

An aerial photograph of a winter park scene. In the upper right, a modern building with large windows and a flat roof is visible. A river flows along the top left edge. The park is filled with snow-covered evergreen and deciduous trees. Some trees are decorated with yellow lights. In the lower right, two people are walking on a path. In the center, a reindeer is visible. The overall atmosphere is festive and serene.

# Soldotna Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan

City of Soldotna, Alaska

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

### CITY STAFF/ADMINISTRATION

Janette Bower, City Manager  
Stephanie Queen, former City Manager  
Laura Rhyner, Assistant to the City Manager  
Jennifer Hester, Associate Planner  
Kyle Kornelis, Public Works Director  
Joel Todd, Parks Director  
Melanie Imholte, Finance Director  
John Czarnezki, Director of Economic Development + Planning

### MAYOR/COUNCIL

Paul Whitney, Mayor  
Linda F. Hutchings, Council Member  
Dan Nelson, Council Member  
Jordan Chilson, Council Member  
Dave Carey, Council Member  
Lisa Parker, Council Member  
Chera Wackler, Council Member  
Justin Ruffridge, Council Member\*  
Tyson Cox, Council Member\*  
Tim Cashman, Council Member\*  
Dr. Nels Anderson\*\*

\*Former Council Member

\*\*Former Mayor

### PLANNING COMMISSION

Kaitlin Vadla, Chair  
Charlene Tautfest, Vice Chair  
Jenny Smithwick Aley  
Thomas Anderson  
Mark D. Burton  
Dennis Murray  
Sonja Barbaza\*

\*Former Commissioner

### RIVERFRONT REDEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Tim Dillon  
Steve Manley  
Chris Parker  
Dale Dolifka  
Jenny Smithwick Aley  
Jim Butler  
Joel Todd  
Maddy Olsen  
Shanon Davis  
Robert Ruffner

### STAKEHOLDERS and PROPERTY OWNERS

Bernie Lewis	Caitlin Coreson
Chuck Kim	Cassidi Cameron
Val, Peter, and Phil Ischi	George Swift
Gary Hinkle	Carol Fraser
Rob Nash	David & Linda Hutchings
Michael Heard	Doug Hogue
Mike Frost	Pamela Parker
Kristina Bucholz	Philip Walker
Kelsey Shields	Willow King
Jenny Neyman	Ana Scollon
Mitch Michaud	Cliff Cochran
Melodie Allen	Chris Beck
Annette Villa	Monique Burgin
Megan Weston	Kim Sparacio
Doug Klegg	Bruce Richards
Kirra Kviteng	Bill & Elaine Howell
Kristina Buchholz	Joe Rizzo

Prepared for the City of Soldotna, Alaska by  
First Forty Feet in partnership with:

### City of Soldotna primary contact:



John Czarnezki, Director of  
Economic Development and  
Planning  
jczarnezki@soldotna.org

### First Forty Feet contacts:

Jason Graf, ASLA Principal  
James Brackenhoff, AIA Principal  
Cindy Trivisonno, Project Coordinator  
Mitchell Scherer, Associate

ECONorthwest  
Greenworks Landscape Architects  
Kinney Engineering  
Shannon & Wilson

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# PREFACE

## Introduction

The City of Soldotna, Alaska, is situated on the western Kenai Peninsula, approximately 60 air miles south of Anchorage. Soldotna encompasses 7.4 square miles and has an estimated population of 4,449. As the regional hub of the central peninsula, Soldotna serves an area of about 30,000 people. The City aims to work with land and business owners, residents, and community partners to redevelop an 85-acre portion of downtown, adjacent to the world-renowned Kenai River. This area comprises a mix of auto-oriented businesses along the bustling Sterling Highway, along with underutilized and undeveloped properties adjacent to the river. The project area stretches about eight-tenths of a mile along the Sterling Highway, lying between the highway and the river.

First Forty Feet (FFF) along with their team of development strategists, transportation and civil engineers, environmental scientists, and landscape architects (the team) was selected by the City of Soldotna (COS), to prepare a redevelopment plan for the 85-acre commercial corridor (project area) between the Sterling Highway and the Kenai River.

The project process involved identifying community values, gathering feedback on iterative planning and design concepts, and implementing strategies over nearly fifteen months of community engagement. The process identified market-viable development, placemaking strategies, and design for riverfront access and open spaces. The project included extensive land use planning, traffic, street, and parking design, environmental analysis, capital investments, and other professional services.

## PLAN PURPOSE

In the coming years developers, City officials, professionals working on the built environment, local residents, and community groups will contribute to bring the downtown project area to life. This document, acts as an official reference for everyone involved to understand the objectives, guiding principles and vision of the Plan. The Plan acknowledges things will change and can be fluid over the lifespan of the plan, therefore this document is a guide and not a strict path. It sets out a framework for land uses, infrastructure, streets design, programming and conceptual plans for open spaces that establish a one-of-a kind downtown riverfront destination.



Fig. 1: Project Area Context-Kenai Peninsula

The development strategy provides an Implementation Plan of initial and catalytic projects, as well as priority actions to be implemented in phases. These initiatives are designed to stimulate development and set in motion a trajectory that aligns with the vision articulated in the Plan. The Plan is a roadmap to navigate redevelopment complexities, foster collaboration, and realize the full potential of the envisioned downtown riverfront district.



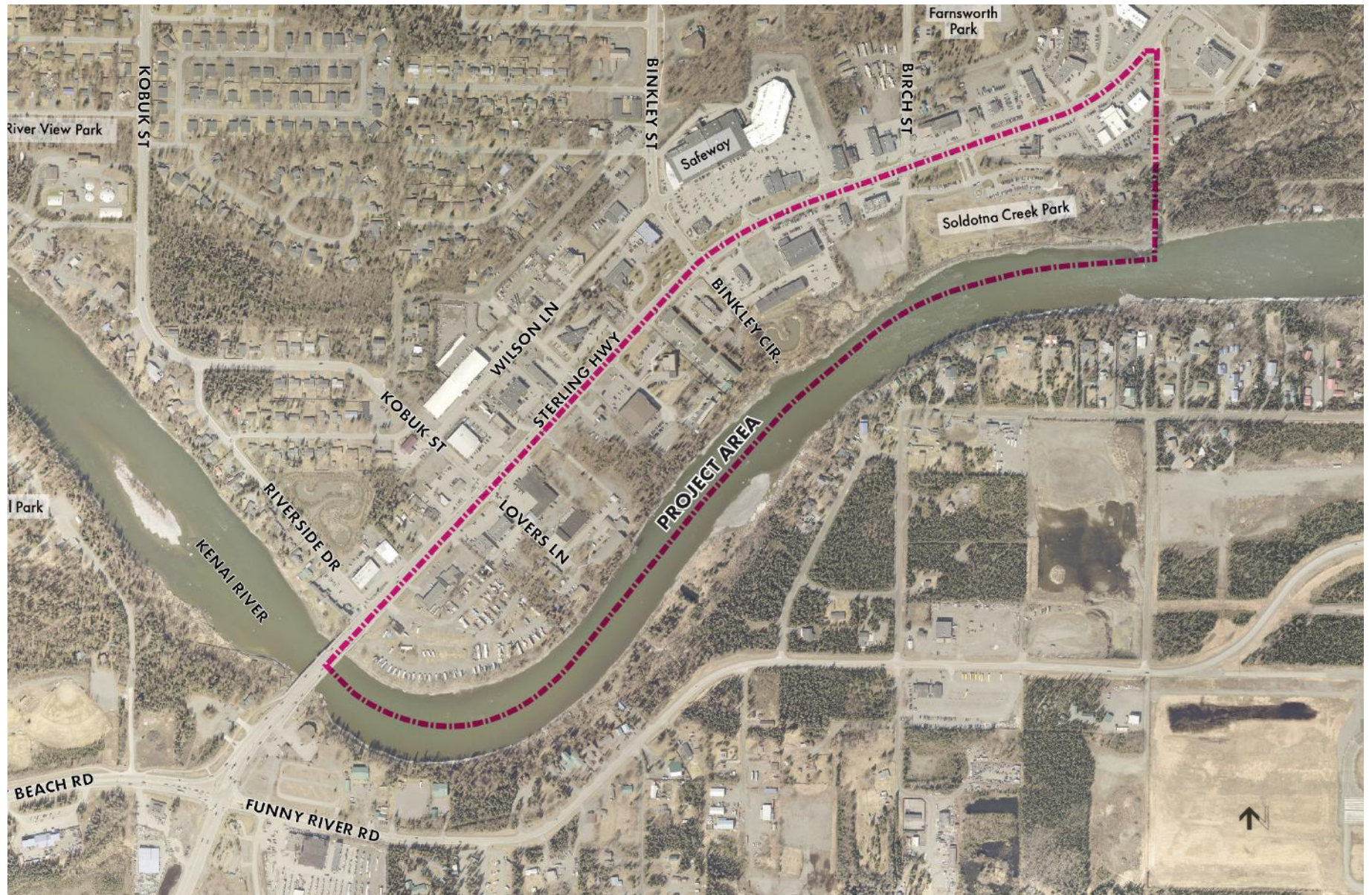


Fig. 2: Project Area



## PROJECT PROCESS AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The City of Soldotna is a partner with the community, organizations, agencies and the private sector to bring new investment to the project area and to ensure new development provides benefits and opportunities to residents, businesses, and visitors alike.



Credit: Peninsula Clarion

Fig. 3: Community-wide Open House #1- Display Boards



# Project Process

## Project Initiation: Set the Game Plan

During the initiation phase, the project focused on connecting with City leadership, stakeholders, a project advisory committee, and the public. This involved defining the project scope, examining background information, and evaluating the area's physical, economic, and regulatory factors that impact downtown redevelopment. Through individual meetings and a community workshop, a vision and guiding principles were identified and confirmed to align with and support the project objectives.

## Build the Vision: Identify the Possibilities

Directed by City staff with guidance from the City Council, the project team crafted scenarios for land use, circulation, and infrastructure. These scenarios included two riverfront-focused development options and context-specific circulation enhancements that reflect community-supported land uses and improved accessibility. The evaluation of scenarios considered the project objectives and technical analysis findings on feasibility, traffic, mobility, environmental conditions, and utilities infrastructure.

## Plan for Success: Create the Road Map

Shaped by community input, the riverfront redevelopment plan reflects shared community values. The development strategy outlines projects, priorities, costs, and financial approaches. Policy and regulatory recommendations ensure projects align with community goals. An action plan details the schedule, roles, and responsibilities for plan implementation across the near, medium, and long-term.

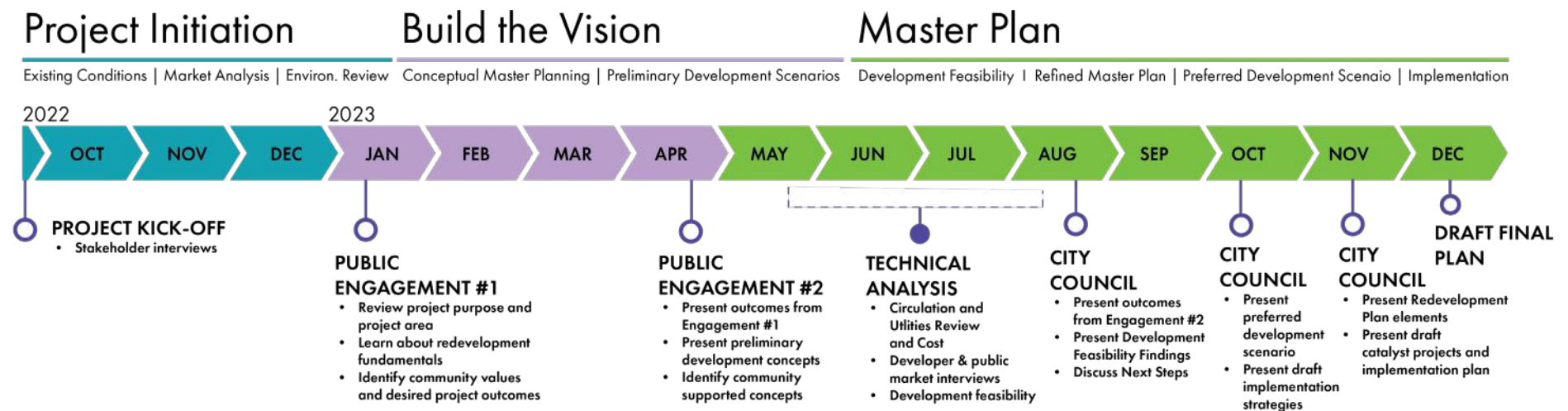


Fig. 4: Project Process and Timeline

## Public Engagement

Public input informed the Soldotna Riverfront Redevelopment Project's master plan process which helped decision-makers shape the project to meet the needs of the community it serves. The results of which informed the development of conceptual plans, created a path for input and communication, and provided the planning team with local insight.

The project team and City staff facilitated engagement with the community and affected stakeholders within the project area. The engagement process included in-person one-on-one meetings, group sessions, work

sessions, and large-format community meetings. Public feedback was gathered through direct conversations, surveys, and comment forms available online via the project website, [www.soldotnariverfront.org](http://www.soldotnariverfront.org), and during in-person engagements.

### Project Outreach

Outreach included a project website that offered an overview of the project area, its purpose, and timeline. Online surveys provided opportunities to gather feedback, identifying the community's vision for future redevelopment and preferences

for preliminary design concepts. The City utilized both the City and project website, a 180 person email subscriber list, social media, and local media outlets for project communication.

### Engagement Sessions

#### Community-wide Workshops

Two engagement milestones provided opportunities to gather stakeholder and community perspectives, informing the project vision, guiding principles, and preferences for conceptual mobility and land use development scenarios.



Fig. 5: Project Advisory Committee Meeting

### **Engagement Milestone #1: Goals and Objectives**

– Introduced the project purpose, objectives and summary of opportunities and challenges for the Project area, gathered community feedback on Project area-specific challenges and opportunities, and desires for future uses, river access, and street improvements. Engagement findings were used to prepare the project vision and guiding principles that served as a touchstone for conceptual planning.

### **Engagement Milestone #2: Conceptual**

Planning – Developed and presented the project vision, guiding principles, and a range of preliminary land use, public gathering, and circulation concepts. Community feedback confirmed the vision and guiding principles, and preferences for the preliminary concepts and development scenarios to be further refined.

### **Affected Stakeholder Meetings**

Individual meetings were conducted with property owners and business owners within the project area. These meetings took place throughout the project to share information, gather feedback on existing or future plans, and discuss redevelopment opportunities.

### **City Council Work Sessions**

Five work sessions with the City Council took place at key project milestones, including the project initiation, review of preliminary concepts, findings of the development feasibility analysis, preferred land use and circulation concepts, and the review of plan elements and development strategies.

### **Project Advisory Committee Meetings**

The project utilized a project advisory committee consisting of members representing property ownership, businesses in the project area, those involved in

downtown business, outdoor recreation, tourist advocacy organizations/groups, as well as others interested in downtown redevelopment. Three advisory committee meetings were convened and aligned with key project milestones, covering 1) the project initiation, 2) review of preliminary concepts, findings of the development feasibility analysis, and 3) preferred land use and circulation concepts.



Fig. 6: Community Open House #1- Community Discussion



## HOW ENGAGEMENT INFLUENCED THE PLAN

The Project's engagement plan was crafted to involve those who are affected by the planning effort to play a role in plan development and in the decision-making process.

The two engagement milestones provided the community with the opportunity to inform the Project vision and guiding principles and shape the "big ideas" related to creating a one-of-a-kind downtown destination, promoting downtown as an enjoyable place for walking and biking and making the

Kenai River an integral part of Soldotna's downtown. Refer to Appendix D: Community Engagement for engagement materials and results.

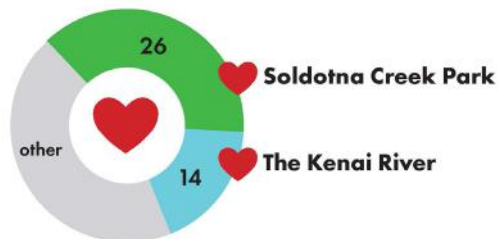
### Informing the Vision and Guiding Principles

During the **Engagement Milestone #1 Workshop** the community interacted through polling and a series of interactive questions to gather input on area-specific challenges and opportunities, desires for future uses, river access, and street improvements.

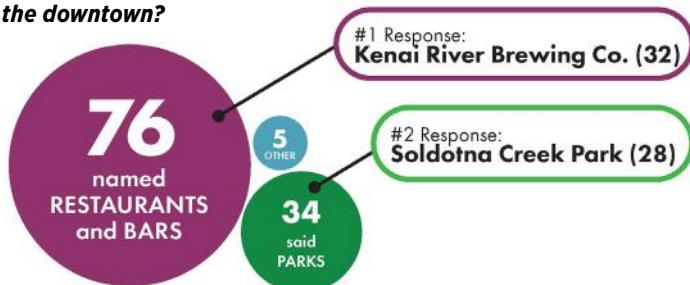
Engagement was structured to gather information about:

- **Community identity**, to understand what people value in Soldotna.
- **Sense of place**, to identify where people go to meet friends and family or be a part of the downtown area.
- **Being connected**, to learn how people travel to and from the downtown and riverfront and to learn the level of interest in making the downtown more walk and bike friendly.

Where is the **heart of Soldotna**?



Where do you like to **meet family and friends in the downtown**?



What are you **most proud of about Soldotna**?

TOP RESPONSES:



RESPONSES BY CATEGORY:



Fig. 7: What We Heard: **Identity**



## What We Heard!

### IDENTITY

*Nature* is a defining element of the community with Soldotna Creek Park and the Kenai River representing the heart of the city.

*Gathering* is highly desirable as reflected in the number of times people referenced meeting friends and family to dine, drink and visit the park.

*Quality of Life* is represented by living in

What would you like to see in the downtown and riverfront area?



Rank the most desirable downtown experiences?



Fig. 8: What We Heard: **Place**

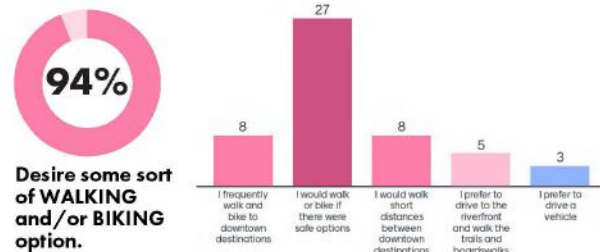
nature, supporting local businesses and an openness to investments that preserve and enhances these qualities.

### PLACE

*A Mix of Uses* is important to support local culture, dining, shopping, entertainment and gathering.

*A Walkable Main Street* is desired to serve as a one-of-a-kind downtown destination with a concentration of activities and places.

How desirable is walking and biking to downtown and riverfront destinations?



What are safety, access and visual **challenges along Sterling Highway** (Rate 0-10)

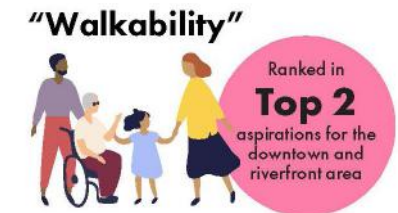
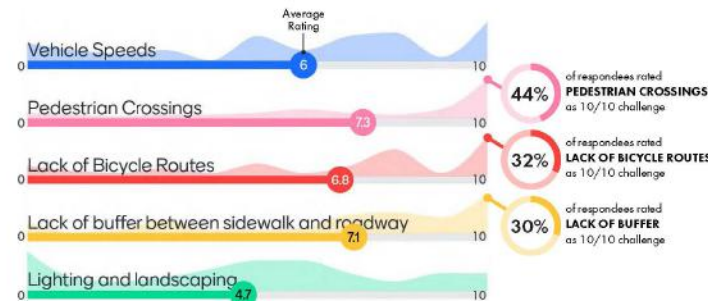


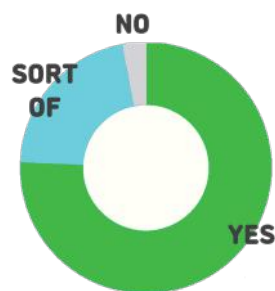
Fig. 9: What We Heard: **Connected**

## Shaping the "Big Ideas"

During the **Engagement Milestone #2 Workshop and a Project Advisory Committee Meeting**, the community and committee members were presented with the Project's vision, more detail and refinement of the "Big Ideas" (public gathering, and circulation concepts), and development scenarios for creating a "Main Street" or "River Street" shopping, dining and entertainment destination. Polling and interactive questions were structured to gather community feedback as follows:

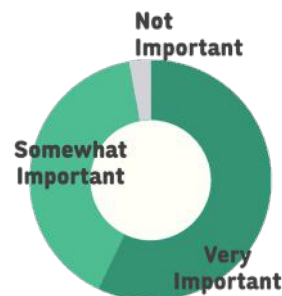
- **Vision**, confirmation of the integration of nature and gathering with redevelopment.
- **"Bookend" public gathering**, identify how important riverfront public plazas are at each end of the project area.

Does the **Vision** capture community values around nature + gathering?



- **Riverfront trail**, learn if the project should continue to pursue the continuous riverfront and Sterling Highway trails.
- **Public market hall**, this idea was introduced as a way to promote year-round activity at the park and a way to promote small local businesses. The community was asked to identify if this would be a valuable community asset on the riverfront.
- **Key pathways**, identify if Riverside, Kobuk, Binkley and Birch Streets, (which are important connections between neighborhoods, and key destinations such as schools, the hospital and the Sterling Highway corridor) should extend to the riverfront.
- **"Big ideas"**, how would the community rank the "Big Ideas" with 1 being the best.

How important are the **"Bookend" public plazas** within the project area?



## What We Heard!

### VISION

*The Vision* of redevelopment playing a role in integrating nature and gathering was confirmed. Approximately 97% of survey respondents indicated that the vision captured community values. Only 3% indicated that the vision was inadequate.

### "BOOKEND" PUBLIC GATHERING

*The Bridgehead Plaza and Soldotna Creek Park Plaza* were confirmed as important public amenities to strengthen the use and function of Soldotna Creek Park and as an amenity and public gathering space at the bridgehead.

### RIVERFRONT TRAIL

*The riverfront trail* and connecting trails

Should the project continue to pursue a new **riverfront trail to connect** the "bookend" plazas?

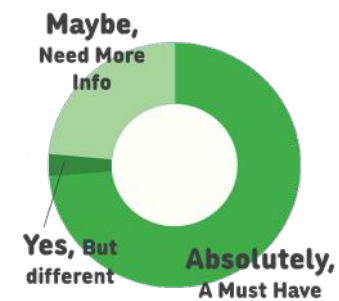


Fig. 10: What We Heard: **Vision**, "Bookend" Plazas, and Riverfront Trail

received overwhelming community support as a continuous route between the "bookend" plazas.

## PUBLIC MARKET HALL

A public market hall on the riverfront was identified as a valuable community asset but needs further study to determine appropriate location, size and program of uses.

## KEY PATHWAYS

The Riverside, Kobuk, Binkley and Birch Streets are important pathways that should extend to the riverfront.

## RANKING THE "BIG IDEAS"

The riverfront trail, public market and "bookend" plazas ranked in the top three "big ideas" for the project area.

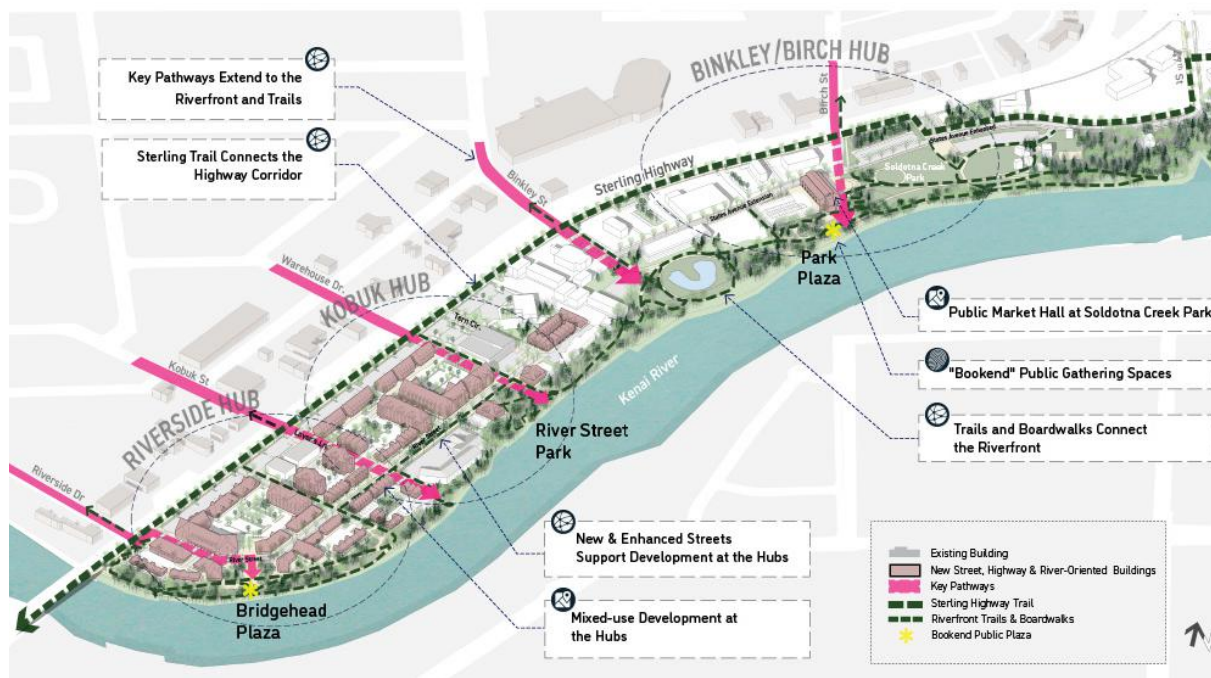
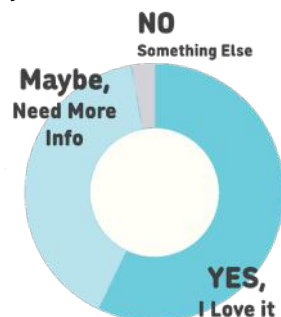


Fig. 11: The "Big Ideas"

Would a new **public market** be a valuable community asset on the riverfront?



Should the existing **key pathways** be enhanced to extend and connect to the riverfront?

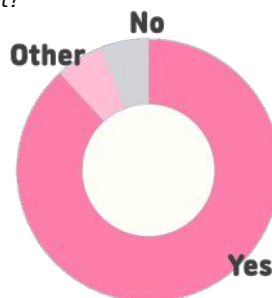


Fig. 12: What We Heard: Public Market Hall & Key Pathways

How would you rank the project's "Big Ideas"?

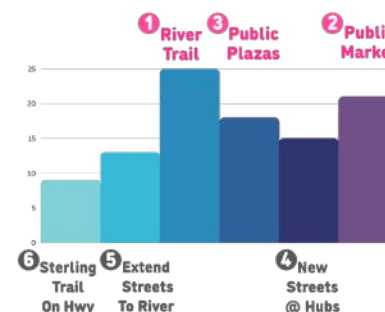


Fig. 13: What We Heard: Ranking the "Big Ideas"



## Considering Development Scenarios that Create a Riverfront Destination.

Development scenarios for a distinctive riverfront destination included a "Main Street" or "River Street" option. Each offered a blend of shopping, dining, entertainment, and housing, along with pedestrian-friendly streets. Public amenities, including a public market, plazas, parks, and riverfront and Sterling Highway trails were also considered.

**Main Street Scenario**—Three blocks of storefronts span edge-to-edge, offering retail, dining, entertainment and housing and anchored by Bridgehead Plaza, a riverfront park, and the existing Blazy Mall. The riverfront includes public gathering spaces, trails, a boardwalk, and a hotel with a restaurant and bar. River-oriented storefronts and housing will grace the new River Street, while commercial uses align with Sterling Highway. Both Main Street and River Street feature wide sidewalks, street trees, lighting, and a shared roadway for bicycles and vehicles.

Soldotna Creek Park will host a public market and plaza at Birch Street, activating the park's edge. States Avenue is extended and enhanced between Binkley Circle and

47th Street, improving local access between existing businesses and the park, to create a more connected downtown.

A continuous trail network would extend along the riverfront and the Sterling Highway connecting the "bookend" public plazas at Soldotna Creek Park and the bridgehead.

**River Street Scenario**—This scenario would "cluster" edge-to-edge storefronts with retail, dining, and entertainment uses along a new River Street at the Riverside Hub. Anchored by Bridgehead Plaza, and a riverfront park, the riverfront area features public gathering, trails, a boardwalk, and a public market building. River oriented storefronts and housing would line the new River Street, while new commercial uses would be oriented along Sterling Highway. River Street will have wide sidewalks, street trees, lighting, and a shared roadway for bicycles and vehicles.

Soldotna Creek Park hosts a public plaza at Birch Street, activating the park's edge. States Avenue extends between Binkley Circle and 47th Street, enhancing local access, and creating a connected downtown.

A continuous trail network would extend along the riverfront and the Sterling Highway connecting the "bookend" public plazas at Soldotna Creek Park and the bridgehead.

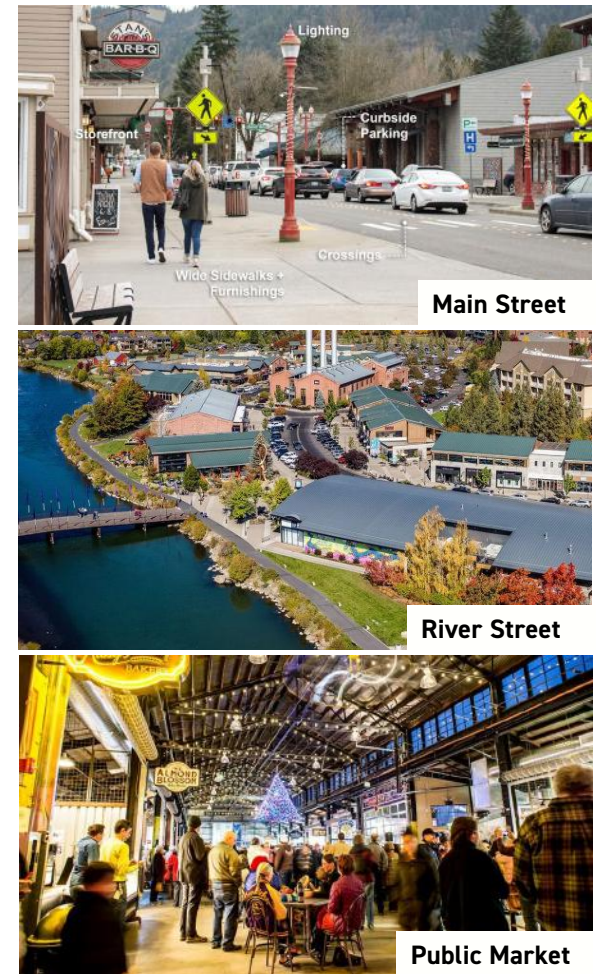


Fig. 14: Main Street, River Street and Public Market Examples



What We Heard!

GETTING to a PREFERRED SCENARIO

The Main Street and River Street scenarios, received similar community support, focusing on a riverfront plaza with retail, shopping, dining, entertainment, and housing. This is complemented by a continuous trail along the Sterling Highway and Kenai River. Placing the public market in either the Riverside Hub or Soldotna Creek Park is viable, with the latter offering potential for a larger market and ample parking, reinforcing its role as Soldotna's central gathering space. The Framework Plan in the following chapter favors positioning the public market at Soldotna Creek Park.

Which **Development Scenario** feels best for Soldotna?

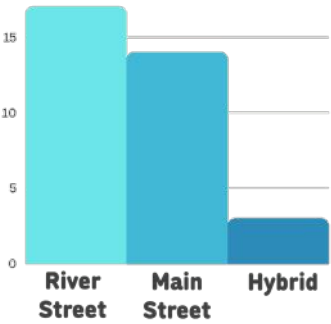


Fig. 15: What We Heard: **A Preferred Scenario**

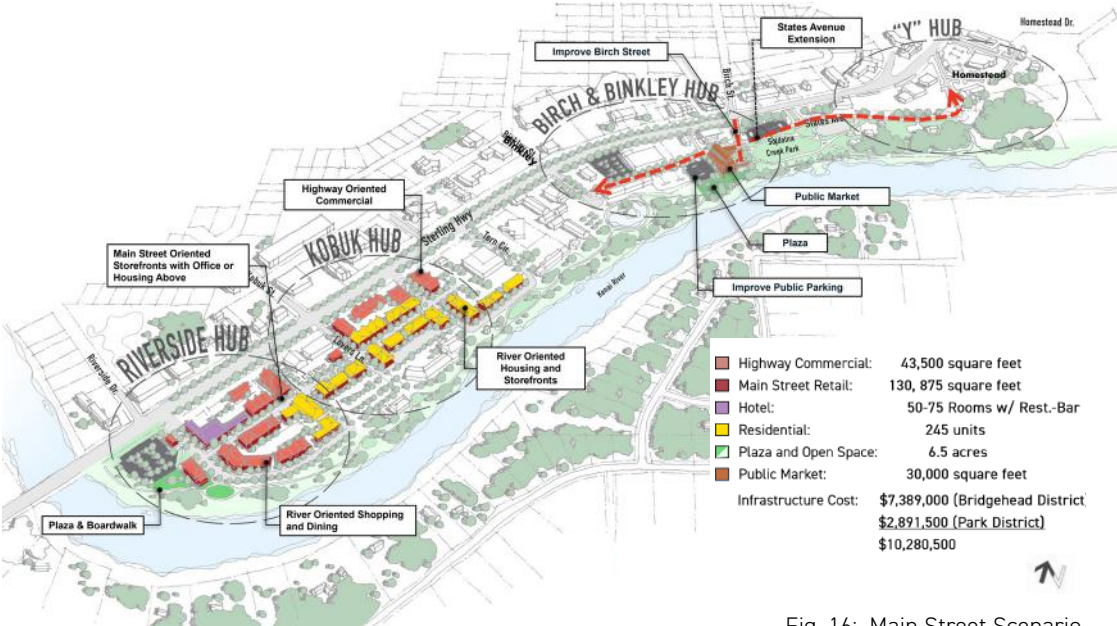


Fig. 16: Main Street Scenario

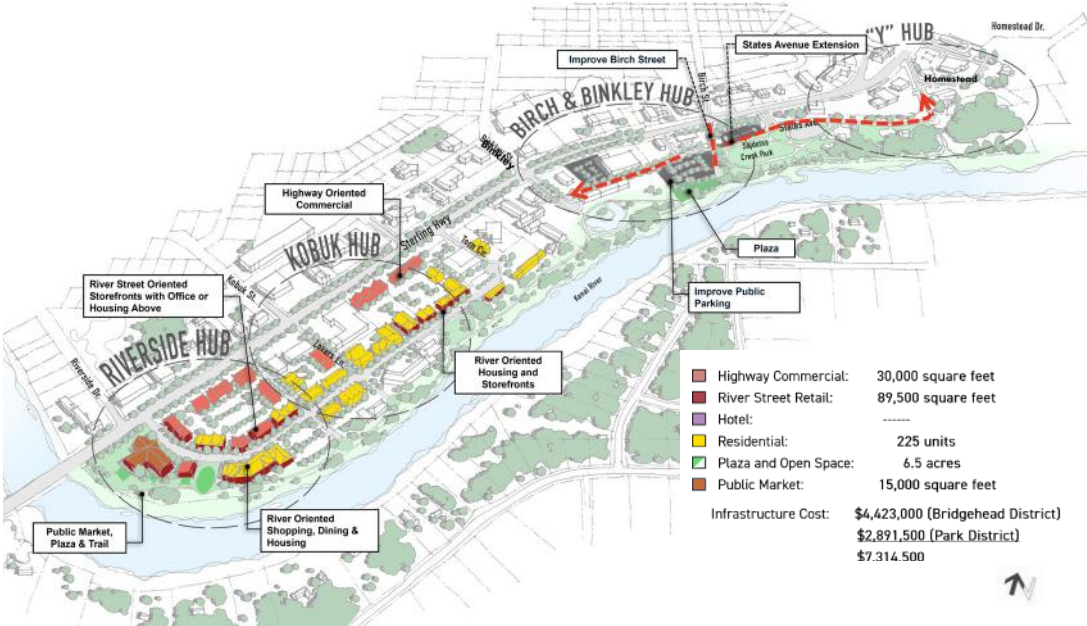


Fig. 17: River Street Scenario









# 1

## THE VISION AND "BIG IDEAS"

The Kenai River is the centerpiece of a walkable, connected downtown and plays a vital role in the local and regional economy of the central peninsula.

## PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The Soldotna Riverfront Redevelopment Project aims to be transformative and advance the City's long-term economic development goals. It endeavors to stimulate new investments and partnerships, generate employment, and enhance the quality of the built environment for both residents and visitors. The project aligns with recent initiatives and previously adopted City policy documents, including the City's Envision Soldotna 2023 Comprehensive Plan (2011), Downtown Development Plan (2015), and the Soldotna Riverfront Options & Opportunities concept paper (2018).

Redevelopment is anticipated to take place through public-private partnerships involving the City, commercial entities, and not-for-profit development partners, leading to river-oriented commercial and community uses. The proposed redevelopment should enhance community access to existing parks, riverwalks, and greenspaces.

The following project objectives served as guideposts throughout the project:



***Create a one-of-a-kind riverfront experience with shopping, dining, entertainment, and lodging in a walkable destination***



***Support and expand local businesses, and attract new entrepreneurs***



***Highlight the Kenai River and incorporate the natural landscape into the Downtown***



***Provide housing options to meet local needs***



***Identify opportunities for public and private partnerships***



***Identify critical infrastructure to support redevelopment***



***Explore options and strategies for funding and implementation***



## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Redevelopment of the project area's 85-acres is an opportunity to build on the features that attract people to the downtown and support what is valued by property owners, businesses and the community.

