

# HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN

## PHASE ONE REPORT – COMMUNITY OUTREACH

### INVESTING IN HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLANNING IN THE MAT-SU BOROUGH

#### What preservation is and why it's important

History tells a story. Preserving our heritage ensures these stories live on into the future. With guidance from the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Preservation Planning, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB) is engaging in a systematic and community-led process to develop a vision, goals, and priorities for the preservation of our cultural resources. Investing in historic preservation planning, enables strategic use of resources and provides our community with a clear path to retain and grow our region's shared identity.

#### Why we're doing this plan

The importance of historic preservation for MSB is a direct reflection of the value our citizens place on preservation. A voter initiative prioritizing historic preservation led MSB to create a Historical Preservation Commission ([www.matsugov.us/boards/hpc](http://www.matsugov.us/boards/hpc)) in 1982. In 1987, the Mat-Su Borough was the first in Alaska to enter the certified local government (CLG) program and become an active partner in the Federal Historic Preservation Program. Our original historic preservation plan (HPP) was also adopted in that year. Through an extensive process of surveying and inventorying historic sites, MSB has built a solid foundation for historic preservation going forward.

However, it's likely that the Mat-Su region of 2020 would be unrecognizable in some respects to those who developed the 1987 HPP. With the fastest growing population in Alaska for many years and significant developments in our economy, in tourism in particular,



TOM BOL/MAT-SU CVB

*Visitors enjoy the historic town site at the Wasilla Museum and Visitor Center in downtown Wasilla.*

the Borough's historic preservation needs and priorities have changed. With continued support from the local community, and with consideration to rapid population growth in the region, we are working to create an HPP that better protects our cultural resources and relays our historic stories for residents and visitors alike.

#### What happens next

This Phase I plan summarizes and synthesizes recent HPP planning efforts and recommends next steps for completion of the update. The final HPP will serve as a strategic action plan to coordinate MSB and volunteer efforts to protect, preserve, and share our history.

As the Mat-Su region develops, so too will our historic preservation needs and priorities. Our aim moving forward is to update the HPP every 10 years to ensure its continued relevance.

What we're living through is going to be something people want to know about 100 years from now.

— SUE DEYOE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, TALKEETNA HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM



TOM BOL/MAT-SU CVB

*The historic depot in downtown Palmer, now revitalized as a community building.*

## PHASE 1 PLANNING EFFORTS

MSB contracted with Information Insights to coordinate and facilitate public meetings and develop the Phase 1 report based on input from the general public and stakeholders representing tribal organizations, local government, interest groups, museums, and historical sites. The purpose of this community engagement was to develop a vision, goals, and priorities for the historic preservation plan. This process was split into stages, each allowing opportunities to gather and refine input and identify gaps in involvement for further engagement as the project advanced.

Phase 1 started in late February, 2020 with in-person public and stakeholder meetings planned throughout the year. However by mid-March, it was clear that stakeholder and public engagement would need to take place entirely remotely due to COVID-19. Original plans and timelines were adjusted to creatively and quickly transition the planning effort to an entirely virtual process. Our first adaptation was to conduct in-depth, one-on-one stakeholder interviews. These led to a deeper understanding of emerging themes and interests at the outset of Phase 1, providing a springboard for activities throughout the process.

Virtual engagement was achieved through use of multiple communications tools, including the MSB website ([www.matsugov.us/projects/historic-preservation-plan-update-2020](http://www.matsugov.us/projects/historic-preservation-plan-update-2020)), social media and email outreach, electronic flyers, online surveys, and online stakeholder and community meetings via Zoom.

Information Insights and MSB designed the remote meetings to encourage active participation by using

best practices for virtual engagement. Participants were encouraged to join by video if able, and facilitators moderated the discussion and employed break out rooms to give everyone the chance to speak. Community members joined from across the Mat-Su Borough, an area roughly the size of West Virginia. The opportunity to convene stakeholders in this way was a silver lining of the remote engagement process. In all, about 50 stakeholders and members of the public actively participated in Phase I.

