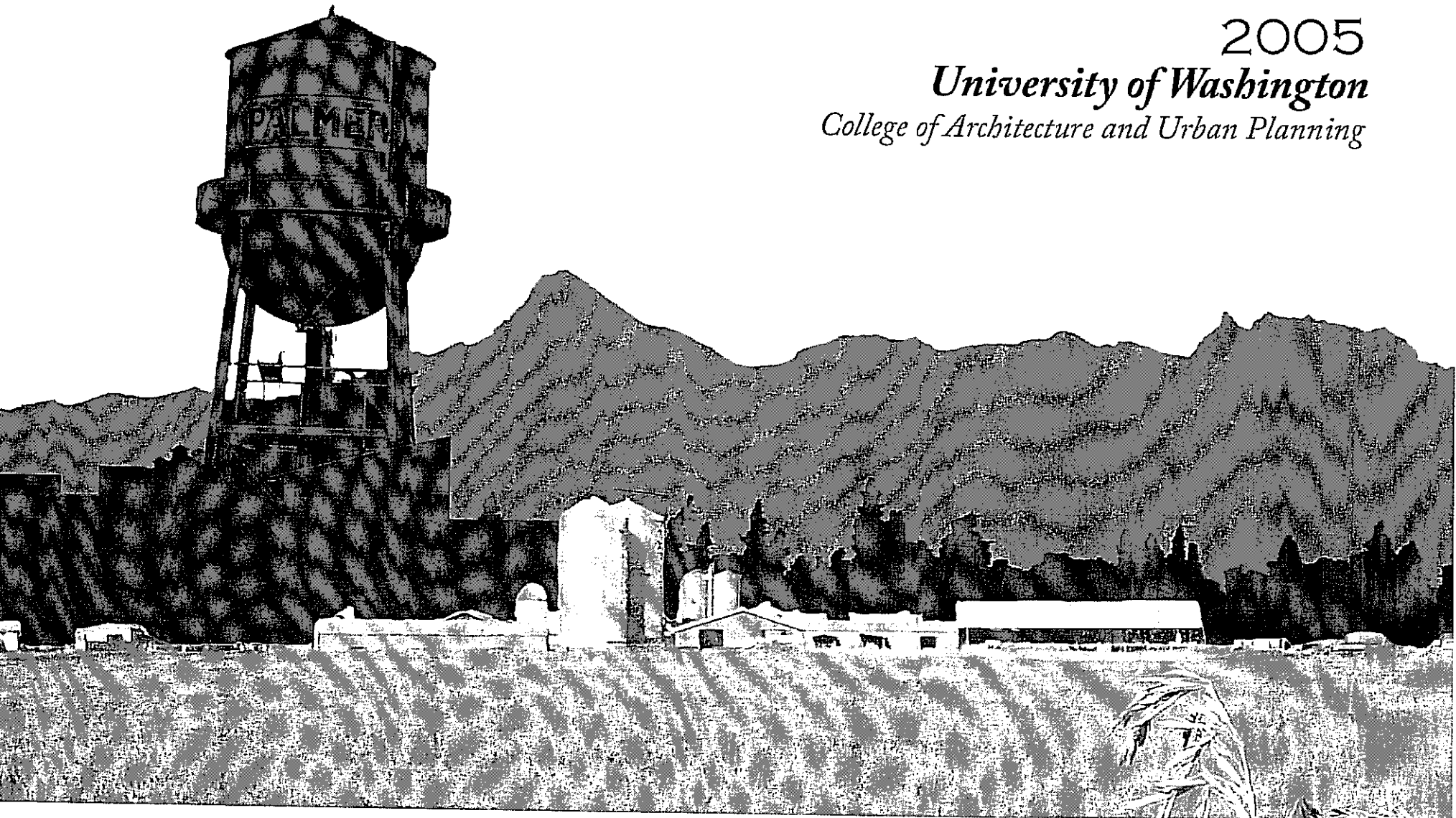


# PIONEERING PALMER'S FUTURE: STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING GROWTH

2005

*University of Washington*

*College of Architecture and Urban Planning*





# Pioneering Palmer's Future: Strategies for Managing Growth

A Collaborative Studio between the Departments of Landscape Architecture and Urban Design and Planning

