



Role and Purpose of Plan

Palmer is experiencing rapid growth and attendant challenges, which is a concern of elected officials, city administrators, and citizens alike. Thus the broad purpose of this plan is to provide immediate assistance with the development of tools designed for the community to take a proactive role in affecting its future shape. *Pioneering Palmer's Future* is a strategic action plan designed to assist the City of Palmer with pressing policy decisions in the short term.

Presented in this plan is a set of recommended strategies and specific mechanisms for implementing them. This plan is not intended to be as comprehensive in scope as in a Comprehensive Plan – rather, it presents a set of strategies and tools to address a specific set of issues and concerns. Thus, the focus of *Pioneering Palmer's Future* is on maintaining and enhancing the small-town character of Palmer, and in preparing for and guiding future area-wide growth.

This plan incorporates physical design and land use opportunities for improving functionality, encouraging more intensive commercial and residential use, and enhancing visual amenities in the downtown area of Palmer. To address area-wide growth pressures, this plan takes a more expanded scale of community development into account than the current Comprehensive Plan includes. Thus, analysis of the location and extent of future growth, including densities, land use mixes, open space configurations, and levels of infrastructure and public facilities at an area-wide scale were included in this plan. This perspective is necessary to help the City of Palmer develop strategies for guiding growth in surrounding areas that are needed prior to making any annexation decisions.

Priority was given to strategies that the City of Palmer and

community could utilize in the short term, in response to current concerns whose urgency warrants attention sooner than the Comprehensive Plan revision could provide. Thus the set of recommendations presented here go beyond broad concepts to include specific strategies and tools for implementation that are applicable now, and are also designed to be incorporated into the ensuing revision of Palmer's Comprehensive Plan.

What This Plan Does

- Focuses attention on specific issues.
- Recommends strategies to address those issues and a corresponding set of actions to carry out those strategies.
- Provides detailed analysis and recommendations at a greater level of specificity than the current Comprehensive Plan (but is consistent with the goals and objectives defined in it).
- Assists the City Council, Planning Commission, and citizens with current issues and policy decisions.
- Provides implementation tools – sample policies, and development codes, as well incentive programs.

What This Plan Does Not Do

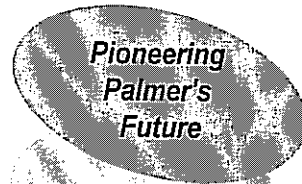
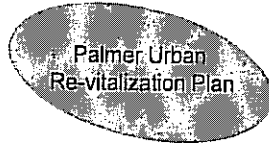
- Does not replace the current Comprehensive Plan.
- Does not contain binding policies or codes – sample codes and policies are provided, but must be adopted by the City Council before going into effect.
- This plan does not decide or make recommendations for the siting of public facilities like schools, fire stations or infrastructure.

How *Pioneering Palmer's Future* relates to other plans

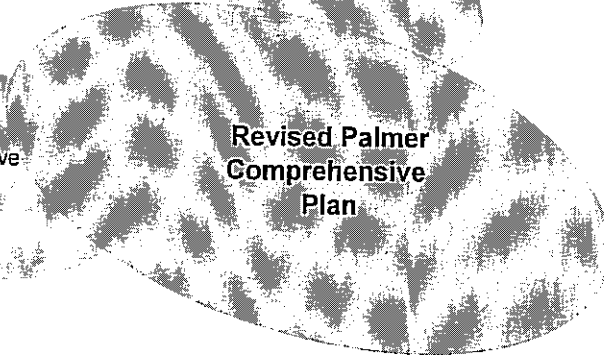
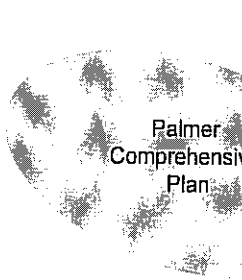
Studies
- present information and ideas



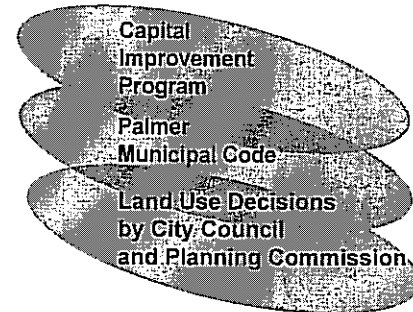
Action Plans
- set of specific and achievable actions



Policy Plans
- lay out policies implemented in municipal decisions

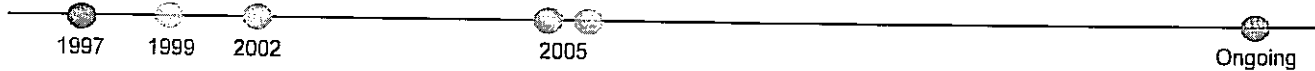


Implementation Actions



This diagram shows the relationship between *Pioneering Palmer's Future* and planning processes in Palmer. How does this plan work with others, and how do they collectively work together? It is intended to guide policy decisions in the short term, during Palmer's current Comprehensive Plan revision. Thus, the plan identifies a specific and achievable set of actions. Once incorporated into the Revised Comprehensive Plan, this work will ultimately help to lay out policies for land use, transportation, environment, and public improvements.

