



*Logo Idea*

## Introduction: An Idea for Big Lake's Future

Big Lake community members and friends of Big Lake; we would like to share an exciting idea for Big Lake's future—an idea that allows us to shape our community's destiny in a way that reflects our values, supports our families, and ensures a sustainable future.

This idea centers around creating a **Big Lake Community Development Cooperative (BLCDC)**—a community-owned cooperative that will bring us together to initially acquire 42 acres of land in the heart of Big Lake's future town square. With this land, we can create a vibrant hub that includes mixed-use commercial and residential spaces and more. Instead of hap-hazard business growth that doesn't draw community engagement, we will develop Big Lake in a way that benefits us all and leaves a legacy for our children and future Big Lake residents. This idea was inspired by the Big Lake Comprehensive Plan from 2008.

- **What it's not** – Incorporating as a city
- **What it is** – Building off of past efforts from the Big Lake Comprehensive Plan, starting with a key parcel of land next to Jordan Lake Park
- **Why** – Create an attractive Big Lake 'Town Square' that brings the community together and draws in visitors
- **How** – Community Development Cooperative model with Special Use District guidelines
  - For example, a Themed Retail Strip with Community Ownership business model
- **When** – First Steps. Forming the Co-op, soliciting members and investors, acquiring property
- **Who** – You! Local community members

## **WHAT IT'S NOT:**

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### **Addressing Concerns**

We know many of you have concerns about changes in Big Lake, and we want to address them head-on:

- **We are NOT advocating for incorporation.** This is not a push to make Big Lake a city. We are simply working to develop a thriving town square area, using a cooperative model to empower the community.
- **We are NOT advocating for higher taxes.** This project will be funded by cooperative membership, local investments, and loans—not by raising taxes.
- **We are NOT advocating for more bureaucracy.** The cooperative will be a streamlined, community-led initiative, and the SPUD designation will allow for flexible development without unnecessary red tape.

## **WHAT IT IS:**

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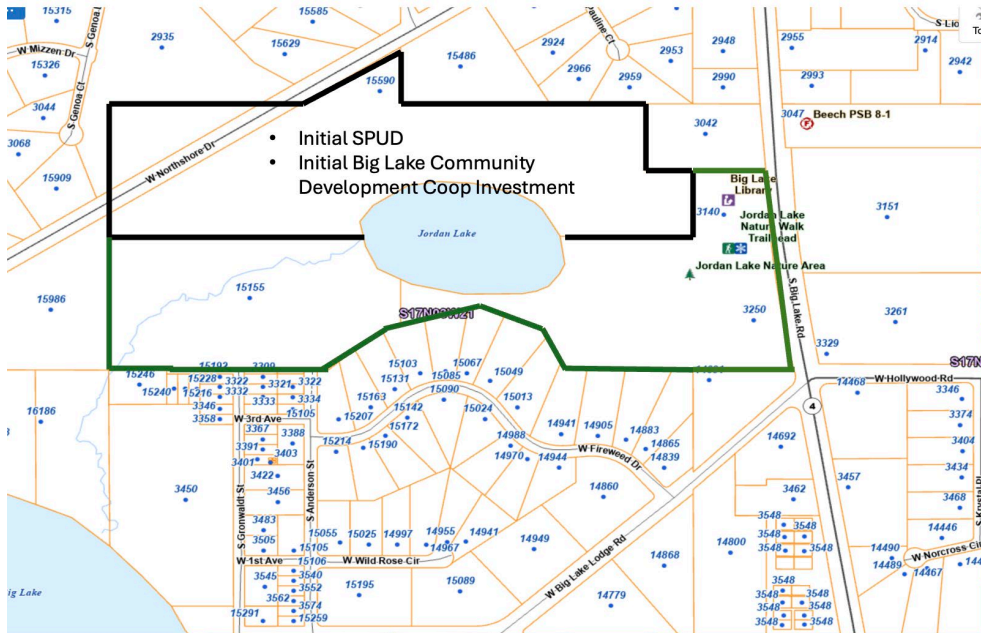
### **A Community Development Cooperative with a Themed Retail Strip with Community Ownership Business Model**

Building off of past efforts from the Big Lake Comprehensive Plan, starting with a key parcel of land next to Jordan Lake Park.

