



**SOLDOTNA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
INTERVIEW RESPONSES
December 2008-February 2009**

This document summarizes information gathered from both personal and phone interviews with a variety of interests during December 2008 through February 2009. The interviews were conversational and often covered broad topics. Any omissions or substitutions are unintentional.

1. Are you familiar with the existing comprehensive plan? If so, how do you use it? Does it work well? What issues or problems do you have with it?

- Yes
 - The existing plan is helpful to support decisions. (3)
 - Have occasionally referenced the existing plan for historic data. (2)
 - Have used the existing comprehensive plan and it works well. (1)

- No
 - Familiar with the current plan, but have not used it. (10)
 - Not familiar with the current plan. (9)
 - The current plan is outdated. (3)
 - It is difficult to anticipate all needs and funding language in a comprehensive plan. (1)
 - Do not understand what a comprehensive plan is or how it is used. (1)
 - Not much of a believer in comprehensive plans. (1)
 - Executive Summary should include information such as the gentlemen's agreement between Kenai and Soldotna, which located the state agencies in Kenai and the borough agencies and school district in Soldotna. (1)
 - The current plan has not been articulated within the community. (1)

2. What do you see as the top 3 land use/development/planning issues facing Soldotna?

- Development
 - Expand the city boundary; the land area of Soldotna is limited. (12)
 - Identify how to attract and keep younger people in Soldotna - aging population. (9)
 - Revisit the downtown zoning and ordinances.
 - The majority of the land within the city limits is not conducive to commercial development due to inadequate lot sizes, zoning, and alleys that divide property. (8)
 - Utilize undeveloped land properly. Currently there is no incentive to develop vacant land in the city. (2)
 - Increase development standards and improve aesthetics

- Increase requirements of new developments and sub-divisions with enhanced vegetation buffers, signage, etc. (8)
 - Soldotna must remain a walkable community. Some connectors are missing and new development should require sidewalks. (4)
 - Additional parks are needed; they add value to the town. Large developments should be required to set aside land for public use, such as parks. (3)
 - Increase requirements of new road construction. (1)
 - Good ordinances are already established but are not enforced, too many variances are granted. (1)
 - Planning and zoning is important but weak in Soldotna. (1)
 - Soldotna has become an ideal place for large, low quality development. (1)
 - Increase development setback from the road. (1)
 - Attract big business. (3)
 - Development in Soldotna is limited due to constraints imposed by the geology, soils, river, wetland issues, and the moose range boundary to the south. (2)
 - Identify potential sites for large box stores. (2)
 - Do not allow the development of big box stores. (2)
 - The best land for future development is Kalifornsky Beach Road. (2)
 - It is not necessary for the city to seek development, but they should work with developers. (1)
 - Integrate the university better into the city. (1)
 - Disperse parks throughout town. Facilities and services should be more compact, currently they are too spread out. (1)
- Specific Development Desires
 - Cemetery. (11)
 - Performing arts center. (3)
 - Convention Center. (2)
 - Traffic light at Sterling and Birch. (2)
 - Expand the medical facilities, they have been an asset. (2)
 - Expand the airport. (2)
 - Spur/Sterling Highway corridor. (1)
 - Visitor Center. (1)
 - Community Center. (1)
 - Large multi-purpose building. (1)
 - Construct another bridge. (1)
 - Retain the golf course for summer and winter use. (1)
 - Improve aging facilities and provide a diverse mix of options in assisted living. (1)
 - Provide more family park activities. (1)
 - Memorial Park. (1)
 - Promote organized sports with school extracurricular activities. (1)
 - Develop the mall into an indoor main street. (1)

- Tourism
 - Tourism is important economically for Soldotna, but there is a need to mitigate effects of tourism, especially in July, for year round residents.
 - Develop year round tourism opportunities, winter and shoulder season including trails, skiing, snow machining, and fall colors. (3)
 - Soldotna consists of two towns: 1) summer-fish, tourists and 2) winter-no visitors, no events. (1)

- DOT Parcel-Soldotna Creek Park
 - This site is a dangerous site for a “kiddie” park, since neighborhood kids will need to cross a busy street to get there. It is prime commercial property and should be used for adult activities. (6)

