



**MAT-SU VALLEY SOUTH GATEWAY VISITOR CENTER**

# Preliminary Feasibility Study

**June 2010**

Agnew::Beck Consulting, LLC  
Wolf Architecture  
RECON, LLC



# ABSTRACT

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The Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau (Mat-Su CVB) has completed an initial feasibility study for a Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center to be located along the Glenn or Parks Highways, in the general vicinity of the southern portion of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

The goal of the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center is to create a lively, attractive, well-designed space where residents and visitors alike will learn about and directly experience the wealth of cultural, natural, recreational and business amenities in the Mat-Su Valley. The Visitor Center will welcome visitors to the Mat-Su Valley, provide interpretive information for travelers, and showcase the natural beauty of the area. The center will also be a destination in its own right, offering interesting activities and learning experiences. Part of the purpose of the Visitor Center is to promote tourism-related and recreation-related economic development, to share information about the region's cultural history and natural attractions in an innovative and interesting way, and to foster stewardship of the Mat-Su Valley's cultural and natural identity.

Market analysis demonstrates that there is great potential to attract more in-state and out-of state visitors to the Mat-Su Valley and promote the area as a vacation destination, as well as allow improved outdoor access and provide increased educational and outdoor amenities for area residents. The feasibility study demonstrates that a Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center is potentially sustainable, and it lays the groundwork for further planning and implementation of the project. The success of the project relies on strong partnerships with a variety of local and regional entities engaged in promoting and protecting the scenic qualities to be found in the Mat-Su Valley.

Funding for the project was provided by a grant from the US National Scenic Byways program to research and develop a plan for a new Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center, with matching funds contributed by the Mat-Su CVB.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors recognized the need to relocate the existing Mat-Su Visitor Center in November of 2006 during discussion at the annual board planning retreat. A vision of a partnership-operated visitor center in a visible and accessible location was established. Through their continued action of developing a new Mat-Su South Gateway Visitor Center and making it a priority issue, the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors has contributed notably to this project since 2007.

Mat-Su CVB Board Members:

- Karen Harris
- Dan McDonough
- Cheryl Metiva
- Dee Dee Kay
- Steve Zadra
- Nicole Bendle
- Wes Tegeler
- Jason Votruba
- Craig Saunders
- Ruth Rosewarne
- Vern Halter
- Mike Hudson
- Kristi Schneider
- Crissy Butts
- Ron Wilson

Many people contributed to the outcome of this plan through participation in the work sessions and individual meetings. We would like to thank these individuals and potential partners for their participation in this plan and will continue the dialogue in making this project a success.

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- Wayne Biessel                Alaska State Parks
- Claire Holland-LeClair      Alaska State Parks
- Kris Abshire                  Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats
- Randi Perlman                Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats
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- Kevin Keeler                 Bureau of Land Management (Iditarod Trail)
- Miriam Valentine             National Park Service

- Steve Halloran Anchorage Convention & Visitors Bureau
- Deb Call Knik Tribal Council
- Melissa Saunders Alaska Native Heritage Center
- Patricia Wade Chickaloon Village Traditional Council
- Jennifer Harrison Chickaloon Village Traditional Council
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## Introduction

In 1986, the Matanuska-Susitna Convention and Visitor Bureau (Mat-Su CVB) was formed as a nonprofit organization to promote the Mat-Su Valley visitor industry. Shortly after, a Mat-Su visitor center was built near the interchange of the Parks and Glenn Highways. Over time, as the Mat-Su Valley has grown in population, jobs and services, the current location has declined in value and appropriateness as a site for a visitor center. The construction of the Parks-Glenn Highways interchange and expansion of the neighboring Triad and Valley Hospital have all made it more difficult to see and access the visitor center. As a result, visitation to the center and sales from its gift shop have declined in recent years.

In 2007, the Mat-Su CVB Board adopted a resolution “supporting the exploration of a partner-driven destination visitor center to showcase the recreational opportunities in the Mat-Su Valley and increase the visitor experience and length of stay.” The following year, the Mat-Su CVB organized a meeting with potential partners, then applied for and was awarded a National Scenic Byways grant to develop a plan for a new “gateway” partnership visitor center. A consultant team made up of tourism planners (Agnew::Beck Consulting), architects (Wolf Architecture) and engineers (Recon Engineering) were selected to work on the plan. The current project concludes in May, 2010.

## Overview

The purpose of a “gateway” visitor center is to welcome travelers into the area and serve as a jumping-off point providing access to and information about activities, events and amenities available throughout the area. The intent of the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center is to create a notable, visible entry point to the Mat-Su Valley, and provide visitors and residents alike with an inspiring, beautiful, popular facility that is emblematic of the place. The center must also be a destination in its own right, offering interesting activities and learning experiences.

The vision for the facility is grand; this vision will be tempered and refined throughout the planning, fundraising, design and building process, based on partner commitments, funding availability, site selection and control, programming decisions and the extent to which the center will serve various market segments (e.g., local residents, out-of-state package tour visitors, independent travelers, educational groups).

The findings of this Preliminary Feasibility Study indicate that:

- This project is doable in a reasonable time frame, at a reasonable cost.
- Potential partners exist that have the organizational capacity to design, construct and operate this facility. There is a significant level of interest from partner organizations to work cooperatively in establishing a Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center.
- There is a market for the facility and its programs. The facility and its programs can contribute significantly to the economic development of the Mat-Su Valley by increasing visitation, tourism and recreation in the Mat-Su Valley, particularly nearer to population centers. Further, there is an established need to relocate and replace the existing Mat-Su Visitor Center.
- There is a need to promote stewardship and caretaking of the Mat-Su Valley’s cultural and natural resources for both visitors and residents, and there is a desire on the part of many organizations to assist each other in this effort.

In determining the type of visitor facility needed, there are several primary factors to consider: facility size, cost to construct and operate, market demand, programming offered and facility location. This graphic illustrates the relationship among these primary factors.

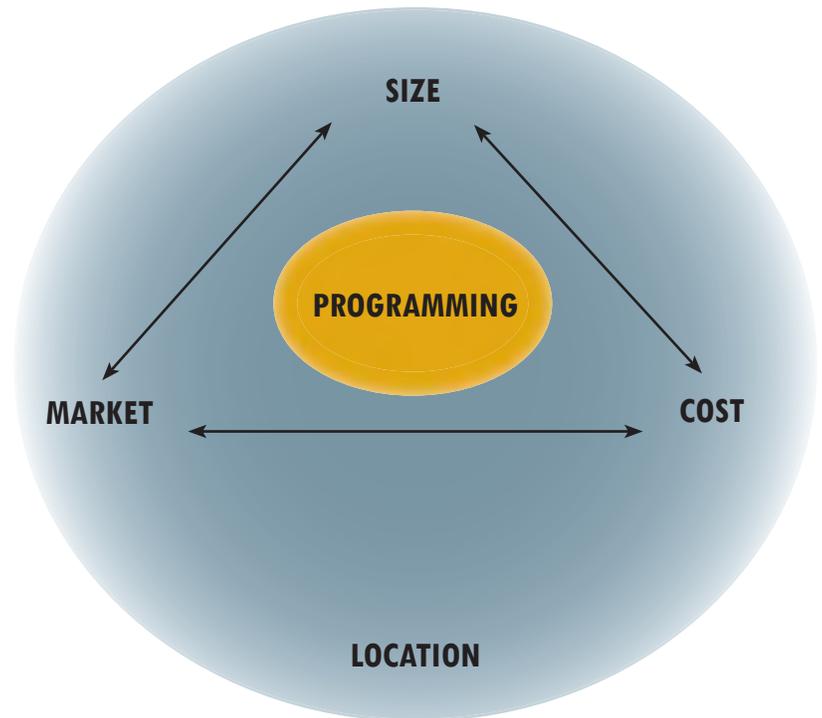
### Size, Cost and Market

The size, cost and market for the facility are directly proportional to one another; as the market increases or decreases, so does the size and cost of the facility. For example, if a large facility is imagined, the costs to build and operate it will be similarly large, and will demand a market to justify the size and expense. Likewise, if costs are a concern, a smaller facility may be all that is affordable, and the level of visitation may be limited by the physical space available for the facility. While costs rise as the size of the facility increases, it is important to note that operations revenues have the potential to grow significantly if the facility expands to include revenue-generating features such as food service.

### Programming

The facility's programs provide a central balancing point for the three factors of size, cost and market. Programming dictates:

- the market, (i.e., the types of audiences who will be attracted to the facility);
- the spaces needed (e.g., exhibit space, auditorium space, office space, etc.), and ultimately the size of the facility;
- the cost to operate the facility, including staff, materials, management and maintenance.



### Location

Underlying all these factors is the facility's location. Location can provide or limit opportunities for market (how accessible, visible is the facility?), cost (what kind of environmental or other design constraints does the location have?), size (what is the buildable area available?), and programming (what kinds of site amenities and programming opportunities does the site provide?).

These five primary factors and their relationship to each other are the main influences on the form and function of the facility. Striking the proper balance among these factors so that each are maximized to their fullest extent is the challenge of facility planning.

## Vision

The Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitors Center will be a lively, attractive, well-designed space where residents and visitors alike will learn about and directly experience the wealth of sightseeing, recreational and business amenities along the Glenn Highway. The proposed Center will welcome visitors to the Mat-Su Valley, providing interpretive information and showcasing

the natural beauty and attractions of the area. The success of the project relies on strong partnerships with a variety of local and regional entities engaged in promoting and protecting the scenic qualities to be found in the Mat-Su Valley and along the entire length of the Glenn Highway.



## Goals

- 1. SHOW OFF:** Showcase the natural beauty of the Mat-Su Valley and the culture of its peoples. Create a facility that is both a gateway and a destination. Incorporate local materials and artwork into the facility, design programming that connects visitors to the unique physical and cultural characteristics of the Mat-Su Valley, and create direct access to the outdoors.
- 1. BUILD OUR REGIONAL ECONOMY:** Bring more visitors to the region, extend visitor stays and expand visitor spending (“stay and play”). Hire and train locals in tourism-related fields. Provide support for local tourism businesses.
- 2. SHARE INFORMATION:** Create an “information bridge” between visitors and the organizations and businesses that serve them. Help visitors and community members understand the Mat-Su Valley and its people by being a central information center that will facilitate visitors’ ability to find things to do and businesses to patronize.
- 3. FOSTER STEWARDSHIP:** Encourage visitors to be responsible and help care for the areas they use and enjoy.
- 4. SERVE LOCALS:** Ensure that the facility and its programs serve local residents/visitors as well as those from other parts of the state and outside of Alaska. Encourage strong local patronage and support of the facility and its programs.
- 5. BUILD PARTNERSHIPS:** Use the visitor center as a place to support the mission of a range of partners and to facilitate use of other related facilities and programs (e.g., Science + Education Center).
- 6. BE INNOVATIVE:** The facility design, equipment and programming should take steps forward in areas of green building, look and feel, access to technology and nature as well as compelling, innovative exhibits and programming.
- 7. BE VISIBLE + ACCESSIBLE:** Locate the facility in a place where it can easily serve visitors and local communities alike.

## Leadership, Advisors + Planning Process

This preliminary feasibility study was conducted by a team of consultants hired by the Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau (Mat-Su CVB), with the involvement of a number of potential project partners, Mat-Su CVB Board and staff. The study began with a visioning work session with Mat-Su CVB Board members and staff, followed by an initial site visit to the gateway area. The Project Team conducted interviews with potential partners (included in the partnership development graphic on the following page) and with managers of comparable facilities from around Alaska and the Lower 48 (listed in the Comparable Facilities chapter).

A Project Work Group was formed that included potential partners and Mat-Su CVB Board members and staff (Project Work Group members are listed in Appendix B Contacts, as well as the

Acknowledgements). The Project Work Group met twice during the process of compiling the information in this report. At the first meeting, the group met to brainstorm about the vision, programming, and look and feel/character of the facility (notes from both meetings are included in Appendix D Meeting Notes). The second meeting gave the Project Work Group a forum to confirm and/or refine the project vision and goals outlined at the first meeting, as well as discuss the consultant team's preliminary findings about the potential market, programming, design, costs and site selection for the facility.

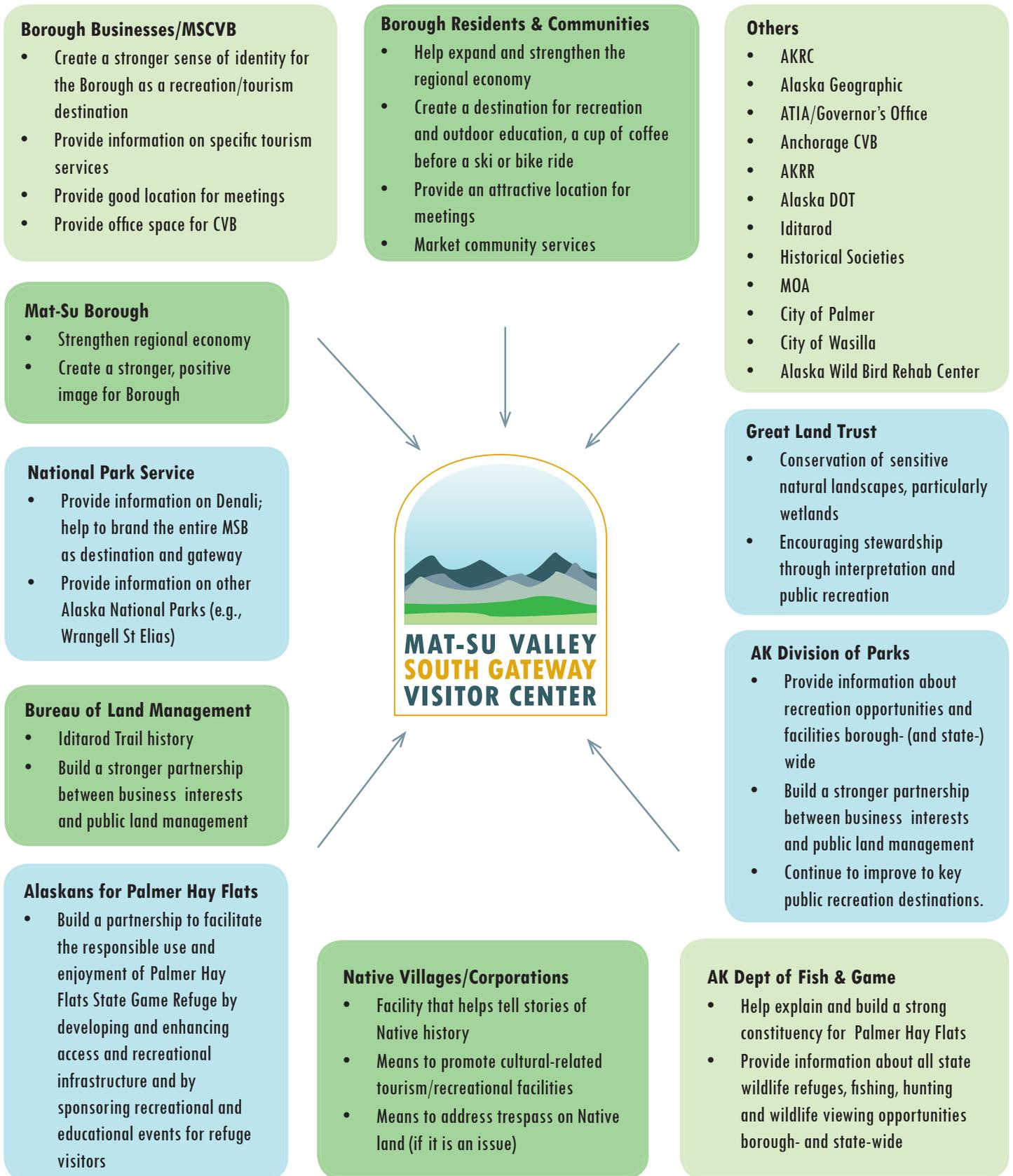
A project website and companion eNewsletters have been used to update the Project Work Group, Mat-Su CVB Board, staff and others about the project's progress.

## Partnership Development

The success of this project relies on strong partnerships with a variety of local and regional entities engaged in promoting and protecting the cultural and scenic qualities to be found in the Mat-Su Valley and along the entire length of the Glenn Highway Scenic Byway. With support from the Mat-Su Borough and a Federal National Scenic Byways Program Grant, the Mat-Su CVB is the primary, initiating partner for the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center and has been a main driving force behind the planning efforts for the past several years. The Mat-Su Borough has also played a strong role in promoting the idea of the Visitor Center, and prioritizing the project.

As the project progresses, many other organizations have joined in work sessions and strategy meetings to advise on and contribute to the plan for the facility and its programs. Partners are not only asked to contribute to the planning effort and perhaps ultimately to the facility and programs, but also benefit from their involvement in the project, and from the creation of a Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center. The figure on the next page illustrates these existing and potential benefits.

# Meeting the Needs of Borough Residents, Businesses, and Diverse Partners



## Facility, Programs + Cost

In considering how best to serve the facility’s diverse users, and in recognition of the capital and operational costs associated, the Design Team chose to explore three scenarios – small, medium and large. Each scenario contains some consistent, core spaces whose sizes grow larger. Additionally, in the medium and large scenarios, other program elements are added.

The Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center will blend traditional and emerging visitor information and interpretive services with the addition of indoor and outdoor venues for community events. A highly visible location, convenient access, flexible activity and gathering spaces, varied seasonal outdoor program areas, and efficient site circulation invite year around use. With these parameters in mind, two possible site concepts were explored: a bluff site concept and a lakeside site concept.

The proposed Visitor Center will house the administrative offices for the Mat-Su Convention and Visitor Bureau (Mat-Su CVB) who will oversee day-to-day operations and staffing of the facility. Other Core program spaces include:

- Lobby and restrooms
- Exhibits and programs
- Tour information
- Virtual tour interface
- Auditorium/theatre
- Storage
- Site amenities

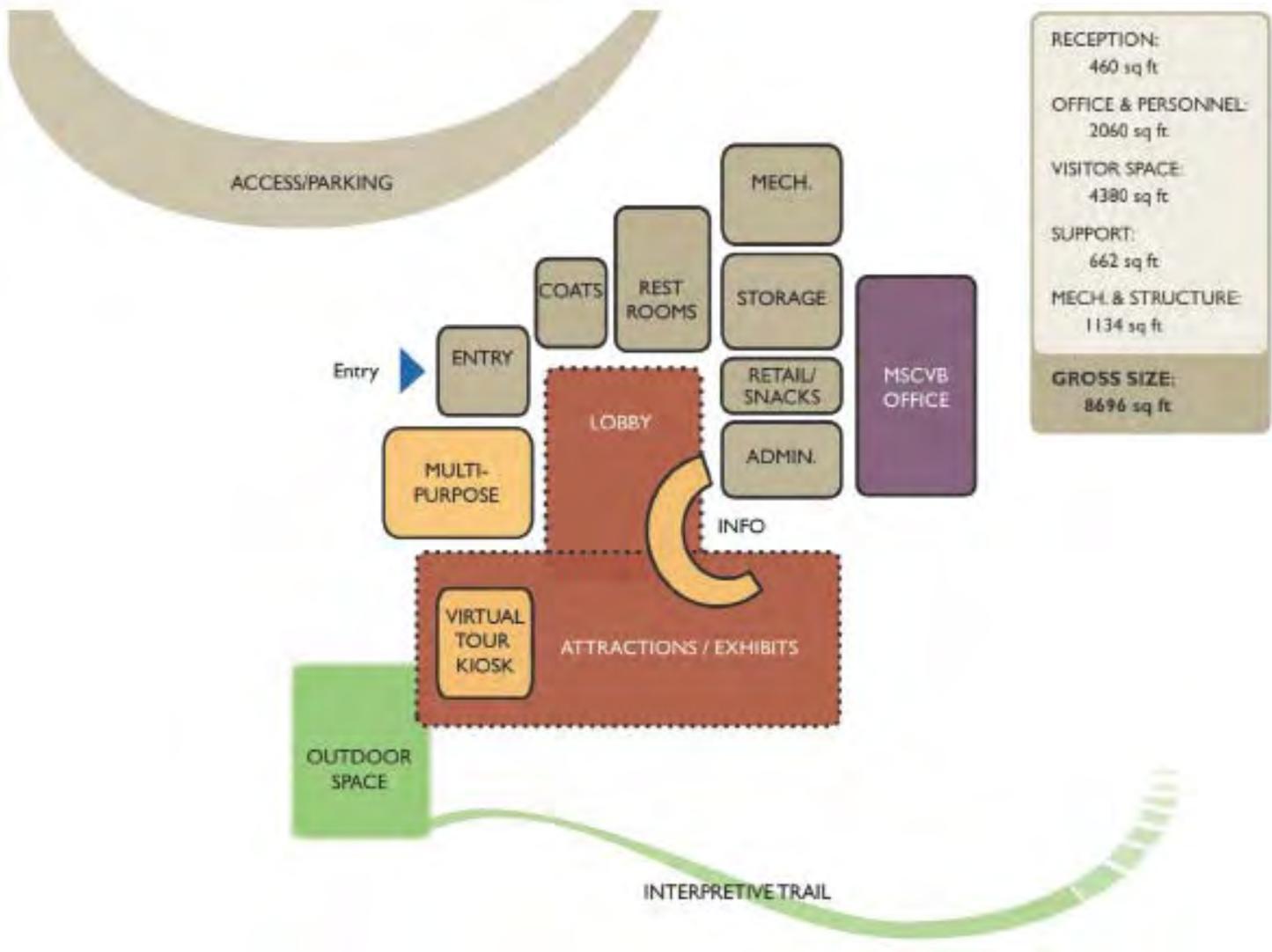
Other components of the facility are variable, depending on the size and specific programming of the eventual facility. These include:

- Size
- Meeting/education component
- Tenant space component
- Café/food service
- Retail
- Outdoor interpretive/activity component
- Outdoor event venue
- Year-round use component

The conceptual diagrams included on the following pages show the relationship among the spaces in the three different size scenarios for the facility. Also included is the estimated square footage and cost to construct.



“Earning your turns” at the nearby Hatcher Pass four-season recreation area.



### Small Facility

#### Features:

- compact, efficient
- multi-purpose space
- virtual tour kiosk
- fits on small site
- could be phase one of multi-phase
- MSCVB manages
- minimum program space

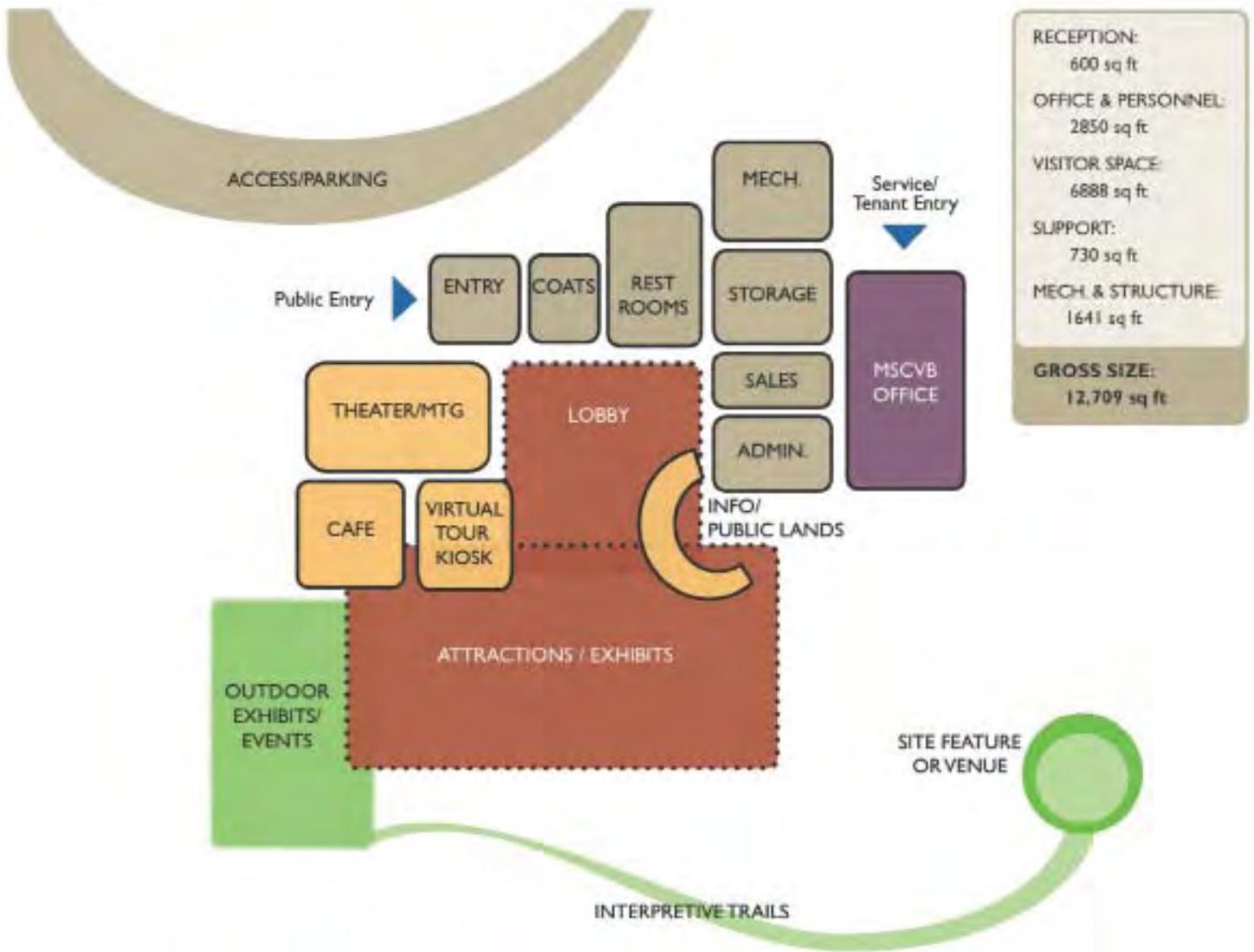
**Cost to construct:** \$4.8 million

**Cost to operate:** \$87,207 - 99,326 /year\*

\*Includes building maintenance and utilities, but not staff costs.

**Comparable Facility:** Denali Eilson Visitor Center (7,965 sf, \$9.2 million to construct)





**Medium Facility**

**Features:**

- more visitor space
- theatre
- cafe/concession
- sales space
- outdoor venue
- MSCVB manages

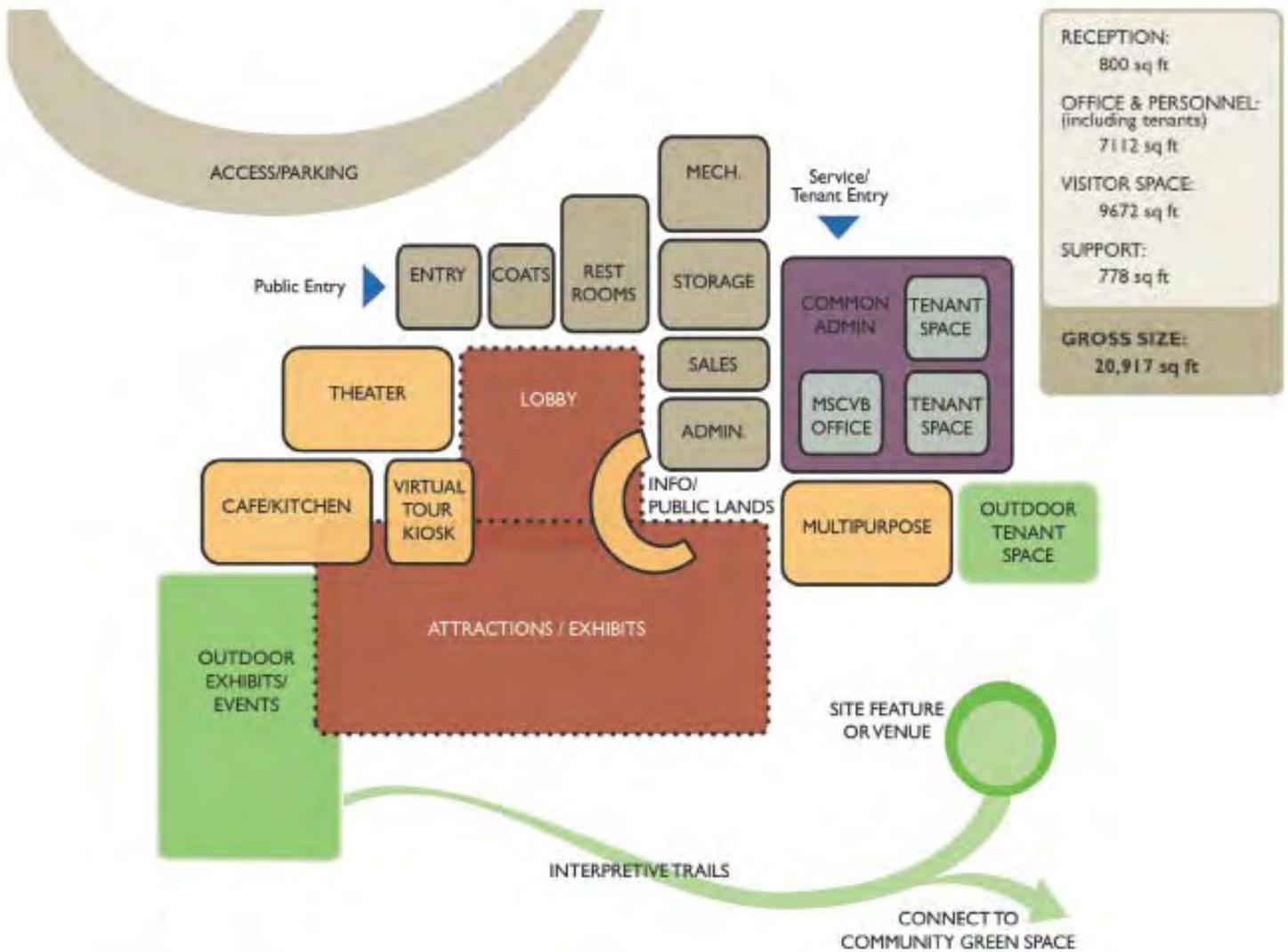
**Cost to construct:** \$9.2 million

**Cost to operate:** \$144,179 - 164,090 / year\*

\*Includes building maintenance and utilities, but not staff costs.

