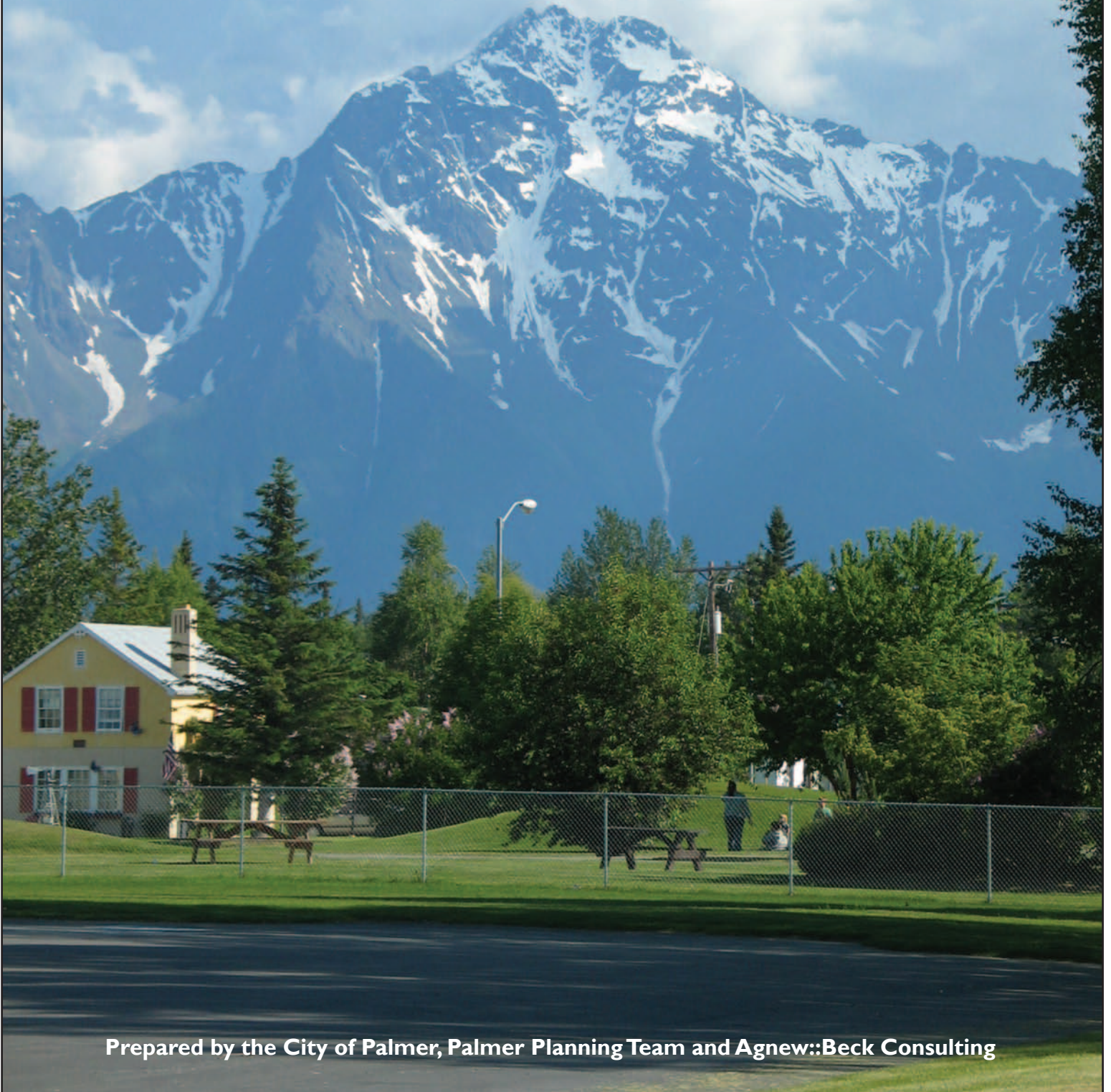


City of Palmer Comprehensive Plan

APPROVED SEPTEMBER 2006



Prepared by the City of Palmer, Palmer Planning Team and Agnew::Beck Consulting

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

City of Palmer Mayor

John Combs

Palmer Planning and Zoning Commission

Guy AlLee

Sharon Allen

Richard Best

Darrin Hamming

Michael Kircher, Chair

Mike Madar

Herder Winkelman

Community Planning Team

Kristy Bernier, Palmer Chamber of Commerce

David Cheezem, Downtown Merchant

John Combs, Mayor

Darrin Hamming, Planning and Zoning
Commissioner and Builder

Brad Hanson, City Council Member

Dot Helm, Resident and Trails Advocate

Geri Keeling, Historical Society

Michael Kircher, Planning and Zoning Commissioner

Joe Lawton, Alaska State Fair

Gabriel Layman, Palmer Senior Center

Joel Lynch, Spenard Builders Supply

Bonnie Quill, Matanuska-Susitna Convention &
Visitors Bureau

Kevin Sorenson, Developer

Palmer City Council

Steve Carrington

Ken Erbey

Brad Hanson

Tony Pippel

Katherine Vanover

Jim Wood

Larry Hill

City of Palmer Staff

Tom Healy, City Manager

Russ Boatright, Police Chief

Janette Bower, City Clerk

Dan Contini, Fire Dept.

Sara Jansen, Community Development

Pat Kilmain, Librarian

Rick Koch, Public Works Director

Dawn Webster, Community Development

Consultants

Agnew::Beck Consulting, LLC

HDR, Inc.

Land Design North

Northern Economics

A community planning project was conducted by a team of twenty graduate students from the University of Washington, College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Department of Urban Design and Planning, Alaska Studies Program over a six month period in late 2004 and early 2005. That planning effort contributed base information to the update of this plan.

CODE ORDINANCE ADOPTING PLAN

CODE ORDINANCE

By: Borough Manager
Introduced: 09/05/06
Public Hearing: 09/19/06
Adopted: 09/19/06

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH ORDINANCE SERIAL NO. 06-183

AN ORDINANCE OF THE MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH ASSEMBLY AMENDING MSB 15.24.030(B)(3), COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AND PURPOSES; CITY OF PALMER.

WHEREAS, Palmer City Council voted to approve the updated comprehensive plan in May 2006; and

WHEREAS, Planning Commission Resolution Serial No. 06-42, adopted August 7, 2006, recommends the inclusion of the updated Palmer City Comprehensive Plan into the overall Borough Comprehensive Plan.

BE IT ENACTED:

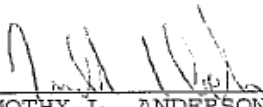
Section 1. Classification. This ordinance is of a general and permanent nature and shall become a part of the borough code.

Section 2. Amendment of section. MSB 15.24.030(B)(3) is hereby amended to read as follows:

(3) City of Palmer Comprehensive Plan (Ord. 82-37 dated July 1982, as amended by Ord. 85-104 dated January 1986, Ord. 87-65 dated July 1987, Ord. 88-12 dated February 1988, Ord. 93-01 dated January 1993, Ord. 99-071 dated June 1, 1999); as amended by Ordinance 06-183 dated May, 2006.


Section 3. Effective date. This ordinance shall take effect upon adoption by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly.

ADOPTED by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly this 19 day
of September, 2005.



TIMOTHY L. ANDERSON, Borough Mayor

ATTEST:



MICHELLE M. MCGEHEE, CMC, Borough Clerk
(SEAL)

PASSED UNANIMOUSLY: Woods, Allen, Colberg, Kvalheim, Bettine,
Colver, and Vehrs

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION (Chapter 1)

This plan was prepared with extensive public involvement. This included a series of meetings with an advisory planning team, interviews with residents and businesses, and two well attended community meetings – an open house in May and a workshop to review the draft plan in October 2005. The plan builds from the 1999 City of Palmer Comprehensive Plan, as well as the work completed in winter 2004-05 by a team from the University of Washington Urban Planning College.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION (Chapter 2)

Palmer is in the midst of profound transformation. While features from Palmer's history – its agricultural character, small town feel, and sense of community - continue to define Palmer's identity, the town now faces a different future. Palmer is embedded in the phenomenally rapidly growing southern Mat-Su Borough. In the 1960's the Mat-Su Borough had a population of just over 5,000 people. By 2000 the population had grown ten-fold to 59,322. During the 1990's Borough population grew 49 percent versus 13 percent statewide. If the State economy remains strong, the Borough is projected to grow to over 108,000 people by 2015. In the span of 20-30 years, this region has evolved from rural, to bedroom community, to what is becoming an increasingly self-sufficient service and employment center.

This growth presents Palmer with great opportunities and challenges:

- Pressures for expansion - a tide of subdivisions, offices and shopping centers transforming the area's traditionally rural landscapes
- A level of population growth that allows the area to support a new scale of commercial and public services, from 'big box' retail to a new regional hospital
- Traffic growth that is rapidly outpacing the capacity of the road system
- A downtown that has changed little over the years, in contrast to the dramatic growth of nearby commercial districts, but appears to be on the cusp of significant construction and redevelopment
- An escalation of community expectations - growing pressures for new public services and facilities to be provided by the City of Palmer, from within and outside City boundaries
- A subtle shift in perspective, from pride in the past to a growing focus on the future

These changes present challenges to the historic character of Palmer and opportunities to emerge as a new kind of community – one that keeps the best of its historic character *and* embraces the need to grow and change. The purpose of this plan is to establish a framework to reach this ambitious goal.

COMMUNITY VISION (Chapter 3)

The overall vision for the community is to “Keep Palmer a vital community, a place that seeks opportunities for growth, and retains what is best about Palmer's history and traditions.” Specific priorities include:

- Keep focused on City fundamental responsibilities: roads, police and fire, water and sewer.

- Facilitate the expansion of the local economy and local business, so residents of Palmer and surrounding areas can find more of the goods, services and jobs they need in Palmer.
- Strengthen downtown Palmer – “the heart of community public life.”
- Promote and enhance what is unique about Palmer to benefit residents and attract visitors.
- Encourage high quality, attractive development, with ready access to parks and green space.
- Improve connections within and out of town, by road, trail and transit.
- Accept and encourage growth, but guide development to benefit the community and maintain what is special about Palmer.

PUBLIC SERVICES, FACILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE (Chapter 4)

Cities like Palmer provide a wide range of services. The services addressed under this chapter, including police, fire, water and sewer, along with the local road system, are the core of the City’s responsibilities. The City of Palmer provides a high level of public services and facilities, including an airport; community water, sewer and stormwater service; and fire, police and emergency services. The City needs to continue to efficiently maintain and expand these services as population and community boundaries grow. Particular challenges for the future include:

- *Overall* – Continue to strengthen the City’s infrastructure, to meet the needs of a growing community.
- *Coordination* - Work cooperatively with the Matanuska Susitna Borough to coordinate expansion of infrastructure, roads, and new development within the City of Palmer Sewer Service District.
- *Sewer* – The City’s sewer system has the capacity to meet expected growth over the next 5-10 years. Further out, the community will have to invest \$20-30 million to expand the plant’s capacity and reduce time required for treatment.
- *Water* – The City has sufficient well capacity to meet future needs, but in the next 5-10 years will need to construct several major water mains to serve predicted growth. Two specific needs are a main in the Inner Springer Loop area (approximately \$5 million), and service to the area north of the new regional hospital (approximately \$10 million).
- *Stormwater* – More development and impervious surfaces will require more effort to manage stormwater flows. The plan supports increasing open space in future developments to promote on-site infiltration, reduce public storm water management costs, and as a side benefit, provide open space for recreation.
- *Fire and Police* – Work to maintain quality service to new developments within current City boundaries and in outlying areas. For fire, one priority is to improve fire protection downtown, where the concentration of structures creates higher risks. In the longer term, the community will have to confront the challenge of providing quality fire service outside the existing town boundaries. In these areas, providing fire service will cost more than within the existing town, due to lower densities and the need to build new water mains.

TRANSPORTATION (Chapter 5)

Plan policies, summarized below, will improve the range and quality of Palmer transportation options, to better serve current needs and respond to projected growth.

Shape the Character and Use of the Glenn Highway - The Glenn Highway carries steadily increasing traffic, but little of this traffic continues past the community. Consequently, the challenge is to *disperse* traffic within the community, rather than move traffic *through* Palmer. Plan actions to improve the Glenn Highway are listed below.

- Create an arterial-level street on the north-south section line that is currently partially occupied by Hemmer Rd., Blunck St., and North Werner Rd. This route will connect the Glenn Highway with development along the Palmer-Wasilla Highway and Bogard Road and avoid the congested intersection of the Glenn and Palmer-Wasilla Highways.
- Change the character of the Glenn Highway in Palmer. Establish a limited access, boulevard-style road with a landscaped median and right-of-way, and with improved pedestrian and vehicular links between the east and west sides of the highway.
- Provide access to development with perpendicular access roads rather than direct driveway access or frontage roads.

Improve the Palmer Road System to Meet Anticipated Growth

- The plan proposes two new east-west collector level streets:
 - Extend Bogard Road east to connect with the Glenn Highway and continue into the greater downtown area.
 - Connect Dogwood Avenue to the east over the Alaska Railroad and connecting to the west across the Glenn Highway to an extended Felton Street.
- Work with the State of Alaska and the Matanuska Susitna Borough to reserve land for other key transportation-related improvements, including reserving routes for collector streets on approximately a 1/2 mile grid, and reserving or acquiring land for expansion of key intersections.

Maintain and Improve Community Sidewalks and Trails – A good trail system is an increasingly valued element of successful communities, supporting quality of life, economic and circulation goals. The plan identifies needed new and improved trails and sidewalks. Two priorities are upgrades and better maintenance of downtown sidewalks and a trail along the railroad right-of-way from the State Fairgrounds through the City and north to Sutton.

Work on a Regional Basis to Expand and Improve Transit Service – Increasing housing densities and climbing gas prices will increase the feasibility and desirability of transit improvements. The plan recommends continued support of these services.

LAND USE (Chapter 6)

The Land Use Chapter includes ten goals to guide growth to make Palmer an increasingly attractive and successful place to live, work, invest and visit. The first goal of this chapter sets out the desired, overall pattern of community land use; the remainder of the chapter goes into more detail on the specific goals for individual land uses. Highlights of the chapter include:

- Maintain the quality of existing neighborhoods, and provide space for diversity of new residential uses, including housing for the upper end of the housing market, higher density housing in around downtown, and housing for seniors.
- Ensure Palmer remains the institutional center of the Borough. Work proactively to help institutions find space for needed expansion, for example, offices of the Matanuska Susitna Borough and the State Court, so Palmer remains the Borough's institutional hub.
- Encourage expansion of commercial uses, primarily in downtown and along the Palmer Wasilla Highway and along the Glenn Highway.
- Work with the planned Business Improvement District, to help maintain and enhance downtown as a compact, walkable, dynamic, mixed use center.
- Encourage expansion of industrial uses while guiding this type of use to reasonably mitigate impacts on surrounding uses.
- Coordinate planning for transportation and land use, so residents and businesses have convenient access to places of work, commercial services, schools and other public facilities, by vehicle, sidewalk and trail.
- Maintain and improve a high quality system of trails, parks, and open space and other recreation amenities.
- Maintain a clear sense of town entry, with open space and/or less developed areas separating Palmer from surrounding communities.
- Support Palmer's agricultural heritage and history and work so it continues to be visible.
- Guide development so there is the right balance of residential and commercial uses, to ensure the City maintains its fiscal health.

The Comprehensive Plan calls for an active, phased approach to annexation, focused on provision of high quality services, and advance land use and infrastructure planning, including cooperative planning with the Borough. Ultimately, the City of Palmer is expected to expand to the existing sewer service area boundary, which extends 6-7 miles west and south of the existing City limits.

ECONOMIC VITALITY (Chapter 7)

Palmer benefits from a diverse economy. This includes institutional and office uses, local-serving retail and service businesses, and modest contributions from tourism and agriculture. While the private sector drives the community's economy, the City can play a role in keeping the economy strong and diverse. Strategies to reach this goal capitalize on the community's history and small town character, and encourage high standards for development.

Strengthen Palmer's competitiveness as the region's institutional center - Work with institutions to understand and meet their needs, including, where possible, help secure land needed for growth. Develop and implement specific strategies with key institutions.

Encourage expansion of high-tech and research-related economic sectors and other well-paid professional jobs – Encourage growth in these sectors, by maintaining and improving Palmer's high quality of life, and ensuring space is available for forms of economic development that provide good jobs that fit well with community character. In particular, encourage research-related economic activity linked to University of Alaska facilities located in the Palmer area.

Strengthen Palmer's role as a place to shop for Palmer residents and visitors - Zone sufficient land for commercial growth, and support continued public investments in infrastructure in commercial areas.

Strengthen Palmer as a tourism destination - Palmer has solid potential to attract travelers and more could be done to take advantage of this potential. Over time, the community could become both a destination in its own right and a "gateway community" providing a base for Hatcher Pass skiing, and trips into the spectacular backcountry that surrounds Palmer. Downtown and trail improvements are the keys to this transformation.

Do more to market Palmer's Attractions - Palmer's distinct character is a real economic asset, derived from the community's unique natural setting, buildings, views, history, people, and stories. The City should actively support efforts by the Greater Palmer Chamber of Commerce, the Matanuska-Susitna Convention and Visitors Bureau and others to better bring out and promote this character. The community should distill and promote the "Palmer brand" in signage, downtown attractions, the community website, and all marketing material. Palmer can increase the benefits of its historic character by further marketing and improving the City's designated National Historic District and the Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway. One additional, longer term possibility would be to establish Palmer as the centerpiece of a National Heritage Area, which would provide recognition and more funding for promotion.

PARKS, RECREATION & CULTURE (Chapter 8)

The plan identifies the need to maintain and improve public parks and open spaces throughout the community. As the amount and intensity of development increases, this strategy will help keep Palmer a desirable place to live and work. Specific goals include:

Establish, improve, and maintain city-wide parks and recreation facilities and programs - Palmer already has an excellent system of park and recreation facilities. Two identified unmet needs are a skateboard park and additional fields for sports like soccer. Palmer will also need to increase park maintenance as the park system expands and promote programs to increase volunteer maintenance of parks. The City also supports creation of a youth council and eventually a youth center.

Obtain funding for and complete the urban revitalization project in downtown - Establish, improve, and maintain a range of downtown open spaces, sidewalks and parks.

Enhance area-wide recreational trail systems - Improve sidewalk and trail connections between residential areas, downtown, schools, institutional areas, recreational areas.

Continue to improve local arts and cultural opportunities - In the same way that the southern Borough increasingly supports new scales of commercial uses, the area can begin to support a new level of quality of cultural facilities. Palmer should work to be the region's cultural center, including working towards development of a multipurpose arts center.

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Overview

Palmer is located in the magnificent Matanuska Valley of Southcentral, Alaska, surrounded on three sides by mountain ranges and two glaciers. It has a history and heritage unique in Alaska. The pioneer families and 203 Colony families who came to Palmer from 1935 onward brought with them small town values, institutional structures, and the beginnings of straightforward architecture that characterize the rural upper Midwest.



Many of the communal qualities of present day Palmer are directly traceable to its origins as a planned community. These qualities today find a variety of institutional expressions from Palmer's public and private schools, a centrally located library, city government and police force, established churches, active Chamber of Commerce, and extensive water and sewer infrastructure. Also within the city limits of Palmer are the Alaska State Fair, a historical society and Historic District, an airport, the finest golf course in the state, ice arena, parks and ballfields. Palmer is the seat of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough government and is home to Matanuska Electric Association, Matanuska Telephone Association, Matanuska Valley Federal Credit Union, the Alaska Job Corps Center, State Superior and District Court, amateur college baseball Mat-Su Miners, and is close to the Matanuska Valley campus of the University of Alaska.

Palmer is in the midst of a significant transformation – “evolving into a new kind of community” in the words of several different participants in the planning process. While features from Palmer’s history – its agricultural character, small town quality, and communal sensibilities - continue to define Palmer and its identity, the town now faces a very different future. Palmer along with the southern Mat-Su Borough has experienced two decades of sustained growth. In less than 20 years this region has evolved from rural, to bedroom community, to its own increasingly self-sufficient commercial and employment center. Agricultural lands are rapidly becoming subdivisions. Residents within Palmer’s boundaries and adjoining areas are looking to the City for new types and levels of community services. Much of downtown has been purchased by new owners, and appears to be on the cusp of significant construction and redevelopment.

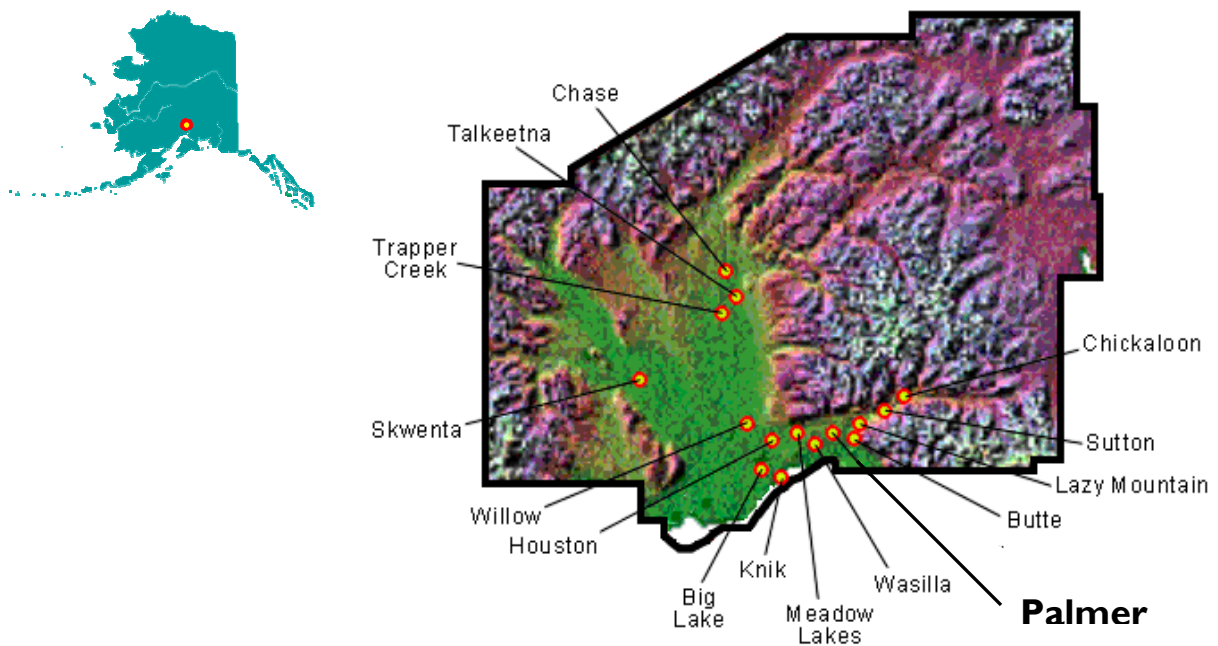
These changes present both challenges to the historic character of Palmer and opportunities to emerge as a new kind of community – one that holds onto what is best of its historic character and embraces the need to grow and change. The purpose of this plan is to set a framework for just such a strategy.

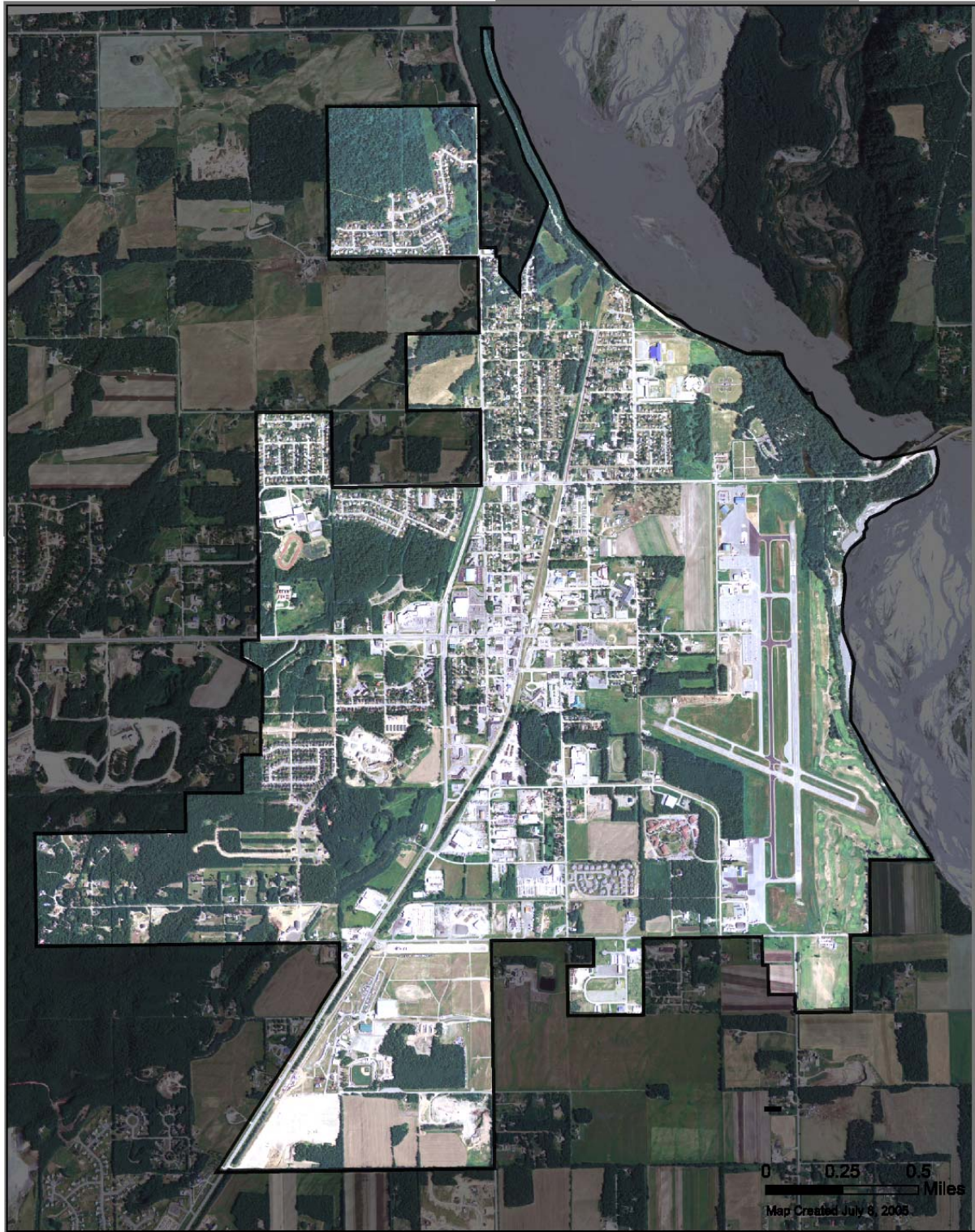
Overview of Community Boundaries and Setting

Palmer is located in the Matanuska Valley of Southcentral Alaska. The town lies just west of the Matanuska River, north of its junction with the Knik River. The community is built in the fertile valley between the peaks of the Talkeetna and Chugach mountains, in the southern Matanuska-Susitna Borough. The community is 42 miles northeast of Anchorage on the Glenn Highway.

Palmer lies at approximately 61.5° north latitude and 149.1° west longitude. The area encompasses 5.2 sq. miles of land (see “Project Area” map on following page). The temperatures in January range from -36 to 51; in July, 37 to 85. Annual precipitation is 15.37 inches, with 57.9 inches of snowfall.

Palmer is the hub of the eastern part of the Mat-Su Borough’s core area, while Wasilla is the hub of the western part. Palmer provides a substantial portion of the goods and services consumed not only by Palmer residents, but also by Borough residents from the Butte and Lazy Mountain areas, northeast up the Glenn Highway including Sutton and Chickaloon, the Fishhook and Hatcher Pass areas, the Springer system, and east of Four Corners. While Palmer’s population is just under 6,000, the number of people Palmer serves probably exceeds 20,000 and is increasing rapidly.





City of Palmer
Comprehensive Plan

City of Palmer - Project Area Map

Purpose of the Plan

The purpose of comprehensive planning is to promote the type of environment that a community desires. Very few cities are planned before they are built; however, Palmer is an exception. Palmer was a planned community from the very beginning, and has had a comprehensive plan in effect since 1959.

In Alaska, comprehensive plans are mandated of all organized municipalities by Title 29 of the Alaska State Statutes. The key elements of the statute (Sec. 29.40.030) are summarized below:

The comprehensive plan is a compilation of policy statements, goals, standards, and maps for guiding the physical, social, and economic development, both private and public, of the municipality, and may include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Statements of policies, goals, and standards;
- Land use plan;
- Community facilities plan;
- Transportation plan; and,
- Recommendations for implementing a comprehensive plan.

A comprehensive plan provides a method to analyze past development, current issues and community views, and use this information to establish policies guiding future development. Key components of this plan include a broad, long term vision for Palmer's future; policies to guide land use, growth, and development; priorities to improve community facilities and services; and policies to promote economic development, retain community character and protect the natural environment.

Funding agencies have become increasingly interested in community planning. Many now require a community plan as a condition for funding infrastructure and economic development projects. For example, the United States Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA) requires a planning process called a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy to qualify for assistance under its economic adjustment, planning, and public works programs.

In addition, beginning with the Federal Fiscal Year 2005 funding cycle, the Denali Commission, which partners with other state and federal agencies and nonprofit agencies, will require a community to have a comprehensive plan that identifies priority projects prior to funding considerations. This plan is intended to meet the criteria of both the Denali Commission and the EDA.

Plan Time Frame – Visionary and Practical

The goal of this plan is to provide a framework for guiding future growth and change in Palmer. To be of greatest value, the plan needs to set clear goals and strategies for the long term, but also allow flexibility to respond to unexpected challenges and opportunities. With these competing objectives in mind, the plan looks at issues and is intended to guide growth over the next 10 to 20 years. For example, it identifies the expected need for substantial expansion to the City's sewer treatment facility in approximately 10 years. At the same time, it is clear that in a fast growing area like Palmer, the City Council and community will need to revisit and update the plan in 5 years. In addition, the City Council may amend the plan on an ongoing basis through a formal revision process.

Planning Process & Public Involvement

This revised City of Palmer Comprehensive Plan (Plan) built from the 1999 City of Palmer Comprehensive Plan. Other contributions included work with members of the Palmer community, the Palmer Planning Team and City staff and City department heads. Also incorporated was a recently completed project by the University of Washington, and research done by Agnew::Beck Consulting.



The following table summarizes the process to date to prepare this comprehensive plan.

| Date | Activity |
|---------------------|---|
| March 3, 2005 | Initial meeting between consultants and city liaison |
| April 20, 2005 | First Planning Team meeting to discuss process and draft Plan outline |
| May – June | Interviews with City of Palmer Department Heads |
| June 1, 2005 | Planning Team Open House – to gain public input on comprehensive plan |
| June – Sept | Series of Planning Team meetings to review draft plan chapters, including Land Use, Circulation, Public Services and Facilities, Parks and Recreation, plus introductory chapters |
| Sept | Completion of Internal Review Draft |
| Mid Oct | Release of Draft Plan for Public Comments |
| Oct 29, 2005 | Community Workshop to review the Draft Plan |
| Nov & Dec | Plan revised to reflect public comments |
| Dec 2005 – Feb 2006 | Review and Approval by City Planning and Zoning Commission |
| March - May 2006 | Review and Approval by City Council |
| July 2006 | Review and Approval by Matanuska Susitna Borough Planning Commission |
| September 19, 2006 | Final Approval by Matanuska Susitna Borough Assembly |

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CHAPTER 2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Introduction

This chapter gives an overview of Palmer's history, current conditions and trends, and sets the stage for the policies presented in the remainder of the plan. Specific subjects covered include history, natural setting, and trends in land use and economic activity.



