



**City of Cordova**  
A L A S K A

# Cordova Comprehensive Plan Update – FINAL

Adopted December 4, 2019



# Acknowledgements

Thank you to all Cordova residents, businesses, organizations and other local, regional, state, and federal partners who have contributed to the Cordova Comprehensive Plan Update process. Key individuals include:

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This plan was produced by Agnew::Beck Consulting with support from PDC Inc. Engineers, Northern Economics, and Kittelson and Associates. Plan photos courtesy of the Cordova Chamber of Commerce and Agnew::Beck Consulting.



# City of Cordova Resolution 12-19-52

## **CITY OF CORDOVA, ALASKA RESOLUTION 12-19-52**

### **A RESOLUTION OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF CORDOVA, ALASKA, ADOPTING THE CITY OF CORDOVA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE.**

**WHEREAS**, the City of Cordova's existing Comprehensive Plan was last updated in 2008;  
and

**WHEREAS**, the City of Cordova has developed a Cordova Comprehensive Plan Update consisting of three parts: an Executive Summary, the Full Plan document, and Appendices; and

**WHEREAS**, the City of Cordova contracted with Agnew::Beck to facilitate the development of the Cordova Comprehensive Plan; and

**WHEREAS**, the City of Cordova, Agnew::Beck, and a Comprehensive Plan Committee comprised of community volunteers representing different perspectives and sectors, spent over a year engaged in an effort to gain widespread and varied public input for the comprehensive plan through in-depth interviews, presence at six large-scale events, a community survey and interactive map, a visitor survey, a project website, several informational postcards, newspaper and radio coverage, and a final extended public comment period; and

**WHEREAS**, the Cordova Comprehensive Plan Update will serve as a community resource and guide, offering recommendations that protect what residents value most about Cordova while benefiting and enhancing the quality of life for current and future residents; and

**WHEREAS**, the Cordova Comprehensive Plan Update is a community-driven tool that will provide direction to community leaders, residents, funders and other partners for years to come.

**NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Council of the City of Cordova, Alaska does hereby adopt the City of Cordova Comprehensive Plan Update.

**PASSED AND APPROVED THIS 4<sup>th</sup> DAY OF DECEMBER 2019**



  
Clay R. Koplitz, Mayor

ATTEST:

  
Susan Bourgeois, CMC, City Clerk



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# 1. Introduction

## Our Vision

***Cordova is a vibrant, livable fishing town known for its outdoor recreation, beautiful landscapes, close-knit community, diverse small businesses and cultural heritage.***



"Cordova is the greatest town I've ever lived in. It's beautiful and quirky and amazing. I've lived in the Oregon countryside, San Diego, Chicago, Ketchikan and Sitka. Nothing beats Cordova!"

"Cordova is a wonderful community because it is small, because of the strong fishing economy, and because of the vibrant people who would not fit in anywhere else."



*The plan includes direct quotes from residents shared as part of the comprehensive planning process including project surveys, and comments shared at community events and meetings. For more detailed community feedback, see the appendix.*





# Purpose

## What is a Comprehensive Plan?

The Cordova Comprehensive Plan Update will serve as a community resource and guide. The plan offers recommendations that protect what residents value most about Cordova while benefiting and enhancing the quality of life for current and future residents. The plan is a community-driven tool that will provide direction to community leaders, residents, funders and other partners. Cordova's Comprehensive Plan was last updated in 2008.

"I think Cordova has been improving itself for the 45 years I've lived here, and it just gets better and more livable with all the quality of life improvements we have made, often thanks to volunteers and devoted city, state and federal workers who take pride in their jobs and the service they give to the community."

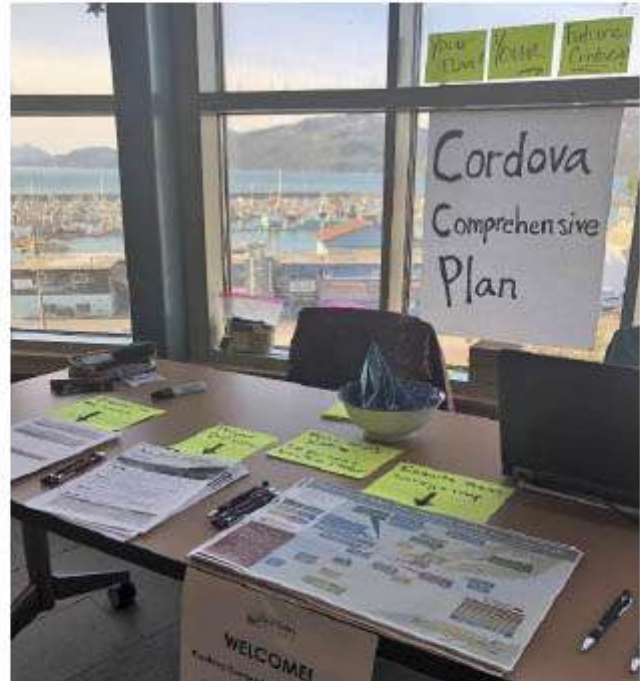
## Why is the plan relevant to Cordova residents?

