

# RECOMMENDED ANNEXATION STRATEGY

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## **An Annexation Strategy for the City of Palmer**

First and foremost, all proposed annexations should comply with all Local Boundary Commission (LBC) standards and procedures for approval. LBC approval is just one part of a successful annexation. The annexation petition and process must also fairly address local issues and concerns about annexation, and the City must be prepared and committed to implement the annexation to the general satisfaction of existing and new residents.

The following recommendations represent the consultant's advice to the City of Palmer for a successful and effective approach to annexation.

### ***Prior to any future annexation proposals:***

The City of Palmer should:

1. Articulate clear goals for City of Palmer annexations in general. Consultants recommend that the City use the following three goals:
  - a. Plan for orderly growth in nearby areas so essential public services can be provided efficiently and cost-effectively where and when warranted. Make plans for needed infrastructure prior to development, to avoid the high costs and inconvenience of retrofitted infrastructure.
  - b. Sustain a desirable quality of life in and around Palmer.
  - c. Protect the City's long-term economic viability and fiscal health.
2. Proactively address legitimate issues created by annexation, prior to annexation. Only by solving these issues first can the City build trust and credibility. A number of these issues are identified in this report, with preliminary recommendations for how the City can address and resolve them. Examples include revised zoning for agricultural lands, creation of a rural residential zone, and revised standards for services in low density residential areas.
3. Establish an explicit approach to deciding when and where to annex territory:
  - a. Though future annexation petitions will be brought on a case-by-case basis as deemed appropriate, the City should define a long-term conceptual boundary for territorial growth. Over time, the cities of Palmer, Wasilla, and surrounding areas will continue to grow. As land is developed and more people locate their homes and businesses in these areas, the two cities will be asked to provide higher levels of service. In order to provide increased city services, Palmer and Wasilla will annex developed territory, growing closer together. Given these trends, the

consultants recommend designating the existing Palmer Water and Sewer Service Area boundary as this long-term conceptual outer boundary for the expansion of City limits.

Identifying the Water and Sewer Service Area as the long-term conceptual boundary for the City of Palmer does not, by itself, mean that the City will actively pursue annexation of this area. Rather, it is meant to be a reasonable guide for landowners and the City in preparing for growth and the possibility of future annexations. It may be decades before Palmer's growth warrants annexing to the limits of this long-term conceptual boundary.

- b. Phase annexations within the long-term conceptual boundary, following the criteria below:
  - i. Scale individual annexations to the City's infrastructure, operational and fiscal capability to deliver services.
  - ii. Coordinate the City's annexation planning with other public and semi-public entities that also have major local governance or service responsibilities such as the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and its service areas, the University of Alaska, Matanuska-Susitna College, and public utilities, and with applicable Matanuska-Susitna Borough plans (e.g., its Comprehensive Development Plan, Core Area Plan, Long-Range Transportation Plan, and Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan).
  - iii. Annex vacant territory with imminent development potential sooner rather than later. A major benefit of annexation is that it provides a chance to coordinate and guide infrastructure development. After development occurs, this and other benefits of annexation are often forfeited, and annexation often becomes unwelcome and politically problematic. Specific priorities include:
    - Existing or potential commercial corridors and nodes near the City whose development might erode the City's sales tax base.
    - Undeveloped and/or under-developed tracts with near-term potential for residential or other land uses, in order to ensure that development meets city standards for roads, drainage, utilities, etc.
    - Undeveloped and/or under-developed tracts whose future use and development will have major influence on the quality of life in and around Palmer (mainly the two major road corridors: the Glenn Highway corridor and the Palmer-Wasilla Highway corridor).

- Nearby vacant tracts whose development potential has been or may be substantially enhanced by public infrastructure investments.
  - Tracts that enhance the City’s long-term ability to function as a trade, service, governmental, and job center for Greater Palmer.
  - Built-up areas as requested by residents, or as essential to maintain cost-effective city services, or as required by LBC boundary standards.
- c. Include Planning and Zoning Commission review in the process of deciding when and where to annex territory. A resolution supporting annexation in itself and specific areas would be an asset to the City Council in their decision-making process.

***When the City is ready to proceed with future annexation proposal(s):***

4. Identifying Priorities for Annexation: If and when the City is ready to move forward with an annexation proposal in the near-term, and considering the criteria presented above, it is the judgment of the consultants that the priority for annexation should be the area bounded by the Palmer-Wasilla Highway corridor on the north, the old Trunk Road on the west and the Glenn Highway corridor on the south and east. Identifying a particular area helps all parties focus attention where benefits of annexation are greatest and limits unnecessary expenditure of planning resources and political energy.
5. Public Process: LBC (Local Boundary Commission) regulations set minimum requirements for local public consultation before an annexation petition is submitted for review. Experience indicates that the City would be wise to greatly expand its local public process for drafting and review of annexation petitions. Based on conversations with Palmer-area residents and business owners, consultants recommend the following measures:
  - Conduct general public outreach regarding annexation issues; work to solve legitimate concerns prior to proceeding with annexation (this report is a part of implementing this recommendation)
  - Define a preliminary territory of interest for consideration for annexation.
  - Hold advance informational meetings and consultations with residents, landowners, and stakeholders in the preliminary territory to learn of local issues and concerns before drafting an annexation petition.
  - Prepare a preliminary draft annexation petition for internal review that:
    - Addresses issues raised by residents and stakeholders about the potential impacts of annexation on taxes, services, and land use and rural lifestyles;

- Analyzes the impact of a prospective annexation on city operations and finances;
  - Evaluates the costs and resource requirements to extend city facilities and services to prospective annexations;
  - Includes a detailed transition plan for the extension of city services in the post-annexation period, and for intended land use policy.
- Initiate appropriate revisions to existing city policies and codes; ensure that critical revisions are in place for timely post-annexation implementation.
  - Present the draft petition for public review with residents/stakeholders.
  - Present the (revised) draft annexation petition for formal hearing and final action by the city council.

### **Specific Steps to Address Identified Issues**

In the course of the many meetings and consultations that have occurred to date, additional specific ideas surfaced that merit the City's consideration, some of which the City has already begun to implement. These are listed below.

- 1) Clarify the process for zoning newly annexed territory. This could be done through a three-step process:
  - a. As part of the City's process to develop an annexation proposal, prepare a preliminary land use plan map with generalized land use classifications (e.g., residential, commercial, industrial, and park/conservation, agriculture) for the territory proposed for annexation. These preliminary classifications may be based on the city development goals and the Core Area Comprehensive Plan Land Use Plan Map. Accompany this map with an explanation of the intent of these designations, allowing for refinements in boundaries, uses and intensity of use upon annexation approval by the LBC.
  - b. Identify areas where current or likely future uses are not a good fit with existing zoning codes. For these areas, develop general intentions for new or revised zoning districts. New categories expected to be needed include: a low density/rural residential zone, a revised agriculture zone, and changes to better accommodate home-based business.
  - c. After annexation approval, work with landowners to amend the City's land use plan, based on the generalized land use classifications in the preliminary land use plan. Discontinue use of the (T) Transitional Use District now in city code.
- 2) Complete the process to revise PMC Title 17.56 (Agricultural District). In particular, consider:
  - a. Revising setbacks for fences on farms to allow fencing to the lot line.
  - b. Allowing vehicle storage for a limited number of vehicles as a permitted use, with additional vehicle storage allowed only as a conditional use.