**Comparable Facility:** Denali Park: Wilderness Access Center (14,000 sf, cost to construct unknown)





## Large Facility

### Features:

- lease space (2800 sf)
- kitchen/cafe
- exhibit/program space
- larger theatre
- multipurpose space
- site amenities
- larger parking area
- community features

**Cost to construct:** \$14 million

**Cost to operate:** \$219,310 - 250,217 / year\*

\*Includes building maintenance and utilities, but not staff costs.

**Comparable Facility:** Begich Boggs Visitor Center (17,020 sf, \$8.1 million original construction + \$2.4 million redesign)



Small Facility Program	Estimated Square Footage	Medium Facility Program	Estimated Square Footage	Large Facility Program	Estimated Square Footage
<b>Potential Uses</b>		<b>Potential Uses</b>		<b>Potential Uses</b>	
<b>Reception</b>					
Entry	64	Entry	96	Entry	180
Lobby	240	Lobby	300	Lobby	360
Storage/Coat Room	80	Storage/Coat Room	100	Storage/Coat Room	120
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>496</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>660</b>
<b>Office + Personnel Space</b>					
Mat-Su CVB offices	1,616	Mat-Su CVB offices	2,240	Mat-Su CVB offices	1,552
				Program offices/Tenants	2,800
				Board/meeting room	600
				Restrooms	150
				Break Room	345
				Entry/Lobby	300
Storage	100	Storage	135	Storage	180
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>1,716</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>2,375</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>5,927</b>
<b>Visitor Space</b>					
Exhibit space	2,000	Exhibit space	2,750	Exhibit space	3,250
Tour Desk - visitor services	100	Tour Desk - visitor services	150	Tour Desk - visitor services	240
Virtual Tour Kiosk	100	Virtual Tour Kiosk	150		
		Info/Reservations Desk	150	Info/Reservations Desk	120
Auditorium/Multipurpose	1,000	Auditorium/Multi-purpose	1,550	Auditorium/Theatre	1,800
				Multi-purpose/Classroom	900
		Retail shop	300	Retail shop	450
Snack Bar/Coffee Cart/Retail	150	Café -- seating for 30	650	Café	1,000
Storage -- printed materials	300	Storage--multipurpose, café, retail	240	Storage	300
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>3,650</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>5,790</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>8,060</b>
<b>SUBTOTAL AREAS ABOVE</b>	<b>5,750</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL AREAS ABOVE</b>	<b>8,661</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL AREAS ABOVE</b>	<b>14,647</b>
<b>Maintenance, Operations Support and Circulation</b>					
General Storage	144	General Storage	200	General Storage	240
Cleaning Janitorial	48	Cleaning Janitorial	48	Cleaning Janitorial	48
Public Restrooms	360	Public Restrooms	360	Public Restrooms	360
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>552</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>608</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>648</b>
<b>NET EST'D SQUARE FEET</b>	<b>6,302</b>	<b>NET EST'D SQUARE FEET</b>	<b>9,269</b>	<b>NET EST'D SQUARE FEET</b>	<b>15,295</b>
<b>ADD 20% CIRCULATION</b>	<b>1,260</b>	<b>+ 20% CIRCULATION</b>	<b>1,854</b>	<b>+ 20% CIRCULATION</b>	<b>3,059</b>
<b>ADD 11% STRUCTURE</b>	<b>693</b>	<b>ADD 11% STRUCTURE</b>	<b>1,020</b>	<b>ADD 11% STRUCTURE</b>	<b>1,682</b>
<b>ADD 7% MECH/HVAC*</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>ADD 7% MECH/HVAC</b>	<b>649</b>	<b>ADD 7% MECH/HVAC</b>	<b>1,071</b>
<b>GROSS EST'D SQUARE FEET</b>	<b>8,697</b>	<b>GROSS EST'D SQUARE FEET</b>	<b>12,791</b>	<b>GROSS EST'D SQUARE FEET</b>	<b>21,107</b>

## Facility Operations

Preliminary operating budgets were developed for the all three size scenarios. In all three scenarios, it is projected that revenues (as defined in the table below) can exceed expenditures. These projections are a starting point for creating a strategy that will allow the visitor center to operate in a way that is sustainable in the long-term.

Potential sources of revenues for the proposed visitor center are described in detail below. Likely primary sources of revenue fall into three categories:

- Mat-Su CVB operational funding contribution
- Facility-generated earned income, including tenant income
- Partner contributions

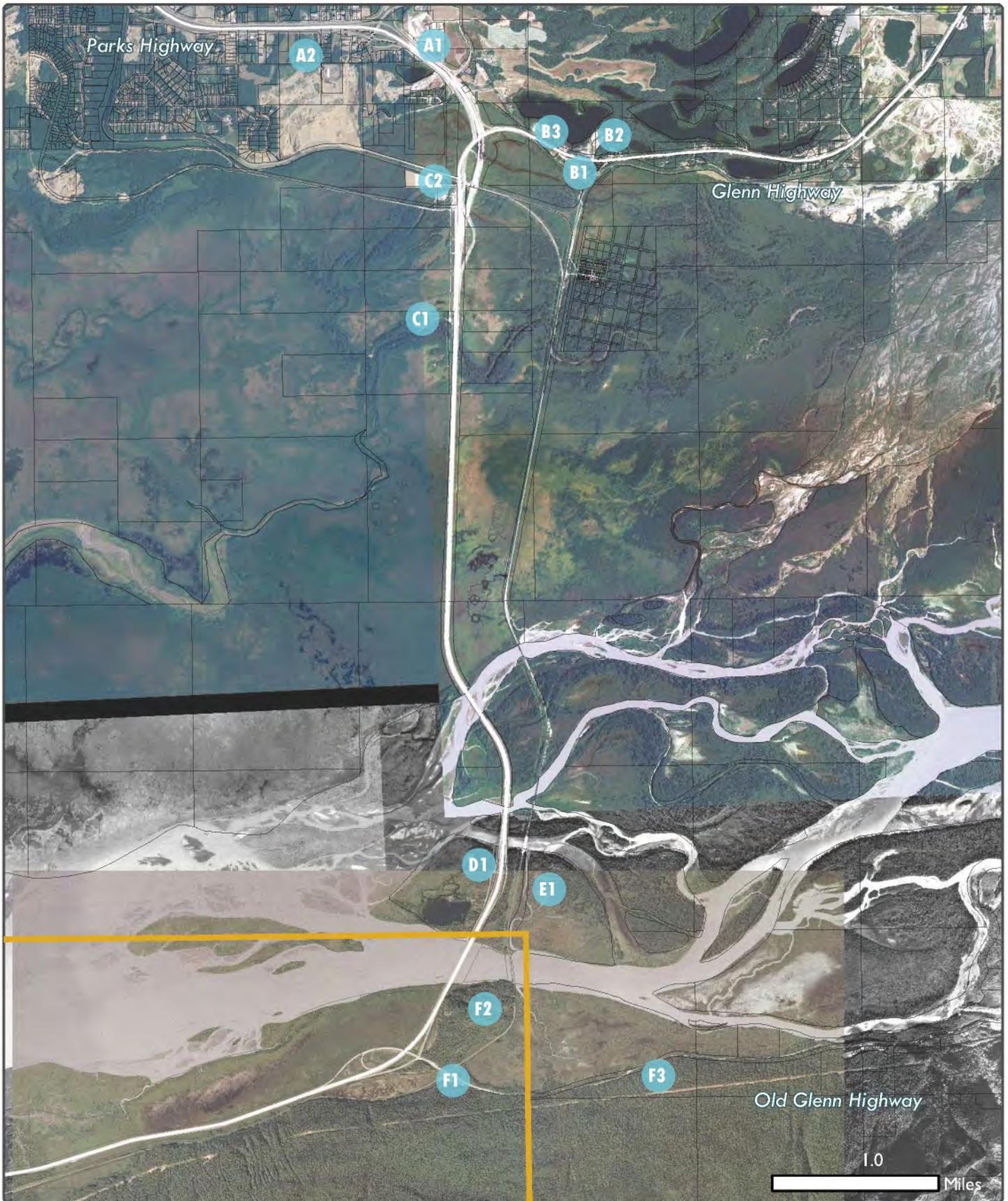
Expenses for the proposed visitor center cover operations and maintenance costs for the facility, but not program or staffing costs. It is expected that these costs will be met by individual program budgets, once the center's programs and staffing needs are further solidified in the next stages of planning. An exception is included in the "medium" and "large" expenditure scenarios: in order to

support the amount of projected revenues generated by booking special events at the facility, an "event coordinator" position is included in the facility costs.

An important finding of the operating projections is that – depending on variables such as visitor center marketing efforts, visibility and access, and spaces and programs – it is likely to be slightly easier to sustain a medium- or large-sized facility than a small one. These larger-sized scenarios have greater potential to provide facility income by having an increased amount of revenue-generating spaces, and by attracting larger numbers of visitors.

	Small	Medium	Large
<b>INCOME</b>			
<b>Earned Income</b>			
Event Income	\$6,000	\$10,000	\$14,400
Admissions*	\$85,800	\$407,750	\$727,000
Café Rental		\$15,600	\$24,000
Gift Shop sales	\$14,376	\$36,086	\$69,275
Auditorium/Theater			\$24,000
MSCVB Operations Contribution	\$26,000	\$32,000	\$40,000
Other Tenant Contributions (Rent)			\$50,400
<b>Contributions</b>			
Borough/Gov't/Partner Contributions	\$42,000	\$52,000	\$9,000
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$88,376</b>	<b>\$145,686</b>	<b>\$231,075</b>
<b>OPERATING COSTS</b>			
<b>Facility Operations &amp; Maintenance</b>			
Estimated \$/SF - Facility	\$69,574	\$102,330	\$168,857
<b>Outdoor Spaces Maintenance</b>			
Estimated \$/acre - Outdoor	\$2,400	\$3,200	\$6,000
<b>Personnel</b>			
Bookings + Events Coordinator	--	\$19,200	\$21,120
<b>Capital Reserve (Repair &amp; Replacement Reserve)</b>			
Facility	\$15,315	\$21,519	\$32,936
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$87,289</b>	<b>\$146,249</b>	<b>\$228,913</b>
<b>Income less Expenditures</b>	<b>\$1,087</b>	<b>-\$563</b>	<b>\$2,162</b>

\* Around the country visitor information centers are beginning to charge admissions as one means of covering operating costs. Often the admission fee applies only to certain, specific activities, such as a movie. Income figures above show possible admissions revenues, but these are not included in the income totals.



# Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center



Data courtesy of Matanuska-Susitna Borough and the Municipality of Anchorage. This map was compiled with assistance from Agnew::Beck Consulting.

Alaska State Plane, Zone 4, NAD 1983  
File: Mat-Su\_VC\_Overview.mxd 2/15/10



## Site

Twelve different sites were considered and evaluated as possible locations for the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center. After this initial evaluation was completed, and the opinions and advice of the Project Work Group were solicited, two locations were identified as preferred sites for the Visitor Center:

- “Kepler-Bradley/Matanuska Lakes” cluster of sites (B1, B2, and B3)
- “The Knob” site (F2)

## Governance

There are two phases to the facility’s governance: managing the process to plan, raise funds for and build a facility, and then secondly, managing the ongoing operations and ownership of a successful visitor center. The organization structure for each phase is likely to be different. Recommendations for governance during the planning phase include:

- Creation of a committee structure, made up of project partners.
- Designating one organization to take the lead on the project, with partners included on an advisory board, overseeing the process.

Additional entities or people that can significantly contribute to the planning phase include:

- Project Manager/ Facility Director
- Nonprofit partner
- Technical and expert support
- “Project benefactor”/“project champion”

There are several workable scenarios for facility ownership and operations management. At this point in the planning process, the two most likely facility managers are:

- The Mat-Su Convention and Visitor Bureau
- A partnership of entities affiliated as a nonprofit organization whose sole purpose is to manage the facility

These sites were chosen for a combination of visibility, access to visitor traffic along the Glenn and Parks Highways, setting (“Wow” factor), and land development suitability. The map on page 13 identifies all the sites considered, including the location of the preferred sites. Eventual formal site selection will depend in large part on partnership and funding opportunities and further analysis of environmental and land ownership/management constraints.

The first scenario – where the Visitor Center is operated and managed by the Mat-Su CVB – is most likely if the facility is owned by the Mat-Su Borough. The current visitor center is owned and managed through a similar relationship. Other partner agencies would contribute funds, staff and programming in the form of in-kind contributions and tenant rent, but would not have a hand in or ultimate responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the facility.

The second scenario – where the Visitor Center is operated and managed by a partnership of entities incorporated as a nonprofit, such as a “Friends of the Mat-Su Valley Visitor Center” organization – is most likely if the facility itself is owned by a similar partnership arrangement. This type of ownership and management is a little more unwieldy than a single owner and single operator, but may be an alternative to a Mat-Su Borough-owned facility if either the Borough is unable or unwilling to be the owner, or if (as mentioned in the above section) a high degree of interest from another partner creates an incentive for a different ownership arrangement.

The ownership and management structure of the facility are also dependent on the selected site. For example, if located in the Matanuska Lakes area (i.e., Kepler-Bradley, the “B sites”), the facility might be owned by the State, with the Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau and/or some combination of partners managing the facility.

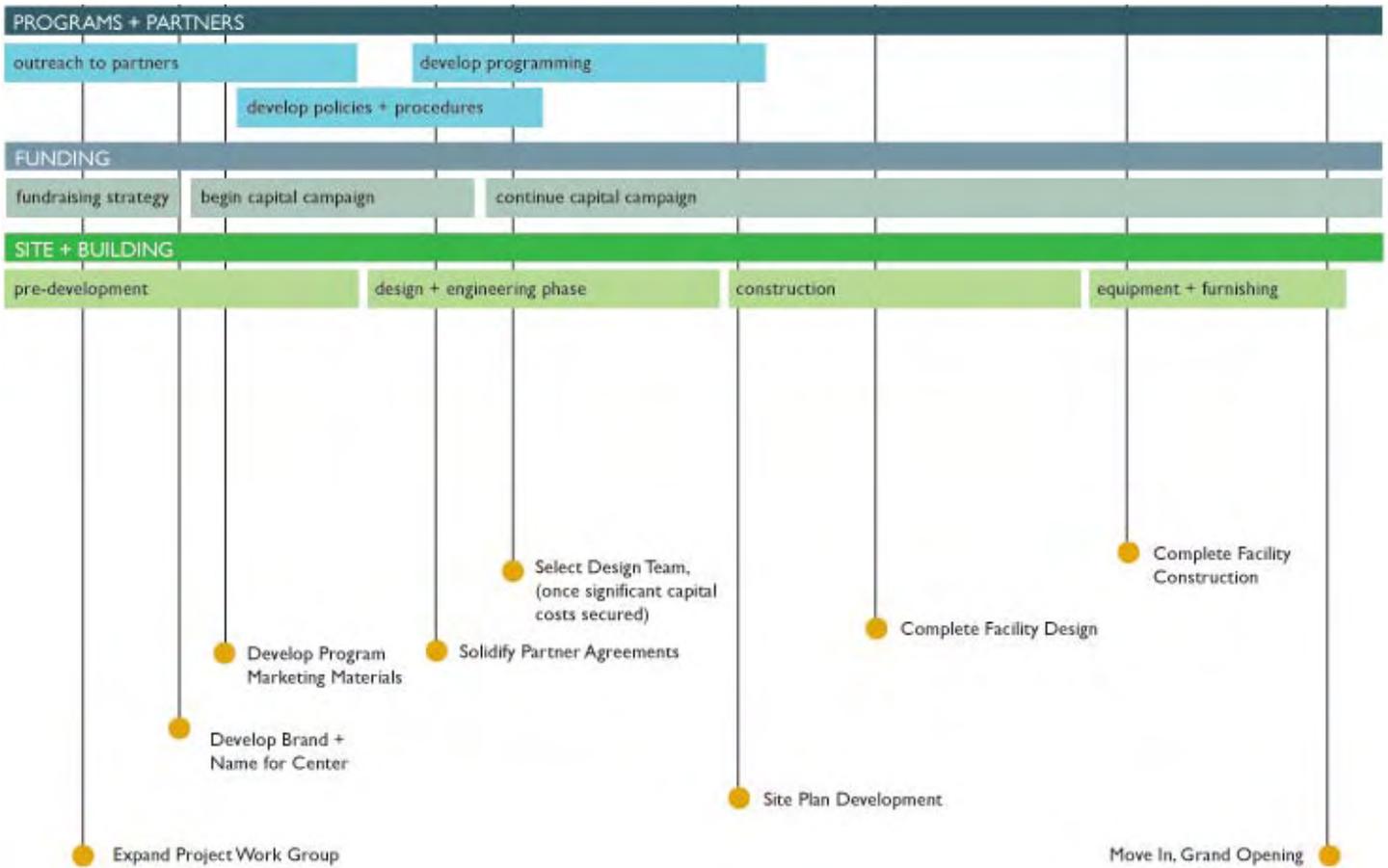
# Implementation

Bringing the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center from vision to reality will involve a series of progressively more precise refinements of the work begun in this report. The process will require sorting out the details of all major project elements: partners and programs, site control, building design, funding, governance, building construction and ultimately the operation of the new facility.

The timeline figure below gives an overview of the general process and sequence of steps to take the project from its current planning phase through fundraising, design, construction and grand opening. These steps are divided into “Programs and Partners,” “Funding,” and “Site and Building” streams. Given the

current stage of the project’s development, and the necessary work ahead, it is likely that the project will take an additional four to five years to complete; the timing of the project may change, depending on factors like funding availability, commitments from project partners, and other issues.

Experience with other public projects similar in scope and funding opportunities suggests the time needed to plan, fund, design and construct this project will be dominated by two interrelated variables: first, the capacity of the project sponsors to aggressively work through all the steps above, and secondly, the time needed to raise necessary funds.



## Recommendations

The following set of recommendations was developed in the course of this project and is intended to help direct the project leadership's next steps.

### Programs and Partners:

#### Formalize Partner Relationships.

Achieve the required level of collaboration among partners by setting up a formal project planning committee. The governance chapter includes more information on this topic.

#### Gain Local Support.

Work actively to keep local communities (residents, businesses, governments, non-profits, etc.) aware of, engaged in, and supporting the project.

#### Create Organizational Structure.

Consider creation of an Advisory Board comprised of Mat-Su CVB board members, partner members, and community leaders willing to promote and realize the Center.

#### Fund a Project Manager Position.

Consider creation of position for and recruitment of a Project Manager or Facility Director who under the direction of the Board would act to implement strategies toward securing funding for and development of this project.

### Fundraising:

#### Maximize Partner Contributions.

Design the program and the building itself with an entrepreneurial mindset: emphasize building and programmatic elements that increase opportunities to raise capital funds and generate ongoing operations funds. For example, if the project includes access to wetlands and the chance to offer education information on this topic, this opens the door to partners and funding with an interest in this issue.

#### Balance Size and Cost.

Size the facility with the goal of finding the right balance between partner needs and cost considerations; the facility should serve partner missions, but not be so costly as to require a fundraising program that stretches beyond the level of interest of partners, Mat-Su CVB staff, the public, and funders. At the same time, as is shown in the operations chapter, recognize that some program/building elements are important generators of operating revenue (e.g., gift shop, coffee sales, rentable space).

#### Have a Solid Operations Plan.

Recognize that obtaining ongoing operations revenue is almost always more of a challenge than obtaining initial capital funding. Additionally, funders are extremely interested in knowing that your facility will “pencil” – i.e., be sustainable – over many years. With this in mind, invest upfront in programs and a facility that can help reduce costs and increase revenues, and have a realistic budget showing these costs and income. Understand, too, that factors such as an upfront investment in energy conservation can save money for the full life of the project (and also provide another line on capital funding sources).

#### Secure a Local Match.

Most private and public funding sources require a local contribution as a condition for their support. Typical local matches are at least ten percent of project costs. As a rule, projects offering a higher local match are much more likely to receive funding. It pays to be creative in arranging for local cash and in-kind contributions. Even if these produce a small amount of the overall cost, they are very important to funders trying to gauge local commitment. Some options include:

- donated land (e.g., from City, State, a land trust, a private individual)
- in-kind services for design and program
- community donations and local fundraisers (e.g., a benefit social event organized by the Mat-Su CVB)

- individual contributions (e.g., sell bricks or plaques on the wall)
- donations from Native Corporations
- City bond measure

### **Secure State and Federal Appropriations.**

Public funding through the State Legislature and or Congress remains a very important strategy for funding in Alaska. This might be done either through a special appropriation or through the agency partner. Strong support in the Governor’s office is extremely helpful in getting support in Washington, D.C.

### **Work Closely with Alaska Native Organizations**

Native organization involvement and leadership not only broadens the attractiveness and cultural value of the Visitor Center, but can also open up a range of funding options.

### **Start Fundraising Now.**

Early funding (to initiate and keep the project moving) will require initial funds for project management and design, as well as a local match for capital fundraising. Project sponsors should aim to secure \$300,000-400,000 as quickly as possible.

## **Site and Building:**

### **Identify a Single, Preferred Site and Obtain Site Control.**

Building design cannot proceed beyond a concept level without greater certainty about the project site. Consequently, it is critical to push ahead and reserve a site as quickly as possible. It is essential to work with partners during this process.

### **Follow an Iterative Design/Build Process.**

Building design can be phased to respond to funding levels and deepening knowledge of site characteristics, access and partner needs. General building design steps are outlined below, along with a general estimate of time required for each step:

- Initial space program/concept design and community review: four months (much of this has already been completed as part of this report)
- Schematics (general layout): three months
- Design development: three months
- Construction documents: three months
- Bidding and negotiation: one to five months (the process can be slow if Federal funding is involved, e.g., EDA money)
- Construction and occupation: one to two years (this estimate includes site preparation, utilities and building construction)

### **Remember that Programs and People – not Buildings – Are the Key to Success.**

Ultimately, success comes from people: what goes on inside the building, not the building itself.

# PROJECT BACKGROUND

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## Purpose of the Project

### Project History

In 1986, the Matanuska-Susitna Convention and Visitor Bureau (Mat-Su CVB) was formed as a nonprofit organization to promote the Mat-Su Valley visitor industry. Shortly after, a Mat-Su visitor center was built in 1989 on land donated the Matanuska-Susitna Borough by the Great Western Bank. The parcel was then put into title with the Mat-Su Borough to qualify for state grant monies. The 4,000 square foot 2-level visitor center was paid for entirely with \$345,000 funding from the 1989 Governor's Jobs bill. And has functioned as a visitor center ever since.

Over time, as the Mat-Su Valley has grown in population, jobs and services, the current location has declined in value and appropriateness as a site for a visitor center. Challenges have arisen such as the construction of the Parks-Glenn interchange – making it more difficult to see and access the visitor center – and the expansion needs of the Mat-Su Regional Medical Center – adjacent land uses that are incongruous with activities at the visitor center. As a result, visitation to the center, and sales from the visitor center gift shop have fallen off in recent years; the correlation with this decline and construction of the new highway interchange and hospital growth is significant.

In 2007 the board adopted a resolution “supporting the exploration of a partner-driven destination visitor center to showcase the recreational opportunities in the Mat-Su Valley and increase the visitor experience and length of stay.” On February 19, 2008 the Mat-Su CVB organized a meeting with potential partners. In March, 2008 the Mat-Su CVB applied for a National Scenic Byways grant to develop a plan for a new “gateway” partnership visitor center. The purpose of a “gateway” visitor center is to welcome travelers into the area and serve as a jumping-off point providing access to and information about activities, events and amenities available throughout the area. The Mat-Su CVB was awarded the grant from the Federal Highway Administration in December, 2008, and in March, 2009 was given permission to proceed with the project. In June, 2009 a request for proposals (RFP) was published inviting contractors to submit proposals for the plan's development. A consultant team made up of tourism planners (Agnew::Beck Consulting), architects (Wolf Architecture) and engineers (Recon Engineering) were selected to work on the plan. The current project, which produced this plan, began in September, 2009 and concluded in May, 2010.

### Vision

The vision for the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center as articulated by the Mat-Su CVB Board and the Visitor Center Work Group will be a lively, attractive, well-designed space where residents and visitors alike will learn about the wealth of sightseeing, recreational and business amenities in the Mat-Su Valley. The center will welcome visitors to the Mat-Su Valley, provide interpretive information for travelers, and showcase the natural beauty of the area. It will also serve the needs of the local community by providing gathering and event space, particularly during the off-season. The success of the project relies on strong partnerships with a variety of local and regional entities engaged in promoting and protecting the scenic qualities to be found in the Mat-Su Valley and along the entire length of the Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway and the Parks Highway, heading north to Denali.

## Project Goals and Strategies

1. **Show Off:** Showcase the natural beauty of the Mat-Su Valley and the culture of its peoples. Create a facility that is both a gateway and a destination. Incorporate local materials and artwork into the facility, design programming that connects visitors to the unique physical and cultural characteristics of the Mat-Su Valley, and create direct access to the outdoors.
2. **Build Our Regional Economy:** Bring more visitors to the region, extend visitor stays and expand visitor spending (“stay and play”). Hire and train locals in tourism-related fields. Provide support for local tourism businesses.
3. **Share Information:** Create an “information bridge” between visitors and the organizations and businesses that serve them. Help visitors and community members understand the Mat-Su Valley and its people by being a central information hub that will facilitate visitors’ ability to find things to do and businesses to patronize.
4. **Foster Stewardship:** Encourage visitors and residents to be responsible and help care for the areas they use and enjoy.
5. **Serve Locals:** Ensure that the facility and its programs serve local residents/area visitors as well as those from other parts of the state and outside of Alaska. Encourage strong local patronage and support of the facility and its programs.
6. **Build Partnerships:** Use the visitor center as a place to support the mission of a range of partners and to facilitate use of other related facilities and programs (e.g., Alaska State Parks, Hatcher Pass Ski Area, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Alaska Railroad, newly forming Science and Education Center, etc. For more information on partnership development, please see page 9-2).
7. **Be Innovative:** The facility design, equipment and programming should take steps forward in areas of green building, look and feel, access to technology and nature as well as compelling, innovative exhibits and programming.
8. **Be Visible and Accessible:** Locate the facility in a place where it can easily serve visitors and local communities alike.

## Description of the Community and Region

The Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Borough lies in the lush valleys of the Matanuska and Susitna Rivers. The Borough is immediately to the north of the Municipality of Anchorage and is the gateway to much of Alaska – lying between Anchorage and Denali National Park, and between the Canadian border and Denali National Park – and directs much of the traffic coming from outside the state. The Borough covers almost 25,000 square miles, the third largest borough in the state. At this size, it is about the same size as West Virginia; however, 90 percent of its residents live in a relatively narrow east-west corridor that stretches between the community of Sutton to the east on the Glenn Highway, and the community of Willow to the west on the Parks Highway. The Borough has only three incorporated cities: Houston, Palmer, and Wasilla. These cities account for about 19 percent of the Borough’s population (Alaska Department of Labor, Fried 2003).

