents of this greater Soldotna area live outside the city limits (Figure 2-3).



*Unincorporated Area includes; Kalifornsky, Ridgeway, Sterling and Kasilof

Source: DLWD 2010

Figure 2-3 - Soldotna and Unincorporated Area Population Chart 1990 - 2009

Economic Trends

Soldotna has consolidated its position as a center for trade and services, and for local government and health care for the Central Peninsula. Half of the top ten employers in the KPB are located in Soldotna, including the KPB administration, KPBSD, CPH, Kenai Peninsula College (KPC), and Fred Meyer. Other large employers include Frontier Community Services, Peninsula Community Health Services of Alaska, and Safeway.

Soldotna's economy is solidly based in industries that have shown strong growth over the last decade and which are projected to continue to grow in the near future. The Education, Health & Social Services Industry accounted for over 20% of the City's employment in 2000, with Retail making up another 17.5% and Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation & Food Services making up almost 16%. The remainder of employment in the city is widely dispersed in several industries, from agriculture/forestry/fishing to

information services. Many of these services are tied to the KPB's major industries: oil/gas, commercial fishing, and tourism.

The State projects that Health Care and Social Services will be the industry with the highest growth in the number of jobs in the state between 2006 and 2016, with Retail trade the second highest. Accommodations and Food Service come in third and Education Services comes in fourth (DLWD 2009). These top four employment generators are the top industries in Soldotna, indicating a likelihood that employment will continue its strong growth in the community.

The emergence of the health care industry as a primary industry for the Soldotna area provides the City with significant opportunities for the future. The industry provides high-paying jobs and draws an educated work force.



Peninsula Community Health Services Building

Fiscal Highlights

City of Soldotna governmental fund revenues for fiscal year (FY) 2009 were \$16.5 million. City services are funded primarily based on sales tax receipts. The City levies a 3% sales tax in addition to the KPB's 3% sales tax. Sales tax revenues of \$7.7 million accounted for 46.6% of governmental fund revenues for FY 2009. Property taxes of \$0.8 million made up 4.9% of governmental fund revenues. Charges for services accounted for \$2.0 million or 12.3%, primarily from utility services and parks and recreation fees. Intergovernmental revenues provided another \$5.3 million or 32.0% for airport, parks and recreation, utility, and public works capital projects; while other revenues accounted for \$0.7 million or 4.2% (Figure 2-4, City of Soldotna 2009). Total governmental fund expenditures for FY 2009 were \$14.4 million (Figure 2-5, City of Soldotna 2009). The City's governmental funds reported combined ending fund balances of \$25.1 million, an increase of \$2.1 million from the prior year.

Soldotna accounted for 28% of taxable sales in the KPB in 2009 (Figure 2-6). Over the last five years (2004-2009), annual taxable sales increased 12.3% in the Borough and 23.6% in Soldotna. Only Kenai's taxable sales grew faster, increasing 26.1% from 2004 to 2009. While Kenai's taxable sales grew faster during this period of time, Soldotna's taxable sales is 41% greater than that of Kenai's. Approximately 80% of Soldotna's taxable sales were from retail sales. The third quarter of the year accounts for approximately 31% of Soldotna's total taxable sales, with retail and tourism sales peaking during this quarter.

The significance of sales tax revenues in the City's fiscal security highlights the need to remain competitive and attractive to businesses and customers. The recent development of retailers in neighboring communities has the potential to increase outside sales tax at the expense of Soldotna's. Soldotna's location on the Sterling Highway, however, is expected to remain a strong factor in the City's favor. With the recent improvement in the national economy, Soldotna has seen

renewed interest from national retailers looking to take advantage of Soldotna's strategic location and high traffic counts.

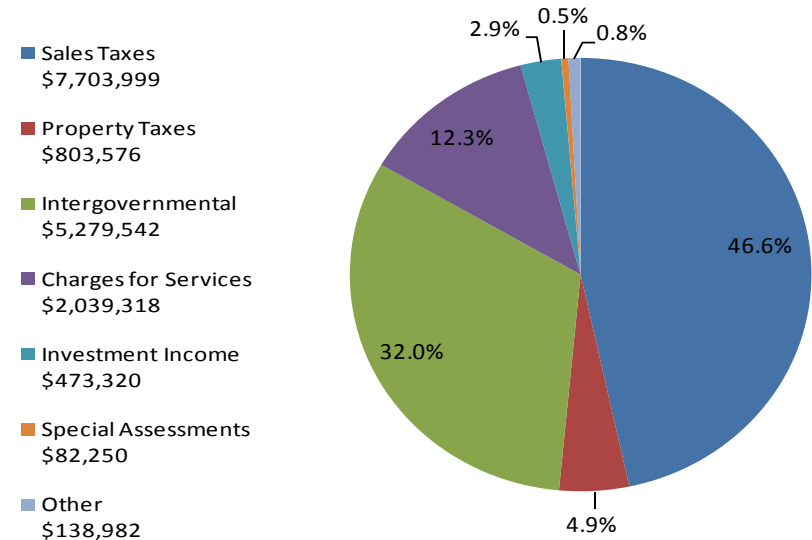


Figure 2-4 - FY2009 Revenues

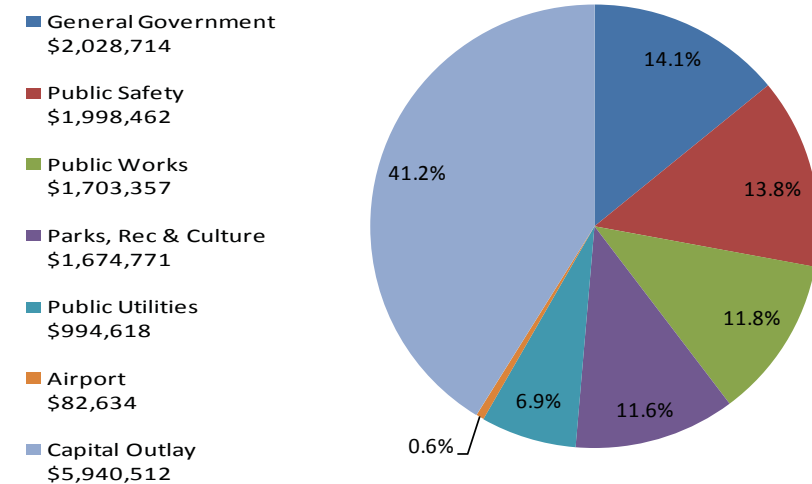


Figure 2-5 - FY2009 Expenditures

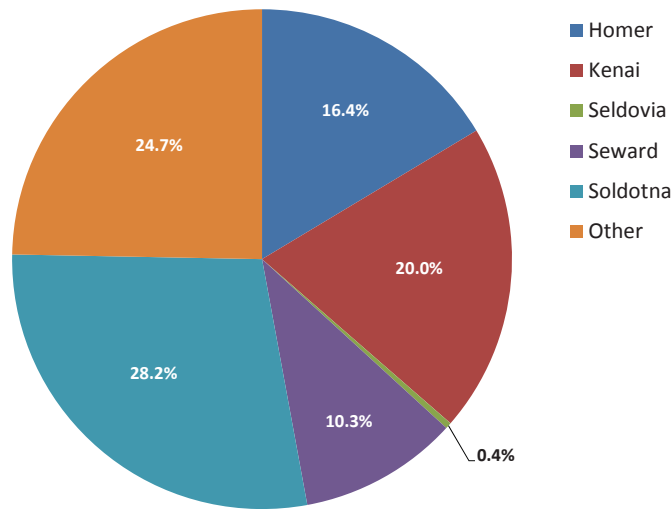


Figure 2-6 - KPB Annual Taxable Sales by Area in 2009

LAND USE

Existing Land Use Patterns

The City regulates land use under Title 17 of the City Code. The aerial view of Soldotna illustrates the areas of development (Figure 2-7). The general pattern of zoning places single-family, two-family and multi-family residential districts between the Kenai River on the west and the Kenai Spur Highway on the east (Figure 2-8). Rural residential areas lie primarily east of the Kenai Spur Highway; although there is also a rural residential area west of the river and north of Kalifornsky Beach Road. Commercially-zoned areas are located primarily in a linear pattern along both highway frontages, as well as along Kalifornsky Beach Road. Limited commercial areas are located between the commercial areas and the residential areas west of the Kenai Spur Highway, as well as in a small area south of the river and west of the City airport. Industrial lands are primarily located south of the Kenai River on or near the airport. The City has major recreational areas located along the Kenai River, and scattered Institutional areas dispersed throughout the city.

Approximately 68% of residentially-zoned lots in the City are developed. There are 1,867 acres of residentially-zoned land, of which 1,016 acres (54%) is vacant (Table 2-1). However, over 50% of that vacant acreage is zoned Rural Residential and is located south of the Sterling Highway in areas with little infrastructure and occasional wetlands. Of the 241 acres vacant single-family/two-family lands, about 100 acres are owned by the State for conservation purposes. Therefore, only about 141 acres are available for development. There are approximately 190 acres of vacant commercial land available, primarily along the highways. Available Limited Commercial acreage is about 40 acres. It is located south of the river on Funny River Road and scattered north and west of the Sterling and Kenai Spur Highway intersection (Figure 2-9). Approximately 128 acres of vacant industrial land is located near the airport, and owned by the City of Soldotna.

Zoning	Total Acreage	Vacant Acreage	% Vacant by Acreage
Single-Family Residential	6.52	0	0
Single-Family/Two-Family	575.14	241.16	42
Multi-family Residential	122.77	47.38	39
Rural Residential	1162.71	727.92	63
Limited Commercial	98.55	41.34	42
Commercial	520.68	242.79	47
Parks and Recreation	408.99	349.94	85
Institutional	508.57	281.94	55
Industrial	413.41	128.40	31
	3817.34	2060.51	54

Table 2-1 - Acreage and Percentage of Vacant Land by Zoning Designation

Recent zoning activities show continued demand for commercial areas, particularly for limited commercial areas in the vicinity of the hospital and full commercial zoning along the Sterling Highway on the east side of the City. Several multi-family parcels on the west side of the City have been rezoned to institutional use while some low density residential areas have been rezoned to multi-family zoning.

Although the City is fairly developed, a small number of platting actions continue to fill in and reconfigure parcels for development west of the Kenai Spur Highway, and large parcels continue to be subdivided for development east of the highway.

NATURAL RESOURCES

The Kenai River

The Kenai River is a major community asset as a recreation resource and an economic engine. The superior natural setting of Soldotna is due in large part to the Kenai River, which runs through the center of town, providing ample economic and recreational opportunities for the community and visitors as well as valuable habitat for wildlife.

The Kenai River's popularity has resulted in some adverse impacts related to water pollution and bank degradation over the last few decades. The State's Kenai River Comprehensive Management Plan was updated in 1997 to address these impacts and to provide recommendations for measures to reduce adverse effects and improve the health of the river. Recommendations include more stringent review of development along the river, reducing access along the banks of the river, and restoration of riverbank areas. Specific concerns addressed in the plan relevant to Soldotna include recommendations for restricting non-residential development on riverfront parcels, providing access infrastructure (stairs, boardwalks, etc.) to reduce bank impacts, and evaluating alternatives to the City's current discharge of treated wastewater effluent into the river (DNR et al., 1997).



Visitors view the Kenai River

Wetlands

There are approximately 200 acres of mapped wetlands within the City's boundaries. The majority of the wetlands lie in the vicinity of Soldotna Creek between the Sterling Highway and the Kenai River (Figure 2-10). Wetlands are also found along Slikok Creek on the west side of the City. These wetlands provide for water recharge, water quality improvement, and habitat for waterfowl and wildlife. Small wetland areas are located between the Sterling and Kenai Spur highways at the north end of the City and along the river at the west end of the City.

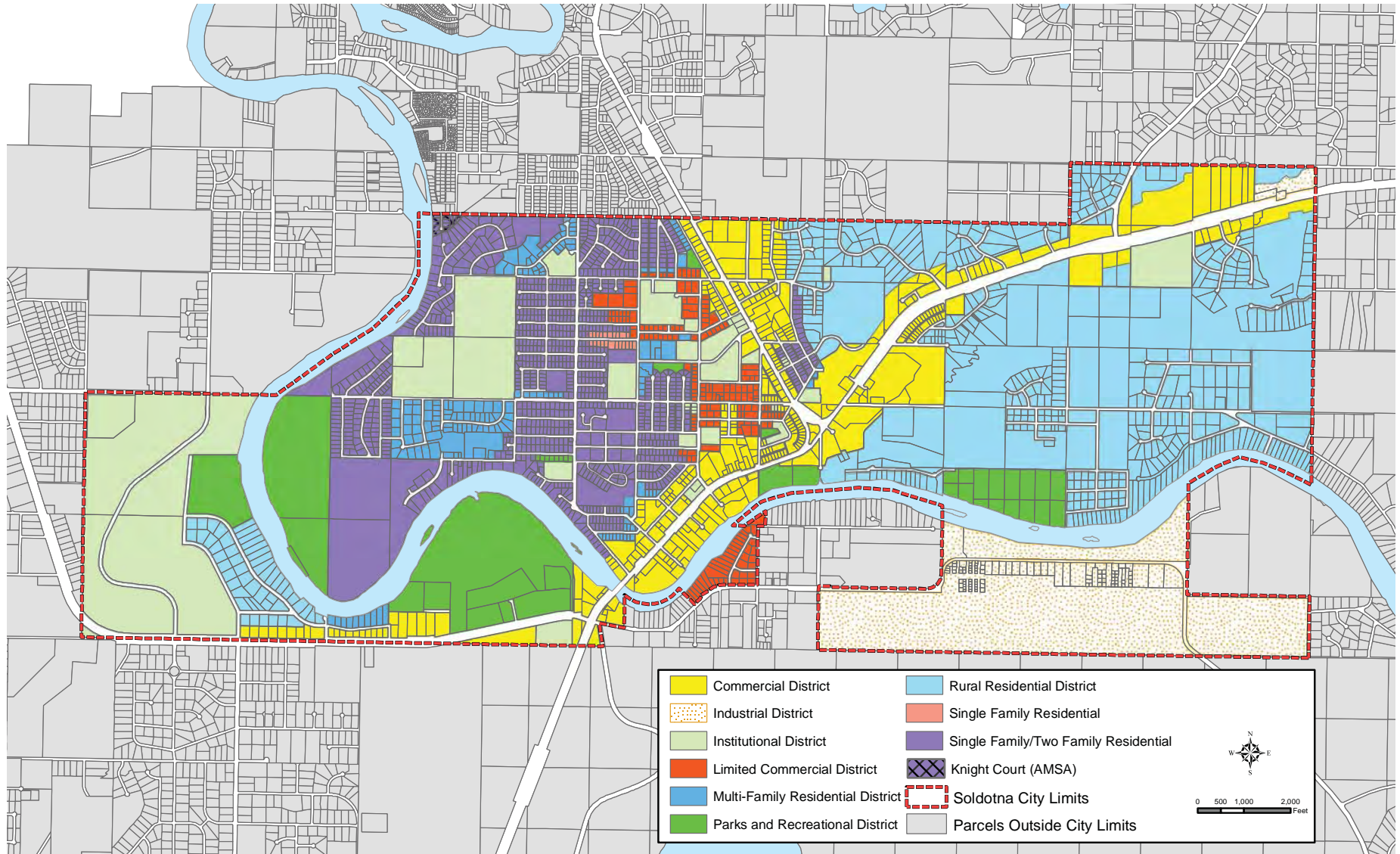
Floodplains

Little of the developed area of Soldotna is in the floodplain of the Kenai River. Flooding does occur seasonally, however, and substantial flood damage to in-river and bank facilities has been caused by ice dams and glacial outbursts (flooding that occurs when water dammed by a glacier or a moraine is released).



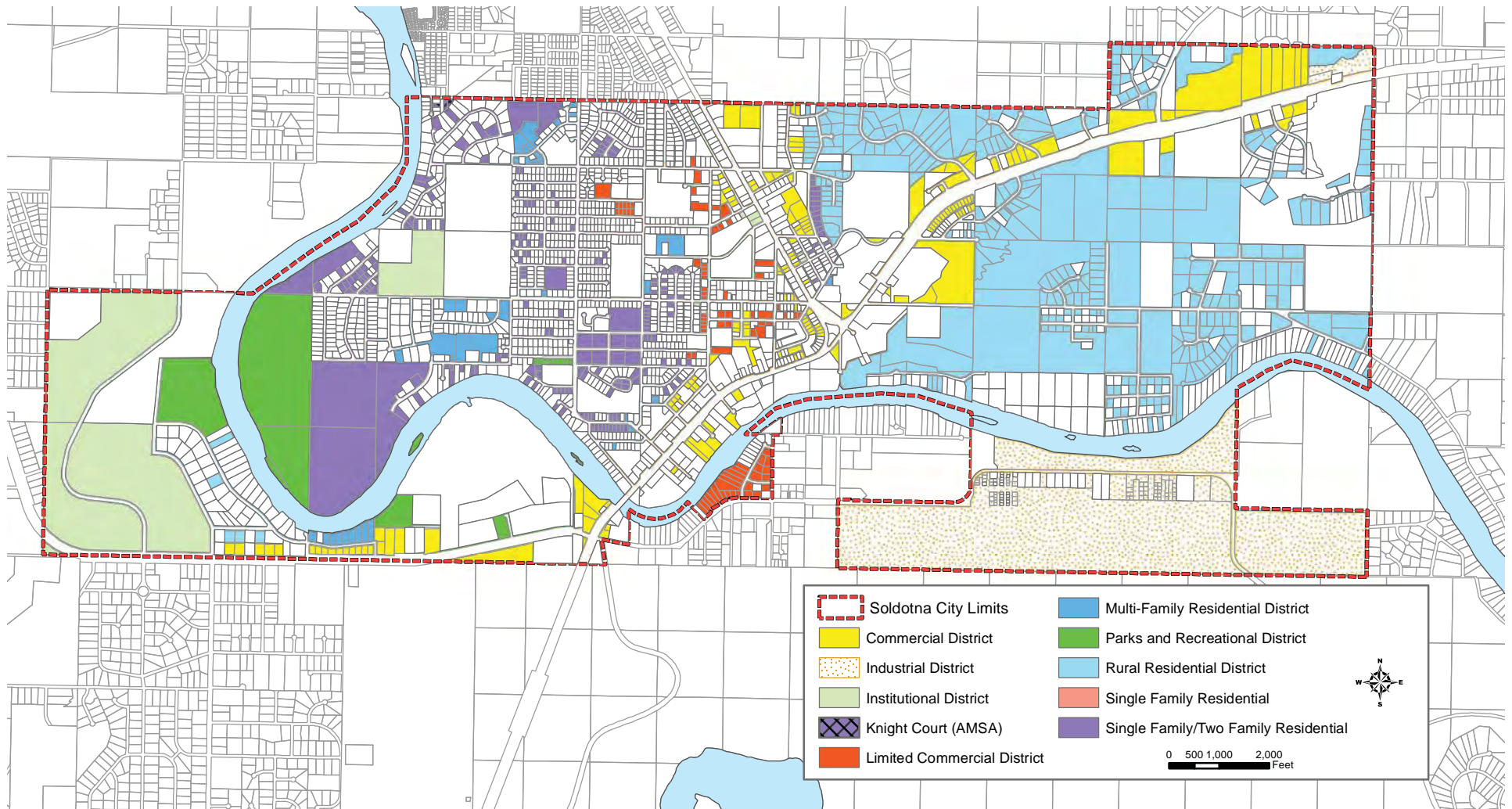
Source: City of Soldotna, 2009

Figure 2-7 - Aerial Photo of Soldotna



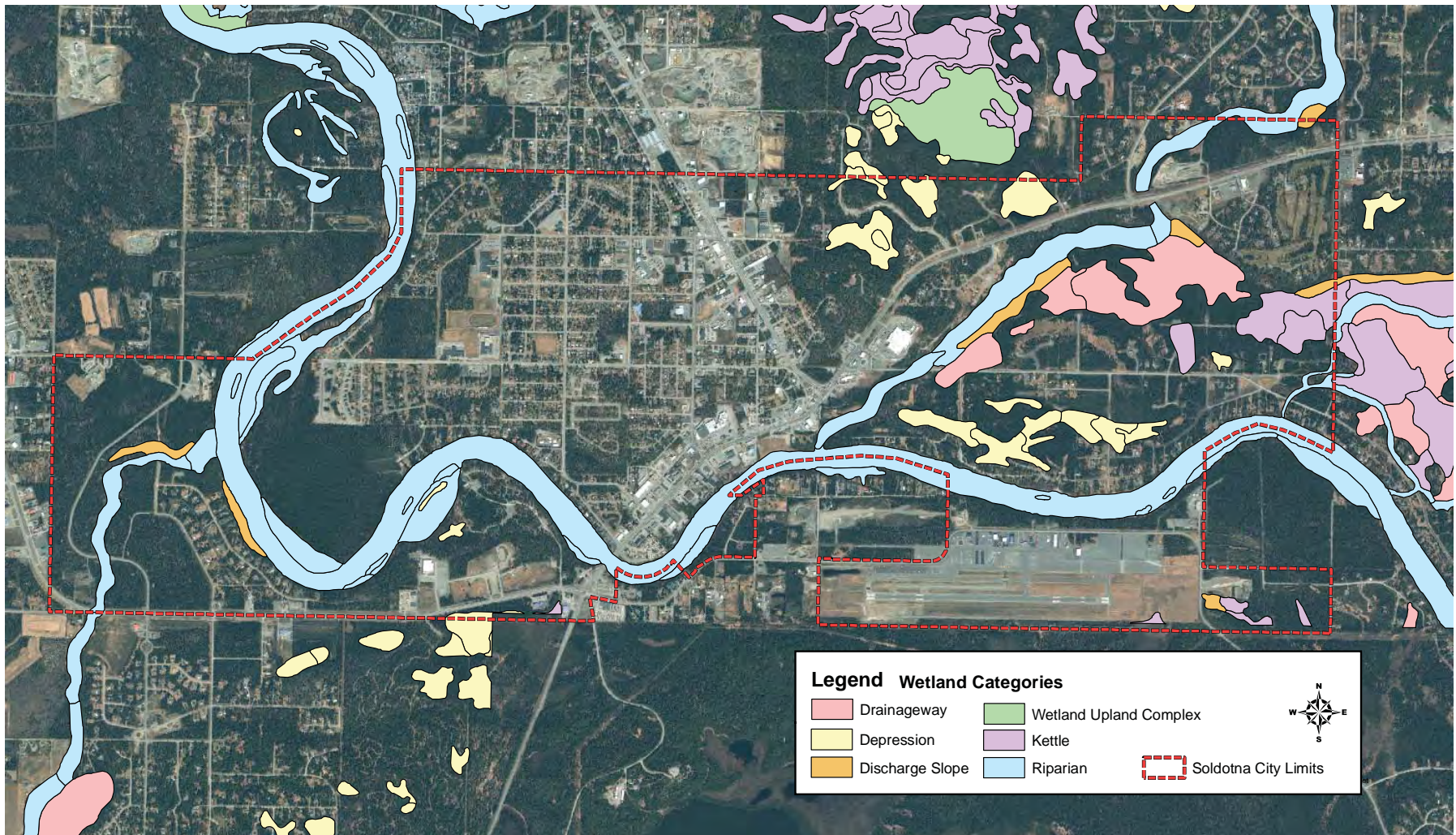
Source: City of Soldotna, 2011.

