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Historical and Regional Context

About 12 miles north of the Knik Arm of Cook Inlet, Wasilla lies in a lake-rich plain between the Matanuska River, and the Susitna River. The Dena'ina (Tanaina) Athabascan Indians called the area Benteh, meaning ‘among the lakes’ (Cook and Norris 1998). Areas of frequent use along these rivers and in the Talkeetna Mountains were historically connected by Native trails and winter routes (Fall 1981).

The original townsite of Wasilla was named after Chief Wasilla, a local Dena'ina chief and shaman (City of Wasilla 2007a). There are various opinions regarding the meaning of Wasilla and the origin of the naming of the community by some historians' accounts. In the Dena'ina dialect the word “Wasilla” means “breath of air,” a perfect name for the town nestled between two beautiful lakes. However, some assert the name descended as a variation of the Russian name “Vasili.” Likely after Vasili Melakoff, who explored the area in the 1830s (Potter 1978).

The productive lakes and streams that characterized Chief Wasilla's home made the area a popular wintering ground and the site of small, semi-permanent Native villages. Local regions such as the Susitna Valley, Talkeetna Mountains, and Matanuska River were historically connected by Native transportation and trade trails. By the late 1830's, smallpox had been introduced in Alaska by the Russian American fur trade. The disease struck many villages in the Wasilla area, killing roughly half of the Dena'ina residents. Measles, tuberculosis, and influenza also took a devastating toll (Cook and Norris 1998).

Knik, the first boom town in the Mat-Su Valley, boasted a population of 500 by 1915 (Potter 1978). The town served the fur trappers and miners working the gold fields at Cache Creek and Willow Creek. The town of Wasilla was established in 1917, at the intersection of the new Alaska Railroad with the Carle Wagon Road (today's Wasilla-Fishhook Road), which linked the Willow Creek mining district with the town of Knik. Wasilla's proximity to the gold fields and railroad service lured Knik residents to relocate, and in a few short years, Knik became a ghost town. Willow Creek was a very active mining area between 1909 and 1950. Incomplete records indicate that at least 623,874 ounces of gold, worth nearly 18 million dollars, were produced at a time when gold was valued between 20 and 35 dollars an ounce. Wasilla was a supply base for gold mining, and for coal mining, through World War II (City of Wasilla 2007a).

Wasilla is home to the headquarters of the Iditarod Trail Committee. The Iditarod sled dog race commemorates the heroic transport of life-saving serum to combat a diphtheria epidemic that broke out in Nome, on the Bering Sea Coast, deep in the winter of 1925, when planes were



Dorothy Page was the “Mother of the Iditarod.” Along with Joe Redington, Sr., she was responsible for bringing the Iditarod to Wasilla.

grounded due to cold. The original serum run began with rail transport from Anchorage to Nenana, north of Fairbanks, where the rail line ended. From there, teams of dogs and mushers relayed the serum to Nome. The annual race, hugely popular in Alaska and with a following nationwide, covers the entire distance by dog team.

As road construction and upgrades have improved access to Anchorage, vacation homes and commuting between Anchorage and Wasilla have become more common. In particular, the Parks Highway segment into Wasilla, finished in the 1970s, allowed hundreds of workers to begin the 45-minute drive to Anchorage and back each day. Hundreds of new residents were drawn to the area, creating a great demand for new services. Wasilla incorporated in 1974 as a First Class City (Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development 2007).

Major growth occurred in Wasilla during the Alaska oil boom and pipeline development of the 1970s and 1980s. By 1984, Wasilla had again become the commercial heart of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and for a time was the fastest growing city of its size in the United States. Many people are attracted to the Valley and to Wasilla for the rural setting, affordable housing and a family-oriented community. While the commercial and residential development patterns have obscured much of the frontier town setting, Wasilla residents still identify strongly with the town's roots in the first days of non-Native settlement of Alaska, when the era's pioneers established a hub of commerce and initiative in the young territory.

Location and Setting

Wasilla provides residents an ideal location that offers access to a multi-use year round playground with some of Alaska's most sought after vacation spots just a short scenic drive from home including the Matanuska and Knik glaciers, Hatcher Pass, several state game refuges and recreation areas, world-class fishing rivers, and Denali National Park and Preserve. Within the City, residents can enjoy Lucille and Wasilla lakes, Cottonwood and Lucille creeks, and several smaller streams (ADCCED 2007 and City of Wasilla 1996). Figure A1 illustrates Wasilla's location and setting within Alaska.

Wasilla covers approximately 13 square miles of land and about 1 square mile of water in the southern reaches of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. The City is anchored between the Talkeetna Mountains and the Knik Arm and flanked by the Matanuska and Susitna valleys in southcentral Alaska. The main line of the Alaska Railroad runs through town, and local roads, the George Parks Highway, and the Glenn Highway provide direct links to Anchorage, as well as other destinations throughout Alaska and Canada. Anchorage is a manageable commute approximately 45 miles south of the City, while Fairbanks is about 315 miles north (ADCCED 2007; City of Wasilla 1996; and City of Wasilla 2005).

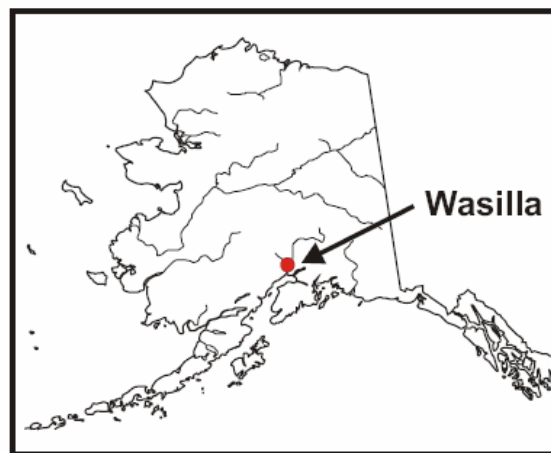


Figure A1. Location and Setting

Vegetation and Wetlands

Existing Conditions

Vegetation is diverse in the Wasilla area and characteristic of boreal forest vegetation as depicted in Figure A2. Treed areas consist mostly of three types of forest cover; needleleaf, broadleaf, and a mixture of the two. Needleleaf forests have a canopy of mainly white spruce in dry areas and black spruce in wetland areas. The understory consists of species such as alder, willow, devil's club, shrub birch, blueberry, cranberry, and mosses. The canopy of the broadleaf forests are made up of paper birch, aspen, and cottonwood, and the understory may consist of Labrador tea, blueberry, rusty Menziesia, prickly rose, species of horsetails, and fireweed. Mixed broadleaf and needleleaf forests can have a canopy of white and black spruce, paper birch, aspen, or cottonwood. In addition to most of the understory species found in either broadleaf or needleleaf forests, mixed forest understory may also consist of dwarf dogwood and lady fern (City of Wasilla 1996 and Lakehead University 2007).

Other types of plant cover in the Wasilla area include tall and low shrubs (alder, devil's club, lady fern, and horestail), dwarf shrubs (dwarf birch and heath species), dry and moist herbs (grasses, sedges, mosses, and lichens), wet and aquatic herbs (sedges, mare's tail, buckbean, pond lilies), agricultural areas (grazing and grain fields), and developed areas (mostly weedy species).

Wetlands in Wasilla and the surrounding areas include Lake Lucille, Wasilla Lake, Cottonwood Creek, and Lucille Creek. These water bodies provide important habitat for freshwater and anadromous fish species as described in the *Fish and Wildlife* section. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has mapped two systems of wetlands in accordance with the Cowardin wetlands classification system in the Wasilla area including the palustrine and lacustrine systems (USFWS 2007).

The terms *bog*, *swamp*, and *marsh* are all common terms for the palustrine system of wetlands. These wetlands are a freshwater system "dominated by trees, shrubs, emergents, and mosses or lichens" (Cowardin et al. 1979). In Wasilla this system is characterized by emergent, forested, and scrub-shrub vegetation types (USFWS 2007). Emergent persistent wetlands are dominated by erect, rooted, perennial plants adapted to growing in water (Cowardin et al. 1979).

Vegetation in the palustrine forested wetlands is typically dominated by white spruce-black spruce hybrids (Viereck et al. 1992). The understory shrub layer consists of both low and tall shrubs such as willow, Labrador tea, lowbush cranberry, and bog blueberry. Common ground cover includes peat mosses, herbaceous species like field horsetail, a few flowered sedges, and a variety of forbs (Viereck et al. 1992 and Reed 1996).

Scrub-shrub wetlands typically are found within and around bogs or fens. Vegetation in palustrine scrub-shrub wetlands is typically dominated by shrubs including those found in forested wetlands, as

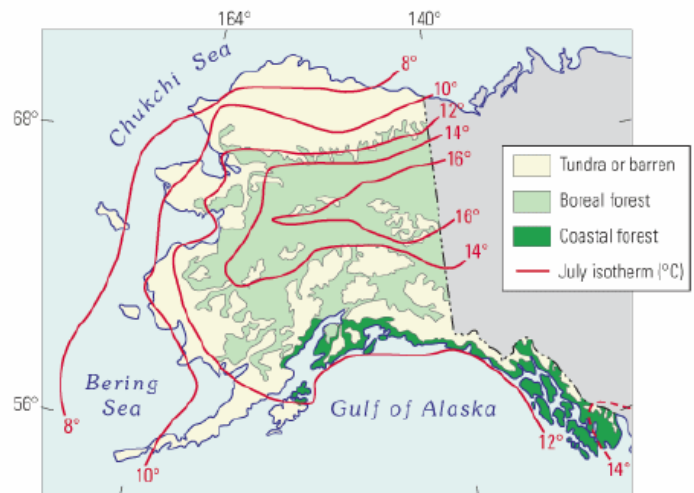


Figure A2. Major Vegetation Types of Alaska.

Source: Ager, T.A. and Carrara, P.E. 2006.

well as sweet gale, leatherleaf, and dwarf birch. The ground cover is similar to that of forested wetlands, with bluejoint reedgrass also being typical (Viereck et al. 1992; Reed 1996).

Implications for Development

Development of land in the Wasilla area may have a variety of effects on wooded and wetland areas. Certain detrimental effects on wildlife are tied to alteration of wetland and forested areas. Some of these, discussed in *Fish and Wildlife* section, may include exclusion of animals from areas normally used, habitat loss, and disturbance. Additionally, fish can be affected by changes in water quality associated with erosion and run-off, and they can be cut off from migration routes to spawning grounds or rearing areas by diverting or blocking streams or draining wetlands. The vegetation itself is susceptible to disturbance from development due to filling wetlands and deforestation.

Geology and Soils

Geology

The Matanuska Valley is characterized as a glacial-drift and loess mantled topographic and structural trough surrounded by the Chugach Mountains to the south and the Talkeetna Mountains to the north. The mountains consist of igneous and metamorphic rocks of Mesozoic age topped with Tertiary sedimentary rocks. Glacial and stream deposits reflect the highly varied geological characteristics of the area (Muhs et al 2004).

The Matanuska Valley was glaciated most recently by the Naptown glacial event. The youngest terminal moraine created by this glaciation, the Elmendorf moraine, lies between 15 to 40 kilometers beyond the Matanuska Valley and is estimated to have been deposited between 13,700 and 11,700 years ago (Muhs et al 2004).

The Wasilla area is generally free of permafrost (NRCS 2002). However, some isolated masses are present locally (Selkregg 1974). The Matanuska Valley is on the southernmost portion of Alaska's zone of discontinuous permafrost (Muhs et al 2004). Permafrost becomes more prevalent to the north and east of Wasilla.

Another noteworthy geologic feature of the Matanuska Valley, and especially to the City of Wasilla, is the Castle Mountain Fault. This fault runs east-west from Sutton to beyond Houston and is a right lateral, strike-slip fault approximately 200 kilometers long (Bunds 2001). The fault occurs within 10 miles northwest of Wasilla and travels through the center of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Documented magnitude 6 and 7 earthquakes have ruptured the Castle Mountain Fault about every 700 years over the last 2,800 years (FTA and ARRC 2005).