Completion Date

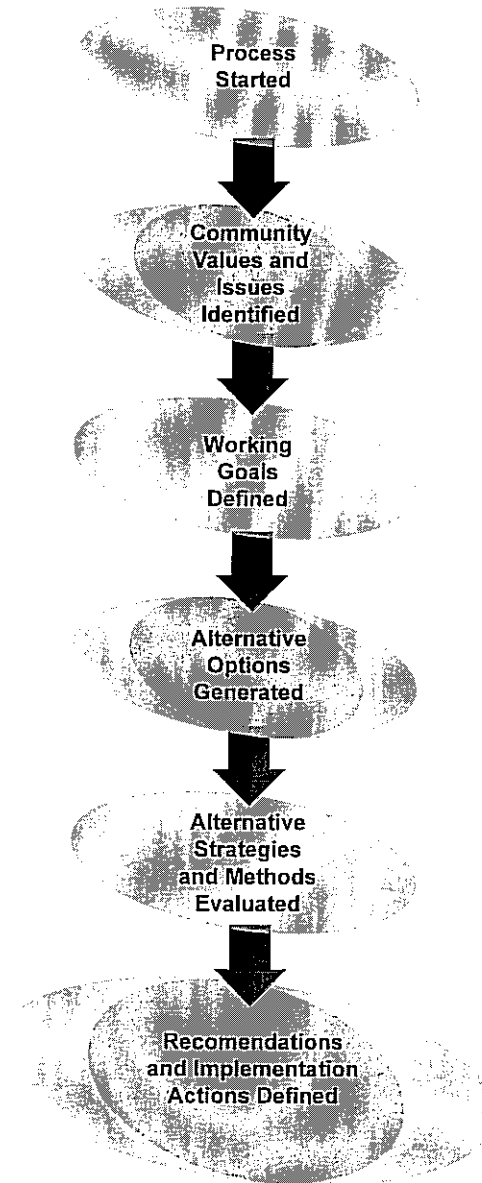


Process of Developing *Pioneering Palmer's Future*

This strategic action plan was developed through a process that integrated the values and perspectives of the community with detailed analysis to inform and develop a set of strategies. The process began with the engagement of the community in order to interpret a common set of values. These emerged through a survey distributed to residents with the City utility bill, a community workshop, over 20 meetings held with individual stakeholder groups, and a community open house at the end of the team site visit.

Through the community's involvement, the issues to address were further refined, and led to the development of a set of working goals. These goals were used to guide the generation of alternative options to address the defined issues. The community values were integrated with detailed analysis of trends in population growth, development patterns, and land uses as the options were generated.

The alternative strategies and methods were then evaluated based on their effectiveness to achieve the working goals relative to the costs involved in implementing them (economic, political, environmental, and social). These alternatives were further refined by continuous feedback from the Community Development Coordinator, and finally revised after presentation to the City Council, Planning and Zoning Commission, and community in January, 2005. The final recommendations and implementation actions were then defined, and are explained in this document.



Several plans, studies, and reports provided critical information for developing this plan:

- Current City of Palmer Comprehensive Plan
- Alaska Capital Projects Report (RAPIDS - Rural Alaska Project Identification and Delivery System)
- City of Palmer 2004 Budget Proposal
- Mat-Su Borough 2001 Transportation Plan
- Mat-Su Borough Core Area Draft Comprehensive Plan
- Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Soil Survey
- Friends of Mat-Su Visual Preference Survey

Palmer Today

This section provides a snapshot of current conditions in Palmer. Current land use, economic, environmental and demographic trends are discussed in the first part of this section. The seven values expressed by community members are then described in the second part of this section.

During the week of September 5-12, 2005, the University of Washington team met with government officials, local groups, and the citizens of Palmer via a number of individual meetings and two community workshops. These meetings and workshops, combined with data gathering and analysis, helped to form a picture of Palmer's current conditions and values. Taken together, these conditions and values form the basis of the working goals guiding the recommendations at the heart of this plan.



Current Conditions

Setting

Palmer is located within the agricultural heart of Alaska, the Matanuska Valley, approximately 45 miles northeast of Anchorage. Nestled into the foot of both the Talkeetna and Chugach mountain ranges, Palmer benefits not only from the rich soils formed by wind laid silts, but also the incredible mountainous backdrop that has become an iconic image of both the town and the state.

