

ACTIVITY 2

Reading Technical Material: Background for Wasilla Community Planning

SUGGESTED TIME: 50 - 75 minutes (or as homework assignment)

OBJECTIVES

- Read technical material in a public planning document.
- Understand the background information necessary to community planning.
- Read about the history, geology, soils, topography, drainage, climate, and wildlife of Wasilla.

CONTENT STANDARDS

English: B, D
Geography: E, F
Government: E
Science: C, D, F

NCLB PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Reading: 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.7, 4.9
Science: C2, D2

MATERIALS

Excerpt from the *Comprehensive Plan*, Chapter 2: Background for Planning (pp 22-32)
Map of Area Plan Locations (handout)
Chapter 2 Discussion Questions

PREPARATION

1. Copy Chapter 2, map, and discussion questions for each student.

LESSON PLAN

Reading to Understand the Community (30 - 55 minutes)

1. Reading Technical Material

One of the first steps in the community planning process is to learn as much as possible about the location and setting of the community. You must know about the history, geology, topography, climate, and wildlife of the community. These are all issues that effect community planning in different ways.

5

Read *Chapter 2: Background for Planning* (pages 22-32) from the Comprehensive Plan. Reading this information will help you understand some of the things that need to be considered in developing the Area Plans for Downtown, South Wasilla Heights, and the Airport and Transportation Museum area.

Discussing Wasilla & Community Planning (20 minutes)

1. Discussion

Distribute the Map of Area Plan Locations and facilitate a discussion based on the following questions:

- Develop a timeline describing Wasilla's history. How much of this history did you already know? What was new information to you?
- What would you say were the two most important factors in the development of Wasilla?
- How do the three planning areas fit into Wasilla's history?
- What soil types does Wasilla have? Which ones are good for development? Why?
- What do you think the soil is like in the three areas targeted for planning?
- How do topography and drainage effect community development?
- What are the topography and drainage like in the areas targeted for planning?
- How does knowing about the community's climate and wildlife help in community planning?

ACTIVITY 3

Using Socioeconomic Data for Community Planning

This page intentionally left blank.

ACTIVITY 3

Using Socioeconomic Data for Community Planning

SUGGESTED TIME: 50-75 minutes (or as homework assignment)

OBJECTIVES

- Explain how socioeconomic data is important in community planning.
- Use socioeconomic data to create and discuss graphs.
- Recognize how students fit into the socioeconomic data.

CONTENT STANDARDS

Math: A, C, E
Geography: A, B, D, F
Government: E, G
Employability: B

NCLB PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Math: 6.4.1, 7.4.1, 8.4.2, 10.4.1

MATERIALS

Map of Area Plan Locations
Wasilla Census History (data handout)
Blank column graph
Wasilla Census History Column Graph
Wasilla's Population by Age (data handout)
Blank pie chart
Population by Age Pie Chart
Employment by Industry (data handout)
Blank bar graph
Employment by Industry Bar Graph
Wasilla Land Use (data handout)
Wasilla Land Use Pie Chart
Graph Discussion Questions

PREPARATION

1. Decide if you will have students create graphs based on the data or if you will just discuss the pre-made graphs.
2. Decide if you will use all four graphs or only selected ones.
3. Copy handouts for students.

LESSON PLAN

Understanding Socioeconomic Data (20 - 45 minutes)

1. Mini-Lecture

Understanding the local economy and population is another important step in the community planning process. Looking at socioeconomic data, or data about the economy and population, of Wasilla can help guide planning efforts.

2. Creating Socioeconomic Graphs

Have students create all of the following graphs or have students create only selected graphs. If time is limited, distribute the completed charts and graphs and then proceed to the discussion questions.

Column Graph: Wasilla's Population History

Distribute the "Wasilla Census Population History" data handout and the blank column graph sheet. Instruct students to create a column graph that shows how Wasilla's population has increased since 1930.

Pie Chart: Wasilla's Population by Age

Distribute the "Wasilla Population by Age" data handout and the blank pie chart sheet. Instruct students to (1) calculate the percentage of population for each age category and (2) create a pie chart showing the Wasilla population by age.

Bar Graph: Employment by Industry

Distribute the "Employment by Industry" data handout and the blank bar graph sheet. Instruct students to create a bar graph showing Wasilla employment by industry.

Pie Chart: Wasilla Land Use

Distribute the "Wasilla Land Use" data handout and the blank pie chart sheet. Instruct students to (1) calculate the percentage of land use for each category and (2) create a pie chart showing Wasilla land use.

How Socioeconomic Data Influences Community Planning (30 minutes)

1. Discussion: Wasilla's Population History

- What does the column graph tell us?
- Why do you think Wasilla's population has been increasing, especially since 1980?
- What do you think Wasilla's population will be in 2010?
- How are people, land, and government affected when population increases?
- Distribute the Map of Area Plan Locations. How will population increase affect the three areas targeted for community planning (Downtown, South Wasilla Heights, and Airport and Transportation Museum)?

2. Discussion: Wasilla's Population by Age

- What does this graph tell us?
- What age group has the highest percentage of people? Second highest? Third?
- How will having a young population affect Wasilla?
- How does age influence community planning?
- What does this mean for you as one of the young people?

3. Discussion: Employment by Industry

- What does this graph tell us?
- What industry employs the most people?
- In 1996, 38% of the Wasilla population commuted to Anchorage or the North Slope. What industries do you think people would need to commute for?
- Do you think 38% still commutes or do you think the percentage is higher or lower today? Why?
- How does employment affect community planning?
- Which of these industries interest you in terms of a career? What would you need to do to prepare for this career?

4. Discussion: Wasilla Land Use

- What does this graph tell us?
- What type of land use do you think is most common in each of the three areas targeted for planning (Downtown, South Wasilla Heights, and Airport and Transportation Museum)?
- How does type of land use affect community planning?
- The data in this chart is from 1991. How do you think land use has changed since this data was collected? Why?

This page intentionally left blank.

ACTIVITY 4

Reading Technical Material: Understanding
the Issues in Wasilla

This page intentionally left blank.

ACTIVITY 4

Reading Technical Material: Understanding the Community Planning Issues

SUGGESTED TIME: 50-75 minutes (or as homework assignment)

OBJECTIVES

- Read technical material in a public planning document.
- Understand the major planning issues and strategies discussed in the Comprehensive Plan.
- Examine these issues and strategies in relation to the Area Plans.

CONTENT STANDARDS

English: B, D
Geography: E, F, D
Government: E, G

NCLB PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Reading: 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.7, 4.9

MATERIALS

Excerpt from the *Comprehensive Plan*, Chapter 1: Summary & strategies (pp 4-21)
Map of Area Plan Locations
Chapter 1 Discussion Questions

PREPARATION

1. Copy Chapter 1, the map, and discussion questions for each student.

LESSON PLAN

Reading to Understand the Issues (30 - 55 minutes)

1. Reading Technical Material

The Comprehensive Plan, approved in 1996, focuses on four areas for planning. The plan identifies goals and strategies for each area. The planning areas include:

- Land Use
- Parks and Recreation
- Public Facilities and Services
- Transportation

Read *Chapter 1: Summary & Strategies* (pages 4-21) from the Comprehensive Plan. This chapter discusses Land Use, Parks and Recreation, Public Facilities and Services, and Transportation. Reading this information will help you understand the issues involved in developing the Area Plans for Downtown, South Wasilla Heights, and the Airport and Transportation Museum area.

Discussing the Issues (20 minutes)

1. Discussion

- Why does Wasilla need a Comprehensive Plan?
- The 2% sales tax accounts for what percentage of the city's budget?
- What are some of the improvements that occurred between 1992 and 1996?
- What are some of the economic challenges that have faced Wasilla between 1992 and 1996?
- What strategies are recommended to expand tourism?
- What is the issue with snow machines?
- What kind of events and land use trends may affect the community?
- What land use goals are included in the Plan?
- Which goals and/or strategies in the Parks and Recreation Plan are most interesting to you? Why?
- Which public facilities and services do you use most often? Have you seen any of the changes in these facilities or services that were recommended in the Plan?
- What transportation issues do you think are most important? Why?
- What has changed over the last 10 years since the Comprehensive Plan was approved? What has stayed the same?
- What are new issues that Wasilla is facing today?
- Distribute the Map of Area Plan Locations. Which of the issues identified in the Comprehensive Plan will affect each of the planning areas?

ACTIVITY 5

Recognizing Wasilla's Strengths, Resources,
& Major Issues

This page intentionally left blank.

ACTIVITY 5

Recognizing Wasilla's Strengths, Resources, & Major Issues

SUGGESTED TIME: 50 minutes

OBJECTIVES

- Recognize Wasilla's strengths and resources.
- Identify the major issues for each targeted planning area.
- Understand the relevance of these issues to students' lives.

CONTENT STANDARDS

Geography: E, F, D
Government: E, G

MATERIALS

Flip chart paper, tape, & markers
Map of Area Plan Locations

PREPARATION

None

LESSON PLAN

Identifying Wasilla's Strength's and Resources (25 minutes)

1. Go-Around

Invite each student to share what she or he likes best about living in Wasilla. What are students proud of about living in Wasilla?

2. Brainstorm

Ask the class to list the strengths and resources (organizations, services, money, activities, etc.) of Wasilla. Record all answers on the board or on flip chart paper for use in another activity.

Identifying Wasilla's Major Issues (25 minutes)

1. Go-Around

Invite each student to share one regret she or he has about living in Wasilla. What do students wish were different about Wasilla?

2. Brainstorm

Divide the board into three columns (or use three pieces of flip chart paper). Label each column with one of the three planning areas - Downtown, South Wasilla Heights, and Airport and Transportation Museum. Distribute the map.

Have students identify the major issues, challenges or needs for each area. Record their answers for use in another activity.

3. Discussion

- Which issues are of most concern to you and/or your family? Why?
- Which issues do you think need to take priority? Why?

*** After this activity, please give the planning team the brainstorming ideas from the class. The planning team will review the students' ideas to include them in the Area Plans.**

ACTIVITY 6

Small Group Activity: Identifying Challenges
and Solutions

This page intentionally left blank.

ACTIVITY 6

Small Group Activity: Identifying Challenges and Solutions

SUGGESTED TIME: 50-75 minutes

OBJECTIVES

- Participate in a community planning activity.
- Identify two major issues that could be addressed in the Area Plans.
- Identify strengths and resources that could be used to address the issues.
- Identify solutions to the issues and who would implement the solutions.

CONTENT STANDARDS

English: C, D, E
Geography: F
Government: E, G

MATERIALS

Strengths, resources, and major issues brainstorming lists from activity 5
Flip chart paper & markers
Map of Area Plan Locations

PREPARATION

None

LESSON PLAN

Small Group Project: Visioning Our Community (30 - 55 minutes)

1. Small Group Work

Divide the class into small groups of three or four students. Explain to the small groups that they are going to participate in a community planning activity. They are actually going to come up with ideas that their community could use to address the challenges identified in Activity 5. The planning team will review their ideas to be included in the Area Plans.

Small groups should look at all of the major issues and challenges the class listed in Activity 5 and decide on the two issues they feel are most important in their own community. Give each small group two pieces of flip chart paper. Instruct the groups to divide each paper into three columns with the following headings:

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
Community Strengths and Resources	Community Challenge or Issue	Solutions: What can be done to solve the problem? Who could implement this solution?

Step 1: Groups should write one of their community challenges in **column 2** on each piece of flip chart.

Step 2: Groups should answer two questions for each challenge they picked. “What can be done to solve this problem?” and “Who would implement the solution?” Emphasize that their suggestions must be realistic ideas that could actually be implemented in their community. Students can use words and/or drawings to describe their ideas. Groups should write their solution ideas in **column 3**.

Step 3: Groups should look at the list of community strengths and resources from the brainstorming list in Activity 5. For each challenge and solution they picked, groups should write down in **column 1** the strengths and resources their community could use to address the challenge.

Sharing the Vision (20 minutes)

1. Go-Around

Invite each group to share one challenge and one solution from their visioning session.

2. Discussion

- What similarities did you see among the groups, in terms of their ideas on challenges and solutions?
- What differences did you see?
- How do you feel about the future of your community? Why?

* After this activity, please give the planning team the brainstorming ideas from each small group. The planning team will review the students’ ideas to include them in the Area Plans.

ACTIVITY 7

Focus Group: A Classic Community Planning
Method

This page intentionally left blank.

ACTIVITY 7

Focus Group: A Classic Community Planning Method

SUGGESTED TIME: 75 minutes

OBJECTIVES

- Participate in a community planning activity.
- Identify major issues that could be addressed in the Area Plans.
- Identify strengths and resources that could be used to address the issues.
- Identify solutions to the issues and who would implement the solutions.