Guiding principles are essential in urban redevelopment as they serve to influence and direct the planning and execution of downtown redevelopment projects. The principles play a crucial role by providing a clear direction for the revitalization effort. They are the basis for ensuring that the redevelopment aligns with the aspirations of residents, businesses, and other stakeholders.

Moreover, guiding principles act as a decision-making framework throughout the redevelopment process. They help inform choices related to land use, design, infrastructure, regulations and other key aspects, ensuring consistency and coherence in the overall plan. These principles also emphasize equity and resilience, promoting environmentally friendly and long-lasting community benefits.

Overall, the following principles emphasize improving the quality of life for residents, aiming for developments that enhance well-being, accessibility, and social connectivity:



### IDENTITY

Reinforce what is valued in the community---history, nature, gathering, active, art, and local.



### PLACE

Support a hub of activity with a variety of indoor and outdoor spaces for people to gather. Incorporate sustainable practices and provide for daily needs, goods, services, and entertainment within a walkable environment that engages the river.



### CONNECTED

Provide for streets, trails, and boardwalks with safe, direct, and continuous access to destinations for all ages, abilities and users.



### PARTNERSHIPS

Participate in coordinated development, infrastructure, and human capital investments involving the City, public agencies, property owners, businesses, and the community.

# VISION

Soldotna, rooted in a history of gathering by Native Alaskan Dena'ina Athabaskan peoples who have lived in the region for thousands of years, emerged as a city in the late 1940s through homesteading. Today, Soldotna continues its legacy by preserving its natural environment.

The city transformed a former highway department maintenance facility into Soldotna Creek Park in 2012, now a community space with green areas, river boardwalks, pavilions, an amphitheater, and year-round public restrooms. Soldotna Creek Park is also home to the Kenai Watershed Forum, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting healthy habitats on the Kenai Peninsula.

Soldotna's identity is shaped by its commitment to stewardship and community gathering. The project presents an opportunity to explore how downtown development and community activities can coexist with, expand, and enhance the natural habitats in the project area. Drawing from community engagement, the project articulated a vision for the riverfront redevelopment plan. Downtown and the riverfront are envisioned as a setting for public and private investment—a woven blend of nature, wildlife, recreation, and gathering.

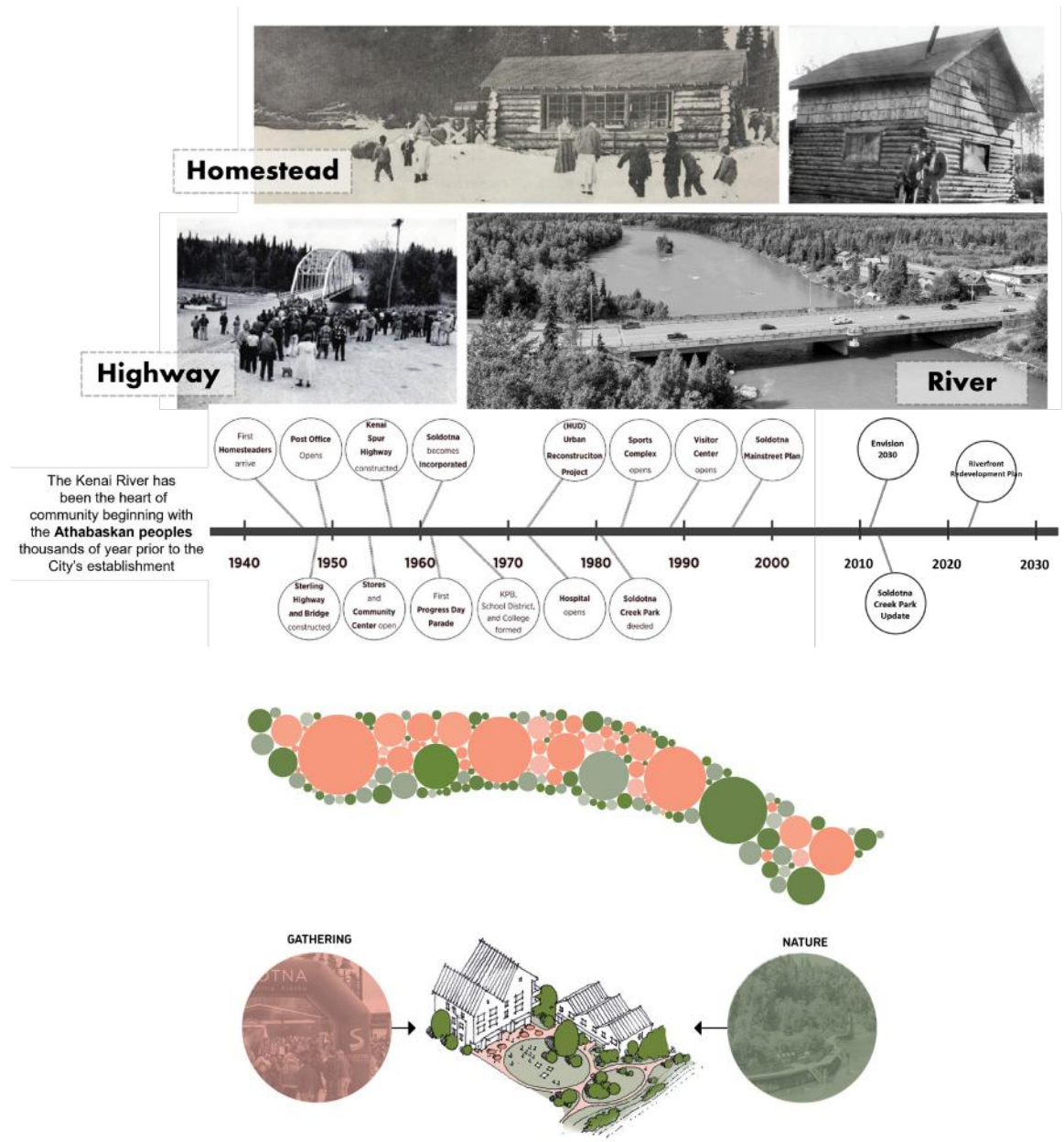


Fig. 18: Soldotna History and Vision Diagram- "Gathering & Nature"



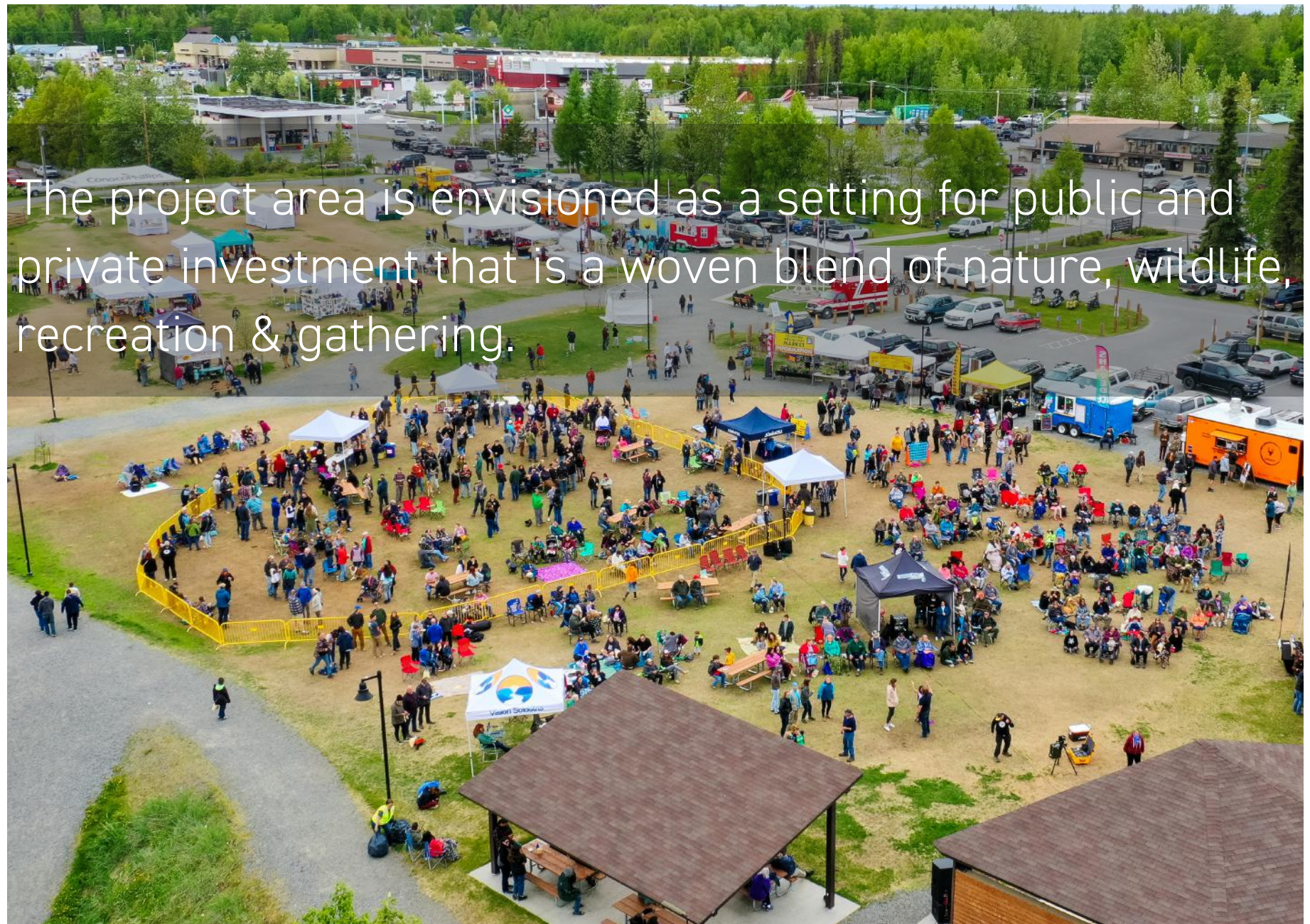


Fig. 19: Vision Statement and Soldotna Creek Park Event



# THE "BIG IDEAS"

The "Big Ideas" represent six strategies that will bring the vision to life: a place where nature and community gathering spaces can coexist—expanding and enhancing one another. The Big Ideas support the project's guiding principles.



## IDENTITY

Reinforce what is valued in the community—history, nature, gathering, active, art, and local.



## PLACE

Support a hub of activity with a variety of indoor and outdoor spaces for people to gather. Incorporate sustainable practices and provide for daily needs, goods, services, and entertainment within a walkable environment that engages the river.



## CONNECTED

Provide for streets, trails, and boardwalks with safe, direct, and continuous access to destinations for all ages, abilities and users.



## PARTNERSHIPS

Participate in coordinated development, infrastructure, and human capital investments involving the City, public agencies, property owners, businesses, and the community.

### "Bookend" Public Gathering Spaces

Public access and gathering at the riverfront are at the heart of establishing the identity for downtown. Riverfront plazas at Soldotna Creek Park and near the bridgehead create bookend public gathering spaces drawing

people to the downtown redevelopment area and serve as amenities to attract private investment. At the bridgehead, the plaza will be the central gathering space for retail, dining, and entertainment along River Street. At Soldotna Creek Park, the plaza, (designed with lower and upper spaces), serves as the front door to the public Market Hall and is directly accessible from Birch Street.

### Mixed-use Development at the Hubs

At the Riverside Hub, a one-of-a-kind destination features retail, dining, and entertainment that is oriented toward River Street, Bridgehead Plaza and the river. A mix of retail, dining, and housing extends along River Street into the Kobuk Street Hub, where the River Street Park serves as an amenity overlooking the Kenai River. New commercial uses oriented to Sterling Highway create an attractive corridor. Meanwhile, at Soldotna Creek Park, a year-round public market hall is a major destination showcasing "local" Soldotna and the Kenai Peninsula.

### New & Enhanced Streets Support Development

A new grid of streets forms a walkable downtown with appropriately sized blocks to facilitate mixed-use development. These streets, similar in size to existing Soldotna

streets, are enhanced to include widened sidewalks, street trees, sidewalk furnishings, and lighting. Curb extensions not only improve safety at intersections but also integrate stormwater plantings to promote river health. The roadway supports low-speed traffic and shared lanes for bicycles.

### Trails and Boardwalks Connect the Riverfront

A continuous string of riverfront trail, and boardwalks connect the "bookend" public gathering spaces.

### Sterling Trail Connects the Highway Corridor

Excess Sterling Highway right-of-way supports a new multi-use trail, separated by landscaping and street trees, with enhanced crossings at intersections and upgraded lighting. The trail extends from the bridge to Birch Street and then transitions to States Avenue through the park to 47th Street.

### Key Pathways Extend to the Riverfront and Trails

Existing key pathways, well-worn by residents, extend to the River Street and riverfront trail, significantly enhancing public access to the Kenai River, new development, and various public amenities and activities.

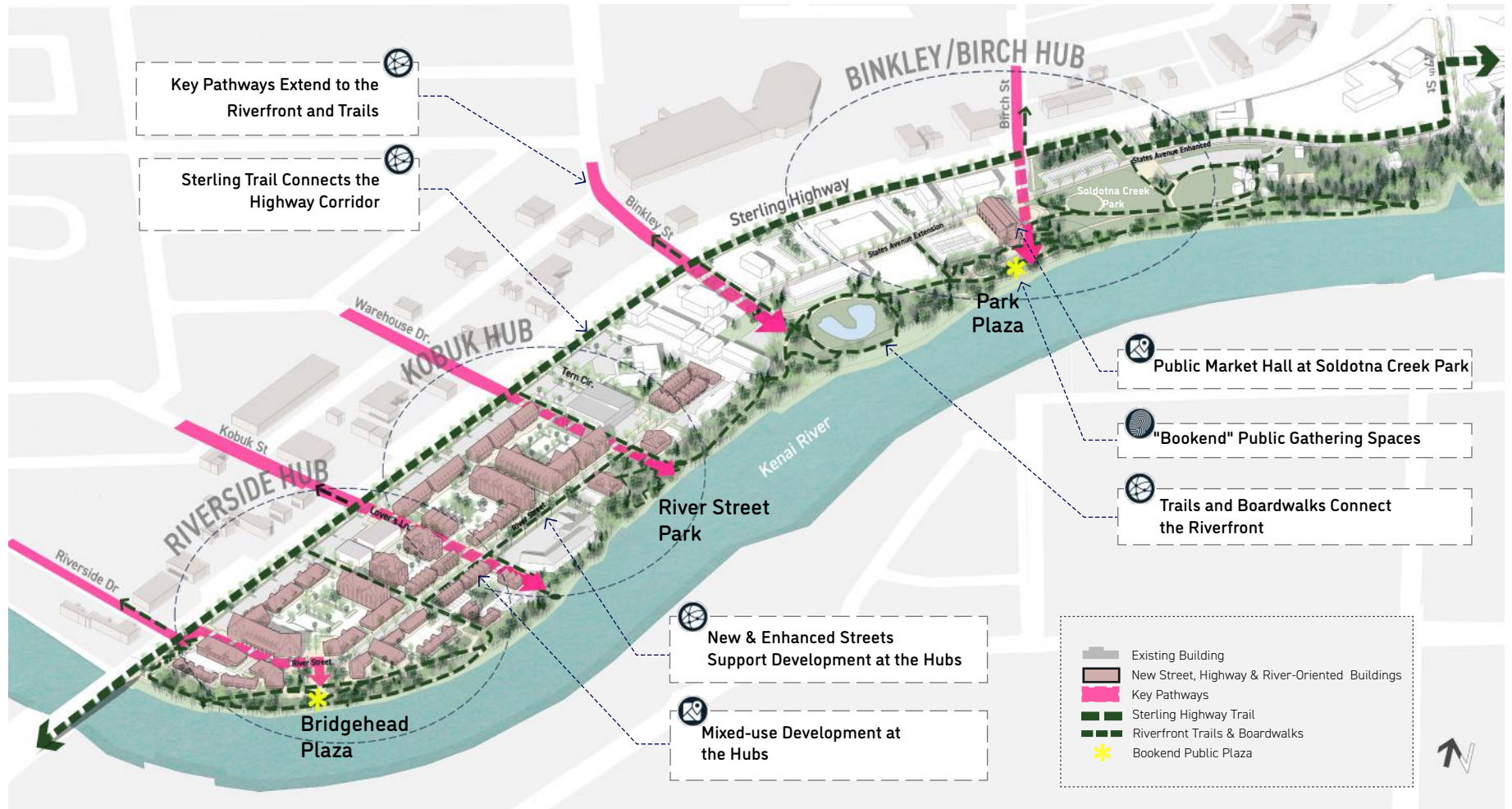
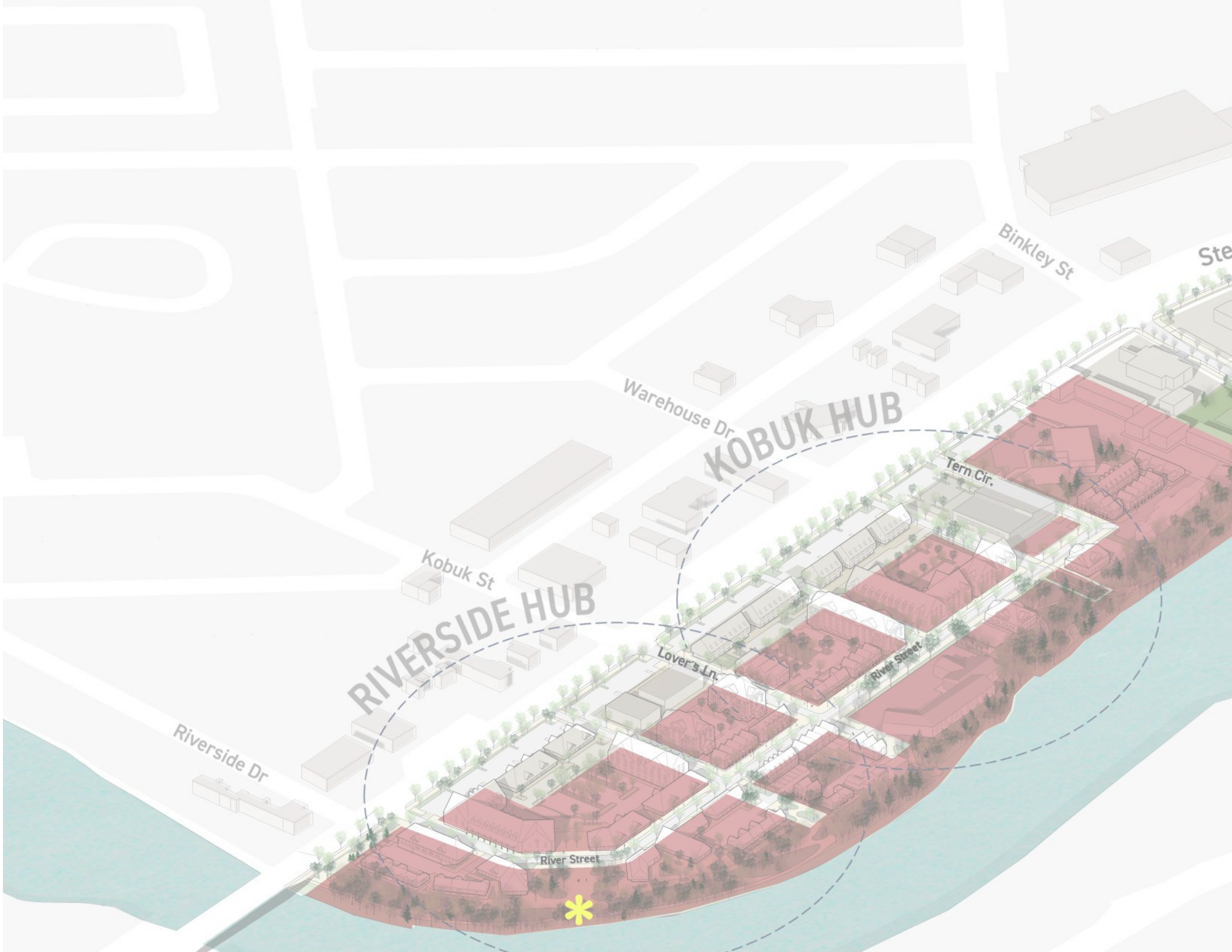


Fig. 20: Fundamental Concept: **The Big Ideas**



KOBUK HUB

RIVERSIDE HUB

Binkley St

Warehouse Dr

Kobuk St

Tern Cir.

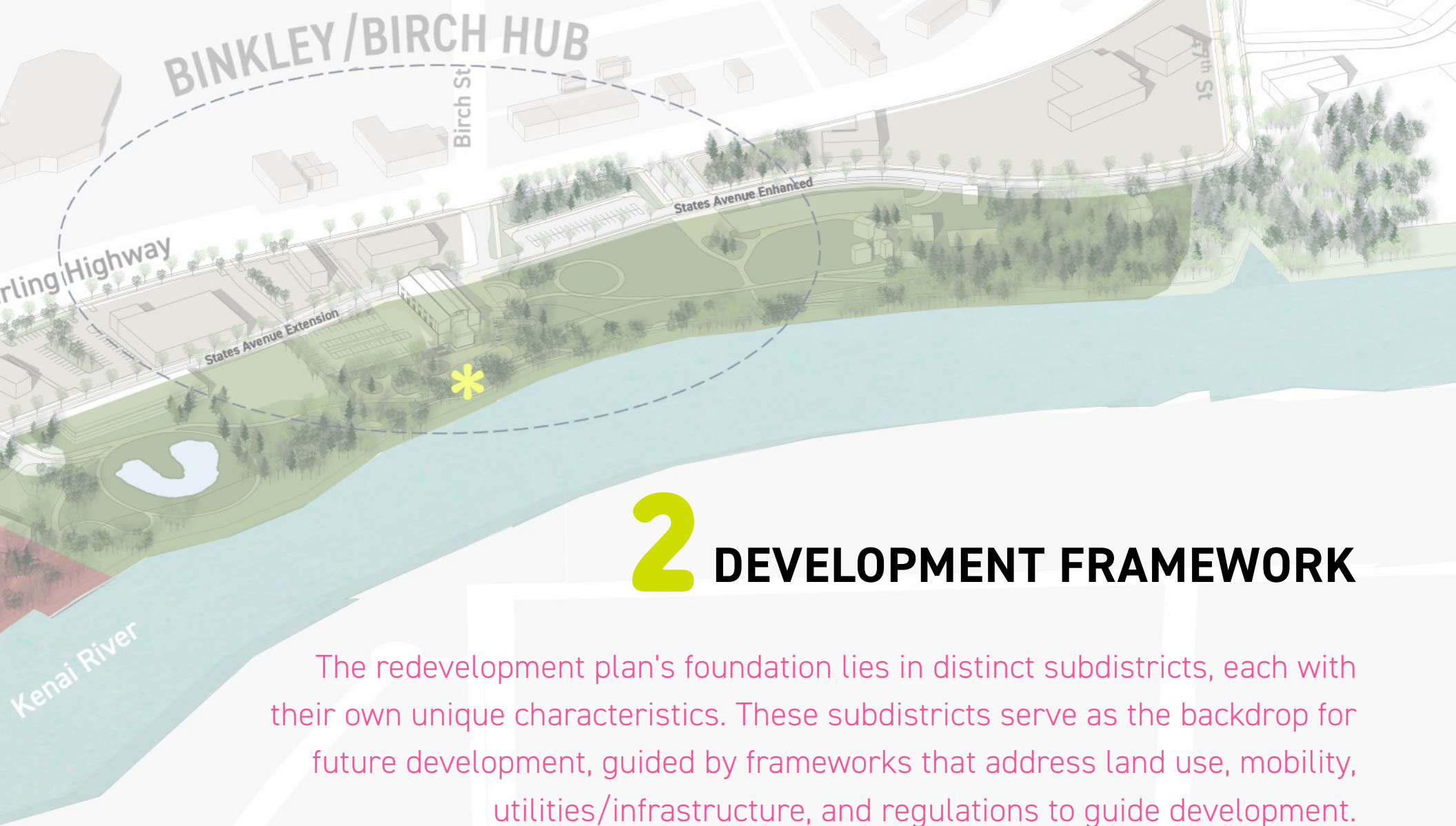
Lover's Ln.

Riverside Dr

River Street







## 2 DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

The redevelopment plan's foundation lies in distinct subdistricts, each with their own unique characteristics. These subdistricts serve as the backdrop for future development, guided by frameworks that address land use, mobility, utilities/infrastructure, and regulations to guide development.

# OVERVIEW

The development framework is shaped by existing conditions – physically on the ground, in policy and planning documents, and market and demographics. This existing environment serves as the baseline for creating transportation and infrastructure design concepts, and redevelopment strategies.

## Market Analysis

At present, residents and visitors can drive through Soldotna without catching a glimpse of the river until they are crossing the bridge out of town. Businesses in the Project Area are oriented toward the highway, missing the opportunity to capitalize on their proximity to the river and to create a walkable, downtown riverfront district. Furthermore, challenges such as private land ownership, limited parking, and steep slopes keep most residents and visitors separated from the river, when visiting downtown Soldotna (Figure 21).

Recognizing these constraints and opportunities, a market analysis (Appendix A.2, Market Analysis) was conducted to help the City identify and understand the types of uses that might be most beneficial to the community. It considers:

- Market conditions in Soldotna in 2022.
- The market potential of residential and commercial uses along the riverfront, given



Fig. 21: Privately-Owned and Underutilized Riverfront Property

existing demand from current and future residents and visitors.

- How redevelopment can benefit both Soldotna and Kenai Borough residents while helping to establish Soldotna as a visitor destination, leveraging its current assets to build its brand.

To understand the market demand for residential and commercial land uses, a trade area of a 30-minute drive time from the Project Area was established. This trade area represents the area of influence for which Soldotna could reasonably draw from for market support for residential and commercial land uses.

The 30-minute drive time is used because Soldotna is a regional hub for employment,

goods and services, and provides a reasonable distance that people may be willing to travel to get to school, work, and do their shopping. This trade area provides a strong starting point for understanding the high-level demand for broad land use types.

### Soldotna's Competitive Advantage

Soldotna holds a competitive position to support various uses and businesses:

- Central location, serving as a destination hub for services, food, healthcare, and recreational amenities.
- Proximity to the Kenai River.
- Visibility and direct access to the Sterling Highway.
- A robust year-round workforce pool.
- Proximity to Kenai airport.

- Kenai National Wildlife Refuge is just minutes from downtown Soldotna.
- Lower taxes, both sales and property taxes, relative to other cities on the Kenai Peninsula.

## Demographics and Economic Trends

In addition to the beneficial attributes noted above, key demographic and economic conditions and trends influence the demand for different uses in the project area:

- Soldotna's residents are older, with smaller households than the state overall. These older, higher income households will drive local demand.
- Median household income in Soldotna has been increasing but remains lower than the Borough and state.
- Visitors come from both within Alaska and out-of-state to enjoy Soldotna's outdoors. Regional visibility, adjacency to the Kenai River, and access to nearby recreational amenities make the riverfront an attractive development area.
- Land owner complexities and a lack of amenities could hinder development potential. The Project Area currently lacks a mix of entertainment, restaurant, and retail uses that typically make mixed-use development attractive. Much of the land

along the riverfront is privately held, and uncertainty about City plans and potential landowner conflicts could pose a challenge for future development.

Below, Figure 22 (Appendix A.2, Market Analysis, page 5) further describes the relevant trends and their implications for development:

Development Type	Trends	Implications
<b>Rental Housing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Steadily increasing multifamily rents</li> <li>• Very low multifamily vacancy</li> <li>• No new large multifamily (5+ unit) development since 2012, but the City has had smaller multifamily development such as quadplexes near the Kenai Peninsula College. The Timberland Condos within the Project Area are mostly used as month-to-month rentals or short-term rentals.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Increasing home prices</b> indicate demand for ownership housing.</p> <p><b>Low vacancy rate</b> indicates a constrained supply of multifamily units and upward rent pressures.</p> <p><b>Rising interest rates</b> could temper demand for homeownership.</p>
<b>Ownership Housing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Steadily increasing home prices with significant increases since 2019</li> <li>• Nearly 80% of population own their home</li> <li>• Rising interest rates</li> </ul>	
<b>Retail</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rents peaked in 2019 and 2021.</li> <li>• Very low vacancies that have remained low for about 8 consecutive years.</li> <li>• Five retail buildings built in the past decade totaling 41,500 sq ft. (Two developments not captured in the data: Whistle Hill in 2017 and River City Books/Lucy's in 2019; both are fully leased.)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Built-to-suit development</b> could be viable.</p> <p><b>Small-sized retail</b> could be absorbed in the trade area.</p>
<b>Office Space<sup>2</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fluctuating rents between 2012 and 2022; declining rents in 2022</li> <li>• Low vacancy rates between 2015 and 2019; Fluctuating vacancy rates between 2020 and 2022</li> <li>• No new speculative office development has occurred in the past decade. However, the hospital has added space for medical office. A few existing retail spaces are being used for small professional service offices.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Potential limited demand</b> for small office users such as medical and dental, insurance, etc. These users typically require office space in the range of 500-2,500 sq ft.</p> <p>Developers are most likely to build new office uses in a mixed-use building or within strip retail with retail and service users.</p>
<b>Lodging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Average daily room rate (ADR) for hotels in the Kenai Peninsula reached a decade-high of \$175.</li> <li>• Since 2012, hotel occupancy has increased year-over-year (except for in 2020) reaching a decade peak of about 70% in 2022.</li> <li>• One new hotel with 72 rooms was built in the Kenai Peninsula since 2012 (Aspen Suites in Homer); Lands End Resort in Homer also added 33 new rooms in 2019.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Growing ADR, high occupancy, and limited new development</b> indicate there could be support for a new hotel.</p> <p>Outdoor amenities, the Regional Sports Complex, and the new Field House are likely to generate most of the demand for a new hotel in the area.</p>

Source: CoStar and Redfin, ECONorthwest Analysis

Note: The trade area for residential, retail, and office consists of a 30-minute drive time from the Project Area; lodging trends are based on the broader Kenai Peninsula

<sup>2</sup> Due to limited demand and the clustering of medical services near the hospital, we did not conduct additional analysis on market potential of office in the Project Area. However, limited office space may be viable within a mixed-use development as small office and retail uses can often occupy similar spaces.

Fig. 22: Market Trends in the Soldotna Trade Area



## Potential Demand for Land Uses

The land uses considered in the market analysis table shown in Figure 23 (Appendix A.2 Market Analysis, page 6) identifies their market suitability and potential for the Project Area. Retail, residential, and lodging uses all exhibited moderate to strong market potential and could be viable uses. It is important to note that these uses do not exist in isolation and establishing one use in the Project Area may catalyze additional development. This information sheds light on what uses may be competitive as the City plans future development in the Project Area and how the City can target policies, planning documents, and investments to unlock additional development potential.

Specifically, the following potential uses and development, which could be absorbed in the project area, were identified (Appendix A.2 Market Analysis, page 33):

- There is demand for four to five restaurants (average size of 2,000 to 5,000 square feet) and two to three boutique clothing or accessories stores between 1,000 and 2,500 square feet.
- Near-term growth in households earning over \$75,000 annually is expected to generate demand for approximately 180 townhome units and 85 apartment units.

- Over the intermediate term, hospitality could be a viable use, especially if the City promotes its current tourism attractions and/or increases attractions.

The potential demand illustrates the quantity and types of development likely to be absorbed in the near term. However, it does not anticipate the total amount

Land Use	Suitability	Market Trends	Market Potential
<b>Retail</b>	<b>Strong</b> Strong visibility, proximity to other retailers, and large daytime population	<b>Moderate</b> Local market fundamentals are stable, with near to mid-term demand for retail.	<b>Moderate</b> Household spending is likely to support five to eight retailers including restaurants and boutique stores. Mid-term potential for new retail space if rents are supportive.
<b>Office</b>	<b>Weak</b> Strong highway access, small concentration of office related jobs, trends in work-from-home	<b>Weak to Moderate</b> Market trends need to correct for low vacancies with increasing rents; low demand outlook.	<b>Weak</b> Expectation of low demand growth. Rent levels currently would not justify new construction.
<b>Rental Residential</b>	<b>Moderate</b> Access to employment center, increasing population, limited lifestyle amenities, and potential for riverfront view premiums	<b>Moderate to Strong</b> Local market conditions are improving with moderate demand.	<b>Weak to Moderate</b> Expectation of moderate demand growth. Rent levels currently would not justify new construction. Limited area amenities lessen the attractiveness of the area.
<b>For Sale Residential</b>	<b>Moderate</b> Access to employment center, increasing population, limited lifestyle amenities, and potential for riverfront view premiums	<b>Strong</b> Home prices have increased steadily, homeownership rates are high, and expected future growth of high-income households.	<b>Moderate to Strong</b> The Kenai Peninsula has more affordable homes compared to Anchorage. Forecasts of household growth are strong in mid- to upper income cohorts.
<b>Lodging</b>	<b>Moderate</b> Strong visibility from highway and proximity to recreation and tourism assets; potential riverfront access and views	<b>Strong</b> Market recovery has been strong surpassing pre-pandemic levels.	<b>Moderate</b> Limited assortment of recreation and tourism attractors; mid-term opportunity if tourist attractions are leveraged or increased

Source: ECONorthwest Analysis

Fig. 23: Summary of Market Potential to the Project Area

of development over a twenty-plus-year timeframe, as indicated in the Plan's build-out capacity for the project area.

### **Can the Project Area Support Mixed Use Development?**

New population growth will drive demand for both ownership and rental housing. The Project Area could be desirable for residential development offering easy access to employment in Soldotna along with access to the river (public or private) and potential riverfront views. The Project Area currently has limited entertainment, restaurant, services, and retail uses that typically make mixed-use residential development and high-end hotel development attractive. Additional lifestyle amenities could boost attractiveness for development of a mixed-use concept.

To understand the potential for a Soldotna mixed-use development, it may be helpful to consider a nearby example. The mixed-use residential development located in the 3600 block of Spenard Rd in Anchorage, Alaska is a recent development that closely resembles the scale of mixed-use that the City is looking to attract. The average per square foot rent for a unit at this development is

\$2.14 per square foot or \$1,262 per month—substantially more than the \$900 per month average rents found in the Soldotna trade area. This suggests that rents in the Soldotna trade area need to be at or above \$2.14 per square foot to support a mixed-use residential development.

## **Development Feasibility**

The project's development feasibility analysis (Appendix B.5 Development Feasibility) looked to answer several crucial questions including: What scale of development is currently feasible, and what level of City support could facilitate development that is not-quite feasible without public participation? The findings from this analysis informed the appropriate type and programming likely to occur within the next five years. The market analysis indicates demand for uses such as retail, restaurant, hotel space, and housing. However, concerns arise that current market rents in Soldotna can't support investment in new development. The analysis also highlighted the redevelopment area's lack of a walkable environment, riverfront-oriented uses, and no clear destination for

entertainment, services, and retail, that would make it attractive for mixed-use and higher-end development.

### **Findings and Considerations**

- Current rents do not support mixed-use or multifamily development.
- Townhomes are more feasible, especially with lower-cost land.
- A new hotel would have a positive cash flow, but a low rate of return may deter developers.

### **Conclusion and Next Steps**

To foster near-term development, the City may need to establish public-private partnerships (e.g., subsidized land costs), enhance infrastructure (e.g., streets, trails, and utilities upgrades), and carefully coordinate public and private investments. In the remainder of this Chapter, the type, arrangement and scale of land uses, buildings, streets, parking and utilities are structured to create a one-of-a-kind Soldotna destination.

The following *Chapter 3: Development Strategy*, identifies the projects and phasing for consideration to stimulate near-term and twenty-year build-out of the project area.



## Conditions Affecting Redevelopment

The project area, situated between the Sterling Highway and the Kenai River, currently comprises primarily retail, services, dining, and visitor-related offerings, such as lodging and services associated with fishing the Kenai River. At the northeast end of the corridor, Soldotna Creek Park serves as the City's central gathering space, featuring a tree-lined riverfront corridor and river boardwalks that offer fishing access to the Kenai River.

The park boasts trails, a pavilion, an amphitheater, and year-round public restrooms. Programmed events, including the seasonal Wednesday Market and Summer Music Series as well as special events like Progress Days, the Kenai River Festival, Christmas in the Park, and many other events hosted by community groups and local organizations draw people to the downtown and project area.

## POTENTIAL REDEVELOPMENT AREAS

The likelihood and extent of redevelopment depends on various factors, including local and regional demographics, accessibility from major roadways, property ownership, and proximity to amenities like the Kenai River. While the project area is directly accessible from the Sterling Highway, infrastructure such as utilities (water, sewer, and sanitary) and an interconnected street network are limited. Parcels within the project area are deep, ranging from 575 feet to 725 feet between the highway and riverfront (Figure 24). Little development or infrastructure investment has taken place along the riverfront.

Through on-site and aerial surveys, GIS data review, and engagement with property owners and businesses, the project identified areas that are vacant and underutilized, as well as for-sale properties (Figure 25). These sites at the Riverside and Kobuk Street intersections and the City owned property next to Soldotna Creek Park are also under single ownerships, and have extensive river frontage. Their unique characteristics make them excellent candidates as catalyst sites for future investment and redevelopment.

