

# Meadow Lakes

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## Comprehensive Plan



ADOPTED  
OCTOBER 2005

Prepared by:  
The Meadow Lakes Community Council Planning Team

In partnership with:  
The Matanuska-Susitna Borough,  
Department of Planning and Land Use  
Agnew::Beck Consulting, LLC  
Land Design North

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## MEADOW LAKES COMMUNITY COUNCIL AREA COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

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### **With Assistance by**

Agnew::Beck Consulting, LLC

Working with Land Design North

## PREAMBLE

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Meadow Lakes is a rural residential community with a diverse population that enjoys a variety of lifestyles. The people appreciate the large tracts of trees and meadows, unspoiled lakes and streams and the majority want to keep that lifestyle. In exchange, residents have foregone some municipal services city dwellers commonly expect.

While change may come, this plan now offers us the opportunity to guide this growth. Evergreen buffers and large lots are two examples of strategies that will retain the rustic character found in Meadow Lakes.

Meadow Lakes is foremost a residential area. This plan respects and understands the need for balance between growth, private property rights, and various land uses and activities.

In an effort to maintain the quality of the meadows, streams, rivers, mountains and lakes, and the lifestyle currently enjoyed by the residents of Meadow Lakes, we offer this comprehensive plan.



*Preparing this Comprehensive Plan – The Meadow Lakes Community Council (MLCC) Planning Team*

# [CODE ORDINANCE ADOPTING THE PLAN]

Inserted once plan has been adopted.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This is the comprehensive plan for the Meadow Lakes Community Council (MLCC) Area. Meadow Lakes is located between Wasilla on the east, and Houston and Big Lake on the west. The area extends on the north to Baldy Mountain – the beginning of the Talkeetna Mountains - roughly three miles above the Little Susitna River. The southern boundary runs about two miles south of the Parks Highway, in the vicinity of Lucille Creek. The Parks Highway enters Meadow Lakes on the east at Mile 45 and exits the area on the west at Mile 52 (see map in Chapter 1).



Over the past fifty years, Meadow Lakes has evolved from an area of wilderness homesteads into a rural, yet increasingly suburban community. Over the past 12 years, the population has more than doubled to over 5,000 residents. This growth reflects an abundance of privately-owned, developable, and relatively low cost land. Meadow Lakes' attractive rural setting and easy access to growing employment and shopping centers in the rapidly developing Palmer and Wasilla areas are other factors contributing to its growth.

The purpose of preparing this comprehensive plan is to help residents, property owners, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, the State, developers, business owners, and other members of the community to work together to respond to both the challenges and opportunities posed by this growth and to guide future development in the Meadow Lakes area to meet community goals. Alaska Statutes Title 29.40.030 requires the Borough Assembly of a second-class borough, such as the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, to adopt a comprehensive plan by ordinance. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly adopted a borough-wide comprehensive plan in 1970. Upon consideration of updating that plan in 1985, the Assembly adopted Resolution 86-7 which established a policy of deferring to each Borough community the opportunity to prepare its part of the Borough's comprehensive plan. Based on the Borough Assembly's resolution, the Planning Commission established a process for a community to initiate and complete a community plan, which has been followed in the Meadow Lakes community as summarized in Table 1: Summary of Planning Process.

The effectiveness of a comprehensive plan is ultimately determined by the extent to which it is prepared and used. This document sets out policies that guide the use of public and private land, and helps to direct community and agency decisions about improvements to roads, trails and other public services and facilities. This plan also establishes strategies for economic development, environmental protection and improved local governance. By design, this is a long-term planning document. While this plan sets the general direction and establishes priorities, there may be additional projects, actions or policies needed to reach plan's goals.

The key to the success of any community planning process is the degree to which it builds upon the knowledge and the vision of the people who live in and care about the area. The

entire process to prepare this plan was organized to bring out and record the common goals of the people of the Meadow Lakes community. Major elements of this public process are summarized below:

**Table 1: Summary of Planning Process**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Action</b>
July 2001	Request received by the MSB planning division from the Meadow Lakes Community Council for Comprehensive Planning Assistance
May 2002	Solicited applications for Planning Team Members
October 2002	Planning Team members (13) appointed by Planning Commission
Oct 02 - Dec 03	Planning Team, meets with representatives of organizations likely to influence Meadow Lakes future (AKRR, Fire, DOT&PF, etc.)
Sept 2003	Planning Team, working with MSB staff, conducts community survey, sent to all post office box holders, regarding Meadow Lakes issues, characteristics, future
Sept-Oct 2003	Planning Team met to prepare RFP to solicit contractor to begin Comp Plan planning process
Oct 2003	RFP released, three proposals received; proposals reviewed, contractor selected
Dec 2003	Contract awarded to Agnew::Beck Consulting. Contract initially focused on "visioning workshop," but expanded to include preparing a comprehensive plan
Jan 04 - Feb 05	Monthly Planning Team meetings held, all publicized & noticed to allow participation by any interested parties. Visitors included Al Tellman of Knikatnu Corp.
March 2004	Release of " <i>Draft Issues and Goals Report</i> ", plus summary flyer (sent to all post office box holders and property owners in community)
April 5, 7 2004	Community-wide workshop, attended by 100+ community members, to review & refine Issues and Goals
Summer 2004	Revision of initial goals based on community input, continued research on key plan issues
Fall/Winter 2004-2005	Preparation of " <i>Draft Comp Plan</i> "
April 7, 9 2005	Community-wide Workshop
April 29, 2005	Deadline for receiving comments on Draft Plan
May 2005	Planning Team meeting to approve, forward revised Draft plan to Community Council for approval
June 2005	Community Council public hearing and approval of plan, recommendation to forward revised Draft plan to Planning Commission
July 2005	Planning Commission public hearing and approval of plan, recommendation to forward revised Draft plan to Assembly
Aug 2005	Assembly public hearing and approval of plan

## SUMMARY OF PLAN POLICIES

### Land Use & Town Center

1. Maintain the Community's Rural Character - Community surveys and public workshops show that for most residents, the area's rural character is one of the top motivations to live in Meadow Lakes. This character includes low density housing, friendly neighbors, limited traffic, large tracts of open land, good views, presence of wildlife, and ready access to trails, rivers, lakes, and recreation. Strategies to maintain and enhance this rural character include:
  - Minimum Lot Size - Encourage low density residential development in the majority of Meadow Lakes. Community sentiment greatly favors increasing the minimum lot size required under existing Borough standards<sup>1</sup>. A strong majority of those community residents who have participated in the planning process supported increasing the minimum lot size in new subdivisions to greater than the minimum 40,000 square feet Borough standard. In a few settings - at the planned town center, as part of open space subdivisions, and near the Parks Highway – higher density housing is appropriate, including smaller lot single family housing and, in the town center, attached and multi-family housing. In other areas, lots significantly larger than this are more appropriate, for example, in key watershed and wetland areas, and along the community's three major watersheds.
  - Open Space – Guide growth to retain and expand public open space, waterways and trails. Retain the “natural feel” of the community and the dominate sense of natural landscapes – forests, wetlands, streams, wildlife, and views.
  - Establish “Open Space” subdivision policies so sub-dividers are encouraged to retain land for trails and recreation and to protect natural areas like wetlands or streams (more details on Open Space subdivisions later in this chapter).
2. Concentrate and Screen Commercial Development; Avoid Sprawl along the Parks Highway
  - Location of Commercial Development - Encourage new commercial develop to locate in relatively concentrated nodes.
  - Green Space - Maintain several undeveloped “green spaces” along the Parks Highway to separate developed areas.
  - Appearance of Roadside Development - Require retention and/or planting of buffers, trees and other landscape features so roadside development is attractive. Where development does occur, encourage high quality, visually appealing site development and buildings.

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<sup>1</sup> Support for increasing the minimum lot size above existing MSB minimums has been strong through out the planning process. Starting with the original survey prepared at the outset of the planning process, residents have said what they most value about Meadow Lakes is rural character, open space/nature, and quiet. During the April 05 Community Workshops, an informal straw poll was taken on this issue and over 80 participants voted 8 to 1 in favor of increasing the minimum lot size.

3. Create A Pedestrian-Oriented, Mixed-Use Town Center. - The plan identifies the area along the south side of the Parks Highway near the Pittman road intersection as the best town center location. Develop the townsite through public-private partnerships. Public actions include improving vehicular and pedestrian access and transit, and siting public facilities in this area to serve as “anchors” for development.
4. Guide Location and Character of Development - Accept economic development activities, but also establish rules to minimize the environmental and off-site impacts of such activities. Specific strategies to reduce these impacts include:
  - Aim to reduce impacts of potential development, rather than prohibit uses. To carry out this approach the plan establishes land use standards to minimize impacts of development.
  - Discourage certain high impact uses in specific portions of the community, such as sand and gravel operations adjoining stream corridors.
  - Establish a special land use district that requires a conditional use permit for high impact uses and sets rules on the location and magnitude of these activities.
5. Establish a set of Land Use Districts that set out encouraged and discouraged uses and development standards in different parts of the Meadow Lakes area, emphasizing protection of river corridor open space, and concentration of commercial development
6. Prepare a Borough-approved Special Land Use District to implement the Comprehensive Plan’s land use recommendations.

## Recreation & Open Space

### 1. Reserve, Protect and Enhance Natural Features & Open Spaces on Public & Private Land

Almost all the undeveloped areas that give Meadow Lakes its pleasing rural character, and the watersheds that support the area's domestic wells, are private lands. The plan includes development standards to encourage private owners to use their lands in a manner that sustains the character of these lands and waterways. The plan also identifies a system of greenbelts along key stream and river corridors, including the Little Susitna River, Lucille Creek and the wetland/stream system crossing through the center of the community.

### 2. Retain, Dedicate and Improve a Community Trail System

The community wants to preserve traditional trails and reserve new trail routes, a challenging prospect given the lack of public lands in Meadow Lakes. In response, the Comp Plan recommends several key trail strategies:

- § Add roadside trails within existing rights-of-way, along Pittman, Church & Meadow Lakes Loop roads
- § Include roadside trails as part of construction or improvement of all future collector roads; with particular priority given to safe access for kids going from home to school, and a trail running east-west along a planned new east-west collector road.
- § Reserve trail access into the Baldy Mountain area, following the route of the one section of state land that crosses the Little Susitna River
- § Create a master trails plan that identifies critical linkages between residential areas, commercial areas, open space and recreation sites. Over time, negotiate or acquire public trail easements to develop a community wide trail system.

### 3. Establish System Of Parks, Recreation Facilities And Open Space To Meet Community Recreation Needs. Specific priorities include:

- § Complete a community parks master plan
- § Work with landowners to develop additional recreational facilities including a public access on the Little Susitna River.
- § Improve public lake access, including adding directional signs, trashcans and in some instances neighborhood park kid play facilities, and developing a community lakefront beach park.
- § Provide a community park as part of the town center development
- § Community Building - Proceed with plans for a community building (see Land Use and Public Facilities chapters); include with this project indoor recreation areas, and outdoor sports facilities.
- § Community Park - Reserve site for at least one large community park (20-60 acres); best options are at one of the two large borough parcels.

### 4. Create a Sustainable Recreation Management System - This may include developing a system so the community, working with the Borough and State, can generate fees from recreation users to cover costs such as emptying trash, maintaining trails and facilities, and providing and maintaining restrooms.

## **Circulation**

### **1. Guide Planned Expansion Of The Parks Highway To Create An Attractive, Efficient 'Parkway' That Benefits Meadow Lakes**

- § Create a controlled access, 4 lane highway, to reduce congestion, provide for efficient flow of through traffic and maximize safety. Minimize driveways and intersections.
- § Encourage the majority of commercial and industrial uses in the Meadow Lakes area to concentrate in several discrete districts, rather the spread along the length of the Highway.
- § Retain existing vegetation or provide landscaping so the large majority of the Highway is lined by trees. Retain several substantial areas adjoining the Parks Highway in a largely natural state, to create a clearer sense of identity for the Meadow Lakes.

### **2. Retain Church, Schrock, and Pittman As Collector Roads With Minimal Driveways And A Largely Rural, Undeveloped Feel**

### **3. Plan for Future Expansion Of The Residential Road System**

### **4. Identify Roads To Serve As Collectors**

As the number of homes steadily increases, many smaller residential roads begin functioning as collector roads (that is, roads that carry traffic from multiple subdivisions). To avoid inappropriate levels of use on residential roads, the Comprehensive Plan identifies a hierarchy of roads – a road system - with higher capacity collectors that are buffered from residential development. Roads identified for collector status include Beverley Lakes and Meadow Lakes Loop Road; routes identified for future collectors include a new east-west route crossing through the center of the community.

### **5. Other Circulation-related Comp Plan Goals include:**

- § Set Appropriate Standards for Road Development and Surfacing
- § Plan for Good Town Center Access
- § Plan For Continuing Railroad Use; Maintain Opportunities for Transit, including Rail and Carpools
- § Improve Road Maintenance

## **Public Services and Facilities**

Several public services and facilities needs have been identified through the planning process. Developing a multi-use community center facility is the overarching highest priority for Meadow Lakes. Public Services and Facilities goals are summarized below:

1. Develop a multi-use community center in Meadow Lakes.
2. Identify and develop other high priority community needs, including emergency access/egress, maintenance of quality and quantity of surface and subsurface domestic water supplies, and land for future schools.
3. Improve the community's capacity to fund development and operation of needed community services and facilities.

## **Economic Development**

The general approach on this topic is to find a balance for maintaining community character while encouraging opportunities for local residents to make a living in Meadow Lakes. There is a particular interest in developing opportunities for youth to find jobs in the community. Specific economic development goals include:

1. Encourage the expansion of job opportunities in the Meadow Lakes area while maintaining the rural character of the community.
2. Maintain recreational resources (open space, trails, lakes, etc.) both for residents and as a basis for attracting out-of-town visitors.
3. Guide the character and location of commercial and industrial development to minimize off-site impacts.

## **Community Governance & Identity**

Residents of Meadow Lakes want to improve their ability to guide growth and manage the demands on the community's resources. The completion of this Comprehensive Plan is an important step in strengthening Meadow Lakes' ability to guide and manage the shape of growth in the community. Residents are also cautious about finding the right level of local governance. The following outlines goals for strengthening the community's identity and addressing the community's control over its future.

1. Establish a stronger, positive image for Meadow Lakes.
2. Create an umbrella organization to provide community facilities and services.
3. Improve communication network (bulletin boards, phone, newspaper, email, newsletter, website, etc.)
4. Narrow priorities to increase odds of success of community projects

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Description	Page
Acknowledgements	i
Preamble	ii
Code of Ordinance Adopting the Plan	iii
Executive Summary	iv
<b>SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION &amp; MAJOR GOALS</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Summary of Plan Contents	1
1.2 Purpose	1
1.3 Legal Basis for Comprehensive Planning	2
1.4 Planning Area	3
1.5 Community Goals	3
1.6 Planning Context	5
1.7 Planning Process & Public Involvement	7
<b>SECTION 2: PLANNING BACKGROUND</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1 Social Environment	14
2.2 Natural & Physical Environment	21
2.3 Land Ownership, Management, and Use Patterns	23
2.4 Community Infrastructure	26
<b>SECTION 3: MAJOR GOALS &amp; STRATEGIES</b>	<b>30</b>
3.1 Land Use	30
3.2 Open Space & Recreation	56
3.3 Circulation	74
3.4 Public Services & Facilities	88
3.5 Economic Development	97
3.6 Community Governance & Identity	103
<b>SECTION 4: IMPLEMENTATION</b>	<b>110</b>
4.1 Summary of Priority Projects	110
4.2 Land Use & Town Center	112
4.3 Recreation & Open Space	116
4.4 Circulation	122
4.5 Public Services and Facilities	124
4.6 Economic Development	126
4.7 Community Governance & Identity	129
<b>SECTION 5: COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISION PROCESS</b>	<b>131</b>
5.1 Process for Revising the Comprehensive Plan	131

## **LIST OF TABLES, FIGURES, & MAPS**

---

Table 1: Summary of Planning Process	v
Table 2: What a Comprehensive Plan Is & Is Not	3
Table 3: Meadow Lakes Population Trends	6
Table 4: Public Involvement & Input Summary	8
Table 5: Average Annual Growth in MSB Communities	17
Table 6: School Enrollment Trends	17
Table 7: Socio-Economic Information on Meadow Lakes	18
Table 8: Meadow Lakes Plumbing & Heat Source Summary	27
Table 9: Summary of Meadow Lakes Service Providers & Status	29
Table 10: 2004 Numbers/ Sizes of Lots in MLCC Area	30
Table 11: Meadow Lakes Open Space & Recreation Priorities	59
Table 12: Meadow Lakes Recreation Users, Needs, and Recommendations	65
Figure 1: Residency Trends in Meadow Lakes	9
Figure 2: Why Residents Live in Meadow Lakes	9
Figure 3: Community Issues – Comparison of Adults & Students	10
Figure 4: What Residents Would Like to See Change in Meadow Lakes	10
Figure 5: Population Change in MSB Communities	16
Figure 6: Out-of-State Visitor Trends for Alaska	19
Figure 7: Vegetative Buffers Alternatives	37
Figure 8: Standard Versus Open Space Subdivisions	39
Map 1: Meadow Lakes Land Ownership	4
Map 2: Meadow Lakes Land Use Districts	41
Map 3: Meadow Lakes Trails, Recreation & Open Space	57
Map 4: Meadow Lakes Circulation	82

## **APPENDICES**

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Appendix A: Summary of Issues & Goals Report	
Appendix B: Workshop Flyer	
Appendix C: Comments Form	
Appendix D: Community Development Resources Guidebook	
Appendix E: Community Facilities Planning Workbook	
Appendix F: Matanuska-Susitna Borough Resolution 04-01 – Blue Ribbon Task Force	
Appendix G: USA on Watch Resources	
Appendix H: Citizen's Task Force	
Appendix I: Economic Tables	
Appendix J: Governance Alternatives & Tables	

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION & MAJOR GOALS

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### 1.1 Summary of Plan Contents

**Section One: Introduction & Major Goals** - Section One (this section) describes the purpose of this Meadow Lakes Comprehensive Plan and the legal basis for comprehensive planning. This section identifies the geographical area that the plan corresponds with; the overarching community goals; the context of this plan; and the planning process and public involvement in creating this plan.

**Section Two: Planning Background** - Section Two provides a detailed description of Meadow Lakes' social environment; its natural environment; the land ownership and land use patterns in the area; and the community's infrastructure.

**Section Three: Major Goals & Strategies** - The Comprehensive Plan will only be of value to Meadow Lakes if it helps the community achieve specific objectives, and provides guidance for the Borough investments to meet local priority needs. Section Three breaks down doable actions under each of the six major goals for Meadow Lakes: 1) Land Use; 2) Open Space and Recreation; 3) Circulation; 4) Public Services and Facilities; 5) Economic Development; and 6) Community Governance & Identity.

**Section Four: Implementation** – As a management tool, Section Four provides a summary of priority projects for Meadow Lakes. It also includes a matrix outlining specific projects that Meadow Lakes has identified throughout this Plan. The Implementation section provides vital guidelines for completing projects by identifying potential lead entities; providing general guidelines for expected capital costs; listing resources for completing projects; and summarizing a tentative schedule for completing projects.

**Section Five: Comprehensive Plan Revisions Process** – Section Five provides general guidelines for how and when revisions to the comprehensive plan typically take place.

### 1.2 Purpose

Meadow Lakes is an unincorporated community within the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB) that blends rural living with ready access to jobs and services. This Meadow Lakes Comprehensive Plan was developed by the Meadow Lakes community and local planning team, working with Borough staff and consultants. This Plan is a formal policy statement of Meadow Lakes' community goals and serves as a means for setting priorities, protecting what residents most enjoy about their community today, and guides growth to improve the community's future.

During the planning process between Spring 2003 and Spring 2005, Meadow Lakes' more than 5,000 residents<sup>2</sup> were invited to provide their input through a survey and multiple workshops. Over 400 Meadow Lakes residents participated in this planning effort.<sup>3</sup> A voluntary group of residents—the Meadow Lakes Community Planning Team — were

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<sup>2</sup> 2002 Data, AK DCED/US Census.

<sup>3</sup> The MSB Planning Department sent out 3,910 survey forms to all property owners of record within the Meadow Lakes Community boundaries and received 367 responses, or 9.3% of mailed survey forms (May – June 2003); residents also participated in a Meadow Lakes Community Workshop May 5 and 8, 2004 (110 attendees, and 65 on the respective days).

instrumental in developing this plan. Their many, many hours of work included background research, coordinating public workshops, conversations with local residents and interest groups, and reviewing and stepping in to draft major sections of the plan. The result is this comprehensive plan that has been prepared to represent what the community seeks for its future.

### **1.3 Legal Basis for Comprehensive Planning**

Comprehensive plans are long-term formal planning documents that state goals of a community and identify priority projects. Although comprehensive plans include land use guidelines, the comprehensive plan is not a zoning ordinance, an application for incorporation, or a method of taxation (see Table 2: What a Comprehensive Plan Is & Is Not).

This Comprehensive Plan serves as Meadow Lakes' portion of the Borough-wide Comprehensive Plan that is required by Alaska Statutes under Title 29.40.030. This provision mandates that second-class boroughs, like the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB), adopt a comprehensive plan as a "compilation of policy statements, goals, standards, and maps for guiding the physical, social, and economic development, both private and public" as part of their area-wide borough responsibilities. The Plan also meets specific borough requirements adopted under MSB Title 15.24.030 - that comprehensive plans be developed to:

- Promote safety for vehicular and pedestrian traffic, prevent congestion and preserve the function of roads;
- Secure safety from fire, flood, pollution, and other dangers;
- Promote general health and welfare;
- Promote for orderly development with a range of population densities in harmony with the ability to provide services efficiently, while avoiding overcrowding of population;
- Provide adequate light and air;
- Preserve the natural resources;
- Preserve property values;
- Promote economic development; and
- Facilitate adequate provision for transportation, water, waste disposal, schools, recreation, and other public requirements.
- Once passed by the Meadow Lakes Community Council and the MSB Assembly, this document will provide policy direction until modifications, future planning, or other actions provide a change of course.

**Table 2 – What A Comprehensive Plan Is & Is Not**

A Comp Plan is:	A Comp Plan is NOT:
A statement of community goals	A zoning ordinance
A formal document	An application for incorporation
A means of setting priorities	A method for taxation

### 1.4 Planning Area

The area covered by this plan is the Meadow Lakes Community Council area. This area is roughly seven by eight miles in size - or approximately 230,000 acres – and is located between the cities of Wasilla (east) and Houston (west); the community of Big Lake (south); and Baldy Mountain (north). More specifically, the Community Council boundaries extend on the north into the Talkeetna Mountains, roughly three miles above the Little Susitna River. The southern boundary runs parallel to and roughly two miles south of the Parks Highway, in the vicinity of Lucille Creek. The City of Houston borders to the west; the City of Wasilla to the east and generally following along Church Road. The Parks Highway enters Meadow Lakes on the east at Mile 45 and exits the area on the west at Mile 52 (see Map 1: Meadow Lakes Community Council Boundary and Land Ownership).

### 1.5 Community Goals

Throughout the planning process, the Planning Team and participating residents focused on six broad goals for the Meadow Lakes community’s future:

- Land Use
- Recreation and Open Space
- Public Services and Facilities
- Circulation
- Economic Development
- Community Governance and Identity

Building from this set of broad goals, the Meadow Lakes Comprehensive Plan explores how the community, the Borough, State agencies, and other entities can best serve residents, land owners and businesses in the area, while maintaining Meadow Lakes’ quality of life and natural setting - especially if the sustained growth of the past few years continues into the future.

**INSERT LAND OWNERSHIP MAP**

## 1.6 Planning Context

Meadow Lakes' natural features create an ideal setting for semi-rural living. Located in the Susitna River Basin, just below the more protected south-facing slope of the Talkeetna Mountains, Meadow Lakes is defined by its abundance of scenic lakes where residents can affordably live in a secluded, natural setting, while still having easy access to major employment and shopping centers in nearby Wasilla (10 minutes), Palmer (25 minutes) and Anchorage (60 minutes).

Meadow Lakes' proximity to world-class recreation and visitor attractions adds another dimension to residents' quality of life. Mt. McKinley, within the Denali National Park, and the Alaska Range are visible more than 200 miles to the north. This attraction brings tourists from around the world directly through Meadow Lakes by way of the Parks Highway. The volume of tourists traveling through the area number in the thousands per day during the peak season summer months. Close to home, the Hatcher Pass State Management Area borders Meadow Lakes to the north, and the Little Susitna River is literally enjoyed by some residents outside their back door. Additionally, Big Lake, Nancy Lake, the Deshka River and a number of other regional recreation destinations are easily accessible for weekend use.

As a community, Meadow Lakes currently enjoys some of the best elements of all worlds. In this scenic, semi-rural setting the Community Council is the primary form of governance, and residents have low taxes compared to neighbors residing further east and south. Yet residents enjoy a high level of access to services and infrastructure due to Meadow Lake's proximity to larger more developed communities, and easy access to major transportation systems.

This unincorporated community has attracted many people who prefer privacy, low taxes, and who like the voluntary, less structured approach to community governance. The current population base of about 5,316 residents in 2002<sup>4</sup> say they moved to the area to “get away from the city” and enjoy “seclusion close to town services”, or because it is “undeveloped, with little commercialism” as well as “the people and the space.”<sup>5</sup>

Although Meadow Lakes' name recognition may not currently be strong with a number of Alaskans—or even with the majority of travelers along the Parks Highway—many residents consider their community to be one of the best places to live in Alaska. Residents, overall, voiced a sense of satisfaction with their community's small town feel and natural setting. Many expressed a desire that Meadow Lakes remain low-key and off the beaten track.

Meadow Lakes, however, may not be able to maintain its quiet and slower pace of life. The community has grown tremendously over the past 12 years (at 120%) rivaling the population growth in Wasilla (see Table 3: Meadow Lakes Population Trends). Between 1990 and 2002, the population of communities from Wasilla to Talkeetna has almost doubled. This suggests that the population explosion in Wasilla has caused people to seek land in the communities to the west where the rural lifestyle and low cost of housing is still available.

As long as Alaska's economy remains strong, it appears that Meadow Lake's growth will continue. The community has extensive vacant private land, and much of this land is

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<sup>4</sup> Alaska DCED/US Census 2002 data.

<sup>5</sup> Meadow Lakes property owners survey responses.

physically suited for development. For example, there are currently nearly 2,000 vacant subdivided lots of less than five acres in the the Meadow Lakes Community Council area.<sup>6</sup> In addition, many thousands of acres of private land are available in larger acreage parcels that could be subdivided in the future.

Some residents are pleased with growth as long as it raises their local property values, and helps them to benefit from investments in “future development potential”<sup>7</sup>. It also creates an economy of scale that could mean a small business district, a new high school, jobs, vocational training and youth programs, and other perceived benefits for residents.

However, “rapid growth” and “all the new growth” were big concerns for other residents.<sup>8</sup> If the growth continues, then what Meadow Lakes is like in five, ten, or twenty years depends to a great degree on how the community responds to these serious questions that were raised and discussed at length during the Comprehensive Plan process:

- Will the area lose the characteristics that attracted us to Meadow Lakes in the first place (privacy, quiet, scenic beauty, nice people, rural feel)?
- Will we lose our access to lakes and trails, and ability to recreate from our back door?
- How do we address growing problems of trash, vandalism, dust, noise, dogs, drug use, etc.?
- How do we address new service and infrastructure needs?
- Will growth drive us to have higher taxes, and an increased level of government (incorporation, annexation by Wasilla)?

Within this context, the challenge of this Comprehensive Plan has been to define how actively Meadow Lakes want to shape their future, and to provide strategies for achieving community goals no matter what changes the future brings.

**Table 3 – Meadow Lakes Population Trends**

Year	Population
1980	N/A
1990	2374
1999	5232
2002	5316

Source (AK DCED/US Census)

*Meadow Lakes Percentage 10 year growth: 120 % population*

<sup>6</sup> Based on 2004 information provided by the MSB assessors office as compiled by Agnew::Beck. These data show 659 two to five acre lots (37% vacant); 1495 one to two acre lots (47% vacant); and 1957 lots of less than one acre (56% vacant). In many instances, a single owner may own several adjoining lots, use one parcel for a residence, and intend to keep the adjoining parcels vacant.

<sup>7</sup> Meadow Lakes property owners survey responses.

<sup>8</sup> Meadow Lakes property owners survey responses.

## 1.7 Planning Process & Public Involvement

*“It is the intent of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough government to learn of and respect each community’s desires for its present and future way of life and to insure that these desires become each community’s portion of the Mat-Su Borough Comprehensive Plan.” - Assembly Resolution 86-7*

The MSB Code encourages communities to develop Comprehensive Plans (Assembly Resolution 86-7; PC Resolution 93-27) and helps communities prepare and implement Plans by providing technical assistance, background information, staff or consultant support, and the opportunity to take part in the Borough’s annual capital improvements programs. This plan was sponsored by MBS’s Planning Department and completed by Agnew::Beck Consulting working with Land Design North in 3 phases.

**Phase 1** of the project included creation of a Meadow Lakes Planning Team, preliminary research and analysis, a formal community survey and analysis, preparation and circulation of a Comprehensive Plan informational mailer and the creation of an “Issues and Goals” report. Phase 1 culminated with the first Community Workshops, held May 5 and 8, 2004. At the end of Phase 1, goals, and general strategies to reach these goals, were identified as a basis for Comp Plan development.

**Phase 2**, which encompassed summer 2004 through winter 2004/05, focused on developing practical strategies to accomplish the goals identified in Phase 1 consistent with community values. Phase two’s culmination is this Comprehensive Plan, reflecting the community’s input from the first workshop and work by the Planning Team, Borough Staff, and the Consultants.

**Phase 3**, the final phase of the process, includes a review of the Comprehensive Plan, delivery of a final Comprehensive Plan to be approved of and officially adopted by the Meadow Lakes Community Council and the MSB Planning Commission and Assembly.

MSB’s Assembly recognizes that public involvement and knowledge of community desires are key to a successful Comprehensive Plan. The planning effort for Meadow Lakes, initiated in the spring of 2003 and completed in October 2004, was designed to gather resident’s input in a variety of ways that are listed in the Table 4: Public Involvement & Input Summary.

**Table 4 - Public Involvement and Input Summary**

A.	May 2003	Issues identification survey sent to all Meadow Lakes Boxholders with notification of project initiation
B.	June 2003	Comprehensive planning issue survey mailed to all Meadow Lakes property owners
C.	Apr. 2004	Meadow Lakes Comprehensive Planning Issues and Goals Brochure mailed to all boxholders summarizing initial findings, and announcing upcoming public meetings, and availability of full Issues and Goals report
D.	May 2004	Community Planning Workshops (two days)
E.	Ongoing	Coordination and discussions with the Meadow Lakes Community Planning Team
F.	Ongoing	Discussions with land and business owners, agencies, and large land owners like the Alaska Railroad and the University of Alaska
G.	Feb 05	Release of this Comprehensive Plan for Community Review
H.	Spring 05	Formal Review, Revision and Adoption of the Comp Plan

**A. Issues Identification Survey**

In May 2003, surveys were sent to all box holders in the Meadow Lakes area, asking questions to help identify community plan issues for further study and discussion in the planning effort. Overall, more than 350 responses were received.

**B. Comprehensive Planning Issue Survey**

In June 2003, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Planning Department mailed 3,910 survey forms to all property owners of record within the Meadow Lakes Community boundaries. The survey was intended to assess general information; where people worked, how long they lived in Meadow Lakes, and information about the households size and demographics. Most questions asked about preferences for services and facilities or opinions about community values. The survey was a precursor to the community-wide visioning process designed to identify issues of concern, desired future development and facilities and help direct community projects.