History

Athapaskan natives, specifically the Ahtna and Dena'ina, have lived in the Matanuska Valley for centuries. According to archaeological evidence the Athapaskan people moved into the area displacing Eskimo populations, sometime around 1000 AD (de Laguna 1975). Historical accounts and oral traditions refer to at least two villages at the head of the Knik Arm, near the mouth of the Knik and Matanuska Rivers. Another village was once located near the Matanuska Bridge on the Palmer side (Karl & Fall 1987:272-273). During the time of Russian fur trading, the Ahtna traveled along the Matanuska River, transporting furs from the Dena'ina to Copper Fort near Chitina. George Palmer came to the area in 1893 and was an early storekeeper in Knik.

In 1912 Alaska was made a territory of the United States. At that time U.S. Navy ships operating in the Pacific ran on coal from the east coast, which was shipped, at great expense, by railroad. The Navy was interested in establishing a northern Pacific supply of coal. In 1912 President Taft appointed a study team to examine the possibility of a railroad to open up the interior of Alaska to access the reported mineral wealth. The study team recommended that a railroad be built from Seward to the Tanana River with a spur to the Matanuska coal fields. On March 12, 1914 Woodrow Wilson, acting on those recommendations, signed a bill authorizing a government-built railroad. The intention was to open Alaska to settlement in the same way railroads had opened the American west.

Congress allowed the leasing of coal reserves in 1914 and one year later construction on the railroad began. The Evan Jones mine opened in 1920 and operated until 1968. Railroad construction brought an influx of workers and homesteaders who settled in the area near Matanuska Junction and present day Palmer. In 1916 a siding was constructed at the present site of Palmer. The White brothers began operating a new post office under the name "Palmer" in 1917. At that time Palmer consisted of a section house, a small depot and a homestead cabin which was used as the post office. That same year the U.S. Department of Agriculture built an experimental station near Matanuska to encourage agriculture. Many of the homesteaders provided agricultural products for the railroad supply center in Anchorage. Between the end of World War I and the beginning of the Great Depression the population of the area declined. In 1929 the Alaska Railroad attempted a colonization effort to encourage settlement along its service area. M.D. Snodgrass of the experimental station headed the settlement program which brought 55 families to the area by 1934.

In 1935, Palmer became the site of one of the more unusual experiments in American history: the Matanuska Valley Colony. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration, one of the many New Deal relief agencies created by President Roosevelt, planned an agricultural colony in Alaska. Two-hundred

and three families, mostly from Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota, were invited to join the Colony. They arrived in Palmer in the early summer of 1935. Although the failure rate was high, the people who came found a way to make a living and stay in the area, and many of their descendants still live in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley today. With the establishment of the agricultural colony, Palmer grew to include schools, churches and businesses. The Anchorage-Palmer highway opened in September 1936 providing better access to markets for valley-grown produce.

The Mat Maid complex was constructed in 1935. The 80,000-square foot structure originally functioned as cannery, creamery and warehouse. It was operated by the Alaska Rural Rehabilitation Corporation, a federal agency.

World War II brought thousands of troops and civilian workers to Alaska. Major transportation projects included airports, harbors and roads. Construction of the Glenn Highway began in 1941 linking Palmer to the port in Valdez. The following year construction of the Alcan Highway began, joining Alaska to the lower 48. Plans were made to lengthen the Glenn to connect with the Alcan.

In 1944, 300 area residents requested action be taken to develop a safe landing field. Construction of the Palmer Airport began in 1946. Construction was directed by the Territorial Board of Road Commissioners. The work was completed using equipment borrowed from the road commission, and labor donated by Boy Scout Troop No.54. In 1950 the airport was upgraded and additional land was acquired.

After the war, defense building provided jobs and markets for the farm produce of the valley. Various homesteading programs enabled ex-military and railroad workers to acquire land. Palmer was incorporated as a city under the territorial government in 1951. Dairy farming boomed and in 1952 there were 42 grade-A dairies. Agriculture production peaked during the 1950s and early 60s.

Coal mining has had a significant impact on Palmer's history. The mining areas at Wishbone Hill, Eska, Chickaloon, Sutton, and Jonesville produced large quantities of high grade coal during the early part of the century. At one time two train loads of coal per day passed through Palmer on the way to the military bases in Anchorage. The mines were largely underground operations and much of the Wishbone Hill area is underlain by tunnels and mining works. Potential still remains for future development.

The city received title to the airport from the state in 1963 and the FAA established a manned flight service station in 1966. The airport has been continually upgraded over the years and today it is one of the most complete small community airport facilities in Alaska.

The Mat-Su Borough incorporated in 1964, with Palmer as the government seat. Palmer evolved into the center for federal, state and borough government. Oil and gas development, which began in the late 1950s in upper Cook Inlet, brought with it new people, industry and business. The valley gradually evolved from an agricultural center to a mixture of farming and residential subdivisions.

The late 1970's and early 1980's brought an unprecedented period of growth to south-central Alaska. The building of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, the development of the North Slope oil fields and rising prices for petroleum products pumped billions of dollars into the state economy. The population of many cities and communities increased dramatically. The Valley experienced rapid economic and population growth. The city constructed an industrial park in the early 1970's.

Declining oil prices brought on a deep depression in Alaska and the Mat-Su Valley during the late 1980's. Bank failures and foreclosures were common from 1986 to 1989. Although Palmer suffered from the recession, from 1990 forward, the community has seen steady growth in population, jobs and residential and commercial valuations, as outlined in more detail later in this chapter.

Natural Environment

Topography

Palmer is located on the upper Cook Inlet near the confluence of the Matanuska and Knik Rivers in the Mat-Su Borough. Anchorage is about 45 miles south. The Matanuska Valley is formed by the Matanuska River and two mountain ranges, the Talkeetna range to the north and the Chugach to the east and south. The geology of the area is very complex as the Talkeetna and Chugach Mountains have different geologic backgrounds. The Knik River joins the uppermost reach of Cook Inlet just south of Palmer. The river valley and Knik Glacier form a low pass, saddled by glaciers, connecting to Prince William Sound.

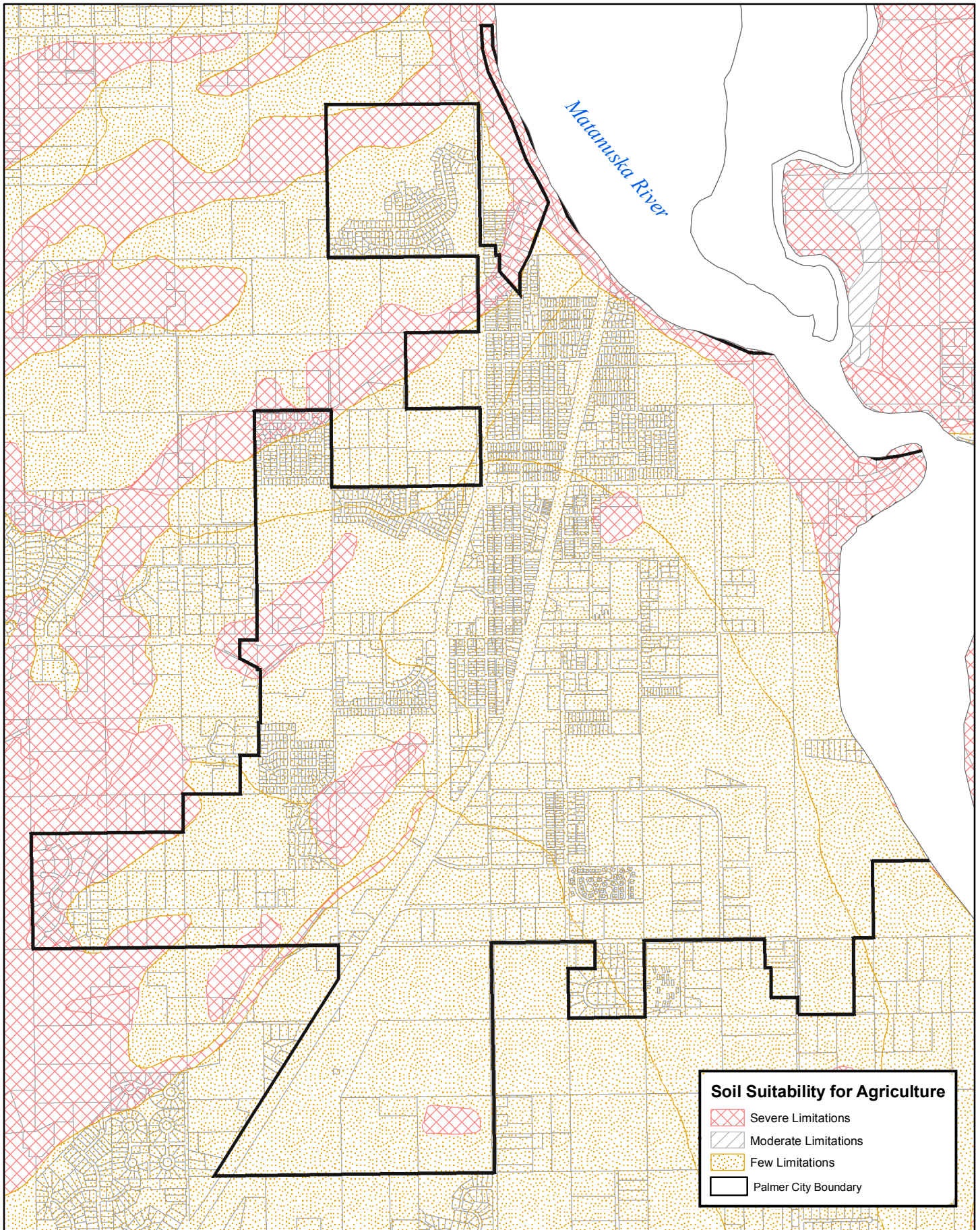
North of City limits, the Glenn Highway follows the edge of a glacial terminal moraine extending west of the highway. This terrain is comprised of low rolling hills which vary in height by about 200 feet. The area south of the city limits and east of the highway is formed of nearly level glacial deposits. The Palmer airport is listed as 232 feet above sea level. The Matanuska River emerges from its narrow canyon just upstream of the George W. Palmer Bridge on the old Glenn Highway and meanders through this flat area to where it meets the upper reaches of Cook Inlet.

The City of Palmer is located on a nearly level to rolling terrace of glacial deposits and bedrock. These deposits vary in depth and in some areas are very deep as evidenced by the bluff along the Matanuska River just east of the airport. Urban intensive land uses in the City are adequately separated from cut banks of the braided Matanuska River channel, with the exception of a small area abutting the river bank along the City's northern boundary. The City's sewage treatment center facility, south of town, is also located on the Matanuska River.

Geology and Soils

The soils of the Palmer area have played an important role in the City's development. It was this natural resource that first enabled people to homestead and farm the area. The principal soil series in the area is the Bodenbergs series. These soils have formed in deep, wind laid silts and very fine sands over gravelly coarse sand. The Bodenbergs soils naturally support a forest of white spruce, birch and cottonwood. Most of the level areas in the Palmer locality have been cleared for use as crop land. The mantle of wind-laid material ranges from 30 inches to 10 feet in depth, but is generally less than 40 inches deep. The level nature and great depth of these soils were an exciting discovery to the early farmers of the area. The ease of tillage, excellent drainage and the lack of major erosion control problems enabled farmers to maximize the short Alaskan growing season. Produce and vegetables grown in the area are still marketed and are famous world wide (see Agricultural Soil Suitability map on following page).

Unlike much of southcentral Alaska, Palmer's gentle terrain and well-drained offer soils very few limitations for building. The deep deposits of gravel underlying the area provide ample storage area for ground water.



City of Palmer
Comprehensive Plan

Agricultural Soil Suitability

Natural Hazards

Earthquakes - Palmer is located in seismic zone 4 for earthquakes. This risk does not pose significant constraints to development, but as is the case throughout Southcentral Alaska, the potential for earthquakes requires a high standard for building foundations and structures.

Flood & Erosion Hazard - Ninety-nine percent of the City of Palmer lies outside of the flood plain areas. For more information consult the Flood Insurance Rate maps (FIRM). Flood damage prevention regulations require developers and owners of land located within federally designated flood hazard areas to obtain a Flood Development Permit pursuant to Mat-Su Borough Code 17.29. The permit requires use of specific design criteria intended to minimize flood damage.

Where the Matanuska River directs its force into the banks and there is no stable underlying bedrock, erosion can be significant. The river eroded a large area and took out several homes on the eastern side of the river, in the Butte area. Eroding river bluffs have also impacted portions of the old railroad line now planned as a trail that runs north out of Palmer. More investigation is needed to determine the degree to which river bank erosion is a hazard in specific areas along the Palmer side of the river.

Vegetation

According to Alaska Regional Profiles, Southcentral Region, Palmer is primarily of one vegetative type - bottomland spruce-poplar forest. This vegetative type is described as a tall, relatively dense forest system which primarily contains white spruce, locally mixed with large cottonwood and balsam poplar, and is found on level to nearly level floodplains, low river terraces, and more deeply thawed south-facing slopes. Both black cottonwood and balsam poplar quickly invade floodplains and grow rapidly. Alaska paper birch and quaking aspen are often present. These species are in turn replaced by white spruce in the successional process. Shrubs that are prevalent are American green alder, Thinleaf alder, willow, rose, Labrador tea, raspberry, blueberry, huckleberry, high bush cranberry, bearberry and service berry. Associated grasses, herbs, etc., are blue joint, fireweed, horsetail, wintergreen, parsley fern, marsh fern, lady fern, lichens, mosses, liverworts, mushrooms, and other fungi. The Alaska Cooperative Extension Office located in Palmer provides detailed information about the multitude of various native species that grow profusely in the area.

Climate

The presence of nearby Cook Inlet moderates both summer and winter temperatures. Summers in Palmer are characterized by long, often beautiful days with daily high temperatures averaging in the upper 60's during the months of July and August. Winters are long with freeze-up usually complete by the end of October and break-up beginning in mid-April. The average winter high temperature in December and January is about 22 degrees. The City enjoys about 19 hours of daylight during the summer. The winter minimum on December 21 is 5 hours. Rainfall averages about 16.5 inches and the average total snow fall is 57 inches. The amount of precipitation in Palmer is moderated by the surrounding mountains. Snow cover is usually minimal due to winds which can blow strongly for long periods.

The winter winds are generally either from the Susitna Valley (northwest) or the Matanuska Valley (northeast). In the spring the strongest winds are usually from the Knik Glacier southeast of the city.

Fish and Wildlife

Not far from Palmer are areas with abundant fish and wildlife resources, including the Jim-Swan Lakes area, Palmer Hay flats, and the slopes leading into the Talkeetna and Chugach mountains. These resources are important for hunting and sportfishing, wildlife viewing and, for some residents, for subsistence. Most of the City of Palmer has been developed for urban land uses, or cleared for agricultural activities. Open areas are used seasonally by waterfowl and other wildlife. The only wetland areas identified in the Palmer vicinity are a few isolated ponds and stretches along the Matanuska River. No unique or unusual wildlife habitat values or concerns have been identified within the city. Small game is occasionally seen in the city and in the winter moose visit city residences to browse.

Social Environment

Regional Growth

Since the late 1980s, the southern Mat-Su Borough¹ has experienced dramatic growth, driven by the advantages the area offers over Anchorage - lower land prices and lower property taxes, excellent recreation amenities and growing access to jobs. Table 1 below shows the remarkably rapid increase in population in the Mat-Su Borough. For the year 2004, the Mat-Su was the 38th fastest growing area in the United States.

Table 1. Mat-Su Borough Population Statistics 1960-2000

| Year | Population | Average Annual Growth |
|------|------------|-----------------------|
| 1960 | 5,188 | - |
| 1970 | 6,509 | 2.3% |
| 1980 | 17,816 | 10.6% |
| 1990 | 39,683 | 8.3% |
| 2000 | 59,322 | 4.1% |
| 2005 | 74,041 | 4.6% |

Source: Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development 2005 population estimates.

Palmer Population Trends and Demographics

Palmer's population declined throughout the 1960s and early 70s because of coal mine closures and decreasing industrial activity. Since this period, Palmer has experienced steady population growth, at a pace almost matching the remarkable growth of the borough as a whole. Table 2 below shows Palmer's steady growth since this recession. Palmer has continued to grow despite the relatively limited supply of undeveloped land within the community's city limits.

¹ This and following sections include a range of information about the Mat-Su Borough, in addition to information specific to Palmer. This information is included for several reasons. In some instances, data is only available for the Borough. In many instances data on the MSB provides a helpful reference for better understanding statistics about Palmer. Finally, particularly for economic data, trends in the borough match those for the Borough as a whole.

Table 2. City of Palmer Population Statistics 1960-2000

| Year | Population | Average Annual Growth |
|------|------------|-----------------------|
| 1960 | 1,181 | - |
| 1970 | 1,140 | -0.4% |
| 1980 | 2,141 | 6.5% |
| 1990 | 2,866 | 3.0% |
| 2000 | 4,533 | 4.7% |
| 2005 | 5,382 | 3.3% |

Source: Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development 2005 population estimates

Palmer has a relatively young median age at 28.8. Despite the relative youth of Palmer's population, nine percent is over 65, compared with six percent for the Mat-Su Borough and the state. A more established population, the community's colony heritage, and a Pioneer Home may help explain the size of Palmer's over 65 population. Table 3 below describes ages in Palmer, the borough and the state; Table 4 gives a more complete breakdown of population by age groups in Palmer.

Table 3. Comparative Age Statistics, 2000

| Location | Median Age | Percent 65 & Up |
|----------------|------------|-----------------|
| Palmer | 28.8 | 9.1 |
| Mat-Su Borough | 34.1 | 5.9 |
| Alaska | 32.4 | 5.7 |

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development. Alaska Trends: The Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

Table 4. Age Statistics for City of Palmer, 1990-2000

| | 1990 Population | | 2000 Population | |
|------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| | Number | Percent of Total | Number | Percent of Total |
| Total Population | 2866 | | 4533 | |
| 9 and Under | 515 | 18.0% | 789 | 17.4% |
| 10 to 19 | 552 | 19.3% | 926 | 20.4% |
| 20 to 34 | 626 | 21.8% | 975 | 21.5% |
| 35 to 44 | 556 | 19.4% | 670 | 14.8% |
| 45 to 54 | 166 | 5.8% | 533 | 11.8% |
| 55 to 64 | 148 | 5.2% | 228 | 5% |
| 65 and Over | 303 | 10.6% | 412 | 9.1% |

Source: US Census Bureau. Note: US Census Bureau's 2000 population is slightly different from Alaska State department's number.

Trends in Land Use & Housing

Land Use Patterns & Capacity

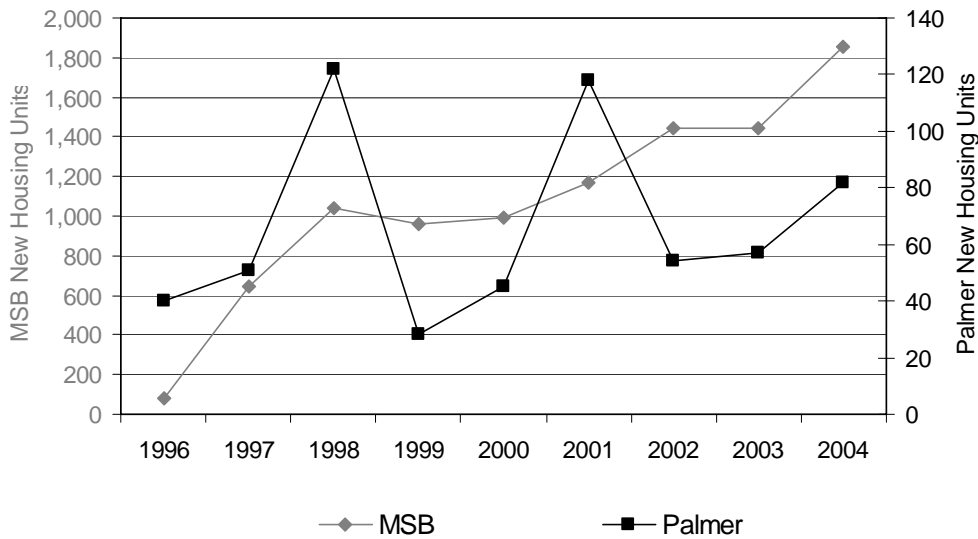
Until the last decade, the southern Mat-Su Borough was to a significant extent a bedroom community for Anchorage, with relatively limited locally-based shopping, services and jobs. This has changed in the last 10-15 years, as the population grew to a scale where a wider range of commercial services can be supported locally.

Residential subdivisions remain the predominant use of developed land in the southern Mat-Su Borough. Under Mat-Su Borough regulations, residential lots relying on on-site water and sewer must be at least 40,000 square feet in size (just under an acre). While subdivisions of three to five acre lots were once common, smaller lots, often at the Borough minimum, are now the predominant lot size. Community water systems are becoming more common, allowing for 20,000 square-foot lots.

Table 5 shows the new housing units starts in the Mat-Su Borough and the City of Palmer from 1996 through 2004². New housing includes single-family, multi-family, and mobile home units. The percentage break-downs of new housing units by housing type are provided in Table 6. During this period, the annual average Borough growth rate was 48 percent. This statistic is somewhat misleading, as 1996 was a relatively slow year for housing starts. In Palmer, growth was less dramatic, with significant peaks in 1988 and 2001. This pattern – where strong years are followed by slow years – has often been followed in Palmer and the borough, and should serve as a point of caution for projecting the future based on past trends.

² Information presented in this section was provided by the State Division of Labor and Workforce Development (DOLWD) Research & Analysis Section, which conducts a quarterly survey of new housing starts and building permits. The survey is based upon voluntary participation, so it does not provide a comprehensive picture of the market, but is a good starting point for understanding the housing market. Information from the Alaska Housing Finance Commission and the Alaska Multiple Listing Service are used to supplement the DOLWD Research & Analysis Section information.

Table 5. New Housing Units in the Mat-Su Borough and the City of Palmer, 1996 through 2004



Source: Kreiger, R., DOLWD Research & Analysis Section, 2005

Table 6. Alaska New Housing Unit Survey—Mat-Su Borough, Palmer, 1996 through 2004

| | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| MAT-SU BOROUGH | 81 | 646 | 1,038 | 962 | 993 | 1,169 | 1,440 | 1,442 | 1,857 |
| Single family (%) | 88.9 | 89.6 | 94.8 | 96.2 | 88.5 | 80.8 | 85.9 | 83.9 | 71.8 |
| Multi-family (%) | 9.9 | 9.9 | 5.2 | 3.4 | 11.2 | 19.2 | 14.1 | 15.0 | 27.2 |
| Mobile homes (%) | 1.2 | 0.5 | 0.0 | 0.4 | 0.3 | 0.1 | 0.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Palmer | 40 | 51 | 122 | 28 | 45 | 118 | 54 | 57 | 82 |
| Single family (%) | 100.0 | 100.0 | 67.2 | 100.0 | 46.7 | 23.7 | 44.4 | 61.4 | 63.4 |
| Multi-family (%) | 0.0 | 0.0 | 32.8 | 0.0 | 53.3 | 76.3 | 55.6 | 35.1 | 34.1 |
| Mobile homes (%) | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 3.5 | 2.4 |

Source: Kreiger, R., DOLWD Research & Analysis Section, 2005.

In recent years, multi-family housing development has become more popular in Palmer. In 1996, 1997, and 1999, no multi-family units were developed, but in all other years since 1996 multi-family units have accounted for between 33 to 76 percent of total new units developed on an annual basis.

Table 7 shows the new building permits issued each year by the City for housing, commercial and public buildings, from 1991 through 2004. The total new housing unit permits issued has fluctuated from one year to the next, and as mentioned earlier, the number of new housing units that are multi-family or duplexes versus single family homes has increased.

Table 7A. Building Permits Issued by the City of Palmer, 1991 through 2005

| | SF Homes | Duplexes | Multi-Family | Total New | Comm./Ind. Buildings | Public Buildings | Total Commercial and Public Buildings |
|------|----------|----------|--------------|-----------|----------------------|------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1991 | 2 | - | 0 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 4 |
| 1992 | 34 | - | 0 | 34 | 4 | 10 | 14 |
| 1993 | 8 | - | 0 | 8 | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| 1994 | 50 | - | 1 | 51 | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| 1995 | 46 | - | 0 | 46 | 4 | 0 | 4 |
| 1996 | 40 | - | 0 | 40 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 1997 | 52 | - | 0 | 52 | 7 | 2 | 9 |
| 1998 | 82 | - | 4 | 86 | 4 | 2 | 6 |
| 1999 | 28 | - | 0 | 28 | 2 | 5 | 7 |
| 2000 | 22 | - | 5 | 27 | 6 | 1 | 7 |
| 2001 | 28 | 18 | 8 | 54 | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| 2002 | 24 | 12 | 2 | 38 | 7 | 2 | 9 |
| 2003 | 35 | 7 | 1 | 43 | 8 | 4 | 12 |
| 2004 | 52 | 0 | 3 | 55 | 7 | 3 | 10 |
| 2005 | 48 | 2 | 1 | 51 | 10 | 1 | 11 |

Source: City of Palmer, 2005. Note: The number of building permits issued for duplex is not available prior to 2001.

Table 7B. New Housing Units, 1991 through 2005

| | SF Homes | Duplex Housing Units | Multi-Family Housing Units | Total New Housing Units |
|------|---------------|----------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1991 | 2 | - | 0 | 2 |
| 1992 | 34 | - | 0 | 34 |
| 1993 | 8 | - | 0 | 8 |
| 1994 | 50 | - | 24 | 74 |
| 1995 | 45 | - | | 45 |
| 1996 | 40 | - | 0 | 40 |
| 1997 | 51 | - | 0 | 51 |
| 1998 | 82+1 addition | - | 40 | 123 |
| 1999 | 28 | - | 0 | 28 |
| 2000 | 21+1 addition | - | 21 | 43 |
| 2001 | 28 | 36 | 56 | 120 |
| 2002 | 24 | 24 | 6 | 54 |
| 2003 | 35 | 14 | 6 | 55 |
| 2004 | 52 | 0 | 28 | 80 |
| 2005 | 48 | 4 | 5 | 57 |

Source: City of Palmer, 2006. Note: The number of housing units generated by building permits issued for duplex is not available prior to 2001.

Table 8 shows the City tax revenues from property and sales taxes from 2000 through 2004. The City levies a three percent property tax. Combined property and sales taxes received by the City increased by almost seven percent annually between 2000 and 2004. This increase reflects both the increase in number of units, and the increase in average prices for land and housing.

Table 8. City of Palmer Tax Revenues, 2000 through 2004

| | Property Tax | Sales Tax | Total Taxes Reported |
|------|---------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2000 | \$489,644 | \$2,346,929 | \$2,836,573 |
| 2001 | \$552,329 | \$2,464,268 | \$3,016,597 |
| 2002 | \$583,931 | \$2,760,798 | \$3,344,729 |
| 2003 | \$625,633 | \$2,914,417 | \$3,540,050 |
| 2004 | \$622,879 | \$3,066,089 | \$3,688,968 |

Source: Department of Community and Economic Development. 2000 through 2004. Alaska Taxable: Population and G.O. Bonded Debt, Full Value Determination, Municipal Taxation, Rates and Policies.

Economy

Introduction

The economy of Palmer is closely related to the greater Mat-Su Borough economy. Facts about the remarkable growth of the borough economy are listed below:

- An increase in jobs from 1990 to 2004 from 7000 to over 16,000 jobs.
- 2004 saw the greatest increase in jobs ever in the borough, with 1,207 new jobs created.
- In the decade from 1994 to 2004, jobs increased 67% in the borough vs. 17% in Alaska, and 21% in Anchorage
- The most rapid growth sectors from 2000-2004 were health care and social services, leisure and hospitality, retail trade, construction and government.
- In 2004, 55% of residents held jobs in the Valley, 34% in Anchorage, and 4% in the North Slope.
- Average annual earnings in the borough in 2004 were \$31,012; in Anchorage \$41,484.
- Average single family home prices in the Borough have grown from \$60,000 in 1990, to \$219,500 in the first half of 2005. During this same period the gap between borough and Anchorage prices has steadily decreased. In 1990, the price of the median Anchorage single family homes was double the average borough price; by 2005 this difference had fallen to just 15%.
- Sales tax income in Wasilla and Palmer has increased from \$4.9 million in 1994, to \$13.2 million in 2004. Agricultural production has increased from \$8 million to \$11 million.

Source: State Department of Labor

Palmer's Economy

Agriculture has been the historic base of Palmer's economy. The Matanuska Valley remains Alaska's leading agricultural area, accounting for over one half of the state's agriculture production. Nearby coal and gold mines once played an important part in Palmer's development; however, this role largely ended with mine closures in the 1960s and early 1970's.

The economy of Palmer, like the remainder of the southern Mat-Su, has evolved from its rural traditions into a retail and service-based economy, with a variety of stores and personal services businesses available to meet needs of local residents, and of the numerous institutions and other businesses based in the area.

Table 9 shows the median household income for households in Palmer and in the MSB. In 1999, the median Palmer household income was 11 percent less than the MSB median income.

Table 9. Median Household Incomes, Palmer and MSB

| | Palmer | MSB |
|------|----------|----------|
| 1989 | \$34,940 | \$40,745 |
| 1999 | \$45,571 | \$51,221 |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, SF-3 and Census 1990 STF-3.

In 2000, the poverty threshold for a four person family was \$16,895. The poverty rate for individuals in 1999 for the entire U.S. was 12.6 percent. In Alaska it was 9.4 percent for individuals, one of the lowest rates in the nation.

The percent of people living below the poverty level increased in the MOA and Mat-Su Borough between 1989 and 1999 (Table 10). In 1999, 11.0 percent of all individuals in the Mat-Su Borough were living in poverty as measured by the U.S. Census Bureau as compared to 7.4 percent of the individuals in Anchorage and 9.4 percent of the individuals in the State.

