

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Comprehensive Development Plan



2005 Update

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Planning and Land Use Department

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Matanuska-Susitna Borough Comprehensive Development Plan (2005 Update)

Purpose

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough Comprehensive Development Plan (Borough-wide Comprehensive Plan) was originally adopted in 1970. This plan contains sections addressing Borough-wide as well as community-specific issues. Since 1970, the plan has been updated and amended through the adoption of community based plans, specific plans such as the Long Range Transportation Plan and Lake Management Plans, and plans prepared by the State of Alaska, such as the Susitna Area Plan. The purpose of revising the Borough-wide Comprehensive Plan of 1970, as amended, is to update the section addressing Borough-wide growth and development issues. In addition, this revision will discuss the method of comprehensive planning used by the Borough, how community based plans and Borough-wide plans relate to one another, and Borough-wide planning issues.

The Borough-wide Comprehensive Plan, as amended, provides general goals and policy recommendations to help guide future development in order to enhance our quality of life and the public health, safety, and welfare. Because the comprehensive plan seeks to promote a high quality of life for a twenty year period, its goals and recommendations are general in nature so as to accommodate new technologies, development patterns, a growing population and diversifying economy.

Comprehensive Planning in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough

The Borough undertakes comprehensive planning in several ways, including: participation in state and federal plans, community based plans, Borough-wide and regional plans, and functional plans such as Lake Management plans. This section describes the general public participation process used by the Borough in developing its plans, discusses the community by community approach used for comprehensive planning in the Borough, and briefly addresses implementation techniques. Implementation of the plan is further discussed on page 15.

Public Participation:

The Borough encourages active public participation in comprehensive planning efforts. The use of citizen based planning teams to develop goals, objectives, and recommendations is the standard method used by the Borough when developing its plans. In most cases, the Borough Planning Commission appoints citizens to planning teams in an effort to obtain broad public involvement and a balance of interests.

In addition to the use of planning teams, a variety of other methods are typically used to increase public involvement. These techniques vary depending upon the type of plan, level

of public interest and impact, and recommendations from the planning team, Planning Commission, Assembly and Administration. Typical public involvement efforts include 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). After community council review, plans are reviewed by the Planning Commission where public hearing(s) are also held. The Planning Commission then makes its recommendations to the Borough Assembly where a public hearing is held and the plan is considered and adopted. Once the Borough Assembly adopts a plan, it then becomes a part of the Borough-wide Comprehensive Plan.



Matanuska River Watershed Coalition
(Frankie Barker, MSB)

Implementation:

Comprehensive plans may be implemented in a number of ways. The typical manner of implementing a comprehensive plan is through a zoning ordinance. When a community comprehensive plan is adopted by the Assembly, it is typically implemented through a zoning ordinance specific to the community planning area; these zoning ordinances are called Special Use Districts (SpUDs). There are several SpUDs within the Borough today. In addition to zoning ordinances, comprehensive plans may be implemented through subdivision regulations, capital improvement programs, specific ordinances, and general policy.

Components of the Borough-wide Comprehensive Plan:

As mentioned earlier, the Borough's comprehensive plan consists of a variety of plans addressing various Borough and community needs and issues. The plans generally fall into one of the following categories:

- State and Federal plans;
- Borough Regional plans;
- Community plans;
- Specialty or Functional plans.

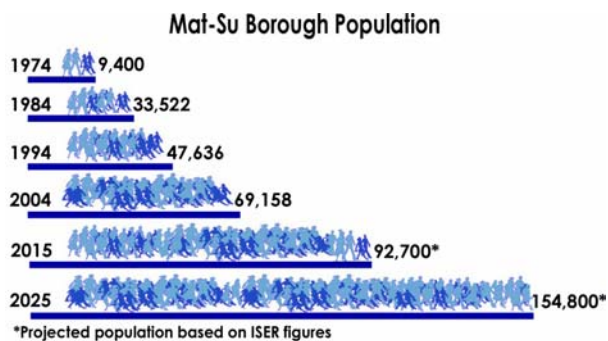
For example, State plans address how state lands are to be managed. Regional transportation and public facility plans guide the development of the Borough's future infrastructure. Community plans address community goals and objectives as well as how these goals and objectives will be achieved at the local level. Lastly, specialty or functional plans address specific issues such as the management of a particular lake or the waste management function of the Borough. Table 1 describes some of the plans adopted by the Borough in each of the aforementioned categories.

Table 1
Examples of Plans Adopted as Part of the Borough-wide Comprehensive Plan

State & Federal Plans	Borough Regional Plans	Community Plans	Specialty/Functional Plans
Susitna Area Plan	Long Range Transportation Plan	Chickaloon Comprehensive Plan	Big Lake, Lake Management Plan
Willow Sub-Basin Plan	Borough-wide Public Facilities Plan	Talkeetna Comprehensive Plan	Port MacKenzie Master Plan
Susitna Basin Forestry Guidelines	Borough-wide Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan	Glacier View Comprehensive Plan	Solid Waste Management Plan

Borough-wide Goals and Recommendations

The first Borough-wide Comprehensive Plan was developed and adopted in 1970. Since 1970, the Borough has dramatically changed in terms of its economy, population and built/natural environment. For instance, in 1970 the Borough had an agricultural based economy, a population of approximately 7,500 and limited infrastructure. Today, retail, finance, and real estate services are the primary sectors of the Borough's economy. The Borough's population is near 75,000 and the public and private infrastructure has grown significantly.



The new growth has also brought new industries and technologies to the Borough. Some of these new industries and technologies such as communication towers, waste incinerators, and oil and gas development have created compatibility issues in residential neighborhoods and recreational areas. Managing these and other land uses to enhance the quality of life of Borough residents, while also

improving and diversifying the local economy, is one task of comprehensive planning.

Alaska State statute requires that a local community's comprehensive plan address, at a minimum, three issues: land use, transportation and public facilities. This update to the Borough's 1970 Comprehensive Development Plan addresses these issues as well as six others including Planning Methods, Community Quality, Parks and Open Space, Economy, Hazards, and Implementation.

