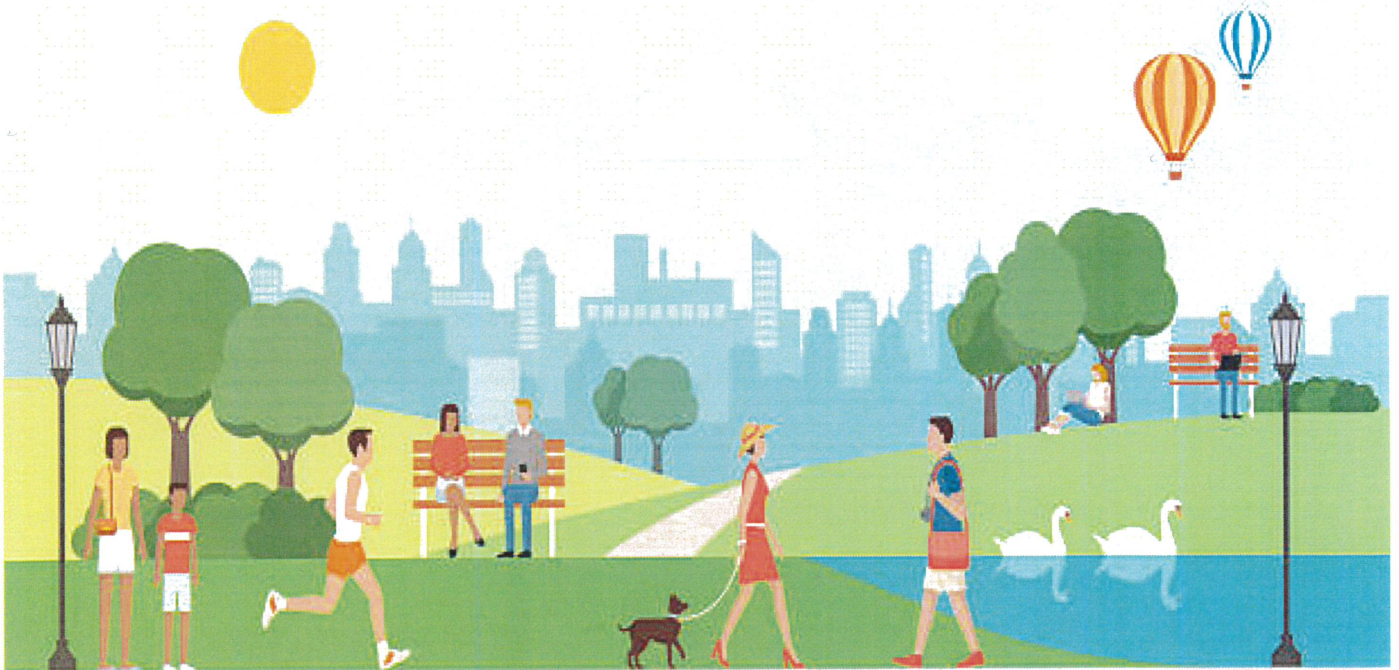




City of Palmer
Parks & Recreation Advisory Board
January 5, 2023



PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD
REGULAR MEETING
JANUARY 5, 2023 6 P.M.
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
231 W. EVERGREEN AVENUE, PALMER
www.palmerak.org



CHAIR Ryan Richard
VICE CHAIR Vacant
BOARD MEMBER Marilyn Bennett
BOARD MEMBER Richell Carmichael
BOARD MEMBER Lisa Albert-Konecky
BOARD MEMBER Joseph Parreira
VACANT

AGENDA

- A. Call to Order
- B. Roll Call
- C. Pledge of Allegiance
- D. Organization of the Commission
 - 1. Election of Chairman
 - 2. Election of Vice Chairman
- E. Approval of Agenda
- F. Minutes of Previous Meetings
- G. Reports
 - 1. Staff Report – Jude Bilafer, Public Works Director: Update on trail and nonmotorized paths
- H. Audience Participation
- I. Unfinished Business
 - 1. A Committee of the Whole: IM 23-001 Presentation and discussion on Strategic Direction of Railroad Utilization (Note: Action may be taken by the Board following the committee of the whole)
- J. New Business
- J. Board Member Comments
- L. Adjournment



**CITY OF PALMER
PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD
INFORMATION MEMORANDUM 23-001**

SUBJECT: Railroad Tracks Utilization

AGENDA OF: January 5, 2023
November 3, 2022
January 13, 2022

ACTION: Discuss the Area-Wide Plan for the Railroad Corridor

Attachments: 1) Downtown Palmer Improvement Pamphlet

January 5, 2023 Update:

On December 27, 2022 a second public open house was given at the Palmer Community Center (Depot). Staff will present the online survey results; and give an update on the outcome of the December 27, 2022 public open house, and future plans and presentations.

November Update:

On October 26, 2022, a presentation was given at the Palmer Community Center (Depot). The board should consider a resolution of support for a strategic direction of improvements to downtown Palmer, including Parks and Trails.

The city of Palmer completed a Brownfield Area-Wide Plan for Downtown Palmer, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board should begin discussion about opportunities for further park development within the railroad corridor in downtown Palmer.

Included in the packet is BED Resolution No. 21-001 that was passed and submitted to the City Council for consideration of improvements that would promote economic development and park improvements in the city. Also provided are past studies that support railroad right of way improvements that improve the quality of life in Palmer. Excerpts from the Area Wide Plan and the Palmer Urban Revitalization are included to show efforts that have been made to increase the utility of the corridor. Both studies can be found at <https://www.palmerak.org/community-development/page/economic-development>. Support for railroad improvements can also be found in the Palmer Comprehensive Plan and the University of Washington plan.

The city has applied to the Alaska Railroad to renew the Permit for Grow Palmer and Shane Woods Trail. If there any supplemental requests, now would be the time to approach the railroad.

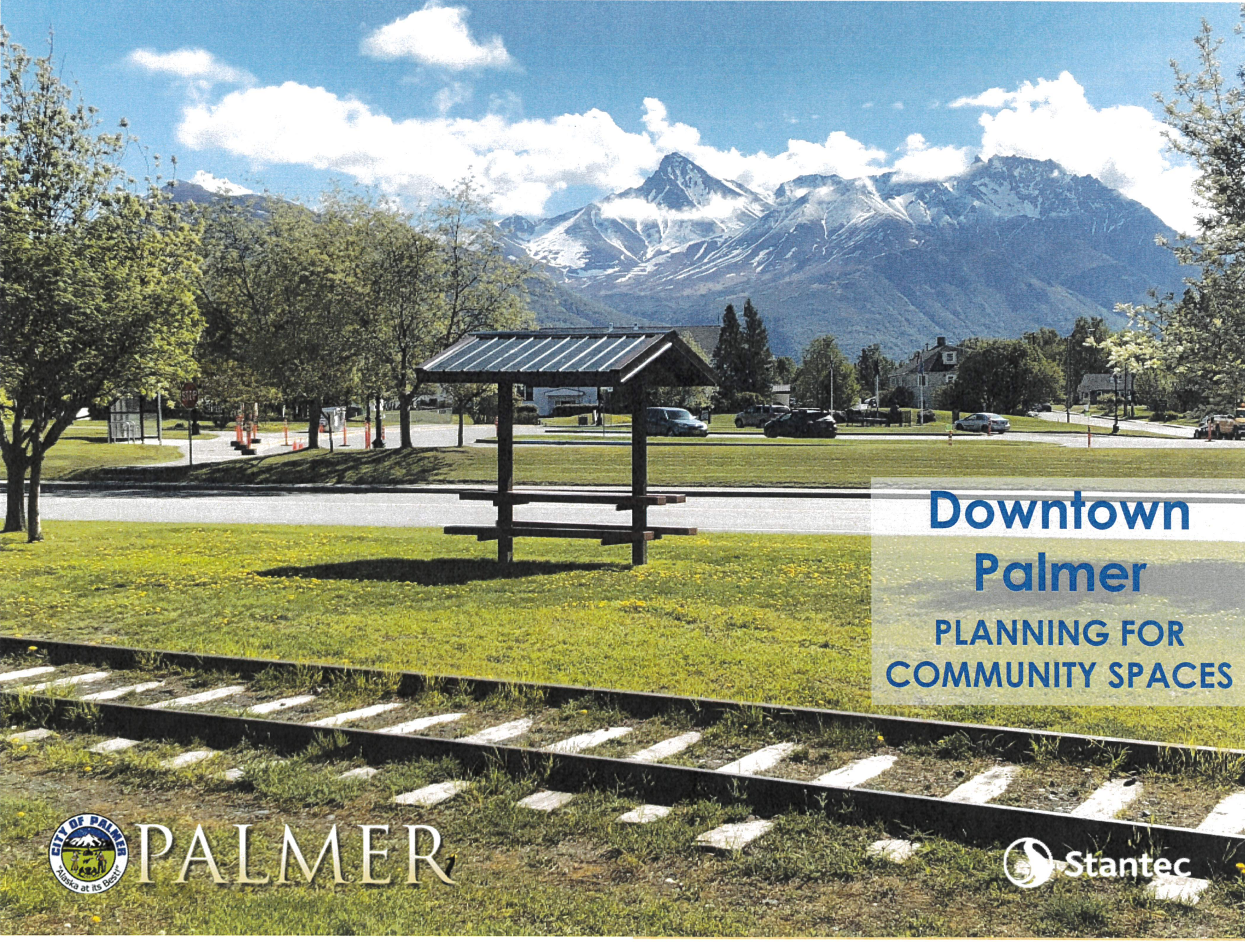
The Parks and Recreational Advisory Board has not actively participated in the railroad discussion, a joint meeting with the Board of Economic Development should be considered if the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board wishes to pursue improvements in the railroad corridor.

