

## **Point MacKenzie Comprehensive Plan**

### **Land Use**

#### **Overview**

This chapter presents background information and policies to guide development in Point MacKenzie. The first goal represents overall land use policy while others are more specific goals for various aspects of land use that need addressing in Point MacKenzie.

#### **Land Use Goals**

The following land use goals are not presented in order of priority.

1. Manage growth;
2. Promote the development of a variety of mixed-use residential/commercial/business areas designed for pedestrian access.
3. Encourage development of a town center, near the intersection of Pt. MacKenzie Road and Burma Road, to include a site for a library, health clinic, and a service station, school sites, post office, community center, grocery store, café, hotel, police station, and multi-family development;
4. Maintain the quality of Point MacKenzie's natural environment and scenic beauty, while allowing for necessary improvements to support growth.
5. Encourage expansion of public and commercial services; protect the scenic quality of the land along the community's road system by encouraging commercial development in clustered centers, and screening development.
6. Minimize impacts of industrial and commercial development at the Port and the associated impacts of the transportation to and from the Port.
7. Maintain the community's rural character.
8. Encourage clean-up and development of the former Nike site.
9. Encourage the routing of any major "linear" project to locate away from any existing or planned commercial or residential areas.

### **Context: Land Use in Point MacKenzie & Surrounding Areas**

#### **Land Use in Point MacKenzie**

Land use in the community of Point MacKenzie today closely corresponds to its specific geographical features, history of homesteading, its road system, access to the Little Susitna River, and its proximity to the Knik Arm of Cook Inlet. Land use in the area is a mix of public recreation uses and wildlife habitat on borough and State lands, residential uses, industrial uses, commercial enterprises, aviation uses, forestry, agriculture, and mineral resource development. Two very distinct areas with very different land use characters exist within the community, one inland and the other at Port MacKenzie. The Point MacKenzie Port District contains its own assortment of industrial and commercial uses. Issues in the Port District are sufficiently distinct and complex that this plan merely references the Port MacKenzie Master Plan and the Area Meriting Special Attention Plan.

The current land use distribution is a result of sporadic subdivision for recreational residential development and in some cases does not mesh with the realities of existing or desired future use patterns.

The Point MacKenzie Agricultural Project is also located in the area. The project, initiated by the State in the 1980s, consists of a group of privately-owned agricultural lands that were sold by the State with agricultural covenants. Owners are required to submit conservation plans for each parcel to the Division of Agriculture (DOA) to ensure that the agricultural resources in the area are preserved.

Recreation is one of the area's major land uses. The planning area includes State parks and refuges, such as the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge (SGR), Little Susitna State Recreation River, and Goose Bay SGR. Land in the area is also commonly used for both sport and subsistence hunting and fishing.

Development of commercial facilities and supporting infrastructure, new residential areas, and transportation corridors should be coordinated with uses such as trails, fishing, hunting, and other recreational activities.

Growth in Point MacKenzie will require a new set of standards to guide the form and location of future land use and development. For instance, the land near the prison and extending west along the Point MacKenzie Road has no land use regulations above those that apply to all land within the borough. New policies are needed to better allow for higher density and greater mixing of retail shopping, professional services, entertainment facilities and restaurants and residential uses. The lack of policies guiding development along Point MacKenzie Road will likely need ongoing refinement to promote businesses with an emphasis on the visitor industry and at the same time be an attractive and notable entry point to Point MacKenzie and the Borough.

Point MacKenzie's pattern of development is also greatly influenced by environmental constraints. Steep slopes, bluff and shoreline erosion, and wetland areas make development of many parcels costly, difficult or even unfeasible. Nevertheless, such areas can have great value for the community as a whole. Drainage ways and slopes can form an integrated open space network ("green infrastructure") which supports the areas that may be developed more intensively. Environmental constraints and opportunities have an important role in guiding the character and location of new growth.

