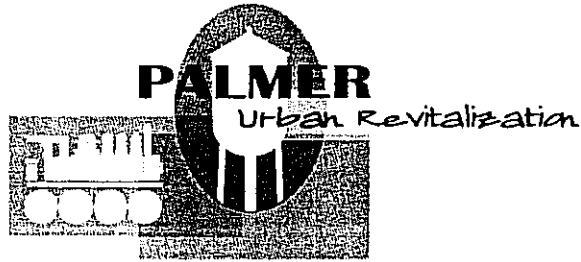


# Final Revitalization Plan

Planning Services for the City of Palmer





## Final Revitalization Plan

Prepared for: the City of Palmer, the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities,  
and the Federal Highway Administration

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December 2002

The preparation of this document was aided by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities through a Federal grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration.

# **Final Revitalization Plan**

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# Palmer Revitalization Project Development Plan

## 1.0 Introduction

This report provides a Development Plan with specific, implementable community design and development recommendations for the enhancement of Palmer's historic railroad corridor. The Development Plan identifies the vision and values to be achieved in Palmer over the next five years or more. The plan is based on a thorough public involvement process led by a Citizen's Advisory Group (CAG) and includes an action-oriented implementation strategy, which recommends both public and private sector initiatives. The plan must be viewed as a flexible document that can evolve over time in response to changing conditions and funding opportunities.

In times of rapid growth in the Palmer area, the vision for a Palmer "Rail-with-Trail" corridor set forth in this report is timely, realistic, and achievable. Palmer is ideally suited for the development portrayed in this plan that creates strong physical and visual linkages to the historic Palmer Railroad Depot at its heart, to core area businesses, surrounding neighborhoods, and community facilities including the Palmer Library and the Alaska State Fair. The rail-trail open space corridor is the backbone of the plan and provides an opportunity for the City to establish a policy of community-focused public access through the heart of Palmer.

The public improvements recommended in this plan will contribute significantly to the enhancements of downtown Palmer as a place to live and do business by helping to establish a fresh image and market identity for the area. These improvements will serve as a powerful catalyst to encourage private investment in downtown Palmer.

### 1.1 Background

The Palmer Rail-with-Trail project has been an important concept to the residents for more than a decade. The Palmer Comprehensive Plan identified the corridor for public use and development as did as the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Trails Plan and the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan. The Parks, Arts, Recreation, Culture and Sports (PARCS) group commissioned two studies (1997 & 1998) in cooperation with Andrews University Division of Architecture that identified development opportunities along the railroad corridor. The Chamber of Commerce, the City Council, local businesses and residents overwhelmingly support the project.

In April of 2002, the City of Palmer began the formal planning process by selecting the consulting team of Lounsbury and Associates (Lounsbury) with Land Design North (LDN) as lead planners for the project. As part of this process a Citizens Advisory Group was formed by the City of Palmer to guide the consulting team through the planning process. The CAG is composed of representatives from the City of Palmer, the Chamber of Commerce, and various Palmer residents and business owners.

## 1.2 Study Process

Over the past six months, the CAG and the consultant team of Lounsbury and LDN have conducted an intensive effort to prepare a Development Plan for the Palmer Rail with Trail Corridor. Throughout the planning process, particular emphasis has been placed on the need to build a consensus-based plan—a plan that can win the support of a broad range of community interests.

The CAG met at key intervals in the planning process to set objectives, discuss alternatives and share ideas. The consultant team conducted interviews with city officials, business people, property owners, the Alaska Railroad and others interested in the future of Palmer. Additional input from area businesses and residents was obtained through a series of open houses and workshops to identify opportunities, constraints and key development issues related to the project.

A thorough physical assessment of the study area was conducted, along with a review of previous plans and existing information. A complete Scoping Summary Report was developed in July, 2002, which summarized the public process and site assessment for the area. The scoping assessment process served as the basis for a series of route alternatives that were presented to the CAG for selection of a final preferred route and provide for the development alternatives outlined in this report.

The Palmer Urban Revitalization Project is intended to contribute to the quality of life in Palmer by improving recreation and economic opportunities along the Alaska Railroad right-of-way from the Alaska State Fairgrounds to the Matanuska River. The development plan is intended to identify key projects and funding needs for the Citizen's Advisory Group and Palmer City Council for the next five years. Included as part of the plan are design guidelines, plan drawings and a detailed phasing plan that begin to illustrate each of the proposed actions outlined below as well as an implementation strategy with sufficient detail for carrying out the work.

Based on public input and agreement, the Development Plan presented in Section 3.0 provides a framework for decisions to be made over the next five years. The plan focuses on the railroad right-of-way corridor through Palmer and seeks to enhance mountain views, and connections to businesses, local government, parks, schools and surrounding neighborhoods. The plan illustrates proposed public improvements (trails, sidewalks, streetscape, lighting, and public gathering areas and amenities) as well as private investment opportunities. The Strategic Action Plan presented in Section 5.0 outlines key initial projects that have been identified as part of the first phase of development.

## **2.0 Assessment and Concept Development**

### **2.1 The Study Area**

The Palmer Rail with Trail Corridor is contained within the boundaries of the Alaska Railroad ROW, which runs north through Palmer. The 2.5 mile corridor starts at the Alaska State Fairgrounds near Springer Loop Road and terminates to the north at the Matanuska River overlook. The railroad ROW is 200' wide with significant roadway encroachments permitted along much of its length.

This project will develop approximately 60 acres of currently under-utilized Alaska Railroad land from the Fairgrounds to the Matanuska River. The primary element of the project is a pedestrian "rail-with-trail", or pedestrian/bike path adjacent to existing railroad tracks. The trail and other improvements will enhance the ribbon of open space through Palmer while at the same time preserving the opportunity for future railroad service, which may include day tour passenger service as well as the potential for freight services to northern communities.

### **2.2 Regional Context**

The City of Palmer lies at the center of the historic Matanuska-Susitna Borough farming district. Formerly, the rail corridor through Palmer provided a link to coal deposits at Sutton to the north and transported the pioneers who made up the Matanuska Farming Experiment in the 1930's. The Alaska State Fairgrounds form the southern terminus of the corridor and the Matanuska River forms the northern boundary. The heart of the project is the historic Palmer railroad depot and the surrounding downtown core area shops.

Residential areas surround the study area to the north and through much of the core area. The southern portion is primarily industrial in character. The Palmer vicinity, as well as the surrounding "Core Area" of the Borough to Wasilla, is a rapidly-growing residential community with much of the employment centers located in Anchorage. The primary access to Palmer is via the Glenn Highway linking Palmer to Anchorage, 45 miles to the south and to the north access to the Trans-Alaskan Highway to Canada. The Palmer-Wasilla Highway links Palmer to Wasilla to the west as well as interior Alaska communities to the north.

### **2.3 Existing Development Patterns and Zones**

The Palmer Rail-with-Trail vicinity contains a variety of existing uses: commercial, retail, industrial, institutional and residential. It also has significant open areas of undeveloped land.

The historic railroad depot is the centerpiece of the study area located at the heart of the downtown core business district. To the west is Alaska Way, an established commercial-retail corridor with a mixture of older buildings, primarily two-story and single-story with

no particular architectural style. Gaps between buildings exist along the avenue. The eastern side through the downtown core is open along the railroad corridor with panoramic views to the mountains. The businesses and shops on Alaska Way provide a mixture of long-established uses and a variety of services. To the east lie the public library, community park, police station, visitor center, Borough offices, senior center and senior housing as well as the vacant, historic Mat-Maid properties.

The southern end of the study area is occupied by the Alaska State Fairgrounds and bounded by industrial lands to the east and the Glenn Highway to the west. Where Colony Way intersects the Glenn Highway, the character of the western edge becomes commercial in nature and is backed by residential development. Senior housing and community services are located along the eastern boundary of the project. To the north of the downtown core, Alaska Way and Valley Way border the project and the character is predominantly a mix of residential and commercial to Arctic Avenue, and then residential from Arctic Avenue to the northern terminus at the Matanuska River.

Development zones have been identified along the corridor based on observation of the surrounding land uses and the potential for the area to support specific types of activities related to the use of the trail corridor such as active recreation and commercial opportunities. These include the five following zones (See Development Zone Map 1):

- **Industrial Zone – Inner Springer Loop Road to Industrial Way.** The primary design characteristics along this section should focus on the safe movement of pedestrians between the rail and road corridor and at major road crossings. Secondary concerns include improving the storm drainage systems and maintaining a vegetative buffer along the eastern boundary to screen the industrial areas from the trail. Landscape treatment for this zone should primarily consist of grasses and low shrubs that do not obstruct the critical sight lines. Entry signage and wayfinding signs should be located at the beginning of the project.
- **Gateway Zone – Glenn Highway Intersection with Colony Way to Bailey Street.** The primary characteristics of this zone are a mix of strip commercial shopping along the western boundary with a continuation of the industrial zone to the east that is screened by existing trees. The primary design characteristic along this section should be to welcome visitors to Palmer and provide a “gateway” into the community. Trail safety should insure compatibility with active rail corridor and include barrier fencing and screening.
- **Core Area Zone – Bailey Street to Dahlia Avenue.** The primary design characteristic along this section should focus on pedestrian movement and connections between shops, offices, governmental services, senior housing and visitor facilities. As the heart of the project, particular attention will need to be spent on the depot and surrounding area. The separation of the active trail users (bikers, skateboarders, in-line skaters, etc.) from the walkers, strollers and shoppers could be accomplished by developing two separate trails. Safety concerns should focus on development of safe pedestrian crossings between the east and west side of the tracks.

ALASKA STATE FAIR  
ZONE

INDUSTRIAL-HIGHWAY  
ZONE

GATEWAY  
ZONE

TRANSITION  
ZONE

ALASKA STATE  
FAIR GROUNDS

PROJECT  
START

Water Sprinkler Loop



DEVELOPMENT ZONE LEGEND

- INDUSTRIAL-HIGHWAY ZONE - DEVELOPED OR TO BE DEVELOPED WITH INDUSTRIAL AND INDUSTRIAL USES
- GATEWAY ZONE - TRANSITIONAL ENTRY TO COMMUNITY WITH COMMERCIAL AND RESIDENTIAL USES
- FAIR AREA ZONE - FAIR GROUND USES AND DEVELOPMENT AREA
- RESIDENTIAL ZONE - SINGLE FAMILY WITH SOME MIXED FAMILY RESIDENTIAL AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS
- KEY POINTS OF INTEREST

