

Appendix A: Community Survey Results

Related Section:
Overview

1. What do you value most about downtown Palmer?

When asked what they value most about downtown Palmer, almost half of the respondents indicated that they value Palmer's appearance, atmosphere, and "small town feel". Among the specific aspects that contribute to that small town feel, respondents specifically identified and value the walkability, the history and historical buildings, the cleanliness, and friendliness of downtown. Respondents also indicated that they value the separation of business and residential areas. The peacefulness and mountain views from downtown are also mentioned. Additionally, the variety of businesses, services, parks and stores available in downtown were indicated. Residents also value the various events that occur downtown, such as Colony days, parades, the Christmas tree, and Friday Fling.

2. What problems or deficiencies do you see in downtown Palmer?

Traffic, parking, (unlicensed/illegally parked on lawns and streets) and visibility and animal control issues were identified most often as problems and deficiencies in and around Palmer. The intersections and access routes to goods and services, specifically Fred Meyer and McDonalds but included other goods and services locations, were identified as unsafe. Pedestrian and bicycle paths were found problematic or lacking. Other issues or deficiencies included the shabby condition of Main Street, Main Street's one-sidedness, the

lack of zoning and the lack of zoning enforcement. There is an obvious contradiction in these latter two statements and suggests that residents are unclear about what zoning exists downtown. Respondents also identified the lack of entertainment, clubs, and activities for families and youth as a problem, along with the lack of clothing, shoe and department stores in general.

3. Would you like to see any improvements in access, parking, or walkability in downtown Palmer?

Many respondents indicated that more sidewalks would improve downtown Palmer and several respondents indicated that there was a preference for heated and plowed sidewalks (sidewalk snow removal being a particularly hot topic). Reduced or rerouted traffic, traffic controls, access routes, parking, and visibility issues were clearly identified as improvements sought by the greater community. Respondents also indicated that trails, pedestrian amenities (particularly lights), handicap accessibility and bike paths were in need of improvements. The idea that several key streets in Palmer could be designated foot traffic only was supported by a number of respondents.

4. What are the positive aspects of growth in and around Palmer?

More than half of the respondents wrote that growth "brings in new businesses, increases the tax base, and makes Palmer self-

sufficient". Many respondents wanted a comprehensive plan that addresses contained growth within the city limits, improved utilities and facilities and zoning issues. An increase in local jobs was also identified as a positive aspect of growth.

5. What are the negative aspects of growth in and around Palmer?

Traffic and congestion was the most dominant answer (1/3 of the respondents agree). Second in line was a combination of concerns addressing the "loss of the small town feel" (23) including large businesses forcing out small businesses, such as Fred Meyer and other big box buildings (11). Many others criticized the planning in general, noting a lack of a long-term vision (19) and poor planning and zoning (26). Many talked about a reduced quality of life (5) from noise (specifically traffic and barking dogs) (11), increase in people (6), higher taxes (4) increase in crime (11), loss of open space/tree loss (19), store diversity (7), and an aesthetic loss (poorly maintained property) (8). While some targeted specific developments such as along the Palmer Wasilla Highway, (7) others were unhappy about sprawl in general (10). Lastly, while some nominal comments made sense: reduction in accessibility to stores, haphazard development, poor signage, and losing the hospital from downtown, others could use more explanation (too many schools, "special interests"). Perhaps on the bright side of things, 2 people seem to think there are no negative aspects to growth.

6. What, for you, are the most important or unique qualities and aspects of Palmer's community character?

We have split these into larger headers under which we include some details:

Social Atmosphere:

- "atmosphere"
- Attitude
- Friendly feel and friendly people
- Neighbors
- Community character
- Family
- Pride
- Slow pace
- Community events (like the Friday fling and the parade)
- Churches and religious communities
- History (and colonists)

Land uses in the City and surrounding area:

- Rural farms
- Water tower
- Historic buildings
- Small businesses
- Unique shops
- Restaurants
- Downtown core
- Schools
- Senior center
- Variety
- Hospital
- Street layout and conveniences



Landscaping
 Accessibility and layout
 Mix of old and new

Other small town characteristics:

Safety
 Quiet
 Lack of congestion in stores and restaurants
 Police department

Natural Aspects:

Open space
 Clean / clean water
 Mountains
 Geological features
 Nature
 Views
 Parks

7. If you are a resident of Palmer, what overall grade do you give the city on basic services such as road maintenance, police, fire services, and utilities?

(Participants graded on an A to F basis). Overall the city got a "B" with 24 votes (from 63 surveys), 15 said A, and 12 said C.