### **Stakeholder interviews: March to May 2020**

Stakeholder interviews were not part of the original plan. When Phase 1 shifted to an entirely remote process, it was clear a deeper level of engagement was needed at the beginning to cultivate and maintain interest in the process. Informal feedback underscored the value of these discussions for the stakeholders themselves. Several interviewees shared that having the focused hour to reflect on and discuss the history and future of historic preservation in the Mat-Su region was restorative during a stressful time. Themes collected in the interviews also provided valuable content and focus for subsequent online meetings.

Ten hour-long interviews were scheduled and conducted with stakeholders of varied backgrounds, interests, and perspectives. During interviews, stakeholders were asked to share and discuss:

- ▶ Histories in the MSB they are most familiar with (including historic themes or sites);
- ▶ Histories they believe to be well-represented in planning, preservation, and education throughout the Borough, and those underrepresented;
- ▶ Challenges that prevent us from fully realizing the potential of historic preservation in the Borough.

#### **Interviewees:**

- ▶ **Alpine Historical Society**, Nancy Dryden, President
- ▶ **Chickaloon Village Traditional Council**, Jessica Winnestaffer, Environmental Stewardship Director
- ▶ **Knik Tribal Council**, invited
- ▶ **Palmer Historical Society**, Sheri Hamming, President
- ▶ **Palmer Museum of History and Art**, Sam Dinges, Executive Director
- ▶ **Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Center**, Bonnie Quill, President/CEO

- ▶ **Mat-Su Historical Preservation Commission**, Fran Seager-Boss
- ▶ **Museum of Alaska Transportation and Industry**, Sherry Jackson, Executive Director
- ▶ **Talkeetna Historical Society and Museum**, Sue Deyoe, Executive Director
- ▶ **Wasilla Museum and Visitor Center**, Bethany Buckingham Follett, Curator
- ▶ **Wasilla-Knik Historical Society**, Linda Frey, Co-Secretary
- ▶ **Willow Historical and Wildlife Foundation**, Madeline Gocke, President

As a result of these interviews, Phase 1 started with deepened engagement from key stakeholders.

The following themes emerged from the interviews. These prominent themes were used to inform the first stakeholder meeting and the first draft of the vision, mission, goals, and objectives for the MSB HPP.

#### **Why is historic preservation in the MSB important?**

- ▶ **It promotes a deeper understanding of and connection to the region.** History tells a story. It creates a sense of place and connects people to each other and to the land through shared understanding and experience. This fosters a sense of collective identity and stewardship.
- ▶ **History gives our past a future.** What we're living through is going to be something that people want to know about 100 years from now. We will face adversity and come through it as others did before us. We will have our own stories to tell.
- ▶ **Healing happens through understanding and acknowledgment of shared history.** Understanding histories—pre-contact and post-contact—is part of a healing process for Tribal citizens, and an important part of the healing process for the community as a whole to help move beyond stereotypes/preconceptions.

#### **What people, places, stories, and events are important to the Borough's history?**

- ▶ **Natural history; Arrival of people** 14,000 years ago; **Alaska Native heritage and continued**

**culture** (Denai'na, Ahtna, potentially Alutiiq); **transportation** (River travel, Iditarod Trail, mushing, railroad); **mining** (gold, coal), **smallpox**; **Russian in-migration**; **agriculture** (homesteading, colony, Matanuska Experiment Farm), and **numerous site-specific histories** across the region.

#### **Which historic contexts are well represented in the MSB?**

- ▶ Palmer, especially the colony history
- ▶ Talkeetna
- ▶ Agriculture
- ▶ Iditarod and dog mushing
- ▶ Historic buildings

#### **Which historic contexts are underrepresented?**

- ▶ Indigenous histories
- ▶ Colony history throughout MSB, not just Palmer
- ▶ Pre-Colony history in Palmer
- ▶ Homesteading

*Summer schedules in Alaska make it difficult to organize well-attended meetings, particularly online. Phase 1 engagement activities paused during June and July, resuming in early Fall 2020.*

#### **Stakeholder Survey: September 2020**

Although interviewees were included and encouraged to also fill out the survey, the primary purpose of the stakeholder survey was to hear from a larger group of identified HPP stakeholders. Qualitative analysis of the survey data provided a more well-rounded understanding of stakeholder interests than interviews alone, supporting design of an effective stakeholder meeting framework and identification of emerging themes.

