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# LAND USE

## GOAL

**Guide the orderly and efficient use of private and public land in a manner:**

- **That fosters economic opportunity,**
- **Maintains Sitka's small-town atmosphere and rural lifestyle,**
- **Recognizes the natural environment, and**
- **Enhances the quality of life for present and future generations.**

## 1 Land Management Context

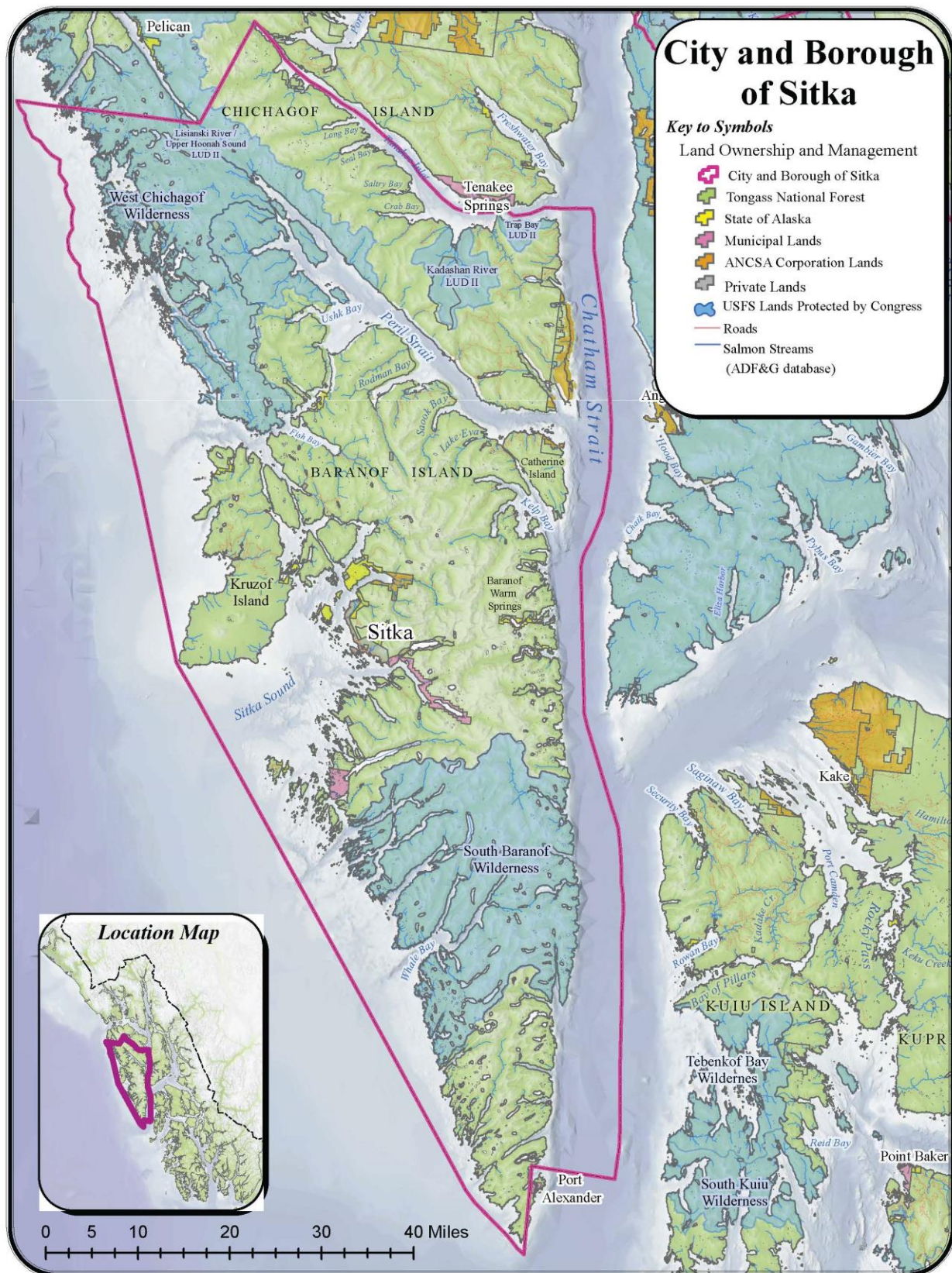
The unified Home Rule City and Borough of Sitka encompasses 4,812 square miles (sq mi) of land (2,874 sq mi) and water (1,938 sq mi). This makes it the 12<sup>th</sup> largest borough in Alaska, and larger than both Rhode Island and Delaware.

Like the rest of Southeast Alaska, most of the land within the City and Borough of Sitka is part of the Tongass National Forest, and managed by the United States Forest Service (USFS). Broad land ownership within the City and Borough of Sitka is depicted on Figure 1.

In December 2016, the Tongass Land Management Plan was revised, and the current Land Use Designations (LUD), which is the framework for how the US Forest Service intends to manage its land. In broad terms, the management intent for much of the Tongass forest land in the borough is to focus on recreation and tourism-oriented uses. There are several congressionally designated wilderness areas also within the borough. The local demand for timber is primarily from two small sawmill owners, and it is primarily met through timber sales in the Peril Strait and False Island areas within the borough. For additional information, refer to Tongass National Forest – Land and Resource Management Plan, December 2016 Amended Forest Plan

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/tongass/landmanagement/?cid=stelprd3801708>

One important part of Sitka's past is that the Alaska Pulp Company operated a \_\_\_-employee (at its heyday) pulp mill in Sitka at the site of the current Gary Paxton Industrial Park, from \_\_\_ to 1993, under a contract with the USFS.