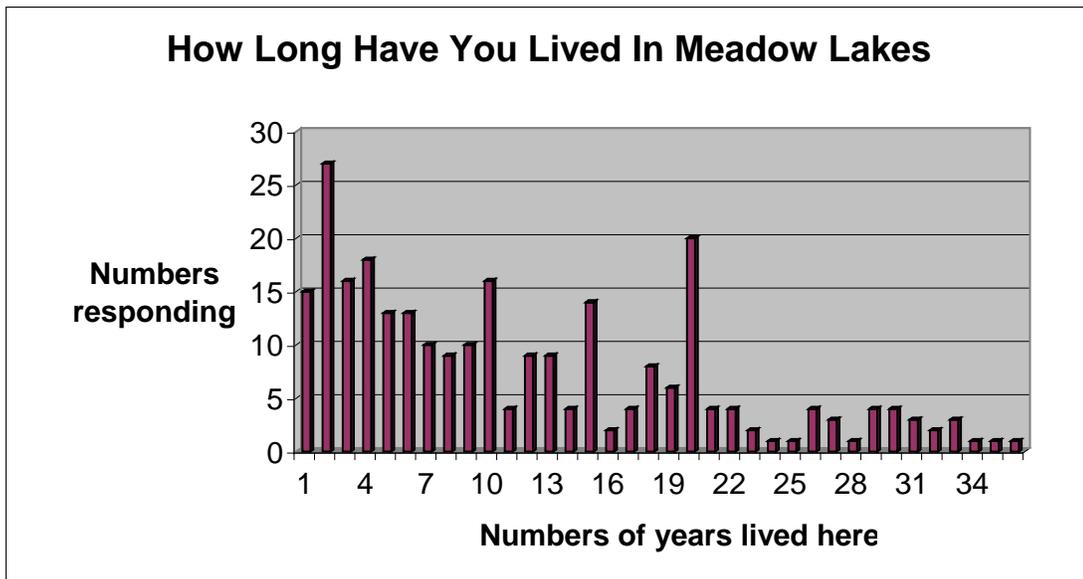
The surveys were bulk mailed with addresses provided by the Borough assessors office and represented the best know addresses at that time. The survey form provided for a self-return with postage prepaid by the borough. Mailings began the week of May 5, 2003 and forms were marked with a return deadline of June 9, 2003. The Mat-Su Borough Planning department received 367 responses or 9.3% of the mailed forms. The percentage of residents versus non-residents from the Borough mailing list of 3,910 addresses compares well (standard deviation 0.006) with the survey results and indicates that respondents were representative of total population of residents and non-residents. The summary of these surveys is provided on the following pages.

**Summary of Survey Results:**

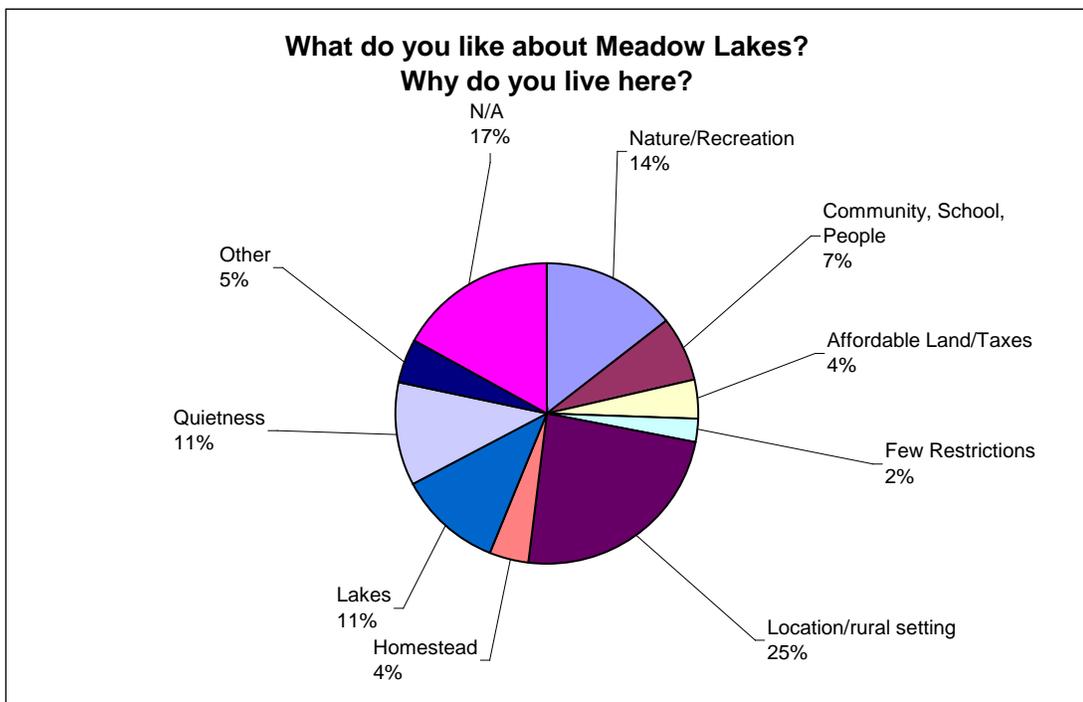
Amongst respondents to the survey, 33% had lived in Meadow Lakes for less than three years (see Figure 1). The second largest group of respondents had lived in Meadow Lakes for 20 years.

25% of respondents to the survey rated 'location and rural setting' as the reason they live in Meadow Lakes (see Figure 2). Other top responses include 'quietness', 'nature/recreation' and 'lakes'. Most adults and students agree that Meadow Lakes is a good place to live and that lakes, wetlands and water quality are important. However, students were more in favor of additional recreation programs and bike trails than adults (see Figure3).

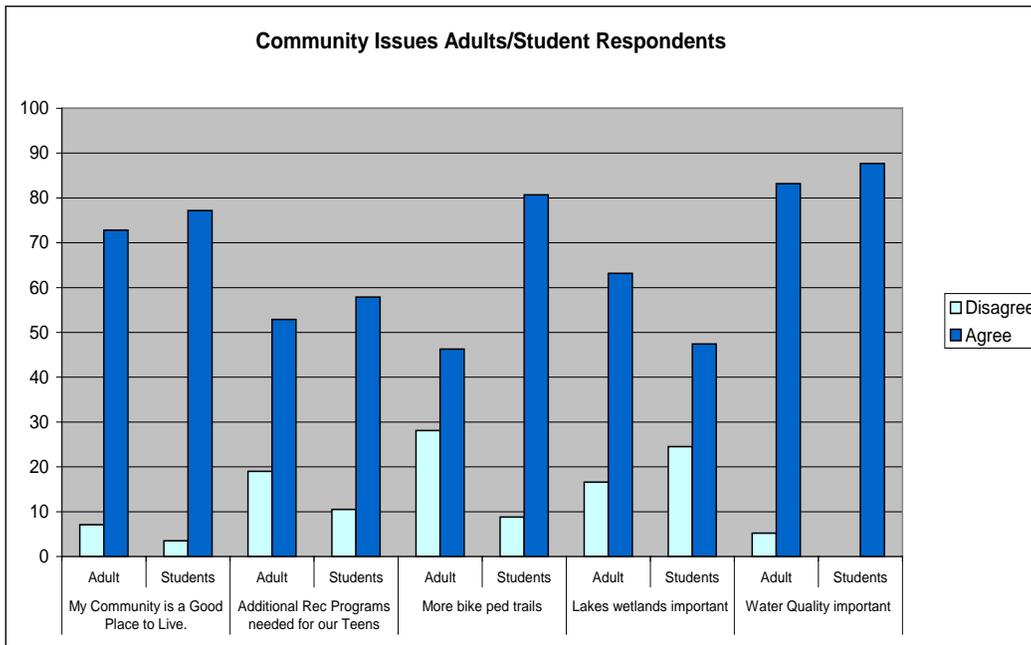
**Figure 1 – Residency Trends in Meadow Lakes**



**Figure 2 – Why Residents Live in Meadow Lakes**

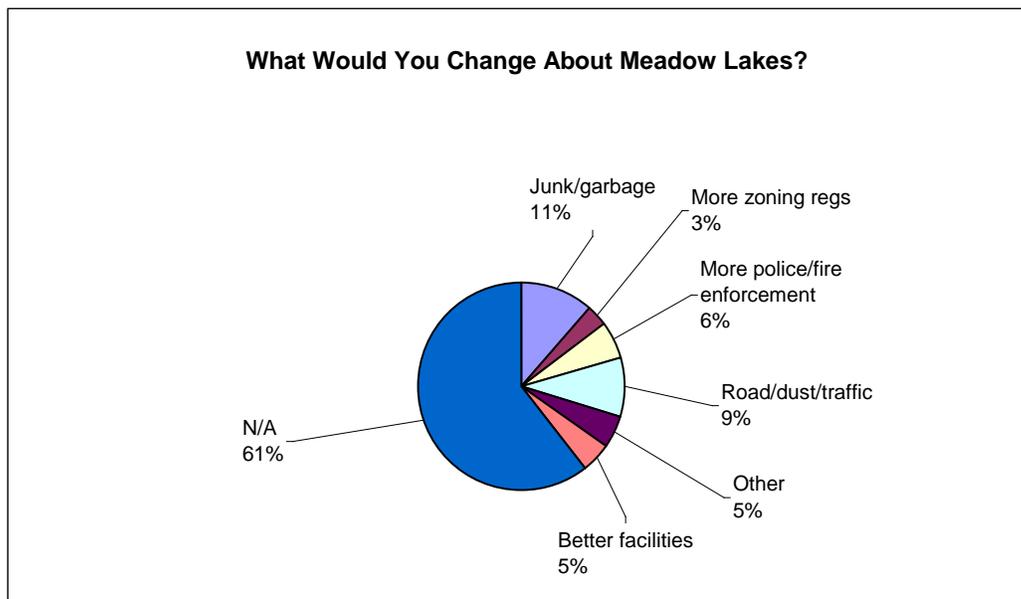


**Figure 3 – Community Issues – Comparison of Adults and Students**



When asked what they would like to change about Meadow Lakes (see Figure 4), most respondents (61%) did not give an opinion. This is significant because it demonstrates a general contentment with the status quo. However, if residents seek to preserve the qualities they enjoy in Meadow Lakes, while the population in the area and the region continue to grow, some planning for the future is necessary.

**Figure 4 – What Residents Would Like to See Change in Meadow Lakes**



Of those who responded, the most common issues were cleaning up junk and garbage and solving congestion and dust problems with area roads.

Similarly, when asked what residents don't like about Meadow Lakes, 36% did not answer the question. Of those who responded, 'junk/litter' topped the list with 18%, with 'road/access problems' and 'not enough regulations/ enforcement' with 14% and 10% respectively.

When asked what kind of development residents would prefer to see for the future of Meadow Lakes, respondents favored single family residences, road access, open space, clinic/ EMT and parks. Respondents did not favor multi-family residences, heavy industry or cemeteries. 42% of respondents favored lot sizes between 1 and 2 acres. 25% of respondents 'strongly disagreed' that more residential growth is desirable in Meadow Lakes. This seems to indicate a preference for maintaining a relatively low-density, rural community.

29% of respondents commute to Anchorage for employment, 48% work somewhere in the MSB. 19% of respondents operate home-based businesses. This is a niche that could be further explored for small-scale tourism related businesses, Internet-based employment such as data processing, or small-scale manufacturing and marketing, such as crafts.

Overall, the survey indicates many areas where residents are neutral or evenly split over the desirability of added services. Points where considerable agreement is evident include:

- Respondents support additional recreation programs for teens
- Respondents agree that medical services are needed in Meadow Lakes
- Road maintenance is not considered adequate
- Respondents believe that Meadow Lakes is a good place to live and that what other people think of Meadow Lakes is important
- Well and septic systems are functioning adequately for most respondents
- Lakes and wetlands, air and water quality are important and should be protected
- Dust control on neighborhood roads is needed
- Signs should be limited in size and content
- Heavy industrial growth is not needed

### **C. Issues and Goals Report**

In April 2004 an Issues and Goals report was produced. A brochure summarizing the report was mailed to all Meadow Lakes box holders, including preliminary research, the community survey findings and analysis, preliminary Comp Plan goals based on the survey and an announcement and supplemental material to prepare residents for participation in the Community Workshops, held May 5 and 8, 2004. A summary of the Issues and Goals Report is provided in Appendix A at the end of this document.

### **D. First Community Workshop**

The purpose of the Community Workshops was to define a broad vision and outline main goals for the Meadow Lakes Community's future, based on community-wide values. The two-day workshop had good public participation and progress was made toward a vision for the future of Meadow Lakes.

About 110 people attended Thursday night's session, which included a presentation on the project (background, Comp Plan process, strategies and goals for the future) and facilitated

break-out sessions on Land Use, Circulation, Recreation & Open Space, and Public Services & Facilities.

Saturday's session saw about 65 attendees. The consultants presented a PowerPoint slide show summarizing Thursday's break-out session. This was the basis for a lengthy, constructive large-group community discussion. The points raised Thursday were generally affirmed on Saturday by the group, and more suggestions were offered about goals and specific strategies. All of the feedback from both workshops was recorded for use in the Comp Plan.

### **Additional Feedback and Research Needed**

Suggestions were made about new information needed for the Comp Plan process – and means to get feedback from a greater portion of the Meadow Lakes population. Some people expressed a desire to better learn the intent of private landowners regarding future use of their lands, or at least to get more data about existing uses. Others were interested in involving younger residents (middle-school and high-school-aged children and teenagers) for educational purposes, and also in recognition that they would be directly affected by decisions made as part of the current Comp Plan process. Still others were hopeful that the process would continue to engender a sense of community, volunteerism and responsibility which would help carry the Comp Plan forward.

### **E. Coordination and Discussions with the Meadow Lakes Community Planning Team**

A voluntary group of residents established by the Meadow Lakes Community Council and MSB played a significant role in developing the Comprehensive Plan and in obtaining local input by coordinating meetings, working to involve residents and major interest groups, gathering information, and helping to prepare the comprehensive plan.

### **F. Discussions with Land and Business Owners, Agencies, and Large Land Owners like the Alaska Railroad and the University of Alaska**

Over the course of the project, the Planning Team has sponsored presentations by key parties whose actions are likely to influence the future of the community. Presentations and discussions occurred throughout this planning process.

### **G. Release and Review of the Draft Comprehensive Plan**

In March 2005, the draft comprehensive plan was completed and released for public comment. During the public comments phase of reviewing the draft plan, there were several ways for the Meadow Lakes community to give their input. First, was a Community Workshop held at the elementary school in Meadow Lakes on April 7, 2005 from 6:30 pm – to 9:30 pm and again on April 9, 2005 from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm (see Appendix B: Workshop Flyer). Second, the draft comprehensive plan and comments forms were available online at [www.agnewbeck.com](http://www.agnewbeck.com) where they could be downloaded and printed (see Appendix C: Comments Form). Comments were mailed to Agnew::Beck Consulting, ATTN: MEADOW LAKES COMP PLAN COMMENTS, 441 West 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 202, Anchorage, AK 99501. Third, comments were also faxed to (907) 222-5426 or emailed to [maryanne@agnewbeck.com](mailto:maryanne@agnewbeck.com) with subject line “MEADOW LAKES COMP PLAN

COMMENTS.” The deadline for submitting public comments on the draft comprehensive plan was April 29, 2005.

#### **H. Steps to Complete the Review and Approval of the Draft Comp Plan**

After the public comments phase, the Meadow Lakes Community Planning Team again reviewed and revised the draft comprehensive plan. Once approved, the Planning Team will pass it on to the Meadow Lakes Community Council for approval. Once the comprehensive plan has been approved at the local level, the Borough’s Planning Commission will review and approve the plan. Finally, the Borough Assembly will review and approve the comprehensive plan to be formally and legally adopted. Once formally adopted, a Borough code ordinance adopting the plan will be completed. This code ordinance adopting the plan will also be included in the final comprehensive plan.

Once formally adopted, it will be the responsibility of the Meadow Lakes Community Council to work on implementing the comprehensive plan. The Council will work with others in the community and the Borough to take steps to accomplish the goals of this comprehensive plan. Since comprehensive plans are long-term (typically 20-year) planning documents, they are typically reviewed and revised every five years to identify successes and changes in implementing the plan. Any changes to the comprehensive plan require local approval as well as review and approval by the Borough Planning Commission and Borough Assembly.

## 2.0 PLANNING BACKGROUND

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### 2.1 Social Environment

#### SETTING AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

Over the past thirty years, Meadow Lakes has evolved from an area of wilderness homesteads into one of Alaska's fastest growing residential communities. This growth reflects a combination of three key factors: an abundance of privately-owned, developable, and relatively low cost land, Meadow Lakes' attractive rural setting, and easy access to growing employment and shopping centers via the Parks Highway.

Located within the Matanuska-Susitna Borough—currently the fastest growing borough in the state—Meadow Lakes has doubled its population over the past 12 years to more than 5,000 residents. Generally, the Meadow Lakes area attracts young, middle-income families seeking a rural lifestyle that is accessible and affordable. A large majority of those who live in Meadow Lakes work outside the community. According to survey results collected in 2003 by the Mat-Su Borough, 10% of the local working population has jobs in Meadow Lakes; an additional 38% work in other areas of the Mat-Su Borough; and 29% work in Anchorage.

While a setting for rapid residential growth, most land in Meadow Lakes remains undeveloped. Residents continue to enjoy many of the freedoms found in a rural setting. This is further enhanced by residents' access to an abundance of scenic lakes and natural features that have attracted people to the area for centuries.

Arriving approximately 2,000 years ago, the Athapaskan people found a bountiful subsistence area between three major river systems, namely the Susitna, Matanuska and Knik Rivers that discharge into Knik Arm, in Upper Cook Inlet. The numerous lakes located within Meadow Lakes, were an important component of that region. The district provided plenty of sources for fresh water; and the potential for rich harvests of geese and water fowl, that were hunted and caught in early spring and late fall from the edges of marshes. Worked stone tools have been found in Meadow Lakes attesting to its early occupation.

Early residents hunted and snared numerous, small, fur-bearing animals frequenting the area. A variety of herbaceous vegetation, spruce and birch trees yielded a diversity of foods, medicines, berries and raw materials for tools. In summer and fall, salmon returned to spawn in local rivers and streams and provided an important subsistence food.

Early inhabitants entering this subsistence-rich region abandoned their entirely nomadic seasonal cycles to adopt a more sedentary life style. They built their dwellings near inland lakes protected from marauding Alutiiq coastal raiding parties. Most of the villages consisted of a cluster of semi-subterranean houses occupied by extended families. Each grouping had a chief or rich man that took care of the families. Villages were occupied predominantly during the winter months between November and March. In spring and early fall fish camps were set up at the mouths of major waterways to take advantage of the anadromous fish runs. Late in the fall the men hunted for large animals while the women picked berries and trapped smaller fur bearers.

It is unknown how far inland the coastal Alutiiq people lived. They occupied Outer Cook Inlet, Kenai Peninsula and Upper Cook Inlet, Knik Arm coastal regions, prior to arrival of

the Athapaskans. The incursion of the Athapaskan people pushed the Alutiiq out of Upper Cook Inlet and the Kenai coastal areas. Linguistic studies show that the first Athapaskans to reach the Matanuska and Susitna region were the Dena'ina. Later the Copper River Ahtna moved into the region from the northeast, predominantly settling near upper Matanuska River. Often wintering over in the lower valley, they mingled and intermarried with the Dena'ina.

After Russian contact, Athapaskans, located near Russian outposts on the Kenai Peninsula, traded briskly for furs with the Upper Cook Inlet Dena'ina. As small furbearing animals of this region became scarcer, Dena'ina chiefs went north and west trading for furs procured from Dena'ina further inland. Acting as middlemen, the chiefs became rich in imported trading goods during the early and mid-nineteenth century. The 1840 small pox epidemic significantly changed this region's demographics. Over 50% of the native population perished from the disease. Soon thereafter the Dena'ina started to abandon traditional home lands in favor of coastal villages and the established trading posts. In 1867 Russian Alaska was sold to the United States. Although the fur trade continued to be a major economic force in the region, prospectors soon started arriving in search of gold. Located just north of Meadow Lakes, the Talkeetna Mountain Range attracted early prospectors seeking placer gold in the Little Susitna and tributaries of Willow Rivers.

Knik townsite was established as a direct outcome of the late nineteenth century Upper Cook Inlet gold rush. It was situated on the west side of Knik Arm. The settlement generated numerous new trails radiating out to various mining concerns. It is quite probable that by the turn of the twentieth century, Meadow Lakes became an important wood harvesting area to supply west Hatcher Pass placer mines with lumber for sluice boxes and after 1906 timbers for underground quartz mining.

For the next fifty years a sparse population of gold miners, trappers and woodsmen inhabited the area. Homesteaders settled the area after World War II, and the area continued to develop after a Department of Natural Resources land disposal during the mid-1960s.<sup>9</sup> The remoteness and beauty of the area, encompassing numerous lakes and streams, helped to attract the first homesteaders to the area. Homesteaders were motivated by the prospect of owning their own land through hard work. Homesteading laws required them not only to build their homes on their respective properties, but to clear and farm their lands before they could own it. A number of families took advantage of the Homesteading Act contributing to permanent settlement in Meadow Lakes.

Between 1975 and 1985, following construction of the oil pipeline from the North Slope to Valdez, the area sustained a boom in house construction. During that period a number of homesteaders profited from creating new housing developments by subdividing their land. By the late 1980s, during an economic slump, Meadow Lakes (similar to other regions of the valley) suffered attrition in population. In the twenty first century Meadow Lakes is now experiencing a resurgence in population as people, once again, are seeking to build within the beauty and tranquility of Meadow Lakes.

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<sup>9</sup> State of Alaska, Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development (DCCED), Division of Community Advocacy, Alaska Community Database Community Information Summaries (CIS), Meadow Lakes – History, Culture and Demographics.

## POPULATION TRENDS

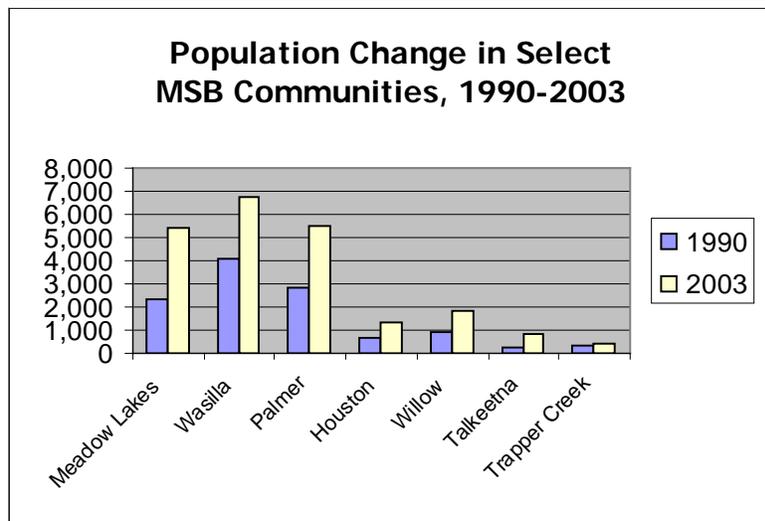
Within the rapidly growing Matanuska-Susitna Borough, over a remarkably short period of time, places like Wasilla have gone from just a handful of buildings and residences, to large diverse communities. Wasilla was a sleepy, wide spot in the road with a population of 300 people in 1974; in 2000 the population was 5,469. The Matanuska Susitna Borough population grew from 39,683 to 59,322 between the 1990 and 2000 census, an increase of almost 50% in 10 years. In contrast, Alaska's population as a whole grew 14% in the same period.

Most of the Borough's growth took place in Wasilla, Palmer, and surrounding areas (see Figure 5: Population Change in MSB Communities). These communities are evolving from being primarily bedroom communities for Anchorage, into cities with much expanded retail and commercial services sectors. Meadow Lakes has attracted much of this growth and its population has grown remarkably within the past 12 years, reaching 5300 people in 2002, and making Meadow Lakes one of the fastest growing and largest areas in the borough.

Over the next twenty years, if the state economy stays healthy, recent growth trends for the Matanuska Susitna Borough are likely to continue and Meadow Lakes could easily again double in size, especially given the following characteristics:

- Convenient location near major employment centers, in Wasilla, Palmer and Anchorage
- Improvements in transportation, in particular, continued upgrades to the Parks Highway, and the possible construction of the Knik Arm Bridge (this latter project would not appreciably change commuting times between Meadow Lakes and Anchorage, but would likely increase the overall rate of growth in the southern Borough)
- Large supply of undeveloped private land, physically suited for development including nearly 2000 vacant subdivided lots of less than 5 acres in the community<sup>10</sup> and many thousands of acres of private land in larger parcels that could be subdivided in the future.
- Land prices that continue to be relatively low compared to Anchorage.

**Figure 5 – Population Change in MSB Communities**



<sup>10</sup> Based on 2004 information provided by the MSB assessors office as compiled by Agnew Beck. These data show 659 two to five acre lots (37% vacant); 1495 one to two acre lots (47% vacant); and 1957 lots of less than one acre (56% vacant). In many instances, a single owner may own several adjoining lots, use one parcel for a residence, and intend to keep the adjoining parcels vacant.

Over the first three years of this decade, growth in Meadow Lakes had slowed to a rate comparable to the MSB as a whole (State of Alaska Department of Labor, Research and Analysis), after being higher than the MSB as a whole for twelve years. While the rural atmosphere of Meadow Lakes gives the impression of a smaller population, there were actually more people living in Meadow Lakes than Palmer in the 2000 Census: 4,819 in Meadow Lakes vs. 4,533 in Palmer. Figure 5 (above) and Table 5 (below) show that between 2000 and 2003 Meadow Lakes continued to grow, increasing by 624 people.

**Table 5 – Average Annual Growth in MSB Communities**

	1990	2000	2003	average annual growth	
				90-00	00-03
<b>Population</b>					
Meadow Lakes	2,374	4,819	5,443	7.3%	3.7%
Wasilla	4,049	5,469	6,715	3.1%	6.3%
Palmer	2,866	4,533	5,474	4.7%	5.8%
Houston	697	1,202	1,339	5.6%	3.3%
Willow	932	1,658	1,838	5.9%	3.2%
Talkeetna	250	772	847	11.9%	4.8%
Trapper Creek	296	423	426	3.6%	0.2%
Mat-Su Borough	39,683	59,322	67,473	4.0%	4.0%
Anchorage Municipality	226,338	260,283	274,003	1.4%	1.6%
State of Alaska	550,043	626,932	648,818	1.3%	1.1%

Source: US Census 2000; State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development

## RESIDENT CHARACTERISTICS

When compared with MSB as a whole, Meadow Lakes falls close to average on all of the social indicators listed in the table below. The population is slightly younger than average, with more young children and fewer seniors. There is also a slightly higher rate of employment in Meadow Lakes as compared with MSB as a whole.

Both Meadow Lakes Elementary and Houston Junior and Senior High Schools are experiencing an increase in enrollment, while Wasilla is experiencing a decline in enrollment (see Table 6: School Enrollment Trends). Meadow Lakes Elementary was reduced from a K-6 program to a K-5 program at the end of the 2002-2003 school year. School officials estimate that if the school were still accepting sixth grade students, current enrollment would be 475 students (Meadow Lakes School, personal communication). Again, these data indicate that the qualities of life that have historically spurred population growth in MSB's Core Area (rural lifestyle, access to recreation, etc.) are now spurring growth in the outlying communities which have maintained those qualities as the Core Area has grown.

**Table 6 – School Enrollment Trends**

	2001	2002	2003
<b>Wasilla Middle/High</b>	2016	1793	1818
<b>Houston Middle/high</b>	559	594	667
<b>Meadow Lakes Elementary</b>	348	413	418

Among respondents to the survey conducted in 2003 by the Meadow Lakes Community Council and MSB, described in Section One, 33% had lived in Meadow Lakes for less than three years. The second-largest group of respondents had lived in Meadow Lakes for 20 years. This suggests Meadow Lakes is a community containing a group of older residents who chose to live in the community when it had little in the way of services, and was a very rural area on the outskirts of Wasilla – what was then a very small town. Added to this group now is a more recently arrived segment of residents. These newer settlers may hold values similar to those of longer-term residents, but are choosing to live in Meadow Lakes for slightly different reasons – because of the combination of rural setting with close proximity to employment opportunities and other services.

## SUMMARY OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC INFORMATION

**Table 7 – Socio-Economic Information on Meadow Lakes**

<b>House District</b>	<u>15</u>
<b>Senate District</b>	<u>H</u>
<b>Population: 1980</b>	<u>N/A</u>
<b>Population: 1990</b>	<u>2,374</u>
<b>Population: 1999</b>	<u>5,232</u>
<b>Population: 2002</b>	<u>5,316</u>
<b>Percentage 10-Year Growth</b>	<u>120%</u>
<b>City Type</b>	<u>Unorganized Community Council</u>
<b>Area</b>	<u>67 square miles</u>
<b>Recording District</b>	<u>Palmer</u>
<b>Major Road Access</b>	<u>George Parks Highway</u>
<b>Percent Native Population</b>	<u>8.1%</u>
<b>Median Age</b>	<u>32.7</u>
<b>2000 Housing Units</b>	<u>2,003</u>
<b>Percent Seasonal Housing</b>	<u>7% (138 dwelling units)</u>
<b>Median House Value</b>	<u>\$105,300</u>
<b>Median Household Income</b>	<u>\$41,030</u>
<b>Percent Below Poverty</b>	<u>17.1%</u>
<b>Percent Not Seeking Work</b>	<u>41.7%</u>
<b>Top Employment Categories</b>	<u>Education-Social Services</u> <u>Retail</u> <u>Arts-Entertainment</u>

## EMPLOYMENT & INCOME DISTRIBUTION

According to the survey conducted in 2003 by the Meadow Lakes Planning Team and MSB, 48% of employed Meadow Lakes residents work within the MSB; 29% commute to Anchorage.

According to the US Census 2000, Meadow Lakes has a comparably high poverty rate with 17.1% of the population living below the poverty line, compared to 9.6% in Wasilla (a rate

only slightly higher than the state as a whole: 9.3%). The median household income in Meadow Lakes (\$41,030), however, is comparable to Wasilla's (\$48,226), which indicates an income gap between wealthy and lower income residents. That is, in order for there to be similar median household incomes in the two communities simultaneous with a divergence in poverty rates, there must be a significant number of wealthier residents in Meadow Lakes to offset the considerable number of lower-income residents indicated by the higher poverty rate. This observation is further borne out by the higher rate of houses lacking complete plumbing and kitchen; in Meadow Lakes the rate is between 11-12%, while in Wasilla the rate is nearly 1%. (See Table 7: Socio-Economic Information on Meadow Lakes.)

## HOUSING VALUES

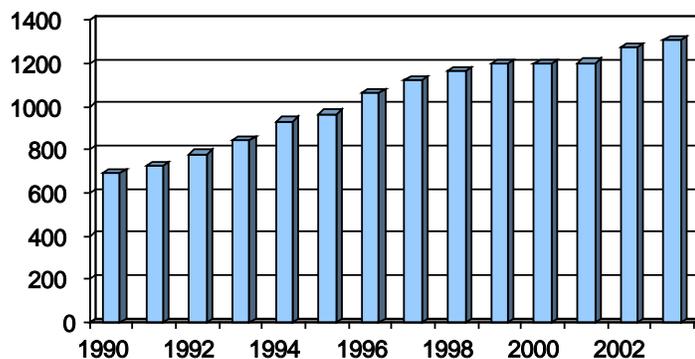
Buying a house in Meadow Lakes continues to be affordable by general MSB standards. The median value of homes in the Meadow Lakes area is \$105,300, compared to MSB's average of \$125,800 and the state average of \$144,200. There are seven houses per square mile in the total Meadow Lakes area, compared to approximately two houses per square mile in MSB overall (US Census 2000). The higher density in Meadow Lakes can make providing services less expensive than areas where the population is more spread out.

## TOURISM GROWTH RATES IN ALASKA

Like Alaska as a whole, tourism grew dramatically in MSB between 1990 and 2000. Most recently, as Figure 6: Out-of-State Visitors Trends for Alaska shows, out-of-state visitors to Alaska have continued to grow, but at a declining rate.