The question for the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board should the city pursue a strategy plan that will encourage development within the railroad right of way that benefits residents and visitors today?

The strategic plan will help guide discussion and should include:

- Railroad corridor concept for elements/improvements
- Comprehensive approach to parking and circulation
- Preservation of historically important items, concepts, or architectural features
- Pre-approved specialty features the community members or groups can purchase or install
- Discussion and involvement of Planning and Zoning, Parks and Recreational Advisory Board
- Alaska Railroad concurrence

Recommendation: Direct staff on the direction the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board would like to pursue.



**Downtown
Palmer**
PLANNING FOR
COMMUNITY SPACES



PALMER



Railroad Right-of-Way Proposed Improvements Project

- The City of Palmer Board of Economic Development (BED) passed a resolution identifying five prioritized projects for the Downtown Alaska Railroad Right-of-Way and requested the Palmer City Council fund a Downtown Concept Master Plan to evaluate the feasibility of development. The purpose of the improvements is to expand economic vitality and increase quality of life in downtown Palmer.
- The BED recognizes railroad reintroduction in downtown Palmer will require significant financial investment for reconstruction of the branch MP A5.1 – MP A6.7 and until this investment is made, the community would benefit through utilization of this space with a permit from the AK Railroad Corporation. Where the railroad tracks are removed for improvements, existing elements of the track will be preserved to protect their historical significance to Downtown Palmer.
- BED prioritized projects have been identified in the Palmer Comprehensive Plan, the Area Wide Plan – Eastern Downtown Palmer Study, and the Palmer Urban Revitalization plan, including:
 - Community Event Space (North of Depot)
 - Parking Enhancements on Colony Way and Valley Way
 - Motorized and Non-motorized connectivity
 - Park and Playground improvements in downtown
 - Branding and Signage recognizing Palmer's History



Project Element Description

Program Element Descriptions:

Community Event Space (North of Depot)

Shared community event spaces can serve as the heart and soul of downtown. Either through the active programming of specific events, or through spaces tailored for individuals and small groups, a reimagined community area to the north of the existing Depot building will be one of the primary objectives for this plan. The community of Palmer already hosts several annual celebrations such as Colony Days during the summer and Colony Christmas in December. Subsequently, it will be important to develop a conceptual design for the community event space that is both flexible to varying sizes of gatherings and responds to the changing needs of the seasons.

As a northern climate community, Palmer has the unique opportunity to embrace outdoor activities that celebrate the coldest and darkest months of the year. Just as winter sports require adequate equipment and clothing for the winter elements, outdoor spaces also require specific design adaptations to create an environment that is welcoming, warm, and interesting during a season that may otherwise keep residents indoors. Winter City Design Guidelines provide a design framework for how these spaces can be developed. Considerations such as prevailing winds, solar exposure (or lack thereof), snow storage, heating elements, vegetation, lighting, and color are all aspects that can be integrated into the design of a community event space to help downtown thrive.

Parking Enhancements on Colony Way and Valley Way

Additional Community Event Spaces will attract both residents and visitors to Downtown Palmer. To accommodate increased activity in the area, as well as ongoing activities that are currently programmed, it will be necessary to address parking improvements on Colony Way and Valley Way. For both roadways, one-way pairs may be considered to improve traffic flow and to introduce a more efficient angled parking scheme for additional stalls. Additional parking areas may also be considered north of the Depot building (which can encroach into the existing railroad ROW) and may be integrated into parking improvements to be considered for the adjacent gravel parking lot. Through paving this surface and expanding it into the area to the north of the Depot, a more efficient and specific parking configuration can be delineated for additional stalls. This expanded parking area could be extended as far east to the existing trail as possible.

As advances in EV technology increase the number of electric vehicles in the community, EV charging stations should also be included at key locations in parking lots. While parking will be a priority in these areas, the design of these improvements should also address pedestrian connectivity and include opportunities for landscaping, signage, and artwork to tie in with the aesthetic and character of downtown.

Motorized and Non-Motorized Connectivity

Connectivity to spaces within downtown, for both motorized and non-motorized activity, will be important to support active use of these spaces. While this plan will keep Dogwood intact, it should consider reorienting Colony and Valley Way into complimentary one-way pairs to support circulation as well as parking for the area. Currently, existing railroad crossings (especially at Evergreen Avenue) are particularly cumbersome and visibility, along with pedestrian accessibility, is an issue at this intersection.

Improvements to this intersection, either through improving the tracks or filling them in, will need to be considered.

Given the long, linear configuration of the community spaces adjacent to the Depot (between Colony Way and Valley way) it's necessary to consider how pedestrian connectivity can also be supported. The current pedestrian trail that extends along the entire eastern edge of this area should continue to remain, and additional pedestrian crossings between proposed parking areas as well as across major roadways, should be addressed to promote connectivity and walkability to surrounding neighborhoods. The existing trail should also be extended over Fireweed to provide greater connectivity to outdoor spaces that host Friday Fling events during the summer months. Just as winter city design guidelines play a role in the design of outdoor gathering areas, they will also need to be considered for pedestrian improvements to support a comfortable and safe walking environment.

The railroad is a key feature of the Palmer that plays homage to the history of the community as well as to the visual identity of the area. However, long-term viability is questionable and should be considered as improvements are addressed. While the existing ROW may remain, it is imperative that the City consider whether it's feasible to maintain the existing tracks in their current capacity. Full removal is an opportunity to completely address improvements, and integration into proposed design elements is another way to maintain the character of the area while also improving the pedestrian experience.

Park and Playground Improvements in Downtown

Park and playground spaces can be very complimentary to community gathering areas like those under consideration for the space north of the Depot. While public plazas and gathering spaces often need specific programming or events to garner activity, green spaces (such as parks) and playground areas are attractive amenities regardless of other activity happening within the vicinity. In downtown spaces, particularly, parks and playgrounds can support patronage of downtown businesses by young families who may increase the duration of their trips to downtown businesses if there are other destinations and features to visit. Similarly, park areas can serve a similar purpose by including elements that incorporate artwork, signage and character elements that are authentic and unique to the community of Palmer.

Branding and Signage Recognizing Palmer's History

Just as artwork can contribute to the authenticity of a place, branding and signage are just as important to establish and reflect the identity of a community. Building on the wayfinding plan that was established for the City of Palmer, opportunities to include monument signs, vehicular wayfinding signs, pedestrian wayfinding signs and orientation kiosks will be identified within these concept plans for the downtown depot area. Orienting visitors to key locations such as points of interest, public venues and parking will be the primary goal of wayfinding signs, while 'announcing' a specific point of interest will be the objective of monument signs. Signage can also play a critical role in identifying social media opportunities through photos and tagging via social media. All these wayfinding opportunities should reflect the agricultural and indigenous heritage of the Palmer community which should be reflected by font, color, form, materials and symbology.



