

# SEWARD COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS  
APRIL 22-24, 2025

*Seward to the Future*  
CITY OF SEWARD, AK  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN



Summary Report, 06/09/25

## THANK YOU, SEWARD!

Nearly 100 residents of all ages turned up at the three Community Workshops held in April 2025 – we enjoyed meeting you and appreciate the thoughtful input you shared!

Special thanks to the following City officials and staff members for guiding and participating in the process:

- ★ Mayor Sue McClure
- ★ Robert Barnwell, City Council
- ★ Julie Crites, City Council
- ★ Randy Wells, City Council
- ★ Carol Griswold, Planning & Zoning Chairperson
- ★ Nathaniel Charbonneau, Planning & Zoning Commissioner
- ★ Rhonda Hubbard, Planning & Zoning Commissioner
- ★ June Pemberton, Planning & Zoning Commissioner
- ★ Kat Sorensen, City Manager
- ★ Jason Bickling, Deputy City Manager
- ★ Sully Jusino, Finance Director
- ★ Clinton Crites, Fire Chief
- ★ Daniel Meuninck, Community Development Director
- ★ Courtney Bringhurst, City Planner
- ★ Clara Brown, Executive Planning Assistant

And thank you to the following organizations/facilities for offering space to host the Community Workshops:

- ★ University of Alaska Fairbanks K.M. Rae Marine Education Building
- ★ Bear Creek Fire Department
- ★ Seward High School



# SEWARD'S COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

The City of Seward is updating the 2030 Comprehensive Plan to recognize and celebrate accomplishments, address new challenges and opportunities, and coordinate efforts to achieve a shared vision for Seward. The Comprehensive Plan serves as a community resource and guide for community leaders, residents, and other partners to protect what residents value most about Seward while enhancing the quality of life for current and future residents.

## WHY UPDATE THE 2030 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN NOW?

The 2030 Comprehensive Plan launched at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. In late 2023, Seward City Council asked the Community Development office to consider updating the 2030 Comprehensive Plan. After a work session with the Planning and Zoning Commission, it was evident that a simple update was not enough, but a full refresh would be more appropriate. Additionally, the City has received feedback from community organizations that the Plan was not specific enough in certain areas to help them apply for grant funds.

## WHAT IS THE PROCESS TO UPDATE THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

The City of Seward is following a robust process to update the 2030 Comprehensive Plan, which kicked off in early 2024 with a target to adopt the final plan in spring 2026 (Figure 1). The process to update the 2030 Comprehensive Plan involves extensive input from the community, city leadership and staff, commissioners, community leaders and partners, and other stakeholders. Other inputs that inform the plan update are described in more detail in the following section.



Figure 1. Timeline and Process to Update the City of Seward 2030 Comprehensive Plan. (Star indicates where we are in the process as of the date of this report.)

## How Workshop Results Inform the Comprehensive Plan Update

Many inputs are included in the process to update the comprehensive plan (see Figure 2). The process relies on input from community members, and various forms of outreach are offered to engage the public at each stage of the process. The planning team will use the workshop results as one of the many community engagement activities to inform the framework for the focus areas, priorities, and objectives that will make up the comprehensive plan. Future workshops and small group conversations will focus on identifying strategies and implementation planning for the focus areas and priorities emerging from inputs earlier in the process (e.g. plan review, focus area research, workshops, surveys, etc.).



Figure 2. City of Seward 2030 Comprehensive Plan Update Inputs.

# SEWARD COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

Three community workshops were hosted on the evenings of April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, and 24<sup>th</sup>, 2025. Workshop locations were selected to encourage inclusive participation from across the community, including City residents and community members who reside outside City limits. Workshops were held at the University of Alaska Fairbanks K.M. Rae Marine Education Building, the Bear Creek Fire Department, and Seward High School. In March and April, the workshops were advertised and promoted via social media posts, radio ads, flyer distribution in community spaces (e.g., the public library), council meetings, and other community gatherings.

The open-house format of the community workshops allowed participants to join as they were able and to choose how long they spent engaging with the variety of information and materials provided at each workshop station. A brief introduction was shared at each workshop to welcome participants, explain workshop stations and activities, share how input would be used, and encourage participation in the comprehensive plan surveys.

