

# CITY OF HOUSTON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

JUNE 2016, PUBLIC HEARING DRAFT



# CITY OF HOUSTON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION

## MAYOR'S MESSAGE

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Dear Citizens of Houston,

It is with great pride that I, along with the City Council and the Planning Commission, present the City of Houston this Comprehensive Plan.

The Comprehensive Plan highlights our resources and development opportunities, which include jobs, economic vitality and revitalization, educational opportunities, safety, security and preservation of Houston's unique character.

The Comprehensive Plan is a living and breathing document which represents the future for Houston. Through its goals, objectives and policies, the plan will serve as our roadmap for the future. The Comprehensive Plan recommends specific actions and projects: but, more importantly, it gives the community a standard measuring tool to help evaluate proposals and plans for development.

Having an updated comprehensive plan is critical to Houston's future success. I, on behalf of the City Council, wish to extend our thanks to R&M Consultants, Inc., specifically the project manager Van Le, the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, the Planning Commission, staff and the citizens that participated in preparing this plan.

Sincerely,

Virgie Thompson  
Mayor

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Comprehensive Plan





# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION



Houston, Alaska is a growing rural residential community which has developed around the Parks Highway, a National Highway Systems Highway bisecting the community. A rural town setting within 15 minutes of urban amenities, Houston is at a crossroads for change and growth.

## NEED AND PURPOSE FOR REVISED PLAN

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The City of Houston's Comprehensive Plan is undergoing a revision. Originally written in 1999 by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and amended in 2003, the City of Houston is now assuming the responsibility of revising its Comprehensive Plan. Comprehensive Plans are used as a tool to plan for future growth, development, and change within a community. Emphasized by the experiences in other Matanuska-Susitna Borough communities, unplanned development creates numerous economic, social, and governmental problems. The City of Houston recognizes that these problems are largely preventable with proper planning and clear implementation strategies.

Population growth with an increased demand for services, as well as major transportation infrastructure project underway within or adjacent to the City of Houston, have prompted the city to determine and thus capitalize on future opportunities. Such possibilities will arise from changes in the community's infrastructure, economy and development.. Since the adoption of the amended 2003 Plan, multiple new sets of census

data have become available and a Community Impact Assessment is underway (congruent with this effort). In addition, information on transportation infrastructure initiatives by the Alaska DOT&PF and Alaska Rail Road anticipated in the Houston area in the near future has become available. With significant development changes affecting community qualities of life anticipated, it has become crucial that the City of Houston revise the 2003 Comprehensive Plan.

The objective of this Plan Revision is to proactively articulate the community's vision to respond to growth and change and provide direction for development decisions and future growth in Houston. The Plan Revision will validate the community's core values, including accommodating orderly growth; the need for enhanced education, health, and governmental services; promoting local employment and economic opportunity; and maintaining a high quality semi-rural residential environment.

## PLANNING CONTEXT

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### RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANS, MSB, ZONING REGULATIONS

Alaska Statute 29.40.020. requires the submission of a comprehensive plan for the systematic and organized development of first and second class boroughs or cities. Alaska Statute 29.40.030 outlines the requirements of a comprehensive plan.

Although the City of Houston is its own jurisdiction, this comprehensive plan is part of the





overall Matanuska Susitna Borough Comprehensive Plan. Cities in the Borough are responsible for the creation and updating of their individual comprehensive plans. The City of Houston's Land Use Regulations, Title 10 of the Municipal Code, is purposed "to regulate the use of land and improvements, in accordance with the City of Houston Comprehensive Plan." The Comprehensive Plan provides guidelines for land use regulations and development in compliance with community defined goals. Together, the Land Use Regulations and the Comprehensive Plan provide the basis for consistent development and provide a tool to adhere to the community's vision of what Houston should be like 20 years forward. If subarea plans are developed and adopted in the future by the City of Houston, those subarea plans become part of this Comprehensive Plan.

## WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

A Comprehensive Plan reflects a community's goals, objectives and policies for governing future land uses and a desired future. Comprehensive Plans provide the best estimate, based on current conditions, of the future growth and development of a community through implementation of adopted policies and strategic actions. Comprehensive Plans

typically plan for a 20-year future with provisions to check in and update plans if updated information is presented such as updated population and Census data. This Comprehensive Plan validates the community's core values, needs, and desires while providing a framework for development in the City of Houston through the year 2035.

## HOW WILL THIS PLAN BE USED?

This Comprehensive Plan is intended to serve as a guiding document for policy makers, the city council, state, federal, and local agencies, and the general public in evaluating if regulatory actions, public investments, and land use changes meet the Plan's goals and objectives. As a guidance document, this Comprehensive Plan does not make decisions about individual properties or specific facilities and does not preclude future decisions by prescribing the future in greater detail.

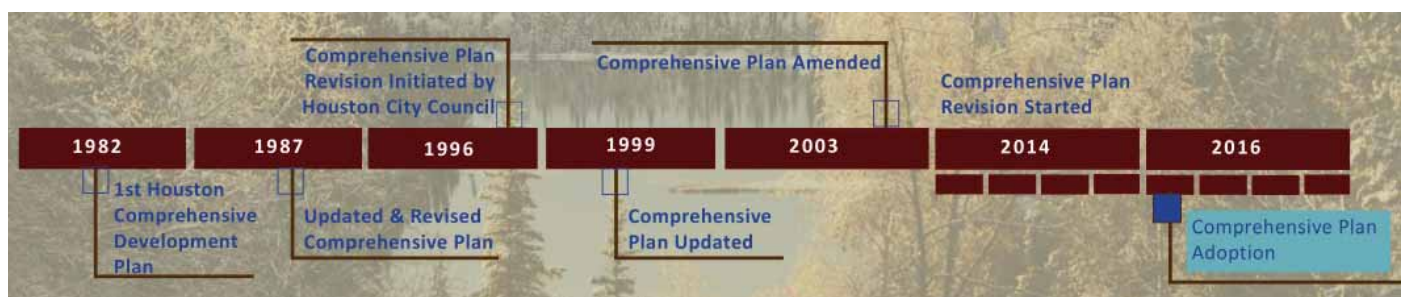
## HOW WILL THIS PLAN BE IMPLEMENTED?

The Comprehensive Plan will be implemented through the policies and action strategies identified in Chapter 7 of the plan.

## PLAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The Comprehensive Plan Update occurred over a two year period and included multiple public involvement opportunities, technical studies, and continuous support from the Steering Committee.

- Existing Conditions Inventory and Report
- 2003 Comprehensive Plan Reevaluation
- Public Outreach: Futures Workshop
- Community Household Survey
- Economic Analysis
- Community Impact Assessment
- Public Outreach: Community Impact Assessment Open House
- Land Use Assessment
- Draft Land Use and Transportation Plan
- Draft Comprehensive Plan Public Outreach:
- Comprehensive Plan Review Open House
- Final Comprehensive Plan Revision.



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CITY OF  
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## CHAPTER 2: COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

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This chapter summarizes the physical environment within the City of Houston, including historical development, existing land use characteristics, public facilities, and transportation system.

## LOCATION

The City of Houston, Alaska is located in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, approximately 57 road miles from Anchorage, Alaska's employment and population center. Located 7.5 miles northwest of Wasilla and adjacent to Big Lake, Houston is along the western edge of the most populous portion of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Houston's city limits encompass about 25.3 square miles, ranging from Mile 61 of the Parks Highway at the northern boundary to Mile 52 at the southern boundary. The center of the community lies near the junction of the Little Susitna River and Mile 57.2 of the Parks Highway. The commercial and residential development along the first mile of Big Lake Road lies within the Houston city limits.

The Alaska Railroad traverses the Parks Highway within the city limits. The Port MacKenzie Rail Extension runs from its junction with the main line south of the Little Susitna River in Houston and

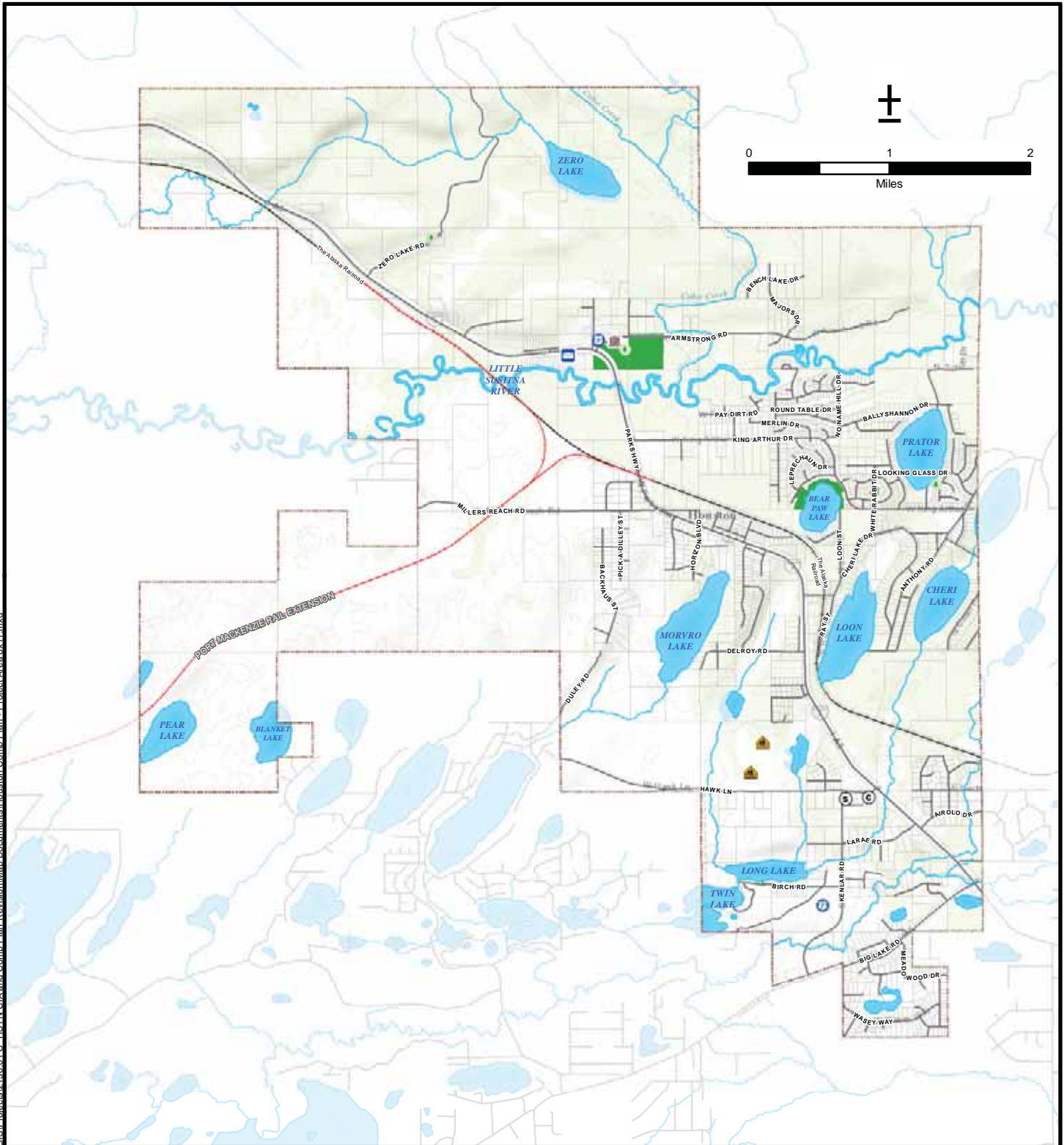
continues 32 miles southwest to the port at Point MacKenzie. Full air service is available at Anchorage International Airport. Other local air service is available at small Mat-Su airports and a local seaplane base on Morvoro Lake. See Figure 1. Project Area.

## HISTORY, DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS, TIMELINE

Houston, Alaska was first listed on a 1917 blueprint Alaska railroad map as "Houston Siding," named after Tennessee Congressman William Cannon Houston. The City's origins began with natural resource development and the Herning Trail (now Willow Creek Sled Trail) for freighting supplies to the Willow Creek Mining District, according to the State of Alaska's Community and Regional Affairs database. Several coal mines were developed in the area in 1917-1918 and a railroad spur was constructed that supplied coal to Anchorage and the LaTouche Mining Company in Prince William Sound. The coal from Houston was heavily mined through World War II, after which mine operations shut down. In 1953-1954 gravel roads and power lines were extended west of Wasilla, and Houston quickly settled. Houston incorporated as a third-class city in 1966 and was reclassified in 1973 to a second-class city. The City of Houston has historically grown and continues to be a residential community with a few commercial developments adjacent to the Parks Highway.

In June of 1982, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly, on behalf of the City of Houston, officially adopted the city's first

Comprehensive Development Plan. The city updated and revised the comprehensive plan to more accurately reflect changing economic conditions in 1987, 1999, and the most recent amendment in 2003. In keeping with the community's commitment to prepare and plan for the opportunities for change in the community's infrastructure, economy, population, and development, the City of Houston initiated this revision in 2014.



**LEGEND**

- |               |                               |               |                  |
|---------------|-------------------------------|---------------|------------------|
| City Boundary | Railroad                      | City Hall     | Community Center |
| Parcels       | Port MacKenzie Rail Extension | Public Safety | Senior Center    |
| Park          |                               | Post Office   | Recreational     |
|               |                               | School        |                  |

CITY OF HOUSTON

COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT  
AND  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION

PROJECT AREA

JUNE 2016

FIGURE 1

## PHYSICAL SETTING

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Houston's pastoral setting is against the backdrop of the Talkeetna Mountains with the Little Susitna River running east-west through the city boundaries. Lakes are scattered throughout the city, attracting many residents and non-residential recreational users.

## SOILS

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Soils in Houston generally range from well-drained, well-sorted gravel to hydric wetland soils. A number of small lakes dot the central and southern portions of the community limits and are bordered by glacial moraines consisting of non-sorted glacial till. Soils located south of the Little Susitna River and east of the Parks Highway are generally well drained sand and gravels of pitted outwash and till material. Larger intermittent areas of poorly drained soils and peat bogs occur to the west of the Parks Highway.

The northern topography is characterized by rolling hills and perched silty areas. These soils are fine grained and poorly draining. Development within the area is sparse with only a few gravel pits cut into glacial moraine and esker/kame complexes.

Soils in the central portion of Houston are suitable for cultivated crops and agricultural development. Portions of these areas are presently zoned for low density residential and agricultural use.

## WATERBODIES

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Approximately 864 acres, or 5%, of Houston consists of surface waters. The most notable is the Little Susitna River which crosses the Parks Highway in the middle of the community. This river originates in the Talkeetna Mountains in Hatcher Pass and flows southwest ultimately into Cook Inlet. The Little Susitna River, Coho Creek, and a number of contributing unnamed streams are listed in the Anadromous (salmon producing) Waters Catalog.

Several popular lakes exist within the City limits including Zero Lake, Bear Paw Lake, Prator Lake, Frog Lake, Cheri Lake, Loon Lake and Morvro Lake. Bear Paw, Prator, Morvro, and Look Lakes are stocked annually with various fish species. There are no designated "Impaired Waterbodies" within the city of Houston.

## WETLANDS

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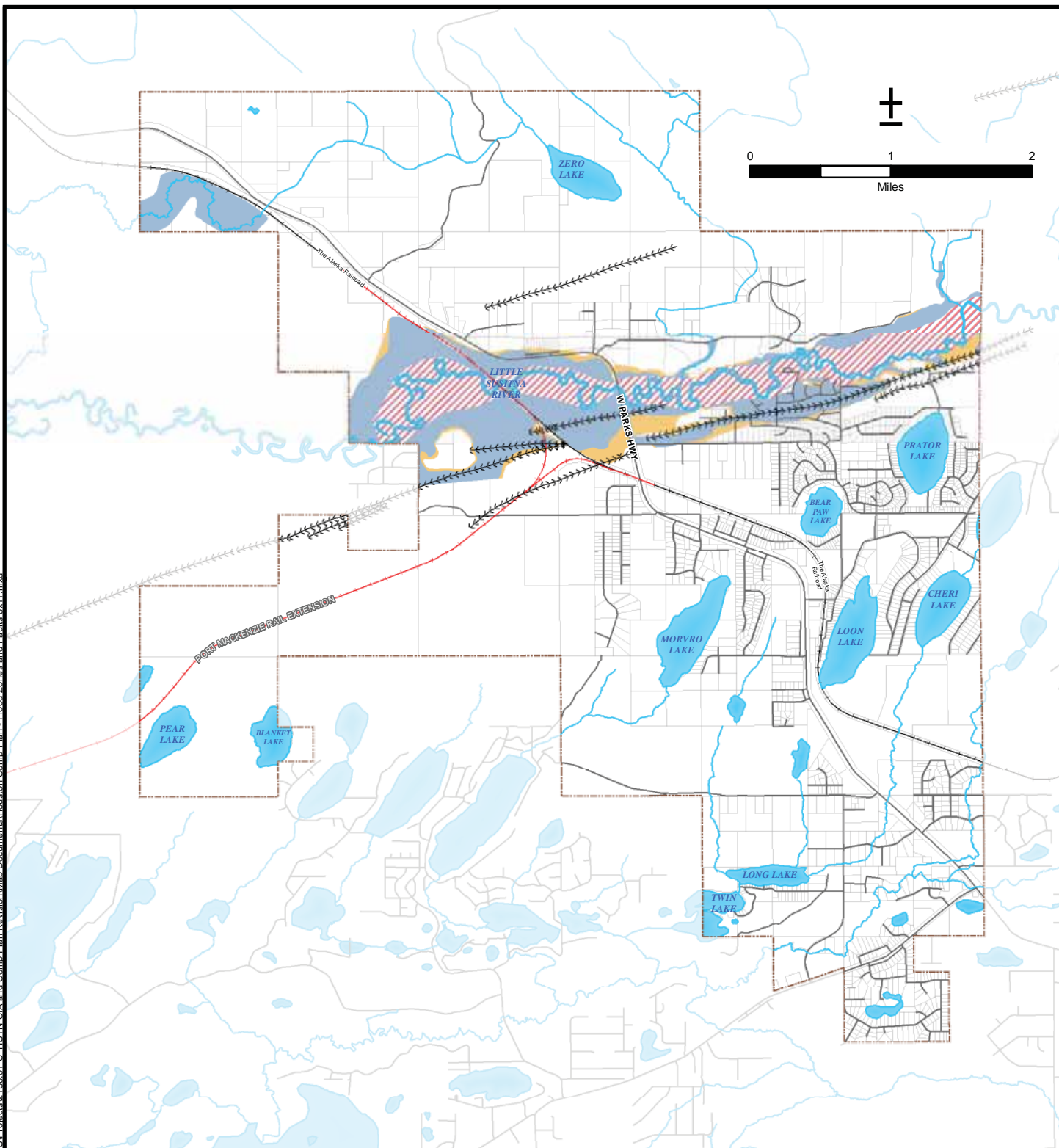
A number of riverine, lacustrine, and palustrine wetlands are present within Houston. Most wetlands are riparian buffers along the Little Susitna River, Coho Creek, and surrounding ponds. Several other wetlands are present in low lying areas between Zero Lake and the Little Susitna River.

## FLOODPLAINS

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

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) completed a Flood Insurance Study and remapped the Special Flood Hazard Areas for the Mat-Su Borough. The Borough adopted the new floodplain mapped in 2011 which shows the floodplain surrounding the Little Susitna River; see Figure 2 Flood Zones. A floodplain development permit from the Borough is required prior to building or development within a federally designated flood hazard area.





### LEGEND

#### Flood Hazard Areas

-  Floodway
-  1% Annual Chance of Flooding
-  0.2% Annual Chance of Flood hazard
-  Area of Minimal or Undetermined Flood Hazard
-  Castle Mountain Fault (Susitna Section)

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COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT  
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COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION

FLOOD ZONES AND FAULTS MAP

JUNE 2016

FIGURE 2

## LAND USE

Approximately 16,210 acres of land are within the City of Houston. The City has eleven distinct zoning districts that implement the policies of the Comprehensive Plan. The zoning districts are a part of Houston's Municipal Land Use Regulations. The table below summarizes the current zoning district area by type. See Figure 3 Existing Zoning.

Of the approximately 16,210 acres within the City of Houston, almost 80% or 12,961 acres of that total land is undeveloped. Approximately 15% of the total land in Houston is currently being used for residential purposes. The following table summarizes the area of existing land uses by type and Figure 4 Existing Land Use shows currently land use in Houston.

There are approximately 7,570 acres of land zoned for residential uses within the City of Houston. Currently, 15% of that zoned land is being used for residential purposes. The following table summarizes the vacant residentially zoned land by residential zoning district.

The few existing commercial land uses are mostly concentrated to the city's southern border where the Parks Highway and Big Lake Road intersect, which is congruent with existing zoning. Commercial development in this location reflects the greater area trend of development along the Parks Highway and the expansion north from Anchorage and Wasilla, which is anticipated to continue.