Water Sprinkler Loop

INDUSTRIAL WAY

Airport Road

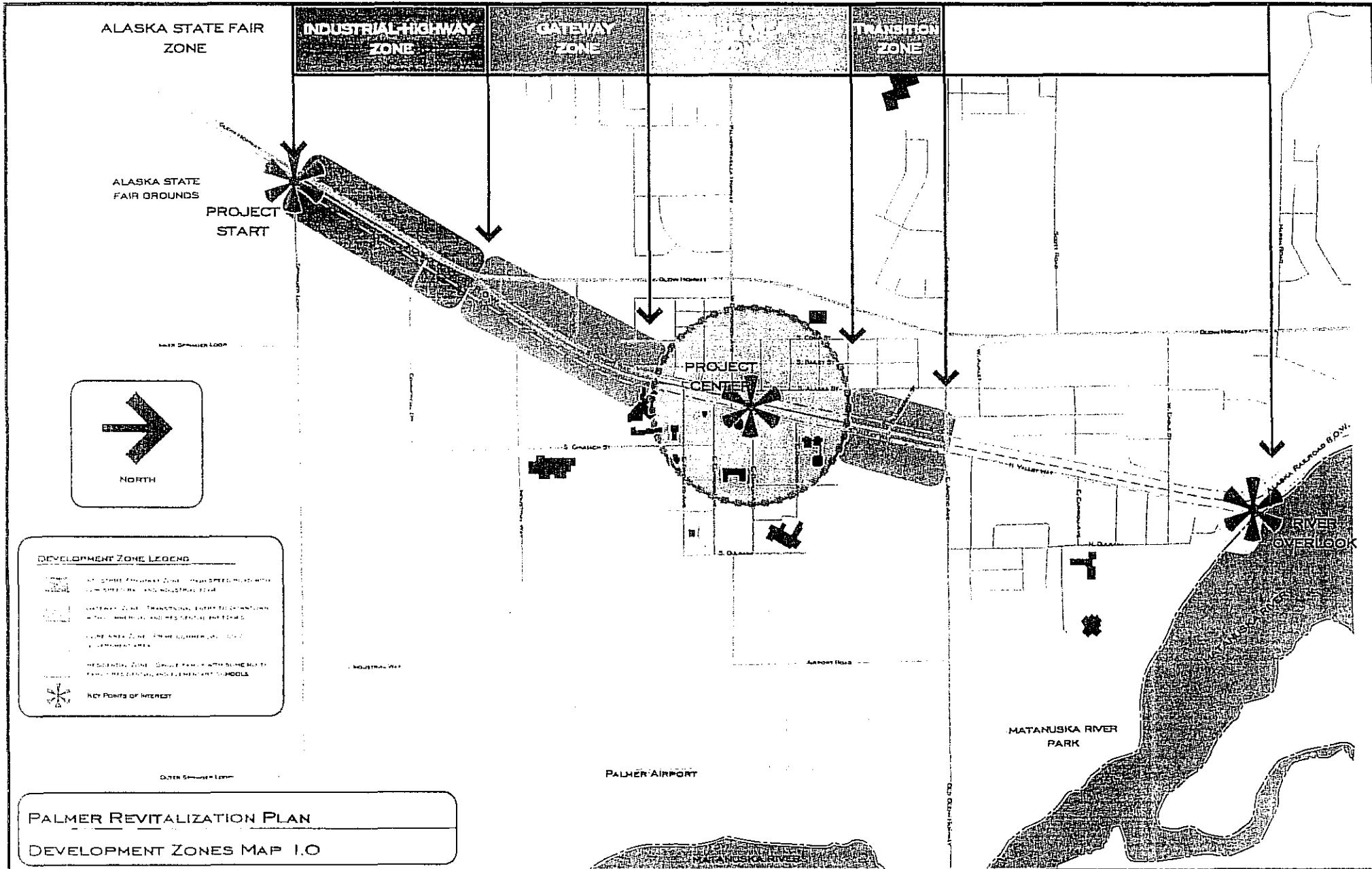
PALMER REVITALIZATION PLAN  
DEVELOPMENT ZONES MAP 1.0

PALMER AIRPORT

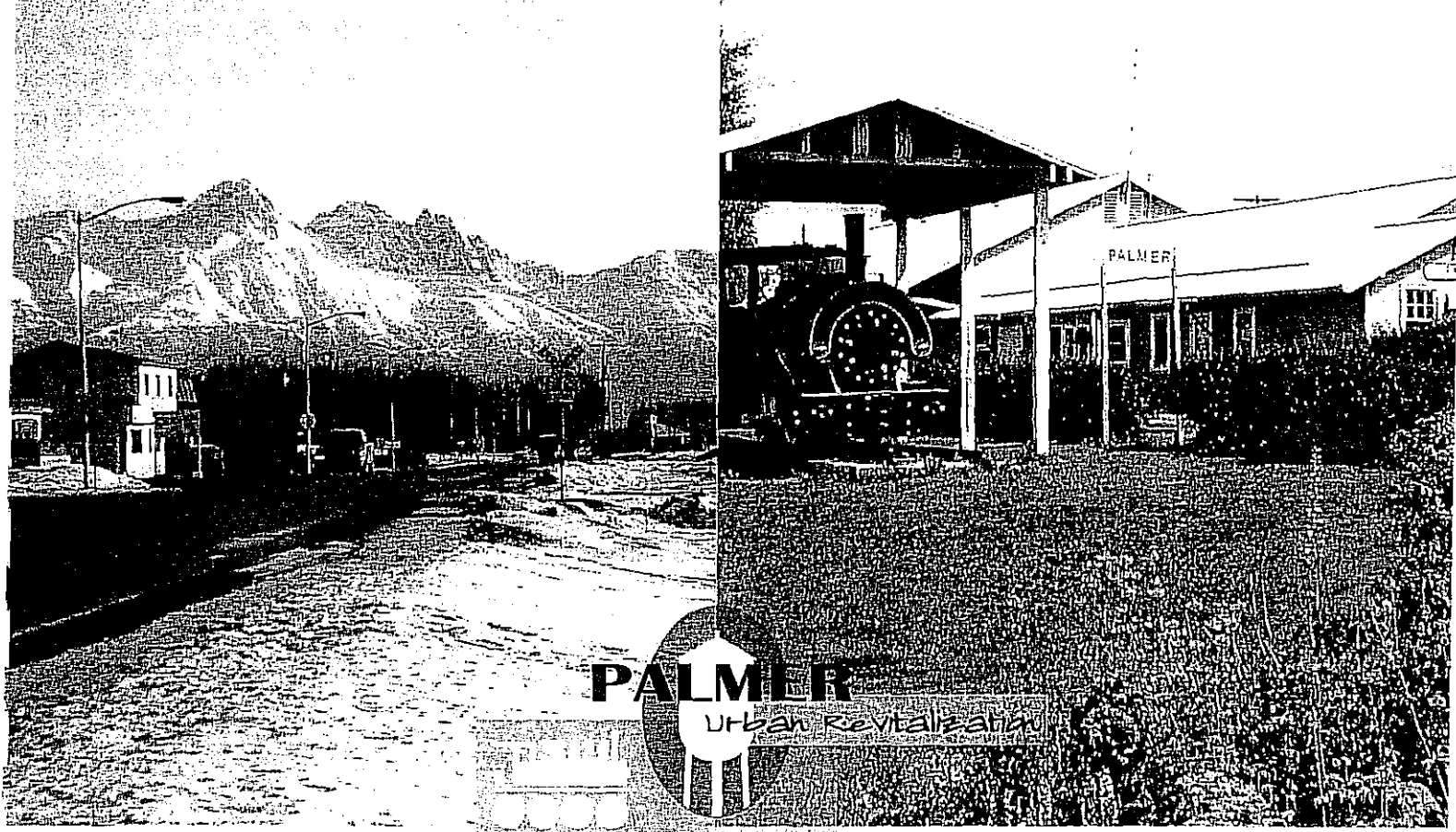
MATANUSKA RIVER

MATANUSKA RIVER  
PARK

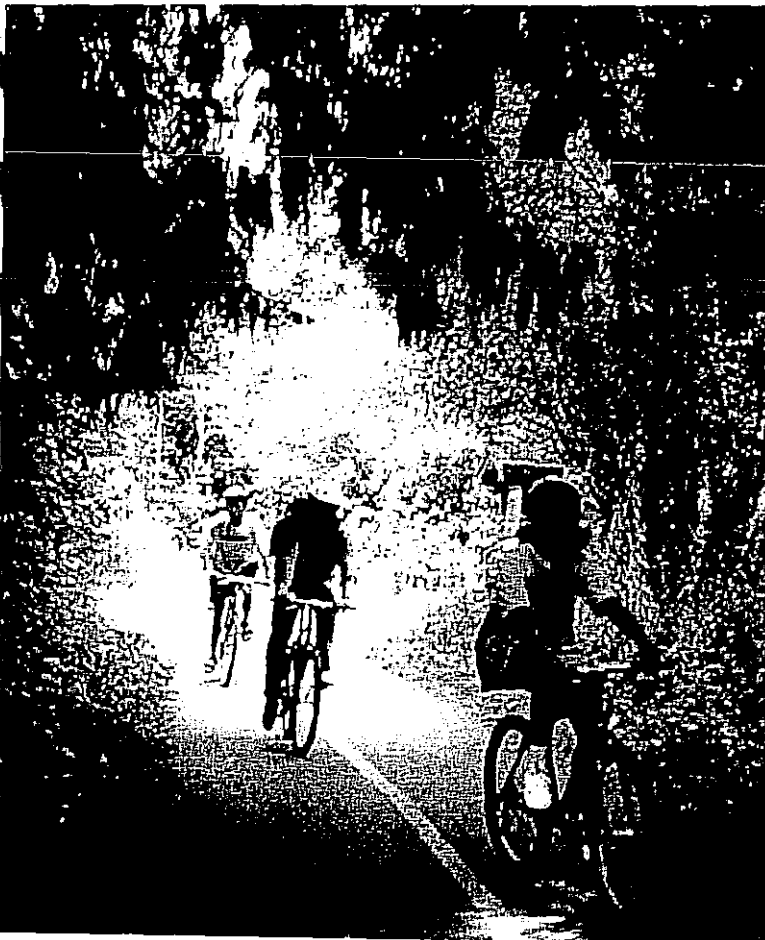
RIVER  
OVERLOOK







## Appendix A: Development Plans



The active railroad track may need to be separated with barrier fencing similar to urban transit rail depots if rail activity increases.

- **Transition Zone – Dahlia Avenue to East Arctic Avenue.** The primary design characteristic along this section should provide a focus on active recreational facilities and special events. This section is bounded to a great extent by commercial and governmental activities and has the largest open space along the corridor. Outdoor concerts, open fields for special events such as Colony Days, skateboard parks, exercise par-course, basketball and tennis are some of the opportunities that could be located safely within this area. There are a few residential areas to the west and east that will need to have privacy screening, low fencing and other considerations to reduce trail incursions onto their property.
- **Residential Zone – East Arctic Avenue to the Matanuska River.** The primary design characteristic along this section should focus on family recreational enjoyment along the length of the trail. The development of destination amenities along this section should be minimal with the focus on the trail overlook and terminus at the Matanuska River. The privacy of residential areas should be protected with landscape plantings, fencing, a road crossing at Caribou Avenue, and by limiting the development of areas to gather for active play. Small seating areas and low scale lighting should be the focus along this section. Safety concerns will focus on the major road crossing at Arctic Avenue and with secondary crossings at Eagle and Caribou Avenues.

## 2.4 Objectives

Based on public input and an analysis of existing conditions, the CAG formulated broad community objectives to guide the planning process. These are summarized below:

- Maximize the railroad corridor as a resource for public enjoyment and as a unifying element with strong linkages to encourage pedestrian circulation.
- The heart of the project is the historic Alaska Railroad Depot and should be the “crown jewel” of Palmer.
- Preserve and enhance the railroad operations within Palmer.
- Use historic themes of the Colony period and Alaska Railroad as design elements to promote a distinct image for Palmer.
- The trail should be designed first and foremost for the residents of Palmer.
- Involve the community in the process to increase a sense of ownership and community pride.
- Provide facilities that are safe, inviting and easily maintained.