- c. Including the conservation of Class I and II soils as an explicit purpose of the Agricultural Zoning District.
  - d. Including an Agricultural Use Notice.
  - e. Including a statement that one purpose of the Agricultural Zoning District is to implement the Palmer Comprehensive Plan, which endorses the goal of protecting agricultural lands and promoting agriculture as a component of the local economy.
- 3) Revise PMC Title 6 to allow, within the Agricultural District:
- a. Smaller setbacks for livestock to correspond with fencing requirements or as otherwise deemed acceptable, and
  - b. Noise and odor from livestock that is associated with normal farm operations.
- 4) Explore the possibility of designating parts of the city, in very low-density areas, where refuse hauling service may not be required, as long as other trash-related ordinances are followed (e.g., no burning, compliance with zoning rules).
- 5) Explore the desirability of agreements to contract with existing services areas to continue to deliver services for a transitional period.
- 6) Public process:
- a. Have multiple meetings at different times of day to accommodate business people, families, and people who cannot make City Council meetings. In particular, the City should seek to meet with farmers in winter months when they have the time to attend meetings, prepare responsive briefs/comments, etc.
  - b. Hold informal meetings focused on annexation (at City Council meetings, people don't get their questions answered). Give people an opportunity to ask questions about how annexation will impact them.
  - c. Prepare an information sheet and have a public workshop attended by city staff who can answer questions about these topics: What is annexation? How will it impact landowners? What is different upon annexation (rules, business license, new rules about business)?
  - d. Provide a draft plan for providing services upon annexation that it can share with the public early on in the outreach process preceding an annexation petition.
  - e. Make sure the City releases correct information, ahead of the rumors.
  - f. Be sure information on annexation issues reaches people with concerns about this topic. Good ways to get out information include:
    - post at the library
    - banners/signs on roads (as long as it's legal)
    - present to groups that meet regularly: Kiwanis, Rotary, Elks, Senior Center, Chamber of Commerce, farmers, etc.
    - give at least four weeks notice of meetings/etc
    - newspaper notices are often not effective, but putting an extra flyer in the newspaper is.

- Flyer in the mailbox
  - Try to include a notice in the DNR newsletter on crop reports that goes out to farmers
  - Email: For persons who have business licenses with the City or Borough, email out to them. Probably have email addresses in order to get the business license; if not, include that as part of the application.
- 7) As part of communications about annexation proposals,
- a. Include a cost-revenue analysis
  - b. Include information about the planning process that precedes annexation proposals. Refer to the 2006 Palmer Comprehensive Plan and regional plans such as the Core Area Plan, the Matanuska Susitna Borough's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), and Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan.
  - c. Present a clear rationale to the public for proposing the annexation of particular lands. Guide any future annexation plans consistent with the three goals below:
    - Fiscal Health: Revenues – annexation can help sustain the City's fiscal health by securing tax revenues development within the Greater Palmer area, in particular possible from commercial development along the Palmer Wasilla and Glenn Highways.
    - Fiscal Health: Costs – annexation provides residents, land owners and the City the opportunity to guide development to ensure public services and facilities can be provided effectively, efficiently and at low cost
    - Keep Palmer "Palmer" – annexation provides the opportunity to guide development
  - d. Be clear and consistent in communicating how zoning of annexed properties will be handled. To the extent possible, work with landowners prior to annexation to clarify acceptable zoning designations. If necessary, revise the zoning code.
- 8) Take steps to enforce real estate disclosures and educate homeowners about living next door to farms. Consider other ways of addressing this issue, including:
- a. Passing a resolution not to enact nuisance ordinances that would restrict normal farming practices.
  - b. Requiring resource management easements for new residential development adjacent to an agricultural zone.
  - c. Passing a local right-to-farm ordinance
- 9) Adopt a preferential policy to route public infrastructure improvements around rather than across farmland, where feasible.
- 10) Support agricultural reforms, as needed, in State policy regarding fertilizer application, manure management, water management, etc.

# **APPENDIX A: COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

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## **Palmer Annexation Strategy Process**

Over the course of a year (2009), the consultant team met numerous times with interested individuals and parties. Early in the process and working with city staff, the consultant team prepared an informational pamphlet to give some background on the project and answer general questions about annexation. Two public workshops were held to gather input on the concerns and questions of the general public. The project team conducted additional research through a series of interviews and small group meetings in order to obtain more detailed information from Palmer-area farmers, business owners, residents and other property owners, outdoor recreation advocates, City Council, and city staff.

The following pages include a timeline of public involvement events, notes from many of the events, and comments submitted by concerned members of the Greater Palmer community.

## Process Summary, Palmer Annexation Strategy

- Project Start-up
  - City Council Meeting (*March 3, 2009*)
- Outreach + Research
  - Agriculture “Focus Group” Meeting (*April 17, 2009*)
  - Discussion with University (*April 22, 2009*)
  - Discussion with Mat-Su Borough (*May 14, 2009*)
- Annexation brochure (FAQ, what the project is & why the City is doing it)
- Outreach + Research (continued)
  - Public Workshop (*May 20, 2009*)
  - Discussion with gravel extraction operators
  - Farm Tour (*June 23, 2009*)
  - Business “Focus Group” Meeting (*June 25, 2009*)
  - Agriculture “Focus Group” Meeting (*October 7, 2009*)
  - Mat-Su Trails Council (*October 12, 2009*)
  - Mat-Su Greenbelt Group (*October 13, 2009*)
  - Gateway Community Council Meeting (*October 29, 2009*)
  - City Council Meeting (*November 10, 2009*)
  - Phone discussions with various residents (*June – November, 2009*)
- Draft report (Issues raised, strategies to address, recommendations)
  - Open House (*November 16, 2009*)
- Annotated report (initial community feedback from open house on report findings presented at open house)
  - City Council interviews (*February 2010*)
  - City Council/PZC worksession (*February 16, 2010*)
- Public review draft report release (*April 2010*)
  - Public review event/open house to review report (*April 19, 2010*)
- Final draft report submitted to City (*May 2010*)



**Attended:**

- Kevin Brown
- Richard Best
- Brad Hanson
- Michael Gatti (Read Council Notes “Not Just Anxieties” (Council Views – NDS or Hold)
- Bill Allen
- John C. Combs – mayor
- Janette Bower – clerk
- Michael Chmeilweski
- Ken Erby
- Katherine Vanover (on phone)

**Notes:**

- Concern that annexation will mean more services and more development; loss of agricultural land. Appreciate effort of City to think/talk about annexation prior to action.
- Last time was very poorly done. The biggest reason given then was economic development.
- Last time, didn't think about impacts of annexation. Next time/this time include NRCS / SCS / Farm Bureau. Once farmland is gone, it's gone. Town does need to grow, but make allowance for farming (animals smell, farms smell, roosters crow...) This time don't ignore the agriculture community.
- The previous process didn't bring everybody to table. Recommendation from Economic Development: look at/ inventory available lands before thinking about annexation.
- Legitimate concerns: agriculture and building permit concerns. Need to look at concerns and reach conclusions about solutions. What are concerns about AG? Add costs and farm operations constrained.
- Context: Palmer has had more annexations than any other city in Alaska (small nibbles); city is dense, has low tax revenues; annexation won't affect growth pressures
- Fiscal impacts (costs and benefits) will process produce information on costs and revenues; changes views about planning

- Build trust for city of Palmer, among potential annexees
  - control vs. influence / right language
  - “survival of Palmer does depend on annexations”
  - any industry can survive / coexist with the city
  - resolution to legitimate concerns
  - Transition zoning – honor existing rights
  - “uses should cost \$\_\_\_\_”
  - Bad argument: non-Palmer residents are using Palmer shops/stores. Provide money for infrastructure/services.