While Meadow Lakes is not an important destination for visitors, there is potential for recreation-related visitors, if amenities were developed on the area's lakes and trails. The portion of the community adjoining the Parks Highway, a main corridor for out-of-state visitors, could attract greater commercial activity if the area was developed in a manner that encouraged visitors to stop their cars and spend time and money in the area.

**Figure 6 –Out-of-State Visitors Trends for Alaska**



Source: Alaska Visitor Statistics Program and ATIA

## ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

Over the last two decades, while the Matanuska Susitna Borough has almost doubled its population, tourism and residential amenity-driven growth has expanded dramatically. This positive economic growth in the region is an outgrowth of larger Alaska economic trends including:

- Federal Spending: Alaska currently receives more federal funds per capita than any state in the US. (Approximately \$7.50 back for every dollar we pay in). One in three jobs in Alaska depends on these federal funds.

- Oil: Federal spending along with the oil industry accounts for two thirds of Alaska's jobs; production losses in recent years have been offset by strong oil prices.
- Tourism: In the summer of 1985 it is estimated that 431,200 out of state visitors took trips to Alaska. By the summer of 2001 this number was up the 1,202,800<sup>11</sup>, with almost half (43% - 517,204 people) visiting Denali, located to the north of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. This growth was part a global upsurge in tourism between 1990 and 1998, wherein pleasure travel volume in the United States grew by 45 percent. By 2000, World Travel and Tourism Industry (WTTI) estimates that worldwide the travel and tourism industry provided one in every 12.4 jobs, and was the fastest growing and largest industry in the world.

These strong points of Alaska's economic growth may continue in to the future, especially if oil prices remain high and military spending increases in Alaska. However, these current trends should be balanced against the following notable concerns:

- The sectors of Alaska's economy that did grow over the last decade – services and tourism – generally offer low average salaries and are seasonal.
- There have been declines or stagnation in major sectors of the Alaska economy – commercial fishing, forestry, mining and state and local government spending.
- Current federal spending levels in Alaska are not apt to continue at current levels indefinitely.
- Alaska had the lowest wage increase in the US – It was number 50 among states in 1998.
- Alaska is losing population in the segment of ages 20 and 55, the primary wage-earning years. Older and younger populations are growing.
- As a percentage of total earnings, earnings in Alaska from transfer payments are rising. In the rest of the US, earnings from transfer payments are falling. This issue is particularly acute in rural Alaska.
- Contractions either in the price of oil, or in oil revenues as the North Slope's output naturally diminishes, could create a serious fiscal impact and shortfalls at the state level that would impact residents statewide.

Exactly how these trends or considerations will impact the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, or Meadow Lakes, is hard to foresee. The Borough cautions that while growth in the Mat-Su is leading Alaska, it is still very much dependent on the overall growth of Alaska. However, they do anticipate that future growth will be steady as people continue to discover the region's unique qualities. The Borough and State Governments are both working actively to create a more diverse and stable locally-based economy. Actions include work on the projects below:

- Knik Arm Crossing
- Point MacKenzie Port
- Hatcher Pass Ski Area
- South Denali Tourism Development

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<sup>11</sup> Alaska Visitor Statistics Program Data, Alaska State Division of Tourism.

- Movement of retail and service jobs from Anchorage to the Valley

Meadow Lakes has several promising sources of continued local economic prosperity. First are the area's significant gravel reserves. A large percentage of the lowland portion of Meadow Lakes is underlain by extensive, commercially valuable gravel deposits. Economic pressures for the large scale excavation of these deposits is likely to continue for years into the future. Another potential source of local economic development is coal-bed methane. In contrast, and potentially conflicting with these sub-surface resources, is the community's attractive natural setting, with lakes forests and rivers, great views, wildlife, trails and other recreational amenities. These resources, if maintained, can be the basis for sustained high land values, and potentially, increased visits (and spending) by out-of-town visitors.

In less than 20 years, the Borough population could be over 100,000 people.<sup>12</sup> If growth does remain strong, Meadow Lakes' affordable land resources will provide an important base for residential development into the future.

## **2.2 Natural & Physical Environment**

### **TOPOGRAPHY**

The overall pattern of the landscape of the area is simple. The southern portion of the area is rolling to flat, with mixed birch and spruce forests, lakes and wetlands. About half of this land, the forested, non-wetland areas, is attractive and physically suited for development. Further north, above the Little Susitna, the land rises quickly into the Talkeetna Mountains, reaching to near the crest of the broad ridge separating the Little Susitna and Willow Creek drainages.

### **CLIMATE**

Alaska has four major climatic zones, the maritime, transition, continental and arctic zones. The Meadow Lakes climate is in the transition zone between coastal and continental climates. The climate is directly influenced by the ocean and surrounding mountain ranges: Chugach, Alaska, and Talkeetna. Cook Inlet and the Knik Arm, both links to the North Pacific Ocean, moderate the temperature. The area generally experiences moderately warm summers and cold winters. The mean annual temperature for the area is 35.2 ° F and ranges from a low of -41° F to a high of 91° F.

In the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, there are two major winds which affect the Palmer-Wasilla area and extend to some degree into the Meadow Lakes planning area. They are the Matanuska winds and the Knik winds. The Matanuska winds come from the northeast and have a velocity of over 60 miles per hour. They usually occur during the winter. The Knik winds come from the southeast and also have an average velocity of over 60 miles per hour. They occur predominately in the summer months.

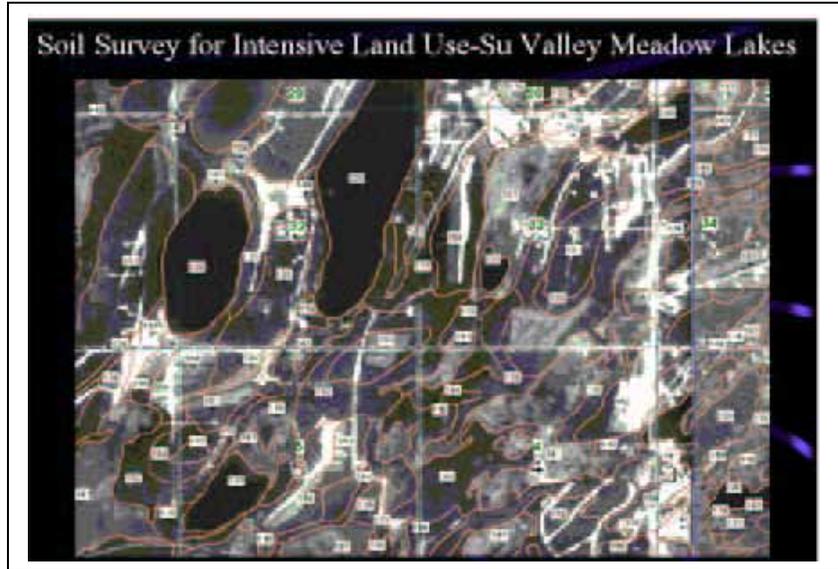
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<sup>12</sup> Matanuska-Susitna Borough. 2003 *Fact Book*, page 13.

## GEOLOGY & SOILS

Receding glaciers shaped the land form and soils in the Meadow Lakes area. As the glaciers retreated, the outwash moraines left a number of terraces, featuring numerous rivers marshes, lakes and streams. Two elements of this glaciation have important implications for current community life. First is the substantial reserve of sand and gravel that underlies most of the community.

Second is the large area of poorly drained wetland soils. This latter condition, shown on the map on the following page, significantly reduces the amount of land that is well-suited for residential or other development. While such areas can be developed, costs are much higher than in better drained soils, and the development can impact water quality, and fish and wildlife habitat.



## HYDROLOGY

Meadow Lakes includes a rich collection of lakes. Sixteen to twenty thousand years ago, receding glaciers formed the landforms seen today. The retreating glaciers left moraines, eskers and other features that shaped Meadow Lakes' current terraces, wetlands, lakes and streams. Most of the Meadow Lakes area consists of gently rolling hills with north-south trending lakes and muskegs scattered among wooded hills. In a few areas this glacial terrain is more dramatic, with moraines and eskers rising above the surrounding land to offer good views.

The area contains a complex inter-related system of surface and sub-surface water. The community's name captures the main surface water features – the areas remarkable and extensive set of lakes and wetland meadows. The major drainage systems in the area are the Little Susitna River, Meadow Creek and Lucille Creek. This surface water system is merely the visible manifestation of the extensive subsurface water system.

## FISH & WILDLIFE

Due to its abundant water sources, Meadow Lakes provides home to a diverse population of fish and wildlife. Resident fish species include rainbow trout, Dolly Varden, and arctic char. All five species of Pacific salmon utilize the area for spawning, rearing and migration. Moose and black bear are the prevalent large animals. Moose are the most common, benefiting from the food, forest cover, water, wetlands for calving, watercourses for travel corridors and critical habitat provided by the area. The vegetative types common to the planning area generally provide habitat to waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors and song birds.

## 2.3 Land Ownership, Management, and Use Patterns

### LAND OWNERSHIP

The majority of the more than 230,000 acres of land in Meadow Lakes is privately owned. This includes several large blocks of land held by Cook Inlet Region Incorporated and the University of Alaska, as well as land held by individual private owners. Much of the undeveloped land is in large parcels of 10-, 20- or 40-acre sizes. Development has tended to occur on smaller parcels – 1-to-5-acres – and has historically centered around the lakes.

The State of Alaska holds most of the northern quarter of the Meadow Lakes Community area, extending south to the edge of private holdings. The State of Alaska also owns 360 acres in the eastern portion of the area. MSB holds approximately 350 acres in Meadow Lakes, in four parcels. Two parcels are currently in use for public facilities (the school and two fire stations); the other two parcels – each 160 acres – are vacant. Alaska Mental Health Trust lands are state lands, but for the purposes of this plan, all Trust lands shall be treated as private lands.

### EXISTING LAND USE REGULATIONS

All development of land in the Matanuska- Susitna Borough is subject to MSB 17.01 regulating:

- Adult-Oriented Businesses
- Auto Salvage Yards, Refuse Areas and Junkyards
- Building structures near Lot Lines, Public Easements, Rights-of-Way, or near a Shoreline
- Community Correctional Residential Centers
- Development within designated Residential Land Use Districts
- Development within designated Single-family Residential Land Use Districts
- Development within Special Land Use Districts
- Development within Flood Hazard Areas
- Establishments that sell Liquor
- Mobile Home Parks
- Public Display of Fireworks
- Racetracks
- Special Events
- Subdividing Land
- Tall Structures
- Tourist Accommodations
- Use of Lakes, Creeks and other Water-Bodies
- Use or occupancy of Borough-owned land, including but not limited to: Clearing rights-of-way, cutting trees, mining or prospecting, crossing with motorized vehicles, camping, shooting, and storing materials or equipment.

Additionally, if residents construct, repair, remodel, add fire systems or change occupancy of any building other than residential housing that is a four-plex or larger or anyone who

plans to install or change fuel tanks, their project must be reviewed and approved by the State Fire Marshal's Office before construction, repair or remodel is started.

For building a structure within the Matanuska-Susitna Borough outside the incorporated cities of Houston or Palmer there are also development set backs as follows:

1. Twenty-five feet from any public right-of-way (including access easements and section line easements). No furthest protruding portion of any structure shall be placed closer than ten feet from the right-of-way when the pre-existing lot measures 60 feet or less in frontage on a public right-of-way and is not located on a cul-de-sac bulb, or comprises of a nonconforming structure erected prior to July 3, 1973.
2. Ten feet from side and rear lot lines.
3. Seventy-five feet from a lake or other water-body or watercourse (stream, creek, etc.). Additional setbacks apply from water-bodies with public access easements
4. No part of any subsurface sewage disposal system shall be closer than 100 feet from any body of water or watercourse.
5. Driveway permits are required when gaining access from a public right-of-way or
6. Well, septic tank and drain field are not to be located within a public right-of-way and may only be placed in utility easement with non objection from utility companies.

Finally, state and federal regulations also may apply, including the following:

- Alaska Fish & Game - Any activity adjacent to, or on a water-body
- The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation and Department of Natural Resources - rules applying to septic systems or wells

## **LAND USE PATTERNS**

One of Meadow Lakes' defining features is its abundance of scenic lakes. These attractive features have attracted residential subdivisions around their perimeter, often in one to five acre parcels. Likewise, the Little Susitna River has attracted residential development, although typically in larger parcels of about five to ten acres.

In large open spaces between the lakeside subdivisions, Meadow Lakes has extensive vacant private land, and much of this land is physically suited for development. There are currently nearly 2000 vacant subdivided lots of less than 5 acres in the community<sup>13</sup> and many thousands of acres of private land in larger parcels that could be subdivided in the future. Land prices continue to be relatively low compared to Anchorage, and the area has good proximity to job opportunities in the southern Borough and Anchorage. Over the next twenty years, if the state economy stays healthy, Meadow Lakes has the land base to easily again double in size.

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<sup>13</sup> Based on 2004 information provided by the MSB assessors office as compiled by Agnew Beck. These data show 659 two to five acre lots (37% vacant); 1495 one to two acre lots (47% vacant); and 1957 lots of less than one acre (56% vacant). In many instances, a single owner may own several adjoining lots, use one parcel for a residence, and intend to keep the adjoining parcels vacant.

The Parks Highway is the primary location for the limited commercial and industrial activities in Meadow Lakes. Along this road that sees more than 16,000<sup>14</sup> cars a day, major blocks of private undeveloped land straddle the Parks Highway.

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<sup>14</sup> State of Alaska, Dept of Transportation & Public Facilities, "Annual Traffic Volume Report – Central Region: 2001, 2002, 2003."

## 2.4 Community Infrastructure

### TRANSPORTATION

The location of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough has been a major determining factor of its growth. Both of Alaska's major highways, the George Parks Highway and the Glenn Highway, travel right through the heart of the Borough, past its population centers including Palmer, Wasilla, Meadow Lakes and beyond. Commuter population traffic counts verify how important these highways are, especially the Parks, in linking residents with employment and service centers.

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities' (DOT & PF's) "Annual Traffic Volume Report – Central Region: 2001, 2002, 2003" shows the annual average daily traffic (AADT) on the Parks Highway between the junction of Pittman Road and the junction of Church Road is 16,742 vehicles.<sup>15</sup> Typically, the average daily traffic decreases along the Parks Highway as the distance increases from Wasilla. For example, in Wasilla, traffic volume on the Parks Highway peaks at the junction with Crusey Street at 31,800 vehicles. Less than three miles to the north on the Parks Highway at the junction with Church Road, traffic volume drops to 16,742 vehicles. Just north of Pittman, traffic volume along the Parks Highway drops to 9,871 vehicles.

Recent transportation improvements in Meadow Lakes include a new traffic light at the intersection of Church Road and the Parks Highway. The Alaska DOT&PF is planning additional improvements to the Parks Highway through Meadow Lakes. Other recent improvements on the Parks Highway include an upgrade to the two lane section through Willow. Additionally, a two-lane highway upgrade is planned for Kashwitna River to the Talkeetna Spurr Road. These types of highway upgrades make recreational centers north of Meadow Lakes to be more accessible and make living in Meadow Lakes more attractive. Beyond the highway, the Alaska Railroad also has a rail corridor traveling through the Borough's main communities that, in the future, may provide commuter rail. The Community Council, working with the Alaska Railroad, plans to identify a location for a future commuter rail station. Finally, further transportation infrastructure that may influence population and growth in Meadow Lakes is under study:

During the past year, representatives of the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) and Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB), in cooperation with the State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, the Alaska Railroad Corporation, the Alaska Legislature's Senate and House Transportation Committees, and the military have formed a Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) to coordinate transportation planning and decision-making in the Anchorage/Mat-Su Region.

Some of the initial goals for regional cooperation include stimulating economic growth in the region and convenient access between work and home, helping select between competing regional projects, identifying which projects are the highest priority for the region, ensuring regional projects are planned to support and complement each other, and seeking funding for regional priorities. This

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<sup>15</sup> State of Alaska, DOT&PF, "Mat-Su Valley Traffic Map 2003" Prepared by Alaska DOT&PF, Div. of Program Development, Statewide GIS/Mapping Section.

organization is poised to make very influential recommendations for regional transportation issues in the upcoming years.

The most prevalent project at this time is the Knik Arm Ferry project. A feasibility study, engineering design, and environmental documentation for a commuter ferry system between Port MacKenzie and Anchorage are currently underway. The ferry would provide Mat-Su residents an alternative to driving into Anchorage, and would provide Anchorage residents easy access to Port MacKenzie worksites, as well as recreational activities in the Mat-Su Borough. As currently planned, ferry landings would be constructed off the existing Port MacKenzie dock, and at one of the alternative sites in Anchorage. The estimated start time for construction of the ferry landings is the summer of 2004, with an anticipated goal of an operational ferry system sometime in 2006. The long range plan is a complete transportation and utility corridor from Anchorage to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough across the Knik Arm, which would include road, rail, and utility services. The location at which the corridor would meet up with the Parks Highway is yet to be determined, however, some of the options being considered are Big Lake, Houston, or Willow.<sup>16</sup>



## UTILITIES

Electricity, telephone, high-speed DSL internet, and cable/satellite television services are widely available in Meadow Lakes. Gas is piped into 40% of local households, while the majority of residents use fuel oil, kerosene, tanked gas or wood heat. Local wells and septic systems are the primary approach used to provide water and waste treatment in residential development; no local piped water or waste service is available. (See Table 8.)

**Table 8 - Meadow Lakes Plumbing and Heat Source Summary**

Total Households:	1,702
Percent of Households That	
Lack Complete Plumbing (lack sink, bath/shower or flush toilet):	12.0%
Lack a Complete Kitchen (lack stove, fridge or running water):	11.4%
Lack Phone Service:	3.5%
Heat Using Electricity:	4.7%
Heat Using Fuel Oil, Kerosene:	35.4%
Heat Using Wood:	11.1%
Heat Using Piped Gas (utility):	40.1%
Heat Using Bottled, Tank, LP Gas:	8.7%
Heat Using Coal or Coke:	0.0%
Heat Using Solar Energy:	0.0%
Heat Using Other Fuel:	0.0%
Use No Fuel:	0.0%

<sup>16</sup> Matanuska-Susitna Borough. 2003 Fact Book, page 13.

## **PUBLIC FACILITIES & SERVICES**

In Meadow Lakes, the Community Council is the primary form of governance and local public services are fairly limited, as is the tax base by choice. Table 9: Summary of Meadow Lakes Service Providers & Status (on the following page) lists these services along with the provider, and issues about the service, future plans, or needs. It should also be noted that residents enjoy a high level of access to regional services and infrastructure, not highlighted in this list, because of Meadow Lake's proximity to larger communities and easy access to major transportation systems.

## **RECREATION**

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough Division of Recreational Services provides library, indoor and outdoor recreational opportunities, programs, services, and facilities to enrich the lives of the community's residents and visitors. Borough facilities include the Brett Memorial Ice Arena, Palmer and Wasilla Public Pools, Regional campgrounds at Lake Lucille in the Wasilla area, Matanuska River near Palmer and the Little Susitna River at Houston, plus hundreds of trails, numerous neighborhood parks, playgrounds and ball fields. The Borough operates public libraries that are located in the communities of Big Lake, Sutton, Talkeetna, and Willow. Additionally, the cities of Palmer and Wasilla have their own public library. Trapper Creek Library is operated by a local volunteer organization. The borough provides some funding to these libraries, Wasilla, Palmer and Trapper Creek, in the form of grants.<sup>17</sup>

## **TRAILS**

Trails play a key role in the enjoyment of residents and visitors alike throughout the Mat-Su Borough. Many trail opportunities exist for those who enjoy hiking, four-wheeling, horseback riding, and biking in the summer, or snow machining, skiing, and dog mushing in the winter. The Borough has recently completed a Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan which is intended to provide management, guidance, and direction for all Borough-owned land and natural resources.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Matanuska-Susitna Borough. *2003 Fact Book*, page 53.

<sup>18</sup> Matanuska-Susitna Borough. *2003 Fact Book*, page 53.

**Table 9 – Summary of Meadow Lakes Service Providers & Status**

<u>Service</u>	<u>Provider</u>	<u>Current Facilities</u>	<u>Issues/Notes/Needs</u>
Fire		New station	Just completed, located at Church & Pittman.
Fire	Fire Service Area		New stations? Johnson Rd, Knik/Vine; trend towards combining fire & EMS, regionalizing fire service – currently planning station shared with Big Lake
Police	State	None	MSB is considering whether to take on Police powers. A task force is investigating the feasibility. Options include creating a Sheriff Department or contracting with Wasilla and Houston for police services.
Post Office		Contract Post Office	A clear need – possible anchor for town center, may require more boxes on the road
EMS	Wasilla, Houston, MSB		Meadow Lakes EMS Districts 44,41,38,39,37, Wasilla District 57, Houston District 47. Borough Emergency Services is reorganizing to combined with service with Big Lake and other for greater response capability and cost savings. As a result so far the response time for Big Lake/Meadow Lakes fell from 19 minutes to six minutes. <sup>19</sup>
<b>Education</b>			
K-6 Midnight Sun	MSB Charter	Meadow Lakes	Located on Borough School site on Pittman. Midnight Sun is a new charter, located at Milepost 1 on Pittman Road.
Middle School	MSB		No Middle School is currently being considered for Meadow Lakes site selections.
High School	MSB	Mid Valley High Alternative	Currently leasing land in Houston, is seeking to relocate to property in the Meadow Lakes area to increase capacity.
Power	MEA		Users at “the end of the line” experience frequent power outages due to trees falling on lines (e.g., Wyoming Rd., Beverly Rd.) MEA periodically funds projects to extend power to unimproved areas. Neighborhoods can apply to MEA.
Water/Sewer		Individual well & septic	Generally satisfactory. north of Castle Mt. An issue, north of Beverly Lake (2-300 ft wells). Growing, but not confirmed concern re water qualities
Senior Center			Locate with community center? (see discussion below)
Community Center	MLCC		MLCC is considering a partnership to secure and develop lands on 160 acre parcel (Tax ID # 17N02W02C001)
Youth Center			Locate with community center? (see discussion below)
Solid Waste	None		No Transfer Station for solid wastes.
Telephone	MTA/Cellular Providers		

<sup>19</sup> [http://members.tripod.com/knik\\_alaska/id4.htm](http://members.tripod.com/knik_alaska/id4.htm)

### 3.0 Major Goals & Strategies

## 3.1 LAND USE

#### ORGANIZATION OF THIS CHAPTER

A. Overview	page 29
B. Land Use Goals	pages 30 - 32
C. Policies That Apply Through Out The Area	pages 33 - 38
D. Policies By Land Use District	pages 39 - 54

#### A. OVERVIEW

*“One of the things I like about this place is the lack of people telling me what to do – but things are changing, and we might need some rules if we’re going to hang on to what we like.”*

Meadow Lakes is among the fastest growing and largest communities in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. In 12 years the community more than doubled in size, reaching 5,300 people in 2002. This growth is expected to continue. The community has extensive vacant private land, and much of this land is physically suited for development. There are currently nearly 2,000 vacant subdivided lots of less than 5 acres in the community (see Table 10: 2004 Numbers/ Sizes of Lots in MLCC Area), and many thousands of acres of private land in larger parcels that could be subdivided in the future. Land prices continue to be relatively low compared to Anchorage, and the area has good proximity to job opportunities in the southern Borough and Anchorage. Over the next 15-20 years, growth trends for the Matanuska Susitna Borough are likely to continue and the population of Meadow Lakes could easily double again.

**Table 10 – 2004 Numbers/ Sizes of Lots in MLCC Area**

LOT SIZE (ACRES)	NUMBER OF LOTS	PERCENT OF LOTS	IMPROVED LOTS	% IMPROVED LOTS
>160	5	0%	1	20%
160 to >100	32	1%	10	31%
100 to >40	80	2%	10	13%
40 to >20	171	4%	72	42%
20 to >10	133	3%	59	44%
10 to >5	335	7%	134	40%
5 to >2	659	14%	413	63%
2 to >1	1,495	31%	785	53%
1 to >0	1,957	40%	866	44%
	4,867		2,350	

*Table by Agnew::Beck, based on MSB Assessors office 2004 data*

Without community action, the qualities that create the rural character of Meadow Lakes, and that make the community such an attractive place to live, are likely to continue to fade into history.

Like all the recommendations presented in this comprehensive plan, the following goals emerged from the community surveys, the Spring 2004 community workshops, and work with the Meadow Lakes planning team.

## **B. LAND USE GOALS**

- 1. Maintain the Community's Rural Character**
- 2. Concentrate and Screen Commercial Development; Avoid Sprawl Along the Parks Highway**
- 3. Create a Pedestrian-Oriented, Mixed-Use Town Center**
- 4. Guide Location and Character of Development**

### **1. Maintain the Community's Rural Character**

Community surveys and public workshops show that for most residents, the area's rural character is one of the top motivations to live in Meadow Lakes. This character includes low density housing, friendly neighbors, limited traffic, large tracts of open land, good views, presence of wildlife, and ready access to trails, rivers, lakes, and recreation. Strategies to maintain and enhance this rural character include:

- Housing Densities - Encourage low density residential development in the majority of the community. The exact policies should be worked out through the Special Land Use District process to implement this plan, but community sentiment strongly favors a target greater than the 40,000 square feet minimum currently required under MSB standards. In a few settings - at the planned town center, as part of open space subdivisions, and near the Parks Highway - higher density housing is appropriate, including smaller lot single family housing and, in the town center, attached and multi-family housing. In other areas, lots significantly larger than this target are more appropriate, for example in key watershed and wetland areas, and along the community's three major watersheds. For the purpose of clarity, the Planning Team thought it was important to identify specific minimum lot size.
- While working with the target for minimum lot size, the size of specific subdivision lots should consider the following:
  - Physical character of the land - minimum lot sizes are acceptable where soil quality and drainage is good; lots should be larger where soil quality and drainage is poor.
  - Use of "open space" subdivision process - to the degree land is dedicated to community use as open space, parks and trails through the open space subdivision process, lot sizes are allowed to be smaller.

- Size of surrounding lots – lots in new subdivisions should be at least the minimum, and should respond to the size of surrounding lots, e.g., if an “inholding” is subdivided in a neighborhood of large lots, the lots around the edge of the new subdivision should match the sizes of surrounding parcels.
- Land Use Districts - In this Comp Plan, the large majority of Meadow Lakes is designated in a single rural residential land use district. In the future, the community may wish to develop a set of more diverse land use districts, setting different lot size standards in different portions of the community (e.g. establishing a lower density in more northern portions of the community).
- Open Space – Guide growth to retain and expand public open space, waterways and trails. Retain the “natural feel” of the community and the dominate sense of natural landscapes – forests, wetlands, streams, wildlife, and views.
- Establish “Open Space” subdivision policies so sub-dividers are encouraged to retain land for trails and recreation and to protect natural areas like wetlands or streams (more details on Open Space subdivisions later in this chapter).

## **2. Concentrate and Screen Commercial Development; Avoid Sprawl Along the Parks Highway**

In past public workshops and surveys, people expressed a clear concern that the Parks Highway should not be lined with strip commercial development like what is found in other parts of the southern Mat-Su Borough. The community recognizes that without land use controls, development will likely scatter along the length of the Parks Highway. Strategies to reach this goal include:

- Location of Commercial Development - Encourage new commercial develop to locate in relatively concentrated nodes, rather than spread along the length of the Parks Highway. Establish a town center as the focus point for commercial development (see below).
- Green Space - Maintain several undeveloped “green spaces” along the Parks Highway to separate developed areas.
- Appearance of Roadside Commercial Development - Require retention and/or planting of evergreen buffers, trees and other landscape features so roadside development is attractive. Encourage modest sized, attractive signage and roadside development.

### **3. Create a Pedestrian-Oriented, Mixed-Use Town Center**

A town center was established as a clear priority for the community during both the workshops and survey. Desired uses in the town center include public spaces to meet friends and neighbors, venues for events and community meetings, and commercial services like a bank, Post Office, grocery, restaurants. A successful town center can improve resident quality of life, attract spending from people traveling through the community, and help develop a stronger, positive image for Meadow Lakes.

Strategies to develop the town center include:

- Identify the right location and size for a town center site – The plan identifies the area along the south side of the Parks Highway near the Pittman road intersection as the best location. This area is large enough to include an “inner circle” of pedestrian-oriented development, and an outer ring for more vehicular-oriented commercial and industrial development.
- Public Actions – Improve vehicular and pedestrian access and transit; encourage public facilities in this area to serve as “anchors” for development; partner with agencies or organizations like Denali Commission, AIDEA, Rasmuson, Great Land Trust
- Private Actions - Partner with private landowners and developers, particularly with larger landowners such as the Mental Health Land Trust and Knikatu Corporation.

### **4. Guide Location and Character of Development**

The community wants to maintain the natural, rural character of the community, and to protect the quality of residential neighborhoods. At the same time, the community recognizes the value of creating opportunities for employment, and increasing the local tax base, for example, through sand and gravel extraction. The balance point between these goals is to accept economic development activities, but also to establish rules to minimize the off-site impacts of such activities. This goal focuses on uses with significant impacts, such as large scale resource development like coal-bed methane and gravel extraction, but also is intended to limit impacts of more modest uses such as auto storage/junk yards.

Specific strategies to reduce these impacts include:

- Establish land use standards to minimize the off site impacts of development.
- Discourage certain high impact uses in specific portions of the community, such as sand and gravel operations adjoining stream corridors.
- Establish a special land use district that requires a conditional use permit for high impact uses and sets rules on the location and magnitude of these activities.

## C. POLICIES THAT APPLY THROUGHOUT THE AREA

This section presents policies that apply in all parts of Meadow Lakes; the land use districts section that follows presents policies for specific portions of the community.

### Site Development Standards (for all types of uses)

To protect unique site opportunities and constraints, including slope, natural vegetation, water quality, and views, and to maintain a sense of the natural setting, the following standards are established:

1. Grading – Encourage retention of natural contours.
2. Natural Vegetation/Site Disturbance – Maximize retention of existing vegetation; grading and clear cutting the entire parcel prior to selling or developing land is strongly discouraged. Large portions of the site's natural vegetation and contours should be maintained.
3. Drainage– Development must not change drainage patterns or create drainage or icing problems on adjoining lots. Construction of driveways and other impervious areas must not increase summer runoff or winter ice on adjoining roads or properties.
4. Water Quality & Erosion - Use drainage swales, holding basins and similar best management practices to ensure runoff from developed areas does not degrade quality of water in adjoining streams and lakes. See appendix for voluntary MSB best management practices.
5. Hazards and Sensitive Areas – Avoid development in hazard areas, including floodplains and steep slopes. Minimize development and development impacts on wetlands and other sensitive natural environments.
6. Setbacks From Waterbodies - Require at least the MSB 75' minimum development setback from streams, lakes, wetlands and other water bodies; "development" is defined as habitable structures. Non habitable structures, such as boathouses, sheds, decks or saunas can be built within 75' of lakes and streams, but these improvements should be designed to have minimal environmental and visual impact on the adjoining waterway.

*17.55.020 Setbacks for Shorelands (B) docks, piers, marinas, aircraft hangars and boathouses may be located closer than 75 feet and over the water, provided they are not uses for habitation and do not contain sanitary or petroleum fuel storage facilities. (E) No part of a subsurface sewage disposal system shall be closer than 100 feet from any body of water or watercourse.*

7. Protection of Water Quality – Use of land adjoining waterbodies shall be designed to minimize impacts on water quality. Actions to achieve this goal include minimizing removal of natural vegetation along the majority of the edge of lakes, streams or wetlands, to keep lawn chemicals, silt, and septic effluents out of the watershed, to inhibit bank erosion and provide habitat for wildlife such as ducks and loons, while also providing some screening of development.

