

The background of the cover is a landscape photograph. In the foreground, there is a wide, flat field of dry, yellowish-brown grass. A dense line of tall, thin, bare trees, likely birches, stretches across the middle ground. In the background, a range of rugged mountains is covered in snow, with some peaks partially obscured by light, wispy clouds. The sky is a clear, bright blue.

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Core Area Comprehensive Plan

2007 Update

**Matanuska-Susitna Borough
Department of Planning and Land Use**

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Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
1.1 Purpose of the Comprehensive Plan	1
1.2 Definition of the Core Area	1
1.3 Relation to other Borough Plans and Planning Ordinances.....	3
1.4 Summary of Previous Core Area Comprehensive Planning.....	4
1.5 Public Participation and Review	4
2. Background for Planning	5
2.1 Introduction	5
2.2 People	6
2.3 Economy.....	8
2.4 Land Use	16
2.4.a Land Inventory and Ownership	
2.4.b Existing Land Use	
2.4.c Housing	
2.5 Residential Density	20
2.6 Forecasts.....	21
2.7 Transportation	26
2.8 Green Infrastructure	30
2.9 Utilities	31
2.9.a Water Supply and Sewage Disposal	
2.9.b Solid Waste Disposal	
2.9.c Electric Power	
2.9.d Natural Gas	
2.9.e Storm Water and Meltwater Drainage; Snow Disposal Sites	
2.10 Community Services	34
2.10.a Education	
2.10.b Police Protection	
2.10.c Fire Protection	
2.10.d Recreation	
2.11 Local Government: Structure, Powers, and Finances	35
2.11.a Structure and Powers	
2.11.b Finances	
3. Comprehensive Plan Goals and Policies.....	38
4. Land Use Plan Map.....	59
References	

List of Tables

- Table 1. Historic Population, 1990-2005, Core Area, Palmer, Wasilla, and Mat-Su Borough
- Table 2. Residents per Local Job, Mat-Su Borough, 1990-2004
- Table 3. Employment in Selected Growth Sectors, Mat-Su Borough, 2000-2004
- Table 4. Employees per Acre by Land Use
- Table 5. Land Ownership (acres), Core Area, 2005
- Table 6. Existing Land Use, Core Area, 2005
- Table 7. Comparative land use, Core Area and Anchorage Bowl
- Table 8. Population Density, Core Area and Cities of Palmer and Wasilla, 2005
- Table 9. Existing and Forecast Population and Employment, Core Area, 2000, 2005, and 2025
- Table 10. MSB LRTP Needed Road Improvements in Addition to 2025 Base Level Improvements
- Table 11. Standards for Parks and Open Space
- Table 12. Structures for Local Governance in the Core Area
- Table 13. Assessed Property Valuation, by Use, 2004, Mat-Su Borough and Select Boroughs
- Table 14. Fiscal Indicators, 2005, Mat-Su Borough and Select Boroughs
- Table 15. Matrix of Goals and Policies

List of Figures

- Figure 1. Vicinity Map, Core Area
- Figure 2. Comparative Population Growth Rates, 1990-2005
- Figure 3. Historic Aerial Photo
- Figure 4. Historic Aerial Photo
- Figure 5. Historic Aerial Photo
- Figure 6. Historic Aerial Photo
- Figure 6A. Existing Land Use and Ownership
- Figure 7. Historic and Forecast Population, Core Area, 1990-2025 (in 1,000s)
- Figure 8: Potential Commercial/Retail Job Growth Areas, Core Area, 2005-2025
- Figure 9: Potential Non-Retail Job Growth Areas, Core Area, 2005-2025
- Figure 10: Potential Residential Growth Areas, Core Area, 2005-2025
- Figure 11. Recommended LRTP Transportation Improvements through 2025
- Figure 12. Certified Service Areas for Public Water and Sewer Utilities, Cities of Palmer and Wasilla
- Figure 13. Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan –Open Space Concept, Central Area Map
- Figure 14. Core Area Land Use Plan Map

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Comprehensive Plan

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough's Core Area has about 25,000 residents. It is more populous than any incorporated city in the state except Fairbanks. It is growing at a faster rate than any city in the state. The Core Area is expected to more than double in population over the next two decades. More than 40 percent of the Core Area's total land base is already developed. Much of the balance is primed for development.

The purpose of this Core Area Comprehensive Plan Update is to set out goals and policies to guide development in the Core Area in a manner that will enhance the quality of life and the public health, safety, and welfare. These goals and policies will guide public and private decisions about land use and public infrastructure for the Core Area.

The time horizon for the plan extends from the present through 2025. In the Core Area, by 2025¹

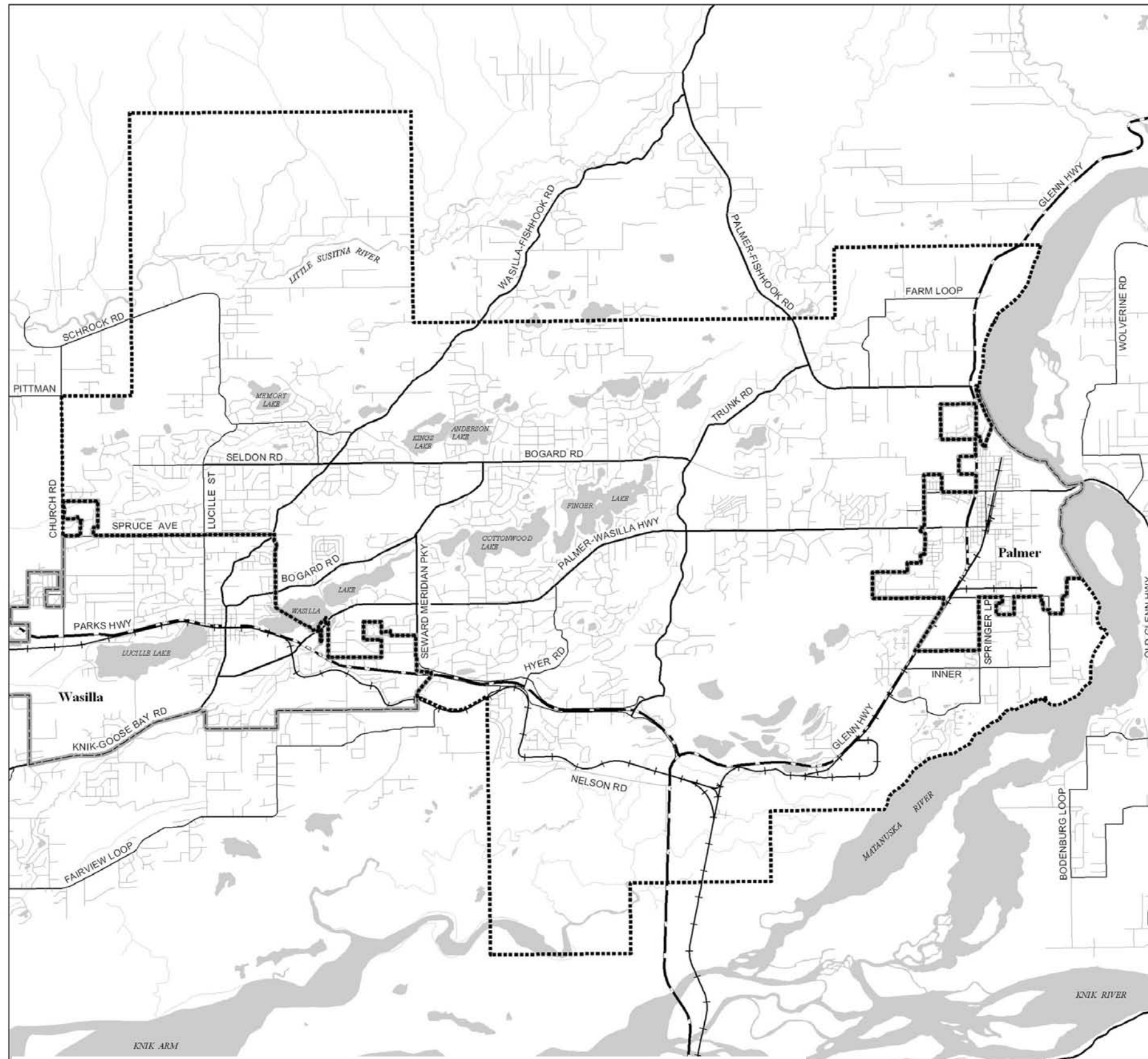
- About 15,200 new homes will be built;
- Trade and services activity will triple;
- Most vacant private land will be developed for homes and businesses;
- The transportation system will need to more than double its capacity;
- Unless properly managed, opportunities to acquire public open space and sites for public facilities will decrease;
- Unless properly managed, some treasured features of life in the Core Area – a semi-rural lifestyle, the natural landscape, plentiful open space – will diminish;
- The structure for local governance will evolve;
- Borough government will spend billions of dollars for public improvements and services, and private investors will invest many billions more.

The Comprehensive Plan Update is a policy blueprint for future community development. After its adoption, its effectiveness will stem from its influence on public and private land use decisions, public decisions about capital improvements and public services, environmental management, and inter-governmental coordination.

1.2 Definition of the Core Area

The Core Area is a 91 square-mile unincorporated area between the cities of Palmer and Wasilla (Figure 1). It includes suburban and semi-rural residential subdivisions, mushrooming commercial corridors along the Parks Highway and Palmer-Wasilla Highway, public lands, numerous lakes and stream corridors, and large-acre farmland and homestead tracts with potential for future development.

¹ The population, economic, and land use forecasts are from Chapter 3.



Matanuska-Susitna Borough
CORE PLANNING AREA

- Legend**
- Core Planning Area
 - City Boundary
- Road Classification**
- HIGHWAY
 - MAJOR
 - MEDIUM
 - MINOR
 - RAILROAD



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Figure 1: Vicinity Map, Core Area

Beyond that, the Core Area is a mixture of political, administrative, and social units. It includes

- Five advisory community councils (Farm Loop, Gateway, North Lakes, South Lakes, Tanaina), plus areas outside any community council;
- Parts of five road service areas, plus areas outside any road service area;
- Parts of three fire service areas, plus areas outside any fire service area;
- Parts of the water/sewer service areas of the cities of Palmer and Wasilla;
- Parts of five assembly districts;
- Five lake management plans;
- Seven residential land use districts;
- One census designated place, plus parts of eight others;
- Much of the Palmer and Wasilla trade areas.

In summary, the Core Area is a well-defined planning area, but has numerous political, administrative and advisory bodies that share responsibility to make and implement local governmental decisions.

1.3 Relation to other Borough Plans and Planning Ordinances

Alaska state law mandates that all boroughs “shall provide for planning, platting, and land use regulation on an areawide basis”.² The Matanuska-Susitna Borough has adopted a comprehensive plan, exercises platting authority, and regulates land use borough-wide except that it has delegated selected planning powers to the cities of Palmer, Wasilla and Houston. The borough comprehensive plan is a mosaic of many separate plan elements:

- The borough-wide Comprehensive Plan and Coastal Management Plan
- The Core Area Comprehensive Plan and several other city and community comprehensive plans
- Functional plans such as the Long Range Transportation Plan; the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan; the Recreational Trails Plan; the Point McKenzie Port Master Plan; the Community Health Plan; and the Rail Corridor Study
- Thirty-five lake management plans

The relevant recommendations of other borough comprehensive plan elements are integrated into this Core Area Comprehensive Plan. This plan may not contradict any of the goals and policies found within the borough’s overall Comprehensive Plan.

The Core Area is distinct from the cities of Palmer and Wasilla, but its ongoing development is intertwined with those cities and with Anchorage’s economy. Palmer and Wasilla, under borough-delegated authority, have adopted and implement their own comprehensive plans which are part of the borough comprehensive plan. The cities collaborate with the borough in delivery of some public services (libraries, fire, EMS) outside their boundaries. They have authority to exercise other extra-territorial powers, most importantly, public water and sewer services. The Core Area and the cities interact most directly at their common boundaries. Both cities have

² AS 29.40.010(a).

recently annexed territory from the Core Area. They may seek future annexations of adjacent urbanizing tracts. For all these reasons, coordination between Core Area and Palmer and Wasilla comprehensive plans is advisable.

The borough's annual Capital Improvement Program is a vital tool for plan implementation, but not an official element of the borough comprehensive plan.

The main borough planning ordinances that affect the Core Area are

- The general provisions for borough planning administration in MSB Title 15;
- The platting requirements of MSB Title 27;
- The Core Area conditional use permit requirements of MSB 17.61;
- The regulations on earth material extraction industries in MSB 17.28 – 17.30;
- The regulation of motorized uses on certain lakes and waterways in MSB 17.58;
- Several other land use regulations in MSB Title 17.

The Assembly adopted MSB 17.02, Mandatory Land Use Permit, in March 2007. The borough has not adopted a building permit system or comprehensive building code, and the Core Area has no such requirements.

The borough actively participates in the planning and decision-making processes of federal and state agencies with planning or land management responsibilities within the borough. This is an important means of coordinating state and federal activities with borough plans and policies.

1.4 Summary of Previous Core Area Comprehensive Planning

The first Core Area Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1993, later amended in 1994 and 1997. In 2002, the borough hired the planning consultant firm peter j. smith & company, inc. to update the plan. The consultants, together with borough staff, conducted an extensive public process through May of 2004. At that time, the borough paused the comprehensive plan update project, in part to synchronize it with the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), another key element of the borough Comprehensive Plan. The LRTP is now complete, and the Core Area Comprehensive Plan Update is being completed in coordination with the final LRTP.

1.5 Public Participation and Review

The typical public involvement process includes; open houses, survey questionnaires, public presentations, focus groups, and both informal and formal requests for public comments.

The Borough uses a formal process to adopt its plans. The formal process begins with the plan's review by the affected community council(s) and area residents. During the 30 day public review period the draft is available on-line, at the planning office, and local libraries. Comments about the draft should be submitted during the review period to the planning department. After the plan is reviewed it is introduced and a public hearing is held by the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission then makes its recommendations to the Borough Assembly. Another

public hearing is held at this stage, giving residents another opportunity to speak about the plan. Following the public hearing the assembly will give the final decision to either adopt, amend, or defeat the plan.

Chapter 2. Background for Planning

This background chapter summarizes the key facts about the Core Area that help frame planning issues and choices.

Population and economic growth drives demand for sites for homes, workplaces, public improvements and other land uses. This chapter highlights recent population, economic, and land use trends for the Core Area, and presents data and forecasts for the planning period 2005-2025. It also briefly profiles the public infrastructure and services that are most critical to the ongoing development of the Core Area.

2.1 Introduction

Over the past fifteen years, the rate of population and job growth in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough has surpassed all other regions of the state. The Core Area has been one of the fastest-growing parts of the borough. Palmer and Wasilla have both grown significantly, but the unincorporated suburban/rural area between the two towns has experienced even greater growth (Figure 2).

The Core Area now has more than twice as many residents as Palmer and Wasilla combined. The broad settlement pattern resembles two small central towns, surrounded by extensive suburbanizing areas forming at the outskirts of the towns, along the main highways, and on lakefronts. Much of the more accessible and attractive private property is already developed or being developed.

Historically, job opportunities in the Core Area have been scarce. Many Core Area residents traveled to Palmer, Wasilla, Anchorage and elsewhere in the state to work, shop, and obtain services. This pattern is gradually changing as the local trade and services economy expands.

The Core Area's appeal – lower land and housing costs, a more rural “Alaskan” quality of life, an attractive natural landscape, light-handed government – draws many homebuyers from Anchorage. Many Core Area residents have moved there despite the inconvenience of a daily work commute to Anchorage.

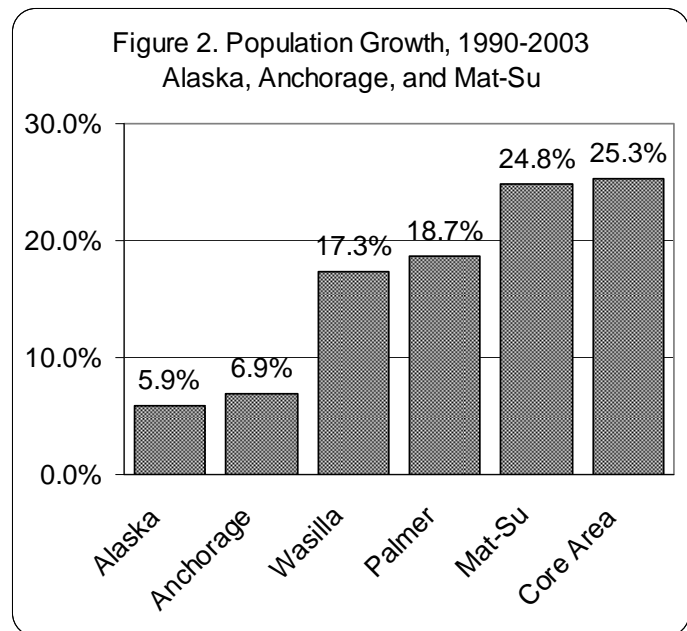


Figure 2

History and Archaeology

The history of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Core Area is the history of the Matanuska and Susitna Valley region. The Core Area, which spans the distance between Palmer and Wasilla, is rich in the history of those two principal borough communities. The towns were respectively founded to support gold mining north of the core area and farming within it early in the twentieth century. The Alaska Railroad and its spur to coal fields north of Palmer add to the area's history. But long before this more well-known history, the Dena'ina (Tanaina) Athabascan Indians used and perhaps settled in the core area.