In addition to the USFS, other large public land owners and managers within the City and Borough of Sitka are the: state of Alaska (general state land managed by DNR or ADFG), the University of Alaska (438 acres), the Alaska Mental Health Trust (592 acres), the National Park Service (156 acres), and the US Geodetic Survey (117 acres).

There are 14 non-public landowners within the City and Borough of Sitka that each own 20 acres or more (Figure 2).

Figure 2 - Largest Non-Public Land Owners within City and Borough of Sitka		
Landowner	Number of Parcels	Total Acres
Aryeh Levenson	3	15,377
Coastal Development Company (mining claims)	10	366
Baranof Island Housing Authority	77	191
Andrew Jack (Kadashan Bay)	1	160
Benjamin Rindge (mining claim)	1	85
Dixie McClintock	1	80
Haida Corporation	14	61
Charlie L. Bower III (mining claim)	1	40
Bert K Stedman (mining claim)	3	38
Avrum Gross (Chatham Cannery)	4	30
Alaska Arts Southeast Inc.	4	24
William Goertzen (Chatham Cannery)	2	22
Paul D. White	1	21
SEARHC	9	21
Source: 2016 City and Borough of Sitka Property Tax Roll		

## 2 Current Land Use

During the summer of 2016 Sitka Community Planning and Development staff mapped current land use in Sitka. This is NOT zoning, rather it is how the land is currently being used. This is a common initial step in Comprehensive Planning or land management planning as the differences between how land is zoned and how it is currently being used, as well as a review of what land is vacant or undeveloped, can give important clues about land use issues to be addressed over the next 10-15 years.

Current Land Use maps are on Figures 4 A, B and C on pages X-X.

Key observations during this mapping exercise were that:

- Most areas zoned R-1 actually have a mix of housing types and densities. There really are very, very few true low density single family residential living areas, despite the existence of lots of R-1 zoning districts.
- Many residential areas (most?) have lots smaller than what the code calls for as the minimum
- Because commercial and industrial zones allow less intensive uses, residential development is interspersed. This creates problems when commercial or industrial uses want to expand, their neighbors object to the potential noise, lights, etc.; however it is a commercial area (or quite close). Similarly, this negatively impacts the business environment for the commercial and industrial businesses, which are wary of disturbing neighbors. Business owners especially want to eliminate nearby residential uses.
- There are many older manufactured house parks that are full of run down pre-1976 mobile homes/ trailers. This is a life safety issue, it is unfair to mobile home owners, and given the prime location of many a potential redevelopment 'crisis.'
- It is unfortunate that the community's freight barge landing is one side of the road system and the office and yard and many delivery locations on another end of the road system.
- Another rock source needs developed.
- State parks and recreation is stepping away from their state park maintenance responsibilities including at Halibut Point and at Castle Rock. A solution must be found.
- Is there enough waterfront commercial/industrial land available for lease or sale?
- There are many vacant, underutilized, or rundown lots and buildings in downtown and the Marine Street-Katlian areas that could be well used for 2-4 plex, apartment and condo development. There could be significantly more housing in these areas.
- Other....



## 3 Issues, Opportunities, and Challenges

Planning commissioner and public comments, research, interviews, and professional knowledge combine to identify the following opportunities, challenges, and issues to address in the Sitka 2030 Comprehensive Plan.

### 3.1 Residential Development

Residential development is both concentrated in the greater downtown area of Sitka and former city, and also spread out in a less dense fashion along the road system both north along Halibut Point road to Starrigavan and east along Sawmill Creek Road to \_\_\_\_\_. Homes are also scattered on some of the many islands surrounding Sitka, and in remote Baranof Warm Springs and Goddard Hot Springs within the large City and Borough of Sitka.

Current population forecasts for Sitka expect a slow but steady population decline. This is based on historic patterns of births, deaths, and in and out migrants (see Chapter X on economic development). Sitka hopes to prove this population forecast wrong, based on success in attracting and retaining young adults and families, and maintaining a growing workforce and well-paying job opportunities. Given uncertainties about future population, this plan takes a conservative approach and reviews current gaps to meet the needs of the existing and likely future population.

The most pressing need is for increased affordable housing for sale and for rent. This is going to be best met through development and redevelopment at high densities (efficiently and 1-2 bedroom apartments, condos, multi-plexes), smaller homes, and all of these dwelling types utilizing techniques to allow them to be and remain affordable. Some of these tools are deed restrictions, targeted financing programs, community land trusts, etcetera.

To help implement this increase in affordable housing, there are several actions in the Housing Chapter. In this chapter, the focus is supportive land use and management using Future Growth Maps (which provide direction for future zoning, rezoning, land sales, permitting, and possible incentives) and accompanying narrative.

### 3.2 Commercial and Industrial Development

NEED TO ADD

### 3.3 Recreational Land Use and Activities

In resident surveys conducted when the Sitka Coastal Management Program was developed, beach and water oriented recreational activities (fishing, beachcombing, picnicking, hunting, camping, etc.) proved to be extremely popular pursuits. Proximity to scenic and pristine areas where these forms of recreation can be enjoyed was reported as one of the principal assets of living in Sitka, and 90 percent of respondents stated that they use the coastal area between Katlian Bay to the north and Goddard to the south, as well as the entire Sitka Sound area, for recreational purposes. Remote and developed recreation and land use is the focus of Chapter X of the Sitka 2030 Comprehensive Plan

## **3.4 Future Growth Maps and Focus Areas**

### **3.4.1 How to Use Future Growth Maps and Narrative**

Future Growth Maps can be viewed in Figures 3 A, B, and C (pages XX – XX).