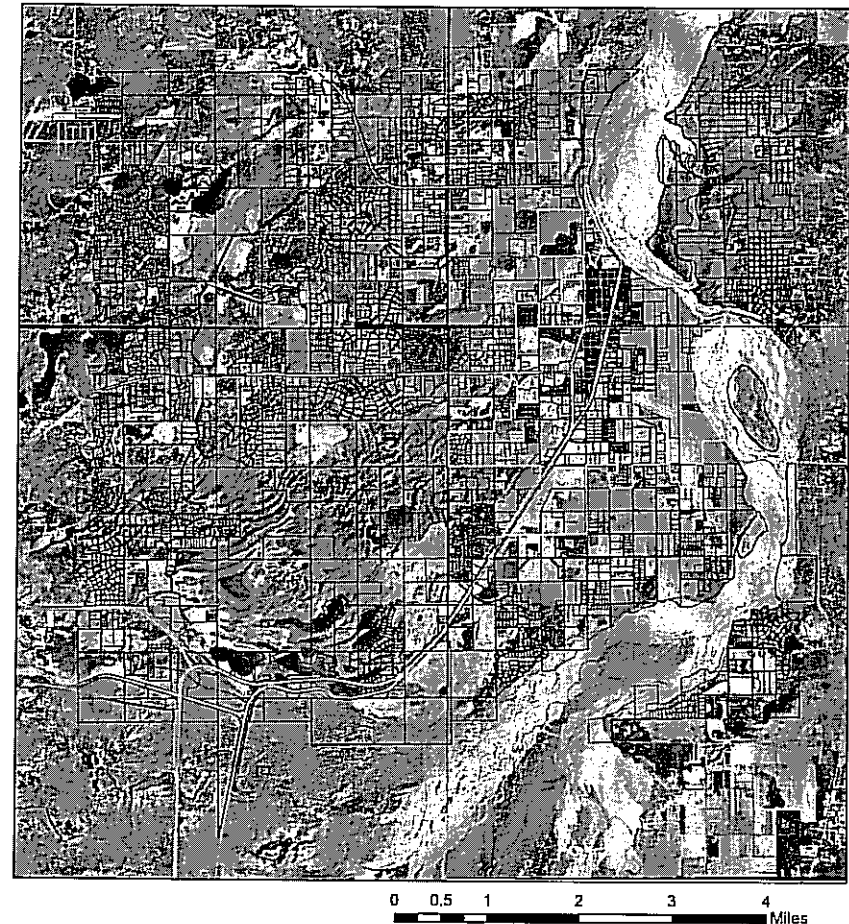
To the southwest of the town lies the mouth of the Knik arm of the Cook Inlet, where both the Matanuska and Knik rivers converge.

History

The Matanuska Valley has been home to Athapaskan natives for hundreds of years. Several villages have been located near the convergence of the Knik and Matanuska rivers, and it was here the George Palmer, a trader, established a store in the late 1800s. It wasn't until the 1930s, though, that the beginnings of the town of Palmer can be traced. While there had been scattered homesteader settlements around present day Palmer, it was in 1935, with the Federal Emergency Relief Act, that the original town settlers arrived, via train, at the Palmer depot. They were farmers who had fallen on hard times in the Midwest until President Roosevelt's New Deal program gave them a chance to start a new life for their families in Alaska. When they arrived, they were given tents and 40 acres of land to farm.

The settlement counted on agriculture and dairy production in the early years. While the dairy industry - symbolized by the Mat Maid building - has largely left the town, farming to this day makes up a

Palmer Study Area



significant part of the area's economy. Coal production, with mining areas to the north of the town, also formed an early, if now largely defunct, economic base.

More recently, Palmer has witnessed periods of boom and bust. The 1970s and early 1980s saw a great deal of growth in south-central Alaska, mainly due to the construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, and Palmer joined its neighbors in this growth. During the late 1980s, however, this boom saw a downturn as the Mat-Su Borough went through a depression between 1986 and 1989. Since 1991, however, Palmer has been recovering and population projections indicate that the town's growth will continue.

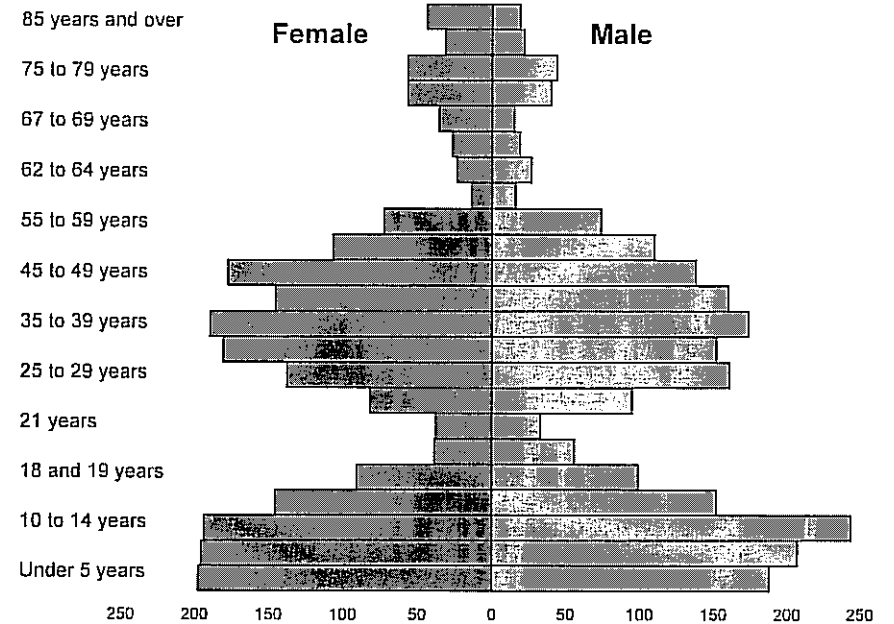
Population

According to the 2004 Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Palmer's estimated 2004 population was 5195 people. Compared to the 2000 Census population of 4533 people, Palmer's growth rate was 12.7% in that time. Numerous growth forecasts indicate that the Mat-Su Borough will experience over 3% of annual growth until 2018, with Palmer's population expected to double during this time. Approximately 2000 new households are expected in the area.