8. Trail Reservations on Private Land – To the greatest degree possible, reserve for continued public use all important existing community trails crossing private land when that private land is subdivided. This can be done through the “open space subdivision” policy outlined later in this chapter. Trails may be reserved along traditional routes, or moved to new locations within the parcel. Trails shall be included as part of all new collector roads.
9. Underground Utilities – If practical, utilities should be placed underground. Exceptions include high voltage electric transmission lines, sub-transmission lines, and substations.

**Standards for Commercial, Industrial or Other Development with Significant Off-Site Impacts (for uses ranging from large scale sand and gravel operations to smaller-scale commercial)**

The community wants to maintain the natural, rural character of the community, the quality of residential neighborhoods and the visual quality of road corridors. To do this, two sets of development standards are established – the first applies to all uses, the second to specific types of uses.

Regulatory control over development is spread among several levels of government – federal, state, borough and local. The policies presented here are designed to supplement and complement policies administered by other agencies.

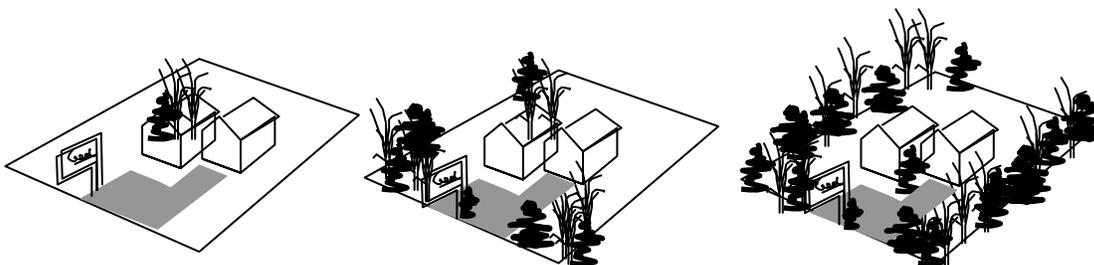
Standards for All Development

1. Noise - Limit maximum noise levels as discernable on adjoining properties.
2. Commercial Use of Roads - Use of residential roads by trucks, heavy equipment is a concern of the community. Such use should be controlled, in terms of amount and timing of use, to minimize congestion, noise, dust and safety impacts on community roads.
3. Impacts On Environment – Activities creating off site impacts on surface and sub-surface water quality and quantity, and air quality are not permitted.
4. Reclamation Required – Return land used for mining, sand and gravel extraction or similar uses to a useable state.
5. Control Extraction Of Water From Area Lakes And Streams – Limit direct use of water (e.g., by industrial uses) to a level that doesn't noticeably reduce lake levels or impact habitat values (this restriction does not apply to emergency use for fire fighting).
6. Hazardous Materials – adequately addressed through MSB Borough-wide regulations

7. Animals - The raising, breeding, and selling of livestock, domesticated animals, including sled dogs, and providing services relating to animals is an established and acceptable use. Operations should be designed and maintained so as not to impact neighboring uses. The following policies apply:
  - All waste must be properly disposed of to eliminate environmental impacts;
  - All operations should be designed and maintained to restrict a negative affect of noise, sight, and smell on neighboring uses.
  
8. Signs – Balance the need of area businesses to have sufficient signage to attract customers, with the community’s desire to maintain attractive road corridors. Options to achieve this balance include, for example, using one sign for several businesses, and controls on sign size and materials. One part of this effort will involve working with DOT/PF to find ways for businesses to advertise close enough to the active roadway to be visible to drivers. The plan establishes the following signage policies:
  - All signs must be tasteful and modest in size.
  - The height of all signs must not interfere with the view of the surrounding properties
  - Prohibited signs:
    - Portable signs;
    - Signs mounted on top of buildings;
    - Flashing, rotating, animated or intermittent lighted signs.
  
9. Building Height – In order to preserve and maintain the existing views of the mountains, lakes and meadows, and to ensure buildings can be served by local fire fighting equipment, building height should not exceed three stories.
  
10. Lighting – Lighting should be shielded so light is directed down and away from the sky, to protect views of the night sky and aurora borealis, and to avoid shining directly onto neighboring properties.
  
11. Residential Densities – See Land Use section.
  
12. Screening along Roads  
To maintain the community’s natural setting and to promote privacy, vegetative screening at the edge of lots should be sufficient to give the impression to drivers that they are passing through a forested landscape, punctuated by buildings, vs., appearing as a cleared landscape, with occasional trees (see Figure 7: Vegetative Buffer Alternatives). Therefore, the following guidelines are established:
  - A buffer of vegetation should be retained along the majority of the lot’s circumference (at least 12 feet in width from an existing easement).
  - Alternative to natural vegetation: Where natural vegetation is limited or non-existent, evergreen buffers should be planted along the majority of the lot’s circumference.

- Exceptions: Screening along street side should not interfere with the sight distance at driveways. Screening is not required in the pedestrian core of the town center.
- A strip of land at least as wide as the suggested screening which has been dedicated to the public for use as a trail or open space can be included in meeting the recommended screening distance.

**Figure 7 – Vegetative Buffer Alternatives**



Discouraged:

No front or side vegetative buffers

Better:

Front vegetative buffers with opening for access drive

Recommended:

Front and side vegetative buffers extending at least ½ the length of site boundaries; access drive OK

Standards for Specific Uses

1. Coal Bed Methane & Mineral Extraction - All coal bed methane and mineral extraction activities shall comply with the MSB codes adopted in 2004 (*insert code reference*).
2. Commercial Sand And Gravel Extraction – Gravel operations, as currently practiced in Meadow Lakes, create significant traffic, noise and other impacts on the community. New policies and better enforcement of existing policies are required to reduce these impacts. The following policies apply to all existing and future operations:
  - An approved Master Plan for Operations and Reclamation is required prior to commencing operations. Operators must put up a performance bond ensuring compliance to the master plan and other development standards
  - Reclamation required – Return the land to a useable state.
  - Noise – Minimize noise of operations on adjoining properties. Limit hours of operation to portions of the day when adjoining properties can reasonably expect peace and quiet, i.e., evenings, nights, early mornings. If necessary to avoid disrupting neighboring uses, build sound reducing walls around the operation.
  - Use of residential roads by trucks, heavy equipment is a significant community concern. The amount and timing of use shall be limited to avoid congestion, noise, dust and safety impacts on community roads.

3. Medical Waste Incinerators - adequately addressed through MSB Borough-wide regulations
4. Junk/Salvage Yards:
  - Require sufficient setbacks, vegetative screening and/or fencing to minimize visual impacts on surrounding roads, trails and properties;
  - Be located no closer than 1 mile to any lake, river or water body;
  - Obtain all permits as required by federal, state, and borough code, to control environmental impacts;
  - Properly dispose of all hazardous waste;
  - In commercial junkyards, it is recommended that cars be dismantled to reduce the size of the lots and visibility of the lot from surrounding properties

*17.60 030 Permit Required. (A) The following land uses are declared to be potentially damaging to the property values and usefulness of adjacent properties, or potentially harmful to the public health, safety and welfare: (1) junkyards and refuse areas; (B)...maintenance of such as land use without a permit is prohibited.*

5. Airports, Airstrips & Float Plane Bases  
There are numerous private airstrips and float plane bases in the Meadow Lakes area. These airstrips and float plane bases are established and acceptable uses. Present and future operations should be designed to protect adjacent property and land uses.
6. Towers – Rely on MSB Borough-wide regulations. Use a single tower for multiple functions wherever possible.
7. Agriculture – Agriculture activities, ranging from hobby farms to hay fields and livestock breeding, and including sled dog lots and kennels, are established and acceptable uses. Associated noise and odors or dust caused by animals and machinery is to be expected, however such effects should be minimized.
  - All operations should be designed and maintained to restrict negative side effects of noise, sight and smell on neighboring uses.
  - Animal waste and agricultural chemicals, including fertilizers, should be used and disposed in a way that causes no negative environmental impacts
  - Stockyards and/or slaughter houses, if allowed, should operate under strict regulations so there are no negative environmental impacts, or impacts on neighboring uses.

### **Open Space Sub-Divisions**

Traditional subdivision practices typically result in 100% of a parcel being subdivided into smaller private lots. A number of alternatives to this practice have been successfully developed around the country. These alternative models - referred to as cluster subdivisions, or “open space subdivisions” – allow for slightly smaller lot sizes, in exchange for portions of the original subdivided property being retained for public use such as trails or buffers on waterways. Working with the Borough, a similar policy should be established and applied in Meadow Lakes. The community strongly supports the inclusion of open space, parks, trails,

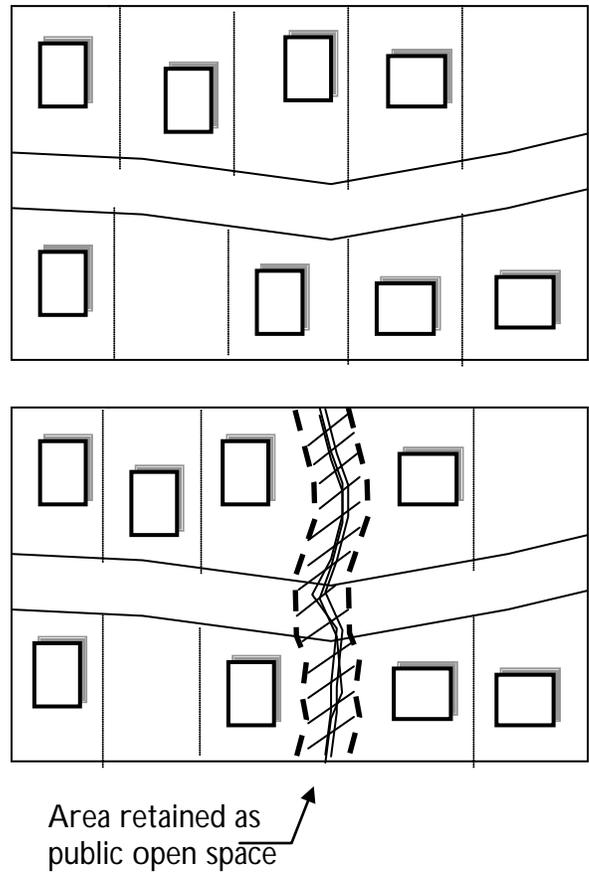
or similar recreation features in all future subdivisions. (See Figure8: Standard versus Open Space Subdivisions.)

**Figure 8: Standard Versus Open Space Subdivisions: An Illustration on a 10 acre Parcel - Same number of lots and houses, two different layouts**

*Top* – Standard subdivision: ten approximately one- acre lots; all available land is sold.

*Below:* “Open Space Subdivision:” same number of lots; average lot size is slightly smaller, difference is used to retain land for open space, trails, and stream buffers. Done correctly, this approach increases access to amenities and produces higher average value for all lots. The residential land near Westchester Lagoon in Anchorage is an urban example of this concept. Lots two and three tiers back from the lagoon are highly desirable because they have access to the lake, its trails and picnic areas.

To be most successful open space land needs to be aligned with similar open space in adjoining properties, e.g. to establish a contiguous river or trail corridor. The Borough, a land trust or a Homeowners Association needs to hold the title and manage the land.



## D. POLICIES BY LAND USE DISTRICT

This section presents a framework for land use policy in Meadow Lakes, using land use districts. Each district defines an area with generally similar types of land use issues, and similar intended future development.

For each of the districts the comprehensive plan presents policies on the following topics:

*Background And Boundaries*

*Overall Objectives*

*Encouraged And Discouraged Land Uses*

*Development Standards Specific To That Land Use District*

A map showing land use district boundaries is presented on the following page; land use districts are listed below.

*Rural Residential Areas*

*Parks Highway Road Corridor*

*Town Center Commercial*

*Neighborhood Commercial centers (within residential areas)*

*Watersheds and Stream Corridors*

*Baldy*

Like all the policies presented in this comprehensive plan, these proposals emerged from the community surveys, the Spring 2004 community workshops, and work with the Meadow Lakes planning team.

**INSERT LAND USE DISTRICTS MAP**

## 1. RURAL RESIDENTIAL AREAS

### *Background and Boundaries*

The dominant land use in Meadow Lakes is low density, rural residential. Boundaries of this district are best defined by what they exclude: this district takes in all of the Meadow Lakes except the town center, highway corridors, watersheds and river corridors and the Baldy area.

### *Overall Objectives*

Keep this area an attractive, safe, family-oriented residential community. Maintain the existing low density residential pattern and rural atmosphere, with a predominance of open space and natural landscapes. Protect environmental quality, particularly the quality of surface and subsurface water used for domestic purposes. Allow a continuation of limited, small-scale commercial uses where such uses are compatible with residential uses and the use will not adversely affect adjoining properties or the natural environment.

### *Land Uses*

#### *Encouraged Uses:*

##### *Residential use.*

*Residential-compatible, home-based “cottage industry” businesses as long as the use does not adversely impact neighboring homes.*

*Other, non-home-based, commercial uses are conditionally allowed if small scale, and do not adversely affect adjoining residents or property values.*

*Public Facilities and Institutions – schools, churches, and similar institutional uses are conditionally allowed.*

#### *Allowed Uses:*

*Small scale resource-based activities – small scale farming, lumber milling or logging are permitted, if operations are designed to not impact neighboring residential uses (e.g. through limits on operation hours, noise, smells, etc. – see standards in previous section).*

*Other resource-based activities, such as gravel extraction already in place at the time of the adoption of this plan, as long as such uses comply with local, and other regulatory standards*

#### *Discouraged Uses:*

*Uses other than those listed above, including new, larger scale resource development activities, are discouraged in residential areas.*

## *Development Standards Specific to This District*

### **1. Lot Sizes & Housing Density**

In order to retain open space and the community's rural character, and to promote privacy, maintenance of current relatively low densities in the large majority of the Meadow Lakes Area is strongly encouraged. The general target for minimum lot sizes is 2.5 acres/housing unit. For the purposes of this policy, a housing unit is defined to include a single family unit with the option for a secondary "mother in law" apartment. This excludes more than one primary dwelling unit on a parcel. Typical densities should be lower still – at least 5 acres per unit - in poorly-drained wetland areas and adjoining stream corridors (see more in chapter on Open Space and Recreation.) Maintaining low densities will help sustain rural character, preserve agricultural opportunities, and by limiting the total number of houses, help maintain water quality, protect wetlands, and retain habitat and recreation opportunities.

Part of the rationale for adopting this policy comes from a review of the current supply of undeveloped, sub-divided lots in Meadow Lakes. As is presented in the chart at the beginning of this chapter, there are over 1000 vacant lots of 1 acre or less in Meadow Lakes, and 700 vacant lots 1 to 2 acres in size.

In certain parts of the Meadow Lakes Area, residential use at densities greater than 2.5 acres per housing unit will better serve community needs. Higher density housing, in the right location and if well-designed and well-built, brings a number of benefits, including providing for more affordable housing, reducing costs for providing utilities, and concentrating housing near commercial centers (so more people walk to services). Cluster housing and higher densities will help to retain open space.

Housing on smaller lots could be allowed adjacent to the Parks Highway, as well as in open space subdivisions, and in the vicinity of the planned town center. Specific actions to refine and implement these policies will be part of the Special Land Use District that is expected to implement this comprehensive plan.

### **2. Home-based or Cottage Industry Businesses, Commercial Activity:**

Home based businesses are numerous in the Meadow Lakes area. These businesses are established and acceptable uses. The following guidelines are established to ensure these uses are compatible with adjoining residential uses:

- Present and future businesses must not adversely impact neighboring homes.
- Home based businesses are defined as businesses a scale that maintains the predominately residential character of the area. For example, a wood shop or an accounting business that generates little traffic, minimal noise and requires limited space readily blends with residential character. An auto wrecking yard, a large scale auto repair business does not.
- When advertising your business in a residential area the size and design of signs must maintain the visual quality of the community. Tasteful and modest signs are recommended. See community-wide standards for additional signage policies.
- Lot size must comply with the previous recommendations and be large enough to provide adequate off street parking for customers and employees, as required in borough code, while not adversely affecting water quality, and wildlife, and limiting environmental impacts.

## 2. RESIDENTIAL COLLECTOR ROAD CORRIDORS

### Background and Boundaries

This district follows the three major collector roads in Meadow Lakes' residential area – Pittman, Church and Schrock roads. These roads currently have minimal roadside development and are attractive, rural, and tree-lined. This character plays a big role in the attractive, rural feel of the community as a whole.

### Overall Objective

Maintain the largely natural, undeveloped appearance that currently exists along these roads. Commercial uses should provide the option for limited, concentrated areas of commercial services, to serve adjoining residential areas. This option will make it easier for residents to get convenience services without driving to the planned Town Center or other commercial areas.

### Land Uses

#### Encouraged Uses:

- Residential use.
- Residential-compatible, home-based “cottage industry” businesses as long as the use does not adversely impact neighboring homes or the attractive, existing character of the road.

#### *Allowed Uses:*

*Other, non-home-based, commercial uses are conditionally allowed. Preferred uses are in two categories:*

*Residential-compatible commercial uses include lodges, recreation rentals (e.g., canoe rentals), and espresso stands (same category as in rural residential district).*

*Commercial activities serving neighborhood commercial needs, such as a video store, or coffee shop. Larger scale, regional commercial developments, such as offices and service commercial activities like auto repair are encouraged to locate in the town center area, or other Parks Highway commercial areas.*

*Public Facilities and Institutions – schools, churches, similar institutional uses are conditionally allowed.*

*Resource-based activities – small scale farming, lumber milling or logging is permitted, if operations are designed to not impact neighboring residential uses (e.g. through limits on operation hours, noise, smells, etc.*

*Other resource-based activities, such as gravel extraction already in place at the time of the adoption of this plan, as long as such uses comply with local, and other regulatory standards*

#### *Discouraged Uses:*

- Uses other than those listed above, including new, larger scale resource development activities, are discouraged in residential areas.

*Development Standards Specific to This District*

*Road Design – Minimize the number of curb cuts along the highway. Instead, future residential development adjoining the road should be reached by on roads that branch off these main roads (to houses back onto Pittman and Schrock).*

*Same standards as the Rural Residential District.*

### 3. PARKS HIGHWAY CORRIDOR

#### *Background and Boundaries*

The Parks Highway corridor extends east-west across Meadow Lakes. The corridor is defined as the area both sides of the highway back to the rear of the first row of parcels on either side of the highway or, where lots are shallow, to a distance of approximately 1,000 feet back from the road. Uses in this area currently include a mix of undeveloped land and a range of commercial and industrial uses.

#### *Overall Objectives*

The community wants the Parks Highway to be an attractive, limited access road, primarily serving as a route for traffic moving through the community or driving to a handful of distinct commercial nodes, rather than a strip commercial highway as is the case in other parts of the southern Matanuska Susitna Borough.

A particular objective is to retain significant portions of the natural vegetation and/or plant trees along the road. Buffers should be of sufficient width to give the impression to drivers that they are passing through a forested landscape, punctuated by buildings.

Previous workshops and the survey show the Meadow Lakes area is generally not seeking significant commercial growth. The community would like, however, to see more daily convenience services. Specific interests include commercial uses such as a bank, post office, and a community center in the proposed Town Center area.

#### *Land Uses*

*Encouraged Uses (assuming setbacks & vegetative buffers described below):*

*Residential uses – densities between the relatively low densities intended for rural residential areas, and the higher densities planned in the Town center area.*

*Industrial - small scale industrial use allowed as “by right” permitted use; larger scale industrial allowed conditionally.*

*Recreation – maintain trails along both sides of the road.*

*Open Space – undeveloped areas to protect habitat, and separate commercial districts within Meadow Lakes, and between Meadow Lakes and adjoining communities.*

#### *Allowed Uses*

*Commercial uses – commercial uses are allowed along the corridor, although the preferred location for new commercial use is in the town center.*

*Non-Alcoholic Cabarets and Under 21 Entertainment Venues.*

*Bars, liquor stores (see notes under development standards)*

*Discouraged Uses:*

*Large scale industrial or commercial uses that dominate views from the road, such as large scale gravel extraction. Existing gravel operations are expected and allowed to continue, but over the long term, the community looks forward to the day when resources are exhausted, and these sites can be restored and used for other purposes.*

*Adult entertainment*

*Development Standards Specific to This District*

1. Screening – same as community-wide policy, plus additional policies below:
  - Retain or plant a vegetative buffer facing the street at least 25 feet back from the ROW, to screen views from the highway. This buffer should be continuous except for access drives.
  - If a commercial operation is using fencing for security purposes the fence must be placed inside the vegetative screening.

2. Liquor Licenses

Businesses with liquor licenses are numerous in the Meadow Lakes area. Due to the large number of businesses that sell alcohol the plan establishes the policy that future liquor licenses of all classifications, including new and transfers, must be no less than:

- 1/2 mile from an existing establishment, unless located with the proposed town center;
- 1 mile from a school, private or alternative school, church, daycare center, park or playground;
- 1 mile from any under 21 entertainment venue.

3. Non-Alcoholic Cabarets and Under 21 Entertainment Venues

At the time this plan was written there were two such businesses in existence in Meadow Lakes. At that time the Community Council supported an ordinance as proposed by the borough to regulate this type of businesses. This plan recommends that the existing businesses and future businesses of this type be operated to comply with borough code.

## 4. TOWN CENTER

### *Background and Boundaries*

Many small towns around Alaska and all over America are working to establish viable town centers, or revitalize main streets, to serve as a commercial and civic center for the community. The desire for a Meadow Lakes town center came through as a priority during both the workshops and survey.

The town center needs a central, convenient location, easily reached, but slightly off the Parks Highway. The area that best meets these criteria is the area south of the Parks Highway, in the vicinity of the Pittman intersection. This area already is the prime retail location in the community, has potential for the right kind of access, and includes large blocks of undeveloped private land.

### *Overall Objectives*

Desired uses in the town center include comfortable public spaces to meet friends and neighbors; space for events, community activities and a range of commercial uses; and higher density housing.

The town center will have two sub-districts:

- The core area is intended to be a pedestrian-oriented district, with relatively high density mixed use development, in the spirit of traditional American main streets.
- Surrounding the core area will be a more spread out commercial and industrial district, providing space for uses that require larger buildings, larger parking lots, and a more auto-oriented character.

The town center is intended to serve as an amenity and convenience to Meadow Lake residents, be a profitable place for local businesses, provide an attractive destination for visitors, and help build a positive image for Meadow Lakes.

Developing a viable town center will require a challenging, multi-year process, and will only be successful with the cooperative efforts of the public sector and private land owners and developers. The qualities desired in the town center sought for Meadow Lakes are outlined below.

- Mixed-use – includes commercial services (see list below), civic uses and with housing within walking distance. This set of uses allows people to conveniently take care of shopping and other needs of daily life.
- Pedestrian-oriented – the central core needs to be comfortable to move around without a vehicle.
- Social life in public places – comfortable places to meet and visit with friends, neighbors, and strangers, including attractive sidewalks and perhaps a central square or plaza, and provides entertainment options for children, young adults, adults and seniors.

- Space to Grow - Provides sufficient space to meet commercial and industrial needs of a growing community; helps concentrate commercial development.
- Clustered Development - By clustering residential development, provides for more affordable housing and reduces costs for providing utilities.
- Identity – the town center should help give Meadow Lakes a more distinct, positive identity.

Steps to develop the town center are outlined below:

- Establish a phased development plan, for public and private investments, including roads and sidewalks, utilities, public buildings, amenities.
- Improve access to the site, for vehicles and pedestrians. Provide good access into and through the area for pedestrians (trails to the site, sidewalks within); provide convenient vehicular access in the area and good visibility to the area from adjoining roads, but avoid high speed traffic through the area.
- Provide a pedestrian overpass across the Parks Highway into this area; provide park and ride lots, and ultimately, a link to rail-based transit.
- Limit commercial development directly off the Parks Highway.
- Plan and develop infrastructure needed to support the more concentrated development associated with successful town centers, including common water, sewer and drainage.
- Adopt a Special Use District that expands upon and adds authority to the standards presented below.

## **TOWN CENTER: PEDESTRIAN CORE**

### ***Land Uses***

#### **Encouraged Uses:**

- Commercial: Primarily local serving commercial uses. Uses most desired include “Main Street” commercial uses such as a bank, grocery, restaurants, bakery, book store, personal service (barber, hair salon), gas stations, repairs, arts and crafts/gift stores, hotels/motels. Secondary commercial uses include regional and visitor serving uses, such as specialty shops and restaurants.
- Secondary commercial uses include regional and visitor serving uses, such as specialty shops and restaurants.
- Public uses: for example, a library, post office, (the area already hosts the school and the senior center), space for a farmers market.
- Residential: single family and multifamily housing – encourage relatively high densities (including apartments and townhouses, up to approx 15 units per acre).

#### **Discouraged Uses:**

- Uses that disrupt opportunities to create a pedestrian-oriented commercial district. Uses that deaden a town center include large parcels devoted to a single function, e.g., large scale industrial activities, auto sales, storage, junkyards, big box retail stores.

## *Development Standards*

1. Overall Character - Create a comfortable, attractive environment that invites people to linger, and is convenient and attractive to residents and to people passing through the area. Specific objectives include:
2. Setbacks – Encourage buildings to locate relatively close to the street, to create a sense of enclosure, and provide views into store fronts from the sidewalk. (note: this is different than the setback standards applying in the remainder of the community).
3. Streetscape – Encourage actions to create a good walking environment - require sidewalks, planting between street and building, on street parking. Include seating, sunlight, attractive and appropriately scaled buildings, historical information.
4. Include parks within and adjoining the town center, and trails that lead to undeveloped natural areas.
5. Building size/footprint – Smaller buildings are encouraged; break large buildings into smaller, human-scaled components rather than constructing large monolithic structures.
6. Parking – Create an attractive, inviting environment for walking. Screen parking areas, break-up large parking areas with planting. Encourage development of shared parking areas. Allow on-street parking.
7. Utilities and Services – Require screening of dumpsters, service bays, similar building features
8. Landscaping – Require attractive landscaping, do not require retention of a vegetative buffer in front of buildings.
9. Building heights and densities – Allow buildings of greater density and height than in other parts of Meadow Lakes, allow multifamily attached housing.

## **TOWN CENTER: OTHER COMMERCIAL / OUTER RING**

### *Land Uses*

#### Encouraged Uses:

- Commercial & Light Industrial: variety of commercial uses, including all those listed for the pedestrian core, plus larger scale industrial and commercial activities – larger grocery stores, construction equipment storage, manufacturing, etc.
- Public uses: for example, a library, post office, (the area already hosts the school and the senior center).
- Residential: Single family and multifamily housing – encourage relatively high densities (including apartments and townhouses, up to approx 15 units per acre).

Note – this area is intended to provide a combination of commercial, industrial and residential uses. More detailed planning will be needed, during the preparation of the Special Use District implementing this plan, to ensure these uses are compatible.

***Development Standards***

1. Allow buildings of greater density than in other parts of Meadow Lakes; allow multifamily attached housing.
2. Encourage attractive buildings, landscaping.
3. Require on-site parking.

## 5. WATERSHED & STREAM CORRIDORS

### *Background and Boundaries*

Primary watersheds and stream corridors are defined as shown on the map at the beginning of this land use districts section. These boundaries are preliminary and may need to be refined as better information becomes available on the relative importance and sensitivity of different watershed areas.

Nearly all of Meadow Lakes' rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands are in private ownership. The areas included in this district are singled out as having particularly high recreation, habitat, open space and environmental values. Specific areas identified are the corridors of the Little Susitna River, Meadow Creek, Lucille Creek and the lakes and wetlands connected by these water-bodies. While not included in the boundaries of this district, tributaries to these water-bodies are also important and need protection.

### *Overall Objectives*

The goal of this plan is to protect the water quality, open space, habitat and where possible, recreation values of these corridors, while recognizing that private owners have rights to develop their properties consistent with these goals. This can be done by establishing rules that limit the amount and impact of development on stream corridors, including low density development, minimizing disruption of natural vegetation, and restricting activities prone to damage ground and surface water. The overall intent of these policies is to find a balance between the community benefits of maintaining these areas in a largely natural state and desires of private land owners for use of their land. The recreation and open space chapter that follows provides specific recommendations for use in these areas.

Little Susitna River corridor is a designated State Recreation River. Under this designation, State lands, including the stream itself up the average high water mark, are reserved for public recreation and protection of habitat and other environmental values. The website below gives more information on the State Recreation Rivers Program:

<http://www.dnr.state.ak.us/mlw/planning/mgtplans/susitna/index.htm>

### *Land Uses*

#### *Encouraged Uses*

*Protection of water quality, open space, habitat.*

#### *Allowed Uses*

*Residential - low intensity residential, either low densities (approximately 5-10 acres per lot) single family housing where using on-site septic systems are used, or higher density residential where septic is treated off-site, significant land is retained as undeveloped open space, and development is set well back from creeks.*

### *Discouraged Uses*

- Commercial - general commercial not allowed, recreation-oriented commercial (e.g., lodging) allowed conditionally.
- Industrial – prohibited.
- Transfer Station/Recycling centers: shall not be located in the proposed residential area or within the open space/stream corridor.

### *Development Standards Specific to This District*

1. Motorized Recreation Use - Establish policies restricting use of the Little Susitna River to non-motorized craft
2. Setbacks of buildings from water – expand MSB existing minimums from 75 to 100’.

*(Also see standards applying to all uses in Meadow Lakes.)*

## 6. BALDY

### *Background and Boundaries*

“Baldy” refers to the mountain area rising north of the Little Susitna River. Much of this area is public land held by the State of Alaska. The Department of Natural Resources’ Willow Sub-basin and Deception Creek plans set out policies for the use of these areas.

The public land in this area includes a large, contiguous parcel held by the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (AMHTA). It is important to understand that Trust Lands are managed separately from other State of Alaska lands, in accordance with regulations adopted in 1997. The regulations provide that Trust Lands are managed solely in the best interest of the Alaska Mental Health Trust and its beneficiaries.

The website below gives details (see the Hatcher Pass and Little Susitna River management units.).

<http://www.dnr.state.ak.us/mlw/planning/areaplans/willow/index.cfm>

Current uses in the area are primarily recreational activities, including hiking, horseback riding, snow machining, four wheeling and hunting. Bench Lake is one popular destination.

### *Overall Objectives*

State lands in this area, excluding Alaska Mental Health Trust lands, should remain in public ownership, and be managed for a range of public uses including protection of water quality, protection of fish and wildlife habitat, subsistence activities and a range of recreation uses including those current uses mentioned above. Mining is discouraged, but permitted to the degree it can occur without significantly reducing opportunities for these other uses.

Private land within this area may be used for the same general set of uses outlined for rural residential district; however, any development will require special care to minimize adverse impacts on visual quality, and impacts on water quality and habitat. This can generally be achieved through either small, carefully placed clusters of homes on suitable sites, or limited numbers of large parcel “estate homes”. For the purposes of this section, lands held by the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority are considered private lands.

### *Land Uses*

#### *Encouraged Uses:*

*Recreation, open space, habitat protection are the primary uses on state land.*

#### *Allowed Uses:*

*Residential development on AMHLT property, as discussed above*

#### *Discouraged Uses:*

*Resource development such as mining. To the extent mining occurs it shall be strictly regulated to maintain recreation, open space, habitat and visual quality.*

*Residential, commercial, industrial:*

### *Development Standards*

Construct, maintain and guide use of trails to ensure protection of environmental quality, and to meet the needs of diverse trail users.

### 3.0 Major Goals & Strategies

## 3.2 OPEN SPACE & RECREATION

*“It’s a quiet area, with nice neighbors and beautiful surroundings.”*

*“We need more open spaces where kids can get on their bikes and go play.”*

### OVERVIEW

With the Meadow Lakes Community Survey and the first Community Workshop, residents and landowners indicated that the natural, rural character of Meadow Lakes – the area’s lakes and streams, wildlife, wetlands and forests, trails, quiet and sense of solitude – is one of the primary reasons people chose to live in this community.<sup>20</sup> It is important to most residents to retain a strong sense of living in a natural, rural community, with ready access to undeveloped lands, and to trails, lakes and other recreation areas. This will protect the quality of life most desired by Meadow Lakes’ residents.