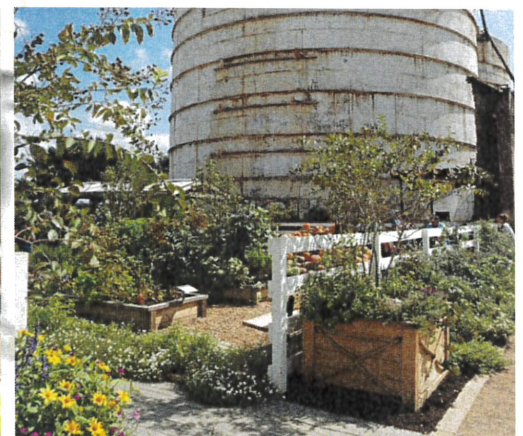
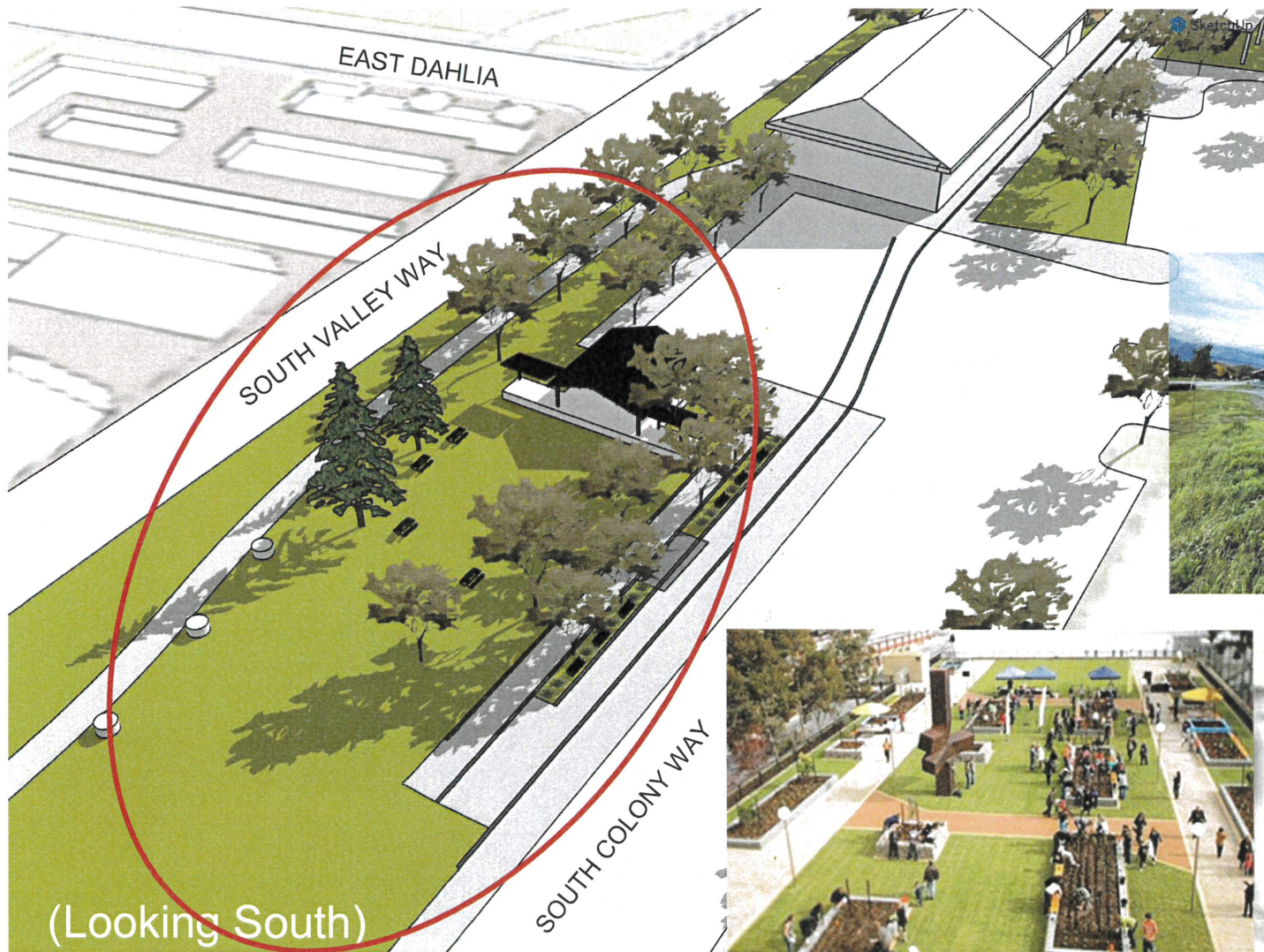
Proposed Projects

1. Expanded parking and street improvements on Colony Way
2. Create Community Event Space on the property between Depot and Dogwood, including non-motorized path connecting dogwood with parking on Colony Way and Shane Woods Trail extension to Glenn Highway
3. Remove Railroad siding and expand parking
4. Add handcart display
5. Remove track crossings to facilitate pedestrian and improve motorized connectivity
6. Library Courtyard improvements for amphitheater and plaza
7. Add play areas, historic features, public art and site furnishings to public spaces (benches, trash receptacles, bike racks, dog care stations)
8. Remove or improve existing tracks to reduce tripping hazards
9. Include stations for Electric Vehicle charging

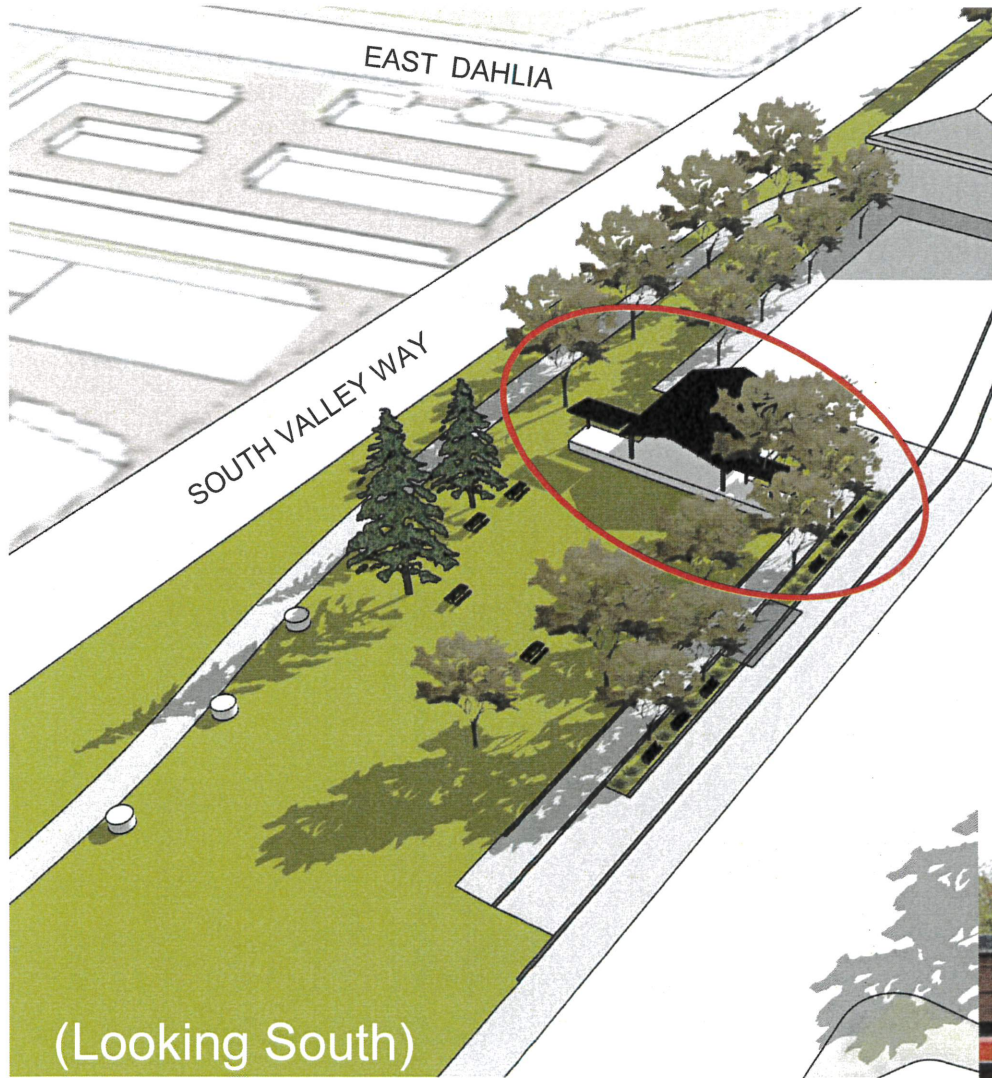
** Branding and signage throughout the concept area



Create a Community Event Space and Maintain Historical Features



Reflect Railroad History in Architectural Features (stage)



