

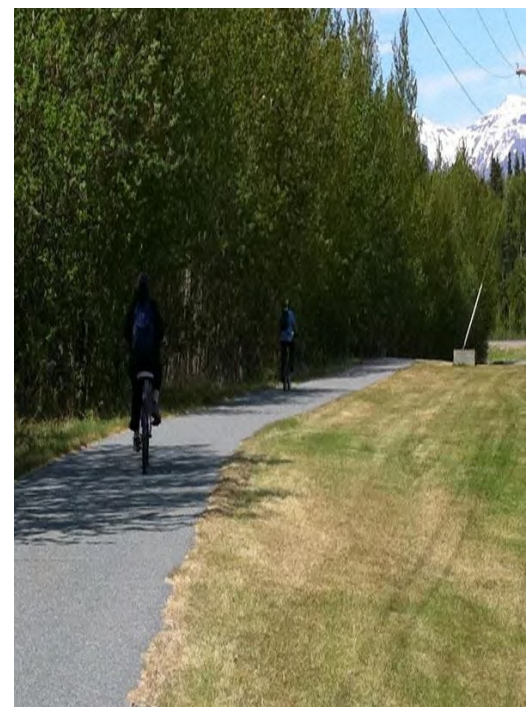


Palmer

Alaska at its Best!



City of Palmer Parks, Trails and Recreational Fields Master Plan November 2011



Acknowledgements

The City of Palmer *Parks, Trails and Recreational Fields Master Plan* was developed by the City's Community Development Department with the technical assistance and design help of PROS Consulting, LLC, and ETC/Leisure Vision Institute. Special thanks go to the many residents, park users, and community leaders for their insight and support throughout the duration of this study.

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Matanuska Soccer Club
Palmer Junior Hockey Association
Job Corps
Valley Mountain Bikers and Hikers
Mat-Su School District

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A Vision for the Future

The City of Palmer is located among the historic and nomadic trading routes of the native Ahtna Athabascan peoples nestled along the Matanuska River on its way to the Cook Inlet and Pacific Ocean. Situated beneath Pioneer Peak to the south and Lazy Mountain to the east, Palmer began its modern era as an American settlement in 1935 when it was established as one of only two colonies in U.S. history.¹ Over the last 75 years, Palmer has steadily grown as a jewel of the Matanuska Valley becoming a major economic engine for the region, incorporating in 1951, being the seat of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, home of the Alaska State Fair, and a City that has retained its small town, frontier charm.

Living in Alaska is not easy, but worth it. The climate, dramatic seasonal differences of daylight, and the perceived distance from the rest of the world does not detract from the breathtaking landscapes and the reality of still living on the American frontier. Living in Palmer offers residents the best of Alaska – proximity to pristine wilderness and native wildlife, coupled with the conveniences of modern living in a small, quant community. The parks, trails, and recreational amenities of the City significantly adds to the local flavor and quality of life.

Parks and trails is a major part of the lifestyle in Palmer and the surrounding residential areas, but has not always been a part of the City’s services. Traditionally, parks and recreation facilities and services in Alaska are the responsibility of Borough governments. In 2005, however, the City of Palmer requested responsibility for the parks, trails and recreational fields within the City from the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and this request was granted. Since that time, the City of Palmer has worked to proactively manage and potentially develop its parks and recreation system in alignment with the needs, interests, and priorities of the community.

This *Parks, Trails and Recreational Fields Master Plan* supports the intent of the City to manage forward towards the goal of further enriching the lives of residents. Parks and trails play a unique and pivotal role in the community, and this plan details a proactive approach to continue this tradition into the future. Intertwined with the City’s strategies for economic development, residential life, and cultural vitality, parks and trails are just as much a part of the future as they are a part of the past and present.

The elements of this master plan outline a multi-dimensional approach for managing the City’s parks and recreational assets over the next 10 years. While not every question may be answered, this plan provides the overarching strategies for maintaining and further developing a municipal park system that celebrates national and local best practices. Ultimately, this is another reason why Palmer is Alaska at its best!

Parks and trails play a unique and pivotal role in the community, and this plan details a proactive approach to continue this tradition into the future.



Palmer
Alaska at its Best!

Photo opposite page: Palmer Golf Course, Pioneer Peak in the background

¹ Palmer was established as a United States colony in 1935 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Executive Summary

The City of Palmer has a unique history that is evident and celebrated throughout town. From the early days as an agricultural colony, Palmer remains a crossroads of traditional rural living and modern urban conveniences. Palmer sits on the northeastern edge of the Matanuska Valley, where the braided stream of the Matanuska River emerges from the winding canyons of the watershed just north of the City, and the broad expanse of the Matanuska-Susitna basin opens up. Officially formed in 1935 as a U.S. colony, and incorporated in 1951 as a city, Palmer thrives today as a hub of culture and commerce.

Today, the City of Palmer is home to 5,937 residents² within the city limits, with an expanded population of nearly 25,000 in the surrounding residential areas. Palmer is located approximately 45 minutes northeast of Anchorage, Alaska, and approximately 20 minutes east of Wasilla, Alaska. Many residents live in Palmer and work in Anchorage, Wasilla, or other points in Alaska as distant as the North Slope. These residents are diverse and active recreationalists³, increasing the demands on the City to stay ahead of community needs.

Parks and recreation as a public service in the City is provided as a partnership between the Community Development Department and the Public Works Department. The program is small, currently has no dedicated employee, is responsible for the management of 14 separate park sites including some substantial facilities. The success and favorable reputation of parks and recreation in the City is a product of genuine and thoughtful community relations and productive partnerships. This *Parks, Trails and Recreational Fields Master Plan* supports the future of the Program through the continuation and expansion of these and many other successful traditions.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTIVES OF THE MASTER PLAN

The master plan update has been developed under the following guiding principles and objectives:

- Sustainably grow the best practices and quality services of the City of Palmer
- Serve the relevant park and recreational needs of existing and new residents of Palmer
- Further position the City as a regional, state-wide and national destination, while protecting the accessibility and privacy of City sites and facilities for local residents
- Qualify for enhanced partnerships and funding opportunities in both the public and private sectors
- Leave a positive legacy for current and future generations of Palmer residents

PARKS, TRAILS AND RECREATION IN PALMER TODAY

There are 14 parks and facilities totaling 210.12 acres owned and/or maintained by the City of Palmer. This system includes neighborhood, community and regional parks, as well as major destination amenities such as the MTA Event Center / Ice Arena and Palmer Golf Course. Additionally, Palmer boasts nearly six (6) miles of paved trails / recreational paths with plans to expand this in the near future. This is an active and “leisure literate” community. Residents of Palmer can be observed hiking, running, on-road and off-road bicycling, and horseback riding, as well as both youth and adults heavily participating in sports leagues and programs ranging from bat-and-ball sports, soccer, and hockey. Overall, the City of Palmer is an active community with a hearty appetite for high quality park and recreation sites, facilities and services.

² U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 U.S. Census.

³ Alaska Department of Natural Resources. July 2009. [Alaska Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2009-2014](#).

A few quick facts regarding the parks, trails and recreational fields of Palmer are listed below:

- The City of Palmer manages 14 park and recreation sites, totaling over 210 acres; a variety of recreational amenities and assets; special use facilities; and nearly six (6) miles of natural and improved surface trails.
- The park and recreation assets of the City of Palmer include many significant amenities within the community such as the MTA Events Center / Ice Arena, Sherrod Park, Palmer Golf Course, and A-moose-ment Park.
- The parks and recreation function of the City of Palmer is one of the few methods in the community through which public parklands and trails are acquired and managed for public recreation as a direct impact from development.
- While the parks and recreation sites of Palmer are financially supported by the City, which has nearly 6,000 residents, these assets serve the greater Palmer area of nearly 25,000 residents.
- The parks and recreation system of the City of Palmer is operated without any dedicated staff or significant allocation of budget funds, and is managed as a partnership between the Community Development and Public Works Departments. The actual funds specifically budgeted for parks and recreation is less than \$1.20 per city resident in 2011. It is estimated that the actual *total* city expenditure to maintain parks and coordinate facility use is approximately \$20-\$25 per resident per year, not including operational support of the MTA Events Center / Ice Arena.

VISION AND MISSION STATEMENTS

The foundation of meeting the needs and interests of residents in the future is outlined in the vision and mission statements of the Program.

Vision Statement of Palmer Parks, Trails and Recreation

Palmer parks and trails connect our community.

Mission Statement of Palmer Parks, Trails and Recreation

The mission of parks and trails is to operate and maintain a high quality parks and connected trail system, to create a sense of place, enhance health and happiness of our community, and support the diverse recreation and cultural talents and traditions that enrich life in Palmer.

LOGICAL FLOW OF THE PARKS, TRAILS AND RECREATIONAL FIELDS MASTER PLAN

The *Parks, Trails and Recreational Fields Master Plan* follows a logical path for responsive community planning, and contains the major components illustrated in the diagram below. Summaries of the site and facility assessment, and the needs analysis are provided in this report. Full versions of the *Comprehensive Assessment Report* and *Needs Analysis Report* are separately bound appendices to the master plan.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS AND PRIORITIES

MAINTAINING WHAT WE HAVE

There are many great examples of quality parks and trails throughout the Palmer parks and trail system, including a number of these sites and facilities that are cornerstone assets in the community. It is important to protect and maintain the quality and integrity of these community assets and operational practices. These include:

- Maintaining high quality neighborhood parks
- Maintaining high quality sport and athletic facilities
- Maintaining high quality community parks
- Strong and productive partnerships with local user groups, facility operators, and non-profit organizations
- Maintaining signature assets in the community
- Improved surface trails that support recreation and walkability
- Superb community relations
- Adopting universal maintenance standards for parks



McKechnie Park (Daron Drive)

IMPROVING WHAT WE HAVE

While there are many things the Palmer parks and recreation program does exceptionally well, there are a few opportunities to improve the quality of assets and amenities in the system. These include:

- Improved park and site signage
- Updating and improving recreational assets (playgrounds, picnic areas, sports fields, etc.) as deemed necessary to support community needs
- Diversifying the age appeal of parks and park amenities
- More clearly defined development and subdivision regulations relating to parks and trails
- Connecting existing trails and pathways
- Facility and amenities repairs at some sites

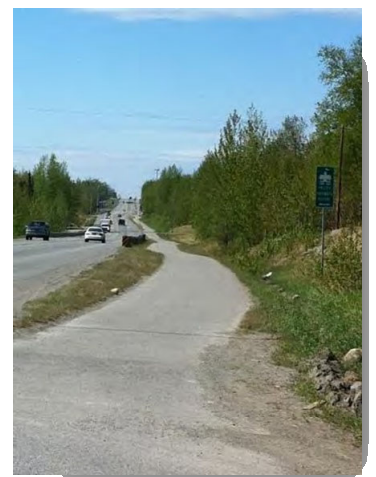


Ball Field at Sherrod Park

DEVELOPING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Palmer residents are generally active and interested in quality recreation opportunities and the Palmer parks and recreation program can play a significant role in meeting current and future needs. The following new development projects have been identified as relevant to the interests and needs of the communities, are relevant for the City to be focused on, and feature a high probability of success:

- Trails that improve connectivity within the community
- Trails that connect communities to nearby recreational destinations outside of the City
- Improving the distribution of parks to accommodate areas of residential growth and increased density
- Developing more non-traditional sport and recreational opportunities
- Developing an additional community or regional park with broad and age and activity appeal



Paved trail along Palmer-Wasilla Highway

ENHANCING OPERATIONS

The Palmer parks and recreation program is known for being a frugal and responsive public service, as seen in the lack of dedicated staffing and creative partnerships to support a multitude of sites and responsibilities. The following key strategies can help to guide the program over the next 10 years in continuing its tradition of excellence while appropriately growing to meet community needs:

- Appropriately establish staff support for the Program to accommodate increased responsibilities and community demands
- Expand funding support for capital and operational needs aligned with community expectations and priorities, including establishing a close working relationship with a non-profit fund development partner
- Utilize consistent maintenance and facility standards for the maintenance and development of parks and park amenities
- Establish more consistent guidelines that reflect best practices for subdivision regulations, park dedication, trail development, and cash-in-lieu
- Enhance security of specific parks where there are community concerns

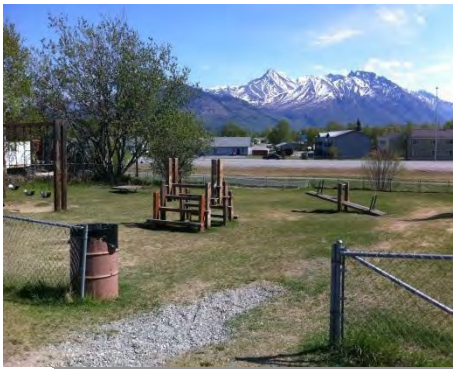


A-moose-ment Park

CORE SERVICES OF THE PALMER PARKS AND RECREATION PROGRAM

The functional core services of the Palmer parks and recreation program are:

- **Site and Infrastructure Stewardship**
 - Parks, facilities, and trails
- **Health**
 - Access to recreational opportunities that can provide for personal wellness
- **Safety**
 - Site and facility maintenance
 - Site security
- **Community Heritage**
 - Conservation of parks and open space



Left to right: Meier Park (Silver Tip Drive); Palmer Skateboard Park; Dr. Myron F. Babb Arboretum

Overview of the Palmer Parks and Recreation System

GENERAL

	FY 2011
Total Full-Time Employees	0
Total Park and Recreation Sites / Facilities	14
Total Park Acreage	210.12 acres
Total Trail Mileage	5.92 miles
Average Annual Park and Recreation Budget Allocation per Resident	\$1.17
Acres of City Park Land per 1,000 Residents <u>not including</u> Palmer Golf Course	10.99 acres
Acres of City Park Land per 1,000 Residents <u>including</u> Palmer Golf Course	35.39 acres

PALMER PARKS

	Quantity	Acreage
Neighborhood Parks	6	2.20 acres
Community Parks	4	7.07 acres
Regional Parks	3	200.55 ⁴ acres
Open Space	1	0.30 acres
Total Parks	14	210.12 acres

PALMER TRAILS

	Quantity	Mileage
Natural Surface Trails	None	0 miles
Improved Surface Trails (paved)	Multiple	5.92 miles
Total Trails	Multiple	5.92 miles

Neighborhood Parks	
Bugge Park	McKechnie Park
Fairfield Park*	Meier Park
Hagen Park	Wilson Park*
Community Parks	
A-moose-ment Park	Busby Soule Fields
Bill Hermann Tennis Courts	Palmer Skateboard Park
Regional Parks (Facilities)	
MTA Events Center / Ice Arena	Sherrod Park
Palmer Golf Course	
Open Space	
Dr. Myron F. Babb Arboretum	
Trails	
Cope Industrial Way Bike Path	Palmer-Wasilla Highway Trail
Shane Woods Memorial Trail	Glenn Highway Trail
Arctic Avenue Trail	

⁴ This includes the 145 acres of the Palmer Golf Course.



Chapter 1: Summary of Community Input

There has been extensive public input and participation in the Palmer *Parks, Trails and Recreational Fields Master Plan* process from February 2011 to August 2011, with additional input opportunities and public meetings yet to be scheduled in the remainder of the project. A total of twelve leadership interviews and stakeholder focus groups and two community meetings were conducted as the foundation of public participation. In addition to the leadership interviews, focus groups, and community meetings, the public input process included a statistically-valid household survey of residents, and a separate survey of students in 5th through 8th grades at Palmer Junior Middle School and 9th through 12th grades at Palmer High School.

1.1 QUALITATIVE INPUT SUMMARY

INPUT OPPORTUNITIES

The qualitative data collected included multiple leadership interviews, focus groups, and community meetings. A summary of the public input opportunities to date is provided below:

- Twelve (12) leadership interviews and focus groups were conducted to be representative, but not exhaustive of interests affecting City of Palmer parks and recreation. These sessions included:
 - Local elected officials
 - Local representatives from federal and state agency stakeholders
 - Administration and department leadership of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough
 - Leadership and staff of City of Palmer
 - Parks and trail user and stakeholder groups
 - Business and community leaders from throughout the City and Borough
- Two (2) community meetings were conducted in Palmer in order to capture representative interests, needs, and priorities of residents through an open forum. These meetings were organized and promoted locally, and held on:
 - March 29, 2011
 - May 25, 2011

GENERAL FINDINGS

There were many findings derived from the interviews, focus groups, and community meetings with often great similarities and differences between stakeholder groups. The following general findings are not intended to be comprehensive of everything heard or mentioned, but rather a summary of prevailing and overall themes learned in the process.

- Trails are a valued asset in the community and the region.
- Connectivity within the community is very important to create a “more walkable” Palmer.
- Connectivity with other regional trails and trail systems is critical.
- There is generally a lack of awareness among residents of the number and location of City of Palmer parks and recreation sites.
- There are numerous stakeholders and dedicated users of Palmer parks and recreation facilities that share the responsibility of managing these public recreation lands and opportunities, and therefore all related planning should be cooperative.

- The prevalent use of local partners to develop, maintain, and manage parks and trails is extremely successful.
- The grants awarded locally and statewide play an important role in making park and recreation projects possible.
- While there is a good start with trails in Palmer, there are many opportunities to make connections that create a more complete system of trails and walkways.
- Major attractions in the City that should be connected include, but are not limited to:
 - Downtown / central city area
 - Local schools
 - Alaska State Fair grounds
 - Matanuska River
 - Crevasse Moraine (outside the City of Palmer, but a connection is important)
- The golf course is well managed by a private operator, and well regarded in the region as a high quality recreation destination.
- The hockey rink is a success for Palmer, especially with recent private sponsorship support, but is almost too small to support the demand placed on it.
- The growth and popularity of bat-and-ball sports in Palmer is steady, but limited by the number, availability and condition of diamond ball fields for both practice and games.
- There are insufficient rectangular sports fields currently available for use to meet the demands of local user groups.
- Palmer has purposefully pursued a locally-driven economy with few large, chain retailers present in the City. Continued growth and diversification of the local economy is important, and parks and trails play a significant role in resident quality of life and tourism appeal.
- There is limited diversity of recreational amenities for youth in Palmer, consisting largely of sport fields, ball fields, and playgrounds. There are unmet needs reflecting the the diverse interests of the City's families and young people.
- The skateboard park is well used site in the City, but can be improved and expanded upon.
- City of Palmer parks and recreation is managed as partnership between the City's Community Development and Public Works Departments, as well as with the Matanuska-Susitna School District, the Borough, and numerous local user groups and organizations.
- One of the greatest challenges to connectivity in Palmer is safely crossing the Glenn Highway. Currently there are limited crossings, most in heavy traffic areas.
- Some City park are a management challenge involving one or more of the following issues:
 - Heavy seasonal uses
 - Turf maintenance
 - Aged equipment
 - Occasional user conflicts

1.2 QUANTITATIVE INPUT SUMMARY

HOUSEHOLD SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The City of Palmer conducted a Community Survey from April through July 2011, with the purpose to help establish priorities for the future development of parks, trails and recreation facilities, and programs and services of the City. The survey was designed to obtain statistically-valid results from households of the City, as well a limited number of residents who live within the greater Palmer service area, and was administered by a combination of mail and phone.

The Consultant Team (PROS Consulting and Leisure Vision) worked extensively with City of Palmer staff and officials in the development of the survey questionnaire. This work allowed the survey to be tailored to issues of strategic importance to effectively plan the future system. Leisure Vision mailed surveys to a random sample of 1,800 households including those both in and outside the City. Approximately three days after the surveys were mailed, each household that received a survey also received an automated voice message encouraging them to complete the survey. In addition, about two weeks after the surveys were mailed Leisure Vision began contacting households by phone. Those who indicated they had not returned the survey were given the option of completing it by phone.

The goal was to obtain a total of at least 370 completed surveys and this was exceeded with a total of 401 surveys having been completed. The results of the random sample have a 95% level of confidence with a precision of at least +/-4.9%.

	GOAL	ACTUAL	% OF GOAL	% RESPONDENTS THAT ARE IN-CITY RESIDENTS
Total Responses	370	401	108%	88%

KEY FINDINGS

While there are numerous findings detailed in the *Palmer Community Survey Findings Report*, the results described herein represent key findings that describe resident attitudes towards current and future park and recreation opportunities in the City.

VISITATION

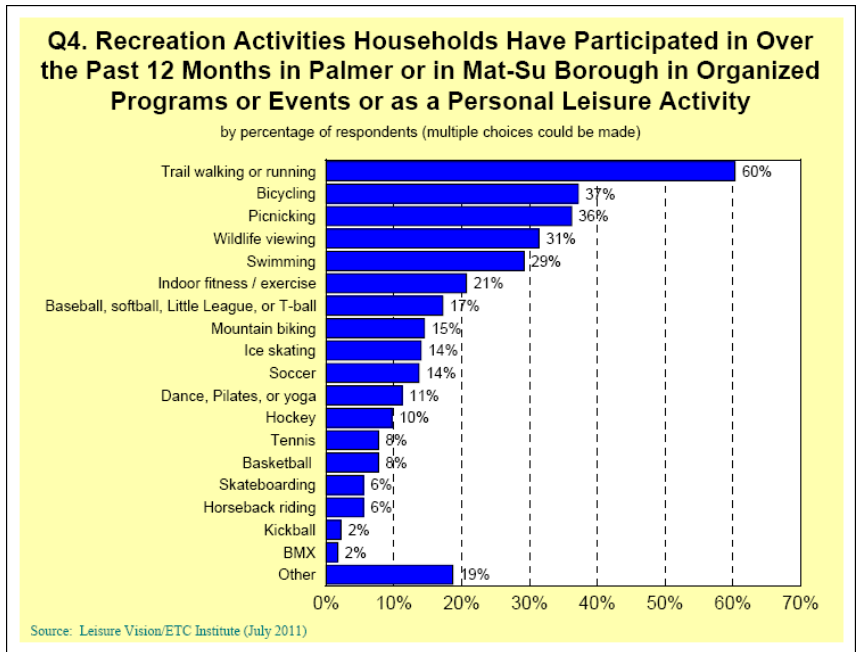
- Seventy-seven percent (77%) of respondents indicated they have visited Palmer city parks or recreation facilities within the last 12 months. This exceeds the national average for communities of 72%.
- Of those that visit parks, 29% indicate they visit parks or recreation facilities 21 or more times a year and 5% responded they visit more than 100 times a year.
- The top five most commonly visited amenities as indicated by the percentage of households that responded they have used or visited in the last 12 months are trails (77%), playgrounds (56%), picnicking areas (45%), A-moose-ment Park (44%), and group pavilions (38%).

SATISFACTION

- Palmer residents seem satisfied with the quality of City parks and recreation facilities, with 63% of respondents indicating the overall quality of their experiences as either above average or excellent. Thirty-three percent (33%) indicated average experiences, 3% below average, and only 1% responded their experiences were poor.
- Lack of time and awareness are the major reasons respondents indicated as to why they or members of their household did not use Palmer parks and recreation facilities more often.

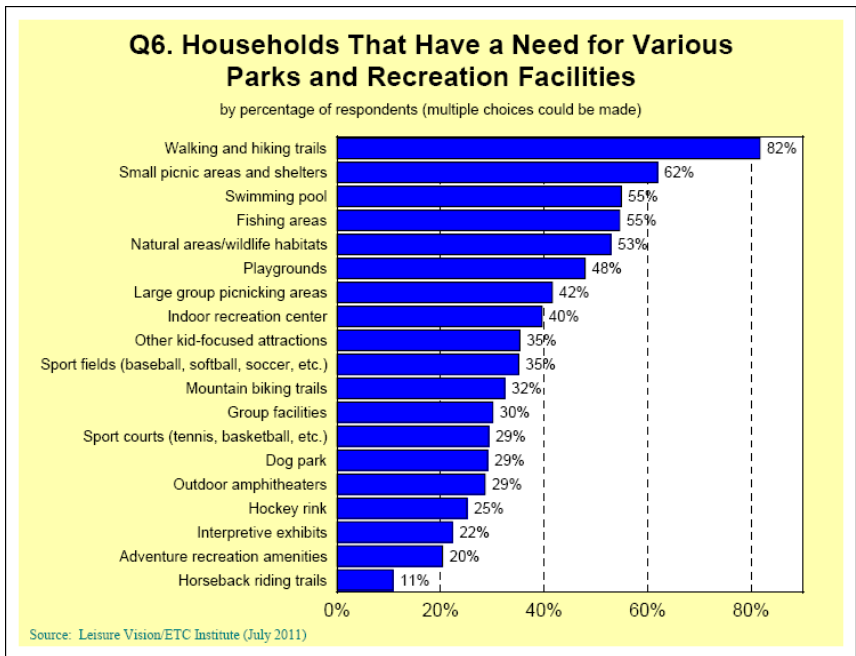
PROGRAM / ACTIVITY PARTICIPATION

- Program or activity participation is heavily dominated by trail walking or running, with bicycling, picnicking, wildlife viewing and swimming rounding out the top five activities with the greatest percentage of participating households.
- Indoor fitness, bat-n-ball sports, mountain biking, ice skating and soccer were among the top ten activities with the heaviest participation.



RECREATIONAL NEEDS

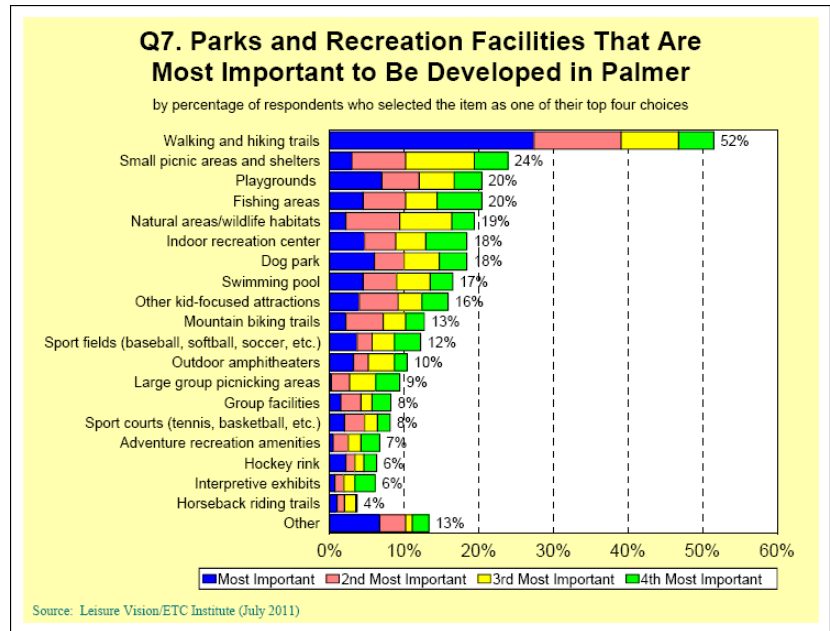
- The predominant recreational needs involve passive or self-guided activities that are individual or family oriented.
- The presence and proportion of other recreational needs such as traditional and non-traditional sports, is similar to mountain towns in the American West.
- Many households feel their recreational facility needs are very well met according to the survey responses, with the greatest met needs being hockey rink, swimming pool, and playgrounds. The greatest unmet needs were in adventure recreation, a dog park, and an outdoor amphitheater.⁵



⁵ Percent of respondents that indicated 50% or less of their needs were currently being met: (1) adventure recreation amenities (78%); dog park (86%); outdoor amphitheater (86%).