Soils

The Wasilla area consists of four main soil types or 'series'. The *Kashwitna* and the *Knik* are most suitable for development. The *Kashwitna* series is found north of the Parks Highway and west of Lake Lucille and occurs within glacial outwash plains and hills (NRCS 1998). The *Knik* series is found mostly north and south of Lake Lucille and Wasilla Lake as well as in downtown Wasilla. *Knik* soils consist of shallow, well-drained soils formed in silty loess over gravelly glacial drift and extremely gravelly coarse sand. *Kashwitna* soils are also well-drained soils formed in silty loess over gravelly glacial drift and extremely gravelly coarse sand and occur at greater depths than the *Knik* series (NRCS 1998). *Knik* series soils are the most suitable and most commonly used for land development, excluding areas along wetlands. However, areas of compacted silt and surficial

depressions associated with these series can contribute to problems with drainage and frost heaving events.

Associated with the *Kashwitna* soil series, are the *Kichatna* and *Deception* soil series. Similar to the *Kashwitna* series, these two soil types occur at greater depths than the shallow *Knik* series. The substratum of the *Kichatna* and *Kashwitna* series is extremely gravelly coarse sand, while the *Deception* series' substratum consists of a very gravelly loam or very gravelly sandy loam (NRCS 1998).

Implications for Development

Frost heaving, slope, and a high water table have implications for local development potential. Drainage and frost heaving occur in localized pockets of the *Knik* and *Kashwitna* series; however, these series are typically suitable for development, particularly the *Knik* series.

Valuable mineral deposits are not currently known to exist within the City of Wasilla; however, large amounts of gravel and sand provide a local and ready source of material for road construction and concrete applications. Several trainloads of gravel are exported to Anchorage daily, during heavy construction seasons. Marl, a lime-rich deposit, is used on a small-scale for agricultural uses (NRCS 1998).

The Wasilla area lies within the Matanuska Valley coal field and contains known deposits of coal (Selkregg 1974). Additionally, coal bed methane (CBM) projects are in place within the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. The Pioneer exploration unit, established in 1998, includes much of Downtown Wasilla (ADNR 2004). Methane is the primary energy component of natural gas. Because coal has such a large internal surface area, it can store six or seven times as much gas as a conventional natural gas reservoir of equal volume. In relation to a natural gas reservoir, the coal beds are much shallower and less expensive, thus methane is a valuable resource for energy demands (USGS 2000).

Topography and Drainage

Existing Conditions

Topographic elevations within the city limits of Wasilla vary from about 300 to 500 feet above sea level. Downtown and the Airport and Transportation Museum Area are nearly level, while South Wasilla Heights is significantly higher in elevation. A sudden rise of over 100 feet on the eastern and southern edges of South Wasilla Heights adds to the area's prominence in the landscape and its desirable views. The area slopes away more gradually toward the west.

Downtown is directly north of South Wasilla Heights and in between Wasilla and Lucille lakes. This area is relatively flat, ranging from 300 to 350 feet above sea level. The Airport and Transportation Museum Area has a shallow rise in elevation near its center just south of Jacobsen Lake, which slightly exceeds 350 feet above sea level. This area also has some low-lying wetland areas, including a stretch of Lucille Creek along its southern border, where the elevation is approximately 300 feet above sea level (USGS 1992).

Area drainage includes two major streams, Lucille and Cottonwood creeks, and two major lakes, Wasilla and Lucille lakes. Wasilla Lake is part of the Cottonwood Creek drainage system.

Lake Lucille is similar in area to Wasilla Lake, but is very shallow. No permanently flowing streams feed Lake Lucille. Two storm drains on the north shore of the lake collect storm water runoff from the Parks Highway. However, the volume and quality of these waters is unknown. This lake does not experience as much inflow as Wasilla Lake and has consequently become eutrophic, i.e., mineral and organic rich leading to seasonal oxygen deficiency. In 1998 the lake was listed on the Alaska

Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) Section 303(d) list of impaired waters for failure to meet ADEC 18 Alaska Administrative Code 70 water quality standards for dissolved oxygen (Oasis 2005).

Historically, there may have been a hydrologic connection between the two lakes, but the construction of the Alaska Railroad line and the Parks Highway separated the two watersheds. Lake Lucille is drained by Lucille Creek into Meadow Creek and then into Big Lake 11.3 miles to the west (ADEC 2002).

Cottonwood Creek's mean flow is estimated at 16 cubic feet per second, depending on seasonal precipitation and snowmelt. Annual mean flow at the Lucille Creek gage is approximately 1.25 cubic feet per second (ADEC 2002).

These waterways are important for supplying water, recreation, subsistence, habitat and intrinsic value. The *Vegetation and Wetlands* and the *Fish and Wildlife* sections further discuss the values of these waterways.

Implications for Development

New development in the three planning areas will have to account for topography and drainage considerations.

Wetlands in low-lying areas may be susceptible to negative effects from development as described in the *Vegetation and Wetlands* section. Also, flooding may occur in low areas such as along the banks of Cottonwood Creek. Development in more hilly areas like South Wasilla Heights should take into account drainage and run-off patterns of disturbed soils. Slope stability issues may arise, impacting local areas, and further alter runoff and drainage patterns in the area.

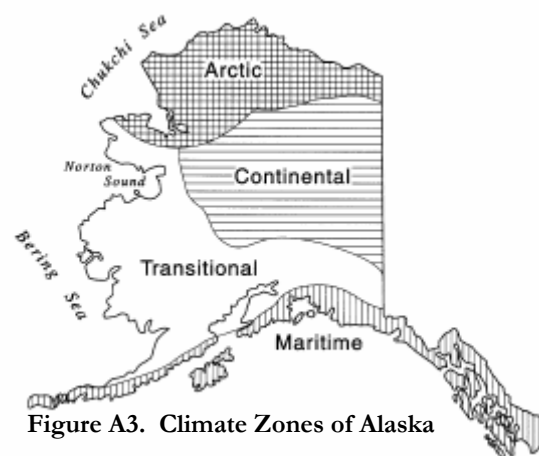
These areas may also have important viewsheds, and their maintenance would likely be desirable primarily through the use of regulatory mechanisms such as zoning and landscaping standards.

Climate

Existing Conditions

Situated in southcentral Alaska at approximately 61° north latitude and -149° west longitude, Wasilla has a transitional climate and thus experiences a combination of the mild and wet conditions of the maritime climate as well as the extremes of the continental climate. Being in the transitional climate zone, Wasilla has experienced both the extreme temperatures of the continental climate as well as the heavy precipitation and snowfall characteristic of the maritime climate. Over 29 inches of snow has fallen in Wasilla in a 24 hour period, and strong cold winter winds coupled with excessively cold temperatures have created dangerous wind chills in excess of -45°F (City of Wasilla 2004).

Wasilla is largely protected from the frigid continental climatic extremes by its location in relation to the Alaska Range and the Chugach and Talkeetna mountains as illustrated in Figure A3. Average temperatures range from approximately -33 and 33 degrees Fahrenheit (°F) in January and between 42 and 83°F in July. Annual precipitation totals roughly 17 inches, with 50 inches of average annual



snowfall (ADCCED 2007 and Ager 2003). The bitterly cold high winds synonymous with the Matanuska, Susitna, and Knik valleys that gust off the Knik and Matanuska glaciers do affect the community. Annually, high winds are recorded in Wasilla and property damage has occurred (City of Wasilla 2004).

Wasilla is located in an area generally free of permafrost (NRCS 2002). By late March and early April, winter begins to release its grip and the ground starts to thaw. On average there are 115 days without frost, and the first frost of the season typically arrives by the beginning of September. Although daylight is limited to about 5 hours on the winter solstice, the summer solstice brings a 19 hour day (City of Wasilla 1996). Local gardeners reap the benefits of the long days as plants, fruit, and vegetable crops grow quickly in these conditions.

Implications for Development

Future development in Wasilla should consider climate-responsive, northern design principles that account for the low winter temperatures, frequent high winds, extreme daylight variations, and snow removal and storage. The City might consider strengthening and adopting building codes that require additional structural and insulation reinforcements to withstand high winds, heavy snow loads, and low temperatures.

Extreme daylight variations can be incorporated into subdivision and building design by deliberate solar orientation so that sunlight at solar noon is unobstructed and maximized during winter months. This can be accomplished through building orientation on the lot and adjacent lots as well as promoting the use of deciduous trees that will allow more sunlight to penetrate to buildings during the winter months. This could be particularly attractive to residents as energy costs continue to rise. Solar orientation can potentially reduce energy costs and provide more comfortable homes (USDOE 1993).

Snow removal and storage is an ongoing concern for development in a northern city. An implication of this is that new development needs to consider adequate room for storage on streets, sidewalks, parking spaces, and other forms of new development. This requires additional space. New infrastructure needs to be designed to accommodate snow storage, decreased daylight, high winds, and extreme temperatures. Suggestions include a greater number of decorative lighting fixtures, strategically placed windbreaks to prevent snowdrift on pedestrian and transportation corridors, and different roadbed designs and materials to withstand sustained periods of freezing temperatures. Greater density Downtown might also be an option to consider as it would minimize the distance between services, thus reducing the time exposed to inclement weather.

Fish and Wildlife

Existing Conditions

Common animals in the Wasilla area include large and small mammals, a diversity of birds, and several species of fish. Many of these are year-round residents, such as moose, fox, rabbit, and beaver. Several species call this area home on only a seasonal basis, or as a rest-stop along migration routes. These may include loons, Canada geese, and arctic terns, among many others. There are no current threatened or endangered species in the Wasilla area, but the American peregrine falcon and the arctic peregrine falcon were downgraded from the Alaska Endangered Species list (ADF&G 2007).

Moose are abundant throughout Alaska, including the Wasilla area. They spend summer months in the mountains north of Wasilla, where they breed and calve. In the winter months, moose migrate to

low-lying areas including river and stream drainages. At this time, moose forage mainly on bare twigs of willow, birch, and aspen. In spring the moose forage on a wide variety of plants including sedges, equisetum (horsetail), aquatic plants, and grasses. Summer forage options expand to other forbs and vascular plants, including leaves of birch, willow and aspen (City of Wasilla 1996).

Moose are preyed upon by bears and wolves, but many also are killed by humans. Sport and subsistence hunting for moose is an important part of many Alaskans' lives. Approximately 6,000 to 8,000 moose are harvested each year; yielding about 3.5 million pounds of meat (ADF&G 2006). Additionally, as moose inhabit low-lying developed areas during winter months, many are killed each year in collisions with cars and trains.

Black and brown bears inhabit the Wasilla area. Brown bears are not common in this area, but can be found in the surrounding areas, usually at higher elevations. Black bears can be found from sea level to alpine areas and are most commonly found in forested areas (City of Wasilla 1996). As black bears emerge from their dens in the spring, they forage on almost anything they can find, including new green vegetation and carcasses of animals killed over the winter. The bears feed heavily on spawning salmon as they travel upstream in the summer, and berries become important to their diet in the late summer and early autumn (ADF&G 2006).

Habituation of black bears to humans and the urban environment is an issue of some concern. Black bears show great ability to adapt to developed areas and often forage in garbage cans and dumps. With the prevalence of black bears in urban settings, risk of injury to humans or bears increases through interactions. However, bears are also valued wildlife in this area and important for both subsistence and sport hunting.

Other small game and furbearing animals are present in the Wasilla area, including fox, rabbit, coyote, mink, weasel, muskrat, and beaver (City of Wasilla 1996). While these species were frequently trapped for their fur and were a source of income for many residents, they have more recently become important on an intrinsic level and contribute greatly to the wildlife viewing possibilities in the Wasilla area.

Birds are also central figures in Wasilla area wildlife. During the summer this area is home to many nesting and migratory species including the bald eagle, Canada goose, common loon, grebes, and arctic tern. Common birds that use the Wasilla area primarily in winter include black-capped chickadee, great grey owl, Bohemian waxwing, pine grosbeak, and downy woodpecker (ADF&G 2006). Three Species of Special Concern exist in southcentral Alaska, and potentially in the Wasilla area. These include the American peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*), arctic peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus tundrius*), and olive-sided flycatcher (*Contopus cooperi*) (ADF&G 2007). Recreational bird viewing can be a popular activity during the summer and people generally enjoy having birds around throughout the year.

