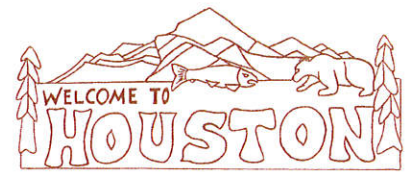


# CITY OF HOUSTON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN





# CITY OF HOUSTON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



ADOPTED SEPTEMBER 8, 2016  
HOUSTON CITY COUNCIL ORDINANCE 16-22

CITY OF HOUSTON  
VIRGIE THOMPSON, MAYOR



PREPARED BY:  
R&M CONSULTANTS, INC.  
VAN LE, AICP, PROJECT MANAGER

# CITY OF HOUSTON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION

## MAYOR'S MESSAGE

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Dear Citizens of Houston,

It is with great pride that I, along with the City Council and the Planning Commission, present the City of Houston this Comprehensive Plan.

The Comprehensive Plan highlights our resources and development opportunities, which include jobs, economic vitality and revitalization, educational opportunities, safety, security and preservation of Houston's unique character.

The Comprehensive Plan is a living and breathing document which represents the future for Houston. Through its goals, objectives and policies, the plan will serve as our roadmap for the future. The Comprehensive Plan recommends specific actions and projects: but, more importantly, it gives the community a standard measuring tool to help evaluate proposals and plans for development.

Having an updated comprehensive plan is critical to Houston's future success. On behalf of the City Council, I wish to extend our thanks to R&M Consultants, Inc., specifically the project manager Van Le, the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, the Planning Commission, staff and the citizens that participated in preparing this plan.

Sincerely,

Virgie Thompson  
Mayor

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

---

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# 7

CITY OF  
HOUSTON  
Comprehensive Plan





# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

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Houston, Alaska is a growing rural residential community that has developed around the Parks Highway, a National Highway Systems Highway bisecting the community. A rural town setting within 15 minutes of urban amenities, Houston is at a crossroads for change and growth.

## NEED AND PURPOSE FOR REVISED PLAN

---

In 2016, the City of Houston's Comprehensive Plan underwent a revision. Originally written in 1999 by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and amended in 2003, the City of Houston now assumed the responsibility of revising its Comprehensive Plan. Comprehensive Plans are used as a tool to guide future growth, development, and change within a community. Emphasized by the experiences in other Matanuska-Susitna Borough communities, unplanned development creates numerous economic, social, and governmental problems. The City of Houston recognizes that these problems are largely preventable with proper planning and clear implementation strategies.

Population growth, with its increased demand for services, as well as major transportation infrastructure projects underway within or adjacent to the City of Houston, have prompted the city to determine and thus capitalize on future opportunities. Such possibilities will arise from changes in the community's infrastructure, economy and development. Since the adoption of the amended 2003 Plan, multiple new sets of census data have become available and a Community Impact Assessment is underway simultaneously with this effort. In addition, information on transportation infrastructure initiatives by the Alaska

Department of Transportation & Public Facilities and Alaska Rail Road anticipated in the Houston area in the near future has become available. With significant development changes affecting the community's qualities of life anticipated, it has become crucial that the City of Houston revise the 2003 Comprehensive Plan.

The Comprehensive Plan Revision seeks to describe the community's vision as it responds to future growth and development changes. It provides direction for development decisions and future growth in Houston. The Plan Revision validates the community's core values. They include accommodating orderly growth; the need for enhanced education, health, and governmental services; promoting local employment and economic opportunity; and maintaining a high quality semi-rural residential environment.

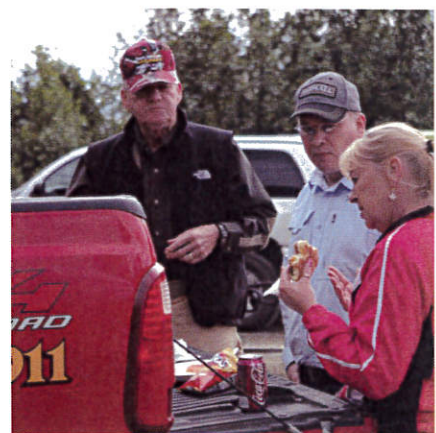
## PLANNING CONTEXT

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### RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANS, MSB, ZONING REGULATIONS

Alaska Statute 29.40.020. requires the submission of a comprehensive plan for the systematic and organized development of first and second class boroughs or cities. Alaska Statute 29.40.030 outlines the requirements of a comprehensive plan.

Although the City of Houston is its own jurisdiction, this comprehensive plan is part of the overall Matanuska Susitna Borough Comprehensive Plan.



Cities in the Borough are responsible for the creation and updating of their individual comprehensive plans. The City of Houston's Land Use Regulations, Title 10 of the Municipal Code, is designed "to regulate the use of land and improvements, in accordance with the City of Houston Comprehensive Plan." The Comprehensive Plan provides guidelines for land use regulations and development in compliance with community defined goals. Together, the Land Use Regulations and the Comprehensive Plan provide the basis for consistent development and provide a tool to adhere to the community's vision of what Houston should be like 20 years forward. If subarea plans are developed and adopted in the future by the City of Houston, those subarea plans become part of this Comprehensive Plan.

## WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

A Comprehensive Plan reflects a community's goals, objectives and policies for governing future land uses and its desired future. Comprehensive Plans provide the best prediction, based on existing conditions, of the future growth and development of a community through implementation of adopted policies and strategic actions. Comprehensive Plans typically plan for a 20-year future with provisions

to check in and revise plans if new information arises, such as updated population and Census data. This Comprehensive Plan validates the community's core values, needs, and desires while providing a framework for development in the City of Houston through the year 2035.

## HOW WILL THIS PLAN BE USED?

The Comprehensive Plan serves as a guiding document for policy makers, the city council, state, federal, and local agencies, and the general public in evaluating if regulatory actions, public investments, and land use changes meet the Plan's goals and objectives. As a guidance document, this Comprehensive Plan does not make decisions about individual properties or specific facilities and thus does not limit future decisions by making an overly detailed future vision.

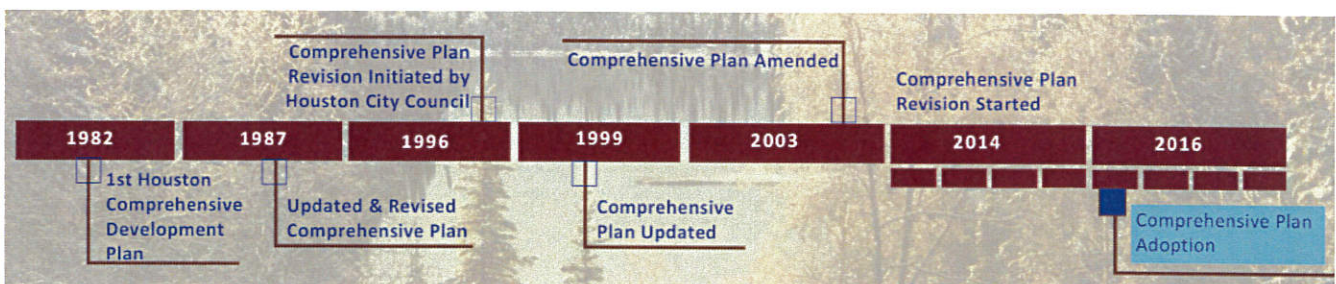
## HOW WILL THIS PLAN BE IMPLEMENTED?

The Comprehensive Plan will be implemented through the policies and action strategies identified in Chapter 7 of the plan.

## PLAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The Comprehensive Plan Update occurred over a two year period and included multiple public involvement opportunities, technical studies, and continuous support from the Steering Committee. The process included:

- Existing Conditions Inventory and Report
- 2003 Comprehensive Plan Reevaluation
- Public Outreach: Futures Workshop  
Community Household Survey
- Economic Analysis
- Community Impact Assessment
- Public Outreach: Community Impact Assessment Open House
- Land Use Assessment
- Draft Land Use and Transportation Plan
- Draft Comprehensive Plan
- Public Outreach: Comprehensive Plan Review Open House
- Final Comprehensive Plan Revision.



# 11

CITY OF  
HOUSTON  
Comprehensive Plan







# CHAPTER 2: COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

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This chapter summarizes the physical environment within the City of Houston, including historical development, existing land use characteristics, public facilities, and transportation system.

## LOCATION

The City of Houston, Alaska is located in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, approximately 57 road miles from Anchorage, Alaska's largest employment and population center. Located 7.5 miles northwest of Wasilla and adjacent to Big Lake, Houston is along the western edge of the most populous portion of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Houston's city limits encompass about 25.3 square miles, ranging from Mile 61 of the Parks Highway at the northern boundary to Mile 52 at the southern boundary. The center of the community lies near the junction of the Little Susitna River and Mile 57.2 of the Parks Highway. The commercial and residential development along the first mile of Big Lake Road lies within the Houston city limits.

The Alaska Railroad traverses the Parks Highway within the city limits. The Port MacKenzie Rail Extension runs from its junction with the main line south of the Little Susitna River in Houston and continues 32 miles southwest to the port at Point MacKenzie. Full air service

is available at Anchorage International Airport. Other local air service is available at small Mat-Su airports and a local seaplane base on Morvvo Lake. See Figure 1. Project Area.

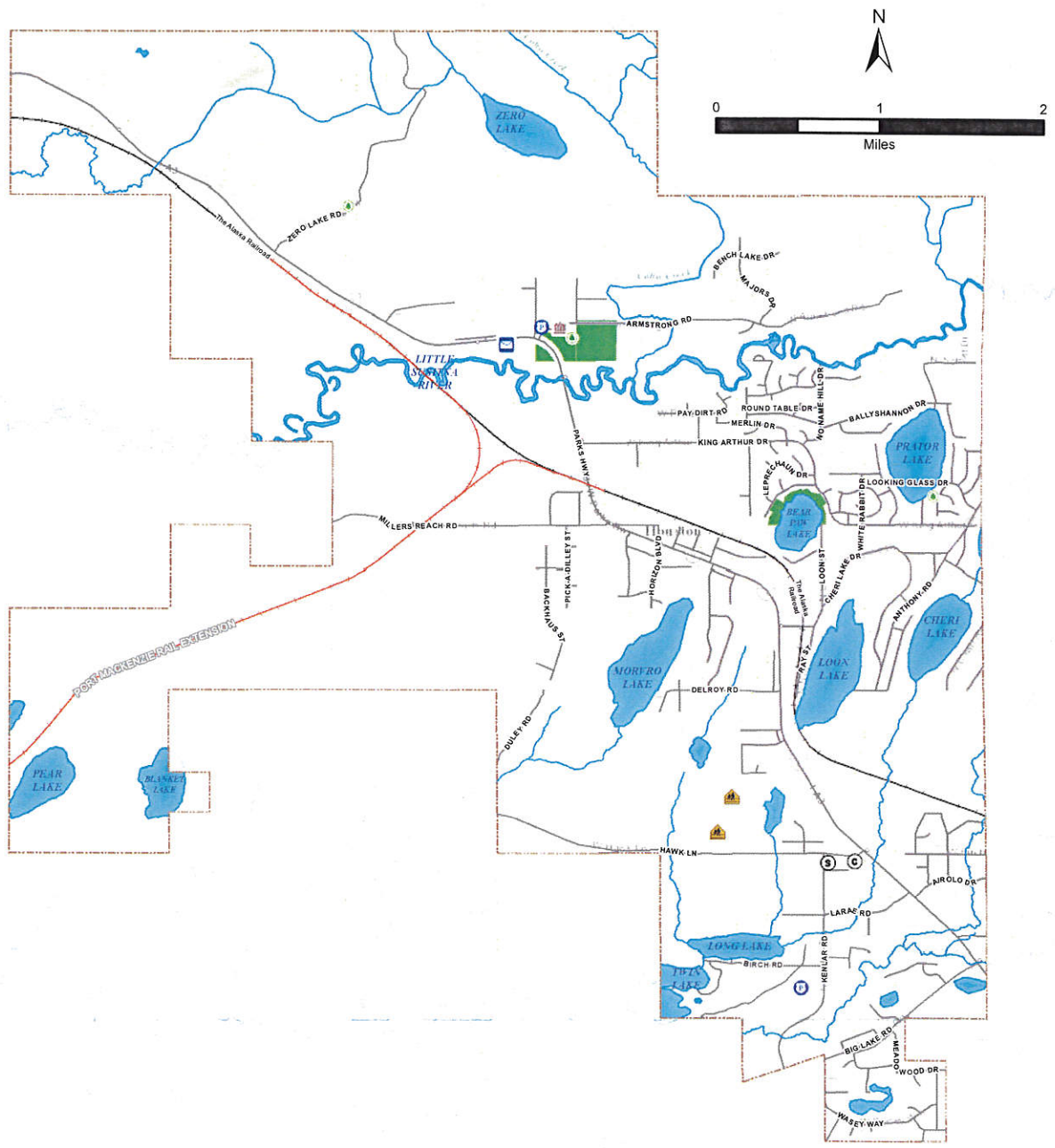
conditions in 1987, 1999, and the most recent amendment in 2003. In keeping with the community's commitment to prepare for changing opportunities in the community's infrastructure, economy, population, and development, the City of Houston initiated this revision in 2014.

## HISTORY, DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS, TIMELINE

Houston, Alaska was first listed on a 1917 blueprint Alaska railroad map as "Houston Siding," named after Tennessee Congressman William Cannon Houston. The city's origins began with natural resource development and the Herning Trail. Now called the Willow Creek Sled Trail, it was first used to freight supplies to the Willow Creek Mining District, according to the State of Alaska's Community and Regional Affairs database. Several coal mines developed in the area in 1917-1918 and a railroad spur was built that supplied coal to Anchorage and the LaTouche Mining Company in Prince William Sound. The coal from Houston was heavily mined through World War II, after which mine operations shut down. In 1953-1954 gravel roads and power lines were extended west of Wasilla and Houston quickly settled. Houston incorporated as a third-class city in 1966 and was reclassified in 1973 to a second-class city. The City of Houston has historically grown and continues to be a residential community with a few commercial developments adjacent to the Parks Highway.

In June of 1982, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly, on behalf of the City of Houston, officially adopted the city's first Comprehensive Development Plan. The city updated and revised the comprehensive plan to reflect more accurately changing economic

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**LEGEND**

- |               |                               |               |                  |
|---------------|-------------------------------|---------------|------------------|
| City Boundary | Railroad                      | City Hall     | Community Center |
| Parcels       | Port MacKenzie Rail Extension | Public Safety | Senior Center    |
| Park          |                               | Post Office   | Recreational     |
|               |                               | School        |                  |

CITY OF HOUSTON  
 COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT  
 AND  
 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION

PROJECT AREA  
 JUNE 2016  
 FIGURE 1

## PHYSICAL SETTING

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Houston's pastoral setting is against the backdrop of the Talkeetna Mountains with the Little Susitna River running east-west through the city boundaries. Lakes are scattered throughout the city, attracting many residents and non-residential recreational users.

## SOILS

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Soils in Houston generally range from well-drained, well-sorted gravel to hydric wetland soils. A number of small lakes dot the central and southern portions of the community limits and are bordered by glacial moraines consisting of non-sorted glacial till. Soils located south of the Little Susitna River and east of the Parks Highway are generally well drained sand and gravels of pitted outwash and till material. Larger intermittent areas of poorly drained soils and peat bogs occur to the west of the Parks Highway.

The northern topography is characterized by rolling hills and perched silty areas. These soils are fine grained and poorly draining. Development within the area is sparse with only a few gravel pits cut into glacial moraine and esker/kame complexes.

Soils in the central portion of Houston are suitable for cultivated crops and agricultural development. Portions of these areas are presently zoned for low density residential and agricultural use.

## WATERBODIES

---

Approximately 864 acres, or 5%, of Houston consists of surface waters. The most notable is the Little Susitna River which crosses the Parks Highway in the middle of the community. This river originates in the Talkeetna Mountains in Hatcher Pass and flows southwest ultimately into Cook Inlet. The Little Susitna River, Coho Creek, and a number of contributing unnamed streams are listed in the Anadromous (salmon producing) Waters Catalog.

Several popular lakes exist within the City limits including Zero Lake, Bear Paw Lake, Prator Lake, Frog Lake, Cheri Lake, Loon Lake and Morvro Lake. Bear Paw, Prator, Morvro, and Loon Lakes are stocked annually with various fish species. There are no designated "Impaired Waterbodies" within the city of Houston.

## WETLANDS

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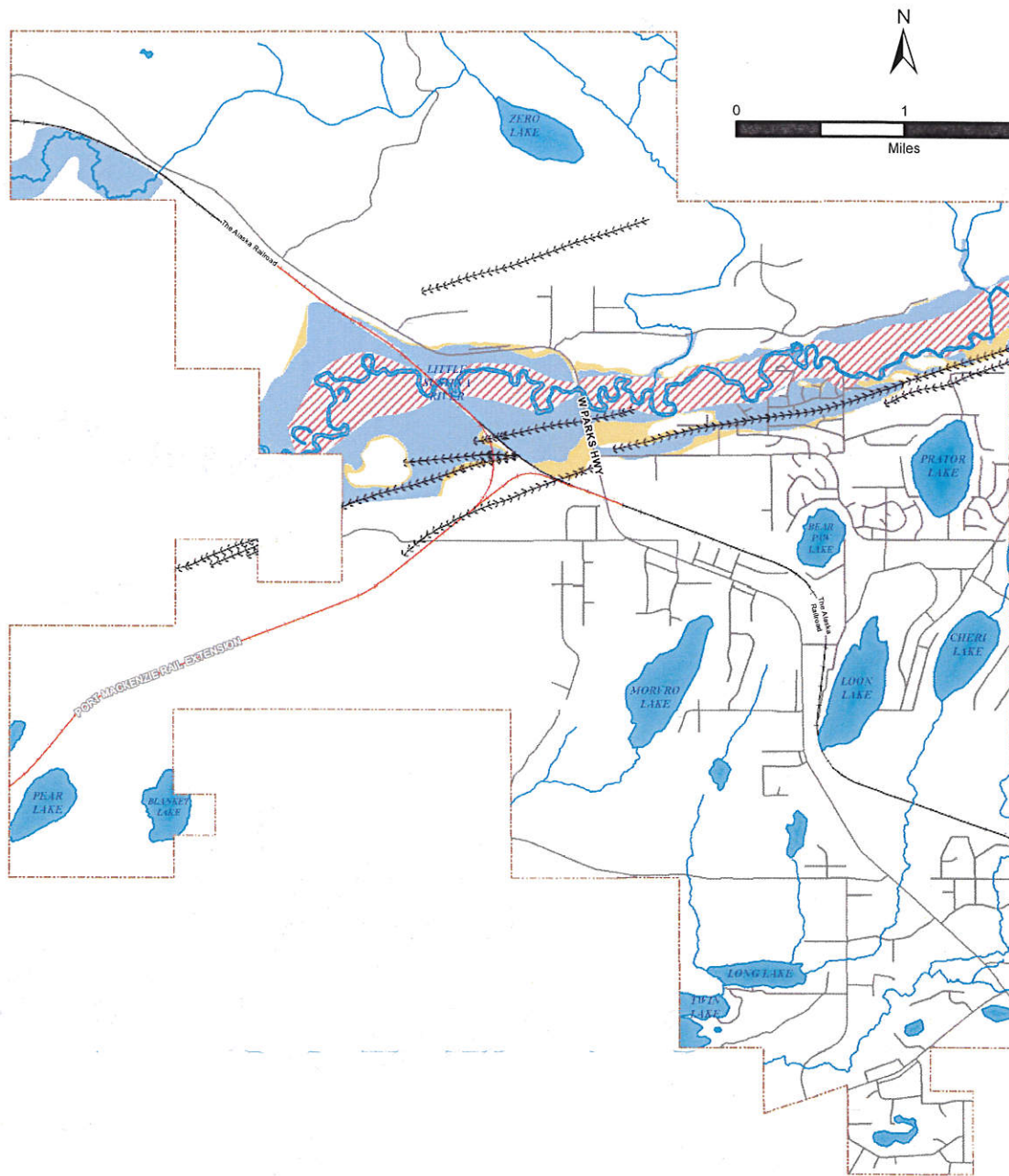
A number of riverine, lacustrine, and palustrine wetlands are present within Houston. Most wetlands are riparian buffers along the Little Susitna River, Coho Creek, and surrounding ponds. Several other wetlands are present in low lying areas between Zero Lake and the Little Susitna River.

## FLOODPLAINS

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The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) completed a Flood Insurance Study and remapped the Special Flood Hazard Areas for the Mat-Su Borough. The Borough adopted the new floodplain mapped in 2011 which shows the floodplain surrounding the Little Susitna River; see Figure 2 Flood Zones. A floodplain development permit from the Borough is required prior to building or development within a federally designated flood hazard area.

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**LEGEND**

**Flood Hazard Areas**

-  Floodway
-  1% Annual Chance of Flooding
-  0.2% Annual Chance of Flood hazard
-  Area of Minimal or Undetermined Flood Hazard
-  Castle Mountain Fault (Susitna Section)

CITY OF HOUSTON

COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT  
AND  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION

FLOOD ZONES AND FAULTS MAP

JUNE 2016

FIGURE 2

## LAND USE

Approximately 16,210 acres of land are within the City of Houston. The City has eleven distinct zoning districts that implement the policies of the Comprehensive Plan. The zoning districts are a part of Houston's Municipal Land Use Regulations. The table to the right summarizes the current zoning district area by type. See Figure 3 Existing Zoning.

Of the approximately 16,210 acres within the City of Houston, almost 80% or 12,961 acres of that total land is undeveloped. Approximately 15% of the total land in Houston is currently being used for residential purposes. The following table summarizes the area of existing land uses by type and Figure 4 Existing Land Use shows currently land use in Houston.

There are approximately 7,570 acres of land zoned for residential uses within the City of Houston. Currently, 15% of that zoned land is being used for residential purposes. The following table summarizes the vacant residentially zoned land by residential zoning district.

The few existing commercial land uses are mostly concentrated to the city's southern border where the Parks Highway and Big Lake Road intersect, which is congruent with existing zoning. Commercial development in this location reflects the greater area trend of development along the Parks Highway and the expansion north from Anchorage and Wasilla, which is anticipated to continue.

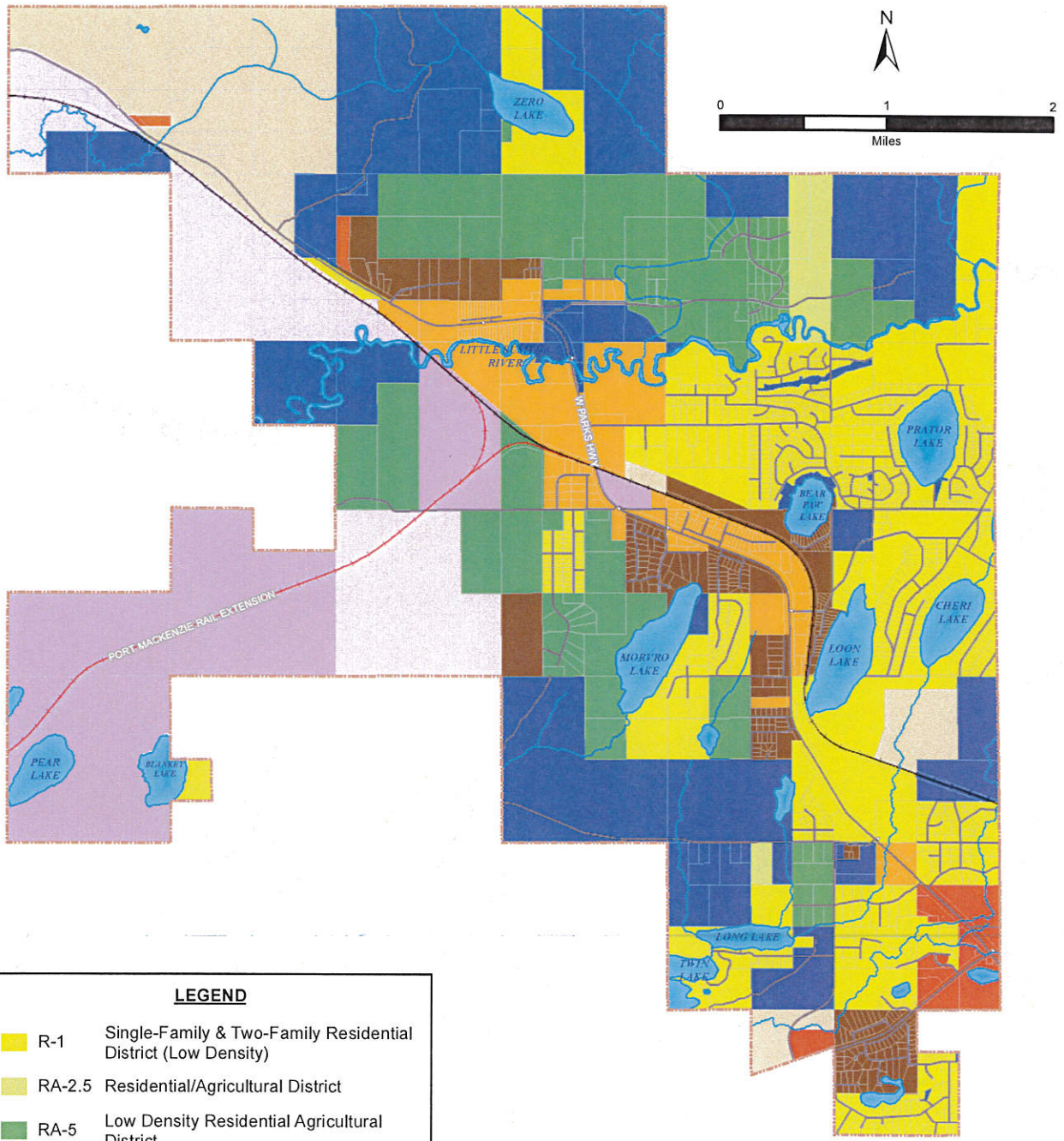
The Alaska Railroad extension from Port MacKenzie to the mainline through Houston has increased the amount of land used for transportation purposes and provides an opportunity for more transportation support uses to emerge in the future. This would be a new trend in Houston's land use which remains dominantly residential.

| Zoning District                                | Approx. Area (acres) | Percent of Total Land |
|--|----------------------|-----------------------|
| PLI – Public Lands and Institutions            | 3450                 | 21.28%                |
| R-1 - Single-family and Two-family Residential | 3940                 | 24.30%                |
| MFR – Multifamily Residential                  | 960                  | 5.92%                 |
| RA 2.5 – Residential / Agriculture             | 190                  | 1.17%                 |
| RA 5 – Low-Density Residential Agriculture     | 2480                 | 15.30%                |
| NC – Neighborhood Commercial District          | 0                    | 0%                    |
| C – Commercial District                        | 210                  | 1.30%                 |
| LI – Light Industrial                          | 1290                 | 7.96%                 |
| HI – Heavy Industrial                          | 1460                 | 9.01%                 |
| H – Holding District                           | 1270                 | 7.83%                 |
| PH – Parks Highway District                    | 960                  | 5.92%                 |

Source: City of Houston Zoning Map, November 2015

| Zoning | Vacant (Acres) | Land Use                         | Area (acres) | % of Total |
|--------|----------------|----------------------------------|--------------|------------|
| R-1    | 2582           | Churches                         | 2            | 0.01%      |
| RA-2.5 | 55             | Commercial – Heavy               | 12           | 0.07%      |
| RA-5   | 1690           | Commercial – Light               | 32           | 0.20%      |
| MFR    | 416            | Communications                   | 10           | 0.06%      |
| Total  | 4327           | Duplex – Two-Family              | 11           | 0.07%      |
|        |                | Education – Public               | 241          | 1.49%      |
|        |                | Mobile Home                      | 97           | 0.60%      |
|        |                | Mobile Home Parks                | 1            | 0.01%      |
|        |                | Multi Family                     | 12           | 0.07%      |
|        |                | Public Use                       | 18           | 0.11%      |
|        |                | Public Safety                    | 93           | 0.57%      |
|        |                | Recreation                       | 3            | 0.02%      |
|        |                | Residential                      | 2435         | 15.02%     |
|        |                | Residential Garage               | 261          | 1.61%      |
|        |                | Residential W/<br>Commercial Use | 10           | 0.06%      |
|        |                | Transient Lodging                | 11           | 0.07%      |
|        |                | Vacant                           | 12961        | 79.96%     |
|        |                | Total                            | 16,210       | 100%       |

Source: City of Houston Land Use Map, per Mat-Su Borough Assessment Office



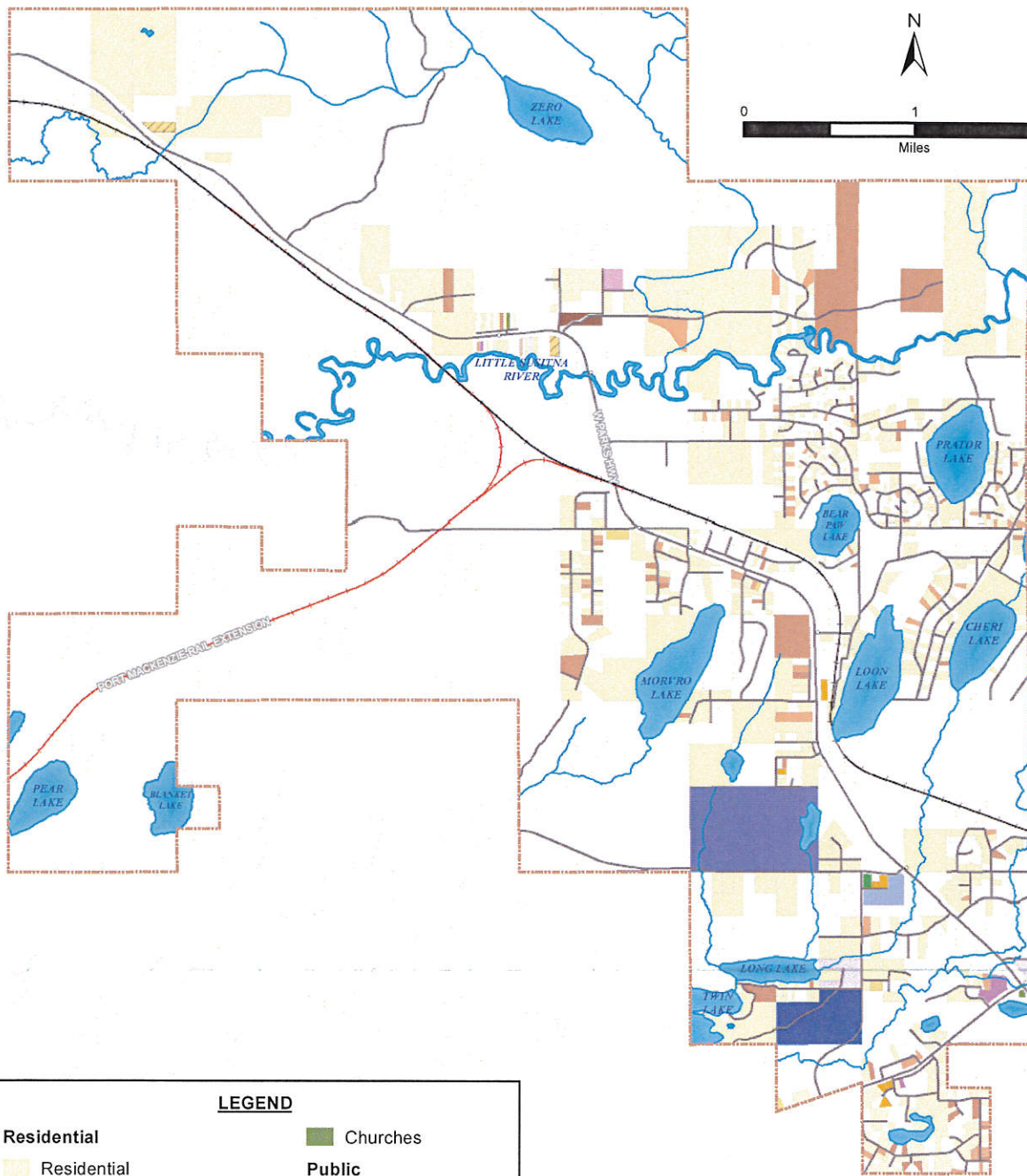
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|   |        |   |
|---|--------|---|
| <span style="color: yellow;">■</span>     | R-1    | Single-Family & Two-Family Residential District (Low Density) |
| <span style="color: lightgreen;">■</span> | RA-2.5 | Residential/Agricultural District                             |
| <span style="color: green;">■</span>      | RA-5   | Low Density Residential Agricultural District                 |
| <span style="color: brown;">■</span>      | MFR    | Multi-Family Residential District (Medium Density)            |
| <span style="color: orange;">■</span>     | C      | Commercial  |
| <span style="color: lightgrey;">■</span>  | LI     | Light Industrial District                                     |
| <span style="color: purple;">■</span>     | HI     | Heavy Industrial District                                     |
| <span style="color: blue;">■</span>       | PLI    | Public Lands and Institutions                                 |
| <span style="color: tan;">■</span>        | H      | Holding District  |
| <span style="color: orange;">■</span>     | PH     | Parks Highway District  |

|   |
|---|
| CITY OF HOUSTON   |
| COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT<br>AND<br>COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION |
| EXISTING ZONING   |
| JUNE 2016   |

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| LEGEND                        |                     |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Residential</b>            | <b>Churches</b>     |
| Residential                   | Churches            |
| Duplex                        | <b>Public</b>       |
| Multi Family                  | Public              |
| Mobile Home                   | Education - Public  |
| Mobile Home Parks             | Public Safety       |
| Residential Garage            | <b>Commercial</b>   |
| Residential W/ Commercial Use | Communications      |
| Transient Lodging             | Commercial - Light  |
| <b>Community</b>              | Commercial - Heavy  |
| Recreation                    | <b>Unclassified</b> |
|                               | Vacant              |

Note: Land use designations based on the MSB GIS parcel dataset Building Use 1 attribute.

|   |
|---|
| CITY OF HOUSTON   |
| COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT<br>AND<br>COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION |
| EXISTING LAND USE   |
| JUNE 2016   |

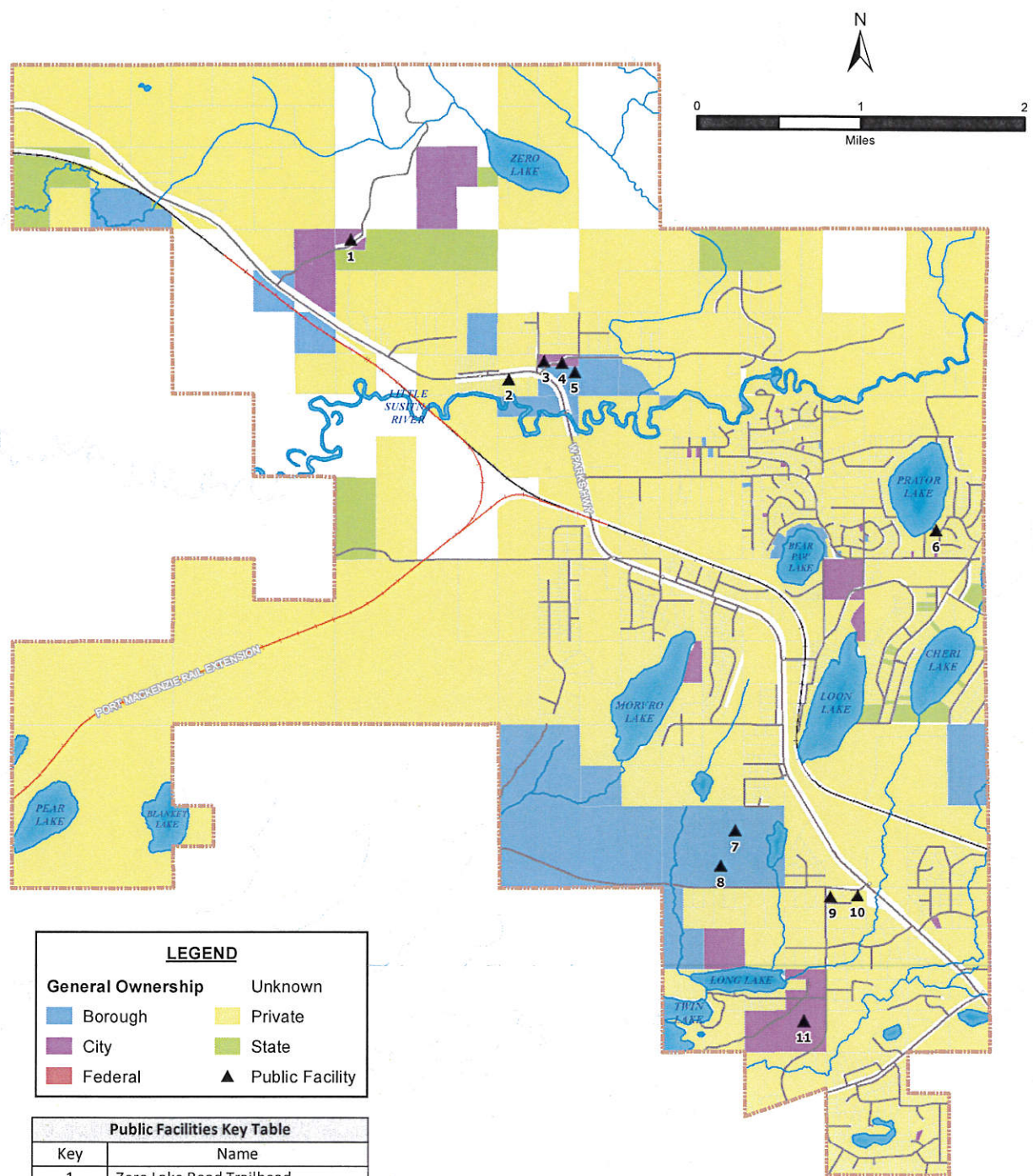
FIGURE 4



## LAND OWNERSHIP

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The Existing Land Ownership map depicts the landownership status for all parcels within the City of Houston's limits. The majority of land is privately owned, about 14,000 acres of the total 16,210 acres. Other large tract land owners include the City of Houston, 420 acres, and the Mat-Su Borough's 1,200 acres. The State of Alaska also owns about 470 acres of land in the city. See Figure 5 Existing Land Ownership.



**LEGEND**

|   |  |         |
|---|--|---------|
| <b>General Ownership</b>                    |  | Unknown |
| <span style="color: blue;">■</span> Borough | <span style="color: yellow;">■</span> Private        |         |
| <span style="color: purple;">■</span> City  | <span style="color: green;">■</span> State           |         |
| <span style="color: red;">■</span> Federal  | <span style="color: black;">▲</span> Public Facility |         |

| Public Facilities Key Table |                                 |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Key                         | Name                            |
| 1                           | Zero Lake Road Trailhead        |
| 2                           | Houston US Post Office (CPU)    |
| 3                           | Houston PSB 9-1                 |
| 4                           | Houston City Hall               |
| 5                           | Little Susitna River Campground |
| 6                           | Prator Lake Park                |
| 7                           | Houston High School             |
| 8                           | Houston Middle School           |
| 9                           | Mid Valley Senior Center        |
| 10                          | Homesteaders Community Center   |
| 11                          | Houston PSB 9-2 & Water Supply  |

|   |
|---|
| CITY OF HOUSTON   |
| COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT<br>AND<br>COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION |
| LAND OWNERSHIP  |
| JUNE 2016   |

## PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

---

### PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES

Like most of Alaska, access to parks and outdoor recreational facilities is essential to the quality of life for Houston residents and visitors. The Little Susitna River provides outdoor recreation in the form of camping, boating, and fishing. Many of the lakes in Houston are stocked by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game with various fish species for recreational purposes. The Little Susitna Campground is located on the east side of the Parks Highway at Mile 57.3. The Campground is open 24 hours from Memorial Day to Labor Day weekends. The facility includes a day use area, pavilion, play grounds, camp sites equipped with fire pits and trash cans, rest rooms, two public water wells, and RV facilities. The City of Houston maintains a Public Use Facility opposite this campground, which provides additional access to the Little Susitna River.

The Riverside Camper Park is located in the core of Houston along the Parks Highway and adjacent to the Little Susitna River. This park provides shower and laundry facilities, electricity, and a grocery store.

The Houston/Willow Creek Sled Trailhead recreation area is located at Mile 59 of the Parks Highway off Zero Lake Road. This recreation area provides parking for approximately 60 vehicles with trailers and provides rest room facilities and trailhead access to the Hatcher Pass recreation area.

Most trails within the community are informal and do not have clearly dedicated public access. These trails are utilized as transportation corridors for snow machines, ATVs, dog sleds, bikers, horses, pedestrians, and skiers. The Haessler-Norris Trail System consists of 20 trails of various distances shown on a map published in April 2011 and created for the Willow Dog Musher's Association.

The Hatcher Pass/Independence Mine, Big Lake, the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge, the Mat-Su Visitor's Center, and Nancy Lake Recreation Areas are all located near the community of Houston. They offer various recreational opportunities to local residents as well as regional, out of state, and international tourists. See Figure 6 for existing Parks and Recreation Facilities.

### COMMUNITY CENTERS, SERVICES, AND LIBRARIES

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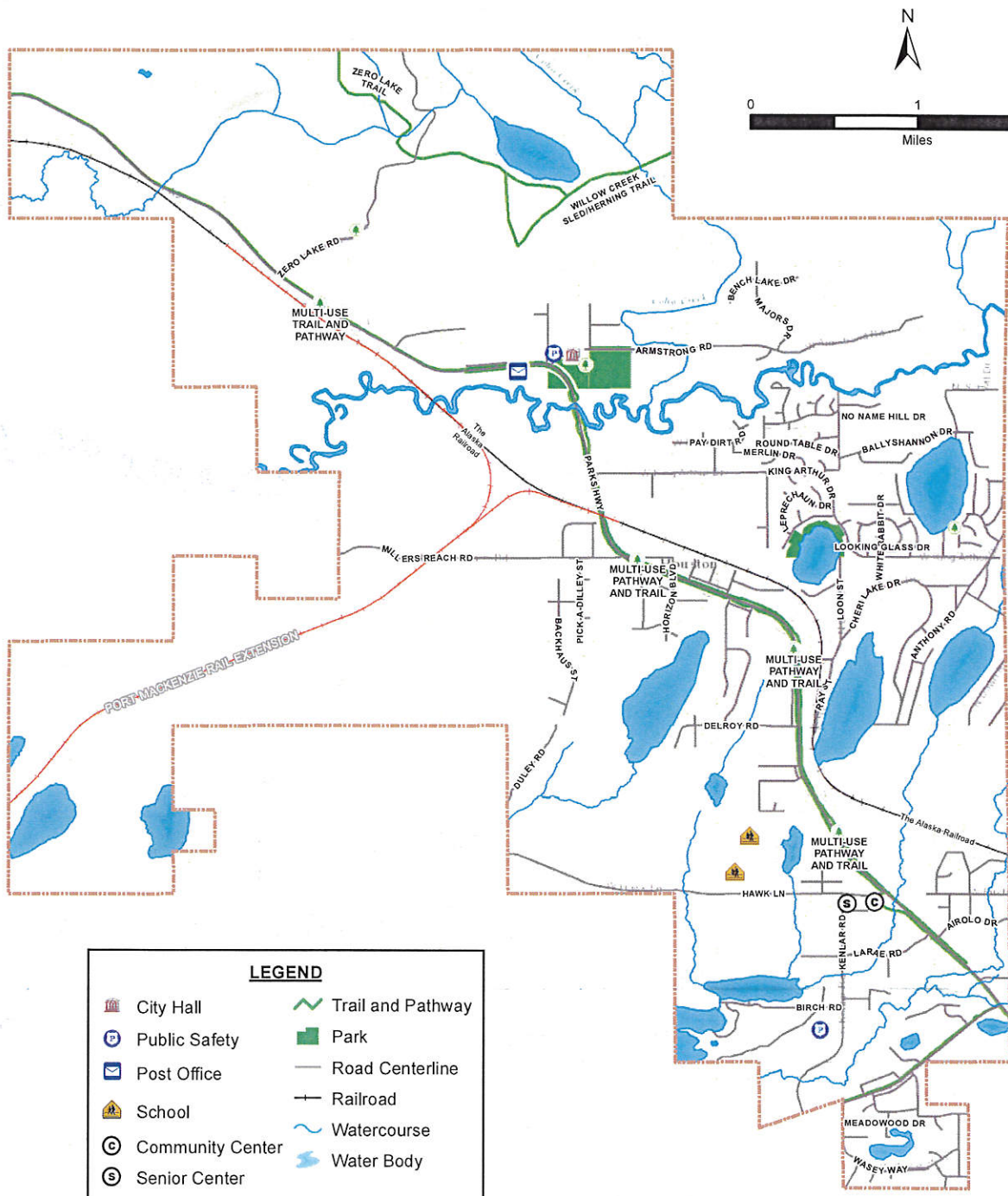
The Homesteaders Community Center, located just west of Mile 53.5 of the Parks Highway on Community Drive, has provided a meeting place and fellowship for area residents since its inception in 1957. The nonprofit organization's members, who are local area residents, host social gatherings, holiday parties, and bingo. The building is rented for functions and on-site amenities include ball fields, a mail hall, kitchen facilities, restrooms, and a storage area.

Mid-Valley Seniors, Inc. is a nonprofit organization founded in 1983. The association provides fellowship and nutritional programs to member seniors in

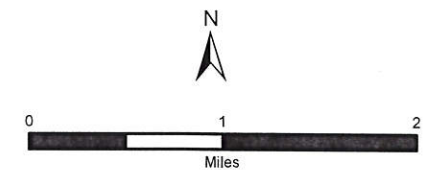
Big Lake, Houston, Meadow Lakes, and Willow areas. In 1987 the Mid-Valley Senior Center opened in Houston which includes a cafeteria, recreation room, and an office.

There are no public libraries in Houston, although the Mat-Su Borough does have libraries in the neighboring communities of Big Lake and Willow. There are libraries available to students at the Houston High School and Middle School. Public libraries are also located in Wasilla, Palmer, Sutton, Talkeetna, and Trapper Creek.

The Big Lake Country Club, founded in 2000, is a 24-hour services provider for developmentally delayed and emotionally challenged adults. The main campus is located in Houston and provides daily support, monitoring and supervision for adults in need. A fenced and secure facility, amenities include a group home and cabins, a game room, kitchen and meals, and a horse facility for therapeutic horseback riding.



| LEGEND |                   |
|--------|-------------------|
|        | City Hall         |
|        | Public Safety     |
|        | Post Office       |
|        | School            |
|        | Community Center  |
|        | Senior Center     |
|        | Recreational      |
|        | Trail and Pathway |
|        | Park              |
|        | Road Centerline   |
|        | Railroad          |
|        | Watercourse       |
|        | Water Body        |



CITY OF HOUSTON

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COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT  
AND  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION

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PARKS & RECREATION

FIGURE 6



## PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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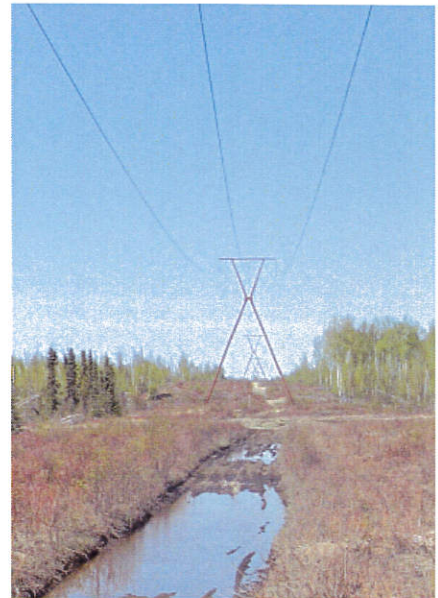
Houston is located within the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District, which consists of 45 schools. There are no elementary schools within the municipal boundaries of Houston; Big Lake, Willow, and Meadow Lakes elementary schools serve the city's elementary school age children. Houston Middle/High School Complex located on Hawk Lane has students from grades six through twelve. Bus service is provided for all public schools in the Houston area.



## PUBLIC SAFETY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

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The City of Houston Emergency Services building is located at Mile 57.3 of the Parks Highway. The building houses the Houston Fire Department and unstaffed Police Department facilities. The Emergency Services building serves as Houston Fire Station 9-1 and a Fire Station 9-2 is located on Birch Road, north of Big Lake Road. Local law enforcement is being handled by the Alaska State Troopers. The fire department is supported by active volunteers who also provide emergency medical services.



## UTILITIES

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Most Houston residents have on-site well and septic systems for wastewater disposal. The majority of commercial properties have access to natural gas but many residential homes rely on heating oil, wood, and electricity for their primary space heating source instead of natural gas. As of 2016, gas lines extend down Hawk Lane to Houston High School and Middle School and from the west along King Arthur Drive.

# TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

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The City of Houston's transportation system is primarily a network of local roads branching east and west from the Parks Highway, which operates as a backbone for the regional transportation network (see Figure 7). The Parks Highway connects Anchorage to interior Alaska, making it the main route for shipping freight, recreational tourism, and general traffic through the City of Houston.

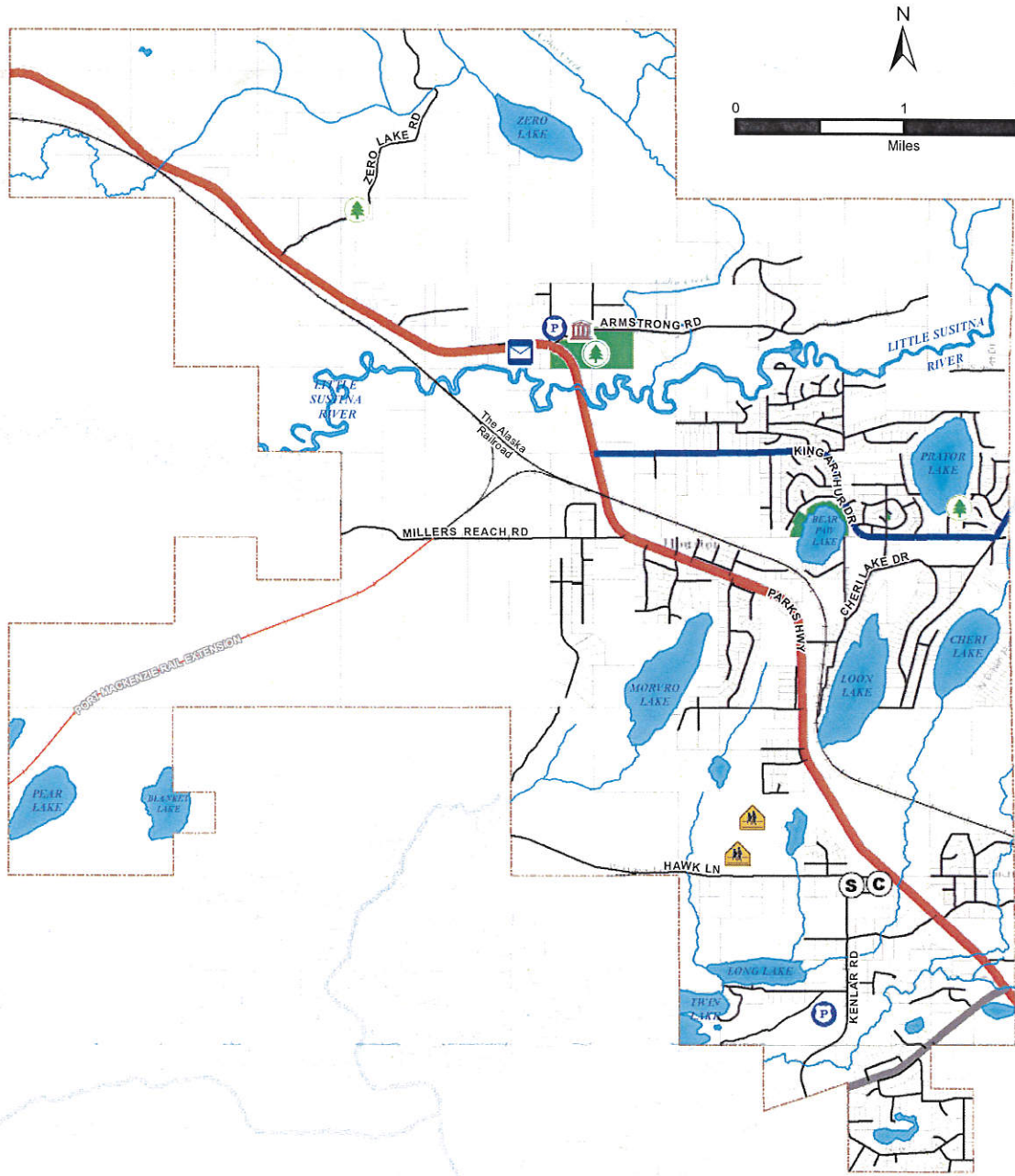
Freight is also transported along the Alaska Railroad, which generally parallels the Parks Highway corridor through the City of Houston's boundaries. A rail extension from the mainline in Houston to the port at Point MacKenzie is currently under construction, and will potentially increase the amount of future freight traffic traveling through Houston.

Most of Houston's existing local roads are unpaved with a gravel surface. Non-motorized transportation facilities in Houston include separated multi-use pathways along the Parks Highway, a multi-use pathway on the north side of Big Lake Road, and a designated Houston/ Willow Creek Sled Trailhead recreation area located off Zero Lake Road that provides access to Hatcher Pass. Unofficial ATV and snow machine pathways exist throughout the City.

Detailed information on the City of Houston's existing transportation system can be found in Chapter 7. Transportation Plan (page 61) of this Comprehensive Plan.



7.1 GIS\Projects\2136.01\_C\_HSTN\_CIA\_and\_Comp\_Plan\_Revision\Map\_Documentation\Houston\_Comp\_Plan\_Revision\_Transportation\_Planning\_8x11.mxd



| LEGEND   |                 |               |                  |
|--|-----------------|---------------|------------------|
| City Boundary                                      | <b>Roads</b>    | City Hall     | Community Center |
| Parcels  | Interstate      | Public Safety | Senior Center    |
| Park   | Minor Arterial  | Post Office   | Recreational     |
| Railroad   | Minor Collector | School        |                  |
| Port MacKenzie Rail Extension (Partially Complete) | Local road      |               |                  |

CITY OF HOUSTON

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COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT  
AND  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION

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TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

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JUNE 2016 FIGURE 7







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CITY OF  
HOUSTON  
Comprehensive Plan

## CHAPTER 3: DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

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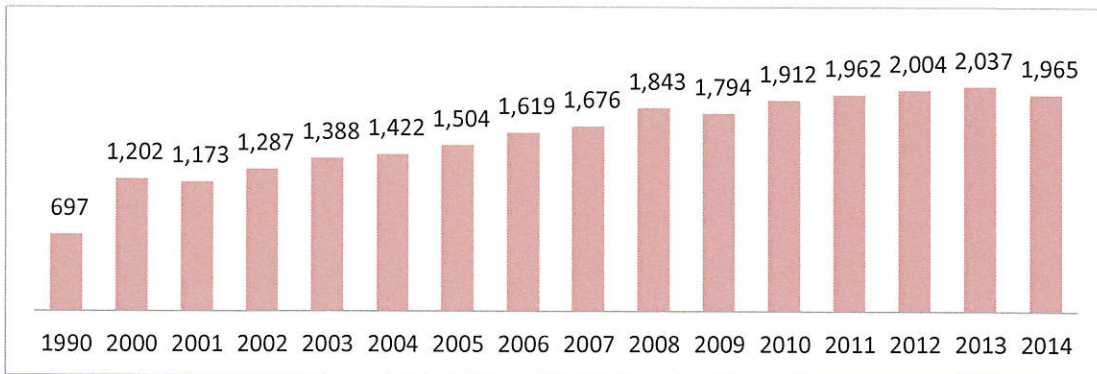




# POPULATION

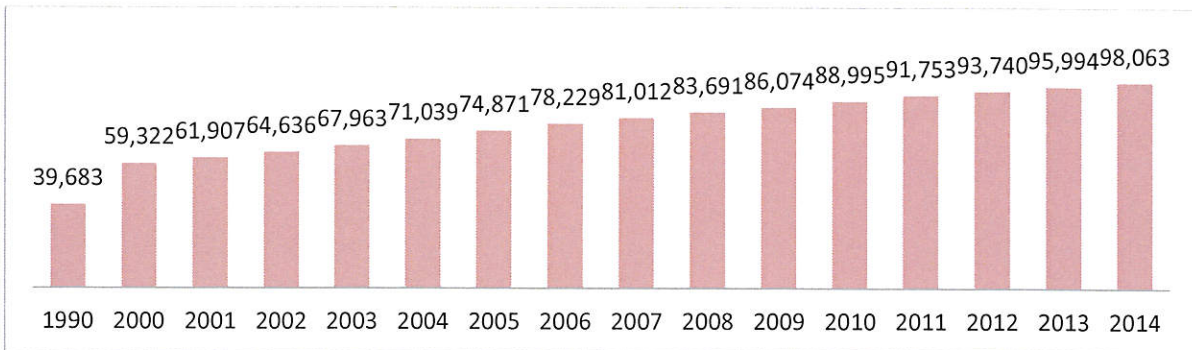
The City of Houston has experienced steady population growth over the past two decades. In 2014, Houston’s population was estimated at 1,965 residents; nearly triple its 697 residents in 1990 (182 percent growth, see Figure 8). This rate of growth is higher than that of the entire Mat- Su Borough, which grew from 39,683 to 98,063 residents over the same time period (147 percent growth, see Figure 9). Part of this higher growth rate can be attributed to lower land costs, highway improvements that make commuting faster and safer, and the unique rural lifestyle Houston offers.

**Figure 8 Houston Populations. 1990 and 2000-2014**



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development (ADOLWD)

**Figure 9 Mat-Su Borough Population, 1990 and 2000-2014**

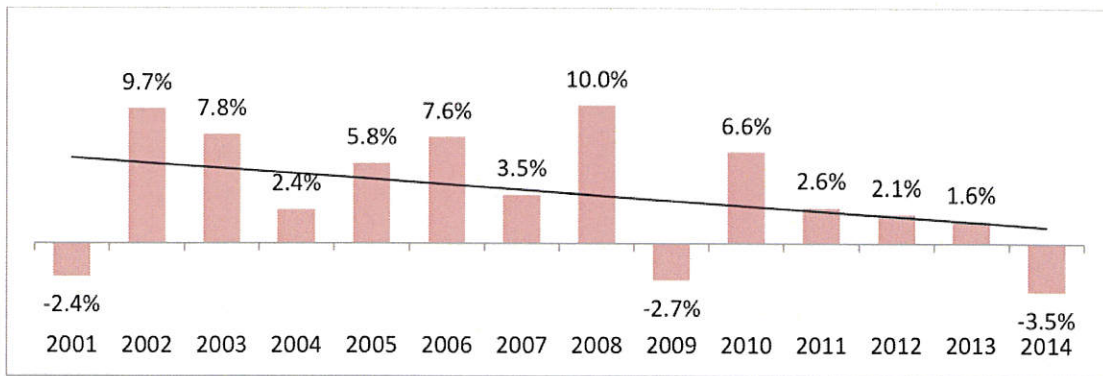


Source: ADOLWD



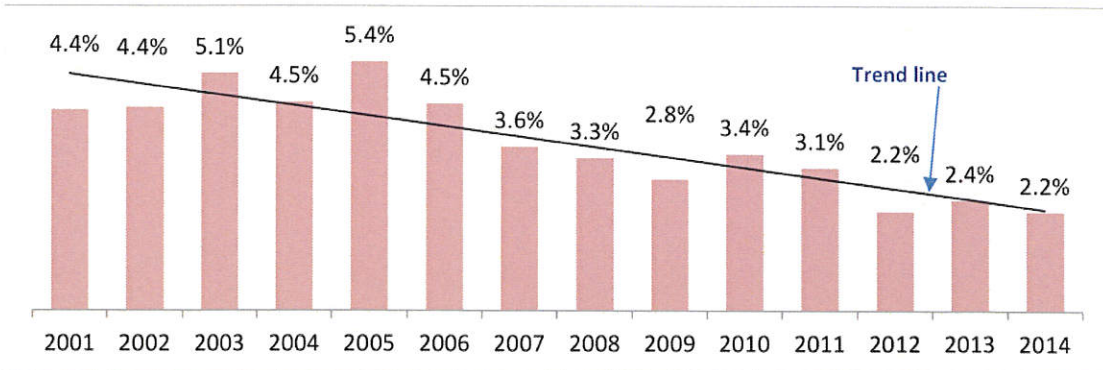
In recent years, population growth rates have slowed in both Houston and the Mat-Su Borough. As shown in Figure 10, Houston grew by 2.6% from 2010 to 2011, but experienced negative growth from 2013 and 2014. On average, Houston grew 0.7% annually since 2011. In comparison, the Borough's population grew 2.5% per year, on average, since 2011 (see Figure 11).

**Figure 10 Houston Annual Population Growth Rate, 2001-2014**



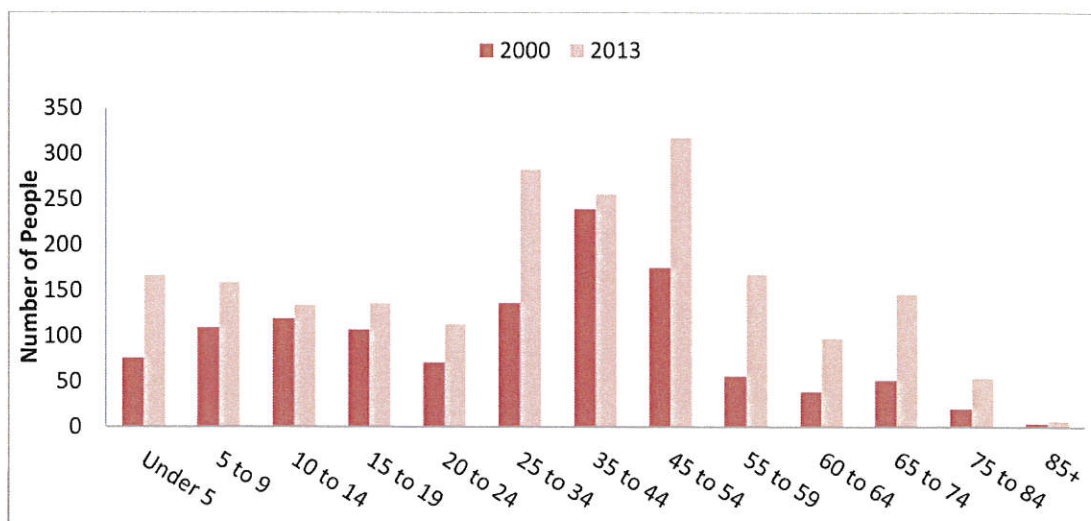
Source: ADOLWD

**Figure 11 Mat-Su Borough Annual Population Growth Rate, 2001-2014**



Source: ADOLWD

Figure 12 Houston Population by Age Category and Median Age, 2000 and 2013



## MEDIAN AGE

The median age of Houston residents in 2013 was just over 36 years of age. That figure is slightly higher than the average of the Mat-Su Borough and the state of Alaska, which have median ages of 35 and 34 years respectively. The largest growth in population from 2000 to 2013 occurred in the age categories ranging from 25 to 34 and 45 to 54 (see Figure 12). This trend might be attributed to Houston's affordable land and housing, which attracts younger families into the area.

## ETHNICITY AND COMMUNITY MAKE UP

The majority of Houston's residents, 87%, self-identify as White. About 4% of Houston residents identify themselves as American Indian and Alaska Native and the remaining 9% of Houston residents identify as multi-racial. These categories reflect the five year average distribution from 2009-2012, according to the US Census and American Community Survey.

## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

According to the US Census and American Community Survey (ACS), approximately 90% of Houston's population had a high school degree or higher with 17% holding a bachelor's degree or higher. Educational attainment has increased since the 1990s. This change might have to do with improvements in the availability of educational facilities. Houston Middle School and Houston High School are located in separate buildings within Houston. Most elementary school age students currently bus to the nearby elementary schools, namely Big Lake Elementary and Willow Elementary School.



| City of Houston                   | 2000     | 2008-2012 | 2008-2012<br>Margin of Error |
|-----------------------------------|----------|-----------|------------------------------|
| Median Household Income           | \$39,615 | \$59,583  | +/- \$11,475                 |
| Households with Public Assistance | 58       | 101       | +/- 39                       |
| Households in SNAP                | -        | 118       | +/- 38                       |
| Per Capita Income                 | \$17,213 | \$25,876  | +/- \$3,318                  |
| Families Below Poverty Line       | 13.1%    | 11.6%     | +/- 5.9%                     |
| Individuals Below Poverty Line    | 17.1%    | 15.8%     | +/- 5.4%                     |

Source: U.S. Census and American Community Survey

## ECONOMY

### HOUSEHOLD INCOME

The median household income in Houston is almost \$60,000, less than the roughly \$70,000 median in the Mat-Su Borough and Alaska. Per capita income averaged slightly more than \$25,000, less than the \$30,000 found in the Mat-Su Borough and \$32,000 for Alaska.

Approximately 12 percent of families and 16 percent of individuals in Houston live below the federal poverty line. According to 2014 Federal guidelines for Alaska, a household of four making less than \$29,440 or an individual with an income of less than \$14,350 is considered living in poverty. There are approximately 101 households that receive public assistance and 118 households utilize the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

### EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

In 2012, the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development estimated there were 768 employed residents (over age 16) living in Houston, with total annual wages of \$26.5 million. Most workers were employed in the private sector (85 percent), followed by local government (11 percent), and state government (4 percent). The top industries in terms of employment included Trade (retail and wholesale), Transportation and Utilities (22 percent), Education and Health Services (16 percent), and Construction (13 percent).

In addition to data compiled by the State of Alaska, the American Community Survey (ACS) offers insight into employment in Houston. According to its data, there were 782 residents over the age of 16 employed, and 166 unemployed.

The unemployment rate is estimated to be 18 percent. Private wage and salary workers made up 80 percent of employed, followed by government workers (19 percent) and self-employed workers (7 percent).

Employment within the City of Houston is currently limited, with most opportunities in retail. The majority of employed residents travel outside the city limits to reach their workplace.

## HOUSTON BUSINESSES

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An estimated 19,000 vehicles per day travel on the Parks Highway through the City of Houston. This number tends to be higher in the summer and on the weekends. A number of businesses are sustained by this traffic as a percentage of these travelers stop for a meal, to rent a room, or purchase fireworks. The largest concentration of businesses selling fireworks in Alaska is located in Houston.

At this time, no large grocery store is located in Houston. Residents typically will go to Wasilla or Big Lake for their shopping needs. Medical services are limited in Houston with a few small clinics offering primary care services. The closest hospital is Mat-Su Regional Medical Center located in Wasilla, where there are also a full suite of dental, chiropractic, and other health services.

The summer brings an influx of anglers fishing the nearby Little Susitna River. Alaska Fish and Game estimated 4,538 anglers fished a total of 10,115 days in 2012 in the Little Susitna River. At least one guiding service is located in Houston and a range of other local businesses rely on these anglers who purchase ice, meals, and refreshments. Float trips on the Little Susitna River frequently start at the Parks Highway Bridge.

During the winter, proximity to Hatcher Pass and Nancy Lake Recreation Area attracts enthusiasts wanting to snowmachine, ski, ice fish, dog-mush, or enjoy other winter activities. Compared to the summer, traffic through the community is much less in the winter but local businesses are able to attract some customers.



HOUSTON EMPLOYMENT INDICATORS, 2000 AND 2008-2012 FIVE YEAR AVERAGE

|   | 2000 (Number Employed) | 2008-2012 (Number Employed) | 2008-2012 Margin of Error |
|---|------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Population 16 years and older   | 881                    | 1,487                       | +/-145                    |
| In labor force  | 549                    | 948                         | +/-129                    |
| Employed  | 452                    | 782                         | +/-114                    |
| Unemployed  | 97                     | 166                         | +/-62                     |
| Unemployment – civilian labor force (%)   | 17.7                   | 17.5                        | +/-5.8%                   |
| Not in labor force  | 332                    | 539                         | +/-91                     |
| <b>Class of worker</b>  |                        |                             |                           |
| Private wage and salary   | 325                    | 579                         | +/-103                    |
| Government  | 70                     | 152                         | +/-54                     |
| Self-employed   | 57                     | 51                          | +/-23                     |
| Unpaid family worker  | -                      | 0                           | +/-10                     |
| <b>Industry</b>   |                        |                             |                           |
| Retail trade  | 78                     | 92                          | +/-32                     |
| Educational, health and social services   | 60                     | 169                         | +/-51                     |
| Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services                    | 52                     | 96                          | +/-44                     |
| Construction  | 50                     | 87                          | +/-34                     |
| Agriculture, forestry, hunting and fishing, mining                                  | 49                     | 70                          | +/-40                     |
| Transportation and warehousing, and utilities                                       | 34                     | 87                          | +/-44                     |
| Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services | 25                     | 57                          | +/-32                     |
| Public administration   | 22                     | 66                          | +/-38                     |
| Wholesale trade   | 19                     | 10                          | +/-11                     |
| Manufacturing   | 15                     | 21                          | +/-22                     |
| Information   | 13                     | 7                           | +/-9                      |
| Finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing                             | 8                      | 0                           | +/-10                     |
| Other services  | 27                     | 20                          | +/-16                     |

Source: ADOWL and U.S. Census American Community Survey

## HOUSING IN HOUSTON

According to Mat-Su Borough and City of Houston data, there are 999 housing units in Houston. Single-family detached units make up 85 percent (846 units) of all housing units, with the remaining composed of 62 multi-family dwellings, 8 duplexes, and 85 mobile homes (see table to right).

This estimate is corroborated by the American Community Survey's 2009-2013 5-year estimate of 991 housing units in Houston. Of these units 72 percent (or 716 units) are considered occupied; and, of these units, 78 percent (561 units or 56 percent of all housing units) are owner-occupied.

According to the City of Houston Comprehensive Plan and Community Impact Assessment Household Survey conducted in November 2014, approximately 35 percent of local property owners do not reside in Houston. Presuming these nonresidents have a dwelling on their property, this would suggest approximately 350 homes in Houston are used as vacation/recreation properties (or otherwise used only occasionally).

Housing data for Houston from the American Community Survey (2009-2013 5-year estimates) are provided in the table to the right. The data suggests approximately 28 percent of housing units are unoccupied. The majority of housing units (55 percent) were built since 1990, with construction peaking between 2000 and 2009 (32.3 percent of the housing units).

The median value of an owner-occupied unit in Houston is estimated at \$177,300 (+/- \$20,161 margin of error, see Table 8). Almost a third (30 percent) of these units are estimated to be valued at less than \$100,000.

|                            | Unit Count | Percent Units of Total |
|----------------------------|------------|------------------------|
| <b>Total Housing Units</b> | <b>991</b> | <b>100%</b>            |
| Single-family Detached     | 846        | 85%                    |
| Mobile Home                | 85         | 9%                     |
| Multi-Family               | 62         | 6%                     |
| Duplex                     | 8          | 1%                     |

Source: City of Houston, MSB. Columns may not sum to 100% due to rounding

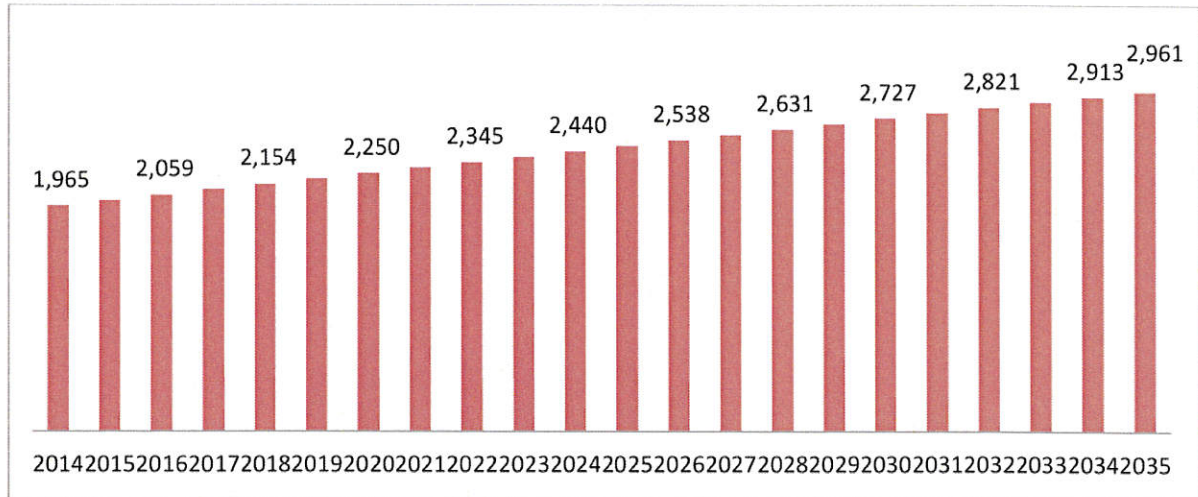
|                            | Unit Count | Margin of Error | Percent Units of Total |
|----------------------------|------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| <b>Total Housing Units</b> | <b>991</b> | <b>+/- 36</b>   | <b>100%</b>            |
| Occupied Housing Units     | 716        | +/- 50          | 72.3%                  |
| Vacant Housing Units       | 275        | +/- 51          | 27.7%                  |
| Homeowner vacancy rate     | 5.7%       | +/- 2.9%        | -                      |
| Rental Vacancy rate        | 9.9%       | +/- 6.9%        | -                      |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009-2013 Five-Year Estimate

|                             | Housing Unit Count | Margin of Error     | Percent of Total |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| <b>Owner-Occupied Units</b> | <b>561</b>         | <b>+/- 47</b>       | <b>100%</b>      |
| Less than \$50,000          | 92                 | +/-33               | 16.4%            |
| \$50,000 to \$99,999        | 77                 | +/-28               | 13.7%            |
| \$100,000 to \$149,999      | 47                 | +/-22               | 8.4%             |
| \$150,000 to \$199,999      | 120                | +/-40               | 21.4%            |
| \$200,000 to \$299,999      | 143                | +/-41               | 25.5%            |
| \$300,000 to \$499,999      | 70                 | +/-28               | 12.5%            |
| \$500,000 to \$999,999      | 12                 | +/-15               | 2.1%             |
| \$1,000,000 or more         | 0                  | +/-9                | 0.0%             |
| <b>Median (dollars)</b>     | <b>\$177,300</b>   | <b>+/- \$20,161</b> | <b>-</b>         |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009-2013 Five-Year Estimate

Figure 13 Projected Annual Average Growth Rates, Houston, 2014-2035, High Growth Scenario



## FUTURE CONDITIONS AND LAND USE NEEDS

### POPULATION GROWTH AND PROJECTIONS

Population growth in the Mat-Su is projected to slow from the current annual growth rate of slightly more than 3.6% to less than 2% by 2035. Since Houston is tied to the Mat-Su economy and has comparable demographics, it is projected that Houston's population growth will reflect that of the larger Mat-Su, growing approximately 2% over the current period to 2035. In determining this growth rate, three different growth scenarios were considered: low, medium, and high growth rate projections. The City of Houston chose to write this Comprehensive Plan Revision and Land Use Plan using the population projections of the high growth rate scenario. Planning for a high growth rate allows goals, objectives, policies and strategies to be set in place prior to an unexpected growth occurrence.

The High growth scenario assumes Houston matches the broader Mat-Su estimates for population growth as project by Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development (ADOLWD). Under this scenario, ADOLWD estimates that Houston's population will grow by 996 persons between 2014 and 2035. With this growth rate, Houston is projected to grow to about 3,000 residents in 2035, which is an increase of around 50% from current population levels (see Figure 13 and adjacent table).

Population projections for Houston are based on extending past trends into the future. This methodology differs from a forecast, which would account for economic and other factors with the potential to affect population change. Forces that may affect population growth in Houston over the next 20 years include the following:

- Economic conditions in Alaska - including factors such as oil prices, gas line development, and other events in the oil and gas industry (responsible for about a third of Alaska’s economy). In general, increases in economic activity are accompanied by increases in population. Conversely, if economic activity contracts, population growth tends to slow or decline.
- Economic conditions in Anchorage might affect Mat-Su’s role as a “bedroom” community (a third of the Mat-Su Borough’s labor force is employed in Anchorage). Job growth in Anchorage can have population effects in the Mat-Su Borough.
- Local (Mat-Su) economic conditions – To the extent the local economy grows (or declines) in response to local events, related or unrelated to statewide or national economic trends, Houston’s population could be affected.
- The Condition of the U.S. economy – A weakening U.S. (Lower 48) economy can cause in-migration to Alaska, as the unemployed come to Alaska seeking work. Conversely, strong growth in the U.S. economy can lead to out-migration from Alaska.
- Housing costs – As long as housing prices are lower in the Mat-Su Borough compared to Anchorage and commuting costs remain stable, the Mat-Su Borough population will continue to have a large component of Anchorage workers and their households. A similar scenario has developed between Houston and Wasilla; with lower housing costs, some opt to live in Houston and commute to Wasilla (or Anchorage) for employment.

- Natural growth and other demographic trends – Birth and death rates, aging of the population, and other demographic forces may also affect local population trends.

It is beyond the scope of this Comprehensive Plan to consider all of these factors. However, statewide and local population projections, prepared by the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development (ADOLWD) can be used as the basis for Houston-specific projections.

ADOLWD periodically prepares long-term population forecasts for Alaska overall and for local areas. The most recent projections, published in April 2014, indicate slow growth (0.8 percent annually) over the next 25 years for the state overall. The Mat-Su Borough is expected to continue experiencing the fastest rates of growth, at 1.9 percent annually (see Table below).

| Years     | Births | Deaths | Net Migration | Population Change | Annual Growth Rate |
|-----------|--------|--------|---------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| 2014-2017 | 1,400  | 506    | 1,469         | 2,363             | 2.37%              |
| 2017-2022 | 1,591  | 621    | 1,476         | 2,446             | 2.19%              |
| 2022-2027 | 1,782  | 755    | 1,455         | 2,482             | 2.00%              |
| 2027-2032 | 1,962  | 909    | 1,419         | 2,472             | 1.81%              |
| 2032-2035 | 2,128  | 1,072  | 1,359         | 2,415             | 1.62%              |

Note: Average annual numbers are rounded to whole numbers. Source: ADOLWD

| Local Area                   | Percent Population Growth | Annual Growth Rate |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Anchorage                    | 35%                       | 1.0%               |
| Mat-Su Borough               | 77%                       | 1.9%               |
| Kenai Peninsula Borough      | 15%                       | 0.5%               |
| Fairbanks North Star Borough | 32%                       | 0.9%               |
| City & Borough of Juneau     | 2%                        | 0.1%               |
| Statewide                    | 26%                       | 0.8%               |

Source: ADOLWD

## Houston Housing Demand Projections

| Years                   | Low-Growth  | Mid-Growth  | High-Growth |
|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 2014                    | 756         | 756         | 756         |
| 2017                    | 772         | 791         | 811         |
| 2022                    | 799         | 850         | 902         |
| 2027                    | 828         | 909         | 994         |
| 2035                    | 875         | 1,001       | 1,139       |
| <b>Growth 2014-2035</b> | <b>+119</b> | <b>+246</b> | <b>+383</b> |

Source: McDowell Group estimates

## FUTURE HOUSING DEMAND PROJECTIONS

According to Mat-Su Borough and City of Houston data, there are 999 housing units in Houston. Single-family detached units make up 85 percent (846 units) of all housing units, with the remaining composed of 62 multi-family dwellings, 8 duplexes, and 85 mobile homes. The current amount of land zoned for residential development is considered for the total 'build out' capacity. Using minimum lot sizes stated in the City of Houston Municipal Code, Title 10 Land Use Regulations and the Housing Needs Analysis conducted by the McDowell Group, the amount of potential housing units and type of housing can be determined.

Housing demand will grow, or decline, with changes in population. However, demographic trends can also have specific impacts on housing demand.

### Demographic factors affecting future housing demand in Houston include:

- **Aging:** The aging of Houston's population will result in changes in household characteristics and housing preferences. For example, U.S. Census data for Anchorage suggests that householders younger than 34 years and older than 64 are more likely to live in rental or multifamily units, and householders between age 35 and 64 are more likely to live in owner-occupied single-family detached housing.
- **Household composition:** Houston may be impacted by similar state and national trends in decreasing household size over time due to aging of the householders and smaller families. For example, as householders age, fewer households include children under the age of 18.
- **Income Levels and Home Affordability:** Income levels also affect demand for different types of housing. For example, families with lower incomes may prefer higher density housing (such as duplex, two-family townhouse, and some types of multifamily housing) and are more likely to be renters. Data from the American Community Survey (2009-2013 5-year estimates) estimate that home prices in Houston are 22 percent lower than Wasilla. Houston owner-occupied have a \$177,300 median value compared to \$227,800 in Wasilla. Lower housing costs make Houston an attractive place to live, including commuters to Wasilla.

While many factors can impact housing demand, including increased demand for vacation and recreational properties, shifts in population are the main driving force. Using low, mid, and high population growth scenarios, we can estimate the number of housing units needed in Houston to accommodate new demand.

Under a high growth scenario, 383 new occupied housing units will be required (see table to left). While some of this demand can be met by conversion of vacant housing units (currently estimated at 5.7%), new housing development will be needed.

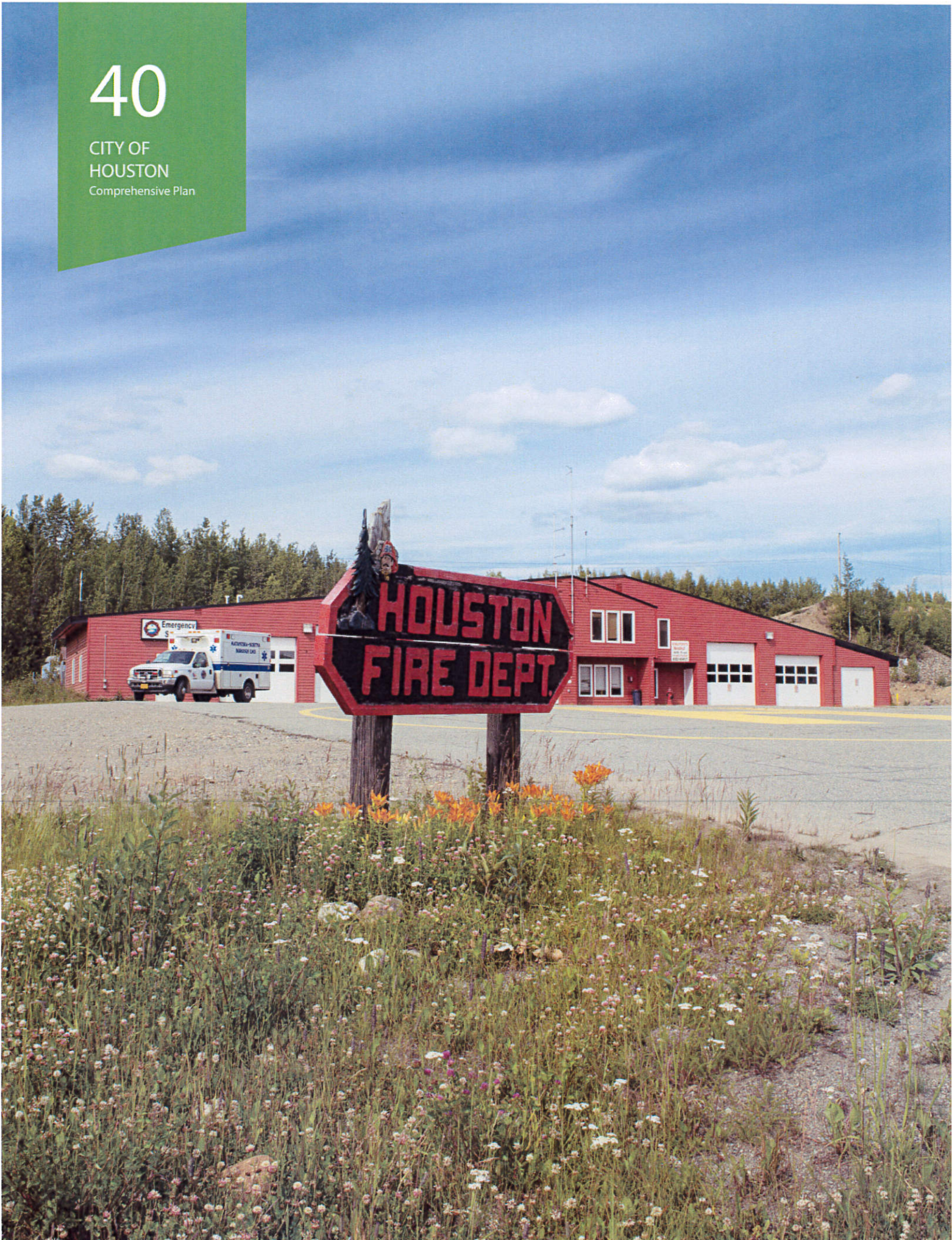
According to the City of Houston and Mat-Su Borough GIS data, a total of 4,742 acres within Houston are vacant, buildable, and zoned for residential development. Based on population projections, this amount of vacant, residentially zoned land suggests an ample amount is available to address future housing demand and residential development for single-family and multi-family homes in Houston by 2035.