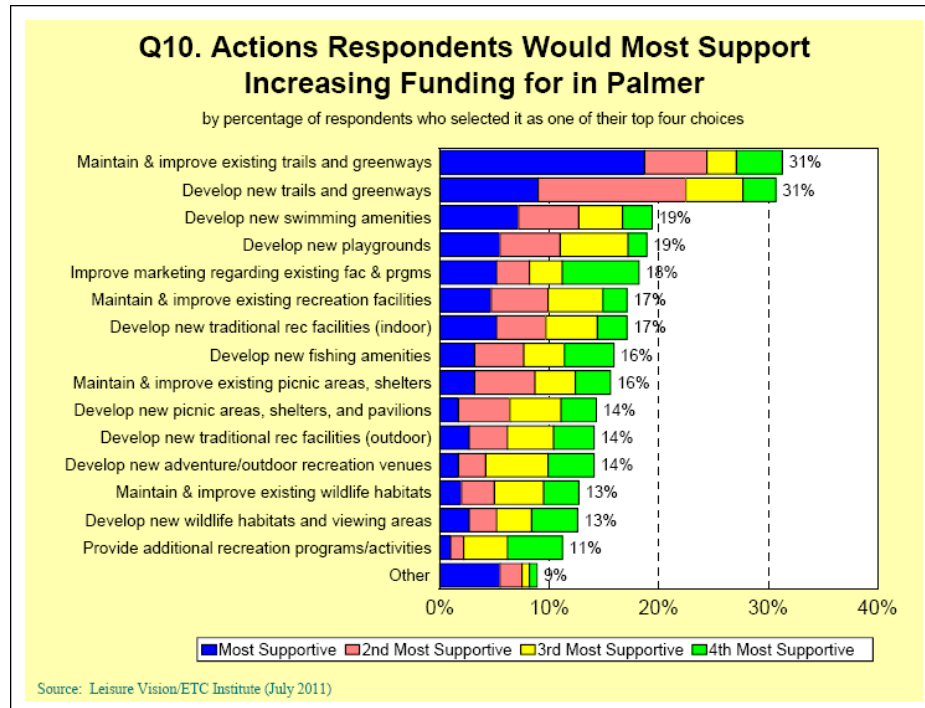
FACILITIES MOST IMPORTANT TO DEVELOP

- Walking and hiking trails dominated the park and recreation facilities that respondents indicated were most important to be developed in Palmer. Other facility types ranked very closely to each other.



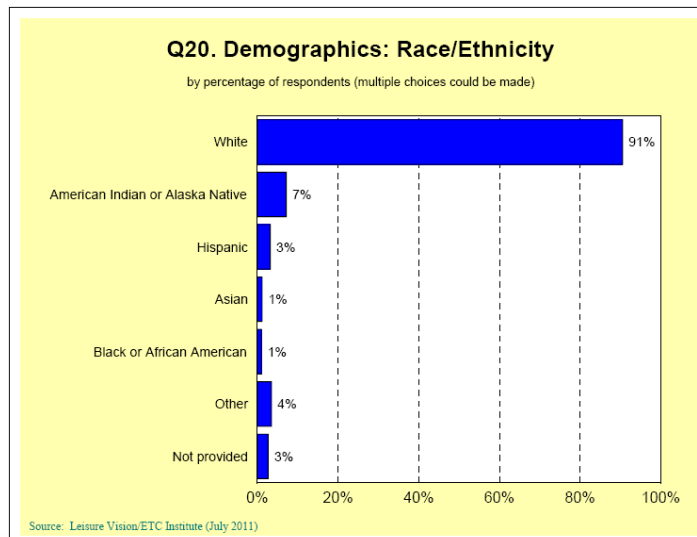
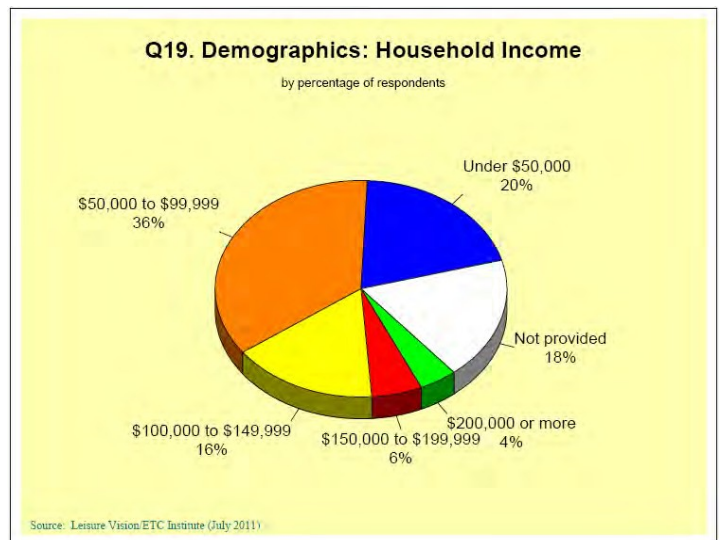
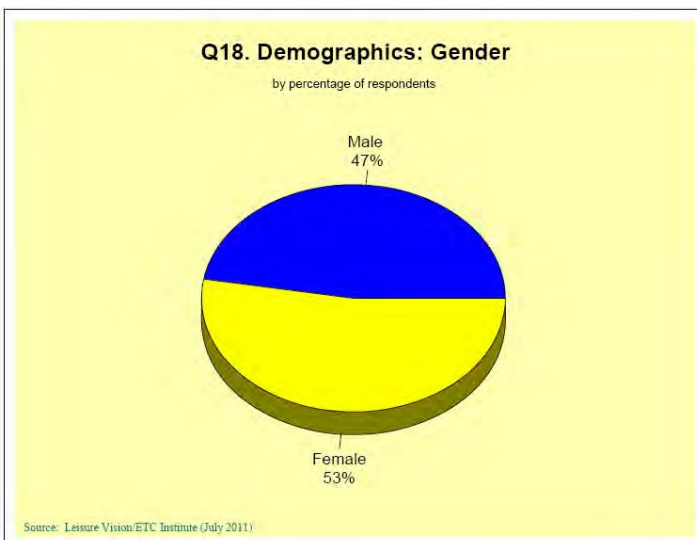
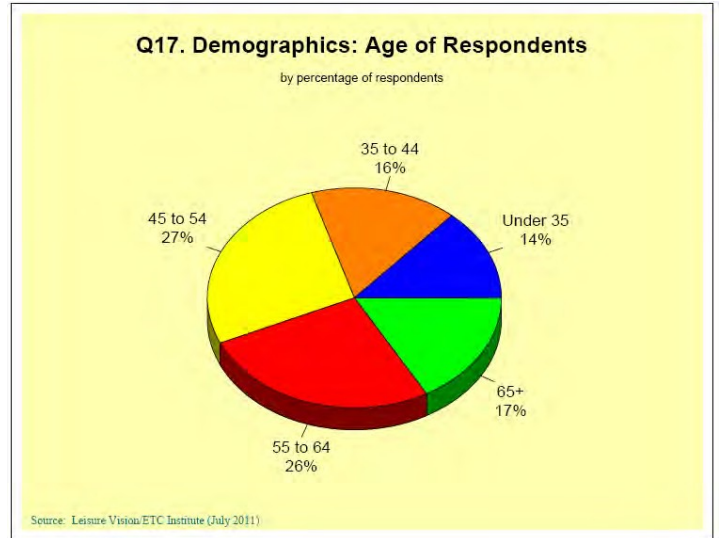
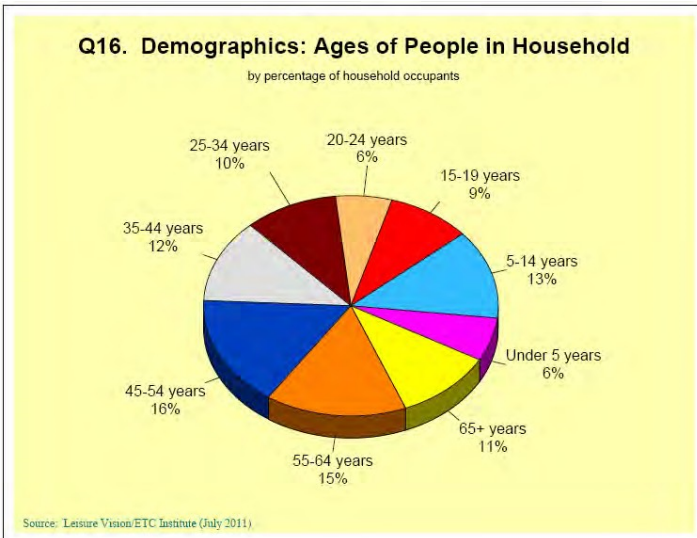
FUNDING SUPPORT

- The highest response for actions respondents would support increasing funding for was maintaining and improve existing trails and greenways, and developing new trails and greenways.
- Overall, respondents indicated they were more supportive of making improvements to and maintaining existing parks, trails and recreation facilities than they were of developing new trails and facilities or acquiring additional park lands and open space.



DEMOGRAPHICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

The demographics of survey respondents closely resemble the demographic profile of Palmer residents, further supporting the validity of the survey sample as representative. The graphs below provide the demographic details of the survey sample.



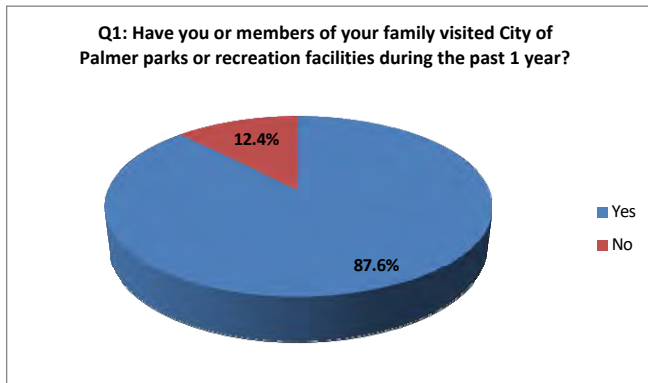
YOUTH / STUDENT SURVEY SUMMARY

In May 2011, students in the 5th through 8th grades at Palmer Junior Middle School and students in 9th through 12th grades at Palmer High School were surveyed as to their recreational interests and needs. A total of 105 surveys from the 5th-8th graders were collected, and a total of 209 surveys were collected from 9th-12th graders. Below and on the following pages are the key results from these surveys that further support the input received throughout other elements of the public process.

VISITATION

Youth and/or families with children appear to visit parks more often than residents without children. High school aged kids seem to visit parks even more than their younger counterparts.

Grades 5-8



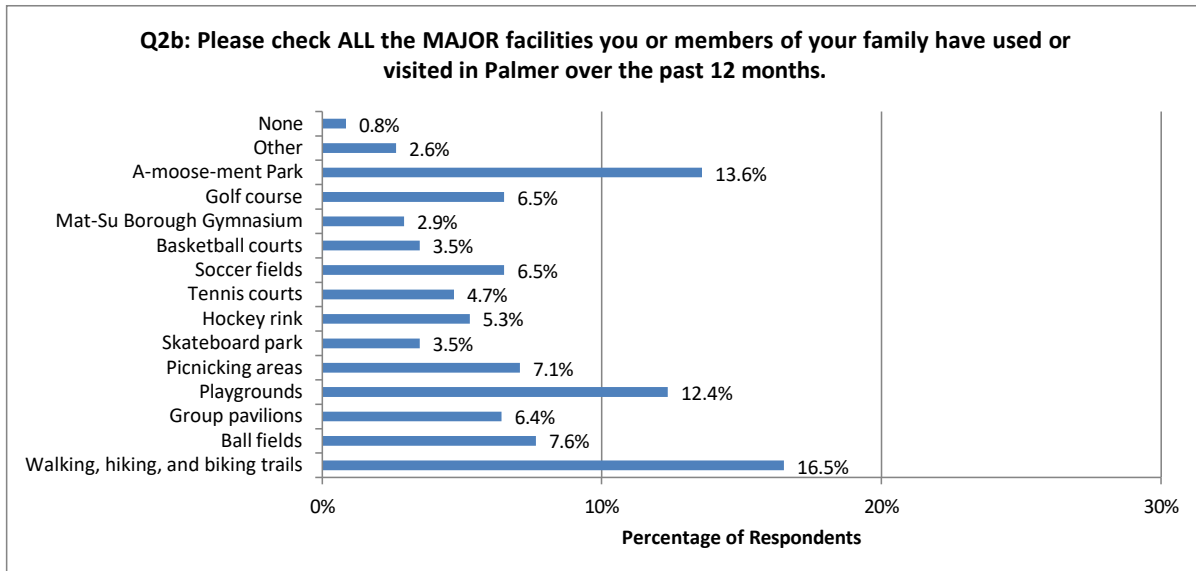
Grades 9-12



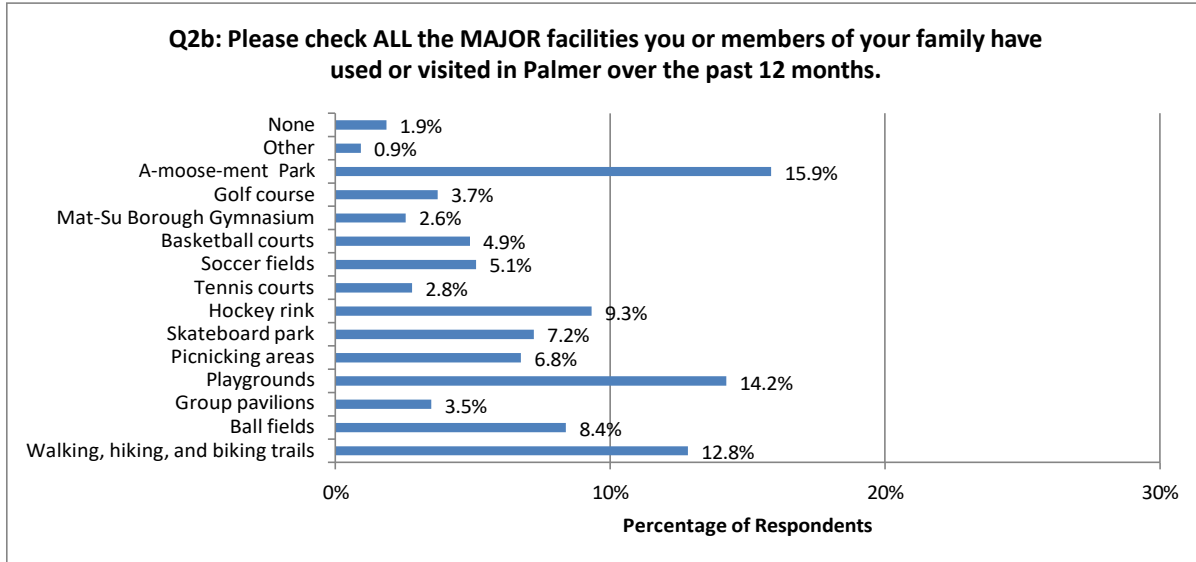
FACILITY / AMENITY USE

There are multiple similarities of facility and amenity usage between youth of different ages, and there are multiple differences. A-moose-ment Park, trails, playgrounds, and sports fields are most popular across all youth surveyed.

Grades 5-8



Grades 9-12



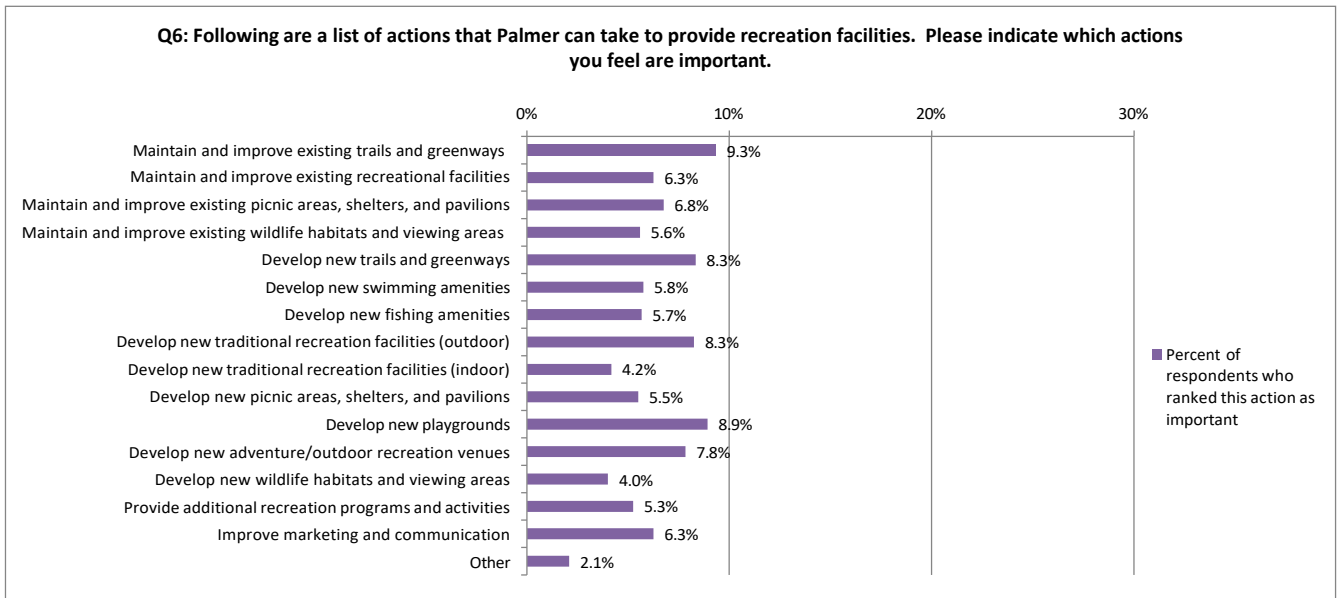
COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

Older students (grades 9-12) were asked about development priorities in Palmer, and indicated that the amenities high school students felt most strongly about are trails, sports fields, and a dog park. Additionally, community priority of maintaining and improving trails continues to arise as the most popular action among residents.

The table below details the proportion of responses from youth in the 9-12 grades indicated which facilities or amenities are most important to be developed in Palmer.

Total	190	100.0%
Walking and hiking trails	25	13.2%
Mountain biking trails	3	1.6%
Horseback riding trails	8	4.2%
Small picnic areas and shelters	13	6.8%
Large picnic areas and shelters	0	0.0%
Natural areas and wildlife habitats	7	3.7%
Playgrounds	19	10.0%
Other kid-focused attractions	0	0.0%
Fishing areas	9	4.7%
Adventure recreation amenities	14	7.4%
Outdoor amphitheaters	0	0.0%
Group facilities	0	0.0%
Interpretive exhibits	2	1.1%
Sport courts	20	10.5%
Sport fields	44	23.2%
Swimming pool	2	1.1%
Indoor recreation center	0	0.0%
Improved hockey rink	6	3.2%
Dog park	12	48.0%
Other	6	3.2%

The graph below illustrates the proportion of responses from youth in the 9-12 grades indicating support for actions of the City of Palmer.



There were numerous additional findings from both the community survey and the student survey not highlighted in these summaries, but are available in the independent survey reports.



Arctic Avenue trail

1.3 COMMUNITY VALUES MODEL

The Consultant Team synthesized findings from the comprehensive public input process to develop a framework for guiding the development of recommendations and strategies for the City of Palmer. The *Community Values Model* features recommended strategies that are aligned with five major categories of best practices: Community Mandates, Standards, Program/Services, Business Practices, and Community Outreach and Partnerships.

This strategy matrix is a building block for recommendations in the final master plan process, and represents the prevailing messages the consultant team and staff collected from stakeholder and public input. The Community Values Model should be evaluated and refined by the political and economic circumstances the City operates in, and used to validate the vision and mission of the parks and recreation function within the City of Palmer.

Community Value 1: Community Mandates	
Maintain and enhance parks, trails and recreational facilities to promote community interaction, healthy lifestyles and safety.	
Strategy	Care for and enhance the quality of current park sites, facilities, and amenities of the City of Palmer Parks and Recreation System.
Strategy	Provide parks, trails and recreational facilities that reflect the ability to serve a diverse public.
Strategy	Upgrade parks, trails and recreational facilities to address management challenges and to meet the needs of current users.
Strategy	Continue to enhance safety and security in parks, trails and recreational facilities that encourages positive use of community amenities.
Strategy	Pursue responsible new improvements of the parks, trails and recreational facilities in areas of the greatest growth and unmet needs.
Strategy	Leverage a variety of resources to support capital and operational needs of the City of Palmer Parks and Recreation System.

Community Value 2: Standards	
Update and utilize standards for acquisition, development, design, operations, and maintenance of parks, trails and recreational facilities.	
Strategy	Utilize consistent standards for acquisition of new park lands, trails, or park amenities.
Strategy	Utilize consistent design standards in park and facility development for landscaping, amenities, and infrastructure.
Strategy	Establish standards and parameters for partnerships within both the public and private sectors to augment the capital and operational resources of the City.
Strategy	Enhance communications in marketing and promotions of City parks, trails and recreational facilities to improve community awareness of programs, services, and facilities, as well as to diversify usage of amenities and expand public feedback opportunities.
Strategy	Maintain consistent and updated standards for asset and amenity management in order to maximize and expand their useful lifespan.
Strategy	Maintain local, state, and national recognition as a best practices organization.
Strategy	Maintain compliance with all existing and applicable laws and regulations.

Community Value 3: Programs and Services	
Provide balance and consistency in delivery of programs and services by meeting the needs of the diverse residents of the City of Palmer.	
Strategy	Enhance support of recreational program and service providers that utilize City parks and recreational sites and facilities to sustain and potentially expand community participation.
Strategy	Establish a regional trails collaboration program that can advance the pursuit of trails that connect communities within the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.
Strategy	Develop an interpretive signage program that appropriately interprets the significance of the natural, cultural and historic resources of parks and landscapes within the City of Palmer.

Community Value 4: Business Practices	
Manage parks, trails and recreational facilities and programs that support the financial goals and policies of the City of Palmer.	
Strategy	Establish alternative funding policies and procedures that support capital and operating expenses.
Strategy	Maximize the capability of new and existing technology to enhance business practices.
Strategy	Develop a comprehensive cost recovery plan for programs, services, and facilities that appropriately balances public funding support with earned revenues, and that balances affordability and entrepreneurialism in the programs and services of the City.

Community Value 5: Community Outreach and Partnerships	
Maximize resources through mutually acceptable partnerships that leverage parks, trails, and recreational facility development and program opportunities.	
Strategy	Develop a formalized on-going community outreach strategy to expand awareness of parks and recreation services offered to the community
Strategy	Develop a sustainable partnership with an established non-profit organization to leverage private sector funding to support select capital projects and programs.
Strategy	Review and update terms of agreements with existing partners utilizing City of Palmer parks and facilities for public or private events.
Strategy	Play an active role in the network of park, trail, and recreational services and opportunities available to residents, organizations and businesses in Palmer and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

Photo opposite page: Shane Woods Memorial Trail near Palmer Skateboard Park





Chapter 2: Summary of Comprehensive Assessments

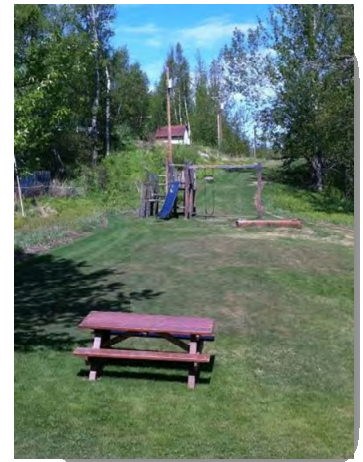
The objectives of the comprehensive assessments performed by the Consultant Team were:

- Identify existing site and operational conditions
- Identify potential areas for improvement or enhancement
- Provide defensibility for future recommendations

The contents of the *Comprehensive Assessment Report* are a basic description of existing conditions, known constraints, observed best practices, and areas for improvement. The following key findings are the prevailing issues noted by the Consultant Team defining the current site and operating conditions. There are additional detailed findings not referenced in this summary that are outlined throughout the sections of this report.

CITY PARKS ARE GENERALLY WELL MAINTAINED

The City of Palmer maintains 13 sites used for public park and recreation lands and facilities, totaling over 210 acres in the community. Most of these sites are maintained by the City, with the golf course being maintained by a private operator. Generally, all of the sites and facilities assessed were observed to be in good condition. There are some areas that need minor maintenance attention, but these are more of an exception than the rule. Typically these involve older play structures or areas of high use. There are two sites that are currently undeveloped – Fairfield Park and Wilson Park – which site plans will later be developed. In summary, City of Palmer parks are well maintained especially given the extreme seasons, featuring good turf; play equipment in good working condition; picnic tables and pavilions in that are in good condition; and sports fields that are well maintained.



Hagen Park (Dolphin Avenue)

ACTIVE COMMUNITY

On repeated visits to the community in the winter, spring and summer seasons, the citizens of Palmer were observed to be an active population with an array of interests. This has been affirmed in preliminary results from the household survey conducted in association with this project. A large portion of residents are frequent trail users for hiking, running, on-road and off-road bicycling, and horseback riding. Additionally, both youth and adults heavily participate in sports leagues and programs ranging from bat-and-ball sports, soccer, and hockey. Overall, the City of Palmer appears to be an active community with a hearty appetite for high quality park and recreation sites, facilities and services.

PARK DISTRIBUTION AND COMMUNITY GROWTH

A circumstance that has evolved over time is the disparity between current park locations and the directions and areas in the community that are experiencing the greatest growth. Simply put, the majority of City park and recreation amenities are on the east side of town – east of the Glenn Highway – while the areas of largest growth are all on the west side of town. This disparity will later become an area of focus in the analysis of the *Parks, Trails and Recreational Fields Master Plan*, as appropriate recommendations will be developed to improve the balance of distribution and accessibility of City parks and recreation amenities.



Cope Industrial Way bike path

GREAT TRAILS, LIMITED CONNECTIVITY

There are a multitude of public trails and walkways in the City of Palmer, some of which were developed and are maintained by the City. The most significant trails include:

1. Cope Industrial Way bike path – extends along Cope Industrial Way from Chugach Street to Outer Springer Loop
2. Alaskan Railroad trail – extends within the railway corridor from the Palmer Depot to Arctic Avenue
3. Arctic Avenue trail – extends along Arctic Avenue and Hemmer Road from the Palmer-Wasilla Highway, to across the Matanuska River to the east
4. Palmer-Wasilla Highway trail – extends beyond the City along the Wasilla Highway to the west
5. Glenn Highway Trail – extends along Glenn Highway from Palmer-Wasilla Highway to underpass just north of Arctic Avenue

While these trails are among the most significant in the City, there are numerous other sidewalks and pathways that create “walk-ability” in Palmer. The challenge, however, lies in the limited connectivity of these trails, sidewalks and pathways. Some connect, others do not. There are major stems and connections that are missing that can dramatically improve the non-motorized transportation and recreational opportunities available in the City. One of the greatest challenges is the limited pedestrian-friendly connectivity across the Glenn Highway, except for the underpass just north of the Arctic Avenue-Glenn Highway intersection.