Table 2
Comprehensive Plan Elements

State-Required Elements	Borough-Elected Elements
Transportation Public Facilities Land Use	Planning Methods Economy Hazards Parks and Open Space Community Quality Implementation

Planning Methods:

The Borough's present method of relying upon four general categories of plans (i.e., State/Federal, Borough/Regional, Community, and Specialty/Functional plans) to guide the development within the Borough provides for public participation at all levels of planning. The Borough's present method of planning provides a balance between Borough, regional, and local community desires while also providing the means to participate in state and federal decision making.

Some issues are best addressed through a Borough-wide or regional planning process. For example, developing an integrated transportation system of highways and arterials to address inter and intra state traffic is best done at the Borough-wide level. The actual location of the highway or arterial, however, is best addressed at the community level through local community based plans. The use of community based comprehensive plans and special use districts provide residents with the opportunity to guide development within their specific community. It is essential that community based plans are consistent with the goals and policies of the Borough-wide Comprehensive Plan in order to maintain efficient, equitable, and effective planning efforts throughout the Borough. To maintain the desired balance between Borough-wide and local community needs the following goals and recommendations are made:

Goal (PM-1): *Use a variety of plans to address the different needs of Borough residents and communities.*

Policy PM1-1: Continue the use of four general planning categories to address the various planning needs of Borough residents and communities; the general planning categories being: state and federal, Borough-wide and regional, community, and specialty or functional plans.

Policy PM1-2: Adopt plans that are consistent with and compliment the goals and policies of the Borough-wide Comprehensive Plan.

Goal (PM-2): *Encourage local communities to develop goals, objectives, and recommendations for their communities.*

Policy PM2-1: Continue to use the community based comprehensive planning process to allow each community in the Borough to tailor land use, transportation, public facility, recreation, and other recommendations to their specific needs and desires which are consistent with the goals and policies of the Borough-wide Comprehensive Plan.

Policy PM2-2: Encourage local communities to further refine the goals and recommendations of state, federal, Borough-wide and regional plans through community based comprehensive plans which are in compliance with the goals and policies of the Borough-wide Comprehensive Plan.

Economy:

The Borough's economy has dramatically changed since 1970. The economy has changed from an agricultural based economy to one that largely consists of tourism, retail sales, and service activities. The Borough's economic maturation process continues to diversify consistent with population growth. For instance, the Borough has recently seen new development in the health care industry bringing new economic and employment opportunities to local businesses and residents.



Vessel Bound for Port MacKenzie (MSB)

The Borough continues to strive for an improved quality of life for its residents through increased economic growth and job creation. Some of the efforts that have been embarked upon include Port MacKenzie, Hatcher Pass Ski Area, creation of economic development incentives, promotion of tourism, and business retention and expansion.

The Borough needs to continue its efforts to maintain, diversify, and expand its economic base. Moreover, continued recognition and support of individual local communities specific economic

goals should occur. In pursuing these efforts the Borough should seek to achieve the following goals to address economic development:

Goal (E-1): *Develop an Action Plan for continued economic development and diversification.*

Policy E1-1: Regularly update the Borough's Economic Development Plan.

Policy E1-2: Work closely with other private, public, and non-profit entities to develop an agreed upon approach to economic development and specific economic development projects.

Policy E1-3: Identify and focus resources on existing and anticipated key economic nodes as a means to improve the potential success.

Policy E1-4: Locate new economic nodes at or near major arterial intersections instead of allowing linear commercial growth along such arterials.

Policy E1-5: Encourage a mix of complimentary uses at designated economic node locations.

Policy E1-6: Recognize and support the different economic and community development goals of the Borough's local communities.

Policy E1-7: Work cooperatively with outlying borough communities to facilitate local efforts to develop economic plans that are consistent with their needs and desires.

Goal (E-2): *Manage Borough owned lands in a manner that fosters economic development while ensuring quality of life.*

Policy E2-1: Consider impacts to surrounding properties when considering potential uses of public lands.

Policy E2-2: Work with local communities to identify possible mitigation and/or enhancement plans when considering uses or sales of borough owned land.

Policy E2-3: When determining sales price of borough owned land, sales price of private property should be considered so as not to put private property owners in a disadvantaged position to sell their property.

Policy E2-4: Consider potential impacts potential buyers/lesors of borough owned land may have on surrounding community.

Goal (E-3): *Create an attractive environment for business investment.*

Policy E3-1: Provide reasonable economic and financial incentives for business retention and expansion.

Policy E3-2: Institute appropriate land use guidelines and regulations that reduce land use conflicts and protect residents and businesses.

Policy E3-3: Enhance the transportation infrastructure to reduce travel times and improve transport efficiencies and safety.

Policy E3-4: Provide superior education facilities and programs for student and worker training.

Policy E3-5: Work cooperatively with the University of Alaska Anchorage to expand the Matanuska-Susitna College to a four-year university.

Public Facilities:

Public facilities include schools, fire stations, libraries, parks, water and sewer systems, landfills, and recreational structures. These facilities are necessary to support community development and growth by supporting the provision of clean water, emergency response, education, recreation, and other vital community services. Public facilities are therefore a necessary ingredient in enhancing the borough's quality of life. A community's public facility infrastructure also engenders a sense of community by providing physical features that may promote additional development activity and thus enhancing community quality. Successful economic development relies upon a comprehensive public facilities network. Potential investors must be assured of the availability of clean water supplies, efficient waste disposal services, fire protection, and quality education opportunities.



Teeland Middle School (MSB)

The Borough's public facilities support different population centers and user groups; therefore the levels of service provided by these facilities may differ depending upon location and service population. The 1984 Borough-wide Public Facilities Plan provided five general

principles to guide the development of public facilities within the Borough. The principles have guided the Borough well over the last twenty years. Updating these five principles to address today's needs is necessary as the Borough has changed greatly since 1984. The updated principles for public facility development are:

- Public facilities serve as the basic infrastructure required to build local communities.
- Public facilities should be considered as systems that interrelate with each other.
- Public facility systems should recognize and accommodate the regional diversity of the Borough.
- Public facilities, to the extent feasible and practical, should be developed on the basis of locally adopted and reasonable standards that are appropriate to the various regions.
- Public facilities can, and should, share space and infrastructure to allow multiple uses to the extent feasible and practical.