## COMMUNITY WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

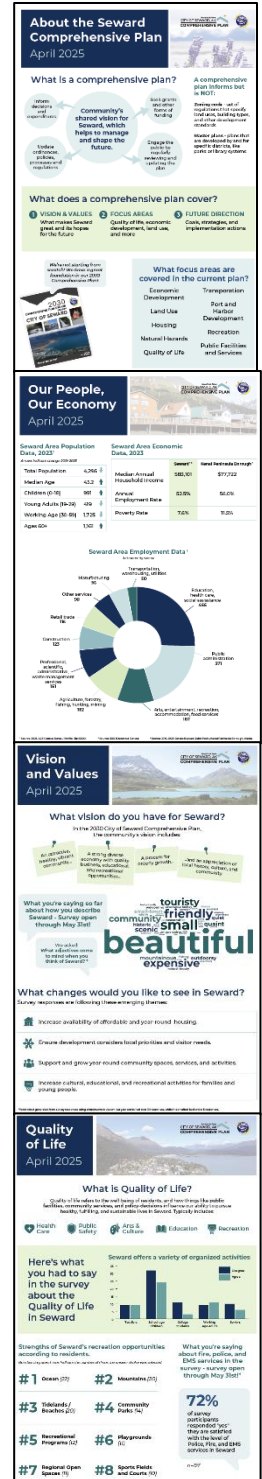
<p>Educate the public about the purpose of a comprehensive plan, why the 2030 Comprehensive Plan is being updated, and the timeline to complete the update.</p>	<p>Share preliminary results of the community surveys and promote participation.</p>	<p>Gather input from the community on Comprehensive Plan focus areas and emerging themes from the survey results and plan review.</p>	<p>Share next steps in the comprehensive planning process and how community input from the workshops will be considered in the updated plan.</p>
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# STATIONS OVERVIEW

At each of the workshops, five stations were set up around the room. Each station included a combination of interactive posters and informational posters, and at least one facilitator was present at each station throughout the Workshops. Below is an outline of station content and the guiding questions and activities for each station. Photos in the banner on the right show the poster content.

- ★ **Workshop Welcome:** sign-in sheets, survey information, “About the Seward Comprehensive Plan” and “Our People, Our Economy” posters (see side panel).
- ★ **Vision and Values:** emerging survey results and vision summary from the 2030 Comprehensive Plan (see side panel).
  - Guiding Questions: “What do you value most about living in Seward,” “What makes it challenging to live in Seward,” and “What do you want Seward to look like 10 years from now?”
- ★ **Quality of Life:** emerging survey results, definition of Quality of Life (see side panel).
  - Guiding Questions: “What would improve your life in Seward today?” and “What do you wish for future generations growing up in Seward”
- ★ **Economic Development:** interactive posters for voting on appetite for growth in key economic drivers and rating level of existing service in key economic supporters (see Economic Development section below).
  - Guiding Question: “Tell us more! What [economic development] ideas do you have?”
- ★ **Future Land Use:** comment maps from the surveys, the existing Future Land Use map, and a landownership and key landmarks map (see Future Land Use section below).
  - Guiding Prompt: “Share your ideas for future land use using sticky dots and post it notes!”



## WORKSHOP OUTCOMES AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

The three workshops brought together nearly 100 community members from the Seward area. City officials and staff also joined the workshops, including the Mayor, Council members, Planning and Zoning Commissioners, the City Manager, the Finance Director, and Seward's Fire Chief. Staff from the Community Development office were available at the stations each evening to answer questions and facilitate the station activities.

The workshops were intentionally scheduled while the surveys were still open to encourage additional participation. Total submissions for each of the four surveys after they closed on May 31, 2025 were: Vision – 379, Quality of Life – 319, Land Use – 263, and Economy – 235.

### *Key Takeaways from Workshops*

Responses and input from all the stations were reviewed and analyzed for common themes, ideas and suggestions that were repeated frequently during the workshops. These themes were then compiled into key takeaway statements, shared below. The more detailed summaries, and the common themes lists, are included in the “Workshop Notes” section of this report.