### **Growth in Point MacKenzie**

The community of Point MacKenzie is growing and it is likely to continue to grow. As stated previously in this plan, future growth will be driven by factors including changes in the overall economy of Alaska, the future of the Port, the pace of growth in the visitor industry and – probably the most difficult to forecast – the growth of Point MacKenzie as a quality-of-life community for retirees, baby boomers and other "footloose" residents. If Point MacKenzie becomes a "hot" residential destination, then it can grow, at least in some dimensions, more or less independently of changes in the conventional economic base.

While increasing visitation may have a great impact on the economic growth of Point MacKenzie, the most significant change in Point MacKenzie's real estate landscape will be the

addition of a ferry linking the community to the city of Anchorage. This may lead to substantial increases in land prices and the construction of many new homes, particularly in the area just outside of the perimeter of the Port, extending out towards the Goose Creek Correctional Center. This growth is an important consideration in the development of Point MacKenzie's Comprehensive Plan. Residents of these developments will use many of the same public and commercial services as Point MacKenzie residents including the roads and trails. Planning for services requires considering the impact of this growing demand.

## **Goals & Objectives for Land Use**

**GOAL 1:** Manage Growth. Guide the amount and location of Point MacKenzie's growth to increase the supply and diversity of housing, protect important environmental resources and community character, reduce sprawl, make efficient use of infrastructure, support a healthy local economy, and help minimize impacts on community and environmental quality.

**Objective A:** Promote a pattern of growth characterized by concentrated, mixed-use centers, a surrounding ring of moderate-to-high density residential and mixed-use areas, with lower densities in outlying areas.

Many of the community's most important goals are tied to the amount and locations of growth, both in the areas selected as the Point MacKenzie community centers and the "greater Point MacKenzie" area. These goals include protecting environmental quality, creating a walkable community, and efficiently providing public services and facilities. The broad strategy behind this objective is to encourage concentrated residential and business growth in the community centers, with densities decreasing in outlying areas. The existing pattern of development in the community will allow this same quantity of growth to spread over a much wider area – which works against all these goals.

While concentrating land uses brings many benefits, many residents want to maintain a sense of open space and privacy that is often associated with lower density development, particularly in residential areas. As a result, this objective of concentrated growth must be accompanied by a set of standards that ensure housing and commercial areas are well designed and attractive. The remainder of this section presents more details on the location of new development; following sections address the character of new development.

**Objective B:** Encourage development of clear and well-defined land use regulations and a land use map in support of the desired pattern of growth while not over-regulating development necessary to accommodate growth.

**Strategy 1:** Encourage industrial development to locate in or near the Port or in other areas identified for industrial development.

**Strategy 2:** Earth material extraction operations should be visually screened from public right-of-ways and should be located away from residential development. Reclamation and final disposition of land used for earth material extraction should result in a beneficial use.

**Strategy 3:** Encourage non-port / non-rail oriented commercial development to locate within the town centers.

**Strategy 4:** Encourage adequate buffers and setbacks for residential, commercial, and industrial uses to minimize off-site impacts.

**Strategy 5:** Encourage the design and placement of signs in a manner which promotes the visibility of scenic views and emphasizes street-side landscaping. Signage for commercial and industrial development should be no higher than the surrounding vegetation, non-animated, illuminated from above to minimize light pollution, and sized to minimize visual impact. Signs for sites with multiple businesses should be clustered and have maximum dimensions of 36 inches by 48 inches.

**Strategy 6:** All business, residential, community driveway, sidewalk, and property lighting systems should avoid shining unnecessary direct light onto nearby or adjacent properties or creating unnecessary glare to motorists or cyclists traveling along roads.

**Strategy 7:** Guide location and character of development with significant off-site impacts to minimize impacts on environmental and community quality, particularly industrial activities and natural resource development, e.g. coal-bed methane, towers, logging, gravel extraction, etc. Encourage forms of development that create economic opportunity and help sustain the area's rural character, including agriculture and timber harvesting.

**Objective C:** Develop policy that supports infrastructure development to be consistent with the intended land use pattern and establishes incentives to encourage development in these areas.