The Future Growth Maps are to guide growth over the next 10-20 years. To prepare these maps and future growth direction issues and trends related to population, housing, utility and infrastructure, economic development opportunities, highest and best use of land, the physical and environmental character of the land base, residents' views, land owner's interests and planning principles to promote compatibility, and more were taken into account.

The Planning Commission and the Assembly will use the Future Growth Maps and accompanying narrative along with other parts of this Comprehensive Plan when they make decisions. Future development projects and permitting, zoning and other code changes, rezoning actions, Capital Improvements, and land sales should be compatible with and follow the direction set out on the Future Growth Maps and in this Comprehensive Plan.

The Future Growth Maps establish areas of emphasis and direction, not regulation. The Comprehensive Plan and Future Growth Maps do not prohibit or allow certain type of development - that is the role of zoning, subdivision, building, and other municipal codes. However, permits and proposals are routinely reviewed for compatibility with the direction, desired land use, and preferences established on the Future Growth maps and in this Plan. Zoning and capital investments are made in conjunction with this direction.

Thorough this comprehensive planning process the Sitka community's broad public interest is defined and expressed and the rationale established to direct certain types of land uses to (and away from) particular areas. The City and Borough of Sitka also expects that the direction for growth and land use set out here will be implemented by State and Federal regulators as they review proposals for leases, approvals and permits.

Future Growth Focus Areas are now presented with more intent language than can be shown on the maps.

### **3.4.2 Starrigavan and North (Map A)**

#### **– Recreation Area and Access Improvements**

Construction of a state 9-mile, one-lane gravel road with multiple turnouts from the north end of the road system at Starrigavan will begin in late 2017/early 2018. The purpose of the road extension is to increase recreational access and uses. This \$17 million state project will likely take two years to complete and will provide access to both Shee Atika Corporation and US Forest Service (USFS) and adjacent to Katlian Bay and then up the Katlian River.

Most of the former logging roads and bridges in this area have washed out. Future planning and work among the USFS, Shee Atika Corporation, the City and Borough of Sitka, and other interested

parties will be needed to address parking, solid waste management, mitigation spending and projects linked to road construction/wetlands impacts, and trail and recreation improvements. At the end of the current road is the USFS-State recreation complex with numerous trails, interpretative areas, parking, a boat launch, picnic areas, and more. On the waterside is Gájaa Héén, now part of the Old Sitka State Historical Park, the setting for a bloody confrontation between Tlingit and Russian American Company. Due to state budgets cuts the State DNR Parks and Recreation Office in Sitka closed in July 2015. This site is currently maintained by the National Park Service on a year-to-year contract while a private party maintains the boat launch.

### **3.4.3 No-Name Mountain (No Name Creek-Granite Creek Area) (Map A)**

- Uphill side of Halibut Point Road for a mix of uses; ocean side for water-oriented commercial and industrial use.

Uphill from subdivided parcels along Halibut Point Road, between No Name Creek and Granite Creek, is approximately \_\_\_ acres of municipally owned land. That municipal land is adjacent to US Forest Service land (Figure 1).

On the south side of Granite Creek there is a pioneering road that intersects with Harbor Mountain Bypass and the USFS Parking lot. This provides access to over 10 acres of municipal land on either side of this road that could be relatively easily subdivided for residential development. This area could also be used for agricultural purposes and to serve as a buffer between industrial uses in the redeveloped quarry and higher end residential uses south of Harbor Mountain bypass Road.

As the quarry's life is completed, this area should be redeveloped for industrial growth.

Granite Creek Road could be extended north to open up land for residential development. However, Harbor Mountain Bypass Road is already developed, so the 50 acres to the west (toward HPR) that it provides access to should be developed first. This area could be subdivided for a combination of large lot residential living, a smaller home clustered development concept, as well as provide opportunity for homesteading , a sweat equity or lottery style program.

On the waterside here just north of Halibut Point Marine's cruise ship dock and boat yard is a 17 acre wooded City and Borough of Sitka owned parcel. The majority or all of this parcel should be leased or sold for water-dependent commercial or industrial development front. (If a treed buffer was left the northern portion could support a few waterfront residential lots.) This parcel should be subdivided into a mixture of lot sizes to attract a diversity of water-dependent businesses. Another possibility is a land exchange to consolidate area barge and trucking services here, potentially freeing upland commercial/industrial space up off Sawmill Cove near Allen Marine for a marine services work area.

The 15-acre Halibut Point State Recreation site is here. As noted above, State DNR Parks and Recreation Office in Sitka closed in July 2015. State Parks continues to be interested in an finding an entity (Veterans, Boys Scouts/Girl Scouts, borough, a school, etc.) to take over management of this



area, which includes retaining generated fees, of this site with its small office building and waterfront residential apartment, parking lot, and four picnic shelters.

#### **3.4.4 Benchlands and Harbor Mountain Bypass Road Area (Map A)**

- Restrict high hazard areas to open space, medium hazard areas can have large lot single family homes, higher density development allowed in low hazard areas.

In 2007, the 193-acre Benchlands tract was purchased from the University of Alaska for \$3.5 million for housing development. It included over 2 miles of 1980's era pioneering roads developed by the city. Development was proceeding until tragedy struck in August 2015 after a downpour dropped 2.6 inches of rain in a short time period and multiple landslides occurred, taking three lives and leaving behind extensive damage. As a result the borough, with state and federal funding, has initiated a community-wide hazard mapping project focused on landslides. The maps will depict areas as low, medium, or high risk for slides. In addition, work is also proceeding to develop a "critical areas ordinance" which could set more strict regulations for developers and property owners in the higher risk slide zones. At issue, is identifying the community's level of acceptable risk and therefore what will be prohibited and allowed in low, medium, and high hazard areas. Both these efforts are ongoing as this plan goes to print and without the results of both efforts future growth planning for this and other areas is somewhat hampered.