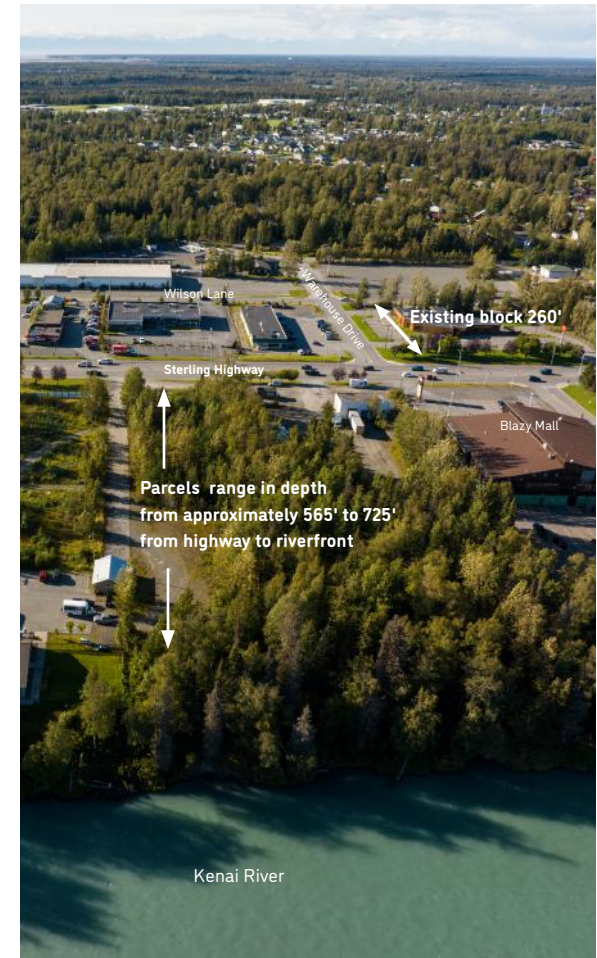


Fig. 24: Existing Conditions- Parcel Depth

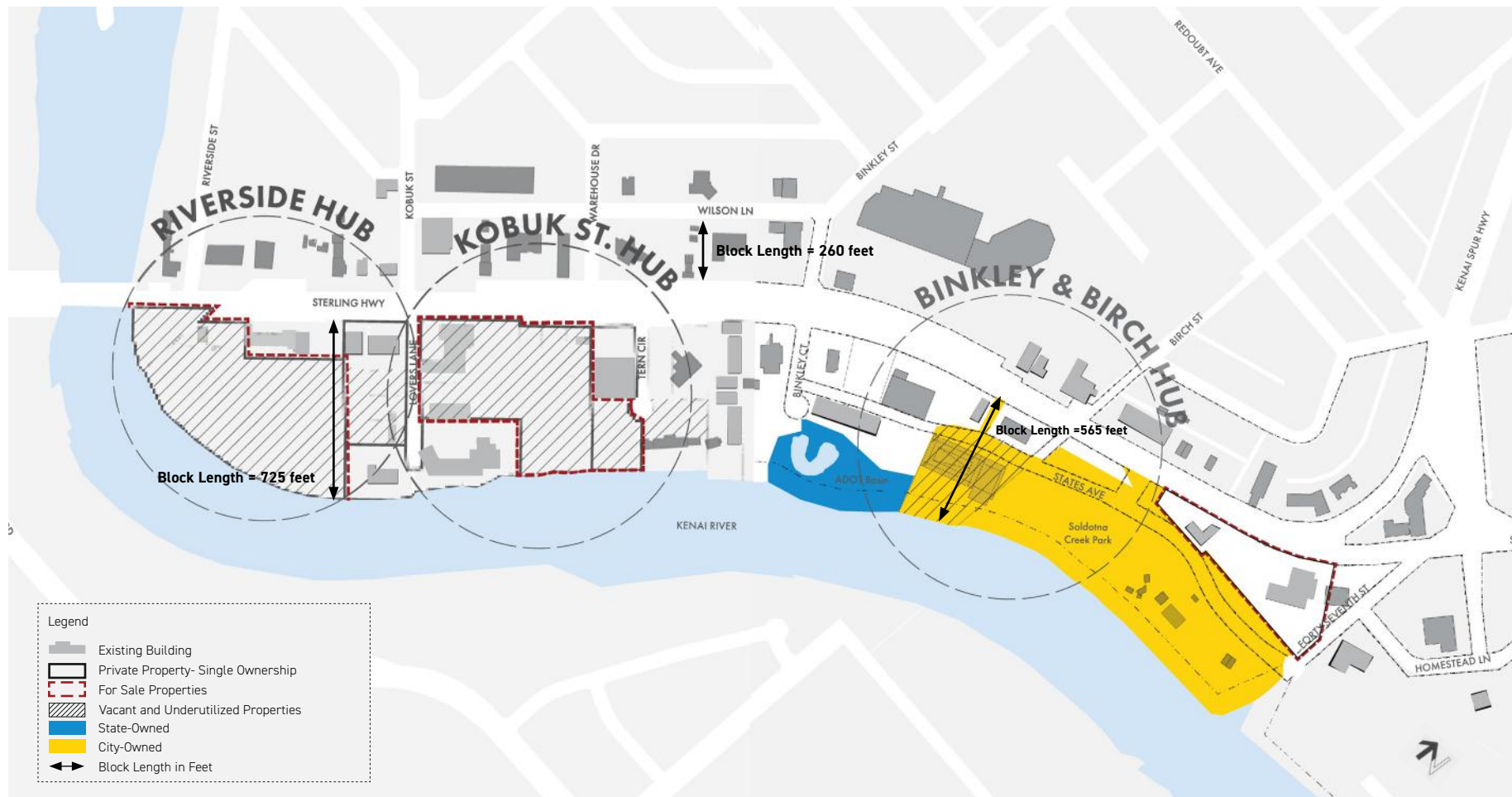


Fig. 25: Existing Conditions- Potential Redevelopment Areas



## The Plan's Approach to Redevelopment

The redevelopment approach focuses on building upon and expanding the existing commercial uses along the corridor. Emphasis is placed on underutilized properties for future redevelopment, aligning with the project's goal of creating a unique destination with a diverse mix of uses.

Existing businesses at intersections along Sterling Highway include Riverside Drive, which emphasizes visitor-related services and lodging; Kobuk Street/Lover's Lane, a local hub for dining, retail, and services; Binkley Street, known for regional retail, auto-oriented commercial ventures, and lodging; Birch Street, featuring local retail, dining, convenience services; and Soldotna Creek Park and 47th Street, hosting national retailers, a local brewery, retail, and a food market.

### Unique Subdistricts

The project envisions two distinct subdistricts building off of existing commercial uses, but adding density (more businesses and downtown residents) to underutilized areas to create a walkable downtown district with the 'Main Street' feel that the community desires. The Park Subdistrict is anchored by Soldotna Creek Park, the Kenai River, and commercial development at Binkley Circle, Birch Street, and 47th Street. The Bridgehead Subdistrict is oriented towards the riverfront, Sterling Highway, and existing commercial hubs at Riverside Drive, Kobuk Street, and Tern Circle.

### A New Street Grid Supports Walkable Development Blocks

The redevelopment strategy involves significant investment in infrastructure, including an interconnected street network and utilities, to support future development within the project area. Proposed improvements include a new River Street, extensions of existing streets, new connections between the Sterling Highway and River Street, and extensions of States Avenue between adjacent hubs and Soldotna Creek Park.

The street network aims to create appropriately scaled development blocks (Figure 27) benefiting from drive-by traffic and visibility from the Sterling Highway and creating new Kenai River frontages. The street network would consist of a 60-foot wide street right-of-way. This is a typical dimension for Soldotna's existing streets. However, the street design (Figure 26) accommodates all modes of travel, ensuring a walkable environment for adjacent street-oriented storefronts, and connecting with new and existing riverfront boardwalks and trails.

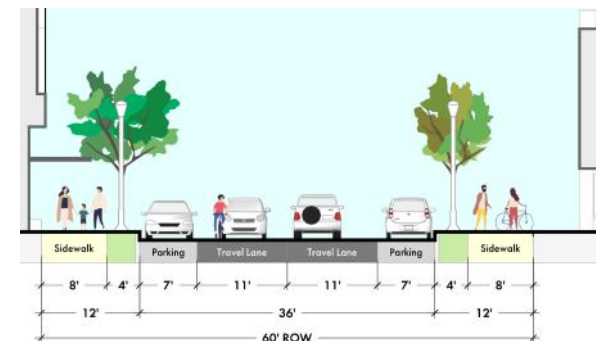


Fig. 26: Street Grid- 60-foot Wide Right-of-way

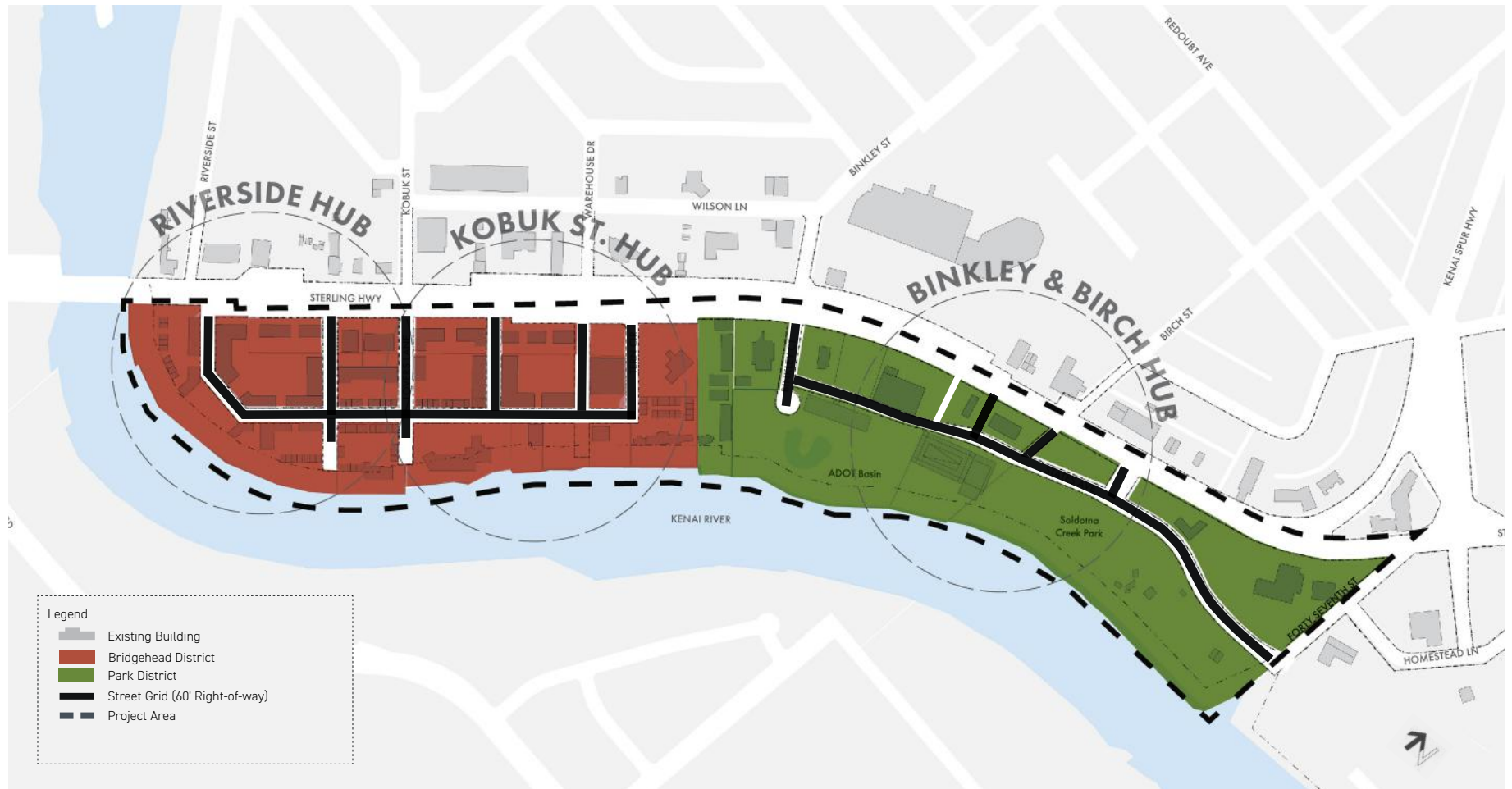


Fig. 27: Subdistricts, Street Grid & Development Blocks



# Build-out Plan and Development Summary

## A 20-Year Vision for Downtown

The Build-out Plan represents a twenty-year snapshot of enhanced existing uses, improved riverfront access, and future development to create a distinctive riverfront destination, with a diverse mix of uses and 'bookend' public plazas at each corridor end. A grid of streets serves both existing and new developments within appropriately sized blocks, fostering a pedestrian-scale and walkable downtown. This design ensures safe, direct, and convenient access to both the Sterling Highway and riverfront destinations. The street grid facilitates vehicular movement by distributing traffic over various streets to reduce congestion.

Central to the plan are plazas, parks, trails, and boardwalk amenities intended to attract private investment and provide community benefits, with enhanced public access to the river and gathering areas. These public amenities create an ideal setting to support a range of establishments such as shops, restaurants, entertainment venues, lodging, and a market hall showcasing local food, products, and culture.

The development program is grounded in a market analysis taking into account current conditions and trends. Findings from the market study indicated steady population and income

growth, highlighting a present and near-term demand for mixed-income multi-family housing, retail, and lodging.

LAND USE	DEVELOPMENT SUMMARY	
Residential	Multi-family (up to 3 stories)	234 units
	Townhomes	68 units
		<b>302 units</b>
Commercial	Highway Oriented & Services	66,600 square feet
	Retail, Food & Beverage	102,850 square feet
		<b>169,450 square feet</b>
Hospitality	Hotel	<b>62 rooms</b>
Parks & Open Space	Plazas, parks & riparian zone	<b>7.25 acres</b>
Trails & Boardwalks	Easements & acquisitions	<b>3,735 linear feet</b>
Streets	Typical 60' right-of-way	<b>8,476 linear feet</b>
Utilities		<b>10,620 linear feet</b>



Fig. 28: Build-out Development Summary



Fig. 29: Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Build-out Plan



## LAND USE

### Mixed-use Hubs and a Riverfront Destination

The proposed land uses enhance existing activities at three key intersections which currently offer some activity with dining, retail, lodging, and commercial services. However, they lack a strong connection to the river, and the dispersed buildings within parking lots do not create a safe and comfortable pedestrian environment crucial for a thriving downtown.

The Land Use diagram (Figure 30) showcases the downtown transformation into a lively mixed-use district facing the Kenai River. This involves enhancing parks, plazas, river access, and leveraging visibility and accessibility to the Sterling Highway. The strategic placement of Land Uses aims to:

- Benefit from the visibility and access to drive-by traffic along the Sterling Highway.
- Expand existing activity nodes at intersections like Riverside Drive, Kobuk Street, Binkley Street, Birch Street, and Soldotna Creek Park.
- Establish a cluster of complementary retail, dining, and entertainment uses focused on the Kenai River. Public amenities like parks and plazas are incorporated to draw people to downtown businesses and the riverfront.
- Create a distinctive downtown neighborhood with housing options to meet Soldotna's housing needs. This builds a critical mass of residents in the downtown area, supporting both existing and new businesses. The blend of residences and businesses fosters an active 18-hour environment, distinguishing Soldotna as a thriving year-round community and the "heart of the Kenai Peninsula."



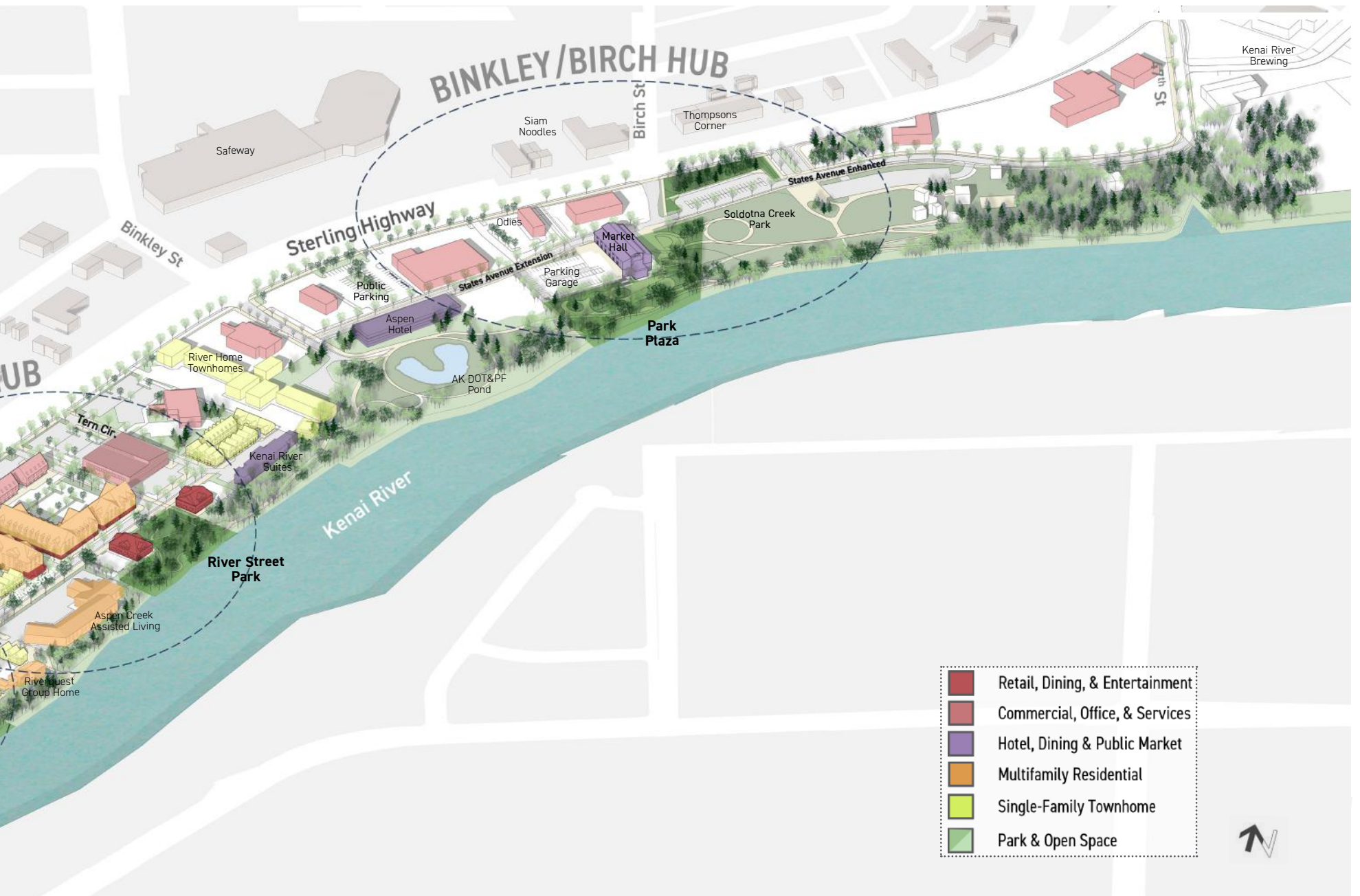


Fig. 30: Land Use diagram



## Plazas, Parks and Open Space

New public spaces within the project area are designed to create additional places for gathering, and to connect people to the Kenai River, aiming to complement the existing array of parks, open spaces, and recreation facilities within and around downtown (Figure 33).

City-owned and maintained public spaces will support land uses, attract private investment, and provide community benefits including:

- A rich public realm that embodies, celebrates and welcomes the local community and provides venues for vibrant and active public life.
- Well-designed and well-maintained parks, plazas, streetscapes and pathways where residents and visitors can enjoy gathering.
- A 100' riparian zone that supports river health and provides limited public access along the riverfront.
- Design features and amenities that enrich the quality of life for Soldotna residents and visitors alike.
- Spaces that are safe and accessible for all ages and abilities.

PLAZAS, PARKS & OPEN SPACE	AREA
Park Plaza	.82 acres
Bridgehead Plaza	.61 acres
River Street Park	.85 acres
Open Space/Riparian Zone	4.97 acres
	7.25 acres

Fig. 31: Plazas, Parks and Riparian Corridor Summary



Credit: mrswebersneighborhood.com/pinterest

Fig. 32: Park and Riparian Corridor

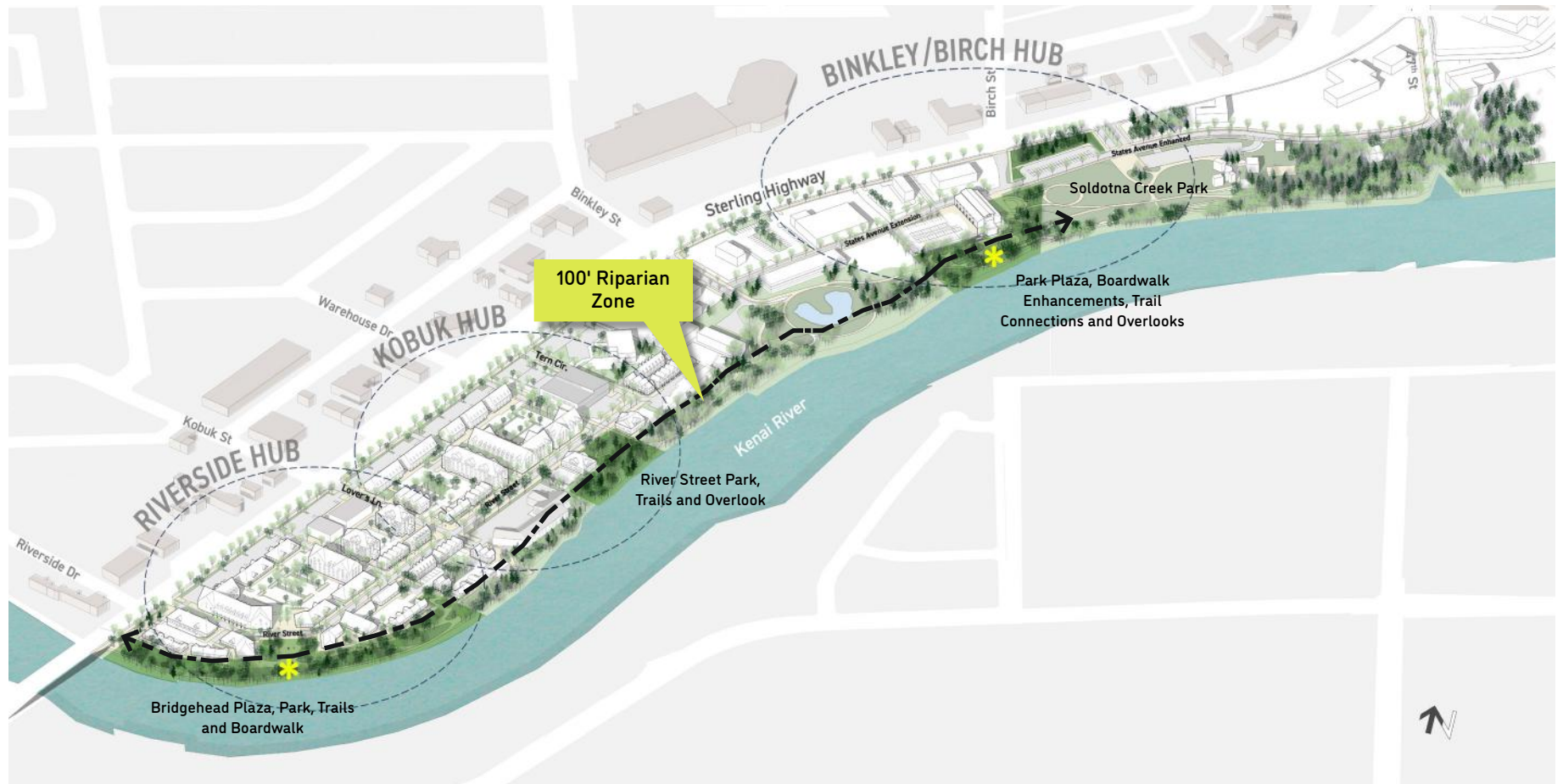


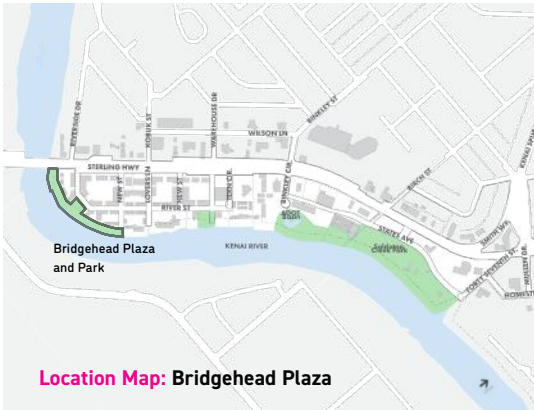
Fig. 33: Plazas, Parks, and Riparian Corridor Diagram

### BRIDGEHEAD PLAZA AND PARK

The Bridgehead Plaza and riverfront park are focal points for the retail, dining, and entertainment proposed along River Street. The plaza acts as a central gathering space for events, programmed activities, and outdoor dining with direct river access and views.

Elements of the Bridgehead Plaza and Park include:

- A central plaza with a mix of paving and landscape planters.
- Trails and boardwalk.
- A terraced riparian woodland area and filtered view of the river.



BRIDGEHEAD PLAZA & PARK	AREA	DISTANCE
Bridgehead Plaza	.61 acres	-----
Trails	----	1,710 linear feet
Boardwalks	----	1,100 linear feet
Open Space/Riparian Zone	2.58 acres	----
	3.19 acres	2,810 linear feet

Fig. 34: Bridgehead Plaza and Park Summary

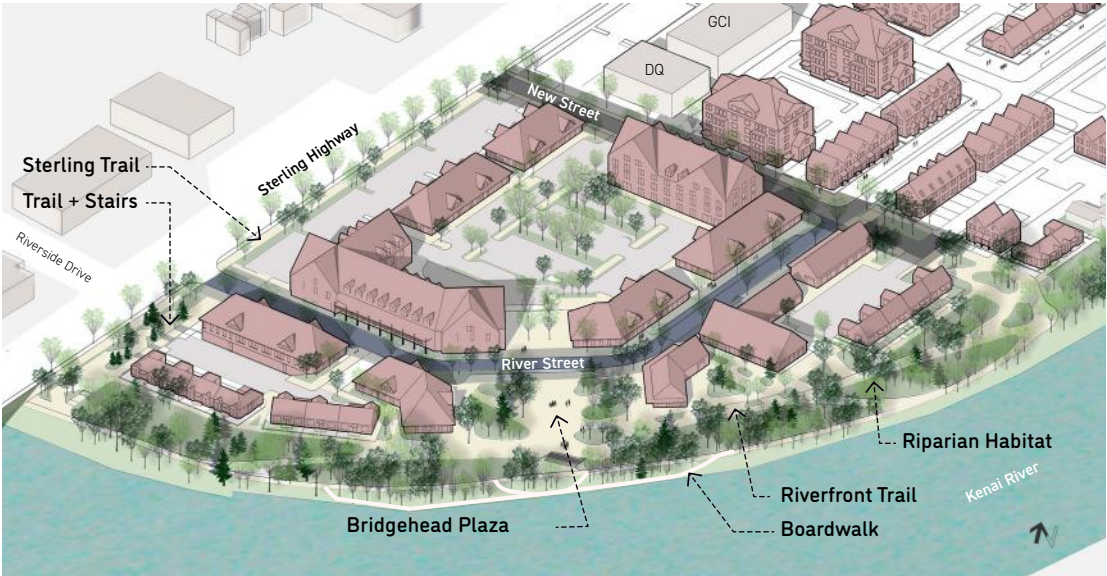


Fig. 35: Proposed Bridgehead Plaza





Fig. 36: Proposed Bridgehead Plaza Illustration



### RIVER STREET PARK

Trails and an upland wooded park serve as amenities for river-oriented housing, retail, and dining. Nestled on a scenic bluff, the woodland park creates an idyllic setting for passive recreation and outdoor dining. Trails meander gently through the woods, inviting visitors to explore the serene beauty of the surroundings.

Elements of the River Street Park include:

- Preservation of the woodland tree canopy with a trail loop and connections to the riverfront trail leading to Soldotna Creek Park.
- An overlook providing upland views of the surrounding landscape and the river below.



RIVER STREET PARK	AREA
River Street Park, Trails & Open Space	.85 acres
	.85 acres

Fig. 37: River Street Park Summary



Fig. 38: Proposed River Street Park



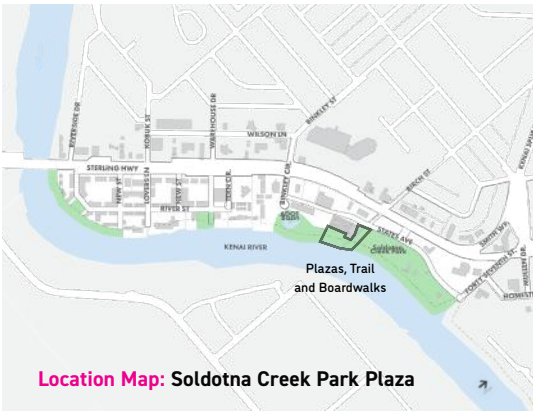
Fig. 39: Proposed River Street Park Illustration



SOLDOTNA CREEK PARK PLAZAS

Situated with picturesque river views and accessible via an extension of Birch Street, the plaza is designed to enhance the utilization and function of Soldotna Creek Park, support a planned market hall and provide visual access to the river. Improvements will maintain public parking for the market hall park use and accommodate seasonal events. Elements of the Soldotna Creek Park Plaza include:

- An upper plaza for gathering and a winter skating pad with a ramp and trail to a lower plaza.
- Lower plaza with a water play feature, nature gardens and play areas adjacent to existing and upgraded boardwalks.
- New trail connections and enhanced boardwalks with an overlook.



SOLDOTNA CREEK PARK PLAZAS	AREA	DISTANCE
Upper Plaza	.41 acres	-----
Lower Plaza	.48 acres	-----
Water Play	.03 acres	-----
Nature Play	.07 acres	-----
Gardens	.11 acres	-----
New/Replace Boardwalks	----	1,300 linear feet
Trail/Ramp	----	600 linear feet
1.1 acres		1,900 linear feet

Fig. 40: Plazas, Trails & Boardwalk Summary

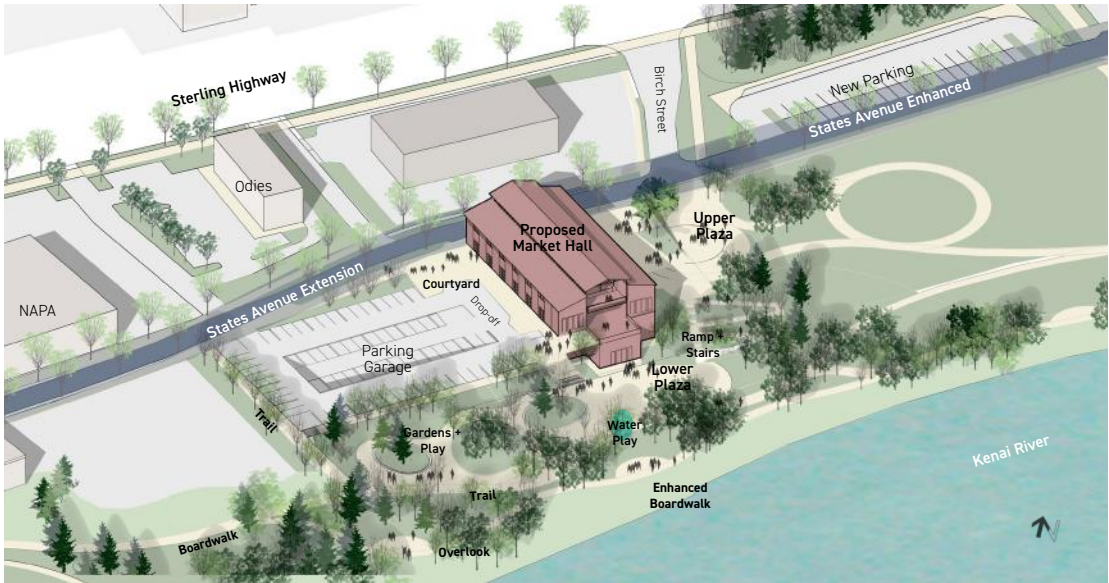


Fig. 41: Proposed Plazas, Trail and Boardwalk



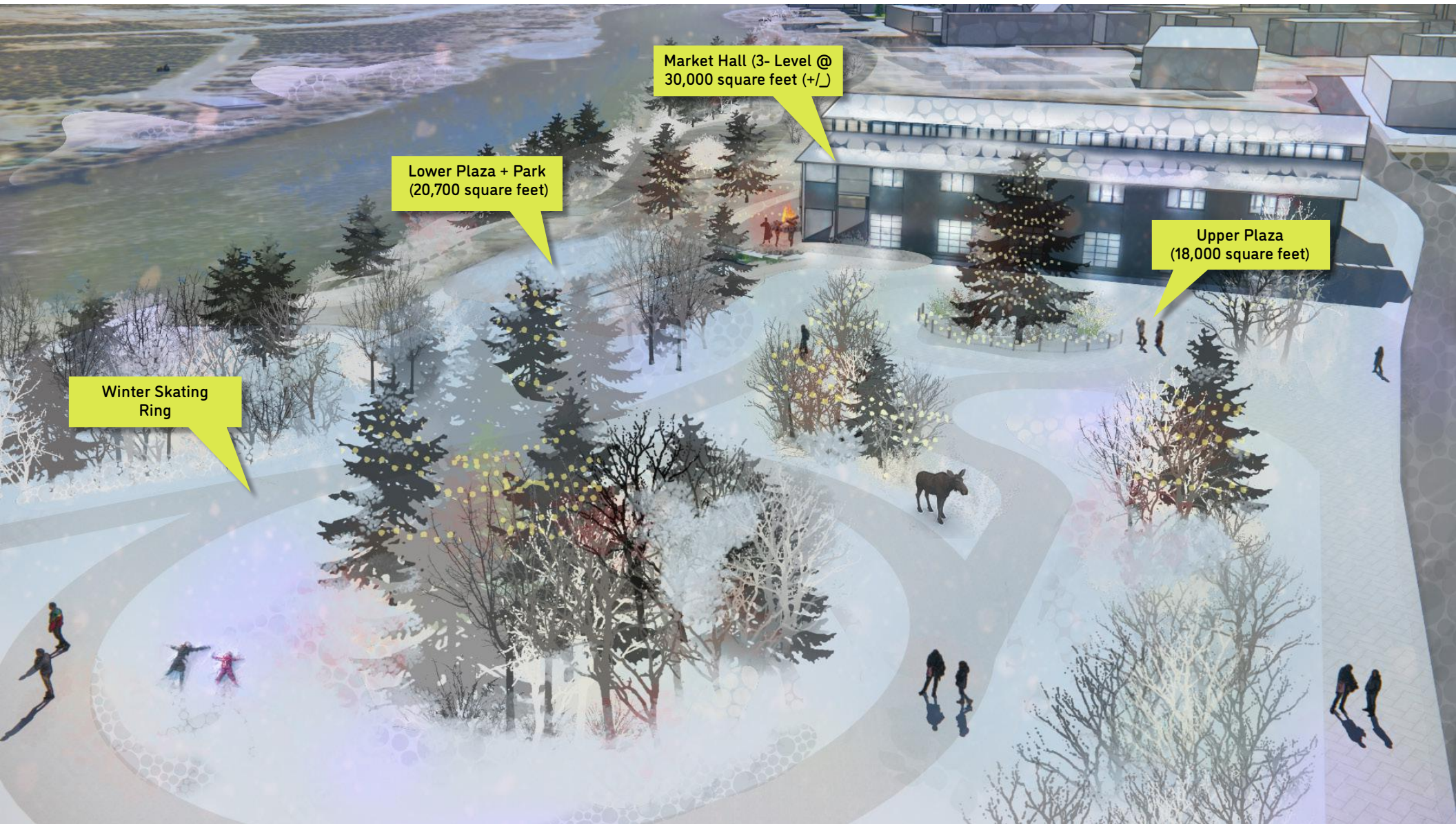


Fig. 42: Proposed "Bookend" Plaza at the Market Hall- Illustration

# Retail, Dining, and Entertainment

A street-oriented retail, dining and entertainment destination will attract residents and visitors to downtown.

The location of retail, dining and entertainment venues builds upon the downtown’s unique qualities including its location along the Kenai River. New uses will complement existing retail, dining, and service uses, and add the density necessary to create a walkable downtown district.

The proposed retail framework is:

- Compact and walkable, extending approximately 1/4 mile in length along River Street
- Street-oriented and active, with continuous retail uses activating ground floors of buildings
- Served by adequate parking, with on-street parking and strategically located public parking
- Anchored by the Bridgehead Plaza, River Street Park and the Blazy Mall

The Plan identifies three complementary areas for retail, dining and entertainment:

- The **Riverside Hub, situated along River Street and the Kenai River, functions as downtown’s primary destination for retail, dining, and entertainment.** It includes a hotel and is anchored by the Bridgehead Plaza, boasting extensive Kenai River frontage.

- The **Kobuk Street Hub, oriented towards River Street and the River Street Park, serves as a more intimate neighborhood destination with retail, and dining storefronts.** It is complemented by a concentration of housing and the River Street upland park with wooded trails and overlook view of the Kenai River.
- The **Binkley, and Birch Street Hub, oriented towards Soldotna Creek Park and the Kenai River, is a year-round destination for local goods, and food vendors, activities, and events** within a public Market Hall and an adjacent riverfront plaza.