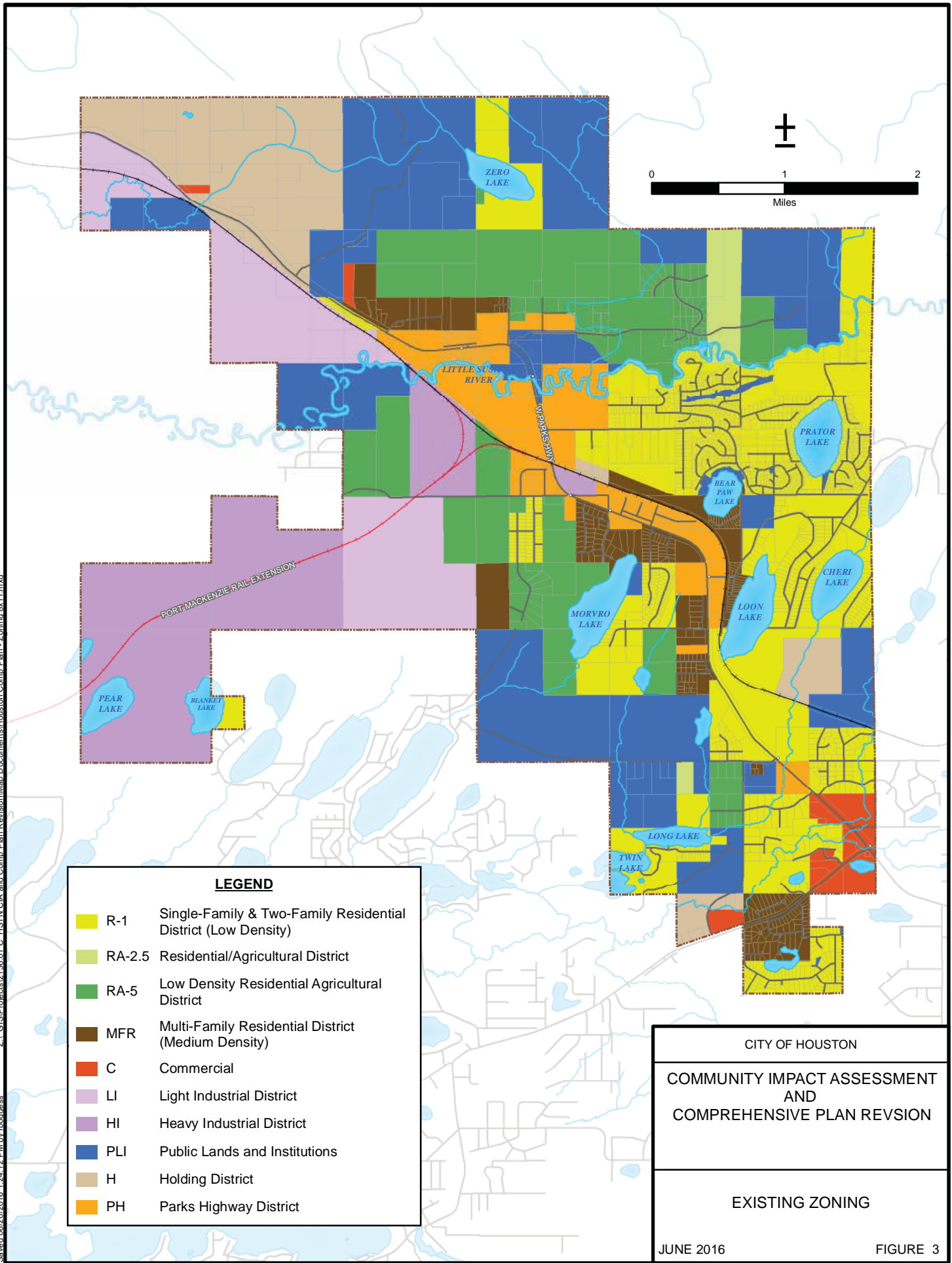
The Alaska Railroad extension from Port MacKenzie to the mainline through Houston has increased the amount of land used for transportation purposes and provides an opportunity for more transportation support uses to emerge in the future. This would be a new trend in Houston's land use which remains dominantly residential.

Zoning District	Approx. Area (acres)	Percent of Total Land
PLI – Public Lands and Institutions	3450	21.28%
R-1 - Single-family and Two-family Residential	3940	24.30%
MFR – Multifamily Residential	960	5.92%
RA 2.5 – Residential / Agriculture	190	1.17%
RA 5 – Low-Density Residential Agriculture	2480	15.30%
NC – Neighborhood Commercial District	0	0%
C – Commercial District	210	1.30%
LI – Light Industrial	1290	7.96%
HI – Heavy Industrial	1460	9.01%
H – Holding District	1270	7.83%
PH – Parks Highway District	960	5.92%

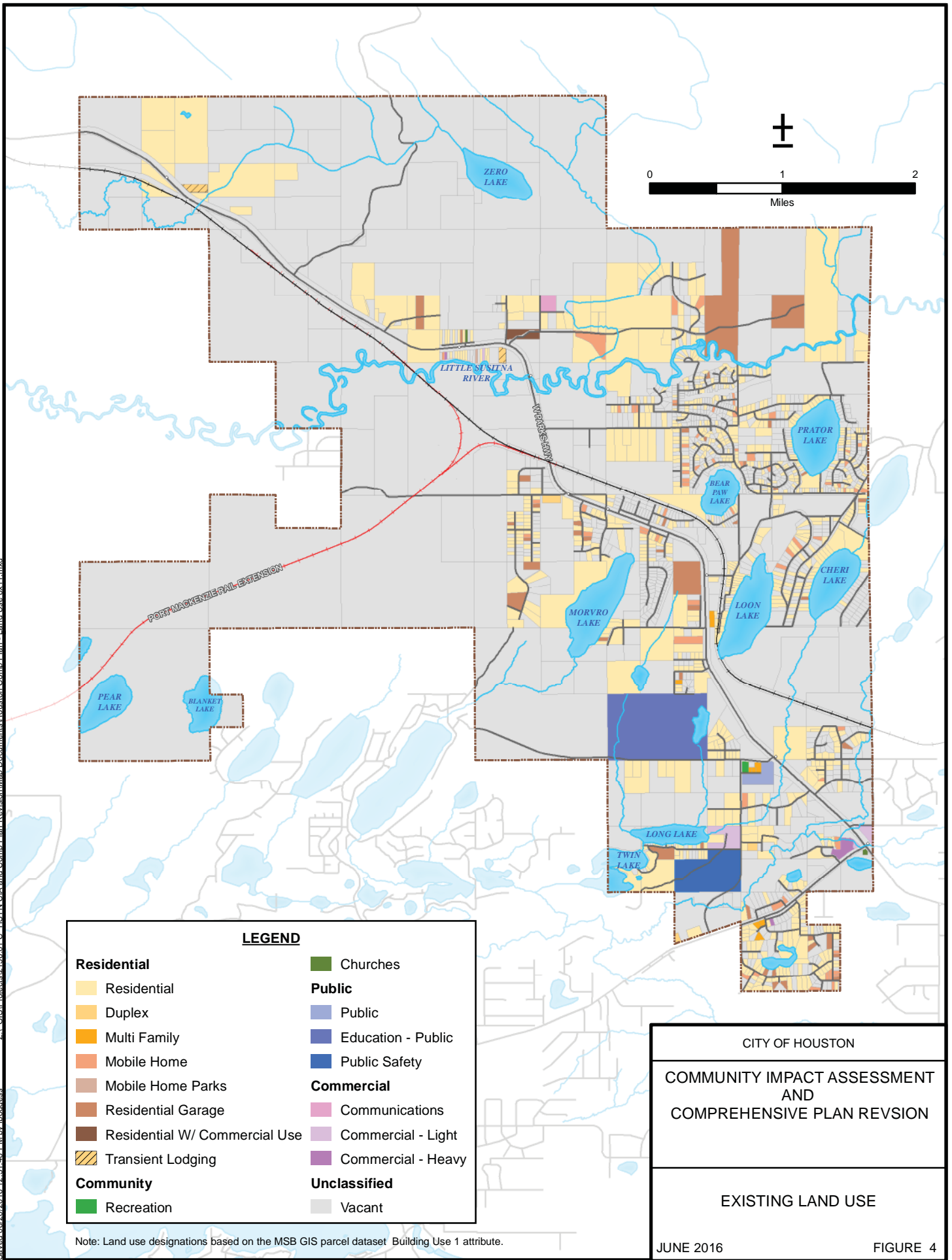
Source: City of Houston Zoning Map, November 2015

Zoning	Vacant (Acres)	Land Use	Area (acres)	% Of Total
R-1	2582	Churches	2	0.01%
RA-2.5	55	Commercial – Heavy	12	0.07%
RA-5	1690	Commercial – Light	32	0.20%
MFR	416	Communications	10	0.06%
Total	4327	Duplex – Two-Family	11	0.07%
Source: City of Houston Zoning Map, November 2015		Education – Public	241	1.49%
		Mobile Home	97	0.60%
		Mobile Home Parks	1	0.01%
		Multi Family	12	0.07%
		Public Use	18	0.11%
		Public Safety	93	0.57%
		Recreation	3	0.02%
		Residential	2435	15.02%
		Residential Garage	261	1.61%
		Residential W/ Commercial Use	10	0.06%
		Transient Lodging	11	0.07%
		Vacant	12961	79.96%
		Total	16,210	100%

Source: City of Houston Land Use Map, per Mat-Su Borough Assessment Office





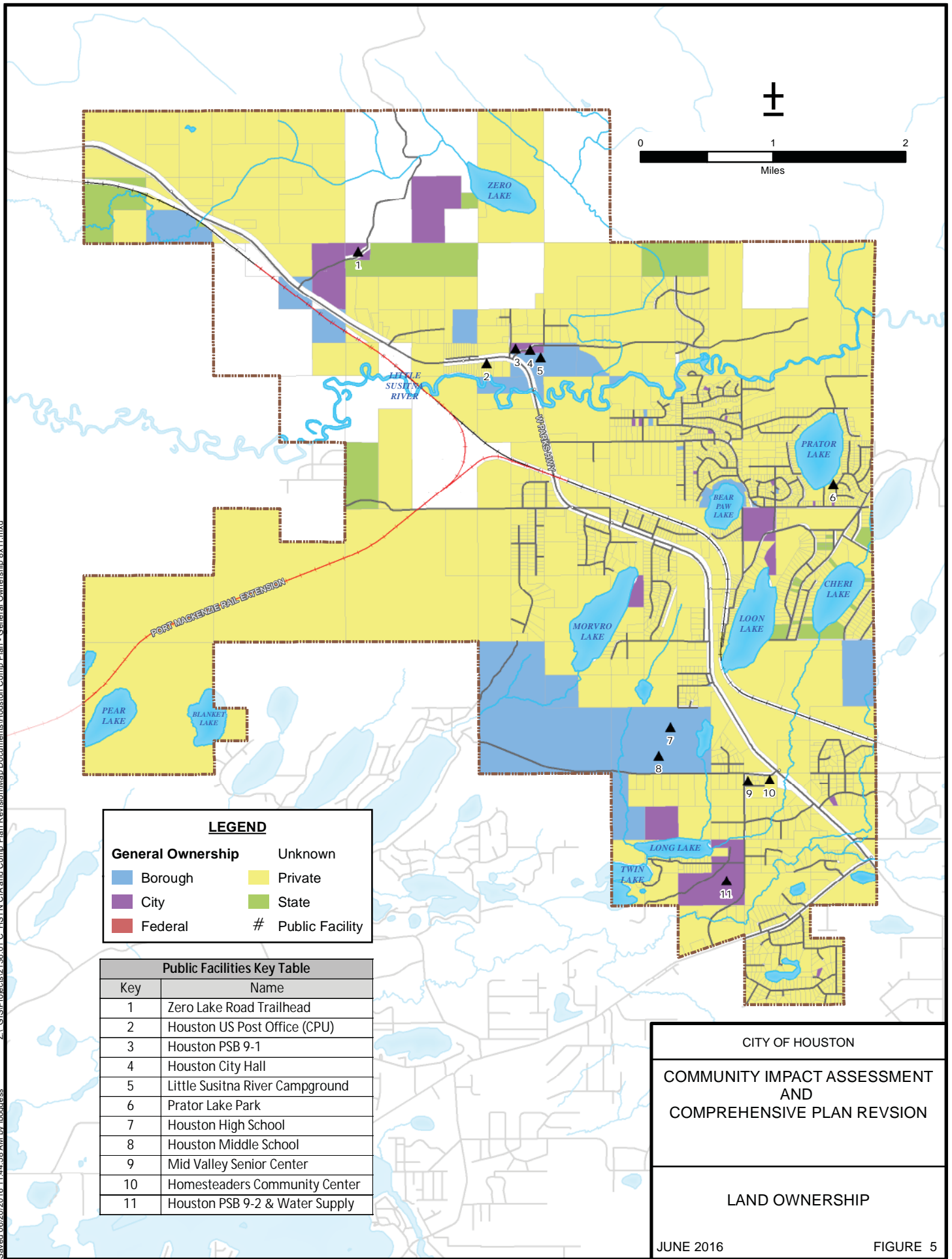




## LAND OWNERSHIP

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The Existing Land Ownership map depicts the landownership status for all parcels within the City of Houston's limits. The majority of land is privately owned, about 14,000 acres of the total 16,210 acres. Other large tract land owners include the City of Houston, 420 acres, and the Mat-Su Borough's 1,200 acres. The State of Alaska also owns about 470 acres of land in the city. See Figure 5 Existing Land Ownership.





# PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

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## PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES

Like most of Alaska, access to parks and outdoor recreational facilities is essential to the quality of community life for Houston residents and visitors. The Little Susitna River provides outdoor recreation in the form of camping, boating, and fishing. Many of the lakes in Houston are stocked with various fish species by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game for recreational purposes. The Little Susitna Campground is located on the east side of the Parks Highway at Mile 57.3. The Campground is open 24 hours from Memorial Day to Labor Day weekends. The facility includes a day use area, pavilion, play grounds, camp sites equipped with fire pits and trash cans, rest rooms, two public water wells, and RV facilities. The City of Houston maintains a Public Use Facility opposite this campground, which provides additional access to the Little Susitna River.

The Riverside Camper Park is located in the core of Houston along the Parks Highway and adjacent to the Little Susitna River. This park provides shower and laundry facilities, electricity, and a grocery store.

The Houston/Willow Creek Sled Trailhead recreation area is located at mile 59 of the Parks Highway off Zero Lake Road. This recreation area provides parking for approximately 60 vehicles with trailers and provides rest room facilities and trailhead access to the

Hatcher Pass recreation area. Most trails within the community are informal and do not have clearly dedicated public access. These trails are utilized as transportation corridors for snow machines, ATVs, dog sleds, bikers, horses, pedestrians, and skiers. The Haessler-Norris Trail System consists of 20 trails of various distances shown on a map published in April 2011 and created for the Willow Dog Mushers Association in April 2011.

The Hatcher Pass/Independence Mine, Big Lake, the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge, the Mat-Su Visitor's Center, and Nancy Lake Recreation Areas are all located near the community of Houston. They offer various recreational opportunities to local residents as well as regional, out of state, and international tourists. See Figure 6 for existing Parks and Recreation Facilities.

## COMMUNITY CENTERS, SERVICES AND LIBRARIES

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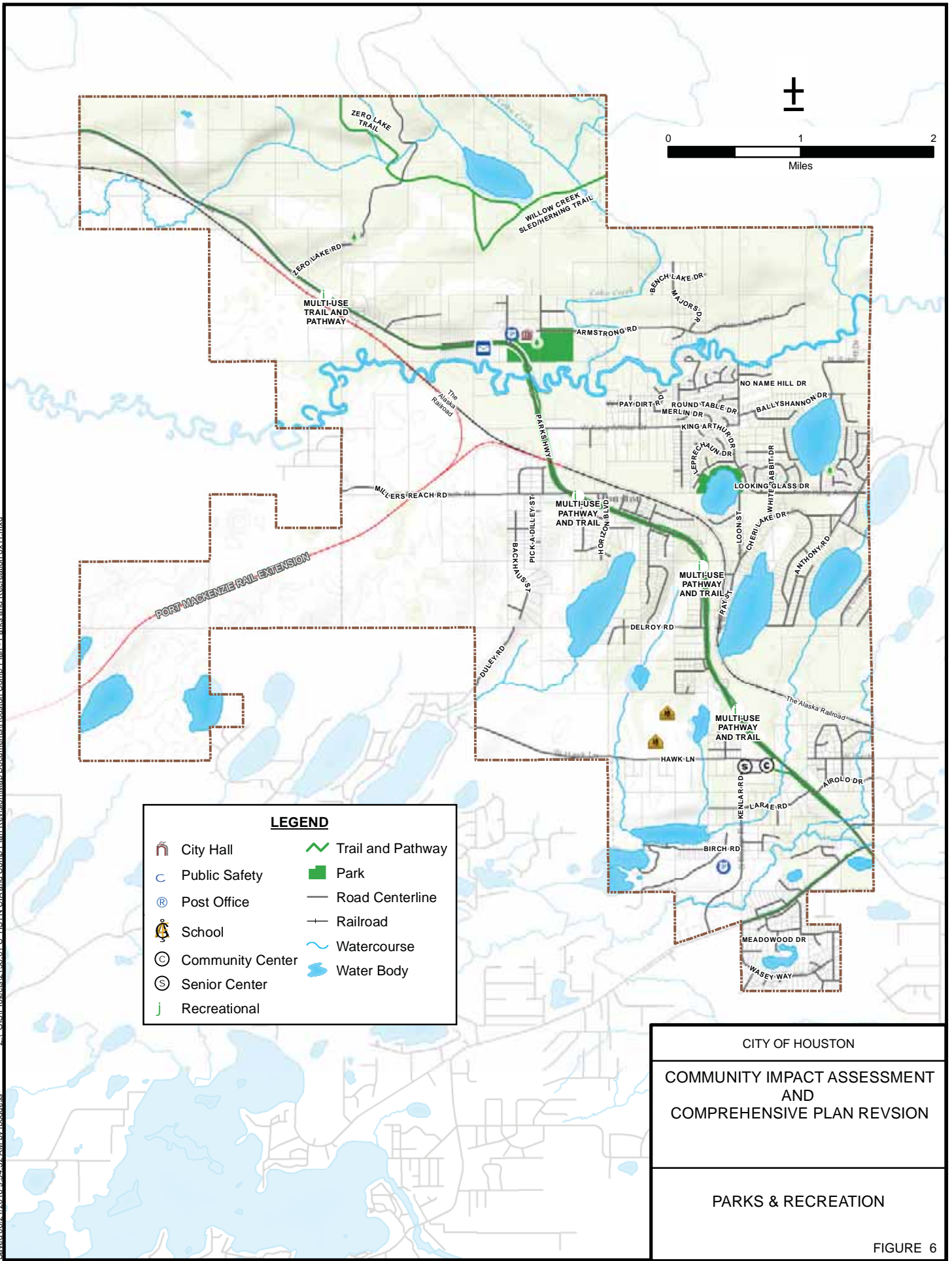
The Homesteaders Community Center, located just west of Mile 53.5 of the Parks Highway on Community Drive, has been providing a meeting place and fellowship for area residents since its inception in 1957. The nonprofit organization's members, who are local area residents, host social gatherings, holiday parties, and bingo. The building is rented for functions and on-site amenities include ball fields, a mail hall, kitchen facilities, restrooms, and a storage area.

Mid-Valley Seniors, Inc. is a nonprofit organization founded in 1983. The association provides

fellowship and nutritional programs to member seniors in Big Lake, Houston, Meadow Lakes, and Willow areas. In 1987 the Mid-Valley Senior Center opened in Houston which includes a cafeteria, recreation room, and an office.

There are no public libraries in Houston, although the Mat-Su Borough does have libraries in neighboring communities. There are libraries available to students at the Houston High School and Middle School. Public libraries are located in Big Lake, Sutton, Talkeetna, Trapper Creek and Willow.

The Big Lake Country Club, founded in 2000, is a 24-hour services provider for developmentally delayed and emotionally challenged adults. The main campus is located in Houston and provides daily support, monitoring and supervision for adults in need. Amenities include a fenced and secure facility, group home and cabins, a game room, kitchen and meals, and a horse facility for therapeutic horseback riding.





## PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Houston is located within the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District which consists of 45 schools. There are no elementary schools within the municipal boundaries of Houston; Big Lake, Willow, and Meadow Lakes elementary schools serve the city's elementary school age children. Houston Middle/High School Complex located on Hawk Lane has students from grades six through twelve. Bus service is provided for all public schools in the Houston area.



## PUBLIC SAFETY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

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The City of Houston Emergency Services building is located at Mile 57.3 of the Parks Highway. The building houses the Houston Fire Department and unstaffed Police Department facilities. The Emergency Services building serves as Houston Fire Station 9-1 and a Fire Station 9-2 is located on Birch Road, north of Big Lake Road. Local law enforcement is being handled by the Alaska State Troopers. The fire department is supported by active volunteers who also provide emergency medical services. A new fire station 9-2 was recently constructed at a site near Birch Road and is in full operation as of June, 2016.



## UTILITIES

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Most Houston residents have on-site well and septic systems for wastewater disposal. The majority of commercial properties have access to natural gas but many residential homes rely on heating oil, wood, and electricity for their primary space heating source instead of natural gas. Currently gas lines extend down Hawk Lane to Houston High School and Middle School and from the west along King Arthur Drive.



# TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

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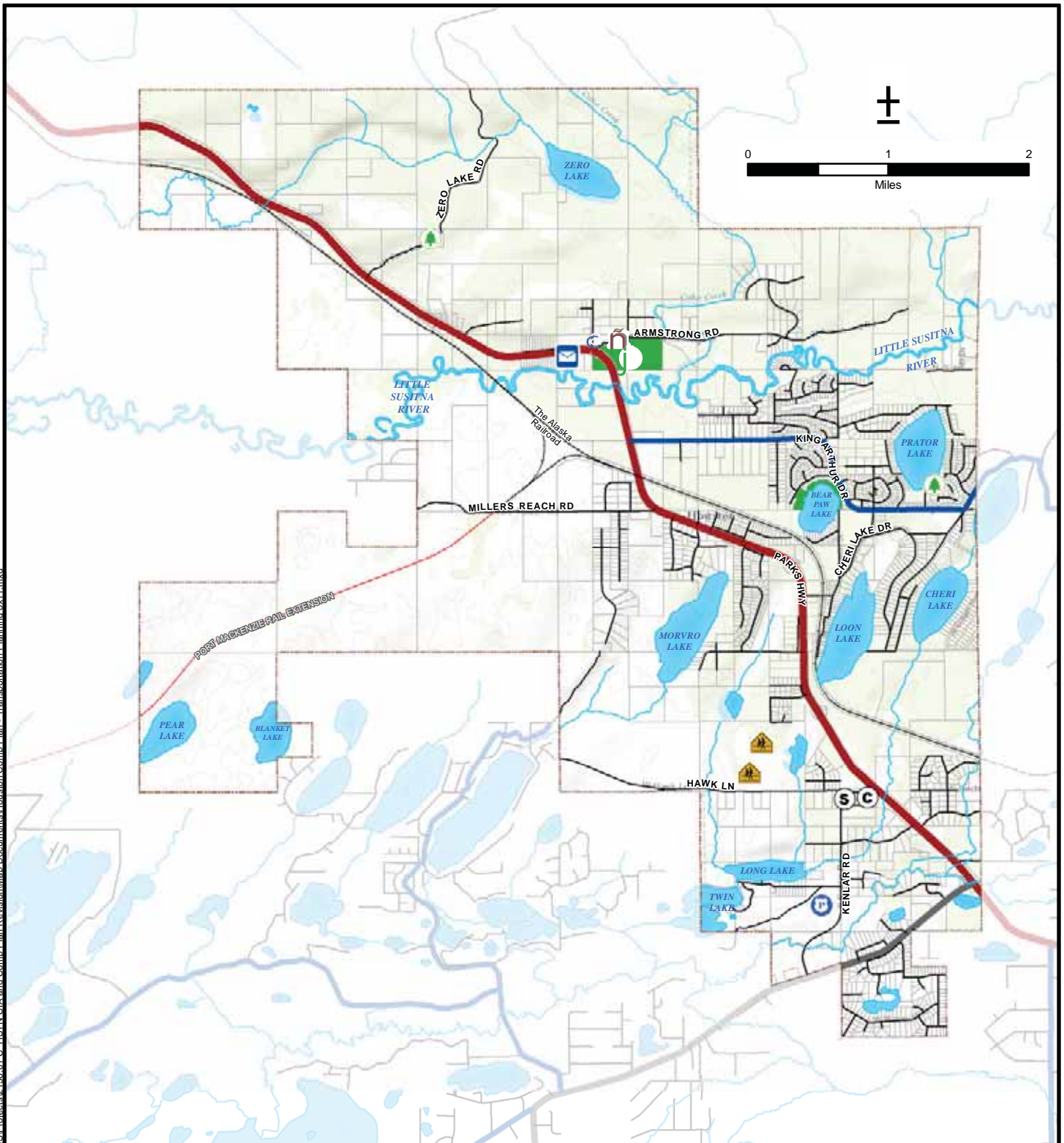
The City of Houston's transportation system is primarily a network of local roads branching east and west from the Parks Highway, which operates as a backbone for the regional transportation network (see Figure 7). The Parks Highway connects Anchorage to interior Alaska, making it the main shipping route for freight as well as recreational tourism, and carries that traffic through the City of Houston.

Freight is also transported along the Alaska Railroad, which generally parallels the Parks Highway corridor through the City of Houston's boundaries. A rail extension from the mainline in Houston to the Port at Point MacKenzie is currently under construction, and will potentially increasing the amount of freight traffic traveling through Houston in the future.

Most of Houston's existing local roads are unpaved with a gravel surface. Non-motorized transportation facilities in Houston include separated multi-use pathways along the Parks Highway, a multi-use pathway on the north side of Big Lake Road, and a designated Houston/Willow Creek Sled Trailhead recreation area located off Zero Lake Road which provides access to Hatcher Pass. Unofficial ATV and snow machine pathways exist throughout the City.

Detailed information on the City of Houston's existing transportation system can be found in Chapter 7. Transportation Plan (page 61) of this Comprehensive Plan.





# **LEGEND**

City Boundary	<b>Roads</b>	City Hall	Community Center
Parcels	Interstate	Public Safety	Senior Center
Park	Minor Arterial	Post Office	Recreational
Railroad	Minor Collector	School	
Port MacKenzie Rail Extension (Partially Complete)	Local road		

CITY OF HOUSTON

COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT  
AND  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVSION

TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

JUNE 2016

FIGURE 7









## CHAPTER 3: DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

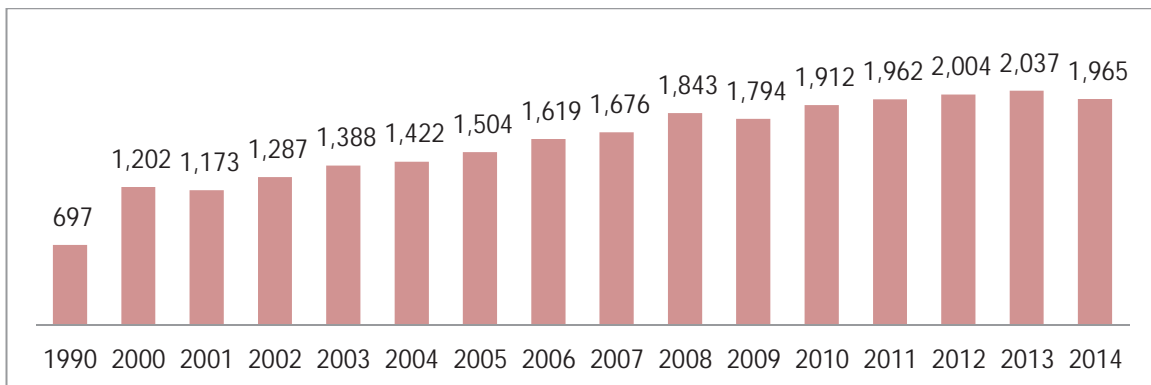
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# POPULATION

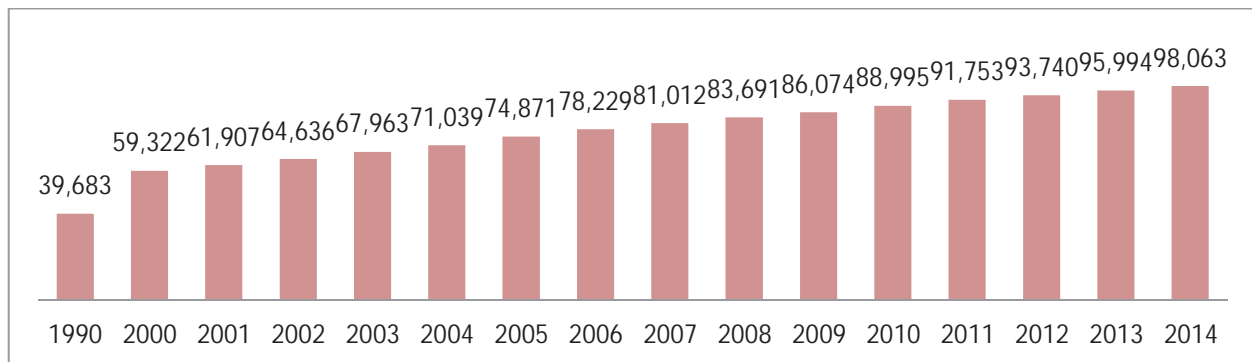
The City of Houston experienced steady population growth over the past two decades. In 2014, Houston's population was estimated at 1,965 residents; nearly triple its 697 residents in 1990 (182 percent growth, see Figure 8). This rate of growth is higher than that of the entire Mat-Su Borough, which grew from 39,683 to 98,063 residents over the same time period (147 percent growth, see Figure 9). Part of this higher growth rate can be attributed to lower land costs, highway improvements that make commuting faster and safer, and the unique rural lifestyle Houston offers.

Figure 8 Houston Populations. 1990 and 2000-2014



Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development (ADOLWD)

Figure 9 Mat-Su Borough Population, 1990 and 2000-2014

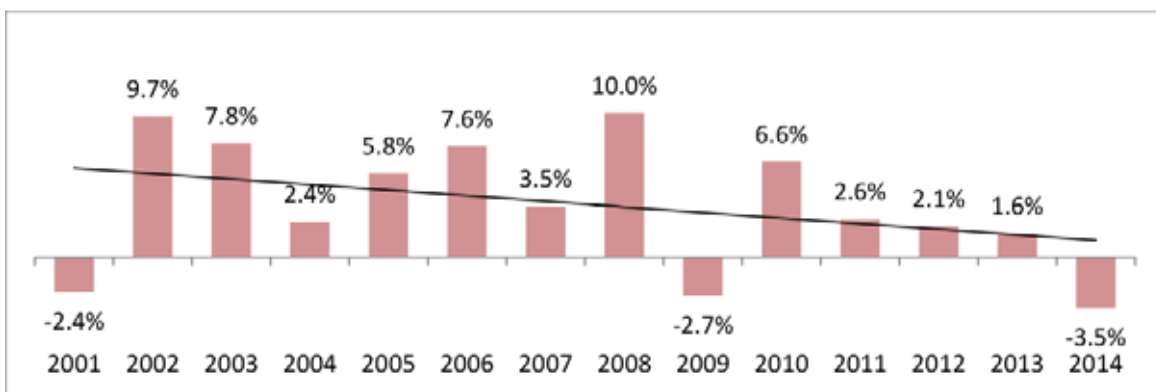


Source: ADOLWD



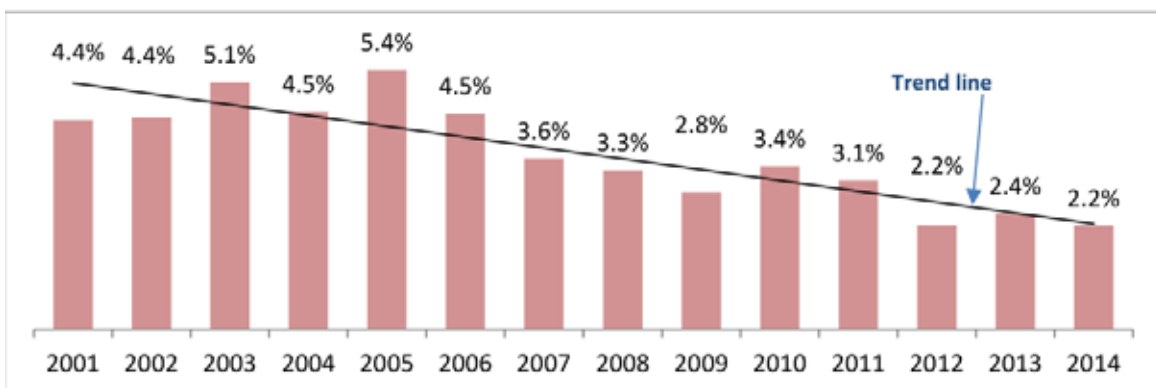
In recent years, population growth rates have slowed in both Houston and the Mat-Su Borough. As shown in Figure 10, Houston grew by 2.6% from 2010 to 2011, but experienced negative growth from 2013 and 2014. On average, Houston grew 0.7% annually since 2011. In comparison, the Borough's population grew 2.5% per year, on average, since 2011 (see Figure 11).

**Figure 10 Houston Annual Population Growth Rate, 2001-2014**



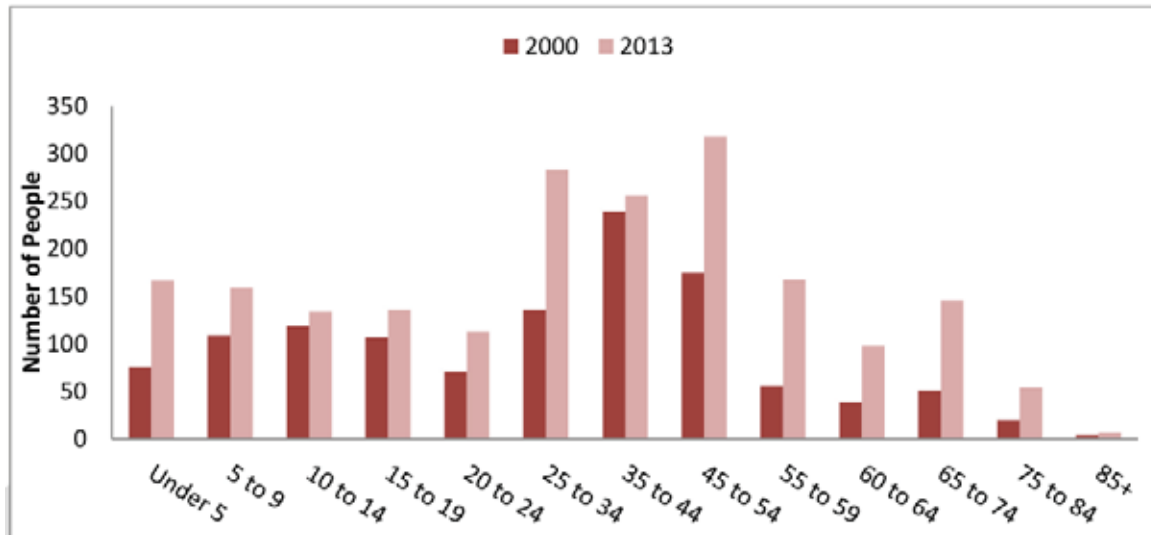
Source: ADOLWD

**Figure 11 Mat-Su Borough Annual Population Growth Rate, 2001-2014**



Source: ADOLWD

**Figure 12 Houston Population by Age Category and Median Age, 2000 and 2013**



## MEDIAN AGE

The median age of Houston residents in 2013 was just over 36 years of age, which is slightly higher than the average of the Mat-Su Borough and the state of Alaska, which have median ages of 35 and 34 years respectively. The largest growth in population from 2000 to 2013 occurred in the age categories ranging from 25 to 34 and 45 to 54 (see Figure 12). This trend might be attributed to Houston's affordable land and housing, attracting younger families into the area.

## ETHNICITY AND COMMUNITY MAKE UP

The majority of Houston's residents, 87%, self-identify as White. About 4% of Houston residents identify themselves as American Indian and Alaska Native and the remaining 9% of Houston residents identify as multi-racial. These categories reflect the five year average distribution from 2009-2012, according to the US Census and American Community Survey.

## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

According to the US Census and American Community Survey (ACS), approximately 90% of Houston's population had a high school degree or higher with 17% holding a bachelor's degree or higher. Educational attainment has increased since the 1990s. This change might have to do with improvements in the availability of educational facilities. Houston Middle School and Houston High School are located in separate buildings within Houston. Most elementary school age students currently bus to the nearby elementary schools, namely Big Lake Elementary and Willow Elementary School.

City of Houston	2000	2008-2012	2008-2012 Margin of Error
Median Household Income	\$39,615	\$59,583	+/- \$11,475
Households with Public Assistance	58	101	+/- 39
Households in SNAP	-	118	+/- 38
Per Capita Income	\$17,213	\$25,876	+/- \$3,318
Families Below Poverty Line	13.1%	11.6%	+/- 5.9%
Individuals Below Poverty Line	17.1%	15.8%	+/- 5.4%

Source: U.S. Census and American Community Survey

## ECONOMY

### HOUSEHOLD INCOME

The median household income in Houston is almost \$60,000, less than the roughly \$70,000 median in the Mat-Su Borough and Alaska. Per capita income averaged slightly more than \$25,000, less than the \$30,000 found in the Mat-Su Borough and \$32,000 for Alaska.

Approximately 12 percent of families and 16 percent of individuals in Houston live below the federal poverty line. According to 2014 Federal guidelines for Alaska, a household of four making less than \$29,440 or an individual with an income of less than \$14,350 is considered living in poverty. There are approximately 101 households that receive public assistance and 118 households utilize the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

### EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

In 2012, the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development estimated there were 768 employed residents (over age 16) in Houston, with total annual wages of \$26.5 million. Most workers were employed in the private sector (85 percent), followed by local government (11 percent), and state government (4 percent). The top industries in terms of employment included Trade (retail and wholesale), Transportation and Utilities (22 percent), Education and Health Services (16 percent), and Construction (13 percent).

In addition to data compiled by the State of Alaska, the American Community Survey (ACS) offers insight into employment in Houston. According to these data, there were 782 residents over

the age of 16 employed, and 166 unemployed. The unemployment rate is estimated to be 18 percent. Private wage and salary workers made up 80 percent of employed, followed by government workers (19 percent) and self-employed workers (7 percent).

Employment within the City of Houston is currently limited, with most opportunities in retail. The majority of employed residents travel outside the city limits to reach their workplace.



## HOUSTON BUSINESSES

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An estimated 19,000 vehicles per day travel on the Parks Highway through the City of Houston. This number tends to be higher in the summer and on the weekends. A number of businesses are sustained by this traffic as a percentage of these travelers stop for a meal, to rent a room, or purchase fireworks. The largest concentration of businesses selling fireworks in Alaska is located in Houston.

At this time, no large grocery store is located in Houston. Residents typically will go to Wasilla or Big Lake for their shopping needs. Medical services are limited in Houston with a few small clinics offering primary care services. The closest hospital is Mat-Su Regional Medical Center located in Wasilla, where there are also a full suite of dental, chiropractic, and other health services.

The summer brings an influx of anglers fishing the nearby Little Susitna River. Alaska Fish and Game estimated 4,538 anglers fished a total of 10,115 days in 2012 in the Little Susitna River. At least one guiding service is located in Houston and a range of other local businesses rely on these anglers who purchase ice, meals, and refreshments. Float trips on the Little Susitna River frequently start at the Parks Highway Bridge.

During the winter, proximity to Hatcher Pass and Nancy Lake Recreation Area attracts enthusiasts wanting to snowmachine, ski, ice fish, dog-mush, or enjoy other winter activities. Compared to the summer, traffic through the community is much less in the winter but local businesses are able to attract some customers.



# HOUSTON EMPLOYMENT INDICATORS, 2000 AND 2008-2012 FIVE YEAR AVERAGE

	2000 (Number Employed)	2008-2012 (Number Employed)	2008-2012 Margin of Error
Population 16 years and older	881	1,487	+/-145
In labor force	549	948	+/-129
Employed	452	782	+/-114
Unemployed	97	166	+/-62
Unemployment – civilian labor force (%)	17.7	17.5	+/-5.8%
Not in labor force	332	539	+/-91
<b>Class of worker</b>			
Private wage and salary	325	579	+/-103
Government	70	152	+/-54
Self-employed	57	51	+/-23
Unpaid family worker	-	0	+/-10
<b>Industry</b>			
Retail trade	78	92	+/-32
Educational, health and social services	60	169	+/-51
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	52	96	+/-44
Construction	50	87	+/-34
Agriculture, forestry, hunting and fishing, mining	49	70	+/-40
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	34	87	+/-44
Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services	25	57	+/-32
Public administration	22	66	+/-38
Wholesale trade	19	10	+/-11
Manufacturing	15	21	+/-22
Information	13	7	+/-9
Finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing	8	0	+/-10
Other services	27	20	+/-16

Source: ADOWL and U.S. Census American Community Survey

## HOUSING IN HOUSTON

According to Mat-Su Borough and City of Houston data, there are 999 housing units in Houston. Single-family detached units make up 85 percent (846 units) of all housing units, with the remaining composed of 62 multi-family dwellings, 8 duplexes, and 85 mobile homes (see table to right).

This estimate is corroborated by the American Community Survey's 2009-2013 5-year estimate of 991 housing units in Houston. Of these units 72 percent (or 716 units) are considered occupied; and, of these units, 78 percent (561 units or 56 percent of all housing units) are owner-occupied.

According to the City of Houston Comprehensive Plan and Community Impact Assessment Household Survey conducted in November 2014, approximately 35 percent of local property owners do not reside in Houston. Presuming these nonresidents have a dwelling on their property, this would suggest approximately 350 homes in Houston are used as vacation/recreation properties (or otherwise used only occasionally).

Housing data for Houston from the American Community Survey (2009-2013 5-year estimates) are provided in the table to the right. The data suggests approximately 28 percent of housing units are unoccupied.

The majority of housing units (55 percent) were built since 1990, with construction peaking between 2000 and 2009 (32.3 percent of the housing units).

The median value of an owner-occupied unit in Houston is estimated at \$177,300 (+/- \$20,161 margin of error, see Table 8). Almost a third (30 percent) of these units are estimated to be valued at less than \$100,000.

	Unit Count	Percent Units of Total
Total Housing Units	991	100%
Single-family Detached	846	85%
Mobile Home	85	9%
Multi-Family	62	6%
Duplex	8	1%

Source: City of Houston, MSB. Columns may not sum to 100% due to rounding

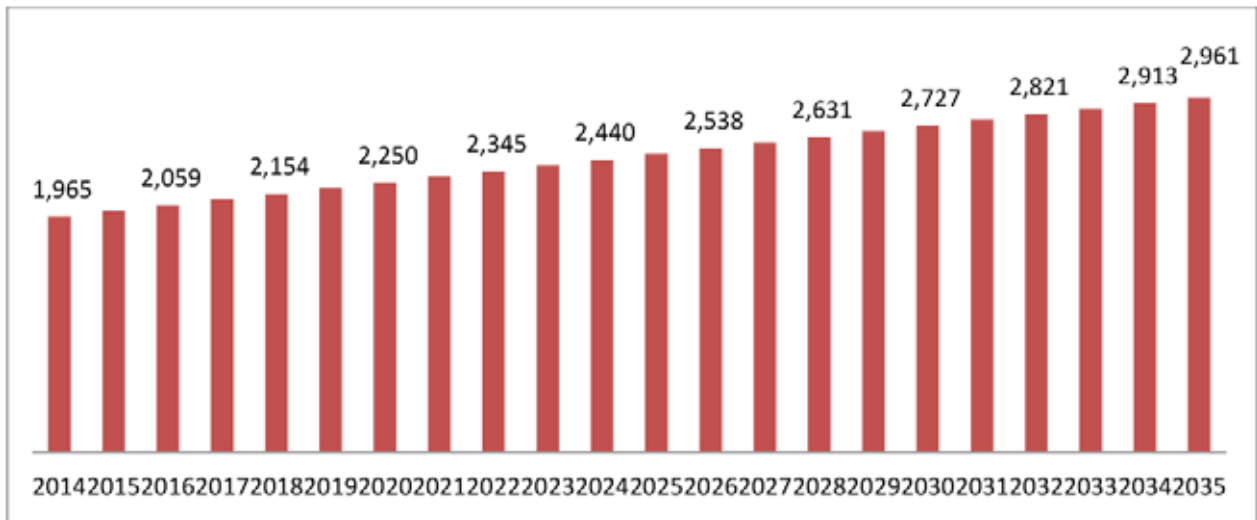
	Unit Count	Margin of Error	Percent Units of Total
Total Housing Units	991	+/- 36	100%
Occupied Housing Units	716	+/- 50	72.3%
Vacant Housing Units	275	+/- 51	27.7%
Homeowner vacancy rate	5.7%	+/- 2.9%	-
Rental Vacancy rate	9.9%	+/- 6.9%	-

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009-2013 Five-Year Estimate

	Housing Unit Count	Margin of Error	Percent of Total
Owner-Occupied Units	561	+/- 47	100%
Less than \$50,000	92	+/-33	16.4%
\$50,000 to \$99,999	77	+/-28	13.7%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	47	+/-22	8.4%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	120	+/-40	21.4%
\$200,000 to \$299,999	143	+/-41	25.5%
\$300,000 to \$499,999	70	+/-28	12.5%
\$500,000 to \$999,999	12	+/-15	2.1%
\$1,000,000 or more	0	+/-9	0.0%
Median (dollars)	\$177,300	+/- \$20,161	-

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009-2013 Five-Year Estimate



**Figure 13 Projected Annual Average Growth Rates, Houston, 2014-2035, High Growth Scenario**

## FUTURE CONDITIONS AND LAND USE NEEDS

### POPULATION GROWTH AND PROJECTIONS

Population growth in the Mat-Su is projected to slow from the current annual growth rate of slightly more than 3.6% to less than 2% by 2035. Since Houston is tied to the Mat-Su economy and has comparable demographics, it is projected that Houston's population growth will reflect that of the larger Mat-Su, growing approximately 2% over the current period to 2035. In determining this growth rate, three different growth scenarios were considered: low, medium, and high growth rate projections. The City of Houston has chosen to write this Comprehensive Plan Revision and Land Use Plan using the population projections of the high growth rate scenario. Planning for a high growth rate allows goals, objectives, policies and strategies to be set in place prior to an unexpected growth occurrence.