As seen in the population profile on this page, Palmer's current demographic profile includes a large middle-aged and young population. A large portion of Palmer's population is comprised of individuals and couples of child bearing age. The proportion of the population comprised of the elderly (over 65 years of age) is greater than the average for the State of Alaska (source: 2000 US Census). The large proportion of both a middle aged and young population in Palmer suggests an in-migration of individuals and couples of child

bearing age.

2000 Census Population Profile



Race	Alaska	Mat-Su Borough	Palmer
White alone	69.3%	87.6%	79.4%
Black or African American alone	3.5%	1.0%	2.6%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	15.5%	4.9%	8.5%
Asian alone	4.1%	0.6%	0.4%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	0.5%	0.1%	0.0%
Some other race alone	1.6%	0.9%	2.6%
Two or more races	5.6%	4.9%	6.4%

Racial demographics in both the Palmer and Mat-Su Borough illustrate some contrast with the rest of the state. The Borough's white population is considerably higher than that of Alaska's as a whole, while the Alaskan Native population is relatively lower. These trends are reflective of uneven geographic distribution of Alaskan Native populations, but may also indicate a trend towards homogenization. Palmer's demographic trends fall in the middle of this racial spectrum.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the average household size in Palmer is 2.81, while the median family income of \$53,164.



Economy

Palmer's economic profile exhibits a more homogeneous tendency with Alaska and Mat-Su Borough statistics. Notably, its "Educational, Health and Social Services" sector is higher by 4% than national and regional trends, while "Retail" is slightly higher than Alaska's trends.

Industry	Alaska	Mat-Su Borough	Palmer
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	4.9%	5.7%	3.9%
Construction	7.3%	11.4%	6.4%
Manufacturing	3.3%	2.4%	2.0%
Wholesale trade	2.6%	2.4%	3.7%
Retail trade	11.6%	12.9%	12.7%
Finance, insurance, real estate and rental and leasing	4.6%	3.7%	4.5%
Educational, health and social services	21.7%	21.3%	25.6%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	8.6%	8.2%	10.5%
Public administration	10.7%	7.9%	9.6%

Live/Work

Particularly illustrative are Palmer's live/work trends. As illustrated in the table below, 57% of Palmer's working residents commute outside of the city boundaries. This trend is even more noticeable in the Mat-Su Borough as a whole, with nearly 85% commuting. In contrast, only 22% of the overall population in Alaska commute.

Live/Work	Alaska	Mat-Su Borough	Palmer
Worked in place of residence	78.0%	15.7%	42.9%
Worked outside place of residence	22.0%	84.3%	57.1%



While this trend owes partially to the climatic and geographical challenges often associated with living and working in many parts of Alaska, the disparity between national and regional commuting trends is immediately apparent and points to Palmer's growing status as a "bedroom community" of Anchorage and neighboring Wasilla.

Land Use

The following table outlines land acreage within the Palmer city boundaries, as well as the study area for the project. Also indicated are the percentages of private and public land within both.

Measure of Land	Palmer	Study Area
Total Acres	4336	28,369
Number of Parcels	2545	7593
Mean Parcel Size (acres)	1.7	3.73

Type of Land	Palmer	Study Area
Public	27.7%	21.1%
State of Alaska	7.0%	2.3%
Mat-Su	5.8%	7.3%
Other	15.0%	11.5%
Private	72.3%	78.9%
Mean Assessed Value of Residential Land	\$82,781	\$80,852

Capacity Analysis

Palmer zoning data are not currently in GIS datasets; zoning maps were plotted and calculated by students based on existing analog maps. GIS shape files were then created for analysis purposes. However, certain zones contain extraneous information and result in inaccurate acreage calculations; time and location constraints precluded accurate removal of this extraneous information.

However, a preliminary capacity analysis for residential parcels was calculated.

Zone	Vacant Acreage	Potential Dwelling Units
Residential 1	331	1700
Residential 2	58	483
Residential 3	2	17
Residential 4	14	137
Residential Estate	12	24
Planned Unit Development	30	370
Commercial Limited	46	156
Commercial General	24	100
Total	517	2988

Methodology: Privately-owned, residentially zoned, non-environmentally sensitive parcels were divided up into their respective zones. Once vacant parcels were isolated and acreage totaled, 15% of this number was subtracted to account for "right of way" dedications. Based on the remaining number of vacant parcels and their respective zoning designations, a "full build out" scenario was established. As the above chart demonstrates, Palmer can theoretically fit an additional 2988 dwelling units within its current boundaries.

Palmer's Values

During the initial site visit to Palmer, the University of Washington team met with government officials, local groups, and the citizens of Palmer through a number of individual meetings and two community workshops. Through these meetings, we arrived at a set of seven core values common among community members involved:

- Small Town Character
- Unique history
- Views and open space
- Working farms and farmland
- Recreation
- Water Quality
- Property rights

These seven values, along with the current conditions analysis, helped to form the basis for the Working Goals and Recommendations presented in the following section. Following is a short discussion of each value.

Small Town Character

Palmer's downtown is the historical, cultural, and economic heart of the community. In workshops and surveys alike, residents voiced their desire to preserve the feel and function of this downtown. Palmer residents identified four main elements that created the "feel" of downtown: its authentic personality, the physical scale of the buildings, businesses and streets, the rich history of the core area and the striking views of the surrounding mountains.

