By: Planning
Public Hearing: 03/08/11
Adopted: 03/08/11

WASILLA PLANNING COMMISSION
RESOLUTION SERIAL NO. 11-06

A RESOLUTION OF THE WASILLA PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDING THAT THE WASILLA CITY COUNCIL REPEAL ORDINANCE SERIAL NO. 96-06, 1996 CITY OF WASILLA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN, AS AMENDED, AND ADOPT THE PROPOSED 2011 CITY OF WASILLA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN.

WHEREAS, the Wasilla Planning Commission has been considering an update to the adopted 1996 Wasilla Comprehensive Plan since May 2009; and

WHEREAS, the City employed qualified planning consultants to assist the Wasilla Planning Commission and staff in the process of revising the Comprehensive Plan through a number of public workshops and discussions held periodically at regular Wasilla Planning Commission meetings since the beginning of the planning process; and

WHEREAS, comments received through the public process have been incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan, to the greatest extent possible so that the Comprehensive Plan is representative of the needs, wishes, and desires of Wasilla residents; and

WHEREAS, the Wasilla Planning Commission now believes that the final draft is complete and ready for review by the Wasilla City Council.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Wasilla Planning Commission, after due consideration of the proposed Comprehensive Plan, public testimony, and other pertinent information brought before them, hereby recommend that the Wasilla

City Council repeal Ordinance Serial No. 96-06, as amended, and adopt the proposed 2011 City of Wasilla Comprehensive Plan, attached hereto as Exhibit A.

ADOPTED by the Wasilla Planning Commission on March 8, 2011.

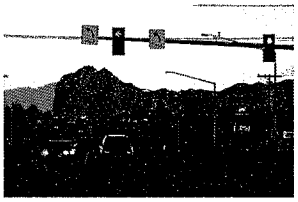
A. C. Buswell, III, Chairman

ATTEST:

Tina Crawford, City Planner

VOTE: Passed Unanimously

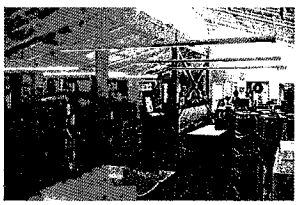
PRELIMINARY DRAFT
February 28, 2011



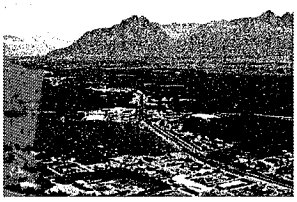
Transportation

Land Use

Downtown



Community Assets



Economic Vitality

Intergovernmental Coordination

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

USKH

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CITY OF
WASILLA
• ALASKA •

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A special thank you to everyone at the City of Wasilla for their support and assistance with this planning effort:

Mayor
Verne E. Rupright

Deputy Mayor
Doug Holler

City Council
Leone Harris
Taffina Katkus
Steve Menard
Colleen Sullivan-Leonard
Dianne Woodruff

Planning Commission
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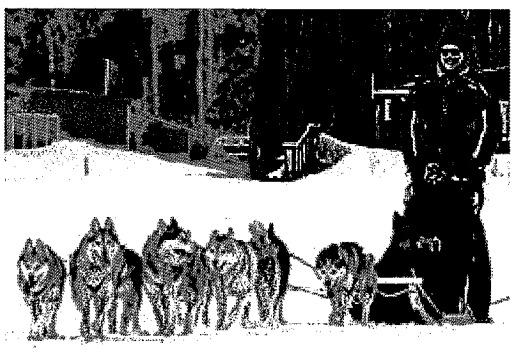
Doug Miller, Vice Chair
Steve DeHart
Daniel Kelly, Jr.
J. Dan King
Glenda Ledford
Robert Webb

City Staff
Marvin Yoder, Deputy Administrator
Tina Crawford, City Planner
Tahirih Klein, Planning Clerk
Archie Giddings, Public Works Director
Kristie Smithers, City Clerk

We also would like to acknowledge all of the many interested community members who attended public meetings and provided input to the planning project. And finally, thanks to residents who provided many of the great photos in this document, especially Mike Criss, Ron Day, Tracey Mendenhall, and Kay Petal.



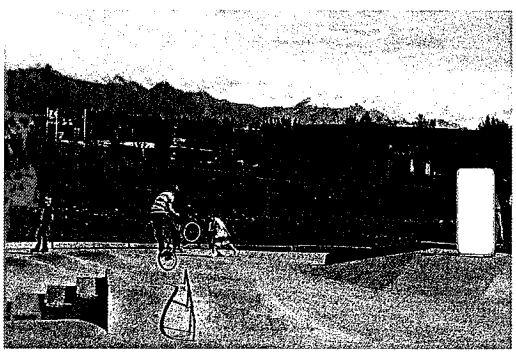


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface

Mayor's Message
Comprehensive Plan Goals

1. Introduction *(page 1)*

1.1 Purpose
1.2 Planning Process
1.3 Consistency with other Adopted Plans

2. Community Overview *(page 9)*

2.1 History
2.2 Demographics and Forecasts
2.3 Physical Context

3. Transportation *(page 27)*

3.1 Current Conditions and Trends
3.2 Desired Future Conditions
3.3 Goals, Objectives, and Actions

4. Land Use *(page 37)*

4.1 Current Conditions and Trends
4.2 Desired Future Conditions
4.3 Goals, Objectives, and Actions

5. Downtown *(page 53)*

5.1 Current Conditions and Trends
5.2 Desired Future Conditions
5.3 Goals, Objectives, and Actions

6. Community Assets *(page 61)*

6.1 Current Conditions and Trends
6.2 Desired Future Conditions
6.3 Goals, Objectives, and Actions

7. Economic Vitality *(page 69)*

7.1 Current Conditions and Trends
7.2 Desired Future Conditions
7.3 Goals, Objectives, and Actions

8. Intergovernmental Coordination *(page 75)*

8.1 Current Conditions and Trends
8.2 Desired Future Conditions
8.3 Goals, Objectives, and Actions

9. Implementation *(page 81)*

9.1 Immediate Priorities
9.2 Measuring Outcomes

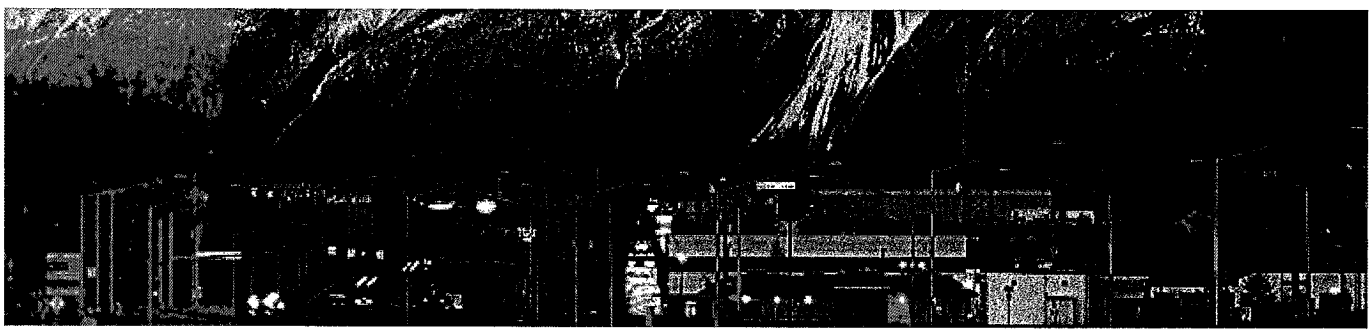
Appendices

A. Future Transportation Map (11x17)
B. Future Land Use Map (11x17)
C. Community Asset Map (11x17)
D. Retail, Office, and Lodging Market Analysis

Mayor's Message

The City of Wasilla offers attractive, livable residential neighborhoods and great retail and industrial development opportunities, but faces challenges. The City has been experiencing unprecedented growth pressures and is recognized as one of America's fastest growing communities. The City's updated Comprehensive Plan provides our community with an important tool for guiding community decision-making related to transportation, land use, capital improvements, and economic development.

The previous Comprehensive Plan was approved in April 1996. Due to the tremendous changes in the community since then, it has been my administration's priority to update the Plan in order to re-evaluate our needs, issues, and opportunities. This draft plan incorporates what we heard residents say are the critical priorities to address in our future.



City of Wasilla Mission Statement:

"It is the mission of the City of Wasilla to provide optimum service levels to the public as cost effectively as possible to ensure a stable and thriving economy, promote a healthy community, provide a safe environment and a quality lifestyle, and promote maximum citizen participation in government."

2011 Comprehensive Plan Goals

This Comprehensive Plan is intended to guide the City's elected officials, commissioners, and City staff in decision-making related to transportation, land use, and growth. This Plan builds from previously adopted Plans and outlines goals and a course of action for six key elements that are critical to the City's future growth and quality of life. The goals for each of the elements are as follows:

Transportation Element	Land Use Element	Downtown Element
GOALS 1) Provide for streets and highways that promote mobility, connectivity and access for both present and future users. 2) Provide a streets and highway network that supports economic development and growth. 3) Support the City as a transportation hub that provides connecting highways, railroad, and expanded air service. 4) Provide a neighborhood street network that enhances the residents' quality of life. 5) Maintain and improve City sidewalks and non-motorized pathways to increase walkability.	**GOALS** 1) Provide balanced land use patterns that support the community's future growth. 2) Encourage development opportunities that support the City's role as a regional commercial center. 3) Encourage a variety of residential housing opportunities. 4) Promote positive neighborhood identities and build a strong civic base to enhance resident's quality of life. 5) Continue to expand the City's borders as needed to allow economic development and growth in the future.	**GOALS** 1) Promote and encourage development and redevelopment within the Downtown area. 2) Build the partnerships and develop the community capacity required to transform Downtown.
Community Assets Element	**Economic Vitality Element**	**Intergovernmental Coordination Element**
GOALS 1) Provide essential services and facilities necessary to encourage new commercial, industrial, and manufacturing development. 2) Enhance educational opportunities. 3) Enhance recreational opportunities. 4) Preserve and enhance the City's unique community assets.	**GOALS** 1) Continue to promote and enhance the City's future as the region's major center for commerce, services, visitor hospitality, culture and arts, transportation and industry. 2) Diversify the economic base and attract new employment generators.	**GOALS** 1) Foster and encourage intergovernmental coordination between the City and the cities of Palmer and Houston, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and regional, state, federal, and Native agencies. 2) Continue to promote the awareness and involvement of the residents in the planning processes for the City.

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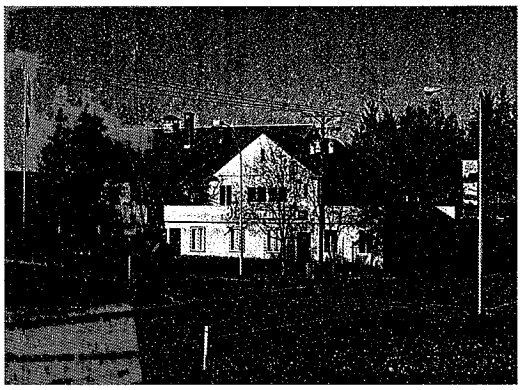
Chapter 1. Introduction



Wasilla's City Hall

1.1 Purpose

Plan Purpose and Organization

This Comprehensive Plan ("Plan") is intended to guide the decision-making of the City's elected officials, commissions, and staff regarding future development and community quality of life. It provides a flexible, forward-thinking road map for action, with findings and goals that address important community elements. The expected useful life of this Plan is ten years, 2011 through 2021, which could be extended with regular updates.

Comprehensive Plan Legal Basis

The State of Alaska's statutes enabling planning (AS 29.40.020 and 29.40.030) requires creation and adoption of a comprehensive plan along with measures to implement the plan. AS 29.40.030(a) states:

> *"The comprehensive plan is a compilation of policy statements, goals, standards, and maps for guiding the physical, social, and economic development..."*

The City has official powers governing land use planning within its boundaries. The City's Land Development Code describes a Comprehensive Plan as:

> *"...a compilation of policies, plans, maps and associated materials that forms the basis for approvals under these regulations" (Wasilla Municipal Code 16.04.040).*

The City's Plan and Land Development Code (Title 16), together provide the legal basis for consistent development decisions. These serve as legal tools to uphold broad community interests, such as public health, safety, welfare and property rights. Revisions to the City's Comprehensive Plan are reviewed by the City Planning Commission and then adopted by the City Council by ordinance. The Planning Commission periodically reviews the Comprehensive Plan and recommends updates as necessary. If any elements of the Plan conflict, the element most recently adopted shall govern (WMC 16.04.040).

Required for Funding Opportunities

The Plan is becoming a basic requirement of more and more funding agencies for awarding grants and other funding for infrastructure and economic development projects. For example, this Plan will fulfill the planning requirement for the Denali Commission and other funding agencies on the local, state and national levels as well as private organizations. It will also help the Matanuska-Susitna Borough ("Borough") better coordinate with the City on community development and infrastructure funding proposals that require state and federal contributions.

1.2 Planning Process

Previous Comprehensive Plans

This plan updates and builds from City's previous comprehensive planning efforts, while at the same time re-evaluating needs, issues, and opportunities based on current trends and conditions. The City's most recent plan was adopted in April 1996, which was preceded by adopted plans in 1992,1986, 1985 and 1982 (original plan).

Public Participation

The Plan was developed by engaging residents in discussions that considered the City's past, present, and desired future conditions. Citizen involvement was a critical component of the planning process.

By coming together to discuss community concerns, residents learned about the issues affecting their city. Public officials benefited from community involvement and used input to shape the Plan to reflect the City's desires and ideas.

Planning Process Timeline

Activity	*Date*
Project initiation	May, 2009
Community Planning Workshop	July 17, 2009
Wasilla Retail, Office, and Lodging Market Analysis	September 2009
Downtown Charrette Workshops	October 21-25, 2009
Community Survey	Completed January 2010
Framework Plan	March 25, 2010
Community Presentations & Dialogue with Planning Commission and City Staff	July - September 2010
Public Meeting	October 23, 2010
Joint Planning Commission and City Council Work Session on Draft Goals, Objectives and Actions	January 11, 2011
Planning Commission receives Preliminary Draft for Review	February 28, 2011
Plan Adoption	T.B.A.

Table 1. Planning Process Timeline.

In terms of the specific public process to create this Plan, key dates and activities are listed in the table right. A number of mechanisms and opportunities were used to engage the residents; these are outlined below.

Project Website

A project website was developed to enable residents to view draft plan documents and learn about upcoming meetings. The website also included a mechanism for providing input via email.

Public Meetings

Public workshops and meetings were conducted as part of the planning process. At the first workshop, July 2009, citizens identified the following issues and opportunities:

- Developing a library, museum, and theatre complex would be a catalyst for Downtown.
- Improving the City's identity – minimize the strip mall appearance.
- The current appearance of buildings and streets, and the amount of traffic detracts from economic development potential.
- Need for additional sidewalks, curbs and stormwater drains.
- Economic development - creating good local job opportunities for residents.

- Financial resources - are people willing to pay for quality of life?
- Promoting tourism around Wasilla's cultural and natural assets.
- City purchase of additional land for future community needs (e.g. road and utility expansion, Downtown redevelopment, parks).

The second public input event consisted of a week-long planning charrette focused around the Downtown area in late October 2009. The Downtown charrette included meetings with City officials, business leaders, walking tours, and three evening planning workshops with the public. In between meetings, concepts for the Downtown were sketched for presentation at the planning workshops.

The planning charrette defined the "built environment" business owner's and resident's desires for Downtown. The "built environment" includes buildings (height, setback, architectural design, etc.) and supporting infrastructure (roads, sidewalks, lighting, utilities, etc.).

Rough sketches were produced during the charrette to communicate these ideas. These ideas, presented below, would require incremental changes to the Downtown area. Workshop participants also expressed their desire for these qualities:

- Pedestrian friendly, with sidewalks and crosswalks at street intersections.
- Convenient, with on-street parking and easy access.
- Vibrant, attracting residents and tourists with a variety of specialty shops and activities that remain open in the evenings and on weekends.
- Attractive, with architectural design and landscaping suited to the Alaskan environment and that highlights Wasilla's cultural and natural assets.

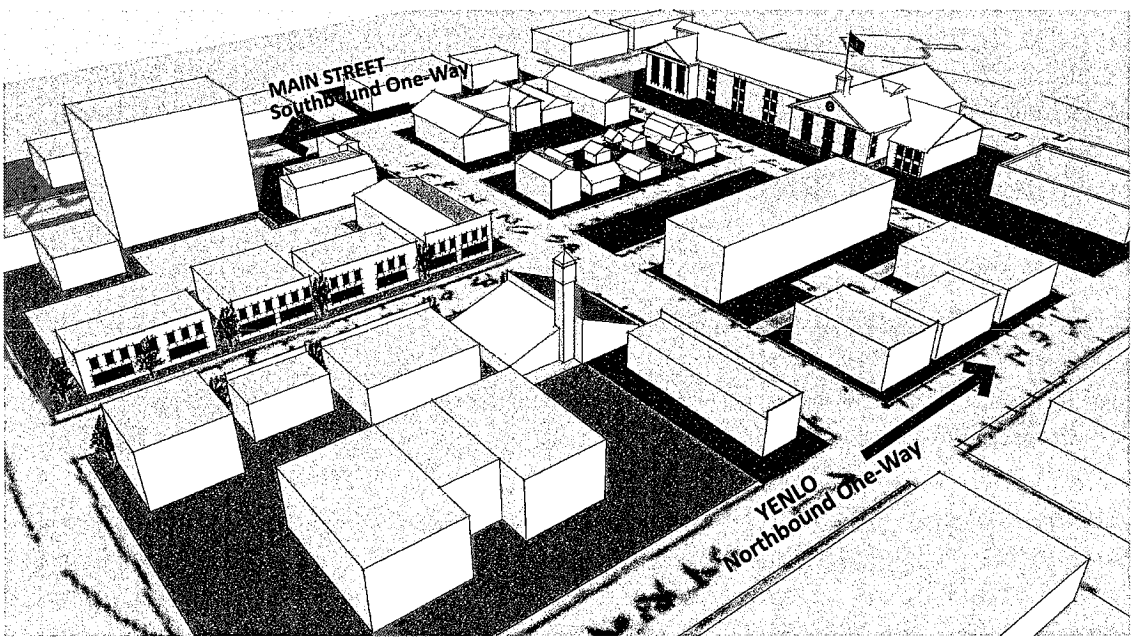


Figure 1. Charrette concept generated during an open house in October 2009 creates a focused "core area of Downtown" and improves traffic flow. The former Post Office site becomes a landmark City building.

Prior to the third and final public meeting, outreach presentations were made to local organizations and development interest groups. At the same time (summer – early fall 2010), discussions were held with City staff and the Planning Commission to identify goals and objectives to be incorporated into the Plan.

A final public workshop was held in October 2010 to ask for residents' input focused on unresolved issues and potential goals. The meeting provided a useful venue for discussing options and ideas to include in the draft Plan.

Participants commented on the following issues:

- Future land use patterns and compatibility
- Future investments in roads, parks and infrastructure
- Future community identity and Downtown

During the final public meeting residents gave input on community goals and actions.

Community Survey

The City conducted a survey to gather citizen input as part of this planning effort during the winter of 2009-2010. The survey was designed to obtain statistically valid results from households throughout the City. The survey was conducted using a combination of mail and phone calls. Leisure Vision worked with City officials and the project team to create the survey questionnaire. This allowed the survey to be tailored to issues of strategic importance to effectively plan for local needs.

Leisure Vision mailed surveys to a random sample of 1,750 households throughout the City. Approximately three days after the surveys were mailed each household that received a survey also received an automated voice message encouraging them to complete the survey. In addition, about two weeks after the surveys were mailed Leisure Vision began contacting households by phone. Those who indicated they had not returned the survey were given the option of completing it by phone.

The goal was to obtain at least 350 completed surveys from City households. This goal was accomplished, with the receipt of a total of 352 completed surveys. The results of the survey have a 95% level of confidence with a precision of at least +/-5.2%.

The following is a summary of major survey findings:

Most Important Interests for the City to Address. Based on the sum of their top four choices, the subjects of interest that households feel are most important for the City to address are: improved roadways and transportation (56%), more employment opportunities (47%), increased public safety (32%), and expanded school services (30%).

Level of Satisfaction with Major City Services. The major City services that the highest percentage of households are very or somewhat satisfied with are: public safety services (71%), parks and recreation programs/facilities (55%), customer service received from City employees (52%), and maintenance of City streets/facilities (52%).

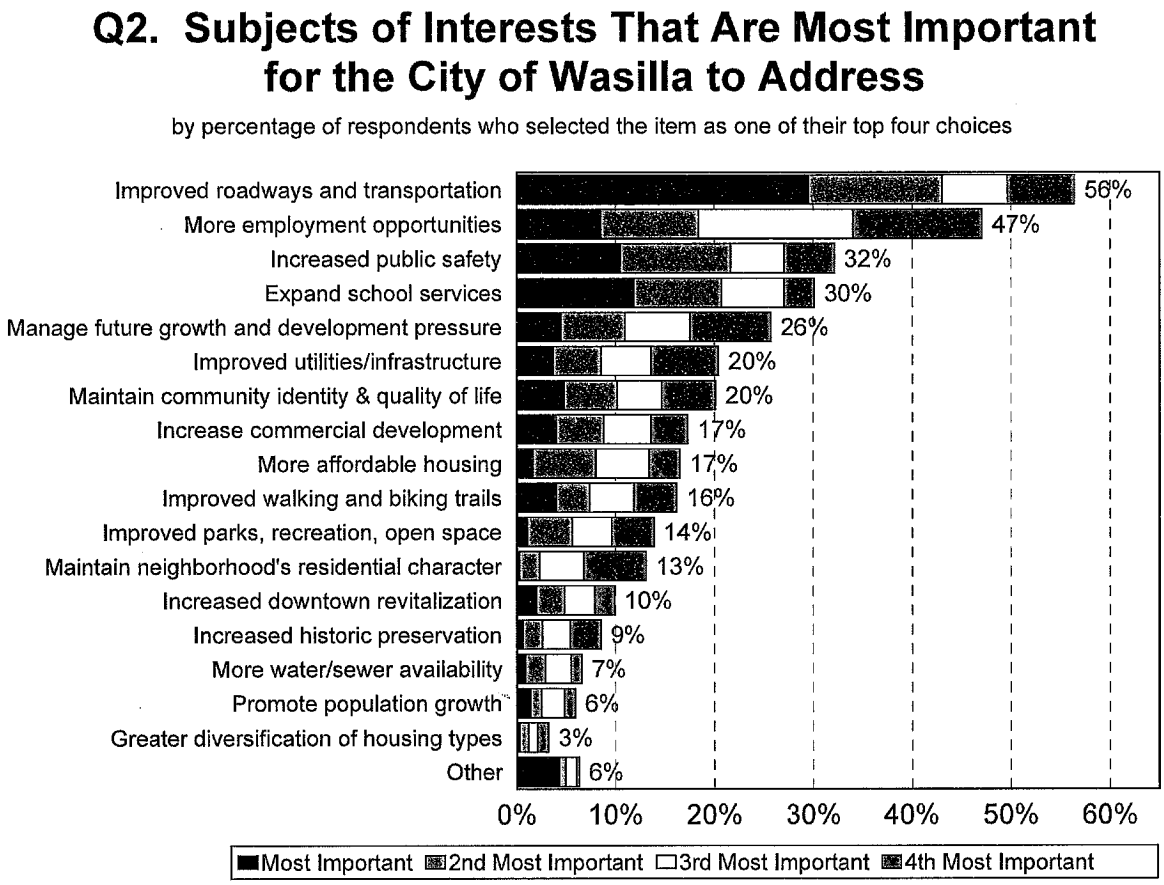


Figure 2. Statistical Survey City Priorities to Address (Source: Leisure Vision survey, January 2010). Graph figures represent Wasilla residents' opinions regarding priorities to address in the City. Survey findings are statistically valid based on a random sample of 1,750 Wasilla residents, with 352 households responding (95% level of confidence) and have been used to guide recommendations in this plan.

Future of Wasilla. Regarding the City's future, the statements that the highest percentage of respondents strongly agree or disagree with are: The built environment should promote healthy and active living (74%), enhanced street connectivity (74%), maintain housing quality (69%), encourage pedestrian and bicycle movement on streets (68%), and maintain Downtown vitality (68%).

Level of Support for Various Economic Development Strategies. The survey results showed that 83% of respondents are either very supportive or somewhat supportive of creating or expanding new industrial and employment areas in Wasilla, and 74% are very or somewhat supportive of expanding areas for redevelopment and development.

Level of Support for Various Neighborhood and Housing Development Strategies. The survey indicated that 77% of respondents are either very supportive or somewhat supportive of having stricter code enforcement to clean up property in Wasilla, and 67% are very or somewhat supportive of redevelopment of the Downtown area to strengthen its role as a town center.

Level of Support for Various Downtown Strategies. Survey results reflected that 72% of respondents are either very supportive or somewhat supportive of redevelopment of key blocks in the Downtown area to strengthen the Downtown commercial and residential markets, 72% are very or somewhat supportive of encouraging revitalization in Downtown and surrounding neighborhoods, and 69% are very or somewhat supportive of encouraging a mix of national and local retail and commercial space Downtown.

Level of Support for Various Parks and Recreation Strategies. Survey responses said that 76% of respondents are either very supportive or somewhat supportive of improving the Lake Lucille Park to serve the entire City, 75% are very or somewhat supportive of developing/renovating smaller neighborhood parks, and 72% are very or somewhat supportive of providing a system of recreational trails/linear parks to connect neighborhood and regional parks.

Other findings:

Half of the respondents are either very satisfied (10%) or satisfied (40%) with the overall quality of new commercial development in the City of Wasilla, compared to only 15% of respondents who are either dissatisfied (11%) or very dissatisfied (4%). The remaining respondents indicated "neutral" (30%) or "don't know" (5%).

Forty-nine percent of the respondents are either very satisfied (12%) or satisfied (37%) with the quality of new neighborhood subdivisions in the City, compared to only 12% who are dissatisfied (7%) or very dissatisfied (5%). The remaining respondents indicated "neutral" (29%) or "don't know" (10%).

Fifty-eight percent of the respondents feel the condition of their neighborhood is staying about the same, 19% feel it's getting better, and 19% feel it's getting worse. The remaining respondents indicated "don't know."