The High growth scenario assumes Houston matches the broader Mat-Su estimates for population growth as project by ADOLWD. Under this scenario, it is estimated that Houston's population will grow by 996 persons between 2014 and 2035. With this growth rate, Houston is projected to grow to about 3,000 residents in 2035, which is an increase of around 50% from current population levels (see Figure 13 and adjacent table).

Population projections for Houston are based on extending past trends into the future. This methodology differs from a forecast, which would account for economic and other factors with the potential to affect population change. Forces that may affect population growth in Houston over the next 20 years include the following:

- Economic conditions in Alaska, including factors such as oil prices, gas line development, and other events in the oil and gas industry (responsible for about a third of Alaska's economy). In general, increases in economic activity are accompanied by increases in population. Conversely, if economic activity contracts, population growth tends to slow or decline.
- Economic conditions in Anchorage might affect Mat-Su's role as a "bedroom" community (a third of the Mat-Su Borough's labor force is employed in Anchorage). Job growth in Anchorage can have population effects in the Mat-Su Borough.

- Local (Mat-Su) economic conditions – To the extent the local economy grows (or declines) in response to local events, related or unrelated to statewide or national economic trends, Houston's population could be affected.
- The Condition of the U.S. economy – Aweakening U.S. (Lower 48) economy can cause in-migration to Alaska, as the unemployed come to Alaska seeking work. Conversely, strong growth in the U.S. economy can lead to out-migration from Alaska.
- Housing costs – As long as housing prices are lower in the Mat-Su Borough compared to Anchorage and commuting costs remain stable, the Mat-Su Borough population will continue to have a large component of Anchorage workers and their households. A similar scenario has developed between Houston and Wasilla; with lower housing costs, some opt to live in Houston and commute to Wasilla (or Anchorage) for employment.

- Natural growth and other demographic trends – Birth and death rates, aging of the population, and other demographic forces may also affect local population trends.

It is beyond the scope of this Comprehensive Plan to consider all of these factors. However, statewide and local population projections, prepared by the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development (ADOLWD) can be used as the basis for Houston-specific projections.

ADOLWD periodically prepares long-term population forecasts for Alaska overall and for local areas. The most recent projections, published in April 2014, indicate slow growth (0.8 percent annually) over the next 25 years for the state overall. The Mat-Su Borough is expected to continue experiencing the fastest rates of growth, at 1.9 percent annually (see Table below).

Years	Births	Deaths	Net Migration	Population Change	Annual Growth Rate
2014-2017	1,400	506	1,469	2,363	2.37%
2017-2022	1,591	621	1,476	2,446	2.19%
2022-2027	1,782	755	1,455	2,482	2.00%
2027-2032	1,962	909	1,419	2,472	1.81%
2032-2035	2,128	1,072	1,359	2,415	1.62%

Note: Average annual numbers are rounded to whole numbers. Source: ADOLWD

Local Area	Percent Population Growth	Annual Growth Rate
Anchorage	35%	1.0%
Mat-Su Borough	77%	1.9%
Kenai Peninsula Borough	15%	0.5%
Fairbanks North Star Borough	32%	0.9%
City & Borough of Juneau	2%	0.1%
Statewide	26%	0.8%

Source: ADOLWD

## Houston Housing Demand Projections

Years	Low-Growth	Mid-Growth	High-Growth
2014	756	756	756
2017	772	791	811
2022	799	850	902
2027	828	909	994
2035	875	1,001	1,139
<b>Growth 2014-2035</b>	<b>+119</b>	<b>+246</b>	<b>+383</b>

Source: McDowell Group estimates

FUTURE HOUSING  
DEMAND PROJECTIONS

According to Mat-Su Borough and City of Houston data, there are 999 housing units in Houston. Single-family detached units make up 85 percent (846 units) of all housing units, with the remaining composed of 62 multi-family dwellings, 8 duplexes, and 85 mobile homes. The current amount of land zoned for residential development is considered for the total 'build out' capacity. Using minimum lot sizes stated in the City of Houston Municipal Code, Title 10 Land Use Regulations and the Housing Needs Analysis conducted by the McDowell Group, the amount of potential housing units and type of housing can be determined.

Housing demand will grow, or decline, with changes in population. However, demographic trends can also have specific impacts on housing demand.

## Demographic factors affecting future housing demand in Houston include:

- **Aging:** The aging of Houston's population will result in changes in household characteristics and housing preferences. For example, U.S. Census data for Anchorage suggests that householders younger than 34 years and older than 64 are more likely to live in rental or multifamily units, and householders between age 35 and 64 are more likely to live in owner-occupied single-family detached housing.
- **Household composition:** Houston may be impacted by similar state and national trends in decreasing household size over time due to aging of the householders and smaller families. For example, as householders age, fewer households include children under the age of 18.
- **Income Levels and Home Affordability:** Income levels also affect demand for different types of housing. For example, families with lower incomes may prefer higher density housing (such as duplex, two-family townhouse, and some types of multifamily housing) and are more likely to be renters. Data from the American Community Survey (2009-2013 5-year estimates) estimate that home prices in Houston are 22 percent lower than Wasilla (\$177,300 median value for owner-occupied homes in Houston compared to \$227,800 in Wasilla). Lower housing costs make Houston an attractive place to live, including commuters to Wasilla.



Another factor affecting housing in Houston is the potential for increased demand for vacation and recreational properties. While many factors can impact housing demand, shifts in population are the main driving force. Using low, mid, and high population growth scenarios, we can estimate the number of housing units needed in Houston to accommodate new demand.

Under a high growth scenario, 383 new occupied housing units will be required (see table to left). While some of this demand can be met by conversion of vacant housing units (currently estimated at 5.7%), new housing development will be needed.

According to the City of Houston and Mat-Su Borough GIS data, a total of 4,742 acres within Houston are vacant, buildable, and zoned for residential development. Based on population projections, this amount of vacant, residentially zoned land suggests an ample amount is available to address future housing demand and residential development for single-family and multi-family homes in Houston by 2035.







# CHAPTER 4: COMMUNITY VALUES AND GOALS

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## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

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Public involvement is essential to a successful planning process. The City of Houston Comprehensive Plan Revision placed significant emphasis on meaningful public engagement to ensure the Plan meets the needs and expectations of the community. The Plan was developed with guidance from the Steering Committee made up of City of Houston Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council members. The Steering Committee met monthly beginning in June 2014 to begin work on the plan. Members were responsible for ensuring balanced representation of the community at each stage of the planning process, provide perspective and insight on information gathered, to draft policies, and to serve as a sounding board for the citizens of Houston.

Multiple methods of public involvement were used during the plan development process including a mailed Household Opinion Survey, two public workshops, stakeholder interviews, a project website, and appearances at local community events. Valuable feedback was provided and received throughout the process (complete summaries can be found in APPENDIX B, Public Involvement Summary). Dominant themes emerged and have been used to update the goals in the following chapter. The feedback also helped create objectives, policies and strategies to achieve those goals for the Houston community. The public involvement process provided insight to what Houston residents see as assets in their community,

challenges and constraints within it, opportunities for the future, and the shared values of Houston residents.

## COMMUNITY ASSETS

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### RURAL LIFESTYLE

Houston's rural setting provides quick access to wilderness and allows for a tight-knit community. There is a lack of pollution and development along with ample privacy that attracted many of Houston residents to the area. A "homestead spirit" prevails in the area unique to Houston as it is able to maintain a rural lifestyle while being within reasonable driving distance to shopping, services, and healthcare in the Mat-Su Borough and Anchorage.

### LAND AVAILABILITY

There are significant amounts of developable land available in Houston which is considered relatively inexpensive, for both residential and commercial use, when compared to other places in the Mat-Su Borough or Anchorage. This may be an advantageous in attracting more business into Houston.

### PARKS HIGHWAY ACCESS

The Parks Highway bisecting the City of Houston can be a significant benefit to the community, even with noted growing congestion. The small number of businesses located along the highway benefit from the vehicles traveling the Parks daily and there is potential for greater economic opportunity emerging along the highway as well as from the Alaska Rail Road Corporation's extension from the mainline in Houston to Port MacKenzie.

### LAKES AND RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

Residents and visitors can engage in a variety of summer and winter activities on Houston's six larger lakes and the Little Susitna River, including fishing in the summer and winter, canoeing and rafting. Four lakes are stocked annually by Alaska Department of Fish and Game with salmon and trout. The Little Susitna River runs through Houston City limits and is perhaps the most significant tourism asset in the area. Salmon and trout fishing, rafting, camping, and wildlife viewing make the Little Su a destination. Winter multi-use trails in Houston are frequented by dog mushers, cross-country skiers, and snowmachiners.



Please indicate your level of agreement regarding the following statements about the community of Houston...

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Unsure/ Don't know
Houston is a good place for outdoor recreation.	30%	53%	6%	3%	9%
Houston is a good place to enjoy a rural lifestyle.	25	58	5	3	8
Houston could use more community planning.	33	35	10	6	16
Houston is a good place for people to live affordably.	13	57	14	7	10
Houston is family-friendly.	9	56	16	4	16
Houston is a safe place to live.	9	55	15	7	14
Houston could use more landscaping of public spaces.	23	26	22	12	16

Note: Due to rounding, results may not add to 100 percent.

## CONSTRAINTS AND CHALLENGES

### LOW POPULATION DENSITY

The low number of residents in the city may be a challenging factor when it comes to the addition of public facilities and services as well as attracting new businesses to take root in Houston. The predicted benefit or customer base may not support the costs it takes to start up or implement new commercial businesses or public services. The low population density and relatively large lot sizes are also a limitation to utility development, thereby making the rural setting of Houston a challenge.

### LACK OF LOCAL AMENITIES

The lack of amenities, such as a gas station, grocery store, medical clinic, and public transportation can be a challenge faced by residents of Houston. Currently, residents must travel to Willow, Talkeetna, Big Lake, Wasilla and Anchorage for such services and amenities. The few amenities correlates to a lack of local employment opportunities, which is a challenge for community growth and development. The lack of amenities were also some of the strongest needs stated by residents and may be a challenge or deterrent for new families and business to establish in Houston.

### LOCAL ROAD CONDITIONS

Many residents have identified a need to improve road conditions and maintenance and consider road standards an important city challenge needing to be addressed. A lack of access or well-maintained transportation systems may be a constraint for businesses looking to develop in the city as well as for residents who may struggle to safely get to and from their homes and around the community.

### UTILITY DEVELOPMENT

Utility service extension, especially natural gas, is a need identified by many residents. While the majority of commercial properties have access to natural gas; many residential homes rely on heating oil, wood, and electricity for their primary space heating source, which leads to higher heating costs. Costs for service extension to an individual property that is not currently serviced can be high. In addition the current energy costs may be a deterrent for new developments in Houston.

## OPPORTUNITIES

### TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Residents and stakeholders have identified the opportunity for Houston to become a destination for recreation and tourism based on its existing assets. Houston has a unique identity with the opportunity to better establish itself so that the community is recognized for more than its recreational trailheads. With access to the Little Susitna River and the Hatcher Pass area, an abundance of lakes, winter multi-use trails and its convenient location off the Parks Highway, there is potential for greater tourism development.

### TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS

If more local road improvements are made, such as increased road maintenance and paving, land without direct access to the Parks Highway may become more attractive for development. Better roadway conditions may also increase home values and allow for easier commutes. Multi-use pathways expansion, lighting improvements, and access to public transportation were also seen as beneficial improvements that would increase residents' quality of life.

A new road between Houston and Port MacKenzie is preferred by residents. If built, it would support freight transportation and to more efficiently connect Houston residents with a significant employer, the Port. A new connection could also support economic development within Houston.

### UTILITY EXPANSION

Improved access to natural gas could allow for more business and residential growth by reducing energy costs.

### TOWN CENTER DEVELOPMENT

Noting the proximity of the Little Susitna River, Houston could establish a destination point through the development of a town center where community services, commercial businesses, and other amenities could locate. This center would encourage community gathering and interaction, maintain Houston's character and family friendliness, and develop a center that may, as one stakeholder stated "make both sides of the river and railroad tracks feel like one community." Establishing a

town center also encourages the preservation of the rural-residential character in other areas of Houston.

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Large areas of vacant land provide opportunities for new development, including commercial and industrial developments. If consistent with community character, goals and objectives defined by the community, this type of development is encouraged and could provide great economic benefit and employment opportunities for Houston.

The Alaska Railroad's extension from the mainline in Houston to Port MacKenzie may provide opportunities for development in Houston, including an increase in the likelihood of manufacturing, mineral export, or transportation activity taking place in the city that could provide economic benefit and employment.







# COMMUNITY VALUES

The following community values have been developed from information gathered at the Future's Community Visioning Workshop, responses to the Household Opinion Survey, and from Steering Committee members. The value statements represent issues, concerns, aspirations, and opinions of the majority of community members as they relate to the City of Houston.



## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:

The community of Houston wants to develop as a destination for tourism and recreation; while maintaining a family friendly community that will encompass a future town center, designated trails and community facilities.

## HOUSING:

The availability of housing in Houston should be appealing for a wide range of incomes, while providing opportunities for satisfactory, safe living for all residents.



## TRANSPORTATION:

There is a need to increase safety, accessibility, and mobility through much of the City and improvements shall be beneficial to all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized users, while maintaining the community character.

## COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES:

The City of Houston recognizes the need to expand its facilities and services in order to provide safe and satisfactory living for its residents, while enhancing the city's autonomy, economy, and unique identity.



## PLANNING:

As voiced by its residents, effective, implementable planning is a recognized need for successful growth, development, and overall health of the community.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

While maintaining the current tax structure, the City of Houston aims to develop economically by capitalizing on its current amenities and natural resources; allowing commercial and industrial development as long as it aligns with the community character and will be to the benefit of city residents.

# 45

CITY OF  
HOUSTON  
Comprehensive Plan





# CHAPTER 5: THE PLAN, COMMUNITY GUIDELINES FOR GROWTH

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## VISION AND CHARGE

The community of Houston wants to develop as a destination for tourism and recreation, while maintaining a family friendly rural-residential community that will encompass a future town center, designated trails, and community facilities.

The Goals, Strategies and Policies of this chapter will help define the future growth and development of Houston for the 20 year life of this plan. They reflect the core values and future vision and aspirations of the community from the extensive community involvement effort during the plan development process.

**GOALS** describe in general terms a desired future condition that is consistent with community ideals and vision. Goals are typically timeless and have no specific date when they must be achieved.

**OBJECTIVES** are specific statements of particular ends as expressed in measurable terms that respond directly to Goals.

**POLICIES** are statements of principle or guidelines to direct actions in pursuit of Goals. **STRATEGIES** are specific means and actions of achieving and accomplishing each Objective.

**STRATEGIES** are specific means and actions of achieving and accomplishing each Objective.

## GROWTH AND ECONOMIC GOAL

The City of Houston aims to develop economically. That means to provide new opportunities for employment, community and commercial services and economic growth and allowing commercial and industrial development that is consistent with the community character and will be to the benefit of city residents.

## OBJECTIVES

- Encourage moderate economic growth which will provide a base in Houston adequate to foster employment opportunities with the City.
- Ensure that economic growth and development is consistent with the rural community character of Houston.
- Provide 10% increased local employment opportunities for residents by encouraging a balanced economic base.
- Encourage the development of local-serving and regional commercial enterprises to strengthen the community's economic base.

- Encourage continued growth of employment in the commercial core of Houston.
- Encourage the economically viable commercial tourism and recreation enterprises such as sports fisheries, campgrounds and year round recreational businesses.
- Encourage home-based businesses as forms of local economic development. They should be compatible with the surrounding neighborhood.

## POLICIES

- Encourage the development of recreational tourism in Houston.
- Encourage the development of industrial enterprises associated with the Alaska Railroad main line Port MacKenzie and the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension.

## STRATEGIES

- Develop a Business Plan for attracting anchor businesses to locate in Houston. Strategies could include financing and tax incentives.
- Work with State of Alaska and Travel Alaska Tourism Organization to develop a Marketing Plan for increasing recreational tourism in Houston.





# LAND USE GOAL

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To develop and maintain a responsive land use plan that supports the goals and objectives of the community including economic, environmental, and social community character and development.

## OBJECTIVES

- Preserve and enhance the identity of established community areas.
- Promote growth and land uses that are compatible with the rural residential character of Houston.
- Ensure an efficient pattern of development that reflects the needs of the community and is consistent with community character.
- Encourage the construction of safe, sound housing.
- Encourage land use patterns and development that connect new public and private investments.
- Encourage new civic and commercial activity to help jumpstart new private investments.

## POLICIES

- Ensure that zoning and platting decisions are guided by this Plan, specifically its maps, goals, policies and strategies.
- Ensure future regulatory changes and planning actions maintain and protect the unique community character and complete appropriate public processes.
- Provide a balanced distribution of land uses to meet Houston's current and future needs.

## STRATEGIES

- Update land use regulations to promote flexibility for marijuana businesses to locate in Houston in appropriate zoning districts.
- Update land use regulations to provide buffer and protection for adjacent zoning districts and established residential areas from incompatible uses.

# PARKS, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE GOAL

To provide a wide range of year-round recreational opportunities for the community and its visitors.

## OBJECTIVES

- Maintain existing trails, pathways and recreational opportunities for area residents and visitors.
- Encourage the establishment of year-round recreational facilities.
- Develop and maintain neighborhood-scale recreational facilities and trail systems.
- Encourage Houston's recreation development as a tool for tourism and economic development.
- Maintain, supplement and enhance new parks and open space for recreational use.

## POLICIES

- Ensure that a range of recreational opportunities is available to residents of all ages, especially for Houston youth.
- If the opportunity exists, ensure that trails and parks are considered at the land development level to preserve access.

## STRATEGIES

- Preserve and improve access to recreational opportunities, especially Houston's lakes and the Little Susitna River.
- Work with the Mat-Su Trails and Parks Foundation to find projects that would qualify for community grants leveraged with volunteer participation.
- Work with the State Historic Preservation Office to ensure that trails are mapped and preserved.







# ENVIRONMENTAL GOAL

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To maintain and protect the quality of the natural environment, especially drinking water and surface water in Houston.

## OBJECTIVES

- Protect drinking water quality for residents.
- Protect and preserve salmon habitat and the environmental health of rivers and streams.

## POLICIES

- Through land use and other regulatory controls, protect or avoid environmentally important areas including streams, rivers and lakes.
- Ensure that setbacks and buffers in development areas are maintained to protect residential wells for potable water and for the environmental health of natural areas.

## STRATEGIES

- Continue to work with the salmon restoration group to support its efforts on the Little Susitna River.
- Provide development setback standards in land use regulations to ensure that new development is protected from flooding and other environmental hazards and to protect natural areas from off-site pollution.

# COMMUNITY FACILITIES GOAL

To provide a safe and secure community for residents and to provide quality community services that enhance and improve residents' quality of life.

## OBJECTIVES

- Provide effective levels of emergency, fire and emergency response services to Houston residents and the surrounding areas.
- Improve access to utilities for local residents.
- Expand utilities to facilitate more intensive land development where appropriate.
- Encourage non-profits to continue to provide community and social activities for residents.

## POLICIES

- Ensure the proper design and installation of on-site water and wastewater facilities to protect property owners and the environment.
- Ensure that adequate school facilities are available when and where they are needed.
- Encourage learning of community residents through formal and informal educational opportunities.

## STRATEGIES

- Coordinate citizen awareness and implementation of wildfire mitigation with Matanuska Susitna Borough and state forestry service programs.
- Explore raising revenue through a variety of taxes which could be used to finance utility expansion. Such financial possibilities could include bonding with the Alaska Municipal Bond Bank.
- Secure state funding to support expansion and development of utilities.
- Partner with Tribal Organizations for shared costs to expand utilities.
- Explore the feasibility of Improvement Districts that will help finance future utility expansion.
- Work with Mid-Valley Senior's Center and the Homesteader's Community Center to continue to be of community service to residents.
- Continue to work with the MSB School District to update student enrollment trends and projections.
- Coordinate with the MSB School District to determine site selection, capital improvements and school bond measures for timely school facilities.

- Address school site selection and acquisition in the review of proposed development plans.
- Support a new elementary school to serve Houston.





# TRANSPORTATION GOAL

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To provide a safe, efficient, multi-modal transportation system that meets the needs of Houston residents and visitors.

## OBJECTIVES

- Provide safe access to the Parks Highway and connecting road system.
- Ensure freight goods movement from the port to interior Alaska through Houston is safe and efficient.
- Encourage the development of alternate routes to serve goods and services movement from Port McKenzie to interior Alaska.
- Improve and expand non-motorized transportation facilities where possible.
- Expand system connectivity and emergency access.

## POLICIES

- Freight routes should be safe, effective and minimize impacts on established neighborhoods.
- Support regional transportation developments that comply with the goals, objectives and policies in this Plan and support positive development within Houston.