#### ★ **Vision and Values:**

- Most Valued: Workshop participants value access to nature and other outdoor amenities. They enjoy the small, quiet, and safe community with its strong sense of neighborliness and friendliness.
- Challenges: Workshop participants find limited access to resources and services such as lumber, hardware, childcare, and affordable housing, especially for seniors, challenging about living in Seward. Other themes that emerged from the challenges question included worrying about the school system, high cost of living, seasonal tourism, and seasonal economy.
- Seward in 10 Years: Workshop participants desire a strong education system, a year-round economy, affordable housing, small town feel, and more local amenities.

#### ★ **Quality of Life:**

- Improvements for Today: Workshop participants identified local amenities (such as a recreation center and outdoor attractions), a strong school system (e.g., well-funded, well-staffed), clean and well-maintained City (including roads), and more local services and resources (such as lumber and childcare) as elements that would improve quality of life in Seward.
- Wishes for Future Generations: Workshop participants shared that they wish for a strong school system, energy-efficient homes and businesses, and a year-round economy for future generations.

#### ★ **Economic Development**

- Suggestions and Ideas: Workshop participants suggested affordable electricity and more recreational winter activities to help provide more local economic development opportunities.

#### ★ **Future Land Use:**

- o Future land use ideas: Workshop participants shared ideas about zoning (e.g. more R3 zoning) and permitting changes (e.g. more flexibility in setbacks on alleys), improving the safety of neighborhoods (e.g. sidewalk improvements, traffic flow), and expanding the diversity of housing options. They are also interested in improvements to existing outdoor areas and have ideas for new parks and open spaces.

## WORKSHOP RESULTS

### HOW TO INTERPRET THESE DETAILED NOTES

Workshop participants shared their ideas and input via the questions and information shared at each of the stations. They wrote responses in marker on the flip charts, added sticky notes to posters, used colored sticker dots to share ideas for future land use, and shared their rating of and appetite towards economic supporters and drivers, respectively. They were also encouraged to add checkmarks or stars next to ideas with which they agreed. Summaries, key takeaways, and emerging themes related to this input are shared in the following sections.

The input was reviewed and analyzed to identify themes, which are shared in the lists below. The numbers in parentheses indicate a combination of common themes from all three workshops and the number of checkmarks next to ideas. The lists were then organized in descending order. In each section, the lists of common themes are further synthesized into a key takeaway statement.

To document and preserve participants' voices, images of the posters are shared in their corresponding sections and graphic representations of the Economic Development and Future Land Use activities have been created directly from poster input.

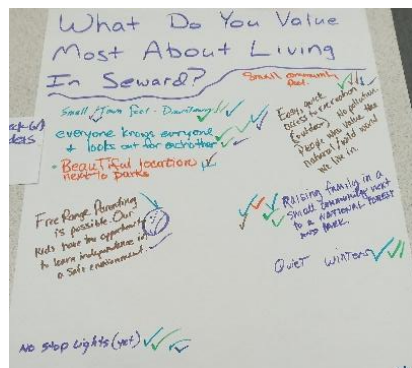
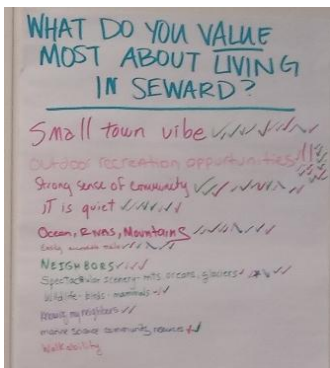