- It is an opportunity to preserve and improve Cordova quality of life – the updated plan will guide decision-making on land use, housing, economic development, fiscal health, public facilities and services, transportation, parks and recreation, health and wellness and other topics that impact quality of life in Cordova.
- It starts with and centers on a shared vision and goals for prioritizing and evaluating all future actions – the plan will clearly identify the community's desired future direction (long-term) and policies and actions (shorter-term) that ensure progress toward that vision.
- It will position the community of Cordova for funding/partnering opportunities – the plan will send a clear message to regional, state and federal partners about Cordova's priorities, how the community is taking action and contributing to its own success.
- The process engages residents in shaping how they want the future of Cordova to look, providing many opportunities to share and discuss common ideas and concerns. It broadly answers:
  - How can we as a community protect the characteristics people value about living here, such as the small-town feel, the schools, the harbor, and access to the outdoors?
  - How can we address the challenges that make it hard to live here, such as the high cost of living and limited transportation access?
  - What are our big priorities? How can we work together to achieve them?

"I live in Cordova because it is exactly the place I want to live, great work/life balance, out-the-door adventure, quality rural lifestyle with a splash of cosmopolitan perspective."

## Methodology: How was this plan developed?

The City of Cordova, led by planning staff, oversaw this effort with help from consulting team Agnew::Beck Consulting, with support from Northern Economics, PDC Engineers and Kittelson and Associates. The Comprehensive Plan Committee, a broadly representative group of Cordova residents, acted as a sounding board and group of creative problem solvers throughout the planning process.



The planning process included the following steps and outreach efforts:

### In-Person Activities

#### Plan Committee

Established the Cordova Comprehensive Plan Committee to help guide the planning process. The Committee was a broadly representative group that offered guidance and input on the process and plan contents and helped share information and gather community input. The Committee met four times. Plan Committee members also participated in project outreach efforts, including attending community meetings, sharing information about the plan at events such as the Cordova Health Fair and the Holiday Bazaar, and facilitating project presentations to local employers and organizations using a customized "Meeting in a Box" toolkit developed for the planning process.

#### Community Conversations

Hosted a public community conversation in October 2018 with over 70 attendees. Hosted a second conversation in January 2019 during Iceworm Festival, where the project team revealed and discussed the interactive map and survey results.

A summary of the conversations can be found in the appendix and on the project website.





## In-Person Activities, Continued

### Information Tables

Hosted informational booths at community events and engaged with hundreds of residents to talk about the plan, share draft products and collect input on how community members want Cordova to look in the future. City staff ordered and handed out customized Cordova Comp Plan pens with the project website URL, which were handed out at community events and used to further promote the process. Community events with a project presence included:

- Native Village of Eyak Sobriety Celebration (November 2018)
- Cordova Holiday Bazaar (December 2018)
- Iceworm Festival (January 2019) – more information below
- Community Dance Performance (April 2019)
- Cordova Health Fair (April 2019)
- Back-to-School Night (August 2019) to meet with middle and high school students and their families

### Iceworm Festival

Engaged with residents throughout the 2019 Iceworm Festival, including the following community events:

- Talked with seniors and other residents during the **Senior Lunch** at the Cordova Community Medical Center (CCMC).
- Spent two full days sharing information and talking with Cordova residents and visitors in the upper atrium of the **Cordova Center** as they passed through to other Festival activities.
- Collected feedback from residents through a fun interactive activity at the **Iceworm Variety Show**.
- Talked with residents and collected survey responses at the **Iceworm Breakfast at St. Joseph's Catholic Church**.

### Interviews

Conducted over 20 in-depth interviews with stakeholders, business owners and community leaders to learn about community challenges, priorities and collect suggestions for the plan.