- Infrastructure
 - Water and Sewer. Establish better working relationship between Soldotna and Kenai. Sewage Treatment Plant - declining water quality due to sewage and waste disposal decomposing and polluting the ground water. (5)
 - Improve drinking water quality. (1)

- Kenai River
 - Protect the entire river from erosion, pollution, and overuse. (4)
 - Educate tourists on the proper use of the river. (1)
 - Develop the edge of the river with appropriate business. (1)
 - Maintain and possibly increase development setbacks from the river. (1)
 - Development is changing the dynamics of the river. It is blocking percolation from the wetlands into the river and the water table is dropping. (1)
 - Reduce non-point source pollution. (1)
 - Provide better public access to the river. (1)

3. Who do you believe are the key people who shape Soldotna’s physical features?

- City – mayor, city council, city manager. (11)
- Business and government along corridor. (4)
- Developers. (3)
- The homesteaders are influential, Soldotna is a young town. (3)
- Mix between developers and city officials. (1)
- Hospital. (1)
- Tourists. (1)
- Should be business and residents. (1)
- DOT. (1)

4. Do you believe that there are traffic issues? If so, what are they? Where? How often?

- Yes
 - Traffic issues are in the summer. (6)
 - Build another bridge over the river from Redoubt to the college. (7)
 - Provide for traffic calming and additional cross walks for pedestrian safety .(4)
 - A bypass would help traffic but may adversely affect economy. (2)
 - Public safety concerns during the increase of July traffic require heightened awareness or warnings. (1)
 - Tourism has increased over time related to visitors. Year round traffic has increased substantially, there are more residents, and more Anchorage people come down on a regular basis to visit their family and property, more out of state residents visit their properties. (1)
 - Synchronize traffic lights. (1)
 - Traffic is an issue even on the side streets. (1)
 - Provide for a snow machine corridor within the city. (1)
 - Specific areas with traffic issues.
 - DOT site is not a good location, it is dangerous for kids to cross highway to the proposed kiddie park-overpass. (6)
 - Visitor Center. (5)
 - A left turn in July. (4)
 - Crossing the highway to get to Soldotna Creek Park during events such as the Kenai River festival is dangerous. (2)
 - A traffic light at Birch and the Sterling Highway is needed. (2)
 - Sports Center. (2)
 - A traffic light at Birch and the Highway is not a good solution. (1)
 - Kalifornsky Beach Road and Sterling Highway. (1)
 - Brinkley and the Kenai Spur. (1)
 - Sterling Highway. (1)
 - Centennial Park. (1)
 - School traffic. (1)

- No
 - Traffic is not bad, especially on the inner streets and with the new bridge. Though there is additional traffic in the summer, most people are used to it. (10)

5. Do people walk to places? If so, where? If not, why not?

- Yes
 - Many people walk, distances between destinations is short. Many biking and walking trails are available which extend almost to Kenai. (11)
 - People walk when the sidewalks are clear. In winter the sidewalks are not cleared. (7)
 - Walking is becoming more prevalent as health awareness grows. (3)
 - People walk away from the traffic of the highway. (2)

- No
 - Winter is too cold with trails and sidewalks left uncleared of snow and summer has too much traffic. (7)
 - People do not walk much, especially in the downtown, it is too spread out. (5)
 - Additional trails and crosswalks would encourage walking. Sidewalks are too narrow and cross walks at road crossings are needed. There is no right-of-way to cross streets and people do not stop. (5)
 - Additional trails along the river are needed. (1)
 - Not a pleasant environment, not enough emphasis on beautification. (1)