In addition to the general principles that guide the development and placement of public facilities, facility and level-of-service standards are also important considerations for the efficient and effective development of public facilities.

Since the Borough adopted a Borough-wide Public Facilities Plan in 1984, it has been amended by the adoption of the following Borough-wide functional plans:

- Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan, 2000
- Solid Waste Management Plan, 2002
- Borough Library Comprehensive Plan, 2001
- Historic Preservation Plan, 1987

These functional plans have addressed the changes that have occurred in the Borough since 1984 and developed recommendations for the future. To help guide further development of the Borough's public facilities the following goals and recommendations are made:

Goal (PF-1): *Develop efficient and effective public facilities to meet the needs of the Borough's diverse communities, economy, and growing population.*

Policy PF1-1: Regularly update the 1984 Public Facilities Plan by preparing functional plans for each of the principle public facility categories to provide overall guidance to the development of the Borough's public facilities while achieving consistency with the goals and policies of the Borough-wide Comprehensive Plan.

Policy PF1-2: Allow local communities, through local community based plans, to tailor the Borough-wide Public Facilities Plan and regional functional plans to address specific local needs and conditions while tailoring such plans to comply with the goals and policies of the Borough-wide Comprehensive Plan.

Policy PF1-3: Develop a set of facility and level of service standards to guide the development of public facilities.

Policy PF1-4: To the extent feasible and practical, co-locate public facilities in order to reduce construction, operating, maintenance costs, and potential negative impacts.

Policy PF1-5: Identify and acquire the necessary land for future public facilities.

Policy PF1-6: Identify and retain public lands that are appropriate for future public facility use.

Policy PF1-7: Consider expansion of public water and sewer infrastructure where appropriate based upon population growth trends and anticipated population density.

Transportation:

A transportation plan identifies the future transportation system for an area by identifying the service level and network improvements necessary to accommodate future growth patterns. A transportation plan also makes recommendations for improving the various modes of transportation and makes recommendations that may improve how the system functions, such as congestion management and road interconnectivity throughout the community. In addition to providing recommendations addressing physical improvements, a transportation plan seeks to improve the natural environment by reducing air and water pollution. Furthermore, through reduction of travel times and safety improvements, the plan should advance the economy as well as the community's general quality of life.

The Borough adopted its first regional transportation plan in 1984 which was later updated with the adoption of the 1997 Long Range Transportation Plan. Each of these plans recognized the need for the development of a regional network of highways and arterials to support the Borough's population and economic growth. The plans also recognized the



Parks and Glenn Highway Interchange
(Sandra Petal, MSB)

importance of improving the various modes of transportation by making recommendations for airports, marine port development, rail, and public transportation and trails that enhance connectivity between communities. System improvements through congestion management techniques, first discussed in the 1997 Long Range Transportation Plan, seek to improve the efficiency of the existing system. The progress made by the 1984 and 1997 plans should be continued and enhanced. In order for the Borough to

keep pace with new technologies and globalization of the economy, recommendations should be considered for other modes of transportation such as electrical, communications, and pipelines.

Goal (T-1): *Develop an integrated surface transportation network that facilitates the efficient movement of people, goods, and services throughout the Borough and region.*

Policy T1-1: Regularly update the Long Range Transportation Plan.

Policy T1-2: Develop an integrated highway and arterial surface transport system.

Policy T1-3: Allow local communities, through local community based plans, to refine and tailor transportation system needs and alternatives for their particular community needs that are consistent with the borough's long range transportation plan and Borough-wide Comprehensive Plan.

Policy T1-4: Develop an effective multi-modal transportation plan that provides recommendations for all modes of transportation including surface, air, waterborne, rail, public transit and trails, pipeline, electrical, and communications. Such a plan should strive to better connect the borough's various communities and neighborhoods.

Policy T1-5: Complete functional plans that address each mode of transportation to achieve a higher level of specificity.

Policy T1-6: Provide and encourage street and trail connectivity at a regional and local level. Require new developments to integrate street and trail connectivity as a component of their proposal.

Goal (T-2): *Protect and enhance the Borough's natural resources including watersheds, groundwater supplies and air quality.*

Policy T2-1: Identify and implement techniques and incentives that improve air quality, reduce non-point water pollution, and improve fuel efficiency.

Policy T2-2: Encourage transportation planning efforts that recognize and consider the Borough's diverse land use development patterns and encourage local community land use decision-making.

Hazards:

Borough residents may periodically be confronted by natural and human caused hazards. Potential natural hazards include floods, earthquakes, avalanches, wildfire, snow and windstorms and extreme cold. Human caused hazards include hazardous material and waste spills, railroad derailments, and air and water contamination. It is vital for the Borough and its residents to be adequately prepared to respond to these hazards in order to reduce the loss of life and property. Moreover, it is necessary to have prepared action plans for community and economic recovery so that our community may begin a timely rebuilding/recovery process. To adequately address natural and human caused hazards, the following goals and recommendations are made:



*Windstorm, Wasilla Lake
(Sandra Petal, MSB)*

Goal (H-1): *Develop an approach for responding to natural and human caused hazards.*

Policy H1-1: Prepare a Borough-wide Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Goal (H-2): *Adequately prepare for natural and human caused emergencies.*

Policy H2-1: Conduct regular multi-agency emergency response training workshops.

Policy H2-2: Ensure Borough employees are adequately trained for emergency response.

Policy H2-3: Conduct regular public information campaigns on emergency preparedness.

