

Chapter 1. Introduction

Purpose of the Hillside District Plan

The purpose of the Hillside District Plan is to establish sound public policy that reflects the vision of Hillside residents and landowners, and the interests of the full community of Anchorage. The plan must address both current needs and future growth. The primary challenge of the Hillside District Plan is to protect the qualities that both residents and users of the area value about the Hillside while accommodating future development. Under existing zoning, if all buildable vacant land in the Hillside District were developed, the area would grow from 8,500 to nearly 14,000 homes. This capacity for growth includes a combination of infill in already developed portions of the Hillside, and development of large tracts of private, vacant land, most of which are located in the southeast Hillside. The pink areas on Map 1.1 show the location of these vacant Hillside lands. Map 1.2 shows the current zoning in the area.

The Hillside District Plan provides greater specificity for policy on land use and public services than the Anchorage 2020 Comprehensive Plan and replaces the Hillside Wastewater Management Plan. Specific issues covered in the plan include the density and character of residential development; infrastructure needs including drainage, roads, trails, and water and wastewater service; the recreational needs of residents and visitors; and protection of environmental quality, particularly water quality.

The adopted Anchorage 2020 Comprehensive Plan provides broad direction for the future of the Anchorage Bowl, including the Hillside District. The 2020 plan also includes an allocation of the Hillside's share of Anchorage's overall growth. Decisions regarding the timing of that development will be made by market forces. The Hillside District Plan provides guidance for the character and location of future growth, and the infrastructure needed to support this development.

Building on the Anchorage 2020 Comprehensive Plan, work by the Municipality of Anchorage, the Hillside Citizen Advisory Committee, and input from the public, the plan aims to achieve the following:

- Maintain the rural character of the area, including preserving natural vegetation and access to open space, particularly in the large portion of the district where housing densities are low.



The Citizen Advisory Committee

Assembly members Janice Shamborg, Chris Birch and Jennifer Johnston appointed the members of the Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC). Our committee includes property developers, geologists, community activists, engineers and even some normal people. Members of the CAC live throughout the district. A very broad range of experience and knowledge was brought to the Hillside District Plan project by the CAC.

Advisory committees are often not much more than window dressing. Not so with this group. The MOA department representatives and the contractors hired to help with this project have filtered all of the issues and research and proposals through this group, facing insightful, probing and persistent questioning. A couple of times CAC members “went to the field” to do their own research and writing on specific topics so the plan would represent accurate information, accurately presented. We have been very involved in the details as well as in the wider policies presented in this plan. We have used our knowledge, experience and the advice of our many neighbors in doing this work, and we endorse the plan with only minor reservations (noted in sidebars in a few places). This plan is very good and we hope the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Assembly will agree after careful review.

The CAC has worked very hard and, I believe, has played a vital part in producing a plan that will greatly improve the Hillside and make all of Anchorage a better place to live for the next ten years and beyond.

– John Reese, CAC Chair



Hillside residents value the beauty and privacy that comes with tree-cover and natural vegetation, as shown above. Other, newer Hillside District developments have preserved less vegetation and retained fewer trees, as shown below. Development standards can help retain buffers of natural and planted vegetation to maintain the character of the Hillside.



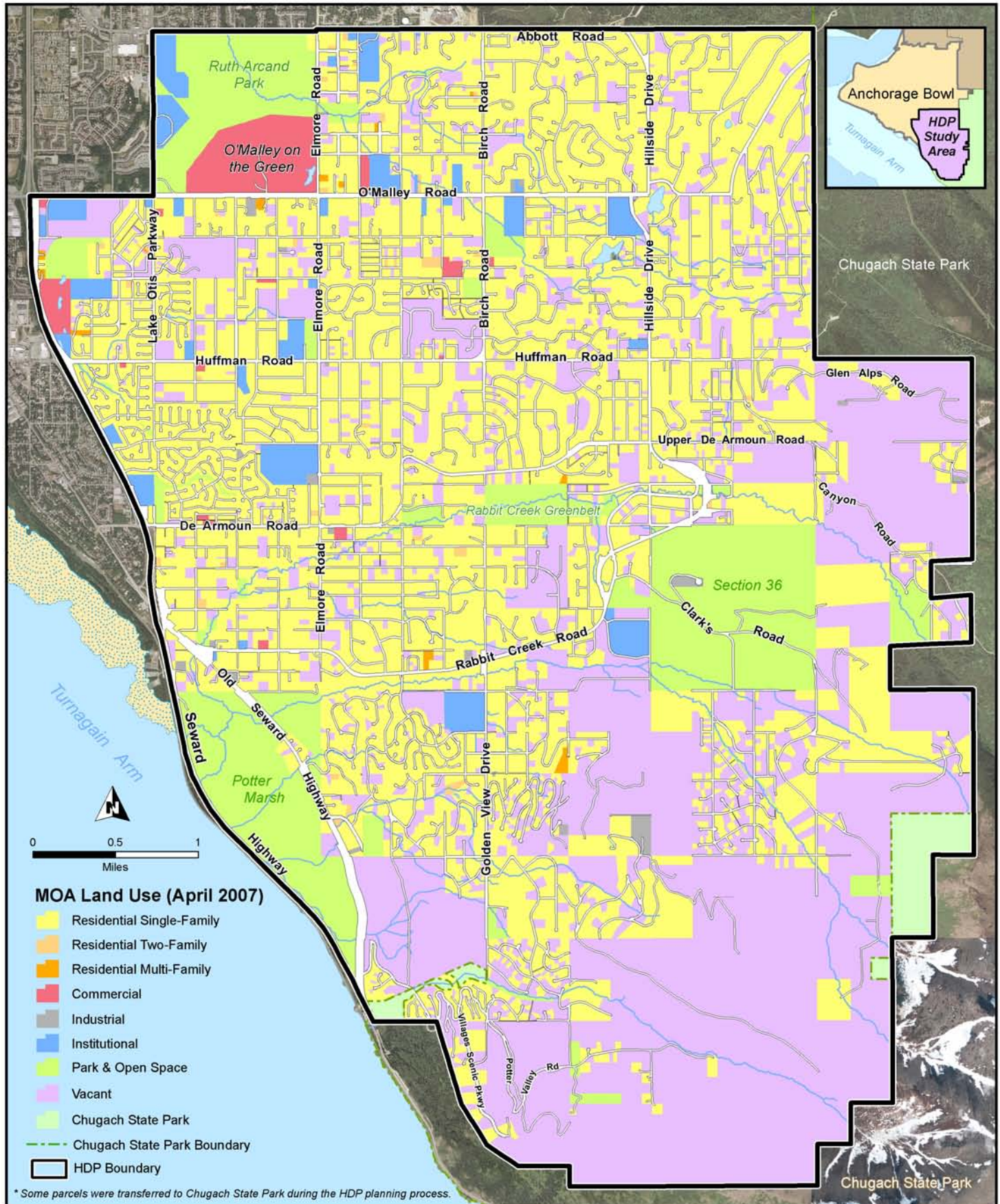
- Identify specific areas of the Hillside that can, over time, absorb more intense residential development than is possible under current zoning, as called for in the Anchorage 2020 Comprehensive Plan. In addition, identify places that should support less intensive residential development than is allowed under current zoning.
- Maintain the overall integrity and health of the Hillside natural environment, including water quality and wildlife habitats.
- Improve the road system, particularly to provide better emergency access and connectivity, to reduce congestion and increase safety, and to support expected growth while maintaining neighborhood character.
- Preserve and connect trails. Develop facilities to respond to the steadily increasing demands for access to Chugach State Park. Improve management of trails and trailheads to increase the quality of the trail system, and to reduce impacts on adjoining residential areas.
- Take action to reduce drainage problems, both for new and existing development. Find better ways to keep ice off roads; keep streets, basements and garages free of water; and keep streams and wetlands clean.
- Preserve the viability of on-site water and wastewater systems; ensure the continued quality of well water. Provide opportunities for new forms of wastewater treatment.
- Building from the Title 21 Rewrite, a project to update the municipal zoning code, establish standards so new development is suited to the environmental conditions of the Hillside (e.g., standards to retain native vegetation, reduce runoff, and reduce wildfire hazards). Improve the development approval and review process so the process works well for developers, landowners, and residents.
- To make achieving many of these goals possible, establish new funding and management mechanisms that provide for locally directed improvements in roads, drainage and trails, and to better monitor and protect water quality.

