

A light blue graphic of a water tower on a wooden structure, with trees and a sky in the background, positioned on the left side of the page.

**City of Palmer, Alaska
Joint City Council and
Board of Economic Development
Meeting
February 7, 2017, at 7 PM
City Council Chambers
231 W. Evergreen Avenue, Palmer
www.cityofpalmer.org**

Agenda

- A. Call to Order
- B. Roll Call
- C. Pledge of Allegiance
- D. Approval of Agenda
- E. Audience Participation
- F. New Business
 - 1. Committee of the Whole (note: action may be taken by the council following the committee of the whole)
 - a. Discussion on the Economic Development Strategy..... Page 3
 - b. Presentation on Open Meeting Act
 - c. Other Matters Related to the Board of Economic Development
- G. Record of Items Placed on the Table
- H. Council and Board Member Comments
- I. Adjournment



Economic Development Strategy

Discover Palmer: *Alaska at its Best*

November 2011

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OUR VISION:

To promote and strengthen a vibrant economy where governmental and educational institutions, transportation and utility infrastructure, traditional and high-tech industry, tourism and shopping complement the cultural and historic charm of Palmer and celebrates its importance as the agricultural center of Alaska.

OUR MISSION:

To serve the people and businesses of Palmer and to represent their interests and aspirations

**OUR COMMITMENT:**

- To provide municipal services and facilities to sustain quality of life for existing and future residents
- To achieve excellence in the management of City resources
- To build positive and productive relationships within this community to facilitate community and social programs
- To sustain the quality of the physical environment for future generations
- To promote and facilitate economic activity for the benefit of our citizens



INTRODUCTION

The City of Palmer is located in the Matanuska Valley in Southcentral Alaska, 40 miles north of Anchorage, the State's largest metropolitan area. The City's distinctive history began as an experiment in 1935, when the U.S. Government relocated 202 families from the drought plagued Midwest to the fertile Matanuska Valley in order to establish an agricultural settlement in Alaska. With an agrarian heritage and Midwestern small town values, the Matanuska Colony families overcame many difficulties and successfully established the beginnings of the City.

LOCAL ECONOMY

A unique microclimate in the Matanuska Valley accounts for over half of the state's agricultural production and produces the celebrated giant vegetables, displayed at the annual Alaska State Fair. Today, Palmer agriculture provides food to communities across the State of Alaska.



From rural traditions, Palmer has matured into a retail and service-based economy with primary local economic activity through retail, service, construction, professional and government offices. Palmer is the seat of government for the Matanuska Susitna Borough, which spans 23,000 square miles. Residents are employed in retail, professional services, city, borough, state, and federal occupations. Top employers are the Mat-Su Borough and School District, Mat-Su Regional Hospital, Carrs/Safeway and Fred Meyer. The City has a 3% local sales tax and a 3 mil real property tax. Low housing costs, the rural lifestyle, and proximity to Anchorage employment and services make the Palmer area desirable to more people choosing to move to an idyllic rural setting.

The pedestrian-friendly downtown is filled with shops and boutiques with books, arts and crafts, and offerings from local artists, businesses, services, and farmers. Palmer embodies hometown America and small-town Alaska. Increasing population and employment trends may increase and stabilize real estate prices for Palmer neighborhoods. Several public and private schools offer families educational options.

LOCAL EVENTS AND ATTRACTIONS

Summer activities include the 18-hole Palmer Golf Course, multiple outdoor trail systems for walking, hiking and biking, rafting, glacier viewing, visiting the Palmer Museum of History and Art and gardens, the weekly Friday Fling market and the Alaska State Fair.

The Alaska State Fair greets nearly 300,000 visitors each summer and features extraordinary entertainers, showcase gardens and the world record-setting giant vegetable competition. The Fairgrounds also host over 50 other public events each year.

The winter slopes at nearby Hatcher Pass and surrounding areas offer snow machining, snowshoeing, ice skating, sled dog mushing and cross country skiing.

Year-round competitive athletic events at the MTA Events Center, Mat-Su Miners Hermon Brothers Baseball Park and fields, and local schools include amateur youth and North American Hockey League hockey, statewide events in basketball, football, soccer, cross-country and track. Colony Days, Colony Christmas, Palmer Pride and other annual events bring out many locals and visitors in celebration.



TRANSFORMATION

Today, Palmer is in the midst of a metamorphosis. In the last decade, offering a safe and pleasant quality of life, the City grew 31%, with an almost 65% growth rate just outside the City boundaries. In less than 20 years, a quiet rural area has transformed into an increasingly thriving commercial center.

The City's population has increased 3.1% per year since 2000, with 5,937 residents currently residing in the 5.2 square mile City. Since 2000, over \$161,630,000 in new construction has occurred in the City. Public and private investment continues to fuel growth. The City completed a major expansion of its water and sewer utilities to the new Mat-Su Regional Medical Center seven (7) miles

away. New water and sewer lines and improvement projects and plans for a regional Wastewater Treatment Plant are setting the foundation for future growth.