RETAIL/DINING/ENTERTAINMENT	AREA
Riverside Hub Retail, Food, Beverage, & Entertainment	102,850 square feet
Riverside Hub Hotel	62 rooms
Kobuk Hub Retail, Food, Beverage, & Entertainment	33,200 square feet
Soldotna Creek Park Market Hall - Retail, Food, Beverage, & Entertainment	31,500 square feet
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>166,550 square feet</b>

Fig. 43: Retail, Dining and Entertainment Summary



Credit: Bar of America/Google

Fig. 44: Outdoor Dining (Truckee, CA)



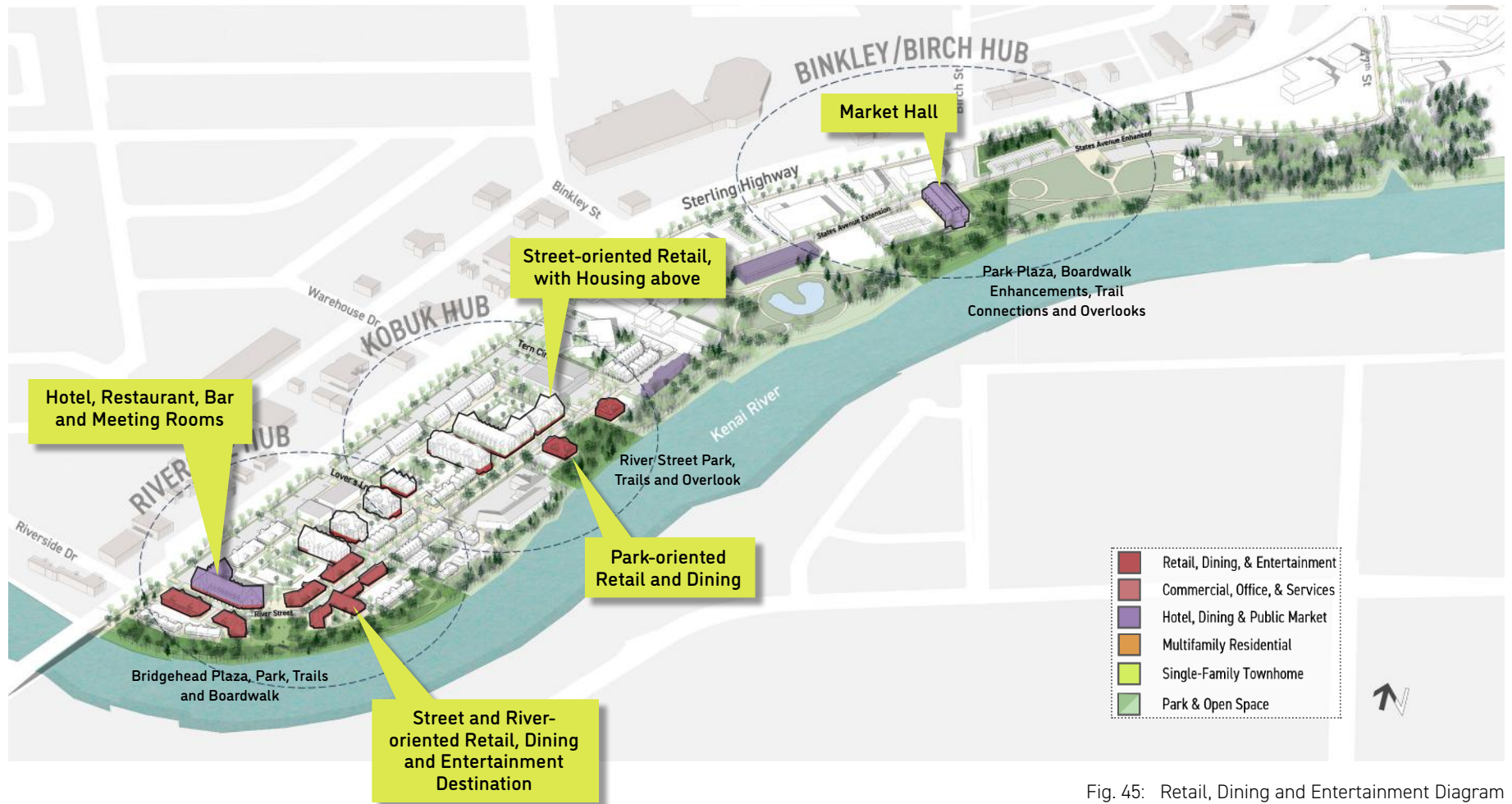


Fig. 45: Retail, Dining and Entertainment Diagram

## Market Hall at Soldotna Creek Park

A Market Hall on the City-owned Davis Block property, is a proposed development which could support a food hall, restaurants, and spaces for meetings, conferences, and community events (Figure 47). A multi-level facility could include the Visitor's Center, Chamber of Commerce offices, and exhibits. Existing parking could be expanded in a proposed two-level parking structure.

The Market Hall, designed as a public space, would benefit locally owned businesses, aligning with goals to foster community and economic development. Its goal is to keep money within downtown, offering low-risk business opportunities for vendors that promote local entrepreneurship. Public markets can contribute significantly to the local economy.

The envisioned Market Hall is complemented by upper and lower plazas, featuring outdoor spaces for gatherings and a scenic view of the Kenai River. Strategically located along Soldotna Creek Park, the Market Hall building aligns with Birch Street, providing excellent access from the Sterling Highway. The central commons of the building is designed to face the river, enhancing the appeal and unique qualities of this location (Figure 48).

MARKET HALL	AREA
Commons	6,925 square feet
Market Stalls (13-20)	4,075 square feet
Restaurant	2,200 square feet
Visitor Ctr./Chamber of Commerce	3,650 square feet
Conf./Meeting/Classrooms	5,750 square feet
Lobby	3,225 square feet
Circulation/Restroom/Other	5,675 square feet
Parking Garage (2 Levels)	170 Stall
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>31,500 square feet</b>

Fig. 46: Market Hall Development Summary

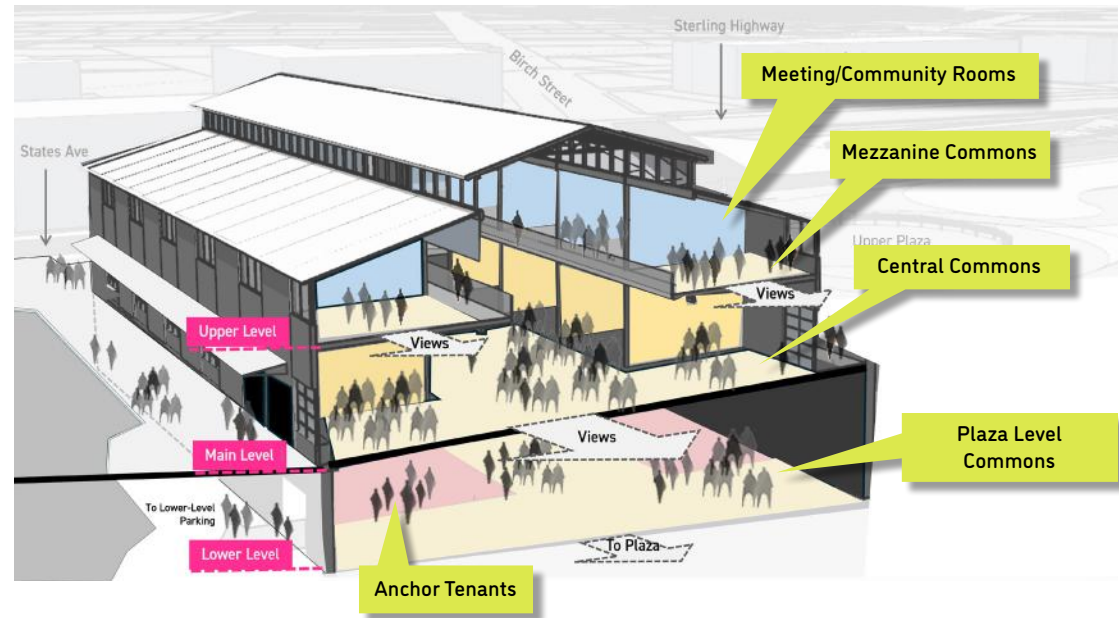


Fig. 47: Proposed Market Hall Section Illustration



The initial step in establishing a Market Hall is to conduct a feasibility analysis to gather additional information, confirming the location and appropriate scale of the facility and exploring alternative models for the operation and ownership of the market.

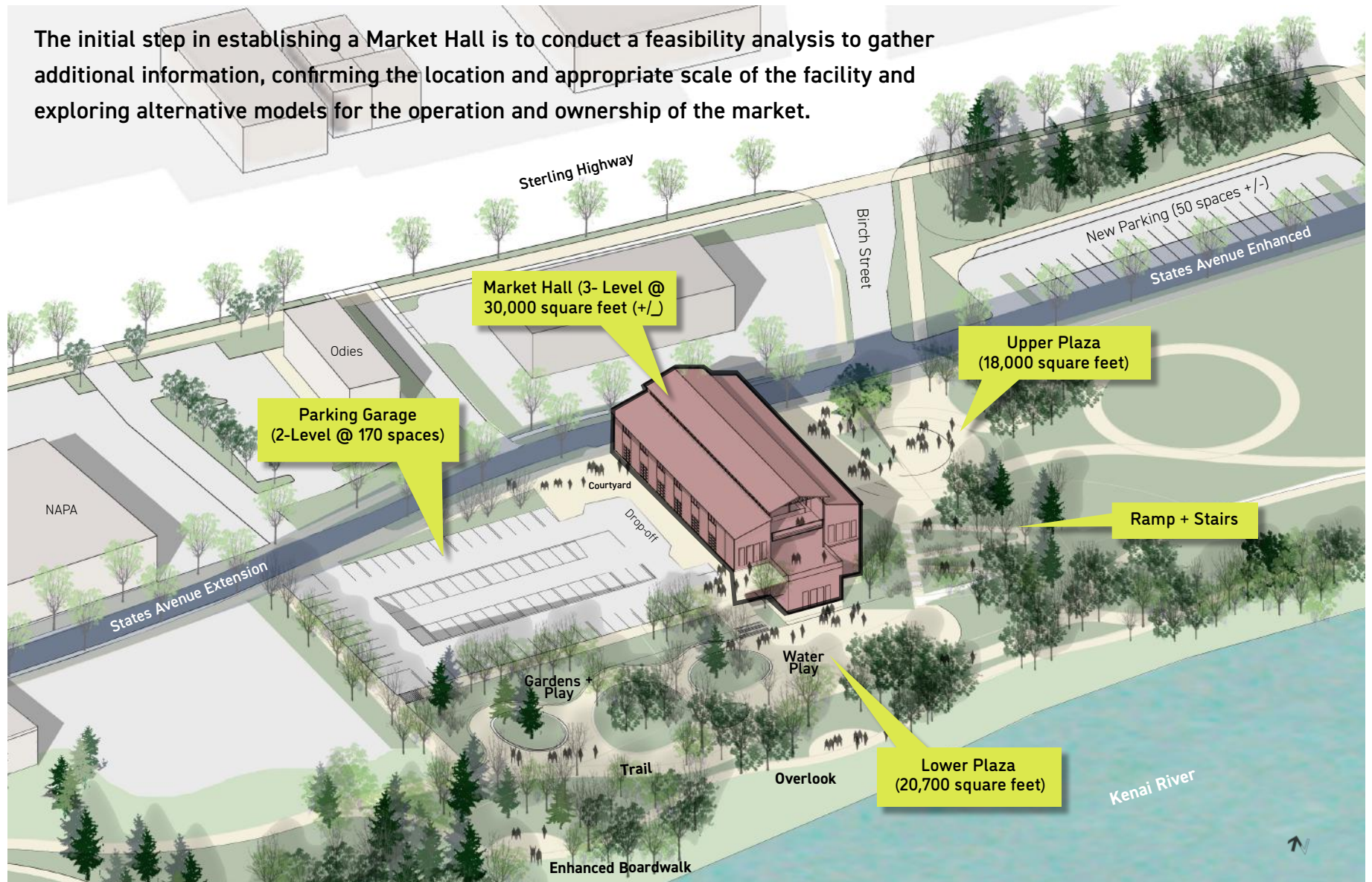


Fig. 48: Proposed Market Hall at Soldotna Creek Park



## Commercial

**The Sterling Highway serves as a backdrop for new commercial ventures that cater to daily needs and services while also serving the seasonal visitor economy.**

Currently, commercial uses are set back from the highway with some lodging further back and closer to the riverfront. Existing buildings are disconnected from each other and are oriented to parking lots. The proposed commercial framework capitalizes on visibility/access from the highway, with a goal to draw motorists off the highway and into the walkable commercial district. Buildings are side-by-side, with windows and doors activating the building's ground floor and office or housing uses on upper floors.

The buildings and parking areas would be interconnected with sidewalks built along each building and from building to building to promote walking and safe access to businesses. This orientation supports the corridor as a gateway into the downtown area (Figure 51).

Adequate parking, including on-street parking and strategically located public parking, is provided. This will allow people to "park once" and more efficiently access multiple businesses in one compact commercial area.

COMMERCIAL	AREA
Riverside Hub Retail, Food & Services	13,000 square feet
Kobuk Hub Retail, Food, & Services	50,600 square feet
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>63,600 square feet</b>

Fig. 49: Commercial Summary



Fig. 50: Arterial Roadway Oriented Commercial Buildings (Tulsa, OK)

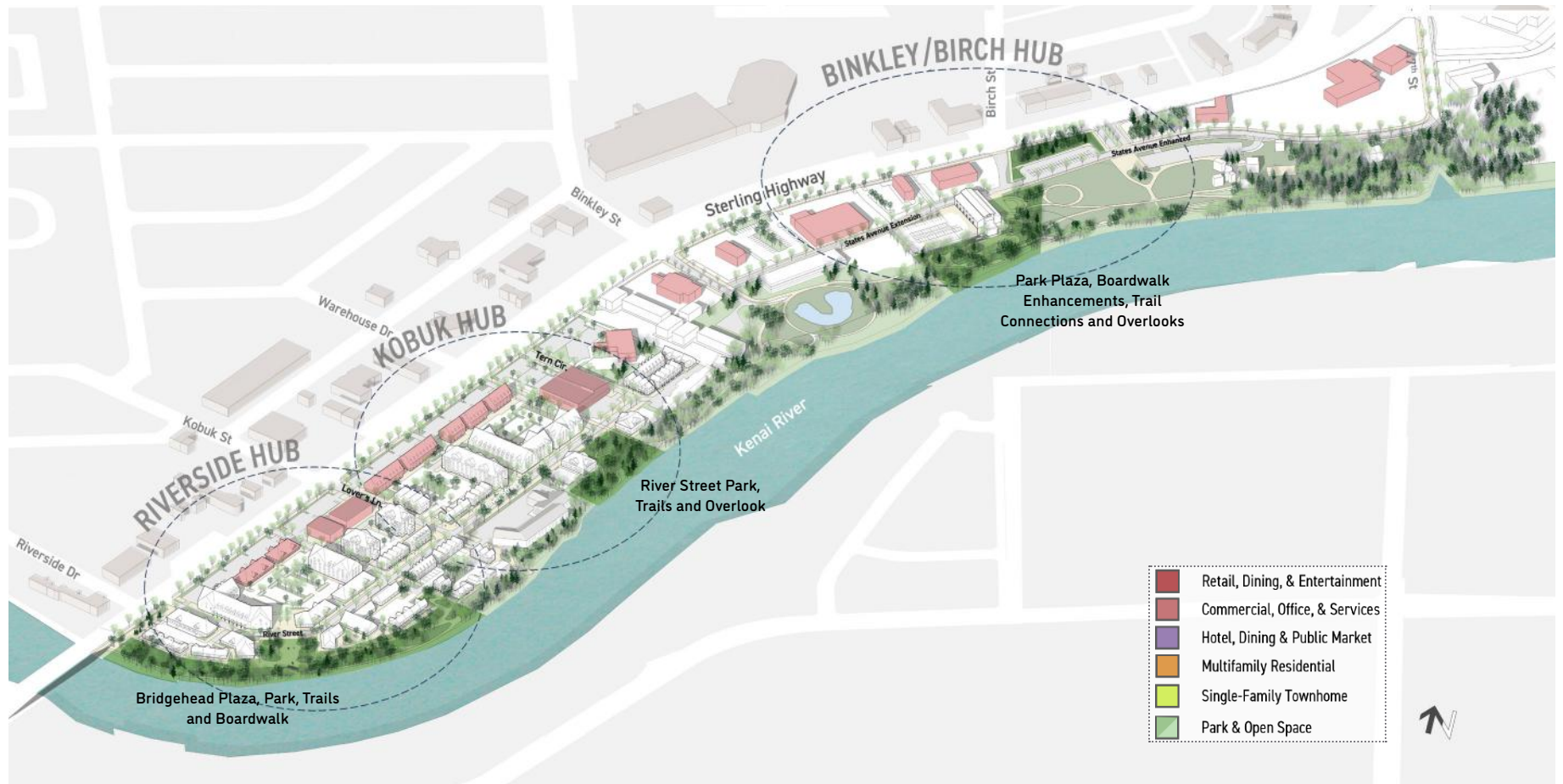


Fig. 51: Commercial Storefront Diagram



## Residential

**Downtown housing is strategically situated in close proximity to jobs and shopping, fostering convenience for residents and supporting downtown businesses.**

A mixed-use district that contains both commercial and residential uses allows for a more active "18-hour activity center," where residents are within a short walk or bike ride to businesses and service centers that meet their daily needs, as well as parks, trails, and other amenities that keep the district active and vibrant all day long and into the evening. The mix of housing types meets the projected housing demand identified in the market analysis in part with locating some single family attached townhomes where building heights are intended to be lower such as along the waterfront and preserving larger sites for multi-family buildings and potentially ground-floor commercial storefronts that allow for a critical mass of residents living in the downtown.

The housing framework supports:

- Opportunities for a high-density neighborhood within the Riverside and Kobuk Street Hubs.
- A diiversity of housing types catering to all incomes and age groups.
- Housing on upper floors above storefronts.
- A variety of market-rate rental and ownership options, along with workforce housing that is aligned with incomes in Soldotna.
- Adequate housing available for employees/ operators of new retail, dining, entertainment establishments to live in the downtown.

OPEN SPACE AMENITY	AREA
Riverside Hub Townhomes	43 units
Kobuk Hub Townhomes	25 units
Riverside Hub Multi-family	84 units
Kobuk Hub Multi-family	150 units
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>302 units</b>

Fig. 52: Residential Summary



Fig. 53: Multi-family building with commercial storefronts

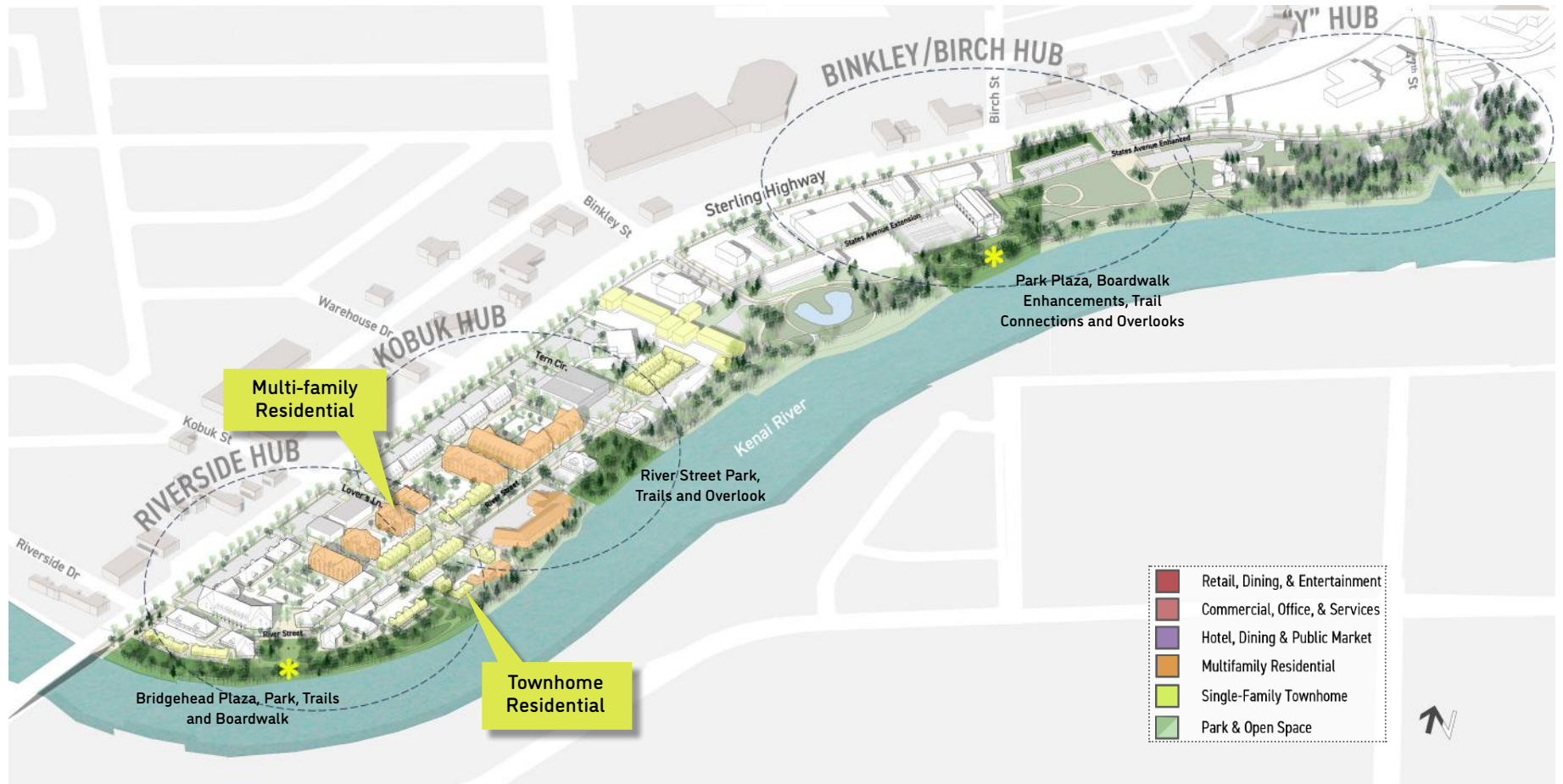


Fig. 54: Residential Diagram



# Parking

New and existing uses require parking in close proximity to businesses, public areas, and housing for future residents.

Balancing parking needs while supporting the downtown as a walkable destination poses challenges. Vehicle movement in and out of parking areas can impact the feeling of safety when walking downtown. Large parking lots and disconnected buildings do not contribute to a walkable environment.

Parking comes at a cost, adding to development expenses, impacting investments, and eventually leading to higher prices for goods, services, and rents. Parking is not free.

Additionally, Soldotna's parking requirements vary for each business type, with restaurants bearing the highest burden of providing off-street parking. Parking requirements for the majority of commercial uses are currently set at 1 space per 300 square feet.

To mitigate the negative impacts of parking on creating a unique destination, the Plan recommends a parking strategy that includes:

- Establishing minimum commercial parking requirements with a uniform standard of 1 space per 400 square feet of commercial development (including restaurants) within the project area.
- Sharing parking through dedicated public lots and on-street stalls, a more efficient method than each development providing all required parking on-site.

- Allowing all parking in the project area including dedicated public lots, on street stalls and private off-street lots to count toward overall parking minimum requirements.
- Allowing more parking to be provided than the minimum but at the owner or business discretion. Parking is to be located curbside, behind buildings or underground.

The parking diagram on the following page (Figure 54) illustrates the concept, with parking provided in:

- A public parking and access lane along Sterling Highway.
- Dedicated public parking lots.
- Private shared off-street parking internal to new development blocks or private lots for existing uses.

- On-street parking within existing and new streets.

Applying the proposed parking minimums for new development within the Riverside and Kobuk Street Hubs means that approximately 70% of all parking would be provided on-site and internal to the development blocks, with the remainder accommodated in public parking areas (adjacent lots and surrounding streets).

The parking summary above illustrates the number of private spaces internal to development blocks in the Riverside and Kobuk Street Hubs and public parking available in public lots, and on-streets throughout the project area.

PARKING LOCATION	AREA
Sterling Frontage	255 spaces
Public Lots	344 spaces
Public On-Street	234 spaces
Private Shared Off-Street	592 spaces
TOTAL	1,425 spaces

Fig. 55: Parking Summary



Fig. 56: Parking Diagram



# UTILITIES

The redevelopment project anticipates not only the creation of new utilities but also upgrades and extensions to existing utility infrastructure. Refer to Appendix B.2 Utilities Concepts for complete infrastructure needs and improvements,

## Water

A properly sized water main pipe should be constructed/extended along the River Street, the New Street, and the extension of Warehouse Lane. The existing Lovers Lane and Sterling Highway water main pipes would be connected into these new main extensions. Water is currently supplied to the area between Lovers Lane and Binkley Circle. Fire hydrants should be designed and constructed on every block or spaced approximately 300'. Water service stubs should be constructed to the ROW for future development and tie in by the property owners.

## Sewer

Sewer service is currently supplied to the area between Lovers Lane and Binkley Circle. New sanitary sewer manholes, and sewer service stubs need to be constructed for future development. A properly sized sewer main pipe with service stubs should be constructed/extended along:

- River Street, New Street (west of Lover's Lane) and the Warehouse Lane extension. The existing Lovers Lane sewer main pipe could be connected into these new main extensions.
- The parking access lane at the Sterling Highway.

## Storm Drain

Storm drain manholes and curb line inlet

catch basins should be designed and constructed. A properly sized storm drain pipe should be constructed/extended along:

- River Street and New Street's full length in the Riverside Hub
- Binkley Circle, and part of States Avenue/ Forty-Seventh Street.

If concurrent reconstruction allows for it, Lovers Lane should have a storm drain pipe extended its full length along with curb inlets installed. A new storm drain pipe extension should be constructed on Warehouse Lane and Tern Circle and connect to existing storm drain main piping along the Sterling Highway. At the parking access lane, drainage could be handled by existing storm drain systems along the Sterling Highway.

## Electric

The local electric utility typically reviews new roadway work and designs relocations or extensions of their electrical service facilities in house. Street lighting and/or pedestrian scale lighting should be considered and designed along all proposed redevelopment routes. Lighting should be constructed or extended along:

- The River Street and New Street's full length at the Riverside Hub. If concurrent reconstruction allows, Lovers Lane could have a new modern lighting system extended its full length.
- Warehouse Lane and Tern Circle connecting to existing electrical systems along the Sterling Highway.

UTILITIES	DISTANCE
Sanitary Sewer	4,600 linear feet
Storm Sewer	5,300 linear feet
Water	2,700 linear feet
Electric	7,500 linear feet
Gas	4,200 linear feet
Communications	5,100 linear feet
TOTAL	29,410 linear feet

Fig. 57: Utilities Infrastructure Summary

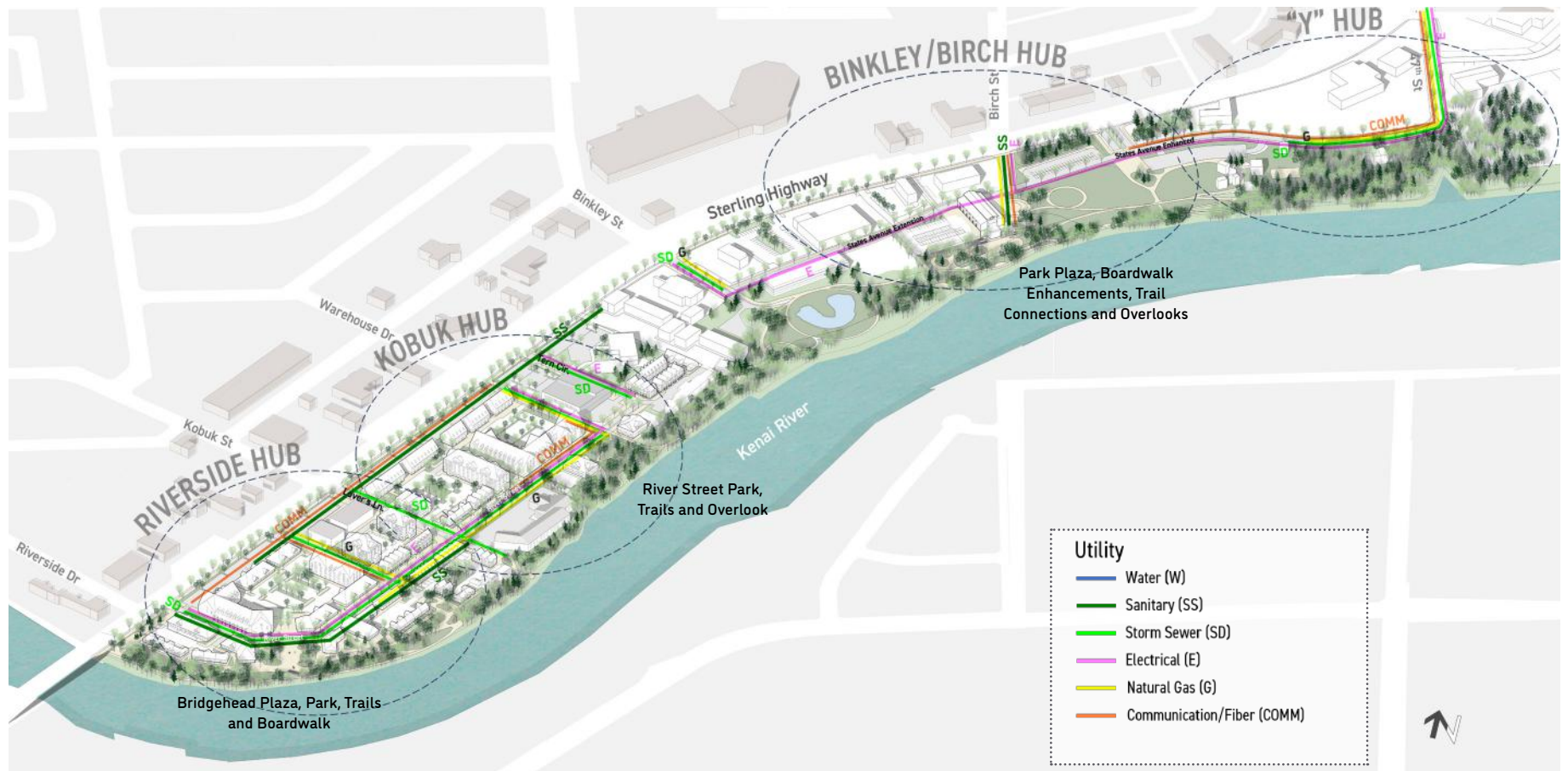


Fig. 58: Utilities Diagram

- Binkley Circle, Birch Street, States Avenue and Forty-Seventh Street.

### Natural Gas

The local gas utility typically reviews new roadway work and designs relocations or extensions of their natural gas service facilities in house. Gas piping may be constructed along:

- River Street, New Street and Warehouse Lane.

- Binkley Circle, Birch Street, and part of States Avenue/Forty-Seventh Street.
- New gas piping could be extended along Tern Circle and connect to existing gas systems along the Sterling Highway.

### Communications

The local communications utilities review new roadway work and designs relocations or extensions of their facilities in house.

New communication lines should connect to existing systems. Communication facilities may be constructed along:

- The east end of River Street near Blazy Mall and along the New Street (west of Lover's Lane).
- States Avenue, Birch Street, and part of Forty-Seventh Street.



## REGULATORY

### Creating Certainty for the Community and Investors

Successfully implementing a one-of-a-kind riverfront destination will require the establishment of regulations (defining what is allowed) and standards (specifying how it will be built). Together, these elements form the "rules of the game" for future investments within the project area. Potential investors, the City, and the greater Soldotna community are seeking a level of certainty that their downtown investment will yield positive outcomes. Two crucial regulations for downtown success include zoning and street standards. Currently, the "rules of the game" in both the existing Commercial zone designation for the project area and current City street standards do not ensure the level of certainty necessary to support the Plan's mix of uses or the creation of a walkable downtown.

To ensure consistency with the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan, regulating policies, plans, ordinances, and funding strategies will need to be either updated or created by the City and consultants and adopted by the City Council and/or in coordination with the Kenai Peninsula Borough, AK DOT&PF, or other regulating bodies.

The following pages highlight the purpose and key elements of a Mixed-Use District zone. Street standards to be considered by the City are included in the Mobility section of this chapter.



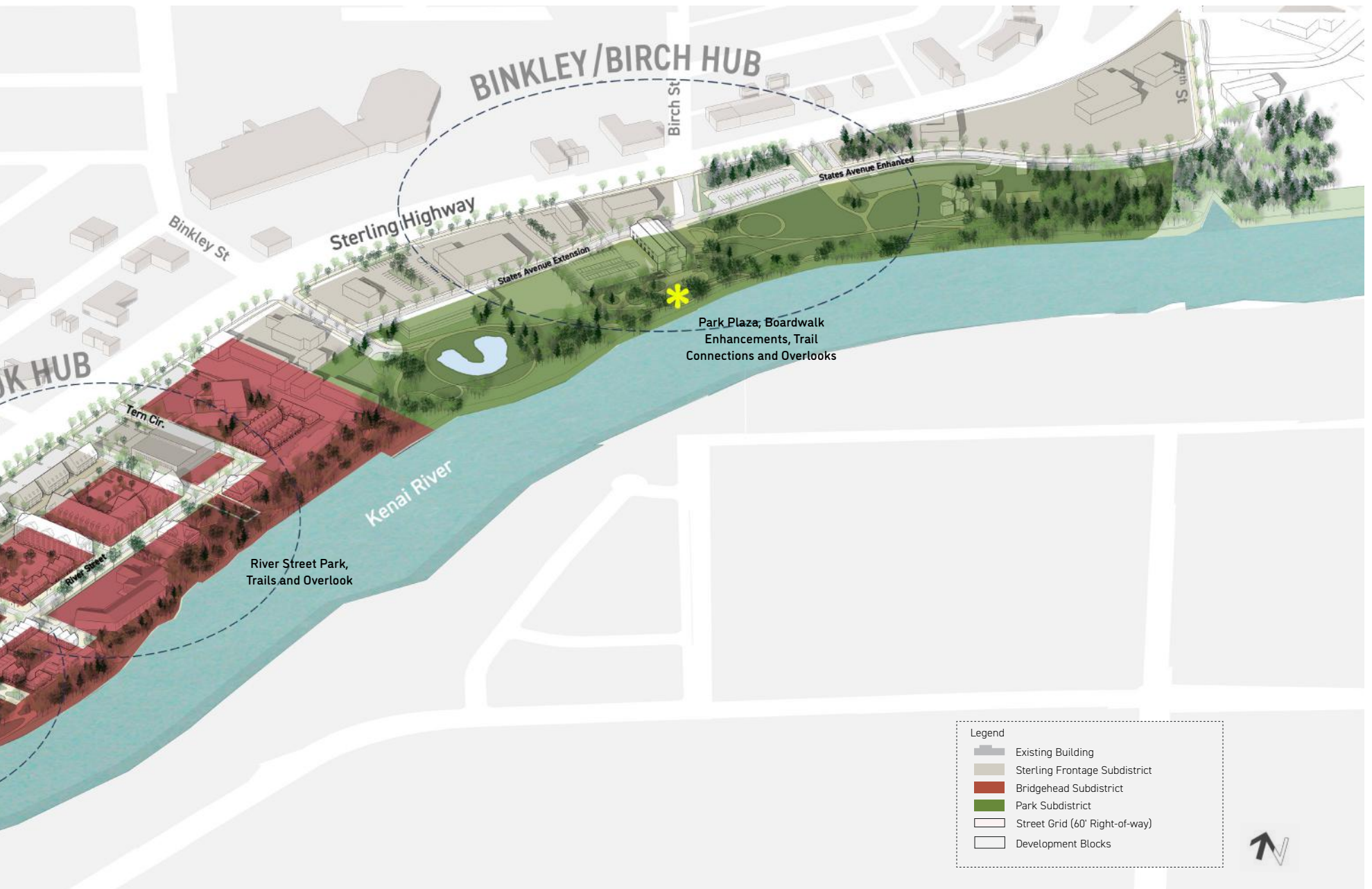


Fig. 59: Regulatory Framework- Downtown Mixed Use District Zone



## Downtown Riverfront Mixed-Use District

Mixed use zoning allows for a mix of uses in a single building, a mix of uses side by side or an integrated site of multiple mixed-use buildings.

### DOWNTOWN RIVERFRONT MIXED USE (DRMU)

A new mixed-use zoning designation is intended to implement the vision, and objectives of this Plan, and the policies of the Envision Soldotna 2030 Comprehensive Plan to ensure future development is integrated, cohesive, context sensitive and contributes to the overall development framework as described in this Plan. Standards would apply to the properties within the areas and subdistricts shown on Figure 60.

### Subdistricts

Subdistricts within the overall District are defined with a unique set of characteristics that support their intended function along the Sterling Highway and Kenai River corridor.

The subdistricts are as follows:

- **Bridgehead District.** The centerpiece of a one-of-a-kind riverfront retail, dining, and entertainment destination this subdistrict offers extensive river frontage, anchored by a riverfront plaza and a River Street that serves as a signature "address" and front-door to the subdistrict.
- **Park District.** The subdistrict offers retail, lodging, and commercial uses organized around Soldotna Creek Park,

the community's 'living room.' States Avenue plays a crucial role in connecting adjacent businesses, promoting the use and function of the park as a community asset. This connection also provides safe, convenient, and direct access to Soldotna Creek Park and riverfront activities.

- **Sterling Frontage.** A mix of commercial uses with convenient access to the Sterling Highway. Development over time is intended to organize buildings such that they promote



Fig. 60: Mixed-Use District- Subdistricts

the corridor as an attractive entry to the downtown. Improvements to the Sterling Highway will promote the safety and attractiveness of the highway and support walking and biking between the downtown subdistricts.

### Ground Floor Uses

Regulating the ground-floor of buildings ensure compatible uses at the street level along unique street frontages. The figure below illustrates three types of ground floor usage, and where they will be allowed in the redevelopment area (Figure 61).

#### 1. Commercial-Type I frontage:

The following commercial uses are allowed—sales-oriented retail; eating, drinking and entertainment establishments; fitness center and community center.

- Residential and office uses prohibited except lobbies and entrances associated with upper story uses are allowed but limited to 25% of the total length of the street frontage.
- Institutional and industrial uses prohibited.
- Storage units and outdoor storage prohibited.