## VISION AND VALUES

### What do you value most about living in Seward?

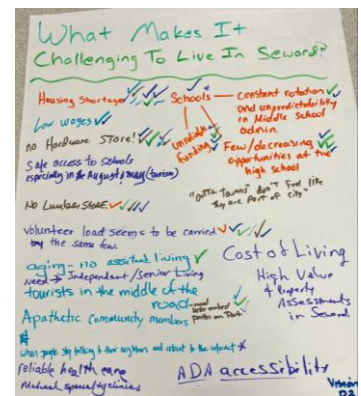
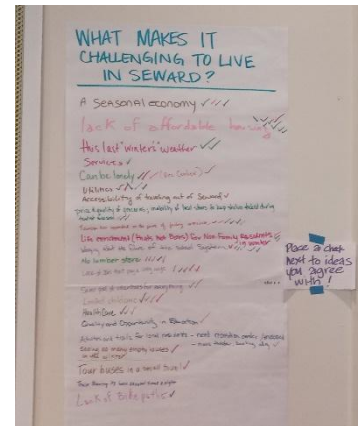
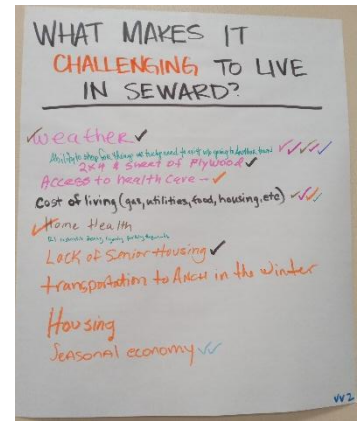
- ★ Outdoor recreation activities and easily accessible trails (38)
- ★ Strong sense of community and neighbors (34)
- ★ Small town vibe (20)
- ★ Spectacular scenery (19)
- ★ Quiet atmosphere (12)
- ★ Safe place for free-range parenting (11)
- ★ No stop lights (5)
- ★ Wildlife, birds, mammals (2)
- ★ Marine science community resources (2)
- ★ No pollution and clean air (2)
- ★ No skyscrapers (1)
- ★ Walkability
- ★ Entrepreneurial opportunities
- ★ Ability to make a difference

Key Takeaway: Workshop participants shared that they value **access to nature and other outdoor amenities**. They enjoy the **small, quiet, and safe community** with its strong sense of neighborliness and friendliness.



## What makes it challenging to live in Seward?

- ★ Limited resources and services available locally, e.g. no lumber or hardware stores, daycare (26)
- ★ Lack of affordable housing, e.g. independent senior living, assisted living (20)
- ★ Worrying about the future of the school system, e.g. desire high quality education that is well-funded, with strong staffing, more opportunities for high school students (18)
- ★ Cost of living, e.g., gas, utilities, groceries (including quality and lack of stocked shelves during tourist season), housing, etc. (14)
- ★ Tourism has expanded to the point of feeling intrusive, e.g. tour buses, safe access to schools during tourist season (9)
- ★ Same pool of volunteers for everything (8)
- ★ Seasonal economy (7)
- ★ Lack of jobs that pay a living wage (7)
- ★ Lack of reliable healthcare and medical specialty clinics (5)
- ★ Lack of year-round activities for residents, e.g. rec center, movie theater, bowling alley (4)
- ★ Weather (4)
- ★ Isolation (4)
- ★ Lack of paths and need better marked paths on Port (4)
- ★ Transit to places outside of Seward, e.g. Anchorage in the winter (2)
- ★ Seeing so many empty houses in the winter (1)
- ★ Train blowing its horn several times a night
- ★ Home health
- ★ R1 restrictive zoning, regarding parking requirements
- ★ Apathetic community members
- ★ High cost of value and property assessments
- ★ ADA accessibility



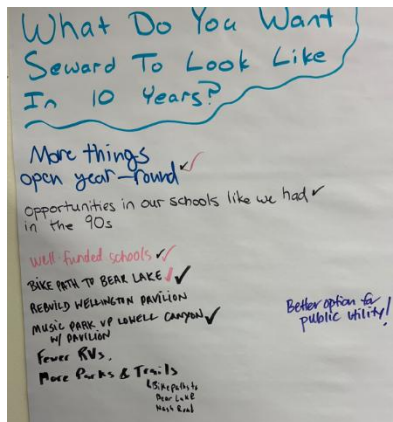
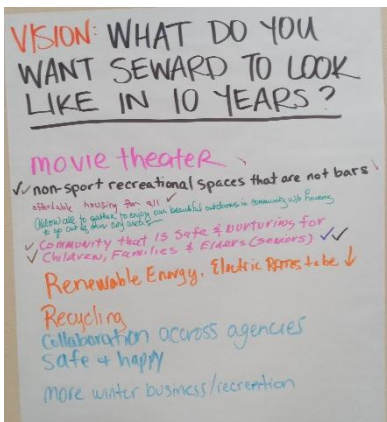
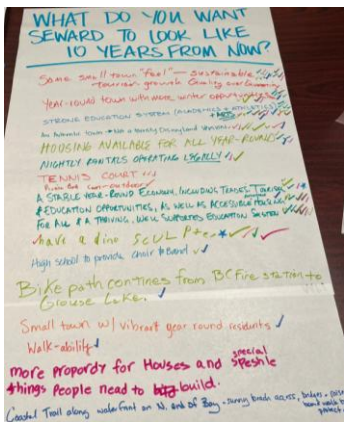
**Key Takeaway:** Workshop participants shared they find limited access to resources and services such as lumber, hardware, childcare, and affordable housing, especially for seniors, challenging about living in Seward. Other themes that emerged from the challenges question included worrying about the school system, high cost of living, seasonal tourism, and seasonal economy.