PARTNERSHIPS MAKE IT POSSIBLE

The parks and recreational facilities of Palmer thrive because of productive partnerships. These include relationships and agreements between the City and private user groups, between different departments within the City, between the City and the Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) School District, and between the City and the Mat-Su Borough. Additionally, the City relies on working relationships with the Alaskan Railroad to manage, maintain and potentially develop the core and central areas of town.



Meier Park (Silver Tip Drive)

Chapter 3: Summary of the Needs Analysis

The master plan project is a three-step process – Step 1) assessment of current conditions, Step 2) determine and prioritize relevant community needs, and Step 3) develop strategies and tactics to meet those needs over the next 10 years. The *Needs Analysis Report* is the summary of findings for the second step of the process – determining the relevant needs of communities and residents throughout the City, and prioritizing those needs based on community input and the results of the comprehensive assessments. A full report of the needs analysis is located in the appendices of this master plan, with this section of the master plan providing a summary of the analysis and findings.

3.1 METHODOLOGY

In order for a needs analysis to be thorough, multiple types of data and information are taken into account. The following data was reviewed, evaluated, and analyzed for the City of Palmer:

- Multiple forms of public and community input
 - Leadership and stakeholder interviews
 - Focus groups
 - Community meetings
 - Statistically-valid household survey
- Existing site and facility conditions
- Existing financial conditions
- Current and projected demographic characteristics of city residents
- Prevailing local, statewide, and national trends
- Technical analysis –analysis to determine equitability and accessibility of parks, trails, and recreational fields

3.2 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The needs analysis in a master planning project is the pivotal step in which preliminary recommendations are developed. This is an important point in the planning process where the strategic direction of the program for the next 10 years begins to emerge with more clarity and definition. The result of combining all of these various forms of data and information into the needs analysis ensures that the foundational principles listed below are followed and met:

1. Identified needs reflect the interests and demands of the communities and residents being served;
2. Identified community needs are appropriate and relevant to the mission, purpose and capability of the Palmer parks and recreation program; and
3. Need prioritization is a balance between what is politically palatable and economically feasible, resulting in recommendations that are realistic while still ambitious.

3.3 KEY FINDINGS

CITY RESIDENTS ARE ACTIVE AND HAVE DIVERSE NEEDS

The results of the community input process to date, as well as the demographic and trends analysis revealed that the population of Palmer is very dynamic in terms of diversity and recreational participation. Residents were commonly observed recreating in sub-freezing temperatures in the winter and into late hours in the long days of summer.

CITY PARKS PLAY A PIVOTAL ROLE IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Palmer parks are highly valued assets in the community, and often are only possible through successful and beneficial partnerships with local organizations and residents. The role and potential of Palmer's City parks and trails has evolved over the last 10 years, and will continue to evolve over the next 10 years to serve recreational needs of local residents in a complementary fashion with other public recreation opportunities in the region. This is most commonly seen in the increased need and interests for multiple types of trails.

RESIDENTS ARE OPEN TO ENHANCEMENTS

The community input process provided reliable insight that most residents are open to the enhancement of the Palmer Parks and Recreation System in certain areas of interests and with certain priorities. According to the results of the household survey conducted with this project, 73% of all residents would support either maintaining the same amount of City funding or paying more each year to develop new trails and greenways. Among the respondents that indicated they preferred to see increases in funding for specific priorities, developing new trails and greenways, maintaining and improving existing trails and greenways, and improving marketing of programs and facilities were the top three choices.

SITE AND FACILITIES SUPPORTING PASSIVE RECREATION ARE THE LARGEST AREA OF INTEREST

There are many different types of recreational interests and sites and facilities that support those needs. Passive recreation needs are typically self-guided experiences that require little or no development of infrastructure, as compared to active recreation which can be development-intensive. While there are diverse recreational interests among Palmer residents, the predominant needs can be classified as passive recreational interests – picnic areas, river/creek access, and trails.

ACTIVE RECREATIONAL SITES ARE ALSO EXTREMELY POPULAR

While passive recreation and self-guided recreation is a major area of interest among most Palmer residents, active recreation sites such as sports and ball fields are also very popular and well used. Currently there are nine (9) diamond ball fields supporting baseball, softball, Little League and T-ball needs, eight (8) rectangular sports fields supporting soccer and football, three (3) tennis courts, a hockey rink, a golf course and a skate park. The condition of these sites and facilities ranges from excellent to poor, as well as their limited availability for use. Palmer has multiple active sports and athletic groups that place tremendous pressure on these sites, with demand that is currently outpacing supply. These groups involve many City residents, as well as residents from neighborhoods immediately outside Palmer and beyond. Growth or expansion is not required for every area of interest, but there are potential unmet community needs with the current inventory of sites and facilities. The City does have new soccer fields in development to assist with some of the demand issues related to sports field interests.



Soccer field at Sherrod Park

3.4 DEMOGRAPHICS ANALYSIS

One component of the needs analysis for the *Palmer Parks, Trails and Recreational Fields Master Plan* is a review of the prevailing demographic characteristics of the City of Palmer and the relevant trends that are affecting public interests and needs related to the core services and functions of the City parks and recreation program.

This demographic analysis provides a basic understanding of the population characteristics of the City of Palmer using data from renowned national databases. The analysis that follows identifies multiple demographic characteristics of interest for this project including:

- Overall size of the City population by individuals, households, age segments, and race
- Economic status and spending power as demonstrated by household income statistics

CITY OF PALMER DEMOGRAPHIC QUICK FACTS

- The total population of Palmer has **increased by approximately 31% in the last decade** from 4,529 in 2000, to **5,937 in 2010**. It is projected to grow another 7% in the next five years to 6,353 in 2015.
- Palmer is located approximately 45 minutes northeast of Anchorage, Alaska, and approximately 20 minutes east of Wasilla, Alaska. Based on discussions with city and area leaders, many residents live in Palmer and work in Anchorage, Wasilla, or other points in Alaska as distant as the North Slope.
- The total number of **households in Palmer has grown by approximately 44% from 2000 to 2010**, while the number of **families has only grown by 28% in that time period**.⁶ This indicates that while the number of families is still growing in Palmer, the number of non-related or non-family households is increasing faster.
- The **median household income of Palmer residents appears to have grown by as much as 34% from 2000 to 2010**⁷, while **median home value has increased by an estimated 102%** indicating a potential growing issue with affordable housing and cost of living. These estimations are limited by the fact they are based on linear regression projections calculated before the greatest effects of the 2007-2010 economic recession were realized. Presumably, the greatest disparity between these projections and current statistics is in median home value which has fallen dramatically in the last 24 to 36 months throughout the United States. Current statistics collected within the last 12 months were not available at the time of this study.
- In 2010, **the population of Palmer residents is relatively young (30.1 years)** compared to many other cities in the United States of similar size (typically 34-35 years). The **largest 10-year age segment of City residents are those aged 10 – 19 years** (17.7% of the total population), with the next largest in descending order being 20 – 29 years (16.1%), 0 – 9 years (16%), 30-39 years (13.7%), and 40 – 49 years (12%).
- The **median age of city residents has slightly increased** from 29.6 years in 2000 to 30.1 years in 2010, and is projected to increase to 31.6 years by 2015.

⁶ Families are defined as one or people living together either married or of the same bloodline. Households are just one or more persons living in the same residence regardless of any family relations.

⁷ Household income data for municipalities in Alaska are not yet available from the 2010 U.S. Census. Projections from ESRI have proven to be the most conservative and reliable, and are utilized here, but it is likely the actual household income could be as much as 10-15% lower than projected because of the economic conditions that began nationally and statewide in 2008.

- The **gender balance of Palmer residents remains fairly equal** (49.5% / 50.5%), with slightly more females than males in both 2000 and 2010.
- The **2010 population of Palmer is predominantly White** (76.6%), with the next largest race or ethnic groups being American Indian or Alaska Native (9.2%), and Black (3.7%). Persons of Hispanic origin are considered to be a part of the “White” race, and constitute approximately 5.7% of the total population.⁸

Tables detailing the basic demographic profile of the City of Palmer are provided below.⁹

TOTAL POPULATION

Total population in 2010	5,937
Population growth since 2000	31%
Projected growth by 2015	7%
Projected population in 2015	6,353

HOUSEHOLDS AND FAMILIES

Total households in 2010	2,113
Average household size in 2010	2.73
Household growth since 2000	44%
Projected growth by 2015	8%
Projected households in 2015	2,282
Total families in 2010	1,337
Average family size in 2010	3.26
Family growth since 2000	28%
Projected growth by 2015	8%
Project families in 2015	1,444

ADDITIONAL DATA (2010)

Median household income	\$62,006
Median home value	\$221,392
Per capita income	\$26,138
Median age	30.1 years

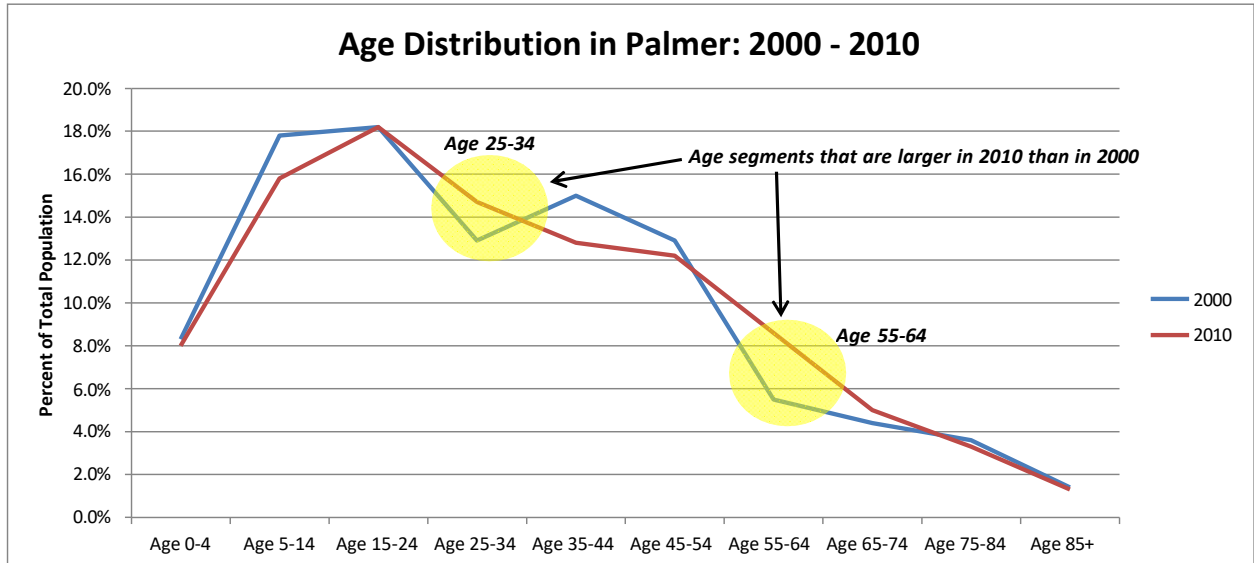
⁸ Persons considered of Hispanic Origin are also considered to be racially classified as White. This is a common classification practice utilized by the U.S. Census and other demographic databases.

⁹ Detailed statistical demographic data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau in the 2010 Census is only partially available for cities at the time of completion of this report. Where 2010 data is not available, population and demographic projections based on the 2000 Census are utilized as the best data set available.

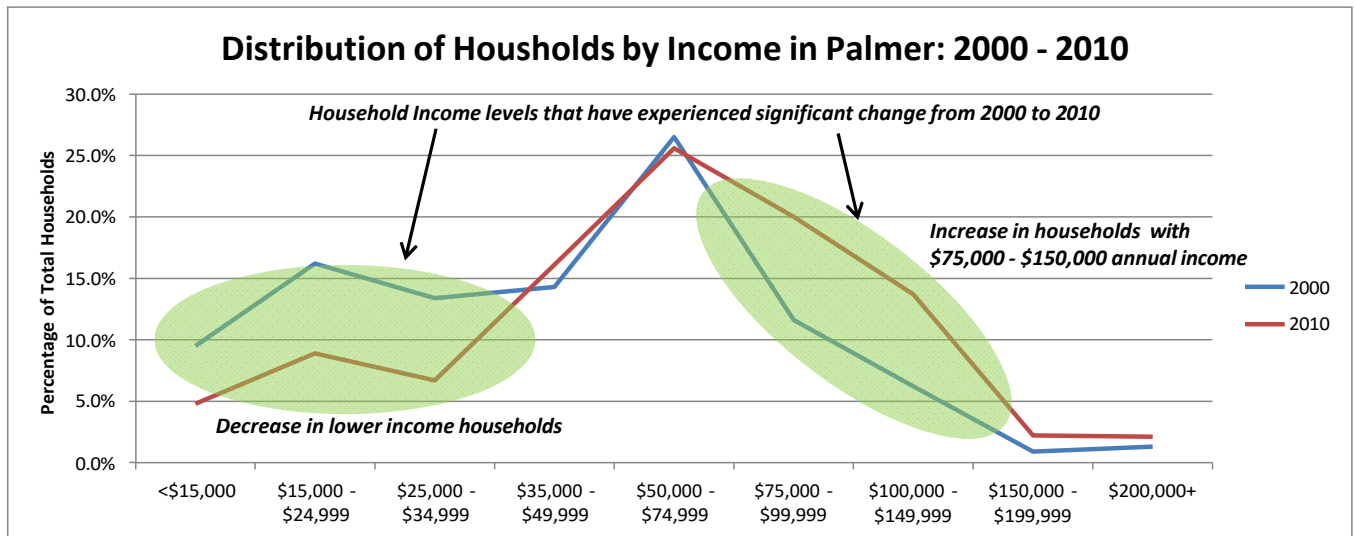
DEMOGRAPHICS ANALYSIS FINDINGS

The City of Palmer is a dynamic community that continues to evolve, which will influence the affect the recreational needs most appropriately served by the City in the next 10 years. There is a multitude of data available about the resident population of Palmer, with the following key findings being the foundation for further understanding community needs.

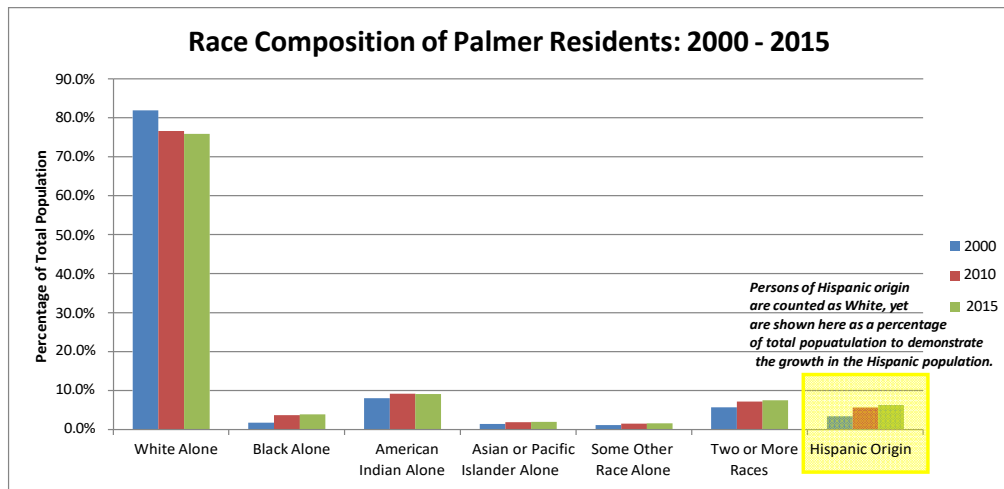
- The resident population is steadily growing and will continue to grow. Palmer, however, is a City whose growth is geographically limited unless annexation efforts in the future (which failed in the recent past) can be successful.
- The growth of the population since 2000 is proportionally significant (31%), yet only constitutes 1,408 additional residents over the last 10 years.
- The City of Palmer is a relatively young population compared to other small cities and town around the United States, with a median age of 30.1 years and over 30% of the total population under 18 years of age.
- The two age segments that have grown the most since 2000 are residents aged 25-34 and those aged 55-64 years. This is illustrated in the graph below.



- Median household income and average household income is typical to most small cities – it is neither a city of high poverty and underserved populations, nor a city with significant populations of wealthy residents. Median home values have increased substantially more than median household income, indicating that the cost of living in Palmer has likely risen significantly in the last 10 years.
- Household income changes in the last 10 years indicate that the number of households with annual incomes less than \$35,000 has dropped, and the number of households with incomes from \$75,000 - \$150,000 has increased. Some of this is influenced by inflation over the last 10 years, but typically this indicates successful economic growth in Palmer, as well as Palmer becoming more popular for residents who commute to higher paying jobs outside the City. A graphical illustration of household income from 2000 to 2010 is provided on the following page.



- Palmer remains a family-friendly City with families constituting 63% of all households. This is a decrease, however, since 2000 when families represented 71% of all households.
- Palmer is a racially diverse community, yet people that are classified as “White” represent the largest race segment in the population at 76.6% of all residents. A graph illustrating the growing diversity, albeit slow growth, is provided below.



WHAT DOES THIS TELL US?

- The City of Palmer must continue a slow and steady growth and evolution of park and recreation facilities and services to meet the needs of a steadily growing population.
- Facilities, amenities and programs that appeal to all age groups is critically important since there is population growth both among young people and older adults.
- Facilities, amenities and programs that appeal to families are important in Palmer as the majority of households in the City are families. Approximately 46% of households are families with children under 18 years.
- Residents in Palmer have a typical household income profile, yet live in a City that likely has experienced cost of living increases over the last 10 years higher than income growth. This indicates that while there is capacity among residents to pay more to support additional facilities and services, the threshold for what would be acceptable to them is limited.

3.5 PARKS AND RECREATION TRENDS ANALYSIS

Alaska and many other western states are widely considered to be an outdoor adventure paradise due to its rugged landscapes, pristine wilderness, millions of acres of public lands, and relative remoteness. The parks and facilities of Palmer predominantly provide traditional recreation opportunities and leaves much of the lands and facilities that are geared toward outdoor, nature-based activities to other public park systems and lands in the region. This analysis provides a basic overview of the prevailing trends in the industry locally and nationally that are most relevant to the City of Palmer.

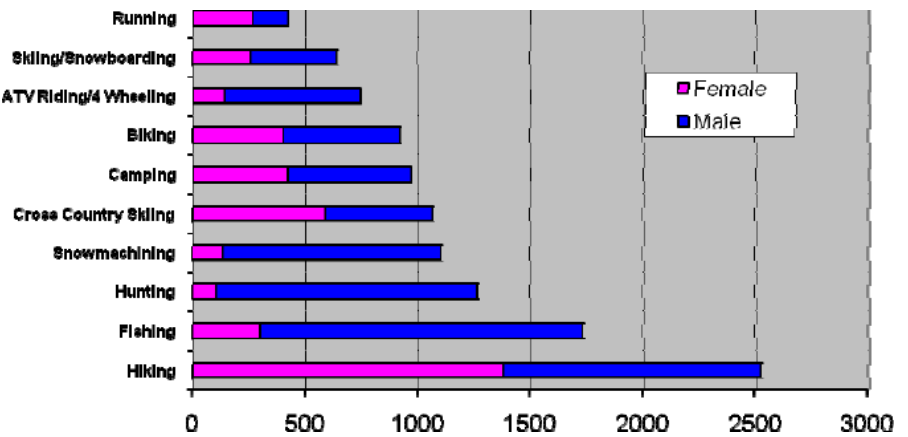
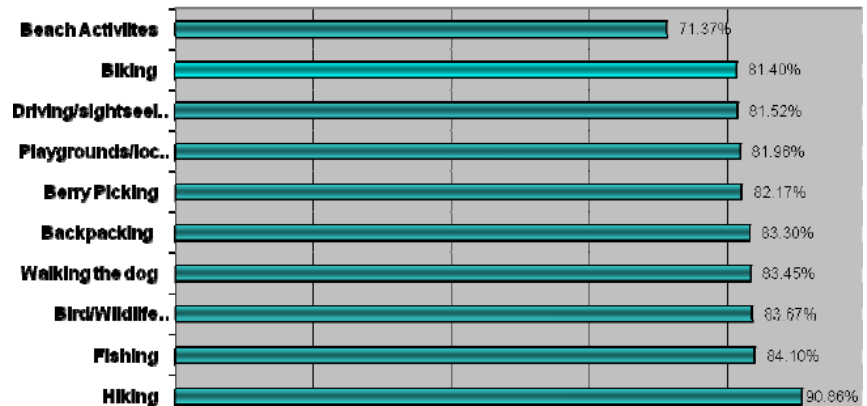
OUTDOOR RECREATION IN ALASKA

Alaska is a state rich in outdoor recreation resources, and Palmer lies in one of the heavily travelled areas of the state because of the abundance of some of the most coveted natural resources for recreational use – forests, mountains, rivers and lakes. While there is considerable demand for traditional sports in urban Alaska, most residents in the smaller rural communities enjoy outdoor recreation such as trail sports and activities as a part of their daily lives. This summary of current trends in Alaska focuses on the recreational activities that are more prominent throughout the State and that are most relevant to the facilities and services of the City of Palmer. The data for recreational trends in Alaska has been taken from the 2009-2014 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) completed by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources.¹⁰

PARTICIPATION PREFERENCES

The Alaska SCORP report featured multiple findings about recreational preferences and participation. The two graphs to the right illustrate the top 10 activities based on participation (top) and the top ten favorite activities as indicated by preferences by gender (bottom). These findings were taken from the statewide surveys, interviews and focus groups conducted in association with the Alaska SCORP study.

Top 10 Participation



¹⁰ Alaska Department of Natural Resources. July 2009. [Alaska Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2009-2014](#).

COMMUNITY RECREATION

While outdoor recreation such as trail activities, fishing, hunting, wildlife viewing, etc., are a major aspect of the lives of Alaska residents, community recreation in urban areas such as the City of Palmer are equally important. The 2009 SCORP report stated,

“Community recreation is often family or school-oriented and includes a wide spectrum of activities, including outdoor court and field sports (e.g., tennis, basketball, softball, soccer), open field activities (e.g., remote control models, picnicking, tot lots), golf, hockey or ice skating, alpine skiing, picnic and playground activities, outdoor target shooting (archery, pistol, etc.) and trail-related activities, such as bicycling, snowmobiling, equestrian sports, cross country skiing, jogging, and walking for fitness. Community recreation plays an important role in Alaska’s urban areas. It is especially meaningful in smaller and rural communities where leisure time programs are in short supply.”¹¹

These findings are based on the trends research and public input process conducted as a component of the 2009 SCORP project. As a municipal provider of facilities, the City of Palmer supports programs and services for residents through a blend of private and public providers and thereby plays an active role in community recreation.

RECREATION IN AMERICA

Our understanding of outdoor recreation trends in America has evolved significantly over the past four decades since the first national survey was conducted in 1960 by the congressionally created Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (ORRRC). Since that time, a long series of statistics have been gathered through seven reiterations of the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE) that identify notable trends in participation and the evolution of new forms of recreation activities enjoyed by Americans. The most recent of these updated reports was from the NSRE conducted in 2003-2004. Participation in 37 outdoor recreation activities were evaluated in this study.¹²

Those activities with great relevance to Palmer community interests are presented in the table below. Participation is measured in millions of people and percentage of total U.S. population.

Activity	Participation (millions)	Percent of Population
Trail, Street, or Road Activities	188.2	88.3
Traditional Social Activities	171.8	80.6
Viewing and Photographing Activities	157.5	73.9
Viewing and Learning Activities	143.4	67.3
Outdoor Adventure Activities	118.7	55.7

Supporting these statistics are the findings from the recently completed *Outdoor Recreation Participation Report 2009*, conducted in 2009 by the Outdoor Industry Foundation. During January and February 2009 a total of 41,500 online interviews were carried out with a nationwide sample of individuals and households from the US Online Panel operated by Synovate. A total of 15,013 individual

¹¹ Alaska Department of Natural Resources. July 2009. [Alaska Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2009-2014..](#)

¹² United States Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service. [National Survey of Recreation and the Environment. 2003-2004.](#)

and 26,487 household surveys were completed. The total panel has over one million members and is maintained to be representative of the US population.

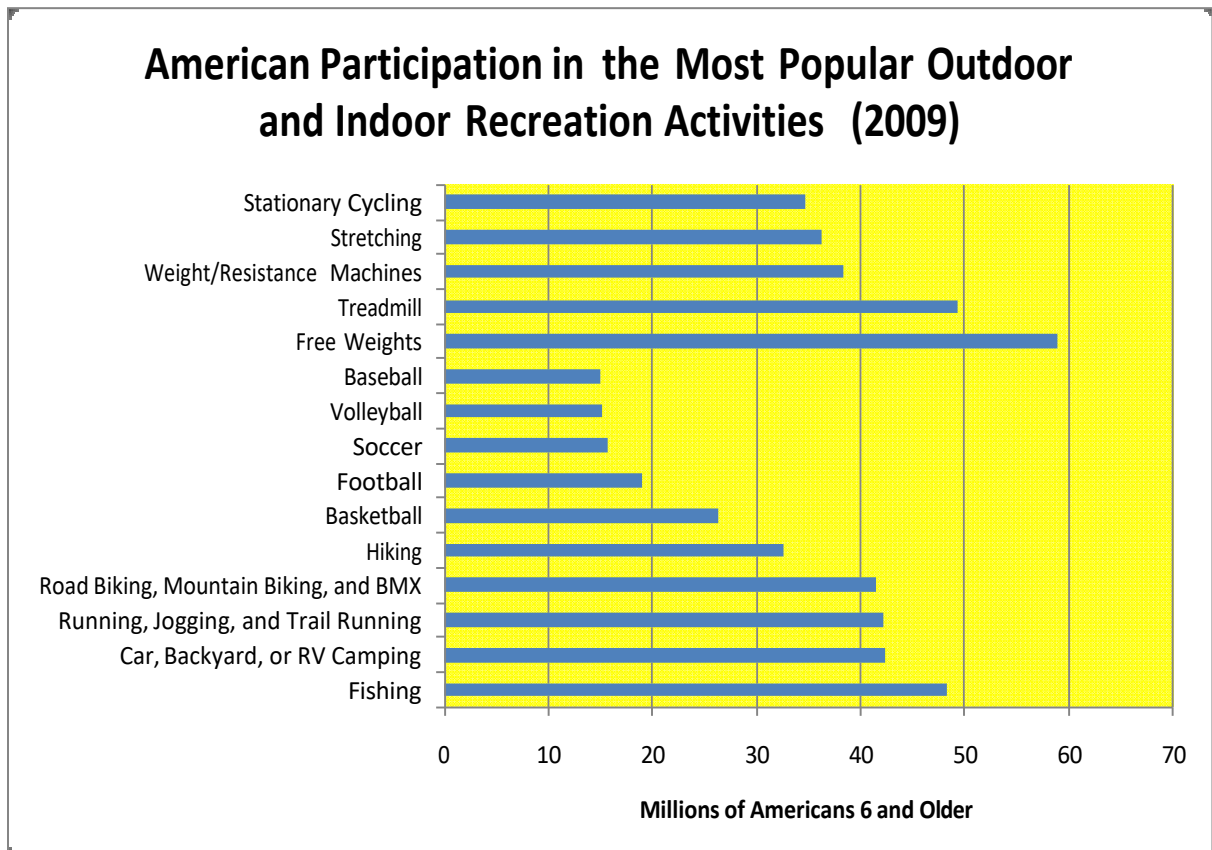
Oversampling of ethnic groups took place to boost response from typically under-responding groups. A weighting technique was used to balance the data to reflect the total US population aged six and above. The following variables were used: gender, age, income, household size, region and population density. The total population figure used was 279,568,000 people aged six and above. The report details participation among all Americans, youth, young adults and adults.