1.3 Consistency with other Adopted Plans

Consistency with other Local Plans

Comprehensive planning provides a future direction and road map for City action. Given the unknown factors that a City faces over the life of its plan, its goals and recommendations are intentionally presented in broad and general terms. In order to fully implement this Plan, more detail-specific plans will need to be developed and regularly updated, consistent with the intent and goals of the Plan, including the Future Transportation and Future Land Use maps in this Plan's appendices.

These supplementary plans provide a greater degree of specificity and detail, and can more accurately respond to changing needs and conditions within the City. Specific details can include capital planning, infrastructure network planning, design criteria, specifications, project development, special area and neighborhood plans, etc. Thus, developers and City

officials are advised to consult, in addition to this Plan, current City codes and other plans as a guide for decision-making. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

City of Wasilla Regulations and Plans

- Title 16, Land Development Code
- Official Streets and Highways Plan
- Airport Master Plan
- Parks Master Plan
- Trails Plan
- Water Master Plan
- Sewer Master Plan
- Stormwater Master Plan

Consistency with other Regional Plans

The Comprehensive Plan for the City is part of the comprehensive development plan of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough under MSB Code 17.45. As a First Class City, Wasilla has accepted the Borough's delegated land use regulatory authority, pursuant to Alaska Statutes 29.40.010(b). Although the City's Plan governs land use decisions within the City, some powers currently remain with the Borough (e.g., platting).

Additionally, the Borough provides regional planning on a number of elements important to the City's future. For these reasons, City officials and developers are advised to be aware of current Borough plans, including, but not limited to, the following:

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Areawide Plans

- Long Range Transportation Plan
- Official Streets and Highways Plan
- Regional Aviation System Plan
- Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
- Coastal Management Plan
- Recreational Trails Plan
- Borough-wide Comprehensive Plan

Consistency with State and Federal Plans

Although the Plan mainly focuses on local and community issues, State planning documents were consulted, particularly related to transportation (the Parks Highway and the Alaska Railroad are both state-owned facilities). Other plans may also apply.

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Chapter 2. Community Overview

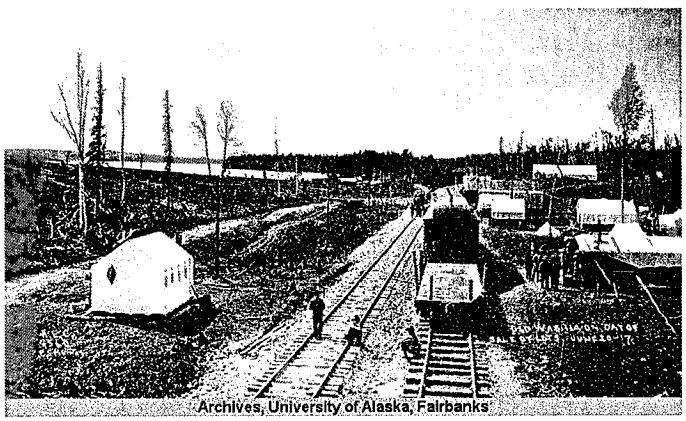
2.1 History

Chief Wasilla, circa 1900.

The City's rich history and diversity of people and ideas are actively treasured and preserved. The community's heritage includes the indigenous Athabaskan (Dena'ina) people, gold miners, and homesteaders, as well as contemporary entrepreneurs and wilderness enthusiasts.

The Dena'ina, the original inhabitants of the Wasilla area, called the area "Benteh," meaning many lakes. The numerous lakes and streams provided ample fishing for indigenous populations and the area became a popular wintering ground for semi-permanent Native villages. Trails connected these villages to hunting grounds in the Susitna Valley and the Talkeetna Mountains, while others linked the villages to the Ahtna people east of the Matanuska Valley.

The town site of Wasilla is named after Chief Wasilla, a local Dena'ina chief and shaman who died in 1907. Prominent theories peg "Wasilla" as meaning "breath of air" in the Dena'ina Athabascan language; or an alternative theory is that Wasilla is derived from "Vassily," a Russian name derived from trading post influences in Lower Cook Inlet (1741 to 1867).



Rail construction in 1916 was followed by townsite development.

Wasilla's history as a community dates back to 1916 when the Alaska Engineering Commission constructed a work camp at the intersection of the Alaska Railroad and the Carle Wagon Trail (now known as the Wasilla-Fishhook Road), which linked the coastal community of Knik with the Willow Creek mining district. The work camp housed men engaged in surveying, clearing, and establishing the rail line that would eventually connect the port of Seward to Fairbanks.

After platting the town site in June 1917, the Alaska Engineering Commission auctioned off town site lots from the railroad platform in Wasilla. This new community led to the demise of the older settlement at Knik. Once established, Wasilla became the most important distribution point in the Valley.

Olaf Wagoner circa 1917 plowing potato fields in Wasilla.

Homesteading and the founding of the Matanuska Colony under President Roosevelt's New Deal increased the population in the area. Several colony farms were located near Wasilla. World War II ended the mining boom and drained workers from farms and businesses. However, economic activity increased during this period due to an influx of military personnel to area bases.

By 1931 Downtown Wasilla was a regional crossroads.

Construction of the George Parks Highway ("Parks Highway") in the early 1970s provided direct access to and from Anchorage. This enabled workers and their families to live in the Wasilla area and commute to jobs in Anchorage. Support and service industries began to develop in the area to meet the needs of these new residents. The Parks Highway also became well used, serving Alaska residents traveling between Anchorage and Fairbanks, and visitors traveling to Denali National Park.

Wasilla's Old Townsite Park has preserved original historic relics.

The City was incorporated in 1974 as a second class city under Alaska statutes, and has continued to develop as the retail and commercial hub of the central Matanuska-Susitna Valley. It became a first class city in 1984.

By the 1990s, road improvements and Alaska's economic growth, with good jobs on the North Slope and in Anchorage encouraged a new wave of commuters to make the City their home. Around the same time, proposals were seriously considered to move Alaska's state capital to Wasilla, a more central location with greater land resources. By 2000 the region's beauty and large-lot homes at a fraction of the cost of Anchorage attracted a growth boom that has shaped the area, and expanded population both within and surrounding the City.

Today the City is famous as headquarters for the Iditarod, home of the Iron Dog snow machine race, and hometown of the politically famous former City Mayor, Sarah Palin. The City has also maintained aspects of its rich history, including regional attractions such as the Dorothy Page Museum and Old Townsite Park and Museum of Alaska Transportation and Industry.

Displays at the Museum of Alaska Transportation and Industry tell the story of Alaska's settlement and transportation modes.

2.2 Demographics and Forecasts

Growth Locally and Regionally

In Alaskan terms, Wasilla's size is just right; large enough to have metropolitan amenities and a blossoming growth center for business, yet small enough to preserve the familiarity, charm, and security of small-town living. The active population enjoys affordable land and housing, unparalleled recreation, a thriving economy, and a responsive local government committed to assisting private development.

Wasilla and areas surrounding the city are anticipated to grow in population at a 3.1% rate through 2034.

At the same time, the City is continuing to grow. Since the 1996 Comprehensive Plan was adopted, the City has been experiencing unprecedented growth pressures. Since the 2000 census, the City has experienced a 32% increase in population—up to 7,245 residents in 2009—and is recognized as one of America's fastest growing communities. Although growth has generally enhanced the City, it also has added new challenges as the City seeks to respond to the demands and needs that new residents bring.

Moreover, growth within the City is just one aspect of a changing demographic story that is addressed in this Plan. The other aspect is the City's role relative to regional growth. Population data shows that although the City is growing fast, residential areas to the City's south and north are growing even faster. While the City's growth is a critical factor in planning for the future, so is coming to terms with its role in meeting the needs and demands of a large and growing population adjacent to the City.

Regional figures show that the City is central to a fast growing population (Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis (ADLWD, 2010). As of 2009, around 40,000 residents live just outside the City limits, but generally rely on the City for some portion of their goods, services, community needs, and infrastructure. As an example of this impact, the City has the third busiest library in the State of Alaska. According to 2008 data the majority of the library patronage (82%) comes from residents living outside the City (see table, page 10). Many of these non-residents are living the Alaskan dream of being "away from it all" but still desire urban services such as libraries. They have no organized community or government near their homes addressing these demands and the Borough's libraries in Sutton or Big Lake are not close to their homes. The City is on their way to work, and near shopping—so they seek services from the City's library.

A large and growing population outside City boundaries is using City services and facilities (library, roads, etc.).

2008 City of Wasilla Library Usage by Residents and Non-Residents.

MSB Road Service Area (RSA)	2008 RSA Population	Residents in RSA Using Wasilla's Library	Percentage of Wasilla Library Checkouts
Big Lake	3,191	337	1.70%
Bogard	8,249	3,786	14.44%
Butte	3,939	271	0.82%
Caswell	3,216	243	0.58%
Fairview	6,495	5,705	8.77%
Houston	1,755	355	1.10%
Knik	6,495	4,989	15.00%
Lazy Mountain	1,447	127	0.44%
Meadow Lakes/Goldtrails	14,324	11,068	25.37%
Midway	4,473	2,310	5.66%
North Colony	768	42	0.10%
Outside RSA/Other	2,316	405	1.15%
Palmer	5,559	289	1.37%
South Colony	6,578	812	4.15%
Talkeetna	1,394	18	0.26%
Trapper Creek	407	3	0.13%
Wasilla	**7,176**	**5,823**	**18.06%**
Willow	1,428	61	0.85%
Total	79,210	36,663	100%

Table 2. 2008 City library usage data. Source: City of Wasilla Library staff in-house report. Population figures from ADLWD.

2000 to 2009 Wasilla Region Population Growth.

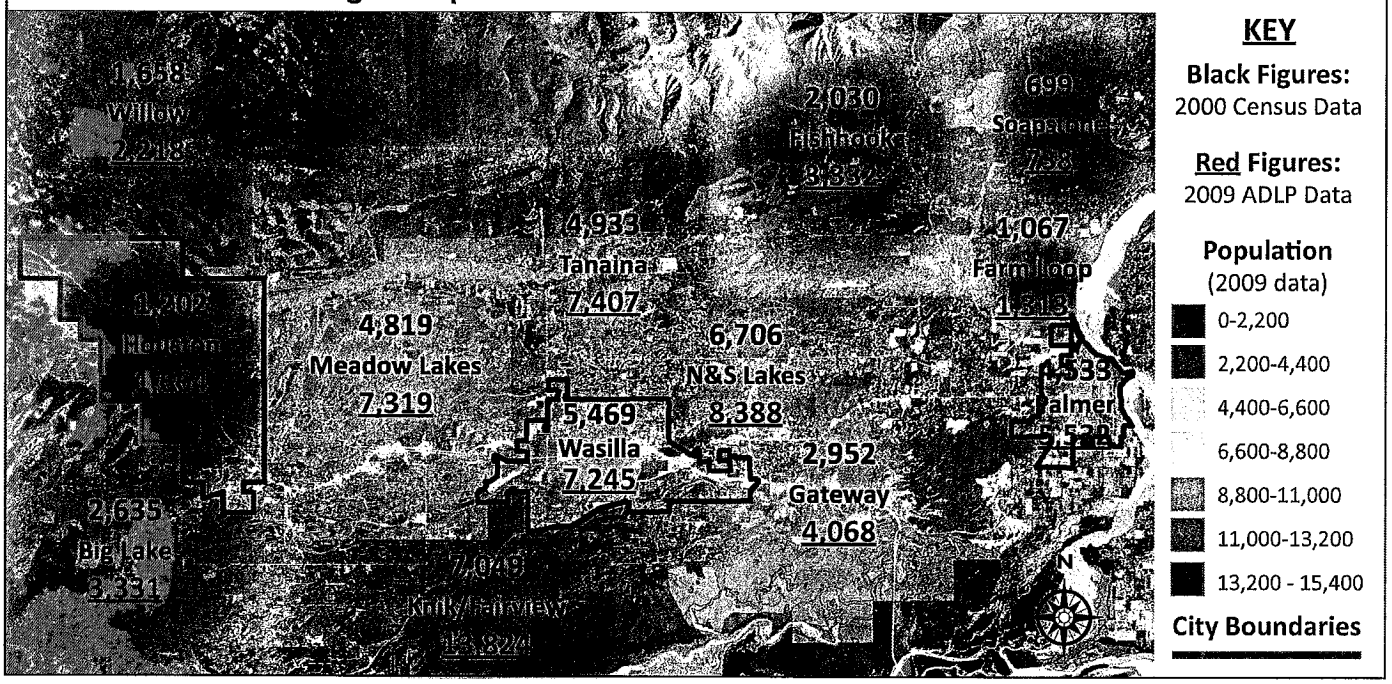
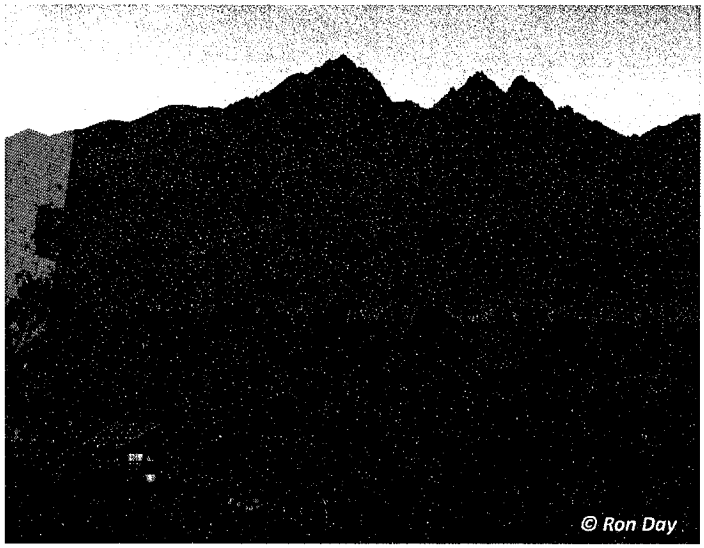


Figure 3. Regional population data from 2000 and 2009, showing the strong population growth in communities directly south and north of Wasilla. Data is for cities and Matanuska-Susitna Borough Community Council Areas using Census and Alaska Department of Labor Population (ADLP) 2009 figures.

Increases in the regional population are expected to continue. A State analysis projects 3.1% annual growth through 2034 for the Borough (ADLWD, December 2010). If the State growth scenarios and economic assumptions are correct, the Borough population could increase to more than 100,000 residents over the next ten years.



Many Valley residents want to "escape city life" but still want urban amenities such as libraries.

In response to these trends, two points were raised during the public input for this planning process (which attracted both residents and non-residents):

- Many Valley residents live where they do now by choice because they want "to get away" from city life. Yet, they desire a balance and still want urban amenities such as services, goods, and social and cultural opportunities.
- Using commerce as a tax base, rather than property tax, allows the City to gain some resources from non-residents who visit the City for services, shopping, etc., which will help support their demands for services.

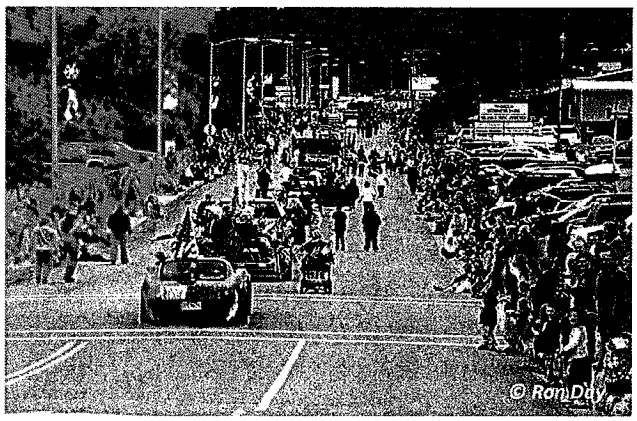
This planning effort found the City at a crossroads, with issues emerging in the community discussion over regional versus local needs and interests. Clearly, the City is beginning to come of age, emerging as a regional center. The City's priorities and actions over the next decade in response to forecasted growth—with increasing demands for services by residents and non-residents—will play a large role in shaping how the City grows and changes.

Serving local residents' needs while expanding as a regional center will present some challenges to the City.

The City's challenge over the life of this Plan will be to constructively consider both local and regional demands, and then weigh carefully the advantages and costs of different service and cost recovery models. Using this approach it may be possible to enhance Wasilla both as a place to live *and* as a regional destination.

City and Borough Demographics

The City's population is currently estimated at 7,245 and is expected to grow at a 3.1% rate over the next 25 years. As the population figures highlight in Table 3, this would basically double the population by 2034.



Wasilla's population is generally young and family oriented, with a growing population of retirees.

In terms of its demographic profile, according to the 2000 Census, 34% of Wasilla's population is younger than 18, with a median age of 29.7 years. More recent Borough figures (ADLWD 2009) place the median age of the Borough area's population at 34.5, one year older than the statewide median age and nearly four years older than the area's median age in 2000. 6.7% of the City's population is 65 years and older, compared with 5.7% at the State level.

Table 4 presents Borough-wide demographic and economic data averages from 2006 to 2009. Although not specific to the City, it highlights the region as attracting more families than the state average. There are more married couples and family households in the Borough than there are statewide, and those households are larger. The average family size in the Borough was 4.3, versus 3.4 statewide.

City of Wasilla Population	
Year(s)	Population
1917 – 1940	"Around 400"
1950	96
1960	112
1970	300
1980	1,559
1990	4,028
2000	5,469
2009	7,245
2014*	8,368*
2024*	10,962*
2034*	14,360*

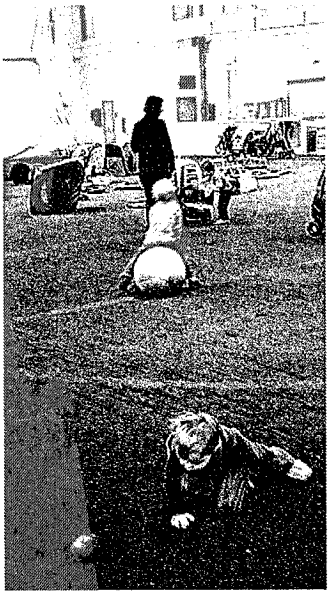
Table 3. City population 1917 - 2034 (Sources: Pre 1940, Wasilla Comprehensive Plan 1996; 1950 - 2000 U.S. Census; 2009 and future estimates, ADLWD 2010).

Income, Education, and Employment

Median household income was $67,132—close to the statewide average, but 7% below Anchorage (see Table 4). Additionally, the Borough's population is considerably less diverse than the State's — 84.1% white versus 70.4% statewide. The ratio of men to women however is similar to the State average of 49%.

In socio-economic terms, City residents in the past have typically been on par with the average economic status of Alaskans generally, but with a lower unemployment rate, a smaller percentage of families below the poverty level, and a greater percentage of residents in the labor force (Draft Wasilla Area Plans, 2007). Extrapolating from 2009 Borough-wide data makes it hard to pinpoint current City-level income trends with any precision. However, 9.6% of the Borough's residents are living in poverty compared with 9.5% of statewide residents and 7.6% of Anchorage residents.

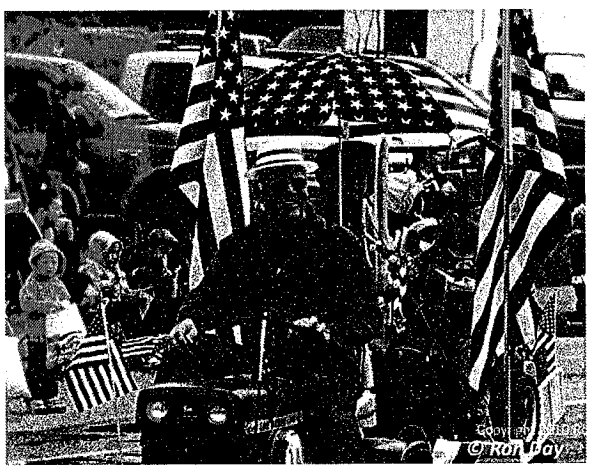
In the 2000 census, educational levels 20 year olds indicated a higher percentage of City residents graduating from high school and attaining associate degrees than the state average. At the same time, a lower percentage attained college or graduate degrees compared with state figures.

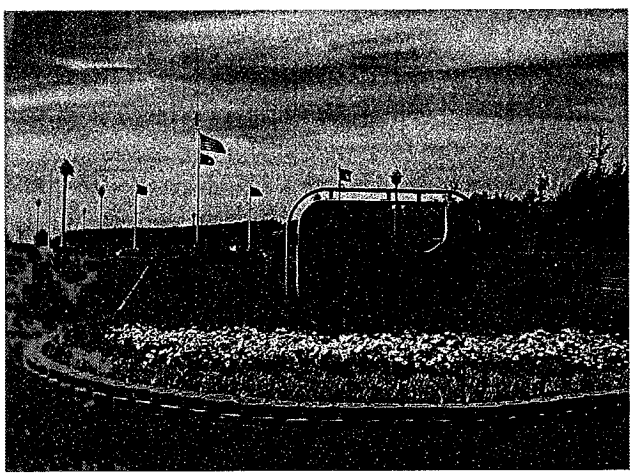


A Demographic Snapshot: Mat-Su Borough 2006 - 2009.			
Population	MSB	Anchorage	Alaska
Total Population	82,485	278,716	681,235
Born in Alaska	36.2%	33.5%	38.9%
Veterans	15.6%	15.6%	14.7%
Type of households			
Average family size	4.3	3.2	3.4
Average household size	3.8	2.7	2.8
Income			
Median household income	$67,132	$72,137	$66,293
Median family income	$74,232	$84,443	$77,020
Living in poverty*	9.6%	7.6%	9.5%
Employment			
Labor Force	66.2%	74.7%	72.3%
Mean travel time to work in minutes	33.7	18.1	18.1
Educational Attainment (age 25)			
Less than ninth grade	2.6%	3.3%	3.6%
Ninth to 12th grade, no diploma	7.8%	4.9%	5.8%
High school graduate or equivalent	32.7%	23.7%	28.5%
Some college, no degree	27.6%	27.4%	27.5%
Associate's degree	9.6%	8.3%	8.1%
Bachelor's degree	12.9%	20.7%	16.8%
Graduate or professional degree	6.8%	11.6%	9.7%
Housing			
Owner-occupied housing units	80.6%	61.6%	64.1%
Renter-occupied housing units	19.4%	38.4%	35.9%

Table 4. Borough Population Statistics, 2006-2009 (Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2006-2008; Three-Year Estimates).

**Poverty is measured by cross classifying household size, composition, and the number of people under age 18.*





Compared with other Alaskan regions the Borough attracts larger families, and more retirees and veterans.

Employment levels continue to grow in the Borough, even as they fell in the rest of Alaska for the first time in 21 years following the 2008 economic downturn. Although a number of job sectors contribute to the Borough's economy, its most important stimulus is its status as a bedroom community — a place where people live while working elsewhere. This has supported many construction jobs related to the housing market; this industry grew 36% in the Borough between 2000 and 2009. An expanding tourism industry also plays a role. A growing tourism sector in the region has more than tripled bed tax receipts in the Borough area over the past five years while visitor growth in most of the State was muted. (ADLWD 2009)

Besides the housing market and tourism industry, other types of businesses that provide services to the rest of the State have brought new jobs into the Borough area. These include Job Corps, Alaska Department of Corrections, and GCI. Other examples include car dealers, greenhouses, farmer's markets, and others that cater to the local population as well as to Anchorage residents.

City job growth is directly attributable to increased spending on local services and goods.

One of the most important explanations for the Borough's rapid employment growth, is that its businesses and institutions are providing a larger range of goods and services to the area's burgeoning population. For example, between 2000 and 2009, health care employment doubled and retail added more than 1,000 jobs. Moreover, as new choices and improved options for spending arrive in the Borough, residents are spending more money locally.

The number of jobs in the Borough grew more than three times as fast as the rest of the state in the past decade, and this trend continues because residents spend a growing share of their income locally. Economists call this phenomenon import substitution, and it increases payroll as well as salaries. Growth in sales tax revenue in Wasilla is further evidence of the Borough capturing more of its residents' consumption dollars. Between 2000 and 2009, collected sales tax more than doubled (even after adjustment for inflation).

According to data compiled by the ADLWD, many residents continue to commute outside of the Borough on a daily basis. This data (which excludes federal, military, and self-employed workers) indicates that nearly one-third of the Borough's residents work in Anchorage, and this hasn't changed much over the years.

Commuter traffic levels are growing.

Unlike many areas that are home to a large population of commuters, the Borough also has many residents that travel to remote job sites. For example, in 2008, 8% of the area's residents worked on the North Slope and another 5% held jobs in other distant places around the State.

Over the past decade, the proportion of commuters and those who work locally has not changed much. In both 2000 and 2008, 45% commuted beyond the Borough's boundaries. However, an interesting trend emerged: workers were taking more jobs farther away.

The number of commuters working on the North Slope doubled between 2005 and 2008 — a reflection of the employment rebound in the state's oil patch and the Borough area's role as home to a large share of the state's oil industry workforce. (ADLWD 2009)

The Borough supplies the second-largest group of oil industry workers to the North Slope, after Anchorage. There are many reasons why so many Borough residents commute, but two are paramount. The Borough offers a competitive housing market, and the State's largest labor market (Anchorage) is within easy commute for most residents. (ADLWD 2009)

A large part of the Borough and City's appeal is its affordable housing market. Other factors such as lifestyle and scenery play an important role, but they are more difficult to quantify. In 2010, the average sale price of a single-family home in the Borough was $239,572: just three-quarters of the price of a single-family home in Anchorage and significantly below the statewide average of $277,941. In addition, homes in the Borough are typically located on larger lots than Anchorage. Measuring how many wage earners it takes to pay the average mortgage also shows why an Anchorage worker might choose to live in the Borough area. It takes approximately 1.2 Anchorage wage earners to pay the average Borough mortgage versus 1.6 to pay the mortgage in Anchorage.

In terms of housing inventory and conditions, the majority of housing in the City can be characterized as single-family homes situated on large lots in a semi-rural environment. Generally the major residential areas are located north of the Parks Highway, the area around Lake Lucille, and along Knik-Goose Bay Road. The majority of subdivided land is platted into lots 40,000 square feet and larger (City of Wasilla Public Works, 2011).

City housing units are primarily single-family homes.

Housing characteristics for Wasilla compared to the MSB, Anchorage, and the State.