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CITY OF  
HOUSTON  
Comprehensive Plan





CHAPTER 4:  
COMMUNITY  
VALUES AND GOALS

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## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

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Public involvement is essential to a successful planning process. The City of Houston Comprehensive Plan Revision placed significant emphasis on meaningful public engagement to ensure the Plan meets the needs and expectations of the community. The Plan was developed with guidance from the Steering Committee made up of City of Houston Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council members. The Steering Committee met monthly beginning in June 2014 to work on the plan. Members were responsible for ensuring balanced representation of the community at each stage of the planning process; provided perspective and insight on information gathered, drafted policies, and to served as a sounding board for the residents of Houston.

Multiple methods of public involvement were used during the plan development process including a mailed Household Opinion Survey, two public workshops, stakeholder interviews, a project website, and appearances at local community events. Valuable feedback was provided and received throughout the process (complete summaries can be found in APPENDIX B, Public Involvement Summary). Dominant themes emerged and were used to update the goals in the following chapter. The feedback also helped create objectives, policies and strategies to achieve those goals for the Houston community. The public involvement process provided insight to what Houston residents see as assets in their community, challenges and constraints within it, opportunities for the future, and the shared values of Houston residents.

## COMMUNITY ASSETS

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### RURAL LIFESTYLE

Houston's rural setting provides quick access to wilderness and allows for a tight-knit community. There is a lack of pollution and development along with ample privacy that attracted many Houston residents to the area. A "homestead spirit" unique to Houston prevails in the area as residents maintain a rural lifestyle while being within reasonable driving distance to shopping, services, and healthcare in the Mat-Su Borough and Anchorage.

### LAND AVAILABILITY

There are significant amounts of developable land available in Houston. These properties are considered relatively inexpensive, for both residential and commercial use, when compared to other places in the Mat-Su Borough or Anchorage. This availability and cost factor may be an advantage in attracting more business into Houston.

### PARKS HIGHWAY ACCESS

The Parks Highway bisecting the City of Houston can be a significant benefit to the community, even with noted growing congestion. The small number of businesses located along the highway benefit from the vehicles traveling the Parks daily. Potential exists for greater economic opportunity emerging along the highway as well as from the Alaska Rail Road Corporation's extension from the main line in Houston to Port MacKenzie.

### LAKES AND RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

Residents and visitors can engage in a variety of summer and winter activities on Houston's six larger lakes and the Little Susitna River, including fishing in the summer and winter, canoeing and rafting. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game annually stock four lakes with salmon and trout. The Little Susitna River runs through Houston City limits and is perhaps the most significant tourism asset in the area. Salmon and trout fishing, rafting, camping, and wildlife viewing make the Little Su a destination. Winter multi-use trails in Houston are frequented by dog mushers, cross-country skiers, and snowmachiners.



Please indicate your level of agreement regarding the following statements about the community of Houston...

|  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Unsure/ Don't know |
|--|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Houston is a good place for outdoor recreation.        | 30%            | 53%   | 6%       | 3%                | 9%                 |
| Houston is a good place to enjoy a rural lifestyle.    | 25             | 58    | 5        | 3                 | 8                  |
| Houston could use more community planning.             | 33             | 35    | 10       | 6                 | 16                 |
| Houston is a good place for people to live affordably. | 13             | 57    | 14       | 7                 | 10                 |
| Houston is family-friendly.                            | 9              | 56    | 16       | 4                 | 16                 |
| Houston is a safe place to live.                       | 9              | 55    | 15       | 7                 | 14                 |
| Houston could use more landscaping of public spaces.   | 23             | 26    | 22       | 12                | 16                 |

Note: Due to rounding, results may not add to 100 percent.

## CONSTRAINTS AND CHALLENGES

### LOW POPULATION DENSITY

The low number of residents in the city may be a challenging factor when it comes to the addition of public facilities and services as well as attracting new businesses to Houston. The predicted benefit or customer base may not support the costs it takes to start or implement new commercial businesses or public services. The low population density and relatively large lot sizes are also a limitation to utility development, thereby making the rural setting of Houston a challenge.

### LACK OF LOCAL AMENITIES

The lack of amenities, such as a gas station, grocery store, medical clinic, and public transportation can be a challenge faced by residents of Houston. Currently, residents must travel to Willow, Talkeetna, Big Lake, Wasilla and Anchorage for such services and amenities. The few amenities correlates to a lack of local employment opportunities, which is a challenge for community growth and development. The lack of amenities were also some of the strongest needs stated by residents and may be a deterrent for new families and business to establish in Houston.

### LOCAL ROAD CONDITIONS

Many residents have identified a need to improve road conditions and maintenance and consider road standards an important city challenge needing to be addressed. A lack of access or well-maintained transportation systems may be a constraint for businesses looking to develop in the city as well as for residents who may struggle to travel safely to and from their homes and around the community.

### UTILITY DEVELOPMENT

Many residents identify utility service extension, especially natural gas, as a community need. While the majority of commercial properties have access to natural gas; many residential homes rely on heating oil, wood, and electricity for their primary space heating source, which leads to higher heating costs. Costs for service extension to an individual property that is not currently serviced can be high. Therefore, the current energy costs may be a deterrent for new developments in Houston.

## OPPORTUNITIES

### TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Residents and stakeholders have identified the opportunity for Houston to become a destination for recreation and tourism based on its existing assets. Houston has a unique identity with which to better establish itself so that the community is recognized for more than its recreational trailheads. With access to the Little Susitna River and the Hatcher Pass area, an abundance of lakes, winter multi-use trails and its convenient location off the Parks Highway, there is potential for greater tourism development.

### TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS

If more local road improvements are made, such as increased road maintenance and paving, land without direct access to the Parks Highway may become more attractive for development. Better roadway conditions may also increase home values and allow for easier commutes. Multi-use pathways expansion, lighting improvements, and access to public transportation were also seen as beneficial improvements that would increase residents' quality of life.

Residents prefer a new road between Houston and Port MacKenzie. If built, it would support freight transportation and more efficiently connect Houston residents with a significant employer, the port. A new connection could also support economic development within Houston.

### UTILITY EXPANSION

Improved access to natural gas could promote more business and residential growth by reducing energy costs.

### TOWN CENTER DEVELOPMENT

Noting the proximity of the Little Susitna River, Houston could establish a destination point through the development of a town center offering community services, commercial businesses, and other amenities. This center would encourage community gathering and interaction, maintain Houston's character and family friendliness, and develop a center that may, as one stakeholder stated "make both sides of the river and railroad tracks feel like one community." Establishing a town center also encourages the preservation of the rural-residential character in other areas of Houston.

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Large areas of vacant land provide opportunities for new development, including commercial and industrial developments. If consistent with community character, goals, and objectives defined by the community, this type of development is encouraged and could provide great economic benefit and employment opportunities for Houston.

The Alaska Railroad's extension from the mainline in Houston to Port MacKenzie may provide opportunities for development in Houston. These possibilities include an increase in the likelihood of manufacturing, mineral export, or transportation activity taking place in the city that could provide economic benefit and employment.





# COMMUNITY VALUES

The following community values have been developed from information gathered at the Future's Community Visioning Workshop, responses to the Household Opinion Survey, and from Steering Committee members. The value statements represent issues, concerns, aspirations, and opinions of the majority of community members as they relate to the City of Houston.



## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:

The community of Houston wants to develop as a destination for tourism and recreation; while maintaining a family friendly community that will encompass a future town center, designated trails and community facilities.

## HOUSING:

The availability of housing in Houston should be appealing for a wide range of incomes, while providing all residents with opportunities for satisfactory, safe living.



## TRANSPORTATION:

A need exists to increase safety, accessibility, and mobility through much of the city. The improvements would benefit all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized users, while maintaining the community character.

## COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES:

The City of Houston recognizes the need to expand its facilities and services in order to provide safe and satisfactory living for its residents, enhancing the city's autonomy, economy, and unique identity.



## PLANNING:

As voiced by its residents, effective, implementable planning is a recognized need for successful growth, development, and overall health of the community.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

While maintaining the current tax structure, the City of Houston aims to develop economically by capitalizing on its current amenities and natural resources; allowing commercial and industrial development as long as it aligns with the community character and will benefit city residents.



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# CHAPTER 5: THE PLAN - COMMUNITY GUIDELINES FOR GROWTH

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## VISION AND CHARGE

The community of Houston wants to develop as a destination for tourism and recreation, while maintaining a family friendly rural-residential community that will encompass a future town center, designated trails, and community facilities.

The Goals, Strategies and Policies of this chapter will help define the future growth and development of Houston for the 20 year life of this plan. They reflect the core values and future vision and aspirations of the community from the extensive community involvement effort during the plan development process.

**GOALS** describe in general terms a desired future condition that is consistent with community ideals and vision. Goals are typically timeless and have no specific date when they must be achieved.

**OBJECTIVES** are specific statements of particular ends as expressed in measurable terms that respond directly to Goals.

**POLICIES** are statements of principle or guidelines to direct actions in pursuit of Goals. **STRATEGIES** are specific means and actions of achieving and accomplishing each Objective.

**STRATEGIES** are specific means and actions of achieving and accomplishing each Objective.

## GROWTH AND ECONOMIC GOAL

To provide new opportunities for employment, community and commercial services and economic growth; allowing commercial and industrial development that is consistent with the community character to the benefit of Houston residents.

### OBJECTIVES

- Encourage moderate economic growth which will provide a base in Houston adequate to foster employment opportunities with the City.
- Ensure that economic growth and development is consistent with the rural community character of Houston.
- Provide 10% increased local employment opportunities for residents by encouraging a balanced economic base.
- Encourage the development of local-serving and regional commercial enterprises to strengthen the community's economic base.

- Encourage continued growth of employment in the commercial core of Houston.
- Encourage the economically viable commercial tourism and recreation enterprises such as sports fisheries, campgrounds and year round recreational businesses.
- Encourage home-based businesses as forms of local economic development. They should be compatible with the surrounding neighborhood.

### POLICIES

- Encourage the development of recreational tourism in Houston.
- Encourage the development of industrial enterprises associated with the Alaska Railroad main line and the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension.

### STRATEGIES

- Develop a Business Plan for attracting anchor businesses to locate in Houston. Strategies could include financing and tax incentives.
- Work with State of Alaska and Travel Alaska Tourism Organization to develop a Marketing Plan for increasing recreational tourism in Houston.





# LAND USE GOAL

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To develop and maintain a responsive land use plan that supports the goals and objectives of the community including economic, environmental, and social community character.

## OBJECTIVES

- Preserve and enhance the identity of established community areas.
- Promote growth and land uses that are compatible with the rural residential character of Houston.
- Ensure an efficient pattern of development that reflects the needs of the community and is consistent with community character.
- Encourage the construction of safe, sound housing.
- Encourage land use patterns and development that connect new public and private investments.
- Encourage new civic and commercial activity to help jumpstart new private investments.

## POLICIES

- Ensure that zoning and platting decisions are guided by this Plan, specifically its maps, goals, policies, and strategies.
- Ensure future regulatory changes and planning actions complete appropriate public processes as well as maintain and protect the unique community character.
- Provide a balanced distribution of land uses to meet Houston's current and future needs.

## STRATEGIES

- Update land use regulations to promote flexibility for marijuana businesses to locate in Houston in appropriate zoning districts.
- Update land use regulations to provide buffer and protection for established residential areas from incompatible uses in adjacent zoning districts.

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## PARKS, RECREATION, AND OPEN SPACE GOAL

To provide a wide range of year-round recreational opportunities for the community and its visitors.

### OBJECTIVES

- Maintain existing trails, pathways, and recreational opportunities for area residents and visitors.
- Encourage the establishment of year-round recreational facilities.
- Develop and maintain neighborhood-scale recreational facilities and trail systems.
- Encourage Houston's recreation development as a tool for tourism and economic development.
- Maintain, supplement, and enhance new parks and open space for recreational use.

### POLICIES

- Ensure that a range of recreational opportunities are available to residents of all ages, especially for Houston youth.
- If the opportunity exists, ensure that trails and parks are considered at the land development level to preserve access.

### STRATEGIES

- Preserve and improve access to recreational opportunities, especially Houston's lakes and the Little Susitna River.
- Work with the Mat-Su Trails and Parks Foundation to find projects that would qualify for community grants leveraged with volunteer participation.
- Work with the State Historic Preservation Office to ensure that trails are mapped and preserved.





## ENVIRONMENTAL GOAL

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To maintain and protect the quality of the natural environment, especially drinking water and surface water in Houston.

### OBJECTIVES

- Protect drinking water quality for residents.
- Protect and preserve salmon habitat and the environmental health of rivers and streams.

### POLICIES

- Through land use and other regulatory controls, protect environmentally important areas including streams, rivers and lakes.
- Ensure that setbacks and buffers in development areas are maintained to protect residential wells for potable water and for the environmental health of natural areas.

### STRATEGIES

- Continue to work with the salmon restoration group to support its efforts on the Little Susitna River.
- Provide development setback standards in land use regulations to ensure that new development is protected from flooding and other environmental hazards and to protect natural areas from off-site pollution.



# COMMUNITY FACILITIES GOAL

To provide a safe and secure community for residents and to provide quality community services that enhance and improve residents' quality of life.

## OBJECTIVES

- Provide effective levels of fire and emergency response services to Houston residents and the surrounding areas.
- Improve utility access for local residents.
- Expand utilities to facilitate more intensive land development where appropriate.
- Encourage non-profits to continue to provide community and social activities for residents.

## POLICIES

- Ensure the proper design and installation of on-site water and wastewater facilities to protect property owners and the environment.
- Ensure that adequate school facilities are available when and where they are needed.
- Encourage learning of community residents through formal and informal educational opportunities.

## STRATEGIES

- Coordinate citizen awareness and implementation of wildfire mitigation with Matanuska Susitna Borough and state forestry service programs.
- Explore raising revenue through a variety of taxes which could be used to finance utility expansion. Such financial possibilities could include bonding with the Alaska Municipal Bond Bank.
- Secure state funding to support utility expansion and development.
- Partner with tribal organizations for shared costs to expand utilities.
- Explore the feasibility of improvement districts that will help finance future utility expansion.
- Work with Mid-Valley Senior's Center and the Homesteader's Community Center to continue to be of community service to residents.
- Continue to work with the MSB School District to update student enrollment trends and projections.
- Coordinate with the MSB School District to determine site selection, capital improvements, and school bond measures for timely school facilities.

- Address school site selection and acquisition in the review of proposed development plans.
- Support a new elementary school to serve Houston.





# TRANSPORTATION GOAL

To provide a safe, efficient, multi-modal transportation system that meets the needs of Houston residents and visitors.

## OBJECTIVES

- Provide safe access to the Parks Highway and connecting road system.
- Ensure freight goods movement from the port to interior Alaska through Houston is safe and efficient.
- Encourage the development of alternate routes through Houston to serve goods and services movement from Port McKenzie to interior Alaska.
- Improve and expand non-motorized transportation facilities where possible.
- Expand system connectivity and emergency access.

- Provide additional traffic crossings across the Little Susitna River to promote public safety and convenience.

## POLICIES

- Freight routes should be safe, effective, and minimize impacts on established neighborhoods.
- Support regional transportation developments that comply with the goals, objectives, and policies in this plan and that support positive development within Houston.

## STRATEGIES

- Support the development of an alternative route to the Parks Highway from Port McKenzie to Houston parallel to the Point McKenzie railroad extension.

- Support the development of a Hawk Lane bike path.
- Work with the State of Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities on Parks Highway planning, routing, and improvements by means of a Parks Highway Corridor Plan.

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# CHAPTER 6: LAND USE PLAN

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The Land Use Plan identifies general land use classifications and the land use plan maps graphically illustrate the location and extent of each land use category in Houston. The land use plan map is a visual representation of long-term policies and is not a detailed blueprint for future development. Nor is the land use plan map a zoning map which establishes specific land uses on a lot by lot basis. The land use plan map, in concert with the Community Growth Guidelines, provides a policy guide and a legal basis for future zoning changes and other development decisions.





## RELATIONSHIP TO HOUSTON'S MUNICIPAL CODE TITLE 10 LAND USE REGULATIONS AND ZONING MAP

The City of Houston's Title 10 Land Use Regulations establishes rules regarding development and are applied as zoning districts in the Official Zoning Map. That map shows zoning district boundaries within the City of Houston's boundaries. Future amendments to Title 10 regulations, zoning changes, and other land use decisions are intended to conform to the Comprehensive Plan and Land Use Plan Map.

This plan makes policy recommendations for current and future land uses based on existing land use patterns and known development plans proposed by large landowners. Title 10 Land Use regulations implement the proposed land use designations through zoning districts.

## AMENDMENTS TO THE LAND USE PLAN

The Land Use Plan is dynamic and may change as the community changes. Proposed amendments to the land use plan map may be reviewed concurrently with new development proposals. Amendments will require that conflicts between the proposal and the maps be resolved by examining the Goals, Objectives, and Strategies Chapter for guidance. Map amendments and changes are Comprehensive Plan amendments and should be consistent with the Plan's Goals, Objectives, and Strategies to meet future community projected growth.

# LAND USE CLASSIFICATIONS

The Land Use Plan Map identifies different land use classifications to illustrate the location and extent of land use categories throughout Houston. The land use classification define the building intensity (density) for each area, based on existing, planned, and projected future development, population and employment.

Each land use classification includes a generalized description of the predominant uses, the intensity of each use, the essential physical characteristics of development, and locational criteria, where appropriate. The locational criteria should be applied in combination to each other and not necessarily individually nor should all criteria be achieved in each location.



## RESIDENTIAL CLASSIFICATIONS

The residential classification identifies areas that are developed for residential purposes and are expected to remain residential for the 20 year horizon of the Houston Comprehensive Plan. The residential classifications also identify vacant land best suited for future residential development. The ranges of residential densities are generalized descriptions of the type of development appropriate for a broadly defined area. They are based on area-wide densities rather than specific densities for specific parcels.

The land use plan map depicts an intended overall distribution of population and housing units for contiguous areas of Houston. The land use plan map is not intended to be applied directly to determine the number of housing units permitted per lot or development site. Title 10 Land Use Regulations and Official Zoning Map will determine the allowed number of housing units on each lot or development area. The type of low density large lot residential development in Houston results from a combination of preferred lifestyle, lack of public infrastructure, such as public water and sewer and other public utilities, and distance from major urban centers.

### RESIDENTIAL 5: 1 DWELLING UNIT PER 5 ACRE (DUA)

The Residential 5 classification provides for low-density single family and rural agricultural residences served by private wells and on-site septic systems. The predominant use consists of a detached house on lots of 5 acres or larger suited for agricultural uses.

### RESIDENTIAL 2.5: 1 DWELLING UNIT PER 2.5 ACRE (DUA)

The Residential 2.5 classification provides for low-density single family and rural agricultural residences served by private wells and on-site septic systems. The predominant use consists of a detached house on lots of 2.5 acres or larger suited for agricultural uses.

### RESIDENTIAL 1: 2 DWELLING UNITS PER ACRE (DUA)

The Residential 1 classification provides for large-lot single family and 2 family residences served by private wells and on-site septic systems. The predominant use consists of detached house on lots of one acre or larger.

## LOCATIONAL CRITERIA

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- Areas with an established large-lot rural development pattern;
- Vacant areas adjacent to established large-lot, rural development;
- Areas without public water and wastewater;
- Areas where environmental constraints preclude an intense site development;
- Access is from low traffic volume local streets.
- Direct access from the Parks Highway is discouraged for new development.



## RESIDENTIAL MULTI-FAMILY: 3 OR MORE DWELLINGS PER ACRE

The Residential Multi-Family 3 or more dwellings per acre classification provides for a range of single and multi-family housing neighborhoods that offer a diversity of housing choices. Residential uses include duplexes, townhouses and low to medium density multi-family. The intended overall density is greater than 3 dwelling units per gross acre. If located within neighborhoods that includes nearby single family homes, the physical scale and appearance and street orientation of multi-family housing developments should be compatible.

### LOCATIONAL CRITERIA

- Areas with a mix of single family and multi-family housing;
- Areas immediately adjacent to existing multi-family development;
- Areas without water and wastewater;
- Areas where environmental constraints preclude an intense site development; and
- Access is from low traffic volume local streets.

## NON-RESIDENTIAL CLASSIFICATIONS

### COMMERCIAL CORE – NEW

The Commercial Core classification is suitable for a wide range of retail and service uses. They include more intense commercial uses primarily for retail and service uses intended to meet the needs of highway users and local residents. This designation is also suitable for a broad range of professional businesses clustered in areas such as a shopping center that may be anchored by one or more large retail establishments. The Commercial Core Classification is also intended for lands that will be best suited for commercial core uses in the future.

### LOCATIONAL CRITERIA

- Existing commercially developed area near the Big Lake Road and Parks Highway intersection; and
- Areas with access onto Big Lake Road within the City of Houston boundaries.

### COMMERCIAL MIXED USE - NEW

The Commercial Mixed Classification provides flexibility for areas that are developed for commercial purposes that also have residential uses and are expected to remain commercial mixed use in the future. This designation is to identify key areas along a highway corridor which are highly visible or transitional in nature. Development in this area should occur in a manner that does not disrupt the function of the highway system. The Commercial Mixed Use Classification is also intended for lands that will be best suited for commercial mixed uses in the future.

This Comprehensive Plan supports and recommends a concentration of commercial uses at strategic locations where safe and compatible access are optimized. Commercial mixed use designations are currently clustered in nodes along the Parks Highway and along the eastside of the Parks Highway, north of the Little Susitna River recreation area and boat launch.

### LOCATIONAL CRITERIA

- Existing commercially mixed use developed area along the Parks Highway north of Big Lake intersection; and
- Areas with safe and convenient access off a side street from the Parks Highway.

### TOWN CENTER/CIVIC CENTER – NEW

The Town Center classification provides the focal point of civic, commercial, and recreation activity for Houston, integrating community serving retail, public services, and civic facilities. The town center allows and encourages community events close to the civic center of Houston, adding life and vitality to the center.

### LOCATIONAL CRITERIA

- Existing commercially developed area near City Hall and Little Susitna Recreational Area; and
- Areas near the existing Fire Hall on Armstrong Road.



## PARK AND NATURAL RESOURCE

The Parks and Open Space classification provides for active and passive recreation, conservation of natural areas, and trail corridors connecting to neighborhoods. Uses include neighborhood, community, regional and natural, open space use, greenbelts, and special purpose facilities. Such facilities might be developed recreational areas including sports complexes or interpretive centers that support parks and recreational functions. Park uses designated on the Land Use Plan Map are generally existing or known planned areas. As new open space and park use areas are acquired the Land Use Plan Map should be updated.

### LOCATIONAL CRITERIA

- Areas designated or dedicated as park use or under management for parks and recreation uses with the City of Houston;
- Areas designated as open space or natural resource use area; and
- City or Borough owned lands of high natural value or environmentally sensitive and not suitable for development.

## INDUSTRIAL

The Industrial classification describes and provides areas of existing and future industrial development. This designation is for areas already substantially developed for industrial use for the duration of the 20 year Plan.

The classification also applies to vacant land that is best suited to industrial development in the future. Limitations on industrial activities should apply near residential areas.

### LOCATIONAL CRITERIA

- Areas with an established primarily industrial development pattern;
- Areas large enough for more intense industrial uses;
- Areas with access to truck routes without the need to travel through local or neighborhood streets and incompatible uses; and
- Areas with rail access to reduce total truck traffic volumes.

## COMMUNITY FACILITY

The Community Facility classification is for developed active public and institutional use areas and undeveloped areas designated for future public and institutional use. Schools, community centers, fire stations, senior and cultural centers, cemeteries, and other public utility facilities designated on the Land Use Plan map are existing or known planned facilities. As new facilities are planned and developed, the Land Use Plan Map should be updated to reflect these changes.

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## TRANSPORTATION FACILITY - NEW

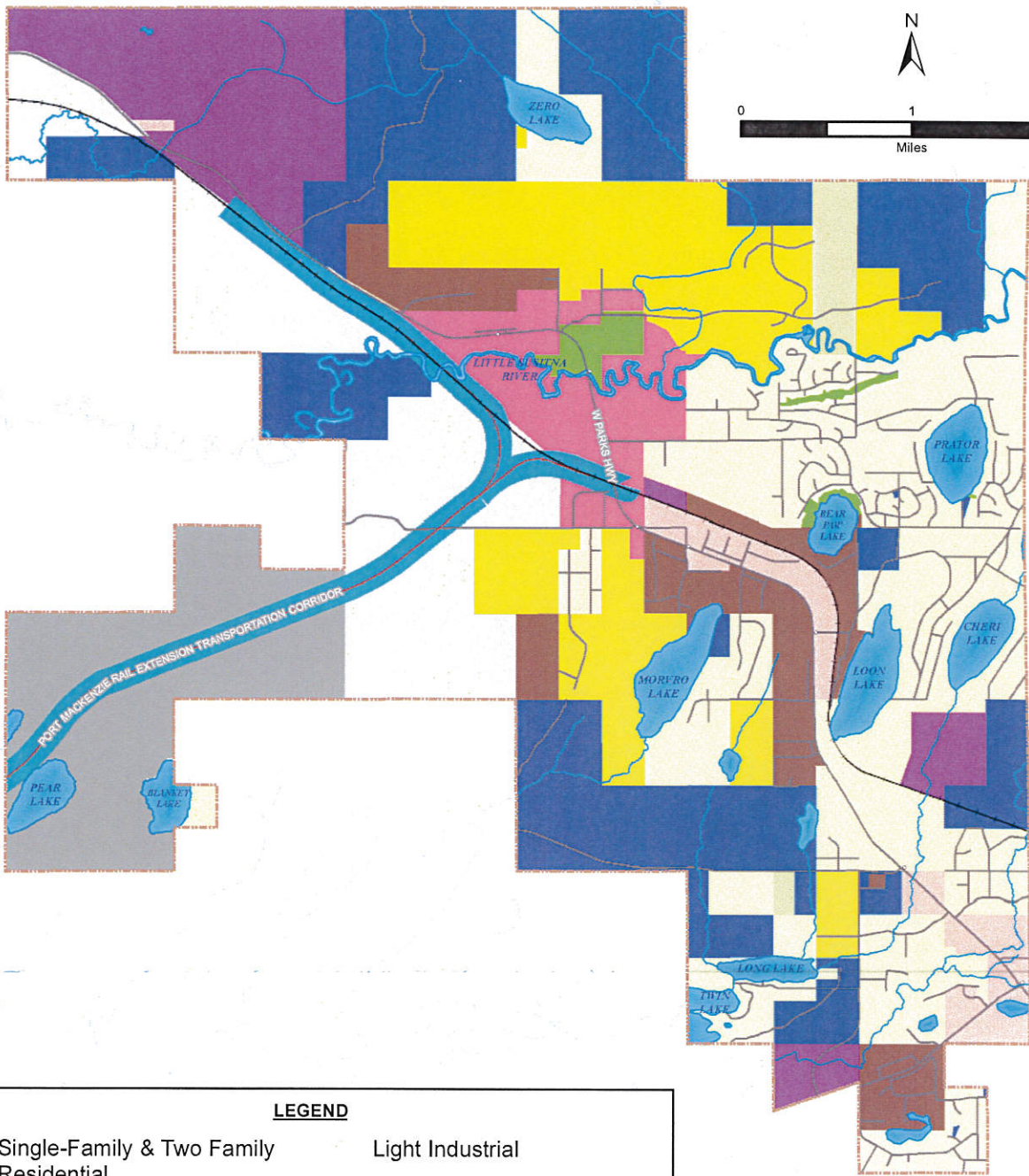
The Transportation Facility classification applies to areas with existing or known planned public facilities that are directly related to transportation by rail or air. This classification includes the Alaska Railroad land holdings and railroad utility corridors including the Port Mackenzie rail extension and roadway corridor, as carried forward from the 1982 City of Houston Comprehensive Plan.

## DEVELOPMENT RESERVE

The Development Reserve classification is applied to areas that are generally suitable for development but whose location and lack of facilities and lack of projected demand make near-term and intermediate term development uncertain. Residential large-lot development is allowed by right but a planning process with a proposed rezoning to an active zoning district should occur prior to development.

## MAJOR ROADS AND STREETS

The Land Use Plan Map illustrates major roads using a black line symbol as a visual geographic reference. The Transportation Plan Map in coordination with the MSB's Long-Range Transportation Plan designates the existing and future transportation network.



| LEGEND |  |
|--------|--|
|        | Single-Family & Two Family Residential |
|        | Low Density Residential/Agricultural   |
|        | Residential/Agricultural               |
|        | Multi-Family Residential               |
|        | Commercial/Mixed Use                   |
|        | Town Center                            |
|        | Light Industrial                       |
|        | Heavy Industrial                       |
|        | Transportation Facility                |
|        | Public Lands and Institutions          |
|        | Parks and Recreation                   |
|        | Development Reserve                    |

|   |
|---|
| CITY OF HOUSTON   |
| COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT<br>AND<br>COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION |
| LAND USE PLAN   |
| JUNE 2016   |
| FIGURE 14   |

CITY OF HOUSTON  
LITTLE  
SUSITNA  
RIVER  
CAMPGROUND →



# CHAPTER 7: TRANSPORTATION PLAN

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# STATUS OF THE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

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## THE PARKS HIGHWAY

The City of Houston is approximately 7.5 miles west along the Parks Highway from the City limits of Wasilla, approximately 50 road miles north of Anchorage, and approximately 300 miles south along the Parks Highway from the city limits of Fairbanks, Alaska. The Parks Highway is part of the Federal Highway's interstate road network. The eastern edge of the city limits of Houston included the intersection of Big Lake Road, with the first commercialized mile of Big Lake Road lying within the jurisdiction of Houston.

The Parks Highway is a 2-lane, undivided facility with 12 foot lanes, 8 foot paved shoulders and a 200 foot wide right-of-way measured from the highway centerline. Within Houston there are periodic passing lane sections for the northbound and southbound lanes, as well as a center two-way left turn lane. The Parks Highway's primary function is to serve statewide mobility for travel and freight transportation through the city limits of Houston for passage to Fairbanks and interior Alaska. Within the national network, the Parks Highway is the primary link between Anchorage, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB), and interior Alaska. Anchorage is the commercial hub of the state, and therefore freight and materials shipped via road to interior Alaska by road must pass through Houston on the Parks Highway. The Parks Highway is also a key element of the Houston road network, serving local traffic throughout the City of Houston.

The Parks Highway is an interstate highway classified as a Rural Interstate by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), and is Route 3 of the National Highway System (NHS). As part of the NHS it has the function of providing mobility on a statewide level, in addition to its secondary function of local area service. The Parks Highway is owned by the State of Alaska and maintained by the DOT&PF.



## CITY OF HOUSTON ROAD NETWORK LAYOUT

The City of Houston's road network branches east and west from the Parks Highway, which operates as a backbone for the regional network. The Parks Highway is the only arterial level roadway within the city limits. The remaining roads are either local roads providing access to the surrounding lots or collector roads that provide access to and from the Parks Highway.

A majority of the parcels within the city limits of Houston access the Parks Highway within the city limits of Houston. Alternative access out of the city is available to the west via Kiowa Street which leads to Big Lake and King Arthur Drive to the east which accesses the Meadow Lakes Loop and Pittman Road areas. Additionally, Big Lake Road leads west into Big Lake. There are currently no signalized intersections within the city, but one is proposed by the DOT&PF for the intersection of Big Lake Road and the Parks Highway.

## ROAD FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATIONS

A functional classification system is a method of identifying the intended use of a road or corridor. It is an important planning level tool to facilitate clear communication about road networks between different agencies, designers, and the public. The function of a road typically falls somewhere between the conflicting purposes of mobility (high speed mobility through a region) and access (lower speed movements with frequent turns to adjacent parcels).

The DOT&PF manages road networks that fall within the City of Houston. Both the DOT&PF and the Mat-Su Borough individually identified functional classifications for roads that they own and maintain or that are adjacent to their roadways. See Figure 15, MSB Functional Classification System.

## ROAD SURFACE CONDITIONS

There are approximately 45 miles of road within the Houston residential road network, not including the Parks Highway and Big Lake Road. Of these 45 miles of road, 90% (40 miles) of the roads are unpaved with a gravel surface. The remaining 5 miles of paved roadway account for most of the collector road network as defined by the MSB.

The paved road network includes all or segments of the following roads:

- Cheri Lake Drive
- Hawk Lane
- King Arthur Drive
- Miller's Reach Road
- Wasey Way
- White Rabbit Drive

Armstrong Road is identified by the MSB as a collector road and is currently unpaved beyond the first quarter mile. The first quarter mile of Armstrong Road serves the Little Susitna River Camp Ground, and the public safety building for Houston which houses one of two Fire Halls serving the north part of Houston. City Hall is also accessed from Armstrong Road.

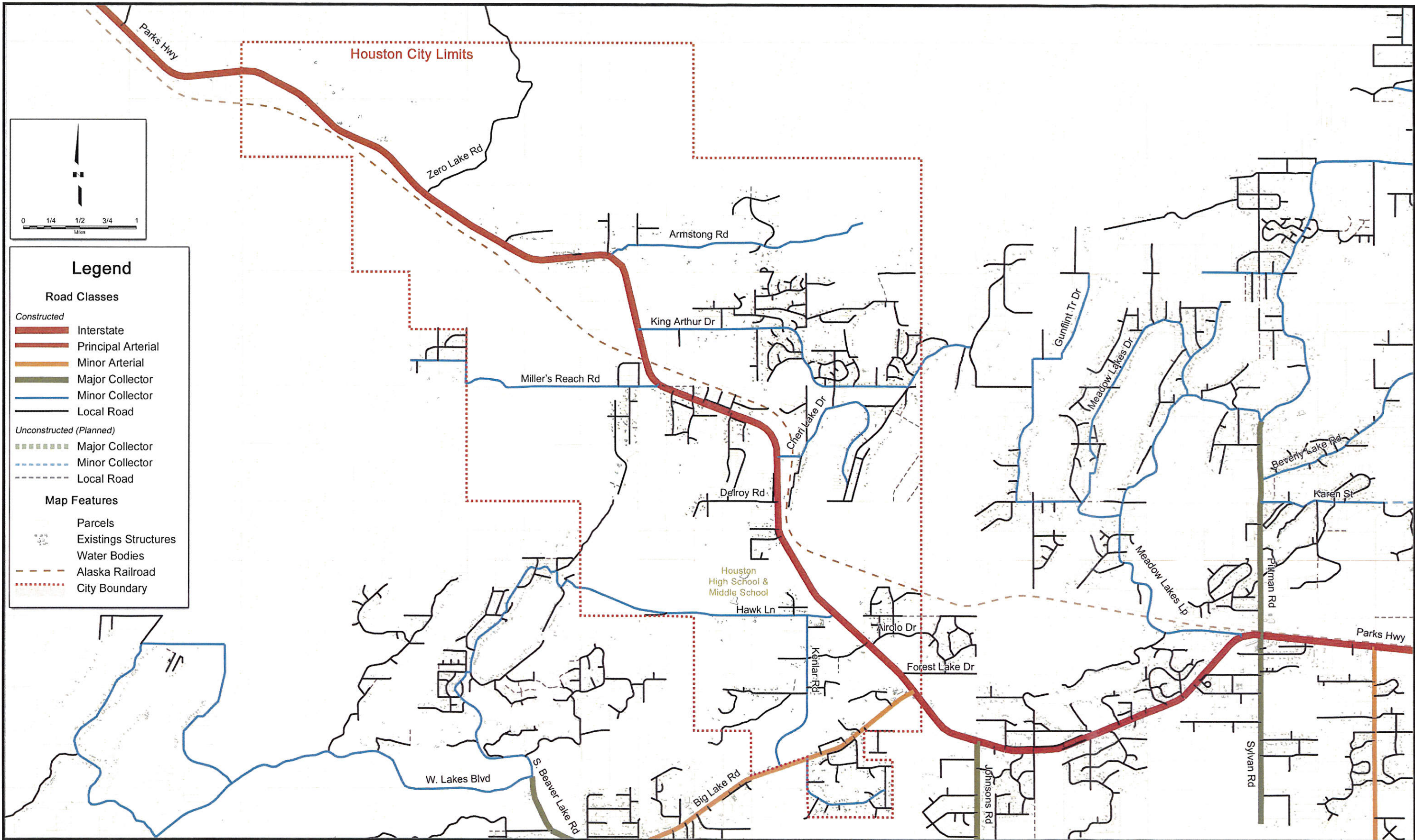
## ROAD OWNERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The road network in Houston is comprised of roads owned by the City, the DOT&PF as well as some roads qualifying for ownership and funding from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Maintenance of the Parks Highway is done by DOT&PF but roadway ownership and responsibilities of all other roads fall under the City of Houston's Public Works Department.

## ALASKA RAILROAD

The Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) generally parallels the Parks Highway corridor throughout the limits of the City of Houston. To the southeast the railroad is on the north side of the highway. The Parks Highway crosses the railroad at a separated grade crossing at approximately milepost 56.5. The separated grade crossing includes a rail bridge that proceeds over the Parks Highway. On the northwest end of the city the rail corridor is on the south side of the highway.

A rail extension from the mainline in Houston to the port at Point MacKenzie is currently under construction. A "Y" junction at the mainline south of the Little Susitna River and the rail spur continuation southwest through the industrial zoned land in Houston has been built.





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## PEDESTRIAN PATHWAYS AND NON-MOTORIZED USE

There is a separated pedestrian pathway on the south side of the Parks Highway that begins east of the Houston city limits and ends at Mile Post 58 within Houston. There is a second pathway on the north side of the Parks Highway that begins at the intersection of the Parks Highway and Cheri Lake Road and continues west beyond the city limits.

There is an established recreation area with a trailhead located at mile 59 of the Parks Highway off of Zero Lake Road. The Houston/Willow Creek Sled Trail provides access to Hatcher Pass recreation area year round and the Zero Lake Trailhead has parking for approximately 60 vehicles and trailers and provides restroom facilities.

The majority of trails in Houston are informal and are used for non-motorized and motorized use year-round, including snow machines, ATVs, dog sleds, bikers, pedestrians, and skiers.

## PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Valley Mover provides public transit between the Mat-Su Valley and Anchorage with routes operating Monday–Friday multiple times a day. Valley Mover has two pick-up and drop-

off locations within the City of Houston: one at the commercial center at Big Lake Road and the recently added Gorilla Fireworks parking lot location.

Mat-Su Community Transit (MASCOT) provides minimal services to residents in Houston. Two busses run a Meadow Lakes/Big Lake to Wasilla route Monday through Friday. The northernmost scheduled bus stop, or Big Lake route cutoff, is at the NAPA Auto Parts and commercial strip mall at the intersection of Big Lake Road and the Parks Highway which is serviced by one bus. MASCOT does provide “Route Deviation” bus service, at an additional fare, which allows for requested additional pickup and drop-off locations depending upon proximity to the route and time requested.

At this time Valley Mover and MASCOT do not have any short or long term plans to expand their services in Houston. Funding and ridership are the determining factors for major changes to the availability public transportation.

## FREIGHT

The Parks Highway serves as a main transportation corridor for commercial freight from the greater Anchorage and Mat-Su area to Interior Alaska. According to the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), in 2013 commercial vehicle traffic made up an average of 16% of annual daily traffic along the Parks Highway through Willow. Peak commercial vehicle counts were greater than 22% of total traffic in September and October (Central Region 2013 Traffic Volume Report, DOT&PF). Considering the low number of freight and commercial destinations between Wasilla and north of Willow, it is reasonable to assume the commercial vehicle traffic recorded on the Parks Highway at Willow is a close reflection of freight traffic on the Parks Highway through the City of Houston.

The Alaska Railroad is the other leading mode for freight transportation. Opportunities for increased freight activity to the Port MacKenzie rail extension are anticipated in Houston due to the “Y” connection to the mainline. Improvement to the Parks Highway from Wasilla to Fairbanks may decrease travel times and continued development of Interior Alaska and the Borough may lead to increased traffic on the Parks Highway and increased use of the railroad.



# RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANS, AREA PROJECTS AND STUDIES

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## MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN (MSB LRTP)

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough Long Range Transportation Plan (MSB LRTP) was completed in 2007 and is currently undergoing an update to create a transportation planning vision to year 2035. The adopted LRTP is part of the Borough-wide Comprehensive Plan which all adopted area and community comprehensive plans are a part of, including the adopted 2003 amended City of Houston Comprehensive Plan. The MSB LRTP identifies transportation goals and objectives which reflect the Borough-wide interests and desires for the future transportation system. The overall purpose and goal of the MSB LRTP is to develop an integrated roadway network that facilitates the efficient movement of people and goods within the central area.

Specific goals identified in the 2007 MSB LRTP relate directly to the City of Houston and its transportation and economic goals, as identified in this Comprehensive Plan. These goals and objectives from the MSB LRTP include:

- Provide a transportation system that enhances the local economy and quality of life;
  - Minimize neighborhood through-traffic movements;
  - Promote positive and attractive design of transportation facilities;
  - Develop a multi-modal transportation network; and
  - Encourage the paving of roads and the increased use of dust control materials;
  
- Develop an integrated roadway network that facilitates the efficient movement of people and goods;
  - Minimizing travel time delays and congestion;
  - Minimize the number of access points on collector and arterial roads to maximize safety and road capacity; and
  - Protect the integrity and level of service on arterial and higher designated roads;

- Protect the through traffic function of highways and arterials;
- Provide a multi-modal transportation system that is safe, effective and meets the needs of all residents;
- Provide for the travel needs of mobility limited residents (young, old, low income, disabled);
  - Support the continued operation and expansion of local public transportation;
- And develop and operate a rail system to benefit Mat-Su's population and economy;
  - Extend a rail connection from the Alaska Railroad main line to Point MacKenzie; and
  - Continue to support economic development of communities along existing and future Alaska Railroad lines.

The MSB LRTP identifies anticipated future projects based on population growth, development, and the existing transportation system's capacities. This information is used to model and forecast estimated future traffic volumes throughout the borough road network. The completed 2007 LRTP extends through the planning year 2025. Assuming residential growth continues in the borough outside of Wasilla and Palmer, proposed future roads were identified with the recommendation that they be improved or completed when the nearby areas they serve are built out. Most of the identified improvements are also included in the Borough's Official Streets and Highways Plan (OS&HP).

The identified recommendations and improvements in the Houston area are mainly for the road system south of King Arthur Drive, where higher density population growth and travel is likely to occur.

Skyview Drive, east of Cheri Lake in Houston and south of Lake Lalen in Meadow Lakes, is a collector-level street recommended to be extended generally west and south of Cheri and Loon Lakes to the Parks Highway, providing a connection to Anthony Road (page 4-24, 2007 MSB LRTP). Big Lake Road from the Parks Highway to Northshore Drive is anticipated to need

expansion from a 2-lane minor arterial to a 4-lane arterial by 2025 based on predicted increases in daily traffic volumes (page 4-14, 2007 MSB LRTP).

Rural area roads are not included in the transportation modeling process. Typically the need for new or improved rural roads is based on providing access to new neighborhoods and a second connection to larger developed areas for emergency access and convenience. Recommendations for rural road improvements in the LRTP are based on needs identified in Mat-Su community adopted comprehensive plans. The City of Houston's 1999 adopted plan stressed the need for emergency access routes and combination fire breaks.

Proposed emergency access routes and staging areas affecting the City of Houston include providing a connection between Millers Reach Road and the Beaver Lake area and connecting roads north of the Little Susitna River from Armstrong Road to Edgerton Parks Road.





## ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES PARKS HIGHWAY VISION, 2006

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities developed a vision for the Parks Highway in 2006. The purpose of the Parks Highway Visioning Document is to establish, in general terms, the Department's future vision of the highway which will provide guidance to the decisions about forthcoming highway projects and is intended to serve as the conceptual basis for more detailed local and Department planning efforts in the future.

Overall the vision for the Parks Highway is as follows:

*"A high degree of mobility for through trips while accommodating local access and slower travelers should be provided in a manner that is highly compatible with the communities and the environment along the corridor. The highway should be free-flowing with enough capacity and appropriate design standards to safely support travel at highway speeds. The long-term vision is for the highway to be upgraded to include freeway-style design characteristics, such as controlled access and interchanges at major connections. Local travel, within communities along the corridor, will be improved by developing local access road systems."*

Using 2030 traffic projections and identified safety and economic needs, general future improvements for the Parks Highway from the Big Lake Junction through Willow were identified. Generally the recommendation is to upgrade this section of the Highway to four lanes with access roads in selected locations. The frontage and access roads may be connected to the highway via interchanges or at-grade signalized intersections in the interim.

Good access management is especially important in Houston where private land exists adjacent to the highway and development pressure has been increasing (Parks Highway Visioning Document, page ES-2). *"Future highway corridor planning efforts should evaluate, on a segment-by-segment basis, how to provide access to adjacent lands, and this should be the basis for an access management plan for the Parks Highway corridor."*



Projected traffic volumes were developed based on historical traffic trends, historical and projected population trends, past design designations, and regional travel models (see Travel Demand Modeling to follow). Average annual daily traffic volumes from the year 2000 were taken as current or existing volumes of traffic along the Parks Highway and used to predict anticipated traffic volumes in the year 2030. The Parks Highway segment from Big Lake Road to Willow is projected to be carrying 8,000 vehicles per day by 2030.

Through this comprehensive planning process, new traffic projections were calculated using updated data in the Travel Demand Model (see following page) for a horizon year of 2035. The new data predicts average annual daily traffic volumes up to three times as much as the 2006 Parks Highway Visioning Document predicted through the Houston segment of the Parks Highway. This increase is significant in terms of highway planning and suggests improvements to the Parks Highway are needed in the near future.

DOT&PF's Parks Highway Visioning Document also notes that if the Wasilla bypass is built, the need for Parks Highway expansion to four lanes through Houston could be needed sooner, due to increases in growth in Houston and Willow and decreased travel time to Wasilla and Anchorage.

Development of Port MacKenzie is anticipated with or without the construction of the Knik Arm Bridge, according to the Visioning Document.

*"Ultimately, a new connection to the Parks Highway from the Knik Arm Crossing may be constructed.... The cities of Wasilla and Houston have zoning. Estimates about the timeframe for this connection range from 10 to 30 years. Most of the land for the route [highway corridor number 7 which follows the existing road alignment from the Parks through Big Lake Road down Burma Road, Ayrshire, and Point MacKenzie Roads] is still in public ownership. The road could intersect the Parks Highway near Millers Reach Road in Houston. This was the most cost effective of the routes studied in 1992. ARRC also may use this corridor. If this route becomes a reality, it could make a bypass at Houston a necessity, put Willow at an easy commuting distance of Anchorage, and increase the number of visitors to the south side of Denali National Park and other tourist and recreational attractions in the Susitna Valley."*

The visioning document states the recommendation for a possible bypass at Houston becomes stronger if a Port-to-Parks roadway connection is built through Houston. The use of interchanges is strongly supported throughout the Visioning Document

and therefore a Houston Bypass appears as a viable option. Otherwise good access management, the use of frontage roads, climbing and passing lanes, and widening to four lanes is predicted to adequately meet future traffic needs.

The Parks Highway is anticipated to expand to four lanes in 2030. There is enough roadside development, existing and anticipated, to warrant frontage roads in some sections of Houston. Construction of the Knik Arm Crossing could alter the traffic projections and change the long term needs of the Parks Highway through Houston. If constructed, the growth and traffic patterns within the borough south of the Parks Highway could change significantly, which may reduce the need for some highway improvements. That is because the provision of this alternate access route may increase the traffic volumes in other sections of the highway.



## TRAVEL DEMAND MODELING AND TRANSPORTATION PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS

The Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions (AMATS) regularly updates and maintains a regional Travel Demand Model (TDM) which includes the Mat-Su Borough areas as well as the greater Anchorage metropolitan area.

In an effort to establish appropriate transportation goals, objectives, and policies, the average annual daily traffic (AADT) volumes have been projected for 2035 by AMATS using the Travel Demand Model (TDM). The TDM includes all planned and funded transportation projects to date (April 2015). The model used in this analysis was developed by the ADOT&PF in conjunction with the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) and the Matanuska Susitna Borough. The extents of the model are the entire network of the MSB and MOA from north of Willow all the way to Girdwood and east as far as the community of Sutton on the Glen Highway. This model is the same one used to analyze the traffic impacts of the Knik Arm bridge project as well as the Highway-to-Highway project in downtown Anchorage, and various Wasilla Bypass alternative corridors.

The model generates traffic volumes based on socio-economic background data such as population, income level, employment in various work sectors, school enrollment, as well as a number of special generators such as hotels and airports. The results of the model were used as a baseline for some the recommendations to follow. Figure 16 presents a diagram of the City of Houston with several key 2035 AADTs taken from the TDM.

## KNIK ARM BRIDGE

The Knik Arm Crossing is a proposed project to construct a toll bridge over Cook Inlet connecting downtown Anchorage to the Point MacKenzie area and provide an alternative route to the Mat-Su Borough. Project management was transferred from the state created Knik Arm Bridge & Toll Authority to the State of Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF) in 2014. Eleven years earlier the State Legislature decided to seriously pursue the development of the bridge following a 1984 Draft Environmental Impact Statement by the DOT&PF.

To date, more than \$72.9 million in federal money has been spent on the Environmental Impact Statement and other preliminary work including right-of-way acquisitions. Full funding, through a loan with the federal Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA), has not been acquired. The Knik Arm Bridge project will also need future funding grants from the state of Alaska to pursue limited right of way requirements.

The Knik Arm Bridge project is included in the AMATS Metropolitan Transportation Plan and regional Travel Demand Model as a constructed project by 2035. Construction of the Knik Arm Bridge could have impacts on traffic volumes experienced by the City of Houston in the future, but growth and increases in traffic along the Parks Highway especially is anticipated to still increase to levels where highway improvements would be recommended.

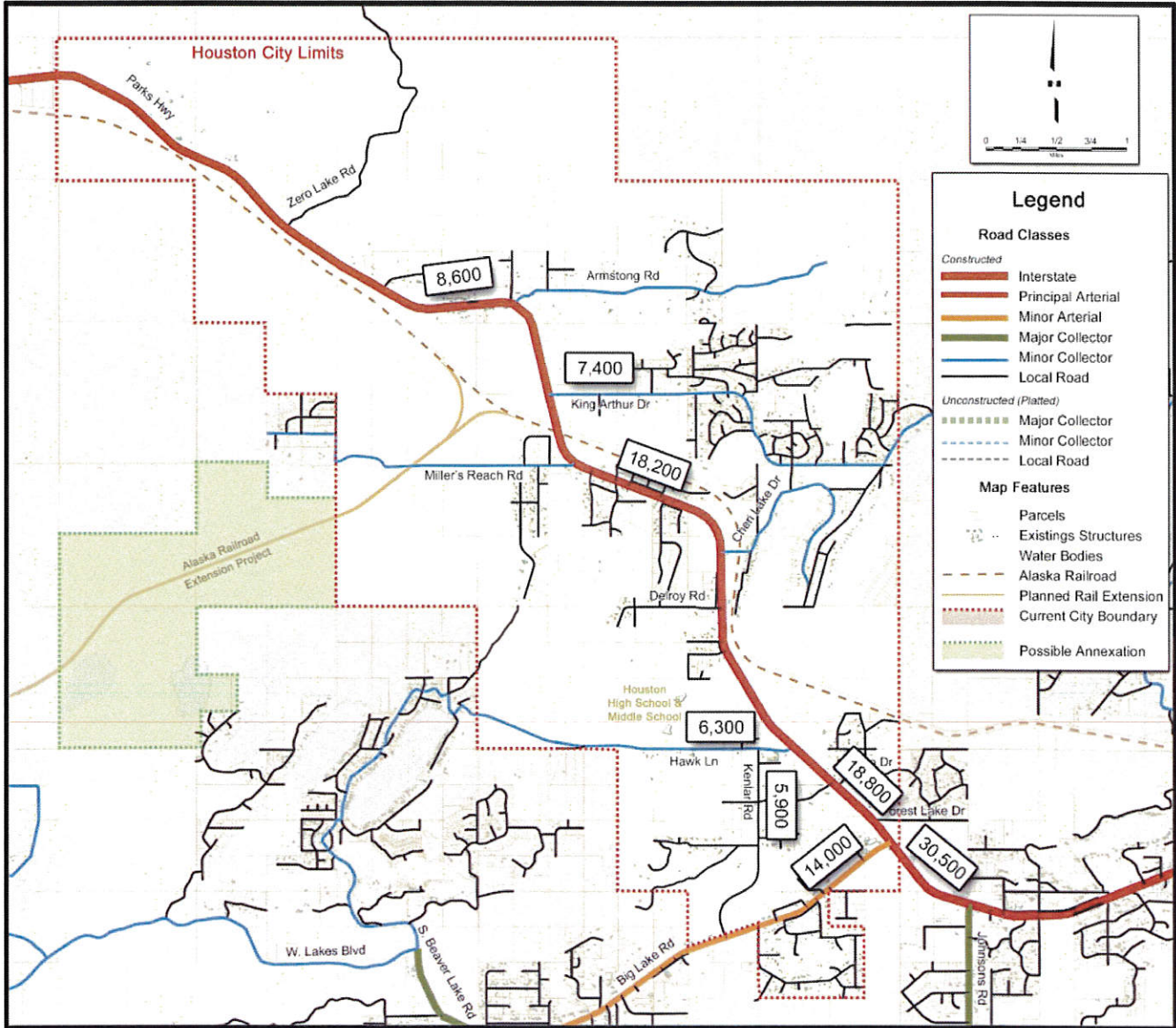


Figure 16. Projected 2035 Traffic Demand Volumes from ADOT&PF Travel Demand Model

# RECOMMENDATIONS

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All recommendations identified in this Transportation Plan element of the City of Houston's Comprehensive Plan support the following community values regarding transportation:

There is a need to increase safety, accessibility, and mobility through much of the city with improvements benefiting all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized users, while maintaining the community character.

The objectives, policies, and strategies identified to achieve the overall Transportation Goal were developed from the community's core values and identified in Chapter 5: Community Guidelines for Growth.

The following Transportation Plan Recommendations coincide with these goals and provide general traffic-related observations and recommendations for the City of Houston based on the analysis of existing conditions, other plans, and the projects generation by the ADOT&PF's Travel Demand Model.

## THE PARKS HIGHWAY

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The Parks Highway represents the backbone of the City of Houston's transportation infrastructure, not only for inter-community travel but also for access to outside services and employment centers. It is also of regional and statewide significance and therefore has a major impact on the residents of the City of Houston. Following are major Parks Highway recommendations.

## BYPASS

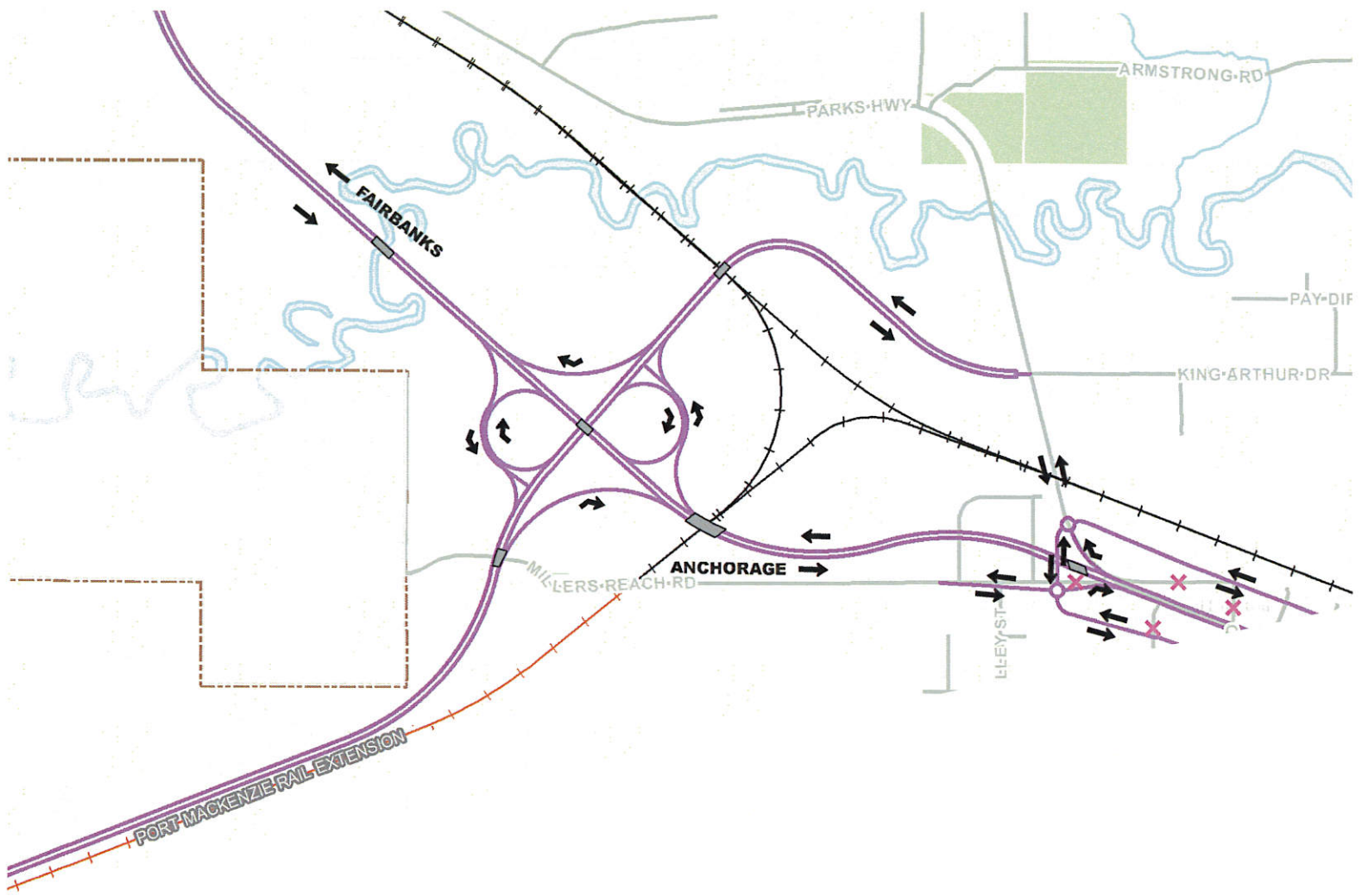
A Parks Highway bypass has been envisioned since at least the early 1980's. The bypass would occur between Mile 56 and Mile 60, and would parallel the Alaska Railroad tracks on the south or west side. This bypass would be integrated with the "Port-to-Parks" highway discussed later. A grade separated interchange would be constructed to facilitate uninterrupted traffic flow along the Parks Highway and (mostly) free flowing turning movements towards the port and town center. Several bridges would be required to cross the railroad tracks, the Little Susitna River, and existing roadways. This recommended project will benefit the community as follows:

## TOWN CENTER DEVELOPMENT

Shifting higher-volume through traffic to the bypass will provide opportunities for a cohesive town center around major community assets, such as the Little Susitna River and existing businesses. However, relocating the highway away from existing businesses could have a negative impact in the form of fewer customers. This result could be mitigated with signage directing travelers to the town center businesses, as well as strategic on/off ramps at the existing Parks Highway at either end of the bypass. The development of streetside or other public parking venues in the Town Center is encouraged.

## EFFICIENT AND SAFE FREIGHT MOVEMENT

Through traffic traveling on the bypass would do so at a higher speed (greater than 55 mph) without the inherent safety risks presented by multiple driveways/intersections. Also, depending on the final alignment of the bypass, up to three horizontal curves could be eliminated or flattened significantly.



## INTERCHANGE

With the construction of the “Port-to-Parks” highway, Houston will be the site of a major highway convergence. In order to provide safe and efficient access, a grade separated interchange is envisioned in the undeveloped land bordered by the Little Susitna River on the north, railroad tracks to the east and south, and the city boundary to the west.

A partial cloverleaf was initially recommended, even though an eventual project will need to complete a detailed evaluation of available interchange types. The Parks Highway would be elevated, with bridges spanning new frontage roads near Millers Reach Road, the Port MacKenzie Rail Link, Little Susitna River, and the railroad mainline. Areas north of the railroad tracks would be linked to the interchange with a new road, including a grade separated railroad crossing.

Main access to the Parks Highway would be through the interchange, particularly for any traffic going south to Wasilla or beyond from the Houston Town Center area. Frontage roads and access management could be utilized at the south end of the bypass to consolidate and route access to and from the freeway. In addition, northbound ‘old’ Parks Highway travel would merge with the freeway at the north end of the bypass. Similarly, southbound freeway traffic would be allowed to exit onto the ‘old’ Parks Highway.

## CONGESTION MANAGEMENT

Future capacity issues north of Big Lake Road are documented in both the Borough's 2007 LRTP (Figure 4-3 & 4-4) and the draft CIA (Appendix C, Section 4). These future traffic projections are in part influenced by projects such as the Knik Arm Bridge and Wasilla Bypass Road. Should the anticipated increases in traffic prove to be correct (more than double by 2035), the Parks Highway will need to be upgraded to a 4-lane divided highway between Big Lake Road and the northern boundary of Houston (and beyond).

This recommended project will benefit the project as follows:

- Efficient and Safe Freight Movement

Reducing congestion by adding lanes can reduce conflicts between slower moving trucks and faster moving cars. It also eliminates the need for passing vehicles to move into the opposing lane, increasing safety for all motorists. Finally, a divided highway, similar to what is currently being designed/constructed between Miles 44 and 52, has the potential to greatly reduce severe crashes, such as head-on collisions.

## ACCESS MANAGEMENT

Access management will likely become a growing concern as traffic volumes on the Parks Highway continue to increase. The Travel Demand Model (TDM) indicates that the majority of growth on the Parks Highway would be local to Houston, rather than being related to pass-through traffic continuing north toward Fairbanks. This likely development suggests that there will be a higher percentage of turning traffic on and off the highway.

One method of accommodating this increase in turning traffic is to encourage turns at safe, logical locations throughout the corridor. This means limiting the number of intersections with the Parks Highway and relocating trips to consolidated intersections through the use of parallel connections and frontage roads. Specifically, frontage roads are recommended in the existing commercial zone near Armstrong Road where linked parking lots currently operate as a de facto frontage road. A bypass, as discussed earlier, would also eliminate conflicts along this section of the Parks Highway.

If the traffic volumes do increase to the level indicated in the 2035 TDM, a 4-lane divided highway would likely be necessary with access points at

a minimum of half mile increments. It is recommended that the City of Houston plan for these access points and encourage development patterns that would reduce the impact and cost of construction for a 4-lane divided highway.

The following access points to the Parks Highway have been identified for consolidation/rerouting or realignment:

1. W Larae Rd/Airolo Dr: Align intersections
2. Corn St: Close Highway access and route to Hawk Ln or Delroy Rd
3. Debra Jean Ln: Close Highway access and route to Hawk Ln or Delroy Rd
4. N Dana Ct to Railroad undercrossing: Close Highway access and provide frontage roads connecting to the repurposed Parks Highway (after the construction of the bypass). Highway access would be via the interchange for northbound traffic and a series of intersections for southbound traffic.

Strategic access control is necessary to preserve efficient movement along the Parks Highway and reduce conflict points.



## FREIGHT AND INDUSTRY

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### PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS

In connection with the consolidation of turning traffic, consideration should also be made concerning the desired location for pedestrian crossings of the Parks Highway. As residential development continues to grow north of the Parks Highway, along King Arthur Road and Armstrong Road, commercial development is expected to increase adjacent to the highway. The major commercial developments are currently on the south side of the highway, and new commercial development is likely to expand from this established location. This development creates a conflict as pedestrians make home based commercial trips which require crossing the Parks Highway.

Safer crossings could be encouraged through construction and proper maintenance of surrounding trail networks which would direct the flow of walking, biking, and motorized pedestrians to reduce speed areas of the Parks Highway or to access points that might be signalized in the future.

It is a goal of the City of Houston to develop economically. Fostering this type of growth, especially industrial development, requires a solid transportation network for moving freight in and out of the industrial zones. The City of Houston has several tracts of Industry zoned land without all-weather roads for freight access. Following are major freight related recommendations.

### PORT TO PARKS

Also known as the "Port MacKenzie to Parks Highway Roadway Corridor", the "Port to Parks" project seeks to construct a more direct highway link between the growing Port MacKenzie and the Parks Highway. Several routes have been studied in the past; including some with impacts to City of Houston lands. It is recommended that an alignment paralleling the north side of the newly constructed railroad link be selected. A "Port to Parks" road through the City of Houston would benefit the community as follows:

- Industrial Development

The recently annexed Knikatnu, Inc. land is zoned heavy industry, but is currently without surface access. A Port to Parks alignment paralleling the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension would provide flexible freight access to a portion of these lands, making it more attractive for businesses to invest. The utility grid will require upgrades to accommodate a growing industry. Providing road access to industrial areas is compatible with the City of Houston's objectives to foster employment opportunities and encourage regional commercial enterprises.

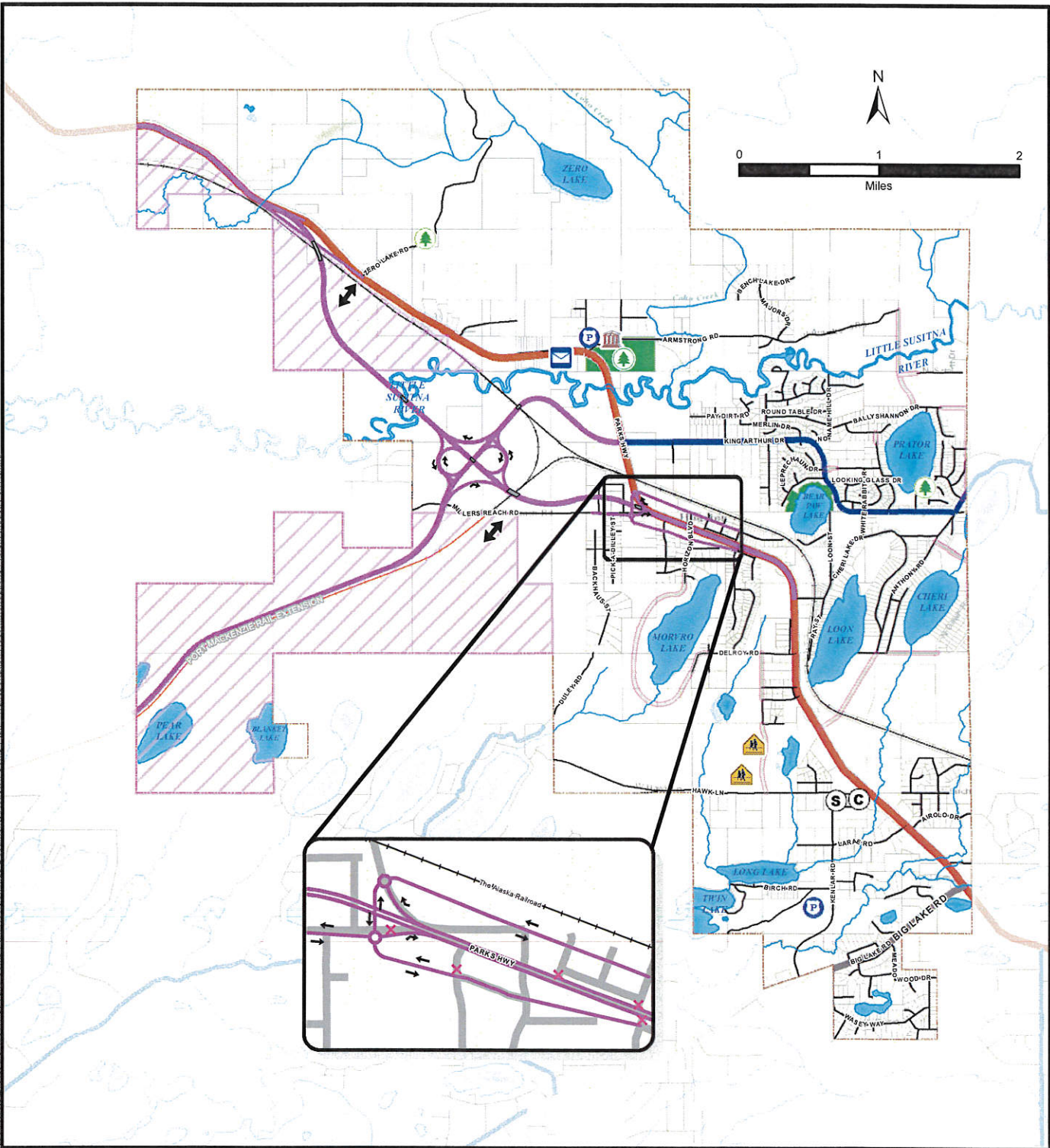
- Freight from Port to Interior Alaska

As operations at Port MacKenzie increase, so will the demand for multimodal access. The "Port to Parks" roadway provides an alternative to the railroad, which is preferred for smaller quantities of goods.

- Light Industry Access

Several tracts of land within the City of Houston's boundary are zoned as "LI", Light Industrial. The majority of this zoning district is not currently connected to the road system, particularly in the northwest portion of the city. In order to attract industrial development, roadways into these districts are recommended. This recommendation includes improvements to existing roadways, such as paving Miller's Reach Road.

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**LEGEND**

- |  |                               |                          |                  |
|--|-------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| City Boundary                                      | Roads                         | Reroute Access to Bypass | Post Office      |
| Parcels  | Interstate                    | Light Industry Access    | School           |
| Park   | Minor Arterial                | Interchange Traffic Flow | Community Center |
| Industrial Zoning                                  | Minor Collector               | City Hall                | Senior Center    |
| Railroad   | Local road                    | Public Safety            | Recreational     |
| Port MacKenzie Rail Extension (Partially Complete) | Proposed Bridge               |                          |                  |
| New to Road Connectors                             | Interchange and Port to Parks |                          |                  |

CITY OF HOUSTON

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**COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT  
AND  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION**

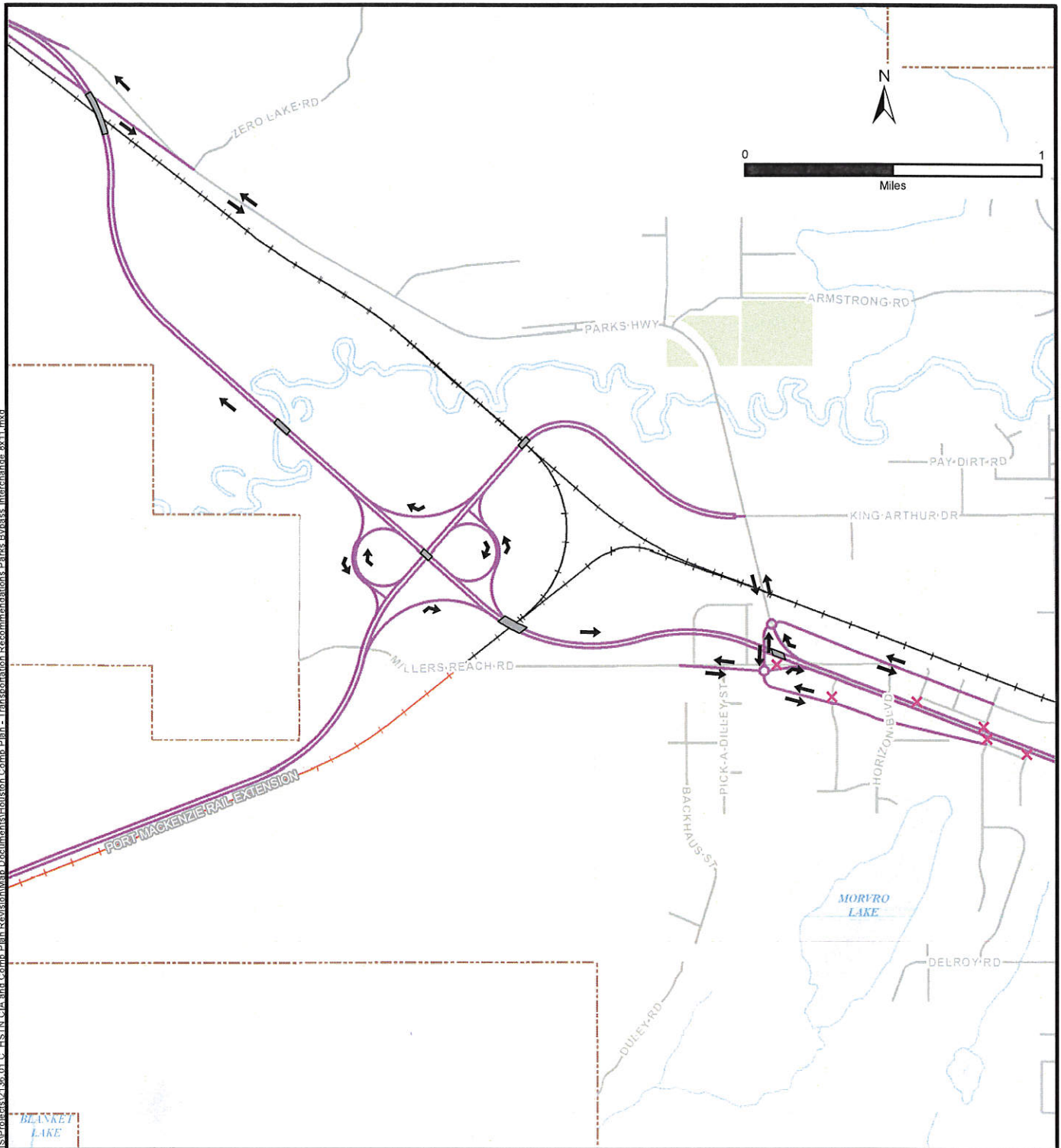
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**RECOMMENDATIONS  
FREIGHT INDUSTRY**

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JUNE 2016
FIGURE 17





**LEGEND**

- City Boundary
- Parcels
- Railroad
- Port MacKenzie Rail Extension (Partially Complete)
- Proposed Bridge
- Interchange and Port to Parks
- Interchange Traffic Flow

CITY OF HOUSTON

COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT  
AND  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION

RECOMMENDATIONS  
PARKS HIGHWAY  
BYPASS INTERCHANGE

JUNE 2016

FIGURE 18

## LOCAL ROAD NETWORK

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If the Parks Highway is considered the backbone of Houston's transportation network, then the local road network makes up the remainder of the skeleton. Residents have identified a need to improve the local road network, from upgrading the surface to providing new connections. Following are recommendations pertaining to the local road network.

- Neighborhood Connectivity

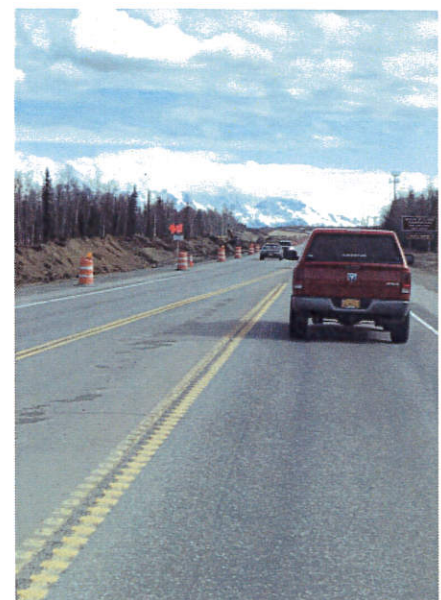
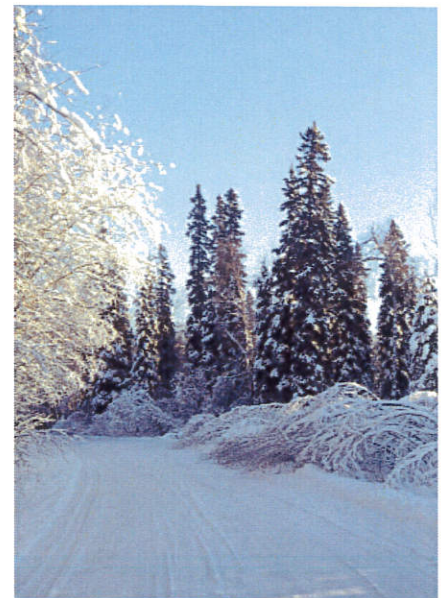
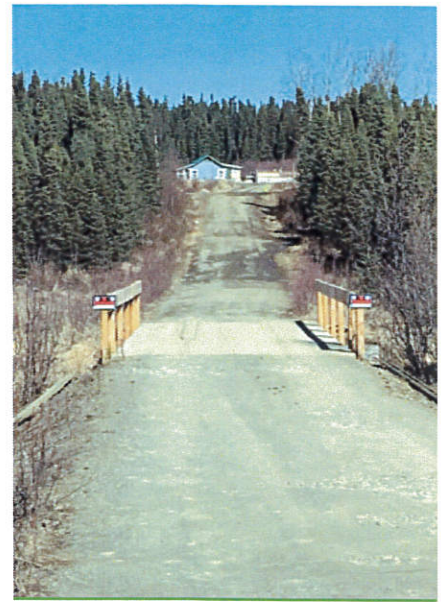
Many of Houston's local roadways lack adequate connectivity, meaning they dead-end or terminate at a lower classification roadway often leaving entire neighborhoods with only one ingress/egress. Not only is this problematic from an emergency response standpoint, but also tends to increase travel time and shifts traffic to lower classification roadways.

Recommended projects include:

1. West of Parks Highway: A secondary road link to the Beaver Lake area; access around the south side of Morvro Lake; and access to the Middle and High Schools from Delroy Road.
2. East of Parks Highway: Alternate Cheri Lake access; access to the east side of Cheri Lake; completion of a loop around Prator Lake; and a new bridge over the Little Susitna River to connect Armstrong Road to the Prator Lake area.

These projects are in alignment with the City's values, goals, and guidelines for growth as follows:

- Connectivity/Emergency Access  
The recommended projects provide alternate access for use during emergency situations as well as better circulation amidst the local road network (meaning less backtracking).
- Promote rural residential growth  
Providing new road connections opens up buildable lands for development, attracting people looking for the rural lifestyle.



## FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION

Current traffic volumes on roads outside the Parks Highway corridor are at the level of local roads regardless of their planned functional classification. Although several roads are currently classified as “Minor Collectors” by the Borough, they have not yet matured to the point where this function is critical to maintain. Volume projections indicate that in the future, a properly designed and well maintained collector road network will be essential.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The “minor collector” road network in the City of Houston should be preserved.
- Property driveways should access local roads when possible instead of collector roads to accommodate possible future turn lanes.
- Local roads accessing on opposite sides of a collector should be aligned directly across from each other to eliminate offset intersections.
- Consideration should be made to possible future right-of-way needs around minor collectors in case these roads ever need to be widened for turn lanes or pathways, particularly in areas around intersections.
- The frontage road paralleling the Parks Highway near the commercial core is located on the south side, not the north side as shown on the Borough’s mapping.

## ROAD SURFACE CONDITIONS

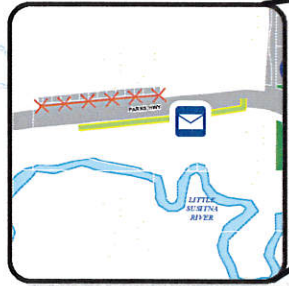
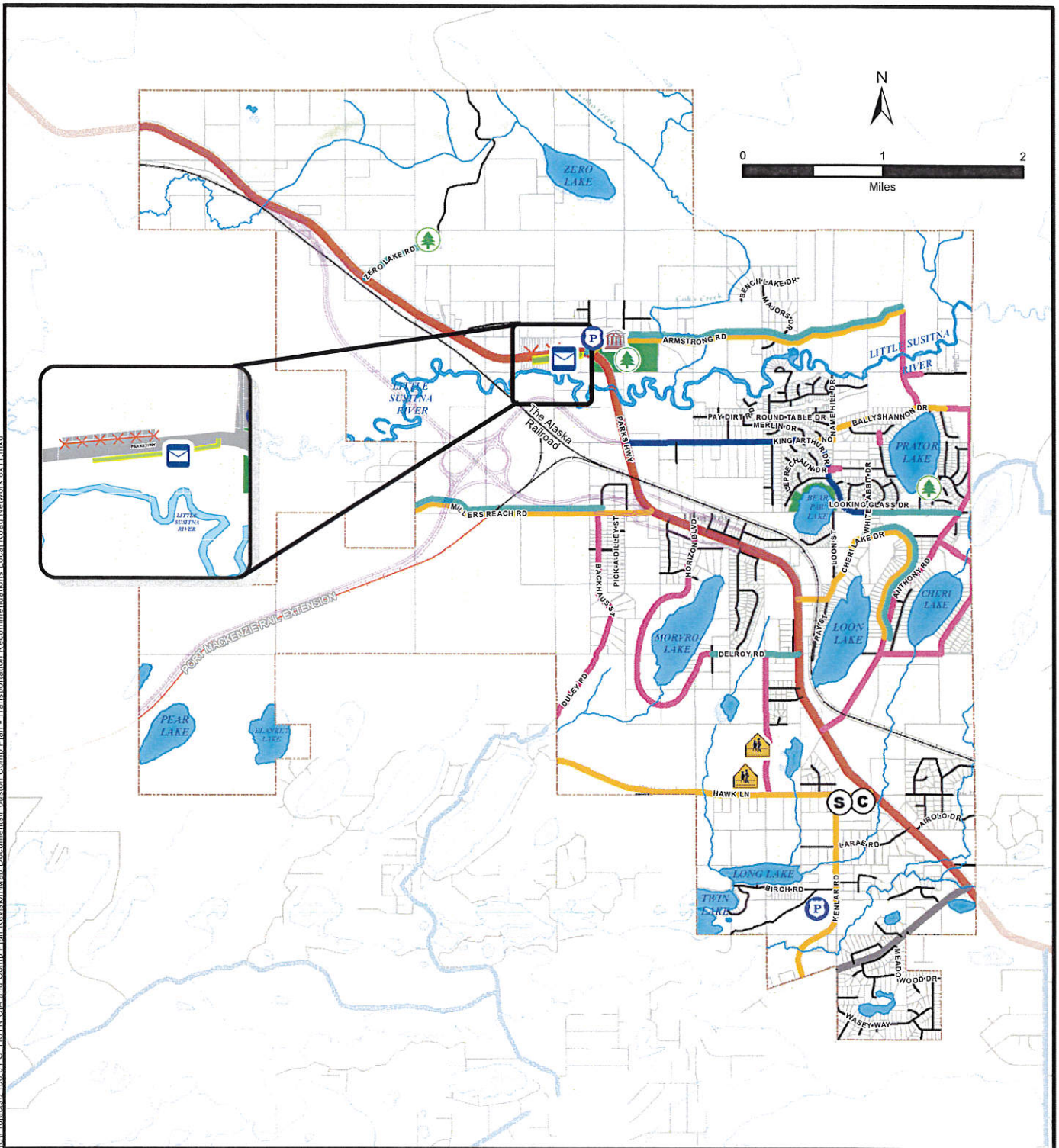
Only approximately 10% of Houston’s roadways feature a paved surface. Recent projects, such as upgrades to Hawk Lane, represent a move in the right direction to pave all collector roadways. It is recommended that existing collectors, as well as any proposed ones, receive a paved surface. This paving will benefit the community as follows:

- Quality of Life

Improving roadway conditions will allow for easier commutes, shift maintenance funds to other priorities, and possibly raise home values. Roadside properties will enjoy the dust-free environment, adding to the enjoyment of outdoor activities.



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**LEGEND**

- |                 |  |                    |                  |
|-----------------|--|--------------------|------------------|
| City Boundary   | Port MacKenzie Rail Extension (Partially Complete) | Mapping Error      | Community Center |
| Parcels         | New/Upgrade to Road Connectors                     | Mapping Correction | Senior Center    |
| Park            | Upgrade Classification to Minor Collector          | City Hall          | Recreational     |
| Roads           | Upgrade to Pavement                                | Public Safety      |                  |
| Interstate      |  | Post Office        |                  |
| Minor Arterial  |  | School             |                  |
| Minor Collector |  |                    |                  |
| Local road      |  |                    |                  |
| Railroad        |  |                    |                  |

CITY OF HOUSTON

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COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT  
AND  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION

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RECOMMENDATIONS  
LOCAL ROAD NETWORK

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JUNE 2016 FIGURE 19

## NON-MOTORIZED USERS

Separated paved pathways exist along the Parks Highway and Big Lake Road. In addition, many less formal trails dot the landscape, used for hiking, cross country skiing, dog mushing, etc.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Existing formal pathways should remain and additional pathways be constructed along Hawk Lane (between the Parks Highway and the Middle/High Schools). The Hawk Lane pathway should be extended from the school campus to Big Beaver Lake and connect with the Big Lake community trail system.
- Construct a formal pathway along Kenlar Road connecting the Hawk Lane pathway with the existing pathway adjacent to Big Lake Road.
- Construct a formal pathway along King Arthur Drive with connection to the existing pathway along the Parks Highway.
- Several segments of the Parks Highway feature a single pathway only. The missing links shall be constructed to provide continuous pathways on both sides along the entire Parks Highway, including the proposed bypass and the existing bridge over the Little Susitna River.