Dena'ina Chief Vasilla, his wife Undudya, and their son circa 1906, near Wasilla Lake (Anchorage Museum of History and Art)

For planning purposes, locating sites related to past events and past people is important, because such sites give residents a sense of place and pride in their community and because such sites can attract visitors. The borough is fortunate to have some of the best examples of historic agricultural sites in the state. The Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation Office of history and Archaeology lists 180 Alaska Heritage Resource Survey (AHRs) sites in the core area. The vast majority of these historical or archaeological sites are related to farms and homesteads. They have been reported, but most have not been thoroughly analyzed for significance. While there may be many significant sites among the 180 sites, the limited analysis has led to limited recognition of national significance. Only eight sites have been determined eligible for inclusion of the National Register of Historic Places. As development continues in the Core Area into the twenty-first century, the borough and state will want to be sure that no invaluable site is lost and may want to actively encourage preserving some sites so that future generations of valley residents understand how the region developed.

2.2 People

From 1990 to 2000, the Core Area added about 5,500 residents to reach about 20,600 residents. Since 2000, growth has accelerated. The Core Area has added another 5,200 residents, up to about 25,800 residents by 2005 (Table 1). The growth rate averaged about five percent annually during that time. Some population groups are growing faster than others.³

³ The figures below are from the 2000 census and Alaska Economic Trends, December 2005.

Table 1. Historic Population, 1990 -2005
Core Area, Palmer, Wasilla, and Mat-Su Borough

	1990 ¹	2000 ¹	2005 ²
Core Area (estimated)	15,081	20,593	25,798
Palmer	2,866	4,533	5,382
Wasilla	4,028	5,469	6,413
Mat-Su Borough	39,683	59,322	74,041

Sources: ¹U.S. Census Bureau; ²Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

- More of the Core Area’s growth stems from net migration (more in-migrants than out-migrants) rather than natural increase (more births than deaths). The Mat-Su Borough, including the Core Area, is the only region of the state where net migration exceeds natural increase. This fact signifies that most new Core Area residents live there by choice, not because they were born there or work there. This in-migration helps drive housing demand.
- The 25 to 40 year age group is growing faster than the overall population. Many newcomers in that age belong to families with young children. This group particularly drives new housing demand and construction.
- School-age children have remained a constant share of total population – about 25 percent. This suggests that demand for schools and other public services geared to schoolchildren will rise in step with overall population growth.
- Seniors are a small part of the total population, but also the fastest growing age group. This implies that demand will climb for the types of services and housing (e.g., health care and smaller single-floor dwelling units) favored by seniors.
- Many young adults move away after high school to pursue educational and career opportunities. There are about half as many residents in the 20-24 years age group as in the 15-19 years age group. This gap is a rough measure of the extent to which young adults are leaving the community.

Question: How many people live and work in the Core Area?

Answer: We don’t know exactly.

The U.S. Census Bureau and the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development are the most authoritative sources of local population and economic data. These agencies do not publish data for the Core Area, which is not a defined political unit. They do, however, publish data for other local geographic units that more or less approximate the Core Area. These data can be used to estimate population and economic activity for the Core Area.

The estimates give a good picture of population and economic trends in the Core Area. Even though the absolute numbers are estimates, the percentage breakdowns are reliable.

2.3 Economy

After a long period as a satellite to Anchorage’s economy, the Mat-Su Borough, including the Core Area, is emerging as a dynamic economic region on its own account. In the 1990s, it was the state’s strongest growing economic region.

The Core Area’s workforce is highly mobile. Its job market includes the greater Palmer and Wasilla labor areas as well as Anchorage. Ninety-six percent of Mat-Su Borough’s local employment is in the Palmer and Wasilla labor areas. Thus, borough-wide data fairly reflect the Core Area’s local job market.

Historically, the borough has been job poor. Its employment base was concentrated in Palmer and Wasilla and depended heavily on the public sector. The ratio of residents to local jobs was very high; in 1990, there were 5.6 residents for every local wage job (Table 2). Unemployment rates were high, typically above 10 percent. About half of Mat-Su’s workers commuted to jobs in Anchorage and other parts of the state.

More recently, strong population growth and prosperity have been transforming the region’s economy in two ways. First, a residential and commercial building boom has boosted construction, building and landscape materials supply, home furnishings, banking and real estate, and other growth-linked sectors.

Second, rapid population growth has also expanded the market for local trade and service businesses. With market growth, it becomes profitable to sell locally many goods and services formerly bought or brought from elsewhere. This process – economists call it “import substitution” – can be a powerful force for local growth. It can trigger job growth and further population growth, and create spiraling demand for commercial development. This “virtuous cycle” has intensified job and population growth over the past decade. As the region’s economy continues to mature over the years ahead, it will add many more retail and service sector businesses and jobs before it reaches saturation.

Table 2. Residents per Local Job MSB, 1990-2004

	Residents per Local Job
1990	5.6
2000	4.8
2004	4.4

Source: Alaska Department of Labor & Workforce Development.

Even so, the region’s basic employment – jobs that earn income for the home region by selling local goods and services to buyers in other regions – remains weak. For example, manufacturing, agriculture and mining account for only 2 percent of the region’s jobs compared to 14 percent nationally. Instead, local residents still bring home much of their household income from out-of-region employment. Commuters are, in effect, the region’s basic employees, exporting their labor and bringing home income. As late as 2003, about 45 percent of Mat-Su workers commuted to jobs in Anchorage (34 percent) or elsewhere in the state (11 percent).⁴

⁴ Alaska Economic Trends, December 2005.

Lately, job growth has accelerated, even outpacing population growth. Since 2000, job growth has averaged seven percent annually, almost twice the rate of population growth four percent). The ratio of residents per job dropped from 4.8 to 4.4 (Table 2). Job growth has been especially strong in the construction, trade, health care, and leisure and hospitality sectors (Table 3). These sectors accounted for 63 percent of all job growth.

Table 3. Employment in Selected Growth Sectors, Mat-Su Borough, 2000-2004

Sector	Employment		Increase 2000-2004	
	2000	2004	Number	Percent
Construction	1,136	1,736	+573	49%
Trade	2,467	3,036	+569	23%
Health care & social assistance	1,561	2,161	+600	38%
Leisure & hospitality	1,323	1,917	+594	45%
All other	5,874	7,237	+1,363	23%
Total	12,361	16,087	+3,726	30%

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

These economic trends have significant land use implications. The make-up of economic growth affects the mix of demand for specific land uses, e.g, big box stores, professional offices, eating establishments, and motels. Also, different types of workplaces typically support different employment densities. For example, office-based businesses are intensive land uses that typically support twice as many employees per acre as service businesses, and three times as many as retail stores (Table 4). Industry and transportation-related businesses such as warehousing are extensive land uses that support the fewest jobs per acre.

Similarly, diversification of the local support sector and the persistence of commuting influences on local and inter-regional traffic patterns. More local businesses mean fewer shopping trips to Anchorage, but more local daytime and evening traffic. On the other hand, commuters boost week-day work-day traffic between Mat-Su and Anchorage. Mat-Su residents spend more time going to and from work (average travel time to work is 40.7 minutes) than any region in the state, more than twice Anchorage's (19.6 minutes). Also, 50 percent more Mat-Su households than Anchorage households own three or more vehicles.⁵

Table 4. Employees per Acre by Land Use

Land Use	Employees per Acre
Retail	18
Services	29
Offices	58
Industrial	6
Transportation	1-2

Source: Adapted from the Anchorage Bowl Commercial and Industrial Land Use Study.

Household incomes and purchasing power in the Core Area are well above average. According to the 2000 census, the median household income in all four of the census designated places that together comprise most of the Core Area (Farm Loop - \$55,234; Gateway - \$60,385; Lakes - \$63,250; Tanaina - \$64,491) was higher than the in borough overall (\$51,221) or statewide (\$51,571).

History of Settlement in the Core Area

The following series (Figures 3-6) of aerial photos illustrates how landforms and roads have shaped the pattern of settlement in the Core Area.

1949: Settlement is centered at Palmer, mostly on agricultural lands, and near the Glenn Highway and Alaska Railroad. Wasilla is a small cross-roads town. The future circulation pattern – partly section line right-of-ways, partly winding roadways dictated by lakes and landforms – is already visible. Core Area development is spotty along rural roads.

1985: With completion of the Parks Highway, Wasilla’s development footprint has expanded. The elongated east-west lakes and moraines inhibit north-south travel, so Core Area development takes an east-west form. Commercial corridors are emerging along the Parks and Palmer Wasilla highways. Subdivisions cluster along main roads and around the lakes between Palmer and Wasilla.

1996: Residential settlement accelerates, notably north of Wasilla, east of Wasilla between the Parks Highway and Bogard Road, and west of Palmer.

2004: Development continues to intensify along the Parks and Palmer Wasilla highways. Infill residential development coalesces north and east of Wasilla and west of Palmer. Few large undisturbed natural areas, most of them public lands, remain.



Retail Development, Palmer-Wasilla Highway (Sandra Petal, MSB)

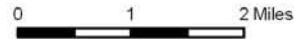
⁵ The 2000 census is the source for the travel time to work and vehicle ownership figures.



Matanuska-Susitna Borough
 CORE PLANNING AREA
 Historical Imagery
 1949

Legend

 Core Planning Area

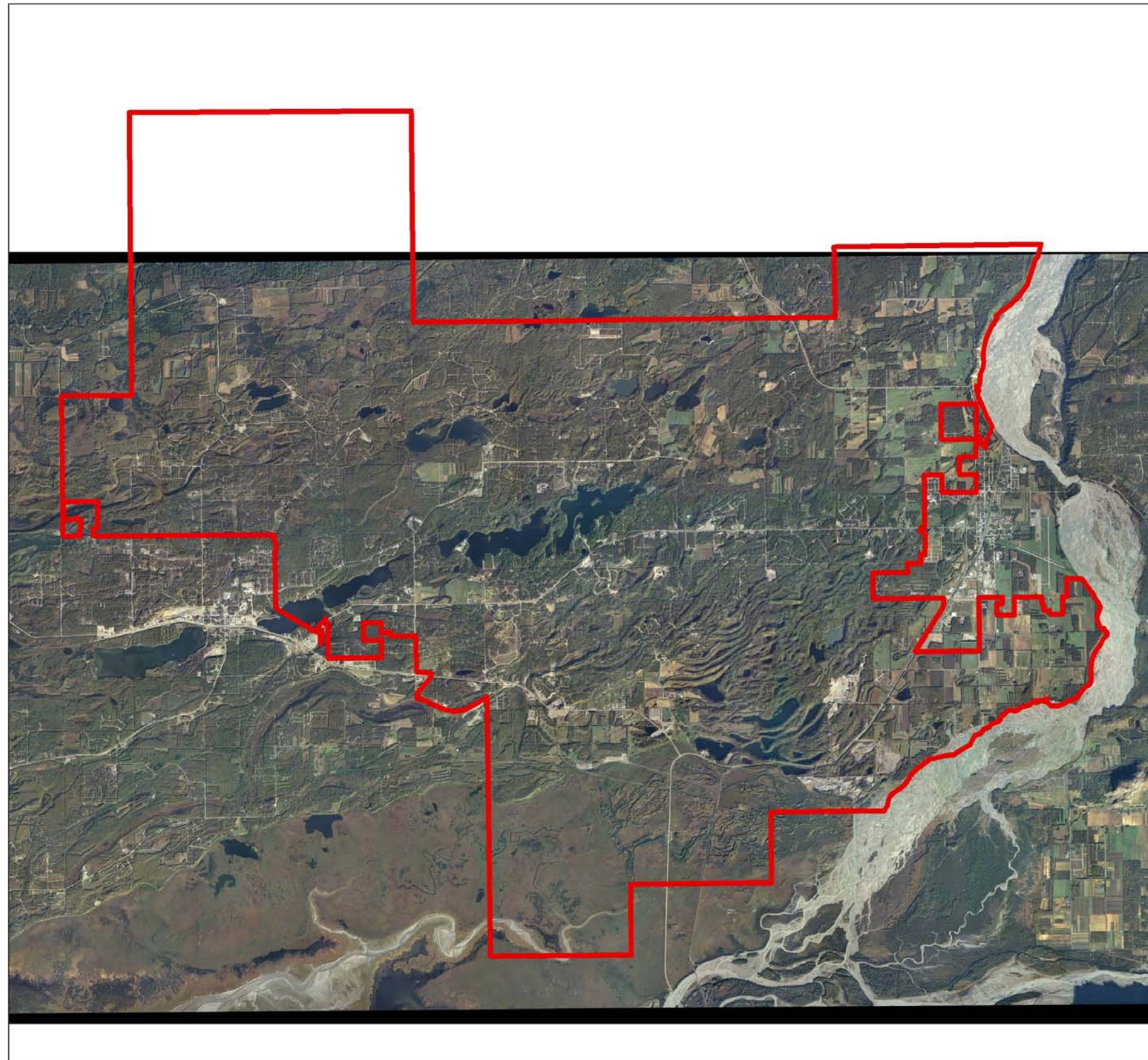


Source: 1949 Imagery from AeroMap

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Figure 3: 1949 Aerial Photograph, Core Area



Matanuska-Susitna Borough
CORE PLANNING AREA
Historical Imagery
1985

Legend

 Core Planning Area



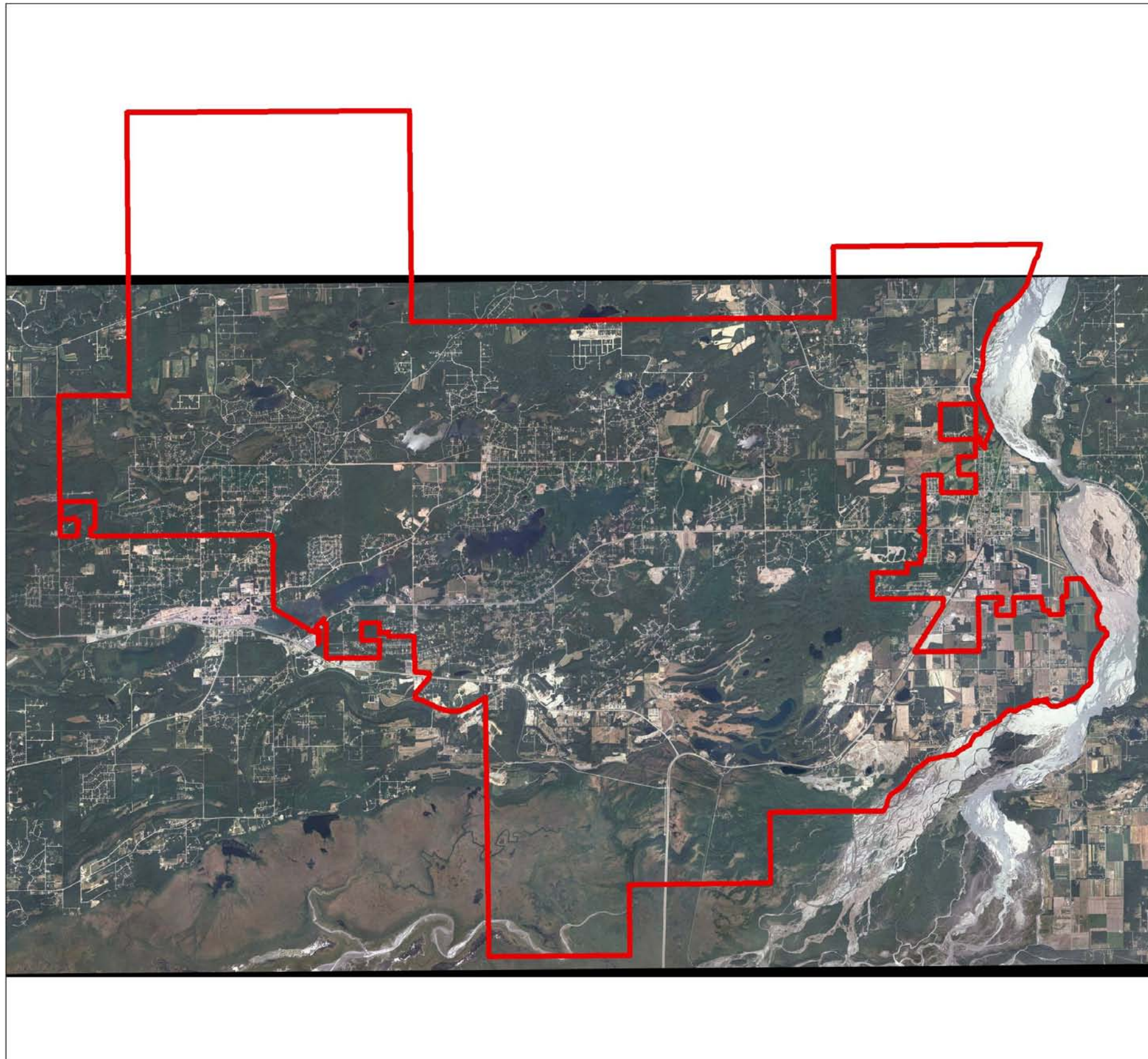
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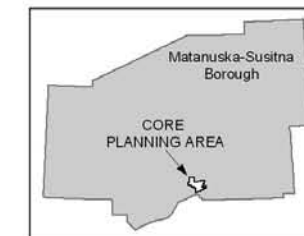
Figure 4: 1985 Aerial Photograph, Core Area