The survey requested information on stakeholders' familiarity with historic preservation planning as a concept and with previous preservation planning efforts in the MSB. It asked about stakeholder priorities for historic preservation planning, which histories are generally well-represented across the region, and which may have been neglected or de-emphasized.

Themes from the stakeholder survey have been integrated with the themes from interviews listed above. These were collated and shared with the full stakeholder group prior to the first stakeholder meeting.

When people talk about history, they sometimes shy away from adversity. I see history as a gem with many facets, and in order to get that brilliance you have to have all the facets show. It doesn't mean they're all wonderful or shiny, but all together they make that brilliant gem that you see.

In order to appreciate one's heritage, history's very important. You have to know what went before you to know what's ahead. If we don't have any elements left from the past, it doesn't give future generations a tangible bridge to that history.

— FRAN SEAGER-BOSS, MSB HISTORICAL PRESERVATION COMMISSION



rooms and with the full group. The need for broader education, cultural recognition and celebration, and preservation of specific sites emerged as themes, which were later integrated into the draft vision, mission, goals, and objectives. Stakeholders also discussed specific needs within the region and their ideas for historic preservation activities, including continued coordination of stakeholders and innovative ideas for public education (see *Next Steps for the HPP*, p.8).

*In October 2020, Information Insights and MSB drafted Vision, Mission, Goals, and Objectives based on stakeholder engagement to date, including interview, survey, and stakeholder meeting themes distilled into categories.*

### **Public Meeting: November 2, 2020**

A public meeting and a second stakeholder meeting were held in November via Zoom to review the draft vision, mission, and goals and provide additional input.

The public meeting started with a presentation on what historic preservation is and HPP activities needed to update the 1987 plan, followed by an overview and discussion of the draft vision, mission, and goals. Attendance at the public session was small, so a public survey was subsequently designed to invite additional input.

### **Stakeholder Meeting #2 – November 9, 2020**

The final stakeholder meeting walked through each section of the draft vision, mission, goals, and objectives, and encouraged stakeholders to identify action items needed to achieve the objectives. Discussion prompts asked stakeholders to identify what resonated for them, what was confusing, and what was missing.

Stakeholders were generally aligned and supportive of the vision, mission, and goals. Participants made few edits to the vision and mission, and agreed with the draft goals. Robust discussion followed review of each objective, generating additional action steps and suggestions for rephrasing. Overall, there was general agreement on objectives, with some suggested edits, and interest in continuing to develop action steps.

## **Stakeholder and Public Meetings: October to November 2020**

### **Stakeholder Meeting #1 – October 1, 2020**

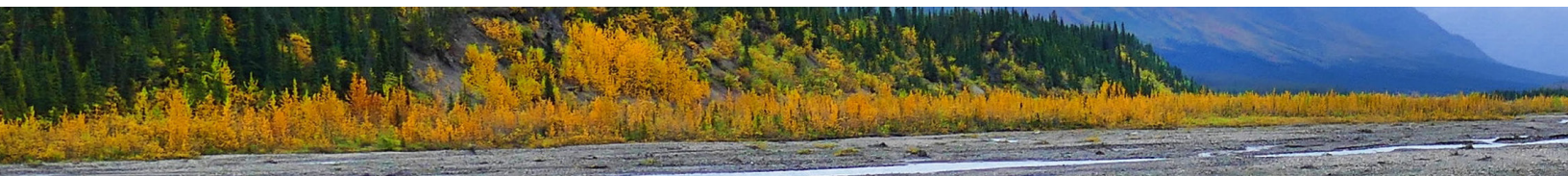
The goal of the first full stakeholder meeting was to develop a vision to guide historic preservation in the MSB. Nineteen people participated, representing the Chickaloon Village Traditional Council, Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance, Knik Tribe, Mat-Su Borough, Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau, MSB Historical Preservation Commission, Native Village of Eklutna, Palmer Museum, the State Historic Preservation Office, Talkeetna Historical Society and Museum, Wasilla Knik Historical Society, Wasilla Museum and Visitor Center, and Willow Historical and Wildlife Foundation.