As more people move to the community, and more land is developed, these qualities will tend to be eroded. Likewise, without management, problems linked to recreational use such as trespass, trail conflicts and litter are likely to grow. In trying to meet recreation goals, Meadow Lakes faces particular challenges – compared to many other areas in the MSB – since almost all of the land is privately held and the population is growing at a rapid rate. Another challenging open space issue is the need to retain healthy stream, lake and wetland systems, which are the basis for clean well water.



This Plan takes into consideration the high value of recreation and open space to the community, and sets out strategies to maintain and improve open space resources and recreation opportunities. As noted above and seen on the map on the following page, the majority of Meadow Lakes’ current open space - defined as natural areas that are largely undeveloped - is privately rather than publicly held. This plan outlines ways to take greatest advantage of the few lands still in public ownership, and, to the extent possible, to retain open space values on private lands.

<sup>20</sup> “Meadow Lakes Community Survey,” Matanuska-Susitna Borough, 2003; Meadow Lakes Community Workshop, May, 2004.

**INSERT TRAILS, RECREATION & OPEN SPACE MAP**

## **RECREATION & OPEN SPACE GOALS**

The goals below are directed toward initiating, maintaining and improving a system for recreation and open space that meets the community's priorities, is area-wide, and sustainable. These goals were derived from the community survey, and the Spring 2004 community workshops. Based on this public input, the general intent is to improve recreational opportunities for residents, with a focus on small-scale, local uses. These Recreation & Open Space goals are closely related to goals in the Land Use, Public Facilities, Economic Development and Governance chapters, and should be considered in context.

### **Recreation & Open Space Goals:**

- 1. Reserve, Protect and Enhance Natural Features & Open Spaces on Public and Private Land**
- 2. Create an Integrated Community Recreation System to Meet the Needs of Diverse Users**
- 3. Retain, Dedicate and Improve a Community Trail System**
- 4. Establish a System of Community Recreation Lands**
- 5. Create a Sustainable Recreation Management System**

**GOAL 1: Reserve, Protect and Enhance Natural Features & Open Spaces on Public and Private Land**

**BACKGROUND AND COMMUNITY VALUES**

One of the main pleasures of living in Meadow Lakes is proximity to open space. Houses sit in a largely intact natural landscape, typically in forested areas, often with views of lakes, wetlands, meadows, mountains, and streams. Unlike life in typical American cities or suburbs, most people don't have to leave their homes to be in an attractive natural setting.

Retaining the community's rural character and open space values in the long-term can best be accomplished by working on two fronts –establishing standards to guide development on important, privately held open space lands (partially described in the “Land Use” chapter), and retaining most existing public lands in open space uses. This section includes strategies to accomplish both these goals.

A first step in this process was to identify which features and uses are priorities for residents. This sets the stage for creating a plan to protect them. With feedback from the community, important features and uses were identified, in Table 11 (below)

**Table 11 – Meadow Lakes Open Space & Recreation Priorities**

Feature		Community Values	Important Summer Uses	Important Winter Uses
Lakes		Open space, wildlife habitat, water source, contribution to rural character	Fishing, boating, waterskiing, swimming, float plane port (not all lakes allow all uses)	Snowmachining, skiing, ice fishing, skating, walking
Rivers, streams and creeks (for fishing, water)		Open space, wildlife habitat, water source, contribution to rural character	Fishing, rafting, canoeing, corridors for hiking	Corridors for skiing, waking, running, snowmachining
Forests and wetlands		Open space, wildlife habitat, water source, contribution to rural character	Walking, hiking, running, biking, horseback riding, four-wheeling	Skiing, waking, running, snowmachining, sledding, horseback riding
Baldy & Southern Talkeetnas; “Backcountry” Open Space		Open space, wildlife habitat, water source, contribution to rural character	Walking, hiking, running, biking, horseback riding, four-wheeling	Skiing, waking, running, snow machining, sledding, horseback riding

## HOW? MEANS TO PROTECT NATURAL FEATURES & OPEN SPACE

### *A. Reserve Remaining Public Lands for Use as Recreation and Open Space*

Though there is not much public land in Meadow Lakes, what does exist should be considered for recreation and open space uses before being designated to other purposes (see Map 1: Meadow Lakes Land Ownership on page four for locations). There are four main types of public lands in Meadow Lakes – state land (mostly in the northern section of the community, in the Baldy/Talkeetna Mountains areas, but also including a number of small parcels reserved for lake access); state waters (larger lakes and streams, e.g., the Little Susitna River, are held in public ownership up to the average high water line), four relatively large MSB parcels, and isolated small parcels dedicated for public use as part of the subdivision process, typically held by a homeowners association or the Borough. In addition to these public lands, there are a range of section line easements and other public and utility easements and rights-of-way in the area.

#### *State Lands*

The state land, excluding Alaska Mental Health Trust lands, managed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has been designated as multi-use public land, to be retained in public ownership, and used for recreation, open space, habitat, mining, and grazing, [State Department of Natural Resources; Deception Creek Area Plan]. Reflecting community desires, this Comp Plan identifies this area to remain as open space, in public ownership, to be used for a variety of recreational purposes.

An additional benefit of this land to the community, aside from its recreational uses, is its value as a watershed. Since many homes in the Meadow Lakes area use wells as a primary source of drinking water, good drainage and clean groundwater is essential for residents.

Hunting and trail activities are the main uses in this area. Currently, there are no facilities or active recreation management in this area. Growing use over the next 5-10 years may necessitate changes in management, including more active trail construction & management.

#### *MSB Lands*

MSB land is currently at a premium. Borough lands include two 160 acre parcels, plus the school and fire station properties. These parcels should be managed for current and future public uses. Two sites are already dedicated to community uses – one for a fire station and the school, the other at the intersection of Church and Pittman, for the community's second fire station.

The Meadow Lakes Community Council recently acquired 40 acres of Borough land in a parcel just north of the Parks highway. The intent of the Community Council is to develop the site for a community center, a developed recreational facility, or other facility – such as a library or senior housing. In light of the lack of public land in the Meadow Lakes area, additional Borough parcels should be retained for similar public purposes.

## ***B. Reserve Recreation and Open Space Values on Private Lands***

Reaching the community's goal of retaining open space and recreation values requires considering how such values might be retained on private land. This is particularly important along lakes, rivers and streams, and in watershed/aquifer recharge areas. Some of the benefits of reaching these goals are listed below.

- Keeps Meadow Lakes' rural character
- Preserves wildlife corridors and protect fish runs
- Enhances water-based recreational opportunities, such as fishing and boating
- Preserves water quality
- If the greenbelts included a trail, improves trail-based recreation

While seeking these benefits, the community recognizes the need to respect the rights of private land owners. The information below outlines options for maintaining open space and recreation values on private land; the section that follows presents specific suggested strategies for Meadow Lakes, first for streamside greenbelt corridors, then for watershed/wetland areas.

### ***1. Provide Greenbelts on Key Water-Bodies***

There are several community waterways that could offer important greenbelts, including the Little Susitna River, Lucille Creek, and several smaller streams linking community lakes. The term "greenbelt" refers to linear corridors with a mostly undeveloped character, such as along a stream or trail.

#### **Little Susitna River**

The Little Susitna River, running east-west along the northern part of Meadow Lakes, is an important stream corridor in the community. For most of its distance, the river is a boundary between residential areas and the backcountry of the adjoining Talkeetna Mountains. Almost all of the land adjacent to the river is privately held, on both the north and south sides. The water column itself, up to the average high water mark, is retained by the State, allowing boating or walking along the river bar at low water. The MSB prohibits construction of habitable dwellings within 75' of the average high water mark.

The "Little Su" is one of 5 rivers in the Matanuska Susitna Borough designated as State Recreation Rivers. These special designations, approved by the State Legislature in 1997, recognize the outstanding value of these streams, and require that all public land along the river be reserved for public use and to protect river values.

This comprehensive plan identifies the Little Susitna as a distinct land use district (see land use chapter for details). The goals of this designation include working with landowners to protect water quality and habitat and to keep the riverfront in an undeveloped, "natural" state; establishing safe access points to the river for boating and fishing; and, if possible in the long term, creating an east-west trail along the river

The tributaries that feed the River are also very important to maintaining the quality and quantity of water in the main channel. The tributaries generally extend on the

north side of the river, into the Baldy/Talkeetna Mountains land use area. Future uses in that area, e.g., trails or other recreation facilities, will be designed to protect water quality and habitat along these tributaries.

Recommendations for protecting open space values and reducing development along the river corridor are listed below:

1. Establish “best management practices” for waterfront development - focusing on outlining suggestions for private developers to reduce the impacts of development on sensitive lands (e.g., limiting runoff that contains pollutants), and encourage land owners to keep their property in a natural state.
2. Review MSB setback requirements - Determine if more stringent development guidelines are desirable, and would help preserve the undeveloped state of the river.<sup>21</sup> This could be accomplished most effectively through a community-driven Special Use District process (SPUD).
3. Limit the density of residential development.  
Lower densities will help preserve rural character, and protect water quality and habitat values. This also could be accomplished through a community-driven SPUD.
4. Use the “open space” subdivision process to reserve key portions of riverfront lands for environmental values or trails when larger parcels are subdivided.
5. Establish land use policies limiting development in natural hazard areas (e.g., floodplains) or sensitive environmental areas (e.g., wetlands).  
Development in floodplains must meet national standards to get flood insurance, which is often required by financial institutions.
6. Support establishment of a local land trust or land bank to purchase and/or hold easements or key parcels along the river.
7. Support tax-incentives for private landowners to grant trail easements along the river and/or to keep the riverfront undeveloped.<sup>22</sup>
8. Request funds from the MSB, State or other agencies to purchase parcels for public use.
9. Work with the State of Alaska to establish rules that encourage non-motorized use of the river, to maintain the quiet character of the corridor.

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<sup>21</sup> For example, currently the MSB retains a 75’ setback from creeks and rivers which prohibits the construction of “habitable dwellings” within the setback. However, this *does not exclude* construction of structures such as garages, docks, and other outbuildings within the setback. Consequently, construction of such buildings is currently allowed on the banks of rivers and creeks in Meadow Lakes.

<sup>22</sup> Over the last 20-30 years, the State of Alaska has retained an access easement on water bodies when it conveys land. These easements range from 25’-75’, but are typically 35’-50’ from the high-water mark. This was less common earlier in Alaska’s history, and public access easements are only intermittently present on water bodies in the Meadow Lakes area. Trail and non-development easements can be donated by private landowners, or acquired for a fee, as is done by land trusts, such as the Great Land trust based in Anchorage. To preserve open space and agricultural lands, some communities make contracts with land owners who agree to not develop their property in exchange for the property being taxed as non-developer property.

### **Lucille Creek**

Lucille Creek runs east-west along the southern end of Meadow Lakes, and is another landmark of the area. Like the Little Susitna River, this corridor is almost entirely in private ownership. This plan identifies this area as an important open space corridor. The plan establishes a land use district defining the boundaries of the area where the community hopes to retain open space values (see Land Use Chapter). To protect open space values in this area, the same set of policies listed for the Little Susitna will apply.

### **Other Creeks & Streams**

There are other smaller drainages in the Meadow Lakes system that are important for water quality, habitat, and potentially for recreation use. Open space values should be protected along these streams where ever possible. Options include requiring development setbacks, and establishing open space corridors to be transferred to public ownership at the time of subdivision using the “open space subdivision process.”

The set of small streams and tributaries crossing through the center of the Meadow Lakes area (Upper Little Meadow Creek) is addressed as part of the following section.

## **2. Protect Water Quality, Open Space, and Habitat Values in Key Privately Owned Wetlands / Watershed Areas**

Much of the undeveloped land in Meadow Lakes is relatively poorly drained, low lying land (see the map in Chapter 2 for details). This land – the “meadow” in Meadow Lakes – generally has poor building conditions, due to the wet soils. At the same time, this land is very important for recharging aquifers, for providing open space that helps sustain the area’s rural character, and providing habitat to moose, birds and other species.

### **Upper Little Meadow Creek**

The Upper Little Meadow Creek drainage takes in a series of linked meadows and stream channels crossing through the heart of Meadow Lakes. While all the wetland areas in Meadow Lakes are important, this area is the largest, most continuous and most valuable of the watersheds in the area. Consequently, the plan establishes a land use district defining the boundaries of the area where the community hopes to retain open space values (see Land Use chapter). To protect open space values in this area, the same policies listed for the Little Susitna will apply.

In addition, require compliance with US Army Corp of Engineers wetland policies that require avoidance or mitigation of actions that adversely affect wetlands

## **GOAL 2: Create an Integrated Community Recreation System to Meet the Needs of Diverse Users**

### **BACKGROUND AND COMMUNITY VALUES**

The next step in developing a community recreation plan is to distinguish more specifically what is valuable about Meadow Lakes natural features and recreation resources, by considering their “uses.” Currently, recreation areas and open space in Meadow Lakes serve a variety of user groups, yet there is no over-arching plan for thoughtfully improving, integrating or separating use areas. Understanding who is using the land and for what purposes is a key step in protecting and taking full advantage of recreation and open space lands.

As more people move to and visit Meadow Lakes, open space becomes more valuable. Some recreation uses come into conflict; some are impacted by continued development. Resources are limited to develop and operate desired recreational facilities. A clear understanding of use and users helps to set priorities among competing recreation improvement projects.

Benefits to users of open space and recreation resources in Meadow Lakes include:

- Community identity – basis for aesthetic value and rural character
- Community-building (e.g., through use of public gathering spaces like parks)
- Access to outdoor activity, for recreation and to improve health
- Access to wildlife and other subsistence resources (for viewing, fishing, hunting, trapping, firewood gathering, berry-picking, etc.)
- Economic development (e.g., through recreation- and tourism-related business and increased property values)
- Environmental benefits (clean air, clean water, healthy ecosystem, etc.)
- “Wild Places” benefits (quality of life benefits of contact with wild places)

Users of the area often have different needs. The Comp Plan should consider ways to best use available land and to resolve user conflicts. Identifying and discussing current and future uses with distinct user groups is a first step, which can help ensure that the recreational needs of a variety of users are being met.

Users can be identified by their age, activity, place of residency, and other factors. Some of the user groups in Meadow Lakes who have special recreation and open space needs are listed in Table 12: Meadow Lakes Recreation Users, Needs, and Recommendations (see following page).

**Table 12 – Meadow Lakes Recreation Users, Needs, and Recommendations**

User	Need	Recommendation
Children & Youth	Ability to navigate the community on safe trails, either by bicycle or walking; immediate access to places for safe, fun outdoor play	Neighborhood trails systems, neighborhood parks & open space
Motorized & Non-Motorized Users	Trails and areas where snowmachines/4-wheelers are segregated from non-motorized uses, such as horses or skijoring	Corridors for skiing, walking, running, snowmachining; for equestrian, dog mushing or other uses including animals
Indoor Recreators	Four-season opportunities for health exercise	Community center housing indoor recreation facility
Residents	Neighborhood Recreation Areas	Local parks, community trail system
Visitors	Easy access to trails, fishing areas, rivers and parks that do not disturb local residents or trespass on private property	Well-marked trailheads with directional signage from the Parks Highway; area map distributed in local businesses; small parking areas
Commercial Recreation-related Operations	Area to successfully operate small-scale tourism ventures, small group guided hikes, canoe trips, river floats	Pull-out/put-in areas for guided rafting trips; Recreation attractions that would support B&B operators

### **HOW? MEANS TO PROVIDE SERVICES TO DIVERSE USER GROUPS**

This comprehensive plan is intended to be the starting point for the community to establish a more complete, broadly beneficial recreation open space system. Actions to make progress in this direction are outlined below:

1. Form a recreation, trails and open space subcommittee of the Community Council. Contact user-groups to discuss specific recreation needs and interests.
2. Meet with specific subdivisions/neighborhoods; carry out neighborhood work sessions to identify currently, locally-used trails and open space areas; identify different types of expected uses; identify parcels for potential neighborhood parks.
3. Identify areas where new, enhanced or more restricted recreation and open space uses should be considered. Make specific recommendations about specially-identified areas.
4. Use the outcome of these first three steps to add to and refine the recommendations of under the other goals this chapter, producing specific recommendations for

- retention/improvement of open space areas, neighborhood parks, or other recreation facilities; and new recreation and open space management strategies.
5. Engage the community to play a more active role in the maintenance of neighborhood and community scale recreation sites, e.g. lake access points, working with the State and Borough. Urge the community to conduct annual clean up days, and to take pride in the signs and upkeep of local parks.
  6. Relate recreation and open space uses to goals established for Land Use, Economic Development, and Governance.

### **GOAL 3: Retain, Dedicate and Improve a Community Trails System**

#### **BACKGROUND AND COMMUNITY VALUES**

Traditional trails cross over much of the Borough, and provide for a wide range of functional and recreational activities, from dog mushing to snow machining, strolling to hunting and trapping. Though many people refer to “trails” as one of the most important elements of Meadow Lakes’ quality of life, there are currently no dedicated (that is, legal public) trails in the non-mountainous portions of Meadow Lakes, other than the Parks Highway bike trail.

Traditional trails do exist in the lowland, privately owned portion of the community, and comprise an extensive system, but all cross private land. Many of these trails have already or are actively being lost as land is developed; if the situation remains unchanged, it is likely that all of the trails in Meadow Lakes will no longer be available for community use. Residents are concerned about the loss of trails, while at the same time respecting private property rights. Creating an integrated, community-wide public trail system will be challenging for Meadow Lakes, but it is something most residents believe is absolutely necessary, and that will only be more challenging in the future.

Specific trail uses to be provided in the community – both for summer and winter and for motorized and non-motorized uses – include trails for: dog mushing, cross country skiing, snowmachines, bikes, horses, ATV’s, walking and hiking

This plan attempts to lay out recommendations and criteria to be used later in developing a more complete Comprehensive Trails Plan for Meadow Lakes.

#### **HOW? MEANS TO CREATE A MEADOW LAKES TRAILS SYSTEM**

##### ***A. Identify Existing Trails***

The MSB is completing a Borough-wide review of traditional trails, and then working with communities to dedicate the most important trails for continuing, legal public use. The community should continue to work with the MSB to identify key traditional trails, including preparing a map showing important existing trails and identifying land over which these trails cross. A Meadow Lakes Trails Committee should be established to work on trail issues within the area.

## ***B. Identify and Reserve Key Trails to Serve as the Backbone to a Community Trails System***

This Comp Plan offers an initial, but incomplete version of a community trails plan. The community should continue to improve and refine this plan, consistent with the specific objectives outlined below:

1. Prepare a Trails Master Plan - Start by reviewing the location, status of any existing, traditional trails (results of item A above), and the needs for trail improvements outlined below. Identify the highest priorities for dedication and improvements. Take actions to secure and/or dedicate important trail routes for public use; secure easements and rights of way, reroute trails where needed.
2. Use Road Rights-of-Way - In light of the lack of public land in the community, the best option for creating a trail system is to locate the trails next to existing and future roads. Where public rights-of-way already exist, the odds of successfully developing community trails and obtaining funds for transportation improvements increase. The State and MSB should consider multi-use trail construction whenever arterial and connector roads are built or improved in Meadow Lakes. One successful approach used in other portions of the Borough is to include a motorized dirt or gravel route on one side, and a paved bike path on the other.
3. Priority Trails - Focus on trails that connect the following points (see map):
  - Establish multi-use road-side trails – along Shrock, Pittman, Church, Meadow Lakes Loop, and future arterials and collector roads
  - Establish new trails running along a planned new east-west collector road
  - Provide trail connections between the elementary school and adjoining residential areas
  - Provide a trail link between community residential areas and the Little Susitna River Corridor and the State-owned, open space land to the north, particularly to Bench lake
  - Establish trail and sidewalk connections between residential areas and the planned town center south of the Parks Highway, near the Pittman Road intersection
  - Provide trail access to existing and future community parks, e.g. on the two 160 acre Borough tracts, and also smaller neighborhood parks
  - If possible, establish trails along future greenbelt corridors, including the Little Susitna River, Lucille Creek, and the Upper Meadow Lakes Creek Watershed corridor. While desirable for the community, these trails can only be developed through cooperation of affected land owners
4. Subdivision Process - Always consider trail needs in reviewing subdivisions, road improvements, or other actions that could affect or provide the chance to reserve public trail easements. Wherever possible include sufficient right of way width in new roads for future roadside trails.
5. Collector Roads - Establish collector roads (See Circulation chapter) to funnel higher speeds and volumes of traffic off neighborhood roads, so these roads are safer for walking and biking.

6. Secondary Trails - Establish other new, often secondary trails:
  - Connector trails as land is developed in the “meadows,” using the open space subdivision process. Many of these may primarily be winter trails
  - Neighborhood trails as part of road improvements, or subdivisions in and near established neighborhoods
  - As an element of the restoration of gravel pits
  - Along section line easements, and where possible, utility easements
7. Partners - Work with land owners (individual private owners, institutional owners such as the Mental Health Trust, the University, and public land managers) who have traditional trails crossing their land and promote? Structure? plans that allow continued, conditional trail use. This approach has been successful in Willow, and resulted in an extensive community trail system.

***C. Upgrade Existing and Add New Bridge Crossing of Little Susitna River.***

Better access to the State land in the Baldy area is key to improving an area-wide trail system. Currently, one bridge crosses the Little Su - the Olsen Bridge – off Schrock Road. The bridge crossing area serves as a put-in spot for boaters, but lacks a dedicated parking area. The site also has problems with partying, litter, and lack of a restroom. Proposed improvements at this site are discussed in the following section.

The next safe stopping area for boaters is outside of Meadow Lakes, in Houston. Second and third put-in areas downstream are desirable – perhaps from the turn at Pittman and/or north of Gunflint.

***D. Establish Trail Heads to Support and Direct Trail Use***

Identify specific trailhead areas that have convenient, safe public access, parking, trash receptacles and trail use information. Use the location of trail heads to funnel trail use away from neighborhoods and private property. Priorities for trails head include sites at the end of the roads that cross north of the Little Susitna, providing access into the Baldy area.

***E. Summary: Highest Priorities for Near-Term Trail Improvements***

Of the various trail-related actions and projects outlined in section, the highest priorities are listed below:

- Complete a community trails master plan
- Develop a trail along Pittman Road (check with state re: ROW width, odds of carrying out this project)
- Find a route and reserve a trail connecting the community’s primary residential areas with the Baldy /Talkeetna Mountains area (including a crossing of the Little Susitna). The trails map shows one promising route – a connection at the western end of the Little Su, in the one location where state land extends across the river.

## **GOAL 4: Establish a System of Community Recreation Lands**

### **BACKGROUND AND COMMUNITY VALUES**

Residents of Meadow Lakes want to preserve their quality of life by establishing an integrated parks, recreation and open space system, with both developed and undeveloped sites. As one resident commented, “We need more open spaces where kids can get on their bikes and go play.” Others have discussed how recreational uses could be considered as a means of increasing visitor-based business to Meadow Lakes. These uses should be considered by examining the needs of the entire area, as well as the needs of individual neighborhoods.

Some recreational facilities to consider are:

- Ball fields and similar outdoor sports and recreation facilities (skating rink, track, basketball courts, etc.)
- Multi-purpose indoor recreation facilities (gym, basketball court, etc.)
- Motorized and non-motorized play areas (motocross or ATV/snowmachine trails; as well as trails for cross country skiing, mountain biking, hiking)
- Neighborhood parks; playgrounds including climbing structures, seating, sled hills
- Campgrounds, picnic areas and restrooms
- Lake and stream access
- Boardwalks, interpretive sites on wetlands
- Water-access facilities (docks & launches)
- Open space areas (ski loops, walking paths, etc.)
- Scenic viewpoints
- Town Center park

### **HOW? MEANS TO PROVIDE A COMMUNITY RECREATION SYSTEM**

As is the case with trails, the Comp Plan can take the first step in developing a community recreation system, but the full process will need to follow the completion of the Comp Plan. Objectives for the community recreation and open space system are listed below:

#### **A. Retain, and in Some Cases, Improve Public Access to Lakes.**

As the community’s name suggests, lakes are the distinguishing characteristic of the area. Much of the residential development in the area has grown up around lakes; waterfront property with good lake access is highly valued. Residents enjoy a range of activities on lakes – canoeing, fishing, jet skiing and swimming during the summer months, and ice fishing, snowmachining, and skiing during wintertime. Float planes take off and land on some lakes. Hiking and walking trails and picnic and beach areas exist around others.

In addition to their recreational value, use of the lakes promotes neighborly relations – “I use my snowmachine to cross the lakes all winter with my kids and visit friends,” said one resident – and provides opportunities for quality family-time – “I like to have someplace where I can take the grandkids swimming,” remarked another.

Allowing residents to safely and responsibly use area lakes is a high priority. Doing so increases the quality of life of residents who don't reside directly near the water, and adds value to all real estate in the area. Fortunately for Meadow Lakes residents, while most easily-accessible shorelines are covered by private subdivisions, public access to many lakes has been retained by the State.

Existing public lake access points need improvement throughout Meadow Lakes. The recreation/open space map shows most (but not all) of these access points. Steps to improve public access to lakes include:

- Identifying public access points with small, attractive signage, including rules for responsible use of these sites [insert sample attractive lake access sign]
- Improving small-craft launches and lake-access trails, where they currently exist
- Improving parking areas, where they currently exist, but keeping them small in size to limit over-use, and
- Creating a system for managing recreation use, with moderate, community-supported management measures, e.g. emptying trash cans or reducing vandalism. Regular use by local residents is one of the most powerful ways to discourage inappropriate behavior

The Meadow Lakes Community Council and the State should work with neighborhoods to determine methods for striking the correct balance between public access and homeowner privacy.

### ***B. Other Policies to Develop Recreation Facilities***

1. Master Plan - Prepare a recreation, trails and open space master plan, establishing guidelines for an area-wide park system, linking smaller neighborhood parks and recreation areas to community scale parks, open space and trails. Set priorities among recreation activities:
  - Community center with indoor sports, work out space
  - Community Park with sports fields: including baseball, soccer, ice rinks, sled hills, etc.
  - Cross country ski area
  - ATV/Motocross area
  - Undeveloped open space recreation areas (for skiing, snowmachining, mushing, equestrian activities, etc.)
  - Better water and lake access (covered above)
2. Neighborhood Parks/Lake Access Points - Explore options to create neighborhood park facilities at lake access points, with picnic tables, play equipment. This will benefit local users, and create more activity in these areas to discourage vandalism.
3. Community Building - Proceed with plans for a community building (see Land Use and Public Facilities chapters); include with this project indoor recreation areas, and outdoor sports facilities. Preferably develop this facility in the planned town center.

4. Community Park - Reserve site for at least one large community park (20-60 acres); best options are at one of the two large Borough parcels.
5. School Recreation Facilities - Upgrade play equipment and sports fields at the school, so this can be a center for community recreation.
6. Campground/Day Use area at the bridge over the Little Susitna River. There are two objectives for this project: one is to create a management presence in the area to control partying by local kids. The second goal is to create a public day use area and/or campground. Implementing this plan will require work with the State, Borough and private owners. Knikatu Corporation, which owns land adjoining this crossing, has expressed interest in working with the community to establish recreation facilities at this site. The campground could function as dedicated access to the river, with parking, a restroom and interpretive information.
7. Subdivision Process - Secure new sites for neighborhood parks and other recreation facilities, establish rules so these areas are dedicated as part of the subdivision process and then managed for public use.
8. Beach Park – secure land for a community lake front park, with swimming, picnicking, parking and trail access.
9. Identify scenic viewpoints.
10. Work with residents to determine the need for individual lake management plans.

***C. Summary: Highest Priorities for Near-Term Actions***

Of the various recreation improvements outlined in section, the highest priorities are (list below is preliminary, for discussion with planning team)

- Complete a community recreation, parks and open space master plan
- Community building, with adjoining outdoor recreation/sports facilities
- Reserve/acquire land for a community lakefront beach park. This site ideally would be centrally located, have space for picnicking and other park facilities, and have a sheltered, south facing, sandy bottomed area for swimming. One option would be to establish this park on a reclaimed, man-made lake, but a natural lake is preferred
- Improvements to lake access – better signage, parking, informational signs, possible play facilities for neighborhood kids

## **GOAL 5: Create a Sustainable Recreation Management System**

### **BACKGROUND AND COMMUNITY VALUES**

Identifying and developing trails, and carrying out recreation and open space projects is a necessary first step in meeting community recreation goals. The key second step is defining strategies to operate, maintain and manage these facilities and activities. Good management is essential for making the Trails, Recreation and Open Space plans sustainable.

Given ongoing fiscal challenges facing the Borough and the State, creative methods to pay for management and maintenance costs are needed. All over Alaska, declining State and Borough budgets are placing greater responsibility at the local level.

Options for maintenance and operation of recreation facilities include:

- Arranging for a third party – the State or Borough - to be responsible for managing recreation facilities
- Creating revenue from the use of a recreation facility to cover management costs. In Talkeetna, for example, the community charges for parking and uses these revenues to manage the adjoining river front park. State and federal campgrounds commonly charge a fee for use, and this approach is increasingly being proposed at Alaskan day use recreation areas
- Relying on local volunteers, camp hosts
- Looking for opportunities for multiple uses of established facilities like a school
- Establishing a recreation service area, to raise funds through property taxes
- Establishing an “impact fee” system, as is common in the western US, where new development/subdivisions pay into a fund to operate parks and other recreation facilities

As the level and variety of recreation activities increases, there are often conflicts and undesirable behaviors that require management. One nearby example is the set of challenges facing the Butte area near Palmer, where reckless shooting, car burning, litter and partying have created major problems for local residents. Other examples include conflicts over motorized vs. non-motorized trail use. Actions to manage recreation use include:

- Information (e.g., brochures, signs, maps to guide recreation use to the right locations)
- Education (e.g., programs on trail etiquette, perhaps conducted by a local snow machine club)
- Design and location of facilities (e.g., directing trail use to a preferred location by constructing a trail head, trails in the right location)
- On the ground enforcement (e.g., through the state troopers, MSB land management)

## **HOW? MEANS TO MANAGE RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE SYSTEM**

Options for managing Meadow Lakes parks, open space and other recreation areas and facilities are outlined below. These general approaches will need to be further explored and developed by the community as part of the implementation of this plan:

- Establish a Meadow Lakes Trails Committee responsible for identifying existing trails, working with the MSB to designate priority trails, and work on a Master Trails Plan for the Meadow Lakes area
- Engage recreation sub-committee of community council in advocating for better recreation management by State and Borough, and also in fundraising and volunteer coordination from the local community
- Recreational education and information programs (maps, brochures, posted regulations, speed limits, directional signage, etc.)
- Directional roadway signs (trailheads, roadside, lake access points, etc.)
- Create local outreach/educational programs (Adopt-A-Lake-Access, Adopt-A-Trail, trail clearing events, school programs, community newsletter notices, etc.)
- Create economic incentives for development and ongoing maintenance (public-private partnerships for campgrounds, facilities, etc.)
- Consider user fees for specific areas
- Create individual lake management plans
- Consider regulations that can be enforced through public or private means (police, neighborhood watch, local towing company, etc.)
- Consider alternative models such as recreation service districts, land trusts, neighborhood patrols, community associations, etc. Some of these bodies may be able to assess fees as well as maintain parks

## **RECREATION & OPEN SPACE LAND USE AREAS**

The land use districts outlined in the land use chapter provide a framework for carrying out recreation and open space goals, see that chapter for details.

## 3.0 Major Goals & Strategies

### 3.3 CIRCULATION

#### OVERVIEW

*Circulation* refers to the range of systems used to move people and goods around and through the Meadow Lakes area, including movement by private vehicles, trains and planes, as well as walking, skiing, four wheelers, snow machines and other trail activities. The community's current road system evolved from roads built to serve the homesteads that developed in the area during 40s and 50s. Today, the Parks Highway is the dominant element of the Meadow Lakes traffic circulation system. Linked to the Parks Highway are two major north-south collectors – Pittman and Church - which circle together at the north end of the community. Branching off this system are many smaller residential subdivision roads, some of which are beginning to carry heavier traffic from multiple subdivisions.