### Leg. Annexation Process

- Need to explain it clearly and succinctly (one pager)
- Survival?
  1. have room to grow
  2. must have influence over development.
  3. Strength in numbers.
- Get resources needed for improvements, get \$, grants
- To be competitive
- Quality of life; “our values”

### Reasons for City’s interest:

- The City is like a business: the costs keep growing, but can’t have the same revenue every year. The City needs land to offer; it has some space, but not enough for a business park or community park
- Many for-sale signs. No guidelines from the Mat-Su Borough on prime property along the Glenn Highway south of Downtown. Palmer was developed by Midwesterners
- Farm work ethic, “keep Palmer, Palmer.” Don’t want to see a flea market like at Meadow Lakes. Palmer has no ability to influence development outside city boundaries. Would love to see frontage land be saved as Palmer. A previous 900-acre annexation included Snodgrass Farm. Zoning can be a bad thing, but it can also be a good thing.
- State laws will provide continued protection for agriculture uses (taxes, noise, smells, etc.); also disclosures. State law sets law.
- In the past, 200 people came to a City Council meeting to say “we don’t want the annexation.”
- For future:
  - Take out fear factor

- Build more assurances
- Keep Palmer Palmer
- Will rate different for farms. Borough and City will rate very similar
- “Agriculture is the heart and soul of Palmer”
- If the City annexes land, the city will be able to influence future uses, but on the other side, some are worried that zoning will prevent conversion to non-Agriculture uses.
- The last annexation proposal: “big land grab,” the City would have final control over the land, big misconception, big unknown

### Communication

- Like to see “overlay” comparison of rules within the city vs. without (e.g. burn barrels)
- “wash away the clutter of misinformation, on both sides”
- Zoning is terrifying; rules can be changed. Want some certainty
- “Constituent Mapping” form of communications will work best for different people
- Correct Misconception Solve/Change
- Can’t be changed
- Provide Facts
- Correctable problems

### Process

- will require more spokespeople; will require opportunity for dialogue; will require City Council to be involved as spokespeople for process
- If it takes more time that’s ok
- Want to get it right; recognize this is for the long-term

**Attended:**

- Heather Stewart
- Sandra Garley
- Steve Gallagher
- Arthur Keyes
- Todd Petit (invited, didn't make it)
- Jenny Vanderweele
- Ben Vanderweele

**Notes:**

- Others to reach out to: SOALS (Bill Olbie?), DuPruys's
- Sandra is working on a revised Palmer Ag zoning district – passed out copies of current draft and wants to know if it makes sense to local farmers or needs revision.
- Sandra is also looking at a possible revision of the Palmer Transition zoning district

**What are the problems?**

- “Seems like every time the City gets involved in farmland, farmland goes away.”
- Farms don't survive in city limits – City Council telling farmers how to do their job (because of complaints about noise, smells, hours of operation)
- Tax issue(s): proposed annexation line went through a field; the value of the land inside the city (area proposed for annexation) doubled the tax rate (assessment doubled the value of the land)
  - Just the proposed annexation doubled the assessed value of the land to the MSB assessor.
- Need to get the State law changed so that assessors cannot do that. Sandy will prepare a draft bill for next year's legislative session if farmers will assist
  - Tried something like this 7-8 years ago; already some groundwork done (Steve has info on that)
  - Need to get Fairbanks on board; Palmer has a good working relationship with them.
- Certified appraisers set value for USDA program

- Palmer City Ordinances – many that interfere with farming
  - Need to list those (and send to Sandy + Heather)
- Problem is, a farm has many acres, but only one family. Subdivisions have many more families in the same land area, so have greater political power/voice.
  - Regulations can change over time; how to provide assurances over time?
  - Seeing that happen now outside the City anyway
  - State “Right to Farm” Statute
- Real estate disclosure is not always happening
  - Need to require that they be filed at the recorder’s office
- City brings services to area (e.g., natural gas). Runs pipes across farm property. Charges costs per lot (regardless of whether they hook up or not), and charges farmers for several lots because of large land area.
  - Had to pay regardless of whether you chose to hook up or not
  - Did not estimate by property lines by estimated number of parcels.
  - LID – Borough (Local Improvement District; how they did gas lines. That or special assessments)

**Sandra on annexation strategy:**

- Need to spell out why you annex, when you annex and when you don’t
- Annex places with economic viability; not people (who will immediately demand City services)
- Annexing farmland does not make fiscal sense for City
- Looking along Palmer-Wasilla and South Glenn Highways, large enough parcels for Walmart, schools, etc. and along the highways where they have visibility
- The Hospital wants Palmer police service

**What farmers want:**

- “Prove” that proposed areas need annexation (What’s in it for us?)
- Tell us the costs and benefits of annexation
- Allow for extra-territorial City Council members with full voting rights to represent the interests of landowners in proposed annexation areas  
[could create an ETZ – extraterritorial zoning commission; Sandra has experiences from Las Cruces, NM]
- Tell the City not to annex ag lands
- City should be helping farmers, not making it impossible for them to farm:

- Vacant commercial building fronts are not good PR for the City, so why encourage more commercial development when existing development can't keep businesses?
- Ag (and tourism) is the most recession-proof industry

**Attended:**

About 27 people attended the workshop held at the Palmer Depot. The workshop was facilitated by Chris Beck and Heather Stewart (Agnew::Beck Consulting), Sandra Garley (City of Palmer), and Kevin Waring (Kevin Waring Associates), as part of the Palmer Annexation Strategy Project.

**Notes:**

Generally, the group discussed concerns raised during the City's past annexation proposals.

**What is the timeframe for this process?**

- The purpose of tonight's meeting is to gather information from concerned community members about why past annexation proposals have been so troublesome to the community.
- The project team will continue to meet with community members over the summer. Also, if anyone wants to send written comments, please do.
- We'll come back with another large meeting in the fall (will have to be in late October or November to allow the farm community to attend), and a written report summarizing what we've heard over the summer, as well as some preliminary ideas to address concerns that came up.
- Group offered some ideas for publicizing the next large meeting:
  - postcards mailed to people (except without a defined area, don't know who to send them to, not to send them to)
  - email/call contact list 1-2 weeks ahead; ask contacts to help spread the word.
  - Hang a banner at the junction of the Palmer-Wasilla Hwy
  - Public Service Announcements on local radio: KNBQ, KBYR, (100.9)
- The final report is expected to be done by the end of the calendar year (by Jan 2010).

**General**

- The City has no existing proposals for annexation. It is at their discretion if/when they choose to initiate another annexation proposal. We don't know about that. Tonight's meeting is about discussing some of the reasons why past annexation proposals were so troublesome to the community.
- What is the story if we take a broader view of the impacts of annexation? What happens over 10 years?
- Why does city want to annex? What does it want more land for? What would it do with the taxes?