Figure 2-8 - Soldotna Existing Zoning



Source: City of Soldotna, 2011.

Figure 2-9 - Soldotna Undeveloped Lands



Source: City of Soldotna, 2011

Figure 2-10 - Natural Resources In and Around Soldotna



The Kenai River provides world class fishing

Fish And Wildlife

The Kenai Peninsula is rich in a diversity of fish and wildlife which attracts both visitors and residents. As previously mentioned, Soldotna is located on the world-famous Kenai River, directly north of the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Although the City is fairly developed, the City's open areas continue to support small mammals and birds, particularly along the river and creeks and in wetland areas.

The Kenai River contains all five Pacific salmon species and is famous for sport-fishing for salmon. Fishing for other salmonids, such as Dolly Varden and rainbow trout, is also popular on the river. It is estimated that up to 34 species of fish are present in the Kenai River drainage, including four exotic species that have been introduced in various areas. One exotic species, northern pike, are thought to have been introduced in Soldotna Creek in the 1970s.

The river's watershed is also home to a wide diversity of birds, from eagles to seabirds, waterfowl and shorebirds. Mammals present in the area range from snowshoe hare, porcupine and coyote to black and brown bear, to moose.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation Infrastructure

Two major state highways converge in Soldotna, providing access north to the Anchorage area, west to Kenai and south to Homer. These State highways function as major throughways but are also the primary transportation infrastructure for local traffic moving from one part of the City to another. The City's arterial road network provides a relatively complete grid in the western portion of the City. The road network on the eastern side of the City is more limited, as much of the area away from the highway remains undeveloped.

Pedestrian routes exist along the highways and along some of the City arterials. The Unity Trail, a multi-use separated trail facility between Soldotna and Kenai along the Kenai Spur Highway is very popular. The City completed a trail plan in 2001 that proposes a thorough non-motorized trail network throughout the City, including sidewalks, boardwalks, bicycle routes and paved and unpaved multi-use pathways. The plan calls for a multi-use trail along the Sterling Highway similar to that constructed along the Kenai Spur Highway, as well as a trail loop from the Sterling Highway along the eastern boundary of the City and down East Redoubt Avenue.

Parking availability is sufficient for the majority of the year, although it can be an issue in commercial areas during the summer. In addition, parking demand has increased significantly in the area around the hospital as some of the formerly-residential areas have been converted to health care offices and support services.

Traffic Levels

The highest recorded traffic levels in the Kenai Peninsula occur on the Sterling Highway west of the Kenai Spur Highway. The Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) at the intersection of the Sterling Highway and Kobuk Avenue was 18,300 in 2008. The AADT at the

intersection of the Sterling and Kenai Spur Highways increased from just under 11,000 in 1995 to a peak of 14,470 in 2004. Traffic levels have decreased slightly since then and were 14,120 in 2008. Along the Spur Highway between Redoubt Avenue and Marydale Avenue, the 2008 AADT was 15,809 and on Kalifornsky Beach Road at Skyline Drive, the AADT was 13,090. Traffic levels peak during the summer visitor season and particularly during the more popular salmon runs on the Kenai River.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES & PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Community Facilities and Organizations

As the administrative center for the KPB and a major service center for a large portion of the Borough's population, the City has many community facilities and organizations providing health and social services, including CPH, Peninsula Community Health Services of Alaska, Heritage Place Nursing Home, Hospice of the Central Peninsula, Frontier Community Services, Bridges Community Resource Network, Soldotna Area Senior Citizens/Senior Center and the Boys and Girls Club.

Cultural and educational facilities within the City include the Soldotna Historical Society Museum, the Joyce K. Carver Public Library, Soldotna Visitor's Center, KPC's Kenai River Campus, three primary schools, one middle school and one high school. The college has an extensive library, an art gallery, and a multi-cultural consortium that sponsors programs and events that provide a forum for discussion of cultural diversity issues. The Donald E. Gilman River Center is located south of the river near the airport. The Gilman River Center also has a natural resource research library that is available to the public. The Kenai National Wildlife Refuge is located just south of Soldotna and provides programs for all ages throughout the year.

Park and recreation facilities in the City include Centennial Park, Soldotna Creek Park, and Swiftwater Park, Riverview Park, Sunrise

Park, Aspen Park, Farnsworth Park, Parker Park, Rotary Park, the Karen Street Recreation Area, and the Soldotna Sports Center. The Sports Center includes an Olympic-size indoor ice rink that is open to competitive and recreation leagues and racquetball courts. The Karen Street Recreation Area contains a skateboard park. Rotary Park and Soldotna Creek Park provide access to the Kenai River, and Centennial and Swiftwater Park provide camping along the river.

The Soldotna Little League operates ball fields on Kalifornsky Beach Road and the Soldotna Equestrian Association hosts programs at the rodeo grounds near the ball fields. There are a number of trails used for recreation within and in the vicinity of the City, such as the Tsalteshi Trails located just south of the City. A privately-owned golf course is located on the Sterling Highway at the north end of the City. Other recreation facilities, such as pools, are available at local schools. Other local business and civic organizations that provide a number of activities and programs throughout the year include the Soldotna Chamber of Commerce, the Soldotna Visitors Center, Rotary, the Elks, the Soroptimist of the Twin Cities, the Soldotna Historical Society and the Kenai Watershed Forum.





Soldotna Police Department

Public Safety

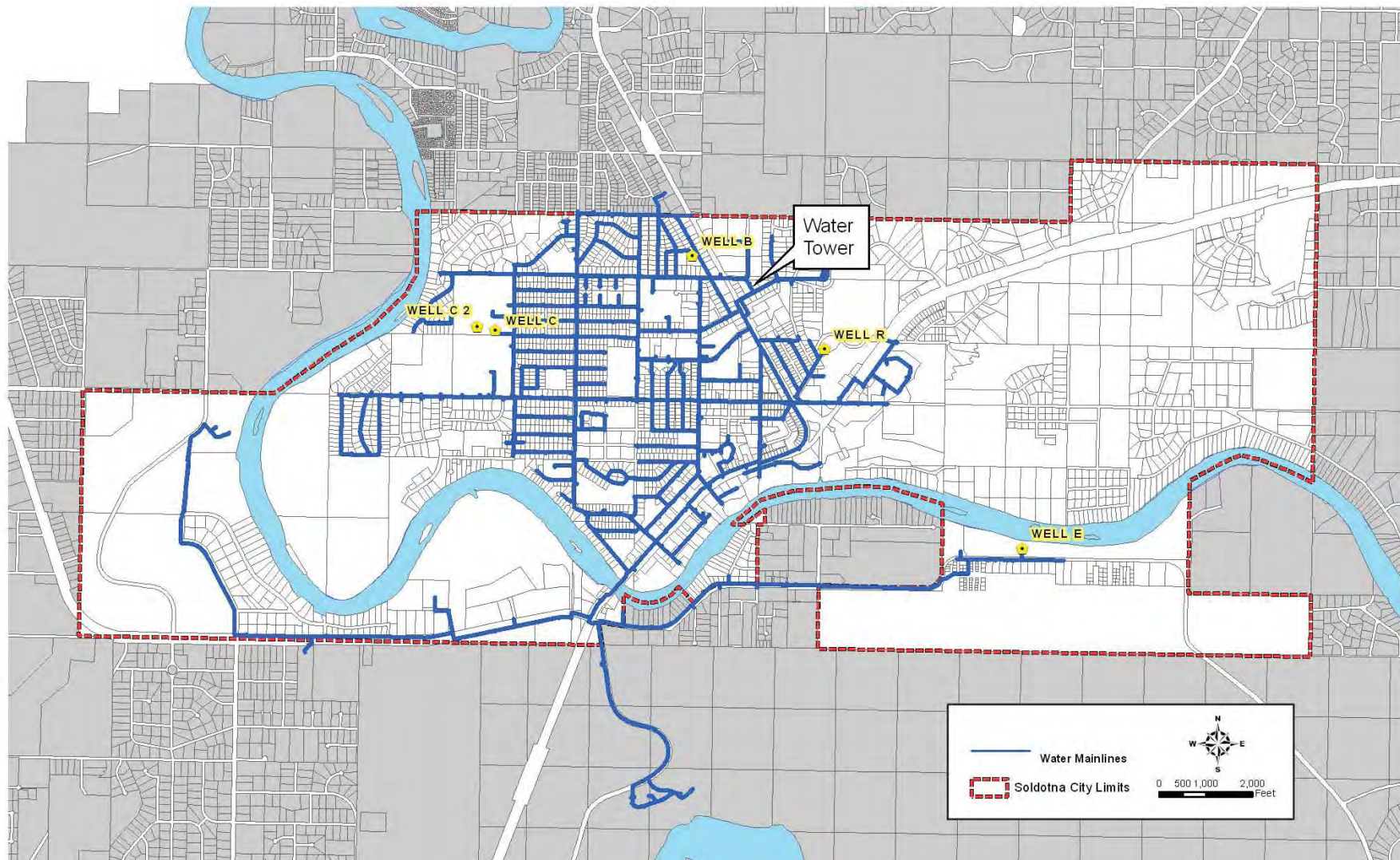
The Soldotna Police Department has 15 full-time staff. The Alaska State Troopers also have a detachment located in Soldotna, which covers the western Kenai Peninsula. Reported violent crimes in the City were reduced by over 50% from 1995 to 2007 (KPB 2008a). Fire service and emergency medical services are provided by Central Emergency Services, which operates a 24-hour station in Soldotna.

Public Utilities

Soldotna's public water utility has a 3.3 million gallon per day (mgd) capacity of water provided through four Class A ground water wells. The water system was operating at 24%-36% capacity during 2009, using 800,000 to 1.2 mgd. The system has 1,200 service connections providing water to approximately 3,036 people (Figure 2-11). The City's wastewater treatment plant capacity is 1.2 mgd with a permit

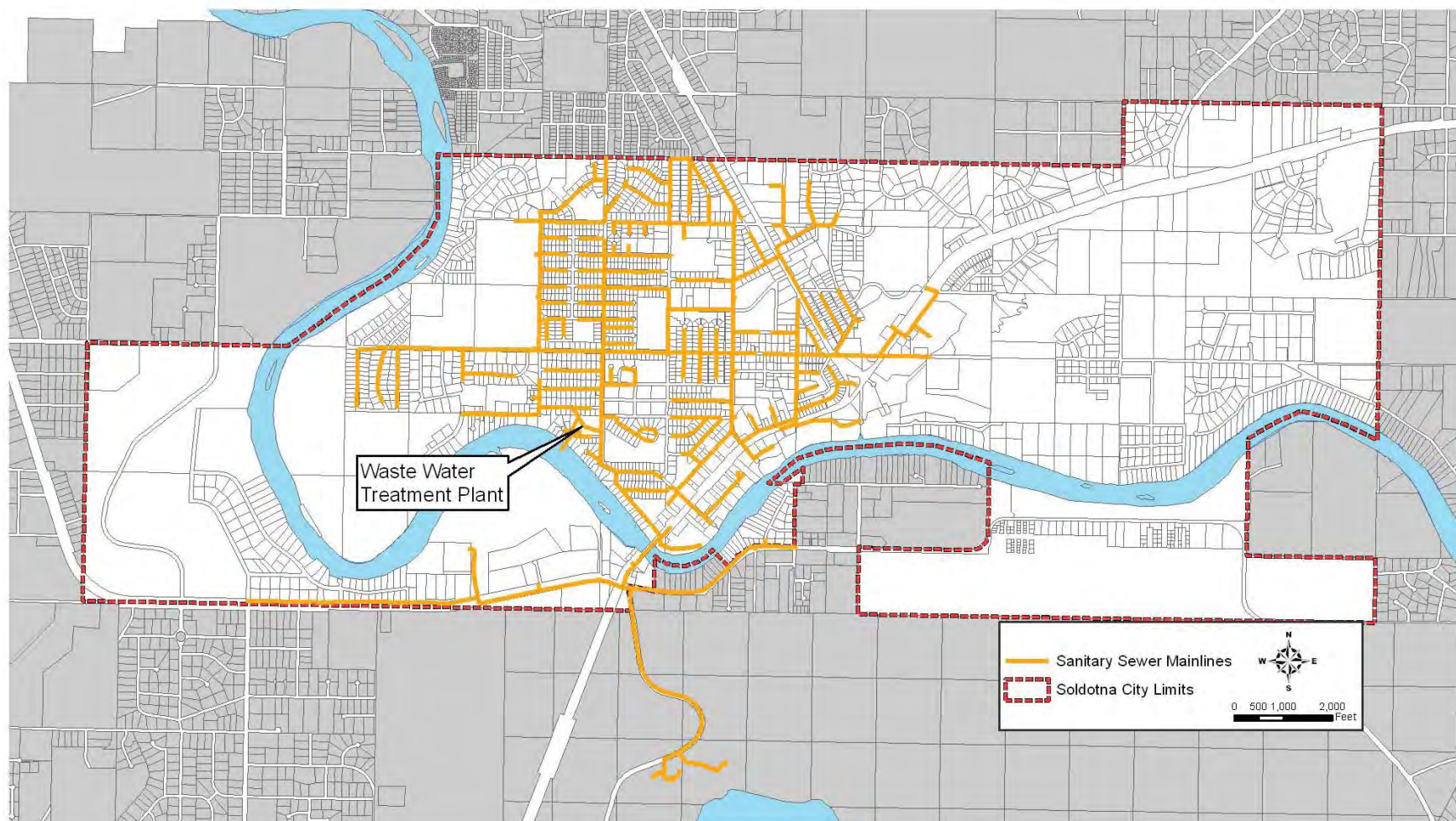
limit of 1.02 mgd. The system was operating at 75% of capacity in 2009, servicing about 2,935 people. The primary wastewater treatment is filtration of solids and secondary treatment is an extended aeration activated sludge process. The treated effluent is discharged into the Kenai River and dewatered sludge is disposed of in the Borough landfill. Although the City meets its permit standards for disposal of effluent into the Kenai River, many agencies continue to have concerns about this discharge.

Many areas of the City do not have access to City water and sewer services, including some areas along the Kenai River. The City provides utilities to the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center south of the City and to a few other areas outside the city limits. Soldotna's commercial water and sewer are lower than many other Southcentral Alaska cities, including Homer, Seward, Palmer, and Wasilla.



Source: City of Soldotna, 2011

Figure 2-11 - Water Services for Soldotna



Source: City of Soldotna, 2011

Figure 2-12 - Sewer Services for Soldotna



Chapter Three Plan Elements

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Soldotna will encourage economic development by expanding health care and educational opportunities; year-round tourism and recreational opportunities; quality commercial development; and by incorporating the Kenai River as a marketable asset and resource. Economic development will promote pedestrian-friendly retail opportunities and the development of a more focused downtown. Soldotna will strive to maintain its tax base while continuing to provide an extraordinary quality of life to its residents.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Soldotna serves as a regional retail, service and government center for the Kenai Peninsula. The concentration of City, Borough and State jobs in the City provides a very stable base of employment, while the expanding health care industry provides the opportunity for employment growth over the next decades. The growth of health care facilities in Soldotna has generated high-paying employment and drawn more people of all ages to the Soldotna area. With health care-related occupations dominating the list of fastest growing occupations in the state, Soldotna is in a good position to grow and diversify its economy (DLWD 2009).

The main economic challenge to Soldotna is its reliance on sales tax and the growing competition for retail sales from neighboring communities and unincorporated areas outside the City's boundaries. Soldotna's high sales tax revenues and its role as a regional retail center has historically allowed the City to maintain a fairly low property tax rate. Retail competition in neighboring communities has the potential to alter Soldotna's retail sales, although the City's location on the Sterling Highway will continue to

provide good opportunities for retail sales to visitors. The growing population of health care-related employees also provides an opportunity to expand the provision of a variety of retail services. Unfortunately, some key areas – including malls and retail stores on the main highways – are currently underutilized. The City may want to attract a high quality big box retail store and continue supporting existing businesses to counter the attraction of neighboring communities' retail opportunities to regional residents. One challenge is that there are few well-placed large vacant commercial properties for locating this type of facility in Soldotna, therefore the City should remain open to creative solutions to facilitate the right type of development in the community.

The linear pattern of commercial properties along the major highways results in a diffuse and shallow commercial zone, in some locations only one parcel deep. There is no concentrated commercial center to serve as the focus of retail activity or to provide a sense of a downtown. This pattern of strip commercial development may



Soldotna provides a variety of lodging accommodations



not be as attractive to visitors passing through on the highway, as opposed to a focused commercial area. This issue was a major concern for residents participating in the visioning process for this plan.

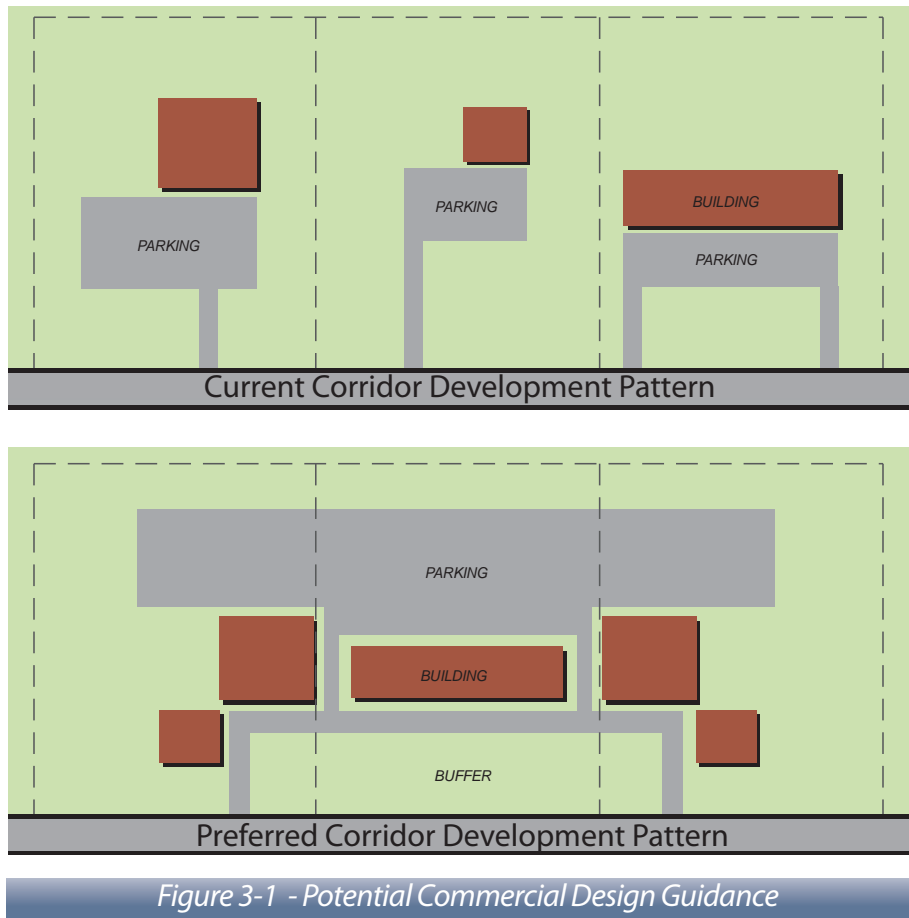
Another challenge is addressing the growing needs of the health care industry and balancing the growth of health care industry facilities with protection of the character of adjacent residential areas. Although the quality of development generally has been high, parking and other issues need to be addressed to increase the compatibility of these facilities with surrounding existing residential areas.

The Kenai River is a valuable asset to the City and could provide opportunities for more growth in tourism-related employment and revenues. Current visitation and associated revenues peak in the third quarter of the year and bottom out in the first quarter of the year. However, winter tourism opportunities exist, particularly with the Tsalteshi Trails, proximity to world-class snow machining, and year-round activities at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Attracting additional visitors outside the summer season can increase City revenues while minimizing additional infrastructure needs.

Finally, information from the 2002 Economic Census indicates that accommodations in Soldotna bring in a relatively low amount of revenue compared to other locations on the Peninsula (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). For example, in 2002 Soldotna accounted for 21% of lodging establishments in the KPB and 24% of the employment in lodging, but receipts and payroll accounted for only 13% of the KPB total. This is likely due to the lack of many large, high-end lodging facilities in Soldotna. Food service, on the other hand, has historically brought in relatively more per establishment. Soldotna had 26% of the KPB's food service establishments, but accounted for 32% of KPB food service receipts. This could be due to the City's key location on the heavily-travelled highway between Anchorage and Homer.

Economic Development Goals

- 1.** Promote development of a "downtown area" that attracts both visitors and residents.
 - a. Develop a downtown plan that identifies what constitutes "downtown" and provides design guidance to support quality commercial and institutional development in this area.
 - b. Identify key focus areas to concentrate commercial/retail activity to create commercial synergy.
 - c. Identify key public facilities that should be located in the identified downtown area to provide a central city area and a sense of community identity.
 - d. Evaluate parking locations and pedestrian access throughout the downtown area. Use clear signage to make it easy for visitors to find parking and retail opportunities.
- 2.** Encourage reuse and/or redevelopment of key areas, particularly along the river and the major highways.
 - a. Establish a highway overlay district with more stringent design standards to ensure that the image of the City presented to visitors reflects the high quality of the City (Figure 3-1).
 - b. 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.
 - 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.
 - d. Evaluate the potential for City involvement in redevelopment through acquisition and marketing of key areas.