Table 10. Percent of Individuals below the Poverty Level in the Affected Area, 1999 and 1989

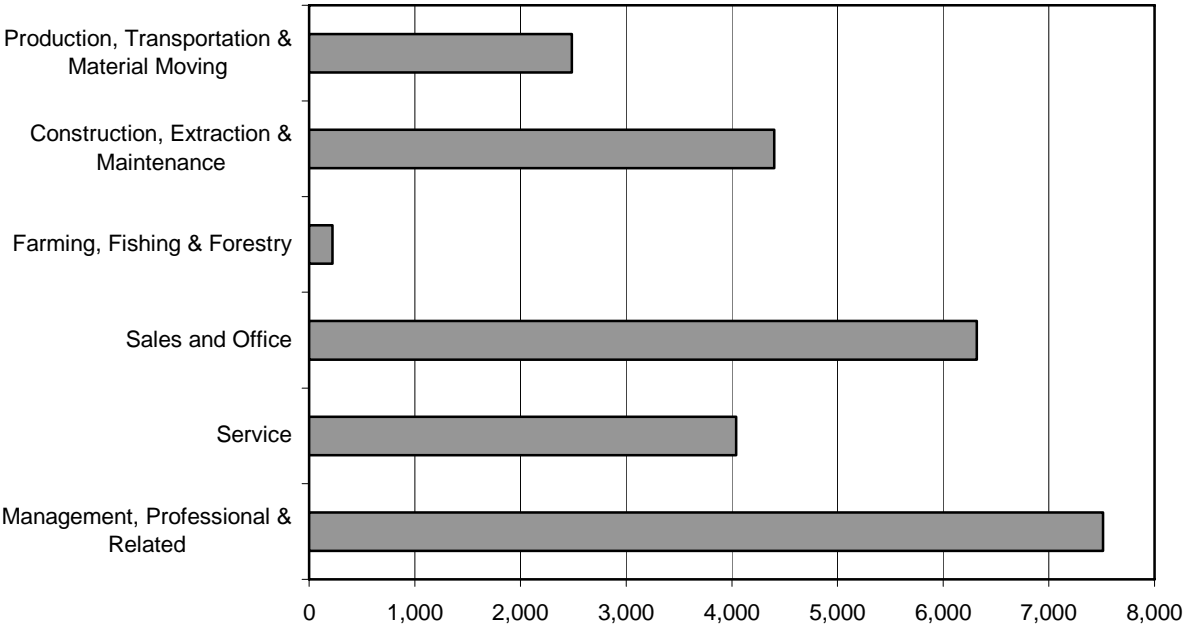
| Area | 1989 | 1999 |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|
| Municipality of Anchorage | 7.07 | 7.35 |
| Matanuska-Susitna Borough | 9.39 | 11.01 |
| MSB Study Area | 8.43 | 10.43 |
| Point MacKenzie | 34.09 | 22.67 |
| City of Palmer | 6.21 | 12.66 |
| City of Wasilla | 10.85 | 9.59 |
| City of Houston | 9.78 | 17.09 |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Tables 11 and 12 on the following page show employment in Palmer and the MSB in 2000. The percentage of employees in different sectors is generally fairly similar in the Borough and the City. Characteristics of these labor forces, and differences between the two areas include:

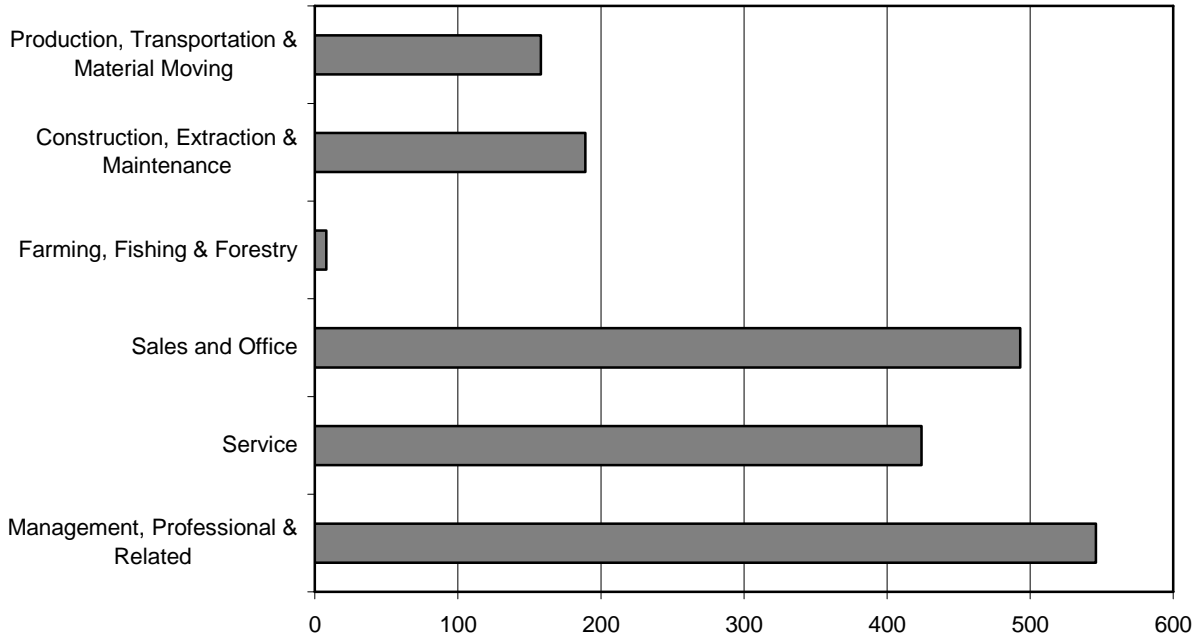
- Palmer has more people employed in occupations related to sales and office, and service - over 23 percent of Palmer workers were employed in service occupations compared to just over 16 percent of all MSB workers.
- Education, health, and social services is the most common industry of employment for Palmer and the MSB, although a greater percentage of the Palmer labor force is employed by this industry than in the MSB (over 25 percent of the Palmer employed workers versus about 21 percent of MSB workers)
- Palmer has a high percentage of government workers, with almost 25 percent of its employed labor force working in government positions.
- In Palmer, private wage and salary workers accounted for 65 percent of total workers compared to 68 percent in the Mat-Su Borough.
- Self-employed workers make up about 10 percent in both Palmer and the Mat-Su Borough, with the Mat-Su Borough having just slightly more.

Table 11A. Employment by Occupation, Matanuska-Susitna Borough, 2000



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census 2000, DP-3.

Table 11B. Employment by Occupation, City of Palmer, 2000



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census 2000, DP-3.

Table 12. Class of Worker in Palmer and the MSB, 2000

| | Palmer | | MSB | |
|--|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| Private Wage and Salary Workers | 1,183 | 65.1% | 16,925 | 67.8% |
| Government Workers | 453 | 24.9% | 5,186 | 20.8% |
| Self-employed Workers in Own Not Incorporated Business | 182 | 10.0% | 2,734 | 10.9% |
| Unpaid Family Workers | 0 | 0.0% | 136 | 0.5% |

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. Census 2000, DP-3 and SF-3

Table 13 shows estimated population thresholds calculated for commercial activities. These thresholds estimate the population needed to sustain various commercial sectors that will likely develop in Palmer and the Mat-Su Borough as their populations continue to grow.

Table 13. Estimated Population Thresholds for Commercial Sectors in the MSB, 2005

| Commercial Sector | Estimated Population Threshold |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Gasoline Stations | 3,827 |
| Grocery Store | 6,949 |
| General Merchandise Stores | 16,503 |
| Hardware Stores | 26,405 |
| Department Stores | 37,722 |
| Consumer Lending | 44,009 |
| Home Centers | 52,810 |
| Investment Banking & Securities Dealing | 88,017 |

Source: Northern Economics Inc., 2005

Growth Trends

Future economic development in the City of Palmer will continue to be closely correlated to economic growth in the Mat-Su Borough as a whole. Future population growth in turn will be driven by growth in economic activity. In simple terms, population growth projections are merely the reflection of the assumption that the state's economy will grow.

The University of Alaska's Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER), projects employment in the Mat-Su Borough will grow on average of 3.9 percent annually, and population at 3.3 percent. ISER population forecasts are shown in Table 14³. According to ISER, the growth rates for employment, population will be more pronounced in the Borough and Palmer when the state's economy is expanding, and the Borough is projected to account for an increasing share of total statewide jobs and income.

Table 14. Palmer and Matanuska-Susitna Population Projections to 2015

| Year | Palmer | Mat-Su |
|------|--------|---------|
| 2000 | 4,533 | 59,322 |
| 2001 | 4,581 | 61,704 |
| 2002 | 4,840 | 64,291 |
| 2003 | 5,267 | 67,526 |
| 2004 | 5,197 | 70,148 |
| 2005 | 5,363 | 71,300 |
| 2006 | 5,591 | 74,300 |
| 2007 | 5,850 | 77,700 |
| 2008 | 6,169 | 81,900 |
| 2009 | 6,435 | 85,400 |
| 2010 | 6,670 | 88,500 |
| 2011 | 6,951 | 92,200 |
| 2012 | 7,240 | 96,000 |
| 2013 | 7,521 | 99,700 |
| 2014 | 7,817 | 103,600 |
| 2015 | 8,129 | 107,700 |

Source: Northern Economics, Inc. using data from ISER "Economic Projections for Alaska and Southern Railbelt 2004-2030" and the Alaska Department of Labor.

³ Estimates for Palmer and Mat-Su Borough populations from 2000 to 2004 are from the Alaska Department of Labor & Workforce Development. Projections for population growth in Palmer are only for the population within existing City boundaries. Population projections would need to be modified if City boundaries grow through annexation. Population estimates for the Mat-Su Borough from 2005 to 2015 use the high case projection from the UAA Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER). High case ISER projections were used because the actual population for 2004, as measured by the DOL, has already risen above ISER's projected population growth for the same year. (ISER's projections were prepared prior to 2004). Given that actual population in 2004 for the Mat-Su Borough exceeded the high case projections, population projections for Palmer were based on high case.

Growth projections are always tenuous because they are derived from assumptions based on past history. Several very different growth scenarios could plausibly unfold for Palmer and the borough. One future is a continuation of the growth experienced over recent decades. The ISER projections depict that future, based on the assumption that the state economy will continue to grow, and the borough economy will continue to mature.

It is worth considering, however, that Alaska's economy largely rests on a narrow base of petroleum revenues and federal spending, neither of which are certain. As was shown in the late 1980's, big declines in oil revenues quickly lead to big declines in the entire State economy. Oil production in Alaska is steadily falling, oil prices are currently very high, major new oil and gas projects are on Alaska's horizon; how these different trends will play out is not clear. Federal spending is certain to drop when Senator Ted Stevens steps down from his position in Congress. ISER's study of this issue concluded federal spending would fall at least 10-20% after Senator Stevens leaves office. Alaska currently receives the highest per capita federal spending of any state in the nation, and federal dollars currently account for roughly one third of State's basic economy.

Another consideration in projecting growth is a look at the relationship between the Borough and State economies. In the last 20 years, fluctuations in the State economy tend to be more pronounced in areas like the Mat-Su Borough. Boom times in the Borough have been greater than the rest of the state and the busts were deeper.

It is important to understand that while the State economy has matured and diversified, with growth in tourism, air cargo and mining, Alaska remains particularly vulnerable to economic shocks. Palmer needs to plan for growth, and there are good reasons to expect this growth will continue. At the same time, the community needs to be aware that growth rates could quickly slow or reverse. The boom and bust of Alaskan economic life requires City governments to be both optimistic and realistic, and to be able to respond to change.

Housing Characteristics

This section describes housing characteristics for the City of Palmer. As a point of comparison, housing information is also presented for the Mat-Su Borough. This information is provided as background on the changes and trends that have shaped the city and community of Palmer and it serves as a starting point for envisioning Palmer's future land uses. The section also includes information on assessed valuation.

Table 15 shows the number of housing units for the City of Palmer and the Mat-Su Borough in 1990 and 2000. Housing units increased by three percent annually in the Mat-Su Borough between 1990 and 2000, growing from 20,953 housing units in 1990, to 27,329 housing units in 2000, while the number of housing units in the City of Palmer increased slightly more quickly- growing by 3.2 percent annually growing from 1,169 housing units in 1990 to 1,555 housing units in 2000.

The percent of vacant housing units in Palmer dropped by almost two-thirds from 1990 to 2000. The percent of vacant units also decreased in the Mat-Su Borough, but not as dramatically, as many of these homes are seasonal or recreational homes so they are occasional rather than permanent residences.

Table 15. Number of Housing Units, 1990 and 2000

| | MSB | | City of Palmer | |
|------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------|
| | 1990 | 2000 | 1990 | 2000 |
| Total Housing Units | 20,953 | 27,329 | 1,169 | 1,555 |
| Annual Percent Change | | 3.0% | | 3.2% |
| Number of Vacant Units | 7,559 | 6,773 | 171 | 83 |
| Vacancy Rate | 36.1% | 24.8% | 14.6% | 5.3% |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005.

Table 16 groups housing units by type or by number of units per structure, showing the number of units that are single family homes versus multi-family or multi-unit structures, and apartment buildings for 1990 and 2000. Mobile homes and trailers are also included. Single family homes are by far the most common type of residency in the borough (almost 83% in 2000) and in Palmer (almost 74% in 2000). However, there are also large pockets of multi-family housing in the City; 24% of Palmer's housing units are multi-family units. In 2000, 122 units existed in buildings that contained twenty to forty-nine units. In the Mat-Su Borough in general multi-family units account for just below 10 percent of all units.

Table 16. Number of Housing Units per Structure, 1990 and 2000

| | MSB | | Palmer | | Wasilla | |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| | 1990 | 2000 | 1990 | 2000 | 1990 | 2000 |
| Total units | 20,953 | 27,329 | 1,169 | 1,593 | 1,723 | 2,118 |
| Single family | 16,672 | 22,560 | 829 | 1,177 | 893 | 1,202 |
| Two units | 586 | 735 | 46 | 22 | 160 | 178 |
| Three to four units | 904 | 1,112 | 35 | 87 | 373 | 425 |
| Five to nine units | 429 | 517 | 93 | 122 | 110 | 128 |
| Ten to nineteen units | 197 | 142 | 81 | 30 | 51 | 62 |
| Twenty to forty-nine units | 66 | 206 | 41 | 122 | 0 | 53 |
| Fifty and more units | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Mobile home or trailer | 1,822 | 1,812 | 34 | 33 | 114 | 57 |
| Other | 277 | 245 | 10 | 0 | 22 | 13 |
| Percent single family | 79.60% | 82.50% | 70.90% | 73.90% | 51.8% | 56.8% |
| Percent multi-family units | 10.40% | 9.90% | 25.30% | 24.00% | 40.3% | 39.9% |
| % mobile home or trailer | 8.70% | 6.60% | 2.90% | 2.10% | 7.9% | 3.3% |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005.

The percentage of housing units occupied by owners increased in both the Mat-Su Borough and the City of Palmer (see Table 17). In 1990, less than 64 percent of housing units in Mat-Su Borough were owner occupied; by 2000 almost 79 percent of housing units were owner occupied. Overall, the Mat-Su Borough had the highest homeowner occupancy rate of any area in Alaska over the past decade. In Palmer, the percentage of homes owner-occupied increased from just over 85 percent in 1990 to almost 95 percent in 2000.

Table 17. Housing Tenure, 1990 and 2000

| | MSB | | Palmer | |
|---|-------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| | 1990 | 2000 | 1990 | 2000 |
| Percent of total housing units occupied | 63.9% | 75.2% | 85.4% | 94.7% |
| Occupied housing units | 13,394 | 20,556 | 998 | 1,513 |
| Percent owner occupied | 73.6% | 78.9% | 58.1% | 64.7% |
| Percent renter occupied | 26.4% | 21.1% | 41.9% | 35.3% |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005.

Table 18 describes median home values, median monthly owner costs (with a home mortgage), median monthly owner costs as a percent of household income (with a mortgage), and median rent for the Mat-Su Borough and Palmer. Median values describe the mid-point or the value that lies at the 50 percent level, with 50 percent of the values below the median value and 50 percent of the values above the median value. The 1990 dollars have been adjusted to 2000 dollars using the Anchorage consumer price index (DOLWD) Research & Analysis, 2005).

The median inflation-adjusted value for owner-occupied housing units grew by 4.5 percent annually, while the median inflation-adjusted value for the Mat-Su Borough increased by 3.6 percent annually. Adjusted median monthly owner costs for housing units with a mortgage in the Mat-Su Borough, actually decreased by .3 percent annually between 1990 and 2000, while adjusted median monthly owner costs for housing units with a mortgage in Palmer increased by .8 percent annually.

In Palmer, the percentage of household income needed to cover median monthly owner costs increased from 22.1 percent in 1990 to 24.7 percent of monthly income in 2000, in the City of Palmer.

Table 18. Median Value and Median Monthly Costs for Housing Units

| | MSB | | Palmer | |
|---|-------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| | 1990 | 2000 | 1990 | 2000 |
| Median value of owner-occupied housing units | \$91,227 | \$125,800 | \$69,088 | \$102,600 |
| Median monthly owner costs for housing units with a mortgage | \$1,145 | \$1,107 | \$898 | \$969 |
| Median monthly owner costs as a percentage of 1999 household income for housing units with a mortgage | 21.8 | 22.0 | 22.1 | 24.7 |
| Median contract rent for renter-occupied housing units | \$646 | \$636 | \$539 | \$557 |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005. Note: All dollar values have been adjusted to 2004 dollars using the Anchorage consumer price index (DOLWD Research & Analysis, 2005).

Summary

Taken together, the set of facts presented in this chapter support the conclusions listed below.

- Palmer and surrounding areas have and continue to grow at a remarkable rate. This reality is evident after even a short visit to area
- The forces driving this growth are still in effect. These include an attractive natural setting, a state economy that continues to expand, a local economy that is maturing and offers increasing employment opportunities, and a large supply of moderate priced land and homes. It should be noted, however, that the price of Palmer area land and housing is rising relative to Anchorage.
- The southern Mat-Su, and particularly Palmer, is “shedding its skin.” Years of quiet rural life are giving way to low density suburban development, and most recently, a more urban character of growth, including accelerated percentages of higher density housing. The region is evolving from its dominate role as a bedroom community of Anchorage, to an increasingly independent area, offering commercial and institutional services and employment within Borough boundaries.
- There are good reasons to imagine these trends will continue, and the City needs to plan to accommodate the challenges and opportunities tied to this growth. At the same time, Alaska’s economy remains prone to booms and busts. The community must steer a prudent path that allows it to meet the needs of a growing population, but also to remain healthy if growth slows or stops.

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CHAPTER 3 COMMUNITY VISION

Vision Summary

Keep Palmer a vital community, a place that seeks opportunities for growth, and retains what is best about Palmer's history and traditions.

Introduction

Chapter 2 describes the rapid growth occurring in Palmer and surrounding areas, and the resulting issues, opportunities and challenges facing the community. Chapters 4-8 present goals and strategies to respond to these issues. This Chapter presents the foundation to those goals – a broad vision for the future of Palmer. This material comes from the 1999 Plan and the comments received from the community in the preparation of this updated Plan. The Chapter includes representative comments made by the public during community meetings.



Broad Goals to Achieve Community Vision

Continue to Ensure the City of Palmer meets its fundamental obligations – that is Provision of Water and Sewer, Police and Fire, Roads

- “Palmer is destined to grow, and will probably grow rapidly. While flowers, parks, views are important, our biggest issues will be roads, water and sewer, police and fire. The faster we grow the more challenging those issues will be. That’s where the great majority of the City budget goes today, and making sure we do a good job providing those services will be our priority in the future.”

Retain and Strengthen Palmer’s “Small Town America” Character

- Keep and enhance the characteristics that make Palmer a distinctive community. Qualities that define Palmer’s character today to strengthened in the future include:
 - “A small town with the spirit of a small mid-western farming community”... “and a unique Alaska flavor”
 - A strong sense of community – “people know each other,” “a friendly community, a good place to raise a family”
 - “A mix of young and older residents, with facilities available to both”
 - A tradition of progressive business, research and innovation



- Easy access to parks, trails, recreational opportunities - “need more things for kids to do – a skate board park, movie theater, ice-skating rink and ice cream shop”
- A remarkable base of volunteers
- Quality schools
- Celebrate Palmer’s history and traditions, including downtown and the community’s historic buildings. Do a better job of telling the story of Palmer, including the agricultural colony and farm life, mining and rail development, the tradition of city planning, and the history of practical, frontier innovation.

Improve the Local Economy, Expand Local Business

- Work to attract well-paying professional jobs, for example, engineering, science, health care, and institutional jobs - “a center for high-tech, low-impact jobs.”
- Provide land for commercial growth. Help make Palmer a more self-sufficient community, “where more of the goods and services residents want are available in town.”
- Increase local economic opportunities, especially for youth, “so kids can grow up and find a good job in Palmer.”
- Take advantage of Palmer’s distinctive history and character as an “economic engine” to draw visitors, to retain and attract residents, and support local businesses, “capitalize on character.”



Strengthen Downtown Palmer

- Work so downtown Palmer is a more economically vital area, and remains the clear center of Palmer public life. Characteristics of downtown should include those listed below.
 - Space for growth – “more commercial space, better parking”
 - Historic character – “keep historic buildings and small houses”
 - Compact and easy to walk around – “fix problem intersections, keep sidewalks clear”
 - Mix of uses, residential and commercial
 - More evening activity – “we need more nightlife: eclectic restaurants, brew pubs, theaters”
 - Improved appearance and cleanliness of houses, businesses and landscaping
 - Predominance of locally-owned businesses
 - Open space and great views
 - A lively cultural scene, a place “where you can go to a play, then walk to a nice restaurant”

Attract Visitors by Promoting and Enhancing what is Unique about Palmer



- Encourage new attractions to draw people off the Glenn Highway. “We need new businesses, more things for people to do.”
- Emphasize attractions linked to community traditions: “Quilting, crafts, farmers market, public areas, farming history, water tower, Matanuska Maid, large vegetables, gardens, garden tour, walking tour.”
- Improve destination marketing.
- Improve town entries, signage and way-finding information.

Encourage High Quality, Attractive Development with Ready Access to Parks and Green Space

- Encourage high-quality, attractive buildings and site development. “Protect views.” “Buildings should be as distinctive as our mountains.” Be a “city of amenities.”



- Provide ready access to parks, trails, and open space.
- Preserve sense of views, open space and trees. “Require landscaping” “Keep the park-like feeling.”
- Ensure Palmer has clear boundaries. “An edge to town, so you can tell when you’ve arrived.”
- Strengthen zoning. Push for “Consistently high quality buildings,” and “Open space, paths and sidewalks in subdivisions.”

Improve Connections Within and Out of Town, by Road, Trail and Transit

- Provide a well-planned, efficient system of roads and trails so it is easy, safe and enjoyable to move around Palmer.
- Maintain a high quality airport.
- Ensure Palmer remains a pedestrian-friendly town.
- Improve trail and sidewalk connections between downtown and out-of-town recreation areas and rural areas.



- Continue to bring the Alaska Railroad train into town for events. Retain the option for future commuter rail service.

Guide Community Growth

- Respect private property rights. Find a practical balance between community policies that guide growth and the benefits of allowing individuals and businesses to develop properties as they see fit. Examples of representative views on this subject are listed below.

- “Facilitate quality development within guidelines, don’t stop growth.”
- “Need flexibility.”



- “Too much regulation and a business will fail.”
- “Create incentives for developers to comply with development guidelines.”
- “Palmer should be functional and beautiful.”

- Encourage commercial growth that generates revenues needed to improve widely-desired services and facilities, from better sidewalks and roads, to improved cultural facilities.

- Sustain Palmer’s tradition of fiscal responsibility. Encourage balanced residential and commercial development.
- Set priorities among competing demands for new City services and programs. Match needs and desires with available resources.

CHAPTER 4 PUBLIC SERVICES, FACILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE

Overview



The City of Palmer is responsible for providing essential services to the Palmer community. The City has been very successful in this role; Palmer has a wide array of high quality, well managed community services. This chapter outlines actions needed to maintain this high standard as the City grows and changes into the future. The first goal in this chapter focuses on actions to provide and improve these essential services, including sewer, water, police, fire, solid waste, maintenance, library and City administration. The second goal identifies a range of other actions that can help make Palmer a

more vibrant, successful community. By including this goal, the City expresses support for these improvements, while recognizing that much of the responsibility for these actions is outside the City's primary responsibilities. Topics addressed under this second goal include improving youth and adult recreation, performing and cultural arts, services to seniors, services to visitors, and services and infrastructure that support institutional development. The third goal identifies strategies for the City to work with partners to provide needed community services in Palmer.

This document identifies general goals for future improvements. Final decisions on if and when such improvements are made will be determined by the City Council, considering available funding, competing needs and other considerations. And as stated above, responsibility to achieve the goals in this chapter, particularly the second goal, does not solely lie with the City of Palmer. As with any community, it is the active participation, support, and motivation of individuals, businesses, non-profit and other organizations that creates a home for many generations to enjoy.

Summary of Goals

GOAL 1: Provide and improve essential city services. Respond to current needs and plan for future demand.

GOAL 2: Work with community partners to help provide other important community services, such as youth and adult recreation, performing and cultural arts, services to seniors, services to visitors, and services and infrastructure that support institutional development.

GOAL 3: Expand the capacity of the community as a whole to provide community services and facilities. Encourage and support other organizations and individuals to develop community services such as those identified under Goal 2 in this chapter.

Goals and Objectives for Public Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure

GOAL I: Provide and improve essential city services. Respond to current needs and plan for future demand.

INTRODUCTION

Cities like Palmer provide a wide range of services. The services addressed under this goal, including police, fire, water and sewer, along with the local road system, are the core of the City's responsibilities. These services tend to be taken for granted, at least until there is a problem. In reality, these services constitute the City's most important responsibilities, and make up the largest component of the City's budget. Maintaining the high level of service people have come to expect from these services is the most important challenge facing the community, particularly as the community continues to grow and City boundaries expand.

Many of the services provided by the City require specific, in-depth planning documents. The water and sewer utilities and the City Municipal Airport have separate plans. Preparation of a formal plan for storm water drainage is proposed in this chapter. The Police and Fire Department undertake internal planning processes which are reviewed by the administration and the City Council on an annual basis. As a result, this comprehensive plan provides an only an overview of these more detailed, service-specific planning documents.

Objective A: POLICE – Provide adequate police services to meet existing demand and anticipated future demands.

CURRENT STATUS

Palmer has a full service municipal police department located in the public safety building at South Valley Way and East Dogwood Street in Palmer. Palmer and Wasilla each have their own municipal police departments while the Alaska State Troopers provide law enforcement in adjoining areas of the Mat-Su Borough.

The Mat-Su region's State Trooper detachment is based in Palmer and has a lease agreement with the City of Palmer to house "B" Detachment. In addition to the State Troopers, and the State's correctional and detention facilities, the State District Court House, District Attorney's office, probation offices, Public Defenders office, and Juvenile Detention Facility are all located in Palmer. The State's correction facility in Sutton is slated for possible expansion. These factors make the City an important regional center for the criminal justice system.

Palmer's crime rate is relatively low. Crimes against property, traffic offenses, domestic disturbances, agency assists, juvenile activity, and drug-related offenses are the leading issues dealt with by the department.

The Palmer Police Department employs 29 people. There are 13 sworn officers, including nine Patrol Officers, one grant-funded position Drug Investigator, two Sergeants, one Lieutenant, and the Chief. Support personnel include an Administrative Assistant, Property and Evidence Records



Technician, and Janitor. Dispatch services have thirteen positions: a Dispatch Supervisor and twelve Dispatchers. The department's dispatchers provide the Valley's primary public safety answering point for the Mat-Su Borough 911 system and dispatch service for the Palmer Police Department, the Palmer Fire Department, and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough's fire and EMS. Incoming 911 calls for the City of Wasilla and the Alaska State Troopers are transferred from Palmer to the "Mat-Comm" dispatch facility in Wasilla.

About one-third of the total city budget is for police services. The 2005 city budget includes \$2,516,053 for the Police Department. Of this amount, one full-time position is funded through a federal grant of \$52,000. The Borough's contribution for dispatch services is \$655,511.

NEAR-TERM PRIORITIES

Each year the Palmer Police Department conducts a resource allocation study. In 2004 the Department also conducted an internal staffing study. These reports conclude that considering the community service area, roadways served, and the number of cases, and considering the continued growth in the area, it will be increasingly difficult to provide the existing level of service at current staff levels. These reports also point to the need for creation of a Records Management System to improve the Department's effectiveness in storing and retrieving its records.

LONG-TERM NEEDS

Future expansion of the City's boundaries, as well as population growth, will expand demands for police services. Additional personnel will be needed to meet the demands of a larger city. The city is currently assessing the economic impact of possible annexation alternatives and how annexation may affect staffing levels. The specific number of additional officers required will be a function of the future size and population of the city.

The current building which houses the Palmer Police Department and the State Troopers headquarters is at capacity. As staff levels for the Palmer Police and Troopers increase both will need additional space. Previously, the State Troopers' Wildlife Protection staff was also located in the building, but moved due to space restrictions. Locating the Palmer Police Department, the State Troopers, and the State Troopers' Wildlife Protection in the same building would coordinate efforts, increase efficiency and is judged highly desirable. Renovating the existing building is more costly than constructing a new facility. While resources are not currently available to construct a new building, land should be identified for a new location that is centrally located, with excellent ingress and egress.

The State Troopers are currently contracting for additional space west of Wasilla and will consolidate personnel from their Big Lake annex to that one location. The City should continue to work with the Department of Public Safety to address increased space needs on the east side of the Borough. *See Goal 3 in the Land Use Chapter.*

Objective B: FIRE & EMERGENCY SERVICES – Provide adequate fire protection measures and services in Palmer to respond to current and future anticipated emergency service needs.

CURRENT STATUS

Palmer Emergency Services includes the fire department and rescue services, serving the City of Palmer and surrounding area. Through a contract with the Mat-Su Borough, funding is provided for fire service and rescue in the Greater Palmer Consolidated Fire Service Area. This service area

covers about 72 square miles and has approximately 15,000 people who rely on fire and rescue services 24-hours a day. The system includes a full-time Chief, a Fire Training Officer and a large group of trained volunteers. The City has achieved a fire insurance rating (ISO) of four, resulting in significant savings in the cost of home insurance. Property outside the City with no access to fire hydrants has an ISO rating of six.



Emergency Services manages five different fire stations and the city fire training center as well as 20 vehicles and apparatus. The 2005 budget for Emergency Services is \$476,984. The department responded to 282 calls in 2003 and 286 in 2004. Collectively police, fire and emergency services account for 45% of the total City budget.

Ambulance service in the City of Palmer is provided by the Mat-Su Borough.

NEAR-TERM PRIORITIES

Many of the buildings in the downtown core area have historic value to the community and share common walls. This condition leads to concern that fire could spread quickly throughout the downtown core. Most of the buildings do not have overhead sprinkler systems, although they are served by four-inch water lines. Reducing the possibility of widespread fire in these buildings is the Fire Department's highest priority.

LONG-TERM NEEDS

The priority long-term need is for greater fire-fighting capacity, in terms of fire stations, equipment and personnel. The timing and magnitude of this need will be driven by population growth and increases in the fire service area. In 2004, the fire department responded to 286 calls. In 2005, the department estimated it responded to approximately 300 calls.

The department currently relies entirely on volunteers to respond to calls. This approach to the provision of fire protection services works because Palmer is relatively concentrated; it has built up and paid for a water system over 50 years, and because of the availability of a well trained, dedicated group of volunteers. The City is unlikely to be able to provide this same level of service at the same cost in areas outside current city boundaries. These areas, where densities are generally lower, and infrastructure is limited, face the choice of either higher costs or a lower level of service.

As it grows, the City needs to closely examine options to meet the challenges of providing quality, affordable fire protection. In the next five to ten years a new approach may be needed. Options include: adding paid staff to supplement the volunteer core, charging more for fire service, setting up different districts with varying levels of service, and possibly obtaining service from other providers, e.g., the Borough.

Serving a larger area and increased populations will require new fire stations and equipment. The estimated cost of a fire station is about \$1,000,000. Trucks cost about \$250,000 - \$300,000 each. Commercial growth may require additional equipment to protect structures over 35 feet in height. ISO ratings require one engine per mile and half service area range, and one ladder truck per two mile range (if there are buildings over 35 feet high). Tankers, which carry water to a fire site, are necessary when an area does not have adequate water lines and hydrants. Personnel requirements for a fire station include four positions minimum – available 24 hours per day and seven days per week.

The fire department's training facilities are adequate for the foreseeable ten years. Population growth and any future expansion to the fire service area are both considerations for long-term fire service planning. Other long-term considerations include infrastructure planning for waterlines, hydrants and water sources.

Objective C: LIBRARY – Provide adequate facilities and services to meet current and anticipated future demand for library services in the City of Palmer.