Matanuska-Susitna Borough
CORE PLANNING AREA
Historical Imagery
1996

Legend

 Core Planning Area



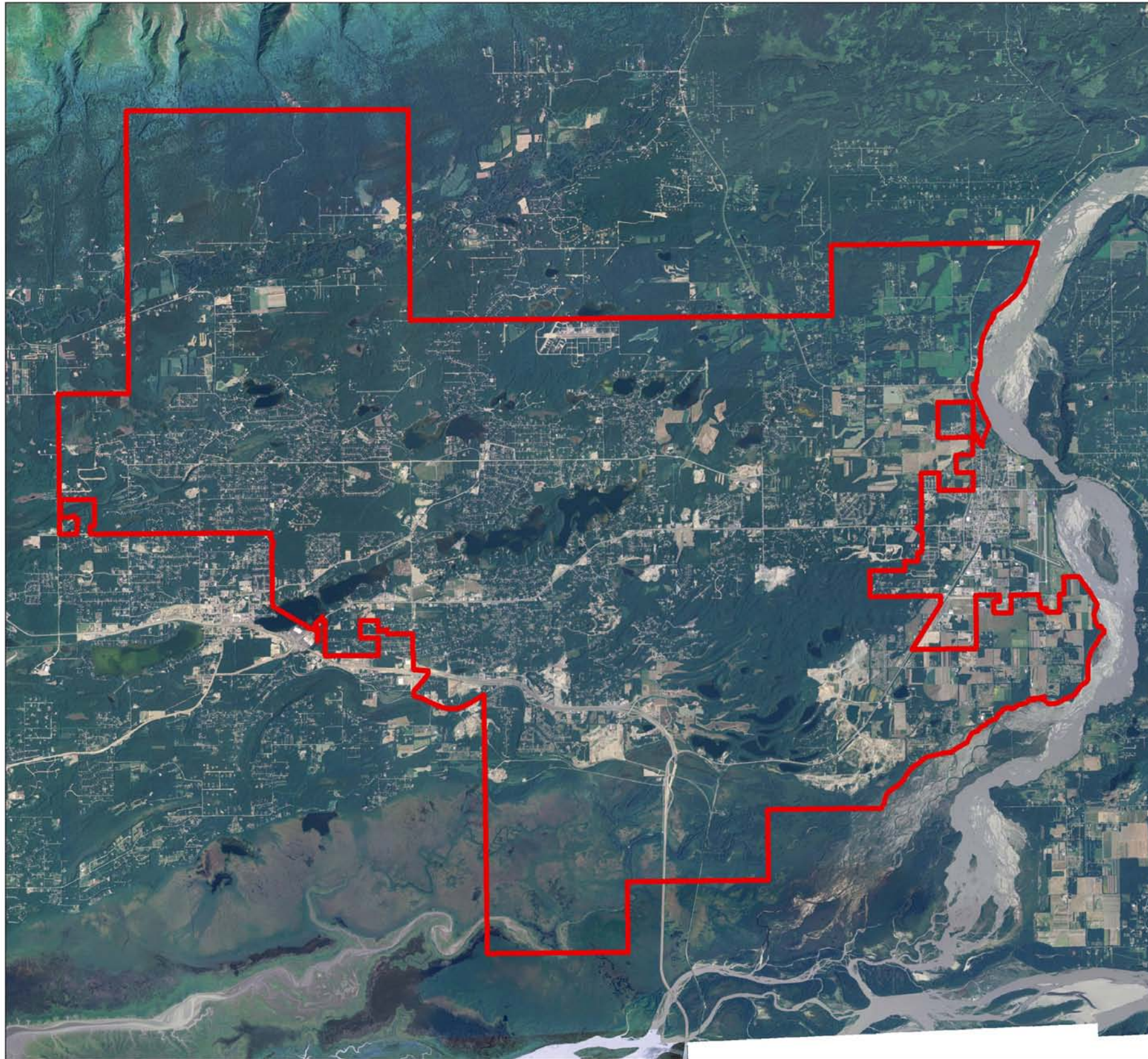
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Source: 1996 Imagery from AeroMap

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Figure 5: 1996 Aerial Photograph, Core Area



Matanuska-Susitna Borough
CORE PLANNING AREA
Historical Imagery
2004

Legend

 Core Planning Area



Source: 2004 USDA/NRCS Aerial Survey

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Figure 6: 2004 Aerial Photograph, Core Area

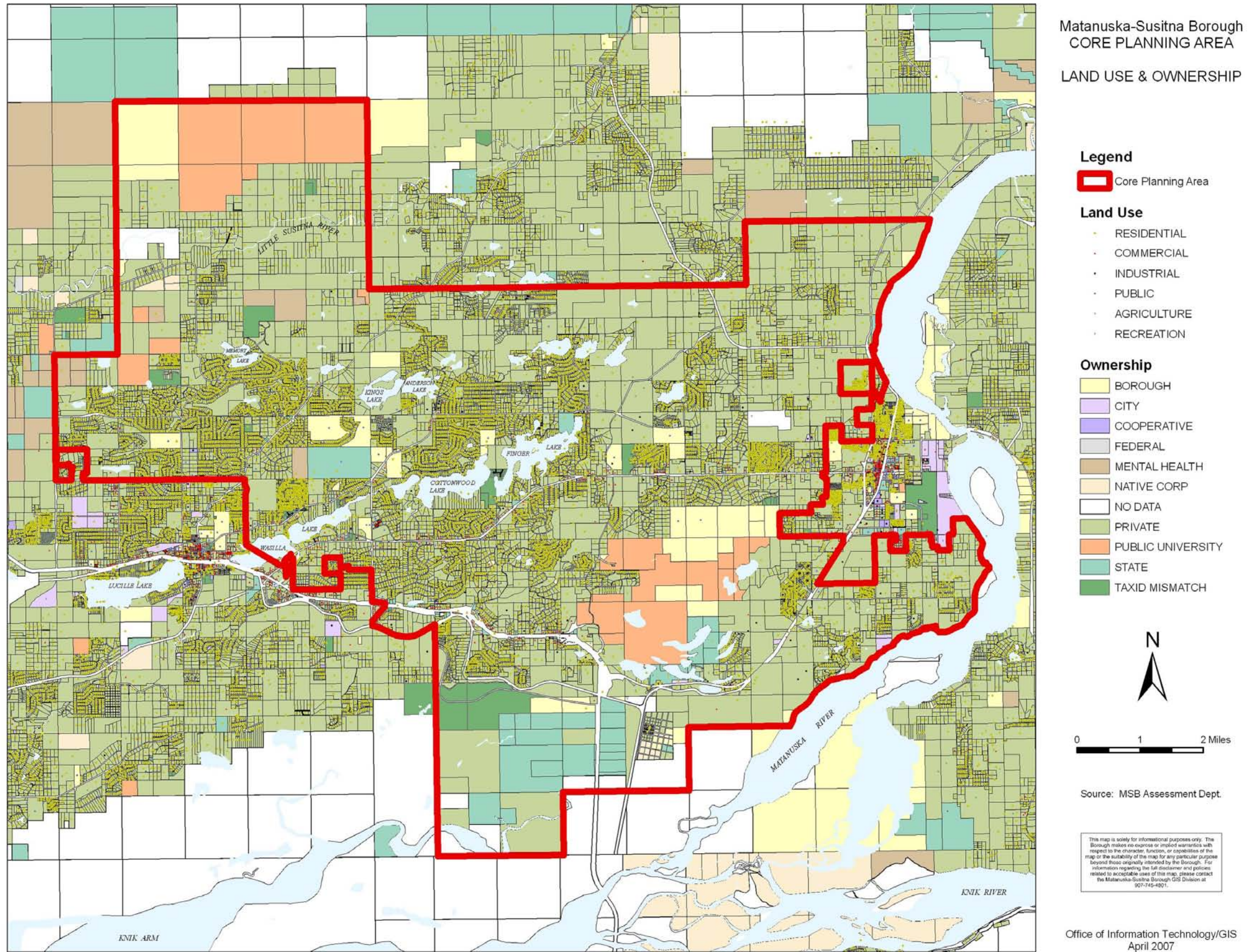


Figure 6a - Existing Land Use and Ownership

2.4 Land Use

2.4.a Land Inventory and Ownership

Even with the headlong residential and commercial growth of the past two decades, the Core Area still has a substantial but diminishing supply of undeveloped private land.

The Core Area's land base encompasses about 53,559 acres (Table 5).⁶ Overall, most land (76.7 percent) in the Core Area is privately owned. Public lands are owned by the State of Alaska (8.5 percent), the borough (1.3 percent), and other public owners (3.5 percent). Finally, the Mental Health Trust Authority (5.6 percent) and the University of Alaska (4.3 percent) own trust lands.

Table 5. Land Ownership (acres), Core Area, 2005

	Developed	Vacant	Total	Percent
Private	21,209	19,894	41,103	76.7%
Public				
State of Alaska	381	4,179	4,560	8.5%
MHTA	826	2,150	2,976	5.6%
Other	0	1,882	1,882	3.5%
Trust Lands				
University of Alaska	49	2,267	2,316	4.3%
Borough	130	592*	722	1.3%
Total	22,595	30,964	53,559	100%

Source: Mat-Su Borough GIS.

Note: This information is based on assessment records of taxable property and may not fully reflect all developed public lands.

*The borough land identified as vacant is classified as a reserved use. Contact the borough Department of Community Development for details.

There is a substantial difference in the development status of private and publicly owned lands. Overall, as of 2005, about 22,595 acres or 42 percent was developed, that is, improved with one or more structures. Almost all (94 percent) of the developed land was privately owned. About two-thirds of the remaining vacant land was privately owned. Relatively little developed land was publicly owned (6 percent) and relatively little public land was developed (about 1,400 of 11,100 acres or 11 percent). State properties such as the Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge and Kepler-Bradley Lakes State Recreation Area comprise a substantial share of all public lands in the Core Area and are dedicated to recreation and wildlife habitat.

As of 2005, more private land was already developed (about 21,200 acres) than remained vacant (about 19,900 acres) for future development. This measurement of the acreage available to absorb additional growth in the Core Area needs several qualifiers. Some of the "developed" property consists of farmlands, large homesteads, and earth materials extraction sites with potential for subdivision and more intensive development. Additionally, some trust land owned

⁶ These land use data are based on borough assessment records. For various technical reasons, assessment data categories do not correspond exactly with conventional land use data categories. Nevertheless, the assessment records generally reflect the overall land use picture in the Core Area.

by the University of Alaska or the Mental Health Trust Authority and intended for revenue generation may be made available for private development. Some vacant lands have limited or no potential for building purposes due to site limitations such as steep slopes, wetlands, poor soils, or flood or erosion hazards. Also, about 20 to 25 percent of the gross acreage of unsubdivided tracts is typically needed for such purposes as rights-of-way and easements.

2.4.b Existing Land Use

The Core Area’s pattern of existing land use (Table 6) reflects its early history as an agricultural settlement, then as a bedroom community for commuters. Only in the past decade has the Core Area begun to develop its due share of commercial uses. The net result is that the Core Area’s land use pattern is heavily skewed toward residential uses, with a lagging but growing share of commercial land uses. Industrial uses are few, consisting mainly of earth materials extraction sites. Agriculture land uses, once prevalent, are declining as farmland is developed for other uses.⁷ Even so, agriculture remains a viable economic activity and a substantial land use.

Table 6. Existing Land Use, Core Area, 2005

Land Use	Acres
Residential	18,604
Commercial	1,100
Industrial	574
Agricultural	605
Public	1,405
Recreation	262
Total	22,595

Note: The extent of agricultural land use is understated because parcels in multiple use (e.g., farmhouse plus agriculture) are typically classified as in residential use.

Source: Mat-Su Borough GIS.

A comparison of the Core Area’s land use profile with the more urbanized, but similarly sized, Anchorage Bowl⁸ shows the extent to which residential uses predominate (Table 7). Residences account for over 82 percent of land use in the Core Area compared to only 48 percent in the Anchorage Bowl. On the other hand, commercial and industrial uses in the Core Area together add up to less than 8 percent of existing uses compared to about 14 percent in the Anchorage

⁷ Table 6 understates the acreage currently in agricultural use. The assessment data on which the land use inventory is based assigns a primary use to parcels that support multiple uses. Thus, a parcel with both a farmhouse and agricultural uses may be classified as a residential use.

⁸ The Anchorage Bowl includes the 100 square mile area between Muldoon Road and Potter and bounded by Chugach State Park. By comparison, the Core Area encompasses approximately 91 square miles.

Bowl. The dominance of residential land uses and the relative lack of commercial and industrial development significantly affects local transportation patterns and the borough’s property tax base.

Table 7 points to another major difference between the Core Area and the Anchorage Bowl. The Core Area has less than 300 acres of dedicated local parks and open space. For comparison, the densely settled Anchorage Bowl, with over 10,800 acres of dedicated local parks and open space, has nearly five times as much park and open space per resident as the Core Area. Much of the Core Area’s “apparent” open space is actually private farmland and woodlands and unbuilt subdivisions apt to be developed in the years ahead.

Table 7. Comparative Land Use
Core Area and Anchorage Bowl

Land Use	Core Area (91 sq. miles)	Anchorage Bowl (100 sq. miles)
Residential	82.3%	47.1%
Commercial	4.9%	7.0%
Industrial	2.6%	6.8%
Agricultural	2.7%	--
Public	6.4%	10.1% ¹
Parks/Open Space	1.1%	29.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0

¹ Omits Ted Stevens International Airport, the Alaska Railroad, the Port of Anchorage, and public rights-of-way.

Source: Mat-Su Borough GIS; Anchorage 2020.

With the above considerations in mind, and assuming the Core Area’s population grows at the rate forecast, it is plausible that its buildable private vacant land will be almost fully subdivided and largely developed over the next two decades. A major factor for the long-term capacity of the Core Area to absorb additional residents will be the extent to which the diminishing land supply and rising land prices induce home builders and buyers to opt for higher residential densities. Escalating land costs will prompt development of agricultural land and more intensive redevelopment of underused or obsolete properties. Meanwhile, potential sites for public improvements will become increasingly scarce and expensive. Most privately owned apparent open space will disappear from view.

Sand and Gravel Extraction

Sand and gravel are essential for development. The Core Area has abundant sand and gravel resources which are the basis for a major local industry. The Core Area produces about half of the state's sand and gravel supply, including much of Mat-Su's and most of Anchorage's supply. Figure 12 shows the location of gravel pits now in operation in the Core Area.

The growth forecast for Mat-Su and Anchorage means that sand and gravel extraction will remain a major industry in the Core Area.



Earth Materials Extraction (Sandra Petal, MSB)

Large-scale sand and gravel extraction poses significant public issues. During operations, there is potential for conflicts with neighboring land uses over traffic and public safety, visual aesthetics, dust, noise, and water quality. Site restoration or reclamation after operations are over may become an issue.

MSB 17.28 limits earth materials extraction on 20+ acre sites to borough-designated interim use districts. The ordinance also requires

- A site development plan, consistent with standards for site characteristics, phasing of operations, access, visual screening, noise and light mitigation, and water quality protection;
- Compliance with applicable federal and state laws, including a reclamation plan per AS 27.19.

MSB 17.30 requires administrative or conditional use permits for extraction operations on sites smaller than 40 acres.

In time, as growth continues and land values appreciate, depleted gravel pits with advantageous locations often become valuable real estate. In fact, some of the gravel pits near the Glenn-Parks Y and south of Palmer are particularly well-located for future development for other uses. They have good access to the Glenn or Parks Highways, are near regional university and hospital facilities and parklands, with access to water, sewer, power, and natural gas utilities. These features endow them with potential to become prime sites for such uses as residential subdivisions, major institutions, business and industrial parks, retail centers, and recreational facilities.

Many of Anchorage's former gravel pits have been reclaimed for residential subdivisions (e.g., Kincaid Estates, Eastridge, Reflection Lake), public parks (Cheney and Taku Lakes, Waldron Park), institutions (Tudor Centre/Alaska Native Medical Center, Alaska Native Heritage Center, University of Alaska Anchorage), retail centers (Northway Mall, Lowe's), and industry.

2.4.c Housing

Housing is the most extensive single land use in the Core Area and most families' biggest investment. Housing patterns in the Core Area are distinctive in ways that are significant for land use planning. According to the 2000 census, the Core Area

- Has the highest rate of home ownership (84 percent) in the state, well above the statewide average (63 percent);
- Has a higher rate of single-family homes (83 percent) than any of the state's urban boroughs, well above the statewide average (59 percent);
- Has a higher average household size than any of the urban boroughs for both owner-occupied (3.1 persons per household) and rented (2.9 persons) housing units;
- Has a smaller share of mobile homes (5 percent) in its housing stock than any of the state's urban boroughs;
- Has the youngest housing stock in the state, because of its recent growth and home building boom.



Development near Colony Schools (Sandra Petal, MSB)

In 2004, Mat-Su Borough reported more new housing starts than the Municipality of Anchorage.⁹ Most (75 percent) of Mat-Su Borough's new starts outside Palmer and Wasilla were single family homes, but the number of multi-family starts (24 percent) rose sharply over the previous year (13 percent). It is not clear whether this increase signifies a long-term trend or an unusual year.

2.5 Residential Density

The Core Area may seem relatively low in density with plentiful open space. In fact, part of the Core Area is already more densely populated than the City of Wasilla (Table 8), and most of the open space is privately owned. Overall, the average density of the Core Area is 271 persons per square mile, about half the City of Wasilla. After allowance is made for undeveloped public lands and private farmlands, these figures suggest that the actual residential density in Core Area neighborhoods and the cities is quite similar.