## STRATEGIES

- Support the development of an alternative route to the Parks Highway from Port McKenzie to Houston parallel to the Point McKenzie railroad extension.
- Support the development of a Hawk Lane Bike path.
- Work with the State of Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities on Parks Highway planning, routing and improvements through a Parks Highway Corridor Plan.

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Specific recommendations for Land Use and transportation policies and improvements are identified in the following chapters.



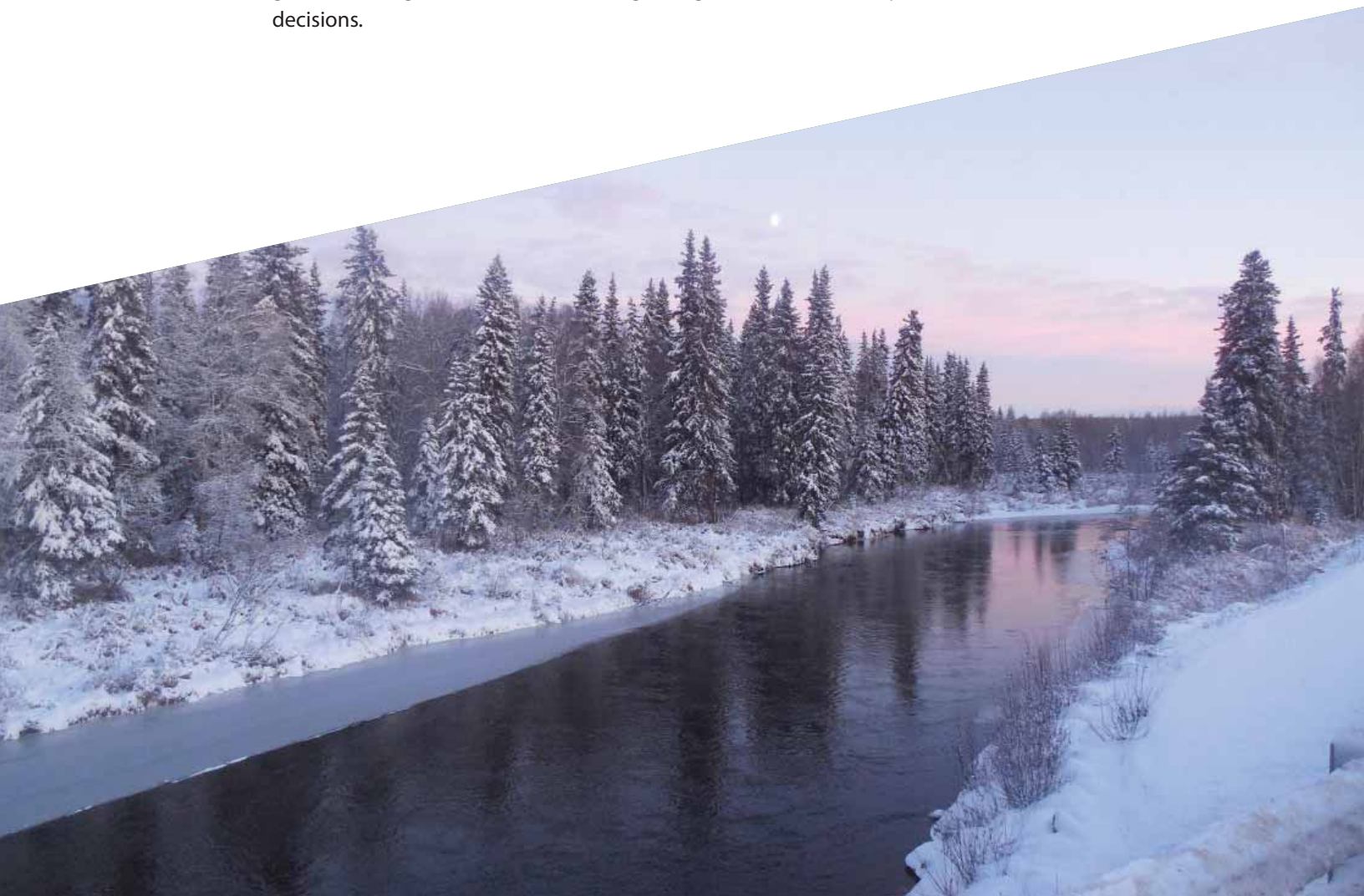




# CHAPTER 6: LAND USE PLAN

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The Land Use Plan identifies general land use classifications and the land use plan maps graphically illustrate the location and extent of each land use category in Houston. The land use plan map is a visual representation of long-term policies and is not a detailed blueprint for future development. Nor is the land use plan map a zoning map which establishes specific land uses on a lot by lot basis. The land use plan map, in concert with the Community Growth Guidelines, provides a policy guide and a legal basis for future zoning changes and other development decisions.



## RELATIONSHIP TO HOUSTON'S MUNICIPAL CODE TITLE 10 LAND USE REGULATIONS AND ZONING MAP

The City of Houston's Title 10 Land Use Regulations establishes rules regarding development and are applied as zoning districts in the Official Zoning Map. That map shows zoning district boundaries within the City of Houston's boundaries. Future amendments to Title 10 regulations, zoning changes and other land use decisions are intended to conform to the Comprehensive Plan and Land Use Plan Map.

This plan makes policy recommendations for current and future land uses based on existing land use patterns and known development plans proposed by large landowners. Title 10 Land Use regulations implement the proposed land use designations through zoning districts.

## AMENDMENTS TO THE LAND USE PLAN

The Land Use Plan is dynamic and may change as the community changes. Proposed amendments to the land use plan map may be reviewed concurrently with new development proposals. Amendments will require that conflicts between the proposal and the maps be resolved by examining the Goals, Objectives and Strategies Chapter for guidance. Map amendments and changes are Comprehensive Plan amendments and should demonstrate to be consistent with the Plan's Goals, Objectives and Strategies to meet future community projected growth.

# LAND USE CLASSIFICATIONS

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The Land Use Plan Map identifies different land use classifications to illustrate the location and extent of land use categories throughout Houston. The land use classification define the building intensity (density) for each area, based on existing, planned and projected future development, population and employment.

Each land use classification includes a generalized description of the predominant uses, the intensity of each use, the essential physical characteristics of development and locational criteria, where appropriate. The locational criteria should be applied in combination to each other and not necessarily individual nor should all criteria be achieved in each location.

## RESIDENTIAL CLASSIFICATIONS

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The residential classification identifies areas that are developed for residential purposes and are expected to remain residential for the 20 year horizon of the Houston Comprehensive Plan. The residential classifications also identify vacant land best suited for future residential development.



Residential densities ranges are generalized descriptions of the type of development appropriate for a broadly defined area. They are based on area-wide densities rather than specific densities for specific parcels.

The land use plan map depicts an intended overall distribution of population and housing units for contiguous areas of Houston. The land use plan map is not intended to be applied directly to determine the number of housing units permitted per lot or development site. Title 10 Land Use Regulations and Official Zoning Map will determine the allowed number of housing units on each lot or development area. The type of low density large lot residential development in Houston results from a combination of preferred lifestyle, lack of public infrastructure such as public water and sewer and other public utilities and distance from major urban centers.





### RESIDENTIAL 5 - 1 DWELLING PER 5 ACRE (DUA)

The Residential 5 classification provides for low-density single family and rural agricultural residences served by private wells and on-site septic systems. The predominant use consists of detached house on lots of 5 acres or larger suited for agricultural uses.

### RESIDENTIAL 2.5 - 1 DWELLINGS PER 2.5 ACRE (DUA)

The Residential 2.5 classification provides for low-density single family and rural agricultural residences served by private wells and on-site septic systems. The predominant use consists of a detached house on lots of 2.5 acres or larger suited for agricultural uses.

### RESIDENTIAL 1-2 DWELLINGS PER ACRE (DUA)

The Residential 1-2 classification provides for large-lot single family and 2 family residences served by private wells and on-site septic systems. The predominant use consists of detached house on lots of one acre or larger.

## LOCATIONAL CRITERIA

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- Areas with an established large-lot rural development pattern;
- Vacant areas adjacent to established large-lot, rural development;
- Areas without public water and wastewater;
- Areas where environmental constraints preclude an intense site development;
- Access is from low traffic volume local streets.
- Direct access from the Parks Highway is discouraged for new development.

## RESIDENTIAL MULTI-FAMILY: 3 OR MORE DWELLINGS PER ACRE

The Residential Multi-Family 3 or more dwellings per acre classification provides for a range of single and multi-family housing neighborhoods that offer a diversity of housing choices. Residential uses include duplexes, townhouses and low to medium density multi-family. The intended overall density is greater than 3 dwelling units per gross acre. If located within neighborhoods that includes nearby single family homes, the physical scale and appearance and street orientation of multi-family housing developments should be compatible.

### LOCATIONAL CRITERIA

- Areas with a mix of single family and multi-family housing;
- Areas immediately adjacent to existing multi-family development
- Areas without water and wastewater;
- Areas where environmental constraints preclude an intense site development;
- Access is from low traffic volume local streets.

## NON-RESIDENTIAL CLASSIFICATIONS

### COMMERCIAL CORE – NEW

The Commercial Core classification is suitable for a wide range of retail and service uses including more intense commercial uses primarily for retail and service uses intended to meet the needs of highway users and local residents. This designation is also suitable for a broad range of professional businesses clustered in areas such as a shopping center which may be anchored by one or more large retail establishments. The Commercial Core Classification is also intended for lands that will be best suited for commercial core uses in the future.

### LOCATIONAL CRITERIA

- Existing commercially developed area near the Big Lake Road and Parks Highway intersection; and
- Areas with access onto Big Lake Road within the City of Houston boundaries.

### COMMERCIAL MIXED USE - NEW

The Commercial Mixed Classification provides flexibility for areas that are developed for commercial purposes that also have residential uses and are expected to remain commercial mixed use in the future. This designation is to identify key areas along a highway corridor which are highly visible or transitional in nature. Development in this area should occur in a manner that does not disrupt the function of the highway system. The Commercial

Mixed Use Classification is also intended for lands that will be best suited for commercial mixed uses in the future.

This Comprehensive Plan supports and recommends a concentration of commercial uses at strategic locations where safe and compatible access are optimized. Commercial mixed use designations are currently clustered in nodes along the Parks Highway and along the eastside of the Parks Highway, north of the Little Susitna River recreation area and boat launch.

### LOCATIONAL CRITERIA

- Existing commercially mixed use developed area along the Parks Highway north of Big Lake intersection;
- Areas with safe and convenient access off a side street from the Parks Highway.

### TOWN CENTER/CIVIC CENTER – NEW

The Town Center classification provides the focal point of civic, commercial and recreation activity for Houston, integrating community serving retail, public services and civic facilities. The town center allows and encourages community events close to the civic center of Houston adding life and vitality to the center.

### LOCATIONAL CRITERIA

- Existing commercially developed area near City Hall and Little Susitna Recreational Area;
- Areas near the existing Fire Hall on Armstrong Road.



## PARK AND NATURAL RESOURCE

The Parks and Open Space classification provides for active and passive recreation, conservation of natural areas and trail corridors connecting to neighborhoods. Uses include neighborhood, community, regional and natural, open space use, greenbelts, allowing special purpose facilities such as developed recreational areas including sports complexes or interpretive centers that support parks and recreational functions. Park uses designated on the Land Use Plan Map are generally existing or known planned areas. As new open space and park use areas are acquired the Land Use Plan Map should be updated.

### LOCATIONAL CRITERIA

- Areas designated or dedicated as park use or under management for parks and recreation uses with the City of Houston;
- Areas designated as open space or natural resource use area; and
- City or Borough owned lands of high natural value or are environmentally sensitive and are not suitable for development.

## INDUSTRIAL

The Industrial classification provides for areas for existing and future industrial development. This designation is for areas already substantially developed for industrial of the duration of the 20 year Plan.

The classification also applies to vacant land that is best suited to industrial development in the future. Limitations on industrial activities should apply near residential areas.

### LOCATIONAL CRITERIA

- Areas with an established primarily industrial development pattern;
- Areas large enough for more intense industrial uses;
- Areas with access to truck routes without the need to travel through local or neighborhood streets and incompatible uses; and
- Encourage development in areas with rail access to reduce total truck traffic volumes.

## COMMUNITY FACILITY

The Community Facility classification is for developed active public and institutional use areas and undeveloped areas designated for future public and institutional use. Schools, community centers, fire stations, senior and cultural centers, cemeteries and other public utility facilities designated on the Land Use Plan map are existing or known planned facilities. As new facilities are planned and developed, the Land Use Plan Map should be updated to reflect these changes.





### TRANSPORTATION FACILITY - NEW

The Transportation Facility classification applies to areas with existing or known planned public facilities that are directly related to transportation by rail or air. This classification includes the Alaska Railroad land holdings and railroad utility corridors including the Port Mackenzie rail extension and roadway corridor, as carried forward from the 1982 City of Houston Comprehensive Plan.



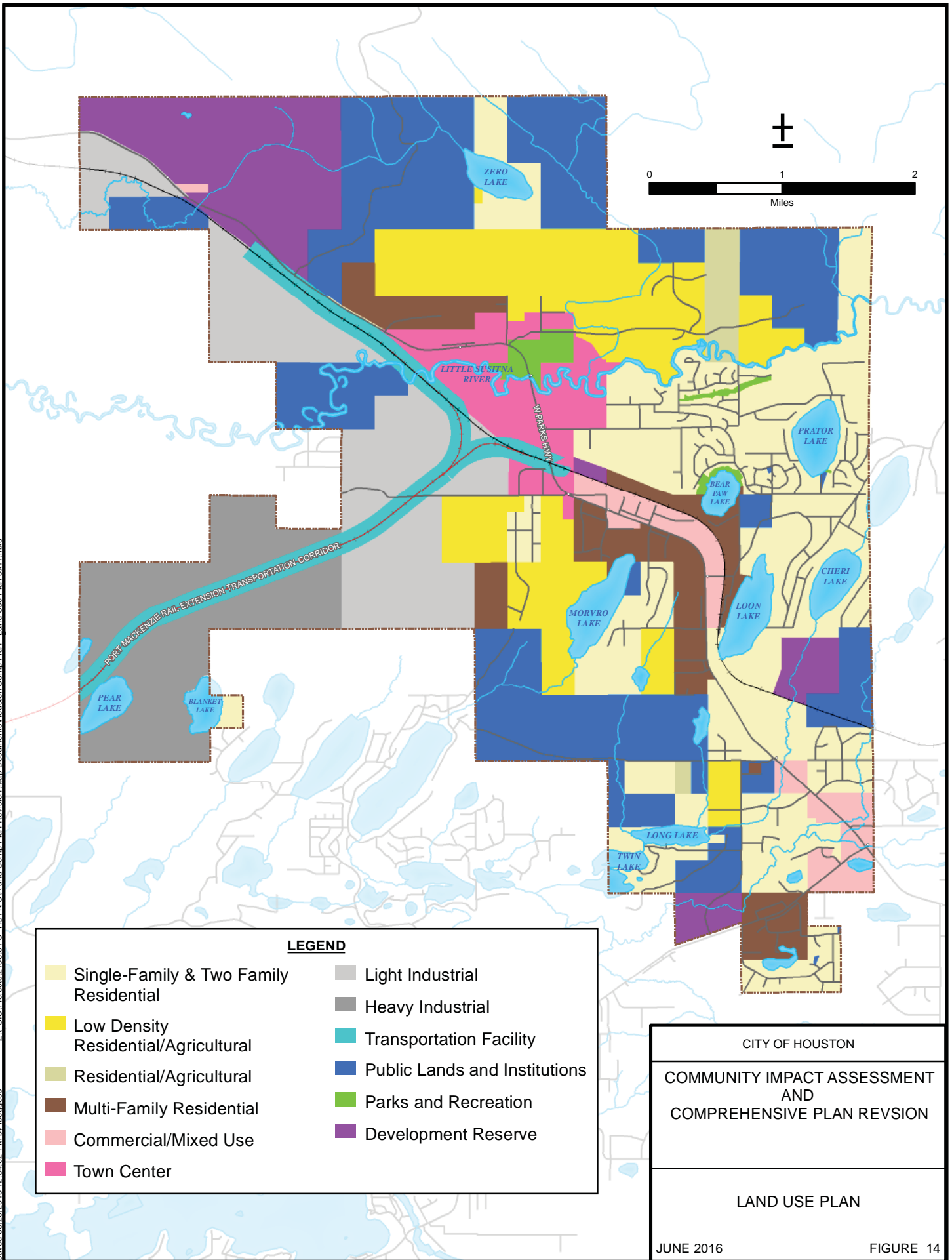
### DEVELOPMENT RESERVE

The Development Reserve classification is applied to areas that are generally suitable for development but whose location and lack of facilities and lack of projected demand make near-term and intermediate term development uncertain. Residential large-lot development is allowed by right but a planning process with a proposed rezoning to an active zoning district should occur prior to development.



### MAJOR ROADS AND STREETS

The Land Use Plan Map illustrates major roads using a black line symbol as a visual geographic reference. The Transportation Plan Map in coordination with the MSB's Long-Range Transportation Plan designates the existing and future transportation network.





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CITY OF  
HOUSTON  
Comprehensive Plan





## CHAPTER 7: TRANSPORTATION PLAN

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# STATUS OF THE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

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## THE PARKS HIGHWAY

The City of Houston is approximately 7.5 miles west along the Parks Highway from the City limits of Wasilla, roughly 50 road miles north of Anchorage, and approximately 300 driving miles south along the Parks Highway from the city limits of Fairbanks Alaska. The Parks Highway is part of the Federal Highway's interstate road network. The eastern edge of the city limits of Houston contains the intersection of Big Lake Road, with the first commercialized mile of Big Lake Road lying within the jurisdiction of Houston.

The Parks Highway is a 2-lane, undivided facility with 12 foot lanes, 8 foot paved shoulders and a 200 foot wide right-of-way measured from the highway centerline. Within Houston there are periodic passing lane sections for the northbound and southbound lanes, as well as a center two-way left turn lane. The Parks Highway's primary function is to serve statewide mobility for travel and freight transportation through the city limits of Houston for passage to Fairbanks and interior Alaska. Within the national network, the Parks Highway is the primary link between Anchorage, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB), and interior Alaska. Anchorage is the commercial hub of the state, and therefore freight and materials shipped via road to interior Alaska by road must pass through the city of Houston on the Parks Highway. The Parks Highway is also a key element of the Houston Road network, serving local traffic throughout the City of Houston.

The Parks Highway is an interstate highway classified as a Rural Interstate by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), and is Route 3 of the National Highway System (NHS). As part of the NHS it has the function of providing mobility on a statewide level, in addition to its secondary function of local area service. The Parks Highway is owned by the State of Alaska and maintained by the DOT&PF.



## CITY OF HOUSTON ROAD NETWORK LAYOUT

The City of Houston's road network branches east and west from the Parks Highway, which operates as a backbone for the regional network. The Parks Highway is the only arterial level roadway within the city limits. The remaining roads are either local roads providing access to the surrounding lots or collector roads that provide access to and from the Parks Highway.

A majority of the parcels within the city limits of Houston access the Parks Highway within the city limits of Houston. Alternative access out of the city is available to the west via Kiowa Street which leads to Big Lake and King Arthur Drive to the east which accesses the Meadow Lakes Loop and Pittman Road areas. Additionally, Big Lake Road leads west into Big Lake. There are currently no signalized intersections within the city, but one is proposed by the DOT&PF for the intersection of Big Lake Road and the Parks Highway.

## ROAD FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATIONS

A functional classification system is a method of identifying the intended use of a road or corridor. It is an important planning level tool to facilitate clear communication about road networks between different agencies, designers, and the public. The function of a road typically falls somewhere between the conflicting purposes of mobility (high speed mobility through a region) and access (lower speed movements with frequent turns to adjacent parcels).

The DOT&PF manages road networks that fall within the City of Houston. Both the DOT&PF and the Mat-Su Borough individually identified functional classifications for roads that they own and maintain or that are adjacent to their roadways. See Figure 15, MSB Functional Classification System.

## ROAD SURFACE CONDITIONS

There are approximately 45 miles of road within the Houston residential road network, not including the Parks Highway and Big Lake Road. Of these 45 miles of road, 90% (40 miles) of the roads are unpaved with a gravel surface. The remaining 5 miles of paved roadway account for most of the collector road network as defined by the MSB.

The paved road network includes all, or segments of the following roads:

- Cheri Lake Drive
- Hawk Lane
- King Arthur Drive
- Miller's Reach Road
- Wasey Way
- White Rabbit Drive

Armstrong Road is identified by the MSB as a collector road and is currently unpaved beyond the first quarter mile. The first quarter mile of Armstrong Road serves the Little Susitna River Camp Ground, and the public safety building for Houston which houses one of two Fire Halls serving the north part of Houston. City Hall is also accessed from Armstrong Road.

## ROAD OWNERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The road network in Houston is made up of roads owned by the City, the DOT&PF as well as some roads qualifying for ownership and funding from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Maintenance of the Parks Highway is done by DOT&PF but roadway ownership and responsibilities of all other roads fall under the City of Houston's Public Works Department.