The Public Services and Facilities Chapter outlines how infrastructure development should respond to the broad goals established in this plan, for quality of life, the environment and economy, and the land use policies of this chapter. General strategies for infrastructure development include:

- Plan the expansion of community infrastructure, especially roads, to serve areas identified for growth.
- Encourage development of infrastructure in areas targeted for development by establishing incentives for public-private partnerships. Examples include tax deferral, land trades, tax credits, and infrastructure local improvement districts (LIDs).

**Objective D:** Encourage and maintain quality residential neighborhoods; promote housing choice by supporting a variety of dwelling options.

Diverse residential neighborhoods are crucial to the stability and economic health of Point MacKenzie. Anticipated future growth may put pressure on housing prices as land prices increase. Neighborhoods established decades ago with large lots face pressure as some landowners create subdivisions with smaller lots, while others would like to preserve the established neighborhood character. Housing choice is crucial to accommodate future growth as the dominant recreational residence large lot developments clearly won't be able to meet the future demand in quantity nor in price. The three strategies below set out a program to address these housing issues.

**Strategy 1:** Diversify housing stock to meet demand by people earning a broad range of incomes.

The demand for housing in Point MacKenzie is anticipated to grow rapidly, and housing prices may likely be increasingly driven by the buying power of people who earned their money outside of Point MacKenzie. The result may be a gap between what housing costs and what many Point MacKenzie residents can afford. Solutions aren't simple, but progress can be made. Specific objectives include:

- Create land use standards to ensure that moderate and higher density housing that is built is attractive and is a good fit with Point MacKenzie's character.
- Encourage the state and borough to hold more public land sales.
- Review the existing Planned Unit Development ordinance which provides the chance to offer somewhat higher density housing in exchange for protecting natural areas, trails and green spaces within the development.

**GOAL 2:** Promote the development several mixed-use residential/commercial/business areas designed for pedestrian access.

**Objective A:** Encourage concentrated, pedestrian oriented, attractive business/commerce areas in the community centers.

Creating vital, successful central business areas – clear commercial and civic centers of Point MacKenzie – won't happen by accident. Areas identified as suitable for concentrated business / commerce areas include the area around the intersection of Point MacKenzie Road and Ayrshire Avenue, the area near the Goose Creek Correctional Center, and adjacent to the Port District..

**Objective B:** Discourage strip development along the Point MacKenzie Road and major collectors/thoroughfares.

Strip development occurs along major transportation corridors where access to the market is ensured by the corridor's daily use. Strip development is an unplanned consequence of building transportation infrastructure, and it tends to include practically any land use in an eclectic – often cluttered and unsightly – array of buildings, parking lots, utilities and support structures.

Strip development along highways introduces competition for the central business district and weakens its role. The current level of land use regulation has the potential to lead to a gradual loss of character along the Point MacKenzie Road and misplaces needed economic activity from other potential commercial and business districts. Strip development can create unattractive community entries (e.g., the Glenn Highway coming into downtown Anchorage) and unsafe edges along thoroughfares. This type of development can have a negative impact on the flow of traffic, leading to congestion and unsafe conditions.

Two primary strategies can help avoid and lessen the potential adverse impacts of unwanted strip development:

**Strategy 1:** Location of development – encourage the majority of future commercial development to locate in the town centers.

**Strategy 2:** Character of development – strip commercial development does not have to be unattractive. A variety of strategies are available to ensure such development makes a positive

contribution to the overall character of the community. These include controls on the size and appearance of signs, requirements for landscaping of parking areas, and basic guidelines regarding building appearance.

**Objective C:** Discourage competition between community centers and Point MacKenzie Port District commercial uses and encourage complementary commercial activity that benefits both in the appropriate locations.

**Strategy 1:** Allow for and encourage marine commercial and marine industrial uses adjacent to the Port District while locating general commercial and business uses in the commercial centers.

**Strategy 2:** Encourage commercial development to locate in the town centers.

**Strategy 3:** Address the needs of seasonal tourism-related commercial/retail activity adjacent to the Port District in the context of the continued focus on marine / rail related commercial and marine industrial uses.