The mountains behind the bench lands are higher and steeper, with more room to run and gain momentum than the mountains behind the Harbor Mountain bypass road. The bypass road area should be at significantly less risk than the benchlands area, though definite results are not available yet. Remote housing development efforts should focus more strongly on the land on the downhill side of the Harbor Mountain Bypass Road, rather than in the benchlands area.

At this time the working proposal for the benchlands area is to restrict high hazard areas to open space, medium hazard areas could be for lower density large lot single family homes, and higher density development would be allowed in low hazard areas.

#### **3.4.5 Kalian Street – Marine Street - Halibut Point Road Area (Map B)**

- Emphasis is increased residential density.

Respect and Celebrate Area History. Part of this area is the original Sitka Indian Village, and is home to 14 clan houses, the Alaska Native Brotherhood Hall built in 1918, used daily and a National Historic Landmark. It also includes the Russian Orthodox Cathedral, restored Russian Blockhouse, historic Russian and Indian graves, several newly redeveloped homes, the business office for the Baranof Island Housing Authority, and most of Sitka's seafood processors along the water's edge. In 1972, the Sitka Village Planning Council adopted a comprehensive Sitka Indian Village Redevelopment Plan with a detailed area history, inventory, and many excellent redevelopment ideas that are still relevant today. Specialty treatment of the sidewalks, lighting, and signage to denote and reflect the area's history and character is recommended.

A Mix of Residential Uses. Regardless of zoning, this area is a mixture of single family, duplex and multi-family and development; some units are new and some are in very poor condition. but all are in highly residential walkable areas.

Reduce Lots Sizes and Required Parking, Selectively Increase Heights. Current height limits in almost all of this area are 35 or 40 feet and minimum lot sizes are 8,000-sf. To facilitate housing development, reduce minimum lot sizes here to 4,000 sq. ft. and allow greater height in areas where there is no or controlled impact to other residential viewsheds (e.g. downhill and adjacent to cemetery parcels). Smaller lots size here reflects existing and historic patterns of development. Since this is a highly walkable area and very close to town relaxation of parking standards for residential use and shared parking agreements makes sense.

Mixed-Use Development along Katlian. Along Kallian Street, seek mixed use development with commercial or retail uses on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor and residential units on 1-2 floors above.

Extend the Seawalk Here. This heavily used pedestrian area also accommodates industrial and commercial vehicle traffic. To better accommodate pedestrian traffic, the seawalk should be extended from its planned end at Totem Square to Thomsen Harbor. It would run along the waterside of Kallian Street where feasible and when necessary would move to a widened sidewalk where water access cannot be arranged. A seawalk here will encourage pedestrian use and help move some of the heavy pedestrian use off the street and narrow sidewalks here.

Do not Widen Katlian, but Reconfiguring Needed. Widening the street would lose the historical character and the sense of place here, and is not recommended. However, reconfiguring the alignments and street to provide a wide sidewalk on one side, with a shoulder to accommodate bike use, and clearly striped pedestrian crossings where needed is recommended.

### **3.4.6 Eastside of Airport (Map B)**

- Transshipment-related commercial and industrial development; buffering for nearby residential.

The scarcity of developable land close to town as well as the adjacent developed infrastructure and water access has resulted in recent higher end residential development around Alice Loop. This is despite the proximity to the airport and related aircraft noise. For future growth, the Charcoal Island area is an excellent location for future shipment related commercial or industrial growth. Encourage the state to move forward with site preparation to make the area available for lease. Over time proximity to the airport could make this a good site for the Cold Storage to relocate, which would also free up highly valuable waterfront along Katlian. The undeveloped parcel between Charcoal Island and Alice Loop could be a buffer between these differing land uses. The old elementary school could be a good site for a restaurant or other light commercial use that complements either the harbor or residences.

### **3.4.7 Downtown District (Map B)**

- Maintain Sitka’s dense, walkable, charming, downtown. Encourage revitalization of one-story buildings to multi-story, and more residential development.

#### **Central Business District (CBD)**

Future Growth Map B outlines Sitka’s Central Business District (CBD); it is roughly coincident with Central Business District zoning. Sitka desires and has achieved a lively well used downtown with a dense myriad of shops, eating and drinking businesses, and apartments. Sitka’s CBD zoning has no height limits, no parking requirements, no required setbacks, and no minimum lot size. Public investment in parks and green space, waterfront walkways, sidewalks, and attractive civic facilities coupled with a stable population and good economy has encouraged investment and resulted in a dense, compact, walkable downtown. Sitka’s downtown is a success and its walkable interesting nature is enjoyed by residents and talked about by Alaskan visitors and tourists. These investments and attributes as well as the zoning code that helped create them should be recognized, valued and continued.

The CBD would benefit from more residential development. Many ask why there is only one multi-story apartment building in the area, and it has a long waitlist. If waitlists and public sentiment are an indication there is demand for more apartments and condo. An analysis of the obstacles to achieving this should be conducted to determine what remedies, investments, or incentives might help achieve this.