Create a Community Event Space and Maintain Historical Features



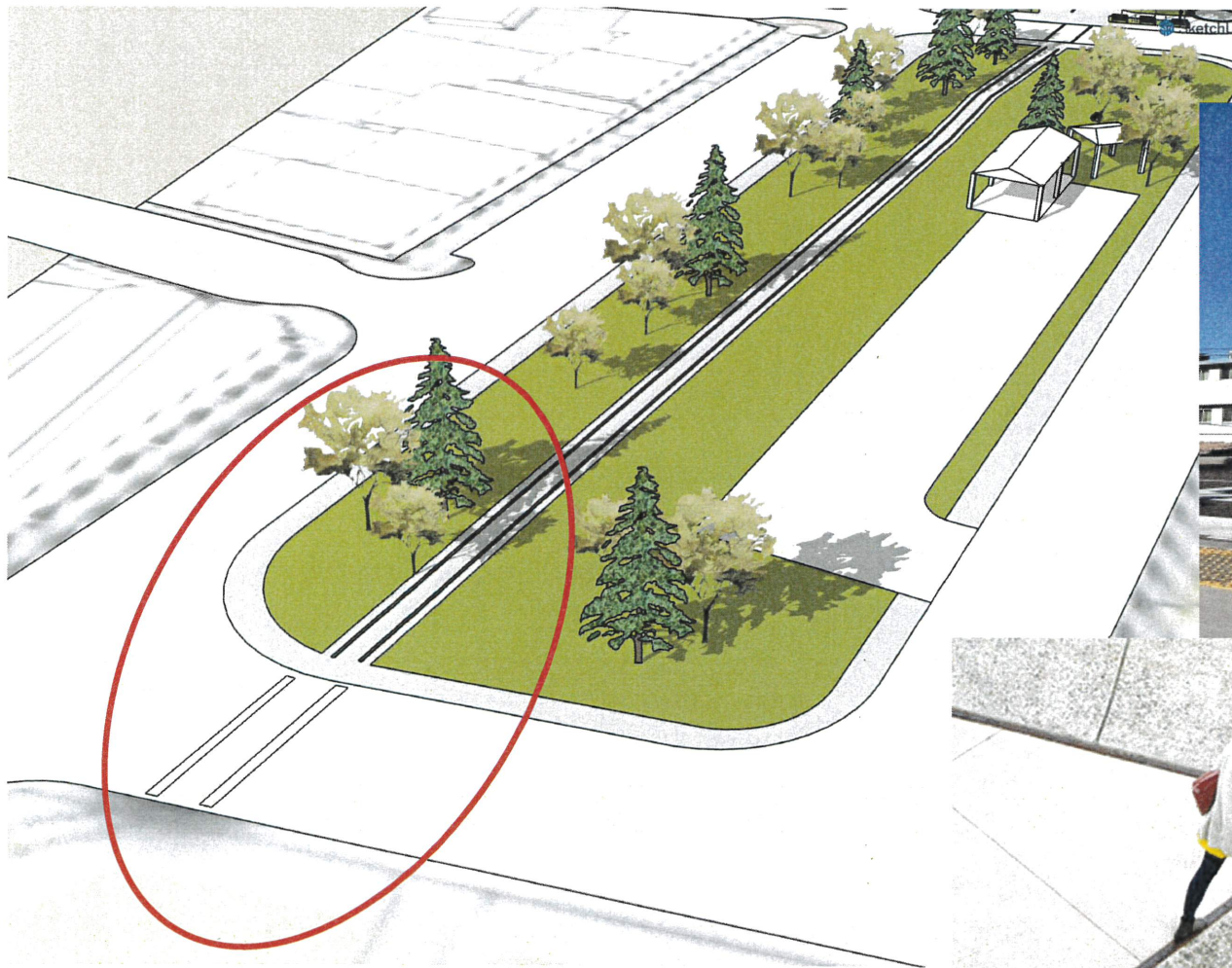
Mandan, ND Example

Parking Improvements to Colony Way



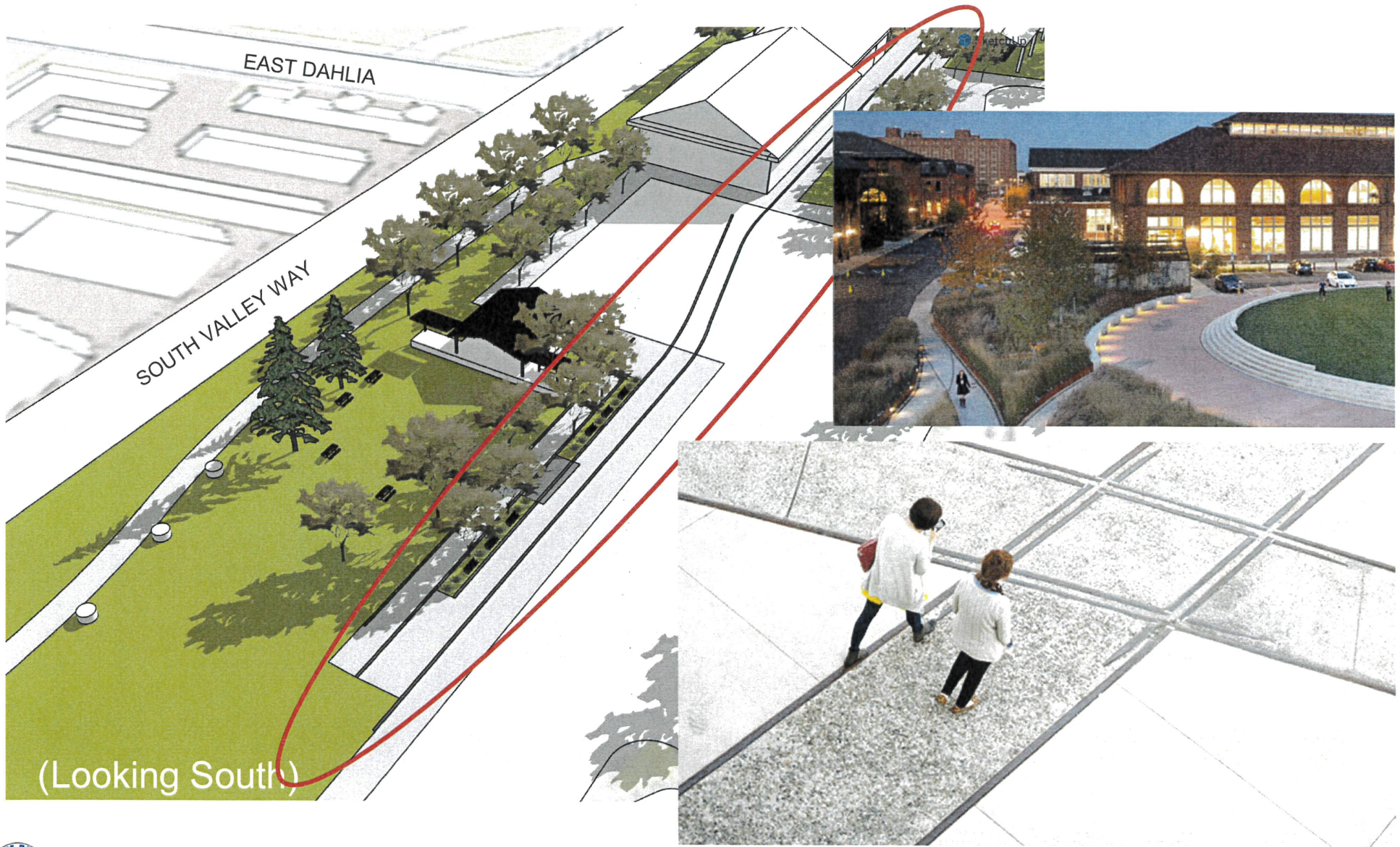
(Looking North)

Remove Track Crossing at Fireweed and Embed Existing Tracks in trail improvements Extending Shane Woods Trail South



(Looking North)