The Matanuska-Sustina Borough's first inhabitants were the Athabascan Dena'ina Indians. Dene' Native Elders suggest that the Athabascans have occupied lands in Alaska for 40,000 years, moving as ice advanced or receded.<sup>1</sup> Occupation of the Upper Cook Inlet likely began in about 4000 B.C., perhaps by the Athabascans.<sup>2</sup> The Dena'ina and the Ahtna are both Athabascans and lived, traded and travelled in the Borough to different degrees. The relationship between the two groups helped establish a network of trails that has developed into some of the major roadway networks used today. It was not until the 19<sup>th</sup> Century that exploration of the interior portions of the State began in earnest.

Historically, most of the non-Native communities in the Borough were established to support farming, gold and coal mining. Mining largely disappeared from the Borough when the Valdez Creek gold mine closed in 1995, but potential for other mining such as coal bed methane and possibly even diamonds exists.<sup>3</sup> While the Mat-Su Valley is still the largest agricultural producer in the state, growing 61 percent of the state's total agricultural production, farming has been largely overshadowed in importance by other economic players.

Today, the Mat-Su Borough economy derives its vitality from a variety of sources, the most prominent of which is its role as residence of choice for many people who work elsewhere – either in Anchorage or on the North Slope. In 2005, approximately 33 percent of the Borough's labor force worked in Anchorage, with a total of 44 percent working outside of the Borough. Those 44 percent earn 58 percent of the total wages earned by Mat-Su residents, the reason why so many Mat-Su residents commute. Wage and salary jobs in the Borough are largely in trade and services in support of resident households. While commuting remains important, a large and growing share of the economic base is based in the Wasilla-Palmer area.

The area has also been one of the fastest growing in the state, with growth rates among some of the highest in Alaska. For the 1990's the Borough was in the top 40 fastest growing areas in the U.S.<sup>4</sup> This continued growth has resulted in the Borough capturing a growing share of the combined Anchorage/Mat-Su region's total population. The Mat-Su Borough's population in 1990 represented 14 percent of the region's total; by 2006 its share had grown to 21 percent.

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<sup>1</sup> *Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway, Interpretive Plan*. Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway Organization. Summer 2006.

<sup>2</sup> *Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway Corridor Partnership Plan*. Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities.

<sup>3</sup> A placer gold miner from Palmer discovered purple and orange garnets in gravel he dredged up a few years ago close to Shulin Lake, 24 miles southwest of Trapper Creek. Garnets are considered a significant "indicator minerals," suggesting that diamonds might be in the vicinity (<http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/diamonds/indicator.html>).

<sup>4</sup> Between 2000 and 2006, the borough's population grew by 30 percent, compared to just 9 percent for Anchorage and 7 percent for the state as a whole. (Alaska State Department of Labor, <http://labor.state.ak.us/>)

Table 1.1 Population Statistics

Year	MSB	Average Annual Growth
1960	5,188	-
1970	6,509	2.3%
1980	17,816	10.6%
1990	39,683	8.3%
2000	59,322	4.1%
2006	77,174	4.5%

Source: Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development. February 20, 2008.

The rapid growth of the Mat-Su Borough has been driven by two factors. First, the Borough’s low land prices combined with proximity to Anchorage has spurred growth by residents who commute to jobs in Anchorage.<sup>5</sup> Second, in the last decade, the Borough has reached a population threshold where it is large enough to support local services previously only available in Anchorage, including stores, entertainment and a major new hospital. This maturing of the Borough economy has contributed significantly to the regional economy.

## What’s there to do in the Mat-Su Valley?

The growing population in the Mat-Su Valley as well as the population centers of Anchorage and the Kenai Peninsula travel to the Mat-Su Valley for the wide variety of activities, at all levels of skill, which the area offers. From fishing, to dog mushing, to flightseeing, to skiing and snowboarding, to museums documenting the area’s history, to the Alaska State Fair, the Mat-Su Valley offers things to do in all seasons.

In the winter, the Mat-Su Valley draws snowmobiles, skiers, snowboarders and snowshoers, fisherman, dog mushers and others interested in heading into the mountains, valleys or waterbodies of the Valley. Hatcher Pass provides a diverse venue for winter activities close to Anchorage and with many amenities and accommodations not found further afield. Activities for those interested in sightseeing and exploring the numerous winter festivals and events also abound. The Iditarod Sled Dog Race each March draws mushers from around the world to the Valley where the pre-race festival, Iditarod Days, allows visitors to meet the mushers. After the race starts there are options to travel by sled dog, air taxi or snowmobile to one of the official Iditarod checkpoints and watch the mushers on their way to Nome.

Preceding the mushers and dogs are snowmobile racers competing in the IronDog and extreme sport enthusiasts testing their meddle on skis, snowshoes or specially prepared bicycles during the Iditasport Race.

The northern lights are often on display in the clear, dark nights in February, March and April. While in the Valley there are opportunities to stay in a locally-owned-and-operated bed and breakfast, unwind in a rented cabin, watch the aurora borealis on a cold, clear night, observe moose

<sup>5</sup> In 2008, 32 percent of employed Mat-Su residents worked in Anchorage (<http://www.iser.uaa.alaska.edu/Publications/BenefitsCookInletFerry2MOA.pdf>)

and other winter wildlife, or flightsee above the many glaciers and mountains. For those headed into the wilderness there are opportunities to snowshoe along forest trails and across frozen lakes, ice skate on valley lakes, explore the miles of wilderness in a snowmobile or in a dog sled, with tours available for each, as well as ski or snowboard in the mountains.

In the summer, the valleys and rivers open up with wildflowers and wildlife, luring people to remote river valleys and secluded lakes. Guided or unguided, anglers go in search of king salmon, silver salmon, lake trout, rainbow trout, dolly varden, Arctic grayling, Arctic char, northern pike and many more types of fish in the Valley's waters. Glaciers abound in the region and the Matanuska and Knik Glaciers offer easy access for photography, trekking or climbing. Flight seers can view numerous glaciers, including the Matanuska, Knik, Tokositna, Kahiltna and Ruth Glaciers, catch views of Denali/Mt. McKinley and generally explore the wilderness via small plane or helicopter. To explore the region's wilderness on foot, by water, by bike or on the backs of horses or llama, there are several state parks located through the Mat-Su Valley and guiding businesses to assist you in getting there. The major parks are Denali State Park, Independence Mine State Historical Park and Nancy Lake State Park. Other smaller state parks include Big Lake, Finger Lake, Kepler-Bradley (Matanuska) Lakes, King Mountain, Matanuska Glacier and Summit Lake. Each of these areas has different facility offerings. Outside of these areas, hikes and biking trails abound as well at all levels of difficulty.

In all seasons, a wide variety of Alaska's wildlife can be seen. Moose are plentiful, as are a wide variety of birds and waterfowl. Just off the Glenn Highway, Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge provides excellent chances to identify dozens of species of migrating birds as they wing to and from summer nesting grounds. The opportunity to see a black bear, brown bear, wolves, fox, mink, lynx and porcupines are frequent. Denali State Park, located in the foothills of the Alaska Range, gives a visitor the opportunity to see the previously mentioned animals as well as caribou, Dall sheep, mountain goats and many additional species of birds. These areas also draw aficionados of northern flora including rare wildflower species.

The region's cultural history also offers a rich experience. From the lengthy history of Native settlements to the turn-of-the-century gold seekers to the Valley's agricultural past, each community in the Mat-Su Valley has a story to tell and the number of museums to tell it. Examples include the Alpine Historical Site in Sutton, the Colony House Museum in Palmer, the Fort Green Trapper's Museum and the Dorothy G. Page Museum and Historic Townsite in Wasilla and the Museum of Northern Adventure in Talkeetna. There are numerous other museums in these communities and others. There are also significant finds of early Alaska Native settlement that help tell the story of the Valley's first people.

The Glenn Highway Gateway Visitor center will showcase the variety of activities listed above and highlight the beauty of the area. Ideally, the Visitor Center site will provide access to existing infrastructure and create a market for additional amenities close-by. To better illustrate the range of these activities, the map below highlights the region and a small sampling what there is to do in the Mat-Su Valley. In addition to achieving the goals set forth above, the creation of a new visitor center would fill some important gaps in the current visitor and resident experience:

- Allow Alaska Native culture of the Mat-Su Valley's culture to be celebrated and shared more completely with residents and visitors.
- Provide a comprehensive account of the history of the Mat-Su Valley.

- Serve as a gateway to a host of recreation destinations and amenities, including Denali National Park.
- Create a visitor center that is more visible, more easily accessed and better serves its target populations.

Map 1.2 Parks and Attractions in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley



Map 1.3 The Matanuska-Susitna Valley





# MARKET RESEARCH

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## Introduction

This section provides an overview of visitor market trends for the Mat-Su Valley. It draws upon and summarizes previous research to provide a general picture of the types and number of visitors the proposed Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center is likely to serve. These estimates are then used to start making assumptions about the type of facilities and programming that would work at the center.

## Overview of Economic and Population Trends in the Mat-Su Borough

The Mat-Su Borough is the third largest borough in the state, both physically and in terms of population. At 24,683 square miles, it is about the same size as West Virginia; however, 90 percent of its 77,174 residents live in a relatively narrow east-west corridor that stretches between the community of Sutton to the east on the Glenn Highway, and the community of Willow to the west on the Parks Highway. The Borough has only three incorporated cities: Houston, Palmer, and Wasilla. These incorporated cities account for about 19 percent of the Borough's population; substantial population is located in nearby unincorporated areas such as Big Lake and Meadow Lakes (Alaska Department of Labor, Fried 2003).

Historically, most of the communities in the Mat-Su Valley were established to support farming, gold and coal mining. Mining largely disappeared from the Valley when the Valdez Creek gold mine closed in 1995, but potential for other mining such as coal bed methane and possibly even diamonds exists.<sup>1</sup> While the Mat-Su Valley is still the largest agricultural producer in the state, growing 61 percent of the state's total agricultural production, farming has been largely overshadowed in importance by other economic players.

Today, the Mat-Su Borough economy derives its vitality from a variety of sources, the most prominent of which is its role as residence of choice for many people who work elsewhere – either in Anchorage or on the North Slope. In 2005, approximately 33 percent of the Mat-Su Borough's labor force worked in Anchorage, with a total of 44 percent working outside of the Borough. Those 44 percent earn 58 percent of the total wages earned by Mat-Su Borough residents, the reason why so many Borough residents commute. Wage and salary jobs in the Borough are largely in trade and services in support of resident households. While commuting remains important, a large and growing share of the economic base is based in the Wasilla-Palmer area.

The Mat-Su Borough has a relatively high percentage of residents 16 years and older not in the labor force. Possible explanations for not being in the workforce include staying at home to raise children or care for an elderly parent, illness, retirement, reliance on subsistence resources, or giving up actively seeking employment because of a lack of opportunities, travel time and the current spike in gas prices.

The rapid growth of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough has been well documented, with growth rates among some of the highest in Alaska. For the 1990's the Borough was in the top 40 fastest growing

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<sup>1</sup> A placer gold miner from Palmer discovered purple and orange garnets in gravel he dredged up a few years ago close to Shulin Lake, 24 miles southwest of Trapper Creek. Geologists consider garnets "indicator minerals," suggesting that diamonds might be in the vicinity (<http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/diamonds/indicator.html>).

areas in the US. Between 2000 and 2006, the borough's population grew by 30 percent, compared to just 9 percent for Anchorage and 7 percent for the state as a whole.<sup>2</sup> This continued growth has resulted in the borough capturing a growing share of the combined Anchorage/Mat-Su region's total population. The Mat-Su Borough's population in 1990 represented 14 percent of the region's total; by 2006 its share had grown to 21 percent.

The rapid growth of the Mat-Su Borough has been driven by two factors. First, the Borough's low land prices combined with proximity to Anchorage has spurred growth by residents who commute to jobs in Anchorage. Second, in the last decade, the Borough has reached a population threshold where it is large enough to support local services previously only available in Anchorage, including stores, entertainment and a major new hospital.

More recently, the Borough-wide real estate market has showed signs of slowing. The Matanuska Electric Association reports that the number of new residential hookups for the first quarter of 2007 was down by over 50 percent when compared to the same period in 2006 (Alaska Economic Trends, June 2007). This change parallels national trends, although higher gas prices are influencing some residents to move closer to centers of work, such as Anchorage, in order to decrease commuting distances.

## **Tourism Industry Trends in Alaska and the Mat-Su Borough**

According to ATIA research, most visitors to Alaska are between the ages of 45 and 65, and nine out of ten travel without children.<sup>3</sup> The number one reason for their visit to Alaska is the fulfillment of a lifetime dream to see glaciers, mountains and wildlife.<sup>4</sup> Major barriers to travel include not enough time and high cost.<sup>5</sup> Increasingly, visitors return to Alaska for one or more trips.<sup>6</sup> The percentage of repeat visitors has grown, from 24 percent in 1994 to 40 percent in 2004.<sup>7</sup>

While there has historically been strong growth in Alaska tourism, this pattern has changed in recent years, with rising gas prices and a slow economy. The weakening of the US dollar has brought more international travelers to Alaska, particularly Germans.<sup>8</sup> Higher gas prices also correspond to a general decrease in road trip vacations, but a simultaneous increase in more localized travel. Package travel has increased, while independent travelers coming via highway and ferry has remained flat or declined.<sup>9</sup> There has been a general increase in airline departures and cruise ships consistent with worldwide growth in these areas.<sup>10</sup> After a decade of steady growth, 2008 visitation to Alaska dropped by 0.4 percent. Most of the drop in 2008 is attributed to a 1.3 percent decrease in air passengers (11,000 visitors) and a 6.8 percent decrease in highway traffic (4,400 visitors).<sup>11</sup> However, major airlines have recently announced a substantial increase in flight capacity for summer of 2010. This coincides with a decrease in cruise ship passengers. In 2009, cruise travel flattened and is expected to decline by 14 percent in 2010, bringing 140,000 fewer cruise passengers to Alaska as a

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<sup>2</sup> <http://labor.state.ak.us/>

<sup>3</sup> Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway Marketing Plan, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> ATIA 2009 Tourism Report Card

<sup>9</sup> Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway Marketing Plan, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Alaska's Travel Industry, 2008 Report. [http://www.alaskatia.org/briefing/PDF/2009\\_Tourism\\_Report\\_Card.pdf](http://www.alaskatia.org/briefing/PDF/2009_Tourism_Report_Card.pdf)

result of capacity cuts by major cruise ship companies (Princess, Holland America Line, Royal Caribbean, Norwegian Cruise Line and Cruise West) for the summer season.<sup>12</sup>

The number of visitors driving to Alaska from the Lower 48 has flattened, coinciding with the larger national trend of shorter vacations in recent years.<sup>13</sup> In 2004, an Alaska Highway Market Study by GMA Research for Tourism North was completed to understand the size of the driving market, the demographic profile and geographic characteristics of those driving to Alaska. The research found that 78 percent of long-haul drivers are over the age of 55; 71 percent own an RV; the main reasons for driving include the freedom to travel at their own pace, the scenery, and the idea that they just wanted to see it. Popular activities for those travelers included wildlife viewing (78 percent), Native cultural attractions (75 percent), sightseeing city tours (65 percent) and day cruises (63 percent). Fishing, bird watching, and backpacking/hiking are other popular highway visitor activities.<sup>14</sup>

Outdoor enthusiasts and history buffs comprise 35 percent of the traveling population and represent a significant marketing opportunity for the Glenn Highway. There is also a significant interest in that group for weekend getaways. History buffs are the largest segment identified as users of scenic byways nationwide (20 percent of the traveling population).

The Parks Highway provides a connection between the state's two largest population centers, Anchorage/Mat-Su Valley and Fairbanks, as well as serving Denali National Park and Preserve. The Parks Highway heads west and north from the Glenn/Parks Highway Interchange, through Wasilla, and serves many functions. The route is the major commercial trucking route between Southcentral Alaska and Interior Alaska, brings a high volume of recreational vehicles heading to and from Denali National Park and Preserve, and serves as a major commercial corridor within the Mat-Su Valley.<sup>15</sup> The 2004 ADT levels were 20,000 on the Parks Highway at the Glenn/Parks Highway Interchange. The Glenn Highway, combined with the Parks, provides the primary vehicular transportation route to/from Anchorage. From downtown Anchorage, the Glenn Highway continues north to the Parks Highway interchange, where it continues east to Palmer and then onward. In 2004, ADT on the Glenn Highway east of Muldoon was 50,100 vehicles.<sup>16</sup>

The trends described above have lowered the number of travelers overall, but increased the proportion and importance of local/regional tourism. Approximately one-quarter of respondents from Anchorage, Fairbanks and Kenai/Soldotna, according to the Mat-Su Visitor Impact Study by Alaska Village Initiatives (1998), visited the Mat-Su Borough during the summer. Popular summer activities for Alaskan visitors include visiting attractions (e.g., Alaska State Fair, Hatcher Pass, Musk Ox Farm), sightseeing and fishing, while the most popular activities for Alaska residents traveling to the area in winter include visiting friends and relatives, outdoor recreation (e.g., snowmachine riding, skiing) or attending/participating in local sports events. The Begich Boggs Visitor Center, also in Southcentral Alaska, has seen visitation numbers fluctuate with economic conditions and predicts that Alaska residents and local users might be very important to the viability of a Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor facility.

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<sup>12</sup> (August 11, 2009) Jainchill, Johanna. "Alaskans rethinking cruise passenger tax," Travel Weekly. [http://www.travelweekly.com/cruise/article3\\_ektid199062.aspx](http://www.travelweekly.com/cruise/article3_ektid199062.aspx)

<sup>13</sup> Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway Marketing Plan, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.knikarmbridge.com/FEIS%20CD%202/FEIS/Ch%203%20Affected%20Environment%20121807.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

## Who will use this facility?

The groups expected to use the proposed facility include: local (Mat-Su Valley residents), in-state, and out-of-state visitors. Cutting across these geographic distinctions, potential users may be either independent travelers or travelers on package tours. The specific types of users will vary with the kinds of facilities provided, but are likely to include visitors looking for educational opportunities (such as families or school groups), people looking for information on services and attractions, and people seeking recreation opportunities directly associated with the facility (such as trails).

According to the Mat-Su Borough Tourism Infrastructure Needs Study (McDowell, 2008), about 780,000 visitors travel to the Mat-Su Borough each year. Of these, more than half (446,000) are from other parts of Alaska; the remaining 332,000 are out-of-state visitors. These numbers show that local and regional user groups are likely to be an important user base for the proposed visitor center; programming for the center should therefore place a strong emphasis on meeting the needs and expectations of local/regional and community user groups.

Most visitation to the Borough (from both Alaskan and out-of-state visitors) happens during the summer season, with approximately 90 percent of out-of-state visitors and 59 percent of in-state visitors.<sup>17</sup> If programming for the center focuses on attracting Alaskan and out-of-state visitors, having a summer-only facility could be appropriate, but if an important goal of the facility is to attract local and regional users, a year-round facility would be more appropriate.

The most popular visitor activities in the Mat-Su Borough include wildlife viewing, various types of outdoor recreation (e.g., fishing, camping, hiking, snowmachine riding), viewing the scenery (e.g., flightseeing, riding the railroad, scenic drives), and visiting friends and family.<sup>18</sup> In order to attract visitors interested in these types of activities, programming for the center should include elements such as: interpretive trails with viewing platforms, links to regional trail systems and/or existing outdoor recreational sites, community and/or family events (e.g., nature talks, special performances), information on recreational activities throughout the Mat-Su Valley. Retail, such as a store offering books, maps and permits, or a café/eatery would complement these types programming, but might not itself draw visitors.

According to the Mat-Su Borough Tourism Infrastructure Needs Study, despite the recent economic slowdown and corresponding decrease or flattening in the number of visitors to Alaska and the Mat-Su Borough, the market outlook for in-state and out-of-state visitation to the Borough is expected to grow: increasing numbers of cruise passengers (growing between two and five percent each year) are choosing to spend additional time exploring Alaska on their own, the out-of-state independent travel market is growing at a rate of one to three percent each year, and the resident population of Alaska, especially in Southcentral Alaska, is also growing.

More detail on each of the major user groups is provided below.

### Mat-Su Borough Residents

Local users (Mat-Su Valley residents) are an important market segment for the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center. When friends and relatives come to visit, residents can direct them to the

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<sup>17</sup> Mat-Su Borough Tourism Infrastructure Needs Study (McDowell, 2008)

<sup>18</sup> Glenn Highway National Scenic Byway Marketing Plan (2006), McDowell Mat-Su Visitor Profiles (2003), McDowell MSB Tourism Infrastructure Needs Study (2008)

visitor center; the Mat-Su Visitor Impact Study (Alaska Village Initiatives, 1998) found that nearly 40 percent of residents escorted visitors on their trips. Combining programming oriented to visitors from outside the Mat-Su Valley and programming that meets local needs will go a long way toward building the local support for the project that will be critical to its success.

Local needs include space for community events (meetings, presentations, weddings, parties, etc.) and recreational areas. The Mat-Su Borough Tourism Infrastructure Needs Study identifies several facility and amenity needs along these lines; they include:

- A conference facility of approximately 8,400 sq. ft., with the ability to accommodate conferences of 125 attendees (or two concurrent events of 125 people), with the optimal location for such a facility being near Palmer and Wasilla, as these cities offer the closest proximity to Anchorage, year-round accommodations, and related services like catering, entertainment, and lighting and sound technicians;
- Continued trail system development, as the region has untapped potential for new or enhanced trail systems for hikers, bikers, equestrians, snow machine riders, and cross-country skiers.
- Additional recreational and social gathering areas. According to the study, day-use parks in the Mat-Su Borough are often used by the local residents for weddings and other social gatherings; facilities usually consist of a covered pavilion, picnic tables, barbeque pits and playgrounds. Well-maintained and accessible recreation areas are attracting both more visitors and more residents, and as the population grows, recreational space will become even more pressing.

The visitor center could provide both community gathering space and amenities tied to outdoor recreation (such as restrooms and parking at trailheads, or a convenient, sheltered, year-round place for outdoor enthusiasts to meet, rest or have a bite to eat during their outdoor adventures) in a way that complements existing facilities and businesses in the Mat-Su Valley.

## **In-State Visitors**

In-state visitors, particularly those from nearby cities like Anchorage, Fairbanks and Kenai/Soldotna, have represented a significant share of Mat-Su Valley tourism for some time and are an increasingly important market segment for tourism in the area. As noted earlier, national and local economic trends, such as an economic slowdown and high gas prices, have reinforced the importance of local and regional visitor markets. There is also evidence of a significant untapped regional market: according to the Mat-Su Visitor Impact Study (Alaska Village Initiatives, 1998), 75 percent of respondents from Anchorage, Fairbanks and Kenai/Soldotna actually visited the Mat-Su Borough during the summer, and 82 percent indicated that they would have traveled to the Mat-Su Borough during the summer if there had been good enough reason to do so.

According to the Mat-Su Borough Tourism Infrastructure Needs Study, an estimated 446,000 Alaskans visited the Mat-Su Borough in 2006/2007. Summer visitors represented nearly 60 percent or 262,800 visitors; the number of fall/winter visitors totaled 183,400 in-state visitors. These numbers are reinforced by another study done by GMA Research Corporation for the Alaska Travel Industry Association, which estimated that an estimated 166,587 Alaska residents visited Mat-Su Borough during the fall and winter of 1997-1998; that number rose to an estimated 238,214 during the summer of 1998, with peak travel months in June, July and August. Statewide, 62 percent of

residents took one or more day trips 50 miles from home within the past year, and 88 percent of residents took at least one overnight trip in the previous year.<sup>19</sup>

In-state travelers to the Mat-Su Borough mainly visit for day or weekend trips.<sup>20</sup> Anchorage residents make up the largest share of the in-state market, coming for both day and overnight trips,<sup>21</sup> but Fairbanks and Kenai residents also travel to and through the Mat-Su Borough with great frequency. Kenai Peninsula residents reported the highest in-state pleasure travel rate (87 percent), followed by Anchorage and Mat-Su Borough residents (85 percent and 84 percent respectively).<sup>22</sup> Other popular travel motivations include business travel and visiting friends and relatives. Several Mat-Su Valley communities were among the leading day-trip destinations including Wasilla (23 percent), Talkeetna (17 percent) and Palmer (14 percent).<sup>23</sup> Many Alaska residents also pass through the Mat-Su region when traveling to other destinations like Denali, Fairbanks and destinations along the Richardson Highway.<sup>24</sup>

In-state visitors to the Mat-Su Valley are mainly active people seeking outdoor recreation opportunities, but engage in a variety of activities<sup>25</sup> such as attending cultural events and visiting friends and family.<sup>26</sup> In summer, the most popular activities include visiting attractions (e.g., Alaska State Fair, Hatcher Pass, Musk Ox Farm), sightseeing and fishing. Fall/winter visitors are mainly from Anchorage, relatively young and activity-oriented,<sup>27</sup> with the most popular winter activities including visiting friends and relatives, outdoor recreation (e.g., snowmachine riding, skiing) or attending/participating in local sports events.<sup>28</sup>

In-state visitors are clearly one of the most important user groups for the proposed visitor center. To make the center attractive to this market segment, it would be advisable to reinforce the value of the center with area residents as a place to entertain friends and family, include programming connected to outdoor-recreation opportunities, and promote the center as a year-round stop for travel to and from the Mat-Su Valley.

## **Out-of-State Visitors**

According to the ATIA 2009 Tourism Report Card, 1.7 million out-of-state visitors came to Alaska between May and September 2008. Of these, an estimated 332,000 out-of-state visitors travel to the Mat-Su Borough each year, with summer visitation representing nearly 90 percent of the out-of-state visitor activity.<sup>29</sup> While there has been steady growth in the number of out-of-state visitors through 2007, there was a downturn in 2008 due to a domestic economic downturn, and high gas prices (which caused a 6.8 percent decrease in highway traffic).<sup>30</sup> Despite this, the Mat-Su Borough saw a smaller decrease in total visitation than other parts of the state, mainly attributed to offsets in local

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<sup>19</sup> GMA Research Corporation for the Alaska Travel Industry Association

<sup>20</sup> Mat-Su Visitor Impact Study, Alaska Village Initiatives, November 1998

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> GMA Research Corporation for the Alaska Travel Industry Association

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Mat-Su Visitor Impact Study, Alaska Village Initiatives, November 1998

<sup>26</sup> GMA Research Corporation for the Alaska Travel Industry Association

<sup>27</sup> Mat-Su Visitor Impact Study, Alaska Village Initiatives, November 1998

<sup>28</sup> McDowell MSB Tourism Infrastructure Needs Study (2008)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> ATIA 2009 Tourism Report Card

and regional visitation.<sup>31</sup> The Mat-Su Borough might also have benefitted from a corresponding increase in the number of international visitors to Alaska (due to a weaker US dollar<sup>32</sup>). The Mat-Su Borough historically draws a larger percentage of international and non-cruise visitors than the state as a whole,<sup>33</sup> which experienced a significant reduction in the number of cruise visitors in 2009.

Out-of-state visitors include travelers on package tours and independent travelers. A growing number of people on package tours are “disappearing cruisers,” spending days before or after their tours and cruises experiencing Alaska on their own.<sup>34</sup> Fifteen percent of Mat-Su Borough non-cruise visitors came to Alaska primarily to visit friends and family, spending an average of 9.8 days with friends and family in the Mat-Su area.<sup>35</sup> One way to attract out-of-state visitors to the proposed Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center would be through promoting the center to local residents, who can either refer their visiting family and friends to the visitor center or as a place to take them on excursions.

The most popular visitor activities for out-of-state visitors in the Mat-Su Borough are wildlife viewing, hiking/nature walks, rafting, bear viewing, and camping.<sup>36</sup> These visitors would come to a visitor center looking for opportunities to learn about Mat-Su Valley attractions, particularly outdoor recreation and to learn about local natural/cultural history. Some degree of retail (such as books, maps, souvenirs, as well as food/beverage concessions) might also be a well-used amenity, and a potential revenue generator for the facility.

Some of the comparable facilities studied in this report (such as the Moab Information Center and Begich Boggs Visitor Center), offer resources such as multi-lingual staff or written guides/materials for non-English-speaking visitors. There are existing partnerships among the Alaska Public Lands Information Centers and University of Alaska Anchorage to translate guide materials into other languages for this purpose. Although serving international travelers has been important enough to drive some decisions about programming and governance for centers such as the Moab Information Center (the center does not take volunteers and is run by a single management entity in order to maintain a multi-lingual staff), these travelers are not expected to comprise a large share of the visitor base for the proposed Mat-Su Valley center. Currently, they make up only 12 percent of the visitor base of the Begich Boggs Visitor Center, and the Alaska Visitor Statistics Program (Alaska Visitor Statistics Program V: Fall/Winter 2006-2007, p74) estimates that for the Palmer/Wasilla area, only five percent are international travelers; of that three percent are from Canada.