Most buildings in the CBD are 2 story or taller (though very few are over 3 stories). Further, there are approximately 13 buildings that are only one-story and thus underutilizing this highly valuable real estate. A goal over time is to encourage these buildings to redevelop with multiple stories that are retail on the bottom floor and a mix of residential apartments and offices above.

#### **Beyond the CBD**

More people living in and near downtown will help make downtown vital and lively on the weekends and evenings year round. More people means more business and more activity. To achieve this the city’s goals are to encourage revitalization of rundown structures, development (“infill”) of vacant lots, redevelopment at higher densities, including apartments, condominiums, and multi-plexes. The borough will consider an overlay zoning district within which certain incentives, bonuses, or code relaxations could occur, or it may enact zoning code changes to accomplish its goals.

### **3.4.8 Educational/Science/Arts District (Sheldon Jackson Vicinity) (Map B)**

- Uses that support Sitka’s education, arts, and sciences economy and activity.

Future growth in this area is expected to support and increase education, arts, and sciences activity within the Sheldon Jackson campus and nearby areas. Another goal is to work collaboratively with Alaska Arts Southeast Inc, Sitka Sound Science Center, Sheldon Jackson Museum, and other area landowners to maintain the historic character and beauty of the area and buildings. The city

supports construction or renovation in this district that includes dorms, apartments, condominiums, or homes for students, seniors, faculty, and visitors.

#### **3.4.9 Indian River (Map B)**

- Encourage residential development; complimentary area uses include agricultural and a multi-use/partner facility that includes a tsunami shelter.

The Baranof Island Housing Authority (BIHA) owns about 200 acres of land in Sitka. It is primarily in the Indian River area, where there are now approximately 100 parcels, most with single family homes. BIHA is the Tribally Designated Housing Entity for Sitka Tribe of Alaska, and was created in 1980 to address housing needs of Tribal citizens and other residents of Baranof Island, Alaska.

Undeveloped land on either side of Yaw Street and north of Herb Didricksen and Andrew Hope Streets is arguably the most developable land in Sitka today. Roads and utilities are immediately adjacent, the Cross Sitka Trail and sidewalks and bike paths to town are nearby; the land is relatively flat and has good sun exposure.

Residential development is highly encouraged. A tool (such as Planned Unit Development, cluster subdivision design, smaller lots sizes) to allow higher density development that preserves/clusters around open space will benefit both the environment and economics of utility extension and development. BIHA's mission focuses on providing affordable housing; collaboration with others could result in mutually leveraged financing to create a mixed-housing style subdivision. For example, there is potential USDA infrastructure assistance, market-rate homes could be for sale and the proceeds used to help subsidize affordable housing.

In the late 2000's the crowd and congestion when residents all tried to get to a single tsunami shelter at the high school pointed to the need for another tsunami shelter in Sitka. This would be a good location for a multi-use/multi-funder facility. Among the possible co-located uses are a tsunami shelter, child care facility, transitional housing, and recreation center.

This is also an area where agriculture and food production is logical as area wetlands could be a benefit and this could be a buffer between the rock quarry and residential use. There is flat land, good sun exposure, fresh water, it is close to roads and there could be a workforce partnership with BIHA and neighborhood residents.

#### **3.4.10 Jamestown Bay and Uplands Areas (Map C)**

- Mixture of land uses expected to continue.

Over time, relocate residential uses away from the waterfront between Jarvis and Chirikov Streets to facilitate increased water-dependent commercial and industrial activity here. Explore the idea of a land exchange to relocate freight transfer and trucking facilities from this area to municipal waterfront land near the barge landing, this could open up area here for a marine repair and service yard near to existing businesses of this type. There are opportunities for residential development on undeveloped privately owned lots on uplands here. The west side of this well-developed upland

area is commercial-industrial in nature, and the middle and east side is residential in nature. Conflicts between residential and more intensive land uses occur as a result; review zoning and buffer options to reduce conflicts over time. Residential use is the primary waterfront land use east of Chirikov Street and expected to remain as such.

### **3.4.11 Goddard Hot Springs**

- Maintain visual beauty, public recreation use, and existing facilities. Determine whether any deed changes are possible to allow some municipal land to be sold for recreational use.

The city and borough of Sitka owns over 800 acres of land here. According to the 2002 State of Alaska Northern Southeast Area Plan, Goddard Hot Springs is located approximately 15 miles south of Sitka, to the east of Biorka Island and Hot Springs Bay. The most sheltered anchorage for users of Goddard Hot Springs is in Kliuchevoi Bay. With the exception of two private parcels in Kliuchevoi Bay, ownership of a majority of the area is owned by the City and Borough of Sitka, with a restriction on the deed that the land is to be used for public recreation. During the early part of this century, a hotel and 40-room sanitarium were heated by Goddard thermal-spring waters.