- Design multi-use spaces where possible to encourage a mix of activities and events.
- Provide amenities that include a variety of experiences and opportunities for all.
- Enhance the economic opportunities and promote downtown businesses by creating a positive climate for existing businesses and encourage new employment-generating uses.
- Provide convenient access and parking within the trail corridor.
- Respect the surrounding residential neighborhood character. Accommodate a complementary mixture of uses where appropriate.

## 2.5 Alternative Trail Route Options

From the issues and opportunities explored in the CAG work sessions and the public open houses, a series of alternative route options were prepared and discussed. These alternatives displayed varying locations for the trail in relationship to the Alaska Railroad right-of-way and main track centerline and will vary depending on which development zone they are located within (see Map 8 in the July 2002 project Scoping Report for more detail). The alternative routing options that have been developed for the corridor include the following:

1. West route orientation maintaining the trail along the west side of the railroad main line where possible,
2. East route orientation maintaining the trail along the east side of the railroad main line where possible.
3. Meandering trail between both sides of the centerline of the railroad main line where possible.

## 2.6 Preferred Trail Route Option

Based on a work session with city staff, the CAG and meetings with representatives of the Alaska Railroad, a preferred trial route was identified. This was accomplished by combining features of several of the alternatives so that the trail corridor switches back and forth from the east to the west side through specific zones. This preferred routing concept provided the basis for the development plan but will require additional modifications to secure final approval from the Alaska Railroad. The preferred trail routing as identified by the City of Palmer and the CAG includes the following locations through each zone:

- **Industrial Zone (Springer Loop to Industrial Way)** – The CAG agrees that the east side of the track will provide the safest trail location. The trail will be set in the outer 30 feet of the right-of-way at a minimum of 50 feet from the track centerline and will meander slightly between 50 and 70 feet to preserve a natural tree barrier along the

eastern industrial boundary. This will be treated as an active rail line (at present there are one or two trains per year and anticipated growth for potential passenger services to Palmer) so appropriate barriers per ARRC's standard trail design will be required. The existing drainage patterns will be maintained.

- **Gateway Zone (Industrial Way extension to Bailey Street)** – The City prefers the west side of the track trail option with an at-grade crossing at Industrial Way, then traveling north along Colony Way until it joins an existing path. The Railroad has indicated that it would prefer continuing the trail along the east side to E. Fireweed intersection. The concern is that businesses and existing trail use along Colony Way will continue and that individuals will cross the tracks at various uncontrolled locations to access the trail, school and playgrounds located on opposite sides of the track. It is our recommendation that both options be further studied and that a safe rail/trail crossing is designed at the Industrial Way location.
- **Core Area Zone (Bailey Street to Dogwood Avenue)** – This is a heavy pedestrian area. Local businesses along the western edge are served by an existing sidewalk in the right-of-way. There are no adequate walks along the east edge to serve the library, visitor center and Pioneer Home. It is our recommendation that trails/walkways be provided along both sides of the track. This will include the existing pedestrian sidewalk along the west through town and a new trail placed along the east side using the existing spur track location. Each walkway will be a minimum of 20 feet from the track centerline and appropriate safety barriers for urban rail transit stations will be developed.
- **Transition Zone (Dogwood Avenue to Arctic Avenue)** – The community desires that the trail be located along the east side of the track centerline to Arctic meandering between the old rail bed and the road. This is considered a non-active rail segment at this time based on conversations with the railroad. The future potential for rail development north would require significant improvements to the existing rail bed at some point in the distant future. Any trail disruption as part of the potential expansion would require the City of Palmer to relocate the trail outside the active rail zone and the City recognizes that this can be accomplished at the time of expansion. Since this area is a non-active rail corridor, no barrier fencing will be provided at this time.
- **Residential Zone (Arctic Avenue to the Matanuska River)** – The railroad expressed concern over Palmer's proposed road project to improve North Valley Way. Proposed improvements include a paved surface with sidewalks on each side of the road. We suggest these improvements can be constructed at the eastern-most edge of the Railroad's right-of-way. We also recommend maintaining a minimum of 70 feet along the western edge for buffering residential housing from the trail and any future rail activity. The community desires that this trail section be responsive to the surrounding residential nature of the area and that the trail will provide a wide meander throughout the right-of-way section. We are recommending that a trail be designed that crosses the right-of-way in wide arcs with the majority of the trail along

the eastern side of the center line but some portions extending up to 30 feet into the western side of the center line. In the event of future northern rail expansion significant rail bed work will need to be undertaken and the City of Palmer will relocate the trail accordingly. Since this area is an inactive rail corridor, no barrier fencing will be provided at this time.

## 3.0 Development Plan and Design Guidelines

The Palmer Rail with Trail Development Plan provides a framework for development decisions to be made over the next five years or more. This section describes the Plan's proposed public improvements (trails, walks, landscape, streetscape, railroad and amenities) as well as the opportunity for private investments specific to each zone. Illustrative maps of each zone corresponding with the text below are presented in Appendix A – Development Plans.

Overall, the plan focuses on enhancing the Alaska Railroad corridor by highlighting views to the surrounding mountains, linking public amenities along the corridor, and providing significant amenities to encourage increased use and private development. The plan considers initial development phases and identifies additional design opportunities in the overall development project. The Development Plan includes amenities that were generated through the public process. The final selection of specific project elements will be approved by the City of Palmer. The plan also incorporates a general set of design guidelines that apply to the entire project, provided in Appendix B – Design Guidelines.

### 3.1 Industrial Zone – Springer Loop Road to Industrial Way

The segment will start at Springer Loop Road and run north to the Y intersection at the Glenn Highway and Colony Way. The track R.O.W. has a major crossing at Springer Loop and a secondary one at Commercial Drive. Public access between downtown and the Alaska State Fairgrounds is one of the objectives of the Development Plan as well as maintaining the potential for passenger rail services between Anchorage and Downtown Palmer. The active railroad corridor from the fairgrounds to the depot will require close coordination with the Alaska Railroad to meet stringent design and safety guidelines. Other than at the time of the Alaska State Fair, it will receive the least amount of use of any of the trail segments and will be used primarily for transit travel.

The trail will be designed with special consideration for safety and separation of rail and trail users with a minimum of 50 feet of separation between the trail and the railroad main track center line. This will include a 10-foot trail segment along the east side of the Alaska Railroad corridor with barrier fencing and grade separation to meet safety requirements. The primary function of this trail will be to provide for pedestrian movement; so limited amenities will be developed but will include landscape screening, wayfinding signage and safety lighting. Existing native vegetation along the eastern edge of the right-of-way will be retained to the extent possible to screen the trail from the adjacent industrial development. Key design features include:

1. An at-grade crossing will be developed at Springer Loop Road for continued access to the fairgrounds. The crossing should be located to the east of the railroad tracks to channel pedestrians directly into the Springer Road entry gate and to provide clear sight line to oncoming traffic.

2. Commercial Drive trail crossing with trail stop signs located at both junctions. Special consideration needs to be given to the elevation change as the trail approaches the road crossing which is elevated to provide ample sight line for trail users.
3. A gateway entry sign located at the railroad spur track approach to the airport that provides location map and entry feature to the trail.

### **3.2 Gateway Zone – Glenn Highway Intersection with Colony Way to Bailey**

This segment starts at Colony Way's south end at the Y intersection to the Glenn Highway and provides for the development of a focal landscape gateway to welcome visitors to Palmer. It also continues the trail north to downtown. The trail segment will run along the east side of the railroad track centerline until it reaches the extension line of Industrial Way. There it will cross the tracks with an at grade crossing and continue along the west side along Colony Way joining the existing path to Evergreen Street. An alternative trail option would maintain the trail along the east side of the rail centerline from Industrial Way to Evergreen Street to avoid the crossing.

Key elements include a 10-foot wide trail section, an at-grade crossing of the Alaska Railroad with safety features including barrier fencing, grading and drainage. Site improvements include pedestrian scale lighting to match downtown along Colony Way, gateway features such as signage, flags, banners, a new focal point landscape entrance feature, new landscape and an automatic irrigation system. Specific elements include

1. Gateway Entry Feature and Sign should be located on the east side of the Glenn Highway at the approach to Colony Way. A low wall with a "Welcome to Palmer" sign with accent lighting and landscape provides a sense of arrival to the community.
2. Screening of MEA Power Station should be located between the access road from the Glenn Highway and provide a visual screen to the existing MEA electrical station. Care should be taken to preserve visual sight lines for vehicle traffic through the area. This may not be required as MEA has indicated a desire to relocate the power station to the east side of the track.
3. Colony Way Gateway Streetscape Improvements should be developed along both sides of the street extending to the downtown core area. Features should include decorative street lights with banners to match those in the downtown area. Street trees should be located at 30-40 foot intervals along the street to help frame views into town.

### **3.3 Core Area Development – Bailey Street to Cottonwood Avenue**

The heart of Palmer, as identified by the community and CAG members, is the historic Alaska Railroad Depot with its adjacent downtown businesses that serve the local community. Key design considerations in this zone include linking the depot to the downtown shops and surrounding residential, senior housing and public facilities with

safe and attractive pedestrian walkways. Development is framed around saving all the existing transportation routes and limiting impacts to the surrounding parking, roads and access points. A number of development opportunities exist for both public and private development within this zone.

Because of the high level of pedestrian traffic and the potential for conflicts, two trails are recommended for this area. A pedestrian-only promenade should be developed along the west side of the track centerline utilizing the existing sidewalk along S. Colony Way that provides seating, wide sidewalks, decorative lighting and amenities. A secondary bike/active pathway should be developed to allow a mix of trail traffic along the east side of the railroad centerline. Together these two trails will provide access to facilities on both sides of the track and link the community together.

Specific elements of the plan include:

Alaska Depot Improvements -The Alaska Railroad Depot is listed on the National Registry of Historic Places and as such is accorded special design considerations and limitations. The depot interior has recently undergone major renovations, and the Alaska Railroad has permitted existing uses within the proposed development boundaries. Design features will replicate and restore the original intent and functions of the depot and surrounding area. The connecting plaza should be improved with new connections to the historic rail engine display and to downtown shops. A formal paved platform area should replace the asphalt drive on the west side of the depot and a new parking lot should be added to the north end of the depot with access to South Valley Way. Removable bollards could be used to limit auto access to emergencies and special events. The existing parking lot occupies an important location between downtown and the depot, and in addition to parking, it could potentially be used for staging community events. Additional parking could be located directly to the north along the west side of the ROW and behind the businesses along South Colony Way.

South Colony Way & Alaska Way Promenade Improvement -The primary business street in Palmer is the historic South Colony Way with shops, businesses and food and beverage services along the western side and a pedestrian sidewalk (asphalt from Evergreen south) with landscape along the eastern edge of the street up to the tracks. The western curb line is approximately the right-of-way edge for the Alaska Railroad, but the project boundaries should encompass the sidewalks fronting the local shops to create a unified design theme. A unified streetscape is integral to community life because it provides safe and comfortable pedestrian connections, street lighting, banners, street trees, specialty accent lighting, quiet setting areas and an opportunity to walk, stroll, shop, meet friends or just watch people. South Colony Way provides an opportunity to restore the small town atmosphere and make the area a hub for local residents.