City facilities include an airport, library, golf course, ice arena and numerous parks and ball fields. In the past year a Board of Economic Development was established by local citizens. These changes come with a unified vision to celebrate the best of Palmer's historic character, embrace responsible growth and keep the extraordinary small-town quality of life.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROCESS FOR PALMER

This Economic Development Strategy represents a collective economic vision for the City of Palmer. Input has been incorporated from multiple and diverse segments of the Palmer community. The Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Action steps herein are the means to realizing this vision; from agriculture and tourism to technology and research, they reflect the diversity of Palmer's economy.

The forward process will include refinement of the components by the Board of Economic Development (BED), and the document will be presented in draft form to the Palmer City Council for their input and approval.

An annual review of the plan will be conducted by the BED, and be incorporated into the ongoing work of the City Council.

The State of Alaska will be provided a copy of the plan in order to encourage support for community and economic development for the City of Palmer.

MUNICIPAL AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY

The City of Palmer Economic Development Strategy is based on five inter-related areas of municipal responsibility essential to supporting a high quality of life for its residents.

Quality of Life, at a personal level, means the degree of enjoyment and satisfaction experienced in everyday life, embracing health, personal relationships, quality of one's working life, social life and leisure time. At the community level, quality of life means a set of measurable socioeconomic indicators such as educational attainment, unemployment rate, crime rate and availability of housing and recreational opportunities.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN GOALS

(Based on and adapted from the 2006 City of Palmer Comprehensive Plan)

- Goal 1 ... Strengthen Palmer's competitiveness as the region's institutional center
- Goal 2 ... Encourage expansion of technology and research-related economic sectors and other well-paid professional jobs in the Palmer area
- Goal 3 ... Strengthen Palmer's role as a place to shop for residents of Palmer, residents of surrounding areas, and visitors
- Goal 4 ... Strengthen Palmer as a tourism destination and stopping point for travel through the southern Matanuska-Susitna area
- Goal 5 ... Strengthen efforts to promote quality of life by supporting Palmer as the Agriculture and Educational center of the Mat-Su Valley
- Goal 6 ... Maintain high quality residential neighborhoods and promote a diverse range of quality housing from high density in or near downtown to single family housing which satisfies the needs of all sectors of the housing market
- Goal 7 ... Provide the necessary public infrastructure to support and retain existing industrial uses and expand development within the community to insure that Palmer remain as an industrial leader of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough
- Goal 8 ... Develop and market the municipal airport to maximize its impact on the Palmer economy

PARTNERSHIPS AND COOPERATIVE ORGANIZATIONS

Other organizations serve the citizens of Fairport by working to bring an between organizations.



OBJECTIVES FOR SPECIFIC PLAN GOALS

(Based on and adapted from the 2006 City of Palmer Comprehensive Plan)

Goal 1 ... Strengthen Palmer's competitiveness as the region's institutional center.

Objective A - Maintain existing institutions and secure new institutions.

1. Develop an Interface Schedule / Action Plan with the Matanuska-Susitna Borough to determine and pursue a very specific list of action items necessary to meet their long term needs;
2. Develop an Interface Schedule/ Action Plan with the Hospital, Clinics, Job Corps, University and Justice System to determine and pursue a very specific list of action items necessary to meet Hospital, Clinics, Job Corps, University and Justice System long term needs.

Goal 2 ... Encourage expansion of technology and research-related economic sectors and other well-paid professional jobs in the Palmer area.

Objective A - Work with the University of Alaska and Alaska Pacific University to determine what new programs might be developed in the Palmer area, and how the City might help these institutions to expand in the community.

1. Support an annual conference on small technology business development in Palmer;
2. Collaborate with the Greater Palmer Chamber of Commerce and other organizations to actively contact large technology companies;
3. Develop specific promotional literature touting the attributes of Palmer as a business friendly, geographically key location on the Pacific Rim as a satellite location for such companies.

Objective B - Work with community organizations such as the Greater Palmer Chamber of Commerce to market the community to desired businesses, including technology and research-based businesses, and well paid professional businesses such as law, medicine and veterinary science.

Objective C - Develop Palmer as a vocational and career center for Southcentral Alaska.

Goal 3 ... Strengthen Palmer's role as a place to shop for residents of Palmer, area residents and visitors.

Objective A – Work with the Planning & Zoning Commission to provide space for commercial expansion through the development of a new central business zoning district or zoning overlay.

Objective B – Make downtown Palmer a more competitive retail destination.

Objective C – Actively pursue infrastructure improvements and identify areas appropriate for developing new areas for commercial general development.