## OUTREACH AND MEDIA

Project Website	<p>Created an informative, simple project website. The website included background information about the project, downloads of past presentations and draft files, announcements of upcoming meetings, links to project surveys and a form to sign up for project e-newsletters. Most printed project materials included a QR code which residents could scan to access the website via a mobile device.</p>	
Email Distribution	<p>Throughout the project, developed and sent multiple email project updates to interested community and partner stakeholders. Relevant project announcements were also included in the City of Cordova E-News, which goes out weekly and has over 400 subscribers.</p>	
Postcards	<p>Distributed two rounds of postcards to every post office box in Cordova in December 2018 and July 2019: over 1,500 postcards total each time. The December postcards introduced the project and included a link to the project website, survey and interactive commenting map. The July postcards announced the release of the draft plan and promoted the visitor survey.</p>	
Social Media	<p>Announced project updates on social media, including the community Facebook page.</p>	
Radio	<p>Participated in a radio show to discuss the importance of the project and how residents can get involved over KCHU's Coffee Break program in December 2018 session and participated in an interview on KLAM.</p>	



## Newspaper

Published an ad in the Cordova Times and invited newspaper staff to cover community events and conversations; the ad included the link to the website and the survey, with a QR code for mobile phone users to quickly locate the page.



Throughout the planning process the Cordova Times provided regular coverage of the key project milestones through articles, staff interviews and photos.



## Extended Public Comment Period

Established an extended public comment period over the summer and early fall so visitors, seasonal residents and fisherman could provide input on the draft plan. The public comment period was open from June 14, 2019 through September 13, 2019.



## RESEARCH TASKS

### Mapping

Developed land use, transportation and other relevant maps to use as decision-making tools and guide future development. This included a site visit to review existing land uses and land use policies, discuss development limitations and conduct an on-the-ground tour of land uses and issues.

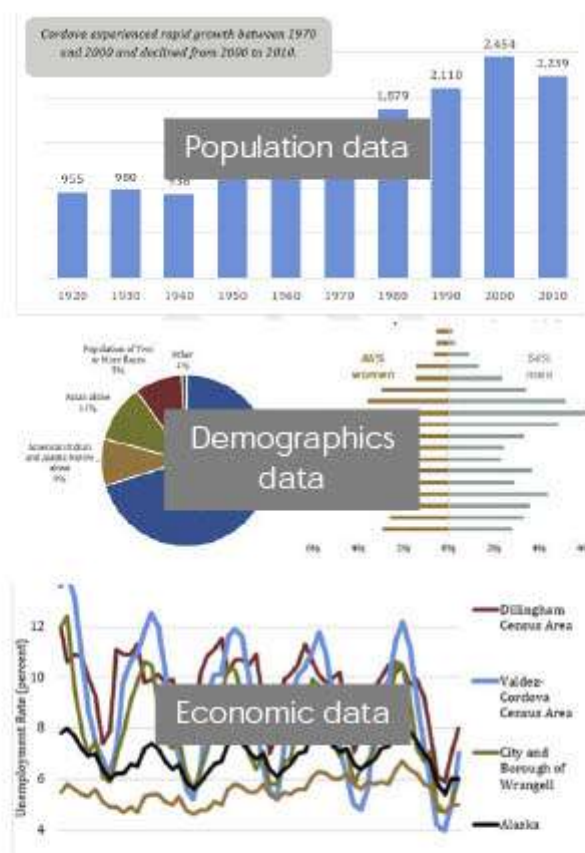


### Secondary Research

Collected information from local, state and federal sources to tell the story of Cordova: how it is changing and how the population, housing, economy and land use characteristics compare to other coastal communities. Most data used to develop key trends in the plan was collected in 2018. Before the plan was finalized in 2019, there were several significant changes that have or will impact the future of Cordova, including statewide budget cuts, suspended 2019-2020 winter ferry service to Cordova, and outcomes of the 2019 fishing season. Due to timing of the draft and final plan, these changes are not reflected in plan trends, but should be considered as city leadership and staff development and implement plan priorities.

### Review of Relevant Resources

Reviewed past and existing community, regional and other relevant plans and reports, including the 2008 Comprehensive Plan.





## Contents: What's in the plan?

There are three components to the Cordova Comprehensive Plan Update:



### Executive Summary

*Offers a condensed summary of the plan, including the community's vision and key policies (goals, strategies and sample actions) for achieving that vision, including a future land use map.*



### Comprehensive Plan (this document)

*Includes additional information on the process, area, and key issues informing plan policies.*



### Appendix

*Includes background information and context used to inform plan policies and plan implementation, such as land use, housing, economic data, summaries of public input, and best practices.*

## Plan Amendments and Updates

Outlined below are the steps for amending and/or updating the Cordova Comprehensive Plan:

- A minor change is a change that does not modify or add to the plan's basic intent, and that serves only to clarify the plan, make it consistent, facilitate its implementation, or make technical corrections. Such changes can be made administratively and do not require additional approval.
- An amendment permanently changes the plan by adding to or modifying the basic intent. Such changes can be recommended by the administration or public and approved by the Planning Commission and City Council.
- A more detailed update of the Cordova Comprehensive Plan should be conducted every five to ten years, starting with a thorough review by the City Council and key city staff to determine which goals and strategies have been accomplished and which may need to be revised, added or deleted. Residents and other key stakeholders should also be engaged during the update process.