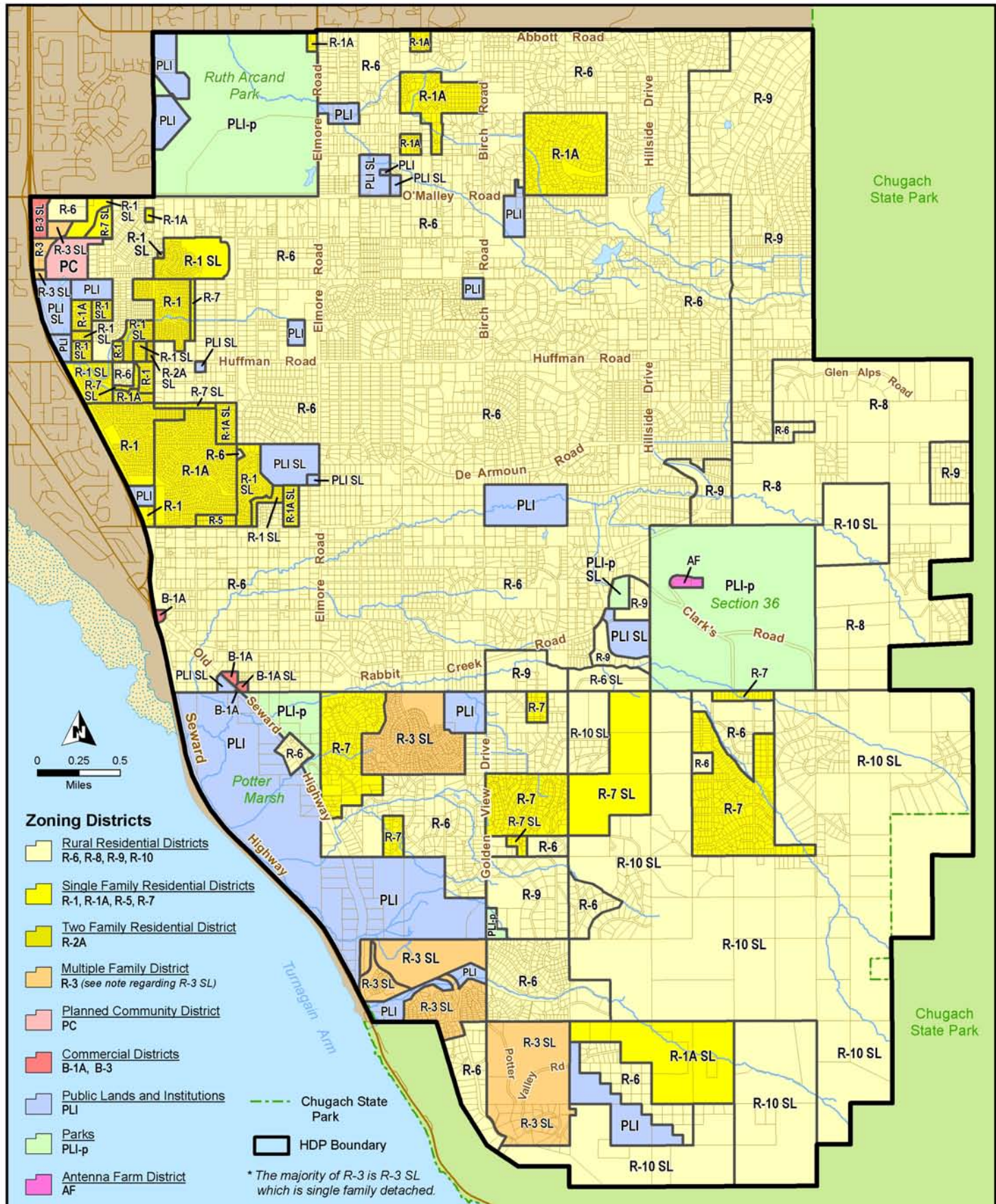
Overall, as the public survey showed, residents are very satisfied with their quality of life on the Hillside and want to maintain those qualities that make their home a special place, even as the area continues to grow.

Map 1.1

Existing Land Use

(Lavendar areas are vacant, undeveloped land. Remaining areas are developed or committed.)





Hillside District Plan Process

The planning process began in autumn 2006. Since that time, the Citizen Advisory Committee met more than 25 times; three rounds of public workshops were held; a survey was completed by 2,157 Hillside residents and landowners; and numerous individuals and community groups contributed their ideas and opinions through mail, email and the Hillside District Plan website.