Table 8. Population Density, Core Area and Cities of Palmer and Wasilla, 2005

Census Designated Place/City	Persons per Square Mile
Core Area	271
Farm Loop CDP	135
Gateway CDP	226
Lakes CDP	569
Tanaina	244
Balance of Core Area	209
City of Palmer	1,431
City of Wasilla	547

Sources: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

⁹ Alaska Housing Market Indicators, Alaska Housing Finance Corp.

2.6 Forecasts

Population and employment forecasts are vital planning tools. Forecasts prefigure the pace and place of population and job growth and future demand for home sites, workplaces, and sites for public facilities and services.

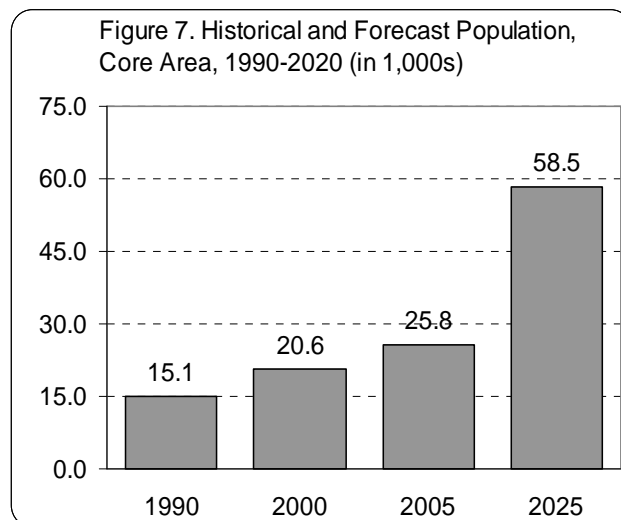
This plan update and the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) use the same growth forecasts and commuter assumptions so their land use and transportation planning recommendations will match. The LRTP adapted borough-wide population and employment forecasts developed for the Knik Arm Bridge and Toll Authority (KABATA) by the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER). ISER prepared two forecasts: with and without construction of the proposed Knik Arm Bridge. For the Core Area, the two forecasts differ only slightly. This plan uses the “without construction” forecast. When a final decision about building the bridge is made, the growth forecasts for this plan can be updated as needed. In any event, bridge construction is not expected to begin before 2010.

The Core Area plan’s time horizon is the year 2025. A forecast is an informed guess, not a sure bet. The Core Area may reach its forecasted growth level a few years sooner or later than 2025. If growth is much faster or slower than forecast, then the urgency for implementing some plan policies may change accordingly.

ISER’s base case (i.e., most probable) forecast is that the central Mat-Su Valley’s population will average more than four percent annual growth through 2025. This extraordinary growth rate – the annual growth rate for the nation and State of Alaska is about one percent – is sustained by overflow residential growth funneled to the Mat-Su Valley from the Anchorage Bowl whose own expansion is blocked by the Chugach Mountains, Knik and Turnagain Arms, and military bases.

The LRTP allocated ISER’s regional growth forecast into traffic analysis zones (TAZs) which it used to analyze future traffic patterns.¹⁰ From the LRTP, we identified a group of 53 TAZs that best fits the Core Area, and compiled the growth forecasts for those TAZs.

This plan and the LRTP both anticipate that the Core Area’s population would more than double by 2025 from 25,800 to 58,500 residents (Figure 7 and Table 9). This forecast envisions that the Core Area will continue its rapid growth, but Palmer and Wasilla will still be the “central



¹⁰ Chapter 3 of the LRTP explains the method used to distribute regional growth to TAZs.

towns” for the Mat-Su Valley. By this forecast, the population density of the Core Area would reach 650 persons per square mile. This would exceed the City of Wasilla’s present population density of about 550 persons per square mile.

Table 9. Existing and Forecast Population and Employment Core Area, 2000, 2005, and 2025					
	2000	2005 (estimated)	2025 (forecast)	Increase 2005-2025	% Increase 2005-2025
Population	19,555	25,000	58,488	33,488	+134%
Dwelling Units	8,104	10,360	25,514	15,154	+146%
Households	6,984	8,929	20,888	11,959	+134%
Retail Jobs	1,419		4,395		
Non-retail Jobs	5,322		15,434		
Note: The minor numerical discrepancies between Table 9 and Table 1 are due to minor differences in geographic coverage. Source: Adapted from ISER and LRTP.					

The Core Area would add about 15,200 more homes to the existing housing stock of 10,400 dwelling units. Employment based in the Core Area is forecast to triple.

Generally, residential growth in the Core Area is forecasted to be strongest near Palmer and the Mat-Su Regional Medical Center/College campuses and, to a lesser extent, north and north east of Wasilla (Figure 8). Otherwise, residential growth is relatively diffused throughout the Core Area. Retail and non-retail job growth in the Core Area gravitates toward the main highway corridors east of Wasilla and west of Palmer. These existing commercial corridors attract most of the new business growth. The Regional Medical Center/College campuses vicinity is expected to become a major employment center.

As shown on Figure 8, the parts of the Core Area expected to show the strongest population and residential growth and job growth are:

- **Population and Housing** – off both sides of the Glenn Highway south of Palmer; west and northwest of Palmer; north of Bogard Road; east of Trunk Road between the Parks and Palmer Wasilla highways; west of the Parks/Glenn intersection and south of the Regional Medical Center; and north Wasilla off Seldon Road. Twelve of the Core Area’s 53 TAZs account for over half of the residential growth.
- **Retail jobs** – three-fourths of new retail jobs are concentrated east of Wasilla near the Parks and Palmer Wasilla highways and Seward Meridian Road and near the Regional Hospital. Eight TAZs account for three-fourths of retail job growth.
- **Non-retail jobs** – non-retail jobs are distributed similarly to retail jobs, except that a major new center for non-retail jobs emerges in the vicinity of the Regional Hospital/University campuses.

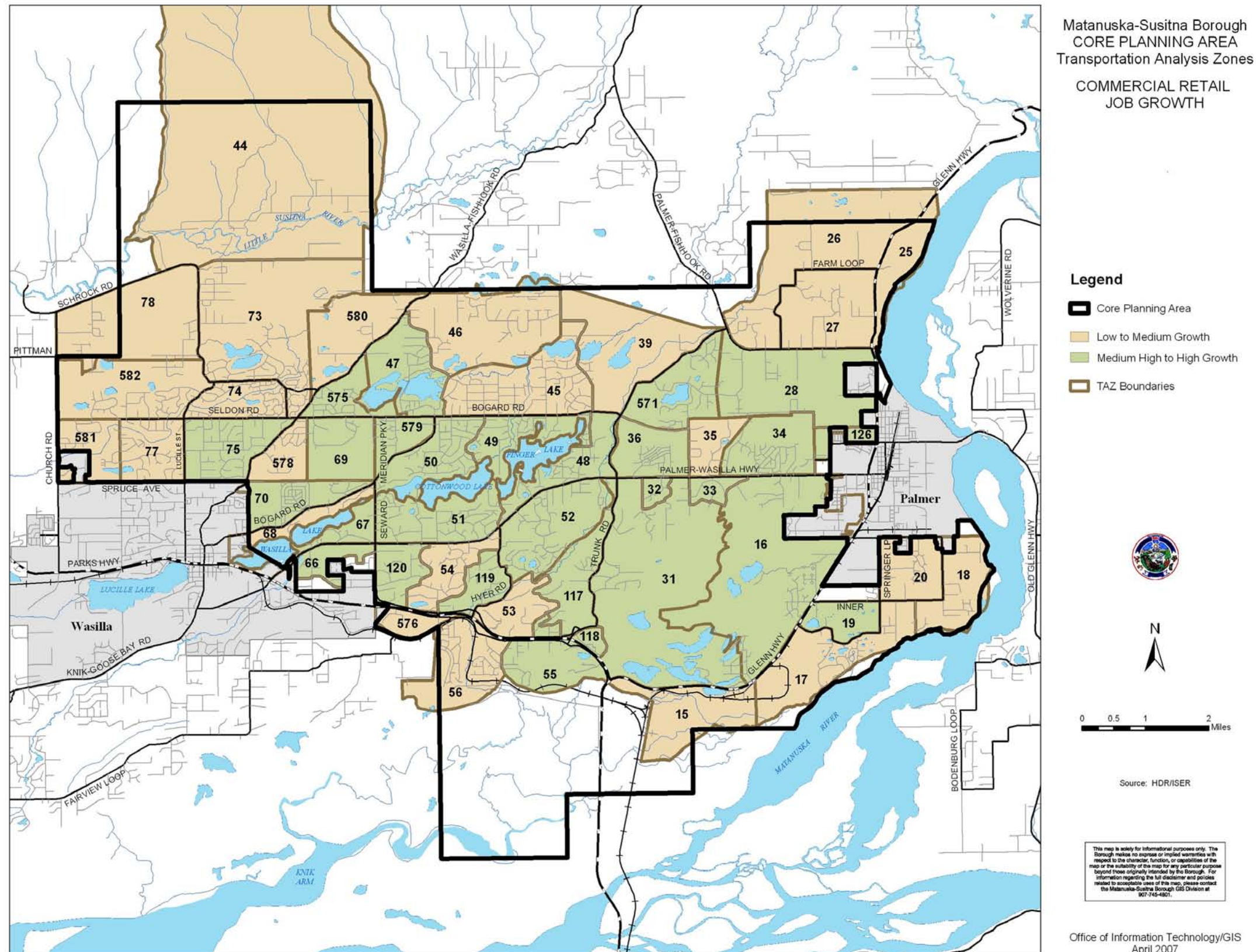


Figure 8: Potential Commercial/Retail Job Growth Areas, Core Area, 2005-2025

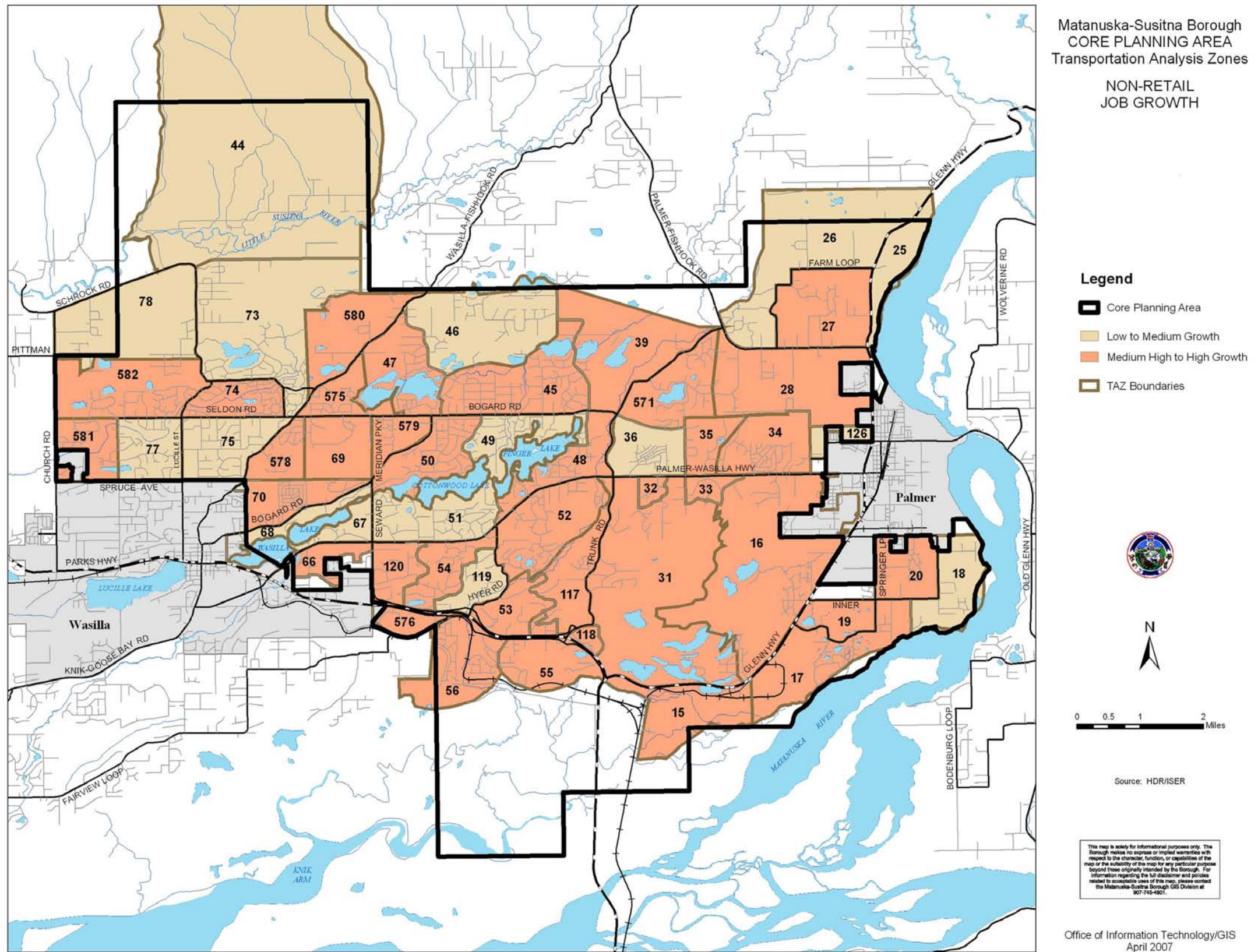
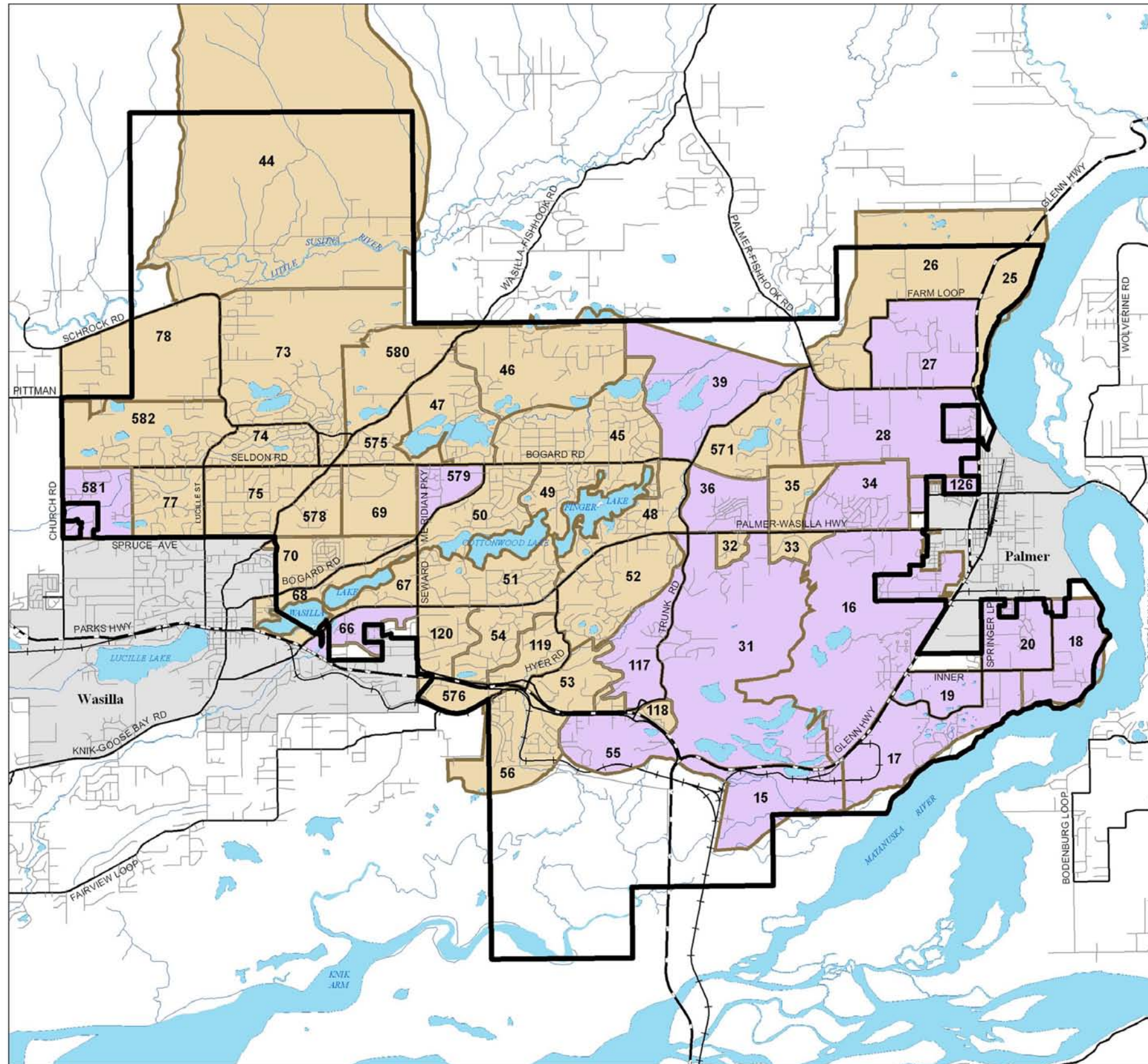


Figure 9: Potential Non-Retail Job Growth Areas, Core Area, 2005-2025



Matanuska-Susitna Borough
CORE PLANNING AREA
Transportation Analysis Zones

RESIDENTIAL
GROWTH

Legend

- Core Planning Area
- Low to Medium Growth
- Medium High to High Growth
- TAZ Boundaries



Source: HDR/ISER

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Office of Information Technology/GIS
April 2007

Figure 10: Potential Residential Growth Areas, Core Area, 2005-2025

This overall pattern reinforces the existing trend of denser residential settlement in the vicinity of Palmer and Wasilla with commercial development focused along the highways and major arterials. In sum, the cities and the major highway corridors attract more intensive residential and commercial uses, and the more rural areas capture most large-lot residential development with relatively few commercial activities.