**Strategy 4:** Provide a strong seasonal transportation link between the town center and the Port District to support tourism and recreation businesses represented at both locations. One option would be to develop multipurpose public parking areas in the community centers and offer shuttle service to the Port District. Charging for Port District parking would create an incentive to use this service.

**Strategy 5:** Recommend revising the master plan for the Port District to build from the recommendations of the Point MacKenzie Comprehensive Plan, addressing parking and other uses as well as the impacts from traffic to and from the Port.

**Objective D:** Introduce new commercial areas to better encourage and accommodate commercial land uses in appropriate locations and allow new types of commercial activities to take place.

**Strategy 1:** Anticipate the growth in white-collar business activities and clean industries by designating live-work districts; provide the development standards needed to maintain the quality of these areas. *See Goal 1 of this chapter.*

**Strategy 2:** Target high tech industries or professional/web-based activities in these new commercial areas by encouraging development of access to wireless communication.

**Strategy 3:** Consider establishing land use regulations to allow for a handful of well-defined neighborhood commercial areas, to reduce the need for longer drives to primary commercial areas, to serve kids and others who don't drive, and to provide neighborhood meeting places.

**GOAL 3:** Encourage development of two town centers, one near the intersection of Pt. MacKenzie Road and Burma Road and one immediately north of Alsop Road. The town centers should include sites for a library, health clinic, and a service station, school sites, post office, community center, grocery store, café, hotel, police station, and multi-family development.

**Objective A:** Create a pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use town center, to include places to meet friends and neighbors, venues for events and community meetings, a farmers market, commercial services like a bank, Post Office, grocery, restaurants; provide sufficient utilities to support higher density development.

**Strategy 1:** Work with the Borough to acquire borough land at the "T" of Point MacKenzie Road for a public facility site;

**Strategy 2:** Work with the Borough to appropriately dispose of land north of Alsop Road for town center development.

**Strategy 3:** Develop two town center master plans that include the desired elements listed in this plan.

**Strategy 4:** Guide the amount and location of Point MacKenzie's growth to protect important environmental resources and community character, make efficient use of infrastructure, support a healthy local economy, and help reduce adverse impacts of development.

**Strategy 5:** Support dedication of borough owned land near the town center location for public facilities, including a school, community center, and a library.

**Objective B:** Encourage development of alternate energy sources in the town centers.

**GOAL 4:** Maintain the quality of Point MacKenzie's natural environment and scenic beauty, while allowing for necessary improvements to support growth.

Point MacKenzie's natural setting provides many benefits but also imposes significant natural constraints. The characteristics of the setting need to be respected in guiding the location, amount, density and character of development.

This plan takes two general approaches to guide development to respond to environmental conditions. One is to "overlay" information regarding environmental constraints and opportunities onto the land use designation and regulations maps. This means, for example, that some portions of an area identified for development would be limited by the site-specific presence of wetland areas, etc. The second broad strategy is to recommend that appropriate standards be adopted so that where development does occur it is designed to respect environmental functions and characteristics. Examples in this category include, for example, site development polices for drainage, vegetation and grading.

**Objective A:** Establish development standards and identify development practices that protect environmental functions including wildlife corridors and habitat.

The intent of these guidelines is to allow for a wide range of uses to coexist in Point MacKenzie, but to encourage these uses to occur in a way that minimize impacts on the quality of life of neighbors and the natural environment.

The same use – say a new store – can have very different effects, depending on how it is developed. For example, in one instance the developer might clear all the vegetation from the site and direct runoff from parking lots into a nearby stream. A different developer might leave more of the original vegetation, and direct runoff to a swale where dirt and oil are filtered out before the runoff goes into the adjoining creek. A list of general development guidelines is provided as an example in Appendix A. The community may later wish to refine these and adopt them as enforceable regulations.

