

CITY OF SOLDOTNA ANNEXATION STUDY

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES INTERIM REPORT, OCTOBER 2017

The City of Soldotna is continuing to study whether or not annexing one or more areas outside current City boundaries is a viable option for the greater community. The primary question we are attempting to answer is: Can Soldotna boundaries change and still respect what matters most to each of us – City government and residents, property owners and business owners within the City and in areas being studied for annexation? This is part of a broader goal to engage citizens (inside and out of City limits) to identify issues, concerns and other general feedback on annexation based on requests over the past two years for people to have an opportunity to make their voices heard.

Success in this process is defined as:

- Reached 30% of population (Unlikely to reach target)
- Community input aids in sound council decision-making, meaning that input is based on facts about potential impacts from annexation (Informed input gathered)
- Council decisions are responsive to community input (To be determined)

PROCESS

The City of Soldotna and its contractor The Athena Group, a consulting consortium headquartered in Washington State, have offered a variety of formal opportunities (see top section of sidebar) for community members to get their questions answered about Soldotna's annexation study and to share their hopes, concerns and ideas on the topic. Additionally, Meagan Picard, the lead consultant on this community study, conducted key informant interviews and 30-second intercept interviews and participated in phone calls and email discussions with community members.

To generate as much participation as possible, the City and The Athena Group advertised these opportunities widely. As shown in the bottom section of the sidebar, these efforts included traditional and social media outreach, community network outreach and direct outreach via mail, phone and in-person visits. Participation incentives were offered, and technology support was offered through the library and the Soldotna Chamber of Commerce.

FORMAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

SOLDOTNA.CONSIDER.IT

An online community feedback and discussion forum. Sept. 1-Oct. 30.

OPEN HOUSES

Q&A with City staff. 11:00 am-2:00 pm, Sept. 28 & Oct. 2-3.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Facilitated discussions on community members' major hopes and concerns. 5:30-7:30 pm, Sept. 27-28 & Oct. 2-3.

CHAMBER PRESENTATION

Study overview and discussion. Noon-1:00 pm, Sept. 27.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Targeted outreach to businesses and community members. July-Sept.

OUTREACH EFFORTS

TRADITIONAL MEDIA

Articles/OpEds in *Peninsula Clarion*, Stories on KSRM radio

SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook announcement with paid ad boost

COMMUNITY NETWORKS

Flyers distributed through local organizations' networks: Soldotna Chamber of Commerce, Senior Citizen Center, Central Peninsula Hospital, Kenai Peninsula College, Kenai Vet Center, Change for the Kenai, and Borough Residents Against Annexation

DIRECT OUTREACH

Mail to property owners in the city and study areas and targeted in-person and telephone outreach to businesses and others identified as key informants.

PARTICIPANTS

As of October 6, 2017, 97 individuals have participated in one or more of the opportunities. The largest group of unique participants includes people who live, own property or own/manage a business in the study areas (see Figure 1 below). These are the people who would be most impacted by an expansion of city boundaries. Some people only participated in one type of engagement activity, while others participated in multiple types on multiple occasions. Most of the participation occurred in the online forum, followed closely by the community conversations (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 1: Soldotna Annexation Study
Unique Participants, 10/6/17

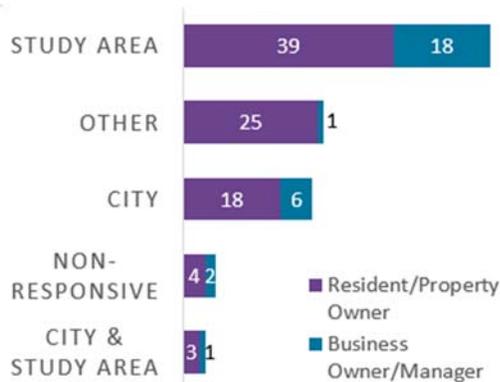
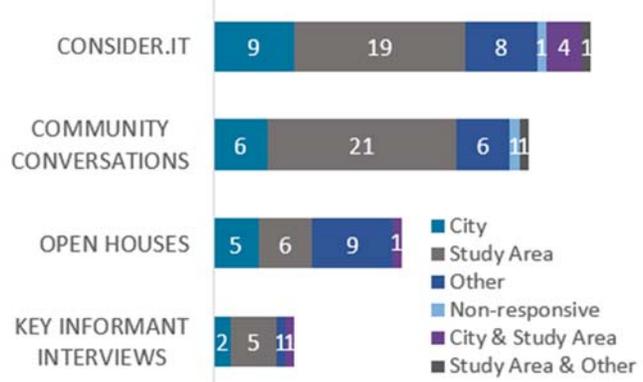


Figure 2: Soldotna Annexation Study
Participants by Engagement Type, 10/6/17



Because outreach efforts were extensive (identified on previous page), it is possible that this low number of participants is due to some combination of a) fatigue with or resistance to discussing the issue among those who are and have been opposed to annexation, b) sense among city residents and businesses that annexation won't impact them in any significant way, and/or c) reluctance to get involved in controversy among those who do not hold strong opinions on the topic. The consultant team heard each of these attitudes toward participation expressed while planning for and during the formal engagement activities.

INTERPRETATION LIMITS AND USE OF INTERIM REPORT

As with any qualitative research, participant input cannot be generalized to the full population of interest in this study – those living, owning property or running a business inside the City of Soldotna and in the annexation study areas. The low number of participants – well below the target of 30% of the population – also limits the generalizability of the input. However, discussions with community members have been infused with information on known differences in living and doing business in the City versus in surrounding unincorporated areas, and the consultant team deems the input to be reliably informed by facts as a result. These results can be viewed as reliable input from community members who are passionate about the issue.

This report is intended as a preview of study results for community members and City decision-makers. It will be posted on the City website and on Soldotna.Consider.It, and it will be shared with local media. Additional input can be given on the Consider.It site; people who have already participated as well as new participants are all invited to further clarify, agree/disagree and/or add to the major themes presented on the next page. Additional input will be included in the final report; it will not override input already received, as all perspectives are deemed important and treated accordingly.

