

**CITY OF HOMER
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

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CHAPTER 2

HOMER SPIT PLAN

GOAL: MANAGE THE LAND AND OTHER RESOURCES OF THE SPIT TO **ACCOMMODATE ITS** NATURAL PROCESSES, WHILE ALLOWING FISHING, TOURISM, OTHER MARINE RELATED DEVELOPMENT, AND OPEN **SPACE/** RECREATIONAL USES.

Introduction

This Homer Spit chapter of the Comprehensive Plan differs from the Marine Land Use section of the previous chapter by focusing on specific management policies and objectives for the Spit, instead of general land use trends and issues.

This chapter is similar to the land use section in that each has used the **1987** Spit public survey as a guide, and includes elements of the TAMS Plan, reflects existing uses, responds to the consensus of the **1985** community survey and workshops, and respects the City lands currently leased to individuals. Also, both may be used as a basis for the Long Term Spit Plan.

This plan is being updated at what may be the bottom of a state and local economic decline. Because of this, innovative management and development approaches must be taken to manage Spit resources wisely. The various revisions in this update reflect the new approaches.

Profile

Homer Spit is an intriguing natural phenomenon. It is one of the longest occupied natural sandspits in the world, extending southeast from the City of Homer, approximately **4.5** miles into Kachemak Bay. The Spit is a natural, dynamic system which is constantly being shaped by the deposition and erosion of sediments. The Spit is sensitive to changes in the natural environment and to man's activities, both on the Spit itself and in the uplands of the mainland.

From very early times in Homer's history, the Spit has weighed heavily in community development, livelihood, and well being. Many describe it as the focal point of the community.

Useable land is now the most important resource of the Homer Spit. Since the catastrophic earthquake of **1964**, of the total **508** acres of Spit uplands under various ownerships available for development, more than 350 acres are submerged at mean high tide. Over half of the remaining **158** acres not submerged are taken up by highway rights-of-way, public easements, and the small boat harbor. This leaves some **70** to **75** acres of land which is or can be developed. However, much of this is already occupied by an existing use.

Since available, useable land on the Homer Spit is in **such** limited supply, the highest and best use is essential to the community. Uses which support fishing and tourism must take priority.

The Port and Harbor

Homer's small boat harbor (sbh), the home of the local fishing fleet, is managed and operated by the City. The dredging of the harbor entrance, breakwater, and **1400** feet of harbor was initially constructed by the USACOE as part of a **1964** earthquake restoration project. The small boat harbor was built in **1964**, and enlarged/improved three times since then.

The first improvement of the harbor took place in **1967**. The City, in conjunction with the State Highway Department, dredged the harbor to a depth of minus 15 feet (at 0.00 tide). The second improvement to the harbor took place in **1969** when the City, again with the State Highway Department, dredged the harbor to a depth of minus 13 feet. At this time floats were installed by the State. The City is currently responsible for routine float maintenance, while the State is responsible for "major" float maintenance.

The third improvement to the harbor was realized in **1982-83**. This expansion, often referred to as the "**TAMS**" project, enlarged the harbor in both length and width, to approximately **50** acres. The TAMS expansion also provided the fill resulting in the 30 acre staging area on the harbor's northeast side.

At this writing, Homer's port facility is about to double in size. Construction has begun on a new deep water cargo dock on the north side of the harbor entrance. The new deep water cargo dock will be **526** feet long, have a 10,000 square foot turn-around area, and be able to handle three boats simultaneously with a deep water draft of forty feet at mean low water (mlw).

The existing City dock is a **24** year old wooden shallow water dock. It serves both the Coast Guard cutter and the State ferry Tustemena on a regular basis. Weather, ice, and constant use have taken a toll on the City dock, which is in need of major repair. Since this dock is our only functional dock at this time, a major repair job has been difficult to schedule.