- I thought legislative annexation is no longer possible?
  - Alaska's Constitution (Article X, Section 12) authorizes the legislative review process for annexations. That process has been the most commonly used method of annexation in Alaska and is still available.
- Last time, the thing that angered people most was the Mayor saying "You come and shop here, so you should be annexed." That makes no sense; why not annex clear down to Anchorage with that logic?
- Basically, we don't want the City to shove things down our throat; things like:
  - road service
  - refuse collection
  - requirements to pay for something is not needed or use certain vendors
  - or annexation generally
- We don't want to be forced into the city
- If not many people are asking to be annexed, there must be a reason
- What's going on with the Mat River?
  - That is a separate process.

#### Fiscal Health of Palmer

- Revenue in Palmer has grown over the past 10 – 15 years; this doesn't support economic arguments for annexation.
- Palmer can provide services efficiently because of its density. If the City expands its boundaries and becomes less dense, its whole business plan will have to change. If the City is concerned about providing services in a high density area, how does it plan to provide services cost-effectively in a low-density area?

#### Taxes + Services

- The mill rate between Palmer and the Borough might be the same, but property values tend to go up with annexation, so the amount of taxes we end up paying upon annexation could be much different.
- Some services don't make sense in areas that were proposed for annexation last time.
- There are hidden taxes that would be imposed on us if we were to be annexed; we'd be forced to pay for services not used.
  - Business licenses are an example: businesses inside City boundaries have to have a business license; businesses outside don't.
  - Refuse collection is another example: you must pay for garbage collection whether you take it to the dump yourself or not.
  - The reason the City does it this way is that it has to have some way to make sure everyone is responsible about their trash in the interests of public health (avoiding the spread of disease, etc.).



- Sales tax rate – customers would have to pay –
- Would I have to hook up to city water and sewer if annexed?
  - Water and sewer provision is separate from annexation. The city water and sewer utility already extends outside Palmer boundaries. The City won't force anyone to hook up.
- Fire service would also not be affected by annexation; the fire service area already extends beyond City boundaries.
- Already there is an overlap/cooperative arrangements between the city and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough for several services.
- Gravel operators are concerned that the City wants to annex them and impose a severance tax on the gravel to pay for services elsewhere (or not directly tied to the gravel operations).

### Land Use

- Palmer should explore the possibility of adapting City policy to different parts of town, rather than a “one fits all” approach; similarly to the way Anchorage has different service districts to provide different levels of services and regulations in different parts of the city?
- Some subdivision residents don't want Palmer rules and are not impressed with the City development they've seen so far.

### Agriculture

- Just to clarify, the Farm Tax Credit is basically a lien on the property; back taxes might have to be paid when the land is sold.
- We are concerned that farmland is looked at for development potential, rather than as farmland. When they're installing a sewer line on or near farmland, and make the assumption that one day the land will be worth so much that the farmer can't afford to keep farming it and pay taxes, that indicates that farming is not valued and supported. What can the City do to protect and support farming in this area?
  - The City needs to recognize the *economic* value of agriculture in the Palmer area.
- Why farming can't work inside City boundaries:
  - Cannot drill a well
  - Cannot fire a gun
  - Setback requirements for animals mean having to move fences (this is very expensive)
  - Regulations for animals and manure disposal are effectively prohibitive
  - Land use regulations are effectively prohibitive (costing farmers time and money, perhaps incrementally, but the cost still adds up)

- (Trespass, vandalism, etc.) liabilities, equipment damage – conflicts with neighboring subdivisions and the pressure to develop/restrict /abandon farm operations
- Buildings, sheds, connexes, manure, having to move fences, etc...
- Don't want Springer paved
- Consultants might want to compare Palmer City revenues with other farm communities rather than fishing communities (e.g. North Pole, Wasilla) in their analysis of how constrained the city is.

**Attended:**

- Sandra Garley
- Heather Stewart
- Arthur Keyes
- Bert Gore

**Notes:**

Need to demonstrate value of agriculture:

- # Jobs, range of pay
- \$ from sale of farm products (aggregate; share of Palmer economy)
- Farm products sold w/in Palmer vs elsewhere (how much revenue is being lost?)
- Impact on air quality (natural air filter)

Farm Tax Credit addresses property taxes, not sales taxes, fees, etc. including:

- sales tax
- fees for selling products
- fees for applying fertilizers (permitting etc.)
- building permits for ag structures
- licenses (for what exactly?)

How City of Palmer can support local agriculture:

- plan infrastructure improvements around farmland, not through it
- make a contribution to the AK Farmland Trust
- revise agriculture zoning
- exempt farmers selling produce at farmers' markets from sales tax
- other regulatory or tax/fee exemptions?

State-level actions to support local agriculture:

Anchorage markets = better sales, no sales tax.

Delta not in Borough or City but would support state ag reform

City of Palmer could make a contribution to the AK Farmland Trust

Roads stubbed out to farm fields – invites trespass and forces farmer to barricade. Also, it's arrogant.

Moose fence: \$10/ft; \$14,000 for a quarter mile.

Sod farm: 40 acres, sends sod to Anchorage, Kodiak, other places. Can keep growing sod forever because the field is pulling so much dust from the air. Gaining topsoil as long as it's growing and a natural air filter as long as the glaciers are there.

Straightening roads: would do it through fields, bust up farms, because it's easier than busting through (or even going next to) neighborhoods/subdivisions. Bill Allen even said, "Get the road through the farm."

Regulations/ordinances for vehicles allowed on land (eyesore, etc.)

Farmers putting up for sale signs at the mention of annexation.

Plants started in the greenhouse, about 1 million plants when full. 5 week jump on growing.

Arthur's farm: 2 full time mechanics, 25-30 kids in fields

"Makes sense to develop the hills, farm the flatlands"

How can the City support local agriculture? (ex. Fred Meyers' – selling local produce at comparable prices)

**Attended:**

- Heather Stewart, Agnew::Beck
- Sandy Garley, City of Palmer
- Pamela Stephen, Healing Path Therapeutic Massage (Lazy Mountain)
- Robin Wessel, Off Her Rocker (Palmer-Wasilla Highway)
- Phillip Wessel, Wessel Farm (Palmer-Wasilla Highway + Springer), also works for DOT
- Ervin Hoppe, H+H Sheet Metal (Glenn Highway across from fairgrounds), lives in Anchorage
- Jillyan Webb, Palmer Chamber of Commerce
- Other woman from the Chamber???

**Notes:**

**Rationale for Annexation**

The City should be able to communicate a good reason for annexing land. Be honest. If the rationale for annexing land is just to increase the City's tax base, say that. Saying, "This would benefit the City because..." would help; but don't just try to say, "It's good for you," people don't believe that. When the push comes from the City, it must benefit the City somehow. When the push comes from people who want to be annexed, that's different.

The City tried to annex too much area all at once last time. Need to slow down, scale back; maybe just look at the corridors.

Farmers are very concerned about being annexed. Annexing farmland does not benefit the City. The City will need an agricultural zone that truly protects farmland.

Leadership = 1) Having a vision; 2) Communicate that vision; 3) Get people to buy into the vision. There is a lack of #2-3.

Is Palmer trying to stay small? Does the City want more people and businesses or not? Does Palmer want to be a "small town" or a somewhat larger town with a small-town feel? Reference the Comprehensive Plan and check in with the community more often to review the

Comprehensive Plan. People need to feel more part of the planning process that precedes these annexation proposals.

### Concerns about Taxes and Services

Business are concerned that annexation means more regulation, more control by the City over how they run their businesses, more taxes. What do businesses get for taxes? Most already have garbage, water and sewer. Businesses often prefer City police – faster response times.