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.
- 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.
- c. Work with the local health care industry to research health care trends, potential expansion needs, and any constraints to existing operations or proposed expansion.
- d. Work with the Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District (KPEDD) and Small Business Administration (SBA) to develop/expand support services to small businesses and entrepreneurs.
- e. Support KPC in continuing to expand training opportunities to support the growing health care industry.
- f. Support KPC in expanding opportunities for students to complete four-year degree programs through distance learning facilities at the Kenai River Campus.
- g. Support KPC in developing student residences on the Kenai River Campus.
- h. Continue to encourage development of airport-related businesses, and actively engage agency utilization of airport facilities.

- e. Evaluate the need for a building maintenance ordinance to provide for minimum upkeep of vacant structures. Consider a reverse tax to encourage reuse and discourage long-term vacancy.
- f. Consider requiring a certain percentage of planned building improvement costs to be used to bring a facility into compliance with new code requirements when applications for commercial renovation alterations are submitted.



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.
- 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).

5. Promote the development of the health care industry while maximizing compatibility with existing residential areas.

- a.* Facilitate a dialogue between the City, Borough and leaders in the health care industry about land use compatibility, the industry's land and infrastructure needs and future expansion plans.
- b.* Identify obstacles and opportunities for continued growth of the health care sector.
- c.* Explore the creation, boundaries and standards for a health care zoning district as discussed in the land use element of the plan.

6. Identify opportunities and plan for the Kenai River to play a prominent role in the expansion of economic development opportunities within the City.

- a.* Identify public river access points and coordinated signage that leads visitors to these areas.
- b.* Consider acquisition of land to develop a convention center on riverfront property with a design that focuses on the river.
- c.* Work with the KPC, the School District, the Watershed

Forum, and other groups to promote interactive learning opportunities focused on the river for local schools, residents and visitors.

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.
- b.* Develop a city-wide multi-use network of trails that leads tourists through the City to key points of interest (from the river, to the Visitor Center, to the view of Mt. Redoubt, to Soldotna Creek). Groom key City trails for winter skiing and provide adequate signage to allow visitors to ski from attraction to attraction.
- c.* Continue to support the Tsateshi Trails and the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center as year-round amenities. Consider joint promotion of these amenities to populations throughout the KPB and in Anchorage.
- d.* Investigate a winter recreational vehicle corridor through the city to connect areas inside the city to outside winter recreational opportunities.

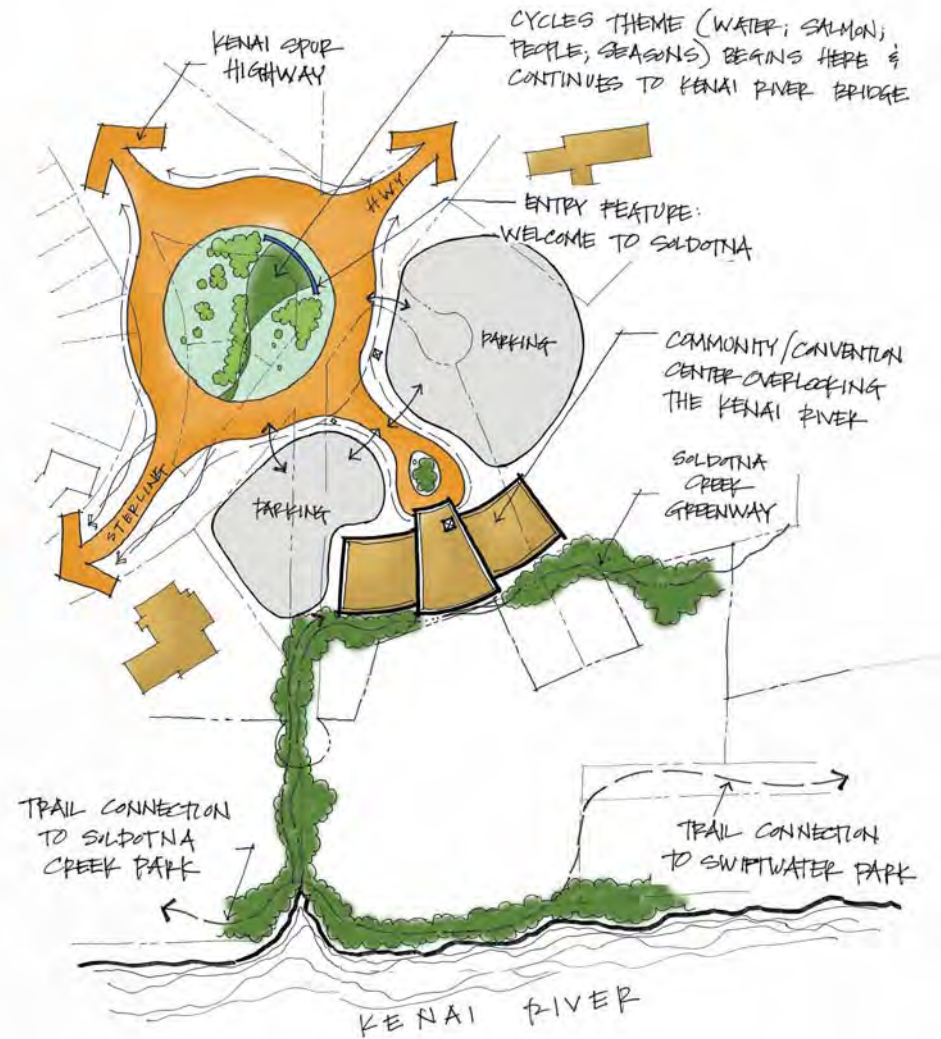
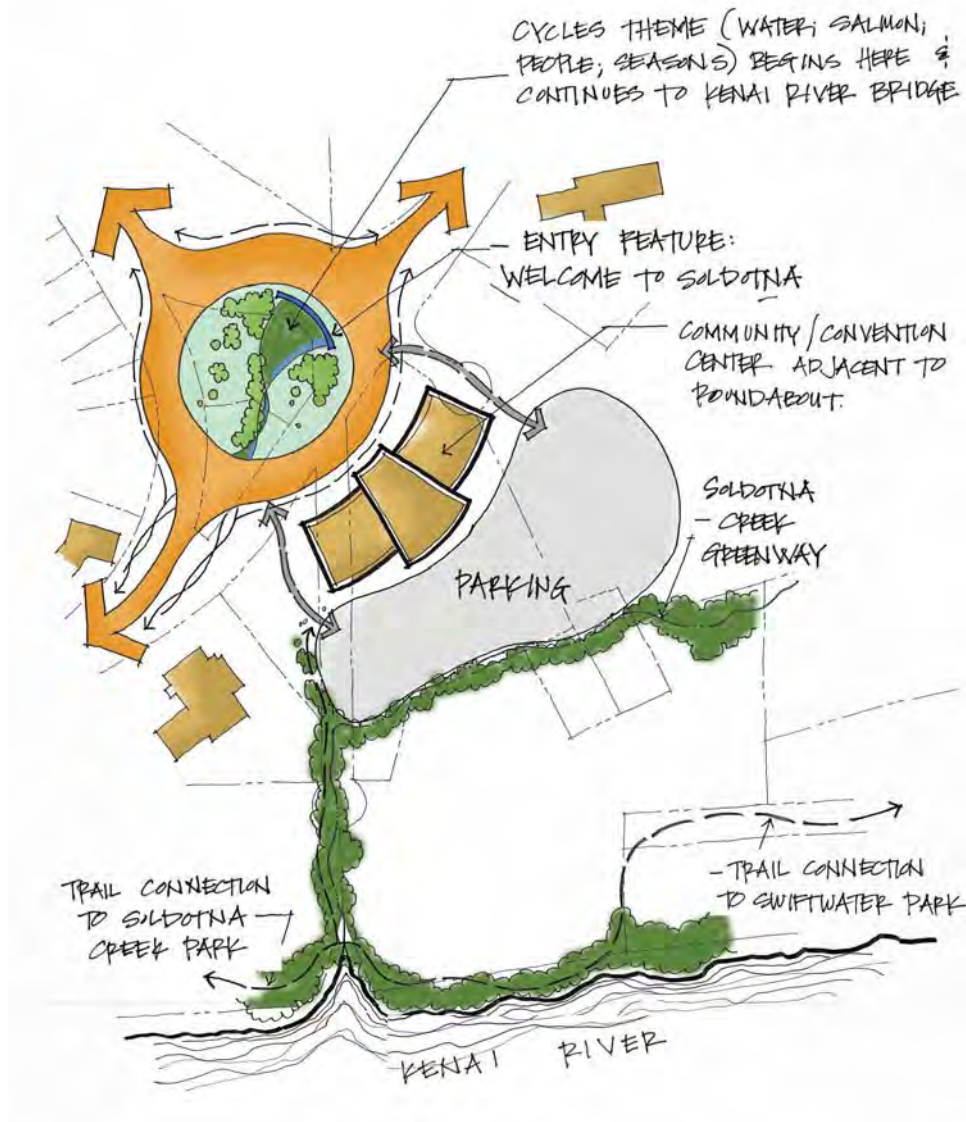


Figure 3-2 - Potential Convention Center Concepts



Soldotna is a family-friendly city

NEIGHBORHOODS

Soldotna neighborhoods will be attractive, vibrant, clean, safe and desirable. They will be well-maintained, provide for mobility, and be well-connected to the larger community. The City will encourage neighborhood interaction and a strong sense of community.

Residents of Soldotna prize the family-friendly feel of the City, which is compact, safe and comfortable with easy access to Alaska's large open spaces. Residents also noted that the citizens of Soldotna are the key to the quality of the City, creating strong neighborhood and community relationships. Soldotna's young age also contributes to the character of the City - where new residents live alongside the original homesteaders that founded the City.

The physical character of Soldotna's neighborhoods is shaped by the river, the Sterling and Kenai Spur Highways, and the initial settlement patterns, resulting in two distinct residential neighborhood areas. The western part of the Soldotna, north of the Kenai River, contains the primary residential area with mostly smaller urban-type lots. The area also includes suburban residential lots, primarily on the outer edge of

this zone along the river. The zoning in the western portion of the City is primarily Single Family/Two Family Residential, though most of the developed housing (62%) is single-family. Although there have been a number of rezones from single-family to multi-family over the last several years, the percentage of housing units provided by smaller multi-family structures (two-four units/structure) has remained constant from 1990-2000 at 14%. Housing units provided by larger multi-family structures (more than four units/structure) decreased from 40% of total housing units in 1990 to 24% in 2000. Smaller undeveloped residential properties are scattered throughout the western portion of the City. Recent subdivisions on the west side of the City have had average lot sizes of 11,000 square feet (sf) to 18,000 sf.

The east side of the City is zoned mostly Rural Residential. The sizes of existing lots vary from approximately one-quarter acre to five acres. Recent subdivisions in this area have been from just under one acre to four acre lots. Many of these areas are impacted by wetlands and limited access. This area of the City has isolated pockets of more suburban development, similar to the development that has occurred outside the city limits. Large areas on the east side remain undeveloped due to a lack of road and utility infrastructure.

The economic value and desirability of riverfront land has resulted in substantial development along the Kenai River both inside and outside of the City. Outside the city limits, development is primarily large lot residential development, similar to the development in the eastern portion of Soldotna. As mentioned previously, much of the current and expected population growth in the greater Soldotna area is occurring in the unincorporated areas outside the city limits.

Neighborhood issues include maintaining the quality of residential neighborhoods and providing a variety and mixture of housing options within the City. Some conflicts associated with the interaction between commercial and residential development are occurring, especially in areas where commercial uses are expanding

into formerly residential areas. Also, there is a growing desire for more connectivity for pedestrians and bicycles, especially as health and environmental awareness is increasing.



Mountain Rose Estates provides a variety of housing types

Neighborhood Quality And Housing Diversity

As mentioned previously, Soldotna is a young city, incorporated in 1960. The 2000 census indicates that 56% of the City's residential structures were built after 1980. The 44% of the structures that were built prior to that are now more than 30 years old - which may provide some opportunities for redevelopment in older residential areas of the City. The annual volume of new residential permits has remained fairly steady over the last ten years, averaging 20-30 permits per year. The average value of those permits has varied significantly over the decade, from a low of \$128,081 in 2003 to a high of \$291,647 in 2007. These figures average together all residential permits issued, ranging from small home remodels or additions, to new home construction. The average value of new homes constructed in 2009 was \$238,378. Housing in the KPB overall remains more affordable than housing in Anchorage and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, however, contributing to Soldotna's appeal for both families and retirees.

The normal aging of the population that is occurring throughout Alaska and the United States is evident in Soldotna as well. The availability of affordable housing and the location of the hospital and the growing health care services sector in Soldotna appear to be attracting a larger number of retirees to settle in the City. This is changing the dynamics of some neighborhoods, as retired households may have fewer vehicles and look for closer access to community services and facilities. Older households may also prefer smaller housing units requiring less yard maintenance. In addition, more group housing may be required. The population in group living quarters (such as nursing homes) increased 70% between 1990 and 2000. As noted previously, a higher percentage of the older population has disabilities (68% of the population over 65). While still a small number of people, the population with disabilities and the need for supported living environments is likely to increase with the aging population.

The aging of the overall population and the expanding health care service industry in Soldotna also provide opportunities for younger professionals in the medical and other service sectors. These younger workers in turn create other work opportunities to support the activities and amenities a growing population will attract, such as shops and restaurants. Maintaining a well-balanced population and providing diverse housing options will promote a stable economy and assure that the demand for local community services, such as schools, can be financed and maintained as key facilities in the community.

Compatibility Adjacent To Residential Areas

The limited commercial zoning district is designed to provide for low-intensity commercial use as a transition between commercial areas and residential areas. Although a variety of commercial uses are allowed in these areas, the overall size of some uses is limited. The expansion of limited commercial areas into residential neighborhoods changes the character of the neighborhood and has



to be carefully reviewed to ensure that measures are incorporated to ensure that the commercial uses do not adversely affect the existing neighborhoods as a result of increased traffic, noise or overflowing parking.

This issue has been highlighted in Soldotna with the expansion of health care facilities near the hospital. There has been a strong demand for commercial properties in the vicinity of the hospital and a continuing conversion of residentially-zoned properties to limited commercial. The health care industry is expected to continue to expand in the future, and plays a key role as an economic engine for the City. A supply of land for expansion of the industry should be identified. In addition, a closer supply of convenient housing for health care industry employees and space for the commercial services to support these workers will be needed as the area expands. The sharing of commercial and residential space could be mutually beneficial in some areas, such as commercial and retail buildings with residential units incorporated on higher levels.



Nature trail connecting Marydale and Redoubt Avenues

Non-Vehicular Connectivity

Within the town core, Soldotna is technically a “walkable” community; many destinations are within a distance that can



Students walking to the library

be reached by foot. However, most of the streets are broad with sidewalks directly adjacent to the traffic lanes and little or no buffer or vegetation, resulting in an unpleasant pedestrian experience. Design features that would enhance the pedestrian experience have often not been incorporated, such as landscape buffers, greenways or separated pedestrian pathways. In addition, many key connectors for both pedestrian and bicycle circulation are missing. Pedestrian and bicycle connections are needed across the Sterling and Kenai Spur Highways, particularly to Soldotna Creek Park, and across the river to the college area. Although adding landscape buffers between traffic lanes and pedestrian paths makes for a more pleasant experience, the design of these facilities must be sensitive to the winter environment and increased costs associated with maintenance of these facilities.

The following goals and recommendations focus on these three main issues.

Neighborhood Goals

1. Enhance the quality of Soldotna neighborhoods while providing for a diversity of housing options.
 - a. Investigate code changes and tax incentives to promote or encourage a diversity (size, design, cost) of housing options for people of all ages, incomes and household size.

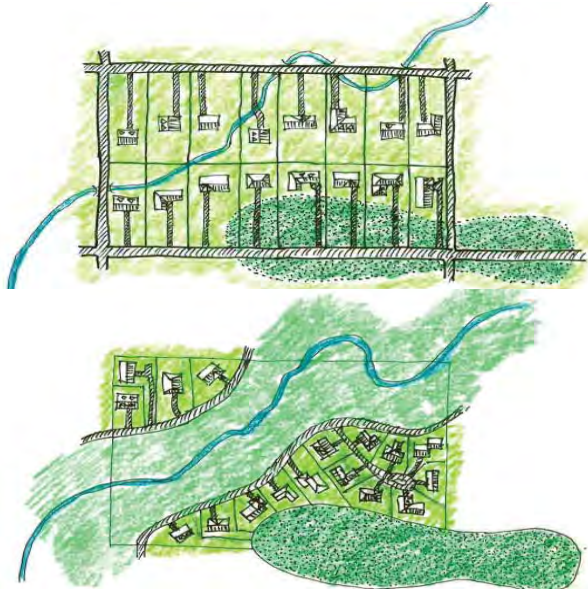


Figure 3-3 - Potential Residential Design Standards

- b. Explore implementing design standards for new residential subdivisions to allow for a diversity of housing options while minimizing the potential for adverse impacts on surrounding areas with a different style and scale of development (Figure 3-3).
- c. Ensure that new development is integrated with the community through pedestrian facilities by requiring site plan review submittals to address pedestrian connectivity.
- d. Consider creating a multi-use zoning district that allows for higher density residential uses along with small-scale commercial uses in proximity to lower density residential areas.

e. Work with local organizations to sponsor housing improvement programs and to provide low-cost funding for various levels of improvements.

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.

3. Encourage “active neighborhoods” that incorporate activities for people of all ages.

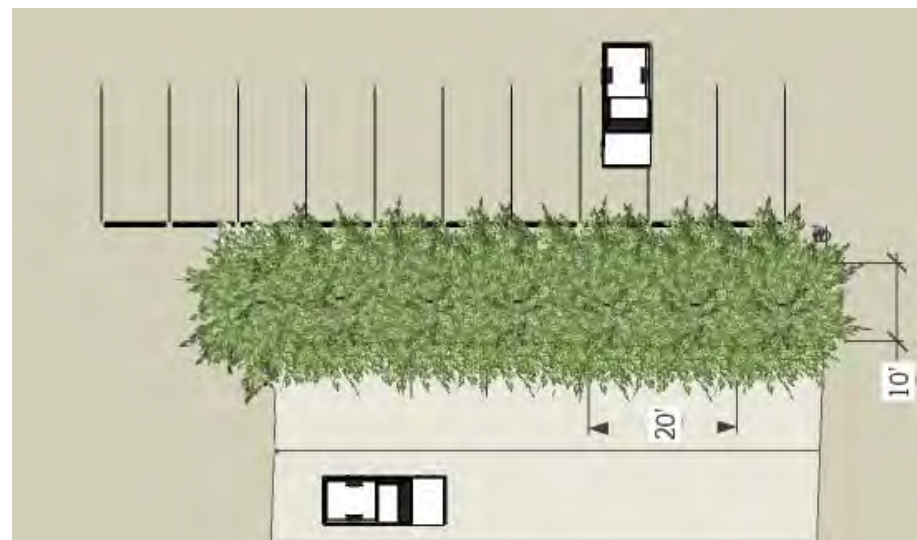
a. Site parks and recreation amenities within walking distance to neighborhoods to draw people outdoors and to gathering areas.

b. Develop park and recreation activities in neighborhood parks for people of all ages from children to active seniors.

c. Incorporate design features, such as resting/refuge areas along pedestrian paths and at street crossings.



Design measures can reduce incompatibility of land uses



Current code provisions require tree spacing no more than 10 ft. on average, and allow a 5 ft.-wide landscaping bed and 6-ft. tall fence to meet minimum buffer requirements. Trees planted at such close intervals and in a narrow bed can have health and development issues due to overcrowding, and may also hamper sidewalk use and parking.

Proposed alternative design standards could include landscape beds a minimum of 8-10 ft. in width to allow adequate space for tree canopies. Average tree spacing intervals could also be increased to prevent overcrowding and improve tree health.

Figure 3-4 - Landscape Design Considerations

4. Reduce land use conflicts in residential areas.

- a. Identify areas for health care industry expansion (see Land Use Goal #5).
- b. Consider revisions to the screening and buffer landscape requirements between residential and non-residential uses.
 - i. Current requirements allow for a fence and five-foot landscape bed. Landscape bed widths should be a minimum of eight to ten feet to allow adequate space for tree canopies (Figure 3-4). When a double row of trees is required, bed widths should be increased to a minimum of 20 feet. Similarly, spacing trees ten foot on center in two rows may result in poor tree health and canopy development due to crowding.
 - ii. Revise the tree requirements to allow for more flexibility in design, such as massing some trees and leaving other areas open for sunlight penetration.

5. Provide for increased connectivity throughout Soldotna for both vehicular and non-motorized access.

- a. Continue to implement the recommendations of the 2001 Roads & Trails Master Plan to address key missing connections for vehicles, pedestrians and bicycles.
 - i. Prioritize study of a vehicle and pedestrian connection across the river at the west end of Redoubt Avenue.
 - ii. Other key connections that should be planned and scheduled (see Park and Recreation Goal #3).
 - iii. Evaluate the potential for additional non-motorized crossings of the Kenai River at key areas, such as Centennial Park and Swiftwater Park.
 - iv. Evaluate a motorized recreational vehicle corridor through Soldotna.



Pedestrian trails could be improved through the use of design details such as special paving techniques to better identify crossings, and separated trails for a more enjoyable and safe experience.

Figure 3-5 - Safer Pedestrian Crossings

- b. Evaluate the potential for greenway trails connecting neighborhoods to other major community destinations using parks, public spaces, and trails.
- 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.
- d. Provide safe pedestrian connections across the Kenai Spur Highway at key locations to link the east and west halves of the City (Figure 3-5).
- e. Add standards for the provision of connections to pedestrian facilities as part of the site plan review standards for non-residential development.
- f. Explore changes to the City's road design standards to consider requiring pedestrian and bicycle facilities within the right-of-way (ROW). Encourage separation of pedestrian facilities (Figure 3-6).
- g. Consider reducing road ROW widths within subdivisions in exchange for pedestrian and bicycle amenities and additional landscaping.