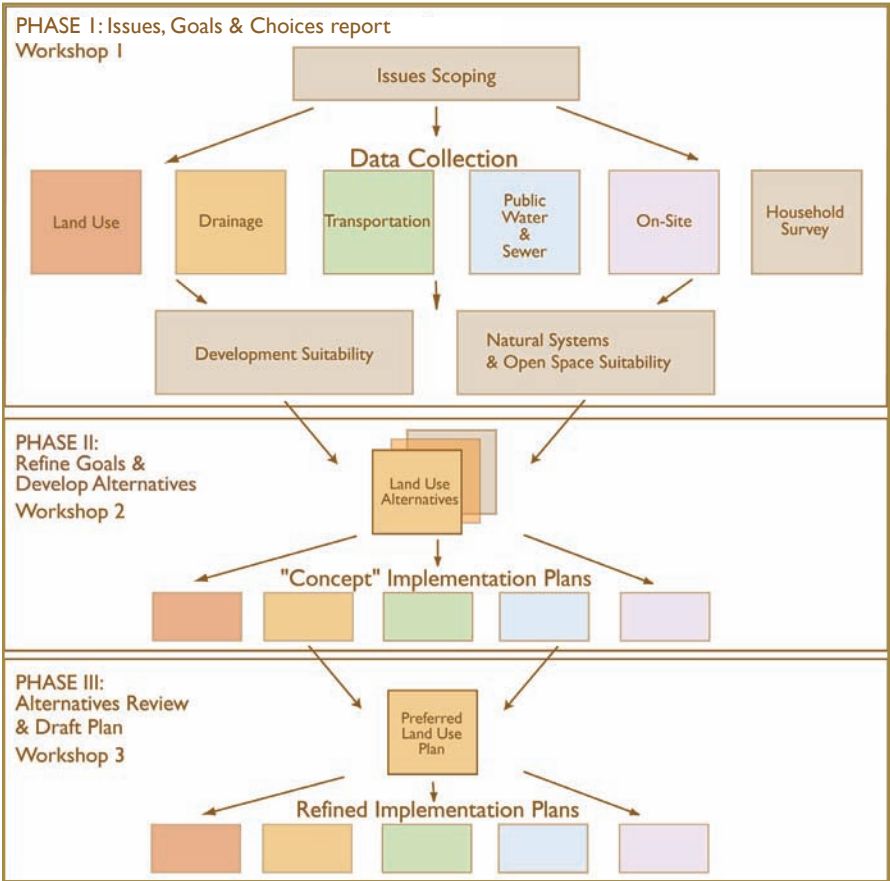
In the fall of 2008, a Public Review Draft Plan was circulated for comment, then revised to reflect a consideration of feedback, producing the Public Hearing Draft. The Public Hearing Draft Plan was reviewed and approved by the Anchorage Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC Resolution No. 2009-047) and adopted by the Anchorage Assembly (AO 2010-22). This is the officially adopted Hillside District Plan.

Figure 1.3 and the text on the following pages explain the process for preparing this plan.



The purpose of the Hillside District Plan is to guide decisions on the location and character of future development on Hillside and the necessary infrastructure needed to support this development. Decisions regarding the general amount of development have already been made through the Anchorage 2020 comprehensive planning process. Decisions regarding the timing of development will be made by market forces.

Figure 1.3
Hillside District Plan Phasing Diagram





The Hillside District remains a highly desirable place to buy a home in Anchorage.



New construction is occurring throughout the Hillside, as shown here near Potter Valley.

The Hillside District Plan process was developed in three phases:

Phase I – Issues

In this initial phase the Planning Team gathered information about issues the plan would address. This included meetings of the Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC), a three-day public workshop series (March 2007), and a household survey mailed to every home on the Hillside. With this information and the assistance of the CAC, consultants and municipal staff prepared a series of background reports intended to better understand and share information about the complex issues that emerged. The resulting documents, a series of topical White Papers and the HDP Issues, Goals, and Choices report were distributed for public review (referenced in the list of Hillside District Plan Supporting Documents, Appendix A).

Phase II – Refine Goals and Develop Alternatives

This phase began with a second multi-day public workshop series (October 2007) to review the White Papers and the Issues, Goals, and Choices report. From the technical studies and feedback gathered at the workshop, municipal staff, contractors and the CAC worked together to identify alternatives to respond to issues. This information was presented in the report “Hillside District Plan Alternatives – A Framework for Public Discussion.” This document (released in April 2008) combined the initial direction provided by the Anchorage 2020 Comprehensive Plan with input received from the CAC, residents, community organizations, landowners and municipal departments, plus the findings from studies on the district’s drainage, transportation, and water and wastewater systems.

Phase III – Alternatives Review and Preparation of Draft Plan

The third phase of the project began with a third multi-day public workshop series (April 2008) where the framework document was presented for public review and discussion. At this workshop (and from comments submitted by mail, email, and the Hillside District Plan website) the Planning Team gathered feedback on the alternatives in the framework report. Based on that feedback, municipal staff, contractors and members of the CAC developed the Public Review Draft of the Hillside District Plan. The Public Review Draft was released in the fall of 2008, with a public review period of 46 days. The review process included one well-attended public workshop. Comments were summarized and made available on the project website.

Plan Review and Approval Timeline

Release Public Review Draft Plan:
October 9, 2008

Public Review:
October 9 - November 24, 2008

Release Public Hearing Draft:
May 7, 2009

Planning and Zoning Commission Public
Hearing:
June 15, 2009

Planning and Zoning Commission
Resolution No. 2009-047:
Passed and approved October 12, 2009
Adopted December 7, 2009

Assembly Public Hearing and Plan
Adoption:
April 13, 2010

Based on this additional public input, a revised draft plan, the Public Hearing Draft was prepared. The Public Hearing Draft was released for an additional round of public review, and was then reviewed and approved by the Anchorage Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC Resolution No. 2009-047) and adopted by the Anchorage Assembly (AO 2010-22). This final Hillside District Plan reflects the specific changes mandated by the PZC and Assembly as condition for approval and adoption, included in AO 2010-22 and three amendments.

All background documents prepared as part of the HDP process and occasionally referenced in this report (including the Hillside District Plan Whitepapers, the Hillside District Plan Issues, Goals and Choices Report, Hillside District Plan Alternatives - A Framework for Public Discussion, and the Public Review Draft of the Hillside District Plan) do not establish policies for the Hillside District. These documents offer background on how the HDP policies evolved, technical references, etc., but only the Public Hearing Draft of the Hillside District Plan as amended was adopted by the Anchorage Assembly and became an official municipal policy document.

Hillside Character

Physical Landscape

The Hillside environment offers both opportunities and challenges for development. Opportunities include a still relatively intact natural setting and, in many areas, excellent views. Constraints include steep slopes, avalanche danger, shallow soils, high winds, longer snow-cover and colder temperatures, especially where solar access is limited by shadow. Winter conditions can last as much as six weeks longer on the Upper Hillside than in the flatlands.

Anchorage's varied terrain reflects a unique combination of marine coastal influences, glacial movement, northern climate and the earthquake activity due to the area's complex tectonics. Large-scale glaciers have advanced down Knik and Turnagain Arms. These glaciers and the materials they have deposited, such as dense, gravel-bearing, silty sediments (tills), are one of the primary forces shaping Anchorage's landscapes, and are especially evident on the Hillside.