Community Interaction

- Survey distributed to residents with utility bill
- Over 20 meetings conducted with stakeholder groups between September 5 - 14, 2004
- Community Workshop, September 11, 2004
- Community Open House, September 14, 2004

Stakeholders Contacted

Alaska Agricultural Statistics Service	Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game
Alaska Farm Bureau Palmer chapter	Alaska Rural Rehabilitation Corp (ARRC)
Alaska State Fair	Alaskana Books
Anchorage Sand and Gravel	Arctic Organics
Boys & Girls Club of Wasilla	Carr's Grocery
Colony House Museum	Colony Inn/Farm Loop B&B
Dept. of Environmental Conservation	D.N.R., Division of Agriculture (DNR)
Downtown Palmer Merchant's Association	Ducks Unlimited
Environmental Protection Agency	Fred Meyer
Friends of Mat-Su	Future Farmers of America
Palmer High School	Homebuilder's Association
Job Corps	Matanuska College
Mat-Su Borough Cultural Resources,	Mat-Su Community Services
Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau	Mat-Su Public Land
Mat-Su Visitors Center	Musk Ox Farm
National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)	NOAA Tsunami Warning Center
Northland Pioneer Grange No. 1	Mat-Maid
Palmer Chamber of Commerce	Palmer Food Bank
Palmer Historical Society,	Palmer Senior Services
Palmer Visitor Center	Palmer Water System
Salvation Army	Soil and Water Conservation District
U.S. Dept. of Fish and Wildlife	U.S. Geological Service
University of Alaska Extension Program	University of Alaska Experimental Station





Unique history

Palmer's rich history has imbued the town with much of its character. Many Palmer residents identify with the pioneer spirit of the early Chugach tribes, the homesteaders and the Midwestern farming families who arrived in the 1930's. Furthermore, many of the residents of Palmer belong to the families of these groups. This heritage and history is evident in the built and scenic features of both the downtown and surrounding areas, and is highly valued by the community.

Views and open space

Just as important as its historical heritage is Palmer's surrounding environment. Residents of Palmer cherish the views of the mountains, the fields of hay, and the undeveloped land that surrounds their homes. While this land is often used for recreation, it is equally important for its views and sense of space it provides. In interviews and workshops, Palmer residents identified farmland, woodlands, fallow fields, the Talkeetna and Chugach Mountains, the Butte, the Crevasse-Moraine area, and the Matanuska River as iconic of the Palmer area. Palmer's surrounding environment is also rich in wildlife, such as moose, salmon and migratory birds, and contributes to the water quality of rivers, lakes, and streams.

Working farms and farmland

Concerned about the loss of their farming economy, Palmer residents emphasized the importance of preserving their working and Colony farmlands. These farmlands contribute to Palmer's cultural and scenic heritage and occupy a vital part of the local and regional economy.

Recreation

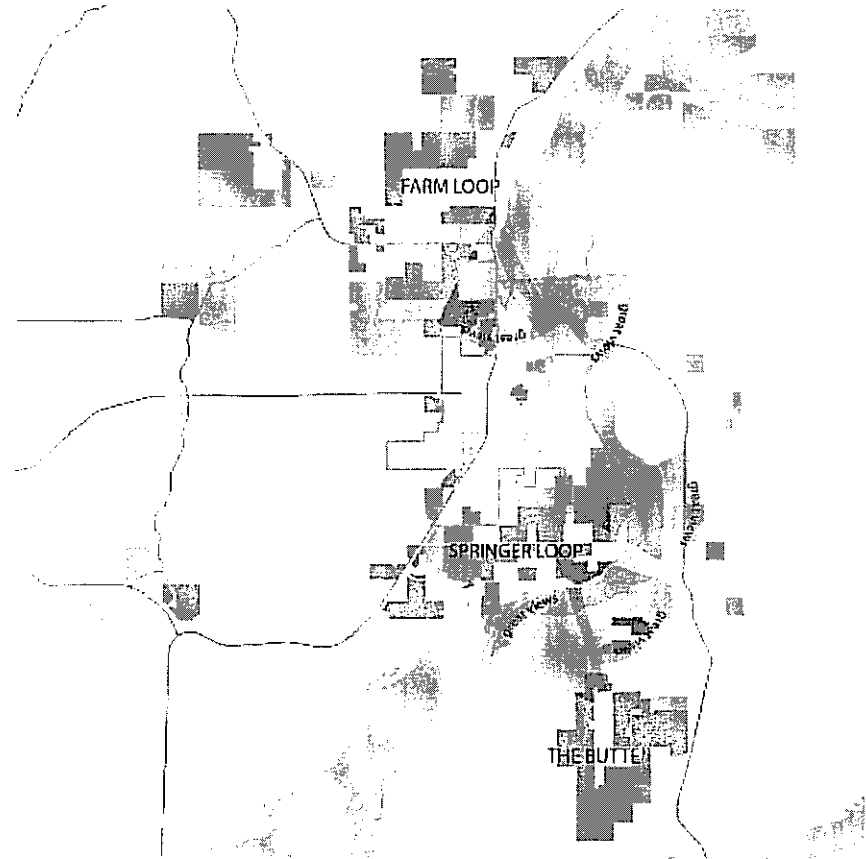
During the public meetings, the Palmer community shared many stories of using the land in and around Palmer for activities such as horseback riding, fishing, hunting, berry picking, skiing, hiking, biking, walking and other activities. The Palmer community highly valued recreating outdoors, as well as increasing connections between activities to make recreation more accessible.