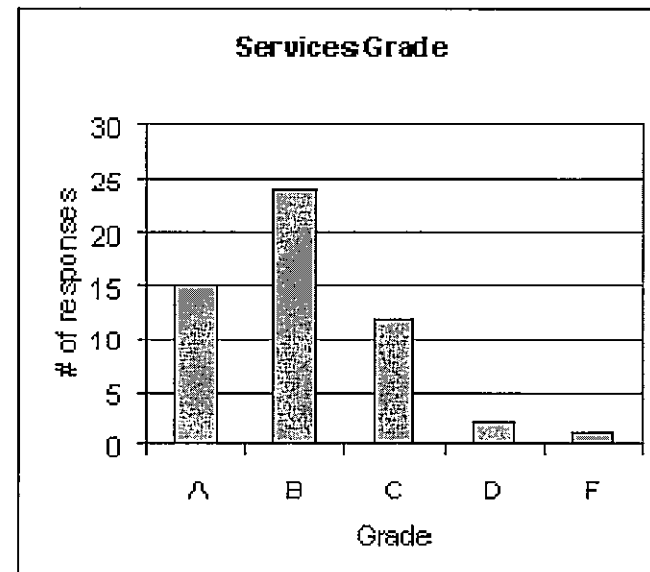
How important are these things to you?

7a. Retention of open space and improvements of recreation areas in and surrounding Palmer?

More than half (66) emphasized the need to retain open space. Slightly less (50) believe it is important to improve recreation areas including parks, trails, access to lakes and tourist attractions. On the other hand many believe the city should concentrate on planning (14), and don't want more recreation development (10) with the idea that we should put education first (3).

7b. Sustain active farming in the Palmer area?

A high number (36) answered, "yes." Another 45 said it's very important and that "this is what Palmer is all about" (14). The rest seemed more discouraged than anything, writing statements like "difficult to sustain", "too late", "what can be done beyond economic incentives already in place?" and "stay away from private land". Most of the rest tried to answer the last question with ideas such as, "save some and develop others", "have agricultural areas remain



zoned with no changes in zoning," "discourage housing development on farmland," and "need incentives." The rest think there are other "higher" priorities. Some comments included, "if they can make it work great, but I don't think we should subsidize it", "not a priority," and "we need growth and year round jobs."

7c. Commercial development in and around Palmer, particularly along the Glenn and Palmer-Wasilla Highways?

All of the comments were negative, although many seemed to be suggesting ways to solve the situation. Most of the responses were concerned with the planning and control of new development, (control growth, proceed carefully, develop responsibly, planning and zoning for commercial needed, stricter guidelines, limit housing and commercial development, and commercial development raises property taxes forcing homeowners out). Many of the questions dealt with the traffic issue. Too much traffic (14), service roads needed (8), turn lanes needed (6), and the biggest intersections have too many entrances (1). Others dealt with the siting of these developments (keep businesses along these main thoroughfares and out of neighborhoods (32) and keep development in industrial park (3). A few people made suggestions about design and standard requirements including better lighting and landscaping, with the idea that developers should pay for water and sewer, and clear cutting must be stopped. Clustering and limiting developments, keep out strip malls and big box (28), was identified as a definite priority. Nine respondents seemed to think commercial development in and around Palmer is inevitable.

Other Comments

Some residents had problems with issues that are beyond the scope

of the planning and design process including a distaste for "the wind" and "gambling." Other issues relate directly to us.

"Why are we looking to an out of state college instead of Mat-Su for help in development?"

Some respondents expressed some of the conflicting views in Palmer.

*"Let's take back our highways/views/nature and landscapes"
"More 4 lanes to ease traffic".*

*"Police overzealous"
"More police and patrols".*

*"Keep taxes under control"
"Pave more gravel roads"*

*"Garbage should pick up grass and building materials"
"Encourage recycling"*

*"Shouldn't have to pay for utilities when gone for the winter"
"Snow plowing concentrated in downtown not in resident areas"*

"a few green groups have way too much influence on government decisions"

"bike/pedestrian paths needed"

*"need more growth in Palmer"
"eliminate commercial development on residential streets"*



Given these contradictions, it is not surprising that some respondents felt that the "Planning and Zoning Commission [is] not listening to residents."

The rest of the comments reflect the desire to grow in a "good way".

On housing:

"recreate the community"

"Provide incentives for people to maintain older Palmer homes.

Don't allow them to be torn down for commercial properties"

"need more apartments and condos in town"

"limit size of apartment complexes"

"subdivision and housing too close together"

"affordable, private pay-assisted living facility"

On roads and parking (probably the most repeated topic):

"tight regulations regarding parking"

"cars, campers, trucks parking illegally"

"visibility issues makes it dangerous on city streets"

"parking"

"speed"

"install speed bumps"

"turning lanes on Parks Highway"

"traffic and flow patterns"

"noise from cars, motorcycles (and dogs)"

"need sidewalks in subdivisions"

"enforce speed limits"

Other comments:

"keep property clean"
"encourage small businesses not large chains"
"loss of farmland"
"curfew needed for minors"
"public transportation needed"
"concerned about the potential harm from coal/methane development"