CONTENT STANDARDS

English: D, E

Geography: F

Government: E, G

MATERIALS

Flip chart paper, tape, & markers

Map of Area Plan Locations

PREPARATION

1. Decide who will facilitate the focus group. Planning team members, teachers, or students themselves, can facilitate the focus group.
2. Training students as facilitators is an opportunity to empower young people with the knowledge and skills to be active leaders in the community planning process. Planning team members could meet with identified student leaders prior to the focus group to brief them about the Area Plans and to provide training on group facilitation.

LESSON PLAN

Community Strengths and Resources (30 minutes)

1. Go-Around and Brainstorm

Have the group finish this sentence, “The best thing about living in Wasilla is...” Record all answers on flip chart paper. Continue brainstorming a list of community strengths and resources.

Community Challenges, Weaknesses and Solutions (30 minutes)

1. Go-Around and Brainstorm

Ask the participants to finish this sentence, “What I regret about living in Wasilla is...” Generate a list of community challenges and weaknesses students think should be addressed in each Area Plan (Downtown, South Wasilla Heights, and the Airport and Transportation Museum area). Record their ideas on flip chart paper so the whole group can see and remember the ideas.

For each issue, discuss solutions and who would be responsible for implementing the solution.

Vision for the Community (15 minutes)

1. Image for the Future

Give each participant a sheet of blank paper and tell them to think about one issue or challenge mentioned in the discussion that is most interesting to them. How could the community solve this challenge? Ask students to write a word or phrase or to draw a symbol that illustrates their vision for the future of their community.

2. Go-Around

When participants are finished with their image, invite each person to share their vision.

* After this activity, please give the planning team the brainstorming ideas. The planning team will review the students’ ideas to include them in the Area Plans.

ACTIVITY 8

Individual Writing Project: My Vision for the
Future

This page intentionally left blank.

ACTIVITY 8

Individual Writing Project: My Vision for the Future

SUGGESTED TIME: 75 minutes (or as homework assignment)

OBJECTIVES

- Strengthen writing skills as part of a community planning activity.
- Identify major issues that could be addressed in the Area Plans.
- Identify strengths and resources that could be used to address the issues.
- Identify solutions to the issues and who would implement the solutions.

CONTENT STANDARDS

English: A, B, D
Geography: F
Government: E, G

NCLB PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Writing: 4.1, 4.2, 4.3

MATERIALS

Strengths, resources, and major issues brainstorming lists from activity 5
Map of Area Plan Locations
Essay Questions

PREPARATION

None

LESSON PLAN

My Vision for the Future (10 minutes)

1. Mini-Lecture

Explain to the students that they will be working on a three-page assignment to describe their own vision for the future of their community. The first parts of the assignment will be a detailed essay about how the community can address their challenges. The last part of the assignment will be creating a drawing or symbol to illustrate their dreams for the future of their community.

2. Choosing an Issue

Instruct students to choose one challenge or weakness that is most interesting to them, from either class brainstorming or from the Comprehensive Plan. Students should answer these questions about the issue they chose:

- How would you describe this challenge to someone not from your community?
- Why is this issue interesting to you?
- How could Wasilla use its strengths and resources to deal with this challenge?
- Who would be responsible for implementing these ideas?

Writing about My Vision (50 minutes)

1. Essay

Students will be writing a four part essay about their vision for the community.

Part 1: Describe your community's strengths and resources. What do you like about living in your community? What is unique and special about your community?

Part 2: Define or describe your chosen challenge or weakness in detail. Explain your hopes, fears or concerns about the issue. How would you describe this issue to someone not from your community? Who or what is impacting or affecting this issue today? Why is this issue interesting to you?

Part 3: State how your community could use its resources and strengths to deal with this challenge. Who would be responsible for implementing these ideas?

Part 4: Create a symbol, drawing or abstract form to represent your hopes and dreams for the future of your community. Reassure students that it is okay if they can't draw well - a very simple symbol or an abstract form would be great!

Sharing the Vision (15 minutes)

1. Go-Around

Invite each student to share one of their solutions or their drawing from the "My Vision for the Future" essay assignment.

*** After this activity, please give the planning team the student essays. The planning team will review the students' ideas to include them in the Area Plans.**

ACTIVITY 9

Student Vision Public Awareness Campaign

This page intentionally left blank.

ACTIVITY 9

Student Vision Public Awareness Campaign

GOALS

- Show students that the community values their ideas.
- Reinforce that students have an important role in the community and in local government.
- Educate students who did not participate in activities about community planning.
- Engage parents and other adults in student learning.
- Promote parent and school cooperation.
- Help students understand and respect the perspectives of others.

CONTENT STANDARDS

English: A
Geography: F
Government: E

MATERIALS

Student work (essays, group projects, focus group notes or student-drawn images)

ACTIVITIES

Student Project Display

Display the small group project (activity 6) and the “My Vision of the Future” essays (activity 8) in schools, the district office, or other places in the community to educate students who did not participate in the project.

Parent Newsletter

Include students’ artwork and visioning ideas in parent newsletters or other school publications to engage parents and families in the project.

Website

Include the students' visioning ideas on the Mat-Su district website. Students' ideas support and compliment the statement on the website, *"Mat-Su Borough School District develops citizens for a global society by inspiring students to learn, achieve, and care."*

Speaking on the Issues

Describe students' vision of the future in the Mayor's and/or Vision Steering Team comments to highlight the valuable role youth have in the future of the community.

Community Events

Report on the Wasilla Youth Involvement Project at community events to encourage continued discussions by youth and elders on the future of the community.

Section 4

This page intentionally left blank.

DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS

This page intentionally left blank.

Developmental Assets

List of 40 developmental assets from pp 10-12 in *Helping Kids Succeed Alaskan Style*;

see also

Search Institute website: <http://www.search-institute.org/assets/40Assets.pdf>

and

Alaska ICE website: <http://www.alaskaice.org> for information regarding the Assets Framework and the Alaska ICE Mission

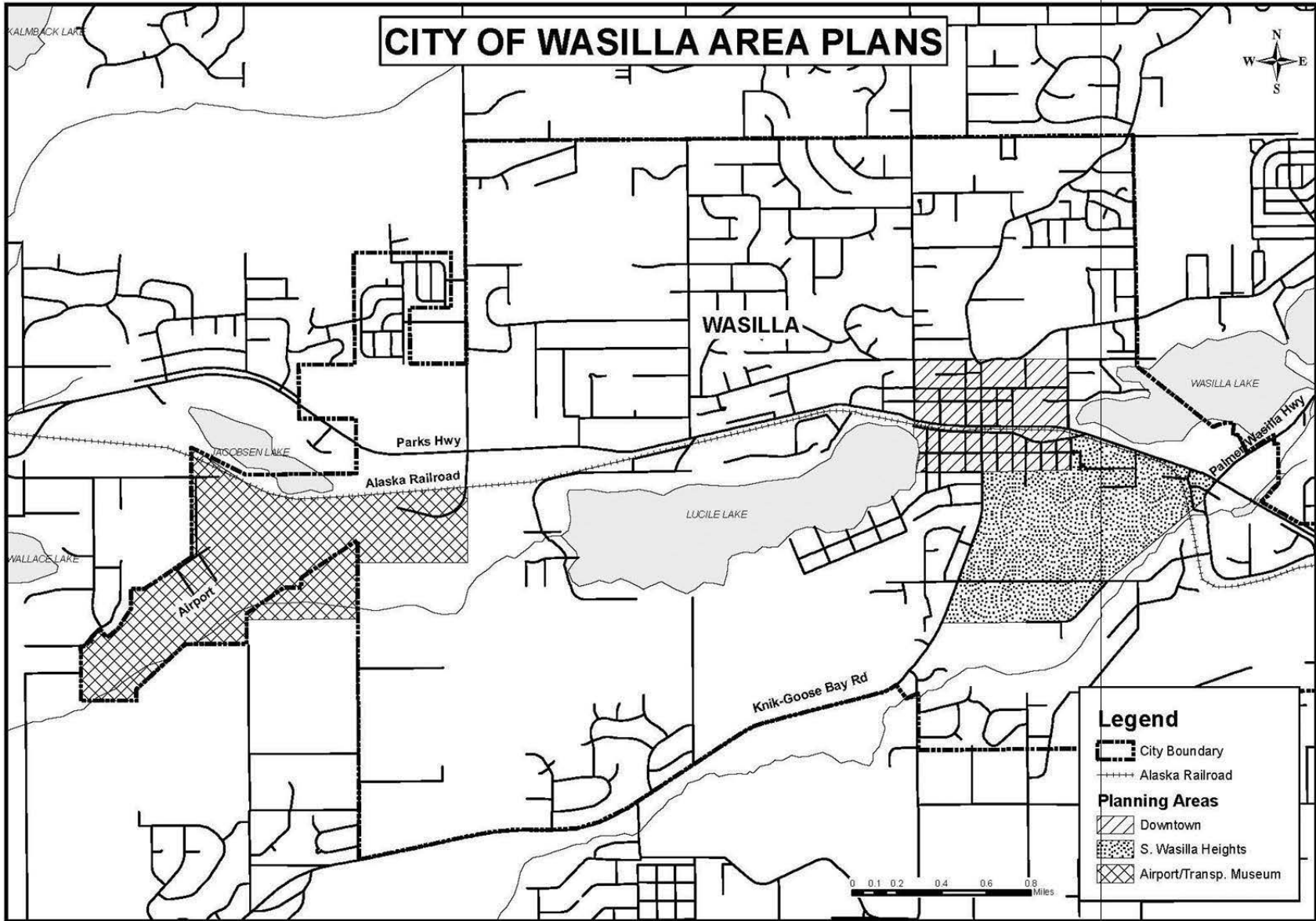
This page intentionally left blank.

MAP OF PLANNING LOCATIONS

(Activities 1-8)

This page intentionally left blank.

CITY OF WASILLA AREA PLANS



This page intentionally left blank.

DISCUSSION & ESSAY QUESTIONS

(Activities 2, 3, 4, & 8)

This page intentionally left blank.

Reading Technical Material: Background for Wasilla Community Planning

Read *Chapter 2: Background for Planning* (pages 22-32) from the Comprehensive Plan. Reading this information will help you understand some of the things that need to be considered in developing the Area Plans for Downtown, South Wasilla Heights, and the Airport and Transportation Museum area.

1. Develop a timeline describing Wasilla's history. How much of this history did you already know? What was new information to you?
2. What would you say were the two most important factors in the development of Wasilla?
3. How do the three planning areas fit into Wasilla's history?
4. What soil types does Wasilla have? Which ones are good for development? Why?
5. What do you think the soil is like in the three areas targeted for planning?
6. How do topography and drainage effect community development?
7. What are the topography and drainage like in the areas targeted for planning?
8. How does knowing about the community's climate and wildlife help in community planning?

Using Socioeconomic Data for Community Planning

1. Discussion: Wasilla's Population History

- What does the column graph tell us?
- Why do you think Wasilla's population has been increasing, especially since 1980?
- What do you think Wasilla's population will be in 2010?
- How are people, land, and government affected when population increases?
- How will population increase affect the three areas targeted for community planning (Downtown, South Wasilla Heights, and Airport and Transportation Museum)? Refer to the map of Area Plan Locations.

2. Discussion: Wasilla's Population by Age

- What does this graph tell us?
- What age group has the highest percentage of people? Second highest? Third?
- How will having a young population affect Wasilla?
- How does age influence community planning?
- What does this mean for you as one of the young people?

3. Discussion: Employment by Industry

- What does this graph tell us?
- What industry employs the most people?
- In 1996, 38% of the Wasilla population commuted to Anchorage or the North Slope. What industries do you think people would need to commute for?
- Do you think 38% still commutes or do you think the percentage is higher or lower today? Why?
- How does employment affect community planning?
- Which of these industries interest you in terms of a career? What would you need to do to prepare for this career?

4. Discussion: Wasilla Land Use

- What does this graph tell us?
- What type of land use do you think is most common in each of the three areas targeted for planning (Downtown, South Wasilla Heights, and Airport and Transportation Museum)?
- How does type of land use affect community planning?
- The data in this chart is from 1991. How do you think land use has changed since this data was collected? Why?

Reading Technical Material: Understanding the Community Planning Issues

Read *Chapter 1: Summary & Strategies* (pages 4-21) from the Comprehensive Plan. This chapter discusses Land Use, Parks and Recreation, Public Facilities and Services, and Transportation. Reading this information will help you understand the issues involved in developing the Area Plans for Downtown, South Wasilla Heights, and the Airport and Transportation Museum area.

