

Section 3

Community Design

This section provides design strategies that enhance and maintain the physical and psychological connections to the city core. The design approaches strengthen the unique identity of the city and ensures that future development reflects a caring and proud community. All the recommendations in this chapter are intended to provide inspiration, and explore what is possible in downtown

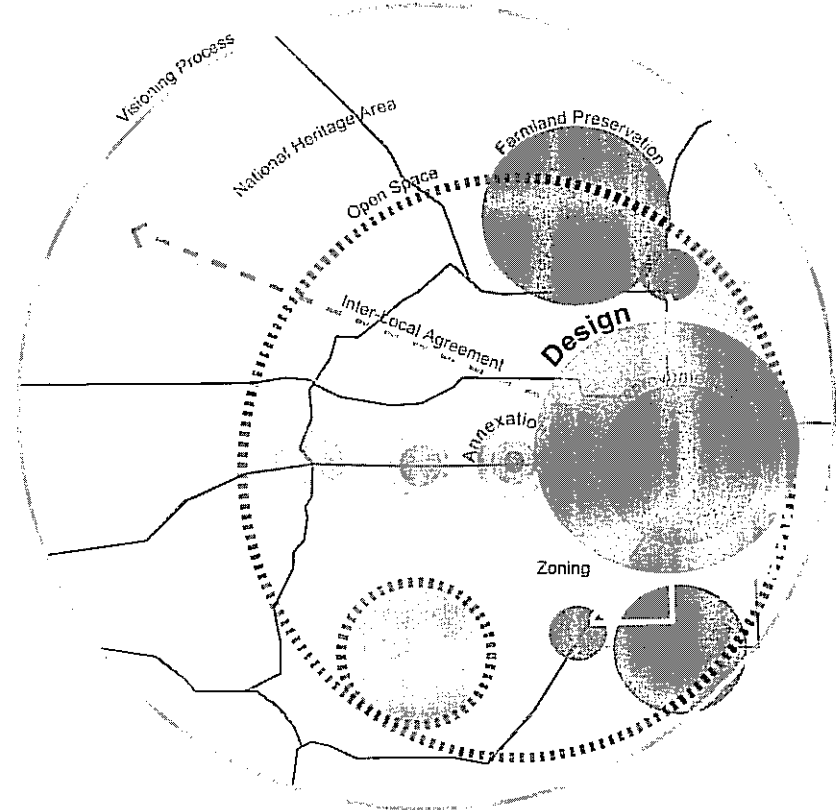
During community workshops, Palmer residents expressed their love of their town's "small town feel", "rich history," "authentic personality," and "beautiful views." It became clear that downtown represents the core of the community's identity and is something the people of Palmer are very proud of. The design ideas represented in this section are intended to be an exploration of what is possible in downtown Palmer. By putting ideas on the ground we learned what the key factors would be in any future development of those areas. For example we learned which subspaces would provide the best view to the Historic District and how sight lines could soften the barrier of the railroad. We discovered which areas need to be better defined to create comfortable outdoor rooms and which places need to be strengthened to express community identity and pride.

Related Working Goals

Shape the character and channel the direction of growth into city limits in order to maintain and enhance Palmer's working rural landscape and small-town identity.

Enhance Palmer's social and economic vitality by promoting downtown commercial growth and community development.

Identify and prioritize farmland facing development pressure and establish mechanisms to preserve identified farmland.



Community Design: Apply design strategies that preserve and enhance Palmer's small town character.

Downtown Palmer is small in scale, full of views and historic structures and offers several important community functions. A historic railroad slices through the middle of town, creating two distinct cores, the Historic District and the Commercial Core. This barrier is bridged by the heart of Palmer - the Depot, which is where the original colonists first set foot in Palmer and where current residents get together.

One of the other sentiments expressed by the community was a concern about where Palmer is headed. People are worried that with growth Palmer will lose the identity that they so cherish, and perhaps, in some small but real way, they might lose something of themselves. However, as the analysis on the next page shows, there are opportunities to establish stronger physical and psychological connections throughout different areas of downtown.

Identity and connections

In Palmer's downtown, we believe it is vitally important to approach all future development with an eye toward its impact on Palmer's identity. By not only maintaining, but strengthening this small town feel, growth can be accommodated while building upon the people's pride in their town. With this palpable sense of pride and connection to what Palmer is all about, residents, visitors and new development will be drawn to the downtown.

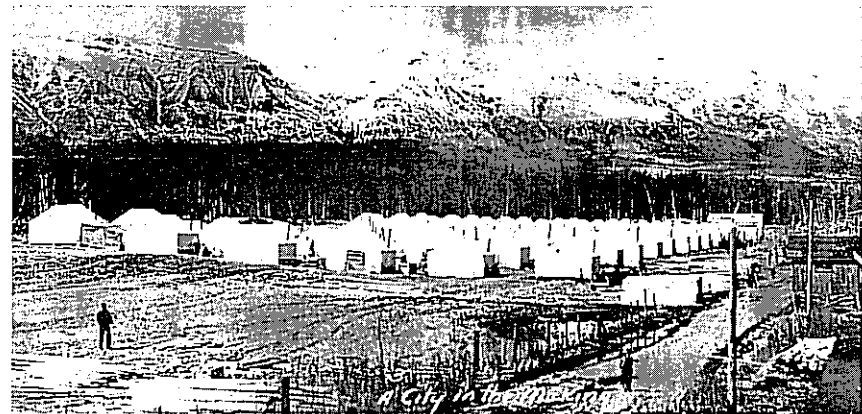
Because Palmer's identity is largely represented through the Historic

STARTED AS
"PLANNED" COMMUNITY.
STILL REMAINS "CORE"
& BASIC FUNCTION OF
ORIGINAL PLAN.

Palmer's "ambiance"
the "personality"
Palmer has a
spirit - lived by
many working in
it is a "small town"
feel a "small town"
a spirit that has
amount of "small town"

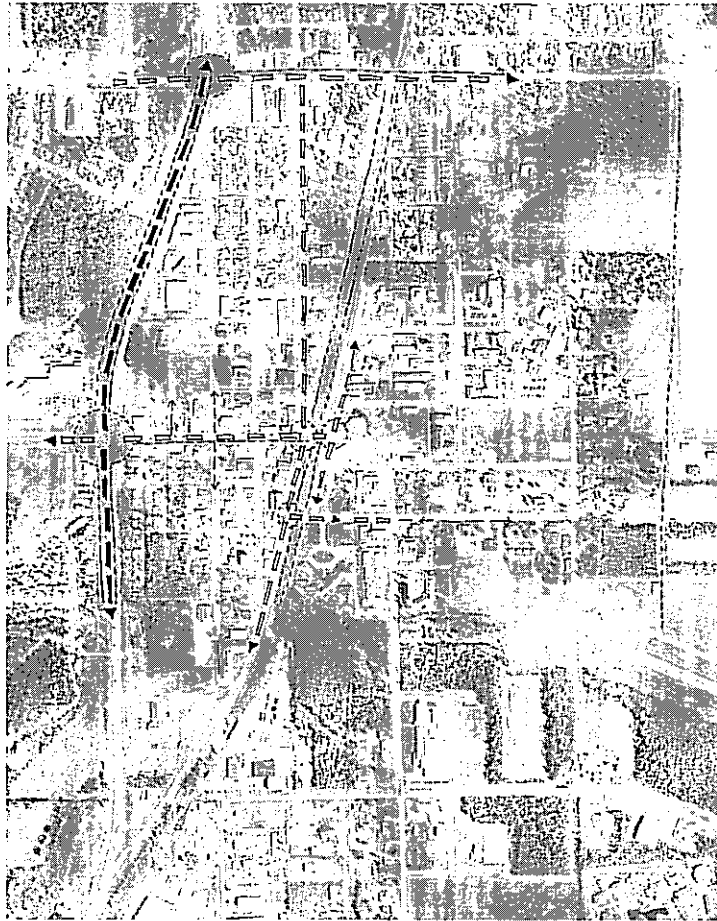
That Palmer's
history, is the
"personality" of
smaller "Palmer"
will not be lost
in future years.

A Real
Cohesive
Town
(no strip mall)



Analysis maps - Flows and opportunities

Drawing upon community input and on site data collection, these maps provide a sense for some of the challenges and opportunities present in Palmer. Note the flow through the edges of town and how the railroad acts as a barrier splitting Palmer in two.



Traffic and Barrier (red) analysis demonstrating FLOWS

This disconnection is demonstrated in the types of places identified as "favorite" by the community. On west side of the tracks, favorite places include the commercial strip and Fred Meyer, while the east side favorites are primarily historic structures like the Mat-Maid and colony houses. Other opportunities include vacant buildings, parking lots and the railroad corridor.



Favorite (blue) and under-utilized spaces representing OPPORTUNITIES

District, we recommend establishing a better relationship throughout downtown to Palmer's history. One way to accomplish this is by establishing physical and psychological connections to the Historic District.

Design goals that maintain small town character

The following are goals developed directly with the community while the students were in Palmer. They have been massaged to speak more specifically to **Identity and Connectivity** such that our work can be evaluated based on their impact on the goals. All the designs presented in this section seek to:

- Protect and enhance identity as small town while encouraging economic growth
- Preserve and better present history
- Establish more interactive community spaces
- Increase physical and psychological connections with and around downtown

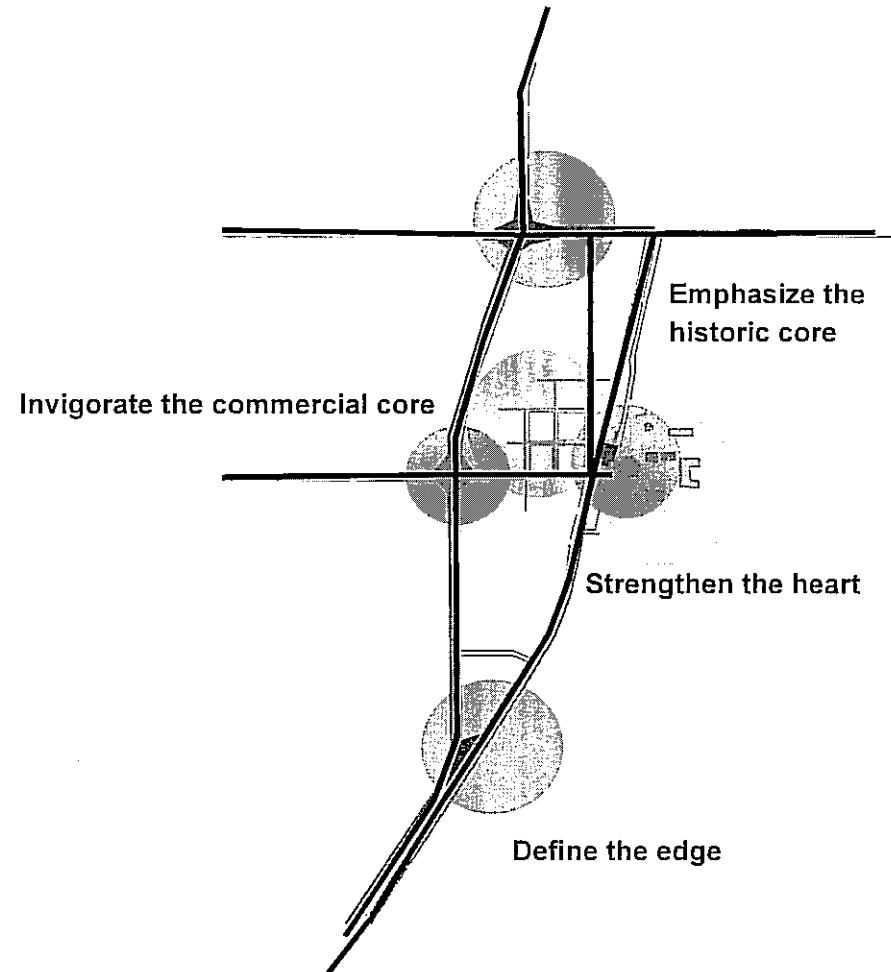
The design explorations over the following pages are divided into four areas:

Strengthen the heart - these designs focus on strengthening and reinforcing the areas and connections in the center of town around the depot.

Emphasize the historic core - these designs reveal and preserve the rich cultural history of Palmer.

Invigorate the commercial core - these designs recommend ways to protect, expand and invigorate the commercial district.

Define the edge - these designs present strategies to better define the boundaries of downtown Palmer through transition, punctuation and connection.



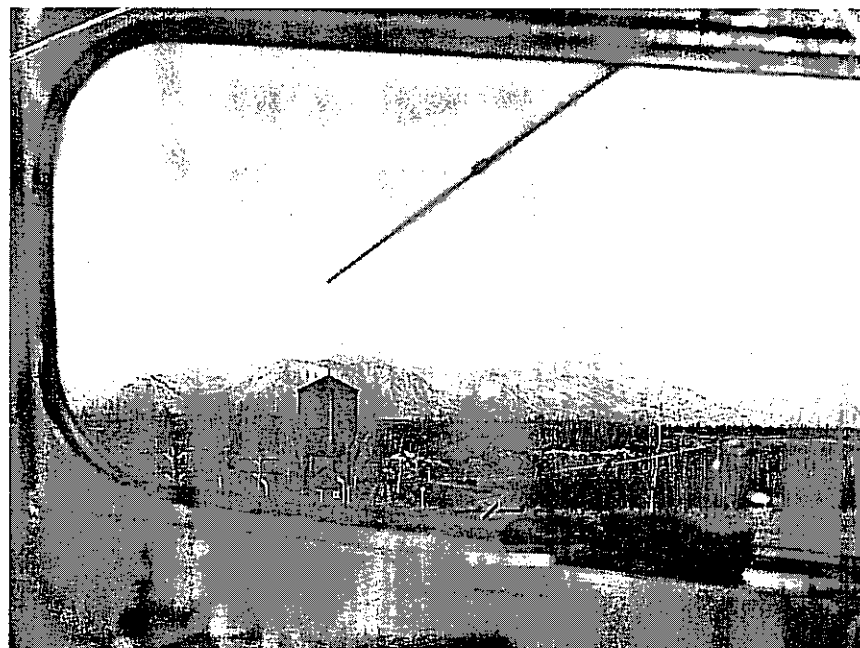
Strengthening the heart

The depot was the point of arrival for the families relocating to the Matanuska Colony Project in 1935. Then, it was their point of departure as they drew numbers in the land lottery determining their new home.

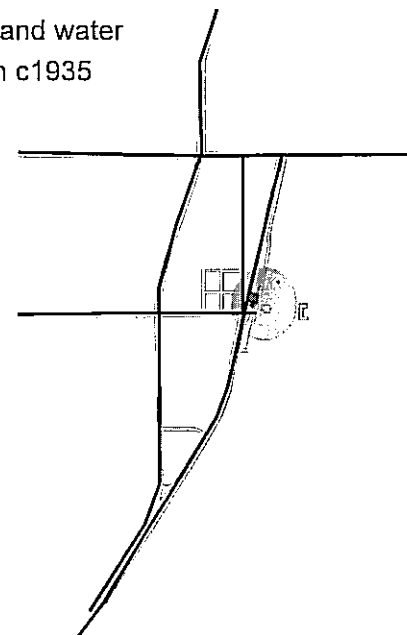
Though the use of the depot has changed over time, now home to weddings, quilting, and community events - not to trains - its identity has not. It is still considered by the community to be Palmer's heart, emotionally and physically. At the center of Palmer, the depot sits on the stretch of rail that forms the second side of "main" street and is an integral part of the historic district, yet divides these two cores in the same breath. This situation gives the depot and the rail corridor it occupies the unique opportunity to break this divide and become the connective tissue between Palmer's two distinct halves.

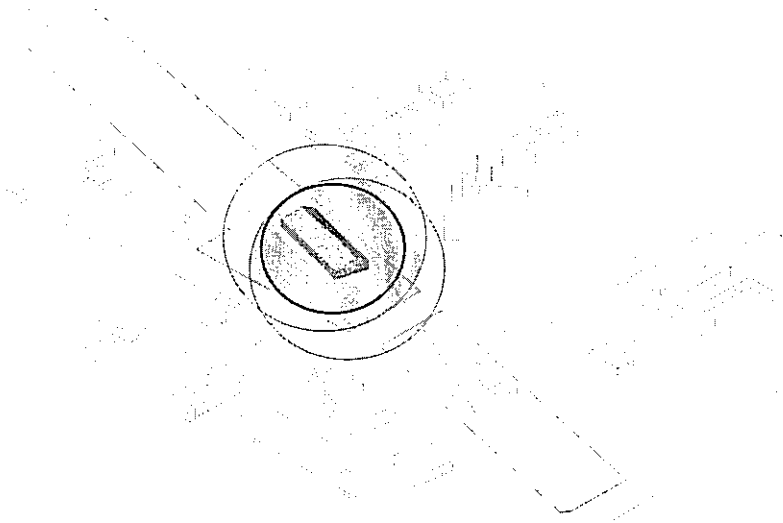
The objective of strengthening Palmer's heart is addressed through three strategies utilizing the central section of the rail corridor as follows:

- **Strengthen the heart**
- **Reinforce the places**
- **Connect the cores**



A view of the iconic Mat-Su Valley and water tower from the windshield of a train c1935





Strengthen the heart

Though identified as the heart, the depot is not visited by residents on a regular basis. Bringing the focus of the town back to the Depot, making it the first place you think of when you think of Palmer, would give the town a clear center.