## Accomplishments Since 2008 Comprehensive Plan Adoption

Cordova has successfully achieved an extensive list of accomplishments since the Comprehensive Plan was last updated in 2008, including:

**LAND:** City land sales are promoting industrial, commercial and residential growth with a significant amount of new construction.

**HOUSING:** There have been new housing developments, including Coast Guard housing and new subdivisions (Cabin Ridge, Sunny Side, Alpine).

**HARBOR:** Cordova continues to upgrade and improve its maritime infrastructure, including:

- Addition of the new travel lift.
- Improved infrastructure at South Fill.
- North Fill boat ramp improved.

**CORDOVA CENTER:** The new facility provides functional, beautiful, energy efficient space for the community and allows Cordova to host more events and conferences.

**BUSINESS:** Cordova has many self-employed business owners and options for telecommuting are increasing as communication infrastructure improves. Businesses are expanding on the South and North Fill.

**FISHING:** The region's fisheries are well-managed and diversified. Young people are returning and attaining permits. Cordova's fish processing plants continue to make improvements, upgrades and expansions.

**BRANDING:** The Copper River brand has been marketed effectively and is increasingly recognized around the state and country.

**RESTAURANTS:** Harborside Pizza opened – the first newly built restaurant in Cordova in a long time; Baja Taco expanded; other restaurants have been renovated.

**SCIENCE CENTER:** The Prince William Sound Science Center is relocating and expanding its campus.





**EDUCATION:** The Cordova School District continues to be recognized as one of the best districts in Alaska.

**GROWTH:** Cordova is seeing an increase of young adults and children.

**THE OUTDOORS:** Cordova continues to be a world-class destination for outdoor recreation and has seen the following improvements:

- Forest Service trails and recreational sites (Sand Trail, Mile 18, One-Eyed Pond), ski hill improvements, Cabin Lake Road, Hartley Bay cleanup and picnic site (Eyak Corporation), Copper River watershed culverts, and an outhouse at Skater's Cabin.
- Completion of Breakwater Trail and the Veterans Memorial pocket park.
- Addition of Tot Lot Playground and Pump Track for bikes and skateboards.

**WELLNESS:** Gains in health care and preparedness efforts, including:

- Development of Native Village of Eyak's Ilanka Community Health Center.
- Expansion of medical capabilities at the hospital.
- Increase in emergency preparedness planning.

**SALMON JAM:** Cordova successfully established the Salmon Jam – Copper River Wild Salmon Festival and the Fungus Festival.

**FACILITIES:** Cordova has improved many community facilities, including:

- Elementary school remodel.
- Remodeled community facilities such as the high school gym and the renovation of Nirvana Park into a cemetery.

**INFRASTRUCTURE:** Cordova continues to improve its infrastructure, including:

- Road improvements – drainage, sidewalks, paving, and more to local roads including Adams Avenue, Browning Avenue, Harbor Loop, Nicholoff Road and 3<sup>rd</sup> Street.
- Upgrades to community drinking water infrastructure.
- Expansion of communication and technology, including fiber optic and cell service coverage.
- Expanded recycling service.





## 2. Land Use Issues and Policies

### Key Issues Guiding the Plan



#### **Limited land available for growth:**

Cordova is facing a challenge experienced by many of Alaska's coastal communities: the town is a small, isolated island of private property within a sea of public lands. Eyak Native Corporation does have relatively large land holdings but currently has no plans for large-scale land sales. In addition, much of the area has significant physical constraints, including steep slopes and wetlands. While the combination of these constraints has resulted in a concentrated, walkable town, they decrease options for growth and increase land and development costs.



#### **Lack of future land use map and outdated zoning:**

The city's current zoning code does not align well with existing and anticipated land uses. For example, the "low density residential" zone is applied on large tracts of vacant, city-owned land where physical constraints are extreme. This sets up unrealistic expectations about how these lands could or should be developed (e.g., easily providing options for affordable housing). The future code should also better respond to emerging community objectives, for example, helping to encourage opportunities for multifamily housing. The community also lacks a future land use map that sets out broad intentions for future growth and land use.