## **How will the facility be used?**

Based on this information about the major user groups, we can start to make some assumptions about how many people would use the facility; this information is summarized in the table below, and the logic behind these assumptions is presented in the following sections. These use projections must be tempered with assumptions about the potential programming for the facility; for example, the level and quality of recreational areas and educational opportunities will have a significant impact on the total number of visitors to the facility.

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<sup>31</sup> “Mat-Su stays ahead of statewide numbers,” The Bureau Bulletin, Fall 2009 (Matanuska-Susitna Convention & Visitors Bureau newsletter)

<sup>32</sup> ATIA 2009 Tourism Report Card

<sup>33</sup> McDowell Mat-Su Visitor Profiles (2003)

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> ATIA 2009 Tourism Report Card

Table 2.1 Estimated Facility Users

	Mat-Su Borough Residents	In-State Visitors	Out-of-State Visitors	Total
Estimated number within Mat-Su Borough, annually	77,174 <sup>37</sup>	446,000 <sup>38</sup>	332,000 <sup>39</sup>	855,174
Estimated number who visit facility	5,000 – 20,000	20,000 – 100,000	15,000 – 75,000	40,000 – 195,000
Visits average per year	1.5	1.1	1	n/a
Estimated visitor days center, annually	7,500 - 30,000	22,000 – 110,000	15,000 – 75,000	44,500 – 215,000

### Mat-Su Borough Residents

**Characteristics:** stable, year-round market with relatively convenient, inexpensive access to the facility. Because the facility can serve both residents and visiting family and relatives (VFR), marketing efforts to Mat-Su Valley residents are more likely than other groups to reach beyond other members of the same user group (in this case, residents can recommend the facility to visiting family and relatives, who may be in-state or out-of-state visitors). Local support for the project is important to the success of the project in several ways:

- The project is expected to be developed in partnership with the Mat-Su Borough. Consequently, it will be important that the facility serve resident needs.
- Local residents can potentially help provide operating revenue to the project, by renting space for meetings, for example.

**Estimated visitation:** Visitation is estimated at a range between 5,000 and 20,000 residents per year.

**Factors affecting use:** the degree to which programming focuses on meeting local user needs, such as meeting space for community events and amenities related to outdoor recreation, and markets itself as a place to take or send visiting family and relatives.

### In-State Visitors

**Characteristics:** stable, year-round market with growth potential, although peak visitation is currently in summer months. This market also has relatively convenient, inexpensive access to the facility. Because in-state visitors can recommend the facility to visiting family and relatives (who may

<sup>37</sup> MSB 2006 population. Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development (2008).

<sup>38</sup> Mat-Su Borough Tourism Infrastructure Needs Study (McDowell, 2008)

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

be other in-state visitors or out-of-state visitors), marketing efforts to in-state visitors could reach other user groups.

**Estimated visitation:** Visitation is estimated at a range between 20,000 and 100,000 in-state visitors per year. This estimate assumes that the ratio of in-state to out-of-state visitors remains roughly the same as it does today. According to the Alaska Visitor Statistics Program, the Palmer and Wasilla area had about 20,000 visitors of friends and relatives (VFRs) in 2006.<sup>40</sup>

Table 2.2 Estimated In-State Visitors

Estimated In-State Visitors*	
Summer	12,000 – 60,000
Fall/winter	8,000 – 40,000
Total	20,000 – 100,000

\*Estimated in-state visitation by season, based on number of visitors (not visitor days)

Factors affecting use: the degree to which programming focuses on meeting in-state visitor needs, such as a center for information about state and borough outdoor recreation areas (including the ability to make reservations and obtain permits), a rest stop along the Glenn or Parks Highways (especially with amenities such as refreshments, clean toilets, or a scenic area to stretch one’s legs), and markets itself as a place to stop or to take or send visiting family and relatives while in or passing through the Mat-Su Valley.

### Out-of-State Visitors

**Characteristics:** primary target market, peak visitation in summer months. Includes both travelers on package tours and independent travelers. Least stable of the three regional user groups.

**Estimated visitation:** Visitation is estimated at a range between 15,000 and 75,000 out-of-state visitors per year. This estimate assumes that the ratio of in-state to out-of-state visitors remains roughly the same as it does today. According to the Alaska Visitor Statistics Program, the Palmer and Wasilla area had about 20,000 visitors of friends and relatives (VFRs) in 2006.<sup>41</sup>

Table 2.3 Estimated Out-of-State Visitors

Estimated Out-of-State Visitors*	
Summer	13,500 – 67,500
Fall/winter	1,500 – 7,500
Total	15,000 – 75,000

\*Estimated out-of-state visitation by season, based on number of visitors (not visitor days)

<sup>40</sup> Palmer/Wasilla VFRs = 56% of 36,000 visitors in 2006 = 20,160 VFRs (from AVCP V: Fall/Winter 2006-2007, Summary Profiles, p65 and Visitor Volume, p23).

<sup>41</sup> Palmer/Wasilla VFRs = 56% of 36,000 visitors in 2006 = 20,160 VFRs (from AVCP V: Fall/Winter 2006-2007, Summary Profiles, p65 and Visitor Volume, p23).

**Factors affecting use:** the degree to which programming meets the needs/interests of out-of-state visitors, such as a rest stop along the Glenn or Parks Highways (especially with amenities such as refreshments, clean toilets, or a scenic area to stretch one’s legs), a place to get information about Mat-Su Valley attractions and state and borough outdoor recreation areas, and some natural/cultural history educational facilities/programming. Visitation will also depend upon how well the center is marketed to out-of-state visitors and as a stop for package tour companies.

**Overall Annual Visitation**

Total visitation to the center is anticipated to be somewhere in the range of 40,000 – 200,000 users overall. This is consistent with comparable facilities in the state, including:

Table 2.4 Visitation to Comparable Alaskan Facilities

Center	Annual Visitation	Who visits?	Biggest draw of facility?
Alaska Native Heritage Center Museum	110,000 - 120,000	Summer (visitors from all over AK, US, international) Winter (Alaska Native & Anchorage)	
Begich Boggs Visitor Center	100,000 - 150,000	Mostly Alaska visitors + independent travelers; driving to facility	Viewing Portage Lake and Portage Glacier; learning about glaciers and climate change
Denali – Main Visitor Center	280,000		
Denali – Eielson Visitor Center	120,000		
Eagle River Nature Center	40,000	Families with children, adult outdoor recreationalists (to get to backcountry), schools/scouting groups/home schools/pre-school kids + parents. Locals = 50% (Eagle River residents, 40% Anchorage residents, 10%). Mat-Su Borough residents.	Educational programming; locals walking dogs/children
Tok APLIC/Tetlin Visitors center*	200,000		
Wrangell-St Elias National Park Visitor Center			
Campbell Creek Science Center	40,000		
Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center**	65,000**	Out-of-state visitors + locals	Visitor information and events (classes, programs, receptions, etc.)

\*The Tok center has not yet been built; this number is an estimate.

\*\*The Morris Thompson Center had 65,000 visitors in 2009, prior to exhibit opening; with the exhibits open, this number is expected to grow to about 100,000-125,000 visitors.

This is a significant increase over visitation to the existing Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau welcome center.

Table 2.5 Mat-Su CVB Visitor Center Annual Visitation

Year	Visitors	Gift shop sales
1999	n/a	\$14,549
2000	12,435	\$16,170
2001	13,168	\$21,649
2002	13,109	\$26,096
2003*	8,895	\$23,633
2004*	13,154	\$27,058
2005**	6,165	\$11,642
2006	5,857	\$9,806
2007	6,154	\$4,403
2008	5,523	\$6,271
2009	4,874	\$6,435

\*highway construction

\*\*no signs up

## Additional User Types

In addition to local, in-state and out-of-state users, it is helpful to understand the specific characteristics and likelihood of cruise/package tour travelers, independent travelers and school/educational groups to use the proposed Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center. In order to minimize the likelihood of double-counting visitor estimates, these non-geographic groups are analyzed separately.

Table 2.6 Estimated Mat-Su Valley Visitors

Estimated Mat-Su Valley Package Tour + Independent Visitors	
Package tours	1,240 – 36,300
Independent	1,670 – 36,700
Total	2,910 – 73,000

## Cruise/Package Tour Travelers

Cruise and package tour travelers who come to the Mat-Su via the Alaska Railroad, bus or motorcoach are expected to be a significant user of the proposed Mat-Su South Gateway Visitor Center.

**Characteristics:** part of primary target market, peak visitation in summer months. Travel in large groups and have less control over their itinerary. Will expect shopping and photo opportunities,

shorter, easy interpretive trails to stretch legs and learn more about the natural and cultural history of the area.

**Estimated visitation:** according to the Alaska Cruise Association (ACA), 124,000 cruise ship visitors visited the Mat-Su Valley in 2007.<sup>42</sup> Within the Valley, a 2006 study estimated that about 14,000 package tour travelers visited the Palmer/Wasilla area and 110,000 package tour travelers visited Talkeetna, a total of 124,000.<sup>43</sup> The *AVSP V* estimates that for 2006–2007, out of a total estimate of 332,000 out-of-state visitors to the Mat-Su Borough, 165,140 had purchased a package tour.

There are multiple ways to estimate the possible volume of package tour travelers that could stop at the Mat-Su South Gateway Visitor Center. Visitation estimates to the Mat Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center generally assume that the Visitor Center could draw anywhere from five to 22 percent of the overall visitation to the Mat-Su Valley. Applying this percentage to the ACA and *AVSP V* estimates of package tour travel, 7,400 – 36,300 package tour visitors<sup>44</sup> would be expected to visit the Mat-Su South Gateway Visitor Center each year.

Because many package tour travelers travel through the Mat-Su Valley via the Alaska Railroad,<sup>45</sup> making the Visitor Center accessible to rail traffic will impact overall visitation. Without the Alaska Railroad traffic, most package tour visitors might be expected to travel to the center by motorcoach.

Cruise/package tour visitation to the center is highly dependent upon the Mat-Su South Gateway Visitor Center management's relationships with the Alaska Railroad, package tour and cruise companies. The center would attract the most visitors from this demographic if the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Center can be incorporated into trip itineraries to Denali National Park, as the Park estimates that about 60 percent of its annual visitation is from package tour travelers, which translates to about 106,000 visitors in 2009.<sup>46</sup>

**Factors affecting use:** the degree to which visitor center can market itself with tour companies and provide amenities that are convenient and useful to this market segment (e.g., shopping, photo opportunities, short and easy interpretive trails). Another factor that could affect use is the location of the facility relative to a possible future Alaska Railroad commuter rail station (or siding).

## Independent Travelers

Independent travelers will continue to be an important segment of the Mat-Su Valley visitor market, especially adventure travelers<sup>47</sup> and those visiting friends and relatives. The Moab Information Center reports that more Americans are traveling within the United States. In 2009 (perhaps because of the attention given to state and federal parkland by the Ken Burns documentary about US

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<sup>42</sup> Interview, Alaska Cruise Association

<sup>43</sup> MSB Tourism Infrastructure Needs Study, pB-10

<sup>44</sup> According to the ACA, 124,000 cruise ship visitors travel through the Mat-Su Valley each year, resulting in a range from 1,240 (one percent of that total) – 27,280 (22 percent of the total) visitors to the Visitor Center. *AVSP V* estimates a total of 165,140 package tour travelers, resulting in a range from 1,650 (one percent of that total) – 36,300 (22 percent of the total) visitors to the Visitor Center.

<sup>45</sup> The Alaska Railroad reports that about 46,000 passengers traveled through the Mat-Su Valley during summer months last year; this number may include a combination of local, out-of-state, package and non-package travelers. Personal communication, Bruce Carr, Alaska Railroad

<sup>46</sup> Personal communication, Andrew Ackerman, Denali Park Social Scientist

<sup>47</sup> MSB Tourism Infrastructure Needs Study, pB-2

National Parks on PBS), there was a significant upturn in “See America First” type of family vacations; Alaska is going to remain a strong destination for visitors seeking this type of experience.

**Characteristics:** part of primary target market, year-round visitation, though peak visitation in summer. Travel in small groups; because they control their own itinerary, independent travelers are likely to seek information about local attractions, recreation opportunities, food and lodging. Locating the proposed visitor center adjacent to or as part of an outdoor recreation site (such as a trail system), would appeal to adventure travelers. Sales of permits, passes, etc. for fishing, hunting and outdoor recreating would also serve this market.

**Estimated visitation:** About half of the annual out-of-state visitation to the Mat-Su Valley is estimated to be package tour/cruise and about half independent. (*AVSP V* statistics estimate that in 2006-2007, 165,140 out-of-state visitors purchased a package tour, out of a total estimate of 332,000 out-of-state visitors to the Mat-Su Borough. This leaves a remainder of 166,860 independent out-of-state travelers to or within the Mat-Su Borough.) Because most Alaska travelers to and within the Mat-Su Valley are also likely to be independent travelers, it is safe to assume that many more independent travelers than cruise/package tour travelers visit the Mat-Su Valley. This is supported by data gathered on travel mode to and within the Mat-Su: 88 percent of Mat-Su visitors come by either personal (47 percent) or rental vehicle (41 percent).<sup>48</sup>

Assuming that the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center could draw anywhere from one to 22 percent of the independent out-of-state visitors to and/or through the Mat-Su Valley (estimated at 166,860 based on 2006-07 *AVSP* statistics on Mat-Su Borough visitation), 7,500 – 36,700 independent out-of-state visitors would be expected to visit the Mat-Su South Gateway Visitor Center each year.

**Factors affecting use:** the degree to which programming meets the needs/interests of out-of-state visitors, such as a rest stop along the Glenn or Parks Highways (especially with amenities such as refreshments, clean toilets, or a scenic area to stretch one’s legs), a place to get information about Mat-Su Valley attractions and state and borough outdoor recreation areas, and some natural/cultural history educational facilities/programming or recreational opportunities.

### **School/Educational Groups**

Because it is such a defining feature of the Alaska experience, some degree of natural and cultural history education should be included in the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center. Depending on how this aspect of the facility’s programming is incorporated into the center, educational groups could be a significant user group, and while not as large a market segment as other visitor user groups, school groups could be a stable, guaranteed user group for the center. Care should be taken to design educational programming to complement, rather than compete with the facility being planned by the Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats.

Both the Eagle River Nature Center and the Campbell Creek Science Center participate in local training programs and an Anchorage School District partnership program that generates a stable base of student groups using the facilities. However, the primary mission of these centers is natural history education, unlike some of the other comparable facilities.

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<sup>48</sup> *AVSP V: Fall/Winter 2006-2007*, p66

**Characteristics:** stable market with relatively convenient, inexpensive access to the facility; peak visitation in fall and spring, making it an excellent complement to visitor groups whose peak visitation tends to be in summer months.

**Estimated visitation:** Visitation is estimated at a range between 1,000 and 5,000 students per year. This estimate assumes that student visitation will depend in large part upon the degree and nature of educational programming for the center, and includes a range with a median of 3,000, which is the annual student visitation of the Eagle River Nature Center, a comparable facility in Eagle River, Alaska.

**Factors affecting use:** the degree to which programming focuses on natural and/or cultural history education. While this has yet to be determined, the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center is not anticipated to be a dedicated education facility like that proposed by the Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats at Cottonwood Creek.

## Potential Programming for the Center

The annual visitation estimates are presented as a fairly wide range, reflecting the as-yet unknown character of the facility. As mentioned above, a number of factors will influence actual use levels. These include facility location, access and visibility, marketing, prices that may be charged for certain activities, and the outdoor and in-building amenities available at the facility. The following section begins to prioritize possible facility programming according to the different expected user groups.

Potential programming for the facility includes:

- Natural and/or cultural history education
- Outdoor recreation
- Space to host community and/or private events
- Information about Mat-Su Valley attractions
- Retail (permits, books, maps, souvenirs, etc.)
- Retail (food + beverage)

Because they represent such an important existing and future market for the proposed visitor center, a successful facility should focus on programming that would serve local and regional users (Mat-Su Valley residents and in-state visitors). The most advantageous location for the facility would be in a central, easy-to-access area, somewhere near the junction of the Glenn and Parks Highways, co-located with some outdoor recreation area, such as a trailhead or park. Ideally, the programming would capitalize on the outdoor recreation link by offering, in addition to information about Mat-Su Valley attractions, amenities such as toilets, retail (including food concessions as well as maps, books, and souvenirs), centralized information about borough and state outdoor recreation areas (including the ability to make reservations and/or purchase permits), and natural/cultural history education (e.g., interpretive trails).<sup>49</sup> With an attractive location and building design, as well as convenient access, the facility could also successfully offer space for community events (meetings, lectures, weddings, etc.).

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<sup>49</sup> The degree to which programming responds to educational needs should be worked out between this center and the Palmer Hay Flats Cottonwood facility so as not to duplicate efforts.

Table 2.7 Prioritizing Facility Programming According to Different Expected User Groups.

	<b>Mat-Su Borough Residents</b>	<b>Alaska Visitors</b>	<b>Out-of-State Visitors</b>	<b>Package Tour Travelers</b>	<b>Independent Travelers</b>	<b>School/ Educational Groups</b>
<b>Natural and/or cultural history education</b>	Could be successful (if complementary to AK4PHF facility)	Priority	Priority	Priority	Priority	Priority
<b>Outdoor recreation</b>	Priority	Priority	Priority		Priority	Priority
<b>Community events</b>	Priority	Could be successful	Could be successful		Priority	Priority (to complement educational programming)
<b>Information about Mat-Su Borough attractions</b>		priority	priority		Priority	
<b>Retail (permits, books, maps, souvenirs, etc.)</b>	Could be successful (if complements existing businesses + depending on inventory)	Could be successful (depending on inventory)	Priority	Priority	Priority	
<b>Retail (food + beverage)</b>	Could be successful (if complements existing businesses)	Could be successful (if complements existing businesses)	Could be successful	Could be successful	Priority	



# COMPARABLE PROGRAMS + FACILITIES

## Introduction

In order to better understand the challenges and possibilities of creating a destination visitor center for the Mat-Su Valley, it is helpful to look at comparable programs and facilities. This section presents a summary of information about and lessons learned from selected comparable programs and facilities across Alaska, as well as a few examples from Outside. These include: the Alaska Native Heritage Center Museum (Anchorage, AK), the Begich Boggs Visitor Center (Portage, AK), the Visit Bend Welcome Center (Bend, OR), the Denali Main and Eielson Visitor Centers (Denali National Park, AK), the Eagle River Nature Center (Eagle River, AK), the Moab Information Center (Moab, UT), Tok APLIC/Visitors Center (Tok, AK), the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park Visitor Center (Tok, AK), the Campbell Creek Science Center (Anchorage, AK), and the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center (Fairbanks, AK).

Table 3.1 Comparable Visitor Center Locations

Center	Location Information
Alaska Native Heritage Center Museum	<i>Anchorage, AK: Between Anchorage and Eagle River, near Elmendorf Air Force Base. Natural setting away from town centers, off Glenn Highway.</i>
Begich Boggs Visitor Center	<i>Portage, AK: Built on terminal moraine of Portage Glacier; 5 miles off road, so people have to know about it to get there, but may be drawn by view or passing between Whittier and Portage.</i>
Visit Bend Welcome Center	<i>Bend, OR: Downtown</i>
Denali* – Main Visitor Center	<i>Denali National Park, AK: Located at the entrance to the Park</i>
Denali* – Eielson Visitor Center	<i>Denali National Park, AK: Mile 66 of the Denali Park Road (historic location of Camp Eielson).</i>
Eagle River Nature Center	<i>Eagle River, AK: End of Eagle River Road (12 mile scenic drive into Chugach National Forest/State Park); location reinforces "destination" experience, gets visitors closer to wilderness</i>
Moab Information Center	<i>Moab, UT: Downtown. Location reinforces citizens' desire to keep the backcountry in the byways by keeping the Moab area as the hub for accommodations, supplies, and services. The inconvenience of visitors having to carry their own food and water or travel long distances for gasoline or civilized accommodations is part of the desirable experience for backcountry travelers.</i>
Tok APLIC/Tetlin Visitors Center	<i>Tok, AK: 1.3 miles east of the Alaska/Glenn highway junction</i>
Wrangell-St Elias National Park Visitor Center	<i>Copper Center, AK: Along the Richardson Highway at mile 106 (between Glennallen and Copper Center)</i>
Campbell Creek Science Center	<i>Anchorage, AK: BLM's Campbell Tract, public land with diverse habitats, wildlife, and native vegetation in the heart of Anchorage</i>
Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center	<i>Fairbanks, AK: Downtown, on the banks of the Chena River</i>

\* Denali has a separate winter visitor center (3,000 sf) and Murie Science & Learning Center (operational year-round, easier to access)

Many of the facilities above are located in wilderness or semi-wilderness places in order to reinforce the idea of the center as a destination for visitors interested in outdoor recreation and natural history education. Other centers maintain downtown locations; these locations focus more on highlighting a balance of urban amenities and backcountry experiences, as well as reinforcing a distinction between the city and the backcountry.

## **Lessons Learned**

Interviews yielded some valuable take-home lessons for visitor centers. These have been grouped thematically, as follows: Partnerships, Programming, Capital Funding and Building Considerations, and Operations and Governance.

### **Partnerships**

Most of the comparable facilities have involved partnerships among different entities, such as state or national park-related agencies, local convention and visitor bureaus or chambers of commerce, nonprofit friends groups, and other interested groups.

#### **Moab Information Center**

The number of partnerships involved in the centers range from a few to several. Interviews with centers confirms that increasing numbers of partners often requires greater coordination challenges, but can yield a greater pool of resources to fund and staff the center. The Moab Information Center has found that more partners make decision-making more difficult, but results in increased financial resources. They advise other centers to make sure all partners can be a part of the project in some way; give them sliding scale of participation. Often, partners are running scared with budgets, but people are still traveling and visiting the center.

The Moab Information Center has always considered partnering with their local chamber of commerce to provide information about area tourism vendors. However, they find that visitors come to the center expecting to find information about natural history, asking questions that Chamber representatives cannot answer, which can detract from the facility's reputation and the visitor experience.

#### **Begich Boggs Visitor Center**

The Begich Boggs Visitor Center includes unusual partnerships with marine and rail entities, including the Alaska Marine Highway System, Phillips Cruises and Tours, Major Marine Tours, Holland America, and the Alaska Railroad. In part, these partnerships provide access to the cruise ship visitor base. But the center has also capitalized on its programming and location to provide a unique visitor experience: the center's programming is oriented around a nearby glacier that has retreated beyond the viewshed of the center itself. In order to give visitors access to up-close views of the glacier, the Forest Service relies upon trail access (the Portage Pass Trail accessed from Whittier), and maintains a partnership with the *M/V Ptarmigan*, on which the Forest Service provides onboard narration for the boat tour operator.

Partnerships among agencies and non-profits focused on natural history with local chamber of commerce and/or convention visitor bureaus have the challenge of balancing educational with commercial goals. Agencies might have strict mandates about the kind of visitor information they are allowed to share. At the Begich Boggs Visitor Center, for instance, the US Forest Service stocks

visitor guides for the different communities that people are headed to or from, but must avoid promoting any particular places or giving visitors advice about which communities or business establishments to visit.

### Other Facilities

Particularly when there are multiple partners involved, the process for creating a visitor center, from conception to completion, can take several years. The Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center took ten years to become realized – in part from working through complex partner relationships. Partners began building support for the Tok APLIC/Tetlin Visitor Center even earlier than the Morris Thompson Center and still do not yet have a facility.

Table 3.2 Comparable Visitor Centers and their Partner Relationships

Center	Partnerships
Alaska Native Heritage Center Museum	Incorporated non-profit educational and cultural organization. Maintains contacts with various Alaska Native groups. Capital funding partners include: Federal and Municipal sources, private corporations, foundations, Regional Corporations, individuals, and Native Village Corporations.
Begich Boggs Visitor Center	Run by USDA Forest Service. Trying to start Friends of Chugach group through partnership w/Alaska Geographic + Children's Forest Initiative. Has partnership with <i>M/V Ptarmigan</i> , provide onboard narration to view glacier; bookstore managed by Alaska Geographic; offer interpretive programs through: AK Marine Highway System, Phillips Cruises and Tours, Major Marine Tours, Holland America, and Alaska Railroad. Most of these programs are offered on boats, but staff members are based out of the BBVC.
Visit Bend Welcome Center	Corporate sponsorship/partnerships, City of Bend
Denali* – Main Visitor Center	Concessionaire agreement.
Denali* – Eielson Visitor Center	Concessionaire agreement.
Eagle River Nature Center	Facility owned by Chugach State Park, leased to Friends of Eagle River Nature Center (a non-profit entity). Partnerships include involvement in Interpretive Naturalist Certification Program Alaska (INCPA), Bird Treatment Learning Center (for fundraising), Ravenwood Elementary School (ASD sponsorship program that pairs schools with non-profits; students give some time for helping the non-profit in exchange for educational field trips, etc., State Parks
Moab Information Center	Owned by Grand County, operated jointly by Canyonlands Natural History Association, the Moab Area Travel Council, the BLM, NPS, and the U.S. Forest Service, with State Parks as a contributor.
Tok APLIC/Tetlin Visitors Center	ADF&G; NPS; AK Marine Hwy; US FWS; DOI - Geological Survey; AK Division of Community + Business Development (Tourism Development); USFS; AK DNR; DOI - BLM; also ADOT+PF; AK Dept of Commerce + Economic Development; Tok Chamber of Commerce
Wrangell-St Elias National Park Visitor Center	no information
Campbell Creek Science Center	19 partner organizations; 10 partner organizations for community-wide Interpretive Naturalist Certification Program Alaska (INCPA). Also a Friends of Campbell Creek Science Center group.
Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center	Alaska Geographic Store, Alaska Public Lands Information Center (APLIC), and the Fairbanks Convention and Visitors Bureau (FCVB). Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) Cultural Programs and Denakkanaaga, the regional Alaska Native Elder's organization.

In order to keep the process moving along, interviewees from the comparable centers offer this advice:

**The project and partnership relations will go much more smoothly if the local community supports the effort.** Over time, project coordinators of the Tok APLIC/Tetlin Visitor Center have seen a complete reversal of community attitude toward the center: in the early stages of the process, the community wanted nothing to do with the center; now they are writing letters of support to the governor asking for funding to make it happen. What changed?

- Recent years have seen a decline in travelers, and businesses are hurting. They see the center as a potential benefit to draw more tourist dollars to the area.
- One of the project partners, Tetlin Wildlife Refuge, provides youth and environmental education programs to the community; these are highly valued by the local community and have helped to garner support for new facilities that will enhance the programs.
- In past years, construction funding was far easier to come by (US Senator Ted Stevens was able to obtain federal funding and the Alaska Department of Transportation had more money available), but now that government funding is much more difficult to obtain, community members are forced to take a more active role in requesting government funding to support the center.
- There is not much else happening in Tok for community members to get involved in.

**Complement other similar facilities, rather than compete.** In Tok, the APLIC, the Tetlin Wildlife Refuge and the Tok Chamber of Commerce each have their own visitor centers: APLIC focuses on regional outdoor recreation information; the Chamber focuses on helping visitors find food and lodging, etc., and Tetlin focuses on the park and outdoor education. These partners are trying to set up rotating interpretive exhibits among the different centers, which will also be showcased in the new visitor center, once it is built. Along these lines, one interviewee stated bluntly, “Tell them to leave their egos outside and remember they are serving the community and public.”

**Multi-partner ownership or management of the facility should be carefully thought through.** A memorandum of understanding (MOU) detailing fair, clear, written, legally-binding explanations of the partners’ roles, responsibilities, privileges and obligations during the process to fund, design and build the facility, as well as once the facility is built and partners and/or tenants take occupancy, should be signed by all partner agencies and organizations upfront. Comparable facilities such as the Morris Thompson Center, Tok Tetlin Visitor Center and Moab Information Center have found that it helps to solidify partnerships early and define clear roles for each entity, even if roles change over time. A sliding scale of participation can help all parties maintain a role in and sense of ownership of the project.

It is especially important for Borough/City governments to have an active, meaningful role in the project throughout the project. The Morris Thompson Center was unable to obtain a property tax exemption from one of their local governments that has resulted in an extra \$80,000 in annual operating costs beyond what they had originally anticipated. Although the decision to grant the tax exemption is an Assembly one, more active and continual involvement by City and Borough governments would likely have helped influence the Assembly in favor of granting the tax exemption.