From these results, a current and accurate picture of outdoor recreation participation trends can be ascertained. Below are some of the key findings associated with this report.¹³

PARTICIPATION IN OUTDOOR, NATURE-BASED ACTIVITIES

An interesting note for many public park and recreation agencies whose facilities and programs are heavily geared for traditional and team sports, the largest areas of overall participation and growth in participation are in outdoor, non-traditional sports and activities. An example of this is the finding that participation in mountain biking and trail running increased by 10.2% and 15.2% respectively from 2007 to 2008, while participation in road biking decreased by 2.1% and road running/jogging only increased by 0.2% over the same period.

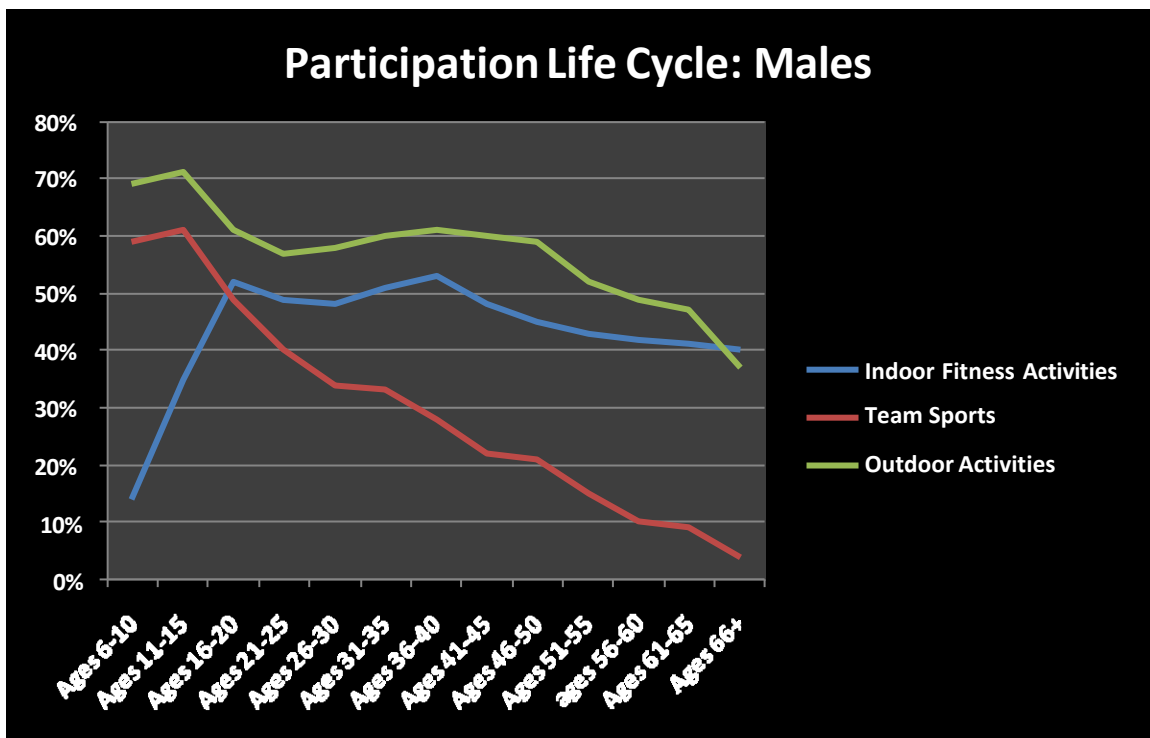
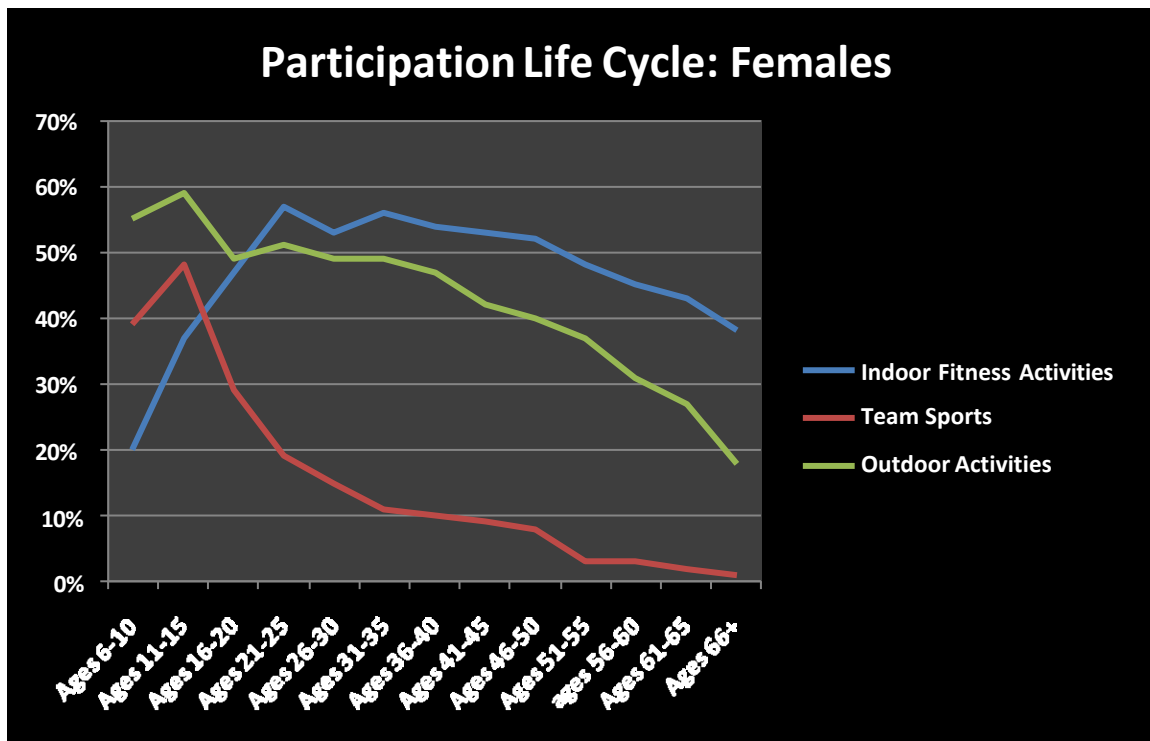
A graph of participation in the most popular indoor recreation, team sports, and outdoor recreation activities in 2009 is provided below. Note that team sport participation in baseball, volleyball, soccer, football, and basketball is considerably less than both indoor and outdoor recreation.¹⁴



¹³ Outdoor Industry Foundation. *Outdoor Recreation Participation Study: 2009*, 11th Edition. Boulder, Colorado, 2009.

¹⁴ Outdoor Industry Foundation. *Outdoor Recreation Participation Study: 2009*, 11th Edition. Boulder, Colorado, 2009.

The graphs below detail the life cycle participation in recreational pursuits in both female and male participants, as identified in the Outdoor Industry Foundation’s 2009 Participation Study. These trends can help to determine which areas of focus and categories of recreational activities are going to appeal best to different age segments by gender among residents of Palmer.¹⁵



¹⁵ Outdoor Industry Foundation. Outdoor Recreation Participation Study: 2009, 11th Edition. Boulder, Colorado, 2009.

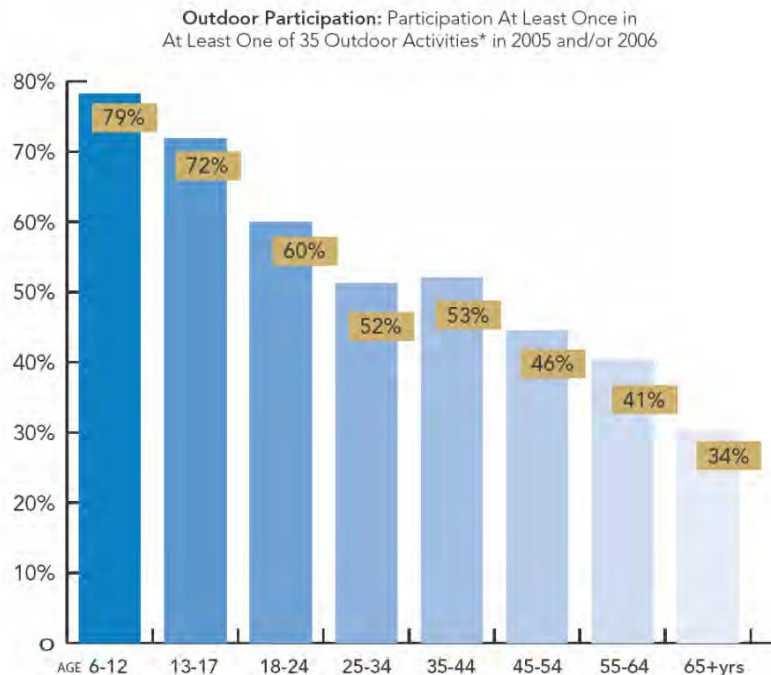
PARTICIPATION TRENDS BY AGE

The Outdoor Industry Association identifies two major generational categories in the U.S.: Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) and Millennials (born between 1978 and 2003). These two generational cohorts have distinct differences in their preferences for an active lifestyle. Baby boomers have shed the image of the relaxed, sedentary lifestyle of generations past pursue a more active form of “retirement”. Many boomers continue the active and healthy lifestyle they converted to in midlife, as evidenced by the increasing number of seniors who participate in the fitness industry. Scott Parmelee, publisher of Outside magazine, describes a boomer as a “hybrid person” who enjoys “less strenuous” activities while still connecting with nature and the outdoors.¹⁶

While many boomers use outdoor experiences for personal growth, the Millennials seek the thrill. Millennials pioneered adventure and extreme sports and have been most responsible for the decline in the traditional “bat and ball” sports leagues targeting young adults. They elect less structured activities such as skateboarding, rock climbing, and mountain biking in place of organized youth activities like baseball, football, and soccer.

In recent years, the Outdoor Industry Foundation (OIF), a 50113 organization chartered to research trends and support growth of the outdoor industry, has produced annual reports of the state of the industry and outdoor recreation participation. In early 2007, OIF surveyed 60,169 households from a representative sample that reflects the demographic and socio-economic composition of the United States to determine the highlights of current outdoor recreation trends in America. Results from this survey were published as *The Next Generation of Outdoor Participants – 2005/2006* by the OIF in late 2007.

This report finds that participation in outdoor activities at least once per year drops off dramatically with age. Seventy-nine percent (79%) of respondents aged 6 – 12 years reported participating at least once in one of the 35 outdoor recreation activities polled, while only 34% of respondents aged 65 years and older reported the same level of participation. This is illustrated in the graph below.¹⁷



¹⁶ Outdoor Industry Association. *State of Industry Report: 2006*. Boulder, Colorado. 2006.

¹⁷ Outdoor Industry Foundation. *The Next Generation of Outdoor Participants – 2005/2006*. Boulder, Colorado. 2007

Americans are exposed to and participate in outdoor recreation activities considerably more when they are younger¹⁸, and therefore it is critical to understand the preferences of our young recreationists to stay aligned with evolving trends. The top five outdoor recreation activities by *frequency of outings* in 2006 and in 2008 of Americans aged 6 to 24 years are detailed in the table below. Note the general consistency over the two-year period.

Top Five Outdoor Recreation Activities in 2006 ¹⁹	Top Five Outdoor Recreation Activities in 2008 ²⁰
1. Bicycling	1. Bicycling
2. Running / jogging / trail running	2. Running / jogging / trail running
3. Skateboarding	3. Skateboarding
4. Fishing	4. Fishing
5. Wildlife viewing	5. Car and backyard camping

The tables below detail the participation in these top five outdoor recreation activities in 2008 for all Americans aged six and older, as well as the top five team sport activities and top five indoor recreation activities participated in during the same year.²¹

Outdoor Recreation Activities – All Persons Aged 6+		
Activity	% of Americans	Total Participants
Freshwater, salt water, and fly fishing	17%	48.2 million
Car, backyard, and RV camping	15%	42.4 million
Running, jogging, trail running	15%	42.1 million
Road biking, mountain biking, and BMX	15%	41.5 million
Hiking	12%	32.5 million

Team Sport Activities - All Persons Aged 6+		
Activity	% of Americans	Total Participants
Basketball	9%	26.3 million
Football (touch, tackle, and flag)	7%	18.9 million
Soccer (indoor and outdoor)	6%	15.6 million
Volleyball (court, grass, and beach)	5%	15.2 million
Baseball	5%	15.0 million

¹⁸ Outdoor Industry Foundation. *The Next Generation of Outdoor Participants – 2005/2006*. Boulder, Colorado. 2007

¹⁹ Outdoor Industry Foundation. *The Next Generation of Outdoor Participants – 2005/2006*. Boulder, Colorado. 2007

²⁰ Outdoor Industry Foundation. *2009 Participation Study*. Boulder, Colorado. 2009.

²¹ Outdoor Industry Foundation. *2009 Participation Study*. Boulder, Colorado. 2009.

Indoor Recreation Activities - All Persons Aged 6+		
Activity	% of Americans	Total Participants
Free weights	21%	58.9 million
Treadmill	18%	49.4 million
Weight / resistance machines	14%	38.4 million
Stretching	13%	36.3 million
Stationary cycling	12%	34.7 million

On the older end of the age spectrum, active retirees are one of the largest emerging markets for the recreation and tourism industry. Retirees sixty-five and older remain active in many activities well into their senior years. Just under thirty-five million Americans, or about one of every eight persons (12.4%), were sixty-five years or older at the time of the 2000 Census. Over ninety percent of these older Americans are retired; almost all are retired by age seventy-five.

For purposes of this study, retirees were divided into three age groups, sixty-five to seventy-four, seventy-five to eighty-four, and eighty-five and above. Data was gathered from the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE). Across all the activities surveyed, with the only exception being gardening or landscaping for pleasure, the percentage of retirees who participate in an activity is less for persons aged 65 and older than for those under age 65. With a few exceptions among activities, participation percentage falls from age sixty-five to age eighty-five and above. For the more passive activities, such as walking, family gatherings outdoors, sightseeing and viewing/photographing wildlife and flowers, the decrease with age is gradual. With the more physically demanding activities, such as swimming, hiking and mountain biking, the decrease in percentage participating sharply increases with age. However, some percentage of even the oldest retirees participates across most activities, regardless of how physically demanding they are.

Although age does play a role in the ability to participate in all activities, eleven activities surveyed by NSRE remain popular among aging Americans over 65 years of age²²:

- Walking for pleasure
- Family gatherings
- Gardening and landscaping for pleasure
- View/photograph natural scenery
- Visit nature centers, etc.
- Driving for pleasure
- Picnicking
- Sightseeing
- Visit historic sites
- View/photograph other wildlife
- View/photograph wildflowers, trees, etc.

As the retiree population grows in future years, accessible opportunities to these popular activities by active, older adults should be accommodated.

Photo opposite page: Hagen Park (Dolphin Avenue)

²² United States Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service. National Survey of Recreation and the Environment. 2003-2004



Chapter 4: Park Classifications and Level of Service Standards

There are 14 parks in the Palmer Parks and Recreation System, totaling 210.12 acres that serve varied and diverse needs within the community and surrounding region. There are multiple methods that can be and are frequently used to determine the community need for park and recreation facilities and programs. The most common and universally accepted approach to a level of service analysis originated with the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) in the 1980's when the organization began establishing norms for the amount of park lands or park amenities a community should strive for based on population. The latest NRPA standards published in 1990 compares the supply of facilities against demand, as measured by the total population of a community.²³ These guidelines are typically reflected as the number of facilities or park acreages per a measureable segment of the population. An example of this may be a minimum of 10 acres of total park land for every 1,000 residents.

This master plan utilizes a level of service analysis to establish reasonable and prudent standards for park lands and park amenities in Palmer over the next 10 years. The reality of current and local economic conditions is that the City is not in a position to pursue large expansion or growth in the parks in the next decade, although there is tremendous interest in trail development. There are specific areas of need where appropriate development of new parks or park amenities, or development of parks should be considered in order to meet the demands and expectations of residents.

The level of service standards developed in this master plan were derived from the combination of multiple analyses and reflect national and local best practices, the relevant needs of local communities, financial constraints of the City, the limited opportunity for acquiring land for new parks, and alternative providers / recreational sites in the City. Ultimately, these standards should be used to provide defensibility and data for leadership of the City to make decisions about facility and asset priorities, but *should not* be taken unilaterally as the sole determinant of how the City will invest in the park and trails system over the next 10 years.

4.1 PARK CLASSIFICATIONS

A park and facility classification system must utilize key characteristics or descriptive factors of each site including the intent and/or mission of sites, predominant types of site usage, and appropriate performance measures unique to each category of park classification. Proper integration of a park and facility classification system that utilize these criteria to organize and distinguish the diverse purposes served by city parks can help to guide the City in the years to come as a key component of this master plan.

These classifications are used as a foundation to determine level of service standards of parks and facilities in Palmer. In addition, these standards can support the development of a high quality park system by addressing current and emerging recreation trends and public need. The following factors are utilized to distinguish city parks and recreation sites:

1. Park Size – defines the relative size of the park in acres, including ratio of land to per capita population.
2. Service Area – details the service area of the park as defined by its size and amenities.
3. Maintenance standards - details the required / expected standard of maintenance required at the park dependent upon usage levels and degree of facility development.
4. Amenities – Describes the level of facility and/or amenity development that is present.

²³ Lancaster, R.A. (Ed.). (1990). Recreation, Park, and Open Space Standards and Guidelines. Ashburn, VA: National Recreation and Park Association.

5. **Performance** – Establishes performance expectations of the park as reflected in annual operational cost recovery (revenue generation), and annual use of major facilities within the park.

There are 14 parks and facilities either owned and/or maintained by the City of Palmer, totaling 210.12 acres that serve varied and diverse needs in the community. Using these criteria above, City of Palmer parks and recreational facilities have been classified into the five categories described below. Each of these park area categories provides a different type of environment and public use, and also has distinctive maintenance and habitat management goals and requirements.

1. Neighborhood Parks
2. Community Parks
3. Regional Parks
4. Open Space
5. Trails

The descriptions that follow provide greater detail in the distinguishing qualities of each of the five major park classifications listed above. These points of distinction are reflective of industry best-practices and adopted to improve the organization and management of parks with diverse amenities, aspects and performance measures. This information is pertinent when addressed in the facility needs discussed in the later sections of this report.

NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

Neighborhood parks are intended to be easily accessible by adjacent neighborhoods and should focus on meeting neighborhood recreational needs, as well as preserving small open spaces in residential or commercial areas. Neighborhood parks are smaller than community or regional parks and are designed typically for residents who live within a one mile radius. Neighborhood parks, which provide recreational opportunities for the entire family, often contain landscaped areas, benches, picnic tables, playgrounds, and small turf areas. Passive recreation activities are predominant at neighborhood parks.

Neighborhood parks generally range from 0.01 to 3 acres depending on the community and the area.

- **Length of stay:** 30 minutes to one hour experience
- **Amenities:** Basic amenities for picnicking and for play. Restrooms are common, as well as occasional pavilions/shelters.
- **Revenue producing facilities:** None
- **Programming:** 100% percent passive
- **Signage:** Limited signage throughout the park
- **Landscaping:** Limited landscaping throughout the park
- **Parking:** Little to no parking
- **Other goals:** Strong appeal to surrounding neighborhoods; integrated color scheme throughout the park; loop trail connectivity; safety design meets established standards.

COMMUNITY PARKS

Community parks are intended to be accessible to multiple neighborhoods and beyond, and meet a broader base of community recreational needs, as well as preserving unique landscapes and open spaces. Community parks are generally larger in scale than neighborhood parks, but smaller than regional parks and are designed typically for residents who live within a three to five mile radius. When possible, the park may be developed adjacent to a school. Community parks often contain facilities for specific recreational purposes: athletic fields, tennis courts, picnic areas, reservable picnic shelters,

sports courts, permanent restrooms, large turfed and landscaped areas, and a playground. A mixture of passive and active outdoor recreation activities often take place at community parks.

Community parks generally range from 1.5 to 10 acres depending on the community and available space. Community parks serve a larger area – radius of 5 miles – and contain more recreation amenities than a neighborhood park.

- **Length of stay:** Two to three hour experience
- **Amenities:** A signature facility (i.e., trails, sports fields, large shelters/pavilions, playground, sports courts, water feature); public restrooms, parking, security lighting, ball field lighting are possible support features
- **Revenue producing facilities:** Limited
- **Programming:** 65% percent active; 35% passive
- **Signage:** Limited signage throughout the park
- **Landscaping:** Limited landscaping throughout the park
- **Parking:** Sufficient to support optimal usage
- **Other goals:** Community parks can include unique amenities or facilities that may draw users from a larger service area

REGIONAL PARKS

A regional park typically serves multiple communities, residents within a town or city, or even across multiple counties. Depending on activities and amenities with a regional park, users may travel as many as 45-60 miles or 60 minutes for a visit. Regional parks usually include both the basic elements of a neighborhood park, combined with amenities similar to a community park. In addition, regional parks can feature specialized facilities including, but not limited to athletic facilities, sport complexes, and special event venues. Regional parks range in size from 15 to 150 acres, and should promote tourism and economic development by enhancing the economic vitality and identity of the entire region.

- **Length of stay:** Two hours to all day experience
- **Amenities:** Multiple signature facilities (i.e. athletic fields, outdoor recreation/extreme sports amenities, sports complexes, playgrounds, reservable picnic shelters, recreation center, pool, gardens, trails, specialty facilities); public restrooms, concessions, ample parking, and special event site.
- **Revenue producing facilities:** No less than two; park designed to produce revenue to assist in off-setting operational costs
- **Programming:** 50% active; 50% passive
- **Signage:** Strong signage throughout the park including entrance, wayfinding, and interpretive
- **Landscaping:** Strong focal entrances and landscaping throughout the park, only flora native to the site should be considered
- **Parking:** Sufficient for all amenities; can support a special event with a regional draw
- **Other goals:** Regional parks are generally the epicenter of many recreation programs and community events, and frequently draw visitors / users from a regional service area. These facilities are often considered major economic and social assets in a community.

OPEN SPACE

Open Space are recreation or natural areas which are usually complimentary to a regional trail system, or to another greenway or open space. These areas can include diverse recreational opportunities that are managed such as multi-use trails (pedestrian, mountain biking, equestrian), fishing areas along creeks or rivers, or just open space. Traditionally, greenways/open space serve both a conservation and interpretive purpose for habitat preservation and responsible recreation. The service area of trails /

greenways / open space depends on size of the park: 0 – 3 acres = 2 miles; 4 – 10 acres = 5 miles; 11 – 30 acres = 10 miles.

- **Length of stay:** Two hour to four hour experience
- **Amenities:** Multi-use trails, appropriate outdoor recreation venues dependent on the relevant natural features
- **Revenue producing facilities:** None
- **Signage:** Strong signage throughout including entrance, regulatory, and wayfinding/directional
- **Landscaping:** Limited landscaping at entrances and only flora native to the site should be considered
- **Parking:** Limited; capable of supporting use of the site and connected trail system
- **Other goals:** Designs should support pedestrian activity and multi-use trail systems; linked to major trails systems

TRAILS

Trails serve diverse recreational opportunities that are managed as multi-use trails (pedestrian, bicycling, mountain biking, equestrian, motorized use, etc.). The trails within the City of Palmer are primarily designed and utilized for walking, running/jogging, and bicycling due to land availability, City ordinance, and appropriate and authorized uses within the city limits. Typically, trails in Palmer are either unpaved, natural surface trails within parks, or are paved trails that are aligned with public roadways for purposes of recreational use and for non-motorized commuting.

Tables of parks and facilities by classification is provided below and on the following page.

Neighborhood Parks	
Bugge Park	McKechnie Park
Fairfield Park*	Meier Park
Hagen Park	Wilson Park*
Community Parks	
A-moose-ment Park	Busby Soule Fields
Bill Hermann Tennis Courts	Palmer Skateboard Park
Regional Parks (Facilities)	
MTA Events Center / Ice Arena	Sherrod Park
Palmer Golf Course	
Open Space	
Dr. Myron F. Babb Arboretum	
Trails	
Cope Industrial Way Bike Path	Palmer-Wasilla Highway Trail
Shane Woods Memorial Trail	Glenn Highway Trail
Arctic Avenue Trail	

**These parks are currently undeveloped neighborhood parks that appear as open space in their current condition, but have been envisioned to be enhanced with limited and appropriate amenities in the future.*

4.2 LEVEL OF SERVICE STANDARDS

CITY OF PALMER LEVEL OF SERVICE STANDARDS

The level of standards analysis is a review of the inventory of parks and major park assets in relation to the total population of the study area. There are multiple approaches to determine standards that are appropriate for each community, thereby making it a complex analysis to establish relevant standards for the City of Palmer.

In order to establish an appropriate set of standards for Palmer, the Consultant Team utilized a four-step method as described below:

1. Established current level of service standards for existing parks and recreation sites and amenities, and projected future needs based upon projected population growth to maintain these standards.
2. Reviewed the inventory of park land and green space, and recreational amenities provided by alternative organizations in the area (i.e Mat-Su Borough, state land agencies).
3. Performed the level of service standards analysis with unique standards for Palmer that reflect community needs, priorities, and supporting circumstances (i.e. financial, public support, availability of public lands, etc.)
4. Developed standards collaboratively between the Consultant Team and management staff from the City to project future needs based upon current standards, local trends, public input, and best practices in similar communities around the United States.