Local waters such as Cottonwood Creek, Cottonwood Lake, and Lucille Creek are home to a variety of important fish species including all five species of Pacific salmon. Additionally, Dolly Varden, steelhead, and cutthroat also use these waters. Cottonwood and Lucille Creeks provide necessary migration corridors for these species, while pools within the creeks and Cottonwood Lake provide habitat for juvenile salmon (City of Wasilla 1996). These species are an important resource for sport and subsistence anglers in the Wasilla area.

Implications for Development

The presence of wildlife populations can have implications for development. Regulations regarding protection of certain species or habitats can slow or stop development in some cases. For example,

bald eagle nests are protected from disturbance under the Bald Eagle Protection Act (16 U.S. Code 668-668d, 54 Statute 250), and buffer zones are required around the nest sites. Bald eagles are known to nest within the City of Wasilla. Other protected and future-protected wildlife habitat, including wetlands, must be addressed in development projects and permits may be required. Due to the presence of bald eagles, other wildlife and their habitats, it is important for developers to conduct bird surveys and obtain necessary permits prior to construction.

Population and Demographics

Population

Wasilla is growing at a much faster rate than is the state as a whole. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Wasilla had a population of 4,028 in 1990 (U.S. Census Bureau 1990). The Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development’s (DCCED) estimates Wasilla’s 2006 population at 6,775, a 68.2 percent increase from 1990 (Alaska DCCED 2006). The U.S. Census Bureau recorded a total population of 550,043 in Alaska in 1990 and estimates the state’s 2006 population at 670,053, which is an increase of only 21.8 percent (U.S. Census Bureau 1990 and 2007). By 2030, the state population is expected to grow by 25 percent and have an estimated total population of 840,000 (Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development [ADLWD] 2007). Neither the U.S. Census Bureau nor the ADLWD provides Wasilla-specific population projections because of the city’s relatively small population. If extrapolated from ADLWD projections for the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, the city would experience a growth rate of 9.3 percent from 2006 to 2010, 26.8 percent from 2006 to 2015, and 78.4 percent from 2006 to 2030. Figures A4 and A5, respectively, present graphic representation of Wasilla’s population from 1920 to 2006 and Wasilla’s estimated future population growth based on ADLWD growth projections for the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

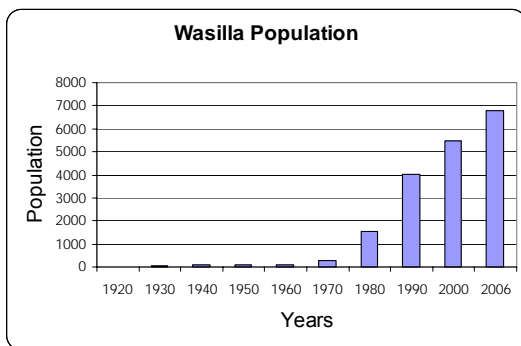


Figure A4. Population 1920-2006

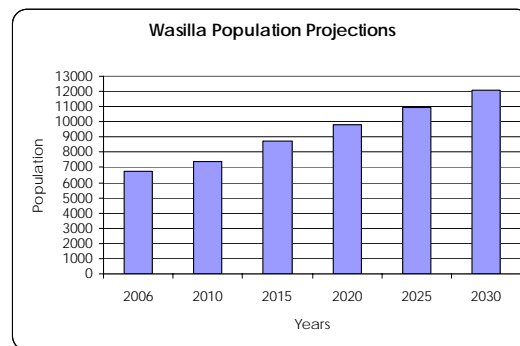


Figure A5. Population Projections

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau 2000; AK DCCED 2006

Gender and Age Composition

According to 2000 U.S. Census Bureau demographic information, the gender and age composition of Wasilla is similar to the state of Alaska; however, females slightly outnumber males in Wasilla, the city’s median age is slightly younger than that of the state population, and a greater percentage of Wasilla residents are 65 years or older. Table A1 presents city and state gender and age information and Figure A6 presents a breakdown of the Wasilla population by age category.

Table A1. Gender and Age

	Wasilla	Alaska
Percent Males	49.9	51.7
Percent Females	50.1	48.3
Median Age	29.7	32.4
Percent 5 years and under	8.8	7.6
Percent under 18 years	33.6	30.4
Percent 18 years and over	66.4	69.6
Percent 20 to 24 years old	7.1	6.4
Percent 25 to 44 years old	30.8	32.5
Percent 45 to 64 years old	19.1	22.3
Percent 65 years and over	6.7	5.7

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000

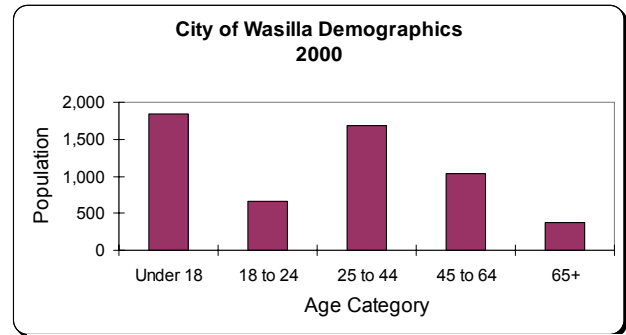


Figure A6. Wasilla Demographics 2000

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000

Racial Composition

Compared to state census data, Wasilla has low minority populations. The 2000 U.S. Census racial composition data for Wasilla and Alaska are presented in Table A2.

Table A2. Wasilla Racial Composition

Race	Number of Wasilla Residents	Percent of Wasilla Population	Percent of Alaska Population
One Race	5,144	94.1	94.6
White	4,674	85.5	69.3
Black or African American	32	0.6	3.5
American Indian and Alaska Native	287	5.2	15.6
Asian	72	1.3	4.0
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	7	0.1	0.5
Some other race	72	1.3	1.6
Two or More Races	325	5.9	5.4
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	201	3.7	4.1

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000

Educational Attainment

Of the 3,091 Wasilla residents 25 years of age or older in 2000, an estimated 89 percent had graduated from high school and approximately 13 percent had a bachelor's degree or a higher level of education. When compared to census statistics for the entire state of Alaska, a greater percentage of Wasilla residents had graduated from high school and earned associate degrees. A smaller percentage, however, had earned bachelor's or graduate degrees. Table A3 presents a more detailed look at this age group's educational attainment.

Table A3. Education Attainment

Education Level	Number of Wasilla Residents	Percent of Wasilla Population	Percent of Alaska Population
Less than 9 th grade	121	3.9	4.1
9 th to 12 th grade, no diploma	225	7.3	7.5
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	1,003	32.4	27.9
Some college, no degree	1,023	33.1	28.6
Associate degree	326	10.5	7.2
Bachelor's degree	224	7.2	16.1
Graduate or professional degree	169	5.5	8.6

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000

Economic Statistics

As shown in Table A4, the 2000 census economic statistics for Wasilla are similar to those for the state of Alaska. Wasilla, however, had a lower unemployment rate, a smaller percentage of families below the poverty level, and a greater percentage of residents in the labor force.

Table A4. 2000 Census Economic Statistics

	Median Household Income (1999 dollars)	Per Capita Income (1999 dollars)	Families Below Poverty Level	Individuals Below Poverty Level	In Labor Force (≥16 years old)	Employed	Unemployed
Wasilla	\$48,226	\$21,127	5.7%	9.6%	70.8%	62.8%	7.9%
State of Alaska	\$51,571	\$22,660	6.7%	9.4%	71.3%	61.5%	6.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000

Housing

Existing Inventory and Condition

Wasilla had an estimated 2,119 housing units in 2000 (City of Wasilla 2007a), and there have been additions in recent years. The majority of housing in Wasilla can be characterized as single-family homes situated on large lots in a semi-rural area. Wasilla also has a proportion of small multi-family units (four, six and eight unit residential buildings), which are often interspersed within single-family neighborhoods. Wasilla housing units have an occupancy rate of 93.4 percent, and owner occupied housing accounts for 55.8 percent of all units (Table A5). Generally, the major residential areas are located north of the Parks Highway and near Lake Lucille. The majority of subdivided land is platted into lot sizes of 40,000 square feet or larger.

Table A5. Housing characteristics for Wasilla compared to the Mat-Su Borough, Anchorage, and the State.

Type of Housing	Wasilla	Mat-Su Borough	Anchorage	Alaska
Total No. of Housing Units	2,119	27,329	100,368	260,978
No. of Occupied Units	1,979	20,556	94,822	221,600
No. of Vacant Units	140	6,773	5,546	39,378
Seasonal, Recreational, Occasional	34	5,244	1,107	21,474
Percent of Occupied Housing	93.4%	75.2%	94.5%	84.9%
No. of Owner-Occupied Units	1,104	16,218	56,953	138,509
No. of Renter-Occupied Units	875	4,338	37,869	83,091
Percent of Owner-Occupied Units	55.8%	78.9%	60.1%	62.5%

Notes: No. = Number

Source: City of Wasilla website, Community Profile: Housing (http://www.cityofwasilla.com/profile/profile_06.asp)

Most residential structures (71 percent) were constructed between 1970 and 1989, and 69.8 percent have between 3 and 6 rooms. Over half (53.4 percent) are 1-unit detached homes, and 20.1 percent are 3 or 4-unit structures. All but 1.3 percent have complete plumbing facilities and only 1.0 percent do not have complete kitchen facilities. Table A6 presents more housing details.

Table A6. Residential Structure Detail

	Number	Percent		Number	Percent
UNITS IN STRUCTURE			HEATING TYPE		
1-unit, detached	1,130	53.4	Utility gas	1,754	88.8
1-unit, attached	72	3.4	Bottled, tank, or LP gas	35	1.8
2 units	178	8.4	Electricity	122	6.2
3 or 4 units	425	20.1	Fuel oil, kerosene, etc.	59	3.0
5 to 9 units	128	6.0	Wood	5	0.3
10 to 19 units	62	2.9			
20 or more units	53	2.5			
Mobile home	57	2.7			
Boat, RV, van, etc.	13	0.6			
YEAR STRUCTURE BUILT			SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS		
1999 to March 2000	41	1.9	Lacking complete plumbing facilities	26	1.3
1995 to 1998	289	13.6	Lacking complete kitchen facilities	20	1.0
1990 to 1994	162	7.6	No telephone service	15	0.8
1980 to 1989	1,014	47.9	Specified owner-occupied units	834	100.0
1970 to 1979	489	23.1			
1960 to 1969	92	4.3			
1940 to 1959	31	1.5			
1939 or earlier	0	0.0			

Table A6. Residential Structure Detail (Continued)

	Number	Percent		Number	Percent
ROOMS			VALUE		
1 room	69	3.3	Less than \$50,000	45	5.4
2 rooms	125	5.9	\$50,000 to \$99,999	108	12.9
3 rooms	296	14.0	\$100,000 to \$149,999	367	44.0
4 rooms	501	23.7	\$150,000 to \$199,999	216	25.9
5 rooms	351	16.6	\$200,000 to \$299,999	85	10.2
6 rooms	329	15.5	\$300,000 to \$499,999	13	1.6
7 rooms	190	9.0	\$500,000 to \$999,999	0	0.0
8 rooms	131	6.2	\$1,000,000 or more	0	0.0
9 or more rooms	126	5.9	Median (dollars)	137,700	(X)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000

Planned Improvements/Development

Wasilla is a young community, with most housing units (71 percent) less than 40 years old. Currently, there are no known large-scale (e.g., subdivision-wide) planned improvements for housing in the City. However, there are residential developments occurring throughout the City. Yenlo Square, a planned unit development is currently in Phase III, and scheduled for completion in 2010. This is a mixed-use development that will include approximately 150 residential units, some for single families and others for seniors and people with special needs (Architects Alaska 2004). Table A7 provides a summary of development permits issued by the City of Wasilla between 2002 and 2006 for residential housing.