- A formal pathway along the Little Susitna River in the vicinity of the proposed Town Center would be a welcome addition for anyone wanting to use the recreation facilities.
- In all new construction and upgrade projects for interstate, arterial and collector roads, provision must be made to include adjacent pathways wherever feasible.

## OFF-ROAD VEHICLES (ATVS, SNOWMACHINES)

City of Houston Municipal Code allows for the operation of off-road vehicles, including ATVs and snow machines on City streets and rights-of-way. It is evident by the vast number of informal ATV trails that this mode of transportation is widely used.

However, this causes several conflicts. First, informal trails have a tendency to migrate outside the ROW and onto private property. Secondly, repeated use during inclement weather can cause widespread rutting, which leads to unsightly roadside conditions. Lastly, uncontrolled trails can cause safety concerns at roadway intersections and create dust/visibility hazards.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Adopt a policy to incorporate off-road vehicle facilities including stabilized shoulders, flat-bottom gravel surfaced ditches, trail/road intersection considerations in the construction/ reconstruction of roadways within the City boundaries.

- Another alternative would be to provide designated ATV trails between major ATV destinations, such as frequently visited lakes.

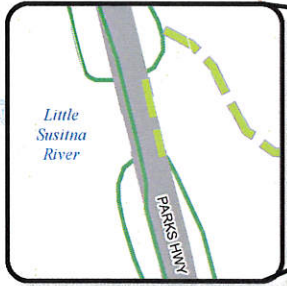
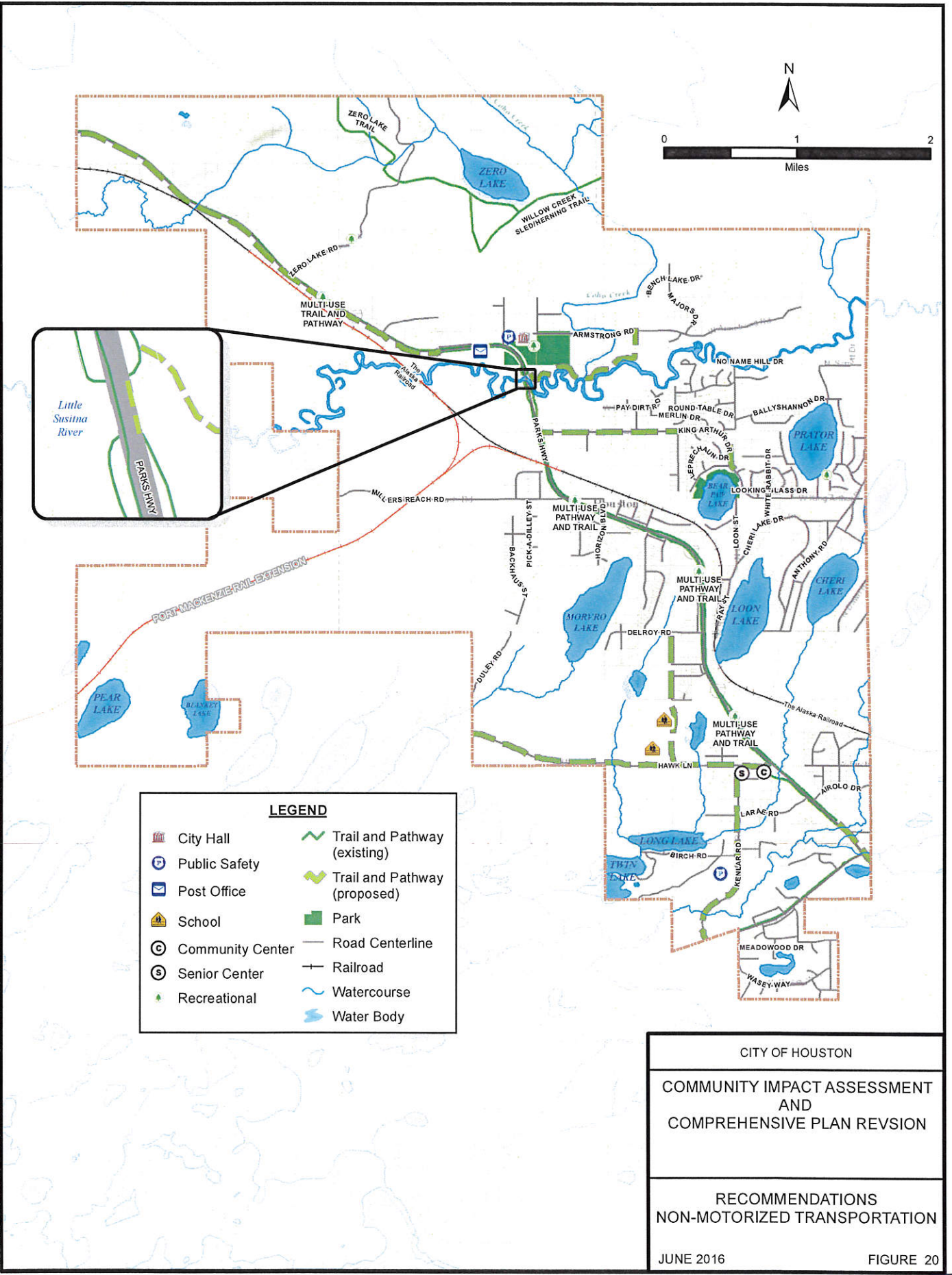
## PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Existing bus service extends into Houston only near the southern boundary. Planning for a potential future commuter rail corridor and possible locations for intermodal stations, including Houston and Willow, is currently in pre-development with the MSB.

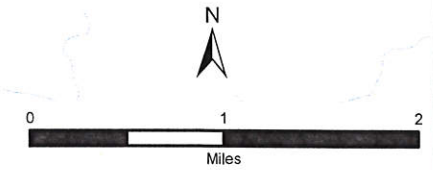
### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Expand the bus service to other parts of Houston could be included in this plan should the community agree to a need.
- Consider the Senior Center on Hawk Lane as a potential candidate for future bus service.
- Site a formal, city owned Park-and-Ride lot for folks wanting to use the bus or carpool to commute to Wasilla or Anchorage.
- Support the development of a multi-agency coordinated plan for an Anchorage to MSB commuter rail corridor that meets Houston's future needs.





| LEGEND |                              |
|--------|------------------------------|
|        | City Hall                    |
|        | Public Safety                |
|        | Post Office                  |
|        | School                       |
|        | Community Center             |
|        | Senior Center                |
|        | Recreational                 |
|        | Trail and Pathway (existing) |
|        | Trail and Pathway (proposed) |
|        | Park                         |
|        | Road Centerline              |
|        | Railroad                     |
|        | Watercourse                  |
|        | Water Body                   |



CITY OF HOUSTON

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COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT  
AND  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION

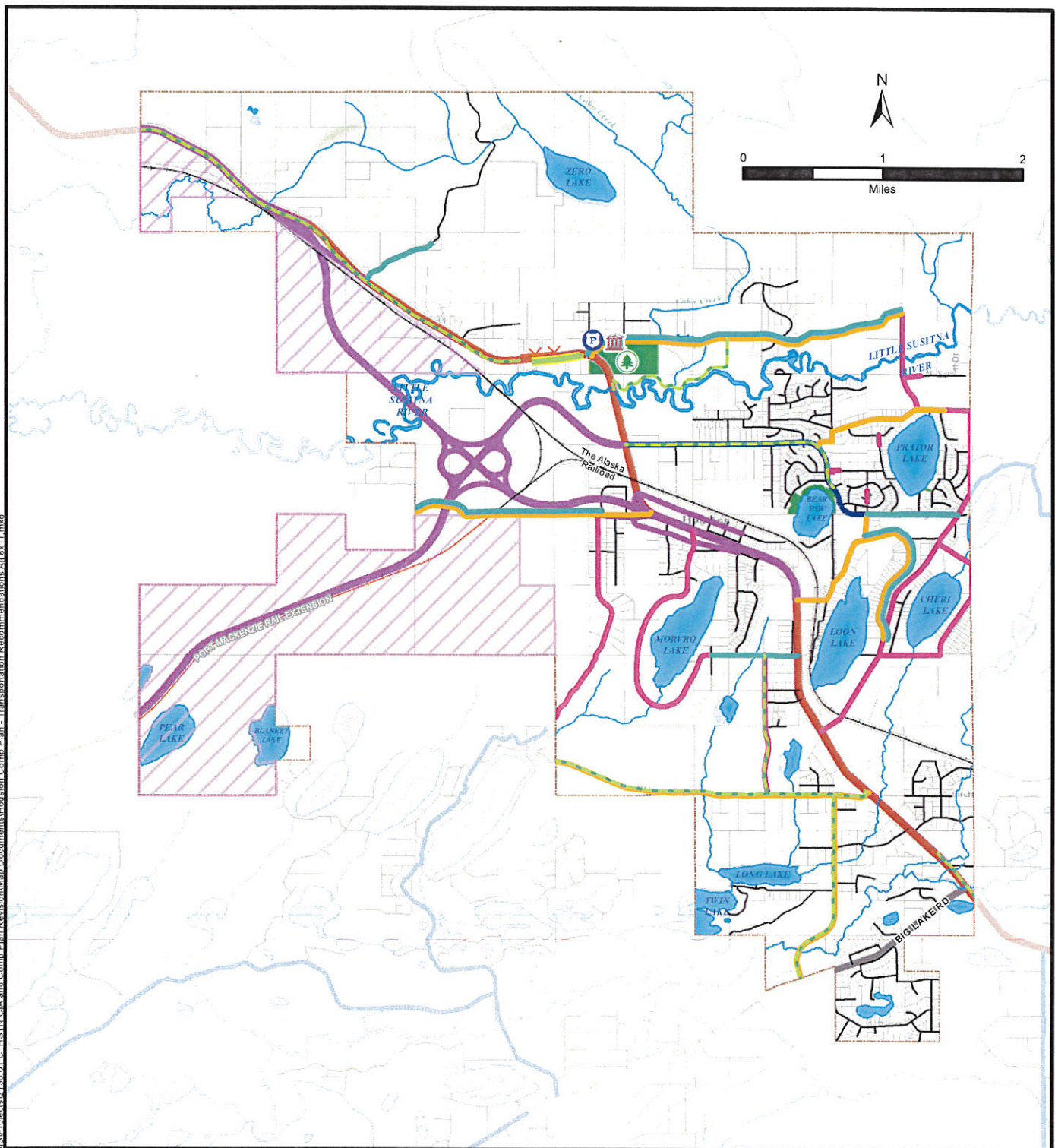
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RECOMMENDATIONS  
NON-MOTORIZED TRANSPORTATION

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JUNE 2016
FIGURE 20

Z:\GIS\Projects\3136.01\_C\_HSTN\_GIA\_and\_Comm\_Plan\_Revision\Mapa\_Documentation\Houston\_Comm\_Plan\_-\_Transportation\_Recommendations\_Alt\_8x11.mxd



**LEGEND**

- |  |                              |   |
|--|------------------------------|---|
| Park   | Interstate                   | New Upgrade to Road Connectors            |
| Industrial Zoning                                  | Minor Arterial               | Upgrade Classification to Minor Collector |
| Railroad   | Minor Collector              | Upgrade to Pavement                       |
| Port MacKenzie Rail Extension (Partially Complete) | Local road                   | Mapping Error                             |
| Interchange and Port to Parks                      | Trail and Pathway (proposed) | Mapping Correction                        |

CITY OF HOUSTON

COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT  
AND  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION

TRANSPORTATION NETWORK  
RECOMMENDATIONS

JUNE 2016

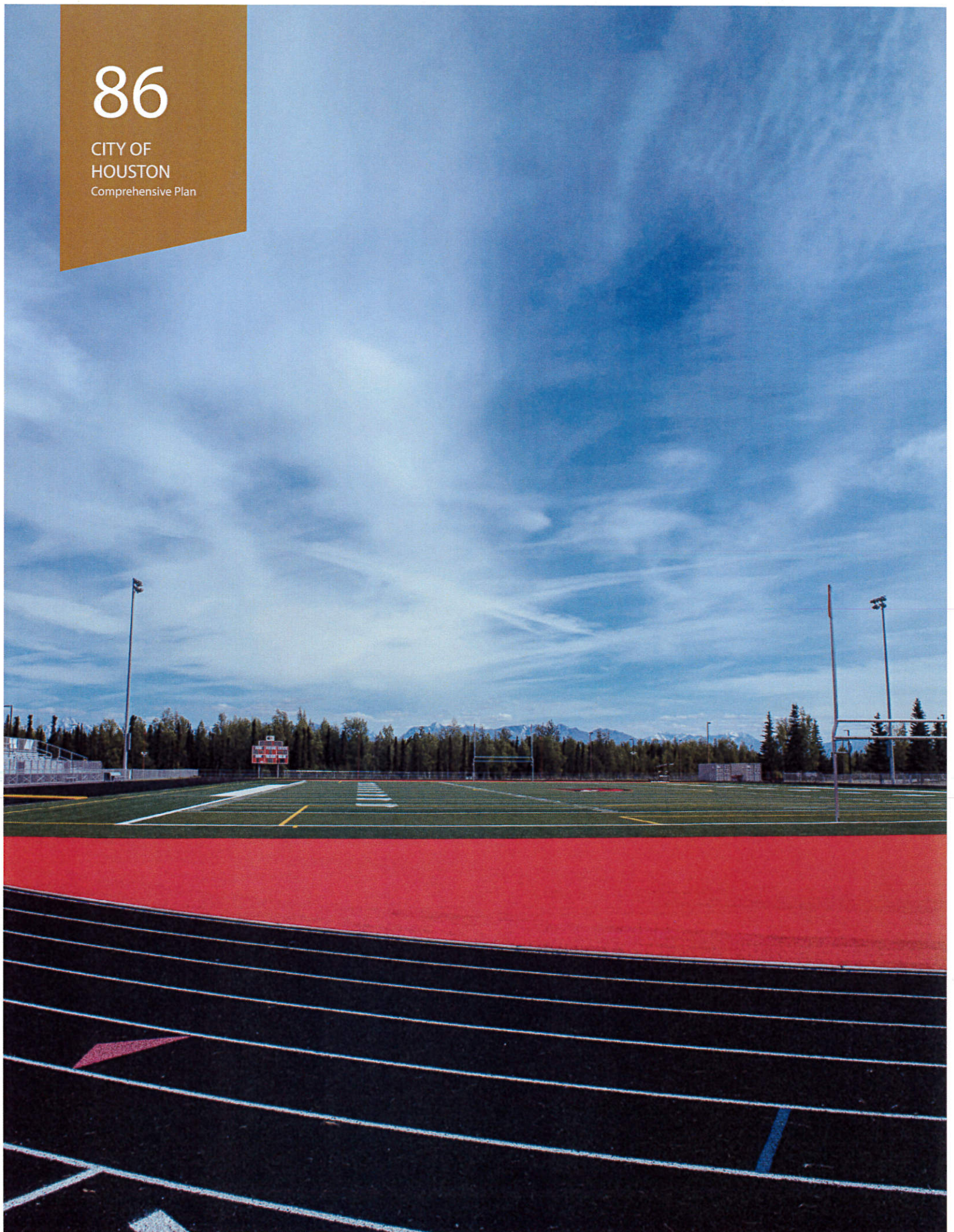
FIGURE 21





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HOUSTON  
Comprehensive Plan





# CHAPTER 8: IMPLEMENTATION

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## OVERVIEW

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The following implementation section describes the steps necessary to actualize the preferred alternative identified in this Comprehensive Plan. Implementation mechanisms for the Comprehensive Plan include regulatory controls, such as zoning, platting, and development standards from Title 10 Land Use Regulations and functional plans, such as the MSB Long Range Transportation Plan.

Timeframes are approximate and based on the information, knowledge and priorities of the Community and the City's ability to acquire funding over the 20 year horizon. As priorities change or funding becomes available, priorities may shift and change timeframes and should be reevaluated in response to changes in economic conditions, permit and regulatory requirements, and statewide economic climate.





## COMMUNITY DESIGN STANDARDS

The community's desire for a more attractive built environment that is also compatible with a semi-rural and rural lifestyle and limited regulations should be balanced with broad design standards in the following areas:

- Streets and roadways;
- Landscaping;
- Public Facilities; and
- Residential development.

## REGULATORY CONTROLS - TITLE 10 LAND USE REGULATIONS

The Comprehensive Plan will be implemented through site development standards as set forth in zoning and land use regulations in City of Houston's Municipal Code, Title 10.

## FUNDING STRATEGIES

Funding development of park and recreation facilities can be challenging, especially with projected budget shortfalls identified for the State of Alaska and its communities beginning in 2016. National, state, local, public, and private funding sources are likely to be required to advance the implementation of this Comprehensive Plan. Funding sources available to implement these elements of this Comprehensive Plan are anticipated to be: Public-Private Partnerships, state and federal grants for community and transportation projects, city budget, and Capital Improvements Programs.

## CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (CIP)

The City of Houston and the Mat-Su Borough uses the Capital Improvement Program as an essential planning and budgeting instrument to identify desired public facilities and capital improvements over a six year cycle. Annual Capital Improvement

Program priorities provide funding, cost and time frames for identified projects and are a useful mechanism to ensure long-term investment for a variety of project scales and types that can be funded by State grants.

## ALASKA STATEWIDE TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (STIP)

The STIP is the state's four-year program for transportation system preservation and development. Interstate, state and some local highways, bridges, and public transportation are eligible to be included in the STIP. It covers all system improvements for which partial or full federal funding is approved. The City of Houston and the Mat-Su Borough use the STIP for planning and coordination with ADOT&PF, especially for changes to the Parks Highway.

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HOUSTON  
Comprehensive Plan

## PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS (3P)

Implementation of the Houston Comprehensive Plan may require funding from non-governmental funding sources, or with assistance from volunteers, grants, or other programs and partnerships. Significant community development initiatives can be made possible by building local support in collaboration with community partners, such as tribal organizations with access to funding for development of transportation infrastructure and economic development through factories and assembly facilities that can employ local residents.

## ADDITIONAL FUNDING SOURCES:

Funding for parks, trails and recreation tourism can be through the project nomination level with the Mat-Su Trails and Parks Foundation.

### FEDERAL FUNDING

National programs for improving communities through non-motorized infrastructure improvements exist and may provide funding opportunities for components of the Comprehensive Plan.

### BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS (BIA)

Where opportunities arise, federal BIA funding for roadways on tribal lands should be explored to provide improvements that will be mutually beneficial to the City of Houston and to tribal entities as well as provide economic expansion through local employment.

### FHWA

The Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act signed into law in December 2015 includes the consolidation of the Surface Transportation Program and Transportation Alternatives Program into a single, Surface Transportation Program Block Grant, increasing flexibility for state and local governments to administer funds. Details about how the Block Grant Program will be administered in Alaska are not yet available, but funds are likely to be made available for a variety of projects based on previous allocations of federal funds by the State.



# IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

## IMMEDIATE TIME FRAME (0-6 MONTHS)

| Priority | Action Item  | Proposed Implementers   |
|----------|--|---|
| 1        | Plan Adoption  | Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC), City Council, COH Staff |
| 2        | Initiate Parks Highway Corridor Plan MP 52-62  | DOT&PF, City of Houston, City Council                         |
| 3        | Coordinate an updated Zoning Map with MSB.   | COH, PZC, MSB.  |
| 4        | Review and develop Marijuana Business policies for consideration in appropriate zoning districts for economic development and commercial business diversity. | COH, PZC, City Council.                                       |



SHORT TERM (1-5 YEARS)

| Priority | Action Item   | Proposed Implementers  |
|----------|---|--|
| 1        | Rezone areawide for implementation of Comprehensive Plan policies and to correct inconsistent zoning districts.   | COH, PZC, City Council   |
| 2        | Update Title 10 Land Use Regulations to reflect Adopted Plan.   | COH, PZC, City Council   |
| 3        | Update Title 10 Land Use Regulations to include design standards for landscaping and setbacks.  | COH, PZC, City Council   |
| 4        | Develop an Overlay District for the Town Center/Civic Center to encourage development of small shops, restaurants, art galleries, and a Riverwalk adjacent to the Little Susitna River. | COH, PZC, City Council, Houston Chamber of Commerce.   |
| 5        | Explore BIA funding for road improvements on tribal lands for pilot projects.   | COH, City Council, PZC, Knikatnu, Inc.   |
| 6        | Determine the feasibility of developing a LED Assembly factory in Houston.  | COH, City Council, PZC, Knikatnu, Inc.   |
| 7        | Explore the feasibility of a Natural Gas Power Plant in Houston to support railbelt energy distribution.  | COH, City Council, Houston Chamber of Commerce, MSB.   |
| 8        | Market and brand Houston as a summer and winter recreation destination through brochures and trails maps.   | COH, Houston Chamber of Commerce, MSB Convention and Visitor's Bureau, Mat-Su Trails and Parks Foundation. |
| 9        | Explore the feasibility of an Improvement District to fund the expansion of utilities to jumpstart growth.  | COH, City Council, MSB.  |
| 10       | Determine the feasibility of a wastewater treatment facility in Houston.  | COH, MSB.  |
| 11       | Continue fish restoration projects on the Little Susitna River for return of salmon to improve riparian ecology and to provide recreational benefits.                                   | COH, Knik Tribal Council, Community Groups and Volunteers.   |
| 12       | Explore partnerships to encourage Industrial Greenhouses as a source of local food and economic development.  | COH, City Council, Houston Chamber of Commerce, MSB.   |
| 13       | During development, ensure the trail system is preserved by obtaining trail easements where possible.   | COH, MSB.  |

## MID-RANGE (5-10 YEARS)

| Priority | Action Item   | Proposed Implementers                             |
|----------|---|---|
| 1        | Prepare a small area plan for a Riverwalk in the Town Center at City Hall and Little Susitna Campground.  | COH, PZC, City Council                            |
| 2        | Evaluate the feasibility of intermodal transfer facility at new ARRC extension  | COH, ARRC, City Council                           |
| 3        | Evaluate the feasibility of a Parks Highway Bypass corridor through a highway engineering design study project to implement the transportation element.                         | COH, DOT, MSB.                                    |
| 4        | Develop a marketing plan to attract a Grocery Store chain to Houston.   | COH, City Council, Houston Chamber of Commerce.   |
| 5        | Prepare a site selection for a new elementary school to ensure that adequate land is set aside in an appropriate location for future anticipated school enrollment projections. | COH, MSB School District, MSB, PZC, City Council. |

## LONG-RANGE (10-20 YEARS)

| Priority | Action   | Proposed Implementers                                |
|----------|--|--|
| 1        | Evaluate the feasibility and funding of a Port to Parks roadway corridor parallel to the new ARRC extension.   | COH, DOT&PF, MSB                                     |
| 2        | Reevaluate the Comprehensive Plan at the 10 year mark or when a new Census is available to ensure Planning Assumptions are still relevant.                   | COH, PZC, City Council, MSB                          |
| 3        | Determine the feasibility of material sites of gravel or other mining/mineral resources to support the construction industry and boost economic development. | COH, City Council, Houston Chamber of Commerce, MSB. |

## **APPENDICES**

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**Appendix A. Existing Conditions Report**

Appendix A - MSB Historic Volume Counts

Appendix B - Houston Road Inventory

**Appendix B. Public Involvement Summary**

**Appendix C. Houston Household Opinion Survey Report**

**Appendix D. Community Impact Assessment and Appendices**

Appendix A - Public Involvement Summary

Appendix B - Economic Development Opportunities: Perspectives of Community Stakeholders

Appendix C - Traffic Impacts of Major Planning Projects

**Appendix E. Land Use Assessment**

**Appendix F. City of Houston Planning & Zoning Commission Resolution**

**Appendix G. City of Houston City Council Adoption Ordinance**



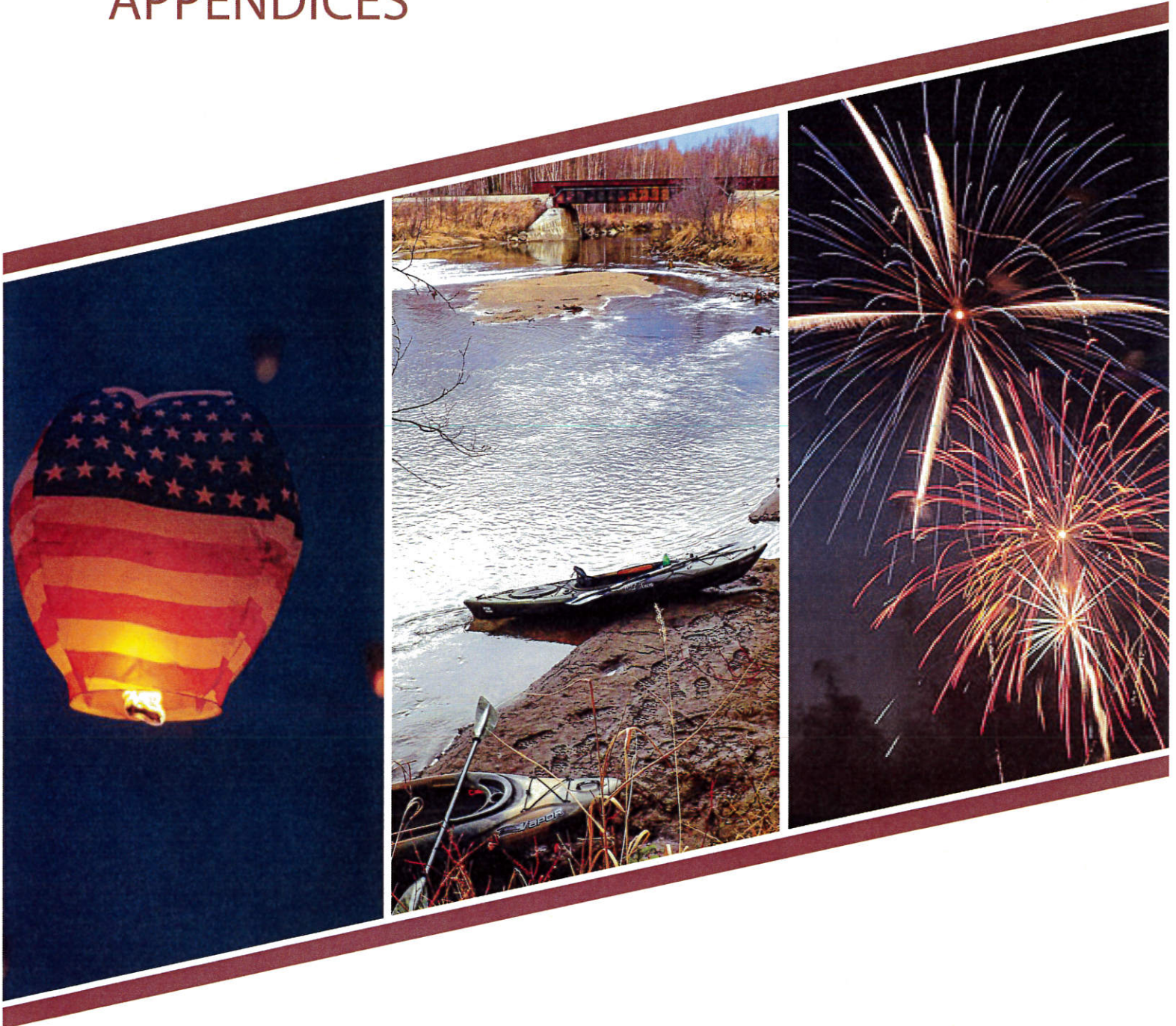
# Comp Plan Appendices



# CITY OF HOUSTON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



## APPENDICES



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- APPENDIX B. Public Involvement Summary
- APPENDIX C. Household Opinion Survey Report
- APPENDIX D. Community Impact Assessment and Appendices
- APPENDIX E. Land Use Assessment
- APPENDIX F. City of Houston Planning & Zoning Commission Resolution
- APPENDIX G. City of Houston City Council Adoption Ordinance





**APPENDIX A.  
EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT**





# DRAFT Existing Conditions Report & Community Profile

**City of Houston Community Impact Assessment & Comprehensive Plan Revision**

Prepared by R&M Consultants, Inc. for the City of Houston

August 2014



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Appendix A - MSB Historic Volume Counts

Appendix B - Houston Road Inventory





## Contracting Agency

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# History and Background

---

According to the State of Alaska's Community and Regional Affairs database, Houston, Alaska's origins began with natural resource development. Houston traces its roots back to the Herning Trail (now Willow Creek Sled Trail) for freighting supplies to the Willow Creek Mining District. "Houston" was named after Tennessee Congressman Houston and the first listing of it on a blueprint map was in 1917 on an Alaska Railroad map as "Houston Siding." Several coal mines were developed in the area during 1917-18 and a railroad spur was constructed to the Janios & Athens coal mine, which supplied coal to Anchorage and the LaTouche Mining Company in Prince William Sound. Houston coal was used extensively by the U.S. Navy up through World War II, when the mines shut down. In the mid-1920s, the Heaven brothers operated a mink farm at mile 59.6. In 1953-54, gravel roads and power lines were extended west of Wasilla, and Houston was quickly settled. In 1966, Houston incorporated as a third-class city; it was reclassified as a second-class city in 1973. In 1998, tests were conducted into the availability, quantity, and quality of natural gas and found huge deposits of coal-bed methane, but the wells were capped due to local restrictions and a lack of marketing.

## Location and Geography

---

Houston is located within the Matanuska-Susitna Borough near the junction of the Little Susitna River and Mile 57.2 of the Parks Highway, 18 miles northwest of Wasilla and 57 road miles north of Anchorage. Houston's city limits encompass 23 square miles, ranging from Mile 61 of the Parks Highway at the northern boundary to Mile 52 at the southern boundary. The commercial and residential development along the first mile of Big Lake Road lies within the Houston city limits. Houston is located near the western edge of the most populous portion of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. The Alaska Railroad traverses the Parks Highway within the city limits.

Full air service is available at Anchorage International Airport. Other local air service is available at Mat-Su's small airports. A local seaplane base exists on Morvvo Lake.

# Climate

---

January temperatures range from -33 to 33 °F; July temperatures range from 42 to 83 °F. The average annual rainfall is 15 inches, mostly from mid-July to early September, with 45 inches of snow. Winds are frequently lower than the Palmer/Wasilla area, with daily averages ranging from 0 to 6 mph.

# Physical Characteristics

---

## Soils

Soils in Houston generally range from well-drained, well-sorted gravel to hydric wetland soils. A number of small lakes dot the central and southern portions of the community limits and are bordered by glacial moraines consisting of non-sorted glacial till. In general, soils located south of the Little Susitna River and east of the Parks Highway are well drained sand and gravels of pitted outwash, and till material. Larger intermittent areas of poorly drained soils and peat bogs occur to the west of the Parks Highway.

The northern topography is characterized by rolling hills and perched silty areas; these soils are fine grained and poorly draining. Development within the area is sparse with only a few gravel pits cut in glacial moraine and esker/kame complexes. Soils in the central portion of Houston are suitable for cultivated crops agricultural development.

Soils in the central portion of Houston are suitable for agriculture. Portions of these areas are presently zoned for low density residential and agricultural use.

## Topography

Houston is situated at 244 feet above sea level. The topography of Houston is generally developable; only a small portion of the total land area contains slopes in excess of 25 percent. Topography is variable with the elevation generally rising from south to north within the city limits. The northeastern portion of the City is on an elevated plateau that marks the beginning of the Talkeetna Mountain foothills. The topography south of the Little Susitna River is undulating with numerous lakes and glacial moraines. The western portion of the community is relatively flat and generally developable.

## Vegetation

The vegetation within the Houston area is comprised of three broad vegetation categories: bottomland spruce-poplar forest, lowland spruce-hardwood forest, and low brush bog.

Vegetation types within these broad categories also vary. The bottomland spruce-poplar forest includes mixed forest, cottonwood, alder and willow. The lowland spruce-hardwood forest includes the birch forest found in the Houston area.

Vegetation species found in bottomland spruce-poplar forest includes white spruce, balsam poplar, black cottonwood, paper birch, quaking aspen, and black spruce. Typical understory include alder, willow, rose, labrador tea, several berry bushes, grasses, ferns and moss. These vegetation types are found on level to nearly level terrain - the cottonwood, alder and willow invade the flood plains and grow rapidly. These species are replaced by white spruce and aspen on some sites.

The lowland spruce-hardwood forest is dense to open lowland forest which includes pure stands of black spruce. It usually occurs in areas of shallow peat, glacial deposits, outwash plains and on north-facing slopes. The predominant vegetation species include black spruce, white spruce, paper birch, quaking aspen, balsam poplar and black cottonwood, with an understory of willow, dwarf arctic birch, and several berry bushes.

Low brush bog and muskeg areas are dominated by dwarf shrubs over mats of sedges, mosses and lichens. This vegetation type is found in wet, flat basins where conditions are too moist for tree growth. Dominant species include black spruce, Labrador tea, bog cranberry, willow, dwarf arctic birch, crowberry, and bog rosemary. A wide variety of grasses, mosses and lichen are also found in these regions.

## **Waterbodies**

Approximately 1.20 square miles, or 5%, of Houston consists of surface waters. The most notable is the Little Susitna River which crosses the Parks Highway in the middle of the community. This river originates in the Talkeetna Mountains in Hatcher Pass and flows southwest ultimately into Cook Inlet. The Little Susitna River, Coho Creek, and a number of contributing unnamed streams are listed in the Anadromous Waters Catalog.

Several popular lakes exist within the City limits including Zero Lake, Bear Paw Lake, Prator Lake, Frog Lake, Cheri Lake, Loon Lake and Maruro Lake.

According to the Alaska's Final 2010 Integrated Water Quality Monitoring Report (July 15, 2010), there are no designated "Impaired Waterbodies" within the city of Huston.

## **Wetlands**

A number of riverine, lacustrine, and palustrine wetlands are present within Houston. Most wetlands are riparian buffers along the Little Susistna River, Coho Creek and surrounding ponds. Several other wetlands are present in low laying areas between Zero Lake and the Little Susitna River.

## **Floodplains**

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) completed a Flood Insurance Study and remapped the Special Flood Hazard Areas for the MSB, inclusive of Houston. The MSB adopted the new floodplain mapping in Ordinance 11-018 on February 15, 2011. The flood insurance rate maps (FIRM) are now available in digital format from either the FEMA or MSB borough websites. The map panels that apply to Houston are: 7138E, 7139E, 7143E, 7144E, 7163E, 8001E, 8002E, 8006E, 8007E, and 8010E. The primary floodplain surrounds the Little Susitna River. A floodplain development permit from the MSB is required prior to building or development within a federally designated flood hazard area.

## **Fish and Wildlife**

According to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the Little Susitna River provides habitat for all five species of Pacific salmon: king (Chinook), silver (coho), chum (dog), pink (humpy), and red (sockeye) – as well as rainbow trout, dolly varden, and arctic char. Coho Creek contains rearing juvenile chinook and coho salmon. Prator, Loon and Bear Paw Lakes are stalked with rainbow trout, with several other fish species present.

Many species of birds occur in the Houston area. All birds in the area, with the exception of grouse and ptarmigan, are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

## **Threatened and Endangered Species**

As of November 2012, no federally listed or proposed species or designated or proposed critical habit under the jurisdiction of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service occur in the Houston area. No new species have been added to the applicable federal lists.

## **Hazardous Waste and Contaminated Sites**

There are five documented contaminated sites within the city of Houston according to the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) – Division of Spill Prevention and Response Contaminated Sites Program Database. Four of the five sites have achieved “Cleanup Complete” status, including sites at the Houston Fire Hall, two Alaska Railroad sites, and the City of Houston Landfill near MP 59 of the Parks Highway. Although the City of Houston’s Landfill is no longer listed as a contaminated site, it is listed in DEC Brownfields Database as of 4/28/2005. One site remains “Open” and is located at a private residence on Meadowood Drive (*a stove was stolen from inside the residence, causing 175 gallons of fuel to spill inside the home and migrate into the soil below the home*). The open site was actively being monitored as of the last entry in the DEC database on 3/16/2011. Additionally, the potential for undocumented contamination always exists.

## **Historic Properties and Cultural Resources**

According to the National Register of Historic Places (NR) maintained by the National Park Service and available to the public, there are no NR listed sites within the City of Houston. While there are no listed sites within city limits, there are likely eligible sites present. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough established a Historic Preservation Commission by Ordinance of the Assembly in April 1982. The Commission is certified to carry out the purposes of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and will aid in identification, evaluation, registration and protection of sites within the Borough.

## **Agriculture**

There are several areas within the City of Houston zoned as Low Density Residential Agricultural District (RA-5) and as Residential/Agricultural District (RA-2.5). Neither of these areas has been taken advantage of by any large-scale farms, but small homestead farms do exist. There is undeveloped potential for agriculture in Houston. Farming in other parts of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough has been very productive, including large farms in Knik and Palmer. Based on known soil data, soils present in parts of Houston are likely similar to those farmed in Knik approximately 15 miles to the southwest. The short growing season and long daylight hours are ideal for producing certain cold weather crops. Potatoes are the most common, but other fruits and vegetables including broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, greens, onions, raspberries, peas and many others are grown. Many World Records for largest vegetable are held by farmers of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough including records for largest beet root, broccoli, cabbage, cantaloupe, carrot, celery, kale, kohlrabi, rutabaga, and turnip.

Popular demand for locally farmed produce has been increasing in recent years. The Houston Farmers Market is held at the Meadowoods Mall on Big Lake Road from late-May through September on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. This is one of about 15 different weekly farmers markets held within the Matanuska-Susitna and Anchorage Boroughs.

The Alaska Department of Natural Resources Division of Agriculture launched a statewide "Alaska Grown" agricultural products certification program in 1986. The program was designed to highlight and promote farm products in the marketplace and the "Alaska Grown" logo now appears not only on certified products, but also clothing and merchandise. The campaign has been highly successful in encouraging pride in and loyalty to Alaska grown products. The program has been extended to include a Restaurant Rewards Program, any enrolled food service will be reimbursed 20% for buying Alaska Grown Specialty Crops from Alaska Grown members. Funding for the program comes from the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant for the reimbursement of specialty crops. There are currently no certified "Alaska Grown" producers in Houston; there are 87 in the South Central region of Alaska.

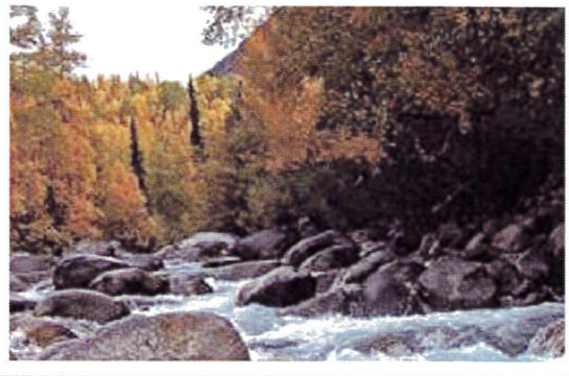
# Parks and Recreation Facilities

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Like most of Alaska, parks and outdoor recreational facilities is essential to the quality of community for Houston residents and visitors. The Little Susitna River provides outdoor recreation in the form of camping, boating, and fishing. The Little Susitna Campground is located on the east side of the Parks Highway at Mile 57.3. The campground is open 24 hours a day between Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends; the facility includes a day use area, pavilion, play grounds, camp sites equipped with fire pits and trash cans, rest rooms, two public water wells, and RV facilities. The City of Houston maintains a Public Use Facility opposite this campground and provides additional access to the Little Susitna River.

The Riverside Camper Park is located in the core of Houston adjacent along the Parks Highway and adjacent to the Little Susitna River. This park provides shower and laundry facilities, electricity and a grocery store.

The Houston/Willow Creek Sled Trailhead recreation area is located at mile 59 of the Parks Highway off Zero Lake Road. This recreation area provides parking for approximately 60 vehicles with trailers and provides rest room facilities and trailhead access to the Hatcher Pass recreation area.



The Alaska Department of Fish and Game stocks four local lakes with various fish species for recreational purposes. Bearpaw Lake is stocked with rainbow trout and coho salmon; Loon and Morvro Lakes are stocked with rainbow trout, and Prator Lake is stocked with arctic char.

Most trails within the community are informal and do not have clearly dedicated public access. These trails are utilized as transportation corridors for snow machines, ATVs, dog sleds, bikers, horses, pedestrians, and skiers. The Haessler-Norris Trail System consists of 20 trails of various distances; the published map was created for the Willow Dog Musers Association in April 2011.

The Hatcher Pass/Independence Mine, Big Lake, the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge, the Mat-Su Visitor's Center, and Nancy Lake Recreation Areas are all located near the community of Houston and offer various recreational opportunities to local residents as well as regional, out of state, and international tourists.

# Community and Culture

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Houston is a rural-residential community that has experienced consistent growth over the past several decades. Houston's proximity to the commercial center of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and its abundance of available land makes it a strategic location for residential, commercial and industrial development.

Houston's "Lakes District" includes popular recreation sites such as the Little Su Campground, Long Lake, Cheri Lake, Prator Lake, Loon Lake, Woody Lake, Zero Lake, Bear Paw Lake, and Birch Lake. Community events such as the Pike Derby is held during the winter months, and Founder's Day, a community celebration, boasts live entertainment, vendors, activities for kids, and a fireworks display in mid-August. Trails for hiking and ATVs crisscross most of Houston and are popular in the winter months for dog sledders and snowmachiners. During the summer months, a water trail is popular in the Nancy Lakes region.



# Community Centers, Services and Libraries

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The Homesteaders Community Center, located just west of Mile 53.5 of the Parks Highway on Community Drive, has been providing a meeting place and fellowship for area residents since its inception in 1957. The nonprofit organization consists of over 50 members and membership is open to any resident for a minimal yearly fee. The group organized social gatherings, holiday parties and bingo (which is the organization's main source of funding). The building is also rented out for functions. Amenities include ball





fields, a 24 by 34 foot main hall, kitchen facilities, restrooms, and a storage area. The building is also made available for Mid-Valley Seniors, Inc. for meal service and for local Boy Scouts of America meetings.

Mid-Valley Seniors, Inc. is a nonprofit organization founded in 1983. The association provides fellowship and a nutritional program to member seniors in Big Lake, Houston, Meadow Lakes, and Willow areas. In 1987, the Mid-Valley Senior Center opened in Houston, which includes a cafeteria, recreation room, and office.

There are no public libraries in Houston, although the Mat-Su Borough does have libraries in neighboring communities. There are libraries available to students at the Houston High School and Middle School. Libraries are located in Big Lake, Sutton, Talkeetna, Trapper Creek and Willow.

The Big Lake Country Club, founded in 2000, is a 24-hour services provider for developmentally delayed and emotionally challenged adults. The main campus is located in Houston and provides daily support, monitoring and supervision for adults in need. Amenities include a fenced and secure facility, group home and cabins, a game room, kitchen and meals, and a horse facility for therapeutic horseback riding.

## Public Safety Facilities and Services

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The City of Houston Emergency Services building is located at MP 57.3 of the Parks Highway. The building houses the Houston Fire Department and Police Department. The police facilities are presently unstaffed due to budget cuts. Local law enforcement is being handled by the Alaska State Troopers. In case of emergencies, the community is serviced by 911 and residents can call troopers in non-emergencies. According to the Mat-Su Borough Emergency Operations Plan (May 2010), the community has an active volunteer fire department with approximately 18 staff which also provide emergency medical services. The City has one fire engine, two tankers and one rescue truck.

# Land Use

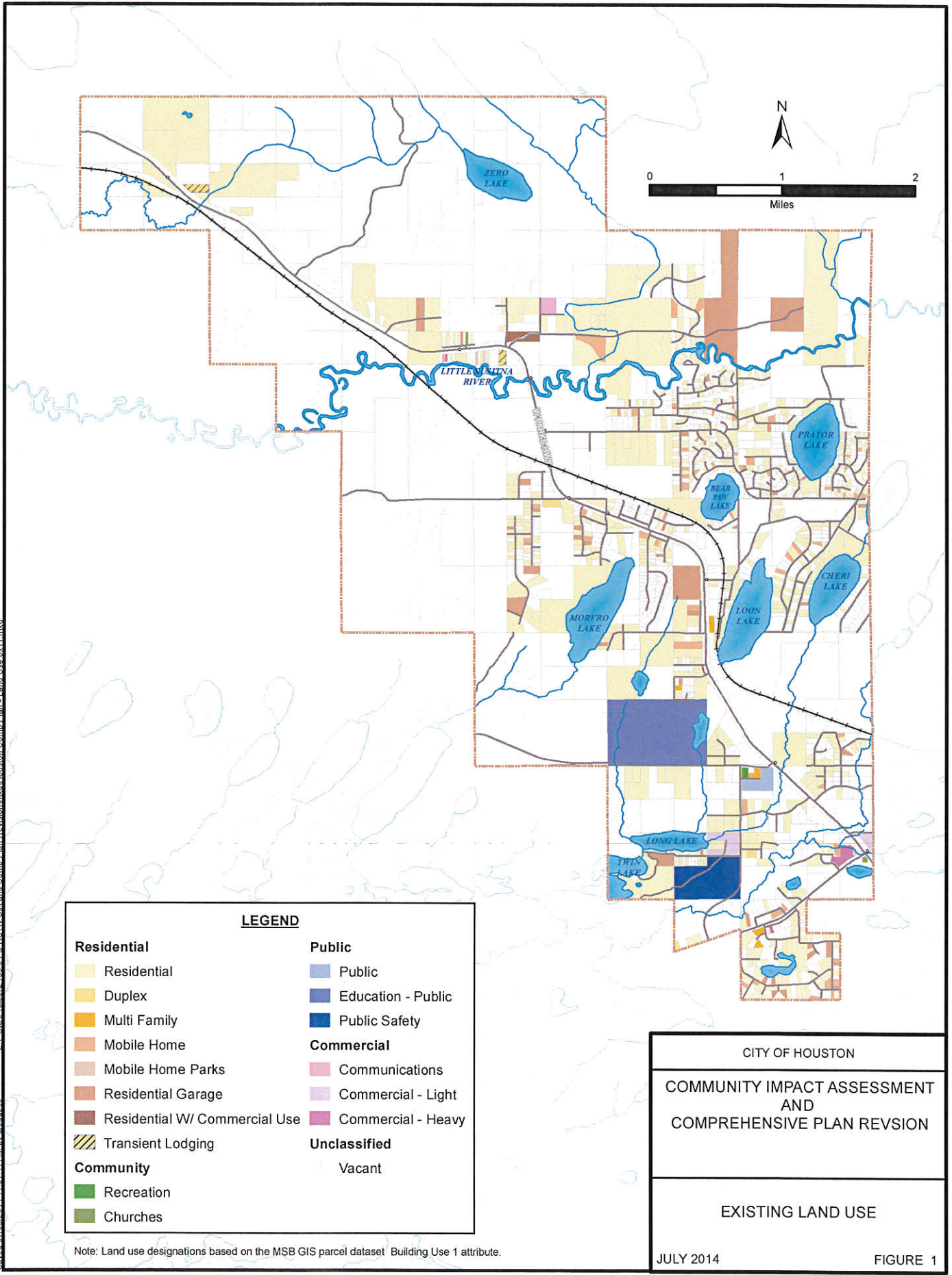
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Currently there are 3,275 acres of developed land, making up 23% of the total 14, 175 acres of land area of Houston. Approximately 10, 900 acres or 77% of total land is undeveloped. Figure 1 graphically depicts existing land use including vacant land. Table 2 summarizes the vacant land suitability by type of land use.

**Table 1. Vacant Land Suitability by Subarea**

| <b>Land Use</b>                      | <b>Area (acres)</b> | <b>% Of Total</b> |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Churches</b>                      | 2                   | 0.01%             |
| <b>Commercial – Heavy</b>            | 12                  | 0.08%             |
| <b>Commercial – Light</b>            | 32                  | 0.23%             |
| <b>Communications</b>                | 10                  | 0.07%             |
| <b>Duplex - 2Family</b>              | 11                  | 0.08%             |
| <b>Education – Public</b>            | 241                 | 1.70%             |
| <b>Mobile Home</b>                   | 97                  | 0.68%             |
| <b>Mobile Home Parks</b>             | 1                   | 0.01%             |
| <b>Multi Family</b>                  | 12                  | 0.08%             |
| <b>Public</b>                        | 18                  | 0.13%             |
| <b>Public Safety</b>                 | 93                  | 0.66%             |
| <b>Recreation</b>                    | 3                   | 0.02%             |
| <b>Residential</b>                   | 2435                | 17.18%            |
| <b>Residential Garage</b>            | 261                 | 1.84%             |
| <b>Residential W/ Commercial Use</b> | 10                  | 0.07%             |
| <b>Transient Lodging</b>             | 11                  | 0.08%             |
| <b>Vacant</b>                        | 10926               | 77.08%            |
| <b>Total</b>                         | <b>14,175</b>       | <b>100%</b>       |

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| LEGEND                        |                     |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Residential</b>            | <b>Public</b>       |
| Residential                   | Public              |
| Duplex                        | Education - Public  |
| Multi Family                  | Public Safety       |
| Mobile Home                   | <b>Commercial</b>   |
| Mobile Home Parks             | Communications      |
| Residential Garage            | Commercial - Light  |
| Residential W/ Commercial Use | Commercial - Heavy  |
| Transient Lodging             | <b>Unclassified</b> |
| <b>Community</b>              | Vacant              |
| Recreation                    |                     |
| Churches                      |                     |

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| CITY OF HOUSTON   |
| COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT<br>AND<br>COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION |
| EXISTING LAND USE   |
| JULY 2014   |

Note: Land use designations based on the MSB GIS parcel dataset Building Use 1 attribute.

FIGURE 1

Table 2 below summarizes the type of land use by housing type as a percentage of total land area.

**Table 2. Land Use by Housing Type**

| <b>Land Use</b>                          | <b>Area<br/>(acres)</b> | <b>% Of<br/>Total</b> |
|--|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Residential - 2F Duplex</b>           | 11                      | 0.39%                 |
| <b>Mobile Home</b>                       | 97                      | 3.43%                 |
| <b>Mobile Home Parks</b>                 | 1                       | 0.04%                 |
| <b>Residential (MF) Multi<br/>Family</b> | 12                      | 0.42%                 |
| <b>Residential (SF)</b>                  | 2435                    | 86.13%                |
| <b>Residential Garage</b>                | 261                     | 9.23%                 |
| <b>Residential W/ Commercial<br/>Use</b> | 10                      | 0.35%                 |
| <b>Total</b>                             | <b>2827</b>             | <b>100%</b>           |

# Zoning Districts

The City of Houston has 11 distinct Zoning Districts that implement the policies of the Comprehensive Plan. The Zoning Districts are a part of the City of Houston’s Chapter 10 Municipal Land Use Regulations. Table 3 Existing Zoning Districts summarizes the City of Houston’s zoning districts and their intent as a baseline for the Comprehensive Plan revision.

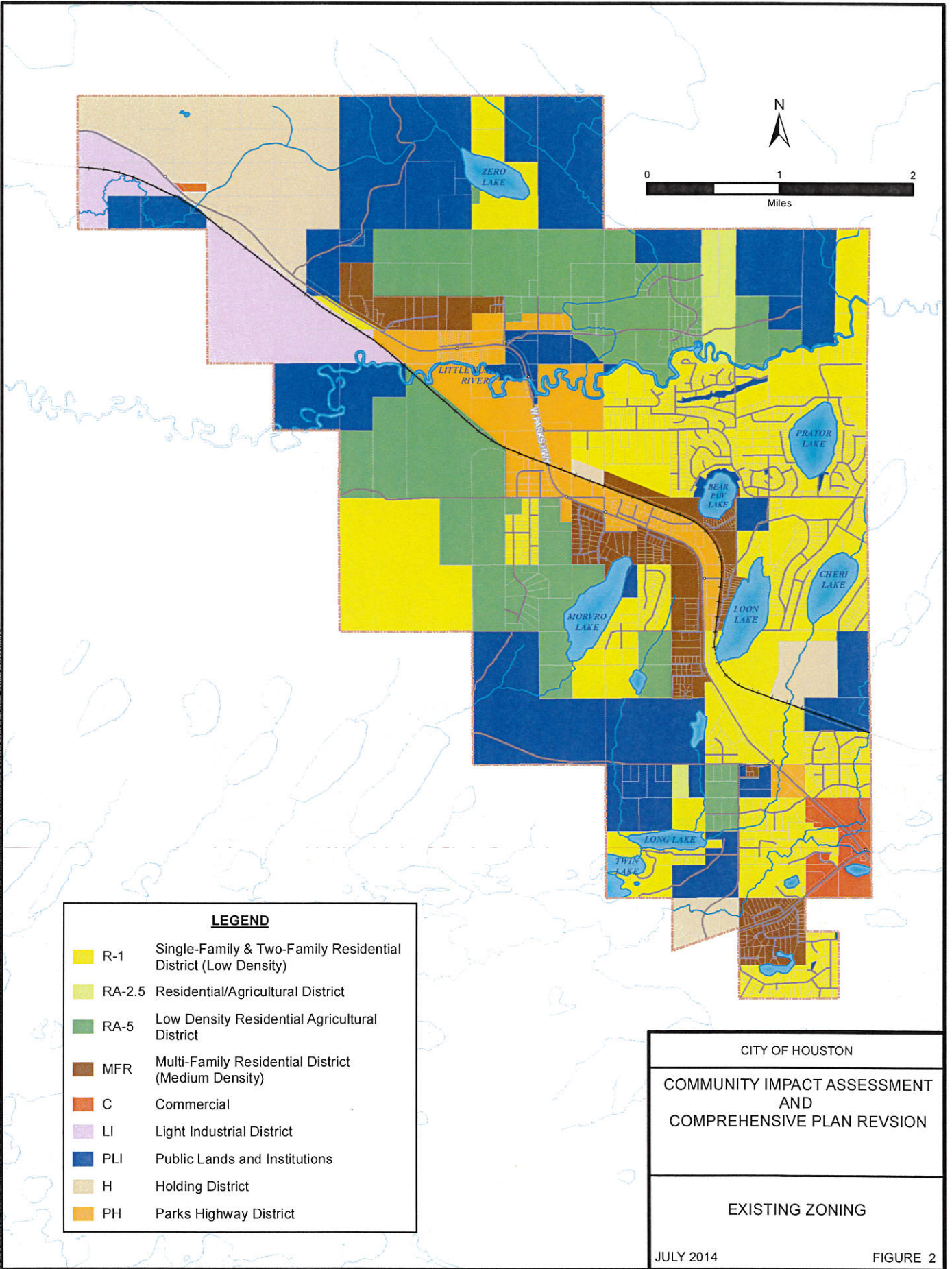
**Table 3. Existing Zoning Districts**

| Zoning District | Zoning Designations   | Intent   |
|-----------------|---|--|
| <b>PLI</b>      | Public Lands and Institutions                                   | Significant open lands and public park and recreation facilities and major public and institutional uses, including governmental office and public facilities.   |
| <b>R-1</b>      | Single-Family and Two-Family Residential District (low density) | Provide for low density, rural residential development with single-family and two-family dwellings and to provide for such community services and facilities that would serve the area populations while preserving the character of existing residential areas within the City of Houston.  |
| <b>MFR</b>      | Multifamily Residential District (medium density)               | Allow these increased densities only where it is feasible to provide an increased level of community services, such as a community sewage disposal system or a community water system. This district is intended to act as a buffer area between the existing low density, rural residential areas of the community and the proposed higher intensity uses along the highways and near major intersections.  |
| <b>RA-2.5</b>   | Residential/Agriculture District                                | Provide for a low-density rural/agriculture single-family district identical to RA-5 in terms of permitted uses and structures, the only change being that lot sizes as small as two and one-half acres are allowed herein. The RA-2.5 district is intended to be located in areas either suited to agricultural uses and intended to be set aside for such uses on a long-term basis, or in areas where development trends and physical features indicate the appropriateness of a very low intensity of residential development. This small lot size may be justified when consistent with existing development and residential densities in the vicinity. |
| <b>RA-5</b>     | Low-Density Residential Agricultural District                   | Provide for a very low-density rural/agriculture single-family district. The RA-5 district is intended to be located in areas either suited for agricultural uses and intended to be set aside for such uses on a long-term basis, or in areas where development trends and physical features indicate the appropriateness of a very   |

|           |                                  |  |
|-----------|----------------------------------|--|
|           |                                  | low intensity of residential development. This larger lot size should be applied in such areas unless existing development and residential densities justify the two-and-one-half-acre minimum lot size allowed in the RA-2.5 district.  |
| <b>NC</b> | Neighborhood Commercial District | Allow for the provision of goods and services on a retail basis within R-1, MFR, RA-2.5 and RA-5 districts in order to provide occupants of these residential districts with the convenience of neighborhood shopping. The NC neighborhood commercial district is intended to apply only to areas which are isolated from other commercial zones, are located on collector streets rather than local roads, but to which there is easy access for the surrounding residential district. This district is intended to be small and compact in design.   |
| <b>C</b>  | Commercial District              | Provide a broad range of goods and services to meet the needs of the population of the City as well as the traveling public utilizing the Parks Highway.   |
| <b>LI</b> | Light Industrial District        | Provide area for light industrial uses, especially transportation related uses associated with the Parks Highway and the railroad corridor. Uses are intended to be low intensity industrial uses, and are not intended to have manufacturing or other uses which produce noise, smoke, glare, or other characteristics that could be detected from off site.  |
| <b>HI</b> | Heavy Industrial District        | Intended for industrial development, including heavy manufacturing, shipping terminals, natural resource extraction and other processes or operations which involve one or more of the following: employs large numbers of workers, heavy truck traffic, significant environmental effects or large-volume public water or sewer service or storage of hazardous materials under a conditional use permit. Commercial and retail uses are generally not allowed in the HI district.  |
| <b>H</b>  | Holding District                 | Certain undeveloped areas have yet to establish a clear land use trend. Because of a number of potential conflicting characteristics that may affect land use, the development plans for these areas deserve special attention. It is the intent of this district to designate those areas where future land use and development may be determined by a number of external factors which cannot be predicted at this time. provides for flexibility in land use regulations in areas where planning has been done, but where development trends will be established in the future. Development of these areas will be sensitive; it will affect immediate surrounding areas and the community as a whole by establishing |

|           |                        |  |
|-----------|------------------------|--|
|           |                        | <p>long-term development trends. The areas designated “holding district” are areas in transition that will respond to changing community characteristics. As definite development trends are established through the procedures set forth in this district, the community should consider amending the designation of the holding district areas to more definitive land use districts.</p>  |
| <b>PH</b> | Parks Highway District | <p>Encourage a moderate level of growth which will provide an economic base in Houston adequate to allow provisions of employment opportunities in the area and to avoid becoming dependent upon external governmental or economic factors and activities. It is also intended to maintain the qualities that make the George Parks Highway corridor an attractive community entry and community center. These qualities include buildings set back from the street, predominance of trees and other vegetation and building sizes and styles that reflect Houston’s history and natural setting. It is intended to encourage this area to support a mixture of residential and commercial activities.</p> |

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**LEGEND**

|   |        |   |
|---|--------|---|
| <span style="color: yellow;">■</span>     | R-1    | Single-Family & Two-Family Residential District (Low Density) |
| <span style="color: lightgreen;">■</span> | RA-2.5 | Residential/Agricultural District                             |
| <span style="color: green;">■</span>      | RA-5   | Low Density Residential Agricultural District                 |
| <span style="color: brown;">■</span>      | MFR    | Multi-Family Residential District (Medium Density)            |
| <span style="color: orange;">■</span>     | C      | Commercial  |
| <span style="color: purple;">■</span>     | LI     | Light Industrial District                                     |
| <span style="color: blue;">■</span>       | PLI    | Public Lands and Institutions                                 |
| <span style="color: tan;">■</span>        | H      | Holding District  |
| <span style="color: gold;">■</span>       | PH     | Parks Highway District  |

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| CITY OF HOUSTON   |          |
| COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT<br>AND<br>COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION |          |
| EXISTING ZONING   |          |
| JULY 2014   | FIGURE 2 |



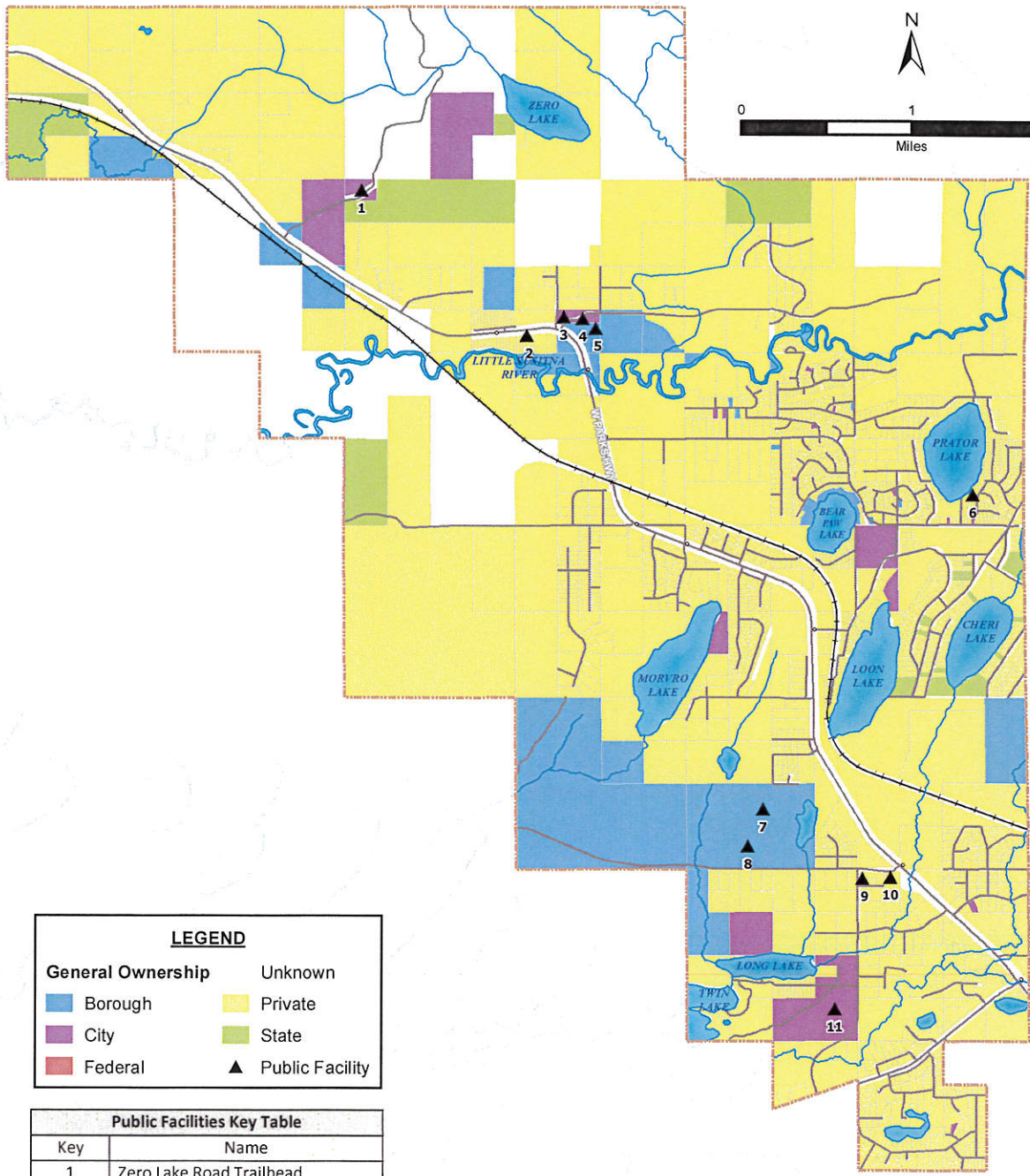
# Land Ownership

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Existing land ownership is depicted in Figure 3 and includes the landownership status for all parcels within the City of Houston's limits. The City of Houston owns approximately 422 acres. The majority of parcels is privately owned at 9068 acres and includes holdings from private residents, commercial and industrial businesses, and Native Corporations. Other large tract land owners include the Mat-Su Borough at 1206 acres. The State of Alaska owns 479 acres of land. Several large tracts of land have missing or inconclusive data that will need additional research.

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**LEGEND**

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>General Ownership</b>                    |  |
| <span style="color: blue;">■</span> Borough | <span style="color: yellow;">■</span> Unknown        |
| <span style="color: purple;">■</span> City  | <span style="color: lightyellow;">■</span> Private   |
| <span style="color: red;">■</span> Federal  | <span style="color: lightgreen;">■</span> State      |
|   | <span style="color: black;">▲</span> Public Facility |

| Public Facilities Key Table |                                 |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Key                         | Name                            |
| 1                           | Zero Lake Road Trailhead        |
| 2                           | Houston US Post Office (CPU)    |
| 3                           | Houston PSB 9-1                 |
| 4                           | Houston City Hall               |
| 5                           | Little Susitna River Campground |
| 6                           | Prator Lake Park                |
| 7                           | Houston High School             |
| 8                           | Houston Middle School           |
| 9                           | Mid Valley Senior Center        |
| 10                          | Homesteaders Community Center   |
| 11                          | Houston PSB 9-2 & Water Supply  |

|   |
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| CITY OF HOUSTON   |
| COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT<br>AND<br>COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION |
| EXISTING<br>LAND OWNERSHIP  |
| JULY 2014   |

FIGURE 3

# Community Demographic Profile

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The following socioeconomic profile of Houston depicts population demographics, household characteristics, and labor force data to give a current overview of the town. Data was collected from several sources. Statewide, borough, and community population estimates, median age, age categories, and worker characteristics are from the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development (ADOLWD). School enrollment data are from the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (ADEED). All other data are from a combination of the U.S. Census Bureau and the American Community Survey (ACS). Data from the U.S. Census Bureau includes data from the 2000 and 2010 decennial censuses. Household characteristics include median household income, household and family size, poverty level, and housing units; and labor force data include number of workers, worker class, industry employment, and educational attainment. Alaska Business Licenses from the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economics Development (DCCED) was examined understand the types of businesses active in Houston.

The quality of data falls drastically for a community the size of Houston. With a population slightly over 2,000, socioeconomic data from the sample-based ACS for Houston is accompanied with an elevated margin of error. These margins are reported when available to assist in understanding the uncertainty inherent in these data.

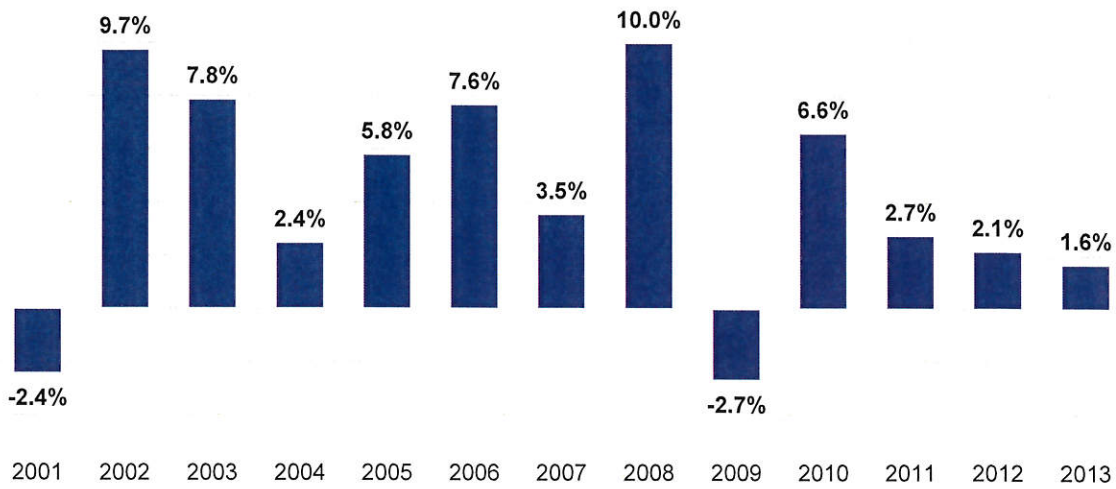
## Population Trends and Projections

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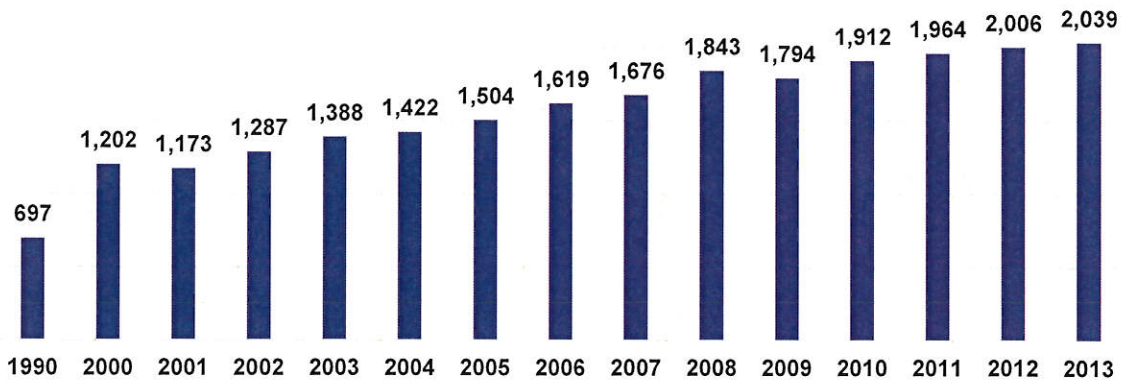
Houston has experienced steady population increase over the past two decades. In 2013, Houston's estimated population was 2,039 residents; nearly triple its 697 residents in 1990. In comparison, the entire Mat-Su grew from 39,600 to more than 96,000 over the same period.

Houston is expected to match the broader Mat-Su in terms of population growth. ADOLWD projects population growth in the Mt-Su to slow from the current annual growth rate of slightly more than 3.6 percent over to less than 2 percent by 2035. Because of Houston's strong ties to the Mat-Su economy and similar demographics McDowell Group projects Houston's population growing at a similar rate—approximately 2 percent over the current period to 2035. This would result in Houston growing to slightly more than 3,100 residents in 2035, an increase of around 50 percent from current population levels.

**Figure 4. Annual Population Growth Rate, Houston, 2001-2013**



**Figure 5. Houston Population, 1990 and 200-2013**



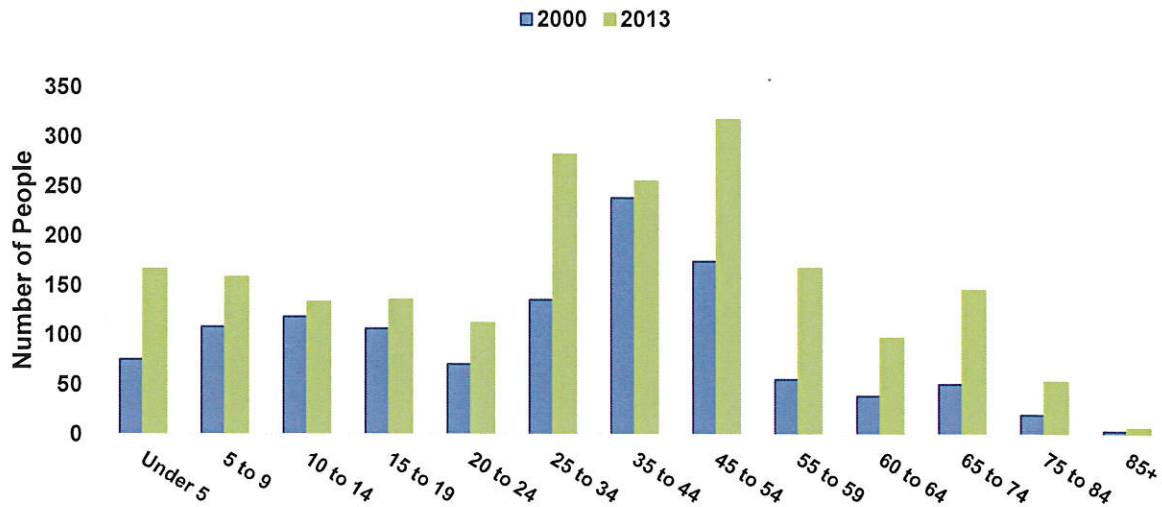
**AGE GROUPS AND MEDIAN AGE**

The median age of Houston residents in 2013 was just over 36 years, slightly higher than both the Alaska and Mat-Su Borough median age of 34 years and 35 years, respectively. The following table indicates that the fastest population growth rates over the past 13 years have been in the older age cohorts.

**Table 4. Houston Population by Age Category and Median Age, 2000, 2010, and 2013**

| <b>Age Category</b> | <b>2000</b>       | <b>2010</b>       | <b>2013</b>       |
|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Under 5 years       | 76                | 157               | 167               |
| 5 to 9 years        | 109               | 125               | 159               |
| 10 to 14 years      | 119               | 144               | 134               |
| 15 to 19 years      | 107               | 154               | 136               |
| 20 to 24 years      | 71                | 125               | 113               |
| 25 to 34 years      | 136               | 241               | 283               |
| 35 to 44 years      | 239               | 252               | 256               |
| 45 to 54 years      | 175               | 343               | 318               |
| 55 to 59 years      | 56                | 120               | 168               |
| 60 to 64 years      | 39                | 87                | 98                |
| 65 to 74 years      | 51                | 122               | 146               |
| 75 to 84 years      | 20                | 36                | 54                |
| 85+ years           | 4                 | 6                 | 7                 |
| <b>Median Age</b>   | <b>34.1 years</b> | <b>35.4 years</b> | <b>36.1 years</b> |

**Figure 6. Houston Population by Age Category and Median Age, 2000 and 2013**



**Race**

Approximately 87 percent of Houston’s population self-identifies as White. This compares to Alaska overall at 67 percent and Mat-Su Borough’s 85 percent. More than 9 percent of Houston residents identify themselves as being multi-racial. American Indian and Alaska Native is the third largest group at 4 percent.

**Table 5. Houston Race Categories, 2000, 2010, and 2008-2012 Five-Year Average**

| Race                              | 2000 | 2010 | 2008-2012 | 2008-2012 Margin of Error |
|-----------------------------------|------|------|-----------|---------------------------|
| White                             | 84%  | 82%  | 87%       | +/-4%                     |
| Two or more races                 | 6    | 8    | 9         | +/-3                      |
| American Indian and Alaska Native | 8    | 7    | 4         | +/-2                      |
| Black or African American         | <1   | <1   | <1        | +/-<1                     |
| Asian                             | <1   | <1   | 0         | +/-1                      |
| Pacific Islander                  | <1   | <1   | 0         | +/-1                      |
| Other                             | <1   | <1   | <1        | +/-1                      |

Note: Due to rounding, some columns may not add to 100 percent.

Source: U.S. Census and American Community Survey.

### School Enrollment

According to the ACS, from 2008-2012 an average of 465 students at all levels (preschool, Kindergarten, elementary, high school, and college) were enrolled in school. Comparing this with the 351 students identified in 2000, all levels of school enrollment has risen 32 percent over this period.

**Table 6. Houston School Enrollment (Preschool through College), Population Age 3 Years and Over, 2000 and 2008-2012 Five-Year Average**

|   | 2000       | 2008-2012  | 2008-2012<br>Margin of Error |
|---|------------|------------|------------------------------|
| Preschool                                     | 9          | 21         | +/-18                        |
| Kindergarten                                  | 21         | 7          | +/-8                         |
| Elementary school (grades 1-8)                | 198        | 219        | +/-84                        |
| High school (grades 9-12)                     | 94         | 141        | +/-49                        |
| College or graduate school                    | 29         | 77         | +/-36                        |
| <b>Population 3+ years enrolled in school</b> | <b>351</b> | <b>465</b> | <b>+/-102</b>                |

Two schools are located in separate buildings in Houston's city limits—Houston Middle School and Houston High School.

The current practice for elementary school age students is to bus them to nearby elementary schools, namely Big Lake Elementary and Willow Elementary School. In 1992, it was determined to be financially advantageous for the City of Houston if the Mat-Su Borough School District built an elementary school serving the larger regional student population. The City has retained the land and its designation as a future site for an elementary school.

The table below outlines enrollment for Big Lake Elementary, Willow Elementary School, Houston Middle School, and Houston High School. It should be noted that similar to how elementary-aged students attend schools outside of Houston, middle and high school-aged students from outside of Houston attend Houston Middle School and Houston High School. Therefore, the totals below do not reflect the number of school age children that only live in Houston.



**Table 7. Big Lake Elementary, Willow Elementary School, Houston Middle School, and Houston High School Enrollment and Schools Personnel Count, 2013-2014 School Year**

|                          | Students | School Personnel |
|--------------------------|----------|------------------|
| Big Lake Elementary      | 439      | 52               |
| Willow Elementary School | 130      | 24               |
| Houston Middle School    | 388      | 32               |
| Houston High School      | 381      | 34               |

Source: ADEED, Matsu Borough.

**Household Income**

The median household income in Houston is almost \$60,000, less than the roughly \$70,000 median in the Mat-Su Borough and Alaska. Per capita income averaged slightly more than \$25,000, less than the \$30,000 found in the Mat-Su Borough and \$32,000 for Alaska.

Approximately 12 percent of families and 16 percent of individuals in Houston live below the federal poverty line. According to 2014 Federal guidelines for Alaska, a household of four making less than \$29,440 or an individual with an income of less than \$14,350 are considered living in poverty. There are approximately 101 households that receive public assistance and 118 households utilize the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

**Table 8. Houston Household and Family Income Indicators, 2000 and 2008-2012 Five-Year Average**

|                                    | 2000     | 2008-2012 | 2008-2012<br>Margin of Error |
|------------------------------------|----------|-----------|------------------------------|
| Median household income            | \$39,615 | \$59,583  | +/- \$11,475                 |
| Households with public assistance  | 58       | 101       | +/- 39                       |
| Households in SNAP                 | -        | 118       | +/- 38                       |
| Per capita income                  | \$17,213 | \$25,876  | +/- \$3,318                  |
| Families below poverty line (%)    | 13.1     | 11.6      | +/- 5.9                      |
| Individuals below poverty line (%) | 17.1     | 15.8      | +/- 5.4                      |

Source: U.S. Census and American Community Survey.

### **Employment Trends and Educational Attainment**

In 2012, ADOLWD estimated there were 768 employed residents (over age 16) in Houston, with total annual wages of \$26.5 million. Most workers were employed in the private sector (85 percent), followed by local government (11 percent), and state government (4 percent).

The top three industries in terms of employment included Trade (retail and wholesale), Transportation, and Utilities (22 percent), Education and Health Services (16 percent), and Construction (13 percent).

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**Table 9. Houston Worker Characteristics, 2012**

|                                       | 2012         |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| Residents 16 years and over           | 1,435        |
| Residents employed                    | 768          |
| Total wages                           | \$26,502,620 |
| <b>Sectors employed in...</b>         |              |
| Private                               | 655          |
| Local government                      | 82           |
| State government                      | 31           |
| <b>Industries employed in...</b>      |              |
| Trades, transportation, and utilities | 167          |
| Education and health services         | 125          |
| Construction                          | 96           |
| Local government                      | 82           |
| Leisure and hospitality               | 70           |
| Natural resources and mining          | 67           |
| Professional and business services    | 63           |
| State government                      | 31           |
| Manufacturing                         | 23           |
| Financial activities                  | 15           |
| Information                           | 7            |
| Other                                 | 22           |

Source: ADOLWD.

In addition to data compiled by the State of Alaska, the ACS offers insight into employment in Houston. According to these data, there were 782 residents over age 16 employed, and 166 unemployed. The unemployment rate is estimated to be 18 percent. Private wage and salary workers made up 80 percent of employed, followed by government workers (19 percent) and self-employed workers (7 percent). The industries with the highest level of employment were Retail Trade (17 percent), Educational, Health and Social Services (13 percent), Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation and Food Services (11 percent); and Agriculture, Forestry, Hunting and Fishing, and Mining (11 percent).

**Table 10. Houston Employment Indicators, 2000 and 2008-2012 Five-Year Average**

|   | 2000<br>(Number) | 2008-2012<br>(Number) | 2008-2012<br>Margin of Error<br>(Number) |
|---|------------------|-----------------------|--|
| Population 16 years and older   | 881              | 1,487                 | +/-145                                   |
| In labor force  | 549              | 948                   | +/-129                                   |
| Employed  | 452              | 782                   | +/-114                                   |
| Unemployed  | 97               | 166                   | +/-62                                    |
| Unemployment - civilian labor force (%)   | 17.7             | 17.5                  | +/-5.8%                                  |
| Not in labor force  | 332              | 539                   | +/-91                                    |
| <b>Class of worker</b>  |                  |                       |  |
| Private wage and salary   | 325              | 579                   | +/-103                                   |
| Government  | 70               | 152                   | +/-54                                    |
| Self-employed   | 57               | 51                    | +/-23                                    |
| Unpaid family worker  | -                | 0                     | +/-10                                    |
| <b>Industry</b>   |                  |                       |  |
| Retail trade  | 78               | 92                    | +/-32                                    |
| Educational, health and social services   | 60               | 169                   | +/-51                                    |
| Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services                    | 52               | 96                    | +/-44                                    |
| Construction  | 50               | 87                    | +/-34                                    |
| Agriculture, forestry, hunting and fishing, mining                                  | 49               | 70                    | +/-40                                    |
| Transportation and warehousing, and utilities                                       | 34               | 87                    | +/-44                                    |
| Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services | 25               | 57                    | +/-32                                    |
| Public administration   | 22               | 66                    | +/-38                                    |

|   | 2000<br>(Number) | 2008-2012<br>(Number) | 2008-2012<br>Margin of Error<br>(Number) |
|---|------------------|-----------------------|--|
| Wholesale trade   | 19               | 10                    | +/-11                                    |
| Manufacturing   | 15               | 21                    | +/-22                                    |
| Information   | 13               | 7                     | +/-9                                     |
| Finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing | 8                | 0                     | +/-10                                    |
| Other services  | 27               | 20                    | +/-16                                    |

Approximately 90 percent of the Houston population had a high school degree or higher, while 17 percent had a bachelor's degree or higher. Overall, educational attainment has increased since 2000.

**Table 11. Houston Educational Attainment, Population 25 Years and Over, 2000 and 2008-2012 Five-Year Average**

|                                 | 2000 | 2008-2012 | 2008-2012<br>Margin of Error |
|---------------------------------|------|-----------|------------------------------|
| High school, no diploma         | 16%  | 11%       | +/-5%                        |
| High school diploma or GED      | 43   | 36        | +/-6                         |
| Some college                    | 26   | 31        | +/-5                         |
| Associate's degree              | 6    | 5         | +/-2                         |
| Bachelor's degree               | 8    | 9         | +/-4                         |
| Graduate or professional degree | 2    | 8         | +/-4                         |

Note: Columns may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.  
Source: U.S. Census and American Community Survey.

## Houston Businesses

There are 82 business licenses that list their physical address in Houston and are considered active. When filing for a business license, a company determines the NAICS code that best fits with the service they plan to offer.<sup>1</sup> While not completely accurate, this classification system offers some insight into the structure of a local private sector economy. A more detailed account of these businesses can be found in the Appendix.

<sup>1</sup> The North America Industrial Classification System (NAICS) is a taxonomy that categorizes businesses by sector of activity.

**Table 12. Composition of Houston Businesses, 2014**

| 2 Digit NAICS Code | Description  | Number of Houston Businesses |
|--------------------|--|------------------------------|
| 11                 | Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting                         | 1                            |
| 23                 | Construction   | 11                           |
| 31                 | Manufacturing  | 4                            |
| 42                 | Trade  | 15                           |
| 48                 | Transportation and Warehousing                                     | 5                            |
| 53                 | Real Estate, Rental and Leasing                                    | 5                            |
| 54                 | Professional, Scientific and Technical Services                    | 5                            |
| 56                 | Administrative, Support, Waste Management and Remediation Services | 6                            |
| 61                 | Educational Services   | 1                            |
| 62                 | Health Care and Social Assistance                                  | 3                            |
| 71                 | Arts, Entertainment and Recreation                                 | 5                            |
| 72                 | Accommodation and Food Services                                    | 4                            |
| 81                 | Services   | 17                           |
| <b>TOTAL</b>       |  | <b>82</b>                    |

<sup>1</sup> The North America Industrial Classification System (NAICS) is a taxonomy that categorizes businesses by sector of activity.