## What do you want Seward to look like 10 years from now?

- ★ Well-funded, strong education system, e.g. academics, athletics, music (choir and band) and arts (37)
- ★ Stable, year-round town with more winter opportunities including trades, tourism, and education opportunities (31)
- ★ Affordable housing available all year round (24)
- ★ An authentic small town with year-round residents that's not as touristy (21)
- ★ Expand resident amenities, e.g., coastal trail along waterfront on north end of Bay with beach access, bridges, and raised boardwalk to protect wildlife; outdoor community gathering spaces; rebuild Wellington Pavilion, music park at Lowell Canyon with pavilion; improved walkability; bike path route from Bear Creek Fire Station to Grouse Lake; bike path to Bear Lake; bike path to Nash Road; tennis courts; outdoor pickleball courts; movie theater (15)
- ★ Community that is safe and nurturing for children, families, and elders (5)
- ★ Nightly rentals operating legally (3)
- ★ Better options for public utilities, e.g. renewable energy and decreased electricity rates (2)
- ★ Recycling options (1)
- ★ Collaboration across agencies (1)
- ★ More property for houses
- ★ Fewer RVs

- ### Ideas from Youth Under 12
- ★ Dinosaur sculpture (5)
  - ★ Dinosaur education (7)
  - ★ Afterschool programs like community choir for kids that offers school music and singing (6)
  - ★ More dogs (2)

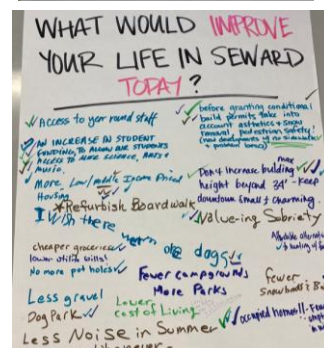
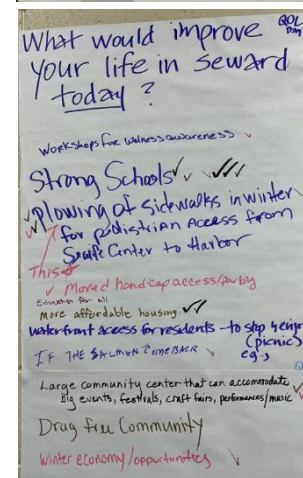
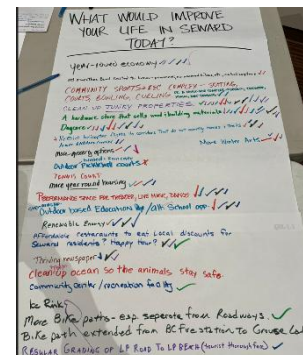
**Key Takeaway:** Workshop participants shared that they desire a **strong education system, a year-round economy, affordable housing, small-town feel, and more local amenities.**