CURRENT STATUS

The Palmer Public Library is a City facility which serves city and borough residents under an agreement with the Mat-Su Borough. The library serves a population of approximately 18,000, and sees approximately 89,000 people each year. The Palmer Public Library, the Wasilla Library and five borough libraries comprise the Matanuska-Susitna Library Network (MSLN). The MSLN maintains



a shared library automation system and catalog, making it easier for all borough residents to have access to materials throughout the borough. The library is also able to connect with other systems around the state through the Internet.

The City library building is about 11,500 square feet and contains approximately 50,000 volumes. The Library staff consists of a Library Director, a half time Administrative Assistant, a Library Systems Manager, two Library Assistants, and a Library Services Coordinator. There are also five part-time Library Technicians. Paid staff is supplemented by over forty volunteers who worked over 1,000 hours in 2004.

The library contains a multimedia collection, a historical archive and eight public computer terminals with Internet access. The Library is also a wireless internet access site.

Resources to support the library come from city, borough and state funding, and local donations. The 2005 library budget is \$571,778.

NEAR-TERM PRIORITIES

The library has experienced significant growth in use in the past four and one half years. The library is looking at options to meet growing demand, including adding more staff and more space. A conceptual design was recently completed for adding 5,000–7,000 square feet to the existing building. Additional near term needs of the library include improved wiring for computers, more electrical service, and additional Internet terminals. The Palmer Library currently processes all of its own materials

LONG-TERM NEEDS

The current expansion plans for the library are intended to provide capacity to serve projected demand for the next ten years. After ten years, another expansion of the library may be warranted. In addition, as technologies continue to change, the library will need to respond to those demands.

The library is ideally located in the center of downtown. The library sits on a parcel backed by a City park that extends to the Borough headquarters building. Future plans for downtown and this City

Park property should recognize the benefits of keeping the library in its current location, and reserve space for possible future library expansion, including additional parking.

Objective D: SEWER AND WATER – Provide adequate infrastructure and facilities and services to meet current and anticipated future demands for water and sewer services in the City of Palmer.

CURRENT STATUS

The City of Palmer has operated well-planned water and sewer systems since the early 1960s. The City water and sewer service district, shown on the **Water & Sewer Service District** map in the Land Use chapter, extends well beyond the existing City boundaries. The city's water utility system consists of a buried pipe distribution system, below ground and above ground water storage reservoirs, and three water production wells. The class "A" system distributes approximately 700,000 gallons per day (gpd) of chlorinated and fluoridated water to its customers. When compared to other Alaska communities Palmer has many advantages including an abundance of excellent quality groundwater at relatively shallow depths, a water distribution system mostly ringed by a large diameter piping loop which insures excellent pressure, and hills northwest of the city that provide an ideal location at proper elevations for reservoirs.

Components of the water utility system include over 300,000 lineal feet of water piping, a 238,000-gallon underground storage reservoir, two above-ground reservoirs with a combined capacity to hold 1,550,000 gallons, and three primary production wells. Well 1 has a sustained capacity of 650 gallons per minute (gpm), and Wells 4 and 5 each have sustained flow rates of 1,200 gpm. There are 349 operating fire hydrants.

The city meters over 310 commercial accounts and about 1,366 residential customers. The department also continues to replace old water meters, and conducts routine monitoring and flushing programs. Many of the older steel water mains have been replaced over the last five years.

The City's existing sanitary sewer system consists of a piped collection system supplemented by three lift stations and aerated lagoon treatment system comprised of three ponds, a headworks facility, an ultraviolet (UV) disinfection facility and a sludge removal, drying and disposal facility. The City's treatment facility is located approximately 3 miles south of downtown (outside of City boundaries). Effluent is discharged to the Matanuska River under conditions of a discharge permit issued by the Environmental Protection Agency.

A 24-inch sewer pipe runs from the City to the treatment facility. The 1999 Water and Wastewater System Utility Plan states the total capacity of the existing collection system is 1,100,000 gpd without flow equalization. The existing 24-inch pipe from Palmer to the treatment lagoons has a maximum hourly flow capacity of 4,500 gpm and a maximum average daily flow of 1,100,000 gpd.

Land uses in the area of the sewer treatment system are agricultural and large lot residential with little conflicts noted. The system is used at about 66% of capacity. The collection system has about 26 miles of sanitary sewer lines. The plant location is a cause for some concern as the Matanuska River has a recent history of bank erosion (1980's). The lagoon is near an area of erosion and may eventually need to be relocated or protected by the purchase of upstream property.

The City is currently extending water and sewer lines along the Glenn Highway to the new Matanuska Regional Medical Center approximately seven miles southwest of the city. While the Medical Center is the only customer at this time, it is expected that landowners along the route will want to tap into the southwest utility extension

NEAR-TERM PRIORITIES – WATER AND SEWER

The 1999 Water and Wastewater Plan provides an overview for the city's future water and sewer services. The plan was supplemented by the 2004 Preliminary Engineering Report for the Southwest Palmer Service Area Utility Extensions. These documents provide the framework for utility expansions.

The City of Palmer will likely be asked to provide water and sewer service to some areas being converted to developed uses on land currently outside city limits. As this occurs, water and sewer lines will need to be constructed linking these areas with the City system.

In some instances, development that would prefer to have water and sewer service, for example a new subdivision, takes place in locations away from the existing water and sewer system. In these cases, extending service is too expensive for the developer to cover the cost. The City should explore options to extend service in these instances.

LONG-TERM – SEWER

Palmer's existing treatment facility operates at about 66% of capacity. Current projections show the existing system has capacity to meet the growth expected over the next five to ten years. However the possibility of large scale subdivisions and other users along the southwest extension could significantly advance the timing of system capacity improvements. The City should monitor flows to, and out-put from, the sewage treatment facility on a regular basis. Several options are available to expand treatment capacity. One is to secure approximately 20 acres for an additional treatment lagoon; others include upgrading the capacity of certain elements of the exiting system, or constructing a new treatment facility that does not utilize large lagoons.

The existing city sewer system treats waste over a 42-day period, using a low-intensity lagoon system. As demand for treatment continues to grow, the city will ultimately need to construct a new plant, at a cost of \$20-30 million, able to treat waste in approximately seven days. The need to jump to this next level of capacity will be driven by the rate of growth in Palmer and surrounding areas, including the possibility of serving developing areas at or beyond the present utility service area boundary.

To use treatment facilities as efficiently as possible, the city will work with larger users to equalize flows. By managing peak flows, treatment needs can be met with a lower capacity plant and smaller diameter sewer mains. The City has paid developers for over-sizing utility pipes during new subdivision construction where utilities extended through the subdivisions can be extended beyond the subdivision by others. This is a cost effective way to extend utility service and this practice should continue where appropriate.

When sanitary sewer lines are put on section lines, they will be a minimum of 24" in diameter. When lines are put on half -section lines, they will be a minimum of 18" in diameter. All others will be a minimum of 8" in diameter.

LONG-TERM – WATER

The Palmer area has significant subsurface water resources and water supply is not likely to be a constraint in the future.

In coming years, the city is likely to be called upon to expand water service into new growth areas. The specific locations and types of growth outside of city limits are not known, and cannot be controlled by the city. However, based on current growth trends, the city water system will need to be expanded in the future into at least two areas.

- Inner Springer Road area – a loop water main, likely in the next five years, with capital costs of approximately \$5 million.
- Area north of new Regional Hospital – water service plus reservoir, likely required in the next 10 years, estimated capital costs \$10 million

Water lines on section lines will be a minimum of 16" in diameter. When water lines are put on half-section lines, they will be a minimum of 12" in diameter. All other lines will be a minimum of 8" in diameter. The City has paid developers for over-sizing utility pipes during new subdivision construction where utilities extended through the subdivisions can be extended beyond the subdivision by others. This is a cost effective way to extend utility service and this practice should continue where appropriate.

Objective E: STORM WATER CONTROL – Provide for current and future needs. Investigate options for expanding the quality and extent of storm water control (increasingly important as development and EPA requirements increase).

CURRENT STATUS

The City takes care of 24 miles of storm sewer lines and 265 catch basins. The state maintains the storm drainage system along the Glenn Highway. Storm drainage planning is included in new subdivision design. Older areas have had storm drains installed as the streets are upgraded through a program to alleviate flooding problems, conducted from 1979 to 1983. The older areas which received storm sewers are south of Eagle Street. Storm drainage from north of Arctic Avenue and east of the Glenn Highway is routed to the Matanuska River through a storm sewer. The most significant storm drainage problems occur during breakup when frozen ground and ice accumulation block runoff and restrict infiltration.

NEAR-TERM PRIORITIES

Continue to maintain and operate the existing stormwater system. Increased construction in the City has started to significantly impact the natural flow of storm water. The City should develop storm water design criteria for large parcel development to address this specific issue. Additionally, the City should develop a long range plan for storm water drainage to foster development and meet increasing federal and state water quality standards. The plan should set a strategy for most efficiently meeting city stormwater needs, incorporating on-site infiltration when possible.

LONG-TERM

Currently there are significant areas of the city not served by storm drains. As the amount and intensity of development increases, the percentage of community covered by impervious surfaces will grow and the city will need to develop new, more active stormwater management strategies.

Much of the community is relatively flat. As a result, installing stormwater lines typically requires deep excavation and is very costly. The preferred alternative strategy is to use on-site stormwater infiltration management techniques. Under this approach, future subdivisions and other large development projects will retain open space within their boundaries for stormwater collection and infiltration. In addition, development will need to limit impervious areas such as paved driveways and paths to reduce the quantity of runoff and provide more areas for infiltration. Increased reliance

on on-site management of storm water is consistent with the general intent of federal water quality standards, focused on reducing “non-point” source pollution. Open space areas for stormwater infiltration could double as space for recreation, community gardens and similar amenities.

Objective F: PALMER CITY AIRPORT – Continue to improve the infrastructure and status of the City airport to foster and support development as an important regional airport facility.

CURRENT STATUS

The City operates a major regional airport, located along the east side of the community. The Palmer Municipal Airport supports private and chartered services with two paved airstrips, one at 6,008' long by 75' wide and the other at 3,617' long by 75' wide. The airport has several lease lots and is the base of the operations for the State Firefighters. New lease lots were developed during the 2005 construction season to foster additional airport-related development. There are seven additional privately-owned airstrips in the vicinity. Float planes may land at nearby Finger Lake or Wolf Lake.

NEAR-TERM PRIORITIES

The Palmer Municipal Airport Master Plan was adopted in 2001 and guides development of the facility. The Plan is comprised of three elements: an airport master plan, a strategic development plan, and an environmental assessment. The five-year capital improvement plan is updated annually. The City is currently working with the University of Alaska to acquire property northwest of the airport for an additional runway protection zone for runway 9/27. Reconstruction of runway 9/27 and the runway 16 safety area and the installation of new runway lights, taxi lights and NAVAIDS are scheduled in the next two years. Other slated projects include expansion of the large aircraft apron, And resurfacing runway 16/34. *See Land Use Chapter for discussion of airport-related land uses.*

Objective G: SOLID WASTE – Provide adequate facilities to meet current and anticipated future demands for solid waste disposal in the City of Palmer.

CURRENT STATUS

The City of Palmer collects solid waste within a service area with mandatory service consisting of curbside pickup. The service reaches about 310 commercial and 1,370 residential customers. Waste is collected once a week and hauled to the 160-acre Mat-Su Borough landfill. The City of Palmer pays a flat fee per ton to use the Borough landfill site. A few commercial users in the greater Palmer area are serviced by the City, but many businesses are serviced by a private firm. The city solid waste fleet consists of two 1-person trucks, one 2-person truck, and approximately 150 large dumpsters. The City solid waste department budget for 2005 is \$490,896, including depreciation.

FUTURE NEEDS – Solid waste services are adequate to meet current and expected near-term demands. As with other services, personnel and equipment will need to be added as the population and service area expands. The capacity of the existing facility can not grow without the acquisition of more land. Land acquisition will need to be addressed by the Borough service district.

Objective H: ADMINISTRATION – Provide adequate administration services and associated facilities to meet current and anticipated future administration demands on the City of Palmer.

CURRENT STATUS

The offices of the city manager, city clerk, community development, and the finance department comprise the City’s administrative services. Although the Building Department personnel work closely with the Fire Department, they also provide essential administrative functions.

The manager’s office is responsible for overall administration, including property, personnel, budget and finance, and community planning and code enforcement. The assistant to the city manager serves as the airport manager. The manager’s office oversees City leases and contracts. A local attorney in private practice serves as City attorney.

The community development office assists the planning commission, administers the zoning code and code compliance, and, in conjunction with the city manager and attorney, prepares land use ordinance amendments. Community development also coordinates consultant services for planning projects, provides public information on the zoning code, and oversees the building inspection process. The building permit process ensures new construction meets basic building standards, increasing the value of development throughout the community.



The finance department prepares and administers the annual City budget in cooperation with the city manager, administers City financial accounts, processes the receipt and payment of City funds, and administers the City sales tax program. The Finance Department also administers the City water, wastewater and solid waste public utility accounts.

The city clerk maintains and manages City records, conducts municipal elections, and coordinates and assembles Council meeting materials. The clerk also administers the City website.

The City provides building permit and building inspection service. This service contributes to a consistent level of quality in all construction, and is important in maintaining community property values.

The Public Works, Police, Fire, and Library Departments all report to the City Manager who retains overall responsibility for the operations of the city.

City sales tax, transfers from other funds and real property taxes make up of the majority of city revenue. The 2006 city budget is based upon a 3.00 mil property tax rate that has remained the same since 1997. The city levies a sales tax of 3 percent with a \$15.00 cap on items over \$500.

FUTURE NEEDS

The present City Hall building on W. Evergreen Avenue has served the City well for several decades. The building presently houses the City’s administrative services (excluding the city attorney), as well as the mayor’s office, the City Council chambers, and extensive records storage areas.

In the past five years, the City has added two positions in the finance department, a city clerk, and the community development office, for a total of five additional employees. In 2005, to make room for additional personnel in City Hall, the building department's two employees moved from City Hall to a renovated building on the fire department training grounds. City Hall is now at its capacity to accommodate additional personnel unless the building is expanded or offices move into the basement.

The present and anticipated population growth of the City will result in an increase in municipal employees to meet public service demands, particularly if the City expands its boundaries through annexation. An expanded City Hall will also allow the City to consolidate permitting and project review services in one building to provide more convenient, "one-stop" service. The City has performed analyses of City Hall, the public safety building and the library to identify present deficiencies and future building space needs. In regards to City Hall, options to expand the building on the present site are limited due to a property area and lack of additional parking. The City should develop a plan to either expand the present building and site, or identify another site, preferably in the downtown area, for a new City Hall.

In regards to utility billing services, the City recently upgraded its water meters and account software to provide automatic meter reading. This system allows staff to read meters and process utility bills for significantly more accounts without having to hire additional personnel. The City should continue to incorporate such cost-saving procedures into its public services.

GOAL 2: Support Community efforts to provide other important community services, such as youth and adult recreation, performing and cultural arts, services to seniors, services to visitors, and services and infrastructure that support institutional development.

This goal focuses on services and facilities that are important to the community, but are outside the direct responsibilities and capacity of the City.

Objective A: YOUTH AND ADULT RECREATION – Sustain and enhance facilities for youth and adult recreation.

Palmer serves as a hub for many youth and adult sports and recreation activities. These programs and activities enhance the quality of life for residents and also benefit the local economy. City facilities that provide sports and recreation include the golf course, an ice arena, sports fields, and trail systems; the school district and other parties offer a range of additional programs and facilities. The City of Palmer recognizes the value of these facilities and activities as an important asset to the Palmer community, and supports their continued improvement. *See Parks, Recreation and Culture chapter for specific recommendations.*

Objective B: SENIOR SERVICES – Provide and sustain public services and facilities to serve the senior population. Keep Palmer an attractive place to live for people at all stages of life.

CURRENT STATUS

The Mat-Su Borough is seeing steady growth in retirees and retirement housing. Between 1990 and 2000, the senior population in Palmer grew about 37%, from 301 to 412. The Senior Center, a

variety of senior housing, and transportation services are located along South Chugach Street, creating a de facto “senior district”.

A variety of features make Palmer attractive to this small but growing segment of the City’s population. These include the concentrated, walkable downtown, the community center, senior center, library, hospital, doctors and other health care providers. Seniors also appreciate the same facilities and amenities enjoyed by all residents, including the golf course and other sports facilities, museum, historical society, and churches. The range of clubs and organizations available in Palmer are also important draws, including the Moose Lodge, Kiwanis, Mat-Su Birders, Scottish Rites Mason, Eastern Star, Palmer Grange, Lions Club, Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, United Way, Salvation Army and numerous religious organizations. The City supports clubs and organizations as part of the Community Vision goal of retaining Palmer’s small-town spirit where “people know each other.”

NEAR-TERM PRIORITIES

All public facilities must be accessible by senior citizens and individuals with disabilities. Private businesses are strongly encouraged to make every effort to improve accessibility for the senior population. Current transportation services include excellent service through the senior center which should be sustained and improved as the senior population grows. In addition, the “MASCOT” transportation system should be coordinated with the senior center transportation network, providing for adequate transportation to serve both the senior citizen population and disabled individuals population. The City of Palmer strongly supports ongoing private efforts to develop a new senior citizens facility in Palmer.

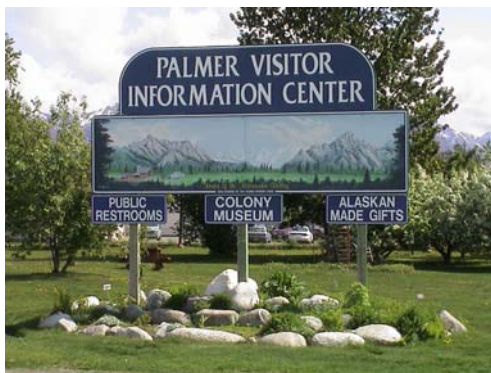
LONG-TERM NEEDS

Palmer wants to retain its attractiveness as a community that appeals to all ages, from youth through retirement. The City will provide for amenities and access by seniors in public facilities developed by the City.

Additional senior housing units are needed in Palmer to continue to attract and accommodate senior citizens with a range of income levels. The City will continue to sustain and improve the walkability of the downtown core and encourage services and amenities that serve the senior population.

Objective C: VISITOR SERVICES – Provide and sustain public services and facilities to serve visitors.

CURRENT STATUS



Out-of-town visitors are a traditional part of life in Palmer, and a key sector of the Palmer economy. Visitor attractions include Palmer’s downtown and the state fair. Palmer has great potential to expand on this tradition, working to better appeal to out-of-state travelers, particularly independent travelers, and to Anchorage and other southcentral Alaska residents. The City currently contracts with the Greater Palmer Chamber of Commerce for the operation of the downtown visitor information center. The City provides the Chamber

approximately \$55,000 annually to fund visitor center operations, as well as use of the building. The City also maintains the visitor center grounds and the garden. On a broader level, the City works to maintain and improve the attractiveness of the community as a visitor destination, through land use, infrastructure and circulation policies, for example, by working to maintain and improve the character of downtown. *See Economic Vitality chapter for specific recommendations.*

Objective D: PERFORMING AND CULTURAL ARTS – Create and sustain programs and facilities to support performing and cultural arts.

Palmer has potential to become a regional hub for performing and cultural arts. This strategy can improve quality of life, and help strengthen the local economy. *See Parks, Recreation & Culture chapter for specific recommendations.*

A new organization – the Palmer Arts Council – was recently created and will be a helpful addition to the effort to sustain and expand art and cultural opportunities in the community. A public radio station was also recently established in Palmer – known as “Radio Free Palmer”. This station features news and information about the local arts scene, and will be a helpful partner as the community works to expand local cultural and arts programs and facilities.

Objective E: INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT – Develop infrastructure to retain and encourage institutional development.

Palmer has played a key role in housing a range of state and regional institutions, including the Mat-Su Borough, the State Troopers and many others. The City of Palmer places high importance on remaining the institutional center of the Mat-Su Borough. *See Land Use chapter, Goal 3 for specific recommendations.*



GOAL 3: Expand the capacity of the community as a whole to provide community services and facilities. Encourage and support other organizations and individuals to develop community services such as those identified under Goal 2 in this chapter.

Objective A: Improve community awareness of the capacity – both opportunities and constraints - of the City to provide desired community services.

Public participation throughout the preparation of this plan has revealed a gap between the services and facilities many area residents would like the City to provide, and the capacity for providing those amenities with current City resources. This gap is not unique to Palmer – all over the nation polls consistently find that citizens’ desire expanded services while also seeking lower taxes. The City will continue to work with residents and businesses to better understand community priorities, and to

the extent possible, to find resources to meet these needs. A starting point is to improve public awareness of current City resources and responsibilities. Specific recommended actions include:

- Each year release a “state of the city” news release, emphasizing specific choices and tradeoffs facing the community (e.g., desire for agriculture land retention, likely cost to city residents to achieve this goal).
- Build public knowledge of the relative tax return as compared with service costs to the City for different types of land uses. Use this information to inform public decision-making regarding land use choices. It may be helpful for residents to know, for example, that generally commercial land uses produce significantly more net revenue to pay for community services than do residential uses.

**Objective B: Increase the City’s capacity to provide and expand community services.
Improve the synergy between the City and other community partners.**

Residents and businesses will continue to have high expectations for the public services and facilities available in the community. As stated previously, to meet the needs and desires of Palmer residents, a strong partnership between the City and community partners will help to bring services and projects to the community beyond what the City can achieve on its own. The following actions will strengthen this partnership and expand the capacity to provide services:

- Increase the net revenues coming into the city, through managing costs and expanding the community’s tax base.
- Improve the ability of the City to provide technical assistance for community organizations seeking to expand their services. The primary steps the City can take to help these organizations is to provide information regarding possible sources of funding for community service projects (*see Appendix B*), and to express support for specific fund raising efforts by writing letters when requested and through this comprehensive plan.
- Continue to create incentives for other organizations to take a lead in community services by providing small matching grants, limited technical assistance, and the option to use City land or facilities at reduced rates.

CHAPTER 5 TRANSPORTATION

Overview

The purpose of the transportation element is to outline an integrated, multi-modal transportation system for the City of Palmer. The system should enhance the economy and quality of life by supporting the safe movement of people, services, and goods within the City and the surrounding area.

Palmer is a unique Alaskan community with a downtown environment where it is possible to live, work and shop without an automobile. This is a rare advantage and a community attribute, which if it can be maintained, will only be more valuable as the city grows.



Palmer is served by the Glenn Highway, part of the National Highway System and the Palmer-Wasilla Highway, part of the state's transportation network.

Summary of Goals

GOAL 1: Shape the character and use of the Glenn Highway.

See also Land Use chapter.

- Provide efficient, safe access to Palmer while serving the needs of through traffic.
- Maintain the Glenn Highway corridor as an attractive community entry.
- Improve pedestrian and vehicular links between east and west sides of the Glenn Highway.
- Control access to commercial development along the Glenn Highway.
- Maintain and enhance the Glenn Highway's status as a National Scenic Byway.

GOAL 2: Improve the Palmer road system to meet anticipated growth.

- Identify and prioritize specific roads for improvement.
- Identify collector-level streets that are or will be needed to serve future development and traffic.
- Identify future road corridors for acquisition of right-of-way.

GOAL 3: Maintain and improve community sidewalks and trails.

- Make it easier to move around town without a car.
- Identify and prioritize trails for improvement and future trail corridors for preservation.

GOAL 4: Support expansion and improvement of regional transit service.

- Continue to provide and improve transportation services for disabled individuals.
- Improve the "MASCOT" transportation service by establishing smaller node routes that are interconnected to reduce overall travel time.

Goals & Objectives for Transportation

GOAL 1: Shape the character and use of the Glenn Highway.

GOAL 2: Improve the Palmer road system to meet anticipated growth.

Background to Goals 1 & 2

In comparison to most of the Mat-Su Borough, Palmer has a well-developed road system. The average lot size and general density of development in central Palmer makes it possible to serve the community with a low ratio of road miles per household. The general condition of the road system in Palmer is good. The City has focused on converting gravel-surfaced roads to paved roads, and made good progress towards this goal.

Based on experience in communities around the state, when the average daily traffic (ADT) on a local gravel-surfaced road exceeds 250 vehicles, the road should become a candidate for paving. Improvements to local roads such as paving and installing curbs, gutters and sidewalks will further improve safety and reduce maintenance costs on the higher-volume roads. The City should continue to focus on upgrading gravel roads and, to the greatest extent possible, finance these improvements with grants from Borough, State and Federal agencies.

Table 5-1 below presents average annual daily traffic estimates based on traffic counts for major roads in or near the City of Palmer. Traffic has continued to grow over the years as the City has grown. The Mat-Su Borough is currently updating the Borough Long-Range Transportation Plan, with a focus on planning for growth in the Palmer-Wasilla area. Preliminary traffic forecasts are available, based on a continuation of recent trends in the state economy and the borough population. As the table shows, in nearly every location, average daily traffic levels in 2025 are projected to rise to be about 2.5 times the counts made in 2003. This would be a dramatic increase, requiring major improvements in the road system, including a number of significant new roads, and significant widening of existing routes.

Table 5-1: Traffic Counts (Average Annual Daily Traffic) 1991- 2025

| Location | 1991 | 1996 | 2003 | 2025 Forecast (1) |
|-----------------------------------|-------|--------|--|--------------------------|
| Palmer-Wasilla Hwy. at Trunk Rd. | 7,465 | 10,080 | 13,671 | 36,400 |
| Palmer-Wasilla Hwy. at Glenn Hwy. | 8,348 | 12,000 | 16,377 | 22,600 |
| Glenn Hwy. at Palmer-Wasilla Hwy. | 7,700 | 9,996 | 12,350 | 30,000 |
| Glenn Hwy at Arctic | 5,800 | 7,376 | 11,650 (S. of Arctic) / 9,240 (N. of Arctic) | 22,200 (N. of Arctic) |
| Old Glenn Hwy. at South Alaska | 7,010 | 8,749 | 8,250 (E. of S. Alaska) / 13,480 (W. of S. Alaska) | 19,300 (E. of S. Alaska) |
| Old Glenn Hwy. at Airport | 6,330 | 6,800 | 7,020 | 17,900 |

Source: State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, 1991-2003; Matanuska-Susitna Borough Planning Department, 2025 Forecast. (1) Forecasts from Borough draft Long Range Transportation Plan.

Glenn Highway Bypass/Hemmer Road Extension

The volumes for the Glenn Highway and the Palmer-Wasilla Highway are currently approaching capacity and in 2025 will likely exceed the volumes that can be accommodated on a two-lane road. Addressing this growth will not only impact travel on these two key roadways, but affect the livability and “walkability” of downtown Palmer. Improvements to the intersection of the Palmer-Wasilla and Glenn Highways were completed in 2000. Nonetheless, putting most north-south traffic on the Glenn Highway and most east-west traffic on the Palmer-Wasilla Highway will result in the need for expanded roadways by the year 2025. It is difficult to reconcile multi-lane, high-volume roads and large channelized intersections with a comfortable, pedestrian-oriented, downtown commercial district.

There has been some discussion of construction of a “Palmer bypass” for the Glenn Highway. Bypasses often are a sensible solution where traffic volumes are increasing on a road running through the center of a community. The Glenn Highway in Palmer, however, is a special case. Although traffic on the Glenn Highway in the midst of Palmer is at or above 10,000 ADT and growing, north of Farm Loop Road the volume (2003) drops to less than 3,000 ADT.

Consequently, the challenge in Palmer is how to move traffic into and *disperse* traffic in Palmer, rather than how to move traffic *through* Palmer on the Glenn Highway. The primary strategy to achieve this objective is the creation of an arterial-level street on the north-south section line (see **Proposed Road Improvements** map) that is currently partially occupied by Hemmer Road., Blunck Street., and N. Werner Road. A new arterial on this or a similar route would allow traffic from south of Palmer destined for a point along the Palmer-Wasilla Highway or Bogard Road to avoid the congested Glenn Highway-Palmer-Wasilla Highway intersection entirely, and should reduce overall traffic volumes at that location. The new arterial should extend from the Glenn Highway at Blunck Street north to cross the Palmer-Wasilla Highway, and to cross Bogard Road Extension, and eventually connect with Palmer-Fishhook Road at North Werner Road.

Glenn Highway Improvements

In order to meet current and future transportation needs, improve pedestrian circulation east-west across the Glenn, maintain community character, and to improve the entrance to Palmer, the Glenn Highway should be designated as a four-lane, limited-access, “boulevard-style” arterial with a generous planted median. The City will be responsible for maintaining median plantings. The plan intends that new development along the Glenn Highway be served by separate, perpendicular roadways that leave the highway and serve multiple businesses, rather than by direct driveway access, or frontage roads (see land use chapter for a diagram explaining this concept).



Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) is in the initial design phase of upgrading the Glenn Highway from the Parks Highway interchange to Palmer. The City should work closely with DOT/PF to ensure this project meets state and community goals. See *Goal 7 of Land Use chapter*.

Glenn Hwy Improvements – Nat’l Scenic Byway Designation

In 2000, the Glenn Highway from Anchorage through Palmer to Eureka Summit was designated a State Scenic Byway, and in 2002, a National Scenic Byway. The national designation followed an energetic organizational effort led by residents of the Glenn Highway corridor and supported by the Alaska

DOT&PF. The Scenic Byway organization for the Glenn Highway (The Glenn Highway Scenic Byway Association) meets regularly along the highway, to organize byway improvements and marketing activities.

Bogard Road Extension

Another key road project is the extension of Bogard Road east to connect to the Glenn Highway, and continuing east into the greater downtown area. Bogard Road is a key Core Area arterial that helps carry east-west traffic that uses the Palmer-Wasilla Highway. The extension of Bogard Road to Palmer has state funding of 13 million dollars. The project will be managed by the Mat-Su Borough.

Downtown – East West Connection

Another important road project is to develop a new, improved east-west connection across the railroad in downtown. The most promising route is to connect existing street segments of Dogwood Street to create an urban street running east of Denali Street, across the Alaska Railroad right-of-way. This road would then connect with the segment of Dogwood west of the railroad, jog north of Fred Meyer, cross the Glenn Highway and run as a new road west to connect with an extended Felton Street. These additions would improve east-west circulation throughout the community, improve downtown circulation for vehicles and pedestrians, and provide alternative access to the new commercial development at the intersection of the Palmer-Wasilla Highway and Felton.