What services would businesses get for city sales taxes? Their bottom line has to be smaller or they have to start charging more (increase in price of utilities already impacting bottom line). The Borough is also having conversations about implementing a sales tax.

Farmers are concerned about protection of Class 1 and 2 soils. Property owners are also concerned about:

- having a different set of rules for development that they would have to follow,
- the impact of City rules on who they can sell their land to (concern that annexation will scare off buyers who want to develop/redevelop property in ways that are not allowed by City land use regulations).
- City control over the type of business/land use allowed on a property.

Examples of taxes, fees, regulations of concern:

- sales tax
- property tax (especially if roads near property; special assessments)
- development regulations (land use, building codes)
- business license
- fire marshal (state fire marshal approval same in City and MSB)
- building and land use permits (incl. putting up a tent)
- electrical codes
- zoning codes; ability to subdivide
- need assurances about land use –rezoning upon annexation?

### Annexation Process

In the past, there has been not enough communication over a long enough period of time.

In future:

- Approach landowners to start talking about a year ahead of the formal proposal submission to the LBC.
- Have multiple meetings at different times of day to accommodate businesspeople, families, people who cannot make City Council meetings.
- Have a meeting(s) just about annexation (at City Council meetings, people don't get their questions answered), to give people an opportunity to ask questions about how annexation will impact them.
- Make an information sheet and have a workshop with people who can answer questions about these topics: What is annexation? How will it impact landowners? Etc. What is different upon annexation (rules, business license, new rules about business)? Do you have to go to someone at the City to build something?
- City should have a plan for providing services upon annexation that it can share with the public. (this might be part of the LBC process anyway – in which case, City should present to public well ahead of time)
- Make sure the City releases correct information, ahead of the rumors.

What is the best way to get information to you?

- post at the library
- banners/signs on roads (as long as it's legal)
- present to groups that meet regularly: Kiwanis, Rotary, Elks, Senior Center, Chamber of Commerce, farmers, etc.
- give at least four weeks notice of meetings/etc
- newspaper notices are not effective, but putting an extra flyer in the newspaper is.
- Flyer in the mailbox
- DNR newsletter on crop reports to farmers
- Email: For those that have business licenses with the City or Borough, email out to them. Probably have email addresses in order to get the business license; if not, include that as part of the application.

Lessons from Borough's Hatcher Pass process:

- 2 big meetings
- 3-min speaking time for individuals, had to sign up ahead of time
- Well-presented
- Plenty of announcements
- Made it clear that the recommendations, etc. came out of focus group meetings.

Chamber of Commerce has a community forum 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday of every month. Will try to get us on the agenda for September or October.

## Palmer Annexation Strategy

### Notes from meetings with Recreation/Open Space/Trails Groups

Meeting 1 – Mat Su Trails Council, October 12, 2009

Meeting 2 – Mat Su Greenbelt Group, October 13, 2009

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#### Summary:

- The two groups have different membership and different priorities. The Trails Council represents diverse users Borough-wide; the greenbelt group is focused on just that issue and has a more pro-planning, pro-environment perspective.
- The greenbelt group revealed a real challenge and opportunity for the City of Palmer. The group very much wants to establish a major regional open space reserve in the vicinity of the Kepler Bradley-Crevasse Moraine-University lands. They currently have more passion than power. This group will ultimately be asking itself - will the Borough or the City be more likely to help establish and sustain this area? This group could become major supporters of the annexation *if* they were persuaded the City might be a strong, supportive partner in this effort.
- As is the case with agriculture, there is a desire that activities traditionally possible on low density 'rural' lands to continue after annexation. Both groups were generally not opposed/favorable to the idea of annexation, *if* a number of these relatively minor issues could be resolved (see list below).

#### Specific Issues Raised by the Possibility of Annexation.

Below are raw notes from the meeting. In the same way we have identified issues and then prepared responses on agricultural issues, this will need to be done for these open space/trail topics.

- ***Why annexation***, and response to the “standard speech”

The standard speech:

- a. Fiscal health of Palmer
- b. Keep Palmer Palmer; guide character of growth
- c. Growth and change is coming, some entity will ultimately need to manage provision of services in this area; water and sewer boundary already extends out past trunk road
- d. Growth and change is coming, for efficiency of service provision, to avoid need for costly infrastructure retrofits

Response to the “standard speech”

Notion “b” above resonated with second group; likewise second group believes Palmer is better suited to manage this area than Wasilla, and, perhaps, the Borough.



- **Motorized Recreation** - Will annexation affect options for use of ATV's and snowmachines? Wasilla is relaxed about motorized rec vehicles, Palmer actively prohibits. Currently not much ATV use in the proposed annexation area: a few snow machines along the powerline that parallels PWH, an informal ATV trail along the trunk road. Most people at the second meetings would like to see prohibition of motorized recreation vehicles in the area; but several believe plans should allow their continued use.
- **Water & Sewer** - What will be impact on water and sewer? (cb says: no impact)
- **Guns** - What will be impacts on use of guns, hunting, etc. ? (cb says: areas with "suburban densities will likely need to follow same rules as apply within Palmer today; areas with very low densities may not need such restrictions. Answer depends on common sense, on character of land use.)
- **Zoning** - Does annexation automatically enforce R-1 zoning (cb says, no)
- **Law Enforcement** - How will change upon annexation? Will Palmer police be better about enforcing no motorized uses on ski/horse/bike trails? Does the Palmer Police force have authority to enforce Palmer rules on Borough lands? A number of people in both meetings pointed out a need for stronger enforcement of prohibitions of ATV use in areas where such vehicles are not allowed. (cb pointed out the possible benefits of designating a specific place for such use, as happens at Kincaid Park in Anchorage, and might happen on former gravel pits in the area.)
- **Impact on Existing Business** (minor issue/question) – one person has a business distributing mail in areas outside City limits. If the city expands will Post Office take over this job, eliminating his business? Same question for trash service, other services currently offered by private business. (cb response – not likely that groups like post office have resources to serve very low density areas, in or out of the city)
- **Views re the "big greenbelt"** – *first group* - not a strong feeling one way or the other (except from Dot); one person says shouldn't restrict land use options of individual private owners. *Second group* – been meeting for a year and passionately supports the reservation and protection of the greenbelt. The group includes representation of the UAF ag lands, and they are active proponents.
- **Trails** - People in both groups expressed frustration with the City of Palmer's track record on trails issues. This concern could undermine the City's ability to convince these interests the City would be an effective protector and advocate for the greenbelt trail system "The City of Palmer lacks credibility on trail issues." "\$500,000 given for rails to trails project and nothing has happened". Both groups said that the City needs a trails department/trails planner, and that the City needs to understand and endorse value of dirt trails, not just paved.