Goal 4 ... Strengthen Palmer as a tourism destination and stopping point for travel through the southern Matanuska-Susitna area.

Objective A – Preserve, improve and celebrate Palmer’s historic character; develop design guidelines for the historic district and explore designation of Palmer as a National Heritage Area.

Objective B – Support efforts to improve and promote community attractions, including cultural facilities and multiple trails systems. Improve linkages between attractions.

Objective C – Build on the success of existing community events, including the Alaska State Fair.

Objective D - Collaborate with the Palmer Visitors Center, the Greater Palmer Chamber of Commerce and other organizations to actively promote Palmer.

Objective E – Support efforts to attract more team sports activities, sporting events and outdoor activities in and around Palmer.

Goal 5 ... Strengthen efforts to promote quality of life by supporting Palmer as the Agriculture and Educational center of the Mat-Su Valley.

Objective A - Support a media campaign to promote distribution and sales of local agricultural products.

A city representative should contact state-funded organizations (schools, prisons, governmental agencies, etc.) to ensure enforcement of the state statute giving local growers an opportunity for priority placement for Alaskan Grown products

Objective B - Promote and expand farmers' market opportunities within the city limits and the greater Palmer area.

Objective C – Review available open land parcels within the city limits and encourage expansion of green areas and adding community gardens.

Objective D – Meet with representatives of local educational institutions (high schools and post-secondary training schools and colleges) to encourage positive communication about their needs and future plans and how the City might be able to help with their goals to the benefit of all citizens.

Goal 6 ... Maintain high quality residential neighborhoods and promote a diverse range of quality housing from high density in or near downtown to single family housing which satisfies the needs of all sectors of the housing market.

Objective A – Encourage a diverse range of quality housing, from attractive higher density housing in or near downtown, to outlying housing in more rural settings.

Objective B – Provide areas for single family housing appealing to the upper end of the housing market.

Objective C – Encourage infill and higher density housing in and around downtown. Prepare new zoning standards and design guidelines to ensure higher density housing is high quality, to benefit the resident and the community.

Objective D – Encourage rehabilitation of older residential structures.

Objective E – Establish, improve and maintain city-wide parks and recreation facilities and programs.

Objective F – Ensure that the location of housing offers residents adequate access to transportation, employment, services and to social and support networks.

Objective G – Promote continued development and maintenance of high quality elder care facilities and senior citizen campuses in Palmer.

Objective H – Increase code enforcement efforts to ensure compliance with city standards and to protect the long-term stability of neighborhoods.

Goal 7 ... Provide the necessary public infrastructure to support and retain existing industrial uses and expand industrial development within the community to ensure that Palmer remains as the industrial leader of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

Objective A – Support private sector development of low cost, alternative or renewable energy and power generation, including energy and power distribution systems.

Objective B – Review and identify logistical, environmental and other beneficial resources in the Palmer area available to attract new technology industries.

Objective C – Review current infrastructure master plans to ensure they place a priority on maintaining low cost, effective municipal services.

Objective D – Promote vocational, technical and career training opportunities within the greater Palmer area to prepare residents for a global marketplace.

Objective E – Work to maintain and improve Palmer’s quality of life (Continually enhance hiking and biking trails, parks, health care resources, downtown upgrades, etc.).

Goal 8 ... Develop and market the municipal airport to maximize its economic benefit to the community.

Objective A – Promote the Palmer Municipal Airport as a site for air taxis, aircraft maintenance and repair companies, flight schools, and aircraft rental and leasing businesses.

Objective B – Develop land for expansion of general aviation leases at the facility.

Objective C – Support development of five year master improvement plan as detailed in the most current Airport Master Plan.

Objective D - Convert the current City of Palmer sales tax charges on fuel sales to a flowage fee on fuel quantities.

Note: It is the intent of the City to operate the Airport in a balanced manner, and as an integrated function of the whole. Activities of the airport which generate revenue to the City are desirable, however, not at the risk of diminishing the quality of life for the residents of the City.

Support for All Goals

The City recognizes a solid foundation is required to foster economic development and has included the following action items in its Economic Development Strategy.

- A. Investigate specific tax incentives for new businesses that are consistent with one or more goals of the EDS and other favored attributes. Emphasis should be for investors who restore old buildings, erect landmarks and viewpoints at their establishments, or provide recreational services such as sightseeing and rides and other enterprises that would foster tourism and the other seven goals of the EDS.
- B. Identify and inventory currently City owned and private lots that already have utilities and access that could support certain goals.
- C. Pass new ordinances to effectively address junk accumulation on property and implement a City-wide Clean Up and Beautification Campaign.
- D. Pass new ordinances that address the disposition of dilapidated and unoccupied structures.
- E. Actively pursue infrastructure improvements and identify areas appropriate for expansion of commercial, industrial agricultural and recreational uses.