During the two-hour online meeting, participants engaged in a series of historical visioning/brainstorming exercises. The opening meeting prompt encouraged participants to ground their thinking in their particular interest, but then to think more broadly about how their interest connects to a shared future:

*Bring to mind a specific history—whether a historic theme, site, or regional history—you are passionate about in the Mat-Su Borough. Try to be specific: a story, place, feature that carries meaning for you. Imagine that it's 10 years from now. Think about this specific history you care about, and what successful preservation of this history looks like to you.*

*Write down 3 words to describe what that's like.*

Stakeholders shared these three words in breakout



Eighteen people participated, representing the Alpine Historical Society, Chickaloon Native Village, Friends of State Parks, Glacier View Community Association, Knik Tribe, Mat-Su Borough, MSB Historical Preservation Commission, Native Village of Eklutna, Palmer Historical Society, Palmer Museum, State Historic Preservation Office, Talkeetna Historical Society, and the Willow Historical and Wildlife Foundation.

### Public survey: November to December 2020

This online survey provided additional opportunity for public input during Phase 1 beyond the public meeting. Distribution methods included MSB and partner Facebook pages, stakeholder emails, and emails to community groups with distribution lists, such as community councils and Chambers of Commerce. Eighteen people participated.

The survey asked respondents to evaluate and give feedback on the draft HPP vision: *Across Alaska's Matanuska-Susitna Borough, the rich, interconnected history of the region is preserved, accessible, and celebrated. Shared understanding and experience of the Borough's unique history connects people to each other and to the land, creating a sense of place.* Response to the vision was positive or neutral, with no negative responses.

The draft HPP mission also generated exclusively positive and neutral responses: *To protect, share, and celebrate the cultures, histories, and special places of the Mat-Su Borough.*

Respondents were asked to rank the draft goals in order of importance. The intent was not to remove any of the goals, but to understand perceived importance and priority. Based on public survey input, these three goals were prioritized:

- ▶ Elevate Alaska Native presence and histories across the region,
- ▶ Support existing and emerging historic preservation efforts, promote collaboration, and share resources, and
- ▶ Identify and preserve cultural resources and landscapes.

Participants emphasized Native representation in particular. One respondent wrote: *"There needs to be an acknowledgement of the Native People who have lived here for thousands of years."*



KNIK TRIBAL COUNCIL

*The oldest known cultural feature in Upper Knik Arm is an early Dena'ina site, ca. 1100 AD, revealed by a series of cultural depressions like the one Alfred Theodore of Knik Tribe stands in. Inset: A large Dena'ina cache pit provides another clue to the region's early history.*

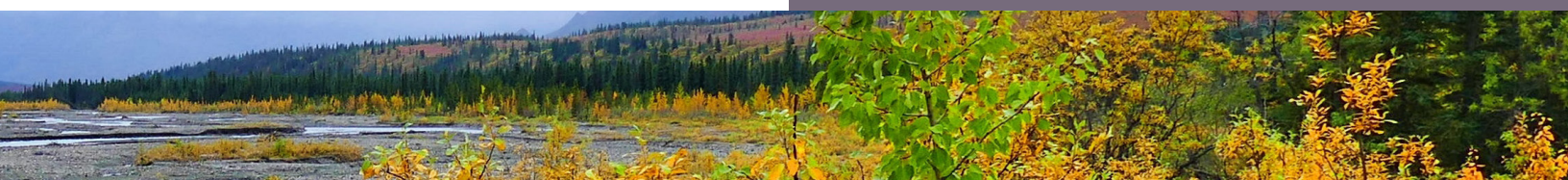


TOM BOL/MAT-SU CVB

*Visitors learn about local Athabaskan culture at the Alpine Historical Park in Sutton-Alpine. The six-acre site also includes exhibits on coal mining and early road construction in the Mat-Su Valley.*

Anything that happens to the land influences the people.... There are hundreds of Ahtna place names that have been passed down through oral history over generations. The maps we have represent how the land was used and how people related to it for thousands of years.