6. Is parking an issue? If so, why? When? Where?

- Yes
 - Parking in the summer is an issue. (4)
 - Parking standards for development are excessive. (5)
 - There is not enough parking in winter especially with snow storage. (2)
 - Centralized parking would encourage walking. (2)
 - Allow street parking during non-snow months. (2)
 - Should not allow camping in store parking lots. (1)
 - Sustainable issues should be addressed, such as storm water runoff and non-point source pollution. Should consider pervious paving, etc. (1)
 - Parking is an issue for people with small children. Spaces near the stores should be reserved for residents with cars. Motor homes should be required to park in the distant parking spaces. (1)
 - Residential streets do not have parking. (1)
 - Specific locations with parking issues
 - Soldotna Creek Park during events such as Progress Days. (2)
 - City Hall. (1)
 - Borough building. (1)
 - Major retail hubs. (1)
 - Hospital. (1)
 - Visitor Center. (1)
 - Tour buses. (1)
 - Library. (1)
 - Safeway. (1)
- No
 - Parking is generally not an issue, especially for new development. (13)
 - Parking will never be adequate in the summer months. (4)
 - The “no parking on the street” code is good. (2)

7. Is there a downtown? Is so, where? If not, where should it be?

- Yes
 - Between the Y and the Bridge. (9)

- Soldotna Creek Park is turning into a community center. (5)
- The Y to ¾ mile up the Spur Highway. (2)
- Yes, according to Alaska standards. (1)
- Begins when driving into town and encounter the 35 mph zone. (1)

- No
 - Soldotna does not have a downtown, development is random and the city is too spread out along the highway. (9)
 - Soldotna is a highway town and was not planned with a typical downtown. (2)
 - A city center should include both the river and city with both a business and social aspect. (2)
 - Move the visitor center to a location on the river next to Soldotna Creek Park. (2)
 - Sterling-Kenai Spur Highways are not aesthetically a downtown and are not pedestrian friendly. (1)
 - There used to be a downtown close to the intersection of Spur and Sterling Highway, the Y was the center of town. (1)
 - Currently people gather in the two grocery stores. (1)
 - A city center should be developed:
 - Around the river. (2)
 - Inside the city, near the hospital and away from the river. (2)
 - Area from Birch to Brinkley to Redoubt. (2)
 - Not all businesses should be concentrated on the strip. The downtown should be in the school district area, i.e. there is an empty lot behind the city hall. A city center is needed, perhaps with a fountain and play area for kids. (1)
 - Along Sterling Highway expanding to Kenai. (1)
 - From Peninsula Center Mall/Borough building toward the Kenai River Hotel.
 - Sterling Highway to Redoubt to Kobuk. (1)
 - Sterling Highway to Carrs Mall. (1)
 - Utilize the mall as an indoor mainstreet. (1)
 - Integrate the trailer park. (1)
 - Brinkley area through the airport. (1)

8. What is the relationship of the City to the River? Should it change? If so, how?

- The river is important to the City.
 - The river is extremely important to Soldotna. (7)
 - Income is provided through tourism on the river. (1)

- The City's relationship to the river is improving
 - City has a responsibility to be an environmental steward of the river. It should promote sustainable development and education for the tourists on the responsible use of the river. (7)

- The City's relationship to the river is evolving. The river can't help but be part of the downtown and the relationship is improving. Soldotna Creek Park is a good addition as well as the new playground and fishing walkways. (5)
 - Soldotna should capitalize on the river more. (3)
 - The river is the focus of the community, but it separates the city. The city was not built to focus on the river. (2)
 - The Kenai River Center should be located on the river with boardwalks, fish walks, retail shops, etc. (2)
 - Fishing should be managed responsibly to ensure the viability of fish. (1)
 - Soldotna is Alaska's Kenai River City. It should be emphasized and exploited in a "green" way. (1)
 - Provide better access, awareness, and signage. (1)
 - The location of the watershed forum and educational signs will further expand this relationship. (1)
 - A corridor is needed to connect a river shopping area to the business hub. (1)
 - A pedestrian crossing from the residential neighborhoods to the river is needed to cross the 4 lane busy street. (1)
- The river is not important to the City
 - The river is not noticed, nothing says "the Kenai". The businesses along the river turn their backs to the river. (3)
 - The community has an incidental relationship to the river. Most people do not live here because of the river. (2)
 - The river has become very commercial and fishing boats have become antagonistic and competitive. Boat waves erode the shores and banks have dropped 30-40'. Drift boats would have less impact. (1)
 - The river has a value, though most businesses don't care about river frontage. (1)

9. Are you aware of how the City finances its operations and improvements? Do you think there are other sources of funding?