Comparable facilities stress that although having multiple partners makes decision-making more difficult and time consuming, the synergies and cost savings from shared space are worth the effort.

A more detailed discussion of this topic, including recommendations for the Mat-Su South Gateway Visitor Center, is included in the Governance chapter.

## **Programming**

In addition to providing visitor information, the most common types of programming of the comparable facilities include educational programs, interpretive displays/exhibits, a gift shop and theatre or performance space for films, presentations, and the like. As emphasized by the Moab Information Center, it is important to know your visitor and tailor the product mix and the programming to that. Do as much market research as possible – who is your visitor? What experience are they looking for? If retail is helping to support operations costs of the facility, what are they going to buy?

**Visitor Information:** Visitors are increasingly relying upon the Internet to get information about destinations and make travel arrangements. The Moab Information Center has observed that this trend does not stop people from using visitor centers. Because there is so much information on the Internet, people stop at the visitor centers to have the information validated by a human being. But, this also means that visitors are asking tougher, more sophisticated questions, which visitor center staff must be able to answer.

**Educational programs:** For centers such as the Eagle River Nature Center and the Campbell Creek Science Center, natural history education is their primary function, but even visitor centers with broader mandates can offer educational programs aimed at casual visitors or to serve local or regional visitors. The Tok APLIC/Tetlin Visitor Center has built a great degree of community support for their new center through the educational programs offered by the Tetlin Wildlife Refuge for area youth. The Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center attributes about half of its visitor base from local residents attending classes, programs or community events at the center, making it a local and regional gathering place.

**Interpretive displays/exhibits:** A number of the comparable facilities offer outdoor interpretive trails that serve multiple functions and user groups including: natural/cultural history education, a unique visitor experience, a place for travelers to stretch their legs on a long drive, or as an outdoor recreation amenity (often highly valued by local users). Due to its downtown location, the Moab Information Center offers a demonstration/interpretive garden rather than interpretive trails.

The Begich Boggs Visitor Center aims to offer learning opportunities for all learning styles, including interpretive exhibits that engage all senses (e.g., sight, hearing, touch, smell). Learning about climate change is a large draw, so the interpretive displays are oriented toward that. The main exhibit rooms are arranged so that the visitor has a sense of walking up Portage Valley, through Portage Pass, and down into Prince William Sound. Before they enter these spaces they encounter five video monitors in an entry room for a preview of what they are about to experience. As they move through the first three rooms, the public can stop at Video Guide Stations, to watch short interviews about a variety of topics. These segments range from “Native Lifeways” to “Fishing Prince William Sound” for a total of 27 different short video presentations. There are also Nature Pianos in the key rooms that allow the visitor to listen to the sounds of that environment, from sandhill cranes to icebergs calving. In addition, people may enter the ‘Alaskans and Their Stories’ room where they can read or listen to stories about people who have lived and adventured in the area. A temporary exhibit area houses changing exhibits, and the Weather Lab highlights Alaska’s weather and the effects of glaciers on the landscape.

**Gift shop:** Some of the comparable facilities include gift shops (e.g., Moab Information Center, Eagle River Nature Center, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park Visitor Center). The Moab Information Center, conceived as a self-reliant community revitalization project, relies upon sales revenue from their gift shop to fund operating expenses. The center's long hours of operation mean high overhead costs; if visitation dips below about 200,000 visitors a year, the center loses money. The Moab Information Center also advises working with local businesses in determining programming and gift shop inventory so they don't think that the visitor center is competing with them.

As a gateway to wilderness areas, the visitor facility may have an important function in obtaining permits, supplies, etc. as well as information about where to go (e.g., Wrangell-St. Elias National Park Visitor Center, Tok APLIC/Tetlin Visitor Center).

**Theatre/performance space:** Some facilities include theaters for viewing educational films, holding public events, etc. (e.g., Tok APLIC/Tetlin Visitor Center, Begich Boggs Visitor Center, Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center). These spaces might be rented out to community groups to augment operating revenues, or offered free as a community resource, as does the Moab Information Center.

Table 3.3 Comparable Visitor Center Programming

Center	Educational programs	Interpretive displays/ exhibits	Outdoor (interpretive/ recreational) trails	Research/ reference library	Gift shop	Permits, supplies, etc.	Theater - films, presentations, etc.	Available for meetings/ conferences	Visitor information	Rest area	Café(s); food
Alaska Native Heritage Center Museum	√	√	√		√		√		√		√
Begich Boggs Visitor Center	√	√	√		√	√	√		√	√	
Visit Bend Welcome Center					√				√	√	
Denali – Main Visitor Center	√	√			√		√				
Denali – Eielson Visitor Center	√	√			√						
Eagle River Nature Center	√	√	√		√	√		√	√	√	√
Moab Information Center	√	√	√		√		√		√		
Tok APLIC/Tetlin Visitors Center	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Wrangell-St Elias National Park Visitor Center	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√	
Campbell Creek Science Center	√		√								
Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center	√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√

## Capital Funding and Building Considerations

Several of the visitor centers interviewed for this project were willing to share their experiences with capital fundraising and construction phases of the project. The table below contains information about each center's construction costs and timeframe. Project timelines range from one to 10 years, and capital budgets from \$6 million to \$30 million.

Table 3.4 Comparable Visitor Center Construction Costs and Timeline

Center	Year constructed	Length of design and construction process	Cost to construct
Alaska Native Heritage Center Museum	1999	5 years (securing site to opening doors)	\$15 million
Begich Boggs Visitor Center	1986; redesign 2001; Portage Valley Learning Center 2005	1.25 years (original construction); 2 years (2001 redesign)	\$8.1 million (1986 original construction: \$4.5 million for design/construction; \$3.6 million for exhibits) \$2.4 million (2001 redesign)
Visit Bend Welcome Center	Use pre-existing building downtown	n/a	n/a
Denali* – Eielson Visitor Center	1960 first Eielson Visitor Center opened to the Public, 1976 expansion, 1995 interior re-design, 2008 new LEED building	6 years: Design began 2002, 2004 existing center closed, 2005 demolition, 2006/2007 construction, 2008 open for business.	\$9.2 million
Eagle River Nature Center	1960s, upgraded by CSP in 1980	1 year for the upgrade	n/a
Moab Information Center	1994	2 years	unknown
Tok APLIC/Tetlin Visitors Center	TBD	pre-design phase (10+ years); design (3 years); now needs to be adapted to new site.	estimated \$12 million
Wrangell-St Elias National Park Visitor Center	no information	no information	no information
Campbell Creek Science Center	1996	no information	\$6 million
Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center	2008	10 years	\$30 million

\* Denali has a separate winter visitor center (3,000 sf) and Murie Science & Learning Center (operational year-round, easier to access)

## Outdoor Space Allocation

The comparable facilities range from small downtown sites on one acre or less, to buildings surrounded by thousands of acres of parkland. Common outdoor amenities include parking, and interpretive and recreational trails. The character of the outdoor spaces is very influential on the use and purpose of the facilities.

Table 3.5 Comparable Visitor Center Outdoor Space Allocation

Center	Lot acreage	Outdoor space allocation
Alaska Native Heritage Center Museum	26	village circle with trail encircling a 2-acre lake; five traditional village exhibits.
Begich Boggs Visitor Center	6.5	parking for cars, buses, large vehicles; redesign sometime soon.
Visit Bend Welcome Center	n/a	n/a (in a commercial building with other tenants; all on-street parking)
Denali* – Main Visitor Center	n/a	Parking, national parkland
Denali* – Eielson Visitor Center	n/a	Parking, national parkland
Eagle River Nature Center		9 miles of trail total; about 3 miles of interpretive trail. Parking: 35 spaces, no designated bus area; could park about 65 cars with overflow (park along road if lot is full).
Moab Information Center	1	½ acre parking; no trails; interpretive garden
Tok APLIC/Tetlin Visitors Center	8.3	will have trails; currently in design stage
Wrangell-St Elias National Park Visitor Center	no information	no information
Campbell Creek Science Center	730	12 miles of non-motorized use recreational trails
Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center	4	Historic cabin, garden, sculpture; adjacent to greenbelt and Chena River

\* Denali has a separate winter visitor center (3,000 sf) and Murie Science & Learning Center (operational year-round, easier to access)

## Indoor Space Allocation

The comparable facilities range from 2,500 square feet to 26,000 square feet in size. Indoor spaces include visitor information and restroom facilities and some form of exhibit or interpretive area. Other common elements include general retail, food and beverage (café or snack offerings), and theater/auditorium/meeting facilities.

Two important uses that are often overlooked include office and storage space. When the Begich Boggs facility was built, the first level flooded during construction, so they raised it and built a second level (where the exhibits, theatre, shop, etc. are today). The first level became a basement (used for storage) and still floods periodically (though not often and not extensively). Storage space is critical for the center, and is used for educational program kits, specimens, decorations, operations tools, paper products, bookstore backstock, uniforms, equipment, and includes a workbench area for maintenance staff.

At the Begich Boggs Visitor Center, people often come to the information desk and ask for the bathrooms first. Because the Begich Boggs center is funded by a federal agency, they chose to locate the bathrooms near the front entrance, where they are easily found and accessed. Alternatively, the Moab Information Center, because it depends heavily upon revenue from its gift shop to meet operating costs, suggests it would be better to locate bathrooms at the back of the retail space, forcing visitors to pass through the gift shop to access them.

Table 3.6 Comparable Visitor Center Indoor Space Allocation

Center	Size of facility	Indoor space allocation
Alaska Native Heritage Center Museum	26,000sf	exhibit + demonstration areas, a theater, café, gift shop, circular hall for gatherings and performances
Begich Boggs Visitor Center	17,020 sf	exhibit space (4,700 sf); theater (3,300 sf), other (restrooms, office, workroom, etc.; 6,020 sf), basement (3,000 sf), classroom (2,750 sf)
Visit Bend Welcome Center	1,700 sf	information desk, maps/guide displays, gift shop
Denali – Main Visitor Center	Denali 14,000 sf	Building: exhibit space, theater, information desk Campus: bookstore, restaurant, restrooms, bus stop/baggage claim, train depot, information kiosk
Denali – Eielson Visitor Center	7,965 sf	employee (1,090 sf), public (4,265 sf), service (1,475 sf), utility (135 sf); Can accommodate up to 300 visitors at a time with indoor and outdoor viewing areas, new exhibits combined with a viewing room, interior eating, and interpretive program space. 24 hour restroom access for backpackers.
Eagle River Nature Center	2,500 sf	office (~350sf, too small); interpretive area (~2150 sf), restrooms, gift shop area. Main building has open floor plan (able to staff multiple uses with same staff, but can get noisy). Classroom yurt. 4 volunteer cabins (wood stove/gas heat; no plumbing/electricity; communal kitchen/bath near/in main facility). Planning to build new facility (120 kids at a time:more bathrooms, classroom, parking, etc).
Moab Information Center	2500 sf	auditorium (700sf), commercial sales area (1,000), interpretive area (400 sf), office, break room and storage (400 sf)
Tok APLIC/Tetlin Visitors Center	8,000 sf	exhibit area (800sf); 25-student classroom; 110-seat theatre
Wrangell-St Elias National Park Visitor Center	no information	theater; exhibit area; lobby; bookstore; park administration + management facilities
Campbell Creek Science Center	no information	two different-sized meeting rooms, commercial kitchen
Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center	38,720 sf	exhibit hall (9,000sf), 100-seat theatre, lobby/reception space, store, artisans workshop, Elder’s Gathering area, classroom, historic cabin/garden, shipping and receiving, office space, conference room, kitchen, public restrooms, staff restrooms.

## Seasonality

While most of the comparable facilities are open year-round, some are only open during summer months, and nearly all of them cite summer months as their peak visiting times. An interviewee from the Begich Boggs Visitor Center predicts that busy times for the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway facility will probably be during the summer and for the Iditarod.

Table 3.7 Comparable Visitor Center Seasonality

Center	Year-round or seasonal	Peak season/times
Alaska Native Heritage Center Museum	year-round	summer
Begich Boggs Visitor Center	year-round	all summer; more on weekends + holidays
Visit Bend Welcome Center	year-round	summer
Denali* – Main Visitor Center	summer only	summer
Denali* – Eielson Visitor Center	summer only	summer
Eagle River Nature Center	year-round	Peak school field trip season (Apr, May + Sep). Peak out-of-town visitors May-Sep. Special events (e.g., Iditarod)
Moab Information Center	summer only	March - October
Tok APLIC/Tetlin Visitors Center	year-round	n/a
Wrangell-St Elias National Park Visitor Center	year-round	no information
Campbell Creek Science Center	year-round	no information
Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center	year-round	n/a

If the center is open year-round, Alaska’s climate requires extra consideration to the limits and conditions of nature when siting, designing and building the center. The Wrangell-St. Elias National Park Visitor Center was designed as a cluster of buildings, some of which can be closed during the winter, while others remain open year-round, saving on winter utility costs, which can be prohibitive for some centers.

The Begich Boggs Visitor Center has endured many challenges due to environmental considerations, and offers this advice: keep facility and functionality in mind, even with powerful interests. Try to pay attention to the building constraints posed by topography and climate: don’t laugh in the face of nature. The Begich Boggs Visitor Center can get 40 feet of snow a year, making snow removal necessary and expensive, as the center is open year-round. In addition to regular maintenance, the Forest Service has to keep money set aside for major repairs at the center: strong winds can cause the roof to blow off, flooding is a possibility, and snow load on the building’s series of flat roofs causes many leaks and regular roof troubles (one of the early designs was for A-frames, which would have been better). At one point, Senator Stevens wanted an extra room built right on the lake, designed as a “weather lab,” the room is connected to the rest of the facility by a plexiglass tunnel

that takes you to the weather lab from the theatre (or from the bookstore via a different tunnel). This tunnel has endured all kinds of problems, from leaks, to icebergs smashing into it, to damage from high winds, etc.

At the time the facility was built, engineers decided to build at the site with the most impressive view, which happened to be right on lake/creek, but the most beautiful spot is not always the most intelligent place to build. Looking back, the center's management believes it would have made better sense to build the center behind a moraine, such as where the Portage Glacier Lodge is. If they could do it over again, it would have been better to build on higher ground, with better protection from wind. The Forest Service would also have liked to pay more attention to green building standards – using that as a showcase, including it in the educational message of the facility (particularly for the school district), and being more energy and budget efficient. The up-front costs would have been higher, but the operating costs lower, especially where the climate is so extreme. For example, in February 2007, the Begich Boggs Center budgeted \$1200 for energy costs; actual energy costs were \$1840.

### **Sustainability/Green Building**

Some facilities have a landmark building that uses architecture to attract visitors, embody the goals/principles of the organization, and/or to complement programming (e.g., the Eielson Visitor Center or the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center). These centers have found that green/sustainable/LEED certified building design can be an effective draw for visitors and can lower operating costs (although not necessarily as much as expected).<sup>1</sup>

Both of the Denali visitor centers (the main visitor center and Eielson) were very successful green building projects. One of the primary challenges the National Park Service had in getting the buildings built to LEED-certified standards was in getting the architecture and engineering firms to understand their vision for sustainability and buy into the process. While LEED certification is an effective marketing tool, branding to the facility as an example of green building, the LEED process is not very flexible, and estimated cost and energy savings can be higher than actual ones. In order to achieve cost savings, building managers must ensure that occupants understand how the building systems work and how to properly maintain them. Maintenance and control is important to getting the return on investment.

Examples of the features that earned the Denali Visitor Center its LEED silver designation include:

- the use of rapidly renewable or recycled materials for items such as wall panels, acoustical ceiling tiles, carpeting, and engineered lumber.
- low volatile organic compound materials in the paint and adhesives.
- the use of local materials such as Alaska white spruce logs and siding, Alaska birch interior trim, and rock from sources near Cantwell and the Mat-Su Valley.
- natural daylight for lighting.
- low water consumption restroom fixtures.
- integrated photo-voltaic solar panels on the south-facing side of the building.

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<sup>1</sup> An article from ConstructionWEEKonline.com stated that 28 to 39 percent of LEED buildings didn't meet their energy budget, and some used more than conventional technology.  
<http://www.constructionweekonline.com/article-6572-not-all-leed-buildings-save-energy/>

- natural ventilation and carbon dioxide monitoring to control mechanical ventilation.
- using the specially-designed fireplace as an integral part of the building’s heating system. The fireplace also preheats the water for the facility.
- “air conditioning” from domestic cold water.

Table 3.8 Comparable Visitor Center Levels of Sustainability/Green Building

Center	"Sustainability" /green building	Year-round/ seasonal
Alaska Native Heritage Center Museum	unknown	year-round
Begich Boggs Visitor Center	no, but would advise in future. Have a lot of maintenance problems with design of existing facility because much of it was not adapted to local climate conditions.	year-round
Visit Bend Welcome Center	pursuing sustainability in operations: composting, using renewable energy, recycling waste + using recycled paper + soy-based inks in marketing materials.	year-round
Denali* – Main Visitor Center	LEED silver designation. Large percentage of visitors are intrigued with sustainability; much positive feedback on visitor centers; people appreciate learning about hem.	summer only
Denali* – Eielson Visitor Center	LEED platinum designation. Current structure is a model in sustainable design, built into the hillside, specifically a “low-profile building that blends into the landscape. The steep slope enables the designers to partially bury the building, which visually screens the structure from the road.	summer only
Eagle River Nature Center	n/a	year-round
Moab Information Center	n/a	summer only
Tok APLIC/Tetlin Visitors Center	alternative energy resources + model for energy efficiency/sustainability	year-round
Wrangell-St Elias National Park Visitor Center	no information	year-round
Campbell Creek Science Center	no information	year-round
Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center	unknown	year-round

\* Denali has a separate winter visitor center (3,000 sf) and Murie Science & Learning Center (operational year-round, easier to access)

## Operations

Interviews with the management bodies of the various comparable facilities emphasized repeatedly: don't underestimate operating costs!

Staffing drives a significant share the operating costs of a center. The nonprofit group Friends of the Eagle River Nature Center took over the ERNC with a contract to manage the facility and several miles of trail because Chugach State Park/National Forest could not afford the operating costs of the facility. They have much lower operating costs (\$200,000) than they should have (about \$500,000) because they have dedicated volunteers and a high degree of local use and support. The Moab Information Center is staffed with multilingual interpreters, and chooses not to use volunteers, as they are not as dependable or knowledgeable as paid staff. In an effort to retain good, experienced staff, operating costs have increased by 25 percent in the past five years.

Designing the center to maximize the amount of shared space can also result in significant savings for operating costs. Due to the amount of shared space in the facility, the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitor Center is able to provide space for its tenants at well below the market rate.

The design and construction of the facility also makes a difference. Sustainable/green building practices, and whether the facility is open year-round or only during the summer makes a difference in building and operating costs, as illustrated earlier in this chapter. On the other hand, the Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitor Center has found that designing a building with high-quality materials and appearance can also give the inaccurate impression that the center generates enough excess revenue that they should not qualify for exemption from local property taxes. Morris Thompson Center staff advise that the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center partners create strong partnership roles for Borough and/or City governments as well as building and maintaining support with local Assembly representatives throughout the project.

Table 3.9 Comparable Visitor Center Operating Costs\*

Center	Size of facility (sf)	Annual operating costs (total)	Annual operating costs/sf	Operating costs increase/decrease over time?
Alaska Native Heritage Center Museum	26,000	\$6,000,000	\$230.00	unknown
Begich Boggs Visitor Center	17,020	\$360,500	\$20.00	increased, particularly energy/utilities
Visit Bend Welcome Center	unknown	\$54,027	unknown	unknown
Denali – Main Visitor Center	14,000	\$6,300,000	\$450	unknown
Denali – Eielson Visitor Center	7,965	\$7,965,000	\$1,000	unknown
Eagle River Nature Center	2500	\$200,000	\$80	Increased as programming expanded; fairly stable last few years.
Moab Information Center	2500	\$600,000	\$240	aging building staffed with multilingual interpreters. In an effort to keep good staff the costs have increased by 25% in the past 5 years.
Tok APLIC/Tetlin Visitors Center	8,000	\$60,000	\$7.50	n/a
Wrangell-St Elias National Park Visitor Center	no information	no information	no information	no information
Campbell Creek Science Center	no information	no information	no information	no information
Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center	38,720	\$725,000	\$19	Increase (assume 3% utility increase each year)

\* Operating costs provided in this table should be regarded as roughly (not strictly) comparable, since different facilities include different costs in their annual budgets and per square foot calculations. For example, some facilities may include programming and staffing costs, while others only include facility maintenance and operating costs for the building itself in their calculations. Additionally, climate conditions, the age of the building, the size of the building, activities within the building, the type of construction and the remoteness of the facility all significantly influence operating cost calculations. These numbers are offered to give a sense of the range of costs that other facilities are committed to, but cannot be compared directly to each other, or to the proposed Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center.

## Revenue Sources

The comparable facilities obtain operating revenue from a variety of sources, retail sales and state or federal funding being the most common. Multiple sources of revenue can provide operational stability, however, this increases the amount of budget management and related administrative costs. A single-stream of revenue, in comparison, is much easier to manage and track.

Table 3.10 Comparable Visitor Center Revenue Sources

Center	Admissions	Grants	State/federal funding	Corporate/private sponsorships	Donations	Special event rental (meetings, conferences, etc.)	Retail sales	Other (specify)
Alaska Native Heritage Center Museum	√	√		√	√	√	√	\$500,000 operating endowment through grant funding (will need to be \$12million before it will adequately support operating costs); \$400,000 educational endowment through corporate gifts
Begich Boggs Visitor Center	√		√		√	√	√	Standard Amenity Fees, Interagency pass sales, direct support budget
Visit Bend Welcome Center				√			√	bed tax, advertising, "partnership marketing"
Denali – Main Visitor Center			√				√	
Denali – Eielson Visitor Center			√				√	
Eagle River Nature Center		√	√	√	√	√	√	tuition fees for educational programs, rental fees for yurts/cabin + snowshoes, parking fees, membership fees
Moab Information Center			√				√	\$70,000 in contribution from partners (operating, goes mainly to staffing)
Tok APLIC/Tetlin Visitors Center								STIP funding (DOT, 2000); otherwise n/a (not yet built)
Wrangell-St Elias National Park Visitor Center			√					
Campbell Creek Science Center			√		√	√		Friends Group; program fees are \$10/student (half day), \$20/student (full day), teachers/chaperones free
Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center					√	√		Rent (roughly one-third among three primary leaseholders); fundraising and memberships once capital fundraising is complete

## Governance

Most of the comparable facilities are partnerships among two or more entities, with a managing entity that is either a state/federal agency or non-profit group. Some are run by or have affiliations with supporting non-profit friends groups (e.g., Friends of the Eagle River Nature Center, Friends of the Campbell Creek Science Center).

**Board:** Among the comparable facilities, only the facilities run by nonprofit organizations have Boards. Centers run by government agencies could have boards, but as Begich Boggs interviewee pointed out, Boards (like volunteers and partnerships) take time and investment, direction, and supervision; agency staff would need to devote time and energy to give the board enough direction and support to be an asset to the functioning of the center.

The Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center established a newly incorporated 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization to operate the facility. The nonprofit has two employees, who do fundraising for the center, collect rent, pay bills, and make sure the building operates safely and efficiently. The nonprofit is governed by a board of directors that includes appointees from the three primary partner entities (the Fairbanks Convention and Visitors Bureau, Tanana Chiefs Conference, and Alaska Public Lands Information Center) as well as one appointee representing the family of Morris Thompson, and one ex-officio family member. This governance structure was very effective during planning and construction for the facility, and has resulted in a facility that provides space for the partner entities for far less than market rate due to the amount of shared space in the facility. Once the partners moved into the new facility, however, the board has been challenged to develop and maintain an overarching view of the center's operations. Often, board members' perspectives are dominated by the interests of individual partner organizations. This situation could be mitigated by ensuring a board composition that reflects a broader body of interests and perspectives than just the primary partner organizations.

**Staff:** Staff needs for the different facilities varied, depending on the size of the facility, available operating revenue, and degree of programming. The Moab Information Center started out having a more equalized management structure, with different agency partners contributing staff to the facility, but found that system unworkable. Because the different agencies paid different wages, and because employees were accountable to their employers (rather than to the staff managing the center), there was no way to effectively manage the staff members of the center. The partner agencies chose instead to contribute \$20,000 each per year toward staff that is hired, fired and managed by the Canyonlands Natural History Association.

The Begich Boggs Visitor Center's partnerships with the Alaska Railroad and boat tour operators allow them to provide interesting and varied work experiences that get a high rate of return on seasonal staff.

**Volunteers:** Several facilities have volunteers, some do not. The Canyonlands Natural History Association chooses not to use volunteers, so that they can hire bi-lingual staff to better serve non-English-speaking visitors. Because volunteer training and turnover is a significant consideration for operating costs, the Eagle River Nature Center makes a strong effort to limit the number of volunteers, so that they can have fewer but more dedicated volunteers. Managing volunteer groups can be tricky; they tend to get tapped out.

A center might also offer internships and mentorship programs. Regardless of whether the center has paid or volunteer staff, good supervisor(s) are necessary to have a good group of staff.

Table 3.11 Comparable Visitor Center Governance

Center	Managing entity	Board (# members, criteria)	Staff (#, position type)	Volunteers (#, type of roles)
Alaska Native Heritage Center Museum	Alaska Native Heritage Center (nonprofit)	15-member Board; membership from Alaska Native corporations, civic and business groups; majority are Alaska Natives.	39 staff; executive, educational & cultural services, community relations & development, operations & administration. Staff is doubled during summer.	
Begich Boggs Visitor Center	USDA Forest Service (Federal agency)	None; not enough time to provide a Board with needed direction and support	staff varies based on budget (4 permanent, 12-14 seasonal staff)	volunteers vary based on budget (1-4); roles are designated based on skills (front desk, Interp, Photography).
Visit Bend Welcome Center	Visit Bend (nonprofit)	8 Board members; seek members who represent the core areas of Bend tourism: lodging, retail, events, and City of Bend representatives.	5 staff (President/CEO; Marketing Director; Director of Destination Sales; Welcome Center Manager; Volunteer Coordinator)	developing volunteer program
Denali* – Main Visitor Center	National Park Service (Federal agency)	n/a	no information	no information
Denali* – Eielson Visitor Center	National Park Service (Federal agency)	n/a	no information	no information

Center	Managing entity	Board (# members, criteria)	Staff (#, position type)	Volunteers (#, type of roles)
Eagle River Nature Center	Friends of Eagle River Nature Center (nonprofit)	14-member board (incl. Chairman + Secretary) 3 officers (President, VP, Treasurer)	3 staff (Director, Chief Naturalist, Manager/Naturalist)	Volunteers include ~40 general (come once a week or more), special (come in groups, spend a day working on the trails), resident (up to 5 in the summer but 2 or 3 Oct through May)
Moab Information Center	Canyonlands Natural History Association (nonprofit)	BLM, USFS, NPS, CNHA Board Chair, Travel council rep	staff include Executive Director of CNHA, MIC Coordinator, 6 Information Specialists	no volunteers; less dependable/knowledgeable
Tok APLIC/Tetlin Visitors Center	Alaska Fish and Wildlife Service (Tetlin Wildlife Refuge) would own and probably manage facility (State agency)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Wrangell-St Elias National Park Visitor Center	National Park Service (Federal agency)	n/a	no information	no information
Campbell Creek Science Center	BLM Anchorage Field Office (Federal agency)	n/a	no information	many volunteers
Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center	Morris Thompson Center (nonprofit)	Thompson Family Representative; Ex – Officio Thompson Family Member; 2 FCVB Appointees; 2 APLIC Appointees; 3 TCC Appointees	Two staff: Director and Facility Manager, all others are employees of tenant or partner organizations, not center itself	FCVB has a volunteer/docent program, but Morris Thompson itself has no volunteers



# PROGRAM + FACILITY DESCRIPTION

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## Overview

The Mat-Su Valley is a conduit as well as a magnet for travelers arriving from and traveling to points throughout Alaska. Situated between Alaska's most populated city (Anchorage) and most popular destination (Denali Park), the Valley can't help but hum! The Alaska Railroad, in its run from Seward to Fairbanks, passes through 200 miles of Mat-Su Valley countryside. Alaska's two most traveled thoroughfares, the Parks Highway (#3) and the Glenn Highway (#1), converge in the Valley offering a prime location at which to site this facility.