Embed Historic Railroad Tracks

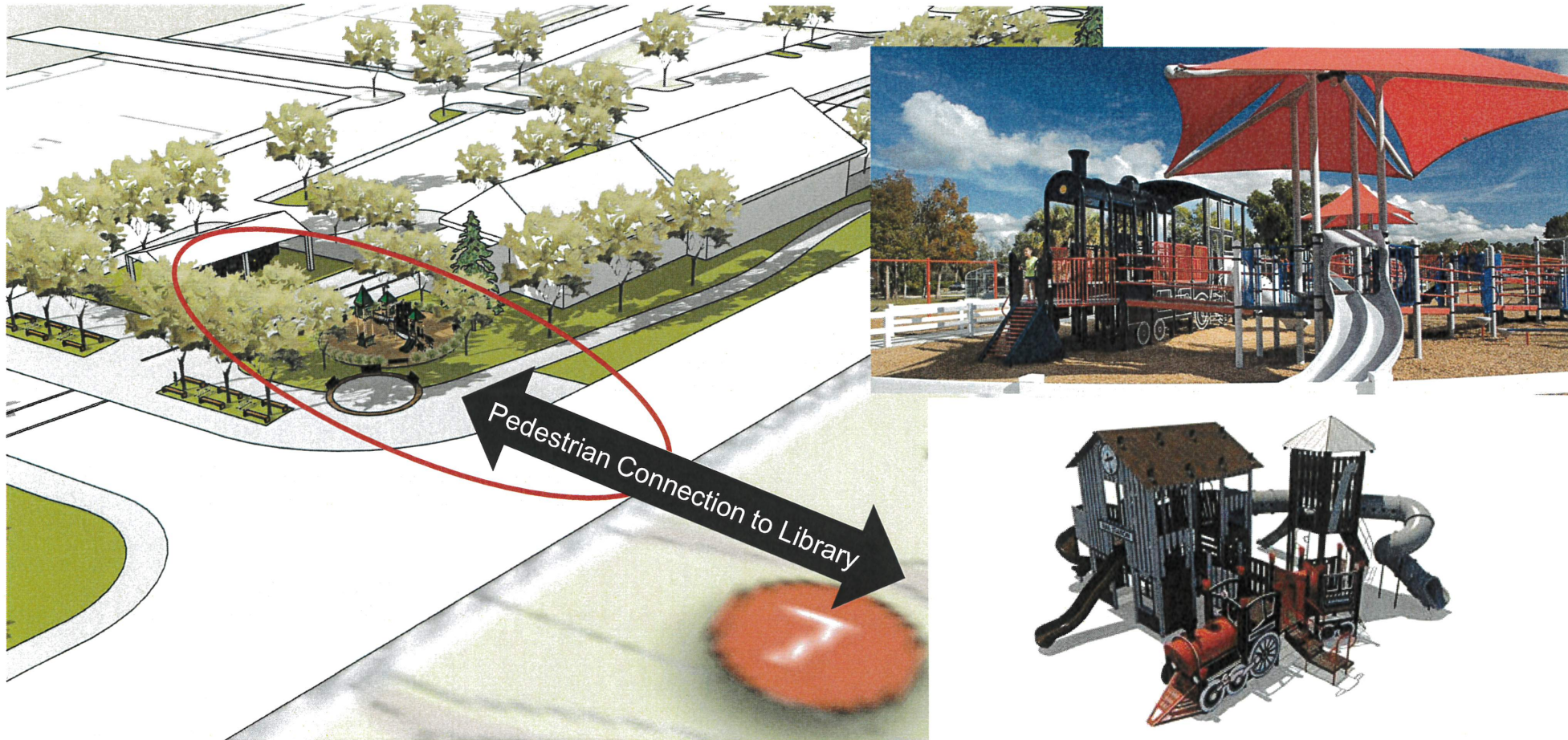


(Looking South)



PALMER *Alaska*

Park/Playground Improvements and Connection to Library Courtyard (railroad node)



(Looking North)

Site Furnishings (Places to Sit, Bike Racks, Trash Receptacles, Dog Waste Stations)



(Looking North)

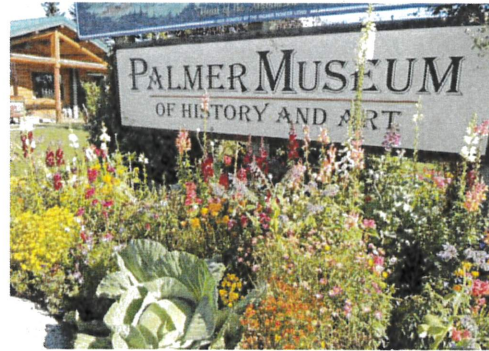


Branding and Signage

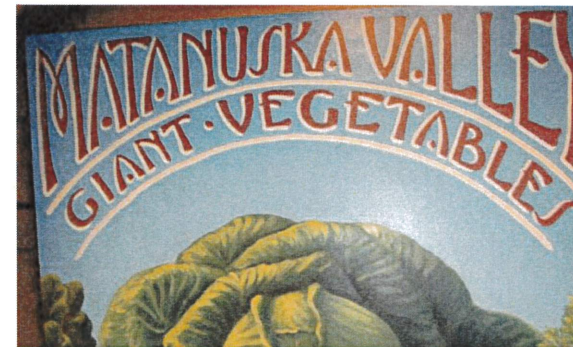
Local History



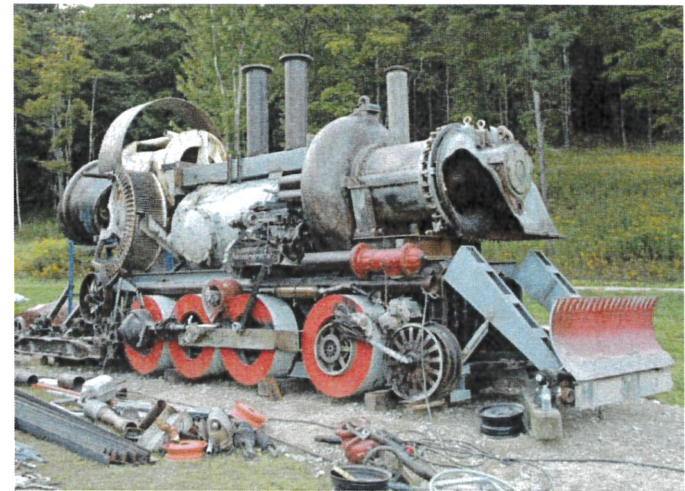
Regional Influences



Color & Texture



Incorporate Public Artwork that Reflects Railroad Heritage (repurpose tracks)



All Season Use



Public Participation

The Alaska Railroad Right-of-Way is an important corridor in Palmer both from a historical perspective and as a public space. The City Council recognized the importance by asking the community for feedback in a variety of ways. They included:

- Two public open houses conducted at the Palmer Train Depot
 - October 26, 2022
 - December 27, 2022
- Online survey regarding the program elements and proposed track removal (183 participants)
- Social media posting on Palmer area sites
- Outline of project and opportunities for public involvement on the City of Palmer Website
- Presentations to civic, boards and commissions and community groups by city staff
- Consultation and guidance from Alaska Railroad on permit opportunities & limitations

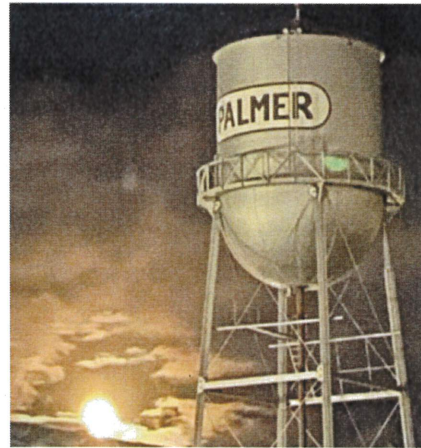
Future Public Participation

The community will have an opportunity to provide feedback once the final reports have been generated. Attend a civic group presentation or a boards and commission meeting.