This could be achieved through:

- The front porch, a place to sit, meet, and connect with the goings-on in town
- Historical markers, recognize the Depot as a symbol of Palmer
- More events, inside and outside the Depot



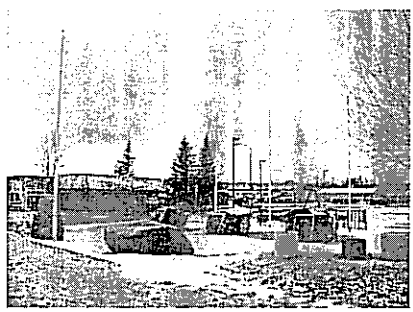
This community meeting illustrates people's passion for Palmer.

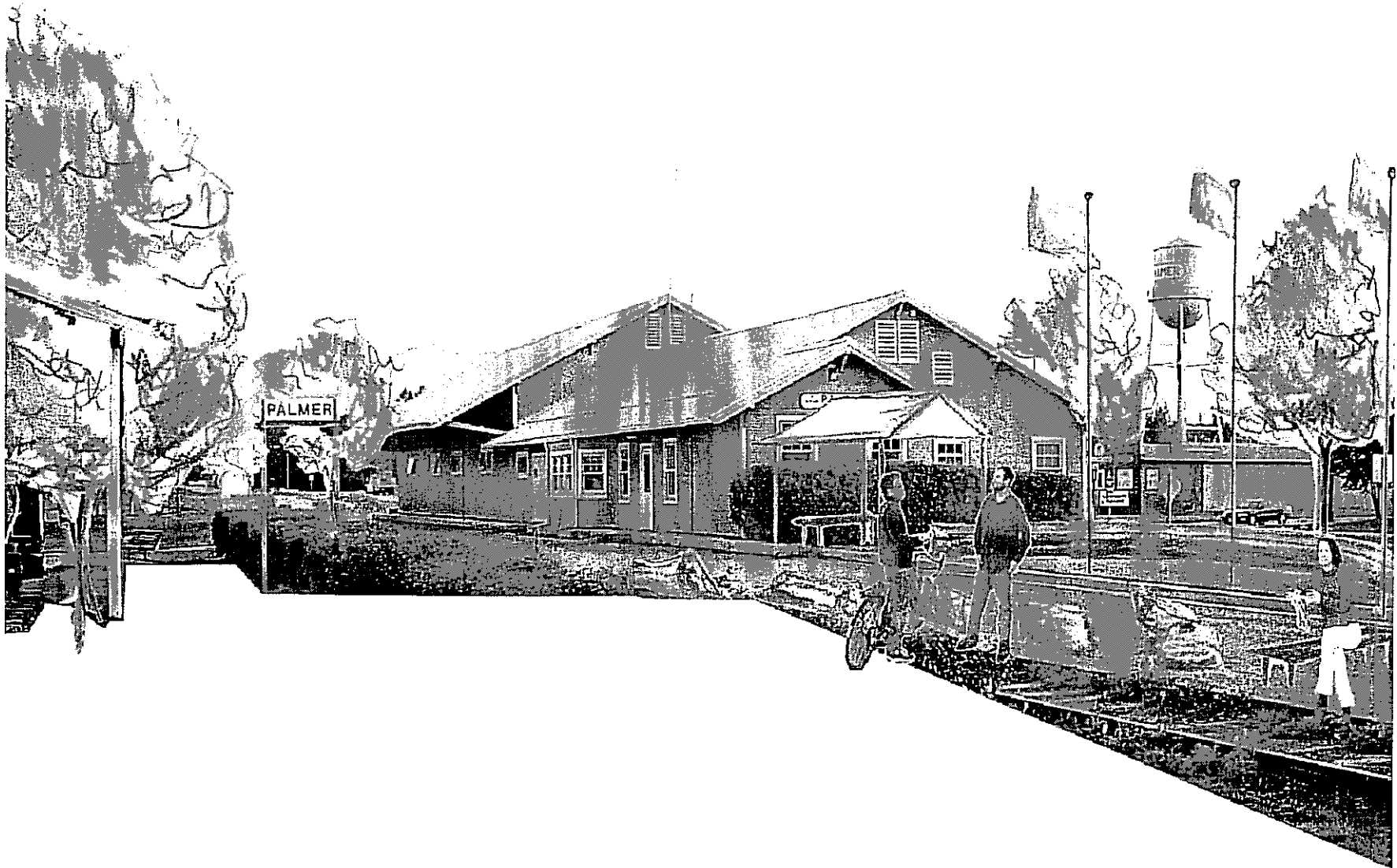
Events like the bed race enliven Palmer and the Depot.



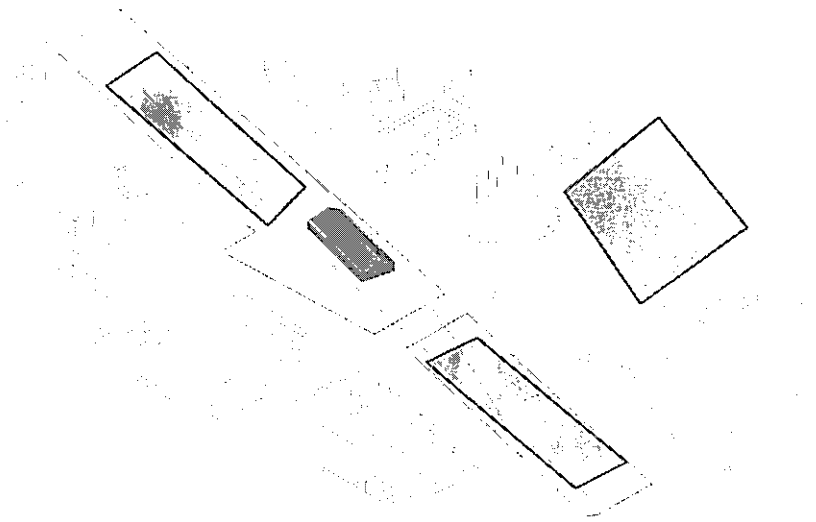
The Depot can help link the commercial core with the historic district.

This monument at the "quad," or one similar, could be a powerful symbol at the Depot.





The “Front Porch” idea treats the depot like a second home, serving as a connection point for residents with the rest of town.



Reinforce the places

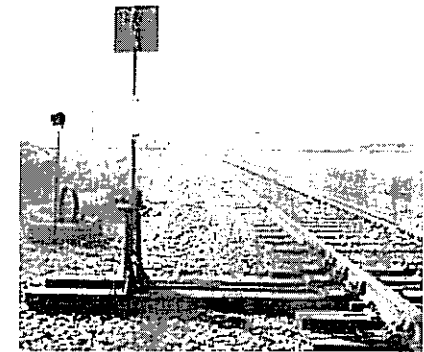
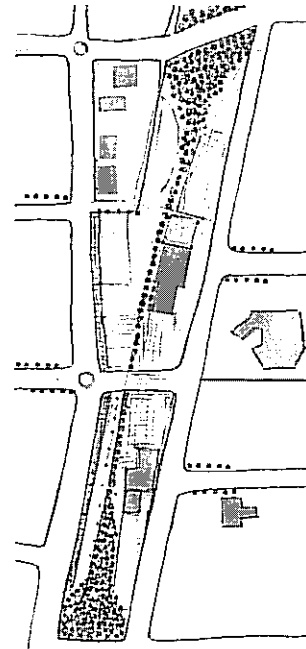
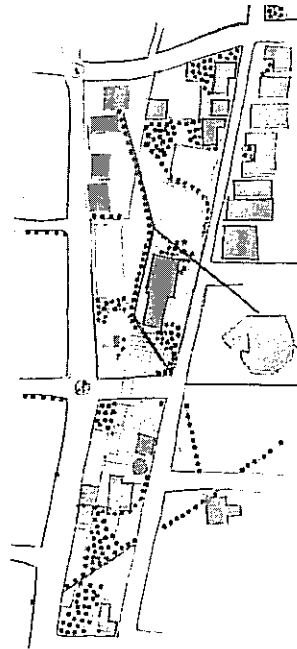
Bring people to the center through programmed places. Convert the rail corridor that flanks the depot as downtown Palmer's community space by:

- Defining and shaping the open spaces that surround the depot
- Program these three places with community events and active use to help populate the area
- Emphasize the three places as belonging to both sides of the tracks - historic and commercial, through community and commercial use

Note: All designs assume that Dogwood will extend across the tracks and recognize that the rail right-of-way would have to be considered.

Design one

Defines similar places as design one through vegetation and structure and brings increased use to the corridor through businesses and parking.



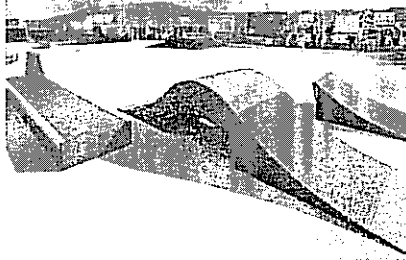
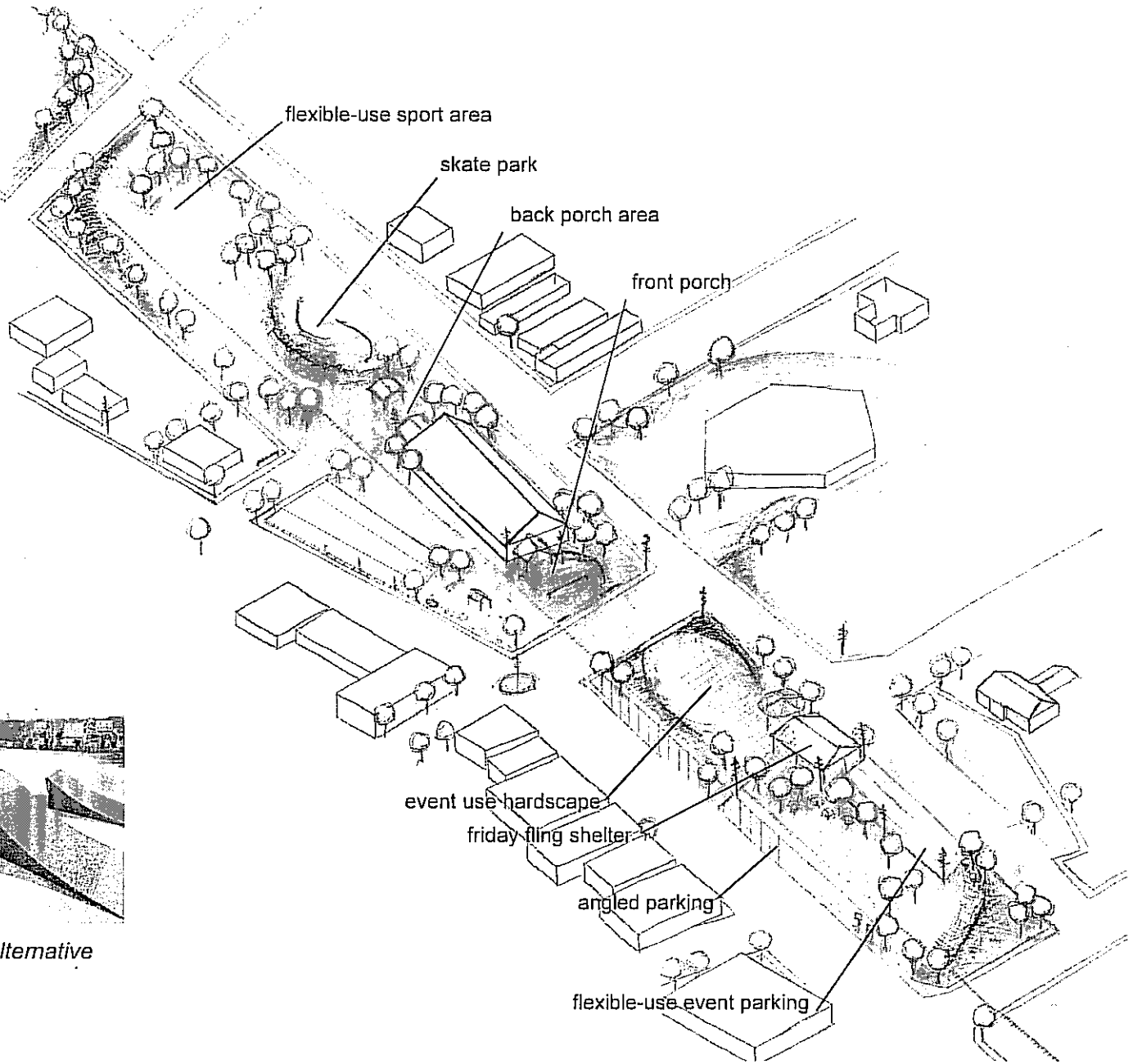
Design two

Emphasizes and celebrates the north-south motion of the rail line and the resulting linear character of the town with an adjacent promenade and railroad relics, while simultaneously drawing the eye directly to the depot.



Design three

Uses landform and vegetation to embrace the top of the rail corridor surrounding the depot at Dogwood and its base at Fireweed.



One prefabricated alternative for the skate park.

The backyard

- sport area: basketball, frisbee
- skate park
- small events: picnic, bbq
- access to rail-trail
- path from downtown to historic core
- edge defined at Dogwood

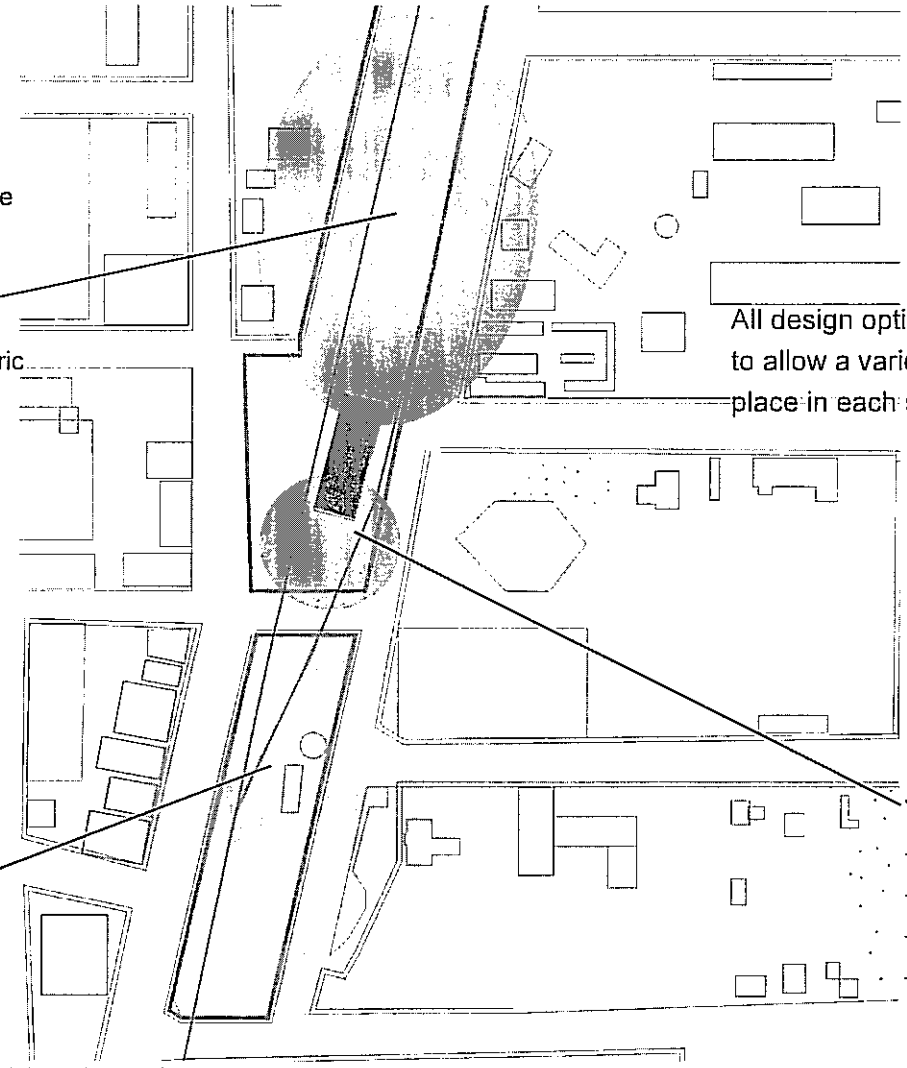
All design options recommended flexibility to allow a variety of functions to take place in each space.