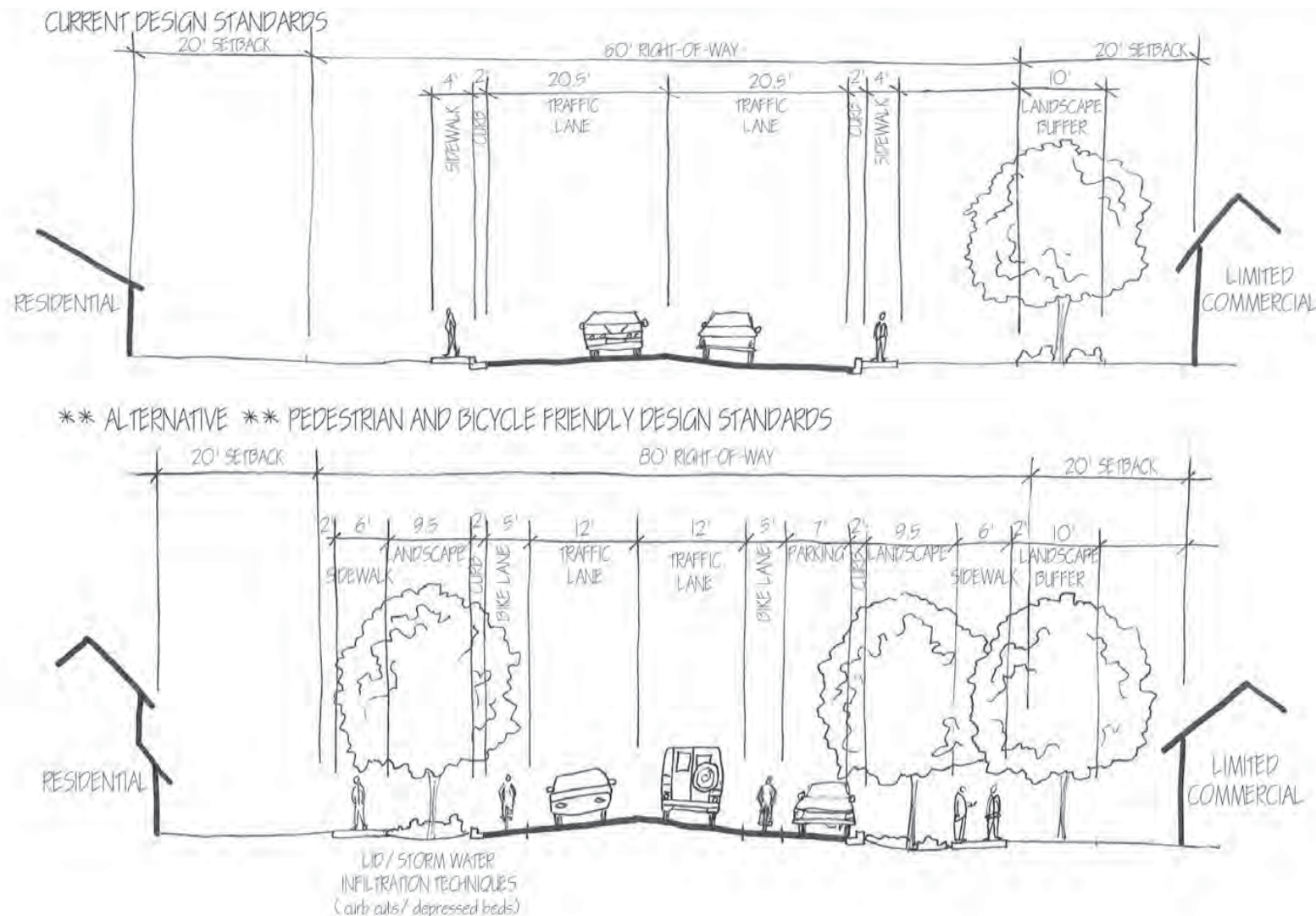


Figure 3-6 shows two typical street sections: current design standards are illustrated at the top, with a pedestrian and bicycle-friendly alternative shown below. In the alternative section, pedestrian sidewalks are separated from the travel way by landscaping. Also, the alternative provides dedicated bike paths adjacent to the street, in both travel directions. Landscaping buffers between the sidewalks and roadway provide physical and visual separation for pedestrians, but also a location for potential stormwater treatment. The alternative also provides on-street parking, which the City could consider when evaluating new street design standards to incorporate into the Standard Construction Specifications.

Figure 3-6 - Separated Trail Standards



July on the Kenai River

NATURAL RESOURCES & THE ENVIRONMENT

Soldotna will protect and maintain the general health of the Kenai River while showcasing its assets to ensure a quality experience.

The Kenai River Watershed

The Kenai River watershed contains 1.4 million acres within the KPB, including the City of Soldotna which is located relatively close to the river's outfall into Cook Inlet. The Kenai River is one of the most productive rivers in the state with the largest sport Chinook salmon harvest (KPBb). Four of the five Pacific salmon species spawn in the Kenai River and several other fish species are supported in the river and its tributaries. Two important tributaries to the Kenai River are also located within the City; Soldotna Creek and Slikok Creek. Wetlands located along these tributaries provide important water quality treatment for water flowing toward the river. These wetlands also provide recharge to groundwater aquifers, reduce flood potential, and provide important habitat for a diversity of birds and wildlife.

The Kenai River flows through the heart of Soldotna and many economic and recreational aspects of Soldotna revolve around the river and its extraordinary fisheries. During the summer, the amount of people using the river spikes during the various salmon runs. The popularity of the Kenai River brings economic benefits to the City, but the high levels of use can impact the health of the river. Fishermen walking along or fishing from the banks of the river can damage the riparian vegetation on the riverbank, increasing erosion and sediment levels in the river. Boats in the river can cause wakes that erode the banks and boat engines can emit pollutants that adversely affect air and water quality. These impacts have become more commonly recognized over the last decade, resulting in several initiatives to reduce adverse effects or to mitigate for those that have occurred.

Development along the river also has a large impact on the health of the river. Some residences along the river – both inside and outside the city boundary - are not served by public water and wastewater systems. Septic systems in the vicinity of the river can adversely impact the quality of the groundwater which can result in contaminants in both groundwater wells and where groundwater discharges into the river. In addition, historic development has removed riparian vegetation that provided riverbank protection and valuable habitat. Intact riverbank vegetation provides important habitat for fish and reduces sediment discharge into the river. Setting development back from the river provides pervious surfaces and vegetation to slow and/or reduce runoff heading toward the river. Although much of the development along the river pre-dates the City's current land use regulations that incorporate special protections for riverside areas, the City has the benefit of owning some of the remaining large parcels located on the river. These key parcels are primarily used for recreation, such as Centennial Park, Soldotna Creek Park, Rotary Park, and Swiftwater Park. Future development of recreation facilities and amenities on these sites provide an opportunity to showcase sustainable development practices.



A number of measures have been taken at the state and local level to reduce impacts and/or mitigate for past impacts to the river. State agencies have restricted the types of boat motors that can be used on much of the river to address high hydrocarbon levels in the river. Public knowledge and concern about impacts to the Kenai River have also resulted in the formation of several groups focused on improving the health of the river, such as the Kenai Watershed Forum and the Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership. These organizations, along with federal, state and local agencies are doing a wide range of research on and implementation of river protection and mitigation measures designed to improve water quality and fish habitat.

Both the Borough and the City have adopted regulations to provide additional oversight over development along the river. The KPB anadromous stream habitat protection area includes areas within 50 feet of the river, while the City's Kenai River Overlay District addresses areas within 100 feet of the river. Within the City overlay zone there are limits on the removal of existing vegetation, development setbacks from the ordinary high water mark or top of cut banks, and reviews required prior to development activities.

The Gilman River Center provides a central location for the federal, state, and Borough review and permitting of development activities proposed along the Kenai River, including in floodplains and wetlands. The Gilman River Center and the local watershed organizations provide the City with the opportunity to use current and relevant research to adopt and implement policies designed to protect and enhance the river.

Water Quality

The City of Soldotna has implemented a variety of measures to reduce water quality effects on the Kenai River watershed. The City has used grant funding to extend the wastewater collection system along some



Storm water treatment system

areas adjacent to the river. This reduces the use of septic systems in these areas reducing the potential for wastewater infiltration into the river. The City and the State have also installed a number of stormwater retention and treatment basins to collect and treat stormwater prior to its discharge into the river. These systems use retention time and wetlands to allow sediment to fall out and nutrients to be absorbed prior to discharge. Although the City site plan review requirements include a site stormwater plan, no specific stormwater requirements have been adopted in the code to address stormwater retention, detention and/or treatment from development on non-residential properties. The Kenai River Comprehensive Management Plan also cites the City's discharge of treated effluent into the river as a major concern. Although the current system meets all permit requirements, many organizations and agencies would like to see an alternative solution for the City's wastewater effluent in the long-term.

Wildlife and Habitat

Sustaining key wildlife habitats and natural areas is important in maintaining the character of Soldotna and its quality of life. Most of



Views on the Kenai River

the wetlands in eastern Soldotna and adjacent to Soldotna Creek are privately owned and subject to future development. The open areas in eastern Soldotna currently serve as important natural open space and habitat for wildlife feeding and movement. The City should consider impacts on wildlife and human-wildlife conflicts as development continues.

Sustainability

Sustainability is related to ensuring that current development considers how to meet current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Typically, sustainability encompasses a broad consideration of the impacts of development on the physical, biological and social environment. Key goals for sustainability are reducing resource use, and reusing or recycling materials when possible. It can be addressed both through daily operational procedures as well as land use regulations and development guidelines, such as those discussed above. Sustainability measures, which tend to look toward conservative use of resources, can also save money when incorporated into daily operations.

Natural Resource Goals:

1. Ensure responsible and quality development along the Kenai River to protect its health and sustainability.

- a. Evaluate the potential development density of private properties within the Kenai River Overlay District and determine whether measures should be taken to reduce the development potential through measures such as property acquisition, conservation easements, and/or voluntary transfer of development rights.
- b. Evaluate the potential for extending public water and wastewater services to developed areas within the overlay district and requiring connection to water and wastewater services for all but very low density new development within the district.
- c. Review the Kenai River Overlay District regulations with regard to:
 - i. Establishing a list of permitted, conditional and prohibited uses within the overlay district;
 - ii. Requiring more stringent stormwater retention, detention and/or treatment within the overlay district;
 - iii. Considering a water-dependency requirement for certain types of commercial and industrial uses;
 - iv. Adopting appropriately detailed and measurable development and design standards for development within the overlay district; and
 - v. Expanding the overlay district to include areas along Slikok and Soldotna Creeks.

2. Develop a Watershed Improvement Plan that evaluates and addresses measures to better collect and treat stormwater and other river discharges.



- 3.** Evaluate the potential to protect wetland areas south of the Sterling Highway, bordering Soldotna Creek.
- 4.** Evaluate the carrying capacity of the Kenai River to determine whether expanded boardwalk facilities can be supported, and what their impact would be.
- 5.** Evaluate the existing City stormwater system to identify and prioritize improvements to stormwater collection, detention and treatment.
- 6.** Increase stormwater design review standards for all non-residential or multi-family residential development.
- 7.** Use public facility development and operations to model sustainable design techniques, such as using green areas along roads for stormwater detention and treatment, maximizing retention of native vegetation, reducing the impermeable footprint of new development, use of energy-efficient systems, and maximizing reuse and recycling of materials.
- 8.** Consider conducting a sustainability audit of City operations and identifying sustainability goals for each City department. Examples could include reducing energy use, increasing recycling and use of recycled materials, and adopting Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification requirements for all new City facilities.
- 9.** Consider working with local organizations and regulatory agencies to develop a Wildlife Habitat Management Plan for the City.
 - a.* Identify key habitats and movement corridors in the City.
 - b.* Evaluate potential conflicts between human activities and development and wildlife habitat and movements.
 - c.* Develop a plan to address protection of key habitats and movement areas. This could include working with local non-profits to acquire conservation easements on important open spaces.



Kenai River boardwalk behind the Aspen Hotel

- 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.
- 11.** Research and evaluate the potential to adopt restrictions on boat motors on the Kenai River similar to the restrictions further up river.



Members of the community volunteered to construct the new Soldotna Community Playground, located at Soldotna Creek Park.

PARKS, TRAILS, & RECREATION

The City will continue to invest in its parks, trails, and other recreational opportunities for both residents and visitors.

Parks, campgrounds, green space, trails and the sports center are important assets for Soldotna residents and visitors. Use of these resources by the community promotes the health and well-being of the individuals as well as the sense of community. Soldotna's location on the world-famous Kenai River provides not only economic benefits but also many recreational opportunities. The City's ownership of large parcels located on the river provides opportunities for public access to the river and for protection and management of development on the river. In addition to the City's waterfront parks, the City owns a large parcel of land on the south side of the river on Funny River Road. Other large riverside parcels are owned by the State west of the Sterling Highway on the river, including the area at the mouth of Slikok Creek. Although these state lands were bought to conserve riverfront

habitats, uses such as recreational trails may be consistent with habitat protection.

The City's riverfront parks include Soldotna Creek Park, Swiftwater Park, Rotary Park, and Centennial Park. The City also has a number of smaller neighborhood parks including Farnsworth Park, Riverview Park, Sunrise Park, Aspen Park, Pioneer Park, Parker Park and the Karen Street Recreation Area. Swiftwater and Centennial Parks provide opportunities for camping and fishing for minimal fees. Soldotna Creek Park has accessible boardwalks for fishing and a large community playground. The City-owned sports center provides an Olympic size ice rink, used for hockey and ice skating, as well as racquetball courts. Little league ball fields and rodeo grounds are located adjacent to the sports center.

In addition to the City's recreation facilities, other recreation opportunities are provided in the area by private businesses, non-profit organizations, and other governmental agencies. A privately-owned golf course is located at the northern entrance to the City from the Sterling Highway. The Tsalteshi Trails Association maintains 15 kilometers of trails on Borough land just south of the City. These trails are popular for running, bicycling and skiing. The Kenai National Wildlife Refuge is located just south of the City and state recreation areas are located along the Kenai River, the Kasilof River, Slikok Creek, and on Johnson Lake, 15 miles south of Soldotna. In addition to outdoor opportunities, the City of Soldotna provides a community schools program that offers residents opportunities to take classes in both indoor and outdoor activities, from kayaking to silk painting.

The City of Soldotna Roads and Trails Master Plan and 2001 Traffic Study completed in August 2001 provides a comprehensive view of the trail system in Soldotna including bicycle routes, sidewalks, multi-use trails, unpaved trails, boardwalks, and bridges. This plan noted the desire of the community for more trail facilities in the City's larger park areas for recreation use as well as continued



development of pedestrian and bicycle trails for access to park and recreation areas throughout the City. Many of the recommendations identified in that study remain valid and are incorporated in this plan.

Park and Recreation Goals

1. Develop a Recreation Master Plan for Soldotna that:

- a. evaluates the demand for a variety of recreation opportunities and facilities;
- b. inventories and documents available recreation resources to meet the demand identified for various recreation opportunities and facilities;
- c. establishes a level of service (LOS) for various recreation opportunities and facilities; and
- d. develops a list of recommended improvements to meet the LOS for each type of recreation opportunity and facility.

2. Evaluate the potential for a connected greenway trail system that spans the City, from Slikok Creek through State-owned lands to Centennial Park to Soldotna Creek Park, and along Soldotna Creek Park to the north, including a potential loop connecting Soldotna Creek to the Kenai River corridor on the east side of the City.

3. Provide for critical connections and missing links in the existing trail system as identified in the 2001 Roads and Trails Master Plan. Key connections that should be planned and scheduled for construction include:

- West Redoubt Avenue accross the river to the college;
- Kobuk Street to Fireweed Street;
- Endicott Drive to College Road;
- Kenai River Bridge to Soldotna Creek Park;
- perimeter of the area containing Redoubt Elementary, Soldotna Middle School and Soldotna High School;



Soldotna Community Playground

- loop system in eastern Soldotna (Sterling Highway/ Boundary Street/Redoubt Avenue);
- East Redoubt Avenue to Swiftwater Park;
- Fred Meyers to Soldotna Creek Park;
- access to the Tsalteshi Trails; and
- trails along Funny River Road, Kalifornsky Beach Road, and College Road.

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.

5. Consider the expansion of boardwalks along the river as proposed in the 2001 Roads & Trails Master Plan (See Natural Resource Goal #4).

6. Consider the potential for a snow machine corridor or recreation area within the City.

7. Incorporate recreation facilities into the City's economy.

- a.* Develop a multi-use trail route that leads tourists through the City to key points of interest (from the river, to the Visitor Center, to Soldotna Creek).
- b.* Promote fall and winter activities in City parks and open spaces. These activities could include hiking, bird watching, rafting, canoeing, snowshoeing, skiing, and ice skating.
- 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.

d. Strive to provide grade-separated access from Soldotna Creek Park to retail areas across the highway and clear pedestrian access to retail areas on the river side of the highway.

8. Explore opportunities to purchase environmentally-sensitive and recreationally-valuable private lands, particularly land along the river or Soldotna Creek.

9. Encourage the use of school facilities during the off-season to provide for activities such as summer community programs, adult recreation and outdoor education.

10. Encourage residents to use the existing City parks.

11. Invest in outreach and improvements geared toward youth, such as improvements at the bike/skate park, and establishment of a teen center.



Mayor Micciche and participants of Soldotna's first annual Bike/Skate Challenge



Ice sculptures at City Hall

ARTS, EDUCATION, AND CULTURE

Soldotna will develop and encourage the arts and cultural services and facilities to preserve and promote the area's history, and to provide adequate public access to art, music, and other cultural activities.

Soldotna exists at a unique intersection of history, place, and nature – and this contributes to the richness of the community and the visitor experience. The community's dedication to the arts, culture, and history is evident through the efforts that are currently being made in these areas and it is crucial that this forward direction be maintained. The efforts of volunteers have been instrumental in preserving the area's history and promoting culture, arts, and education in Soldotna. The City should support this and encourage them to continue this important effort. The location of the KPC's Kenai River Campus, the Gilman River Center, and the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge are also key assets that should be used to enrich the lives of those that are here year-round as well as those who visit for only a short time.

Cultural Services and Facilities

The community is enriched through the visual arts, music, performing arts, native arts, and the local history museum. A central facility to

house performances and art would provide a venue for local non-profit dance and art organizations to perform as well as more commercial performances from visiting artists and performers. There are two options for providing a venue for this – use of existing space or construction of a new space.

The local Visitor Center and Chamber of Commerce is exploring the potential for developing a convention center. If this project moves forward, there is the potential for this facility to incorporate a visual and performing arts center. Another project that could be expanded to include a facility of this type is the planned expansion of the library. Incorporation of a performing arts facility into the library would enhance the role and importance of the library in the community. Displays of local art at the library, City Hall and other public facilities would help promote the local arts community to the broader community.

Alternatively, the City could help the local arts community in identifying and pursuing the redevelopment and reuse of an existing vacant space or use of other public spaces. Vacant space in a shopping center or mall could be redeveloped for this use and could attract more foot traffic through the retail area. The KPC may be willing to enter into an agreement with the City and arts groups to allow use of some of their facilities, further integrating the City and the college.



Soldotna's first post office is on the National Registry of Historic Places



Local art at Kenai River Center

The City should work with other organizations, such as KPC, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), and the Kenai Watershed Forum, to sponsor a lecture series during the winter months. Speakers could include locals with knowledge of the City's history, professors from the college, state or federal agency staff, and health care professionals as well as speakers brought to Alaska by other organizations in Anchorage, Fairbanks or Homer. Again, this series could be held at the library, KPC, the Gilman River Center, the Soldotna Visitor Center, or other venues. The City could also work with the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center to co-sponsor and publicize events at the refuge, particularly during the winter.

Due to the area's recent homesteading history, much of the early settlement is still evident in the community. The Andrew Berg Cabin and the Soldotna Post Office are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The first post office in downtown Soldotna is still in its original location. The Soldotna Historical Society Museum and Historic Village display original homestead cabins and artifacts providing a glimpse into the early days of Soldotna. As stated from comments during the public process, "knowledge of the history of

our people and our lands instills respect and understanding of the present; provides valuable information for future planning."

Rotating historic displays could be shared with the KPC, local schools, the library, and the Soldotna Visitor Center. Community involvement in the Soldotna Historical Society and Museum should be encouraged, as well as visitor outreach through the Soldotna Visitor Center and local businesses.

Education and the Kenai Peninsula College

Education could be enhanced for adults and youth through partnerships with KPC. Learning opportunities could be developed for both residents and visitors, from seminars on fisheries habitat management and protection, to focused classes on health care issues, to general business management classes. The City's Community Schools program provides a model for continuing education and KPC and its faculty should be encouraged to participate in this or a similar program on the campus. The Kenai River currently plays a role in the perceived distance between the community and the college. A bridge over the river and/or a non-motorized trail, could physically link the college more directly into the community.

Cultural Atmosphere

Improvements to the areas along the Kenai River and the main highways could enhance the cultural atmosphere of Soldotna. Traffic calming and pedestrian overpasses would enhance the pedestrian experience of moving through these areas. The addition of art displays, sculpture, community activities, and other attractions and events along the river would enhance the community's connection to this key resource. Ideally, a community venue for gathering for music, history or theatre events could be located on the river. Boardwalks along the Kenai River provide another opportunity to promote cultural awareness through trails, boardwalks, interpretation, and art.



Progress Days Parade

Arts, Education and Culture Goals

1. Continue to support a broad range of cultural services and facilities including:

- a. Expansion of the public library;
- b. Support for/expansion of the Community Schools program;
- c. Local performances by the Kenai Peninsula Orchestra;
- d. Support for the Soldotna Historical Society and Museum.

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.

3. Expand opportunities for collaboration and participation on events between KPC and the City.

- a. Work with the historical society to provide photographs and other materials to the college for display on campus.

b. Seek out local expertise, such as college professors, to participate in the Community Schools Program.

c. Explore the possibility of community use of college facilities for performing arts events.

d. Encourage KPC faculty and/or students to share information on their projects at Chamber of Commerce meetings to promote more interaction between the college and the local business community.

4. Evaluate the potential for incorporating a performing arts facility as part of a new conference center or other facility.

5. Encourage the use of vacant retail areas for a community performing arts center or other public uses. The City could encourage this through incentives, such as abatement of property taxes, vacancy charges, and/or other measures.

6. Encourage rotating local art displays in public areas, such as Soldotna Creek Park, City Hall, the library and other parks.



Storm drain system

PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES

Soldotna will continue to devote resources to capital improvements which meet and anticipate the needs of our developing community. The City will continue to expand and maintain an integrated, cost-effective system of municipal improvements and public infrastructure.