- **Why a Community Development Cooperative?**
  - They are becoming a trend in rehabilitating small, struggling towns.
  - Similar structure as consumer, food, and produce co-ops.
  - Example: Minnesota
    - 200 community members, \$1000 buy-in, \$200,000 raised to purchase a failing retail building to reinvigorate the struggling town.
  - Member/owners vote for the board members and have a voice in decision making.
  - The BLCDC would act as a holding company for the businesses/housing to be developed.
  - Dividend structure to be paid to members from overall business profits and lease fees.
  - The dividend will be determined after all expenses are paid and a % is reinvested back into the overall community plan for voted on growth.
  - Members have a stake in how large their dividends are each year, (i.e., they have a stake in the success of each business), reciprocally, the businesses provide a great business in the community to ensure the members continue to support it
- **What is the BLCDC?**
  - A cooperative formed by local residents and stakeholders working toward a more planned community development that the members have a voice in and own the property and businesses.
  - Will work collaboratively with our assemblyman and the Mat-Su Borough to set up zoning and guidelines for development for a Special Use District (SPUD).
- **What is a Themed Retail Strip with Community Ownership Business Model?**
  - An owner (the BLCDC) oversees several boutiques or service providers, maintaining a unified aesthetic and customer experience.
- **What is a SPUD?**
  - A SPUD (Special Use District) is obtained through the Mat-Su Borough and allows flexible zoning to encourage mixed-use developments; combining residential and commercial guidelines on what residents want and don't want. It could be viewed as something similar to an HOA. It would only apply to businesses and parcels that chose to fall under the SPUD.
    - Example: Talkeetna, Alaska, is an example of how SPUD zoning has helped preserve character while enabling controlled growth.

- Benefits:
  - Promotes economic growth and job creation.
  - Encourages responsible, community-driven development.
  - Keeps the spirit of the town intact while modernizing.
  - Gives members a stake and say in how the area is developed and what it will look like.

## The Location:



## WHY?

Create an attractive Big Lake 'town square' that brings the community together and draws in visitors.

### 1. What we learned from the Big Lake Comprehensive Plan from 2008

The community responded to questionnaires and the three main requests for any future development were the following:

- ☐ **Create a place for the community to come together:**
  - Shops
  - Restaurants
  - Meeting/gathering/event areas
- ☐ **Keep as much natural space as possible:**
  - Provide nature trails and wildlife spaces.
  - Expand the park and gather spaces
- ☐ **Enhance the economic opportunities for the community, especially the youth.**
  - Encourage desirable small businesses for locals and visitors.

### 2. Background: Past Attempts in Big Lake

- **2008 Big Lake Comprehensive Plan:**
  - This was a community-lead plan and sought input from the Big Lake community.
  - The plan was adopted and is still available from the Borough website ([https://matsugov.us/plans?plan\\_type=Comprehensive+Plan](https://matsugov.us/plans?plan_type=Comprehensive+Plan)).

- However, this plan lacked funding and initiative.
- **Failed City Incorporation Attempt:**
  - Residents of Big Lake resoundingly rejected a push to incorporate Big Lake into a city.
    - Concerns included: Increased taxes, increased bureaucracy, increased rules
  - This failed attempt shows a need for new, collaborative approaches.

### 3. The Benefits of the BLCDC for Big Lake

By forming the BLCDC, we will bring significant benefits to our community:

- **Economic Growth:**
  - Job creation in construction, retail, hospitality, and other services.
  - Increased business revenue from new businesses and Big Lake visitors and residents, which will be reinvested into the community.
  - Attraction of new businesses to Big Lake, fostering local entrepreneurship and providing services that we currently lack.
- **Civic and Family Benefits:**
  - Stronger Community: By working together, we will foster stronger bonds among neighbors and businesses, creating a sense of pride in our shared efforts.
  - Affordable Housing: As we develop the land, we will ensure there are housing options that remain affordable for Big Lake families, preventing us from being priced out of our own community.
  - Public Spaces: Parks, walking trails, and community spaces will enhance our quality of life, making Big Lake an even more wonderful place to live.
- **Legacy for Future Generations:**
  - This project is not just about today—it's about building something that will last for generations. The town square we create will be a lasting legacy for our children and grandchildren.
- **Access to External Funding:**
  - We will be well-positioned to secure support from the following organizations all of which are interested in supporting rural Alaskan communities that demonstrate collective action. These organizations are eager to partner with us to fund projects that align with our goals.
    1. **Matanuska Health Foundation**
      1. Supports initiatives that improve the wellbeing of our region. By demonstrating a collective, community-driven effort like the BLCDC, we can position ourselves for additional funding to support health-related infrastructure, community wellness, and more.
    2. **Rasmussen Foundation**
      1. Focuses on improving the lives of Alaskans by supporting community development projects. They are especially interested in funding initiatives that demonstrate collaboration and long-term sustainability. By uniting as a community, we have the chance to access funding that will make Big Lake's development even more impactful.
    3. **Matsu Parks and Trails Foundation**
      1. This foundation seeks to support communities that prioritize outdoor spaces and recreational infrastructure. With the BLCDC's focus on creating park space, walking trails, and public spaces in our future downtown, we can align our vision with their funding priorities to further enhance Big Lake's outdoor amenities.