#### 2. Commercial-Type 2 frontage:

Most institutional and commercial uses, including office uses, allowed except:

- Residential uses are excluded other than residential lobbies and entrances associated with upper story residential uses are allowed but limited to 25% of the total length of the street frontage.
- Industrial uses prohibited.
- Storage units and outdoor storage prohibited.

#### 3. Mixed Residential/Commercial frontage:

- Residential and live/work uses allowed.
- Commercial uses allowed but limited to no more than 25% of the total length of street frontage.
- Industrial and institutional uses prohibited
- Storage units and outdoor storage prohibited.

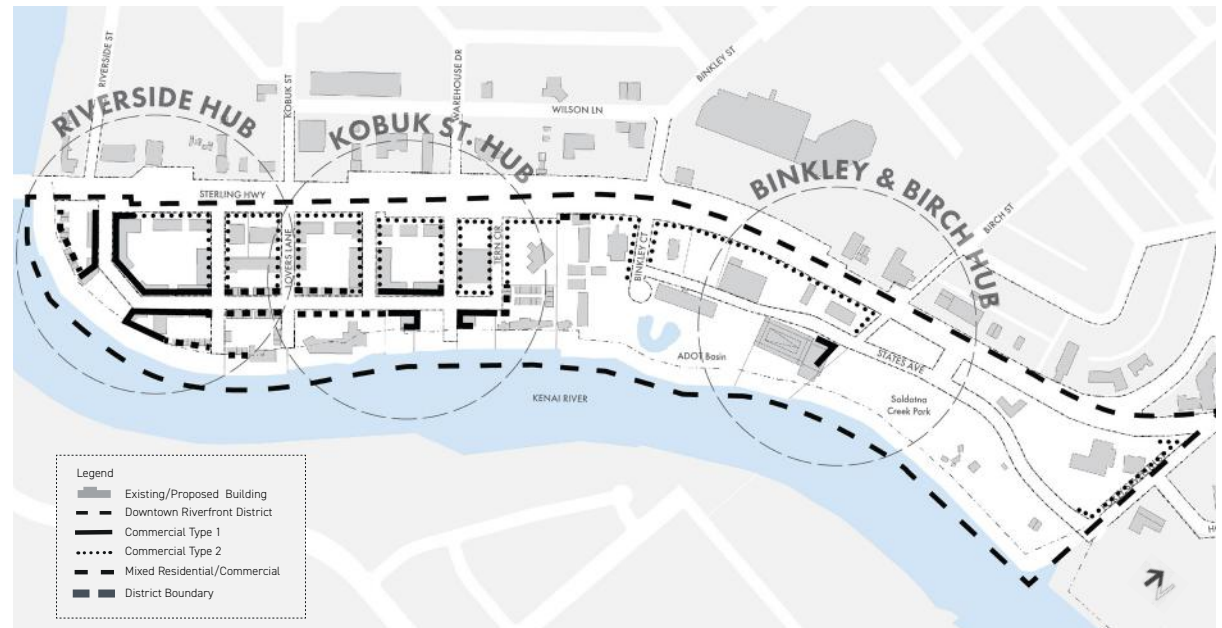


Fig. 61: Mixed-Use District- Ground-floor Uses



## Building Heights

The necessity for height restrictions in the project area is intended to safeguard views of the river. The impact of commercial building heights on neighborhoods is not a significant issue, given that the project area primarily functions as a commercial corridor. The heights of buildings are generally influenced by parking considerations, with the availability of land for surface parking or the construction of structured parking being a limiting factor in development.

The plan recommends restricting building heights only in areas indicated on Figure 62. Heights would be limited to 25 feet, allowing for two-story buildings.

According to the current Kenai River regulations, within 50 feet of the river's edge, no building is permitted, and within 100 feet, structures are limited and subject to conditional review and provisions.

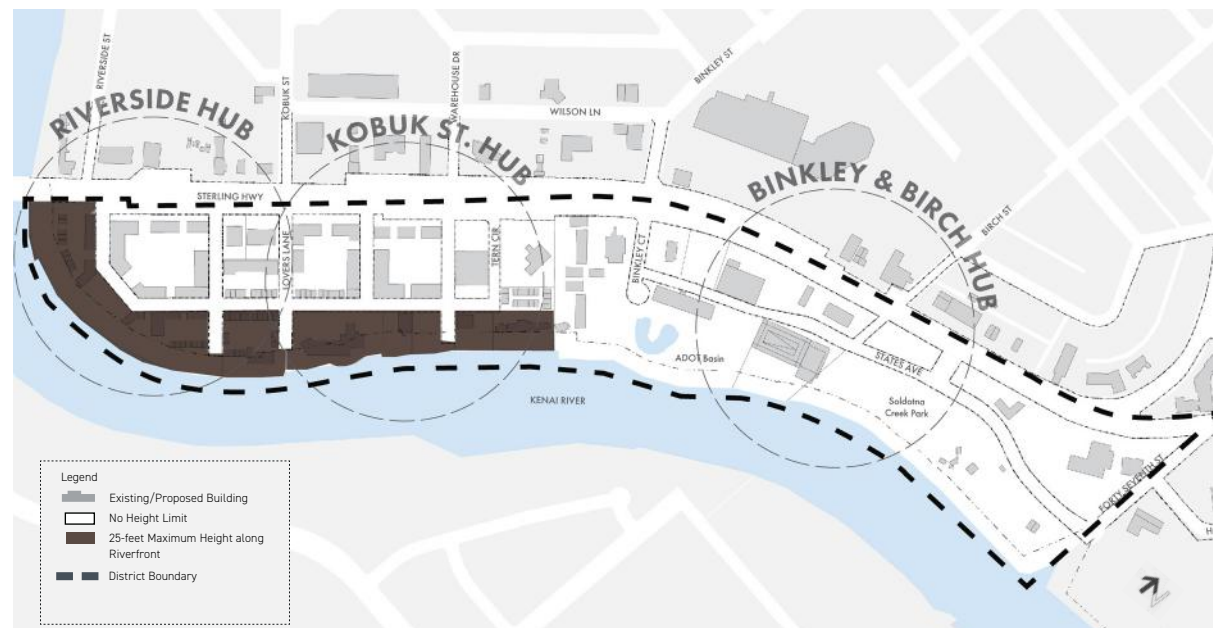


Fig. 62: Mixed-Use District- Building Heights

## Parking Access

Limits and prohibitions for vehicular access to parking and loading areas are intended to promote safe and comfortable pedestrian access along River Street and new and enhanced streets that serve the Downtown Riverfront Mixed-Use District.

### 1. Limited Access Frontages.

The following standard limits vehicular access to off-street parking and loading

areas is limited to one-curb-cut/driveway per development block frontage where indicated. This promotes safe and comfortable pedestrian access within the Downtown Riverfront District, including access to trails and public gathering areas along the Kenai Riverfront.

### 2. Prohibited Access Frontages.

Vehicular access to development blocks is prohibited along key frontages where

indicated. This measure aims to reduce conflicts between automobiles and pedestrians, promoting a safe and pleasant walking experience.

A complete Draft Downtown Riverfront Mixed Use (DRMU) zoning ordinance is provided for in the Appendix to this Plan.

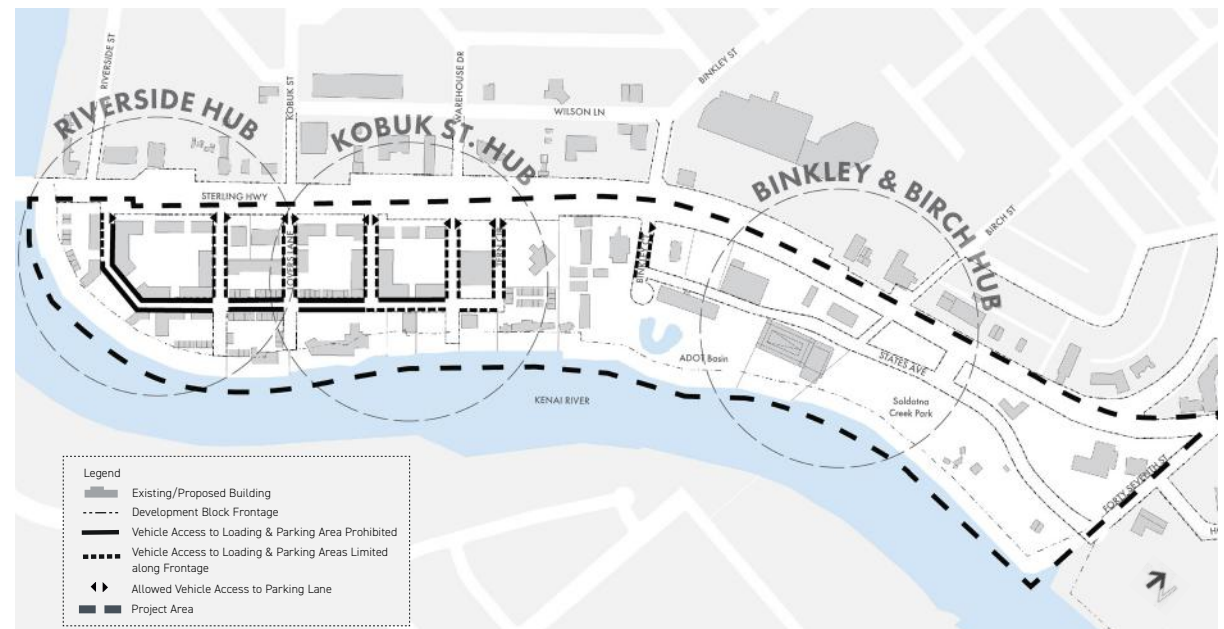


Fig. 63: Mixed-Use District- Parking Access



# MOBILITY

## A Connected Community

The Mobility Framework incorporates recommendations for creating "complete streets" that promote a pedestrian-friendly downtown and provides pedestrian, and bicycle enhancements coupled with auto traffic-calming measures.

- New and enhanced streets offer direct and convenient local access between the Sterling Highway and the Kenai River and an interconnected street grid supports existing and future development along the corridor.
- Multi-use trails along Sterling Highway, the Kenai River and new and enhanced connecting streets form a complete and continuous trail network to promote walking and biking.
- Sterling Highway access management measures are proposed to improve traffic, pedestrian and bicycle safety and enhance business access. This will require a partnership with AK DOT&PF, and aligns with goals identified in the Alaska Strategic Highway Safety Plan and the Alaska Statewide Active Transportation Plan.

While the proposed redevelopment at build-out will increase the number of people traveling to the area, the Traffic and Safety Impacts Analysis (Appendix B: B.5 Traffic and Safety Impacts Analysis) shows that the existing traffic signals along the Sterling Highway can handle the increased traffic at an acceptable level of service (LOS D or better).



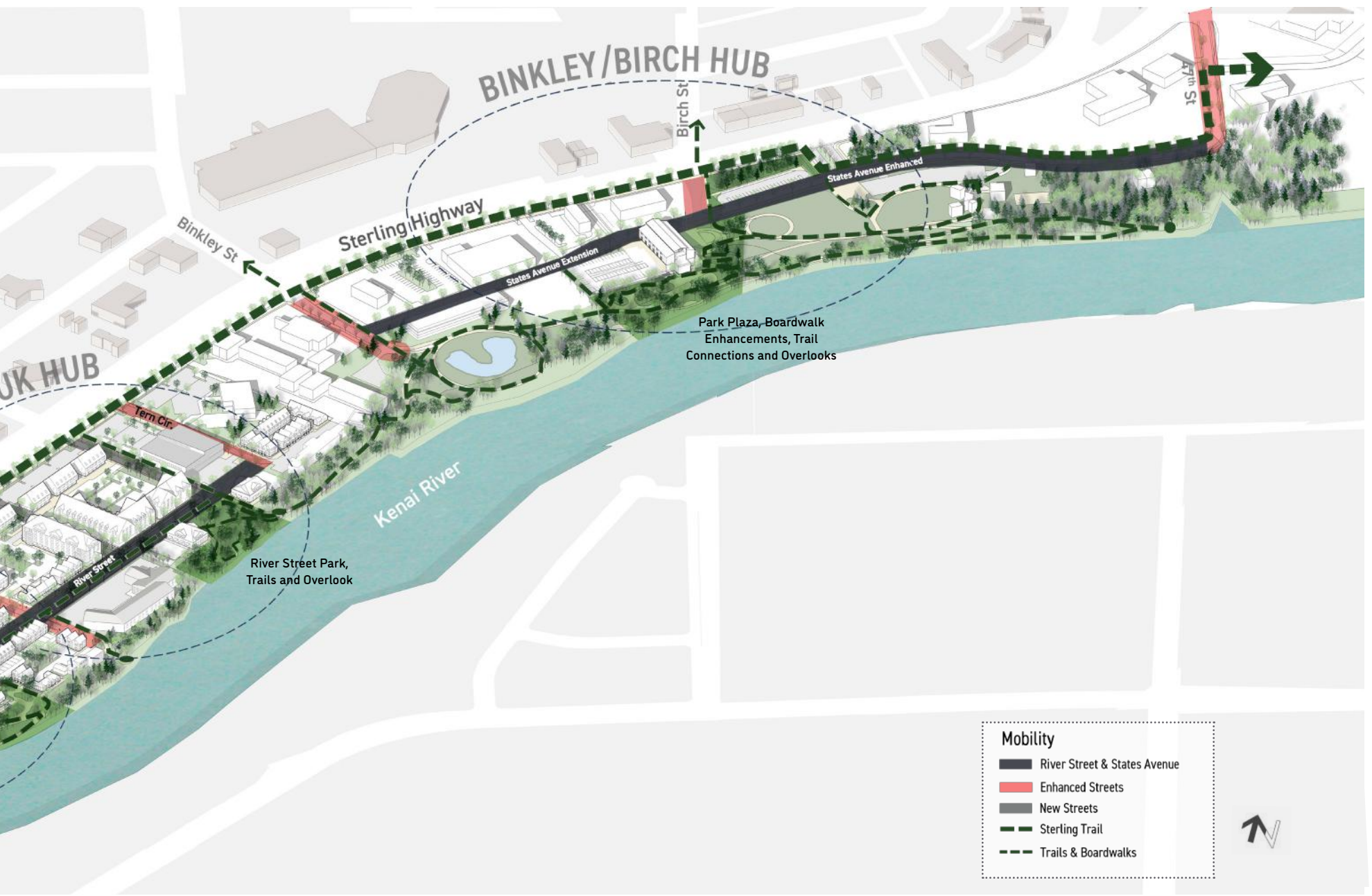


Fig. 64: Mobility Framework Diagram

## Streets Anatomy

Creating a walkable downtown destination requires foundational elements in street design to support a safe, comfortable, and attractive environment for pedestrians.

Crucial to this effort are distinct sidewalk zones accommodating storefronts, outdoor dining, and streetscape furnishings such as lighting, benches, public art, and bicycle parking. The plan strongly advocates that all new and improved streets in the project area adhere to the following design principles:

### ***Street Anatomy Design Principles:***

- Prioritize walking and biking.
- Provide a safe, "slow traffic," and well-lit street.
- Support outdoor dining and seating.
- Manage stormwater to protect river habitat.
- Promote universal access for all users.

Figure 65 illustrates the design elements and character of an exemplary walkable street for the downtown area. Most of Soldotna's street rights-of-way have a 60-foot dimension, but current standards heavily emphasize roadway design, leaving minimal space for walking or activities such as sidewalk dining.

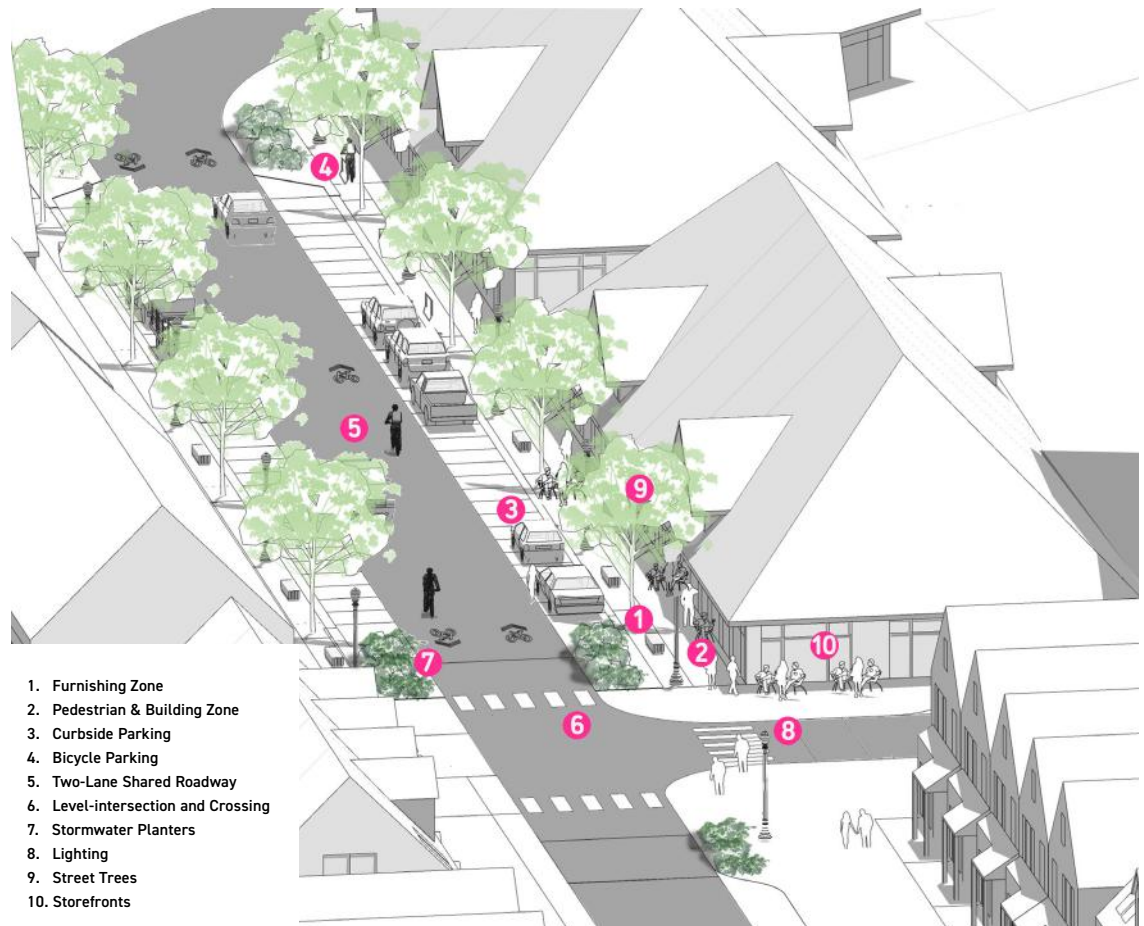


Fig. 65: Proposed Complete Street Standard- 60-foot Right-of-way



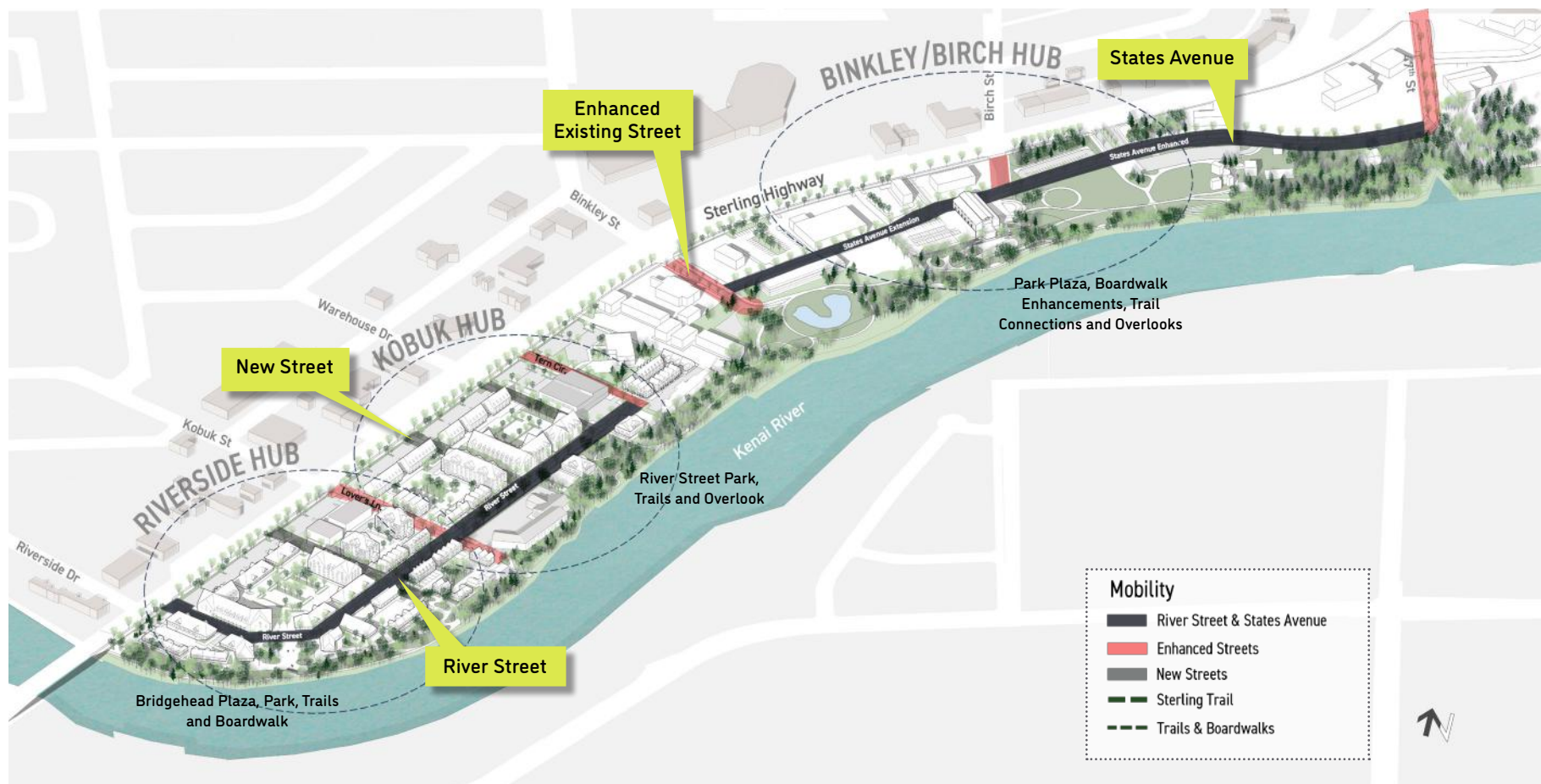


Fig. 66: Street Network

Figure 66 depicts a network of streets designed to support redevelopment and encourage the use of streets for more than just vehicular movement, transforming them into vibrant spaces for people.

Detailed cross-sections and sidewalk elements promoting a walkable downtown are further elaborated on the following pages.

# River Street

River Street serves as a destination for retail, dining, and housing with an emphasis on slower vehicle speeds and encouraging walking and biking.

As a parallel route to the Sterling Highway and oriented to the Kenai River, the River Street provides local traffic access, convenient on-street parking to support businesses and residents, and an enhanced placemaking environment with wide sidewalks for outdoor dining, seating, street trees, and lighting.

Two distinct street sections are provided on River Street. Located at the Bridgehead Plaza, Figure 67 and Figure 68 illustrate the intended design of River Street as a destination for shopping, dining, and entertainment with a focus on the pedestrian environment.

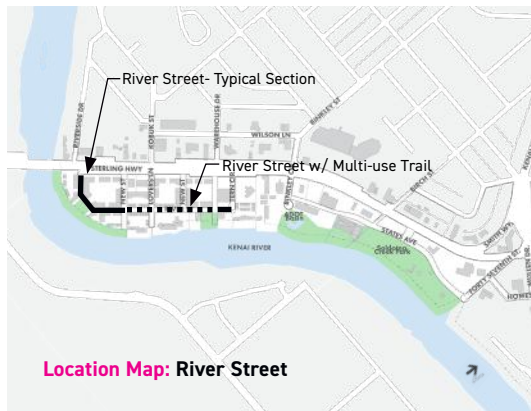


Fig. 67: Walkable Downtown Winter City (Jasper, Alberta, Canada)

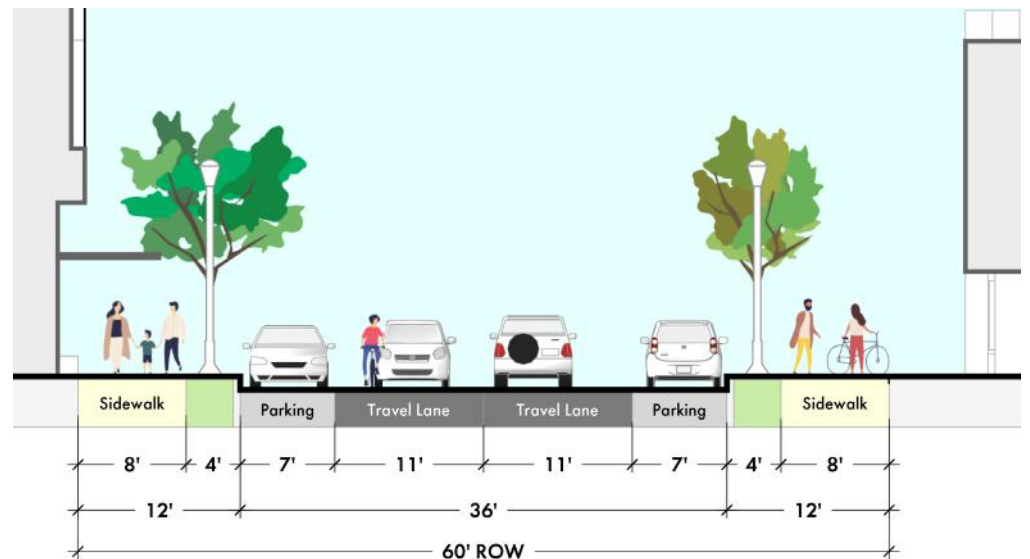


Fig. 68: Proposed Typical River Street Section

On River Street between the Blazy Mall and Lover's Lane, Figure 69 and Figure 70 illustrate the intended design of the street to serve a mix of storefronts and residents with a multi-use trail.

This trail is part of the overall riverfront trail network and represents an area where the trail moves inland from the river's edge. Due to existing buildings located close to the river, the riverfront trail must be redirected to the River Street for three blocks before transitioning back to the riverfront just past Lover's Lane.



Fig. 69: Proposed River Street w/Multi-Use Trail Illustration

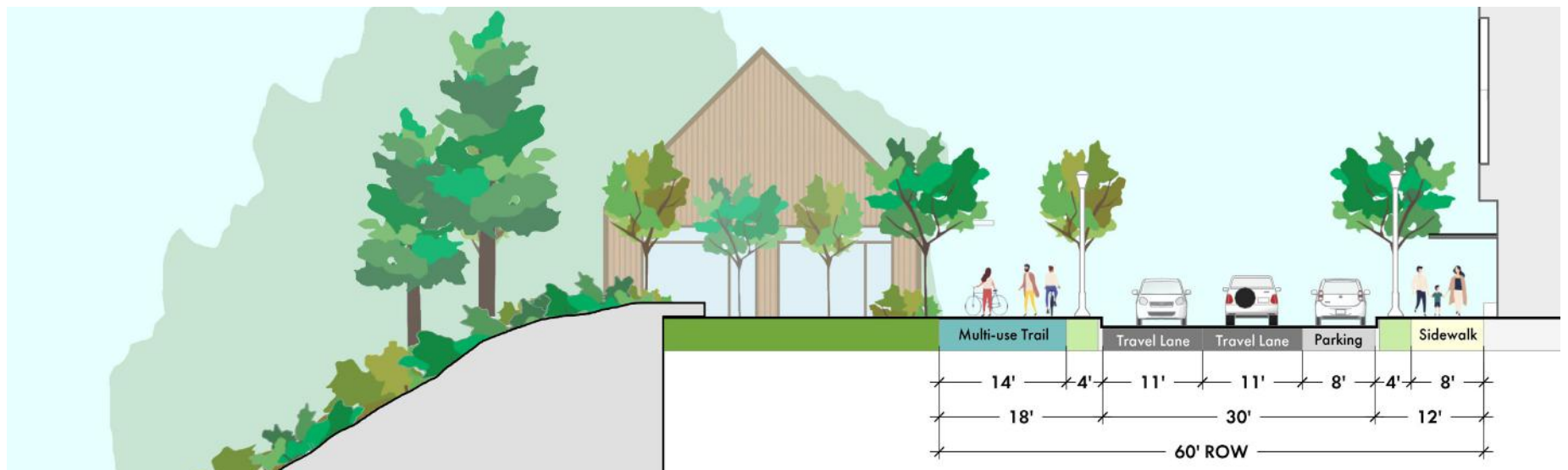


Fig. 70: Proposed River Street w/Multi-Use Trail Section



# States Avenue

Improvements to States Avenue would establish a new street connection by linking the existing Aspen Hotel driveway, starting at Binkley Circle, to the current States Avenue (in Soldotna Creek Park) and extending the road through to 47th Street.

The States Avenue connection combined with the City's planned future improvements to Homestead Drive (between 47th Street and Redoubt Street) will provide a parallel route to Sterling Highway and improve access to businesses between the Binkley Street and Birch Street Hub, the "Y" Intersection and Soldotna Creek Park.

Figure 72 illustrates the intended design of the States Avenue extension between Birch Street and Binkley Circle.

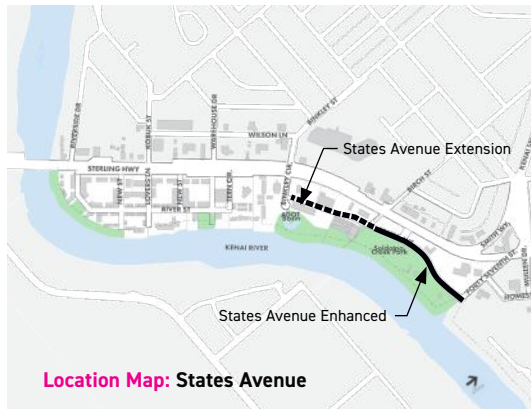


Fig. 71: Existing Driveway at Aspen Hotel (Looking Northeast)

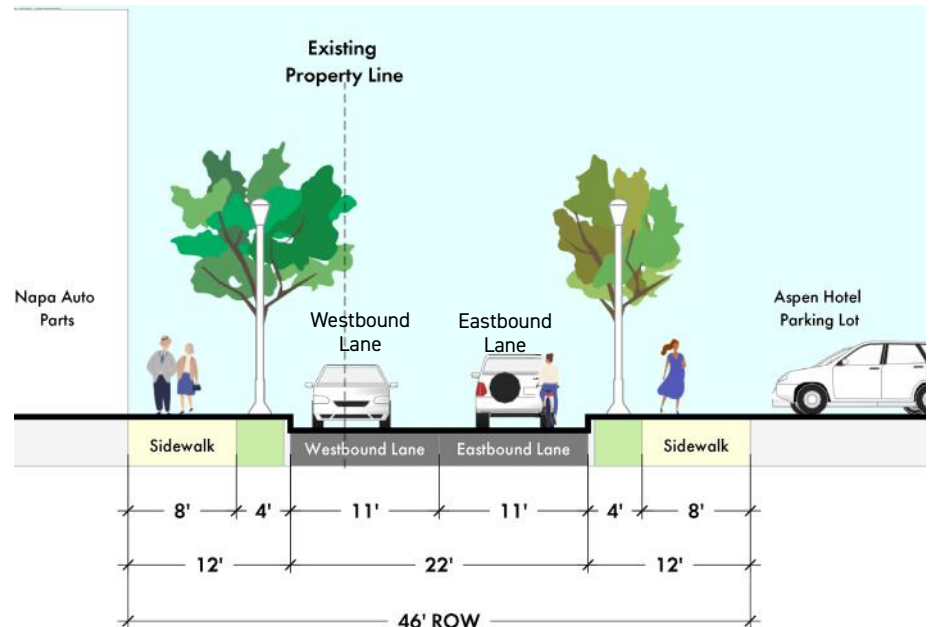


Fig. 72: Proposed States Avenue Extension Section

**States Avenue improvements between Birch Street and 47th Street will support convenient local vehicular access, on-street parking and wide sidewalks with street trees and lighting.**

Within this street segment a multi-use trail will be located along the north side of the street and is an extension of the proposed Sterling Highway trail (Figure 74).



Fig. 73: Existing States Avenue at Soldotna Creek Park (2023)

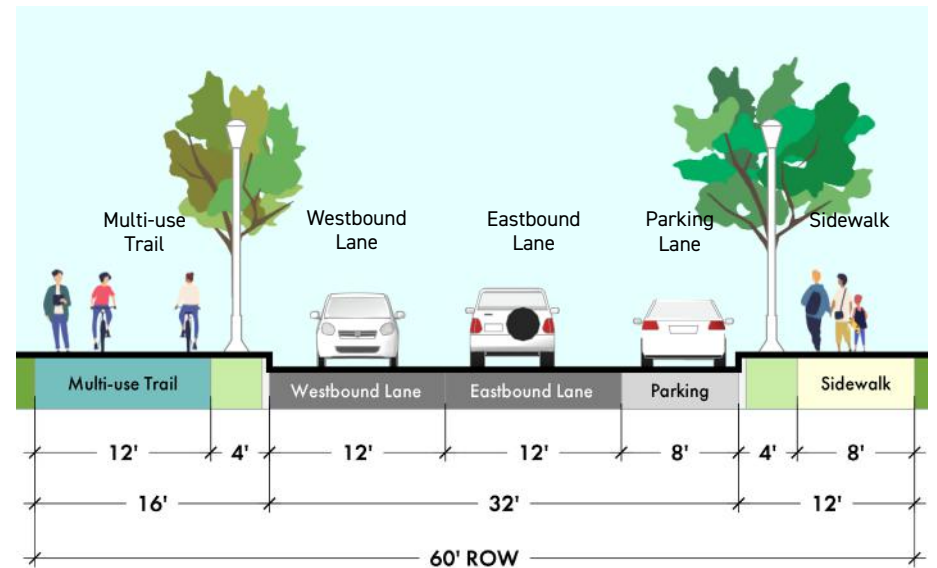


Fig. 74: Proposed Typical Enhanced States Avenue Section

## Enhanced Streets

Enhanced streets consist of proposed improvements to the existing 60-foot rights-of-ways at Lover's Lane, Birch Street, Binkley Street, and Tern Circle.

Figures 75 and 77 illustrate the condition of existing streets that serve hubs along the corridor and are extensions of important routes that connect neighborhoods to the downtown Project Area. A lack of sidewalks and street furnishings diminishes the value of these streets to promote walking in downtown and a place for people.

Figure 76 indicates proposed enhancements to Lover's Lane and Tern Circle with an emphasis on pedestrian improvements. Lover's Lane and Tern Circle improvements would:

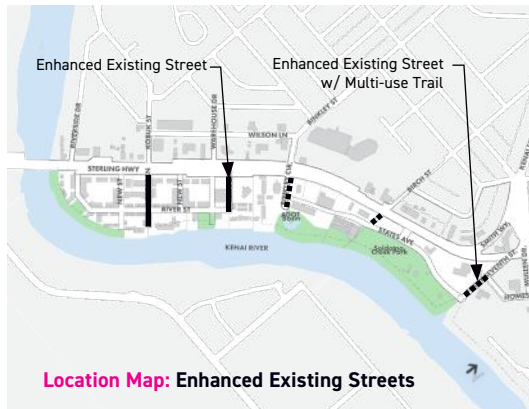


Fig. 75: Partially Improved Streets (Lover's Lane & Tern Circle)

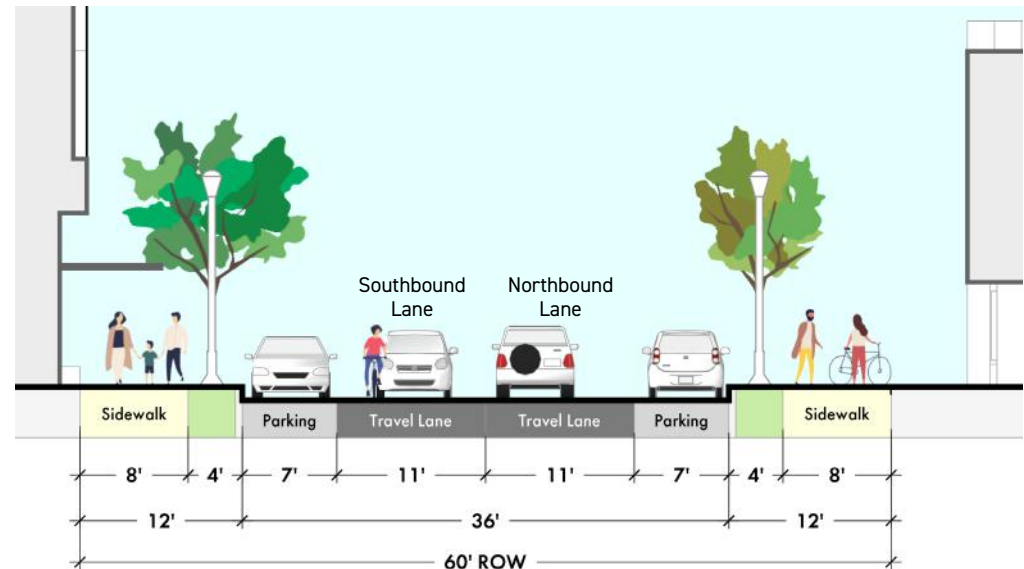


Fig. 76: Proposed Typical Enhanced Street Section



- Maintain the existing roadway between curbs, but narrow lanes to 11-feet each.
- Add a 4-foot landscape bed with street trees and lighting and an 8-foot wide sidewalk (both sides of the street).