The continuing strong growth projected by ISER foreshadows several trends:

- Dramatically rising land prices for private and public development
- Development of private “apparent open space” and infill of vacant parcels
- Accelerating demand on groundwater resources
- Denser residential and commercial development, posing potential problems for safe on-site sewage disposal
- Rising demand for population-based public facilities, e.g., schools
- Heavier traffic burdens on the road system
- Accelerating growth of local trade and services, and related land use demand
- Rising demand for in-region higher education
- Strong growth in professional offices and residential neighborhoods in the vicinity of the hospital
- Higher – but not high – densities along corridors and nodes with appropriate infrastructure (roads, water & sewer utilities, urban amenities, etc.)

2.7 Transportation

The Core Area’s network of highways and arterials defines high-traffic corridors and nodes, facilitates access and circulation, influences land values, and frames the pattern of land development and use. The borough’s LRTP is designed to facilitate efficient, safe vehicular circulation as the borough and the Core Area grow.

This plan and the borough’s Long Range Transportation Plan share common assumptions about the pace and place of growth in the Core Area. The LRTP recommends many new road construction or upgrade projects, and other transportation system improvements needed to maintain transportation efficiency throughout the borough. The LRTP also makes recommendations for numerous new trail connections and public transportation.



Glenn Parks Highway Interchange
(Sandra Petal, MSB)

The LRTP identifies Base Level road projects which it assumed would be completed during the 2005-2025 period.¹¹ The LRTP also identifies additional road projects recommended to maintain an efficient local transportation system. The Core Area plan incorporates the relevant recommendations of the LRTP. Together, the two plans comprise a consistent, coordinated approach to land use and transportation planning.

The LRTP identifies the following Base Level projects for completion in the Core Area between 2005 and 2025 (Figure 9):

- Parks Highway is a 4-lane highway from Seward Meridian Road to Big Lake Road
- Glenn Highway is a 4-lane arterial/highway from Parks Highway to Palmer Fishhook Road
- Palmer-Wasilla Highway is a 4-lane arterial from the Glenn Highway to the Parks Highway
- Seldon Road is added as a 2-lane facility from Lucille Street to Pittman Road
- Hermon Road is added as a 2-lane facility from Parks Highway to Palmer Wasilla Highway
- Seward Meridian Road from Parks Highway to Bogard Road is a 4-lane facility
- Seward Meridian is added as a 2-lane facility from Bogard Road to Seldon Road
- Hyer Road is realigned to collector standards
- Trunk Road is realigned and widened to a 4-lane facility from Parks Highway to Bogard Road; and as a 2-lane facility from Bogard Road to the Palmer-Fishhook Road
- Bogard Road is extended from 49th State Street to Glenn Highway as a 2-lane facility
- Hemmer Road is extended from the Glenn Highway to the Palmer Wasilla Highway as a 2-lane facility



Four Corners Intersection, Palmer-Wasilla Highway
(Sandra Petal, MSB)

¹¹ The LRTP also identified road improvements that might be needed if the Knik Arm Bridge were built.

The LRTP also recommends the additional projects shown in Table 10 as essential to maintain an efficient local transportation system:

Location	Segment	2025 Base	Improvement to 2025 base
Seward Meridian	Parks Hwy – Bogard Rd.	Collector/4-lane/40 mph	Major Arterial/4-lane/40 mph
Seward Meridian	Bogard Rd. – Seldon Rd.	Collector/4-lane/40 mph	Major Arterial/4-lane/40 mph
Wasilla Fishhook	Bogard Rd. – Seldon Rd.	Minor Arterial/2-lane/30-40 mph	Major Arterial/2-lane/30-40 mph
Bogard/Seldon	Wasilla Fishhook – Glenn Highway	Minor Arterial/2-lane/30-45 mph	Minor Arterial/4-lane/35-45 mph
Bogard/Seldon	Church Rd. – Wasilla Fishhook	Collector and Minor Arterial	Minor Arterial
Bogard	Wasilla Fishhook – Seldon Rd.	Minor Arterial/2-lane/25-50 mph	Major Arterial/2-lane/25-50 mph
Hermon Rd.	Bogard Rd. – Seldon Rd.		Collector/2-lane/40 mph
Hermon Rd.	Palmer Wasilla – Parks Hwy	Minor Arterial/2-lane/40 mph	Major Arterial/2-lane/40 mph
Hemmer Rd.	Palmer Wasilla Hwy – Palmer Fishhook Rd.		Minor Arterial/2-lane/40 mph
S Trunk Rd./Nelson Rd.	Parks Hwy – Fairview Loop		Collector/2-lane/40 mph
Lucille St.	Spruce Ave – Seldon Rd.	Collector/2-lane/35 mph	Minor Arterial/2-lane/35 mph

Source: Excerpted from the LRTP, February 2007.

The LRTP additionally recommends numerous collection-level street improvements throughout the Core Area to be completed as the neighborhoods they serve are built out with subdivision road improvements.

The LRTP made the following recommendations for trail connections in or partly in the Core Area:

- Seldon/Bogard Road from Church Road to Trunk Road, 8.9 miles
- E. Bogard Road, from N. Peck Street to Seldon Road, 3.7 miles
- Trunk Road, from Bogard Road to the Parks Highway, 4.1 miles

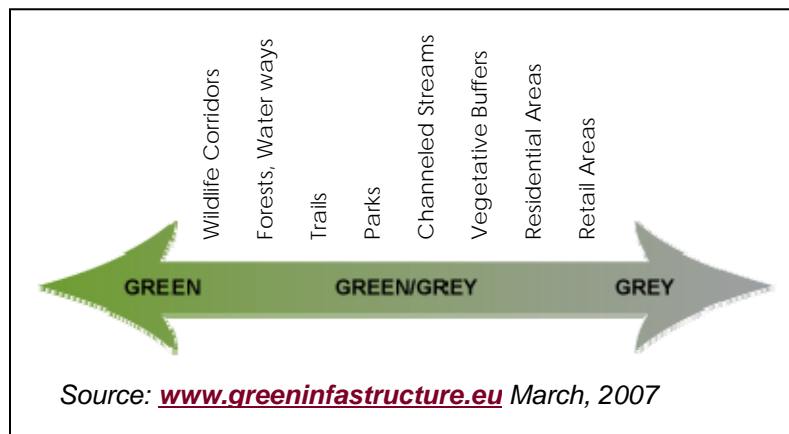
- Seward Meridian, From Parks Highway to Seldon Road, 3.0 miles
- Wasilla-Fishhook Road, from E. Nelson Avenue to Seldon Road, 2.7 miles
- Fairview Loop, from the Parks Highway to Knik Goose Bay Road, 11.1 miles
- North Trunk Road, from Palmer-Fishhook Road to Seldon Road, 2.3 miles
- Palmer-Fishhook Road, from the Glenn Highway to Wasilla-Fishhook Road, 6.9 miles
- Wasilla-Fishhook Road, from Palmer-Fishhook Road to Seldon Road, 7.7 miles
- Church Road, from Seldon Road to Pittman Road, 1.0 miles
- Werner Road, from Arctic Avenue to Farm Loop, 3.0 miles
- Blunck Street, from the Glenn Highway to the Palmer-Wasilla Highway, 1.9 miles

With regard to public transportation, the LRTP recommends that the borough continue to pursue expansion of the publicly-supported Matanuska-Susitna Community Transit (MASCOT) service. MASCOT provides limited local scheduled bus service, provides bus service in coordination with numerous local no-profit agencies, and contracts for taxi service for medical appointments. Additionally, the LRTP recommends continued borough efforts to promote commuter transit service.

2.8 Green Infrastructure

Just as communities benefit from planning their infrastructure (roads, subdivisions, schools, fire stations, utilities – (“grey infrastructure”), communities can benefit from interconnected wildlife corridors, recreational trails, forests, wetlands, waterways, parks, open and green spaces and other natural areas (“green infrastructure”).

Green infrastructure is an interconnected system of green space, such as forest, agricultural lands, farms, wetlands, wildlife corridors, and parks that conserves the community’s natural resources and assets, and provides benefits to the residents. By providing green infrastructure - clean air, water quality, and natural resources can be sustained for future generations and enhance the quality of life in the Core Area.



As land is subdivided and converted, it is often fragmented into smaller and more isolated patches of open space, which can alter the way in which natural systems, such as wetlands, function. As these natural areas diminish, habitat diversity declines, and the degradation of water

and natural resources occurs. The goal of green infrastructure is to place development and green space where it is most needed and most appropriate.

Proactive planning of green infrastructure can help guide future land development decisions, accommodating population growth while protecting community assets and natural resources. It is important to understand that “green infrastructure” does not require or imply public ownership of all of the land in the system.

“Just as we must carefully plan for and invest in our capital infrastructure – our roads, bridges, waterlines or grey infrastructure, we must invest in our environmental or green infrastructure – our forests, wetlands, streams and rivers.”

***Parris Glendening
Former Maryland Governor***

2.9 Utilities

Rapid residential and commercial development may impose substantial demands on public infrastructure, including utilities, particularly where facilities are lacking or at capacity. Timely installation of public improvements and utilities – roads, schools, water and sewage systems, power, natural gas, drainage – can greatly influence the place and timing of development.

2.9.a Water Supply and Sewage Disposal

The cities of Palmer and Wasilla are certified to provide public water and sewer services to most of the Core Area (Figure 10). At present, the cities actually provide services only within their boundaries with the exception of the City of Palmer’s project now underway to extend service along the Glenn Highway to the Mat-Su Regional Medical Center.

Many homes and many businesses in the Core Area depend on onsite water supply and septic waste disposal systems, or on small private systems.

The City of Palmer recently prepared a long-range plan to extend water and sewer services to the Southwest Palmer Service Area, first to the Mat-Su Regional Medical Center, and eventually to the entire service area bounded by the Glenn and Parks highways, Trunk Road, and Palmer Wasilla Highway. Construction of the systems south along the Glenn Highway and west to the Medical Center is scheduled for completion in 2007.

The Core Area’s dependence on groundwater resources means that its supply and quality is vital to the local economy and community well-being. Therefore, conservation of public groundwater aquifers is a major planning issue. Protection of onsite well-water resources from contamination is critical, especially in areas where installation of public water systems is impractical or prohibitively costly. In the latter areas, reliance on on-site septic waste disposal systems has potential to impair groundwater quality, endanger public health, and require costly solutions, if those systems fail.

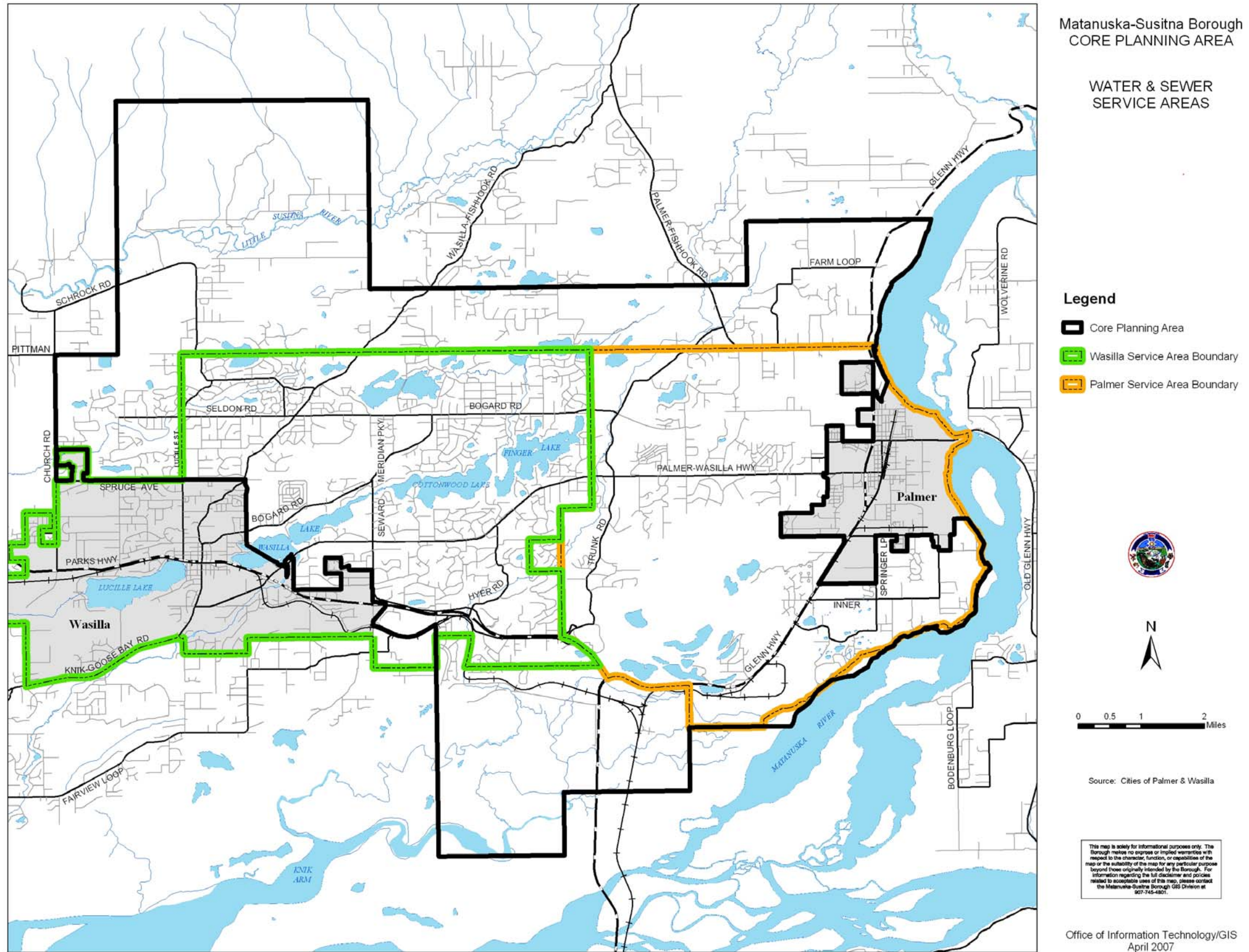


Figure 12: Certified Service Areas for Public Water and Sewer Utilities, Cities of Palmer and Wasilla

2.9.b Solid Waste Disposal

The borough-owned and operated central landfill is located on a 620 acre site one half mile south of the Palmer Wasilla Highway via 49th State Street. Commercial firms offer solid waste collection services. Many households haul their solid waste to the central landfill.

The Central Landfill Twenty Year Master Plan, prepared in 1996, designates the entire site for eventual landfill use. The Master Plan projects that a quarter of the 620 acres located in the most northwestern area of the property would be developed for the landfill and other facilities by 2016. About 20 acres are actively used at any one time. The landfill's capacity extends well beyond the term of this plan.

The Crevasse Moraine Trail System is situated on the eastern half of the landfill property. The borough Recreation Services Division maintains the trail system by agreement with the borough Department of Public Works which has management authority. The current Master Plan does not propose landfill expansion into the main trail system before 2016. However, the recent revision of the Master Plan¹² does identify expansion to the east, which would affect the trail head and trail system. Undeveloped land is available for compatible recreational and other uses. Closed and restored landfill surface areas may be available for compatible uses in the future.

2.9.c Electric Power

The Matanuska Electric Association (MEA) distributes electric power within the Core Area. MEA's Long-Range Plan, completed in 1996, did not identify any specific new transmission line corridors needed in the Core Area between 2005 and 2015. However, the Core Area's recent and projected rapid growth required a new transmission line to the Mat-Su Regional Medical Center. This growth may warrant revisiting whether and where new transmission corridors should be identified and reserved to support future residential and commercial development.

2.9.d Natural Gas

ENSTAR supplies natural gas to most Core Area residences and other consumers. The Core Area compares to Anchorage for the highest share of homes using natural gas for home heating. ENSTAR has not identified new transmission pipeline corridors required to serve future consumers.

2.9.e Storm Water and Meltwater Drainage; Snow Disposal Sites

As land development proceeds, more ground area is covered by impermeable surfaces – roofs, roads, parking areas, sidewalks, trails, etc. Over time, disposal of storm and melt water drainage will become an increasing problem. Also, as road and parking surface area increases, there is more need for private and public snow disposal sites. Without a good drainage system, potential problems include local flooding, surface water pollution, and erosion.

¹² Central Landfill Future Cell Sequencing Plan, Onsite Leachate Treatment Evaluation, and Closure Cost Evaluation.

2.10 Community Services

2.10.a Education

The Matanuska-Susitna School District operates the borough school system. In the Core Area, there are six borough elementary schools (Cottonwood Creek, Finger Lake, Larson, Pioneer Peak, Shaw, Tanaina), two middle schools (Colony and Teeland), and one high school (Colony). Funds have been approved for construction of a new South Palmer elementary school on a site in the Gateway Community Council. Several other schools in the peripheral areas also enroll Core Area students.

If the school-age population remains constant at about 25 percent of the total population, the school district will need to more than double its classroom capacity to serve projected population growth. This will require acquisition of additional school sites in the Core Area and, possibly, expanded enrollment at existing schools.

