

Memo

To: Patricia Buholm, Dillingham City Planner
cc: Dillingham Planning Commission
From: Agnew::Beck Consulting
Date: January 4, 2024
Re: **Dillingham Comprehensive Plan Update**

Project Timeline

As we have extended the contract period of performance, we are now aiming to complete the comprehensive plan update by this spring.

- **January:**
 - Complete contextual research and analysis.
 - Prepare for public workshop.
- **February-March:**
 - Public workshop to review goals, strategies and actions and identify overall community priorities.
 - Strategies and actions will be identified as City-led or Partner-led to help City staff, Council members and Commissioners focus on a more manageable set of priorities.
- **March-April:**
 - Assemble full draft update of the Comprehensive Plan.
 - Public Review and Approvals process.

Status of Public Input to Date

- **Public Input Form:** 71 responses
- **Interviews:**
 - 8 interviews completed with representatives of Dillingham educational institutions, seafood industry, BBNA and Tribes, landowners and/or land managers, and a mix of recent and long-time community members.
 - 2-3 interviews in process of scheduling/conducting but not completed with representatives of the Dillingham Fire Department, community healthcare and social services.
- A summary of public input to date is provided as Attachment A.



Dillingham Comprehensive Plan Update

Community Input Summary to Date

updated January 3, 2024 – ATTACHMENT A

Process

Public Input Form

A public input form was distributed to the community via online survey format and hard copy format in mid-October and was open until December 1st, 2023. The form asked respondents to provide open-ended comments about which 2010 Comprehensive Plan topics should be prioritized over the next 10-20 years. The Comprehensive Plan topics include:

1. Land Use and Housing
2. Transportation
3. Waterfront
4. Economic Development
5. Energy
6. Community Wellness and Education
7. Public Facilities and Services

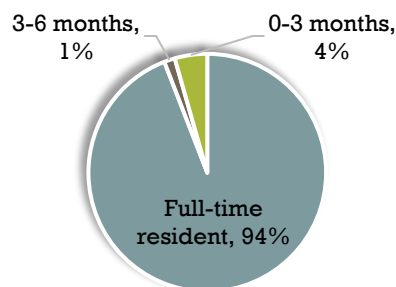
Respondents were also asked to provide the average time they spend in Dillingham each year.

Interviews

To date, eight interviews have been conducted with stakeholders from Dillingham educational institutions, the seafood industry, BBNA and Tribes, landowners and/or land managers, and a mix of recent and long-time community members. Interviewees were asked to provide information about Dillingham accomplishments, quality of life, and the biggest challenges, opportunities, and priorities they see today and over the next 10-20 years. They were also asked whether they are familiar with the 2010 Comprehensive Plan and to share ideas about creatively engaging the community during the current update process.

Response Summary

71 individuals provided feedback using the Public Feedback Form and 25 individuals provided feedback through interviews – **95 respondents total**. Nearly all who provided feedback using the Public Feedback form did so online. The vast majority of Public Input Form respondents indicated that they lived in Dillingham year-round.



Themes

Approximately 417 comments from 95 individuals were received from the Public Input Form and interviews. The main themes of all topics have been summarized below. Housing affordability and availability were the top concerns among respondents, which also impact community wellness and education, economic development, and public facilities and services.

Topics - Main	#Comments
Land Use & Housing	75
Community Wellness and Education	74
Public Facilities and Services	71
Economic Development	60
Transportation	33
Waterfront	19
Energy	17
Comp Plan Process	25
Vision	10
Accomplishments	8
Quality of Life	25
Total	417

Top Comprehensive Plan Themes

(Public Form and Interviews, 349 responses total)

Topic	Key Themes
Land Use & Housing 66 responses related to Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable housing stock was the top concern for most respondents. • Lack of housing prevents workforce development, especially in the education sector. Housing was cited as the primary reason that teacher recruitment and retention is so difficult in Dillingham. Many positions in the workforce are vacant because they cannot find a place to live. • There is a sense that housing challenges are partially to blame for outmigration and that the younger population will move to other cities where affordable housing can be found. • Respondents felt that the City could help by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ simplifying the permitting system and reducing unnecessary regulations that prevent development and affordable housing types; ○ document vacant city-owned property to determine appropriate land uses; ○ updating the floodplain information for the downtown area; ○ incentivizing housing projects through property tax reductions or city land sales at reduced prices, earmarked for housing developments; and