Palmer Annexation Strategy  
Notes from Discussions with and Comments from Various Residents  
June – November 2009

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July 15, 2009, Phone Discussion

Tee Little, Environmental Program Specialist, DEC, DEH Drinking Water

*(The Drinking Water Program requires public water systems to be in compliance with state and federal regulations, for drinking water, for the public health protection of the residents and visitors to the State of Alaska.)*

### Water/Sewer/Annexation Meeting

- Ranch subdivision: 800 homes + school (Wasilla is feeding them water; Palmer is feeding the hospital water, but they're right near each other)
- Wasilla Creek Commons: 650-850 homes and 3 wells. Trunk Road, near Four Corners, just before the Greenhouse, Meadow Brook, across the creek
- Much rather have Palmer and Wasilla work together on where their official boundaries are for water + sewer.
  - Project 3-5 years out for the water system
  - Community septic would be most appropriate
- City of Palmer plans – three Phases:
  - Phase 1: 1 million gallon water holding tank at college (but no approval from the college yet)
  - Phase 2: line from hospital to tank, connect to water tower, possible agreement with hospital to take over their artesian well and the college's well
  - Phase 3: construct new police and fire station (but how does that help with water?)
- City says without the holding tank, neither the hospital nor the college would have water (not true, they both have backup wells). Gave no reason to hook up.
- Conducted a public meeting on the pretenses that it would happen right now, but the City has no money. As a homeowner, I want to know why the City is having this meeting?
- Knowing the ins and outs of what you're trying to present. Carter presented as if it were happening now. People generally said "we don't need it." Said things that were not true (Just talking about water, not other infrastructure). Did not contact State ahead of time. DOT realignment of Trunk Road – same thing: people asked a lot of questions, DOT said "Don't know, will get back to you."
- City says it has some money to do Phase 1, but not enough. Yet they want to start Phase 2 next year?
  - Wasilla quoted \$1million/mi for extending water

- 1 million gallon water tank is not necessary for the college and hospital (already have backup wells); line up Trunk Road doesn't reach homes up near Palmer-Wasilla Highway. Huge issue boring under road from hospital up to areas with arsenic.
  - will have to replace old infrastructure; way more expensive than installing treatment
- higher arsenic – can use water, install treatment or find a new source.
  - Arsenic pickets all over the Valley; could be your well water is fine, next door neighbor drilled to a different depth and has higher arsenic content
  - Park n' Ride – higher arsenic
  - Wilderness East is banking on Palmer water and not installing treatment
- Want to see (/didn't say anything at the meeting about):
  - Project 3-5 years out; plan of action using current infrastructure (new Trunk Road)
  - Approval from college
  - Design of where it goes next
  - Projections of where it would go next
  - Where the boundaries are between Palmer service area and Wasilla
  - Long term goals and short term goals
  - For short term goals: timelines, how City intends to fund (will homeowners be assessed? How much?)
  - In Eagle River, they were assessed \$40,000 a home, whether they hooked up or not.
- Want to do new realignment to Trunk Road, use that as a guide for extending water, but not there yet, so who knows?
- New Trunk Road:
  - Old Trunk Road is maintained by the State; assume State will maintain new Trunk Road.
  - Who will maintain the old Trunk Road when the new one is built?
  - New Trunk Road will be 5 lanes: 2 driving lanes going each direction and 1 turning lane. Plus roundabouts (like Dowling)
  - Going to peel up the road in the potato patch
  - Tank trail will become road that connects to new Tunk Rd with a roundabout
  - Carter said new Trunk Road will be just like Tudor, but Tudor took 35 years to become the built-up commercial area it is today.
  - Freeway will avoid turns around the research farm
  - But going to go through residential areas, not commercial areas. Already residential developments along there. (unless the City rezones upon annexation?)

- Happy to answer any questions, come speak at meetings in capacity as State Water expert, etc.

#### As a resident

- Only complaint about mail service: Bought home in 2004, moved from Eagle River. Used to post boxes and package slot. Why mailboxes and no place to leave packages in Palmer? When a package comes, I have to go all the way to Palmer Post Office and lunch, stand in a long line. Because I live outside City limits, I'm told the Post Office won't deliver the packages, but if homeowners want to get together and pay \$100 each they'll put in the package boxes. But I've seen some of those boxes in places further out from City limits than I live! They won't drop the package at the house. It's a very simple infrastructure. Reduce people standing in line at the Post Office. Federal issue, but why does it matter if I live in City limits or not? Mailboxes at antique store. Put in metal things, put key in your box.
  - If her well went dry and had to punch in a new well, would consider City water; otherwise sees it as spending a lot of money for an unnecessary service.
- 

#### Phone Discussion Tom 745-8526 and/or Scott 440-7755

- Borough already has building permits, don't want to pay for City building permits and follow City codes (mess with grandfathering, etc.)
  - Don't want City water
  - Businesses have a hard enough time without sales tax and City regulations about land use, etc.
  - Burn barrels (to burn brush) would not be allowed.
  - One has a gravel extraction operation; used to be surrounded by wilderness, now getting built up around him, having difficulties because of that.
- 

#### Phone Discussion Joy – Harvest Acres 746-1243

- Biggest concern is that property taxes don't go up.
- Second biggest concern that they can keep their large-lot, rural lifestyle: subdivision is 2-5 acres in size, neighbor practices target shooting for hunting and want to be able to keep doing that.
- Don't want to be forced to hook up to City water/sewer; don't want to be forced to subdivide to small-lots.
- Unhappy about Bogart extension through subdivision (4-lane highway through the middle of the subdivision, MSB voted for even though representative claimed to be against).

- Also disillusioned with farmers who say they want to pass farmland along to children and develop for gravel or sell for subdivision.
- 

June 23, 2009, Email

What about some less talked about taxation -- like on housing rentals and internet purchases? Are phone, electric and gas utility bills and medical services subject to taxation? If so, that is a significant cost of living increase, especially for those on a fixed income.

Donna A Massay

12100 E Woodstock Drive  
Palmer, Alaska 99645  
(907) 745-4348

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October 30, 2009, Email

As a home owner in Crimsonview sub. My opinion of being annexed has not changed from the privies attempt. And the subdivision as a hold, I am sure has not changed their opinion, which is NO we are not in fervor of being annexed. Its to bad that we have to hear about this in the ADN. and not being contacted direct by mail or phone number. I am sure their are manes that could be obtained from the city of Palmers council meting back from last attempt. There is no services that the city of Palmer can add to make me change my mind. Again NO we do want annexed.

Rex H Erps

1361 S. Ochre Dr,  
Palmer AK. 99645  
PH# 907 745 0170

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October 30, 2009, Email

I am a member of the Board of Directors for Crimsonview and I would like to know why we have not received notification about the annexation issue? It is apparent to me that you are deliberately excluding one of the more vocal of the subdivisions. When will we receive notification?

Please advise.

Sarah Mayfield

And yes, one of the most RIDICULOUS arguments for Annexation was that we use the City's infrastructure and so should pay for it. I DO pay for it because I shop there. The City has shown a WOEFUL disregard for small businesses such that there won't be much to shop FOR soon.

Let them get their OWN house in order first and then we can discuss the rest. And note that there's not enough capacity to add any more customers to the sewer system. Again, get your OWN house in order first.

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November 6, 2009, Email

I, Emily Longbrake, am against annexation of my family's and neighbors' property by the City of Palmer. The cost of the proposed annexation to the people of the area and Alaska's most productive farmland would be devastating. Please listen to the farmers and community members that visit the open house: they have built this place.

Thanks,  
Emily Longbrake

Country Garden Farms,  
1201 S Grover Ln  
Palmer, AK 99645  
[emilylongbrake@gmail.com](mailto:emilylongbrake@gmail.com)  
907-862-0801  
907-745-8300  
907-745-8311 fax

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November 17, 2009, Email

I attended the meeting last night. I came away with the impression that the City of Palmer was once again going to do whatever they dang-well pleased, with no regard to the impact to or desires of the homeowners in the annexation area. If the City were truly interested in making this right, there would be a vote of the landowners in all the affected areas, and those areas that did not vote for annexation would be eliminated from this plan. All this chatting and these meetings appear to be a way to mute the firestorm of protest the City was inundated with the last time around. I don't think it will work. Those of us who would be affected now know what is going on, and are prepared to respond to protect our chosen way of life.