Water Quality

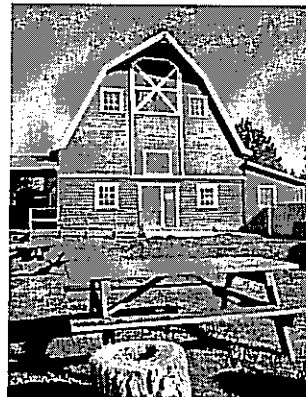
During the information-gathering process, the Palmer community consistently placed high value on clean water, and frequently expressed a desire to maintain water quality in the region for drinking as well as for fishing, recreation, and general quality of life.

Property rights

Like most Alaskans, most Palmer citizens have a deep respect for individual property rights. During the information-gathering process, balancing future growth with a person's ability to develop their land to its highest and best use was a very important value for most people.



This map illustrates the extent of remaining working farmland in the Palmer area. Dark green represents original colony farms still in use.



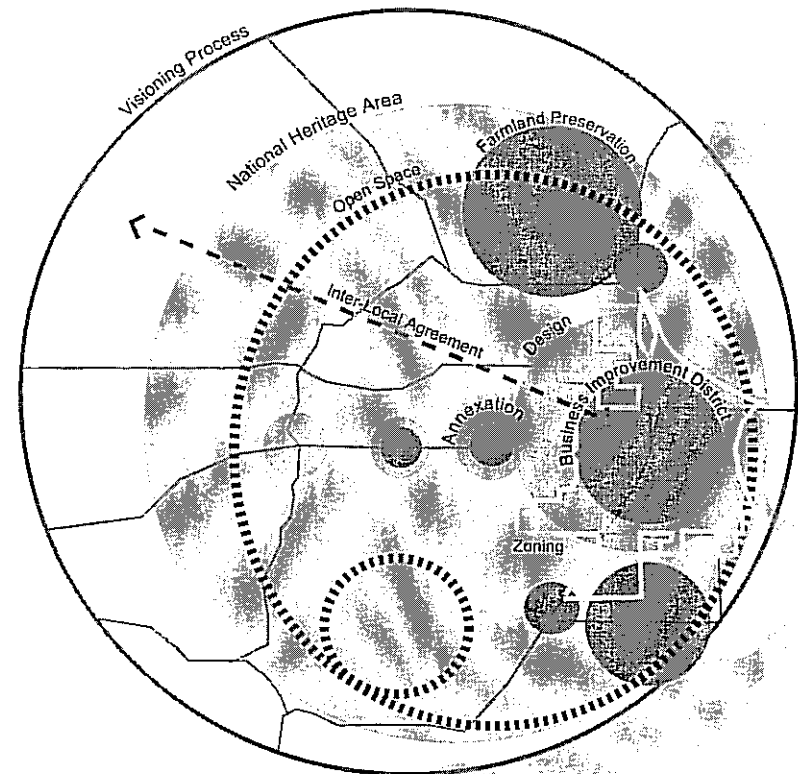
Working Goals and Recommendations

This section outlines recommended strategies that will allow Palmer to preserve and enhance its unique rural and historic character. Strategies for managing growth, preserving farmland, and enhancing the downtown area are included. A more detailed picture of each recommendation is presented in the sections that follow.

After five months of analyzing various alternatives based on current conditions and community input, the following goals and recommendations were developed based on the city's expectations, the community's input, and an analysis of current conditions. Together, they seek to establish economically viable strategies that consider the values, aspirations, and goals of the community. Overall, the goals and recommendations envision a cohesive community with a unified community design pattern, a preserved rural gateway of working farmland, a connected and efficient open space pattern, and a more compactly-developed city with an active downtown district.

Wayfinder Concept Diagram

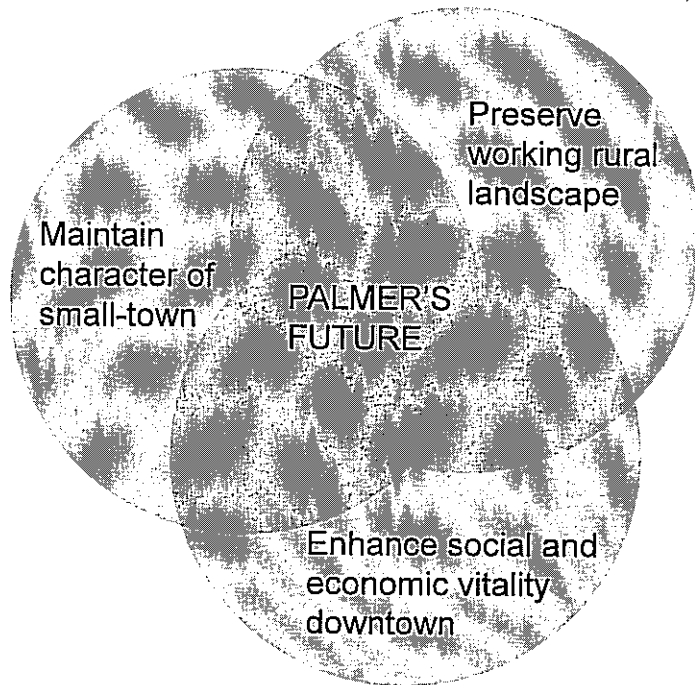
The Wayfinder is a visual reference intended to help guide and locate the reader throughout the document. It is a diagrammatic method of spatially locating the 9 recommendations, while also illustrating how they relate to one another. A Wayfinder, accompanied by related goals, is located at the beginning of each section. It can be thought of as a "you are here" icon. The highlighted portion will locate the area associated with the recommendation(s) discussed in the section.