Type of Housing	Wasilla	MSB	Anchorage	Alaska
Total Number of Housing Units	2,119	27,329	100,368	260,978
Number of Occupied Units	1,979	20,556	94,822	221,600
Number of Vacant Units	140	6,773	5,546	39,378
Seasonal, Recreational, Occasional	34	5,244	1,107	21,474
Percent of Occupied Housing	93.4%	75.2%	94.5%	84.9%
Number of Owner-Occupied Units	1,104	16,218	56,953	138,509
Number of Renter-Occupied Units	875	4,338	37,869	83,091
Percent of Owner-Occupied Units	55.8%	78.9%	60.1%	62.5%

Table 5. 2007 City Housing Characteristics (Source: City of Wasilla, 2007).

Multi-unit housing is generally sited along major roadways.

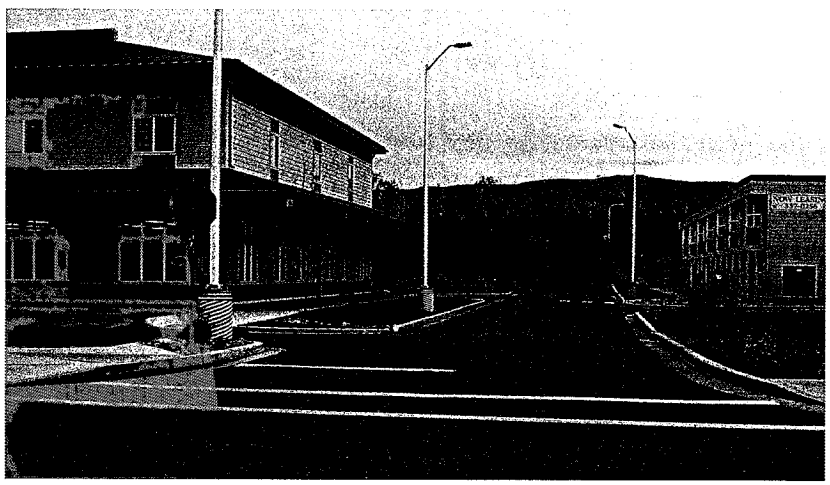
Wasilla Housing Unit Detail, 2000.		
Rooms	**Number**	**Percent**
1 room	69	3.3
2 rooms	125	5.9
3 rooms	296	14.0
4 rooms	501	23.7
5 rooms	351	16.6
6 rooms	329	15.5
7 rooms	190	9.0
8 rooms	131	6.2
9 rooms	126	5.9
Value	**Number**	**Percent**
Less than $50,000	45	5.4
$50,000 to $99,000	108	12.9
$100,000 to $149,999	367	44
$150,000 to $199,999	216	25.9
$200,000 to $299,999	85	10.2
$300,000 to $499,999	13	1.6
$500,000 to $999,999	0	0.0
$1,000,000 or more	0	0.0

Table 6. City Housing Unit Details (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Multi-family dwelling units are also present in the City, along major roadways, with duplexes generally interspersed within single-family neighborhoods.

As of 2007, the City had 2,119 housing units with a 93.4% occupancy rate. Newer figures (see Table 4, page 15) estimate that the Borough has a significantly higher rate of owner-occupied housing units, at 80.6%, compared with 61.6% in Anchorage and 64.1% statewide. Conversely, the percentage of renter-occupied housing units in the Borough is 19.4% compared with 38.4% in Anchorage and 35.9% statewide. Most residential structures (71%) were constructed between 1970 and 1989. More than half (53.4%) are single-family homes and 20.1% are multi-family unit structures (Wasilla Area Plan 2007).

Several housing developments supporting special needs populations also exist in the City. Examples include Williwa Manor, 32 private townhouse-style units that serve senior and disabled populations in a campus style development. Additionally, Yenlo Square, a planned unit development in the heart of Downtown has a mix of commercial and residential uses and provides housing for families, seniors, and people with special needs. Initial phases have been constructed with planned expansion as market conditions allow. These units benefit from proximity to the library, shopping and other Downtown destinations.



Yenlo Square is a new planned unit housing and retail development in the City.

City Permit Applications 2000 - 2009										
Type of Permit	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000
Single Family Residence	31	25	33	68	99	28	44	41	30	41
Multi Family Residence	3	1	4	13	22	6	13	17	8	8
Subdivision	8	8	13	20	12	2	18	10	2	3
Commercial Development	12	17	15	23	27	17	23	11	20	35
Signs	20	13	22	10	14	2	10	10	14	13
Public Uses	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	5	4
Rezone	2	0	6	1	3	1	3	3	4	2
Variance/Amnesty	1	1	5	7	12	3	4	6	2	4
Towers	0	1	0	2	2	1	0	0	0	0
Total Permit Applications	77	66	98	144	191	60	117	100	85	110

Table 7. 2000 - 2009 Permit Data for the City (Source: City of Wasilla Planning Department, 2011).

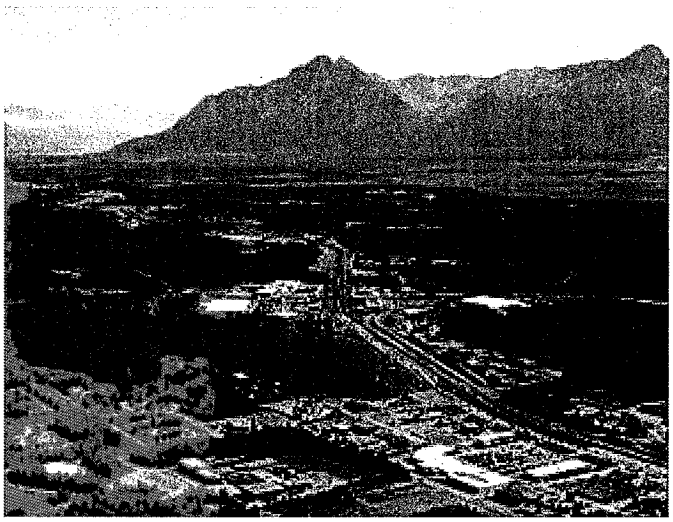
In terms of future development, the City has a young building stock and significant land area to accommodate future growth. Table 7 highlights development trends in terms of permit applications received by the City over the past ten years. Although the number of development permit applications has varied from year to year over the last decade, over 60 permits are consistently being applied for each year.

In addition to strong housing growth, the table highlights the City's steady commercial growth. Large retailers in the City currently include Walmart, Fred Meyer, Carrs (Safeway), Sears and hardware giants Home Depot and Lowes. In the fall of 2008 Target opened their newly constructed store.

The City has received permit applications for more than 200 commercial developments over the past decade, and has expanded its retail base to include several major national chains including Fred Meyer.

2.3 Physical Context

Location and Setting



The Parks Highway and rail line pass just south of Wasilla Lake.

Wasilla offers the best of Alaska. A thriving crossroads with a booming economy, it is the heart of a diverse and dynamic region. Located in Alaska's fastest growing area, the City serves as the region's commercial and retail center.

Its advantageous location along the Parks Highway and the Alaska Railroad makes it a strategic link between Anchorage and Fairbanks, the largest population centers and transportation hubs of Southcentral and Interior Alaska. The 50-minute driving commute between the City and Anchorage is manageable and scenic and it is just 30 air miles north-northeast of Anchorage.

The location and natural features provide residents with a virtual outdoor playground, which includes access to some of Alaska's most sought after year-round recreational spots. These include the Matanuska and Knik glaciers, Hatcher Pass, several State game refuges and recreation areas, world-class fishing rivers, and Denali National Park and Preserve. This unique locale appeals to those who seek an Alaskan lifestyle while raising a family, taking advantage of economic prospects, or retiring in comfort.

Natural Conditions - Geology and Soils

Within its majestic surroundings, the City sits between two river valleys carved by glaciers. The Matanuska and Susitna valleys are located in Southcentral Alaska, anchored between the Talkeetna Mountains and Cook Inlet. The City consists of approximately 13 square miles of land, generally consisting of undulating ridges of glacial till and flat benches of sand and gravel outwash. Elevations vary from 300 to 500 feet above sea level. The Downtown and Airport areas generally sit on a level plain between and surrounding Wasilla Lake and Lake Lucille. Area ridges and variations in topography provide sought after development sites with spectacular views that include Pioneer Peak in the Chugach Range to the south, and the Talkeetna Mountains to the north.

Soils are generally well-suited to development. The ground moraine is considered complex till stratigraphy with artesian aquifers and high water permeability. Predominant soils are well-graded to poorly-graded silty and sandy gravels. Intermittent areas have soils with a high water table, high silt content, and wetlands.

Valuable subsurface deposits are not known to exist within the City, except high-grade gravel and marl, a lime-rich deposit used on a small-scale for agriculture. However, the City does lie within the Matanuska Valley coal field that contains known deposits of coal.

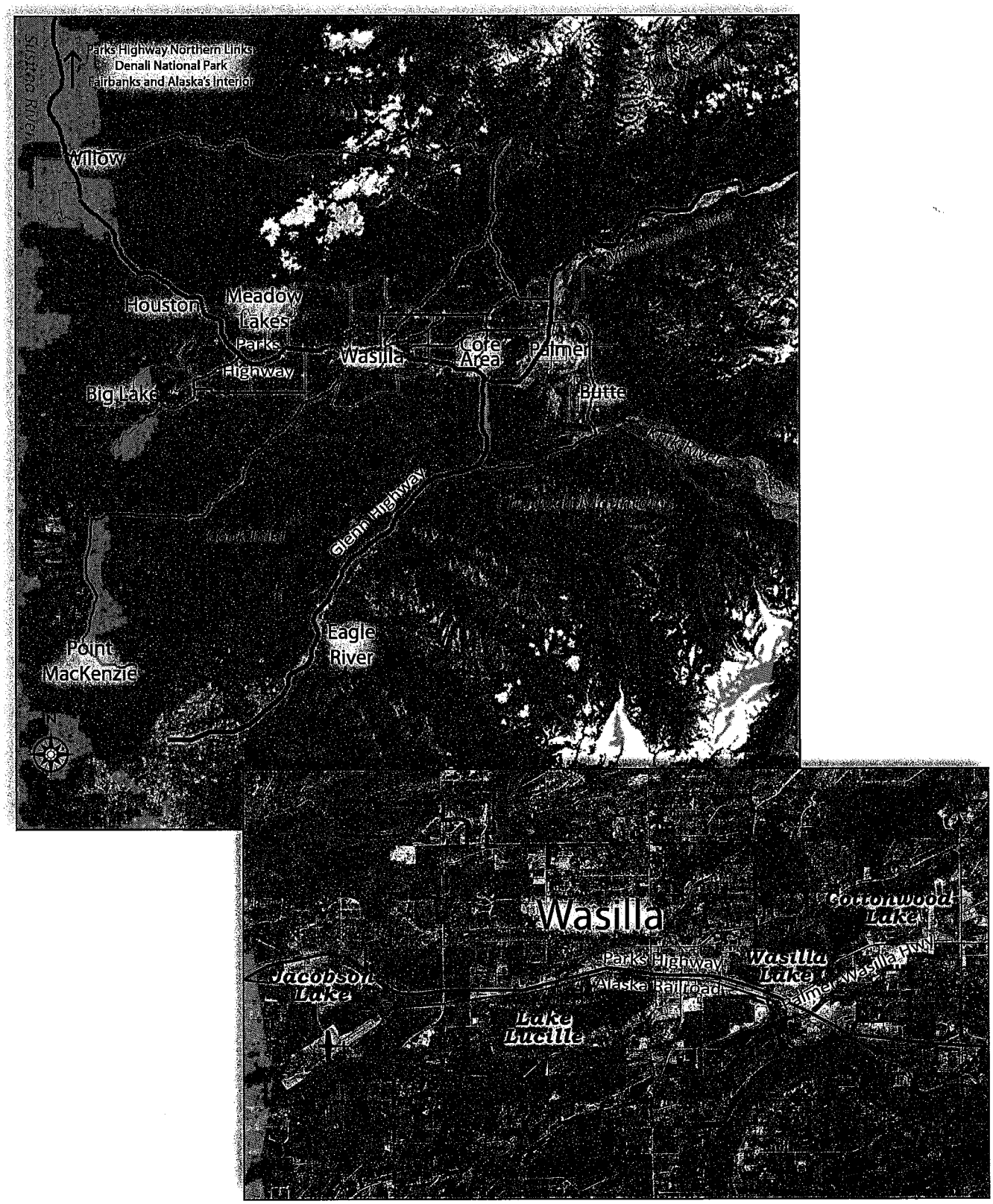
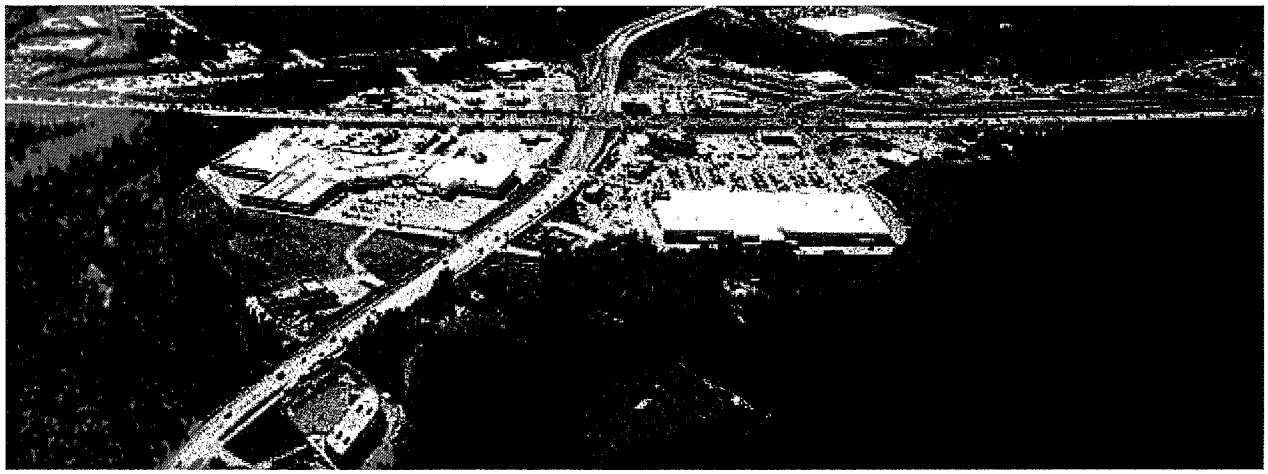


Figure 4. Regional Context Map. The City is located in southcentral Alaska, anchored between the Talkeetna Mountains, Cook Inlet, and the Matanuska and Susitna valleys. Major City features include area lakes, the Parks Highway and Alaska Railroad.



Wasilla Lake and other natural features in the City have strongly shaped the region's development pattern and the location of transportation corridors. As a result, some land uses have oriented to face roads, with minimal connection to the adjacent lake.

One noteworthy geologic feature of the Matanuska Valley, especially to the City, is the Castle Mountain Fault. This fault runs in an east-west direction from Sutton to Houston and is a right lateral, strike-slip fault approximately 200 miles long. The fault is located 10 miles northwest of the City, and has potential for magnitude six and seven earthquakes, with a 700-year average occurrence.

The Matanuska Valley is on the southernmost edge of Alaska's zone of discontinuous permafrost, but the Palmer/Wasilla area is generally free of permafrost.

Natural Conditions - Water and Drainages

Remnant lakes, wetlands, peat and bogs emerged as glaciers retreated, along with stream channels that traverse from the Talkeetna Mountains to Cook Inlet. Water covers less than one square mile of the City's surface area, but is an important defining feature. Water and drainage systems help enhance Wasilla's natural setting by providing aesthetic and scenic value, and supporting tremendous sport fishing and recreational opportunities close to home.

The City is nestled between two beautiful lakes, Wasilla Lake and Lake Lucille. These lakes have very different characteristics, but once were connected by waterflow, until construction of the Alaska Railroad line and road development, including the Parks Highway, effectively separated the watersheds.

Wasilla Lake, which shares its name with the City, is only partially within City limits. At 387 acres, it is one of largest lakes in Southcentral Alaska. The lake is part of the Cottonwood Creek drainage system, which eventually discharges into Knik Arm, and is also interconnected with other smaller lakes. Although much of the lakefront is ringed by houses that take advantage of the scenic backdrop, prime lakefront areas are taken up with commercial uses oriented to the Parks Highway and Palmer-Wasilla Highway. Newcomb Park provides a public access and beach, which supports swimming, small boats and fishing in the summer, and ice skating and other winter activities.

Wasilla Lake's depth and water flow characteristics help recharge water and clean the lake. However, water quality is a community concern. Runoff from residential and commercial areas, and nearby roads have the potential to adversely affect water quality.

Lake Lucille is another important community water feature. Although residential development and a hotel complex have located along this highly scenic lake, a number of factors have helped to retain a more rural quality to Lake Lucille that many residents value. This includes the limited amount of commercial development near the lake, the amount of undeveloped land along the lake, and the location of the rail line, which buffers the Parks Highway and helps limit access along the north shore.

Wasilla Lake: retaining vegetation, use of setbacks, and limiting lawn chemicals helps support water quality.

Several City parks provide public recreational access including Carter Park and the Susitna Avenue Boat Launch on the east end of the lake. Lake Lucille Park to the south is owned by the Borough and operated by the City. Many recreational uses, including wildlife and waterbird viewing and floatplane access, are popular lake activities.

Unlike Wasilla Lake, Lake Lucille is shallow with an average depth of 5 ½ feet, and no creek feeding it. Lucille Creek is a small stream that drains out of the lake, into Meadow Creek, and then into Big Lake, 11.3 miles to the west. Lucille Creek's stream flow and water circulation is slow.

View from the boardwalk at Lake Lucille Park, an important recreational asset in the community, providing lake access and camping for visitors.

Drainage into the lake, as with Wasilla Lake, is affected by adjacent land uses, although City sewer service has been provided to all lake side development to improve water quality (City of Wasilla Public Works, 2011). Despite this effort, there are ongoing concerns about this lake's health. Mineral and organic rich waters, and decaying vegetation can lead to a seasonal deficient supply of oxygen, which impacts the lake's health. In 1998, Lake Lucille was listed as an "impaired water body" by Alaska's Department of Environmental Conservation, under Alaska's Administrative Code 70 water quality standards. Since this time, the City has been working toward improving the lake's water conditions and addressing stormwater quality issues from the Parks Highway, which travels along portions of the lake's northern edge.

The Little Susitna River is just north of the City, with Cottonwood Creek to the west. Both are anadromous streams with sportfishing and recreational opportunities. These waterways are connected to Wasilla's wetland systems; and altogether, provide value to the area in terms of regenerating groundwater, flood control, and wildlife habitat.

In 2007, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service mapped two wetland types in the Wasilla area using the Cowdarian classification system. These systems include *Palustrine* wetlands, often called bogs or marshes that function as inland freshwater systems dominated by trees, shrubs, and mosses or lichens. *Lacustrine* wetlands also are present and generally occur on river floodplains and along lake shores and are influenced by seasonal variations in groundwater levels.

Although the City generally has good soils for development, some wetlands are present.

There are implications for development near water bodies and in wetlands. Flooding is a minor concern since the City has a moderate to low flood hazard rating, with concerns primarily along Cottonwood Creek. Additionally, lands near water and wetlands have potential permitting requirements. As the City's population density increases, stormwater management will become more regulated and require greater consideration for future development. Beyond supplying water, habitat, and intrinsic and scenic value for the area, they support transportation (float planes via lakes), recreation, and subsistence opportunities.

Vegetation and Wildlife

Area vegetation is diverse and characteristic of a boreal forest. White spruce provides canopy along with birch, aspen and cottonwood in drier areas. Black spruce is a common overstory species in wetland areas. Understory plants are diverse, particularly on undisturbed sites.

All five species of Pacific salmon, Dolly Varden, Steelhead, and Cutthroat trout are present in local waterways.

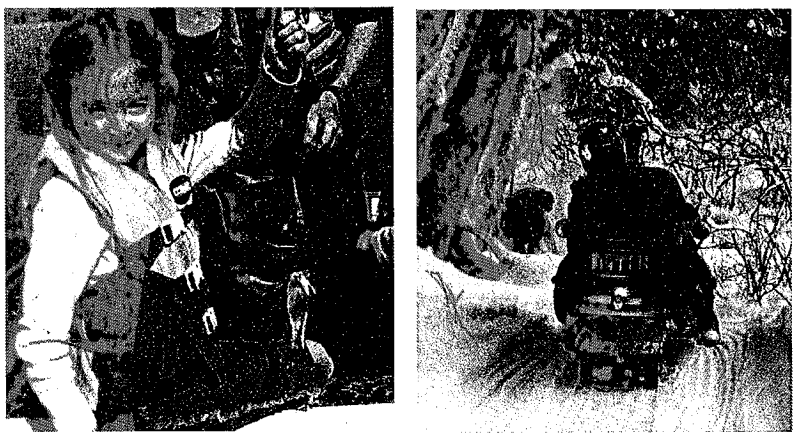
Wildlife in the area remains diverse. Common animals include small and large mammals, a diversity of birds, and several species of fish. Many animals are year round residents including moose, fox, rabbit and beaver. Other species are part-time residents or travel through on seasonal migration paths. These include loons, Canada geese, swans, and Arctic terns. Recreational bird viewing has become a popular activity in the region, particularly at area lakes.

Local waterways are home to a variety of important fish species, including all five species of Pacific salmon. Additionally, Dolly Varden, Steelhead and Cutthroat trout also use these waters. Cottonwood and Lucille creeks provide necessary migration corridors for these fish species, while pools within the creeks and Cottonwood Lake provide habitat for juvenile salmon. These species are an important resource for sport and subsistence anglers in the area. There are implications for development projects relating to wildlife in Wasilla, although there are currently no threatened or endangered species in the area. The Bald Eagle Protection Act and other wildlife habitat values on specific sites may require developers to seek permits or establish buffers prior to construction.

Retaining the wildlife and sport fish resources valued by the residents could be a challenge as the City grows and becomes more urban. At the regional level, voluntary tools are being explored to help preserve vegetation corridors for use by wildlife, and for trails and recreation (Borough's Green Infrastructure Program). Also, in order to preserve water quality and fish stocks, alternative stormwater system designs such as "rain gardens" are being tested by the Borough and the Wasilla Soil and Water Conservation Service, to determine their effectiveness in cleaning and filtering parking lot runoff draining into lakes and streams, enhancing the habitat value for salmon and recreational fish stocks.

Climate

Situated at approximately 61° latitude, the City has a transitional climate, experiencing the mild wet conditions of the maritime climate, as well as the temperature extremes of continental climates. Its climate is moderated by its location, which is sheltered by the Alaska Range and the Talkeetna and Chugach mountains.



Wasilla's varied conditions support a range of outdoor activities.

On average, the City has 115 days without frost. Like other high latitude communities, there are extremes in daylight from 5 hours to 19 hours on the winter and summer solstices, respectively. Temperature and precipitation averages and extremes are shown in Table 8.

Implications for development include the need for snow storage and removal, and the possibility of extreme weather events. In the past, the City has experienced 29 inches of snow in a 24-hour period. Additionally, it periodically experiences frigid and strong winter winds (30 to 80 miles per hour). Climate-responsive, northern design principles are tools for addressing energy and maintenance costs and helping residents to better adapt to and enjoy variable weather conditions.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Record high	56	56	65	73	83	[illegible]	87	85	76	69	58	55
Average high	22.2	27.6	36.0	47.6	59.8	66.6	69.4	67.2	58.5	42.6	28.9	22.8
Daily mean	13.8	18.8	26.3	37.5	47.9	55.1	58.8	56.6	48.6	34.4	21.0	14.7
Average low	5.5	10.1	16.7	27.5	36.0	43.7	48.3	46.0	38.7	26.3	13.2	6.6
Record low	-40	-41	-30	-16	8	27	-14	27	-14	-14	-25	-40
Precipitation	0.8	0.9	0.5	0.7	0.8	1.6	2.5	2.7	2.7	1.8	1.2	1.0
Snowfall	8.4	8.9	5.8	2.5	0.1	0	0	0	0	4.7	8.7	12.8

Table 8. City Climate Data; Temperatures are in Fahrenheit (F°) and precipitation and snowfall are in inches (Source: National Weather Service).

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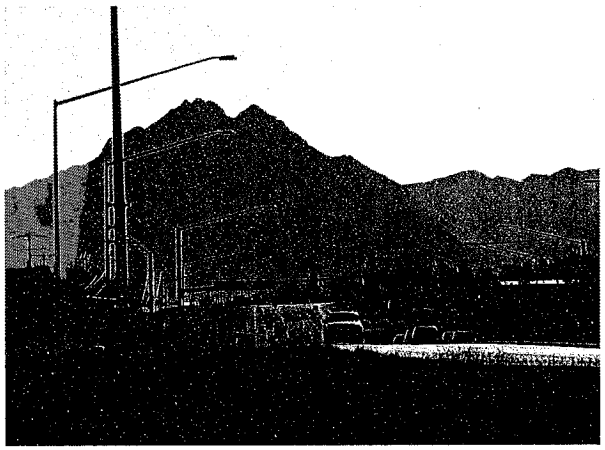
Chapter 3. Transportation

3.1 Current Conditions and Trends

Road Networks



34,471 vehicles pass daily through a traffic bottleneck, near the Parks and Palmer-Wasilla Highway intersection.

The City was founded as a regional crossroads, and is even more so today. It is where the Alaska Railroad, Parks Highway, and major arterial and collector roadways intersect, bringing together the State's travelers, regional trade area traffic, commuters, and local residents.

As the region grows, demands on the City's road networks are intensifying. Although widely dispersed land development patterns play a role, the City's major lakes, ridges, and wetlands also tend to focus major transportation routes into confined corridors, creating bottlenecks, and significantly limiting grid connection opportunities. The Transportation Corridor Constraint Map (left) shows major elevation changes, waterways and wetland complexes, and land features which can limit road development options or make costs prohibitive.

Because of these constraints, the City's road network has taken the form of a hub with spokes, rather than a functional grid. This arrangement puts significant pressures on central Wasilla as the Parks Highway ("Parks Highway") funnels 34,471 vehicles daily past Wasilla Lake and through the middle of the City (Mat-Su Valley Traffic Map 2009).

The Parks Highway is a critical transportation link that serves many users and needs. Current demands include:

- Long distance through-traffic, including Alaskan residents and the military traveling to Fairbanks.
- Freight traveling to local, regional, and statewide destinations.
- Greater Wasilla area residents (40,000+) seeking highway access for daily commutes.
- Seasonal tourism traffic, including visitors and Alaska residents driving to Denali Park and Preserve.
- Local residents on daily trips to access commercial nodes and community destinations who have limited network options.