Table A7. Development Permits Issued by the City of Wasilla

Year	Single Family	Duplex	Multi Family	Total Dwelling Units
2002	42	24	110	176
2003	43	28	35	106
2004	48	34	60	142
2005	75	22	11	108
2006	41	34	34	109

Source: City of Wasilla 2007b

Public Facilities and Schools

Existing Facilities and Condition

Airport

Wasilla Municipal Airport was constructed by the State of Alaska to replace the old airport that was located in Downtown Wasilla. The new airport was constructed in 1992 on 370 acres of City-owned land and opened in 1993 (City of Wasilla 1996 and 2002). It is approximately 15 minutes from Downtown in the Airport and Transportation Museum Area and has year-round operations. The 3,700-foot paved runway is approved for general aviation aircraft and was paved in 1999 (City of Wasilla 2002). The airport's amenities and services include a radio-controlled runway, taxiway and security lighting, onsite engine and airframe repair, onsite fuel service, and air-taxi services. Lease lots, spaces, and tie-downs are available.

The City is responsible for year round operation and maintenance of the Wasilla Municipal Airport. A five-member Airport Advisory Commission advises and provides recommendations to the City for airport operations and maintenance, site locations and development plans for airport lease lots,

and for specific proposals for development at the airport (WMC 2.68.010). The Wasilla Airport Master Plan includes a capital improvement plan and describes the anticipated projects to be completed through 2022.

Aurora Cemetery

The Wasilla Aurora Cemetery is located at mile 1.1 Wasilla-Fishhook Road outside of the planning area boundaries. The City has maintained the cemetery since 1980. There are approximately 500 plots and no plans to expand the cemetery through land acquisition (City of Wasilla 1996). The City assumes the powers of the cemetery and sells the remaining lots and will maintain the cemetery in perpetuity. The Department of Parks and Recreation maintains the cemetery, and the City Clerk administers the records. Funds acquired from the sale of cemetery lots are held in a nonexpendable trust fund. The interest from the trust fund is used for maintenance, operation of and capital improvements construction in the cemetery. General operations of the cemetery are paid for through the City's general fund.

City Hall

City Hall, built in 1934 and located Downtown, is one of the oldest buildings in Wasilla located on the corner of Knik Street and Herning Avenue. The structure was originally built to function as a school. The state owned the building when the Mat-Su Borough bought it in 1973; the City did not have title to the property until 1981 (City of Wasilla 1996). The following functions operate at City Hall:

- Mayor and Administrative Offices
- City Council Chambers
- City Clerk
- Finance
- Public Works
- Planning
- Economic Development

Some city departments are not located there due to lack of space. City Council, Planning Commission, Parks and Recreation Commission, and Airport Advisory Commission and meetings are hosted here as well.

Currently, the building is not compliant with the American Disabilities Act, nor is the parking for the building. There are a sufficient number of parking spaces available for the 25 staff. However, there limited ADA-compliant parking spaces available for the public building. Coupled with an aging electrical system and capacity issues, City Hall is in need of upgrades and expansion. However, at this time there are no existing plans for modifications to the building.

Dorothy Page Museum and Historic Town Site

The Dorothy Page Museum, established in 1967, is Wasilla's first museum. It is located Downtown, near the Wasilla Public Library and museum and library patrons vie for approximately 20 available parking spaces in the shared lot. The main museum building, a National Historic Landmark, was originally constructed as the Wasilla Community Hall in 1931 and served as a forum for social gatherings and sporting events such as basketball games. Although the exhibits are on display mostly in the main building, the museum is comprised of 10 structures, including Wasilla's first school,

which is also a National Historic Landmark. Home to an extensive collection of Wasilla artifacts, the museum also offers rotating exhibits each summer. These exhibits are on loan from the state museum and differ from year to year. Every April, a Borough archaeologist presents one to two lectures at the facility in celebration of Archaeology Month. On Fridays, museum entry fees are waived for all Mat-Su residents. In fiscal year 2007, a total of 6,162 people visited the museum - a dramatic increase from the previous year's visitor total of 4,528. The City of Wasilla operates the museum. Currently there are no plans for expansion; however, the Visitor's Center will be fitted with a Halon-type fire suppression system this winter (Neel 2007).

Fire and Emergency Medical Services

Fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) are provided to the City of Wasilla by the Mat-Su Borough. Wasilla is served by the Central Mat-Su Fire Department, which has seven stations. Station 61 is located in Downtown Wasilla at 101 West Swanson Avenue in the Central Public Safety Building. This station is the first to respond to an emergency in the City. Other stations have the capacity to assist with response efforts if needed. The facility is 5 years old and is the first station to have built-in living quarters, which includes 17 beds, a dayroom, kitchen, and a workout room. Fire and EMS positions are on-call and respond via pager. The following positions are staffed at this station:

- 4 full-time fire fighters (includes 2 chiefs)
- 2 secretaries
- 6 paramedics (staffing 2 ambulances; staffed around the clock at this station)
- 1 paramedic supervisor (staffed around the clock at this station)
- 2 fire code officials
- 1 public educator/fire trainer
- 2 fire service area helpers

Station 61 houses the following equipment for response:

- 2 engines
- 1 pumper tanker to carry extra water
- 1 ladder truck with a 100 foot aerial ladder
- 1 heavy rescue truck
- 1 hazardous materials decontamination trailer
- 4 ambulances
- 2 command vehicles (for 2 chiefs)

This facility also has two training rooms available for use that include a TV, VCR, DVD, and multi-media projector. The rooms have an adjoining collapsible wall and together can accommodate up to 300 people. These rooms are available to both government and non-government users.

Library

Wasilla Public Library, located in the Downtown Planning area, is the fourth busiest library in the state. It receives funding from the City of Wasilla and the Mat-Su Borough. The library is open daily, Monday through Saturday. Parking is limited at the facility with merely 11 available spaces; however, there is supplemental parking available at the corner of Boundary Street and Swanson Avenue. Library cards are free to Mat-Su residents or landowners in the Mat-Su Borough, and are available for a charge to others. Beginning January 1, 2008, non-City residents will be charged either \$10 for a 3-month library card or \$35 for a full-year library card. Cards are valid at all Mat-Su Library Network branches.

The Wasilla Public Library offers multiple services. The library participates in the state interlibrary loan system. It has six computers connected to the Internet. One computer station has Microsoft® Word, Excel, and PowerPoint, and Adobe® Reader. The library offers free Internet access and other computer resources, such as printing and disk purchase for downloading. The staff includes 12 part-time and full-time employees. There are approximately 55,000 items in the library's collection, including circulating and reference books, audio books, periodicals, and videos. The library catalog can be searched online.

The facility is a key destination in downtown Wasilla, and one that faces some challenges. Parking is extremely limited, and while the building does have handicap access, this is minimal and inconvenient for patrons with disabilities.

Friends of Wasilla Public Library, a non-profit organization, is currently trying to raise funds and support for a new library facility. According to the organization, the current library is too small and requires too much maintenance because of its age; a new facility will provide much needed additional space, more parking, and easier access for people with disabilities. The City has hired an architect to prepare initial design documents, but funding for final design work has not been secured.

Multi-Use Sports Complex (MUSC)

The Wasilla Multi-Use Sports Complex, located at 1001 South Mack Drive, opened in March 2004. This facility is located in the Airport and Transportation Museum Area. This indoor sports complex has four primary activity areas: an ice arena, an indoor artificial turf court, a running/walking track, and three community meeting rooms. Ice skating, skate rentals and lessons, and ice rentals are offered to the public for a fee at the Curtis C. Menard II Memorial Ice Arena. The turf court is available for rental for birthday parties, sports team practices and games, or other events, and a for-fee "Turf for Tots" program is offered midday three days a week during the summer. Patrons can use the running/walking track by paying as they go, purchasing punch cards, or 3-month passes. Each of the approximately 650-square-foot meeting rooms will accommodate about 30 people. They can be rented by the hour or by the day. Audio/visual equipment and other presentation items are available at additional costs. Some events held at the complex in 2007 include the Iron Dog Snow Machine Display and Vendor Show, the Alaska Youth Hockey State Tournament, the Valley Home Builder's Show, and several high school graduation ceremonies. There are currently no formal plans for expansion of this facility, however, there are plans to construct a new kitchen in the building.

Museum of Alaska Transportation and Industry

The Museum of Alaska Transportation and Industry (MATI) is a private, non-profit corporation (501(c)(3)) with a volunteer board of directors and is located in the Airport and Transportation Museum Area. While it is not a publicly owned facility, it serves the public of the City of Wasilla and

visitors, and is important to include in the overview of facilities. Its stated mission is "...the collection, conservation, restoration, exhibition, and interpretation of artifacts relating to Alaska's transportation and industrial history." The museum receives no government funding, relying solely on admissions, gift shop sales, and donations to cover costs.

The museum is open from May 1 through September 30. Operating hours are 10:00 am to 5:00 pm Tuesday through Sunday. The entry fee is \$8.00 for adults and \$5.00 for senior citizens. Parking is free, sufficient to support the number of daily visitors, and spots for recreational vehicles are provided.

The museum was originally established in Anchorage in 1967 as the Air Progress Museum. It operated at this location until 1973, when a fire closed down the facility. In 1976, the remaining museum pieces were moved to 3 acres on the Alaska State Fair grounds. The museum, renamed "The Transportation Museum of Alaska" and later the "Alaska Historical and Transportation Museum," remained at this location for 15 years before being moved to its present location in 1992.

The museum sits on over 20 acres of land and includes a gallery, a train yard, an exhibit hall, and numerous outdoor artifacts. The artifacts on display include items donated by individuals and on-loan items from the military and other organizations. This summer, the museum relocated a 1935 barn to the museum grounds; they plan to restore the building for display. According to museum staff, approximately 8,000 people visited the museum in 2006. There are no formal plans to relocate the museum or to upgrade current facilities.

Police Department

The Wasilla Police Department (WPD) headquarters is located at 1800 East Parks Highway. The Mayor appoints the police chief who manages the department. Established in 1993 with only 8 commissioned officers, the WPD has grown to include 23 commissioned officers as of 2005. The WPD serves the entire population of Wasilla. The department also provides services as needed to surrounding area residents and many seasonal visitors that stop in or pass through the City to shop or recreate. The Wasilla Youth Court is also located in the Police Department building. It is unknown if there are formal plans to upgrade or renovate the current facility.

Post Office

The Wasilla Post Office is located in Downtown at 401 North Main Street on the corner of Swanson Avenue and Main Street. This is the only post office servicing Wasilla residents located wholly within the City boundaries. The 1996 comprehensive plan spoke about a replacement facility because of the inadequacies of the existing facility. The post office continues to be overcrowded and a contributing factor to traffic congestion.

Schools

Table A8 lists schools within the Downtown Planning Area, as well as other schools that are commonly used by Wasilla residents. No schools are located in the Airport & Transportation Museum Planning Area or the South Wasilla Heights Planning Area.

Table A8. Select Schools Serving Wasilla Residents

School	Grades	Enrollment	Portables	Space adequate
Within Downtown planning area boundaries				
Wasilla High School	7-12	1,284	6	No, very crowded
Wasilla Middle School	6-8	756	6	Yes, with portables
Iditarod Elementary	K-5	469	4	Yes, with portables
Correspondence Study School**	K-12	1,031	—	not applicable
Twindly Bridge Charter School	K-12	157	—	Yes
Outside of the planning areas but within Wasilla or are commonly used by residents				
Burchell High School	9-12	238	1	Yes
Colony High School	9-12	1145	0	No
Palmer High School	9-12	912	0	Yes
Mat-Su Career and Technical High School	9-12	Opens Fall 2007	0	Yes
Teeland Middle School	6-8	629	0	Yes
Cottonwood Creek Elementary	K-5	490	2	Yes, with portables
Tanaina Elementary	K-5	492	0	Yes
Midnight Sun Family Learning Center	K-10	168	—	Yes

Sources: Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District 2007; Alaska Department of Education and Early Development 2007; City of Wasilla 2007a

The Correspondence Study School is commonly referred to as the “home-schoolers school.” The school was established to help parents with curriculum and is a support network. This school offers teachers to advise parents, a small library (primarily stocked with materials passed down), and a training room for special events. The school district leases the current space.

There are no formal plans for expansion of any of the listed schools. Wasilla High School is in the process of renovating sections of the school, and Wasilla Middle School is in the process of renovating the cafeteria. However, neither of the renovations will add square footage.