## QUALITY OF LIFE

### What would improve your life in Seward today?

- ★ Community recreation center / multiplex and other amenities, e.g. skating, courts, bowling, curling, sports, theater, music, and art studios, outdoor pickleball courts, ice rink, performance space, waterfront greenspace access for residents, refurbish boardwalk, dog park, more bike paths that are separate from roadways (from Bear Creek Fire Station to Grouse Lake) (20)
- ★ Strong schools that offer quality education for all, e.g. funding for science, arts, and music, outdoor-based education and alternative school opportunities (18)
- ★ Clean up junky properties and surrounding ocean (15)
- ★ Road improvements, e.g. plowing sidewalks from Sealife Center to Harbor, less potholes, before granting conditional build permits take snow removal into account and sidewalk infrastructure, regular grading of Lowell Point Road to Lowell Point Beach (tourist thorough fare), more handicapped accessible parking (14)
- ★ Hardware store that sells wood and building materials (13)
- ★ Daycare (10)
- ★ Year-round, affordable housing with less empty houses in the winter, e.g. less snowbirds and BnBs (9)
- ★ Year-round economy and staff (8)
- ★ Cheaper and more grocery options (5)
- ★ Renewable energy (4)
- ★ Restrict helicopter flights to corridors that do not fly over homes and trails (4)
- ★ Don't increase max building height beyond 34' – keep downtown small and charming (4)
- ★ Affordable restaurants with local discounts for Seward residents or a happy hour option (3)
- ★ Thriving newspaper (3)
- ★ Lower cost of utilities (3)
- ★ Less noise (3)
- ★ Drug free community (3)
- ★ Mt. Marathon Bowl limited to human powered, e.g. no powered bikes or helicopters (2)
- ★ Workshops for wellness awareness (1)
- ★ Return of salmon (1)

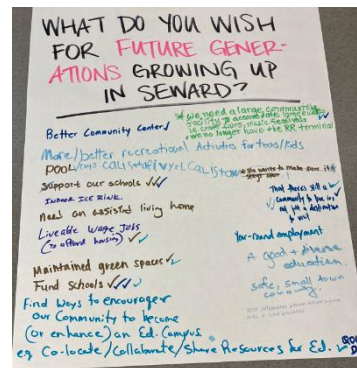
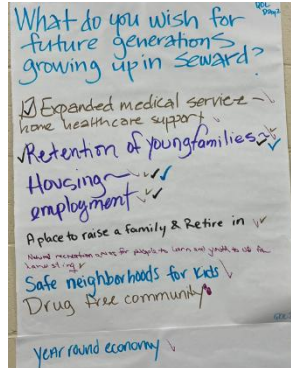
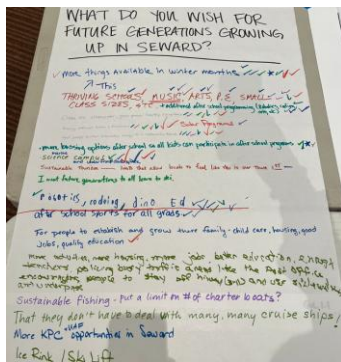


**Key Takeaway:** Workshop participants identified **local amenities** (such as a recreation center and outdoor attractions), a **strong school system**, a **clean and well-maintained City** (including roads), and **more local services and resources** (such as lumber and childcare) as elements that would improve quality of life in Seward.

## What do you wish for future generations growing up in Seward?

- ★ Strong education system, e.g. funding, music, arts, physical education, small class sizes, enough teachers, higher education campus, additional afterschool programming (robotics, coding, arts, etc.), more bussing options after school so all kids can participate in afterschool programs, more Kenai Peninsula College and UAF opportunities in Seward (36)
- ★ Energy efficient homes and businesses, e.g. solar programs, heat pumps and other alternative energy options (16)
- ★ More winter economy and activities (11)
- ★ Clean air, water, green spaces, and healthy ecosystems (9)
- ★ Large community center for more activities and events, e.g. ice rink, ski lift, festivals, craft fairs, performances, programming for youth, swimming pool (8)
- ★ More year-round jobs with livable wages (8)
- ★ Retention of young families with services like childcare (8)
- ★ Marine science campus (6)
- ★ More housing, e.g. assisted living home (6)
- ★ Safe, vibrant community for residents (6)
- ★ Expanded medical services, e.g. home support (2)
- ★ Sustainable tourism, e.g. limits that allow locals to feel like this is our town first, less cruise ships (2)
- ★ Food subsistence areas and programming (1)
- ★ Drug-free community (1)
- ★ I want future generations to all learn to ski
- ★ Policing busy traffic areas like the post office
- ★ Sustainable fishing, e.g. put a limit on the number of charter boats

**Key Takeaway:** Workshop participants shared that they wish for a strong school system, energy-efficient homes and business, and a year-round economy for future generations.