Input from residents during this planning effort consistently ranked Parks Highway issues and roadway connectivity, capacity, and safety improvements—within the City, and within the greater Wasilla area—as the top priority for the City and this Plan to address.

Addressing these issues will be important, as roadway demands are projected to greatly increase over the life of this Plan. The State forecasts a growth rate of 3.1% from 2009 to 2034, which would add approximately 70,000 new Borough residents. Growth in container and trailer movement from Anchorage north through the City is also increasing at an average of 2.5% per year, and new development projects (coal from Wishbone Hill, gas pipeline construction traffic) could also impact Parks Highway traffic.

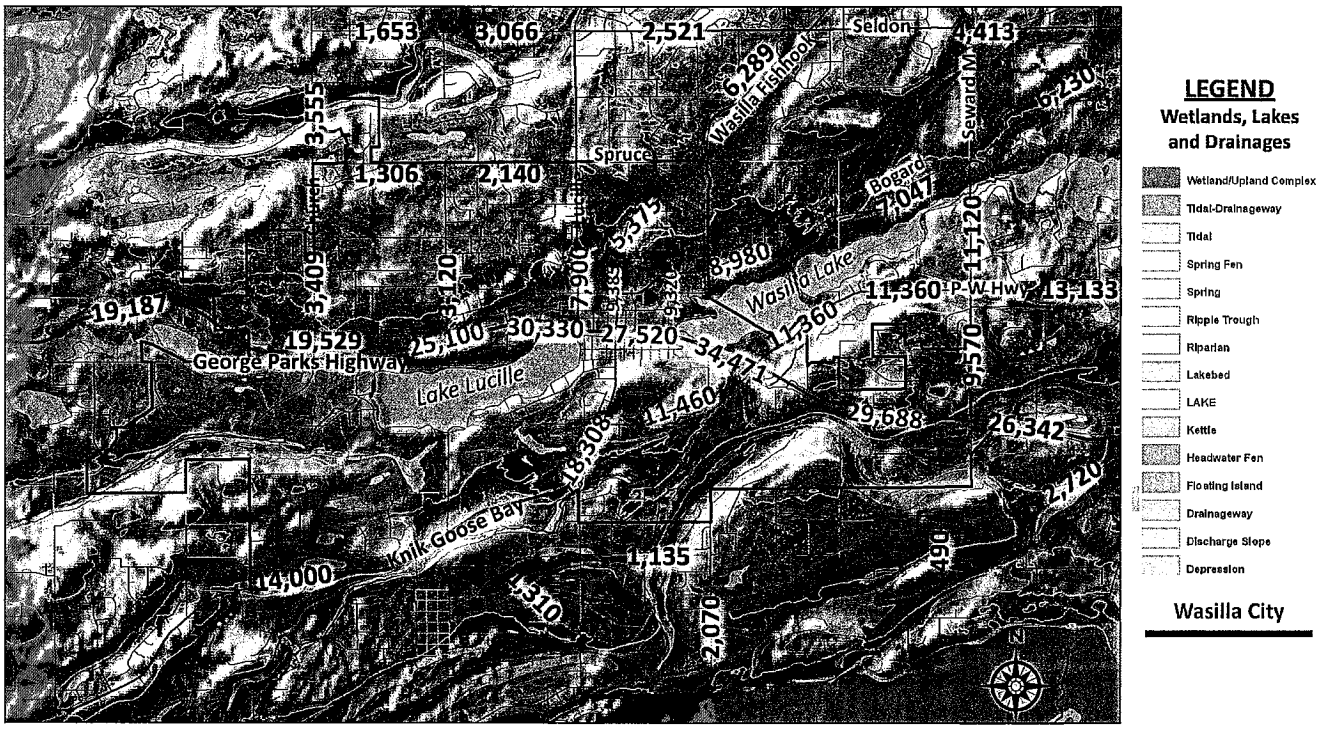


Figure 5. Transportation Corridor Constraint Map. Map layers constraints (lakes, wetlands, and slope data) with 2009 Average Daily Traffic data for road segments to help illustrate the bottlenecks and physical challenges inherent in creating a functional transportation grid. (Sources ADOT&PF 2009; MSB 2011 Wetland GIS Data).

Traffic flow modeling for the Borough's Long Range Transportation Plan indicates that unless major improvements and roadway linkages are planned and built prior to 2025, area roads will be at or well over capacity making gridlock and safety a major issue, particularly on the Parks Highway at key intersections.

In comprehensive planning terms, transportation often drives land use decisions, community form, and quality of life. In the City, the Parks Highway is "the elephant in the room." Unless its issues are addressed, many of the desires for a more cohesive Downtown and enhanced aesthetic environment expressed during this planning effort will be hard to implement. For example by 2025, Borough Long Range Transportation Planning forecasts estimate a 12-lane highway will be needed through the City. If this expanded roadway comes to pass, the highway will move closer to the banks of Wasilla Lake and Lake Lucille, City parks will lose land for right-of-way and be impacted by traffic, and the roadway size and volume of traffic will make it very difficult to create an attractive, walkable Downtown. ADOT&PF is currently planning for a future alternative Parks Highway corridor outside of the City, and the City needs to continue supporting this effort.

Historically, as residents have watched congestion intensify in the City, there have been mixed reactions. High volumes of traffic degrade the residents' quality of life, contribute to air and water pollution, create transportation safety and pedestrian challenges, and make maintaining a "small town" difficult. At the same time, the City has benefited from the retail development that it attracts. For example, the commercial node at the Parks Highway and Palmer-Wasilla Highway intersection is bustling, and tax revenues currently fund public services.

For decades a bypass route for the Parks Highway has been discussed as a way to alleviate congestion. Yet even when the last Plan was adopted in 1996, according to a long-term Planning

Commissioner, business interests and the community at large were fearful that the loss of traffic would negatively impact the businesses along the Parks Highway. By 2011, although resistance certainly remains, particularly among property owners who may be impacted, input received as part of this planning process indicates that community sentiments have shifted.

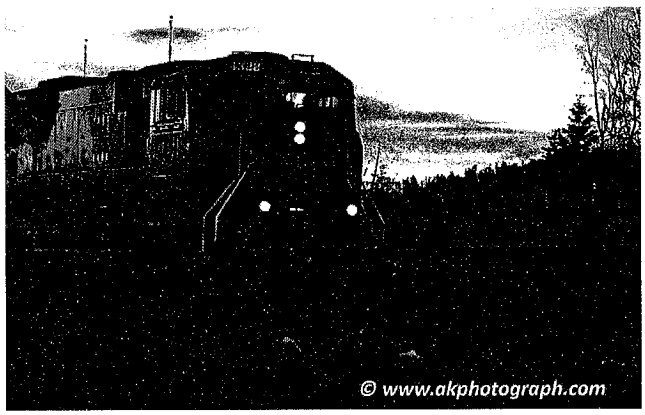
There is a strong interest in relieving congestion; the City's retail nodes are established enough as destinations that removing congestion now is expected to improve shopping. Moreover, 12 lanes through the middle of the City is not perceived as beneficial for either business or the residents—the scale and physical impact is too large.

Funding will be a significant challenge in making a bypass a reality. This and other critically needed roadway linkages are very expensive due to right-of-way acquisition and construction costs. Additionally, shrinking federal dollars have resulted in new Alaska Department of Transportation (ADOT&PF) funding formulas that make rehabilitation and maintenance projects for already constructed roads a priority, making it almost impossible to fund new roadways and linkages.

This is a major issue for the City since it is one of the few areas in the State with a strong population growth. Consistently over the last decade, the Borough has identified the need for $1.2 billion in road projects in the Valley, but only received about $750 million annually—leaving most projects "on the books" for years with no action. Although the City has some resources to help maintain City-owned roads, state funding is critical to addressing the growing regional road capacity needs and fixing local roads that experience heavy through-traffic demands. Since funding formulas preclude success, one of the few mechanisms for addressing these needs (Anchorage has used this approach) may be a 10-year dedicated fund approach with a Memorandum of Understanding through the Governor's office.

Railroad

The City was originally founded as a railroad town in 1917. Now owned and operated by the Alaska Railroad Corporation, the railroad line through the City that links Seward to Fairbanks, mainly provides freight and tourism-related passenger service, with stops at the historic depot. Commuter service is being discussed, and an intermodal park and ride facility is currently in the design stages for the south side of Jacobson Lake at the City airport.



The rail line physically divides the City and impacts traffic flow at key intersections.

The rail line route follows the Parks Highway on the south side, which effectively divides the City and impacts traffic, access and land use patterns. Because of safety concerns and traffic backups at railroad crossings, the ARRC has explored rail line relocation and elevated rail options. Relocation is not currently economically feasible and the elevated railroad is not generally supported by residents for both aesthetic and City cohesiveness reasons since this would further divide the City.

Public Transportation

As commuter travel has expanded, Mat-Su Valley Public Transportation buses and vehicle share programs have provided important benefits to the region and users. Potential future commuter services and public transportation options may include new commuter rail and ferry options, a proposed Knik-Arm Bridge, and airport and commuter bus service expansions. Although some federal transportation dollars may help support the programs as a measure for reducing single-occupancy auto trips, the private sector is anticipated to play an important role in providing commuter services.

Mat-Su Valley Public Transportation's MASCOT currently provides bus service between Palmer, Wasilla, and Anchorage.

Air Transportation

The City owns and operates the Wasilla Airport, which is approximately three miles west of Downtown and has a 3,700-foot paved, lighted runway. Opened in 1993 on 370 acres of City-owned land, the airport is approved for general aviation for smaller aircraft (primarily single engine airplanes, small multi-engine planes, and helicopters). Recent Airport master planning has identified ways to enhance airport functionality, and gain benefit from this strategic City-owned asset, both in terms of intermodal connectivity (air, rail, road) and as a possible employment generator.

The City owns a 3,700-foot paved runway and other general amenities serving small airplanes

Pedestrian

Dispersed land use patterns, seasonal conditions, lack of maintained sidewalks and pathways, and the prevalent use of ATVs and snowmachines, are just some of the challenges pedestrians face in the City. The expense of building out sidewalks community wide using a "complete streets" approach is too great, both for the City and developers. That said, many residents would like priority areas to be enhanced for safe pedestrian access (Downtown, near schools and parks) and enhanced pedestrian linkages.

Multi-Use Trails

The City has a long tradition of using trails for transportation and recreation, and of embracing trail use modes ranging from walking, biking, and ATV/ snowmachine use to horseback riding and cross country skiing. Existing multi-use trails are well-used in the City, however, limited connectivity, maintenance costs, and multi-modal sharing issues are concerns that the City needs to address.

Sidewalks, pathways, and trails support a range of modes of access in the City and support important transportation and recreation values.

City of Wasilla Resident Opinions Regarding Future Transportation
√ City residents ranked *"improved roadways and transportation"* the top priority for the city from a list of 17 specific issues. Below are the percentages and categories: ***66% - "Very important"*** ***27% - "Somewhat important"*** ***3% - "Not Sure"*** ***4% - "Not important"***
√ City residents generally agree that Wasilla should enhance street connectivity: ***32% - Strongly Agree*** ***42% - Agree*** ***18% - Neutral*** ***4% - Disagree*** ***4% - Strongly Disagree***
√ Residents largely agree that pedestrian and bicycle movement should be enhanced: ***33% - Strongly Agree*** ***35% - Agree*** ***19% - Neutral*** ***9% - Disagree*** ***4% - Strongly Disagree***

3.2 Desired Future Conditions

In the future a functional network of State and **regional roads** are funded and constructed including a Parks Highway bypass. This allows the existing Parks Highway to be re-scaled to fit community needs.

Regional improvements take pressure off the **local road system**, which the City maintains to a consistently high standard.

The **railroad** brings commuter rail online and serves new industrial users via the multi-modal node at the airport. Aesthetic, acceptable safety solutions are found for rail-vehicle conflicts.

Public transportation **options expand such** as commuter rail, and community programs that reduce single-occupancy vehicle trips.

The **airport** expands and becomes a regional hub for small jets and planes, while personal floatplane and small plane use safely flourishes.

Pedestrians have safe routes for travel around schools and parks, and many neighborhoods feature sidewalks. Downtown has become pedestrian friendly.

Multi-use trails are well-linked across the City. Motorized and non-motorized uses are separated allowing both uses to safely operate.

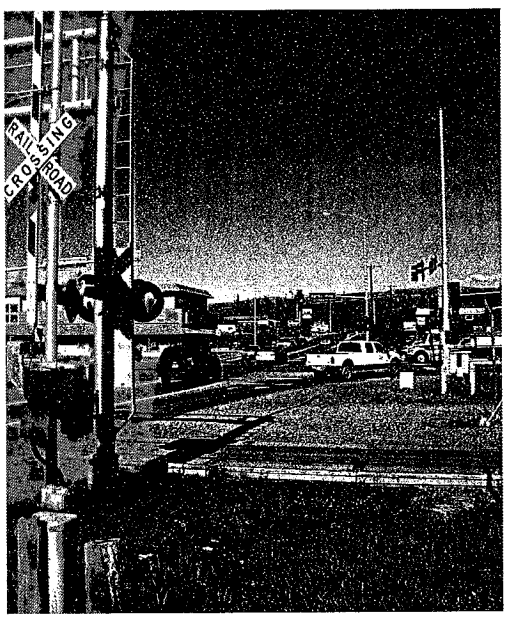
Transportation Element Supplementary Documents

This comprehensive plan chapter on transportation presents a broad vision, intended for incremental implementation over the next 10 or more years. Please consult other documents, including those listed below, for more specific and up to date information, priorities and projects:

City of Wasilla
Official Streets and Highways Plan
City of Wasilla Trails Plan
Wasilla Municipal Code Title 12 Streets and Sidewalks
Wasilla Municipal Code Title 16 16.16.050.A(7)
City of Wasilla Airport Master Plan

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Areawide Plans
Long Range Transportation Plan
Official Streets and Highways Plan
MSB Code Title 11 Roads, Streets, Sidewalks and Trails
MSB Code Title 27 Subdivisions

State of Alaska
Statewide Transportation Improvements Program (STIP) Needs List
Statewide Long Range Transportation Policy Plan
Alaska Aviation System Plan
Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) Studies and Comprehensive Program of Capital Improvements



Rail crossing at Main and Knik Goose Bay Road.

3.4 Goals, Objectives, and Actions

Goal 1. Provide for streets and highways that promote mobility, connectivity and access for both present and future users.

Objectives	Actions
1.1 Develop strategies and partnerships to successfully fund regionally important road projects (e.g., STIP identified priority projects).	1.1.1 Work with Alaska's Governor's Office and regional partners to ensure that incremental funding can move forward critical projects over the next decade. 1.1.2 Aggressively pursue funding for transportation projects such as the Main Street couplet and KGB road improvements. 1.1.3 Coordinate with Federal, State, and Borough government agencies to support and fund local and regional transportation needs, such as regional corridors, Parks Highway alternatives, and better street connectivity in and out of the City. 1.1.4 Consider creating development fees to be reserved and used for future transportation improvements where the expense should not be borne by a single developer or project, and is unlikely to be funded by state or federal programs.
1.2 Continue to improve and upgrade City-maintained streets and highways.	1.2.1 Update and maintain the City's Streets and Highways Plan. 1.2.2 Set aside funds annually to maintain and improve the existing City roads.
1.3 Identify the major east/west and north/south roadway corridors and linkages needed to support future growth.	1.3.1 Seek alternatives to expanding and widening the Parks Highway through Downtown to alleviate current and future traffic. 1.3.2 Identify network options and negotiate right-of-way acquisition needed to speed up work on anticipated critical project linkages. 1.3.3 Work toward completing the region's perimeter roads that allow residents north and south of the City to avoid major road networks and remove unnecessary traffic from congested areas.
1.4 Improve the City's road system to meet projected growth.	1.4.1 Continue efforts to locate, design, and maintain roads based on their function and the community needs.
1.5 Strive to ensure safe and efficient traffic flow.	1.5.1 Work with Alaska Railroad to develop and maintain appropriate at-grade railroad crossings and to make improvements that address traffic flow impacts related to the railroad. 1.5.2 Minimize driveways and visual clutter within sight distance of intersections. 1.5.3 Identify ways to improve safety at high accident intersections. 1.5.4 Seek ways to reduce pedestrian and vehicle conflicts and make pedestrian crossings safer.

Goal 2. Provide a streets and highway network that supports economic development and growth.

Objectives	Actions
2.1 Create regulations that protect and improve the traffic flows on highways and arterials.	2.1.1 Promote access management along collector and arterial roadways. 2.1.2 Reserve sufficient room for major future roadway upgrades along collector and larger roads when developing new roads. 2.1.3 Revise right-of-way reservation requirements in City Land Development Code to accommodate four lanes or more. 2.1.4 Require new commercial developments to provide connectivity with adjoining commercial uses.
2.2 Ensure new development provides efficient roadway connections to existing street network.	2.2.1 Continue to provide voluntary pre-application conferences for developers that gives staff feedback regarding proposed access and circulation. 2.2.2 Ensure future street connectivity for new subdivisions during plat reviews by recommending connections between subdivisions and appropriate roadway alignments.
2.3 Maintain and enhance transportation infrastructure that accommodates future growth.	2.3.1 Use the official streets and highways plan to identify desired and required parcels and routes to support future infrastructure networks. As parcels come up for sale, and or are platted, work to acquire the needed land resources and rights. 2.3.2 Dedicate funding in the City budget, as available, to obtain needed rights-of-way, easements, and properties.

Goal 3. Support the City as a transportation hub that provides connecting highways, railroad, and expanded air service.

Objectives	Actions
3.1 Continue to support improved aviation and an expanded airport.	3.1.1 Adopt, implement, and regularly update an Airport Master Plan to identify future aviation demand and supporting infrastructure and site development needs. 3.1.2 Explore opportunities and funding sources for preserving future opportunities to expand the airport runways.
3.2 Support improved rail service and linkages.	3.2.1 Coordinate with the Alaska Railroad to plan and develop the linkages and infrastructure that will bring commuter service online and make the rail element of the multi-modal site capable of serving its anticipated broad range of users, which include the following: • Industrial and commercial shipping • Commuters • Transit-oriented tourism with connectivity to Downtown, the Museum of Alaska Transportation and Industry, and other potential attractions, including at Jacobson Lake.

Goal 3. Support the City as a transportation hub that provides connecting highways, railroad, and expanded air service.

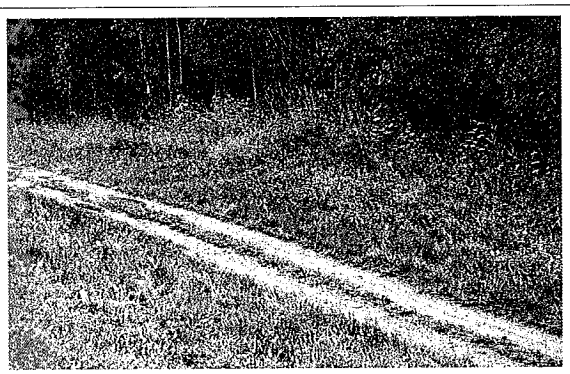
Objectives	Actions
3.3 Improve road connectivity to the new multi-modal transportation node at the City airport.	3.3.1 Consider a Mack Drive with Clapp Road extension, with a major intersection that re-orients and links in Fairview Road for maximum safety and connectivity. 3.3.2 Consider a Museum Drive extension and new airport access road.
3.4 Ensure that land uses adjoining the multi-modal node support and utilize the strategic transportation linkages.	3.4.1 Create a prospectus outlining city plans, goals, lease terms, and inviting proposals from prospective industry and enterprise representatives to help attract a synergistic mix of uses. 3.4.2 Develop a conceptual site master plan for the transportation node and surrounding lands which considers compatibility, connectivity, and buffering between non-compatible uses.
3.5 Encourage transportation options that minimize single-occupancy vehicle trips within the City and to major commuter destinations.	3.5.1 Support the public and private sector in establishing viable alternatives to single-occupancy vehicle trips, particularly for commuters.

Goal 4. Provide a neighborhood street network that enhances the residents' quality of life.

4.1 Minimize use of local streets as major traffic corridors.	4.1.1 Where through traffic problems occur consider traffic calming measures or shifting road use and circulation patterns to address the issue. 4.1.2 Endeavor to retain the integrity of neighborhoods as the road network expands.
4.2 Continue to work with residents to identify and address priority transportation issues and needs that will improve day-to-day travel experiences, safety, and neighborhoods' quality of life.	4.2.1 Encourage neighborhoods to develop plans and identify neighborhood-specific transportation improvement priorities.
4.3 Continue to pave, improve, and rehabilitate substandard neighborhood roads.	4.3.1 The City should encourage formation of Local Improvement Districts (LID) by continuing to commit matching funds for neighborhood street improvements

Goal 5. Maintain and improve City sidewalks and non-motorized pathways to increase walkability.

Objectives	Actions
5.1 Create a safe pedestrian environment around community schools, parks, and neighborhoods.	5.1.1 Work with existing schools to identify major pedestrian/ bike access routes, and undertake safety and circulation improvements. Use the "Safe Routes to School" program as a potential resource and source of funding. 5.1.2 Evaluate community parks and family attractions for pedestrian deficiencies and undertake safety and circulation improvements.
5.2 Enhance pedestrian connectivity between commercial establishments.	5.2.1 Require new commercial developments to provide basic pedestrian access to adjacent commercial uses.
5.3 Improve motorized and non-motorized pathway safety.	5.3.1 Develop signage and safety solutions for road crossings and sidewalks that attract multiple types of users (pedestrians, handicapped persons, bicycles, and ATV's.
5.4 Improve existing walkways and create new walkways when possible.	5.4.1 Create and implement a maintenance plan for walkways that allows them to be used year-round. 5.4.2 Encourage sidewalk connections to public transit stops. 5.4.3 Create design standards for new sidewalks that require the developer to provide connectivity between uses that are pedestrian friendly. 5.4.4 Ensure that sufficient area for pathways is set aside for future pathways at time of development. 5.4.5 Enhance ADA accessibility on walkways. 5.4.6 Encourage use of low-impact lighting.



The City needs to ensure that sufficient area for pathways are set aside at time of development, even if funds are not available for construction or improvements.

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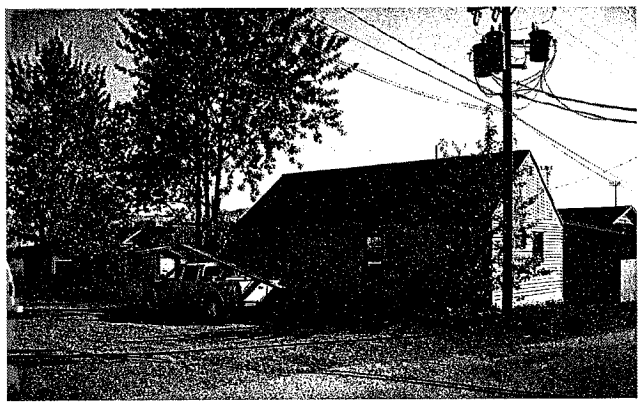
Chapter 4. Land Use

4.1 Current Conditions and Trends



Land use patterns established by railroad surveyors in 1917 are highly visible today in the Downtown area.

Existing Land Use Patterns

The City's pattern of land use reflects more than 70 years of development based around the decisions of individuals, businesses and non-local government agencies. The City government was organized in 1974—long after the original 1917 town lots were sold and the Carle Wagon Road and rail line were constructed. Thus, it is only relatively recently that the City established the policy basis for fully implementing land use regulations, including comprehensive planning and Land Development Code (Title 16).

Because of the relatively recent use of land planning, pre-1970 community development patterns will persist within the City for some time. Original land patterns and buildings constructed long ago still make up much of the fabric of the City. As local historian, Mrs. Louise Potter wrote in *A Study of a Frontier Town in Alaska: Wasilla to 1959*:

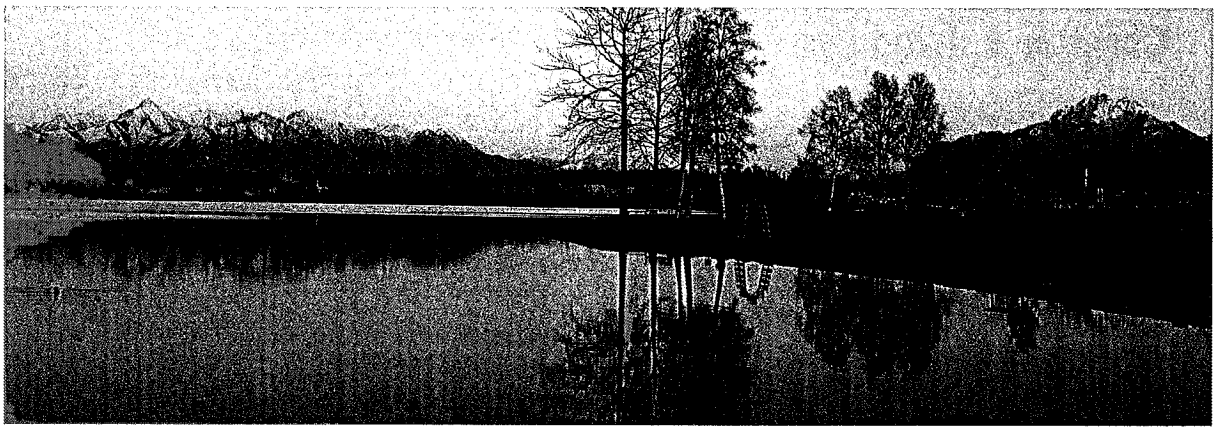
> "*Whatever good things can be said about Wasilla—and I think myself there are a great many of them—no one can say it is a photographic village, nor can anyone pick out an architectural triumph. Not only does the place suffer from the temporary cabin idea of its early days, and the economic up and down of two wars, and a depression, it suffers very badly, and always will from the government surveyors who laid Wasilla out in narrow little 40 and 50 foot house lots where there was all of God's country available.*"

Because many developed parcels in the City pre-date zoning non-conforming uses and structures are prevalent. Understandably, enforcement of zoning code has not been applied vigorously, and the City historically has relied on a complaint driven process versus a proactive approach.

Despite this history, growth is re-shaping the City's overall land use patterns and development forms. The City remains a land-rich community, with ample development sites. Population growth is promoting new development that will be shaped by this Plan and the City's Land Development Code, Title 16. Only underutilized parcels with non-conforming development, particularly near the historic Downtown, are likely to persist in older patterns until redevelopment becomes cost effective as land becomes scarcer.