Topic	Key Themes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ increase collaborative efforts with other agencies (such as BBHA, BBAHC, BBNA, and the School District), land managers, banks and contractors to create holistic solutions. ● Regarding other land use topics, respondents expressed concern about the effects of erosion, invasive species control, site control for developments to protect fish habitat, and abandoned buildings that cause blight and potential environmental harm.
<p>Community Wellness & Education 49 responses related to Wellness, 19 responses related to Education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Respondents commented on the need for a multi-purpose building for adult and youth activities, fitness options, meeting space, and event space. ● There was broad recognition that many Dillingham residents suffer from mental health and addiction illnesses, but disagreement about the primary cause. Respondents suggested that prioritizing support services in health care, housing, and public safety are needed. Others suggested that more activities for younger residents would decrease instances of drug abuse. Many recommended more robust collaboration efforts between the City and support services. ● Elder care was an important topic for some respondents, noting the loss of Grandma’s House (MEAL) and long-term doctors at the hospital. Many see Elders leaving Dillingham for better assisted living options and understand that the aging population will continue to grow over the next decade. ● Lack of childcare options for families with young children was observed. ● Topics related to teacher recruitment and retention were the largest concerns related to education in Dillingham. Some listed housing as the main barrier, while others focused on the decline in school population. ● There are less than 400 students in the school district, which is the lowest enrollment in at least 20 years. The government may take back one-third of the district’s funding because of the low enrollment. School population decline is attributed to outmigration, privatization, and increased homeschooling enrollment. ● Many expressed praise for the school system, despite the lack of resources, especially in its effort to build partnerships with other agencies. ● Respondents suggested increasing education and training opportunities for trades to support/increase the local workforce.
<p>Economic Development 60 responses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Respondents generally agreed that the cost of living in Dillingham is a major barrier to growing the economy, though many believed that there was little that could be done to improve it. ● 17 respondents commented on taxation as it relates to the fishing industry, small business development, and housing. There was general consensus that taxes are needed in order to fund and improve Dillingham’s infrastructure, but no consensus about precisely which taxes should be increased or created. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Many commented that the property tax is a hindrance to small businesses. They suggested relaxing taxes or creating other

Topic	Key Themes
	<p>incentives for needed services in Dillingham, like restaurants, fishing supplies and services, veterinarians, and mechanics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Some supported implementing a raw fish tax or onshore fish processing tax, while others feared it would drive processors to communities with better infrastructure and/or lower taxes. ○ Some suggested finding ways to increase taxes on non-residents. ○ Many suggested providing tax breaks to those who would develop housing in Dillingham. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Many supported the fishing industry and noted it is recently impacted by world affairs and politics. Last year, they were paid \$0.50 per pound. ● Some noted that there are many open jobs in the community that are not being filled. Low wages, discrimination, mental illness and addiction, and seasonal employment from fishing could be possible deterrents to year-round jobs. ● There was general support for an expanded tourism/eco-tourism sector to diversify the economy, encourage beautification of the city, protect the environment, and improve the quality of life for residents. ● Some respondents support finding ways to keep the workforce local, such as using the local workforce to build housing and providing training opportunities for trades.
<p>Transportation 33 responses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Many respondents praised recent improvements to the roads but reinforced the importance of year-round road maintenance and the development of new roads, such as paving Neqleq subdivision and Emperor Way, establishing an alternative route from downtown to Wood River Road via HUD road, and resolving Squaw Cr Road. ● 9 respondents expressed a need for a shuttle or transit service for residents (Elders, teachers, university students, seasonal employees, visitors, etc.), even if it only ran a few times per week. ● Praise was given to the City for providing more infrastructure for multimodal transportation, like bike paths and sidewalks, which are used frequently. Maintaining and extending active transportation infrastructure was requested. ● The lack of barge service was perceived as a main reason for the high costs of goods and services and a deterrent to developing new housing in Dillingham. ● One respondent requested a freight lane across the waterfront from Peter Pan to the City dock to avoid traffic in front of the AC store.
<p>Waterfront 19 responses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Erosion was a top concern. Mitigation measures, like building seawalls, were suggested. ● Improving harbor facilities and management were recommended, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Utilizing the Bingman property as a Seafood Innovation Center or a multi-use retail space with a boardwalk. ○ Moving the food vendors away from the busy driveway.