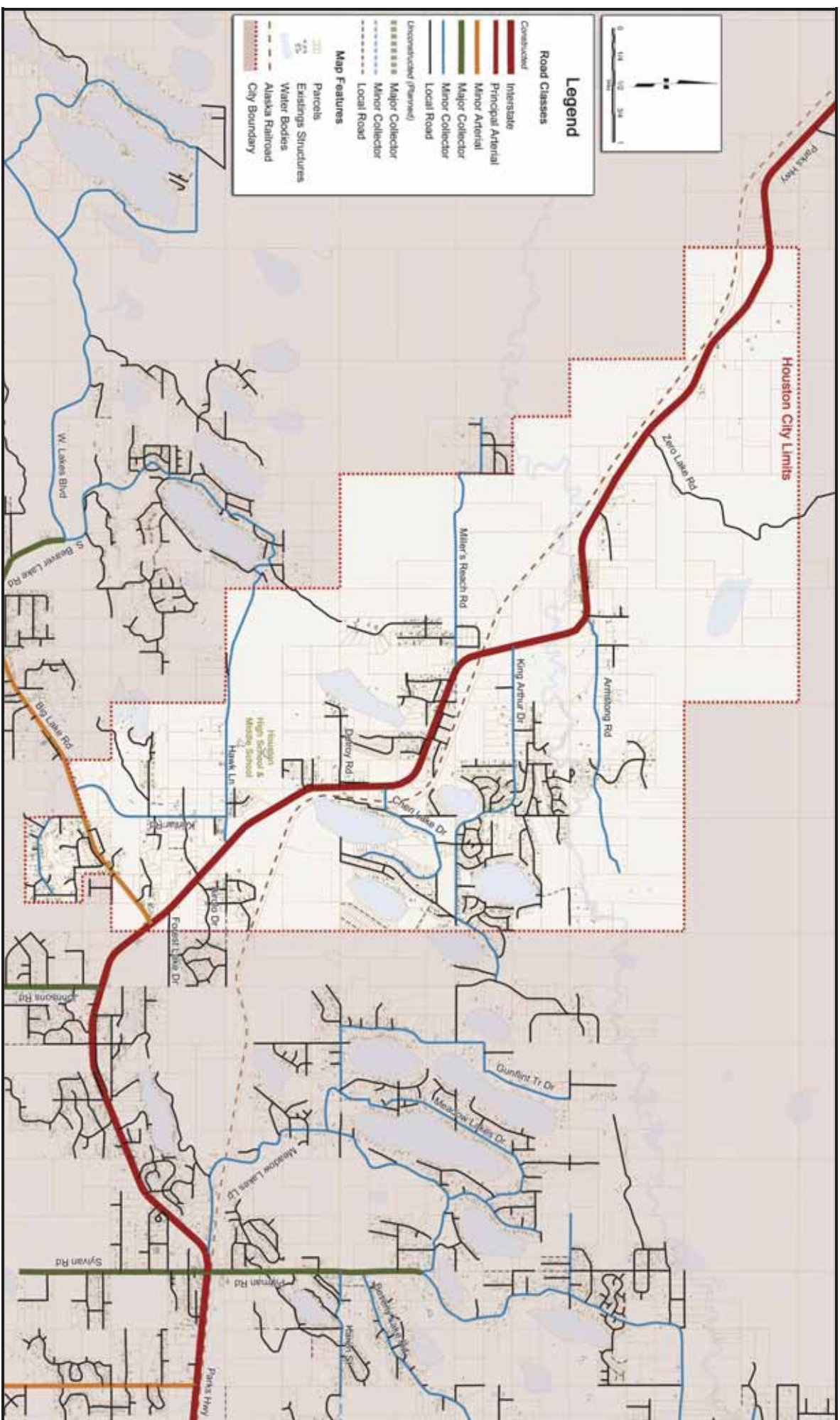
## ALASKA RAILROAD

The Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) generally parallels the Parks Highway corridor throughout the limits of the City of Houston. To the southeast the railroad is on the north side of the highway. The Parks Highway crosses the railroad at a separated grade crossing at approximately milepost 56.5. The separated grade crossing includes a rail bridge that proceeds over the Parks Highway. On the northwest end of the city the rail corridor is on the south side of the highway.

A rail extension from the mainline in Houston to the port at Point MacKenzie is currently under construction. A "Y" junction at the mainline south of the Little Susitna River and the rail spur continuation southwest through the industrial zoned land in Houston has been built.







## PEDESTRIAN PATHWAYS AND NON-MOTORIZED USE

There is a separated pedestrian pathway on the south side of the Parks Highway that begins east of the Houston city limits and ends at Mile Post 58 within Houston.

There is a second pathway on the north side of the Parks Highway that begins at the intersection of the Parks Highway and Cheri Lake Road and continues west beyond the city limits.

There is an established recreation area with a trailhead located at mile 59 of the Parks Highway off of Zero Lake Road. The Houston/Willow Creek Sled Trail provides access to Hatcher Pass recreation area year round and the Zero Lake Trailhead has parking for approximately 60 vehicles and trailers and hosts restrooms facilities.

Most of the trails in Houston are informal and are used for non-motorized and motorized use year-round, including snow machines, ATVs, dog sleds, bikers, pedestrians and skiers.

## PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Valley Mover provides public transit between the Mat-Su Valley and Anchorage with routes operating Monday–Friday multiple times a day. Valley Mover has two pick-up and drop-

off locations within the City of Houston; one at the commercial center at Big Lake Road and the recently added Gorilla Fireworks parking lot location.

Mat-Su Community Transit (MASCOT) provides minimal services to residents in Houston. Two busses run a Meadow Lakes/Big Lake to Wasilla route Monday through Friday. The northernmost scheduled bus stop, or Big Lake route cutoff, is at the NAPA Auto Parts and commercial strip mall at the intersection of Big Lake Road and the Parks Highway which is serviced by one bus. MASCOT does provide “Route Deviation” bus service, at an additional fare, which allows for requested additional pickup and drop-off locations depending upon proximity to the route and time requested.

At this time Valley Mover and MASCOT do not have any short or long term plans to expand their services in Houston. Funding and ridership are the determining factors for major changes to the availability public transportation.

## FREIGHT

The Parks Highway serves as a main transportation mode of commercial freight from the greater Anchorage and Mat-Su area to Interior Alaska. According to the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), in 2013 commercial vehicle traffic made up an average of 16% of annual daily traffic along the Parks Highway through Willow. Peak commercial vehicle counts were greater than 22% of total traffic in September and October (Central Region 2013 Traffic Volume Report, DOT&PF). Considering the low number of freight and commercial destinations between Wasilla and north of Willow, it is reasonable to assume the commercial vehicle traffic recorded on the Parks Highway at Willow is a close reflection of freight traffic on the Parks Highway through the City of Houston.

The Alaska Railroad is the other leading mode for freight transportation. Opportunities for increased freight activity to the Port MacKenzie rail extension are anticipated in Houston due to the “Y” connection to the mainline. Improvement to the Parks Highway from Wasilla to Fairbanks may decrease travel times and continued development of Interior Alaska and the Borough may lead to increased traffic along the Parks Highway and increased use of the railroad.





# RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANS, AREA PROJECTS AND STUDIES

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## MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN (MSB LRTP)

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough Long Range Transportation Plan (MSB LRTP) was completed in 2007 and is currently undergoing an update to create a transportation planning vision to year 2035. The adopted LRTP is part of the Borough wide Comprehensive Plan which all adopted area and community comprehensive Plans are a part of, including the adopted 2003 amended City of Houston Comprehensive Plan. The MSB LRTP identifies transportation goals and objectives which reflect the Borough-wide interests and desires for the future transportation system. The overall purpose and goal of the MSB LRTP is to develop an integrated roadway network that facilitates the efficient movement of people and good within the central area.

Specific goals identified in the 2007 MSB LRTP relate directly to the City of Houston and its transportation and economic goals, as identified in this Comprehensive Plan. These goals and objectives from the MSB LRTP include:

- Provide a transportation system that enhances the local economy and quality of life;
  - Minimize neighborhood through-traffic movements;
  - Promote positive and attractive design of transportation facilities;
  - Develop a multi-modal transportation network;
  - Encourage the paving of roads and the increased use of dust control materials;
  
- Develop an integrated roadway network that facilitates the efficient movement of people and goods;
  - Minimizing travel time delays and congestion;
  - Minimize the number of access points on collector and arterial roads to maximize safety and road capacity;
  - Protect the integrity and level of service on arterial and higher designated roads;

- Protect the through traffic function of highways and arterials;
- Provide a multi-modal transportation system that is safe, effective and meets the needs of all residents;
- Provide for the travel needs of mobility limited residents (young, old, low income, disabled);
  - Support the continued operation and expansion of local public transportation;
- Develop and operate a rail system to benefit Mat-Su's population and economy;
  - Extend a rail connection from the Alaska Railroad main line to Point MacKenzie;
  - Continue to support economic development of communities along existing and future Alaska Railroad lines.

The MSB LRTP identifies anticipated future projects based on population growth, development, and the existing transportation system's capacities. This information is used to model and forecast estimated future traffic volumes throughout the Borough road network, and for the completed 2007 LRTP it was for the planning year 2025. Assuming residential growth continues in the Borough outside of Wasilla and Palmer, proposed future roads were identified with the recommendation that they be improved or completed when the nearby areas they serve are built out. Most of the identified improvements are also included in the Borough's Official Streets and Highways Plan (OS&HP).

The identified recommendations and improvements in the Houston area are mainly for the road system south of King Arthur Drive, where higher density population growth and travel is anticipated to occur.

Skyview Drive, east of Cheri Lake in Houston and south of Lake Lalen in Meadow Lakes, is a collector-level street recommended to be extended generally west and south of Cheri and Loon Lakes to the Parks Highway, providing a connection to Anthony Road (page 4-24, 2007 MSB LRTP). Big Lake Road from the Parks Highway to Northshore Drive is anticipated

to need expansion a 2-lane minor arterial to a 4-lane arterial by 2025 based on predicted increases in daily traffic volumes (page 4-14, 2007 MSB LRTP).

Rural area roads are not included in the transportation modeling process and typically the need for new or improved rural roads tends to be based on providing access to new neighborhoods and a second connection to larger developed areas for emergency access and convenience. Recommendations for rural road improvements in the LRTP are based on needs identified in Mat-Su community adopted comprehensive plans. The City of Houston's 1999 adopted plan stressed the need for emergency access routes and combination fire breaks.

Proposed emergency access routes and staging areas affecting the City of Houston include providing a connection between Millers Reach Road and the Beaver Lake area and connecting roads north of the Little Susitna River from Armstrong Road to Edgerton Parks Road.





## ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES PARKS HIGHWAY VISION, 2006

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities developed a vision for the Parks Highway in 2006. The purpose of the Parks Highway Visioning Document is to establish, in general terms, the Department's future vision of the highway which will provide guidance to the decisions about forthcoming highway projects and is intended to serve as the conceptual basis for more detailed local and Department planning efforts in the future.

Overall the Vision for the Parks Highway is as follows:

"A high degree of mobility for through trips while accommodating local access and slower travelers should be provided in a manner that is highly compatible with the communities and the environment along the corridor. The highway should be free-flowing with enough capacity and appropriate design standards to safely support travel at highway speeds. The long-term vision is for the highway to be upgraded to include freeway-style design characteristics, such as controlled access and interchanges at major connections. Local travel, within communities along the corridor, will be improved by developing local access road systems."

Using 2030 traffic projections and identified safety and economic needs, general future improvements for the Parks Highway from the Big Lake Junction through Willow were identified. Generally the recommendation is to upgrade this section of the Highway to four lanes with access roads in selected locations. The frontage and access roads may be connected to the highway via interchanges or at-grade signalized intersections in the interim.

Good access management is noted as especially important in Houston where private land exists adjacent to the highway and development pressure has been increasing (Parks Highway Visioning Document, page ES-2). "Future highway corridor planning efforts should evaluate, on a segment-by-segment basis, how to provide access to adjacent lands, and this should be the basis for an access management plan for the Parks Highway corridor."



Projected traffic volumes were developed based on historical traffic trends, historical and projected population trends, past design designations, and regional travel models (see Travel Demand Modeling below). Average annual daily traffic volumes from the year 2000 were taken as current or existing volumes of traffic along the Parks Highway and used to predict anticipated traffic volumes in the year 2030. The Parks Highway segment from Big Lake Road to Willow was projected to be carrying 8,000 vehicles per day.

Through this comprehensive planning process, new traffic projections were calculated using updated data in the Travel Demand Model (see below) for a horizon year of 2035. The new data predicts average annual daily traffic volumes up to three times as much as the 2006 Parks Highway Visioning Document predicted through the Houston segment of the Parks Highway. This is significant in terms of highway planning and suggests improvements to the Parks Highway are needed in the near future.

DOT&PF's Parks Highway Visioning Document also notes that if the Wasilla bypass is built, the need for Parks Highway expansion to four lanes through Houston could be needed sooner, due to increases in growth in

Houston and Willow and decreased travel time to Wasilla and Anchorage.

Development of Port MacKenzie is anticipated with or without the construction of the Knik Arm Bridge, according to the Visioning Document.

"Ultimately, a new connection to the Parks Highway from the Knik Arm Crossing may be constructed... The Cities of Wasilla and Houston have zoning. Estimates about the timeframe for this connection range from 10 to 30 years. Most of the land for the route [highway corridor number 7 which follows the existing road alignment from the Parks through Big Lake Road down Burma Road, Ayrshire, and Point MacKenzie Roads] is still in public ownership. The road could intersect the Parks Highway near Millers Reach Road in Houston. This was the most cost effective of the routes studied in 1992. ARRC also may use this corridor. If this route becomes a reality, it could make a bypass at Houston a necessity, put Willow at an easy commuting distance of Anchorage, and increase the number of visitors to the south side of Denali National Park and other tourist and recreational attractions in the Susitna Valley."

The recommendation for a possible bypass at Houston will be strengthened if a Port-to-Parks roadway connection was built through Houston, according to this Visioning Document. The use of interchanges is strongly supported throughout the Visioning Document and therefore should be considered as a viable option for a Houston Bypass. Otherwise good access management, the use of frontage roads, climbing and passing lanes, and widening to four lanes is predicted to adequately meet future traffic needs.

There is enough roadside development, existing and anticipated, to warrant frontage roads in some sections of Houston, and the expansion of the Parks Highway to four lanes is anticipated by 2030. The construction on the Knik Arm Crossing could alter the traffic projections and change the long term needs of the Parks Highway through Houston. If constructed, the growth and traffic patterns within the Borough south of the Parks Highway could change significantly, which may reduce the need for some highway improvements because of the provision of this alternate access route and may increase the traffic volumes in other sections of the highway.



## TRAVEL DEMAND MODELING AND TRANSPORTATION PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS

The Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions (AMATS) regularly updates and maintains a regional Travel Demand Model (TDM) which includes the Mat-Su Borough areas as well as the greater Anchorage metropolitan area.

In an effort to establish appropriate transportation goals, objectives and policies, predicted average annual daily traffic (AADT) volumes have been projected for 2035 using the Travel Demand Model (TDM) which include all planned and funded transportation projects to date (April 2015). The model used in this analysis was developed by the ADOT&PF in conjunction with the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) and the Matanuska Susitna Borough. The extents of the model are the entire network of the MSB and MOA from north of Willow all the way to Girdwood and east as far as the community of Sutton on the Glen Highway. This model is the same one which has been used to analyze the traffic impacts of the Knik Arm bridge project as well as the Highway-to-Highway project in downtown Anchorage and various Wasilla Bypass alternative corridors.

The model generates traffic volumes based on socio-economic background data such as population, income level, employment in various work sectors, school enrollment, as well as a number of special generators such as hotels and airports. The results of the model were used as a baseline for some the recommendations to follow. Figure 16 presents a diagram of the City of Houston with several key 2035 AADTs taken from the TDM.

## KNIK ARM BRIDGE

The Knik Arm Crossing is a project to construct a toll bridge over Cook Inlet connecting downtown Anchorage to the Point MacKenzie area, providing an alternative route to the Mat-Su Borough. Project management was transferred from the state created Knik Arm Bridge & Toll Authority to the State of Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF) in 2014; eleven years after the State Legislature decided in 2003 to seriously pursue the development of the bridge following a 1984 Draft Environmental Impact Statement by the DOT&PF.

To date, more than \$72.9 million in federal money has been spent on the Environmental Impact Statement and other preliminary work including right-of-way acquisitions. Full funding, through a loan with the federal Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) has not been acquired. Future funding grants from the state of Alaska will also be needed to pursue limited right of way requirements.

The Knik Arm Bridge project is included in the AMATS Metropolitan Transportation Plan and regional Travel Demand Model as a constructed project by 2035. Construction of the Knik Arm Bridge could have impacts on traffic volumes experienced by the City of Houston in the future, but growth and increases in traffic along the Parks Highway especially is anticipated to still increase to levels where highway improvements would be recommended.

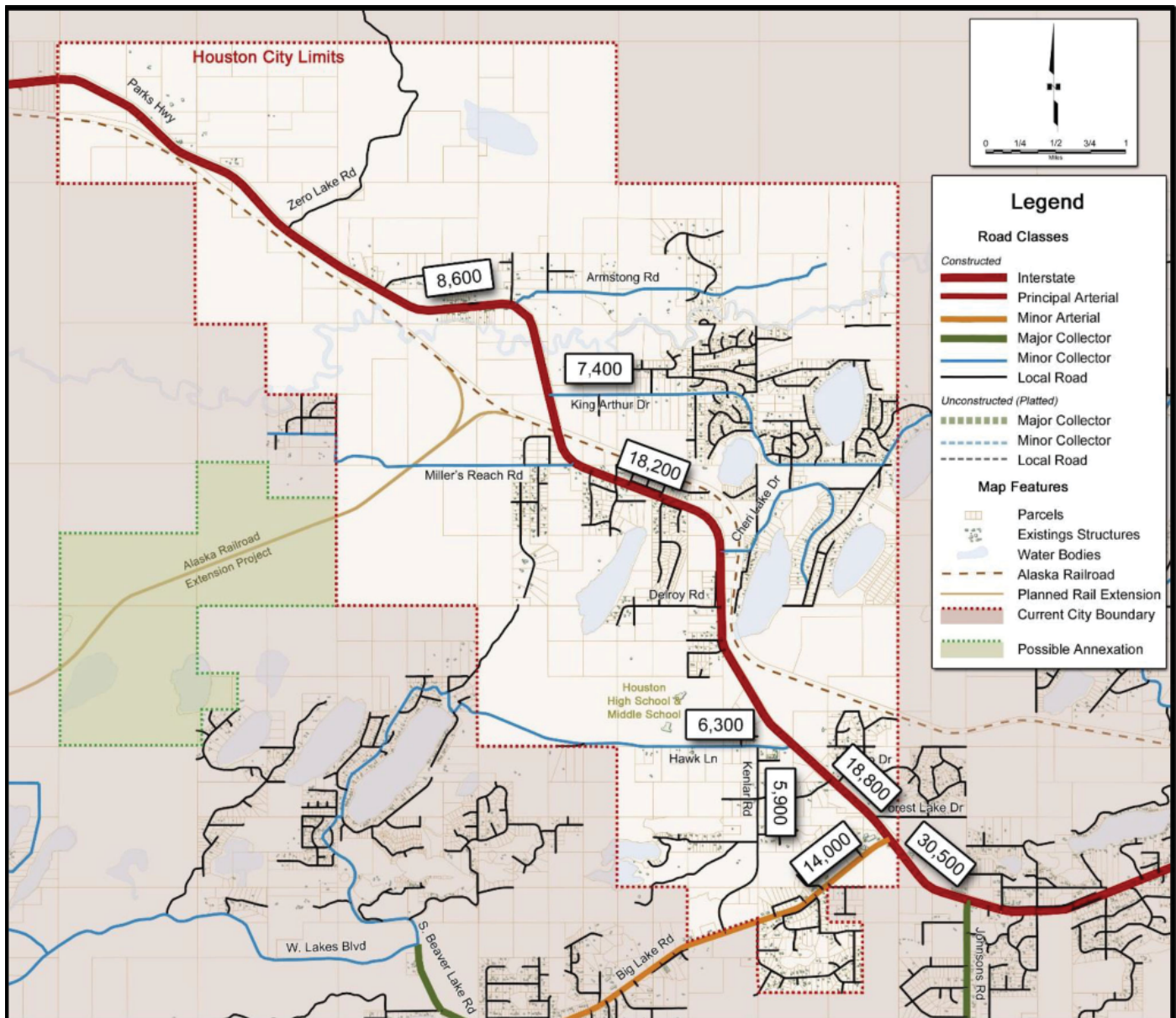


Figure 16. Projected 2035 Traffic Demand Volumes from ADOT&amp;PF Travel Demand Model



# RECOMMENDATIONS

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All recommendations identified in this Transportation Plan element of the City of Houston's Comprehensive Plan support the following community value regarding transportation:

There is a need to increase safety, accessibility, and mobility through much of the City and improvements shall be beneficial to all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-motorized users, while maintaining the community character.

The objectives, policies and strategies identified to achieve the overall Transportation Goal were developed from the community's core values and identified in Chapter 5: Community Guidelines for Growth.

The following Transportation Plan Recommendations coincide with these goals and provide general traffic-related observations and recommendations for the City of Houston based on the analysis of existing conditions, other plans, and the projects generation by the ADOT&PF's Travel Demand Model.

## THE PARKS HIGHWAY

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The Parks Highway represents the backbone of the City of Houston's transportation infrastructure, not only for inter-community travel but also for access to outside services and employment centers. It is also of regional and statewide significance and therefore has a major impact on the residents of the City of Houston. Following

are major Parks Highway recommendations.