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

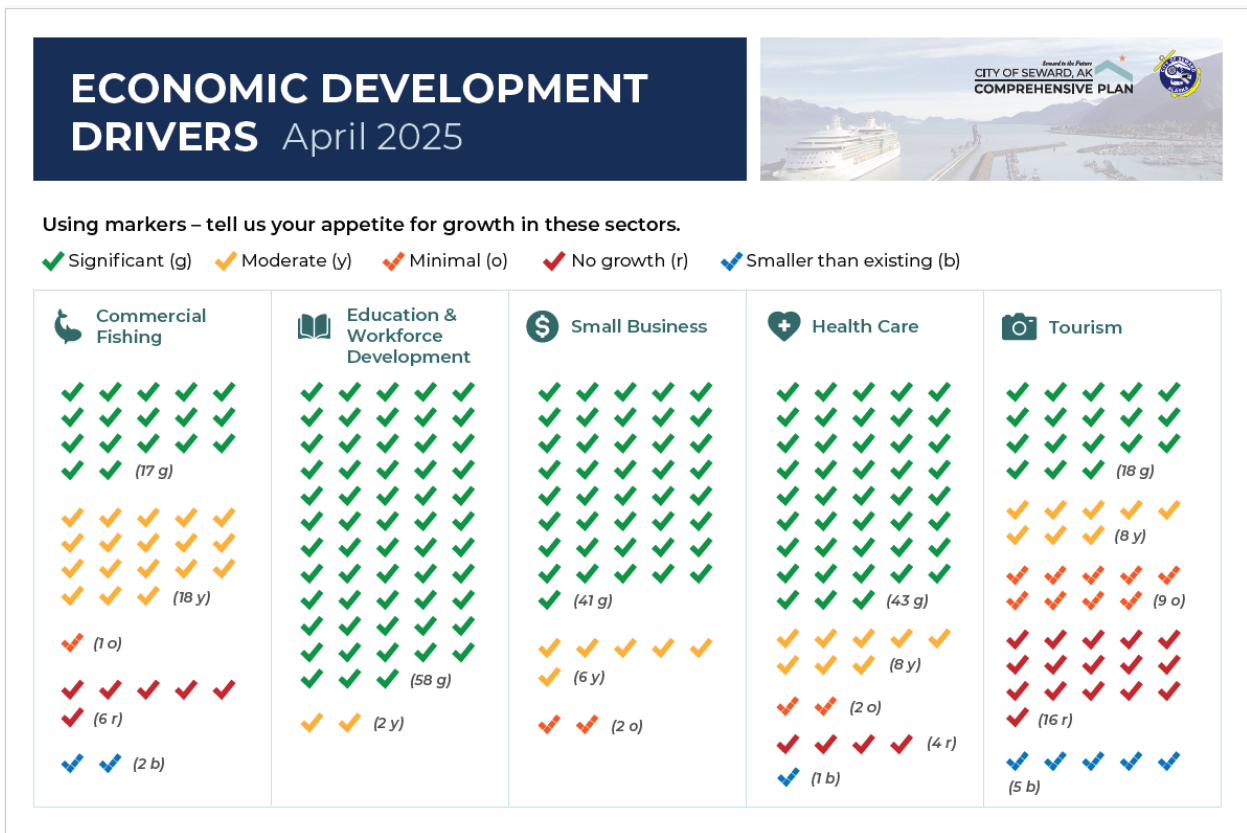
*Indicate your appetite for growth in these economic development drivers.*

**Note:** comments written on the posters were included in the “Tell Us More” analysis at the end of this section.

## Key Takeaways

Number in parentheses indicates the total count of check marks from the poster.

- ★ Workshop participants were aligned on wanting to see significant growth in the Education and Workforce Development sectors (58).
- ★ Most workshop participants would like to see some level of growth in the Commercial Fishing (36), Small Business (49), and Health Care (53) sectors, though the appetite ranges from minimal growth to significant growth.
- ★ Appetite for growth in the Tourism sector indicates a wide range of perspectives from workshop participants and warrants additional exploration.