CURRENT INVENTORY

There are 14 parks and facilities totaling 210.12 acres owned and/or maintained by the City of Palmer. This system includes the following park types and major amenities:

Park Type	Quantity
Neighborhood Parks	6 parks, 2.20 acres
Community Parks	4 parks, 7.07 acres
Regional Parks	3 parks, 200.55 acres
Open Space	1 park, 0.30 acres
Trails	5 trails, 5.92 miles
Amenity Type	Quantity
Natural surface trails (mileage)	0
Improved surface trails (mileage)	5.92
Diamond ball fields	7
Soccer fields	8
Tennis courts	3
Playgrounds	6
Pavilions	2
Picnic areas	6
Golf course	1
Hockey rink	1
Skateboard park	1

An inventory and level of service standards analysis of City of Palmer parks and facilities was performed. These current levels of services standards are shown as **current acres per 1,000 residents based on the estimated resident population of 2010.**

Following current level of service standards, **recommended level of service standards were developed for City of Palmer parks.** These standards are based on the following:

1. Public interests, needs and priorities gathered in the community input process
 - a. Community meetings
 - b. Focus groups and interviews
 - c. Household survey
2. Inventory of City park lands, recreational facilities, and trails in the area
3. Capacity for growth
 - a. Financial
 - b. Land availability
 - c. Public interests
 - d. Population growth / demand
4. City priorities

CURRENT LEVEL OF SERVICE STANDARDS

Facility Type	Total City Parks	Current City of Palmer Standards (2010)		
Neighborhood Parks (Acres)	2.20	0.37	Acres per	1,000
Community Parks (Acres)	7.07	1.19	Acres per	1,000
Regional Parks (Acres)	200.55	33.78	Acres per	1,000
Open Space (Acres)	0.30	0.05	Acres per	1,000
Trails (Miles)	5.92	1.00	Miles per	1,000
Total Park Acreage	210.12	35.39	Acres per	1,000
Natural surface trails (mileage)	0.00	0.00	per	1,000
Improved surface trails (mileage)	5.92	1.00	per	1,000
Diamond ball fields	7	1.18	per	1,000
Soccer fields	8	1.35	per	1,000
Tennis courts	3	0.51	per	1,000
Playgrounds	6	1.01	per	1,000
Pavilions	2	0.34	per	1,000
Picnic areas	6	1.01	per	1,000
Golf course (18-holes)	1	0.17	per	1,000
Hockey rink	1	0.17	per	1,000
Skateboard park	1	0.17	per	1,000

RECOMMENDED LEVEL OF SERVICE STANDARDS

PARK STANDARDS

- The prominence of other public lands available in or near Palmer that are passive recreation-based open space, potentially relieves the City of Palmer of preserving large tracts of open space within the city limits.
- Park and facility development can occur either with acquisition and development of a new park, development of a currently undeveloped park, or redevelopment of an existing park.
- City parks often are a major provider of traditional recreation amenities in small, local communities and therefore nominal growth or development of amenities such as basketball courts and ball fields are projected as communities grow.
- These are standards to strive to achieve over the next 10 years through direct City action and partnered initiatives.

TRAIL STANDARDS

- The major level of service recommendations around trails have been developed to support the following needs:
 - Connectivity within the community
 - Connectivity with other regional trails and communities
 - Complementary natural surface trails within City parks to augment the area's recreational opportunities
- Standards for natural surface trails are intended to support development of recreational trails within City parks or on City lands for hiking, biking, or other non-motorized use. Natural surface trails for motorized use often are more appropriate for non-City lands.
- Standards for improved surface trails are intended to support the development of internal trail connections and connections to regional trails.
- These are standards to strive to achieve over the next 10 years through direct City action and partnered initiatives.

Numbers (quantities) listed in the tables on the following pages indicate the inventory required by 2015 or 2020 to meet the recommended standard based on corresponding population projections. **These are cumulative, not additive, recommendations.** In other words, calculations for 2020 based on recommended standards assume that the calculations for 2015 have not been achieved. Negative numbers indicate inventories that exceed the recommended standard.

The table on the facing page details parks, facilities, and trail standards – current and recommended. This table also provides projected park and amenity needs for the next 10 years based on recommended standards and estimated population growth.

City of Palmer Parks, Trails and Recreational Fields Master Plan

Facility Type	Total City Parks	Current City of Palmer Standards (2010)			Recommended City of Palmer Standards			2015 Calculation (Acres) Based on Recommended Standards	2020 Calculation (Acres) Based on Recommended Standards
Neighborhood Parks (Acres)	2.20	0.37	Acres per	1,000	0.75	Acres per	1,000	2.56	2.95
Community Parks (Acres)	7.07	1.19	Acres per	1,000	1.25	Acres per	1,000	0.87	1.51
Regional Parks (Acres)	200.55	33.78	Acres per	1,000	5.00	Acres per	1,000	(168.79)	(166.25)
Open Space (Acres)	0.30	0.05	Acres per	1,000	0.50	Acres per	1,000	2.88	3.13
Trails (Miles)	5.92	1.00	Miles per	1,000	1.50	Miles per	1,000	3.61	4.37
Total Park Acreage	210.12	35.39	Acres per	1,000	7.50	Acres per	1,000		
Natural surface trails (mileage)	0.00	0.00	per	1,000	0.35	per	1,000	2.22	2.40
Improved surface trails (mileage)	5.92	1.00	per	1,000	1.50	per	1,000	3.61	4.37
Diamond ball fields	7	1.18	per	1,000	1.35	per	1,000	1.58	2.26
Soccer fields	8	1.35	per	1,000	1.50	per	1,000	1.53	2.29
Tennis courts	3	0.51	per	1,000	0.50	per	1,000	0.18	0.43
Playgrounds	6	1.01	per	1,000	1.25	per	1,000	1.94	2.58
Pavilions	2	0.34	per	1,000	0.50	per	1,000	1.18	1.43
Picnic areas	6	1.01	per	1,000	1.00	per	1,000	0.35	0.86
Golf course (18-holes)	1	0.17	per	1,000	0.15	per	1,000	(0.05)	0.03
Hockey rink	1	0.17	per	1,000	0.15	per	1,000	(0.05)	0.03
Skateboard park	1	0.17	per	1,000	0.25	per	1,000	0.59	0.72



Sherrod Park

4.3 PRIORITIZED NEEDS SUMMARY

This *Prioritized Needs Summary* section of this report summarizes the park and program priorities for the City of Palmer from which specific tactics will be developed in the *Parks, Trails and Recreational Fields Master Plan*. These needs were identified by the Consultant Team based upon industry best practices and our experience in the field, and were derived from the findings of the following previous analyses:

- Comprehensive site, facility, and program assessments
- Extensive public input
- Interviews with leadership and staff of City of Palmer, Mat-Su Borough, and State and Federal agency representatives
- Focus groups with key stakeholders, user groups, and community leadership
- Demographics and trends analysis
- Park classifications and facility standards analysis

Each need has been assigned a priority level as primary or secondary to support future project sequencing, investment of public resources, and meeting community expectations. **The priority assignment for each need is not a measure of importance.** Rather, these recommended priorities are a result of both qualitative and quantitative analyses to create and maintain an appropriate balance of focus for the operations the next 10 years. Needs indicated as a primary priority should be considered to be addressed in one to five years, and secondary needs are recommended to be addressed sometime over the next six to ten years.

PRIORITIZED FACILITY NEEDS

Park / Facility Need	Recommended Priority Assignment
Multi-use trails to enhance connectivity within the community	Primary
Multi-use trails that connect to regional trails outside the community	Primary
Enhance amenities and equitable distribution of neighborhood parks in the community	Primary
Improve community parks and park amenities	Primary
Develop a city park and trail signage program	Primary
Develop additional non-traditional sport facilities and amenities	Primary
Improve existing and develop new diamond ball fields	Secondary
Improve existing and develop new multi-use rectangular sports fields	Secondary
Improve existing and develop new picnic areas and pavilions/shelters	Secondary
Improve existing and develop new playgrounds	Secondary
Improve existing and develop new river / creek access areas	Secondary
Develop a special event venue	Secondary

PRIORITIZED PROGRAM NEEDS

Program Need	Recommended Priority Assignment
Enhance partnership program to engage alternative providers in the community as a network of recreational opportunities in Palmer	Primary
Enhance and modify existing acquisition and development standards to improve the future growth and sustainability of City of Palmer parks, trails and recreational fields	Primary
Develop partnered programs that improve the health and lifestyles of residents	Secondary
Improve the quality and accessibility of youth programs through partnerships	Secondary
Improve the quality and diversity of programs for adults of all ages through partnerships	Secondary
Improve the quality and diversity of programs for residents with special needs through partnerships	Secondary
Enhance programs that promote safety in the community	Secondary
Develop and support programs that celebrate the significance of natural and cultural resources of Palmer (i.e. interpretive signage, naturalist programs, etc.)	Secondary
Support new programs that will engage whole families in recreational experiences	Secondary
Support programs that promote and draw tourism to the community	Secondary



Matanuska River with Pioneer Peak in background

Chapter 5: Summary of Recommendations

The City of Palmer *Parks, Trails and Recreational Fields Master Plan* is a living document that provides a framework for guiding Palmer City Council and staff in managing the parks and recreation program over the next 10 years. This plan is based on extensive and thorough public involvement process conducted over the period of eight months (February 2011 to September 2011), and includes a statistically-valid household survey of residents. The public input process revealed ideas, priorities, values, needs, interests, and concerns of residents, many of which varied widely among individuals and among different communities. There were also many similarities of what the residents of Palmer desire from their parks and recreation program today and in the future.

This master plan works to responsibly address the needs that are relevant and appropriate to the City; position the City to improve the provision of parks, recreation and trails in the future; and work to meet the prevailing needs of the community.

5.1 GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

These general recommendations are briefly summarized below and on the following page.

1. Develop consistent park signage

It is recommended the City of Palmer develop a consistent signage program to clearly and tastefully distinguish park sites, as well as provide usage rules and regulation when they apply. This program should address updating official park names, including use of “neighborhood” or “community” in park names to signify park type and intended site usage.

2. Adopt park and trail acquisition and development standards

Recommendations for updated park and trail acquisition and development standards have been provided for consideration to be incorporated into the subdivision regulations of the City, and to improve the overall quality of future park sites and trails acquired through future residential development.

3. Enhance and diversify existing parks through upgrading

There are opportunities to develop or enhance existing parks with new or updated amenities and features. Park development through upgrading can be a simple process to improve park quality and equity throughout the City. This is especially true in areas that are experiencing population growth.

4. Establish a Parks, Recreation and Trails Advisory Board

One of the most exciting and ambitious recommendations of this master plan is the development of a Parks, Recreation and Trails Advisory Board to support the City Council and City Staff in development of strategies and implementation of this master plan. This citizen advisory board should include either five or seven members appointed by the City Council to serve alternating four-year terms. The Board should meet monthly as a public meeting, and elect their leadership (Chair and Vice Chair) each year. A staff liaison should be assigned by the City Council. The specific role of the Board should be to:

- advise Council and staff on the development and implementation of strategies regarding the management and operations of parks, trails and recreational amenities in Palmer;
- support and guide acquisition and development of future park sites in Palmer;
- receive public comment and input related to parks, trails and recreational amenities;
- advise staff and the Council on park, trail and recreational capital projects; and
- recommend relevant policy changes or enhancements to the City Council based on staff recommendations.

5. Establish a Parks and Recreation Department

The lack of dedicated staff and personnel to manage the parks and recreation system in Palmer will hinder the implementation of this master plan and the ability of the City to meet community needs. A parks and recreation department should initially consist of one or two persons to coordinate site and facility usage, coordinate site and facility maintenance priorities, work with local user groups and stakeholders, manage contracts and private operators, seek alternative funding to support capital and operational needs, and manage communication and promotion of park and recreation opportunities in the City. This department could directly report to the Community Development Director, and work with the Public Works Department for site and facility maintenance support.

6. Develop maintenance and management standards

Recommended maintenance and management standards have been developed to support the efforts of the Program to improve the upkeep of park sites and trails, as well as to address ongoing maintenance challenges with some sites.

7. Diversify funding support and recruit a dedicated fund development partner

It is recommended that the City of Palmer diversify the funding support provided to the Program by multiple means explained further in the funding and revenue section of this plan. Additionally, Palmer needs support and assistance in acquiring the funds to support the capital and operational demands of the Program beyond just reliance on the taxpayers. The organization of a dedicated fund development partner can be a critical part of a robust funding approach.

5.2 SITE RECOMMENDATIONS

Numerous recommendations have been developed for specific parks and sites in Palmer. These recommendations were derived from detailed site assessments, public workshops and involvement, level of service standards analysis, and interviews with stakeholders and leaders in the City. For parks in the Palmer system that do not have specific recommendations featured in this master plan, a subsequent public involvement processes may reveal additional community needs and park issues.

The specific local recommendations are provided on the following pages. Recommended implementation plans are further described in later sections of the master plan.

PARKS

1. Wilson Park (Felicia Street)

Wilson Park is currently an undeveloped park near the Brittany Estates residential development. It is recommended to develop Wilson Park as a small community park featuring limited play equipment, basketball court, picnic area with a small pavilion, BBQ grill and horseshoe pits.

2. Fairfield Neighborhood Park (Dolphin Avenue)

Fairfield Neighborhood Park is currently an undeveloped park near the recently completed home sites on North Denali Street. It is recommended to develop Fairfield Park as a neighborhood park featuring basketball and/or volleyball court, and picnic area with small shelters.

3. Additional park in the northern portion of the City

There is substantial residential area growth in the northern portions of the City, particularly around the Cedar Hills development. It is recommended to develop a new neighborhood park in this area to serve nearby residents. This park should have open green space, playground, picnic shelter(s), and limited sport / athletic amenities (i.e. basketball court or volleyball court, etc.).

4. Upgrade existing park amenities

Upgrade amenities at parks in a phased approach to enhance the quality and diversity of play equipment and sports/athletic facilities. The following sites are specifically recommended to be included in park improvement plans:

- Bugge Park (Cobb Avenue) – updated play equipment; vegetative screening from Glenn Highway
- Bill Hermann Tennis Courts – resurfaced / refurbished tennis courts
- Hagen Park (Dolphin Avenue) – updated play equipment
- Meier Park (Silver Tip Avenue) – updated play equipment; vegetative screening from Glenn Highway
- Palmer Skateboard Park – new / improved equipment
- Sherrod Park – updated play equipment

5. Pump track / BMX park

There is strong support among interested residents in the community to expand the adventure sport / non-traditional recreational amenities in the City with the development of a pump track. This facility is recommended to be developed as a combination pump track / BMX park to provide a site that can manage heavy and diversified usage, particularly in the summer season. It is recommended to develop this park near the skateboarding park for the synergy of the two sites, but alternative locations are possible. The eventual location of this park should address the following criteria:

- Site security and enforcement
- Parking
- Centralized location that is easy and safe for youth on bicycles to reach from their neighborhoods
- Appropriateness of surrounding development and real estate

6. “Heart of Palmer” Park

The City of Palmer lacks a centralized park and open space that can serve as a venue for gathering, leisurely recreational activities, ice skating in the winter, and appropriate special events. This central special events park should become a hub of community pride and activity. The advisable location for this park should be in the vicinity of the Quad area and Palmer Library. If historical restrictions prevent the limited development (ice rink, band shell, etc.) use of the Quad for this purpose, alternative locations could include either the parcels north of Dahlia Avenue where the water tower is located (there have been approved bonds for the City to purchase this land for future community use), or to reclaim and relocate the existing parking lot for the Palmer Library and redevelop that site as a central park amenity. Another potential location for this park could be the Busby softball fields east of the Mat-Su Borough



Rosa Parks Circle in Grand Rapids, Michigan

building, but the fields would need to be relocated somewhere in the City.

7. Dr. Myron F. Babb Arboretum

Expanding the uses of the Dr. Myron F. Babb Arboretum is recommended to improve the value of this open space in the City. This can include limited development of appropriate amenities such as a small pavilion, benches, parking, and interpretive signage. This can enable the park to become a popular site for weddings and small outdoor events, as well as quiet reflection and relaxation.

8. Additional park in the southwestern portion of the City

Another area of residential growth in Palmer is in the southwestern portions of the City. It is recommended to develop long-range plans to acquire property and develop a larger community or regional park in this area as residential growth continues. This park should feature a sports complex of two or three diamond ball fields, two or three multi-purpose rectangular fields, playground, small skateboarding amenity, basketball court, large group pavilion, and loop trail.

TRAILS

1. Improve connectivity

Improve the connectivity within the City of Palmer by completing links within the existing trails and walkways. This should be a phased approach with the following recommendations:

- a. **Priority 1** – connect the State Fairgrounds with the central portion of the City with a paved rec path / commuter trail extending to the existing trail (Shane Woods Memorial Trail) in the rail corridor north of the Palmer Depot. Additionally, improve the connection of the existing pathway along Arctic Avenue from the Matanuska River to the Glenn Highway intersection. This may include addressing a more formalized crossing near North Gulkana Street intersection, or redeveloping the pathway on the north side of Arctic Avenue.
- b. **Priority 2** – connect the high density residential areas in the Brittany Estates vicinity to the trail from the Fairgrounds to the central area of the City, and to the Palmer-Wasilla Highway with a paved rec path / commuter trail. This priority includes a crossing (over or under pass) of the Glenn Highway near Moore Road, and could include a pedestrian crossing light on the Palmer-Wasilla Highway.
- c. **Priority 3** – Connect high residential areas in the north portion of the City with a paved rec path / commuter trail extending southwards from the Cedar Hills area to the existing trail ending at the underpass near Beaver Avenue. This should include a pedestrian crossing (pedestrian-activated light, underpass or overpass) in the Eagle Avenue vicinity.
- d. **Priority 4** – connect the State Fairgrounds to the Palmer Golf Course with a paved rec path / commuter trail along rail corridor north of Outer Springer Loop. This trail should connect on the west to the trail extending from the Fairgrounds to the central portion of the City, and to potential natural surface trails along the Matanuska River and edge of the golf course on the east.
- e. **Priority 5** – Extend either a paved rec path / commuter trail or natural surface trail west from the trail along Moore Road / E. Helen Road connecting the State Fairgrounds to the Brittany Estates area, for purposes of future connections with the Crevasse Moraine area to the west.



Cope Industrial Way Bike Path

2. Improve trail diversity

Improve the diversity of trails in the City of Palmer with the addition of designated natural surface trails for hiking and/or light mountain biking.

- a. Consider developing natural surface hiking and mountain biking trails on the western side of Palmer, potentially on the city-managed land originally planned for a landfill site or on an acquired site in the vicinity.
- b. Consider developing natural surface trails along the Matanuska River, from the Palmer Golf Course northwards to the Matanuska River Park, or within some segments therein.

3. Develop a Fitness Trail

Improve the fitness opportunities and impacts provided by trails in the City of Palmer by the following methods:

- a. Grade / rate the trails within Palmer, as well as consistent distance markers that inform users of the health benefit and impacts of each trail.
- b. Establish an official fitness trail in Palmer with multiple fitness and exercise stations.



Photos: Fitness trail signage and stations

4. Develop an Art and Cultural Trail

Diversify the trails and trail experiences in Palmer by developing an art and cultural trail along a section of paved trail near the center of the City. It is recommended that portions or all of the existing Shane Woods Memorial Trails, and the future extension to the State Fairgrounds. This trail can feature trail art and sculptures that celebrate local artists and local history and culture.



Trail art and sculptures

5. Trail / Highway / Roadway Development Standards

It is important for the City of Palmer to establish and adopt trail develop standards that correlate with the development of new or redevelopment of existing highways and roadways. Transportation projects coordinated with the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and/or the State of Alaska should include trail development within the right-of-way that aligns with the priorities and values defined within this master plan. Trail development should be considered with the following criteria:

- A. Paved recreational pathways a minimum of 10 feet in width.
- B. Preference given to pathways separated from main roadway, although expanded and delineated shoulder is acceptable in select cases where fight-of-way width or project cost is an issue.
- C. Maintenance and snow removal plans are developed to ensure year-round usage.
- D. All necessary roadway crossings are accounted for.
- E. Connections to existing and/or future planned pathways are addressed.

RECREATIONAL FIELDS AND FACILITIES

1. Future sports complex

Previously identified in the PARKS recommendations was a future regional or community park in the southwestern portion of the City. It is recommended this future site feature an additional sports complex in Palmer to accommodate current and future needs. Two or three diamond ball fields and two or three multi-purpose rectangular fields are recommended.

2. Winter Recreation at Palmer Golf Course

Palmer residents can benefit from a greater diversity and availability of winter recreation opportunities within the City itself. The greatest opportunity to expand winter recreation is at Palmer Golf Course. It is recommended that the cart paths are groomed and marked for cross-country skiing, as well as possible ice skating on the small ponds.

3. Palmer Teen Center

Currently there are few opportunities to constructively occupy teens within the City of Palmer that can provide secure places to gather, socialize, and play casual games and activities. This is especially true in the winter months. It is recommended that the City seek a partnership for the development and operation of a teen center in a centralized location of the City. Optimally, this center should feature both indoor and outdoor activity space, as well as limited administration and storage. The most probable partners for a teen center are youth service organizations, community-based foundations, or other relevant non-profits.

4. Expanded relationship with the Matanuska-Susitna School District

There is currently a functional relationship between the City of Palmer and the Matanuska-Susitna School District for the limited use of select facilities. It is recommended this relationship be reviewed and enhanced to include additional facilities, such as gymnasiums, in the late fall, winter, and early spring months of the year.

Chapter 6: Operations and Management Manual

The operations and management manual section of the City of Palmer *Parks, Trails, and Recreational Fields Master Plan* provides strategic guidelines and recommended tactics for managing the Program over the next 10 years. The recommendations contained in this manual are derived from a thorough review of the Program's administration and management, the culture and values of the City of Palmer, and best practices in the parks and recreation industry from around the United States. The manual contains the following major areas of focus:

- **Policy and Procedural Recommendations** – A detail of recommendations pertaining to policies and procedures of the Program and how they are administered.
- **Organizational Recommendations** – A detail of organizational recommendations addressing the functionality and structure of the Program.

6.1 POLICY AND PROCEDURAL RECOMMENDATIONS

A small number of recommendations in this master plan pertain to suggested policies, procedures and practices. These recommendations are:

1. Improve the ability of the City of Palmer to manage the quality of lands received through subdivision development regulations as viable public park assets.
2. Expand the ability of the City of Palmer to pursue trail development projects through subdivision development regulations.
3. Establish a mechanism within the City of Palmer to coordinate and support the development and maintenance of eligible and approved trail projects throughout the City.
4. Strengthen existing and develop new partnerships with leaseholders, user groups and stakeholders to enhance the quality of Palmer parks, trails and recreational facilities.
5. Establish more consistent maintenance standards for City of Palmer parks.

These recommendations are further explained in detail in the sections that follow.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations provide policy considerations that would require adoption by the City Council to be successful, and would require support from City of Palmer staff.

1. SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS

The City of Palmer Subdivision Regulations contain no provisions for park land dedication and cash-in-lieu. These provisions are detailed in Chapter 16 of the City of Palmer Municipal Code – SUBDIVISIONS. Within this section, there are no details regarding requirements or priorities for park and open space preservation and development as related to residential subdivision development. It is recommended to amend the subdivision regulations to include the following park land dedication objectives:

1. Preserve and protect wildlife habitat, species of special concern and their habitat, agricultural uses, historical and cultural features, scenic views, natural drainage areas and systems, and other desirable features of the natural environment, such as healthy long-lived trees, topography, significant plant communities, ground and surface water, wetlands, and riparian areas;
2. Provide open space areas for conservation or passive recreation;
3. Provide active recreational areas for use by residents of the development and, where specified, the larger community;

4. Meet the goals of the City of Palmer Parks, Trails and Recreational Fields Master Plan;
5. Provide areas for social interaction and livability;
6. Arrange open space to be accessible and functional for use by the residents of the development and where specified, the larger community; and
7. Protect sensitive environmental features and natural areas by providing landscape buffers within open space areas.

Current Challenge:

A challenge with many current municipal regulations is that the design standards for what constitutes quality park lands are not adequately detailed. Ambiguity has resulted in the dedication of multiple city parks that are largely unusable as public parks. Recommended changes to City regulations are intended to improve the quality of dedicated parklands in newly developed subdivisions as usable public parks with meaningful recreational value, as well as provide an alternative to subdivision developers to engage in trail development projects in lieu of parkland dedication.

Recommendations:

- 1. Develop design standards to include specific requirements for park design, size and dedication options as a result of subdivision development.**

Specific design standard examples the City may consider as a starting point for revising subdivision regulations are provided as a supplement to this master plan.

- 2. Consider formulating and adopting a park development fee associated with cash-in-lieu donations that provides financial resources for the City of Palmer to develop dedicated parklands in subdivisions, versus relying solely on the City taxpayers as a whole to fund park development in subdivisions.**

Park development fees associated with cash-in-lieu of land dedication in subdivision regulations are beginning to become more accepted as a measure of fairness for who is expected to bear the financial burden of park development in new residential areas. John Crompton, Ph.D., of Texas A&M University recently published "An Analysis of Parkland Dedication Ordinances in Texas" and noted,

A problem with ordinances that contain only the land and fee in lieu elements is that they provide only for the acquisition of land. The additional capital needed to transform that bare land into a park is borne by existing taxpayers. In some instances, the result is that the dedicated land is never developed into a park and remains sterile open space which detracts from a community's appeal rather than adding to it. This led...communities to expand their ordinances to incorporate a park development fee element to pay for the cost of transforming the land into a park.²⁴

- 3. Formalize the alternative for subdivision developers to provide trail development in lieu of parkland dedication or cash-in-lieu donation.**

²⁴ Crompton, John L., "An Analysis of Parkland Dedication Ordinances in Texas." Journal of Park and Recreation Administration 28.1 (Spring 2010): 70-102.

2. ACQUISITION CRITERIA

RECREATION PARKS

If the parcel is intended to become a recreation park, it should provide a benefit to the area. The below questions can help determine the value of the parcel. These questions are relative to the park's classification (pocket, neighborhood, or community, regional) and general location (rural or urban).

Basic Attributes

1. Is the land of an appropriate size and shape?
2. Is the character of the land (topography, drainage, soils, etc.) appropriate?
3. Does the land have inherent economic value comparable to the lands adjoining it?
4. Is this land suitable, upon development, to provide the recreation experiences needed in the area?
5. Would the use of this land (as guided by its classification) harm the natural environment?

Location

1. Is the land in an appropriate place?
2. Would this land contribute to the equitable distribution of parks in the planning region?

Access

1. After dedication, would this land, upon casual observation, be easily identifiable as a public park?
2. Will the land be appropriately accessible to the public?

Developments

1. Is the supporting infrastructure (utilities, access, etc.) available in the appropriate form and scale needed?
2. Is the land free of infrastructure (high-tension power lines, sewage lagoons, etc.) that would limit appropriate park uses?
3. Is the land free of easements (drainage, effluent disposal, mineral extraction, motorized access, etc.) that would limit appropriate park uses?
4. Does the land have any special cultural or historical significance?

Hazards and Costs

1. Are there physical hazards, limitations or restrictions that would hinder the intended use of the land?
2. Would the benefits offered by this land outweigh the potential liabilities?
3. Would the benefits offered by this land outweigh foreseeable maintenance costs?

Contribution to the Park System

1. Does the land complement other nearby park lands?
2. Does the land serve as a linkage or corridor to other park lands?
3. Do non-motorized travel-ways exist between this park and residences, schools, and other parks and open space?

Harmonious Existence with Built Environment

1. Would the use of this land (as guided by its classification) conflict with adjacent land use?
5. Does adjacent land use conflict with the intended uses of this land?

CONSERVATION PARKS

If the parcel is intended to become a conservation park, it should provide for the protection of important natural values. The below questions can help determine the value of the parcel.

Physical Landform

1. Does the land contain a riparian area?
2. Does the land contain unique geomorphic features?
3. Is the landform essentially in its natural state, or can it be returned to such a state?

Flora and Fauna

1. Does the land serve an important biological purpose in the area?
2. Is the majority of the vegetation native to the area?
3. Is the habitat unique to the area?
4. Does a diversity of plant species exist on the site?
5. Does a diversity of animal species exist on the site?
6. Is the land large enough and of high enough quality to provide self-contained habitat?
7. Does the land provide for wildlife linkages to other habitat areas?
8. Do any sensitive or rare plant or animal species live on or use this land?
9. Does the land buffer adjacent lands that contain sensitive or rare plants or animals?
10. Is the habitat largely unaltered from its natural state, or can it be restored to such a state?

Human Uses

1. Will human use of this land harm the natural habitat?
2. If the land is intended to serve as a non-motorized linkage to other areas, is it suitable for such a purpose?
3. Does the land provide educational opportunities?
4. Is the land threatened by other uses?