The overall goal of the Hillside District Plan is to take active steps to retain the qualities of the Hillside most enjoyed by the residents and the area's visitors – including quality residential neighborhoods, natural vegetation, views, trails and access to open space – while accommodating the Hillside District's share of Anchorage's growth, as determined by the Anchorage 2020 Comprehensive Plan.



Southern Hillside District from the air.













As shown in Map 1.4 Terrain Complexes for Drainage Planning, the Hillside District is characterized by gentle slopes in the northwest, giving way in the southeast to steeper mountain ridges separated by alpine valleys. Streams collect snowmelt and runoff from nearby peaks and flow down these valleys into the forests and wetlands of the lower Hillside, and ultimately into the tidal flats of Turnagain Arm. Rabbit

Creek, which traverses the center of the district, cuts a significant canyon through the lower Hillside.

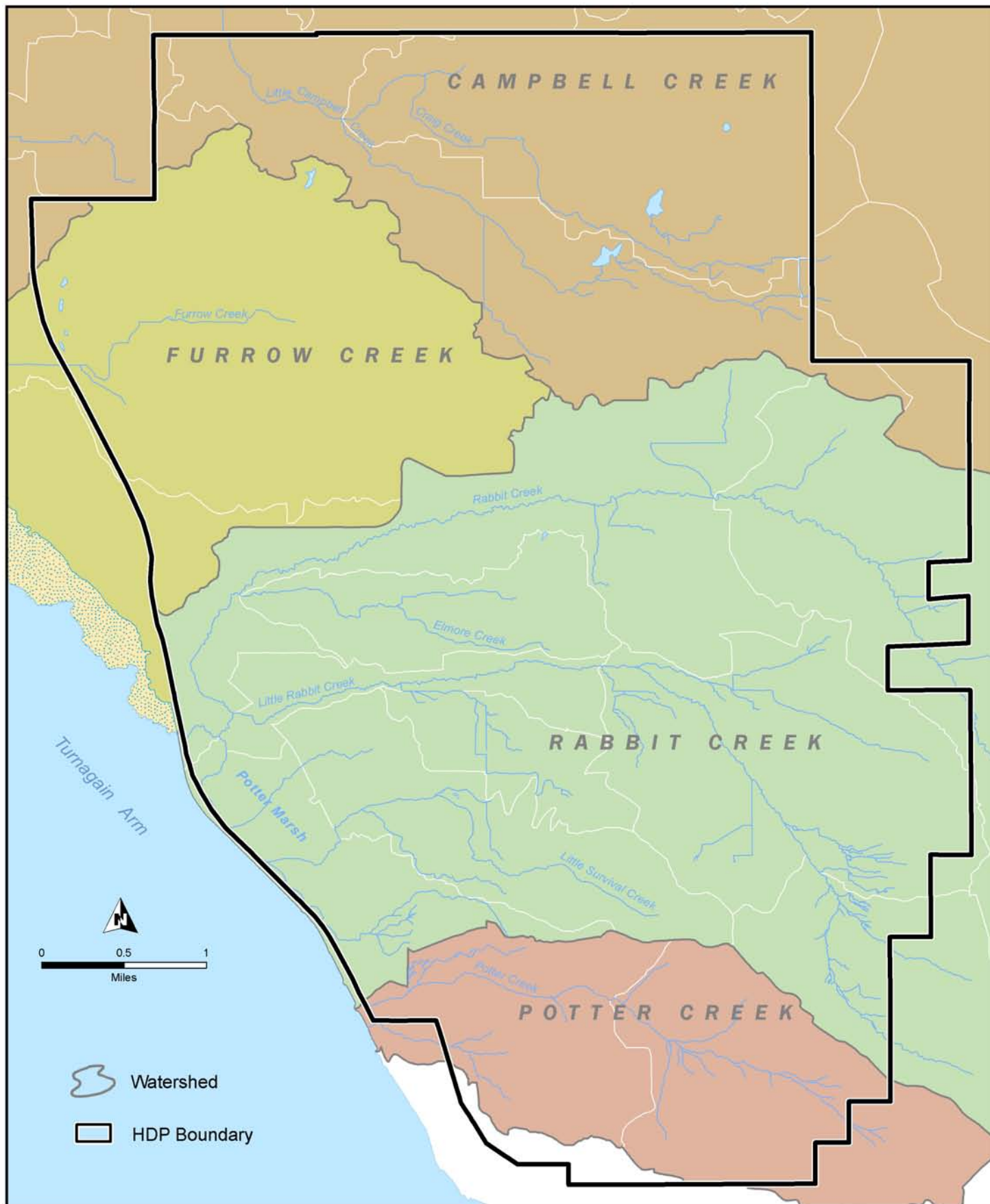
A review of the Terrain Complexes map paints a helpful picture of the underlying physical structure of the Hillside. The eastern half of the area has two main components. One is the set of higher elevation ridges coming down from the Chugach Mountains. These open alpine areas are largely composed of exposed bedrock and slope tills. They are characterized by steeper slopes, thin but generally well-drained soils, and good views. Between these ridges are alpine valleys with milder terrain, formed of valley tills and moraine materials. These areas are located at the edge of timberline and include scattered spruce, hemlock, birch, aspen and cottonwood. Soils are deeper than on the adjoining ridges, and wetlands and saturated soils are common. Most of the southeastern Hillside, with its higher elevation ridges, glacial valleys and mountain streams, remains undeveloped.

Much of the transitional land between the steeper eastern and gentler western areas of the Hillside is made up of lands defined as Kame-Kettle topography and moraines. These areas include ridges, pits, and swales of coarse boulder-like sediment manipulated by glaciers. In some areas the moraine landforms extend west into the lower Hillside. These transitional areas tend to have a jumbled topographic character, with variable slope conditions and mixtures of well drained and saturated soils.



-  Bedrock
-  Moraine
-  Kame-Kettle
-  Slope Tills
-  Valley Tills
-  Ridged Tills
-  Washed Tills
-  Channel Outwash
-  Fan
-  Floodplain
-  Bog/Water
-  Fill

 HDP Boundary



The flatter lands in the western portions of the Hillside are made up largely of washed and ridged till soils. Compared to other parts of the Hillside, a higher percentage of these areas have well-drained soils suitable for development, although there are still a number of areas with poorly drained soils. The combination of better-than-average building conditions and access to infrastructure extending from the west has allowed more intense development to occur in this part of the Hillside.

One of the defining features of the Hillside is the spectacular view, both into the Chugach Mountains and, from the upper Hillside out towards the Anchorage Bowl, Cook Inlet, Turnagain Arm, and the Alaska Range. As the gateway to Chugach State Park and the mountain range that frames the city of Anchorage, the visual quality of the Hillside, especially the upper Hillside, is important to Hillside residents, visitors, and Anchorage citizens alike. Visual quality is one important consideration in Hillside District Plan policy regarding roads and vegetation retention, buildings, and other man-made structures.