Topic	Key Themes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Opening more boat launch ramps. ○ Parking enforcement. ○ Restroom maintenance. ○ Waste management, especially for disposed oils that tend to leak near the bins. ○ A running ice machine. ○ Better fire suppression hydrants. ○ Bring water and electricity to the south end of the harbor. ○ Maintain/pave the City dock surface; equipment is easily damaged. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Some perceive conflicts with those that use the waterfront as a 'working waterfront' and those who would like to use it more for community gathering spaces and celebrations. (Many working harbors, like those in Sitka, Alaska, have found ways to create community spaces without conflicting with industry or subsistence uses.) ● Respondents would like to improve the waterfront for community spaces see the waterfront as a focal point of the community and a source of pride/identity. Utilizing the Bingman property as a Seafood Innovation Center or a multi-use retail space with a boardwalk or coastal trail was suggested.
<p>Energy 17 responses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Many respondents recognized that the community is heavily reliant on diesel for fuel and support options for expanding renewable, sustainable energy infrastructure. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Some suggested incentives for small-scale alternative energy solutions, such as community-wide grants for solar and wind initiatives. ○ There may be opportunities for the City to collaborate with the UAF Bristol Bay Campus on other initiatives through existing programs. ○ Some City-owned buildings could be more energy-efficient and be modified for solar electricity where appropriate. ○ Others suggested installing EV charging stations and replacing City vehicles with electric vehicles when appropriate. ● Many respondents supported the Nushagak Electric and Telephone Cooperative's initiatives to develop hydro power and expand fiber optics for the region. Some noted that expanding fiber optics may benefit economic development by allowing more remote workers to live in Dillingham.
<p>Public Facilities & Services 71 responses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Many respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the City and perceive that the community has a negative view of the City (29 responses). Respondents suggested that the City should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Find solutions by building partnerships. Collaborate with keystone organizations, Tribal entities, educators, contractors, and neighborhoods. Support community initiatives that other agencies lead. Find a way to stimulate the volunteer core. (17 responses)

Topic	Key Themes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Recruit and retain employees by paying a fair wage and reviewing the City’s structure and processes. The turnover is disruptive to providing consistent services. (10 responses) ○ Emphasize public relations. Create an engagement plan to improve transparency about decisions. Involve the community in decisions, especially working families who may not be able to attend meetings. Provide more education about what the City does and how it works. (8 responses) ○ Focus on deferred maintenance, asset management, and low maintenance solutions. ○ Prioritize actions. ● Public safety comments (8): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Some respondents remarked that they do not call the police in dangerous situations because the police will either make things worse or not respond. ○ Improve or build a new police station and jail. ○ Improve police action on petty crimes (vandalism and theft) that occur on boats over winter, boat storage areas, and the harbor. ○ Promote fire mitigation programs and projects. ○ Promote the numerous training opportunities that Fire/EMS conduct to increase volunteers and provide education. ● Utility comments (7): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The sanitation services need to be improved; many components of the 20-year-old master plan are out of date. ○ Extend sewer and water where possible. Septic is always backing up at HUD. ○ Protect the sewage lagoon. ○ Expand water and sewer to the airport. ○ Improve drinking water. ● Eight respondents commented about the declining condition of the landfill. While some improvements have been made in the past few years, they perceive that it is not yet improved to the quality it was 15 years ago and that the City is mainly responsible. Respondents recommended: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Maintaining the landfill to meet ADEC Solid Waste requirements. ○ Having clear and well-maintained areas for recycling. ○ Covering waste daily and installing bear-proof fencing. ○ Prioritizing fire prevention. ○ Convert the incinerator burner to used waste oil instead of buying diesel.

Other Themes:

(Public Form and Interviews, 68 responses total)

