

CHAPTER 4 PUBLIC SERVICES, FACILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE

Overview



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

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

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

Summary of Goals

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

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

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

Goals and Objectives for Public Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

CURRENT STATUS

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

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

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

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



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

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

NEAR-TERM PRIORITIES

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

LONG-TERM NEEDS

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

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

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

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

CURRENT STATUS

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

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



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

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

NEAR-TERM PRIORITIES

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

LONG-TERM NEEDS

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

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

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

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

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

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

CURRENT STATUS

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



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

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

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

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

NEAR-TERM PRIORITIES

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

LONG-TERM NEEDS

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

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

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

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

CURRENT STATUS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NEAR-TERM PRIORITIES – WATER AND SEWER

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

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

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

LONG-TERM – SEWER

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

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

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

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

LONG-TERM – WATER

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

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

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

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

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

CURRENT STATUS

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

NEAR-TERM PRIORITIES

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

LONG-TERM

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

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

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

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

CURRENT STATUS

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

NEAR-TERM PRIORITIES

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

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

CURRENT STATUS

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

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

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

CURRENT STATUS

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

FUTURE NEEDS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CURRENT STATUS

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

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

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

NEAR-TERM PRIORITIES

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

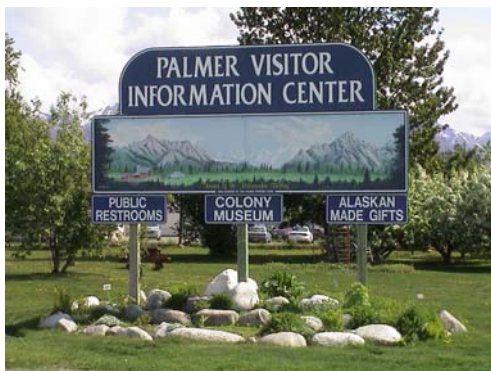
LONG-TERM NEEDS

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

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

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

CURRENT STATUS



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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