The City of Soldotna provides a variety of essential infrastructure and public services to the community. Public facilities and services include utilities (water and sewer), roads and drainage, parks and recreation, animal control, library services, police and airport facilities.

The utilities section of the Public Works Department serves approximately 1,250 residences and businesses with water and sewer. Water and sewer service are available to many, but not all, of the areas of the City west of the Kenai Spur Highway. Water and sewer services are limited east of the Kenai Spur Highway. Many areas along the Kenai River and Soldotna Creek do not have water and/or sewer service available. City code currently requires new development to connect to the public water and sewer service if the property is within 300 feet of City water and/or sewer mains. The City also uses grants and local revenues to expand the utility systems. Revenues from water and sewer

service do not currently meet the full cost of operating the systems. A rate structure study is currently underway to address this issue.

The City's wastewater treatment system discharges treated effluent into the Kenai River. Although the discharge meets all permit requirements, public regulatory agency concerns are likely to continue. The City should continue to evaluate alternative options for discharge in the future.

The street maintenance section of the Public Works Department is responsible for maintenance of all street improvements, as well as maintenance of public buildings. Drainage improvements continue to be implemented to improve stormwater quality prior to discharge of stormwater into the Kenai River.

The Parks and Recreation Department manages and maintains the City campgrounds and parks, as well as the Soldotna Sports Center and the Community Schools program. The community has expressed strong support for increasing parks, trails and recreation opportunities in the City, for both residents and visitors. To successfully implement many of the proposed policies in this plan, a reliable revenue stream will need to be identified to adequately fund construction and maintenance of additional park and recreation areas.



Crews work on upgrades to Soldotna Creek Park



The library is an essential facility that contributes to the community fabric and cultural identity. Plans are currently underway for a library expansion.

The community's expressed desire for a high level of public facilities and services that contribute to the City's high quality of life will require continued capital investment and operating funds as the City grows.

Public Infrastructure Goals.

1. Update the City's water and wastewater master plan.

- a. Address utility fees to ensure that they cover the full cost of utility services.
- b. Investigate the potential to obtain additional grant funds to expand utility services to more areas along the Kenai River and Soldotna Creek.
- c. Evaluate policies and requirements for providing utility services to properties outside the City limits.
- d. Review the code requiring connection to City sewer and water to determine if it needs revisions to address when and where connections should be required.
- e. Consider subsidizing water and sewer extensions to areas where a majority of the landowners are willing to pay some portion of the expansion costs.
- f. Study the potential for alternative disposal of wastewater effluent, such as land application or other options.

2. Develop a Capital Improvement Plan nomination, evaluation and ranking program to increase public understanding and participation in development and review of the City Capital Improvement Plan.

a. Develop and adopt level of service standards for roads, utilities, and other services.

b. Develop specific rating criteria to be used to prioritize projects.

c. Develop informational materials and a project nomination form to allow organizations and individuals to identify needed improvements.

d. Hold periodic public workshops to allow the public to review projects proposed by the City and how they were evaluated and prioritized.

3. Design public improvements to allow for future expansions of infrastructure, such as utilities, roads, paving, and lighting.



Local design features on a pedestrian bench along the Sterling Highway.

HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION

Soldotna will be pedestrian friendly and aesthetically pleasing, and will give motorists a reason to slow down and stop in the City. The City's motorized and pedestrian transportation network will be safe, efficient, and well-maintained year-round.

Traffic Circulation and Access

The Sterling Highway and the Kenai Spur Highway are major elements that have shaped Soldotna's character and development. These highways, along with the other roads in the City provide the primary circulation and access for the people that visit and live in Soldotna. The highway corridors also play a role in the first impression visitors have of the City. It is crucial that these primary roads be safe, efficient, and aesthetically pleasing. The two major highways that bisect Soldotna provide intrastate access and mobility as well as local access to businesses and recreation areas. The importance of these highways from a statewide perspective and the high traffic levels associated with them results in conflicts and safety issues particularly during peak traffic conditions. Traffic issues along the highways intensify in the summer with the influx of tourists, especially

during the month of July. Peak traffic levels make it difficult to get in and out of the Soldotna Visitor Center and left hand turns are especially difficult during this period.

Reducing the width of highway would facilitate slowing traffic and increasing pedestrian safety. If the road lanes could be narrowed or a central island constructed it would make the road feel narrower; that naturally slows traffic speeds and allows for a wider landscape bed and pedestrian sidewalk. The streets could then be lined with landscaping, enhancing both the vehicular and pedestrian experience (Figure 3-7). Although the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF) statewide long-range transportation plan recognizes the importance of non-vehicular modes of transportation and the need for coordination with local planning efforts, the DOT&PF's priority for the highway system is efficient movement of through traffic, not access. Thus, any proposals to enhance pedestrian crossings or improve aesthetics within the highway ROWs by slowing traffic or narrowing traffic lanes, may conflict with DOT&PF priorities for the highways.

The connectivity of the City to surrounding communities could be improved through the construction of a bridge connecting the residential core to Kalifornsky Beach Road, possibly from Redoubt Avenue to East Poppy Lane and the college. Another issue is the lack of road infrastructure east of the Kenai Spur Highway which requires all traffic from the east to pass through the Y to travel from Soldotna to Kenai and other communities. The need for an alternative connection between the Sterling and Kenai Spur Highways was noted often in discussions with the public. A connection from Mackey Lake Road to Riggs Avenue/Frontier Avenue has been suggested, but this would reroute traffic completely around Soldotna and could impact retail businesses.

The City completed a Roads & Trails Master Plan in 2001 to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the City's road and trail network and to plan for future growth and development. The recommendations in this

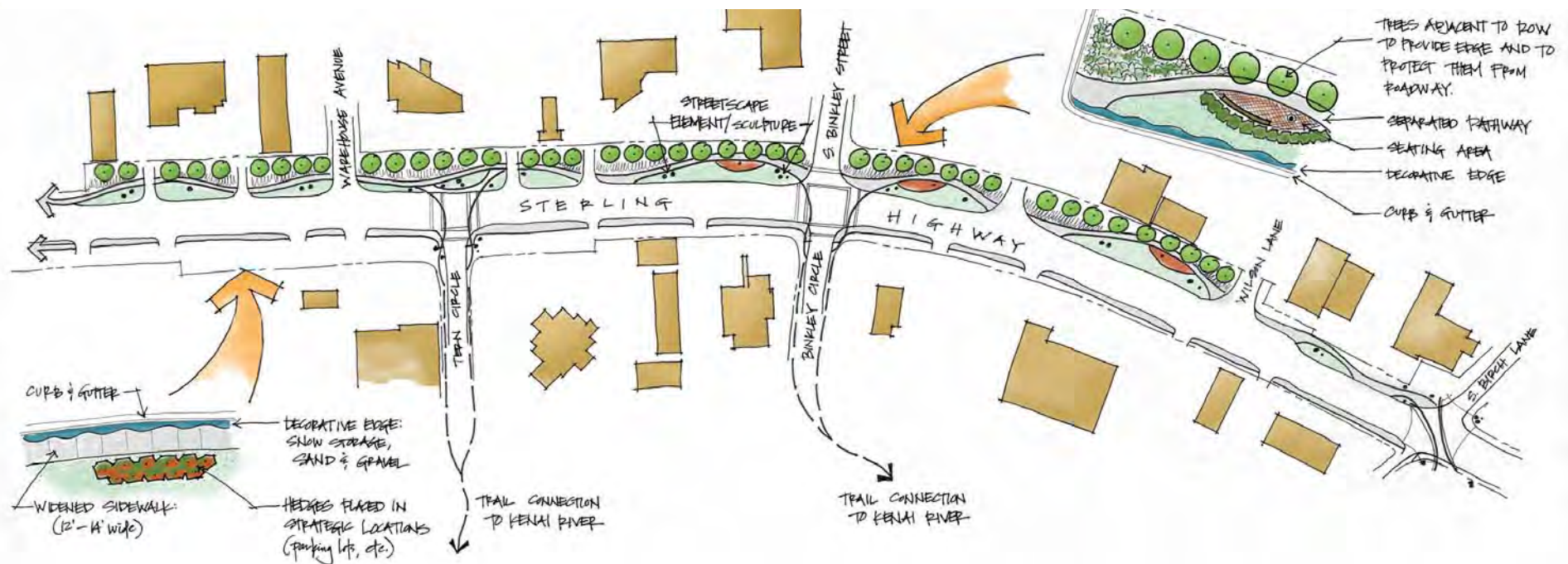


Figure 3-7 - Potential Streetscape Concept Plan

study for the local road network to address current and future access and circulation remain valid and are adopted by reference in this plan. Trail recommendations from the 2001 plan are addressed in the Parks, Recreation and Trails element.

The need for enhanced public transit was also mentioned during public visioning sessions. Public transit is currently provided by CARTS (Central Area Rural Transit Systems, Inc.). CARTS provides transportation services throughout the central peninsula, including Soldotna, Kenai, Kasilof and Nikiski. CARTS provides on-demand transportation services with 12- to 15-passenger vans and operates Monday through Friday from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. Rides to and from work are available around the clock. CARTS is run by a non-profit organization and is designed to support transportation-disadvantaged populations but their transportation services are available to anyone.

Non-motorized Transportation and Pedestrian Circulation

Soldotna residents had conflicting opinions regarding the walkability of the City. Although residential areas are in close proximity to many public facilities and recreation areas, many streets do not include pedestrian facilities or bicycle lanes and those that do may not provide a pleasant experience. The new Unity Trail between Soldotna and Kenai is very popular and demonstrates that people will use a trail that is safe and attractive.

With the Sterling Highway separating most of Soldotna from the Kenai River, it is essential that attention be given to non-motorized crossings of the highway. This is even more important with the recent development of Soldotna Creek Park on the south side of the Sterling Highway.



Sterling Highway can be difficult for pedestrians to cross

Landscaping and Aesthetics

Streetscape and landscape aesthetics along the Sterling and Kenai Spur Highways are critical to the City, as these areas serve as the face of the City to the visiting public. Much of the development along the highway corridors occurred prior to adoption of strong land use regulations, resulting in unattractive development, inefficient access and circulation patterns, and underutilization of key lands. DOT&PF ownership of significant amounts of ROW along the highways and the inconsistent width of the ROWs also result in an inconsistent streetscape appearance. The widening and thinning of the ROW could, however, be used as part of a corridor-wide landscape design to provide an interesting streetscape with pockets of enhanced landscaping.

Parking

Though traffic congestion and safety are the primary transportation concerns in the summer, parking can also be an issue. Parking capacity is generally sufficient throughout the majority of the year, but it can become tight in commercial areas during the summer. The parking demand has also increased in the hospital area as residential areas have been converted to health care offices or other support businesses. The City's current parking standards appear reasonable for certain uses, though some small business owners find the standards difficult to meet. The City undertook a parking survey of

selected land uses in 2008 and found that most parking areas had more than sufficient capacity, indicating that a reduction may be justified for certain use categories.

Though it may not be practical to provide enough parking to meet the peak demand in the summer months, it may be possible to identify a key area for centralized parking to be shared by commercial areas along the river and/or highways. With a consolidated parking area (or areas), the City could work with businesses in these areas to reduce their on-site parking requirements in exchange for additional design amenities or more public access to the river. Development of pleasant pedestrian trails and signage to guide visitors from these parking areas to key attractions could increase the potential for more pedestrian circulation as could a visitor shuttle service. Other potential solutions include the addition of on-street parking during non-snow months, and the restriction of camping in parking lots.



Soldotna Municipal Airport

Airport

Soldotna's airport provides general aviation and some limited commercial aviation services. The airport contributes to the City's economic strength through businesses associated with flightseeing, guided trips to other areas, medical-related transport, and private air transportation. An airport master plan was completed in 2004 to evaluate future growth needs and opportunities. One item noted was the dominance of Soldotna in Federal Express packages being delivered to the Central Peninsula and the potential for Soldotna to build on this trend to recruit package delivery businesses to the airport. The master plan also identified areas for apron and hangar expansion and



needed infrastructure upgrades. The City has moved forward with land acquisition projects suggested in the plan and has requested funds for a proposed realignment of Funny River Road that will benefit future airport expansion. The City is expected to continue to seek federal airport improvement funds to support the airport improvements identified in the master plan.

Highways and Transportation Goals

1. Improve the streetscape along the Sterling and Kenai Spur Highways.

- a. Develop a highway streetscape plan to identify specific landscape, signage and site design standards to be applied within a highway corridor overlay zone. The overlay zone should include all properties with frontage on the Sterling or 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.
- c. Investigate the potential to encourage existing development to come into compliance through incentives such as tax credits for a portion of the cost. Consider requiring existing properties to come into compliance upon a change of use, ownership or major renovation or expansion.
- d. Evaluate the effects from the recent sign ordinance re-write. Revisit the sign standards to evaluate the need for more specific guidance for properties with highway frontage.
- e. Investigate the potential to negotiate a use and maintenance agreement with DOT&PF to allow for City management and maintenance of areas of excess ROW along the highways. This would provide an opportunity for the City to implement and maintain key streetscape improvements.

2. Improve connectivity to the surrounding communities.

- a. Provide a connection across the river between western Soldotna and the KPC area, such as from Redoubt Avenue to Poppy Lane.
- b. Develop alternate routes connecting the Sterling Highway with the Kenai Spur Highway and Keystone Drive, to be used as secondary egress during emergencies.
- c. Support small-scale public transit within Soldotna and between Soldotna and surrounding communities.

3. Improve motorized and non-motorized transportation routes throughout the City.

- a. Develop an Official Streets and Highways Plan for the City to establish the location, classification and minimum ROWs needs for the City's transportation system.
 - i. Prioritize property or ROW acquisition and construction needed to fill in critical connections and missing links in the transportation system.
 - ii. Develop City road standards that include safe and pleasant non-motorized facilities that can be used year-round.
 - iii. Consider development of green boulevards along major cross-town roads (Figure 3-8).



Figure 3-8 - Green Boulevard Concept

- b.* Heighten attention to winter maintenance of sidewalks and trails. This is critical in winter cities to provide safe routes for pedestrians and bicyclists who can be forced into the road lanes if paths are not cleared of snow and ice.
- c.* Evaluate the need for improved signage along roads and trails that allows visitors to find their way to key businesses and recreation areas.
- d.* Evaluate the need for additional lighting standards for roads and trails.
- e.* Continue to implement the 2001 Roads and Trails Master Plan.

4. Address the safety and efficiency of non-motorized circulation near and across the Sterling Highway and Kenai Spur Highway.

- a.* Evaluate the highway corridors to identify the most important pedestrian and bicycle crossing areas.
- 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.
- c.* Improve pedestrian crossings at key locations through use of special lights, signals, pavement design, etc.
- d.* Improve pedestrian safety for visually-impaired residents and visitors by incorporating new (voice) technologies at crosswalks.
- e.* Work with DOT&PF to investigate the incorporation of measures that could calm highway traffic without adversely impacting capacity. Examples may include use of pavement markings, curb bulb outs, or gateway features that signal to drivers that they are entering a community.

5. Improve traffic circulation and parking opportunities along the Sterling and Kenai Spur Highways.

- a.* Identify areas for centralized parking near key areas, such as the riverfront and Soldotna Creek Park.
- b.* Work with riverside and highway property owners to establish centralized parking that can reduce parking requirements on riverside properties in exchange for increased public access and design amenities.
- c.* Provide effective signage to guide visitors to key business or activity locations and to appropriate parking areas.
- d.* Work with the Chamber of Commerce and local businesses to evaluate development of a seasonal “River City Shuttle” to provide visitor access from a centralized parking area to major attractions in Soldotna, such as Soldotna Creek Park, retail shopping, the museum, the proposed Mt. Redoubt viewpoint, lodging, restaurants, etc.

6. Continue to implement goals of the 2004 airport master plan.

7. Evaluate the City’s parking code and revise if necessary.



REGIONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Soldotna will develop a forward-looking approach to regional growth and development, and will coordinate with neighboring communities and landowners to identify common interests and goals. The City will also explore opportunities to share infrastructure and public spaces with neighboring jurisdictions.

Coordination with other levels of government is essential to the efficient and cost-effective provision of services and facilities to the local community. Many state, regional and local agencies and organizations have roles and responsibilities that can affect how the City develops or can help contribute to measures designed to maintain or improve the high quality of life in Soldotna. This section focuses on the relationships between the City and other governmental organizations.



City of Kenai

The City of Kenai is the closest incorporated city to Soldotna. Although Soldotna and Kenai may compete for sales and regional-scale facilities at times, there may be times when the cities working together can fund and operate a needed or desired facility or service that neither city could finance alone.

Kenai Peninsula Borough

Soldotna serves as a government, commercial and health care center for the Central Peninsula and provides a variety of services that benefit Borough residents beyond the city limits. The City and Borough work together to provide services and support important public institutions for the greater central peninsula



Extraction uses in unincorporated areas adjacent to Soldotna city limits.

population, such as the hospital and the KPC. The City must continue to work closely with the Borough, as well as other cities and unincorporated areas, to develop, fund and operate public services and facilities in a cost-effective manner.

The population of the KPB is continuing to grow, and nearby unincorporated areas are growing at a faster rate than Soldotna. The Borough has limited zoning regulations, although it does have restrictions on development along the Kenai River, local option zoning, and conditional use permits for certain types of uses. The population growth and development in unincorporated areas around Soldotna has the potential to impact Soldotna's future fiscal and economic strength and the quality of life in Soldotna. The City is encouraged to work with the Borough to ensure that development outside the City is reviewed for impacts on the City, including traffic, water and sewer needs, public safety needs, and social service needs. It may often be cost effective for services for the surrounding communities to be

provided by the City. It will be important for the City and the Borough to work together to recognize these opportunities and to ensure that the costs associated with providing services to Borough residents from outside Soldotna are appropriately addressed. Examples of services that are currently provided by Soldotna to unincorporated areas include animal control, library services, and to a lesser extent, utilities. Land for expansion of City and KPB services in the future will need to be identified and possibly acquired, as there is very little vacant land zoned for institutional uses currently.

State of Alaska

Several state agencies play key roles in the development of Soldotna. The DOT&PF controls the Sterling and Kenai Spur Highways and their ROWs in Soldotna. These highways are key features in Soldotna and the design, operation and maintenance of the highways and use of the ROWs strongly influence design and development along these corridors. The City will need to work closely with the DOT&PF to address issues discussed previously in this plan related to streetscape aesthetics, pedestrian access, and other issues.

The University of Alaska's KPC Kenai River Campus is a key institution in Soldotna. KPC owns over 300 acres with over 1,000 feet of river frontage. Average student enrollment at the Kenai River Campus is about 1,500 students. KPC estimates its 2008 impact on the KPB to be \$15.8 million, including 346 jobs and over \$11 million in payroll. Since the main KPC campus is in Soldotna, much of the economic impact is in this area. In addition to full time faculty, the college may use other community residents as adjunct instructors and employs dozens of students. KPC's significant land holding in Soldotna, its economic impact, and the potential for building new economic and cultural activities in cooperation with KPC, makes KPC an important partner in Soldotna.

The DNR owns some key riverside parcels in Soldotna. These properties were purchased for habitat protection and conservation,

but they also have the potential to play a key role in greenbelt trail connections through western Soldotna.

DNR manages the Kenai River Special Management Area and works with the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) and local governments on issues related to fish and wildlife habitat and management. ADF&G is also responsible for reviewing and permitting projects that affect anadromous streams, such as Soldotna Creek, Slikok Creek, and the Kenai River. DNR and ADF&G could be potential partners with the City in implementing some of the recommendations contained in this plan, such as trail corridors, proposed changes to the Kenai River Overlay District, wildlife habitat management studies, and identification of key wetland areas for protection.

The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has taken over the regulatory authority for the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) in Alaska. This will result in DEC regulating wastewater discharges to the Kenai River, such as the City's. DEC would be an important partner in the study of potential alternatives to river discharge in the long-term.



Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Sign

Federal Agencies

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife service operates the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge just south of the City. In addition to owning a large amount of land adjacent to the City, the refuge provides opportunities for



a variety of recreation activities year-round. In addition, the Visitor Center at the refuge provides programs for all ages throughout the year.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers regulates wetland fills in waters of the U.S. The Corps could be a potential partner with the City in implementing some of the recommendations contained in this plan, such as identification of key wetland areas for protection, and potential strategies for preserving wetland areas.

Annexation

The fundamental principle of local government in Alaska is the provision of a maximum of local self-government with a minimum of local governments. This principle explicitly favors city annexation over establishment of new cities or service areas to extend local public services to developing areas near existing cities. Annexation provides a means for a city to address development in adjacent areas that has the potential to impact the health, safety and quality of life in the city or the city's future ability to provide essential public services. Annexation may be initiated by unanimous consent of property owners wishing to be annexed, or more typically through the legislative review process.

Natural features have confined and shaped the city's pattern of growth. The Kenai River, local wetlands, and the natural terrain limits access to the original settlement area, and defines the three transportation corridors (Sterling Highway, Kenai Spur Road, Kalifornsky Beach Road). These factors have contributed to Soldotna becoming the most densely settled mid-sized (2,500 – 5,500 population) city in Alaska (Figure 3-9). Its sister cities on the Kenai Peninsula (Homer, Kenai, and Seward) are two to four times larger in area, and much less densely settled.

Residential development in the unincorporated area outside the City has outpaced residential building inside the City in recent years. Despite growth shifting outside, Soldotna has continued to thrive as

The local boundary commission is required to evaluate all annexation petitions to determine they meet such standards as:

- **Need.** Does the territory proposed for annexation exhibit a reasonable need for city government?
- **Character.** Is the territory compatible in character with the annexing city?
- **Resources.** Does the economy within the proposed expanded boundaries of the city include the human and financial resources necessary to provide essential city services on an efficient, cost-effective level?
- **Population.** Is the population within the proposed expanded boundaries of the city sufficiently large and stable to support the extension of city government?
- **Boundaries.** Do the proposed expanded boundaries of the City include all land and water necessary to provide the development of essential municipal services on an efficient, cost-effective level?
- **Best Interests of the State.** Is the proposed annexation in the best interests of the state?
- **Transition Plan.** Does the annexation petition include a practical plan to extend essential city services, to assume all relevant and appropriate powers, duties, rights, and functions presently exercised by other local governmental entities?
- **Civil and Political Rights.** Does the annexation deny any person the enjoyment of any civil or political right, including voting rights, because of race, color, creed, sex, or national origin?