1. Why does Wasilla need a Comprehensive Plan?
2. The 2% sales tax accounts for what percentage of the city's budget?
3. What are some of the improvements that occurred between 1992 and 1996?
4. What are some of the economic challenges that have faced Wasilla between 1992 and 1996?
5. What strategies are recommended to expand tourism?
6. What is the issue with snow machines?
7. What kind of events and land use trends may affect the community?
8. What land use goals are included in the Plan?
9. Which goals and/or strategies in the Parks and Recreation Plan are most interesting to you? Why?
10. Which public facilities and services do you use most often? Have you seen any of the changes in these facilities or services that were recommended in the Plan?
11. What transportation issues do you think are most important? Why?
12. What has changed over the last 10 years since the Comprehensive Plan was approved? What has stayed the same?
13. What are new issues that Wasilla is facing today?
14. Which of the issues identified in the Comprehensive Plan will affect each of the planning areas?

My Vision for the Future Essay

Part 1: Describe your community's strengths and resources. What do you like about living in your community? What is unique and special about your community?

Part 2: Define or describe your chosen challenge or weakness in detail. Explain your hopes, fears or concerns about the issue. How would you describe this issue to someone not from your community? Who or what is impacting or affecting this issue today? Why is this issue interesting to you?

Part 3: State how your community could use its resources and strengths to deal with this challenge. Who would be responsible for implementing these ideas?

Part 4: Create a symbol, drawing or abstract form to represent your hopes and dreams for the future of your community. It is okay if you can't draw well - a very simple symbol or an abstract form would be great!

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

(Activities 2 & 4)

This page intentionally left blank.



**CITY OF WASILLA
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
CITY APPROVED DRAFT**

Prepared by:
The Canelos Group
Community Planning
LCMF, Ltd.
Wasilla Planning Office

April 1996

Chapter 1 Summary & Strategies

This document is the City of Wasilla's Comprehensive Plan. It is designed to serve as a guide for citizens and civic decision makers concerning land use, growth, development and enhancement of the quality of life for residents and visitors to the community. The plan contains important background information on the community's history, natural environment and economy.

Wasilla's citizens are in the midst of long term city building. Located in the heart of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, the City has grown ten-fold over the past 30 years. Wasilla is the dominant trade, retail and service center for the Valley, as well as a major suburban locality for the Anchorage metropolitan area. The population is relatively young and active. The area offers the best of Alaska: it has relatively affordable land, housing, small-town living and spectacular scenery.

The community features paved streets, water and sewer utilities, public buildings and schools, a variety of residential areas, recreational opportunities and a large business district. Wasilla is also a winter community, and all plans for the town should recognize the importance of living and working in a winter environment.

This plan contains the following major elements:

- ◆ Chapter 1, Summary and Strategies
- ◆ Chapter 2, Background for Planning
- ◆ Chapter 3, Economy and Population
- ◆ Chapter 4, Land Use Plan
- ◆ Chapter 5, Parks and Recreation Plan
- ◆ Chapter 6, Public Facilities and Services
- ◆ Chapter 7, Transportation Plan

The remainder of this chapter summarizes the major goals, policies, themes and recommendations contained within this plan. Goals (the long-term end towards which programs or activities are ultimately directed) are shown in bold text, while policies (the way in which programs and activities are conducted to achieve an identified goal) or city positions are shown with check marks.

Chapter 2, Background for Planning

Wasilla's setting offers what many consider to be the best of Alaska: extensive forests, numerous lakes and streams, abundant wildlife and spectacular mountain scenery. Wasilla is a "winter city" with lengthy periods of inclement conditions. This chapter

Wasilla Comprehensive Plan

summarizes Wasilla's important environmental conditions and history, and provides important background for comprehensive planning.

Chapter 3, Economy and Population

The economy of Wasilla has evolved dramatically since the last Comprehensive Plan update was approved in 1992. Local voters approved a 2% sales tax which now accounts for over 75% of the operational city budget of \$6,089,160 for FY 1996. Local property tax rates have dropped by more than half from 4.2 mills in FY 1993 to 1.7 mills for FY 1995 and 1996. Several miles of local streets have been paved and improved, and work continues on local bike paths and amenities. A new police force was established, and recently completed its second year on the job. The first major national retailer to discover the Valley, Wal Mart, opened with great fanfare inside the city limits. The State of Alaska completed the four lane upgrade from the junction of the Glenn and Parks Highway across the Palmer Hay Flats to Anchorage. Land use permits are up, and more small businesses are opening branches in Wasilla. The local fire service area has an improved rating, lowering costs for fire insurance. Valley school enrollments and overall population are at all time highs.

All is not good news, however. Several major proposed economic development projects in the Valley, including the capital move initiative, coal mining at Wishbone Hill, and short-term development of Port MacKenzie, are on hold for the foreseeable future. The Valley is even more dependent on Anchorage for steady employment, and at least 38% of valley workers must commute to Anchorage or the North Slope for employment. ARCO Alaska and other oil companies have undertaken substantial reductions in force. State budget gaps continue without easy solutions. Diversification of the economy remains an important, but elusive goal.

The message for Wasilla remains the same as in the 1992 plan: the more self-sufficient the community can become in terms of revenue generation, and the more efficient local government can become, the more assured the future will be.

The City should continue its strong support of an educated workforce as the underpinning of Wasilla's private sector economy. By continuing to serve as the retail and service center of the Valley, Wasilla should continue to grow, and have the resources to improve the area's quality of life.

Tourism is growing in importance. To help increase tourism to Wasilla, the City should:

- ◆ Support improved access to the community through highway improvement projects and more frequent rail passenger service.
- ◆ Strongly support local efforts to landscape and beautify Wasilla. Amend the Wasilla Development Code to include provisions for landscaping and winter city design.

Wasilla Comprehensive Plan

- ◆ Encourage the Borough to require landscaping and removal of unsightly buildings, including the building packages of national chains of fast food franchises, filling stations, retail and warehouse groups whose trademark is gaudy and not in keeping with the standards for building and sign design set forth in the Wasilla Development Code.
- ◆ Continue to expand the Iditarod Days Festival associated with the Iditarod sled dog race re-start;
- ◆ Co-sponsor an annual spring visitor industry/tourism conference with the MSCVB, Chambers, Palmer, State Parks and private industry. The conference could debrief the past season, looking at successes and problem areas to be corrected.
- ◆ Install new Wasilla entry signs on the Parks Highway and major roads. Continue to work to upgrade parking and pedestrian amenities in the museum and historic block area
- ◆ Work closely with the MSCVB, the Chamber of Commerce and the Borough on joint planning for tourism and visitor promotions
- ◆ Continue to publicize the historic connections between Knik, Wasilla and the Hatcher Pass Mining Districts
- ◆ Provide for visitor-related information and displays as part of the master plan for the old airport
- ◆ Include visitor information and amenities at the airport
- ◆ Work with DOT&PF to install appropriate signs marking the crossing of the Iditarod Trail at the Parks Highway.

The issue of whether or how snow machines should be allowed to operate within the City needs to be resolved. Wasilla should seek acceptable ways to encourage people on their snow machines to come into town, without endangering pedestrians and vehicle traffic. If Wasilla wants to pursue working to include snow machines as part of its winter recreation attractions, the City should take the following steps:

- ◆ Work with the borough and state to accommodate registered snowmachine access on designated streets.
- ◆ Encourage snowmachine users and clubs to join together to develop a connecting trail system to public lands in the area. It is especially important that this be done soon before the addition of landowners makes the job of acquiring access more difficult.

Wasilla Comprehensive Plan

- ◆ Develop rules and a means of enforcement for clean, quiet and safe operation of snow machines within the city.
- ◆ Work with the borough to open parks in the area for winter use. A cooperative agreement could provide funds for the maintenance needed.

This chapter offers five population forecasts. The most likely scenario is based upon an annual growth rate of 3.5%. This mid-level case assumes continued business and residential growth in the Valley, relatively stable oil prices, and the gradual expansion of city boundaries. Under this scenario, Wasilla's population would rise from 4,028 to 7,735 people by 2010.

Chapter 4, Land Use Plan

The land use plan is a guide for current and future land use and development decisions affecting the City of Wasilla. The plan's objective is to anticipate and respond to development trends, respect natural site characteristics, and reflect the community's attitudes about future growth. The plan assigns all land areas in the city to appropriate land use categories, based upon existing and emerging patterns of development, transportation access, availability of utilities and other sound planning principles.

The chapter includes discussions of existing land use, growth trends, and objectives for residential, commercial, industrial, and park sites. Not every future land use problem or concern can be predicted. However, a fairly accurate prediction of short term issues can be made and long term goals can be stated to provide guidance for the Planning Commission and Council.

Over the past decade, Wasilla has witnessed a number of important events that shape land use. These include:

- ◆ The economic recession of the mid to late 1980's;
- ◆ The gradual recovery of the Valley economy during the 1990's;
- ◆ Development of a new city owned airport, and closure of the old downtown airfield;
- ◆ Significant improvements to the Glenn Highway between Anchorage and the junction of the Parks Highway;
- ◆ The arrival of a national discount store to Alaska: Wal-Mart;
- ◆ Voter approval of a city 2% sales tax;
- ◆ Voter approval of a city Police Department;
- ◆ The growth of new businesses in Wasilla, gradually filling in the downtown area
- ◆ Rapidly increasing summer tourism
- ◆ Moving the official start of the Iditarod to Wasilla (the ceremonial start remains in Anchorage)

Wasilla Comprehensive Plan

The Land Use Plan and recommended strategies attempt to guide civic decision making over a 10-20 year period. However, if the 1992 plan is any guide, this current document will need to be frequently revisited and revised. Wasilla continues to change rapidly. Here is a listing of events and land use trends which may affect the community:

- ◆ The passage and reaffirmation of the Sales Tax and Police Force were fundamental turning points in Wasilla's growth and development. They will continue to contribute to local government and the quality of life in Wasilla.
- ◆ Traffic congestion will continue to increase, although DOT&PF will make major improvements to the George Parks Highway and other state maintained arterials and collectors in the Valley.
- ◆ Commercial growth should continue in the Valley, sometimes in unpredictable ways. The arrival of major discount stores (such as Wal Mart) to Alaska was not widely forecast, for example.
- ◆ Builders and developers favor home construction in what's locally known as "the golden triangle" bordered by the Palmer-Wasilla Highway, the Parks Highway and Trunk Road. This burgeoning area of the central Valley has relatively easy access to major highways for the commute to Anchorage or the short trip into Wasilla. This "core area" of the Valley can be expected to continue to grow.
- ◆ DOT&PF plans to improve the Parks Highway and extend the Palmer-Wasilla Highway to Knik-Goose Bay Road, provides opportunities for Wasilla to encourage development south of the railroad tracks. Widening the physical aspect of the commercial area is a long-standing community goal.
- ◆ Several unincorporated areas of the Valley will likely consider and apply for municipal status over the coming years. Talkeetna and Memory Lakes are considering such a move.
- ◆ The old Wasilla Airport will be gradually developed into the focus of Wasilla's public amenities.
- ◆ Long-term, Wasilla and Palmer may consider expanding their boundaries to meet at Trunk Road, or to even combine their forces in a new mega-city encompassing much of the populated area of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.
- ◆ Long-term, the Knik Arm Crossing may again come to life, prompting significant shifts and land use patterns and development.
- ◆ Municipal boundaries will gradually expand, both by request and necessity. The City will be much larger in 20 years.

Wasilla Comprehensive Plan

Goal: Encourage growth and development that promotes the economy, protects the environment and improves the quality of life. The City should do everything it can to encourage economic development, while protecting and enhancing the small town atmosphere and semi rural way of life.

- ◆ The R-1 residential area should be expanded in those areas which actively, by 100 percent vote, seek protection for exclusively residential use.
- ◆ The city should allow for conversion of some of the Intermediate zoned land to other uses.
- ◆ Change the Creekside Estates District to R-1 or Intermediate. The present Creekside Estates District is an anomaly, and allows for modular homes as a major development permit.
- ◆ The city should consider ways to encourage the development of starter homes in the city to meet these needs. The city should help the expanding service sector work-force, and first time homeowners to find a wider range of housing options.
- ◆ The City should continue its strong support of active senior housing programs and organizations.
- ◆ Facilitate the upgrading and in-filling of commercial uses throughout the western downtown area to more fully utilize existing development. The redevelopment of the old airport site should help revitalize this area. This will help create a more vital downtown, and promote a cost effective distribution system for water, sewer and other utilities.
- ◆ Designate land adjoining the airport and railroad for future industrial purposes.
- ◆ Changing zoning designation, with 100 percent support of the landowners, between the Parks Highway and Mission Hills Subdivision, from Intermediate to R-1 or Industrial. Lands between the Parks Highway and Mission Hills Subdivision are presently zoned Intermediate.
- ◆ Wasilla should seek to diversify its economic base, but should not expend significant city funds to develop a speculative industrial park.
- ◆ New industrial areas may be added in the intermediate zone if separated from existing residential uses and do not significantly interfere with adjacent known potential residential development.