### 4. Examples of Community-Driven Development

We are not alone in this effort. Across Alaska and the Lower 48, communities have come together to develop their own futures through cooperatives. Success stories from other communities:

- **Alaska:**
  - **Talkeetna, Alaska:** With the SPUD designation, Talkeetna has preserved its small-town charm while fostering growth. It's a model of how flexible zoning can help a community thrive.
  - **Other Matsu Borough SPUDs** – Sutton, Chickaloon, Glacier View, Port McKenzie...
  - **Alaska Peony Co-ops**
    - Locations: Mat-Su Valley, Homer, Soldotna
      - Examples:
        - Alaska Peony Co-op (Mat-Su)
        - Alaska Beauty Peony Co-op (Homer)
        - Alaska Peony Market Cooperative (Soldotna)
    - Focus: Support for small-scale peony farmers through shared marketing, infrastructure, and collective branding.
    - Benefits: Provides access to markets and storage solutions for peony producers.
  - **Alaska Oyster Co-ops**
    - Locations: Homer, Naukati Bay
      - Examples:
        - Kachemak Bay Oyster Co-op (Homer)
        - Alaska Oyster Cooperative (Naukati Bay)
    - Mission: Enhance the oyster farming industry by providing shared infrastructure, processing facilities, and collective marketing.
    - Achievements: Kachemak Bay Oyster Co-op is Alaska's oldest oyster cooperative, offering services like an oyster nursery and wet storage. Alaska Oyster Cooperative is expanding its capacity to ship oysters multiple days a week.
  - **Food Co-ops**
    - Locations: Fairbanks, Sitka, Kodiak
      - Examples:
        - Co-op Market Grocery & Deli (Fairbanks)
        - Sitka Food Co-op
        - Kodiak Harvest Food Co-op
    - Purpose: Provide access to fresh, affordable, and locally sourced food through member-owned grocery stores.
    - Impact: Improved food security and supported local agriculture by connecting consumers with producers.
  - **Electric Co-ops**
    - Coverage: Approximately 90% of Alaskan residents
      - Examples:
        - Golden Valley Electric Association (Fairbanks)
        - Chugach Electric Association (Anchorage)
    - Role: Provide reliable and affordable electricity to rural and urban communities, often reinvesting profits into local infrastructure and services.
- **Lower 48:**
  - **Ashland, Oregon:** A community-driven cooperative focused on creating public spaces, arts districts, and mixed-use zoning that rejuvenated downtown.
  - **Portland, Maine:** The development of a Special Use District for mixed-use properties led to more local business opportunities and an increased quality of life.

- **3CDC – Cincinnati, Ohio**
  - Overview: The Cincinnati Center City Development Corporation (3CDC) is a nonprofit real estate development organization that has played a pivotal role in revitalizing Cincinnati's downtown, particularly the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood.
  - Key Projects:
    - Restoration of historic buildings into mixed-use developments, combining residential, commercial, and cultural spaces.
    - Management of public spaces like Fountain Square and Washington Park, hosting events to attract visitors and residents.
  - Impact: 3CDC's efforts have transformed a once-declining area into a vibrant urban center, attracting new businesses and residents.
- **Weavers Way Co-op – Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**
  - Overview: Founded in 1973, Weavers Way Co-op started as a neighborhood buying club and has since grown into a significant community-owned grocery cooperative.
  - Community Engagement:
    - Operates multiple retail locations, including a pet supply store and a health and wellness store.
    - Engages in local events and supports community initiatives through its farm operations and partnerships.
  - Impact: Contributed to the economic development of the West Mt. Airy neighborhood by providing local jobs and supporting sustainable agriculture.
- **College Hill Alliance – Macon, Georgia**
  - Overview: The College Hill Alliance is a nonprofit organization formed to revitalize the College Hill Corridor in Macon, Georgia.
  - Initiatives:
    - Development of a master plan with extensive community input.
    - Implementation of projects aimed at enhancing infrastructure, supporting local businesses, and preserving historic sites.
  - Support: Received significant funding from the Knight Foundation to support its revitalization efforts.
- **Northeast Investment Cooperative (NEIC) – Minneapolis, Minnesota**
  - Overview: NEIC is a community investment cooperative focused on purchasing and developing real estate in the Northeast Minneapolis area.
  - Model:
    - Allows local residents to invest in the cooperative, pooling resources to acquire and develop properties.
    - Focuses on projects that align with community values and needs.
  - Impact: Empowered residents to take control of local development, ensuring that projects reflect the community's interests.