The frontyard

- hardscape for event use
- expanded friday fling structure
- dual use poles: art enhancement, tent raising, decoration
- parking: friday fling, event overflow, angled for S. Colony Way commercial
- access to rail-trail
- central path from main street to historic core
- edge of space defined at Fireweed

The front porch

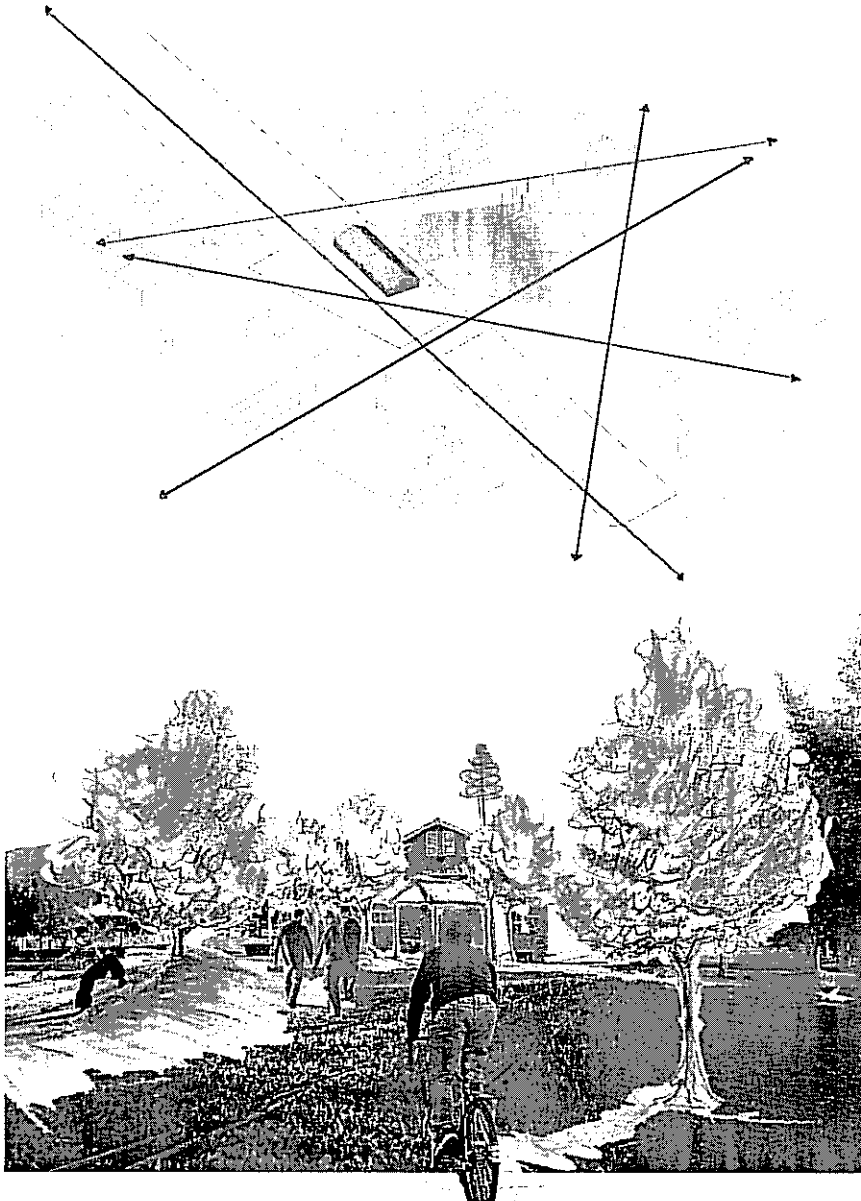
- identity definition
- the first and last stop in Palmer
- rail-trail stop
- casual seating



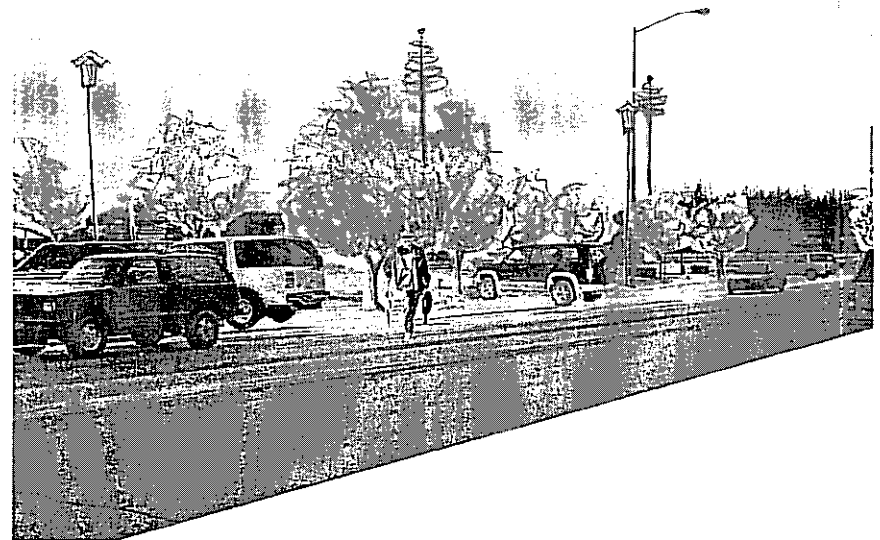
Connect the cores

As Palmer's heart area develops, the divide between the historic and commercial cores will fade. These central places also can serve as a conduit by:

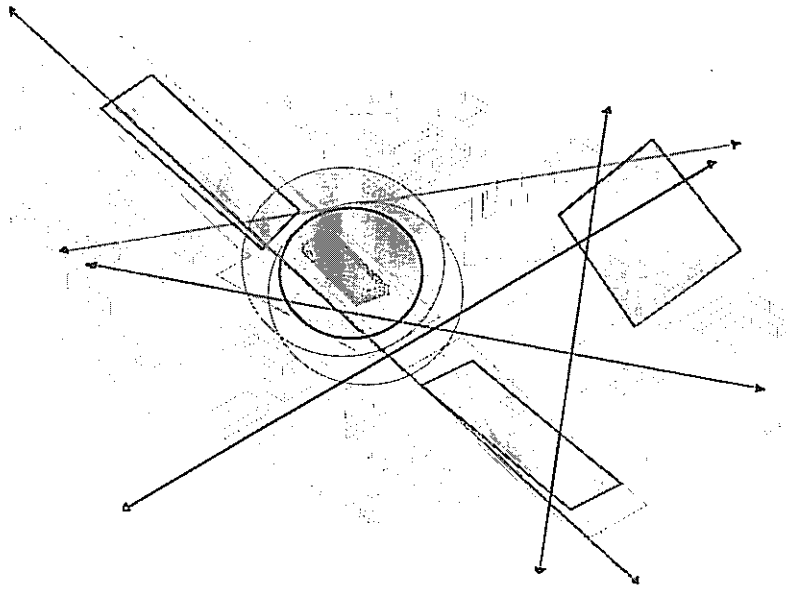
- providing ease of access across town, east and west-moving more people through town on the rail-trail and catching them with increased activities within the corridor and on either side of it
- creating visual links through landform, vegetation, and views



Looking south to the depot from the active skate park and trail shows compatible uses and a vibrant area north of the depot.



Looking south towards the corridor from Evergreen shows new parking along S. Colony and a corridor cut-through path for greater use of the corridor.



Looking north through the corridor from Fireweed illustrates possibilities for vegetative framing.

The beating heart

This integral ingredient to preserving and enhancing Palmer's identity can be addressed through:

- Funding allotted for the central piece of the rail-trail
- Proposed business improvement district
- National Trust Main Street Program



Emphasizing the historic core

Originally intended as the colony's community center and having recently been listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Palmer's Historic District is rich in history and has played a critical role in the development of this town. The Palmer Public Library, its Visitor's Center, the Depot and the Mat-Su borough offices are all currently located in this district and reinforce the original intent of this site as the community's center.

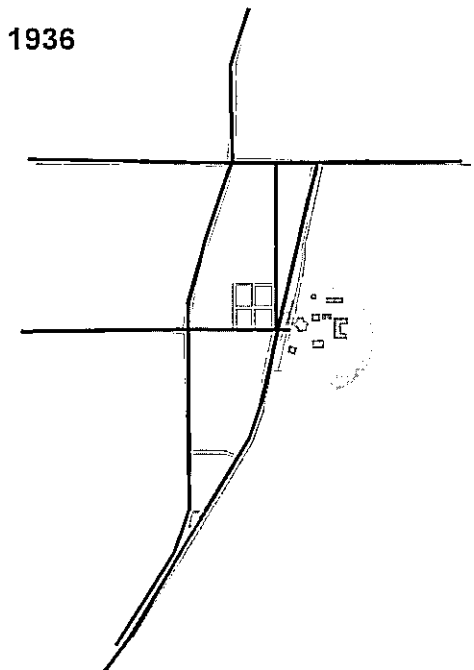
Because of the distinct way in which Palmer has evolved over time, a dichotomy between the intended colony center and the town's commercial core has developed. In this vision for Palmer's Historic District, the intent is to establish better connections to the town's commercial center while reinterpreting the site, remaining conscious of its historical design and providing for the present and future needs of Palmer. The designs, text and images that follow are intended to provide a road map to help guide the development of this district to ensure these objectives are met.

Objectives

- Reveal and preserve the rich cultural history of Palmer
- Enhance the sense of community pride through developing the historic identity
- Strengthening the cohesion of downtown Palmer through increasing the connectivity between Palmer's Historic District and its commercial center
- Strengthen the connections from the historic core to its surroundings



Aerial view of Palmer circa 1936



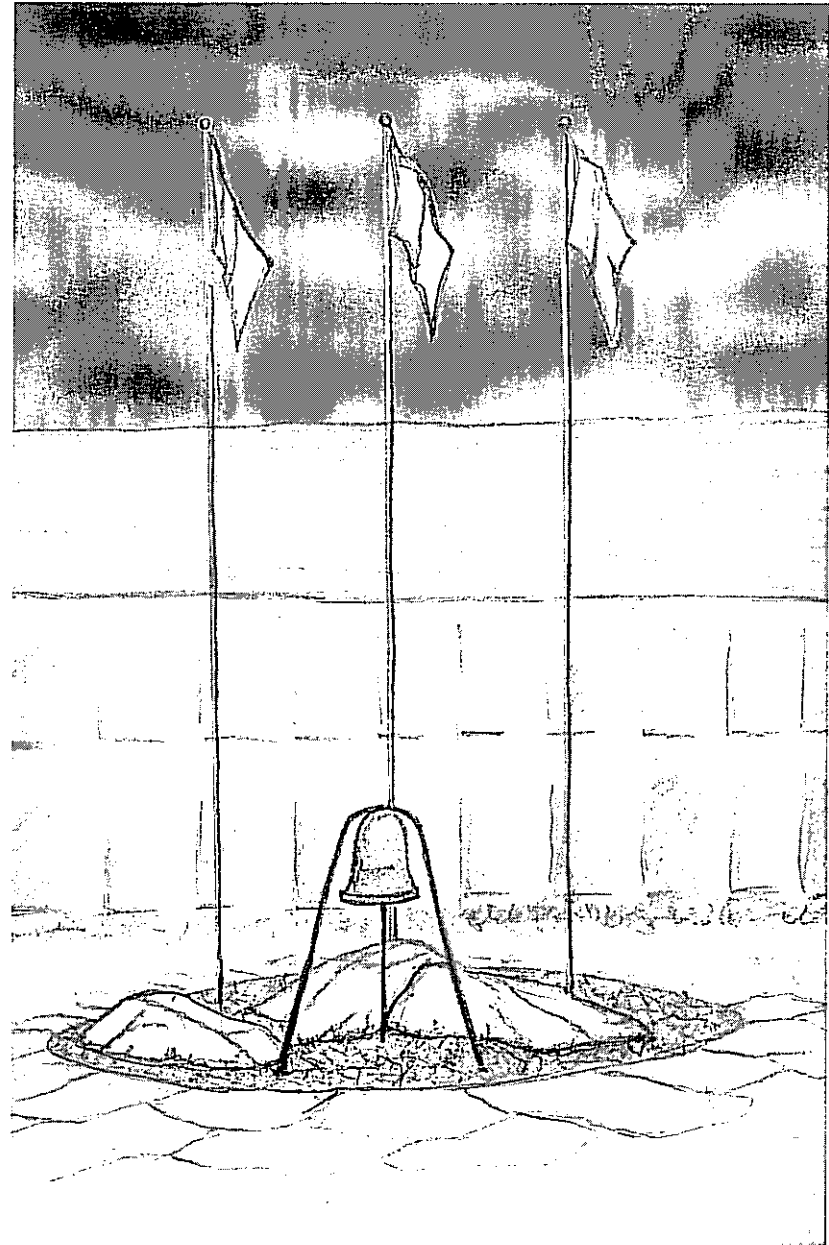
Restoring the Colony Quad

Originally conceptualized by David Williams in 1935, the design for the Matanuska Colony included a type of town square in the form of a quadrangle which would be surrounded by necessary administrative, economic, and social services. This space was intended to function as the town's center. The quadrangular design was ultimately replaced by a curvilinear pathway leading from the borough building to Evergreen St. The historic concept of the town square was compromised in this design.

This proposal intends to restore and renovate the quad to both restore its historic identity and to improve the function and aesthetics of this critical space. While the structure of the original quadrangle is evident, the space is reinterpreted in order to best provide connectivity between areas of importance such as the visitors center, the commercial center, and the old creamery/cannery site. An emphasis has also been placed along the East /West axis of this site in order to appropriately frame the view of this historic space upon entering Palmer from Evergreen St.

Objectives

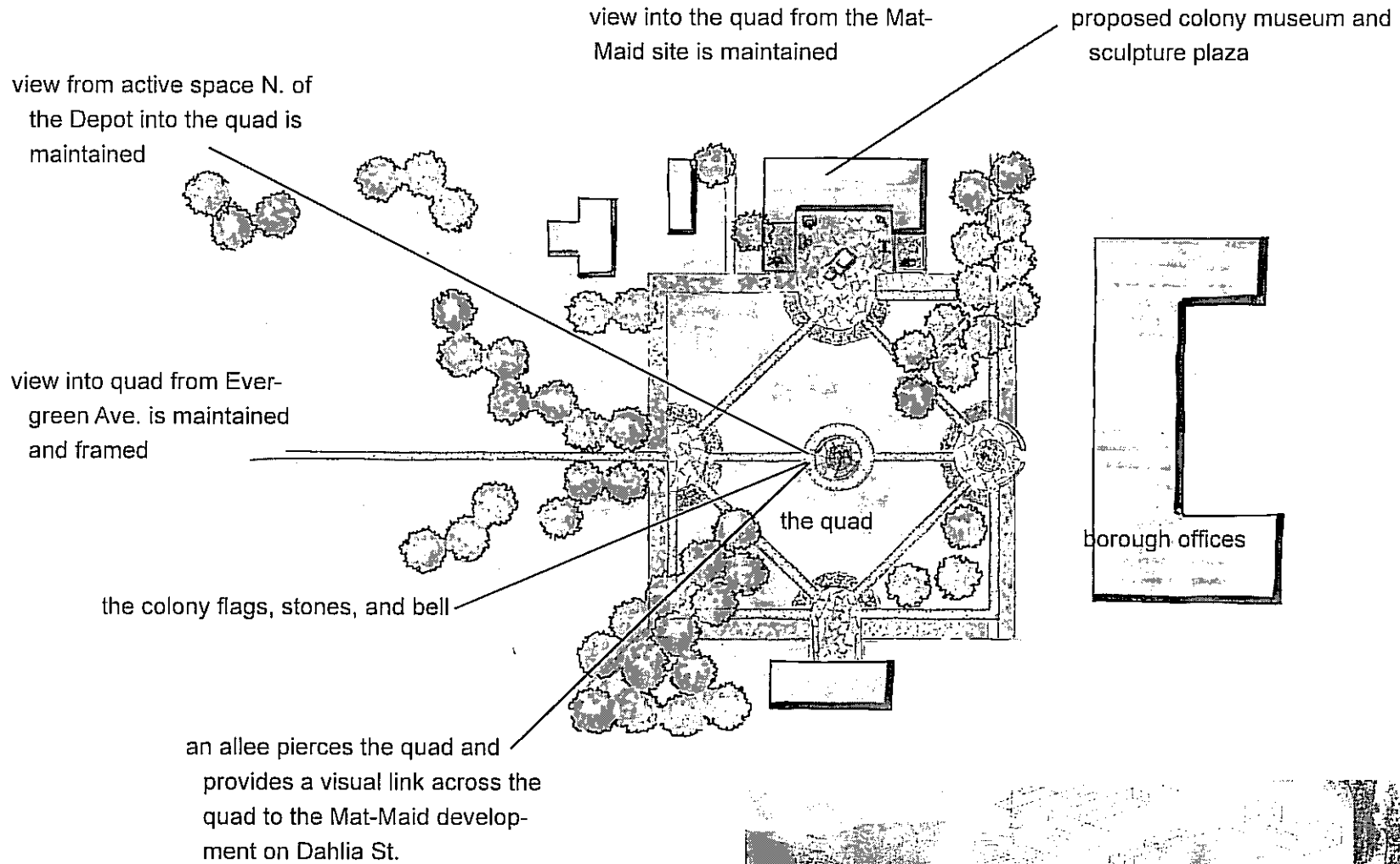
- Provide physical and psychological connections from this historic community center to proximate areas of significance
- Restore an appropriate interpretation of the quadrangle that speaks both to the site's rich history while appropriately providing for current and future uses of the site
- Activate the center of the historic district through drawing people into and through this critical central space
- Enhance the historic authenticity of this nationally recognized district