Figure 78 indicates proposed enhancements to Binkley Circle, Birch Street and 47th Street to Homestead Lane with an emphasis on pedestrian and bicycle improvements.

Binkley Circle improvements would:

- Narrow the roadway to accommodate two-way traffic and parking on one-side of the street.
- Replace the 5-foot sidewalk with a 4-foot landscape bed, street trees and lighting and an 8-foot wide sidewalk.
- At the Sterling Highway intersection drop the parking lane to accommodate two-way traffic and a left-turn lane.

Birch Street improvements would:

- Accommodate two-way traffic and a dedicated left-turn lane.
- Add a 4-foot landscape bed, street trees and lighting and an 8-foot wide sidewalk on the gas station side of the street.
- Add a 4-foot landscape planter, street trees and lighting and an 14-foot wide multi-use trail on the park side.

**The planned design of the 6' trail within Soldotna Creek Park to 47th Street and Homestead Lane should be revisited and adjusted to conform to the 14' multi-use trail dimension identified in Figure 78.**



Fig. 77: Partially Improved Streets- Binkley Circle & Birch Street

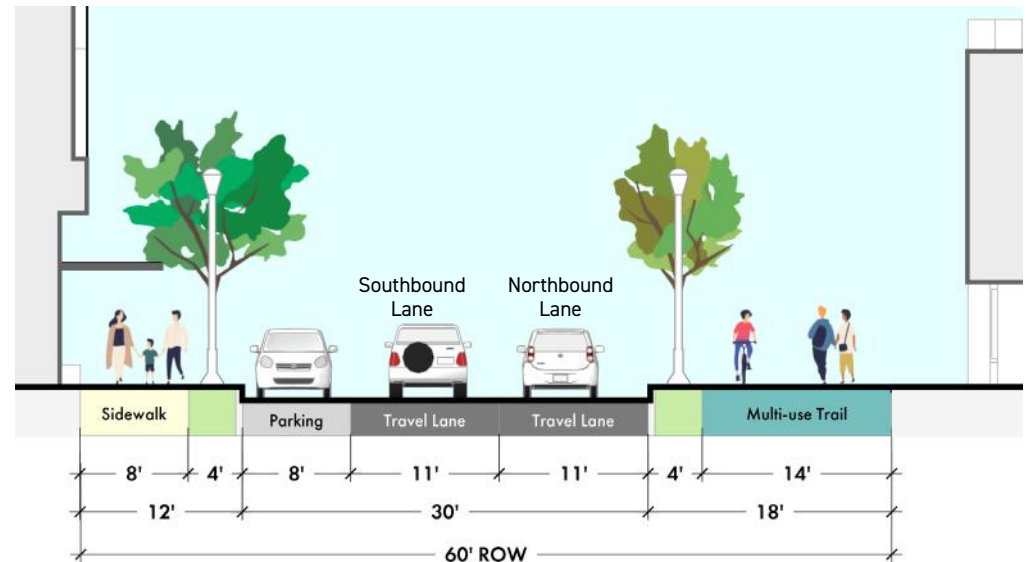


Fig. 78: Proposed Typical Enhanced Street Section w/ Multi-Use Trail

## New Streets

**New Streets** are those that complete the street network within the redevelopment area and establish a walkable pedestrian environment.

All new street improvements would be supported within a typical 60-foot right-of-way or modified where conditions require adjustments. Figures 79 and 80 illustrate the type of environment the new streets are intended to create and the necessary dimensions of streets and sidewalks.

Figure 81 illustrates an Alaska example of the essential elements of a successful downtown street within a narrow 54-foot right-of-way.

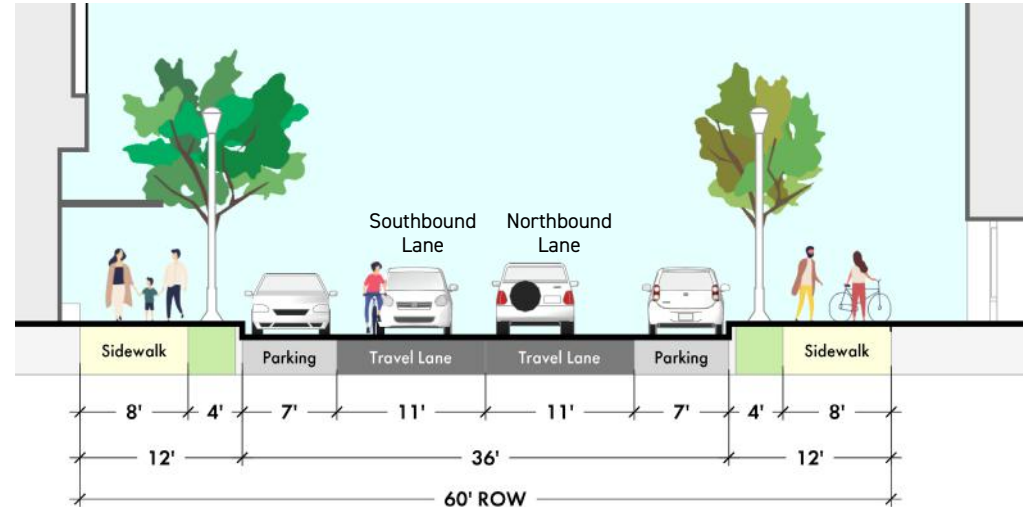
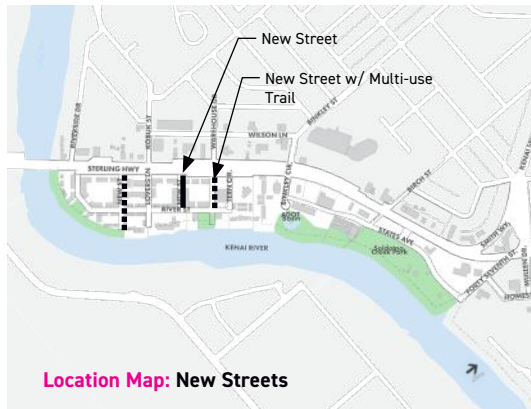


Fig. 79: Proposed Typical Street Section

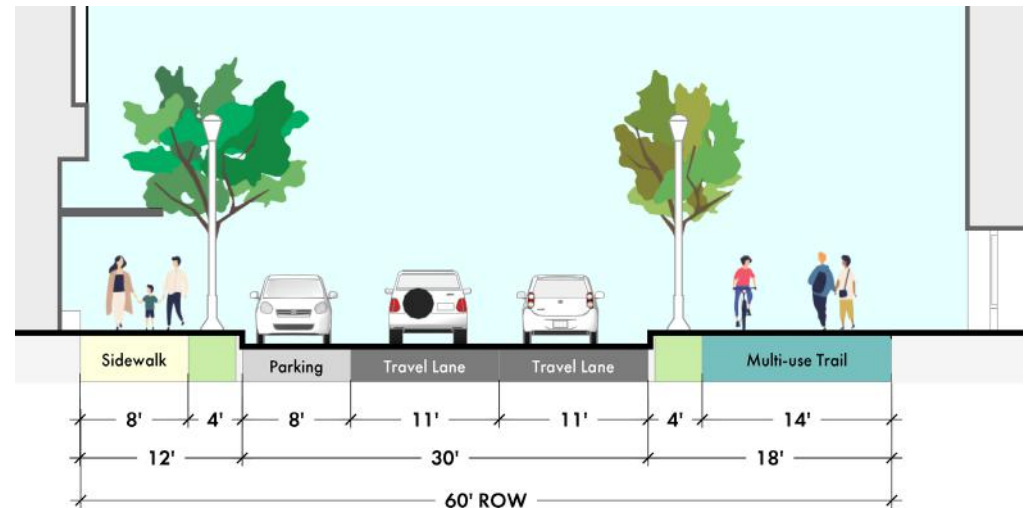


Fig. 80: Proposed Typical Street Section w/ Multi-Use Trail



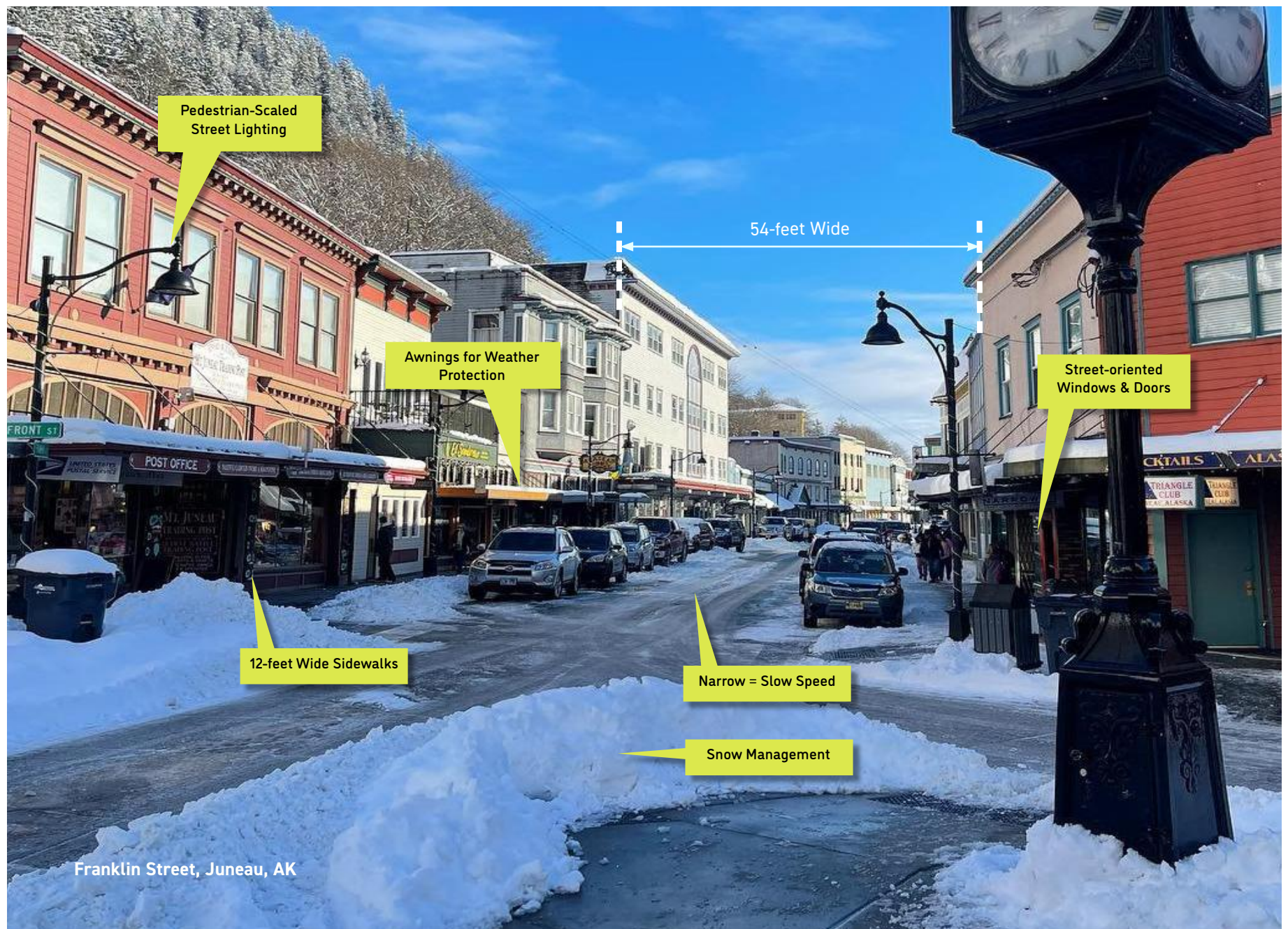


Fig. 81: Lessons from Alaska's Most Walkable Downtown (Franklin Street, Juneau, Alaska)



# Sterling Highway Access Management

**Excess Alaska DOT right-of-way, between the Kenai River Bridge and Birch Street provides an opportunity to improve walk and bicycle access, address driveway impacts on highway operations and safety and improve vehicular access between businesses.**

The Sterling Highway provides drive-by traffic and visibility that is essential to support businesses within the project area. Traffic signals at Kobuk Street/Lover's Lane, Binkley Street/Binkley Circle and Birch Street manage traffic flow and access to the local street network. Today, walk and bike use of the corridor is hampered by a lack of appropriate bicycle facilities, existing sidewalks located directly next to busy travel lanes and crossings limited to only signalized intersections.

Traffic safety and operations are impacted by the multiple driveways accessing the highway which add to the potential for collisions as cars enter and exit the roadway at many different entry points. Some portions of the AK DOT & PF right-of-way are wider and include a landscape setback and/or parking lanes used by adjacent businesses.



Fig. 82: Proposed Sterling Highway Access Management

Preliminary concepts for mobility management are intended to address these conditions and provide for:

1. A multi-use trail and landscape buffer along the south side of the Sterling Highway to promote safe walking and biking.
2. Consideration of additional crossings and or enhancements to existing crossings to promote safe walk and bike access.
3. Consolidation of some driveways to support traffic operations and safety (Figure 83).
4. A standardized parking lane and driveways between businesses to support business access.

Excess Alaska DOT & PF right-of-way, between the Kenai River Bridge and Birch Street provides an opportunity to improve walk and bicycle access, address driveway impacts on

highway operations and safety and improve vehicular access between businesses.

Figure 82 illustrates the general location of the AK DOT & PF right-of-way along a portion of Sterling Highway in proximity of the Kobuk Street and Lover's Lane intersection and areas where potential improvements are suggested.

Figure 85 illustrates a conceptual design that include a multi-use trail and landscape buffers, an improved parking and frontage lane and driveway consolidations.

The design concept would be implemented between the existing curbline and the edge of the existing right-of-way. No changes to the existing curb-to-curb (5-lane roadway) are suggested.

Location	Existing Driveways	Proposed Driveways
Bridge to Kobuk St/ Lover's Ln.	4	2
Kobuk St/Lover's Ln. to Tern Circle	4	2
Tern Circle to Binkley Circle	2	1
Binkley Circle to Birch Place	6	4
<b>Total:</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>9</b>

Fig. 83: Proposed Driveway Consolidation Summary



Fig. 84: Driveway Consolidation Concept (Downtown Improvement Plan)



Fig. 85: Proposed Sterling Trail and Parking Access Lane Improvements



## Trails

**Trails along the Sterling Highway and the Kenai Riverfront form a continuous multi-use trail network intended to promote walking and biking within the downtown (Figure 87).**

The goal is also to enhance access to businesses along the highway and create a complete "loop" around the project area. Interconnected trails play a crucial role in ensuring pedestrian and bicycle access throughout the district, facilitating movement between the Sterling Highway and riverfront trails.

Connecting trails between the highway and the river link destinations within neighborhoods to and from the downtown area across the highway and to the riverfront. These connecting trails create smaller loops within the Project area. As phasing of trail improvements occur over time, building-out these smaller loops will provide the greatest benefit to the community and generate local support to complete additional loops to eventually create a complete system.



Fig. 86: Proposed Upland Trail Illustration

### **Riverfront Trail:**

The riverfront is envisioned to include a continuous trail network connecting Soldotna Creek Park and the Bridgehead Plaza.

### **Connecting Trail:**

Connecting trails link the Sterling Trail to the Riverfront Trail.

### **Sterling Trail:**

Sterling Highway supports a continuous walk and bicycle path spanning from the highway bridge crossing to Soldotna Creek Park.



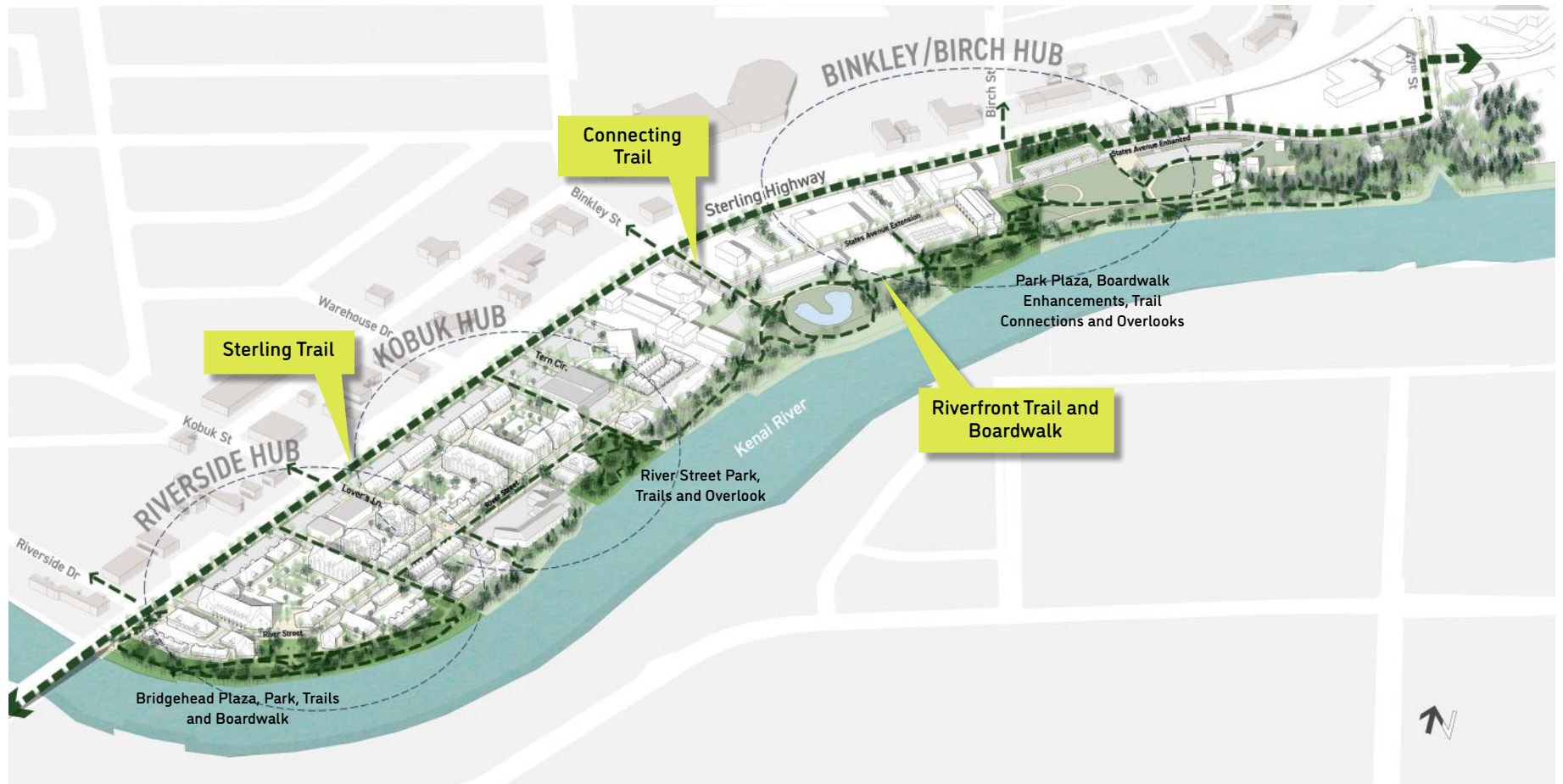


Fig. 87: Multi-use Trails and Boardwalks

**“Walkability creates public spaces that are a pleasure to pass by; moreover, implementing small and well-planned distances between destinations enhances the pleasure of strolling through the city and enjoying local services, shops and landmarks.” Few people want to visit a town or city with no “sense of place.”** From Robert Steutville’s Ten Economic Benefits of Walkable Places, CNU Journal (2021).

## Riverfront Trail + Boardwalks

The Kenai River and riparian corridor are envisioned to be an interconnected network of trails and boardwalks that connect the “bookend” public plazas.

Today, portions of the corridor include trails and boardwalks between Soldotna Creek Park, the AK DOT & PF detention pond behind the Aspen Hotel, and Binkley Circle. The conceptual design would:

1. Replace the existing boardwalk at Riverview Terrace with a new light-penetrating platform compliant with Kenai River Overlay District requirements. See Location Map: Riverfront Trail below.

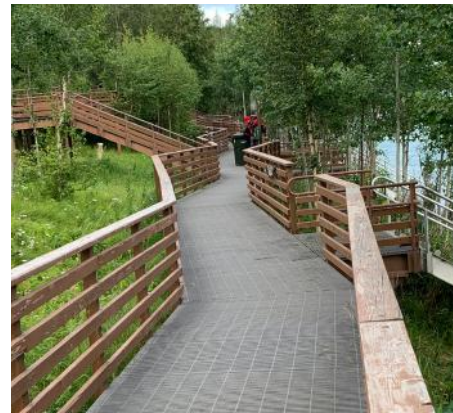
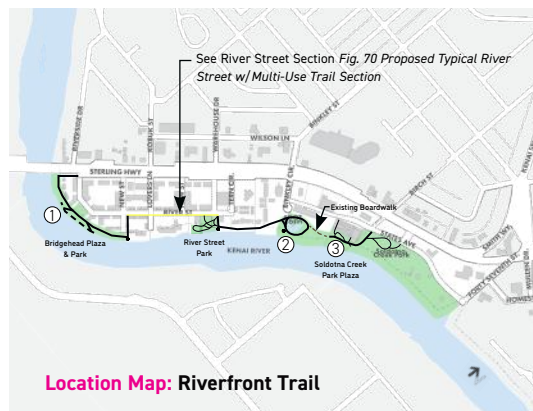


Fig. 88: Existing Boardwalk and Trail

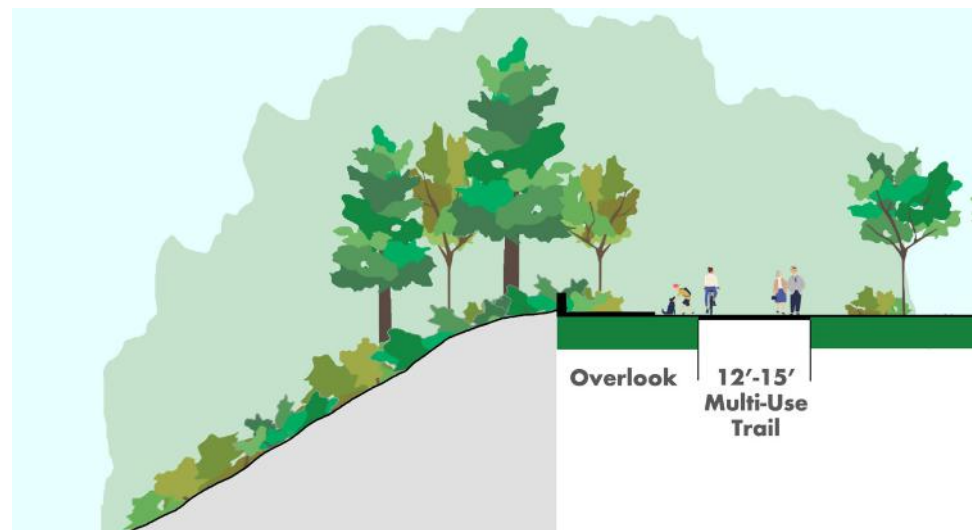


Fig. 89: Typical Upland Section: Overlook and Multi-Use Trail

2. Add new upland trail alignments and boardwalks between the AK DOT & PF detention pond and Tern Circle. (See Typical Upland Trail section Figure 89).

3. Add new trail alignments along the Soldotna Creek Park Plaza frontage and between the Plaza and the existing trail in Soldotna Creek Park. (See Location Map: Riverfront Trail Pg. 82).

Currently there are long stretches with no opportunity to enter/exit the boardwalks. Where feasible the City should consider additional access points to existing boardwalks.

Locating portions of the trail alignment will necessitate the City to coordinate with existing private properties and the Alaska Department of Transportation for the required trail easements or the purchase of rights-of-way (Figure 90). Figure 91 indicates a proposed trail location downslope and out of view of existing properties to address privacy considerations for properties along the corridor. Not only would it address privacy but offer a new amenity to businesses who would benefit from trail access for customers.

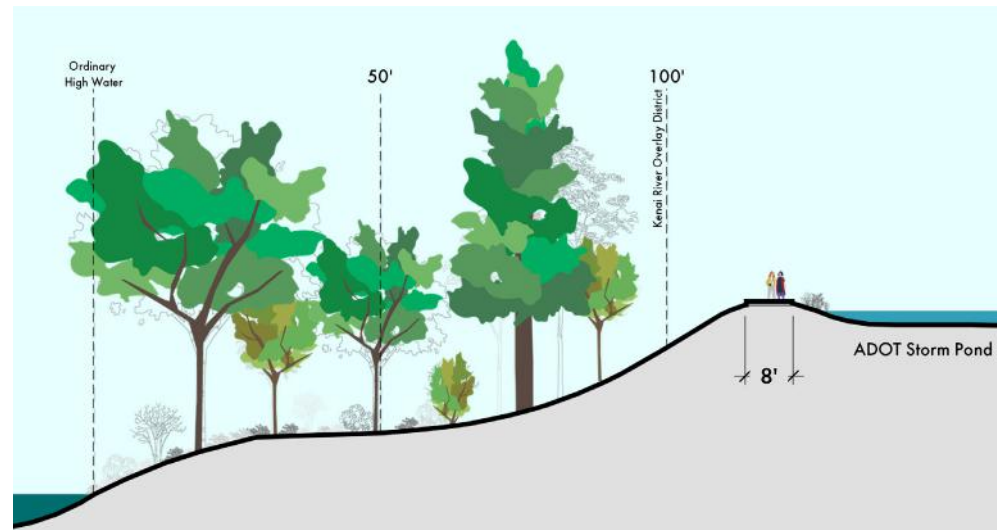


Fig. 90: Proposed Section: Multi-Use Trail and Easement (AK DOT&PF Pond)

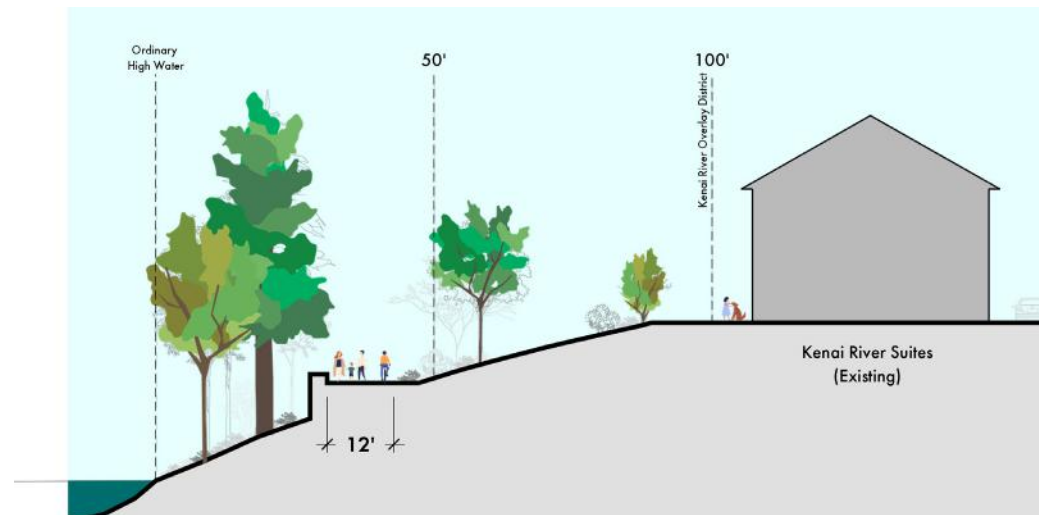


Fig. 91: Proposed Section: Multi-Use Trail and Easement



## Connecting Trails

Ensuring safe and direct walking and bicycle access from neighborhoods to the Downtown trail network along the riverfront and Sterling Highway is achieved by incorporating a multi-use trail within key streets.

These multi-use trail connections also provide access to businesses that enhance visitor spending and the time people spend in the downtown area.

Figure 92 is an example of the Indianapolis Cultural Trail, a community and tourist attraction. The trail was constructed with financial support from community donations and U.S. Department of Transportation funding through a Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant. It is managed by Indianapolis Cultural Trail, Inc., which works to maintain and continue the trail's growth and improvement.

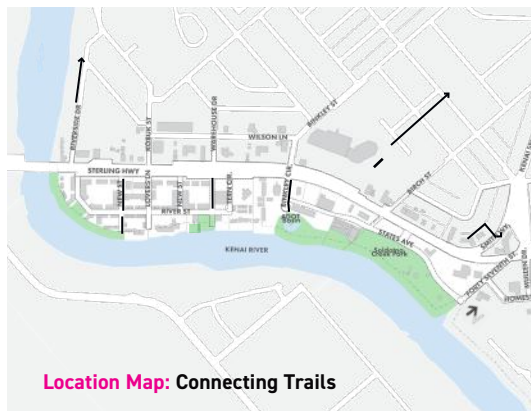


Fig. 92: Multi-use Trail: Indianapolis Cultural Trail

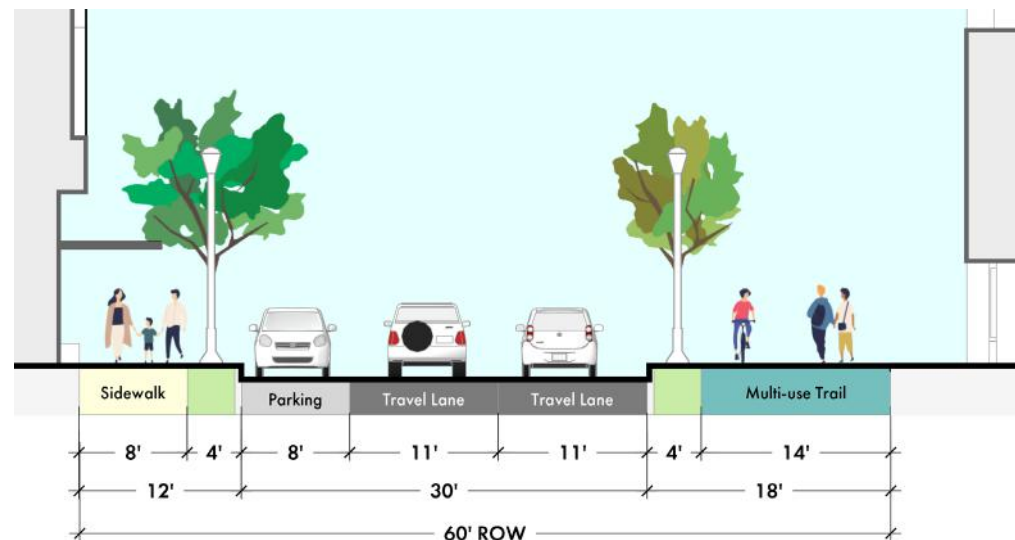


Fig. 93: Typical Connecting Trail Section: Street w/ Multi-Use Trail

The Location Map on Page 84 identifies the location of connecting trails. Figure 93 indicates a typical street section with a multi-use trail located on one-side of the street. This section would be appropriate to Birch Street north of the Sterling Highway to the Kenai Spur Highway.

### Riverside Street Multi-Use Trail

The Cities of Soldotna and Kenai along with the Alaska Department of Transportation manage the Unity Trail, an intercity paved and separated trail connection. A portion of the trail is built and resides along Kalifornsky Beach Road with potential connections to the Tsalteshi and Centennial Trails west of the downtown project area. The City of Soldotna identifies Riverside Drive, and Kobuk Street as part of the Unity Trail route between the downtown and built portions of the trail along the Kenai Spur Highway, north of Knight Drive.

Today Riverside Drive is partially improved with a narrow sidewalk on one side of the street. Bicyclists typically share the roadway with vehicles (Figure 94).

The conceptual design and proposed section (Figure 95) would:

1. Add a 10-foot wide trail to the sidewalk along the northeast side of the street intersection at Kobuk Street.
2. Replace the rolled curb with a stand-up curb.



Fig. 94: Existing Riverside Drive (2023)

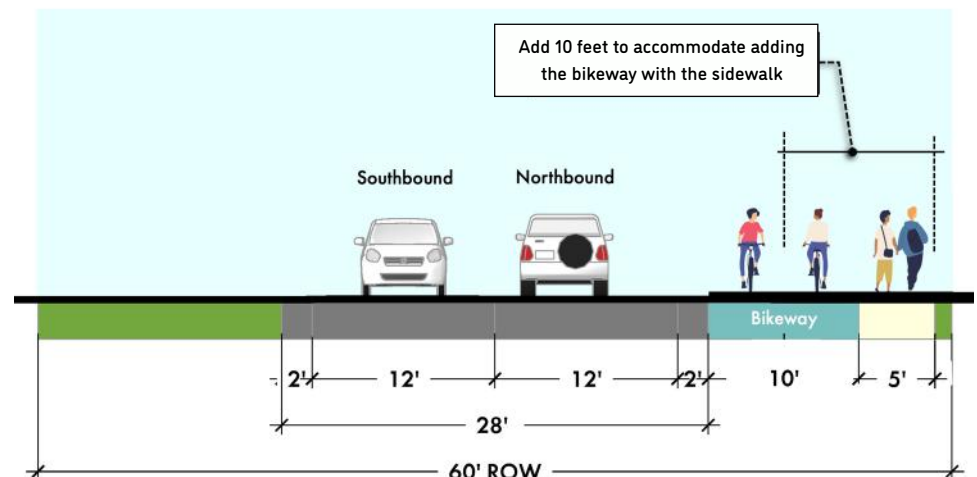


Fig. 95: Proposed Section: Riverside Drive Multi-use Trail

# Sterling Trail

**A multi-use trail is proposed on the south side of the Sterling Highway stretching from the Kenai River bridge crossing to Birch Street.**

The trail is consistent with the Adopted Recreation and Trails Master Plan (2014), and is an important connection that would enhance pedestrian and bicycle access between businesses along the corridor. It will also complement the riverfront trail along the Kenai River. Design elements would include a landscape buffer between the trail and the roadway, featuring street trees and lighting to improve safety and enhance the visual quality of the roadway as a gateway to the City of Soldotna.

The design concept would be implemented between the existing curbline and the edge of the existing right-of-way, with no changes to the existing 5-lane roadway.

The conceptual design involves:

1. Incorporating the existing face of curb and replacing the current sidewalk with a 5.5-foot tree-lined buffer.
2. Replacing the existing landscape buffer with a 12-foot multi-use trail and a 4-foot landscaped buffer adjacent to off-street parking.



Fig. 96: Multi-use Trail with Buffer on Multi-lane Arterial Roadway

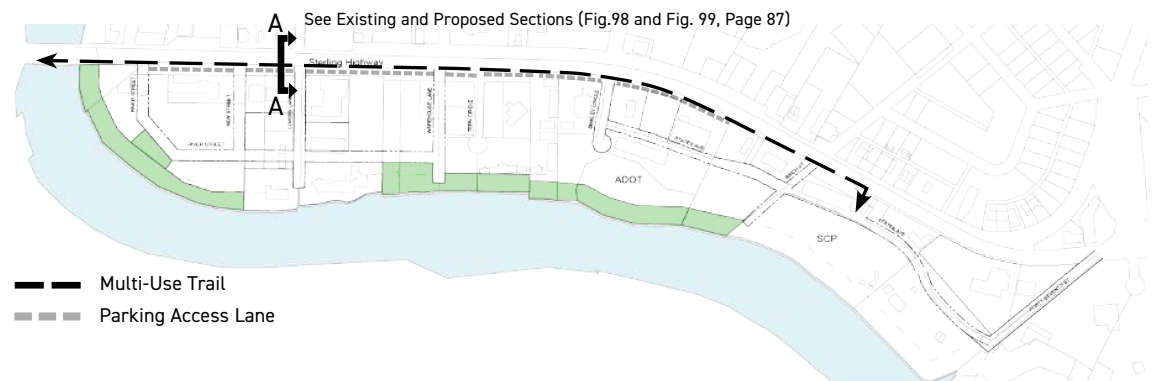


Fig. 97: Sterling Highway Trail Alignment



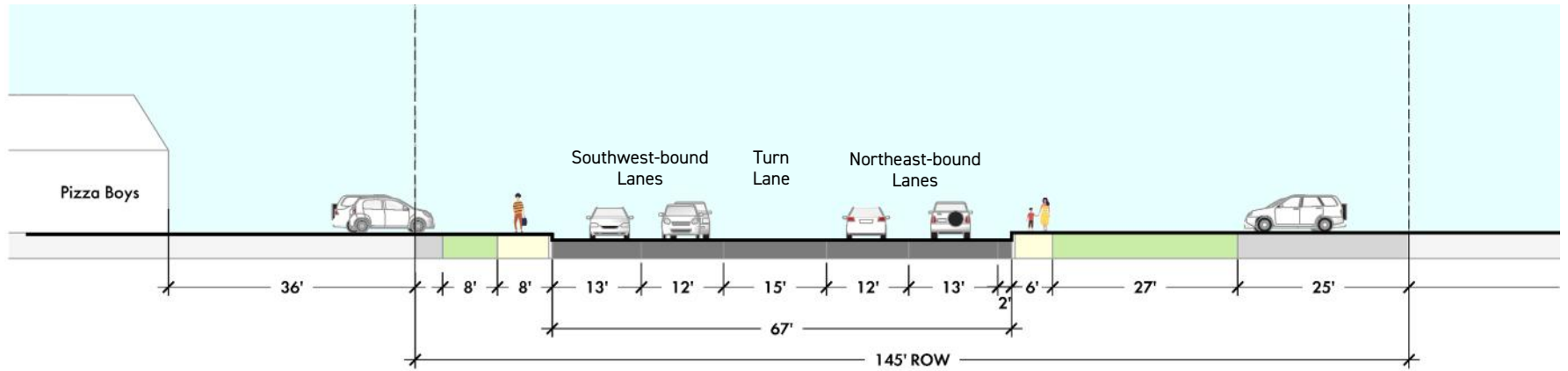


Fig. 98: Existing Section AA: Sterling Highway

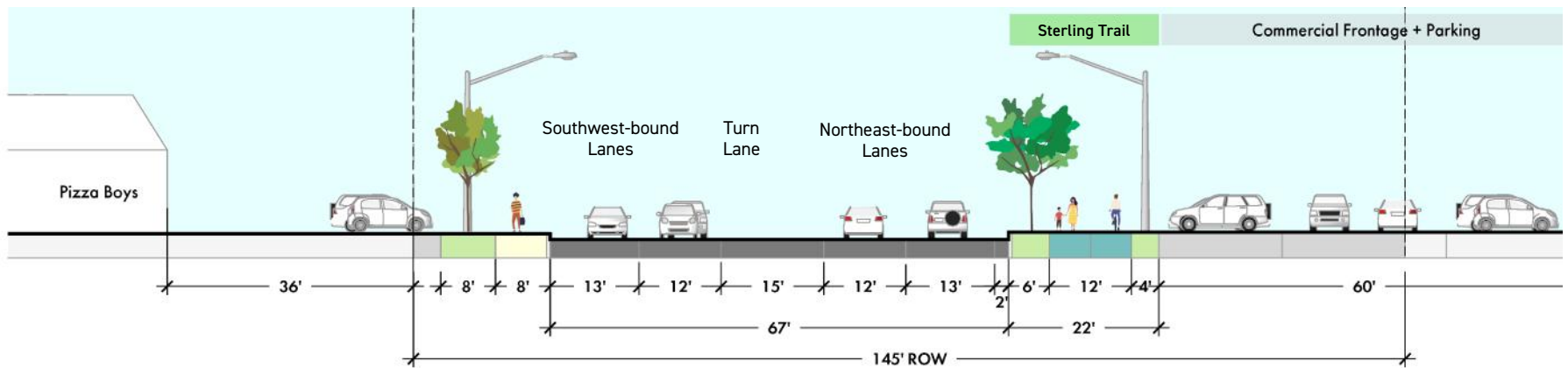


Fig. 99: Proposed Section AA: Sterling Highway Multi-Use Trail

An aerial photograph of a riverfront area, likely in Soldotna, Alaska. The image shows a river with a small bridge or dock structure. The surrounding area is densely forested with green trees. In the foreground, there is a paved area with a person walking. A semi-transparent dark grey box is overlaid on the image, containing two paragraphs of white text.