Land Use:

The Borough is comprised of over 24,000 square miles containing urbanized, suburban, rural, and remote areas. There are twenty-six recognized communities, each distinguished with unique life styles and community values. While the Borough is distinguished with diversity in land use patterns and communities, a common thread exists throughout the Borough that seeks to preserve and enhance existing qualities that make living and working within the Matanuska-Susitna Borough a chosen and welcomed lifestyle.

Balancing the different needs and desires related to land use decisions is challenging. Some land use decisions need to be addressed in a consistent fashion throughout the Borough because they have a common affect on the population as a whole. Consistent application of Borough-wide land use decisions results in an effective, efficient, equitable policy. For example, the Borough created a Borough-wide seventy-five foot (75') shoreline setback for habitable structures. Developing consistent standards for businesses wishing to locate in the Borough is another reason for making some land use decisions at the Borough-wide level. Consistent standards allow the business community to better plan their investments and allow for better predictability for both industry and residents alike. Many land use issues are best addressed at a Borough-wide level because of the very nature of the issue. Examples of such issues include watersheds, groundwater, and waste disposal which affect large areas and multiple communities.

While many issues are better addressed at a regional or Borough-wide level, it is necessary to recognize that some land use issues are better addressed at the local community level. This is due to the unique characteristics embodied within the Borough's communities. For instance, communities with water and sewer infrastructure may prefer small lot development, while those communities without such infrastructure and having sensitive groundwater supplies may prefer large lot development. Certain communities may wish to preserve important historical sites or promote certain economic opportunities which may be irrelevant to other communities.

Some of the key reasons to manage land uses are to limit residential and commercial sprawl, limit proximity of incompatible uses, and to encourage uses that support one another. For instance, while it may not be appropriate for a loud, externally illuminated, busy industrial use to be located next to a residential use, there are reasons to encourage a modest-sized grocery store to be located within close proximity to residential properties. To maintain a healthy and diversified economy it is necessary to provide places for all development, especially commercial and industrial development; hence, land use regulations should accommodate such uses and provide investors with a clear understanding, supported by consistent policies, of where and how they may develop their specific investments. To support this land-use framework, the following goals and recommendations are provided:

Goal (LU-1): *Protect and enhance the public safety, health, and welfare of Borough residents.*

Policy LU1-1: Provide for consistent, compatible, effective, and efficient development within the Borough.

Goal (LU-2): *Protect residential neighborhoods and associated property values.*

Policy LU2-1: Develop and implement regulations that protect residential development by separating incompatible uses, while encouraging uses that support such residential uses including office, commercial and other mixed-use developments that are shown to have positive cumulative impacts to the neighborhood.

Goal (LU-3): *Encourage commercial and industrial development that is compatible with residential development and local community desires.*

Policy LU3-1: Develop and implement regulations that provide for non-residential development.

Policy LU3-2: Allow local communities, through local community based plans, to refine Borough-wide regulations addressing development patterns and impacts while maintaining consistency with the goals and policies of the Borough-wide Comprehensive Plan.



Palmer in Winter (Frankie Barker, MSB)

Goal (LU-4): *Protect and enhance the Borough's natural resources including watersheds, groundwater supplies and air quality.*

Policy LU4-1: Identify, monitor, protect, and enhance the quantity and quality of the Borough's watersheds, groundwater aquifers, and clean air resources.

Policy LU4-2: Population density standards should accommodate the natural system's ability to sustain varying density levels.

Goal (LU-5): *Recognize and protect the diversity of the Borough's land use development patterns including agricultural, residential, commercial, industrial and cultural resources, while limiting sprawl.*

Policy LU5-1: Develop and implement land use planning efforts that recognize, protect, and enhance the Borough's diverse land use development patterns and encourage local community land use decision-making, while limiting sprawl and maintaining consistency with the goals and policies of the Borough-wide Comprehensive Plan.

Policy LU5-2: Encourage and provide various lot size and population density standards to accommodate a variety of property owners and residents.

Goal (LU-6): *New developments greater than five (5) units per acre should incorporate design standards that will protect and enhance the existing built and natural environment.*

Goal (LU-7): *The borough should actively limit sprawl through setting appropriate density standards and encouraging residential and commercial development to occur in areas that are centrally located and within close proximity to public and private services.*

Parks and Open Space:

Parks and other open spaces make a distinct contribution to the landscape and quality of life in the Borough. Without proactive decisions, policies and financial commitment, this aspect of our quality of life is in jeopardy. As the Borough experiences additional growth pressures, not only is the protection and development of such areas needed, but the equitable dispersion of parks and open space should be addressed. Consequently, the Borough should strategically and creatively position itself to deal with open space demands for various users. Some of the challenges facing the Borough to meet this need are:

1. Acquiring and developing additional parkland, campgrounds and recreational areas in areas of the Borough where such amenities are deficient, by providing additional neighborhood parks, community parks, campgrounds, recreational areas and open space.
2. Providing additional pedestrian and bicycle trails and linkages, between parks, open spaces, water bodies, and neighborhoods. Acquire additional public greenways to enhance such trails and linkages.
3. Developing facilities such as restrooms and additional benches in new and existing parks and recreational areas.
4. Providing ongoing renovation and maintenance of parks and recreational areas associated facilities.
5. Promoting habitat conservation through acquisition and preservation of important natural areas including farms and open space.



Trunk Road Farm (Sandra Petal, MSB)

Currently, the Borough maintains a large number and diversity of parks, campgrounds and recreational areas. As the Borough's population continues to grow, the demand for various year-round passive and active recreational opportunities increases. The Borough should accommodate such demand with the following goals and recommendations:

Goal (PO-1): *To acquire, develop, and redevelop a system of parks, recreation facilities, community centers, and open spaces that is safe, functional, and accessible to all segments of the population.*

Policy PO1-1: Acquire parks, community centers, recreation, and open space facilities in those areas of the Borough facing population growth, commercial development, and in areas where facilities are deficient.

Policy PO1-2: Develop pedestrian and bicycle linkages between schools, public facilities, neighborhoods, parks and open spaces and population centers where feasible.

Policy PO1-3: Ensure adequate maintenance and operation funding prior to development of parks and recreational facilities.