The new Gateway Visitor Center will express the spirit of this unique convergence through form, function and finish. Mirroring the Chugach Mountains and Talkeetna Mountains as a backdrop and the rich estuaries of the upper Cook Inlet and Knik River close by, and framing amazing views of Denali and the Alaska Range, the Visitor Center will visually gather together iconic Alaskan landscapes and use these as inspiration for its design. Local materials and artisanship will help ground the facility in the landscape and the people of the Mat-Su region. An inspiring structure, visible and proximate, the Center will be the hub for Valley travel and tourism—a not-to-be-missed stop for both first-time and life-long visitors.

## Program Goals

During the initial workshop session and subsequent partner interviews, the Project Work Group identified program elements for a Mat-Su Valley Gateway Visitor Center that serves a variety of functions and needs. These elements are determined by functional requirements as well as by the overall project goals that the visitor center:

- function as both a gateway and a destination,
- contribute to the regional economy,
- share information,
- foster stewardship,
- serve locals,
- build partnerships,
- and be innovative and visible.

Some program elements are general to any visitor center and encourage opportunities for connecting visitors to Mat-Su Valley history, natural amenities, places of interest and those public and private accommodations that facilitate visitor experiences. These are the core components of the program.

Other identified goals expand upon the traditional vision for a visitor facility, recognizing the economic realities necessary to create and sustain a successful project. These variables include spaces – such as a café, tenant office space, and auditorium – that would add to the cost and complexity of the building but which also serve to increase the financial viability of the visitor center and to support a broader economic and community vision for what the visitor center should be.

In considering how best to serve the facility's diverse users, and in recognition of the capital and operational costs associated, the Design Team chose to explore three scenarios – small, medium and

large. Each scenario contains some consistent, core spaces whose sizes grow larger. Additionally, in the medium and large scenarios, other program elements are added.

Below are summaries for each program area and their respective approximate size in each scenario (including multipliers for circulation, structure and HVAC). Program areas are divided into three categories:

- Administration
- Core Program Spaces
- Variable Program Components

Site size and outdoor facilities and amenities are also discussed. The table below summarizes the comparative spaces and sizes of the three facility scenarios. More detailed tables showing proposed facility spaces are contained in Appendix G. *Note: slight discrepancies in square footage scenarios between this summary table and detailed space tables in Appendix G are the result of the different methods for including circulation, structural and HVAC spaces in calculations.*

**Table 4.1 Facility Space Scenarios**

<b>Function</b>	<b>Existing</b>	<b>Small</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>Large</b>
Entry/Coat	0	180	240	312
Lobby/Reception	0	288	360	432
Theater/Gathering	0	1,200	1,860	2,160
Multipurpose/meeting	0	0	0	1,080
Exhibit/Program	1,700	2,400	3,300	3,900
Café/Kitchen	0	120	780	1,000
Retail	25	50	360	540
Information/Virtual Guide	120	120	180	432
Administration	80	144	220	300
MSCVB Offices	1,720	200	2,700	1,862
Tenants	0	0	0	3,360
				1,890
Restrooms	200	432	600	750
Support, Structural, Mech.	250	1,150	1,502	2,345
Storage/Other	0	500	500	600
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4,000</b>	<b>8,697</b>	<b>12,709</b>	<b>20,917</b>

## **Administration**

The Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center will house the administrative offices for the Mat-Su Convention and Visitor Bureau (Mat-Su CVB) who will oversee day-to-day operations and staffing of the facility. This adjacency continues the existing relationship between the Visitor Center and Mat-Su CVB, an arrangement the Borough crafted in 1985. Depending upon the ultimate function, size and program partners, a full-time Director or Facility Administrator may be needed and office provided independent of the Mat-Su CVB.

Program affiliates may also require space for storage and preparation space as well as staff belongings, breaks and meetings. These ancillary areas may be jointly provided for other tenants if such space exists in the facility. Whether or not management of the facility remains with the Mat-Su CVB into the future, their tenancy in the Center is consistent with the goals for the project.

## Core Program Spaces:

- **Lobby and Restrooms** – first impressions are critical to creating a welcoming and enthusiastic atmosphere. The lobby must also serve to orient and direct visitors to other parts of the facility and be proximal to restrooms and the information desk or area. Daylight and durable materials are preferred.

Restrooms will be sized to accommodate a larger than usual occupancy, recognizing the need for this basic amenity in the area and for most travelers arriving from any distance.

- **Exhibit and Program** – areas to house both permanent and rotating displays interpreting the natural features, cultural history, events, and communities that personify the Mat-Su Valley. Secure cases and panels, as well as free-standing installations are planned. A storage area for rotating or seasonal exhibits and receiving room for visiting displays will be included.

A budget for exhibit design is included in the facility estimations in the “Finance: Capital Development” and “Finance: Operations” chapters.

Program space is the largest, and most prominent volume and function in the facility. Sizes for the three schemes are estimated to be 2,400 sq. ft., 3,300 sq. ft. and 3,900 sq. ft. respectively. Workshop participants characterized the ideal feel for this space as being like a grand gathering room, taking advantage of natural light and views.

Adjacent uses to include tour information, outdoor amenities and any food service.

- **Tour Information** – a place for traveler’s queries and directing them toward activities, accommodations and adventures within the Mat-Su Valley and beyond. A counter for maps, guidebooks and other props behind which staff can store items for sale or handout is desired. Encourage easy access for staff to interact with visitors in the exhibit area and other display areas.
- **Virtual Tour Interface** – utilize technological means for connecting travelers with itinerary options, informational/interpretive downloads, and Mat-Su CVB member discounts. Provide wireless and plug-in Internet/intranet access as well as touch-screen type interfaces for visitors. This space may be provided for within or adjacent to the tour information and exhibit areas.
- **Auditorium/Theatre** – most similar facilities with an interpretive element are served by having an assembly space for presenters and productions. At minimum, such a space needs to accommodate one tour bus plus independent travelers, or approximately 100 seats. Anticipating growth and wider utilization of such a space for other community functions such as community theatre suggests a space to house 200 seats.  
The space should include projection and sound facilities for both traditional and digital media, and have favorable acoustics and sight lines. A sloped floor is preferable for a theatre or auditorium, but is optional and contingent upon the facility size, budget and other priorities.

- **Storage** – programming materials as well as Mat-Su CVB member marketing materials require adequate storage near their point of use. Seasonal or rotating displays may be stored near either a loading area or the exhibit hall.
- **Site Amenities** – provide appropriate site circulation and parking for a minimum of 50 vehicles, 15 recreational vehicles and three motorcoaches; a coach and disabled load/unload staging area; site and building lighting; pathways from screened parking to building; interpretive trail and connection to site appropriate water or topographic features; linkages to existing or future public land trails is a priority.
- **Mat-Su CVB Offices** – Currently, Mat-Su CVB offices occupy approximately 1,700 sq. ft. of daylighted basement beneath the existing Mat-Su Visitor Center. The suite contains a waiting/reception room, one private office (used by the Executive Director), a large open space (divided into a board room, three cubicles, and a copier/mail area), small kitchen, bathroom, storage and mechanical room. One cubicle is kept for the seasonal Visitor Center Manager.

Growth of Mat-Su CVB membership and marketing opportunities are projected with the opening and during the life of the center. Staff and board space needs will increase and need integration within the layout of the facility commensurate with program and operations development.

To accommodate this growth and serve the activities of the Mat-Su CVB, a suite of approximately 3,000 sq. ft. is needed including an open office configuration with five workstations, director's office, work room, board room, and ancillary service spaces.

If the proposed facility is to house other tenants also, some areas may be shared in 'commons' area. These functions may include: entry, office lobby/waiting, employee lounge/kitchen, board/meeting room, storage lockers, and restrooms. This efficiency could result in approximately 1,500 sq. ft. of area shared among two or three tenants.

If size and program dictate, a Facility Director may be desirable to focus on management and planning for the facility.

## **Variable Program Components:**

- **Size** – considering the variables of market demand, partner commitments, program requirements, site constraints and budget the project team opted to explore three different facility size scenarios of 8,700 sq. ft., 12,800 sq. ft., and 21,000 sq. ft., respectively. For relative comparison, the smallest scenario more than doubles the current space at the Mat-Su CVB by enlarging visitor spaces and amenities including a 100-seat theater, exhibit area, food and retail, virtual tour kiosk, restrooms.
- **Meeting/Education Component** – this building has the potential to provide a long-sought venue for small or medium-sized meetings or conferences. Space is provided in the two larger scenarios for a flexible, group gathering room. It will be advantageous to plan for off-hours use of this space and attendant functions (entry, coat room, bathrooms).

- **Tenant Space Component** – program partners would not only enrich the interpretive capacity of the center but could occupy tenant space thereby contributing to repaying the capital investment and offsetting yearly operations and maintenance costs.

In the large scenario 2,800 sq. ft. of leasable or partner space is included. Combined with 1,500 sq. ft. for Mat-Su CVB offices and a shared support spaces brings the total lease area to a net size of 6,000 sq. ft.

As plans for the Center progress, and potential tenants are identified, more specific requirements may be programmed.
- **Café/Food Service** – providing grab and go snacks and hot and cold beverages for visitors supplements the destination quality of the facility, regardless of its size, and encourages longer stays. At minimum, accommodation for a coffee bar and prepackaged food and drink cooler is needed.

A larger, more elaborate café, with an efficient kitchen for prepping and heating simple foods would expand the opportunity for the facility to cater to groups with such needs and could bring additional revenues to the facility.

Some workshop participants felt that the economics of a kitchen may not work; however such an area could be closed during the slow, winter months and opened for specific events or functions, at a fee.
- **Retail** – out-of-state travelers routinely spend considerable money on take home gifts and souvenirs for themselves, family and friends. The current visitor center sells a limited number of travel paraphernalia, souvenirs and snacks primarily as a convenience.

A goal for the Mat-Su Valley, and this facility, will be to market itself and the destinations it serves in part through carefully branding the unique attributes of the area, including this venue. Products may be developed, showcased and sold—here and elsewhere—that promote that vision of the Valley.
- **Outdoor Interpretive/Activity Component** – facility is to take advantage of natural site attributes and proximities in locating trails, boardwalks, interpretive signage, a viewing deck and other chances for visitors to learn about the natural and cultural resources, landscapes, fish and wildlife in the region.

Locating the site adjacent to existing public lakes or open space facilities is highly desirable and could encourage agency partnerships. Additional efforts will need to be made to enhance access for the facility, particularly if sited at a location without turn lanes or existing exit infrastructure. Design of safe entry and exit for large vehicles and, where appropriate, a pedestrian crossing will be necessary.

A gated entry and appropriate security for the facility may also be employed, depending upon sighting and other considerations.
- **Outdoor Event Venue** – events that promote the visitor center as a destination and offer the opportunity for the Center to redeem operating expenses through rentals will boost local and regional interest and use elevating the reputation of the facility. The program shall include a site venue in the form of a small amphitheater or semi-hardened surface with infrastructure for a portable stage that takes advantage of topography, view and acoustics.

## **Seasonal Use**

The existing Mat-Su CVB Visitor Center operates May through September and has no capacity for shoulder or off-season events. The new facility anticipates year-round use with programming to bolster off-season visitor use and help sell winter tourism opportunities and community events such as the Iditarod Sled Dog Race.

# FACILITY CONCEPTS

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## Overview

The Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center will blend traditional and emerging visitor information and interpretive services with the addition of indoor and outdoor venues for community events. A highly visible location, convenient access, flexible activity and gathering spaces, varied seasonal outdoor program areas, and efficient site circulation invite year around use.

The images below are examples of the look and feel the center might have, on a scale that matches the site and project budget.

Figure 5.1 Visitor Center Architectural Examples

Eilson exterior, Kent Miller, NPS



©islandwood.org, Bainbridge Is, WA



©islandwood.org

Figure 5.1 Visitor Center Architectural Examples, cont'd

Vasilla Museum



@islandwood.org



@islandwood.org, Bainbridge Is, WA



Morris Thompson Center, Fairbanks AK



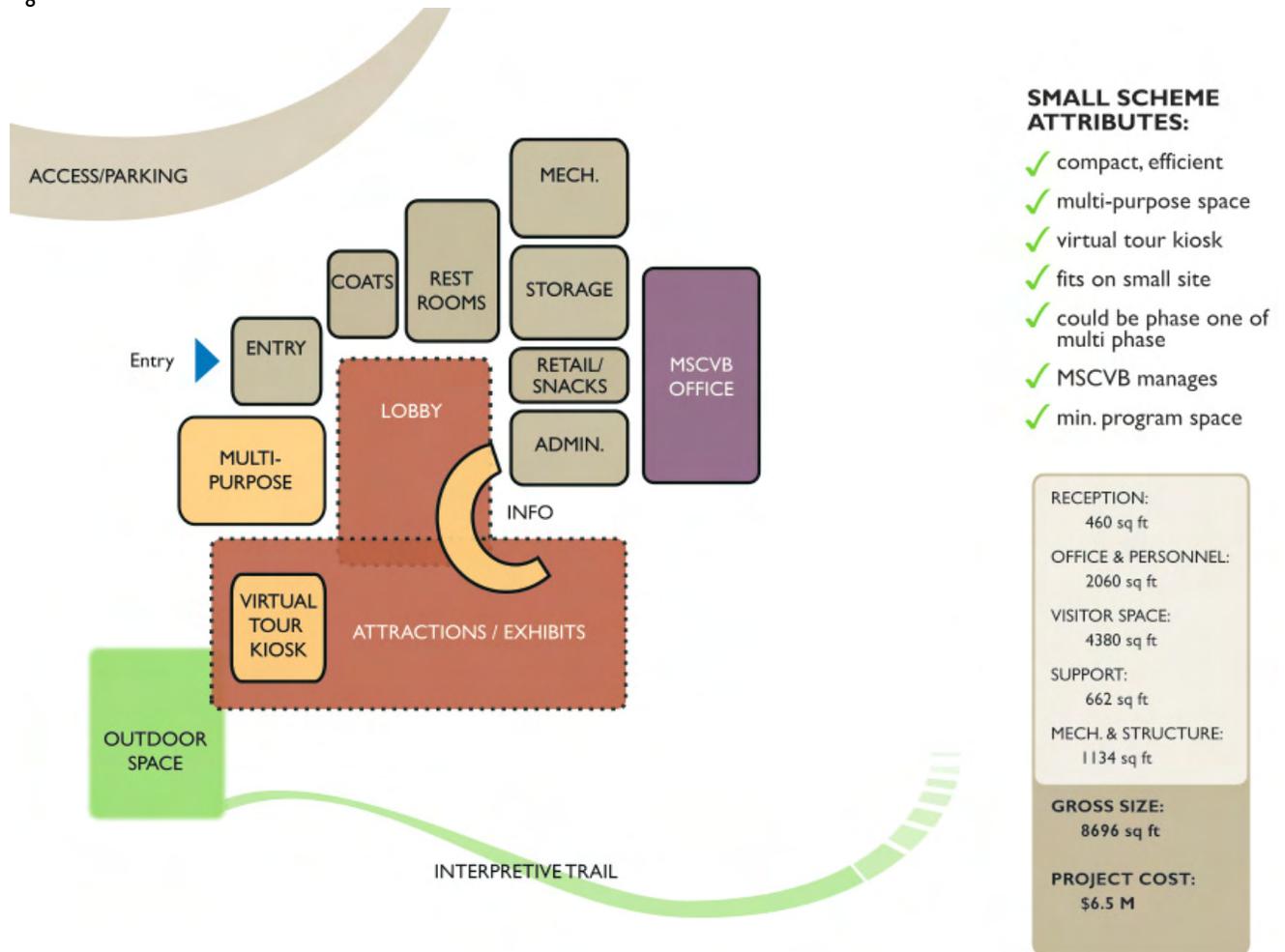
Eilson Interior, RIM Architects

The conceptual diagrams on the following pages express the relationships of the spaces currently programmed in the small, medium and large facility scenarios.

## Small Scheme

Centralized reception, information and administrative functions yield economical and efficient staffing and security. Lobby and exhibit areas merge and combine with a separate multipurpose meeting/theatre to create 4,400 sq. ft. of available visitor space--almost three times the area available in the existing facility. Scheme features snack/drink service, a small retail area and limited outdoor program/interpretive space. 50 parking spaces, 15 RV pull throughs, and staging for three buses serve the minimum-sized, five-acre site.

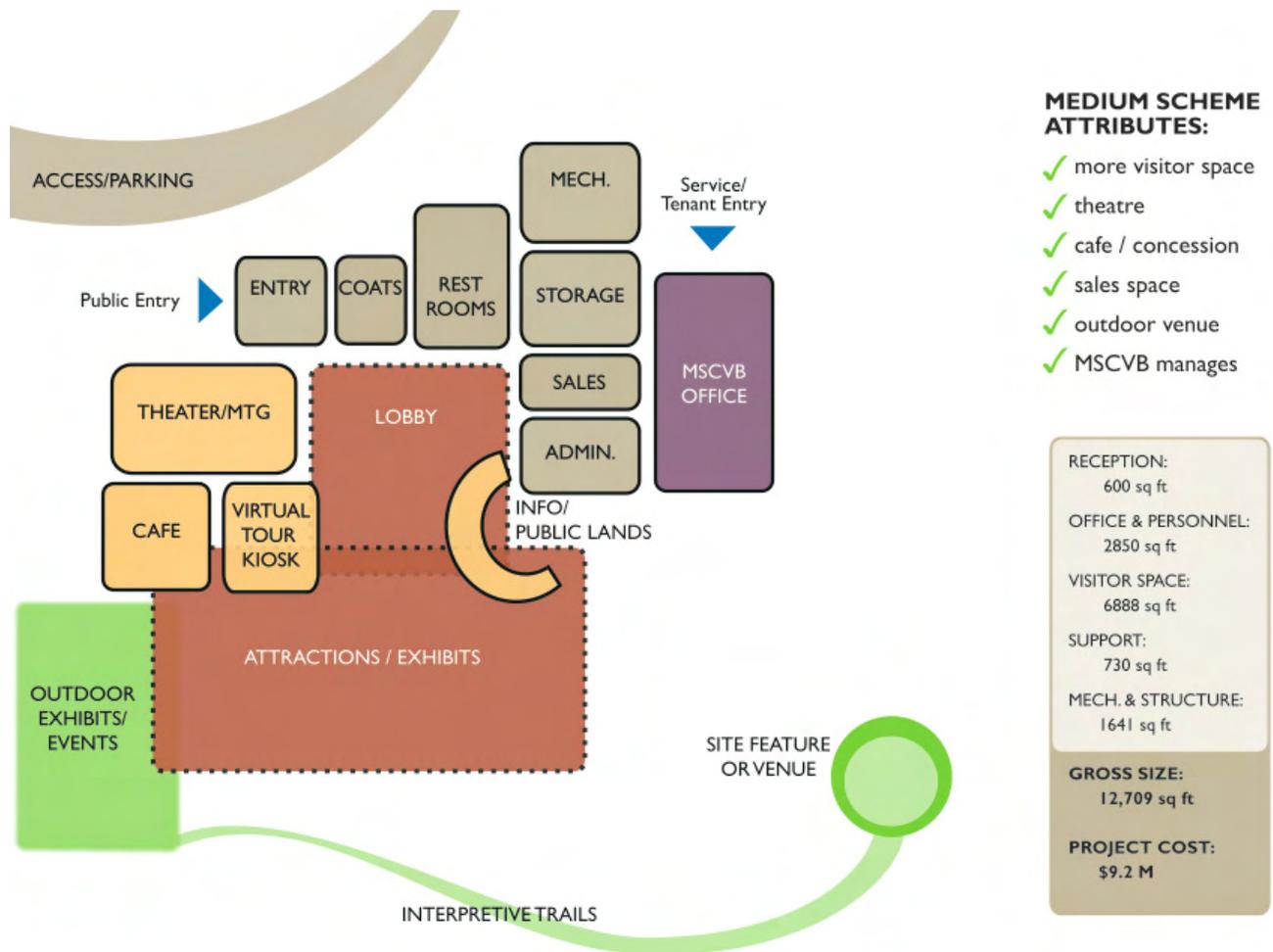
Figure 5.2 Small Scheme



## Medium Scheme

Additional room for exhibits, programs and interpretive presentations as well as tour information enhance visitor experience and opportunities. A small kitchen and café can serve either individual visitors or meeting groups including catered events. An outdoor venue for presentations or music also accommodates private functions such as receptions or parties. A site of approximate seven acres provides parking for 75 vehicles, 15 RVs and up to three coaches at a time.

Figure 5.3 Medium Scheme

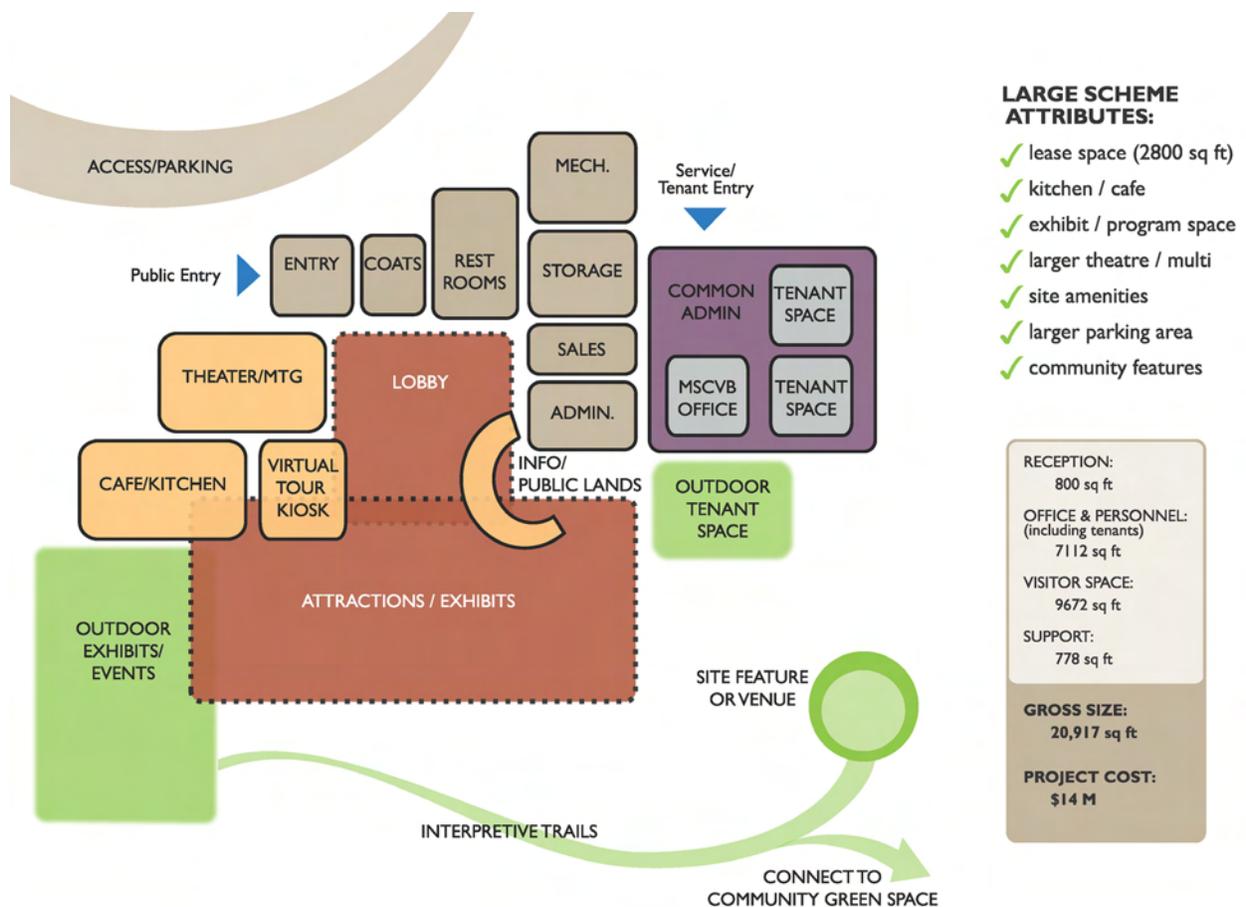


## Large Scheme

Combined with the attributes of the previous schemes, the large scheme adds 2,800 sq. ft. of leasable tenant space for program partners or others, a 200-seat theater, and extensive site amenities. A site of approximately 12 acres would be required to accommodate the anticipated 100 or more vehicles, and 30 full-sized RVs. Drop off and staging lanes for up to five motor coaches or ten smaller step-vans afford packaged tours ample access.

Significantly, this scheme takes advantage of access to nearby public open space (water features, trails, etc.) to create a strong “destination” orientation with links from this facility to the greater Mat-Su Valley community.

Figure 5.4 Large Scheme



## **Bluff Site Concept**

With suitable access and orientation, this concept takes advantage of topography to embrace the view and exposure provided by sites located above the Palmer Hay Flats, east or west of the Parks and Glenn Highway interchange. Such a site would afford excellent views to the Chugach and allow for optimal daylighting and solar gain.

This location and site may allow the designer to build into the bluff thus lowering the scale of the facility and sheltering it from winter winds. By letting the floor tier, a two-story scheme might feature an entry point a floor level above the main exhibit space. The result could provide a flattering and surprising variation on the soaring embrace of the mountain range beyond.

The concept plan shows how the largest, 21,000 sq. ft. scheme would fit onto a 12-15 acre site.

Exterior amenities also take advantage of the opportunities with a site venue situated toward the view and a meandering interpretive trail, boardwalk and, if appropriate, salmon viewing feature.

Figure 5.5 Bluff Site Conceptual Site Plan



## Lake Site Concept

Promoting the Mat-Su Valley as the “Stillwater Fishing Capitol of Alaska” would be given a serious boost by siting the new Visitor Center adjacent to an area lake. This concept enthusiastically welcomes a dual role of providing visitor information and amenities while simultaneously allowing access to a publically-used water body for popular recreational sports.

Fishing, canoeing, swimming and other summer time, water-oriented activities will flourish here and invite visitors to stay and play either on their own or with a guide. Interpretive ‘tours’ for birdwatching, fishing, etc. could provide revenue to the facility.

In the winter the lake surface can become a skating pond where families gather for an afternoon of fun or an evening of celebration under the aurora. Year-round access and a strong link to adjacent public trails and open space would allow this concept to flourish and grow, gaining favor with groups and individuals who otherwise may not have an affiliation with tourism.

This location also may also lend itself to partnership opportunities with public agencies who manage area lands and resources. Such a partnership would be mutually beneficial and help the Visitor Center be a success.

Figure 5.6 Lake Site Conceptual Site Plan





# FINANCE: OPERATIONS

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## Summary of Operating Projections

Operating projections for the Mat-Su Valley Visitor Center were developed working with the Project Work Group, and financial information from Mat-Su Convention and Visitor Bureau (Mat-Su CVB). These projections are a starting point for creating a strategy that will allow the visitor center to operate in a way that is sustainable in the long-term.

Potential sources of revenues for the visitor center are described in detail below. Likely primary sources of revenue fall into three categories:

- Mat-Su CVB operational funding contribution
- Facility-generated earned income, including tenant income
- Partner contributions

Revenue scenarios are described for a small, medium and large facility. In all three scenarios, it is projected that revenues can exceed expenditures.

Expenses for the visitor center cover operations and maintenance costs for the facility, but not program or staffing costs. It is expected that these costs will be met by individual program budgets, once the visitor center's programs and staffing needs are further solidified in the next stages of planning. An exception is included in the "medium" and "large" expenditure scenarios: in order to support the amount of projected revenues generated by booking special events at the facility, an "event coordinator" position is included in the facility costs.

An important finding of the operating projections is that – depending on variables such as visitor center marketing efforts, visibility and access, and spaces and programs – it is likely to be slightly easier to sustain a medium- or large-sized facility than a small one. These larger-sized scenarios have greater potential to provide facility income by having an increased amount of revenue-generating spaces, and by attracting larger numbers of visitors.

