



Soldotna Comprehensive Plan

Public Participation Plan

February 2009



ENVISION SOLDOTNA 2030

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

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1.0 OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

The City of Soldotna (City) is initiating a project to develop a new comprehensive plan for the City called Envision Soldotna 2030. This comprehensive plan will provide implementable policies that will shape and direct new growth and 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 and other public infrastructure.

2.0 PURPOSE OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public participation is a key element in making sure that Envision Soldotna 2030 reflects the community's vision and has broad public support for implementation. This public participation plan provides a framework for soliciting public and agency input for Envision Soldotna 2030. The plan provides a framework for the project team to use in soliciting public input as well as provides a summary of opportunities for the public to get involved in the project. The project team members are committed to keeping the public informed, maintaining coordination and brisk project pace, being ready to respond to comments and questions in a timely manner, and using state-of-the-art tools and approaches for public involvement. This public participation plan will be continually updated and revised as needed during the project.

The project team is aware that the “public” consists of many different entities with different and sometimes conflicting needs and desires, and wants to encourage a diverse cross-section of the community to get involved. By using a variety of meeting formats and recognizing the value of participants' time by making it convenient to participate, it is easier to involve a broader cross-section of the community. Numerous groups and individuals may be interested or invested in how development of the area will progress. The objective of the public participation plan is to work directly with the interested public throughout the planning process to ensure that their issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered. In addition to consideration of public issues and concerns, it is important that the public receives feedback on how their input has been incorporated into the project. This two-way exchange of information can help establish the credibility of the planning process and develop a plan that the whole community will support.

The key to successful public participation is to use the right measures to encourage a diverse range of community interests to become engaged in the planning process.

The project team will discuss input received and the success of public participation measures used each month at project progress meetings with the City. The participation plan is fluid and can be revised as needed throughout the process to address opportunities and issues that might arise.

Input gathered from the interviews, meetings and submitted comments will be used to identify issues, develop ideas, and establish policy and implementation methods that not only reflect the vision of the community, but also provide attainable goals and practices that can be put into operation.

3.0 GOALS OF THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

Goals for a successful public participation process:

- Keep the public informed on the project progress, listen to and acknowledge concerns, and provide feedback on how public input has influenced project decisions.
- Create a program to maximize public input throughout the process with convenient opportunities for public input.
- Identify and utilize the best methods to reach, listen to and gather input from all community groups.
- Share information openly and directly to help people become familiar with the issues and the process.
- Establish clear milestones in the process and acknowledge their achievement.
- Gather input on proposed ideas for the City. Try to understand different points of view and to resolve conflicts that arise along the way.
- Utilize local knowledge and expertise.

4.0 STAKEHOLDERS

City of Soldotna

- City Planning and Zoning Commission
- City Council
- Chamber of Commerce
- City Mayor
- City Manager
- City Planning and Zoning Department
- City Parks and Recreation Department
- City Maintenance Department
- Utility Department

Kenai Borough

- Borough Planning Director
- Borough Planning Commission
- Borough Assembly
- Central Emergency Services

Other Interested Groups

- Kenai River Center
- Kenai River Sport Fishing Association
- Kenai Peninsula College
- Kenai Watershed Forum
- Soldotna Senior Center

- Peninsula Community Health Center
- Peninsula Independent Living Center
- Kenai Peninsula Tourism/Marketing Council
- Soldotna Historic Society
- Local Real Estate Firms
- Local Construction Firms
- Local Developers
- Soldotna Rotary Club
- Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District
- Bridges Community Resource Network
- Soroptimists of the Twin Cities
- Nature Conservancy

Additional stakeholders will be identified throughout the project.

5.0 METHODS TO REACH IDENTIFIED AND POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

Numerous methods of reaching the public for input and involvement will be employed on this project. Descriptions of the public participation efforts planned for the project are as follows.

5.1.1 Project E-mail and Distribution List

A project-specific contact e-mail address of *envisionsoldotna2030@dowlhkm.com* has been established to collect public comments and questions. It will be checked each business day.

An e-mail distribution list will be created to provide timely delivery of information to interested parties and create an avenue of two-way communication. The list will be updated throughout the project.

5.1.2 Project Website

A project-specific website will be developed. The website address will be www.envisionsoldotna2030.org and hosted on the City homepage. Working with the City, the team will provide documents and information to link to the site that will provide current project information including newsletter content, meeting announcements, meeting agendas/minutes, maps, drawings, and project documentation.

The weblink will also provide a page where comments can be submitted for review and response by the project team.

5.1.3 Media

Project newsletters will be sent to the local community groups and the established e-mail list. They will also be sent to Soldotna residents via insert into regularly mailed utility bills. The newsletters will contain graphics and text to explain the project status, inform the public of the charette and any additional public involvement opportunities, direct the public to the project website to view information and make comments, and ask for public feedback on the proposed solutions. Project newsletters may be produced throughout the project to provide public information in an easily understood manner.

Methods to distribute the newsletter and information will include:

- Posting to the project website,
- Sending to the project e-mail list,
- Mailing out the newsletter in City utility bills,
- Inserting newsletter into Peninsula Clarion circulation
- Sending to local media, and
- Posting in public places.

It is also important to use as much free press as possible to maximize community involvement. The team will write editorial pieces, provide press releases and fact sheets to generate stories in the local paper and on local radio. The team will also draft articles for possible inclusion in user-

group related newsletters and disseminate project public meeting information to Soldotna and Kenai news outlets.

In addition the team will:

- Post advertisements in the Peninsula Clarion/Redoubt Reporter to announce upcoming meetings,
- Send press releases to local newspapers to provide additional information, and
- Run advertisements on radio stations KDLL/KBBI/KSRM/K-WAVE to announce upcoming meetings.

5.1.4 Charette

The project team will hold an extended “fishbowl” working session, or charette, over a weeklong period. During this extended visioning session the public will be encouraged to drop by and participate in the planning process at their convenience. Comments and ideas will be talked through and worked out with the project team in situ as Envision Soldotna 2030 is developed. The charette and work session will be promoted using the methods outlined in this plan.

5.1.5 Other Interest Group Meetings

Team members will be available to meet with other groups throughout the project as the budget allows. The groups will be able to request a meeting via any of the contact methods listed in this document. The project team will maintain contact with any interest group that requests project updates.

The project team will also use existing organizations to disseminate information during key stages of the project by providing them with newsletters, presentations, handouts, etc. for distribution to their members (e.g. Soldotna Chamber of Commerce).

5.1.6 Interviews

One-on-one interviews will be held with key stakeholders at the beginning of the project and to follow-up after a draft document has been created. The project team will set up the interviews at convenient times for the participants.

5.1.7 Presentations to Local Governments

The project team will assist the City in scheduling, preparing and presenting draft and final documents to the Soldotna Planning and Zoning Board and the City Council at key stages of the project.

6.0 EVALUATION OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The project team will continuously evaluate the public participation plan throughout the project. An e-mail will be sent to the project distribution list approximately every three months. This e-mail will report on the public participation to date as well as ask for suggestions on methods of seeking input. Effectively engaging the public throughout this project will continue to be a goal for the project team.

Additional suggestions for public participation are always welcome and can be submitted through the project website.