Vegetation, Hydrology, Wildlife

Vegetation patterns on the Hillside follow the terrain. Lowland portions of the Hillside, like much of the rest of Anchorage, are characterized by mixed spruce and birch forest. Cottonwoods and other riparian vegetation grow in floodplains along Rabbit Creek and other larger water courses. Vegetation thins as the elevation climbs, with spruce and birch giving way to hemlock and alder. Above the treeline, dense brush composed of willow and alder dominate. In areas above 2,000 feet, the landscape is a mix of alpine tundra plant species and open outcrops of rock, often covered in lichens. Wetlands are found along streams, in the troughs and depressions of the moraines and terraces left by glaciers, in areas overlying clay, and on flattened portions of steep slopes on shallow bedrock.

Many streams flow through the Hillside District Plan area. As is shown on Map 1.5, these include (generally from south to north) Potter Creek, Little Survival Creek, Little Rabbit Creek, Rabbit Creek, Elmore Creek, Furrow Creek, Little Campbell Creek, and Craig Creek, and numerous unnamed or locally named tributary streams.

Potter Marsh, located between the Old and New Seward Highways, is one of the most distinctive natural features of the Hillside. Like Westchester Lagoon, this area was “created”



The Hillside is far from homogenous. The district encompasses a diversity of land forms and landscapes. Examples above show homes built on alpine ridges and in flatlands comparable to the rest of Anchorage.

when the railroad was constructed, creating a berm that captured freshwater runoff and transformed tidal flats into an area of marshes and shallow ponds. Potter Marsh is part of the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge (ACWR), which was established in 1988 to protect waterfowl, shorebirds, salmon, and other fish and wildlife species and their habitat. The refuge is managed cooperatively by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources. Today Potter Marsh is framed to the north and east by a wooded slope of spruce, cottonwoods, and alders that reaches up the hill to low-density residential development. To the south and west, the railroad embankment separates the marsh from Turnagain Arm, although several culverts through the embankment allow exchange of water between Turnagain Arm and the marsh. In addition to the boardwalk at the northern end, two highway pullouts at the southern end of the marsh allow for viewing and photography. Within the Hillside District, the Rabbit Creek and Potter Creek watersheds are important water sources for this freshwater marsh, making maintaining water quantity and quality in this watershed important to maintaining the marsh itself.



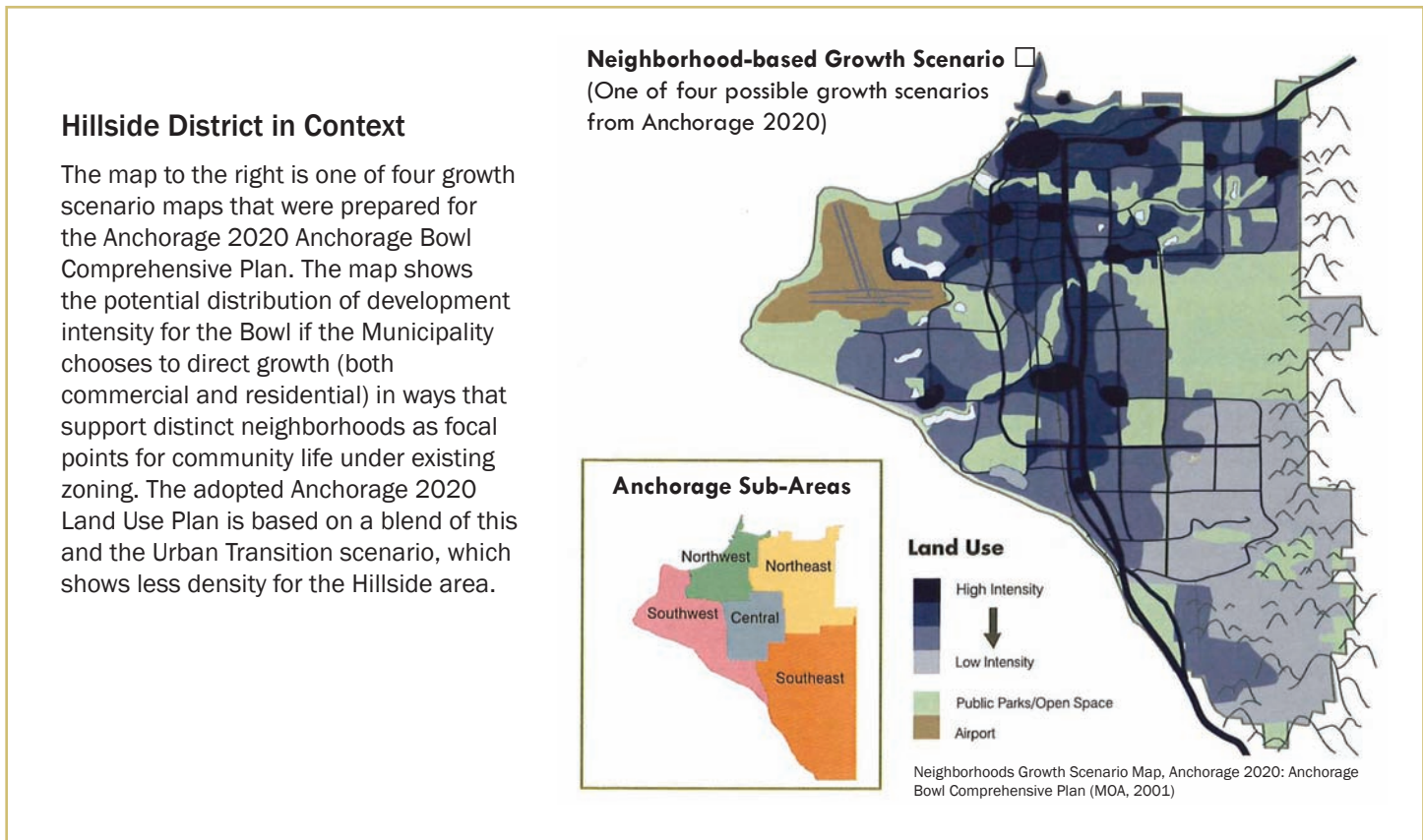
Potter Marsh is a popular wildlife viewing area, featuring a 1,550-foot boardwalk with interpretive signs (and often, local naturalists) that provides access to the northern part of the marsh.