## **HOW:**

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The process to realize this vision starts with a community-driven cooperative or Community Development Cooperative with Special Use District guidelines and Themed Retail Strip with Community Ownership Business Model.

### **1. The Process: How We'll Make This Happen**

#### **a. Form a Steering Committee**

- i. Assemble a group of dedicated residents, business owners, and stakeholders who are passionate about the development.
- ii. The committee will help guide the formation of the co-op, oversee key decisions, and provide leadership throughout the process.

#### **b. Form the Cooperative**

- i. Form a cooperative entity and structure, the Big Lake Community Development Cooperative (BLCDC), with the help of the Alaska Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and the Alaska Cooperative Development Center (ACDC), where interested Big Lake residents can become a member and investor. This will give us collective ownership and control over the proposed development area.
- ii. Create a Mission and Vision Statement
  1. Define the purpose of the BLCDC: To collaboratively develop the 42-acre parcel and create a vibrant downtown area with mixed-use commercial and residential properties.
  2. Develop a clear vision for the future of Big Lake's downtown, emphasizing sustainability, community benefits, and long-term economic growth.
- iii. Write Bylaws and Register the Co-op
  1. Draft the cooperative's bylaws outlining governance structure, membership rights, and decision-making processes.
  2. Set membership fees and determine how new members can join the co-op.
  3. Develop a return on investment payment structure.
  4. Register BLCDC as a cooperative with the state of Alaska.

#### **c. Have members approve the BLCDC structure**

#### **d. Develop a Membership Drive**

- i. Hold informational meetings to educate the community about the cooperative model and its benefits.
- ii. Launch a membership campaign to recruit local residents and businesses to become members of the co-op.

#### **e. Seek and Acquire Approval for the SPUD Designation**

With the support of the community, we will seek approval for a Special Use District (SPUD) designation from the Mat-Su Borough. This zoning will allow for mixed-use development and preserve the character of Big Lake while enabling growth.

- i. Engage with local government and the Borough Assembly
  1. Meet with the local Assemblyman and other key officials to explain the vision for the project and gain initial support.
  2. Discuss how the SPUD designation will benefit the community and align with Big Lake's long-term development goals.
- ii. Prepare the SPUD Proposal
  1. Collaborate with urban planners, architects, and legal advisors to develop a detailed proposal for the SPUD designation.
  2. The proposal should include:
    - a. Land use plans (including zoning changes for mixed-use development).

- b. Infrastructure plans (roads, utilities, public spaces).
  - c. Environmental assessments and any necessary permits.
  - d. Economic impact statements if necessary.
- iii. Hold Public Meetings and Gather Community Feedback
  - 1. Organize public meetings to present the SPUD proposal to the community, allowing for feedback and input.
  - 2. Address any concerns and incorporate suggestions to ensure the project meets the needs of the community.
- iv. Submit the SPUD Application
  - 1. Submit the formal application to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly for approval.
  - 2. Ensure all necessary documents, such as the feasibility study, land use plan, and community feedback, are included in the application.
- v. Advocate for Approval
  - 1. Lobby local government officials and the Assembly to gain support for the SPUD designation.
  - 2. Present the community benefits of the SPUD, including economic growth, job creation, and improved public amenities.
  - 3. Stay engaged with the process and be prepared to address any concerns that arise during the approval process.