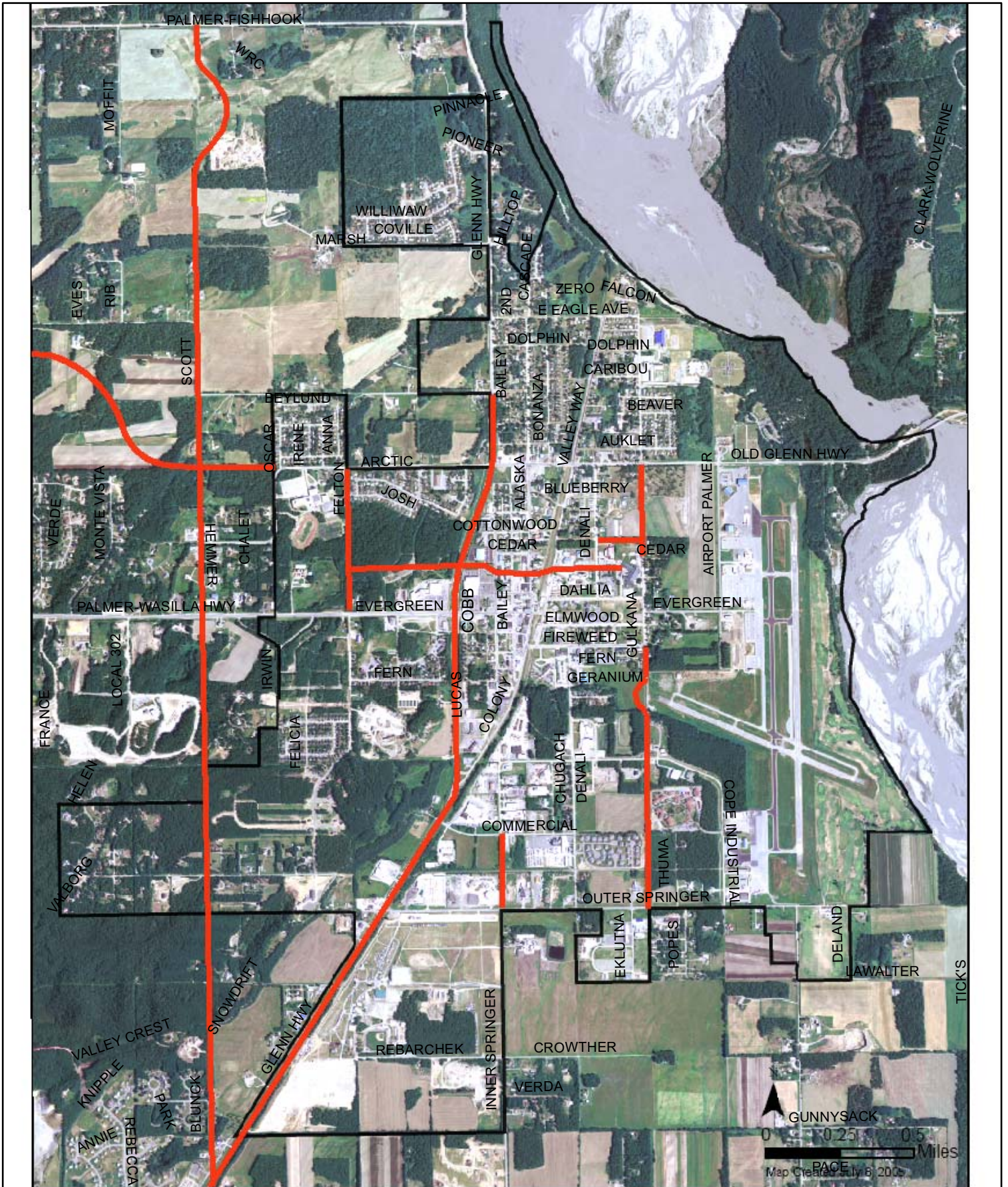
Felton Extension

The Felton extension would connect Evergreen (Palmer-Wasilla Highway) with W. Arctic Avenue, and be connected to the planned extension of Dogwood. This improvement will create an important, more direct north-south link, reducing travel times and congestion on the Glenn Highway. This route crosses steep, varied terrain and will have to be designed accordingly.

Other Road Connections/Road Projects

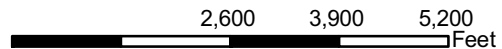
- The City should continue with its successful efforts to pave all roads within the community. Highest priorities should be streets with the greatest use, particularly in the downtown commercial and mixed use area.
- In general, collector streets are needed on an approximate one to one half mile grid. Specific decisions on routes will need to be made as subdivision takes place. An absence of connections can contribute to traffic congestion on major routes because of a lack of internal circulation. Although a grid street pattern is probably neither suitable nor desirable in these areas, it is recommended that the City require subdividers to consider the relationship of their developments to adjacent subdivisions.
- Additional minor road connections needed include connecting the north and south sections of Gulkana Street coincident with the development of adjacent property. In addition, subdivisions developed west of the Glenn Highway should be interconnected by road and trail easements.
- Work with DOT/PF and the State of Alaska to reserve and/or acquire land at key intersections where more lanes will likely be needed to meet predicted growth in traffic volumes.

The City will work closely with the Mat-Su Borough and the State to ensure new development outside the City but within the sewer service district has adequate roads and trails. Reaching this goal will require the coordination of plans for land use, infrastructure and transportation. Initial planning is taking place through the City's annexation study, and the Mat Su Borough Core Area plan and Long Range Transportation Plan. The City may want to work the State and Borough to prepare more detailed plans to provide for efficient expansion of services in this area.



Palmer Comprehensive Plan
Figure 1
Proposed Road Improvements

— Proposed Roads or Road Improvements
 (Conceptual Locations)



GOAL 3: Maintain and improve community sidewalks and trails.

Developing a quality trail system and integrating of the system with the existing trails and sidewalks serves transportation, economic, recreation and quality of life goals. The public identified improvements to trails and sidewalks as a high priority during the preparation of the plan. For walking, biking and other non-motorized uses to offer a realistic option to driving, Palmer must retain and improve its network of paths and trails. This goal clearly applies in downtown, where a pedestrian-friendly environment is a key attraction, but extends to providing trail connections throughout the community, linking residential neighborhoods, with shopping, transit facilities and schools, parks, open space and other public facilities.

Existing Trails and Sidewalks

A number of pedestrian facilities, trails and separated paths exist or are under development in the Palmer area. Please see **Proposed Trail Improvements and Proposed Sidewalk Improvements** maps on the following pages.

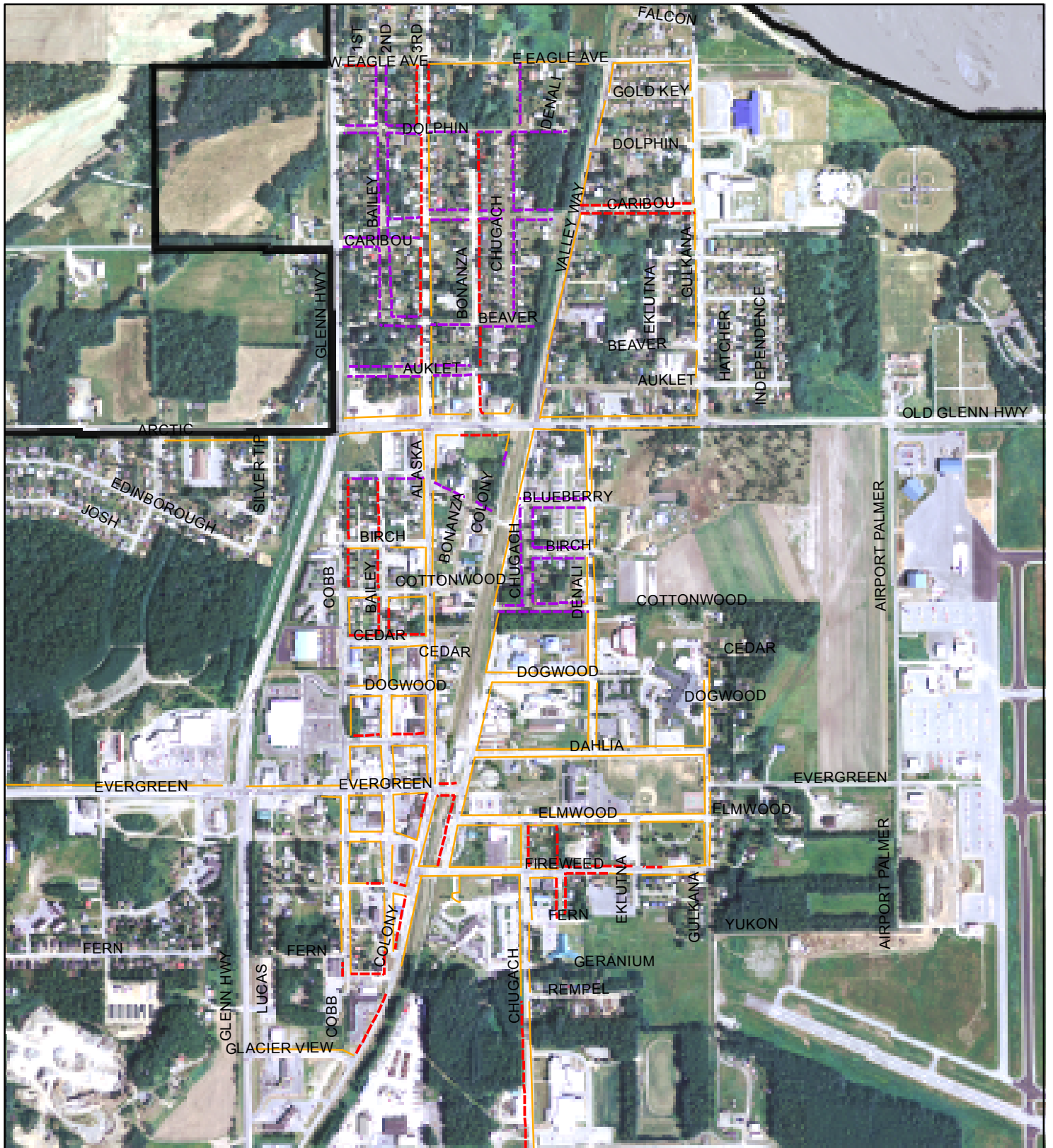
Sidewalks have been constructed on most of the streets in the downtown area defined as generally west of Gulkana Street, east of the Glenn Highway, south of Arctic Avenue and north of Fireweed Avenue. More isolated sidewalks extend beyond this core area.

Existing paved separated paths located along roads include the trail on the north side of the Palmer-Wasilla Highway from Felton Street west, the trail near Palmer High School connecting West Arctic Avenue with Hemmer Road, the trail along the west side of the Glenn Highway from the Palmer-Wasilla Highway to Arctic Avenue, and the section of trail along E. Cope Industrial Way that connects E. Outer Springer Loop with the Palmer Middle School. Improvements to sidewalks and trails should improve pedestrian connections community wide, including links between residential neighborhoods, and between residential areas and schools, parks and open space, and downtown and other shopping areas. Specific recommendations are presented below.

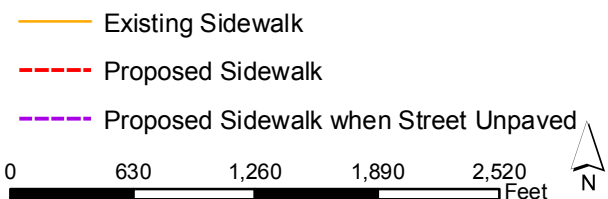
Improved Sidewalks

Responsibility for constructing new sidewalks will be split between the City and subdividers, depending on the setting. In general, the City shall be responsible for sidewalks connecting different areas of the community, with individual subdividers responsible for sidewalks and trails within subdivisions.





**Palmer Comprehensive Plan
Figure 3
Proposed Sidewalk Improvements**



As Palmer grows, sidewalks should be extended or added to all streets within the area bounded by the Glenn Highway to the west, Eagle Avenue to the north, South Airport to the east and E. Commercial Drive to the south. New sidewalks are also needed to link downtown and the airport, to provide several safe, convenient places to cross the Glenn Highway, and to connect subdivisions to trails along the Glenn Highway and the Palmer Wasilla Highway. As discussed in the Downtown section of the Land Use Chapter, there is a particular need for improved sidewalks running east to west across the railroad tracks and through the Depot area.



All subdivisions shall make adequate provisions for safe, functional pedestrian circulation. This includes:

- Safe, effective and enjoyable pedestrian circulation within the subdivision – including on-street sidewalk and off street trails. In some locations, pathways should be reserved between lots to provide “short cuts” linking streets.
- Connections within the subdivision that lead to pedestrian routes linking to community destinations, including schools, parks and commercial areas.

The specific form of pedestrian improvements will vary depending on housing density and current and expected traffic levels. Where traffic is light, such as on a short cul-de-sac, sidewalks may not be required; where traffic is heavier, sidewalks typically will be required. In some instances, off street trails may be substituted for sidewalks.

Rehabilitate Sidewalks and Improve Sidewalk Maintenance

Many Palmer sidewalks, particularly in downtown, need rehabilitation. Numerous stretches of sidewalks are overgrown with vegetation, and/or cracked. Sections of these sidewalks have obstacles that make them difficult to use by people in wheelchairs. In addition to improving these sidewalks, and ensuring they meet handicapped access standards, there is a need for better regular maintenance including snow removal. This action may best be done in partnership with the planned Business Improvement District.

Proposed Trails¹

With the addition of key links to the existing trail network, Palmer would enjoy a well-connected network allowing reasonably comprehensive travel through town by foot or bicycle. Many of these trails are not in the City, requiring coordination with the Mat-Su Borough and Alaska DOT&PF. The Borough’s adopted Trail Plan provides a valuable description of Mat-Su Borough plans for

¹ The distinction between trails and sidewalks is not black and white. As used here, “sidewalks” refers to street-side, paved pedestrian routes, primarily serving the needs of immediately adjoining properties. “Trails” refer to a range of pedestrian routes, paved and unpaved, single-use and multi-use trails. In general trails serve community-wide transportation and recreation needs. Trails can run along or separated from roads.

trails in the Core Area and the southcentral Borough generally. Please see **Proposed Trail Improvements** map. Recommended trails are listed below:

- Along the Alaska Railroad right-of-way from the Glenn Highway north past the Palmer depot to Moose Creek (initial phase), south to the Alaska State Fairgrounds and on to Sutton (second phase). This project was formally endorsed as part of the Palmer Urban Revitalization Plan.
- Along the Glenn Highway from E. Sienna Street to the Palmer-Wasilla Highway, constructed as part of the Glenn Highway upgrade.
- Connecting the Old Matanuska River Bridge trail to existing sidewalks along Arctic Ave.
- From the Old Matanuska River Bridge trail to an upgraded trail along the Matanuska River Park connecting to Swanson and Sherrod Elementary schools, and then to E. Eagle Avenue.
- South from the Old Matanuska River Bridge along or near the Matanuska River, past the golf course to E. Lepak Avenue (extended). More work is needed to determine if this trail is possible. A trail along the river in this area was proposed as part of the golf course development in 1989. Two options are currently being considered:
- Select one of two alternatives for a connection from the Old Matanuska River Bridge to the southern end of the golf course.
 - Option A would depart the Old Glenn Highway at the northeastern edge of the airport and then turn east at the north edge of the Palmer Golf Course and run along the river bluff of the golf course. A similar trail was proposed as part of the golf course development in 1989. Reconfiguration of several holes of the golf course would be necessary.
 - Option B would depart the Old Glenn Highway and head south on S. Airport Road to East Evergreen, to E. Fireweed, to S. Chugach, to E. Cope Industrial to E. Outer Springer.
- Along E. Lepak Avenue, E. Outer Springer Loop, N. Inner Springer Loop, and E. Moore Road to Hemmer Road extended. This separated path would include a grade-separated crossing of the Glenn Highway.
- From the end of the existing trail along Cope Industrial Way west to the Alaska Railroad right-of-way.
- Along the extension of Bogard Road from W. Arctic Avenue to Trunk Road or beyond.
- Along the full length of the proposed extension of Hemmer Road.
- Along the Inner and Outer Springer Road system.
- Trail connections and an associated trailhead linking the Palmer-Wasilla Highway area and Downtown Palmer with the trail system in the Kepler Bradley Lakes and Crevasse Moraine area. Trail connections into this large open space park will add greatly to the value of remaining city trails, and provide an important amenity to the community. One possible route is along N. France Road beginning at a grade-separated crossing of the Palmer-Wasilla Highway and extending past the alternative school into the Crevasse-Moraine trail system.

In order to better define these routes, determine appropriate trail types and trail users, set priorities among different projects, and develop funding and maintenance strategies, the City should develop a comprehensive trails plan, for use by a variety of user groups. The City should work with ATV users to serve appropriate areas for ATV use. The Borough will need to be an active participant in this process.

GOAL 4: Transit and Rail Service

Mat-Su Community Transit (MASCOT)

Mat-Su Community Transit or MASCOT was established in 1999 as a private, non-profit corporation. MASCOT is open to the general public and is coordinated with a number of non-profit, governmental and human service agencies throughout the Borough to provide more specific transit services.

MASCOT operates both local and commuter fixed route service on seven separate lines, and can deviate up to $\frac{3}{4}$ mile off the route. MASCOT also provides a number of transportation services for non-profit agencies throughout the Borough, both on a regular and semi-regular basis.



Total ridership on the system for the calendar year 2002 was just over 57,000. Steady expansion of the MASCOT system with the support of the Borough and the cities of Palmer and Wasilla is recommended and will, over time provide an alternative to travel by private auto.

The City will encourage transit use, working with MASCOT, through the following policies:

- Encourage compact development near primary transit facilities
- Encourage MASCOT to coordinate bus schedules and routes with work schedules, particularly for large employers.
- Encourage carpooling and van pooling.

The Palmer Senior Citizens Center

The Senior Center operates a fleet of 16 vans providing transportation and in-home meals services to seniors in the Palmer area. In the fiscal year ending June 30, 2005, the Center provided 22,388 passenger-trips and 29,000 home-delivered meals. Service is focused on medically-oriented trips, with recreational trips provided on a pre-scheduled or space available basis. Service mileage grew approximately 10 percent over the previous year and rides were up 12 percent. A significantly greater number of trips could be provided if funding were available.

The Alaska Railroad

Rail service to Palmer is limited at present to four to six roundtrip passenger trains per year during the State Fair, and one passenger train in December for the Colony Christmas event.

There is interest in expanding the frequency of service, particularly in the summer, in order to provide a new venue for visitors and a potential economic boost to Palmer businesses. In addition, a regional transportation planning organization between the Mat-Su Borough and the Municipality of Anchorage has been formed and has discussed the creation of bus and rail commuter service between the Valley and Anchorage. Should such service be implemented, Palmer is also a natural terminus of such rail commuter service. A park and ride inter-

modal facility has been constructed on the Alaska State Fairgrounds. *See Land Use chapter for details about rail use downtown.*



CHAPTER 6 LAND USE

Overview

This chapter presents background information and policies to guide development in Palmer. The first goal gives the plan's overall land use policy. The second goal addresses the need to revise the community's zoning ordinance, including new standards for the form and character of development. The goals that follow focus on specific land use categories, including commercial development; downtown; and residential, industrial, agricultural and open space uses. Goal 10 addresses annexation and community growth. Consistent with the approach presented in Goal 10, this chapter focuses on uses within current City limits, but also presents the City's general policy direction for development within the sewer and water service district that extends beyond those boundaries.

Summary of Goals *Note: order of goals does not reflect priority*

GOAL 1: Guide growth to make Palmer an increasingly attractive place to live, work, invest and visit.

GOAL 2: Maintain high quality residential neighborhoods; promote development of a range of desirable new places to live in Palmer.

GOAL 3: Support the continuation of institutional and appropriate industrial uses.

GOAL 4: Encourage new commercial development, so residents of Palmer, residents of surrounding areas, and visitors can find the goods and services they need in Palmer.

GOAL 5: Guide the form and character of growth to encourage high quality buildings and site development that reflects Palmer's history and setting.

GOAL 6: Support efforts by the Downtown Business Improvement District to help ensure Palmer's traditional downtown is lively, attractive and inviting for residents and visitors.

GOAL 7: Maintain and improve the visual quality of the Glenn and Palmer-Wasilla Highway corridors, and other major community roads.

GOAL 8: Sustain Palmer's agricultural traditions.

GOAL 9: Maintain a positive connection with Palmer's natural setting; maintain the quality of the natural environment - particularly stream corridors, lakes, and watershed areas.

GOAL 10: Annexation – plan for the phased expansion of City boundaries.

Context: Land Use in Palmer & Surrounding Areas

Land Use in Palmer

Palmer's overall land use pattern owes much to the manner of its settlement in the 1930's, the routing of highway and railroad corridors, and the fact the City has a long history of sound planning.

Palmer has a concentrated, mixed use core. Residential areas are generally buffered from adjoining incompatible uses. Most industrial uses are located within a long-established industrial park. Most residential development is in the form of single family housing, although by valley standards, Palmer does have a relatively large amount of multi-family housing. The municipally-owned Palmer Airport borders the eastern edge of town and is the single largest consumer of land in the City. Two major regional recreation amenities, the Palmer Golf Course, on City property next to the airport, and the Matanuska River Park, held by the Mat-Su Borough, are also located along the eastern edge of town. The southern area of the City includes the state fairgrounds. Palmer has retained a traditional "Main Street" business district as well as accommodating highway-related commercial uses.



Approximately three-quarters of the land in the City is used for industry, institutions, and parks and recreation. Palmer has long been the institutional center for the Matanuska-Susitna Valley and a relatively large amount of land is taken up by institutional uses. The importance of these uses in Palmer is reflected in the City's zoning, which designates over half of the City for public purposes.

The City of Palmer has guided land use through use of a zoning code since the City was incorporated in 1951. The City's current zoning plan, shown on the **Current Zoning Districts** map, reinforces the pattern of existing uses. Downtown and land along the Palmer-Wasilla Highway is zoned for a combination of limited commercial (allows "intermingling of commercial and housing") and general commercial (allows all uses in limited commercial, plus additional, more intensive commercial activities). Interspersed in this area are lands zoned for somewhat higher density residential (R-2, allowing four units per lot), and areas for government/institutional uses. North of downtown, along East Arctic, land is designated R-4, allowing higher density, multi-family housing. The area south of downtown and just east of the Glenn Highway is zoned industrial; between this area and the airport uses is an interesting mix of different housing densities including senior and affordable housing, commercial areas, education, government and agriculture.

Land Use in the Area Surrounding Palmer

Two maps on the following pages show the development just outside Palmer's boundaries. The **Palmer and Surrounding Area** figure presents an aerial photo; the **Water and Sewer Service District** map shows the location of roads and subdivisions. Together, these two maps give a good picture of the significant amount of residential development in this area, much of which has taken place in the last 10 – 15 years. With the exception of the rough terrain in the southwestern portion

of this area, the great majority of undeveloped land in this area is physically well-suited for development.

This rapidly growing area is an important consideration in the development of this plan for several reasons. Most importantly, the water and sewer service districts operated by the City of Palmer extend into this area. Residents of these areas use a variety of City public and commercial services, from police and fire to shops and restaurants. Planning for future land use and increased needs for City-provided services requires understanding current and likely future uses in these areas. As outlined under Goal 10, portions of these areas may be annexed to the City in the future.

The section below summarizes the existing and likely future uses of this area:

Springer Loop System – This area, located south of Palmer and east of the Glenn Highway, is still mostly in agricultural uses, but is rapidly being developed into residential subdivisions.

Glenn Highway/ Parks Intersection/ Regional Hospital – This area is on the southwestern section of the City's water and sewer service district boundary. Until recently this district was largely agricultural; more recently this area has become the site of the new regional hospital (to be served by City water and sewer). A number of new office and residential projects are also being proposed for this area.

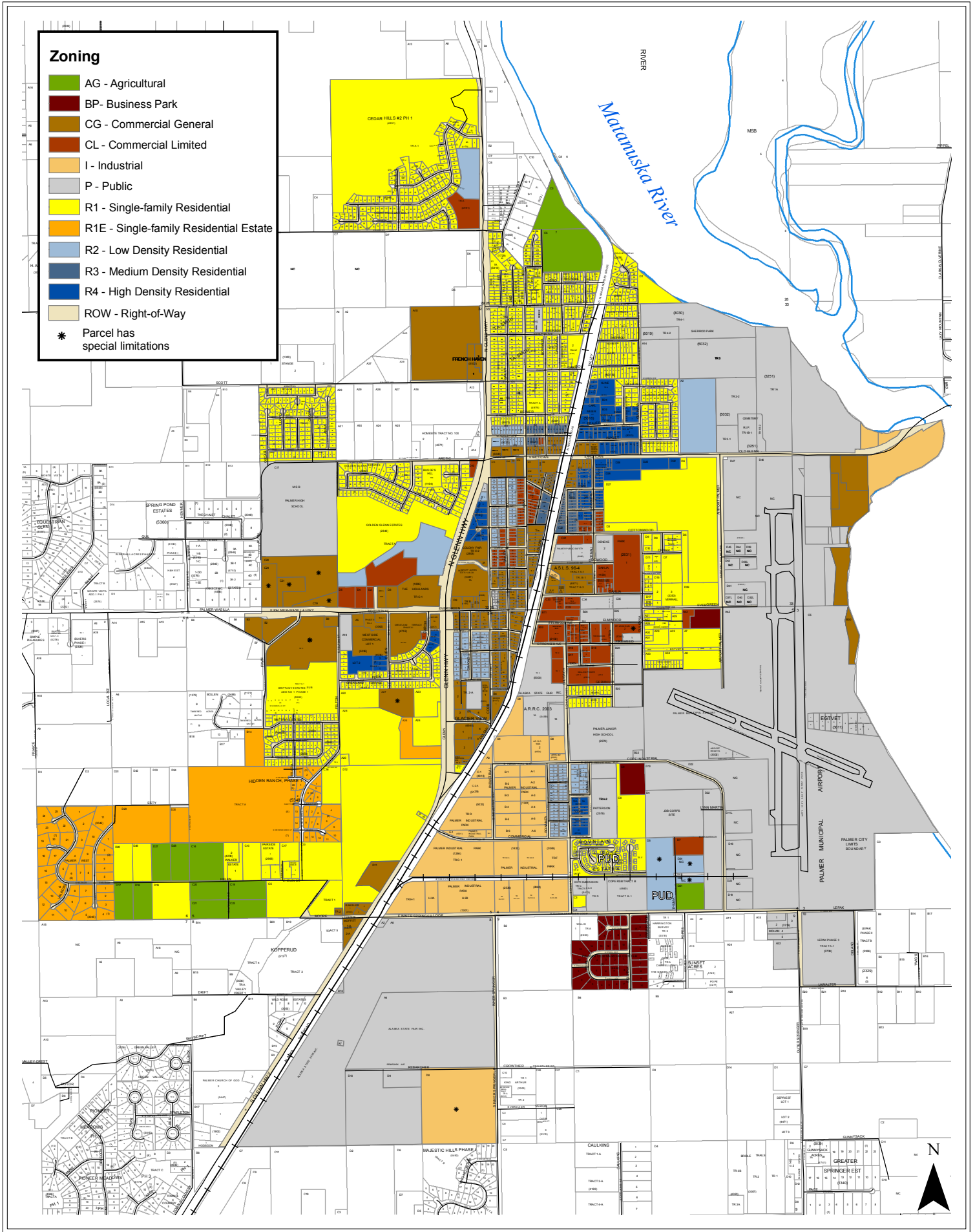
Park Land – A large area west of the Glenn Highway is undeveloped open space. Much of this area is used for recreation, including Kepler Bradley State Recreation Area, and the Crevasse Moraine area hiking, mountain-biking and cross country ski trail system.

Palmer-Wasilla Highway Corridor – This busy road, which carries more traffic than the Glenn Highway, is becoming a major commercial corridor. Frontage along this road today is a mixture of larger commercial properties and residential uses.

Glenn Highway Corridor, South – Land along the Glenn Highway has traditionally been used for the gravel mining, farming, and the State Fair. Development east of the highway is restricted by the Alaska Railroad tracks. In more recent years, a significant portion of this land west of the highway has been subdivided for residential uses. The large presently vacant properties on the west side of the highway are suitable for commercial development, particularly where utilities are available.

Glenn Highway Corridor, North – This area extends north of the city. Land in this area slowly climbs in elevation, providing excellent views over rolling terrain towards the Mt Matanuska and Pioneer Peak. East of the road is a narrow strip of land between the highway and the Matanuska River. West of the road is a mixture of fields, woodlots, individual homes and a few small subdivisions.

Northwest of Palmer/Lower Palmer Fishhook area – As a result of its slightly higher elevation and rolling terrain, it is known for offering particularly attractive views of farmlands and views south and east to snow covered peaks. Like other areas surrounding Palmer, this area has long been a quiet rural district, but is now seeing a steady increase in residential development.



City of Palmer

Current Zoning Districts
as of July 1, 2005

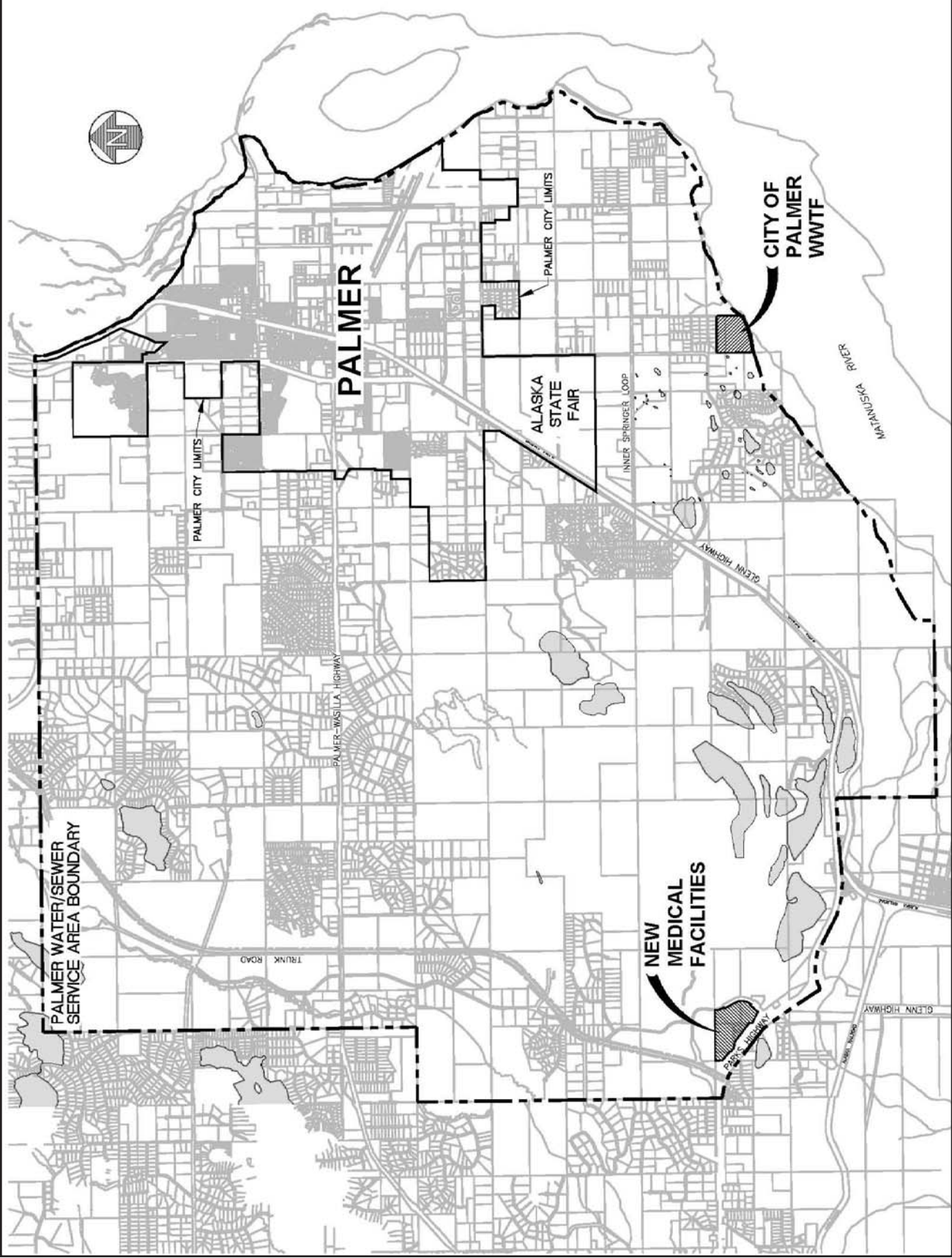
"Alaska at its Best!"