2.10.b Police Protection

The Mat-Su Borough has not adopted police powers. At present, the Alaska State Troopers provide police protection within the Core Area. The Palmer and Wasilla city police departments police those jurisdictions.

2.10.c Fire Protection

Three fire service areas provide fire protection to the Core Area. There are three fire stations in the Core Area. Another four stations located outside the Core Area serve parts of the Core Area. Notwithstanding the growth forecast for the Core Area, the existing fire stations are well-located to provide future fire protection services, though additional buildings, equipment and staff will be needed.

2.10.d Recreation

The borough assembly adopted the borough-wide Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan in June 2001. The plan inventories, sets standards, and identifies needs for various types of recreational assets.

The Core Area is rich in drive-to out-of-area recreation lands and open space, and poor in permanently protected local recreational assets. State, federal, and borough governments own and manage major parks and recreational areas elsewhere in the borough that are accessible to Core Area residents. However, the amount of parks, public recreational facilities, and open space in the Core Area is limited.

The major large-acre recreational areas are Kepler-Bradley State Recreational Area (345 acres), Finger Lake State Recreational Site (47 acres), and Alcantra Athletic Complex (140 acres). The Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge is partly in the Core Area. There are also on-site recreational facilities at all the borough schools in the Core Area.

The largest and most popular open space in the Core Area consists of contiguous state, University of Alaska, and borough-owned properties. This area is comprised of Kepler-Bradley Lakes State Recreation Area, Mat-Su Central Landfill, University of Alaska land, and adjacent undeveloped property. The Kepler-Bradley Lakes State Recreation Area, University of Alaska’s experimental farm, Crevasse Moraine Trail System, and other public trail systems are located in this area. The university’s property is not dedicated open space and thus may be developed for other uses. The recent controversy over a new transmission line corridor across this recreation area illustrates its popularity and its vulnerability in its current status.

Table 11 summarizes the recreation and open space standards established in the park plan. Based on these standards, the Core Area needs about 1,450 acres of parks and open space for its present population, and an additional 1,825 acres for additional residents by 2025. Within the Core Area, there are still substantial opportunities to acquire and dedicate additional open space, greenbelts, and wildlife habitat for the perpetual benefit of future residents.

Table 11. Standards for Parks and Open Space

	Acres per 1,000		
	Residents	Service Area	Size in Acres
Local play areas	0.5-1	1-2 mi.	1-2
Neighborhood parks	5	1-5	5-40
Community park	10	10-15	40-120
Regional parks	20	1 hr. driving	200+
Open space/greenbelt	20	1 hr. driving	200+
Total	55.5-56		

Source: Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan.

2.11 Local Government: Structure, Powers, and Finances

2.11.a Structure and Powers

The Mat-Su Borough was incorporated in 1964 as a second-class borough. The borough is a regional government, headquartered in Palmer, with a seven-district assembly, an elected borough mayor, and an appointed borough manager. Five separate assembly districts represent parts of the Core Area, but none are entirely within it.

The Core Area is unincorporated and has no official status except as a borough planning district which is subject to certain conditional use permit requirements. The boundaries of the Core Area are defined by borough ordinance. Its boundaries may be altered by the borough assembly or by city annexations. The cities of Palmer and Wasilla have recently annexed parts of the Core Area and are likely to pursue further annexations as their development progresses. Likewise, ongoing development at the Core Area’s perimeter may warrant future adjustments to its boundaries.

Table 12 charts the structures that have evolved for local governance in the Core Area. The borough exercises the borough-wide powers mandated by state law: education; planning,

planning, and land use regulation; and tax assessment and collection. The borough school district administers education. The borough exercises all planning powers in the Core Area, but has delegated planning and land use regulation to the cities of Palmer and Wasilla within their boundaries. Additionally, the borough exercises several area-wide powers (parks and recreation, ports, ambulance, transportation, air pollution control, day care, historic preservation) and several optional non-areawide powers. Five borough road service areas and three fire service areas are each partly inside, partly outside the Core Area. Road and fire service area boundaries do not coincide. The cities of Palmer and Wasilla have exclusive authority to extend public water and sewer services to the Core Area, but their past practice has been to operate only within their city confines. Recently, the City of Palmer extended water services to the Mat-Su Regional Medical Center. Under agreement with the borough, Palmer and Wasilla offer library services to all borough residents. The borough does not exercise police powers but relies on the Alaska State Troopers for public safety. Palmer and Wasilla have city police departments.

Table 12. Structures for Local Governance in the Core Area

Function/Service	Structure
Borough Assembly and Mayor	Five of seven assembly districts are partly in Core Area, none wholly in Core Area; mayor is elected at large
Community Councils	Five advisory community councils inside Core Area; some Core Area outside any community council
Education, Planning, Tax Assessment & Collection, Parks & Recreation, Ports, Ambulance, Transportation, Animal Care and Regulation, Air Pollution Control, Historic Preservation	Borough administers on area-wide basis, except planning and land use regulation and animal care and regulation in cities which are delegated to the cities; MSB School District administers local education
Roads	Five borough road service areas, all partly inside, partly outside Core Area; some Core Area outside any road service area
Fire/EMS	Three borough fire service areas, all partly inside, partly outside Core Area; some Core Area outside any fire service area
Land Use Districts and Lake Management Plans	Borough administers seven land use districts and five lake management plans in Core Area
Power, Natural Gas, Telecommunications	MEA, ENSTAR, MTA, various private telecom firms
Public Water & Sewer	Palmer and Wasilla certified to provide public water/sewer services in east and west Core Area. Palmer is currently providing services for the “Mat-Su Regional Medical Center”
Library	Available to all borough residents via borough and Palmer and Wasilla libraries

The borough assembly has established community councils outside cities to advise on community planning, capital improvements, and government programs. There are five community council districts in the Core Area.¹³ None of them coincide with road or fire service area boundaries. Minor parts of the Core Area are outside any community council district or road or fire service area.

In summary, the structure for local governance that has evolved for the Core Area is many-sided – geographically, politically, administratively, and functionally. With no unified political or administrative body of its own to make and carry out local governmental decisions, the Core Area relies on the borough assembly and administration for those purposes.

2.11.b Borough Finances

In the Core Area and elsewhere, the borough faces the double fiscal challenge of maintaining essential services for established residents and funding new facilities and expanded services for newcomers. The Core Area plan update can help meet this challenge. Smart planning that fosters efficient land use patterns, cost-effective capital improvements, and economical service delivery also saves tax dollars.

Under Alaska’s constitution, cities and boroughs are the only local governmental units that can levy taxes or appropriate revenues. As the Core Area is not an incorporated government, the borough levies and appropriates all revenues for local governmental services there, including education and service areas. There is no separate budget for the Core Area.

This short profile illustrates the borough’s financial circumstances. In FY 2006, the borough levied an area-wide property tax of 10.58 mills or \$1,058 annually per \$100,000 in assessed taxable value. The borough also imposed additional mill levies to fund fire and road service areas and non-areawide services. The borough does not levy a sales tax, but does levy a 5 percent bed tax.

Compared to the state’s four other most populous boroughs (Tables 13 and 14),¹⁴ Mat-Su Borough¹⁵

- Relies on property taxes for its local revenue – for almost 99 percent;
- Relies on single family homes and vacant land (82 percent for Mat-Su vs. average of 66 percent) for property tax revenue, and least (10 percent for Mat-Su vs. average of 22 percent) on commercial and industrial property;
- Collects and spends the least local tax revenue per resident;
- Has the second-lowest assessed property tax base per resident;
- Has a below-average bonded debt.

¹³ MSB 2.76.040(A) defines community council districts so as “to group residents within natural communities and to recognize community interests in setting boundaries. ‘Natural communities’ means areas within the borough that have or are achieving distinct identity by reason of geography, history, population, transportation, fire protection and other factors. Population is not a criterion. Service area boundaries may be considered, but shall not be determinative.”

¹⁴ Municipality of Anchorage, Fairbanks North Star Borough, City and Borough of Juneau, and Kenai Peninsula Borough.

¹⁵ The sources for the fiscal data are Alaska Taxable 2004 and Alaska Taxable 2005.

These figures underline how rapid growth pinches the borough's finances and its homeowner taxpayers. The borough's local revenues come almost wholly from a modest real property tax base which, in turn, consists mostly of single family homes and vacant land. In times of rapid growth, the public outlays for new infrastructure and expanded services typically start before tax revenues accrue from new private construction. In effect, established homeowners absorb part of the local public costs incurred for new residents. Meanwhile, budgets to maintain facilities and services for existing residents are compromised. All of these circumstances apply to the Core Area. The Comprehensive Plan proposes some options to diversify the borough's revenue sources and distribute the local tax burden more fairly.

	Mat-Su Borough	Select Boroughs ¹
Single family homes	68.0%	60.4%
Vacant land	13.9%	5.7%
Commercial	9.9%	14.8%
Other residences	7.5%	10.6%
Industrial	0.4%	7.3%
Other	0.3%	1.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

¹Municipality of Anchorage, Fairbanks North Star Borough, City and Borough of Juneau, Kenai Peninsula Borough.
Source: Alaska Taxable, 2004.

	Mat-Su Borough	Select Boroughs ¹
Per capita tax revenues	\$925	\$1,328
Per capita assessed value	\$86,238	\$91,861
Per capita bonded debt	\$2,239	\$3,210

¹Municipality of Anchorage, Fairbanks North Star Borough, City and Borough of Juneau, Kenai Peninsula Borough.
Source: Alaska Taxable 2005.

Chapter 3. Comprehensive Plan Goals and Policies

3.1 Introduction

This Core Area Comprehensive Plan Update proposes goals and policies to guide public and private decisions about the Core Area's future development. The proposed Core Area Land Use Plan graphically represents the goals and policies that relate to land use.

The Core Area Comprehensive Plan Update is not a stand-alone plan. It is part of the borough comprehensive plan, which consists of several borough-wide plans and numerous functional and local plans. Two borough plans – the Long Range Transportation Plan and the Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan supply the borough-wide framework to link transportation and open space planning for the Core Area with its surrounding region. Likewise, the Core Area Comprehensive Plan Update and the plans of its neighboring cities (Palmer and Wasilla) and community councils (Knik-Fairview and Meadow Lakes) should mesh where they intersect.

For purposes of this Plan Update, **goals** are brief, broad statements of the positive results the plan seeks to achieve. The goals represent the aspirations of the community. The **policies** provide more detailed guidance for public and private actions to implement the planning goals. The goals, then, are benchmarks against which more specific policies and implementation actions can be measured.

Community plans do not take shape in a vacuum. They should embody the community’s prevailing values and goals. A recent borough-wide survey tells what local residents like about life in Mat-Su Borough, how they regard its development, and what they think the borough needs to do about ongoing development. According to the survey (see sidebar)¹⁶

- 82 percent of borough residents agree that they “like the rural, small town character of the Mat-Su Borough;”
- Many residents (57 percent) are not, on the other hand, “satisfied with the way the Borough has been developed;”
- 81 percent agree that “the Borough must do a better job of managing growth and development;”
- Substantial majorities agree the borough should adopt land use zoning (74 percent) and spend more funds for road improvements (61 percent) and open space preservation (60 percent).

Surveys are only one source of information about community values and goals. The extensive, diverse spoken and written public comments given at several open houses and workshops during plan development have strongly shaped the planning goals and policies. So has the evolving history of community acceptance of the role of local



Core Area Community Open House (Sandra Petal, MSB)

planning in guiding community growth and development. The community survey shows that, while residents still prefer limited local government and low taxes, they are also open to work through their local government to improve and preserve the community features they prize in the Core Area – to “do a better job of managing growth and development.” Adopting the updated comprehensive plan and land use plan is a first step in that process

¹⁶ The percentages cited are for all borough residents; responses for Core Area community council residents are consistent with these percentages.

Question: What do your neighbors think about land use planning?

Answer: The University of Alaska Anchorage, Mat-Su College, and the Mat-Su Borough recently surveyed 2,600 borough residents for their opinions on land use planning issues, among other topics. Here’s what they said.

Survey question	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
I like the rural, small town character of the Mat-Su Borough.	81.6%	6.7%	11.7%
The Borough must do a better job of managing growth/development.	81.3%	9.6%	9.2%
I support a system of zoning that designates: residential; agricultural; and commercial/industrial (with specific regulations for each).	74.1%	9.5%	16.4%
Traffic congestion is a serious problem in the Borough.	74.1%	6.2%	19.8%
Over the next 10 years, the Borough will need to develop/preserve more park land.	61.5%	14.2%	24.3%
More tax money should be spent to improve Borough roads.	60.9%	15.3%	23.8%
Funds should be spent to preserve open spaces in the Borough.	59.8%	15.8%	24.5%
I support a system of zoning allowing different land uses to be located near one another, with standards for noise, traffic and other impacts.	58.1%	11.7%	30.2%
I support imposing an impact fee on developers for residential/commercial properties to pay for services.	57.7%	13.1%	29.2%
I am very concerned about water quality in the Borough.	46.8%	25.7%	27.4%
Funds should be spent to preserve agricultural land in the Borough.	48.9%	20.9%	30.2%
As of today, I am satisfied with the way the Borough has been developed.	28.2%	15.0%	56.8%

Source: The Matanuska-Susitna Borough Community Survey, 2006.

3.2 Goals and Policies

Each of the goals focuses on a particular plan element, but in practice the goals often interact. Similarly, each policy is listed under the primary goal it supports, even though individual policies may promote several goals. In particular, many of the land use policies affect multiple goals. Policies often work together to reinforce each other. Table 15 shows how the policies can work together in overall support of the planning goals.\

Goal 1. Land Use: Foster a pattern of land development that protects the appealing features of the Core Area, offers developers and consumers choices in the market place, and allows local government to provide cost-effective infrastructure and services economically.

Policy 1-A: Adopt and implement a land use plan.

Discussion: A land use plan is the essential foundation for effective land use planning. Previous Core Area comprehensive plans did not include a land use plan. That omission has limited their usefulness for managing growth and keeping development in harmony with the rural, small town character that residents say they value. This plan update proposes a land use plan. It is a generalized picture of land uses and densities toward which the Core Area can evolve as its population and built environment continue to grow in the coming years.

Policy 1-B: Promote an orderly land use pattern suited to the demand for attractive settings in which to live, work, shop, learn, play, and carry on other daily activities.

Discussion: As the Core Area's population grows – it is forecast to double by 2025 and absorb most of the remaining vacant land in the Core Area – the limited vacant land supply must provide a balanced supply of well-located sites for homes, businesses, private and public institutions, industry, parks and recreation, public improvements, and other purposes. The plan needs to provide a place for every permitted land use, but not all land uses go well side-by-side. Some uses such as residences and open space or retail trade and service business are usually compatible and enhance each other. Others, like heavy industrial activities and residential subdivisions, make poor neighbors and are best separated by distance or buffers. The need and place for each major land use is addressed in policies below.

Policy 1-C: Encourage density patterns that make best use of public investment in infrastructure.

Discussion: Higher-density residential, commercial, and institutional developments generally require greater investment in transportation and other public improvements and services than large-lot subdivisions or small, free-standing commercial buildings. Mixing high- and low-density land uses together usually results in under-use of some costly public infrastructure and extra infrastructure elsewhere. Clustering high-density uses with high public service requirements permits cost-effective provision of new infrastructure where it can be most productive. It can also minimize the need for new public infrastructure elsewhere. Promoting an efficient density pattern saves public dollars.

Policy 1-D: Develop and adopt land use regulations to guide private land use development.

Discussion: The assembly previously considered but did not adopt a proposed zoning ordinance for the Core Area. At present, the main ordinance governing land use in the Core Area is the Core Area Conditional Use Permit (MBC 17.61) which regulates certain features of commercial and industrial uses. The recent community survey indicates widespread support for a more comprehensive system of zones and regulations to guide land use development.

Zoning ordinances generally limit permitted uses and densities for the benefit of protecting nearby property owners and occupants against unwelcome new uses and development. Zoning ordinances vary widely in the extent to which they limit and protect property owners. Each local jurisdiction must resolve, in accord with its community values, the best balance between acceptable limits and desirable protections. The policy proposed here is that the borough re-start the process of developing a basic zoning map and code to implement the proposed land use plan.

Policy 1-E: Coordinate land use with the Long Range Transportation Plan

Discussion: The Core Area Comprehensive Plan Update and the borough-wide LRTP are matching parts of a coordinated land use and transportation planning effort. Land uses generate traffic and require transportation improvements. Conversely, the network of highways and major arterials defines high-traffic corridors and crossroads, facilitates access and circulation, influences land values, and frames the pattern of land use and development. The success of the two plans depends on their coordination in place and time. For that reason, the two plans have been developed with similar assumptions about the future population and economy of the Core Area, its future land use patterns, and its transportation requirements.

Policy 1-F: Foster an affordable mix of residential areas and housing types at suitable locations, in balance with market demand, and with appropriate public infrastructure.

Discussion: The analysis of existing land use patterns and trends indicates that homesites will remain the most extensive land use in the Core Area. Housing patterns and trends indicate that single-family homes will be the most popular type of housing. Even so, changing economic and demographic conditions, such as a diminishing land supply, rising land costs, and a growing senior population, will shift some demand toward higher-density single-family subdivisions, multi-family dwellings and senior housing with good access to support services. The plan should provide adequate opportunities for the needed mix of housing types – large-lot single family homes, full-service residential subdivisions, multi-family dwellings, special-needs housing – at suitable locations. In particular, higher residential densities can improve access to affordable housing for persons who live and work in the local community, and thereby strengthen the local economy.