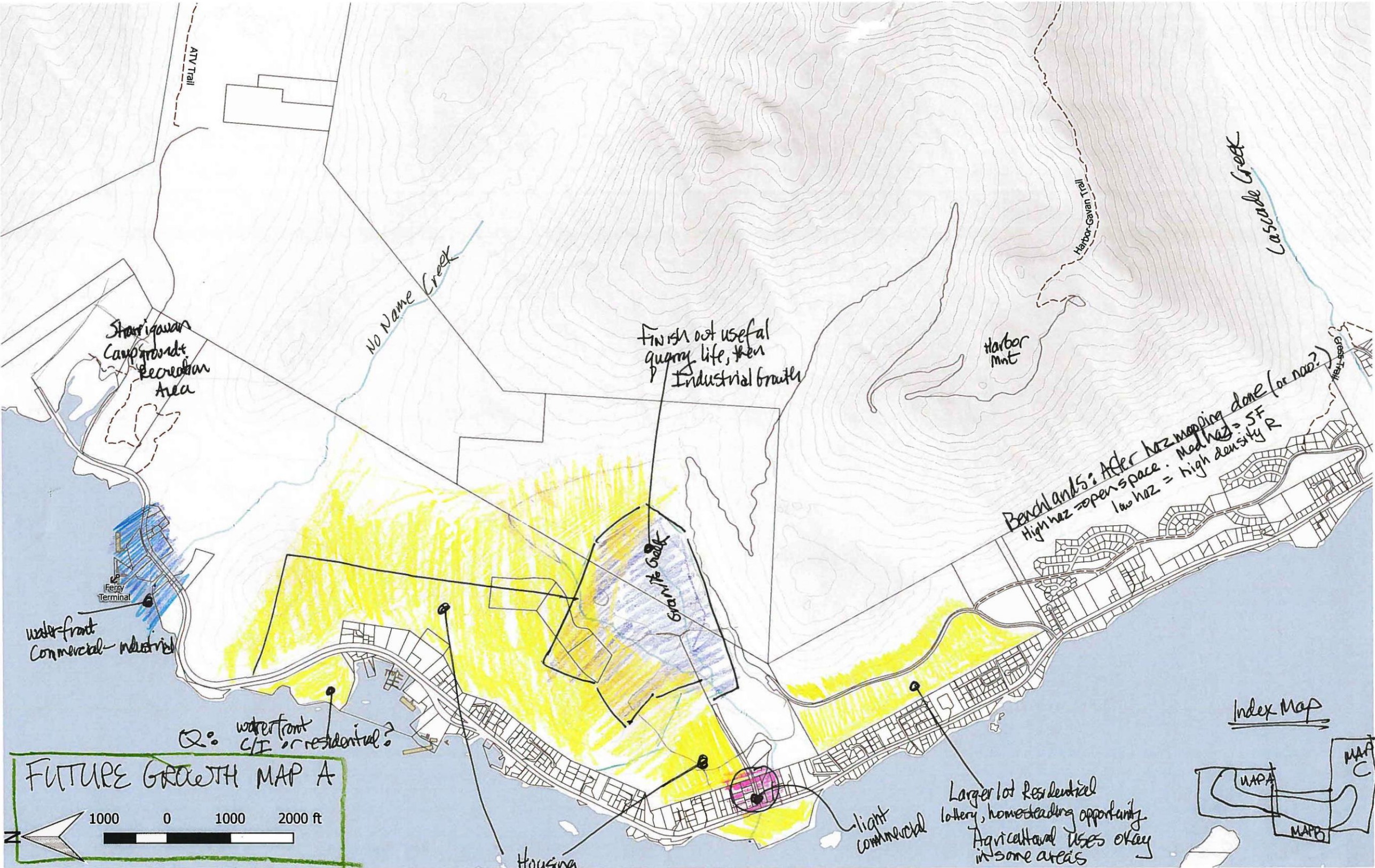
The State of Alaska owns 1,070 acres in the vicinity of Big Bay. The municipality has built two bathhouses for public use, and these receive intensive use in the summer months. There are also other minor thermal springs located ½ mile east of the bathhouse area. There is a fairweather anchorage directly in front of the tubs in Hot Spring Bay, and places to camp along the shore. There is also much evidence of prior settlement in the area.

Thought of as the "playground of Sitka", the Goddard Hot Springs area is one of the most popular recreation areas in central Southeast Alaska. In addition to the hot springs, scenic beauty is the main visitor attraction, but fishing, hiking, camping, and hunting are close behind. The area is reached during good weather by small "day" boats and floatplanes, as well as hundreds of fishing boats which anchor up in the area. There is good bottom fishing in the area, as well as coho, chum, and pink salmon as primary salmon species. In some years in April, herring spawn can be observed along the salt water beaches. The uplands are habitat for various bird species along with deer and an occasional brown bear. Most of the topography of the area is level to moderately undulating. Tree cover is primarily hemlock with 25 percent old growth spruce, as well as low lying bushes and muskegs.