Loading Dock Relocation and East Side Improvements - The loading dock on the east side of the depot should be removed and relocated to a location closer to the users of this facility. A preferred location is at the MEA yard just south of Fireweed Avenue with a second possible location on city land near the airport spur line. Removal of the dock will



open up the east side of the track and allow for better connections to be made to the library, visitor center, borough offices, city park, senior center and the Pioneer Home as well as to the surrounding residential areas. The parking lot and picnic shelters can be enhanced with improved connections, paving and landscape screening and a new parking lot can be developed to the north side of the depot. The removal of the spur track along the eastern side of the Depot will permit an active trail link for bypass of the downtown area by bikers and other active trail users.

Potential Spur Removal - The spur track to the historic Matanuska Maid plant has not been used for a number of years. The city recently met with the current owners of the plant to discuss possible future use of the spur and to explore this option, but found that the owners have compelling reasons to leave the spur, although they are willing to continue talks with the city.

Pedestrian Crosswalks and Bulb-Outs should be developed to improve safety at South Valley Way and Alaska Street crossings at Evergreen, Fireweed, and Cottonwood Avenues. The crossings should utilize specialty pavement to clearly indicate to vehicles the pedestrian zone. Bulb-outs should be used at Evergreen to improve pedestrian safety.

Trail Head Kiosk and Interpretive Signage should be developed in connection with the central plaza area that provides orientation to the entire trail segments and general information on the history of the area and opportunities to take side trips to local businesses and points of interest.

Outdoor Theatre & Band Shell - The opportunity exists to develop an outdoor performance and seating area north of the depot in the approximate vicinity of the existing loading dock. The existing timber wall and grass slopes can be designed to accommodate seating using timber or concrete steps and a raised platform with band shell should be oriented to block the north winds. Overflow seating on top can be developed on a large grass lawn area that can also serve as a special event staging area.

Community Gardens could potentially be located in either plan adjacent to the Pioneer Home to the east of the track center line. This area provides a clear view from downtown and the entry roads into Palmer providing a sense of arrival and connection to the past farming in the valley. By locating it close to the Pioneer Home and other senior services elderly residents can conveniently visit the area on foot and continue to garden or provide oversight to novice gardeners. In addition to community garden plots the area could also house a small green house and garden shop and serve as the Farmer's Market headquarters. Additional elements include:

- A small parking lot can be located adjacent to the garden entry for 8-10 vehicles.
- Mix of beds with some raised for ADA accessibility
- Raised timber edging
- Decorative fencing
- Seating on benches and on seating walls that could also act as walls for raised beds

### 3.4 Transition Zone – Dahlia Avenue to East Arctic Avenue

The primary design characteristic along this section should provide a focus on active recreational facilities and special events. This section is bounded to a great extent by commercial and governmental activities and has the largest open space along the corridor. A 10-foot paved path should meander through the area with access to surrounding neighborhoods and special features. Two alternatives have been developed for this zone. One provides for a trail meandering entirely along the east side of the track centerline, and a second option allows the trail to meander back and forth between the centerline of the track.

Special consideration should be given to maintaining the privacy of the adjacent residential development along this corridor by using vegetation to screen and enhance the area. There are a few residential areas to the west and east that will need to have privacy plantings for screening; low fencing and other considerations to reduce trail incursions onto their property. Other improvements include grading and drainage improvements, lighting features, and amenities such as benches, tables, bike racks, kiosks, information signage, a shelter, new landscape and an automatic irrigation system. Key elements include the following:

Active Asphalt Play Area & Skateboard Park – Located across from the police station, this area should provide basketball, volleyball and other court games as well as a moderate sized skateboard park. Bike parking with covered shelter should also be located adjacent to this area to provide for a gathering space. On street parking for up to 8 vehicles should be located along South Valley Way.

Ice Skating Area – A small outdoor skating area could be located in one of several areas, including in the Active Asphalt Play area, or in an expanded swale along South Valley Way. Palmer's typical winter wind and airborne glacial till and sand make the creation of a maintained outdoor skating area problematic and expensive. Therefore, if implemented, this would be envisioned as an informal, non-maintained skating area. The City has plans for an indoor ice arena that would meet community skating needs.

Improve South Valley Way – Including widening, curb and gutter and sidewalk improvements to match the existing roadway sections further south..

Improve Colony Way Extension – Including curb and gutter, parking and paving from Dahlia to Blueberry. This could provide for up to 120 additional overflow parking spaces for community events.

Rest Area and Kiosk – Should provide seating, a covered area, telescopes to view surrounding mountains, landscape and specialty paving. The area should provide the hub for the self-guided interpretive walk.

The East Arctic Avenue crossing should at a minimum provide for flashing pedestrian crossing signage and a special pavement crosswalk, and it may need to include an overpass or underpass for safety reasons depending on budget constraints. In option two an above grade trail crossing is shown using earth berms to reach required elevations above the roadway.

### **3.5 North Residential – E. Arctic Avenue to Matanuska River Overlook**

This zone is entirely residential in nature with a mix of single family and multi-family units along both sides of the R.O.W north of Arctic Avenue. Valley Way runs within the R.O.W. along the eastern edge of the project from Arctic Avenue to Eagle Avenue. Eagle is the only east-west street that crosses the corridor through this section. Caribou has an at-grade pedestrian crossing that connects residents along the west side to the elementary schools to the east.

The primary design characteristic along this section should focus on enhancing family recreational enjoyment along the length of the trail. Improvements include a 10 foot meandering trail, grading and drainage improvements, pedestrian crossings at Caribou and Eagle Avenues, low level bollard lighting features, amenities such as benches, tables, bike racks, kiosks, information signage, new landscape and an automatic irrigation system. Key elements include the following:

Matanuska River Overlook - An overlook and rest station with restroom facilities can be located at the terminus of the trail and serve as a trailhead north towards Sutton. The area should provide for ADA access to an elevated platform with interpretive signage and telescopes for viewing. Trail head maps and general information should also be located in this vicinity. The restrooms should be designed to resist vandalism and be winterized during the off season.

Caribou Avenue Rest Area should be developed to provide a quiet sitting area, landscape feature, and interpretive signage. The area should provide pedestrian links to the east and west sides and direct access to the elementary schools to the east.

Caribou Avenue Crossing - An option is shown providing vehicular access between east and west. This would need to be designed as part of a larger transportation plan and take into consideration traffic calming techniques to reduce road speed and improve pedestrian safety.

Eagle Avenue Crossing and Trail Head Parking should be developed at the northern terminus of the trail project. Parking can be provided for 4-6 vehicles.

## **4.0 Implementation Strategy**

### **4.1 Organizing for Action**

Careful coordination of public and private initiatives will be the key to successful implementation of the Palmer Revitalization Plan. Palmer is fortunate to have an action-oriented city administration and an established Citizens Advisory Group composed of community leaders committed to the future of the area. We believe that it will be important for the CAG to continue to meet regularly to initiate and review the action steps required for implementation.

The Action Plan outlined in Section 5.0 of this report is a first effort to prioritize the elements of the plan and indicate the individuals or organizations that may want to step forward to take responsibility for each step of the process.

### **4.2 Easement and Trails Permit**

As the primary property owner, the Alaska Railroad is an important partner in the future of Palmer's future. As such, a strong working relationship must continue to be fostered between railroad management and the city of Palmer. The railroad has provided a draft Trails Permit for both the Palmer section as well as sections from Palmer to Sutton with the City of Palmer, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities as permit holders. This would have a 180-day notice of termination right for the railroad in the event that rail services are expanded north. It also would have the standard requirements for liability insurance. The City of Palmer supports the use of a trail permit and the potential for termination for future rail growth.

We recommend that the City of Palmer should request to be the only permit holder through Palmer on ARRC land. The City should continue working with the railroad to develop the preliminary language of the trail permit along with the liability limits and estimated costs associated with the insurance requirements.

### **4.3 Circulation, Traffic Management and Parking Policy**

The transportation and parking recommendations in the scoping plan represent the best efforts of the design team to listen to the CAG, city staff and the community but do not reflect an in-depth review or study of all the transportation issues related to the Palmer area. As the volume of residents in the area grows along with an increase in visitorship, traffic volumes can be expected to increase. Prior to any major circulation or parking improvements it is our recommendation that an official Transportation Study be undertaken in partnership with the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. This study should look at all the issues outlined in the Draft Report Transportation Analysis as well as other related projects. Short-term improvements that could be undertaken include the following:

- North Valley Way Improvements

- South Valley Way Improvements
- Evergreen Avenue Improvements
- Downtown Traffic Calming and Circulation Improvements
- Colony Way Improvements

Parking Plan - The availability of convenient parking is an essential ingredient for a successful shopping district. On-street parking represents the ultimate convenience, but the number of spaces will be limited and should be restricted for short-term use. Off-street surface parking areas will provide most of the spaces needed to serve existing and future businesses in the core area of Palmer. While there is no immediate shortage of parking most of the lots are in private ownership located with adjacent businesses. As development increases the pressure for individual parking will increase and enforcement of private lots will begin. It is our recommendation that the community should undertake a parking study as part of the overall transportation plan and develop an overall shared parking plan with downtown businesses.

#### **4.4 Guidelines for Private Development**

Guidelines and design review processes should be developed to assist owners and potential new businesses in improving the buildings along Alaska Way, Colony Way and Valley Way. The guidelines should address renovation of existing buildings of significant architectural character as well as provide standards for new buildings and in-fill development that will fit with the desired architectural style of Palmer. An illustrated booklet can be prepared to explain the guidelines and special resources available to help with redevelopment and new construction. The basic objectives for the guidelines is to ensure that buildings are compatible in design, materials and colors to make adjacent buildings read as a unit and to create storefronts which add interest, activity and comfort to the street environment.

#### **4.5 Image Promotion and Retail Recruitment**

For Palmer to reach its full potential as a tourism and shopping destination, some degree of retail management and support may be desirable. At a minimum, local businesses should address coordinated business hours, promotions, parking and image development. An active campaign to promote a positive image for Palmer should begin as soon as possible, building on the enthusiasm generated by the planning process.

- Tourism Plan - Partnership with the Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau, the Alaska Railroad and local businesses to develop a tourism plan for the area that includes a tour train between Palmer and Anchorage, convention opportunities and other surrounding connections to points of interest.
- Mat-Maid Redevelopment Strategy - Work together with the current owners of the historic property to develop a long term development strategy that is in keeping with the goals and objectives of the Palmer Revitalization Plan.

- Retail Development Plan - Work with the local business community to identify additional development opportunities for local businesses including:
  - Unified shop signage using local artisans.
  - Pedestrian crosswalks should feature specialty concrete paving.
  - Landscape islands with elevated planter seats in some of the existing parking stalls (approximately 6-8 parking spaces to be relocated)
  - Retail front improvements – Foster partnerships with local businesses to offer low cost or interest free loans for street front improvements such as shop windows, overhangs, signage and other details oriented to pedestrians.
  - Outdoor cafes, street vendors and points of interest – encourage local businesses to expand their business to the sidewalks in front of their stores.