### BYPASS

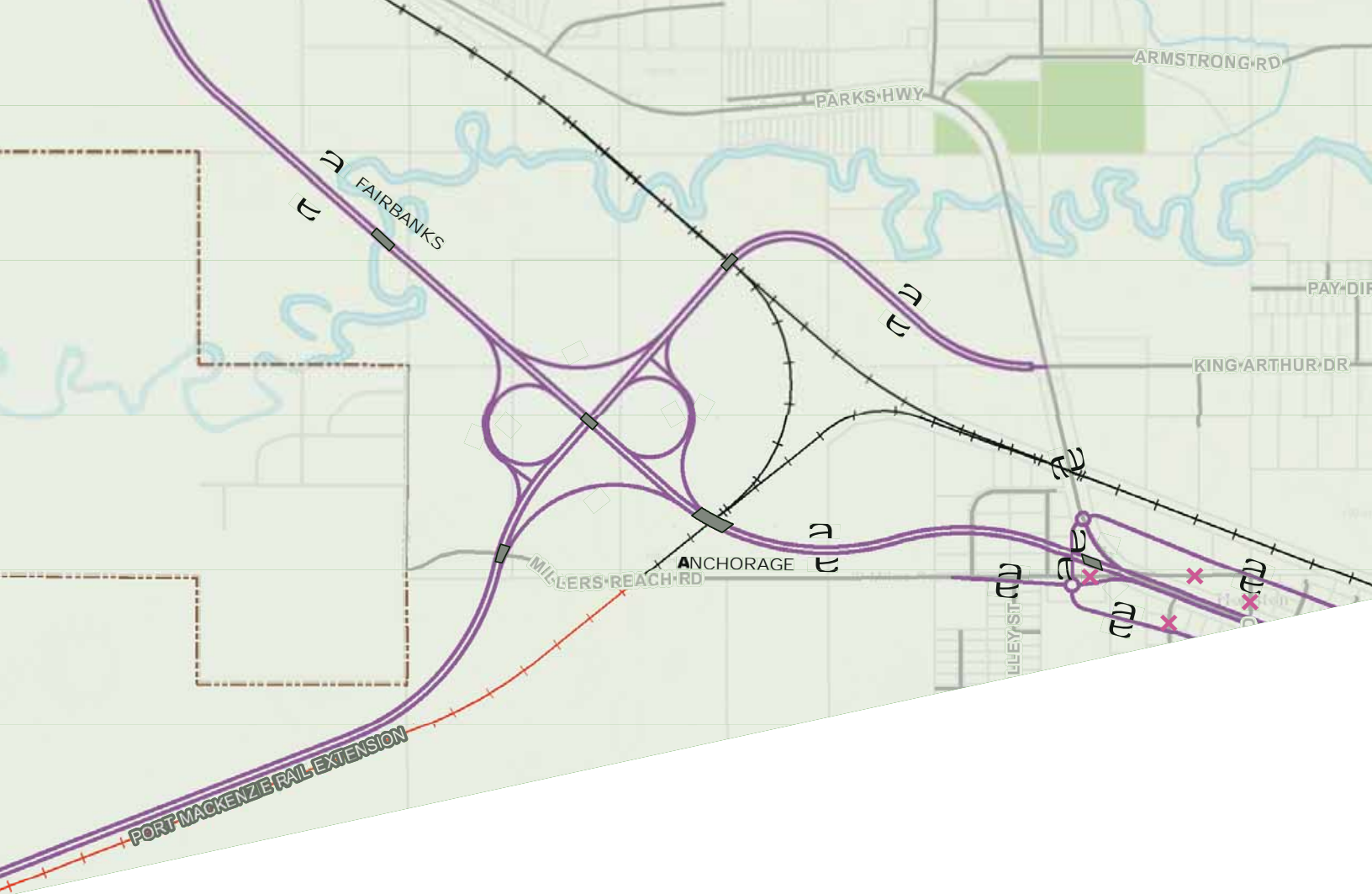
A Parks Highway bypass has been envisioning since at least the early 1980's. The bypass would occur between Mile 56 (approximate) and Mile 60, paralleling the Alaska Railroad tracks on the south or west side. This bypass would be integrated with the "Port-to-Parks" highway discussed later. A grade separated interchange would be constructed to facilitate uninterrupted traffic flow along the Parks Highway and (mostly) free flowing turning movements towards the Port and Town Center. Several bridges would be required to cross the railroad tracks, the Little Susitna River, and existing roadways. This recommended project will benefit the community as follows:

### TOWN CENTER DEVELOPMENT

Shifting higher-volume through traffic to the bypass will provide opportunities for a cohesive town center around major community assets, such as the Little Susitna River and existing businesses. However, relocating the highway away from existing businesses could have a negative impact in the form of fewer customers. This could be mitigated with signage directing travelers to the town center businesses, as well as strategic on/off ramps at the existing Parks Highway at either end of the bypass.

### EFFICIENT AND SAFE FREIGHT MOVEMENT

Through traffic traveling on the bypass would do so at a higher speed ( $\geq 55$  mph) without the inherent safety risks presented by multiple driveways/intersections. Also, depending on the final alignment of the bypass, up to three horizontal curves could be eliminated or flattened significantly.



## INTERCHANGE

With the construction of the “Port-to-Parks” highway, Houston will be the site of a major highway convergence. In order to provide safe and efficient access, a grade separated interchange is envisioned in the undeveloped land bordered by the Little Susitna River on the north, railroad tracks to the east and south, and the city boundary to the west.

A partial cloverleaf was initially selected, even though an eventual project will need to complete a detailed evaluation of available interchange types. The Parks Highway would be elevated, with bridges spanning new frontage roads near Millers Reach Road, the Port MacKenzie Rail Link, Little Susitna River, and the railroad mainline. Areas north of the railroad tracks would be linked to the interchange with a new road, including a grade separated railroad crossing.

Main access to the Parks Highway would be through the interchange, particularly for any traffic going south to Wasilla or beyond from the Houston Town Center area. Frontage roads and access management could be utilized at the south end of the bypass to consolidate and route access to and from the freeway. In addition, northbound ‘old’ Parks Highway travel would merge with the freeway at the north end of the bypass. Similarly, southbound freeway traffic would be allowed to exit onto the ‘old’ Parks Highway.

## CONGESTION MANAGEMENT

Future capacity issues north of Big Lake Road are documented in both the Borough's 2007 LRTP (Figure 4-3 & 4-4) and the draft CIA (Appendix C, Section 4). These future traffic projections are in part influenced by projects such as the Knik Arm Bridge and Wasilla Bypass Road. Should the anticipated increases in traffic prove to be correct (more than double by 2035), the Parks Highway will need to be upgraded to a 4-lane divided highway between Big Lake Road and the northern boundary of Houston (and beyond).

This recommended project will benefit the project as follows:

- Efficient and Safe Freight Movement

Reducing congestion by adding lanes reduces conflicts between (sometimes) slower moving trucks and faster moving cars. It also eliminates the need for passing vehicles to move into the opposing lane, increasing safety for all motorists. Finally, a divided highway, similar to what is currently being designed/constructed between Miles 44 and 52, has the potential to greatly reduce severe crashes, such as head-on collisions.

## ACCESS MANAGEMENT

Access management will likely become a growing concern as traffic volumes on the Parks Highway continue to increase. The Travel Demand Model (TDM) indicates that the majority of growth on the Parks Highway would be local to Houston, rather than being related to pass-through traffic continuing north toward Fairbanks. This suggests that there will be a higher percentage of turning traffic on and off the highway.

One method of accommodating this increase in turning traffic is to encourage turns at safe, logical locations throughout the corridor. This means limiting the number of intersections with the Parks Highway, and relocating trips to consolidated intersections through the use of parallel connections and frontage roads. Specifically, frontage roads are recommended in the existing commercial zone near Armstrong Road where linked parking lots currently operate as a de facto frontage road. A bypass, as discussed earlier, would also eliminate conflicts along this section of the Parks Highway.

If the traffic volumes do increase to the level indicated in the 2035 TDM, a 4-lane divided highway

would likely be necessary with access points at a minimum of half mile increments. It is recommended that the City of Houston plan for these access points, encouraging development patterns that would reduce the impact and cost of construction for a 4-lane divided highway.

The following access points to the Parks Highway have been identified for consolidation/rerouting or realignment:

1. W Larae Rd/Airola Dr: Align intersections
2. Corn St: Close Highway access and route to Hawk Ln or Delroy Rd
3. Debra Jean Ln: Close Highway access and route to Hawk Ln or Delroy Rd
4. N Dana Ct to Railroad undercrossing: Close Highway access and provide frontage roads connecting to the repurposed Parks Highway (after the construction of the bypass). Highway access would be via the interchange for northbound traffic and a series of intersections for southbound traffic.



Strategic access control is necessary to preserve efficient movement along the Parks Highway and reduce conflict points.



## PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS

In connection with the consolidation of turning traffic, consideration should also be made concerning the desired location for pedestrian crossings of the Parks Highway. As residential development continues to grow north of the Parks Highway, along King Arthur Road and Armstrong Road, commercial development is expected to increase adjacent to the highway. The major commercial developments currently are on the south side of the highway, and new commercial development is likely to expand out from this established location. This development creates a conflict as pedestrians make home based commercial trips which require crossing the Parks Highway.

Safer crossings could be encouraged through construction and proper maintenance of surrounding trail networks which would direct the flow of walking, biking, and motorized pedestrians to reduce speed areas of the Parks Highway or to access points that might be signalized in the future.

## FREIGHT AND INDUSTRY

It is a goal of the City of Houston to develop economically. Fostering this type of growth, especially industrial development, requires a solid transportation network for moving freight in and out of the industrial zones. The City of Houston has several tracts of Industry zoned land without all-weather roads for freight access. Following are major freight related recommendations.

### PORT TO PARKS

Also known as the “Port MacKenzie to Parks Highway Roadway Corridor”, the “Port to Parks” project seeks to construct a more direct highway link between the growing Port MacKenzie and the Parks Highway. Several routes have been studied in the past; including some with impacts to City of Houston lands. It is recommended that an alignment paralleling the north side of the newly constructed railroad link be selected. A “Port to Parks” road through the City of Houston would benefit the community as follows:

- Industrial Development

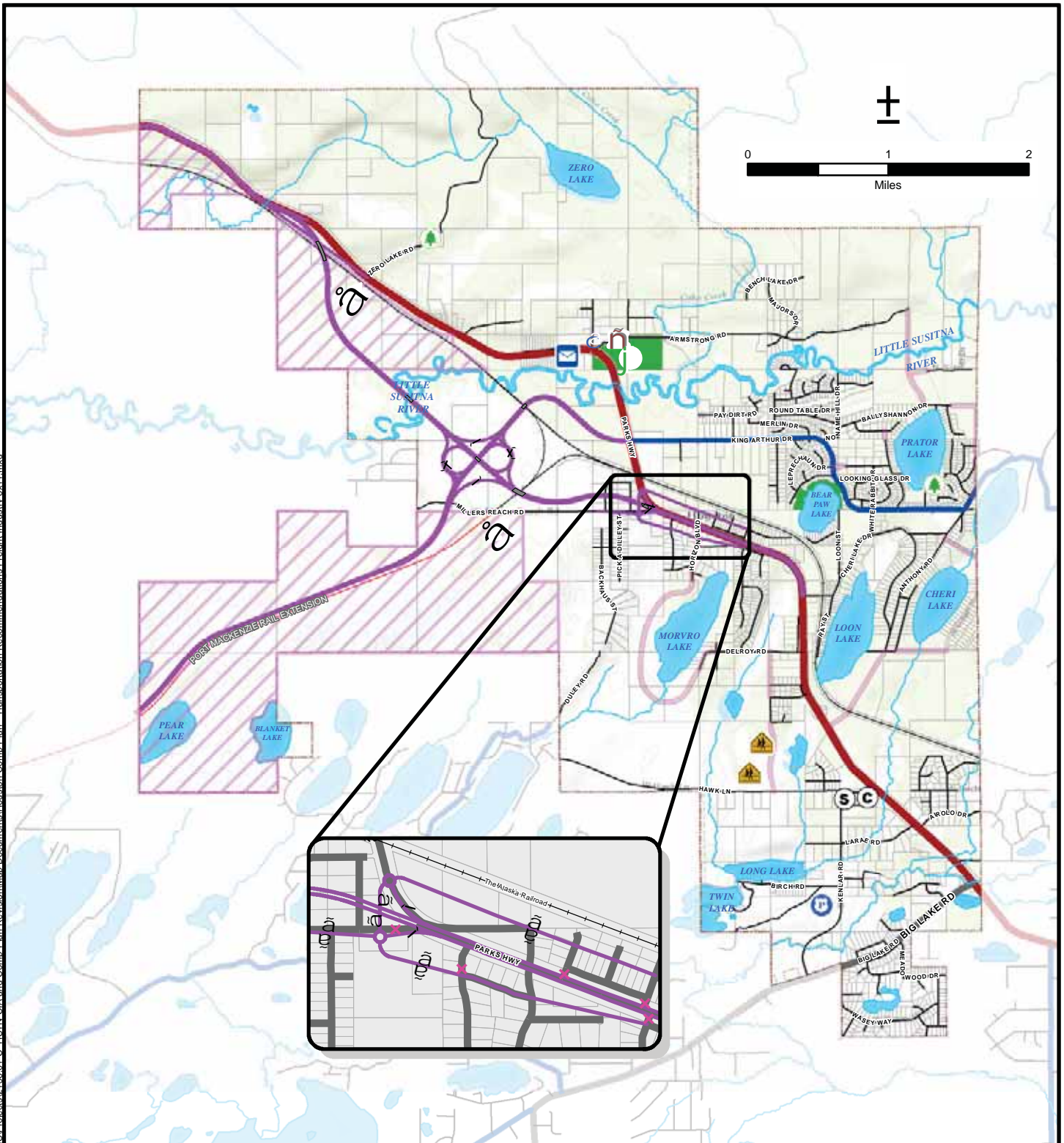
The recently annexed Knikatnu, Inc. land is zoned heavy industry, currently without surface access. A Port to Parks alignment paralleling the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension would provide flexible freight access to a portion of these lands, making it more attractive for businesses to invest. The utility grid will require upgrades to accommodate a growing industry. Providing road access to industrial areas is compatible with the City of Houston’s objectives to: foster employment opportunities and encourage regional commercial enterprises.

- Freight from Port to Interior Alaska

As operations at Port MacKenzie increase, so will the demand for multimodal access. The “Port to Parks” roadway provides an alternative to the railroad, which is preferred for smaller quantities of goods.

- Light Industry Access

Several tracts of land within the City of Houston’s boundary are zoned as “LI”, Light Industrial. The majority of this zoning district is not currently connected to the road system, particularly in the northwest portion of the City. In order to attract industrial development, roadways into these districts are recommended. This includes improvements to existing roadways, such as paving Miller’s Reach Road.



### LEGEND

City Boundary	<b>Roads</b>	Reroute Access to Bypass	Post Office
Parcels	Interstate	Light Industry Access	School
Park	Minor Arterial	Interchange Traffic Flow	Community Center
Industrial Zoning	Minor Collector	City Hall	Senior Center
Railroad	Local road	Public Safety	Recreational
Port MacKenzie Rail Extension (Partially Complete)	Proposed Bridge		
New to Road Connectors	Interchange and Port to Parks		

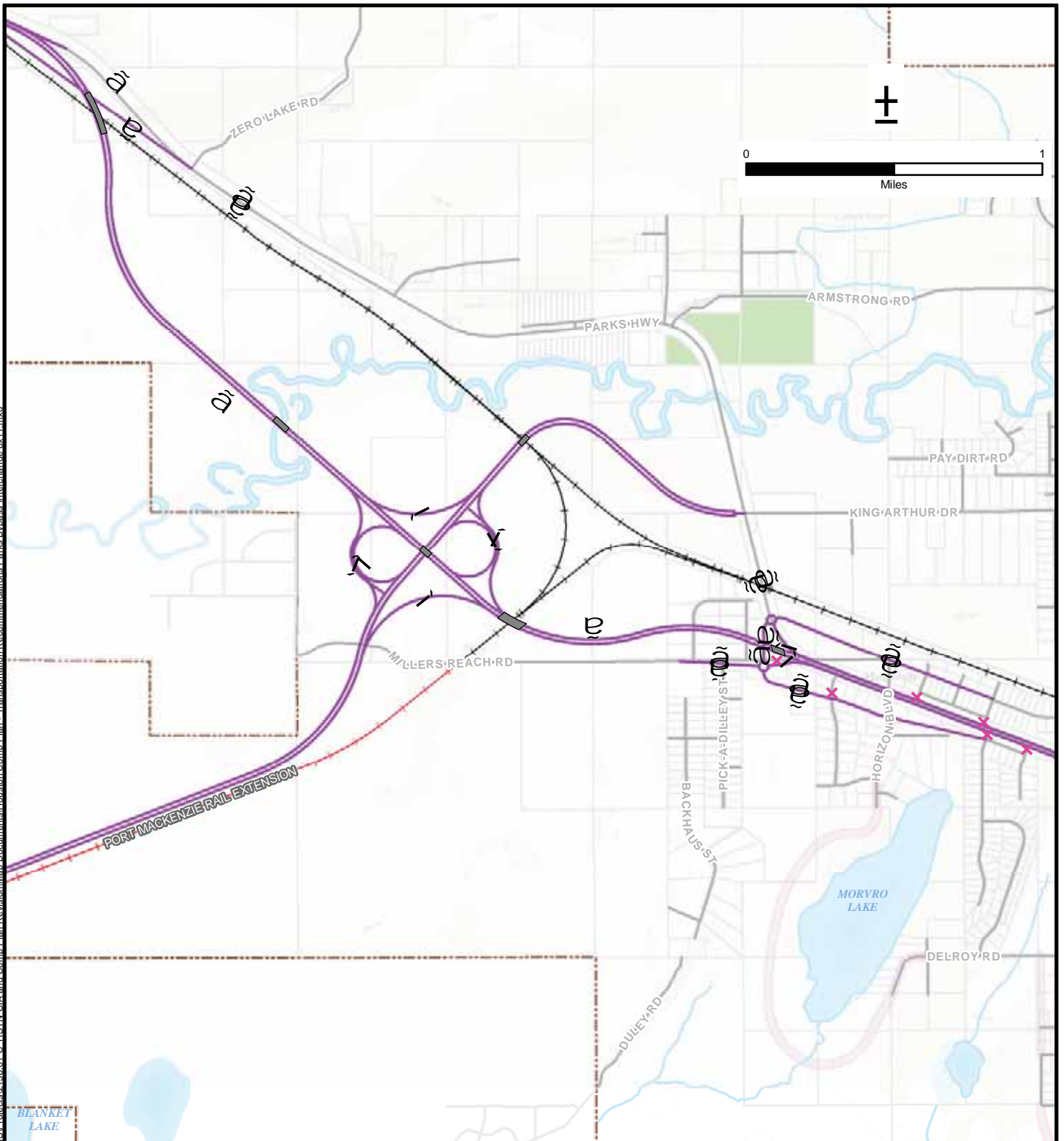
CITY OF HOUSTON

COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT  
AND  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION

RECOMMENDATIONS  
FREIGHT/INDUSTRY

JUNE 2016

FIGURE 17



**LEGEND**

- |  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
| City Boundary                                      | Proposed Bridge               |
| Parcels  | Interchange and Port to Parks |
| Railroad   | Interchange Traffic Flow      |
| Port MacKenzie Rail Extension (Partially Complete) |                               |

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RECOMMENDATIONS  
PARKS HIGHWAY  
BYPASS INTERCHANGE

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FIGURE 18



## LOCAL ROAD NETWORK

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If the Parks Highway is considered the backbone of Houston's transportation network, then the local road network makes up the remainder of the skeleton. Residents have identified a need to improve the local road network, from upgrading the surface to providing new connections. Following are recommendations pertaining to the local road network.

- Neighborhood Connectivity

Many of Houston's local roadways lack adequate connectivity, meaning they dead-end or terminate at a lower classification roadway, often leaving entire neighborhoods with only one ingress/egress. Not only is this problematic from an emergency response standpoint, but also tends to increase travel time and shifts traffic to lower classification roadways.

Recommended projects include:

1. West of Parks Highway: A secondary road link to the Beaver Lake area; access around the south side of Morvro Lake; and access to the Middle and High Schools from Delroy Road.
2. East of Parks Highway: Alternate Cheri Lake access; access to the east side of Cheri Lake; completion of a loop around Prator Lake; and a new bridge over the Little Susitna River to connect Armstrong Road to the Prator Lake area.

These projects are in alignment with the City's values, goals, and guidelines for growth as follows:

- Connectivity/Emergency Access  
The recommended projects provide alternate access for use during emergency situations as well as better circulation amidst the local road network (meaning less backtracking).
- Promote rural residential growth  
Providing new road connections opens up buildable lands for development, attracting people looking for the rural lifestyle.



## FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION

Current traffic volumes on roads outside the Parks Highway corridor are currently at the level of local roads regardless of their planned functional classification. Although several roads are currently classified as “Minor Collectors” by the Borough, they have not yet matured to the point where this function is critical to maintain. Volume projections indicate that in the future, a properly designed and well maintained collector road network will be essential.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- “Minor collector” road network in the City of Houston should be preserved.
- Property driveways should access local roads when possible instead of collector roads to accommodate possible future turn lanes.
- Local roads accessing on opposite sides of a collector should be aligned directly across from each other to eliminate offset intersections.
- Consideration should be made to possible future right-of-way needs around minor collectors in case these roads ever need to be widened for turn lanes or pathways, particularly in areas around intersections.
- The frontage road paralleling the Parks Highway near the commercial core is located on the south side, not the north side as shown on the Borough’s mapping.