## Share your perspective on what Seward offers in these economic development supporters.

**Note:** comments written on the posters were included in the “Tell Us More” analysis at the end of this section.

### Key Takeaways

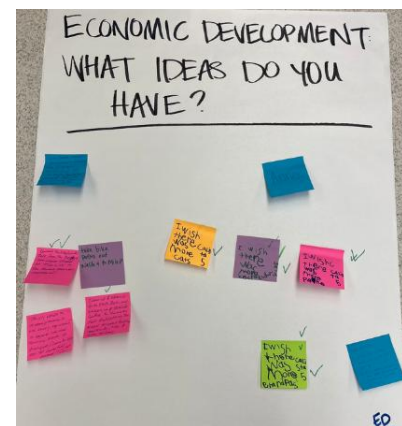
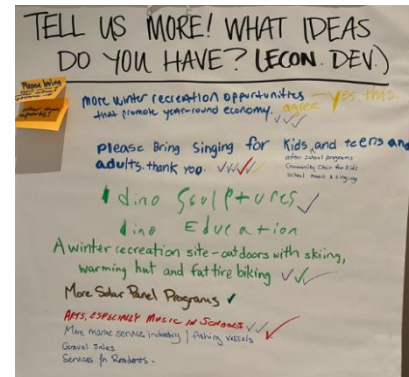
Number in parentheses indicates the total count of check marks from the poster.

- ★ Workshop participants were aligned in their rating of Housing (53 red, 1 green), Renewable Energy (46 red), and Childcare (42 red), indicating that their perspective is that there is too little offered in these areas.
- ★ Perspectives were balanced between “too little” and “about right” when it came to Transportation (20 red, 22 green) and Subsistence (13 red, 15 green) resources.
- ★ Recreation, Public Safety, and Food Security received indications of more wide-ranging perspectives and potentially warrant further exploration.



## Tell us more! What [economic development] ideas do you have?

- ★ More winter recreation opportunities that promote year-round economy, e.g. winter recreation sites with outdoor skiing, warming hut, and fat tire biking (9)
- ★ Affordable electric, e.g. more solar panel programs, renewable energy, nuclear reactor (8)
- ★ Arts, especially music in schools (3)
- ★ Affordable access to groceries (2)
- ★ More marine service industry / fishing vessels
- ★ Gravel sales
- ★ Services for residents
- ★ Bond program for first time homebuyers
- ★ Remove parking requirements to expand housing development
- ★ Support for start-up businesses



**Key Takeaway:** Workshop participants suggested **affordable electricity** and more **recreational winter activities** to help provide more local economic development opportunities.



## FUTURE LAND USE

**Share your ideas for future land use using the map, Post-It Notes, and sticky dots provided.**

- ★ Workshop participants shared their ideas about future land use activity in the City of Seward through an interactive mapping activity.
- ★ **Instructions:** Participants were given four dots per land use (see color coding key on the map) and instructed to place their dots on the map where they would like to see that land use. Post-It Notes were used for participants to share specific ideas (post it notes were not color coded). Participants were also invited to add a checkmark, star, or other mark to ideas on the map that they agree with.



### Common Themes by Land Use Type

Comments from participants were reviewed and analyzed for common themes. There were not enough comments (fewer than 5) about Commercial and Industrial land uses to analyze for themes. Participants provided comments and recommendations about Parks and Open Space most often, with 27 comments on the map, and Residential / Housing received 9 comments.

### Residential (Yellow)

- ★ Zoning and permitting changes to better integrate and expand housing options (4)
- ★ Improving the safety of neighborhoods (3)
- ★ Expanding the variety of housing options and types (e.g., senior housing, condos, entry-level housing) (3)

### Parks and Open Space (Green)

- ★ Infrastructure and site improvement recommendations for existing parks and open spaces, such as expanded / new parking, improved landscaping, new public access routes) (10)
- ★ Recommendations for new parks and recreation spaces, including pickle ball courts, a jump park, dog parks, and new campgrounds (10)
- ★ Recommendations to add, extend, or improve bike trails and routes (5)

**Key Takeaway:** Workshop participants shared ideas about zoning and permitting changes, improving the safety of neighborhoods, and expanding the diversity of housing options. They are also interested in improvements to existing outdoor areas and have ideas for new parks and open spaces.

