



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

*Anchorage 2020* identified the Airport as one of seven key factors that influence community growth. Once smaller and situated in undeveloped sections of West Anchorage, Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport (TSAIA) now adjoins established neighborhoods, transportation corridors, and heavily used public recreational facilities. Because of the land use/ownership complexities and impacts stemming from the location of this major airport, and with its anticipated growth needs, *Anchorage 2020* determined that a West Anchorage District planning effort be undertaken to clarify these issues and forge a plan to resolve conflicts in a way that meets both TSAIA and community needs. To quote *Anchorage 2020*. . .

*"This plan recognizes a symbiotic relationship between the airport and surrounding community, and that activities from one can impact the other. The West Anchorage District Planning Area formalizes a collaborative planning process to address issues of mutual concern." - Page 57*

*"This strategy calls for the preparation of a detailed land use plan for the subarea defined on the Land Use Policy Map as the West Anchorage Planning Area. Development of a land use plan will be coordinated by the Municipality and will include involvement by a neighborhood project team and the Airport. Along with a specific framework for making land use recommendations and decisions within this planning subarea, this document will include mechanisms and recommendations for resolving airport impacts to the surrounding community and on transportation activities." - Page 108*

The issues surrounding this airport interface are complicated and have remained unresolved for decades. As the planning team began its work on the *West Anchorage District Plan (WADP)* in 2009, they found that, because of the combative history and complexities involved, a situation best described as "gridlock" had resulted where little constructive dialogue or progress had occurred for many years. Three major factions have come about and they are:

- TSAIA and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) want long-term predictability with airport uses and growth and are required by federal laws to accommodate long-term airport growth, including the preservation and use of airport lands for aviation purposes.
- The adjacent neighborhoods and community councils believe that, as a public entity, TSAIA should manage activities, reduce airport noise, and limit expansion to minimize or reduce impacts on surrounding residential areas.
- The third group comprised of outdoor enthusiasts and park users believes that popular recreation facilities on airport land (including the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail and several parks), which were conditionally allowed by the TSAIA on a short-term interim basis, have become a public right and should be made permanent municipal parkland.

The Municipality, with interests in supporting economic development and minimizing neighborhood impacts, wants to mediate these conflicts but must contend with limits on its land use authority to apply regulations on state land within the airport. Unfortunately, this simple description of issues defies simple solutions.

The *WADP* functions as the essential *Anchorage 2020* implementation strategy for this area of the Anchorage Bowl. *Anchorage 2020* presented numerous policies including “transit-supportive development corridors,” “town centers,” “neighborhood commercial centers,” etc. located in the west side. In addition to focusing on airport issues, the *WADP* presents a detailed land use map and policies to guide and address neighborhood character, road and utility needs, environmental issues, and parks and trails for the next twenty years.

The Community Development Department’s Planning Division and its contractor URS Corporation assembled a West Anchorage District Planning Group to assist with the planning process. The planning team solicited input from community councils, TSAIA, and the Planning Group and convened focus groups of experts in specialty topics, including economic development, housing and real estate, quality of place, utilities, the environment and recreation. Along with the direction outlined in *Anchorage 2020*, this public outreach effort helped frame the essential planning issues for the *WADP*. The Planning Group served as a sounding board throughout the plan’s development.

## Key Findings

The *West Anchorage District Plan* features details, analyses, objectives, and implementation actions focused around six essential elements: land use, transportation, TSAIA, neighborhoods, parks and recreation, and public services and utilities. Following are highlights of the plan’s significant findings, which are detailed as existing conditions in Chapter 2 and plan elements in Chapter 4:

- Neighborhood Character – West Anchorage is predominantly made up of residential neighborhoods that range from older, established, single-family subdivisions like Spenard and Turnagain, to homes on larger lots with on-site services and a more rural quality in Sand Lake, to pockets of larger multi-family units or newer subdivisions. Maintaining this neighborhood character was a common goal heard throughout the public outreach process. The *WADP* includes recommendations and policies to support this goal, including maintaining local streets, implementing “context sensitive solutions” in the alignment and design of new roads, and promoting residential and commercial design standards to ensure that new development supports stable property values.
- Spenard Road Corridor – The Spenard Road corridor exhibits unique development and revitalization potential. The *WADP* calls for the north end of Spenard to serve as the core of an already developing town center, and recommends a new “Spenard Corridor Strategic Plan” as a *WADP* implementation action.
- Aging Residential Infrastructure – A high percentage of the area’s residential infrastructure is aging (especially multi-family structures), the bulk of which was built prior to the 1970s. Much of the pedestrian network within these aging neighborhoods is lacking or substandard and does not support safe pedestrian movements. Residential streets have no systematic funding mechanism for long-term maintenance or reconstruction. The potential for redevelopment and revitalization, in some cases to higher densities with more amenities, is high for much of the district.

- Recreation Resources – West Anchorage contains many high profile recreation resources and facilities that are valuable to local residents and to the entire community. These include the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail, Kincaid Park, Connors Lake Park and Dog Park, and other lakes used for water sports. Maintaining community access and the quality of these resources is a common goal, and in many cases will require resolution of airport land use issues.
- Relationship to Municipal Plans – The Municipality's functional plans that focus on parks, trails, roads, and utilities have done an admirable job of identifying policies that, if implemented, would effectively keep pace with community growth. With the exception of resolving use conflicts around the airport, the *WADP* identifies a limited number of necessary update recommendations for each.
- Airport Issues – The conflicts and complexities of land ownership, federal and state regulations, long-range growth needs, and the management structure at TSAIA all contribute to a long-standing suite of issues and conflicts. While there are many tools that could be applied to resolve these, few are easy to implement, many will be controversial, and few are likely to be accepted by all parties involved. The *WADP* identifies key stakeholders, describes their interests, and explains the FAA regulatory framework that applies to TSAIA. The plan identifies and characterizes each of the important land parcels around the airport that could be relevant to a long-term solution. In the interest of being balanced and thorough, and recognizing that these divisive issues cannot be resolved without consideration of any and all possible solutions, the *WADP* presents a full range of available tools, which are applicable to lands inside and outside of the airport. This plan has given all possible solutions equal consideration. Ultimately, it will be up to municipal decision-makers, after candid public dialogue, to determine what final suite of policy approaches should be adopted and retained in the plan.

## Implementation Recommendations

The land use maps in Chapter 4 and the Chapter 5 implementation actions are two of the most important plan features. The maps will influence discretionary land development decisions while the implementation actions will guide municipal policy and future work programs. Following are some of the key implementation actions recommended to achieve the goals of the plan and to address the needs of the community:

1. Prepare a "Spenard Corridor Strategic Plan."
2. Implement targeted improvements to the road network, bicycle routes, and pedestrian network of West Anchorage.
3. Pursue comprehensive, long-term solutions to resolve TSAIA-neighborhood conflicts, including:
  - a. Establish and apply airport zoning and an effective airport noise management and mitigation program to reduce off-site impacts.
  - b. Evaluate alternative management and regulatory tools that, when applied both on and off airport land, will begin to resolve and mitigate land use, noise issues, and impacts from airport activities on the adjacent community. Some of these items are intended to inform the community and serve to reduce conflicts to airport operations.
  - c. Identify and implement a process for securing title to lands within the airport that are used for or desired by the public for parks and recreation purposes and for a coastal trail corridor with a permanent greenbelt.

- d. Establish a mayor-governor-appointed committee to explore cooperative airport management structures that will promote airport growth while responding to community and municipal needs.
- e. Establish a coordinated approach to addressing airport land use and other conflicts that involves municipal and airport staff and the community to resolve airport and West Anchorage community conflicts.