An estimated 19,000 vehicles per day travel through the city of Houston on the Parks Highway. This number tends to be higher in the summer and on the weekends. A number of businesses are sustained by this traffic as a percentage of these travelers stop for a meal, to rent a room, or purchase fireworks. The largest concentration of businesses selling fireworks in Alaska is located in Houston.

At this time, no large grocery store is located in Houston. Residents typically will go to Wasilla or Big Lake for their shopping needs. Medical services are limited in Houston with a few small clinics offering primary care services. The closest hospital is Mat-Su Regional Medical Center located in Wasilla, where there are also a full suite of dental, chiropractic, and other health services.

The summer brings an influx of anglers fishing the nearby Little Susitna River. Alaska Fish and Game estimated 4,538 anglers fished a total of 10,115 days in 2012 in the Little Susitna River. At least one guiding service is located in Houston and a range of other local businesses rely on these anglers who purchase ice, meals, and refreshments. Float trips on the Little Susitna River frequently start at the Parks Highway Bridge.

During the winter, proximity to Hatcher Pass and Nancy Lake Recreation Area attracts enthusiasts wanting to snowmachine, ski, ice fish, dog-mush, or conduct other winter activities. Compared to the summer, traffic through the community is much less in the winter but local businesses are able to attract some customers.

## City Services

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The City of Houston offers fire and limited police services. The Houston Emergency Services building houses both the Houston Fire Department and Houston Police Department. At this time, no local police are active and law enforcement is handled by the Alaska State Troopers.

**Table 13. Houston Fire Department Response Information, 2007-2011**

|                                     | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 |
|-------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Total Call Volume                   | 77   | 111  | 235  | 261  | 329  |
| Average Response Time in Minutes    | 8:56 | 6:57 | 4:49 | 2:52 | 2:57 |
| Percent of Response Under 2 Minutes | 22   | 32   | 32   | 56   | 58   |
| Percent of Response Under 8 Minutes | 53   | 69   | 85   | 93   | 93   |

Source: Houston Fire Department

The closest public libraries are located in Willow and Big Lake.

## Housing Trends, Characteristics and Future Housing Needs

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As population has increased in Houston, the number of housing units (single-housing units, apartments, duplexes, etc.) has risen. In 2012, an estimated 732 units were occupied with 245 vacant. Houston has a large number of relatively new housing units with 32 percent built after 2000. This is a reflection of the steady population growth the community has experienced and the availability of land to develop.

More than 50 percent of housing units are heated with fuel oil and 20 percent rely on wood as their primary heat source. Median rent in the community is \$869; an amount less than the greater Mat-Su.

**Table 14. Houston Housing Indicators, 2000, 2010, and 2008-2012 Five-Year Average**

|                                   | 2000       | 2010       | 2008-2012  | 2008-2012<br>Margin of<br>Error |
|-----------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Total housing units</b>        | <b>581</b> | <b>973</b> | <b>977</b> | <b>+/-36</b>                    |
| Occupied housing units            | 445        | 731        | 732        | +/-47                           |
| Owner-occupied                    | 356        | 538        | 573        | +/-53                           |
| Renter-occupied                   | 89         | 193        | 159        | +/-43                           |
| Vacant housing units              | 136        | 242        | 245        | +/-41                           |
| Homeowner vacancy rate (%)        | 1.4        | 4.2        | 6.4        | +/-3.5                          |
| Rental vacancy rate (%)           | 11.0       | 10.6       | 7.2        | +/-7.8                          |
| Median value owner-occupied units | \$91,400   | -          | \$177,000  | +/- \$19,724                    |

Source: U.S. Census and American Community Survey.

## Composition of Houston Business Licenses

**Table 15. Composition of Houston Businesses, 2014**

| 6 Digit<br>NAICS<br>Code | Description  | Number of<br>Houston<br>Businesses |
|--------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| 113310                   | LOGGING  | 1                                  |
| 236115                   | NEW SINGLE-FAMILY HOUSING CONSTRUCTION (EXCEPT OPERATIVE BUILDERS) | 2                                  |
| 236220                   | COMMERCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL BUILDING CONSTRUCTION                 | 1                                  |
| 238130                   | FRAMING CONTRACTORS  | 3                                  |
| 238160                   | ROOFING CONTRACTORS  | 1                                  |
| 238210                   | ELECTRICAL CONTRACTORS AND OTHER WIRING INSTALLATION CONTRACTORS   | 1                                  |
| 238310                   | DRYWALL AND INSULATION CONTRACTORS                                 | 2                                  |
| 238350                   | FINISH CARPENTRY CONTRACTORS                                       | 1                                  |



|        |   |   |
|--------|---|---|
| 311942 | SPICE AND EXTRACT MANUFACTURING                                 | 1 |
| 321113 | SAWMILLS  | 2 |
| 339914 | COSTUME JEWELRY AND NOVELTY MANUFACTURING                       | 1 |
| 423110 | AUTOMOBILE AND OTHER MOTOR VEHICLE MERCHANT WHOLESALERS         | 1 |
| 423330 | ROOFING, SIDING, AND INSULATION MATERIAL MERCHANT WHOLESALERS   | 1 |
|        | PIECE GOODS, NOTIONS, AND OTHER DRY GOODS MERCHANT              |   |
| 424310 | WHOLESALERS   | 1 |
| 441210 | RECREATIONAL VEHICLE DEALERS                                    | 1 |
| 444220 | NURSERY, GARDEN CENTER, AND FARM SUPPLY STORES                  | 1 |
| 445110 | SUPERMARKETS AND OTHER GROCERY (EXCEPT CONVENIENCE) STORES      | 1 |
| 451211 | BOOK STORES   | 1 |
| 453220 | GIFT, NOVELTY, AND SOUVENIR STORES                              | 1 |
| 453998 | ALL OTHER MISCELLANEOUS STORE RETAILERS (EXCEPT TOBACCO STORES) | 7 |
| 454113 | MAIL-ORDER HOUSES   | 1 |
| 484110 | GENERAL FREIGHT TRUCKING, LOCAL                                 | 1 |
| 484220 | SPECIALIZED FREIGHT (EXCEPT USED GOODS) TRUCKING, LOCAL         | 1 |
| 485310 | TAXI SERVICE  | 1 |
| 488999 | ALL OTHER SUPPORT ACTIVITIES FOR TRANSPORTATION                 | 1 |
| 493110 | GENERAL WAREHOUSING AND STORAGE                                 | 1 |
| 531110 | LESSORS OF RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS AND DWELLINGS                  | 3 |
| 531390 | OTHER ACTIVITIES RELATED TO REAL ESTATE                         | 2 |
| 541310 | ARCHITECTURAL SERVICES  | 1 |
| 541340 | DRAFTING SERVICES   | 1 |
| 541690 | OTHER SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL CONSULTING SERVICES              | 1 |
| 541990 | ALL OTHER PROFESSIONAL, SCIENTIFIC, AND TECHNICAL SERVICES      | 2 |
| 561499 | ALL OTHER BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICES                             | 1 |
| 561720 | JANITORIAL SERVICES   | 1 |
| 561790 | OTHER SERVICES TO BUILDINGS AND DWELLINGS                       | 3 |
| 562111 | SOLID WASTE COLLECTION  | 1 |
| 611430 | PROFESSIONAL AND MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT TRAINING                | 1 |
| 621610 | HOME HEALTH CARE SERVICES                                       | 2 |
| 623311 | CONTINUING CARE RETIREMENT COMMUNITIES                          | 1 |
| 711510 | INDEPENDENT ARTISTS, WRITERS, AND PERFORMERS                    | 2 |
| 713990 | ALL OTHER AMUSEMENT AND RECREATION INDUSTRIES                   | 3 |
| 721211 | RV (RECREATIONAL VEHICLE) PARKS AND CAMPGROUNDS                 | 1 |
| 722110 | FULL-SERVICE RESTAURANTS  | 4 |
| 811111 | GENERAL AUTOMOTIVE REPAIR                                       | 1 |
| 811121 | AUTOMOTIVE BODY, PAINT, AND INTERIOR REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE     | 1 |
| 811198 | ALL OTHER AUTOMOTIVE REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE                     | 1 |
| 811411 | HOME AND GARDEN EQUIPMENT REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE                | 1 |
| 811420 | REUPHOLSTERY AND FURNITURE REPAIR                               | 1 |
| 811490 | OTHER PERSONAL AND HOUSEHOLD GOODS REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE       | 1 |
| 812112 | BEAUTY SALONS   | 2 |
| 812199 | OTHER PERSONAL CARE SERVICES                                    | 1 |
| 812910 | PET CARE (EXCEPT VETERINARY) SERVICES                           | 1 |

|        |  |   |
|--------|--|---|
| 812990 | ALL OTHER PERSONAL SERVICES INCLUDING HANDYMAN       | 6 |
| 813110 | RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS                              | 1 |
| 813312 | ENVIRONMENT, CONSERVATION AND WILDLIFE ORGANIZATIONS | 1 |

## Transportation Network

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This section summarizes the existing transportation network conditions within the City of Houston. The City of Houston is approximately 7.5 miles west along the Parks Highway from the City limits of Wasilla, and approximately 220 driving miles south along the Parks Highway from the city limits of Fairbanks Alaska. The Parks Highway is part of the Federal Highway’s interstate road network. The eastern edge of the city limits of Houston contains the intersection of Big Lake Road, and the first commercialized mile of Big Lake Road is within the jurisdiction of Houston.

### The Parks Highway

The Parks Highway’s primary function is to serve statewide mobility for travel and freight transportation through the city limits of Houston for passage to Fairbanks and interior Alaska. Within the national network, the Parks Highway is the primary link between Anchorage, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB), and interior Alaska. Anchorage is the commercial hub of the state, and therefore freight and materials shipped to interior Alaska by road must pass through the city of Houston on the Parks Highway. The Parks Highway is also a key element of the Houston Road network, serving local traffic throughout the City of Houston.

### Classification and Function

The Parks Highway is an interstate highway classified as a Rural Interstate by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF), and is Route 3 of the National Highway System (NHS). As part of the NHS it has the function of providing mobility on a statewide level, in addition to its secondary function of local area service. The Parks Highway is owned by the State of Alaska and maintained by the ADOT&PF.

### Lane Configuration

The Parks Highway is a 2-lane, undivided facility with 12 foot lanes and 8 foot paved shoulders. Within Houston there are periodic passing lane sections for the northbound and southbound lanes, as well as a center two-way left turn lane (CTWLTL). Figure 7 shows the location of the changes in lane configuration.

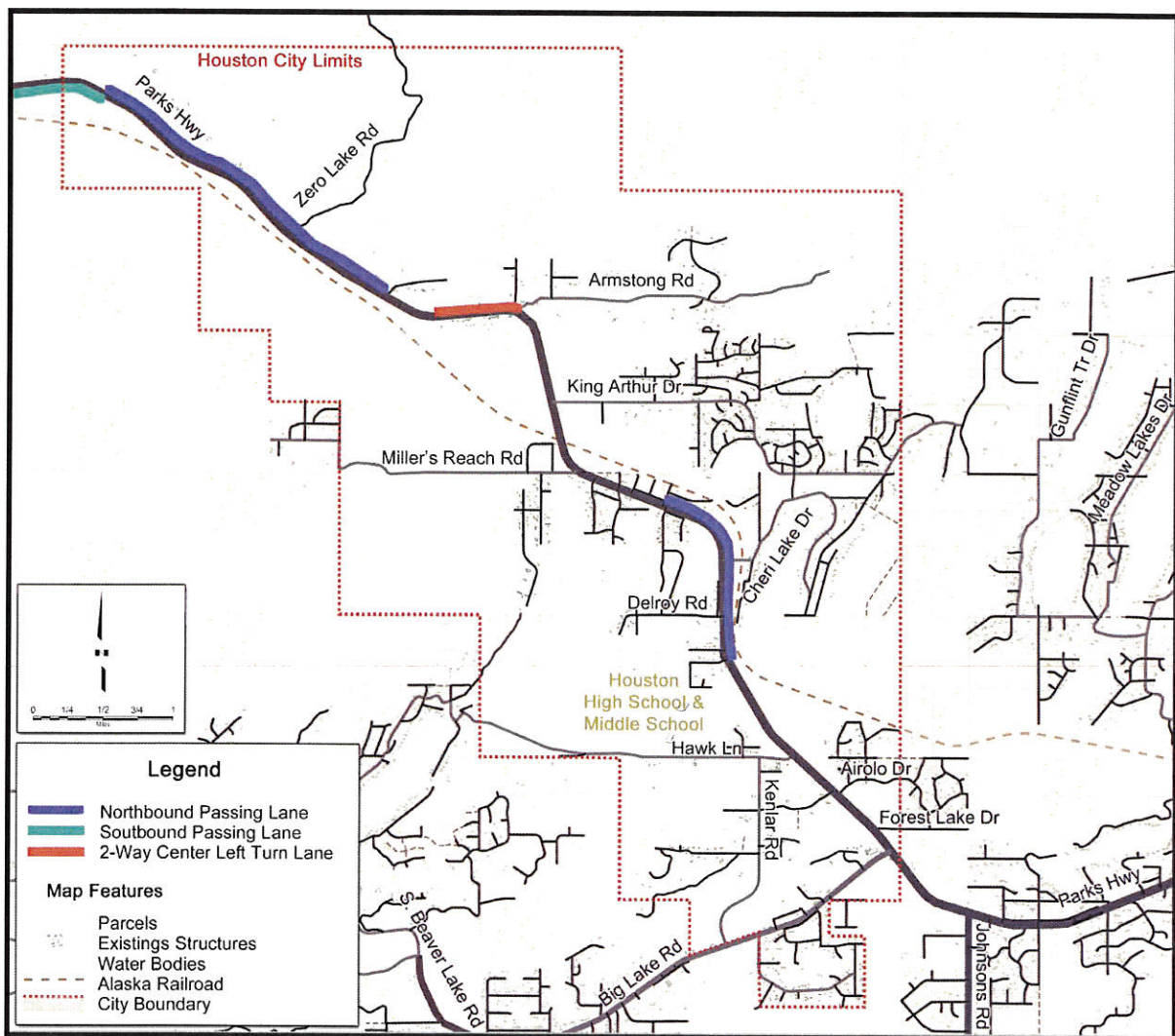
The intersection of The Parks Highway and Big Lake Road is a T-Intersection. The Parks Highway approaches have both a southbound right turn lane and a northbound left turn lane, in addition to their single through lanes. Big Lake Road has a left turn lane, and a separate right turn lane. The right turn lane off of Big Lake Road onto the Parks Highway enters its own added southbound

lane that continues south out of Houston's city limits and merges with the through lane at Johnson's Road.

The intersection of the Parks Highway and Cheri Lake Road has both a northbound right turn lane and a south bound left turn lane onto Cheri Lake Road.

The northbound approach to the intersection of Armstrong Road develops a left turn lane within the median which services access to a frontage road leading to various storefronts parallel to the Parks Highway. North of this intersection is the start of the 3,000 foot long CTWLTL shown in Figure 7.

**Figure 7. Parks Highway Lane Configurations**



## **City of Houston Road Network Layout**

The City of Houston's road network branches east and west from the Parks Highway, which operates as a backbone for the regional network. The Parks Highway is the only arterial level roadway within the city limits. The remaining roads are either local roads providing access to the surrounding lots, or collector roads that provide access to and from the Parks Highway.

A majority of the parcels within the city limits of Houston access the Parks Highway within the city limits of Houston. Alternative access out of the city is available to the west via Kiowa Street which leads to Big Lake and King Arthur Drive to the east which accesses the Meadow Lakes Loop and Pittman Road areas. Additionally, Big Lake Road leads west into Big Lake.

There are currently no signalized intersections within the city.

## **Little Susitna River**

The Parks Highway crosses the Little Susitna River at approximately MP 57. On the south side of the river crossing there is a parking area on either side of the Parks Highway. This parking area provides river access and connects to the separated pathways that are on both sides of the Parks Highway. The parking areas provide ten marked parking spaces per side with additional pull offs for RVs and trailer equipped trucks. Figure 8 shows a map of the Little Susitna River crossing and the nearby parking area.

**Figure 8. Alaska Railroad Separated Grade Crossing of the Parks Highway**

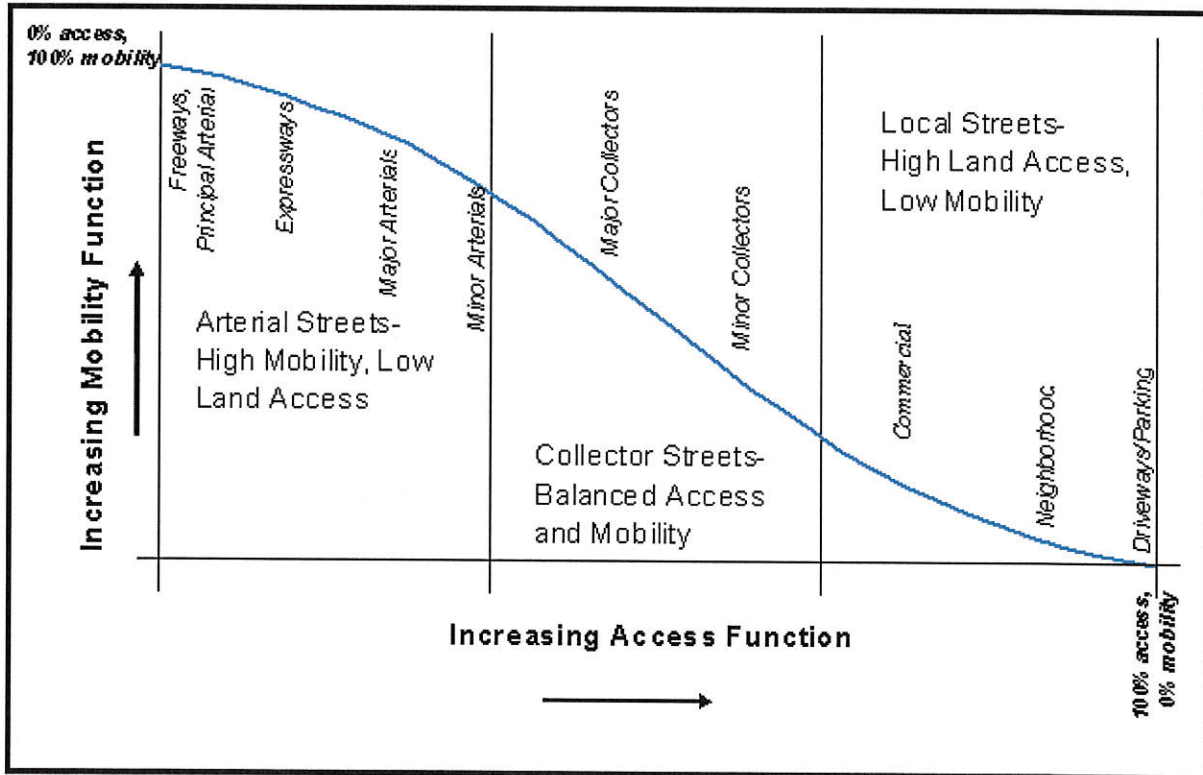


### **Road Functional Classifications**

A functional classification system is a method of identifying the intended use of a road or corridor. It is an important planning level tool to facilitate clear communication about road networks between different agencies, designers and the public.

The function of a road typically falls somewhere between the conflicting purposes of mobility (high speed mobility through a region) and access (lower speed movements with frequent turns to adjacent parcels). Figure 9, illustrates the mobility and access balance for each functional class.

**Figure 9. Functional Classification: Mobility and Access Relationship**

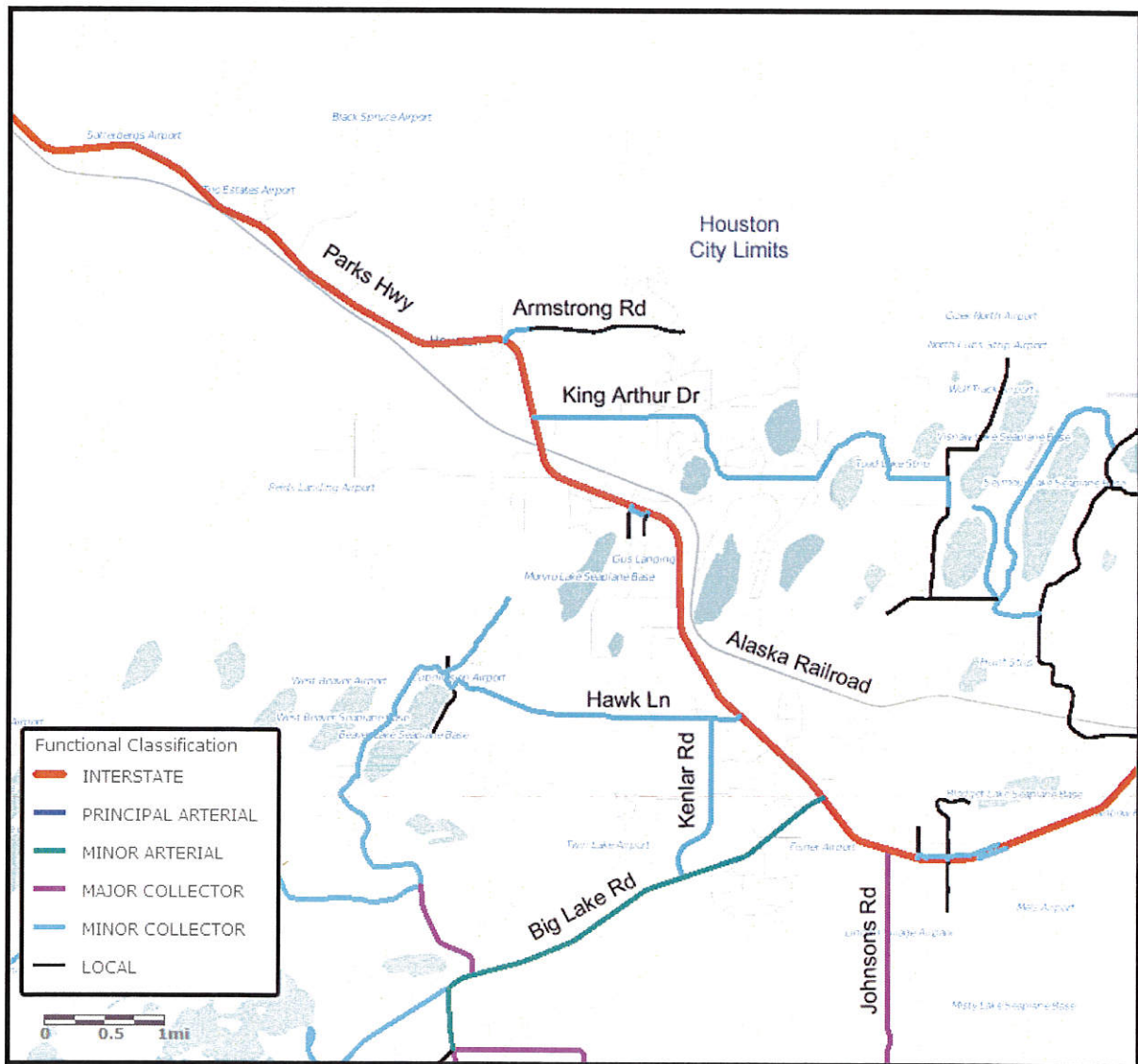


Both ADOT&PF and the MSB manage road networks that fall within the City of Houston. Each of these agencies individually identifies functional classifications for roads that they own and maintain or that are adjacent to their roadways.

## ADOT&PF Classifications

ADOT&PF publishes functional classifications in a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) database. The current system was updated as part of a 2011 Functional Classification Update project following the 2010 census. Figure 10 shows the functional classifications identified in the 2011 study by ADOT&PF.

**Figure 10. ADOT&PF Functional Classification System**



Source: ADOT&PF 2011 Functional Classification System Update GIS viewer

## **MSB Classifications**

The Borough maintains a database of roads within the MSB which includes functional classification definitions. A current study of this database is in the process of reapplying functional classification criteria to update the definition of road classes on the collector and local road level. Figure 11 shows the functional classifications currently identified in the MSB system.

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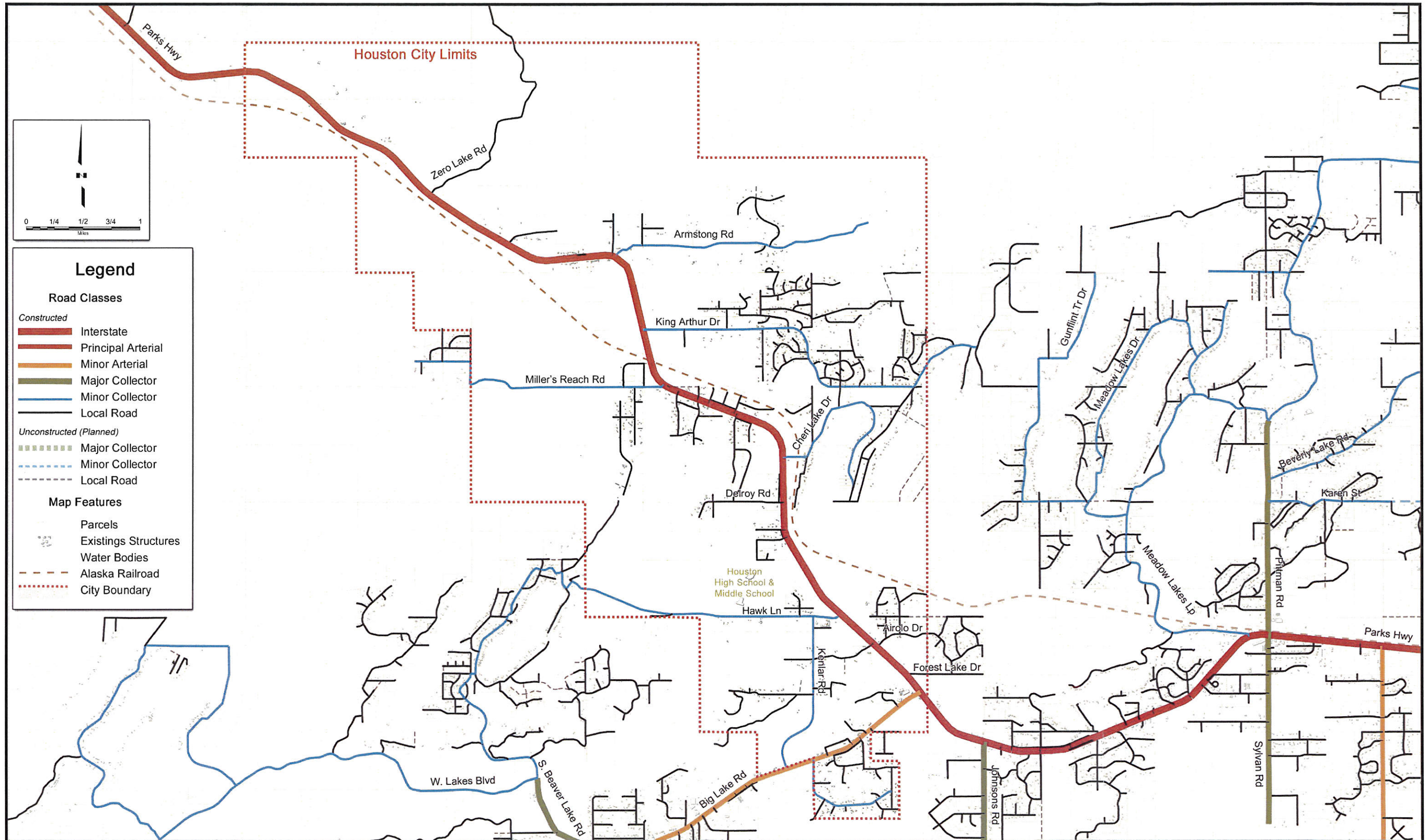


Figure 11. MSB Functional Classification System



## **Traffic Volumes**

Historical traffic volume estimates on road segments within the limits of Houston are collected by both the ADOT&PF and the MSB, for different roads depending on ownership. These agencies each count traffic in the summer months and then convert the data into an estimated average annual daily traffic (AADT) value.

## **DOT&PF Volume Counts**

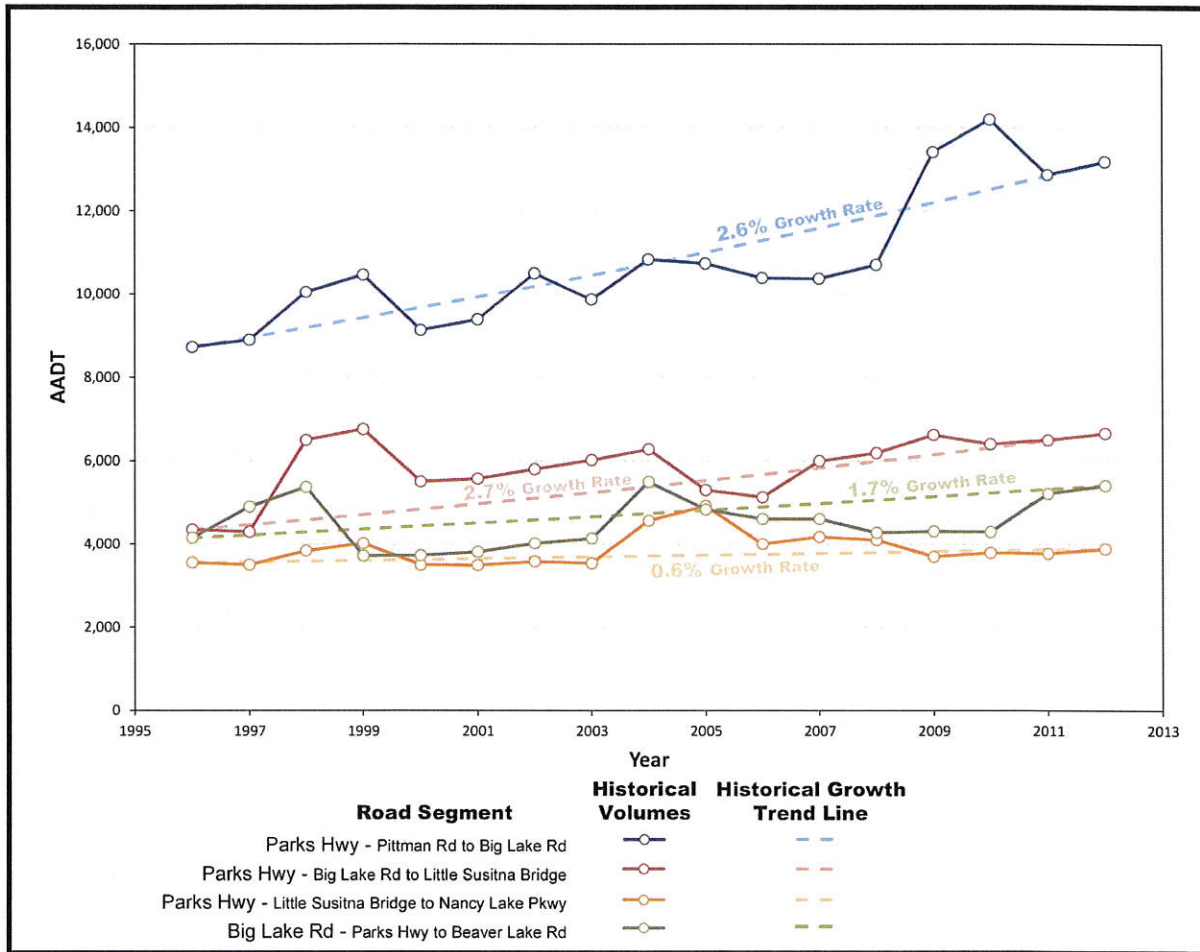
Historical AADTs as shown in Figure 12, presents data showing the calculated growth rate history between the oldest recorded AADTs (1996) and the most recent (2012).

Note that, historically, the Parks Highway traffic volumes are almost evenly split between Big Lake Road and the Parks Highway, as traffic proceeds north in the direction of Houston. However, the growth on the Parks Highway heading into Houston and beyond is significantly greater than the growth on Big Lake Road.

## **MSB Volume Counts**

Traffic levels on several major cross streets within the city of Houston have been observed by the MSB and published in annual reports. However, due to staff and funding every link is not counted every year. Estimated AADT for observed years, per road can be found in Appendix A.

**Figure 12. Historical AADTs**



**Road Surface Conditions**

There are approximately 45 miles of road within the Houston residential road network, not including the Parks Highway and Big Lake Road. Of these 45 miles of road, 90% (40 miles) of the roads are unpaved with a 3" gravel surface. The remaining 5 miles of paved roadway account for most of the collector road network as defined by the MSB.

The paved road network includes all, or segments of the following roads:

- Cheri Lake Drive
- Hawk Lane
- King Arthur Drive
- Miller's Reach Road
- Wasey Way

- White Rabbit Drive

Armstrong Road is identified by the MSB as a collector road and is currently unpaved beyond the first quarter mile. The first quarter mile of Armstrong Road serves the Little Susitna River Camp Ground, and the public safety building for Houston which houses both the city Police and Fire Departments. City Hall is also accessed from Armstrong Road.

## **Alaska Railroad**

The Alaska Railroad generally parallels the Parks Highway corridor throughout the limits of the City of Houston. To the southeast the railroad is on the north side of the highway. The Parks Highway crosses the railroad at a separated grade crossing at approximately milepost 56.5. The separated grade crossing includes a rail bridge that proceeds over the Parks Highway. On the northwest end of the city the rail corridor is on the south side of the highway. Figure 12 shows the separated grade rail crossing of the Parks Highway.

There is an at-grade crossing of the railroad on Cheri Lake Drive approximately 750 feet east of the intersection of Cheri Lake Drive and the Parks Highway. This crossing is equipped with gates, crossbucks, advanced warning flashers, and stop bars. There are no other crossings of the Alaska Railroad within the limits of Houston. Figure 13 shows the current configuration of the at-grade crossing of Cheri Lake Drive and the Alaska Railroad.

**Figure 13. Alaska Railroad Separated Grade Crossing of the Parks Highway**



**Figure 14. Cheri Lake Drive at-grade Railroad Crossing**



### **Speed Limits**

The Parks Hwy and Big Lake Rd are currently posted at 55 mph, with a reduction to 45 mph in a 1.25 mile section of the Parks Hwy. This section of road begins just south of the parking area at the Little Susitna Bridge and continues northbound until MP 58, just beyond the CTWLTL section.

Hawk Lane, King Arthur Drive, and Kenlar Road are all posted at 35mph. All other roads within the City of Houston are posted at 25mph.

### **Pedestrian Pathways**

There is a separated pedestrian pathway on the south side of the Parks Highway that begins east of the Houston city limits and ends at mp 58 within Houston. There is a second pathway on the north side of the Parks Highway that begins at the intersection of the Parks Highway and Cheri Lake Road and continues west beyond the city limits.

### **Road Inventory**

The road inventory for all named roads within the City of Houston can be found in Appendix B.

# **APPENDIX A**

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**Parks Highway (CDS Route 170000)**

| Segment   | 1996  | 1997  | 1998   | 1999   | 2000  | 2001  | 2002   | 2003  | 2004   | 2005   | 2006   | 2007   | 2008   | 2009   | 2010   | 2011   | 2012   |
|---|-------|-------|--------|--------|-------|-------|--------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Pittman Road to Big Lake Road                     | 8,730 | 8,900 | 10,050 | 10,470 | 9,138 | 9,390 | 10,503 | 9,871 | 10,842 | 10,742 | 10,393 | 10,380 | 10,710 | 13,415 | 14,199 | 12,870 | 13,180 |
| Big Lake Road to Little Susitna River Bridge      | 4,350 | 4,300 | 6,501  | 6,760  | 5,504 | 5,573 | 5,800  | 6,020 | 6,280  | 5,300  | 5,130  | 5,997  | 6,190  | 6,624  | 6,402  | 6,500  | 6,660  |
| Little Susitna River Bridge to Nancy Lake Parkway | 3,550 | 3,500 | 3,840  | 4,020  | 3,498 | 3,490 | 3,580  | 3,540 | 4,568  | 4,918  | 4,003  | 4,180  | 4,100  | 3,695  | 3,790  | 3,770  | 3,885  |

Source: Alaska Department of Transportation Volume Reports  
**Historical Traffic Volume Counts: Parks Highway**

**Big Lake Road (CDS Route 170073)**

| Segment                     | 1996  | 1997  | 1998  | 1999  | 2000  | 2001  | 2002  | 2003  | 2004  | 2005  | 2006  | 2007  | 2008  | 2009  | 2010  | 2011  | 2012  |
|-----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Parks Hwy to Beaver Lake Rd | 4,154 | 4,900 | 5,375 | 3,719 | 3,730 | 3,810 | 4,019 | 4,140 | 5,502 | 4,836 | 4,610 | 4,610 | 4,278 | 4,310 | 4,300 | 5,218 | 5,410 |

Source: Alaska Department of Transportation Volume Reports  
**Historical Traffic Volume Counts: Big Lake Road**

| Airolo Drive |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|--------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Year         | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
| AA DT        | 107  | 113  |      |      |      |      |      | 309  | 284  |      | 302  |      |      |      | 286  |

Source: Matanuska-Susitna Borough Volume Reports

Table 1 - Historical Traffic Volume Counts: Airolo Drive

| Forest Lake Drive |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|-------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Year              | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
| AA DT             | 162  | 179  |      |      |      | 244  | 257  |      | 311  |      | 394  |      |      |      |      |

Source: Matanuska-Susitna Borough Volume Reports

Table 2 - Historical Traffic Volume Counts: Forest Lake Drive

| Hawk Lane |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|-----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Year      | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
| AA DT     |      | 792  |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 831  |      |

Source: Matanuska-Susitna Borough Volume Reports

Table 3 - Historical Traffic Volume Counts: Hawk Lane

| Kenlar Road |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|-------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Year        | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
| AA DT       |      | 262  |      |      |      |      | 399  |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |

Source: Matanuska-Susitna Borough Volume Reports

Table 4 - Historical Traffic Volume Counts: Kenlar Road

| King Arthur Drive |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|-------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Year              | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
| AA DT             | 569  | 584  |      |      |      |      |      | 674  |      |      |      | 720  | 636  |      | 654  |

Source: Matanuska-Susitna Borough Volume Reports

Historical Traffic Volume Counts: King Arthur Drive

| Miller's Reach Road |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|---------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Year                | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
| AADT                |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 329  | 488  |

Source: Matanuska-Susitna Borough Volume Reports  
 Table 5 - Historical Traffic Volume Counts: Miller's Reach Road

| Wasey Way |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
|-----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Year      | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
| AADT      | 277  | 273  |      |      |      |      | 343  |      | 389  |      | 396  |      |      |      |      |

Source: Matanuska-Susitna Borough Volume Reports  
 Historical Traffic Volume Counts: Wasey Way



# **APPENDIX B**

DRAFT



| Road Name           | MSB Route Number | ADOT&PF Route Number | Length (mi) | Speed Limit | MSB Functional Class | ADOT&PF Functional Class    |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Big Lake Road       | 4804             | 170073               | 1.18        | 55 mph      | Minor Arterial       | Minor Arterial              |
| Parks Hwy           | 2132             | 170000               | 5.42        | 45 - 55 mph | Interstate           | Interstate                  |
| Adrian Place        | 41               |                      | 0.14        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road                  |
| Airollo Drive       | 50               |                      | 0.46        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road                  |
| Anastasia Avenue    | 99               |                      | 0.80        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road                  |
| Anning Drive        | 3856             |                      | 0.12        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road                  |
| Anthony Road        | 111              |                      | 1.16        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road                  |
| Armstrong Road      | 125              |                      | 1.51        | 25 mph      | Minor Collector      | Minor Collector, Local Road |
| Aspen Cove Drive    | 135              |                      | 0.19        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road                  |
| Backhaus Street     | 4596             |                      | 0.86        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road                  |
| Ballyshannon Drive  | 170              |                      | 0.84        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road                  |
| Bench Lake Drive    | 226              |                      | 0.50        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road                  |
| Birch Harbor Road   | 269              |                      | 0.36        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road                  |
| Birch Road          | 271              |                      | 0.76        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road                  |
| Birchwood Lane      | 276              |                      | 0.45        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road                  |
| Black Knight Drive  | 283              |                      | 0.23        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road                  |
| Brian Circle        | 357              |                      | 0.09        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road                  |
| Britt Avenue        | 4594             |                      | 0.06        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road                  |
| Brittany Drive      | 4691             |                      | 0.20        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road                  |
| Brittany Lou Avenue | 4595             |                      | 0.19        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road                  |
| Bruce Way           | 379              |                      | 0.28        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road                  |
| Bryan Street        | 384              |                      | 0.19        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road                  |
| Calonder Way        | 4603             |                      | 0.25        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road                  |
| Cannon Drive        | 434              |                      | 0.26        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road                  |
| Castle Drive        | 479              |                      | 0.16        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road                  |
| Cattail Circle      | 490              |                      | 0.08        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road                  |

| Road Name             | MSB Route Number | ADOT&PF Route Number | Length (mi) | Speed Limit | MSB Functional Class | ADOT&PF Functional Class |
|-----------------------|------------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Cheri Lake Drive      | 4773             |                      | 1.78        | 25 mph      | Minor Collector      | Local Road               |
| Cheshire Circle       | 524              |                      | 0.03        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Claudia Court         | 570              |                      | 0.09        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Claudia Road          | 571              |                      | 0.38        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Cole Circle           | 5444             |                      | 0.15        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Commerce Street       | 3504             |                      | 0.09        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Commercial Park Drive | 3858             |                      | 0.19        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Corn Street           | 3505             |                      | 0.25        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Dana Court            | 706              | 170147               | 0.15        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Minor Collector          |
| Dawn Road             | 726              |                      | 0.48        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Debra Jean Lane       | 731              |                      | 0.25        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Delroy Road           | 741              |                      | 0.80        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Denlow Drive          | 753              |                      | 0.24        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Derrick Avenue        | 4400             |                      | 0.24        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Diana Way             | 764              |                      | 0.06        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Dodge Drive           | 780              |                      | 0.25        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Donnybrook Drive      | 797              |                      | 0.40        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Drawbridge Circle     | 819              |                      | 0.07        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Duke Drive            | 830              |                      | 0.21        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Duley Road            | 3530             |                      | 0.53        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Durado Drive          | 835              | 170102               | 0.14        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Minor Collector          |
| Dutchess Circle       | 836              |                      | 0.13        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Easy Street           | 865              |                      | 0.31        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Elf Circle            | 889              |                      | 0.04        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Emerald Isle Circle   | 902              |                      | 0.08        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Enchanted Circle      | 908              |                      | 0.25        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |



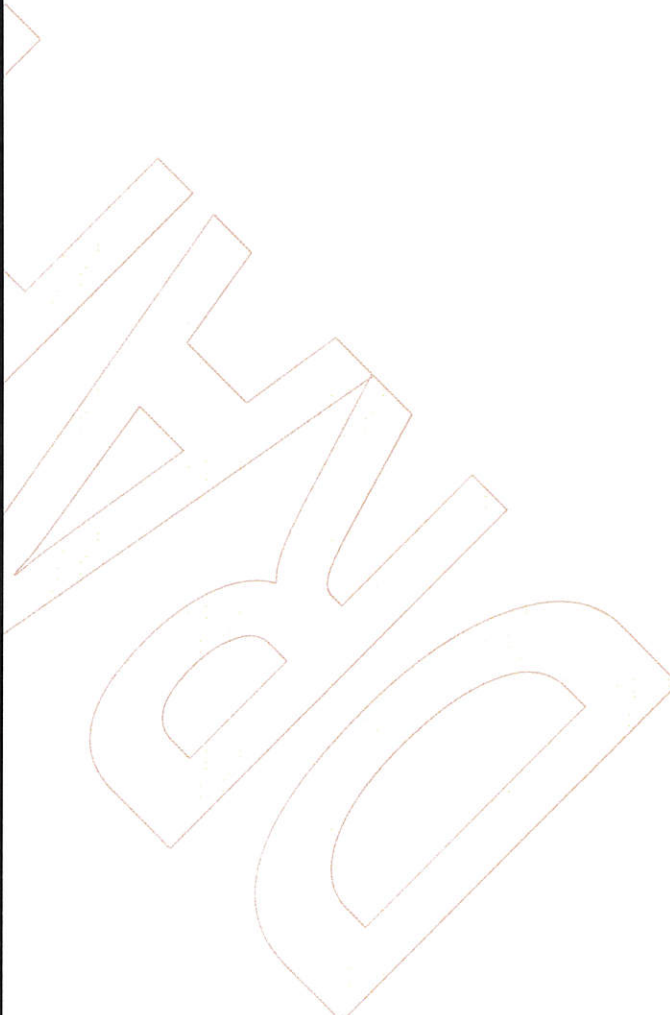
| Road Name          | MSB Route Number | ADOT&PF Route Number | Length (mi) | Speed Limit | MSB Functional Class | ADOT&PF Functional Class |
|--------------------|------------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Friar Tuck Circle  | 1062             |                      | 0.13        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Frog Circle        | 5016             |                      | 0.07        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Gallagher Circle   | 3825             |                      | 0.14        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Gaunt Lane         | 1091             | 170105               | 0.23        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Minor Collector          |
| Gina Circle        | 1112             |                      | 0.04        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Hawk Lane          | 4190             | 170109               | 2.25        | 35 mph      | Minor Collector      | Minor Collector          |
| Heath Drive        | 1246             |                      | 0.42        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Hidden Drive       | 1278             |                      | 0.26        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Hobbit Road        | 1300             |                      | 0.11        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Horizon Boulevard  | 1323             |                      | 0.37        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Horizon Way        | 1325             |                      | 0.20        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Hubner Circle      | 5962             |                      | 0.06        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Janet Road         | 1401             |                      | 0.22        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Jeffrey Lane       | 1411             |                      | 0.19        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Jerry Circle       | 1420             |                      | 0.08        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| John Circle        | 4881             |                      | 0.03        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Johnathon Circle   | 5409             |                      | 0.25        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Kar Drive          | 1464             |                      | 0.11        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Karami Lane        | 1465             |                      | 0.30        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Karen Avenue       | 1467             |                      | 0.25        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Kathy Lane         | 1482             |                      | 0.09        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Kenlar Road        | 1496             | 170145               | 1.42        | 35 mph      | Minor Collector      | Minor Collector          |
| King Arthur Circle | 1522             |                      | 0.03        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| King Arthur Drive  | 4772             | 170108               | 2.91        | 35 mph      | Minor Collector      | Minor Collector          |
| King David Street  | 5428             |                      | 0.25        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| King John Drive    | 1526             |                      | 0.19        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |

| Road Name                | MSB Route Number | ADOT&PF Route Number | Length (mi) | Speed Limit | MSB Functional Class | ADOT&PF Functional Class |
|--------------------------|------------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Kreja Circle             | 5261             |                      | 0.12        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Lake Horizon Circle      | 1586             |                      | 0.07        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Lakeway Loop             | 4775             |                      | 0.34        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Larae Road               | 1578             |                      | 0.54        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Leprechaun Drive         | 1654             |                      | 0.32        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Little John Drive        | 1688             |                      | 0.74        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Little Meadow Creek Road | 4690             |                      | 0.37        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Little Millers Road      | 6375             |                      | 0.13        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Longbow Circle           | 1717             |                      | 0.09        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Looking Glass Drive      | 1723             |                      | 0.68        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Loon Boulevard           | 4557             |                      | 0.35        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Loon Street              | 1728             |                      | 0.44        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Louise Lane              | 1739             |                      | 0.19        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Mad Hatter Street        | 1771             |                      | 0.07        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Maid Marian Drive        | 1776             |                      | 0.12        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Majors Drive             | 1781             |                      | 0.65        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Marginal Access Road     | 4771             |                      | 0.25        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Marian Circle            | 1802             |                      | 0.03        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Meadowood Drive          | 1869             |                      | 0.58        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Melissa Circle           | 1878             |                      | 0.06        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Merlin Drive             | 1887             |                      | 0.54        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Meti Avenue              | 4593             |                      | 0.06        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Mid Valley Way           | 4506             |                      | 0.13        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Miller Circle            | 6376             |                      | 0.03        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Miller's Reach Road      | 1909             |                      | 1.50        | 25 mph      | Minor Collector      | Local Road               |
| Miller'S Ridge Road      | 6103             |                      | 0.08        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |

| Road Name             | MSB Route Number | ADOT&PF Route Number | Length (mi) | Speed Limit | MSB Functional Class | ADOT&PF Functional Class |
|-----------------------|------------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Moat Circle           | 1921             |                      | 0.05        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Nichols Drive         | 2009             |                      | 0.21        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| No Name Hill Drive    | 4632             |                      | 0.24        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Nottingham Circle     | 2048             |                      | 0.08        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| O'Keefe Court         | 4624             |                      | 0.04        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| O'Megan Circle        | 5461             |                      | 0.12        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| One Horse Lane        | 5628             |                      | 0.22        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Owlhaven Drive        | 2104             |                      | 0.08        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Pay Dirt Road         | 2146             |                      | 0.25        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Pepper Street         | 3506             |                      | 0.17        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Phyllis Lane          | 2177             |                      | 0.16        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Pick-A-Dilley Street  | 4586             |                      | 0.48        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Pinecrest Circle      | 2187             |                      | 0.09        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Prince Charming Drive | 2236             |                      | 0.28        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Princess Circle       | 2238             |                      | 0.11        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Princess Kylie Drive  | 6326             |                      | 0.28        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Queen Of Drive        | 2272             |                      | 0.09        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Railside Drive        | 3857             |                      | 0.39        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Rainbow Circle        | 2279             |                      | 0.13        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Rainee Street         | 2287             |                      | 0.17        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Ray Street            | 2307             |                      | 0.33        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Rel Street            | 2330             |                      | 0.13        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Rex Street            | 2340             |                      | 0.10        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Rippy Road            | 2365             |                      | 0.13        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Robin Hood Drive      | 2383             |                      | 0.22        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Ross Street           | 2417             |                      | 0.10        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |

| Road Name                   | MSB Route Number | ADOT&PF Route Number | Length (mi) | Speed Limit | MSB Functional Class | ADOT&PF Functional Class |
|-----------------------------|------------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Round Table Drive           | 2419             |                      | 0.55        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Schutt Drive                | 4995             |                      | 0.44        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Sherwood Forest Park Circle | 4880             |                      | 0.03        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Sluice Box Drive            | 2578             |                      | 0.06        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Spruce Haven Drive          | 2673             |                      | 0.20        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Spruce Street               | 5001             |                      | 0.03        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Squire Drive                | 2679             |                      | 0.22        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Stetson Circle              | 4382             |                      | 0.05        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Susan Lane                  | 2746             |                      | 0.07        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Susitna Way                 | 2756             |                      | 0.12        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Swingle Road                | 3533             |                      | 0.23        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Tara Street                 | 4398             |                      | 0.21        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Tea Party Drive             | 2802             |                      | 0.12        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Telstitna Street            | 4063             |                      | 0.34        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Twiddle Dee Circle          | 2911             |                      | 0.06        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Valois Drive                | 2944             |                      | 0.24        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Wasey Circle                | 4909             |                      | 0.14        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Wasey Way                   | 3000             |                      | 1.00        | 25 mph      | Minor Collector      | Local Road               |
| Westen Drive                | 3046             |                      | 0.31        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| White Knight Drive          | 3056             |                      | 0.54        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| White Rabbit Circle         | 3057             |                      | 0.03        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| White Rabbit Drive          | 5011             |                      | 0.47        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| White Stag Circle           | 3058             |                      | 0.11        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Wild Rose Drive             | 3216             |                      | 0.13        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Wilderness Court            | 3069             |                      | 0.10        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Wilhelm Street              | 3077             |                      | 0.41        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |

| Road Name         | MSB Route Number | ADOT&PF Route Number | Length (mi) | Speed Limit | MSB Functional Class | ADOT&PF Functional Class |
|-------------------|------------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Wilson Road       | 3553             |                      | 0.19        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Winfield Way      | 3109             |                      | 0.27        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Winterhaven Drive | 3113             |                      | 0.36        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Wonderland Circle | 3132             |                      | 0.07        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Wonderland Drive  | 3133             |                      | 0.40        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Woody Lake Drive  | 4774             |                      | 0.60        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Yellow Cub Drive  | 3763             |                      | 0.13        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |
| Zero Lake Road    | 4879             |                      | 0.42        | 25 mph      | Local Road           | Local Road               |





**APPENDIX B.**  
**PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT SUMMARY**







## Meeting Record

**Project Number:** 2136.01 (R&M)

**Project Title:** City of Houston CIA and Comprehensive Plan Revision

**Subject:** Future's Workshop and Open House #1

**Author:** Taryn Oleson

**Site Visit Location:** City of Houston Fire Station

**Meeting Date:** Thursday, September 18, 2014

**Distribution Date:** September 3, 2014

**Attendees:**

|                         |   |                       |
|-------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| Van Le, AICP            | Planning & Public Involvement Coordinator | R&M Consultants, Inc. |
| Taryn Oleson            | Public Involvement Coordinator            | R&M Consultants, Inc. |
| Kristi McLean           | CIA Lead                                  | R&M Consultants, Inc. |
| Virgie Thompson         | Mayor                                     | City of Houston       |
| Len Anderson            | Steering Committee                        | City of Houston       |
| Ron Jones               | Steering Committee                        | City of Houston       |
| Christopher Johnson     | Steering Committee                        | City of Houston       |
| Rebecca Rein            | Steering Committee                        | City of Houston       |
| Gina Jorgensen          | Steering Committee                        | City of Houston       |
| Lance Wilson            | Steering Committee                        | City of Houston       |
| Donna Logan             | Economist                                 | McDowell Group        |
| Allen Kemplen, AICP-CTP | Mat-Su Area Planner                       | AK State DOT          |

35 attendees signed in on the sign in sheet, including some project team members and Steering Committee members. At least two additional residences who were in attendance did not sign in.

The objective of this open house was to “Establish a Community Vision to be used as a guiding principle for the Community Impact Assessment and Comprehensive Plan.” The use of a Future’s Workshop is considered to be best practices for community visioning, as a way to begin a Comprehensive Plan Update. This visioning session was successful in gauging

community ideals and ideal futures, but a single vision statement was not generated in consensus by the resident attendees.

The meeting started at 4:30 PM at the Houston Fire Station.

As attendees entered the Future's Workshop, they were greeted and asked to fill out the sign in sheet. A City of Houston Fact Sheet was available as a handout, agendas were posted throughout the meeting space, and cookies and refreshments were served.

In the truck bay, half the space was used for display of the following maps: three historic maps from the 1979 Plan, existing zoning, existing land use, existing land use by zoning, existing land ownership, and the project area (City of Houston boundaries). Also on display were three posters showing aspects of the City of Houston's history, including the planning timeline and photographs of community members and events. Attendees were encouraged to examine the displays so as to better understand their City's past and present conditions.

At 5:00 PM all attendees were gathered into the main room and seated at seven small tables of 4-7 people for the small breakout session entitled "Creating ideal futures". Each table was hosted by a pre-designated facilitator and had at least 5 blank City of Houston Mind Maps which were used as a tool for note-taking and idea generation. Van Le and Taryn Oleson presented the purpose of the meeting and the small group task.

Over the next hour and fifteen minutes, small groups discussed what the City of Houston should be like 20 years from now. The small group session was not limited in scope and all relevant ideas were recorded in each group by the facilitator. Instructions were provided to the facilitators three days prior to the meeting, and again during the meeting, which included suggested questions to consider posing if conversation stified. The small group session was scheduled to be last about a half hour, but was allowed to continue due to highly active participation by the attendees.

At 5:50 PM pizza was delivered and served. Small groups continued to work through the meal until Van and Taryn cut the conversation to reconvene as a large group for the second session.

Tasked with finding "Common Ground on the Future," small groups took turns sharing an emerging theme developed by the group. Each theme was then recorded on one of six large City of Houston Mind Map, which Van and Taryn were writing on at the front of the room. Five of the six Mind Maps had pre-determined categorical titles: Transportation, Housing, Community Character, Community Facilities and Services, and Economic Development. The sixth Mind Map was given the title 'Planning' after multiple themes were presented within this category. Though overall successful, groups struggled to prioritize themes, ideas, or aspects of the future they felt were most important. It was also difficult for groups to limit their turn to sharing to only one of those items on their list at a time.

Establishing consensus was the overarching goal of the whole group session. While there was discussion and disagreement on specifics of certain contributed themes, the overall intent of the theme was agreed upon more often than not.

All Mind Maps, produced by both small group and whole group sessions, were collected and are available in hard copy and digital formats.

The Future's workshop concluded at 7:30 PM.

Draft Summary Statements have been developed by Taryn Oleson of R&M post-workshop from the whole group Mind Maps and are as follows;

- **Transportation:** There is a need to increase safety, accessibility, and mobility through much of the City and improvements shall be beneficial to all users including pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized uses such as dog sleds, while maintaining community character.
- **Housing:** Housing in the City of Houston should be available to a wide range of incomes, while providing opportunities for satisfactory, safe living for all residents, including the elderly.
- **Planning:** Effective, implementable planning is a recognized need for successful growth, development, and overall health of the community, as defined by its residents.
- **Community Character:** To be developed by Steering Committee
- **Economic Development:** While maintaining the current tax structure, the City of Houston aims to develop economically by capitalizing on its current amenities and natural resources; allowing commercial and light industrial development as long as it aligns with the community character and will be to the benefit of City residents.
- **Community Facilities and Services:** The City of Houston recognizes the need to expand its facilities and services in order to provide safe and satisfactory living for its residents, while enhancing the City's autonomy, economy, and unique identity.



# City of Houston at a Glance

## Demographics

- Rural-residential community experiencing consistent growth;
- 2013 estimated population of 2,039 residents
- Median age is 36; older age groups experiencing the fastest growth rate
- Estimated growth rate of 2% - population of 3,100+ residents in 2035
- Median household income almost \$60,000;
- About 12% of families and 16% of individuals are below federal poverty line

## Economic Development

- 82 active business licenses have physical addresses in City
- Top three business types; Services, Trade, and Construction
- Private sector employment is 85% with Trade (retail and wholesale), Transportation and Utilities, and Education and Health services being the top employment industries
- Unemployment rate is about 18%

## Education

- Houston High school of the Mat-Su Borough School District
- Land designated for a future elementary school
- Approximately 90% of residents has a high school

## Land Use

- City limits encompass 23 square miles
- 77% of land is vacant - 18% is residential
- Minor homestead agricultural activity but several areas are zoned for mixed agriculture (RA-)
- Major Parks and Recreation facilities; Little Susitna Campground, Riverside Camper Park, Houston/Willow Creek Sled Trailhead rec. area, and Haessler-Norris Trail System

## Community Services

- City Fire Department, law enforcement by Alaska State Troopers
- Homesteaders Community Center and Mid-Valley Senior, Inc. provide fellowship and services
- No large grocery store or medical facilities exist within the City; Wasilla and Big Lake are the closest providers





The City of Houston is conducting a Community Impact Assessment (CIA) and revising its Comprehensive Plan to guide future growth. Since the Comprehensive Plan was updated in 2003, population growth, transportation infrastructure projects and industrial development are on the rise. Participate in developing the plan for the future and prepare for growth and development while preserving community values.

Several major, regional-serving projects are currently underway that will require close coordination with the CIA and Plan including:

- Port MacKenzie Rail Extension
- Port MacKenzie to Parks Highway Connection
- Future Parks Highway segment upgrades
- Parks Highway Alternative Corridor Plan
- The annexation of Native corporation-owned land into City of Houston's boundaries

Visit the Project Website:  
[www.HoustonAKCompPlan.com](http://www.HoustonAKCompPlan.com)  
to sign up for updates

For More Information Please  
Contact:  
Van Le, AICP, Project Manager  
R&M Consultants, Inc.

E-mail:  
[comments@rmconsult.com](mailto:comments@rmconsult.com)  
Phone: 907-646-9659



# City of Houston Future's Workshop 9/18/14

## Mind Maps Summary

### *Whole Group Session – Sharing common themes and findings*

---

#### Community Character:

- Houston as a destination for tourism and recreation
- Have a unique identity or theme for us to be recognized by- distinguish Houston Alaska from the rest of the country and state
- Preservation of residential character – keeping “Houston Houston” with larger parcels for housing and minimal light pollution and noise
- Own a recreational identity; more than just trail heads
- Design standards for development
- Establish a Town Center keeping to the Houston feel
- Preservation of existing trails and ecology
- Involving community in the development and construction of community facilities
- Maintaining the quiet dark character – open for growth but keep it rural
- Community needs to be proactive
- Family friendly
- Make both sides of the river and railroad tracks feel like one community
- Wide reaching community government and development- increased involvement

#### Transportation:

- Train station in the City
- More connectivity – more emergency access
- Town center that is accessible and multiuse
- Multiuse pathways
- Better signage
- Main road be protected – increased vegetation
- Maintain multiuse trails
- Improved lighting and roadways
- Eventually expand availability of utilities and services
- Safety on the Parks corridor
- Development of King Arthur Rd.
- Hawk lane bike path – improvement of pedestrian safety via pathways and lighting

# City of Houston Future's Workshop 9/18/14

## Mind Maps Summary

- Industrial development along the rail lanes- light industrial
- Increase vegetative buffers in roadways
- Main artery needs proper planning for controlled access and the expansion of the Parks highway and the secondary roadways – *proper planning for corridor*
- *Port to Parks*
- Bus stop marker, signage, and lighting
- Park and ride with Valley-movers throughout Mat-Su and Anchorage Bowl

### Planning

- More staffing for City, Fire department should not be responsible for all emergency and police services
- Evolve into a 1<sup>st</sup> class city
- Corridor study
- Planning land use (one comment on no zoning restrictions)
- Water resource planning –special attention to the flood planes
- Development suitability study
- MSB build out- match with community growth
- Program to reduce junk cars
- Transfer centers
- Incentive for people to come here – education, recreation facilities, design
- Encourage subdivision with more high income development

### Housing

- Incentivize Dr. and medical facilities to move here
  - Assisted care facilities
- Plan for multi-family and senior housing with the aging population
- Conveniences for high end houses for a higher tax base – designate areas for high end housing

### Community Facilities and Services

- Education – elementary school



# City of Houston Future's Workshop 9/18/14

## Mind Maps Summary

- Town Center with; pedestrian friendly facilities, landscaping, panels and walk theme, restaurants, mixed use, near river or railroad, building codes (Form based codes)
- Youth summer programs
- Opportunities for post-secondary education/carter school
- Public safety; EMS expansion, year round water flow for fire
- Flood control response planning
- Community watch
- Recreation; trails, multiuse, designated facilities for recreation (rinks, pools, ball courts), preservation of natural areas, facility maintenance for motorized and non-motorized users including horses and dogs
- Animal shelter
- Utility expansion dependent on road alignment ; natural gas, coal, alternative energy
- Recreation destination; use Little Su for business services (tourism)
- Cemetery
- Veterinary clinic
- Daycare
- Business districts; planned, designed, and built
- Pharmacy
- Dentist
- Medical facilities
- Assisted care facilities
- Gas station and goods services
- Grocery store or food shops

### Economic Development

- Keep tax base
- Local jobs
- Riverwalk
- Community identity for economic development (using it to draw in visitors and residents)
- Centralized for recreation for Hatcher Pass, Deskha, etc. – capitalize on natural location
- Facilities at King Arthur; Laundromat, shower, gym, meeting place
- Daycare
- Natural resource development; coal mines, power plant, city owned utility





**June 4, 2015 Community Impact Assessment & Comp. Plan Review Open House 2 – CIA**

**Project:** City of Houston Community Impact Assessment & Comprehensive Plan Revision  
**Project No:** R&M 2136.01  
**Purpose:** Open House for public to review and comment on draft CIA findings  
**Date:** Thursday, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015  
**Time:** 4:30PM – 6:30PM  
**Location:** City of Houston Fire Station  
**Meeting Attendance:** 28 members of the public and Steering Committee member were present

**Project Team in Attendance:**

R&M Consultants

Van Le, AICP Project Manager  
Taryn Oleson Planner & PI Coordinator  
Kristi McLean Environmental Specialist, CIA Lead

City of Houston Steering Committee Members

Mayor Virgie Thompson  
Lance Wilson, Deputy Mayor  
Len Anderson, Chair Steering Committee  
Ron Jones  
Chris Johnson





## MEETING SUMMARY

As the public entered the Fire Station, they were greeted by a member of the R&M project team who provided a brief explanation on what the CIA is and the purpose of the open house. Attendees signed in, picked up a Fact Sheet on the transportation alternatives assessed in the CIA, and helped themselves to snacks and refreshments. In the truck hull of the Fire Station a variety of boards were on display.

The maps on display were the focus of the open house. Three graphics on large 34x44" boards depicted the potential impacts identified in the CIA to this point. Each graphic showed impacts for one of three impact categories; Transportation, Land Use, and Economic impacts. Impacts were shown geographically on a map of the City of Houston. In addition to the three main boards, a copy of each graphic was printed on the same large size paper and placed on tables for attendees to write directly on. See Attachment A. Supporting the three City of Houston CIA graphics were maps of the existing conditions within Houston, including zoning, land use, land use by zoning. A board showing the Transportation Plan map from the adopted City of Houston 1982 Comprehensive Plan was also on display for reference.

Members of the public were encouraged to read the three CIA maps and provide any comments, concerns, or opinions regarding the information shared. Markers and pens were provided on each table with a CIA map on it and any feedback provided by attendees could be written directly on the map. Comment forms were provided throughout the Open House space to allow written comments to be recorded.

Members of the project team and the Steering Committee engaged in conversations with the public about the process and the goals of performing a CIA. Generally, the public in attendance concurred with the impacts identified. Little new information emerged during the open house; most discussion focused around the opportunities that could emerge due to some of the impacts identified. The Economic Impacts map yielded discussion around the potential development that could occur around the new Port-MacKenzie Rail Extension, including zoning the new areas for industrial development and Knikatnu Inc developing an LED Assembly Facility south of Millers Reach Road. The information and opinions gathered on the impacts identified in the CIA will be incorporated into the CIA report.

Additional comments not directly related to the CIA impacts were largely related to the development of parks and establishment of more services and amenities, such as a gas station and grocery store, in the area. This information will be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan Revision effort.

The public was made aware of the open house through direct postcard mailings, an e-notification reminder, and information posted to both the project website as well as the City of Houston's website. The draft CIA will be made available for review by the public via the project website once it has been approved for release by the Steering Committee.



# Community Impact Assessment INFO SHEET

## What is a CIA and why is the City of Houston conducting one?

A Community Impact Assessment (CIA) is an evaluation of potential impacts transportation projects could have on the community of Houston. Each project analyzed has the potential to impact the socioeconomic, physical environment, and future growth and development in Houston. The CIA will serve as a planning tool and reference for the City and the Mat-Su Borough by ensuring the needs, opinions, vision and goals of the community are acknowledged and documented to help guide compatible growth and development within and around Houston. The CIA is being conducted concurrently in support of the City's Comprehensive Plan Update.

### TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS ANALYZED

#### Parks Highway Upgrade MP 44-52 Phase 3 Pittman Road to Big Lake Road

##### PLANNED - AKDOT&PF

- Proposed signalized intersection at Parks Hwy and Big Lake Road and at S. Johnson Road in Wasilla
- Pedestrian improvements include realignment of the pathway along Parks Hwy and Big Lake Rd; a pedestrian island and crosswalk at the intersection of Big Lake Rd and Parks Hwy
- Proposed four-lane divided Hwy from MP 44 in Wasilla returning to a two-lane Hwy after Forrest Lake Drive in Houston
- Proposed lighting at the intersection of Big Lake Road and the Parks Hwy; along the Parks Hwy
- Proposed access and driveway consolidation
- Construction planned for 2017-2018

#### Port MacKenzie Rail Extension

##### PLANNED AND IN CONSTRUCTION - ARRC & MSB

- 32-mile extension of the ARRC system to connect Port MacKenzie to the mainline along Parks Hwy
- Extension passes Houston Lake Loop Trail and Horseshoe Lake with connection to the mainline north of Miller's Reach Road
- Grade-separated crossings planned at officially recognized trails and roads
- No support facilities planned as part of the extension

#### Port MacKenzie to Parks Highway Roadway Corridor

##### CONCEPTUAL PROJECT

- Road alignment reflects concept shown in the adopted 1982 City of Houston Comprehensive Plan, Transportation Plan Map
- Road alignment parallels the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension alignment
- Conceptual corridor is 800' wide centered on the Rail Extension alignment, designed for a 2-lane 65 mph Hwy
- Anticipated primary use for freight and truck traffic to and from the Port

### FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT

PROJECT MANAGER: VAN LE, AICP | R&M Consultants, Inc. | [vle@RMConsult.com](mailto:vle@RMConsult.com) | 907.646.9659

PLANNER & PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT COORDINATOR: TARYN OLESON | R&M Consultants, Inc. | [Comments@RMConsult.com](mailto:Comments@RMConsult.com) | 907.646.9645

VISIT THE PROJECT WEBSITE: [WWW.HOUSTONAKCOMPLAN.COM](http://WWW.HOUSTONAKCOMPLAN.COM)



**May 5, 2016 Community Impact Assessment & Comprehensive Plan Revision:  
Open House #3 – Draft Comprehensive Plan Review**

- Project:** City of Houston Community Impact Assessment & Comprehensive Plan Revision
- Purpose:** Open House for public to review and comment on Draft Comprehensive Plan
- Date:** Thursday May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2016
- Time:** 5:00 PM- 7:00 PM
- Location:** City of Houston Fire Station
- Meeting Attendance:** 14 members of the public and Steering Committee member were present
- Outreach:** The public was made aware of the open house through postcards distributed at frequented locations throughout the City, an e-mailed invitation, and information posted to both the project website as well as the City of Houston’s website. The Draft Comprehensive Plan Revision is available for public review on the project website.

**Project Team in Attendance:**

**R&M Consultants**

|                      |                                |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Van Le, AICP         | Project Manager                |
| Taryn Oleson         | Planner & PI Coordinator       |
| Lance DeBernardi, PE | Senior Transportation Engineer |

**City of Houston Steering Committee Members**

Mayor Virgie Thompson

Lance Wilson, Deputy Mayor

Len Anderson, Chair Steering Committee

Ron Jones

Chris Johnson







## MEETING SUMMARY

As the public entered the Fire Station, they were greeted by a member of the R&M project team who provided a brief explanation on the purpose of the open house and the materials on the table. Attendees signed in, picked up a Comprehensive Plan Summary Handout, a copy of the draft Comprehensive Plan and helped themselves to snacks and refreshments. Draft Comprehensive Plan boards were on display on easels in the truck bay of the Fire Station.

The maps on display were the focus of the open house. Four maps highlighted the significant changes proposed in the Draft Comprehensive Plan Revision. The maps included:

- Draft Land Use Plan Map
- Draft transportation recommendations for Freight and Industry, Local Road Network, and Parks Highway.
- Four boards of proposed improvements
- Copies of the graphics were printed on the same large size paper and places on tables for attendees to write comments on. See Attachment A.

Supporting the four draft Comprehensive Plan Revision graphics were maps of the existing zoning and land use conditions within Houston as well as the Transportation Plan map from the adopted City of Houston 1982 Comprehensive Plan was for reference.

Members of the public were encouraged to examine the maps, specifically on the proposed Land Use Plan and Transportation Plan Maps, and provide any comments, concerns, or opinions regarding the information shared. Markers and pens were provided on each table with comment forms and a copy of a transportation plan map on it. Attendees could provide feedback by written directly on the map or filling out a comment form. Comment forms were also provided at the sign-in table as well as throughout the Open House space.

Members of the project team and the Steering Committee engaged in conversations with the public about the process, goals of the Revision, and the Land Use Plan and Transportation recommendations.



### Public Comments

The most discussed topics included the proposed Parks Highway Bypass and interchange with a future Port MacKenzie to Parks Highway, specifically how that would affect the development of Houston's economy and future Town Center. A resident and local business owner provided comments about two major items for further consideration in the Draft Comprehensive Plan:

- **Proposed Parks Highway bypass:** *A bypass to foster development of a Town Center may not work because Houston is dependent on Parks Highway travelers to support local businesses. A bypass will not ensure that travelers keep going to Wasilla or Willow instead of stopping even though the plan is to allow the Town Center to develop before the bypass is built in the next 20+ years.*
- **Parks Highway Design:** *Would like the Comprehensive Plan Revision to include a policy that will require DOT to build the Parks Highway into a 5 lane with center turn lane, with direct access to properties adjacent to the Parks Highway, versus a 4 lane divided highway with consolidated access. Gas station companies such as Tesoro are considering building a station in Houston near the Big Lake intersection or what is being called the future Commercial Center, and consolidated access on a divided highway will remove this potential.*

The Steering Committee and Project Team will take the comments into consideration at the next Steering Committee meeting and may edit the Draft Comprehensive Plan accordingly.

### **Attachments:**

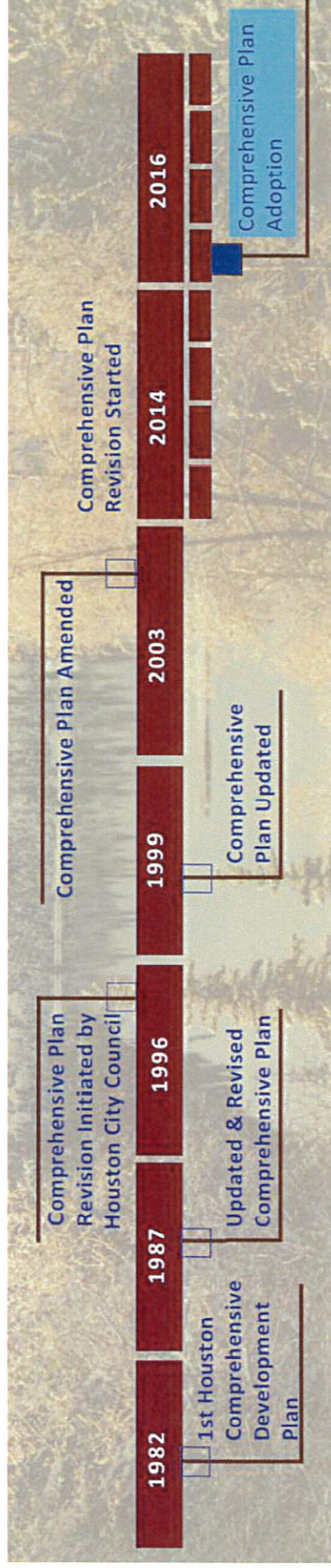
- Draft Comprehensive Plan Info Sheet
- Draft Comprehensive Plan Open House Comment Form
- Postcard Open House Notice



May 5, 2016 Open House

## Community Impact Assessment & Comprehensive Plan Revision Draft Comprehensive Plan Info

### What is a Comprehensive Plan and why is the City of Houston revising its Plan?



A Comprehensive Plan is a community's blueprint for future growth, development and change. Houston's Comprehensive Plan will serve as a planning tool and reference for the City and the Mat-Su Borough by ensuring the needs, opinions, vision and goals of the community are acknowledged and well documented to help guide compatible growth and development within and around Houston.

This Draft Plan is based on updated census, population and land use data. This Plan is an articulation of the community's core values based on a community wide survey and business and community stakeholder interviews conducted in 2015 and two public workshops in 2014 and 2015.

The Draft City of Houston's Comprehensive Plan revision reflects the goals, objectives and policies for Houston to govern future land uses and a desired future for the next 20 years through the year 2035.

The Draft Comprehensive Plan is available on the project website: [www.HoustonAKCompPlan.com](http://www.HoustonAKCompPlan.com)

[www.HoustonAKCompPlan.com](http://www.HoustonAKCompPlan.com)



May 5, 2016 Open House

## Community Impact Assessment & Comprehensive Plan Revision Draft Comprehensive Plan Info

### Land Use Recommendations Summary

(See Land Use Plan Map)

#### New Land Use Districts

- Town Center/Civic Center (*City Hall & Little Su Campground*)
- Commercial Core (*Parks Hwy & Big Lake Intersection*)
- Commercial Mixed Use (*North of Parks Hwy & Big Lake Intersection*)
- Transportation Facility (*Parks Highway & ARRC*)
- Development Reserve
- Parks and Natural Resource

### Transportation Recommendations Summary

(See Transportation Plan Maps)

#### Parks Highway Bypass

- Facilitates the development and growth of a Town Center at City Hall and the Little Su Campground area
- Provides efficient and safe freight movement
- Access management & consolidation for Parks Highway movement

#### Port MacKenzie to Parks Highway Roadway Corridor

- Road alignment parallels the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension alignment & reflects concept in Adopted 1982 City of Houston Transportation Plan Map

#### Parks Highway/Port McKenzie Interchange

- Connects Parks Highway, Proposed Parks Highway Bypass and future Port to Parks corridor

#### Local Roads Network

- Improved neighborhood connectivity
- Improved emergency response and access

#### New Zoning Districts

- Town Center
- Development Reserve (formerly Holding District)
- Parks and Natural Resource

APPENDIX C.  
HOUSTON HOUSEHOLD  
OPINION SURVEY REPORT



# *City of Houston Comprehensive Plan and Community Impact Assessment: Household Survey Results*

*Prepared for:*



*Prepared by:*



*February 2015*





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# Executive Summary

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The City of Houston contracted with R&M Consultants to help update its Comprehensive Plan and Community Impact Assessment. As part of this effort, R&M Consultants' subcontractor, McDowell Group, an Alaska research and consulting firm, conducted a mail survey (with an online option) of both City of Houston residents and nonresident property owners. The purpose of the survey was to gather input from City residents and property owners on a variety of comprehensive planning issues, such as transportation and recreation needs. The survey also asked residents about environmental issues, economic development, city services, and other aspects of their community. Key findings are summarized below.

## Quality of Life

Respondents rated quality of life in Houston an average of 6.9 on a scale of one-to-ten (with 10 being "high"). Just over four in ten respondents (42 percent) said their quality of life was high (rating of 8, 9, or 10 combined).

- More than eight of ten respondents (83 percent) agreed or strongly agreed with the statements that Houston is a good place to live with respect to outdoor recreation and enjoying a rural lifestyle.
- More than two-thirds of respondents (68 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that Houston could use more community planning.
- Houston residents were more likely to agree or strongly agree that Houston is a safe place to live compared to nonresident property owners, 64 percent versus 39 percent. Approximately two respondents in ten disagreed or strongly disagreed that Houston is safe (22 percent).

## Transportation-Related Projects

Improved roads and road maintenance are the most widely held transportation concerns in Houston and are considered very important by 62 percent of respondents.

- Younger respondents were more likely than older respondents to rate a new road between Houston and Port MacKenzie very important (38 percent versus 23 percent), and more of them said a Hawk Lane bike path is very important (41 percent versus 24 percent).

## Recreation-Related Projects

The top recreation issues for most respondents are creation of recreation programs for youth and maintenance of existing trails and pathways, which both were rated important or very important by 76 percent of respondents.

Houston residents were more likely than nonresident property owners to:

- Rate the creation of recreation programs for youth very important (33 percent versus 24 percent).
- Rate the creation or expansion of an indoor recreation facility very important (32 percent versus 22 percent).

- Rate more motorized trails and pathways very important (36 versus 17 percent).
- Rate non-motorized trails and pathways not important (40 percent versus 27 percent).

### **Support for Environmental-Related Issues**

When asked about their level of support for three environmental-related issues, more than two-thirds of respondents (69 percent) said they are very supportive of protecting drinking water quality, while 29 percent are very supportive of stricter enforcement of flood plan development regulations, and 27 percent are very supportive of stricter regulation of land near rivers, lakes, and streams.

### **Economic Development Initiatives**

When asked the importance of seven economic development initiatives, more than half of respondents (52 percent) said supporting extension of utility services is very important, followed by recruiting new business (42 percent), and supporting natural resource development (35 percent).

- Attracting industrial development along the railroad tracks, attracting more tourism, developing a tourism attraction along the Little Susitna River, developing a “town center” with pedestrian-friendly facilities, and recruiting new business all have somewhat less support among residents than among nonresident property owners.

### **City Services**

Eight in ten respondents said continuing to provide fire and emergency services and road maintenance are very important, while 43 percent and 36 percent respectively rated community planning and animal control and shelter very important. All four services were considered very important by more than one-third of respondents.

- Residents were more likely to rate nearly all of the city services very important compared to nonresidents, with the exception of animal control and shelter.

### **Willingness to Pay for New or Improved City Services or Facilities**

Approximately one-third of respondents said they are very willing to pay for improved city fire and emergency response and improved road maintenance through increased property taxes. Only 6 percent of respondents were very willing to pay for cemetery development and maintenance, and 58 percent were not willing to pay for this service at all.

- Men were more likely than women to say they are not willing to pay for city services through increased taxes.

### **Land Use Regulation**

Four in ten respondents said there is just enough regulation of private-property land use, two in ten said there is too much regulation, and an equal number said there is too little regulation.

- Men were more likely to say there is too much private property regulation compared to women, 26 percent versus 11 percent.

## **Respondent Demographics**

- Nearly two-thirds of respondents (65 percent) lived in Houston at least nine months during the past year. The average number of years a Houston resident respondent had lived in the community was 13.3 years.
- Only 4 percent of the Houston residents who responded are renters.
- Fifty-nine percent of respondents were male, and 41 percent were female. The average age of all respondents was 56.7 years.
- Average Houston resident household size for all respondents was 2.6 people. The average number of children in Houston households with children was 2.1 children.
- The median annual household income for all respondents was \$63,000.

# Methodology

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The City of Houston contracted with R&M Consultants to update its Comprehensive Plan (completed in 1999 and amended in 2003), as well as conduct a Community Impact Assessment. As part of that process, R&M Consultants subcontracted with McDowell Group, an Alaska research and consulting firm, to conduct a community household survey. The purpose of the survey was to gather opinions of Houston property owners (including non-Houston residents) and residents about the city's priorities for the next 20 years. The survey enhances community engagement and survey results will inform the planning process.

McDowell Group met with the City of Houston Comprehensive Impact Assessment and Comprehensive Plan Revision Steering Committee in August and October committee meetings to discuss survey content, as well as review of and pre-test the survey instrument. McDowell Group also attended the September 18 "Future's Workshop" held in Houston to hear community concerns and issues that were also considered for incorporation into the survey design.

On November 7, 2014, a postcard was mailed to 1,651 Houston resident households (including renters and home owners), and property owners. The purpose of the postcard was to provide advance notice of the survey. There were 209 returned post cards with bad addresses. These addresses were removed from the sample (new total of 1,442). The survey was mailed on November 12, 2014. Households were given the option to complete the survey by mail or go online to a secure website, enter their assigned password, and complete the survey. On November 21, another postcard was mailed to thank residents who had completed the survey and encourage those that had not to do so at their earliest convenience. On December 5, a second survey was sent to 1,259 nonrespondents of the first survey mailing. Responses were accepted until January 15, 2015. A total of 365 surveys were completed for a response rate of 25.3 percent.

A self-reported survey has the potential for self-selection bias. While the survey results may be representative, if this was a statistically random survey (such as a telephone administered survey), all responses would have a potential margin of error at the 95 percent confidence interval of +/-5.0 percent. In addition to reporting totals for all questions, this report identifies potentially statistically significant differences in responses for the following major subgroups:

- **Residency** – Residents of Houston and individuals who own property in Houston but whose primary residence is elsewhere (termed "nonresidents").
- **Age** – For sub-group analysis by age groups, "young" respondents are defined as those who indicated they were under 35 years old, "middle age" respondents are defined as 35 to 54 years old, and "older" respondents are defined as those who are 55+ years old.
- **Gender** – Male and female.

A total of 170 respondents (47 percent) provided verbatim responses to an open-ended statement, "*Please feel free to comment about any other planning issues you feel are important for the City of Houston to consider as it develops its new Comprehensive Plan and Community Impact Assessment.*" These comments are sorted by general theme and are found under separate cover, *Appendix – Verbatim Comments*.

# Residency Status

## Residency

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (65 percent) lived in Houston at least nine months during the past year.

### Did you live in Houston for more than 9 months in the past year?

|     | All Responses<br>n=357 | Houston Residents<br>n=233 | Nonresident<br>Property Owners<br>n=124 |
|-----|------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| Yes | 65%                    | 100%                       | -                                       |
| No  | 35                     | -                          | 100%                                    |

## Houston Resident Length in Community

Houston resident respondents were evenly distributed by length of residency and lived an average of 13.3 years in Houston.