Working Goals

The following working goals have been defined to reflect the community's values - reinforced by public meetings and surveys - and to effectively frame the issues facing the city of Palmer:

1. 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.
2. Identify and prioritize farmland facing development pressure and establish mechanisms to preserve identified farmland.
3. Enhance Palmer's social and economic vitality by promoting downtown commercial growth and community development.



Recommendations

Once alternative strategies and methods were generated, they were then evaluated based on their effectiveness to achieve the working goals relative to the costs involved in implementing them (economic, political, environmental, and social dimensions were considered). These alternatives were further refined by continuous feedback from the Community Development Coordinator, and finally revised after presentation to the City Council, Planning and Zoning Commission, and community in January, 2005.

Each of the following recommendations addresses more than one goal, while supporting each other strategically to help determine a solid direction for the community of Palmer. These recommendations also address the multiple values expressed by citizens who participated in the planning workshops, completed surveys, or met with the UW team.

While these recommendations were based on community input, it is vital that the city and community of Palmer undertake a visioning process to establish a general vision for their town's future. The rapid growth in the Palmer and Borough is making decision-making more complex – new policies affect more and more people, and a diverse, growing community must accept these decisions. A cohesive and inclusive community vision statement will form the roots for a planning process that is truly community based.

Lastly, the planning process can be resource-intensive, and with an ever-growing requirement to proactively address growth in the region, additional planning staff will be needed to respond to future growth and to implement the following recommendations.



Summary of Recommendations

- **Zoning:** Strengthen existing zoning code, establish new guidelines, and identify incentive zones to anticipate future land use and address population pressures.
- **BID:** Encourage and facilitate the establishment of a local Business Improvement District (BID) to empower local businesses to vitalize the commercial and social base of downtown.
- **Community Design:** Apply design strategies that preserve and enhance Palmer's small town character.
- **Farmland Preservation:** Pass a local bond measure to establish a fund to preserve farmland through tools such as the purchasing of land outright or its development rights.
- **Open Space:** Create a Special Purpose District to form partnerships and employ methods of preserving areas of open space.
- **Annexation:** Evaluate economic and social feasibility of Palmer/Wasilla Highway annexation option.
- **Inter-Local Agreement:** Formalize a relationship between the City and the Borough to lessen interagency conflicts and to promote and develop regional planning and decision-making.
- **National Heritage Area:** Encourage and facilitate community groups to promote Palmer as a National Heritage Area to preserve the area's historic and rural character.
- **Visioning Process:** Engage the Palmer community in a participatory visioning process that results in a unified vision of Palmer's future.

Zoning: Strengthen existing zoning code, establish new guidelines, and identify incentive zones to anticipate future land use and address population pressures.

In order to preserve Palmer's small-town character, the city should encourage commercial growth within the downtown area and residential growth within the city limits. The current zoning code has resulted in piecemeal development that does not reflect the values of the community. The recommended zoning code gives the city better control over future land uses. Enforcing this code is crucial. The first stage of this zoning process would involve strengthening and making more flexible the current code by creating two more Commercial Limited designations and a Rural Residential designation, modifying height requirements in the Commercial General zone, and elaborating on permitted uses in several zones. The goal would be a zoning code that is structurally cohesive and a process that is rigorous in its adherence. Spot zoning is strongly discouraged. The second phase would involve modifying current geographic zoning designations so as to further concentrate commercial development downtown and provide additional zoning alternatives that preserve Palmer's small town character. In the final phase, the city would target geographic areas in which to add a "second zoning tier," one which would give developers an additional permitting option. The second tier system would grant developers more leeway while giving the city leverage to solicit social, environmental, and aesthetic amenities.

BID: Encourage and facilitate the establishment of a local Business Improvement District (BID) to empower local businesses to vitalize the commercial and social base of downtown.

Whereas zoning establishes a regulatory framework for the vitalization of downtown, a Business Improvement District (BID) establishes a market framework that can revitalize a District. Considering the substantial investment of resources by the city needed to initiate and develop an economic development plan, innovative alternatives need to be considered. The establishment of a (BID) in downtown Palmer would provide funds for small to medium scale projects while empowering the local business community to identify strategies that would vitalize the commercial core of the city. A BID is a geographical area within which businesses self-impose a marginal tax increase that provides funds for identified projects. While it is not within the purview of the city to create a BID authority, the city could facilitate the process by introducing the concept of the BID to existing business groups and acting as the fiduciary agent to the collection and disbursement of the additional tax proceeds.