#### **4.6 Maintenance**

The public improvements proposed in the Development Plan have been designed to minimize maintenance through simplicity of design and high quality materials. However, no design is maintenance-free. Ongoing maintenance of both existing and new features for Palmer will be critical to the image of the area. The City has recently acquired Park and Recreation powers from the Borough which will allow them to provide the level of maintenance and services necessary to keep the area attractive and healthy.

Operation costs will be a function of the maintenance efforts provided by Palmer. Routine maintenance of bikeways will be required to maintain safe and good riding conditions. For shared use paths, attention should be given to maintaining the full paved width and not allowing the edges to break down. Trees, shrubs and other vegetation should be controlled to provide adequate clearances and sight distances. They should also receive watering and annual maintenance such as pruning and fertilizing for healthy growth. Trash receptacles should be placed and maintained at convenient locations. Grassed areas should be mowed regularly and snow removed from bikeways.

#### **4.7 Cost Estimate**

The Palmer Revitalization Plan is both bold and pragmatic. It provides specific recommendations for a limited number of projects, both public and private, that have a high probability of early implementation. Summary costs for full implementation of the Development Plan, by zone, are presented below (Development costs are presented in Appendix C – Development Plan Cost Estimates).

Preliminary budget estimates have been prepared for each Zone of the project area. These have been broken down into Basic Cost that includes trail, grading and drainage, landscape, irrigation, lighting, signage, parking and basic road crossings. Projects that relate directly to railroad improvements for safety and operations are located under the Railroad costs. Projects that have been identified by the community as desirable but not necessarily required for a successful trail project are included under Add Alternative

Costs. These include items such as band shell, public art, skateboard park, community garden plots, specialty lighting, as well as traffic safety such as overpasses.

**Table One: Summary Cost by Zones**

<u>Zone</u>	<u>Basic Cost</u>	<u>Railroad</u>	<u>Add Alt. Cost</u>	<u>Total Cost</u>
Industrial	\$425,300	\$324,700	\$238,000	\$988,000
Gateway	787,400	329,900	157,000	1,274,300
Core Area	712,000	354,600	80,000	1,146,600
Transition	632,000	150,000	1,503,000	2,285,000
Residential	897,400	0	728,000	1,625,400
<b>Total Costs</b>	<b>\$3,274,100</b>	<b>\$1,159,200</b>	<b>\$2,706,000</b>	<b>\$7,319,300</b>

**Timing:**

The project costs above provide for a full build out of the “Rails-with-Trails” corridor through Palmer. Implementation of this project will require a number of key steps that include both political, management and funding efforts. The final phasing of projects should be based on balancing the communities desire with the likelihood of success when measured against specific project obstacles such as safety concerns, ownership conflicts or other issues that may take some time to resolve.

**4.8 Funding Strategy**

Funding for the various elements of the Palmer Revitalization Plan will come from a variety of sources, both public and private. Costs for the construction of the trail, sidewalks, streetscape improvements, railroad improvements and public amenities can potentially be covered by public resources available through the local, state and federal government. The downtown street lighting has already received funding from the state, interpretive signage some funding from the Mat-Su Borough and the largest portion of the funding is available through the Federal Highway Transportation and Community and System Preservation (TCSP) grant. These public dollars can be combined with private contributions from local organizations, corporations, individuals or from foundations for specific projects.

For the project to be the economic success envisioned by the community CAG these funding sources will need to be combined with private contributions for new residential, mixed-use development and local business improvements. The Chamber of Commerce should begin marketing the Palmer area to potential new investors.

## 5.0 Strategic Action Plan

The Strategic Action Plan identifies specific and achievable projects for the enhancement of Palmer's historic railroad corridor. The Strategic Action Plan is developed from the Palmer Development Plan that identified the vision and values to be achieved in Palmer for the next 5 years. The Strategic Action Plan provides for phase one projects utilizing the \$1.25 million of funding from a variety of sources including Federal, State, Borough and the City of Palmer that is now available to the City.

The public improvements recommended for phase one were identified as part of the public open house held in September and a final review and recommendation by the Citizens Advisory Group (CAG) in October, as summarized below in Exhibit 1. The plan will contribute significantly to the enhancements of downtown Palmer as a place to live and do business by helping to establish a fresh image and market identity for the area. These improvements will serve as a powerful catalyst to encourage private investment in downtown Palmer.

In times of rapid growth in the Palmer area, the vision for a Palmer "Rail-with-Trail" corridor set forth in this Action Plan is timely, realistic, and achievable. Palmer is ideally suited for the development portrayed in this plan that creates strong physical and visual linkages to the historic Palmer Railroad Depot at its heart, to core area businesses, surrounding neighborhoods, and community facilities including the Palmer Library and the Alaska State Fair. The rail-trail open space corridor is the backbone of the plan and provides an opportunity for the City to establish a policy of community-focused public access through the heart of Palmer.

### 5.1 Community Priorities Summary

The Palmer Urban Revitalization Project intensively involved the public and key stakeholders to ensure that the project outcome would best serve community needs over the long term. The planning process was broad and inclusive, integrating all visions, ideas, and interests. Before moving into design and implementation, however, phasing and prioritizing the many ideas generated by the community was necessary. Limits in funding, and long-term maintenance concerns needed to be weighed, and decisions needed to be made about where construction should begin, and what projects are of highest priority.

The final public open house on September 26, 2002 was designed to gain significant public input on residents' priorities with respect to the projects and zones they perceive as the most important. Following the open house, the Citizens Advisory Group (CAG) was provided with a ranking form, and members provided input on the same issues; what to develop first given limited funding and where to start.

The table below in **Exhibit 1** summarizes both the public and the CAG input, and includes a prioritization of zones and a ranking of the most important projects within each zone (one being the highest priority). Although the Public and CAG rankings are somewhat



different, there is a good deal of overlap. Based on common priorities, a phase one plan and construction budget was developed.

**Exhibit 1**

Zone Rank	CAG Project Ranking	Public Project Ranking
1	<b>Gateway Zone</b> 1. Screening MEA Power Station 2. Gateway Entry Feature 3. Colony Way Streetscape Improvements 4. Trail Construction 5. East side trail	<b>Core Area Downtown Zone</b> 1. Promenade on west side 2. East side trail 3. Ice Skating 4. Depot Improvements 5. Parking Lot expansion north of the depot
2	<b>Core Area Downtown Zone</b> - Depot Improvements - Railroad Platform - Ice Skating - Trail-head Kisok and Signage - Pave Colony Way extension - East side trail - Promenade on west side	<b>Gateway</b> 1. Screening MEA Power Station 2. East side trail 3. Gateway Entry Feature 4. Rest Area and Interpretive Kiosk
3	<b>Industrial Zone</b> 1. Trail Construction 2. Trail landscape and Signage 3. Security Fencing and lighting 4. Springer Loop Crossing	<b>Transitional Zone</b> 1. Trail Construction 2. Active play area (basketball/skateboard) 3. Upgrade South Valley Way 4. Picnic shelters 5. Outdoor theater / bandshell
4	<b>Transitional Zone</b> 1. Trail Construction 2. Picnic Shelters 3. Active play area (basketball/skateboard) 4. Rest Area, Kiosk and Signage 5. Upgrade South Valley Way	<b>Residential Zone</b> - River Overlook - Trail - Public restrooms - Eagle Street Trail Head and Parking
5	<b>Residential Zone</b> - River Overlook - Trail - Public restrooms - Interpretive signage	<b>Industrial Zone</b> - Trail landscape and Signage - Trail Construction - Springer Loop Crossing

Beyond phase one, the City of Palmer can use the community priorities presented above and select projects for development as funding becomes available. As the Development Plan is implemented project by project, the City should also keep the overarching goals of the effort in mind, and especially those identified as most important by the public at the final open house:

- Develop the rail corridor into a unifying element of the community
- Involve the youth in developing the project
- Enhance Economic opportunities and promote downtown business

## 5.2 Strategic Action Plan Phase One Projects 2003-2004:

The heart of Palmer, as identified by the community and CAG members, is the historic Alaska Railroad Depot and the adjacent downtown businesses that serve the local community. The development of the first segments of the trail north from the depot to the Matanuska River are also included in phase one development. We believe that this mix of projects should be the first focus of redevelopment in Palmer. They have wide community support as well as the support of the Alaska Railroad, which is working with the City to develop a Trail Permit. Most importantly, improvements to this area will have the greatest impact on economics and community character providing an immediate benefit to the city.

The matrix in Exhibit 2 on the attached pages provides a detailed listing of the priorities for all early action priority projects in the Strategic Action Plan. The matrix lists phase one projects, actions required, estimated costs and schedules. The Strategic Action Plan Map in Exhibit 3 following this page shows general project locations by their number. Following is a description of each of the projects recommended for development as part of Phase One construction for the 2003 and 2004 season.

Gateway Entry Feature and Sign should be located on the east side of the Glenn Highway at the approach to Colony Way. A low wall with a "Welcome to Palmer" sign with accent lighting and landscape to provide a sense of arrival to the community.

South Alaska Way Promenade - The primary business street in Palmer is the historic South Alaska Way with shops, businesses and food and beverage services along the western side and a pedestrian sidewalk with landscape along the eastern edge of the street up to the tracks. A unified streetscape is integral to community life because it provides safe and comfortable pedestrian connections, street lighting, banners, street trees, specialty accent lighting, quiet setting areas, bulb outs at Evergreen, pedestrian cross walks will provide an opportunity to walk, stroll, shop, meet friends or just watch people. South Alaska Way provides an opportunity to restore the small town atmosphere and make the area a hub for local residents.

Alaska Depot Improvements - The Alaska Railroad Depot is listed on the National Registry of Historic Places and as such is accorded special design considerations and limitations. The depot interior has recently undergone major renovations, and the Alaska Railroad has permitted existing uses within the proposed development boundaries. Design features will replicate and restore the original intent and functions of the depot and surrounding area. The existing plaza should be improved with new connections to the historic rail engine display and to downtown shops.

Railroad Depot Platform and Pedestrian Crossing - A formal paved platform area should replace the asphalt drive on the west side of the depot with pedestrian track crossing at the entrance to the depot. Removable bollards can be used to limit auto access to emergencies and special events.

Trail Head Kiosk and Interpretive Signage should be developed in connection with the central plaza area that provides orientation to the entire trail segments and general information on the history of the area and opportunities to take side trips to local businesses and points of interest.

Parking Lot Expansion – North of the depot a new parking lot should be developed for up to 40 vehicles with pavement and emergency access to the depot.

Trail from Depot north to Arctic Avenue - A 10-foot paved path should meander through the area with access to surrounding neighborhoods. The trail should utilize the existing railroad bed where possible and lower the grade at Blueberry.

Colony Way Gateway Streetscape Improvements should be developed along both sides of the street extending to the downtown core area. Features should include decorative street lights with banners to match those in the downtown area. Street trees should be located at 30-40 foot intervals along the street to help frame views into town.

Trail from Arctic Avenue to the Matanuska River - The primary design characteristic along this section should focus on enhancing family recreational enjoyment along the length of the trail. Improvements include a 10 foot meandering trail, grading and drainage improvements, pedestrian crossings at Caribou and Eagle Avenues, low level lighting features, amenities such as benches, information signage, new landscape and an irrigation system.