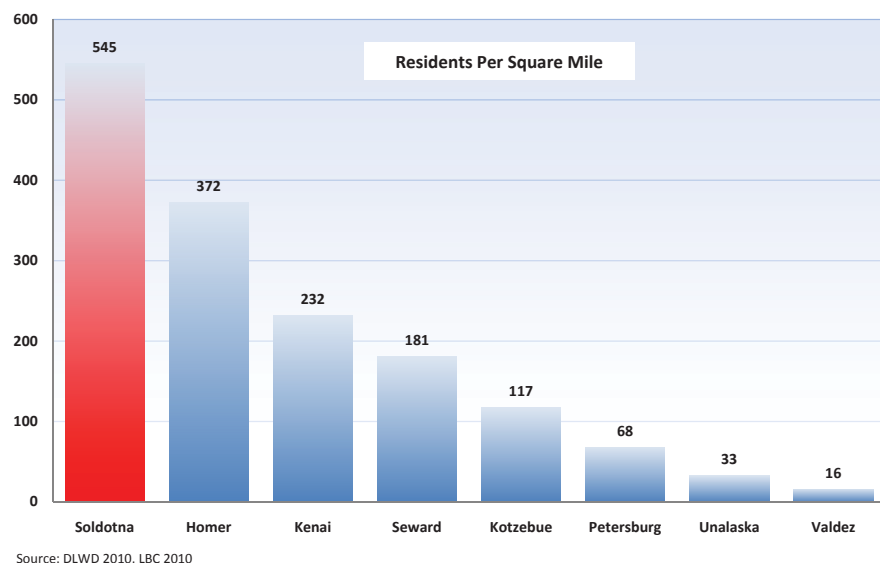


Figure 3-9 - Population Density for Mid-Sized Cities in Alaska

a center for trade and services, and for local government and health care for the Central Peninsula. But looking to the future, Soldotna should continue to identify or create sites for new large-scale retail development. As new residential growth continues to flow outside Soldotna's current boundaries, new retail and service businesses may over time follow their customers to sites outside the City. The City is encouraged to be proactive in taking steps to achieve its economic and development goals.

The KPB and the City of Soldotna are the only local governmental units with authority to levy taxes, appropriate funds, and deliver services in the Soldotna area. The KPB is a second-class borough, with mandatory areawide powers for education, tax assessment and collection, education, and planning, as well as several adopted areawide powers (solid waste disposal, 911 emergency communications, emergency management, and post-secondary education). The KPB maintains three non-areawide service areas in the Soldotna subregion. Central Peninsula Hospital and Central Emergency Services respectively provide hospital and fire/EMS services

in the subregion, including within the City. The KPB Road Service Area maintains local roads outside the City. The KPB does not provide water or sewer, public safety, zoning, building code, library, parks, or animal control services in the region. Soldotna is a first-class city. The City provides local roads as well as numerous services (water and sewer utilities, public safety, zoning, building code, library, parks and campgrounds, and animal control) the KPB does not provide.

As development of nearby areas progresses, and the need becomes evident for such essential services as water and sewer, drainage, and public safety that the KPB does not provide, neighbors will look to the City to meet those needs. Annexation is a tool that enables the City to plan for timely and cost-effective extension of water and sewer, drainage, and other services when needed. In particular, this advance planning helps the City and taxpayers avoid expensive retrofits after development has occurred.

Both the KPB and the city levy property and sales taxes. Table 3-1 compares local taxes and services inside and outside the City and shows what changes annexation would bring to properties being annexed. In FY 2010, property owners in both jurisdictions paid the same borough tax levy for areawide services (4.5 mills), Central Emergency Services (2.45 mills), and CPH (.5 mills). The only difference was that non-city property owners paid a 1.4 mill levy to the KPB's Road Service Area, while Soldotna property owners paid a 1.65 mill levy for city roads and other city services, including services not provided by the Borough. The City's property tax levy (1.65 mills) accounted for about one-sixth of the total property tax (9.1 mills) that Soldotna property-owners pay. The net difference in the mill rate between just outside/inside Soldotna was 0.25 mills. This difference amounts to \$50 in property taxes yearly for a home assessed at \$200,000, and \$100 yearly for a home assessed at \$400,000.

The KPB levies a 3% borough-wide sales tax. The City levies an additional 3% sale tax, for a total sales tax of 6% on businesses in the



	Inside Soldotna	Outside Soldotna	Outside Soldotna
	Status Quo		If Annexed
Local Taxes			
Property tax assessment	by KPB	by KPB	No change
Property taxes (FY 2010)			
KPB Areawide	4.50 mills	4.50 mills	No change
KPB Central Emergency Serv.	2.45 mills	2.45 mills	No change
KPB Road Service Area	none	1.40 mills	- 1.40 mills
KPB Central Peninsula Hospital	0.50 mills	0.50 mills	No change
City of Soldotna	1.65 mills	none	+ 1.65 mills
Total	9.1 mills	8.85 mills	9.1 mills
Net change			+ 0.25 mills
Sales tax rate	6%	3%	6%
Senior citizen & disabled veteran property tax exemption (\$ of assessed value)	Up to \$150,000 is exempt from city taxes.	Up to \$300,000 is exempt from KPB taxes.	Up to \$150,000 of is exempt from city taxes and \$300,000 is exempt from KPB taxes.
Tax Funded City Services			
Local roads	City	KPB RSA	City
Public safety	City	State Troopers	City
Fire & EMS	KPB CES	KPB CES	No change
City library & parks	City	None	City
Animal control	City	None	City
User-Fee Services			
City water & sewer utility	user fees where served	user fees where served	No change
City airport & campgrounds	user fees	user fees	No change
Solid waste collection/disposal	Private/KPB	Private/KPB	No change
Land Use Regulation			
Subdivision plats	KPB	KPB	No change
Zoning	City	None	City
Building code	City	None	City
Other			
School attendance areas	KPB School District	KPB School District	No change
Elections and voting	City & Borough elections	Borough elections	City & Borough elections

Table 3-1 - Local Taxes and Services as of June 2010, Inside/Outside City of Soldotna - Status Quo and If Annexed

City. In FY2009, sales tax (\$7.7 million) yielded almost ten times more revenue than the property tax (\$0.8 million). Thus, maintaining a strong sales tax base is vital to the City's ability to fund public services and keep city property taxes low.

In perspective, the situation which Soldotna faces – boundaries with residential and other growth moving into peripheral areas; lack of another local governmental unit existing to provide certain essential public services; lack of city planning jurisdiction over an area which will eventually need city-provided services, with impairment of the City's ability to provide those services cost-effectively in the future; and erosion of the City's principal local revenue source – exemplifies the problems that annexation was intended to remedy.

Regional Growth and Development Goals

1. Collaborate with Borough, state and federal agencies on land use and natural resource issues related to the Kenai River, its tributaries, and adjacent wetlands.

- a.* Participate in and support research and restoration initiatives associated with the Kenai River.
- b.* Consider forming an advisory group of regulatory agency staff to assist in reviewing and proposing revisions to the City's Kenai River Overlay District.

2. Work with the KPB to address the cost of services provided to residents of unincorporated areas.

3. Identify lands which may be needed in the future to provide city or borough services to the larger regional population.

4. Evaluate, support, and enhance the mission of regional economic development organizations (such as the Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District and Kenai Peninsula Municipal Conference) with representatives from Soldotna, Kenai, and the Kenai Peninsula Borough to support and promote locally and regionally important industries (oil/gas, commercial fishing, tourism, etc.).

5. Explore annexation to promote orderly high-quality development, cost-effective extension of public services, protection of the City's sales tax base, and protection of the natural environment.

- a.* The City should assemble a panel of community and business leaders to evaluate the potential need for annexation and the appropriate areas to be annexed. People appointed to the panel must be impartial, represent a broad spectrum of interests, and be able to grasp the importance of the issue as well as its sensitivity and difficulty. Meetings of this panel should be open to the public and the process should be as open and transparent as possible.
- b.* The City should use a variety of methods to educate City and adjacent residents about the annexation process.

6. Work with the DOT&PF on the design, operation and maintenance of the Sterling and Kenai Spur Highway ROWs.

- a.* Investigate the potential for a use and maintenance agreement that allows the City to install and maintain streetscape elements within the highway ROWs.
- b.* Coordinate with the DOT&PF on appropriate signalization or other measures to address public concerns regarding pedestrian safety and traffic congestion at peak periods.
- c.* Continue to work with the DOT&PF on funding for priority transportation improvements in the Soldotna area.



General Land Use

Soldotna will plan and manage use of its lands to promote the social and economic vision of the community and to maintain a high quality of life in the community.

Soldotna has matured over the decades from a frontier town to a city with land use, population and fiscal stability. Population growth has stabilized at a low rate. Much of the City is developed, although not all areas are used as efficiently as they could be. Most of the remaining undeveloped residential lands are located on the east side of the City. These lands have environmental constraints, limited infrastructure, and are separated from the core of the City by a major highway.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the City's population is changing and aging. The high growth and expansion of health care facilities and its effect on both the social and economic characteristics of the



Health care-related development is increasing

City was not anticipated in the last comprehensive plan. This City must respond to this growth and address appropriate measures for directing this growth and ensuring its compatibility with adjacent residential areas.

The changing demographics in the City may result in a change in the demand for various types of residential properties. As the population ages, there may be more demand for group housing and smaller multi-family residential areas close to the health care facilities or other amenities. Planning also needs to provide for a variety of housing options for a diverse workforce moving into the area to work in the health care field.

Health care-related development has increased significantly in the area around the Central Peninsula Hospital over the last several years. Although much of this development has been designed to fit in with the existing residential areas around it, residents have noted traffic and parking issues associated with this commercial development that will need to be addressed. Planning for continued expansion of the health care facilities will need to consider the appropriate areas for expansion and land use design standards that may address these issues. The health care industry is projected to continue to grow over the next 20 years as the central peninsula's population ages. Providing adequate room for these facilities to expand will be critical to continued growth of this economic engine in Soldotna.

The City's industrial lands are primarily located on and adjacent to the airport and include parcels with Kenai River frontage. Some residents have raised concerns regarding allowing industrial development adjacent to the river and whether the industrial lands are sufficient for future needs. It is not clear, however, what level of demand there is for industrial lands and what site characteristics industrial users are seeking in this area. The City may want to address requiring industrial uses within the Kenai River Overlay District to demonstrate water dependency.

Institutional uses within the City include schools, churches, park and recreation sites, the KPC campus, and City and Borough offices and facilities. The City has recently begun design of Soldotna Community Memorial Park near the western terminus of Redoubt Avenue, fulfilling a long-term goal of the community. There are limited vacant institutionally-zoned lands available for future development or expansion of needed facilities and services. Most private institutions have acquired residential lands and rezoned the properties to institutional. This trend may result in more demand for the limited vacant residential properties on the west side of the City than would be indicated by population growth projections.

One of the most common issues raised during public scoping for this plan was the lack of a well-defined downtown area. Previous planning efforts have identified the area from the Y (the intersection of the Sterling and Kenai Spur Highways) to the Sterling Highway bridge as the commercial center of the community, sometimes referred to as the, "Miracle Mile." Improved pedestrian connectivity and infill development could enhance the feel of a downtown area along these highways.

The dispersion of commercial uses along the highway, both in the City and spreading outside the City along the highways, is not the most efficient use of commercial land. In some areas, this commercial district is only one property deep. Concentrating commercial activities in a few more intensive commercial nodes may attract more visitor interest and create synergies among commercial businesses. Distinct centralized nodes of commercial activity are more efficient from a land use perspective and are more successful from a business perspective (Figure 3-10). Although it will not be easy to change the linear pattern of commercial development, the City can adopt policies to guide changes as existing facilities age and opportunities arise for redevelopment.

Another key issue raised by the public was the quality of development and aesthetics in the key corridors along the two highways. The City's

location on the highway from Anchorage to Homer and Kenai results in a high number of pass-through visitors, both from Alaska and from out of state. These visitors typically only see the development along the highway corridor and this corridor is the basis of their perception of Soldotna. In addition, the commercial corridor obstructs the view of the river from the highway until visitors reach the bridge. As a river city, it is important that the river be more incorporated into site design and development along the riverfront. The highway corridors and the riverfront commercial area would benefit from specific design standards that reflect the importance of these areas to the community. The proposed generalized future land use map was developed to address the issues raised above.

A hospital overlay zone is proposed to plan for future expansion of healthcare-related facilities and support services for these facilities. The generalized land use map proposed that these facilities be directed south from the current hospital site and to the east toward the highway. This provides the health care industry with good highway access, provides a draw to bring people out to the commercial areas on the highway, and reduces expansion to the west into established single-family neighborhoods.

The generalized future land use map proposes identifying the city-owned lands along the south bank of the river near the airport for mixed use or preserving a green buffer setback along the river (Figure 3-10). Finally, the plan proposes to guide commercial growth into more concentrated areas with higher design standards, as opposed to strip development the entire length of the highway. Properties outside the concentrated commercial area are designated for mixed use, to allow for a mixture of residential and commercial uses.

Other strategies to achieve many of the goals identified in earlier sections and in the following goals are illustrated on the concepts map (Figure 3-11).

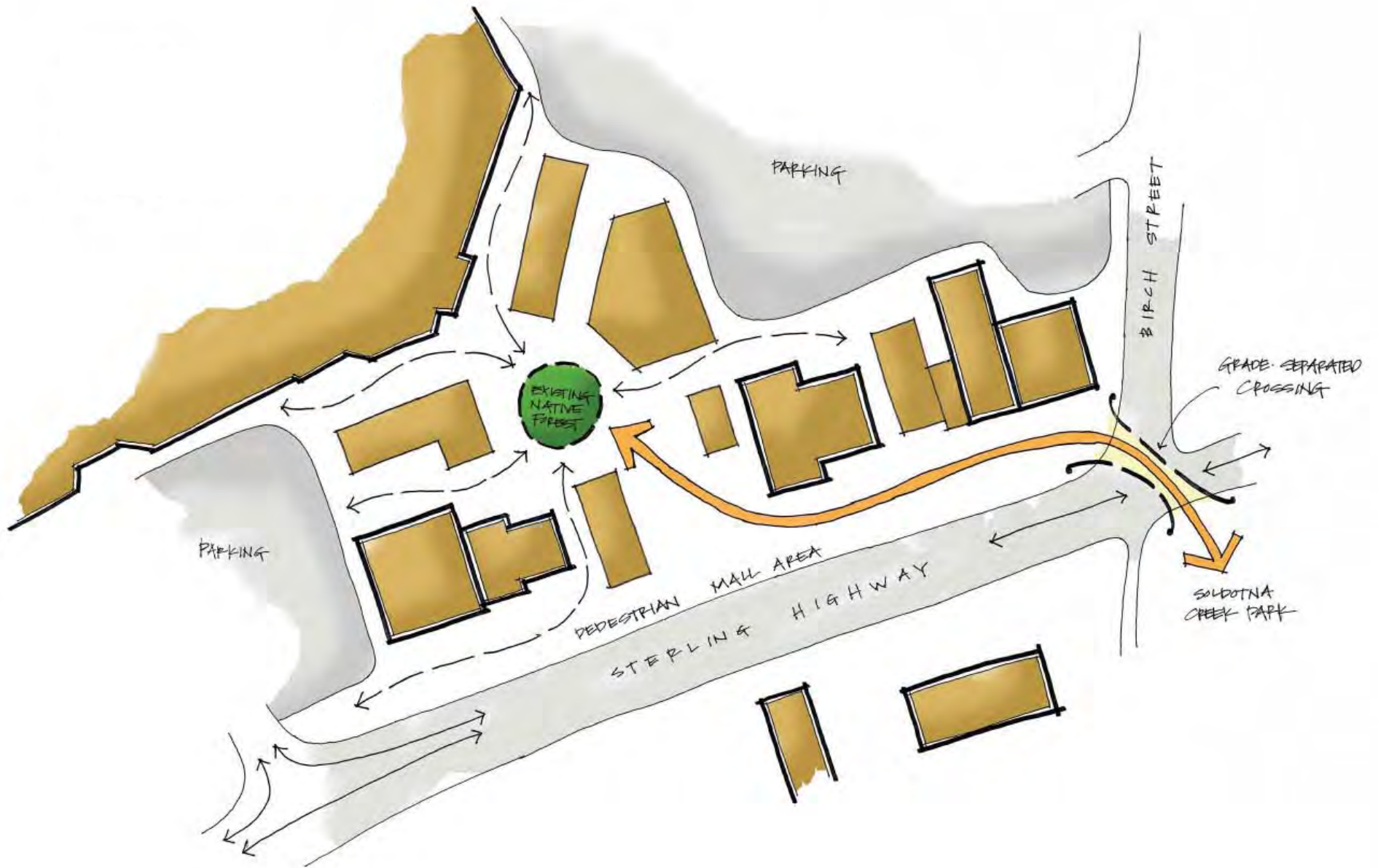


Figure 3-10 - Commercial Node Concept

General Land Use Goals

1. Use the Generalized Future Land Use Map to guide land use decisions and infrastructure development.

- a.* Amend zoning districts to more accurately capture the stated intent of each land use classification.
- b.* Amend the zoning code to require zoning amendments and conditional use approvals to document consistency with the adopted future land use map and comprehensive plan policies.
- c.* Provide a process in the zoning code for amendments to the future land use map when appropriate and there are findings that the proposed change is consistent with the overall intent and vision of the comprehensive plan.

2. Establish a more concentrated commercial zone along portions of the primary highways.

- a.* Restrict low-density residential uses in the commercial zone.
- b.* Include specific guidance for design features for highway commercial properties that have highway frontage either in the commercial zone district regulations or as an overlay zone along the highway corridors.
- c.* Designate distinct commercial nodes in selected key areas that promote commercial synergy and are more visible and attractive to pass-through visitors (See Figure 3-10).

3. Establish an overlay district for the Sterling Highway riverfront corridor with specific design standards to enhance the area's relationship to the river. The design standards should address:

- Orientation toward both the highway and the river
- Building setbacks
- Landscape requirements
- Parking requirements (amount, design, buffering)
- Signage regulations

- Pedestrian and vehicle circulation
- Architectural features

4. Convert the Limited Commercial district to a Mixed Use zoning district. Defining the district as mixed use, as opposed to limited commercial, provides a more accurate description for the intent of the district, which is not just for transition between commercial and residential uses, but which is designed to encourage the synergy of a mixture of uses within the district.

- a.* Remove the size restrictions for uses and allow the compatibility of these uses be determined through a site plan review process to ensure compatibility with comprehensive plan goals and adjacent existing uses, rather than by requiring a conditional use permit.

5. Establish a Health Care Overlay district to provide guidance for future growth of this industry while minimizing adverse impacts on adjacent established residential areas.

- a.* Establish zones within the overlay district to be developed sequentially, with the first zone being the area closest to the hospital and the last zone being the furthest away.
 - i.* Establish regulations that restrict the rezoning of properties from residential uses outside of the first zone until some percentage of the area within the first zone is redeveloped. Once that occurs, parcels within the next zone could be considered for rezoning.
 - ii.* Include a provision for exceptions when there is no suitable site within the zone currently being redeveloped and where the proposed development can be made compatible with adjacent uses.
- b.* Provide a priority for retail, office and service uses that support the health care industry when considering zoning amendments and conditional use permits within this overlay district.



6. Continue to monitor available land supply and evaluate the need for land of different zoning designations.

7. Evaluate the potential to rezone the riverfront portion of the industrial lands north of the airport to a mixed use zone to protect the river from intensive industrial uses.

a. Evaluate appropriate uses of riverfront land as part of the revision of the Kenai River Overlay District.

b. Alternatives to rezoning this area include creating a light industrial zone for industrial lands along the river or requiring greater setbacks from the river for industrial uses.

8. Review and revise the Kenai River Overlay District regulations.

a. Establish a technical advisory group to review and recommend changes.

b. Establish a list of appropriate, conditional and prohibited uses within the overlay district.

c. Require more stringent stormwater retention, detention and/or treatment within the overlay district.

d. Adopt appropriately detailed and measurable development and design standards for development within the overlay district.

e. Extend the overlay district to cover lands along Slikok and Soldotna Creeks.

f. Evaluate the need for addressing development on riverfront properties even if the development is greater than 100 feet from the river bank.

9. Prioritize the establishment of key greenbelt/trail/green boulevard connections to link key elements of the City.

a. Link neighborhoods to schools, libraries, public services, and shopping.

b. Link the City's parks and open space areas, particularly along the river. The City is unique in its potential for an extensive greenway connection system but it would require some land acquisition.

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.

d. Evaluate the potential for pedestrian links across the river at key areas, such as KPC and Centennial Park.

e. Evaluate the potential for a "Riverwalk" experience that would be unique to Soldotna.