**Objective B:** Use the Green Infrastructure map as a reference in the review and approval of development projects.

Maps of important environmental features, processes, and key open space areas are valuable to the extent this information informs decisions about development. In particular, this information

is critical to protect features that cross boundaries of multiple parcels, e.g. streams and trails. This action not only protects open space values, but increases value of open space for developers.<sup>1</sup> Specific policies for using this information to shape development include:

**Strategy 1:** Include details about environmental features and processes along with plans for open space when submitting subdivisions or other developments for approval.

**Strategy 2:** Demonstrate how features that cross multiple parcels will be protected in individual projects. Use this process to create links between open space areas and integrate new development into the network of open space.

Comparative examples of different approaches to preserving green infrastructure in land subdivision and development follow.

**Objective C:** Use the detailed green infrastructure map as a reference to help provide extra protection for areas with highest environmental value or development constraints.

Ideally, adopting more effective development standards will result in the preservation and protection of high value land; however, there may be some areas identified that cannot easily be protected through standard means and are considered of such importance that they need to be preserved in perpetuity. Examples might include a particular beach access corridor, or a particular section bordering a lake or stream. Various creative means exist for accomplishing such goals, such as:

**Strategy 1:** Work with land trusts and/or public agencies to acquire land for protection and recreational use (build on example set by Kachemak Heritage Land Trust).

**Strategy 2:** Land trades or variations on transfer of development rights.

**Strategy 3:** Encourage the borough to provide tax relief for landowners who guarantee retention of large unbroken open space.

**GOAL 5:** Encourage expansion of public and commercial services; protect the scenic quality of the land along the community's road system by encouraging commercial development in clustered centers, and screening development

**Strategy 1:** Maintain / encourage a vegetated buffer along the major roadways in the community;

**Strategy 2:** Provide for mixed residential and commercial development and encourage a walkable community.

**GOAL 6:** Minimize impacts of industrial and commercial development at the Port and the associated impacts of the transportation to and from the Port.

**Strategy 1:** Encourage the community to work with the Port Commission and Director to minimize Port-related impacts including but not limited to dust, noise, and fumes on the community.

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<sup>1</sup> Park Community Utah is an example of a community that has developed an extensive public trail system, almost entirely on private land, by following this approach. Developers in the Park Community area have come to recognize that trails are an amenity that buyers seek out, that add value to their projects and that can be provided at relatively little cost. The coordinated actions of many individual developers have resulted in an integrated communitywide trail system.

**GOAL 7:** Maintain the community’s rural character.

**Strategy 1:** Encourage developers to review and implement the recommendations of this plan and strive to achieve the vision of the community with every proposed project and subdivision.

**GOAL 8:** Encourage clean-up and development of the former Nike site.

The Anchorage Nike Site Bay, commonly referred to as the Goose Bay Nike Site, was used from about 1959 to 30 Jul 1979. The land was acquired by the Air Force (withdrawn from Bureau of Land Management) on 16 Oct 1956. It was transferred to the Army on 8 Oct 1957. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers documents indicate the control area was a correctional center owned by the state of Alaska; the launcher site has remained abandoned since it transferred to the University of Alaska. Some level of hydrocarbon contamination resulting from previous site activities may persist at the site. The site contains developable land at the end of the Knik Goose Bay Road.

**Objective 1:** Encourage the current owners of the former Nike site to remediate and redevelop it for the following potential future uses:

- i. School or university;
- ii. Mixed use residential area;
- iii. Business center;
- iv. Industrial Park;
- v. Park; or a
- vi. Regional airport.

**Strategy 1:** Encourage the State, the Mental Health Trust, and the University of Alaska to pursue EPA Brownfield Program grant funding for assessment and cleanup of the site.

Brownfields are property where redevelopment or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant. Cleaning up and reinvesting in these properties protects the environment, reduces blight, and takes development pressures off green spaces and working lands.

**GOAL 8:** Encourage the routing of any major “linear” project to locate away from any existing or planned commercial or residential areas.

Limited available land for development in the Point MacKenzie community will result in a majority of the development occurring along Point MacKenzie Road. Every effort should be made to retain the open nature and natural beauty of this corridor.

**Objective 1:** New “linear” projects should locate along existing easements and right-of-ways.