The Alaska Railroad crosses the Meadow Lakes community and provides an important statewide freight and tourist link, but it also creates a significant barrier to new roads linking Meadow Lakes residential areas and the Parks Highway. Natural features such as the Little Susitna River, the wetlands along Lucille Creek, numerous lakes and meadows, and commercial ventures, including several large gravel mining operations form additional obstacles to road expansion.

The southeastern corner of the Meadow Lakes Community Council boundary wraps around the Wasilla Airport. The community also has a number of smaller airstrips and lakes used by wheeled aircraft and floatplanes. With an extensive, but mostly informal trail system, trails in Meadow Lakes have long been used by snowmachines, hikers, dog sleds, horse riders and skiers; virtually all trails cross what are now private lands, and consequently these trails are likely to be closed to future public use.

The Mat-Su Borough and the local road system have rapidly grown over the last two decades, and this trend is expected to continue. Circulation issues have created increased concern in Meadow Lakes. These issues include congestion on the Parks Highway, the transformation of some quiet residential streets into ad hoc collector roads, and the heavy use of Pittman and other residential roads by gravel trucks. In addition to concerns posed by incremental residential and commercial growth, future regional transportation projects that will affect the local circulation system include continued improvements to the Parks Highway, both within and outside Meadow Lakes, and the proposed Knik Arm crossing. The Knik Arm ferry and bridge projects would not improve driving times between Meadow Lakes and Anchorage, and could actually divert traffic that currently passes through the community.

## **COMMUNITY CIRCULATION GOALS**

The circulation element of this plan responds to residents' desires to maintain rural character, concentrate commercial development, and upgrade existing roads and locating future collectors to serve private property that is likely to be developed. Early location of future collector roads will allow the Borough to obtain right-of-way cost-effectively and allow residents and future residents some certainty as to where future main roads will be located. These goals and strategies are derived from a community survey in 2003 and the spring 2004 community workshops.

- 1. Guide Planned Expansion Of The Parks Highway To Create An Attractive, Efficient 'Parkway' That Benefits Meadow Lakes**
- 2. Retain Church & Pittman As Collector Roads With Minimal Driveways And A Largely Rural, Undeveloped Feel.**
- 3. Plan for Future Expansion Of The Residential Road System; Identify Roads To Serve As Collectors; Create Better Connections To Adjoining Communities To Supplement The Parks Highway**
- 4. Set Appropriate Standards for Road Development and Surfacing**
- 5. Plan for Good Town Center Access**
- 6. Plan For Continuing Railroad Use; Maintain Opportunities for Transit, including Rail and Carpools**
- 7. Maintain and Improve Roadside Trails (covered under recreation & open space)**
- 8. Improve Road Maintenance**

## **GOAL 1: Guide Planned Expansion of the Parks Highway to Create an Attractive, Efficient 'Parkway' that Benefits Meadow Lakes**

### **BACKGROUND AND COMMUNITY VALUES**

The Parks Highway serves three functions. It is a major state highway carrying freight and through traffic, a means for local residents to reach their homes, and the location for a number of local and regional businesses. This mix of uses creates congestion and safety problems, which will intensify as the traffic continues to grow. In past meetings, the community emphasized that the comprehensive plan should support appropriate road design and development that evokes a “parkway” character, that is, an attractive, tree-lined road, with smooth traffic flow, minimal driveways, and with most roadside businesses reached by way of secondary roads or frontage roads, . A parkway is both more attractive and better at moving through traffic than the commercial strip that has evolved in the Wasilla area. What drivers see from their vehicles, determines their impression of the community.

The recently completed Draft Parks Highway Management Plan (ADOT/PF, Nov. 2002, Table 3-4) predicts continued traffic growth, from 15,100 vehicles per day in 2000, to 31,700 per day by 2030. The ADOT/PF plan identifies the eventual need for either substantial widening of the existing road, or a bypass. The State is now in the early stages of planning road improvements. Environmental analysis will be done over the next several years, and construction completed by the end of the decade. Meadow Lakes can be active in shaping this project through this comprehensive plan and providing comments and information about community goals to ADOT/PF.

### **HOW? - PARKS HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENT THAT BENEFITS MEADOW LAKES**

#### **A. Plan for future expansion of the Parks Highway to create an attractive, safe and efficient route that better separates through and local traffic**

Meadow Lakes faces the same set of issues that have confronted communities around the US for decades – what to do with an increasingly congested regional highway crossing through the center of town? The ADOT/PF Parks Highway Corridor plan is evaluating several alternative approaches for upgrading the Parks Highway through Wasilla and Meadow Lakes. Currently, DOT favors widening the Parks on its existing alignment, rather than shifting the road to a new location. Under this approach the road would grow from two to four lanes, requiring an increase in ROW from 200 to 400 feet. Major, freeway-style intersections will ultimately be needed at the intersections of Church, Rocky Ridge, Pittman and west of Meadow Lakes at the Big Lake turn-off. Construction is not expected for 8-12 years.

The community looks forward to working with DOT to help plan this project, to identify and compare different alternatives, and to select the alternative that best meets the community’s goals. Currently this plan supports the recommendation to maintain the Parks Highway on its existing alignment, provided this decision incorporates the actions listed below.

- Create a controlled access, 4 lane highway, with grade separated intersections, to reduce congestion, improve flow of through traffic and maximize safety. Minimize driveways and intersections along the Highway; uses located near the Parks should gain access from frontage roads and shared entryways rather than individual driveways. .

- Work with DOT/PF to identify the preferred route for the upgraded Parks Highway. Three alternatives have also been proposed. The first is to upgrade the existing highway. The second is to move the road south, beginning at about the Charles Street intersection, into the vicinity of Calico Drive, and then west till it meets the existing route near the Randall Road intersection. The third is tied to a possible bypass of the Parks through southern Wasilla. This would likely enter Meadow Lakes from the southeast, along Knik Goose Bay Road, and continue west near Calico Drive and back to the existing highway near the Randall Road intersection.
- Encourage the majority of commercial and industrial uses in the Meadow Lakes area to concentrate in several discrete districts, rather the spread along the length of the Highway. In particular, work to create a Meadow Lakes town center area, located south of the Parks Highway near the Pittman Parks Highway intersection, to include an attractive, pedestrian-oriented commercial and civic core serving local residents and visitors.
- Provide a series of well designed intersections that provide access off the Parks Highway into adjoining residential areas, and the town center commercial district.
- Retain existing vegetation or provide landscaping so the large majority of the Highway is lined by trees. Retain several substantial areas adjoining the Parks Highway in a largely natural state, to create a clearer sense of identity for the Meadow Lakes as distinct from adjoining communities. In particular, work to maintain the Alaska Railroad property on the eastern side of the community as an undeveloped, natural area.
- Provide for safe crossings of the Parks Highway by pedestrians and other trail users including bridges and tunnels. Improving the pedestrian crossing at Pittman is a very high priority.
- Minimize adverse environmental impacts of highway development, for example, minimizing impacts on wetlands and stream systems.
- Consistent with other considerations outlined above, minimize road construction costs, including costs for construction and ROW acquisition.

## **B. Improve Parks Highway Intersections**

Parks Highway improvements are not expected for at least 8-12 years. Meanwhile actions are needed to improve key community intersections. Most important are improvements at Pittman, including improving visibility, improving pedestrian safety, reducing gravel truck-vehicular conflicts, and reducing problems due to ice. A signal at Vine is also a priority.

## **C. Limit commercial development along the Parks Highway**

In order to create a successful town center, these facilities and services need to be the focus of commercial development in Meadow Lakes. If commercial enterprises are allowed to sprawl along the Parks Highway and other community roads, it will be more difficult to achieve the concentration of development necessary for a functional town center. (See Land Use Chapter for details.). One way to implement this strategy is to take advantage of the relocation of businesses that will be required when ADOT/PF expands the Parks Highway ROW, and buys the adjoining properties. Businesses can use this opportunity to relocate the town center area.

**GOAL 2: Retain Pittman, Church & Schrock as Collector Roads with Minimal Driveways and a Largely Rural, Undeveloped Feel.**

**BACKGROUND AND COMMUNITY VALUES**

Meadow Lakes residents have consistently emphasized their enjoyment of the rural character of their community, and the desire to maintain this rustic character into the future. One major reason for this character is the tree-lined, largely undeveloped nature of Pittman and Schrock – the two major gateways into the community’s residential areas. In addition to aesthetic benefits, the lack of driveways and commercial development on these roads means traffic flows smoothly.

**HOW? – MEANS TO MAINTAIN EXISTING CHARACTER OF PITTMAN, CHURCH AND SCHROCK ROADS.**

Pittman and Schrock shall be managed in the same general style proposed for the Parks Highway, that is, these should be limited access, “parkway-style” roads with minimal driveways to individual properties. Instead, as is largely the case today, properties adjoining these roads should gain access using shared drives or separate roads. A buffer of vegetation (natural evergreen) should be retained along the length of both roads. (See Land Use Chapter for a proposed buffer).

**GOAL 3: Plan for Future Expansion of the Residential Road System; Identify Roads to Serve as Collectors; Create Better Connections to Adjoining Communities to Supplement the Parks Highway.**

**BACKGROUND AND COMMUNITY VALUES**

The Meadow Lakes Area road system has developed organically over the years. The road circulation system is likely to go through growing pains as more land is developed. The roads serving subdivisions were originally constructed for low levels of use. With increased development some of these roads are effectively functioning as ‘collectors’, that is, roads that carry traffic from multiple subdivisions. To avoid too much traffic on residential roads, a plan is needed that identifies a hierarchy of roads – a road system - with higher capacity collectors that are buffered from residential development. Certain existing roads need to be identified as collectors, or even as arterials, and improved and maintained to a higher standard. New collector roads are needed to augment existing roads, as well as to provide more direct road and trail connections to surrounding communities.

In addition, several neighborhoods with significant populations have only one way in or out. Greater connectivity and secondary access between neighborhoods and main highways can improve public safety in case of emergency and can spread traffic over additional routes.

## HOW? – MEANS TO CREATE AN IMPROVED RESIDENTIAL ROAD SYSTEM

### A. Improve the Capacity of Existing Roads to Better Serve Current and Expected Future Increases in Traffic

During planning meetings residents described how traffic has increased on Beverly Lakes, and other roads serving multiple subdivisions. Since many of these roads were built to modest standards with gravel surfacing, traffic should be monitored to ensure that the road standards and surfacing are appropriate for traffic volumes. As volumes increase, road geometrics and surfacing should be improved to keep pace. Although the common response to increased traffic levels is wider, straighter and harder-surfaced roads, residents also voiced the desire to maintain the rural character to roads in the area and to avoid the appearance of urbanization (see more under Goal 4).

Specific road segments recommended for near term improvements are listed below, and shown on the accompanying map.

- Beverley Lakes Road
- Meadow Lakes Loop Road

### B. Develop a “Corridor Preservation Program” to Reserve Routes That Will Improve Connectivity Between Existing Residential Roads and Serve Future Growth on Currently Undeveloped Private Property.

Corridor preservation is a pro-active strategy that will help the community address its future transportation needs. This approach can also identify areas where roads are not needed or wanted. Nearly all of Meadow Lakes is privately owned. Only a portion of this private property has been subdivided. In many of existing subdivision, only a minor fraction of the lots have had homes or other structures built upon them.

Through this plan, the Borough should designate and immediately begin reserving needed rights-of-way for future arterial and collector-level roads, in anticipation of expected future growth. Early identification of future collector and arterial road locations is important for a number of reasons:

- Reduces the chance that too much traffic will use previously quiet residential streets.
- Minimizes the cost of right-of-way acquisition. In a developed community, the cost of right-of-way for a new road can equal or exceed construction costs.
- Minimizes hard feelings, by giving residents realistic expectations about traffic levels on the roads where they live or intend to buy.

An initial identification of key routes to be reserved is included in this comp. plan. This effort should be refined by the Borough, working with the community. These initial routes are based on a review of property ownership and soil suitability, to identify which parts of the Meadow Lakes area are most likely to be developed through 2025. Ownership and physical constraint information were combined with a consideration of existing roads, rights-of-way and section-line easements to create a preliminary set of future collector-level road

connections, shown on the following page. These routes are designed to accomplish a number of purposes:

- Connect developable property to the existing road system cost-effectively.
- Provide an additional way to access the larger subdivisions – “two ways in and out”.
- Connect subdivisions with one another so that travel between subdivisions need not always involve travel to and on the major highways. Providing this upgrade would be accomplished in a roundabout means as to not lure through traffic while allowing emergency vehicles access.
- Provide improved links to adjacent communities.

New connector roads recommended for the Meadow Lakes area include: Bozinoff, Skyview Drive, Spruce Skyview, Mine Properties/Beverly Lake, and Knik Goose Bay Road. It is possible that some of the proposed connections confront topographical or other constraints that will result in a different alignment. It is important to take action in the near future to refine and preserve specific corridors for these connections, including:

- Identify section line and other existing, potential but un-constructed roadway easements;
- Finalize the “preliminary” corridor needs identified in this plan, provide enough ROW to allow space for trails on both sides of the road;
- Field verify the recommended corridors to make sure the routes are constructible;
- In cases in which recommended or existing (section line) rights-of-way are not feasible, select alternative alignments; and
- Develop an “Official Streets and Roads Map” recognized by the Borough that identifies future road corridors and road classifications.

Where possible on these routes, the Borough should reserve 80 to 100 feet of right-of-way to accommodate collector or minor arterial level streets. In order to implement the corridor program, the following measures should be considered as a basket of tools to be developed, and in some cases codified as Borough ordinances<sup>23</sup>:

#### **Tools For Corridor Preservation**

- Fee simple purchase of land for right-of-way, coupled with requiring building setbacks from road rights-of-way.
- Voluntary dedications or donations of right-of-way on a case-by case basis during the land development process.
- Restrictions on building in the right-of-way of a mapped but un-built road.

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<sup>23</sup> Adapted from *Managing Corridor Development: A Municipal Handbook*, Center for Urban Transportation Research, 1996.

- Requiring subdividers to contribute funds toward upgrades on roads that will be more heavily used as a result of their subdivisions; in the future, the Borough will not approve subdivisions unless new and affected roads are improved to Borough standards;
- Allowances for some interim use of transportation right-of-way for uses having low structural impact through an agreement that requires the property owner to relocate or discontinue the use at their expense when the land is needed for a road or trail;
- Criteria for right-of-way exactions and a process for determining the amount of right-of-way dedication that is roughly proportionate to the impact of the proposed development;
- A reduction or reprieve from property taxes on property subject to corridor preservation restrictions. Examples are removing property from the tax roll, lowering the tax rate for preserved land, or providing a tax credit;
- An option for clustering developments by reducing setbacks or other site design requirements to avoid encroachment into the right-of-way;
- Procedures for intergovernmental coordination between the Borough and the ADOT/PF.

### **C. Create New Connections to Adjoining Communities to Supplement the Parks Highway**

Several new roads are needed to help relieve congestion on the Parks Highway, and provide for more efficient movement to adjoining communities. Most important is creation of a new east-west road, referred to as “Seldon West”, north of and generally parallel to the Parks Highway, that ultimately will provide a connection from Houston, through Meadow Lakes, to Wasilla and Big Lake. In addition, Slyvan should be extended south, across Lucille Creek, to the Knik-Goose Bay Road. This will create a more efficient road system, provide the opportunity for a needed roadside trail, and provide for more vehicular and pedestrian traffic to the planned Meadow Lakes Town center. The need for these roads will be integrated into the corridor preservation program described above.

### **D. Create New Connections for Gravel Trucks to Reach the Parks Highway**

Pittman receives heavy use by gravel trucks and heavy equipment, with trucks coming and going every few minutes for much of the summer construction season. Truck traffic creates issues of safety for vehicles and pedestrians, delays in traffic, noise and dust. Alternative routes for these trucks should be planned, which separates industrial uses from streets with regular residential traffic. Options to solve this problem, from west to east, include: improving the intersection at Pittman, having the trucks cross the railroad and enter at a new signalized intersection immediately south of the main gravel yard, or for the trucks to go east and connect in the vicinity of Vienna Woods. In any case, trucks will have to enter the Parks Highway at a signalized intersection.

**INSERT MEADOW LAKES CIRCULATION MAP**

## **GOAL 4: Set Appropriate Standards for Road Development and Surfacing.**

### **BACKGROUND AND COMMUNITY VALUES**

Many residents like the rural character of the Meadow Lakes area and would like to see it preserved as growth occurs. One key part of the rural nature of the area is that local roads are relatively narrow, with low speed limits, typically with a gravel-surface. While many residents would like to see their neighborhood roads preserved with the “country” feel, others would like to see their roads improved, allowing for more traffic and higher speeds. The result of this may be a road improvement plan that would be specific to each neighborhood.

To provide the character of roads that meet neighborhood needs, road standards should be developed that permit both straight fast paved roads and roads with a more rural character. The desire to avoid paved roads is tied to the ultimate density of residential areas; as densities of actual development increase beyond one dwelling unit per 10 acres the need for hard-surfaced roads increases. For roads that serve higher traffic volumes, for which gravel surfacing is not practical, the first hard-surface options should emphasize surfaces that are less expensive and have less of an urban “feel” than asphalt.

### **HOW? – MEANS TO SHAPE THE STANDARDS FOR FUTURE ROADS**

#### **A. Develop Rural or “Country” Road Standards That Call for Appropriate Road Widths, Horizontal and Vertical Curves, and Surfacing.**

Road standards and their interpretation have been both contested and evolving in the past several years. Conservative and rigid use of the roadway design standards established by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) has softened to some extent. There is increasing understanding that incorporating community values, creativity and the flexibility provided in the AASHTO “Green Book” can produce designs that provide superior all-around service to the community. In 1997, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) published *Flexibility in Highway Design*, which provided guidance and encouragement to transportation engineers to conceive of roadway solutions broadly and creatively. Congress in 1995 passed the National Highway System (NHS) act, which states in section 304:

A design for new construction, reconstruction, resurfacing...restoration, or rehabilitation of a highway on the National Highway System...may take into account ...(in addition to safety, durability and economy of maintenance)...

- (A) the constructed and natural environment of the area;
- (B) the environmental, scenic, aesthetic, historic, community, and preservation impacts of the activity; and
- (C) access for other modes of transportation.

In *Flexibility in Highway Design* the FHWA points out that “by emphasizing the importance of good design for NHS roads, Congress is saying that careful, context-sensitive design is a factor that should not be overlooked for any road.”

Local and collector road standards in the rural parts of the Borough should provide sufficient flexibility to ensure roads that are designed and constructed strike a balance between capacity and design speed on one hand and roads that are rural in nature and “rest easy” on the land. They should also have lower speed limits and provide emergency access.

**B. Provide Development Density Standards Supportive of Lower-Density Development That Can Be Supported By Gravel-Surfaced Roads.**

Gravel-surfaced roads are ideal at limiting speeds and maintaining a “country” feel to the road. However, without treatment, gravel roads and traffic can produce large amounts of dust, and higher traffic volumes result in the need for frequent grading and resultant high maintenance costs. Recent research on the relationship between gravel-surfaced roads and development density helps establish reasonable standards for determining limits on development density in order to avoid paved, higher-speed roads. Research shows the maximum density for a higher-capacity gravel road is about six acres per dwelling unit, assuming the area served by the road is fully built-out.

Some parts of Meadow Lakes will have low densities, but in general, a desire to limit the area to gravel-surfaced roads will require more limitations on the density of development than the community generally wants. Therefore, as the town grows, it is likely that nearly all roads will ultimately require paving.

**C. In Cases Where Traffic Volumes Require Hard-Surfacing, Consider Alternatives to Asphalt.**

If low densities at full build-out are impractical in most areas, then methods to build hard-surfaced roads that are not wide and straight should be considered. Limits on street lighting and alternative surfacing methods, such as chip-sealing, avoiding straight road alignments, and building roads on the narrow side of accepted standards will all contribute to lower travel speeds and traffic, and a “country” rather than urban aesthetic. Roads with non asphalt road surfaces require a good base.

Although chip-seal in the place of pavement and a narrow road profile will reduce the cost of road development, alignments that depart from straight roads built will increase the cost of collector roads. An additional factor is travel speed. While most residents of a community support lower travel speeds, narrower, curving, gravel-surfaced roads mean more time required to make a trip. The general sense of the comments made during the public meetings held for the Comprehensive Plan is that residents prefer “slow and country” to “fast and urban,” even if it means trips take a bit more time. To the Borough, “slow and country” will likely require more unique sections of right-of-way and less reliance on section line easements.

**D. Locate Roads Within Right-of-Ways in a Manner That Serves Traffic Needs and Minimizes Impacts on Adjoining Homes.**

In the past, roads have been established and then paved without reference to the location of established rights of way. In the future, when roads are improved, the centerline of the road should generally be placed on the centerline of the right-of-way, to ensure that maximum land is available for roadside trails and snow storage. Exceptions may be made where shifting the road off the centerline reduces impacts on adjoining properties and reduces construction costs while maintaining a safe roadway.

## **GOAL 5: Plan For Good Access to Town Center.**

### **BACKGROUND AND COMMUNITY VALUES**

Good access is key to a successful town center - by road, trail, transit, perhaps ultimately including rail. “Good access” means the town center is readily accessible by vehicle, and at the same time, is a safe and comfortable place for moving around on foot. Downtown Talkeetna is an example of a place that strikes a good balance on these issues; Wasilla and Midtown Anchorage generally are readily accessible by vehicle, but offer little pleasure to pedestrians.

### **HOW? – MEANS TO ENSURE GOOD TOWN CENTER ACCESS**

**Develop a town center circulation plan, identifying options that would provide for good access, visibility, parking, and pedestrian circulation needed for a successful town center.**

As described above, plans for improving the Parks Highway are a key step toward developing a successful town center. Particularly important is the policy to limit commercial development along the road, while concentrating a critical mass of commercial, civic and other uses in the town center.

The town center will be located predominantly on the south side of the Parks Highway. Vehicular access will need to occur at at least two intersections. Possibilities include Pittman, Deer Hoof and an extension of Vine. An additional future road will connect from the south (from the Knik Goose Bay Road), either along Sylvan or a road a mile to the west. Details of a town center circulation plan need to be developed as part of the ongoing planning for the Parks Highway. While the specifics of this eventual plan can’t be tied down in the comp plan, it is possible to outline the objectives to be met by the eventual town center circulation system

#### **Good Access Into The Town Center:**

- Provide at least two and preferably three intersections on the Parks Highway providing clear, safe, attractive and convenient vehicular access in and out of the town center.
- Design roads that cross through the town center so businesses within the center are conveniently reached both on foot and by vehicle. Traffic in the town center should move slowly.
- Intersection Design – work with DOT so intersections create attractive positive entryways into the town center.
- Transit connection – plan for the option for a park and ride, bus and eventually a rail connection to the town center.

#### **Good Access Within The Town Center:**

- Commercial and community functions need to be located close enough to each other that people are encouraged to walk. Walkways and sidewalks need to be designed so they are not impinged upon by parked or moving cars, and have amenities (seating, flowers, storefronts, etc.) that encourage a stroll in place of a short trip by car.

- Provide for easy, safe walking from parking to commercial uses.
- Allow for safe and enjoyable pedestrian accessibility to all parts of the town center, including a central, pedestrian core, and a more auto-oriented outer ring. (see land use chapter map)

**GOAL 6: Plan For Continuing Railroad Use; Maintain Opportunities For Transit, Including Rail and Carpools.**

**BACKGROUND AND COMMUNITY VALUES**

The option of getting around without a car is likely to grow in importance over the years. The Meadow Lakes area can encourage transit use by influencing the pattern of development (more concentrated, more options for transit) as well as taking advantage of the Alaska Railroad.

**HOW? – DEVELOP WITH AN EYE TO THE FUTURE; PLAN AHEAD FOR TRANSIT AND CARPOOL OPTIONS**

**A. Locate and Reserve Carpool and Park-And-Ride Lots.**

The first transit option for the Meadow Lakes area is likely to be carpooling and vanpooling. A significant portion of the families living in the area have a household member who commutes to work in Wasilla, Palmer or Anchorage. Over time and with growth, the number is likely to increase. Development of ridesharing can save users significant amount of money otherwise spent on gas, repairs, and wear and tear to the family vehicle. The service can be ad-hoc, organized by the Borough, or by a special-purpose private-non-profit.

If there is public or private property that can be used as a park-and-ride lot located near the Meadow Lakes area, then the service could start relatively quickly. Areas with most promise for park-and-ride lots include the town center area (perhaps the corner of the Parks Highway and Pittman) and the Church Road- Parks Highway intersection. The property could be set aside, or used without the creation of structures in order to save it for future park-and-ride use. Initially, the service could operate on a public-use basis--simply as a location for commuters to park their cars and join the day’s driver.

Ultimately, the community will want to work with the Alaska Railroad to establish regular commuter rail service. Land for a future commuter rail depot should be reserved for this purpose.

**B. Work In Concert With The Alaska Railroad To Guide Continuing Use Of The Rail Route To Meet The Railroad And Community Needs.**

Freight traffic on the Alaska Railroad has grown and is expected to continue to grow at three percent per year. Principal commodities on the railroad as it traverses the Meadow Lakes area are petroleum products, coal and scrap. Passenger services and ridership are also increasing. Princess Cruises is considering establishing separate trains carrying only Princess cars from Whittier direct to Denali National Park. This addition would result in two passenger trains in each direction each day during the summer. While commuter rails service is not likely in the near term, it would still be worthwhile to establish a future “station” location as part of the town center detailed planning process. This proposed new station

needs to plan to work with the Commuter Trail Station planned near the S. Mack Sports Complex just east of Meadow Lakes in Wasilla.

Rail crossings are a major concern, for safety and efficiency reasons. ARRC is unlikely to allow any additional at-grade crossings, and the cost of over crossings is beyond the budget for most collector or local roads. Over time, it will be essential to establish grade separated crossings where collectors cross the railroad. Improving the Pittman crossing is a priority.

**GOAL 7: Maintain and Improve Roadside Trails and Trailheads.**

**BACKGROUND AND COMMUNITY VALUES**

The Meadow Lakes area has gained a major recreation and transportation resource with the creation of the paved roadside trail along the Parks Highway. As is discussed in more detail in the recreation chapter, the community should work with ADOT/PF and the Borough to create roadside trails to access the more populated parts of Meadow Lakes, in particular, through construction of roadside trails along Pittman and Church roads, in addition to all new roads. Over time, as improvements are made to east-west collector roads, these projects should also include roadside trails See recreation chapter and trails map for details.

**GOAL 8: Improve Road Maintenance.**

**BACKGROUND AND COMMUNITY VALUES**

Maintenance is carried out by the two local road service districts. Improvements in maintenance practices are needed to better address the issues below:

- Dust management
- Snow storage and removal
- Plowing before gravel is laid
- Improved polices for cutting the vegetation along the roads (avoid leaving sharp, vegetation “spikes”)
- In some areas, request that DOT and the Borough maintain the shoulders in grass, which will require wider, lower angle road shoulders

### 3.0 Major Goals & Strategies

## 3.4 PUBLIC SERVICES & FACILITIES

*“I moved out here knowing that many of the services found in cities wouldn’t be available. The affordable rural lifestyle is what I enjoy. If we improve our public services and facilities, we need to first address what’s most important, and make sure we can afford to maintain it.”*

### OVERVIEW

Meadow Lakes is a fast-growing unincorporated area lying between several incorporated cities. Currently, Meadow Lakes relies on the Borough and State for many of the services and facilities it requires. The community has shown a broad desire for certain improvements to public services and facilities in the area. Developing a community center multi-use facility is the highest priority for Meadow Lakes residents. Other priorities include establishing a garbage transfer station/



recycling center in the area; improving emergency access and egress; improving the addressing system for responding to 911 calls; and establishing a post office in Meadow Lakes. Responsible for implementing the comprehensive plan, the Meadow Lakes Community Council (MLCC) plans to work closely with the Borough, the State Dept of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF), and other agencies and organization to plan for these services and facilities. In addition, MLCC plans to monitor funding opportunities as they become available. Appendix D: Community Development Resources Guidebook, located at the end of this document, provides preliminary information about potential funders for public services and facilities projects.

In addition to the above priorities, residents have identified the need for improved law enforcement (i.e., police sub-station or neighborhood watch program), upgrades to sub-standard roads, senior housing, land to be set aside for future high school and junior high school, land to be set aside for a cemetery, and improved handicapped access to facilities throughout the community.

This chapter on public services and facilities provides a summary of overarching goals that have been identified by the Meadow Lakes Planning Team with input from residents throughout the area. For each of these overarching goals, a more detailed list of specific objectives is provided to identify how the community hopes to achieve each of its goals.

## **PUBLIC SERVICES & FACILITIES GOALS**

During the April 2005 Meadow Lakes Community Planning Workshop, the community confirmed earlier discussions on the highest priority service and facility needs. The three overarching public service and facilities goals are:

### **1. Develop a Community Center Multi-Use Facility in Meadow Lakes.**

Developing a community center – multi-use facility – is the overarching highest priority for residents in Meadow Lakes. Desired functions of the multi-use community center facility include the following:

- youth services
- senior center
- adult education programs
- indoor and outdoor recreation
- regional satellite office space
- space for community meetings and events
- business resource center/ business incubator
- cottages for visiting artists, writers, and crafts teachers
- library
- MLCC office space

### **2. Identify and Develop Other High Priority Community Needs.**

Public services and facilities needs addressed under this goal include:

- garbage transfer station/ recycling center
- better emergency access and egress
- better addressing system for responding to 911 calls
- post office
- police/ law enforcement services
- improved handicapped access to facilities throughout Meadow Lakes
- senior housing
- land for junior high school
- land for middle school and high school
- library (stand alone or as part of the community center facility)
- land for a cemetery
- ensured water quality/quantity
- upgraded sub-standard roads
- improved EMS

### **3. Improve the Community's Capacity to Fund Development and Operation of Needed Community Services and Facilities.**

## **GOAL 1: Develop a Multi-Use Community Center in Meadow Lakes.**

### **BACKGROUND AND COMMUNITY VALUES**

Over the last several years the Council has worked to develop a multi-use community center facility in Meadow Lakes and has acquired the site from the Borough. This community center building is intended to efficiently serve community needs by pooling several public services into one multi-use building. Specific proposed uses are listed below. Meadow Lakes will market the facility as a center that can be shared by residents and groups. The proposed community center is a multi-use facility, and should not be confused with the proposed business-oriented town center site. Desired functions of the multi-use facility include:

- ÿ youth services
- ÿ senior center
- ÿ adult education programs
- ÿ indoor and outdoor recreation
- ÿ regional satellite office space
- ÿ space for community meetings and events
- ÿ business resource center and business incubator
- ÿ cottages for visiting artists, writers, crafts teachers
- ÿ library
- ÿ MLCC office space

### **HOW? – PLANNING FOR COMMUNITY CENTER USES**

#### **A. Improve Services Available to Youth in Meadow Lakes by Establishing a Youth Center as a Component of the Proposed Community Center.**

Youth services are important to the Meadow Lakes community. A youth center, if appropriate into the community center, can provide a meeting place; opportunities for leadership and skill building; opportunities for exploring individual talents in areas such as arts, music, sports and crafts; a safe, positive place for kids to spend time; and education and job opportunity training. The center should be a fun place for youth, offering organized opportunities and a chance for youth to be actively involved in the community.

#### **B. Establish a Senior Center as a Component of the Proposed Community Center.**

Input of Meadow Lakes seniors has been and will continue to be very valuable in identifying the desired functions of the senior center.

#### **C. Establish an Adult Education Program in Meadow Lakes.**

The Meadow Lakes community will need to identify alternatives available for operating and managing the program; identify specific educational programs of interest to residents; and identify equipment and resources required for offering these services such as a variety of distance learning programs.

#### **D. Evaluate Alternatives for Establishing Indoor and/or Outdoor Facilities as a Component of the Proposed Community Center.**

#### **E. Establish a Regional Satellite Office Space**

In an effort to improve the communications network with the Borough, State, and other agencies, the Meadow Lakes Community Council proposes to establish an office space in the proposed community center that is dedicated to assuring office services for regional and state agency functions.