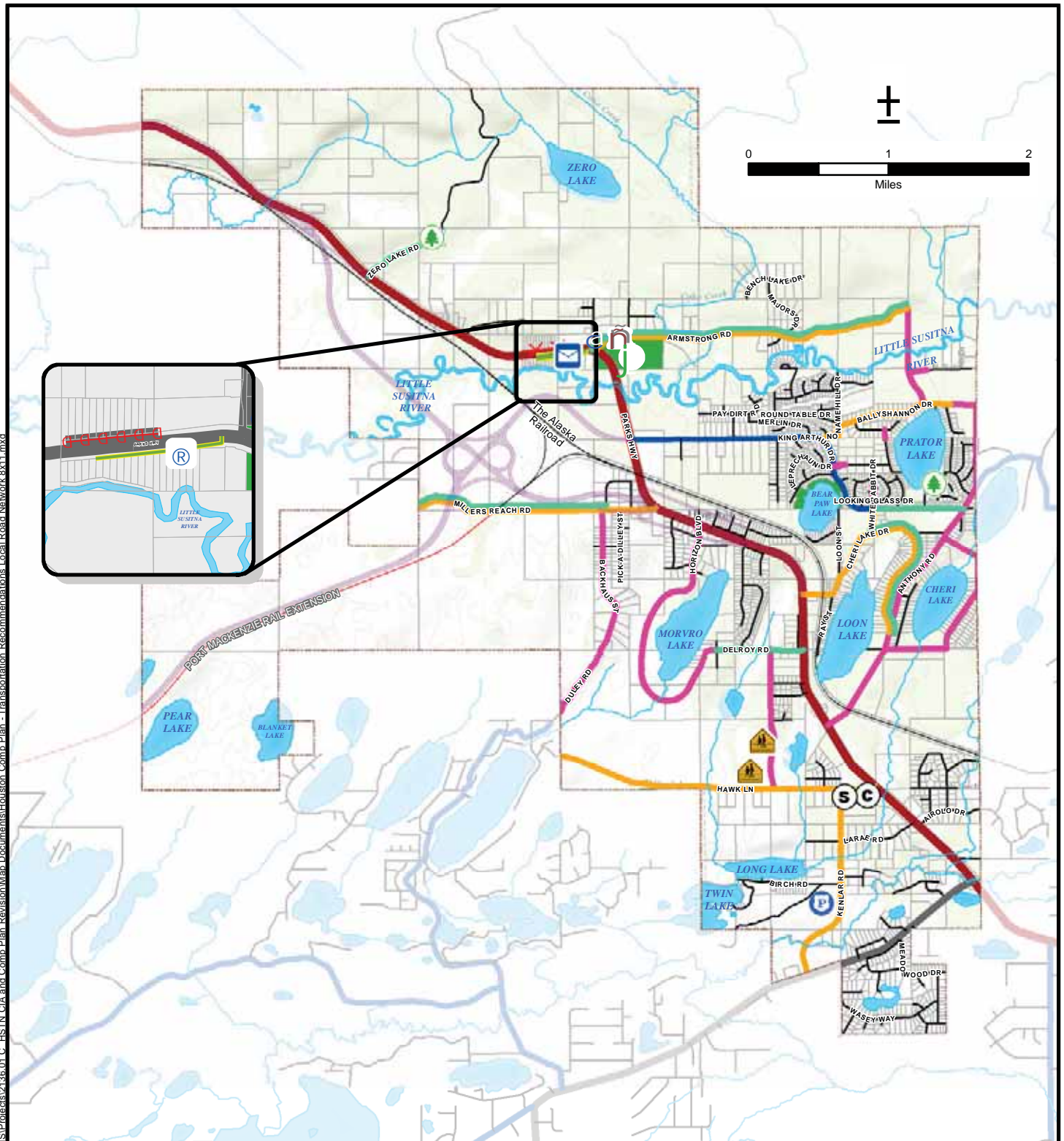
## ROAD SURFACE CONDITIONS

Only approximately 10% of Houston’s roadways feature a paved surface. Recent projects, such as upgrades to Hawk Lane, represent a move in the right direction to pave all collector roadways. It is recommended that existing collectors, as well as any proposed ones, receive a paved surface. This will benefit the community as follows:

- Quality of Life

Improving roadway conditions will allow for easier commutes, shift maintenance funds to other priorities, and possible raise home values. Roadside properties will enjoy the dust-free environment, adding to the enjoyment of outdoor activities.





### LEGEND

- |                 |  |                    |
|-----------------|--|--------------------|
| City Boundary   | Port MacKenzie Rail Extension (Partially Complete) | Mapping Error      |
| Parcels         | New/Upgrade to Road Connectors                     | Mapping Correction |
| Park            | Upgrade Classification to Minor Collector          | City Hall          |
| Roads           | Upgrade to Pavement                                | Public Safety      |
| Interstate      |  | Post Office        |
| Minor Arterial  |  | School             |
| Minor Collector |  |                    |
| Local road      |  |                    |
| Railroad        |  |                    |
|                 |  | Community Center   |
|                 |  | Senior Center      |
|                 |  | Recreational       |

CITY OF HOUSTON

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RECOMMENDATIONS  
LOCAL ROAD NETWORK

JUNE 2016

FIGURE 19



## NON-MOTORIZED USERS

Separated (paved) pathways exist along the Parks Highway and Big Lake Road. In addition, many less formal trails dot the landscape, used for hiking, cross country skiing, dog mushing, etc.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Existing (formal) pathways remain and additional pathways be constructed along Hawk Lane (between the Parks Highway and the Middle/High Schools). Hawk Lane pathway should eventually be extended from the school campus to Big Beaver Lake and connect with the Big Lake community trail system.
- Construct a formal pathway along Kenlar Road connecting the Hawk Lane pathway with the existing pathway adjacent to Big Lake Road.
- Construct a formal pathway along King Arthur Drive with connection to the existing pathway along the Parks Highway.
- Several segments of the Parks Highway feature a single pathway only. The missing links shall be constructed to provide continuous pathways on both sides along the entire Parks Highway, including the proposed bypass and the existing bridge over the Little Susitna River.

- A formal pathway along the Little Susitna River in the vicinity of the proposed Town Center would be a welcome addition for anyone wanting to use the recreation facilities.
- In all new construction and upgrade projects for interstate, arterial and collector roads, provision must be made to include adjacent pathways wherever feasible.

## OFF-ROAD VEHICLES (ATVS, SNOWMACHINES)

City of Houston Municipal Code allows for the operation of off-road vehicles, including ATVs and snow machines on City streets and rights-of-way. It is evident by the vast number of informal ATV trails that this mode of transportation is widely used.

This causes, however, several conflicts. First, informal trails have a tendency to migrate outside the ROW and onto private property. Secondly, repeated use during inclement weather can cause widespread rutting, which leads to unsightly roadside conditions. Lastly, uncontrolled trails can cause safety concerns at roadway intersections and create dust/visibility hazards.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Adopt a policy to incorporate off-road vehicle facilities including stabilized shoulders, flat-bottom gravel surfaced ditches, trail/road intersection considerations in the construction/ reconstruction of roadways within the City boundaries.

- Another alternative would be to provide designated ATV trails between major ATV destinations, such as frequently visited lakes.

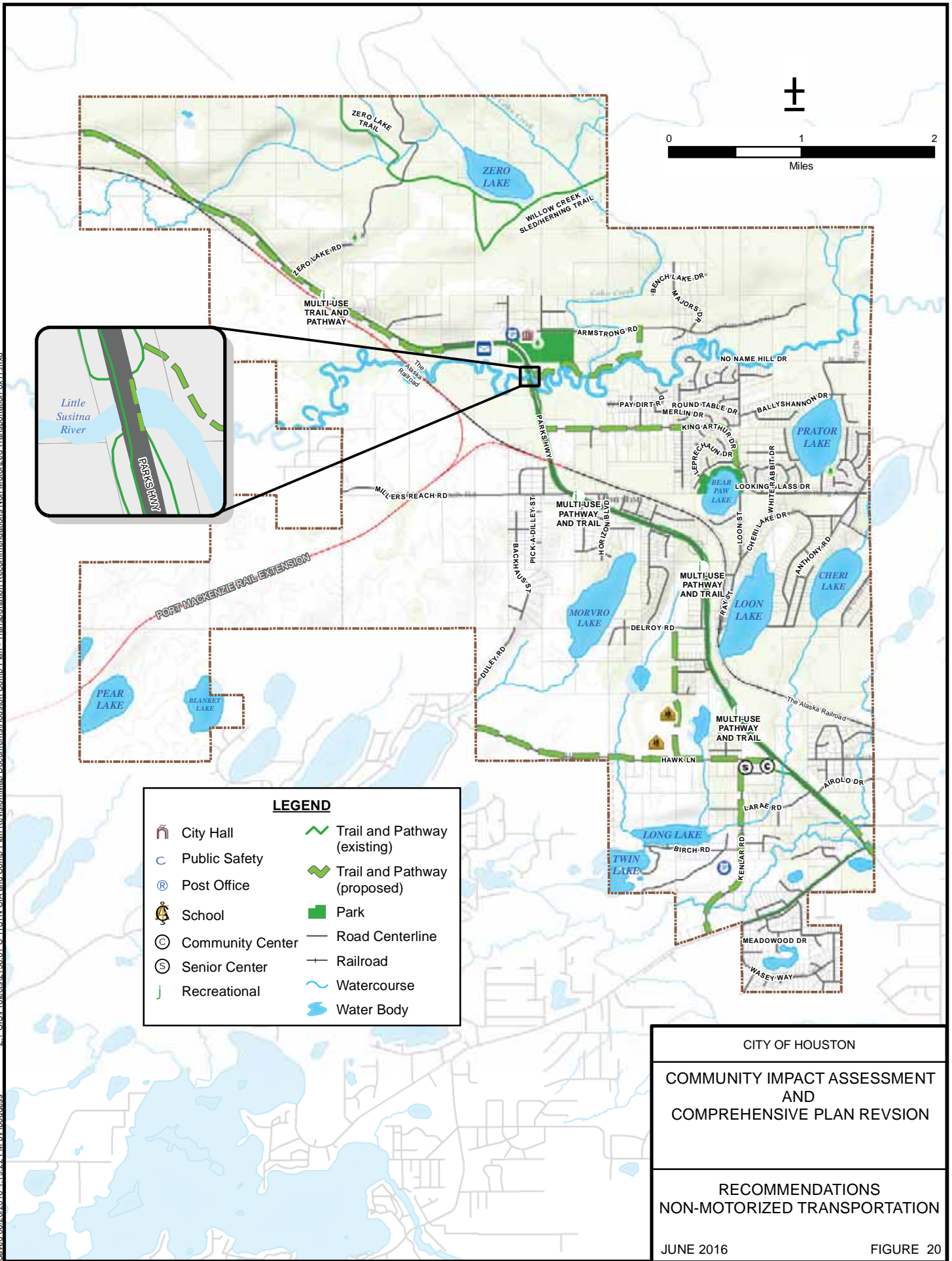
## PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Existing bus service extends into Houston only near the southern boundary.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

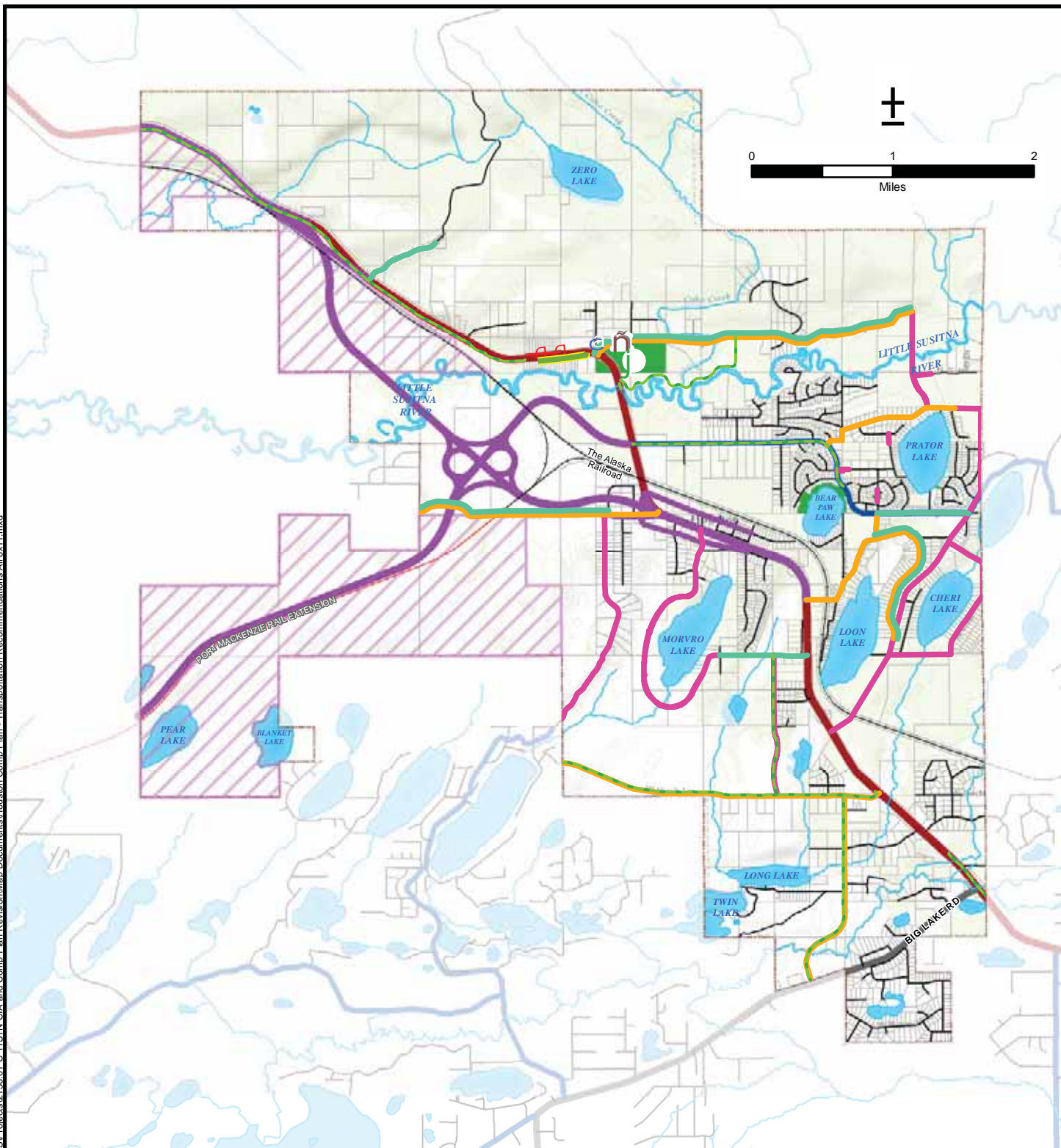
- Expand the bus service to other parts of Houston could be included in this plan should the community agree to a need.
- Consider the Senior Center on Hawk Lane as a potential candidate for future bus service.
- Site a formal, city owned Park-and-Ride lot for folks wanting to use the bus or carpool to commute to Wasilla or Anchorage.











### LEGEND

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: green; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Park  | <b>Roads</b>   | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; border-bottom: 2px solid magenta;"></span> New/Upgrade to Road Connectors           |
| <span style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; height: 10px; background: repeating-linear-gradient(45deg, transparent, transparent 2px, magenta 2px, magenta 4px); border: 1px solid magenta;"></span> Industrial Zoning  | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; border-bottom: 3px solid red;"></span> Interstate       | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; border-bottom: 2px solid orange;"></span> Upgrade Classification to Minor Collector |
| <span style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; border-bottom: 2px solid black;"></span> Railroad  | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; border-bottom: 2px solid gray;"></span> Minor Arterial  | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; border-bottom: 2px solid green;"></span> Upgrade to Pavement                        |
| <span style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; border-bottom: 2px solid red; position: relative;"><span style="position: absolute; left: -5px; top: -5px; width: 0; height: 0; border-left: 5px solid transparent; border-right: 5px solid transparent; border-bottom: 10px solid red;"></span></span> Port MacKenzie Rail Extension (Partially Complete) | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; border-bottom: 2px solid blue;"></span> Minor Collector | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; border-bottom: 2px dashed red;"></span> Mapping Error                               |
| <span style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; border-bottom: 2px solid purple;"></span> Interchange and Port to Parks  | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; border-bottom: 2px solid black;"></span> Local road     | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; border-bottom: 2px solid green;"></span> Mapping Correction                         |
|   |  | <span style="display: inline-block; width: 20px; border-bottom: 2px dashed green;"></span> Trail and Pathway (proposed)              |

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TRANSPORTATION NETWORK  
RECOMMENDATIONS

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FIGURE 21

# 85

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HOUSTON  
Comprehensive Plan





# CHAPTER 8: IMPLEMENTATION

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## OVERVIEW

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The following implementation section describes the steps necessary to actualize the preferred alternative identified in this Comprehensive Plan. Implementation mechanisms for the Comprehensive Plan include regulatory controls, such as zoning, platting, and development standards from Title 10 Land Use Regulations and functional plans, such as the MSB Long Range Transportation Plan.

Timeframes are approximate and based on the information, knowledge and priorities of the Community and the City's ability to acquire funding over the 20 year horizon. As priorities change or funding becomes available, priorities may shift and change timeframes and should be reevaluated in response to changes in economic conditions, permit and regulatory requirements, and statewide economic climate.





## COMMUNITY DESIGN STANDARDS

The community's desire for a more attractive built environment that is also compatible with a semi-rural and rural lifestyle and limited regulations should be balanced with broad design standards in the following areas:

- Streets and roadways;
- Landscaping;
- Public Facilities; and
- Residential development.

## REGULATORY CONTROLS - TITLE 10 LAND USE REGULATIONS

The Comprehensive Plan will be implemented through site development standards as set forth in zoning and land use regulations in City of Houston's Municipal Code, Title 10.

## FUNDING STRATEGIES

Funding development of park and recreation facilities can be challenging, especially with projected budget shortfalls identified for the State of Alaska and its communities beginning in 2016. National, state, local, public, and private funding sources are likely to be required to advance the implementation of this Comprehensive Plan. Funding sources available to implement these elements of this Comprehensive Plan are anticipated to be: Public-Private Partnerships, state and federal grants for community and transportation projects, city budget, and Capital Improvements Programs.

## CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (CIP)

The City of Houston and the Mat-Su Borough uses the Capital Improvement Program as an essential planning and budgeting instrument to identify desired public facilities and capital improvements over a six year cycle. Annual Capital Improvement

Program priorities provide funding, cost and time frames for identified projects and are a useful mechanism to ensure long-term investment for a variety of project scales and types that can be funded by State grants.

## ALASKA STATEWIDE TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (STIP)

The STIP is the state's four-year program for transportation system preservation and development. Interstate, state and some local highways, bridges, and public transportation are eligible to be included in the STIP. It covers all system improvements for which partial or full federal funding is approved. The City of Houston and the Mat-Su Borough use the STIP for planning and coordination with ADOT&PF, especially for changes to the Parks Highway.

## PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS (3P)

Implementation of the Houston Comprehensive Plan may require funding from non-governmental funding sources, or with assistance from volunteers, grants, or other programs and partnerships. Significant community development initiatives can be made possible by building local support in collaboration with community partners, such as tribal organizations with access to funding for development of transportation infrastructure and economic development through factories and assembly facilities that can employ local residents. Funding for parks, trails and

## ADDITIONAL FUNDING SOURCES:

recreation tourism can be through the project nomination level with the Mat-Su Trails and Parks Foundation.

### FEDERAL FUNDING

National programs for improving communities through non-motorized infrastructure improvements exist and may provide funding opportunities for components of the Comprehensive Plan.

### BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS (BIA)

Where opportunities arise, federal BIA funding for roadways on tribal lands should be explored to provide improvements that will be mutually beneficial to the City of Houston and to tribal entities as well as provide economic expansion through local employment.

### FHWA

The Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act signed into law in December 2015 includes the consolidation of the Surface Transportation Program and Transportation Alternatives Program into a single, Surface Transportation Program Block Grant, increasing flexibility for state and local governments to administer funds. Details about how the Block Grant Program will be administered in Alaska are not yet available, but funds are likely to be made available for a variety of projects based on previous allocations of federal funds by the State.





# IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

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## IMMEDIATE TIME FRAME (0-6 MONTHS)

Priority	Action Item	Proposed Implementers
1	Plan Adoption	Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC), City Council, COH Staff
2	Initiate Parks Highway Corridor Plan MP 52-62	DOT&PF, City of Houston, City Council
3	Coordinate an updated Zoning Map with MSB.	COH, PZC, MSB.
4	Review and develop Marijuana Business policies for consideration in appropriate zoning districts for economic development and commercial business diversity.	COH, PZC, City Council.

## SHORT TERM (1-5 YEARS)

Priority	Action Item	Proposed Implementers
1	Rezone areawide for implementation of Comprehensive Plan policies and to correct inconsistent zoning districts.	COH, PZC, City Council
2	Update Title 10 Land Use Regulations to reflect Adopted Plan.	COH, PZC, City Council
3	Update Title 10 Land Use Regulations to include design standards for landscaping and setbacks.	COH, PZC, City Council
4	Develop an Overlay District for the Town Center/Civic Center to encourage development of small shops, restaurants, art galleries, and a Riverwalk adjacent to the Little Susitna River.	COH, PZC, City Council, Houston Chamber of Commerce.
5	Explore BIA funding for road improvements on tribal lands for pilot projects.	COH, City Council, PZC, Knikatnu, Inc.
6	Determine the feasibility of developing a LED Assembly factory in Houston.	COH, City Council, PZC, Knikatnu, Inc.
7	Explore the feasibility of a Natural Gas Power Plant in Houston to support railbelt energy distribution.	COH, City Council, Houston Chamber of Commerce, MSB.
8	Market and brand Houston as a summer and winter recreation destination through brochures and trails maps.	COH, Houston Chamber of Commerce, MSB Convention and Visitor's Bureau, Mat-Su Trails and Parks Foundation.
9	Explore the feasibility of an Improvement District to fund the expansion of utilities to jumpstart growth.	COH, City Council, MSB.
10	Determine the feasibility of a wastewater treatment facility in Houston.	COH, MSB.
11	Continue fish restoration projects on the Little Susitna River for return of salmon to improve riparian ecology and to provide recreational benefits.	COH, Knik Tribal Council, Community Groups and Volunteers.
12	Explore partnerships to encourage Industrial Greenhouses as a source of local food and economic development.	COH, City Council, Houston Chamber of Commerce, MSB.
13	During development, ensure the trail system is preserved by obtaining trail easements where possible.	COH, MSB.

## MID-RANGE (5-10 YEARS)

Priority	Action Item	Proposed Implementers
1	Prepare a small area plan for a Riverwalk in the Town Center at City Hall and Little Susitna Campground.	COH, PZC, City Council
2	Evaluate the feasibility of intermodal transfer facility at new ARRC extension	COH, ARRC, City Council
3	Evaluate the feasibility of a Parks Highway Bypass corridor through a highway engineering design study project to implement the transportation element.	COH, DOT, MSB.
4	Develop a marketing plan to attract a Grocery Store chain to Houston.	COH, City Council, Houston Chamber of Commerce.
5	Prepare a site selection for a new elementary school to ensure that adequate land is set aside in an appropriate location for future anticipated school enrollment projections.	COH, MSB School District, MSB, PZC, City Council.

## LONG-RANGE (10-20 YEARS)

Priority	Action	Proposed Implementers
1	Evaluate the feasibility and funding of a Port to Parks roadway corridor parallel to the new ARRC extension.	COH, DOT&PF, MSB
2	Reevaluate the Comprehensive Plan at the 10 year mark or when a new Census is available to ensure Planning Assumptions are still relevant.	COH, PZC, City Council, MSB
3	Determine the feasibility of material sites of gravel or other mining/mineral resources to support the construction industry and boost economic development.	COH, City Council, Houston Chamber of Commerce, MSB.



## APPENDICES

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Appendix A. Existing Conditions Report

Appendix B. Public Involvement Summary

Appendix C. Houston Household Opinion Survey Report

Appendix D. Community Impact Assessment and Appendices

Appendix E. Land Use Assessment