- Sales Tax. City sales tax 3% plus 3% borough tax. (23)
- Increase cooperative effort with non-profits. (5)
- Implement a seasonal sales tax. (3)
- Some property tax. (2)

10. Does the City provide services to people living outside city limits? How are these funded? Do the people receiving the services bear the cost? Should it change? If so, how?

- People
 - Maverick and extreme people live at the end of the road, they are individuals. (2)
 - Many people live outside the city intentionally to avoid the additional costs of taxes, etc. (2)

- Services
 - Good services are provided to those outside the city limits, including ambulance, fire, police, and library. (5)
 - The City provides some services to those outside the city limits but not to all within the limits. (3)
 - City believes they provide more services than the community thinks they do. (2)
 - Services are funded by user fees and sales tax. (1)

- Revisit Annexation.
 - Extend the city limits so those who benefit from city services share the tax burden.(10)
 - Any annexation process should include much community involvement; the last effort was legislative and very aggressive. (3)
 - The city should provide incentives to make annexation more attractive. (1)
 - No annexation. Property owners should be able to decide if they want to be annexed or not. Property-by-property, not in large chunks. (1)

11. Do you feel that Soldotna is pro-business? If so, how? If not, what obstacles are there to business development?

- Yes
 - Soldotna is pro-business. (10)
 - Soldotna is pro-business, sometimes too much so. Businesses can do a lot of “arm twisting” to avoid following ordinances. Though some regulations can be hard on small businesses, there should be a willingness of the city to make things work. (2)
 - The city has done a lot to improve quality of development through regulations. (1)
 - There is a sense of opportunity in Soldotna. (1)
 - Soldotna is now pro-business with the new city manager and mayor. (1)
 - Soldotna is pro-business though may not be sufficiently organized to compete. (1)

- No
 - Soldotna is not pro-business, too many regulations and inconsistent enforcement – parking-signage-access. (8)
 - Limited space limits business opportunities. (2)
 - Need a regional approach. Work with Kenai. (2)
 - Does not have enough business and attractions to draw young people. (2)
 - Wasn’t in the past, but should become so. (1)
 - Soldotna is small town that doesn’t realize it’s potential. There is general apathy toward development by the community. (1)
 - Need to attract big box stores. (1)

12. If you were King of Soldotna for one year, what three things would you want to do during your reign?

- Development
 - Think long term, unify and interface with Kenai, sewer/water issue, bus service. (7)

- Develop and expand the downtown/city center. (6)
 - Encourage new retail business. Expand Peninsula Center Mall to include some large chains, such as Target, Chiles, GAP, Old Navy, and Titlewaves. (4)
 - Expand industry – such as a long haul airport. (3)
 - Create better public spaces. (2)
 - Improve opportunities for spouses when recruiting. (2)
 - Develop alternative energy, tidal fluctuations, wind, etc. (2)
 - Integrate Kenai Peninsula College activities into the city and river. (2)
 - Produce a regional development and land use plan to plan and direct growth. (2)
 - 20 Year Vision – A community with planned and controlled growth. A thriving family community with the look and feel of a resort town. (1)
 - Establish a shared vision for the future of the peninsula. (1)
 - Eliminate the airport. Use airport land for public river access, arts/science, and subdivide the rest. (1)
 - Develop airport to compete with Kenai. (1)
 - Review what resources have been used and what the city has received in exchange. (1)
 - Mitigate the effects of tourism. (1)
 - Move visitor center to entrance of town near Soldotna Creek Park. (1)
 - Develop the Soldotna water front park and river banks with boardwalks, fish walks, and trails. (1)
 - Provide lighting on streets, in parks, etc. (1)
 - Purchase the surrounding land and annex it to the city. (1)
 - Develop community and facilities for integrated age groups including seniors, singles, families, and children. (1)
- Improve aesthetics
 - Develop Soldotna into a vibrant town with interesting architecture, more of an Alaska theme; examples include Banff, Leavenworth, Silverthorne, Vail, and Aspen. (10)
 - Improve aesthetics for highway, business, and residential development. (3)
 - Become a community with an identity. (1)
 - Bring aesthetics out from the neighborhoods to the highway. (1)
 - Change aesthetics on Spur and Sterling. (1)
 - Provide a visual barrier between the elementary school and the highway. (1)
 - Fix or move the section of town that has the rodeo grounds. (1)
 - Provide for maintenance of outdoor space, amenities, and vegetation. (1)
 - Improve cultural activities
 - Develop cultural atmosphere in Soldotna. (2)
 - Provide for traffic calming and pedestrian overpasses. (2)
 - Promote cultural activities on the river. (1)
 - Develop downtown attractions. (1)
 - Develop convention/civic center at the sports center. (1)
 - Construct a large building to host functions, theatre. (1)