Community Values

Public input was sought during the revision process of this Plan regarding the desired land use planning and regulations for the future since comprehensive plans are intended to codify community values. A statistically valid survey indicated that a majority of residents are in support of the City taking a more active role in implementing land use planning. For example, 86% of residents either support or are neutral regarding "stricter code enforcement to clean up property in Wasilla."



Residents during planning expressed support for stricter code enforcement and measures to manage growth, partly based around a desire for enhanced community aesthetics and protection of property values.

The survey also found that only a small minority of residents (9%) think it is not important for Wasilla to manage future growth and development pressure and only 7% of residents are against Wasilla strictly adhering to its Plan.

Over the course of this planning effort, many residents expressed at public meetings and in the survey, a desire for the City to more fully use land use planning tools to enhance the community. Some of the individual reasons cited for support of planning include:

- The strong population growth experienced by the City over the past decade has intensified land uses and created concern over "incompatible" forms of development, particularly in neighborhoods in areas zoned Rural Residential where large semi-industrial and commercial uses are allowed, and near the region's expanding commercial and industrial land base.
- As residents make greater investments in properties, and build custom homes rather than the "temporary cabin" of Wasilla's early days, they want to protect their property value and be assured of the future land uses and the quality of surrounding development.
- Many families are moving to the Valley seeking a higher quality of life than Anchorage provides in terms of scenic and wildlife values, larger lots, and separation from neighbors and more intensive land uses.
- As residents within a population grow older and consider where to retire, individuals (especially with challenged mobility) want communities with sidewalks and an attractive Downtown with housing options that meet their needs as empty-nesters.

Current Land Use and Future Growth

The City spans approximately thirteen square miles and the land area is dominated by private ownership. As of 2010, approximately 37.9% of the land within the City limits is undeveloped (see Figure 6). Some of these lands include wetlands or other unsuitable and expensive areas to develop (City of Wasilla Planning Department, 2010).

The major land use in the City is residential (32.7%), which includes a mix of low density rural residential and single family subdivisions. Approximately 4 % contains more dense residential including townhouse, duplex, and multi-family.

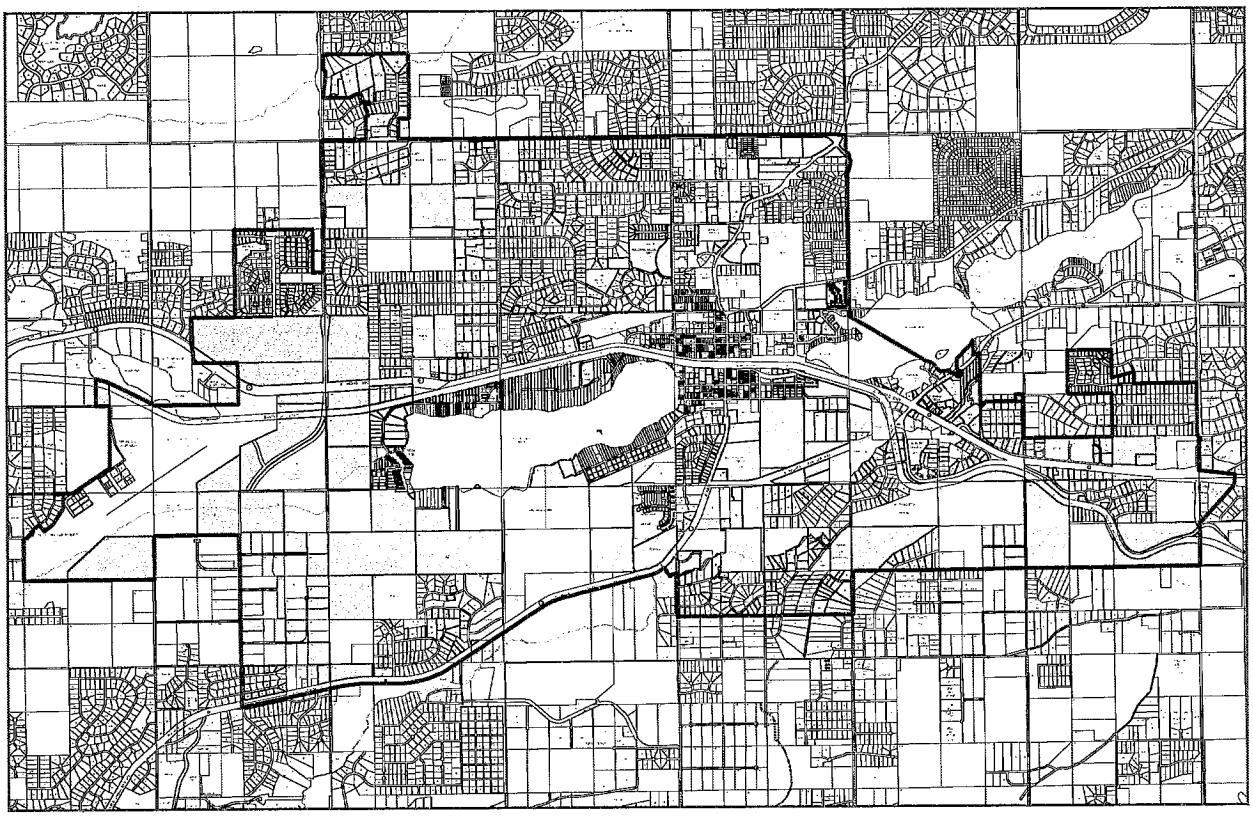


Figure 6. Future Development Areas - Undeveloped private parcels are highlighted in pink. Around one third of the City's land supply remains undeveloped, although some of this land has natural challenges (wetlands, slope, etc.).

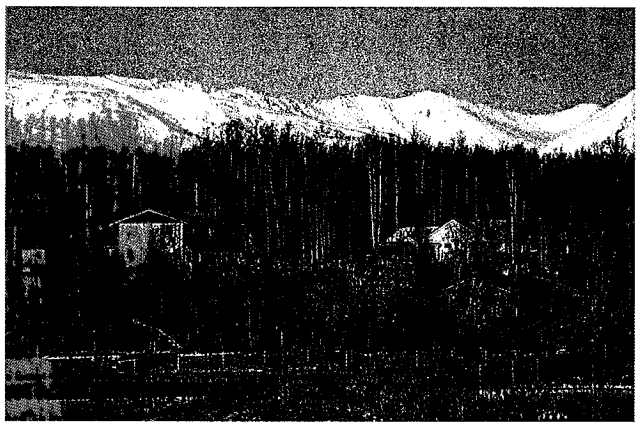
Commercial land use occupies a fairly limited land area (6.8%), although because of its high visibility and linear development along major roadways it is perceived as more dominant. Industrial uses comprise 1.6% and remaining uses, including institutional, parks and limited state and federal public parcels, comprise 16.6% of overall land use.

In the time since the previous Plan was updated in 1996, the City has almost doubled its population from 4,028 (1996) to 7,245 (2009) and greatly expanding its commercial base (ADLWD 2009). Over the life of this Plan, the City will be able to accommodate significant additional growth and development, particularly in terms of an expanding residential population and commercial development. There is an ample land base, with City sewer and water infrastructure able to accommodate full build out within current City limits with planned upgrades (City of Wasilla Public Works, 2011). Additionally, planning for regional

Although commercial land uses only occupy 6.8% of the land area in the City, it is perceived as more dominant because of its highly visible location along major roadways.

water and waste collection facilities is underway to serve the area between the City and Palmer.

Additionally, a sizable amount of industrial land is owned by the City at the airport, which will have enhanced multi-modal connections (freight and commuter rail, plane, and road) and infrastructure to allow for new economic enterprises to grow.



The City has the land and infrastructure to attract significant new development over the life of this plan.

Key Issues to Address

The City's larger segments of remaining undeveloped land have undefined patterns—they could become residential, or commercial, or both (mixed use) and a range of densities are possible. Over the long term, this means that over the life of this comprehensive plan, key land use decisions will be made that strongly shape the City's future. Key issues addressed in this Plan are the need to:

- Achieve a mix of land uses that balances income generation for the City and service demands.
- Protect the industrial land base and at the same time, buffer incompatible uses;
- Dedicate needed regional transportation corridors (including linkages and rights-of-way). Use the Future Transportation Map in the Appendix for guidance.
- Work to protect the through-traffic capacity on major roads by carefully controlling access patterns (shared driveways, frontage roads).
- Because the City's prime land supply is diminishing, allow creative site planning on marginal lands, such as smaller lots with land set aside as open space.
- Retain some regulatory flexibility around land use and at the same time, set up a clear and consistent approach for decision-making. A regularly updated Future Land Use Map, located in the Appendix, is a vital tool in this respect.
- Assist neighborhoods, especially in historic rural residential areas, to develop neighborhood plans and explore ways to help preserve and retain neighborhood character as growth occurs.

Rural Residential zoned lands are attracting non-residential uses such as this large footprint daycare and gym facility.

4.2 Desired Future Conditions

In the future enhanced Land Use procedures and practices contribute significant benefit to the community as it continues to grow:

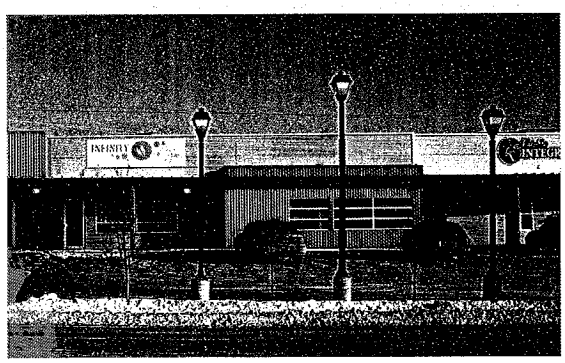
Property owners' rights are respected and **land use decisions** are made in a clear, predictable and fair process.

Wasilla's **zoning codes** reflect community values, and are broadly complied with for the benefit of the broader public good.

Wasilla's **land use map** guides future land uses decisions, and is regularly updated to accurately gage changing conditions and needs.

Land use and transportation decisions are coordinated to ensure mobility even as the community grows.

A successful balance of **land uses** is achieved in the community, supporting both fiscal and quality of life values.



City of Wasilla Resident Survey Opinions Regarding Future Land Use
√ Many city residents agree that "Wasilla should strictly adhere to the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance": ***21% residents - Strongly Agree*** ***28% residents - Agree*** ***34% residents - Neutral*** ***10% residents - Disagree*** ***7% residents - Strongly Disagree***
√ City residents generally think it is important for Wasilla to "manage future growth and development pressure": ***45% residents - Very important*** ***32% residents - Somewhat important*** ***14% residents - Not Sure*** ***9% residents - Not important***
√ Residents are generally supportive of "stricter code enforcement to clean up property in Wasilla": ***47% residents - Very Supportive*** ***30% residents - Somewhat Supportive*** ***9% residents - Neutral*** ***14% residents - Not Supportive***

Land Use Element Supplementary Documents

This comprehensive plan chapter on Land Use presents a broad vision, intended for incremental implementation over the next 10 or more years. Please consult other documents and sources, including those listed below, for more specific and up to date information governing land use and development in the City of Wasilla:

City of Wasilla

Wasilla Municipal Code Title 16
Area Plans (Wasilla Area Plan, Airport Master Plan)
Water Master Plan
Sewer Master Plan

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Areawide Plans

MSB Code Title 27 (Platting)
Coastal Management Plan

State of Alaska

Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (on-site well and septic systems, and snow disposal regulations)
Alaska Department of Fish and Game (development near shores and in water)
Alaska Department of Transportation (access and driveways)
State Fire Marshall (state building and fire codes)

Federal Government

ACOE Wetland Permitting (Section 404 of the Clean Water Act)
Bald Eagle Protection Act

4.3 Future Land Use Map

Overview

The Future Land Use Map element of the City of Wasilla Comprehensive Plan provides valuable guidance for future land use decisions. It consists of the Future Land Use Map in Appendix B and the following land use designation descriptions, criteria, and implementation zoning.

Land Use Designations

Land use designations are provided to generally define the amount, type, and character of future development allowed in a given location in the City and they reflect the goals, objectives, and actions outlined in the City's Comprehensive Plan. The pages that follow define the land use designations. Each designation includes a statement of intent and a description of essential characteristics, such as predominant uses, intensity of use, and the general nature of new development/redevelopment. The table on the next page summarizes the Land Use Designations.

Location Criteria

Each Residential, Commercial and Industrial land use designation concludes with set of bulleted Location criteria. These are essential to understanding the maps. They provide the rationale for the locations, types and intensities of uses. However, it is not necessary that all criteria be achieved in every location provided that the proposed use or zoning district is substantially consistent with the intent of the land use designation or zoning district.

Implementation Zoning

Each of the land use designations on the Future Land Use Map is implemented by a defined set of zoning districts from the Official Zoning Map. The Land Use/Zoning Consistency Table on the next page cross-references each land use designation with the most appropriate implementing zoning districts. The table serves as a guide for future zoning changes. Rezoning proposals that are consistent with the table should be considered for approval approved pursuant to appropriate Title 16 review and approval findings based on the Comprehensive Plan policies.

Where more than one zoning district is listed for a land use designation, the proposed zoning district should be shown to be the most appropriate, taking into consideration the purpose of each district, the proposed rezoning site, and the zoning and/or development pattern of surrounding area. If a land use designation boundary does not follow established property lines, roadways, or water bodies, actual delineation of uses will be established at the time of a rezoning or development request. Although zoning must generally adhere to the land use boundaries depicted on the Future Land Use Map, flexibility in interpretation of a boundary may be granted through the rezoning or development approval process. Interpretation should be based on the policies and Location criteria in the Comprehensive Plan.

Land Use Designations and Implementing Zoning Categories

The following chart is not intended to identify the only zoning districts that can implement the future land use map designations. The zoning districts identified on the chart are the districts commonly associated with the future land use map designations listed in the left-column.

The districts identified are consistent with the Plan when selected for a site having the land use designation shown in the chart and when the district is also consistent with the goals, objectives, and policies of the plan and this will usually be the case. However, consistent with the goals, objectives, and actions of the Plan, an implementing zoning district not specifically identified on this chart may be selected for a site that is more limited in intensity of uses and density than the future land use map designation and be consistent with the Plan.

Corresponding Future Land Use Map Designations	Land Use Designation Overview (see detail under land use designations)	Corresponding Implementation Zoning[1]
Generally Residential	• Wide range of housing types and density • Neighborhood commercial uses permitted in appropriate locations • Residential densities designated by zoning districts in Title 16 • Schools and day care facilities • Necessary public utilities/facilities	RR[2], R1, R2, RM, P
Mixed Use Area	• Wide range of housing types and density including upper-story residential above commercial uses in appropriate locations • Wide range of commercial uses in appropriate locations • Encourages mixed-use developments in the Downtown area • Necessary public utilities/facilities	RR, R1, R2, RM, C, I, P
	• Wide range of commercial uses • Limited residential uses in the Commercial zoning district except when developed as upper-story housing or within a mixed-use or planned unit development. • Public utilities/facilities	RM, C, P
Generally Industrial	• Wide range of industrial uses • Commercial uses limited to those necessary to support industrial uses • Public utilities/facilities	I, C[3], P
Parks	• Parks and playgrounds • Other areas that function as park or natural resource	P
Public/Institutional	• School and Community Institutional • Major Institutional • Public utilities/facilities	P

1 Not every corresponding implementation zoning district listed for a land use designation is necessarily appropriate in all areas. A proposed rezone for an area should be shown to be the most appropriate for that location.

2 When rezoning to RR, only the residential uses allowed in the RR district are considered consistent with the Generally Residential designation. Commercial uses would only be consistent if permitted within a specific area plan, neighborhood plan, or PUD (or other similar plans) or complies with required location criteria in Title 16 for the commercial uses.

3 The C district is not a primary implementation zone for Generally Industrial designations. It is only for areas designated in area or master plans to allow supporting/complimentary commercial uses.

Table 9. Future Land Use Map Zoning Consistency Table.

GENERALLY RESIDENTIAL

Intent: The Generally Residential designation allows a wide range of housing densities and types to meet the demand of current and future residents. Small-scale, non-obtrusive neighborhood commercial services such as places of worship, day care facilities, and neighborhood supporting commercial uses that serve the surrounding residential areas are also often allowed in this designation.

Description: The Generally Residential designation allows large-lot, semi-rural neighborhoods, a variety of urban single-family and duplex residential neighborhoods, and a compatible mix of compact multi-family housing. The commercial uses in this designation are typically small scale, non-obtrusive retail and personal services, such as convenience stores, drug stores, small restaurants, and professional services oriented to the needs of the surrounding residential population. The scale, appearance and function should be compatible with adjacent residential uses. Title 16 and the official zoning map will determine how many housing units may be allowed on each lot or development site. This designation is usually implemented by RR, R1, R2, and RM zoning districts.

Location Criteria:

- Large-lot developments are typically located to take advantage of natural features (views, lake frontage) or in areas where natural conditions and distance to services provide challenges to more intensive development. Single and two-family development is usually located in areas outside of the more rural areas but still within areas not severely impacted by intense or incompatible uses that generate high volumes of traffic. Multifamily uses are typically located closer to existing community services, public infrastructure, and the commercial areas within the City.
- Commercial uses will have frontage on arterial or collector-type roadways or a locally important street corner and that are usually within walking distance of, or that can provide conveniences to the adjacent residential uses, which will reduce vehicle trips or driving distances. Commercial uses may also be approved in areas designated in neighborhood or area plans to allow these uses. Existing commercial uses will be considered consistent with the Generally Residential designation but future additions or redevelopment must be consistent with the intent, description, and location criteria of the land use designation.

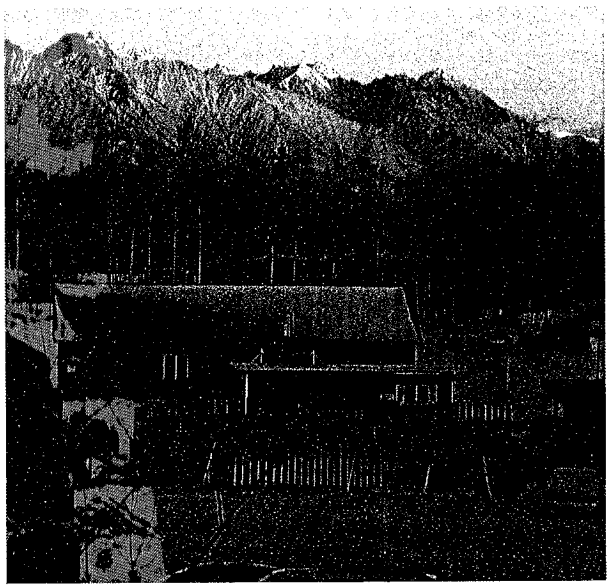
MIXED-USE

Intent: The Mixed-Use designation is intended to promote innovative arrangements of commercial, residential, recreation, and light industrial uses, including mixed-use and planned unit developments while preserving and enhancing the character of existing neighborhoods. It also promotes natural resource protection and enhancement and open spaces around buildings.

Description: Mixed-use designations promote a complimentary mix of residential, commercial, light industrial, and recreation uses that minimize the impacts of new development on existing resources and facilities by allowing a variety of uses in close proximity to one another.

Location Criteria:

- Existing commercially developed areas
- Areas formerly designated as residential that are no longer poised for conventional housing development, where other mixed uses would be compatible
- Areas suitable for higher intensity residential and commercial development or redevelopment



COMMERCIAL

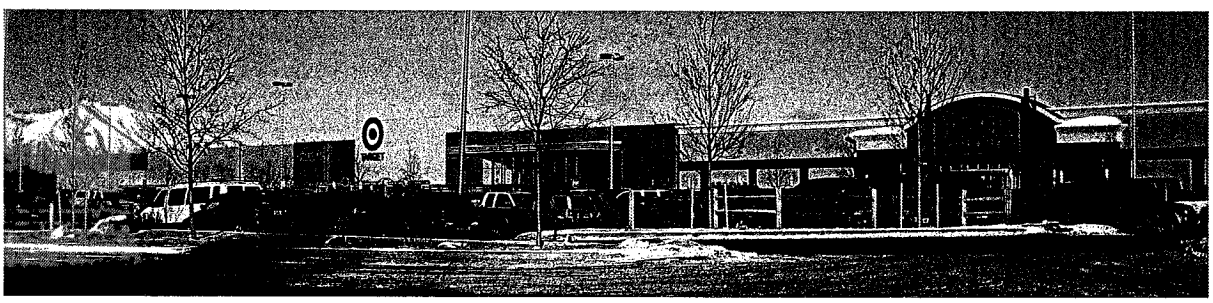
Intent: The Commercial designation provides for a wide range of local and regional shopping, retail sales, personal services, and employment.

Description: This designation allows a variety of offices, retail sales and service uses, fast food, vehicle services, and entertainment uses that generate customer vehicle traffic. Site design should minimize impacts on adjoining residential uses in terms of scale, bulk, buffering setbacks, and traffic volume.

Other commercial areas, such as the Downtown area, have older, smaller lot development patterns and are well positioned for more intensive, pedestrian-friendly development. The Downtown area is well-suited for an overlay district with design guidelines and criteria that will help create a vibrant, walkable Downtown. Public improvements and the orientation of new stores to the street will help to enhance the pedestrian environment. The addition of public spaces and sidewalks and community facilities such as post offices, recreational facilities, libraries and schools will add vitality to the area. Low intensity development is discouraged in this area.

Location Criteria:

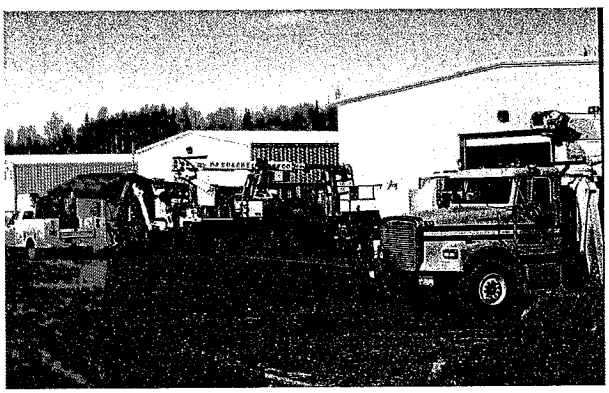
- Linear street corridors with single-use retail sites or multi-tenant malls
- Existing commercially developed areas
- Not intended for significant geographic expansion at the expense of areas designated Generally Residential or Industrial
- Areas formerly designated as residential that are no longer poised for conventional housing development, where other commercial would be compatible
- Areas at intersections of arterial streets with nearby access to the Parks Highway.
- Located near public services, transit facilities, hotels, and other uses
- Criteria for Downtown areas include areas designated by an adopted area plan or overlay district as a mixed-use town center, accessible by pedestrians from nearby residential areas, or suitable for higher intensity redevelopment



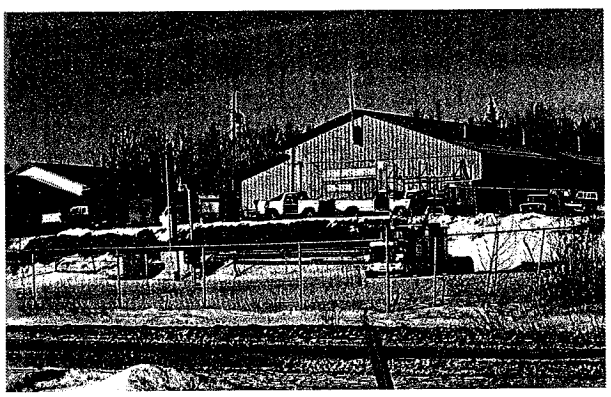
INDUSTRIAL

Intent: The Industrial designation provides for a variety of employment and economic development opportunities and seeks to preserve key industrial lands for existing and future industrial economic development.

Description: This designation allows a variety of industrial uses, including office industrial parks. Commercial uses that are supportive to industrial functions and character may occur, but are limited in intensity to maintain adequate industrial development opportunities. Development is compatible with adjacent residential areas in terms of physical scale, intensity of activities, and through buffering and transitions.



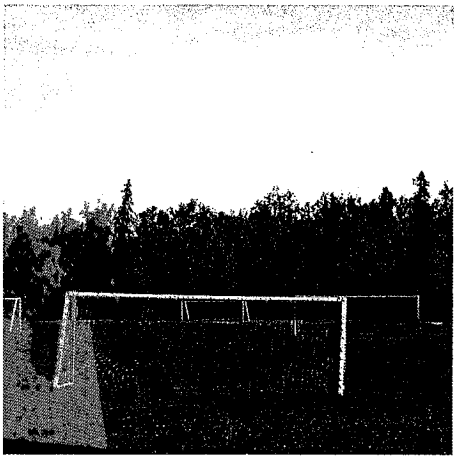
There is a limited supply of large, strategically located industrial areas in the City. Non-industrial uses are limited to prevent land use and traffic conflicts and to preserve land for industrial economic development. Uses may include manufacturing, major transportation operations, research and development, industrial/ business parks, warehousing and distribution, equipment and materials storage, vehicle and equipment repair, waste management and similar uses. Certain areas may allow for processing and distribution of natural resources and hazardous materials.



Location Criteria:

- Areas with a mix of industrial and compatible commercial activities
- Areas located along major truck routes without the need to travel through incompatible uses such as residential or commercial retail
- Industrial enclaves too small to be major industrial reserve districts
- Existing industrial areas subject to encroaching commercial that remain optimal for industrial use
- Areas with an established pattern of primarily industrial development
- Areas large enough for multiple, intense industrial uses
- Areas with efficient access to major transportation facilities

PARKS

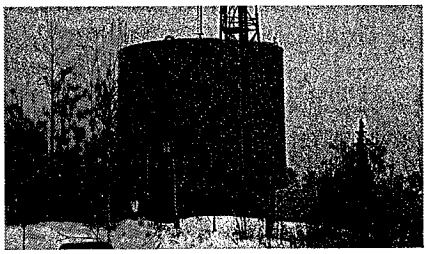


Parks and natural resource use areas designated on the Future Land Use Map are generally either existing or known planned areas.

Intent: The Parks designation provides for active and passive outdoor recreation, conservation of natural areas, and trail corridors connecting neighborhoods. Also includes non-municipal lands that, by adopted plan, formal agreement, subdivision or easement, function as part of the community system of parks, outdoor recreational facilities or natural preservation areas.