Utilities

Sewer Service System

Wastewater Collection System

The City wastewater treatment system was constructed in the mid 1980s with a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency that covered 93 percent of the cost of construction. The system

is “a community drain field with individual septic tanks connected by force mains that pump the effluent” (City of Wasilla 1996).

The existing Septic Tank Effluent Pumping (STEP) system was reported in overall good condition during the 1999 master plan assessments. The assessment provided that the main service line consisted of a high density polyethylene (HDPE) piperun with fused joints, that was in good condition and could be expected to last many years without overly aggressive maintenance activities. Auxiliary system components, including septic tanks, individual STEP pumping stations and piping, were also reported to be in overall good condition. It was anticipated that many of the septic tanks would reach the end of their service lives within the next 20 years and would need repair or replacement. The main HDPE piperun was approximately 15 years old during the time of the investigation and was estimated to have approximately 35 years of remaining service life, or 27 years remaining as of 2007 (City of Wasilla 1999).

Additionally, no major capacity overages had been identified as of December 1999. Minor capacity overages were identified; however, these systems are subjected to more frequent maintenance intervals, to reduce downtime and potential system failures (City of Wasilla 1999).

Planned Improvements/Development

The state has been granted \$500,000 for the Palmer-Wasilla Highway Sewer Extension (Alaska Department of Community Advocacy [ADCA] 2007a).

Growth of the current service area supplied by the STEP system is limited due to the City of Wasilla’s plans to utilize a more efficient and cost effective gravity feed system that would support a more long term expansion of the area. The area currently serviced by the STEP system would likely continue, as complete conversion to a gravity feed system is not economical. However, areas outside of the service radius of the STEP system would be best served by a gravity system (City of Wasilla 1999).

Wastewater Treatment Facility

The current wastewater treatment plant (WWTP), located at 2900 Jude Street, consists of the following organizational structure: septic effluent from individual customer on-site septic tank treatment systems is pumped through a pressure main to the treatment plant. The effluent flows through an aerated lagoon system consisting of four lagoon cells, through an air handling building, a pump building and into a clarifier and valve vaults that feed nine active percolation beds. Flow measurement weirs are located at the influent and effluent of the lagoon, to measure real-time flows through the system (City of Wasilla 1999).

Only septage (Biosolids) from the STEP system is received by the WWTP. Septage is discharged into the digester along with clarifier sludge, where they are digested in a batch mode with a batch duration of approximately one year. Treated septage sludge is discharged to sludge drying beds and allowed to dry and finally is collected for spreading into the percolation beds. Septage received by the system varies from 20,000 to 130,000 gallons per month with between 100,000 to 200,000 gallons of sludge delivered to the drying beds per year. It was estimated that the inflow would increase from 200,000 gallons per day in 2000 to nearly 450,000 gallons per day in 2007 (City of Wasilla 1999). Currently the wastewater treatment facility handles approximately 400,000 gallons per day and adequately serves the needs of serviced customers (Becker 2007).

Planned Improvements/Development

Alternatives provided in the 1999 master plan investigation included modification to the current system to increase efficiency, including upgrades of lagoon aeration systems and percolation beds, addition of treatment systems for lagoon effluent, modifications for extended lagoon aeration, and disposal of effluent by overland irrigation. Expansion of the current treatment facility would be limited to the land availability in the immediate plant area. As of 1999, regulators had not determined whether nearby surface water bodies and streams were suitable for receiving treated effluent (City of Wasilla 1999).

Water Service System

The City supplies approximately 35 percent of the city's residents with water through the operation of three public water systems (Harvey 2007). Two are small residential systems associated with subdivisions: Lacy Laine and Mission Hills. One much larger system serves the core area of Wasilla, including Downtown, several nearby residential areas, and commercial developments along the Parks Highway (City of Wasilla 2001).

The Lacy Laine and Mission Hills water systems are dependent on a single production well and neither has a backup well for use in emergencies. Water from the Lacy Laine well is stored in 10 pre-pressurized tanks inside a well house, and the tanks have a total approximate withdrawal capacity of 160 gallons. The Mission Hills well water is stored in a 6,000-gallon tank inside a well house (City of Wasilla 2001).

The City's core water system is presently dependent on two primary production wells, the Spruce Avenue well and the Bumpus municipal wells. The East Susitna well will soon be added to the City's core water supply system. Aboveground reservoirs provide storage for this system. The main reservoir, the Spruce Avenue reservoir, is located adjacent to the primary production well and has a usable water volume of 1.2 million gallons. The Iditarod reservoir has a usable water volume of approximately 977,000 gallons (City of Wasilla 2001) and the Bumpus reservoir has a capacity of approximately 1 million gallons (Giddings 2007). The East Susitna reservoir will soon be added to the core system, providing an additional capacity of approximately 850,000 gallons.

In 2001, deficiencies that were identified included the following:

- No adequate backup water source to the Spruce Avenue well.
- Existing water system could have serious supply problems under emergency flow conditions if the production well at the Spruce Avenue reservoir site were taken out of service.
- If a large fire were to occur, low pressure conditions, which can cause backflow of possible contaminants, would take place on water mains at the higher elevations on the system.
- There is a lack of redundancy in the water piping system that connects the Spruce Avenue reservoir to the majority of core area users (City of Wasilla 2001).

Currently, the water system is adequate for City needs. The current system serves all of Downtown and only the MUSC in the Airport and Transportation Museum Area. Main water lines surround South Wasilla Heights, providing accessible hook-ups for developers. However, developers are responsible for the cost of hook-ups and extensions to specific locations (Becker 2007).

Planned Improvements/Development

The City of Wasilla has completed the engineering for a Mission Hills water line extension with a \$500,000 grant from the state of Alaska. Funding is still needed for construction of this water line. The state has been granted an additional \$500,000 for the Palmer-Wasilla Water Improvement Phase 3 and Bumpus Well Number 2 project (Alaska Department of Community Advocacy [ADCA] 2007a). Currently, there are no formal plans for further expansion of City water lines to the Airport and Transportation Museum Area (Becker 2007).

Storm Drains

Storm drains are not present in all areas throughout Wasilla. Most of the Downtown planning area has storm drains, but not all. The current improvements on Crusey Street are installing storm drains for the first time. Much of South Wasilla Heights is without storm drains, and several gravel ditches suffice as storm drains in this area. In the Airport and Transportation Museum Area, only the airport property has storm drains installed (Harvey 2007).

As Wasilla continues to grow, roads are upgraded, and new roads are constructed, storm drains are included and upgraded as necessary (Harvey 2007).

Solid Waste

The Mat-Su Borough provides solid waste services for Wasilla residents. The Central Landfill is located at 1201 North 49th State Street in Palmer. Curbside pick-up is offered to Wasilla residents through Wasilla Refuse. Central Landfill is a Class 1 Municipal Landfill with the capacity to accept more than 20 tons of solid waste per day (ADCA 2007b).

Parks and Recreation

Existing Conditions

Alaska State law mandates that official park and recreation powers are held by the Borough. However, since 1993 the City of Wasilla has held parks and recreation authority under an Intergovernmental Cooperation Agreement with the Mat-Su Borough defined in MSB Ordinance Number 93-027 (City of Wasilla 1996). The Mat-Su Borough retains authority over some recreation facilities, which are detailed later in this section.

Parks and recreational facilities are governed through chapter 12.24 of the Wasilla Municipal Code. The City exercises their park and recreation powers through two departments—the Public Works Department and the Recreation and Cultural Services Department.

The Wasilla Parks and Recreation Department falls under the Public Works Department and is responsible for maintenance of parks and recreation facilities. The Parks and Recreation Department staff consists of one supervisor and approximately 20 seasonal personnel during summer months (Urban 2007).

The Wasilla Recreation and Cultural Services Department is responsible for the programmatic side of parks and recreation and oversees operation of the MUSC, library, museum and recreational programs such as the annual Christmas tree lighting, 4th of July picnic, and City-wide clean-up days. This department staffs a manager, secretary, building supervisor, maintenance personnel, building support personnel, and a facilities coordinator (Urban 2007).

Department responsibilities include: pre-season planning, equipment mobilization, maintenance and storage, gardening and landscaping, weeding and lawn care, trash and garbage removal, vandalism

repair, and post-season winterization. The department maintains 5 parks, 49 facilities and parking lots, 5 ball fields, and 10 miles of trails, a skateboard park, volleyball courts, basketball courts, a BMX track, an outdoor amphitheater, and children’s playgrounds (City of Wasilla 2007).

The Wasilla Parks and Recreation Commission is a five member advisory group, appointed by the mayor. The Commission provides input of park and recreation programs, and formulates policy and management action recommendations for the City Council and Administration (City of Wasilla 2007a). Figure A7 illustrates the organization of Parks and Recreation in Wasilla.

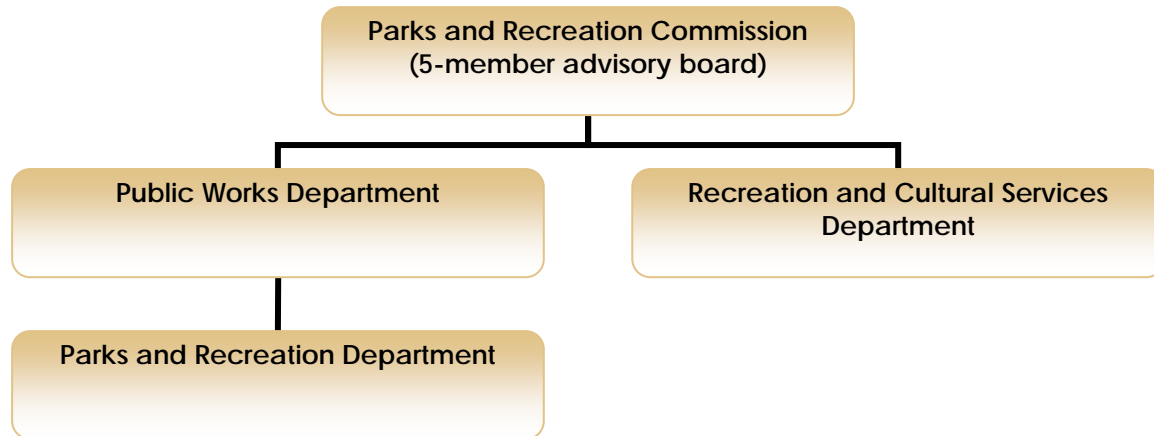


Figure A7. Parks and Recreation Organization

City of Wasilla Parks Recreation Facilities

Bumpus Recreation Complex

This 120-acre site is located off Chlds, soccer fields, an equestrian trail, a central concession stand, associated amenities, and parking. The Mat-Su Softball Association manages the ball fields, and the Parks and Recreation Division is responsible for maintenance (City of Wasilla 1996 and Urban 2007).

Carter Park

Carter Park is used mostly by families with small children. The park is approximately 0.5 acre, located along the eastern shore of Lake Lucille in South Wasilla Heights and provides canoe access to the lake, playground and picnicking facilities, restrooms, and parking. A boat launch is located adjacent to the park at the end of Susitna Street (City of Wasilla 1996 and Urban 2007).

Iditapark

The Wasilla Airport was previously located at this 28-acre Downtown site. This park is an example of redevelopment efforts after constructing a new airport on the west end of town. Iditapark offers activities for every age including:

- a skateboard park
- 3 volleyball courts
- 4 basketball courts
- 2 tennis ball courts
- a BMX track
- an outdoor amphitheater
- various pavilions with BBQ facilities
- a reflection garden with a small covered bridge, pond, and gazebo

Many community events are hosted here during the summer such as the Independence Day Festival, Governor's Picnic, and weekly outdoor concerts. Park benches, restroom facilities, and parking are also available. There is an Honor Garden for Veterans that includes a "Path of Freedom" and "Circle of Honor" is distinguished by flowerbeds. The flags of each branch of the armed forces fly in the Circle of Honor with the American Flag in the center of them.

Bricks and benches have been sold to help fund the project and can still be purchased. There is a path of civilian engraved bricks that leads up to the Circle of Honor, which is reserved for veteran's engraved bricks.