Contribution to the Conservation Land System

1. Is the land in an area identified as having important resources?
2. Does the land link other conservation lands?
3. Does the land contribute to the diversity of conservation lands in the area?

Harmonious Existence with Built Environment

1. Does (or will) adjacent land use degrade the naturalness of the land?
2. Will it be possible to prevent intrusions from exotic plants, domestic animals, and other threats?

3. CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENTS

Some park developments and maintenance may be beyond the abilities of the City of and must be performed by skilled and organized professionals. On-going contracts may be for mowing, landscape maintenance, tree pruning, or litter control and example one time contracts may include well digging, electrical or plumbing installation, timber harvesting, landscaping, surveying, architectural drawings, or heavy equipment use. It may be possible for future parks in Palmer to be developed and maintained, under contract, by other entities.

The City of Palmer will support these contractual agreements to the extent that they meet the goals and criteria identified in this plan.

4. TRAIL RIGHT-OF-WAYS

Trails along roads and highways are often constructed either within the road right-of-way, or on parcels with negotiated easements. In the case that trails are constructed in right-of-ways, the City should verify ownership³⁴ of the right-of-way and affected current or future trail. Inter-local agreements regarding trail ownership and maintenance should be established between the City of Palmer and other right-of-way owners (private parties, Mat-Su Borough, State of Alaska, or federal) where trails are constructed or accepted by the City that are not within City right-of-ways.

5. DISABLED ACCESS

Development of a quality parks system requires that all users, of all abilities, have access to at least the basic components of that system. Few City of Palmer parks provide opportunities for the mobility impaired. Meeting the needs of this population, and the requirements of the Americans With Disabilities Act, will take a number of years. Implementation is based on a system that designates the highest priority park needs as follows:

1. Access to the park, including adequate parking and trail system.
2. Access to each major site or facility within the park.
3. Access to restrooms and drinking fountains.

Access to other remaining sites and programs within the park, which are appropriate and will not fundamentally change the site or program, its flora and fauna, and the recreation experiences available there.

6. NAMING CITY PARKS

Every park should feature a sign indicating its name. Signs are appropriate at regional and community parks, and for neighborhood and pocket parks, or when there is a special need to identify the park as public land.

The City Council has authority to name City parks, giving deference to the wishes of those developing the park or local residents. The guidelines below suggest ways of choosing names for placement on signs or for internal reference:

- Name of former City of Palmer Mayor
- Significant local geographical feature.
- Name of a prominent historical resident, interest, or event.
- Name of an organization that has developed and/or maintains the park.
- Name of neighborhood or subdivision (for neighborhood parks).
- Name of an adjacent school.

7. RECOGNIZING DONORS

The City of Palmer may contribute only a portion of the money and time needed for park development or enhancements. Local organizations, residents, and businesses, who provide assistance should be recognized. While the City Council does not typically permit advertising in City parks, it recognizes proper recognition of donors, which the following guidelines help address.

- If a number of donors are recognized for general park improvements and maintenance, one sign should be used.
- Any sign recognizing multiple donors should be of a similar size and shape as a sign that names a park or posts regulations.
- Signs recognizing donors should not be brightly colored and should not include business logos unless otherwise approved.
- Donors of specific facilities or structures (such as benches, water fountains, etc.) can be identified, if desired, by a small, unobtrusive plaque or engraving on or near the structure. This identification should not be brightly colored and should not include business logos. Standard specifications for the signs will be set by the City of Palmer staff and City Council. These plaques would recognize contribution for facilities added after the park has been established.

8. PLACING MEMORIALS

Parks are visible, appropriate places to memorialize deceased citizens who have given special service to the community. Deciding whom to memorialize, and how to do so, requires serious consideration and reflection and should be guided by the following:

- Discussions and decisions regarding memorials of persons recently deceased should not occur until a minimum of three months after the person's death.

- A person who dies while performing a public service should receive priority for memorialization.
- Persons who have contributed exceptional services to their community can be memorialized.
- It is not recommended to change the name of an established park.

Trees or benches, accompanied by a small plaque, are ways to memorialize a person within a park. They should be placed in parks that are well-maintained.

9. LEASING CITY PARKS

While City parks are generally available for public use at no charge, there are certain situations when leases for special uses are necessary. This can occur when one individual or group will receive much greater benefits from park usage than would the general public, and the general public has no immediate interest in the land.

TYPES OF LEASES

The following policies will better guide City staff, future Park Board, or City Council in granting leases for City parks. The policies differ depending upon if the proposed purpose of lease is for an optimal recreational use, non-optimal recreational use, or non-recreational use.

Recreational Uses

It should first be determined if the proposed lease or special permit for recreational use would provide for the optimal use of the park. The determination can be guided by this plan, public comment, and staff assistance. If, after this guidance, uncertainty exists, then the use should be considered non-optimal. Different policies exist for optimal and non-optimal recreational uses.

Optimal uses

- The City will consider incentives to the lessee to develop and maintain the land as proposed.
- The City will consider a lease or permit for a length of time most desirable to the lessee.
- The land will be leased for a minimal fee to non-profit organizations. A fair rental amount will be charged to for-profit organizations
- The lessee must have insurance that removes all liability from the City.
- A public hearing must be held before any lease or permit is granted, and comments taken regarding the above issues and any other relevant concerns.
- After the lease or permit expires, and is not renewed by decision of either party, the land must be reclaimed to its previous condition.

Non-optimal uses

- The proposed use must not substantially alter the landscape, nor may it harm the natural environment.
- The lease or permit must be proposed for renewal every year. If an optimal use of the land is proposed at a later date, then the lease for the non-optimal use will not be renewed.
- After the lease or permit expires, and is not renewed by decision of either party, the land must be reclaimed to its previous condition.
- The land will be leased for a minimal fee to non-profit organizations. A fair rental amount will be charged to for-profit organizations
- The lessee must have insurance that removes all liability from the City.

- A public hearing must be held before any lease or permit is granted, and comments taken regarding the above issues and any other relevant concerns.

Non-Recreational Uses

For all non-recreational uses, the following criteria should be met before granting a lease or special use permit:

- The proposed use must not interfere with a public interest in the land.
- The proposed use must not substantially alter the landscape or harm the natural environment.
- The lease or permit must be proposed for renewal every year. If an optimal use of the land is proposed at a later date, then the lease for the non-optimal use will not be renewed.
- After the lease or permit expires, and is not renewed by decision of either party, the land must be reclaimed to its previous condition.
- The City will charge fair-market value for the lease or permit. Revenue will be used for park development, maintenance, or acquisition in the planning region where the funds are generated.
- The lessee must have insurance that removes all liability from the City
- A public hearing must be held before any lease or permit is granted, and comments taken regarding the above issues and any other relevant concerns.

10. FEASIBILITY STUDIES AND FUTURE SITE OPERATIONS PLANS

The City should perform a feasibility study and preliminary operations plan on any future development of park sites or recreational facilities where capital expenses are estimated to exceed \$1,000,000.

PROCEDURAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The procedural recommendations address issues that do not require policy or policy action, but are exercised through practices of the City of Palmer Parks and Recreation Program.

1. PARTNERSHIP STANDARDS

The success of the Palmer Parks and Recreation Program is largely due to the diversity of working partnerships with non-profit organizations and user groups for utilization and support with maintenance of park sites. It is recommended to develop partnership standards for current and future leaseholders and other partners. The following partnership standards are recommended for all current and future leaseholder and partnership agreements:

- All partnerships should require a written working agreement with measurable outcomes that hold each partner accountable to the desired outcomes and will be evaluated by the Program on an annual basis.
- Depending on the level of investment made by the partner, the partnership agreement can be limited to months, a year, or multiple years.
- All partnerships should track direct and indirect costs associated with the partnership investment to demonstrate the level of equity each partner is investing.
- Each partnership should exhibit collaborative planning on a yearly basis; regular communication; and annually reporting to each other's board or owners on how well the partnership is working and the results of their efforts to the taxpayers of Palmer.

2. MAINTENANCE STANDARDS

It is recommended to develop maintenance standards that can be applied to all City park and recreation sites whether they are managed directly or in concert with lease holders and other partners. These standards do not have to be stringent, just consistent in order to protect the safety of park users. The maintenance standards below are brief examples of high level requirements.

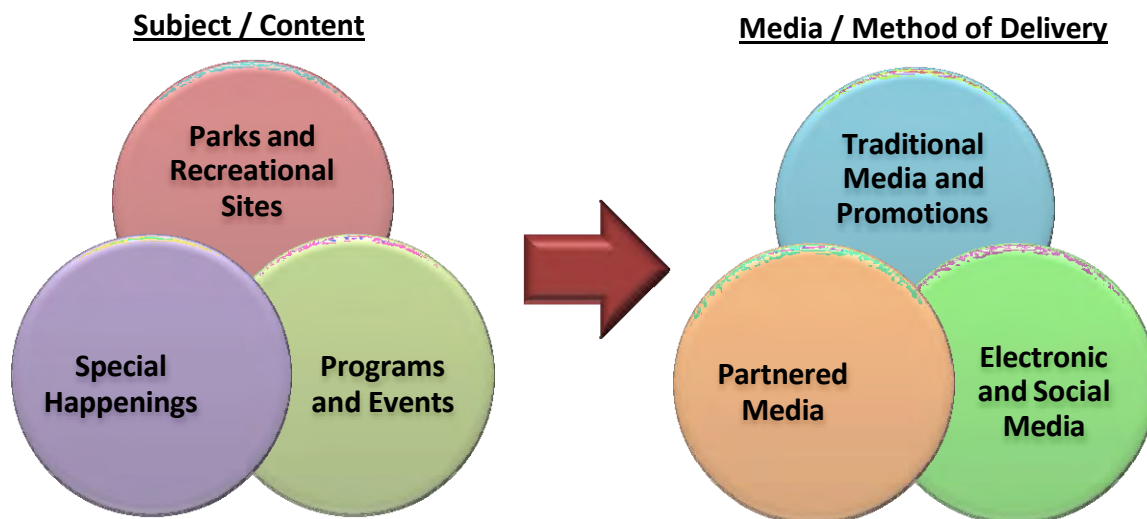
- Establish maintenance standards and frequency levels for each type of amenity based on established expectations of the visitors to the parks and to meet customer service requirements for a well maintained parks system. These standards can also vary by park or asset type, such as day use facilities, community centers, and regional parks.
- Train City staff and partners on maintenance standards and frequency levels for care to meet the expectations of the visitors to the City park system.
- Upgrade the amenities that have the highest level of use first to keep the sites well valued in local communities
- Seek outside funding and resource support to fund improvements for each park.
- Seek the local communities to engage in “clean up, fix up” events and days to keep the parks in prime position to support a strong visitor base appeal.
- Inspect sites and facilities on a seasonal basis to evaluate adherence to maintenance standards at a 90% or greater level of compliance.
- Management of forested areas, noxious weeds, and invasive species should be in accordance with the policies and practices detailed by City ordinance, policies of the Mat-Su Borough, and best practices utilized by other notable forest management agencies (local, state, and federal).

Specific recommendations for maintenance standards are provided in the appendices of this master plan.

3. COMMUNICATION PLAN

Among the prevalent findings of the public input process was a general lack of awareness among City residents of the parks and recreation opportunities available in Palmer. It is an important recommendation that the City develop and maintain an annual communication plan for promoting awareness and participation among residents of the City and the surrounding areas that includes a broad diversity of communication media – electronic and otherwise.

Communications Plan



6.2 ORGANIZATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The current structure and capabilities of the City of Palmer Parks and Recreation Program is limited due to the lack of personnel dedicated exclusively to the public service of parks and recreation by the City. Pursuit of many of the recommendations and strategies contained within this master plan will require enhancing the current Program's organizational capacity. This can be achieved through the following means:

- Establish a Parks, Recreation and Trails Advisory Board
- Establish a Parks and Recreation Department with dedicated or shared staff
- Contract labor
- Volunteers

The organizational recommendations that follow have been developed after careful study of the current capabilities of the Program, a review of priorities for implementing part or all of this master plan, use of multiple means for growing organizational capacity, and discussion with City staff and leadership.

PARKS, RECREATION AND TRAILS ADVISORY BOARD

A Parks, Recreation and Trails Advisory Board can provide great support for the City Council and City staff in development of strategies and implementation of this master plan. This would be a citizen advisory board that should include either five or seven members appointed by the City Council to serve alternating four-year terms. The Board should meet monthly as a public meeting, and elect their leadership (Chair and Vice Chair) each year. A staff liaison should be assigned by the City Council. The specific role of the Board should be to:

- Advise Council and staff on the development and implementation of strategies regarding the management and operations of parks, trails and recreational amenities in Palmer;
- Support and guide acquisition and development of future park sites in Palmer;
- Receive public comment and input related to parks, trails and recreational amenities;
- Advise staff and the Council on park, trail and recreational capital projects; and
- Recommend relevant policy changes or enhancements to the City Council based on staff recommendations.

The benefits of having a Parks, Recreation and Trails Advisory Board include, but are not limited to:

- Build advocacy in the community for relevant priorities and opportunities to further grow and enhance the parks, trails and recreational amenities of the City.
- Provide the City Council an additional organized public forum for addressing parks, recreation and trail issues that is outside of regular or special City Council meetings.
- Promote more citizen engagement in the public park, recreation and trail facilities and services of the City of Palmer.



Parks Board in Missoula County, Montana, discussing county-wide trail priorities

PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT

Establishing dedicated staff and personnel to manage the parks and recreation system in Palmer will support the implementation of this master plan and the ability of the City to meet on-going community needs. A parks and recreation department should initially consist of one or two persons to coordinate site and facility usage, coordinate site and facility maintenance priorities, work with local user groups and stakeholders, manage contracts and private operators, seek alternative funding to support capital and operational needs, and manage communication and promotion of park and recreation opportunities in the City. This department could directly report to the Community Development Director, and work with the Public Works Department for site and facility maintenance support. The following staff are recommended.

1. PARKS AND RECREATION DIRECTOR

This can be a dedicated position that is focused on the management of park and recreation sites and amenities in the City of Palmer, coordination with Public Works for maintenance, and coordination with user groups and other stakeholders for site and facilities use. This position would also be responsible for developing and maintaining an annual communications plan that promotes community awareness and participation in park and recreation opportunities in the City. Finally, the Parks and Recreation Director should be accountable to an annual budget allocation approved by the City Council, fund development from alternative sources for identified capital and operational needs, and management of additional staff, contract labor and volunteers supporting the City of Palmer Parks and Recreation Program.

Potential annual salary/wage cost: \$35,000 - \$45,000

Potential annual fund / resource development: \$100,000+ annually as a minimum expectation

2. PROGRAM AND TRAILS COORDINATOR

This can be a dedicated or shared position that is initially part-time and potentially evolves to a full-time position that is focused on the coordination of programs and services, as well as trail maintenance and development projects in the City of Palmer. This employee would be expected to assist in the pursuit of partnership opportunities linked to developing financial or capital resources, delivery of programs and services at parks and recreation facilities, and generating successful grant pursuits. Additionally, this position should be responsible to oversee trail maintenance and repair projects as they are assigned and support the Parks and Recreation Director in the implementation of capital projects related to trails.

Potential annual salary/wage cost: \$15,000 - \$35,000

Potential annual fund / resource development: \$25,000+ annually as a minimum expectation

CONTRACT LABOR

The Program currently utilizes contract labor for various functions on an as needed basis. There are no recommendations pertaining to any change in the contract labor practices of the Program.

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are a major part of current operations of the Program and are generally organized within user groups and leaseholders to meet the needs of an individual park or park asset. It is recommended to consider developing a formalized volunteer program that organizes work-days at parks and could incubate a source of labor support and awareness around meeting park and recreation site and facility needs of the City.

Chapter 7: Capital Improvement Plan

This *Capital Improvement Plan* section of the master plan is the culmination of facility and asset recommendations derived as priorities over the next 10 years. These recommended capital projects are aligned within the vision, mission, and core values of the Program, and have been preliminarily scoped based upon the findings of the assessments and needs analysis reports.

7.1 CAPITAL PROJECT IDENTIFICATION

This master plan update includes detailed and multi-faceted analyses into the current conditions of the City of Palmer park and recreation facilities and infrastructure, the demographics and trends relevant to the residents of the area, substantial public input and meetings, and additional need analyses. This process has yielded defensible recommendations for capital projects that can maintain and enhance the current quality of facilities available to residents of Palmer, as well as work to better meet the needs of visitors to the community.

Overall, this *Capital Improvement Plan* can be utilized as a guideline for future improvements and development with flexibility to be altered and updated as needed.

CAPITAL PROJECT PRIORITY ASSIGNMENT

Recommending priorities for capital projects over the next 10 years is a challenge due to all the factors that influence how a project can go from a recommendation to a reality. The suggested prioritization of these capital projects was developed based upon a number of dynamic factors including, but not limited to:

1. Potential capital costs of the project
2. Potential operating costs of the facility or asset once completed
3. Current financial capacity of the City of Palmer, as well as potential financial capacity available through grants, partnerships, and regional coordination
4. Public need and interests
5. Current political and economic conditions of the local area

Previous sections of this master plan address specific funding and finance alternatives that should be explored as a means to support these projects during both the development and operational phases. The final section of this master plan will organize these projects by their recommended priority status as a suggested action plan over the next decade.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PRINCIPLES

Development principles for parks include those that support the programming, planning, and design of facilities and assets to meet the needs of residents of the service area(s) and classifications within the overall parks system. The design of sites and facilities should be driven to create an enriched visitor experience including ease and diversity of use. This pertains to the ingress and egress as well as the circulation once the destination has been reached and participation has commenced. Three principles associated with the visitor experience can be summarized as follows:

- Sense of Arrival
 - Highway / street signage
 - Entrance(s)
 - Landscaping
 - View and aesthetics
- Aesthetic and Functional Signage
 - Directional
 - Safety and management

- Architecture and Use
 - Design with natural surroundings
 - Site circulation
 - Mixed use
 - Visitor satisfaction
 - Supports revenue generation where appropriate

Most activities associated with parks is designed around a desired length of experience. A blend of passive and active recreational opportunities extends the length of experience and increases the frequency of participation by users.

7.2 CAPITAL PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION PLAN



The pages that follow detail a recommended sequencing of capital projects for Palmer parks, trails and recreation facilities over the next 10 years. The sequencing of these projects was determined by community input and factors that reflect best practices in the parks and recreation industry. These factors are (not in priority order):

1. Creates or improved connectivity with trail enhancement or development
2. Optimizes use of a key facility or valued asset in the community
3. Optimizes usage of other key facilities in the community
4. Distributes City parks more equitably
5. Improves balance in facility/park types
6. Demand is high or increasing per trend and community research
7. Protects/manages open space
8. Improves park connectivity to communities
9. Partner and/or land is available
10. Targets underserved population
11. Improves current operations
12. Consistent with community survey and public input findings
13. Repairs or improves existing facility

Capital projects have been bundled into priorities for efficiency in this implementation plan. Projects should be unbundled from these priorities for practical purposes throughout the implementation phase. **Estimated capital costs are based upon the experience of the consultant team and are provided as a broad range to account for options for amenities that could be included in the scope, different means and methods for construction, industry inflation, and other variable costs that could be associated with each priority bundle.**




Potential capital costs only apply to the specific amenity, facility, or feature described in the recommended capital priority, and do not include grants, other outside funding sources, or cost sharing that could otherwise reduce the total costs to the City.




Estimated capital cost ranges are:




\$ A	= \$0 - \$50,000
\$	= \$50,000 - \$250,000
\$	= \$250,000 - \$500,000
\$	= \$500,000 - \$1,000,000
\$ 	= \$1,000,000 - \$5,000,000
\$ 	= \$5,000,000+




SHORT TERM CAPITAL PRIORITIES




The following capital priorities are identified to be the first tier of focus for facility enhancement and development over the next 10 years.




Capital Priority 1: City of Palmer park signage program			
Recommended Scope:	Develop a consistent park signage program to (1) identify City parks more prominently, (2) provide safety and usage guidelines and regulations, and (3) provide limited, but high quality interpretation of the natural and cultural significance of select sites.		
Estimated Capital Cost:	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>\$ </td> <td>Timeline: 1 to 3 years</td> </tr> </table>	\$ 	Timeline: 1 to 3 years
\$ 	Timeline: 1 to 3 years		

Capital Priority 2: Develop “Priority 1” trail(s) in Palmer			
Recommended Scope:	Develop trail(s) identified previously as Priority 1 (State Fairgrounds connections with central city; Arctic Avenue pathway) assisting to connect major focal points, parks, and other areas of interest.		
Estimated Capital Cost:	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>\$ </td> <td>Timeline: 1 to 3 years</td> </tr> </table>	\$ 	Timeline: 1 to 3 years
\$ 	Timeline: 1 to 3 years		

Capital Priority 3: Complete development of Wilson and Fairfield Parks			
Recommended Scope:	Complete development of Wilson Community Park and Fairfield Neighborhood Park as recommended in this master plan. This may require coordination with the subdivision developer and neighbors to the park properties. A separate public process regarding the proposed site plans is recommended.		
Estimated Capital Cost:	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>\$ </td> <td>Timeline: 1 to 3 years</td> </tr> </table>	\$ 	Timeline: 1 to 3 years
\$ 	Timeline: 1 to 3 years		

Capital Priority 4: Upgrade existing park and recreation amenities – Phase 1			
Recommended Scope:	Upgrade existing amenities at parks as identified in this master plan. The recommended first phase of this process includes projects detailed for Bugge Park (Cobb Avenue), Bill Hermann Tennis Courts, and Sherrod Park.		
Estimated Capital Cost:	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>\$ </td> <td>Timeline: 1 to 3 years</td> </tr> </table>	\$ 	Timeline: 1 to 3 years
\$ 	Timeline: 1 to 3 years		

Capital Priority 5: Develop a pump track / BMX park			
Recommended Scope:	Develop a pump track / BMX park as recommended in this master plan at either the site adjacent or nearby the existing skateboard park, or at another site that meets the recommended criteria.		
Estimated Capital Cost:	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>\$ </td> <td>Timeline: 1 to 3 years</td> </tr> </table>	\$ 	Timeline: 1 to 3 years
\$ 	Timeline: 1 to 3 years		

Capital Priority 6: Develop amenities at Dr. Myron F. Babb Arboretum to enhance usage			
Recommended Scope:	Develop amenities as identified in this master plan, as well as a separate public process addressing a specific site plan, in order to enhance usage of the site.		
Estimated Capital Cost:	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>\$ </td> <td>Timeline: 1 to 3 years</td> </tr> </table>	\$ 	Timeline: 1 to 3 years
\$ 	Timeline: 1 to 3 years		

SHORT TERM CAPITAL PRIORITY IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommendations for organizing short term capital priorities:

2012 – 2013

- Develop and install City park signage for 50-100% of City park sites
- Organize funding plans and initiatives to support City of Palmer costs to complete identified short term capital projects for trail development
- Organize funding plans and initiative to support City of Palmer costs to complete development of Wilson and Fairfield Parks per the adopted site plans
- Organize funding plans and initiatives to support City of Palmer costs to complete remaining identified short term capital projects

2013 – 2015




- Develop and install City park signage for remaining 50% of City park sites
- Complete development of Wilson and Fairfield Parks per the adopted site plans
- Complete development of identified trail development projects
- Complete selected park and recreation amenity upgrades and enhancements
- Complete development of a pump track / BMX park
- Complete enhancements to Dr. Myron F. Babb Arboretum
- Reorganize projects not completed due to funding or resource limitations and establish a revised timeline for these projects to be addressed









Play equipment at Bugge Park (Cobb Avenue)




INTERMEDIATE TERM CAPITAL PRIORITIES

The following capital priorities are identified to be the second tier of focus for facility enhancement and development over the next 10 years.

Capital Priority 7: Develop a “Heart of Palmer” park			
Recommended Scope:	Develop a centralized park site with amenities as recommended in this master plan. A separate public process will likely be required to formalize a specific site plan, as well as to build advocacy for the funding requirements of this project.		
Estimated Capital Cost:	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>\$ </td> <td>Timeline: 3 to 7 years</td> </tr> </table>	\$ 	Timeline: 3 to 7 years
\$ 	Timeline: 3 to 7 years		

Capital Priority 8: Develop “Priority 2” and “Priority 3” trails in Palmer			
Recommended Scope:	Develop trails identified previously as Priority 2 (west and southwest side connections) and Priority 3 (northern connection) assisting to connect major focal points, neighborhoods, parks, and other areas of interest.		
Estimated Capital Cost:	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>\$ </td> <td>Timeline: 3 to 7 years</td> </tr> </table>	\$ 	Timeline: 3 to 7 years
\$ 	Timeline: 3 to 7 years		

Capital Priority 9: Upgrade existing park and recreation amenities – Phase 2			
Recommended Scope:	Continue to upgrade existing amenities at parks as identified in this master plan. The recommended first phase of this process includes projects detailed for Hagen Park (Dolphin Avenue), Meier Park (Silver Tip Avenue), and the Palmer Skateboard Park.		
Estimated Capital Cost:	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>\$ </td> <td>Timeline: 3 to 7 years</td> </tr> </table>	\$ 	Timeline: 3 to 7 years
\$ 	Timeline: 3 to 7 years		

Capital Priority 10: Develop a Fitness Trail and Art & Culture Trail			
Recommended Scope:	Designate a trail section within Palmer as a Fitness Trail, and develop as recommended with a limited number of fitness stations. Also, mark existing and future trail with fitness information signage as detailed in this master plan. Designate a trail section as a Art & Culture Trail, and develop as recommended with trail art.		
Estimated Capital Cost:	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>\$ </td> <td>Timeline: 3 to 7 years</td> </tr> </table>	\$ 	Timeline: 3 to 7 years
\$ 	Timeline: 3 to 7 years		

INTERMEDIATE TERM CAPITAL PRIORITY IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommendations for organizing intermediate term capital priorities:

2012 – 2013

- Organize funding packages and initiatives to support City of Palmer costs to complete identified intermediate term capital projects

2013 – 2014


- Continue to organize and further develop funding plans and initiatives to support City of Palmer costs to complete identified intermediate term capital projects
- Initiate required or recommended public input processes for intermediate term projects when appropriate.


2014 – 2016


- Complete a “Heart of Palmer” park
- Complete selected trail development projects
- Complete selected recreation and play amenity park improvement projects
- Reorganize projects not completed due to funding or resource limitations and establish a revised timeline for these projects to be addressed


LONG TERM CAPITAL PRIORITIES

The following capital priorities are identified to be the third tier of focus for facility enhancement and development over the next 10 years.