Matanuska River Overlook - An overlook can be located at the terminus of the trail and serve as a trailhead north towards Sutton. The area should provide for ADA access to an elevated platform with benches, interpretive signage and telescopes for viewing. Trail head map and general information should also be located in this vicinity.

Eagle Avenue Crossing and Trail Head Parking should be developed at the northern terminus of the trail project. Parking can be provided for 4-6 vehicles.

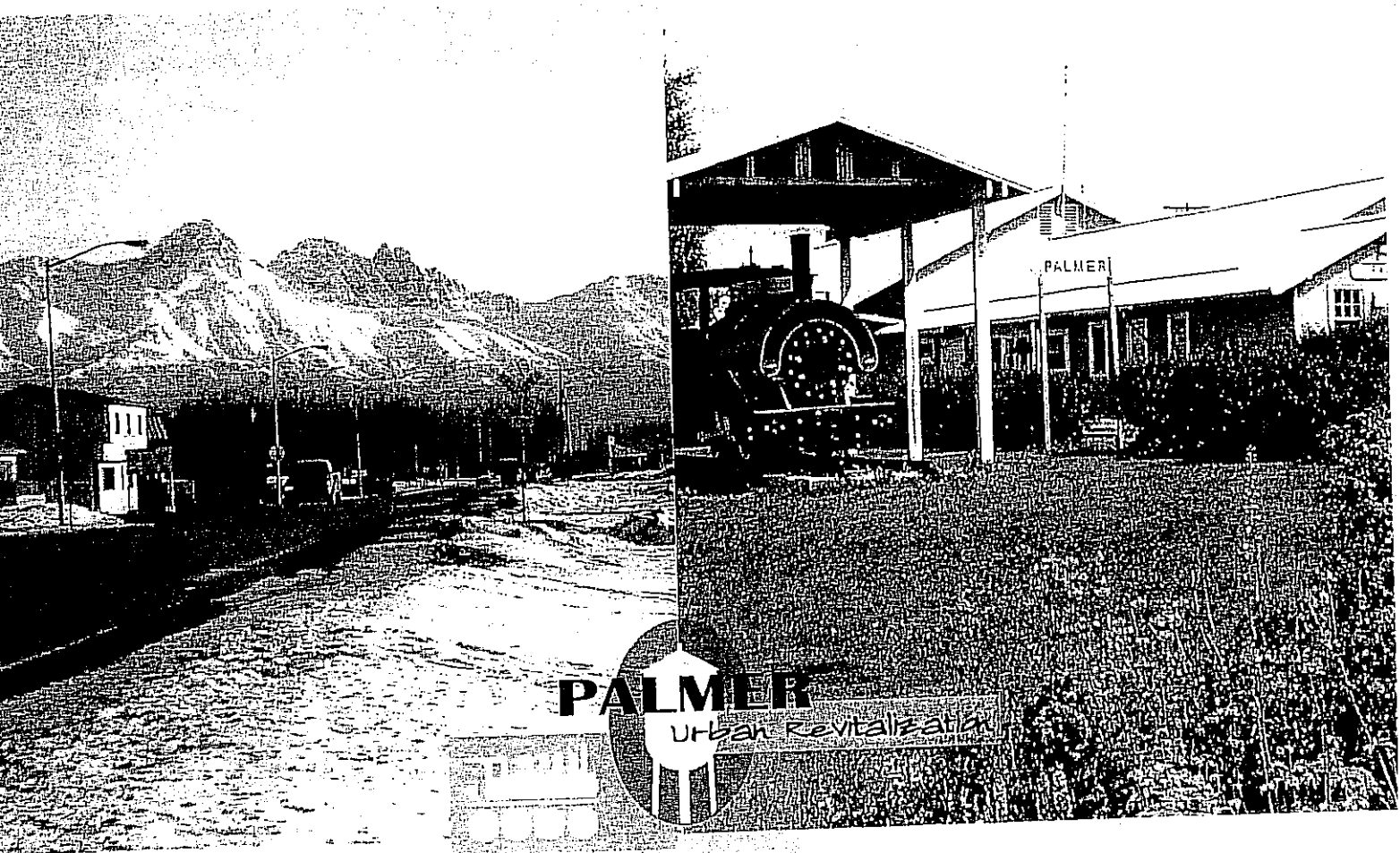
### **5.3 Conclusions**

The Palmer Revitalization Plan is ambitious and its implementation will require the full energy of the CAG, Palmer Chamber of Commerce, local businesses, local government and the entire community. Yet the vision is also incremental; there are a number of small, moderate-cost projects that will bring immediate benefit while paving the way for the more long-term investments. These important early action projects will demonstrate to the community and to potential investors that real progress is being made.

The planning process has focused the attention of public and private sector leaders on the future of Palmer. The current level of enthusiasm and momentum must be maintained and put into a systematic and continuing program of implementation. The first steps should include:

- Official adoption of the Development Plan by the CAG, the City Manager and by the Palmer City Council as the framework for future decisions regarding development in Palmer.
- Unofficial adoption of the Development Plan by the Palmer Chamber of Commerce, Rotary and other relevant organizations that can lend support for the development process.
- Authorization of Phase One Design and Development to prepare construction drawings for initial public investment to begin construction during the 2003 season.

This is an exciting time for the community of Palmer and the basic commitment to reclaim the railroad corridor as a primary development opportunity will benefit the entire community. The right decisions will come from a shared vision and the cooperation of all parties who hold responsibility for making that vision a reality.



## Appendix B: Design Guidelines



## Appendix B: Design Guidelines

The purpose of the design guidelines is to provide a general description of the design elements with sufficient detail to provide a sense of the intent of the development plan. Guidelines provide for the overall theme and unifying elements necessary to create a sense of place and maintain the historic connections to the past. Specific design elements will be completed during the detailed design phase associated with developing construction drawings for each phase.

### General Design Guidelines

The general design guidelines provide for the overall themes for the Palmer Revitalization Project and encourage consistent design development.

**Unifying Trail Corridor** – The trail corridor shall provide safe and inviting community space through the heart of Palmer with connections to businesses, public facilities, and residences along the entire length. Connect the trail to surrounding City and Borough trails.

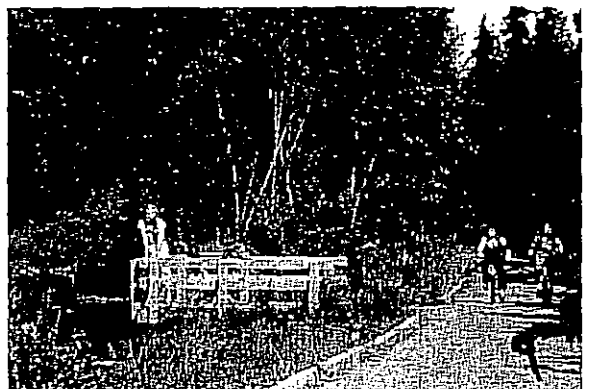
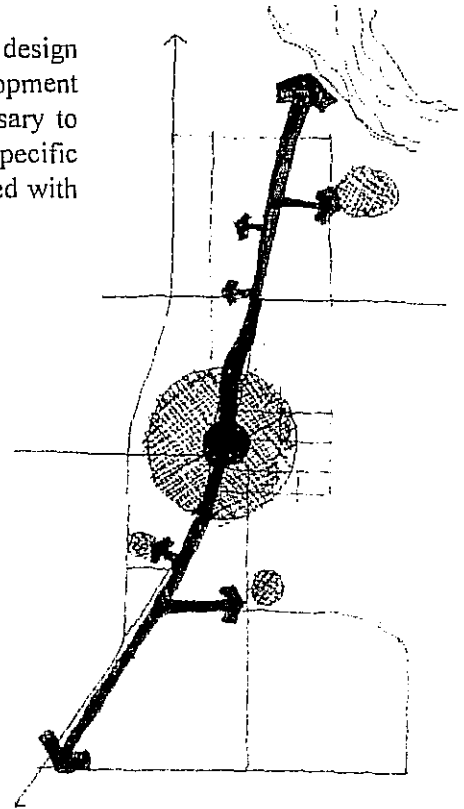
**Reflect the History of the Region** – Make the history and stories of early Palmer visible to visitors and residents by using the colony and railroad themes for amenities and interpretive materials wherever possible. This includes early colonial architecture, lighting, and furnishings.

The Corridor should be safe, inviting, and easy to maintain – Insure that both bikers and walkers feel safe on the trail.

Amenities should include a variety of experiences and opportunities for all with elements designed to be multi-use where possible. Incorporate features and experiences that make the space more interesting to all different kinds and ages of users.

**Respect the surrounding residential neighborhood character** – Near residential areas trail design should emphasize through-travel and enhance property owners privacy through screening.

Enhance economic opportunities and promote downtown business by making the downtown walkable, safe crossings, use of historic design elements, and by encouraging local businesses to enhance storefronts.



## Specific Design Guidelines

The specific design guidelines provide the basic description for individual components of the overall Development Plan. Copies of catalogue cut sheets are included in the master document provided to the City that shows individual design elements.

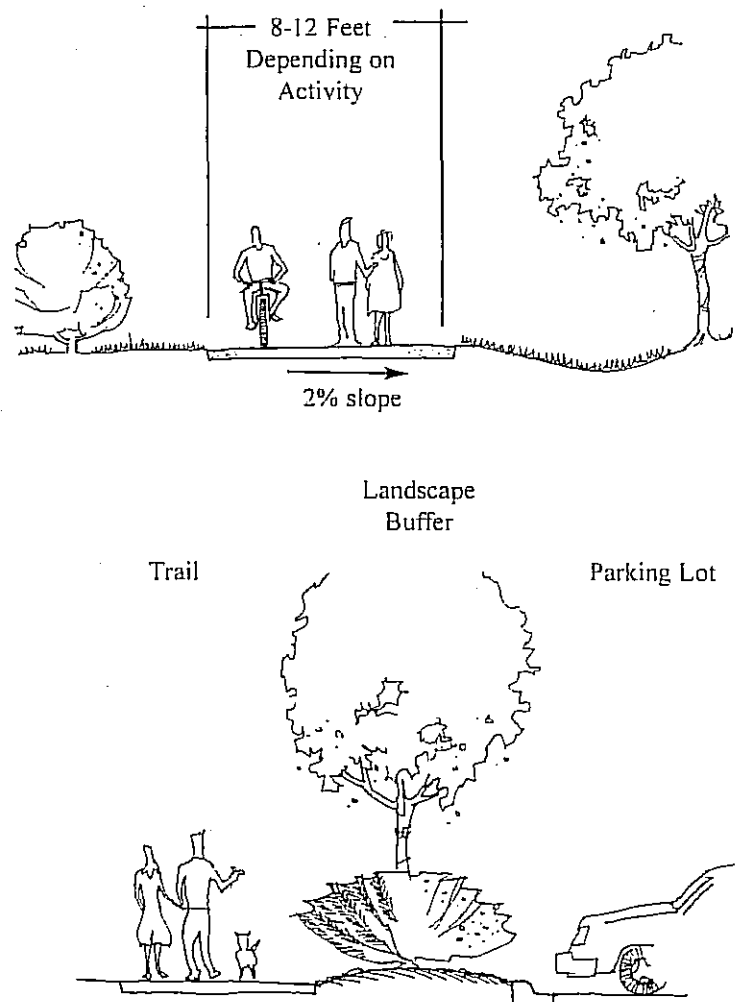
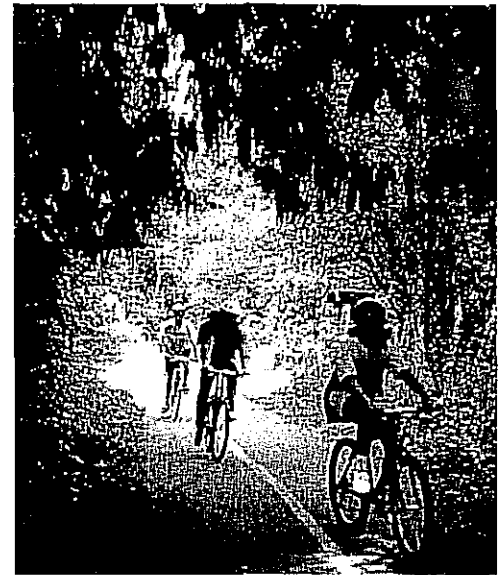
### Circulation

This design element addresses issues related to the safe and efficient movement through project boundaries.