— JESSICA WINNESTAFFER, ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP DIRECTOR, CHICKALOON TRIBAL COUNCIL



---

# A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR THE MSB HPP

## Draft Vision, Mission, Goals, and Objectives to Guide Historic Preservation Planning

The Phase 1 Mat-Su historic preservation planning process was guided by local expertise and input, building buy-in along the way to ensure the community's unique desires, strengths, and capacities are reflected in the final plan. Public meetings provided stakeholders and the general public with opportunities to learn about ongoing preservation planning efforts and to help define the vision, mission, goals, and objectives that will shape those efforts going forward.

The HPP Vision will broadly define what success looks like for historic preservation across the Mat-Su Borough for the next 10 years and into the future:

**A vision statement is a forward-thinking statement** that provides guidance on the purpose and characteristics of a world we want to build in fulfillment of our mission.

**Mission defines how this vision is achieved.**

**Goals provide a broad framework to achieve the vision.** Goals broadly define what we must achieve in order to fulfill our vision and our mission. Each goal represents a subset of objectives and action steps specifying how it will be fulfilled.

**Objectives provide benchmarks for fulfilling each goal,** in line with the guidance provided by the mission and vision.

---

### VISION

Across Alaska's Matanuska-Susitna Borough, the rich, interconnected history of the region is preserved, accessible, and celebrated.

Shared understanding and experience of the Borough's unique history connects people to each other and to the land, creating a sense of place.

### MISSION

To protect, share, and celebrate the cultures, histories, and special places of the Mat-Su Borough.

### GOALS

1. Elevate Alaska Native presence and histories across the region.
2. Support existing and emerging historic preservation efforts, promote collaboration, and share resources.
3. Identify and preserve cultural resources and landscapes.
4. Improve and coordinate community engagement and education to increase public awareness of the Mat-Su Borough's cultural resources.
5. Connect historic preservation with regional and local planning.

## OBJECTIVES

Below each goal are specific objectives and examples of action steps developed during stakeholder conversations. Measurable outcomes and action items for each objective will be developed in Phase II.

### GOAL 1: Elevate Alaska Native presence and histories across the region

- ▶ Engage Indigenous leadership in developing and fulfilling objectives within this goal.
- ▶ Recognize Indigenous peoples and heritage through the renaming of places.
- ▶ Represent Indigenous lands and significant sites on maps. **Example action item:**  
*Display historic and prehistoric Indigenous land use, including trails, fishing, and hunting sites, on maps.*
- ▶ Conduct land management, planning and historic preservation activities in partnership with Tribes.
- ▶ Incorporate land acknowledgments in public meetings and gatherings.
- ▶ Celebrate Indigenous heritage and support Alaska Native language, cultural education, and activities.

### GOAL 2: Support existing and emerging historic preservation efforts, promote collaboration, and share resources

- ▶ Centralize and improve preservation and usability of archival resources. **Example action item:**  
*Catalogue MSB-related historical resources housed in collections across the state.*
- ▶ Grow collaboration and partnering within the preservation community. **Example action item:**  
*Foster increased collaboration between local historic preservation groups and MSB.*
- ▶ Support information and resource sharing in historic preservation. **Example action items:**  
*1) Identify and share examples of what is working in MSB historic preservation (e.g., pedestrian experiences in Palmer and Talkeetna. 2) Create collaborative educational opportunities to improve technical preservation knowledge in MSB communities.*
- ▶ Promote existing funding sources and preservation incentives. **Example action item:**  
*Reinstate ability to apply for bed tax grant funding.*
- ▶ Explore new funding sources and preservation incentives.

### GOAL 3: Identify and preserve cultural resources and landscapes

- ▶ Maintain and update historic contexts.

- ▶ Inventory known cultural resources.
- ▶ Identify and inventory undocumented cultural resources.
- ▶ Encourage appropriate treatment of cultural resources.
- ▶ Conserve land to preserve the historic character of sites within the region.