### How many years have you lived Houston?

| n=228                  | Houston Residents |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 to 5 years           | 24%               |
| 6 to 10 years          | 32                |
| 11 to 20 years         | 23                |
| 21+ years              | 21                |
| <b>Average (Years)</b> | <b>13.3 years</b> |

## Home Ownership

Only 4 percent of the Houston resident respondents are renters.<sup>1</sup>

### Do you own or rent your Houston residence or property?

| n=228                  | Houston Residents |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| Own                    | 94%               |
| Rent                   | 4                 |
| Some other arrangement | 3                 |

Note: Due to rounding, results may not add to 100 percent.

<sup>1</sup> In comparison, the U.S. Census American Community Survey 2009-2013 Five-Year Average for Houston was 17 percent rental units of all housing units.

Of the nonresident property owners, 94 percent said they do not rent their Houston property to others.

**Do you rent your Houston property to others?**

| <b>n=113</b> | <b>Nonresident Property Owners</b> |
|--------------|------------------------------------|
| Yes          | 6%                                 |
| No           | 94                                 |



# Perceptions of Community Life

## Rating of Quality of Life

All respondents were asked to rate their quality of life in Houston on a scale from 1 (very poor) to 10 (very good). Eighteen percent of respondents chose to not answer the question because they did not live in Houston. Of the remaining respondents, four in ten respondents (42 percent) reported their quality of life as high (8, 9, 10 combined), and 51 percent rated it medium (4, 5, 6, 7 combined). Only 7 percent of respondents said their quality of life is low (1, 2, 3 combined). The average response for quality of life was 6.9.

Young respondents were more likely to rate their quality of life as high (52 percent 8, 9, 10 combined) compared to middle age (39 percent 8, 9, 10 combined) and older respondents (41 percent 8, 9, 10 combined).

Quality of Life Rating (1 to 10)

| n=344                                      | Percent of Total |
|--|------------------|
| <b>High rating (8, 9, 10 combined)</b>     | <b>42%</b>       |
| 10 – Very good                             | 16%              |
| 9  | 9                |
| 8  | 18               |
| <b>Medium rating (4, 5, 6, 7 combined)</b> | <b>51%</b>       |
| 7  | 20%              |
| 6  | 11               |
| 5  | 15               |
| 4  | 4                |
| <b>Low rating (1, 2, 3 combined)</b>       | <b>7%</b>        |
| 3  | 2%               |
| 2  | 4                |
| 1 – Poor                                   | 1                |
| <b>Average rating</b>                      | <b>6.9</b>       |

Note: Due to rounding, results may not add to 100 percent.

## Level of Agreement with Statements about Community Life

Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Houston is a good place to live with respect to outdoor recreation (83 percent) and enjoying a rural lifestyle (83 percent). Approximately two in ten disagreed or strongly disagreed that Houston is affordable (21 percent), safe (22 percent), or family friendly (20 percent), however.

More than two-thirds (68 percent) agreed or strongly agreed Houston could use more community planning, and 49 percent agreed or strongly agreed the community could use more landscaping of public spaces.

Please indicate your level of agreement regarding the following statements about the community of Houston...

|  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree | Unsure/ Don't know |
|--|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Houston is a good place for outdoor recreation.        | 30%            | 53%   | 6%       | 3%                | 9%                 |
| Houston is a good place to enjoy a rural lifestyle.    | 25             | 58    | 5        | 3                 | 8                  |
| Houston could use more community planning.             | 33             | 35    | 10       | 6                 | 16                 |
| Houston is a good place for people to live affordably. | 13             | 57    | 14       | 7                 | 10                 |
| Houston is family-friendly.                            | 9              | 56    | 16       | 4                 | 16                 |
| Houston is a safe place to live.                       | 9              | 55    | 15       | 7                 | 14                 |
| Houston could use more landscaping of public spaces.   | 23             | 26    | 22       | 12                | 16                 |

Note: Due to rounding, results may not add to 100 percent.

### DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HOUSTON RESIDENTS AND NONRESIDENT PROPERTY OWNERS

There were several statistically significant differences between Houston residents and nonresident property owners on the above statements about community life.

- Houston residents were *more* likely to agree Houston is a safe place to live compared to nonresident property owners (64 percent versus 39 percent, respectively).
- Residents were *more* likely to disagree Houston is family-friendly than nonresidents (21 percent versus 7 percent, respectively).
  - Likewise, young respondents were *more* likely to disagree Houston is family-friendly (31 percent) compared to middle age and older respondents (both 15 percent).
- Residents were *more* likely to strongly agree Houston is a good place to enjoy a rural lifestyle compared to nonresidents (30 percent versus 18 percent, respectively).

- Residents were *more* likely to disagree and strongly disagree Houston is a good place for people to live affordably (17 and 9 percent, respectively), compared to nonresidents (6 and 1 percent, respectively).
- Residents were *more* likely to agree and strongly agree Houston could use more community planning (37 and 40 percent, respectively), compared to nonresidents (24 and 25 percent, respectively).
- Residents were *more* likely to agree Houston could use more landscaping of public spaces than nonresidents (30 percent versus 20 percent, respectively).

# Transportation Issues

## Level of Importance

Of the nine transportation issues presented in the survey, more respondents considered improved road maintenance very important (62 percent) than any other. Paved roads (38 percent) and more road lighting (36 percent) received the next highest percentages of “very important” ratings. All nine issues were considered very important by at least 20 percent of respondents.

Please indicate how important it is for the City of Houston to support each of the following transportation-related projects...

|   | Very Important | Somewhat important | Not important | Unsure/ Don't know |
|---|----------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Improved road maintenance   | 62%            | 27%                | 5%            | 6%                 |
| More paved roads  | 38             | 33                 | 23            | 6                  |
| Improved lighting on road   | 36             | 34                 | 23            | 7                  |
| New road between Houston and Port Mackenzie   | 28             | 30                 | 30            | 13                 |
| Development of a Hawk Lane bike path  | 26             | 29                 | 32            | 12                 |
| Improved street/road signage  | 25             | 42                 | 25            | 8                  |
| Public transportation (bus service) between Houston and other parts of the Mat-Su Borough | 24             | 35                 | 31            | 10                 |
| New Alaska Railroad depot/train stop  | 23             | 35                 | 30            | 12                 |
| Development of a “Park and Ride” lot for commuters  | 22             | 36                 | 32            | 11                 |

Note: Due to rounding, results may not add to 100 percent.

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HOUSTON RESIDENTS AND NONRESIDENT PROPERTY OWNERS

Many of the statistically significant differences between Houston residents and nonresident property owners were related to Houston’s roads. The “very important” percentages of the various road issues for residents and nonresidents are as follows:

- Improved road maintenance: 70 percent of residents versus 48 percent of nonresidents.
- More paved roads: 45 percent of residents versus 26 percent of nonresidents.
- Improved road lighting: 38 percent of residents versus 29 percent of nonresidents.

Residents were *more* likely to consider improved street/road signage as not important compared to nonresidents (29 percent versus 19 percent, respectively). Other differences between residents and nonresidents include the following:

- Residents were *more* likely to say public transportation between Houston and the Mat-Su Borough is very important or somewhat important (27 and 38 percent, respectively), compared to nonresidents (16 and 28 percent, respectively).
  - However, residents were *more* likely to say a new Alaska Railroad depot/train stop is not important compared to nonresidents (33 percent versus 23 percent, respectively).
  - Residents also were *more* likely to say development of a “Park and Ride” lot for commuters is not important compared to nonresidents (37 percent versus 24 percent, respectively).
- Residents were *more* likely to say development of a Hawk Lane bike path is very important compared to nonresidents (30 percent versus 19 percent, respectively).

### OTHER DIFFERENCES

Men were *more* likely than women to say various transportation-related issues were not important. The “not important” percentages of men and women are shown below:

- Improved road lighting: 28 percent not important for men versus 16 percent for women.
- Public transportation between Houston and the Mat-Su Borough: 38 percent of men versus 23 percent of women.
- New Alaska Railroad depot/train station: 34 percent of men versus 23 percent of women.
- Development of Hawk Lane bike path: 40 percent of men versus 22 percent of women.
  - Women were *more* likely to rate a Hawk Lane bike path very important compared to men: 36 percent versus 20 percent, respectively.

There were also statistically significant differences among age groups:

- Young and middle age respondents were *more* likely to rate a new road between Houston and Port MacKenzie as very important compared to older respondents (38 and 34 percent, respectively, versus 23 percent).
- Young respondents were *more* likely to rate the development of a Hawk Lane bike path very important compared to older respondents (41 percent versus 24 percent, respectively).
- Young respondents were *more* likely to rate more paved roads not important (38 percent) compared to middle age and older respondents (both 21 percent).
- Young respondents were *more* likely to rate improved road/street signage not important (48 percent) compared to middle age (27 percent) and older respondents (22 percent).

## Highest Transportation-Related Priority

When respondents were asked to identify the single most important priority among the transportation issues listed, improved road maintenance again rose to the top, with 37 percent of respondents saying it is most important. More paved roads and a new road between Houston and Port MacKenzie were considered most important among those on the list by 15 percent and 12 percent of respondents, respectively.

### Of the transportation-related projects listed, which one should be the most important priority for the City?

| n=335   | Percent of Total |
|---|------------------|
| Improved road maintenance   | 37%              |
| More paved roads  | 15               |
| New road between Houston and Port MacKenzie   | 12               |
| Improved lighting on road   | 7                |
| Public transportation (bus service) between Houston and other parts of the Mat-Su Borough | 7                |
| Development of a Hawk Lane bike path  | 6                |
| New Alaska Railroad depot/train stop  | 4                |
| Development of a "Park and Ride" lot for commuters  | 3                |
| Improved street/road signage  | 1                |
| Unsure/Don't know   | 10               |

Note: Due to rounding, results may not add to 100 percent.

Answers given for "the most important transportation project" did not vary significantly by subgroups.

# Recreation Issues

## Level of Importance

Respondents were asked the importance of seven recreation-related projects/issues in Houston. The percentage of “very important” ratings for the top five recreation issues are all similar (within the statistical margin of error). Combining “very important” and “somewhat important” categories suggests the top issues for recreation are creation of recreation programs for youth and maintenance of existing trails and pathways, which both had a combined rating of 76 percent.

**Please indicate how important it is for the City of Houston to support each of the following recreation-related projects...**

|   | Very Important | Somewhat important | Not important | Unsure/ Don't know |
|---|----------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Creation of recreation programs for youth   | 30%            | 46%                | 17%           | 8%                 |
| Maintenance of existing trails and pathways   | 29             | 47                 | 16            | 7                  |
| More motorized trails and pathways  | 29             | 33                 | 30            | 8                  |
| Creation or expansion of indoor recreation facilities, such as an ice rink, swimming pool, or running track | 29             | 32                 | 31            | 7                  |
| Improved public access to lakes   | 27             | 43                 | 23            | 6                  |
| More non-motorized trails and pathways  | 22             | 34                 | 35            | 9                  |
| Creation of new parks with playground   | 19             | 44                 | 30            | 7                  |

Note: Due to rounding, results may not add to 100 percent.

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HOUSTON RESIDENTS AND NONRESIDENT PROPERTY OWNERS

The following are the statistically significant differences between Houston resident respondents and nonresident property owners on recreation-related issues.

- Residents were *more* likely to rate the creation of recreation programs for youth as very important compared to nonresidents (33 percent versus 24 percent, respectively).
- Residents were also *more* likely to rate the creation or expansion of an indoor recreation facility very important compared to nonresidents (32 percent versus 22 percent, respectively).
- Residents were *more* likely to rate the maintenance of existing of trails and pathways not important compared to nonresidents (19 percent versus 12 percent, respectively).
  - However, residents were *more* likely to rate more motorized trails and pathways as very important compared to nonresidents (36 and 17 percent, respectively), and they were *more* likely to rate non-motorized trails and pathways not important (40 percent and 27 percent, respectively).

## OTHER DIFFERENCES

- Female respondents were *more* likely to rate the creation of new parks with playgrounds very important compared to men (25 percent versus 14 percent, respectively).
- Women were *more* likely to rate maintenance of existing trails and pathways very important compared to men (37 percent versus 24 percent, respectively).
- Men were *more* likely to say more non-motorized trails and pathways were not important compared to women (44 percent versus 24 percent, respectively).
- Middle age respondents were *more* likely to say more motorized trails and pathways were very important compared to older respondents (39 percent versus 25 percent, respectively).
- Young respondents were *more* likely to rate the expansion of indoor recreation facilities very important compared to older respondents (45 percent versus 26 percent, respectively).

## Highest Recreation-Related Priority

The four top issues for “most important priority” among the recreation issues listed were creation of recreation youth programs (16 percent), improved public access to lakes (16 percent), creation or expansion of indoor recreation facilities (15 percent), and more motorized trails and pathways (14 percent).

### Of the recreation-related projects listed, which one should be the most important priority for the City?

| n=335   | Percent of Total |
|---|------------------|
| Creation of recreation programs for youth   | 16%              |
| Improved public access to lakes   | 16               |
| Creation or expansion of indoor recreation facilities, such as an ice rink, swimming pool, or running track | 15               |
| More motorized trails and pathways  | 14               |
| Maintenance of existing trails and pathways   | 11               |
| More non-motorized trails and pathways  | 9                |
| Creation of new parks with playground   | 7                |
| Unsure/Don't know   | 13               |

Note: Due to rounding, results may not add to 100 percent.

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HOUSTON RESIDENTS AND NONRESIDENT PROPERTY OWNERS

Residents were *more* likely than nonresidents to say more motorized trails and pathways and the creation or expansion of indoor recreation facilities are the most important recreation projects, 18 percent resident versus 8 percent nonresident for trails and pathways, and 17 percent resident versus 10 percent nonresident for indoor facilities. There was no statistically significant difference between residents and nonresidents in their responses to the other recreation options.



# Environmental Issues

## Level of Support

Respondents were asked about their support of three environmental-related issues. More than two-thirds of respondents (69 percent) were very supportive of the protection of drinking water quality, more than twice the “very supportive” percentages for stricter enforcement of flood plain development regulations (29 percent) and stricter regulation of land near rivers, lakes, and streams (27 percent).

**Please indicate how supportive you are for the City of Houston to strengthen each of the following environmental-related issues...**

|   | Very supportive | Somewhat supportive | Not supportive | Unsure/ Don't know |
|---|-----------------|---------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| Protection of drinking water quality                        | 69%             | 20%                 | 6%             | 5%                 |
| Stricter enforcement of flood plain development regulations | 29              | 36                  | 25             | 11                 |
| Stricter regulation of land near rivers, lakes, and streams | 27              | 37                  | 27             | 9                  |

Note: Due to rounding, results may not add to 100 percent.

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HOUSTON RESIDENTS AND NONRESIDENT PROPERTY OWNERS

With respect to environmental issues,

- More residents were very supportive of the protection of drinking water quality than nonresident property owners (78 percent versus 52 percent, respectively).
- Residents were *more* likely to be very supportive of flood plain development regulations compared to nonresidents (33 percent versus 21 percent, respectively).

## OTHER DIFFERENCES

- More men said they were not supportive of stricter regulation of land near water sources than women (33 percent versus 19 percent, respectively), and stricter enforcement of flood plain development (29 percent versus 19 percent, respectively).
- More women were very supportive of drinking water quality compared to men (76 percent versus 66 percent, respectively).

# Economic Development Initiatives

## Level of Importance

When asked the importance of seven economic development initiatives, more than half of respondents (52 percent) said supporting extension of utility services is very important, followed by recruiting new business (42 percent), and supporting natural resource development (35 percent). All issues were considered very important by at least one-quarter of respondents; however, developing a “town center,” developing a tourism attraction, attracting more tourism, and attracting more industrial development were all described as not important by more than one-quarter of respondents as well.

**Please indicate how important it is for the City of Houston to support new development or expansion in each of the following areas of economic development...**

|  | Very Important | Somewhat important | Not important | Unsure/ Don't know |
|--|----------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Supporting extension of utility services                       | 52%            | 30%                | 12%           | 6%                 |
| Recruiting new business  | 42             | 40                 | 13            | 5                  |
| Supporting natural resources development in the area           | 35             | 34                 | 22            | 8                  |
| Developing a “town center” with pedestrian-friendly facilities | 31             | 33                 | 28            | 8                  |
| Developing a tourism attraction along the Little Susitna River | 29             | 33                 | 31            | 8                  |
| Attracting more tourism development                            | 27             | 39                 | 29            | 6                  |
| Attracting industrial development along the railroad tracks    | 26             | 39                 | 26            | 9                  |

Note: Due to rounding, results may not add to 100 percent.

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HOUSTON RESIDENTS AND NONRESIDENT PROPERTY OWNERS

Residents are *more* likely to rate several of the economic development issues not important compared to nonresidents:

- Attracting industrial development along the railroad tracks: 31 percent of residents versus 17 percent of nonresidents rated it not important.
- Attracting more tourism development: 35 percent of residents versus 16 percent of nonresidents rated it not important.
- Developing a tourism attraction along the Little Susitna River: 36 percent of residents versus 21 percent of nonresidents.

- Developing a “town center” with pedestrian-friendly facilities: 32 percent of residents versus 20 percent of nonresidents.
- Recruiting new business: 15 percent of residents versus 8 percent of nonresidents.

Residents are *more* likely to say the extension of utility services is very important compared to nonresidents, 55 percent of residents compared to 44 percent of nonresidents.

#### OTHER DIFFERENCES

- Young respondents were *more* likely to say recruiting new business is very important compared to middle age and older respondents (62 percent versus 44 and 38 percent, respectively).
- Young respondents were *more* likely to say supporting natural resource development is very important compared to older respondents (56 percent versus 31 percent).
- Middle age respondents were *more* likely to say supporting the extension of utility services is very important compared to older respondents (64 percent and 46 percent, respectively).
- Male respondents were *more* likely than women to say attracting more tourism development is not important (32 percent versus 23 percent, respectively) and developing a tourism attraction along the Little Susitna River is not important (35 percent versus 22 percent, respectively).

## Highest Economic Development Priority

When asked to identify the single most important priority among the economic development initiatives, 30 percent of respondents said supporting extension of utility services is most important. Recruiting new businesses and developing a “town center” followed, with 16 percent and 12 percent of respondents respectively.

### Of the economic development projects listed, which one should be the most important priority for the City?

| n=345  | Percent of Total |
|--|------------------|
| Supporting extension of utility services                       | 30%              |
| Recruiting new business  | 16               |
| Developing a “town center” with pedestrian-friendly facilities | 12               |
| Attracting industrial development along the railroad tracks    | 10               |
| Supporting natural resources development in the area           | 9                |
| Developing a tourism attraction along the Little Susitna River | 6                |
| Attracting more tourism development                            | 6                |
| Unsure/Don’t Know  | 12               |

Note: Due to rounding, results may not add to 100 percent.

## **DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HOUSTON RESIDENTS AND NONRESIDENT PROPERTY OWNERS**

- Residents were more likely than nonresidents to say supporting extension of utility services is the most important economic development initiative (34 percent versus 21 percent, respectively).

There was no other statistically significant difference in responses between residents and nonresidents, or by age or gender.

## Level of Importance

When asked the importance of four city services, eight in ten respondents said continuing to provide fire and emergency services and road maintenance are very important (80 percent and 79 percent, respectively). All four services were considered very important by more than one-third of respondents.

**Please indicate how important it is for the City of Houston to continue providing the following services...**

|                             | Very Important | Somewhat important | Not important | Unsure/ Don't know |
|-----------------------------|----------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Fire and emergency services | 80%            | 16%                | 1%            | 4%                 |
| Road maintenance            | 79             | 16                 | 2             | 4                  |
| Community planning          | 43             | 38                 | 12            | 7                  |
| Animal control and shelter  | 36             | 38                 | 20            | 6                  |

Note: Due to rounding, results may not add to 100 percent.

### DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HOUSTON RESIDENTS AND NONRESIDENT PROPERTY OWNERS

Residents were *more* likely to rate nearly all of the city services very important compared to nonresidents. The "very important" percentages of residents and nonresidents are shown below for the various services:

- Road maintenance: 84 percent of residents rated it *very important* versus 67 percent of nonresidents.
- Fire and emergency services: 84 percent of residents versus 72 percent of nonresidents.
- Community planning: 46 percent of residents versus 36 percent of nonresidents.

On the remaining city service, residents were *more* likely to consider animal control and shelter not important compared to nonresidents (22 percent versus 13 percent, respectively).

- Male respondents were also *more* likely to consider animal control and shelter as not important compared to female respondents (26 percent versus 10 percent, respectively).

## Willingness to Pay for City Services or Facilities

Approximately one-third of respondents said they were very willing to pay for improved city fire and emergency response (35 percent) and improved road maintenance (34 percent) through increased property taxes. Only 6 percent of respondents were very willing to pay for cemetery development and maintenance, and 58 percent were not willing to pay for this service at all.

Please indicate how willing you are to pay for the following suggested new or improved City of Houston services or facilities through increased property taxes...

|   | Very willing | Somewhat willing | Not willing | Unsure/ Don't know |
|---|--------------|------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| Improved city fire and emergency services | 35%          | 44%              | 17%         | 4%                 |
| Improved road maintenance                 | 34           | 40               | 21          | 5                  |
| Funding of Public Safety Officers         | 26           | 29               | 40          | 6                  |
| Cemetery development and maintenance      | 6            | 24               | 58          | 12                 |

Note: Due to rounding, results may not add to 100 percent.

### DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HOUSTON RESIDENTS AND NONRESIDENT PROPERTY OWNERS

Residents were *more* likely to say they are not willing to pay for funding for public safety officers through increased property taxes than nonresidents (45 percent versus 30 percent, respectively), and not willing to pay for cemetery development and maintenance (63 percent versus 48 percent, respectively).

### OTHER DIFFERENCES

Men were *more* likely than women to say they are not willing to pay for all the city services through increased taxes. The "*not willing*" percentages of male respondents and female respondents are shown below:

- Funding of public safety officers: 46 percent of men said they are not willing versus 31 percent of women.
- Improved city fire and emergency services: 22 percent of men versus 9 percent of women.
  - *Conversely*, women were *more* likely to say they are very willing to pay for this improved fire and emergency services than men (43 percent versus 31 percent, respectively).
- Cemetery development and maintenance: 63 percent of men versus 50 percent of women.
- Improved road maintenance: 24 percent of men versus 17 percent of women.
  - *Conversely*, women were *more* likely to say they are very willing to pay for improved road maintenance than men (41 percent versus 28 percent, respectively).

## Solid Waste Fee

Respondents were evenly split between very willing (28 percent), somewhat willing (30 percent), and not willing (30 percent) to pay a fee for using a solid waste transfer station.

Please indicate how willing you are to pay a fee to drop off your garbage at a solid waste transfer station in Houston...

| n=345                    | Very willing | Somewhat willing | Not willing | Unsure/ Don't know |
|--------------------------|--------------|------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| Solid waste drop off fee | 28%          | 30%              | 30%         | 12%                |

### DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HOUSTON RESIDENTS AND NONRESIDENT PROPERTY OWNERS

Residents were *more* willing to pay a garbage drop off fee than nonresidents, 31 percent said they are very willing versus 22 percent, respectively.

# Private Property Regulation

## Perceptions on Land Use Regulations

Approximately four in ten respondents said there is just enough regulation of private-property land use, slightly more than two in ten said there is too much regulation, and about another two in ten said there is too little regulation. The remaining one-fifth of respondents were unsure/do not know.

### In Houston, do you feel there is too much, too little, or just enough private property regulation?

| n=356                  | Percent of Total |
|------------------------|------------------|
| Too much regulation    | 21%              |
| Too little regulation  | 19               |
| Just enough regulation | 41               |
| Unsure/Don't Know      | 20               |

Note: Due to rounding, results may not add to 100 percent.

### DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HOUSTON RESIDENTS AND NONRESIDENT PROPERTY OWNERS

- Twenty-four percent of residents said there is too much regulation compared to 14 percent of nonresidents, while 45 percent of residents said there is just enough regulation compared to 33 percent of nonresidents.
- Men were *more* likely to say there is too much private property regulation compared to women (26 percent versus 11 percent).



# Respondent Demographics

This section provides a demographic profile of survey respondents, including age, gender, household size and characteristics, and educational attainment. Demographic data is presented for the total sample, as well as for Houston residents and nonresident property owners.

## Age and Gender

Fifty-nine percent of respondents were male, and 41 percent were female.<sup>2</sup> The average age of all respondents was 56.7 years. Houston resident respondents had an average age of 54.8 years, and the average age of nonresident property owners was 60.2 years.

### Age and Gender

|                    | All Responses     | Houston Residents | Nonresident Property Owners |
|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Age</b>         | <b>n=343</b>      | <b>n=223</b>      | <b>n=114</b>                |
| Less than 25 years | 1%                | 1%                | 1%                          |
| 25 to 34 years     | 8                 | 11                | 2                           |
| 35 to 44 years     | 8                 | 8                 | 7                           |
| 45 to 54 years     | 24                | 23                | 24                          |
| 55 to 64 years     | 32                | 33                | 31                          |
| 65+ years          | 28                | 24                | 36                          |
| <b>Average age</b> | <b>56.7 years</b> | <b>54.8 years</b> | <b>60.2 years</b>           |
| <b>Gender</b>      | <b>n=356</b>      | <b>n=229</b>      | <b>n=121</b>                |
| Male               | 59%               | 59%               | 59%                         |
| Female             | 41                | 41                | 41                          |

Note: Due to rounding, results may not add to 100 percent.

<sup>2</sup> In comparison, the U.S. Census American Community Survey 2009-2013 Five-Year Average gender breakout for Houston was 51 percent male and 49 percent female.

## Houston Resident Household Characteristics

Average household size for Houston resident respondents was 2.6 people.<sup>3</sup> For households with children under age 18, the average number of children in the household was 2.1.

### Household Size and Children in the Houston Household

| Houston Residents                                      |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| <b>Household Size</b>                                  | <b>n=223</b>        |
| 0  | 0%                  |
| 1  | 17                  |
| 2  | 47                  |
| 3  | 12                  |
| 4+   | 22                  |
| <b>Average household size</b>                          | <b>2.6 people</b>   |
| <b>Children in Household**</b>                         | <b>n=229</b>        |
| 0  | 69%                 |
| 1  | 12                  |
| 2  | 9                   |
| 3  | 5                   |
| 4+   | 3                   |
| <b>Average # children for households with children</b> | <b>2.1 children</b> |
| <b>Average # children for all households</b>           | <b>0.6 children</b> |

Note: Due to rounding, results may not add to 100 percent.

<sup>3</sup> In comparison, the U.S. Census American Community Survey 2009-2013 Five-Year Average average household size for Houston was 2.61 (+/-0.35).

## Household Income

The median household income for all respondents was \$63,000, and that did not vary among residents and nonresidents.<sup>4</sup>

Annual Household Income (Self-Reported)

|                                | All Responses<br>n=312 | Houston<br>Residents<br>n=207 | Nonresident<br>Property Owners<br>n=100 |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Less than \$15,000             | 7%                     | 7%                            | 6%                                      |
| \$15,001 to \$25,000           | 8                      | 9                             | 6                                       |
| \$25,001 to \$35,000           | 9                      | 12                            | 4                                       |
| \$35,001 to \$50,000           | 13                     | 15                            | 8                                       |
| \$50,001 to \$75,000           | 23                     | 21                            | 27                                      |
| \$75,001 to \$100,000          | 17                     | 17                            | 17                                      |
| Over \$100,000                 | 23                     | 18                            | 32                                      |
| <b>Median household income</b> | <b>\$63,000</b>        | <b>\$63,000</b>               | <b>\$63,000</b>                         |

Note: Due to rounding, results may not add to 100 percent.

## Educational Attainment

The educational attainment of Houston resident respondents and nonresident property-owner respondents are similar in most respects. Nonresident property owners were slightly more likely to have a bachelor's degree than Houston residents (29 percent versus 18 percent, respectively).

Educational Attainment

|                                  | All Responses<br>n=352 | Houston<br>Residents<br>n=228 | Nonresident<br>Property Owners<br>n=119 |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Less than high school degree     | 3%                     | 3%                            | 3%                                      |
| High school diploma/GED          | 16                     | 18                            | 13                                      |
| Vocational/technical certificate | 9                      | 11                            | 6                                       |
| Some college                     | 28                     | 28                            | 28                                      |
| Associate's degree               | 9                      | 10                            | 7                                       |
| Bachelor's degree                | 22                     | 18                            | 29                                      |
| Master's degree                  | 12                     | 11                            | 12                                      |
| Doctorate                        | 1                      | 1                             | 3                                       |

Note: Due to rounding, results may not add to 100 percent.

<sup>4</sup> In comparison, the U.S. Census American Community Survey 2009-2013 Five-Year Average median household income for Houston was \$51,974 (+/- \$8,656).



APPENDIX D.  
COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT &  
APPENDICES





**Community Impact Assessment  
& Comprehensive Plan Revision**

# **City of Houston**

## **Community Impact Assessment**

### **Final Report**

Prepared by R&M Consultants, Inc. for the City of Houston

October, 2015

DRAFT



# CITY OF HOUSTON COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Houston is conducting a Community Impact Assessment in conjunction to the update of the city's Comprehensive Plan. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough wrote the city's Comprehensive Plan in 1999 and its amendment in 2003, and this is the first Community Impact Assessment (CIA) and Comprehensive Plan revision conducted by the City of Houston. Recent increases in population growth, demand for services, as well as major transportation infrastructure projects underway within or adjacent to the City of Houston have prompted the City to prepare and plan for the opportunities for change in the community's infrastructure, economy, and development. The following CIA will assist the planning process by analyzing potential impacts major transportation projects may have on the City of Houston and its quality of life. The evaluation will allow the city and its residents to prepare for positive impacts and mitigate any negative potential impacts within their community and assist Houston in maintaining its unique community character.

The process used to develop the CIA is based on the process defined in the US Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) "Community Impact Assessment; A Quick Reference for Transportation." The study area assessed is the City of Houston as defined by its existing boundaries, including the newly annexed Knikatnu Inc. land. A community profile and the existing conditions report on Houston are used as a baseline for considering impacts. Analysis of the relationship between the proposed transportation projects and the City of Houston consists of identifying and investigating impacts through eleven impact categories.

Categories used to assess impacts of the transportation projects include:

- social and psychological aspects;
- physical aspects;
- visual environment;
- land use;
- economic conditions;
- traffic and circulation;
- mobility and access;
- provision of public services;
- safety, displacement; and
- environmental justice.

Each category is assessed for direct (temporary and long-term), indirect, and cumulative impacts for each alternative and community goals and values identified through various public involvement outreach methods, including open houses and interviews, were considered whenever possible.

Four transportation alternatives are assessed in this CIA including a No Build Alternative. The No Build scenario, Alternative One in the CIA, is evaluated for the direct and indirect impacts that are incurred without action or development and serves as a standard with which to compare impacts of action alternatives to. The second project assessed is the Parks Highway Milepost 44-52

Upgrade. While the majority of the proposed upgrades are occurring outside City boundaries, the terminus of the project is at Big Lake Road where an intersection traffic light is proposed, is within City boundaries and has the potential to impact land use, traffic and circulation, economic conditions and more within Houston.

Alternative three in the CIA is the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension. Segments of the rail extension are currently in the construction phase and will connect Port MacKenzie to the ARRC mainline north of Miller's Reach Road in Houston upon its completion. Newly annexed Knikatnu Inc. land into Houston is crossed by the rail extension. Currently, the ARRC does not intend to develop any additional facilities in Houston other than the rail line, though it was expressed by ARRC that the idea of a loading facility would be entertained if private development initiated the establishment of such a facility. The fourth alternative analyzed in this CIA is a Port MacKenzie to Parks Highway Roadway Corridor. This alternative is conceptual but has been considered since the planning phases of the Port MacKenzie rail extension. The roadway corridor analyzed parallels the rail extension and is based on historical studies supporting the rail extensions development and the City of Houston's 1982 Transportation Plan Map.

The transportation alternatives were chosen for assessment based on their potential to have significant impacts on the City of Houston, both positive and negative. After analyzing each alternative using the FHWA based methodology, minimal to null impacts were identified at large for the City of Houston. The Rail Extension and the conceptual roadway corridor from Port MacKenzie to the Parks Highway would have minimal impacts for the City of Houston. This is largely because the rail extension and roadway corridor would be constructed on currently vacant land, resulting in minimal change. Additional facilities supporting economic growth and development are not a part of the rail extension. Services and amenities necessary for the local economy to benefit from increased traffic along the Parks Highway as a result of the Port-to-Parks roadway are not yet established. While the Parks Highway MP 44-52 Upgrade is proposed to improve travel time throughout that corridor, it does not have any cumulative impacts to the land use or development within Houston, according to FHWA guidelines. Significant adverse impacts were not identified for any of the alternatives.

Despite a lack of short-term direct impacts, members of the community and identified stakeholders believe the City of Houston is poised for expansion and has the right attributes to turn the community into a place that would attract residents, new business, and visitors. While the alternatives assessed may not directly produce a significant change in the community, the long-term cumulative impacts have the potential to be significant. Changes in land use and traffic volumes may encourage new business development, bring more residents and the Rail Extension could provide a more attractive market for industrial and natural resource development. Houston is becoming a key connection point for material goods as well as people traveling between Interior and Southcentral Alaska and that provides greater growth potential for the City. If new developments or information emerge pertaining to the alternatives assessed in this CIA, additional analysis will be conducted in order to provide the most reasonably to-date analysis on anticipated impacts for the City of Houston.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The City of Houston is conducting a Community Impact Assessment (CIA) to evaluate potential effects transportation projects could have on the community of Houston and its quality of life. The CIA will serve as a planning tool and reference for the City of Houston and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough by ensuring the needs, opinions, vision, and goals of the community are acknowledged and well documented to help guide compatible growth and development within and around Houston.

Transportation projects, hereafter referred to as alternatives, assessed in this CIA are: the Parks Highway Milepost (MP) 44-52 Upgrade project, the planned rail extension from Port Mackenzie to the existing Alaska Railroad mainline at Houston, and a conceptual roadway connection from Point MacKenzie Road to the Parks Highway at Houston.

Houston is a growing rural residential community which has developed around the Parks Highway, a National Highway Systems Highway bisecting the community. Each alternative has the potential to significantly impact the socioeconomics, physical environment, and future growth and development of Houston. The CIA will identify potential impacts and recommend mitigation to impacts that conflict with the needs and goals of the community. The documented findings will provide usable information for future development decisions-making processes that will help the community maintain its high quality rural residential living environment, and provide a useful tool for accommodating orderly growth.

### 1.1 Relationship to the Comprehensive Plan

In conjunction to the CIA, the City of Houston is in the process of updating its Comprehensive Plan and is conducting a Parks Highway Corridor Study in partnership with the Alaska Department of Transportation. Comprehensive Plans are a tool to plan for future growth, development, and constant change within a community. This CIA will support an effective comprehensive plan by providing city decision makers with information on potential positive and negative impacts major transportation projects could have on the city, assisting the development of effective policies that reflect the community's best interests.

Houston's natural resources provide countless recreational opportunities and attractions. Houston is defined by its rural-residential character and its abundance of available land, popular recreation sites within its "Lakes District", and proximity to the Mat-Su commercial center. There is potential for residential, commercial, and industrial development within Houston and residents are requesting an increase in services and amenities. Planning for development that aligns with the community's rural-residential character and improves residents' quality of life is the goal of the Comprehensive Plan update and the CIA.

## 1.2 Process Used in this Study

The process used to develop the City of Houston's Community Impact Assessment (CIA) is based on the process defined in the US Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) "Community Impact Assessment; A Quick Reference for Transportation". Generally, the process consists of defining the project area, developing a community profile of existing conditions, identifying alternatives, analyzing the impacts for each alternative, identifying solutions for any adverse impacts and documenting the findings.

Transportation alternatives were identified through research of current and planned major transportation infrastructure projects within or around Houston. They were selected for analysis based on their potential to have significant impacts on Houston and their proximity to the city. Impacts analyzed include changes in:

- social and psychological characteristics of the community;
- physical aspects;
- visual environment;
- land use;
- economic conditions;
- mobility;
- access;
- traffic and circulation;
- provision of public services; and
- safety.

The CIA will also analyze any environmental justice (EO 12898) concerns and the potential displacement of residents, businesses or facilities. Environmental justice is the fair and equal treatment and meaningful involvement of all peoples regardless of whom they are or where they come from with respect to development, implementation, and enforcement of policies, laws and regulations.

The public plays a crucial role throughout the process by serving as a dynamic source of information. Public involvement for the CIA included meetings with the City of Houston CIA and Comprehensive Plan Revision Steering Committee, public meetings and open houses, newsletters, and a project website. Interviews were conducted as part of the economic analysis for the CIA and Comprehensive Plan Revision and key stakeholders were actively involved in the assessment review process. See *Appendix A for Public Involvement materials*.

## 1.3 Study Area

The area of study for the Community Impact Assessment is the City of Houston as defined by its existing boundaries, from milepost 52 of the Parks Highway to milepost 62, and includes the newly annexed 1,555 acres of Knikatnu, Inc. land. See [Figure 1 City of Houston](#). The annexation was approved by the Local Boundary Commission on April 15, 2015.

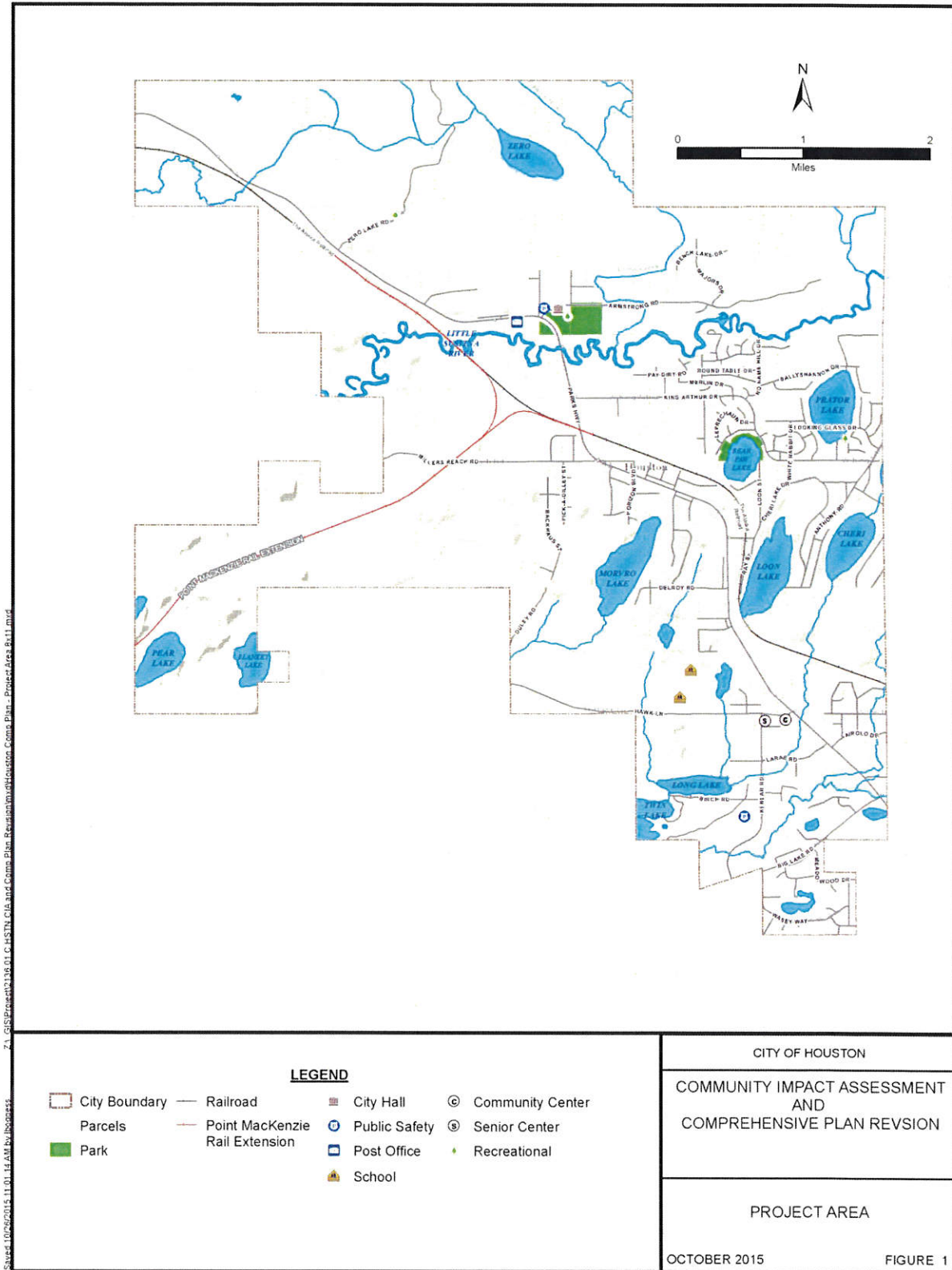


Figure 1 Study Area

## 2. COMMUNITY PROFILE

The community profile establishes an understanding of the City of Houston's history, existing conditions, anticipated conditions, and of the values residents of the community hold. An understanding of these community elements provides the basis for determining potential affects any given transportation action may have on the City of Houston.

### 2.1 Community History and Background

Houston, Alaska was first listed on a 1917 blueprint Alaska Railroad map as "Houston Siding," named after Tennessee Congressman William Cannon Houston. The City's origins began with natural resource development and the Herning Trail (now Willow Creek Sled Trail) for freighting supplies to the Willow Creek Mining District, according to the State of Alaska's Community and Regional Affairs database. Several coal mines were developed in the area in 1917-1918 and a railroad spur was constructed that supplied coal to Anchorage and the LaTouche Mining Company in Prince William Sound. The coal from Houston was heavily mined through World War II, after which the mine operations shut down. In 1953-1954 gravel roads and power lines were extended west of Wasilla, and Houston quickly settled. Houston incorporated as a third-class city in 1966 and was reclassified in 1973 to a second-class city.

### 2.2 Physical Environment

#### Soils

Soils in Houston generally range from well-drained, well-sorted gravel to hydric wetland soils. A number of small lakes dot the central and southern portions of the community limits and are bordered by glacial moraines consisting of non-sorted glacial till. In general, soils located south of the Little Susitna River and east of the Parks Highway are well drained sand and gravels of pitted outwash and till material. Larger intermittent areas of poorly drained soils and peat bogs occur to the west of the Parks Highway.

The northern topography is characterized by rolling hills and perched silty areas. These soils are fine grained and poorly draining. Development within the area is sparse with only a few gravel pits cut in glacial moraine and esker/kame complexes

Soils in the central portion of Houston are suitable for cultivated crops and agricultural development. Portions of these areas are presently zoned for low density residential and agricultural use.



## **Waterbodies**

Approximately 864 acres, or 5%, of Houston consists of surface waters. The most notable is the Little Susitna River which crosses the Parks Highway in the middle of the community. This river originates in the Talkeetna Mountains in Hatcher Pass and flows southwest ultimately into Cook Inlet. The Little Susitna River, Coho Creek, and a number of contributing unnamed streams are listed in the Anadromous Waters Catalog.

Several popular lakes exist within the City limits including Zero Lake, Bear Paw Lake, Prator Lake, Frog Lake, Cheri Lake, Loon Lake and Morvro Lake. Bear Paw, Prator, Morvro, and Loon Lake are stocked annually with various fish species.

According to "Alaska's Final 2010 Integrated Water Quality Monitoring Report" (July 15, 2010), there are no designated "Impaired Waterbodies" within the city of Houston.

## **Wetlands**

A number of riverine, lacustrine, and palustrine wetlands are present within Houston. Most wetlands are riparian buffers along the Little Susitna River, Coho Creek and surrounding ponds. Several other wetlands are present in low lying areas between Zero Lake and the Little Susitna River.

## **Floodplains**

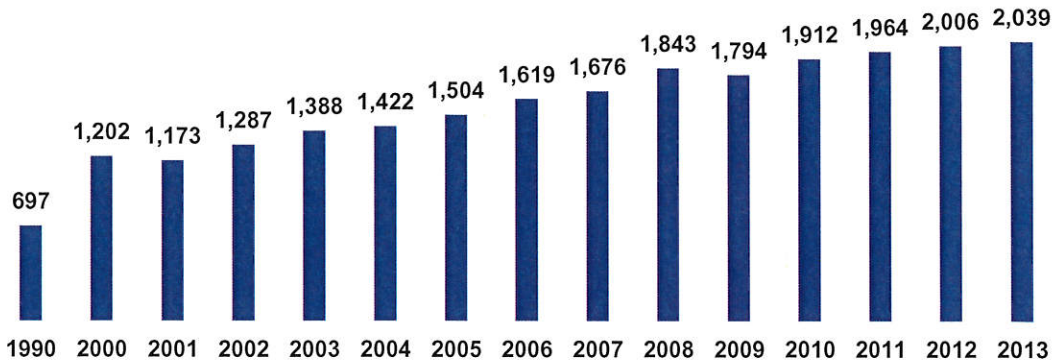
The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) completed a Flood Insurance Study and remapped the Special Flood Hazard Areas for the Mat-Su Borough. The Borough adopted the new floodplain mapping in 2011. The primary floodplain surrounds the Little Susitna River. A floodplain development permit from the Borough is required prior to building or development within a federally designated flood hazard area.

## **2.3 Population and Demographics**

### **Trends in Population Growth and Demographics:**

Houston has experienced steady population growth over the past two decades; its 2013 population of 2,039 is almost triple that of 1990 which had 697 residents (see figure 2). This growth rate is higher than that of the entire Mat- Su Borough, which grew 2.4 times in size from 1990 to 2013.

**Figure 2. Houston Population, 1990 and 2000-2013**

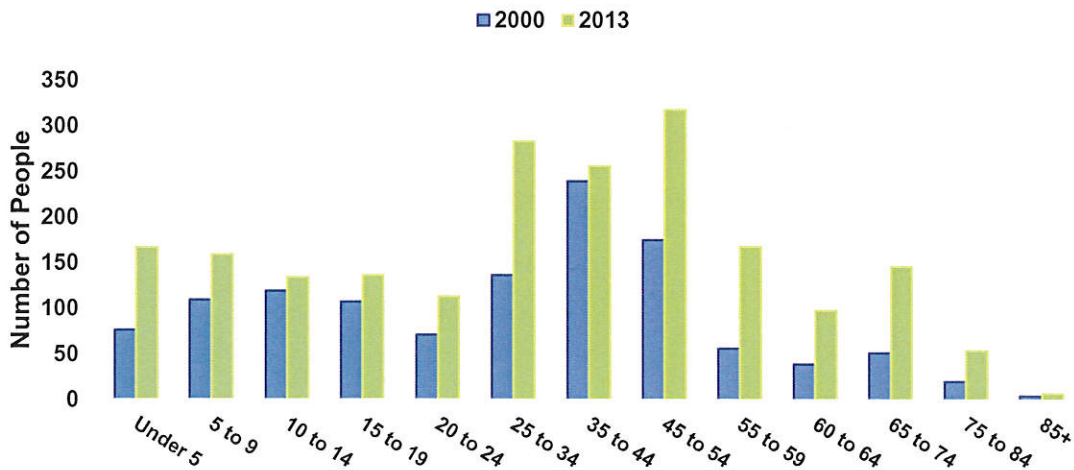


Population growth in the Mat-Su is projected to slow from the current annual growth rate of 3.6% to less than 2% by the year 2035. Since Houston is tied to the Mat-Su economy and has comparable demographics, McDowell Group projects that Houston’s population growth will reflect that of the larger Mat-Su, growing approximately 2% over the current period to 2035. With this growth rate, the City of Houston would grow by about 50% of its current population level to slightly more than 3,100 residents in 2035.

**Age**

The median age of Houston residents in 2013 was just over 36 years of age. This is slightly higher than the average age for the Mat-Su Borough and Alaska, which have median ages of 35 and 34 years respectively. The majority of the population growth has occurred in the older age cohorts.

**Figure 3. Houston Population by Age Category and Median Age, 2000 and 2013**



## Race

The majority of Houston's residents, 87%, self-identify as White. About 4% of Houston residents identify themselves as American Indian and Alaska Native and the remaining 9% of Houston residents identify as multi-racial. These categories reflect the five year average distribution from 2009-2012.

## Household Income

The median household income in the City of Houston is almost \$60,000, which is about \$10,000 less than the median household income in the Mat-Su Borough and the state. Per capita income averaged slightly more than \$25,000, less than the \$30,000 found in the Mat-Su Borough and \$32,000 for Alaska.

Approximately 12 percent of families and 16 percent of individuals in Houston live below the federal poverty line. According to 2014 Federal guidelines for Alaska, a household of four making less than \$29,440 or an individual with an income of less than \$14,350 are considered living in poverty. There are approximately 101 households that receive public assistance and 118 households utilize the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

## Educational Attainment

*Availability of Facilities:* Two schools are located in separate buildings within Houston: Houston Middle School and Houston High School. Elementary school age students currently take a bus to the nearby elementary schools, namely Big Lake Elementary and Willow Elementary School.

According to the U.S. Census and American Community Survey, approximately 90% of Houston's population had a high school degree or higher with 17% holding a bachelor's degree or higher. Educational attainment has increased since the 1990s, see Table 1.

The Household Opinion Survey conducted by the McDowell Group for the City of Houston Comprehensive Plan and CIA in 2014 suggests that 18% of Houston residents have a bachelor's degree.

**Table 1. Houston Educational Attainment, Population 25 Years and Over, 2000 and 2008-2012 Five- Year Average**

|                                 | 2000 | 2008-2012 | 2008-2012 Margin of Error |
|---------------------------------|------|-----------|---------------------------|
| High school, no diploma         | 16%  | 11%       | +/-5%                     |
| High school diploma or GED      |      | 36        | +/-6                      |
| Some college                    |      | 31        | +/-5                      |
| Associate's degree              |      | 5         | +/-2                      |
| Bachelor's degree               |      | 9         | +/-4                      |
| Graduate or professional degree |      | 8         | +/-4                      |

Note: Columns may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.  
Source: U.S. Census and American Community Survey.

## Employment

In 2012, Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development (ADOLWD) estimated there were 768 residents over age 16 employed in Houston, with total annual wages of \$26.5 million. Most workers were employed in the private sector (85 percent), followed by local government (11 percent), and state government (4 percent). The top four industries in terms of employment included Trade (retail and wholesale), Transportation and Utilities (22 percent), Education and Health Services (16 percent), and Construction (13 percent).

In addition to data compiled by the State of Alaska, the American Community Survey offers insight into employment in Houston. According to these data, 782 residents over age 16 were employed and 166 unemployed. The unemployment rate is estimated to be 18 percent. Private wage and salary workers made up 80 percent of employed, followed by government workers (19 percent) and self-employed workers (7 percent). The industries with the highest level of employment were Retail Trade (17 percent), Educational, Health and Social Services (13 percent), Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation and Food Services (11 percent); and Agriculture, Forestry, Hunting and Fishing, and Mining (11 percent). Many residents are employed outside of Houston.

## Disabled Groups

According to the American Community Survey, about 12% of the civilian population in the Mat-Su Borough is estimated to have a disability. It is assumed that Houston generally reflects the greater Mat-Su in this trend. Services for disabled groups are extremely limited with the City with most persons receiving care in Wasilla or Anchorage.

## Alaska Native Entities

Knikatnu, Inc. and Cook Inlet Region, Inc. are adjacent land owners to the City of Houston. Some properties owned by CIRI and Knikatnu are within the City of Houston boundaries and the roadways on those properties are managed and owned by the City but are listed within the BIA TTP inventory.

## 2.4 Economics

### Economic Base

The economic base for the City of Houston is made up of local tax revenues including sales tax, property tax, and motor vehicle tax, licenses and permits, service fees, and income from outside sources. Collectively the City of Houston has an annual budget of less than one million dollars. Houston's largest expenses are for road service and maintenance and providing fire services.

Seasonal tourism and travel along the Parks Highway provides increased revenue opportunities for the City of Houston. Increasing recreational tourism has been identified as a method of establishing a larger economic base, along with commercial and industrial development along transportation corridors.

### Taxes

The City of Houston generates income from local sales taxes, property taxes, and motor vehicle taxes. The current sales tax rate is 2% and the City has budgeted for anticipated revenue of \$151,500 in sales tax for the fiscal year 2015. Property taxes are anticipated to provide \$361,607 in income to the City for the same fiscal year. Overall, the tax base in Houston is proposed to provide \$526,007 in revenues to the City. Residents have stated that an appeal of Houston is its affordable property values; allowing first time homeowners and young families the opportunity to invest.

### Houston Businesses

There are 82 business licenses that list their physical address in Houston and are considered active. When filing for a business license, a company determines the North American Industrial Classification System code that best fits with the service they plan to offer. While not completely accurate, this classification system offers some insight into the structure of a local private sector economy. See Table 2 for the composition of businesses in Houston by business type.

**Table 2. Composition of Houston Businesses, 2014**

| 2 Digit NAICS Code | Description  | Number of Houston Businesses |
|--------------------|--|------------------------------|
| 11                 | Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting                         | 1                            |
| 23                 | Construction   | 11                           |
| 31                 | Manufacturing  | 4                            |
| 42                 | Trade  | 15                           |
| 48                 | Transportation and Warehousing                                     | 5                            |
| 53                 | Real Estate, Rental and Leasing                                    | 5                            |
| 54                 | Professional, Scientific and Technical Services                    | 5                            |
| 56                 | Administrative, Support, Waste Management and Remediation Services | 6                            |
| 61                 | Educational Services   | 1                            |
| 62                 | Health Care and Social Assistance                                  | 3                            |
| 71                 | Arts, Entertainment and Recreation                                 | 5                            |
| 72                 | Accommodation and Food Services                                    | 4                            |
| 81                 | Services   | 17                           |
| <b>TOTAL</b>       |  | <b>82</b>                    |

The North America Industrial Classification System (NAICS) is a taxonomy that categorizes businesses by sector of activity.

During the summer months, traffic through Houston tends to increase. A number of businesses are sustained by this traffic because some travelers stopped to eat a meal, to rent RV space, or purchase fireworks. The City of Houston has the largest concentration of businesses selling fireworks in Alaska. The Little Susitna River is an attraction for anglers as well as river adventurers during the summer months.

At this time, there is no grocery store in Houston: typically residents will travel to Wasilla or Big Lake for their shopping needs. No medical clinics or facilities are in operation within Houston. The closest hospital is Mat-Su Regional Medical Center in Wasilla, along with a full suite of dental, chiropractic and other health services. Currently no gas stations exist within the Houston City limits.

## 2.5 Physical and Social Community Characteristics

### **Community Values and Issues (from the 2003 Comprehensive Plan Update, Futures Workshop, Household Opinion Survey and Existing Conditions Report)**

The City of Houston is a rural-residential community. Its abundance of available land, popular recreation sites within the “Lakes District” of Houston, and proximity to the commercial center of the Mat-Su Borough has made it a desirable area which has experienced consistent growth. There is potential for residential, commercial, and industrial development within Houston and residents are open to limited development of amenities to enhance their quality of life as long as the city maintains the rural-residential character and preserves the recreational opportunities and ecology within Houston. Finding a balance between development for amenities such as a medical facility, pharmacy, daycare provider, or grocery store and maintaining the current community character is a top priority for the City moving forward.

The City of Houston values its unique identity, independence, rural and recreational lifestyle, affordability, and family-friendliness.

### **Community Goals (from the 2003 Comprehensive Plan Update)**

The goals and objectives of the community play a vital role in assessing the impacts of each alternative. The goals and objectives of the community, as stated in the amended City of Houston Comprehensive Plan (Mat-Su Borough 2003), are as follows:

#### *Primary Goal:*

To maintain the high quality residential living environment that currently exists in Houston and to continue to take advantage of the characteristics of the community’s rural setting. The community should work toward encouraging a moderate level of growth which will provide an economic

base in Houston adequate to allow provision of employment opportunities in the area and to avoid becoming dependent upon external governmental or economic factors and activities.

*Economic Goal:*

To help develop a broadly-based economy that is responsive to the requirements of the community by providing opportunities for employment, commercial service and economic growth while maintaining an economical, aesthetically high standard of living not in conflict with established residential, commercial and industrial development goals.

*Land Use Goal:*

To develop a realistic and responsive land-use plan for Houston, based upon the goals and objectives of the community as well as the economic, environmental and social characteristics of the area.

*Recreational Goal:*

To provide a broad spectrum of recreational opportunities for all segments of the community and for visitors who come to the community for recreational purposes, while at the same time develop and maintain a neighborhood-scale recreational facilities system.

*Governmental Organization Goals:*

To assure that the local, borough, state and federal government agencies with jurisdiction in and around Houston are directed in a positive, creative and responsive manner when providing governmental services and facilities needed by the residents of Houston, as well as to ensure responsiveness to public concerns by providing for citizen participation in the planning process at all levels of government.

*Environmental Goal:*

To work actively toward ensuring that the natural environment of Houston, including but not limited to air and water quality, fish and wildlife habitat and natural vegetation, is enhanced and maintained by encouraging land uses and development that are consistent with the natural characteristics of the community.

*Public Services Goal:*

To take whatever actions are necessary to provide or encourage the provision of a broad variety of community services within the community on a quality rather than a quantity basis that will improve and enhance the already desirable living environment.

## **Historic Properties and Cultural Resources**

According to the National Register of Historic Places (NR) maintained by the National Park Service and available to the public, there are no NR listed sites within the City of Houston. While there are no listed sites within city limits, there could be eligible sites present. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough established a Historic Preservation Commission by Ordinance of the Assembly in April 1982. The Commission is certified to carry out the purposes of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and will aid in identification, evaluation, registration and protection of sites within the Borough.

### Public Services

The City of Houston offers fire and road services. The Houston Emergency Services building houses the Fire Department, see Table 3 for response times of the Houston Fire Department. The City is in the process of constructing a new Fire Station 9-2 to support the function of the existing Interim Fire Station 9-2. At this time, no local police are active and law enforcement is handled by the Alaska State Troopers. The closest public libraries are located in Willow and Big Lake.

**Table 3. Houston Fire Department Response Information 2007-2011**

|                                     | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 |
|-------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Total Call Volume                   | 77   | 111  | 235  | 261  | 329  |
| Average Response Time in Minutes    | 8:56 | 6:57 | 4:49 | 2:52 | 2:57 |
| Percent of Response Under 2 Minutes | 22   | 32   | 32   | 56   | 58   |
| Percent of Response Under 8 Minutes | 53   | 69   | 85   | 93   | 93   |

Source: Houston Fire Department

Public educational facilities within Houston include Houston High School and Houston Middle School. Currently elementary students attend schools in Big Lake or Willow.

### Community Facilities

The Homesteaders Community Center provides a meeting place for the public and fellowship for area residents. The nonprofit organization, which started the Community Center in 1957, has over 50 members and is open to anyone in the community. The group organized social gatherings and holiday parties and also rents out the center for functions. The building is made available for the Mid-Valley Seniors, Inc. which provides fellowship, nutritional programs, and meal services to member seniors in the Big Lake, Houston, Meadow Lakes, and Willow areas.

There are no public libraries in Houston, but there are libraries available to students at the Houston High School and Middle School. The Big Lake Country Club, founded in 2000, is a 24 hour services provider for developmentally delayed and emotionally challenged adults. The Country Club's main campus is in Houston and provides daily support, monitoring, and supervision for adults in need.

### Parks and Recreational Facilities

The Little Susitna River provides outdoor recreation in the form of camping, boating, and fishing. On the east side of the Parks Highway, the City of Houston operates the Little Susitna Campground which is open 24 hours a day from Memorial Day to Labor Day weekends. The Campground provides a day use area, pavilion, playgrounds, defined camp spots, fire pits, restrooms, trash disposal and an RV pump station. The City also maintains a public day-use facility on the west side of the Parks Highway with access to the Little Susitna River that includes a



parking area suitable for boat trailers, restrooms and trash receptacles. The Riverside Camper Park is located in the core of Houston, adjacent to the Parks Highway and the Little Susitna River. This Camper Park provides shower and laundry facilities, electricity and a small concession store.

The Houston/Willow Creek Sled Trailhead and recreation area is located at mile 59 of the Parks Highway off Zero Lake Road, providing both day-use and overnight spaces for approximately 60 vehicles or RVs with trailers, picnic tables, BBQ grills, restrooms and trash disposal. There are permanent map signs for two trailheads that lead into Hatcher Pass recreation area.

Five local lakes are stocked with various fish species for recreational purposes, providing even more opportunity for anglers to enjoy Houston. Most trails within the community are informal and do not have clearly dedicated public access. Trails are utilized as transportation corridors for snow machines, ATVs, dog sleds, bikers, horses, pedestrians, and skiers. The Haessler-Norris Trail System is made up of 20 trails of various distances and a published map of this trail system was created for the Willow Dog Musers Association in 2011.

The Hatcher Pass/Independence Mine, Big Lake, the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge, the Mat-Su Visitor's Center, and Nancy Lake Recreation Areas are all located near the community of Houston and offer various recreational opportunities to local residents as well as regional, out of state, and international tourists.

### **Infrastructure**

There is no public utility system within Houston. Most homes and businesses have private wells and septic systems and some residents do not have indoor plumbing. Electricity is available through Matanuska Electric Association in most of Houston. Natural gas is available in several areas of the City, including areas as far northwest as the north end of Prator Lake on Ballyshannon Drive, but has been identified by residents of Houston as a service they would like to see expanded. Increased accessibility to internet services has been identified by residents as well.

### **Transportation**

The Parks Highway runs through the City of Houston from the southeast boundary to the northwest, bisecting the community. The Parks Highway serves statewide mobility for travel and freight transportation through the city limits of Houston for passage to Fairbanks and interior Alaska. The Alaska Railroad main line also runs through Houston in a route similar to the Parks Highway corridor.

The City of Houston's road network contains about 45 miles of road branching east and west from the Parks Highway, which operates as a backbone for the regional network. The Parks Highway is the only arterial level roadway within the city limits. The remaining roads are either local roads providing access to the surrounding lots or collector roads that provide access to and from the Parks Highway. The majority of roadway network in Houston has a gravel surface with only 10% of the roadways (mainly collector roads) being paved.

A majority of the parcels within the city limits of Houston access the Parks Highway within the city limits of Houston. Alternative access out of the city is available to the west via Kiowa Street which leads to Big Lake and King Arthur Drive to the east which accesses the Meadow Lakes Loop and Pittman Road areas. Additionally, Big Lake Road leads west into Big Lake. There are currently no signalized intersections within the city.

Public transportation services are limited in Houston to a single stop at Gorilla Fireworks for commuters heading south to Wasilla or on to Anchorage. This service began in August of 2014.

### **Land Use**

Currently there are about 3,275 acres of developed land, making up 20% of the total 16,210 acres of land area of Houston. Approximately 12,961 acres or 80% of total land is undeveloped. [Figure 4](#) graphically depicts existing land use including vacant land. The majority of Houston's land is privately owned and other large tract land owners include the City of Houston, the Mat-Su Borough and the State of Alaska. The Alaska Rail Road's rail line, including the Rail Extension from Port MacKenzie to Houston, will be using approximately 161 acres in the City of Houston once the Extension is constructed. This acreage does not include any support facilities such as maintenance buildings or access roads which may be built.

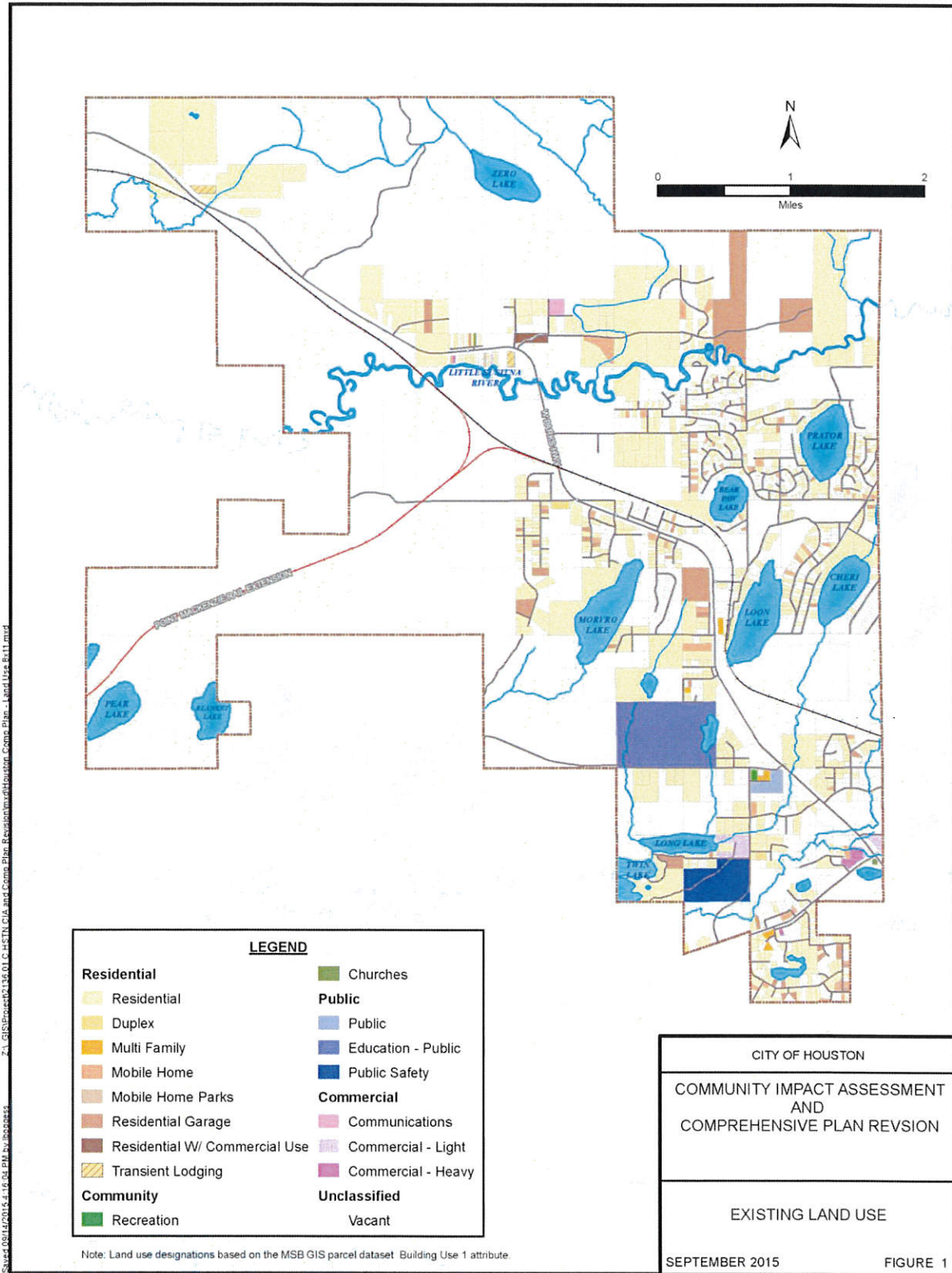


Figure 4. Current Land Use

## Zoning Districts

The City of Houston has 11 distinct Zoning Districts that implement the policies of the Comprehensive Plan. The Zoning Districts are a part of the City of Houston's Municipal Land Use Regulations. Table 4 Existing Zoning Districts summarizes the City of Houston's zoning districts and their intent as a baseline for the Comprehensive Plan revision. [Figure 5](#) shows the existing zoning for the City of Houston.

**Table 4. Existing Zoning Districts**

| Zoning District | Zoning Designations   |
|-----------------|---|
| <b>PLI</b>      | Public Lands and Institutions                                   |
| <b>R-1</b>      | Single-Family and Two-Family Residential District (low density) |
| <b>MFR</b>      | Multifamily Residential District (medium density)               |
| <b>RA-2.5</b>   | Residential/Agriculture District                                |
| <b>RA-5</b>     | Low-Density Residential Agricultural District                   |
| <b>NC</b>       | Neighborhood Commercial District                                |
| <b>C</b>        | Commercial District   |
| <b>LI</b>       | Light Industrial District                                       |
| <b>HI</b>       | Heavy Industrial District                                       |
| <b>H</b>        | Holding District  |
| <b>PH</b>       | Parks Highway District  |

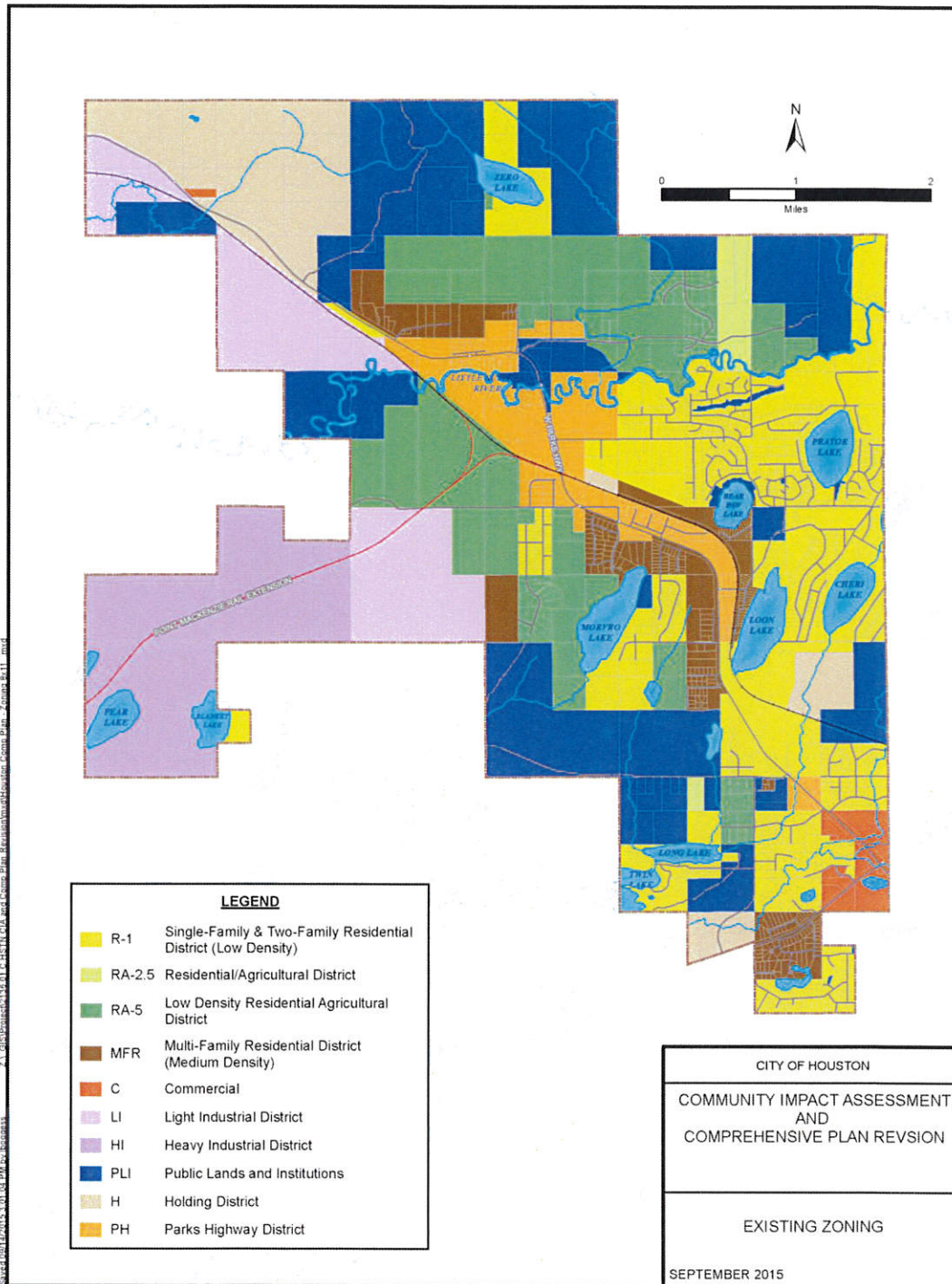


Figure 5. Current Zoning

## 2.6 Planned and Neighboring Community Development

### **Planned and Approved Future Development**

The City of Houston recently received approval to have a 1,555-acre (2.4 sq. mi.) undeveloped, unincorporated parcel of land owned by Knikatu Inc., a Wasilla-based Alaska Native village corporation, annexed into the City of Houston. The parcel adjoins other Knikatu land that is within the existing City of Houston boundaries and road access is from Houston. Currently there are roads which are included in the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Tribal Transportation Program (TTP) inventory and are owned by the City of Houston. The City of Houston is in the process of designing and constructing a new Fire Station 9-2 to be located at 12176 W. Birch Road to replace the current interim Fire Station 9-2. The new station is intended to be safe, efficient, and provide a comfortable environment for emergency responders to work, train and stay.

### **Neighboring Community Activities**

Wasilla is experiencing growth comparable to that of Houston and is continuing to develop along the Parks Highway. Roadways are being upgraded throughout the commercial district and safety improvements to the Parks Highway have been an Alaska DOT&PF priority for the area. The Alaska DOT&PF are working in partnership with the City of Wasilla and the Mat-Su Borough to conduct a study identifying alternative Parks Highway routes to move through traffic around Wasilla instead of through the City's core. The City of Wasilla is also working to implement the *Wasilla Downtown Area Plan* and is currently going through the approval process for the proposed Downtown Overlay District.

Big Lake is currently petitioning the Local Boundary Commission to incorporate into a second class city. In 2014, Big Lake completed a Community Impact Assessment which considered impacts to Big Lake that could result from different highway routes connecting the Port MacKenzie to the Parks Highway, at full build out of Port MacKenzie.

### **3. TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES**

The following transportation projects or plans are being assessed through the City of Houston's Community Impact Assessment. The alternatives have been chosen for the assessment based on their location within or adjacent to the City of Houston boundaries and the potential impacts that could occur to the community if or when these alternatives are implemented.

#### **3.1 Alternative 1: No Build Alternative**

The No Build Alternative assesses the existing conditions within the community and the potential impacts no development or action will have for the City of Houston. By performing an impact analysis on the anticipated future without a major transportation action, a baseline is established to which impact analyses of other alternatives can adequately be compared. Although a No Build scenario is not a possible alternative for the community at this time due to proposed project already underway or in construction, the No Build alternative provides an informative summary of baseline conditions associated with no development.

### **3.2 Alternative 2: Parks Highway MP 44-52 Upgrade (Lucus Road through Big Lake Road)**

The Parks Highway, from Lucas Road to Big Lake road is being upgraded by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) to improve safety and congestion along the roadway. The project has been phased into three segments, the third of which begins at Pittman Road and ends at Big Lake Road, where the City of Houston boundary is, see [Figure 6 Parks Highway Upgrade MP 44-54 Lucas Road to Big Lake Road](#).

Phase 3 is currently moving towards Final Design and Right of Way acquisitions, with construction anticipated for 2017-2018. All information on the project is sourced from the 2013 Design Plans made publically available. Proposed improvements for Phase 3, Pittman Road to Big Lake Road include:

- Stop light controlled intersection with the Parks Highway at Big Lake Road including a crosswalk and pedestrian island;
- Four-lane divided highway which returns to a two-lane highway after Forest Lake Drive;
- New lighting is proposed down a portion of Big Lake Road and on the Parks Highway;
- Pedestrian pathway is to be realigned along the Parks Hwy and Big Lake Road;
- Driveway consolidation throughout project corridor;
- Stoplight controlled intersection at the Parks Highway and S Johnson Road (outside of Houston city limits);
- Add a S Johnsons Frontage road (outside of Houston city limits);
- Continue Winter Way west towards the Parks Highway (outside of Houston city limits); and
- Extend Margin Way to Spring Drive (outside of Houston city limits).



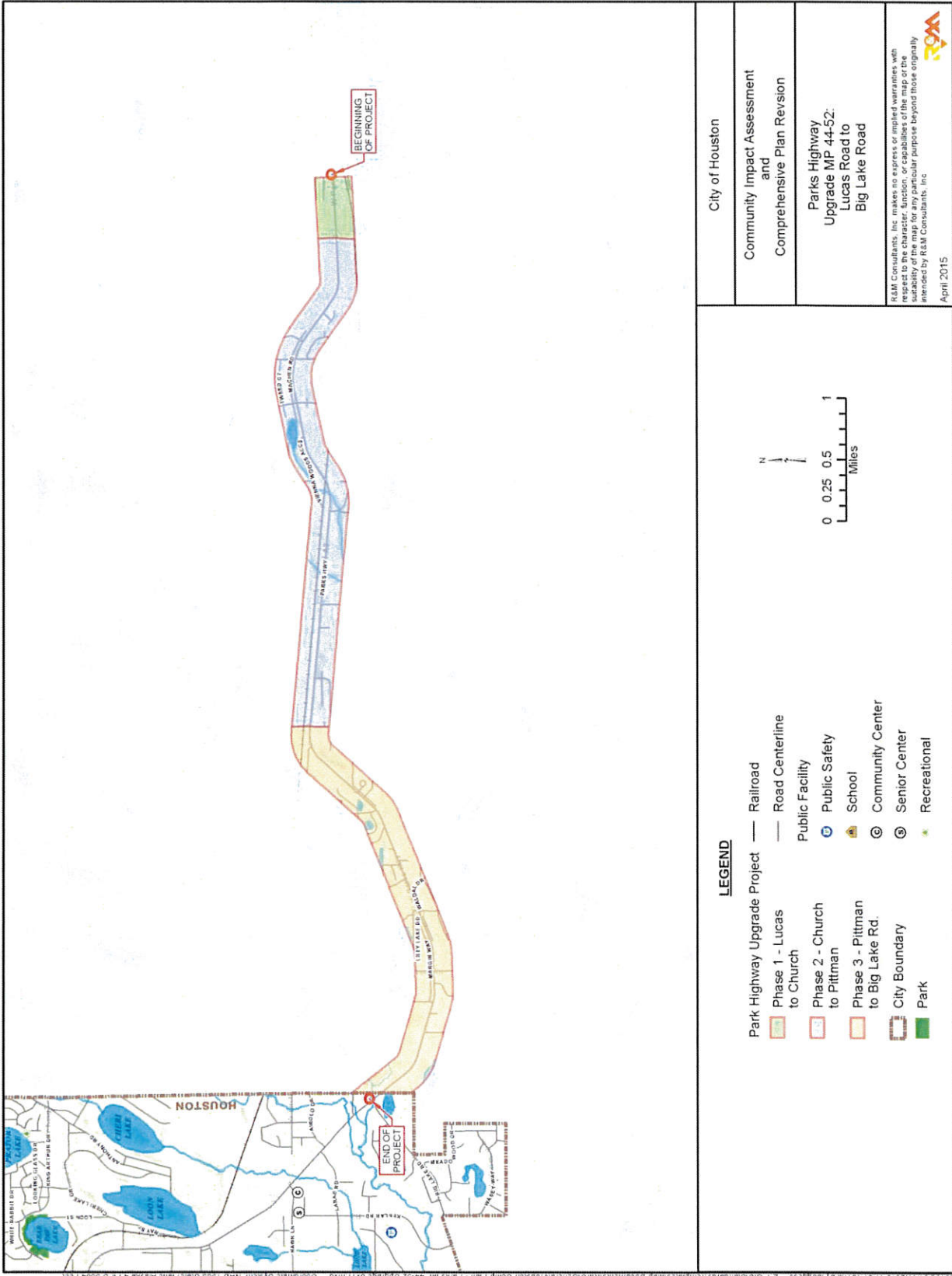


Figure 6. Parks Highway Upgrade MP 44-52 Project Area

### 3.3 Alternative 3: Port MacKenzie Rail Extension

The Port Mackenzie Rail Extension is a 32-mile extension of the ARRC system that travels from the Port facility north and connects to the mainline in the City of Houston. The Rail Extension will connect with ARRC mainline north of Miller's Reach Road, cross Miller's Reach Road and continue southwest through the annexed area of Knikatnu Inc. land, see [Figure 7](#). The Matanuska-Susitna Borough is the co-manager of the rail extension and the operator of Port MacKenzie. Port MacKenzie is a deep-water port with the capacity to handle bulk commodities and is closer to Interior Alaska than the Port of Anchorage. The rail extension will provide for more efficient movement of freight that is currently moved by a combination of rail and truck and has the potential to make the development of Interior Alaska's natural resources more economically feasible.

The Port MacKenzie Rail Extension route was developed from the 2003 Matanuska-Susitna Borough Rail Corridor Study, the 2007 Port MacKenzie Rail Corridor Study, and the 2011 Environmental Impact Statement which recommended the proposed route for the Rail Extension.

Construction of the Extension began in 2013 and in 2014 the embankment was complete and rail was installed for Section 6 of the Extension, from Miller's Reach Road to the ARRC mainline, see [Figure 8](#). Segment 5 of the Rail Extension, beginning north of Muleshoe Lake and connecting to Segment 6 at Miller's Reach Road, passes Houston Lake Loop Trail, Horseshoe Lake and a private access road. This segment is fully funded and embankment construction is anticipated to be completed in the fall of 2015.

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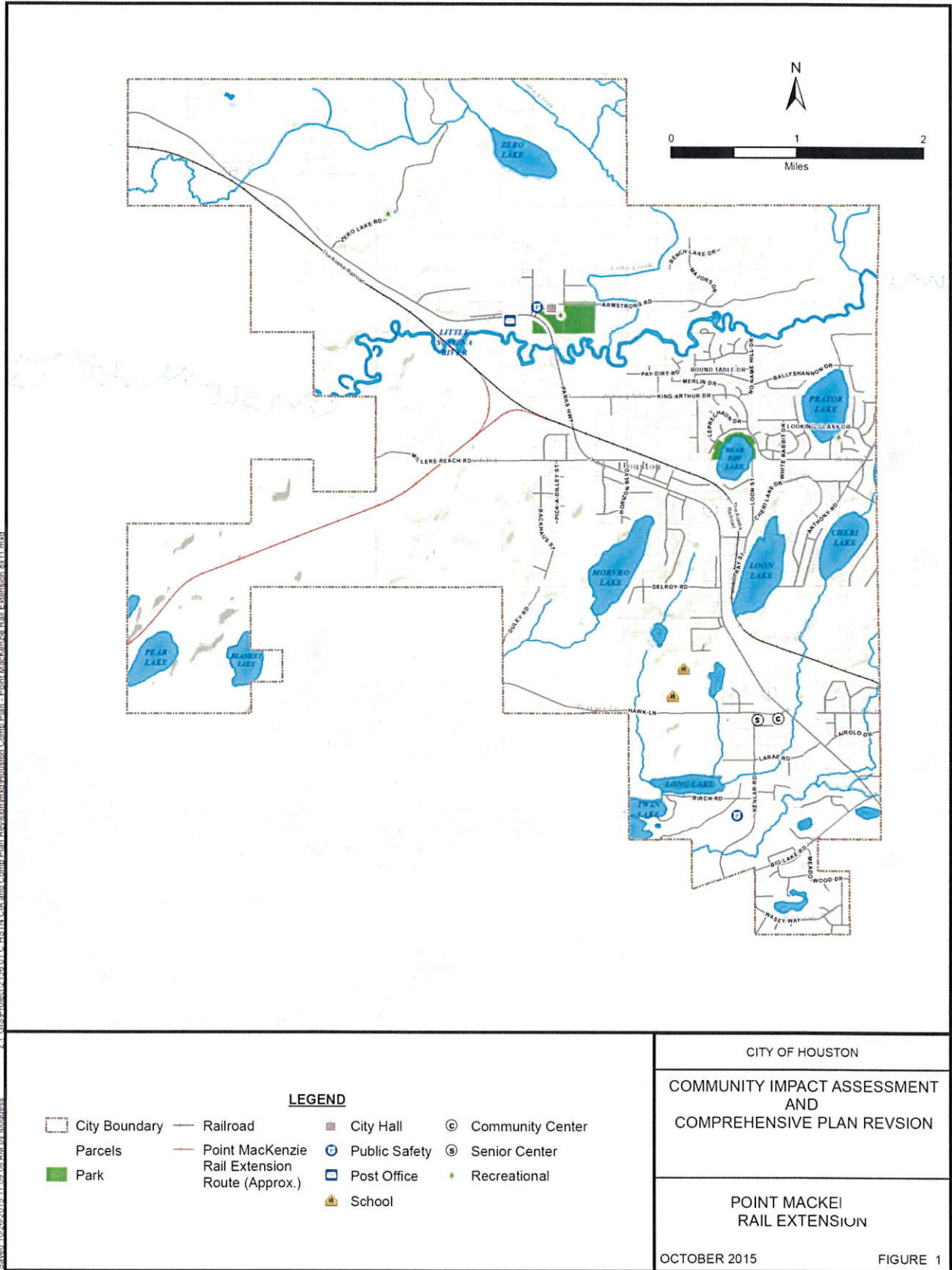


Figure 7. Port MacKenzie Rail Extension in Houston

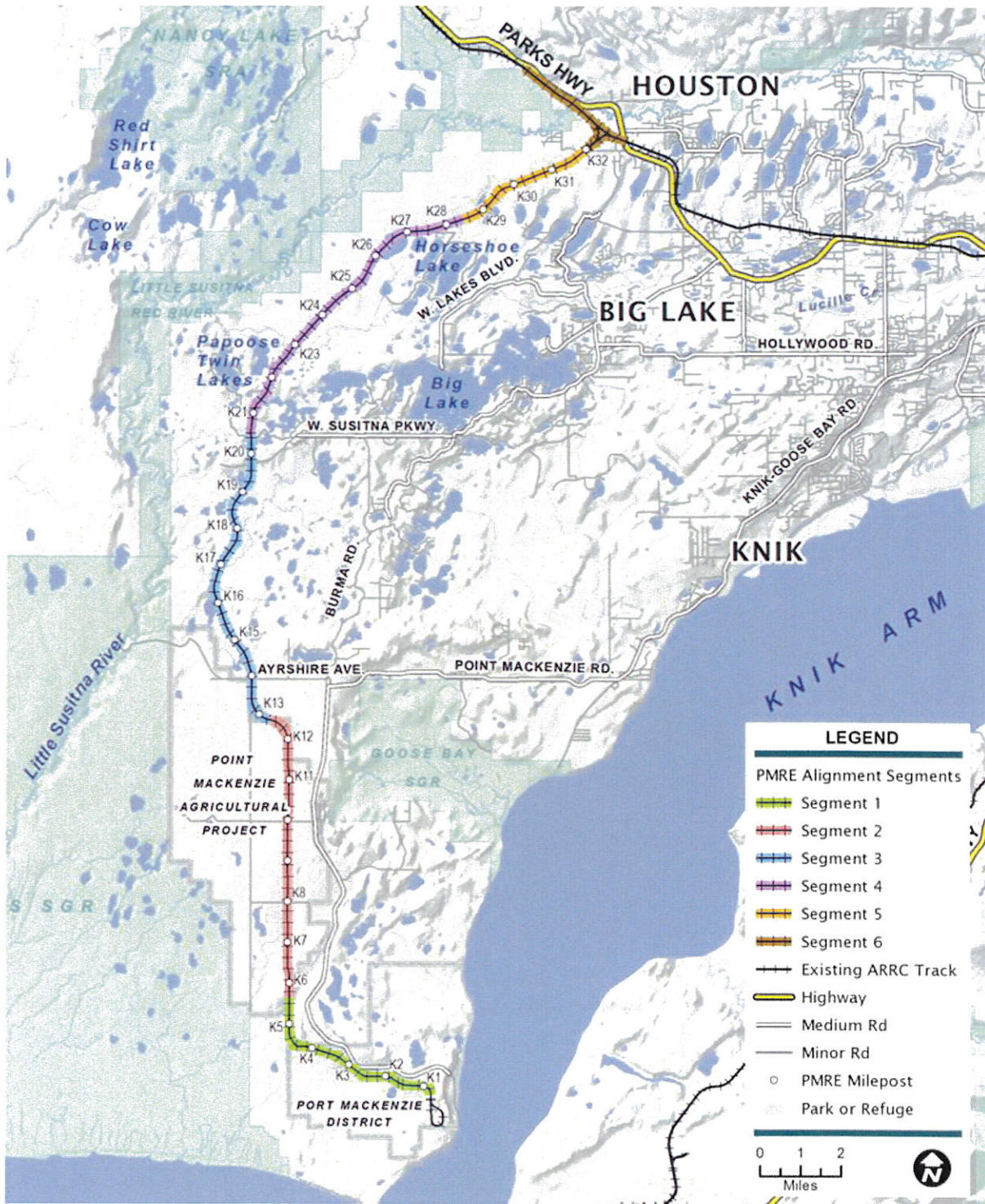


Figure 8. Port MacKenzie Rail Extension Project, sourced from portmacrail.com

### 3.4 Alternative 4: Port MacKenzie to Parks Highway Roadway Corridor

#### Introduction and Background

Port MacKenzie is a growing facility and economic asset to the Mat-Su Borough, Anchorage Municipality, and the state of Alaska. Surface transportation access is essential for the port's success and a rail line extension from Point MacKenzie to the Alaska Railroad's (ARR) mainline is being developed. The rail extension's terminus with the ARR mainline is in the City of Houston. A roadway corridor from Port MacKenzie to the Parks Highway has not yet been decided and the City of Houston's CIA will assess a roadway alternative included in past corridor studies which falls within city boundaries.