Goal: Encourage growth and development in appropriate areas south of the Alaska Railroad to create geographic balance in the downtown area.

Wasilla Comprehensive Plan

A long standing community goal has been to expand commercial development south of the Alaska Railroad line and the Parks Highway. ADOT&PF's plans to extend the Palmer-Wasilla Highway westward to Knik-Goose Bay Road. This offers opportunities for the City to encourage commercial expansion in this area. Other areas with high potential are the Palmer-Wasilla Highway and the Knik-Goose Bay Road corridors. These well traveled routes are experiencing expanding commercial uses along the right-of-way.

- ◆ The Land Use District north of Glenwood Avenue is zoned Core Area. This will facilitate commercial expansion south of the Parks Highway.
- ◆ Extend the Core Area zone along Hallea Lane and the area surrounding Lake Lucille Lodge, in recognition of this area as an important waterfront commercial area. The Lake Lucille Lodge may be expanded in the near future. Since the Waterfront Core District does not allow lodges, this is a conforming pre-existing use.
- ◆ Support programs to extend the Palmer-Wasilla Highway, Church Road and similar projects which provide improved access south of the railroad.
- ◆ Over the next twenty years, the City should focus on developing and improving several key public parcels. These include:
 - the 30 acre old airport site
 - the City's downtown historic area
 - the new airport site
 - recreational opportunities along Wasilla Lake and Lake Lucille
 - the Smith Ballfields
 - the Bumpus Ballfield

Goal: Carry out land use regulations and planning that is equitable, cost-effective and responsive to the needs of the public.

- ◆ The Planning Commission and City Council should continue to strive for maximum public involvement in all phases of the decision-making process.
- ◆ The City should go "on line" with computer-accessible public notices advertisements, agendas, minutes and other important city documents.
- ◆ Rewriting the Wasilla Development Code is a key step in the assumption of planning powers from the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.
- ◆ The city should work with the Borough to ensure that newly platted areas are compatible with potential urban services such as bike trails, street lights and sewer and water.

Goal: Improve the appearance of Wasilla for the benefit of residents and visitors.

- ◆ Wasilla should continue to work closely with local volunteer and civic organizations such as the local garden clubs, service clubs and the Historical Society to establish and carry out programs to beautify the downtown area.
- ◆ The Parks Highway should receive special attention as a landscape corridor. Locally crafted wooden signs welcoming visitors to Wasilla should replace or augment the present regulation metal signage along the highway.
- ◆ The Iditarod Trail crossing of the Parks Highway should receive special attention with a suitable sign and markings.
- ◆ The wooded corridor west of the downtown along the Parks Highway should be protected as development increases in the area.
- ◆ City codes should require landscaping from new development.
- ◆ The city should initiate a program to encourage landscaping by existing development.

Goal: Expand municipal boundaries cautiously as required to provide cost effective government services to the maximum number of people.

The city should adopt the following guidelines to assure that annexation, need for in-fill and the provision of services are kept in balance. The City should:

- ◆ Prepare it's own analysis of the fiscal impacts to revenues and expenditures from all annexation proposals.
- ◆ Require paving city maintained streets inside the 1994 city limits through the use of local improvement districts.
- ◆ Ensure that developed areas proposed for annexation have a high percentage of Occupied lots.
- ◆ Complete infrastructure consisting of paving, sewer, water, storm drainage, sidewalks and street lights in areas proposed for annexation.
- ◆ Balance the inclusion of new residential areas with new commercial areas. A high ratio of commercial property value over residential property value should be maintained.
- ◆ The city should work with the Borough to ensure that adjoining areas are platted and developed in a manner that will preserve their rural character, and not make

the provision of infrastructure such as roads, sewer and water prohibitively expensive.

Chapter 5, Parks and Recreation Plan

Wasilla's park and recreation program is working hard to catch up with rapid population growth and demand for services over the past decade. Officially, most parks and recreation services have historically been provided by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Many services within Wasilla, however, have been delegated to the City under contract. A major challenge facing Wasilla and other borough communities is the lack of funding to support and maintain existing parks and programs.

Park and recreation powers are held by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough under state law. After several years of declining funding and upkeep of local parks, however, the City of Wasilla approached the borough requesting a delegation of park and recreation powers. The Borough passed Ordinance No. 93-027 in 1993 authorizing an Inter-Governmental Cooperation Agreement for parks and recreational activities within the City of Wasilla.

The FY 95 Parks and Recreation Services Agreement provides for the City to operate, maintain and improve Newcomb (Wasilla Lake), Nunley and Carter Parks. In return, the Borough agrees to compensate the City \$10,000. The three named parks are the only park facilities in town recognized by the Borough in this agreement.

Goal: Involve the community in creating a public common and recreation preserve within the City at the old airport site.

Goal: Develop a comprehensive public parks and greenway Master Plan.

Wasilla has an extraordinary opportunity to reshape and define the character and quality of its urban center. The City has obtained title to the old 30-acre Wasilla airport site from the State of Alaska. With the opening of the new airport at Jacobsen Lake, this downtown site is now available for other public uses.

- ◆ Carry out a phased, conceptual plan which includes the following major elements:
 - Public ownership
 - A greenway within the city
 - Beginning of the Iditarod sled dog race
 - Wasilla Wonderland Community playground
 - Fully functioning in winter and summer
 - Visitor information
 - Greenhouse, rose garden and botanical garden

Wasilla Comprehensive Plan

- Circuit trails with lights
- Event fields, picnic areas and informal sport areas
- Parking on the periphery
- Utilities and limited snow storage.

The City should take several steps in the near-term (1-3 years) to institutionalize the development of this public use area in a cost-effective manner. The City should:

- ◆ designate a lead department or official within the administration to take overall responsibility for carrying out an adopted master plan;
- ◆ Establish several recreational uses during 1995 at minimum cost. For example, a number of the concrete slabs remaining from the former hangars can be converted into half-court basketball areas and similar uses. Sand lot volleyball could be provided;
- ◆ Coordinate the planting of the site to accelerate the "greening up" transformation of the area from industrial/airport to greenbelt/public open space. The community could be invited to participate in a number of volunteer or memorial tree plantings throughout the site;
- ◆ Work closely with the Iditarod Committee and the Dept. of Transportation & Public Facilities to design and place permanent trail signage both on-site and on the Parks Highway. The race is a significant Alaskan and national event, and should be suitably recognized;
- ◆ Continue the support given to Valley Performing Arts, including provision of space for parking on the edge of the site. This parking will provide parking for park users during summer months when VPA is inactive;
- ◆ Forming a permanent "Friends of the Wasilla Greenbelt Master Plan" organization to coordinate civic involvement and development of the property following an adopted master plan. Development should be funded through a combination of public and private funds;
- ◆ Begin programming each facility and activity. At this stage, architectural and preliminary engineering can be done to determine square footage, capacities, utility design and cost estimates. Design themes should also be adopted, so that all structures relate well to the site, and to each other.

Goal: Provide organizations and programs to meet current and future recreational needs.

- ◆ Continue community beautification efforts.

Wasilla Comprehensive Plan

- ◆ Enthusiastically support youth and adult sports and recreation organizations and programs.

Goal: Acquire, develop and maintain suitable parkland for current and future needs.

Successful park programs balance the continuing need to maintain existing facilities with a long-term vision of acquiring and developing lands to meet growing demand. The Wasilla Parks and Recreation Commission projects a significant shortfall in park property in the near future. The City currently has a number of important opportunities to greatly improve the size and quality of parks within the community.

- ◆ Acquire and develop an 80 acre parcel owned by the State of Alaska adjacent to the Smith Ballfields.
- ◆ Expand recreational opportunities at the Bumpus Ballfields to include all segments of the population.
- ◆ Acquire and develop the wooded peninsula known as Green Acres Park for future public access to Wasilla Lake.
- ◆ Expand Carter Park on Lake Lucille.

Goal: Acquire, develop and maintain suitable facilities and improvements for current and future recreational needs.

- ◆ Continue to support the Wasilla Wonderland Community Playground Project
- ◆ Craft and install suitable gateway and directional signs throughout the community.
- ◆ Continue development of a citywide trails system.
- ◆ Support development of a tournament-capable sports field complex.
- ◆ Find a suitable site for equestrian and rodeo corrals and facilities.
- ◆ Support construction of a new public library.
- ◆ Support construction of a multi-purpose community center.
- ◆ Long-term, the feasibility of a "full-facility" recreation center

Chapter 6, Public Facilities and Services

Goal: Successfully support the need to carry out cost-effective, basic governmental services with bold and visionary planning to prepare Wasilla for the future.

Water and Sewer System

The City should seek federal funding to fund construction of a more conventional sewage treatment plant, such as a granular recirculating filter system. Once this is accomplished, the City can do major expansions to the system, most likely eastward along the Parks Highway commercial corridor.

Surface Water Drainage

- ◆ Surface water drainage studies need to be updated, and the City needs to address construction of a surface/storm water drainage system.

Public Safety. The Police Department currently occupies two former classrooms in the original 1934 school building at the rear of City Hall. These facilities are expensive to maintain and are not designed for efficient law enforcement administration. A major need for the Police Department in the coming years will be to have suitable housing in a public safety building.

- ◆ One option would be to construct a new Public Safety Building for both the Police Department and portions of the Wasilla Lakes Fire Service Area personnel and equipment. The plan recommends that a suitable location for this facility be identified on existing City lands, if possible, or on land to be acquired if necessary.
- ◆ The plan recommends relocating the downtown fire station elsewhere in the core area. One option is to construct a joint Public Safety Building at the eastern edge of the old airport site on Lucille. This option is shown in the conceptual Master Plan for the old airport site. Use of the old airport site for structural development may depend on a follow-up planning process to focus solely on the old airport site.

Public Library. Wasilla Public Library is the fourth busiest library in Alaska. Only Juneau, Fairbanks and Anchorage have more activity. To resolve these problems, the plan recommends the City pursue one of these two options:

- ◆ If the Post Office facility becomes available, the City should conduct a feasibility and cost study to determine whether the library could cost-effectively relocate across Swanson Road into this structure. Remodeling this facility could provide a new library very near the current location in the downtown core. The facility

Wasilla Comprehensive Plan

would have increased parking, and an elevated pedestrian crossing would provide safe access between the library and museum/historic area. The library would remain close to the museum, taking advantage of many common programs and constituents.

- ◆ A second option, shown as part of the conceptual Wasilla Greenbelt Master Plan (Figure 5-1) is to construct a new library as a major element of the new Iditarod Greenbelt area at the old airport site.

Conceptually, Figure 5-1 shows a new two-story structure with about 16,100 square feet. The library would be located adjacent to a new Community Center. Together, these facilities would have about 200 parking spaces and be located on the citywide trails system. The proposed site is about one mile from existing schools and is conveniently located for most residents. This proposal is based upon the evolution of prior plans including the 1992 Comprehensive Plan and the more recent Iditarod Park plan which was not adopted by the City Council. Use of the site will depend on a follow-up planning process to specify areas on the old airport.

Museum and Townsite Park. The Dorothy Page Museum and Visitor Center, together with the historic block, provide significant economic, educational and cultural benefits to Wasilla. The area lacks suitable zoning protection, has limited parking, and incompatible land uses within the historic area. The plan recommends:

- ◆ Designating the area as public/institutional lands to better protect these activities and facilities from conflicting uses and activities.
- ◆ Vacating Boundary Street between Herning and Swanson Avenues to provide additional room and site flexibility.
- ◆ Relocating the library and the fire station to other locations, and expand museum/historic functions to take advantage of these facilities
- ◆ Purchasing or otherwise acquiring private property within the historic block area

Post Office. With recent growth and development in the community, the main facility located at the corner of Swanson and Main Street has become overcrowded and the cause of considerable traffic congestion in the downtown area. The U.S. Postal Service (USPS) estimates that site selection for a replacement facility will take place in 1996. Construction would begin in 1997 or 1998.

- ◆ The plan supports a potential new site for the Post Office along the Knik-Goose-Bay Road corridor, near the Glenwood intersection. This site would be the most beneficial to the overall development of the city. The new Post Office would establish a new and significant traffic generator on the south side of the Parks Highway. This should, in turn, encourage commercial development in this area.

Wasilla Comprehensive Plan

Snow Removal Although relatively expensive, a snow removal program would benefit the community in several ways. Besides improving vehicular and pedestrian traffic, the hauling of snow from the core area will reduce storm water drainage problems in the spring, and make it easier for people to shop and conduct business downtown.

- ◆ The City should initiate a snow removal program which keeps downtown roadways and sidewalks clear of snow.

Going On-line. Municipalities across the country are discovering the benefits of going on-line with many city services. Some municipal systems are simple read-only bulletin boards, such as notices of upcoming meetings and hearings, agendas, detailed city budgets, procurement announcements, job openings and voice telephone numbers. Some city bulletin boards go a step further and allow messages and comments on specific items. Still others are more elaborate with access to ordinances, resolutions, plans and the city code that are sorted by subject or keyword and access to other sites. Systems can also feature electronic mail to connect residents with city departments, employees and elected representatives.