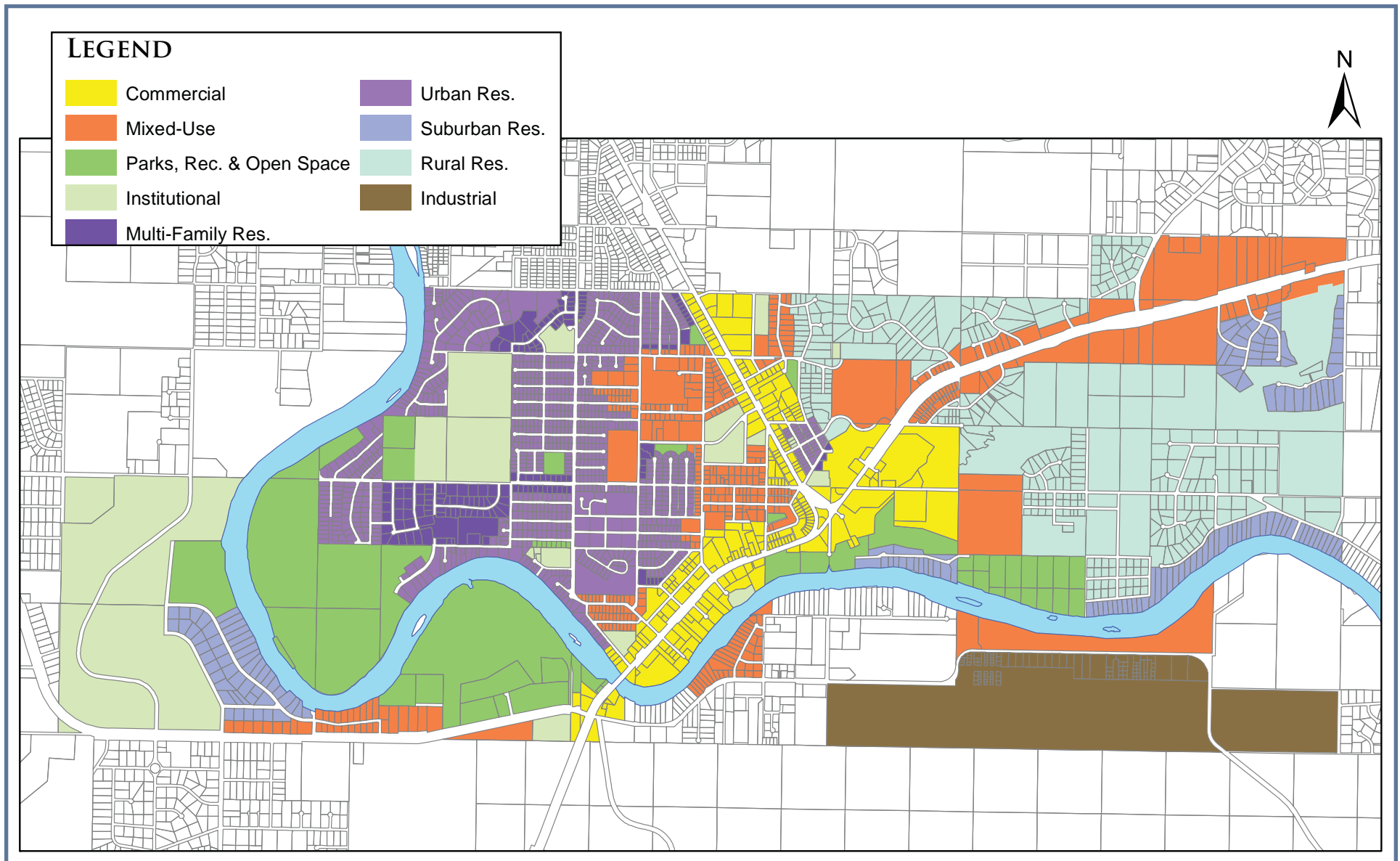
10. Review and revise the sign ordinance.

a. Consider providing special regulations for properties that have highway frontage to ensure adequate guidance on sign size, design and location.

b. Evaluate the potential to provide incentives for businesses to bring existing signs into conformance.

c. Review the procedure for granting variances from the sign ordinance to ensure that relief is granted only for exceptional circumstances.

11. Evaluate the need for an airport overlay zone to encourage airport-compatible development on or near the airport.

*Figure 3-11 - Generalized Future Land Use Map*



USE OF THE FUTURE LAND USE MAP

The comprehensive plan provides guidance to help direct growth and development toward the vision statements outlined in the document. The Future Land Use Map also provides guidance on the type and intensity of development proposed to occur in specific areas, based on the goals of the plan. The Future Land Use Map is not a zoning map – but may provide guidance for decisions on future zoning amendment requests. The City may decide to pursue area-wide zoning changes to address certain priority goals or may use the map to guide development in the proposed direction through individual zoning applications as they occur. It is anticipated that this map shall be frequently revisited and occasionally amended as community needs change or unanticipated opportunities arise.

URBAN RESIDENTIAL (U-R):

- **Intent:** The Urban Residential classification is designed to reflect residential development in the core areas of town, where each structure contains primarily one family unit.
- **Primary Use:** Single-family dwellings.
- **Other Compatible Uses:** Limited other uses such as duplexes, institutional development (churches, parks, schools, etc.), and neighborhood-oriented retail or service if compatible with the residential character of the area.
- **Characteristics:**
 - o Residential is primary use; but allows for other uses where these uses maintain residential character.
 - o Smaller minimum lot sizes.
 - o Full extent of City services typically available including: paved streets and sidewalks, water and sewer service, and neighborhood parks.
 - o Neighborhoods have pedestrian connectivity to other areas of town which may include sidewalks, bike lanes, and/or trails.
 - o Encourage attractive, diverse housing types (vs. “cookie-cutter” subdivisions).

MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL (MF-R):

- **Intent:** This classification is designed to reflect higher density residential development where each structure contains more than one family unit.
- **Primary Use:** Multi-family residential dwellings.
- **Other Compatible Use:** Other uses that are compatible with a residential neighborhood, such as institutional uses and neighborhood-oriented retail and service uses may be allowed as conditional uses.
- **Characteristics:**
 - o Multiple dwellings per building, or multiple buildings per lot with an option for cluster and higher density development.
 - o City water and sewer typically available.
 - o Minimum lot size may depend on number of dwelling units.
 - o Sidewalks, paved streets, and neighborhood parks typically available.
 - o Pedestrian connectivity to the rest of the community.

SUBURBAN RESIDENTIAL (S-R):

- **Intent:** The Suburban Residential classification is designed to provide for traditional single-family residential development and compatible uses (similar to the Urban Residential classification) in areas which are more rural, and may not yet have access to the full range of City services. This classification provides for a scale, density, and character of residential development appropriate for locations between urban and rural classifications.
- **Primary Use:** Single-family dwellings.
- **Other Compatible Uses:** Limited other uses such as duplexes, institutional development (churches, parks, schools, etc.), and neighborhood-oriented retail or service if compatible with the residential character of the area.
- **Characteristics:**
 - o Residential is primary use; but allows for other uses where these uses maintain residential character.
 - o Smaller minimum lot sizes where city water and sewer are available, otherwise moderate lot sizes meeting the minimum requirements for on-site services.

- Full extent of City services may not presently be available including: paved streets and sidewalks, water and sewer service, and neighborhood parks.
- Encourage attractive, diverse housing types (vs. “cookie-cutter” subdivisions).
- Encourage subdivision development which incorporates recreational or green space, when applicable.

RURAL RESIDENTIAL (R-R):

- **Intent:** This classification is designed to reflect low-density residential development in the more rural portions of the City.
- **Primary Use:** Single-family and Two-family residential dwellings.
- **Other Compatible Uses:** Other compatible uses may include multi-family dwellings, farm animals, and agricultural pursuits. The City may allow more flexibility with uses in this area, particularly accessory uses, given the larger lot sizes and more rural nature of the area.
- **Characteristics:**
 - City water/sewer typically not available.
 - Larger minimum lot sizes to accommodate on-site well and septic, and to preserve a sense of open space.
 - Lower density development (may be multiple uses per property, but large lots maintain rural feel).
 - Encourage retention of rural character.
 - Encourage open space subdivisions as an alternative to more typical lot layouts.

COMMERCIAL (C):

- **Intent:** This classification is intended to create a concentrated, vibrant, and attractive downtown business district which is convenient to both motorists and pedestrians. The commercial districts are typically designed to serve larger areas than just the immediate neighborhoods, and are oriented toward serving the entire City and regional residents. A diverse retail base ranging from small to medium to large and from local to regional to national stores is encouraged.

- **Primary Use:** Primary uses include general retail, personal and professional services, entertainment establishments, restaurants, and related businesses. Mixed-use developments which incorporate limited residential uses with business are encouraged to provide for a more vibrant mix of occupants.
- **Other Compatible Uses:** Non-commercial uses, such as institutional, educational, or residential uses may be allowed.
- **Characteristics:**
 - High-quality public spaces (sidewalks, trails, parks, river access) are encouraged to provide for pedestrian movement throughout the area.
 - City water and sewer typically available.
 - Vibrant, attractive development.
 - Control signage to maintain the visual quality of the district.
 - Encourage shared parking where appropriate to reduce unused parking areas.

MIXED-USE (M-U):

- **Intent:** This classification is designed to include a variety of uses to allow for a vibrant mix of development within the district.
- **Primary Use:** A diversity of compatible land uses is encouraged. Typically, developments in this area would include a mixture of two or more of the following uses: residential, office, retail, or service, or recreational.
- **Other Compatible Uses:** Institutional uses and light industrial uses may be allowed if they are compatible with the primary uses.
- **Characteristics:**
 - Developments in this area would be designed to be functionally integrated to use shared vehicular and pedestrian access and parking.
 - City water and sewer services are typically available.

INSTITUTIONAL (INS):

- **Intent:** The institutional district provides an area in which government and tax exempt institutions can offer social and cultural amenities to the citizens of the community.



- **Primary Use:** Public, non-profit, and quasi-public uses including government offices and facilities, schools, churches, and other community-service oriented facilities.
- **Other Compatible Uses:** Residential uses of various densities, light industrial uses, and neighborhood-oriented commercial uses may be allowed where compatible.
- **Characteristics:**
 - o High-quality public spaces should be encouraged.
 - o Vibrant, attractive development.
 - o Control signage to maintain the visual quality of the area.
 - o City water and sewer services are typically available.

PARKS, RECREATION, AND OPEN SPACE (PR&O):

- **Intent:** This classification includes public recreation facilities, as well as undeveloped lands intended to provide for conservation of natural or scenic resources. These areas can be used for a variety of passive and active outdoor and indoor sports and recreational activities.
- **Primary Use:** Recreation facilities may include sports centers, parks, greenbelts and trail rights-of-way or easements. Open spaces typically include lands owned by governmental organizations, but can also include areas where government agencies have acquired conservation easements.
- **Other Compatible Uses:** Institutional uses may be allowed where compatible. Temporary commercial uses may be allowed by permit.
- **Characteristics:**
 - o Clear and consistent signage should be used to direct uses.
 - o Non-motorized access should be encouraged through trail connections.
 - o Parking and other facilities should be designed to minimize permeable surfaces and to retain and treat stormwater.
 - o City water and sewer are typically available.

INDUSTRIAL (IND):

- **Intent:** This classification includes areas used for production, manufacturing, processing, packaging, distribution, and other similar activities that may result in higher levels of noise, odors,

or other emissions than would be generated by typical commercial activities.

- **Primary Use:** Light industrial uses, such as storage, light manufacturing, processing and distribution and heavy industrial uses, such as heavy manufacturing and fabrication.
- **Other Compatible Uses:** Institutional and commercial uses may be allowed where compatible.
- **Characteristics:**
 - o Attention should be given to provision of adequate access, maneuvering and parking for large vehicles should be provided.
 - o Signage should be controlled.
 - o City water and sewer services should be available.

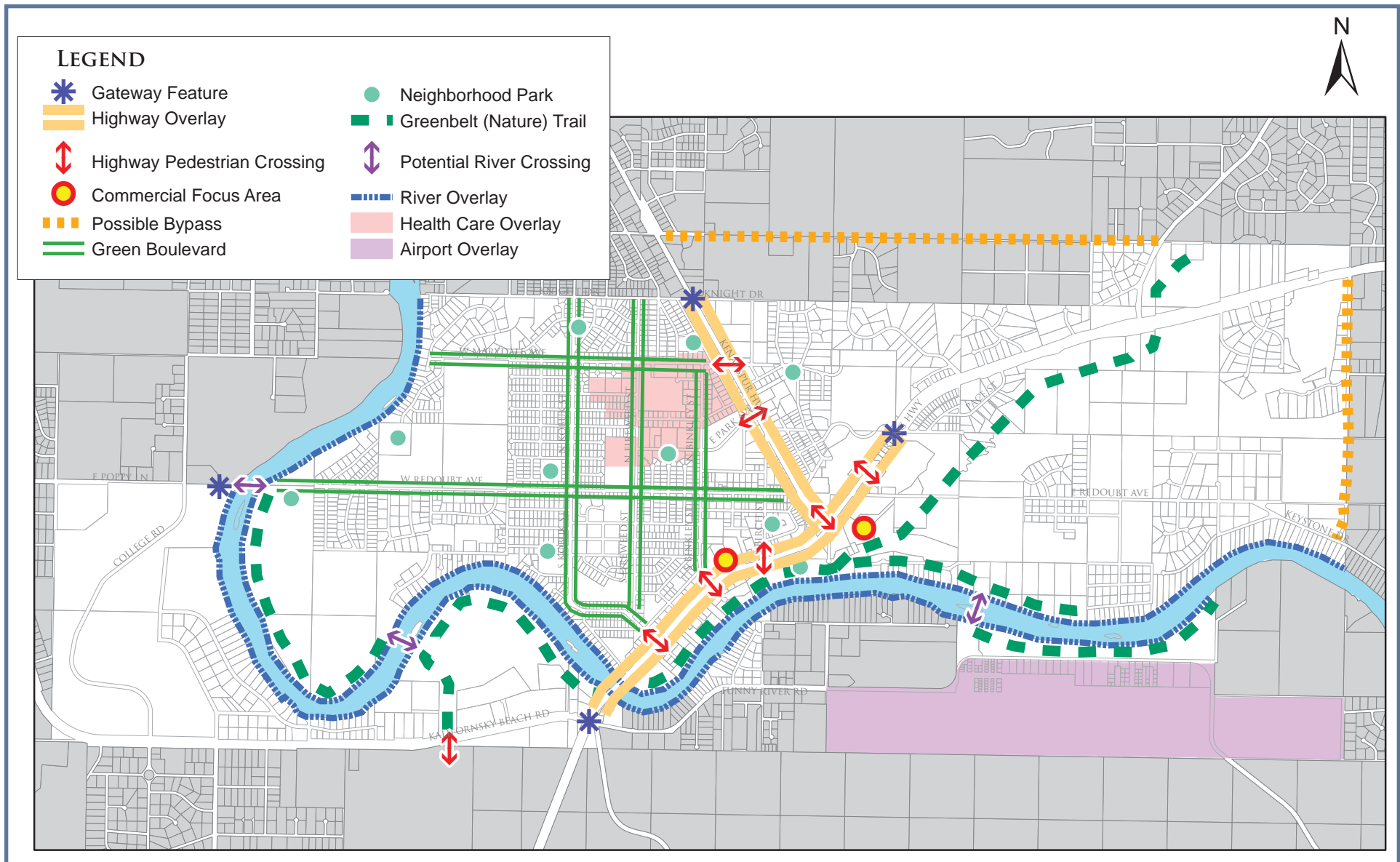


Figure 3-12 - Proposed Land Use Concepts Map



CONCEPT MAP FEATURES

The Concept Map shows those goals of Envision Soldotna 2030 which can be represented graphically. As a complement to the Future Land Use Map and the text of this plan, the Concept Map helps provide guidance and direction for the preferred long-term growth and development of the City of Soldotna. The major components of the map are discussed below.

Commercial Focus Area

Intent: The map identifies two commercial focus areas: one located at the intersection of the Sterling and Kenai Spur Highways; and another at the block located north of the Sterling Highway between South Binkley and South Birch Streets. These areas could be the focus of future development/redevelopment efforts. The intent of identifying commercial focus areas would be to concentrate commercial and retail activity, create commercial synergy and provide a more pedestrian-friendly experience several strategic down-town locations.

Supporting Goals: Economic Development Goal: 1b; Land Use Goal 3c.

Gateway Feature

Intent: Gateway Features are shown on the map at the highway entrances to the downtown commercial corridor. Gateway features could include 'Welcome to Soldotna' signage, as well as sculptural and landscaping elements which establish a community theme. Elements from these gateway features, such as smaller sculptural components or coordinating landscaping, could then be introduced in other locations along the highways, to further develop a consistent downtown feel.

Supporting Goals: Highways and Transportation Goal: 1b.

Highway Pedestrian Crossing

Intent: Highway pedestrian crossings are shown at important intersections located along both major highways, as well as Kalifornsky Beach Road. The purpose of identifying these intersections is to focus safety improvements for pedestrians in key areas linking the core of town to properties along the Kenai River south of the Sterling Hwy., and areas east of the Kenai Spur Hwy. Key community resources, such as Soldotna Creek Park, currently lack adequate pedestrian crossings, and

should be identified in capital project requests for upgrades. Crossings shall be easily identified, well-marked and well-lit, and grade-separated where feasible.

Supporting Goals: Neighborhoods Goals: 5c, 5d; Parks, Trails, and Recreation Goal: 7d; Highways and Transportation Goals: 4a-c.

Highway Overlay:

Intent: Envision Soldotna 2030 contains goals aimed at identifying and establishing a downtown commercial core which is vibrant and reflects the high quality of life enjoyed in Soldotna. A highway overlay district is shown to include properties on both sides of the Kenai Spur and Sterling Highways, through the city. The purpose of an overlay district would be to eventually create design guidelines and standards specific to commercial properties with highway frontage, and addressing the desire of residents for a more pedestrian-friendly, and aesthetically pleasing downtown. Design guidelines should be aimed at improving the streetscape, site design, and appearance of structures located within the district. Design features and signage consistent with the gateway features could be incorporated where possible, to further enhance a sense of place. The City should work closely with residents, the State of Alaska DOT&PF, the Chamber of Commerce, and local business community in designing and implementing a highway overlay district.

Supporting Goals: Economic Development Goals: 1a, 2a; Highways and Transportation Goals: 1a-b; Regional Growth and Development Goal: 6.

Neighborhood recreation areas

Intent: Neighborhood parks and recreation areas should be located to encourage "active neighborhoods" and provide activities for people of all ages. Many neighborhood parks already exist within walking distance of neighborhoods, and the City should continue locating these small parks in proximity to residential areas for easy pedestrian access.

Supporting Goals: Neighborhood Goal: 3a.

Potential Pedestrian River Crossings

Intent: The map identifies three potential Kenai River crossings for pedestrians. The locations shown would tie together the proposed

greenbelt (nature) trail system, further integrating the City's many parks, trails, and other outdoor resources. Additionally, a pedestrian bridge connecting West Redoubt Avenue to East Poppy Lane would connect the core residential area of the city directly with Kenai Community College.

Supporting Goals: Neighborhood Goal: 5.a.iii; Highways and Transportation Goal: 2.a.

Key Greenbelt Trail

Intent: The map shows a city-wide nature trail which could be developed utilizing many existing boardwalks along the Kenai River. This trail could further be integrated with public parks and green spaces, as well as trail networks outside the City (such as Tsaltehi Trail).

Supporting Goals: Economic Development Goal: 7.b; Neighborhood Goal 5.b; Parks, Trails, and Recreation Goals: 2, 7a.

Green Boulevard

Intent: Green boulevards would promote planting additional trees in right-of-way along the City's collector roads. These would provide a more pleasant pedestrian experience, especially if sidewalks and trails were separated from the travelway by the additional landscaping. Streets identified as potential green boulevards are Redoubt and Marydale Avenues, as well as Kobuk, Fireweed, and Binkley Streets.

Supporting Goals: Highways and Transportation Goal: 3.a.iii.

Bypass

Intent: Two proposed bypass routes are shown which could be developed and used as detours, in cases of emergency. One connects the Sterling and Kenai Spur Highways and bypasses the Y intersection, and the other connects Keystone Drive (down East Redoubt) to the Sterling Highway.

Supporting Goals: Highways and Transportation Goal: 2.b.

Riverfront Overlay:

Intent: Several goals of Envision Soldotna 2030 discuss revising the Kenai River Overlay district in the zoning code to ensure responsible and quality development along the Kenai River. The intent is to protect the river's health and sustainability, but also provide more guidance on appropriate uses and development to be located along the river.

Supporting Goals: Natural Resources and the Environment Goal: 1; General Land Use Goal: 3.

Health care District Overlay:

Intent: Several goals of Envision Soldotna 2030 refer to establishing an overlay district for health care uses in the vicinity of the hospital. The intent of adopting a formal overlay district for the area is to identify areas for health care industry expansion and provide for more certainty regarding where these facilities will develop in the future and where residential uses will be protected. Additionally, the overlay district provides more specific guidance on allowable uses that are compatible and in support of the hospital and neighboring professional health care offices. Site design considerations such as shared parking facilities, and aesthetic guideline, such as coordinated signage, could also be incorporated into the district standards.

Supporting Goals: Neighborhood Goals: 4a, 4a1; Economic Development Goal: 5c; General Land Use Goals 5, 5a.

Airport Overlay:

Intent: Land located at the airport, including lease lots and tie-down spaces within the secure area, have different requirements and restrictions than lands outside the airport. General zoning requirements such as landscaping, and access to dedicated rights-of-way may be inappropriate for lots used solely for aviation. The City should consider establishing an airport overlay zone, which governs use of airport lands and is specific to the needs of these aviation-related properties.

Supporting Goals: Land Use Goal: 11.





Chapter Four Implementation

Implementation is a key component of the planning process and is essential to achieving the vision and desired outcomes of Envision Soldotna 2030. This comprehensive plan includes many proposed studies, policies, and projects. Some projects may be easier to implement in the short-term, while others may require more time for study, planning, and to secure necessary funding.

Envision Soldotna 2030 contains many goals identified by the public, and they are all important. In order to be successful in making progress in the short-term, however, the City must determine where to focus its efforts. This implementation chapter identifies those recommendations that are the highest priorities, those that are secondary, and those that may take longer to implement or may not be pressing needs. It is recommended that the City re-evaluate the plan recommendations every five years to remove completed items from the list, add new goals, and make any necessary amendments due to changes in the City's economy, demographics, or community desires.

All goals from the various plan elements are listed below, and prioritized into one of three categories:

High-Priority goals are those goals the City should consider focusing on first, as they emerged from the public participation process as those items most-urgent to the citizens. While the high-priority goals may require significant effort over the long-term to accomplish, the City should begin initiating the recommended strategies listed in this chapter so that steady progress can be made.

Secondary goals are those that the City anticipates initiating in the next five years. These goals are important to the City, and should be addressed as time, money, and other resources allow.

Long-term goals are those the City does not plan on initiating in the next five years. However, opportunities for funding or factors such as political motivation may at some

point make a long-term goal more feasible or desirable, and under those circumstances the City should not hesitate to undertake these projects as well.

Implementation of the recommendations will require specific steps – and the table below lists several strategies for achieving the high-priority goals. These strategies include the list of objectives for that goal from chapter 3, and additional follow-up steps to provide the City with some direction about how to move forward.

The Comprehensive plan is the guiding document for the City of Soldotna, and should be incorporated into decision-making for all city departments, boards and commissions, and the Council - from budgeting and land use decisions to planning for capital improvements. Consistency with the goals and direction of the comprehensive plan should be a standard to which all City departments strive. An annual work session between the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council is encouraged to monitor progress towards meeting plan goals.