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

Good design allows a city to function smoothly and can improve quality of life for a community. Fortunately, Palmer already has a recognizable identity, and an important element in maintaining the community is to ensure Palmer grows in ways that ensure its

citizens continue to enjoy a high quality of life. Implementing small projects such as rural gateways creates definite entrances into town, establishing Palmer's identity. Projects such as downtown revitalization are made stronger by having exciting designs. Zoning codes with design guidelines help create vitality in the public spaces where people walk, live, run, and drive. Plus, code that includes design gives developers more certainty and may lessen permit approval time.

Farmland Preservation: Pass a local bond measure to establish a fund to preserve farmland through tools such as the purchasing of land outright or its development rights.

The rapid development occurring around the city of Palmer is resulting in a loss of farmland, which in turn is leading to a loss of unique historical and cultural resources. Furthermore, this development pressure is undermining the economic viability of farming. Passing a bond issue to purchase threatened farmland takes development pressure off farmland and could focus development in the city limits. The funds raised from a bond can either be used to facilitate the purchase of development rights, thus leaving land ownership in the hands of farmers while limiting future development. Alternatively, the money raised could be used to purchase lands that would be held and leased to farmers by a local land trust. In either case both the farmers and community benefit economically. Such a strategy not only physically maintains the extent of working farmland, but can also lead to the preservation of open space and views. Additionally, it protects Palmer's unique history of the homesteaders and colony farmers. A bond issue would also focus community efforts towards identifying and prioritizing



areas for preservation, in addition to directing development within the city boundaries and supporting National Heritage Area designation.

Open Space: Create a Special Purpose District to form partnerships and employ methods of preserving areas of open space.

During the information-gathering process, a common refrain heard was the community's concern over urbanization and the displacement of open space: agricultural lands, resource lands, and recreational lands. The greatest threat to these resource properties is land conversion. The loss of open space takes place gradually; bit by bit, slowly land is converted to a more intensive use and its resource, scenic or recreational use may be lost. A strategy to address the loss of resource land to development is to create a Special Purpose District to reduce threat of land conversion to resource properties. This District could be a quasi-governmental organization created solely for the preservation of agriculture and open space lands that may occur only through partnerships and willing landowners. Financing the acquisition of land (or easements) could be done by various means, but the acquisition would be for the purpose of ensuring the open space value of the land remains for a specified time (or in perpetuity). Special Purpose Districts generally have appointed boards that oversee the acquisition and administration of property and easements.

Annexation: Evaluate economic and social feasibility of Palmer/Wasilla Highway annexation option.

Annexation is one possible alternative to addressing and directing growth in the Palmer area. Annexation has economic and other costs, however, and decision-makers must carefully weigh the benefits of annexation against these potential costs. Infrastructure must be delivered, as newly annexed homes usually expect a higher level of service. The social dynamic of the City will change, with new taxpayers having a voice in the direction of the City. Section 7 looks in detail at the economic and social consequences of expanding city boundaries, and concludes the widest range of realized benefits is an exploration of an annexation west out the Palmer-Wasilla highway to the Four Corners intersection.

Inter-Local Agreement: Formalize a relationship between the City and the Borough to lessen interagency conflicts and to promote and develop regional planning and decision-making.

Both the City of Palmer and the Mat-Su Borough are experiencing rapid growth and the resultant issues that accompany such growth. As the City and the Borough cope with how to address development pressure, a productive interim step could be to share planning tasks via an Interlocal Agreement, or ILA. ILAs are working agreements that allow governments to cooperate with one another when performing planning tasks, thus reducing duplication of effort and achieving savings by pooling resources. Joint planning and community development services may enjoy greater efficiency

and cost-effective service delivery when administered via an ILA. For example, the City and Borough can agree to work together to establish a National Heritage Area for the region, or the City and Borough can work together to approve subdivision permits within a certain distance of the City, ensuring some ability to shape the design and character of those subdivisions.

National Heritage Area: Encourage and facilitate community groups to promote Palmer as a National Heritage Area to preserve the area's historic and rural character.

A National Heritage Area is a place designated by Congress where natural, cultural, historic and scenic features combine to form a cohesive, nationally distinctive landscape. With its unique and rich farming history, from the homesteaders to the colonist and present day farming, the Palmer area is an ideal candidate for such designation. The benefits of NHA status include a leverage for funding, the preservation of local culture, traditions and way of life, the protection of farmland while remaining in private ownership, enhanced economic development, and national recognition. Also, the process of achieving NHA status offers a unifying strategy and focuses community energies towards common goals. An NHA is totally managed by local entities, recognizing the fact that the people who live in a place are uniquely qualified to protect and interpret it. Taking the initial steps towards NHA designation goes hand-in-hand with the community defining a clear vision of what they wish Palmer to look like in the future and supports the desire to relieve the development pressure off farmland.

Visioning Process: Engage the Palmer community in a participatory visioning process that results in a unified vision of Palmer's future.

Although the University of Washington held two workshops that helped to identify community values, it is recommended that additional community meetings are held in order to develop a unified vision for the community's future. A discussion of the recommendations listed above is an ideal point from which to start. It is to the community of Palmer's advantage to have an explicit statement that defines what they value. By undertaking the visioning process – identifying what Palmer may look like in the future, what to do to achieve that future and making commitments to that vision – people come to the table and talk to each other and community unity is gained. Holding public participatory meetings allows for a greater sharing of ideas, concerns and understanding, and can ultimately gain public support for the decisions that will define the direction that Palmer will take.