**Trail Design** - The trail should include safety features such as fencing at active trail crossings, signage, textured paving, lighting and plantings. The trail should have a positive cross slope (2%) for drainage purposes. Along most sections of the project, the trail width should be 8 to 10 feet. In areas where there is higher pedestrian traffic and where emergency vehicles should be accommodated, the trail width should be a minimum of 10 to 12' wide.

**Paving** - The trail shall have asphalt as its main material, except in designated locations (plazas, intersections, crosswalks, or pedestrian streets) where concrete bands, textured pavement, concrete pavers or other specialty paving may be preferred. A change in the texture of the paving shall be used on the trail before all crossings, whether they are road crossings or rail crossings.

**Parking** - The plan seeks to improve the existing parking situation by either building new spaces or enhancing existing ones. The improved parking shall have asphalt paving and meet ADA specifications. All parking areas shall have clear, visible signage as to where the entrance is located and have a well defined direction of flow through the parking area. The parking area shall be easily seen by pedestrian and vehicular traffic. These improved or new parking areas shall have a clear separation between pedestrian and vehicular circulation, through the use of curb stops, curbing, bollards, planting decorative fencing or light fixtures. All parking shall be planned in locations that serve a high-use area such as an outdoor pavilion, the downtown business district, or the train depot.



## Signage

Signage shall be an integral element to trail development and have a common theme that matches the overall design concept of the trail and the other landscape amenities along the trail. The sign types follow these general guidelines:

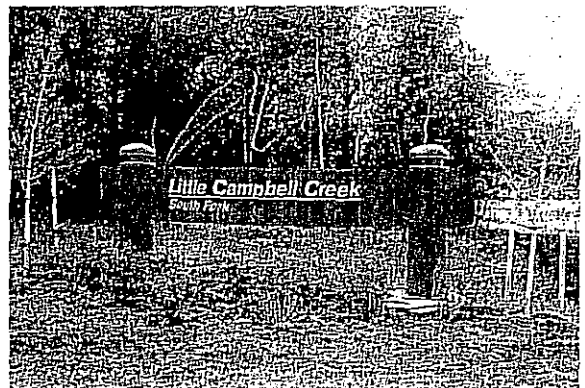
Kiosks shall give wayfinding cues to the users along the trail and offer an opportunity for posting notices for events.

The trail mileposts measure the distance of the trail and should be two sided and have mileage on both sides of the sign, indicating the milepost for trail users going in either direction. These mileposts shall have a consistent theme and be reminiscent of railroad switching posts.

Historic signs shall link the place to a time by featuring some of the historic events that occurred on or near the corridor. These types of signs shall occur in areas of more highly concentrated pedestrians, at outdoor gathering areas and at points of historic interest.

Interpretive signs shall be incorporated at special locations along the trail. Some of these locations may include the Depot area, overlooks, outdoor gathering areas, and other areas of greater visibility and higher pedestrian use.

Gateway signage that announces thresholds into different zones shall be located at the beginning and end of the trail. As the trail moves into these areas of higher pedestrian use, these gateway signs may be used to accentuate the overall change in the character of the trail. For example, a gateway into another zone may give the trail user a visual cue in terms of slowing down on the trail.





## Landscape

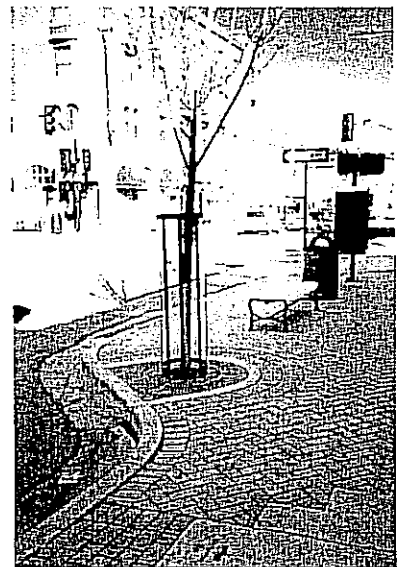
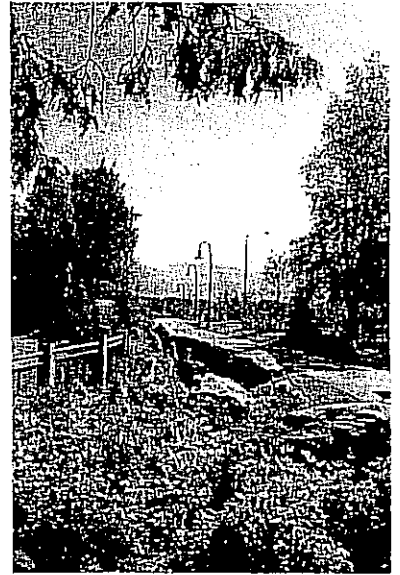
The overall landscape theme places importance on safety, preservation, quality of life, aesthetics and low-maintenance. We recommend the following when considering existing and proposed landscape plantings along the trail:

Preserve existing trees where deemed appropriate or beneficial for vegetative screens or focal points.

Existing and proposed vegetative screens and barriers should be set back far enough from the trail to preserve adequate sight visibility into potential hiding places. For deciduous trees, place plants at least 5 to 6 feet from the trail's edge, while evergreen trees require a distance of at least 8 to 10 feet from the trail.

Preserve sight lines at critical points with low plantings and grasses that do not compromise sight triangles or sight distance lines for pedestrians, bikers and drivers.

Low-maintenance plantings: A low-maintenance landscape means that plants are selected for hardiness and wind resistance. For this reason, there tends to be greater consideration given to native plants; however, the overall planting scheme should include non-natives as well as ornamental plantings in order to allow for variation in color, texture, and function. The Palmer Plant Material Center serves as a local resource for appropriate plants that would provide shade, screening, seasonal color, allow for low maintenance and reflect a history of the farming community.



## Landscape as Unifying Element

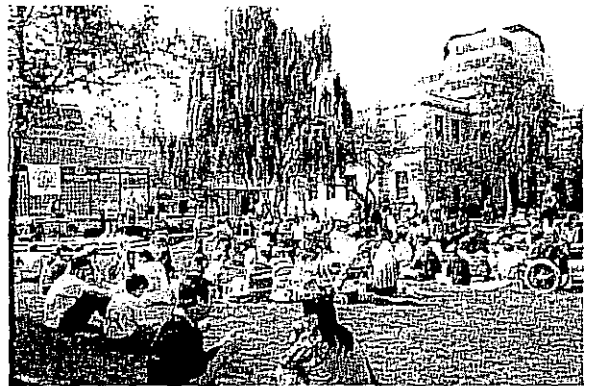
The landscape plantings shall function as another unifying element that enhances the gateways, nodes and corridors. Plant features can offer year-round interest to the landscape, and certain types of plantings can contribute to the experience in different ways.

Street Tree Plantings provide a transparent but distinct edge to the significant passageways. Providing adequate growing space for street trees ensures healthy life for this important landscape element.

Gateway Plantings mark key entry points into Palmer and along the trail. These areas shall feature ornamental plantings such as flowering trees, shrubs, perennials and annuals.

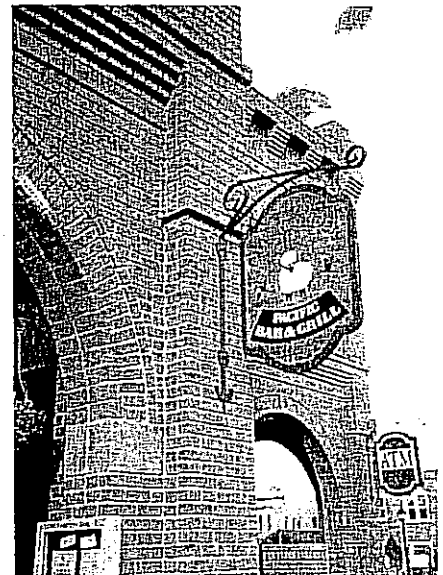
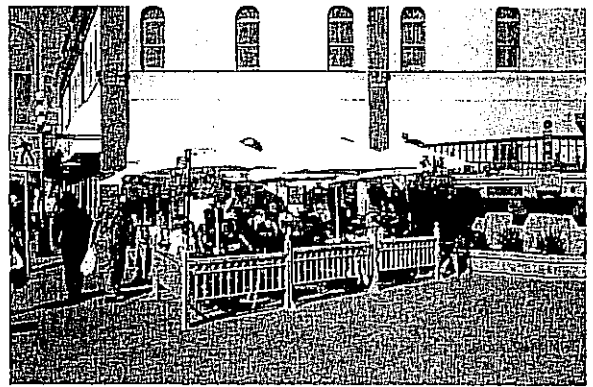
Focal Point Plantings bring attention to special areas of interest along the trail, such as the depot area, rest areas, pedestrian nodes and at overlooks. These areas shall include ornamental plantings, like flowering trees and shrubs, as well as provide the area with some seasonal color through the use of perennials and annuals displayed in planting beds or planters.

Open areas of lawn, native grasses and wildflowers allow for recreational activities on the manicured lawns to passive viewing of the native vegetation. The seed mix would vary for each zone so that areas of active recreation or passive use of greenspace would have manicured lawns whereas other areas may have a combination of seed mixes that would include mown lawns along with native grasses.



## Architectural Features and Elements

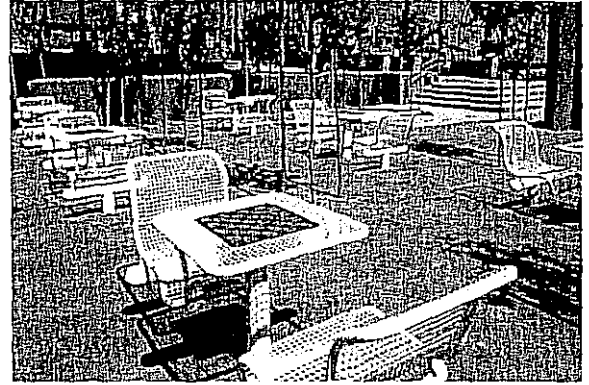
These features and elements should respond to Palmer's historic and civic character. Two themes from which to draw design elements include the historical Matanuska farms and the Alaska Railroad, each of which has played a significant part in Palmer's development. Both of these themes could be used to gain design ideas on forms, colors and patterns for specialty features, signage and pavement. These visual design references to Palmer's past pay tribute to the key forces in its development while playing an integral part in the initiative to make the rail corridor and its adjacent urban connections a vital part of the city's future.