I very much want the City of Palmer to know that when I purchased my home, I had a choice of where to live. I chose, most intentionally, to live well outside the city limits of either of our fine cities in the MSB. Like many Alaskans, I do not want a city bureaucracy messing about in my life. I live in a fully developed subdivision, selected for CCRs that matched well with my preferred living conditions. After 20+ years in my home, I am happy with my selection. I do not regret the decision to live outside the city boundaries, and very much hope to keep it that way. The proposed annexation brings nothing to me except restrictions and a dysfunctional city government. No, thank you! I should add that I have worked within the city limits of Palmer

for 25 years, and am therefore familiar with the activities of the City of Palmer.

Jenifer Hunter  
PO Box 1128  
Palmer AK 99645  
907-745-1208  
resident of Eagle Estates

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December 6, 2009, Email

Here are some of the concerns and objections to the last time the City of Palmer tried to annex our subdivision.

- Currently if we call 911 for a medical emergency, Palmer Ambulance responds, no change after annex.
- Currently if we call 911 for a fire, Palmer Fire Dept. responds, we already pay for fire protection in our taxes. Will we pay more for the *same service*?
- Currently the State Troopers respond, after annex it would be Palmer PD. Same building, different uniforms. Will the response times increase due to the larger area PPD now covers? At what cost?
- After annex we will be paying for city water and garbage. However we have been told in the past by Palmer officials that the newly annexed areas will not have these services provided. The new water main going to the hospital is across the street from us. There is a tie in already in place to connect our well supported water system to the city grid. We will be paying for city water and our well water simultaneously, that is *not* a benefit to us.
- We shop in Anchorage, maybe they should annex us. We shop in Wasilla, maybe they should annex us. I work in Seward, maybe they should annex us.
- Our taxes will go up, this is exactly what we were told last time.
- Our utility costs increase due to added taxes.

We have never seen a benefit to annexation. Paying more money for the same services is not a benefit. Please tell us what the specific benefits would be.

Sincerely,

Eric & Judy Granquist

1135 South Pinnacle Mountain Tr. (Majestic Hills Subdivision)

P.O. Box 984

Palmer, AK 99645

746-3254

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Heather:

Thank you for your prompt reply.

I do understand the City of Palmer is not trying annex any land right now; however, I know for a fact, that they will in the near future. I've already reviewed the online report. I also understand that with annexing, you cannot cherry pick areas to annex and which areas not to.

The Glenn Hwy. corridor south of the Fair has not grown much in the past 30 years (I am a life-long Alaskan resident). Especially not when compared to the extensive development that has gone on in the Palmer/Wasilla corridor. If the City of Palmer does not annex that area, you better believe the City of Wasilla will. It would be even more in the City of Palmer's interest if they managed to find a way to extend all the way to 3 Bears.

The services that we have right now- snowplowing and the State Troopers fulfill the needs of this area very well and in an extremely timely response, especially when compared to Anchorage.

What about all the farmland in the Springer loop area? Won't annexing this area pressure further residential development? I absolutely believe so. Farmland is very important, to the world's and the community's future.

Thanks,  
Maia Hatter  
1560 S. Phyl Ct.  
Palmer, AK 99645

-----Original Message-----

**From:** Heather Stewart [mailto:HStewart@agnewbeck.com]

**Sent:** Tuesday, May 18, 2010 9:55 AM

**To:** Maia Hatter

**Cc:** Sandra Garley

**Subject:** RE: Palmer Annexation

Thank you for your comments.

First, I just want to make sure it's clear: the City of Palmer is not trying to annex any land right now. Instead, the City hired a consultant team (including my firm) to take a look at the issue of annexation, and answer questions like:

- What has gone wrong in the past? How could the city have done better, or do better in the future, should it pursue annexation again at some point? (again, the city is not proposing any annexations at this time)
- Why are some people interested in being annexed? Why do others not want to be annexed? Are these concerns based on misconceptions that can be clarified? Are they based on issues that the City should address?

What we have found, in talking to numerous groups and individuals in and around Palmer is that there are some misconceptions out there, there are also some valid concerns that the City can and should address before anyone even thinks about making an annexation proposal, and there is more dialogue between the City and the residents and business owners of the greater Palmer area that should be taking place. The annexation strategy project is a beginning of that process, but there is still a ways to go.



As part of this project, we did think about the issue you raise. You make an excellent point about the Palmer-Wasilla Highway corridor currently having more development pressure and commercial property than the Glenn Highway corridor south of the State Fairgrounds. We (consultants) agree that if the City were to annex any territory, it would be smart to focus on the PWH corridor in order to support development of the corridor in a way that will benefit Palmer, and for the fiscal reasons you mention as well. Although the pressures might not be as great today, at some point, the Glenn Highway corridor could come under the same kinds of development pressures as the Palmer-Wasilla Highway corridor. For that reason, it makes sense to give thought to the Glenn Highway corridor as well.

You are also correct in pointing out that it is not in the City's fiscal interest to target residential areas, and the recommendations in our report support that point. However, because the Local Boundary Commission will not allow a city to cherry-pick which lands to annex and which not to annex, if it ever does come to it, the City might have to propose to annex some residential properties along with other territory. In that case, our annexation strategy report contains a number of recommendations for addressing residential concerns before any annexation proposal is brought forth, in order to make the prospect of living within city boundaries as equal to or better than living outside city boundaries as possible.

The specifics are included in the draft report, which you can view online at: <http://www.agnewbeck.com/pages-portfolio/matsu/palmer-annex.html> You can also read a paper copy at the Palmer Library (655 South Valley Way), Palmer City Hall (231 W. Evergreen Avenue) and/or Palmer Department of Community Development (645 E. Cope Industrial Way).

Again, the City of Palmer is not trying to annex any territory at this time. The annexation strategy project is more about the City trying to be the most responsive and effective government it can be, so that people (residents and business owners alike) will want to be a part of it.

Heather Stewart

907.222.5424

[www.agnewbeck.com](http://www.agnewbeck.com)

:: resources for community ::

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**From:** Maia Hatter [mailto:[maia@kuskoae.com](mailto:maia@kuskoae.com)]

**Sent:** Monday, May 17, 2010 3:18 PM

**To:** Heather Stewart

**Subject:** Palmer Annexation

Heather:

Why is the City of Palmer trying so hard to annex south of the State fair instead of up the Palmer-Wasilla highway, where there is more housing, more businesses, ect. to tax? There is so much more development and housing going up the Palmer-Wasilla highway, that it seems way more productive for the City of Palmer to annex that way instead. I found a place outside of city limits for a reason.