### GOAL 4: Improve and coordinate community engagement and education to increase public awareness of the Mat-Su Borough's cultural resources

- ▶ Elevate local histories in K-12 education, in and outside the classroom. **Example action items:**  
*1) Include MSB histories in K-12 curricula. 2) Build on existing Tribal educational resources, such as the Knik Tribe's cultural exchange grants for fostering school outreach. 3) Identify creative opportunities and tactics to elevate regional history, such as an inter-school competition during historic preservation week.*
- ▶ Support and create opportunities for tourists to connect with MSB history. **Example action item:**  
*Contact tourism companies to promote Mat-Su museums, cultural centers, historic sites, and other opportunities.*
- ▶ Expand and coordinate promotion of historic preservation across the Borough.
- ▶ Use technological solutions to create centralized educational resources. **Example action item:**  
*Create an online multimedia resource.*
- ▶ Create volunteer opportunities to support historic preservation efforts.

### GOAL 5: Connect historic preservation with regional and local planning

- ▶ Include preservation in land use planning and land management efforts.
- ▶ Regularly update preservation planning documents.
- ▶ Advocate for additional funding allotments for planning and cultural resource management.
- ▶ Establish historic preservation guidelines for unincorporated areas of the MSB. **Example action item:**  
*Establish a local register of historic properties.*

## NEXT STEPS FOR THE HPP

This Phase I report is intended to serve as a springboard for Phase II of the MSB historic preservation planning process. Guided by the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Preservation Planning, Phase II will be led by the Borough Planning Department with input and approval from the MSB Historical Preservation Commission (HPC) and additional stakeholder and public engagement.

Building on Phase I, this next phase of the planning process will:

- ▶ **Establish historic contexts.** A historic context is an overarching theme used in historic preservation planning: "Information about historic properties representing aspects of history, architecture, archeology, engineering and culture must be collected and organized to define these relationships. This organizational framework is called a "historic context." – National Park Service. **Actions:**
  - *Coordinate with community members and historic preservation stakeholders to gather key histories of the region to inform the historic context framework.*
  - *Reach consensus with key stakeholders on the framework.*
  - *Work with the HPC to adopt historic contexts for the region. Once adopted, as per the Secretary of Interior's planning standards, a goal for each historic context will need to be defined with community involvement.*
- ▶ **Adopt the Vision, Mission, Goals, and Objectives.** Reach consensus with historic preservation planning stakeholders to recommend adoption of this strategic framework to guide planning. **Action:**
  - *Convene multiple stakeholder sessions to review and approve the vision, mission, goals, and objectives for the MSB HPP.*
- ▶ **Define action steps.** Building on the objectives and actions identified during Phase 1, identify additional actions to strengthen preservation planning and implementation efforts prior to formal adoption of the plan. **Actions:**
  - *Organize Tribal-specific stakeholder group*



Talkeetna then and now  
(ca. 1949 and 2016).

INSET: ROLLIE OSTERMICK

*sessions to support meaningful dialogue and input throughout planning efforts.*

- *Develop an on-going historic preservation working group to grow momentum, share knowledge, and identify collaboration opportunities across the MSB.*
- *Identify opportunities for culture sharing, celebration, education and promotion, historic preservation trainings, volunteer opportunities, and shared resources throughout historic preservation dialogues.*
- *Identify opportunities to connect historic preservation with regional and local planning.*
- ▶ **Create the plan.** Using the national standards and HPP elements approved by stakeholders, draft an updated HPP to guide MSB preservation activities for at least the next 10 years. **Actions:**
  - *Identify a lead to coordinate HPP development.*
  - *Develop strategic, actionable steps for realizing goals and objectives through a public involvement process.*
  - *Prioritize historic context goals according to the overarching HPP vision, mission, and goals.*
- ▶ **Implement the plan.** Develop next steps and work plans to support historic preservation activities in line with the overall HPP vision and framework. **Actions:**
  - *Adopt the HPP.*
  - *Coordinate tracking and implementation of action items via the HPC.*