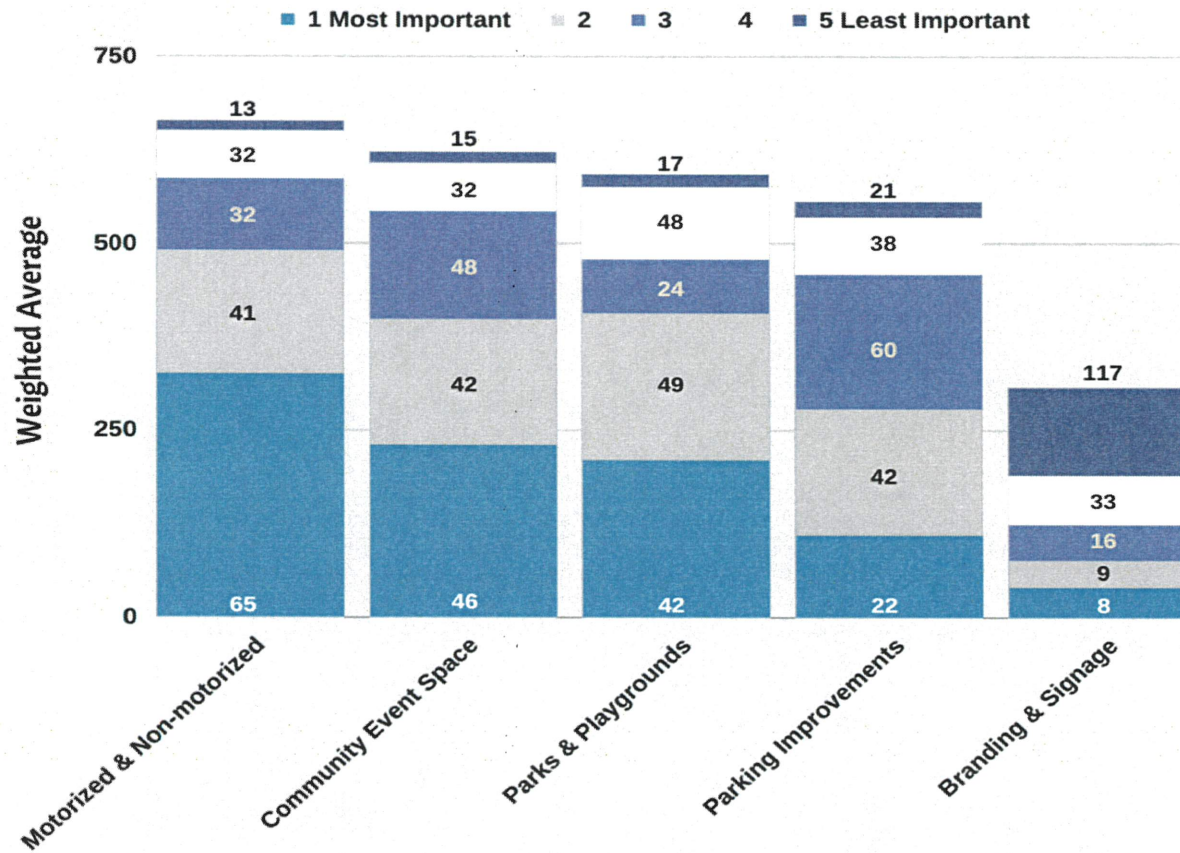
Survey Results

From Public Online Survey
conducted from October 26 –
November 25



Please rank these projects for importance to Palmer (1-5)

- a. Community Event Space (North of Depot)
- b. Parking improvements on Colony and Valley Way
- c. Motorized and non-motorized connectivity (Bike Path Extension, Pedestrian Crossing at Dogwood & Elimination of RR Fireweed Crossing).
- d. Parks & Playgrounds in downtown
- e. Branding & Signage



What other improvements can be made downtown that will enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors?

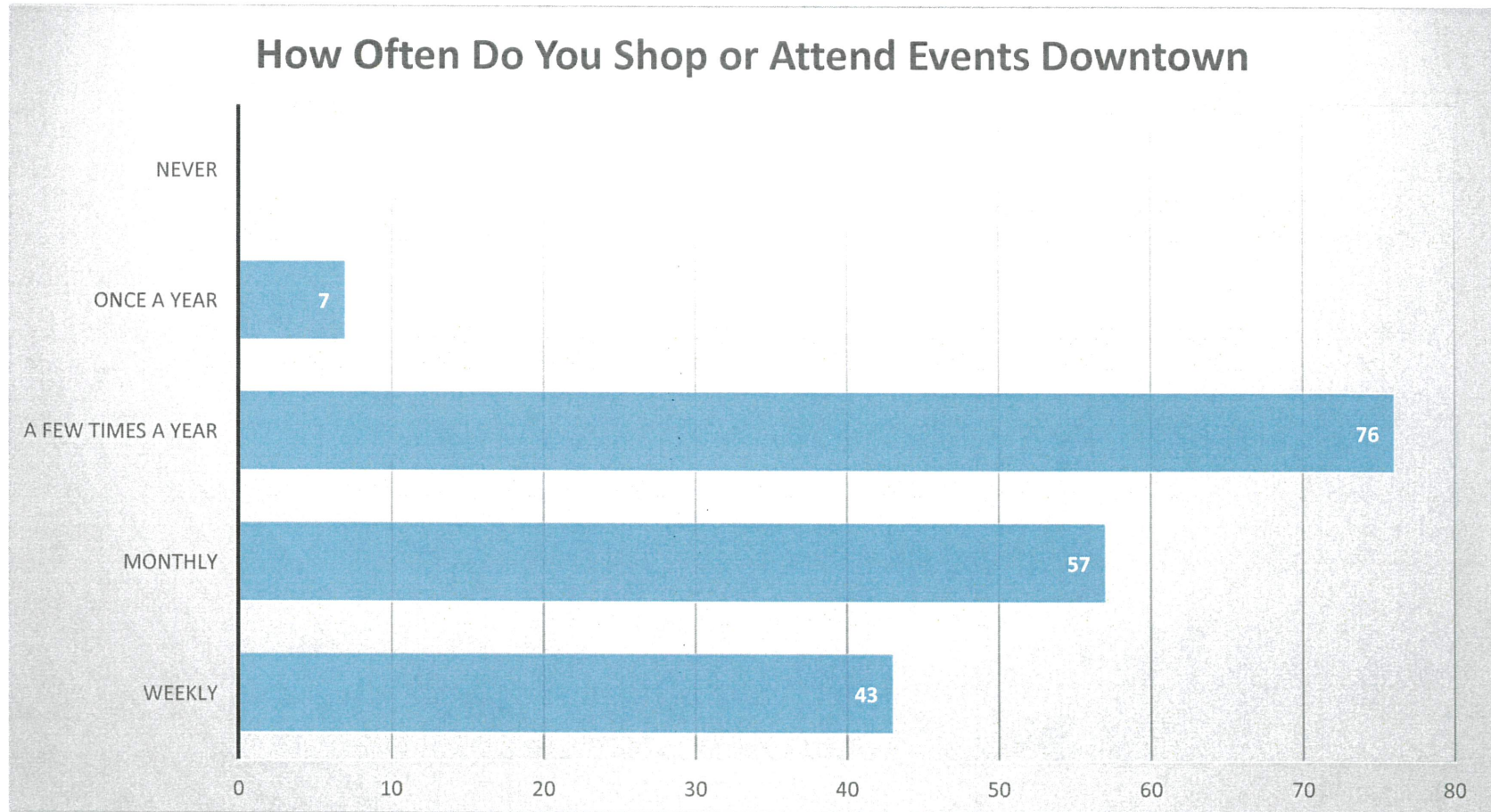
Top Responses

- Downtown Accessibility
- Greenspace / Playgrounds
- Remove Railroad Tracks
- Enhance Commercial Opportunities



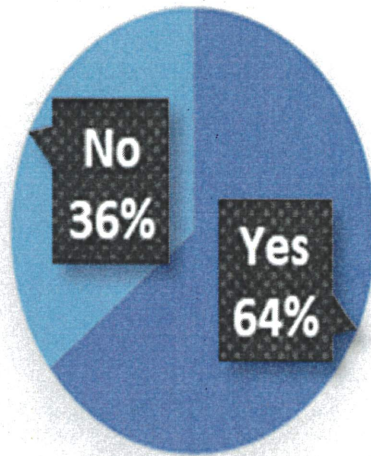
How often do you attend events in downtown that utilize the Railroad right-of-way?