Policy 1-G: Secure the stability and viability of established residential neighborhoods.

Discussion: As more of the Core Area's vacant land is built up, securing the stability and viability of established residential neighborhoods will become an increasing concern, as vital as ensuring that new subdivisions are well-located and well-designed. Several other planning policies proposed to separate or buffer incompatible uses from residential areas, conserve public open space, and promote equitable property taxes also serve to protect the viability of established residential neighborhoods.

Policy 1-H: Encourage concentration of major commercial development at central locations and along already developed major transportation corridors.

Discussion: The land use forecast underlying the LRTP anticipates that retail and non-retail job growth in the Core Area will gravitate toward the existing highway commercial corridors east of Wasilla and west of Palmer. These existing commercial corridors are expected to attract most of the new business growth in the Core Area. Overall, about three-fourths of new retail jobs are estimated to locate east of Wasilla near the Parks and Palmer Wasilla highways and Seward Meridian Road and near the Mat-Su Regional Medical Center. Non-retail jobs are distributed similarly to retail jobs, except that a major new center for professional services and other non-retail jobs is expected to emerge in the vicinity of the Medical Center/College campuses. Even so, the established sub-regional commercial centers in Wasilla and Palmer will continue to capture a major share of the Core Area's trade and services business.

The land use plan should encourage major commercial development at locations consistent with the LRTP, and discourage major commercial development at dispersed locations with inferior highway access elsewhere in the Core Area. This general policy will facilitate successful commercial development and still help protect the rural character and natural landscape of the balance of the Core Area.

Neither this plan update nor the LRTP propose development of a new sub-regional commercial center in the Core Area at the Palmer Wasilla Highway/Trunk Road intersection. That intersection is at the margin of two sub-regional trade areas centered in Wasilla and Palmer. The Parks Highway is also experiencing ongoing commercial development. In those circumstances, the competitive viability of a third sub-regional commercial center is very uncertain. Moreover, reliance on nearby established commercial centers will better retain the rural character of the Core Area.

Policy 1-I: Encourage neighborhood commercial districts at suitable locations for neighborhood-scale retail and service needs.

Discussion: Neighborhood commercial districts enable nearby residents to take care of some retail and service needs near home. This reduces the need for longer trips to larger commercial districts, thereby reducing traffic congestion at the busiest locations.

This land use policy seeks to concentrate neighborhood-serving commercial activities at several convenient, high-traffic crossroads, where they have the best chance of success. It seeks to discourage new dispersed commercial uses in predominantly residential neighborhoods and to maintain the character of residential neighborhoods situated along arterials.

This plan policy proposes neighborhood commercial districts with market areas of about 8,000 to 10,000 residents, suited for businesses that can thrive by serving market areas of that size. Typical businesses might include convenience stores, gas stations, small professional offices, day care centers, restaurants, and similar small-scale businesses. Industrial uses are not appropriate in these districts.

The land use plan identifies seven highway/arterial crossroads locations for neighborhood commercial districts:

- Glenn Highway/Inner Springer Loop Road/Hemmer Road
- Trunk Road/Palmer Fishhook Road
- Palmer Wasilla Highway/Trunk Road
- Palmer Wasilla Highway/Hyer Road
- Bogard Road/Seldon Road
- Wasilla Fishhook Road/Seldon Road
- Lucille Street/Seldon Road

Policy 1-J: Encourage light industrial parks

Discussion: The Core Area does not have and is not expected to attract much heavy industry, not including earth materials extraction sites. However, the Core Area already has pockets of light industrial uses such as outdoor storage, construction yards and shops, building materials supply, garage and outdoor vehicle storage yards, warehousing, utility buildings, miscellaneous outdoor storage, etc. These industrial uses are necessary and a good fit for the local economy, with good growth potential. Demand for sites for industrial uses will increase as the Core Area's economy matures. Even so, industry will remain a modest land use in the overall picture.

These light industrial uses are generally mutually compatible. They tend to have similar locational requirements, such as a good highway access and public utilities, and separation from residential neighborhoods, schools and recreation facilities, and public institutions. Designating sufficient well-situated tracts for light industry will help create a more attractive climate for these activities by enabling them to operate efficiently and with minimal conflict with other uses. Restored earth materials extraction site with good highway access can be prime candidates for light industrial uses.

Policy 1-K: Expand the "planned unit development" ordinance (MSB 17.36) to authorize commercial, industrial, and mixed use PUDs; encourage subdivision and development of large tracts as "planned unit developments".

Discussion: The Core Area’s farming and homesteading history has left a legacy of many large-acreage tracts. Some of these large tracts have potential for future subdivision and planned development for commercial, industrial, and mixed uses. At present, the borough’s planning ordinance now provide for residential PUDs (MSBC 17.36) with minor non-residential uses allowed in large development.

PUDs are a flexible and innovative alternative to strict application of subdivision and zoning regulations. PUDs allow property owners and the public to take advantage of the special design opportunities and economies of scale afforded by large-scale development. For example, PUDs may facilitate shared parking, retention of natural vegetation and drainage, safer interior circulation, consistent building design, and more effective landscaping. PUDs may also be more adaptable to sites with special conditions such as unusual topography or prior uses such as earth materials extraction sites.

Policy 1-L: Develop a district plan for the Educational/Medical/Glenn Park District



Matanuska-Susitna College
(Sandra Petal, MSB)

Discussion:

The proposed Educational/Medical/Glenn Park District is bounded by the Parks Highway, Trunk Road, the Palmer Wasilla Highway, City of Palmer, and the Glenn Highway, and includes abutting properties. It encompasses the Matanuska-Susitna College and Mat-Su Regional Medical Center campuses, recreation lands in state or borough ownership, extensive undeveloped private and University of Alaska property, several large earth materials extraction sites, and the borough central landfill.

This area is poised for robust growth as the Mat-Su Valley’s regional center for higher education, health services, and related professional and commercial services; as a residential community; and as a regional natural recreational area. The LRTP and this Comprehensive Plan Update both envision that the district will develop into a major employment center, residential community, and traffic destination.



University of Alaska Experimental Station
(Sandra Petal, MSB)



Construction of Mat-Su Regional Medical Center (Sandra Petal, MSB)

Several public infrastructure improvements, spurred partly by construction of the Mat-Su Regional Medical Center, will prime the district's growth. The City of Palmer has installed public water and sewer service via the Glenn Highway to the Mat-Su Regional Medical Center. Matanuska Electric Association is building a new high-voltage transmission line to the hospital. The Parks Highway was recently upgraded, and near-term upgrades are programmed for Trunk Road and the Glenn Highway. Further, the earth materials extraction sites have substantial potential for redevelopment for residential, commercial, light industrial and other uses after they are depleted.

This policy proposes that the borough initiate a joint public planning process with the University of Alaska, the City of Palmer, the State of Alaska, and private landowners to develop a concept plan for optimal realization of the Ed/Med/Glenn Park District's long-term institutional, economic, settlement, and recreational potential.

Policy 1-M: Collaborate with operators of large earth materials extraction sites to plan for site reclamation and re-use after earth materials extraction activities are finished.

Discussion: Earth materials extraction sites – gravel and sand pits – are an extensive active interim land use in the Core Area. Several former sites have been redeveloped or await redevelopment. Earth materials extraction is expected to continue as a local industry, with additional sites being put to that interim use in the future.

Rising land values will enhance the development potential of former sites which often become prime real estate for new uses. Redevelopment of these sites makes good use of the borough's land base and enhances the value and economic potential of nearby properties.

This policy proposes that the borough work jointly with property owners, consistent with borough ordinances, to plan for redevelopment of these sites for productive and profitable reuse. The borough can facilitate redevelopment by ensuring that earth materials extraction is managed in a manner that conserves future redevelopment options and by providing essential public infrastructure for redevelopment.

Policy 1-N: Initiate a joint planning effort in order to create consistency among utilities in the core area. The joint planning effort will work to identify utility corridors for future water, sewer, natural gas, and power transmission lines. All community water and sewer systems should be managed by a public or private utility provided.

Discussion: Fragmented and belated planning for major utility corridors can be inefficient, costly, excessive, and disruptive to affected property owners. Advance joint planning for future utility corridors can reserve suitably located corridor, reduce land acquisition costs, minimize conflicts, avoid delays and displacement of existing development, facilitate multiple use of shared corridors, conserve open space. Also, coordinate with planning for new road development.

Policy 1-O: Evaluate the feasibility and advisability of development impact fees.

Discussion: Development impact fees are a means to fund installation of new public infrastructure required to serve new development. Local governments charge the developer a one-time advance fee that is dedicated to defray public costs for new infrastructure. In effect, part or all of the extra costs of new development are charged back to the beneficiaries rather than shared by all local taxpayers. Development impact fees are popular in fast-growing localities as a method of financing new development without raising property taxes for established residents. Development impact fees are not an appropriate funding means to remedy deficiencies in existing development.

Development impact fees can be geared to the actual costs of providing infrastructure. In that way, they are a market incentive for cost-effective development patterns.

As development impact fees potentially affect the interests of a broad range of stakeholders, the process for evaluating impact fees should engage all stakeholders.

Policy 1-P: Coordinate implementation of the Core Area plan with other borough comprehensive plan elements and the community plans of adjacent jurisdictions.

Discussion: The Core Area is a distinct planning area, but it shares basic infrastructure, such as road systems, public utilities, and educational, health care, and recreational facilities, with its surrounding region. It also shares boundaries, service areas, and some public facilities and services with several neighboring community planning jurisdictions. As a practical matter, implementation of the Core Area plan needs to be coordinated with other borough-wide functional plans and, on issues of shared concern, with neighboring cities and community councils. For example, because the cities of Palmer and Wasilla are exclusively authorized to provide public water and sewer utilities in the Core Area, coordination is essential to plan for extensions of those utilities.

The dynamic growth of the region may also warrant periodic consideration of Core Area boundary changes via city annexations or adjustments to the boundaries of the Core Area and neighboring community councils.

Goal 2. Transportation: Provide for safe and efficient vehicular and non-motorized travel within the Core Area and between the Core Area and other destinations.

Policy 2-A: Incorporate the LRTP's recommendations for major transportation improvements in the Core Area.

Discussion: The borough-wide LRTP is designed to facilitate efficient, safe vehicular circulation throughout the borough and within Core Area. Coordination of the Core Area Plan Update and the LRTP and incorporation of its recommended improvements will

promote orderly growth patterns, facilitate efficient traffic movement between the Core Area and surrounding areas, and strengthen the link between fiscal, transportation, and land use planning. The Comprehensive Plan Update incorporates the LRTP's recommendations for improvements to these major road segments in the Core Area through 2025:

- Glenn Highway
- Parks Highway
- Palmer Wasilla Highway
- Trunk Road
- Seward Meridian Road
- Wasilla-Fishhook Road
- Bogard Road
- Seldon Road
- Hyer Road
- Hemmer Road
- Hermon Road
- Trunk Road/E. Nelson Road/Linlu Lane
- Lucille Lane

Similarly, this Plan Update incorporates the LRTP's many recommendations for collector level street improvements and trail connections in the Core Area, as listed in the previous chapter.

Future revisions to the LRTP will become part of the Borough comprehensive plan and will, in effect, also revise the Core Area Comprehensive Plan.

Policy 2-B: Improve and maintain connectivity within the arterial road network.

Discussion: Maintaining good connectivity, with multiple points of access to and from the arterial road network, contributes to safe and efficient routing of vehicular traffic, quick access for fire-fighting apparatus, good school bus service, and alternative emergency exits. In some parts of the Core Area, the topography and water bodies require thoughtful road planning and design to maintain good connectivity.

Policy 2-C: Support increased use of local transit services and of commuter service between the Core Area and Anchorage.

Discussion: The Core Area's continuing population growth will enhance the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of upgraded local transit services as a means of mobility along higher-density corridors and for special groups such as seniors, youth, and persons needing health care. Increased reliance on local transit can also help reduce local traffic congestion. Likewise, as the volume of commuter traffic between the Core Area and the Anchorage area rises, commuter transit service offers similar benefits.

Policy 2-D: Retain needed section line and utility easements.

Discussion: Public land policy governing the land survey and conveyance process has reserved an extensive network of undeveloped section line and utility easements for the borough. Many of these easements will be needed and should be retained for future road and utility system extensions. Other easements may not be useful for their intended purpose because of engineering constraints or existing development patterns. This policy recommends that the borough review existing section line and utility easements with affected utilities in order to identify those with potential public value and which should therefore be retained. This review will also identify easements that can be prudently vacated for other public or private uses, or in response to requests for vacation.

Goal 3. Parks and Open Space: Establish a permanent system of publicly owned natural open space, parklands, greenways, corridors, and habitats for the enjoyment of present and future residents.

Policy 3-A: Incorporate the borough Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan and Recreation Trails Plan.

Discussion: The recent community survey indicates strong community support for programs and outlays to develop and conserve more parkland and for preservation of agricultural lands. The background analysis found that the Core Area is deficient in dedicated public parklands and open space. The Core Area has relatively little dedicated public open space for current and future residents. Much of the Core Area's "apparent" open space is private property that is likely to be developed in coming years. As development progresses, opportunities for public acquisition of more open space will diminish and acquisition costs will rise.



Cycling
(Frankie Barker, MSB)

The conservation of natural areas throughout the Core Area is vital to perpetuate its natural character and provide convenient access to a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities. The borough's Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan identifies a variety of natural areas, park lands, outdoor recreation areas, trails, and wildlife habitat throughout the Core Area to meet future needs. This policy incorporates the relevant major recommendations of the Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan and Recreational Trails Plan into the Core Area plan update.

The Comprehensive Plan incorporates these elements from the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan: (See Figure 11.)

- Crevasse Moraine Trails
- Wasilla Creek Corridor
- Kepler-Bradley Lakes State Recreation Area
- 7 Mile Canoe Trail Corridor
- Finger Lake State Recreation Site
- Matanuska River Corridor
- Little Susitna River Corridor
- Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge



Figure 13: Matanuska-Susitna Borough Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan Map – Central Area

Policy 3-B: Work in partnership with private land conservancy organizations to conserve open space and natural areas.

Discussion: Private land conservancy organizations such as The Nature Conservancy, the Alaska Farmland Trust and the Great Land Trust have resources and expertise to conserve open space and natural areas. As private entities, they have great flexibility to work with willing landowners for conservation purposes. Often, they use tools such as purchase of development rights or conservation easements that retain land in private ownership and use and conserve woodlands, wetlands, stream corridors, wildlife habitat and other high-value natural areas.



Wasilla Creek Corridor (Sandra Petal. MSB)

Goal 4. Green Infrastructure: Plan, develop, and grow in a way that protects natural functions while respecting the needs and desires of the landowners and other stakeholders.

Policy 4-A: Identify and Map

Discussion: Identify and map waterways, wildlife habitat and corridors, wetlands, forests, natural hazards, erosion and fire prone areas. Mapping of outdoor recreation and trail networks is also encouraged. Identifying where green infrastructure is desired will aid in the protection of natural resources.

Policy 4-B: Proactive Planning

Discussion: Protect natural systems prior to development. By coordinating and integrating land use planning and design for roads, trails, water, electric, drainage, etc. with green infrastructure, costs to restore and repair natural systems can be avoided.

Policy 4-C: Connectivity

Discussion: Where possible, link waterways, wildlife habitat and corridors, trails, etc. to create an interconnected system of natural corridors in the Core Area. Developing interconnected green space systems benefits communities by providing areas for recreation, protecting water quality, and other public values.

Policy 4-D: Public Awareness

Discussion: Promote community education and information on the benefits of green infrastructure. Green infrastructure can reduce the risk to residents' homes and properties from fire, erosion, flooding, septic failure, and other hazards.

Goal 5. Public Facilities: Provide timely, cost-effective public improvements and services] and explore alternative means of financing from both public and private sectors.

Policy 5-A: Coordinate and synchronize provision of public improvements and services consistent with land use planning.

Discussion: The extension or upgrade of public improvements and services can be a powerful influence upon ongoing development. For example, timely road improvements, plans for utility service extensions, and new school construction can be strong stimulants for new residential or commercial development in areas designated for those purposes. For the near term, Borough coordination with the cities of Palmer and Wasilla to plan for extension of public water and sewer services along commercial corridors and to areas with high potential for large-scale, small-lot residential development is vital for orderly development of such areas.

For cost-effectiveness, the Borough should seek to make maximum use of alternative means of financing public improvements, working in concert with other local, state, and federal sources as well as the private sector.

Policy 5-B: Identify and acquire or retain sites needed for future public improvements.

Discussion: Early identification and advance acquisition of sites for future schools, public safety facilities, neighborhood recreation, and similar public improvements can ensure that public facilities are optimally located. It can also save on site acquisition costs. This is especially so in a dynamic land market like the Core Area with dynamic growth and rapidly rising land prices. The borough is now preparing an updated borough-wide public facilities plan which can be used to guide public facility site acquisition.

Goal 6. Economic Development: Promote private sector development and a strong local job market suited to the region's economic assets, with a prosperous support sector and affordable housing.

Policy 6-A: Identify suitably located tracts with necessary infrastructure to accommodate economic development.

Discussion: The borough can support new economic development in the Core Area by ensuring there are adequate suitable locations with public infrastructure and a regulatory environment that minimizes land use conflicts and provides regulatory incentives for well-planned development. It is particularly important to anticipate the site requirements of growth sectors such as health care and professional services, retail trade, and light industry. Fostering an adequate supply of affordable housing for resident workers will also strengthen the local job market.