Successful implementation of the Riverfront Redevelopment Plan can be achieved by having the City take a lead role in prioritizing the project area for future investment. The goal is to establish a distinctive downtown riverfront destination. To stimulate private investment, the City may collaborate with investors, developers, and agencies, contributing to infrastructure costs such as roads and utilities essential for development. Additionally, the City can assist in remediating contaminated sites to promote community health, advocate for affordable housing and small business development, and foster a publicly accessible riverfront with trails, boardwalks, and gathering areas.

As a steward of the greater Soldotna community, the City can act as the "carrot" to incentivize investment while ensuring significant community benefits. These benefits may include developing housing for the local workforce, promoting both existing and new businesses to support a year-round economy, designing streets that encourage safe walking, biking, and driving, and creating a publicly accessible riverfront. These enhancements are intended to elevate the quality of life for Soldotna residents, visitors, and the natural environment.



An architectural rendering of a modern residential development. The central focus is a large, angular building with a light-colored, vertically-slatted facade and a dark, steeply pitched roof. The building has several windows and a prominent corner. In the foreground, a paved plaza with a curved path is populated with several stylized human figures. The plaza is surrounded by lush green trees and shrubs. To the right, a red car is parked on a street. In the background, other residential buildings and a forested hillside are visible under a clear sky.

# 3 DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY



# OVERVIEW

The Development Strategy will serve as a guiding framework for the City of Soldotna, providing a roadmap to navigate the complexities of redevelopment, foster collaboration, and ultimately realize the full potential of the envisioned downtown riverfront district.

## Laying the Foundation for a Mixed-Use One-of-a-kind Destination

Central to the redevelopment plan is a mix of uses, including shopping, entertainment, dining, services, and housing, that are next to each other and within multi-story buildings. This critical mass of uses is essential for creating a one-of-a-kind destination. Financial viability hampers the prospects of immediate mixed use and multifamily developments in the redevelopment area without strategic interventions, investments, and public-private partnerships. Furthermore, the City should invest in critical infrastructure improvements, including streets, sidewalks, trails, and open spaces, to lay the foundation for a thriving and connected community.

The project area consist of catalyst sites at the Riverside and Kobuk Street Hubs as well

as, the City owned property next to Soldotna Creek Park. These sites play a crucial role in transforming the investment environment of an emerging downtown area. These sites are strategic locations that act as catalysts for positive change and development within the community.

## Catalyst Sites, Projects and Phasing

A 'menu' of catalyst sites and projects are identified. Not all projects are equal. Some are time-sensitive and need to commence immediately, while others will require further study and coordination.

Additionally, to ensure consistency with the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan, regulating policies, plans, ordinances,

and funding strategies will need to be either updated or created by the City and consultants, and adopted by the City Council, and/or in coordination with the Kenai Peninsula Borough, AK DOT&PF, or other regulating bodies.

The Plan recommends a phased approach and identifies timing and sequencing of both public and private investments that are crucial to the success of this endeavor. Phasing is identified to not only stimulate immediate development but also to set in motion a trajectory that aligns with the overarching vision articulated in the Plan.

## Action Plan, Roles and Partners

An Action Plan for each project has been crafted to delineate the sequencing of



Fig. 100: Investing in Trails and Overlooks

projects primarily investments in physical infrastructure improvements including associated planning, programming, design, engineering, and construction. This could be initiated by the City of Soldotna and/or through coordination with the private development sector as public-private partnerships.

The Action Plan for each project includes the City's role in facilitating redevelopment through regulations, additional studies and feasibility plans, developer outreach, participating in public-private partnerships (e.g., market hall, subsidized land costs for private development, etc.), constructing infrastructure improvements (e.g., streets

and sidewalks, trails, and open space), and carefully considering the timing and location of both public and private investment.

#### **Costs and Funding Sources**

Some of the actions in this plan could be implemented using the City's existing General Fund. However, General Funds are limited and already support many City priorities. Given the limited existing revenue sources, the Development Strategy offers a variety of tools to generate additional revenue for City initiated improvements.

#### **Uses not Consistent with the Plan**

The adoption of the Redevelopment Plan does not force existing uses to change.

Existing uses not consistent with the Redevelopment Plan should be allowed as legal non-conforming uses, permitted to remain and operate until property owners' interests change to re-purpose, redevelop or sell their buildings or sites. For the purpose of redevelopment the City is likely to negotiate, where necessary, easements, property acquisition, partnerships, or other agreements with public or private partners to facilitate needed infrastructure, public amenities, and riparian habitat improvements.



Fig. 101: Investing in Multi-use Boardwalks



Fig. 102: Investing in Downtown Winter Activities

## CATALYST SITES

**Catalyst sites represent areas with unique characteristics that make them attractive for future development.**

Investment in any of these sites will establish development momentum and build confidence in Soldotna as a place for investment. These sites include:

- Properties with extensive river frontage and have access from the Sterling Highway.
- Multiple properties under a single owner, a few owners or are City owned.
- Large areas that are vacant and/or underutilized.
- Contaminated properties or sites where the City could support or lead remediation efforts with funding through federal grants.

Within the project area are three catalyst sites, which make up the majority of the project area. Specific actions and potential phasing scenarios are recommended for each. Figure 103 illustrates a long-term vision and likely future build-out (uses and infrastructure) for the catalyst sites. The realization of this long-term vision will necessitate phased implementation and City engagement with property owners. Prioritizing near-term investments is crucial to catalyze change. In an effort to stimulate downtown investment in the Catalyst Sites,

the City could consider pursuing the following actions:

- Purchase property and seek out a development team to design, finance, permit, and build a high-quality mixed-use
- Acquire easements or purchase rights-of-way from property owners or developers and invest in infrastructure such as streets, utilities, trails, plazas, and public amenities to set the stage for private development.
- Work collaboratively with a property owner or developer to overcome development obstacles, craft a supportive development agreement, and if possible, seek out grants and funding opportunities.

### **Determining the City's Role in Catalyzing Development**

The market analysis suggests that early development projects in Soldotna are likely to consist of townhouses, affordable or workforce housing eligible for federal grant subsidies, and a limited amount of retail and commercial uses. The feasibility of a hotel is likely if amenities, such as new streets, a riverfront plaza, and trails, are constructed to appeal to a national brand or boutique-style product.

To stimulate development the City will likely need to invest entirely on its own or

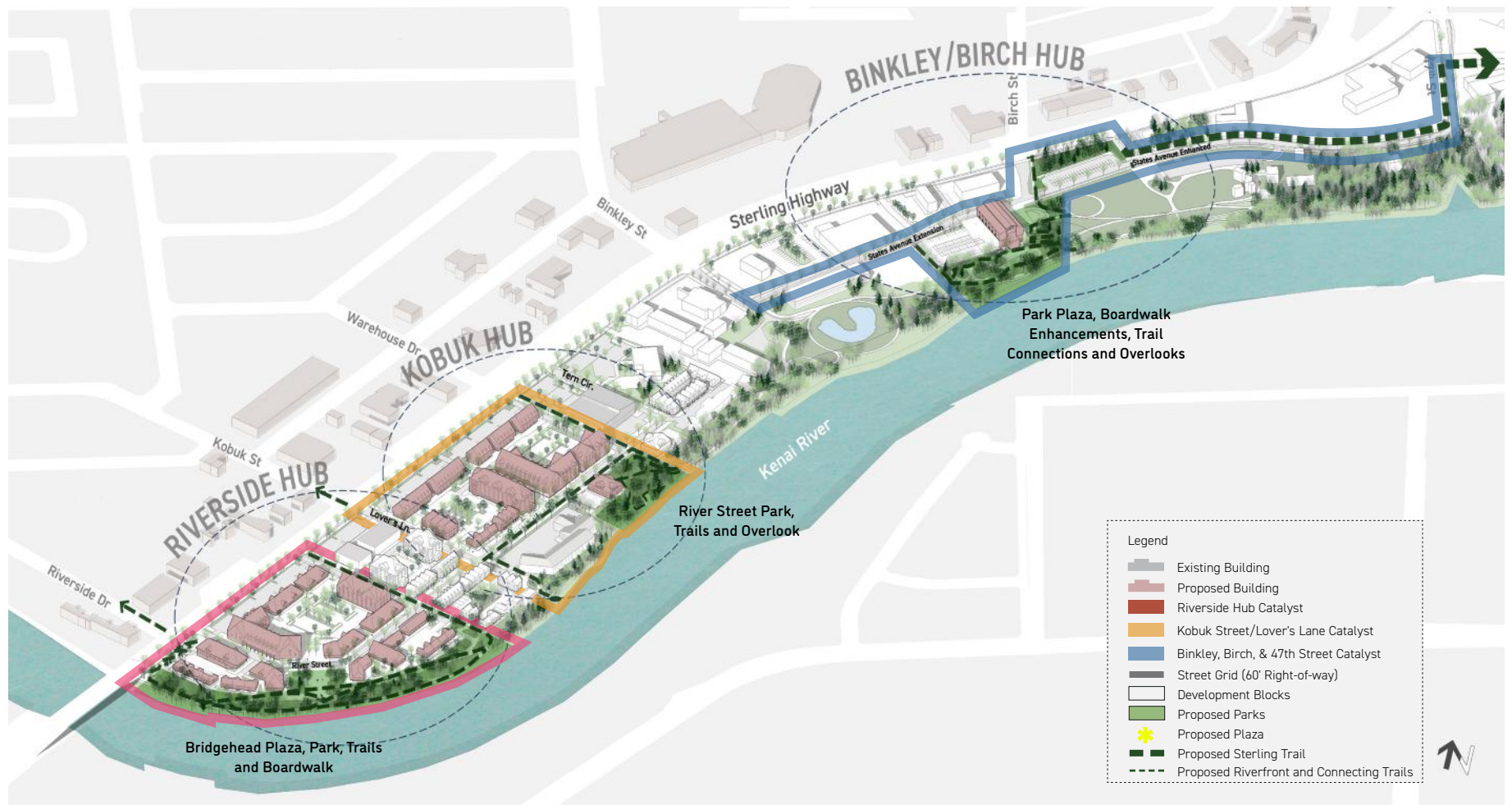
in partnership in new infrastructure and amenities i.e., new streets, riverfront plaza and trails necessary to support development and to create an attractive environment for future phases. The City as a partner can leverage broad community benefits that ensure public access to the riverfront. The City may seek out grants or other partners to support funding infrastructure projects.

The City may prioritize investing in a single catalyst site or simultaneously with multiple sites. For catalyst sites at the Riverside and Kobuk Hubs, the City needs to answer the following questions:

- Is the City purchasing the land or partnering with the owner? Is the owner willing to sell or support redevelopment of their property?

The answer to these questions will impact the location and timing of potential City investments in infrastructure to support redevelopment. If the City pursues a site with contamination, the City will need to conduct site remediation, if it owns the site, or in coordination with a property owner. The City could pursue grants such as the EDA's Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance Program or the EPA's Brownfield Program to fund cleanup.





Riverside Hub: Mixed-use Riverfront Destination	AREA
Retail, Dine, Entertain. + Commercial	74,850 square feet
Housing (Apartments + townhomes)	42 units
Hotel	62 rooms
Streets (60' right-of-way)	1,788 linear feet
Utilities (water, sewer, storm, power + comm.)	1,788 linear feet
Bridgehead Plaza	35,553 square feet
Trails, Ramp, +Bridgehead Plaza Boardwalks	2,810 linear feet

Kobuk Hub: Mixed-use Residential Neighborhood	AREA
Retail, Dine, Entertain. + Commercial	79,600 square feet
Housing (Apartments + townhomes)	158 units
Streets (60' right-of-way)	3,050 linear feet
Utilities (water, sewer, storm, power + comm.)	3,050 linear feet
Trails + Open Space	37,000 square feet

Birch & Binkley Street Hubs: Market Hall and Riverfront Plaza	AREA
Market Hall	31,750 square feet
Parking Structure	170 spaces
Street Improvements	3,618 linear feet
Utilities Improvements	3,618 linear feet
Park Plaza (Upper + Lower)	68,575 square feet
Trails + Boardwalks	1,160 linear feet

Fig. 103: Catalyst Sites and Build-out Development Summary

# CATALYST SITES BUILD-OUT AND PHASE 1 PROJECTS

Catalyst sites are unlikely to be built out all at once. Phased development is necessary to achieve early success that establish a market for a walkable downtown. Direct city investments or partnerships in essential infrastructure construction (such as streets and utilities) can leverage these early wins. They build momentum to support more intensive private development in later phases.

*For each Catalyst Site, a description of the development at build-out is provided, followed by Phase 1 projects and a development summary detailing the necessary investments in streets, utilities, and amenities to stimulate future development.*

## Riverside Catalyst Site: A Mixed-use Riverfront Destination at Build-out

Regarding the Riverside Catalyst Site, the build-out and development summary in Figure 105 depicts a walkable River Street lined with storefronts. The Bridgehead Plaza, trails, and boardwalks create a central gathering space, serving as an attractive amenity for development. New commercial buildings house businesses oriented toward the highway, and apartments and townhomes offer housing options close to the river, supporting an 18-hour activity center.



Fig. 104: Existing riverfront property (2023)

*The centerpiece of downtown riverfront redevelopment is the creation of a shopping, dining, entertainment, and lodging destination anchored by the Bridgehead Plaza, trails and boardwalk along the riverfront.*

Buildout: Riverside Catalyst Site	AREA
Retail, Dine, Entertain. + Commercial	74,850 square feet
Housing (Apartments + townhomes)	42 units
Streets (Parking Access & 60' right-of-way)	1,788 linear feet
Utilities (water, sewer, storm, power + comm.)	1,788 linear feet
Bridgehead Plaza	35,553 square feet
Trails, Ramp, + Boardwalks	2,810 linear feet





Fig. 105: Riverside Catalyst Site Build-out and Development Summary



## Riverside Catalyst Site: A Mixed-use Riverfront Destination Phase 1 Projects.

The Riverside Catalyst Site Phase 1 projects involve initial investments in River Street and a new street. The aim is to provide access and utility improvements to support the near-term development of multi-family housing, commercial storefronts, and townhomes (Figure 107). A Phase 1 Action Plan outlines the necessary steps to promote redevelopment (Figure 106).

Riverside Catalyst Site Phase 1 Action Plan		
STRATEGY DESCRIPTION	SOLDOTNA'S ROLE AND PARTNERS	TIMELINE AND IMPLEMENTATION STEPS
Acquire Public Right-of-way/Design/Construct River Street, and New Street	<p><b>Soldotna:</b> Partner with private developer to acquire right-of-way and or easements. Design/Construct infrastructure and utilities</p> <p><b>Potential Partners:</b> Developers may construct and dedicate ownership and maintenance as public right-of-way to the City</p>	<p><b>Do First</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acquire street right-of-way or easements</li> <li>Fund 30% construction documentation</li> </ul> <p><b>Do Second</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Secure funding for 100% construction</li> <li>Complete 100% construction documentation and prepare bid package</li> <li>Select contractor and construct</li> </ul>
Acquire Public Right-of-way or Easement/Design/Construct riverfront trail, trail ramp and boardwalk enhancements	<p><b>Soldotna:</b> Design/Construct plazas, trails and boardwalk connections.</p> <p><b>Potential Partners:</b> Philanthropy, voter approved bond, or capital investment program</p>	<p><b>Do First</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acquire street right-of-way or easements</li> <li>Fund 30% construction documentation</li> </ul> <p><b>Do Second</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Secure funding for 100% construction</li> <li>Complete 100% construction documentation and prepare bid package</li> <li>Select contractor and construct</li> </ul>
Acquire a site or development agreement for infrastructure or for affordable housing. If owned donate the land to support development and/or establish local funding sources or incentives	<p><b>Soldotna:</b> Land acquisition and transfer to a nonprofit or other affordable housing developer, deal facilitator (find partners, help find other funders, etc.), gap funder</p> <p><b>Potential Partners:</b> Kenai Peninsula Housing Initiatives, Cook Inlet Housing Authority, or Alaska Housing Finance Corporation</p>	<p><b>Do First</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate the City's capacity and interest</li> <li>Seek out potential partners and funders</li> </ul> <p><b>Do Second</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assign site(s)</li> <li>Determine City funding capacity</li> <li>Conduct solicitation for developer</li> </ul>

Fig. 106: Riverside Catalyst Site Phase 1 Action Plan

*Street improvements provide direct and convenient local access, include necessary utilities, and support an interconnected street grid for existing and future development. These investments coupled with a riverfront trail and boardwalk would serve Phase 1 multi-family housing, commercial storefronts and town-homes.*

Phase 1: Riverside Catalyst Site	AREA
Retail, Dine, Entertain. + Commercial	12,350 square feet
Housing (Apartments + townhomes)	36 units
Streets (60' right-of-way)	1,328 linear feet
Utilities (water, sewer, storm, power + comm.)	1,250 linear feet
Trails, + Boardwalks	2,575 linear feet



Fig. 107: Riverside Catalyst Site Phase 1 and Development Summary

### Kobuk Street and Lover's Lane Catalyst Site: Mixed-use Storefronts and Residential Neighborhood at Build-out.

The Kobuk Street and Lover's Lane Catalyst Site build-out, depicted in Figure 109, highlights improvements to Lover's Lane, turning it into a walkable street with retail and commercial storefronts, complemented by upper-level housing or offices. Along River Street, active storefronts and residential stoops extend from Lover's Lane to the Blazy Mall, promoting eyes on the street. Apartments on upper floors and townhomes offer housing options, contributing to an 18-hour activity center. New commercial buildings will house businesses oriented toward the highway. The River Street park, upland woods overlook, and trails will create a central gathering space, serving as an attractive amenity for development. The street design prioritizes walking and biking, featuring on-street parking, lighting, street trees, furnishings, and stormwater planters. A multi-use trail will be located on one side of River Street, connecting to the Warehouse Lane extension and the Sterling Highway Trail.



Fig. 108: Existing Kobuk Street area (2023)

*A blend of highway commercial and mixed-use retail, entertainment, and dining options oriented toward the River Street Park within a residential downtown neighborhood. A wooded upland park, trails, and overlooks serve as development amenities and provide public access to the riverfront.*

Build-out: Kobuk Catalyst Site	AREA
Retail, Dine, Entertain. + Commercial	79,600 square feet
Housing (Apartments + townhomes)	158 units
Streets (60' right-of-way)	3,050 linear feet
Utilities (water, sewer, storm, power + comm.)	3,050 linear feet
Trails + Open Space	37,000 square feet





Fig. 109: Build-out: Kobuk Catalyst Site

## Kobuk Street and Lover's Lane Catalyst Site: Mixed-use Storefronts and Residential Neighborhood Phase 1 Projects.

The Kobuk Street and Lover's Lane Catalyst Site Phase 1 projects involve initial investments in River Street and a new street. The goal is to provide access and utility improvements to support the near-term development of multi-family housing with a limited amount of ground-floor retail and townhomes. The existing commercial building will remain and continue to function as a revenue-generating property that supports local businesses (Figure 111). A Phase 1 Action Plan outlines the necessary steps to promote redevelopment (Figure 110).

Kobuk Street and Lover's Lane Catalyst Site Phase 1 Action Plan		
STRATEGY DESCRIPTION	SOLDOTNA'S ROLE AND PARTNERS	TIMELINE AND IMPLEMENTATION STEPS
Acquire Public Right-of-way/Design/Construct River Street, and New Street and utilities. Enhance Lover's Lane (widen sidewalks, add street trees and lighting).	<p><b>Soldotna:</b> Partner with private developer to acquire right-of-way and or easements. Design/Construct infrastructure and utilities</p> <p><b>Potential Partners:</b> Developers may construct and dedicate ownership and maintenance as public right-of-way to the City</p>	<p><b>Do First</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acquire street right-of-way or easements</li> <li>Fund 30% construction documentation</li> </ul> <p><b>Do Second</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Secure funding for 100% construction</li> <li>Complete 100% construction documentation and prepare bid package</li> <li>Select contractor and construct</li> </ul>
Acquire Public Right-of-way/Land or Easement/Design/Construct upland trail, and River Street Park enhancements	<p><b>Soldotna:</b> Design/Construct trails and park</p> <p><b>Potential Partners:</b> Philanthropy and voter approved capital investment program</p>	<p><b>Do First</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acquire street right-of-way or easements</li> <li>Fund 30% construction documentation</li> </ul> <p><b>Do Second</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Secure funding for 100% construction</li> <li>Complete 100% construction documentation and prepare bid package</li> <li>Select contractor and construct</li> </ul>
Acquire a housing site or development agreement. If owned donate the land to support development and/or establish local funding sources or incentives	<p><b>Soldotna:</b> Land acquisition and transfer to a nonprofit or other affordable housing developer, deal facilitator (find partners, help find other funders, etc.), gap funder</p> <p><b>Potential Partners:</b> Kenai Peninsula Housing Initiatives, Cook Inlet Housing Authority, or Alaska Housing Finance Corporation</p>	<p><b>Do First</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate the City's capacity and interest</li> <li>Seek out potential partners and funders</li> </ul> <p><b>Do Second</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assign site(s)</li> <li>Determine City funding capacity</li> <li>Conduct solicitation for developer</li> </ul>

Fig. 110: Kobuk Street Catalyst Site Phase 1 Action Plan

*Street improvements provide direct, convenient local access, include necessary utilities, and support an interconnected street grid for existing/future development. These investments coupled with a riverfront trail and upland park can stimulate new development and provide public access to the riverfront.*

Phase 1: Kobuk Catalyst Site	AREA
Retail, Dine, Entertain. + Commercial	6,000 square feet
Housing (Apartments + townhomes)	58 units
Streets (60' right-of-way)	860 linear feet
Utilities (water, sewer, storm, power + comm.)	860 linear feet
Trails + Open Space	37,000 square feet





Fig. 111: Phase 1: Kobuk Catalyst Site



**Binkley and Birch Street Catalyst Site:  
Market Hall and Riverfront Plazas at Build-out**

Soldotna Creek Park functions as Soldotna's "living room" and the community's central gathering space by the river. The build-out, Figure 112, showcases a multi-story market hall that supports local vendors, a spacious food hall, anchor restaurant tenants, meeting rooms, Chamber of Commerce offices, exhibit space, and a two-level parking structure. States Avenue is extended between Binkley Circle and 47th Street, improving access between existing businesses and the park.

Upper and lower level plazas provide outdoor gathering spaces for the market hall with water features, assembly areas, play elements, furnishings, landscape, and lighting. New trails and connections to existing boardwalks link the plazas to Soldotna Creek Park, enhancing the park's overall usability and function. Phase 1 implementation involves a market hall feasibility study and initial infrastructure investments to partially extend States Avenue. The lower plaza, trails, and parking lot enhancements would be designed first and constructed when funding is available.



Fig. 112: Existing Binkley and Birch Street area (2023)

*States Avenue is extended between Binkley Circle and 47th Street. A year-round market hall and a public parking structure expands the use and function of Soldotna Creek Park with added plaza and park amenities, new trails and boardwalk connections.*

Build-out: Binkley and Birch Street Catalyst Site	AREA
Market Hall	31,750 square feet
Parking Structure	170 spaces
Street Improvements	3,618 linear feet
Utilities Improvements	3,618 linear feet
Park Plaza (Upper + Lower)	68,575 square feet
Trails, Ramp + Boardwalks	5,929 linear feet

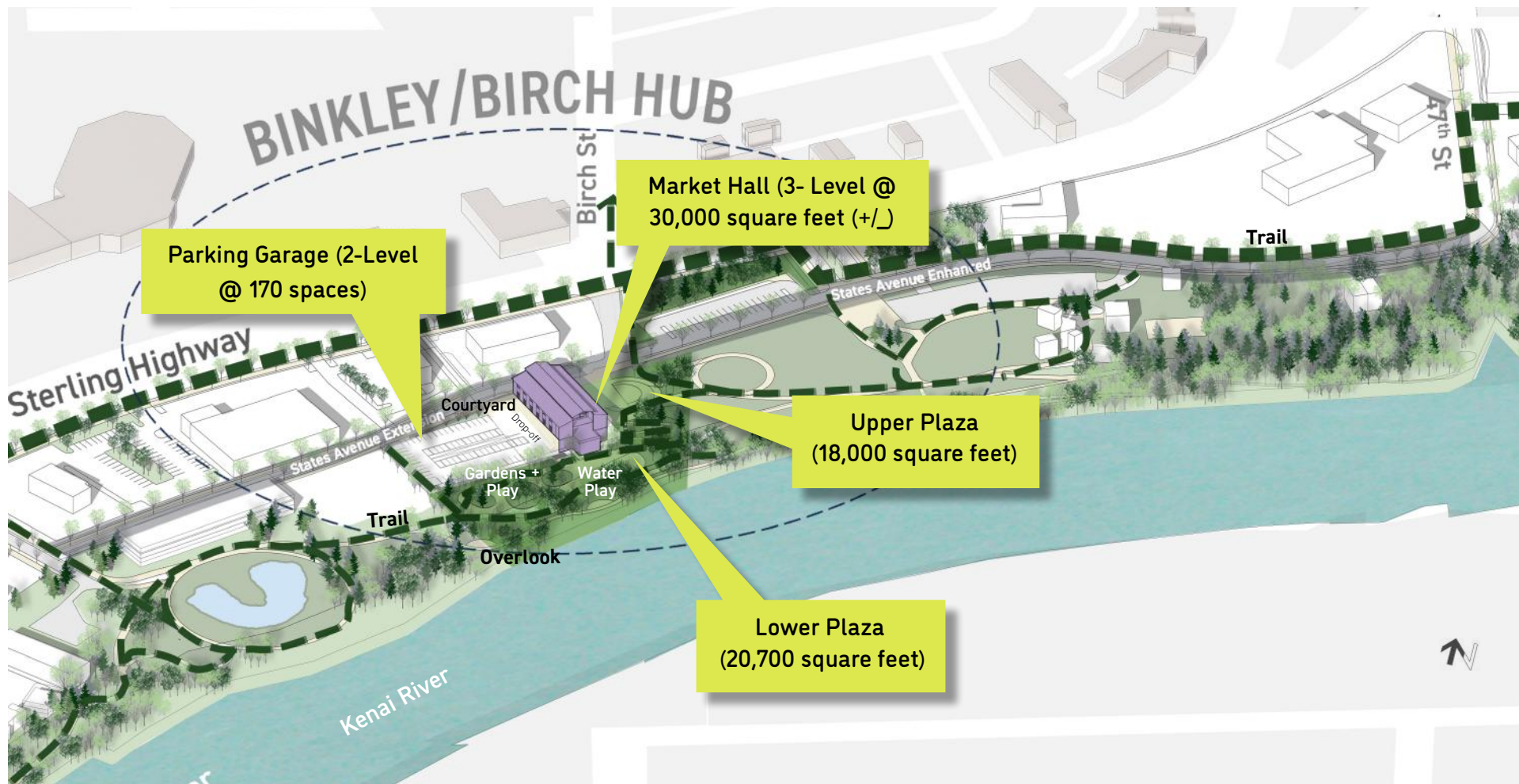


Fig. 113: Build-out: Binkley and Birch Catalyst Site

## Binkley and Birch Street Catalyst Site: Phase 1 Riverfront Plaza and Trails.

The Binkley and Birch Street Catalyst Site Phase 1 projects involve initial investments in States Avenue between Birch Street and 47th Street to enhance access between Soldotna Creek Park and businesses along Homestead Drive. In addition, the current gravel parking lot could be paved and restriped before the construction of the Market Hall to improve access to the lower plaza and riverfront.

The initial design and construction of the Riverfront Plazas should focus on access from the Birch Street and States Avenue intersection to the lower plaza along the riverfront. Improvements should include a ramp and stair connection from the intersection of Birch Street and States Avenue, providing direct access to the lower plaza with its water and play features, landscaping, seating, and new trail connections to the existing boardwalk along the riverfront (Figure 115). A Phase 1 Action Plan outlines the steps to consider in promoting redevelopment (Figure 114).

Binkley and Birch Street Catalyst Site Phase 1 Action Plan		
STRATEGY DESCRIPTION	SOLDOTNA'S ROLE AND PARTNERS	TIMELINE AND IMPLEMENTATION STEPS
Design/Construct States Street extension and utilities (Birch St to 47th St) enhance Birch Street.	<b>Soldotna:</b> Design/Construct infrastructure and utilities <b>Potential Partners:</b> Philanthropy and voter approved capital investment program	<b>Do First</b> • Fund 30% construction documentation <b>Do Second</b> • Secure funding for 100% construction • Complete 100% construction documentation and prepare bid package • Select contractor and construct
Design/Construct lower plazas, and trail and boardwalk connections.	<b>Soldotna:</b> Design/Construct trails and plaza <b>Potential Partners:</b> Philanthropy and voter approved capital investment program	<b>Do First</b> • Fund 30% construction documentation <b>Do Second</b> • Secure funding for 100% construction • Complete 100% construction documentation and prepare bid package • Select contractor and construct
Establish a "blue ribbon" panel to assist the City in completing a Market Hall Feasibility Study.	<b>Soldotna:</b> Complete Market Hall Feasibility Study	<b>Do First</b> • Evaluate the City's capacity and interest • Seek out potential partners and funders • Prepare feasibility study and confirm site <b>Do Second</b> • Identify operator • Refine program, schematic design & cost • Develop fundraising plan

Fig. 114: Binkley and Birch Streets Hub Phase 1 Action Plan

*States Avenue is extended between Birch Street and 47th Street. The existing parking lot is improved with pavement and stormwater collection. Between the parking lot and the river a lower plaza, and park expansion with new trails and boardwalk connections expands park use and river views.*

Phase 1: Binkley and Birch Street Catalyst Site	AREA
Market Hall	-----
Parking Lot Improvements	120 spaces
Street Improvements	2,208 linear feet
Utilities Improvements	2,310 linear feet
Park Plaza (Lower)	53,500 square fee
Trails + Ramp	1,160 linear feet





## TIME-SENSITIVE PROJECTS

The time-sensitive projects encompass both direct and indirect impacts on the catalyst sites and phase 1 initiatives. These projects are crucial in ensuring that the City's staffing capacity can effectively meet the challenges associated with managing implementation. They also play a vital role in guiding the amendment and adoption of regulations necessary to ensure that future development aligns with the plan. Additionally, time-sensitive projects involve initiating further studies and analyses to guide future projects and prioritize capital improvements directly linked to the plan. Time-sensitive projects include:

- Plan adoption: Address staffing capacity to manage implementation.
- Regulatory amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and the Code of Ordinances (Zoning Code) Title 17.
- Development of new street standards and seasonal maintenance plans.
- Conduct a Market Hall Feasibility Study.
- Conduct and establish partnerships for a Regional Housing Needs Analysis.

### RIVERFRONT REDEVELOPMENT PLAN ADOPTION

Plan adoption is crucial to proceed with the implementation of the Plan's development strategy. The initial step involves the Planning Commission providing recommendations for adoption to City Council, and City Council adopting the Plan through a resolution.

The adopted plan would then be presented to the Kenai Peninsula Borough for adoption as part of Envision Soldotna 2030 and as an element of the Official Borough Comprehensive Plan. Through resolution, the Plan would be deemed a binding document, serving as a tool for implementing the Comprehensive Plan. It will guide capital facilities, transportation improvements, direct economic development initiatives, and direct amendments to Title 17 (Zoning) Soldotna Municipal Code to encourage development aligned with the plan.

### STAFFING TO MANAGE IMPLEMENTATION

Effective implementation will require coordination and leadership by the City

of Soldotna. It is recommended that a single point of contact and full-time position be employed to coordinate and manage plan implementation over a three-year timeframe. The Implementation Manager would spearhead implementation efforts, coordinate and conduct periodic meetings with City department leadership. Additionally, they will facilitate regular updates to the City Council and Planning Commission.

### Implementation Oversight Committee

To build stewardship beyond the Implementation Manager it is recommended that the City Council appoint an Implementation Oversight Committee. The City might consider reconvening willing members of the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan project advisory committee, key technical advisory City staff and representative downtown interests. The purpose and role of the committee would be to provide recommendations to the City Council for any expenditure of public resources throughout the life of the implementation plan and be a community conduit to their respective networks

for identifying redevelopment partners and public advocacy for the Plan. The Implementation Oversight Committee would:

- Be formally appointed by the City Council
- Receive support from City staff regarding necessary data and information needs, scheduling of regular meetings and preparation of an annual report and briefing materials.
- Meet at regular intervals to review and provide recommendations to the City Council on implementation progress.
- Prepare an annual report and briefing to City Council.

The following is an outline of the three fundamental characteristics of an Implementation Oversight Committee.

#### **Committee Members**

The Implementation Oversight Committee should include a diverse and representative group of downtown members including property and business owners, representatives of downtown business associations and advocacy groups, and City departments, agencies, and commissions.

#### **Committee Purpose**

The Implementation Oversight Committee should meet regularly to review implementation progress and identify opportunities for advancing implementation efforts. Tasks of the Oversight Committee may include:

- Meeting regularly
- Keeping the Redevelopment Plan 'Alive and Breathing'
- Tackling topics and components of the Plan, setting goals, finding community members to engage in goals, advocating for goals, and creating committees to achieve goals.
- Seeing the plan through
- Recognizing that City support is essential for plan success.
- Recognizing that accomplishments of the Plan are the result of a community-wide effort.

#### **Committee Annual Report**

The Implementation Oversight Committee should prepare an annual report. An annual report and briefing to City Council and Commissions identifies implementation

progress and provides a basis for establishing partnerships and prioritizing City funds for implementation projects. The annual report should include updates on:

- Accomplishments for the year
- List of Plan accomplishments since the start of the plan
- Committee's immediate goals for the near future

#### **REGULATORY AMENDMENTS, STUDIES AND PLANS**

Regulatory amendments, additional studies, analyses and plans should be initiated and implemented in the near term to ensure development is compatible with the Plan. Additional studies, plans and analysis will need to occur to direct decision-making with respect to a future market hall, management and access along the Sterling Highway, determining City capacity to purchase land, acquire easements or rights-of-way and prioritizing housing needs that support the local community. Amendments to local street standards will be necessary to support downtown as a destination ensuring that walking and biking are priorities and encourage winter use with a snow maintenance plan.



### **Potential Comprehensive Plan Amendments**

The Riverfront Redevelopment Plan's land use, mobility, and utilities frameworks and development strategy are consistent with the Envision Soldotna 2030 Comprehensive Plan goals. To maintain consistency between this Plan and the Comprehensive Plan the City should consider amending the General Future Land Use map.

### **Mixed-Use District Zone**

Updates, amendments or creating new codes, and development standards are time sensitive measures necessary to ensure future development meets the intent of the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan, encourages quality development and provides certainty to private developers and the community. The City should initiate a code update and adoption process as soon as practicable.

### **Update City Street Standards and Maintenance Plan**

Improving street standards and effectively planning for snow maintenance is crucial for fostering a pedestrian and bicycle-friendly downtown area. The City should take the lead in implementing new street standards and coordinating snow maintenance efforts in collaboration with the Public Works, Street and Maintenance,

Parks and Recreation, as well as Economic Development and Planning Departments.

New downtown street standards should align with the Street Anatomy Design Principles, as illustrated in Figure 65 (Proposed Complete Street Standard - 60-foot Right-of-way; Page 68). Additionally, these standards should adhere to the recommended street sections for a 60' wide typical street (Figure 79 Proposed Typical Street Section; Page 76) and a 60'-wide typical street with a multi-use trail (Figure 80 Proposed Typical Street with Multi-use Trail Section; Page 76) outlined in the Mobility section of the Plan.