Description: Uses include neighborhood, community, and natural resource use area parks, special use parks, greenbelts, and other municipal open spaces that are dedicated or designated by an adopted plan for parkland or natural conservation. Other municipal lands of high natural value that are environmentally unsuitable for development are also included. This includes state or federal lands designated by an adopted plan as park or natural resource use, or that are environmentally unsuitable for development and private lands that function as park, outdoor recreation or natural resource area. Special purpose facilities such as sports complexes or interpretive centers that support park, recreation and natural resource functions may be allowed subject to the provisions in an adopted master plan or Title 16, Land Development Code. This designation is implemented by the P zones but most other zones may also be compatible implementation zones for non-dedicated park and recreation lands

PUBLIC/INSTITUTIONAL



Intent: The Public/Institutional designation usually contains existing or known planned facilities. These uses can integrate into the scale of the local neighborhood and provide a community service or focus for the surrounding area. This designation also provides for major public or quasi-public institutional centers that serve a wide area of the community, function as major activity and employment centers, and are not usually integrated into residential areas. The Land Use Plan Map is intended to be updated as new facilities are planned and public facility site selections made.

Description: This designation typically consists of public utilities such as sewer and water treatment plants, power generation plants, industrial yards, water tank reservoirs, pump stations and facilities for maintenance or fleet services. It also allows facilities such as fire stations, public and private schools and colleges with outdoor campus recreation facilities, religious facilities and/or schools, community centers, public museums, cemeteries, and public libraries. Physical design should mitigate the external impacts of scale and the facilities should be compatible with the surrounding areas. This designation is generally implemented by the P zoning district.

4.4 Goals, Objectives, Policies and Actions

Goal 1. Provide balanced land use patterns that support the community's future growth.

Objective	Strategies
1.1 Ensure that future land use designations reflect demographic and market trends.	1.1.1 Update and maintain a future land use map that provides appropriate designations that allow rezonings necessary to accommodate anticipated growth that are compatible with surrounding areas.
1.2 Revise development review process to require early coordination with developers to ensure quality projects and minimize negative impacts to the community.	1.2.1 Work toward assuming platting powers from the Borough in order to balance developer and community goals while minimizing impacts on private property rights. 1.2.2 Continue to provide comments and recommendations on platting request processed by the Borough to ensure consistency with this Plan.

Goal 2. Encourage development opportunities that support the City's role as a regional commercial center.

Objective	Strategies
2.1 Encourage expansion of the City's commercial major areas to accommodate regional demands.	2.1.1 Review and amend the Future Land Use Map and Title 16 to allow for map amendments and rezonings necessary to allow for appropriate commercial development.
2.2 Ensure adequate land area preserved for industrial and manufacturing-type uses.	2.2.1 Review and amend the Future Land Use Map as necessary to allow for appropriate industrial and manufacturing development.

Goal 3. Encourage a variety of residential housing opportunities.

Objective	Strategies
3.1 Retain pockets of land zoned Rural Residential to allow historical homesteading, less intensive land uses, and protection of natural water systems (lakes, wetlands, etc.)	3.1.1 Work at the neighborhood plan level, under code 16.08.050 to help the City's more rural neighborhoods to develop strategies to help retain their rural qualities.
3.2 Adopt policies that allow increased residential densities in appropriate areas necessary to accommodate future growth.	3.2.1 Provide opportunities for subdivision development that utilizes alternative designs to maximize use of property while preserving natural land features. 3.2.2 Amend Title 16 to allow cluster subdivision development with required common open space, stream, and trail corridors.

Goal 4. Promote positive neighborhood identities and build a strong civic base to enhance resident's quality of life.

Objective	Strategies
4.1 Encourage a minimum housing safety standard to minimize decreased property values, neighborhood blight, and health and safety problems.	4.1.1 Consider adopting the International Building Code for residential and other development not currently covered by State law in order to increase the stock of sound and safe housing built consistent with widely accepted building standards. Explore approaches for ensuring compliance that are the most cost-effective and time efficient, both for the developer and the City.
4.2 Encourage residents to take an active role in improving the community, especially at the neighborhood level.	4.2.1 Continue to encourage neighborhoods to create neighborhood plans and provide appropriate staff assistance. 4.2.2 Support annual neighborhood clean-up initiatives.
4.3 Enhance neighborhood connectivity, aesthetics, and recreational opportunities by securing greenbelts, trail easements, neighborhood use pocket parks, natural open spaces, and retaining wetlands, stream corridors, and lake frontage in a natural condition into the future.	4.3.1 Develop a future trail system concept that better links Wasilla's neighborhoods to each other and to key destination centers. 4.3.2 Consider adopting regulations that require developers to provide sidewalks, trails, greenbelts, or dedicated pocket parks and open space.

Goal 5. Continue to expand the City's borders as needed to allow economic development and growth in the future.

Objective	Strategies
5.1 Identify areas to be annexed into the City that will provide opportunities for economic growth.	5.1.1 Develop quantitative criteria for determining if, when, and where parcels outside the city limits are creating an issue of acute importance in terms of Wasilla's future services, health, safety and economy. Re-evaluate opportunities for additional annexation every five years. 5.1.2 In the immediate future, evaluate areas adjacent to the City's boundaries that are appropriate for annexations.

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Chapter 5. Downtown

5.1 Current Conditions and Trends

What Downtown?

The City's Downtown does not have easily definable boundaries. Those not familiar with the City might wonder if there is a Downtown. For the purposes of describing the current conditions, the historic townsite area currently the "core" or heart of Downtown, surrounded by a larger area (presented in the aerial, left) which has elements that may sometime, represents a possible Downtown boundary.

Wasilla's Original Post Office and Historic Townsite

Currently, Downtown has a variety of land uses including public facilities retail, housing, and offices. Public facilities include the historical museum and historic building complex, City Hall and offices, public library, parks, and the post office.

In 1917, a plat of small lots was auctioned off by the Alaska Railroad Commission, effectively creating what is now the Downtown district. From this beginning, a small crossroads commercial area has expanded east and west along the present Parks Highway to become the major commercial corridor of the Matanuska-Susitna Valley.

Until the population boom years of the last two decades, the City never had the opportunity to develop a traditional pedestrian-friendly mixed-use Downtown like older communities that grew during pre-automobile times. Instead, the recent period of growth followed the "suburban", highway-oriented development pattern classic to highway corridors in America. The original small lots of Downtown are not conducive to this development pattern and have been overlooked as development sites.

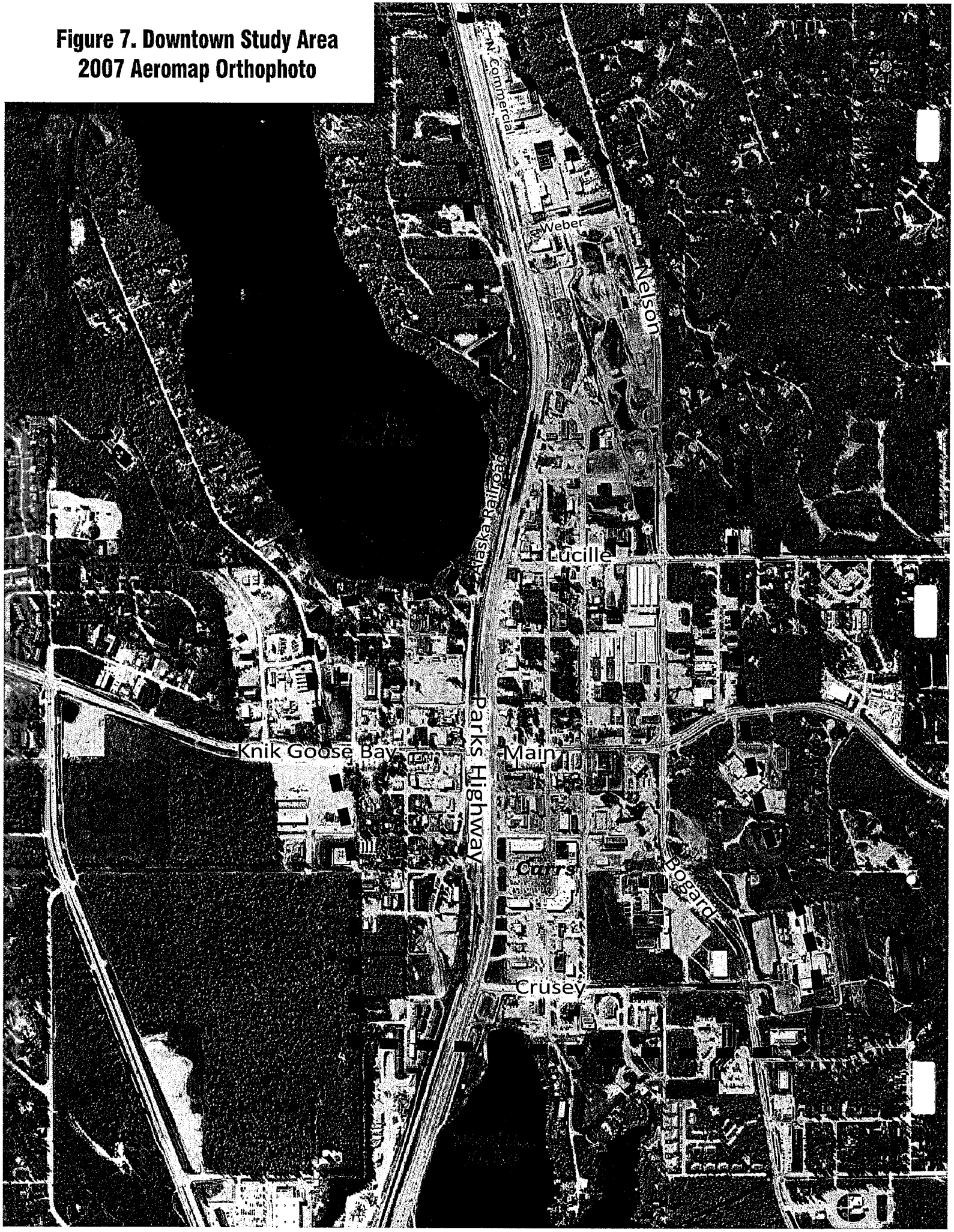
Creating a traditional town center is still possible for the City. The most important factor is that the market conditions are conducive for growth. There is significant room in the marketplace for retail, service and hospitality businesses.

Remnants of the original fabric of the crossroads Downtown includes several historic structures, the museum, and historic townsite complex, City Hall, and post office to serve as Downtown anchors. The existing small lot sizes can even become an asset for developing small businesses if the zoning codes are amended to enable commercial uses. At a minimum, revisions are needed to the minimum required setbacks and parking requirements.

Community Input

A week-long planning charrette was conducted for the City's Downtown in late October 2009. This included meetings with City officials, business leaders, walking tours, and three evening planning workshops with the public. In between meetings, concepts for the Downtown were sketched for presentation at the planning workshops.

Figure 7. Downtown Study Area
2007 Aeromap Orthophoto

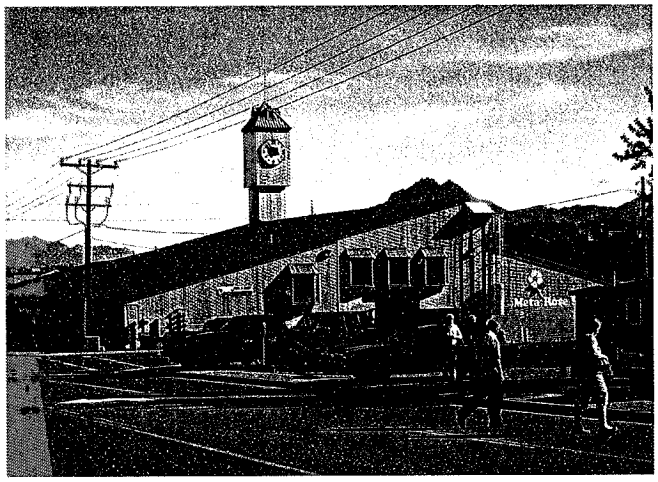


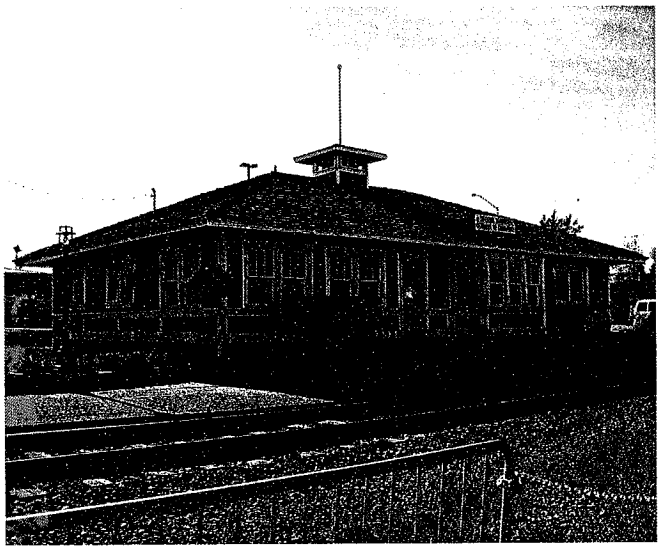
Current issues identified by workshop participants with Downtown include:

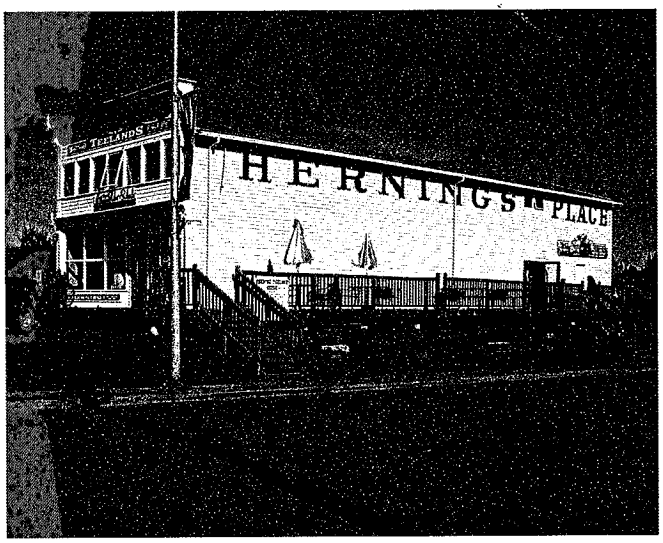
- Traffic congestion, especially related to vehicle stacking on Main Street for access to the Parks Highway.
- Poor pedestrian connectivity and a lack of sidewalks and crosswalks throughout the Downtown area.
- No identity as a Downtown district; looks like a strip mall and lacks personality.
- Appearance of buildings, streets, and sidewalks detract from economic development potential
- Lack of places to gather, learn, and enjoy arts and culture (need new Library and Valley Performing Arts Theater).
- Need a Downtown park as a gathering place and green area
- Need gateway entrances to town
- Identify Downtown boundaries

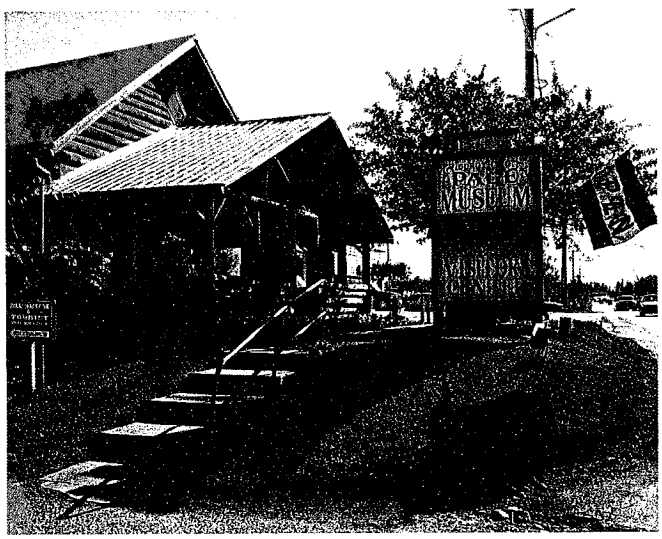
Opportunities identified by participants include:

- Market potential for growth
- Desire by the community to develop a vibrant Downtown
- Access and location
- Parks and open space





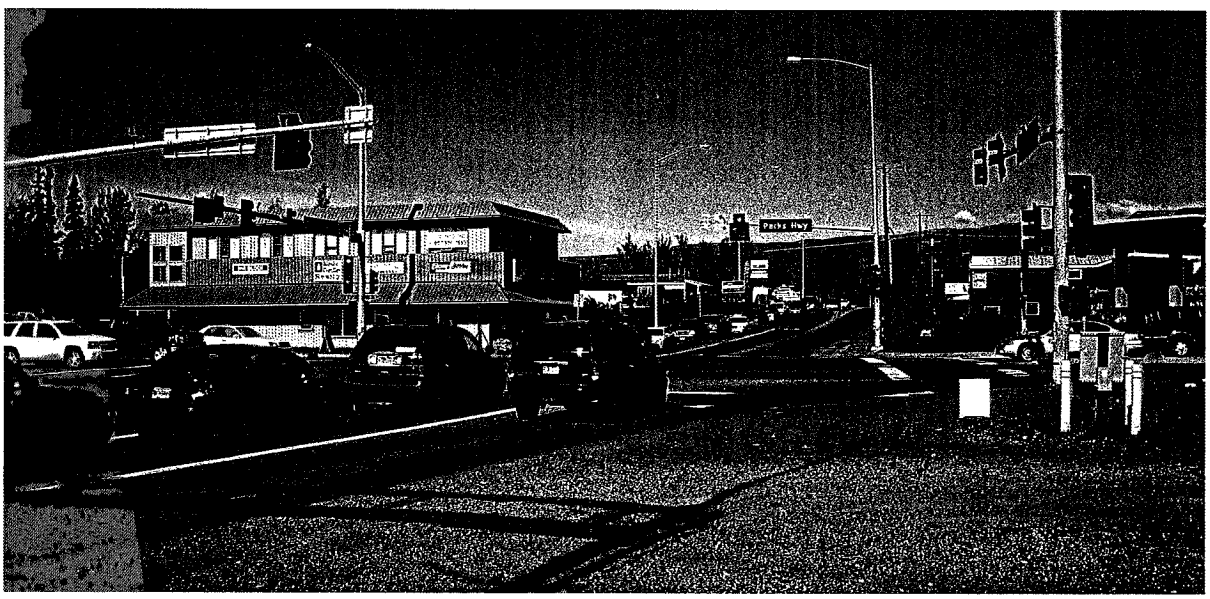




Although residents feel that Downtown needs an enhanced overall identity, cornerstone buildings are already in place.

The planning charrette defined both the physical and built environment business owners and residents desired for Downtown. Rough sketches were produced during the charrette to communicate these ideas. These ideas would require extensive changes to the Downtown area. The concept plan features:

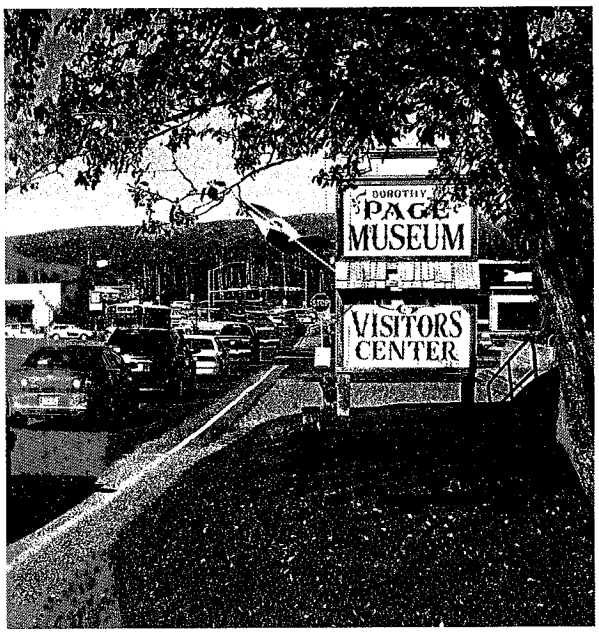
- **Improved Traffic Flows:** A one-way couplet should be constructed to improve traffic flows around Downtown. The Yenlo and Main Street couplet is a key project to move forward. On-street parking is essential for Downtown and must be included the project.
- **Pedestrian Focus:** Sidewalks should be constructed on both sides of all Downtown streets. Buildings are oriented to the sidewalk and street rather than parking lots and have minimal or no setbacks from the sidewalks. Crosswalks define safe pedestrian zones at intersections.
- **Town Square:** Residents liked the idea of a town square to add green space and a place for gatherings and celebrations in Downtown. There are two possible locations for the town square as shown in the concepts.
- **Building Form:** Two and three story commercial buildings should be developed in a zero lot line form, right up to the sidewalk. Private parking lots can be constructed in the rear of the buildings. Retail and service businesses should be located on the ground level, with office and residential use on upper floors. A 2009 Retail, Office and Lodging Study completed by the Gibbs Planning Group for this planning effort demonstrates that the City could add considerable retail, office and lodging development, some of which may be captured in the Downtown area.
- **Parking:** On-street parking throughout Downtown will serve to calm traffic and support business development. This will add a considerable parking inventory to Downtown and is sufficient for the development conceptualized. Additional parking may be located at the rear of buildings. Larger developments may require the construction of parking structures.



Enhancing Downtown's traffic flow at Main Street, Knik-Goose Bay Road, the railroad tracks, and the Parks Highway requires major roadway improvements, including a Yenlo and Main Street couplet system.

- **Landscaping:** Landscaped areas will add beauty and visual interest to Downtown. Gateway landscaping treatments at the intersections of Yenlo, Boundary and Main Streets and the Parks Highway will attract attention to the Downtown.
- Streetscape: Clean, attractive sidewalks and pedestrian scale lighting fixtures will enhance the business district and appeal to pedestrians and shoppers. Fancy and expensive streetscape treatments are not necessary.

As an implementing tool for implementing what was envisioned in the charrette, this plan recommends that the City and key Downtown interests explore Overlay zoning to include land use provisions and specific design standards that are compatible with community needs. A general area to consider for the overlay is the Downtown study area.



Downtown sidewalks, on-street parking, and streetscape would add appeal for pedestrians and shoppers.

5.2 Desired Future Conditions

The City has a definable Downtown based around the historic townsite with these attributes:

- ***It is pedestrian friendly, with sidewalks and crosswalks at street intersections.***
- ***The area is attractive, with landscaping and good architecture that represents an Alaskan image and fits in with the spectacular natural surroundings.***
- ***Downtown has convenient, on-street parking and easy access.***
- ***Mixed uses are present, combining ground-level retail with office and housing in upper stories of buildings, as market conditions allow.***
- ***The area is vibrant, attracting residents and tourists with a variety of specialty shops and activities, at all hours of the day and evening and in all seasons.***

City of Wasilla Resident Opinions Regarding Downtown
√ Residents are generally supportive of "Redevelopment of the Downtown Area to strengthen its role as a town center": ***33% residents - Very Supportive*** ***34% residents - Somewhat Supportive*** ***16% residents - Not Sure*** ***17% residents - Not Supportive***
√ Many residents believe that Wasilla "should strengthen small city identity": ***24% residents - Strongly Agree*** ***31% residents - Agree*** ***30% residents - Neutral*** ***10% residents - Disagree*** ***6% residents - Strongly Disagree***
√ Residents have mixed views about "developing physical enhancements in the Downtown (e.g. gateways, streetscapes)": ***24% residents - Very Supportive*** ***34% residents - Somewhat Supportive*** ***17% residents - Not Sure*** ***25% residents - Not Supportive***

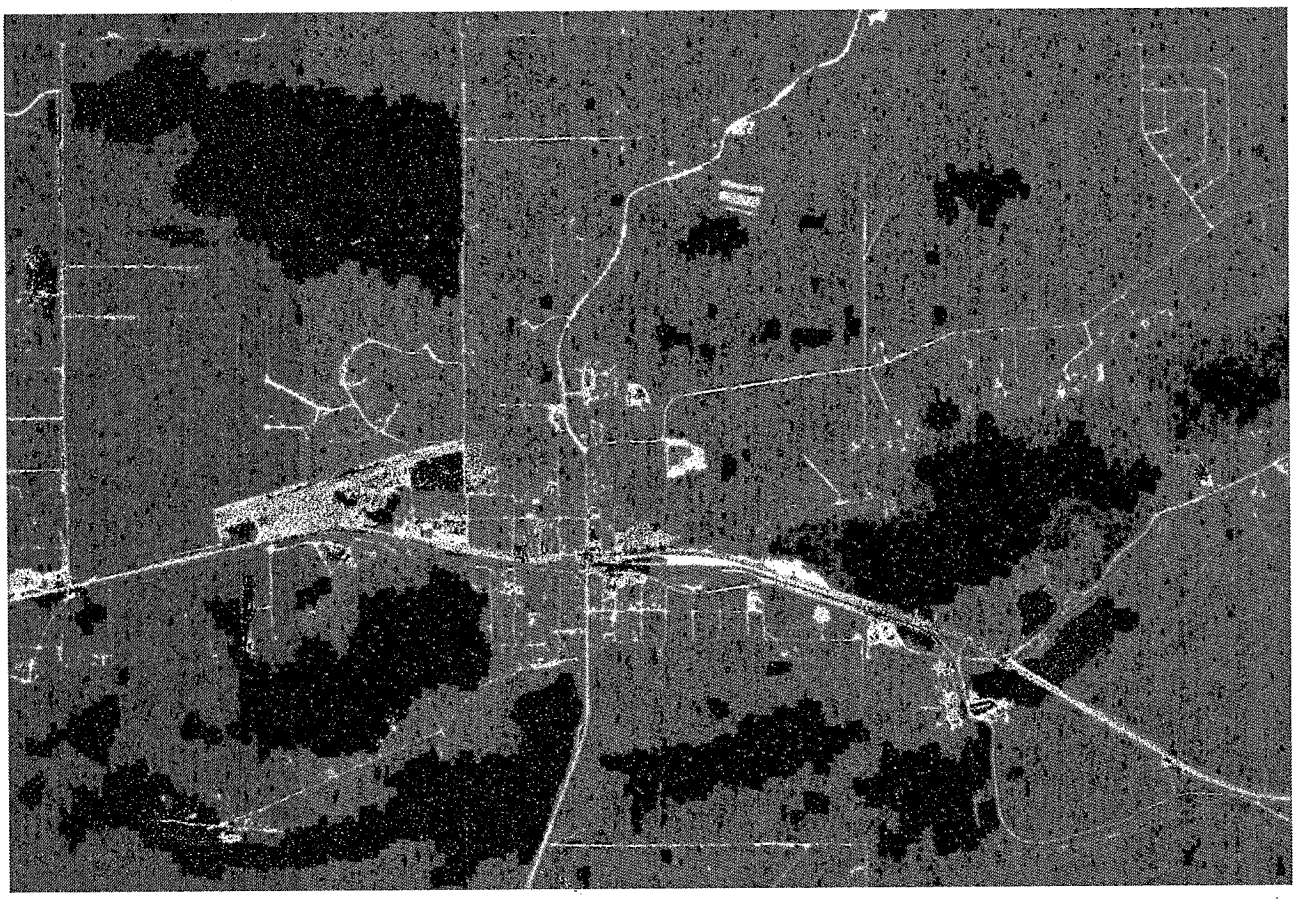
5.4 Goals, Objectives, Policies and Actions

Goal 1. Promote and encourage development and redevelopment within the Downtown area.