#### **F. Establish Space for Community Meetings and Events**

Meadow Lakes is currently in short supply of adequate meeting space and community events space. In order to alleviate pressures on the school and fire station (which provide current demands in meeting space), the Council hopes to establish meeting and events space in the proposed community center facility that can be used for a variety of community purposes.

#### **G. Establish a Business Resource Center/ Business Incubator**

In an effort to improve opportunities to entrepreneurs in the Meadow Lakes area, the Council hopes to establish business resources that enhance opportunities locally for start-up businesses. Establishing a business resource center and business incubator in the proposed community center facility is intended to improve business opportunities locally.

#### **H. Establish Cottages for Visiting Artists, Writers, and Crafts Teachers**

In an effort to enhance the attractiveness of Meadow Lakes to inviting unique opportunities for those in surrounding communities and other visitors through the area, the Council hopes to develop lodging accommodations along with the proposed community center facility to house visiting artists, writers, and crafts teacher from outside the local area. This investment, along with recruiting efforts, is intended to attract individuals who can provide unique opportunities that attract local residents and visitors from outside the area to participate.

#### **I. Establish a Library in the Meadow Lakes Area**

Meadow Lakes residents would like to see a library built within the Meadow Lakes Community Council Area. In terms of efficiency of use, the library should be built as part of the proposed community center. However, if that proves to be limiting in any way, residents would still like to see a library built (either as part of the proposed community center, or as a stand-alone facility).

#### **J. Establish Office Space for the Meadow Lakes Community Council**

In an effort to increase the capacity of the Meadow Lakes Community Council to implement the priority projects, policies, and actions of the Meadow Lakes Community Comprehensive Plan, office space is needed. By locating office space in the proposed community center, MLCC could lease the space rather than constructing a stand-alone building. In addition, the office space would be more accessible by those residents visiting the community center for a variety of other functions.

#### **K. Identify Funding Sources for the Community Center.**

It has been the continued goal of the community to have the community center be self sufficient and not place a burden on area residents in the form of taxes. It is expected that a non-profit organization will be established to operate the facility. This entity will be responsible for establishing a business plan, and carrying out fundraising for capital operating budgets. Possibilities for funding include grants from federal, state and foundations (see Appendix D: Community Development Resources Guidebook).

#### **L. Prepare a Business Plan for the Proposed Community Center.**

Planning for a multi-use facility such as a community center will require the Meadow Lakes Community Council to take the initial following steps (also see Appendix E: Community Facilities Planning Workbook):

- Prepare a preliminary business plan identifying the capital and ongoing operations costs and funding sources;
- Establish a management entity for the facility;
- Identify and evaluate site alternatives and then establish and secure a preferred site;
- Secure design and construction funding to ultimately construct the facility; and
- Establish a facilities operation plan.

## **GOAL 2: Identify and Develop Other High Priority Community Needs.**

### **BACKGROUND AND COMMUNITY VALUES**

Meadow Lakes relies on the Borough for a range of services including fire, solid waste disposal, emergency medical services, schools, and as the areas planning authority. Other service providers include electric and telephone utilities, and the State for police services. Typically, most homes have septic systems and wells, although there are some private community well systems. Some homes have outhouses and haul water from a local water source.

Priorities for improvement include emergency access/egress; evaluating long-term water and wastewater capacity; locating a junior high school, middle school, and high school in Meadow Lakes; upgrading sub-standard roads; establishing a local post office; improving the community's capacity to manage solid waste; improving law enforcement services; enhancing emergency response capabilities; improving the addressing system for responding to 911 calls; establish senior housing; improve handicapped access to facilities throughout the community; and reserving land for a cemetery.

With the high growth rate of the Meadow Lakes area, long-range planning is needed to assure public services and facilities are available to meet community needs as the area continues to grow. The community must also recognize the requirement to balance the desire for improved services with what the community can afford.

### **HOW? – MEETING HIGHEST PRIORITY COMMUNITY NEEDS**

#### **A. Improve Emergency Access/Egress to Residential and Commercial Areas Throughout the Meadow Lakes Community.**

Emergency access/egress is a high priority in the Meadow Lakes area, which is characterized by long roads with relatively few residents and high maintenance costs. As outlined in the circulation chapter, a system of new and improved residential roads is needed, including ensuring that residential areas have two ways in and out.

#### **B. Ensure Quality of the Water Table and Water/ Wastewater Carrying Capacity.**

Approximately 85% of the homes in the Meadow Lakes area are fully plumbed using individual water wells and septic systems. In addition to individual wells, there are some private community well systems. A few residents haul water from a safe source and use outhouses. Currently existing water and wastewater systems appear satisfactory. There is a growing concern regarding water quality and water supply.

As private and currently undisturbed properties are developed, the demand for water and land needed for septic systems will grow dramatically. To adequately address future needs and the ability to meet those needs, a study is needed to evaluate water quality and quantity and wastewater carrying capacity, This study will help determine the point at which demand may exceed available resources and the point at which public water and wastewater systems may be needed. The study will set the stage for actions needed to manage and protect the community's water supply (quantity & quality), including:

- controlling water withdrawals from area lakes (education, enforcement)

- securing community water rights (e.g. access to aquifers for domestic water use)
- ensuring protection of adequate in-stream flow to protect habitat, recreation values and water quality of the area's streams, lakes and wetlands
- controlling land use activities, such as development in watershed areas, or gravel mining, that have the potential to harm the community's water supply.

Factors that will adversely affect water quality and wastewater carrying capacity need to be closely monitored and managed. These include population densities and industrial/commercial activities including gravel extraction, mining and drilling. Residents are becoming increasingly concerned about the depths that material is being extracted for producing gravel. If gravel extraction operations dig deep enough to hit the water table, it could dewater or contaminate the water supply of the area.

**C. Secure Land for Building a Junior, Middle, and High School in Meadow Lakes.**

Meadow Lakes is located in the Matanuska-Susitna School District. Schools in the District are operated by the Borough. Currently, two schools are located in Meadow Lakes including Meadow Lakes Elementary School (grades P thru 5) operated by the Borough, and the Midnight Sun Family Learning Center (grades K thru 8) operated by a MSB Charter. As the community grows there will be a need for a junior high school and a high school in Meadow Lakes. Sites for these needed facilities should be determined now. The two Borough parcels are the logical sites to reserve for this purpose.

**D. Upgrade Sub-Standard Roads in Meadow Lakes.**

This plan provides a full discussion of circulation issues and policies in the Circulation chapter for upgrading sub-standard roads in Meadow Lakes.

**E. Locate a Federally-Owned and Operated Post Office in Meadow Lakes (Located in the Town Center).**

At present there is a contract post office in Meadow Lakes, while the closest full-service post office is located in Wasilla. Shortcomings of the current contract station include unsafe access and limited services. Currently Meadow Lakes residents with rural delivery who receive packages, certified and registered mail, must travel on average 30 miles round trip to a building located on the Palmer-Wasilla Highway that has limited hours of service. Growing residential areas will increase the already existing need for improved postal services in the Meadow Lakes area. The proposed town center would be an appropriate location for the post office.

**F. Work with the Matanuska-Susitna Borough to Locate a Solid Waste Transfer Station in Meadow Lakes; and establish a recycling center in Meadow Lakes.**

The Borough operates a central landfill and eight transfer stations throughout the Borough, none of which are located in Meadow Lakes. The Borough has programs for Junk vehicle removal, Roadway Clean-Up, Adopt-a-Highway and a Litter Clean-Up. MSB conducts an annual spring clean-up and works with community councils on roadside clean ups during the summer months.

Trash dumping, abandoned and “junk” vehicles are growing problems in Meadow Lakes and around the Borough. Dumping in public places has led to illegal dump spots becoming known and well-used. Problem spots have been identified and with the success of clean-up efforts, there has been less trash each year. These problem spots need to be cleaned-up and blocked to prevent future trash dumping. Enforcement should also be increased to encourage the proper disposal of solid waste. As Meadow Lakes continues to grow, a transfer station may be warranted.

Residents are also interested in establishing a recycling center in the area. In the long-term future, Meadow Lakes residents are extremely interested in pursuing early plans for a recycling center in the Meadow Lakes Community Council Area.

#### **G. Improve Local Policing Services Throughout the Meadow Lakes Area.**

Meadow Lakes is a growing residential community that will require growing police services to the area. In addition, there is a need for greater capacity to manage recreational uses, such as trespass, vandalism, trash and disruptive behavior. Some options include establishing a Trooper sub-station in Meadow Lakes, improving coordination of services with nearby communities, establishing a neighborhood watch program, or establishing a sheriff in Meadow Lakes. (See Appendix F: Matanuska-Susitna Borough Resolution 04-01 – Blue Ribbon Task Force, Appendix G: USA on Watch Resources, and Appendix H: Citizen’s Task Force.)

#### **H. Improve the Emergency Medical Technician Services**

Establish improved EMT/EMS service in Meadow Lakes – locate a new station at the Johnson Road fire station.

#### **I. Emergency Response – Improve the Addressing System for Emergency Response.**

The overall emergency response “addressing system” in Meadow Lakes should be improved, increasing the ability for police, fire and emergency medical services to locate addresses efficiently. As the area grows, additional full time emergency response staff will be needed, based in the community.

#### **J. Senior Housing – Establish Senior Housing in Meadow Lakes.**

Senior housing is a growing need in the Meadow Lakes area as it is around the country. In Meadow Lakes, there are approximately 250 residents that are currently age 65 or over. Meadow Lakes residents have identified the need to establish senior housing within the area.

#### **K. Handicapped Access – Improve Handicapped Access to all Facilities – Both Public and Private - Throughout Meadow Lakes.**

Meadow Lakes has a large senior population, and, like the nation as a whole, the percentage of seniors will be growing as the baby boom ages. An active program is needed to encourage and ultimately require compliance with nationally accepted standards for handicapped access to all buildings open to public use.

**L. Cemetary – Reserve land for a public cemetery in Meadow Lakes.**

As is the case with many growing rural residential communities, generations of families are typically forced to locate their ancestors burial spots in areas outside the community. Meadow Lakes is in need of establishing a cemetery locally to strengthen community ties to its family members that have shaped its past. Although not frequently recognized, access to deceased relatives helps to strengthen the sense of local identity for those in the community.

**GOAL 3: Improve the Community’s Capacity to Fund Development and Operation of Needed Community Services and Facilities.**

**BACKGROUND AND COMMUNITY VALUES**

With many of the strategies identified in this chapter, entities are required to own, operate, and manage the recommended programs, services, and facilities. The chapter titled “Community Governance & Identity” identifies funding and management possibilities.

## 3.0 MAJOR GOALS & STRATEGIES

### 3.5 Economic Development

#### OVERVIEW

*“Jobs at what price? – What kind of jobs and what kinds of industry to create jobs?”*

Meadow Lakes has evolved from an area of wilderness homesteads into what it is today

- the fastest growing community in the fastest growing borough in the state. The primary transportation corridor through the community is the Parks Highway, providing a direct link between Anchorage and Fairbanks, where the majority of the state’s commercial and industrial activities are located.

At present, Meadow Lakes is largely a residential community. People living in Meadow Lakes find most of their jobs, goods and services in Wasilla, Palmer or Anchorage. The most visible commercial and industrial activity is gravel extraction; other types of local economic activities include a range of construction businesses, a diverse range of other small service-oriented businesses, and a few farms. Businesses seen along the Parks Highway include automobile and trucking services, log home construction, fish processing, propane services, storage facilities, a flea market/storage/housing area, refrigeration services, wood crafts, taxidermy services, water-well drilling services, gravel extraction, lumber supplies, top soil and sand supplies, fire place supplies and services, gas stations, an RV park, greenhouse businesses, heavy and light equipment rentals, and a host of food, beverage, entertainment, and retail businesses.

A large majority of Meadow Lakes residents work outside the Meadow Lakes community. According to survey results collected in 2003 by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, 10% of the Meadow Lakes working population work in Meadow Lakes; another 38% work in other areas of the Borough; and 29% work in Anchorage.

Based on input from the community survey and public workshops, Meadow Lakes residents enjoy the freedoms of a rural setting while having easy access to the services and employment opportunities of larger communities. They value their environmental resources and are not interested in attracting large-scale economic development. Priority economic goals for the community focus on maintaining options for home-based business, improving job opportunities for the youth of the area, and minimizing residential impacts from industrial development such as gravel extraction.

#### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS

In the two-day workshop conducted in April 2004, three goals were identified as recommendations for economic development. These goals, confirmed at the November 2005 workshop, frame the economic development strategies presented in this chapter.

- 1. Encourage the Expansion of Job Opportunities in the Meadow Lakes Area While Maintaining the Rural Character of the Community.**
- 2. Maintain Recreational Resources (Open Space, Trails, Lakes, Etc.) both for Residents and as a Basis for Attracting Out-of-Town Visitors.**
- 3. Guide the Character and Location of Commercial and Industrial Development to Minimize Off-Site Impacts.**

## **GOAL 1: Encourage the Expansion of Job Opportunities in the Meadow Lakes Area While Maintaining the Rustic Character of the Community.**

### **BACKGROUND AND COMMUNITY VALUES**

Population growth in the southern portion of the Borough is creating opportunities to provide goods and services locally instead of in Anchorage. Because the Parks Highway serves as a conduit linking residents to other larger communities, and out-of-town visitors frequently travel through the area, Meadow Lakes has a variety of options for increasing local job opportunities. The Meadow Lakes area and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough as a whole have relatively higher unemployment, and lower average annual earnings, than other railbelt communities. As reported in the Anchorage Daily News (9.16.04), the Borough's average annual earnings are at 67% of the US average, while Alaska as a whole is at 106% of the US average. The following strategies outline how the Meadow Lakes community plans to achieve this first goal. Appendix I: Meadow Lakes Employment and Industries provides additional information about employment, occupation, and types industry found in the Meadow Lakes region.

#### **A. Economic Development Forum - Organize a local forum where business owners can meet and discuss business needs, niches, local/regional linkages, and ways to strengthen the local economy while maintaining the community character.**

Establish an active organization to advocate for improvements in local job and business opportunities, and to help carry out the other goals outlined in this section. This could be a new organization, or an offshoot of the local Chamber of Commerce. Such a group can bring together a wide range of organizations and business leaders to discuss common issues, advocate for local businesses, and advise the Meadow Lakes Community Council on issues relating to the development of Meadow Lakes' economic interests. Members of the forum should identify and agree upon a clear statement of priorities to be addressed during a specific time frame that is consistent with this comprehensive plan. This will provide the framework for an action plan that focuses on areas of greatest importance to current and planned economic activity. The forum should meet regularly (at least quarterly) each year and can form sub-groups that carry out key activities and meet more regularly.

#### **B. Business Incubator – Create a business incubator program and facility to support local start-up businesses.**

Business “incubators” are a common strategy employed by local and state governments and non-profit organizations to help small businesses get started and grow. Business incubators are facilities that provide start-up entrepreneurial businesses with affordable space and shared support and business development services, such as financing, marketing, and management. Incubators can play a nurturing role in helping young businesses survive and grow during the start-up period when they are most financially vulnerable.

Incubators come in many formats, with different objectives. They may be:

- Public or not-for-profit incubators, sponsored by government and nonprofit organizations, whose primary purpose is to promote economic development.
- Private incubators, run by venture and seed capital investment groups, or by corporations and real estate development partnerships. These incubators generally

- seek a return on their investment, often through a stake in the firm, further development, royalties, etc.
- Academic-related incubators, which share characteristics of the first two types, but also have objectives in faculty development, and creating business spin-offs from faculty research.
- Public/private incubators, which are joint efforts between government or other non-profit agencies and a private developer. These offer the advantage that government funding can often be secured to support private sector expertise and financing.

For the Meadow Lakes area, the proposed community center building could offer a practical solution in providing possible incubator space. Ideally, the incubator program would be structured to provide support services and technical assistance to small businesses residing in the community center building, and also would provide support to other small start up or growing home-based businesses or other locations around the community. One option would be to partner with Federal or State organizations like the Small Business Development Center in Anchorage, perhaps through establishing a satellite office in this location.

**C. Community Resources Directory - Create a community resource directory that includes all businesses, services, and facilities located in Meadow Lakes.**

Creating a directory of services available in Meadow Lakes can help promote increased use of local products and services, both by residents and visitors from outside the community. The directory could be presented in several different forms: a brochure, signs, and/or a community website. One option is a link to the “Meadow Lakes 99629” website at [www.meadowlakes99629.com](http://www.meadowlakes99629.com) that currently provides information on Meadow Lakes. The directory, which could include information on lodging, recreational attractions and other local activities, could also be targeted to visitors regionally and statewide through the Convention & Visitors Bureaus and other statewide outlets.

Another example of a community resource directory is the community of Gustavus, which provides a well-developed electronic version of their directory. Gustavus is more focused on tourism and promotion than is likely to be the case for the Meadow Lakes area, but this site (<http://www.gustavus.com/>) demonstrates how much a community can do to describe businesses, community events, community facilities, etc.

A related project, which might be done by the Economic Development Forum in cooperation with the youth of the area, would be to conduct a skills and assets survey of Meadow Lakes residents. This would identify not only established businesses, but also provide a snapshot of the diverse range of skills available in the community.

**D. Jobs for Teens – Encourage businesses to give young people in the area opportunities to gain job experience.**

About 33% of the Meadow Lakes population is under the age of 18. Many residents of Meadow Lakes would like to

*“We need local jobs for young people – so they can learn what it means to work.”*

see increased opportunities for youth to gain work experience. As part of the strategy for developing the town center, a greater number of appropriate job opportunities should be available to youth. In addition, services provided in the community center should specifically identify ways to link the youth to jobs in the area, such as a Job Corps program

or other training. With the encouragement of the Community Council and the availability of job training programs, local employers could hire more local youth, particularly during the busy summer months.

**E. Town Center – Utilize the planned town center to encourage and promote small, diverse businesses, particularly products of home-based businesses and cottage industry.**

As described in the land use section of this plan, establishing a town center will help to centralize commercial development in a attractive, pedestrian-oriented setting. The mix of businesses in the town center can highlight the unique character of the community while creating opportunities to market and sell locally-made products and services. It will help convey a positive image of the community, and encourage out-of-town visitors to slow down, take notice, stop and buy local products and services to benefit the local economy.

Within the town center, visitors should be provided a directory of other activities, products, and services available outside the town center (e.g., recreational areas, B&Bs, events, and other businesses). Meadow Lakes can also use the proposed business center (a component of the planned community center multi-use facility) to assist local and home-based businesses market their products in the town center.

**F. Events – Target and promote local events to appropriate markets in the region and state to encourage visitors to spend time and money in the Meadow Lakes area.**

Meadow Lakes has the potential to be a popular destination for out-of-town visitors. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough is actively promoting itself as destination for in-state and out-of-state visitors alike. By identifying appropriate events in the area, and carefully developing recreation amenities, the community can promote Meadow Lakes as a destination, rather than merely passing through.

Promoting and holding events can encourage visitors to use local accommodations, stop at local restaurants, buy local products, and utilize local services. Examples of possible events include farmers market, arts and crafts markets, music festival, local dances, athletic events such as a bike or ski race, and fishing derbies. Gustavus also provides a good example of an unincorporated community using a range of community events to support community programs.

**G. Well-Managed Tourism & Recreation – Encourage amounts, location, and types of tourism and recreation development that provide economic and help maintain and enhance community values.**

Writer and peach farmer Mas Masamoto coined the term “micro-brewed tourism” to capture the idea there are two kinds of tourism: mass market (like mass market, low cost beers) and small volume/high value tourism. The latter category, like micro-brewed beers, emphasizes sale of small quantities of high value products – products that tell stories about places and create significant economic benefits with little disruption of local life. Tourism, if well managed can bring significant local benefits, including opportunities for businesses directly serving tourists, added spending at service businesses like stores or gas stations, and a way to effectively subsidize services and businesses that local spending alone can’t support.

Tourism strategies for Meadow Lakes are focused on maximizing benefits and minimizing adverse impacts are outlined below; more details are presented in the recreation chapter:

Take better advantage of the large volume of packaged and independent tourists passing through the area. Provide facilities for travelers that encourage them to slow down, and spend money in the Meadow Lakes area. Examples include roadside turnoffs and viewing areas (interpretive information), a new pedestrian-oriented town center featuring locally produced products, and camping and picnic areas.

Encourage well-managed, low impact trail activities (hiking, biking, dog-mushing, cross-country skiing).

Use targeted promotions, and careful sharing of information to steer visitors toward recreation areas (e.g. trails) that residents see as appropriate; and away from areas that are intended primarily for local use.

#### **H. Home-Based Businesses – Encourage and support opportunities for home-based businesses.**

This comprehensive plan acknowledges the value and importance of home-based businesses. Policies in the Special Use District should allow continued development of home-based businesses as a recognized approach to enhancing economic opportunities for residents of the Meadow Lakes area.

### **GOAL 2: Maintain Recreational Resources (Open Space, Trails, Lakes, Etc.) Both for Residents and Out-of-Town Visitors.**

#### **BACKGROUND AND COMMUNITY VALUES**

The chapter on Recreation and Open Space addresses this goal in greater detail. The following strategies identify some ways to attract out-of-town visitors to appropriate Meadow Lakes recreational resources.

#### **HOW? – MEANS OF MAINTAINING RECREATIONAL RESOURCES**

##### **A. Signage – Post signs identifying recreational areas that are appropriate for out-of-town visitors.**

Post standardized signs at trail heads, lakes, fishing areas, and other recreation spots to identify and promote these resources to residents and visitors.

##### **B. Privately-Owned Campgrounds – Develop local, privately-owned campgrounds that target out-of-town visitors.**

This approach serves the dual purpose of supporting the local economy/creating local jobs and creating recreational areas that are appropriate for out-of-town visitors. In promoting these areas, Meadow Lakes can work with the Mat-Su Borough and Mat-Su Borough Convention & Visitors Bureau.

**C. Seasonal Attractions – Identify appropriate seasonal events/attractions to encourage out-of-town visitors to stay in the Meadow Lakes area, to participate in events, to utilize local services, and to buy products locally.**

**D. Volunteers Day – Encourage businesses community-wide that benefit from visitor attractions to volunteer one day a year (or more) to clean-up, repair, and improve the recreational resources throughout the community.**

**E. Supporting the Local Economy – Attract those out-of-town visitors to recreational resources who will also utilize other local services and buy local products; encourage visitors to slow down, stop, stay, and spend money locally; in order to attract specific visitors to the area, efforts to target appropriate markets should be made.**

Examples of high value/low impact visitors include trail users, small group tours and in-state residents looking for weekend getaways.

**F. User Fees – Establish modest user fees for recreational area users that contribute to the cost of maintaining and improving recreational resources.**

**G. Visitors Center – Establish a Meadow Lakes Visitors Center that informs the public of recreational resources in the Meadow Lakes area; that identifies appropriate and inappropriate activities; and that serves as a point of collection for user fees.**

More details on these proposals are presented in the Recreation/Open Space Chapter.

### **GOAL 3: Guide the Location and Character of Commercial and Industrial Development to Minimize Off-Site Impacts.**

Strategies on this topic are outlined in the Land Use chapter

### 3.0 Major Goals & Strategies

## 3.6 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE & IDENTITY

*“We have a lot of interesting things here but it’s going to take a while for that to grow together as a community - but we’re working on that.”*

### OVERVIEW

Meadow Lakes area is facing rapid residential growth, commercial development along the Parks Highway, planned improvements to the Parks Highway and other roads, pressures for resource development, and growing public service needs. Residents want to improve their ability to guide these changes, and to manage these demands on Meadow Lakes’ community resources. To respond to the need for greater local control the community has developed this comprehensive plan. This chapter outlines strategies for strengthening the community’s identity and increasing the community’s control over its future.

The community is cautious about finding the right level of local governance. “If you want to get a roomful of angry people, start talking about incorporation. But we need to understand our options, and better understand what Houston and Wasilla are thinking about annexation.” This chapter includes a section on Community Governance Alternatives addressing options on this subject.

### COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE & IDENTITY GOALS

In the draft “Issues and Goals Report” published in April 2004, four goals were identified as preliminary recommendations for community governance and identity. These goals frame the strategies presented in the remainder of this chapter.

1. **Establish a Stronger, Positive Image for Meadow Lakes.**
2. **Create an Umbrella Organization to Provide Community Facilities and Services.**
3. **Improve Communication Network (Bulletin Boards, Phone, Newspaper, Email, Newsletter, Website).**
4. **Narrow Priorities to Increase Odds of Success of Community Projects.**

## **GOAL 1: Establish a Stronger, Positive Image for Meadow Lakes.**

### **BACKGROUND AND COMMUNITY VALUES**

As highlighted throughout this plan, the Meadow Lakes area is currently facing rapid residential growth. Many people passing through the area don't realize that Meadow Lakes is one of the most populous communities in the Borough.

Establishing a stronger sense of community identity is important for residents and visitors. Meadow Lakes is a distinct area with the opportunity to guide its own destiny. The strategies listed below focus on ways of bringing out Meadow Lakes' distinct personality.

### **HOW? – MEANS TO CREATE STRONGER COMMUNITY IDENTITY**

**A. Community Center Building – Establish a community center building in Meadow Lakes as a gathering point for residents, and to serve as a distinct landmark identifying the Meadow Lakes community for those traveling through the area.**

Over the last several years, the Council has worked on developing plans for a multi-purpose community center. This community center building is intended to serve the needs of local residents by pooling several public services in this one multi-use building including space for meetings and events, youth and senior programs, and for a handful of businesses to lease space in the building. The community center facility will be a gathering place for Meadow Lakes residents. See Public Services & Facilities chapter for details.

**B. Town Center – Establish a town center district to distinctively identify the Meadow Lakes area and to centralize appropriate development in the town center.**

See Land Use and Economic Development chapters.

**C. Events – Promote events that attract active support by local residents, match community values, and that appeal to larger statewide or regional markets.**

Events can bring a range of community benefits – increased spending to benefit local businesses; promoting the community's character; opportunities to raise money for supporting local organizations; and the fun of participation. Events are a good way to promote the identity of the Meadow Lakes area. Meadow Lakes residents would like to establish events that do not adversely impact local life. Some examples of appropriate events include the Chugach carvers workshops; running races (such as to Hatcher Pass); workshops on crafts; crafts fairs; and other small-scale events.

**D. Promote Meadow Lakes' Identity – Establish community-wide agreed upon goals for promoting the identity of the Meadow Lakes area, especially along the Parks Highway corridor.**

To better promote the identity of the Meadow Lakes community, the Council can encourage residents to agree on the image that the community wants to project to visitors. Based on work to date as part of this comprehensive plan process, key ideas include: self reliance, access to the natural environment, entrepreneurship, and a great place to raise a family.

The community wants to develop a set of consistent, attractive community signs that help with way-finding and create a stronger sense of community identity. Signs should be

developed that identify entry points (in both directions) along the Parks Highway for those traveling through the Meadow Lakes area, such as “Welcome to Meadow Lakes” and identify lakes (and stocked lakes) that are located off of Pittman Road. To encourage more local participation in the maintenance of public access points, one alternative is to establish an “adopt-an-access” similar to the “adopt-a-highway” program. Businesses should also be encouraged and supported to post appropriately-scaled signs that clearly identify their location to those driving by.

During the 2005 Community Planning Workshop held in Meadow Lakes to review and discuss the draft comprehensive plan, residents expressed concerns regarding the style of signs that businesses post. The community has clear definitions about what constitutes a good or bad example of signage. Future measures may require guidelines to be established that businesses should adhere to.

#### **E. Improve the Appearance of the Storage Buildings/Flea Market Area Near the Intersection of Pittman & Parks Highway.**

This unruly development area is the primary image most people hold of Meadow Lakes. Actions should be taken to change the character and/or move these uses to another site. In the longer term this area is likely to be removed as part of the widening of the Parks Highway. In the near term, the community should work with the landowner and tenants to investigate options to upgrade the functions, parking, utilities and appearance of this area, so it might become a “funky” but interesting place to shop for residents and visitors. Possible specific actions include, screening with landscaping and provision of necessary sanitary services.

### **GOAL 2: Create an Umbrella Organization to Provide Community Facilities and Services.**

#### **BACKGROUND AND COMMUNITY VALUES**

Currently, the Meadow Lakes community relies upon the Mat-Su Borough, and the Borough-established Meadow Lakes Community Council and service districts for local governance. With the growing need for expanded services and facilities in Meadow Lakes, there needs to be an entity established to manage these services and facilities. At the end of this plan is an appendix with information about alternative approaches to local governance. The community can use this information to evaluate the appropriate level of governance to meet the needs of the community.

#### **HOW? – MEANS TO PROVIDE LOCAL SERVICES AND FACILITIES**

##### **A. Community Council – Review and select a preferred strategy to strengthen the capacity of the Meadow Lakes Community Council to better serve the Meadow Lakes Area.**

Three options for local governance were discussed – stick with existing system, strengthen the community council, and investigate incorporation. Based on community discussions, the preferred governance alternative is to strengthen the existing Community Council. This would include establishing an office location for the Council (perhaps in the proposed

community center building), pursuing funders to receive grant funding for priority projects, and funding a part-time staff position. One good short-term option for this latter goal would be to work with the VISTA Program which could train and fund a local resident.

Options for funding a staff person and paying for office costs include local fundraising events and rental fees from offices located in the proposed community center facility. The community of Gustavus is a good example of a town that, for many years, raised funds for a range of community services without being incorporated or receiving external financial support.

While strengthening the Community Council is a good near-term strategy, many people have pointed out the benefits of incorporation. One widely-shared motivation for this action would be to avoid being annexed by the City of Wasilla, or worse yet, to have Wasilla gradually annex Meadow Lakes' commercial and industrial uses that provide significant property taxes. Other motivations include greater local control over fiscal and land use issues; disadvantages include the challenges of raising sufficient funds locally to provide needed services. In the coming years the community will need to further investigate this issue. (See Appendix J: Governance Alternatives for additional information on community governance options.)

#### **B. The Comprehensive Plan – Completion of the Comprehensive Plan.**

This comprehensive plan gives the community a voice in the development decisions made by state, regional, and federal agencies. In addition, it expresses the community's voice regarding decisions by large landowners and businesses that affect the Meadow Lakes area. The comprehensive plan is an important step towards gaining greater local control and increasing funding opportunities available to the community.

### **GOAL 3: Improve Communication Network (Bulletin Boards, Phone, Newspaper, Email, Newsletter, Website).**

#### **BACKGROUND AND COMMUNITY VALUES**

Many residents in Meadow Lakes frequently commute out of the community for work, shopping, and needed services. Residents have expressed a need to improve their communication network both within and outside the community. As Meadow Lakes and surrounding communities continue to grow, coordinated planning efforts will require an improved communication network both within the community as well as with other communities, regionally and statewide. This will help to assure Meadow Lakes residents have a voice in decisions made about Meadow Lakes that affect their interests.

#### **HOW? – MEANS TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION**

##### **A. Common Voice – Maintain and strengthen the advisory capacity of the Community Council to represent community-wide agreed upon directions.**

Completing this comprehensive plan is an important step towards establishing a common voice representing the community's interests. Ultimately, the plan helps to unify the community's voice and to limit the opportunities for outside entities to ignore or misrepresent community-wide views. The Council will continue to pursue avenues for improving its ability to reach community members and gaining their input.

##### **B. Community Communication Network – Improve the existing communication network between residents, business owners, and the Community Council.**

Explore the existing communication network in the community to determine which combination of approaches most effectively improves communication community-wide. Most promising options are listed below:

- Bulletin Boards – establish accessible locations where the community can get updates on meetings, plans, projects, etc.
- Newspaper – work with the local newspaper to establish a regular “Meadow Lakes News” section that keeps the community informed about upcoming meetings, special events, etc.
- E-mail/List-Serve/Website – establish a collection of email addresses that would receive regular updates on community issues (perhaps a regular electronic newsletter) and post information on a community website. (a local individual is already offering a popular site serving many of these functions – is this sufficient?)
- Newsletter – circulate a newsletter (quarterly?) providing regular updates on community events.
- Radio – utilize the local radio station to announce meetings, events, and plans; and to report on locally-impacting issues. Use this approach to inform and engage local residents in activities in the community. Perhaps a 30-minute (or longer?) community talk show – where residents can call-in and comment on a local “topic of the day.”