Figure 6.1 Five-Year Operations Projection: Small

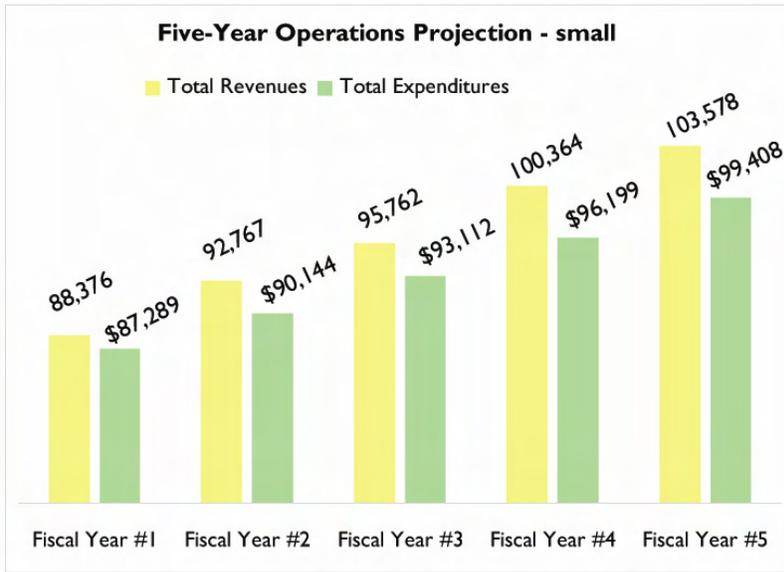


Figure 6.2 Five-Year Operations Projection: Medium

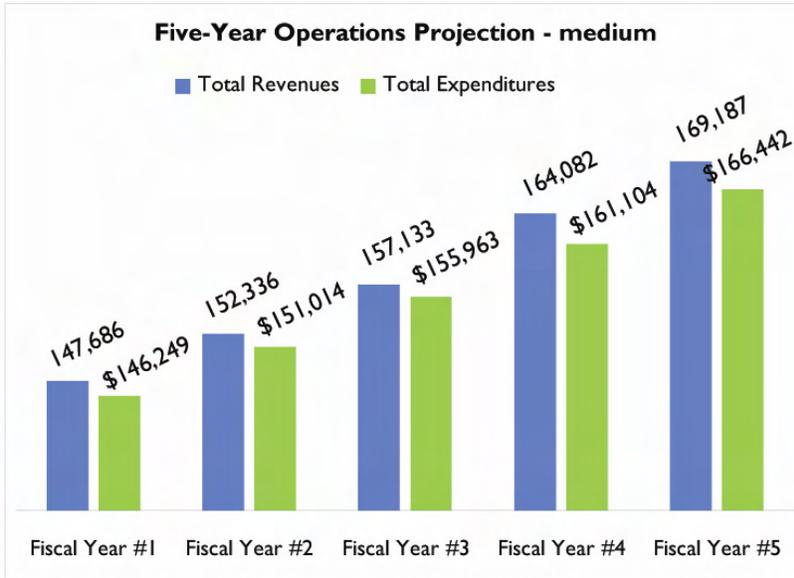
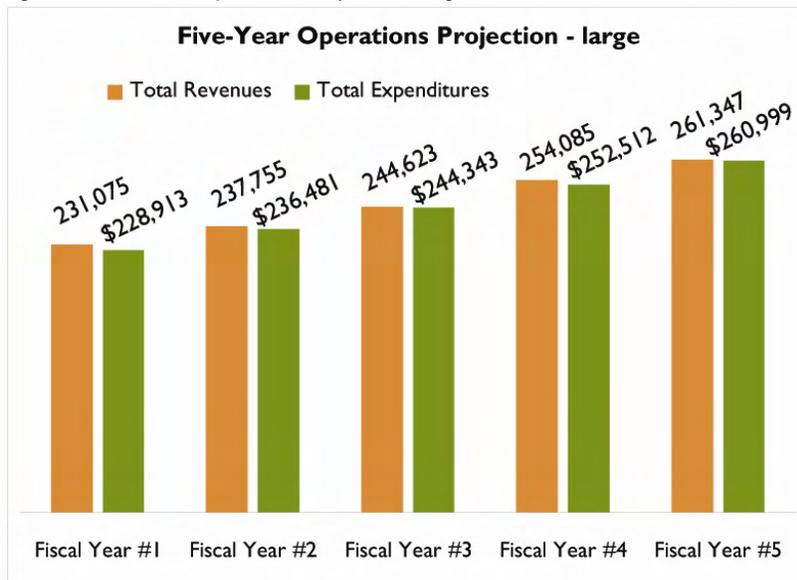


Figure 6.3 Five-Year Operations Projection: Large



## Revenue Sources

### Contributions

There are two sources of projected revenue contributions to the visitor center: those from the Mat-Su CVB and those from partners. Revenue projections from the Mat-Su CVB are based on the organization’s current operational budget. The “small” scenario assumes a slightly smaller contribution than currently, since some of their operational costs might be offset by earned income; the “medium” scenario uses their existing 2010 operational budget contribution; the “large” assumes a slightly greater contribution than in years past.

Partner contributions can be used to make up any budget shortfall remaining after Mat-Su CVB contributions have been made, and facility-generated earned income is contributed. Depending on the amount of earned income, and the extent of use and support for the facility by partners, partner contributions might make up between five percent (large scenario) and 48 percent (small scenario) of the total revenue for the visitor center.

### Earned Income

The visitor center has the potential to generate a significant amount of earned income, depending on the spaces included in the center and the amount of marketing and sales efforts conducted to maximize those revenues. Potential earned income sources considered were:

- Special Event income/space rental
- Gift shop sales
- Café rental (medium and large scenarios, only)
- Auditorium ticket sales (large scenario only)
- Office space rental (large scenario only)

- Admissions fees (estimated revenues were calculated, but not included in the overall revenue projections. Figures are available should the project work group or Mat-Su CVB want to include admissions fees in visitor center revenue projections. Revenue generated by parking passes or fees was not considered, but might be an additional earned income option.)

The tables below show revenue projections for small, medium and large scenarios. Tables explaining assumptions and calculations for the specific types of earned income, listed above, are included in Appendix F.

Table 6.4 Revenue Sources: Small

Revenue Sources: Small		
Item	Annual Amount	Percentage
<b>EARNED INCOME</b>		
<b>Event Income</b>	\$6,000	
<b>Admissions</b>	\$85,800	
<b>Gift Shop sales</b>	\$14,376	
<b>MSCVB Operations Contribution</b>	\$26,000	
<b>Subtotal Earned Income</b>	<b>\$43,376</b>	52%
<b>OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS</b>		
Borough Government/Partner Contributions	\$42,000	
<b>Subtotal Earned Income</b>	<b>\$42,000</b>	48%
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$88,376</b>	100%

Table 6.5 Revenue Sources: Medium

Revenue Sources: Medium		
Item	Annual Amount	Percentage
<b>EARNED INCOME</b>		
Event Income	\$10,000	
Admissions	\$407,750	
Café Rental	\$15,600	
Gift Shop sales	\$38,086	
MSCVB Operations Contribution	\$32,000	
<b>Subtotal Earned Income</b>	<b>\$95,686</b>	<b>65%</b>
<b>OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS</b>		
Borough Government/Partner Contributions	\$52,000	
<b>Subtotal Earned Income</b>	<b>\$52,000</b>	<b>35%</b>
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$147,686</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 6.6 Revenue Sources: Large

Revenue Sources: Large		
Item	Annual Amount	Percentage
<b>EARNED INCOME</b>		
Event Income	\$14,400	
Admissions	\$727,000	
Café Rental	\$24,000	
Gift Shop sales	\$69,275	
Auditorium/Theater	\$24,000	
MSCVB Operations Contribution	\$40,000	
Other Tenant Contributions (Rent)	\$50,400	
<b>Subtotal Earned Income</b>	<b>\$222,075</b>	<b>96%</b>
<b>OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS</b>		
Borough Government/Partner Contributions	\$9,000	
<b>Subtotal Earned Income</b>	<b>\$9,000</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$231,075</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Expenditures

Expenditures are itemized in four categories:

- Facility operations and maintenance
- Outdoor spaces maintenance
- Personnel
- Capital Reserve (repair and replacement reserve)

A more detailed explanation of these expenses follows. The tables found at the end of this section give a summary of the expenses figures for the small, medium and large scenarios.

### Facility Operations and Maintenance

Costs for facility operations and maintenance (O+M) are calculated on a dollar per square foot basis. As the size of the facility grows, so does the operations and maintenance costs. The figure used for calculating O+M costs is \$8 per square foot, annually. This figure is derived from O+M estimates for comparable facilities in the region and has been corroborated by costs from the Mat-Su school district. This \$8 per square foot figure is likely to be a very inclusive figure, including utilities costs, maintenance and janitorial costs, insurance, and non-capital repair and replacement costs.

### Outdoor Spaces Maintenance

The outdoor facilities surrounding the visitor center will be an integral part of the visitor experience. Maintaining these spaces will be an important part of facility upkeep. The current visitor center outdoor landscaping (as well as routine building maintenance and utilities) is the responsibility of the Mat-Su CVB (the Mat-Su Borough is responsible for major building maintenance and capital repairs). Because the ownership and location of the visitor center is not yet solidified, current costs for outdoor spaces maintenance is minimal, and is intended to be supplemental to Mat-Su Borough or other partner contributions to the outdoor environment. The cost is calculated currently on a per-acre basis of \$400 per acre, annually.

### Personnel

In the medium and large scenarios, a part-time booking and events coordinator position has been included in facility costs, in order to ensure that special event rental potential is maximized. In the medium scenario, a rate of \$20 per hour for a PTE (part-time equivalent) position was calculated; a rate of \$22 per hour was used for the large scenario.

### Capital Replacement Reserve

As part of the annual expense budget, a certain amount money should be contributed to a repair and replacement reserve fund. This fund is security for the asset (e.g. the facility) and is used when a major capital repair is needed, such as a new roof. The table below describes how this figure is calculated.

Table 6.7 Capital Replacement Expense: Small

<b>Capital Replacement Expense: Small</b>			
	<b>Facility Cost:</b>	<b>\$6,509,612</b>	
	Inflation Rate:	1.5%	
	Expected Life in Years:	30	
	Future Value of Facility (Cost with inflation):	<b>\$10,175,045</b>	(formula for future value of an asset)
	Percent Local Cash Required for Replacement:	10%	
10%	Capital Replacement Amount:	<b>\$1,017,504</b>	(future value multiplied by % local cash required)
	Expected Interest Rate:	5.0%	
	<b>Annual Capital Replacement Expense</b>	<b>\$15,315</b>	(formula for determining annual capital replacement amount)

Table 6.8 Capital Replacement Expense: Medium

<b>Capital Replacement Expense: Medium</b>			
	<b>Facility Cost:</b>	<b>\$9,146,837</b>	
	Inflation Rate:	1.5%	
	Expected Life in Years:	30	
	Future Value of Facility (Cost with inflation):	<b>\$14,297,240</b>	(formula for future value of an asset)
	Percent Local Cash Required for Replacement:	10%	
10%	Capital Replacement Amount:	<b>\$1,429,724</b>	(future value multiplied by % local cash required)
	Expected Interest Rate:	5.0%	
	<b>Annual Capital Replacement Expense</b>	<b>\$21,519</b>	(formula for determining annual capital replacement amount)

Table 6.9 Capital Replacement Expense: Large

Capital Replacement Expense: Large			
	<b>Facility Cost:</b>	<b>\$13,999,539</b>	
	Inflation Rate:	1.5%	
	Expected Life in Years:	30	
	Future Value of Facility (Cost with inflation):	<b>\$21,882,402</b>	(formula for future value of an asset)
	Percent Local Cash Required for Replacement:	10%	
10%	Capital Replacement Amount:	<b>\$2,188,240</b>	(future value multiplied by % local cash required)
	Expected Interest Rate:	5.0%	
	<b>Annual Capital Replacement Expense</b>	<b>\$32,936</b>	(formula for determining annual capital replacement amount)

### Expenditures Summary

Table 6.10 Expenditures: Small

Expenditures: Small			Annual Amount
Item			
<b>Facility Operations + Maintenance</b>	<b>\$/SF</b>	<b>Estimated SF</b>	<b>Fiscal Year I</b>
Estimated \$/SF - Facility	\$8.00	8,697	\$69,574
<b>Outdoor Spaces Maintenance</b>	<b>\$/acre</b>	<b>Estimated acreage</b>	<b>Fiscal Year I</b>
Estimated \$/acre – Outdoor*	\$400.00	6	\$2,400
<b>Capital Reserve (Repair + Replacement Reserve)</b>			
Facility			\$15,315
<b>Total Expenditures</b>			<b>\$87,289</b>

\*This estimate will need to be adjusted once the extent of the grounds and open space areas is better known.

Table 6.11 Expenditures: Medium

Expenditures: Medium			Annual Amount
Item			
<b>Facility Operations + Maintenance</b>	<b>\$/SF</b>	<b>Estimated SF</b>	<b>Fiscal Year I</b>
Estimated \$/SF - Facility	\$8.00	12,791	\$102,330
<b>Outdoor Spaces Maintenance</b>	<b>\$/acre</b>	<b>Estimated acreage</b>	<b>Fiscal Year I</b>
Estimated \$/acre – Outdoor*	\$400.00	8	\$3,200
<b>Personnel</b>	<b>Pay + Benefits</b>	<b>PTE hours annually</b>	<b>Fiscal Year I</b>
Bookings + Event Coordinator	\$20.00	960	\$19,200
<b>Capital Reserve (Repair + Replacement Reserve)</b>			
Facility			\$21,519
<b>Total Expenditures</b>			<b>\$146,249</b>

\*This estimate will need to be adjusted once the extent of the grounds and open space areas is better known.

Table 6.12 Expenditures: Large

Expenditures: Large			Annual Amount
Item			
<b>Facility Operations + Maintenance</b>	<b>\$/SF</b>	<b>Estimated SF</b>	<b>Fiscal Year I</b>
Estimated \$/SF - Facility	\$8.00	21,107	\$168,857
<b>Outdoor Spaces Maintenance</b>	<b>\$/acre</b>	<b>Estimated acreage</b>	<b>Fiscal Year I</b>
Estimated \$/acre – Outdoor*	\$400.00	15	\$6,000
<b>Personnel</b>	<b>Pay + Benefits</b>	<b>PTE hours annually</b>	<b>Fiscal Year I</b>
Bookings + Event Coordinator	\$22.00	960	\$21,120
<b>Capital Reserve (Repair + Replacement Reserve)</b>			
Facility			\$32,936
<b>Total Expenditures</b>			<b>\$228,913</b>

\*This estimate will need to be adjusted once the extent of the grounds and open space areas is better known.

Figure 6.13 Revenues and Expenditures Summary

	Small	Medium	Large
<b>INCOME</b>			
<b>Earned Income</b>			
Event Income	\$6,000	\$10,000	\$14,400
Admissions*	\$85,800	\$407,750	\$727,000
Café Rental		\$15,600	\$24,000
Gift Shop sales	\$14,376	\$36,086	\$69,275
Auditorium/Theater			\$24,000
MSCVB Operations Contribution	\$26,000	\$32,000	\$40,000
Other Tenant Contributions (Rent)			\$50,400
<b>Contributions</b>			
Borough/Gov't/Partner Contributions	\$42,000	\$52,000	\$9,000
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$88,376</b>	<b>\$145,686</b>	<b>\$231,075</b>
<b>OPERATING COSTS</b>			
<b>Facility Operations &amp; Maintenance</b>			
Estimated \$/SF - Facility	\$69,574	\$102,330	\$168,857
<b>Outdoor Spaces Maintenance</b>			
Estimated \$/acre - Outdoor	\$2,400	\$3,200	\$6,000
<b>Personnel</b>			
Bookings + Events Coordinator	--	\$19,200	\$21,120
<b>Capital Reserve (Repair &amp; Replacement Reserve)</b>			
Facility	\$15,315	\$21,519	\$32,936
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$87,289</b>	<b>\$146,249</b>	<b>\$228,913</b>
<b>Income less Expenditures</b>	<b>\$1,087</b>	<b>-\$563</b>	<b>\$2,162</b>

\*Around the country visitor information centers are beginning to charge admissions as one means of covering operating costs. Often the admission fee applies only to certain, specific activities, such as a movie. Income figures above show possible admissions revenues, but these are not included in the income totals.

# FINANCE: CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

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## Project Cost Estimate

Assessing preliminary project costs for the proposed Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center was performed by Wolf Architecture and is based on 25 years of professional experience with the construction market in the Matanuska Susitna Borough. In spite of the early stage of this project's development, it is possible to ascertain a probable building and site construction cost utilizing comparative construction estimation methodology. Once a site is selected and a more detailed building program developed, more precise cost estimation and contingency figure can be completed. The estimates are developed based on the following factors:

1. Site Development: Assumptions made relative to the grading and constructability of the site. (Amount of grade change on the site, sub-surface conditions, water table, proximity to infrastructure)
2. Building Structure: Degree of building complexity/simplicity (is the building presumed to be a simple or complex form to construct); relevant site issues.
3. Building Finishes: Level of interior and exterior finishes.
4. Glazing: Proportion of glazing affects the heating and cooling loads, and the building structure; curtain wall effect would raise price due to structural considerations.
5. Level of sustainability (Silver, gold or platinum LEED certification).

Combining the Design Team's expertise and the existing conceptual design of the facility, preliminary building costs were estimated (see Tables 7.2, 7.3 and 7.4). Recently constructed buildings similar in complexity were considered as comparative examples. The case study projects researched suggest an anticipated construction cost which was escalated accordingly for publically-funded work. If public funding is not utilized in the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center project, the construction amount may be adjusted to reflect prevailing wage rate requirements at the time. Future market activity would need to be reviewed to verify any upward or downward trends on construction costs which may impact the final the estimated building estimate.

Capital cost estimates assume that the visitor center will be constructed on a relatively flat site and have a straightforward, wood or steel-framed structural system. Other assumptions include that the facility will have some large areas of glazing and will be designed with regional, contemporary flair utilizing a large amount of natural materials (see images below for design and finish examples). Based on 2010 construction prices we anticipate a facility at or under 15,000 sq. ft. can be constructed for approximately \$400/square foot. A larger building, realizing the benefit of economy of scale, will be somewhat less per constructed square foot; hence for the large scenario, \$385/square foot construction cost was used for preliminary estimates. The images included here give comparable examples of the level of detail, design and finish that likely can be achieved at this cost. This level of design, detail and finish met with general approval of the Project Work Group.

Site development costs have been calculated separately and are based on current costs to prepare the site as we anticipate will be required to realize the project. A base cost for extending utilities to the site is included, but without a known site selected, it is not possible to accurately estimate utility hook-up costs.

Finally, complete project costs including anticipated costs relative to funding design services, purchasing fixtures, furnishings, and equipment. An allowance for exhibit design and other such costs have been included to complete the cost estimate.

Figure 7.1 Architectural Details

A. The Center will feature simple exterior forms articulated by large glazed panels and wood detailing.



B. Exposed timbers frame vaulted program space to complement innovative displays.



C. Projecting eaves protect finishes and reduce summer heat gain. Durable siding materials lower maintenance.

D. Interior finishes and detailing utilize exposed natural materials and structural connections for economy and unique expression reminiscent of both mining and agricultural details.



E. Simple forms with a variety of materials and textures



Table 7.2 Small Scenario Cost Estimate

Small Scenario Cost Estimate		Cost
<b>Outdoor Space</b>		
Clearing and Grubbing @ \$8400/acre	6 acres	\$50,400
Parking (vehicles and motorcoaches) @ \$8/sf	120,000sf	\$960,000
Utility Extension		\$100,000
Exterior Interpretive + scenic overlooks		\$150,000
Associated trail system		\$40,000
SUBTOTAL Outdoor Space		\$1,300,400
<b>Site + Building</b>		
Construction Costs @ \$400/sf	8,697 sf	\$3,478,704
SUBTOTAL Site + Building		\$3,478,704
<b>Other</b>		
Design + Project Development Costs		\$1,051,403
Construction Administration Costs		\$95,582
FF&E** + Move-in Costs		\$334,537
Exhibit Design + Materials @ \$5/sf		\$43,484
LEED Silver Certification		\$205,501
SUBTOTAL Other Costs		\$1,730,507
<b>Total Project Costs</b>		<b>\$6,509,612</b>

Table 7.3 Medium Scenario Cost Estimate

Medium Scenario Cost Estimate		Cost
<b>Outdoor Space</b>		
Clearing and Grubbing @ \$8400/acre	8 acres	\$67,200
Parking (vehicles and motorcoaches) @ \$8/sf	145,000 sf	\$1,160,000
Utility Extension		\$100,000
Interpretive + scenic overlooks; event venue		\$200,000
Associated trail system		\$60,000
SUBTOTAL Outdoor Space		\$1,587,200
<b>Site + Building</b>		
Construction Costs @ \$400/sf	12,791 sf	\$5,116,488
SUBTOTAL Site + Building		\$5,116,488
<b>Other</b>		
Design + Project Development Costs		\$1,474,811
Construction Administration Costs		\$134,074
FF&E** + Move-in Costs		\$469,258
Exhibit Design + Materials @ \$5/sf		\$76,747
LEED Silver Certification		\$288,259
SUBTOTAL Other Costs		\$2,443,149
<b>Total Project Costs</b>		<b>\$9,146,837</b>

Table 7.4 Large Scenario Cost Estimate

Large Scenario Cost Estimate			Cost
<b>Outdoor Space</b>			
Clearing and Grubbing @ \$8400/acre	15 acres		\$126,000
Parking (vehicles and motorcoaches) @ \$8/sf	180,000 sf		\$1,440,000
Utility Extension			\$100,000
Interpretive + scenic overlooks; event venue			\$250,000
Water features-dock, skating shelter			\$100,000
Associated trail system			\$80,000
<b>SUBTOTAL Outdoor Space</b>			<b>\$2,096,000</b>
<b>Site + Building</b>			
Construction Costs @ \$385/sf	21,107 sf		\$8,126,234
<b>SUBTOTAL Site + Building</b>			<b>\$8,126,234</b>
<b>Other</b>			
Design + Project Development Costs			\$2,248,891
Construction Administration Costs			\$204,445
FF&E** + Move-in Costs			\$715,556
Exhibit Design + Materials @ \$5/sf			\$168,857
LEED Silver Certification			\$439,556
<b>SUBTOTAL Other Costs</b>			<b>\$3,777,305</b>
<b>Total Project Costs</b>			<b>\$13,999,539</b>

Using the assumptions outlined above, the following preliminary total project costs have been estimated for the small, medium and large visitor center scenarios:

- **Small (8,697 sf):** \$6,509,707
- **Medium (12,791 sf):** \$9,146,749
- **Large (21,107 sf):** \$13,999,500

## Fundraising Strategy and Potential Funding Sources

One of the first tasks for the Project Work Group and Mat-Su CVB during the next phase of visitor center planning is to identify a person or team of people who will be responsible for raising the capital needed to develop this project, and to develop a fundraising timeline and strategy. Having a committed, core group of people assigned to this important task will be vital to the success of the fundraising efforts.

Potential sources for capital funding for this project include:

- State budget appropriation or grants
- Mat-Su Borough budget appropriation
- Federal grants – for example, from the Economic Development Administration, USDA Rural Development Program, and Federal Highways Administration/National Scenic Byways program
- Partner agencies and nonprofit organizations
- Private foundations and corporations

Appendix C provides fuller descriptions of possible federal and private funding sources for capital funding, including deadlines, contacts, and eligibility. Some planning and program funding sources are included as well. This list is preliminary. Further research will be completed by the Project Work Group and Mat-Su CVB in order to find a full range of prospects for a fundraising strategy. The Fundraising Team should make inquiries with the funding sources, particularly for private foundations and corporations, to begin to learn more about the priorities and funding process and to develop a relationship with the program officer. Many private foundations will require that a substantial portion of capital funding is already committed from other sources before they will commit their funds. Because of this, it is important to secure other sources of funding – such as state and federal sources – prior to applying for funds from private foundations.

The general strategy for project funding is to secure 50 percent of funds needed for the capital campaign prior to commencing the next phase of design. Securing this level of capital fundraising is expected to take from one to two years. Once these funds are committed, additional funding will be used to continue the design process, and to begin permitting and addressing site issues. As these processes are underway, remaining capital funds will be raised. Design may be staged, if appropriate, to levels of 35 percent, 65 percent and 100 percent, to allow the Project Work Group and Mat-Su CVB to refine space needs, project budget and a number of other factors over time. Once design is complete, the project will be on sound footing to begin the construction phase. Construction will likely be a multi-year process as well. An important factor to consider in capital fundraising is the length of time required to secure funds: as the life of the project lengthens, the cost to construct often increases. This creates a strong incentive to condense the fundraising and design period as much as possible, to prevent construction costs rising beyond what has been budgeted. A project timeline, giving an overview of the likely major project milestones, is included in the Implementation chapter of this report.

A useful format for developing a funding strategy is pictured below. This format allows project planners to show which part of the project each funder is funding and ensures that funding targets are set accurately.



# SITE SELECTION

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## Site Selection Process

Because the visitor center is intended to be a southern gateway to the Mat-Su Valley, the site selection process focused on the area along the Glenn Highway corridor that is roughly bounded by Wasilla on northwest, Palmer to the northeast, and the Knik River on the south, and includes the interchange with the Parks Highway.

The site selection process began with site visits by members of the project team, during which several potential sites were identified. These initial areas were refined into a list of 12 candidate sites for review. The project team concurrently developed a site evaluation worksheet and ranking system for the potential sites (see below section “Site Evaluation Criteria”); these criteria were reviewed by the project team, the Project Work Group and the Mat-Su CVB Executive Director. Using these approved criteria, the team engineer did an initial site review, evaluating and ranking each of the potential sites. This initial review was then reviewed by the project team, the Mat-Su CVB Executive Director and shared with the Project Work Group. From subsequent discussions with the Project Work Group, two preferred site areas were identified from the list of 12. These are described below in the “Results” and “Conclusions” sections of this chapter.

## Sites Evaluated

The potential sites evaluated by the group are shown in Map 8.1 and described briefly below.

### A SITES – located off of Parks Highway, near Wasilla

#### **A1: Current Site**

The Mat-Su CVB’s existing visitor center is located along the Parks Highway, northwest of the Parks/Glenn Highway interchange. Although it is located within the highway corridor and has excellent views, recent upgrades to the Parks/Glenn Highway interchange have made it difficult for visitors to locate and access. As a consequence, visitation to the center has noticeably declined. Also, in the decade since the facility was constructed, land uses have grown up around the visitor center that are relatively incompatible with the area’s use as a tourism destination.

#### **A2: Parks Highway South**

Located along the Parks Highway, north and west of the Parks/Glenn Highway interchange, site A2 has excellent accessibility off the Parks Highway, but like the existing Mat-Su Visitor Center, it is located in an already developed, commercial area, with views of/adjacent to an existing gravel pit. These adjacent uses seriously impact the attractiveness of the site for tourism purposes.

### B SITES – cluster located off of Glenn Highway, near Palmer

#### **B1: Glenn Highway Bluff South**

Site B1 is located on private property on the south side of the Glenn Highway, just east of the Parks/Glenn Highway interchange. The site has excellent views of the Palmer Hay Flats and is easily accessed off the Glenn Highway. This site could take advantage of synergy with the Kepler-Bradley/Matanuska Lakes recreation area located directly across the street from the site. A potential drawback of this site and other ones identified in the “B cluster” of sites is that they are located on

the Glenn Highway *north* of the interchange, which could mean that the visitor center would potentially miss some of the visitor traffic turning onto the Parks Highway, if not marketed well and sited in a highly visible location with easy access.

### **B2: Glenn Highway North (private)**

Site B2 is located on private property on the north side of the Glenn Highway, just east of the Parks/Glenn Highway interchange. The site has some views of the Palmer Hay Flats, is easily accessed off the Glenn Highway, and could take advantage of synergy with the adjacent Kepler-Bradley/Matanuska Lakes recreation area.

### **B3: Glenn Highway North (State)**

Site B3 is located on State property on the north side of the Glenn Highway, just east of the Parks/Glenn Highway interchange. The site is easily accessed off the Glenn Highway and could take advantage of synergy with the adjacent Kepler-Bradley/Matanuska Lakes recreation area.

## **C SITES – located off of Glenn Highway, in the flats north of the Knik River**

### **C1 :Rabbit Slough and C2 North Flats**

Included on the list because of their stunning views of the three mountain ranges, these sites are located on land managed by Alaska Department of Fish and Game as part of the Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge. The environmental, permitting and ownership issues associated with these sites are substantial, severely constraining development.

## **D & E SITES – located off of Glenn Highway, near Mat-Su Borough boundary**

### **D1: Reflection Lake**

The Reflection Lake site is located adjacent to and west of the Glenn Highway immediately north of the Knik River Bridge. Part of the Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge, the site currently serves as a hunting, fishing and recreational access point. The Palmer Fish and Game office is mandated to manage Palmer Hay Flats, but is assisted by the Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats, a nonprofit organization that conducts conservation, public awareness, education and enhancement projects to promote the preservation and responsible stewardship of the Refuge. Site amenities associated with the group include a notice board/map kiosk, benches and trash receptacles near the parking lot/trailhead. The site has severe environmental constraints to development. In addition, the highway noise is significant, and may be incompatible with the optimal visitor experience.