- Improve recreational activities
 - Promote a winter city and shoulder season. Provide family activities in winter. (8)
 - Develop a path on the river from Soldotna Creek Park to Centennial Park. (4)
 - Construct a walking path from Swift Water Park to the college. (1)
 - Develop a youth institute to provide opportunities for writing classes, dance, music, and art. (1)
 - Provide drift boat access along the river. (1)
 - Develop a float plane base at Headquarter Lake. (1)
 - Upgrade campgrounds for visitors. (1)
 - Move the visitor center to Soldotna Creek Park. (1)
 - Improve visitor resources. (1)
 - Skate Park with benches. (1)
 - Build a beginner ice rink. (1)
 - Develop more parks throughout the city. (1)

- The Kenai River
 - Protect the river and provide for tiered zoning in order to keep certain uses away from the river. (2)
 - Increase the focus on the river. (1)
 - Improve access and signage. (1)

13. What do you think is unique or special about Soldotna? What is your vision of Soldotna in 20 years?

- Quality of life - Location, river, people, good schools, good to raise kids, safe, affordable, small town, walkable, and friendly. (24)
- Soldotna offers opportunities for all activities available in Alaska all in one place, providing more options than a typical rural town, including access to the mountains and river, fresh water, clean air, fishing, snow machining, float planes, good PBS station, charter schools. (6)
- Good trail system. (2)
- Soldotna has an intimate relationship with the river. (1)
- Good opportunities for careers, education, and housing. (1)
- Outstanding health care. (1)
- Soldotna will grow and the hospital will continue to expand in the next 20 years. (1)

14. What do you believe are the best ways to reach the people who should be involved in and provide input into this planning process?

- Meetings
 - Organize a town meeting or several meetings on different days. (3)
 - There is a strong community feeling and people are willing to participate in this planning effort. (1)
 - Follow “main street” charrette format (1)

- Presenting at meetings that are already happening is a good way to reach people, Chamber, Senior Center, Realtors, Rotary, and Native Associations. Presentations at “hang out” places, such as the Donut Shop, Gingers Restaurant, Good Time Charlies, Veronicas Restaurant in Kenai. (3)
- Through non-profits or organized groups. Most people will not come to meetings. (1)
- Most opinions will come from like-minded people; they are the ones interested in this planning process. It will be difficult to get the majority of the people to come to meetings and get involved. (1)
- Point-tell-paint – Point out the need – tell how to address it – paint the picture. (1)
- Listen to all groups – mayor or city council. (1)

- Personal Contact
 - Local Events, River Festival, Progress Days, and the Arctic Winter Games. (4)
 - Phone interviews. (1)
 - City has done a good job in reaching people. (1)
 - Emails, calls, newsletters. (1)
 - Ask the mayor to be the “cheerleader”. (1)
 - Involve kids. (1)

- Advertisement
 - Post flyers at “hang out” locations, see “meetings” above. (4)
 - Newspaper ads, articles, and inserts (4)
 - Radio ads (3)
 - Get tourist input by posting flyers at the visitor center or adds in tourist magazines. (1)
 - Website (1)

15. What is the easiest way for you to participate? Reviewing and commenting on-line? One on one meetings to discuss concerns/issues? Small roundtables or focus groups of diverse interests or for particular issues?

- Small round table focus groups (3)
- One on one meetings (2)
- Telephone. (1)

16. Are there specific event time periods that we should avoid meetings in? [Review draft schedule]

- Avoid summer. (10)
- Avoid end of January-beginning of February. (1)