Sources of historical routes for the Port to Parks Roadway Alternatives include:

- Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB) Long Range Transportation Plan 2007 Update
- Port MacKenzie Rail Corridor Study (ARRC 2007)
- Matanuska- Susitna Borough Rail Corridor Study (Tryck Nyman Hayes, 2003)
- City of Houston Comprehensive Plan
- 2010 Big Lake Community Council Transportation Projects Location Map

The 2003 Rail Corridor Study analyzed corridors for a new roadway and railway. The study recommended Corridor 3 for the railway, which terminated in Willow, and Corridor 7 for the roadway, which terminated at the Parks Highway via South Big Lake Road, see [Figure 9](#). For the description of the study area and route options analyzed, see pages 9-17 of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Rail Corridor Study 2003, prepared by Tryck Nyman Hayes, Inc.

Corridor 3 (rail) to Willow was recommended for the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension but the alternatives developed in 2007 Rail Corridor Study recommended a Houston South route. The 2007 Houston South route is currently being developed as the ARRC Rail Extension. The Rail Extension has begun construction but some segments of the project have not been established due to pending easements and additional funding (see [Figure 8](#)).

In 2014 the community of Big Lake completed a Community Impact Assessment analyzing possible route alternatives for the Port to Parks roadway connection. The 2014 Big Lake Assessment routes are similar to the corridor alternatives studied in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Rail Corridor Study (2003) that studied roadway and railway corridor alternatives. The Big Lake CIA chose an alternative which used Knik Goose Bay Road as a connecting point to the Parks Highway as the baseline alternative in its study for comparisons because that was the route previously studied by DOT&PF in 2007.

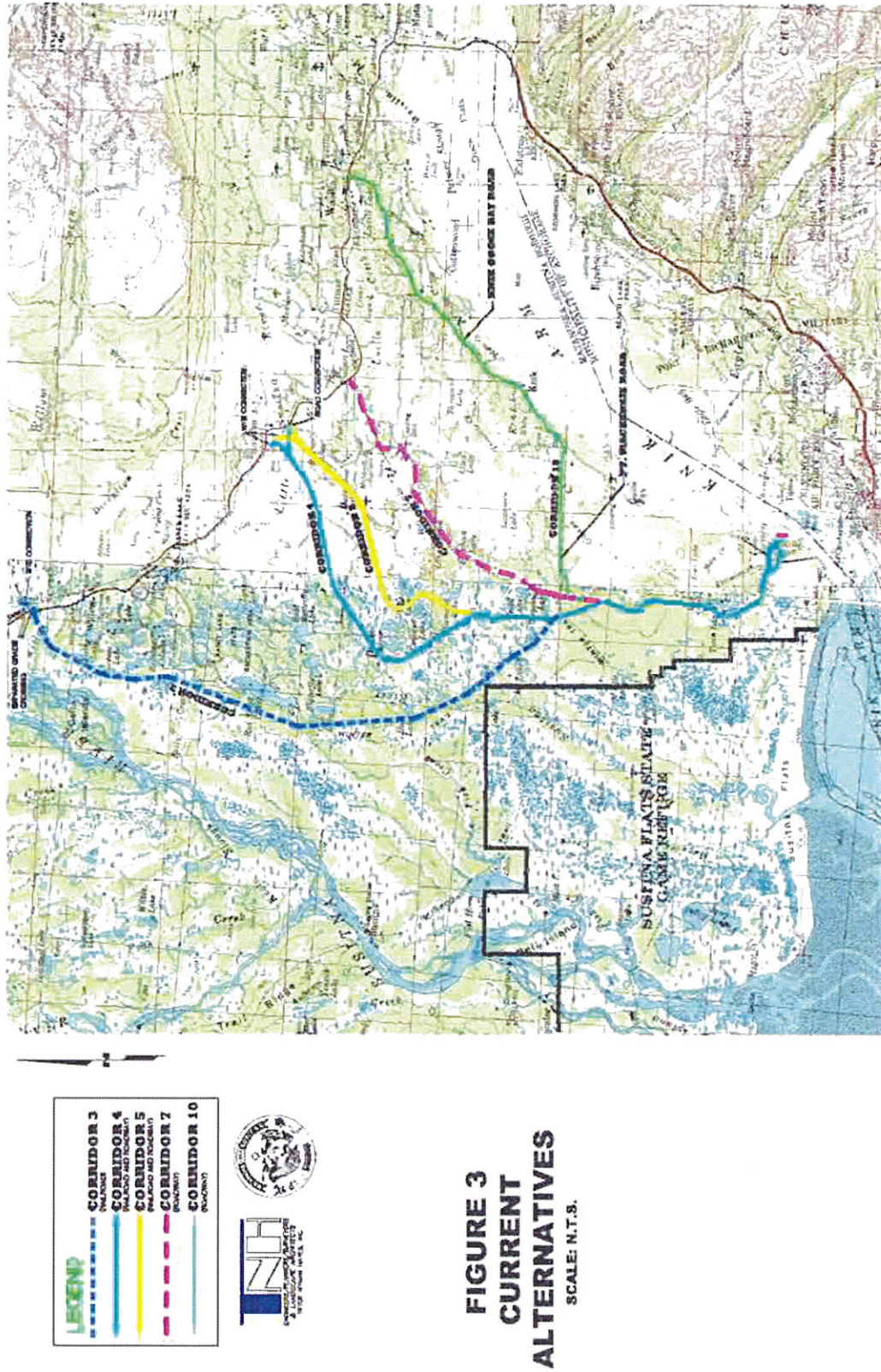


Figure 9. 2003 Rail Corridor Study Alternatives

## Highway Corridors to be assessed in the City of Houston's CIA

The City of Houston's CIA will analyze a roadway corridor route, adjusted to known transportation projects, based on the 2003 Rail Corridor Study and the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension, see Figure 10. The Port to Parks roadway alternative also includes the elements shown on the Transportation Element Map in the City of Houston's Comprehensive Development Plan in 1982 (see Figure 11), excluding the Parks Highway Bypass. The Parks Highway Corridor Bypass shown in the 1982 Transportation Plan Map will not be included in the Port to Parks Roadway Corridor assessment, but will be a part of the Parks Highway Corridor Study that will occur in concurrence with this effort.

The City of Houston's CIA will assess a roadway route following the determined Port MacKenzie Rail Extension from Point MacKenzie to Houston. This route was reflected in Alternative 2 of the Big Lake CIA. The roadway alternative, which would parallel the rail line, incorporates the route elements shown in the City of Houston's 1982 Transportation Element Map. The road section is planned and modeled as a two-lane undivided road with a design speed of 65 mph in accordance with assumptions in the 2003 and 2007 planning studies. The City of Houston recently annexed 1,500 acres of Knikatnu, Inc. land into the City and zoned the properties to accommodate railroad reliant development at the request of the landowner. This roadway alternative would pass through that land. Houston could be impacted by the development of the rail extension and by the potential development of the roadway corridor which connects to the Parks Highway within its boundaries. As the ARRC constructs the rail extension, right-of-way will be established making a parallel roadway a logical choice for the Port MacKenzie to Parks Highway roadway corridor.

The City of Houston's CIA is not assessing the other corridors analyzed in the Big Lake CIA because they are outside of the determined study area and the impacts to wetlands and existing trail networks make them unreasonable for further study. The development of Alternative 7 of the 2003 Rail Corridor Study and comparable Alternative 3 of the Big Lake CIA, which uses Big Lake Road as the connection to the Parks Highway, would have little impacts upon the City of Houston as this roadway currently exists. The only anticipated change is the project travel on this roadway which will be included in this CIA through the traffic analysis.





City of Houston 1982 Plan Map

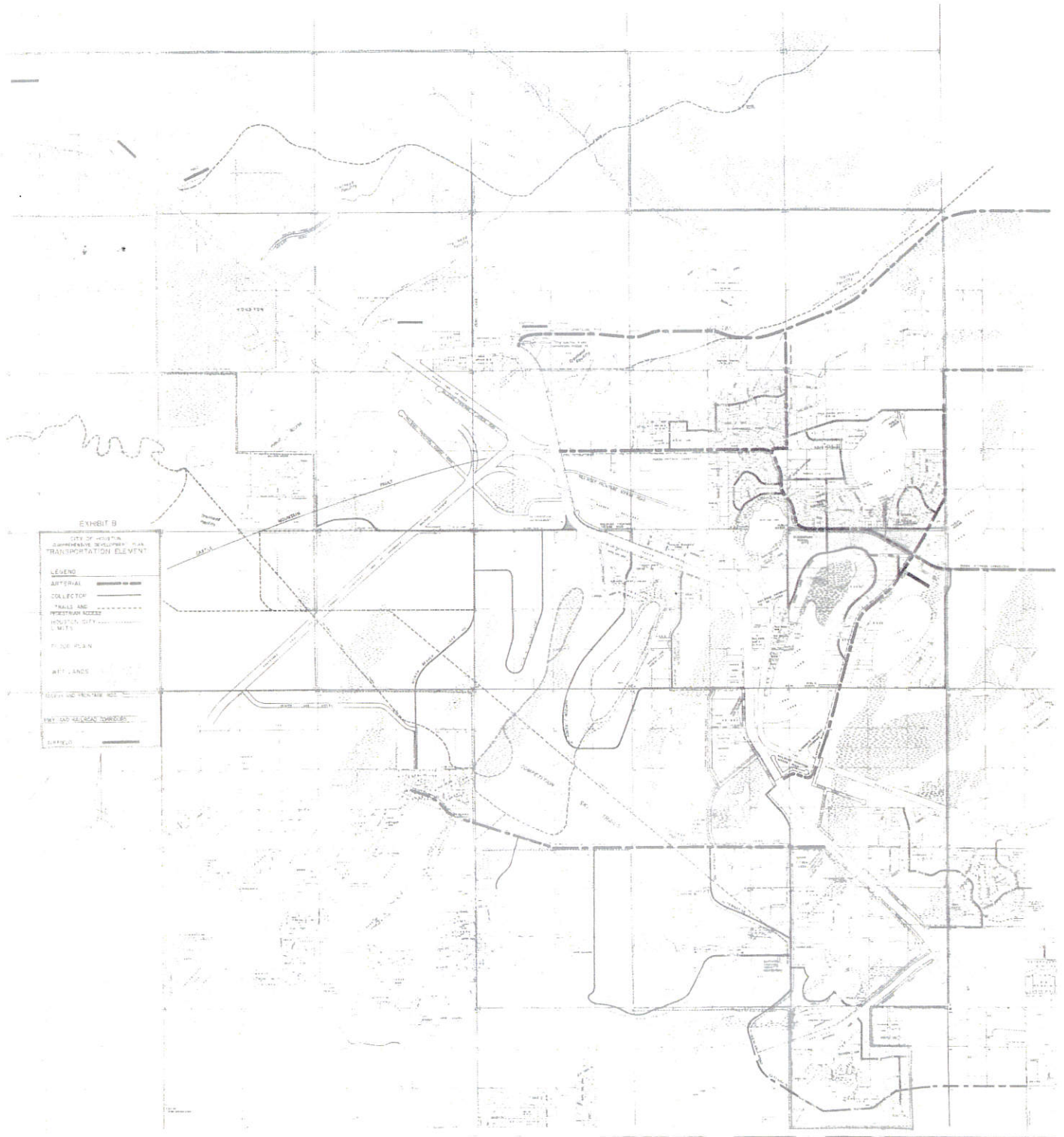


Figure 11. City of Houston 1982 Transportation Plan Map

## 4. ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

The Alternatives Analysis Section of this document will explore and document the relationship between the proposed transportation projects and the City of Houston. This section will identify and investigate impacts of the proposed transportation projects through ten different impact categories.

Community impact assessment, like the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, includes analysis of direct (temporary and long-term), indirect and cumulative impacts per 40 CFR §§ 1508.7 and 1508.8. The community impact assessment is an integral part of the transportation development process and combined with other relevant environmental studies help shape project decisions and outcomes under NEPA. Direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts will be addressed for each impact category.

### 4.1 The No Build Alternative

The positive and negative impacts of a no-build alternative have also been assessed and presented in this section. The No Build Alternative analyzed in this section is technically not feasible as portions of both the Parks Highway MP 44-52 Upgrade and the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension are in the final design or preliminary construction phase. However, for purposes of this Community Impact Assessment, a No Build scenario is evaluated for direct and indirect impacts to capture the types of positive and negative impacts that are incurred without action or development.

### 4.2 Impact Categories

Ten impact categories identified in the FHWA Community Impact Assessment reference guide (FHWA 1996) were included in this study, see Table 5 below.

**Table 5. Impact Categories Used in Alternatives Assessment**

|                                  |                              |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Social and Psychological Aspects | Mobility and Access          |
| Physical Aspects                 | Provision of Public Services |
| Visual Environment               | Safety                       |
| Land Use                         | Displacement                 |
| Economic Conditions              | Environmental Justice        |

This CIA will also be assessing Traffic and Circulation impacts in the alternative assessments. Each impact category has been assessed for direct (temporary and long-term), indirect and cumulative impacts for each alternative including a no-build alternative. Both positive and negative impacts have been included. Community goals and values identified through public involvement and community outreach were considered whenever possible.

## 4.3 Assessing Impact Categories

A comprehensive approach identified and investigated anticipated project impacts. Relevant data gathered during the existing conditions identification process supports the analysis of the potential project impacts on the community of Houston. As the following sections outline, the potential impacts are based on the likelihood, severity, scale, and length of the impacts. Impact determinations are based on community input, best professional judgment, and by analyzing impacts upon other communities with similarities of size and/or location. Data gathering techniques included research, modeling, mapping, interviews with community stakeholders, public involvement, and household surveys. This methodology assessed the potential impacts for the three build and one no build alternatives to Houston. The FHWA guide provides the framework for identifying effects within each impact category.

### **1. Social and Psychological Aspects**

Impacts examined include changes in population or the redistribution of the population, if the alternative would isolate certain people and if the project could cause a change in community values. This section also considers community cohesion and interaction and assess if the alternative would impact social relationships and patterns or alter the quality of life perceived by residents of the community.

### **2. Physical Aspects**

Assessing impacts on physical aspects includes the examination of noise or vibration, walls, barriers or fencing, or other physical intrusions such as an increase in dust or odor that would result from the transportation alternative.

### **3. Visual Environment**

Impacts are assessed for this category based on the aesthetics of the community and if there will be a change in the character of those aesthetics. It also considers the alternative's compatibility with community plans, goals and design standards.

### **4. Land Use**

Impacts to land use include any changes in land use patterns such as loss of agricultural land use areas, changes in areas open for development and changes in density of an area. Land use assessment also considers the consistency of the alternative with local land use plans and zoning.

### **5. Economic Impacts Analysis**

Impacts to economic conditions include the alternative's ability to encourage or discourage businesses to move to the area, the relocation of businesses within the community or to move outside the area, the visibility of businesses, alterations in the tax base or property values, and short term effects such as economic changers like job creation and loss during construction activities.

Working closely with the City of Houston Community Impact Assessment and Comprehensive Plan Revision Steering Committee, McDowell Group developed a list of contacts that represented a cross-section of business and community groups and interests related to Houston, including tribal organizations, nonprofits, business leaders, school district officials, utility representatives, and others and conducted interviews with those identified. See *Appendix B Economic Development Opportunities: Perspectives of Community Stakeholders*. An interview protocol was designed and adjusted to best capture the interests, experience, and expertise of individual stakeholders. They were asked about the potential of various infrastructure and business opportunities to create employment, generate city revenue, improve community assets, and how Houston's vision responds to growth and change.

Further analysis will be conducted as more information on conceptual projects and events become available.

## **6. Traffic and Circulation Impacts**

Kinney Engineering projected average annual daily traffic (AADT) volumes for the horizon year 2035 using an area travel demand model (TDM), which includes all current planned and funded transportation projects. The models used in this analysis were developed by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF) in conjunction with the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) and the Matanuska Susitna Borough (MSB). The extents of the model include the entire network of the MSB and MOA from north of Willow all the way to Girdwood and east as far as the community of Sutton on the Glenn Highway. This model has been used to analyze the traffic impacts of the proposed Knik Arm bridge project as well as the Highway-to-Highway project in downtown Anchorage and various Wasilla Bypass alternative corridors.

The model generates traffic volumes based on socio-economic background data, such as population, income level, employment in various work sectors, and school enrollment, as well as a number of special generators such as hotels and airports. The results of the model were used as a baseline for recommendations and for judging project impacts. Since this baseline includes all current planned and funded transportation projects, excluding the Port MacKenzie to Parks Highway Roadway Corridor, the model's traffic volumes can be considered cumulative. See *Appendix C Traffic Impacts of Major Planning Projects*

## **7. Mobility and Access**

Assessing impacts to mobility and access include examination of pedestrian and bicycle access and how the alternative affects non-motorized access to destinations such as businesses, public services and schools. It also considers shifts in traffic, public transportation, and vehicular access and parking.

## **8. Provision of Public Services**

Impacts to the provision of public services include changes in the use of public facilities, displacement of public facilities, or the introduction to new facilities.

## 9. Traffic Safety

Impacts to safety are assessed by the ability of the proposed action to affect the likelihood of accidents for non-motorized and motorized travel, changes in the nature and frequency of crime in the community, as well as changes in emergency response time.

### 4.4 Public Involvement

Throughout the CIA and Comprehensive Plan Revision process, numerous outreach and public involvement activities were conducted. Feedback and input from Houston residents is essential for a complete comprehensive plan or CIA. Public Involvement techniques used to support the CIA and Comprehensive Plan Update include:

- Steering Committee – Community members serving as the planning advisory committee to the CIA and comprehensive plan revision process.
- Project Website
- E-newsletter updates
- Open Houses and Workshop
- Household Opinion Survey sent to all residents and property owners
- Stakeholder interviews

A CIA specific Open House was held on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015. Members of the public reviewed three graphics depicting the impacts identified in the CIA. Each graphic showed the impacts identified for the alternatives assessed for one of three impact categories: Transportation, Land Use, and Economic Impacts. Copies of each graphic were on tables for members of the public to write their feedback directly onto. Attendees were asked to provide the project team with any information they felt was missing from the impact analysis and if there were additional impacts they foresaw that were not shown on the maps (See Figures 13, 14, and 15).

After the CIA Open House, the project website and Steering Committee meetings continued to support the development of the final CIA and public feedback on the CIA was accepted at any time during the process. The summary of the CIA Open House can be found in [Appendix A](#).

### 4.5 Regulatory Framework

Several laws, regulations and Executive Orders apply to the CIA process; these include the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice), Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, and The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990.

### 4.6 Direct Impacts (Temporary and Long-term)

NEPA defines direct effects as those caused by the action and occur at the same time and place. Direct impacts to each impact category will be assessed for each alternative including the no-

build alternative. Assessment will include both positive and negative temporary and long-term impacts.

#### 4.7 Indirect Impacts

NEPA defines indirect effects as those caused by the action and are later in time or farther removed in distance, but are still reasonably foreseeable. Indirect effects may include growth-related effects and other effects related to induced changes in the pattern of land use, population density or growth rate, and other related effects.

#### 4.8 Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts are the impacts that result from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of the agency or parties responsible for the action (40 CFR 1508.7). Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively substantial actions occurring over a period of time within the potentially affected area.

For the purpose of the cumulative impacts analysis, the following projects will be considered:

- Any identifiable existing infrastructure
- All projects in the final design or construction phase including:
  - Parks Highway MP 44-52 Upgrade (Lucus Road to Big Lake Road)
  - Port MacKenzie Rail Extension
- Projects in the conceptual or preliminary design phase:
  - Port MacKenzie to Parks Highway Roadway Corridor

## 5. ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS:

This section summarized the socioeconomic impacts for the alternatives studied in the CIA.

### 5.1 Alternative 1: No Build Alternative

NEPA requires the comparison of impacts associated with proposed alternatives against anticipated effects of the No Build scenario. Thus the No Build Alternative serves as a baseline to compare the impacts of the proposed or anticipated alternatives. Although the No Build Alternative is not a possible option at this time with portions of proposed projects already underway, this brief impacts analysis provides an informative summary of baseline conditions and the often overlooked positive and negative impacts associated with no development.

#### **Social and Psychological Aspects, Displacement, Environmental Justice**

The No Build Alternative would have minimal impacts on the social and psychological aspects of the community structure. Without the construction of new transportation projects, the City of Houston would not incur the typical positive and negative impacts associated with such projects. Population would likely not increase as transportation in and out of the community would not be altered under the No-Build. Without a notable increase in population, community characteristics such as cohesion and interaction, social values, and quality of life would also remain the same. There would be no direct or indirect impacts to neighborhoods as the No Build Alternative does not require residential, business, or farm displacement. The No Build Alternative complies with executive order 12898 regarding Environmental Justice, as this alternative would not result in a disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effect on minority and low-income populations.

#### **Physical Aspects**

There would be no new impacts to the physical aspects of the community structure. No sound barriers or walls are currently needed within the community as there would be no elevation in noise sources or receivers. Other physical changes such as dust, odor, or shadow effect are not anticipated.

#### **Visual Environment**

There would be no new impacts to the visual and aesthetic character of the community.

#### **Land Use**

Under the No Build alternative, there would be no direct or indirect impacts to current land-use patterns such as loss of farmland or density of development. The community has been developing community goals to guide future planning efforts (see Community Profile, Physical and Social Community Characteristics). Although the No Build Alternative would not prohibit the achievement of Houston's Primary Goal, it would not facilitate a "moderate level of growth." As a result, the

No Build alternative does not comply with the community's established goals and therefore could have negative impacts on the community.

### **Economic Impacts Analysis**

The No Build Alternative would have minimal to no impacts on the economic condition in the City of Houston. Assuming the steady population growth the City has been experiencing continues, proportional increases in the tax base are expected.

### **Mobility and Access**

There would be no impact to mobility and access within the City of Houston. Pedestrian and bicycle access and facilities would not be improved upon or negatively affected by development. Public transportation services and facilities as well as vehicular access would not be affected under the No Build Alternative.

### **Traffic and Circulation Impacts**

There would be minor impacts to traffic and circulation under the No Build alternative. There will be continued increase in traffic volumes in relation to the community's steady population increase. Traffic counts recorded by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF) and the Matanuska Susitna Borough from 1997 to 2012 reflect a growth trend in traffic volumes of 2.6% along the Parks Highway from Pittman Road to Big Lake Road, a 2.7% increase in volume on the Parks Highway from Big lake Road to Little Susitna Bridge, and a 0.6% increase from Little Susitna Bridge to Nancy Lake Parkway along the Parks Highway. Under the No Build alternative these trends are expected to continue.

### **Provision of Public Services**

The population of Houston is such that public facilities such as schools and recreational facilities are not currently overcrowded. The No Build alternative would therefore not have an effect on public facilities within the community.

### **Safety**

The No Build alternative would not consider new transportation projects and the associated safety concerns with new road and railway corridors.



## 5.2 Alternative 2: Parks Highway MP 44-52 Upgrade

### Social and Psychological Aspects, Displacement, Environmental Justice

#### Direct and Indirect Impacts

This alternative would have negligible impacts on the social and psychological aspects of the community structure as the proposed road upgrades would occur primarily outside Houston's city limits. This alternative improves an existing highway facility and is not anticipated to result in a notable increase in population, or community characteristics such as cohesion and interaction; social values, and quality of life are also not anticipated to be negatively impacted by this alternative. There would be no direct or indirect impacts to neighborhoods, as this alternative does not require residential, business, or farm displacement. This alternative is consistent with EO 12898 Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations. As is documented in this section, this alternative would have no high and adverse impact to any impact category; therefore no disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority and low-income populations are expected. Potential impacts from the alternative would have the same social effects regardless of race or income level; therefore minority or low-income populations would not be disproportionately affected, see Community Profile, Population and Demographics.

#### Cumulative Impacts

This alternative would have no adverse cumulative social and psychological impacts or result in cumulative effects to minority or low-income populations when considering past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

### Physical Aspects

#### Direct and Indirect Impacts

This alternative would have minimal impacts to the physical aspects of the community structure. A new traffic signal would be installed at the intersection of the Parks Highway with Big Lake Road which could have minor noise, dust, or odor associated with idling traffic at this intersection. The impacts are anticipated to be minor as the project will upgrade the condition of the roadway and make safety and traffic efficiency improvements without projected increases in traffic volumes.

#### Cumulative Impacts

The minor direct and indirect impacts would only result in temporary, highly localized effects to air quality and the noise environment of Houston; therefore the cumulative impacts resulting from previous, current, and other reasonably foreseeable projects would not be significant.

### Visual Environment

#### Direct and Indirect Impacts

The Parks Highway MP 44-52 Upgrade would have minor impacts to the visual and aesthetic character of the community. The new signalized intersection would be the first within the community of Houston and some residents may find this addition an adverse visual effect. Although this alternative has the potential for minor visual effects, the location is near the city limits at a heavily trafficked intersection where such modern traffic signals are appropriate.

### Cumulative Impacts

The incremental contribution to cumulative visual effects from this alternative would be negligible. The proposed new infrastructure would be consistent with the existing highway corridor and would not contribute to new effects when considering other past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions.

### **Land Use**

#### Direct and Indirect Impacts

Proposed improvements associated with this project would result in minor land use impacts. The intersection improvements will require temporary and permanent right-of-way acquisitions and/or easements from private property owners to accommodate cut/fill slopes. Changes at the intersection may require the reconfiguration and possible realignment of parking and vehicular access on adjacent properties. Direct or indirect impacts to farmland or density of development are not anticipated. This alternative is consistent with the community's goals and plans.

Members of the public in attendance at the CIA Open House concurred with the anticipated land use impacts.

#### Cumulative Impacts

The Parks Highway MP 44-52 Upgrade would have minor cumulative impacts on land use compatibility when considering past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

### **Economic Impacts Analysis**

#### Direct and Indirect Impacts

The Parks Highway Upgrade will have minimal impacts on the economic conditions in Houston. With the Parks Highway bisecting the City of Houston, its effect was a common theme heard throughout stakeholder interviews; most residents view the Parks Highway as a potential economic benefit, even with growing congestion. Significant increases in traffic in recent years, resulting in longer commute times to Wasilla or Anchorage, was noted by a few residents. This alternative is designed to alleviate some of that congestion. However, even with the economic potential residents see the Parks Highway having and the proposed traffic improvements to MP 44-52, there are no current plans for development along this section of the Parks Highway, resulting in minimal impacts to the existing conditions. See *Appendix B Economic Development Opportunities: Perspectives of Community Stakeholders*.

#### Cumulative Impacts

This alternative will have minor direct and indirect impacts for Houston's economic condition, and there will be minor cumulative impacts considering the historic and current trends and reasonably foreseeable future actions. If speculated opportunities for development evolve into more concrete plans, the economic analysis will be updated.

### **Mobility and Access**

#### Direct and Indirect Impacts

There would be negligible impacts to mobility and access within the City of Houston. Pedestrian and bicycle access and facilities would not be improved upon or negatively affected by

development. However, a positive impact on mobility and access may be realized after construction of the Big Lake Road and Parks Highway intersection and associated pedestrian island and crosswalk. Potential impacts to vehicular traffic and safety for non-motorists is expanded upon below (Traffic and Circulation Impacts). Public transportation services and facilities as well as vehicular access would not be affected under this alternative.

#### Cumulative Impacts

The Parks Highway MP 44-52 Upgrade would have no cumulative impacts on mobility and access within the community of Houston when considering past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

### **Traffic and Circulation Impacts**

#### Direct and Indirect Impacts

The Parks Highway MP 44-52 Upgrade will alleviate congestion by increasing estimated segment Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) capacity, resulting in faster and more consistent trips between Houston and the city of Wasilla. This could impact economic development in both communities. Additionally, the project would include frontage roads and additional intersection signals, which would also affect economic development along the corridor. Due to the scheduled completion date of this project, it is already included in the base traffic volume forecast for the horizon year 2035; see *Appendix C Traffic Impacts of Major Planning Projects*.

#### Cumulative Impacts

Likely effects of this alternative include an increase in the number of recreational trips to the City of Houston from Wasilla and surrounding communities; however, local traffic growth as a result of population increase is expected to continue at a steady pace. Increases in population growth and traffic through Houston may impact economic development and land use.

The Travel Demand Model projected traffic volumes for cumulative impacts as it included currently planned and future projects, including this alternative. One key impact and concern which arose from this analysis is the potential traffic volumes between Big Lake Road and King Arthur Road for the Future Planning year of 2035. The travel demand model used in this analysis indicates that the volumes north of Big Lake will grow to about 18,500 AADT in the future planning year. Currently these road segments carry 7,000 AADT. This increase is partial a result of the inclusion of a constructed Knik Arm Bridge and the Wasilla Bypass Road alternatives which would pull additional traffic from Anchorage and Wasilla to attractions in Houston and north on the Parks.

The approximate capacity of the Parks Highway through Houston is 16,500 AADT to achieve a level of service of "D", which is the limit of what is recommended by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. The projected volumes would be at or above this approximate capacity threshold, which suggests that if growth occurs in accordance with the TDM it will likely result in congestion on the Parks Highway between Big Lake Road and King Arthur Road.

Note that this scenario is currently taking place further east on the Parks Highway between Vine Street and Pittman Road, where the current road design and traffic volumes are similar to what is projected in 2035 between Big Lake Road and King Arthur. This indicates that if traffic growth

matches the modeled trends, there may possibly be issues of congestion and severe crashes similar to what is currently being seen in the Parks Highway MP 44-52 4-lane divided upgrade project. See *Appendix C Traffic Impacts of Major Planning Projects*

### **Provision of Public Services**

#### Direct and Indirect Impacts

Public facilities such as schools and recreational facilities, are not currently at capacity or over capacity given the relatively low population of Houston. There are currently no public water or wastewater services in Houston and the Parks Highway Upgrade does not impact the demand for public utility services. The construction of the proposed new Fire Station 9-2 will not be impacted by this transportation alternative. The Parks Highway Upgrade would therefore not have an effect on public facility density within the community.

#### Cumulative Impacts

This alternative would have no cumulative impacts on public facilities within the community of Houston when considering past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

### **Safety**

#### Direct and Indirect Impacts

The safety improvements associated with this alternative along with the new traffic signal and crossing facilities would have a direct positive impact on the safety of pedestrians, bicycles, and motorized traffic. With proper signal timing, emergency vehicles passing through this intersection may be able to respond quicker to emergencies resulting in additional positive impacts.

#### Cumulative Impacts

This alternative would not contribute cumulatively to safety impacts within the community of Houston when considering past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

### 5.3 Alternative 3: Port MacKenzie Rail Extension

#### **Social and Psychological Aspects, Displacement, Environmental Justice**

##### Direct and Indirect Impacts

This alternative would have minor impacts on the social and psychological aspects of the community structure as the proposed railroad extension would traverse through previously undeveloped areas between two existing residential neighborhoods. The railroad addition could affect community characteristics such as cohesion and interaction, social values, and quality of life for rural residences in the vicinity. Direct impacts to neighborhoods are anticipated to be minor as this alternative does not require residential or business relocations within Houston's city limits. Displacement of farm land required for construction of this alternative are also considered to be minor given the availability of land allowing agricultural development outside of this project area, yet still within the community of Houston.

This alternative is consistent with Executive Order (EO) 12898 Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations. As is documented in this section, this alternative would have no high and adverse impact to any impact category; therefore no disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority and low-income populations are expected. Potential impacts from the alternative would have the same social effects regardless of race or income level; therefore, minority or low-income populations would not be disproportionately affected (refer to Population and Demographics Section).

##### Cumulative Impacts

For the City of Houston, the railroad extension would have a minor contribution to cumulative social and psychological impacts based on past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions. This alternative would have no adverse cumulative effects to minority or low-income populations when considering past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

#### **Physical Aspects**

##### Direct and Indirect Impacts

This alternative would result in minor impacts to the physical aspects of the community. This alternative would have minor long and short-term noise and air quality (dust) impacts associated with increased train traffic at this new intersection. A sound barrier is not proposed as part of the railway connection as the noise analysis prepared to support the project specific EIS determined that noise and vibration impacts were not substantial enough to necessitate mitigation in the form of noise walls/barriers (EIS Source). No other physical intrusions or shadowing effects are anticipated. Temporary noise impacts during construction would be associated with the use of heavy construction equipment and potentially due to pile driving during the new rail bridge construction.

##### Cumulative Impacts

The minor direct and indirect impacts would not result in anything other than temporary, highly localized effects to air quality and the noise environment of Houston but would not constitute physical alterations to the community; therefore the cumulative impacts resulting from previous, current, and other reasonably foreseeable projects would not be significant.

## Visual Environment

### Direct and Indirect Impacts

This alternative would result in minor impacts to the visual environment of the community. The construction of a new rail track intersection within the city limits would constitute a visual change but the connection is to an existing rail track and would be compatible with current transportation based land use. This alternative does not include construction of any associated appurtenances, whistle stop locations, or railroad support facilities. The new railway bridge over the Little Susitna River has been constructed adjacent to the existing railway bridge to minimize visual impacts. This alternative would involve construction within previously undeveloped areas and could have minor visual impacts to existing recreational users (hikers, hunters, snow machining, etc.) at grade-separated crossings.

### Cumulative Impacts

The minor or negligible direct and indirect impacts incurred by this project, would not incrementally contribute to cumulative visual effects when considering other past, present and reasonably foreseeable projects.

## Land Use

The Rail Extension will be built on land that is currently unclassified vacant land near the connection to the ARRC mainline, zoned as RA-5 Low Density Residential Agricultural District, and will go through a privately owned vacant R-1 Single-Family and Two-family Residential District (Low Density) area before continuing south into Knikatnu, Inc. land annexed into the City of Houston.

### Direct and Indirect Impacts

The 2011 EIS evaluated anticipated land use impacts for a number of potential alternative route and alignment combinations. A five mile radius from the proposed project Right-of-Way was evaluated for consistency with existing land use objectives. The segments passing through Houston city limits may incur the following land use impacts: "The need to acquire land within the proposed rail line ROW from existing land owners; the conversion of lands within the rail line ROW, including agricultural lands, to rail line use; and the restriction of access within the ROW without an ARRC entry permit." (Cite EIS). Given the small number of residential displacements, difficulty in identifying and providing comparable nearby housing would not be expected. In accordance with Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act, ROW acquisitions and/or easements would not occur on any 4(f) resources identified within Houston (EIS). These resources would include public parks, recreational areas, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, or public and private historical sites. Construction of this alignment would provide opportunity for future moderate growth and economic development for the City and is therefore compatible with the community goals outlined in section 2.5 *Physical and Social Community Characteristics* as part of Houston's Comprehensive Plan Update. This alternative would incur moderate impacts to land use as most of the acreage required for this project will need to be acquired and converted.

### Cumulative Impacts

The railroad extension would have a moderate contribution to cumulative land use impacts based on past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions. Construction of this railroad extension directly contributes to the potential impacts associated with the Port MacKenzie to Parks Highway

roadway corridor (Alternative 4). Although the roadway corridor is still conceptual from a design perspective, the establishment and construction a road from the Port to the Parks has been included in community and borough planning documents for decades and would have potential impacts on land use (see section 3.4 Alternative 4: Port MacKenzie to Parks Highway Roadway Corridor).

## **Economic Impacts Analysis**

### Direct and Indirect Impacts

The Rail Extension is viewed by many in the community as an opportunity for Houston. This extension could decrease transportation costs between Southcentral and Interior Alaska, in turn encouraging development of natural resources and similar activities in the area. A 2007 report commissioned by the Mat-Su Borough that examined the benefits of a similar rail extension concluded:

*The quantifiable benefits from the Port MacKenzie to Willow rail link with respect to resource development can be divided into the following two major categories:*

- *Benefits in the form of rail freight savings derived from the reduced haulage distances from natural resource production sites to tidewater at Port MacKenzie relative to the Ports of Anchorage, Whittier, and Seward.*
- *Benefits to the Rail Belt communities in the form of enhanced economic diversification and economic development as a consequent of increases in natural resource production.*

Interviewees for this CIA study saw great potential in having the connection between the new and existing rail line located in Houston as the extension is viewed as a factor increasing the likelihood of manufacturing, resource export, or transportation activity taking place in Houston.

While many interviewees were optimistic about the long-term effects of the rail extension, ARRC indicated there are few marketable ideas in the short to near-term that would warrant additional investment. "There really needs to be a reason for us to build anything beyond just the new tracks," an ARRC representative said. "If it is clear a loading facility or other infrastructure is needed in the future, we will deal with that then. Until that happens, we see minimal impact on Houston and its economy." See *Appendix B Economic Development Opportunities: Perspectives of Community Stakeholders*.

### Cumulative Impacts

This alternative would have minor impacts to the economic conditions in Houston given the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. If private sector development which would use the rail line, such as freight loading-off loading facility, expressed intent to establish in Houston, then cumulative economic impacts could be analyzed further.

At the public open house, there was discussion on the potential development that could occur around the new Port-MacKenzie Rail Extension, including zoning parts of the annexed area for industrial development and Knikatnu Inc developing an LED Assembly Facility south of Millers Reach Road. This type of activity would prompt more long-term economic development. Based on discussions at the public meeting and the conducted interviews, the potential future economic impacts driven by the Rail Extension would align with the goals and opinions of the community, so long as this development allows the rest of the community to retain its rural residential character.

## **Mobility and Access**

### Direct and Indirect Impacts

Mobility and access would remain largely unchanged as a result of the railroad extension. There are no proposed pedestrian, commuter, or recreational aspects to this alternative; as such, potential positive impacts to public transportation and non-motorist access are not anticipated. As no support facilities are proposed, there are no anticipated parking impacts. Grade-separated crossings are proposed as needed to avoid negative impacts to vehicular access through Houston. ARRC does not propose to provide crossings for all unofficial trails and therefore the rail line would block some trails and associated recreational access to these areas. Anticipated adverse impacts to mobility and access are anticipated to be minor.

### Cumulative Impacts

This alternative would have only minor direct and/or indirect land use impacts and would therefore not contribute to cumulative impacts on mobility and access within the community of Houston when considering past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

## **Traffic and Circulation Impacts**

### Direct and Indirect Impacts

The Alaska Railroad does not currently have any plans to construct facilities or base any operations at the new railroad junction in Houston. Therefore direct socioeconomic impacts and traffic impacts due to the rail line project alone are considered to be minimal and traffic and circulation would remain largely unchanged as a result of the Rail Extension. However, the ARR has expressed a willingness to accommodate loading facilities at the junction for private development. This may have a considerable impact on the percentage of trucks and freight in the local road network. Private development to support this type of activity is not foreseen in the near future. See *Appendix C Traffic Impacts of Major Planning Projects*. If economic conditions were to change, the rail junction could be considered for a loading site for material currently being driven by truck north from Big Lake to Fairbanks. Therefore, trips that currently exist from the travel lanes on the Parks Highway and Big Lake Road would now be turning in and out of a railroad access point at or near Millers Reach Road. Accommodations for these truck traffic maneuvers would include turn lane construction and providing adequate sight distance for trucks leaving the access road.

### Cumulative Impacts

This alternative would have only minor impacts to traffic and circulation considering the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. This transportation alternative was included in the TDM for the horizon year 2035 and so is reflected in the baseline traffic volume projection discussed in the Alternative 2: Parks Highway MP 44-52 Upgrade Traffic and Circulation analysis. See *Appendix B Traffic Impacts of Major Planning Projects*. If the ARR Extension were to serve loading facilities within Houston, land use, economic development, and the transportation network may be affected.

## **Provision of Public Services**

### Direct and Indirect Impacts



Public facilities such as schools and recreational facilities are not currently at capacity or over capacity given the relatively low population of Houston. There are currently no public water or wastewater facilities in Houston and no public facilities are proposed for construction within Houston as part of the railway extension; therefore, an effect on public facility density within the community is not expected.

#### Cumulative Impacts

This alternative would have no cumulative impacts on public facilities within the community of Houston when considering past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

### **Safety**

#### Direct and Indirect Impacts

Safety measures for this alternative have been incorporated into the design of the rail alignment and road/trail intersection lighting and signals. Most importantly, grade-separated crossings have been designed for roads and designated multi-use trails that intersect the new alignment. This alternative would have no direct or indirect impacts to criminal activity or emergency response within the community.

#### Cumulative Impacts

This alternative would not contribute cumulatively to safety impacts within the community of Houston when considering past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

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## 5.4 Alternative 4: Port Mackenzie to Parks Highway Roadway Corridor

### Social and Psychological Aspects, Displacement, Environmental Justice

#### Direct and Indirect Impacts

This alternative would have minor impacts on the social and psychological aspects of the community structure similar to the proposed railroad extension (Alternative 2). However, social impacts associated with construction of a new transportation corridor through previously undeveloped areas between two existing residential neighborhoods would have already been incurred under Alternative 2. Construction of the roadway corridor within the ARRC ROW would substantially reduce the degree of adverse effect on the community of Houston. The expansion of the transportation corridor to include a roadway within the vicinity of these rural residences could affect community characteristics such as cohesion and interaction, social values, and quality of life. Direct impacts to neighborhoods are anticipated to be minor as this alternative does not require residential or business relocations within Houston's city limits and construction would occur within an existing transportation corridor. Additional displacement of farm land required is not anticipated.

This alternative is consistent with EO 12898 Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations. As is documented in this section, this alternative would have no high and adverse impact to any impact category; therefore no disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effect on minority and low-income populations are to be expected. Potential impacts from the alternative would have the same social effects regardless of race or income level; therefore minority or low-income populations would not be disproportionately affected (refer to Population and Demographics Section).

#### Cumulative Impacts

Construction of this railroad extension directly contributes to the potential impacts associated with the railroad corridor (Alternative 2). For this alternative, the railroad extension would contribute to minor cumulative social and psychological impacts based on past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions.

This alternative would have no adverse cumulative effects to minority or low-income populations when considering past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

### Physical Aspects

#### Direct and Indirect Impacts

This alternative would result in minor impacts to the physical character of the community associated with increased vehicular traffic along the road corridor. A sound barrier will likely not be proposed to mitigate the road corridor noise impacts as it was not required for the railroad extension. No other physical intrusions or shadowing effects would result from construction of the road corridor itself. Temporary and minor noise impacts associated with the use of heavy equipment and air quality (dust) impacts during construction are anticipated. Assuming the road will be paved, no long-term air-quality issues associated with dust are expected and no other physical intrusions have been identified.

#### Cumulative Impacts

The anticipated minor impacts could contribute to minor cumulative impacts resulting from previous, current, and other reasonably foreseeable projects. Construction of the roadway corridor would change the physical aspect of this transportation corridor when considering the past construction of the railroad extension and the likely development of commercial, residential, industrial or recreational facilities along the corridor.

## **Visual Environment**

### Direct and Indirect Impacts

This alternative would result in minor impacts to the visual environment of the community. The construction of a road paralleling the new rail track would constitute a visual change, but the initial construction of the rail track would incur a majority of these impacts to the visual setting. This alternative does not include construction of any associated appurtenances, whistle stop locations, or railroad support facilities or any other secondary development. The new road corridor is proposed within the ARR ROW to minimize social and environmental impacts in general, including visual. This alternative would involve construction within previously undeveloped areas and could have minor visual impacts to recreational users (hikers, hunters, snow machining, etc.).

### Cumulative Impacts

The minor direct and indirect impacts incurred by this project could have a minor contribution to cumulative visual effects when considering other past, present and reasonably foreseeable projects. Construction of this roadway corridor would further change the visual setting of this previously undeveloped area of Houston. The potential for additional development is possible, but is not considered in this cumulative impacts assessment as there are currently no funded projects of this nature.

## **Land Use**

### Direct and Indirect Impacts

Anticipated land use impacts for a number of potential railroad alternative route and alignment combinations were identified in the Rail Extension's environmental document. The adverse impacts that were identified in the EIS would be directly related to construction of the railroad and acquiring the necessary ROW. As a result, associated direct and indirect land use impacts resulting from construction of the roadway within the ARR ROW would result in negligible impacts. Construction of this roadway would provide opportunity for future moderate growth and economic development for the City and is therefore compatible with the community goals, outlined in section 2.5 *Physical and Social Community Characteristics*, as part of Houston's Comprehensive Plan Update. The potential for moderate growth and development was reviewed by members of the public at the CIA Open House and encouraged the potential controlled moderate growth.

### Cumulative Impacts

Construction of this railroad corridor directly contributes to the anticipated impacts incurred by the railroad extension project (Alternative 2). This alternative would incur minor cumulative impacts to land use when considering past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future.

## **Economic Impacts Analysis**

### Direct and Indirect Impacts

The establishment of a roadway from Port MacKenzie to the Parks Highway in Houston would have minor impacts on the economic conditions in Houston. While more traffic may be traveling through the community, current lacks of services and amenities such as a gas station, grocery store, or other attractions limit the additional traffic's contribution to the local economy.

#### Cumulative Impacts

Because this alternative would only have minor direct and indirect impacts, cumulative impacts on the City's economic condition would also be minimal considering the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions within Houston. If plans for development (including natural resource development, natural gas expansion or transportation, or business development) became more concrete initiatives, then further economic analysis could be conducted.

### **Mobility and Access**

#### Direct and Indirect Impacts

The potential impacts to mobility and non-motorized access are unknown at this time. There is no current project design and the inclusion of multi-use pathways or trail systems is not currently known. Construction of the roadway corridor would provide additional access to Port MacKenzie facilities and thus could have a positive impact on commute traffic and possibly public transportation if such facilities such as bus service are provided for during the design. As no support facilities are proposed, there are no anticipated parking impacts.

#### Cumulative Impacts

This alternative would have only minor direct and/or indirect impacts and would therefore not contribute to cumulative impacts on mobility and access within the community of Houston when considering past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

### **Traffic and Circulation Impacts**

#### Direct and Indirect Impacts

The traffic impacts would not be highly significant when compared to the current system. The existing distance from Millers Reach Road to the intersection of Purinton and Burma is approximately 15 miles via Big Lake Road. The alternative corridor between these same two points would be approximately 16 miles. Therefore, the benefit for travel would be exclusively based on the fact that the new route would have a design speed of 65 mph, compared to Big Lake Road which is currently posted at 55 mph, and the reduced turbulence of adjacent access along Big Lake Road and the avoidance of existing and future traffic signals or roundabouts in Big Lake. See Figure 12 below.

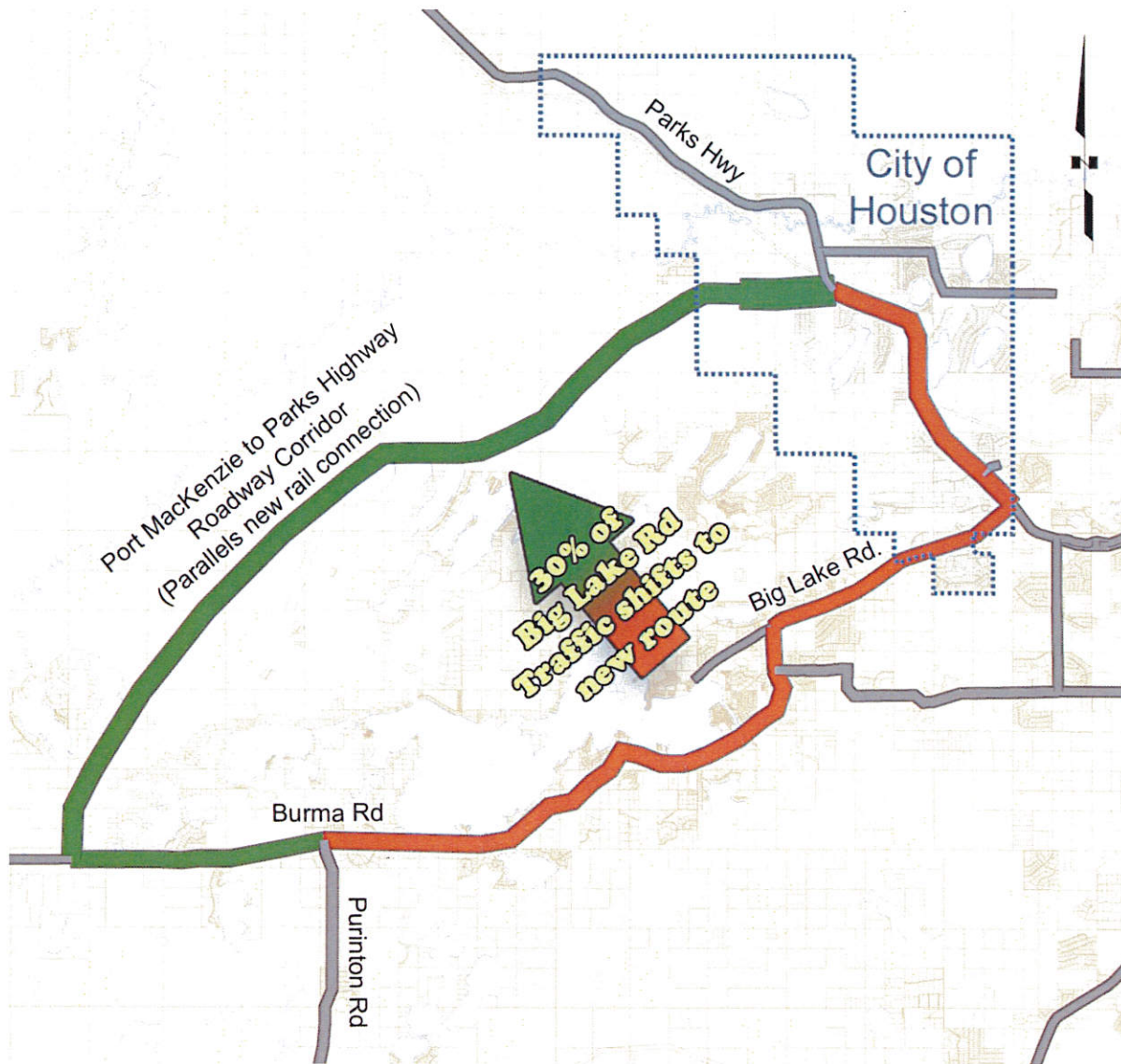


Figure 12. Port MacKenzie to Parks Highway Roadway Corridor Traffic Shift

Likely effects of a new and improved route between Port MacKenzie and Houston include a shift of traffic volumes from Big Lake to Houston of about 4,000 vehicles per day, which is approximately 30% of the daily traffic on Big Lake Road. A large percentage of the heavy 10 vehicle trips on Big Lake Road would be included in this shifted traffic, particularly after the construction of the proposed Knik Arm Bridge. The decrease in travel time using the new route, if the travel speed is 65 mph, is approximately 5 minutes, considering side street friction and intersection delay due to signals and roundabouts. See *Appendix C Traffic Impacts of Major Planning Projects*

#### Cumulative Impacts

This alternative could result in changes in economic development and land use based on the projected travel along the corridor. Increased traffic volumes through Houston may allow for greater interest in development along the corridor and Parks Highway.

#### **Provision of Public Services**

##### Direct and Indirect Impacts

Public facilities such as schools and recreational facilities are not currently at capacity or over capacity given the relatively low population of Houston. The change in demand for additional public services is minimal or null as a result of the roadway corridor. There is no existing public water or wastewater service in Houston and no public facilities are proposed for construction within Houston as part of this alternative; therefore no effect on public facility density within the community is anticipated. At this point, the roadway corridor would be providing access to industrial facilities at Port MacKenzie; therefore, impacts to public facilities in Houston are not anticipated.

##### Cumulative Impacts

This alternative would have no cumulative impacts on public facilities within the community of Houston when considering past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

#### **Safety**

##### Direct and Indirect Impacts

Impacts to transportation safety for this alternative are anticipated to be minor. Although safety measures have been incorporated into the design of the railroad corridor (i.e. road/trail crossing indicators and grade-separated crossings), the potential conflict between roadway users and the railroad is possible. Emergency vehicles requiring access to Port MacKenzie may be able to respond quicker to emergencies resulting in additional positive impacts. This alternative is not expected to have any direct or indirect impacts to criminal activity within the community.

##### Cumulative Impacts

This alternative would not contribute cumulatively to safety impacts within the community of Houston when considering past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions.

## 6. OPPORTUNITIES, LIMITATIONS AND MITIGATIONS IDENTIFIED:

The City of Houston's rural setting and character is perceived as both an opportunity and a limitation when considering future development of the community. There is ample land availability that could support industrial, commercial, and residential development. The existing Parks Highway, which bisects the community, as well as the construction of the Rail Extension could further encourage development in Houston. The Extension is viewed as a catalyst for increasing the likelihood of manufacturing, mineral export, or transportation activity taking place in Houston due to its location between the Interior and Southcentral Alaska (see Appendix B). In the short-term, though, the lack of any clear reason or need for Alaska Railroad to invest in infrastructure other than the tracks, such as a loading facility which would support the transportation of any natural resource production, will limit any such development.

Port MacKenzie currently offers minimal infrastructure and associated economic activity, but combined with investment in rail access, a possible gas pipeline, and additional private investment, the Port is viewed as a factor positively impacting the entire region. There is opportunity for the City of Houston to capitalize on growing activity at Port MacKenzie. Possibilities include the potential to host an export facility for coal, gravel, timber, and other natural resources or serve as a staging area for movement of construction materials for oil and natural gas or other major infrastructure projects. These opportunities could become more likely with the completion of the Rail Extension or the construction of a Port MacKenzie to Parks Highway Roadway Corridor in Houston. The key for activities like this to develop in Houston will be action initiation and investment by the private sector.

The increasing traffic volumes on the Parks Highway may provide an opportunity for development along the Highway corridor and if the Port to Parks Roadway Corridor were to be constructed in Houston, use of the Parks Highway would continue to increase. The tourism industry in Houston could benefit from increases in traffic and capitalize on the Little Susitna River which runs through the Houston City limits, as well as summer use of the lakes for fishing and recreation and the multi-use trails in the winter. Two limiting factors for growth of tourism around the Little Susitna River, however, are access and reduced salmon runs. There currently is no formal boat launch and so boaters use a number of ad-hoc launches along the Parks Highway. Continuing reductions in salmon numbers limits the amount of potential tourism by fishermen, who are the main users of the Little Susitna River.

While land may be plentiful and potential for growth seemingly high, a limitation in development is the low penetration of utilities throughout the community. While there are opportunities to develop relatively large lots that offer privacy, the cost of extending natural gas and electricity utilities can be prohibitive. Population density is the most significant factor reducing availability of natural gas in Houston, especially for residential customers. For this reason, natural gas is unavailable to many residential homes, underlying the reliance on expensive heating oil or wood-burning stoves, which could continue to limit development.

The City of Houston could consider a few approaches if the expansion of utilities became a community priority, including (See Appendix B, Economic Opportunities Report):

- Local Taxation
- Bonding
- State Funding
- Partnering with a Native Organization
- Improvement Districts

Opportunities for new businesses to develop in Houston are supported by the need for amenities such as a gas station or grocery store within the community, the availability of land, increasing traffic along the Parks Highway, and the Park Highway upgrades. The limitations for commercial development reflect similar limitations encountered by industrial and residential development; limited access to utilities, high energy costs, and a small low-density population. However, with the Parks Highway MP 44-52 Upgrade improving access and safety at the intersection of Big Lake Road and the Parks Highway, the potential for new businesses to develop around that location might increase.

During discussions with stakeholders in April, 2015, a number of individuals noted the possibility of Houston becoming a center for both retail marijuana sales and wholesale growing and processing facilities. With the passage of a ballot measure in the fall of 2014 legalizing marijuana in the state and municipalities like Anchorage and Wasilla starting to restrict the use and sale of marijuana, stakeholders thought Houston would benefit if it could position itself as the market for marijuana. While some viewed marijuana as a benefit to the community, a small number of interviewees disapproved of the encouragement of legal marijuana-related activities in Houston. Pointing to the possible social costs of drug use, these stakeholders said they would support restrictions on the local sale and growing of marijuana. On October 6, 2015 Houston voters failed a measure to prohibit commercial marijuana facilities.

When any new development or major action is taken within the City of Houston, the consideration of the action's consistency with community character is essential. The City's Comprehensive Plan outlines goals and policies which are designed to maintain community character and guide desired development with the City. Mitigation between economic development and the maintenance of community character as defined by the policies and goals in the Comprehensive Plan will be essential for successful development within the City of Houston.



## 7. SUMMARY:

The CIA assessed potential impacts three transportation projects could have on the City of Houston. The Parks Highway MP 44-52 Upgrade will result in minimal short-term direct impacts to the city. Changes in intersection alignment, property access, and vehicle and pedestrian safety and facilities may result in slight land use changes or development of land around the intersection of Big Lake Road and the Parks Highway in the future. Cumulative impacts to the City of Houston due to the Upgrade will be minimal.

The construction of the Rail Extension from Port MacKenzie to the main line in Houston will have moderate land use impacts for the City of Houston, but minimal short-term direct impacts for all other impact categories. The conversion of vacant land to railroad use will not have significant impacts on residents or use of the vacant land, but has the potential to support the changes of land use around the new Rail Extension in the future to non-residential types of development. Long-term cumulative impacts from the Rail Extension could include development that supports industrial activities, commercial development, and support additional transportation facilities such as roadways. Industrial and natural resource development around the new rail junction could have impacts to Houston's economy, but due to the lack of reasonably foreseeable future actions which could be analyzed the impacts are not able to be identified.

The conceptual Port MacKenzie to Parks Highway Roadway Corridor, connecting to the Parks Highway in Houston near the new rail junction, would have moderate direct traffic impacts for the City of Houston. If the conceptual project were to be built, the projected traffic volumes would shift about 30% of anticipated traffic on Burma Road and Big Lake Road to the new corridor. This traffic would then continue along the Parks Highway through Houston. Direct short-term impacts, other than that to traffic, would be minimal. However, cumulative future impacts could include changes in land use from vacant to that which would support development along the roadway corridor, as well as the more heavily trafficked Parks Highway. Development and higher traffic volumes may initiate changes in Houston's economy.

Many individuals stated during interviews, the CIA open house, and through the household survey that they felt Houston was poised for expansion and had the right attributes to turn the community into a place that would attract residents, new business, and visitors. Most saw Houston being perfectly situated to benefit from a variety of large infrastructure projects such as the development of Port MacKenzie and the accompanying Rail Extension, improvements to the Parks Highway, interim solutions to provide the Interior with natural gas, and the eventual final goal of construction of a natural gas pipeline from the North Slope. While the ideas and long-term visions are numerous, concrete initiatives have not been developed beyond speculation. A possible slowed growth of Houston could include the limited access to natural gas, a relatively small low-density population, growing congestion on the Parks Highway, difficulties in attracting tourism and new businesses to the area, and the possibility that nearby large infrastructure projects may have minimal effect on the city's economy.

Although the alternatives assessed may not directly produce a significant change in the community, the long-term cumulative impacts could be significant. Houston has the potential to emerge as a key connection point for material goods as well as people traveling between Interior and Southcentral Alaska, all of which provides greater growth potential for the City. It should be expected that the City will continue to experience steady population growth and see an increase in the potential for economic development. Maintenance of Houston's unique community character will need to be a priority when considering development actions as well as compliance with the city's goals and policies as defined by its Comprehensive Plan.

## **8. FUTURE IMPACTS ASSESSMENT RECOMMENDATIONS:**

If a significant action was taken by a public or private entity, such as the construction of the Port MacKenzie to Parks Highway Roadway Corridor in Houston or development of a large industrial facility, it is recommended that the City of Houston conduct an economic analysis and potential update of the Community Impact Assessment. A significant industrial development within the City could produce changes in employment availability, transportation routes and modes frequently used, and land use. Because of this possibility, an update to the CIA would be recommended in order to more adequately support future planning processes undertaken by the City of Houston.

## 9. REFERENCES:

Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation (FHWA 1996). Community Impacts Assessment – A Quick Reference for Transportation. Publication No. FHWA-PD-96-036. September 1996.

Surface Transportation Board, Final Environmental Impact Statement, Alaska Railroad Corporation Construction and Operation of a Rail Line Extension to Port MacKenzie, Alaska. Docket No. FD 35095. March 2011.

## **APPENDIX A: PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT SUMMARY**



**June 4, 2015 Community Impact Assessment & Comp. Plan Review Open House 2 – CIA**

- Project:** City of Houston Community Impact Assessment & Comprehensive Plan Revision
- Project No:** R&M 2136.01
- Purpose:** Open House for public to review and comment on draft CIA findings
- Date:** Thursday, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015
- Time:** 4:30PM – 6:30PM
- Location:** City of Houston Fire Station
- Meeting Attendance:** 28 members of the public and Steering Committee member were present

**Project Team in Attendance:**

R&M Consultants

- Van Le, AICP Project Manager
- Taryn Oleson Planner & PI Coordinator
- Kristi McLean Environmental Specialist, CIA Lead

City of Houston Steering Committee Members

- Mayor Virgie Thompson
- Lance Wilson, Deputy Mayor
- Len Anderson, Chair Steering Committee
- Ron Jones
- Chris Johnson





## MEETING SUMMARY

As the public entered the Fire Station, they were greeted by a member of the R&M project team who provided a brief explanation on what the CIA is and the purpose of the open house. Attendees signed in, picked up a Fact Sheet on the transportation alternatives assessed in the CIA, and helped themselves to snacks and refreshments. In the truck hull of the Fire Station a variety of boards were on display.

The maps on display were the focus of the open house. Three graphics on large 34x44" boards depicted the potential impacts identified in the CIA to this point. Each graphic showed impacts for one of three impact categories; Transportation, Land Use, and Economic impacts. Impacts were shown geographically on a map of the City of Houston. In addition to the three main boards, a copy of each graphic was printed on the same large size paper and placed on tables for attendees to write directly on. See Attachment A. Supporting the three City of Houston CIA graphics were maps of the existing conditions within Houston, including zoning, land use, land use by zoning. A board showing the Transportation Plan map from the adopted City of Houston 1982 Comprehensive Plan was also on display for reference.

Members of the public were encouraged to read the three CIA maps and provide any comments, concerns, or opinions regarding the information shared. Markers and pens were provided on each table with a CIA map on it and any feedback provided by attendees could be written directly on the map. Comment forms were provided throughout the Open House space to allow written comments to be recorded.

Members of the project team and the Steering Committee engaged in conversations with the public about the process and the goals of performing a CIA. Generally, the public in attendance concurred with the impacts identified. Little new information emerged during the open house; most discussion focused around the opportunities that could emerge due to some of the impacts identified. The Economic Impacts map yielded discussion around the potential development that could occur around the new Port-MacKenzie Rail Extension, including zoning the new areas for industrial development and Knikatnu Inc developing an LED Assembly Facility south of Millers Reach Road. The information and opinions gathered on the impacts identified in the CIA will be incorporated into the CIA report.

Additional comments not directly related to the CIA impacts were largely related to the development of parks and establishment of more services and amenities, such as a gas station and grocery store, in the area. This information will be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan Revision effort.

The public was made aware of the open house through direct postcard mailings, an e-notification reminder, and information posted to both the project website as well as the City of Houston's website. The draft CIA will be made available for review by the public via the project website once it has been approved for release by the Steering Committee.



# Community Impact Assessment INFO SHEET

## What is a CIA and why is the City of Houston conducting one?

A Community Impact Assessment (CIA) is an evaluation of potential impacts transportation projects could have on the community of Houston. Each project analyzed has the potential to impact the socioeconomic, physical environment, and future growth and development in Houston. The CIA will serve as a planning tool and reference for the City and the Mat-Su Borough by ensuring the needs, opinions, vision and goals of the community are acknowledged and documented to help guide compatible growth and development within and around Houston. The CIA is being conducted concurrently in support of the City's Comprehensive Plan Update.

## TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS ANALYZED

### Parks Highway Upgrade MP 44-52 Phase 3 Pittman Road to Big Lake Road

#### PLANNED - AKDOT&PF

- Proposed signalized intersection at Parks Hwy and Big Lake Road and at S. Johnson Road in Wasilla
- Pedestrian improvements include realignment of the pathway along Parks Hwy and Big Lake Rd; a pedestrian island and crosswalk at the intersection of Big Lake Rd and Parks Hwy
- Proposed four-lane divided Hwy from MP 44 in Wasilla returning to a two-lane Hwy after Forrest Lake Drive in Houston
- Proposed lighting at the intersection of Big Lake Road and the Parks Hwy; along the Parks Hwy
- Proposed access and driveway consolidation
- Construction planned for 2017-2018

### Port Mackenzie Rail Extension

#### PLANNED AND IN CONSTRUCTION - ARRC & MSB

- 32-mile extension of the ARRC system to connect Port Mackenzie to the mainline along Parks Hwy
- Extension passes Houston Lake Loop Trail and Horseshoe Lake with connection to the mainline north of Miller's Reach Road
- Grade-separated crossings planned at officially recognized trails and roads
- No support facilities planned as part of the extension

### Port Mackenzie to Parks Highway Roadway Corridor

#### CONCEPTUAL PROJECT

- Road alignment reflects concept shown in the adopted 1982 City of Houston Comprehensive Plan, Transportation Plan Map
- Road alignment parallels the Port Mackenzie Rail Extension alignment
- Conceptual corridor is 800' wide centered on the Rail Extension alignment, designed for a 2-lane 65 mph Hwy
- Anticipated primary use for freight and truck traffic to and from the Port

## FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT

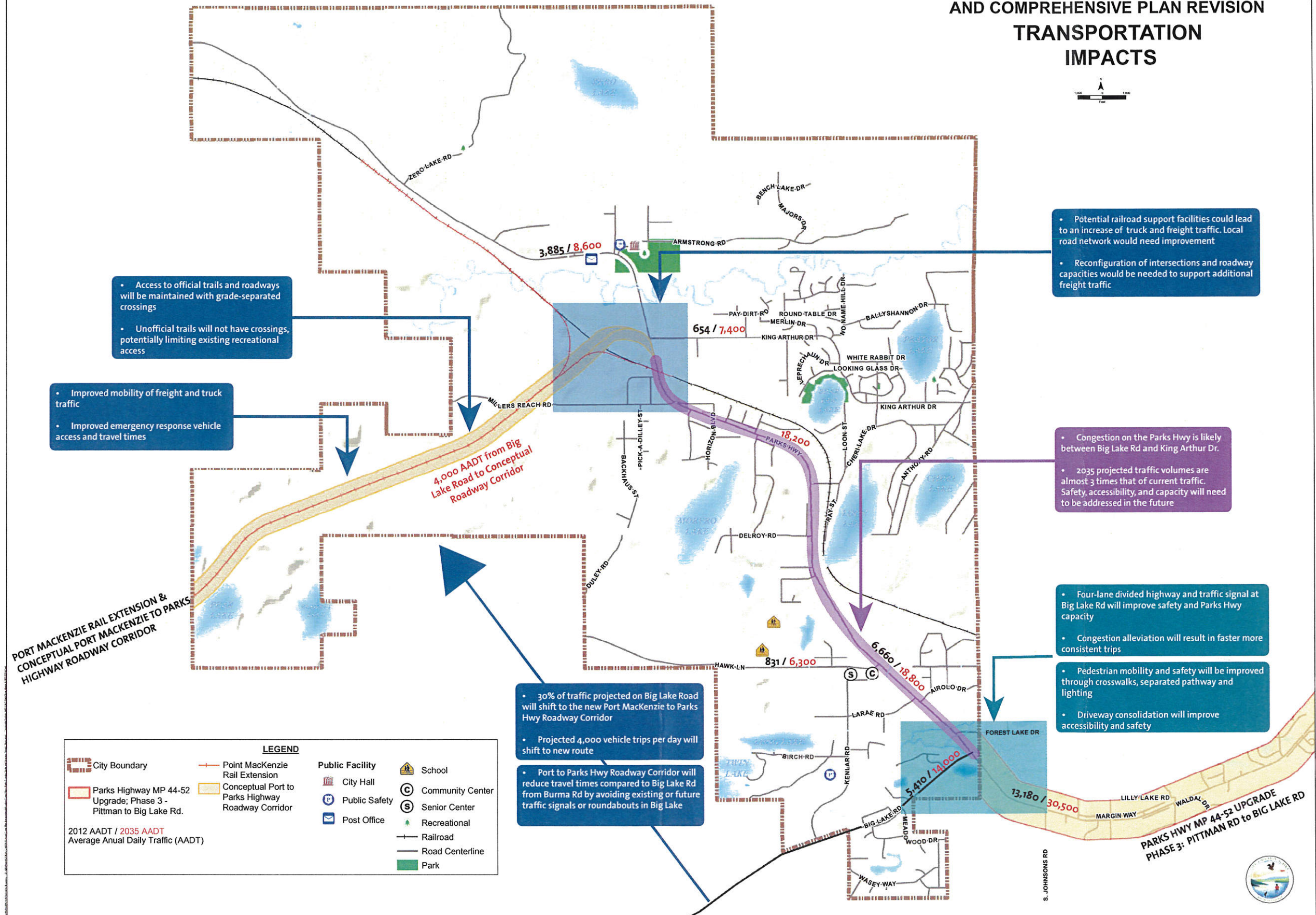
PROJECT MANAGER: VAN LE, AICP | R&M Consultants, Inc. | [vl@RMConsult.com](mailto:vl@RMConsult.com) | 907.646.9659

PLANNER & PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT COORDINATOR: TARYN OLESON | R&M Consultants, Inc. | [Comments@RMConsult.com](mailto:Comments@RMConsult.com) | 907.646.9645

VISIT THE PROJECT WEBSITE: [WWW.HOUSTONAKCOMPLAN.COM](http://WWW.HOUSTONAKCOMPLAN.COM)



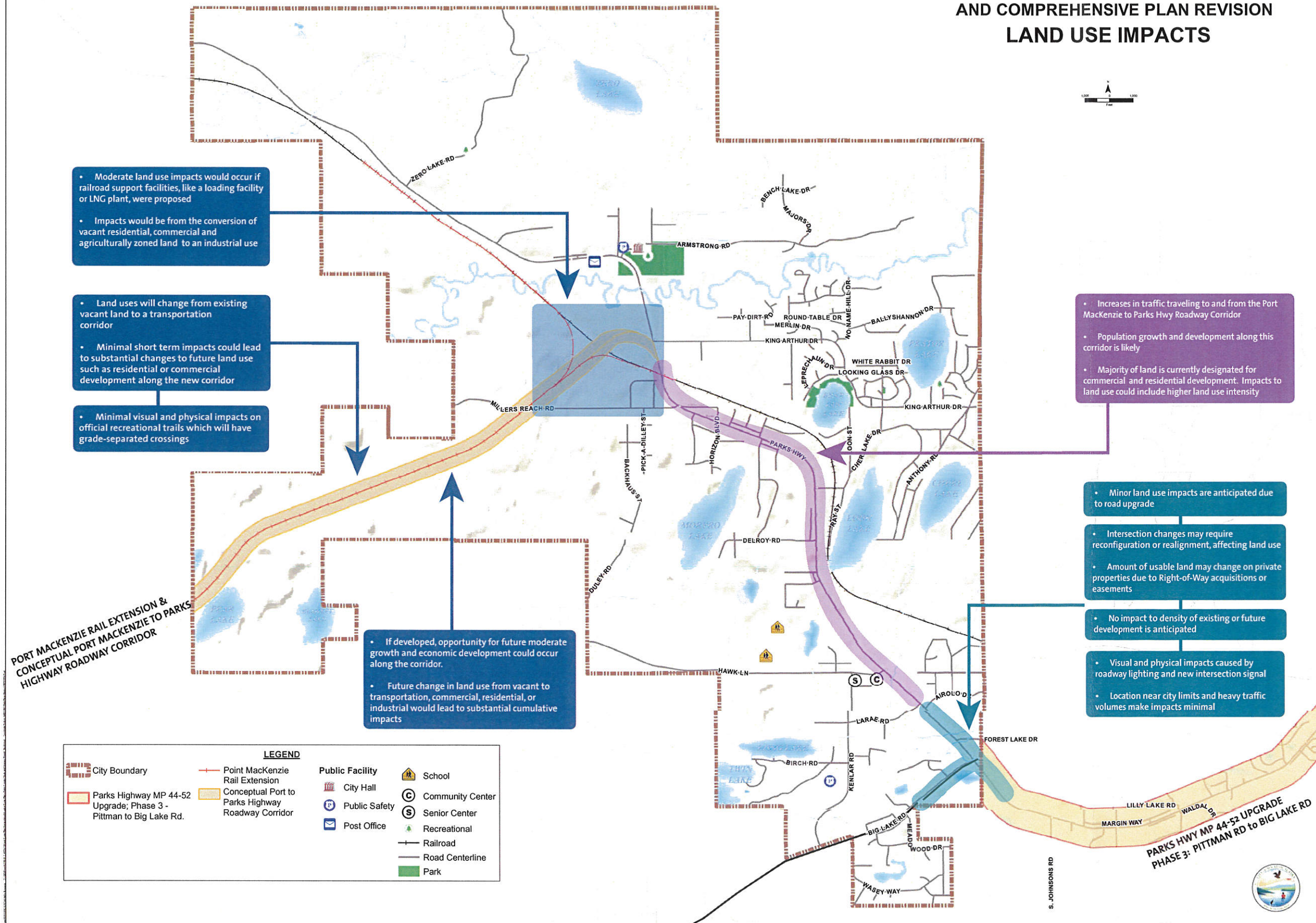
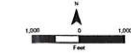
# City of Houston COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION TRANSPORTATION IMPACTS



**LEGEND**

|   |   |                 |                  |
|---|---|-----------------|------------------|
| City Boundary   | Point MacKenzie Rail Extension                    | Public Facility | School           |
| Parks Highway MP 44-52 Upgrade, Phase 3 - Pittman to Big Lake Rd.   | Conceptual Port to Parks Highway Roadway Corridor | City Hall       | Community Center |
| <b>2012 AADT / 2035 AADT</b><br>Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) |   | Public Safety   | Senior Center    |
|   |   | Post Office     | Recreational     |
|   |   | Railroad        | Road Centerline  |
|   |   | Park            |                  |

# City of Houston COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION LAND USE IMPACTS



- Moderate land use impacts would occur if railroad support facilities, like a loading facility or LNG plant, were proposed
- Impacts would be from the conversion of vacant residential, commercial and agriculturally zoned land to an industrial use

- Land uses will change from existing vacant land to a transportation corridor
- Minimal short term impacts could lead to substantial changes to future land use such as residential or commercial development along the new corridor

- Minimal visual and physical impacts on official recreational trails which will have grade-separated crossings

- If developed, opportunity for future moderate growth and economic development could occur along the corridor.
- Future change in land use from vacant to transportation, commercial, residential, or industrial would lead to substantial cumulative impacts

- Increases in traffic traveling to and from the Port MacKenzie to Parks Hwy Roadway Corridor
- Population growth and development along this corridor is likely
- Majority of land is currently designated for commercial and residential development. Impacts to land use could include higher land use intensity

- Minor land use impacts are anticipated due to road upgrade

- Intersection changes may require reconfiguration or realignment, affecting land use
- Amount of usable land may change on private properties due to Right-of-Way acquisitions or easements

- No impact to density of existing or future development is anticipated

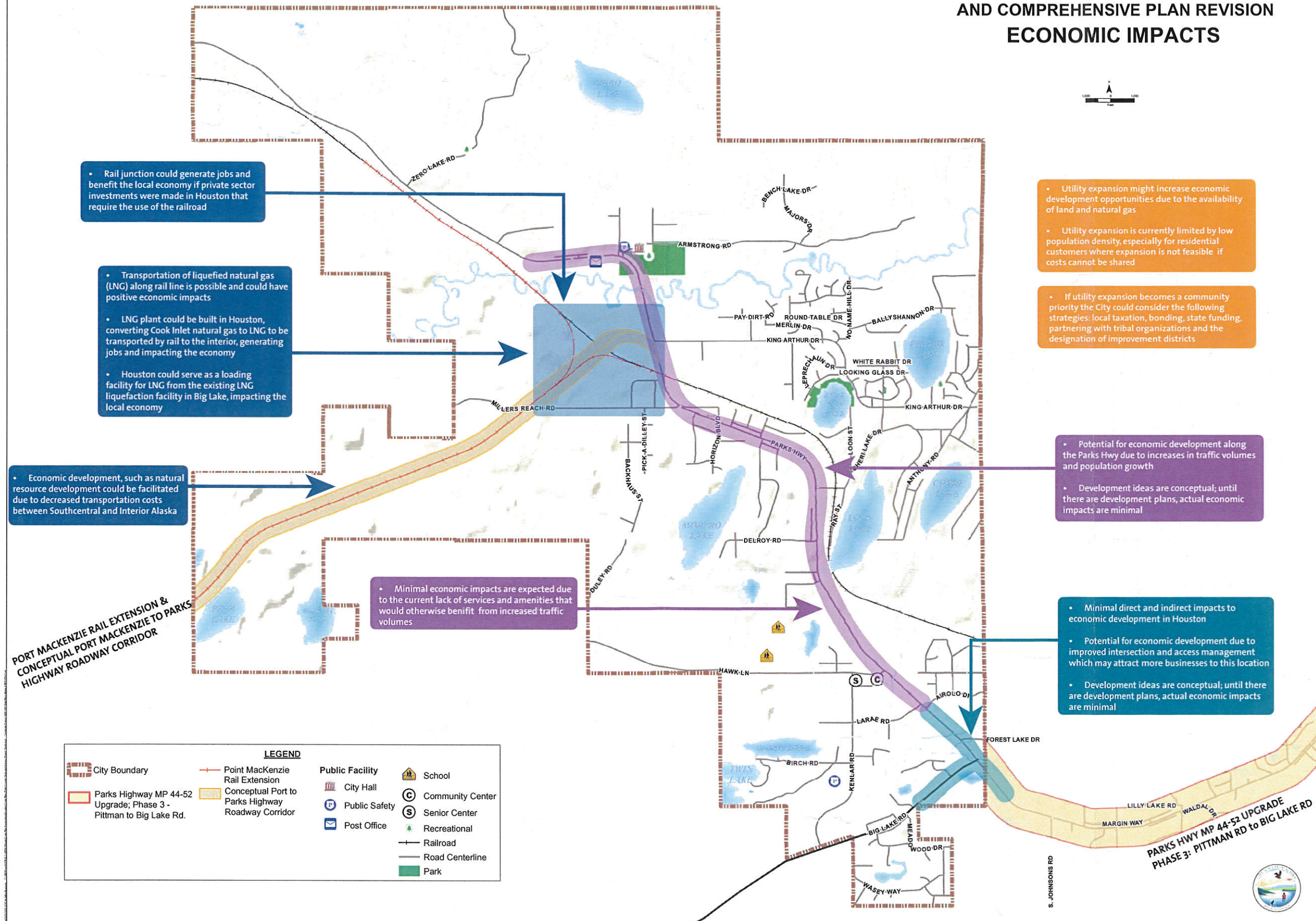
- Visual and physical impacts caused by roadway lighting and new intersection signal
- Location near city limits and heavy traffic volumes make impacts minimal

| LEGEND |   |
|--------|---|
|        | City Boundary                                     |
|        | Point MacKenzie Rail Extension                    |
|        | Conceptual Port to Parks Highway Roadway Corridor |
|        | Public Facility                                   |
|        | City Hall   |
|        | Public Safety                                     |
|        | Post Office                                       |
|        | School  |
|        | Community Center                                  |
|        | Senior Center                                     |
|        | Recreational                                      |
|        | Railroad  |
|        | Road Centerline                                   |
|        | Park  |

# City of Houston

## COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION

### ECONOMIC IMPACTS



- Rail junction could generate jobs and benefit the local economy if private sector investments were made in Houston that require the use of the railroad

- Transportation of liquefied natural gas (LNG) along rail line is possible and could have positive economic impacts
- LNG plant could be built in Houston, converting Cook Inlet natural gas to LNG to be transported by rail to the interior, generating jobs and impacting the economy
- Houston could serve as a loading facility for LNG from the existing LNG liquefaction facility in Big Lake, impacting the local economy

- Economic development, such as natural resource development could be facilitated due to decreased transportation costs between Southcentral and Interior Alaska

**PORT MACKENZIE RAIL EXTENSION & CONCEPTUAL PORT MACKENZIE TO PARKS HIGHWAY ROADWAY CORRIDOR**

- Minimal economic impacts are expected due to the current lack of services and amenities that would otherwise benefit from increased traffic volumes

- Utility expansion might increase economic development opportunities due to the availability of land and natural gas
- Utility expansion is currently limited by low population density, especially for residential customers where expansion is not feasible if costs cannot be shared

- If utility expansion becomes a community priority the City could consider the following strategies: local taxation, bonding, state funding, partnering with tribal organizations and the designation of improvement districts

- Potential for economic development along the Parks Hwy due to increases in traffic volumes and population growth
- Development ideas are conceptual; until there are development plans, actual economic impacts are minimal

- Minimal direct and indirect impacts to economic development in Houston
- Potential for economic development due to improved intersection and access management which may attract more businesses to this location
- Development ideas are conceptual; until there are development plans, actual economic impacts are minimal

| LEGEND |   |
|--------|---|
|        | City Boundary   |
|        | Point MacKenzie Rail Extension                                    |
|        | Parks Highway MP 44-52 Upgrade; Phase 3 - Pittman to Big Lake Rd. |
|        | Conceptual Port to Parks Highway Roadway Corridor                 |
|        | Public Facility   |
|        | City Hall   |
|        | Public Safety   |
|        | Post Office   |
|        | School  |
|        | Community Center  |
|        | Senior Center   |
|        | Recreational  |
|        | Railroad  |
|        | Road Centerline   |
|        | Park  |



**APPENDIX B: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES:  
PERSPECTIVES OF COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS**



*City of Houston*  
*Economic Development Opportunities:*  
*Perspectives of Community Stakeholders*

Draft Report

*Prepared for:*  
**City of Houston**



*April 2015*

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# Introduction

The process to update the City of Houston’s Comprehensive Plan is currently underway. Additionally, a Community Impact Assessment is being conducted to evaluate the economic growth potential of several infrastructure projects in progress within or adjacent to the city’s boundaries. Examples of these projects include the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension, the Parks Highway MP44-52 upgrade, future Parks Highway segment upgrades, Parks Highway Alternative Corridor, and the annexation of Knikatnu-owned land into City of Houston’s boundaries. As part of this assessment, stakeholders with an interest in economic, business, and industrial development in Houston were interviewed. They were asked about the potential of various infrastructure and business opportunities to create employment, generate City revenue, improve community assets, and Houston’s vision to respond to growth and change.