- a. Weekly
- b. Monthly
- c. A few times a year
- d. Once a year
- e. Never

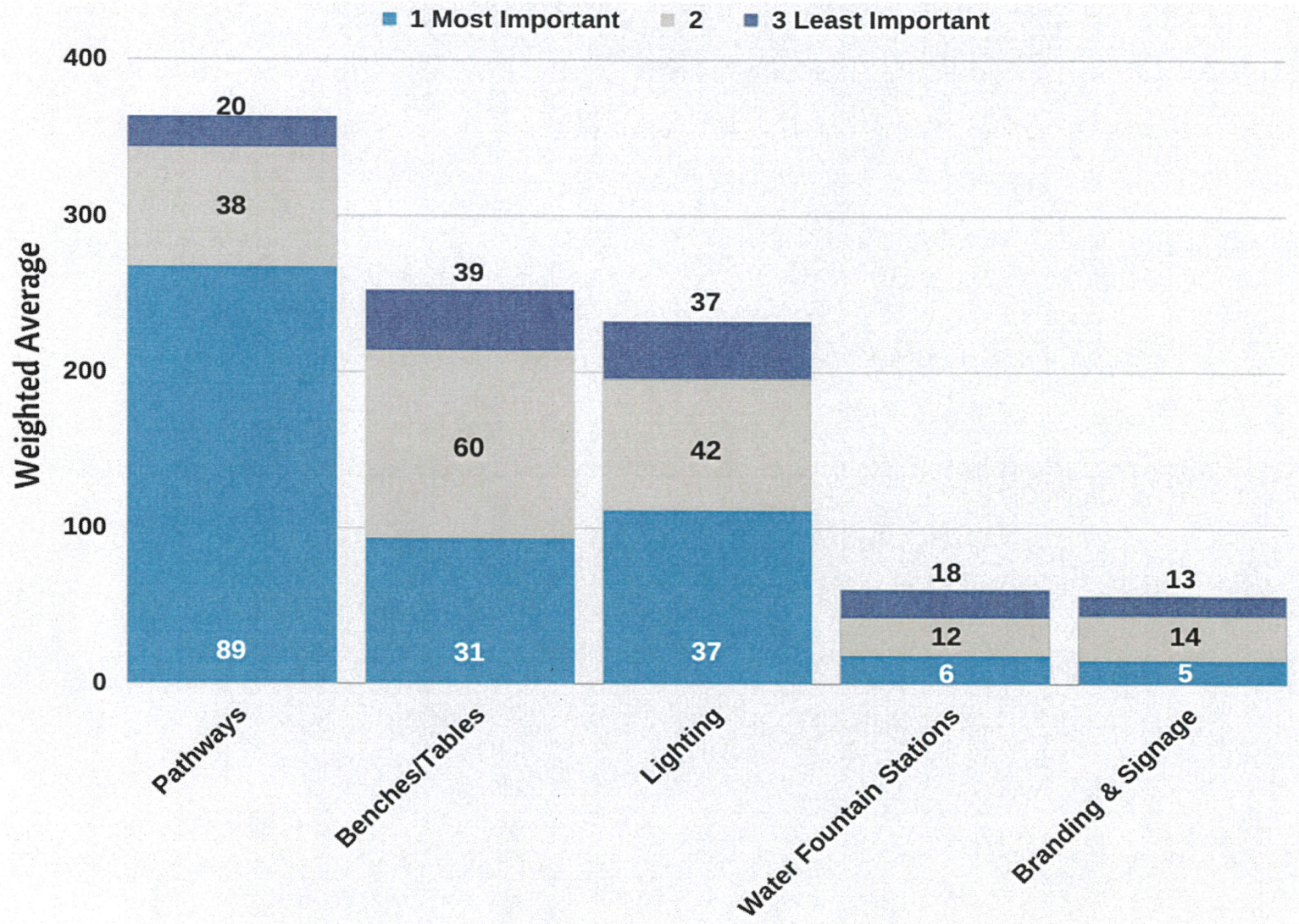


Do you utilize the downtown space for anything other than Shopping and Community Events? If yes, please elaborate.

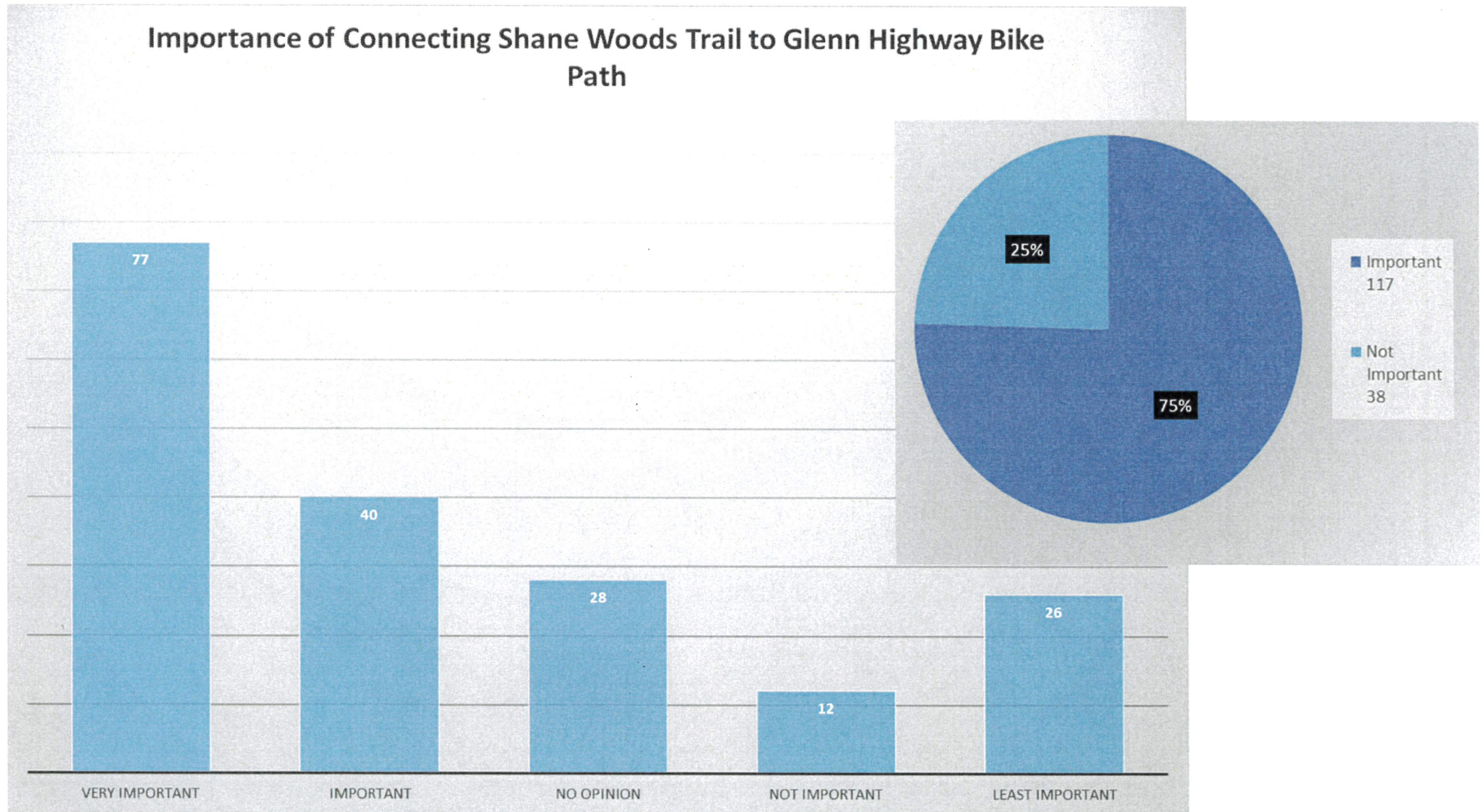
Used for Anything other than Shopping or events



How should the city improve non-motorized accessibility for seniors and people with disabilities in downtown? (Select your top three)

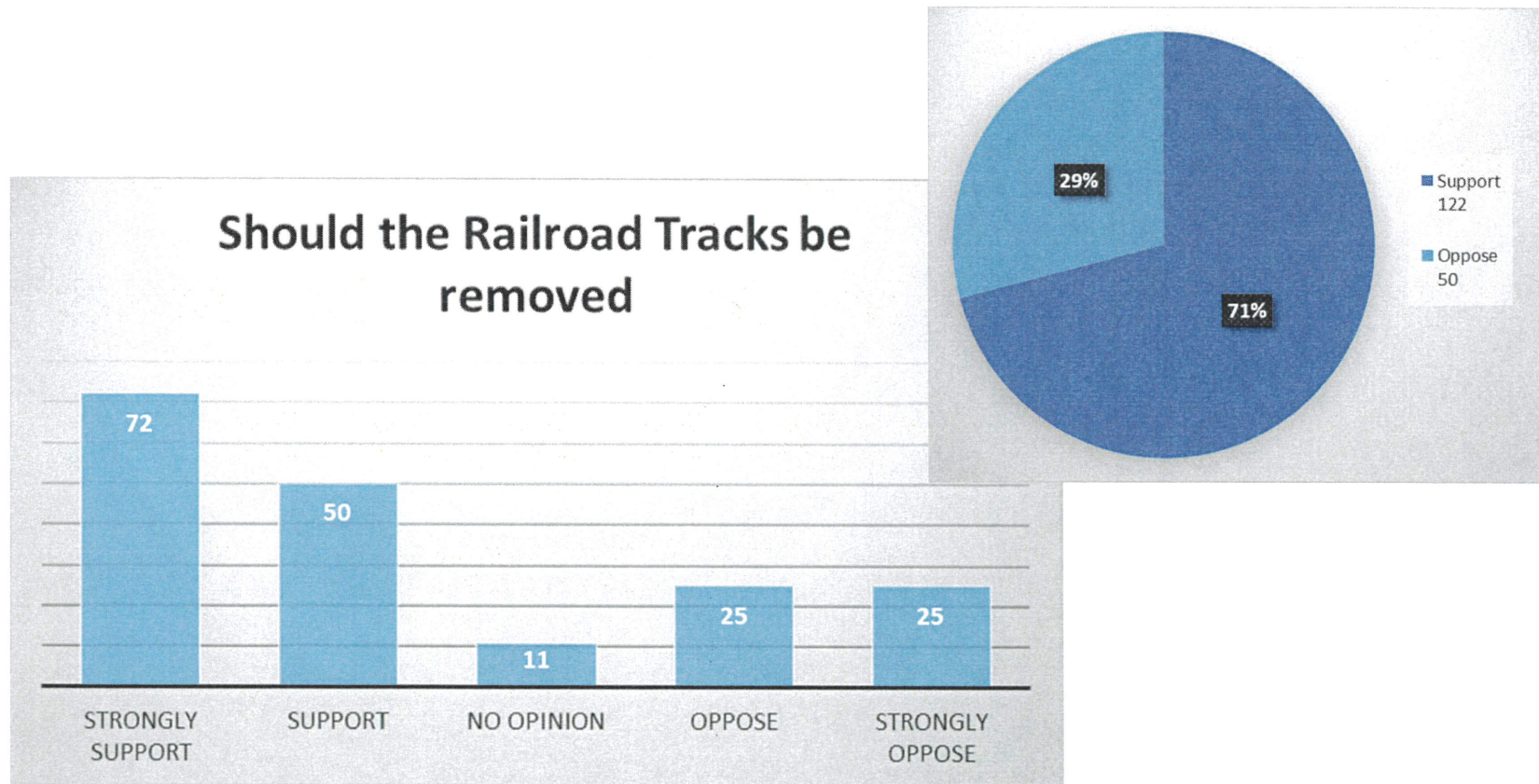


How important is connecting the Shane Woods Trail to the Glenn Highway bike path?