This summer will mark the completion of an outdoor skating park surrounded by Wonderland, the shelter, and the parking lot. Only small landscaping remains to be completed (City of Wasilla 1996 and Urban 2007).

Nunley Park

Nunley Park is a neighborhood park located in Downtown along Swanson Avenue between Willow and Knik Streets. This park was recently expanded by about 1/3 of an acre, increasing its total size to approximately 1.5 acres. Here you will find playground facilities, a picnic area, a fenced tennis court, and restrooms (City of Wasilla 1996 and Urban 2007).

Newcomb Park

Newcomb Park is 2.06 acres in size, located within Downtown along the western end of Wasilla Lake. The park is popular for the picnic and swimming areas, and includes a covered wood pavilion, fenced playground, sand beach, restrooms, and parking. There is not a lifeguard on duty at this park (City of Wasilla 1996 and Urban 2007).

Mat-Su Borough Recreation Facilities within Wasilla

Fritzler Complex

The Fritzler Complex is located off Bogard Road east of Iditarod Elementary School in Downtown. The complex includes little league, Babe Ruth, and softball fields. The Ressler Baseball Fields, which include little league fields, are often associated with this complex (City of Wasilla 1996 and Urban 2007).

Smith Ball Fields

The Smith Ball Fields are located at Mile 2 of the Knik-Goose Bay Road outside of the three planning areas. It is a 40 acre site that includes a soccer field and three to four little league fields. The Wasilla Area Little League holds a long-term lease with the state of Alaska (City of Wasilla 1996 and Urban 2007).

Brett Memorial Ice Arena

Located on the Wasilla Middle School campus in Downtown, this ice arena is owned and operated by the Mat-Su Borough. This is a year round facility featuring opportunities for public skating and hockey (both novice and advanced), private rental, skating lessons, and an adult hockey league. Special events are hosted here throughout the year such as the Hockey for Fun Program, Halloween Party, Wasilla Christmas Show, and the Pep Rally/Skatefest. Staff of the arena also maintains an outdoor ice arena located behind the Wasilla Middle School. About 4 years ago, new locker rooms and an office replaced two portable buildings that were used for those purposes. The two portable buildings are currently used as additional locker rooms (MSB 2007a and Marcott 2007).

Lake Lucille Campground

This park is located outside of the three planning areas near the Iditarod Headquarters at Mile 2.4 of Knik-Goose Bay Road. Lake Lucille Park is an 80-acre regional park with 64 spaces available to tents or RVs for overnight camping and non-motorized day access to Lake Lucille. There are several amenities including restrooms, potable water, day use area, trails, two soccer fields, amphitheatre, a fishing dock, a boardwalk, a group camping area that accommodates up to 100 people, and pavilions available for reservation. The MSB plans to add an RV dump station in the future. There will also be an Alaska Botanical Gardens located at the front of the park that will provide history of the area. Camping fees are \$10 and the park is open from Memorial Day weekend through freeze-up in the fall (MSB 2007b and Templin 2007).

Wasilla Swimming Pool

The Wasilla Swimming Pool facility is located in the Wasilla High School and is suitable for hosting local competitions. The facility also includes a hot tub, slides, and dive boards. It is operated by the school during school hours and by MSB after hours with a lifeguard on duty at all times. Wasilla and Colony High Schools swim and dive teams practice and host meets here. The facility offers swim lessons, lap times, open swims, and adult physical fitness classes offered throughout the week. The facility is also available to rent for private events up to 105 people (MSB 2007b).

Other Private Parks

There are small unnamed residential and private parks that neither the City of Wasilla nor the Mat-Su Borough manage or maintain. Some of these include Snider Park, Dinkel Botanical Park, and areas within Ravenswood and Wasilla Estates Subdivisions (City of Wasilla 1996 and Urban 2007).

Applicable Plans

City of Wasilla Comprehensive Plan (1996)

The comprehensive plan provides the most complete historical description of Wasilla parks, including recommendations for each park facility. Further, the document lists a number of general parks and recreation recommendations, grouped by 1) Organization and Programs; 2) Land Acquisition, Development, and Upkeep; and 3) Facilities and Improvements.

City of Wasilla Trails Plan (1999)

This document provides basic planning and policy framework to guide trail development and maintenance within Wasilla. Trail priorities are provided.

Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2008 anticipated)

This master plan will examine and inventory community recreation needs and establish maintenance and land acquisition priorities for recreation and trail use. The plan will also develop goals and objectives to guide management and design.

Implications for Development

Parks within the City of Wasilla serve as long-term strong-holds for open space, family friendly environments, and recreational opportunities. The three planning areas do not have a large amount of park space and the public has expressed a desire for more citing reasons such as increased quality of life and increased healthy lifestyles. There are currently private subdivision parks that have been established as a condition of development. The new Creekside Town Center is an example of a

developer setting aside land to add protection to a natural resource—Cottonwood Creek. These types of “pocket” parks could become more of a trend with permitting conditions of new subdivisions and developments in Wasilla.

Land Use

Applicable Ordinances and Codes

Title 16 is Wasilla’s land development code, and was adopted to achieve the goals and implement the policies of the Wasilla Comprehensive Plan. Title 16 also ensures that the City’s growth is within the values of its residents, ensuring public involvement in permitting, and that growth managed by type, design, and location. Areas covered by Title 16 include:

- Administrative Procedures (such as annexation and neighborhood planning)
- Zoning Districts
- Density and Dimensional Requirements (including parking)
- Signs
- Landscaping Standards

Zoning Districts

Zoning is the process by which a local government regulates the use of privately and publicly owned land within its jurisdiction (Oxford University Press 2005). Various land uses are authorized or restricted within each zone. The City of Wasilla is divided into seven zoning districts, which include:

1. *RR, Rural Residential District.* Very low-density rural residential and agricultural uses, with appropriate low-density development trends, transportation systems, and physical features.
2. *R1, Single-Family Residential District.* Low-density, quiet residential areas on large lots. Ample storage area should be provided for vehicles, boats and other recreational equipment.
3. *R2, Residential District.* Higher residential density than either the RR or R1 districts. This zone may have some multifamily and a higher density of different uses but is generally a residential area with neighborhood commercial, and some larger commercial uses.
4. *RM, Residential Multifamily District.* The multifamily district is the highest density residential development. Other compatible uses that are commonly associated with higher density residential areas may be allowed.
5. *Commercial District.* The intent of the commercial district is to protect areas of existing commercial development and provide areas for the continued growth of commercial enterprise.
6. *Industrial District.* Productive industrial areas, typically served by major highways or collector streets, Alaska Railroad, airport, and public or community water or sewer. This designation must contain specific provisions for traffic circulation and buffering of nearby non-industrial areas and uses from traffic, noise, dust, vibration, glare, pollution, and unsightly uses or activities.
7. *Public District.* The public district is intended to provide for and protect areas of public lands for public uses.

Detailed zoning district definitions can be obtained from the Wasilla Municipal Code (WMC 16.20.010). The required standards of review for proposed uses within each zoning district are categorized as: administrative approval, use permit, conditional use, excluded, and no city approval needed. Refer to the WMC (16.20.020) for more information regarding review standards and appropriate zone uses.

Landscaping Standards

Revised landscaping standards were adopted December 11, 2006 as part of Title 16. The purpose of the revised standards “are to stabilize soils, reduce dust and erosion, protect natural vegetation, sustain fish and wildlife, protect shorelines, reduce runoff, facilitate groundwater recharge, reduce noise, enhance the community’s environment and visual character, provide attractive and functional separation and screening between uses, and to attract visitors and tourists to the city for economic benefit” (WMC 16.33, Ordinance 06-47 (AM)). Additional landscaping standards for parking areas in residential and commercially zoned lots are defined in Title 16: Parking (WMC 16.24.040). Landscaping within parking areas includes requirements for planting beds, fences, walls, and landscaping islands.

Applicable Plans

City of Wasilla Comprehensive Plan (1996)

The Wasilla Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1996 and is a general guide for growth and development for the City of Wasilla. The plan was amended in 1999 to include the City of Wasilla Trails Plan, in 2004 to include the Wasilla Alaska Railroad Relocation Reconnaissance Study, and in 2005 to include the Wasilla All Hazard Mitigation Plan Phase I – Natural Hazards (WMC 2007). This comprehensive plan is intended to aid civic decision makers and citizens regarding issues of land use, growth, development, and quality of life within Wasilla.

City of Wasilla Trails Plan (1999)

The volunteer Wasilla Trails Advisory committee was formed in 1997 to address the community needs for a trail system that allowed cross-town access to existing routes used for recreational purposes. The Trails Plan provides a basic planning and policy framework from which to guide trail development and maintenance within the City of Wasilla.

Wasilla Sewer Master Plan (1999)

This document inventoried the existing collection and treatment system and provided the City of Wasilla with a 15-year plan for future expansion and upgrade of its collection and treatment infrastructure (LCMF Inc. 1999).

City of Wasilla Water Systems Facilities Master Plan 2000 – 2015 (2001)

This document serves as an update to the 1977 Water Facilities Master Plan. The goal of the master plan is to provide for future growth of, and modifications to, the City of Wasilla water system, which is operated and maintained by the Department of Public Works.

Wasilla Airport Master Plan (2002)

The purpose of the Wasilla Airport Master Plan is to guide development and operation of the Wasilla Airport for a 20-year planning period (2002 through 2022). The goal is to provide a safe and economically-viable airport that is consistent with the Federal Aviation Administration's standards, and has adequate capacity to serve the area's air transportation needs.

City of Wasilla Official Streets & Highways Plan FY 2005 – 2025 (2005)

The Official Streets and Highways Plan serves as a planning guide for the Planning Commission, City Council, and other agencies to use as the basis for decisions on street development and improvement in Wasilla. The goals of the Official Streets and Highways Plan are (1) to provide for a street and highway network that provides mobility, connectivity and access to the City's present and future residents and (2) to develop a street and highway network that supports economic development and growth.

Mat-Su Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (2006)

This document updates the 2000 Mat-Su Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. The Mat-Su Borough experienced rapid growth and change from 2000 through 2006. Accordingly, the update required nearly a total rewrite of the 2000 document. The Mat-Su Resource Conservation & Development Council was the regional economic development organization responsible for creating this document.

Wasilla Main Street Traffic Study (2006)

The purpose of the Main Street Traffic Study was to determine what improvements may be necessary for Main Street and the adjacent Wasilla core area to accommodate existing and future traffic needs.

City of Wasilla Hazard Mitigation Plan (2004)

The purpose of the City of Wasilla Hazard Mitigation Plan was to analyze the level of risk to population and infrastructure vulnerability from natural and technological hazards that affect Wasilla and develop goals, objectives, mitigation actions, and a mitigation implementation strategy that decrease the City's vulnerability.

Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2008 anticipated)

This master plan will examine and inventory community recreation needs and establish maintenance and land acquisition priorities for recreation and trail use. The plan will also develop goals and objectives to guide management and design.

Existing Land Use and Spatial Distribution

Wasilla is the largest incorporated city in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and has experienced major retail growth due to a large and growing population outside the city boundaries. The presence of large national retail companies, lumber yards, medical services, food and storage facilities, shopping malls, real estate and financial service centers, and dozens of small specialty businesses, make Wasilla the commercial hub of the Mat-Su Borough (Mat-Su Resource Conservation and Development Council [RCDC] 2006). The City of Wasilla spans approximately 13 square miles (8,458 acres), and the land area is dominated by private ownership (Table A9).

Table A9. Wasilla Land Ownership

Owner Type	Area in Acres	Percentage of Total Area
City	700	8%
Borough	150	~2%
State	140	~2%
University of Alaska	40	<1%
Private	7,428	88%
Total	8,458	

Source: City of Wasilla website, Community Profile: Wasilla Facts
(http://www.cityofwasilla.com/profile/profile_14.asp)

Wasilla land use includes residential, commercial, public and semi-public facilities, light industrial, and vacant land. Current acreages for each land use are unavailable at this time. The following table represents the acreage of each land use in 1991 and provides an approximate idea of the distribution of land uses throughout Wasilla. Approximately 50 percent of the land area is undeveloped, largely due to wetlands or other unsuitable and expensive areas to develop. The second largest land use is residential areas, covering approximately 1,091 acres or 15 percent of the community (City of Wasilla 1996). Table A10 summarizes land use characteristics within Wasilla by category. The total acreage for land use in Wasilla differs from the total acreage for land ownership because updated numbers for land use are not available at the time of this plan. Much available information on Wasilla land uses is over ten years old; data should be updated in the next Comprehensive Plan process.