## Methodology

Working closely with the City of Houston Comprehensive Impact Assessment and Comprehensive Plan Revision Steering Committee, McDowell Group developed a list of contacts that represented a cross-section of business and community groups and interests related to Houston, including tribal organizations, nonprofits, business leaders, school district officials, utility representatives, and others. Below is a list of the 19 stakeholders interviewed. An interview protocol was designed and adjusted to best capture the interests, experience, and expertise of individual stakeholders.

| <b>Name</b>     | <b>Title</b>                       | <b>Organization/Affiliation</b>                 |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Lisa Byrd       | Site Manager                       | Mid-Valley Senior Housing                       |
| Rick Dilley     | Owner                              | Cozy Coal                                       |
| Julie Estay     | Director of Public Relations       | Matanuska Electric Association                  |
| Gary Fandrei    | Executive Director                 | Cook Inlet Aquaculture Association              |
| Robert Hall     | Owner                              | Gorilla Fireworks                               |
| Tom Harris      | Chief Executive Officer            | Knikatnu, Inc.                                  |
| Thomas Hood     | Fire Chief                         | Houston Fire Department                         |
| Jimmy Hudson    | Facility Manager                   | Spenard Builders Supply                         |
| Marty Metiva    | Executive Director                 | Mat-Su Resources Conservation and Development   |
| Deven Mitchell  | Executive Director                 | Municipal Bond Bank                             |
| Richard Porter  | Executive Director                 | Knik Tribal Council                             |
| Roger Purcell   | Past Houston Mayor/General Manager | A to Z Realty                                   |
| Chad Rice       | Teacher                            | Houston High School                             |
| Kevin Shumway   | Pastor/Fire Department Chaplin     | Hilltop Assembly of God/Houston Fire Department |
| Tim Sullivan    | External Affairs Manager           | Alaska Railroad Corporation                     |
| Marc Van Dongen | Port Director                      | Port MacKenzie                                  |
| Marsha VonEhr   | Document Specialist                | Mat-Su Borough                                  |
| Dee Williams    | Network Account Executive          | Matanuska Telephone Association                 |
| Bruce Zmuda     | Marketing Representative           | Enstar  |

# Perceived Community Strengths and Weaknesses

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## What are the City of Houston's strengths and weaknesses?

Stakeholders were each asked what they believed were Houston's core community strengths and weaknesses to attract economic and business development opportunities. Some community attributes were considered both an advantage and a disadvantage when considering opportunities for growth.

### Rural Lifestyle

Houston's rural setting emerged as both a strength and weakness. Quick access to the wilderness, a tight-knit community, lack of pollution and development, and privacy were a few factors mentioned as strengths. Stakeholders spoke of a "homestead spirit" prevalent in the area. "There is an attitude in Houston," one resident noted, "that if you are not bothering anyone, you should be left alone." "Last year, our neighbor bought a piece of land and is building a home out-of-pocket," a stakeholder stated, adding "This can be great for a young family that might not be able to get financing. And this contributes to the do-it-yourself attitude of Houston."

While these factors were noted as positive attributes, the same may also detract from residents' satisfaction with Houston's quality of life. As noted by several stakeholders, the "hands-off" attitude has resulted in homes of varying degrees of completion, properties full of old cars and trash, dogs being allowed to run around, and a general lack of consideration for other residents. Yet, some stakeholders noted they see improvement over time: "In the 15 years I have been in Houston, I have seen slow improvement. People seem to be taking better care of their homes and are just having more consideration for others in the community."

The benefit of being able to maintain a rural lifestyle while having access to shopping, services, and healthcare in the Mat-Su Borough and Anchorage was noted by a number of stakeholders. At the same time, some felt the distance from these amenities and services was limiting, especially for employment opportunities. "There are not many jobs locally," a resident said, adding "Many people have to drive into Wasilla to get a decent job, a round-trip commute that can easily be an hour."

### Land Availability

Many stakeholders recognized there are significant amounts of developable land available in Houston while others noted the counter-effects of low population density. Both residential and commercial land in Houston is considered relatively inexpensive when compared to other places in the Mat-Su Borough or Anchorage. "This really is an advantage for us," said one interviewee, "we have the ability to grow and maybe attract businesses

because of the room available in Houston. We already see some manufacturing in Big Lake. Maybe Houston can do the same thing.”

The supply of land for residential development also appears to be sufficient and affordable. “While residential land prices have increased recently, our prices are still pretty low compared to other areas in the Borough,” a stakeholder familiar with the local real estate market stated.

While land may be plentiful, the downside is the low penetration of utilities throughout the community. While there are opportunities to develop relatively large lots that offer privacy, the cost of extending natural gas and electricity utilities can be prohibitive. For this reason, natural gas is unavailable to many residential homes, underlying the reliance on expensive heating oil or wood-burning stoves.

### **Local Government Leadership**

Viewpoints about city government were polarizing. Supporters cited stability, pragmatism, low taxes, and a willingness to hear new ideas, and new and enforced codes and zoning laws to improve the aesthetics of the community and manage growth. Critics felt City leaders was short-sighted; they also wanted to see a local police force funded.

The proposed annexation of land owned by Knikatnu Inc., an Alaska Native village corporation, into the City of Houston is due, in part, to favorable attitude of City leaders. A Knikatnu representative felt they would be treated fairly by the City, saying “We view the City of Houston as a stable local government that will provide value to our organization as we plan for future development.”

### **Local Road Conditions**

The condition of local roads was a concern expressed by several stakeholders. With many of Houston’s residential areas accessed on dirt roads, some felt the low quality of the roads was slowing residential growth. “People don’t want to drive miles and miles on a bumpy, washed-out dirt road. There is good quality residential land that could be developed if it was not for some of the bad roads in Houston,” said an interviewee.

One stakeholder in particular thought the City should be more forceful with the Mat-Su Borough on the issue of road maintenance. “Years ago, the Borough built roads in Houston that simply cannot be maintained properly. Now we have to deal with the Borough’s bad decisions. I think the City should send the Borough a bill for all our road problems.”

While many roads are currently dirt, the recent paving of some local roads, particularly Hawk Lane, was noted as a positive development. “I’m lucky to be able to drive nearly all the way to my house,” said one stakeholder. “I hope we see more paving done in Houston as it helps increase home values and allows for easier commutes.”

## **Parks Highway Access**

With the Parks Highway bisecting the City of Houston, its effect was a common theme heard. Most individuals thought the Highway was a significant benefit to the community, even with growing congestion.

A number of interviewees mentioned they thought Houston could take better advantage of the many vehicles traveling through Houston. “Houston has two rivers—the Little Susitna and the Parks Highway, which is a river of money; we just need to get a few dollars from every vehicle and we will be doing fine,” stated one local business leader. “With thousands of vehicles traveling through Houston every day on the Highway, the small number of businesses along the highway benefit from purchases of snacks, meals, and other supplies.”

Several stakeholders mentioned a significant increase in traffic in recent years, resulting in longer commute times to Wasilla or Anchorage, and more potential for traffic accidents. “Today, if you do not time a run into Wasilla correctly you could be stuck in traffic on the Parks for 20 minutes or more,” mentioned one resident. “This is not something we dealt with in the past. And with all the traffic on the highway we need to be careful when we are just going to a friend’s house. Transitioning from a slow dirt road to a highway with people driving 70 miles per hour can be dangerous.”

## **Improved Fire Safety**

A few interviewees pointed to the leadership of the fire department, a new fire station, better training, and improved equipment as factors as major steps to improve community safety, leading to a decrease in the cost of fire insurance paid by homeowners and businesses.

## **Lack of Local Amenities**

The lack of amenities, such as a gas station, grocery store, medical clinic, and public transportation were mentioned as weaknesses faced by the residents of Houston. Interviewees noted it would be preferable to support local businesses and organizations instead of traveling to Willow, Talkeetna, Big Lake, and Wasilla. “There is plenty of demand for a gas station or small grocery store but everyone drives out of Houston for basically all their needs,” said one stakeholder, adding “If we could start supporting Houston businesses, we might be able to grow our economy.”

# Tourism Development

---

## **What does Houston currently have that attracts tourists? What should be developed to increase tourism?”**

### **Little Susitna River**

The Little Susitna River (Little Su) runs through Houston City limits and is perhaps the most significant tourism asset in the area, according to most stakeholders. Salmon and trout fishing, rafting, camping, and wildlife viewing make the Little Su a visitor destination. While most activity takes place in the summer, snowmachining, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing were mentioned as winter-time activities available on the Little Su.

Two limiting factors for growth, however, are access and reduced salmon runs. A number of interviewees mentioned there is no formal boat launch; boaters currently use a number of ad-hoc launches along the Parks Highway. A common one- or two-day trip is to put-in at Houston and take-out at Burma Landing. Reduced salmon runs on the Little Su have resulted in reduced fishing originating in Houston. An interviewee that had lived in the area 30 years noted there are fewer guides offering their services on the Little Su: “Back in the 80s and 90s, there were at least ten guides working on the Little Susitna. Today there are maybe one or two. In my view, this is a result of lower salmon runs.”

### **Other Attractions**

In addition to the Little Su, interviewees noted a variety of other tourism activities and assets Houston has to offer:

#### **LAKES**

Visitors can engage in a variety of activities on Houston’s six larger lakes, including fishing in the summer and winter and canoeing or rafting. Three lakes are stocked annually by Alaska Department of Fish & Game with chinook and coho salmon, and rainbow trout. Limited public access to lakes may be preventing visitors from frequenting these water bodies at a higher rate.

#### **WINTER MULTI-USE TRAILS**

Houston offers access to trails frequented by dogmushers, cross-country skiers, and snowmachiners. Interviewees noted that Houston’s proximity to the Talkeetna Mountains make the area a good staging area. “We are 30 minutes away from world-class snowmachining and backcountry skiing,” mentioned a stakeholder who was hoping to build some cabins to cater to winter tourists.

## TOWN CENTER

The concept of a developed town center was raised by a few stakeholders. Noting the proximity of the Little Su, some thought Houston could become a “destination” through development of waterside boardwalks, small shops, restaurants, and art galleries. “The setting is perfect,” one individual noted. “People could come out from Wasilla, Palmer, or Anchorage to have a relaxing evening along the Little Susitna.”

The possibility of music and art festivals, a brewery, or even a convention center being built in Houston were also mentioned.

# Utility Development

## Is access to utilities an issue for Houston residents and businesses?

### Natural Gas

Stakeholders indicated lack of access to natural gas has led to higher heating costs and stifled economic development for Houston and its residents. While stakeholders report the majority of commercial properties have access to natural gas, many residential homes rely on heating oil (51 percent), wood (23 percent), and electricity (9 percent) for their primary space heating source instead of natural gas (14 percent) (*see table below*). This contrasts with Wasilla and the rest of Mat-Su Valley where 90 percent and 70 percent of homes use natural gas, respectively. Natural gas is traditionally a cheaper energy source than heating oil or electricity.

Primary Source of Space Heating by Source, 2013

|              | City of Houston | City of Wasilla | Mat-Su Borough |
|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Heating Oil  | 51%             | 5%              | 15%            |
| Wood         | 23              | 1               | 7              |
| Natural Gas  | 14              | 90              | 70             |
| Electricity  | 9               | 5               | 6              |
| Other        | 4               | <1              | 2              |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>100%</b>     | <b>100%</b>     | <b>100%</b>    |

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2014.

Note: Some columns may not sum due to rounding.

Many stakeholders expressed improved access to natural gas would allow for more business and residential growth by reducing energy costs. This perspective was summed up by an interviewee: "If we could combine the land we have that is available with natural gas, businesses in Wasilla or even Anchorage might move out here. It really comes down to lower costs; if people can save money, they will come out here."

Other interviewees spoke about the impact natural gas could have on space-heating costs at the residential level. "Houston can be cold in the winter," a resident said. "It is not uncommon for us to experience weeks of below zero [temperatures]. Many of us use heating oil and supplement our energy needs with wood. If we could access natural gas, a fuel that could be more than 30 percent cheaper, this would be huge for the community."

A representative from Enstar, the natural gas utility serving the area, stated population density was the most significant factor reducing availability of natural gas in Houston, especially for residential customers. Houston's relatively large lot sizes, dispersed residential zoning, and lack of anchor tenants contribute to the situation.

For many homeowners, transitioning to natural gas is cost-prohibitive if the installation costs cannot be shared with others. Enstar can credit a percent of future annual revenue from the customer, typically \$600 for a residential home. The cost of extending natural gas lines to a home begins at \$22.56 per foot and rises quickly when streams need to be crossed or larger pipe is needed.

Enstar reports they have been slowly expanding natural gas distribution lines in Houston. Currently, lines extend down Hawk Lane to Houston High School and Middle School, and from the west along King Arthur Drive. According to the Enstar, continued expansion is expected to be slow.

## **Electricity**

An Matanuska Electric Association (MEA) representative reported the same factors limiting the expansion of natural gas also apply to electricity: low population density, difficulty in obtaining right of way easements, customers not wanting trees cut down, road alignment, and the cost of running power lines being the most significant.

The cost to extend power lines are approximately \$30 per foot or \$160,000 per mile, with costs rising as more poles are needed. For the average homeowner, this makes connecting to the electric grid cost-prohibitive and results in the use of generators or other means to generate electricity.

## **Strategies for Supporting Utility Expansion**

Interviewees noted a variety of approaches the City of Houston could consider if expansion of utilities becomes a community priority, including:

### **LOCAL TAXATION**

The City of Houston has authority to raise revenue through a variety of taxes which could be used to help finance expansion of utilities.

### **BONDING**

Revenue could be leveraged through bonding with the Alaska Municipal Bond Bank, a public corporation that helps provide communities with more favorable interest rates than they might be able to obtain on their own.

### **STATE FUNDING**

Precedent exists for state funding to support development of utilities. Current examples include the expansion of natural gas distribution in Homer and Fairbanks.



## PARTNERING WITH A TRIBAL ORGANIZATION

The City of Houston may be able to partner with local tribal organizations to encourage expansion of utilities. The Knik Tribal Council (KTC) and the City of Houston have entered into a pilot project that would transfer responsibility of maintenance for some roads to KTC. Because KTC is a federally recognized tribe, they qualify for programs and funding unique to tribal entities. In addition to road maintenance, KTC also intends to provide 76 LED streetlights near Houston High School and Middle School as a demonstration of this partnership. This model of cooperation between the City of Houston and KTC, a number of interviewees mentioned, could be an additional strategy to increase utility expansion in the area.

## IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS

Designation of an “improvement district” would allow Houston to pay for the cost of utilities expansion and effectively finance this expense through a special assessment paid by residents over time.<sup>1</sup> The City of Homer used this approach to increase access to natural gas by charging property owners a fixed amount upfront or financing the development expense at approximately 4 percent over ten years.

Discussions with the Mat-Su Borough reveal this is a common strategy for a wide variety of infrastructure projects. There are currently 68 improvement districts throughout the Borough. Two main types of improvement districts are used:

- *Contiguous improvement district* that requires at least 50 percent of a group of homeowners in a defined area to support an infrastructure project for it to be approved.
- *Non-contiguous improvement district* that only includes homeowners that support the project in question.

A representative from the Mat-Su Borough reported the former type of improvement district may be appropriate for Houston’s unique situation.

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<sup>1</sup> Section 4.18.010 of the Houston Municipal Code authorizes improvement districts.

# Port MacKenzie Impacts

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## How will growth at Port MacKenzie impact Houston?

Port MacKenzie, located 42 road-miles from Houston, has the potential to impact Houston development. The Port is located on the west side of Cook Inlet, 3.5 miles from downtown Anchorage. Among other ideas, the Port could host a rail-loading or LNG export facility; facilitate export of coal, gravel, timber, and other natural resources; or serve as a staging area for movement of construction materials for oil and gas projects, or other major infrastructure projects (such as the Susitna-Watana Hydroelectric Project).

While the Port currently offers minimal infrastructure and associated economic activity, stakeholders were cautiously optimistic about future development and what it could mean for Houston and its residents. Many viewed the Port as one part of the broad development trajectory the area is on. Combined with investment in rail access, a possible gas pipeline, and additional private investment, the Port is viewed as a positive factor impacting the entire region.

# Rail Extension Impacts

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## How will the rail extension from existing rail lines to Port MacKenzie impact Houston?

The 32-mile construction of a rail extending from Port MacKenzie to existing rail in Houston is viewed by many as an opportunity for the area. This extension could decrease transportation costs between Southcentral and the Interior of Alaska, in turn encouraging development of mineral resources and other projects. A report commissioned by the Mat-Su Borough that examined the benefits of a similar rail extension concluded:

*The quantifiable benefits from the Port MacKenzie to Willow rail link with respect to resource development can be divided into the following two major categories:*

- *Benefits in the form of rail freight savings derived from the reduced haulage distances from natural resource production sites to tidewater at Port MacKenzie relative to the Ports of Anchorage, Whittier, and Seward.*
- *Benefits to the Rail Belt communities in the form of enhanced economic diversification and economic development as a consequent of increases in natural resource production.<sup>2</sup>*

Interviewees saw great potential in having the “Y” (the connection between the new and existing rail lines) located in Houston. The extension was viewed as a factor increasing the likelihood of manufacturing, mineral export, or transportation activity taking place in Houston.

“Here we are,” a local business owner stated, “located at the cross roads of the Alaska Railroad. We have land, access to natural gas is improving, some existing manufacturing, and are positioned between the Interior and Southcentral. It is sure to benefit the area.” Other individuals echoed this perspective, pointing to resources locally such as coal, gravel, or timber that could be developed as a result of easier access to rail transportation.

Another stakeholder said Houston would need to be conscious of what is being moved through Houston as a result of the rail extension. “We don’t want to be in a situation where the railroad is moving dangerous cargo through our City without the fire department being prepared for an accident.” Asked about these concerns, a representative of the Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) stated they regularly engage with local governments and first responders when moving new types of cargo through an area. The representative also noted ARRC has a long history of moving volatile cargo such as refined petroleum products and a variety of chemicals.

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<sup>2</sup> Metz, Paul A., Economic Analysis of Rail Link, Port MacKenzie to Willow, Alaska, Prepared for the Matanuska Susitna Borough, 2007.

While many interviewees were optimistic about the long-term effects of the rail extension, ARRC indicated there are few marketable ideas in the short- to near-term that would warrant additional investment. “There really needs to be a reason for us to build anything beyond just the new tracks,” an ARRC representative said. “If it is clear a loading facility or other infrastructure is needed in the future, we will deal with that then. Until that happens, we see minimal impact on Houston and its economy.”

### What other concepts have implications for economic development for Houston?

#### Energy

Several ideas or concepts involving or requiring natural gas were offered. One of the main assumptions accompanying these ideas was that more natural gas in Houston, whether by a pipeline from the North Slope or if existing utilities are expanded, would reduce the price of energy. Once the cost of energy was reduced, many interviewees stated, projects and ideas previously cost-prohibitive could move forward. The concept of “cheap energy” was mentioned a number of times while discussing potential projects that could impact Houston. The following is a brief overview of the natural gas-related ideas mentioned.

#### NATURAL GAS BY RAIL

While the Federal Railroad Administration currently restricts the movement of liquefied natural gas (LNG) by rail, ARRC has applied for permission and reports they are confident approval will be granted. Interviewees pointed to two ideas which would transport LNG to the Interior using rail and potential could impact Houston:

- An LNG plant could be built in Houston to convert Cook Inlet natural gas to LNG that would be transported by rail to the Interior. While a number of locations are being considered, ARRC points to three main reasons Houston is a preferred location: (1) Houston is optimally located between the Interior and Southcentral; (2) 10,000 feet of track space is already available; and (3) rail near Houston would require minimal site preparation to support loading and unloading of LNG containers.<sup>3</sup>
- Instead of constructing a new liquefaction plant in Houston, containers could be filled at the existing LNG liquefaction facility in Big Lake and transshipped by truck onto northbound rail cars in Houston. This concept would require minimal capital investment for ARRC and would be considered an interim solution for Fairbanks in its early stages of natural gas expansion.

#### NATURAL GAS POWER PLANT

The possibility of a natural gas-fired power plant being built in Houston was mentioned by a few stakeholders. Three factors supporting this perspective were raised: (1) the City’s location along the Railbelt would allow a local power plant to provide electricity both to the Interior and Southcentral; (2) land is available; and (3) natural gas is nearby.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.akrdc.org/membership/events/breakfast/1415/wade.pdf>

## INDUSTRIAL GREENHOUSES

An idea that necessitates access to “cheap energy” includes industrial greenhouses, according to one interviewee. “We ship virtually all our food up to Alaska. Maybe we should focus on building greenhouses and try to be more self-sufficient...Natural gas would be used to provide heat and existing agricultural zoning in Houston could be used,” mentioned the stakeholder.

## SEPTAGE PLANT

The possibility of a wastewater treatment site in Houston was proposed to provide local economic activity and solve the existing septage problems faced by the Mat-Su Valley.<sup>4</sup> Septage from residential homes in the Mat-Su Valley is currently trucked to Anchorage where it undergoes treatment before discharge into Cook Inlet. This practice is expected to end in the near-term because of Anchorage’s lack of capacity to process the waste. Some stakeholders supported development of a facility in Houston to not only benefit Houston residents, but the broader Mat-Su Valley as well.

A couple stakeholders mentioned Houston’s septage treatment plant built in the 80s. After five years of operation, the facility closed due to groundwater concerns. While this precedent could mean Houston is a possible candidate for a facility, the Mat-Su Borough has already identified a location near the Borough landfill for a new treatment plant.<sup>5</sup>

## MINING/MINERAL RESOURCES

Houston’s legacy as a mining town was mentioned by a small but passionate number of stakeholders. Both the nearby coal that was mined until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century and extensive gravel resources were noted as opportunities to be developed. “We could start mining coal and export it through Port MacKenzie. This would represent the closet coal mine to the export facility.” One contact added, “And there is enough coal that we could build a coal power plant and sell power to the Railbelt.”

Gravel was also mentioned as a valuable resource that could be developed. One stakeholder stated, “With all the road construction that is going on in the proximity of Houston, we should be selling our gravel to all these projects.”

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<sup>4</sup> Septage is the liquid and solid material that comes from septic tanks.

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.frontiersman.com/news/soil-testing-narrows-septage-sites/article\\_de608c9c-db3f-11e4-8f71-676ca4d023d7.html?mode=story](http://www.frontiersman.com/news/soil-testing-narrows-septage-sites/article_de608c9c-db3f-11e4-8f71-676ca4d023d7.html?mode=story)

## **RETAIL**

A desire for more local retail businesses, specifically a grocery store and gas station, was expressed by interviewees. While no formal plans to locate a grocery store in or close to Houston were identified, two interviewees mentioned they had heard rumors that a gas station is being considered. Two locations were noted as possibilities: the Big Lake Road and Parks Highway intersection, and the gravel pit area across the Parks Highway from Millers Market.

One of the main issues slowing the development of a gas station in Houston, one stakeholder reports, was the 2 percent sales tax that would be paid on gas and diesel. "People are very price sensitive to the cost of gasoline and diesel. If they can save a few cents per gallon, they may avoid a gas station that has to pay a tax." This same stakeholder suggested the City to change the municipal code to exclude gasoline sales from the sales tax.

## **MARIJUANA BUSINESSES**

With the passage of a ballot measure in the fall of 2014 legalizing marijuana in Alaska, a number of individuals noted the possibility of Houston becoming a center of both retail marijuana sales and wholesale growing and processing facilities. With municipalities, such as Wasilla and Anchorage, restricting the use and sale of marijuana, stakeholders thought Houston would benefit if it could position itself as the "go-to" spot for marijuana.

The City was approached in early 2015 by a two marijuana-related companies: one wanting to open a grow facility and another business interested in developing a testing facility. With regulations still being crafted at the state government level, Houston has been hesitant to permit any marijuana-related commerce.

While some viewed marijuana as a benefit to the community, a small number of interviewees thought the City should not encourage legal marijuana-related activity in Houston. Pointing to the possible social costs of drug use, these stakeholders said they would support restrictions on the sale and growing of marijuana locally.

## **FISH RESTORATION**

Efforts are underway to increase the annual salmon return on the Little Susitna River. Using a technique called moist air incubation, a number of organizations including the Knik Tribal Council and past Mayor of Houston Roger Purcell, are hoping revitalized salmon runs would benefit local residents and help support fishing-related tourism in the area.

## **LED ASSEMBLY FACILITY**

Knikatnu, Inc. has been exploring the possibility of assembling light-emitting diode (LED) streetlights in Houston. The group owns land in Houston and would build a new facility. "This is the type of low-impact development we would like to see on our land," a Knikatnu representative stated. "The LED facility is in very early stages of planning." The facility would import LEDs and assemble them for use lighting Alaska roads.

## Conclusion

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After completion of 19 executive interviews with a variety of Houston stakeholders, McDowell's research team noted the optimism expressed by nearly all contacted. Many individuals said they felt Houston was poised for expansion and had the right attributes to turn the community into a place that would attract residents, new businesses, and visitors. Many saw Houston being perfectly situated to benefit from a variety of large infrastructure projects such as development of Port MacKenzie and the accompanying rail extension, improvements to the Parks Highway, interim solutions to provide the Interior with natural gas, and the eventual construction of a natural gas pipeline from the North Slope. While ideas were plenty, concrete initiatives had not been developed beyond speculation.

While many stakeholders were optimistic, issues that could slow the growth of Houston were also raised. These included limited access to natural gas, a relatively small population, congestion on the Parks Highway, difficulties in attracting tourism and new businesses to the area, and the possibility that nearby large infrastructure projects may actually have minimal effect.

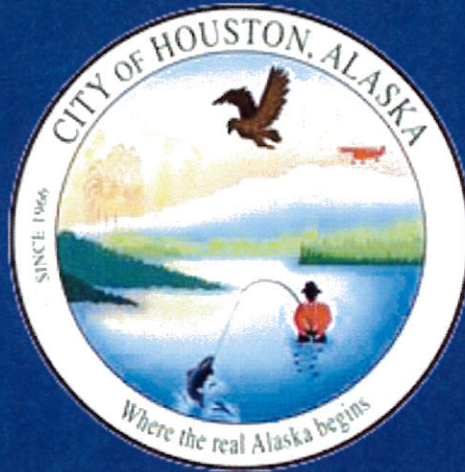


## **APPENDIX C: TRAFFIC IMPACTS OF MAJOR PLANNING PROJECTS**

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City of Houston



## Traffic Impacts of Major Planning Projects

~ **Draft** ~

August 2015

**Prepared by:**  
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**Prepared for:**  
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## 1 Introduction

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There are several projects planned or considered for construction in and around the City of Houston which could change the flow of traffic through the existing and future roadway network. Additionally, as traffic levels increase on the existing network, proactive improvements and alternatives may need to be considered in order to accommodate future demand.

In this report, Kinney Engineering, LLC (KE) presents an analysis of the traffic impacts of these projects and makes recommendations for future road infrastructure improvements and alternatives.

## 2 General Growth and Development

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The City of Houston is on the far western edge of an urban/suburban core area of the Matanuska Susitna Borough. Growth and development within the City of Houston is expected to continue at a steady pace through the horizon year of 2035 as the Wasilla and Meadow Lakes area population densities increase and push the extents of the suburban density zone farther towards Houston and Big Lake. Growth is specifically expected to occur in the areas north of the Parks Highway, particularly on King Arthur Road and Armstrong Road, and especially on lakefront and riverfront properties.

Industrial development is possible in the area of the Big Lake Road and Parks Highway intersection and on Miller's Reach Road in the direction of a new future rail connection.

Commercial growth is most likely along the Parks Highway corridor. Near the intersections of Armstrong Road and King Arthur Road with the Parks Highway, commercial growth will target the increased residential traffic served by these roadways.

### **3 Base Level Traffic Volumes**

---

KE projected average annual daily traffic (AADT) volumes for 2035 using an area travel demand model (TDM) which includes all current planned and funded transportation projects. The models used in this analysis were developed by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF) in conjunction with the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) and the Matanuska Susitna Borough (MSB). The extents of the model include the entire network of the MSB and MOA from north of Willow all the way to Girdwood and east as far as the community of Sutton on the Glenn Highway. This model has been used to analyze the traffic impacts of the Knik Arm bridge project as well as the Highway-to-Highway project in downtown Anchorage and various Wasilla Bypass alternative corridors.

The model generates traffic volumes based on socio-economic background data such as population, income level, employment in various work sectors, and school enrollment, as well as a number of special generators such as hotels and airports.

The results of the model were used as a baseline for recommendations and for judging project impacts.

Figure 1 on page 4 presents a diagram of the City of Houston with 2035 AADTs for key roadways taken from the TDM.

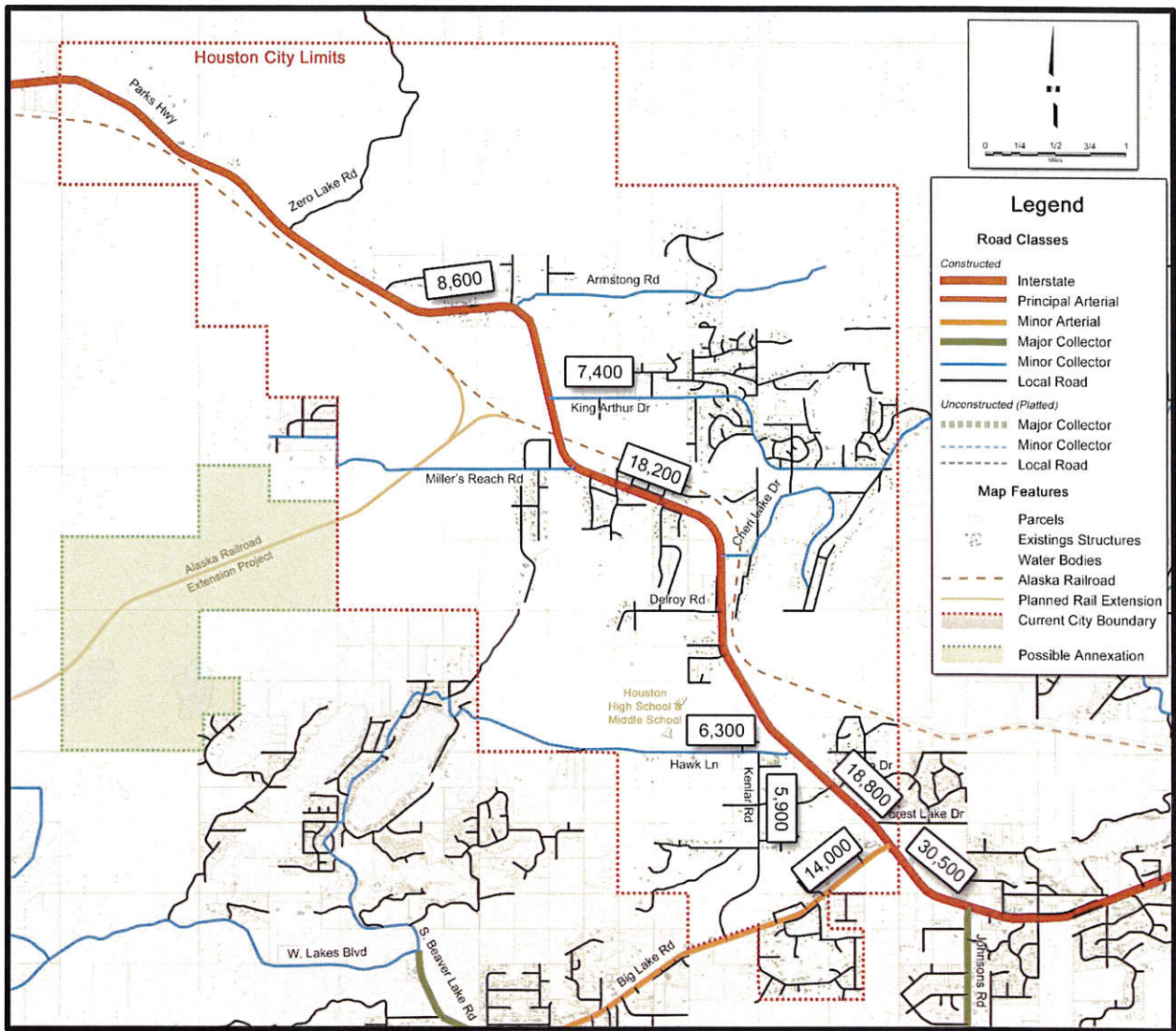


Figure 1 - Projected 2035 Demand Volumes

Note that the above figure shows a planned extension of the Alaska Railroad (ARR) which would link to the existing rail line within Houston city limits.

#### 4 Performance Estimates

One key concern which has arisen from this analysis is the potential 2035 traffic volumes between Big Lake Road and King Arthur Road. These volumes were presented earlier in Figure 1 above. The travel demand model used in this analysis indicates that the volumes north of Big Lake will grow to about 18,500 AADT in the horizon year. Currently these road segments carry 7,000 AADT. This increase is partially a result of the inclusion of the proposed Knik Arm Bridge and Wasilla Bypass Road alternatives in the TDM which would pull additional traffic from Anchorage and Wasilla to attractions in Houston and north on the Parks.

KE used planning level screening analysis to estimate the performance of the existing Parks Highway in this area (a 2-lane undivided rural road). The approximate capacity of the Parks Highway through Houston is 16,500 AADT to achieve a level of service of "D", which is the limit of what is recommended by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. The projected volumes would be at or above this approximate capacity threshold, which suggests that if growth occurs in accordance with the TDM it will likely result in congestion on the Parks Highway between Big Lake Road and King Arthur Road.

Note these projected volumes are equivalent to the traffic volumes currently traveling along segments farther east on the Parks Highway (such as between Vine Street and Pittman Road). As traffic volumes grow over time, congestion and safety concerns similar to current conditions on the Parks Highway MP 44-52 are likely.

## **5 Future Projects**

---

Several planned and future capital projects are included in the scope of this study. These projects include the Parks Highway MP 44-52 Upgrade, the Alaska Railroad Port MacKenzie Rail Extension, and a Port MacKenzie to Parks Highway roadway corridor.

The scope of this study includes the recent annexation of Knikatnu/CIRI lands into the City of Houston along the route of the planned rail extension, as shown in green in Figure 1.

### **5.1 Project 1 – Parks Highway MP 44-52 Upgrade Phase 3**

The Parks Highway MP 44-52 Upgrade Phase 3 project is the third and final phase of an ADOT&PF central region project that is currently in final design with planned construction completion in 2017. The entire project extends from Lucus Road to Big Lake Road. Phase 3 of the project is the section from Pittman Road to Big Lake Road, entering the city limits of Houston.

The project will expand the existing 2-lane Parks Highway facility to a full 4-lane divided facility from Wasilla west to Big Lake Road. The main goal of the project is to improve safety along the corridor which historically has had a high rate of severe crashes. The project would also alleviate congestion by increasing estimated segment AADT capacity from approximately 16,500 to 33,000 vehicles per day (vpd). This would result in faster and more consistent trips between Houston or Big Lake and the city of Wasilla, which would impact the economic development in these communities. Additionally, the project would include frontage roads and additional signals, which could also affect the economic development along the corridor.

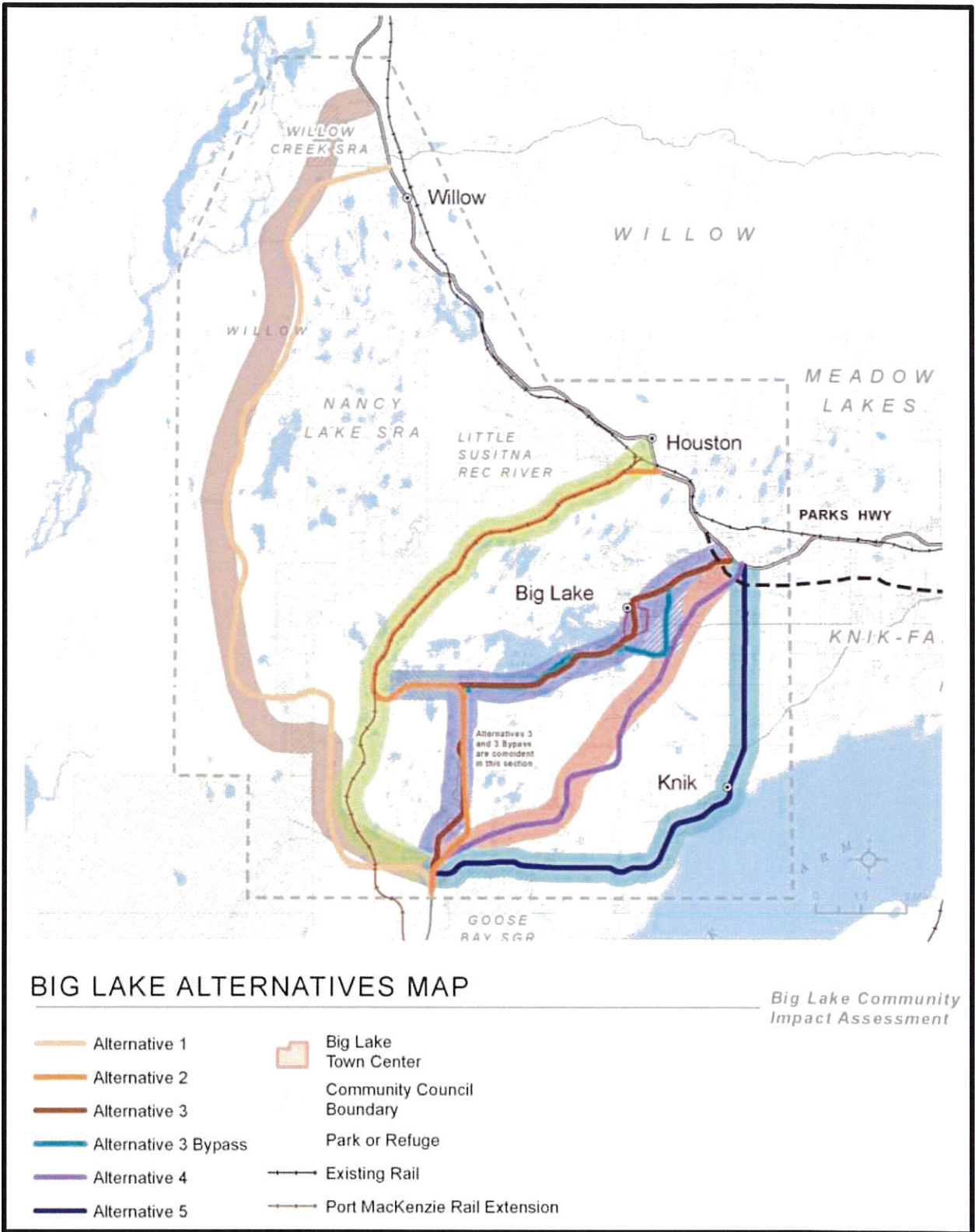
Due to the scheduled completion date of this project, it is already included in the base traffic volume forecast.

Likely effects of the Parks Highway upgrade include an increase in the number of recreational trips to the City of Houston from Wasilla and surrounding communities; however, local traffic growth as a result of population increases is expected to continue at a steady pace.

## **5.2 Project 2 – Port MacKenzie to Parks Highway Roadway Corridor**

This proposed project would construct a more direct route from Point MacKenzie to the Parks Highway. Various routes have been considered in conjunction with the 2003 Matanuska Susitna Borough Rail Corridor Study, the 2007 Port MacKenzie Rail Corridor Study and the Big Lake Community Impact Assessment in 2013. Figure 2 on page 7 shows the alternatives studied in the more recent Big Lake study, conducted by the Matanuska Susitna Borough.



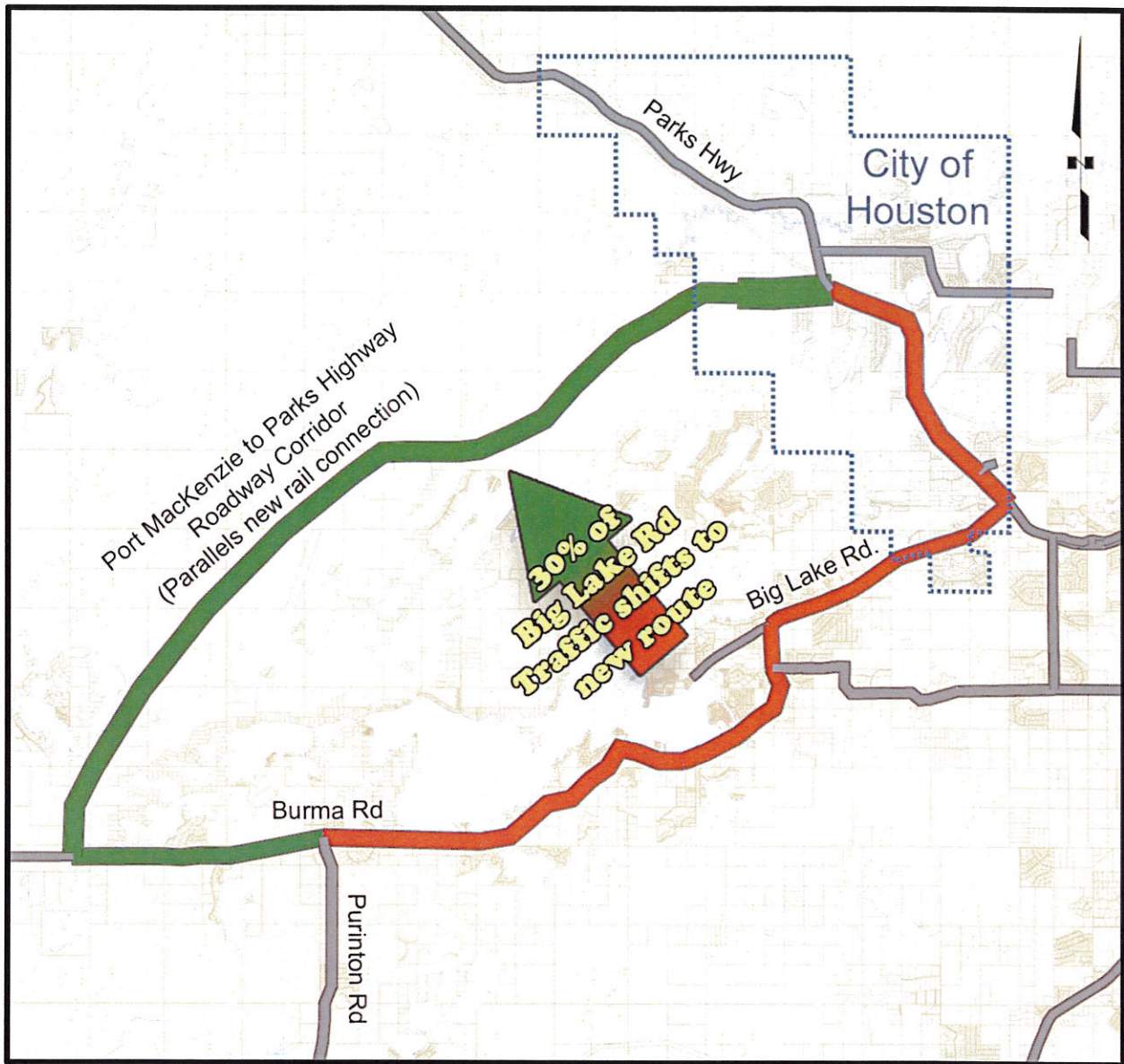


Source: *Big Lake Community Impact Assessment, 2013*  
**Figure 2 - Port Mackenzie to Parks Highway Road Alternatives Map**

The only alternative that falls within the City of Houston is Alternative 2 which would run north from the port along the section line currently occupied by Purinton Road until it reaches Burma Road. At this point it would travel west on Burma and intersect the railroad extension and would parallel the railroad tracks north to Houston. It would access the Parks Highway at or around the Millers Reach Road intersection.

The expected traffic impacts were assessed using two different versions of the travel demand model. One with the currently planned road network and a second with the alternative road segments included. The road section is modeled as a 2-lane undivided road with a design speed of 65 mph in accordance with assumptions in the planning studies.

Figure 3 on page 9 shows a general diagram of the positive and negative AADT impacts of the alternative route.



**Figure 3 - Traffic Impacts of Road Extension**

Note that the traffic impacts would not be highly significant when compared to the current system. The existing distance from Millers Reach Road to the intersection of Purinton and Burma is approximately 15 miles via Big Lake Road. The alternative corridor between these same two points would be approximately 16 miles. Therefore, the benefit for travel would be exclusively based on the fact that the new route would have a design speed of 65 mph, compared to Big Lake Road which is currently posted at 55 mph, the reduced turbulence of adjacent access along Big Lake Road, and the avoidance of existing and future traffic signals or roundabouts in Big Lake.

Likely effects of a new and improved route between Port MacKenzie and Houston include a shift of traffic volumes from Big Lake to Houston of about 4,000 vehicles per day, which is approximately 30% of projected daily traffic on Big Lake Road. A large percentage of

the heavy vehicle trips on Big Lake Road would be included in this shifted traffic, particularly after the construction of the Knik Arm Bridge. The decrease in travel time using the new route, if the travel speed is 65 mph, is approximately 5 minutes, considering side street friction and intersection delay due to signals and roundabouts.

### **5.3 Project 3 – Port MacKenzie Rail Extension**

The Alaska Railroad has begun construction on a 32-mile rail line from Port MacKenzie to connect with the existing ARR line within the City of Houston. The location of the planned rail line was shown previously in Figure 1 on page 4.

The ARR does not currently have any plans to construct facilities or base any operations at the new railroad junction in Houston. Therefore direct socioeconomic impacts (and therefore traffic impacts) due to the rail line project alone are considered to be minimal.

The ARR has expressed willingness to accommodate loading facilities at the junction for private development. The potential passenger car traffic associated with operations such as this would be minimal compared to overall traffic. However, this may have a considerable impact on the percentage of trucks in the local road network.

One scenario currently being considered would use the rail junction as a loading site for material currently being driven by truck north from Big Lake to Fairbanks. Therefore, trips that currently exist on Big Lake Road and the Parks Highway through Houston, would now be turning in and out of a railroad access point at or near Millers Reach Road. Likely accommodations for these truck traffic maneuvers would involve constructing turn lanes to remove the trucks from the travel lanes on the Parks Highway and providing adequate sight distance for trucks leaving the access road to enter the Parks Highway. The existing intersection of Millers Reach Road and the Parks Highway does not meet these characteristics, as it is on the outside of a curve and has no additional turn lanes.

## **6 Recommendations**

---

The following are general traffic-related observations and recommendations for the City of Houston.

### **6.1 Functional Classifications**

The current traffic volumes on roads outside the Parks Highway corridor are currently at the level of local roads regardless of their planned functional classification. Although several roads are currently classified as “Minor Collectors” they have not yet matured to the point where this function is critical to maintain. Volume projections indicate that in the future, a properly designed and well maintained collector road network will be essential. The current functional classifications of roads were shown previously in Figure 1 on page 4.

It is recommended that the “minor collector” road network in the City of Houston should be preserved. Property driveways should access local roads when possible instead of collector roads and new local roads should be constructed with adequate spacing from adjacent roads to accommodate possible future turn lanes. Additionally, local roads accessing on opposite sides of a collector should be aligned directly across from each other to eliminate offset

intersections. Consideration should be made to possible future right-of-way needs around minor collectors in case these roads ever need to be widened for turn lanes or pathways, particularly in areas around intersections.

## **6.2 Access Management**

Access management will likely become a growing concern as traffic volumes on the Parks Highway continue to increase. The TDM indicates that the majority of growth on the Parks Highway would be local to Houston, rather than being related to pass-through traffic continuing north toward Fairbanks. This suggests that there will be a higher percentage of turning traffic on and off the highway.

One method of accommodating this increase in turning traffic is to encourage turns at safe, logical locations throughout the corridor. This means limiting the number of intersections with the Parks Highway, and relocating trips to consolidated intersections through the use of parallel connections and frontage roads. Specifically, frontage roads are recommended in the existing commercial zone south of Armstrong Road where linked parking lots currently operate as a de facto frontage road.

If the traffic volumes do increase to the level indicated in the 2035 model, a 4-lane divided highway would likely be necessary with access points at a minimum of ½ mile increments. It is recommended that the City of Houston plan for these access points, encouraging development patterns that would reduce the impact and cost of construction for a 4-lane divided highway.

## **6.3 Pedestrian Crossings**

In connection with the consolidation of turning traffic, consideration should also be made concerning the desired location for pedestrian crossings of the Parks Highway. As residential development continues to grow north of the Parks Highway, along King Arthur Road and Armstrong Road, commercial development is expected to increase adjacent to the highway. The major commercial developments currently are on the south side of the highway, and new commercial development is likely to expand out from this established location. This development creates a conflict as pedestrians make home based commercial trips which require crossing the Parks Highway.

Safer crossings could be encouraged through construction and proper maintenance of surrounding trail networks which would direct the flow of walking, biking and motorized pedestrians to reduced speed areas of the Parks Highway or to access points that might be signalized in the future.



APPENDIX E.  
LAND USE ASSESSMENT







Community Impact Assessment  
& Comprehensive Plan Revision

# [LAND USE ASSESSMENT]

Prepared for the City of Houston's Comprehensive Plan Revision

Prepared by:  
R&M Consultants, Inc.

Van Le, AICP  
Project Manager

November, 2015



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## 1.0 Land Use Analysis Overview

The purpose of a land use analysis and assessment is to evaluate the existing land use and zoning districts to determine if there is enough land in the future for the projected growth and desired future residential, commercial and Industrial development. A land use analysis includes a build out analysis which uses existing and projected land use data to determine if there is enough capacity for growth if every parcel of land is developed in the future.

### 1.1 Existing Conditions - Zoning District Map Evaluation, Land Use and Population

The purpose of this evaluation is to understand how much land is zoned for each type of district to help determine if there is enough of each district to support future needs based on growth projections. Approximately 16,210 acres are zoned with the City of Houston, including the newly annexed and zoned Knikatnu, Inc. owned lands. The table below summarized the zoning district area by type.

**Table 1: Existing Zoning by Acreage and % of Total Land**

| Zoning District                                       | Approx.<br>Area (acres) | Percent of Total |
|---|-------------------------|------------------|
| <b>PLI</b> – Public Lands and Institutions            | 3450                    | 21.28%           |
| <b>R-1</b> - Single-family and Two-family Residential | 3940                    | 24.30%           |
| <b>MFR</b> – Multifamily Residential                  | 960                     | 5.92%            |
| <b>RA 2.5</b> – Residential / Agriculture             | 190                     | 1.17%            |
| <b>RA 5</b> – Low-Density Residential Agriculture     | 2480                    | 15.30%           |
| <b>NC</b> – Neighborhood Commercial District          | 0                       | 0%               |
| <b>C</b> – Commercial District                        | 210                     | 1.30%            |
| <b>LI</b> – Light Industrial                          | 1290                    | 7.96%            |
| <b>HI</b> – Heavy Industrial                          | 1460                    | 9.01%            |
| <b>H</b> – Holding District                           | 1270                    | 7.83%            |
| <b>PH</b> – Parks Highway District                    | 960                     | 5.92%            |

Of the approximately 16,210 acres within the City of Houston, almost 80% or 12,961 acres of that total land is undeveloped. Approximately 15% of the total land in Houston is currently being used for residential purposes. The following table summarizes the area of existing land uses by type.

**Table 2: Existing Land Uses by Acreage and % of Total Land**

| Land Use                      | Area (acres)  | % Of Total  |
|-------------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Churches                      | 2             | 0.01%       |
| Commercial – Heavy            | 12            | 0.07%       |
| Commercial – Light            | 32            | 0.20%       |
| Communications                | 10            | 0.06%       |
| Duplex – Two-Family           | 11            | 0.07%       |
| Education – Public            | 241           | 1.49%       |
| Mobile Home                   | 97            | 0.60%       |
| Mobile Home Parks             | 1             | 0.01%       |
| Multi Family                  | 12            | 0.07%       |
| Public Use                    | 18            | 0.11%       |
| Public Safety                 | 93            | 0.57%       |
| Recreation                    | 3             | 0.02%       |
| Residential                   | 2435          | 15.02%      |
| Residential Garage            | 261           | 1.61%       |
| Residential W/ Commercial Use | 10            | 0.06%       |
| Transient Lodging             | 11            | 0.07%       |
| Vacant                        | 12961         | 79.96%      |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>16,210</b> | <b>100%</b> |

**Table 3: Vacant Residentially Zoned Land by Residential Zoning District**

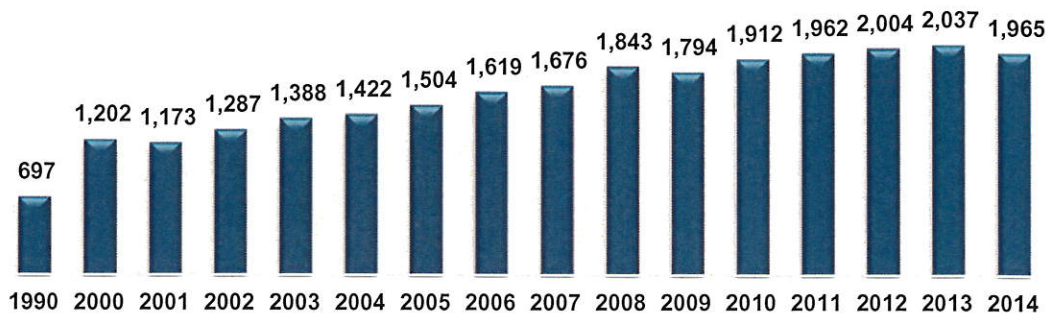
| Zoning        | Vacant (Acres) |
|---------------|----------------|
| <b>R-1</b>    | <b>2582</b>    |
| <b>RA-2.5</b> | <b>55</b>      |
| <b>RA-5</b>   | <b>1690</b>    |
| <b>MFR</b>    | <b>416</b>     |

**Total 4327**

## 2.0 Population and Population Projections

Houston experienced steady population growth over the past two decades. In 2014, Houston’s population was estimated at 1,965 residents – nearly triple its 697 residents in 1990 (182 percent growth, see Figure 1). In comparison, the entire Mat-Su grew from 39,683 to 98,063 over the same period (147 percent growth, see Figure 4).

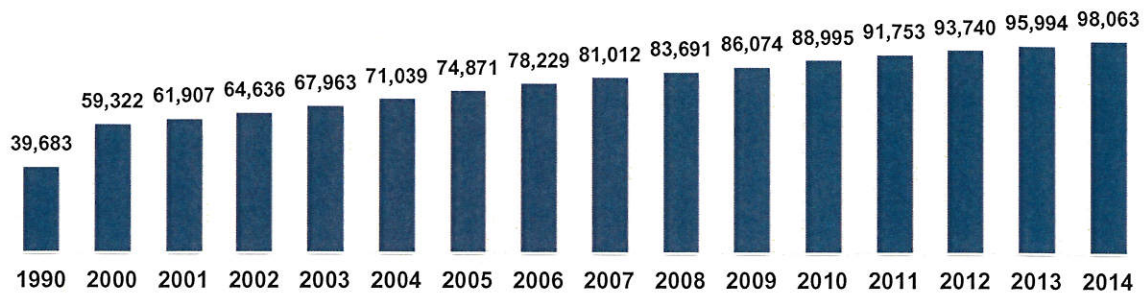
Figure 1: Houston Population, 1990 and 2000-2014



Source: ADOLWD

Houston is expected to match the broader Mat-Su Borough in terms of population growth, which ADOLWD projects population growth to slow from the current annual growth rate of slightly more than 3.6% to less than 2% by 2035.

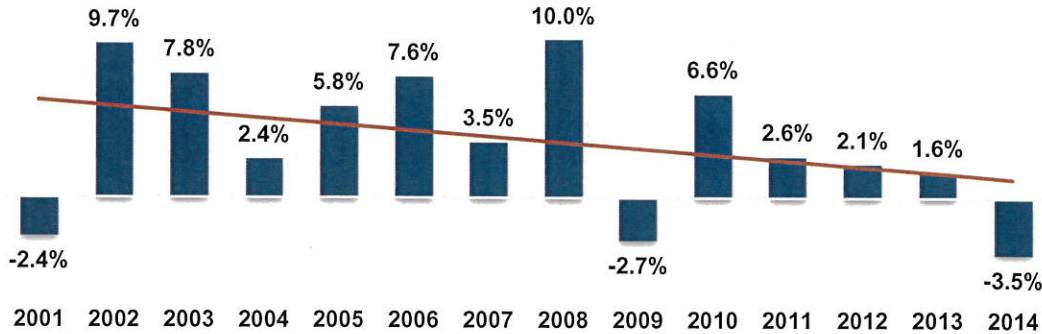
Figure 2: Mat-Su Borough Population, 1990 and 2000-2014



McDowell Group projects Houston’s population growing at a similar rate of approximately 2% over the current period to 2015. With this growth rate, Houston is projected to grow to slightly more than 3,100 residents in 2035, which is an increase of around 50% from current population levels.

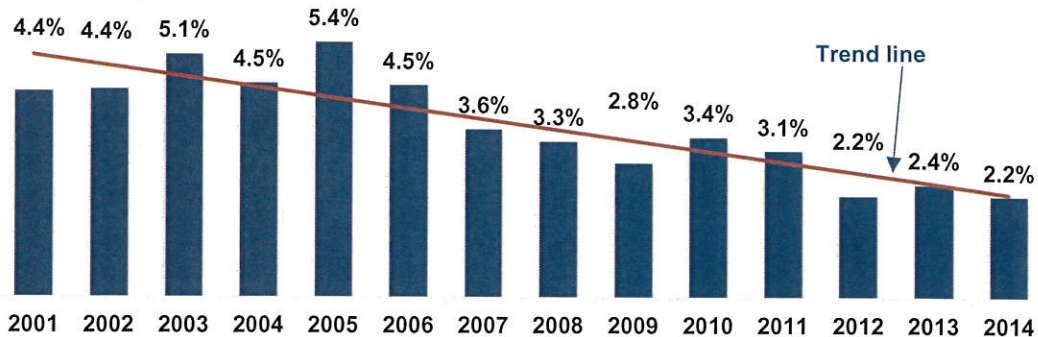
In recent years, population growth rates have slowed in both Houston and the Mat-Su Borough. As shown in Figure 3, Houston grew by 2.6 percent from 2010 to 2011, but experience negative growth from 2013 and 2014. On average, Houston grew 0.7 percent annually since 2011. In comparison, the Borough’s population grew 2.5 percent per year, on average, since 2011 (see Figure 4).

Figure 3: Houston Annual Population Growth Rate, 2001-2014



Source: ADOLWD

Figure 4: Mat-Su Borough Annual Population Growth Rate, 2001-2014



Source: ADOLWD

**Population Projections**

This analysis provides population projections for Houston, based on extending past trends into the future. This methodology differs from a forecast, which would account for economic and other factors with the potential to affect population change. Forces that may affect population growth in Houston over the next 20 years include the following:

- **Economic conditions in Alaska**, including factors such as oil prices, gas line development, and other events in the oil and gas industry (responsible for about a third of Alaska’s economy). In



general, increases in economic activity are accompanied by increases in population. Conversely, if economic activity contracts, population growth tends to slow or decline.

- **Economic conditions in Anchorage** might affect Mat-Su's role as a "bedroom" community (a third of the Mat-Su Borough's labor force is employed in Anchorage). Job growth in Anchorage can have population effects in the Mat-Su Borough.
- **Local (Mat-Su) economic conditions** – To the extent the local economy grows (or declines) in response to local events, related or unrelated to statewide or national economic trends, Houston's population could be affected.
- **The condition of the U.S. economy** – A weakening U.S. (Lower 48) economy can cause in-migration to Alaska, as the unemployed come to Alaska seeking work. Conversely, strong growth in the U.S. economy can lead to out-migration from Alaska.
- **Housing costs** – As long as housing prices are lower in the Mat-Su Borough compared to Anchorage, AND commuting costs remain stable, the Mat-Su Borough population will continue to have a large component of Anchorage workers and their households. A similar scenario has developed between Houston and Wasilla; with lower housing costs, some opt to live in Houston and commute to Wasilla (or Anchorage) for employment.
- **Natural growth and other demographic trends** – Birth and death rates, aging of the population, and other demographic forces may also affect local population trends.

It is beyond the scope of this study to consider all of these factors. However, statewide and local population projections, prepared by the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development (ADOLWD) can be used as the basis for Houston-specific projections.

ADOLWD periodically prepares long-term population forecasts for Alaska overall and for local areas. The most recent projections, published in April 2014, indicate slow growth (0.8 percent annually) over the next 25 years for the state overall.<sup>1</sup> The Mat-Su Borough is expected to continue experiencing the fastest rates of growth, at 1.9 percent annually (see Table 4).

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<sup>1</sup> Alaska Population Projections, 2012-2042. Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, April 2014.

**Table 4: Alaska Statewide and Local Area Population Projections, 2012 to 2042**

|                              | Percent Growth | Annual Growth Rate |
|------------------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| Anchorage                    | 35%            | 1.0%               |
| Mat-Su Borough               | 77%            | 1.9%               |
| Kenai Peninsula Borough      | 15%            | 0.5%               |
| Fairbanks North Star Borough | 32%            | 0.9%               |
| City and Borough of Juneau   | 2%             | 0.1%               |
| <b>Statewide</b>             | <b>26%</b>     | <b>0.8%</b>        |

Source: ADOLWD

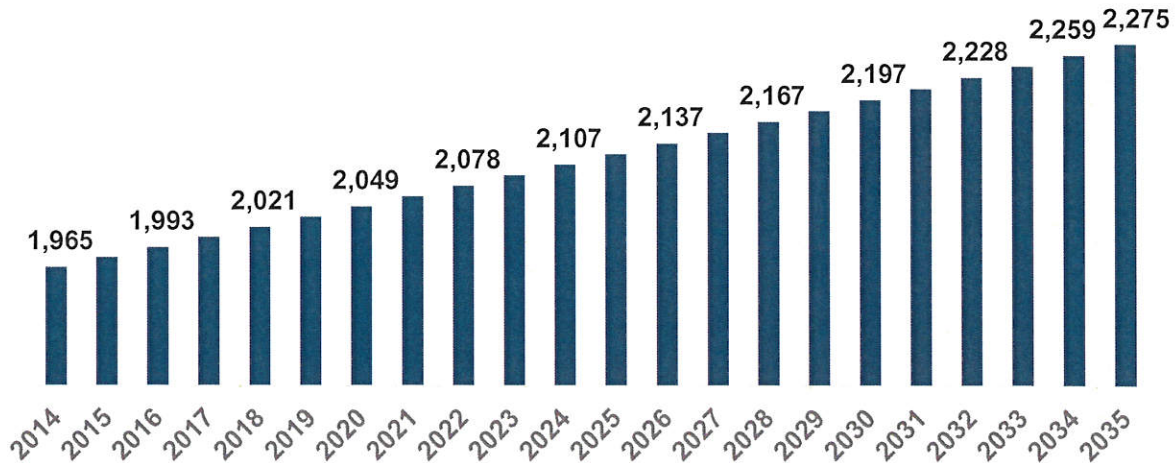
ADOLWD uses a “cohort component” methodology, separating the population of each gender into age groups and aging them forward in time, then adding projected births and in-migrants and subtracting projected deaths and out-migrants. ADOLWD assigns each borough/census area its own unique mortality, fertility, and migration rates “based on recent data and knowledge of the specific populations.” Again, these projections do not consider particular events in the economy (such as Alaska’s current state government budget deficits or low oil prices in general).

For purposes of this study, three growth projections have been defined, including low-case, mid-case, and high-case projections. These projections are described, below.

#### **Low Growth Scenario**

The Low Growth Scenario assumes Houston’s projected growth between 2014 and 2035 will be similar to the recent 4-year (2011-2014) average annual growth of 0.7 percent. Under this scenario, Houston’s population will grow by 310 persons between 2014 and 2035, for an overall growth rate of 16 percent during that time period (see Figure 5). Based on an average of 2.6 persons per household (2010 Census), this growth would indicate 119 new housing units would be needed to accommodate this population growth by 2035.

Figure 5: Low Growth Scenario, Project Annual Average Growth Rates, Houston, 2014-2035



Source: McDowell Group estimates

#### Mid Growth Scenario

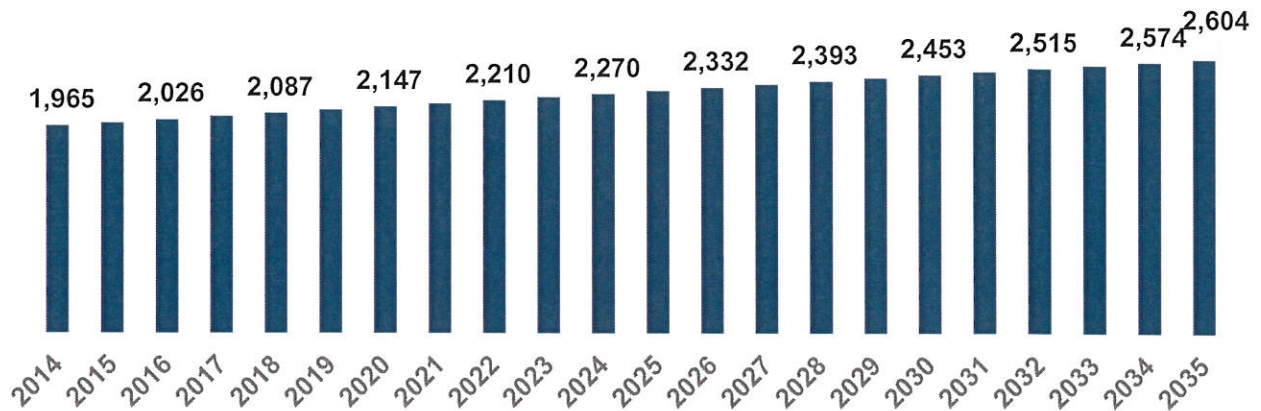
The Mid Growth Scenario applies a growth rate at the mid-point between those used in the high and low growth scenarios (see Table 3). Under this scenario, it is estimated that Houston's population will grow by 639 persons between 2014 and 2035, or 33 percent growth overall (see Figure 6). Based on an average of 2.6 persons per household, this growth would indicate 246 new housing units would be needed to accommodate this population growth by 2035.

Table 5: Mid Growth Scenario, Projected Annual Average Growth Rates, Houston 2014-2035

| Years     | Annual Growth Rate |
|-----------|--------------------|
| 2014-2017 | 1.54%              |
| 2017-2022 | 1.45%              |
| 2022-2027 | 1.35%              |
| 2027-2032 | 1.26%              |
| 2032-2035 | 1.16%              |

Source: McDowell Group calculations

Figure 6: Mid Growth Scenario, Projected annual Average Growth Rates, Houston 2014-2035



Source: McDowell Group estimates

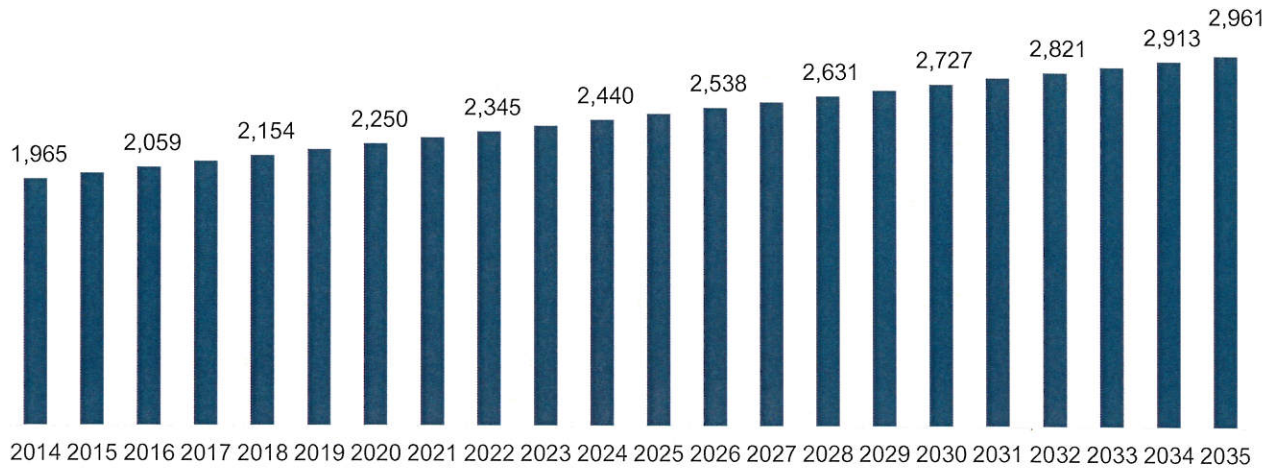
### High Growth Scenario

The High Growth Scenario assumes Houston matches the broader Mat-Su estimates for population growth as projected by ADOLWD (see Table 4). Under this scenario, it is estimated that Houston's population will grow by 996 persons between 2014 and 2035, for an overall growth rate of 51 percent (see Figure 7). Based on an average of 2.6 persons per household, this growth would require 383 new housing units by 2035.

Table 6: High Growth Scenario, Projected Annual Average Growth Rates, Mat-Su Borough, 2014-2035

| Years     | Births | Deaths | Net Migration | Population Change | Annual Growth Rate |
|-----------|--------|--------|---------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| 2014-2017 | 1,400  | 506    | 1,469         | 2,363             | 2.37%              |
| 2017-2022 | 1,591  | 621    | 1,476         | 2,446             | 2.19%              |
| 2022-2027 | 1,782  | 755    | 1,455         | 2,482             | 2.00%              |
| 2027-2032 | 1,962  | 909    | 1,419         | 2,472             | 1.81%              |
| 2032-2035 | 2,128  | 1,072  | 1,359         | 2,415             | 1.62%              |

Note: Average annual numbers are rounded to whole numbers. Source: ADOLWD

**Figure 7: High Growth Scenario, Projected Annual Average Growth Rates, Houston, 2014-2035**

Source: McDowell Group estimates.

### 3.0 Build Out and Housing Needs Assessment

#### Housing in Houston

According to Mat-Su Borough and City of Houston data, there are 999 housing units in Houston. Single-family detached units make up 85 percent (846 units) of all housing units, with the remaining composed of 62 multi-family dwellings, 8 duplexes, and 85 mobile homes (see Table 9).

**Table 7: Total Housing Units by Housing Type**

|                            | Count      |             |
|----------------------------|------------|-------------|
| <b>Total housing units</b> | <b>991</b> | <b>100%</b> |
| Single-Family Detached     | 846        | 85%         |
| Mobile Home                | 85         | 9%          |
| Multi-Family               | 62         | 6%          |
| Duplex                     | 8          | 1%          |

Columns may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding. Source: City of Houston, Mat-Su Borough

The current amount of land zoned for residential development is considered for the total build out capacity. Using minimum lot sizes stated in the City of Houston Municipal Code, Title 10 Land Use Regulations and the *Housing Needs Analysis* to be conducted by the McDowell Group, the amount of potential housing units and type of housing can be determined.

This estimate is corroborated by the American Community Survey's 2009-2013 5-year estimate of 991 housing units in Houston. Of these units 72 percent (or 716 units) are considered occupied; and, of these units, 78 percent (561 units or 56 percent of all housing units) are owner-occupied.

According to the City of Houston Comprehensive Plan and Community Impact Assessment Household Survey conducted in November 2014, approximately 35 percent of local property owners do not reside in Houston. Presuming these nonresidents have a dwelling on their property, this would suggest approximately 350 homes in Houston are used as vacation/recreation properties (or otherwise used only occasionally).

### Houston Housing Characteristics

Housing data for Houston from the American Community Survey (2009-2013 5-year estimates) are provided in Table 8. The data suggests approximately 28 percent of housing units are unoccupied.

**Table 8: Houston Housing Units, Occupancy, and Vacancy Rates, 2009-2013 Five Year Estimates**

|                            | Count      | Margin of Error | Percent     | Margin of Error |
|----------------------------|------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|
| <b>Total housing units</b> | <b>991</b> | <b>+/-36</b>    | <b>100%</b> | <b>-</b>        |
| Occupied housing units     | 716        | +/-50           | 72.3%       | +/-4.9          |
| Vacant housing units       | 275        | +/-51           | 27.7%       | +/-4.9          |
| Homeowner vacancy rate     | 5.7%       | +/-2.9%         | -           | -               |
| Rental vacancy rate        | 9.9%       | +/-6.9%         | -           | -               |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009-2013 Five-Year Estimates.

The majority of housing units (55 percent) were built since 1990, with construction peaking between 2000 and 2009 (32.3 percent of the housing units) (See Table 9.0).

Table 9: Houston Housing Units, by Year Built, 2009-2013 Five Year Estimates

|                            | Count      | Margin of Error | Percent     | Margin of Error |
|----------------------------|------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|
| <b>Total housing units</b> | <b>991</b> | <b>+/-36</b>    | <b>100%</b> | <b>-</b>        |
| Built 2010 or later        | 39         | +/-21           | 3.9%        | +/-2.1          |
| Built 2000 to 2009         | 320        | +/-56           | 32.3%       | +/-5.6          |
| Built 1990 to 1999         | 189        | +/-50           | 19.1%       | +/-5.0          |
| Built 1980 to 1989         | 169        | +/-42           | 17.1%       | +/-4.2          |
| Built 1970 to 1979         | 147        | +/-43           | 14.8%       | +/-4.2          |
| Built 1960 to 1969         | 98         | +/-31           | 9.9%        | +/-3.1          |
| Built 1950 to 1959         | 24         | +/-19           | 2.4%        | +/-1.9          |
| Built 1940 to 1949         | 5          | +/-8            | 0.5%        | +/-0.8          |
| Built 1939 or earlier      | 0          | +/-9            | 0.0%        | +/-2.0          |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009-2013 Five-Year Estimates.

Table 9.0 indicates that 14 percent (+/-5.1 percent margin of error) of occupied housing units in Houston lack complete plumbing facilities, and 11 percent (+/- 5.0 percent) lack complete kitchen facilities.

**Table 10: Houston Occupied Housing Units, by Selected Utility Characteristics, 2009-2013 Five-Year Estimates**

|                                      | Count      | Margin of Error | Percent     | Margin of Error |
|--------------------------------------|------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|
| <b>Occupied housing units</b>        | <b>716</b> | <b>+/-50</b>    | <b>100%</b> | <b>-</b>        |
| Lacking complete plumbing facilities | 100        | +/-37           | 14.0%       | +/-5.1          |
| Lacking complete kitchen facilities  | 81         | +/-35           | 11.3%       | +/-5.0          |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009-2013 Five-Year Estimates.

The median value of an owner-occupied unit in Houston is estimated at \$177,300 (+/- \$20,161 margin of error, see Table 11.0). Almost a third (30 percent) of these units are estimated to be valued at less than \$100,000.

**Table 11: Houston Housing Units, by Value of Owner-Occupied Units, 2009-2013 Five Year Estimates**

|                             | Count            | Margin of Error     | Percent     | Margin of Error |
|-----------------------------|------------------|---------------------|-------------|-----------------|
| <b>Owner-occupied units</b> | <b>561</b>       | <b>+/-47</b>        | <b>100%</b> | <b>-</b>        |
| Less than \$50,000          | 92               | +/-33               | 16.4%       | +/-5.7          |
| \$50,000 to \$99,999        | 77               | +/-28               | 13.7%       | +/-4.9          |
| \$100,000 to \$149,999      | 47               | +/-22               | 8.4%        | +/-3.7          |
| \$150,000 to \$199,999      | 120              | +/-40               | 21.4%       | +/-7.1          |
| \$200,000 to \$299,999      | 143              | +/-41               | 25.5%       | +/-6.9          |
| \$300,000 to \$499,999      | 70               | +/-28               | 12.5%       | +/-4.8          |
| \$500,000 to \$999,999      | 12               | +/-15               | 2.1%        | +/-2.7          |
| \$1,000,000 or more         | 0                | +/-9                | 0.0%        | +/-3.5          |
| <b>Median (dollars)</b>     | <b>\$177,300</b> | <b>+/- \$20,161</b> | <b>-</b>    | <b>-</b>        |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009-2013 Five-Year Estimates

### Housing Demand Projections

Housing demand will grow (or decline) with changes in population, as discussed above. However, demographic trends can also have specific impacts on housing demand. Demographic factors affecting future housing demand in Houston include:



- **Aging:** The aging of Houston's population will result in changes in household characteristics and housing preferences. For example, U.S. Census data for Anchorage suggests that householders younger than 34 year and older than 64 are more likely to live in rental or multifamily units, and householders between age 35 and 64 are more likely to live in owner-occupied single-family detached housing.

Additionally, one of the important demographic questions in the coming years is how baby-boomers will behave when they reach retirement age. Will they leave Alaska? Move from Anchorage or Wasilla? Older households will make a variety of housing choices. Many will choose to remain in their homes as long as they are able. Some may downsize to smaller single-family homes; these will be a mixture of owner and renter units. Some may choose to move away from Houston to be closer to specialized medical facilities or to be closer to family care-givers.

- **Household composition:** Houston may be impacted by similar state and national trends in decreasing household size over time due to aging of the householders and smaller families. For example, as householders age, fewer households include children under the age of 18.
- **Income Levels and Home Affordability:** Income levels also affect demand for different types of housing. For example, families with lower incomes may prefer higher density housing (such as duplex, two-family townhouse, and some types of multifamily housing) and are more likely to be renters. Data from the American Community Survey (2009-2013 5-year estimates) estimate that home prices in Houston are 22 percent lower than Wasilla (\$177,300 median value for owner-occupied homes in Houston compared to \$227,800 in Wasilla). Lower housing costs make Houston an attractive place to live, including commuters to Wasilla.

Another factor affecting housing in Houston is the potential for increased demand for vacation and recreational properties.

While many factors can impact housing demand, shifts in population are the main driving force. Based on low, mid, and high population growth scenarios, housing units needed in Houston to accommodate new demand can be estimated.

Under a low growth scenario, approximately 119 new occupied housing units will be needed by 2035; under a high growth scenario, 383 new occupied housing units will be required. The mid-point is 246 new occupied housing units by 2035 (see Table 10). While some of this demand can be met by conversion of vacant housing units (currently estimated at 5.7 percent, see Table 5), new housing development will be clearly needed.

**Table 12: Low, High, and Mid Growth Scenarios, Future Housing Demand in Houston, Number of Housing Units, Houston, Various Years (2014-2035)**

| Years                     | Low-Growth  | Mid-Growth  | High-Growth |
|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 2014                      | 756         | 756         | 756         |
| 2017                      | 772         | 791         | 811         |
| 2022                      | 799         | 850         | 902         |
| 2027                      | 828         | 909         | 994         |
| 2035                      | 875         | 1,001       | 1,139       |
| <b># Growth 2014-2035</b> | <b>+119</b> | <b>+246</b> | <b>+383</b> |

Source: McDowell Group estimates.

### Land Use Implications

Residential development in Houston can occur on land zoned as:

- R-1: 1-acre minimum lot size designated for single-family and two-family (low density)
- MFR (multifamily): designated for medium density use
- RA-2.5: 2.5 acre lot designated for residential/agriculture use
- RA-5: 5-acre lot size designated for low density residential use

According to City of Houston and Mat-Su Borough GIS data, a total of 4,742 acres within Houston are vacant, buildable, and zoned for residential development (see Table 3.0 and Table 13.0 below). This level of vacant land suggests an ample amount of zoned land is available to address future housing demand and residential development for single-family homes and multi-family homes in Houston by 2035, based on the population projections described in this analysis.

**Table 13: Vacant Acreage by Zone District and Housing Demand, Houston, 2014**

| Zone District   | Vacant Zoned Acreage | Number of Available Buildable Lots | Low Growth Scenario Additional # of housing units by 2035 | Mid Growth Scenario Additional # of housing units by 2035 | High Growth Scenario Additional # of housing units by 2035 |
|---|----------------------|------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| R-1   | 2,582                | 2,582                              |   |   |  |
| RA-2.5  | 55                   | 22                                 |   |   |  |
| RA-5  | 1,690                | 338                                |   |   |  |
| MFR   | 416                  | 104                                |   |   |  |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>4,742</b>         | <b>3,046</b>                       | <b>119</b>  | <b>246</b>  | <b>383</b>   |
| <b>Housing Demand by Housing Type</b>                     |                      |                                    |   |   |  |
| Single Family Detached Demand (85 percent of total units) |                      |                                    | <b>101</b>  | <b>209</b>  | <b>326</b>   |
| Multi-family Demand (15 percent)                          |                      |                                    | <b>18</b>   | <b>37</b>   | <b>57</b>  |

Source: Mat-Su Borough, City of Houston, McDowell Group estimates.

### 3.1 Residential Build Out

Table 14: Existing Zoning by Housing Type under Existing Zoning, Capacity for New Housing

| Existing Zoning and Capacity for Future Growth (Base Growth) by Housing Type, Under Existing Residential Zoning |                              |                           |                           |                          |
|---|------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Housing Category  | Existing Housing Stock       |                           | Total Build Out Capacity  |                          |
| SINGLE FAMILY   | Existing # Housing Units     | Percent of Existing Units | Potential # Housing Units | Percent of Housing Units |
| Single Family (Detached)  | 846                          | 84.7%                     | 2194                      | 85%                      |
| Single Family Large Lot (2.5 acre lots)   |                              |                           | 22                        | 1%                       |
| Single Family Large Lot (5 acre lots)   |                              |                           | 338                       | 13%                      |
| Single Family (Attached)  | 8 Duplex                     | 0.8%                      | 21                        | 1%                       |
| <b>Sub Total 1</b>  | 851                          | 85.2%                     | 2963                      | 100%                     |
| <b>Multi Family, Residential Other</b>  |                              |                           |                           |                          |
| Multi-Family (3 Units or more)  | 62                           | 6.2%                      | 104                       | 6%                       |
| Residential/Commercial  | (2 parcels no units listed)  | 0%                        |                           |                          |
| Mobile Homes  | 85 (1 MH Park Unit)          | 8.6%                      | 196                       | 9%                       |
| Residential Other - Residential Garage  | No dwelling units            | 0%                        |                           |                          |
| Transient Lodging   | 2 parcels, no dwelling units | 0%                        |                           |                          |
| <b>Sub Total 2</b>  | 148                          | 14.8%                     | 300                       | 15%                      |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>999</b>                   | <b>100%</b>               | <b>3263</b>               | <b>100%</b>              |

### 4.0 School Needs Analysis (MSB Data Source)

Another indication of future land needs is population growth of students based on student multiplier and population projects for Houston and the Mat-Su from the Mat-Su Borough School District. Future school and educational facilities needs are based on population projections, and based on housing type to accommodate that future growth in student population. Below is a summary of the MSB School District Projections and summary of methods:

- Grades at all school sites are moved ahead one grade level, assuming 100% cohort survival.

- Kindergarten enrollment is established by analyzing live birth rate data determined by the State of Alaska, Department of Health and Social Services.
- A cohort survival rate is calculated for each grade level in each school by averaging the percent change over the two prior years. This rate is then applied to the incoming class to establish a projected enrollment by grade level.
- Grade level projections at every school are combined, providing for an aggregate, district wide enrollment projection.
- The District analyzes economic trends and other factors that may assist in determining the accuracy of its projected enrollment and adjusts accordingly.

