

## COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

The Community Participation Program outlines the basic public involvement process that will be used to ensure Goals and Objectives of the Comprehensive Plan represents the values and desires of the residents. Ensuring the participation of a variety of stakeholder groups in developing the Community Agenda will also improve efforts for implementing the Plan by securing wider public understanding, support and cooperation.

The completion of the Community Assessment provides a baseline of information about the community to assist with the public involvement process, assuring the participants have a better understanding of the conditions and issues involved. The Community Participation Program will guide how this information is presented to the open public and various stakeholder groups, whose responses will refine the information, prioritize the issues and goals and identify the preferred alternatives for achieving those goals.

### **Identification of Stakeholders**

Because Homer can be defined as a smaller, rural town, the most prominent group of stakeholders targeted for the planning process will be the residents and major landowners. With a relatively homogenous character akin to a bedroom community and very few sizable businesses within the city, the general residents of the population constitute the largest interest group within the community.

The civic interests will be largely involved through the City Council and affiliated officers, whose involvement is critical considering that the comprehensive plan process was devised to provide local public discourse and direction about the management of local communities. The schools, among the largest employer in the city, will be solicited for direct involvement, as will the Banks County Chamber of Commerce and the Banks County Industrial Development Authority for their roles in the economic development of the area. Officials from Banks County, of which Homer is the county seat, will also be invited to participate in the process.

Employers and business interests within Homer include several small businesses, banks and some agricultural industries. The City will work with the Chamber in identifying several private sector representatives to participate in the process and assist in outreach to all businesses. A full listing of all businesses permitted within the city will be reviewed for promotions and soliciting input as a part of this process.

Members of both the business interests and the general residents will be invited to participate on a Plan Advisory Committee (PAC). The PAC will meet on several occasions in addition to any general public forums. The role of the PAC will be to assist the GMRDC with soliciting general input, promoting the planning process and offering detailed insight in local issues and objectives. The PAC will also help in reviewing any survey results and guiding the development of the draft Community Agenda. Nominees already identified by the City Council include the following city residents and/or business owners:

Plan Advisory Committee nominations

Michael Brown,  
Mary Hill  
Tim Harper  
Danny Mason  
Steve Lewallen  
Williamm “Billy” Turk  
Herbert “Bo” Garrison  
Jack Blackwell  
Mack Garrison  
Ofe Bridgeford

**Public Involvement and Comment**

A variety of measures will be employed to secure involvement from each group of stakeholders.

Given the rural character of the town and the short term prescribed for the planning process, the majority of public outreach activities will be driven through open public meetings. A series of open forums will be scheduled for City Hall, the most convenient central meeting space, over the months of May and June. During this time the GMRDC and the City will facilitate discussion about the community’s vision, prioritize issues and identify critical objectives. The original schedule will focus on 4 stages of meetings that will concentrate on the following topics:

- Meeting #1*    Confirm community issues; Collect ideas for community vision
- Meeting #2*    Confirm community vision; Prioritize issues; Propose character areas
- Meeting #3*    Discussion of alternative development scenarios; Establishment of goals
- Meeting #4*    Review of draft Community Agenda

At a minimum the above four meetings will be held at City Hall or other comparable space. If a large turnout is expected there may be acceptable space within one of the school buildings such as a cafeteria or gymnasium. However, additional meetings are being considered for select subsets of the community, such as churches or neighborhoods. The City and GMRDC staff will use any opportunity to communicate with the public about the plan and are actively considering any forum that will facilitate the process.

In addition to the open forums the public will have additional opportunities to review material and provide comment. Residents and stakeholders will have the opportunity to review plan materials throughout the process at displays set up in the library and in City Hall, and online via a City of Homer Comprehensive Planning Process web page ([www.gmrdc.org/homer](http://www.gmrdc.org/homer)). Both the public displays and the web site will include copies of plan materials, a schedule of public events, a survey that can be submitted as part of the process and contact information for submitting comments and questions to the GMRDC staff.

**COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM**

Advertising for the process and public events will be handled through several means. The local Banks County newspaper will be used for general advertising and will be contacted directly to provide notice of key events and offer cooperation for the development of any feature articles about the process. Copies of select material will be provided to the press directly and in electronic form for ease of reproduction. In addition, flyers advertising the process will be distributed to local businesses and churches for posting in shop windows and on bulletin boards. These flyers will be designed such that they provide information about the next public event as well as the locations for finding copies of Plan materials at the public displays or online. The schedule of plan related events will also be included in any announcements made during regularly scheduled City Council and Planning Commission meetings.

**Development of the Community Agenda**

Development of the Community Agenda will focus on using the information generated in the Community Assessment for confirming and prioritizing issues and opportunities, developing the Vision and then crafting the goals and objectives that will address the issues and advance the City of Homer towards the stated Vision. The general timeframe for the process will be 10-12 weeks, seeking to capitalize on a high-energy campaign for public involvement but allowing for evolving conditions. The GMRDC will work with the City staff to develop the actual document throughout the process, allowing everyone to see and understand that the work is contributing to a very tangible product that will be accessible in the near future.

**Proposed Community Agenda Development Process**

<b><u>Activity</u></b>	<b><u>Timeframe</u></b>
<i>Identify and invite members for Plan Advisory Committee</i>	Week 1
<i>Begin Displays and Promotion</i> Create promotional material, craft Plan status web page and establish locations for distribution of promotional material	Week 2
<i>Open Forums &amp; Committee meetings - Initial</i> Review Community Assessment, confirm Issues and Opportunities, discuss Vision	Week 3-5
<i>Update Displays/ Communicate with Committee</i> Distribute updated information about draft Vision statement, key issues and goals for Homer	Week 6
<i>Open Forums &amp; Committee Meetings – Follow Up</i> Confirm Vision for Homer, prioritize issues and goals, update Character Area maps and begin crafting Future Dev. Scenarios	Week 7-8
<i>Update Displays/ Communicate with Committee</i> Create draft Community Agenda and distribute for review	Week 9
<i>Open Forums and Draft Agenda Reviews</i>	Week 10-11
<i>Town Hearing and Approval of Community Agenda</i>	Week 12

**COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM**

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