Table A10. Wasilla Land Use

Land Use Category	Area in Acres	Percentage of Total Area
Single-Family Residential (occupied and vacant subdivided areas)	1,091	15%
Multi-Family Housing	77	1%
Mobile Homes	2	< 1 %
Commercial/Business/Services	198	3%
Industrial	150	2%
Wasilla Municipal Airport	386	5%
Public Lands (e.g. schools, parks)	340	5%
Semi-public Lands (e.g. churches)	55	< 1 %
Lakes & Streams	750	10%
Vacant Land (including streets)	4,311	59%
Total Land Use:	7,360	100%

Source: City of Wasilla Comprehensive Plan (1996)

Many business and commercial uses in Wasilla extend along the Parks Highway due to the benefits of higher traffic volume and maximum visibility. Commercial developments are generally characterized by a combination of strip shopping malls, high-volume retail businesses, and small businesses. A large proportion of commercial developments in Wasilla are located on the north side of the Parks Highway. The most active commercial area south of the Highway is located along Knik-Goose Bay Road. The Palmer-Wasilla Highway is also a developing commercial strip between the two adjacent communities. The small percentage of industrial use in Wasilla is made up of the airport, the Alaska Railroad right-of-way, and sewage treatment facility.

Transportation

Highway and Road Systems

The road system in Wasilla provides the primary method of transportation in Wasilla and the surrounding area. As of 2005, the City was responsible for maintenance of approximately 30 miles each of paved and gravel streets; and the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities was responsible for an additional 18 miles of roadway within Wasilla. There are five classifications of roads in Wasilla based on the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) functional classification guidelines, which are grouped by the level of service they provide (City of Wasilla 2005 and FHWA 2007).

- *Arterial streets* are main thoroughfares that emphasize mobility and are designed to move large volumes of vehicles between destinations at intermediate to high speeds. Examples include Knik-Goose Bay Road, Palmer-Wasilla Highway, and Wasilla-Fishhook Road.
- *Major collector streets* function as access streets to arterial streets, allow inter-city movement, and movement to and from residential areas. Collector streets have a lower degree of mobility than arterial streets. Examples include Bogard Road, Crusey Street, and Lucille Street.
- *Minor collector streets* move traffic from large residential areas to major collectors, arterial streets, and highways. Examples include Church Road, Lucas Road, and South Mack Drive.
- *Commercial streets* emphasize access more than mobility and allow movement between business, industrial, retail, and other commercial areas. Examples include Aviation Avenue, Herning Avenue, and Swanson Avenue.
- *Local/residential streets* also emphasize access and have low operating speeds, moving traffic from individual properties to collector and arterial streets. Examples include Lee Trevino Avenue and Pinion Drive (City of Wasilla 2005 and FHWA 2007).

The Parks Highway, an arterial street, runs through the middle of Wasilla for approximately 5 miles in an east-west direction. Other arterials and collector streets stem off of this road providing access to other areas of the City. The Airport and Transportation Museum Area and South Wasilla Heights have limited road access and internal road networks.

Railroad

The Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) has a long history in Wasilla, as the City started as a rail town. The railroad has greatly influenced development patterns in Wasilla. The rail line is roughly parallel with the Parks Highway, thus bisecting the City. There are six at-grade railroad crossings in town, and the City is responsible for paying ARRC for maintenance. New crossings are difficult and expensive to obtain, which is an issue when planning for additional roads to add efficiency to the transportation system in Wasilla (City of Wasilla 1996).

As the population continues to increase in the Mat-Su Borough, the Parks Highway becomes more congested. At the same time, ARRC business has expanded, increasing the number of daily trains, which contribute to traffic congestion in the area. ARRC continues to evaluate realignment and crossing elimination options to work with the City to determine alternatives to provide safe and efficient transportation corridors that provide the greatest possible mobility. The City and ARRC share safety concerns about at-grade crossings and have identified at-grade crossings that will need grade separation in the foreseeable future (ARRC 2007).

The preferred alternative for a safe solution to road/rail traffic congestion is to construct a multimodal corridor bypassing the City. The City of Wasilla, ARRC, the Mat-Su Borough, and the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities have signed a cooperative agreement to plan for and develop a multimodal corridor within Wasilla and the Mat-Su Borough. While necessary regulatory compliance documents are completed for a multimodal corridor, ARRC and the City continue to investigate grade separation options (ARRC 2007).

ARRC does not offer passenger service to or from Wasilla. Train traffic passing through Wasilla is seasonal and on average, 4 trains per day pass through Wasilla during the winter months (October through May); between 8 and 10 trains pass through the City during the summer months. Trains carry passengers and freight and travel between 45 and 49 miles per hour. There is one stretch of about 1 mile where trains slow their speed to 25 miles per hour (Carr 2007).

Airport

The Wasilla Municipal Airport is discussed in the *Public Facilities and Schools* section in this appendix. The Wasilla Airport is one of two airports in the Mat-Su Borough with a paved runway. ADOT&PF classifies the Wasilla Airport as a Community Class Airport, which means the airport provides general aviation, and commercial and light cargo needs for the Mat-Su Borough. Regular users of the airport include air taxis, cargo, and back-country pilots. To date, regular passenger service has not been provided by the Wasilla Airport, although the City would welcome such service. Notable users of the Wasilla Airport include the Army National Guard and the Alaska Division of Forestry (City of Wasilla 2002).

The airport's service area is considered to be Wasilla, Meadow Lakes, and Knik/Fairview with a total service population of approximately 17,200 (City of Wasilla 2002).

Public Transportation

Mat-Su Community Transit (MASCOT) is a private nonprofit corporation established in 1999. After a brief pilot program showed success, full service began in August 1999 with five vehicles. MASCOT now operates fixed route, commuter, and paratransit services between Palmer, Wasilla, and Eagle River. There are seven separate bus lines offering local and commuter fixed route services, and although there are established routes, the buses may deviate up to $\frac{3}{4}$ mile off a particular route. There are also five, 20-passenger vans with lifts utilized for fixed routes (MASCOT 2007).

MASCOT fares can be purchased per trip, daily, or monthly. Seniors ride free of charge. One-way connection transfers are available to Eagle River and MASCOT/People Mover passes are also available per trip or monthly. Each year ridership has steadily increased and in 2006, annual ridership was more than 72,000 (Friend 2007 and MASCOT 2007).

Paratransit services are also offered with three wheelchair accessible vehicles and Alaska Valley Cab transportation for transport of Medicaid patients to medical appointments. MASCOT is an active contributing member of the community and works closely with other non-profit organizations, schools, and state human service agencies to provide regular, semi-regular, and/or coordinated transit services. The organization is governed by a board of directors and currently employs four office staff and 11 full-time drivers (Friend 2007 and MASCOT 2007).

Pedestrian and Bicycle Access

Pedestrian and bicycle travel satisfy a minor portion of the transportation needs in Wasilla. Downtown has 5-foot wide sidewalks along some streets that are in good condition. However, pedestrian facilities along Main Street are in poor condition, with American Disability Act compliant

curb ramps in poor condition at the Parks Highway and nonexistent at other intersections. Recently paved pathways have been installed that connect City streets from the Parks Highway to the east, Wasilla Fishhook Road to the north, and Knik-Goose Bay Road to the south. A pedestrian tunnel was recently constructed under the Parks Highway at Crusey Street; this is the only north-south connection of pedestrian facilities across the Parks Highway and Alaska Railroad at this time. Aside from this pedestrian tunnel, a direct connection for pedestrians does not exist between the South Wasilla Heights and Downtown.

Economic Development

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough is the fastest growing area in the state. Wasilla's population has increased more than 64 percent since 1990; this high growth rate has spurred robust economic growth. The city is largely a residential area for workers employed in other parts of Alaska, with Anchorage by far the largest commuter destination. According to the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, more than 34 percent of Wasilla residents commute to Anchorage daily. Others work in remote areas, such as the North Slope or Red Dog Mine (Fried 2003).

Figures from the 2000 Census can be useful in gaining an understanding of Wasilla's current economy. The total potential work force (age 16 or older) of Wasilla in 2000 was 3,893, with 11.2 percent unemployment. The median household income was \$48,226, and 9.6 percent of residents were living in poverty. These indicators were slightly less robust than those in Anchorage, where unemployment was at 6.8 percent, median household income at \$55,546, and 7.4 percent of residents were living below the poverty level. The gap is not great, and Wasilla's economy is growing with its population.

The Alaska Department of Workforce and Labor Development predicts that the Mat-Su Borough will continue to attract more of the Anchorage workforce, and estimates that, from 18 percent of the Anchorage/Mat-Su area population in 1999, by 2018, the Mat-Su Borough is likely to house 26 percent of the region's people. This ongoing shift translates into rapidly increasing investments in housing, consumer goods, businesses, and services for Wasilla and other Mat-Su Borough communities.

Wasilla is the retail hub of the Mat-Su Borough. In its biennial budget, the City reports that it provides services for approximately 76 percent of the Mat-Su Borough's population. Retail and service sectors are expected to continue to expand rapidly as the area's population continues to grow (City of Wasilla 2006).

Affordable housing is a key factor in the migration from Anchorage to Wasilla and other parts of the Valley. In 2002, the average price of a single family home in the Mat-Su Borough was \$169,404, 22 percent below the average single family dwelling in Anchorage, and well below the statewide average of \$185,735 (Fried 2003). The City of Wasilla reports that surveys show that the Mat-Su Borough's more rural lifestyle and availability of larger pieces of land also play into the area's appeal to homeowners. As the state continues to invest in transportation infrastructure between Anchorage and the Mat-Su Borough, and particularly if a Knik Arm crossing becomes reality, these factors may play an even greater role. (City of Wasilla 2006 and Fried 2003)

Compared with Anchorage, Wasilla and the Mat-Su Borough have a wealth of developable land. As with affordable housing in the residential sector of the market, space for buildings and infrastructure is already beginning to draw commercial-sector ventures that serve the entire South Central region. Car dealerships are a prime example. Retailers of goods or services that are major or one-time purchases can afford to be at a greater distance from consumers in the Anchorage area, and still

compete. As transportation between Anchorage and the Mat-Su Borough continues to become easier, the types of goods and services that can be regionally competitive will continue to expand.

The 2000 Census lists the following industries in Wasilla, grouped here by estimates of number of people employed in each sector:

- Education, Health and Social Services (525) – These vital public services are key to Wasilla’s health and appeal as a community.
- Retail Trade (387) – Wasilla is the retail center of the Mat-Su Borough.
- Public Administration (261) – Wasilla provides services for a great proportion of the Valley’s residents, and has the staff and infrastructure to do so. Thriving public services like the library can in turn draw more regional residents to visit Wasilla often, which then boosts retail and service business.
- Construction (254) – Growth in population and the business sector spur a healthy construction industry.
- Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities (196) – Wasilla has long been a hub of Alaskan commerce, and continues to build on that role.
- Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation, and Food Services (181) – Not only for visitors, but providing “extras” in life for Valley residents represents a growing part of Wasilla’s economy.
- Professional, Scientific, Management, Administrative, and Waste Management (109) – These jobs are both internally focused, serving Wasilla residents, and externally focused, supporting area and regional ventures.
- Finance, Insurance, Real Estate, Rental, and Leasing (104) – As a growing community, Wasilla continues to develop its own financial marketplace.
- Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting, Mining (96) – Resource extraction and agriculture continue to be a part of Wasilla’s economy, and an area ripe for expansion, with growing markets for local agricultural products, and opportunities for adding value to raw resources.