### **Market Hall Feasibility Study**

Fund and manage a Market Hall feasibility study to determine the appropriate site, building program and operations, funding and a management and financial plan. Creating a market hall would meet the community's need for affordable retail/restaurant space, addressing gaps in private market support, and strengthening the year-round economy. This strategic move lays the foundation for future private development phases by cultivating a pipeline of retail businesses to tenant new development and establishing a vibrant focal point to stimulate later development phases. If the

City's desired design and/or location for a market hall proves to be too expensive for Phase 1, the City could look to reusing an existing building in Phase 1 and expand on it in later phases. This would give the City time to prove the concept, build funding capacity and refine design.

### **Conduct a Regional Housing Needs Analysis**

In partnership with the Kenai Peninsula Borough and the City of Kenai, Soldotna could conduct a Housing Needs Analysis. Determining the local housing need and the types of housing most critical to addressing this need can support city decision-making on where to consider investments in infrastructure and potential partners to promote downtown housing. Rising housing costs affect not only Soldotna but also the broader central peninsula region. Instead of being a localized challenge, unaffordable home prices and rents reflect regional economic shifts and housing undersupply.

Addressing housing needs requires a coordinated regional-local approach involving cities, the Borough, residents, businesses, and various stakeholders. Collaboration supports effective resource allocation, particularly beneficial for smaller localities leveraging pooled funding and expertise. Regional coordination

ensures equitable housing opportunities and complements efforts on related issues such as transit planning and workforce development .

## OTHER PROJECTS

### **STERLING HIGHWAY ACCESS MANAGEMENT PLAN AND TRAIL FEASIBILITY STUDY**

The City should initiate and manage a Sterling Highway Access Management Plan and Trail Feasibility Study with AK DOT&PF. This effort should build off the City's Complete Streets grant and safety improvements planned as a demonstration project for the intersection of Birch Street and Soldotna Creek Park. The study would identify the design of pedestrian, bicycle and landscape improvements, consolidation of driveways, pedestrian and signal enhancements and improvements to the parking access frontage between the Kenai River Bridge Crossing and Birch Street.

### **RIVERFRONT TRAIL EASEMENTS AND ACQUISITIONS**

The City should initiate discussions with riverfront property owners to explore acquisition of trail easements or rights-of-way to further the goal of providing a Soldotna Creek Park to bridgehead trail.

As contiguous segments with easements and/or acquired right-of-way are assembled the City should fund the trail design and construct the segments.

## CITY & PARTNER ROLES

Successful implementation of the Master Plan will require time and energy from a variety of partners, but the City will be the champion of the plan. To stimulate desired development in the near term, it is likely the City will need to facilitate redevelopment through participating in public private partnerships (e.g., market hall, subsidized land costs for private development, etc.), constructing infrastructure improvements (e.g., streets and sidewalks, trails, and open space), and carefully considering the timing and location of both public and private investment. The City's role will include soliciting developers, coordinating partners, pursuing funding, and implementing actions where possible.

Additional considerations around the City's role are included in the action sheets of Appendix C.3 Development Strategy. Potential partners are listed below. This list is not exhaustive; other potential partnerships might emerge throughout the course of the Master Plan's implementation.

Possible Partners and Roles:

- **Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District (KPEDD):** Partner in economic development activities and provides support to small businesses. KPEDD offers microloans that could support businesses with tenant improvements which could be leveraged by business owners in the market hall or other new retail spaces.
- **wwwSoldotna Wednesday Market:** Market operator could serve as a resource for market hall operations. Wednesday Market vendors may be interested in market hall space.
- **Soldotna Chamber of Commerce:** Partner for economic development activities and market hall development. Consider co-location of Chamber offices and visitor center in a new market hall.
- **Small Business Development Center:** Provide support to small businesses and refer tenants to new commercial space opportunities (including a market hall).
- **Kenai Peninsula Borough:** Partner on redevelopment tools and initiatives and establishing local funding sources.

- **Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC):** Potential partner to develop and manage affordable housing. AHFC provides loans and grants to support affordable housing development.
- **Kenai Peninsula Housing Initiatives (KPHI):** Potential partner to develop and manage affordable housing for low-income individuals and families, senior citizens, and supportive housing for special needs adults on the Kenai Peninsula.
- **Cook Inlet Housing Authority (CIHA):** Potential partner to develop and manage affordable housing. They develop housing for rent and ownership from single family, plexes, multi-family and mixed-use buildings. CIHA is also a community development financial institution (CDFI).
- **Cook Inlet Region, Inc. (CIRI):** Potential partner on community investments. CIRI is committed to preserving and perpetuating Alaskan Native heritage and, through a family of Designated Tribal Organizations, foundation and community nonprofits, provides educational opportunities, housing, health care and social services to shareholders, descendants and other Alaska Native and American Indian people residing in the Cook Inlet region.
- **Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Utilities (AK DOT&PF):** Could

provide technical and design assistance, research and data, and funding for transportation investments.

- **Cook Inletkeeper:** Partner in the market hall development. Cook Inletkeeper currently operates incubator space with a DEC approved kitchen and could share experience and expertise in managing these spaces.
- **Federal agencies:** the Economic Development Administration (EDA), US Department of Agriculture (USDA), Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other federal agencies could provide funding.
- **Other state agencies:** The Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development, the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Environmental Conservation and others could provide funding technical assistance, education and outreach, and program assistance.
- **Other funding organizations:** could include Rasmuson Foundation and Kenai Peninsula Foundation which provide grants for community development.
- **Property owners:** Property owners will be instrumental in the redevelopment of the

area. They may serve as direct developers, participate with the city in infrastructure investments, or intentionally convey their property to developers interested in delivering the outcomes of the Master Plan.

- **Community members:** Some community members may be willing to donate money, time, or expertise to support the Master Plan's vision.

## COSTS AND FUNDING SOURCES

To implement the plan and catalyze redevelopment, Soldotna will need to leverage diverse funding sources. Pursuing a mix of funding will allow the City to incrementally take steps toward achieving the Master Plan vision as resources permit. Understanding high-level costs and identifying a phased implementation strategy will help Soldotna prioritize actions when funding and resources become available. Specific infrastructure projects within the plan include planning estimates, but other actions lack detailed costs. Resource considerations include financial needs along with staff and partner capacity. Potential sources and funding tools are listed in this section and project sheets where applicable. Funding tools are set into three categories:



- Local, Public Revenue Sources
- Grants and Loans
- Philanthropic Sources

### **Local, Public Revenue Sources**

Some of the actions in this plan could be implemented using the City's existing General Fund. However, General Funds are limited and already support many City priorities. Given the limited existing revenue sources, the City may want to consider establishing the following locally controlled tools to generate additional revenue for improvements.

- **Transient Occupancy Taxes** are fees charged to customers for overnight lodging, generally for periods of less than 30 consecutive days. The fee is a generally a percentage of lodging charges incurred by the customer. The Council passed an ordinance implementing a 4% lodging tax at their December 13, 2023 meeting, which will go into effect in January 2025.
- **Urban Renewal** is a locally controlled program, authorized under state law, to improve specific areas of a city that are not achieving local land use and development objectives. Urban renewal diverts property tax revenues from growth in assessed value inside an urban renewal area for investment in capital projects

within the area to alleviate blight. To fund long-term projects along the waterfront, the City may be able to establish an Urban Renewal District. However, to make this happen the City would first need to establish that urban renewal is appropriate and then collaborate with the Borough and other taxing districts to ensure that all extra tax revenue goes toward urban renewal, not just the City's share. While funds generated through urban renewal can be substantial, it can take many years before enough revenue is generated for significant investment.

- **Special Assessment Districts** are a way to finance the construction of public capital improvements which primarily benefit property owners in a limited geographical area. This distinguishes them from improvements which benefit the entire community and are generally paid for with City funds or grants. The City may want to consider establishing a Special Assessment District for Master Plan areas where infrastructure will strongly benefit property owners.
- **General Obligation (GO) Bonds** are used for capital improvement projects, such as roads, schools, public buildings, etc. and are paid back through taxes or other sources of general fund revenue. GO bond

levies must be approved by a public vote. Soldotna recently established GO bond for the construction of the Field House at Soldotna Regional Sports Complex. Additional bond measures may be challenging to enact at this time but could be used to support infrastructure projects in the Master Plan.

- **Revenue Bonds** allow a public body to issue debt to fund public projects. Revenue bonds are used for projects that can generate revenue that can be used to pay back the debt. Examples would be electric or water and sewer utilities, or a parking garage that generates revenue through user fees.
- **Development Driven Sources** such as Construction Excise Taxes (CET) or System Development Charges (SDC) could help fund some of the necessary infrastructure in the Master Plan. However, given that the scale of development envisioned in the Master Plan is currently infeasible without City support, adding additional taxes and charges on developers is likely to discourage development. The City may want to consider CETs and SDCs at a future date when development feasibility improves.
- **User Fees** such as parking fees (raised from both operations and fines) and/

or park-user fees could provide another funding option. However, these fees would be minimal and most likely be used to support ongoing maintenance of facilities than support large-scale redevelopment. Adding fees for parking and park use where it was previously free may be more likely to meet with public resistance.

While not a local funding source, the City could consider **pursuing direct support in the form of Congressionally Directed Spending Requests**. Congressional appropriations are highly competitive but could provide significant support for Master Plan priorities, if granted.

### Grants and Loans

Because currently available funding sources are limited, grants are likely to play an important role in project implementation. Grant funds are not typically included in funding forecasts because they are too project-specific and uncertain to predict. However, if the City is successful in receiving grant money, it could use local revenue as matching funds to leverage additional grant dollars.

ECONorthwest researched regional, state, federal, and foundation-based grant programs that the City of Soldotna could

consider pursuing for eligible projects in the project area. A summary of these sources is listed below and are included in the Action Sheets when applicable. Appendix A provides additional details on the grants available from these agencies. It is important to note that the grants in Appendix A provide the City with an initial list of grants to consider but actual eligibility will vary based on specific project details.

- **US Economic Development Administration (EDA)** has a variety of grants and loan programs, including the Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistant Program, to support economic development in communities, including funds to support critical infrastructure that will allow businesses to locate or expand operations. The Master Plan aims to promote economic development in an equitable and sustainable way and may be eligible for EDA funds if the City focuses on projects that align with EDA's investment priorities. The Master Plan likely has the strongest alignment with EDA's recovery, resilience, equity, and sustainable development priorities.
- **Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (AK DOT&PF)** manages programs that provide funding and

technical assistance for transportation planning and improvements, including the Community Transportation Program and Transportation Alternatives Program, which support a variety of transportation improvement projects.

- **US Department of Transportation (USDOT)** manages programs that provide funding and technical assistance for transportation planning and improvements, including the RAISE and Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods Programs.
- **Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation** administers water/wastewater financing programs that fund the design and construction of public infrastructure needed to ensure compliance with the Safe Drinking Water Act or the Clean Water Act.
- **Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of the Department of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (DPOR)** administers Alaska's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Recreational Trails Program grant. The DPOR offers this competitive, reimbursable, matching trail grant for maintaining public recreational trails and related facilities, and for safety and educational projects.

- **Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Development manages the Community Assistance Program (CAP)** and competitive **Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)**. CAP provides Alaska's boroughs, cities, and unincorporated communities with funds vital to the delivery of basic public services. CAP funds can be used for any public purpose that have been determined as a priority of the funding recipient. CDBG competitive grants (funded by HUD, distributed by the Department of Commerce, Community, and Development) are single-purpose project grants that can support community development, planning and special economic development.
- **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)** administers the Brownfields Program which provides several types of nationally competitive grants for brownfield assessment and cleanup.
- **USDA Rural Development** is focused on communities with populations of less than 10,000 and offers funding for infrastructure, economic development, housing, and other community priorities.
- **US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)** administers a variety of programs to support housing development including the PRO Housing

Pathways to Removing Obstacles grant. This is a competitive grant to identify and remove barriers for affordable housing. This could apply to both implementation as well as planning should the City decide to pursue a Housing Needs Analysis.

- **Foundations.** The Kenai Peninsula Foundation, Rasmuson Foundation, and AARP all offer grants to support community development projects.

### Philanthropic Sources

Many residents and organizations in Soldotna are passionate about investing in the community. Some have the financial means to support projects they believe in or are excited to see come to fruition. To gauge the community's willingness to support projects in the study area, the City could consider asking for financial support to implement key projects which resonate with the community. Fundraising options include:

- **Traditional capital fundraising campaign:** A coordinated effort to raise a substantial pool of funds for a specific project or effort. While a campaign deadline is typically established, the fundraising period can span many years. Campaigns require increasing public awareness

through various channels (phone calls, emails, mailers, events) and will require heightened staff capacity.

- **Local Foundation.** Explore the creation of a local foundation to support the project or elements of the project (trail, market hall, etc.).
- **Crowdfunding campaign:** An online fundraising campaign aimed at gathering small contributions from many individuals or groups.
- **Business or corporate sponsorship program:** An arrangement where a business pays to support a project in exchange for recognition. The sponsoring entity gains visibility through its name/logo being displayed on the project. Sponsorship programs can vary, such as sponsoring an entire project or participating in a tiered donation system.
- **Naming rights and legacy gift program:** Similar to a business or corporate sponsorship program, a naming rights/legacy gift program can be established to generate funds from a wider range of people and groups.
- **In-kind donations requests:** A request for non-monetary donations which may include volunteer support, goods or material, and/or services.



# THE BUSINESS CASE: SOLDOTNA'S 20-YEAR BUILD-OUT

Fundamentally, investing in community redevelopment entails risks, it takes tremendous effort and requires strong local leadership and decision-making to make Soldotna a better city, a great city with a one-of-a-kind riverfront destination.

The Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan is intended to balance “risk” by establishing “the rules of the game” to provide greater certainty that taking a risk will yield substantial benefits. Those benefits can be measured in positive returns on investments that deliver a more stable year-round economy, the creation of jobs and income, integrating the Kenai River into the downtown, and improved quality of life that is central to the community's vision for the downtown and riverfront.

The project prepared an analysis of the economic impacts of constructing the infrastructure to support future development and the potential economic return from development as a result of the infrastructure investments. The findings offers a compelling case for the City's continued support and leadership in bringing the Plan's vision to life. The quantitative construction impacts, and qualitative benefits offer advantages both in the short and long term for Soldotna's economy and people.

The City stands to gain by playing an active role in catalyzing the downtown riverfront's transformation.

Key findings indicate at Build-out (2024-2043) there is the potential for:

- **2,068 jobs and \$109.8M in labor income created in the City and Borough through construction.**
- **\$155M contributed to the City's and Borough's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) over the course of construction.**
- **\$5.1M in additional local and state tax revenues from construction.**

For further information see APPENDIX C: Master Plan, C.2 Business Case-20-Year Build-out.

The full buildout over the 20-year period is estimated to cost \$199.4M, when adjusted for inflation. The total economic effect of this construction investment is estimated to be \$291.9M.

Impact	FTEs	Wage & Salaries	Value Added	Output
Direct Effect	1,546	\$87,840,000	\$105,340,000	\$199,390,000
Indirect Effect (Supply-Chain Impact)	169	\$7,460,000	\$16,625,000	\$33,296,000
Induced Effect (Household Consumption Impact)	353	\$14,520,000	\$32,867,000	\$59,176,000
Total	2,068	\$109,810,000	\$154,832,000	\$291,862,000

Fig. 116: Total Economic Impacts of Full Buildout, 2024–2043

Soldotna is expected to generate \$724,000 in taxes, the Borough \$1.77M and the state \$2.63M. This is for construction impacts only, not additional tax revenues from ongoing operations.

Impact				Total State & Local
	City	Borough	State	
Direct	\$60,000	\$158,000	\$503,000	\$720,000
Indirect	\$264,000	\$640,000	\$814,000	\$1,717,000
Induced	\$401,000	\$975,000	\$1,318,000	\$2,694,000
Total	\$724,000	\$1,773,000	\$2,634,000	\$5,132,000

Fig. 117: Total Tax Impacts of Full Buildout, 2024–2043



Fig. 118: Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Build-out,

The project analysis identified a development to infrastructure cost ratio in an effort to understand the relationship between investment in infrastructure and the anticipated development yield as a result of that investment. The development to infrastructure cost ratio is calculated as total development cost of buildings (\$144M) divided by infrastructure and public amenities cost (\$27.3M). In total, each \$1 that the City spends on the construction of infrastructure yields \$5.30 in development. This demonstrates the powerful economic stimulus and leverage that can be created by the City's infrastructure investments. For further information see APPENDIX C: Master Plan, C.2 Business Case-20-Year Build-out.

## Key Inputs and Assumptions

The business case analysis estimated economic impacts and tax revenues based on development assumptions and high-level cost estimates. Rather than precise projections, the outcomes illustrate proportional allocations and order-of-magnitude gains across jurisdictions. By demonstrating tax stimulus alongside the labor income, job creation, and other impacts, the analysis provides evidence supporting public participation where reasonable. Returns to multiple levels of government help justify involvement and partnerships across local, regional, and state government.

The findings from this analysis will assist the City in making the case for additional funding and partnerships to support the project.

To estimate the economic effects, the project used the IMPLAN Input-Output modeling framework. IMPLAN traces how spending associated with an industry flows through the local economy, generating direct, indirect (supply-chain), and induced (household spending) impacts.

The analysis focused exclusively on quantifying the impacts of construction activity and did not model long-term operations and maintenance jobs and impact. As such, the impact analysis should be considered conservative because on-going operations and maintenance will inevitably generate longer-lasting economic effects into the future through supporting jobs, labor income, and generating taxes in the local economy.

### Construction costs

Measures the cost of infrastructure and new development including:

- Street and utility cost estimates
- Public amenity (trails, parks, plazas, etc.) cost estimates
- Total square feet of development estimates
- Building cost estimates multiplied by square footage estimates
- Hotel pro forma

### Phasing: 20-year buildout period

- Phase 1: 2024-2028 (first five years of buildout)
- Remaining Buildout: 2029-2043 (last fifteen years of buildout)

#### What is IMPLAN?

IMPLAN is an Input-Output (I-O) modeling framework that allows policy makers to measure the change in regional economic activity resulting from new economic stimulus (e.g., constructing an apartment complex). The IMPLAN model works by tracing how spending associated with an industry circulates through an economy using backwards-looking supply- and demand-chain linkages. It summarizes the total economic effects resulting from the new economic activity in terms of output, jobs, and income.

IMPLAN estimates economic effects in three distinct impact measures:

- The direct effects are the output, jobs, and income associated with the immediate effects of the final demand changes. These are the primary data inputs we supply to the model (i.e., the known dollar value of the stimulus we're estimating).
- The indirect effects are the production changes in backward-linked industries caused by the changing input needs of directly affected industries. These are often referred to as supply-chain impacts.
- The induced effects are the changes in regional household spending patterns caused by changes in household income—generated from the direct and indirect effects. These are often referred to as consumption-driven impacts.
- The *total economic effects* are the sum of the direct, indirect, and induced effects.

A couple other key IMPLAN terms used throughout this analysis are defined as follows:

- Value added means contribution to Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP). It is defined as the sum of labor income, taxes on production and imports (property taxes, sales and excise taxes, etc.) net of subsidies, and other property income (corporate profits, consumption of fixed capital, etc.).
- Output is the broadest measure of total economic activity. It is defined as Value Added plus all Intermediate Inputs, which are all the goods and services purchased to produce the economic activity being modeled (e.g., a construction company purchasing lumber, steel, and concrete to erect a new building).

Fig. 119: What is IMPLAN?



### **IMPLAN data –**

- Assumes all dollars to be in 2023 denominations.
- IMPLAN model processed the direct effects, whereby the effects are inflated to the appropriate year using IMPLAN's built-in inflation calculator.
- The project used IMPLAN's 2019 economic data to generate both the economic and fiscal impacts.

At the time of analysis, 2021 economic data were readily available; however, the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic—by way of PPP loans—rendered IMPLAN's tax impacts difficult to interpret.

### **Broader Economic and Community Benefits**

The construction impacts detailed in the previous section exclude ongoing operations. Ongoing operations will undoubtedly create additional long-term benefits in terms of jobs, income, and tax revenues which the project was unable to measure given data limitations. Modeling these long-term operational and maintenance costs would require a level of detail that is presently unavailable for this project, but the City could measure these

impacts once they have additional details on the businesses that will locate in the area.

In addition to the quantitative construction impacts, the redevelopment offers advantages for both the local economy and community over the long term.

#### **Economic Upside**

- New commercial spaces allow business expansion and new startups, creating permanent jobs and tax revenue.
- A new market hall incubates local businesses in affordable year-round spaces, enabling them to graduate into retail spaces.
- More housing addresses shortages,

while supporting the customer base and workforce for businesses.

- Increased tourism due to having a more inviting and iconic downtown captures a greater share of Kenai Peninsula tourism.

#### **Community Perks**

- Greater year-round activity and amenities meet residents' desires.
- Housing at varied income levels fills critical needs for the workforce and may provide affordable options.
- An enhanced sense of place fosters community pride and livability.

Together, these benefits demonstrate that Soldotna's investment in the riverfront area will benefit current and future residents.



Fig. 120: Community Perks- Soldotna Creek Trail and Upland Woods

# KEY PROJECTS AND SCHEDULE

There are a number of key projects and actions that should be initiated and substantially completed within five years of plan adoption. These projects are essential to 'set the table' for sustained long-term investment within the project area.

Without the implementation of these key projects, revitalization efforts will fall short of their potential. The following pages provide brief descriptions of the identified key projects and recommended actions to be taken within a five-year schedule.

## 1. Implementation Manager

Effective implementation will require coordination and leadership by the City of Soldotna. It is recommended that an implementation manager position be created to coordinate and manage plan implementation over a three-year time frame. The Implementation Manager would spearhead implementation efforts, and coordinate and conduct periodic meetings with City department leadership and an Implementation Oversight Committee. Additionally, the Implementation Manager would facilitate regular updates to the City Council.

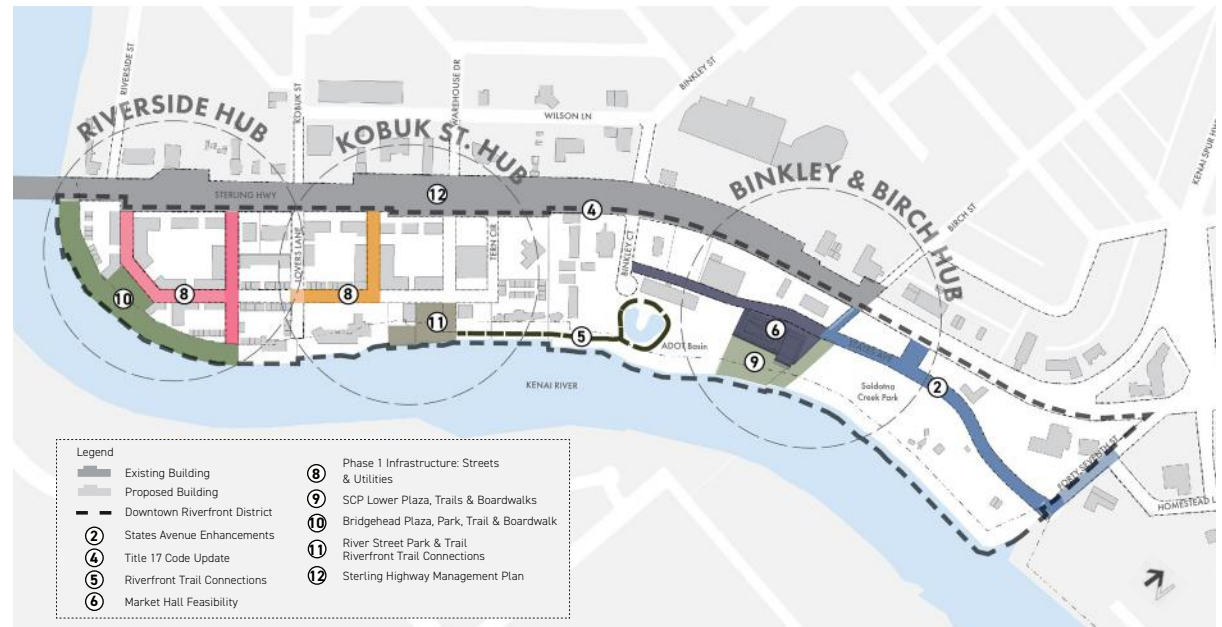


Fig. 121: Key Projects

## 2. States Avenue Enhancements

Improvements to States Avenue would establish a new street connection by linking the existing Aspen Hotel driveway, starting at Binkley Circle, to the current States Avenue (in Soldotna Creek Park) and extending the road through to 47th Street. The States Avenue connection combined with the City's planned future improvements to Homestead Drive (between 47th Street and Redoubt Street) will provide a parallel route to Sterling

Highway and improve access to businesses between the Binkley Street and Birch Street Hub, the "Y" Intersection and Soldotna Creek Park.

The planned design for a 6-foot trail connection on States Avenue to 47th Street and Homestead Drive should be coordinated with the Plan's recommended street section that calls for a 14-foot trail (Figure 93: Typical Connecting Trail Section. Street w/Multi-use Trail, Page 84).

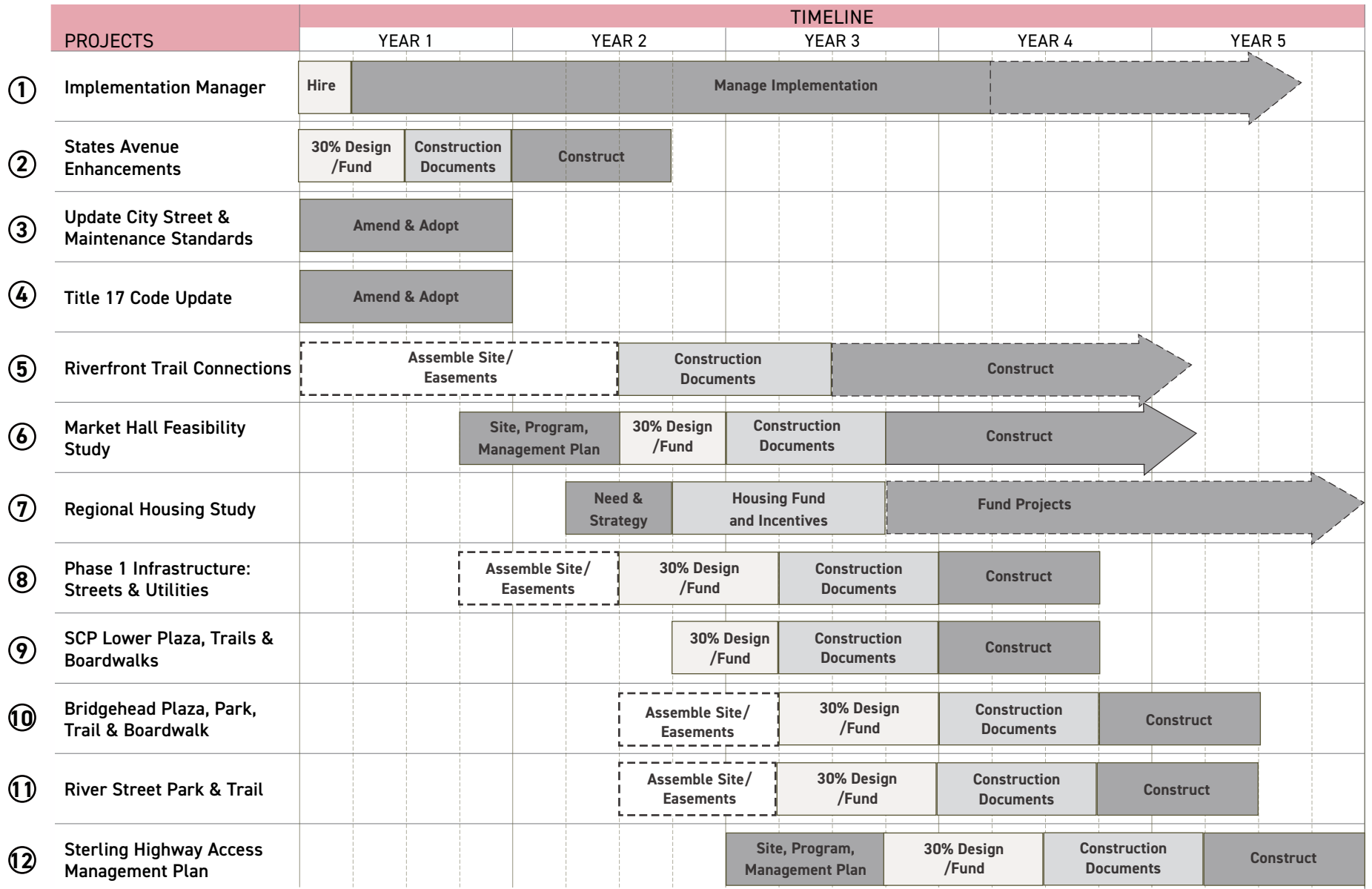


Fig. 122: Key Projects Schedule



For States Avenue Enhancements details refer to:

- Development Strategy chapter, *Binkley and Birch Street Catalyst Site: Market Hall and Riverfront Plazas*, pages 102-105;
- Development Framework chapter, Mobility section, *States Avenue*, pages 72 and 73.

### **3. Update City Street and Maintenance Standards**

Improving street standards and effectively planning for snow maintenance is crucial for fostering a pedestrian and bicycle-friendly downtown area. The City should take the lead in implementing new street standards and coordinating efforts across various city departments, including Public Works, Street and Maintenance, Parks and Recreation, as well as Economic Development and Planning.

New downtown street standards should align with the Street Anatomy Design Principles, as illustrated in Figure 65 (Proposed Complete Street Standard - 60-foot Right-of-way; Page 68). Additionally, these standards should adhere to the recommended street sections for a 60' wide typical street (Figure 79 Proposed

Typical Street Section; Page 76) and a 60'-wide typical street with a multi-use trail (Figure 80 Proposed Typical Street with Multi-use Trail Section; Page 76) detailed in the Mobility section of this Plan.

Snow removal and maintenance for downtown streets will ensure the usability of sidewalks, maintain on-street parking, and provide access to businesses during the winter. The Street Maintenance and Parks and Recreation departments should collaborate to formulate a comprehensive snow clearing plan, with a specific emphasis on clearing snow from trails, sidewalks, and curbside parking in tandem with the opening of downtown streets. Additional coordination with AK DOT&PF will be necessary to ensure efficient snow maintenance along the highway and intersections with downtown streets.

### **4. Title 17 Code Update**

Initiate a code update process and consider adopting a mixed-use zone for the project area. Updates, amendments or creating new codes, and development standards are time sensitive measures necessary to ensure future development meets the intent of the Downtown Riverfront Redevelopment Plan,

encourages quality development and provides certainty to private developers and the community.

### **5. Market Hall Feasibility Study**

Fund and manage a Market Hall feasibility study to determine the appropriate site and building program, funding and a management and financial plan. Creating a market hall would meet the community's need for affordable retail/restaurant space, addressing gaps in private market support and building toward a year-round economy.

For the Market Hall Feasibility Study details refer to:

- Development Strategy chapter, *Binkley and Birch Street Catalyst Site: Market Hall and Riverfront Plazas*, pages 102-103
- Development Framework chapter, Land Use section, *Market Hall at Soldotna Creek Park*, pages 50 and 51; and *Soldotna Creek Park Plaza*, pages 46 and 47.

### **6. Central Peninsula Housing Study**

The City should initiate, with the Borough and the City of Kenai, the funding of a regional housing study. Addressing

housing needs requires a coordinated regional-local approach involving cities, the Borough residents, businesses, and various stakeholders. Collaboration supports effective resource allocation, particularly beneficial for smaller localities leveraging pooled funding and expertise. Regional coordination ensures equitable housing opportunities and complements efforts on related issues like transit planning and workforce development.

Key elements of a regional housing study include:

- Conducting a Regional Needs Assessment: Identify gaps between current and projected housing needs and supply.
- Determine and Collaborate on Housing Strategies: Focus on supply, stability, and subsidy to meet diverse demands.
- Pool Resources: Encourage collaboration and innovative funding programs for regional housing initiatives.
- Implement Performance Tracking: Establish systems to track outcomes and identify challenges over time.

Incorporating these elements enables effective collective action, addressing housing challenges while supporting broader regional development.

## **7. Phase 1 Infrastructure: Streets and Utilities**

The City should initiate discussions with property owners at the Riverside and Kobuk Street Hubs and explore the potential for public and private partnerships to facilitate infrastructure improvements. New streets and utilities will be needed to support existing and future development within the Riverside and Kobuk Street Hubs. Critical steps for implementing infrastructure improvements include:

- Negotiating easements and/or acquiring right-of-way for streets to establish the basic street network that promotes a walkable downtown and provides improved access to existing businesses and future development areas.
- Funding the design of roadways and infrastructure improvements.
- Identify and secure funding to construct improvements.

For the Phase 1 Infrastructure: Streets and Utilities details refer to:

- Development Strategy chapter, *Riverside Catalyst Site: Mixed-use Riverfront Destination*, pages 94-97; and *Kobuk Street*

*and Lover's Lane Catalyst Site: Mixed-use Storefronts and Residential Neighborhood*, pages 98-101.

- Development Framework chapter, Mobility section, *New Street*, page 76 and *Connecting Trail* page 84; and *Riverfront Trail and Boardwalks* page 82; *New Streets*, page 76; *River Street*, page 70; and *Utilities*, pages 58-59.

## **8. Bridgehead Plaza, Park, Trails and Boardwalk**

At the Riverside Hub the Bridgehead Plaza is an amenity that will serve to attract investment and provide a local community benefit with improved public access to the riverfront. Critical steps for implementing riverfront improvements include:

- Negotiate easements and/or acquiring right-of-way for the Bridgehead Plaza, trails and boardwalk.
- Funding the design of the plaza, trails, boardwalk and riparian habitat improvements.
- Identify and secure funding to construct improvements.

For the Bridgehead Plaza, Park, Trails and Boardwalk details refer to:

- Development Strategy chapter, *Riverside Catalyst Site: Mixed-use Riverfront Destination*, pages 94-97;
- Development Framework chapter, Mobility section, *Riverfront Trail and Boardwalks* page 82; Land Use section, *Bridgehead Plaza and Park*, pages 42 and 43.

## 9. River Street Park and Trail

At the Kobuk Street Hub, the River Street Park is an amenity that will serve to attract investment and provide a local community benefit with improved public access to the bluff overlooking the riverfront. Critical steps for implementing riverfront improvements include:

- Negotiating easements and/or acquiring right-of-way for the park, trails and an overlook.
- Funding the design of the park, trails, overlook and riparian habitat improvements.
- Identify and secure funding to construct improvements.

For the River Street Park and Trail details refer to:

- Development Strategy chapter, *Kobuk Street and Lover's Lane Catalyst Site: Mixed-use Storefronts and Residential Neighborhood*, pages 98-99.
- Development Framework chapter, Land Use section, *Riverfront Trail and Boardwalks* page 82; Land Use section, *River Street Park*, pages 44 and 45.

## 10. Soldotna Creek Park Lower Plaza, Trails and Boardwalks.

At Soldotna Creek Park, the lower plaza, trails and boardwalk are amenities that will serve to enhance the use and function of Soldotna Creek Park. In advance of a market hall the City can begin design and construction of the lower plaza, trails and boardwalk enhancements. Critical steps for implementing infrastructure improvements include:

- Funding the design of the parking lot, lower plaza, and trails, boardwalk enhancements and riparian habitat improvements.
- City identifies and secures funding to construct improvements.

For the Soldotna Creek Park lower plaza trails and boardwalk details refer to:

- Development Strategy chapter, *Binkley and Birch Street Catalyst Site: Market Hall and Riverfront Plazas*, pages 104-105
- Development Framework chapter, Mobility section, *Riverfront Trail and Boardwalks* pages 82-83; Land Use section, *Market Hall and Soldotna Creek Park* pages 50-51; Land Use section, *Soldotna Creek Plaza*, pages 46-47.

## 11. Riverfront Trail Connections

The City should initiate discussions with riverfront property owners to explore acquisition of trail easements or rights-of-way. As contiguous segments with easements and/or acquired right-of-way are assembled the City should fund the trail design and construct the segments.

For the Riverfront Trail Connections details refer to:

- Development Framework chapter; Mobility section *Trails*, pages 80-81; and *Riverfront Trail and Boardwalks*, pages 82-83.



## 12. Sterling Highway Access

### Management Plan

The City should initiate and manage a Sterling Highway Access Management Plan and Trail Feasibility Study with AK DOT&PF. This effort should build off the City's Complete Streets grant and safety improvements planned as a demonstration project for the intersection of Birch Street and Soldotna Creek Park. The study would identify the design of pedestrian, bicycle and landscape improvements, consolidation of driveways, pedestrian and signal enhancements and improvements to the parking access frontage between the Kenai River Bridge Crossing and Birch Street.

For the Sterling Highway Access Management Plan details refer to:

- Development Framework chapter, Mobility section, *Sterling Highway Access Management* pages 78-79; *Sterling Trail* pages 86 and 87; and *Appendix B.1 Preliminary Design Concepts, Sterling Highway* pages 17-20.



# APPENDICES

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- A.2 Market Analysis
- A.3 Transportation Conditions Assessment
- A.4 Parks and Trails Considerations

## **APPENDIX B: BUILD THE VISION**

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- B.2 Utilities Impacts Analysis
- B.3 Traffic and Safety Impacts Analysis
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## **APPENDIX C: MASTER PLAN**

- C.1 Development Summary
- C.2 Business Case- 20-Year Build-out
- C.3 Development Strategy
- C.4 Streets, Sterling Trail and Utilities Cost Estimate
- C.5 Plazas and Parks Cost Estimate

## **APPENDIX D: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

- D.1 Community Engagement Plan
- D.2 Project Advisory Committee Plan
- D.3 Engagement Milestone #1 Objectives and Vision
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## **APPENDIX E: DRAFT MIXED USE ZONING**

- E.1 Draft Downtown Riverfront Mixed-Use District



**SOLDOTNA**  
City of Soldotna, Alaska