



February 4, 2025

RE: SB 50 – Municipal Comprehensive Plans: Housing

Dear Alaska State Senate Labor and Commerce Committee,

Unfortunately, I was unable to provide live testimony regarding SB 50, but I am providing written comments to assist the Committee.

As the Director of Research and Technical Assistance at the University of Alaska Center for Economic Development one of my roles is to help communities across the state with their strategic economic development planning. These plans are comprehensive documents that look at the economy from all angles, and to do this they have to consider not just business and industry but also infrastructure, workforce, energy, housing, and more.

Planning for encouraging more plentiful, affordable housing is a component of almost every economic plan CED has worked on in recent years, including the Statewide Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) which has an explicit goal of “increasing the supply of affordable housing for urban and rural communities throughout Alaska.” To prepare for testifying for SB 50 I reviewed many of the currently active CEDS across Alaska and nearly all contained explicitly stated goals around housing.

Housing is being integrated in almost every area of planning. Many regions, in fact, already have requirements to conduct comprehensive housing assessments or housing planning. What makes all these layers of planning more effective is not duplicating efforts, instead having each layer of planning reference each other. This sets communities up to leverage funding opportunities more effectively. One example of this is the 2021 Valdez Comprehensive Plan Revision which has been leveraged to overhaul housing development in the community.

The addition of housing planning to the description of first- and second-class boroughs’ comprehensive plans proposed in SB 50, does not create a new requirement for these planning efforts. It simply encourages the explicit recognition of housing planning as its own area of focus, highlighting efforts that many communities are already engaging in independently.

I am happy to provide any further information to the Committee. Please do not hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

Richelle Johnson

Research and Technical Assistance Director