Based on the two year cohort survival method, the following anticipated enrollment projections for the upcoming years are:

- FY16: 18,098 Students
- FY17: 18,303 Students
- FY18: 18,458 Students
- FY19: 18,379 Students

These enrollment projections were completed 10 months ago and MSB has already exceeded their projection of 18,098 for the 2015-16 school year. MSB is currently serving 18,455 students. Being that the State's student count period does not take place until October, MSB has held off in updating their enrollment projections for the time being.

#### Demographic Analysis and Enrollment Forecast Summary

Western Demographers provided a demographic analysis and enrollment forecast study that was completed in spring 2015. Western Demographers used their own methodology to arrive enrollment projections across the Valley and takes into account economic trends, the housing market, etc.

#### School District and Borough Overall Growth Estimates (2010-2013)

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District has grown at approximately 1.5 percent for the past year. The University of Alaska at Anchorage Institute of Social and Economic Research has maintained a standard 3.06 percent growth estimate for the MSB for the foreseeable future and has considered downgrading that figure to two percent. Recent population estimates from the Census Bureau American Community Survey support the eventual estimate of a 2% percent growth given the most recent measured annual growth rate of 2.46 percent.

**Table 15: Mat-Su Borough Population Growth and Change**

| Year       | 2010   | 2011   | 2012   | 2013   |
|------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Population | 84,147 | 86,817 | 89,319 | 91,519 |

|                   |  |       |       |       |
|-------------------|--|-------|-------|-------|
| Change            |  | 2,670 | 2,502 | 2,200 |
| Percentage Change |  | 3.17% | 2.88% | 2.46% |

The expected 1.5 percent growth will generate **1,200 elementary students, 800 middle school students** and **1,000 high school students** during the next ten years (2014-2024).

### School Needs

Growth in the Borough tends to suggest the future locations of new elementary school attendance areas. New housing will justify new elementary schools within the next decade in these areas:

1. Big Lake / Meadow Lake area
2. Machetanz / Cottonwood Creek / Snowshoe
3. A possible additional elementary serving the far west KGB corridor

Additional school facility needs based on the MSB 6 year CIP (FY 2017-FY 2022):

1. New Knik Area High School
2. New Wasilla Area Elementary School (Hyer Road)
3. New Palmer Area Elementary School

### Mat-Su Housing Growth & School Facility Implications

Most development in the Borough has relied on water wells and septic systems as the primary source of domestic utilities and future, build-out modeling has assumed the continuation of low-density development. Growth underway in the Mat-Su is the result of a variety of trends:

- **Housing costs** in the Mat-Su relative to Anchorage have been historically low and have been well documented in local media as the conversation associated with the Anchorage land shortage has grown to address both residential and industrial land needs. Many Anchorage and Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER) employees have chosen to reside in the Mat-Su in order to afford owning a home vs. renting or to have more house for their money (purchasing power). Mat-Su homes, typically \$160K less than homes in Anchorage, are attractive to buyers.
- The Mat-Su Borough continues to embody the **Alaskan lifestyle** and foster **recreational amenities** that enrich the lives of all Alaskans. Fishing, hunting, sledding, mushing, skiing, boating and aviation opportunities in the Mat-Su are among the best in the State and are within easy reach of its largest population concentration. Many choose to live as close to these recreation amenities as possible. The Glenn Highway has effectively served to tie jobs to

housing and provide a transportation conduit in both directions between Anchorage and the Mat-Su.

- Historically, the Borough has added significant **new housing units** during the four most recent decades. The most significant housing was added in the 2000's with approximately 15,636 new housing units added between 2000 and 2009.

### Future School Needs

The two percent expected annual growth in the Mat-Su Borough and the 1.5 percent expected annual growth in school enrollment supported by this report will require the construction of two or three elementary schools and the completion of the Redington Secondary School Campus High School Facility. Other expansions including the Palmer Junior High may be required to address other capacity short-falls along with boundary changes to balance enrollment. These improvements will be required during the next five to eight years.

### 5.0 Commercial Space Needs Analysis

Houston currently has 12 acres of Heavy Commercial zoned land and 32 acres of Commercial Light Zoned land or less than 0.5% of the total land. Based on the current commercially zoned and commercial land use, there is not enough commercially zoned land for future development as desired by the City's need for more development to support the tax structure and to support the types of businesses needed to sustain the growing population. Table 16 below summarizes the existing Heavy Commercial Zoning and existing Light Commercial Zoning. The majority of the commercially zoned land is along the Parks Highway where there is good direct access but future Parks Highway upgrades may consolidate access and secondary access from side roads or shared frontage roads may be a reality.

**Table 16: Existing Commercial Land Use**

| Land Use           | Acres | Percent of Total |
|--------------------|-------|------------------|
| Commercial – Heavy | 12    | 0.08%            |
| Commercial - Light | 32    | 0.23%            |

### 6.0 Other Public Facilities Needs Analysis

#### 6.1 Parks and Recreation

The Land Use map has been updated to reflect the two parks in the City. Currently, there is only 3% of existing land uses are Recreation (see Table 2.0). Based on the desires of the community through the survey, stakeholder interviews, open houses and Steering Committee work, this is not enough recreation for the desired future for Houston to become a destination where outdoor recreation is a draw.

## 6.2 Library

Mat-Su 2014 Strategic Library Plan Map shows a future library in Houston but no implementation strategies or timeline for such a library is provided.

## 6.3 Public Safety

A new Fire Station and public safety facility is being planned by City of Houston for the area of Birch Road. If funding for a City based police force is anticipated, more facilities will be needed.

## 6.4 Transportation

A future Transportation Corridor to support the development of the railroad extension (from Port McKenzie) should be reserved for the future development of a road corridor from Port Mackenzie to Parks Highway through Houston.

## 7.0 Industrial Space Needs Analysis

There is currently no land use that has developed as either light industrial or heavy industrial. However, there is currently 1290 acres of Light Industrially Zoned land and 1460 acres of Heavy Industrially Zoned land including the Knikatnu, Inc. annexed land. With the availability of this newly zoned land, the need for industrially zoned land may be met for the short term but land use and growth policies may still warrant the need to determine if additional land is needed.

**Table 17: Existing Industrial Zoning Districts**

| Zoning           | Acres | Percent of Total Area |
|------------------|-------|-----------------------|
| Light Industrial | 1290  | 7.96%                 |
| Heavy Industrial | 1460  | 9.01%                 |

## 8.0 Subareas Analysis – (See Existing Land Use and Planning Concepts Map)

- Town Center District (Civic Center of Houston)
- Commercial Areas District (Commercial Activities Center of Houston)

- Geographic Center of Houston – Node

## 9.0 Suitability Analysis (See Map Packet)

Land suitability is an analysis to determine how much land is developable, based on environmental constraints. These natural constraints include wetlands, floodplains, and unstable soils, slopes that exceed 45% as well as any known historical or archeological sites. Vacant land is categorized into levels of suitability for development based on the presence of constraining environmental factors.

- 5.1.1 Suitable land is assumed to be 100% available for development
- 5.1.2 Marginally Suitable land is assumed to be 66% available (i.e. 60 out of every 100 acres of marginally suitable vacant land are considered developable)
- 5.1.3 Unsuitable land is assumed to be not available for development

Environmental data sets used for this analysis are sourced from the Matanuska Susitna Borough. Wetlands data is from the Cook Inlet Wetlands Inventory and the initial suitability analysis included all types of wetlands within the inventory as unsuitable land. After review, not all types of wetlands within the inventory are undevelopable and so we are working to refine that constraint in the analysis to more realistically represent that attribute.



Table 18: Existing Land Use Analysis and Recommendations

| Map Pages | Description  | Recommended Action                               |
|-----------|--|--|
| 1         | Parcel 73412 is split over the railway ROW and Parks Highway ROW and has 3 residential units   |  |
| 3         | Parcel 201824 is proposed Susitna Valley State Forest  | If State Forest is approved, update land use map |
| 8         | City parcel 6627 is where Fire House and City Hall are located. Current land use is recorded as Residential with Commercial Use                  | Change land use to PLI                           |
| 8         | Parcel 7346 is zoned PHD; 7 dwelling units exist on the designated single-family residential land use  | Change land use or zoning if needed              |
| 12        | Parcel 515626 is privately owned with 1 residential dwelling and parcel 57350 is privately owned with residential garage use; both zoned for PLI | Change zoning                                    |
| 15        | Parcels 56708, 49748 have split zoning of R-1 and Holding District buffering the railroad  | Eliminate split zoning                           |
| 17        | Parcel 73198 is privately owned, zoned for PLI. Recall discussion with Steering Committee that it might be park space?                           |  |
| 18        | Parcel 12086 has split zoning of R-1 and MRF buffering the railroad from the R-1   | Eliminate split zoning                           |
| 19        | Parcel 31015 is Borough owned and has Park designation according to City – land use map does not reflect this use                                | Update Land use map to show recreational use     |
| 22        | City owned parcel 83874 with one Mobile Home- what is this parcel? (it is zoned PLI)   |  |
| 23        | City owned parcels 27141, 48676 zoned R-1 - what are these parcels?  |  |
| 23        | Privately owned parcel 87426 is zoned for PLI  |  |
| 29        | Native Corp owned parcel 26121 is zoned RA-5 but with annexation, it is proposed to be rezoned to MFR  | If approved, update zoning from RA-5 to MFR      |

| Map Pages | Description  | Recommended Action  |
|-----------|--|---|
| 35        | City owned parcel 75182 on north shore of Loon Lake-zoning is R-1, should it be PLI? What is the parcel use?   |   |
| 41        | Borough owned parcel 59946 is zoned RA-5 - is this to remain Borough owned? Should it be rezoned for PLI?  |   |
| 43        | Parcel 67787 is privately owned, zoned for R-1 but is bordered by the Parks Highway and ARRC.  | Should be R-1.  |
| 46        | Parcel 31962 is privately owned, zoned for PLI and is split by the railroad – is it owned by ARRC? What is the intent of the parcel?                             |   |
| 47        | Parcels 37005, 46707, 14093, 20663, 1595 are zoned PLI but land use is private single family residentially used parcels. Zoning or land use needs to be updated. | COH: rezone parcels from PLI to R-1 or RA -2.5 or update land use |
| 47        | Parcel 33760 is zoned RA-2.5, use is single family residential, and has 4 residential units on it – zoning or land use might need to be updated                  |   |
| 49        | PLI zoned parcels 80457 and 27934 are privately owned  |   |
| 52        | Parcel 7018 is privately owned, single family residential land use with one dwelling unit – zoning is Commercial   |   |

#### General Notes:

- **Parks Highway District**
  - Intent: encourage a moderate level of growth which will provide the city with an economic base, employment opportunities, and decrease dependency on external governmental or economic factors. Encourage this area to support mixed residential and commercial use which maintains community character and promotes a community center.
  - Introduction of a **Town Center district** or overlay might replace this designation in some areas – PHD may not be needed at all if this is established
- **Neighborhood Commercial District**

- Intent: allows for the provisions of goods and services on a retail basis within residential districts to provide residents with convenience of neighborhood shopping. Intended to apply only to areas which are isolated from other commercial zones, located on collector streets rather than local roads but are easily accessible for the surrounding residential district.
- Currently, no parcels are zoned for NCD
  - City is discussing the removal of this zoning district, debating whether it serves a purpose separate from a conditional use within a residential district
- **Industrial Districts**
  - Newly annexed Knikatnu Inc. land is proposed for mainly HI and LI land uses.
    - Knikatnu, Inc. anticipates proposing through the CUP process the following projects:
      - Wastewater treatment plant
      - Railroad Reliant Industries
      - Warehousing and other Support Services
- **Commercial District**
  - Other than the Gold Miners Lodge in the northeast, only commercial zoning exists near the Big Lake Road intersection extending north to W Larae Road.
  - Parks Highway District currently allows for commercial development within it
    - If Parks Highway District is eliminated, Town Center District will most likely include some commercial but may way to reconsider some current PHD parcels for commercial designation
- **Recreation and Lake Access**
  - Concerns about lack of access and determined recreation spaces have been expressed within the Steering Committee as well as at the Open Houses
    - Only two areas are designated for recreation/parks – one is the Susitna Campground by City Hall and the other is the Park on the north shore of Bear Paw Lake

- No Parks and Recreation District exists within zoning, only PLI. Might want to consider creating a P&R District
- Parcel 31015 is owned by the Borough but surrounds the northern shoreline of Bear Paw Lake – Park designation according to our Project Area map but is not listed as a park on our land use map (update land use map)
- City owned parcel 75182 on north shore of Loon Lake, currently zoned for R-1 but could be PLI and has recreational and lake access potential
- Land west of Houston Middle and High Schools is owned by the Borough, zoned PLI has been sighted by the public as a potential area for recreational trails (CIA Open House)

### Next Steps

#### **Land Use Plan Map**

- a. Land Use Designations
- b. Designate distribution and general location of land uses including residential, commercial, industrial, parks and institutional development
- c. Address desired density, intensity, character of land use designations
- d. Ensure adequate housing, employment and recreation opportunities
- e. Maintain a balance distribution of land uses
- f. Provide guidance for future public facilities and utility investments
- g. Provides basis for future zoning decisions but is not a Zoning Map
- h. COH's Municipal Code, Title 10, Land Use Regulations is the primary tool for implementing the Comprehensive Plan Policies and are applied as Zoning Districts on the Zoning Map
- i. The Land Use Plan Map is the graphical representation and geographically explicit statement of the Comp Plan policies

APPENDIX F.  
CITY OF HOUSTON PLANNING  
AND ZONING COMMISSION  
RESOLUTION NO. 16-PC-07



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**CITY OF HOUSTON  
PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION**

**RESOLUTION NO. 16-PC-07**

**A RESOLUTION OF THE HOUSTON PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION FORWARDING FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE CITY OF HOUSTON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE DRAFT DATED JUNE 23<sup>RD</sup>, 2016.**

---

**WHEREAS**, The City of Houston received Grant # 14-DC-057 in the amount of \$350,000 to perform a Community Impact Assessment and Comprehensive Plan Update; and

**WHEREAS**, this process is nearing completion and a Draft Comprehensive Plan Update is ready for review; and

**WHEREAS**, Houston Municipal Code 7.06.030 Planning Commission Duties states that the Planning & Zoning Commission shall "Undertake a general review of the Comprehensive Plan at least once every two years and make recommendations to the Council for amendments"; and

**WHEREAS**, this draft plan update was introduced by the Planning Commission at the publicly noticed Planning Commission regular meeting on June 30, 2016 and set to a public hearing on July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016; and

**WHEREAS**, the Houston Planning Commission sufficiently considered all evidence and testimony presented to them to make the following recommendation.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the Planning Commission of the City of Houston to forward the following recommendations regarding proposed City of Houston Comprehensive Plan Update:

**Section 1.** This following findings-recommendations are made or affirmed:

**Recommendation 1:**

**Under Town Center Development, add language to encourage the development of street side or other public parking venues in the town center.**

**Recommendation 2:**

**Implement additional information on the history of industry in Houston.**

**Recommendation 3:**

**Under Transport add objective to provide additional traffic crossings across the Little Susitna River to promote public safety and convenience.**


Introduced By: Councilmember Hartley  
Introduction Date:  
Public Hearing Date: July 28, 2016  
Vote: Anderson, Burnett, and Hartley in favor  
Jones and Mistor absent

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**PASSED, APPROVED, AND ADOPTED** By a duly constituted quorum of the Planning & Zoning Commission for the City of Houston on this 28th day of January, 2016.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Christian Hartley, Chair

**ATTEST:**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Sonya Dukes, CMC  
Houston City Clerk



APPENDIX G.  
CITY OF HOUSTON  
CITY COUNCIL  
ADOPTING ORDINANCE 16-22



Introduced by: Mayor Thompson  
Introduction Date: August 11, 2016  
Public Hearing: September 8, 2016  
Adoption Date: September 8, 2016

Vote: Barney, Johansen, Johnson, Jorgensen, Stout, Wilson and Thompson in favor

**HOUSTON, ALASKA  
ORDINANCE 16-22**

**AN ORDINANCE OF THE HOUSTON CITY COUNCIL REPEALING THE 1999 CITY OF HOUSTON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN, AS AMENDED IN 2003 (ORDINANCE SERIAL NO. 199-078; 2003-108) AND ADOPTING THE 2016 CITY OF HOUSTON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN.**

---

**BE IT ORDAINED AND ENACTED BY THE CITY OF HOUSTON, ALASKA:**

**WHEREAS**, The City of Houston received State of Alaska Grant #14-DC-057 in the amount of \$350,000 to perform a Community Impact Assessment and Comprehensive Plan Update; and

**WHEREAS**, in 2013 the City created a Community Impact Assessment and Comprehensive Plan Update Steering Committee to work closely with the consultant, City staff, City Planning Commission and City Council through the public process; and

**WHEREAS**, in 2013 the City hired qualified planning consultants through the bidding process to assist the Committee and staff in the process of revising the Comprehensive Plan through a number of public meetings, open houses and workshops ; and

**WHEREAS**, the 2016 City of Houston's Comprehensive Plan is based on community and stakeholder input and has been supported by the City and Committee as a balanced approach to the community's future;

**WHEREAS**, the 2016 City of Houston's Comprehensive Plan is based on community and stakeholder input and has been supported by the City and Committee as a balanced approach to the community's future;

**WHEREAS**, the Houston Planning and Zoning Commission reviewed the 2016 plan, held a Public hearing and forwarded recommendations on the plan to the City Council (Resolution 16-PC-07).

**SECTION I: CLASSIFICATION:** This ordinance is a non-code ordinance.

**SECTION II: SEVERABILITY:** If any provisions of this ordinance, or any application thereof to any person or circumstances is held invalid, the remainder of this ordinance and the application to all other persons or circumstances shall not be affected thereby.

Introduced by: Mayor Thompson  
Introduction Date: August 11, 2016  
Public Hearing: September 8, 2016  
Adoption Date: September 8, 2016

Vote: Barney, Johansen, Johnson, Jorgensen, Stout, Wilson and Thompson in favor

**SECTION III: PURPOSE:** The Purpose of Ordinance 16-22 is to replace the regulatory framework for land use and development in the City of Houston with a new, revised comprehensive plan that is responsive and convenient for the City residents.

**SECTION IV: REPEAL OF THE 1999 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN:** the 1999 Comprehensive Plan (Adopted in Ordinance Serial No. 1999-078) including the amendment adopted in 2003 (Ordinance Serial No. 2003-108) is hereby repealed.


**SECTION V: ADOPTION OF THE 2016 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN:** The 2016 City of Houston Comprehensive Plan, as submitted by the Houston Planning and Zoning Commission and the City of Houston Community Impact Assessment and Comprehensive Plan Update Steering Committee as contained in Exhibit A of this ordinance, is hereby adopted.

**SECTION VI: SUBMISSION TO THE MATANUSKA - SUSITNA BOROUGH.** The Mayor shall submit the 2016 City of Houston Comprehensive plan in this ordinance to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough for approval by the Borough Planning Commission and Assembly as required by AS 29.40.030 (b) and MSB 17.42.025.

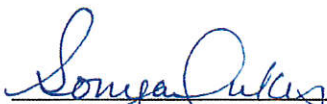
**SECTION VII: ENACTMENT:** Sections IV and V of this ordinance shall be effective upon the effective date of the ordinance of the Matanuska Susitna Borough Assembly approving the City of Houston Comprehensive Plan in this ordinance.

**ADOPTED** by the Houston City Council on September 8, 2016.

**THE CITY OF HOUSTON, ALASKA**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Virgie Thompson, Mayor

**ATTEST:**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Sonya Dukes, CMC, City Clerk



# Community Outreach





# City of Houston Comprehensive Plan and Community Impact Assessment Survey

November 2014

Dear << Name >>

The City of Houston needs your help! We are in the process of updating our Comprehensive Plan and Community Impact Assessment. As part of that process, we have contracted with the McDowell Group, an Alaska research firm, to conduct a survey of Houston property owners and residents. The purpose of the survey is to gather your opinions about the city's priorities for the next 20 years. Please take a few minutes to complete the enclosed survey now. Your participation is critical. You can make a difference for your community.

The information you provide is confidential and is seen only by McDowell Group. The City of Houston will never see any individual survey data. Survey results are presented only in aggregate with other responses.

Please complete your survey by **December 5, 2014** and return it by using the enclosed self-addressed, postage-paid envelope. You may also fax the survey to (907) 586-2673, scan to [robert.koentizer@mcdownellgroup.net](mailto:robert.koentizer@mcdownellgroup.net), OR complete the survey on-line. Type the following address into your web browser and enter the password found in the bottom right of your survey's last page.

**[HoustonCompPlanSurvey.com](http://HoustonCompPlanSurvey.com)**

When you return your completed survey (either by mail, online, fax, or scan), your name will be entered into a drawing to win your choice of one of **20 \$50 Fred Meyer or Walmart gift cards**. Winners will be randomly selected by McDowell Group.

If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Bob Koenitzer, McDowell Group Project Manager at (866-586-6133) or [robert.koenitzer@mcdownellgroup.net](mailto:robert.koenitzer@mcdownellgroup.net).

We appreciate your time and assistance with this important project.

Sincerely,

Virgie Thompson  
Mayor  
City of Houston

Len Anderson  
Chair, City of Houston CIA and Comprehensive Plan  
Revisions Steering Committee







# City of Houston Comprehensive Plan and Community Impact Assessment Survey

The City of Houston is in the process of updating its Comprehensive Plan and Community Impact Assessment. This process will outline city priorities and guide planning efforts for the next 20 years. As part of that process, we appreciate you taking the time to complete this survey. Your opinions will help shape the future of your community.

If you prefer, you may also complete the survey online at a secure website by entering the following URL into your computer's browser and then entering your password (found in the bottom right of the survey last page). You will be entered in the drawing if you complete the survey by mail or online.

**HoustonCompPlanSurvey.com**

When you return your completed survey (either online or by mail), your name will be entered into a drawing to win your choice of **one of 20 \$50 Fred Meyer or Walmart gift cards.**

**1. Did you live in Houston for more than 9 months in the past year?**

01  Yes  **1a. If yes, how many years have you lived in Houston? # \_\_\_\_\_ years** (go to Question 2)

02  No  **1b. Do you rent your Houston property to others?** 01  Yes (go to Q3) 02  No (go to Q3)

**2. Do you own or rent your Houston residence or property?**

01  Own      02  Rent      03  Some other arrangement: \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Overall, how would you rate your quality of life in Houston using a scale of 1 – 10, where 1 means "very poor" and 10 means "very good"?** (Circle answer)      01  Do not live in Houston

**Very Poor**

**Very Good**

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|

**4. Please indicate your level of agreement regarding the following statements about the community of Houston.**

|  | <i>Strongly Agree</i> | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Strongly Disagree</i> | <i>Unsure/ Don't know</i> |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>a. Houston is a safe place to live.</b>                       | 1                     | 2            | 3               | 4                        | 5                         |
| <b>b. Houston is family-friendly.</b>                            | 1                     | 2            | 3               | 4                        | 5                         |
| <b>c. Houston is a good place to enjoy a rural lifestyle.</b>    | 1                     | 2            | 3               | 4                        | 5                         |
| <b>d. Houston is a good place for people to live affordably.</b> | 1                     | 2            | 3               | 4                        | 5                         |
| <b>e. Houston is a good place for outdoor recreation.</b>        | 1                     | 2            | 3               | 4                        | 5                         |
| <b>f. Houston could use more community planning.</b>             | 1                     | 2            | 3               | 4                        | 5                         |
| <b>g. Houston could use more landscaping of public spaces.</b>   | 1                     | 2            | 3               | 4                        | 5                         |

5. Please indicate how important it is for the City of Houston to support each of the following transportation-related projects.

|  | <i>Very important</i> | <i>Somewhat important</i> | <i>Not important</i> | <i>Unsure/ Don't know</i> |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| a. Improved road maintenance   | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| b. Improved lighting on roads  | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| c. Public transportation (bus service) between Houston and other parts of the Mat-Su Borough | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| d. New Alaska Railroad depot/train stop  | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| e. New road between Houston and Port Mackenzie   | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| f. More paved roads  | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| g. Improved street/road signage  | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| h. Development of a "Park and Ride" lot for commuters  | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| i. Development of a Hawk Lane bike path  | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |

6. Of the transportation-related projects listed above, which one should be the most important priority for the City? \_\_\_\_\_(enter letter a-i)     Unsure/Don't know

7. Please indicate how important it is for the City of Houston to support each of the following recreation-related projects.

|  | <i>Very important</i> | <i>Somewhat important</i> | <i>Not important</i> | <i>Unsure/ Don't know</i> |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| a. Creation of new parks with playgrounds  | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| b. Improved public access to lakes   | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| c. Creation of recreation programs for youth   | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| d. Maintenance of existing trails and pathways   | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| e. More non-motorized trails and pathways (for walking, biking, horse-riding, dog-sledding, etc.)              | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| f. More motorized trails and pathways (for ATVs, snow machines, etc.)  | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| g. Creation or expansion of indoor recreation facilities, such as an ice rink, swimming pool, or running track | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |

8. Of the recreation-related projects listed above, which one should be the most important priority for the City? \_\_\_\_\_(enter letter a-g)     Unsure/Don't know

9. Please indicate how supportive you are for the City of Houston to strengthen each of the following environmental-related issues.

|  | <i>Very supportive</i> | <i>Somewhat supportive</i> | <i>Not supportive</i> | <i>Unsure/ Don't know</i> |
|--|------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| a. Stricter regulation of land near rivers, lakes, and streams | 1                      | 2                          | 3                     | 4                         |
| b. Stricter enforcement of flood plain development regulations | 1                      | 2                          | 3                     | 4                         |
| c. Protection of drinking water quality                        | 1                      | 2                          | 3                     | 4                         |

10. Please indicate how important it is for the City of Houston to support new development or expansion in each of the following areas of economic development.

|   | <i>Very important</i> | <i>Somewhat important</i> | <i>Not important</i> | <i>Unsure/ Don't know</i> |
|---|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| a. Attracting industrial development along the railroad tracks                                      | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| b. Recruiting new businesses  | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| c. Attracting more tourism development  | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| d. Developing a tourism attraction along the Little Susitna River (ex. river walk, city park, etc.) | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| e. Developing a "town center" with pedestrian-friendly facilities                                   | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| f. Supporting natural resource development in the area  | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| g. Supporting extension of utility services (ex. power, communication, etc.)                        | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |

11. Of the economic development projects listed above, which should be the most important priority for the City? \_\_\_\_\_(enter letter a-g)     Unsure/Don't know

12. Please indicate how important it is for the City of Houston to continue providing the following services.

|                                | <i>Very important</i> | <i>Somewhat important</i> | <i>Not important</i> | <i>Unsure/ Don't know</i> |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| a. Community planning          | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| b. Road maintenance            | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| c. Animal control and shelter  | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| d. Fire and emergency services | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |

13. Please indicate how willing you are to pay for the following suggested new or improved City of Houston services or facilities through increased property taxes.

|  | <i>Very willing</i> | <i>Somewhat willing</i> | <i>Not willing</i> | <i>Unsure/ Don't know</i> |
|--|---------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| a. Improved road maintenance                 | 1                   | 2                       | 3                  | 4                         |
| b. Funding of Public Safety Officers         | 1                   | 2                       | 3                  | 4                         |
| c. Improved city fire and emergency services | 1                   | 2                       | 3                  | 4                         |
| d. Cemetery development and maintenance      | 1                   | 2                       | 3                  | 4                         |

14. Please indicate how willing you are to pay a fee to drop off your garbage at a solid waste transfer station located in Houston?

Very willing

Somewhat willing

Not willing

Unsure/Don't know

15 In Houston, do you feel there is too much, too little, or just enough private property regulation?

- 01  Too much regulation
- 02  Too little regulation
- 03  Just enough regulation
- 04  Unsure/Don't know

16. How many people, including yourself, live in your Houston household? #\_\_\_\_\_ people

- 01  I do not live in Houston

17. How many people in your Houston household are under 18 years of age? #\_\_\_\_\_ people

- 01  I do not live in Houston

18. What is the highest level of education you have had the opportunity to complete?

- 01  Less than HS diploma
- 02  HS diploma/GED
- 03  Vocational/Tech Cert.
- 04  Some college
- 05  AA (Associate's Degree)
- 06  BA (Bachelor's Degree)
- 07  MA (Master's Degree)
- 08  PhD (Doctorate)

19. Please indicate the category that best describes your total combined household income before taxes for 2013.

- 01  Less than \$15,000
- 02  \$15,001 to \$25,000
- 03  \$25,001 to \$35,000
- 04  \$35,001 to \$50,000
- 05  \$50,001 to \$75,000
- 06  \$75,001 to \$100,000
- 07  Over \$100,000

20. Please indicate your gender    01  Male            02  Female

21. In what year were you born? 19\_\_\_\_\_

22. Please feel free to comment about any other planning issues you feel are important for the City of Houston to consider as it develops its new Comprehensive Plan and Community Impact Assessment.

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If you have any questions contact: Bob Koenitzer, McDowell Group Survey Manager, call toll free 1-866-586-6133 or 1-907-586-2990, or e-mail [robert.koenitzer@mcdowellgroup.net](mailto:robert.koenitzer@mcdowellgroup.net).

**Please complete and return this survey by December 3, 2014.**

***Thank you. Your opinions matter!***

For more information on the City of Houston Comprehensive Plan and Community Impact Assessment, please visit: <http://houstonakcompplan.com/>

|          |
|----------|
| Password |
|----------|



# City of Houston Comprehensive Plan and Community Impact Assessment Survey

December 2014

Dear << Name >>

A couple weeks ago, we sent you a survey that asked for your opinions about the City of Houston's priorities for the next 20 years as part of our process to update our City's Comprehensive Plan and Community Impact Assessment. If you have completed the survey, thank you for your time and participation in our planning process. If you have not completed the survey, please take a few minutes to complete the enclosed survey now. Your participation is critical. You can make a difference for your community.

The information you provide is confidential and is seen only by McDowell Group. The City of Houston will never see any individual surveys or names associated with survey data. Survey results will be presented only in total with other responses.

We have extended the survey's due date to **December 15, 2014**. Please return your survey by using the enclosed self-addressed, postage-paid envelope. You may also fax the survey to (907) 586-2673, scan to [robert.koenitzer@mcdowellgroup.net](mailto:robert.koenitzer@mcdowellgroup.net), OR complete the survey on-line. Type the following address into your web browser and enter the password found in the bottom right of your survey's last page.

**[HoustonCompPlanSurvey.com](http://HoustonCompPlanSurvey.com)**

When you return your completed survey (either by mail, online, fax, or scan), your name will be entered into a drawing to **win your choice of one of 20 \$50 Fred Meyer or Walmart gift cards**. Winners will be randomly selected by McDowell Group.

If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Bob Koenitzer, McDowell Group Project Manager at (866-586-6133) or [robert.koenitzer@mcdowellgroup.net](mailto:robert.koenitzer@mcdowellgroup.net).

We appreciate your time and assistance with this important project.

Sincerely,

Virgie Thompson  
Mayor  
City of Houston

Len Anderson  
Chair, City of Houston CIA and Comprehensive Plan  
Revision Steering Committee



Hi, just a reminder that you're receiving this email because you have expressed an interest in the City of Houston's Community Impact Assessment & Comprehensive Plan Revision. Don't forget to add vle@rmconsult.com to your address book so we'll be sure to land in your inbox!

You may [unsubscribe](#) if you no longer wish to receive our emails.

## City of Houston Community Impact Assessment and Comprehensive Plan Revision



### Reminder: Complete the Survey!

As part of the City of Houston's Community Impact Assessment and Comprehensive Plan Revision, we are conducting a survey of Houston residents and property owners to gather your opinions about the City's priorities for the next 20 years.

You received a survey in the mail from McDowell Group, an Alaska research firm. We appreciate you taking a few minutes to complete the survey.

Your opinions matter and we thank you in advance!

### Thank you for attending the Future's Workshop in September

On September 18th, residents gathered in the Houston Fire Station for the first project open house, the Future's Workshop.

Attendees were tasked with "creating ideal futures" and openly discussed what the future of Houston should include; all responses were recorded.

For the results of the Future's Workshop and to provide us with feedback, go to the Public Involvement page of the project website: <http://houstonakcompplan.com/>

Please continue to participate in the City's Community Impact Assessment and Comprehensive Plan Revision

The City of Houston Community Impact Assessment and Comprehensive Plan Revision is a collaborative effort between the City of Houston, the Planning Commission, Houston residents and business owners, and the R&M Team.

Questions? Please Contact:

Van Le, AICP  
Project Manager  
R&M Consultants, Inc.

email:  
[comments@rmconsult.com](mailto:comments@rmconsult.com)  
phone: 907-646-9659

Visit the project website:  
[www.houstonakcompplan.com](http://www.houstonakcompplan.com)

process, your input is important appreciated!



R&M Consultants, Inc., 9101 Vanguard Drive, Anchorage, AK 99507

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JOIN US AT THE  
**OPEN HOUSE**

THURSDAY  
June 4, 2015  
4:30 pm-6:30 pm

**HOUSTON FIRE STATION**

The City of Houston is conducting a Community Impact Assessment (CIA) to identify the potential impacts upcoming projects may have on the community. Please join us at the open house to review identified impacts and provide feedback. The CIA will be used to help inform the Comprehensive Plan Revision currently underway. The City, in partnership with the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, is also kicking off a Parks Highway Corridor Plan effort that will be introduced at the Open House.

13965 W Armstrong Road, Houston, AK 99694

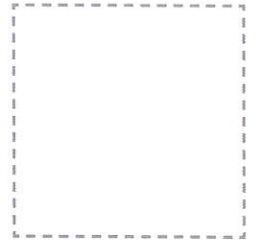
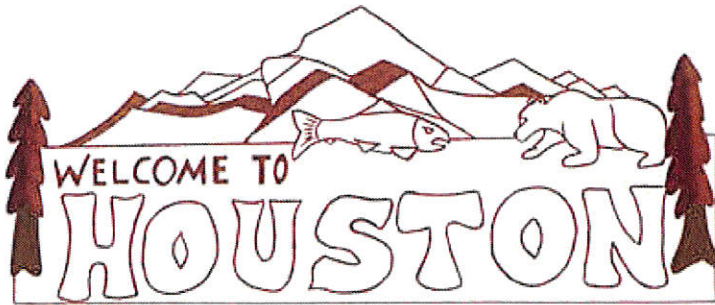
For More Information Please Contact: **PLANNER & PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT COORDINATOR**  
**TARYN OLESON** | R&M Consultants, Inc. | [Comments@RMConsult.com](mailto:Comments@RMConsult.com) | 907.646.9645

VISIT THE PROJECT WEBSITE – [www.HoustonAKCompPlan.com](http://www.HoustonAKCompPlan.com)



JOIN US AT THE  
**OPEN HOUSE**

THURSDAY  
June 4, 2015  
4:30 pm-6:30 pm



MR. AND MRS. SMITHERS  
OR CURRENT RESIDENT  
5943 Meow Avenue  
Anchorage, AK 99518

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You may [unsubscribe](#) if you no longer wish to receive our emails.



## JOIN US AT THE OPEN HOUSE

The City of Houston is conducting a Community Impact Assessment (CIA) to identify the potential impacts upcoming projects may have on the community. Please join us at the open house to review identified impacts and provide feedback. The CIA will be used to help inform the Comprehensive Plan Revision currently underway.

Thursday, June 4, 2015  
4:30 PM - 6:30 PM  
Houston Fire Station

We hope you continue to participate in the City's Community Impact Assessment and Comprehensive Plan Revision process, your input is important appreciated!

For more information about the City of Houston Community Impact Assessment and Comprehensive Plan Revision, please visit the project website [www.houstonakcompplan.com](http://www.houstonakcompplan.com)

The City of Houston Community Impact Assessment and Comprehensive Plan Revision is a collaborative effort between the City of Houston, the Planning Commission, Houston residents and business owners, and the R&M Team.

Questions? Please Contact:

Van Le, AICP  
Project Manager  
R&M Consultants, Inc.

email:  
[comments@rmconsult.com](mailto:comments@rmconsult.com)  
phone: 907-646-9659

Visit the project website:  
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## The Draft Community Impact Assessment is Available for Review

The [Draft Community Impact Assessment \(CIA\)](#) is now available for public review. The full report and appendices can be found on the project website:

<http://houstonakcompplan.com/>

The CIA will help inform the current City of Houston Comprehensive Plan revision effort by analyzing potential impacts transportation projects may have on the community and residents' quality of life. The evaluation will allow the city and its residents to prepare for positive impacts and mitigate any potential negative impacts and assist Houston in maintaining its unique community character.

We appreciate your interest in the CIA and Comprehensive Plan Update process and value your comments on this draft report. Comments can be submitted through the project website, or you can contact a member of the project team.

Thank you and please contact a member of the project team if you have any questions!

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Questions? Please Contact:

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Project Manager  
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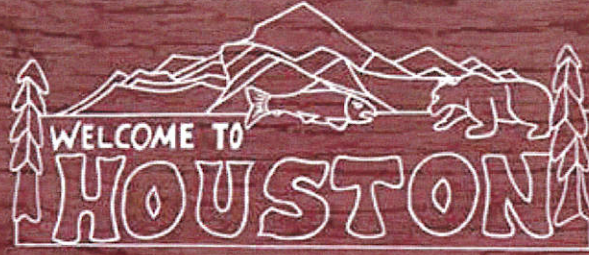
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## Community Impact Assessment & Comprehensive Plan Revision

JOIN US AT THE

# OPEN HOUSE

THURSDAY

May 5, 2016

5:00 pm-7:00 pm

Please join us at the Open House to review the Draft Comprehensive Plan for the City of Houston. This 20-year plan reflects the community's core values and future needs while providing a framework for development in the City of Houston through 2035.

HOUSTON FIRE STATION

13965 W Armstrong Road, Houston, AK 99694

For More Information Please Contact: **PLANNER & PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT COORDINATOR**  
VAN LE | R&M Consultants, Inc. | [Comments@RMConsult.com](mailto:Comments@RMConsult.com) | 907.646.9659

VISIT THE PROJECT WEBSITE – [www.HoustonAKCompPlan.com](http://www.HoustonAKCompPlan.com)



## Community Impact Assessment & Comprehensive Plan Revision

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You may [unsubscribe](#) if you no longer wish to receive our emails.



## Join us at the Draft Comprehensive Plan Open House

Please join us at the Open House to review the Draft Comprehensive Plan for the City of Houston on May 5th, 2016. This 20-year plan reflects the community's core values and future needs while providing a framework for development and improvements in the City of Houston through 2035. We appreciate your interest and encourage your feedback on the Draft Comprehensive Plan Revision.

### Open House

**Thursday, May 5th, 2016**  
**5:00 PM - 7:00 PM**

**Houston Fire Station 9-1**  
**13965 W Armstrong Road, Houston**

<http://houstonakcompplan.com/>

The Draft Comprehensive Plan will be posted to the website before the Open House on Thursday.

Comments can be submitted at the Open House, through the project website, or you can contact a member of the project team.

Thank you and please contact Project Manager, Van Le at [vle@rmconsult.com](mailto:vle@rmconsult.com) if you have any questions!

The City of Houston Community Impact Assessment and Comprehensive Plan Revision is a collaborative effort between the City of Houston, the Planning Commission, Houston residents and business owners, and the R&M Team.

Questions? Please Contact:

Van Le, AICP  
Project Manager  
R&M Consultants, Inc.

email:  
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PUBLIC NOTICES

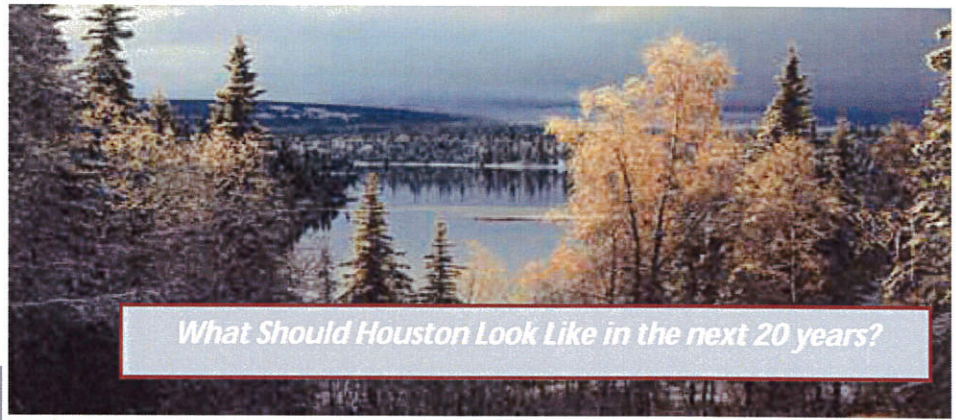
1. **Postcard Mailing and Flyer– Futures Workshop**  
Postcard sent to 1,651 residents, tenants property owners, and businesses and flyers distributed at Founder’s Day event and at City Hall
2. **Household Opinion Survey Mailing**  
Cover letter, opinion survey, and second round mailing sent out 1,651 residents, tenants, property owners, and businesses
3. **Constant Contact E-Newsletter – Household Survey**  
Email newsletter with reminder to complete the Household Survey and with information on past Future’s Workshop
4. **Postcard Mailing – CIA Open House**  
Postcard sent to 1,651 residents, tenants, property owners, and businesses inviting them to the public open house to identify the potential impacts upcoming projects may have on the community for the CIA
5. **Constant Contact E-Newsletter – CIA Open House**  
Email newsletter inviting stakeholders to the CIA Open House
6. **Constant Contact E-Newsletter – Draft CIA Review**  
Email newsletter notifying stakeholders the Draft CIA is available for review and to solicit comments on the Draft.
7. **Postcard Flyers – Draft Comprehensive Plan Review**  
Over 200 flyers were distributed throughout the community, including City Hall, the Post Office, Miller’s Market, etc. inviting them to the public open house to review the Draft Comprehensive Plan.
8. **Constant Contact E-newsletter- Draft Comprehensive Plan Open House**  
Email newsletter inviting stakeholders to the public open house to review the Draft Comprehensive Plan.
9. **Frontiersman Advertisement– Public Hearing Notice**  
Advertisement placed in the Frontiersman notifying interested stakeholders of the City Council Public Hearing on the Comprehensive Plan
10. **City of Houston Website – Screen Shot of Home Page**  
Throughout the project, the city’s website prominently advertised the CIA and Comp Plan efforts, events, and updates as they were available. The City Calendar on the left reflected all events and Steering Committee meetings and posted the agenda of each meeting a minimum of one week prior to the meeting date.
11. **CIA & Comp Plan Project Website – Screen Shots (partial view)**  
The project specific website, linked to the City of Houston’s website, has been routinely updated and managed throughout the project to keep stakeholders well informed. All drafts and reports available for review are posted on the Documents page. Comments can be submitted any time through the website
12. **Public Involvement Page of Project Website – Content View**  
Full content on the Public Involvement page of the project specific website.



***Your Community, Your Future, Your Plan***

Save the date:  
Thursday,  
September 18, 2014 for a  
***Futures Workshop***

4:30 PM to 7:30 PM  
Houston Fire Station



*What Should Houston Look Like in the next 20 years?*

The City of Houston is conducting a Community Impact Assessment (CIA) and revising its Comprehensive Plan to guide future growth. Since the Comprehensive Plan was updated in 2003, population growth, transportation infrastructure projects and industrial development are on the rise. Join us at the first community workshop to plan for the future and prepare for growth and development while preserving community values.

For More Information Please Contact:  
Van Le, AICP, Project Manager  
R&M Consultants, Inc.

E-mail:  
[comments@rmconsult.com](mailto:comments@rmconsult.com)  
Phone: 907-646-9659

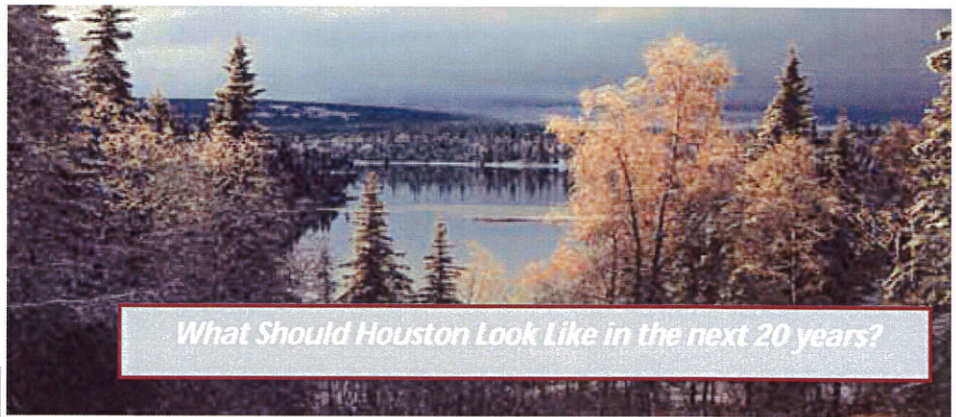
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Visit the Project Website:  
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9101 Vanguard Drive  
Anchorage Alaska

## City of Houston Comprehensive Plan Household Survey

### Watch Your Mail!

As part of Houston's Comprehensive Plan development, we have asked McDowell Group, an Alaska research firm, to conduct a mail survey of Houston residents. The Comprehensive Plan is a document that will guide our community's growth for the next 20 years. We want your opinions to help guide Houston's future.

McDowell Group will be mailing a survey to all households with a Houston mailing address this Fall. Once you receive the survey, we would appreciate you taking a few minutes to participate. Your opinion matters and we thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Virgie Thompson'.

Mayor, City of Houston



9101 Vanguard Drive  
Anchorage Alaska

## City of Houston Comprehensive Plan Household Survey

### Watch Your Mail!

As part of Houston's Comprehensive Plan development, we have asked McDowell Group, an Alaska research firm, to conduct a mail survey of Houston residents. The Comprehensive Plan is a document that will guide our community's growth for the next 20 years. We want your opinions to help guide Houston's future.

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Virgie Thompson'.

Mayor, City of Houston



**Your Community, Your  
Future, Your Plan**

**Open House & Futures Workshop**

Thursday, September 18, 2014

4:30 PM to 7:30 PM  
Houston Fire Station



*What Should Houston Look Like in the next 20 years?*

The City of Houston is conducting a Community Impact Assessment (CIA) and revising its Comprehensive Plan to guide future growth. Since the Comprehensive Plan was updated in 2003, population growth, transportation infrastructure projects and industrial development are on the rise. Join us at the first community workshop to plan for the future and prepare for growth and development while preserving community values; families are encouraged to attend.

For More Information Please Contact:  
Van Le, AICP, Project Manager  
R&M Consultants, Inc.

E-mail: [comments@rmconsult.com](mailto:comments@rmconsult.com)  
Phone: 907-646-9659

Visit the Project Website:  
[www.HoustonAKCompPlan.com](http://www.HoustonAKCompPlan.com)  
to sign up for updates



9101 Vanguard Drive  
Anchorage Alaska 99507

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Anchorage, AK

**Watch Your Mail**  
for the City of Houston Comprehensive Plan  
Household Survey, conducted by the  
McDowell Group in late fall.  
We want your opinions to help guide  
Houston's future.







## ***City of Houston Comprehensive Plan and Community Impact Assessment Survey***

November 2014

Dear << Name >>

The City of Houston needs your help! We are in the process of updating our Comprehensive Plan and Community Impact Assessment. As part of that process, we have contracted with the McDowell Group, an Alaska research firm, to conduct a survey of Houston property owners and residents. The purpose of the survey is to gather your opinions about the city's priorities for the next 20 years. Please take a few minutes to complete the enclosed survey now. Your participation is critical. You can make a difference for your community.

The information you provide is confidential and is seen only by McDowell Group. The City of Houston will never see any individual survey data. Survey results are presented only in aggregate with other responses.

Please complete your survey by **December 5, 2014** and return it by using the enclosed self-addressed, postage-paid envelope. You may also fax the survey to (907) 586-2673, scan to [robert.koentizer@mcdowellgroup.net](mailto:robert.koentizer@mcdowellgroup.net), OR complete the survey on-line. Type the following address into your web browser and enter the password found in the bottom right of your survey's last page.

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We appreciate your time and assistance with this important project.

Sincerely,

Virgie Thompson  
Mayor  
City of Houston

Len Anderson  
Chair, City of Houston CIA and Comprehensive Plan  
Revisions Steering Committee





# City of Houston Comprehensive Plan and Community Impact Assessment Survey

The City of Houston is in the process of updating its Comprehensive Plan and Community Impact Assessment. This process will outline city priorities and guide planning efforts for the next 20 years. As part of that process, we appreciate you taking the time to complete this survey. Your opinions will help shape the future of your community.

If you prefer, you may also complete the survey online at a secure website by entering the following URL into your computer's browser and then entering your password (found in the bottom right of the survey last page). You will be entered in the drawing if you complete the survey by mail or online.

**HoustonCompPlanSurvey.com**

When you return your completed survey (either online or by mail), your name will be entered into a drawing to win your choice of **one of 20 \$50 Fred Meyer or Walmart gift cards.**

**1. Did you live in Houston for more than 9 months in the past year?**

01  Yes  $\Rightarrow$  1a. If yes, how many years have you lived in Houston? # \_\_\_\_\_ years (go to Question 2)

02  No  $\Rightarrow$  1b. Do you rent your Houston property to others? 01  Yes (go to Q3) 02  No (go to Q3)

**2. Do you own or rent your Houston residence or property?**

01  Own                      02  Rent                      03  Some other arrangement: \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Overall, how would you rate your quality of life in Houston using a scale of 1 – 10, where 1 means "very poor" and 10 means "very good"?** (Circle answer)                      01  Do not live in Houston

**Very Poor**

**Very Good**

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|

**4. Please indicate your level of agreement regarding the following statements about the community of Houston.**

|   | <i>Strongly Agree</i> | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Strongly Disagree</i> | <i>Unsure/ Don't know</i> |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| a. Houston is a safe place to live.                       | 1                     | 2            | 3               | 4                        | 5                         |
| b. Houston is family-friendly.                            | 1                     | 2            | 3               | 4                        | 5                         |
| c. Houston is a good place to enjoy a rural lifestyle.    | 1                     | 2            | 3               | 4                        | 5                         |
| d. Houston is a good place for people to live affordably. | 1                     | 2            | 3               | 4                        | 5                         |
| e. Houston is a good place for outdoor recreation.        | 1                     | 2            | 3               | 4                        | 5                         |
| f. Houston could use more community planning.             | 1                     | 2            | 3               | 4                        | 5                         |
| g. Houston could use more landscaping of public spaces.   | 1                     | 2            | 3               | 4                        | 5                         |

5. Please indicate how important it is for the City of Houston to support each of the following transportation-related projects.

|  | <i>Very important</i> | <i>Somewhat important</i> | <i>Not important</i> | <i>Unsure/ Don't know</i> |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| a. Improved road maintenance   | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| b. Improved lighting on roads  | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| c. Public transportation (bus service) between Houston and other parts of the Mat-Su Borough | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| d. New Alaska Railroad depot/train stop  | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| e. New road between Houston and Port Mackenzie   | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| f. More paved roads  | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| g. Improved street/road signage  | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| h. Development of a "Park and Ride" lot for commuters  | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| i. Development of a Hawk Lane bike path  | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |

6. Of the transportation-related projects listed above, which one should be the most important priority for the City? \_\_\_\_\_(enter letter a-i)     Unsure/Don't know

7. Please indicate how important it is for the City of Houston to support each of the following recreation-related projects.

|  | <i>Very important</i> | <i>Somewhat important</i> | <i>Not important</i> | <i>Unsure/ Don't know</i> |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| a. Creation of new parks with playgrounds  | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| b. Improved public access to lakes   | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| c. Creation of recreation programs for youth   | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| d. Maintenance of existing trails and pathways   | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| e. More non-motorized trails and pathways (for walking, biking, horse-riding, dog-sledding, etc.)              | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| f. More motorized trails and pathways (for ATVs, snow machines, etc.)  | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| g. Creation or expansion of indoor recreation facilities, such as an ice rink, swimming pool, or running track | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |

8. Of the recreation-related projects listed above, which one should be the most important priority for the City? \_\_\_\_\_(enter letter a-g)     Unsure/Don't know

9. Please indicate how supportive you are for the City of Houston to strengthen each of the following environmental-related issues.

|  | <i>Very supportive</i> | <i>Somewhat supportive</i> | <i>Not supportive</i> | <i>Unsure/ Don't know</i> |
|--|------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| a. Stricter regulation of land near rivers, lakes, and streams | 1                      | 2                          | 3                     | 4                         |
| b. Stricter enforcement of flood plain development regulations | 1                      | 2                          | 3                     | 4                         |
| c. Protection of drinking water quality                        | 1                      | 2                          | 3                     | 4                         |

10. Please indicate how important it is for the City of Houston to support new development or expansion in each of the following areas of economic development.

|   | <i>Very important</i> | <i>Somewhat important</i> | <i>Not important</i> | <i>Unsure/ Don't know</i> |
|---|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| a. Attracting industrial development along the railroad tracks                                      | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| b. Recruiting new businesses  | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| c. Attracting more tourism development  | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| d. Developing a tourism attraction along the Little Susitna River (ex. river walk, city park, etc.) | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| e. Developing a "town center" with pedestrian-friendly facilities                                   | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| f. Supporting natural resource development in the area  | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| g. Supporting extension of utility services (ex. power, communication, etc.)                        | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |

11. Of the economic development projects listed above, which should be the most important priority for the City? \_\_\_\_\_(enter letter a-g)     Unsure/Don't know

12. Please indicate how important it is for the City of Houston to continue providing the following services.

|                                | <i>Very important</i> | <i>Somewhat important</i> | <i>Not important</i> | <i>Unsure/ Don't know</i> |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| a. Community planning          | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| b. Road maintenance            | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| c. Animal control and shelter  | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |
| d. Fire and emergency services | 1                     | 2                         | 3                    | 4                         |

13. Please indicate how willing you are to pay for the following suggested new or improved City of Houston services or facilities through increased property taxes.

|  | <i>Very willing</i> | <i>Somewhat willing</i> | <i>Not willing</i> | <i>Unsure/ Don't know</i> |
|--|---------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| a. Improved road maintenance                 | 1                   | 2                       | 3                  | 4                         |
| b. Funding of Public Safety Officers         | 1                   | 2                       | 3                  | 4                         |
| c. Improved city fire and emergency services | 1                   | 2                       | 3                  | 4                         |
| d. Cemetery development and maintenance      | 1                   | 2                       | 3                  | 4                         |

14. Please indicate how willing you are to pay a fee to drop off your garbage at a solid waste transfer station located in Houston?

Very willing

Somewhat willing

Not willing

Unsure/Don't know

15 In Houston, do you feel there is too much, too little, or just enough private property regulation?

- 01  Too much regulation
- 02  Too little regulation
- 03  Just enough regulation
- 04  Unsure/Don't know

16. How many people, including yourself, live in your Houston household? # \_\_\_\_\_ people

- 01  I do not live in Houston

17. How many people in your Houston household are under 18 years of age? # \_\_\_\_\_ people

- 01  I do not live in Houston

18. What is the highest level of education you have had the opportunity to complete?

- 01  Less than HS diploma
- 02  HS diploma/GED
- 03  Vocational/Tech Cert.
- 04  Some college
- 05  AA (Associate's Degree)
- 06  BA (Bachelor's Degree)
- 07  MA (Master's Degree)
- 08  PhD (Doctorate)

19. Please indicate the category that best describes your total combined household income before taxes for 2013.

- 01  Less than \$15,000
- 02  \$15,001 to \$25,000
- 03  \$25,001 to \$35,000
- 04  \$35,001 to \$50,000
- 05  \$50,001 to \$75,000
- 06  \$75,001 to \$100,000
- 07  Over \$100,000

20. Please indicate your gender    01  Male    02  Female

21. In what year were you born? 19\_\_\_\_\_

22. Please feel free to comment about any other planning issues you feel are important for the City of Houston to consider as it develops its new Comprehensive Plan and Community Impact Assessment.

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If you have any questions contact: Bob Koenitzer, McDowell Group Survey Manager, call toll free 1-866-586-6133 or 1-907-586-2990, or e-mail [robert.koenitzer@mcdowellgroup.net](mailto:robert.koenitzer@mcdowellgroup.net).

**Please complete and return this survey by December 3, 2014.**

***Thank you. Your opinions matter!***

For more information on the City of Houston Comprehensive Plan and Community Impact Assessment, please visit: <http://houstonakcompplan.com/>

|          |
|----------|
| Password |
|----------|



## City of Houston Comprehensive Plan and Community Impact Assessment Survey

December 2014

Dear << Name >>

A couple weeks ago, we sent you a survey that asked for your opinions about the City of Houston's priorities for the next 20 years as part of our process to update our City's Comprehensive Plan and Community Impact Assessment. If you have completed the survey, thank you for your time and participation in our planning process. If you have not completed the survey, please take a few minutes to complete the enclosed survey now. Your participation is critical. You can make a difference for your community.

The information you provide is confidential and is seen only by McDowell Group. The City of Houston will never see any individual surveys or names associated with survey data. Survey results will be presented only in total with other responses.

We have extended the survey's due date to **December 15, 2014**. Please return your survey by using the enclosed self-addressed, postage-paid envelope. You may also fax the survey to (907) 586-2673, scan to [robert.koenitzer@mcdowellgroup.net](mailto:robert.koenitzer@mcdowellgroup.net), OR complete the survey on-line. Type the following address into your web browser and enter the password found in the bottom right of your survey's last page.

**[HoustonCompPlanSurvey.com](http://HoustonCompPlanSurvey.com)**

When you return your completed survey (either by mail, online, fax, or scan), your name will be entered into a drawing to **win your choice of one of 20 \$50 Fred Meyer or Walmart gift cards**. Winners will be randomly selected by McDowell Group.

If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Bob Koenitzer, McDowell Group Project Manager at (866-586-6133) or [robert.koenitzer@mcdowellgroup.net](mailto:robert.koenitzer@mcdowellgroup.net).

We appreciate your time and assistance with this important project.

Sincerely,

Virgie Thompson  
Mayor  
City of Houston

Len Anderson  
Chair, City of Houston CIA and Comprehensive Plan  
Revision Steering Committee





Hi, just a reminder that you're receiving this email because you have expressed an interest in the City of Houston's Community Impact Assessment & Comprehensive Plan Revision. Don't forget to add vle@rmconsult.com to your address book so we'll be sure to land in your inbox!

You may [unsubscribe](#) if you no longer wish to receive our emails.

## City of Houston Community Impact Assessment and Comprehensive Plan Revision



### Reminder: Complete the Survey!

As part of the City of Houston's Community Impact Assessment and Comprehensive Plan Revision, we are conducting a survey of Houston residents and property owners to gather your opinions about the City's priorities for the next 20 years.

You received a survey in the mail from McDowell Group, an Alaska research firm. We appreciate you taking a few minutes to complete the survey.

Your opinions matter and we thank you in advance!

### Thank you for attending the Future's Workshop in September

On September 18th, residents gathered in the Houston Fire Station for the first project open house, the Future's Workshop.

Attendees were tasked with "creating ideal futures" and openly discussed what the future of Houston should include; all responses were recorded.

For the results of the Future's Workshop and to provide us with feedback, go to the Public Involvement page of the project website: <http://houstonakcompplan.com/>

Please continue to participate in the City's Community Impact Assessment and Comprehensive Plan Revision

The City of Houston Community Impact Assessment and Comprehensive Plan Revision is a collaborative effort between the City of Houston, the Planning Commission, Houston residents and business owners, and the R&M Team.

Questions? Please Contact:

Van Le, AICP  
Project Manager  
R&M Consultants, Inc.

email:  
[comments@rmconsult.com](mailto:comments@rmconsult.com)  
phone: 907-646-9659

Visit the project website:  
[www.houstonakcompplan.com](http://www.houstonakcompplan.com)

process, your input is important appreciated!



R&M Consultants, Inc., 9101 Vanguard Drive, Anchorage, AK 99507

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JOIN US AT THE  
**OPEN HOUSE**

THURSDAY  
June 4, 2015  
4:30 pm-6:30 pm

**HOUSTON FIRE STATION**

The City of Houston is conducting a Community Impact Assessment (CIA) to identify the potential impacts upcoming projects may have on the community. Please join us at the open house to review identified impacts and provide feedback. The CIA will be used to help inform the Comprehensive Plan Revision currently underway. The City, in partnership with the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, is also kicking off a Parks Highway Corridor Plan effort that will be introduced at the Open House.

13965 W Armstrong Road, Houston, AK 99694

For More Information Please Contact: **PLANNER & PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT COORDINATOR**  
**TARYN OLESON** | R&M Consultants, Inc. | [Comments@RMConsult.com](mailto:Comments@RMConsult.com) | 907.646.9645

VISIT THE PROJECT WEBSITE – [www.HoustonAKCompPlan.com](http://www.HoustonAKCompPlan.com)



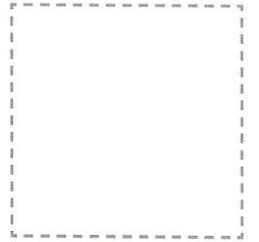
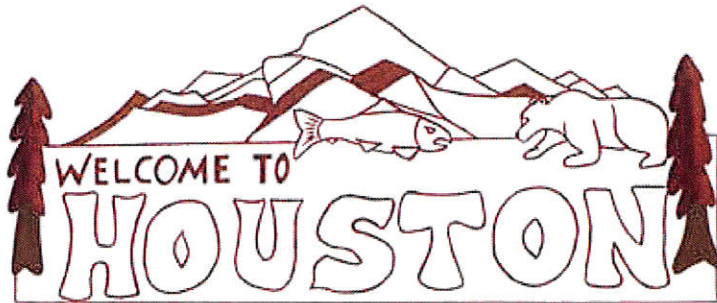
*Innovating Today for Alaska's Tomorrow*

JOIN US AT THE  
**OPEN HOUSE**

THURSDAY

June 4, 2015

4:30 pm-6:30 pm



MR. AND MRS. SMITHERS  
OR CURRENT RESIDENT  
5943 Meow Avenue  
Anchorage, AK 99518

Hi, just a reminder that you're receiving this email because you have expressed an interest in the City of Houston's Community Impact Assessment & Comprehensive Plan Revision. Don't forget to add vle@rmconsult.com to your address book so we'll be sure to land in your inbox!

You may [unsubscribe](#) if you no longer wish to receive our emails.



## JOIN US AT THE OPEN HOUSE

The City of Houston is conducting a Community Impact Assessment (CIA) to identify the potential impacts upcoming projects may have on the community. Please join us at the open house to review identified impacts and provide feedback. The CIA will be used to help inform the Comprehensive Plan Revision currently underway.

Thursday, June 4, 2015  
4:30 PM - 6:30 PM  
Houston Fire Station

We hope you continue to participate in the City's Community Impact Assessment and Comprehensive Plan Revision process, your input is important appreciated!

For more information about the City of Houston Community Impact Assessment and Comprehensive Plan Revision, please visit the project website [www.houstonakcompplan.com](http://www.houstonakcompplan.com)

The City of Houston Community Impact Assessment and Comprehensive Plan Revision is a collaborative effort between the City of Houston, the Planning Commission, Houston residents and business owners, and the R&M Team.

Questions? Please Contact:

Van Le, AICP  
Project Manager  
R&M Consultants, Inc.

email:  
[comments@rmconsult.com](mailto:comments@rmconsult.com)  
phone: 907-646-9659

Visit the project website:  
[www.houstonakcompplan.com](http://www.houstonakcompplan.com)



R&M Consultants, Inc., 9101 Vanguard Drive, Anchorage, AK 99507

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You may [unsubscribe](#) if you no longer wish to receive our emails.



## The Draft Community Impact Assessment is Available for Review

The [Draft Community Impact Assessment \(CIA\)](#) is now available for public review. The full report and appendices can be found on the project website:

<http://houstonakcompplan.com/>

The CIA will help inform the current City of Houston Comprehensive Plan revision effort by analyzing potential impacts transportation projects may have on the community and residents' quality of life. The evaluation will allow the city and its residents to prepare for positive impacts and mitigate any potential negative impacts and assist Houston in maintaining its unique community character.

We appreciate your interest in the CIA and Comprehensive Plan Update process and value your comments on this draft report. Comments can be submitted through the project website, or you can contact a member of the project team.

Thank you and please contact a member of the project team if you have any questions!

The City of Houston Community Impact Assessment and Comprehensive Plan Revision is a collaborative effort between the City of Houston, the Planning Commission, Houston residents and business owners, and the R&M Team.

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Project Manager  
R&M Consultants, Inc.

email:  
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phone: 907-646-9659

Visit the project website:  
[www.houstonakcompplan.com](http://www.houstonakcompplan.com)



R&M Consultants, Inc., 9101 Vanguard Drive, Anchorage, AK 99507

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## Community Impact Assessment & Comprehensive Plan Revision

JOIN US AT THE  
**OPEN HOUSE**

THURSDAY  
May 5, 2016  
5:00 pm-7:00 pm

Please join us at the Open House to review the Draft Comprehensive Plan for the City of Houston. This 20-year plan reflects the community's core values and future needs while providing a framework for development in the City of Houston through 2035.

### HOUSTON FIRE STATION

13965 W Armstrong Road, Houston, AK 99694

For More Information Please Contact: **PLANNER & PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT COORDINATOR**  
VAN LE | R&M Consultants, Inc. | [Comments@RMConsult.com](mailto:Comments@RMConsult.com) | 907.646.9659

VISIT THE PROJECT WEBSITE – [www.HoustonAKCompPlan.com](http://www.HoustonAKCompPlan.com)



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You may [unsubscribe](#) if you no longer wish to receive our emails.



## Join us at the Draft Comprehensive Plan Open House

Please join us at the Open House to review the Draft Comprehensive Plan for the City of Houston on May 5th, 2016. This 20-year plan reflects the community's core values and future needs while providing a framework for development and improvements in the City of Houston through 2035. We appreciate your interest and encourage your feedback on the Draft Comprehensive Plan Revision.

### Open House

**Thursday, May 5th, 2016**  
**5:00 PM - 7:00 PM**

**Houston Fire Station 9-1**  
**13965 W Armstrong Road, Houston**

<http://houstonakcompplan.com/>

The Draft Comprehensive Plan will be posted to the website before the Open House on Thursday.

Comments can be submitted at the Open House, through the project website, or you can contact a member of the project team.

Thank you and please contact Project Manager, Van Le at [vle@rmconsult.com](mailto:vle@rmconsult.com) if you have any questions!

The City of Houston Community Impact Assessment and Comprehensive Plan Revision is a collaborative effort between the City of Houston, the Planning Commission, Houston residents and business owners, and the R&M Team.

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Wasilla, AK 99654

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### AFFIDAVIT OF PUBLICATION

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, STATE OF ALASKA, THIRD DIVISION  
BEFORE ME, THE UNDERSIGNED, A NOTARY PUBLIC, THIS DAY  
PERSONALLY APPEARED BEFORE **JACKIE DOWNS** WHO, BEING  
FIRST DULY SWORN, ACCORDING TO LAW, SAYS THAT SHE IS THE  
LEGAL AD CLERK OF THE **FRONTIERSMAN**  
PUBLISHED AT WASILLA, IN SAID DIVISION THREE AND STATE OF ALASKA  
AND THAT THE ADVERTISEMENT, OF WHICH THE ANNEXED IS A TRUE  
COPY, WAS PUBLISHED ON THE FOLLOWING DAYS:

**AUGUST 26, 2016**

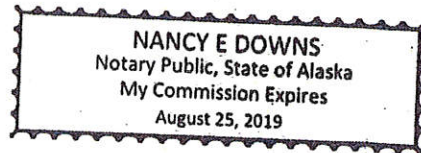
AND THAT THE RATE CHARGED THEREIN IS NOT IN EXCESS OF  
THE RATE CHARGED PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS.

*Jackie Downs*

SUBSCRIBED AND SWORN TO BEFORE ME  
THIS 13TH DAY OF SEPTEMBER 2016.

*Nancy E Downs*

NOTARY PUBLIC FOR STATE OF ALASKA



CITY OF HOUSTON



# City of Houston

www.houston-ak.gov

## Public Hearing Notice Houston City Council - Regular Meeting September 8, 2016, 7 P.M.

Houston City Hall - 138778 Armstrong Road

During the upcoming Regular City Council meeting on September 8, 2016, at 7 p.m. the Houston City Council will take public testimony on the following public hearing items:

- **AM 16-15:** City Council statement of non-protest to the application of a retail marijuana store license # 10316 held by Silverthorn Investment group LLC. DBA Denali 420 Recreationals *(Introduced by Mayor Thompson)*.
- **Ordinance 16-21:** An Ordinance of the Houston City Council amending Houston Municipal Code Title 3, Elections to provide clarification and specifications to definitions, declaration of candidacy payment options, notifications, election officials, ballots, election procedures, materials, voting methods, ballot counting procedures and the recount process, and requiring voter identification and a payment for contest of election. *(Introduced August 11, 2016)*.
- **Ordinance 16-22:** An Ordinance of the Houston City Council repealing the 1999 City of Houston Comprehensive plan, as amended in 2003, (Ordinance serial no. 199-078; 2003-108) and adopting the 2016 City of Houston Comprehensive Plan. *(Introduced August 11, 2016)*.

Comments are limited to 3-minutes per person.

Publish: August 26, 2016

HOUSTON CITY HALL  
13878 W ARMSTRONG ROAD, HOUSTON AK, 99694

[WWW.HOUSTON-AK.GOV](http://WWW.HOUSTON-AK.GOV)

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS PLEASE CONTACT THE CLERK'S OFFICE AT 907-892-6869



# City of Houston

[www.houston-ak.gov](http://www.houston-ak.gov)

## Public Hearing Notice Houston City Council - Regular Meeting September 8, 2016, 7 P.M.

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**[WWW.HOUSTON-AK.GOV](http://WWW.HOUSTON-AK.GOV)**

**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS PLEASE CONTACT THE CLERK'S OFFICE AT 907-892-6869**



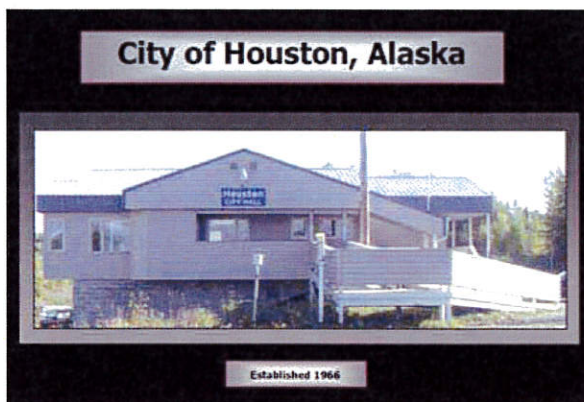




# Houston, Alaska

- Home
- Departments ▾
- City Council ▾
- Commissions/Committees ▾
- Houston Municipal Code
- Forms
- Links ▾

Welcome to Houston, Alaska!



## Houston Happenings

### DRAFT CITY OF HOUSTON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AVAILABLE FOR REVIEW

Visit <http://houstonakcompplan.com> to access this document.

The *DRAFT* Community Impact Assessment (CIA) is Available for Public Review.

The full report and appendices can be found on the project website:

<http://houstonakcompplan.com/>

The CIA will help inform the current City of Houston Comprehensive Plan revision effort by analyzing potential impacts transportation projects may have on the community and residents' quality of life. The evaluation will allow the City and its residents to prepare for positive impacts and mitigate and potential negative impacts.

For more information contact:

Project Manager, Van Le , AICP at 907.646.9659 or [comments@rmconsult.com](mailto:comments@rmconsult.com)

[To View All City Holidays Click Here](#)

### Notice:

**The Little Su Campground is now CLOSED as of September 6th, 2016.**

**Houston/Willow Creek Sled Trailhead Parking Area Welcome all trail user enthusiasts! The new Houston/Willow Creek Trailhead parking area is maintained by the City of Houston. [Click Here](#) for directions and information.**

**For Campground Information please call 907-355-8794**

### Public Notice

[9.8.16 Notice of Council Action Taken](#)

[Click Here](#)

### NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS

#### Regular City Council Meeting

Items set for a Public Hearing at a Regular Meeting on September 8, 2016 at 7:00 pm. (Public Hearing to be held 13878 W Armstrong Road).

**Ordinance 16-21:** An Ordinance of the Houston City Council amending Houston Municipal Code, Title 3 Elections.

**Ordinance 16-22:** An Ordinance of the Houston City Council repealing the 1999 City of Houston Comprehensive Plan as amended in 2003, and adopting the 2016 City of Houston Comprehensive Plan.

### MSB District 7 Platting Board Seat Available

The Borough is looking to fill a vacant seat on the Platting Board for District 7.

For more information and how to apply please visit <http://www.matsuqov.us/boards/platting>

The Platting Board acts on applications for preliminary plats, variances, public use easements, plat note amendments and vacation of public interest. The Platting Board also acts on appeals of the Platting Officer's decision.

### Zoning Map

[To view the City of Houston Official Zoning Map, Click Here!](#)

**[For Marijuana Business Information in the City of Houston, Click Here!](#)**

### Alaska State Rail Plan

[Click Here](#) for the official website outlining future freight and passenger rail transportation policy in Alaska.

### Search

Search

Search Section  
 Full Site  
 This Section

Search Tips

### CITY CALENDAR

September 2016

| S     | M  | T  | W  | Th | F  | S     |
|-------|----|----|----|----|----|-------|
|       |    |    | 1  | 2  | 3  |       |
| 4     | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  | 10    |
| 11    | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17    |
| 18    | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24    |
| 25    | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |       |
| < Aug |    |    |    |    |    | Oct > |

[Read more...](#)

### Licensed Houston Business Services

The Mat-Su Valley is the fastest growing area in Alaska. Several large infrastructure projects as well as the peace and beauty of Valley life are drawing record numbers of families and businesses to the area.

Please click read more and visit the category buttons on the left to discover who is doing business in Houston and which services you may be able to benefit from right here at home.

[Shop local!](#)

[Read more...](#)

Mayor Thompson is available 5 days a week after 5 pm  
Please call City Hall to set up an appointment

Unless otherwise noted:

All City Meetings are Held at Houston City Hall, located at  
13878 W Armstrong Road, Houston AK 99694.

For a **Map** [CLICK HERE](#)

**Your Next Regular City Council Meeting**

**Thursday, September 8th, at 7:00pm**

**Agenda:** [Click Here](#)

**Packet: To Be Posted**

**Your Next Planning Commission Meeting**

**Thursday September 29th, at 7:00 pm**

**For Agenda: To Be Posted**

**For Packet: To Be Posted**

**NOTICE TO RESIDENTS CONCERNING ISO RATING**

Houston residents and business owners may see reduced fire insurance premium costs due to an improved fire class rating.

Please [click here](#) for notice for your Insurance Company.

City of Houston, 13878 W Armstrong, PO Box 940027, Houston AK  
99694  
P:907-892-6869 F:907-892-7677

Last updated 9/9/2016

Official City of Houston, Alaska Website

**Parks HWY Project MP 44-52 (Lucas Rd -  
Big Lake Rd)**

DOT info about the Parks HWY expansion project  
[Click Here](#) or 1-907-535-1877 or  
[mycomments@brooks-alaska.com](mailto:mycomments@brooks-alaska.com)



**Absentee By-Mail Ballot Applications**



Did you know?

You can vote by mail. [Click here to apply for an Absentee By-Mail Application!](#)

**We are on Facebook!**



The City of Houston is on Facebook.

[Check us out by clicking here!](#)



houstonak.complan.com

Assessment Public | Title 21 | Anchorage Link | MCA Property Info | Alaska News, Politics | Anchorage, AK (907) | Forecast for Anchorage | Alaska Department | DASH Digital | Register

## Community Impact Assessment & Comprehensive Plan Revision

Home | Comment | Contacts | Documents | Public Involvement | Schedule

Public Hearing Draft of the Comprehensive Plan Available for Review

Updated June 27, 2016

The City of Houston's Comprehensive Plan Revision Public Hearing Draft is available for review. On Thursday, June 30th, 2016 starting at 7 PM the Houston Planning Commission will introduce and discuss the draft. Please submit your comments on the Public Hearing Draft on our Comments page, or contact a member of the Urban Team.

City of Houston Comprehensive Plan, Public Hearing Draft June 2016

[View the statement](#) | [Leave a reply](#)

[June 2016](#)  
[February 2015](#)  
[October 2015](#)  
[July 2014](#)

[Log in](#)



## Open House to Review Draft Comprehensive Plan Revision

Updated February 10, 2016

Mark your calendars to join us at the Open House to review the Draft Comprehensive Plan for the City of Houston in May, 2016. This 20-year plan reflects the community's core values and future needs while providing a framework for development in the City of Houston through 2036. We appreciate your interest and encourage your feedback on the Draft Comprehensive Plan Revision.

houstonak.complan.com

Assessment Public | Title 21 | Anchorage Link | MCA Property Info | Alaska News, Politics | Anchorage, AK (907) | Forecast for Anchorage | Alaska Department | DASH Digital | Register

## Community Impact Assessment & Comprehensive Plan Revision

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# Documents

City of Houston Comprehensive Plan Revision – Public Hearing Draft

City of Houston Comprehensive Plan, Public Hearing Draft June 2016

The City of Houston Planning Commission will be introducing the Public Hearing Draft of the Comprehensive Plan on Thursday, June 30th, 2016.

Draft City of Houston Comprehensive Plan Revision – Public Review Draft

Draft City of Houston Comprehensive Plan Revision, 2/2016

Please join us May 18th at 7:00 PM at the Houston Fire Station on Armstrong Road to review and provide feedback on the draft plan.

Appendices to the Comprehensive Plan Revision

City of Houston Community Impact Assessment November 2014

City of Houston Community Impact Assessment Public Review Draft Report

Appendices of the CIA and Comprehensive Plan Revision

City of Houston Community Impact Assessment November 2014



City of Houston Community Impact Assessment Public Review Draft Report

City of Houston Community Impact Assessment November 2014

City of Houston Community Impact Assessment Public Review Draft Report

houstonak.complian.com

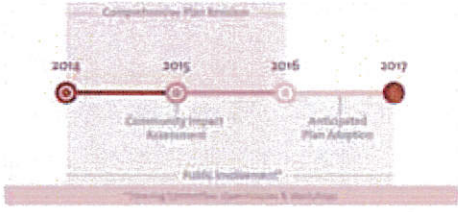
Assessment Public | Title 22 | Anchorage Law | MGA Property Information | Alaska News, Politics | Anchorage, AK (907) | Forecast for Anchorage | Alaska Department of | GARDING Digest | Register



Community Impact Assessment  
& Comprehensive Plan Revision


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## Schedule

COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION SCHEDULE





\*Ongoing Committee Meetings & Workshops



houstonak.complian.com

Assessment Public | Title 22 | Anchorage Law | MGA Property Information | Alaska News, Politics | Anchorage, AK (907) | Forecast for Anchorage | Alaska Department of | GARDING Digest | Register



Community Impact Assessment  
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## Comment

If you have an idea or a comment for the Community, a plan update, or anything else, comment here.

### Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked \*

Comment

Name \*

Email \*

Post Comment

# Public Involvement

## Join Us at the Open House to review the Draft Comprehensive Plan

Join us at the Houston Fire Station on **Thursday, May 5th** to review and provide feedback on the City of Houston's Draft Comprehensive Plan. Members of the project team and Steering Committee will be in attendance to answer any questions you may have. Please continue to help your community plan for the next 20 years by visiting us at the Open House.

## Thank you for attending the Second Open House on June 4th

The second Open House focused on the Community Impact Assessment. Thank you for joining us to identify and analyze the impacts upcoming projects may create for the City of Houston. The information gathered at the Open House will be incorporated into the CIA.

## Thank you for participating in the Survey!

Thank you for your participation in the City of Houston Comprehensive Plan Household Survey, conducted by the McDowell Group over the last two months. Your opinions will help guide Houston's future.

The **Future's Workshop was held on September 18th** at the Houston Fire Station where residents gathered to answer the question;

## “What should Houston be like in 20 years?”

If you missed the Workshop, it's not too late to participate. Please use the [comment](#) form or [contact](#) the Project Manager to tell us what your ideal future of Houston is like!

## Workshop Summary:

In small groups, residents were tasked with “creating ideal futures” and openly discussed what the future of Houston should include; all responses were recorded. After the small group session, residents reported key themes and ideas shared within their group to all attendees in an effort to find common ground on the future.

The Mind Maps are the complete list of ideas and themes we heard the community say during the Future's Workshop:

View or print the [Workshop's Small Group Mind Maps](#).

View or print the [Workshop's Whole Group Mind Maps](#) .

The following is what we heard the community say in the whole group session:

## Community Character

- Houston as a destination for tourism and recreation

- Have a unique identity or theme for us to be recognized by- distinguish Houston Alaska from the rest of the country and state
- Preservation of residential character – keeping “Houston Houston” with larger parcels for housing and minimal light pollution and noise
- Own a recreational identity; more than just trail heads
- Design standards for development
- Establish a Town Center keeping to the Houston feel
- Preservation of existing trails and ecology
- Involving community in the development and construction of community facilities
- Maintaining the quiet dark character – open for growth but keep it rural
- Community needs to be proactive
- Family friendly
- Make both sides of the river and railroad tracks feel like one community
- Wide reaching community government and development- increased involvement

#### Working Mission Statement:

The community of Houston wants to develop as a destination for tourism and recreation; while maintaining a family friendly community that will encompass a future town center, designated trails and community facilities.

#### Transportation

- Train station in the City
- More connectivity – more emergency access
- Town center that is accessible and multiuse
- Multiuse pathways
- Better signage
- Main road be protected – increased vegetation
- Maintain multiuse trails
- Improved lighting and roadways
- Eventually expand availability of utilities and services
- Safety on the Parks corridor
- Development of King Arthur Rd.
- Hawk lane bike path – improvement of pedestrian safety via pathways and lighting
- Industrial development along the rail lanes- light industrial
- Increase vegetative buffers in roadways
- Main artery needs proper planning for controlled access and the expansion of the Parks highway and the secondary roadways – *proper planning for corridor*
- *Port to Parks*
- Bus stop marker, signage, and lighting
- Park and ride with Valley-movers throughout Mat-Su and Anchorage Bowl

#### Summary Statement:

There is a need to increase safety, accessibility, and mobility through much of the City and improvements shall be beneficial to all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized uses, while maintaining the community character.

#### Planning

- More staffing for City, Fire department should not be responsible for all emergency and police services
- Evolve into a 1<sup>st</sup> class city

- Corridor study
- Planning land use (one comment on no zoning restrictions)
- Water resource planning –special attention to the flood planes
- Development suitability study
- MSB build out- match with community growth
- Program to reduce junk cars
- Transfer centers
- Incentive for people to come here – education, recreation facilities, design
- Encourage subdivision with more high income development

**Summary Statement:**

Effective, implementable planning is a recognized need for successful growth, development, and overall health of the community, as defined by its residents.

Housing

- Incentivize Dr. and medical facilities to move here
  - Assisted care facilities
- Plan for multi-family and senior housing with the aging population
- Conveniences for high end houses for a higher tax base – designate areas for high end housing

**Summary Statement:**

The availability of housing in Houston should be appealing for a wide range of incomes, while providing opportunities for satisfactory, safe living for all residents.

Community Facilities and Services

- Education – elementary school
- Town Center with; pedestrian friendly facilities, landscaping, panels and walk theme, restaurants, mixed use, near river or railroad, building codes (Form based codes)
- Youth summer programs
- Opportunities for post-secondary education/carter school
- Public safety; EMS expansion, year round water flow for fire
- Flood control response planning
- Community watch
- Recreation; trails, multiuse, designated facilities for recreation (rinks, pools, ball courts), preservation of natural areas, facility maintenance for motorized and non-motorized users including horses and dogs
- Animal shelter
- Utility expansion dependent on road alignment ; natural gas, coal, alternative energy
- Recreation destination; use Little Su for business services (tourism)
- Cemetery
- Veterinary clinic
- Daycare
- Business districts; planned, designed, and built
- Pharmacy
- Dentist
- Medical facilities
- Assisted care facilities
- Gas station and goods services
- Grocery store or food shops

**Summary Statement:**

The City of Houston recognizes the need to expand its facilities and services in order to provide safe and satisfactory living for its residents, while enhancing the City's autonomy, economy, and unique identity.

Economic Development

- Keep tax base
- Local jobs
- Riverwalk
- Community identity for economic development (using it to draw in visitors and residents)
- Centralized for recreation for Hatcher Pass, Deskha, etc. – capitalize on natural location
- Facilities at King Arthur; Laundromat, shower, gym, meeting place
- Daycare
- Natural resource development; coal mines, power plant, city owned utility

**Summary Statement:**

While maintaining the current tax structure, the City of Houston aims to develop economically by capitalizing on its current amenities and natural resources; allowing commercial and light industrial development as long as it aligns with the community character and will be to the benefit of City residents.

**Let us know how you would define Houston's Community Character and your opinion on these summary statements!**