Capital Priority 11:	Develop a park in northern portion of the City		
Recommended Scope:	Develop an additional City park as recommended in this master plan near or within the residential area of Cedar Hills.		
Estimated Capital Cost:	\$ 	Timeline:	5 to 10 years

Capital Priority 12:	Develop “Priority 4” and “Priority 5” trails in Palmer		
Recommended Scope:	Develop trails identified previously as Priority 4 (Fairgrounds to golf course connection) and Priority 5 (Crevasse Moraine connection) assisting to connect major focal points, neighborhoods, parks, and other areas of interest.		
Estimated Capital Cost:	\$ 	Timeline:	5 to 10 years

Capital Priority 13:	Develop natural surface trails in Palmer		
Recommended Scope:	Develop natural surface trails as identified in this master plan along the Matanuska River and near or to the Crevasse Moraine area.		
Estimated Capital Cost:	\$ 	Timeline:	5 to 10 years

Capital Priority 14:	Develop a regional or community park in southwestern portion of the City		
Recommended Scope:	Develop an additional City park as a regional or large community park with the recommended amenities and features identified in this master plan in the southwestern portion of the City.		
Estimated Capital Cost:	\$ 	Timeline:	5 to 10 years

LONG TERM CAPITAL PRIORITY IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommendations for organizing long term capital priorities:

2012 – 2016

- Organize funding plans and initiatives to support City of Palmer costs to complete identified long term capital projects
- Begin the process of planning long term projects, and building local advocacy

2016 – 2022















- Complete a new park in the northern portion of the City
- Complete selected trails development projects
- Complete initial plans and potential construction of a new park in the southwestern portion of the City
- Reorganize projects not completed due to funding or resource limitations and establish a revised timeline for these projects to be addressed



Trailhead signage for the Crevasse Moraine Trail System

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED CAPITAL PRIORITIES

The matrix below details a summary of the recommended capital priorities, the estimated capital costs, and the recommended timelines for implementation.

Capital Priorities	Description	Estimated Capital Cost	Timeline
Short Term Priorities			
Capital Priority #1	City of Palmer park signage program	\$ 	1 to 5 Years
Capital Priority #2	Develop "Priority 1" trail(s) in Palmer	\$ 	1 to 5 Years
Capital Priority #3	Complete development of Wilson and Fairfield Parks	\$ 	1 to 5 Years
Capital Priority #4	Upgrade existing park and recreation amenities – Phase 1	\$ 	1 to 5 Years
Capital Priority #5	Develop a pump track / BMX park	\$ 	1 to 5 Years
Capital Priority #6	Develop amenities at Dr. Myron F. Babb Arboretum to enhance usage	\$ 	1 to 5 Years
Intermediate Term Priorities			
Capital Priority #7	Develop a "Heart of Palmer" park	\$ 	3 to 7 years
Capital Priority #8	Develop "Priority 2" and "Priority 3" trails in Palmer	\$ 	3 to 7 years
Capital Priority #9	Upgrade existing park and recreation amenities – Phase 2	\$ 	3 to 7 years
Capital Priority #10	Develop a Fitness Trail and Art & Culture Trail	\$ 	3 to 7 years
Long Term Priorities			
Capital Priority #11	Develop a park in northern portion of the City	\$ 	5 to 10 years
Capital Priority #12	Develop "Priority 4" and "Priority 5" trails in Palmer	\$ 	5 to 10 years
Capital Priority #13	Develop natural surface trails in Palmer	\$ 	5 to 10 years
Capital Priority #14	Develop a regional or community park in southwestern portion of City	\$ 	5 to 10 years

TOTAL ESTIMATED CAPITAL COSTS

The total estimated costs projected for capital projects over the next 10 years are provided as a broad range due to unforeseeable circumstances in the future. Varying factors include, but are not limited to scope variations, design criteria, and construction costs. These costs represent the estimated cost to the City which can be reduced or managed through the funding options detailed in this master plan.

Estimated Short Term Costs	Estimated Intermediate Term Costs	Estimated Long Term Costs
\$500,000 - \$900,000	\$2,250,000 - \$2,750,000	\$5,000,000 - \$6,000,000

Chapter 8: Funding and Revenue Plan

The purpose of the funding and revenue plan is to assist the City of Palmer in maximizing its financial sustainability of the Parks and Recreation Program and guide the financial planning process for the next five to ten years. The information provided was from a workshop assessment completed in September 2011 with key staff, community stakeholders, and representation from the City Council.

The City of Palmer mostly uses general fund revenues of the City that are derived predominantly from sales and property taxes to maintain parks and trails. The City of Palmer has the potential to expand to a more diversified funding and finance strategy that involves other revenue sources, as well to supplement general fund allocations for land acquisition and development. The suggested strategies in this funding and revenue plan have been successful in other similar communities around the United States to support their parks and recreation department, and should be reviewed and considered by Palmer as the City builds its own funding strategy for the next 10 years.

8.1 FINANCIAL POLICIES

The Program does not appear to have written policies for managing the financial operations. While Palmer is unique in many ways, many best-in-class programs or departments have policies that assist in both daily and long term decisions. These policies typically address:

- Pricing
- Partnership
- Sponsorship
- Volunteers

Pricing policies establish guidelines for pricing of programs and services. It is likely that the City of Palmer will rarely or never have the occasion where sophisticated pricing schedules are required; however there are circumstances where the Program collects fees or payments for land or amenity usage. Pricing policies can be a guide for cost recovery from fees and charges, peak and off-peak pricing, and tiered pricing based on levels of service as it applies to park usage, reservations, programs and services.

Partnership policies establish guidelines for agreements with partnering entities to assure that there is equity in the partnership to benefit both parties. The guidelines usually include a description of the types of partnerships (public/public, not-for-profit/public and public/private) that are compatible with the community values and a summary of services that are best suited for partnering.

Sponsorship policies establish guidelines for agreements with entities that are interested to sponsor specific events, programs and services. The guidelines should include the type of events and programs that the Program will consider for a sponsorship. Sponsorship pricing and identification/recognition are also established and included in the policy.

Volunteer policies provide operating guidelines recruiting, training, managing, and tracking volunteer efforts. Volunteer guidelines include responsibilities, minimum standards, and rules of operation.

8.2 FUNDING OPTIONS

In order to continue to build and maintain the park system, the Program should pursue funding sources presented in this section for operations and capital improvement projects.

New, sustainable funding sources are essential to implementing the master plan. The Program has relied heavily on taxes, and some developer fees, to support the system. The key for the future is to diversify sources of funding to accomplish the initiatives in this master plan. These sources need to be committed on a long-term basis to assure a continuing income stream. There is significant potential to

increase revenue to operate the parks and recreation services, while still meeting the objectives of providing affordable public recreation opportunities. The following are suggested funding options that can be considered by the City of Palmer specifically for parks, recreation and trail projects and initiatives.

EXTERNAL FUNDING SOURCES

The following examples provide external funding opportunities for the Program to consider for the future. Each of these sources can be evaluated in more detail to determine the level of funding they would yield if pursued aggressively. External funding sources are those that leverage funding from *outside* the traditional revenue and debt service means of the City, usually seeking funding from outside sources to augment City financial resources.

PARK FOUNDATION OR CONSERVANCY

A park foundation or conservancy partnership is a joint development funding source or operational funding source between the foundation and the government agency. The foundation operates as a non-profit organization working on behalf of the public agency to raise needed dollars to support the vision and operational needs of the Program for the future.

The dollars that are raised from the foundation are tax-exempt. These types of park foundations are non-profit organizations established with private donations in promotion of specific causes, activities, or issues that the park system needs to address. They offer a variety of means to fund capital projects, including capital campaigns, gifts catalogs, fundraisers, endowments, sales of park related items, etc. The park foundation can be an incredible funding source for the Program over the next 15 years if established correctly and with the right staffing to raise significant dollars for the Program for the future.

Private donations may also be received in the form of funds, land, facilities, recreation equipment, art or in-kind services. Donations from local and regional businesses as sponsors for events or facilities should be pursued. A park foundation in Palmer could generate \$100,000 to \$250,000 a year if set up and managed correctly based on similar type of cities with similar wealth.

GREENWAY FOUNDATIONS

Many cities have turned to greenway foundation to help develop and maintain trails and green corridors throughout the city. The City of Indianapolis Greenway Foundation develops and maintains the greenways throughout the city and seeks land leases along the trails as one funding sources, as well as “selling” miles of trails to community corporations and non-for-profits. In addition, cities sell the development rights along the trails for local utilities for water, sewer, fiber optic, and cable lines on a mile-by-mile basis which helps to develop and manage these corridors.

FRIENDS ASSOCIATION

Friends associations are a form of a foundation but are formed to raise money typically for a single focus purpose that could include a park facility or program that will better the community as a whole and their special interest.

FOUNDATIONS SUPPORT AND SEEK IRREVOCABLE REMAINDER TRUSTS

These trusts are set up with individuals who typically have more than \$1 million in wealth. They will leave a portion of their wealth to a park agency in a trust fund that allows the fund to grow over a period of time and then is available for an agency to use a portion of the interest to support specific park and recreation facilities or programs that are designated by the trustee.

CORPORATE/PERSONAL GIVING

Corporate and personal giving is a process where the Program Coordinator seeks corporate leadership funds via a foundation partner or through personal contact to support a specific project or a specific operational goal that helps the Program to manage forward. These gifts can come in the form of a financial gift for a year or up to five years to support the park system for the future. Many park agencies develop a park fund raising event to appeal to private corporations' leaders to support the park system as part of their fee to come to the event.

GRANTS

The grant market continues to grow annually. Grant writers and researchers are required to make this funding source work financially. Matching dollars are required for most federal grants and some state grants. The type of grants available to the City could be the following:

- Safe Routes to Schools
- Land and Water Conservation Fund Grants (LWCF)
- Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)
- Economic Development Administration (EDA)
- Storm water grants that the limit storm water runoff through parks
- Trail Enhancement Grants for regional trails systems through the state and federal system
- Development grants through community foundations to support specific park projects
- Redevelopment grants to support parks and facilities that increase revenue from the value of property or from activities that create sales and tourism taxes

FACILITY AUTHORITIES

Facility authorities are used by park and recreation agencies to improve a specific park or develop a specific improvement such as a stadium, large recreation centers, large aquatic centers, or sports venues for competitive events. The revenue to sustain repayment of these bonds usually comes from sales and/or property taxes. The City of Indianapolis has created several community venues for recreation purposes and national competition events for local purposes and economic purposes. The facility authority is responsible for managing the sites and operating them in a self-supporting manner.

FACILITIES, IMPROVEMENT OR BENEFIT DISTRICTS

Many municipalities also are a part of regional trails systems have developed a trails district to support costs and management requirements for development and maintenance. Sometimes this includes multiple counties, and usually is funded through a bond issue and/or various tax initiatives. A facilities or trails district can also be a major impetus for raising external financial support from foundations, individuals, corporate sponsors, grants, and more.

A benefit district is similar to an improvement district and identifies the benefits associated with an improvement. A sales or property tax is then established to support the capital cost associated with the acquisition and development of the property. This is usually applied to community parks, regional parks, downtown districts, event plazas, signature parks, and attractions. The benefit districts are usually in downtown areas or in regions of the city slated for redevelopment.

DEVELOPER CONTRIBUTIONS TO PARKS AND TRAILS

Many municipalities seek developer contributions for park land and also for development of trails that could run through their property. The developer sees the value to the sale of their houses and they put in the trail connection as part of their contribution. Park and/or trail dedication as a requirement of subdivision development is a reliable opportunity to keep pace with neighborhood and community park needs of the City.

DEVELOPER CASH-IN-LIEU FEES

Alaska state law allows cities to accept cash-in-lieu of park land. This program can help move away from small developed parks in subdivisions by seeking the cash value of the property to buy the type of land that supports the City’s goal for land acquisition and park development. This is very popular and allows counties to put enough cash together to buy larger tracts of land that can support many recreation opportunities in one setting. As recommended in this master plan, park development fees should be considered to be a part of the cash-in-lieu calculation.

DONATIONS

Private donations can be a popular form of fundraising for public agencies, particularly on facilities and services that are highly visible and valued by the public. Donations can either be received directly by the City, or channeled through a park foundation or conservancy aligned with the City’s park, recreation and trail priorities. Support from donations for parks and trails can come from through one or more of the following methods:

- Donations of cash to a specific park or trail segment by community members and businesses
- Donations of services by large corporations to reduce the cost of park or trail implementation, including equipment and labor to construct and install elements of a specific park or trail
- Reductions in the cost of materials purchased from local businesses that support parks and trails implementation and can supply essential products for facility

ADOPT-A-TRAIL PROGRAMS

These are typically small grant programs that fund new construction, repair/renovation, maps, trail brochures, and facilities (bike racks, picnic areas, birding equipment), as well as provide maintenance support. These programs are similar to the popular adopt-a-mile of highway programs most states utilize. Adopt-a-trail programs can also be in the form of cash contributions that typically include a range of \$12,000 to \$16,000 a mile to cover the total operational costs.



ADOPT-A-PARK PROGRAMS

Similar to adopt-a-trail programs, adopt-a-park programs are small grant programs that fund new construction, repair/renovation, and facilities, as well as provide maintenance support. Adopt-A-Park programs can also be in the form of cash contributions that typically include a range of \$1,000 to \$5,000 an acre to cover the total operational costs.

PARTNERSHIPS – DEVELOPMENT AND/OR OPERATION

Partnerships are joint development funding sources or operational funding sources between two separate agencies, such as two government entities, a non-profit and a public agency, or a private business and a public agency. Two partners jointly develop revenue producing park and recreation facilities and share risk, operational costs, responsibilities and asset management, based on the strengths and weaknesses of each partner.

LEASE BACKS

This is another source of capital funding where banks or private placement fund companies will develop a park, recreation attraction, recreation center, pool, or sports complex with the intent of buying the land, developing a recreation attraction and then leasing it back to the city to pay off the land or capital costs over a 30 to 40 year period. Cities like to use this source because they can increase their operational budgets easier than they can get capital dollars to pay off the lease over a set period of time.

INTERNAL FUNDING SOURCES

The following examples provide internal funding opportunities for the Program to consider for the future. Each of these sources can be evaluated in more detail to determine the level of funding they would yield if pursued aggressively. Internal funding sources are those that represent an expansion or enhancement of traditional revenue and debt service means of the City, usually seeking additional funding from City financial capabilities.

PARKS, RECREATION AND TRAILS DEDICATED FUNDING SOURCES

Municipalities that seek a dedicated funding source for parks, recreation and trails typically have several options: dedicate a percentage of a sales tax, various fees, and/or dedicated millage to park and trail project that is increased or maintained every 10 years. The revenues generated from dedicated funding sources typically go toward operations and maintenance costs of the managing the park sites, programs, and trails in accordance with the community's expectations. These sources can also support the costs of incremental upgrading and replacement of existing park and recreation amenities.

SALES TAX

Palmer currently maintains a 3.00% sales tax that generates between 40-50% of the total revenues of the City. One dedicated funding source for parks, recreation and trails in Palmer is an additional percentage sales tax that is committed to maintaining park sites, infrastructure, recreational fields, and trails. The value of a sales tax is that it collects revenues from both residents and non-residents that do business in Palmer, thereby expanding the funding burden beyond City residents. An increase of $\frac{1}{4}$ percent (0.25%) is estimated to be able to generate between \$400,000 and \$450,000 annually.

REAL ESTATE TRANSFER FEES

This is among the newest form of funding many local park agencies and states have used to acquire park land and develop the lands they acquire. The money comes from the transfer of real-estate from one owner to another owner and the city retains $\frac{1}{2}$ percent (0.50%) of the value of the property at the time of sale paid by the buyer, not the seller. These monies are then reserved and dedicated to the acquisition and development of parks in the City.

FRANCHISE FEE FOR UTILITY RIGHT-OF-WAYS

Many park and recreation agencies have sold the development rights below the ground to utility companies for fiber optic lines, water, sewer and electricity lines and cable services on linear-foot basis. King County in Seattle sold the development rights below their greenway network and generates \$300,000 a year from the utilities involved.

STORM WATER UTILITY FEES

This funding source is used in many cities as a way to develop greenways and trail corridors from the storm water tax on utilities that residents pay as part of their utility bills. Improvements can include trails, drainage areas, retention ponds used for recreation purposes and natural protection of waterways through cities. An example of this is the City of Houston that is using this source to develop and maintain their bayous in the city, and to improve the access and use of them throughout the community for flood control and recreation purposes.

DEDICATED MILLAGE

This provides the opportunity for the Park System to demonstrate how well they are meeting the community's needs through a voter approved millage. In the last five years in the United States, 93% of all park-related bonds and millage issues have passed. Communities understand the value of parks if given the opportunity to vote on an increase. One mil in Palmer can generate an estimated \$95,500 annually. Currently, the City levies 12.956 mils as a property tax.

PARK, OPEN SPACE, AND TRAIL BOND ISSUES

Cities typically seek park bond issues to support unmet needs in the community. The key is to use debt financing through bonds to address needs that are unmet and clearly a community priority. It is best to deliver a capital bond project that serves a variety of types of users and needs in the City. Even in the worst economic downturn bond issues have been passing because communities see that they are the direct recipient of the money that benefits them and their families on a personal basis. Given the current economic climate and financial circumstances of the City, no more than \$2,000,000 - \$2,500,000 in bonds is recommended to be considered. A 20-year repayment schedule of \$2,500,000 financed at 4.50% (APR), would require an annual debt payment of \$192,190. This could be supported by two mills levied on property in the City.

TRANSIENT OCCUPANCY TAX (BED TAX)

This funding source is used by many cities to fund improvements in parks to improve the image of the area, enhance parks where hotels and businesses are located around the park, to support the development of a park related improvement or to build an attraction. Cities charge 5 to 10% tax on the value of a hotel room dedicated to improve facilities and market the community. The tax is usually set between the city and county and its goal is to support tourism and attractions to the city. This can either be used to support funding for specific park development or improvements that is discontinued once the debt is fully serviced, or can be established as a component of dedicated funding for parks, recreation and trails in a community. Palmer currently has a 5% bed tax on hotel and motel rooms in the City.

FEES, LAND LEASES, AND TAX INCREMENT FINANCE OPPORTUNITIES

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT FEE

Many agencies add a capital improvement fee onto an existing user fee when they develop or enhance major recreation facilities. This is usually applied to golf courses, aquatic facilities, recreation centers, ice rinks, amphitheatres and special use facilities like sports complexes. The dollars created either pay back the cost of the capital improvement or the revenue bond that was used to develop or enhance the special use facility. Once the capital improvement is paid off, the fee typically expires and is discontinued.

HOMEOWNER ASSOCIATION FEES

This funding source is used highly across the United States for developing parks and maintaining parks. Residents in these neighborhoods tax themselves with a fee for parks, landscape of roadways, boulevards, and neighborhood parks for park developments and ongoing maintenance. These improvements raise the value of homes and the quality of the neighborhood because of this dedicated homeowner fee.

CATERING PERMITS AND SERVICES

This is a license to allow caterers to work in the park system on a permit basis with a set fee or a percentage of food sales returning to an agency. Many agencies have their own catering service contracts in place and receive a percentage of dollars off the sale of their food and drinks for a percentage of gross dollars (10-15%). This would likely be most suitable for large or special events occurring on City properties. Another form of collecting fees for catering is currently used by the City in the requirement of these services to acquire a temporary business license.

RECREATION SERVICE FEES

This is a dedicated user fee, which can be established by a local ordinance or other government procedures for the purpose of constructing and maintaining recreation facilities. The fee can apply to all organized activities, which require a reservation of some type or other purposes, as defined by the local government. Examples of such activities include adult basketball, volleyball, tennis, and softball leagues, youth baseball, soccer, football and softball leagues, and special interest classes. The fee allows participants an opportunity to contribute toward the upkeep of the facilities being used.

SOLID WASTE FEE

Many cities charge a tipping fee at landfills to support parks and recreation facilities including acquiring and developing park land. Tipping fees add \$5 dollars per tipping from a user, and also represent a fee that is collected for more than just City residents to support the costs of developing and maintaining park, recreation and trail assets.

PRIVATE CONCESSIONAIRES OPERATING WITHIN A LAND LEASE

Contract with a private business to provide and operate desirable recreational activities financed, constructed and operated by the private sector, with additional compensation paid to the agency through a land lease. The communities that have used land lease look for retail operations that support the needs of recreation users of the parks and the trails. This includes coffee shops, grill and food concessions and small restaurants, ice cream shops, bicycle shops, farmers markets and small local business. Land leases are usually based on 15% of the value of the land plus a percentage of gross from the operation on an annual basis.

REGIONAL "CANNED" EVENTS

Many city and county park systems have bought canned special events that have produced large amount of revenue for their Program. The City can support the event with volunteers and the event is put on by the private franchised agency for a set access fee paid by the either the City and/or its partners, who then receive a percentage of gross revenues from the event. Events like these have reliably and regularly produced similar communities \$300,000 a year in net revenue.

TAX INCREMENT FINANCING

TIF Districts are very popular with counties to support park related improvements that can include trails, golf courses, special use facilities and general park improvements. The intent is that if the improvement(s) enhances the property values surrounding the amenity because of what it brings in the form of recreation opportunities, then TIF options are appropriate. This is a very popular way to support development of new park or enhancing existing parks in the City.

8.3 FUNDING CONCLUSION

The Program should seek external funding sources to provide additional resources to enhance and maintain the quality of the facilities and services. The Program can periodically review the funding model to consider new and enhanced funding opportunities. The results of the community survey indicated that only 15% of City residents were opposed to additional funding initiatives to support parks, recreation and trails in Palmer. The community did express, however, they would only support specific projects with clearly identified costs and benefits. If diversified funding options were implemented in a phased approach over the next 10 years, there is the potential of providing an additional \$500,000 - \$1,000,000 annually to support debt service or direct costs for park and trail development, improvement and operations. This would include additional funding obtained through foundation support, grants, and other earned revenue opportunities.

FUNDING MATRIX SUMMARY

Funding Option	Capital Funding	Operational Funding	Annual Funding Potential
Park Foundation	X	X	\$ 🚶🚶🚶
Grants*	X		\$ 🚶🚶
Facility Authority	X	X	\$ 🚶🚶🚶🚶
Improvement or Benefit District	X	X	\$ 🚶🚶🚶🚶
Developer Parkland Dedications*	X		\$ 🚶🚶
Develop Cash-in-Lieu*	X		\$ 🚶🚶
Donations	X	X	\$ 🚶
Adoption (Trail or Park) Programs	X	X	\$ 🚶
Partnerships and Lease Backs*	X		\$ 🚶🚶🚶🚶
Sales Tax	X	X	\$ 🚶🚶🚶
Real Estate Transfer Fees	X	X	\$ 🚶🚶
Franchise Fee for Utility Right-of-Ways	X	X	\$ 🚶🚶
Storm Water Utility Fees	X	X	\$ 🚶🚶
Dedicated Park and Trail Millage	X	X	\$ 🚶🚶
Park Bond Issue*	X		\$ 🚶🚶🚶🚶
Transient Occupancy Tax	X	X	\$ 🚶
Capital Improvement Fees	X		\$ 🚶
Homeowner Association Fees	X	X	\$ 🚶
Catering Permits and Services		X	\$ 🚶
Recreation Service Fees		X	\$ 🚶
Solid Waste Fee	X	X	\$ 🚶🚶
Private Concessionaires / Land Leases	X	X	\$ 🚶🚶
Regional Canned Events*	X	X	\$ 🚶🚶
Tax Incremental Financing*	X		\$ 🚶🚶🚶

The relative funding potential is provided as a range based on a review of the capacity of the City of Palmer to mobilize funding in the options detailed above. The ranges are:

- \$ 🚶 = \$0 - \$50,000
- \$ = \$50,000 - \$250,000
- \$ = \$250,000 - \$500,000
- \$ = \$500,000 - \$1,000,000
- \$ 🚶🚶🚶🚶 = \$1,000,000 - \$5,000,000
- \$ 🚶🚶🚶🚶🚶 = \$5,000,000+

***Note:** These funding options may not produce annual funds based on how they are pursued and implemented.

Chapter 9: Strategic Action Plan

This final chapter of the master plan has been developed as a tactical tool for planning and executing actions aligned with the approved strategies of the Program in meeting community needs and interests over the next 10 years. These actions and strategies have been tested against and support the core services of the City of Palmer Parks and Recreation Program. These core services are:

- **Site and Infrastructure Stewardship**
 - Parks, facilities, and trails
- **Health**
 - Access to recreational opportunities that can provide for personal wellness
- **Safety**
 - Site and facility maintenance
 - Site security
- **Community Heritage**
 - Conservation of parks and open space

9.1 STRATEGIES OF THE MASTER PLAN

There were 24 key strategies identified through the public input process associated with this master plan update that were detailed previously in the Community Values Model. These strategies were uniquely developed to steer the Program in the next decade to remain a highly valued asset and service in Palmer by meeting community needs, interests, and expectations, and are based upon the findings from multiple interviews, numerous focus groups, public meetings, and the statistically-valid community survey. The strategies are organized into five categories and have been addressed in all recommendations throughout this master plan. The categories and subsequent strategies are detailed below.

CATEGORY 1: COMMUNITY MANDATES

Goal: Maintain and enhance parks, trails and recreation facilities and programs to promote community interaction, healthy lifestyles and safety.

Strategy 1.1: Care for and enhance the quality of current park sites, facilities, amenities of the City of Palmer Parks and Recreation System.

Strategy 1.2: Provide parks and trails that reflect the ability to serve a diverse public.

Strategy 1.3: Upgrade park and trail facilities to address management challenges and to meet the needs of current users.

Strategy 1.4: Continue to enhance safety and security in parks and trails that encourages positive use of community amenities

Strategy 1.5: Pursue responsible new improvements of the parks and trails in areas of the greatest growth and unmet needs.

Strategy 1.6: Leverage a variety of resources to support capital and operational needs of the City of Palmer Parks and Recreation System.

CATEGORY 2: SERVICE STANDARDS

Goal: Update and utilize standards for acquisition, development, design, operations, and maintenance of parks, trails and recreational facilities.

Strategy 2.1: Utilize consistent standards for acquisition of new park lands, trails, or park amenities.

- Strategy 2.2:** Utilize consistent design standards in park and facility development for landscaping, amenities, and infrastructure.
- Strategy 2.3:** Establish standards and parameters for partnerships within both the public and private sectors to augment the capital and operational resources of the City.
- Strategy 2.4:** Enhance communication standards for marketing and promotions of City parks and trails to improve community awareness of programs, services, and facilities, as well as to diversify usage of amenities and expand public feedback opportunities.
- Strategy 2.5:** Maintain consistent and updated standards for asset and amenity management in order to maximize and expand their useful lifespan.
- Strategy 2.6:** Maintain local, state, and national recognition as a best practices organization.
- Strategy 2.7:** Maintain compliance with all existing and applicable laws and regulations.

CATEGORY 3: PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Goal: Provide balance and consistency in delivery of programs and services by meeting the needs of the diverse residents of the City of Palmer.

- Strategy 3.1:** Enhance support of recreational program and service providers that utilize City parks and recreational sites and facilities to sustain and potentially expand community participation.
- Strategy 3.2:** Establish a regional trails collaboration program that can advance the pursuit of trails that connect communities within the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.
- Strategy 3.3:** Develop an interpretive signage program that appropriately interprets the significance of the natural, cultural and historic resources of parks and landscapes within the City of Palmer.

CATEGORY 4: BUSINESS PRACTICES

Goal: Manage park and trail facilities and programs that support the financial goals and policies of the City of Palmer.

- Strategy 4.1:** Establish alternative funding policies and procedures that support capital and operating expenses.
- Strategy 4.2:** Maximize the capability of new and existing technology to enhance business practices.
- Strategy 4.3:** Develop a financial plan for programs, services, and facilities that appropriately balances public funding support with earned revenues, and that balances affordability and entrepreneurialism in the programs and services of the City.