- ◆ Wasilla should install a basic on-line system to provide better access for the community to its local government.

City Hall. The current facility, while adequate for administrative and police functions, is housed in a 60-year old former school. Maintenance, energy and repair costs are expensive, and the building is less and less suited to the operations of modern city government.

- ◆ Long-term, the City should begin to plan for a new City Hall.
- ◆ A new City Hall should remain in the downtown area, north of the Parks Highway and probably located between Lucille Street, Nelson Road/Bogard Road and Crusey Street.

Chapter 7 Transportation Plan

The Transportation Plan identifies and evaluates ongoing and proposed state, borough and local projects for road and highway improvements, including pedestrian and bicycle amenities. The plan focuses on continuing with an aggressive local road improvement program, while supporting regional and state efforts to build a transportation infrastructure to meet current and future needs.

Past improvements to Wasilla's road and highway system have stimulated community growth and development, contributed to economic diversification, and encouraged more people to relocate to the Valley and to Wasilla. Additional improvements are essential, however, to ensure that traffic flows efficiently and safely through the city, to upgrade

Wasilla Comprehensive Plan

local streets to uniform standards, to contribute to the community's quality of life, and to keep pace with population growth and economic development.

Goal: Develop and maintain a transportation system that meets the current and future needs of Wasilla and the Matanuska Valley.

The successful development, operation and maintenance of the Wasilla area transportation network depends upon a creative and cooperative strategy between the public, City of Wasilla, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF) and all affected highway users.

- ◆ The City should continue to work closely with the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and the DOT&PF to develop and execute a visionary, regional strategy for transportation improvements.
- ◆ Design standards and level of service standards for arterials and collectors should be coordinated at the borough level in various stages of discussion or implementation. The area's transportation system is still "catching up" with land use, population, traffic pressures and growth patterns. Improvements should be designed to enhance traffic flow, help prevent accidents and maintain or improve access to businesses and private property.

Goal: Improve the safety and traffic carrying capacity of the area's arterial and major collector systems.

- ◆ State and Borough planning should reflect the priorities, constraints and concerns expressed in this Comprehensive Plan.
- ◆ All modifications to arterial or collector routes within Wasilla and the surrounding area should include provision for sidewalks or pathways at the time of construction or upgrade.
- ◆ The City supports the following state projects:
- ◆ Main Street and Bogard Road Intersection Improvements. DOT&PF is currently designing major improvements to the intersection of Bogard Road, Main Street and Nelson Avenue. Design is set for completion by August 1996 with construction scheduled for 1997. The goal is to create a safe, 4-way intersection, either through conventional design, or perhaps with a "round-about" scheme. The City supports this upgrade as a local priority, and looks forward to commenting formally once a design is presented to the public.

Two pathways are also part of this project: the first proceeds from the intersection along Bogard Road to Peck Street; the other runs along the west side of Crusey from Swanson Avenue to the Parks Highway. The City supports these pathway extensions and are part of its overall city pathway plan. In

Wasilla Comprehensive Plan

in addition the City supports a below grade pedestrian crossing between Wasilla High School and Wasilla Middle School as part of the related pathway development.

- ◆ Palmer-Wasilla Highway Bike path. DOT&PF is planning long-range construction of a separated pathway along the length of the Palmer-Wasilla Highway. About \$1.5 million is available for construction of the first segment, beginning at the Parks Highway. Construction is scheduled for FY 1996.
- ◆ Church Road. DOT&PF is currently designing major upgrades to Church Road between the Parks Highway and Spruce Avenue. This \$3.4 million project will include paving of the roadway, and construction of a pathway. Construction is set for 1997. This project should resolve serious safety problems and is fully supported by the City.
- ◆ The City takes the following position concerning DOT&PF plans to reconstruct the Parks Highway, MP 37-44:

Crusey Street to Seward Meridian: This phase should be completed on an accelerated schedule. The approved design must successfully move traffic safely through town, while not unduly compromising safe and convenient access to businesses and commercial establishments. Given available information, the City supports a four lane design, with a two-way left turn lane system. Frontage roads would add to the design, provided direct access to most property is not unduly restricted. The City passed resolutions No. WR94-45 and WR96-02 supporting the five lane concept through Wasilla. In addition, the separated pathway should include an under-crossing near Cottonwood Creek.

Palmer-Wasilla Highway Extension. This phase should also move ahead on an accelerated schedule. The opportunity for commuting traffic to avoid downtown Wasilla by directly reaching Knik-Goose Bay Road should help alleviate traffic congestion. In addition, this project facilitates Wasilla's strategy to encourage expansion of the downtown area south of the railroad tracks. Highway designers should consider options which permit full development and access of surrounding property near the Parks Highway intersection. The City does not support the creation of a limited access interstate highway through the heart of Wasilla.

- ◆ The City urges a more comprehensive examination of highway and road options and alternative transportation options, including a serious investigation of constructing a by-pass highway at some point in the future.

Over the past two decades, the Wasilla business sector has grown to the point where a by-pass is not likely to harm Wasilla's retail and commercial sector. The City supports a cooperative effort with the Borough and DOT&PF to examine the bypass option when it becomes feasible and prudent to do so.

Wasilla Comprehensive Plan

- ◆ The City supports the following projects sponsored by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough:
- ◆ Intersection Improvements: Wasilla Fishhook/Bogard/Nelson, Bogard Road/Crusey Street, Peck Street and Wasilla-Fishhook
- ◆ Trunk Road
- ◆ Seward Meridian Road
- ◆ Bogard Road – The Seldon Road extension east to Bogard Road was supported by City Resolution WR94-43.
- ◆ Church Road – Resolutions WR94-44 and WR95-28 lists this project as the city's highest priority on their state recommended list.
- ◆ DOT&PF should include upgrading Wasilla-Fishhook Road from Glenwood to Schrock Road as a priority in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan.

The City supports the development of a pedestrian crossing along Bogard road to connect the Wasilla High School and Junior High School campuses and across Wasilla Fishhook Road in front of Iditarod Elementary School.

Eliminating dangerous curves and improving driving conditions is important for public safety. From Glenwood Avenue to Lakeview Avenue, the two-lane roadway could be widened to a rural three-lane roadway with a striped median designated for two-way left turns.

Goal: Maintain and improve the system of collectors and local streets to serve present and future needs.

Because of rapid growth in Wasilla and the lack of funding to improve local streets and collectors, many serious instances of gaps, poor alignment and substandard roadways exist in the City. These problems need to be recognized and remedied if the transportation needs of the area are to be effectively met.

- ◆ Decisions to improve collectors and local roads should be consistent with the Land Use Plan.
- ◆ The City should continue its aggressive program to bring all collectors and local streets up to standard, including paving. The City should continue to encourage the formation of Local Improvement District's (LID's) to fund one-third the cost of local street improvements. The City should continue to fund 100% of improvements to collector streets.

Wasilla Comprehensive Plan

- ◆ The City should work diligently to carry out projects identified on the Wasilla Road Projects Short List (FY 96) and Deferred List FY 96/FY 97. These are identified in Chapter 7.

Goal: Create a citywide and regional system of pathways and trails to provide for alternative methods of transportation, improve public safety and enhance quality of life for residents and visitors.

- ◆ The bicycle, pedestrian and winter trails proposed in the Parks & Recreation element and the Transportation element should be recognized and supported for their value as part of the local transportation system.
- ◆ The City should work diligently to carry out projects identified on the
- ◆ The City should design and construct a trail linking the city's three major public spaces: the proposed Wasilla Greenbelt Master Plan (including the old Wasilla Airport and Nunley Park), the Dorothy Page Museum and historic building district, and Newcomb Park.
- ◆ Continue to seek acceptable solutions to accommodate snow machine activities within Wasilla without endangering pedestrians and vehicles or the quality of life in neighborhoods.

Goal: Encourage the development of alternative transportation means.

- ◆ Wasilla should support recurring efforts to initiate commuter bus or rail service between Wasilla and Anchorage.
- ◆ The Comprehensive Plan supports replacing the railroad crossing being eliminated with the new overpass near Rocky Ridge Road with a new railroad crossing for the extension of Church Street south to the airport.
- ◆ Wasilla should continue to market the advantages of the airport, together with carrying out airport projects on the Short List (FY 96) and Deferred List FY96/FY97

Chapter 2

Background for Planning

Location and Setting

Wasilla's setting offers what many consider to be the best of Alaska: extensive forests, numerous lakes and streams, abundant wildlife and spectacular mountain scenery. The City is located near the center of the Matanuska Susitna Borough in the heart of south-central Alaska. The Borough encompasses about 23,000 square miles, including much of the drainage of the Susitna and Matanuska Rivers. Wasilla lies south of the Talkeetna Mountains, about 12 miles north of Knik Arm on Cook Inlet. The City is located only 30 air miles NNE of Anchorage, alongside the Alaska Railroad main line and the George Parks Highway. Driving time between Wasilla and Anchorage is about one hour, depending on the time of year and weather conditions. The highway and railroad connect Anchorage and Fairbanks, with the Denali National Park and preserve lying about halfway between these two urban areas.

Figures 1 and 2 depict Wasilla's regional and local setting and location.

The Wasilla area owes its varied setting to the glacial forces that shaped the area during the end of the last ice age. The broad Susitna River valley is the landward extension of Cook Inlet which was formed by an underlying trough of poorly consolidated rocks from the Tertiary age. Several glacial advances and retreats left a complex system of hills, ridges, lakes and lowlands that define the topography of today. Landforms in and around Wasilla consist of undulating ridges of glacial till and flat benches of sand and gravel out-wash.

Cottonwood Creek, Lucille Creek and several smaller streams traverse the Wasilla area. Two large lakes, Lucille and Wasilla, are partially or wholly within the city limits.

History

Understanding Wasilla's development patterns provides insights for updating the comprehensive plan. The townsite was named after Chief Wasilla, a local Dena'ina chief and shaman who died in 1907 (there are many variant spellings of his name; however, the chief having received a rudimentary education, reportedly spelled his name Visilla). Numerous lakes and streams surrounding Visilla's residence provided ample fishing for indigenous populations, thereby becoming a popular wintering ground for small semi-permanent native villages.

Wasilla Comprehensive Plan

Native trails crisscrossed the area, some connected with distant hunting grounds in the Susitna Valley and Talkeetna Mountains, while others linked with the Ahtna people, north of the Matanuska River. These trails also served as trade networks between remote villages. During the Russian American fur trade local native populations prospered until the small pox epidemic struck many villages, causing area-wide abandonment of homes in the mid-19th Century. Surviving populations deserted many remote villages, congregating into larger population centers closer to trading posts in the Upper Cook Inlet.

Continuing to lead a subsistence lifestyle, native communities again began to prosper during the American fur trade. This is especially true of Chief Wasilla who maintained a subsistence diet, while accruing numerous trade items through the American Commercial Company. Chief Wasilla harbored his extended family in a village not too far from the current townsite of Wasilla. His village, which once stood adjacent to Cottonwood Creek, was called "Benteh," meaning a Place Among the Lakes.

Gold strikes on Willow Creek in the late 19th Century not only increased traffic along existing trails but helped to create numerous new ones. Native populations from Wasilla area moved to the trading posts at Knik on the west side of Knik Arm to participate in the gold rush; many worked as guides or haulers for the gold miners. Knik was established in the late 19th Century as a trading post and commercial center for gold miners plying the Susitna River and its tributaries for gold. Establishment of the Iditarod Trail in 1908 added to the importance of Knik's link with distant gold mines. By 1914 Knik had grown to encompass several businesses including a newspaper office and schoolhouse.

Wasilla's Euro-American history began in 1916 when the Alaska Engineering Commission (AEC) selected construction of a work camp at the intersection of the proposed railroad with the Carle Wagon gold mining trail (now known as Wasilla-Fishhook Road). The road, connected Knik with the Willow Creek mines in the Talkeetna Mountains. Resembling a tent town, the camp harbored railroad men engaged in surveying, clearing and establishing the rail line right-of-way through Wasilla which eventually would connect the open port of Seward with Fairbanks. The first business opened in 1916 when Mrs. Small, catering to railroad construction workers, operated a modest restaurant.

Wasilla was established on well-drained lands in a beautiful setting between two lakes. After platting the townsite on June 20, 1917, from the railroad platform in Wasilla, the AEC sold townsite lots by auction. Spelling the demise of Knik, several traders from Knik bought Wasilla lots and re-established their businesses in the new townsite. It did not take long before additional trails fanned out to the mines making Wasilla the new gateway to the gold mines. The Iditarod trail also became connected with the new townsite bringing both gold and traffic to Wasilla Depot for rail transportation to Seward.