Both the small boat harbor and the City's port facilities to a great extent determine land use, Spit operations and management. The plan for Homer Spit must balance the existing facilities with priorities of protecting the economic livelihood of fishing and tourism for the community, while protecting the natural processes on the spit.

Trends

The three land use trends which most affect operations and management on the Spit are 1) The Homer harbor has been enlarged three times in the last 26 years, in a general northwesterly direction, 2) There is increased use of the harbor, as a result of harbor expansion, and 3) A new deep water cargo dock is being constructed, which will impact Spit land management and operations especially on the 30 acre staging area.

Issues

There are four issues derived from current Spit land use trends. These issues should be addressed in the objectives, policies, and actions sections that follow.

The first land use issue involves safety and access. Recognizing the increased use and activity generated from the enlargement of the boat harbor, new floats and the new deep water cargo dock, continued safety and quality access must be given high priority.

The second issue involves the trend cited relative to the direction of harbor expansion. Land northwest of the load/launch ramp road, in the area of the fishing lagoon should be reserved for low impact/temporary uses in anticipation of future harbor expansion.

The third issue is the public preference for mixed land uses, clearly stated in the Spit public surveys. Although it is a challenge to maintain the mix of land uses on the Spit, while balancing the priority for safety, this may be accomplished with carefully written and implemented policies.

Lastly, throughout the 1987 review processes of this Homer Spit Plan, both the Port and Harbor and Planning Commissions emphasized the following note.

NOTE: The following objectives and policies address existing or potential activities on the Homer Spit. The most important activities addressed are marine industrial activities, including commercial fishing, fish processing, preserving marine habitat, transportation, parking, recreating, and dredging and filling.

OBJECTIVE 1 - Provide for public safety while achieving a balanced mix of water-dependent and marine-related activities on the Homer Spit.

POLICY 1.1 - Priority for use of the Homer Spit shall be given to marine commercial, marine industrial (fishing), industrial transportation, tourism, and day use recreation. Proponents of other uses shall demonstrate that priority uses will not be adversely affected.

ACTION 1.1.1 - City, borough, state and federal agencies implement through leasing, zoning, subdivision, permitting, Spit Action Plans, and direct development decisions.

POLICY 1.2 - Priority use of the west side of Homer Spit shall be for open space/recreation.

ACTION 1.2.1 - Implement Policy 1.2 through zoning and leasing ordinances.

ACTION 1.2.2 - Obtain ownership of land on west side of the Spit.

POLICY 1.3 - Commercial fishing storage shall occur on the Spit only when there is no higher priority use for the area.

ACTION 1.3.1 - Implement the Policy 1.3 by the Long Term Spit Action Plan, City leasing ordinance, and management decisions.

POLICY 1.4 - Similar land uses (such as charter offices, boat and gear sales, tourist activities) shall be encouraged to cluster to achieve a mix of related activities and minimize adverse impacts on other activities.

POLICY 1.5 - All other activities not specifically mentioned as priority activities in Policy 1.1 above are low priority activities, and will be permitted only where sufficient evidence can be presented by the proponent that higher priority activities will not be adversely affected or displaced.

ACTION 1.5.1 - Implement Policy 1.5 through the conditional use provisions of the City zoning ordinance, through requirements of leases and licenses of City property, and through management decisions and plans, such as the Long Term Spit Plan.

POLICY 1.6 - Facilities and services on the Spit shall be developed with a balanced consideration for a wide range of fishing and tourist-related uses.

ACTION 1.6.1 - Encourage development of businesses and facilities that support land use priorities and simultaneously cater to non-fishing family members.

ACTION 1.6.2 - Include some family oriented facilities in each City capital project list if deemed needed by a market study.

ACTION 1.6.3 - Evaluate and develop a plan for non-boating access to fishing opportunities, such as the lagoon fishing hole, or a public fishing pier.

ACTION 1.6.4 - Encourage continuation of the Spit shuttle to transport day users to various locations on the Spit.