Objective	Strategies
1.1 Adopt land use policies that encourage a mix of land uses in the Downtown area that create and establish a more vibrant town center, create a gathering place for residents and visitors, and a focus for business and cultural activities.	1.1.1 Create a Downtown overlay zoning district that incorporates Wasilla's historic center (see Downtown overlay concept map). Develop land use regulations and development standards that encourage new development/ redevelopment, appropriate land use patterns, and a cohesive town center. 1.1.2 Consider developing an incentive based policy or other solutions to help reduce lot fragmentation of potentially valuable commercial sites. 1.1.3 Support developer's efforts to reconsolidate Downtown lots for high-quality development that will enhance the historic Downtown district. 1.1.4 Adopt land use policies that allow development of multi-story buildings with street-level commercial and office uses with upper-story residential units in the Downtown area.
1.2 Identify opportunities to develop civic investments that revitalize the Downtown area and reinforce its identity as an attractive civic center.	1.2.1 Support partnership approaches that leverage funding and community support to help build a new library, expanded Valley Performing Arts Theater, town square, streetscape, sidewalks, and lighting in the Downtown core. 1.2.2 Design and improve Downtown streets to encourage walking, on-street parking, covered walkways, and additional curbs and gutters. 1.2.3 Work closely with ADOT&PF on major road projects, including the Yenlo Street Extension/Main Street Couplet and the Parks Highway Alternative Route development, to ensure that roadway's are upgraded to re-shape core area circulation for walkability, on-street parking, and to include streetscape design opportunities.
1.3 Improve pedestrian access in the Downtown area.	1.3.1 Work with roadway facility designers and community members to define basic functional and aesthetic parameters for streetscape improvements in the Downtown area. 1.3.2 Dedicate city, state, and federal resources as available to developing Downtown's streetscape infrastructure, including wide sidewalks and pedestrian amenities. 1.3.3 Partner with Downtown business and property owners on improvement and management issues related to improving the Downtown pedestrian environment (parking needs, sidewalk upgrades, and regular snow clearing and maintenance).

Goal 2. Build the partnerships and develop the community capacity required to transform Downtown.

Objective	Strategies
2.1 Bring key stakeholders together to help mobilize implementation of a Downtown overlay zoning district.	2.1.1 Engage key stakeholders and involve them in creating and assisting with the implementation of the Downtown overlay zoning district, potentially through a Downtown Development committee.
2.2 Create public-private partnerships that can leverage resources to implement the Downtown overlay zoning district.	2.2.1 Encourage the creation of a business improvement district among core area businesses to supplement city services and invest in the Downtown's maintenance, marketing, and the common improvements that help attract residents and visitors.



Wasilla's business district in 1974 (left) was focused in a "node" at the major crossroads. Today, much of the main business activity has become linear in nature, and spread along the highway corridor, making it harder to identify Wasilla's "Downtown."

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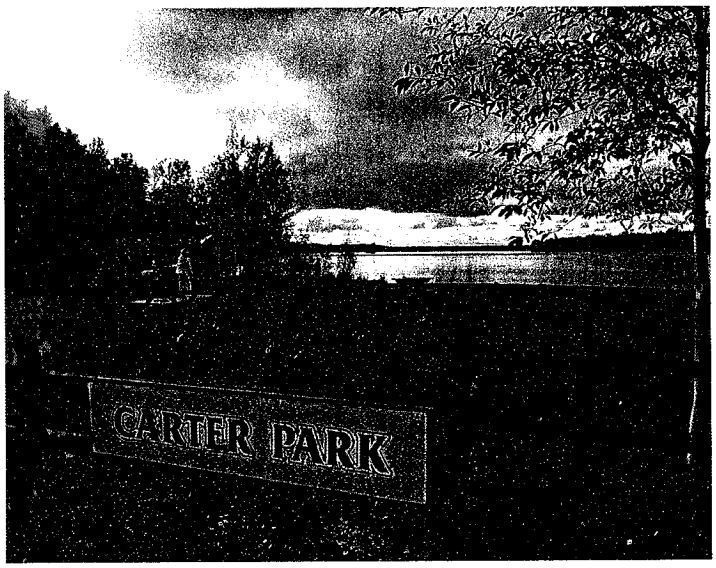
Chapter 6. Community Assets

5.1 Current Conditions and Trends

The Community assets specifically include the many resources and attributes that the City develops, manages, and enhances for current and future residents. Cost effective infrastructure and services, upholding important quality of life issues that residents and visitors value, and enhancing future economic development opportunities are all critically important aspects of this planning element.



City services will be needed to serve a population anticipated to grow at a 3.1% rate through 2034.

Currently, the resources to oversee and enhance community assets are largely provided by the City and are funded from a number of sources, with the largest contribution being from a municipal sales tax. It is the mission of the City to:

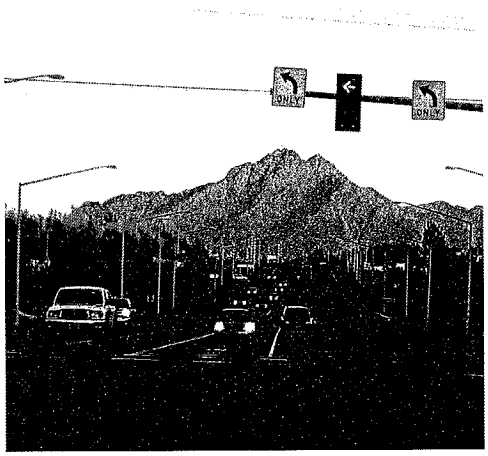
> *Provide optimum service levels to the public as cost effectively as possible to ensure a stable and thriving economy, promote a healthy community, provide a safe environment and a quality lifestyle, and promote maximum citizen participation in government.*

For several years now, the City has been one of the fastest growing communities in the United States, and it is a real challenge for the City government to keep up with this growth. The increasing demand for services due to this growth must be met and the City must continue to work with federal, state, and local entities to meet these needs.

As part of this planning effort, residents were surveyed about the City. This statistically valid input provides important feedback about investments into public services. Major areas of support from residents include:

Most Important Interests for the City to Address:
- improve roadways and transportation (56%)
- more employment opportunities (47%)
- increase public safety (32%)
- expand school services (30%)

Level of Satisfaction with Major City Services:
- public safety services (71%)
- parks and recreation programs/facilities (55%)
- customer service from city employees (52%)
- maintenance of city streets/facilities (52%)



Improved roadways and transportation are the top priority of residents.

Public Facilities

The City has a number of important community public facilities, which are all generally located Downtown, including City Hall, the Wasilla Public Library, Post Office, and the Dorothy Page Museum. Over the life of this Plan, key issues related to facilities are expected to include:

- Ongoing repair and maintenance, limited space, a lack of elevator access, and insufficient parking. In a number of cases, new facility space may be more cost effective or necessary, especially in undersized facilities such as the existing Wasilla Public Library.
- Considering the role of location and visibility for public facilities. This includes finding ways to gain value by being willing to sell valuable real estate and at the same time, investing in real estate in ways that can leverage future civic uses in a cost effective manner.

Water, Sewer and Utility Networks

City water and sewer currently serves approximately 1,100 and 800 customers (respectively) within the general area shown on the Community Assets Map in Appendix C. These systems are expected to be adequate in terms of their future capacity and able to support a full build out of the City within its current boundaries, with planned upgrades (City of Wasilla Public Works, 2011). Planning for regional systems is underway, and land will need to be purchased to support key collection and distribution sites. In the meantime maintaining current infrastructure will need to be a priority to extend the life of the existing systems.

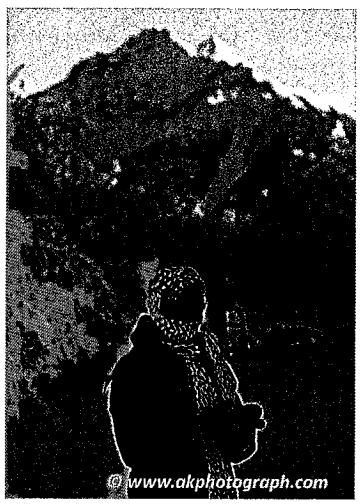
Other utility networks including gas, electric, and telecommunications are in place, and are adequate for the community's needs. However, efforts should be continued in concert with private providers to ensure that new commercial and economic enterprises have adequate service. Another priority is reservation of rights-of-way and finding ways to fund future utility and public works projects.

Recreation and Parks

City parks and recreational resources are valued assets, used both by residents and the growing regional population. During the public process, many comments were generated about individuals' appreciation for City parks and facilities, and the desire to take good care of the existing stock, especially the "gems." A 2009 survey undertaken within this planning effort found a general level of satisfaction with the City's existing parks and recreation services.

Key park issues over the life of this Plan include:

- Finding ways to stretch limited resources
- Creating realistic funding priorities
- Recognizing that it is counter-productive to compete with the private sector by providing expensive equipment and facilities for more specialized sports that serve a limited population of users. Support the private sector in meeting this demand on a "pay to play" basis, while using City dollars to serve the largest populations of user needs.
- Allow the private sector to help generate income for key parks
- Do strategic planning for key facilities with income generating potential such as the Curtis D. Menard Memorial Sports Center to determine the most cost effective balance of programming. Consider non-recreational uses of these facilities and regional event opportunities that help generate direct of tax revenue.



Residents value City parks and recreation resources.

Trails

A 2007 Wasilla park master planning survey identified that more than half of the City's residents are using City trails. Enhancing motorized and non-motorized trail connections can provide more recreation opportunities community wide, on a year-round basis, with important health, transportation, and recreation benefits. Key trail issues over the life of this plan include:

- Finding resources to extend and improve the existing system.
- Addressing use incompatibilities and improve safety.
- The need for regionally connected networks for both motorized and non-motorized trail use, and diverse recreational user groups.

Historic, Cultural and Educational Assets

The City has exceptional assets that support learning about and connecting to history and culture. These assets, located on the Community Assets Map in the Appendix include a mix of City-owned, private and Borough facilities; many are non-profits.

City support for these entities over the life of this Plan will help enhance Wasilla as a regional center, attract visitors (who contribute sales tax), and attract employers by enhancing residents' education and community life.

Natural and Scenic Resources

The City is located within a spectacular setting with ample natural resources that contribute to the area's quality of life and potential visitor appeal. Retaining and enhancing these assets can be a challenge as the City grows and develops. Over the life of this Plan, working with private landowners and community partners will be vital to maintaining them for future generations.

Community Character and Identity

An intangible, yet critical asset of any community is its overall character and identity. Although difficult to manage, community planning and public projects should consider ways to "re-frame" and enhance perceptions of the City. This could include creating highly visible landmarks, buildings and enhancements along the Parks Highway, revitalizing Downtown, community branding, and outreach through the Wasilla Chamber of Commerce and other tourism agencies.

6.2 Desired Future Conditions

Wasilla's **Public Facilities** are attractive, safe, functional and provide value to the community.

Adequate **water, sewer and utility** networks serve residents and new growth, including economic enterprise and commercial uses.

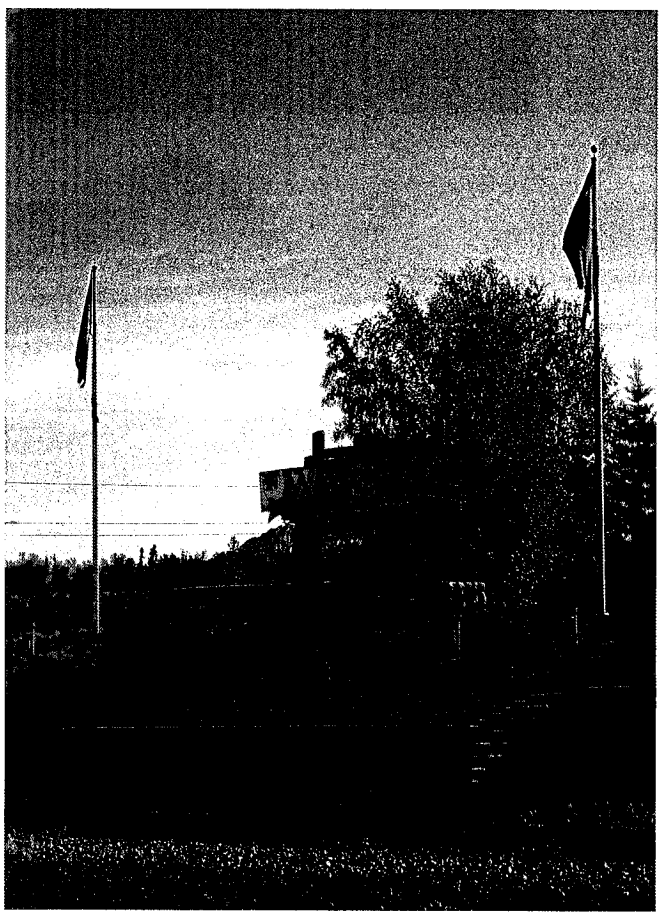
Recreation and parks are cost-effectively run and enhance local health and quality of life.

A regionally linked network of trails serves diverse users safely and enjoyably.

Historic, cultural and educational assets are enhanced for residents and visitors.

Natural and scenic resources are preserved and maintained for the future.

Wasilla enjoys an enhanced **community character and identity.**



City of Wasilla Resident Survey Opinions Regarding Community Assets
√ Improved utilities and infrastructure are important community priorities: ***39% residents - Very important*** ***40% residents - Somewhat important*** ***12% residents - Not Sure*** ***9% residents - Not important***
√ Most city residents are generally satisfied with Wasilla's Parks and Recreation Programs and Facilities: ***11% residents - Very Satisfied*** ***44% residents - Satisfied*** ***33% residents - Neutral*** ***10% residents - Dissatisfied*** ***8% residents - Very Dissatisfied***
√ There is broad support for a City system of recreational trails and greenbelts connect the community: ***39% residents - Very Supportive*** ***33% residents - Somewhat Supportive*** ***10% residents - Neutral*** ***18% residents - Not Supportive***

Community Asset Supplementary Documents

This comprehensive plan chapter presents a broad vision, intended for incremental implementation over the next 10 or more years. Please consult other documents and sources, including those listed below, for more specific and up to date information such as capital improvement lists, design standards, and project criteria.

<u>City of Wasilla</u>

Official Streets and Highways Plan
Airport Master Plan
Draft Wasilla Area Plan
Parks Master Plan
Trails Plan
Water Master Plan
Sewer Master Plan
Storm Water Master Plan

6.3 Goals, Objectives, and Actions

Goal 1. Provide essential services and facilities necessary to encourage new commercial, industrial, and manufacturing development.

Objective	Strategies
1.1 Enhance capacity and connectivity of services needed for new commercial, industrial, and manufacturing investment.	1.1.1 Maintain and expand City infrastructure investments to adequately provide sewer services as the community grows. 1.1.2 Coordinate at the regional level to plan for and develop the regional sewer systems necessary to accommodate future growth. 1.1.3 Consider policies that require developers to anticipate future infrastructure connections in mind (conduit for utilities, pipe for water and sewer).
1.2 Anticipate and plan for new state and federal regulations regarding development, land use, and infrastructure requirements.	1.2.1 Update and maintain water, storm water, and sewer master plans.

Goal 2. Enhance educational opportunities.

Objective	Strategies
2.1 Support quality education and lifelong learning opportunities needed to develop a skilled workforce that will attract new employers.	2.1.1 Work with the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, the State of Alaska, and other partners to support development of a new library facility that can more adequately serve the region's population. 2.1.2 Partner with the Matanuska-Susitna School District, Charter College, and other educational institutions to help them enhance their program delivery, and to work on mutual community goals (recreation, health, safe routes to school, crime prevention, etc.).

Goal 3. Enhance recreational opportunities.

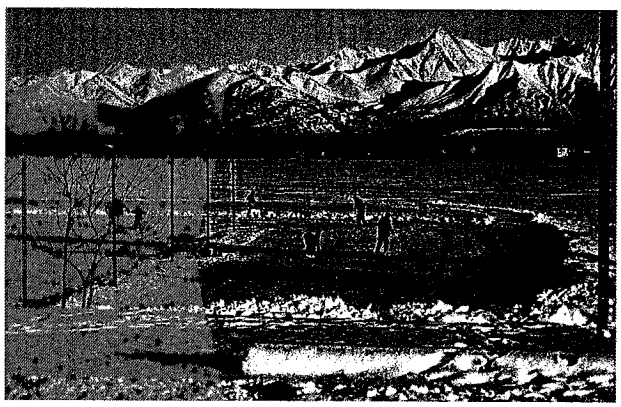
Objective	Strategies
3.1 Continue to provide and improve opportunities for community recreation.	3.1.1 Develop and protect important recreational trail corridors (e.g. Iditarod, Wasilla-Big Lake trails) and promote multiple-use trails year-round. 3.1.2 Maintain existing parks to a high standard and review options for new parks as deemed necessary or desirable by residents. 3.1.3 Adopt formal plans for Wasilla's Parks, Trails, and the Multi-Use Sports Center to identify priority goals, projects, standards and implementation tools. 3.1.4 Assess the capacity and use of the recreational and park facilities to ensure sufficient capacity, maximum/multiple use, and additional facilities and parks where desired by the community. 3.1.5 Enhance City parks and recreation facilities; where possible, partner with volunteer, private, and not-for-profit organizations for improvements.

Goal 3. Enhance recreational opportunities.

Objective	Strategies
3.2 Identify missing trail links and address deficiencies and safety issues associated with the existing trail network.	3.2.1 Update the 1999 City of Wasilla Trails Plan using a public process that integrates Trail Management methods which can both address multi-use safety conflicts, and ensure that each user group has a usable network. 3.2.2 Identify, reserve, and purchase rights-of-way for trail routes that link Wasilla to regional networks and destinations (Big Lake Wasilla Trail) and that connect local residents to parks, educational centers, and commercial centers. 3.2.3 Determine access points for trails and trailheads that respect private property. 3.2.4 Develop or adopt a trail education, etiquette, and sign program to help trail users respect other users and trail neighbors.

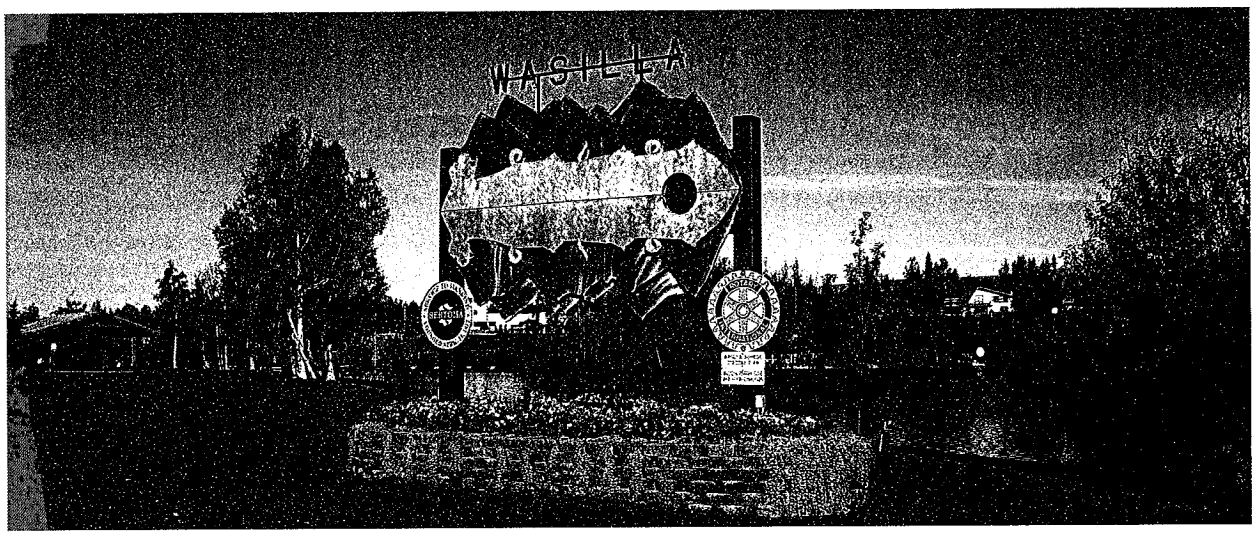
Goal 4. Preserve and enhance the City's unique community assets.

Objective	Strategies
4.1 Recognize, preserve, and showcase the City's historic past.	4.1.1 Maintain, strengthen, and preserve the City's historic town site and structures. 4.1.2 Seek to acquire, restore, and protect important historical resources with an emphasis on pre-statehood articles, buildings, and historic sites. Once acquired, provide interpretive and visitor facilities that support that attraction. 4.1.3 Provide support for the Dorothy Page Museum, and Museum of Alaska Transportation and Industry as important visitor and resident attractions.
4.2 Enhance the City's visual appearance and identity.	4.2.1 Identify landmarks and features of visual interest to residents and visitors, and explore opportunities for enhancing access to them and/or framing views for the public (e.g. scenic overlooks, pullouts, site development that maintains and/or incorporates views.) 4.2.2 Work to tap community pride and owners' self interest in enhancing properties along the Parks Highway by partnering with the Chamber of Commerce and other organizations on community beatification and cleanup efforts. 4.2.3 Collaborate with Alaska Department of Transportation to identify ways to preserve landscaping along state roadways and minimize dust pollution from winter maintenance.



Goal 4. Preserve and enhance the City's unique community assets.

Objective	Strategies
4.3 Protect the City's natural resources, including Wasilla Lake and Lake Lucille.	4.3.1 Seek mitigation opportunities and design solutions to balance recreational use of lands and preservation goals, particularly with ORV crossings of wetlands and anadromous streams. 4.3.2 Consider ways to better protect waterways from neighborhood septic tanks, use of damaging chemicals and fertilizers, and clearing of natural vegetation along the shoreline which both filters chemicals and provides important habitat for young Salmon and other fish. 4.3.3 Establish programs to improve and maintain the water quality in both Lucille Lake and Wasilla Lake. 4.3.4 Require curbs, gutter, and storm water runoff control measures that help collect, filter, and enhance the quality of water quality returning to natural waterways.
4.4 Enhance access to natural areas.	4.4.1 As possible expand the public land base to include greenbelts, stream corridors, and open spaces that support groundwater, flood control, habitat, and community enjoyment values. 4.4.3 Work with landowners and other partners to enhance resident's access to Cottonwood Creek, Lucille Lake and Wasilla Lake, and to create a connected trail system that features overlooks and interpretive materials pertaining to these important community resources.



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Chapter 7. Economic Vitality

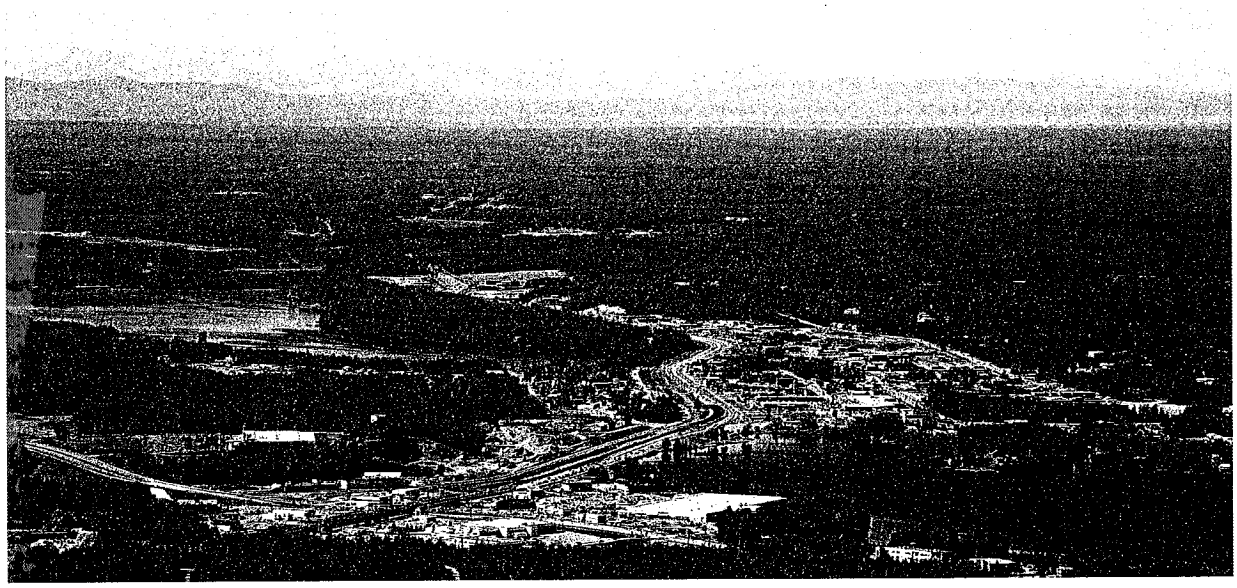
7.1 Current Conditions and Trends

Regional Commercial and Service Center

The last decade has firmly established the City's "crossroads" as the region's major commercial center. This development, largely zoned Commercial, is focused along the Parks Highway, generally from the Palmer-Wasilla Highway to Knik-Goose Bay Road. Commercial development is also radiating from this center along collector roads, including into areas with Rural Residential zoning. As the region's population grows, the City is beginning to reach a critical mass in terms of the size of the population served and the market's ability to support a greater diversity of service and retail providers. For example, in the past decade it has attracted new large retailers and a number of service organizations and company branch offices including Target, South Central Foundation, and Providence Hospital.

As part of updating the Plan, in September 2009 a *Wasilla Area Retail Office, Commercial, and Market Analysis Market Study* ("Market Study") was completed by the Gibbs Planning Group which is included in Appendix D. This analysis was completed so that future development plans reflect actual market conditions and potentials. The study indicated that the City is in the midst of evolving from a bedroom community of Anchorage to a more self-sufficient community, meeting some regional retail needs. Moreover, the September 2009 study determined that Wasilla is currently serving a larger regional trade area population of around 90,000, which is projected to continue to expand.