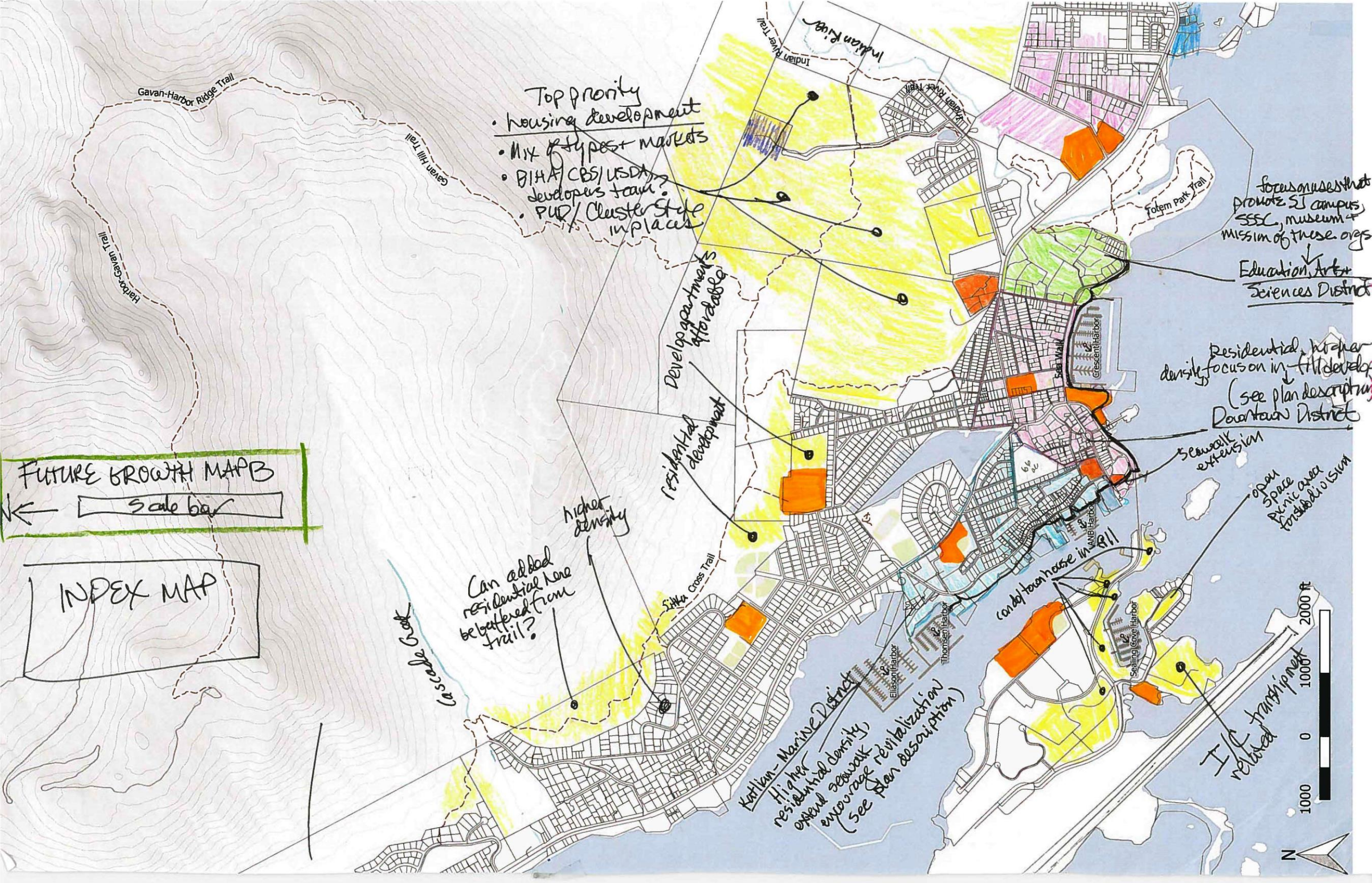
### **3.4.12 Land Acquisitions/Exchanges**

Acquire state lands to facilitate further development opportunities adjacent to the road system. Areas of interest are at Millersville on Japonski Island, north of Indian River quarry, two parcels at Starrigavan/Katlai Bay, and at end of Seward Avenue, and off Sawmill Cove east of the Thimbleberry Lake access trail.