**How to form a Special Use District (SPUD) within the Matsu Borough.**

*To establish a Special Use District (SPUD) in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB), a community council or its equivalent local representative body must initiate the process by submitting a written request, typically in the form of a resolution, to the MSB Clerk's Office, with a copy provided to the Planning Department. [matsugov.us+1matsugov.us+1](https://matsugov.us+1matsugov.us+1)*

**Process Overview**

*The creation of a SPUD involves several key steps:*

- 1. **Initiation:** A community council submits a resolution to the MSB Clerk's Office, requesting the development of a SPUD. [matsugov.us+3matsugov.us+3sknikriverspud.matsugov.us+3](https://matsugov.us+3matsugov.us+3sknikriverspud.matsugov.us+3)
- 2. **Planning Team Formation:** Upon approval, a planning team is established, comprising community representatives, MSB staff, and agency representatives as needed. The team is responsible for drafting the SPUD, ensuring it aligns with the local community's comprehensive plan. [matsugov.us](https://matsugov.us)
- 3. **Drafting:** The planning team drafts the SPUD, incorporating public input and aligning with the community's goals. [matsugov.us+2sknikriverspud.matsugov.us+2matsugov.us+2](https://matsugov.us+2sknikriverspud.matsugov.us+2matsugov.us+2)
- 4. **Public Engagement:** The draft SPUD is made available for public comment. Notices are sent to property owners and registered voters within the affected area, and the draft is announced through various MSB communication channels. [matsugov.us+1matsugov.us+1](https://matsugov.us+1matsugov.us+1)
- 5. **Review and Revision:** After the comment period, MSB Planning staff compile public feedback and provide it to the planning team. The team revises the SPUD as necessary.
- 6. **Approval:** The final draft of the SPUD is submitted to the MSB Assembly for consideration. If adopted, the SPUD becomes enforceable under MSB 1.45 and is incorporated into Title 17 of the borough code. [matsugov.us+1matsugov.us+1](https://matsugov.us+1matsugov.us+1)

**Assistance Options**

*Community councils can choose from three levels of assistance from MSB staff: [matsugov.us](https://matsugov.us)*



- **Option 1:** Limited assistance, where the community council leads the process with occasional technical support from MSB staff. [matsugov.us](https://matsugov.us)
- **Option 2:** Moderate assistance, with more active involvement from MSB staff in the development process. [matsugov.us](https://matsugov.us)
- **Option 3:** In-depth/formal assistance, where MSB staff take a leading role in drafting the SPUD. [matsugov.us](https://matsugov.us)

#### **Additional Resources**

- **SPUD Maps:** Interactive and PDF maps showing existing SPUD boundaries can be accessed here: [MSB SPUD Maps.sknikriverspud.matsugov.us+6matsugov.us+6matsugov.us+6](https://matsugov.us/sknikriverspud.matsugov.us+6matsugov.us+6matsugov.us+6)
- **Planning Department:** For more information or assistance, contact the MSB Planning and Land Use Department: [Planning Department.matsugov.us](https://matsugov.us/planning-department.matsugov.us)

For a detailed overview of the SPUD development process, refer to the MSB Plan/SpUD Process Overview document: [MSB Plan/SpUD Process Overview.matsugov.us](https://matsugov.us/msb-plan/spud-process-overview.matsugov.us)

- f. Raise Funds:** Through membership fees, local investment, and external funding avenues, we'll raise the necessary funds to acquire the land and develop it.
- Conduct a Feasibility Study**
    - Assess the land's potential for mixed-use development (residential, commercial, or a boutique hotel).
    - Study the legal, environmental, and financial implications of acquiring the land.
    - Estimate the total cost of acquisition, development, and infrastructure.
  - Create a Funding Plan**
    - Develop a comprehensive plan to raise funds for the purchase of the 42-acre parcel.
    - Identify multiple funding sources, such as:
      - Community Investment: Encourage co-op members to invest in the project.
      - Grants and State/Federal Funding: Explore funding opportunities from state and federal programs supporting economic development, urban renewal, and infrastructure projects.
    - Bank Loans/Private Lenders: Seek financing from banks or private investors willing to support community development projects.
    - Crowdfunding and Public Donations: Use online platforms to raise smaller contributions from the broader community.
  - Host Fundraising Events**
    - Organize community events, such as fundraising dinners, silent auctions, or online campaigns to raise awareness and funds for land acquisition and development.
    - Offer incentives for investment, such as preferential access to commercial space, discounts for members, and dividends on profits.
  - Make an offer on the 42-acre parcel with 120-day closing once we reach 1/3 of the funds needed for acquisition, this will allow for time to raise the additional 2/3 of the funding and time to complete our due diligence to ensure this property can be developed in accordance with the goals of the BLCDC development objectives.**
- g. Acquire the Land**
- Site Plan**
    - Work with a surveyor to develop a feasible site plan.
  - Final Land Purchase**
    - Ensure all legal documents, title searches, and ownership rights are properly addressed.