Wasilla Comprehensive Plan

Reportedly the first building in Wasilla was constructed by Harry Shough who freighted for the mines. It later served as Wasilla's public library between 1942 and 1950, before being replaced. Many early businesses which were moved from Knik have long since been replaced by newer commercial entities. Some of the earliest buildings constructed in 1917, however, can be found today behind the Dorothy Page Museum located in the Old Wasilla Townsite. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places is the Heming/Teeland/Mead Store which served as a commercial dry goods store in Wasilla for over 65 years before closing its doors. Teeland's Country Store, evoking memories of a forgotten era has been rehabilitated by the Dorothy Page Museum. Other buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places include Wasilla's first elementary school, the Dorothy Page Museum (former Community Hall) and Wasilla Depot. There are several other buildings such as the Thorpe log cabin located on Main Street and the Tryck house on Knik which help recall Wasilla's early days.

Over 400 homesteaders were registered in the Valley prior to the First World War. The number fell back during the war years but grew again in the twenties. The Alaska Railroad sponsored a program to bring farm settlers to the area in 1929, but the most successful effort occurred in the midst of the Great Depression in 1935. That year the Federal Emergency relief Administration sponsored 202 families to the Valley via steamship and rail. The townsite of Palmer was established to serve the needs of farm families in the eastern part of the valley. Since many of the Colonists were closer to Wasilla they went there to shop and established an economic trend which continues today.

1940 was a high water mark for pre-war Wasilla. Many of the farm families were well established, mining operations were thriving and the development of Fort Richardson and Elmendorf Field brought the first boom to the area. World War II abruptly ended the boom by closing the mines and draining labor from the farms and businesses. The influx of military personnel to Alaska brought a wider knowledge of the area, however, and many chose to stay or return after their enlistment. Wasilla's role as the main distribution center for the mining industry in the Valley ended.

In 1947 the government released 45,000 acres for homesteading, this land had been held in reserve for the farm project. Many former military people took the opportunity to homestead the area.

The discovery of oil in Cook Inlet and the Kenai Peninsula in the mid-1950's assured statehood for Alaska and brought increased development to upper Cook Inlet. As road conditions and access improved between Anchorage and the Valley, the Wasilla area gradually became important as an area for recreational and second home development.

Construction of the George Parks Highway through Wasilla in the early 1970's provided direct access to and from Anchorage. This development enabled workers and their families to live in the Wasilla area, and commute to the city. Support and service industries began to expand to meet the needs of new residents.

Wasilla Comprehensive Plan

Alaska experienced a boom in the late 1960's and 1970's with the discovery of oil on the North Slope and construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline. Oil field and construction workers found the environment and climate in the Wasilla area to their liking and hundreds of subdivisions were approved as an additional influx of people came to the Valley to live. Regional government, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, was established in 1964 by the state under the Mandatory Borough Act. During this period farming declined and the area became more dependent on the statewide and Anchorage economic situation.

The George Parks Highway, completed in October 1971, passes by the entrance to Denali National Park and links Anchorage and Fairbanks, the main population centers of the state. The Parks Highway is heavily used throughout the year by tourists and resident Alaskans. Increased traffic and a rapidly-expanding population encouraged the development of strip malls, services and a variety of retail businesses along the highway in the Wasilla area. The characteristic strip development, that marks the area, was solidified during this period.

The City of Wasilla was incorporated in 1974 as a second class city under Alaska statutes. In 1984, the City upgraded to first class status. By the mid 1970's, Wasilla had become the commercial and retail center of the Borough. Wasilla is referred to as a "bedroom community", because of its easy access to Anchorage.

During the late 1970's, Wasilla became a focus of public debate, as the state considered whether to relocate Alaska's capital city from Juneau to an undeveloped site between Wasilla and Willow. Settler's Bay and many other subdivisions were developed in anticipation of the capital move. Although the move was defeated in public votes, real estate speculation and development continued through the mid 1980's.

The years from 1980 to 1986 witnessed the period of most rapid growth for Wasilla and the Matanuska- Susitna Borough. State oil money fueled a real estate boom, and the Valley's population expanded as housing prices in Anchorage escalated. During these years, both Wasilla and the Borough grew two to three times faster than Anchorage.

Economic booms are often followed by periods of bust, or economic adjustment. During the late 1980's the economy in Wasilla had its "adjustment". Like most Alaska communities, Wasilla is extremely vulnerable to economic forces beyond its control. Real property values in Wasilla peaked in 1986 at \$333 million. At the bottom of the recession in 1990, real property values had plummeted by almost half, bottoming out at approximately \$170 million. Business failures were high and both the City and Valley lost population. Many homes in Wasilla and the outlying area were left empty as banks and state financial institutions foreclosed on overdue mortgages. Much of the newly developed commercial area along the Parks Highway became empty store fronts and office space.

Wasilla Comprehensive Plan

During 1992, Wasilla voters passed a 2% local sales tax, and also approved formation of a local Police Department. Wal-mart established the first national discount store in the Wasilla in 1993. Currently, Wasilla enjoys an improving economic situation, rebounding real estate prices, continuing retail activity and a growing population. Many local schools face record student enrollments, and the State has recently completed construction of a new airport for the community.

While the commercial and residential development patterns have obscured much of the frontier town setting, many people are still attracted to the Valley and to Wasilla as a desirable place to live and raise families. Attractions include a small town atmosphere, the area's natural amenities, a manageable commute to Anchorage and affordable housing.

Geology and Soils

During glacial times much of the Susitna River valley lowland was a glacial lake. Large chunks of ice left stranded formed many small depressions in the area. This lake and the deposition of glacial silts and clays played an important part in the make up of the soils of the area.

Most of the soils in the area are generally well suited for development and provide good sources of sand, gravel and topsoil. Finding good road-fill, gravel and building sites is generally not a problem. Some areas remain poorly drained, however, and pose limitations for septic systems. The deposition of silt, clay and organic muck in old lakes and depressions means that some areas have soil conditions which change substantially in a short distance.

Wasilla's city limits do not encompass known reserves of minerals such as silver, gold or copper. However, deep deposits of gravel in the city do provide a ready source of material for construction.

The U.S. Soil Conservation Service has mapped seven soil associations in and around Wasilla. The general lay of the land and the vegetation it supports are good clues to soil types. Although the primary concern for soil suitability has been septic systems frost heaving, slopes and high water tables can also affect development. In many areas a community water system is necessary to protect the health of local residents. Minimal investigation such as digging or an engineering analysis of any site prior to planning for development is a wise decision.

Two soil types, the Homestead and the Knik, predominate in the Wasilla area. Both of these soils are well suited to most types of development. Small localized pockets of compacted silt and depressions, however, contribute to problems with drainage and frost heave, especially in the Homestead series.

The **Homestead** series is common in the Wasilla area especially north of the Parks Highway from the west end of Lake Lucille. Homestead soils are shallow, well-drained silty soils over loose sand and gravel. They have formed on broad out-wash plains and gravel moraines and run from nearly flat terrain to steep areas. These soils generally support forests of paper birch, white spruce and aspen. The understory often supports low growing shrubs and a thin blanket of moss.

Homestead soils are found along Church Road north of the Parks Highway and throughout the Mission Hills subdivision. This soil type has good suitability for septic systems, but excessive drainage ability can lead to contamination of nearby well water. Building is occasionally restricted by boulders and cobble stones, and some localized problems can occur with frost heaving. Low depressions in this series typically have considerably poorer capabilities for development.

The **Knik** series is the other major soil type in the area. It includes most of the downtown area, north and south of Lake Lucille and Wasilla Lake. Except along streams, lakes and in depressions this is the soil and surficial geology most suited for land development.

Knik soils are shallow, well-drained and silty, overlaying coarse, gravelly material, although scattered areas of poorly drained soils are also included. The soils are extensive over a broad range of slopes from flat to steep escarpments. Native vegetation includes forests of paper birch, white spruce and quaking aspen. Many areas have been cleared for pasture or crops.

Soils in this association can support a variety of construction activities such as buildings and roads. Septic systems are usually not a problem as long as the lot size is big enough to keep adequate separation between wells and drain fields. The wetter areas in this series are subject to frost heaving.

The remaining soil associations in the immediate Wasilla area have severe limitations for development. Extensive site work will be necessary to use these areas. Figure 3, Soil

Limitations for Development, shows areas generally unsuited for development without special precautions.

The **Coal Creek** series consists of dark colored, poorly drained soils that formed in moderately deep silty material over compacted, fine-textured sediments. These soils occur in nearly level to gently sloping stream valleys, on the border of muskegs and in small depressions. They are sometimes characterized by hillside seeps. The vegetation on these soils is most commonly sparse forests of paper birch, white spruce and black spruce with undergrowth of alder, willow, grasses and horsetail. This soil unit is found in small areas north and west of the downtown area (see Figure 3) and is unsuitable for building due to poor drainage and slope.

The *Jacobsen* series is a very poorly drained, very stony silt loam found in broad depressions. It is usually covered with a thick mat of sphagnum moss and supports scattered stands of willow and stunted black spruce. The type is found west of Lake Lucille, south of the railroad, about even with Church Road. These soils are nearly undevelopable owing to their high water table and stony condition.

The *Salamatof* and *Slikok* soils require extensive work and should remain undeveloped. Found within low areas of the Knik series, they consist of poorly drained, peat, muck and silty sediments in shallow depressions throughout the eastern side of the city. High water tables, often at or just below the surface, are characteristic of these soils. Vegetation consists of sparse bog birch, willow and stunted black spruce. The banks of Cottonwood Creek south of Wasilla Lake have the greatest concentrations of these soils.

Finally, the *Wasilla* series consists of somewhat poorly drained soils with layers of sand and compacted finer material. They do not have the high organic content of the Slikok series. These soils are not extensive in the local area and are most commonly found southeast of Lake Lucille along the Knik-Goose Bay Road.

Topography and Drainage

Topography in the City of Wasilla varies from about 300 feet to 500 feet above sea level. Generally, terrain gradually rises from south to north. The downtown area is relatively level.

Hills and varying terrain present excellent opportunities for planning a better community. For example, the hilly terrain north of Wasilla High School offers excellent potential for expansion of cross-country ski trails.

Figure 4, Steep Slopes, shows areas of the community which have slopes exceeding 30 degrees. These areas should remain undeveloped, unless care is taken during construction to prevent erosion and the collapse of hillsides.

Views looking southeast and south from the Parks Highway towards Pioneer Peak and the Palmer Hay Flats are striking and should be protected. In addition the Talkeetna Mountains can be seen from many points in the city, with Government Peak at 4,781 feet being the most prominent.

The Wasilla area is blessed with several large lakes and two substantial streams (See figure 5, Drainage and Wetlands). *Wasilla Lake* is partially within the eastern city limits along the Parks Highway. At 387 acres, it is one of the largest lakes in Southcentral Alaska which is easily accessible from a main highway.

Wasilla Comprehensive Plan

Wasilla Lake is part of the Cottonwood Creek drainage system which begins northeast of Wasilla and eventually discharges into Knik Arm about 15 miles to the south. Several lakes are interconnected along this drainage and Wasilla Lake is the largest and last major lake. It is a popular recreation area for both local residents, and for people traveling the highway to other destinations. The lake has limited public and private access points for swimming and boating, however. The Mat-Su Resort has the only boat launch on the lake and it is outside Wasilla's corporate limits. Fishing is very popular year-round and the lake is stocked with silver salmon by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) to help support recreational fishing.

The overall water quality of Wasilla Lake appears to be good and is considered safe for human contact and the lake's aquatic life. No water quality testing program is done on a regular basis but water samples taken by the State and City several years ago did not indicate any problems. The patterns of circulation and natural flushing contribute to stable water quality.

Cottonwood Creek is a very popular salmon fishing stream, although fishing is closed within the city limits. Several species of salmon pass through or use Wasilla Lake as a spawning ground. The average rate of flow for Cottonwood Creek is about 16 cubic feet per second near the outfall from Wasilla Lake. However, average flows are occasionally grossly exceeded during heavy rains especially during spring and fall months. Residential development along the banks of the creek south of Wasilla has sometimes experienced flooding.

Lake Lucille is about the same size as Wasilla Lake (362 acres). However, even though Lake Lucille and Wasilla Lake are in close proximity, they are part of two separate drainages and have very different characteristics. Lake Lucille is very shallow with an average depth of only five and a half feet. The lake's primary source of water is springs in the lake bed. No significant creek leads into it and only a small creek drains it. Lucille Creek is a low flow stream that drains Lake Lucille into Big Lake. Flushing action and water circulation through the lake is slow. In the last few years Lake Lucille has become quite eutrophic and has experienced fish kills during the winter months. The shores of Lake Lucille are developed with many residences on individual water systems. The city sewer service was provided to virtually all lake side development in 1987. Shallow lakes surrounded by development such as this often have problems with water quality. While city water quality testing has not revealed any problem with sewage contamination, the lake should be tested on a regular basis.