Policy PO1-4: Ensure that parks and open spaces are provided using the following standards to determine the need for parks (Table 3).

Policy PO1-5: Actively promote through various land use techniques the preservation of agricultural land.

Table 3
Park and Open Space Levels of Service

Facility	Standard
Neighborhood Parks	5 acres/1,000 persons
Community Parks	10 acres/3,500 persons
Nature/Open Space Parks	15 acres/5,000 persons

Natural Resource Conservation. Natural areas and open spaces are a vital component of the health and well being of the Borough. Conservation and enhancement of the ecological resources found within the Borough should be a key component of its land use and park planning. In surveys and workshops, Borough citizens have consistently identified natural areas as being a key component of the Borough's quality of life.

The Borough has hundreds of lakes, streams and rivers that provide valuable habitat for fish and wildlife, contribute to water quality and provide recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. Open space corridors serve many important functions, including recreation, fish and wildlife habitat, and the connection of individual features that comprise a natural system. For example, the "Crevasse Moraine" area in the Borough's Core Area provides such functions.



Two Moose
(Jackie Muncy, MSB Photo Contest Winner)

Goal (PO-2): *Protect and preserve natural resource areas.*

Policy PO2-1: Work cooperatively with numerous resource management agencies, community councils, and citizens to care for lakes, wetlands, streams, rivers, and wildlife habitat and corridors while providing public access for recreational opportunities that have minimal impacts to such areas.

Policy PO2-2: Preserve opportunities for people to observe and enjoy wildlife and wildlife habitats.

Policy PO2-3: Identify, through analysis, potential natural resource areas throughout the Borough that should be protected.

Community Quality:

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough's natural environment, with its abundant supplies of clean water, its beauty, and its other natural resources, has attracted people to our community for generations. Natural systems serve many essential biological, hydrological, and geological functions that significantly affect life and property in the Borough. Features such as lakes, wetlands, streams and rivers provide habitat for fish and wildlife, flood control, and groundwater recharge, as well as surface and groundwater transport, storage, and filtering. Vegetation, too, is essential to fish and wildlife habitat, and also helps to support soil stability, prevents erosion, and absorbs significant amounts of water, thereby reducing runoff and flooding. A well-functioning natural environment also provides clean air, which is becoming a growing concern as the Borough continues to develop. In addition to these functions, the natural environment provides many valuable amenities such as scenic landscape, community identity, open space, and opportunities for recreation, culture, and education.



*Mud Lake, Knik Public Use Area
(Frankie Barker, MSB)*

In addition to the aforementioned benefits, a healthy natural environment helps to fuel the Borough's economy. Industry and its employees are attracted to communities which are recognized as having a high quality of life. The natural environment is one of the key considerations or indicators of the definition of quality of life. Currently the Borough is recognized as a place to "work and play"; this recognition must be nurtured and protected in order for the Borough to continue its ability to attract business and industry in the years to come. Two specific industries that have capitalized on the Borough's quality of life are

tourism and recreational opportunities. The Borough's citizens recognize and often comment upon the important role the natural environment plays in our quality of life.

The Borough's desire and duty to protect natural resources must be balanced with the Borough's obligations to:

- Accommodate future growth, and
- Provide a development process that is timely, predictable, and equitable to developers and residents alike.

Success in balancing these complex and often conflicting concerns depends in large part upon the provision of extensive opportunities for public participation, during the formulation of policies, programs, incentives, and regulations relating to the natural environment.

As a rapidly growing community with an abundance of environmental resources, the Borough has a daunting yet reachable task to manage such resources appropriately. The Borough's natural resources include several significant rivers and lakes, many supporting

significant fish populations. The Susitna and Matanuska Rivers act as significant drainage basins, and are hydrologically unpredictable, thus requiring adequate planning for erosion and flooding occurrences. The Borough also contains a vast number of wetlands, riparian and wildlife corridors, wilderness areas, and considerable topographic variation. Being partially located on both the north and west shores of Knik Arm presents additional unique concerns and opportunities associated with the marine environment. With this said, the Borough's challenge for the future will be to accommodate new and infill growth while protecting and enhancing natural systems on public and private lands.

Natural Water Systems. The Borough is currently embarking on a study/plan to address the past, current, and future impacts as well as evaluate and record the primary functions, existing problems and future opportunities within the Big Lake Watershed natural system. This effort is indicative of the importance planning efforts have when addressing Borough-wide watershed issues.

Development, through addition of impervious surface and removal of vegetation, increases the volume and flow rate of surface water runoff. If uncontrolled, this increases the peak flow and decreases summer base flow in stream channels. Property damage and loss of human life can result if stream channels are not large enough to contain the increased flows, or if the development has encroached on the natural floodplain of the stream or river. In addition, frequent high flows can cause excessive erosion and can destroy the complex channel structure that provides food and habitat for fish and other aquatic life.

The retention of natural drainage systems should be given priority to altering such systems in most cases. However, many natural watercourses may be unable to accommodate unusually large storms or increased runoff from development, not to mention the meandering presence many of the Borough's streams and rivers have. In such cases, the natural stream and river systems should be preserved and enhanced by stabilizing the banks of watercourses. Preserving the natural drainage system to the greatest extent feasible and discouraging non-essential structures, land modifications, or impervious surfaces in the drainage system will assist in ensuring optimal natural functioning within the drainage area.



Wetlands Class (Frankie Barker, MSB)

Increases in impervious surface resulting from development cause decreases in ground water recharge. This causes a decline in base flows and subsequent loss of habitat that impacts fish and wildlife populations. Moreover, the pollutants carried with such runoff including gasoline, oil, sediment, heavy metals, and herbicides, can potentially contaminate water supplies for numerous Borough properties which rely on well systems for drinking water.

Floodplains are lands adjacent to lakes, rivers, and streams that are subject to periodic flooding and erosion. Floodplains naturally store flood water, protect water quality, and are valuable for recreation and wildlife habitat. New development or land modification in

designated floodplains should be designed to maintain natural flood storage functions and minimize hazards to life and property. Areas subject to erosion, such as the banks along the Matanuska River, should be similarly managed to accomplish the same life and safety concerns.