Rabbit Creek, Little Rabbit Creek, and Little Survival Creek all support populations of pink, Coho, and Chinook salmon and Dolly Varden char. With its nutrient-rich environment and mix of fresh- and salt-water, Potter Marsh is an important juvenile fish-rearing area. Salmon fry, sticklebacks, and sculpins are found throughout the marsh, providing food for summer birds, such as arctic terns. Arctic grayling have also been observed occasionally.¹ Potter Marsh is a stopping point for a range of bird species including Canada geese, mallards, northern pintails, northern shovelers, American widgeons, canvasbacks, red-necked grebes, horned grebes, yellowlegs, northern phalaropes, arctic terns, and mew gulls. Other birds that have been sighted include trumpeter or tundra swans, snow geese, short-eared owls, Pacific loons, northern harriers, and bald eagles.

The Hillside presents a rich habitat for wildlife within the Anchorage Bowl. The area's mountainsides, forests, stream corridors, lakes, and marshes support a number of fish, bird and mammal species. Approximately 80 species of birds have been identified in Chugach State Park, of which approximately 20 are year-round inhabitants. These species include golden eagles, bald eagles, hawks, owls, woodpeckers, ducks, and many species of warblers, according to the Chugach State Park Management

¹ - Note: Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Wildlife Conservation Division website <http://wildlife.alaska.gov> (Accessed June 16, 2008).

Figure 1.6
Hillside District Growth and Character in Context



Plan. Terrestrial animals include moose, Dall sheep, mountain goat, grizzly and black bear, coyote, wolf, red fox, lynx, wolverine, mink, weasel, marten, porcupine, marmot, several species of squirrel, beaver, and others. Many residents of (and visitors to) the Hillside value their interactions with wildlife, making habitat protection one important goal for the area.

The Human Landscape

From the city's modest beginnings in the early 1900s, Anchorage's development has gradually spread outward from the original tent city at the mouth of Ship Creek. As Anchorage has grown, development has slowly reached into the Hillside area. Maps from the 1940s and 1950s show just a handful of marginal roads into the Hillside, generally corresponding to section line easements, and providing access to early homesteads. The original Seward Highway provided access into the southern sections of the Hillside, and at one point included a small commercial district with a gas station in the area just north of Potter Marsh. This



Prominence Pointe (above) and Goldenview Park (below). These subdivisions, along with Potter Valley further south, are examples of relatively recently developed subdivisions, served by public water and sewer, which bring areas of higher density development into the southern Hillside.



commercial hub faded as South Anchorage grew and traffic transferred to the New Seward Highway.

Over the years, Hillside lands have developed on a parcel-by-parcel or subdivision-by-subdivision basis. Development practices have evolved over time on the Hillside. As the Hillside has grown, issues such as drainage problems, congestion, and loss of trails and open space have become more frequent and visible, creating a need for the Hillside District Plan.

The Hillside district encompasses a range of development intensity, from middle density suburban character in the northwestern portions of the area, to an increasingly rural character with scattered, large-lot homes nestled among forests and open glacial valleys on the upper Hillside. Overall, the area is dominated by single-family residential development and vacant private land zoned for additional single-family residential use. The Hillside does have significant numbers of nonresidential uses, including numerous churches, the Alaska Zoo, a golf course, a number of horse stables, several municipal parks, and a variety of home-based businesses. A handful of retail and service commercial uses exist on the Hillside (shown on Map 2.4). In general, though, most of the Hillside District remains low-intensity residential.

Roads and Trails

Previous Hillside District Plan background reports and the remainder of this plan provide a thorough review of Hillside infrastructure. This section provides a brief summary of that information. The Hillside area currently does not have many of the public services and facilities that are common in the rest of Anchorage and Eagle River. This lack of services is seen as a benefit by many Hillside residents. At the same time, as the area continues to grow, the lack of such services, particularly drainage, roads and trails, is proving to be a problem.

Currently on the Hillside, the State of Alaska is responsible for the major roads in the area. Road maintenance on secondary and residential roads is covered in portions of the Hillside by Local Road Service Areas (LRSAs) and Rural Road Service Areas. Homeowners associations and other “independent areas” have no government-assisted system for road maintenance and rely on efforts organized by local residents. No management authority exists for drainage; this is a critical Hillside issue. Roughly 80 percent of all Hillside homes rely on on-site water and well

service. The remainder of the area, mostly in the western portions of the Hillside, is served by public water and sewer systems. Police and fire services are provided by the Municipality as they are in the remainder of the Anchorage Bowl. Roughly three-quarters of the Hillside is within the Anchorage Bowl Park District. The upper elevation portions of the southeastern Hillside are currently outside this area, preventing the Municipality from spending money on parks and trails in this area where many Hillside recreational needs are greatest.

The character of the Hillside road system generally follows the density of the residential areas surrounding them. The flatter, denser areas of the lower (northwestern) Hillside have a well-developed primary road network on a one-mile grid generally aligned with section lines, only interrupted where large wetlands or rough terrain prevent easy road construction. The secondary road network in the interior of this grid typically has a more organic structure, wending its way to and through neighborhoods and subdivisions of varying age. In many areas, smaller roads are narrow gravel country lanes, reinforcing the rural character dear to many Hillside residents. The primary road system in the fast-growing southern half of the study area is less well developed, except for Golden View Drive, this area's one primary north-south route.

The Hillside road system has generally sufficed in the past but as the area continues to develop, a number of smaller roads and several intersections are increasingly congested, particularly near schools. Safety issues have also increased, with growing speeds and volumes of traffic on roads that are often icy and slick. With fewer route options, the existing lack of connectivity in the upper reaches of the Hillside creates additional difficulties for emergency access and public services.

The Hillside has an extensive but informal and often disconnected trail system. This set of routes, ranging from roadside paths to sketchy game trails, serves hikers, equestrians, bicyclists, and an array of winter users. In addition to the use of trails, many Hillside residents enjoy walking on the (mostly) quiet roads in their neighborhoods. Many well-used trails cross currently vacant private lands that will likely be developed in the future. Trails are an important form of community infrastructure, valued for recreation, transportation, socializing, health, and economic reasons. Multi-use trails and sidewalks (in and around



Roadside trails (often little more than the shoulders of busy roads) form the back bone of the Hillside trail system.



Better, more active management of recreation on the Hillside is critical if trailheads and trail use are going to be good neighbors in residential areas. The Transportation and Implementation Chapters outline planned locations of trails and trailheads and means to increase funding for trail-related uses.



Hillside Trailheads: Demand for ready access to alpine areas is much greater than access to lower-elevation, forested areas. These two photos, taken within the same minute on a sunny Thursday at the beginning of July, show more than 100 cars at the Glen Alps parking lot (below), as opposed to five vehicles at the Upper Huffman parking lot (above). This plan aims to establish several new trailheads providing ready access to alpine terrain, along with a system to properly manage and maintain these areas.



neighborhoods, near schools, and along key arterials) provide mobility and accessibility. In many places on the Hillside, trails infrastructure (parking areas, trash services, signage, and general management of trails use) has not kept pace with demand. Evidence of this problem includes overflowing parking areas, parking in places not intended as trailheads, and, on occasion, problems with trespass, trash, and vandalism.