- h. *Develop the Land:*** *Once the planned is voted on and adopted, we will move forward with the development—building infrastructure, commercial spaces, residential units, and public spaces that will serve Big Lake for generations, in reasonable phases.*
- i. Hire Development Team
    - 1. Hire architects, engineers, and urban planners to design the initial phases of the downtown development as determined and voted on with the BLCDC plan.
    - 2. Ensure the design reflects community input and meets the goals outlined in the SPUD proposal.
  - ii. Begin Infrastructure Development
    - 1. Develop the necessary infrastructure (roads, utilities, sidewalks, and green spaces) to prepare the site for development.
    - 2. Work with local contractors to complete construction in phases, prioritizing areas that will generate early revenue or community impact.
  - iii. Launch Commercial and Residential Projects
    - 1. Begin the construction of commercial spaces, residential buildings, or possibly a boutique hotel.
    - 2. Ensure that these developments cater to local businesses and provide housing options for residents.
- i. *Long-Term Maintenance and Growth***
- i. Ongoing Community Engagement
    - 1. Keep the community informed of progress and continue to engage with residents throughout the development process.
    - 2. Host public meetings to update stakeholders and gather feedback on future phases of development.
  - ii. Establish a Management Entity
    - 1. Create a long-term management entity responsible for the operation and maintenance of the developed area, including property management, infrastructure upkeep, and community events.
    - 2. Ensure the co-op continues to be a key stakeholder in the ongoing success of the development.
  - iii. Reinvest in the Community
    - 1. Use profits from development to fund future phases of the project or other community-driven initiatives, ensuring the co-op remains sustainable and community-focused.
  - iv. Plan for Expansion
    - 1. Over time, as the downtown area grows, look for opportunities to acquire additional land, add other commercial properties and adjacent properties to be included in the Big Lake SPUD and expand the development, enhancing Big Lake’s reputation as a thriving, sustainable community.

## **WHEN:**

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### **1. Time is of the essence**

This parcel is currently available now and we don’t want to miss out on this opportunity to ensure that our community has an incredible area for residents and visitors to come together and enjoy a quaint town square. This is a rare opportunity. If we miss out on this perfect parcel we will lose the opportunity to complete the Jordan Lake Park nature trails around Jordan Lake and retain the natural look of any development that takes place on this strategically located parcel, in the heart of Big Lake.

## 2. A defining moment for Big Lake

This is the moment when we can decide to take control of our future rather than letting outside developers shape it for us, or simply allowing hap-hazard growth to occur outside of a community plan. This land is a blank canvas – an opportunity to build something that reflects our values and our vision for the community now and for generations to come.

### **WHO:**

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#### 1. You! Local community members

#### 2. How You Can Get Involved?

##### *a. Join the Steering Committee*

##### *b. Become a member/owner*

- i. Add your name to the list of prospective, buy-in members and become part of the movement that will shape Big Lake's future. Your membership gives you a voice in the direction of the project, as well as a stake in the future of our town, as soon as the BLCDC has been formed and the documentation is approved by an attorney.

##### *c. Invest in Big Lake*

- i. You don't have to be a large corporation or investor to make a difference. By pooling our resources as a community, we can raise the funds needed to acquire the land and develop it in a way that benefits everyone.

##### *d. Spread the Word*

- i. Share the vision of the BLCDC with your friends and neighbors. The more people who join, the stronger our collective power will be.

### **A CALL TO ACTION:**

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#### 1. The time to act is now.

- a. The opportunity to shape our town's future is within our grasp. By coming together as a community, we can create a town area that reflects our values, strengthens our economy, and leaves a legacy for future generations.

#### 2. Join us today!

- a. I invite each of you to join us in this effort. Become a member of the BLCDC, invest in our future, and have a voice in building the downtown that Big Lake deserves.

### **Contact Information**

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**Interested in joining or providing feedback:** Contact Keith or Tina Dobson

- **Keith Dobson:** [keithrdobson@gmail.com](mailto:keithrdobson@gmail.com)
- **Tina Dobson:** [tsdobson@gmail.com](mailto:tsdobson@gmail.com)