City of Palmer & Surrounding Area

City of Palmer Comprehensive Plan





City of Palmer
Comprehensive Plan

Water & Sewer Service District

Goals & Objectives for Land Use

GOAL I: Guide growth to make Palmer an increasingly attractive place to live, invest, work, and visit.

This is the primary goal for land use in the community, taken from the 1999 comprehensive plan. Objective A below establishes a broad strategy to meet this goal; more specific strategies are presented in the remainder of this chapter.

Objective A: Guide growth so the overall development pattern for the community has the following characteristics:

- Adequate space for expansion of commercial uses, primarily in downtown and along the Palmer-Wasilla Highway, and along the Glenn Highway.
- A concentration of institutional uses, primarily in downtown, but extending into other parts of the community.
- Space for new residential neighborhoods, primarily around the outer portions of the community, but also within mixed use areas in the downtown core. Residential areas include internal open space, parks and connecting trails.
- Industrial and similar uses are generally separated from residential areas.
- Convenient access to places to work, commercial services, schools and other public facilities, both by vehicle, sidewalk and trail.
- A high quality system of community parks, open space, trails and other recreation amenities.
- Compact, walkable, dynamic, mixed use downtown core.
- A clear sense of town entry, with open space and/or less developed areas separating Palmer from surrounding communities.
- Agricultural heritage and history that continues to be visible.
- The right balance of residential and commercial uses, to ensure the City maintains its fiscal health¹.



¹ In general, the net revenue to the City (that is, tax revenue generated vs. services consumed) is greater from commercial uses than from residential and institutional uses.

GOAL 2: Maintain high quality residential neighborhoods; promote development of a range of desirable new places to live in Palmer.

Palmer has many assets that will continue to attract residential development. In addition to the general attractions of the southern Mat-Su Borough, Palmer offers water and sewer connections which permit higher density housing. Another unique asset is “urban living” – the chance to have a home within walking distance of stores, restaurants and places to work. Finally, Palmer is surrounded by vacant land, providing extensive areas for residential development. Developers built significant amounts of new residences in this area over the last 10 years. As long as the state economy remains healthy, this trend is likely to continue.

Objective A: Promote a diverse range of quality housing, from attractive higher density housing in or near downtown, to outlying housing in more rural settings.

Palmer offers a greater range of attractive residential environments than other Mat-Su communities, including downtown single family homes and small apartments, a range of senior housing, as well as lower density subdivisions. This diversity should continue. Among the most important characteristics that create “quality” are well built homes, safe neighborhoods, compatible adjoining uses, good schools, public infrastructure including water, sewer, power and telephone and internet connections, and access to amenities including trails, open space, and shopping. Categories of housing the City in particular wishes to promote are listed below, and covered in more detail in the following objectives:

- Single family detached housing appealing to the mid and upper end of the market
- Quality, higher density housing in downtown
- Senior housing

Objective B: Provide areas for single family housing appealing to the upper end of the housing market.

One type of housing not widely found in the Palmer area is more costly homes appealing to the upper end of the housing market. Certain lands surrounding Palmer offer promising locations for this type of residential development. Topographic constraints caused by kettles and moraines in the area immediately south of the Palmer-Wasilla Highway are likely to make the extension of sewer services there unfeasible. Large lot residential development with high-end single family units may be more practical in such areas. This would help broaden the variety of Palmer's housing stock and make the City a more desirable place to live for a broader segment of the Valley's population.

Objective C: Encourage infill and higher density housing in and around downtown. Prepare new zoning standards and design guidelines to ensure higher density housing is high quality, to benefit the residents and the community.

Palmer has little undeveloped residential land within its present corporate limits, particularly east of the Glenn Highway. Future development will include in-filling and redevelopment of currently developed sites. These residential developments will be compact, with relatively high overall densities. Palmer already has sufficient area zoned multi-family to accommodate foreseeable near term needs for higher density residential development. More land will be needed to meet demand associated with mid and longer term growth.



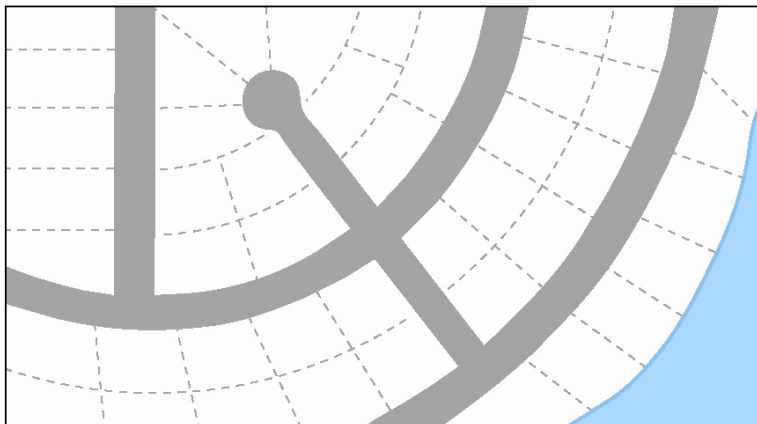
Example of recently built subdivision just outside of Palmer City limits

Around the country, a growing body of experience shows that higher density housing can offer very desirable places to live, *if* this housing is well designed and constructed, and has pedestrian access to amenities like open space, parks and shopping. In response to changing demands and tighter land supplies, developers are building many different types of attractive higher density housing, including traditional townhouses, stacked flats and other forms of attached housing, as well as more innovative forms such as

detached single family homes on land held in common. New City policies are needed to encourage high quality, higher density housing, including:

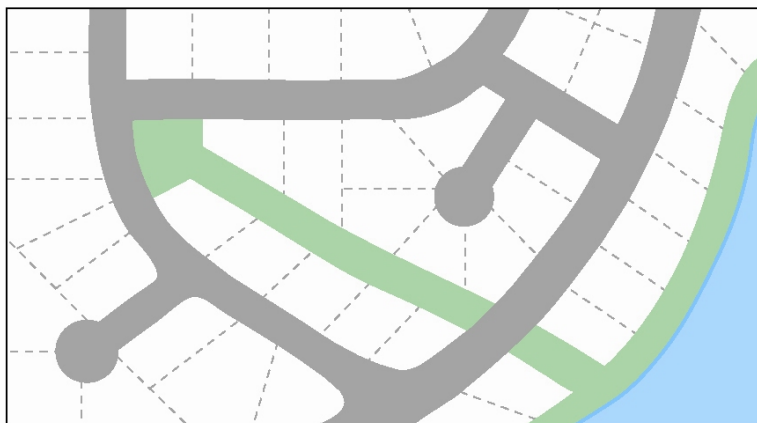
- changes to the zoning code including greater provision of amenities for higher density housing such as on-site open space, landscaping
- rules for “site condominiums” that allow flexibility in standards but ensure quality
- design guidelines that encourage attractive buildings to harmonize with the City’s traditional architectural styles
- development of community trails, parks and other amenities in the vicinity of housing

Objective D: Develop “open space/clustered housing subdivision” standards to encourage new subdivisions to cluster development and provide open space, trails, stormwater management and other community amenities.



Standard Subdivision (Top)

Approx 45 lots, 1-2 acres each. All available land is used for lots.



Open Space Subdivision (Bottom)

Same number of lots as above. Average lot size is slightly smaller. The difference is used to retain land for open space, trails, and stream buffers. Done correctly, this approach increases access to amenities and produces higher average values for all lots.

Residential land near Westchester Lagoon in Anchorage is an urban example of this concept. Lots located two-to-three tiers away from the waterfront are highly desirable because of their ready access to the lagoon, and its trails and picnic areas.

To be most successful, open spaces need to be aligned with similar open space in adjoining properties, e.g. to establish a contiguous river or trail corridor. The City of Palmer, Borough, a Homeowners Association or similar party needs to manage and hold legal title to the land.

Objective E: Encourage Rehabilitation of Older Residential Structures

In addition to new construction, it is likely that some of Palmer's older housing stock, particularly in downtown will need rehabilitation. There are several possible futures for older houses in downtown. Much of this land is currently zoned commercial, and one scenario is that older homes will be converted to commercial use such as professional offices. Another scenario is older buildings will be removed, and replaced with new commercial structures, preferably with residential units on upper floors. The third scenario is for these structures to remain in residential use.

The older residential structures in downtown are an important part of the community's character. While many of these structures will be removed for more intensive commercial development, the community will benefit if a number of these buildings are retained and rehabilitated. In the downtown neighborhoods zoned residential, it is hoped that a majority of the older structures will remain in the future. The City should encourage the downtown business improvement district, local financial institutions, and agencies to take full advantage of this valuable community asset. The improvement of local streets including paving, curbs, gutters, and sidewalks would greatly improve the appearance of these areas. The City should contemplate a paving formula for internal residential streets which combines City funds and local improvement districts (LID).

GOAL 3: Support the continuation of institutional and appropriate industrial uses.

Objective A: Provide for the continuation and expansion of Palmer's traditional role as a center for institutional and governmental users for the Mat-Su Borough and State. *See also Goal 1 in the Economic Vitality chapter.*

The City should take a proactive role to ensure Palmer maintains and enhances its role as the Valley's institutional center. Institutional uses create good local jobs. Their employees shop in Palmer and contribute to the overall economic health of the city. In addition, institutional uses like the Post Office and Library attract a regular flow of people to downtown who in turn patronize local businesses.

Means to accomplish this objective include monitoring the needs of existing institutions and working with these organizations to meet their needs. Continuing to improve Palmer as a place to live and a setting for institutional activities is also important. One specific strategy, appropriate in some instances, is for the City to help secure lands required to accommodate new institutional development, as it did to meet the needs of the Alaska Job Corps Center and the Mat-Su Juvenile Center. The passage of a City bond measure to acquire land for the State Troopers headquarters is another past example of the City's role in retaining institutional users.

The magnitude of existing public investment in Palmer, together with the availability of superior local public facilities and utility services, tends to discourage larger agencies from relocating elsewhere. Nevertheless, the City needs to work actively to ensure that institutional functions do not drift away.

The city should develop a plan for working with the institutional users: State court system and related services; Mat-Su Borough; State Troopers and Fish & Game; State Departments of Transportation, Public Facilities and Environmental Conservation; State Division of Motor Vehicles; State Division of Agriculture, State Recording Office, State Bureau of Wildlife Enforcement, State Pioneer and Veterans Home, United States Department of Agriculture, United States Tsunami Warning Center, United States Postal Service, Federal Aviation Administration, Alaska Job Corps, Mat-Su School District Headquarters, MEA and MTA. The plan should help to establish a point of contact with the users groups and work to identify projected growth and programming changes which will impact future space requirements and identify how the city can help meet those needs.

Since 1936, Palmer has been identified as the medical center for the Valley. With the construction of the new regional hospital near the junction of Parks and Glenn Highways, the future of the existing Valley Hospital in downtown Palmer is uncertain. Several concepts for the use of the building have emerged including a state-wide medical training facility, conversion of the space for university purposes, and the consolidation of state department and services with emphasis on the judicial and public safety offices. The city should support actions that meet the present and future needs of government offices in Palmer in the long term.

Another potential site for expansion of institutional uses is the old Mat-Maid block and vacant lands a short distance north and east of the downtown area. Matanuska-Susitna Borough offices are overcrowded. In the next several years the borough is likely to need to either expand at its current location, or develop a satellite office. The City should work closely with the borough to ensure it has room to grow, and that the borough continues to be a preeminent institution in the community. Options that have been suggested include expanding borough offices at their existing location, and housing new borough offices in the proposed renovation of the Mat Maid building.

The State Court system is currently expanding the courthouse but has identified the need for further expansion after five years. The old Valley Hospital site is adjacent to the court house and for that reason offers many advantages for future expansion. Should the hospital site be converted to another use, Palmer should continue to work to meet the future needs of the justice system in Palmer.

The Palmer Pioneer Home has shifted functions and now focuses on veterans, and currently has no plans for expansion. Currently 75% of the people residing in the Pioneers Home are veterans. The Alaska Job Corps Center, currently ranked among the top five in the nation, may require additional land for future expansion. Its existing 20-acre site is almost fully developed. The Credit Union is another important local institution that needs room to expand.

The University of Alaska Anchorage and Alaska Pacific University both have facilities in the valley. Universities provide jobs, generate trained employees, support research that can contribute to local economic development, and offer amenities that enhance quality of life. The City should encourage APU and UAA to expand their facilities in the Palmer area.

Objective B: Support continued industrial use, consistent with other plan goals

The City welcomes industrial activities and the jobs and associated tax revenues these uses generate. Industrial activities need to be located and managed so they are good neighbors to adjoining uses. .

The City's industrial park has been established for many years and all lots are in private ownership. However, large areas of the industrial park are not fully developed. Lots in the nearby Palmer Commercial Center should be able to accommodate anticipated future demands for light industrial land.

The proximity of Palmer's airport is an important resource for potential industrial developers. Lands surrounding the Palmer Airport offer one of the most promising areas for expansion of industrial activities. Ideally, growth in this area would take advantage of the air access, for example businesses that might distribute or assemble value-added products for use around Alaska.

The primary role for City in encouraging industrial expansion is to zone land for this use, and ensure compatibility between industrial and adjoining uses. Large tracts of land immediately to the east of the industrial park along South Chugach Street and the Springer system, inside and some outside Palmer's present City limits, are being developed for institutional and residential use. Ensuring compatibility between uses will require appropriate locations, appropriate site and building design, and managing ongoing operations. Examples of such policies, intended to maintain the value of both residential and industrial areas, include adequate setbacks, retention of buffers on new residential subdivisions, use of vegetation as screening, and performance standards regarding noise and light.

Today Outer Springer Loop defines the southern boundary of Palmer's industrial lands, except for the Palmer Commercial Center and additional screening is needed along this route. Similarly, screening around the Palmer Commercial Center should be required to protect existing and future residential development in adjoining areas.

Palmer should also make an effort to phase out industrial areas in other parts of town over the next twenty years. In particular, Service Oil and Gas on South Valley Way and the Borough facilities on East Auklet should be relocated to established industrial areas.

GOAL 4: Encourage new commercial development, so residents of Palmer, residents of surrounding areas, and visitors can find the goods and services they need in Palmer.

This goal addresses a range of commercial activities including retail, service and restaurants. Early in Palmer's history the community was isolated, and people shopped for all of their needs in town. Over the last several decades, shopping opportunities outside of town have expanded dramatically, while commercial uses in Palmer have grown more slowly. Residents of "greater Palmer" must now travel to Wasilla or Anchorage to purchase many of the goods and services they desire.

Public input during this planning process made clear that residents want growth in commercial uses in Palmer, so the community is more self-sufficient. At the same time, residents want to guide the location and form of commercial development to maintain the community's character.

The result of these two intentions sets the stage for important changes in Palmer's commercial landscape. Over the next 10-20 years, Palmer should seek significantly expanded commercial activity, to better serve existing and new area residents, as well as out-of-region visitors.

Background – Existing Commercial Use

Retail and office uses can be found in several different locations in Palmer, reflecting different types of demands and neighborhood conditions. Over the years, downtown has evolved and expanded south, north and west. In mid-century, downtown Palmer was dominated by the Mat-Maid dairy facilities, and the territorial school. Today, the former use sits vacant, the school is now the offices of the Mat-Su Borough, and downtown offers a wide range of businesses serving nearby residents and modest numbers of out-of-town visitors. Businesses include convenience retail, restaurants and bars, several hotels, specialty and gift shops, beauty salons and other personal services, gas stations and car repair. The Palmer-Wasilla Highway includes a diverse, growing collection of commercial activities. Two full-service grocery stores, located at the intersection of the Palmer-Wasilla and Glenn Highways, serve Palmer and the surrounding area.



Palmer also has many professional offices, interspersed in all the community's commercial districts. The Palmer Industrial Park, on the south side of town, is fully occupied and houses two major cooperative utilities, Matanuska Telephone Association and Matanuska Electric Association, as well as the City of Palmer Public Works Department. The Palmer Business Park located off the Glenn Highway a short distance south of S. Colony Way, is a former shopping center. It now houses a number of State Agency offices.

To meet the broad goal for high quality commercial development, five distinct locations and styles of commercial development are required. Intentions for commercial development in each of these areas are presented below.

Objective A: Expand institutional, commercial and mixed use areas in downtown east of the Alaska Railroad.

This historic area includes the mix of institutional, office and limited commercial areas east of the Railroad, and east of the Alaska Street business area. A portion of this area is a designated National Historic District, requires special attention regarding renovation and construction of buildings. The district includes the Palmer water tower and the Mat-Su Borough office building – Palmer's two defining landmarks. Residential neighborhoods are located north and east of this area. This district includes several vacant or empty buildings with historical interest and potential for redevelopment, such as the Mat-Maid buildings.

This district is well located to support expanded institutional development that would help strengthen the downtown core and benefit the community, with commercial activities as an important, but secondary use. Development objectives for this district include:

- Through use of the design guidelines and the City zoning code, encourage building forms and styles that complement this area's historic character. Consider developing an explicit overlay zone to guide development in the historic district. Elements of the character include buildings that are set back from street, include landscaped open space, and have well defined, gabled roofs. Large floor area "big box" retail buildings are not

permitted in this district, however, larger commercial developments under a single owner are acceptable if buildings are broken into smaller, more human-scaled components.

- Commercial uses in this area should strengthen the area's attraction as a setting for institutional uses, and attract workers in nearby office buildings as well as residents and visitors. Examples include restaurants, a brew pub, specialty grocery stores, specialty retail, and professional offices.
- Designs for parking and the relationship of buildings to the street should make this area an extension of the pedestrian-oriented character of the downtown core. Parking areas should be broken into smaller units with landscaping. Require safe, attractive pathways from the street and parking areas to building entries.

Objective B: Encourage high quality, larger scale commercial uses along the Palmer-Wasilla Highway, and several other local highways. *See below for Glenn Highway policies.*

The Palmer-Wasilla Highway is the center of a major, steadily expanding commercial corridor connecting Palmer and Wasilla. This area is appropriate for highway-oriented commercial uses, such as larger floor area, higher traffic developments, for example, larger grocery, and department or home-improvement stores. Other road corridors with similar general intent, but with smaller lots and therefore smaller buildings, include the southern end of S. Colony Way, and E. Arctic Avenue. Development objectives for these districts include:

- Landscaping for parking areas and along the highway/property interface
- Shared access
- Controls on size, appearance of signs
- Screened service areas
- Good pedestrian circulation, within and through these areas

See Goal 7 of this chapter for a more complete discussion of Glenn Highway/South Town Entry.

Objective C: Strengthen Palmer's traditional downtown core.

This district, between the Glenn Highway and the Railroad, is the traditional center of Palmer. Lots and buildings are generally small and pedestrian-oriented. In addition to retail and commercial services downtown includes a number of residences and former residences now used as offices. Development objectives in this district include:

- On Alaska Street and S. Colony Way – Encourage Main Street style buildings, with minimal or no front and side setbacks. Ensure the zoning code maintains downtown's pedestrian-friendly character.
- Areas outside of Alaska Street commercial area – These areas should continue to be mixed use neighborhoods. New and refurbished buildings should have retail, office or other commercial uses on the ground floor. Residential uses are encouraged on the upper floors. New or rehabilitated buildings should maintain the positive architectural characteristics of the residential buildings traditionally found in this area, for example, well defined entries and entry porches, detailed facades, human-scaled doors and windows, use of natural materials and styles that echo traditional residential styles.

See Goal 6 of this chapter for a more complete discussion of Downtown.

Objective D: Allow for attractive commercial use along the Glenn Highway corridor.

The plan seeks to maintain the attractive entry into Palmer, characterized by a passage through a tree-lined road and areas where there is presently little development, followed by arrival in the more developed community center. The plan recognizes that new commercial use will most likely occur along the Glenn Highway south of downtown with the installation of the southwest water and sewer extension.

See Goal 7 of this chapter for a more complete discussion of Glenn Highway/South Town Entry.

Objective E: Allow for neighborhood commercial uses.

The plan allows for smaller nodes of commercial use in residential areas. Examples of such uses include a small neighborhood store, coffee shop or video rental shop. Allowing such uses adjoining residential neighborhoods is a convenience to residents and helps reduce the need for driving. Development objectives for these areas include:

- Control the location, size and design of such uses so the neighborhood commercial facility does not disrupt neighborhood character, or generate excess traffic.
- Allow this type of use only to a limited degree, and in carefully selected locations, such as intersections of collectors or arterials. Locations can either be identified in advance on the zoning map, or be proposed by a developer and then be considered under a special, conditional review process.

GOAL 5: Guide the form and character of growth to encourage high-quality buildings and site development that reflects Palmer's history and setting.

Background

The community of Palmer expects to continue to grow, but wants to guide growth to maintain Palmer's positive qualities - the community's small town feel, mix of uses, pedestrian scale, attractive buildings, and links to history. New policies are needed to guide the form and character of development, particularly of commercial and industrial buildings. These policies will include advisory design guidelines and a zoning code that continues to set high standards for development.

Palmer needs to modify its zoning code to better achieve the following goals:

- recognize the differences between commercial development in downtown and in other commercial areas
- provide clear standards for new types and scales of development coming to the community, particularly for projects with community-wide impacts; provide predictable, objective criteria for evaluating projects
- find a balance between encouraging high quality development while not establishing unreasonable burdens on developers

Strategies to Achieve this Goal

Objective A: Revise zoning code to allow for growth and encourage quality development, and to shape development to reflect Palmer’s unique identity.

1. Ease of Use – As recommended in the University of Washington (UW) study, make changes to simplify use of the code, for example, provide tables that summarize permitted uses.
2. Incentive Zoning – The City should establish a “two-tier” zoning system that offers incentives to developers to provide community amenities. In certain parts of the City, this would allow the choice of using the standard “first-tier” zoning system, or a more flexible, “second tier” approach. Under the latter approach, in exchange for more amenities than otherwise would be provided (e.g., a mini-plaza with seating, a trail), the developer could be allowed more flexibility in meeting standards (e.g. increased intensity of development).
3. Form and Character of Building and Site Development – This plan presents objectives to be translated into revisions and new sections of the Palmer Zoning code. A list of topics and references to the plan sections where these changes are described is presented below:
 - Downtown – regulations that encourage appropriate commercial, institutional and mixed use development, including pedestrian scaled, “main street” commercial in the core area, and mixed institutional and commercial uses east of the railroad. *See Goals 4 and 6 of this chapter.*
 - Commercial adjoining Glenn and Palmer-Wasilla Highways – regulations that require commercial buildings to maintain the visual quality of these primary entries to the community, including standards for setbacks, landscape buffering, use of shared access roads and shared signs. *See Goal 4 and 7 of this chapter.*
 - Highway Commercial along other roadways outside of downtown – regulations reflecting an automobile-oriented use pattern (e.g., front parking). *See Goal 4 of this chapter.*
 - Higher Density Housing – rules for higher density housing and mixed use projects that include residential that encourage high quality development. *See Goal 2 of this chapter.*
 - Landscaping standards – rules setting minimum standards for landscaping buildings, parking lots and other developments
4. Locations and Intensity of uses. *See Goal 2 of this chapter.*
 - Rural Residential – a new zoning district to be used as City boundaries grow, to be applied in areas of very low density residential use, where rural standards for development and for services and facilities are appropriate.
 - Cluster or “Open Space” subdivisions – the PUD ordinance should be revised to create more requirements and incentives for developers to include open space, stormwater drainage and other community amenities in their subdivisions. Incentives could be offered in exchange for higher densities than would otherwise be permitted.

Objective B: Adopt policies to keep Palmer a visually attractive community, including maintaining good views of surrounding mountains

- Design guidelines – Work in partnership with affected businesses and landowners to develop advisory design guidelines. Guidelines should present community goals and give examples regarding site development, landscaping and building styles, scale and mass.

One important goal of these standards is to encourage building styles that reflect Palmer’s unique history and location.

- Building height restrictions – Retain existing height restrictions in downtown. In other commercial districts develop standards to allow buildings up to 5-6 stories. In developing these standards, the City should consider the benefits of retaining winter sunlight, and the differences of views in different directions. For example, views of mountain to the south, east and north of the City are more valuable than views to the west.
- Sign Ordinance – rules allowing a range of sizes and styles of signs, to maintain the community’s visual quality, help businesses be successful, and respond to the different character of different commercial districts.
-

GOAL 6: Support efforts by the Downtown Business Improvement District to help ensure Palmer’s traditional downtown is lively, attractive and inviting for residents and visitors.

Residents and visitors treasure the small town feel of Palmer, with its array of locally-owned businesses, sense of history and open space. This character, shared by very few other Southcentral Alaska communities, is a valuable economic asset. It helps downtown businesses attract customers, helps sustain property values and creates a clear image for the community. Downtown provides a center for community public life, a place to meet friends and acquaintances, and amenities and infrastructure that attract office and institutional users.

Downtown is defined as the area bounded by N. Arctic Avenue on the north, the S. Colony Way entrance on the south, the Glenn Highway on the west, and roughly the Mat-Su Borough office building on the east. This broad boundary encompasses areas with different characteristics and different goals, including the predominately institutional district east of the railroad, areas that are primarily residential and the core “main street” commercial district.

After years of stability and in some instances decline, in recent years much of the land in downtown has turned over to new ownerships. Odds are good the area will experience substantial change in the next five to ten years. This plan establishes six objectives to guide downtown economic development. The **Downtown Opportunities** map summarizes these objectives.

Objective A: Create Demand – Expand the base of downtown users within walking distance of downtown, including more residential and office uses and more tourist accommodations.

Successful downtowns compete with single purpose shopping destinations by appealing to a diverse range of users. Particularly important is having a large market of people who live and/or work in downtown. To be more successful, Palmer needs to encourage more of the following uses downtown:



- **Residential.** Promote housing development and redevelopment in walking distance of downtown. Spending by residents supports downtown merchants. Regular use by residents helps make evenings and weekends livelier.
- **Offices & Institutional.** Retain and attract new office and institutional users. Increasing the number of these uses supports downtown restaurants and other businesses, and strengthens the tax base which generates funds for a range of community needs.
- **Tourism.** Promote new and improved accommodations in downtown to encourage more visitor spending.

Objective B: Make downtown “the place to be” - Give residents and visitors new reasons to spend time and money in downtown. Encourage more commercial development, upgrades of existing facilities, new attractions and new events.

To become a stronger commercial center, downtown Palmer needs to offer visitors and locals more reasons to visit. Major opportunities to achieve this include:

- **Diverse Shops, Stores, Restaurants.** The core attraction of small downtowns remains a diverse, concentrated set of businesses. To compete successfully against big box discount stores and shopping malls, downtown needs to offset its comparatively lesser convenience by offering a greater mix of unique specialty shops, services, restaurants and night spots, as well as public amenities. To encourage this expansion, the City supports improvements to make downtown more attractive for private investment, including improved roads, trails, parking, events, public attractions and all the other actions outlined under this goal.
- **Public “Anchor” Facilities** – Shopping malls have anchor tenants; in downtowns, facilities like the post office and library play a comparable role, attracting significant regular use which leads to more spending at adjoining downtown businesses. The City will work to ensure these valuable uses remain in downtown.
- **“Bridge the Barrier”** - The railroad tracks and depot area provide an open space with both positive and negative impacts on downtown. On the plus side, this area offers an open, park-like corridor in the center of the city. On the less positive side, because this area is largely unimproved, it acts as barrier that splits downtown, and creates a ‘dead space’ in what should be the heart of the heart of the community. Even in good weather, pedestrians are disinclined to cross this undeveloped area.

The depot/railroad area is undergoing a change to become a focal point of activity that unites and energizes downtown. The improvements will have to retain the railroad link and accommodate the use limitations within the railroad right-of-way. The City, Alaska Railroad Corporation, and other affected land owners need to continue to work together to meet the needs of all parties and maximize the value of this key location. Specific actions include:

- carry out Downtown Revitalization Plan, which sets out specific plans for improving the depot and the rail corridor.

- reserve the rail connection south from Palmer to Anchorage, however, work with Alaska Railroad to de-activate the rail tracks north of the Depot up to Arctic, and to permit new road and pedestrian crossings on the section of rail line between downtown and the gravel pits, at least until such time as rail traffic increases and these crossings may need to be removed.
 - work with Alaska Railroad to find way to reduce constraints on downtown development linked to the presence of the rail line. Ultimately this rail line should be modified to urban rail standards, (comparable to light rail standards) which permit development and pedestrian activities to immediately adjoin rail activities. This may include reducing the height of the existing berm.
- **New Attractions** – Both for visitors and residents, downtown needs the kind of attractions that make people go out of their way to visit. Once there, the other aspects of downtown – its shops, public spaces, people – create reasons people choose to linger. Priority improvements are listed below:
- Rail Corridor. Implementation of the Downtown Revitalization Plan will turn the rail corridor s into a greenbelt park with a trail connecting the downtown with surrounding residential areas, recreation destinations and the Fairgrounds. Other planned actions include improvements at the depot, improved landscaping, developing a new east-west road, and improving east-west sidewalks (with signage, benches, kiosks, other features plus improved maintenance).
 - Agriculture. Visitors come to Palmer wanting to see the giant cabbages, to learn about colony history and see Alaskan farms. Residents take pride and pleasure in sharing this heritage. Palmer has a unique opportunity to use this story to revitalize the downtown, but this effort needs to go well beyond photos and exhibits. This initiative should involve the Museum, the proposed Business Improvement District (BID), the Borough, the City and other parties. Ideas to explore include: improvements at the visitor’s center and vegetable garden, cabbage art, restaurants serving local produce, local produce and meat market at the Matanuska-Maid Creamery site or horse carriage farm tours that leave from downtown.
 - Mat Maid. The vacant Mat Maid historic creamery and its three-acre site have the potential to be a major mixed use development. For example, this facility could house expanded offices of existing local institutions, and also include specialty shopping, dining, a museum or art galleries, all done in a way that evokes the town’s history.
 - The Quad. Palmer’s historic Quad is an asset that can become an interesting secondary downtown attraction, and a venue for events. At a minimum, construction of structures that diminish its historic, open character should be discouraged. Over time, efforts should be made to bring out its classic, original design.
- **Small Town Feel**. Maintain the small town atmosphere by upgrading existing buildings and providing advisory design guidelines and standards to ensure quality construction when new buildings are built.

- **Comfort, Reasons to Linger.** Provide public restrooms, benches, trash cans and similar public amenities along Palmer's downtown streets.
- **Events.** In recent years, Palmer has taken important steps to develop and enhance events and activities downtown, largely through the hard work of local volunteers. This process should continue, using events to further add vitality to downtown. Specific actions include improving event venues for multiple uses, and adding capacity better accommodate growing crowds.

Objective C: Improve downtown circulation, starting with the entries to the City, to make access, parking, and walking efficient, safe, enjoyable, and inviting year-round.