OBJECTIVE 2 - Recognize and accommodate natural features and processes, while giving adequate space for marine commercial and industrial, tourist commercial, transportation, recreation, open space, and traditional uses.

POLICY 2.1 - Allow the natural transport of sediments along the west side of the Spit to continue uninterrupted. Proponents of bulkheads, groins, breakwaters or other devices shall demonstrate that their project will not adversely disrupt this sediment transport.

ACTION 2.1.1 - Implement Policy 2.1 by means of City approval of building permits and review of state and federal agency permit applications.

ACTION 2.1.2 - Strongly discourage the construction of structures below the mean high water line.

POLICY 2.2 - Maintain and protect traditional uses of the beaches along the Spit such as gathering coal, shellfish, and others.

POLICY 2.3 - Commercial extraction of sand and gravel from the Spit shall not be allowed.

POLICY 2.4 - On-site use of dredged material shall be permitted except in designated open space and marine habitat preserve areas.

ACTION 2.4.1 - Implement Policy 2.4 by means of City building permit approval, existing City ordinance, and stipulations placed on USACOE dredge and fill permit applications by the City, State, Borough and Federal agencies.

POLICY 2.5 - Recognizing increasing non-resident demands for camping, tent, and recreational vehicle usage, commercial camping shall be encouraged to locate away from commercial and industrial activities at each end of the Spit. Open space camping shall be encouraged to locate in the middle area of the Spit.

ACTION 2.5.1 - Evaluate the impact of restricting motorized vehicle traffic by establishing driveways on the northeast side of the Spit, especially towards the head of Mud Bay.

POLICY 2.6 - Open space recreation uses shall be encouraged on the east and west sides of the Spit, from the north end of the existing harbor to the uplands. Permanent structures within this area shall be discouraged.

ACTION 2.6.1 - Require appropriate engineer's approval for structural integrity, for any additions to existing structures.

ACTION 2.6.2 - Implement a low impact use concept for the west side of the Spit in the update of the zoning ordinance.

POLICY 2.7 - The City shall manage marine habitat preserves according to borough, state and federal coastal zone management and critical habitat regulations.

ACTION 2.7.1 - Implement the above policy by inclusion of applicable borough, state and federal coastal zone management and critical habitat policies into zoning ordinance, subdivision ordinance and capital improvement plans.

OBJECTIVE 3 - Quality access.

POLICY 3.1 - Transportation (including Coast Guard) activities are a high priority use of the end of the Spit.

ACTION 3.1.1 - Implement Policy 3.1 by means of the subdivision process, conditional use permits, leases, City parking requirements, and zoning variances.

POLICY 3.2 - Traffic congestion shall be alleviated by improving the organization of existing parking areas, and encouragement of privately provided transportation services (for example, shuttle buses) to encourage parking off of the Spit.

POLICY 3.3 - Increases in road capacity through roadway width expansion or addition of more traffic lanes shall be encouraged only for the length of the boat harbor and other congested areas.

POLICY 3.4 - The City shall develop its property between the highway and the boat basin for parking and public uses.

POLICY 3.5 - City leases shall include land sufficient for businesses and minimal employee parking.

ACTION 3.5.1 - Implement Policy 3.5 by amending the zoning ordinance to reflect this change in policy, leasing, variance, and design processes.

POLICY 3.6 - The City shall reserve right-of-way for access to the east side of the harbor.

ACTION 3.6.1 - Implement Policy 3.6 by way of the subdivision/ platting process.

POLICY 3.7 - The City shall reserve a 15' pedestrian/safety right-of-way around the periphery of the small boat harbor.

ACTION 3.7.1 - Implement Policy 3.7 by way of the subdivision/platting, zoning, and leasing/licensing process, including leasing of the overslope.

POLICY 3.8 - Maintain and increase public access to harbor and beaches on the Spit to improve opportunities for fishing and other recreational activities.

ACTION 3.8.1 - Investigate the engineering, legal, and economic feasibility of a public fishing pier.