The availability of clean water is essential to residential and business development and to the survival of vegetation, fish, animals, and humans in our ecosystem. Water quality is degraded when indiscriminate modifications to wetlands, watercourses, lakes, subsurface drainage, or associated natural areas occur, thus disrupting basin functions. In addition to water quality degradation, such actions can cause flooding, decreases in groundwater quantity, sedimentation, erosion, uneven settlement, or drainage problems. Land surface modifications and other development activity should be properly managed to avoid these problems.

Goal (CQ-1): *Protect natural systems and features from the potentially negative impacts of human activities, including, but not limited to, land development.*

Policy CQ1-1: Use a system-wide approach to effectively manage environmental resources. Coordinate land use planning and management of natural systems with affected state and local agencies as well as affected Community Council efforts.

Policy CQ1-2: Manage activities affecting air, vegetation, water, and the land to maintain or improve environmental quality, to preserve fish and wildlife habitat, to prevent degradation or loss of natural features and functions, and to minimize risks to life and property.

Policy CQ1-3: Guide development along the Borough's many glacially braided rivers such as the Matanuska River to preserve the resources and ecology of the water and shorelines, avoid natural hazards, minimize erosion and associated property damage and public welfare and safety.

Policy CQ1-4: Provide site restoration if land surface modification violates adopted policy or development does not ensue within a reasonable period of time.

Policy CQ1-5: Make information concerning natural systems and associated regulations available to property owners, prospective property owners, developers, and the general public,



Matanuska River (Frankie Barker, MSB)

Goal (CQ-2): *Manage the natural and built environments to achieve minimal loss of the functions and values of all drainage basins; and, where possible, enhance and restore functions, values, and features. Retain lakes, ponds, wetlands, streams, and rivers and their corridors substantially in their natural condition.*

Policy CQ2-1: Using a watershed-based approach, apply best available science in formulating regulations, incentives, and programs to maintain and, to the degree possible, improve the quality of the Borough's water resources.

Policy CQ2-2: Comprehensively manage activities that may adversely impact surface and ground water quality or quantity.

Policy CQ2-3: When appropriate, utilize Borough adopted “Best Management Practices” when managing watershed impacts.

Policy CQ2-4: Develop a “wetland banking” and “land trust” program to provide property owners and developers alternatives when considering development strategies on environmentally sensitive lands.

Implementation:

There are a broad range of measures necessary to implement the Comprehensive Plan involving a wide variety of people and organizations. It is the responsibility of the Borough, however, to put in place mechanisms that will promote the actions needed for implementation. Listed below are the primary methods that will be used to implement the Plan.

- Land-use regulations (SpUDs);
- Capital improvement program;
- Subdivision regulations.

Because of the broad range of plans that the Borough utilizes when developing and implementing its comprehensive planning efforts, the Borough’s implementation methods consist of all of the most common means of implementing comprehensive plans with the exception of impact fees.

A comprehensive plan cannot be implemented entirely by codes and ordinances. Some recommendations made within the plan require other types of actions that only a governing body can take. Examples of these types of actions are: developing capital improvement programs; promoting redevelopment or in-fill development, and fostering good public participation, perhaps the keystone and the catalyst of most plan implementation techniques.

Obviously, there can be many other similar actions that can aid in implementing the comprehensive plan, none of which require codes and ordinances to be put into effect by which, nevertheless, are equally as important to assist with plan implementation. For example, periodic informational meetings with Borough community councils to discuss the comprehensive plan can aid in plan implementation. Exchanges with groups like the local Chamber of Commerce and other civic organizations will keep the plan in the forefront as individuals make business decisions and civic groups plan their community assistance activities. Collectively, actions by individuals and individual civic groups can add up toward accomplishing goals set forth in the plan. When government sponsored activities are linked to non-governmental actions real progress can be made.

Land-use Regulations. Land use regulations set the legal requirements for new development and modifications to existing uses. The vast majority of such regulations are found in zoning and subdivision codes as well as shoreline plans. The Borough uses both Borough-wide and special use district (SpUD) zoning ordinances. Borough-wide zoning ordinances address land use issues that are common throughout the Borough and are most effectively and

efficiently administered on a Borough-wide basis. Examples of these ordinances include setback standards including a seventy-five foot water-body setback, alcohol beverage dispensary, sanitary solid waste disposal sites, and mobile home park standards.

Special use districts are zoning ordinances that implement locally adopted community based comprehensive plans, state management plans, and certain components of a Borough-wide plan. SpUD's are thus tailored to a local community's special conditions that are unique to the geographic boundary of such community. Local communities have the ability to redefine a particular Borough-wide zoning measure through their SpUD. For example, a community may regulate a certain land use in a more permissive or restrictive manner than provided by a Borough-wide zoning measure. A SpUD may also implement a state plan such as the Denali State Park Special Use District implements the Denali State Park Management Plan.

Common land use standards that are regulated by a zoning ordinance or other land use implementing techniques include: density standards, setback and height standards, use separation and standards, signage standards, lot coverage limitations, design standards, landscape and parking standards and wireless communication facility standards.

Although by nature regulations impose restrictions on the development of property, where appropriate, regulations can be structured to provide incentives to desired development, rather than being solely restrictive. For instance, if the community determined that a certain area is appropriate for commercial uses, however, due to the proximity to residential properties, the uses should be limited to businesses that will have minimal impacts to the area and provide a service to the surrounding properties (e.g., small grocery store), a land-use regulation could be drafted to accommodate such concerns.