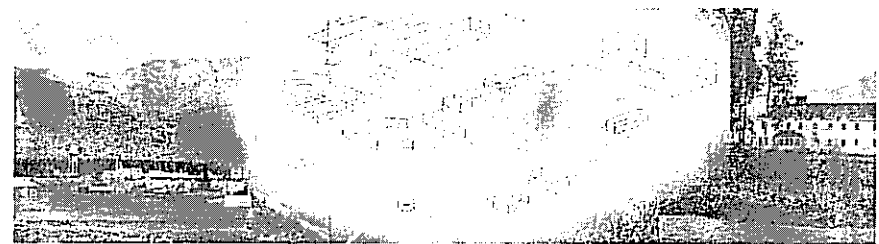
The colony flags, stones, and bell



Plan view of proposed Quad restoration

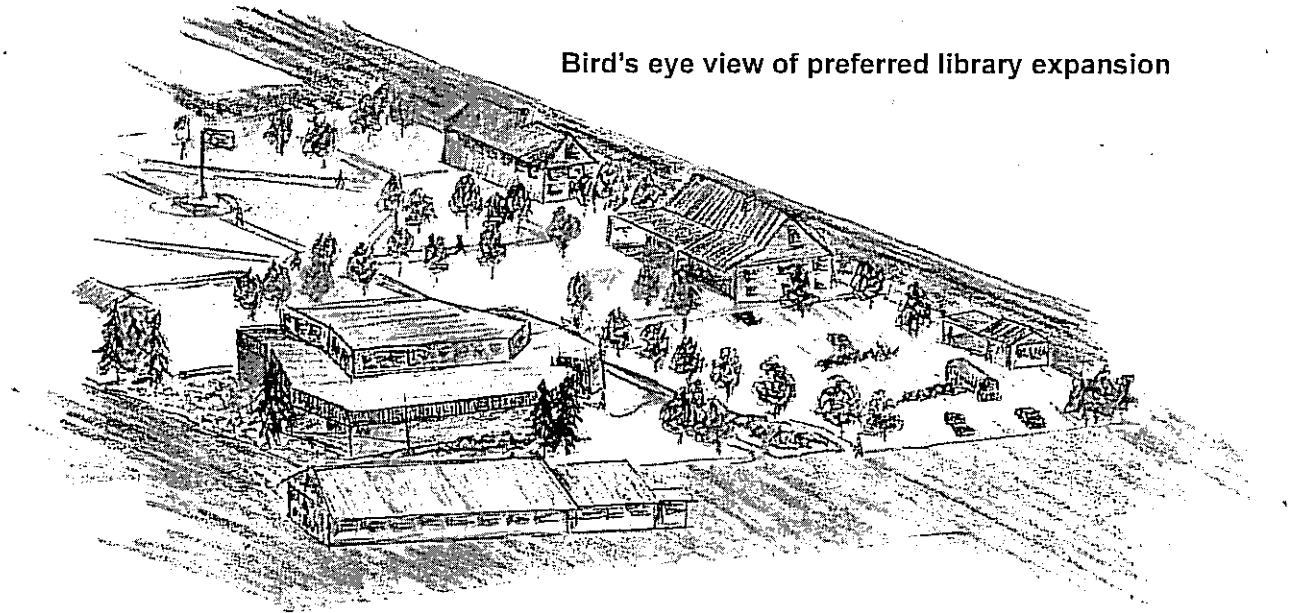


Section 3



Expanding the Palmer Library

The City of Palmer has asked that we explore alternatives for expanding the library building. While many enjoy the current building, it displays little relationship to the Historic District in which it resides. Beyond the architecture style, the building stands on an island separate and hidden from adjacent places. It is our hope that any future development of the library attempt to reconcile this disconnection through the use of the following objectives.

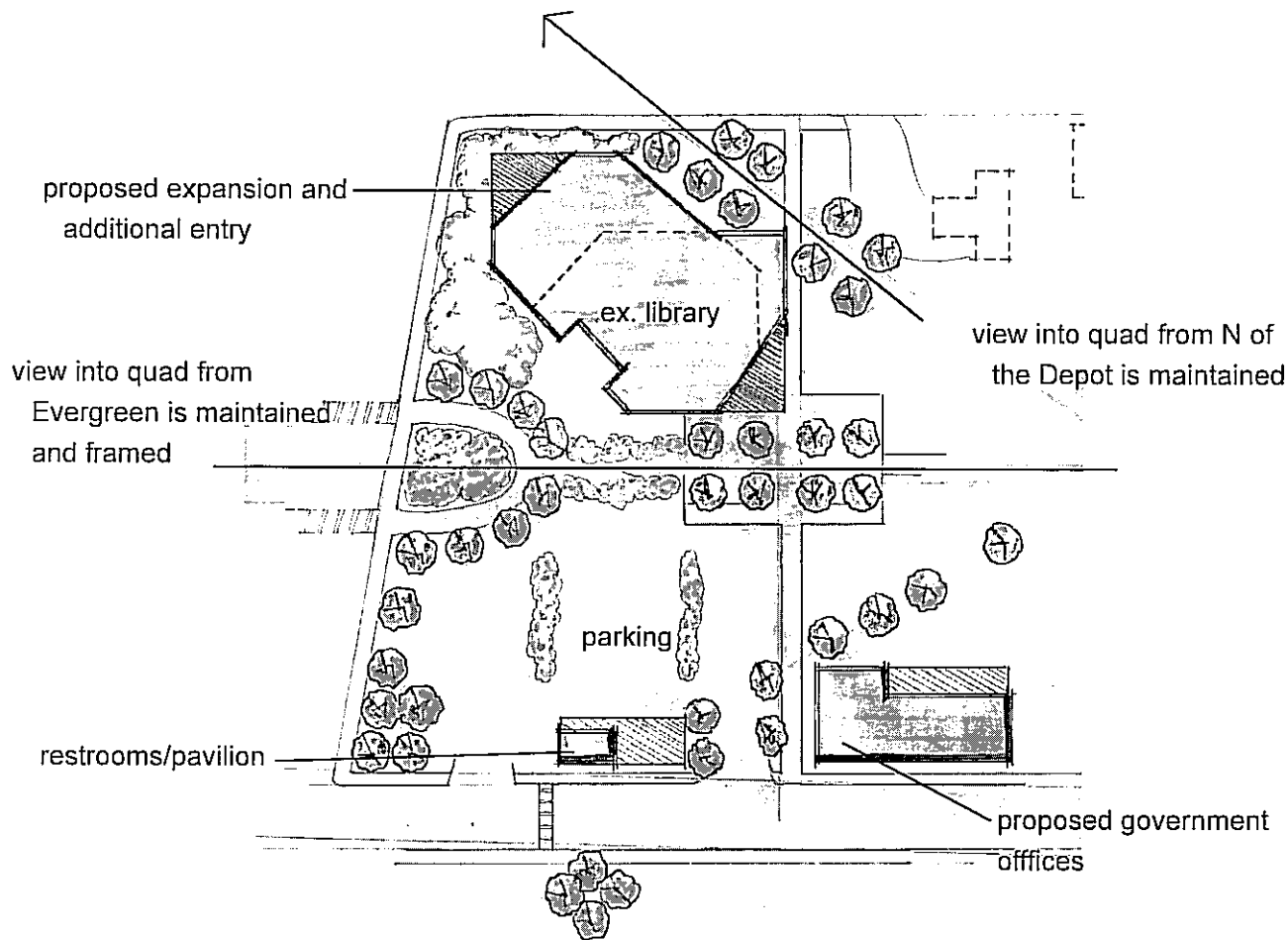


Bird's eye view of preferred library expansion

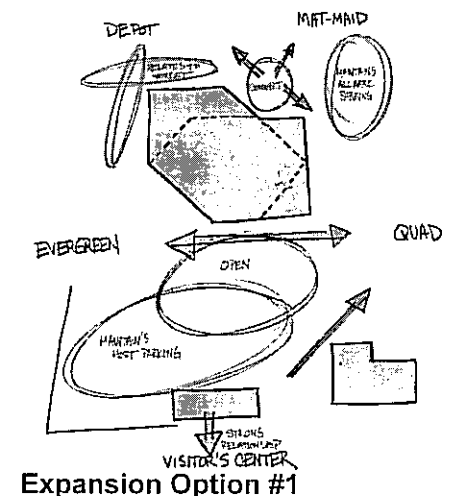
Objectives

- Create stronger relationships with surrounding places: Depot, Mat-Maid, Borough, Visitor Center and Evergreen Ave.
- Maintain/create connections to Historic Quad area
- Massing reflects existing design language of neighboring buildings
- Create opportunities for additional place-making

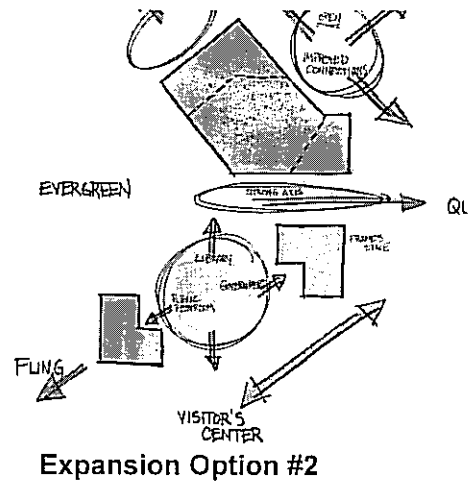




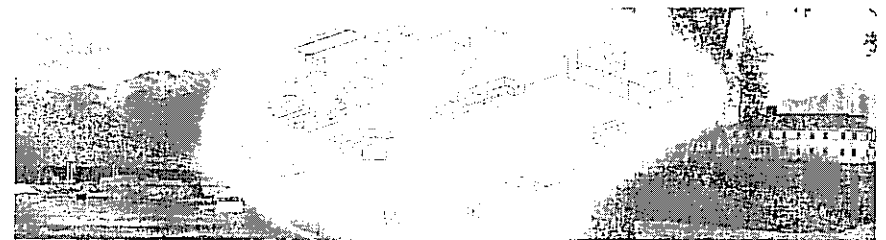
Plan View of the Preferred Library Expansion



Expansion Option #1



Expansion Option #2



Visitor's Center Homestead Gardens

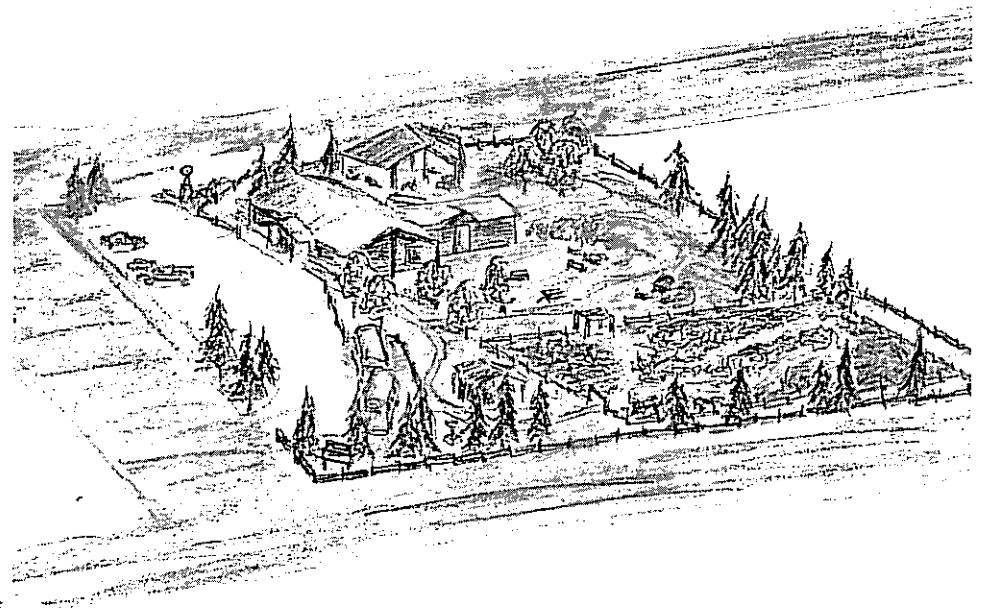
The Palmer Visitor Information Center is home to several Palmer treasures such as the Colony Museum, a beautiful ornamental garden, a few random sculptures and a well-used public restroom. While these resources are valuable individually, they fail to come together in the creation of a special "place." Additionally, there exists pressure to continue adding miscellaneous components to the Center's open space. We have been asked to provide a master plan to guide future development of the site.

Even as the sculptures feel plopped down and the garden is disconnected from the building, there is a somewhat consistent theme to these attractions – they tend to relate to Palmer's larger history, something beyond the colony and even the geographic boundaries of the city. It could be argued that the Visitor Center is really about the greater Matanuska valley and could even focus on the history of Alaskan homesteading. In this way, the Center could distinguish itself from the other museum in town (which is primarily colony-centric) while crafting an identity capable of guiding future development.

Other considerations include the disconnection between the Visitor Center and the rest of town. As a first impression for visitors, it is important for a visitor center to not only attract people but to steer them toward the rest of the city. Without a strong physical relationship to the Historic District or the Commercial Core, it is easy for visitors to hop back in their cars or bus and zip on past the other wonders of Palmer. With this in mind, we recommend using the following objectives when considering additional development of Palmer's Visitor Information Center.

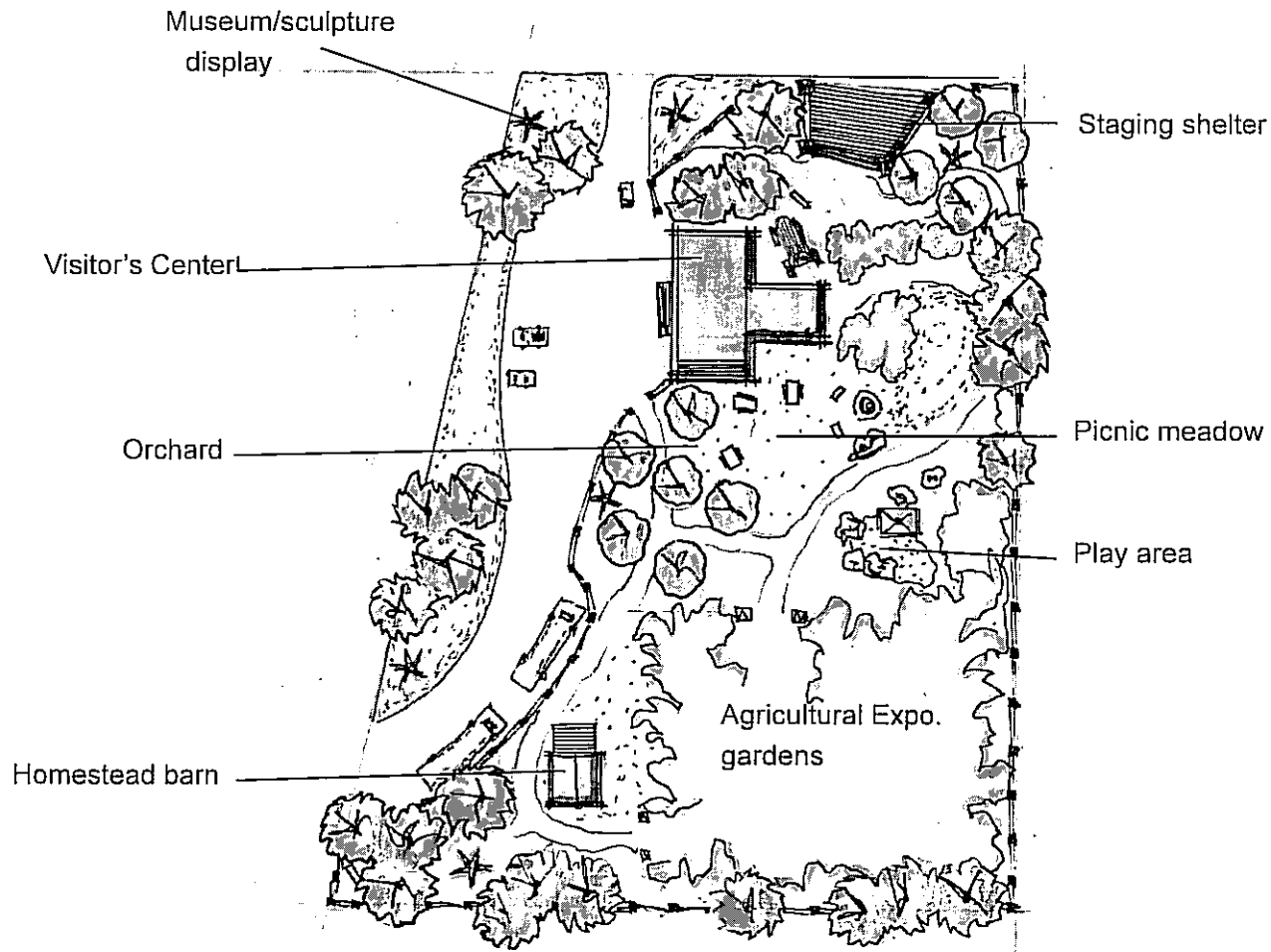
Objectives

- Create an interactive community center
- Reference the site's rich history while providing for present day needs
- Create a series of spaces which provide a variety of future user groups with spaces that function appropriately (Designs should cater to potential tourists, residents, professionals, and the community all of whom will utilize the site)
- Develop an economically feasible balance of compatible uses appropriate for this historically significant site