Street corner garden



A note on the use of this table: The following pages restate the vision statements and goals from each of the nine planning areas of interest. The numbers in black in the far left-hand column represent the goal number, while the gray number in parentheses lists the page number to reference that particular goal in Chapter 3 of the plan. Goals listed as ‘High Priority’ list additional action items, and possible funding sources to help implement the goal, if known. All goals, regardless of priority, identify the lead department in the administration responsible for ensuring the goal is pursued.

Economic Development

Soldotna will encourage economic development by expanding health care and educational opportunities; year-round tourism and recreational opportunities; quality commercial development; and by incorporating the Kenai River as a marketable asset and resource. Economic development will promote pedestrian-friendly retail opportunities and the development of a more focused downtown. Soldotna will strive to maintain its tax base while continuing to provide an extraordinary quality of life to its residents.

	Goal	Priority	Lead Department
	Promote development of a “downtown area” that attracts both visitors and residents.	High	Administration Planning & Zoning
1 (24)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a downtown plan that identifies what constitutes “downtown” and provides design guidance to support quality commercial and institutional development in this area. Identify key focus areas to concentrate commercial/retail activity to create commercial synergy. Identify key public facilities that should be located in the identified downtown area to provide a central city area and a sense of community identity. Evaluate parking locations and pedestrian access throughout the downtown area. Use clear signage to make it easy for visitors to find parking and retail opportunities. <p>Possible Funding Sources: Americorps Vista, Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District (KPEDD).</p>		
2 (24)	Encourage reuse and/or redevelopment of key areas, particularly along the river and the major highways.	Secondary	Administration Planning & Zoning
3 (25)	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.	Secondary	Administration
4 (26)	Investigate the potential for a Convention Center to draw visitors throughout the year and provide meeting facilities for local events and organizations.	Secondary	Administration
5 (26)	Promote the development of the health care industry while maximizing compatibility with existing residential areas.	Secondary	Administration Planning & Zoning
6 (26)	Identify opportunities and plan for the Kenai River playing a prominent role in the expansion of economic development opportunities within the city.	Secondary	Administration Parks & Recreation
7 (26)	Encourage development of off-season tourism based on outdoor recreation.	Long-term	Administration Parks & Recreation

Neighborhoods

Soldotna neighborhoods will be attractive, vibrant, clean, safe and desirable. They will be well-maintained, provide for mobility, and be well-connected to the larger community. The City will encourage neighborhood interaction and a strong sense of community.

2 (31)	Develop Subdivision regulations to ensure that developers provide adequate infrastructure for their developments.	High	Planning & Zoning Public Works
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Form a Technical Advisory Group to review existing subdivision regulations. This group should include City public works and planning staff, developers, neighborhood representatives, and KPB planners. Review subdivision infrastructure requirements to ensure adequate consideration of lighting, pedestrian and vehicle circulation, stormwater collection and treatment and street design. Investigate whether the City could/would want to request platting authority from the Kenai Peninsula Borough. Identify issues and concerns regarding timing, level and financing of infrastructure requirements for subdivisions Implement through negotiation of development agreements for private developments 		
4 (33)	Reduce land use conflicts in residential areas.	Secondary	Planning & Zoning
5 (33)	Provide for increased connectivity throughout Soldotna for both vehicular and non-motorized access.	Secondary	Parks & Recreation Public Works
1 (30)	Enhance the quality of Soldotna neighborhoods while providing for a diversity of housing options.	Long-term	Planning & Zoning
3 (31)	Encourage “active neighborhoods” that incorporate activities for people of all ages.	Long-term	Parks & Recreation



Natural Resources & the Environment

Soldotna will protect and maintain the general health of the Kenai River while showcasing its assets to ensure a quality experience.

	Ensure responsible and quality development along the Kenai River to protect its health and sustainability.	High	Planning & Zoning Public Works Utilities
1 (37)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the Kenai River Overlay District Regulations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a technical advisory group to review and recommend changes. This group should include regulatory agencies, non-profit organizations, developers, and river-users. Establish a list of permitted, conditional and prohibited uses within the overlay district. Require stringent stormwater retention, detention and /or treatment within the overlay district, consider a water-dependency requirement for certain types of commercial and industrial uses; Adopt appropriately detailed and measurable development and design standards for development within the overlay district. Expand the overlay district to include areas along Slikok and Soldotna Creeks. Evaluate the potential for extending public water and wastewater services to developed areas within the overlay district and requiring connection to water and wastewater services for all but very low density new development within the district. Evaluate the potential development density of private properties within the Kenai River Overlay District and determine whether measures such as property acquisition, conservation easements, and/or transfer of development rights. <p>Possible Funding Sources: Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Kenai River Sportfishing Association</p>		
5 (38)	Evaluate the existing City stormwater system to identify and prioritize improvements to stormwater collection, detention and treatment.	Secondary	Public Works Utility
8 (38)	Consider conducting a sustainability audit of City operations and identifying sustainability goals for each City department. Examples could include reducing energy use, increasing recycling and use of recycled materials, and adopting Leadership in Energy Efficient Design (LEED) certification requirements for all City facilities.	Secondary	Administration
10 (38)	Continue to pursue upgrades to the wastewater treatment system and study the potential for a long-term alternative to river discharge of treated wastewater.	Secondary	Utility
2 (37)	Develop a Watershed Improvement Plan that evaluates and addresses measures to better collect and treat stormwater and other river discharges.	Long-term	Public Works Utility
3 (38)	Evaluate the potential to protect wetland areas south of the Sterling Hwy, bordering Soldotna Creek.	Long-term	Planning & Zoning
4 (38)	Evaluate the carrying capacity of the Kenai River to determine whether expanded boardwalk facilities can be supported, and what their impact would be.	Long-term	Parks & Recreation
6 (38)	Increase stormwater design review standards for all non-residential or multi-family residential development.	Long-term	Public Works

7 (38)	Use public facility development and operations to model sustainable design techniques, such as using green areas along roads for stormwater detention and treatment, maximizing retention of native vegetation, reducing impermeable footprint of new development, use of energy efficient systems, and maximizing reuse and recycling of materials.	Long-term	Public Works
9 (38)	Consider working with local organizations and regulatory agencies to develop a Wildlife Habitat Management Plan for the City.	Long-term	Planning & Zoning
11 (38)	Research and evaluate the potential to adopt restrictions on boat motors on the Kenai River similar to restrictions further up the river.	Long-term	Administration



Parks, Trails, & Recreation

The City will continue to invest in its parks, trails, and other recreational opportunities for both residents and visitors.

1 (40)	Develop a Recreation Master Plan for Soldotna.	High	Parks & Recreation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget for a Master Plan, and retain a Consultant Conduct work sessions and other public involvement opportunities through the Parks and Recreation Board, to solicit public comments on recreation opportunities and facilities; Prepare a plan that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluates the demand for a variety of recreation opportunities and facilities; Inventories and documents available recreation resources to meet the identified demand; Establish a Level of Service for various recreation opportunities and facilities; Develop a list of recommended improvements to meet the desired Levels of Service. Add priority projects to the City's 5-year Capital Improvement Program. 		
2 (40)	Evaluate the potential for a connected greenway trail system that spans the City, from Slikok Creek through State-owned lands to Centennial Park to Soldotna Creek Park, and along Soldotna Creek Park to the north, including a potential loop connecting Soldotna Creek to the Kenai River corridor on the east side of the City.	Secondary	Parks & Recreation
3 (40)	Provide for critical connections and missing links in the existing trail system as identified in the 2001 Roads and Trail Master Plan.	Secondary	Parks & Recreation Public Works
4 (40)	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.	Secondary	Parks & Recreation
10 (41)	Encourage residents to use the existing City parks.	Secondary	Parks & Recreation
7 (41)	Incorporate recreation facilities into the City's economy.	Secondary	Administration Parks & Recreation
5 (40)	Consider the expansion of boardwalks along the river as proposed in the 2001 Roads and Trails Master Plan (See Natural Resource Goal #4).	Long-term	Parks & Recreation
6 (41)	Consider the potential for a snow machine corridor or recreation area within the City.	Long-term	Parks & Recreation
8 (41)	Explore opportunities to purchase environmentally sensitive and recreationally valuable private lands, particularly land along the river or Soldotna Creek.	Long-term	Administration Parks & Recreation
9 (41)	Encourage the use of school facilities during the off-season to provide for activities such as summer community programs, adult recreation and outdoor education.	Long-term	Parks & Recreation
11 (41)	Invest in outreach and improvements geared toward youth, such as improvements at the bike/skate park, and the establishment of a teen center.	Long-term	Parks & Recreation

Arts, Education, & Culture

Soldotna will develop and encourage the arts and cultural services and facilities to preserve and promote the area's history, and to provide adequate public access to art, music, and other cultural activities.

	Continue to support a broad range of cultural services and facilities.	High	Administration
1 (44)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support expansion of the Joyce C. Carver Public Library • Support the Community Schools program • Support local performances by the Kenai Peninsula Orchestra and Performing Arts Society • Support development and maintenance of Soldotna Community Memorial Park • Support the Soldotna Historical Society and Museum <p>Possible Funding Sources: Rasmuson Foundation, Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development</p>		
2 (44)	The City should coordinate with other public entities and non-profit organizations to co-sponsor a lecture series on Soldotna area history and other topics.	Secondary	Library
3 (44)	Expand opportunities for collaboration and participation on events between Kenai Peninsula College and the City.	Long-term	Administration
4 (44)	Evaluate the potential for incorporating a performing arts facility as part of a new conference center or other facility.	Long-term	Administration
5 (44)	Encourage the use of vacant retail areas for a community performing arts center or other public uses. The City could encourage this through incentives, such as abatement of property taxes, vacancy charges, and/or other measures.	Long-term	Administration
6 (44)	Encourage rotating local art displays in public areas, such as Soldotna Creek Park, City Hall, the library and other parks.	Long-term	Administration



Public Infrastructure & Services

Soldotna will continue to devote resources to capital improvements which meet and anticipate the needs of our developing community. The City will continue to expand and maintain an integrated, cost-effective system of municipal improvements and public infrastructure.

1 (46)	Update the City's water and wastewater master plan.	Secondary	Utility Public Works
2 (46)	Develop a Capital Improvement Plan nomination, evaluation and ranking program to increase public understanding and participation in development and review of the City Capital Improvement Plan.	Secondary	Public Works
(3) (46)	Design public improvements to allow for future expansion of infrastructure, such as utilities, roads, paving, and lighting.	Secondary	Public Works Utility

Highways & Transportation

Soldotna will be pedestrian friendly and aesthetically pleasing, and will give motorists a reason to slow down and stop in the City. The City's motorized and pedestrian transportation network will be safe, efficient, and well-maintained year-round.

1 (50)	Improve the streetscape along the Sterling and Kenai Spur Highways.	High	Administration Planning & Zoning Public Works Parks & Recreation Maintenance
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a highway streetscape plan to identify specific landscape, signage and site design standards to be applied within a highway corridor overlay zone. The overlay zone should include all properties with frontage on the Sterling or Kenai Spur Highways. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place specific projects or phases of the plan on the 5-year CIP list. Budget for ongoing maintenance of improved areas. Secure necessary approvals / beautification permits from the State of Alaska DOT&PF and negotiate a use and maintenance agreement if necessary. Contract for design of streetscape improvements Develop the highway entrances to the City as gateways, with coordinated signage and landscaping. To establish a sense of place, development along the highway corridors should have consistent design features and signage. Investigate the potential to encourage existing development to come into compliance through incentives such as tax credits for a portion of the cost. Consider requiring existing properties to come into compliance upon a change of use, ownership or major renovation or expansion. Evaluate the effects from the recent sign ordinance re-write. Revisit the sign standards to evaluate the need for more specific guidance for properties with highway frontage. Partner with private businesses for annual beautification projects. 		
4 (51)	Address the safety and efficiency of non-motorized circulation near and across the Sterling Highway and Kenai Spur Highway.	High	Administration Public Works Planning & Zoning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate the highway corridors to identify the most important pedestrian and bicycle crossing areas. Provide for a well-marked and well-lit non-motorized crossing of the Sterling Highway near Soldotna Creek Park. Strive to install a grade-separated crossing in the future. Provide for well-marked and well-lit non-motorized crossings of the Kenai Spur Highway. Evaluate the need for a centralized grade-separated crossing in the future. Improve pedestrian crossings at key pedestrian or bicycle crossings through use of special lights, signals, pavement design, etc. <p>Possible Funding Sources: Alaska Highway Safety Office, Alaska Police Standards Council, Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development.</p>		



3 (50)	Improve motorized and pedestrian transportation routes throughout the City.	Secondary	Public Works Parks & Recreation Planning & Zoning
2 (50)	Improve connectivity to the surrounding communities.	Long-term	Public Works
5 (51)	Improve traffic circulation and parking opportunities along the Sterling and Kenai Spur Highways.	Long-term	Planning & Zoning Administration
6 (51)	Continue to implement goals of the 2004 Airport Master Plan.	Long-term	Public Works
7 (51)	Evaluate the City's parking code and revise if necessary.	Long-term	Planning & Zoning

Regional Growth & Development

Soldotna will develop a forward-looking approach to regional growth and development, and will coordinate with neighboring communities and landowners to identify common interests and goals. The City will also explore opportunities to share infrastructure and public spaces with neighboring jurisdictions.

5 (57)	Explore annexation to promote orderly high-quality development, cost-effective extension of public services, opportunities for large-scale developments requiring larger parcels, protection of the City's sales tax base, and protection of the natural environment.	High	Administration
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assemble a panel of community and business leaders to evaluate the potential need for annexation and the appropriate areas to be annexed. People appointed to the panel must be impartial, represent a broad spectrum of interests, and be able to grasp the importance of the issue as well as its sensitivity and difficulty. Meetings of this panel should be open to the public and the process should be as open and transparent as possible. Use a variety of methods to educate City and adjacent residents about the annexation process. Develop a new city process to meet with prospective residents and stakeholders to identify the issues and concerns about annexation. Define tentative territory of interest for annexation, consistent with City development priorities. Prepare a preliminary draft annexation petition that addresses issues and concerns of potential annexees, evaluates annexation's impacts on city operations and finances, and presents a detailed transition plan to extend future city services to the tentative annexed territory. Hold public review and comment on the preliminary draft annexation petition. Present the (revised) draft annexation petition for formal hearing and final action by the city council If approved, submit final petition to the local boundary commission <p>Amend Future Land Use Map to incorporate annexed territory</p>		
6 (57)	Work with the State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities on the design, operation and maintenance of the Sterling and Kenai Spur Highway ROWs.	Secondary	Streets & Maintenance
4 (57)	Evaluate, support, and enhance the mission of regional economic development organizations (such as the Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District and Kenai Peninsula Municipal Conference) with representatives from Soldotna, Kenai, and the Kenai Peninsula Borough to support and promote locally and regionally important industries (oil/gas, commercial fishing, tourism, etc.).	Secondary	Administration
1 (57)	Collaborate with Borough, State, and Federal agencies on land use and natural resource issues related to the Kenai River, its tributaries, and adjacent wetlands.	Long-term	Administration
2 (57)	Work with KPB to address the cost of services provided to residents of unincorporated areas.	Long-term	Administration
3 (57)	Identify lands which may be needed in the future to provide City services or Borough services to the larger regional population.	Long-term	Administration



General Land Use

Soldotna will plan and manage use of its lands to promote the social and economic vision of the community and to maintain a high quality of life in the community.

8 (62)	Review and revise the Kenai River Overlay District regulations. (See <i>Natural Resources & Environment, Goal 1</i>)	High	Planning & Zoning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a technical advisory group to review and recommend changes. Establish a list of appropriate, conditional and prohibited uses within the overlay district. Require more stringent stormwater retention, detention and/or treatment within the overlay district. Adopt appropriately detailed and measurable development and design standards for development within the overlay district. Consider extending the overlay district to cover lands along Slikok and Soldotna Creeks. 		
10 (62)	Review and revise the sign ordinance. (See <i>Highways & Transportation, Goal 1</i>)	High	Planning & Zoning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider providing special regulations for properties that have highway frontage to ensure adequate guidance on sign size, design and location. Evaluate the potential to provide incentives for businesses to bring existing signs into conformance. Review the procedure for granting variances from the sign ordinance to ensure that relief is granted only for exceptional circumstances. 		
1 (61)	Use the Generalized Future Land Use Map to guide land use decisions and infrastructure development.	Secondary	Planning & Zoning
2 (61)	Establish a more concentrated commercial zone along portions of the primary highways.	Secondary	Planning & Zoning
4 (61)	Convert the Limited Commercial district to a Mixed Use zoning district. Defining the district as mixed use, as opposed to limited commercial, provides a more accurate description for the intent of the district, which is not just for transition between commercial and residential uses, but which is designed to encourage the synergy of a mixture of uses within the district.	Secondary	Planning & Zoning
5 (61)	Establish a Health Care Overlay district to provide guidance for future growth and expansion of medical facilities to facilitate continued growth of this industry while minimizing adverse impacts on adjacent established residential areas.	Secondary	Planning & Zoning
7 (62)	Evaluate the potential to rezone the riverfront portion of the industrial lands north of the airport to a mixed use zone to protect the river from intensive industrial uses.	Secondary	Planning & Zoning
9 (62)	Prioritize the establishment of key greenbelt/trail/green boulevard connections to link key elements of the City.	Secondary	Parks & Recreation
3 (61)	Establish an overlay district for the Sterling Highway riverfront corridor with specific design standards to enhance the area's relationship to the river.	Long-term	Planning & Zoning

6 (62)	Continue to monitor available land supply and evaluate the need for land of different zoning designations.	Long-term	Planning & Zoning
(11) (62)	Evaluate the need for an airport overlay zone to encourage airport-compatible development on or near the airport.	Long-term	Planning & Zoning



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Appendix

Public Involvement

Public Participation Plan developed February 2009

Mass Mailers

- Postcard mailer with information about community survey, April 2009 (2,081 mailed to property owners in city limits and within .5 miles of city limits)
- Newsletter 1, May 2009 (1, 220 mailed with COS utility bills)
- Newsletter 2, October 2009 (1,220 mailed with COS utility bills)
- Clarion Insert June 29th advertising PZ work session (2500 inserts to newspapers delivered to 99669 zip code)
- Postcard mailer, Nov. 18, 2010 with information about Dec. 1st P&Z public hearing

Newspaper Articles

- Comprehensive Plan is Progressing in Soldotna (2/12/2009, radiokenai.com)
- Soldotna City Leaders Look Ahead to 2030: Public Comment Sought (2/17/2009, Peninsula Clarion)
- Soldotna Takes the Lead to Stay on the Best Path (2/22/2009, Peninsula Clarion Op Ed)
- Soldotna's New City Plan Requires Citizens' Input (3/11/2009, Peninsula Clarion)
- Future is Now – Soldotna Asks Residents to Help Think Ahead (10/14/2009, Redoubt Reporter)
- Future Plans: Soldotna Looks Ahead to 2030 (11/2/2009, Peninsula Clarion)
- Eyes to the Future: Open House, Work Session Slated for Envision Soldotna Plan (6/30/2010, Peninsula Clarion)
- Soldotna Plots Future: City Residents Take Opportunity to Critique Comprehensive Plan (7/4/2010, Peninsula Clarion)
- Envision Soldotna Gets Final Touches (11/29/2010, Peninsula Clarion)

Radio

- Public service announcements
- KSRM news blurbs

Public Work Shops / Charettes

- May 8, 2009 vision workshop, Soldotna Sports Center
- May 9, 2010 open house, SOHI
- July 1, 2010 all-day work session with draft plan, City Hall

P&Z Commission Meetings

- June 9, 2008 - PowerPoint presentation, Comprehensive Planning Process
- March 4, 2009 – Project Update / Community Survey Results, Public Participation Plan, Project Web Site
- April 1, 2009 – Public comment and update / K-Beach Elementary project, Community survey post card mailers, Newsletter #1 advertising May charette
- May 6, 2009 – Maryellen Tuttell and Tim Potter of DOWL HKM briefed commissioners on the upcoming public work session
- June 3, 2009 – Public Comment and update
- August 5, 2009 – Ch. 1, 'Introduction' distributed
- September 2, 2009 – Ch. 1, 'Introduction' work session
- September 16, 2009 – Vision and Goals, work session
- October 21, 2009 – Chapter 2, 'Background,' work session
- November 18, 2009 – Project Update
- February 3, 2010 – 'Neighborhoods and Nat. Resources,' work session
- April 7, 2010 – Goals Prioritization
- May 19, 2010 – Draft Plan Review, work session
- June 2, 2010 – Second Review of Ch. 1 and 2, Public Involvement Strategy work session
- June 16, 2010 – Review of Ch. 3, work session
- July 7, 2010 – Future Land Use Map / Concepts Map, work session
- July 21, 2010 – Future Land Use Map / Concepts Map, work session

P&Z Commission Meetings (continued)

- August 4, 2010 – Future Land Use Map / Concepts Map, work session
- August 18, 2010 – work session
- September 1, 2010 – work session
- October 6, 2010 – Ch. 4 ‘Implementation,’ work session
- November 17, 2010 – First Public Meeting for Plan Adoption
- December 1, 2010 – Public Hearing for Plan Adoption and Joint Work Session with City Council

City Council Meetings

- August 13, 2008
- February 11, 2009
- April 8, 2009
- May 27, 2009
- October 28, 2009
- December 1, 2010 – Joint Work Session with P&ZC
- December 8, 2010 – Ordinance Introduction
- December 22, 2010 – Ordinance 1st Public Hearing
- January 12, 2011 – Ordinance 2nd Public Hearing
- January 26, 2011 – Plan Adoption

Other

- 1-on-1 interviews, December 4-5, 2008
- Phone interviews, January – February 2009
- Access/Ability Forum, March 5, 2009
- Community Survey, April, 2009
- K-Beach Elementary 1st and 3rd grade student projects, May 2009
- Focus Group Meetings, vision statements, June 15-17, 2009
- Soldotna Chamber luncheon presentations
 - o March 10, 2009 project update
 - o June 22, 2010 draft plan presentation
- Web site updates
- Email list serve



Public workshop



Acknowledgements

The City of Soldotna would like to thank everyone involved in the development of this Comprehensive Plan. It would not have been possible without the dedication of the public, staff and stakeholders who generously gave their time and knowledge to make this project a success.

For more information or to obtain a copy of the plan, please contact the City of Soldotna Planning Department.





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