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	iii
Foreword .....	v
Summary of Sections .....	vi

## OVERVIEW

Role and Purpose of Plan .....	9
Palmer Today.....	13
Working Goals and Recommendations.....	21

## SECTIONS

Section 1: Land Use and Zoning .....	27
Section 2: Economic Development .....	37
Section 3: Community Design .....	43
Section 4: Farmland and Open Space Preservation .....	85
Section 5: Annexation and Regional Partnerships .....	93
Section 6: National Heritage Area .....	107
Section 7: Visioning Process and Next Steps .....	117

## APPENDICES

Appendix A: Community Survey Results .....	123
Appendix B: Permitted Uses Matrix.....	128
Appendix C: Zoning Dimensions Matrix .....	135
Appendix D: Sample R3 Zoning Code .....	136
Appendix E: Sample Design Guidelines.....	140
Appendix F: Residential Performance Code .....	143
Appendix G: Floor Area Ratios for Downtown.....	150
Appendix H: Commercial District Evaluation .....	151
Appendix I: Farmland/Open Space Preservation Tools.....	154
Appendix J: Additional Annexation Options, Calculations .....	158
Appendix K: Inter-Local Agreements .....	173





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## Foreword

The special character of Palmer is widely recognized and its setting of surrounding farmland against a stunning backdrop of mountains and glaciers is one of Alaska's most iconic images. Yet, Palmer sits in the path of an unprecedented wave of growth. Over the past decade, the fertile Matanuska Valley has experienced the fastest rate of growth and development in the State of Alaska. Recognizing that this rural "small town" character is cherished by residents and visitors alike, an Alaska State Legislative Aide connected Palmer's Community Development Coordinator with the University of Washington's Northwest Center For Livable Communities. The broad purpose behind this meeting was to discuss ways that the University of Washington could help the City of Palmer address issues that are directly related to this rapid growth. The meeting was a success, as the City of Palmer chartered the University of Washington to assist with the development of policies, plans, and implementation tools for protecting and enhancing the downtown core area while managing growth in surrounding areas.

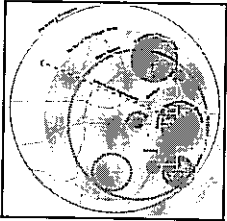
Beginning in the late summer of 2004, twenty graduate students and five faculty members from the disciplines of Urban Design and Planning and Landscape Architecture come together as a studio to work on this project. It commenced with ten days of site work in Palmer. This process engaged the citizens with the definition of issues and opportunities in Palmer, and enabled the studio team to collect existing data sets and additional information through fieldwork to be used for analysis.

There are two major components to the scope of the work behind this plan. The first is a study of methods for protecting and enhancing the downtown and surrounding core area of Palmer. The second component involved a study of approaches and methods to assist Palmer in preparing for and guiding future area-wide growth. A number of implementation tools not now employed by the City, both regulatory and incentive-based, were examined for their applicability.

*Pioneering Palmer's Future* is the conclusion of the studio's work. This document is at heart a strategic action plan, presenting a recommended set of strategies and corresponding implementation actions to address the issues defined in the scope of work. While it marks the conclusion of the studio's work, *Pioneering Palmer's Future* also marks a beginning for the community. With the imminent update of the Palmer Comprehensive Plan, the level of energy and initiative within the community needs to be harnessed to continue the planning process. Implementation and follow through are the most important and challenging parts of taking a pro-active role in affecting the future shape of Palmer and its surroundings. With the infectious enthusiasm among residents for the incredible beauty of its physical surroundings and its special character, all the pieces are in place for that shape to be uniquely Palmer's. We believe that this plan will help to connect those pieces, and the Palmer community with the exceptional potential that its future holds.