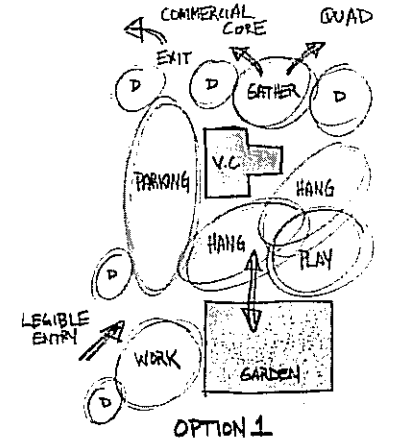


Bird's eye view of Visitor's Center Homestead Gardens

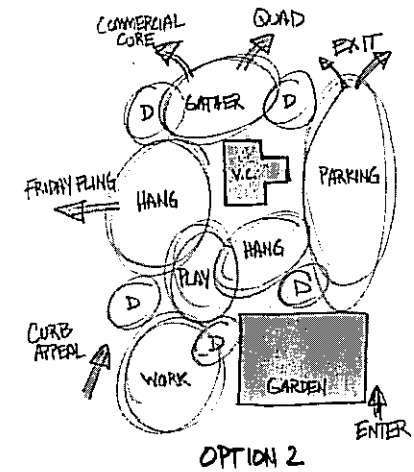




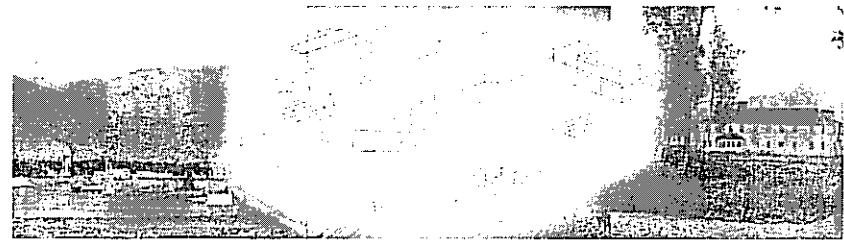
Plan view of the Visitor's Center
Homestead Gardens



Visitor's Center option #1



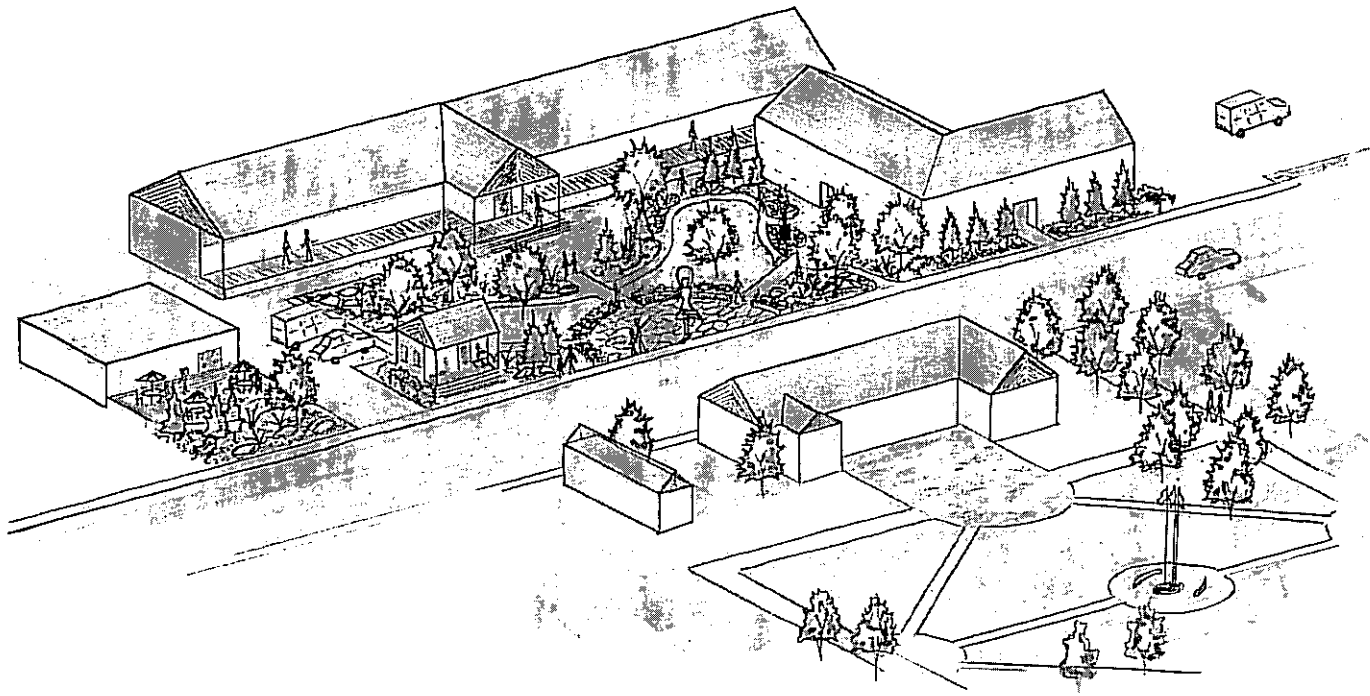
Visitor's Center option #2



Mat-Maid Redevelopment

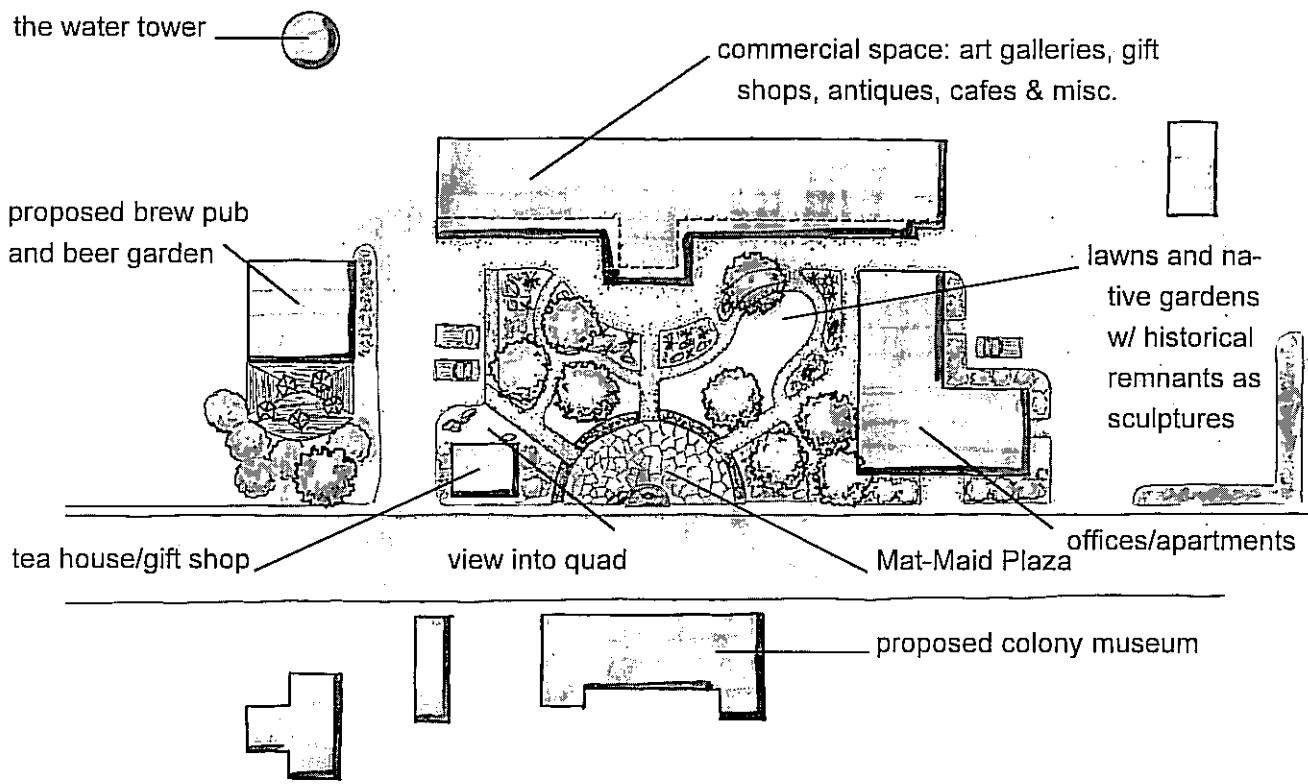
Originally developed to function as a creamery and cannery for the original colony, this site also served as a farmer's co-op where colony farmers would bring their goods both as payment on their federal loans and in exchange for other goods. It thus functioned as an active community center for the original colony. The site was then purchased by Matanuska Maid, one of Alaska's largest producer of dairy products. Mat-Maid ran the bulk of its operations at this site for a number of years. Mat-Maid moved its headquarters to Anchorage, and the site is now vacant.

This site has recently been purchased by a developer who is planning to develop the property as a multiuse facility potentially including such elements as residential apartments, professional office space, and retail/community space. The community sees this as an opportunity to develop an interactive community center on this site which historically served a similar function. While the developer is entertaining this idea, he wants to make sure whatever is developed on this site is an economically feasible option. It will be important that the objectives listed are adequately achieved if an appropriate and successful development is to take place on this historically significant site.

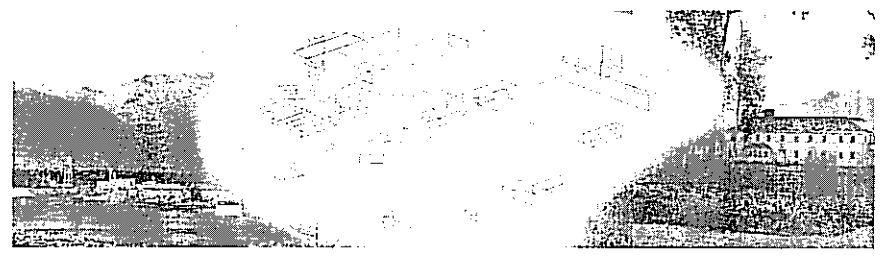


Bird's eye view of the preferred Mat-Maid design





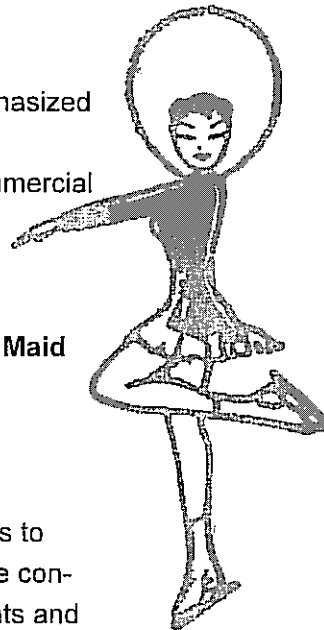
Plan View of the Preferred Mat-Maid Design



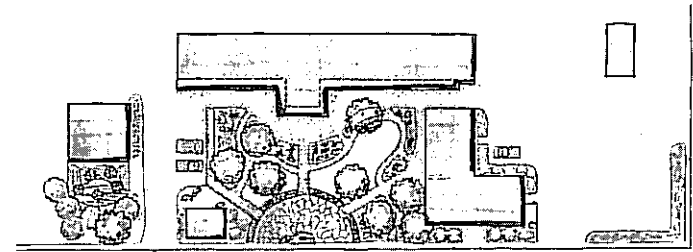
Design guidelines

- Roof lines of proposed structures should match those of the historical structures in pitch and surfacing
- Proposed structures should use the same lap siding present on the existing historic structures
- Similar sizing of windows and doors should be constructed as this will help to blend new structures into their historical context
- The relationship of the buildings to the landscape of the site and that of the colony center should be paid particular attention
- Views into the quad should be maintained and emphasized
- Clearly defined pedestrian connections into the commercial core and the quad should be provided

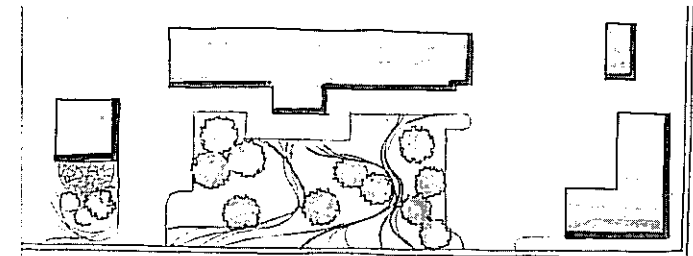
The Matanuska Maid



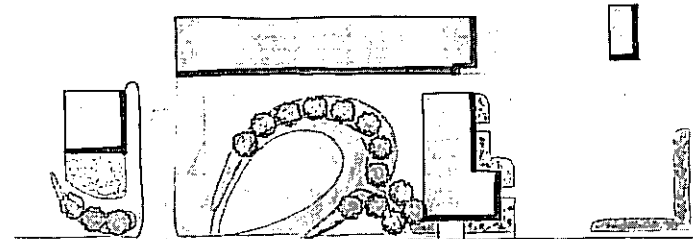
Each design alternative depicted works within the guidelines to achieve the aforementioned objectives. Although these are conceptual designs and display a variety of spatial arrangements and building massings, it should be noted that a successful design for this particular site should achieve the listed objectives while working within the framework of the design guidelines.



Conceptual design alternative #1



Conceptual design alternative #2



Conceptual design alternative #3



Invigorating the commercial core

Historically, the town center was a place of vibrant commercial activity from the arrival of the colonists in the 1930s through the early 1980s. In recent years, the Palmer's commercial core has seen some loss of action and vibrancy as commercial development in the surrounding region has siphoned off businesses and customers.

Though the intensity of use in Palmer's business core has changed over time, as other commercial areas have developed, the feeling that this 3-block strip along Colony/Alaska St is a key element in Palmer's identity has not. It is the commercial counterweight to the historic district, the place of events, meeting, shopping, and many of the other activities that breathe life into the small town character of Palmer.

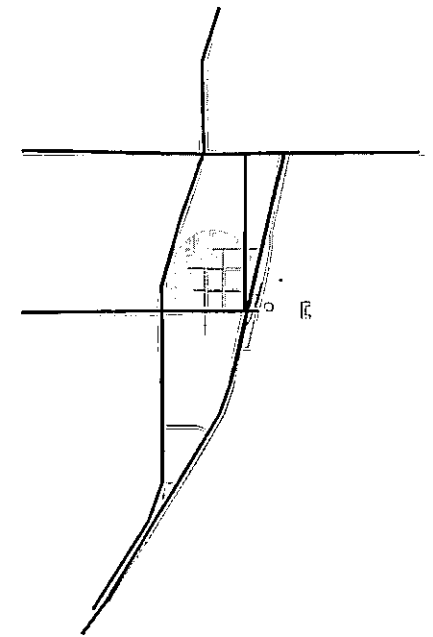
The objective of reinforcing and expanding the Palmer's commercial core is addressed through a three phase strategy, starting with small steps and continuing on to think boldly about the possibilities. These phases are:

- Protect and enhance existing businesses and amenities
- Expand the core's size and convenience of use in the winter
- Invigorate the commercial core with new parks, residents, and custom details

Downtown Palmer, 4th of July, 1936



Koslosky's, c.1936



Protect and enhance the existing core

At the community meeting, the 3-block area of the existing business core in Palmer was almost universally identified amongst residents as a favorite place in downtown. As a crucial first step, this existing area needs to be protected and its existing street amenities should be enhanced. The strategies suggested on these two pages are targeted at this goal.

Create mechanisms to fund projects

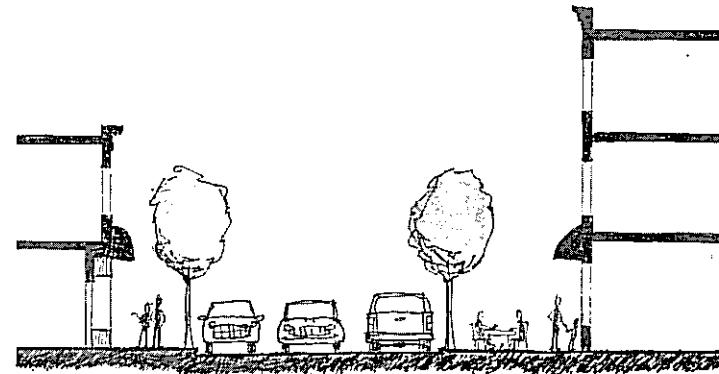
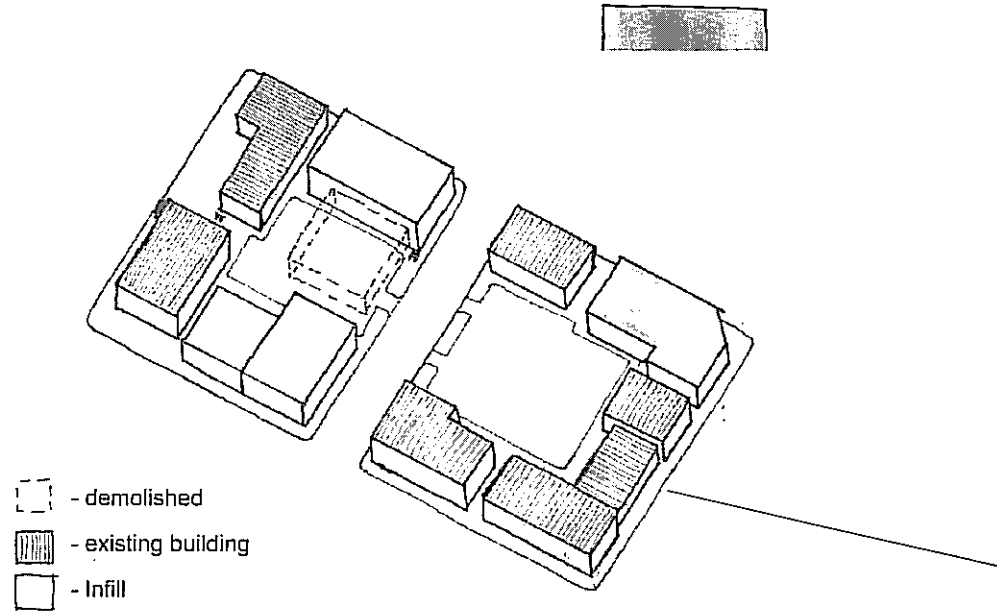
Organize and promote mechanisms, such as a Business Improvement District (B.I.D.), to raise money to implement improvements to Palmer's commercial core. Other options might include: issuing bonds, tax increment financing, small grants or interest-free loans, and overlay districting.