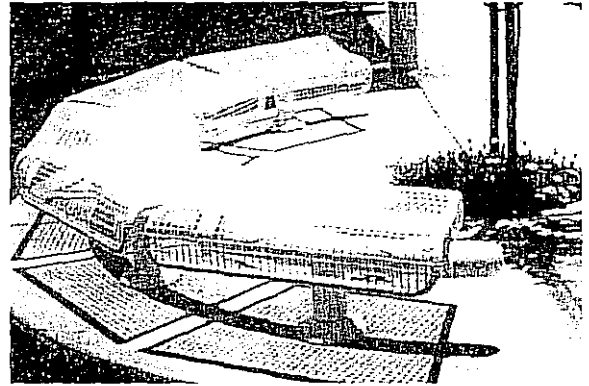
## Specialty Features

Site features may vary depending on specific use, e.g. the Depot, but overall they work to unify the entire corridor experience. These elements are durable and aesthetic, and they provide a permanence and level of detail to the pedestrian that adds cohesion to the entire design. The ADA guidelines should be applied to these specialty features when appropriate. The different types of specialty features include:

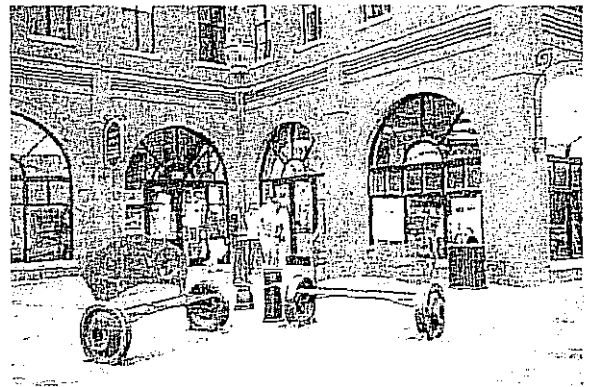
**Tables-** Gaming tables (e.g. chess, checkers) invite pedestrians to pause and play while in close proximity to other activity. This feature would be most appropriate adjacent to outdoor gathering spaces, the Depot area, and near the downtown business district.



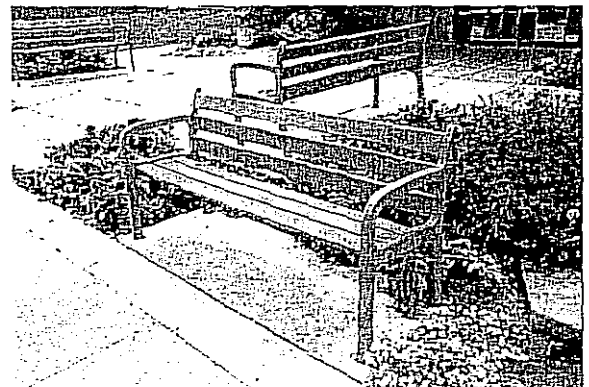
**Benches-** These features should accommodate the trail user the entire length of the trail. The quantity of benches in each zone along the trail will vary. They will be provided to a lesser extent at the beginning and the end of the trail, while as the trail enters the core of Palmer, there will be more opportunities for seating.



**Trash/Ash Receptacles-** They shall carry the same basic theme throughout the whole trail, as well as be provided in convenient places for the trail users. These receptacles shall be a combination feature that could be mounted on a street bollard to reinforce this idea of tying these features together.

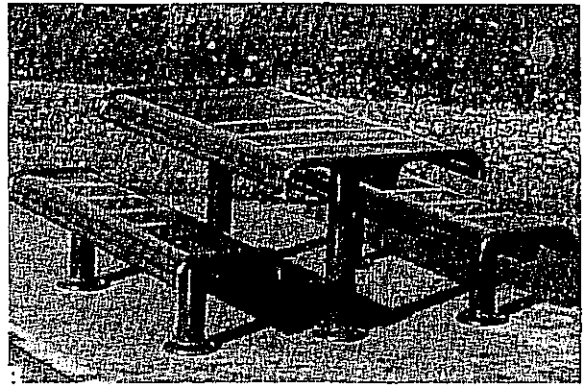


**Rest Areas -** These areas shall accommodate the trail user with a resting point or a place to sit down and relax. These spaces will be off the main trail but adjacent to it. They will be sporadically placed along the fringes of the project, while areas of higher pedestrian use, such as the downtown area, will receive a higher concentration of these resting areas. They will be located in order to take advantage of a nice view



or have a pleasantly landscaped backdrop to them.

**Picnic Tables-** These features shall be incorporated in areas of outdoor gathering spaces, near active and passive recreation areas, and directly adjacent to any picnic shelters or structures.



**Bicycle Racks and Shelters-** The project seeks to encourage alternative modes of transportation for work and leisure by providing for safe and attractive opportunities for parking and storing a bicycle.



**Public Art -** The entire corridor is an invitation for artistic expression. Public art provides a potential site design opportunity that could add interest and enhance the sense of community. It also makes way for local artists and local materials to be used for projects, some of which could celebrate local history and themes, such as the farming legacy.



## Safety/Crossings

### Pedestrian Crosswalks at Road Crossings:

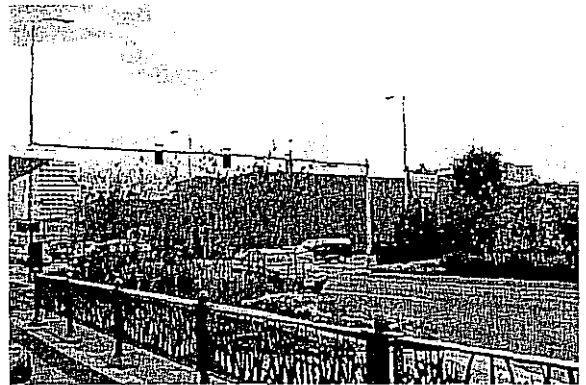
Pedestrian safety requires certain measures that facilitate safe movement across roadways. Crosswalks shall meet ADA specifications in terms of slope (12:1) at curb cuts and textured surfacing. They shall also be at-grade and perpendicular to roadways, unless otherwise noted for a particular zone.

### Active Railroad Barrier Features and Rail Crossings

All railroad crossings should provide an at-grade crossing of the tracks by utilizing the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) specifications. Landscape amenities at road or railroad crossings vary depending on location and zone. In general, the following guidelines are recommended:

All crossings of the road and railroad tracks shall be at-grade and perpendicular with the tracks.

**Fencing:** A fence should be used to channel trail users to crossings. In areas of low pedestrian activity, the use of warning signage may supplement barrier measures such as fencing and grade changes. When this type of fencing is necessary for public safety, decorative fencing shall be incorporated with a theme that relates to the overall trail's design concept.



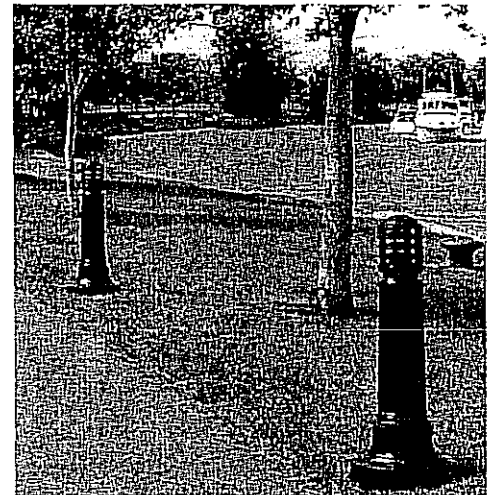
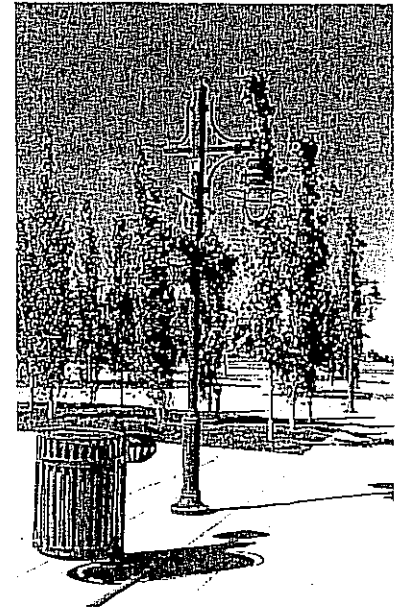
## Lighting

All lighting features will have a decorative quality that relates to the trail's overall design character. In key areas on the trail and at all nodes, lighting should be of pedestrian scale. Pedestrian scale lighting adds vertical elements that link the project together, as well as define pedestrian and vehicular circulation. The spacing of the lighting depends on the use along the corridor, so that lights shall be spaced closer to each other in the more urban areas and farther from each other as people move towards either end of the trail. The lighting types fall into the following categories:

**Street Lighting:** This lighting exists in areas of high pedestrian traffic and along the main business district of Palmer. Two forms of street lighting can be used in these pedestrian corridors. A top-mounted light is intended for use on narrow sidewalks of 8 feet or less and in order to match existing lighting along the business district area. The other type of lighting is the armature fixture with the lighting fixture extending over the sidewalk in areas where the walkway is 8 feet or greater. These overhanging light fixtures will have banner arms that can display seasonal banners or local advertisements. They also provide space for special events such as winter carnivals and summer solstice celebrations.

**Bollard Lighting:** This lighting should occur at nodes of pedestrian activity, outdoor plazas and gathering spaces. The bollard light can also act as a separation between pedestrian and vehicular circulation.

**Accent Lighting:** This type of lighting should be located at special features in the landscape (up-lighting of trees or flagpoles) or at focal points, such as an elevated platform or performance pavilion.



## Utilities & Infrastructure

Power for lights - This service will be critical to the project. Load centers should be spaced and size for future expansion. Trail lighting along all parts of the project will be required for safe movement along the trail. Trail lights should provide outlets in the light fixture that can be utilized for seasonal lights or decorative lighting.

Irrigation - Irrigation will depend on the area and the situation along the trail. Areas of higher importance and visibility, such as gateways, pedestrian nodes, plazas, active and passive recreation areas shall be on an automatic system whereas areas of less use and visibility will rely on a quick coupler system. Costs for irrigation include the water use and the water connection to the main pipe as well as the necessary HDPE piping and quick coupler system.

### Storm Drainage, Grading and Snow Storage

Wherever possible, the construction of biofiltration swales that connect to existing roadside ditches or drainage systems shall be incorporated into the trail's design. In areas with more impermeable surfacing, e.g. plazas, activity areas, and along sidewalks, other techniques may be used such as grading to direct drainage into existing storm water systems. Snow storage provided near the biofiltration swales and away from trails, planting beds and active recreation areas, would be another way to cleanse the water before connecting to existing drainage systems.

Curbs and Gutters - Curbs and gutter shall be utilized to provide a defining edge between vehicular and pedestrian traffic. It shall also be used to direct water to existing storm drainage systems. The design shall be an integral curb and gutter concept with the height of the curb relating to its surrounding uses.