Hillside Character Summary: Implications for Development


The Hillside District Plan is designed to respond to the particular physical characteristics of the Hillside, which include the development that has occurred there during the past 50 years. The same qualities that attract people to the area, including scenic views, a mountain setting, and contact with the natural world, also present challenges for development.

This plan and the Municipality of Anchorage recognize these physical constraints and opportunities. The potential implications for development of these environmental features are presented in Map 1.7 (Development Suitability). The map shows weighted and combined environmental constraints that have been divided into three categories:

1. Lands generally suitable for development,
2. Marginally suitable lands, and
3. Lands generally unsuitable for development.

Generally suitable lands are considered minimally affected by any of the more significant environmental constraints of the other two categories. Marginally suitable lands include those affected by moderate avalanche hazard, slopes between 25 and 45 percent, Class B and C wetlands, and/or areas with high seismic activity. Generally unsuitable lands include high avalanche hazard areas, slopes greater than 45 percent, floodplains or flood ways, stream setbacks, Class A wetlands, bedrock, and/or lands that experience very high seismic activity.

Development Suitability



Expectations for Growth



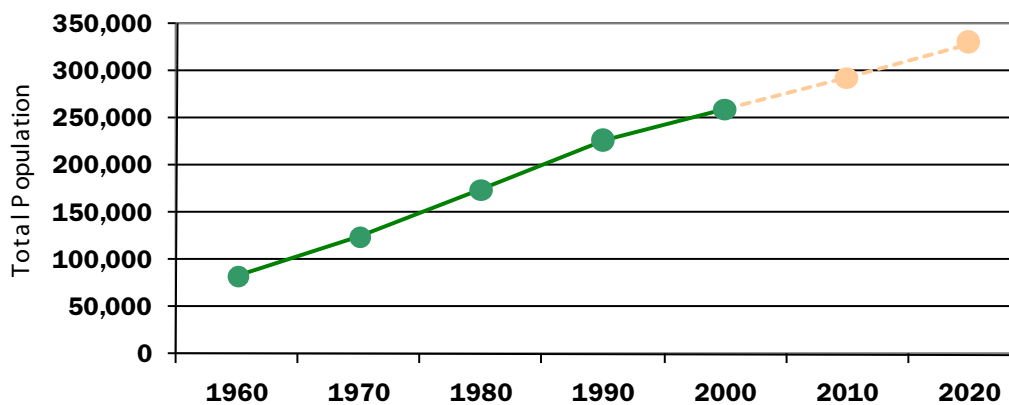
Depending on market conditions, full build-out could occur in the next 15 years or the next 50 years. The fundamental challenge for the Hillside District Plan is to find ways to accommodate this growth, while retaining the qualities that make the Hillside a special place.

The Hillside is a special place. The qualities that residents most treasure (and those most often cited in public comments during the HDP planning process) include large-lot living, rural atmosphere, a country road feeling, visual separation from neighbors, privacy, seclusion, and the sense of elbow room. These comments paint a picture of a low-density residential area with ample vegetation, owner-built homes, quiet streets, dark night skies, and easy access to undeveloped open space. Hillside residents also enjoy convenient access to the amenities of city life: good jobs, shops, services and entertainment, to name a few.

This proximity, however, also presents challenges. Anchorage is a young and growing city. As Figure 1.8 shows, the population of Anchorage has more than doubled during the past 50 years. Within the past ten years, the Abbott Road area east of the New Seward Highway has developed into a major commercial center.

There are two main ways to think about the amount of growth expected on the Hillside. One view is offered by the Anchorage 2020 Comprehensive Plan; the other is to look at existing zoning. Both lead to the same general conclusion.

Figure 1.8
Municipality of Anchorage Population, 1960-2020



Source: Historical data from Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development (Alaska DCCED). Projections from Economic Projections for Alaska and the Southern Railbelt 2004-2030 (ISER, 2004).

Anchorage 2020 establishes general allocations for estimated citywide growth across five major districts of the Anchorage Bowl (Anchorage 2020, Anchorage Bowl Comprehensive Plan, p58-59). As the sidebar on the following page explains, the plan aims to concentrate most of the Anchorage Bowl's future growth in the Northwest (Downtown), Northeast (East Anchorage), and Central (Midtown) sectors of the Municipality, with the goal of creating more compact urban development in areas with established infrastructure. The 2020 plan allocates 13 to 20 percent of the Municipality's growth to the Hillside District (called the Southeast district in the 2020 Plan). The Hillside is expected to absorb more single-family rural housing units than other sectors of the Bowl, in keeping with the character of the Hillside and because it contains the most privately owned vacant land available for development in the Municipality. The plan also assumes that a limited amount of medium-density and multi-family housing development will occur along the western portion of the lower Hillside.

The second way to estimate the amount of future Hillside growth is to look at existing zoning. The Hillside District contains almost two-thirds of the Anchorage Bowl's vacant residential land. The MOA Planning Department estimates that 5,030 additional dwelling units could be built on the Hillside under existing zoning and considering physical constraints on development. Table 1.9 estimates the amount of growth possible under existing zoning. This includes the infill of existing subdivisions as well as new subdivisions in the process of being platted, approved and developed (3,040 homes). It also includes an estimate of the housing units that could be developed on vacant land not yet subdivided (1,990 homes). At an average of two to three people per household, this translates into an additional 10,000 to 15,000 Hillside residents.

While Table 1.9 estimates the number of homes possible at complete build-out, it does not project the pace of this growth. Depending on market conditions, full build-out could occur in the next 15 years or the next 50 years. The fundamental challenge for the Hillside District Plan is to find ways to accommodate this growth while retaining the qualities that make the Hillside a special place.



Located 7 to 15 miles from downtown Anchorage, Hillside residents enjoy living in a low-density setting with access to well-paying jobs, a range of shops and services and the many amenities that urban environments provide. Maintaining these qualities while the area develops is the central challenge of the Hillside District Plan.



Residents from all parts of Anchorage, as well as visitors to the city, access the Chugach State Park through trailheads located in the Hillside District. The infrastructure to meet this demand (including trails, trailheads, and parking areas) is not adequate to support the current and growing level of use. Pictured above is the popular but undeveloped access point in the Rabbit Creek Valley.

Where should the next 100,000 people live? How did the Anchorage 2020 Plan allocate 4,000-6,000 new dwelling units to the Hillside?