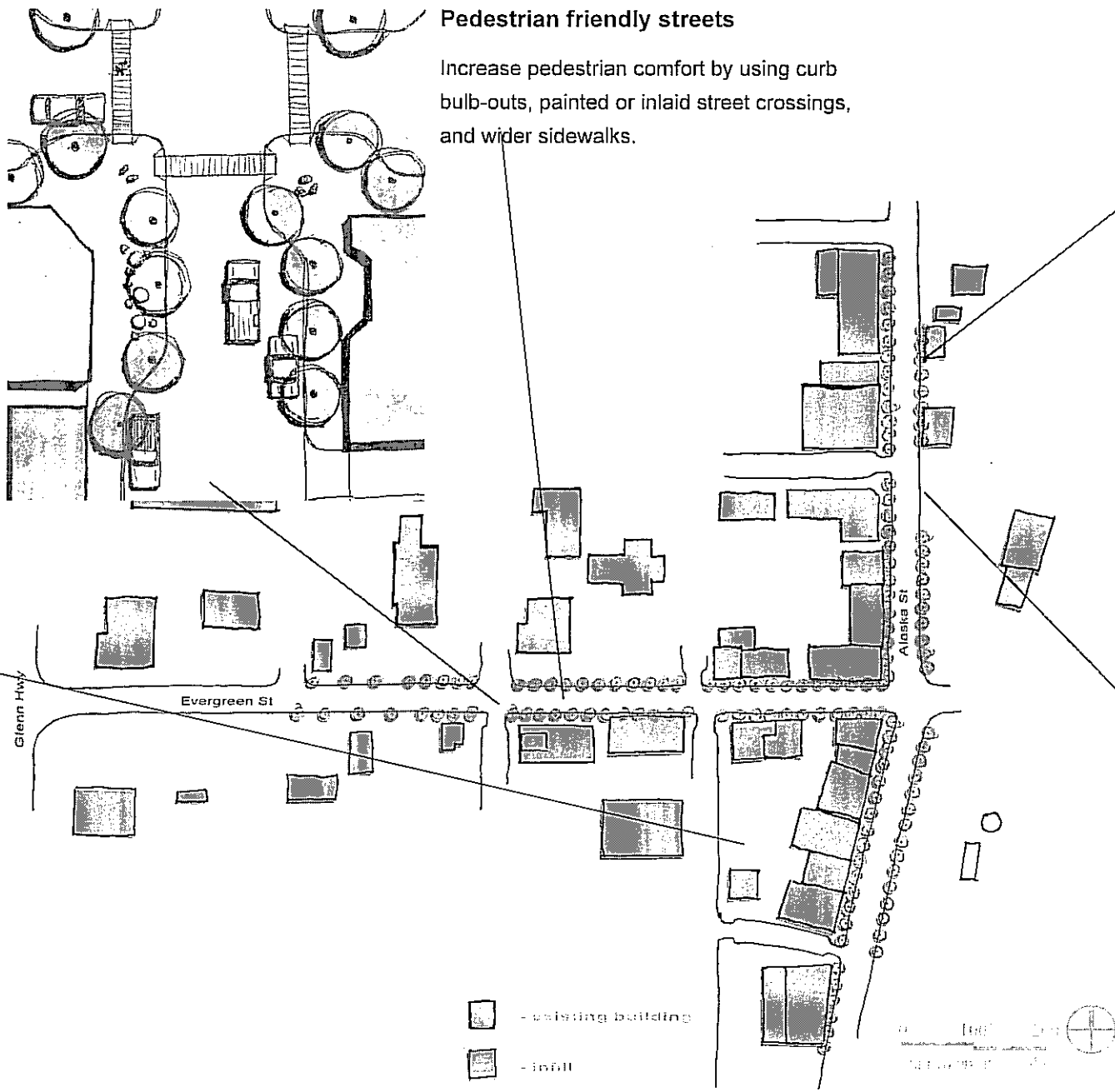
Eyes on the street

Building main entrances face the street. Building facades should contain windows and have some detailing (awnings, simple cornices).

Hollow block massing

Use new development and redevelopment at block edges to create 'hollow' blocks where the interior can be used as shared parking. Having 2 hollow blocks face each other is ideal.





Pedestrian friendly streets

Increase pedestrian comfort by using curb bulb-outs, painted or inlaid street crossings, and wider sidewalks.

Pedestrian passages

When siting infill, create one pedestrian passage near the middle of every block.

Fill in the gaps

Encourage development and expansion of buildings along Evergreen and Alaska to strengthen the street wall of the existing commercial core.

- existing building
- infill



Expand the core

After protecting and enhancing the existing business area, a recommended second step for Palmer's commercial core is to: 1. expand the boundaries of the core business area; and, 2. strategize how to economically expand the times of year when shopping is convenient.

Expand the footprint

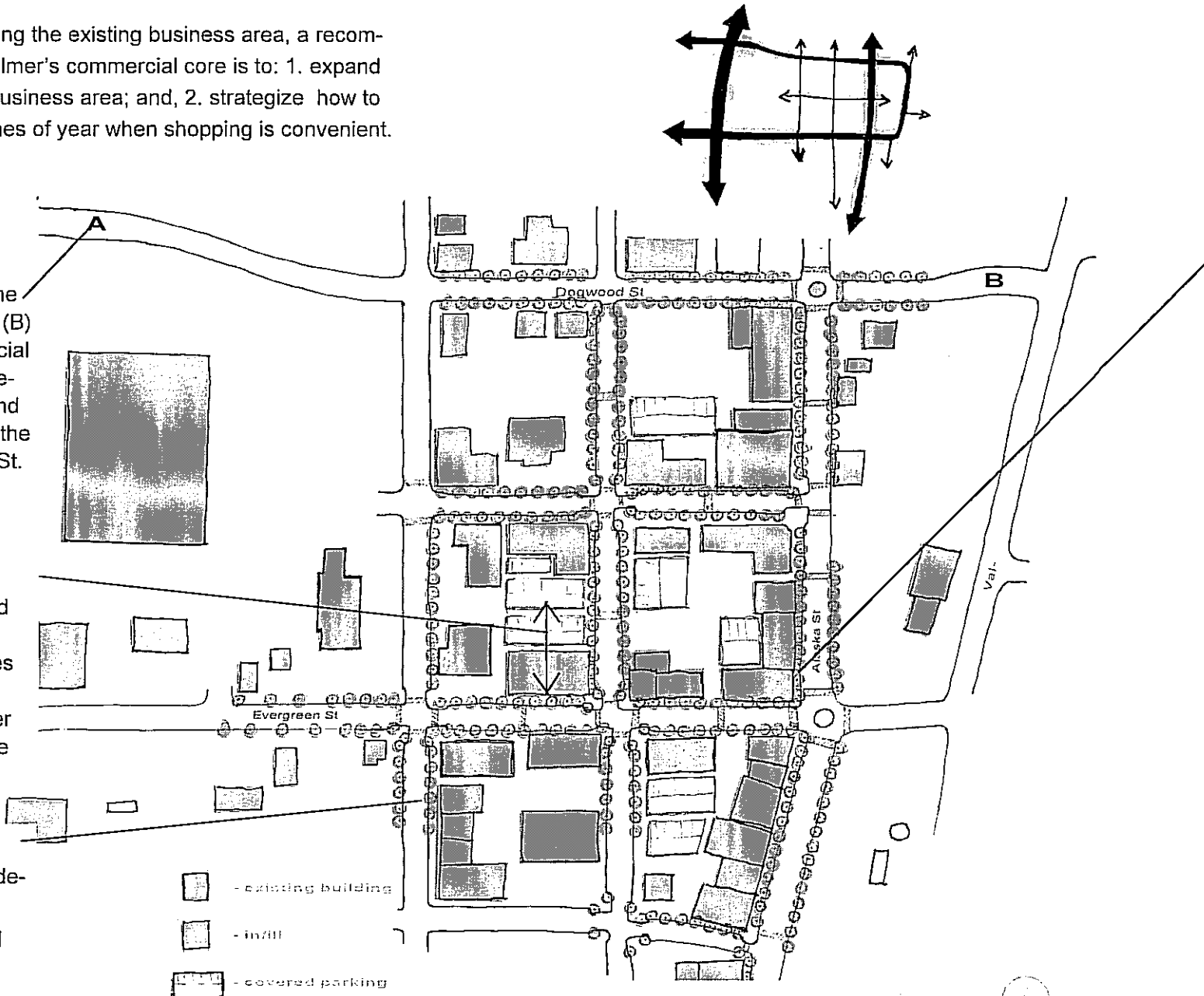
Connecting Dogwood to the Glenn Hwy (A) and across the rail right-of-way to Valley St. (B) better connects the commercial core to other districts and creates the opportunity to expand the business core north into the area bordered by Dogwood St.

Redeveloped property

As structures are demolished and replaced, moving the footprint of the new structures to the block edge can create opportunities to create further shared parking internal to the block.

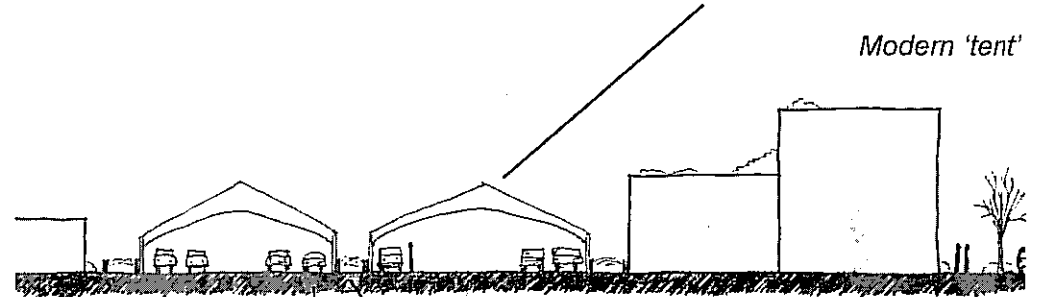
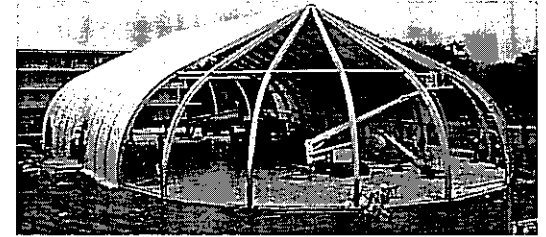
Implement streetscaping

Extend the street design guidelines further into existing and new areas of the commercial core



Low-cost sheltered parking for the commercial core

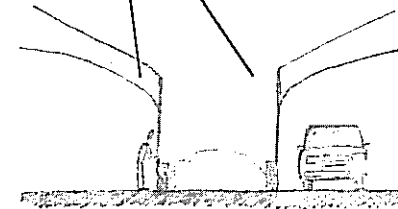
Due to Palmer's inclement winter weather, there is a need for sheltered parking to serve the commercial core. Playing off Palmer's successful historical use of tents as a low-cost, flexible shelter, sprung-structures (such as the one in use at the State Fairgrounds) could be used to cover shared parking lots on block



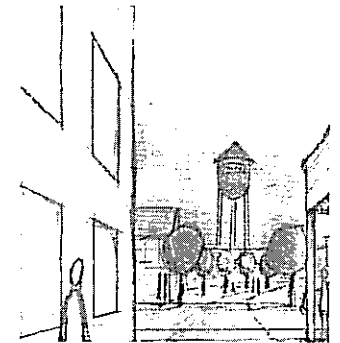
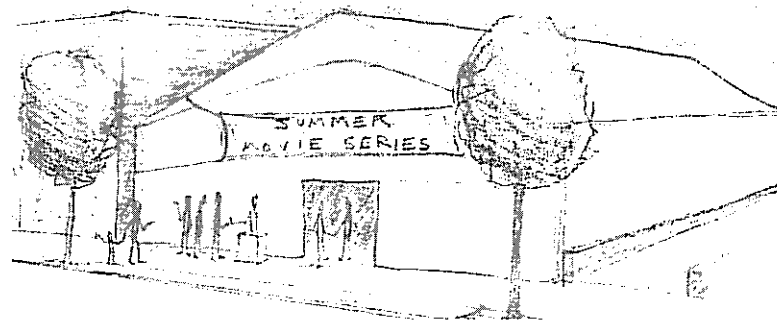
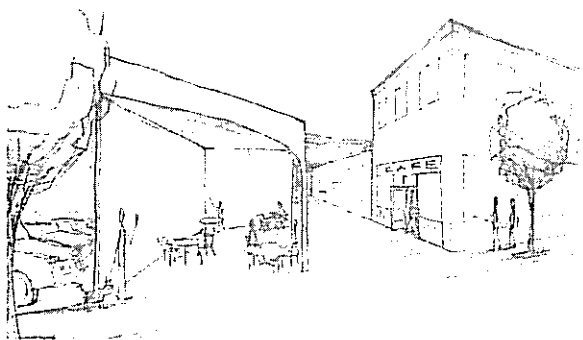
Modern 'tent'

Alternative use of 'tents' in warmer weather

Palmer's colony of 'tents' and snow lanes could be turned to recreational uses in warmer times of the year when long warm days create a desire to spend a great deal of time outside. Activities could include eating, summer movies (in a specially curtained tent), and sitting.

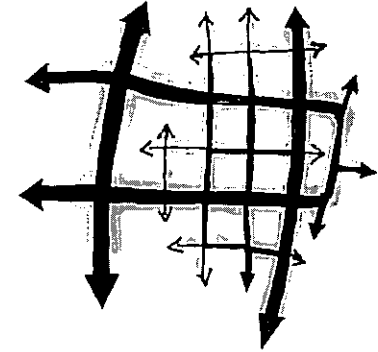


Directing snow into 'snow-lanes' lined with 3' walls facilitates plowing of snow out of block interior.



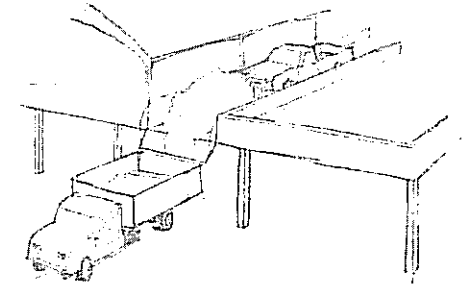
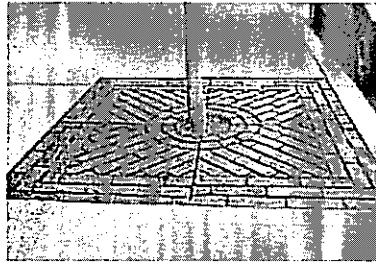
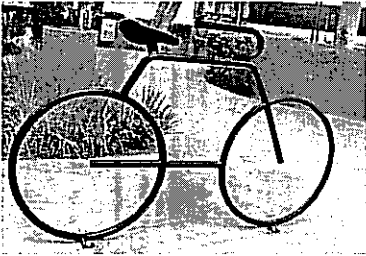
Invigorate the core

With an expanded footprint, more convenient winter parking, and increased summer activities, Palmer's commercial core should be both more lively and more economically viable. As a final phase, to draw together all the previous improvements and give a further shot of vigor to the area, the following strategies are suggested.



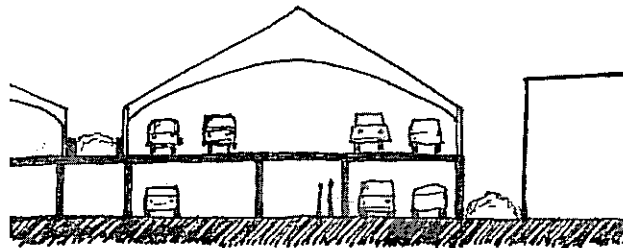
Distinctive downtown detailing

City and/or B.I.D incentivized custom street furniture, bike racks, lighting, signage, and other details add an extra layer to Palmer's unique character (see Section 2).