- Community Council Office – establish a location where community members can check in on community business, ask questions, pick up information.

**C. Regional Communication Network – Improve communication between the Community Council and the Borough, other agencies, neighboring communities, and local business owners.**

Use the comprehensive plan to communicate the community values, goals and policies to those outside the community. Ensure the community’s voice is heard with the Borough Planning Commission and Assembly meetings, but having a community representative attend those meetings.

## **GOAL 4: Narrow Priorities to Increase Odds of Success of Community Projects.**

### **BACKGROUND AND COMMUNITY VALUES**

Currently, the Meadow Lakes Community Council is volunteer-driven and limited in its capacity to take on too many community projects. By focusing resources on the top priorities, the Council will have greater likelihood of achieving the goals of this comprehensive plan.

### **HOW? MEANS TO FOCUS ON PRIORITY COMMUNITY PROJECTS**

#### **A. Choose Your Battles – Identify the top priorities (e.g., 3 – 5) that the community wants and needs.**

One of the main values of this comprehensive plan is that it provides a mechanism for setting priorities among competing projects. Section Four: Implementation outlines these priorities, focusing on projects that are strongly needed, that have a likelihood of success, and are realistic. Setting and achieving priorities can be one of the best ways for a community to gain citizen support and build capacity to take on more challenging projects. During the process of preparing this plan, residents identified their highest priority projects.

#### **B. Monitor Funding Sources – Encourage the Council to monitor potential funding sources for the priority projects.**

Once a community identifies the goals or projects they want to pursue, it can take several years of identifying various funding opportunities, timing for applying for these funding sources, planning for these projects, applying for grants or other funding, acquiring land and securing financial capacity before the projects are even initiated. Therefore, identifying needs today may not be met for several years or even a decade later.

Appendix D: Community Development Resources Guidebook identifies possible funding sources for community projects.

## 4.0 IMPLEMENTATION

### 4.1 Summary of Priority Projects

The following pages present an implementation program for carrying out the recommendations of the Meadow Lakes Comprehensive Plan. This section provides both a summary of priority projects and a complete table showing all short-term and long-term actions identified by the community to achieve the goals of the comprehensive plan. Recognizing that the comprehensive plan is a long-term planning tool, the implementation plan is intended to be revised periodically to reflect successful completion of certain tasks and updates to the progress of other tasks.

#### SUMMARY OF HIGHEST PRIORITY PROJECTS

Meadow Lakes residents gathered in April 2005 for a two-day workshop where they gave input on the draft version of the Meadow Lakes Comprehensive Plan. During this workshop, residents discussed and identify priorities for the implementing the plan which are summarized below:

##### **Land Use & Town Center Priorities**

- Prepare, Adopt Special Use District establishing standards for development
- Establish "Open Space" subdivision policies (working with MSB)

##### **Recreation & Open Space Priorities**

- Retain State and Borough lands for public uses, for recreation
- Prepare, adopt "SPUD" with standards for development of private land on river corridors, wetlands
- Form a local recreation/ open space and trails committee
- Roadside trails on Pittman Road
- New trail route for new, legal Baldy trail
- Complete community trails master plan
- Retain, improve public access to lakes
- Prepare recreation/ parks and open space master plan
- Identify, reserve and improve land for a community lakefront beach park
- Complete community center multi-use facility

##### **Circulation Priorities**

- Adopt the comprehensive plan with clear statement of community wishes for future Parks Highway expansion (route, driveways, use of frontage roads, etc.)
- Adopt Special Use District with standards for roadside development
- Improve Beverly Lakes Road
- Improve connectors for gravel trucks
- Plan for good access to town center

**Public Services & Facilities Priorities**

- Create a community center multi-use facility including youth services, senior center/ senior housing, library, MLCC office space, MSB satellite office, community meeting space/events space, business resource center/business incubator, cottages for visiting artists/writers/crafts teachers, indoor/outdoor recreation, and visitors center.
- Garbage transfer station / recycling center
- Emergency access and egress
- Improved addressing system for responding to 911 calls
- Post office

**Economic Development Priorities**

- Establish an Economic Development forum
- Improve job opportunities for teens
- Create a town center
- Improve/ establish signage for recreation sites
- Minimize off-site impacts of commercial and industrial development

**Community Governance & Identity Priorities**

- Establish a community center multi-use facility
- Establish a town center
- Strengthen capacity of Community Council – choose preferred governance alternative
- Complete the comprehensive plan
- Narrow priorities to increase odds of success

## IMPLEMENTATION

### Implementing the Comprehensive Plan

Project	Lead	Cost	Resources	Schedule			Committee Comments
				2005	2006	After 2006	
<b>LAND USE &amp; TOWN CENTER</b>							
<i>GOAL 1 – MAINTAIN RURAL CHARACTER</i>							
Encourage low density residential development in the majority of the community.	MLCC		MSB	X			
Retain and expand public open space, waterways and trails.	MLCC		MSB; landowners		X		
Establish "Open Space" subdivision policies	MLCC		MSB	X			
<i>GOAL 2 – CONCENTRATE &amp; SCREEN COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT; AVOID SPRAWL ALONG THE PARKS HWY</i>							
Encourage new commercial develop to locate in relatively concentrated nodes, rather than scattered along the length of the Parks Highway.	MLCC		MSB; landowners	X			
Maintain several undeveloped "green spaces" along the Parks Highway to separate developed areas.	MLCC		MSB; landowners		X		
Require retention and/or planting of buffers, trees and other landscape features so roadside development is attractive.	MLCC		MSB	X			
Encourage modest sized, attractive signage and roadside development.	MLCC		MSB; DOT&PF; business owners		X		

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Project	Lead	Cost	Resources	Schedule			Committee Comments
				2005	2006	After 2006	
<b>LAND USE &amp; TOWN CENTER (cont.)</b>							
<i>GOAL 3 – CREATE A PEDESTRIAN-ORIENTED, MIXED-USE TOWN CENTER</i>							
Identify the right location and size for a town center site	MLCC		MSB; landowners	X			
Improve vehicular and pedestrian access and transit	MLCC	\$\$\$\$	MSB; DOT&PF		X		
Encourage public facilities in this area to serve as “anchors” for development	MLCC		MSB; Funders; Landowners; consultants		X		
Partner with agencies or organizations like Denali Commission, AIDEA, Rasmuson, Great Land Trust	MLCC		MSB; agencies; organizations	X			
Partner with private landowners, developers.	MLCC		MSB; Landowners; developers	X			
<i>GOAL 4 – GUIDE LOCATION &amp; CHARACTER OF DEVELOPMENT</i>							
Reduce impacts of potential development, rather than prohibit uses.	MLCC			X			
Adopt land use standards to minimize the off site impacts of development.	MLCC		MSB; consultants	X			
Discourage certain high impact uses in specific portions of the community	MLCC			X			
Establish a special land use district that requires a conditional use permit for high impact uses and sets rules on the location and magnitude of these activities.	MLCC	\$\$\$	MSB; consultants		X		

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Project	Lead	Cost	Resources	Schedule			Committee Comments
				2005	2006	After 2006	
<b>LAND USE &amp; TOWN CENTER (cont.)</b>							
<i>LAND USE DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS</i>							
Adopt site development standards for commercial, industrial or other development with significant off-site impacts.	MLCC		MSB; consultants; commercial/ industrial developers		X		
Adopt development standards for the rural residential district.	MLCC		MSB; consultants; residents		X		
Adopt site development standards for future subdivisions	MLCC		MSB; consultants; developers		X		
Adopt site development standards for existing subdivisions	MLCC		MSB; consultants; developers; residents		X		
Adopt site development standards for home-based, cottage industry, and commercial activity in the residential district	MLCC		MSB; consultants; home-based business owners; residents		X		
Adopt development standards for residential collector road corridors.	MLCC		DOT&PF; MSB; consultants		X		
Adopt development standards for the Parks Highway corridor.	MLCC		DOT&PF; MSB; consultants		X		
Adopt development standards for the town center – pedestrian core.	MLCC		DOT&PF; MSB; consultants; business owners; residents		X		

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Project	Lead	Cost	Resources	Schedule			Committee Comments
				2005	2006	After 2006	
<b>LAND USE &amp; TOWN CENTER (cont.)</b>							
Adopt development standards for the town center – commercial/outer ring.	MLCC		DOT&PF; MSB; consultants; business owners; residents		X		
Adopt development standards for open space/stream corridors.	MLCC		MSB; consultants; USF&WS; State DNR		X		
Adopt development standards for Baldy Mountain area.	MLCC		MSB; consultants; State DNR		X		

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Project	Lead	Capital Cost	Resources	Schedule			Committee Comments
				2005	2006	After 2006	
<b>RECREATION &amp; OPEN SPACE</b>							
<i>GOAL 1 – RESERVE, PROTECT &amp; ENHANCE NATURAL FEATURES &amp; PUBLIC OPEN SPACES</i>							
Reserve Remaining Public Lands for Use as Rec./O.S.	MLCC	?	MSB; landowners	X			
Reserve Recreation and Open Space Values on Private Land	MLCC		Landowners		X		
Provide Greenbelts on Key Waterbodies	MLCC	\$\$\$	Landowners		X		
Protect Water Quality, Open Space, and Habitat Values in Key Wetland/Watershed Areas	MLCC		State DEC; MSB; EPA; DNR		X		
<i>GOAL 2 – CREATE AN INTEGRATED COMMUNITY REC. SYSTEM TO MEET NEEDS OF DIVERSE USERS</i>							
Form a recreation, trails and open space subcommittee of the Community Council. Contact user-groups to discuss specific recreation needs and interests.	MLCC		Recreational users	X			
Meet with specific subdivisions/neighborhoods; carry out neighborhood work sessions to identify currently, locally-used trails and open space areas; identify different types of expected uses; identify parcels for potential neighborhood parks.	MLCC		Residents; trail users; landowners	X			
Identify areas where new, expanded/ more restricted rec. and open space uses should be considered. Make specific recommendations about specially-identified areas.	MLCC		DNR; USF&WS	X			
Use the outcome of these first three steps to add to and refine the recommendations of under the other goals this chapter, producing specific recommendations for retention/improvement of open space areas, neighborhood parks, or other recreation facilities; and new recreation and open space management strategies.	MLCC		MSB; consultants		X		

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Project	Lead	Capital Cost	Resources	Schedule			Committee Comments
				2005	2006	After 2006	
<b>RECREATION &amp; OPEN SPACE (cont.)</b>							
Engage the community to play a more active role in the maintenance of neighborhood and community scale recreation sites, e.g. lake access points, working with the State and Borough. Urge the community to conduct annual clean up days, and to take pride in the signs and upkeep of local parks.	MLCC		Residents; MSB; State; volunteers	X			
Relate recreation and open space uses to goals established for Land Use, Economic Development, and Governance.	MLCC		MSB; consultants	X			
<i>GOAL 3 – RETAIN, DEDICATE &amp; IMPROVE A COMMUNITY TRAIL SYSTEM</i>							
Identify existing trails	MLCC	\$\$	Trails sub-committee; volunteers; trail users; MSB	X			
Identify and reserve key trails to serve as the backbone to a community trails system	MLCC	\$\$	Trails sub-committee; volunteers; trail users; MSB	X			
Upgrade existing and add new bridge crossing of Little Susitna River.	MLCC	\$\$\$\$	DOT&PF; MSB			X	
Establish trail heads to support and direct trail use	MLCC	\$\$	MSB; consultants; Trails sub-committee		X		
Establish a recreation, trails and open space master plan.	MLCC	\$\$	MSB; consultants; Trails sub-committee		X		

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Project	Lead	Capital Cost	Resources	Schedule			Committee Comments
				2005	2006	After 2006	
<b>RECREATION &amp; OPEN SPACE (cont.)</b>							
Complete a community trails master plan.	MLCC	\$\$	MSB; consultants		X		
Develop a trail along Pittman Road.	MLCC	\$\$\$\$	DOT&PF; Trails sub-committee			X	
Find a route and reserve a trail connecting the community's primary residential areas with the Baldy Mountain/Talkeetna Mountain area (including a crossing of the Little Susitna).	MLCC	\$\$	Landowners; Trails sub-committee		X		
Create neighborhood park facilities at lake access points with picnic tables, play equipment, etc.	MLCC	\$\$\$\$	Funders			X	
Proceed with plans for a community building including indoor recreation areas and outdoor sports facilities.	MLCC	\$\$\$\$	Consultants; funders (i.e., Denali Commission)	X			
Reserve site for one large (20 – 60 acres) community park.	MLCC	?	Landowners; MSB; funders	X			
Upgrade play equipment and sports fields at the school.	MLCC; School	\$\$\$	School Board; funders		X		
Work with the State, Borough and private owners to establish a public day use area or campground.	MLCC	\$\$\$	MSB; landowners			X	
Secure new sites for neighborhood parks and other recreation facilities.	MLCC	\$\$\$	Landowners			X	
Establish rules to create and dedicate space for neighborhood parks in subdivision development.	MLCC		Developers		X		
Secure land for a community lake front park with swimming, picnicking, parking and trail access.	MLCC	\$\$\$	Landowners; funders		X		

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Project	Lead	Capital Cost	Resources	Schedule			Committee Comments
				2005	2006	After 2006	
<b>RECREATION &amp; OPEN SPACE (cont.)</b>							
Identify scenic viewpoints.	MLCC		MSB; consultants; residents; volunteers; DOT&PF	X			
Work with residents to determine the need for individual lake management plans.	MLCC		MSB; consultants; residents	X			
<i>GOAL 4 – ESTABLISH A SYSTEM OF COMMUNITY RECREATION LANDS</i>							
Identify public access points with small, attractive signage, including rules for responsible use of these sites.	MLCC	\$\$	DOT&PF; State DNR; MSB		X		
Improve small-craft launches and lake-access trails where they currently exist.	MLCC	\$\$	MSB; funders			X	
Improve parking areas, but keep them small in size to limit over-use.	MLCC	\$\$\$	MSB; DOT&PF			X	
Create a system for managing recreation use with community-supported management measures.	MLCC		MSB; consultants; State DNR; residents		X		
Establish a community center with indoor sports and workout space.	MLCC	\$\$\$\$\$	Consultants; landowners; funders (i.e., Denali Commission)			X	
Establish a community park with sports fields.	MLCC	\$\$\$\$				X	
Establish a cross country ski area.	MLCC	\$\$\$				X	
Establish an ATV/motor-cross area	MLCC	\$\$\$				X	

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Project	Lead	Capital Cost	Resources	Schedule			Committee Comments
				2005	2006	After 2006	
<b>RECREATION &amp; OPEN SPACE (cont.)</b>							
Dedicate an area as undeveloped open space for rec.	MLCC	?			X		
Improve water and lake access for boat launches, parking, camping, etc.	MLCC	\$\$\$				X	
<b>GOAL 5 –CREATE A SUSTAINABLE RECREATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM</b>							
Establish a Meadow Lakes Trails Committee.	MLCC		Residents; recreational users	X			
Engage recreation sub-committee of the Council to advocate for improved rec. mgmt by the State and MSB.	MLCC		MSB; State; trail users	X			
Engage recreation sub-committee of the Council to do fundraising and volunteer recruiting and coordination.	MLCC		Trails sub-committee; volunteers	X			
Establish a recreational education and information program.	MLCC	\$\$	DNR; other existing programs			X	
Establish directional roadway signs marking trailheads, roadside, lake access points, etc.	MLCC	\$\$	DOT&PF; MSB; local donations		X		
Create local outreach/educational programs.	MLCC	\$\$	Outreach/ed. program providers			X	
Create economic incentives for development and ongoing maintenance of recreational facilities.	MLCC		Bed tax (?)		X		
Establish user fees for specific areas.	MLCC				X		

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Project	Lead	Capital Cost	Resources	Schedule			Committee Comments
				2005	2006	After 2006	
<b>RECREATION &amp; OPEN SPACE (cont.)</b>							
Create individual lake management plans.	MLCC	\$\$	Consultants; residents; lake users		X		
Establish regulations to be enforced through public and private means.	MLCC				X		
Establish a system of assessing fees and maintaining parks, such as a recreation service district, land trust, neighborhood patrol, or community association.	MLCC		Existing programs as models		X		

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Project  <b>CIRCULATION</b> <b>(roads, trails, trains, planes)</b>	Lead	Capital Cost	Resources	Schedule			Committee Comments
				2005	2006	After 2006	
<i>GOAL 1 – GUIDE PLANNED EXPANSION OF THE PARKS HWY TO CREATE AN ATTRACTIVE, EFFICIENT ‘PARKWAY’ THAT BENEFITS MEADOW LAKES</i>							
Plan for future expansion of the Parks Highway to create an attractive, safe and efficient route that better separates through and local traffic.	MLCC	\$\$\$	DOT&PF		X		
Limit commercial development along the Parks Highway.	MLCC		Landowners		X		
<i>GOAL 2 – RETAIN CHURCH &amp; PITTMAN AS COLLECTOR ROADS WITH MINIMAL DRIVEWAYS &amp; A LARGELY RURAL, UNDEVELOPED FEEL.</i>	MLCC		DOT&PF		X		
<i>GOAL 3 – PLAN FOR FUTURE EXPANSION OF RESIDENTIAL ROAD SYSTEM; IDENTIFY ROADS TO SERVE AS COLLECTORS; CREATE BETTER CONNECTIONS TO ADJOINING COMMUNITIES/ SUPPLEMENT PARKS HWY</i>							
Improve the capacity of existing roads to better serve current and expected future increases in traffic	MLCC	\$\$\$\$	DOT&PF			X	
Develop a “corridor preservation program” to reserve routes that will improve connectivity between existing residential roads and serve future growth on currently undeveloped private property.	MLCC	\$\$	DOT&PF		X		
Create New Connections to Adjoining Communities to Supplement the Parks Highway	MLCC	\$\$\$\$\$	DOT&PF			X	
Create New Connections to for Gravel Trucks to Reach the Parks Highway	MLCC	\$\$\$\$	DOT&PF; gravel companies; residents		X		

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Project <b>CIRCULATION (cont.) (roads, trails, trains, planes)</b>	Lead	Capital Cost	Resources	Schedule			Committee Comments
				2005	2006	After 2006	
<i>GOAL 4 – SET APPROPRIATE STANDARDS FOR ROAD DEVELOPMENT AND SURFACING</i>							
Develop rural or “country” road standards that call for appropriate road widths, horizontal and vertical curves, and surfacing.	MLCC; DOT&PF		DOT&PF; MSB; consultants		X		
Provide development density standards supportive of lower-density development that can be supported by gravel-surfaced roads.	MLCC		DOT&PF		X		
In cases where traffic volumes require hard-surfacing, considered alternatives to asphalt.	MLCC; DOT&PF		DOT&PF	X			
Locate roads within right-of-ways in a manner that serves traffic needs and minimizes impacts on adjoining homes	MLCC; DOT&PF		DOT&PF	X			
<i>GOAL 5 – PLAN FOR GOOD TOWN CENTER ACCESS</i>							
Develop town center circ. plan, identify options to provide for good access, visibility, parking, and pedestrian circulation needed for a successful town center.	MLCC	\$\$	DOT&PF; MSB; consultants			X	
<i>GOAL 6 – PLAN FOR CONTINUING RAILROAD USE; MAINTAIN OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRANSIT, INCLUDING RAIL &amp; CARPOOLS</i>							
Locate and reserve carpool and park-and-ride lots.	MLCC	\$\$\$	Landowners		X		
Work in concert with the Alaska Railroad to guide continuing use of the rail route to meet the railroad and community needs.	MLCC; ARR		ARR	X			
<i>GOAL 7 – MAINTAIN &amp; IMPROVE ROADSIDE TRAILS</i>	MLCC	\$\$	DOT&PF		X		
<i>GOAL 8 – IMPROVE ROAD MAINTENANCE</i>	MLCC; DOT&PF	\$\$\$\$	DOT&PF	X			

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Project <b><u>PUBLIC SERVICES &amp; FACILITIES</u></b>	Lead	Capital Cost	Resources	Schedule			Committee Comments
				2005	2006	After 2006	
<i>GOAL 1 – DEVELOP A MULTI-USE COMMUNITY CENTER IN MEADOW LAKES.</i>							
Improve services available to youth in Meadow Lakes by establishing a youth center as a component of the proposed community center.	MLCC; youth providers	\$\$\$	Local youth; funders; consultants			X	
Establish a senior center as a component of the proposed community center.	MLCC; seniors	\$\$\$\$	Senior citizens; funders; consultants			X	
Establish an adult education program in Meadow Lakes.	MLCC	\$\$\$	Adult ed. providers; funders; consultants			X	
Evaluate alternatives for establishing indoor /outdoor rec. facilities as part of the proposed community center.	MLCC		Funders; consultants		X		
Identify funding sources for the community center.	MLCC		Consultants; Appendix D	X			
Prepare a project plan for proposed community center.	MLCC	\$\$	Consultants Appendix E	X			
<i>GOAL 2 – IDENTIFY AND DEVELOP HIGHEST PRIORITIES.</i>							
Improve emergency access/egress to residential and commercial areas in Meadow Lakes.	MLCC	\$\$\$\$	DOT&PF	X			
Ensure quality of the water table and water/wastewater carrying capacity.	MLCC		State DEC		X		
Secure land for building a junior and senior high school in Meadow Lakes.	MLCC; school; MSB	?	MSB; landowners	X			

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Project	Lead	Capital Cost	Resources	Schedule			Committee Comments
				2005	2006	After 2006	
<b>PUBLIC SERVICES &amp; FACILITIES (cont.)</b>							
Upgrade sub-standard roads in Meadow Lakes.	MLCC; DOT&PF	\$\$\$\$\$	DOT&PF			X	
Locate a federally-owned and operated post office in Meadow Lakes located in the town center.	MLCC; USPS	\$\$\$\$\$	USPS; landowners			X	
Work with MSB to locate solid waste transfer station in Meadow Lakes.	MLCC; MSB	\$\$\$\$\$	MSB			X	
Improve local policing services throughout the Meadow Lakes area.	MLCC	\$ - \$\$\$\$	Neighborhood Watch; MSB; State; Appendices F, G, and H		X		
Improve the addressing system for emergency response.	MLCC	\$	EMS; volunteers; residents	X			
Establish senior housing in Meadow Lakes.	MLCC	\$\$\$\$	Seniors; funders			X	
<i>GOAL 3 – IMPROVE THE COMMUNITY'S CAPACITY TO FUND DEVELOPMENT AND OPERATION OF NEEDED COMMUNITY SERVICES AND FACILITIES.</i>	MLCC	\$	Funding sources	X			
(See "Community Governance & Identity" implementation schedule.)							

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Project	Lead	Capital Cost	Resources	Schedule			Committee Comments
				2005	2006	After 2006	
<b><u>ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT</u></b>							
<i>GOAL 1 – ENCOURAGE EXPANSION OF JOB OPPORTUNITIES WHILE MAINTAINING THE RURAL CHARACTER OF THE COMMUNITY.</i>							
Establish a Meadow Lakes Economic Development Forum	MLCC		Business owners		X		
Create a business incubator program and facility	MLCC	\$\$\$\$	Funders; consultants; SBDC; SBA; EDA			X	
Create a Community Resources Directory	MLCC	\$	Businesses; volunteers; internet		X		
Encourage business owners to offer opportunities for young people to gain job experience in Meadow Lakes	MLCC	\$\$	Business owners; Job Corps; SBDC; voc-ed programs		X		
Utilize town center to encourage/promote small businesses, esp. home-based and cottage industry	MLCC		Business owners; entrepreneurs			X	
Target/promote local events to appropriate markets in the region and state to encourage visitors to spend time/money in Meadow Lakes.	MLCC	\$\$	State V&CB; MSB V&CB; Anch. V&CB		X		
Encourage amounts, locations, and types of tourism and recreation development that provides economic opportunities and help maintain and enhance community values	MLCC	\$\$	State V&CB; MSB V&CB; Anch. V&CB; business owners; lodging providers		X		
Encourage and support opportunities for home-based businesses	MLCC		Home-based business owners		X		

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Project	Lead	Capital Cost	Resources	Schedule			Committee Comments
				2005	2006	After 2006	
<b>ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (cont.)</b>							
<i>GOAL 2 – MAINTAIN RECREATIONAL RESOURCES (OPEN SPACE, TRAILS, LAKES, ETC.) BOTH FOR RESIDENTS AND AS A BASIS FOR ATTRACTING OUT-OF-TOWN VISITORS.</i>							
Post signs identifying recreational areas that are appropriate for out-of-town visitors.	MLCC	\$\$	DOT&PF; local donations; MSB; Trails sub-committee		X		
Develop local, privately-owned campgrounds that target out-of-town visitors.	MLCC; private owners	\$\$\$	Local entrepreneurs/ landowners; DNR; MSB			X	
Identify appropriate seasonal events/attractions to encourage out-of-town visitors to stay in Meadow Lakes, participate in events, utilize local services and buy products locally.	MLCC		State V&CB; MSB V&CB; Anch. V&CB; local businesses; lodging providers		X		
Encourage businesses community-wide that benefit from visitor attractions to volunteer one day a year (or more?) to clean-up, repair, and improve recreational resources throughout the community.	MLCC		Local business owners		X		
Attract those out-of-town visitors to rec. resources who will also utilize other local services and buy local products. (Slow down, stop, stay, and spend money locally.)	MLCC	\$\$	State V&CB; MSB V&CB; Anch. V&CB; internet		X		

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Project	Lead	Capital Cost	Resources	Schedule			Committee Comments
				2005	2006	After 2006	
<b>ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (cont.)</b>							
Establish modest user fees for rec. area users that contribute to the cost of maintaining and improving recreational resources.	MLCC				X		
Establish a Meadow Lakes Visitors Center that informs the public of recreational resources in Meadow Lakes; identifies appropriate/inappropriate activities; and serves as a point of collection for user fees.	MLCC	\$\$\$\$	MSB V&CB; Funders; DNR			X	
<i>GOAL 3 – GUIDE THE CHARACTER &amp; LOCATION OF COMMERCIAL &amp; INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT TO MINIMIZE OFF-SITE IMPACTS.</i>							
Establish rules and locations encouraging commercial development in a way that ensures compatibility with other community goals.	MLCC		Industrial developers; MSB; State		X		
Establish rules and locations for industrial development to ensures compatibility with other community goals.	MLCC		Commercial developers; MSB; State		X		
Limit the hours of operation for commercial /industrial activities to minimize off-site impacts to residential areas.	MLCC		Commercial/ industrial owners; residents		X		
Create appropriate (natural landscaping) buffers surrounding commercial and/or industrial activities to reduce the visual off-site impacts.	MLCC	\$\$	Commercial/ industrial owners; MSB; State		X		
Identify standards to limit the max. decibel allowed by commercial/ ind. activities to minimize off-site impacts.	MLCC		State DEC; EPA; MSB; consultants		X		
Utilize land use policies and planning to appropriately locate future commercial and industrial activities away from residential areas to minimize off-site impacts to residential areas.	MLCC		MSB; developers		X		

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Project	Lead	Capital Cost	Resources	Schedule			Committee Comments
				2005	2006	After 2006	
<b>GOVERNANCE &amp; IDENTITY</b>							
<i>GOAL 1 – ESTABLISH A STRONGER, POSITIVE IMAGE FOR MEADOW LAKES</i>							
Establish a multi-use community center facility.	MLCC	\$\$\$\$\$	Funders; consultants; landowners			X	
Establish a town center district.	MLCC		Landowners; MSB; businesses		X		
Promote events to attract active support by local residents, match community values, and that appeal to larger statewide or regional markets.	MLCC		State V&CB; MSB V&CB; Anch. V&CB; businesses		X		
Establish community-wide agreed upon goals for promoting the identity of the Meadow Lakes area.	MLCC			X			
Improve the appearance of the storage buildings/flea market area near the intersection of Pittman and Parks.	MLCC	\$\$\$	DOT&PF; ARR		X		
<i>GOAL 2 – CREATE AN UMBRELLA ORGANIZATION TO PROVIDE COMMUNITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES</i>							
Review and select a preferred strategy to strengthen the capacity of the Meadow Lakes Community Council to better serve the Meadow Lakes area.	MLCC		Funding opportunities; Appendix J	X			
Complete the comprehensive plan.	MLCC	\$\$\$	MSB; consultants; residents	X			
<i>GOAL 3 – IMPROVE COMMUNICATION NETWORK</i>							
Maintain and strengthen the advisory capacity of the Community Council to represent community-wide agreed upon directions.	MLCC			X			

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Project	Lead	Capital Cost	Resources	Schedule			Committee Comments
				2005	2006	After 2006	
<b>GOVERNANCE &amp; IDENTITY (cont.)</b>							
Improve the existing communication network between residents, business owners, and the Community Council.	MLCC	\$	Residents; business owners; newsletter; newspaper; radio	X			
Improve the communication between the Community Council and the Borough, other agencies, neighboring communities, and business owners.	MLCC	\$	MSB; agencies; neighboring communities; business owners	X			
<i>GOAL 4 – NARROW PRIORITIES TO INCREASE ODDS OF SUCCESS OF COMMUNITY PROJECTS.</i>							
Identify the top priorities (e.g., 3-5) that the community wants and needs.	MLCC		Comprehensive plan; residents; landowners; MSB; consultants	X			
Encourage the Council to monitor potential funding sources for the priority projects.	MLCC		Comprehensive plan priority projects; funders; Appendix D	X			

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## 5.0 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN REVISIONS PROCESS

### 5.1 Process for Revising the Comprehensive Plan

A comprehensive plan is intended to be a long-range planning document, guiding growth development over 20 years and longer. It is a “living document” that helps to guide the long-range goals and strategies of the Meadow Lakes area. Recognizing that changes occur within the term of 20 years, a comprehensive plan needs to be open to change in two ways.

First, there is need for a process to make amendments to specific plan policies. This can be done through a process beginning with the community council, and requiring approval by the Borough Planning Commission and Assembly.

The second category of changes is the need for a regular updating process – typically done every five years. The Meadow Lakes Comprehensive Plan should be reviewed after five years by the Meadow Lakes Community Council to determine which actions have been accomplished and which priority actions should be focused on during the following years. Over time, these revisions to the comprehensive plan will help to document the accomplishments made and new priorities that surface.

After 20 years, and the completion of many of the goals and strategies of the comprehensive plan, the Meadow Lakes Community Council will want to reflect upon the accomplishments of the preceding 20 years and, again, plan for the next 20 years by taking on a public participation process to gain community-wide input on the next Meadow Lakes Comprehensive Plan. Upon completion of the next 20 year comprehensive plan, an ordinance will again be required to legally adopt the plan under Borough codes.

Although not required, one excellent way of documenting a community’s accomplishments is to produce a summary of those accomplishments after five years. The Native Village of Eyak (outside Cordova) provides an excellent example of how to document your community’s accomplishments. This approach improves future funding opportunities by documenting past successes.

## **APPENDICES**

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- Appendix A: Summary of Issues & Goals Report
- Appendix B: Workshop Flyer
- Appendix C: Comments Form
- Appendix D: Community Development Resources Guidebook
- Appendix E: Community Facilities Planning Workbook
- Appendix F: Matanuska-Susitna Borough Resolution 04-01 – Blue Ribbon Task Force
- Appendix G: USA on Watch Resources
- Appendix H: Citizen's Task Force
- Appendix I: Economic Tables
- Appendix J: Governance Alternatives & Tables

Appendix A:  
Summary of Issues & Goals Report

Appendix B:  
Workshop Flyer

## Appendix C: Comments Form

Appendix D:  
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## Appendix I: Economic Tables

Appendix J:  
Governance Alternatives & Tables