Capital Improvement Plans. Although not technically a part of the Comprehensive Plan, Capital Improvement Plans, or Functional Plans, address in detail subjects more generally discussed in the Comprehensive Plan. Existing Borough functional plans include:

- School District Plans
- Trails and Recreation Plans (Pedestrian, Bike, Trail, Park, Refuge projects)
- Borough Capital Projects (e.g., Port MacKenzie, Hatcher Pass Ski Recreational Area)
- Transportation Plans (Federal, State, Local)

Functional plans are both guided by and help to guide the Comprehensive Plan. Theoretically, the Comprehensive Plan sets the broad policy framework which functional plans address in more detail. In practice, however, functional plans also raise issues and ideas which help to shape Comprehensive Plan goals and policies. Either way, general consistency between the Comprehensive Plan and functional plans is important, as is regular updating of functional plans to maintain their effectiveness.



Mushing (Harry Banks, MSB)

Subdivision Standards. The subdivision ordinance is one of the key tools used to implement the comprehensive plan. Subdivision regulations are designed to provide a variety of land-use benefits to a community including the following:

- Ensure a well-designed and functional subdivision or land development;
- Set minimum standards for the layout or design of developments;
- Promote coordinated development including adequate vehicular connectivity;
- Insure the installation of necessary improvements;
- Manage storm water runoff and erosion



Subdivision in Palmer (Frankie Barker, MSB)

Goal (I-1): *Encourage flexibility in the implementation of the Borough's comprehensive plans.*

Policy I1-1: Provide a variety of methods, including land-use regulations, subdivision standards and capital improvement plans, to implement the comprehensive plan.

Goal (I-2): *Allow local communities to have the ability to tailor implementation methods to local needs and desires.*

Policy I2-1: Allow the use of special use districts as a means of implementing locally adopted community based comprehensive plans if they comply with the borough-wide plan.

Policy I2-2: Allow local communities to consider land use regulations that are more flexible than Borough-wide zoning measures.

Life after the Plan:

After the Borough adopts the comprehensive plan and any implementing codes and ordinances, there is a tendency to put the plan away and to consider the planning task complete. This is not and should not be the case. A community is seldom a stagnant place; especially considering the rapid population growth the borough is experiencing. Planning is an organized process managing change. Therefore, all change should be examined to see what effects it may have upon the community. The comprehensive plan and its implementing ordinances should be adjusted accordingly. This examination and updating procedure should be done methodically and periodically. This is known as the continuing planning process. With that said, this plan should be reviewed every seven (7) years, and if the review uncovers shortcomings, the plan should be updated to account for such changes.

APPENDIX

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Comprehensive Development Plan Components

The following is a non-inclusive list of plans and studies that are incorporated by reference as part of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Comprehensive Development Plan (as of 2005).

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH REGIONAL PLANS

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Comprehensive Development Plan (adopted 1970, amended 2005)

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Public Facilities Plan (adopted 1984)

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Coastal Management Plan (adopted 1984, amended 1992)

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Historic Preservation Plan (adopted 1987)

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Core Area Comprehensive Plan (adopted 1993, amended 1997)

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Long Range Transportation Plan (adopted 1997)

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Recreational Trails Plan (adopted 2000, amended 2004)

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Rail Corridor Study (adopted 2003)

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH COMMUNITY PLANS

City of Palmer Comprehensive Plan (adopted 1982, amended 1999)

City of Wasilla Comprehensive Plan (to include City of Wasilla Trails Plan; City of Wasilla Alaska Railroad Relocation Reconnaissance Study; City of Wasilla Hazard Mitigation Plan, Phase I – Natural Hazards) (adopted 1992, revised 1996, amended 1999)

City of Houston Comprehensive Plan (adopted 1982, amended 2003)

Chickaloon Comprehensive Plan (adopted 1991, amended 1995)

Chase Comprehensive Plan (adopted 1993)

Glacier View Comprehensive Plan (adopted 1994)

Big Lake Comprehensive Plan (adopted 1995)

Knik-Fairview Comprehensive Plan (adopted 1997)

Petersville Road Corridor Management Plan (adopted 1998)

Lake Louise Comprehensive Plan (adopted 1998)

Talkeetna Comprehensive Plan (adopted 1998, amended 1999)

Sutton Comprehensive Plan (adopted 2000)

Meadow Lakes Comprehensive Plan (adopted 2005)

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH SPECIALTY/FUNCTIONAL PLANS

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Community Health Plan (adopted 1997)

Point MacKenzie Port Master Plan (adopted 1998, amended 1999)

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Solid Waste Management Plan (adopted 2002)

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Library Comprehensive Plan (adopted 2005)

Lake Management Plans

Knik Lake, Lake Management Plan (adopted 1995)

Crooked Lake, Lake Management Plan (adopted 1995)

Honeybee Lake, Lake Management Plan (adopted 1995)

Rainbow Lake, Lake Management Plan (adopted 1995)

Island and Doubloon Lake, Lake Management Plan (adopted 1995)

West Papoose Lake, Lake Management Plan (adopted 1995)

John Lake, Lake Management Plan (adopted 1995)

Crystal Lake, Lake Management Plan (adopted 1995)

Bonnie Lake Area, Lake Management Plan (adopted 1996)

Wolf Lake, Lake Management Plan (adopted 1997)

Twin Island Lake, Lake Management Plan (adopted 1997)

Fish Lake, Lake Management Plan (adopted 1997)

Blodgett Lake, Lake Management Plan (adopted 1997)

Big Lake, Lake Management Plan (adopted 1998)

Memory Lake, Lake Management Plan (adopted 1998)

Toad Lake, Lake Management Plan (adopted 1998)

Lake Management Plan (adopted 1998)

Question, Little Question, Lake Five and Unnamed Lakes, Lake Management Plan (adopted 1998)

Marilee Lake, Lake Management Plan (adopted 1998)

Diamond Lake, Lake Management Plan (adopted 1999)

Christiansen Lake, Lake Management Plan (adopted 1999)

Neklasen and Lower Neklasen Lakes (adopted 2000)

Marion Lake, Lake Management Plan (adopted 2000)

Long Lake (Houston), Lake Management Plan (adopted 2001)

Three Mile Lake, Lake Management Plan (adopted 2002)

Wolverine Lake, Lake Management Plan (adopted 2004)