The Comprehensive Planning Process

- Public engagement ideas:
 - *Increase opportunities for youth to be engaged. We can slow outmigration if we engage kids now. If kids feel like they're heard, they will feel like they have buy-in. Ask what they consider "fun."*
 - *Townhalls and public workshops; incentivize attendance with gift cards and door prizes.*
 - *Lunch-and-Learns at the University.*
 - *Public radio.*
 - *Choggiung Ltd. Board meeting in June.*
 - *Piggyback on other events, have staff there to discuss the plan and process.*
 - *Talk to small business owners - ones that still have business and ones whose businesses have closed. Ask about challenges.*
 - *Leave materials at the post office.*
- Content:
 - *Make it a shorter plan, easily digestible, accessible*
 - *Use definable metrics in the goals and actions. The 2010 plan doesn't do that, so it's difficult to know whether or not it has happened.*
 - *Track it yearly.*
 - *Make goals attainable. Most comp plan goals don't get accomplished because they entity doesn't have enough control of the outcomes.*
 - *Prioritize goals; make sure they connect with what really matters. The City is talking about planter boxes, but the dump and lagoon are in dire straits.*
 - *Include the inventory that was taken of the City's assets and facilities. It was well-documented and would be a really good idea to keep updated and make transparent so the public can track changes.*
 - *More emphasis on leadership roles and partnerships.*
- Process:
 - *Put the plan online, where the public can reach it. A way for the public to comment through the whole process, not just the planning process.*
 - *Track it yearly.*
 - *Have leadership meetings every couple of months to check in. The City seems to sit out of the regional meetings. Require an annual review by City Council.*

Vision for the Future:

- *Dillingham has the potential to be a great little city again, to be a place where people want to live and stay.*
- *Make a "greener" connection easier for residents of Dillingham.*
- *There is no more sense of community here. People come and go after a year or two. It is so expensive. If you're not from here, why would you stay?*

- *There are so many great and caring people in the community that want to do great things, but it is going to require the City and other agencies like BBEDC to take more initiative in finding ways to bring in the resources for the collective community instead of individuals all struggling on their own to fix individual problems.*
- *We must build the groundwork to support people who can support themselves. This starts with the basics. Housing, food and economic security etc.*
- *Dillingham is a beautiful community, and we need to help revive all these aspects and bring more for our youth and elders to be a part of. All while preserving the subsistence way of life and traditional values.*
- *Unless we as a community change, this town will continue to degrade. We need something to be proud of, something that, as a community, we can call our own. A morale booster, and a motivator. And we need it sooner than 10 years. School partnership with BBRCT program and literacy program. Youth are trained in high school to take the open positions. All four school districts in partnership. It grows a local work force through vocational education.*
- *We need to make Dillingham more appealing. The more residents we get, the more opportunities for small businesses to start back up, like restaurants. Make this town alive again.*

Accomplishments

- *Afterschool programs (more tutoring, food services, transportation, culture integration).*
- *School partnership with BBRCT program and literacy program. Youth are trained in high school to take the open positions. All four school districts in partnership. It grows a local work force through vocational education.*
- *BBEDC youth hiring. There is funding for local youth experience in the local workforce, which helps keep youth in our community. Same with the ANSEP program, which helps recruit FWS workforce.*
- *The school district has aggressively gone for education grants (State and Federal) to provide additional books (every child gets two books each month), staff for literacy, mental health and SEL programming, mental health counselors, partnerships to support students, preschool.*
- *BBNA Rebuild partnership w/DCSD – Piloted in 2014.*
- *Road improvements.*
- *Bike trail. Many community members advocated for it (it wasn't in the plan), and it has been wonderful for kids and families.*
- *High praise for community outreach during the pandemic; the City's partnership with the hospital.*

What People Love About Dillingham

- *I enjoy that Dillingham is a small town. It's easy to be involved with the community here. I appreciate the environment, subsistence resources, opportunity to enjoy the outdoors, the hospital here. Without the hospital, I wouldn't be able to live here. The school system is as good or as challenging as a family wants it to be. Facilities and basic infrastructure are good.*
- *The Yup'ik culture.*
- *Dillingham provides broader opportunities for different recreation and outdoor interests (hiking, fishing, hunting, trapping).*

- *People come together when there are hardships.*
- *Close knit support system.*
- *Having a public library, museum, and a University of Alaska campus in town is really great.*
- *The SAFE shelter.*
- *BBNA as a tribal arm for social services.*
- *Wonderful organizations working out of Dillingham.*
- *The people and the children.*
- *The people and relationships with small businesses.*
- *It's my home.*
- *Sense of community.*
- *The subsistence lifestyle.*
- *Alice Ruby.*
- *Everyone is like family. Going to the grocery store, I know everybody. It brings me joy to be close.*
- *Beauty and diversity. The Russian fleet that comes in the summer, the people from Croatia and Mexico for the canneries. Close knit families. Healthy rivalry between villages and sports. The King Run.*
- *"This is the place that has always been."*