In terms of specific commercial and economic opportunities, the study points out that historic retailers have been convenience and neighborhood oriented in size and scale, but that the City has successfully attracted community scale retailers (Target, Sears, Wal-Mart, Fred Meyer, etc.). Under current economic conditions, growth in retail development is anticipated to be able to support an additional 177,000 square feet of additional retail. See Table 10 for specific categories.



The City is the region's commercial center.

The City has attracted major retailers including Sears, Walmart, Target, and Home Depot.

Supportable Additional Retail
72,600 sf of general merchandise stores
34,600 sf of dine in and carry out restaurants
17,000 sf of apparel and accessories stores
14,000 sf of hardware and lawn/garden retail
9,000 sf of sporting goods and hobby retail
6,600 sf of electronic and appliance retail
5,900 sf of home furnishings
3,900 sf of specialty food stores
2,500 sf of health care and personal services
1,400 sf of jewelry, luggage and leather retail
9,500 sf of miscellaneous neighborhood retailers (e.g., florists, pet supplies, video and gift shops).

Table 10. Supportable Additional Retail in the Wasilla Area (Source: Gibbs Planning Group Retail Office and Lodging Market Analysis, September 28, 2009).

An Attraction for Residents and Visitors

A year-round recreation paradise, the City has historical ties to the renowned Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race and is the home of the Tesoro Iron-Dog 2000, the world's longest snowmobile race. Fishing, swimming, boating, hiking, and biking are popular activities during summer's long daylight hours, and mountains, lakes, streams, wetlands, tundra, and boreal forests are within easy reach. The quality of life is excellent, the water is clean and abundant, the air is fresh, and the people are friendly. The City embodies the small-town values of family, community, and caring for neighbors. The unique locale appeals to those who seek an Alaskan lifestyle while raising a family, taking advantage of economic prospects, or retiring in comfort. In terms of City finances, total revenues and expenditures over a number of years show that the City is consistently in the black.

Work Where You Play

Although the City has a growing number of jobs related to its growth as a retail and service center, most residents' jobs remain outside the community. During public meetings, and in the survey, City residents expressed support for expanding new industrial and employment areas and were excited about the prospect of shifting more jobs to the City. Specific ideas and opportunities for creating new enterprises and jobs in the City that emerged during the planning process include:

Multi-Modal Related Enterprises at the Airport

The City has industrially zoned land located at its airport. Enhanced rail, road and air transportation linkages can support a range of enterprises that could create local jobs, including the following:

- New local product development and manufacturing;
- Attracting high tech businesses that can take advantage of the technical skills and education of former military and North Slope workers;
- Material transport and resource storage/staging;
- Transit-oriented tourism and connectivity to the Museum of Alaska Transportation and Industry. This could include large scale Denali tour train passenger drop-offs, train and bus transfer, and shuttling or walking options to reach nearby private developments, which are proposed to include a large private hotel and convention center complex (west end of Jacobson Lake).

Regional Offices, Branches, and Service Centers

A number of commercial, financial, and government entities have figured out that Wasilla serves as the central node for the Valley, the closest accessible point for all Valley residents and consumers. Just as shopping closer to home has brought significant resources into the local economy (see the demographics discussion) so would bringing business closer to home. This could provide win-wins allowing these entities to provide better services directly in the Borough's population growth center, and to allow commuting employees the option of working in their community.

Gateway to Recreation

The City provides residents a virtual outdoor playground with access to some of Alaska's most sought after year-round recreational spots just a short scenic drive from home including the Matanuska and Knik glaciers, Hatcher Pass, several state game refuges and recreation areas, world-class fishing rivers, and Denali National Park and Preserve. Moreover, Wasilla has a growing tourism sector, and could market itself as the affordable, fun, and logical place for Alaskans and visitors to stay while pursuing their recreational experiences.

Diverse regional recreational destinations are easily accessible to the City, and could be "packaged" in sample itineraries. Travel planning materials could help visitors locate lodging and other desired services to support their itinerary. Lodging in the City will place visitors that much closer to destinations.

This effort is largely a task of marketing and packaging and would need the marketing expertise of the Wasilla Chamber of Commerce, Matanuska-Susitna Convention and Visitors Bureau, and regional guides and outfitters.

The Valley's Meeting and Convention Center

The Curtis D. Menard Memorial Sports Center has gained regional interest as a place to hold large public events, seminars, and small conventions. Income from these activities are a growing segment, and are helping to cover the high costs of operating the recreational aspects.

Additionally, new plans for a rail and road-based convention center, hotel, condos, and restaurant are being explored in the Jacobson Lake area. Although mainly intended to support the region's growing meeting space needs, the facility could also bring out of state travelers by bus or eventually with rail service direct from the Anchorage Airport.

7.2 Desired Future Conditions

The City's economy in the future is more diverse and vibrant. The region's commercial and service sectors provide competitive products keeping regional dollars in the local economy.

The City attracts additional residents and visitors. The population grows, as does the City's tourism sector. The already high quality of life, in addition to a revitalized Downtown, and enhanced community image, make the City a desirable place to live, visit, and play.

The City now has a stable and growing job sector that utilizes its well-qualified workforce. Every year, more and more commuters are shifting to employment in the local economy.

City of Wasilla Resident Survey Opinions Regarding Economic Vitality
√ Residents support City efforts to expand new industrial and employment areas: ***52% residents - Very Supportive*** ***31% residents - Somewhat Supportive*** ***8% residents - Neutral*** ***9% residents - Not Supportive***
√ City residents broadly support expanding Wasilla's development areas (airport, Downtown, Wasilla Heights, etc.): ***36% residents - Very Supportive*** ***38% residents - Somewhat Supportive*** ***16% residents - Neutral*** ***11% residents - Not Supportive***
√ Residents generally agree that Wasilla needs to strengthen its small city identity: ***24% residents - Strongly Agree*** ***31% residents - Agree*** ***30% residents - Neutral*** ***10% residents - Disagree*** ***6% residents - Strongly Disagree***

7.3 Goals, Objectives and Actions - Economic Vitality

Goal 1. Continue to promote and enhance the City's future as the region's major center for commerce, services, visitor hospitality, culture and arts, transportation and industry.

Objective	Strategies
1.1 Adopt policies and programs that will ensure that the City remains the preferred place in the Valley for shopping, services, employment, arts, entertainment, sports, and culture.	1.1.1 Develop a strategic economic plan that considers how to secure Wasilla's future as the leading commercial center given its location and proximity to growing population nodes, particularly Knik/Fairview.
1.2 Develop a plan to creating a more diverse economic base that will attract a wider range of employment opportunities.	1.2.1 Identify ways to ensure that the City continues to support appropriate development. 1.2.2 Continue to offer efficient and affordable permitting to foster improvements to and investments in the area's housing stock and business properties. 1.2.3 Coordinate with non-City utility providers to expand services that will support new commercial, industrial, and manufacturing investment. 1.2.4 Identify key commercial and industrial areas of the City for development; promote the advantages for businesses to build or expand in these locations such as availability of City Services, access to utilities, and the value of being adjacent to other businesses. 1.2.5 Encourage developers and investors to work with the comprehensive planning process to help formulate plans for community and economic development.
1.3 Encourage the development of new anchor developments, facilities, and attractions that generate economic activity.	1.3.1 Support community initiatives to strengthen the City as a regional center of art, culture, and education (e.g. Valley Performing Arts expansion, new Wasilla Library, new Sports Dome). 1.3.2 Promote opportunities for creating a destination hotel, restaurant, timeshare and convention center in areas such the multi-modal transit center and the Museum of Alaska Transportation and Industry and Wasilla Heights. 1.3.3 Promote and support new activities, festivals, and recreational opportunities that encourage visitors and tourists to visit the City (e.g., fishing derbies, new mining history display attr, winter festival, etc.).
1.4 Promote the City as a base for Valley recreation and a "Gateway to Adventure."	1.4.1 Partner with the Matanuska-Susitna CVB and Wasilla Chamber of Commerce and other recreation-oriented interests to promote the City's visitor hospitality services and location as the gateway to recreational opportunities. 1.4.2 Identify opportunities for tourist attractions within the City.

Goal 2. Diversify the economic base and attract new employment generators.

Objective	Strategies
2.1 Continue to expand the City airport and encourage development of adjacent economic generators on City-owned land.	2.1.1 Identify ways to attract new product manufacturing and assembly plants, including focused on producing specialty items using local resources. 2.1.2 Seeks funds to be used for capital improvements that serve as an incentive to attract new employers to the City.

The Curtis D. Menard Memorial Sports Center has gained regional interest as a place to hold large public events, seminars, and small conventions.

Economic Vitality Element Supplementary Documents

This comprehensive plan chapter presents a broad vision, intended for incremental implementation over the next ten or more years. Please consult other documents, including those listed below, for more specific and up to date information, priorities and projects:

City of Wasilla
Airport Master Plan
Wasilla Area Plans
Retail, Office, and Lodging Market Analysis for the Wasilla Area

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Areawide Plans
Economic Development Strategic Plan

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Chapter 8. Intergovernmental Coordination

8.1 Current Conditions and Trends

Multiple-Levels of Government

The City is one of many government entities trying to serve citizens in the region. Moreover, the interrelationship of these layers is complex and changing, particularly around available funding and current priorities (see Figure 9).

As a City with a defined mission, boundaries, and tax base, Wasilla has a limited ability to directly address many issues of importance to the City and region. Therefore, over the life of this Plan, it will be important for the City to work as a team player on regional goals.

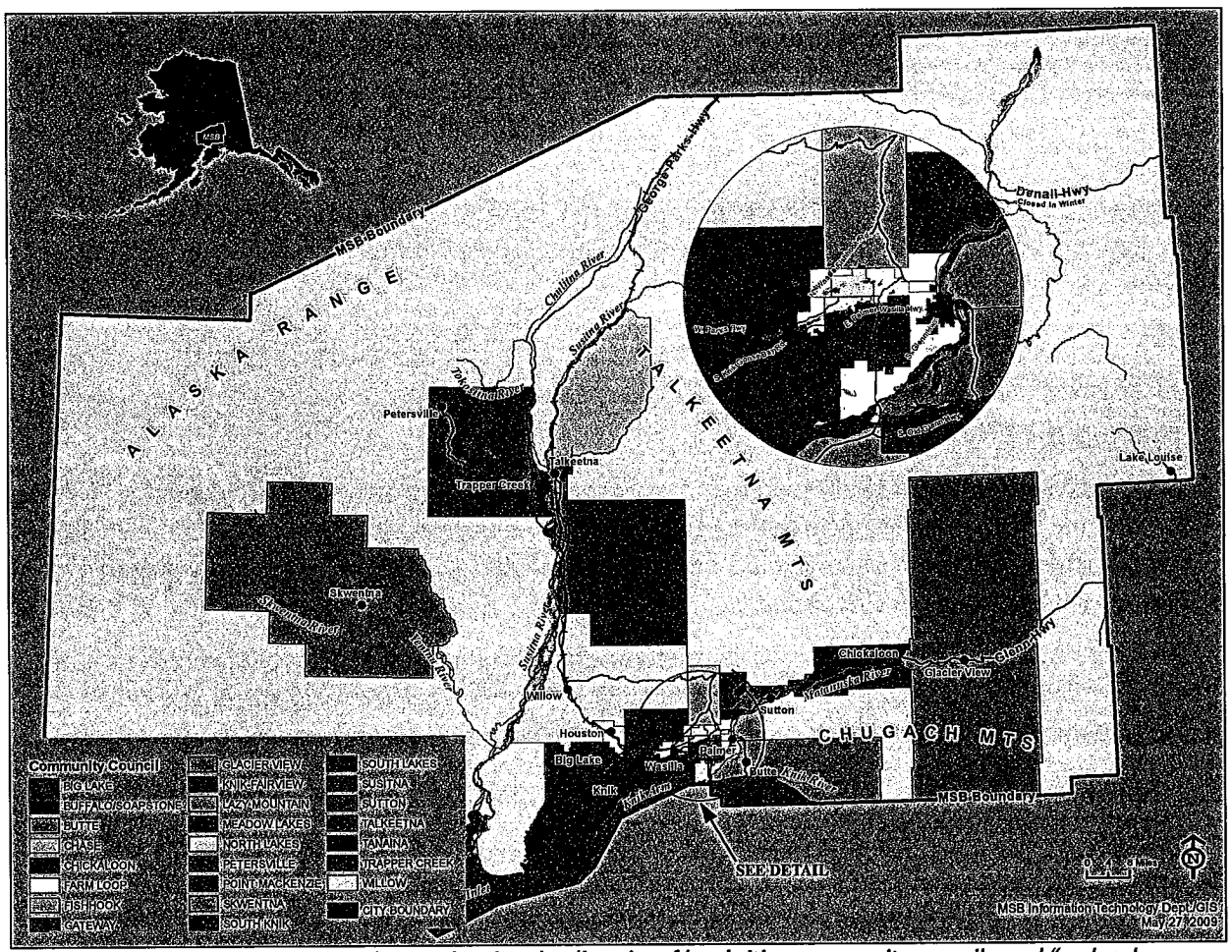
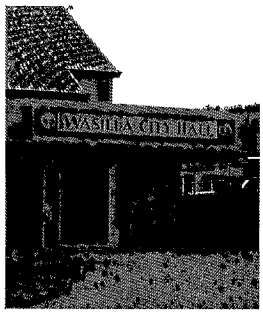


Figure 8. Matansuka-Susitna Borough map showing the diversity of local cities, community councils, and "no local government" areas (see inset, white areas). Coordination to serve regional needs is vital to the City's future.



MSB and the City of Wasilla provide complimentary services under different powers at the regional and local levels, respectively. As the region's population grows, 40,000 residents living outside the City boundaries in Borough community council areas are seeking more and more services from the City because it is centrally located, such as the Wasilla City Library.

The City Library is the third busiest in the state because it is convenient to many of the regions' residents.

Moreover, as the population continues to grow and seek services or impact the City, as is the case with growing vehicle traffic, it is also important that the City seek resources—from the State and the Borough—commensurate with serving these needs.

In the end, all of these multiple levels of government need to remain responsive to public involvement, due process and community needs.

Expanding the City's Boundaries

Concurrent with this planning effort were discussions and a property owners' survey about expanding the City limits. Many of the residents who were consulted about annexing into the City expressed strong opposition; immediate annexation plans will focus efforts on property owners seeking to annex within the City limits.

At the same time, annexation remains a useful tool which the City should keep under consideration. The State of Alaska's Boundary Commission set up annexation processes, recognizing that although choice is important, local governments sometimes need to forcibly annex in response to:

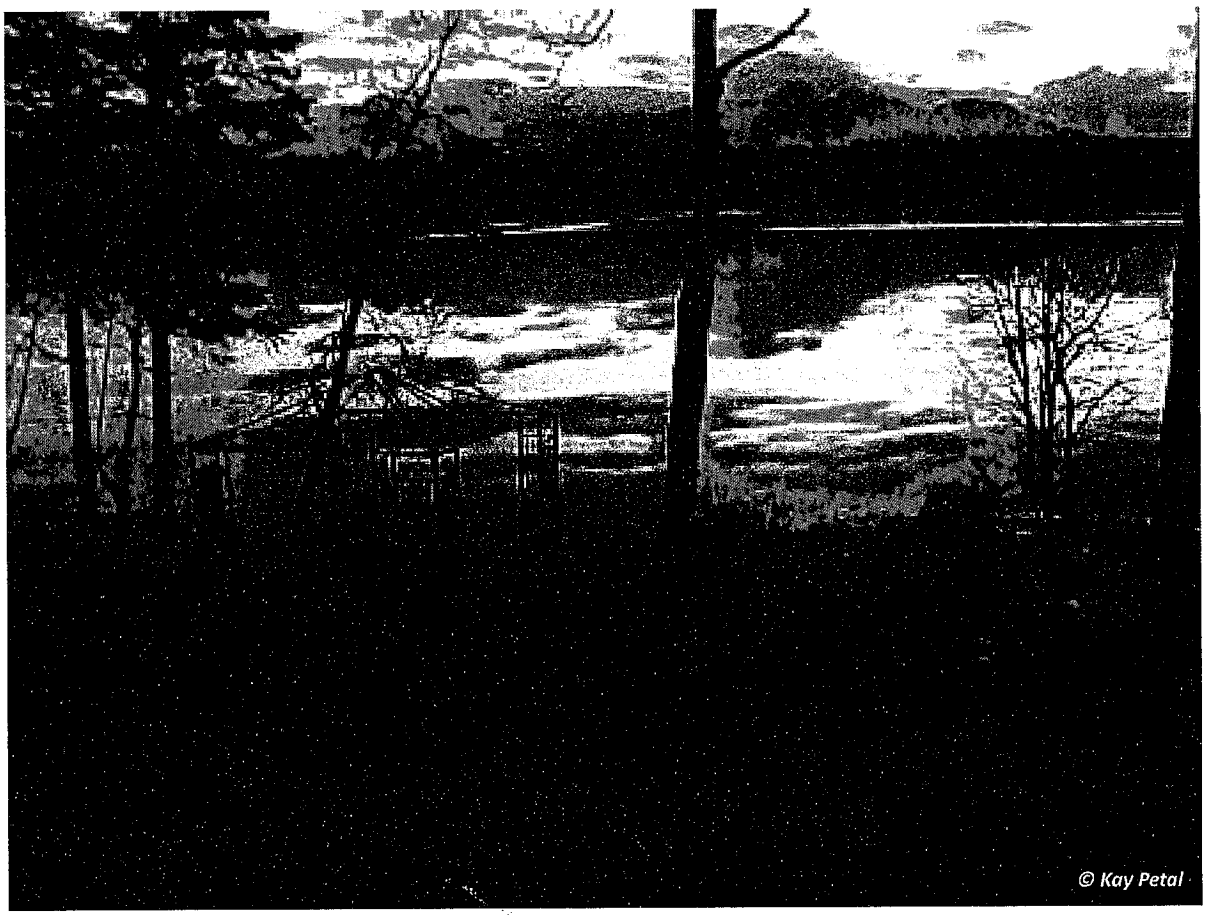
> *"Acute issues beyond City boundaries that will significantly compromise its future services, health, safety, and economy."*

Because of the political nature of annexation decisions, over the life of this Plan it would be valuable for the City to develop a quantitative approach and criteria for determining if, when, and where parcels outside the City limits are creating an issue of acute importance in terms of Wasilla's future services, health, safety and economy. This list and ranking of criteria should be the basis for communicating with landowners around potential annexation issues, and to

determine whether to use Annexation by Election (with the consent of voters in the area) or Annexation by Legislative Review (based on a vote of the State Legislature, without approval of the voters or property owners).

Finally, although currently annexation is not underway, over the life of this Plan at least two areas should be explored on a criteria basis:

- **Health, Safety, Environment and Identity Criteria:** Although they share a name, Wasilla Lake is largely out of City boundaries. To allow cohesive planning and enhanced water stewardship, annexing the lake and adjacent properties may be in the greater public interest.
- **Safety and Economic Criteria:** Properties outside the City proximate to the airport may be impacted by industrial and airspace activities, making it critical to coordinate development. Furthermore the City's new economic activities in the area may generate a need for more commercial land uses that require infrastructure coordination and joint planning.



Government Coordination Needs

Adequately serving both City and regional residents' needs will require coordination and partnering on many governmental levels. Some of the most critical coordination needs identified in this planning effort are:

State of Alaska
ADOT&PF
Governor's Office
Alaska Railroad Corporation

Matanuska-Susitna Borough

Nearby Cities
City of Houston
City of Palmer
Municipality of Anchorage

Local
Community organizations and service providers
Neighborhoods
Citizens
Private landowners and enterprises

8.2 Desired Future Conditions

Into the future, the regions' governmental interests carefully coordinate their efforts to more effectively serve residents' needs.

Citizens play a constructive role in helping their governments respond to the challenges and issues ahead.

Wasilla respects the choice of property owners when it comes to expanding City limits, except where critical issues of health, safety and economy are involved.

8.2 Goals, Objectives, and Actions - Intergovernmental Coordination

Goal 1. Foster and encourage intergovernmental coordination between the City and the cities of Palmer and Houston, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and regional, State, Federal and Native entities.

Objective	Strategies
1.1 Coordinate on land use proposals and planning.	1.1.1 Establish processes to review and provide comment on development proposals in the Borough near the City's boundary.
1.2 Coordinate on new school proposals and planning.	1.2.1 Establish procedures to provide copies of rezoning and conditional use applications and other development applications that are pertinent to the School District staff for their information.
1.3 Encourage cooperation and coordination at many levels on mutually beneficial endeavors.	1.3.1 Consider mechanisms for fostering enhanced cooperation and coordination between the City, the Borough, interested citizens groups and advisory boards, and private organizations, regarding mutually beneficial endeavors.

Goal 2. Continue to promote the awareness and involvement of the residents in the planning processes for the City.

Objective	Strategies
2.1 Continue to advocate public participation in the planning processes for the City.	2.1.1 Continue to utilize an information exchange program, including the maintenance of an email mailing list and posting on the City's web site as a means of communication between the City and all interested parties. 2.1.2 Maintain procedures to provide for the disseminating of proposals and alternatives for public inspection; opportunities for written comments; public hearings; open discussions; communication programs and information services; and the notification of real property owners for the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan, amendments to the Comprehensive Plan, and Comprehensive Plan Evaluation and Appraisal Reports, and other planning implementation efforts. 2.1.3 Continue to encourage public awareness of the Comprehensive Plan and the implementing regulations by providing for public education programs designed to promote a widespread understanding of the Plan's purpose, intent and how citizens can be involved in the planning process and in all aspects of City government. 2.1.4 Seek involvement of local school and college students and staff in planning processes.

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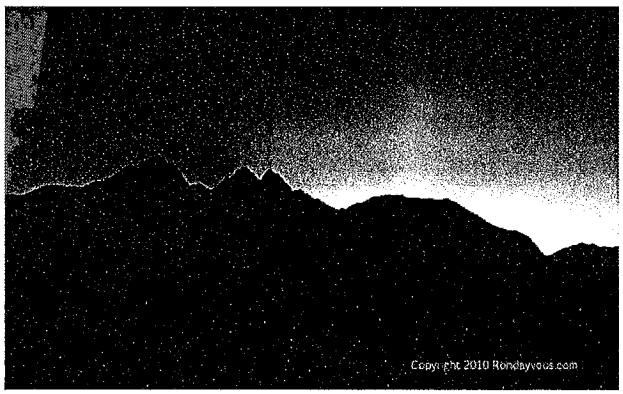
Chapter 9. Implementation



New strategies and actions may need to be considered in addition to those outlined to fully achieve Plan goals.

9.1 Immediate Priorities

This Plan outlines a roadmap for City action on issues that residents' said were important during the course of this planning effort. Fully implementing this plan and its vision for the future of Wasilla will involve a significant work effort for City staff and officials, and also for its citizens in terms of additional public process and deeper-level problem solving around critical issues, and discerning best options (such as is the case with the Parks Highway Alternative). Moreover, a number of the goals, objectives and actions provided in this plan will take years to fully address, and will require careful and strategic cooperative effort to move forward.

Thus, the City will need to be flexible and realistic about implementation, and at any given time choose only to focus on priority elements that are within the City's capacity in terms of leadership and the resources to move forward productively. That said, in order to build on the momentum and community good will that has been built over the course of this effort, there are immediate sets of priorities that the City will benefit from focusing on immediately after the adoption of this Plan:

Transportation Objective 1.1 - The actions under this goal focus on addressing regional transportation network deficiencies, which are some of the more challenging to tackle, but should be top City priorities at the administrative and staff level. Roadway capacity limitations are a major public input concern, and this issue could become dire with continued population growth and state funding formula limitations that disfavor critically needed projects.

Land Use Actions 2.1.1, and 3.2.2 - Title 16 will require minor revisions following adoption. Given projected growth, it would be good to go ahead and move forward draft code revisions quickly after adopting this plan, and seek input from developers and property owners' to create a better tool for consistent use as the City grows.

Land Use Actions 3.1.1 and 4.2.1 - Currently neighborhood planning under code 16.08.050 is not functional because of the lack of procedures and City staff support. Procedures should be developed and implemented, and City staff should be encouraged to support them as soon as possible to enable neighborhoods to participate more fully in developing strategies that better serve their needs and retain important qualities even as the population continues to expand.

Downtown Goals 1 and 2 – Continue work on Downtown related efforts and build on the momentum that this planning process and the charrette generated.

Future Land Use Map – City staff should regularly maintain and update Future Land Use Map as development decisions shape land use patterns on the ground, particularly in undeveloped sectors, with changes adopted by the City Council.

9.2 Measuring Outcomes

The heart of any comprehensive plan is its recommended goals, objectives, policies, and actions:

Goals are a broad statement of a future condition, desirable for the community.

Objectives are specific statements of desired results that help fulfill the goal.

Actions are the activities, programs, and projects that should be undertaken, continued, or modified to help achieve the established objectives and contribute to the fulfillment of the goals.

Once adopted, the goals, objectives, and actions recommended in City's new Plan will serve as a strong foundation for land use planning in terms of:

- Providing a legal foundation for the City's Land Development Code (Title 16);
- Justifying investment in capital improvement projects, including municipal systems development (water and sewer), and trails, parks, etc.;
- Helping to involve residents in important planning endeavors (e.g. creation of a Downtown overlay district); and
- Securing grant funding and partnerships.

Implementing the goals, objectives, and actions proposed in this Plan will help the City achieve those things and improve the quality of life in the City. In order to keep the Plan current and useful, it will need to be reviewed every few years to update the information, acknowledge outcomes and progress, and make any necessary revisions.

Currently, Section 2.60.010(B) of the Wasilla Municipal Code outlines specific Planning Commission responsibilities for review of the City's comprehensive plan, as follows:

- Undertake a general review of the comprehensive plan at least once every two years and make recommendations to the council for amendments.
- Annually, review one or more elements of the comprehensive plan, and make recommendations for amendment to the council.

Additionally, in order to ensure that the local planning process is not static, this Plan should be audited from time to time and the following performance standards should be considered:

- Have the goals, objectives, and actions been implemented as outlined in the Plan?
- Are there changing conditions in the City?
- Does the Plan provide sufficient guidance to the local government regarding land development regulations?
- Are there new state and regional policies or planning studies that can provide guidance to the City regarding land development decisions?
- As the City gains more experience and understanding of the Plan, are there elements that need clarification, or no longer reflect community goals?

Active dialogue on the efficacy of the Plan will enable more effective and focused problem solving and action around City goals and needs, and support implementation of this Plan.