Parking deck with 'tent' cover on second level

Re-use sprung-structures on parking decks to create 2 levels of sheltered parking for less expense. Second-level snow lanes facilitate easy snow removal directly into dump trucks

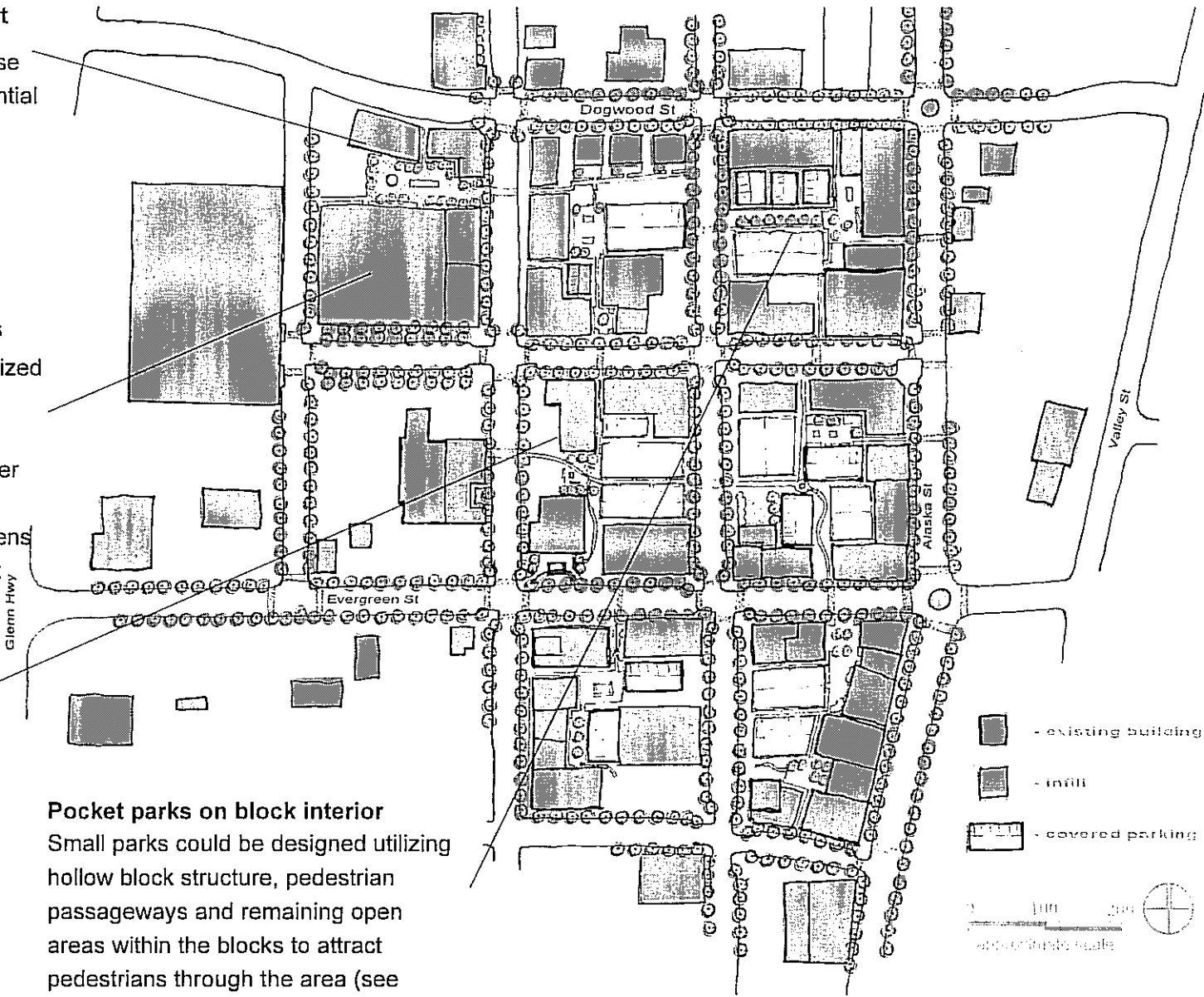


Mixed-use development

Encourage new mixed-use development with residential facing onto interior park space




Shielded parking decks

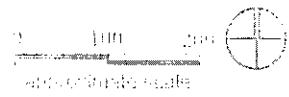
City and/or B.I.D incentivized shared parking deck is hidden by mixed-use buildings around perimeter facing busy streets. Consolidated parking opens up opportunities on block interiors



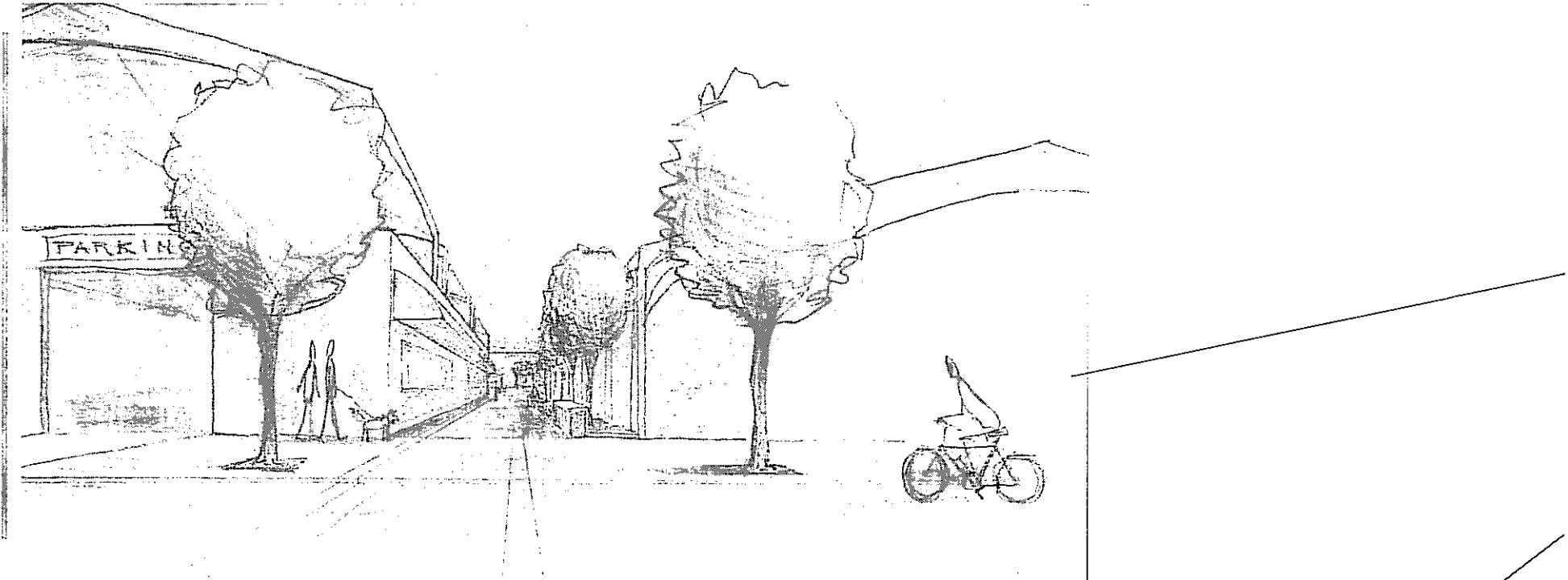
Pocket parks on block interior

Small parks could be designed utilizing hollow block structure, pedestrian passageways and remaining open areas within the blocks to attract pedestrians through the area (see detail on following pages)

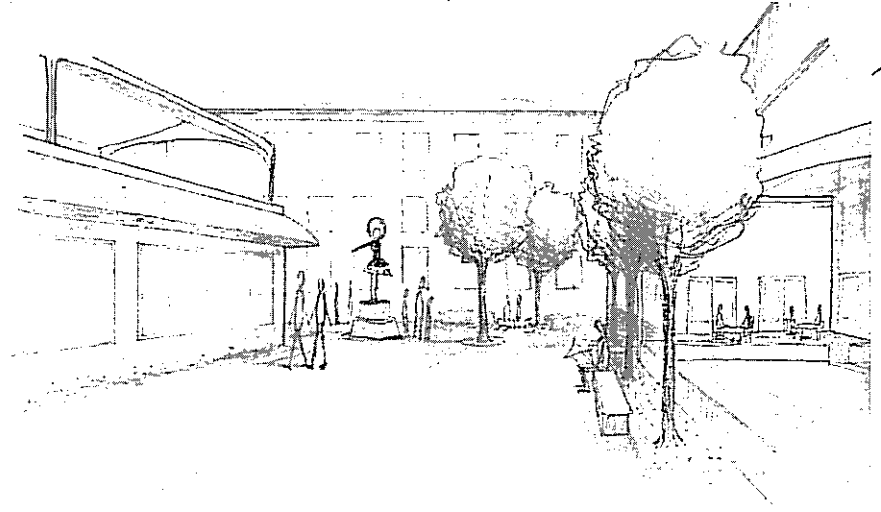
-  - existing building
-  - infill
-  - covered parking



Detail of Pocket Park concept for Palmer

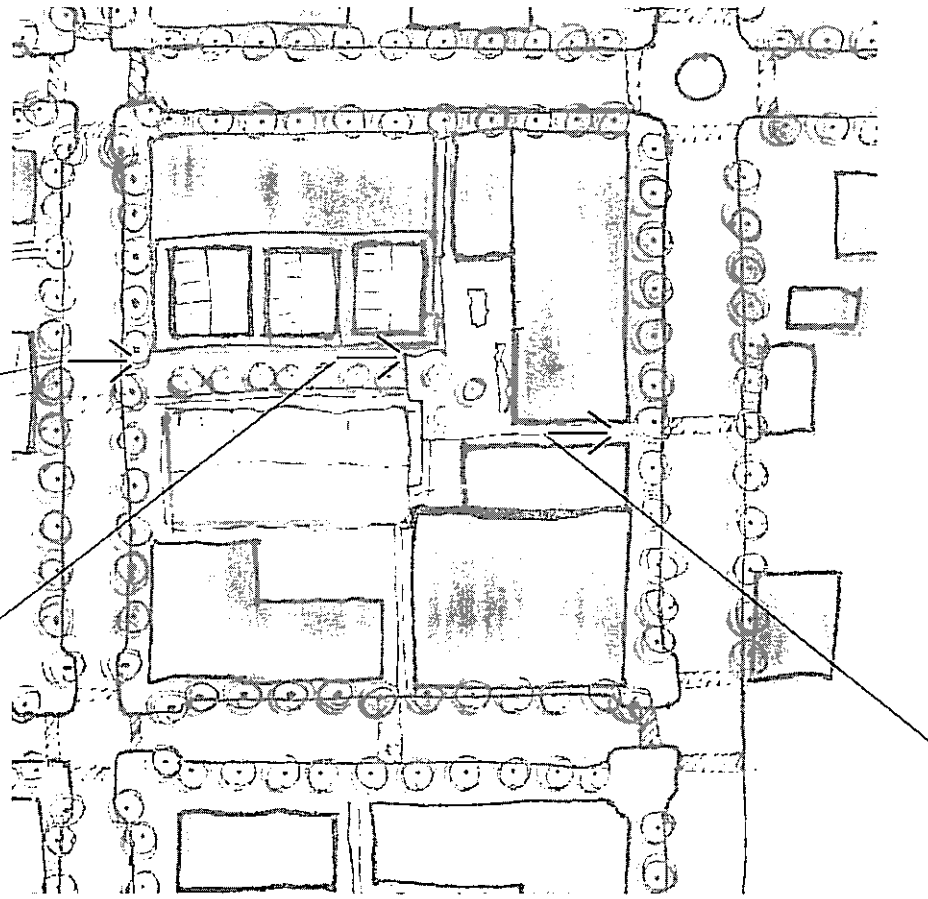


Pedestrian crossings with distinctive paving lead passersby inwards

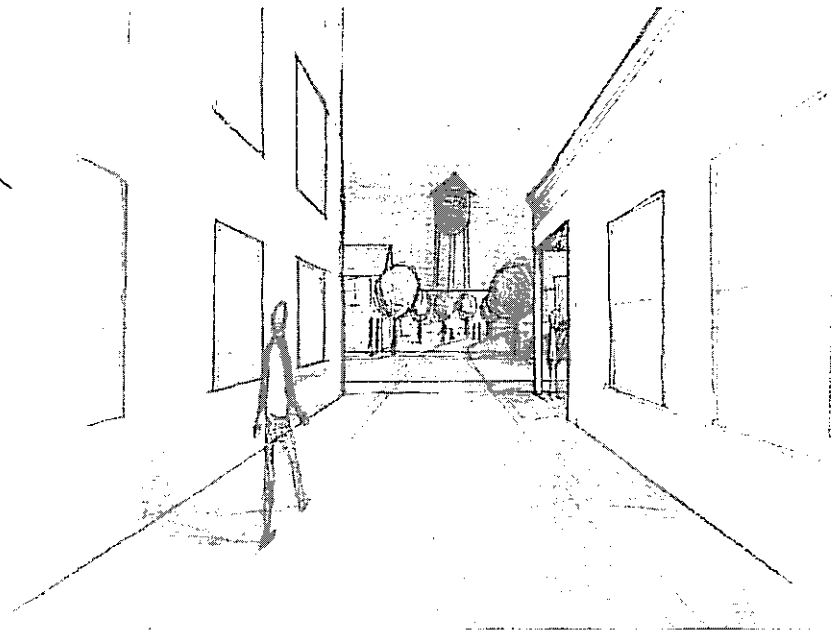


Wall murals, statuary, food, and seating invite people to stay in the pocket park





Exploded view of downtown block



Framed views out of the block interior lead residents and visitors into and out of the commercial core

Defining the edge - strategies for gateways

"The strength of the boundary is essential to a neighborhood. If the boundary is too weak, the neighborhood will not be able to maintain its own character." Pattern Language

Currently, the boundaries to downtown Palmer are primarily defined as the Glenn Highway to the west and south, Arctic to the north and the Matanuska River to the east. However, while these features circumscribe the city core, they do not speak to the character of the community or the downtown district. Enhancing the psychological and physical boundaries of downtown Palmer will help to define and enhance the city's core area and reinforce the small town feel that the citizens clearly value. Also, a stronger downtown boundary will promote Palmer's uniqueness and highlight its difference from Wasilla.

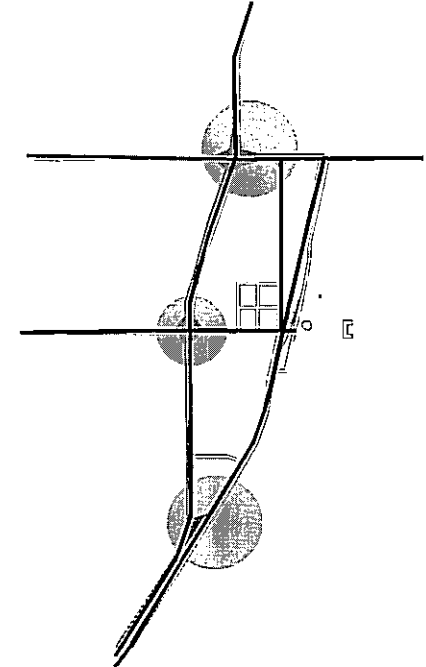
The strategies recommended to better define the boundaries of downtown Palmer involve considering and embellishing the functions of an 'edge'. Thus, the edge will be considered as a place of:

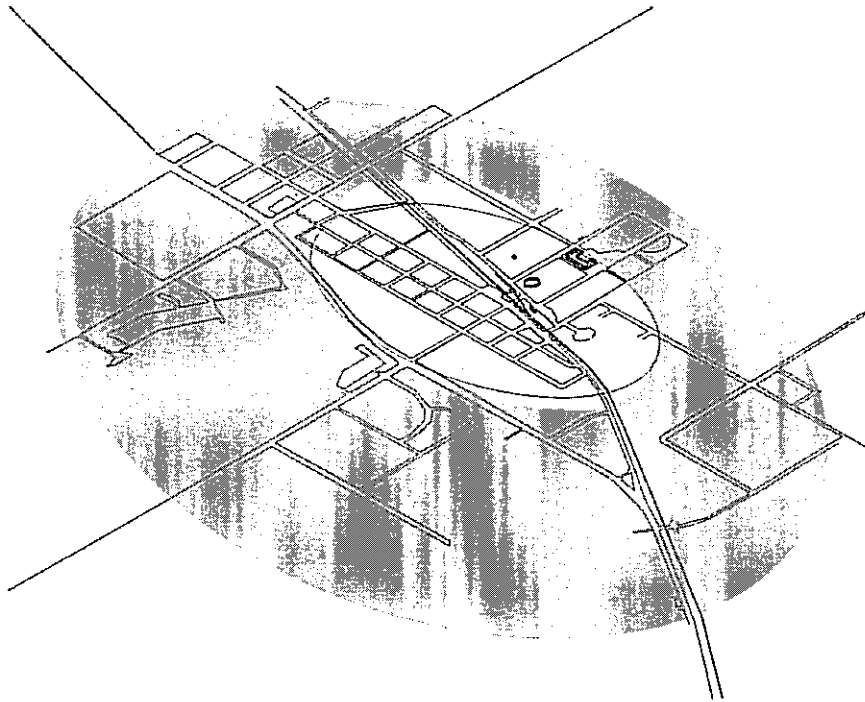
- **Transition**
- **Punctuation**
- **Connection**

By adopting strategies and designs that enhance these functions, the neighborhood will be strengthened psychologically and physically for both residents and visitors.



At one time, the boundary to downtown Palmer was clearly defined by the edge of open farmland. Now, as Palmer continues to grow and road networks increase, the edge of the downtown neighborhood is less obvious.