Goal 7. Environment: Protect and conserve the natural resources that support the well-being of residents and the region's tourism and recreation economy.

Policy 7-A: Protect groundwater supplies and quality.

Discussion: Many existing and future residences and businesses will depend on on-site groundwater resources for their water supply. Protection of the supply and quality of groundwater is vital to sustain this arrangement.

Policy 7-B: Protect surface water quality.

Discussion: The Core Area's many lakes are valuable natural and economic assets. They provide an attractive setting for residential development, enhance property values, support a variety of public and private recreational activities, and provide natural habitat, absorb runoff. These lakes are linked to steams and wetlands with similar positive values. The borough's existing program of lake management plans already provides some protection for surface water quality.

Policy 7-C: Provide for storm water and meltwater drainage and snow disposal sites.

Discussion: Proper management of storm water and meltwater that finds its way into natural drainage ways will become increasingly critical as more land surface is cleared and paved. With development, there will also be greater need for private and public snow disposal sites which can impact surface water quality. Implementing surface drainage standards and providing surface drainage improvements where needed can avoid such potential problems as local flooding, surface water pollution and siltation, and erosion.

Policy 7-D: Establish minimum landscaping, signage, and lighting standards for new major commercial development.

Discussion: As commercial development of the Core Area progresses, the positive impact of amenities such as landscaping and retention of natural vegetation, and appropriate signage and lighting on the appearance and visual quality of the build environment will be increasing appreciated. These amenities are difficult to retrofit after development has occurred.

Goal 8. Hazards: Protect life and property from harm from natural and man-made hazards such as floods, erosion, wildfire, earthquakes, air and water pollution, and hazardous materials.

Policy 8-A: Maintain emergency response preparedness capability.

Discussion: The Core Area is relatively free of several natural hazards that constrain land development in other areas of the state. Most of the Core Area is free of major flood and erosion hazards, though some stream corridors are subject to periodic local flooding. Relatively good soils provide good foundations and lower the exposure to seismic hazards. The area is free of avalanche hazard. Experience has shown that the potential for wildfires is a local concern as it is generally throughout southcentral Alaska. The borough has identified and mapped the location of sites that have been contaminated with hazardous materials.

This policy proposes that the borough continue to monitor potentially hazardous conditions and maintain its emergency preparedness response capability. Additionally, the borough can monitor proposed development that might be exposed to or apt to add to hazardous conditions.

Policy 8-B. Reduce risk to persons and property from natural or man-made hazards and encourage natural hazard mitigation.

Discussion: This policy proposes that the borough monitor proposed development that might be exposed to or contribute to hazards such as flooding, erosions, wildfire, and hazardous materials. The borough should discourage development in such hazard-prone areas, or encourage adoption of measures to mitigate hazards. As appropriate, mitigation measures might include floodproof construction, retention of natural vegetation to prevent rapid run-off and erosion, retention of natural drainage ways and wetlands to absorb run-off, and remediation of contaminated sites.

Goal 9. Agriculture: Promote the continued viability of local agriculture.

Policy 9-A: Establish priorities for conservation and acquisition of agricultural lands.

Discussion: Agriculture is an important economic activity and land use in the Core Area and an important part of local heritage. Farmlands enhance the “rural, small town character” that appeals to Core Area residents. A majority of residents agree that funds should be spent to preserve agricultural lands and to preserve open spaces.



Trunk Road Farm (Sandra Petal, MSB)

As land prices rise and development pressures intensify, agricultural land will be increasingly in demand for settlement uses. State law (AS 29.45.060) requires the borough to assess farmlands at “farm use value” rather than full market value. This helps maintain the economic viability of farmlands in general.

Beyond that, the borough has limited financial resources to purchase or conserve agricultural lands as open space and natural areas or for other public purposes. In fact, agricultural lands are prime candidates for future public facilities such as schools, recreational facilities, and public safety and utility buildings for the Core Area.

This policy proposes that the borough inventory and prioritize large-acreage agricultural tracts according to their potential value as public open space, natural areas, and wildlife habitat, or for future public facilities. Based on that information, the borough can then target its efforts and resources on the agricultural lands with greatest value as open space or for public facilities.

Policy 9-B: Pursue a multi-pronged approach to enhance the continuation and economic success of local agriculture.

Discussion: Population growth and economic changes are altering the economics of agriculture in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley. These changes are eroding the viability of traditional large-scale, stand-alone agriculture. At the same time, agriculture’s potential value is rising as a feature of the Core Area’s historic heritage, as a local source of high-quality foodstuffs, as open space and habitat, and as an element of a variety of other productive economic activities.

This policy proposes a set of strategies that, pursued in concert, will help perpetuate the Core Area’s farming tradition and assist farm enterprises to realize their full economic potential while also fulfilling public goals. Possible strategies include:

- Purchase of a variety of development rights to conserve open space, natural habitat, and historic buildings, consistent with the continuation of active private agriculture
- Encouragement of small farms geared to production of high-value crops and specialized crops (e.g., organic foods) for local and regional markets
- Support the development of local processing to add value to and expand markets for local agricultural products
- Promotion of a community gardens program to enable residents to rent small tracts of farmland for family use
- Promotion of the greenhouse and landscape supplies industry to meet the rapidly growing local demand for landscape plant materials
- Promotion of agritourism to supplement farm income

Policies		Goals							
		Land Use	Transportation	Parks and Open Space	Public Facilities	Economic Development	Environment	Hazards	Agriculture
1-A	Adopt and implement a land use plan	X	o	o	o		o		o
1-B	Promote an orderly land use pattern	X							
1-C	Encourage appropriate density patterns	X							
1-D	Develop and adopt land use regulations	X							
1-E	Coordinate land use with the LRTP	X	o						
1-F	Foster a mix of residential areas and housing types	X							
1-G	Secure the stability and viability of established residential neighborhoods	X							
1-H	Encourage concentration of major commercial development	X				o			
1-I	Encourage neighborhood commercial districts	X				o			
1-J	Encourage light industrial parks	X				o			
1-K	Authorize commercial, industrial, and mixed use PUDs	X				o			
1-L	Develop a district plan for the Educational/Medical/Glenn Park District	X				o			
1-M	Plan for reclamation and re-use of large earth materials extraction sites	X				o			

Table 15. Matrix of Goals and Policies

Key: X = Primary Policy o = Secondary Policy		Goals							
		Land Use	Transportation	Parks and Open Space	Public Facilities	Economic Development	Environment	Hazards	Agriculture
Policies									
1-N	Plan with major utility providers for future major utility corridors	X		O	O		O		
1-O	Evaluate development impact fees	X			O				
1-P	Coordinate with borough and community plans	X							
2-A	Incorporate the LRTP's recommendations	O	X						
2-B	Improve and maintain road connectivity within arterial road network		X						
2-C	Support local and commuter transit services	O	X						
2-D	Retained needed section line and utility easements	O	X		O				
3-A	Implement the Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan	O		X	O		O		O
3-B	Partner with private land conservancies	O		X			O		O
4-A	Identify and map various feature to create and improve green infrastructure	X					O		O
4-B	Proactively plan to protect and preserve natural features	O		O			X		O
4-C	Create interconnected system of natural features	X				O	O		O
4-D	Promote community education and information about green infrastructure	O			X		O		O

Policies		Goals						
		Land Use	Transportation	Parks and Open Space	Public Facilities	Economic Development	Environment	Hazards
5-A	Coordinate public improvements with land use planning	o			X			
5-B	Identify and acquire future public facility sites	o			X			
6-A	Designate tracts for economic development	o				X		
7-A	Protect groundwater supplies and quality						X	
7-B	Protect surface water quality						X	
7-C	Provide for surface drainage				o		X	
7-D	Establish minimum standards for major commercial development					o	X	
8-A	Maintain emergency response preparedness capability	o						X
8-B	Discourage or mitigate development in areas at risk from hazards	o					o	X
9-A	Establish priorities for conservation and acquisition of agricultural lands.	o		o	o		o	
9-B	Pursue a multi-pronged approach to enhance the continuation and economic success of local agriculture.	o		o		o	o	X

Chapter 4. Land Use Plan Map

Introduction

The land use plan map (Figure 12) designates the types of development – e.g., residential, commercial, industrial, and transportation improvements – proposed for different parts of the Core Area. Once adopted by the borough assembly, the land use plan map, together with the goals and policies, becomes a policy framework to guide public and private decisions about land development. It also becomes a policy framework for development and administration of the ordinances and regulations that shape land development on a day-to-day, case-by-case basis.

The land use plan map is general and conceptual in nature. It presents a picture of the eventual land use pattern toward which the Core Area might evolve through ongoing land use decisions. The land use plan map is not a map of existing uses or a zoning map that applies to proposed development. Adoption of the land use plan map does not, by itself, impose any new limitations on land use, although it may be the conceptual basis for implementing regulations on future land uses.

In the future, as determined by the borough assembly, the land use plan map may be used to implement various land use regulations:

- Site development standards
- Special use or conditional use permits
- A zoning map and ordinance
- The platting ordinance
- Public improvements
- Public land acquisition programs

This plan update's goals and policies, and the accompanying land use plan map, are meant to reflect the community's aspirations for its long-term future. After its adoption, the plan's effectiveness will stem from its influence on ongoing private and public decisions about community development and on the actions the community supports to implement its goals for community development.

Land Use Plan Map Definitions

The section below defines the terms that are used on the land use plan map and legend to illustrate proposed future land use patterns.

Major Transportation Improvements. Major transportation improvements include the major road segments the LRTP proposes for improvement in the Core Area through 2025.

Residential. Residential areas are reserved principally for residential development. These areas may also include other development compatible with residential neighborhoods such as schools, churches, and similar institutional uses; low impact neighborhood commercial, home-based

offices and occupations; bed & breakfasts; non-commercial outbuildings such as garages, sheds, greenhouses, and stables, as consistent with borough codes.

Neighborhood Commercial. Neighborhood commercial designates locations that are well suited for retail and service businesses that serve nearby residential neighborhoods. Neighborhood commercial districts are scaled to serve a trade area of about 8,000 to 10,000 residents. Other compatible uses, such as multi-family housing, may also be appropriate.

Major Commercial. The major commercial areas designate parts of the Core Area whose prime location in the regional trade area positions them for retail trade and service business expansion, office industries, and related job growth and property development. The major commercial areas are located near the existing sub-regional commercial centers near the Core Area border with Wasilla and Palmer and along major transportation corridors best suited for highway-oriented commercial development.

Educational/Medical/Glenn Park District. The Educational/Medical/Glenn Park District encompasses the Matanuska-Susitna College and Mat-Su Regional Medical Center campuses, developed and undeveloped private property, University of Alaska lands, the borough central landfill, public recreation lands and trails. This area has high potential for growth into a regional center for education, health care, and related professional and commercial services; as a planned residential community; and as a regional natural recreational area. To realize that potential, the land use plan recommends creation of a district plan to achieve its long-term institutional, economic, residential, and recreational potential.

Potential Earth Materials Extraction Redevelopment Sites. This category includes current or former earth materials extraction sites of 20+ acres. The borough code treats materials extraction sites as interim uses. These sites are prime candidates for eventual redevelopment for residential, commercial, industrial, or institutional uses. Mixed-use development may also be appropriate, depending on site location and characteristics.

Industrial. The industrial category designates areas suited for industrial and light industrial uses. Additionally, areas identified as potential earth materials extraction redevelopment sites may be candidates for redevelopment for industrial uses.

Parks, Recreation, and Open Space. Here, it may be noted that the land use plan map does not display the major recommendations of the borough's already adopted Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan Parks and Open Space for the Core Area. Those recommendations are, however, incorporated into this Core Area Comprehensive Plan Update and are illustrated in Figures 11 and 12.

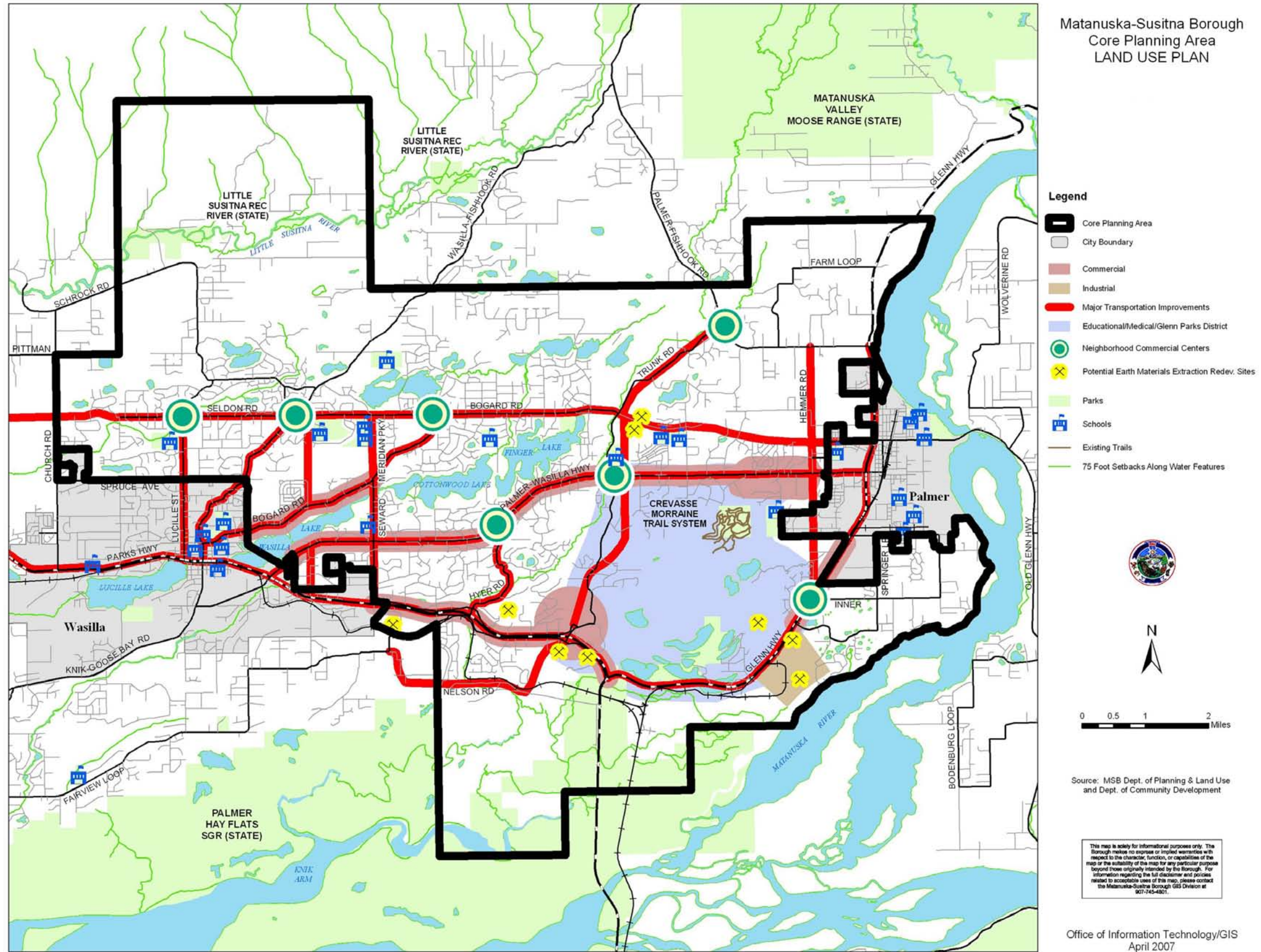


Figure 14: Matanuska-Susitna Borough Core Area Land Use Plan Map

Conclusion

For the past decade, the Core Area has been Alaska's the fastest-growing community. The recent pace of population and economic growth is forecasted to continue for the next two decades. By the end of that period, most of the remaining vacant land in the Core Area will be built up. The long-term development patterns will be set. By that time, the practicality and feasibility of altering established development patterns will be limited. In particular, the opportunity to acquire and conserve public open space, parklands, greenbelts, and natural habitat for future residents will be seriously reduced.

This comprehensive plan provides specific goals and policies to ensure that the core area's residents, economies, natural environment, and general quality of life will be protected and enhanced as the area continues to evolve. Planning for the future of a community is a dynamic and challenging effort. Therefore, it is recommended that this plan be re-visited and amended as necessary on a regular basis (every five to seven years).

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CODE ORDINANCE

By: Borough Manager
Introduced: 08/21/07
Public Hearing: 09/04/07
Adopted: 09/04/07

**MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH
ORDINANCE SERIAL NO. 07-131**

AN ORDINANCE OF THE MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH ASSEMBLY AMENDING MSB TITLE 15 - PLANNING, TO ADOPT THE 2007 CORE AREA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE.

BE IT ENACTED:

Section 1. Classification. This ordinance is of a general and permanent nature and shall become a part of the Borough Code.

Section 2. Amendment of section. MSB 15.24.030(B) is hereby amended as follows:

(8) Matanuska-Susitna Borough Core Area Comprehensive Plan, September 1993, amended September 1997; amended [date].

Section 3. Effective date. This ordinance shall take effect upon adoption by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly.

ADOPTED by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly this 4 day of September, 2007.

/ S /

LYNNE WOODS, Deputy Borough Mayor

ATTEST:

/ S /

MICHELLE M. MCGEHEE, CMC, Borough Clerk

(SEAL)

PASSED UNANIMOUSLY: Woods, Church, Kvalheim, Bettine, Wells, and Kluberton.