As part of the Anchorage 2020 Comprehensive Plan, the University of Alaska Anchorage’s Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) projected that the Anchorage Bowl would increase by approximately 100,000 people or 31,600 households between 1998 and 2020. The Anchorage 2020 Plan allocated this growth projection across five sectors as shown below (see map in Figure 1.6 for boundaries of these areas):

Central	5,000 – 7,000 (17-23%)
Northwest	7,000 – 9,000 (23-30%)
Northeast	5,000 – 7,000 (17-23%)
Southwest	4,000 – 6,000 (13-20%)
Southeast	4,000 – 6,000 (13-20%)

Overall, growth is allocated somewhat evenly among the five subareas. The Southeast planning sector, which corresponds to the Hillside District Plan area, has the largest land area of the five subareas, and by far the largest amount of vacant private land, but is one of the two subareas with the smallest growth allocations.

The market will determine the rate of growth. The most important aspect of the growth allocations outlined in Anchorage 2020 is that it sets a target of 13 to 20 percent of Anchorage’s growth (4,000-6,000 units of 30,000 total) to occur on the Hillside.

The Hillside allocation assumes that most residential development will follow established settlement patterns and densities. However, Anchorage 2020 also assumes that within the “urban” portion of the proposed Urban/Rural Service Area Boundary, limited revisions to existing zoning will be allowed (where it is cost-effective to satisfy demand for small-lot home sites). The plan also assumes that some medium-density multi-family housing development will occur along the western portion of the Lower Hillside. (Source: Anchorage 2020 Comprehensive Plan, pages 26-28 and 58-61).

As previously noted, the Hillside is also experiencing steady growth in demand for trails and access to recreation areas. At least 200,000 users per year come to the Chugach through the Hillside area (from the Hillside and from all across Anchorage and beyond) usually seeking a parking spot first, and then some form of access to open land. Most of these visitors want to reach the scenic alpine country and ridges found in the state park. Some walk through land that might appear to be state parkland, but is in fact private property. The infrastructure to meet this demand (including trails, trailheads, and on- and off-street parking areas) is not adequate to support the current and growing level of use. Developed trailheads such as Glen Alps are frequently overflowing. Traditional, but undeveloped, trailheads are experiencing many more cars and people than they can accommodate. Newly established trailheads are also experiencing demands well beyond their capacity. Some landowners are frustrated by the issues sometimes associated with trail use, including maintenance of private roads, trash, and traffic.

Table 1.9
Estimated Build-Out in the Hillside District, Based on Existing Zoning

	Number of Housing Units	
	Built	Total
Existing homes as of 2000	7,730	
Total increase in homes since 2000*	862	
Existing homes as of March 2007		8,590
Additional homes based on infill development, pending development and preliminary plats**	3,040	
Additional homes based on vacant land analysis adjusted for physical constraints	1,990	
Total additional homes		5,030
Total homes possible at build-out		13,620

* The information from 2000 is used to compare growth since the adoption of Anchorage 2020.

** This includes 400 units of the undeveloped by approved Legacy Pointe Development. Estimates updated by the Municipality Planning Department, as of January 2008.

The Municipality of Anchorage Planning Department projects that under existing zoning, 5,030 additional dwelling units could be built in the Hillside District. These estimates have been updated by the MOA Planning Department as of January 25, 2008.

Summary of Plan Policies

The Hillside District Plan addresses a wide range of issues, but the plan's most fundamental actions are captured in the five sets of policies outlined below:

1. Maintain the Hillside's Existing Low-Density, Rural Residential Character.

In response to the strongly expressed opinions of the majority of Hillside residents and the Citizen Advisory Committee, the HDP largely leaves intact the low-density land use designations currently in place on the Hillside. Consistent with this policy, the plan supports continued reliance on on-site water and wastewater for the large majority of the Hillside. Part of the Furrow Creek area in the lower Hillside is recommended for increased density, with development standards to help protect the rural feel of the Hillside.

2. Maintain and Improve the Functioning of On-site Water and Wastewater Systems; Establish a Well Water Protection Program.

Consistent with low-density development, the plan supports continued reliance on on-site water and wastewater for the large majority of the Hillside. While accepting the continued reliance on on-site systems, the plan establishes direction for new standards for the installation and maintenance of septic tanks. The plan also recommends a research and monitoring program to provide more complete, current, and accurate information about Hillside water quality, and a proactive program to educate users on best management practices for well and wastewater system operations. Together these actions are intended to help allow the Hillside to successfully rely on on-site water and wastewater for the long term.

3. Establish New District-wide Approaches to Infrastructure Funding and Management.

The Hillside District Plan calls for the creation of new ways for the Hillside to fund and manage the provision of roads, drainage and trails. The key objective is to approach roads, drainage, and trails issues from a district-wide (or watershed-wide) basis. This is essential to resolve issues such as drainage, which can't be solved subdivision-by-subdivision. The plan's recommendation is to establish a Hillside District-wide roads, trails and drainage funding and management entity, similar to the locally controlled



View from Chugach State Park, over Bear Valley and the southern Anchorage Bowl.

Terms Used In This Plan

Plans and planners are full of words like goals, objectives, policies, standards, guidelines and implementation actions. Different planning documents use these terms for different purposes, and at times these words seem to be used interchangeably, which can be confusing. For this document we have adopted the following definitions, ranging from the broadest (goals) to the most specific (standards). The line between some of these terms is not always precise.

- **Goal:** a desired end; no single goal has priority over others and there may be conflicts between individual goals.
- **Strategy:** a general approach or method of arriving at a goal.
- **Policy:** a rule for action on a specific issue. This term takes in a range of measures, including land use classifications, development standards, capital improvements.
- **Standard:** measures to guide the form and character of development. This term covers a spectrum of measures, from those that would ultimately be adopted as law in Title 21 (e.g., a specific vegetation rule), to generalized guidelines (e.g., encouraging the use of rain gardens).

Chugiak-Birchwood-Eagle River Rural Road Service Area (CBERRSA). Existing LRSAs, RRSAs, and independent areas will continue to exist and will focus primarily on winter road maintenance of neighborhood roads.

4. Improve Roads, Trails, and Access to Chugach State Park.

The Hillside District Plan identifies a system of primary and secondary roads, and a comparable system of primary and secondary trails, to better meet existing and future needs. This set of improvements is designed to improve connectivity and emergency access in the area while retaining neighborhood quality. The Hillside-wide service area concept will help implement these improvements, in particular providing funds for a higher level of trails management and maintenance. The plan also establishes several strategies to maintain and improve access to Chugach State Park, including identifying a system of trail heads, and recommending the establishment of a Bowl-wide approach to fund needed improvements.

5. Establish New Approaches to Development.

The Hillside District Plan calls for a set of new development policies and procedures guiding future development. This includes establishing a built/green infrastructure system (an integrated system of roads and trails, drainage ways, and open space) that connects across and serves multiple subdivisions; using the conservation subdivision process to provide developers more flexibility and incentives to protect environmental features; and creating a set of Hillside-specific development standards to control issues like runoff and vegetation removal from individual lots and subdivisions.