Whiskey Lake, Lake Management Plan (adopted 2004)

Little Lonely Lake, Lake Management Plan (adopted 2005)

Asset Management Plans

Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan (adopted 2001)

Deshka River Recreation Management Plan (adopted 2004)

Jordan Lake Parcel Master Plan (adopted 2004)

Talkeetna Lakes Park Plan (adopted 2004)

Talkeetna Riverfront Park Plan (adopted 2004)

STATE AND FEDERAL PLANS

Willow Sub-Basin Area Plan (adopted 1982)

Hatcher Pass Management Plan (adopted 1986)

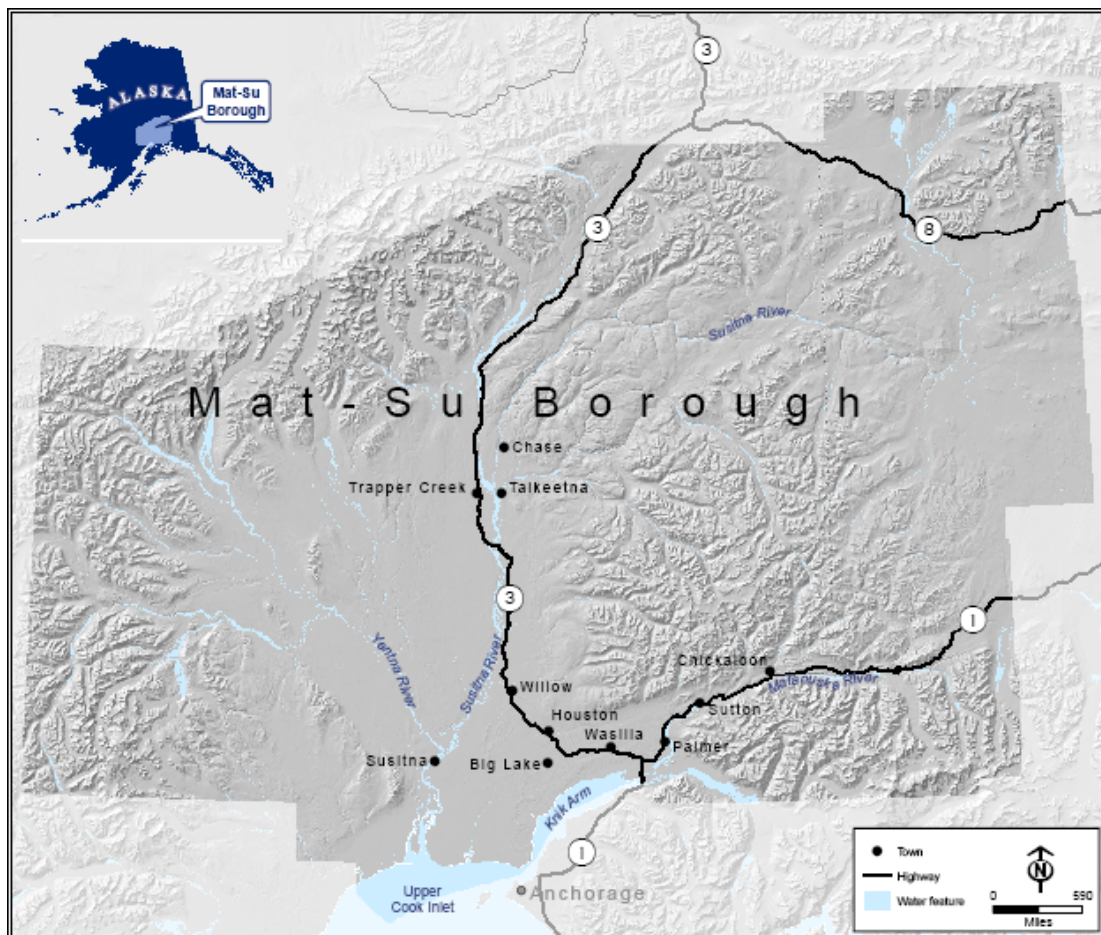
Denali State Park Management Plan (adopted 1986)

Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge Management Plan (adopted 1986, revised 1999)

Susitna Area Plan (adopted 1985, amended 1993)

Hatcher Pass Management Plan Amendment (adopted 1989)

Susitna Basin Forestry Guidelines (adopted 1991)



CODE ORDINANCE

By: Borough Manager
Introduced: 12/06/05
Public Hearing: 01/03/06
Adopted: 01/03/06

**MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH
ORDINANCE SERIAL NO. 06-001**

AN ORDINANCE AMENDING MSB 15.24.030(B)(1) TO ADOPT THE
MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH COMPREHENSIVE PLAN - 2005 UPDATE.

WHEREAS, the original Matanuska-Susitna Borough Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1970, and due to the increased population growth, infrastructure demands, and other impacts associated with development an updated plan is needed; and

WHEREAS, throughout the entire update process, the Borough solicited and accepted public comments, a planning committee met several times to discuss planning methods to address growth and development issues within the Borough, and a 60 day public review period provided the public, including community councils, an opportunity to comment on the draft plan; and

WHEREAS, Boroughwide issues such as transportation systems, economic development, housing, land use, and environmental quality need continued and expanded attention; and

WHEREAS, the 2005 update introduces specific goals and policies to address the many issues that the Borough must embrace in order to maintain the high quality of life we enjoy; and

WHEREAS, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Planning Commission adopted Resolution No. 05-44, recommending Assembly adoption of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Comprehensive Plan - 2005 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 paragraph. MSB 15.24.030(B)(1) is hereby amended to read as follows:

(1) Matanuska-Susitna Borough Comprehensive Development Plan, adopted 1970, amended (1998) 2005;

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 3 day of January, 2006.

/s/

TIMOTHY L. ANDERSON, Borough Mayor

ATTEST:

/s/

MICHELLE M. MCGEHEE, CMC, Borough Clerk (SEAL)

PASSED UNANIMOUSLY: Woods, Allen, Colberg, Kvalheim, Bettine,
Colver, and Vehrs