Groundwater supplies are abundant in the area, although the quality can vary significantly in a short distance. Much of the core area of the city has a central water system and several subdivisions have private water systems. Many homes in the surrounding area, however still rely on individual wells for their water supply. Most of these wells are shallow with depths of less than 100 feet. Static water levels in many of these wells is around 30 feet below the surface. The coarse gravel underlying the city provides a large aquifer even in the winter when infiltration is very low. Some wells are

drilled much deeper and suggest that another aquifer exists still lower down closer to bedrock. Water from these wells is usually of good quality and moderately hard, although iron concentrations are high some localized areas.

Climate

Wasilla's climate is transitional between the extremes of Interior Alaska and the wet maritime conditions found along the coastal areas.

Wasilla is less than 10 miles from Knik Arm and about 75 miles from Prince William Sound. The proximity to the coast means that summer temperatures are more moderate than those in the Interior. The Alaska Range, Chugach and Talkeetna Mountains also protect Wasilla from the extreme cold of the Interior winter and serve to break up strong storm fronts.

This combination of location and topography gives Wasilla a less severe climate than other nearby communities. Wasilla tends to be warmer in the summer with fewer clouds and less rain than communities further south along Cook Inlet such as Homer. Although generally protected from the Matanuska and Knik winds which blow more than 60 miles per hour from 16 to 25 days each year, buildings in the community occasionally suffer wind damage.

Wasilla averages only about 18 inches of precipitation per year, including about 59 inches of snowfall (see Figure 6). Moreover, thaws during the winter months can decrease snow cover to a few inches. However significant variations from these averages do occur. For example the late 1980's witnessed several intense rain storms that brought Wasilla's yearly precipitation totals to over 25 inches.

Sunrise and sunset are only 5.5 hours apart on December 21st. Spring breakup usually is underway by late March or the first week in April. The longest day of the year, June 21, brings 19.5 hours of daylight.

Mean temperatures are shown in Figure 7. Mean monthly high temperatures in Wasilla range from about 22 degrees in December and January to 69 degrees in July. The frost-free period in spring and summer averages 115 days, with the first frost usually arriving by September 1st.

The long hours of daylight means that many crops and plants grow rapidly during the growing season. The record low for the City was -50 degrees in January 1947. The years from 1945 to 1948 were a period of extreme cold and contain the low records for ten months. The highest recorded temperature was 90 degrees in 1969.

Fish and Wildlife

Moose are abundant in the Wasilla area and use a large variety of habitats, including stream valleys, lowlands and south-facing foothills. They forage among a variety of woody and herbaceous plants associated with early successional stages and woodland fringe areas.

Moose populations are cyclical with periodic low and high numbers. Summer range in the mountains north of Wasilla is critical for breeding and calf production. The winter range is mainly within lowland and stream bank areas that support preferred browse such as willow, birch and aspen. Mature successional forests found in undeveloped areas of the city are not particularly suitable for providing the large nutritional demands of these animals. Natural predators are wolves and bears but the largest number of moose are lost due to human conflicts.

Moose are most visible during the winter months when snow forces them out of remote areas and onto the road system and into subdivisions. Especially dangerous for all concerned are moose-vehicle accidents. The large number of commuters, widely separated residential units and long hours of darkness during the seasons when the moose leave the higher elevations pose a significant seasonal traffic hazard to Wasilla residents. According to ADF&G, between 20 and 50 moose are hit each year in the immediate Wasilla area.

A significant number of moose are also killed in railroad accidents each winter. Moose using the snow-free tracks are often hit by trains. Efforts have been made to reduce the winter kill by the railroad. Nevertheless, despite damage to vehicles, summer gardens and ornamental plantings, the presence of moose is considered a desirable attraction of the area.

Both black and brown bear are found in the Wasilla area with black bear being the more abundant. In the spring when bears emerge from hibernation they feed mainly on new green vegetation and carrion. In early summer bear take newborn moose.

Spawning salmon draw bears to nearby streams to take advantage of this readily available food source. Berries become an important food item in the fall as the bears go on an eating binge to put on food reserves for the winter. Black bear are sociable and opportunistic, resulting in increased human-black bear encounters and incidents. Some black bear have discovered the excellent source of food found in residential garbage cans. The growth of rural subdivisions in the Wasilla area has provided an excellent source of food for black bear, especially in the spring and fall.

Brown bear have not adapted to human habitation as well as black bear. Browns prefer to stay in the higher elevations and do not come into contact with humans as often as their black bear cousins.

Wasilla Comprehensive Plan

Small game and furbearers are also abundant. Even within the city limits it is not unusual to find fox, rabbit, coyote, mink, weasel, muskrat and beaver. In the past these small game and furbearing animals supported many local residents with income and food. The importance of small game as income has declined as most people now have other, more conventional, occupations. These small animals are presently important as an ingredient which adds to the local quality of life and as a component of the city's ambience.

The streams and lakes in Wasilla contain a large variety of fish. Fishing is a year-round activity, especially on Wasilla Lake. Freshwater fish include rainbow trout, landlocked coho, and whitefish. Non-game species such as sticklebacks, suckers and sculpins are common in both lakes and the two streams. Lake Lucille has experienced some winter die-offs due to lack of oxygen.

Anadromous fish are an important part of the Wasilla area's natural ecosystem. All five species of Pacific salmon are present. King, Coho, Sockeye, Pink and Chum salmon pass through the city streams and lakes each year. Steelhead, Dolly Varden and a few cutthroat trout are also present. Cottonwood Creek and Lucille Creek provide important habitat for migration, spawning and rearing of anadromous fish. Deep pools within the streams and Cottonwood Lake provide winter habitat for juvenile salmon. Anadromous fish are very sensitive to siltation and deterioration of water quality. Spawning areas and juvenile fish are especially sensitive to changes in the water quality associated with urbanization.

Given the environmental importance of protecting shorelines against urban development and potential pollution, the Borough has established 75 foot minimum setback requirements for construction near lakes and streams. The City also operates a sewage collection and treatment system which prevents untreated waste from entering Lake Lucille and Wasilla Lake, at least within the city limits.

GRAPH HANDOUTS

(Activity 3)

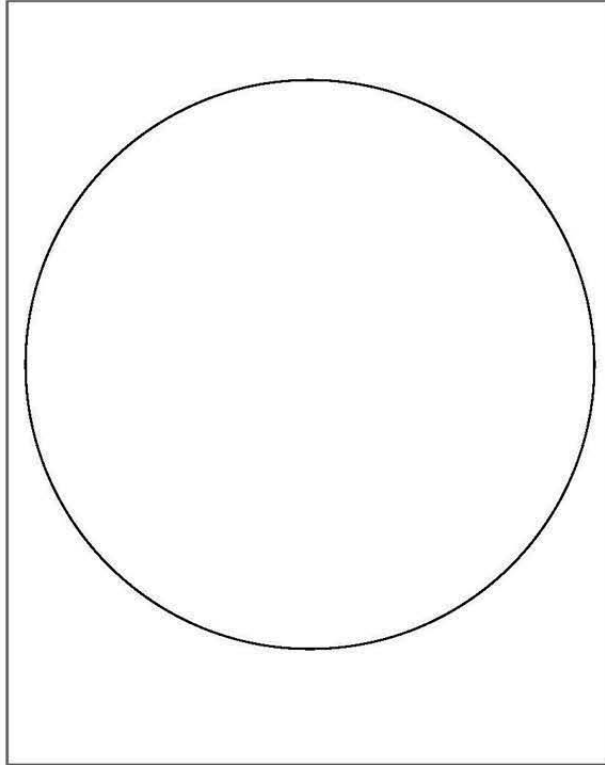
This page intentionally left blank.

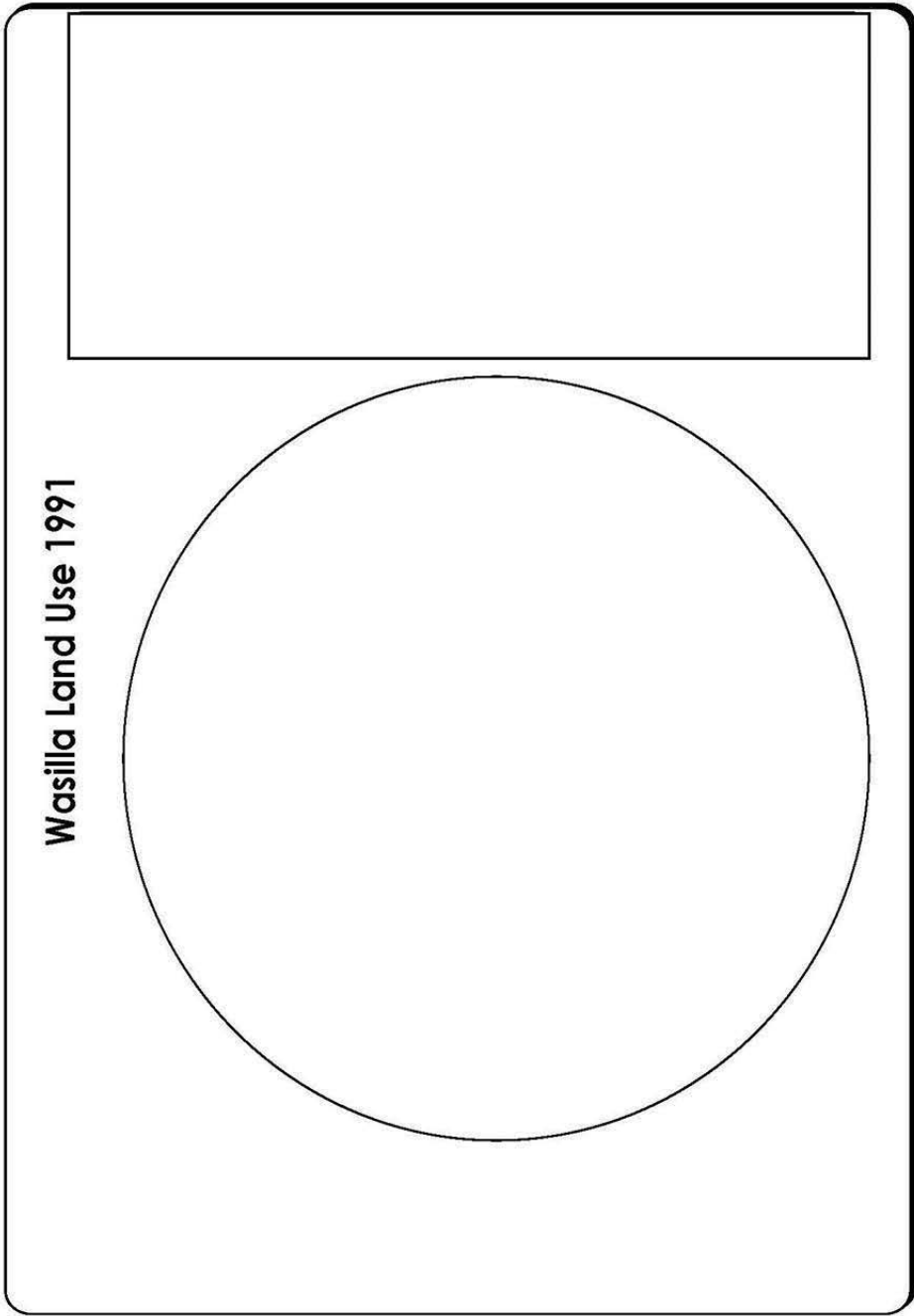
Wasilla Population History

Population

Years

**Wasilla Population by Age
2000**





Wasilla Land Use 1991

Wasilla Employment by Industry



Number of Employees

Industry

Wasilla Socioeconomic Data Sheet

Wasilla Employment by Industry (2000 Census Data)

Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting & Mining	96
Construction	254
Manufacturing	66
Wholesale Trade	40
Retail Trade	387
Transportation, warehousing & Utilities	196
Information	67
Finance, Insurance, & Real Estate	104
Professional, Administrative, & Waste Management	109
Education, Health & Social Services	525
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, & Hospitality	181
Other Services	157
Public Administration	261

Wasilla Land Use 1991 (1996 Comprehensive Plan)

Single Family	1091 acres
Multi-Family	77
Mobile Homes	2
Commercial	198
Industrial	150
Airport	386
Public Lands (e.g. parks, schools)	340
Semi-Public (e.g. churches)	55
Lakes & Streams	750
Vacant Land (includes roads)	4311