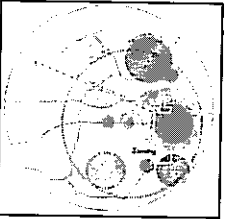


# Summary of Sections



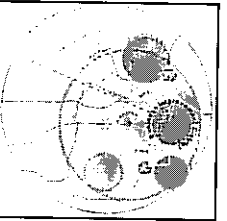
## **Overview**

The Overview section describes the role and purpose of this plan, outlines its development process, and relates it to other planning efforts the City has undertaken. The overview also gives a snapshot of the Palmer community today, with a description of current demographics, land uses, and a brief set of community values defined by citizens involved. Critical planning issues are highlighted and the working goals that frame the recommendations in this plan are defined.



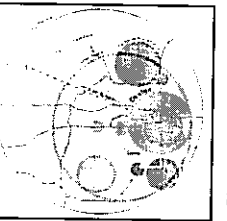
## **Section 1: Land Use and Zoning**

Changes to Palmer's existing zoning code are recommended to create a more transparent, efficient and flexible zoning system. This strategy is part of an integrated approach, combined with the Economic Development and Community Design sections, to enhance the downtown commercial core while retaining the "small town" character of Palmer as a whole. Appendices B – E provide examples of recommendations made within the section.



## **Section 2: Economic Development**

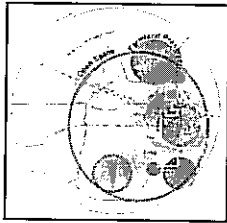
The Economic Development section discusses the advantages of a Business Improvement District (BID) in downtown Palmer. It describes the mechanics behind a BID, steps that the Palmer business community can take to form a BID organization, and examples of relevant projects and services the BID could coordinate.



## **Section 3: Community Design**

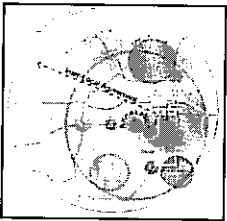
This section introduces design approaches that strengthen the identity of the city by enhancing the physical and psychological connections to the city core. These design concepts are not prescriptive – rather, they provide inspiration and explore possibilities for downtown development. Through this work, a recommended set of guidelines was generated and included in Appendix E.





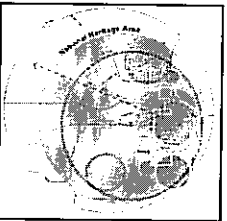
#### **Section 4: Farmland and Open Space Preservation**

This section outlines a strategy for preserving farms and open land in and around the city of Palmer. A set of tools to maintain farmland with supporting funding scenarios are presented in the first part of this section. The second part proposes the establishment of a special purpose district to protect "valued lands," and describes methods of protecting those spaces. Additional strategies and information are found in Appendix I.



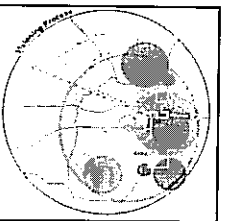
#### **Section 5: Annexation and Regional Partnerships**

This section addresses the issue of changing the jurisdictional boundaries of Palmer in order to manage growth outside Palmer's current city limits. One potential area for annexation is discussed in the first part of the section, and the second part describes an Inter-local Agreement strategy – a collaborative effort between the City and Borough to prepare and plan for growth in the surrounding area. Additional information is found in Appendices J and K.



#### **Section 6: National Heritage Area**

The National Heritage Area Designation is described in this section as a specific strategy for leveraging funds, unifying the community and larger region with a common heritage, and complementing other economic development strategies. It explains why Palmer is a strong candidate, benefits that the designation status provides, and critical steps to becoming a National Heritage Area.



#### **Section 7: Visioning Process and Next Steps**

This section describes the importance of establishing a formal, future-oriented expression of a community's direction. A discussion of the recommendations throughout this document is an ideal point from which to start. Such a unified vision will facilitate the integration of these recommendations into a broader, systematic approach to guiding growth.