- **Gateway Arrival.** Improve the major gateway entry points to downtown, to create a better sense of arrival and better brand for the community.
- **Easy to Park.** Without adequate parking downtowns wither for lack of customers. But too many large surface parking lots force downtowns to spread out and sacrifice the ease of walking that is the heart of their appeal. Downtown Palmer currently has good parking, but significant parking improvements will be needed as downtown grows. The critical need is to help businesses provide more parking off-site, so that buildings remain close together for easy walking. The City has recently adopted a new parking ordinance that makes major strides in these directions. Specific actions to improve parking include:
 - Identify and reserve land for future public parking lots, paid for in part by fees in-lieu of on-site parking.
 - Maximize on-street parking.
 - Work with owners of select existing private parking lots to retain these lots for parking use.
 - Consolidate separate lots to increase efficiency and improve management and maintenance.
 - Working with the future BID, encourage downtown business owners and employees to leave the best parking for customers. Establish dedicated outlying areas for employee parking.
- **Easy to Walk.** Make it easy to walk throughout downtown on a year-round basis. The City will support sidewalk rehabilitation, improved trails, better pedestrian links across the railroad, and improved year-round maintenance.
- **Trail Hub.** Make downtown a hub for paved and un-paved trail connections that will attract visitors and locals visitors. Establish the trail as called for in the Palmer Urban Revitalization Plan along the rail line north up the Matanuska River Valley and south to the Fairgrounds; link this trail to the City-wide trail system to provide good trail access to businesses, neighborhoods, parks and schools.
- **Downtown Road Improvements.** Downtown will function better if strategic road improvements are made, including a second link across the railroad north of the Depot. As is explained in the Transportation Chapter, Dogwood appears to be the logical extension, but further study is needed to ensure this is the preferred route.

- **Urban Rail.** The rail line into downtown is only used rarely, for special events. A recent study concluded that commuter rail service between Anchorage and the valley is feasible in terms of quality of service, but too expensive on a per rider basis given current demand. In the future, however, commuter rail may become much more practical, as energy costs rise, and more jobs and housing concentrate in downtown Palmer and Anchorage. The Alaska Railroad Corporation intends to retain the rail link into Palmer. As is discussed in “bridging the barrier” section above, in the near term, the City should work with the railroad to minimize the impacts of the rail-related restrictions on downtown activities. One option, as has occurred in many other downtowns, is to use urban rail standards, which allow for adequate safety in the rail corridor, but also supports other downtown goals.

Objective D: Use the power of informational tools and branding to tell Palmer’s story, improve name recognition, catch visitors’ attention and leverage increased economic returns.

Palmer’s a unique history and setting gives the community a distinctive statewide and even national image. This can translate into real economic benefits for businesses and the community as whole. Many cities spend hundreds of thousands of dollars trying to conjure up an equally compelling public image. Specific actions to build on Palmer’s strengths include:

- **Historic District.** A portion of downtown Palmer has been designated a National Historic District, formally acknowledging this area’s national significance. Palmer needs to do more to retain and enhance this resource, including inventory historic resources, assist building owners who want to use tax incentive programs to restore historic buildings, and consider an overlay zoning district to maintain the area’s historic character. A grant to the Borough from the State Historic Preservation Office may assist in this process.
- **Stories and Interpretation.** The Palmer “story” should be more fully integrated into the experience of the historic district, downtown and the community as a whole. The City is already moving in this direction. Additional steps should include themed attractions and events; improved interpretive signs, photos, and art in public places; and brochures, maps, websites and other promotional materials crafted to convey the “Palmer brand”.
- **Signature Signage, Way finding and Maps.** Many towns, visitor attractions and campuses (University of Alaska Anchorage for example) attract and direct visitors through a cohesive program of custom signs and well-conveyed graphic and text information. Palmer’s historic district and downtown would benefit from a similar approach.
- **Selling Palmer.** To draw more use to downtown - tourists, residents, developers, business entrepreneurs, and employers - Palmer needs to promote itself and keep its strengths intact as it grows. This should be done in partnership with the Chamber, Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau (MSCVB), and future Business Improvement District. *See Economic Vitality chapter for details.*

- **Support effort to establish Business Improvement District – Create a “Downtown Champion.”** Palmer is well known for its volunteer can-do spirit and effective City government in the traditional realms of fire, police, safety and basic services. The City actively supports the current movement by downtown property owners to establish a formal Business Improvement District (BID). The City can work with this group to advocate and see through implementation on the measures outlined in this section.

Objective E: Identify near term actions as first priorities for improving downtown

Building momentum for large scale downtown improvements requires first moving forward with more modest, achievable actions. Priorities for City action are listed below:

- Implement the Downtown Revitalization Plan – improve the Depot and establish trails along the rail line
- Support efforts to create a Business Improvement District
- Work with partners to provide a memorable, fun, year-round way to meet entirely reasonable question – “where can I see a giant cabbage?”

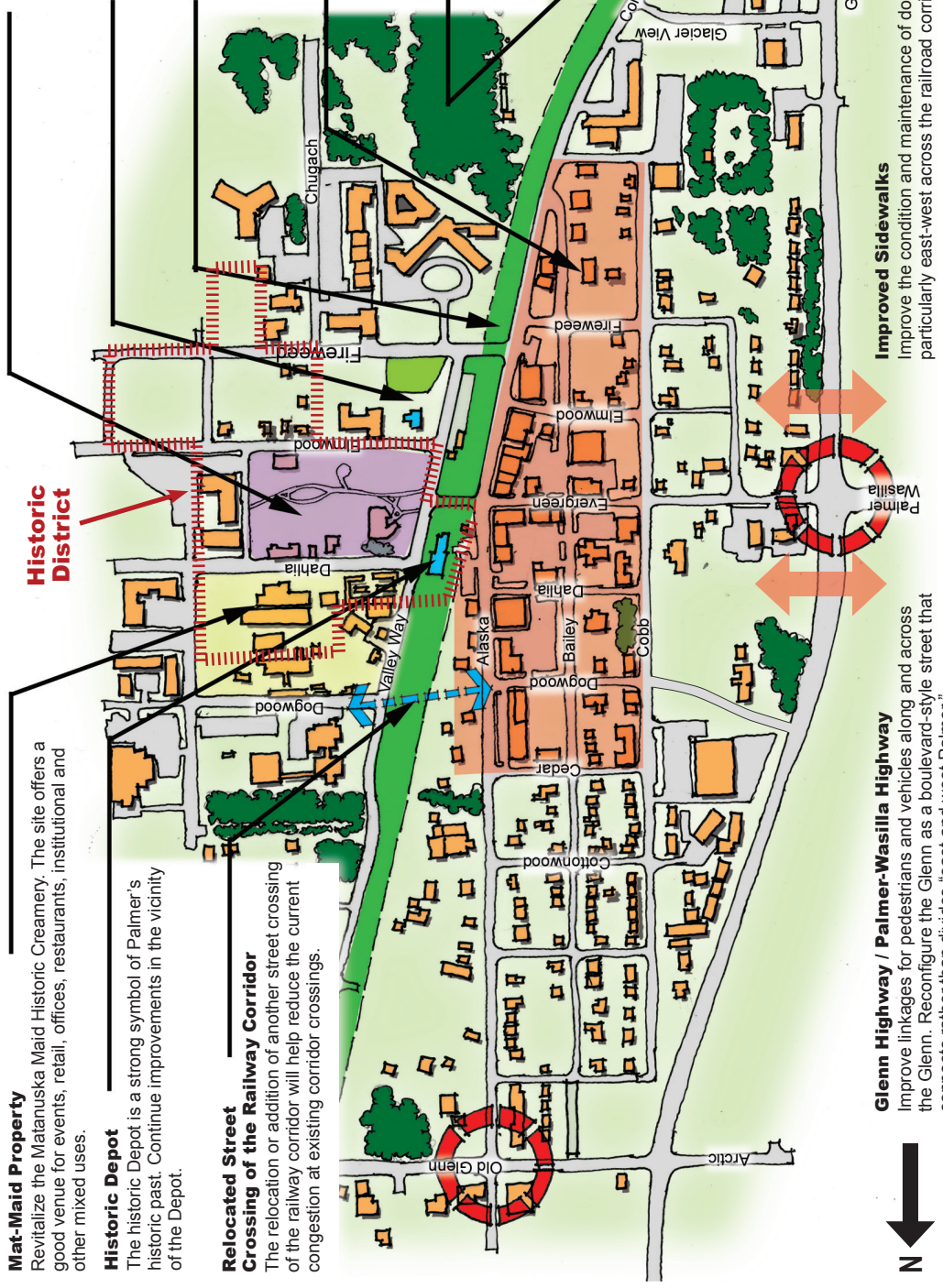
The Quadrangle
Palmer's historic Quad is an asset that will best serve downtown if its original design is strengthened and more active uses are implemented.

Visitor Center and Garden
Use the Visitor Center and Garden to reinforce Palmer's agricultural traditions. Provide a year round answer to the question: "Where's the giant cabbage?"

Railway Corridor
Better utilize the rail corridor for a variety of community benefits. The corridor can provide trail and walkway links, serve as a community green belt, and host future light rail service.

Downtown Core
The Downtown core is a vital resource for Palmer that could be strengthened. Work toward improving the variety of shopping, attractions, and experiences for Palmer visitors and residents. Utilize the downtown as a hub for an extensive trail and walkway system and identify private-public parking options to serve growth.

Gateways
Reinforce Palmer's identity with gateway features at key entry points. Incorporate screening of the electrical substation into the gateway feature at the "Y".



Mat-Maid Property
Revitalize the Matanuska Maid Historic Creamery. The site offers a good venue for events, retail, offices, restaurants, institutional and other mixed uses.

Historic Depot
The historic Depot is a strong symbol of Palmer's historic past. Continue improvements in the vicinity of the Depot.

Relocated Street Crossing of the Railway Corridor
The relocation or addition of another street crossing of the railway corridor will help reduce the current congestion at existing corridor crossings.

Glenn Highway / Palmer-Wasilla Highway
Improve linkages for pedestrians and vehicles along and across the Glenn. Reconfigure the Glenn as a boulevard-style street that connects rather than divides "east and west Palmer."

Improved Sidewalks
Improve the condition and maintenance of downtown sidewalks, particularly east-west across the railroad corridor.



Downtown Opportunities

Land Use Goal 4, Objectives B & C

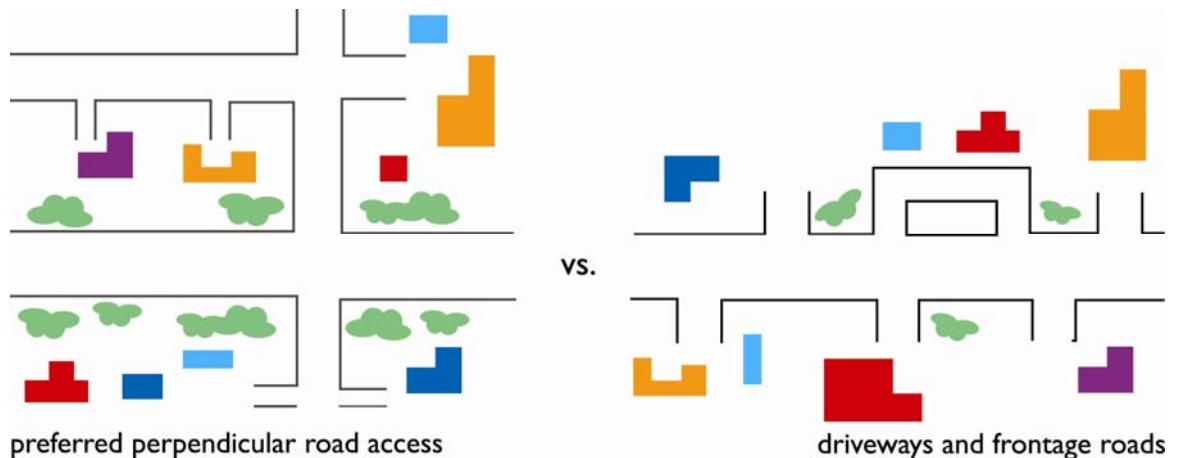
GOAL 7: Maintain and improve the visual quality of the Glenn and Palmer-Wasilla Highway corridors, and other major community roads.

Community members expressed a strong desire to maintain the attractive entry into Palmer. Making the Glenn Highway into a “boulevard-style” road is the primary strategy to reach this goal. An attractive, tree-lined boulevard will help maintain visual quality, better serve the needs of uses along the highway, and connect rather than divide the community. The Transportation Chapter describes the role of the Glenn Highway as part of the community, regional and statewide circulation system; this section focuses on the design characteristics of the road and adjoining uses.



This boulevard-style road will differ in two separate stretches of the highway:

- Southern Glenn Highway Corridor (south of Outer Springer Loop) - The highway in this area should serve as an attractive entry to the community, with a handful of intersections providing access to current and future development. Specific design and access standards include:
 - add trees on the sides of the road to screen expected future commercial and residential development (both within the right-of-way by the state, and along adjoining properties)
 - minimize driveways and use of frontage roads, instead provide access to adjoining properties by way of limited numbers of perpendicular roads (see sketch below)



- limit commercial signage; encourage several businesses to use a common sign
- establish a pedestrian bikepath along at least one side of the road

- Glenn Highway in Downtown Palmer (north of Outer Springer Loop) - In this area the highway should make the transition from a high speed road that carries through traffic, to a lower speed road, that helps connect the areas east and west of the highway. Design standards to reach this goal are outlined below:
 - establish a planted median, as well as landscaping along the right-of-way
 - provide space for improved entry sign or monument
 - establish signage and lighting standards appropriate for a roadway with slower traffic speeds (smaller than in the southern stretch of the Glenn)
 - minimize driveways and use of frontage roads, instead provide access to adjoining properties by way of perpendicular roads
 - add additional pedestrian and vehicular crossing points between Glacier View and Arctic Avenue
 - provide for safe, enjoyable pedestrian circulation along and across the road

GOAL 8: Sustain Palmer’s agricultural traditions.

Palmer is the center of Alaska’s longest established and most successful agricultural region. The Palmer area has good soils, access to markets, a favorable climate and skilled farmers. Like many fast growing communities, Palmer is facing the challenge that lands that are excellent for agriculture are also attractive for residential development. Many of these lands have already been converted to non-agricultural uses, and a number of farms have recently been purchased for residential development.

Objective A: Support creation of mechanisms to preserve high quality farmlands. Encourage retention of agricultural lands, recognizing that not all existing agricultural lands will remain in agricultural use.

The community has long wished to preserve portions of Palmer’s agricultural lands for agricultural uses, to provide jobs, provide agricultural products, and preserve the community’s character. The City supports the effort of local groups to retain agricultural lands, although the City will not be the primary leader of this effort. Options to protect farmlands for agricultural use include:

- Form a land trust or partner with an established trust to work with land owners to acquire development rights on agricultural land.
- Establish an open space district with the capacity to raise funds for land acquisition.
- Support efforts of groups like the State Fair who may be able to acquire and hold farmlands as part of their ongoing operations.
- As the City expands, apply land use zoning and property tax policies that encourage retention of agricultural lands where property owners wish to keep land in agricultural use.

Objective B: Support and maintain Palmer’s rural, farming identity and traditions.

The creation of an Agricultural Processing and Product Development Center is being proposed by the Mat-Su Borough. The borough hopes to combine the facility with the School District Central Kitchen already in Palmer. The City supports this effort to promote and provide incentives for using local agricultural produce in the development of new products at the center. There are other goals

in this Land Use chapter and the Economic Vitality chapter which present additional strategies to achieve this objective, including, developing community gardens and expanding the Farmer's Market at Friday Fling.

GOAL 9: Maintain a positive connection with Palmer's natural setting; maintain the quality of the natural environment - particularly stream corridors, lakes, and watershed areas.

Objective A: Encourage retention of open space, park lands and agricultural lands.

Community members have consistently emphasized the value they find in Palmer's open space, views, trees and overall sense of connection with its natural setting. Strategies to protect and enhance these characteristics are outlined below.

- Retain existing community parks lands. *See Parks, Recreation and Culture chapter.*
- Revise existing zoning code to:
 - encourage improved landscaping of commercial development.
 - where practical, encourage retention of areas of existing vegetation when sites are improved and discourage clearing of sites until the time they are developed.
 - retain open space within future subdivisions. *See Goal 2 of this chapter.*
- Encourage more voluntary planting of trees on private property
- Require retention of buffers and development setbacks adjoining water bodies.
- Provide a list of plant species that are well suited to local conditions
- Encourage retention of agricultural lands. *See Goal 8 of this chapter.*

Objective B: Encourage development practices that protect water quality and habitat

Currently there are limited natural areas within Palmer community boundaries. As the community expands, more such areas may be included within the City. As development takes place, developers are encouraged to follow accepted best management practices for protecting water quality and wildlife habitat through setbacks from water bodies, and use of drainage swales and onsite infiltration of storm water runoff to reduce erosion.



GOAL 10: Annexation – plan for the phased expansion of City boundaries.

This plan recommends that Palmer adopt an active annexation strategy to guide future development. Overall objectives are:

- Plan for phased annexations to guide growth, and provide for effective delivery of municipal services which benefit land owners, residents and businesses currently on the periphery of Palmer City limits.
- Actively work with the Matanuska Susitna Borough to develop shared plans for future growth, including residential and commercial activities and extension of services.
- Set general goals for land use in areas proposed for annexation prior to annexation.
- Establish a procedure to obtain input from interested persons regarding what City services are appropriate for areas that may be annexed.
- Coordinate annexation proposals with the Mat-Su Borough, e.g. provision of services, shared development standards such as road standards, and land use policies.

Palmer's ability to plan for and control future growth is presently constrained by its very small physical area. Of Alaska's sixteen mid-sized (2,000 to 6,000 residents) cities, Palmer has the smallest area and greatest population density. Palmer's land area takes in only 5.2 square miles, significantly smaller than the average area of Alaska's mid-sized cities. Palmer's 2004 population density (993 persons per square mile) was double that of the next most densely populated city (Soldotna) and more than ten times that of the average mid-sized city.

Palmer's boundaries are even more constricted when the relatively large amount of non-residential land within the City taken up by the airport, golf course, the Alaska State Fair and other institutional uses is considered. Unlike most of the other mid-sized cities, Palmer is not an isolated community. A significant share of the Palmer area's recent growth has taken place in the urban fringe outside the City's municipal boundaries.

Not only can the City make a very strong case that it needs additional area for community expansion, but it also has a great deal to offer urbanizing areas outside its corporate limits. No other place in the Mat-Su Borough matches the breadth and quality of municipal services that are enjoyed by Palmer residents. Among Palmer's many assets, four services in particular stand out:

- High quality local law enforcement services provided by the City police department. The presence of Alaska State Troopers in the community is an additional asset. Urban growth requires more services than the Alaska State Troopers can provide.
- Exceptional fire protection services, which in combination with the citywide piped water system and the enforcement of local building codes, are reflected in a very good fire insurance rating of 4, the best in the Mat-Su Borough. The good fire rating, in turn, results in significantly lower fire insurance premiums for Palmer residents than for people living outside the City, and at a distance from the city water system.
- Good street maintenance and snow removal services. Palmer's compact form enables these services to be provided more efficiently than is possible in less densely developed areas.
- Planning and zoning land use policies. Palmer residents have some certainty that structures within the City limits were built to code. Their neighborhoods are also protected from the intrusion of incompatible uses because Palmer has enforced local

zoning for many years. These conditions have not always been considered to be assets in the Mat-Su Borough. However, increasing densities and land use conflicts in the "Core" area are changing attitudes toward land use regulation. Increasingly, Borough residents are recognizing that reasonable planning and zoning policies help ensure the quality of neighborhoods, and maintain and increase property values.

Annexation Policies

This plan adopts a phased approach to annexation, and identifies the certificated sewer service area as the boundary for the expansion of the City. (This boundary, which extends well beyond the existing City boundary, takes in all the land included in the water service district boundary.) This concept should be filed with the Local Boundary Commission and individual annexation petitions should be used to implement the concept. *See Appendix A.*

The implementation of this concept will serve the needs of the City and the land owners in areas of possible annexation. By providing advance notice to land owners and residences in areas of possible annexation, and working with the Mat-Su Borough, they would be in a stronger position to prepare for annexation into the City. Land developers would have the opportunity to work with the City and plan land uses.

Municipal Policies in Future Annexation Areas

Existing land use in the area surrounding Palmer's existing City limits is a mix of residential, agriculture and some commercial, industrial and institutional uses. The City of Palmer supports continued agricultural activity, but recognizes that as the limited amount of remaining vacant land within Palmer is built out, the financial incentive for owners to convert nearby agricultural land will lead to increased residential and commercial development in these areas.

The City of Palmer is using this plan to state its interest in eventually annexing lands within its existing sewer service area boundary. Annexation boundaries should follow topographical features when possible as opposed to section lines.

While the City of Palmer has no direct jurisdiction over how development will occur in areas currently outside the city, because the City's sewer service district extends into the areas, the City has strong interest in when and how development takes place. The City, the Mat-Su Borough and State should work together closely to guide development within the sewer service area, particularly for major developments such as new roads, major subdivisions, park and open spaces and community facilities. One good way to achieve this goal would be to prepare a cooperative Borough/City plan to guide land use and infrastructure decisions in this area.

It is also important that the City obtain input from landowners, residents and businesses in possible annexation areas, and that the City is clear on the process for setting land use policy in future annexation areas. This will assist Palmer in planning for its future overall growth, and enable land owners and businesses outside Palmer to have input into the process and to understand how annexation may affect them.

The following specific annexation policies will be implemented by the City of Palmer.

1. Cooperative Planning with the Borough

The City and Borough should investigate options for cooperative approaches to guiding land use and infrastructure development within the Sewer Service area boundary.

2. Site Specific Annexation Planning Studies.

Prior to proceeding with any annexation petition the City, working with the Borough will undertake a planning study of the area proposed for annexation. This will include providing public notice and public meetings to discuss and help delineate recommended future land uses, and to indicate how and when municipal services (including public safety, utilities, streets and trails) will be extended to the area, together with any estimated associated costs. Particularly when significant changes in land use are contemplated, factors such as topography, drainage, traffic impacts and utility requirements may be considered. The recommendations of the study will be incorporated into any annexation proposal submitted to the Alaska Local Boundary Commission.

3. General Land Use Policy for Annexed Areas.

As made clear above, it is not possible or appropriate for the City of Palmer to prepare specific land use policy for potential annexation areas. At the same time, the City needs to convey general intentions for the future use and zoning of annexed lands. This intent is established through the general policies of this Comprehensive Plan and other City land use policies, which are intended to describe the City's general intentions for land use in future annexation areas. Examples of general policies that apply City-wide, and would be extended to annexed areas, include creating and maintaining quality residential neighborhoods, requiring on-site infiltration of stormwater, using setbacks and buffers to ensure compatibility between different types of uses, providing open space and trails, and providing roads built to City standards. The annexation planning studies called for above will build from the general framework in the comprehensive plan and other City policies, and take into account the uses and opportunities and constraints of specific locations, and the perspectives of affected property owners and residents.

4. New Development in Annexed Areas.

Following annexation, new development will comply with all applicable City of Palmer codes.

CHAPTER 7 ECONOMIC VITALITY

Overview

Palmer's diversified economy reflects the community's different roles in the state and region. Palmer is the institutional center for the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, a focus of commercial services for residents of the City and surrounding areas, a growing tourism destination, and an important agricultural center. The State Fair and Palmer's agricultural heritage are important economic resources with cultural significance for the state and nation. Each of these roles influences Palmer's overall economic vitality.



This chapter presents goals and objectives for strengthening the local economy. While the private sector ultimately drives most economic development, the public sector plays a key supporting role, through its land use and infrastructure policies and projects.

Most of the economic development actions presented here are tied to topics addressed in other chapters, for example, recommendations regarding commercial development are included in the land use chapter. Where a topic is addressed in another chapter, this chapter makes references to these other sections, rather than repeating those policies here.

Summary of Goals

GOAL 1: Strengthen Palmer's competitiveness as the region's institutional center.

GOAL 2: Encourage expansion of technology and research-related economic sector and other well-paid professional jobs in the Palmer area.

GOAL 3: Strengthen Palmer's role as a place to shop for residents of Palmer, residents of surrounding areas, and visitors.

GOAL 4: Strengthen Palmer as a tourism destination and stopping point for travel through the southern Matanuska-Susitna area.

GOAL 5: Support efforts to promote Palmer as a travel destination and place to live and do business.

Goals and Objectives for Economic Vitality

GOAL 1: Strengthen Palmer’s competitiveness as the region’s institutional center.

Greater Palmer plays a key role in housing federal, state, regional government and non-profit institutions including the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development state office, the Alaska Job Corps campus, the Matanuska-Susitna State Troopers headquarters, the Mat-Su Borough headquarters, the State Courthouse, the District Attorney’s offices, State Forestry firefighting, the Department of Motor Vehicles area office, the district State Recorder’s Office, the University of Alaska’s Agriculture & Forestry Experiment Station office, the University’s district Cooperative Extension Service office, the University Matanuska Research Farm, and the University of Alaska’s Mat-Su Campus. The community is also the home base for important private entities such as the Mat Valley Federal Credit Union.



The City of Palmer strongly supports the community’s role as an institutional center. It is City policy to coordinate its essential city services, land use policies, and amenities to encourage institutions to remain and expand in Palmer. The *Land Use* chapter, under Goal 3, sets out specific strategies to reach this goal. These strategies include understanding the needs of institutions in Palmer, helping the institutions secure space for growth where possible, and continuing to enhance Palmer as an attractive setting.

GOAL 2: Encourage expansion of technology and research-related economic sectors and other well-paid professional jobs in the Palmer area.

The City of Palmer wants to encourage more well paid professional jobs in the community, including, for example, work in the legal, medical, engineering and design fields. Community members expressed a particular hope that Palmer can attract new businesses and entrepreneurs in “high tech” and research-based economic sectors. These sectors have a reputation for providing low impact, well paid jobs for communities. Compared to the many communities competing for this type of businesses, Palmer has many of the key ingredients likely to attract this footloose sector. These attributes include good quality of life, access to recreation amenities, a good regional airport, and easy access to a major international airport (in Anchorage). In addition, a number of research and educational institutions are located in the area, including the three mentioned above regarding agriculture, and the University of Alaska’s Mat-Su campus. City actions to promote this economic sector include those listed below:

- Continue to work to maintain and improve Palmer’s quality of life (trails, parks, health care, downtown, etc.).

- Work with the University of Alaska and Alaska Pacific University to determine what new programs might be developed in the Palmer area, and how the City might help these institutions to expand in the community.
- Work with the Chamber to market the community to desired businesses, including high tech and research-based businesses, and well paid professional businesses such as law, medicine and veterinary science.

GOAL 3: Strengthen Palmer’s role as a place to shop for residents of Palmer, residents of surrounding areas, and visitors.

Objective A: Provide space for commercial expansion; set high standards to ensure quality development.



Commercial growth is essential to Palmer’s quality of life and economic health. The City encourages commercial development so that Palmer residents and visitors can find more of the goods and services they need in Palmer, and help generate tax revenues to pay for needed City services. Plan policies are intended to ensure appropriate and sufficient land is zoned to encourage developers and business owners to make investments that will expand the commercial products and services available in town.

The Land Use chapter sets out strategies to encourage commercial development in Palmer, including establishing a preferred, overall development pattern; encouraging expansion of commercial uses downtown and on the Palmer-Wasilla and Glenn Highways. These policies also include standards so commercial development helps maintain and enhance community character and avoids highway sprawl. *See Land Use chapter, Goals 4, 5 and 6.*

Objective B: Make downtown a more competitive retail destination.

Policies to help Palmer’s downtown be a more economically vital area are addressed in the Land Use chapter. Strategies include improving parking, pedestrian and vehicular circulation; establishing design guidelines; and helping establish new attractions. *See Land Use chapter, Goals 5 and 6.*

Objective C: Support efforts to establish a local Business Improvement District (BID).

A Business Improvement District (BID) is a designated geographic area within a city, within which an association of businesses uses a BID tax to raise funds for downtown projects. The revenue generated can be used to supplement City services, for example, to develop new attractions, keep downtown clean and safe, hold special events and activities, or maintain outdoor spaces. A BID is organized by local property and business owners, and empowers the local business community to plan and carry out downtown improvement projects, to support existing businesses and attract new businesses to the area.

A group of property owners is working to establish a downtown Palmer BID. The City recognizes the value of a BID, and is working with these businesses to establish the improvement district.

GOAL 4: Strengthen Palmer as a tourism destination and stopping point for travel through the southern Matanuska-Susitna area.



Palmer has a solid base of attractions and excellent potential to expand this base to attract both Alaska residents and visitors from out-of-state. Palmer is the only community in Alaska that was originally established as an agricultural colony. Giant cabbages are an icon recognized statewide and around the world. Residents today celebrate the community’s agricultural heritage through several Colony festivals, parades, and events, as well as the State Fair. Palmer is a destination for travelers and a gateway to outdoor and cultural activities in the surrounding area, including the planned Hatcher Pass ski area. Palmer attracts people for a range of sporting events, including watching or participating in golf, baseball, hockey, and youth sports.

This section describes options for the community to improve attractions and marketing of Palmer’s events, history, recreation and other attractions, including the option to establish Palmer as a National Heritage Area. More about Palmer’s unique identity is presented in the *Community Vision* chapter.

Objective A: Preserve, improve and celebrate Palmer’s historic character; develop design guidelines for the historic district and explore designation of Palmer as a National Heritage Area.

Palmer’s distinct character is a real economic asset derived from the community’s unique natural setting, buildings, views, history, people, and stories. The *Land Use* chapter outlines strategies to protect and enhance these resources, including establishing standards and guidelines to protect and enhance the built environment, and improving circulation and marketing. Taking advantage of the area’s designation as a National Historic District is a particular priority.



One additional option to retain and profit from Palmer’s historic character is to establish Palmer as a National Heritage Area. There are currently 27 National Heritage Areas in the nation with most located in the eastern states. Congressional designation as a National Heritage Area would strengthen and promote the area’s image, and help provide funding for projects. The focus of Heritage Area designation is to tell the story of the creativity and energy of America’s economic life – its industry, transportation and commerce¹. Palmer’s history, including original Native residents,

¹ *From the National Heritage Areas Website* “Heritage Areas are places federally designated to preserve an important aspect of America’s past and share it with visitors. Generally, these areas were started at the grassroots. Community members envisioned places where the best of the past becomes part of a sustainable future. National Heritage Areas are not living

homestead ingenuity, agriculture, mid-century commercial and residential buildings, mining and railroad development, is an excellent match for the goals of this national program.

Objective B: Support efforts to improve community attractions, including cultural facilities, trails and access to open space. Improve linkages between attractions.

Palmer and the surrounding area already offer a diverse set of natural and cultural activities. Outdoor recreation opportunities in the immediate Palmer area include horseback riding, golfing, fishing, hiking, and walking. The musk ox farm, the Colony House Museum, and the State Fair are important cultural attractions within or adjoining the City. Nearby outdoor attractions and activities include Hatcher Pass, the Matanuska River, Knik Glacier, Matanuska Peak, and Pioneer Peak. These natural features support a range of outdoor activities including glacier trekking, flight-seeing, air boat rides, hiking, white-water rafting, horseback riding, and sightseeing.

While this is a solid base, work is needed to expand and improve attractions for Palmer. The community, particularly the downtown, lacks an anchor attraction to draw more visitors. The *Land Use, Parks, Recreation & Culture*; and *Transportation* chapters outline recommendations for expanding Palmer's attractions, focused on downtown. Highlights on this list include:

- Palmer Urban Revitalization Plan projects including a greenway trail along the rail corridor and depot improvements
- Increased number and range of downtown shops and restaurants
- Improved events and event venues, including an expanded downtown farmers market
- Improved sidewalks; better linkages between different Palmer attractions
- Improved opportunities to experience of farming life and history, such more downtown gardens and restorations to the original downtown park "quad"

Objective C: Build on the success of existing community events, including the State Fair.



Palmer currently celebrates its history through special events such as Colony Days and Colony Christmas. In 2005, Palmer celebrated the 70th Anniversary Colony Reunion. These events are important to the community's identity, quality of life, and economic health.