"The physical growth possibilities to accommodate a larger population are slim, so concentrating on improving the public standard of living is a more realistic goal. A well-maintained downtown has a positive effect on visitors as well as locals and improves the branding of the town as a destination. Maybe a low interest loan program to help downtown building owners with repairs/upgrades could be considered an investment in the community."

"The city is not in the real estate business, but if they want to have people invest in Cordova, and grow their property tax revenue long term, we should develop a road to open up more lots. I bet it would pay for itself."





**High development costs and redevelopment challenges:** Cordova's remote location, small population, challenging terrain and limited land supply all contribute to high construction costs. Cordova has been an established community for over 100 years, and some of the community's most valuable land is occupied by aging, underused and/or deteriorated buildings. Responding to these realities is difficult because the city currently does not have the tools and funding needed to help support redevelopment or take other actions to expand housing supply and reduce housing costs.



**Sustaining what people love about Cordova, while supporting change:** While most Cordova residents hold a core set of shared values, there is a divergence between those who prioritize sustaining Cordova's small-town traditions, and those more focused on development and growth. This mix of views can lead to creative solutions but also makes it harder to respond to important issues. The key land use issue is the need for community agreement on general directions for community growth, economic development and fiscal policy, which in turn sets the stage for the practical actions needed to address critical needs such as housing.

"We need zoning laws to permit less costly housing options. You need to be a millionaire to develop on a piece of suitable land in this community. Too many people come to Cordova for work but end up leaving because no affordable housing options exist."

"We should expand industrial development by airport. Cold storage, fish processing, storage facilities - things that take a larger footprint and don't need to be in town."

## Land Use Goals

Goal A	Goal B	Goal C
Establish policies that better guide land use to promote affordable, quality housing and expand economic opportunities.	Protect and improve Cordova's character; its downtown, neighborhoods, waterfront and outdoor access.	Sustain the health of Cordova's natural systems.

## Land Use Strategies and Actions

**Strategy #1:** *Implement a future land use map that guides future decisions about land use and growth.*

### What is a future land use map?

The Cordova Future Land Use Map provides a tool for Cordova residents, landowners and elected officials to plan for growth and change. The map expresses objectives for the general location and character of different types of growth and land use.

The future land use map does not change city zoning districts or zoning code policy. The map provides broad guidance for future policy and development decisions, which will likely result in future revisions to the underlying zoning. The map is intended to be used as a generalized map and is not intended to follow specific property lines. Any zoning changes would require a separate, subsequent process with further public review.

The map can help guide plans for road and other infrastructure improvements, expansion of economic opportunities, protection of important conservation areas, and sustain the qualities residents value most about the community. The map covers lands in all ownerships, including public and private lands.

*See the Cordova Future  
Land Use Maps on the  
following pages.*



### Future Land Use Map Categories

*The general land use categories defined on the map cover areas with different uses, but with similar underlying characteristics. For example, the "Community Core" includes a mix of commercial, industrial and residential uses, but these uses are concentrated in the walkable center of town.*

Land Use Category	Intended Land Uses	Application Area
<b>Community Core</b>	Areas for continuing infill and densification, with a focus on mixed use development, walkability, redevelopment and policies for compatibility between differing uses. This is the primary business district for Cordova.	Historic downtown, harbor, South Fill and waterfront
<b>In-Town Residential</b>	Predominately residential with compatible public, commercial uses; an area for infill and densification, including neighborhoods that currently have public water, sewer, and other utilities.	Neighborhoods within reasonable walking distance (approximately ½ mile) from the Community Core
<b>Outlying Residential</b>	Predominately residential uses although other uses allowed; generally applied in areas with limited public water and sewer service and mixed sewer and septic.	Existing residential and other use properties in areas adjacent to the Community Core and In-Town Residential
<b>Hillside Residential</b>	Undeveloped, physically-constrained property intended for future residential use, in locations requiring rigorous subdivision, road and utility development to respond to the area's physical constraints.	Properties with significant physical development constraints on predominantly city-owned tracts, in areas adjacent to the Community Core and In-Town Residential
<b>Rural Mixed Use</b>	Variety of uses including residential, commercial, lodging and industrial with minimal rules on allowed uses.	Low density areas outside current/ anticipated utility service areas; generally, in areas on the outskirts of the city such as Whitshed Road, the airport, Six-Mile
<b>In-Town Mixed Use</b>	Areas that require further public engagement to determine best use, which could include residential, commercial or other developed uses.	City-owned and private land, typically in areas with strategic locations but significant physical development challenges