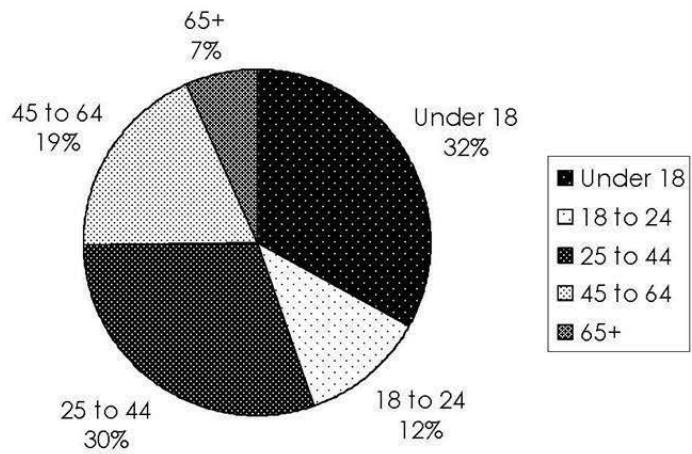
Wasilla Population History (2000 Census Data)

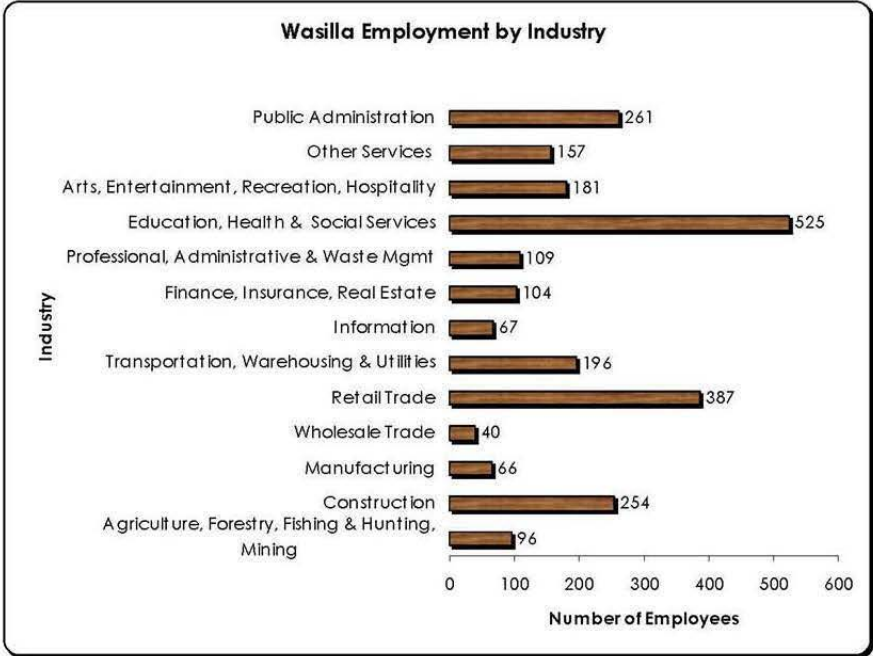
1900	0
1910	0
1920	0
1930	51
1940	96
1950	97
1960	112
1970	300
1980	1559
1990	4028
2000	5469

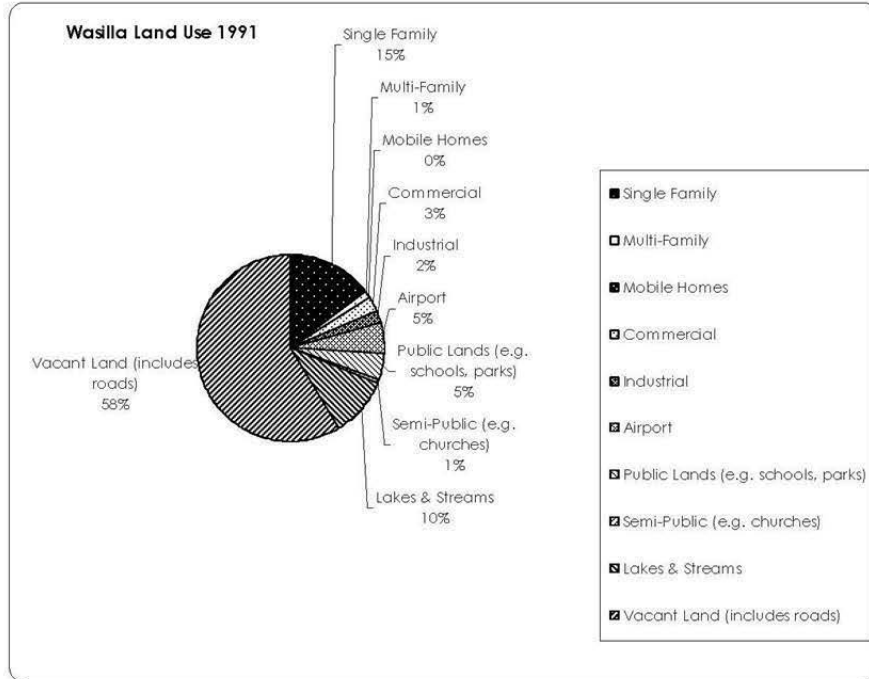
Wasilla Population by Age (2000 Census Data)

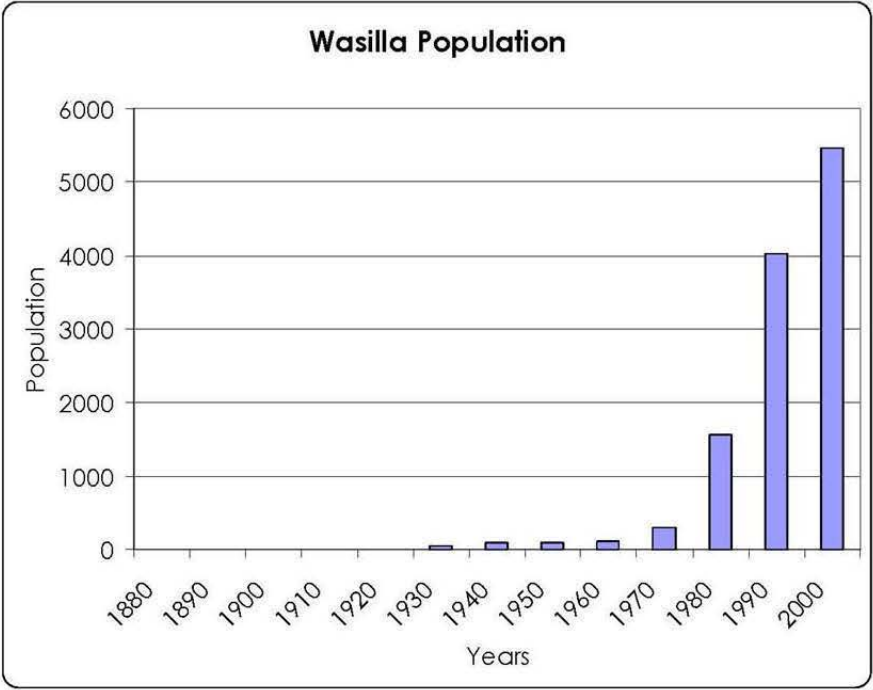
Under 18	1837
18 to 24	656
25 to 44	1681
44 to 64	1037
Over 65	369

**City of Wasilla Population by Age
2000**









WASILLA HIGH SCHOOL MAY 2007

Joan Kluwe met with two of Sandy Aschenbrenner's classes at Wasilla High School on Wednesday, May 16, 2007 to discuss the students' visions for the Downtown area of Wasilla. The 7:30am class was mostly Freshmen and the 11:36am class was mostly Juniors. An overview of the Wasilla Area Planning Process was provided, followed by a discussion of land uses. The students brainstormed ideas for potential land uses in the Downtown area, predominantly focusing on commercial and public uses. Transportation issues were also identified and discussed.

The classes were divided into groups of approximately 5 students and each group was provided a map of the Downtown area. They were asked to identify locations for suggested land uses and to identify boundaries for the Wasilla Downtown. The sessions concluded with the students brainstorming the strengths and weaknesses of Wasilla.

These notes summarize the suggested developments or land uses in Downtown Wasilla, as well as the students' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the community.

Suggested Developments/Uses for Downtown Wasilla:

Commercial

- Businesses, few homes
- Small local businesses; no chains
- Few restaurants, but have local cafes
- Restaurants such as Olive Garden, Dairy Queen, Sonic, and local restaurants
- Shopping mall
- Toy stores
- Skate shop
- Clothing stores, including Abercrombie and Fitch
- Starbucks
- Tanning salon
- Game/computer store
- Apple store
- Bookstore
- Teen club
- Clubs/social settings for adults
- Theaters: movie, drive-in, performing arts
- Arcade
- Amusement park
- Water park
- Paintball park

Public

- Keep parks and green space
- Develop winter parks, expand beyond summer uses
- Bike paths/sidewalks
- Beautification/landscaping
- Increase space between buildings/uses
- Downtown courthouse
- Bigger library
- Schools, especially a new high school
- Concert area
- Town square
- Nature walk
- Parks
- Museum
- Fountain
- Playground
- Climbing structure
- Frisbee golf
- Stadium
- YMCA

Transportation

- Improve traffic and parking
- Centralized parking and green space
- Need to be more pedestrian-friendly, you can't walk through downtown Wasilla
- Winter access and convenience for parking
- Public transportation

Strengths—What Students Like About Wasilla:

- It's not like Anchorage
- Lots of space
- I'm not bugged by authorities here; the community is less strict than other places
- Safe
- Quiet – no sirens
- Less strict
- Not lots of cars
- Not cluttered together
- Open
- Nature
- Don't get lost
- Family owned business
- Some modern conveniences/services here

- Skate park (could be better, but it's better than none)
- Environment – calm
- Lakes
- Close together, but not crowded
- Nicely placed
- IHOP
- 4-wheeler paths
- Not too crowded
- Laid back/relaxed

Weaknesses—What Students Dislike About Wasilla:

- Old houses that are run-down
- The community is unorganized (referred to geographic layout)
- Need better roads that are paved
- Sloppy/dirty
- Reputation of the community
- Drugs
- Need better zoning
- “Valley trash”
- People think Wasilla is uncivilized or rough around the edges
- Hicktown
- Nothing to do
- Boring
- Need more daycare
- Increase fire safety service
- People are not polite
- Middle and high school should be farther apart
- Get rid of train tracks
- Have high school open campus
- Need new, bigger schools
- Need better restaurants
- Bad road conditions
- Parks underpasses
- Improve Knik/Parks Highway intersection
- Need more activities for teens
- Need a bus/trolley/public transportation

[Home](#)

[Local News](#)

[Sports](#)

[Opinion](#)

[Subscribe](#)



Home

Wasilla seeks planning input



News

High school students get to weigh in on how city should look

- [Local News](#)
- [Obituaries](#)
- [Opinion](#)

May 18, 2007

By Will Elliott/Frontiersman

Sports

WASILLA - A monorail, a greenbelt, a mega-mall, a casino. Wasilla High School students have been asked by city planners to design their community's future, and their visions may be surprising.

Features

- [Valley Life](#)
- [Bullseye](#)
- [Calendar](#)
- [Police Beat](#)

The city of Wasilla has commissioned a study to determine what residents want Wasilla to look like in 20 years. URS Corporation, a global design and engineering firm, will conduct the process and draft plans this summer. The plans will guide development in three key Wasilla areas: near the sports complex, near the Home Depot store, and in the Wasilla downtown area.

Classifieds

- [Place an Ad](#)

URS environmental scientist Joan Kluwe met with Sandy Aschenbrenner's fifth-hour Law Related Studies class at Wasilla High Wednesday to gather suggestions from the students for the future of downtown. That area has been provisionally defined by URS as a rectangle extending from Wasilla Middle School to a point a few blocks west of Main Street, and a few blocks south of the Parks Highway. URS has already met with other classes at the school, as well as focus groups and community boards. They will unveil the finished plans this fall.

Info Desk

- [2007 Summer Visitors Guide](#)
- [About Us](#)
- [Subscribe](#)

According to Kluwe, in 20 years, some estimates expect Wasilla to surpass Anchorage in size. "We need to plan today if we want to make things happen tomorrow," Kluwe said. "These plans have a 10 to 20 year outlook, so it's important to get the opinions of young people."



Those opinions varied wildly Wednesday.

Archives

Some students focused mainly on commercial options, such as which franchises to welcome and how big to build new shopping centers. For many, the all-inclusiveness of modern mega-malls simplified planning, as shopping, restaurants and entertainment could all be integrated in a few mammoth buildings. Others favored a more exurban model, in which chain stores, franchises and their attendant parking lots would spread out across downtown.

City of Palmer

- [Borough Web site](#)

Other students hoped to see more family-owned businesses and green space in the Wasilla metro area, and suggested bike paths, parking garages, and a city square to encourage walking and reduce traffic.

URS was also interested in how students felt about living in the wider Valley.