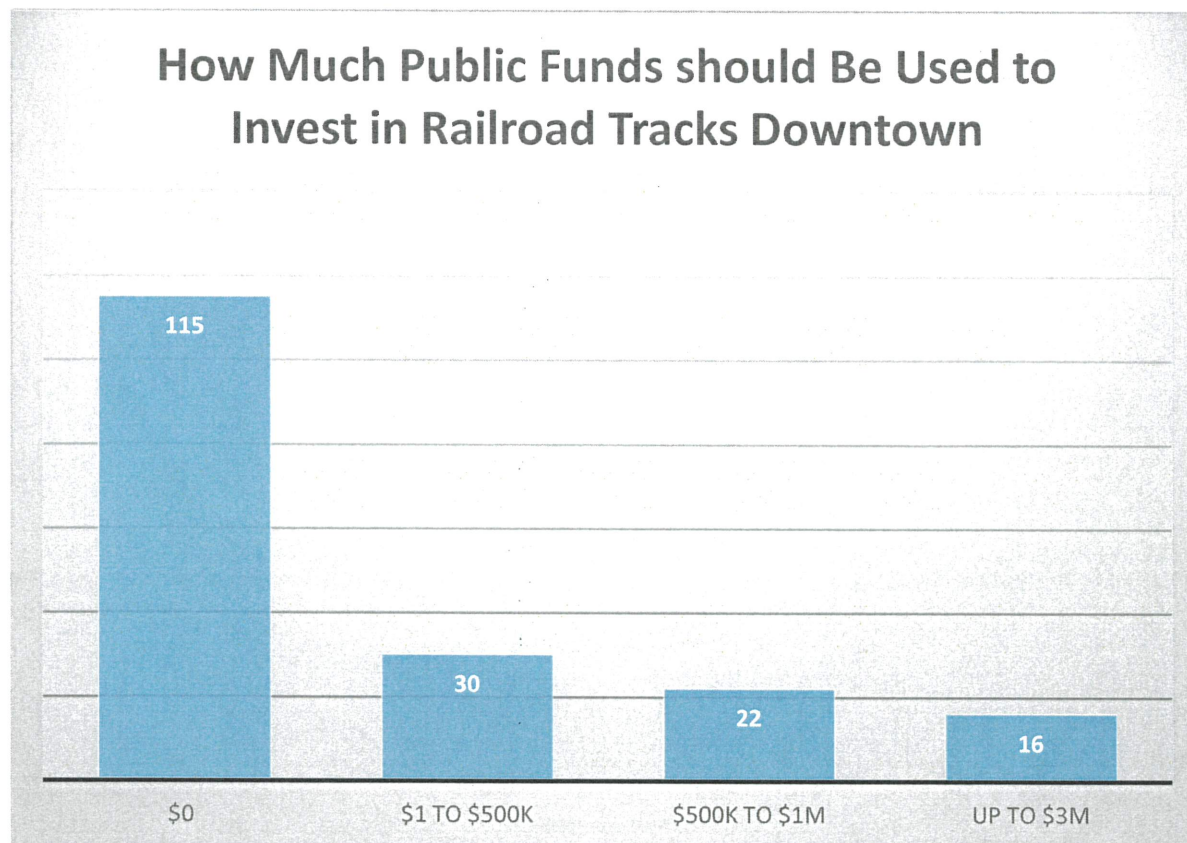
To address community improvements such as trail connections and community gathering areas, would you support the city of Palmer in the removal of railroad tracks in downtown from Fireweed Avenue to Arctic Avenue?

Strongly Support Support No Opinion Oppose Strongly Oppose

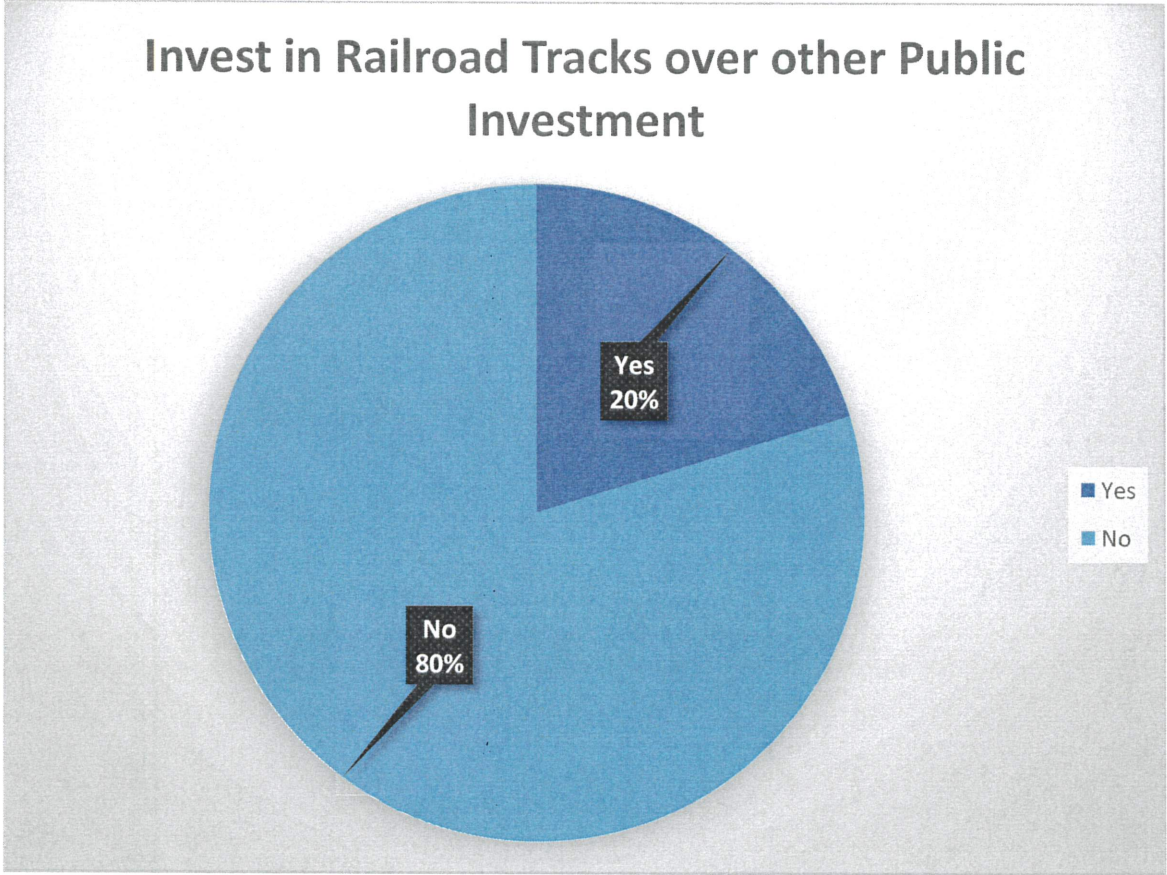


If you would like to see railroad activity in downtown, to what level of public investment would you support to keep active railroad trains in downtown Palmer?

- a. \$0
- b. \$1 to \$500,000
- c. \$500,000 to \$1,000,000
- d. Up to \$3,000,000



Would you prioritize investment in improvements of the railroad tracks over other community infrastructure improvements? (Yes or No)



What other improvements would you like to see downtown?

- More community spaces w/ benches & firepits
- Creating spaces for activities so roads do not need to be closed.
- More things for kids to do!
- Small Concert venue, outdoor ice rink, more space for food trucks, more winter lighting



What other improvements would you like to see downtown?

- Economic Growth! Increasing revenue through businesses and events
- Put a depot/platform by the pioneer home before the tracks cross Fireweed. Solves both issues.
- Updated skatepark, playgrounds, and pathways. PED CROSSING AT VALLEY WAY & ARCTIC!
- Better lighting for trail systems.
- Preserve historical artifacts within ROW