CATEGORY 5: COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND PARTNERSHIPS

Goal: Maximize resources through mutually acceptable partnerships that leverage parks, trails and recreation facility development and program opportunities.

Strategy 5.1: Develop a formalized on-going community outreach strategy to expand awareness of parks and recreation services offered to the community

Strategy 5.2: Develop a sustainable partnership with an established non-profit organization to leverage private sector funding to support select capital projects and programs.

Strategy 5.3: Review and update terms of agreements with existing partners utilizing City of Palmer parks and facilities for public or private events.

Strategy 5.4: Play an active role in the network of park, trail, and recreational services and opportunities available to residents, organizations and businesses in Palmer and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.



Memorial at Mat-Su Valley Visitors Center

9.2 ACTION PLAN

All the strategies and recommendations of this *Parks, Trails and Recreational Fields Master Plan* are detailed in the tables that follow. Some actions are shown independently and some in bundles for efficiency purposes.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS: SHORT TERM

Actions / Recommendations	Responsible Parties	Potential Funding Sources
Policy and Procedural Recommendations		
Subdivision regulations / acquisition standards – begin the process of review, potential modification, and adoption of amended subdivision regulations as determined appropriate.	City Staff City Planning and Zoning Commission City Council	City operations
Maintenance and management standards – begin the process to review, modify and adopt maintenance and management standards as determined appropriate.	City Staff City Council	City operations
Enhance the funding and finance strategies – enhance the funding and finance strategies utilized by the City of Palmer to support the acquisition, development, operations and maintenance of parks, trails and recreation facilities.	City Staff City Council	City operations
Organizational Recommendations		
Parks, Recreation and Trail Advisory Board – establish and appoint members to a Parks, Recreation and Trails Advisory Board as recommended to remain aligned with the organizational needs of the City and community needs of residents.	City Staff City Council	City operations
Parks and Recreation Department – pursue the development of a Parks and Recreation Department as recommended and as needed to remain aligned with the organizational needs of the City and community needs of residents.	City Staff City Council	City operations Dedicated funding source(s) Fees and charges
Volunteers – pursue development of enhanced volunteer program to develop Friends groups and city-wide volunteer efforts.	City Staff	City operations Foundations and grants
Capital Project Recommendations		
City of Palmer park signage program – begin development of a city park signage program as recommended, as well as consistent park rules.	City Staff	City operations Dedicated funding source(s) Fees and charges Foundations and grants Adoption programs
Develop “Priority 1” trail(s) – develop and implement project plans for trails connecting the State Fairgrounds to the central portion of the City.	City Staff City Council	City operations Dedicated funding source(s) Fees and charges Foundations and grants Adoption programs
Complete Wilson and Fairfield Parks – work to complete Wilson Community Park and Fairfield Neighborhood Park as recommended.	City Staff City Council	City operations Dedicated funding source(s) Foundations and grants Adoption programs Developer contributions

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS: SHORT TERM (CONTINUED)

Actions / Recommendations	Responsible Parties	Potential Funding Sources
Capital Project Recommendations		
Upgrade existing park and recreation amenities (Phase 1) – develop project plans to upgrade park and recreation amenities as recommended, including community-driven projects.	City Staff City Council	City operations Dedicated funding source(s) Fees and charges Foundations and grants Adoption programs
Develop a pump track / BMX park – develop project plans to design and construct a pump track / BMX park as recommended.	City Staff City Council	City operations Dedicated funding source(s) Fees and charges Foundations and grants Adoption programs
Develop amenities at Dr. Myron F. Babb Arboretum – begin project plans to enhance usage through development of appropriate amenities as recommended.	City Staff City Council	City operations Dedicated funding source(s) Foundations and grants Adoption programs

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS: INTERMEDIATE TERM

Actions / Recommendations	Responsible Parties	Potential Funding Sources
Policy and Procedural Recommendations		
Continuation of previous actions – continued work to complete and/or implement policy and procedural recommendations as appropriate.	City Staff City Parks Board City Council	City operations
Organizational Recommendations		
Continuation of previous actions – continued work to complete and/or implement organizational recommendations as appropriate.	City Staff City Parks Board	City operations Dedicated funding source(s) Fees and charges Foundations and grants
Capital Project Recommendations		
Develop a “Heart of Palmer” park – develop project plans for the design and construction of a “Heart of Palmer” park as recommended.	City Staff City Parks Board City Council	City operations Dedicated funding source(s) Special district Foundations and grants Bond issue Adoption programs Lease back options
Develop “Priority 2” and “Priority 3” trails, and Fitness and Art & Culture trails – develop and implement project plans for trails in the west, southwest and northern portions of the City.	City Staff City Parks Board City Council	City operations Dedicated funding source(s) Special district Foundations and grants Bond issue Adoption programs
Upgrade existing park and recreation amenities (Phase 2) – develop project plans to upgrade park and recreation amenities as recommended, including community-driven projects.	City Staff City Parks Board City Council	City operations Dedicated funding source(s) Fees and charges Foundations and grants Adoption programs

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS: LONG TERM

Actions / Recommendations	Responsible Parties	Potential Funding Sources
Policy and Procedural Recommendations		
Continuation of previous actions – continued work to complete and/or implement policy and procedural recommendations as appropriate.	City Staff City Parks Board City Council	City operations
Organizational Recommendations		
Continuation of previous actions – continued work to complete and/or implement organizational recommendations as appropriate.	City Staff City Parks Board	City operations Dedicated funding source(s) Fees and charges Foundations and grants
Capital Project Recommendations		
Develop a new park in the northern portion of the City – develop project plans to design and construct an additional neighborhood park as recommended.	City Staff City Parks Board City Council	City operations Dedicated funding source(s) Foundations and grants Fees and charges Adoption programs
Develop “Priority 4” and “Priority 5” trails, and natural surface trails – develop and implement project plans for trails in the east and southern portions of the City.	City Staff City Parks Board City Council	City operations Dedicated funding source(s) Special district Foundations and grants Bond issue Adoption programs
Develop a new park in the southwestern portion of the City – develop project plans to design and construct an additional community or regional park as recommended.	City Staff City Parks Board City Council	City operations Dedicated funding source(s) Special district Foundations and grants Bond issue Adoption programs Lease back options



Ball fields at Sherrod Park

Appendices to the Parks, Trails and Recreational Fields Master Plan

There have been multiple research and analysis reports, technical studies, and site schematics developed as a part of the City of Palmer *Parks, Trails and Recreational Fields Master Plan* process. The following supplemental reports are provided as appendices to the master plan.

1. **Palmer Park Site Schematics**

A complete set of site schematics for each park managed and operated by the City of Palmer.

2. **Suggested Maintenance Standards**

A summary of recommended maintenance standards for Palmer parks and recreation sites based on industry best practices.

3. **Comprehensive Assessment Report**

A summary of the key findings from the site, facility, program, and financial assessments performed on Palmer parks, trails and recreational facilities from February through June 2011.

4. **Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment Survey Findings Report**

A summary of the survey process, instruments, and findings of the Palmer community surveys conducted in association with this master plan from April through July 2011.

5. **Needs Analysis Technical Report**

A summary of the key findings from the community input process, demographics and trends analyses, and the technical needs analyses of relevant parks and trail needs of Palmer residents.

Photo opposite page: Dr. Myron F. Babb Arboretum



Appendix 1: Palmer Park Site Schematics

The following site schematics are provided in this order:

1. A-moose-ment Park
2. Bugge Park
3. Busby / Soule Fields and Hermann Tennis Courts
4. Dr. Myron F. Babb Arboretum
5. Fairfield Park
6. McKechnie Park
7. Meier Park
8. MTA Events Center / Ice Arena
9. Palmer Skateboard Park
10. Sherrod Park North
11. Sherrod Park South
12. Wilson Park

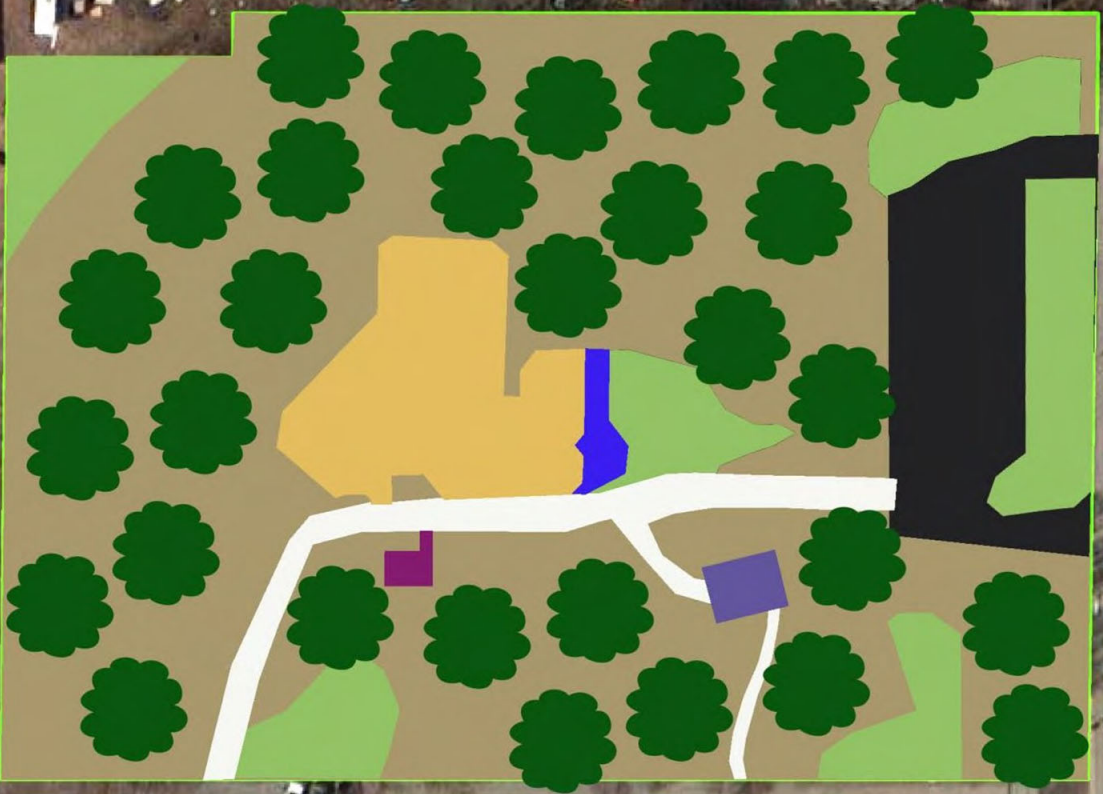
A-Moose-Ment Park
 420 West Fern Avenue
 3.53 Acres

-  Turf
-  Vegetative Areas
-  Basketball Court
-  Picnic Table / BBQ
-  Playground Area
-  Pavilion / Shelter
-  Trails
-  Structures
-  Parking / Roads
-  Trees / Landscaping

Current Inventory:

- 1 Playground
- 1 Pavilion
- 1 Wooded Seating Area
- 1 Picnic Area w/2 Tables

Scale 1:2257



Proposed Inventory:

- * None

Maintenance Tasks:

- * Turf Maintenance
- * Landscaping Maintenance
- * Site / Structure Inspection
- * Site / Structure Repair
- * Graffiti Removal
- * Trash Removal
- * Snow Removal



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Bugge Park
220 South Cobb Street
0.26 Acres



Turf

Picnic Table

Playground Area

Structures

Current Inventory:

- 1 Playground (and Areas)
- 1 Picnic Table
- 2 Benches

Scale 1:1128

Proposed Inventory:

- * Updated Play Equipment
- * Vegetative Screening

Maintenance Tasks:

- * Turf Maintenance
- * Landscaping Maintenance
- * Site / Structure Inspection
- * Site / Structure Repair
- * Graffiti Removal
- * Trash Removal
- * Snow Removal



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**Busby / Soule Fields &
Herrmann Tennis Courts
E. Elmwood & E. Dahlia
3.25 Acres**

- Turf
- Tennis Courts
- Diamond Fields
- Structures
- Trees / Landscaping

- Current Inventory:**
- 1 Diamond Field (Softball)
 - 2 Diamond Fields (baseball)
 - 3 Tennis Courts

Scale 1:4514

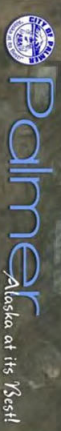


Proposed Inventory:

- * None

Maintenance Tasks:

- * Turf Maintenance
- * Landscaping Maintenance
- * Site / Structure Inspection
- * Site / Structure Repair
- * Graffiti Removal
- * Trash Removal
- * Snow Removal

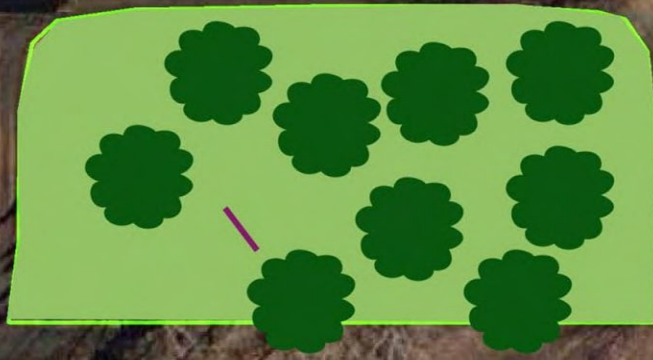


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Babb Arboretum
E. Fireweed and S. Gulkana
0.30 Acres

- Turf
- Structures
- Trees / Landscaping



Proposed Inventory:

- * Small Pavilion
- * Benches
- * Interpretive Signage

Maintenance Tasks:

- * Turf Maintenance
- * Landscaping Maintenance
- * Site / Structure Inspection
- * Site / Structure Repair
- * Graffiti Removal
- * Trash Removal
- * Snow Removal

Current Inventory:

- 1 Open Space / Natural Area
- 1 Sign

Scale 1:2257



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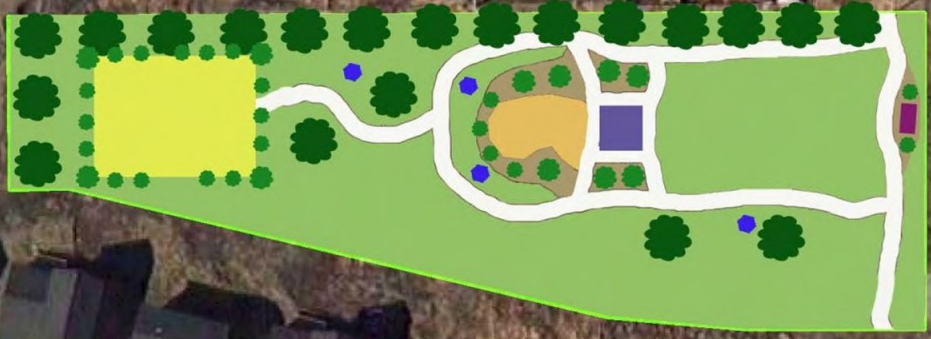
Fairfield Park
340 East Dolphin
0.30 Acres

-  Turf
-  Vegetative Areas
-  Picnic Table / BBQ
-  Playground Area
-  Pavilion / Shelter
-  Trails
-  Basketball Court
-  Structures
-  Trees / Landscaping

Current Inventory:

Open Space

Scale 1:2257



- Proposed Inventory:**
- * Basketball Court
 - * Small Shelter
 - * Playground Area
 - * Picnic Areas

Maintenance Tasks:

- * Turf Maintenance
- * Landscaping Maintenance
- * Site / Structure Inspection
- * Site / Structure Repair
- * Graffiti Removal
- * Trash Removal
- * Snow Removal



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Hagen Park
201 East Dolphin
0.37 Acres

- Turf
- Playground Area
- Basketball Court
- Trees / Landscaping



Current Inventory:

- 1 Playground
- 1 Picnic Table

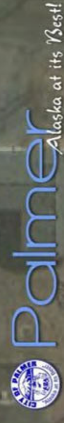
Scale 1:2257

Proposed Inventory:

- * None

Maintenance Tasks:

- * Turf Maintenance
- * Landscaping Maintenance
- * Site / Structure Inspection
- * Site / Structure Repair
- * Graffiti Removal
- * Trash Removal
- * Snow Removal



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McKechnie Park
643 West Daron Drive
0.20 Acres

- Turf
- Picnic Table
- Trees / Landscaping

Current Inventory:
1 Playground
2 Picnic Tables

Scale 1:2257

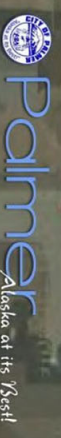


Proposed Inventory:

- * None

Maintenance Tasks:

- * Turf Maintenance
- * Landscaping Maintenance
- * Site / Structure Inspection
- * Site / Structure Repair
- * Graffiti Removal
- * Trash Removal
- * Snow Removal



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Meier Park

325 S. Silver Tip Drive

0.32 Acres

Turf



Picnic Table / BBQ



Playground Areas



Basketball Court



Trees / Landscaping



Current Inventory:

1 Playground

1 Picnic Table

Scale 1:1128

Proposed Inventory:

- * Updated Play Equipment
- * Vegetative Screening

Maintenance Tasks:

- * Turf Maintenance
- * Landscaping Maintenance
- * Site / Structure Inspection
- * Site / Structure Repair
- * Graffiti Removal
- * Trash Removal
- * Snow Removal



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MTA Events Center
1317 Kerry Weiland Way
14.70 Acres

- Turf
- Multipurpose Fields
- Structures
- Parking / Roads
- Trees / Landscaping

Current Inventory:

- 1 Ice Area
- 4-8 Multipurpose Fields

Scale 1:4514



Proposed Inventory:

- * Portable Basketball Court
- * Restrooms

Maintenance Tasks:

- * Turf Maintenance
- * Landscaping Maintenance
- * Site / Structure Inspection
- * Site / Structure Repair
- * Graffiti Removal
- * Trash Removal
- * Snow Removal



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Palmer Skate Park
231 East Arctic Avenue
0.29 Acres



Current Inventory:

- 1 Playground
- 1 Pavilion
- 1 Wooded Seating Area
- 1 Picnic Area w/2 Tables

Scale 1:1128

Proposed Inventory:

- * Updated Equipment

Maintenance Tasks:

- * Turf Maintenance
- * Landscaping Maintenance
- * Site / Structure Inspection
- * Site / Structure Repair
- * Graffiti Removal
- * Trash Removal
- * Snow Removal



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Sherrord Park (North)
 561 North Gulkana Street
 41.00 Acres



- Current Inventory:**
- 4 Diamond Fields
 - 4 Multipurpose Fields
 - 1 Pavilion
 - 1 Playground
 - 1 Concessions Building
 - Trail

Scale 1:4514



Proposed Inventory:

- * None

Maintenance Tasks:

- * Turf Maintenance
- * Landscaping Maintenance
- * Site / Structure Inspection
- * Site / Structure Repair
- * Graffiti Removal
- * Trash Removal
- * Snow Removal



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Sherrord Park (South)
 561 North Gulkana Street
 41.00 Acres

-  Turf
-  Vegetative Areas
-  Multipurpose Fields
-  Diamond Fields
-  Playground Area
-  Pavilion / Shelter
-  Trails
-  Structures
-  Parking / Roads
-  Trees / Landscaping

Current Inventory:

- 4 Diamond Fields
- 4 Multipurpose Fields
- 1 Pavilion
- 1 Playground
- 1 Concessions Building
- Trail

Scale 1:4514



Proposed Inventory:

- * Updated Play Equipment

Maintenance Tasks:


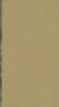








- * Turf Maintenance
- * Landscaping Maintenance
- * Site / Structure Inspection
- * Site / Structure Repair
- * Graffiti Removal
- * Trash Removal
- * Snow Removal
- * Restroom Maintenance



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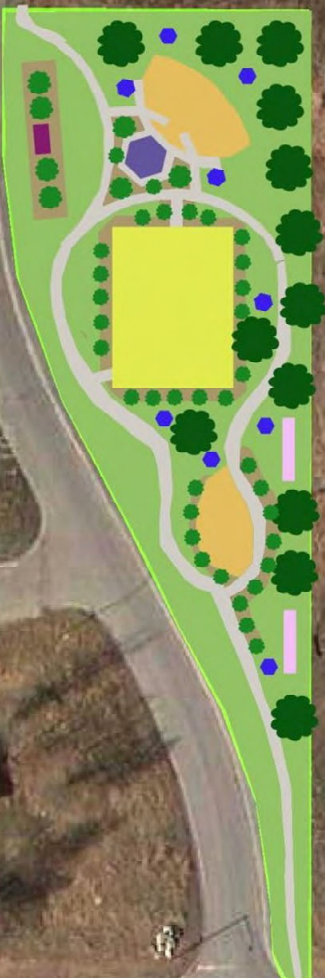
Wilson Park
 1115 South Felicia Street
 0.68 Acres

-  Turf
-  Vegetative Areas
-  Horseshoe Pits
-  Picnic Table / BBQ
-  Playground Area
-  Pavilion / Shelter
-  Trails
-  Basketball Court
-  Structures
-  Trees / Landscaping

Current Inventory:

Open Space

Scale 1:2257



Proposed Inventory:

- * Playground Area
- * Basketball Court
- * Horseshoe Pits
- * Small Pavilion
- * Picnic Areas

Maintenance Tasks:

- * Turf Maintenance
- * Landscaping Maintenance
- * Site / Structure Inspection
- * Site / Structure Repair
- * Graffiti Removal
- * Trash Removal
- * Snow Removal



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Appendix 2: Suggested Maintenance Standards

The City of Palmer should consider developing the quantitative standards of the Zero-Based Budgeting (ZBB) process that precisely identifies the number of labor hours necessary to complete a maintenance task or function to the level described in the qualitative standards for the same task. Quantitative standards are determined by multiplying the number of units to be maintained by the number of man-hours needed to complete the task one time by the frequency with which the unit needs to be maintained. The general national industry descriptions are presented below. The recommended standards and levels of effort are adjusted for the client's region.

LEVEL 1 – DEVELOPED AREAS, HEAVY PUBLIC TRAFFIC, HIGH VISITOR DENSITY

MOWING AND DETAILING

- Mow to the maximum recommended height for the specific turf variety
- Edge sidewalks, borders, fences and other appropriate areas
- Install sod as needed and mow
- Weeds should cover no more than 15% of the grass surface
- Inspect thatch layer regularly and remove as needed
- Remove grass clippings only if coverage is unsightly or impacts health of the lawn
- Test soil as needed and apply fertilizer according to optimum plant requirements
- Inspect regularly for insects, diseases and rodents and respond to outbreaks according threshold standards

LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

- Prune shrubs as necessary
- Shear formal shrubs during the growing season consistent with procedures for bird nesting survey
- Prune trees as necessary
- Inspect regularly for insects, diseases and rodents. Respond to outbreaks according to IPM thresholds and procedures
- Place 4" of organic mulch around shrub beds to minimize weed growth
- Remove hazardous limbs and plants immediately upon discovery
- Remove dead trees that pose an immediate hazard upon discovery
- Remove or treat invasive plants
- Replant trees and shrubs as necessary

IRRIGATION SYSTEM MAINTENANCE

- Inspect irrigation drip systems a minimum of once per month
- Initiate repairs to non-functioning systems within 24 hours of discovery during the dry season and within 10 days during the wet season
- Inspect and adjust and/or repair drip emitters as necessary weekly during the dry season
- Modify systems as necessary to increase irrigation coverage or efficiency

ROAD, TRAIL AND PARKING LOT MAINTENANCE

- Remove debris and glass immediately upon discovery
- Remove sand, dirt, and organic debris from roads, walks, lots and hard surfaces weekly
- Remove trip hazards from pedestrian areas immediately upon discovery
- Repair concrete walks, scenic view area, curbs and other surfaces as needed
- Repair asphalt trails, or soft surface trails, parking lots, roadways and other surfaces as needed

GENERAL MAINTENANCE AND SUPPORT SERVICES

- Inspect fences, gates and other landscape structures at least once annually. Complete safety-related repairs immediately.
- Water manually as necessary to establish new plantings
- Install and maintain automatic drip irrigation system to reforestation projects
- Prune shrubs and trees as necessary
- Weed by hand or mechanically as necessary
- Provide pest control as needed and as per IPM thresholds
- Plant and renovate areas as necessary

LEVEL 2 – SEMI-DEVELOPED AREAS, MODERATE PUBLIC TRAFFIC AND VISITOR DENSITY

MOWING AND DETAILING

- Mow to maximum recommended height for the specific turf variety
- Edge sidewalks, borders, fences and other appropriate areas during the growing season
- Install sod or seed to maintain uniform turf coverage of 80%
- Weeds should cover no more than 25% of the grass surface
- Apply fertilizer according to optimum plant requirements
- Inspect regularly for insects, diseases and rodents and respond to outbreaks according IPM threshold standards

LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

- Prune shrubs as necessary
- Shear formal shrub hedges monthly during the growing season consistent with procedures for bird nesting survey
- Prune trees as necessary
- Apply fertilizer to plant species only if plant health dictates
- Inspect regularly for insects, diseases and rodents. Respond to outbreaks according to IPM thresholds
- Place 4" of organic mulch around shrub beds to minimize weed growth
- Remove or barricade hazardous limbs and plants immediately upon discovery. Remove barricaded hazards consistent with procedures for bird nesting survey
- Remove or barricade hazardous trees immediately upon discovery. Remove barricaded hazards consistent with procedures for bird nesting survey.
- Remove or treat invasive plants
- Replant as trees and shrubs as necessary

LEVEL 3 – UNDEVELOPED/NATURAL AREAS, MODERATE PUBLIC TRAFFIC, LOW VISITOR DENSITY

MOWING AND DETAILING

- Areas should be left in a natural state. Unless legal requirements dictate, areas are not mowed, trimmed, fertilized, or irrigated
- Weed control limited to legal requirements for eradication of noxious plants
- Respond only for safety-related concerns or where addressed by agency policies

LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

- Respond only for safety-related concerns or where addressed by agency policies

ROAD, TRAIL AND PARKING LOT MAINTENANCE

- Respond only for safety-related concerns

WORK PRIORITIES FOR LEVELS OF SERVICE

The following are recommended work priorities by level:

LEVEL 1 & 2 WORK PRIORITIES

- Priority 1: Conditions which pose an immediate threat to life or property (fire, explosion, water main break, building structural failure, electrical failure).
- Priority 2: Emergency requests from a regulatory agency to correct immediate hazards (fire code deficiency, hazardous material issue).
- Priority 3: Special request from the Director or designee determined to require immediate attention
- Priority 4: Emergency or routine work intended to improve services for visitors, or the general public.
- Priority 5: Emergency or routine work intended to reduce the long-term maintenance levels.
- Priority 6: Emergency or routine work intended to improve the aesthetics or attractiveness of an area or facility.

LEVEL 3 WORK PRIORITIES

- Priority 1: Conditions which pose an immediate threat to life or property (fire, explosion, water main break, building structural failure, electrical failure).
- Priority 2: Emergency requests from a regulatory agency to correct immediate hazards (fire code deficiency, hazardous material issue).
- Priority 3: Emergency or routine work intended to reduce the long-term maintenance levels.
- Priority 4: Emergency or routine work intended to improve the aesthetics or attractiveness of an area or facility.