More could be done to strengthen the economic benefits of these and future events. This is largely the responsibility of community organizations; however, the City recognizes the value of Palmer-area events, and the importance of City support for this objective.

theme parks seeking to freeze places in time. They instead seek to conserve their special natural spaces and historic places as part of their communities' social and economic futures. The successful melding of past and future is the National Heritage Area challenge".

The State Fair in particular is a huge part of local life. The Fair provides facilities for a wide range of activities in the community beyond just those that occur at summer's end, including hosting many events, and providing recreational facilities. The City and the State Fair organization should further explore opportunities to ensure the continued success of the Fair, and to further expand the community benefits of the Fair. Specific strategies to explore include:

- Improve physical linkages, including the proposed Downtown Revitalization Trail and bike path between downtown and the Fairgrounds.
- Find ways to better extend the activities (and spending) of fair visitors into local businesses.
- Work with the State Fair to continue to expand facilities on the Fairgrounds to be used year round. The baseball field and more recently competitive soccer fields are excellent examples.
- Explore options for partnering with the Fair organization to preserve agricultural lands, and provide visitors a chance to better understand rural traditions, e.g., through tours of demonstration farms, and/or original pioneer farm homes.

Other recommendations to improve events include:

- Expand scope of the Friday Fling, to attract more visitors to downtown.
- As part of the Friday Fling or separately, establish the best Farmer's Market in Alaska

GOAL 5: Support efforts to better promote Palmer as a travel destination and place to live and do business.

Palmer's distinctive character and attractions should be actively promoted, to attract visitors, and new residents and businesses. Specific tourism targets include Alaska residents from Anchorage and beyond, as well as out-of-state independent and package travelers.

Objective A: Collaborate with Chamber, the future BID and other organizations to actively promote Palmer.

Primary responsibility for promoting Palmer properly lies with groups like the Greater Palmer Chamber of Commerce and through partnerships with the Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau. The City can support these efforts through its work to maintain and enhance community tourism attractions, sports and cultural facilities, residential neighborhoods, event venues and the community's business environment. These issues are each addressed in other policy chapters of this plan.

Objective B: Support efforts to attract more team sports activities, sporting events and outdoor activities in and around Palmer.

Palmer is a popular destination for team sport competitions, including hockey, soccer, baseball, football and cross-country running. The community should actively encourage continuation and expansion of these activities.

A new opportunity on the horizon is the planned development of the Hatcher Pass ski area. The first phase of this project is intended to be a world class Nordic ski trail system, to support national

level cross-country skiing competitions. Palmer is the logical base for accommodations and support services for competitors and spectators coming to the planned downhill and Nordic ski area.

Another important partner tied to this objective is Alaska Pacific University. APU has a large parcel of land and a major facility just north of Palmer off the Palmer Fishhook road. APU, in partnership with the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) conducts a range of outdoor education programs, many based out of this facility. The City should explore options for partnerships with APU for marketing and improving local parks and trails.

Objective C: Support efforts to sell Palmer’s agricultural products both statewide and locally.

Palmer is Alaska’s best known agricultural area. Palmer is the agricultural trading and supply center for the Matanuska Valley. The Valley’s farms and dairy herds yield two-thirds of Alaska’s agricultural products. Major crops grown in the Valley include potatoes, lettuce, carrots, peas, squash, radishes, cauliflower, broccoli, and cabbage. Hay is another common agricultural product grown in Palmer and throughout the Valley.



The city supports the effort of the Mat-Su Borough to construct an Agricultural Processing and Product Development Center with commercial kitchens for rent. The commercial kitchens would help support expansion of “value-added” agricultural products in the community and serve as an incubator for small agricultural businesses. For example farmers with small agricultural plots could use this facility to produce niche agricultural goods such as pickled beans or peas.

Palmer’s agricultural products include selling qiviut (musk ox wool) to Alaska Native women in rural villages throughout the state. The qiviut is made into approximately 2,700 garments which are sold by an Anchorage Cooperative to tourists. The musk oxen are raised on the 75-acre musk ox farm in Palmer which also serves as a tourist attraction for visitors to Palmer.

The community should encourage events that celebrate and promote local products and expand the Farmer’s Market at Friday Fling to attract more visitors to Palmer for fresh locally-grown produce. The City recognizes the value of promoting agricultural products and agricultural heritage as one way to increase the economic health of the community.

Objective D: Support continued efforts of the University of Alaska in agricultural research in Palmer.

Three important agricultural research facilities – the University of Alaska’s Agriculture & Forestry Experiment Station office, the University’s district Cooperative Extension Service office, and the University Matanuska Research Farm – are located in Palmer. The City of Palmer supports the role of the University and will continue to encourage the institution to remain in Palmer.

CHAPTER 8 PARKS, RECREATION & CULTURE

Overview

Palmer is fortunate to have wide open spaces, great views, and a well-developed system of recreational facilities, and parks and cultural facilities, including facilities owned by the City, the Borough and other organizations. Palmer is an active community, with large numbers of residents involved in softball, baseball, soccer, golf, ice hockey, and other sports. Within City boundaries there are an unusually strong, diverse set of recreational facilities, including a city-owned golf course and indoor ice arena; softball, baseball and soccer fields, a number of smaller parks and a borough-operated swimming pool and campground.



The City also benefits from several nearby public recreational destinations, including Hatcher Pass, Crevasse Moraine Trails, Lazy Mountain, the Butte, and Knik River and Knik Glacier areas. The Borough is moving forward with development of the Hatcher Pass Ski project, which, if successful, could bring a new influx of winter visitors to the area. The Glenn Highway corridor is a National Scenic Byway. In the long term, Palmer could increasingly be seen as both a destination, with great in-town facilities and attractions, and a “gateway community” offering a good place to stay or shop with easy access to out-of-town recreational areas with statewide and even national reputations.

Community parks are managed under the City Public Works Department. City staff for maintenance of facilities and parks rises to 5-6 part time people in the mid summer and falls to 1-2 people in other parts of the year. In 2002, the City took over responsibility for managing most local parks from the Mat-Su Borough. Under this arrangement, park lands remain in Borough ownership and management belongs to the City. The City recently established the progressive policy of requiring developers to include land, or money in-lieu of land, for local parks as part of all new residential developments.

Summary of Goals *Note: order of goals does not reflect priority*

GOAL 1: Obtain funding for and complete the Palmer Urban Revitalization Plan in downtown. Establish, improve, and maintain all downtown open spaces and parks.

GOAL 2: Establish, improve, and maintain city-wide parks, and recreation facilities and programs.

GOAL 3: Enhance area-wide recreational trail systems, and connections between residential areas, downtown, schools, institutional areas, recreational areas. *See Transportation chapter.*

GOAL 4: Continue to improve local arts and cultural opportunities.

Goals & Objectives for Parks, Recreation & Culture

GOAL 1: Obtain funding for, and complete the urban revitalization project in downtown. Establish, improve, and maintain all downtown open spaces and parks.

Background

Downtown needs a set of attractive, well maintained public parks, plazas, event spaces and other public open spaces, and is currently well on the way towards that goal. The center of town has a pleasant open feel, with substantial undeveloped areas. These include lands in public ownership, such as the “park quad” area in front of the Mat-Su Borough headquarters, the grounds of the library, the railroad right-of-way including the space surrounding the depot. Also important are large areas of open space, commonly landscaped in a park-like form, surrounding several churches and other institutional uses and the Mat-Su Borough baseball fields.

Strategies to Achieve this Goal

Plans for downtown open spaces and parks are covered under Goal 6 – Downtown, in the Land Use Chapter. Recommended projects include the improvements listed below. All of these projects fit under the general umbrella of the downtown urban revitalization project now underway. The first two of these projects are expected to take place in the next few years.

- Improve open space and facilities around the Depot.
- Improve open space and a trail along the rail line.
- Working with community organizations, support improved space for events, including a farmer’s market and a downtown vegetable garden, and rehabilitation of the Park quad.

GOAL 2: Establish, improve, and maintain city-wide parks, and recreation facilities and programs.

Background

A diverse, high quality system of parks, trails, sports and cultural facilities is increasingly seen as a high priority for local governments, supporting quality of life and helping to attract and retain local business. In addition, quality recreational facilities and programs are a critical part of the nation-wide effort to combat obesity and encourage more active, healthier lifestyles, particularly for kids. The City shares responsibility for providing such programs and facilities with a number of partners, including the schools, the state and borough, sports clubs, and community volunteers.

Existing recreational facilities in Palmer are listed below:

- Municipal 18-hole golf course (city)
- Indoor ice arena (city)
- Tennis courts (city)
- Football, soccer, baseball and softball fields (city and school property)
- Hermon Brothers Mat-Su Miners semi-pro baseball field (Alaska State Fairgrounds)

- Swimming pool (managed by the Mat-Su Borough)
- State Fair horse show grounds, other recreation and event space (state fair)

In addition, the City manages a set of smaller parks and playgrounds, listed below. Until 2002, these facilities were part of the Borough-wide parks system, and the borough still owns these lands. In 2002, management authority was passed to the City of Palmer. Sherrod Park was built with Land and Water Conservation Funds from the National Park Service. This program requires these areas to remain dedicated as parks in perpetuity.

- Sherrod Park 41.00 acres
(little league, soccer field, multi-use)
- Amoosement Park 3.53 acres
- Ken Soule Fields 3.00 acres
- Eagle Street 1.36 acres
- Highlands .32 acres
- John Bugge Tot Lot .26 acres
- Bill Hermann Tennis Court .25 acres
- Merritt Long Park .10 acres



Also located within City limits is the Matanuska River Park, managed by the Mat-Su Borough. This large park includes camping areas, trails, and day use recreation facilities. The City assists in the maintenance of the ball fields next to the borough headquarters and the Bill Hermann Tennis Courts.

Local civic organizations commit volunteer labor which is an important in keeping the parks well maintained. The “Amoosement Park” provides a good model for the public private partnerships that can lead to the development of new parks in the community. This facility was built in one week through a massive, community-led effort, bringing together service clubs, sports organizations, corporate donors, schools, and residents.

The community is also getting new neighborhood parks developed under the City’s ordinance requiring residential developments to dedicate land for, or contribute to, a neighborhood park. Typically these parks are small and provide play equipment, lawn, and space for picnics. The Daron Street Park was the first to open in the summer of 2005. Neighborhood parks in the Brittany Estates, Mountain Rose East, and Fairfield Park subdivisions will open by 2007.

Important parks and open space areas outside City limits include:

- Kepler Bradley State Park
- Crevasse Moraine Trails (borough)
- Matanuska River Park (borough)
- Matanuska River Trails (trails on state owned land between ordinary high water marks and railroad corridor)
- Alaska Railroad corridor (north to Sutton)
- Hatcher Pass Recreation area (state)
- Lazy Mountain area (state)
- Butte Trail system (borough)

Strategies to Maintain and Improve Community Recreation Facilities and Programs

Objective A: Continue to Maintain and Improve the City Parks System

As stated above, the City currently has a very good parks system. A big challenge for all communities is ensuring resources are available to adequately maintain parks. City parks are currently well maintained. Resources for park maintenance will need to grow as new parks are developed, particularly as new subdivisions dedicate lands for new parks. Continuing to work with volunteers and service organizations is one important means of maintaining local parks. In the longer term, the City may wish to establish a park endowment fund, as was recently done in Anchorage. This allows private citizens to donate funds for the ongoing maintenance and improvement of the City's park system.



Other strategies to maintain and improve the City park system include:

- Plan for priority future recreational needs. Two identified priorities for improvement are needed are listed below:
 - Skateboard park
 - Additional sports fields, particularly for soccer
- Improve the Land Surrounding the Ice Arena – The ice arena sits on approximately 14 acres of land which the city plans to develop for recreational use.
- Encourage multiple activities in the same park so a number of activities can occur at the same facility. For example, include trails and exercise areas as part of a sports field, and schedule activities to make maximum use of the facility.

Objective B: Encourage high quality sports programs for youth and adults. Use sports as a means of attracting visitors to spend time and money in Palmer.

A wide range of facilities are available for organized sports in and around Palmer. These activities are important to the quality of life of the community, and promote healthy lifestyles. In addition, sports activities contribute to the community's economic health, as sports events bring spectators, families and participants into Palmer from surrounding communities and around the state, for regular scheduled competitions, and also for special events and tournaments.

More could be done to expand events and sports programs, to increase the associated quality of life, health, and economic benefits. In general, this is not a direct City function. These responsibilities largely lie with local schools and sports clubs. In addition to continuing to provide programs and facilities for which the City is directly responsible (e.g., golf, ice arena), the City could partner with

schools, non-profit organizations, and other community groups, for example by providing and helping to maintain land for parks and other recreation facilities.

Objective C: Support Development of a Youth Council and Youth Center

The City supports community-based efforts to increase opportunities for youth to build their physical, emotional, and intellectual strengths through a variety of development programs in a safe environment. Two specific near term actions are encouraged:

- Support development of a Youth Council
- Explore options for developing a Youth Center

The Youth Council should consist of residents of the City of Palmer or the Palmer service district and include mostly youth with several adult mentors. The Youth Council will assist in development of the local sports facilities and events, including, but not limited to, ice arenas, tennis courts, ballparks, playgrounds, and skateboard parks. An important function of this group is to encourage coordination among different sports programs, for example, coordinating use of and maintenance of sports facilities.

The City recognizes the need for improved facilities for youth activities, and supports the efforts of local groups working to develop a dedicated youth center. One option is to incorporate this function into an existing building, or have it be one element of future multi-purpose facility. Palmer Youth Council could solicit funds to design, build, and maintain a youth Activity Center, or remodel a currently existing facility. The center would host a variety of activities for the whole family and make people feel welcome. The center should act as a community information center to publicize current regional activities and coordinate with other organizations.

The City's role in this objective includes providing political support for the establishment of the Youth Council, and assisting the Council secure space in an existing building or a site for the proposed youth center.

GOAL 3: Enhance area-wide recreational trail systems. Improve connections between residential areas, downtown, schools, institutional areas, recreations areas.

This goal is addressed in the Transportation chapter.

GOAL 4: Continue to improve local arts and culture opportunities.

Background

Arts and cultural activities have a similar set of benefits for Palmer as do sports facilities and programs: they contribute to quality of life, and provide economic benefits. Like sports activities,

the City is not the primary party responsible for continuing and expanding cultural activities, but can be a helpful partner.

Current cultural facilities and activities in the community include the Palmer Public Library, Colony House Museum, the downtown historic district, the state fairgrounds, and the newly formed Palmer Museum of History and Art. Several local businesses have performing and cultural arts programs, and have a growing regional reputation as good places for music, poetry and other cultural events.

Community comments expressed during the process of preparing this plan showed strong support for improvements to arts and cultural opportunities in Palmer. Strategies to achieve this goal include:

Objective A: Develop a Palmer Arts and Culture Plan

Palmer has excellent potential to become the center of a growing Mat-Su Borough cultural scene. As the southern borough continues to grow, area population will begin to demand and be able to support a richer range of locally-based cultural facilities and programs. Palmer is well suited to become the hub of borough art and cultural activities, by virtue of its attractive setting, compact downtown, convenient location, state fair facilities, rich history, and energetic and creative population. To harvest this potential will take effort and imagination. One first step would be to prepare a Palmer Arts and Culture Plan. The City is not the organization to take the lead in this effort, but can be a partner. Other key players include the Mat-Su Borough, the Borough Convention and Visitors Bureau, Palmer Museum of History and Art, Chamber of Commerce, and the downtown business improvement district. This plan could inventory current facilities, activities and programs; and identify near term and longer term strategies to accelerate development of cultural resources; and find ways to maximize the community benefits of these developments.

Objective B: Develop a Multi-Purpose Arts Center

Palmer's downtown would benefit from being able to offer an expanded range of arts and cultural programs, so people would be drawn to some specific event, and then choose to linger and spend time and money at local restaurants and shops.

In the near term, the Greater Palmer Chamber of Commerce, Mat-Su Borough Convention and Visitors Bureau, and downtown businesses would benefit by better documenting and marketing existing arts and cultural opportunities.

Over the long term, a number of residents have suggested exploring options to establish a multi-purpose performing and cultural arts center located near restaurants, shopping, art galleries, bars, and other complementary business activities. The City recognizes the value of having a performing and cultural arts facility either within the City limits or nearby. Such a facility would be particularly beneficial to Palmer if located downtown. An alternative would be to create a facility managed jointly with other communities and the Borough, perhaps in the vicinity of the new hospital.

Establishing this type of facility is a large-scale undertaking, requiring a coordinated effort of the private sector and other organizations, which the City supports.

APPENDIX A

Extract Of State Of Alaska Annexation Regulations

This appendix presents extracts from the Alaska Administrative Code; Title 3. Community and Economic Development, Chapter 110. Municipal Boundary Changes. The full chapter can be reviewed on line, at <http://touchngo.com/lqcntr/akstats/AAC/Title03/Chapter110.htm>

03 AAC 110.090. Needs of the Territory

(a) The territory must exhibit a reasonable need for city government. In this regard, the commission may consider relevant factors, including:

- (1) existing or reasonably anticipated social or economic conditions, including the extent to which residential and commercial growth of the community has occurred or is reasonably expected to occur beyond the existing boundaries of the city;
- (2) existing or reasonably anticipated health, safety, and general welfare conditions;
- (3) existing or reasonably anticipated economic development;
- (4) adequacy of existing services;
- (5) extraterritorial powers of the city to which the territory is proposed to be annexed and extraterritorial powers of nearby municipalities; and
- (6) whether residents or property owners within the territory receive, or may be reasonably expected to receive, directly or indirectly, the benefit of services and facilities provided by the annexing city.

(b) Territory may not be annexed to a city if essential city services can be provided more efficiently and more effectively by another existing city or by an organized borough on an areawide basis or non-areawide basis, or through an existing borough service area.

03 AAC 110.100. Character

The territory must be compatible in character with the annexing city. In this regard, the commission may consider relevant factors, including the

- (1) land use and subdivision platting;
- (2) salability of land for residential, commercial, or industrial purposes;
- (3) population density;
- (4) cause of recent population changes; and
- (5) suitability of the territory for reasonably anticipated community purposes.

03 AAC 110.110. Resources

The economy within the proposed boundaries of the city must include the human and financial resources necessary to provide essential city services on an efficient, cost-effective level. In this regard, the commission may consider relevant factors, including the

- (1) reasonably anticipated functions of the city in the territory being annexed;
- (2) reasonably anticipated new expenses of the city that would result from annexation;
- (3) actual income and the reasonably anticipated ability to generate and collect local revenue and income from the territory;
- (4) feasibility and plausibility of those aspects of the city's anticipated operating and capital budgets that would be affected by the annexation through the third full fiscal year of operation after annexation;
- (5) economic base of the city after annexation;
- (6) property valuations in the territory proposed for annexation;
- (7) land use in the territory proposed for annexation;
- (8) existing and reasonably anticipated industrial, commercial, and resource development;
- (9) personal income of residents in the territory and in the city; and
- (10) need for and availability of employable skilled and unskilled persons to serve the city as a result of annexation.

03 AAC 110.120. Population

The population within the proposed boundaries of the city must be sufficiently large and stable to support the extension of city government. In this regard, the commission may consider relevant factors, including

- (1) total census enumeration;
- (2) duration of residency;
- (3) historical population patterns;
- (4) seasonal population changes; and
- (5) age distributions.

03 AAC 110.060. Boundaries

(a) The boundaries of a proposed borough must conform generally to natural geography, and must include all land and water necessary to provide the full development of essential borough services on an efficient, cost-effective level. In this regard, the commission may consider relevant factors, including

- (1) land use and ownership patterns;
- (2) ethnicity and cultures;
- (3) population density patterns;
- (4) existing and reasonably anticipated transportation patterns and facilities;

- (5) natural geographical features and environmental factors; and
- (6) extraterritorial powers of boroughs.

(b) Absent a specific and persuasive showing to the contrary, the commission will not approve a proposed borough with boundaries extending beyond any model borough boundaries.

(c) The proposed borough boundaries must conform to existing regional educational attendance area boundaries unless the commission determines, after consultation with the commissioner of education and early development, that a territory of different size is better suited to the public interest in a full balance of the standards for incorporation of a borough.

(d) Absent a specific and persuasive showing to the contrary, the commission will presume that territory proposed for incorporation that is non-contiguous or that contains enclaves does not include all land and water necessary to allow for the full development of essential borough services on an efficient, cost-effective level.

(e) If a petition for incorporation of a proposed borough describes boundaries overlapping the boundaries of an existing organized borough, the petition for incorporation must also address and comply with all standards and procedures for detachment of the overlapping region from the existing organized borough. The commission will consider and treat that petition for incorporation as also being a detachment petition.

03 AAC 110.140. Legislative Review

Territory that meets the annexation standards specified in [3 AAC 110.090](#) - [3 AAC 110.135](#) may be annexed to a city by the legislative review process if the commission also determines that any one of the following circumstances exists:

- (1) the territory is an enclave surrounded by the annexing city;
- (2) the health, safety, or general welfare of city residents is or will be endangered by conditions existing or potentially developing in the territory, and annexation will enable the city to regulate or control the detrimental effects of those conditions;
- (3) the extension of city services or facilities into the territory is necessary to enable the city to provide adequate services to city residents, and it is impossible or impractical for the city to extend the facilities or services unless the territory is within the boundaries of the city;
- (4) residents or property owners within the territory receive, or may be reasonably expected to receive, directly or indirectly, the benefit of city government without commensurate tax contributions, whether these city benefits are rendered or received inside or outside the territory, and no practical or equitable alternative method is available to offset the cost of providing these benefits;
- (5) annexation of the territory will enable the city to plan and control reasonably anticipated growth or development in the territory that otherwise may adversely impact the city;
- (6) repealed 5/19/2002;
- (7) annexation of the territory will promote local self-government with a minimum number of government units;
- (8) annexation of the territory will enhance the extent to which the existing city meets the standards for incorporation of cities, as set out in AS [29.05](#) and [3 AAC 110.005](#) - [3 AAC 110.042](#);

(9) the commission determines that specific policies set out in the Constitution of the State of Alaska or AS [29.04](#), 29.05, or 29.06 are best served through annexation of the territory by the legislative review process.

03 AAC 110.150. Local Action

Territory contiguous to the annexing city, that meets the annexation standards specified in [3 AAC 110.090](#) - [3 AAC 110.135](#) and has been approved for local action annexation by the commission, may be annexed to a city by any one of the following actions:

- (1) city ordinance if the territory is wholly owned by the annexing city;
- (2) city ordinance and a petition signed by all of the voters and property owners of the territory;
- (3) approval by a majority of voters residing in the territory voting on the question at an election;
- (4) approval by a majority of the aggregate voters who vote on the question within the area proposed for annexation and the annexing city;
- (5) approval by a majority of the voters who vote on the question within the annexing city if the territory is uninhabited.

■ APPENDIX B

Funding & Technical Assistance Resources

| Organization | Service | Contact | Address | Telephone | Fax | E-mail |
|--|--|---|--|---------------------------------|----------------|---|
| Rasmuson Foundation www.rasmuson.org | Invests in well-managed Alaskan based organizations that provide a unique public service, thereby ensuring that basic human needs are met and that quality of life for all Alaskans is enhanced. Rasmuson is primarily interested in capital funding, not for operations. | Rosie Ricketts, Grants Administrator | 301 West Northern Lights Blvd., Suite 400 Anchorage, AK 99503 | (907) 297-2825 | (907) 297-2770 | rricketts@rasmuson.org |
| <i>Rasmuson Foundation: Individual Artist Award Program</i> http://www.rasmuson.org/index.php?switch=viewpage&pageid=92 | Grants provide Alaskan artists, at any stage in their artistic career, funds to support specific, short-term projects that have a clear benefit to their growth as an artist and creative development of their art. | Victoria Lord | | (907) 297-2827, 877-366-2700 | | Vlord@rasmuson.org |
| <i>Rasmuson Foundation: Art Acquisition Fund</i> http://www.rasmuson.org/index.php?switch=viewpage&pageid=90 | Provides grants for Alaska museums to purchase current work by practicing Alaskan artists. | Michael Hawfield: | PO Box 853 Homer, AK 99603 | (907)235-6078, (907)299-0290 | | hawfield@alaska.net |
| <i>Rasmuson Foundation: Creative Ventures Fund</i> http://www.rasmuson.org/index.php?switch=viewpage&pageid=115 | Provides matching grants of up to \$50,000 to augment and enrich the programs offered by Alaska's arts and cultural organizations. | Victoria Lord | | (907) 297-2827, 877-366-2700 | | Vlord@rasmuson.org |
| M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust www.murdock-trust.org | The Trust's mission is to enrich the quality of life in the Pacific Northwest by providing grants to organizations that seek to strengthen the region's educational and cultural base in creative and sustainable ways | John Van Zytveld, Senior Program Director | PO Box 1618 Vancouver, WA 98668 | (360) 694-8415 | (360) 694-1819 | johnvz@murdock-trust.org |
| Paul Allen Foundation www.pgafamilyfoundation.org | Paul Allen offers funding in four program areas: Arts & Culture, Youth Engagement, Community Development & Social Change, Scientific & Technological Innovation | Anna Fulton, Grants Administrator | 505 5 th Avenue South, Suite 900 Seattle, WA 98104 | (206) 342-2030 | (206) 342-3030 | info@pgafamilyfoundation.org |
| National Science Foundation (NSF) www.nsf.gov | The National Science Foundation (NSF) is an independent federal agency created by the National Science Foundation Act of 1950. The purpose of the NSF is "to promote the progress of science; [and] to advance the national health, prosperity, and welfare by supporting research and education in all fields of science and engineering." Primary focus includes financing for research, education and training projects. | | 4201 Wilson Blvd. Arlington, VA 22230 | (703) 292-5111 | | info@nsf.gov |
| U.S. Economic Development Administration | To assist in the creation of public facilities needed to initiate and encourage the creation and retention of permanent jobs in the private sector in areas where economic growth is lagging behind the rest of the country and where there is significant economic distress. | Bernie Richert, Director, Alaska Region | 510 L Street, Suite 444 Anchorage, AK 99501 | (907) 271-2272 | (907) 271-2274 | brichert@eda.doc.gov |
| U.S. Department of Education (DOE) http://www.ed.gov | The U.S. Department of Education is providing nearly \$38 billion this year to states and school districts through formula based grant programs, to improve primary and secondary schools and meet the special needs of students. For a listing of grant programs with contact information, please visit the above page. There are many programs listed, with new opportunities announced regularly. | | | | | http://www.ed.gov/fund/grant/find/edlite-forecast.html |

| Organization | Service | Contact | Address | Telephone | Fax | E-mail |
|--|--|---|--|---|--|--|
| AK Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development (DCCED) | | | | | | |
| DCCED: Div. of Community & Business Development <i>Office of Tourism</i> www.dced.state.ak.us/tourism/ | | Caryl McConkie, Development Specialist | P.O. Box 110809 Juneau, AK 99811 | (907) 465-2012 | (907) 465-3767 | caryl_mcconkie@dced.state.ak.us |
| DCCED: Div. of Community & Business Development <i>Development Section</i> | | Ruth St. Amour, Development Specialist II | 550 W. 7th Ave., Suite 1790 / Anchorage, AK 99501 | (907)-269-4527 | (907) 269-4539 | Ruth_St.Amour@commerce.state.ak.us |
| DCCED: Small Business Economic Development Revolving Loan Fund: | Small business loans to expand employment opportunities in rural Alaska. Provides start-up and expansion capital of small businesses. | | | Anchorage T: (907)269-8150 Juneau T: (907)465-2510 | Anchorage F: (907)269-8147 Juneau F: (907) 465-2103 | investments@dced.state.ak.us |
| DCCED: Mini-grant Assistance Program www.dced.state.ak.us/cbd/grt/blockgrants.htm | Economic and/or comm. development projects, including projects using natural resources. | Jo Grove, Program Coordinator | Div. of Community & Business Dev. 209 Forty Mile Ave. Fairbanks, AK 99701-3100 | (907) 452-4468 | (907) 451-7251 | Jo_Grove@dced.state.ak.us |
| State of Alaska Alaska Community & Economic Development Resource Guide http://www.dced.state.ak.us/dca/edrg/EDRG_Build_Browse_List.cfm | Provides an extensive overview of resources and funding opportunities for Alaskan organizations/individuals. | Indra Arriaga | | (907) 465-4750 | (907) 465-5085 | Indra_Arriaga@commerce.state.ak.us |
| United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) www.rurdev.usda.gov | (see below) | Dean Stewart - USDA Rural Development | 800 W. Evergreen, Suite 201 Palmer, AK 99645 | (907) 761-7722 | (907) 761-7793 | dstewart@rdmail.rural.usda.gov |
| USDA: Rural Business Opportunity Grants: | Assists with costs of providing economic planning for rural communities, technical assistance for rural businesses, or training for rural entrepreneurs or economic development officials. | | | | | |
| USDA: Housing & Community Facilities: | Community Programs administers programs designed to develop essential community facilities for public use in rural areas. These facilities include schools, libraries, childcare, hospitals, medical clinics, assisted living facilities, fire and rescue stations, police stations, community centers, public buildings and transportation. | | | | | |
| Alaska State Council on the Arts | Offers grants to assist the development of the arts; distributing state and federal funds through programs to support both individual artists and arts organizations. | Charlotte Fox, Executive Director | 411 West Forth Avenue, Suite 1E Anchorage, AK 99501 | (907) 269-6610 | (907) 269-6601 | Charlotte_fox@eed.state.ak.us |

| Organization | Service | Contact | Address | Telephone | Fax | E-mail |
|---|---|----------------|---|-----------------------------------|---------------|--|
| National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) http://www.neh.gov/ | (see below) | | 1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Washington, D.C. 20506 | (202) 606-8269, (202) 606-8267 | | publicpgms@neh.gov |
| <i>NEH: Consultation Grants for Libraries</i> http://www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/public-consult.html | Consultation grants help museums, libraries, historical organizations or community organizations develop a new public humanities project or chart a new interpretive direction of an existing program. They support the costs of conferring with a team of advisors to help identify key humanities themes and questions during the early stages of a project's development. | | | | | |
| <i>NEH: Interpreting America's Historic Places</i> http://www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/historicplanning.html | Planning grants may be used by organizations to develop in detail the content and interpretive approach of projects prior to implementation. The "place" to be interpreted might be a single historic site, a series of sites, an entire neighborhood, a community or town, or a larger geographical region. The place taken as a whole must be significant to American history and the project must convey its historic importance to visitors. Applicants should already have defined the appropriate humanities content and themes in consultation with scholars and programming advisors. | | | | | |
| National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) http://www.nea.gov/ | Offers grants in the following departments: arts & education, museums, dance, music, musical theater, design, opera, folk and traditional arts, presenting, literature, state and regional, local arts agencies, media arts, visual arts, and multidisciplinary. | | 1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW Washington, D.C. 20506 | (202) 682-5400 | | webmgr@arts.endow.gov |
| Institute of Library and Museum Studies (ILMS) http://www.ims.gov/ | The Institute of Museum and Library Services is an independent Federal grant-making agency dedicated to creating and sustaining a nation of learners by helping libraries and museums serve their communities. | | 1800 M Street NW, 9th Floor Washington, DC 20036-5802 | (202)653-ILMS | | imsinfo@ims.gov |
| Alaska State Museum: Grants-in-Aid http://www.museums.state.ak.us | Alaska museums or museum-related organizations, such as historical societies, historic site, museum support groups, cultural centers, and science centers may apply. The grants may be used to purchase materials, equipment, personal services, or other items necessary to support and improve museum services and operations. | Kenneth DeRoux | 395 Whittier Street Juneau, AK 99801 | (907) 465-2396 | (907)465-2976 | Ken_deroux@eed.state.ak.us |