In City of Wasilla and Chamber of Commerce descriptions of local industry, two important points emerge that are not covered in the previous break-down:

- Tourism is an element of Wasilla’s economy that intersects with many of the industries or occupations listed above. One of the leading economic opportunities across the State of Alaska comes from its natural beauty and recreational opportunities. Wasilla’s current tourist attractions include: the Museum of Alaska Transportation and Industry; the Dorothy Page Museum; Matanuska-Susitna Convention and Visitors Bureau; Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race Headquarters; Knik Museum and Musers Hall of Fame; Hatcher Pass/Independence Mine State Historical Park (nearby wilderness recreation); and the Veterans Wall of Honor. A local developer is considering developing a train and vehicle destination Iditarod Village that would incorporate a pond and Alaskan wildlife. In addition, recreational opportunities abound in and near Wasilla, including rockhounding, berry picking, boating, fishing, bird watching, and waterfowl hunting. Any of these activities could be further tapped as draws for tourism and regional recreation. (Wasilla Chamber of Commerce 2007).

- The service sector of the economy includes increasing convenience and affordability in the growing population buying goods and services locally, rather than outside the community. In addition, telecommunications and the internet open up possibilities for non-area-dependent services, such as call centers. The migration of some of the region’s population to the Valley has encouraged some Anchorage-based businesses to open offices in Wasilla, which keeps commute time down and keeps more support and service work in Wasilla as well.

In summary, Wasilla enjoys a strong and growing economy. The City has an energetic Economic Development program, working with the public and with developers, and has identified principles and tools to foster a diversified economy that can be applied municipality-wide and in each planning area. With careful attention to public vision, and by using this period of rapid growth to establish an economic base that is diverse and possessed of solid local foundations, as well as capitalizing on the city’s role as a regional hub, Wasilla should continue to thrive as a vital Alaskan community.

Municipal Finance

The services provided by the City of Wasilla are funded from a number of sources, with the largest contribution being from a municipal sales tax. In the City’s 2007–2008 Biennial Budget, Mayor Dianne Keller outlined the philosophy behind Wasilla’s municipal finance:

Mission Statement

It is the mission of the City of Wasilla to provide optimum service levels to the public as cost effectively as possible to ensure a stable and thriving economy, promote a healthy community, provide a safe environment and a quality lifestyle, and promote maximum citizen participation in government.

Major Issues

For several years now, Wasilla has been one of the fastest growing communities in the United States, and it is a real challenge for the City government to keep up with this growth. The increasing demand for services due to this growth must be met at the same time we are seeing both an increasing number of unfunded mandates and decreased funding from both the federal government and state of Alaska. ...

One of our main goals is to prioritize and focus expenditures on much needed infrastructure improvements and public safety needs. Due to our ability to achieve a level-funded budget, we will transfer over \$1,534,776 to the Capital Improvement Project budget in FY 07 and \$1,248,276 in FY 08 to fund these infrastructure projects. We will also be able to transfer \$343,141 (a 4.75% increase) to the Library Special Revenue Fund. By “holding the line” on spending, we are able to present a General Fund budget including transfers that is only 2.94% higher than last year.

Revenue and Expenses

Revenue for the City of Wasilla has come from a relatively steady number of sources over the past several years. The forecast model used by the City increases both revenue and expenditures at proportional rates. Figure A8 depicts revenue breakdown for fiscal year 2007 (City of Wasilla 2006a) illustrates the revenue contributed by each source.

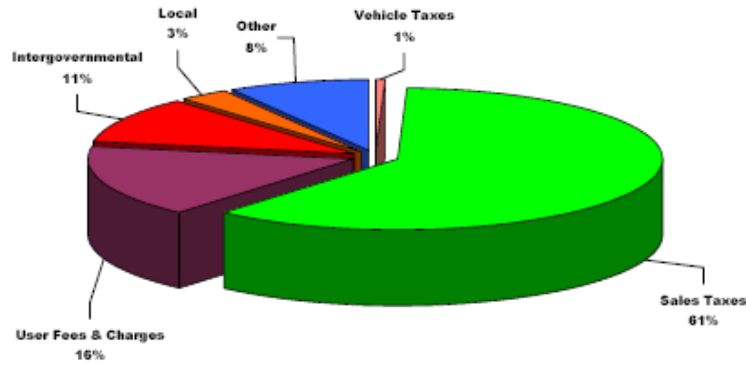


Figure A8. OPERATING EXPENDITURE BREAKDOWN BY CATEGORY (ALL FUNDS) FOR FISCAL YEAR 2007

Figure A9 presents actual and forecast revenue for the City of Wasilla over the span of a decade (City of Wasilla 2006b).

City of Wasilla Historical and Projected Revenue Sources

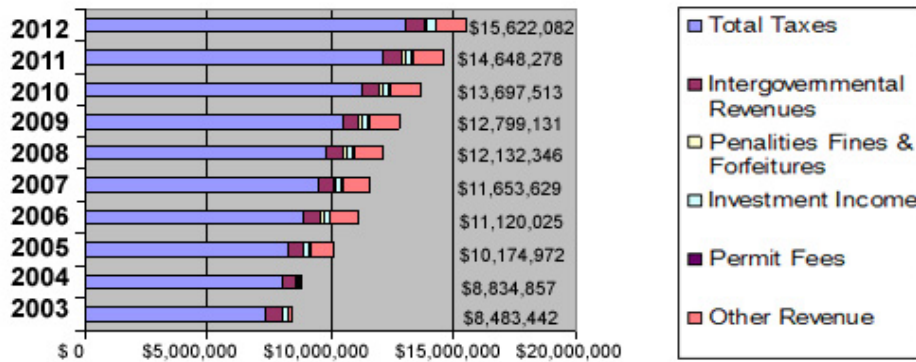


Figure A9. Historical and Projected Revenue Sources

Similar to the case with revenue, spending by the City has remained roughly proportional over the past several years. In 2004, the City added Economic Development to its expenditures, and forecast models retain this expense. Figure A10 displays the expenditure breakdown for fiscal year 2007 (City of Wasilla 2006a) is a good illustration of how the City is allocating its funds.

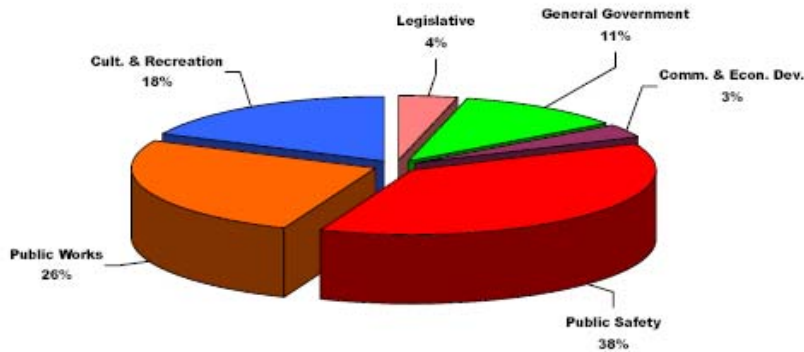


Figure A10. Operating Expenditure Breakdown by Category (All Funds) for Fiscal Year 2007.

Comparing total revenues and expenditures over time shows that the City of Wasilla is consistently in the black; providing services for residents, and some that are enjoyed by the region (thus drawing more business into the community), in a manner in keeping with income. The City is living within its means, and has been able to put away money for long-term and capital improvement projects. City officials are actively managing the fiscal well-being of the community, and are considering options for how to maintain the healthy balance in the city budget should some revenue sources (such as shared State of Alaska revenues) decrease in the future. Figure A11 shows the comparison of total revenues and expenditures, both historical and projected, between the years of 1995 and 2012.

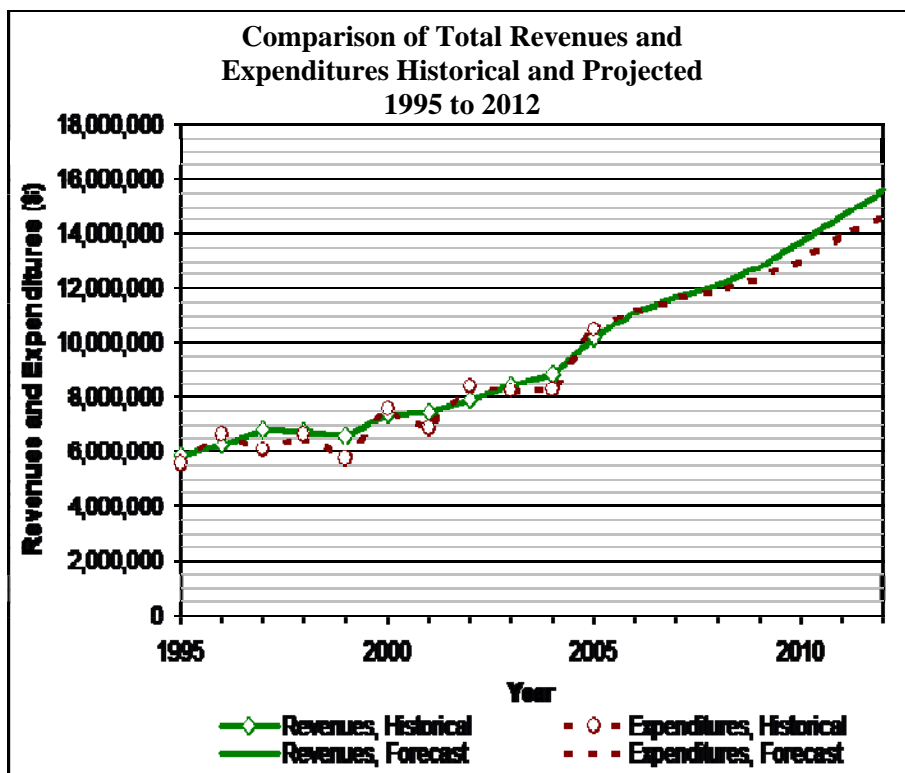


Figure A11. Comparison of Total Revenues and Expenditures

References and Further Sources of Information

This overview of municipal finance was drawn from the following sources, to which the reader is directed for more detailed information.

- City of Wasilla Biennial Budget, 2007-2008
- Fiscal Forecast Model, Final Report, City of Wasilla 2006

Planned Improvements

As Wasilla continues to grow, infrastructure and facilities are quickly outgrown and residential and commercial needs increase. Some of the foreseeable improvements planned for construction within the City are discussed here.

Yenlo Square

This mixed use neighborhood center is the first planned unit development (PUD) of its kind in Wasilla. The developers of Yenlo Square seek to centralize housing, goods, and services for those who do not have automobiles. The PUD includes a variety of housing choices including flats and row houses, single-family and coach houses, loft apartments, and special needs housing. Yenlo Square will also have dedicated open space, boulevard and parking lot plantings, and a playground.

This development will be completed in 5 phases, the first of which will be completed by the end of October 2007. Phase 1 completes three buildings that include housing and mixed use (residential and commercial). Once completed, Yenlo Square will cover 7.5 acres and have an average density of 20.66 residential units per acre (Architects Alaska 2004).

Creekside Town Square

The Creekside Town Square is designed to be a lifestyle center that will include large and medium sized nationwide retail chain stores and small shops. The development will be situated on approximately 30 acres adjacent to Cottonwood Creek in an area that is in the process of being annexed into the City boundaries (Meritage Development Group 2005).

Retail and Commercial Development

High demand retail and commercial businesses are in the preliminary stages of site selection and permitting with the City.

City Water and Wastewater

The Wasilla Public Works Department is currently conducting a feasibility study to analyze the City's future needs for water and wastewater. The City received two \$500,000 grants in 2007 from the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development for the Palmer-Wasilla Highway sewer extension and the Palmer-Wasilla Water Improvement Phase 3 and Bumpus well number 2. While the City also has funds remaining from another \$500,000 grant to complete the Mission Hills water line extension, additional funds are needed to complete the project.

Wasilla Municipal Airport

The 2001 Airport Master Plan identified a variety of projects to improve and expand the airport over a 20-year timeframe. Some of the improvements and expansion projects have been completed. In the near future, the airport runway will be expanded from 3,700 to 5,000 feet. Connecting to city water lines is another improvement that airport proponents would like to see considered to

accommodate future growth and needs at and near this facility. For a complete list of improvements considered for the airport, please refer to the Wasilla Airport Master Plan published in 2002.

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