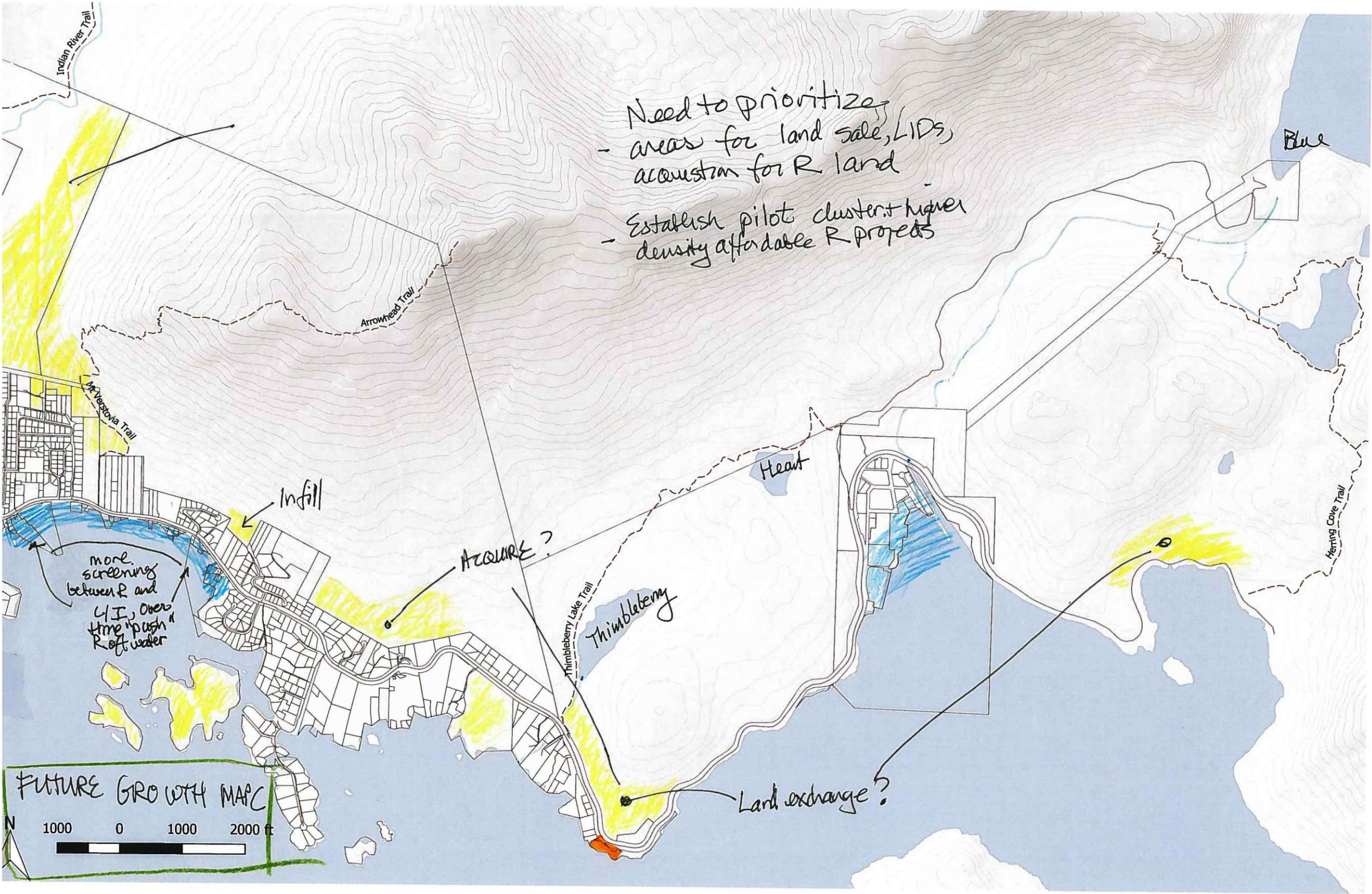








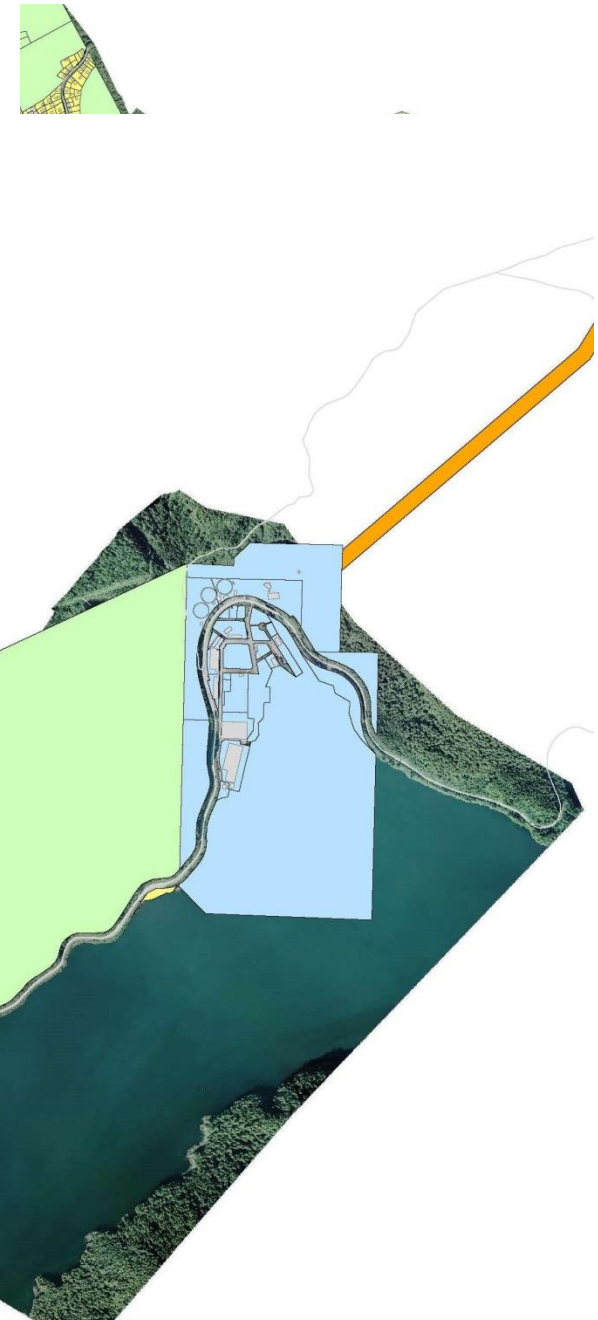
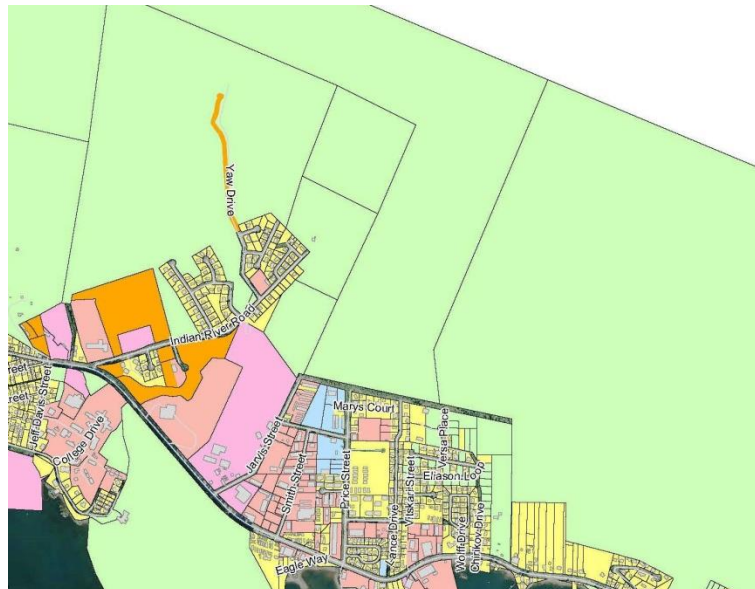
Future Growth Map C





**Figure 4 A - Current Land Use (NOT zoning or Future Growth)**





**Figure 4B – Current Land Use (NOT zoning or Future Growth)**