Transition

An edge is not only a boundary but also a place of transition from one zone to another. There are opportunities to strengthen the experience psychologically through patterns of rhythm, progression and intensity, color and texture.

- reduce the scale of the surrounding landscape
- enhance the feeling of a more intimate neighborhood
- strengthen the approach

The approach to Palmer's downtown area varies from each direction. From the north, the feeling of transition is already defined by the open fields of Farm Loop giving way to the tree lined avenue that dramatically descends into the valley. However, emphasis needs to focus on the transition from the Glenn Highway, east to Arctic and Alaska street, because the axis of the Glenn Highway is very strong and passes by the downtown district. This is also true in the approach from the south and west. And while the Palmer - Wasilla highway focuses attention on the borough building, it fails to fully underline the difference between the commercial and business district at the core of downtown, from the big box stores that are starting to line the sides of the highway.



The color and size of the ornamental plums contrast with the taller evergreens and mark the transition into Langley.

The canopy and rhythm of the trees reduce the scale of the agricultural landscape.



Simple strategies can be employed to indicate the approach to a more intimate and smaller scale neighborhood. The use of trees and vegetation can emphasize the sense of transition. This will give the community a greater sense of attachment to the small downtown feel, which will become even more valuable as Palmer continues to grow and expand.

Strategies to strengthen the experience of entering Palmer

Texture and color

- create interest
- offer a focal point from the hill
- break the axis of the Glenn Highway

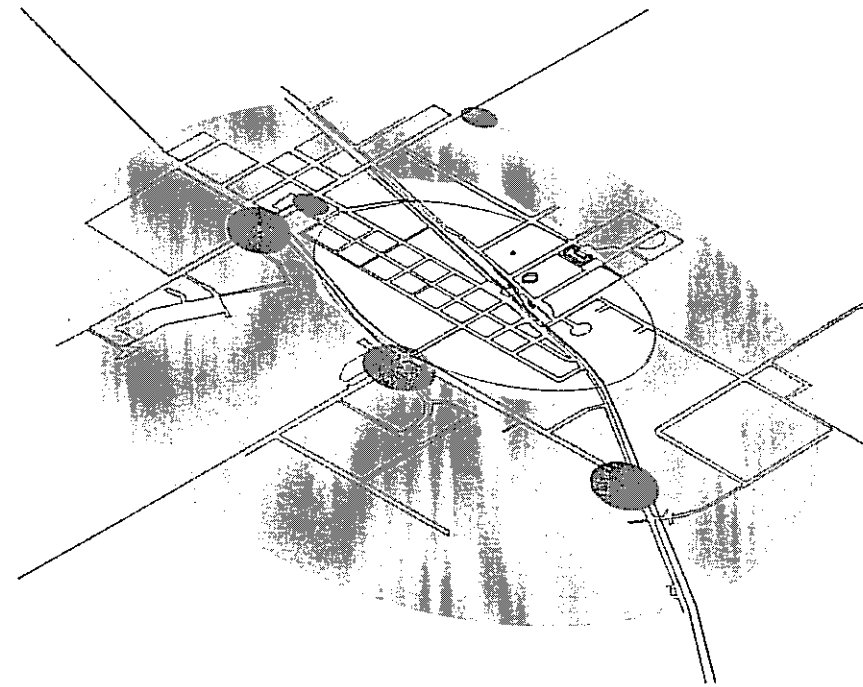
Rhythm

- allows for glimpses of surrounding mountains
- creates fractured buffers
- reinforces focus on down town Palmer

Progression and intensity

- indicates change
- creates anticipation
- reduces the scale of the surrounding landscape
- softens the axis of the highway





Punctuation

"A boundary comes alive in people's minds because they recognise the gateways." Pattern Language

An edge is defined by cues and markers. There are opportunities to physically punctuate the key junctions that lead to downtown Palmer. This not only announces entry, but communicates that Palmer is a community that cares.

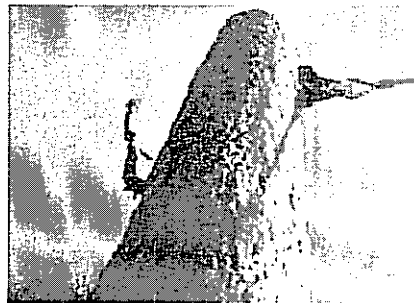
- Break the axis of the Glenn Highway
- Enhance the entrance to downtown
- Create prominent landmarks
- Establish a focus on pedestrian movement

Currently the landmarks that residents associate with the entrance to downtown consist of a sunken triangle with a sign that is barely visible, and a McDonalds or ice cream cone sign. These don't really emphasise Palmer's character, uniqueness or speak to a caring community.

A variety of strategies can be employed to punctuate the main junctions into town. For example, planted berms, medians or corners allow for seasonal color and texture and can help to influence views and movement towards the downtown core. This is especially true at the southern junction. Alternatively, the gateways to downtown could be defined by public art. Such features can reflect and build community identity and honour the history and character of the area, especially if commissioned by the community. Other strategies involve defining the importance of pedestrian traffic or highlight lighting community involvement.



Bronze sculptures can tell specific stories such as this one in Everett, WA. or they can be more abstract like this pole.

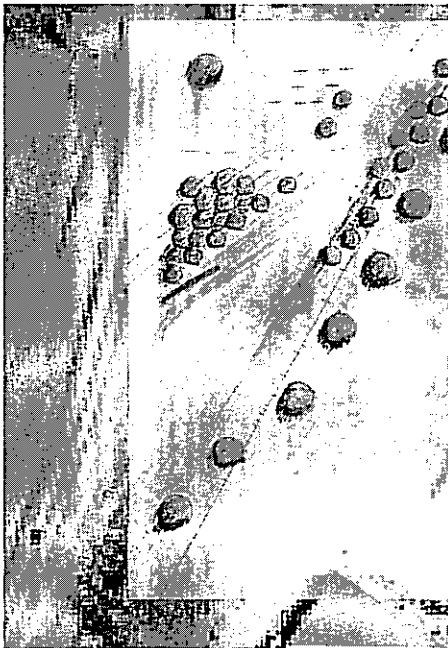


The sunken triangle

Creating a prominent landmark defines the southern entrance into town and influences sight lines, and possibly movement. While residents already identify with this access point, enhancing the gateway speaks to the community's sense of pride.

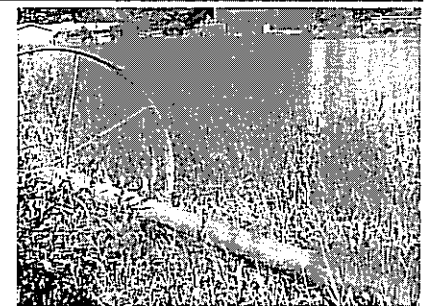


Plan view of design option one



Design option one

A small grove of different trees, planted in rows like the furrows of the surrounding fields, hide the electricity plant, visually draw attention to Colony Way and create eye catching lines of color and texture for Glenn Highway drivers.



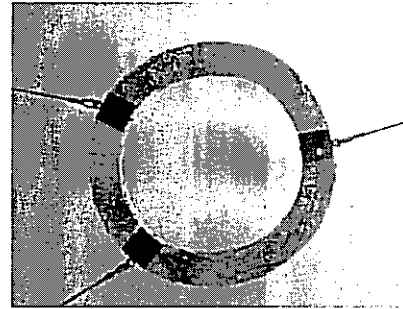


Design option two

Sweeping walled berms, like the meandering banks of the Matanuska river, visually lead to Colony Way. On the east side, the walls create a barrier to the train tracks and create braided lines into town.

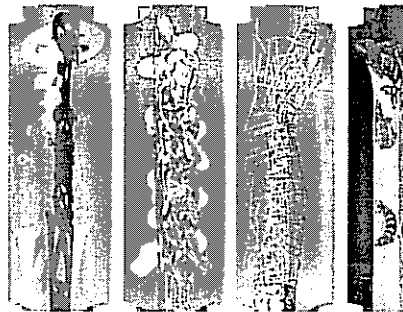
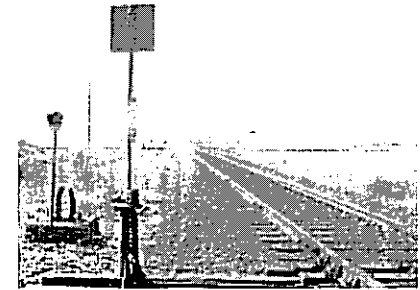


Plan view of design option two

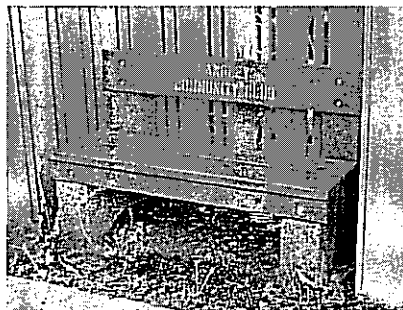


In Lakewood, WA. a ring suspended from three columns represents how everything is suspended by nature. The shadows cast circle features etched into the ground plane.

In Ballard, WA. metal pillars adorn a bridge which leads into the neighborhood. Each pillar depicts a different aspect of the area's past such as sawmilling, an industrial maritime base, fishing and lush prolific greenery.



Examples of public art as landmarks



A bench provides a rest stop with a view. The words 'Langley Community Club' on the back rest clearly highlight the community's vested sense of interest in its downtown area.





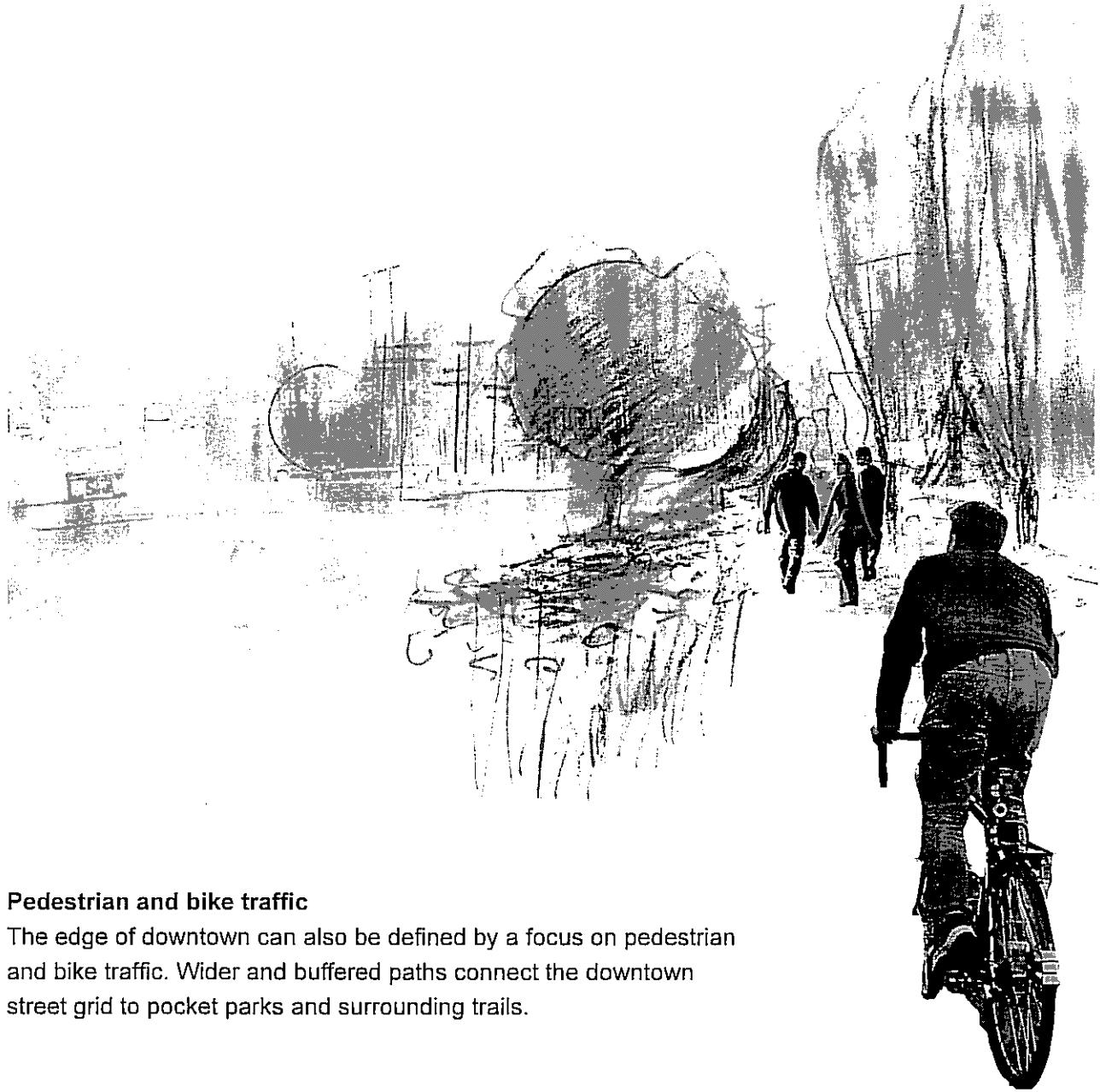
Plan view of Palmer-Wasilla junction

Palmer-Wasilla Junction

Planted medians break the axis of the Glenn Highway, enhance the entrance and create focus on downtown buildings. They also allow for safer pedestrian crossing.



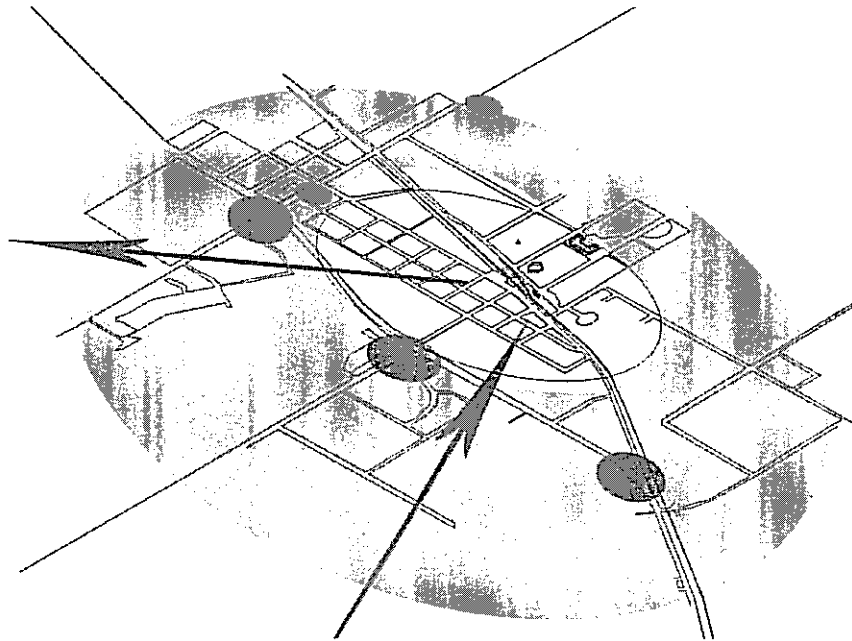
In Langley, WA. at the entrance to downtown the pedestrian and bike trails are clearly marked and given equal status to roads. This helps to emphasize the entrance into a smaller scale neighborhood, one that is walkable.



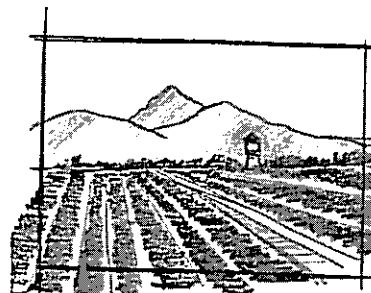
Pedestrian and bike traffic

The edge of downtown can also be defined by a focus on pedestrian and bike traffic. Wider and buffered paths connect the downtown street grid to pocket parks and surrounding trails.





The Palmer sign should help to enhance Palmer's reputation as a unique small town and reinforce its distinct cultural, natural and historical character. It should direct not only those entering the city, but should also define the boundary for those leaving the area and remind them what they are leaving.



<p>PALMER CITY CENTER 1 MILE</p>
<p>CITY CENTER NEXT LEFT</p>
<p>YOU ARE NOW LEAVING PALMER</p>

Connection

An edge also strengthens the connection between two areas. Defining the boundaries of downtown subsequently speaks to the identity of the community. This identity is ultimately communicated through the surrounding rural landscape, small town feel and colony history. It is important to enhance these connections.

- create signage that speaks to the identity of the community
- promote the distance to downtown
- strengthen the experience of leaving Palmer
- connect sidewalks to paths and trails

As Palmer develops and grows it is essential that the values which ultimately define the identity of the community are highlighted. This will help to maintain and focus the vision for the future. Maintaining strong rural community roots will be especially important as more and more land is developed.

A major strategy for strengthening the connection to Palmer's identity involves preserving the rural gateways - the farmland - that surround the city. Tools and scenarios to achieve this are discussed earlier in the book. Other strategies involve focusing attention on the features that speak to the downtown character - a small agricultural city, with a rich and unique history, located in a fertile valley encircled by mountains. It is important to reinforce this in order to underscore the city's uniqueness, further promote its difference from Wasilla and maintain community commitment and interest.