Thanks,

Maia Hatter

1560 S. Phyl Ct.

Palmer, AK 99645

Pioneer Subdivision – “works today just fine”

- Doesn't need government – another layer not helpful

Annexation

- What's in it for me? – I just see more costs
- Want to see what annexation is going to cost us, want to know about new permits requirements. Project needs “open disclosure”
- Don't want to have to move to Talkeetna
- Retroactively enforce building codes – I am worried about costs
- Building codes antiquated; no need, banks do the inspections today
- “Great news – more fees collected” – city council applauds; Newspaper headline – That's why I don't want to be in the city
- Justify why we need
  - Business permit
  - Building permit
  - Etc.
- Don't want to be annexed into an existing administration – they won't reflect my needs
- Disclosure needed on current city finances
  - Police (subsidized?) to serve greater Palmer! (need to get facts)
  - Fire (subsidized?) to serve greater Palmer!
- City claims it's worried about protecting residents from industry while building industrial parks...
- Horse owners
  - 2 horses per acre (“Noahs Ark”) Kavoc?
- CCRs control development character just fine
  - I bought my house so I could have a horse, don't want to lose that
  - Like trails (Borough does a good job) – can city match?
- Don't want to be forced to have wastewater treatment
  - Wells work just fine in our subdivision, don't want city water & sewer
- Concern about maintaining current uses
- Flexibility is needed in zoning

- Springer Loop – already paved
- Trust issue – hard to believe words from city
  - Sewer lagoon, poorly managed
  - Gravel pits – grandfathering, sales tax, severance tax?
- City responsibility on river erosion issues? (state has main responsibility)
- I live in a fully developed subdivision and there is nothing to gain from annexation
- Why annex existing buildings?
  - Cost?
  - CCRs? – don't have dog lots, no horses, 2 car garages (but ignored), casual
  - Satisfied with things as they are and how they are maintained
- We've got good police and fire services already
- City tells us we use the services and contribute nothing – but that's wrong
- Revenue is the only city motivation (side discussion – not true for residential areas)
- Invested \$8,000 to construct a trap range on parcel just outside of city limits – would be shut down with annexation
- Nobody likes local police. Troopers are very responsive and professional
- Need to redo the entire subdivision code prior to annexation
- Bill Weidinger (Farmer in Palmer) – prefer to see the entire water and sewer district annexed
- City Subdivision code
  - Don't need curb and gutter requirements
  - Need improved subdivision code, more flexible
  - Use green infrastructure not gray (preserve natural waterways)
  - Conservation subdivision – need a new code section to meet needs of larger landowners interested in more flexible approach
  - Performance based zoning code (MSB) vs traditional Euclidian? Better a hybrid

### Agriculture

- Guns: euthanasia is necessary, rancher shoots elk/buffalo for harvest
- (town for butcher/process; not allowed on farm)
- MSB tax property program (tax credit some in Palmer?)
- MSB only considers farms “farms” if they have Federal loans because that must be how they looked up the farms (core plan)
- Roads through farms supporting agriculture

- Come out and talk to property owners face to face , not at hearings, come out before making annexation proposal

#### Other

- Shooting range – small private property, hunt on property
- 4 wheelers on or along roadways
- Burning trash
- Grandfather rights for large animals – by right use
- How much vacant land in Palmer, Vacant buildings? Percentage of occupancy? Percentage of growth?
- Unite population for a 4 lane Glenn Hwy into Palmer now!
- Equestrian Acres – Bogart Road issue has them incensed
- Would having Palmer police affect fire insurance rates?
- Participants noted that commercial businesses that needed to send sales tax revenues to the City would need to pass increased accounting costs along to their customers.
- Several existing residents of the COP wanted to know how the city would pay for the transition. This exchange was one of many in the evening that supported the idea of developing and communicating a transition plan (including zoning, regulations, etc.) even before the COP sets its sites on a given area. The plan would give residents and potential future residents alike an opportunity to work together on annexation.
- Several existing residents indicated that they were happy with their current level of services and wanted to know if annexation would result in the degradation of those services.
- “Will the COP automatically require sub-divisions with pre-existing roads to upgrade their roads to current COP standards?”
- “What will happen to the cost of construction in the newly annexed area? The quality of building outside of the COP is the same or better than inside the COP and with less red tape.” This concept was disputed by several participants and supported by several participants.
- Several participants indicated that the City of Palmer should consider what’s going away with annexation. For example, can the COP create different zoning areas before annexation that can be communicated to the public so that they know whether they’ll be held up to the same regulations as currently exist in COP? It seemed like a certain amount of opposition came from not knowing why the COP wanted to go through annexation and the idea of living with current city regulations which may not be appropriate in slightly more rural areas.
- “The COP has always been singularly inflexible about regulations; this (annexation) is a naked money grab to save a dying city.”
- Participants noted that commercial businesses that needed to send sales tax revenues to the City would need to pass increased accounting costs along to their customers.

**Attended:**

Over 30 members of the greater Palmer community attended the meeting. Project team members included Chris Beck and Heather Stewart (Agnew::Beck Consulting), Kevin Waring (Kevin Waring Associates), and Sandra Garley (City of Palmer).

**Notes:**

- John Nystrom (a resident of the pocket of land between the Glenn and the River at the north end of Palmer) and his neighbors opposed annexation in the past and continue to oppose it, partly because they think that the road maintenance and other services they provide themselves obviate the need for any city services.
  - “We, the long-time land owners in the Bailey Heights Subdivision wish to express our disapproval of annexation to the City of Palmer. We have NO NEED for utility services, water/sewer, etc. Residents John W. Nystrom, Pete Yannikos”
- Some attendees voiced the concern that inclusion in the City will mean limitations on the number of hives that can be kept on the parcel of land, especially during winter, when all hives are overwintered in a heated unit; during summer the hives are placed around the property and other properties throughout the Valley. Other farmers/landowners in the area will rent the hives for pollination of their crops/plants. Right now there are no rules prohibiting the hives, but the concern is that there might be in future.
  - “We have our own everything. We even paved our own road. We do not want to be included in the city. That is why we moved here. We have bees and do not want limits on our agricultural activities. We live packed up to Crevasse Morraine Trailhead.”
- Two persons, one of whom is on the borough planning commission, advocated for the continuance of agriculture and protection of farmlands, were farmlands to be annexed. They had a positive reaction to the idea of revising the definition of the agricultural zoning district and other ideas to conserve agricultural opportunities.
  - “Overall policy goal/statement to actually encourage/support local food production and food security.”
- One attendee suggested Hyer Road as western boundary instead of Trunk Rd because that is the postal district boundary.
- One attendee was very unhappy that the legislative review process did not offer an opportunity for residents to vote on proposed annexations, and thought that the legislature should require a local vote.
  - Response: Such a change would entail a constitutional amendment.
- A resident who lived on lakefront property (Walby Lake) wanted to know whether the City would supersede the Borough in administering the lake management plan.

- Response: Under borough code, lake management would not be delegated to the City, and the Borough would continue to administer the lake management plan.
- An attendee who opposed annexation in his area also said that the report did a good and even-handed job of defining issues and offering possible solutions.
- Two attendees liked the idea that the City might clarify in advance what the post-annexation land use policies and zoning status affecting to-be-annexed property might be. This would help them decide whether to be pro- or anti-annexation.
- Several people liked the idea that the City would revise its codes (creation of a rural residential district, etc.) to be more accommodating to more rural residential areas. The idea that, in some circumstances, it would be feasible to opt out of refuse collection service was particularly appealing to one person who lives near the City boundary and says that he regularly picks up trash wind-blown from the neighbors putting out their trash for pick-up.
- The Bogard Road route selection process left some residents along the route unhappy with the outcome and with the Borough. Also, there was concern that the Borough would not protect residential neighborhoods along the corridor from unwelcome commercial development, and openness to the possibility that the City might do a better job of land use regulation.