### **E1: East of Reflection Lake**

This site initially looked viable because of its views, its access to both the Glenn Highway and the Alaska Railroad, and the potential to build along the Knik River. Upon closer examination, the site was deemed to have severe environmental constraints, and that – though in close proximity to both the road and rail – the access to the site was likely very limited. Additionally, rights-of-way for the road and rail line constrain the actual amount of land available for development.

## **F SITES – cluster of sites located near interchange of Old and New Glenn Highways**

### **F1: Old Glenn Highway West**

Similar to site E1, this site was considered because of its seemingly good access to both vehicle traffic on the Glenn Highway and train traffic on the Alaska Railroad. However, also similar to site E1, this proximity does not translate into easy access, and actually signifies land ownership constraints that leave very little buildable land outside road and rail right-of-ways. Additionally, a location close to the highway means that noise pollution issues may affect the site. This site is located inside the Municipality of Anchorage.

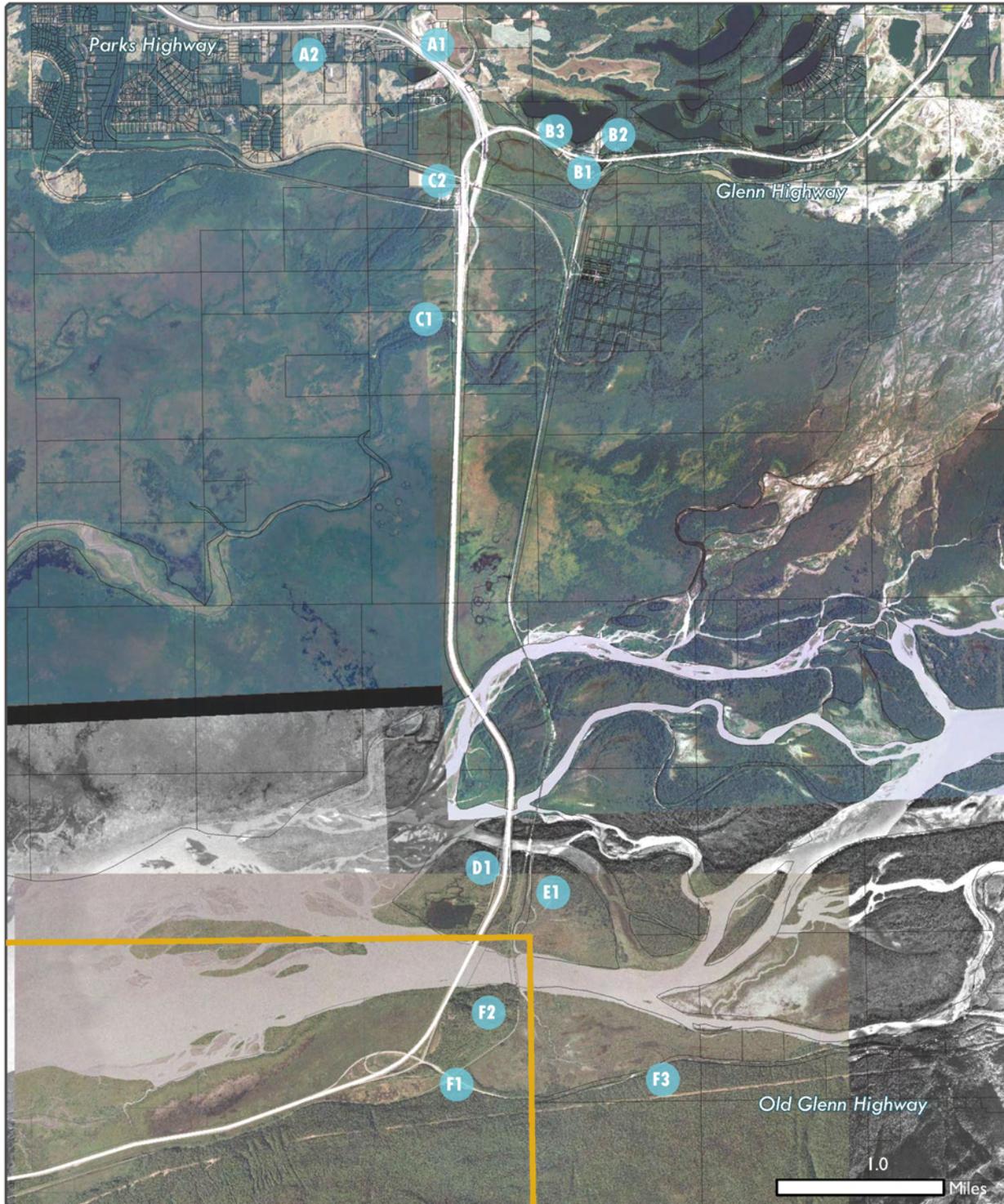
### **F2: Knob Site**

Site F2, “the Knob” is located along the Glenn Highway to the west of the road. The site has excellent visibility from the highway as well as excellent views of the Palmer Hay Flats and surrounding mountain ranges. This site has the most “Wow factor” of any of the sites considered. Like all of the “F cluster” of sites, and unlike the other areas considered, this site stands at the true southern gateway to the Mat-Su Valley. While presenting some significant access and environmental issues, these issues are not nearly as constraining as in other locations. While the site does offer incredible views, it offers less potential outdoor space for development into walking, skiing or biking trails and other recreational uses; it is relatively isolated from other visitor attractions that are found closer to the core areas of Palmer and Wasilla. This site is located inside the Municipality of Anchorage.

### **F3: Old Glenn Highway East**

Located within the first mile of the Old Glenn Highway, where it branches from the (new) Glenn Highway, site F3 has excellent views of the Palmer Hay Flats, but has poor visibility from the main highway, which would require greater reliance on signage directing visitors to the Center. Additionally, this site is tucked up against the flanks of the Chugach Range’s Twin Peaks, which shield it from direct sunlight much of the year, and signify some environmental constraints. This site is located in the Mat-Su Borough.

Map 8.1 Sites Selected for Evaluation



# Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center



Data courtesy of Matanuska-Susitna Borough and the Municipality of Anchorage. This map was compiled with assistance from Agnew::Beck Consulting.  
 Alaska State Plane, Zone 4, NAD 1983  
 File: Mat-Su\_VC\_Overview.mxd 2/15/10



## Site Evaluation Criteria

The site evaluation criteria developed by the project team and Project Work Group are included in the table below. For some sites, an additional critical constraint that would render the site extremely unlikely to be developed or unsuitable for development may have been identified in the evaluation process.

Table 8.2 Site Evaluation Criteria

Subject	Specific Criteria
<i>Physical capability and cost for development, utilities</i>	
Parcel size	size relative to program needs
Developable area	useable area for structures and parking
Site development challenges	physical limitations, costs for construction
Geotechnical Hazards	unstable soil or slopes, flooding, seismic hazard
Natural Gas	ease/cost to provide
Power, communications	ease/cost to provide
Wastewater	ease/cost to provide
Water supply	ease/cost to provide
Design compliments parcel and environment	
<i>Accessibility and visibility</i>	
Ease of access	distance of route from road to site
Ease of access	difficulty of route from road to site
Access from railroad	Location relative to rail siding
Visibility	ability to draw highway travelers
<i>Site Amenities</i>	
Views	mountains, open space, etc.
Noise	separation from hwy noise
Activity options	trails, water, etc.
Micro-climate; aspect	Sunlight, wind
Wildlife	odds of seeing birdlife, moose, salmon, etc.
“Wow factor”	overall memorable nature, draw of site

Table 8.2 Site Evaluation Criteria, continued

Subject	Specific Criteria
<i>Location relative to users</i>	
Visitors	contact with north bound road and rail travelers
Residents (e.g. for social events)	proximity to residential areas
Compliments other partner projects	
<i>Land Use Issues</i>	
Ownership	difficulty of establishing site control
Zoning, regulatory issues	challenge for development approval
Politics	any special real/perceived issue
Land use context	impact of setting, adjoining uses
Cost	relative full site development cost

## Results

Although every potential site identified has challenges associated with it, two sites (or sets of sites) emerged as preferred sites for further consideration. These include the Kepler-Bradley/Matanuska Lakes cluster of sites (B1, B2, and B3) and “The Knob” site (F2). These sites were chosen for a combination of visibility, access to visitor traffic along the Glenn and Parks Highways, setting (“Wow” factor), and land development suitability. The B cluster of sites are also attractive due to potential synergy with the Kepler-Bradley/Matanuska Lakes recreational area, which presents particular partnership opportunities with State Parks.

A summary of the ranking results is included on the following page. The full site evaluation rankings for each site are included in Appendix E. An engineering and environmental analysis for the preferred sites – the “B cluster” and “The Knob” – are also included in Appendix E, along with the Reflection Lake site.

## Conclusions and Next Steps

Eventual formal site selection will depend in large part on partnership and funding opportunities and further analysis of environmental and land ownership/management constraints. Below is a synopsis of probable next steps for determining a specific site to pursue for the visitor center location.

The Project Work Group will need to balance exploring the viability of these preferred sites while still being aware that they may need to explore additional site options, should these sites prove untenable for some reason. A key step in assessing viability will be to build partnerships and have site-specific discussions with land owners and managers, and other partners who have a significant stake in the visitor center’s development.

## **Site F2: “The Knob”**

This site has, an incredible visual impact – both for its visibility to travelers and its viewsheds. It also has the advantage of being located at a geographic entrance point to the Mat-Su Valley, and a very short distance from the Glenn Highway and Alaska Railroad line. Its proximity to the Old Glenn Highway means that access may be available from the Old Glenn, rather than from the (new) Glenn Highway, which would be much more costly and difficult to accomplish. Its proximity to Anchorage might be both an advantage and a disadvantage – visitors in Anchorage with a little free time on their hands might be inclined to drive the short distance to the visitor center; at the same time, the site is so close to Anchorage amenities, travelers may not wish to stop so soon, on their way north. Making the visitor center and site very compelling, and including programming and materials that have a strong reputation will help balance out any disadvantages.

While the Knob has the biggest “Wow factor” and forms a natural gateway opportunity, environmental constraints to development could cause the development costs to be much higher than other preferred sites. Committing to this site will necessitate raising additional monies to cover these higher development costs. These environmental constraints, and its virtue of being a knob, means that there is a smaller potential footprint for development than at other preferred sites, and outdoor spaces and amenities are likely to be more limited.

Additionally, the Knob’s location in the Municipality of Anchorage will likely necessitate negotiations with the Municipality, possibly affecting the viability of the site – or else the Mat-Su CVB and Project Work Group would have to reconcile itself to having a Mat-Su Valley Visitor Center located outside the boundaries of the Mat-Su Borough. The land is owned by the Eklutna Corporation (Eklutna, Inc.), which will obviously necessitate striking an agreement with them in order to consider the site as a viable location for the proposed visitor center.

Another consideration for this site is that it is relatively isolated from other Mat-Su Valley communities and amenities, decreasing the potential synergistic relationship with the cities of Palmer and Wasilla, the local population, and local businesses in those communities. Since the site is not located adjacent to public lands that are developed for recreation purposes, the ability to “piggyback” visitor center attractions with partner agencies is also potentially limited.

Despite these downsides, the visibility and stunning location of the site give it the potential to be a “marquee” visitor center for the Mat-Su Valley and for the state.

## **B Sites: “Kepler-Bradley/Matanuska Lakes”**

The Kepler-Bradley/Matanuska Lakes sites provide access to incredible recreation opportunities for visitors and locals alike, creating a potentially very lively and well-used, year-round facility. The sites’ location in the Core Area and nearness to not only Kepler-Bradley/Matanuska Lakes State Park, but also other recreation areas such as Crevasse-Morraine Trail System and even Hatcher Pass increases the potential draw to the facility from multiple types of users. This area also presents a particular opportunity to partner with the Alaska State Parks Department, which could increase access to funding and facilitate site control. The synergy between the recreation area and the visitor center would also be likely to add to the success of the center, and increase its possible funding streams.

These sites – particularly B1, on the south side of the Glenn Highway – also have the potential for incredible views of the Chugach, Talkeetna and Alaska Ranges, as well as overlooking the vibrant Palmer Hay Flats and Knik River valley. Access to Kepler-Bradley State Park from the B1 site will

need to be planned closely with Alaska Department of Transportation as they continue the process of planning and constructing upgrades to this section of the Glenn Highway.

A significant detractor from these sites is their location north of the Parks/Glenn Highway interchange. Although located less than a mile from the interchange, traffic turning toward Denali, Fairbanks and other points north on the Parks Highway will have to go out of their way to backtrack and stop off at the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center. This is likely to decrease the visitor traffic to the center, although it is hard to predict at this point in the project to what degree visitation would be impacted. To mitigate this situation, the facility could be located so that (a) it is highly visible from the highway before the interchange, and (b) it is easy to access with well-marked access routes. Additionally, a strong marketing program and the creation of a compelling design and very desirable programming and amenities will increase the likelihood that visitors will stop. Local visitors are unlikely to be deterred by this location.

The Kepler-Bradley/Matanuska Lakes sites, while not as show-stopping as The Knob site, still offer the potential for great visual impact – both in terms of visibility to travelers, and in terms of epic scenery and views from the facility and its grounds. These sites will have a potentially lower cost to develop, and increased benefit from partnerships with local businesses, communities, and Alaska State Parks, creating a nice balance and a lively, well-loved visitor center.

## **Other Sites**

In addition to the 12 sites evaluated in this process, at least one additional site at Jacobson Lake in Meadow Lakes, was suggested at the second Project Work Group meeting. Although this site is located outside the “gateway” area, it meets other key criteria, such as views, accessibility off the Parks Highway, and proximity to a proposed future Alaska Railroad station stop. Should the preferred sites identified through this process eventually be determined unviable, a broader view may have to be taken and a new set of sites identified for detailed consideration.

Table 8.3 Summary of Site Evaluation

Site	Physical capability + cost for development, utilities	Accessibility & visibility	Site Amenities	Location relative to users	Land Use Issues	TOTAL	Critical Constraints	Pluses	Summary
<b>North: Parks Hwy</b>									
A1 Current site	22	11	23	9	10	75	too small (2 acres); "urban" overlooks gravel site	access, views	marginal
A2 Parks Hwy	16	12	26	9	15	78		access	possible
<b>North: Glenn Hwy</b>									
B1 Glenn Hwy Bluff South	11	6	14	6	9	46	might miss Parks Hwy traffic	great views	possible
B2 Glenn Hwy North	18	8	14	6	10	56	might miss Parks Hwy traffic	Kepler-Bradley	possible
B3 Glenn Hwy North State	14	7	13	6	14	54	might miss Parks Hwy traffic	Kepler-Bradley	possible
<b>Central: Hay Flats</b>									
C1 Rabbit Slough	33	17	17	11	22	100	minimal access. wetlands	natural setting	not viable
C2 North Flats	33	17	20	13	20	103	roundabout access		extremely marginal
<b>South Hay Flats</b>									
D1 Reflection Lake	35	10	17	9	23	94	very limited area; wetlands	marginal	marginal
E1 East of Reflection Lake	32	16	16	12	24	100	very limited area; wetlands	not viable	not viable
<b>South: Old Glenn</b>									
F1 Old Glenn Hwy West	35	12	22	13	19	101	outside of MSB, "in a hole"	rail access	extremely marginal
F2 Knob Site	23	9	10	8	18	68	outside of Mat-Su Borough	great views	marginal
F3 Old Glenn Hwy East	35	18	20	14	19	106	poor solar aspect, distance	views	extremely marginal

Note: lower scores are better scores, according to ranking system  
 Evaluation criteria (subjective judgment) = 1 – very good/best, 5 – severely challenged/worst



# **PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT + GOVERNANCE**

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## **Introduction**

This chapter reviews issues and makes recommendations regarding the broad subject of project “governance.” This takes in two main topics: managing the process to plan, raise funds for and build a facility, and then secondly, managing the ongoing operations and ownership of a successful visitor center.

## **Initial Governance: Plan, Fund, Design and Build**

### **Project Leadership**

As is outlined in the implementation chapter, and also reviewed in the chapter on comparable facilities, the process to plan, fund, design and build the center will span a multi-year period. Throughout this process the project will need strong, sustained leadership. This leadership will be responsible for a host of tasks, including those outlined in the implementation chapter, partially summarized below:

- Bring together, solidify and maintain partnerships.
- Organize and chair a project steering committee, possibly based on the Project Work Group established for this project (see Appendix B “Contacts”).
- Guide the process to select and secure a site.
- Guide the ongoing refinement of the project’s program, size, markets, operations revenues, and other project dimensions.
- Coordinate a fundraising process, ultimately raising \$7-15 million dollars of capital funding.
- Carry out ongoing community outreach.
- Hire and manage a design team (architect, landscape architect, civil engineer, exhibits specialist, etc.).
- Manage the construction process.
- Prepare a detailed operations plan and business plan, including staffing, marketing, maintenance, etc.

These responsibilities can be fulfilled in a variety of ways. Two approaches that may work best for this particular project are:

- A committee-based approach, where committees are made up of representatives from a variety of partners who commit to dedicating time (either paid staff time or volunteer time) to the project.
- A single-entity approach, where work on the project is conducted mainly by the staff of a single organization, and partners are included in the planning process in an advisory capacity.

The committee-based approach can be organized in a variety of ways.

- **Project Steering Committee** – made up of primary project partners, those who will play an active, leadership role in guiding and benefitting from the project’s development. For the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center project; this team might include the Mat-Su CVB, Mat Su Borough, Alaska State Parks, area Tribes such as Chickaloon, Knik and Eklutna, Alaska Department of Fish & Game, City of Palmer, City of Wasilla, Alaska Railroad, and the Great Land Trust.
- **Project Advisory Committee** – made up of other project partners, those who have a stake in the success of the project, but a lesser position in determining facility design and operations.
- **Other Subcommittees** – the Project Steering Committee may see fit to create special subcommittees whose role is to take on specific sets of project tasks. For example, some projects have designated subcommittees for overseeing and developing efforts at funding, marketing and community outreach, facility design, and facility programming.

Whether the committee-based approach or the single-entity approach is used for leading the project through from planning to funding to designing and building, there are several other important roles to be considered for the success of the project. Additional roles might include:

- **Project Manager/Facility Director** – a designated individual who is empowered with overall responsibility to guide all aspects of the project, and maintain project momentum. The level of effort required will not be constant, but over the course of the project, typically will require at least 50 percent and often 100 percent of one person’s time.
- **Nonprofit Partner** – the project sponsors need to be able to raise funds from a range of sources, including foundations that will only fund nonprofit organizations; consequently the Project Manager, Project Steering Committee and/or Project Advisory Board may determine that it is beneficial to partner with a nonprofit (501(c)(3)) entity, or to create one to fundraise for this project.
- **Technical and Expert Support** – specialist contractors and consultants will be needed to move the project forward in areas such as marketing, fundraising, design and construction.
- **“Project Benefactor”/“Project Champion”** – Look at the history of many successful projects and there will be one or two key people who tirelessly devoted thousands of hours to make the project a reality; likewise most successful projects have a potent and well-connected supporter – a governor, legislator, or wealthy patron – who believes in the project, and finds ways to open doors and make connections.

## **Partnership Development**

The success of the project relies on strong partnerships with a variety of local and regional entities engaged in promoting and protecting the cultural and scenic qualities to be found in the Mat-Su Valley and along the entire length of the Glenn Highway Scenic Byway. With support from the Mat-Su Borough and a Federal National Scenic Byways Program Grant, the Mat-Su CVB is the primary, initiating partner for the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center and has been a main driving force behind the planning efforts for the past several years. The Mat-Su Borough has also played a strong role in promoting the idea of the Visitor Center, and prioritizing the project.

As the project progresses, many other organizations have joined in work sessions and strategy meetings to advise on and contribute to the plan for the facility and its programs. Known and potential partners include:

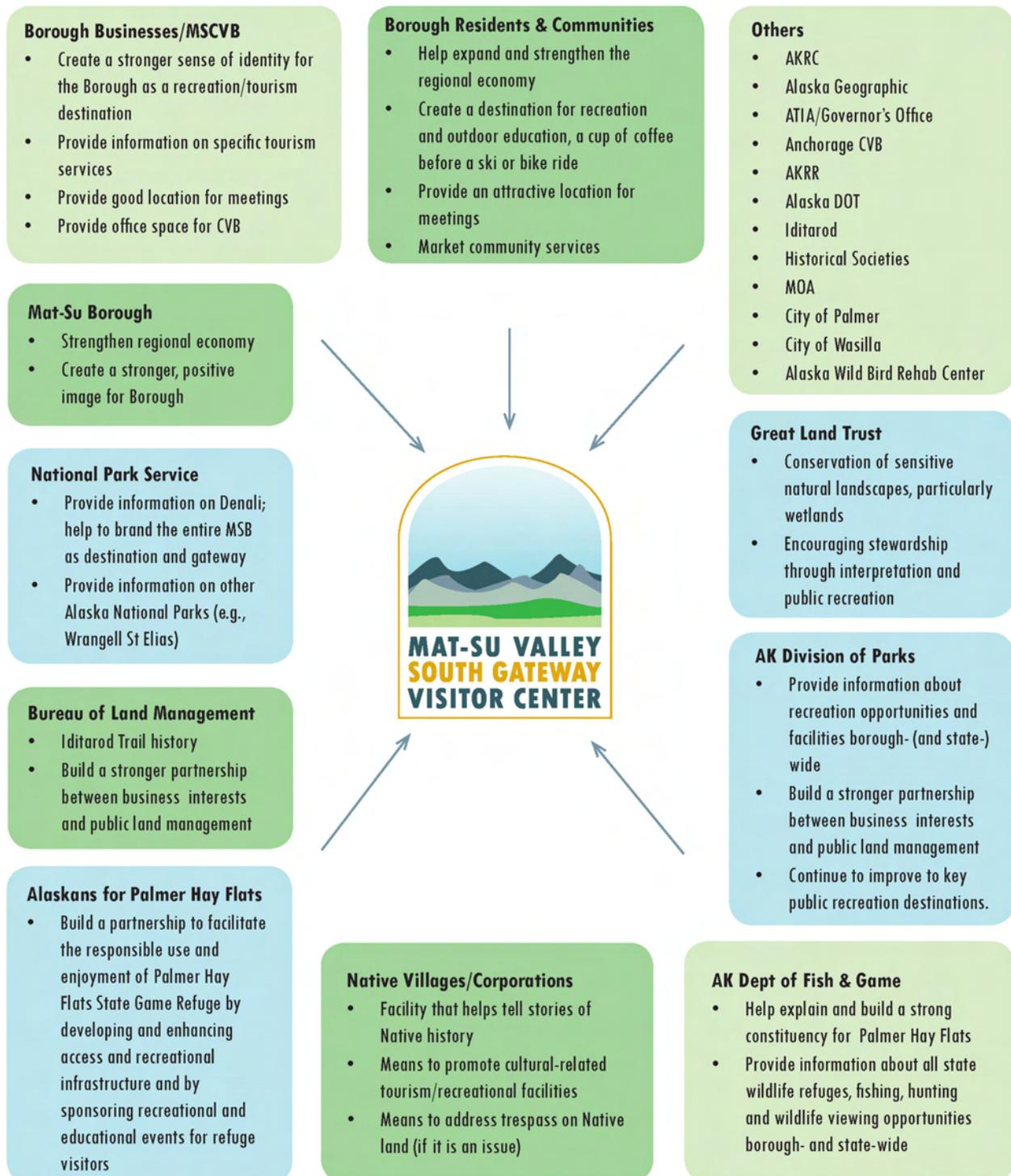
- Mat-Su Borough
- Alaska Division of Parks
- National Park Service
- US Bureau of Land Management/Iditarod
- Alaska Railroad (ARRC)
- ATIA/Governor's Office
- City of Palmer (Kepler Bradley w/in Palmer Water and Sewer District)
- Borough Residents and Communities
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game
- Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats
- Native Villages/Corporations (CIRI, Eklutna, Knik, Chickaloon)
- Alaska Geographic
- Anchorage CVB
- Historical Societies/National Heritage
- University of Alaska
- Alaska DOT
- Alaska Native Heritage Center
- Greatland Trust
- Alaska Wild Bird Rehab Center (AWBRC)

Partner roles could include offering general support for and advice on the project, to providing interpretive exhibits or programming, assisting with staffing (e.g., a summer information desk), renting space, or even having a major role in owning and operating the facility.

Partners must be asked not only to contribute to the facility, but also should benefit from their involvement in some way. The figure below illustrates how the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center can benefit its existing and potential project partners. Partnerships based on mutually-beneficial arrangements are strong ones, and the proposed Visitor Center has great potential to make significant contributions to its supporters and partner organizations.

Figure 9.1 Partnership Development Diagram

## Meeting the Needs of Borough Residents, Businesses, and Diverse Partners



## Ongoing Governance: Ownership and Operations Management

Though it is still early in the planning process for this facility, it is appropriate to think about how the facility might be owned and operated once it is completed. This may be a different group or individual than needed for the plan, fund, design and build phase of the project.

### Ownership

The Mat-Su Borough is likely to be the major partner in the development of the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center, and consequently the facility is likely to be owned by the Borough. This preliminary assumption may change as the project develops, for example, if one or more partners step into a larger role. However, the Mat-Su Borough has several important characteristics that make it a strong candidate for owner:

- It has a vested interest in encouraging the economic development of the region, investing in infrastructure, undertaking projects that benefit Borough residents, and promoting the image of the Mat-Su Valley.
- It has the ability to raise capital and operations funds through mechanisms such as bond measures, bed taxes and similar means.
- It has the ability and credibility to receive funding from other sources – such as the State and Federal governments.
- It is an experienced land manager and facility operator.
- It is a fiscally stable entity.

### Operation

There are several workable scenarios for facility operations management. At this point in the planning process, the two most likely facility managers are:

- The Mat-Su Convention and Visitor Bureau
- A partnership of entities affiliated as a nonprofit organization whose sole purpose is to manage the facility

The first scenario – where the Visitor Center is operated and managed by the Mat-Su CVB – is most likely if the facility is owned by the Mat-Su Borough. The current visitor center is owned and managed through a similar relationship. Other partner agencies would contribute funds, staff and programming in the form of in-kind contributions and tenant rent, but would not have a hand in or ultimate responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the facility.

The second scenario – where the Visitor Center is operated and managed by a partnership of entities incorporated as a nonprofit, such as a “Friends of the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center” organization – is most likely if the facility itself is owned by a similar partnership arrangement. This type of ownership and management is a little more unwieldy than a single owner and single operator, but may be an alternative to a Mat-Su Borough-owned facility if either the Borough is unable or unwilling to be the owner, or if (as mentioned in the above section) a high degree of interest from another partner creates an incentive for a different ownership arrangement.

The ownership and management structure of the facility are also dependent on the selected site. For example, if located in the Matanuska Lakes area (i.e., Kepler-Bradley, the “B sites”), the facility

might be owned by the State, with the Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau and/or some combination of partners managing the facility.

Tasks for the operator include:

- Preparing a detailed operations plan, including a staffing plan, and a budget and operations plan (prior to opening)
- Managing the day-to-day operations of the facility, including visitor information, space rentals, gift shop, food service, etc.
- Ongoing fundraising for new programs, exhibits, operations costs
- Coordinating among project partners
- Communicating with and building relationships with local communities
- Marketing the facility to traditional and new users and maximizing the facility's earned income streams

The operator and facility manager may also manage certain types of building maintenance and repair and replacement. The terms of this maintenance would presumably be worked out and shared with the facility owner.

### **Lessons from Comparable Facilities**

The comparable facilities studied as part of this preliminary feasibility study generally have a structure in which the center is owned and operated by a government agency, a nonprofit entity, or some combination of the two. Some are run by or have affiliations with supporting nonprofit friends groups (e.g., Friends of the Eagle River Nature Center, Friends of the Campbell Creek Science Center).

In cases where there is a partnership among government and nonprofit entities, the government agency may own the facility with a nonprofit entity managing it (or vice versa). Alternatively, one primary partner may own and have primary responsibility for operating the facility, with other partners having occasional staff or some portion of dedicated programming. Lessons learned from the comparable facilities indicate that it would probably be most effective to have a single entity manage the facility. Most of the facilities studied have a single managing partner. One of the facilities, the Moab Information Center, started out with different agency partners contributing staff to the facility, but found it more effective for the partner agencies to contribute funds in lieu of staff; the Canyonlands Natural History Association staffs and manages its facility.

The Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitors Center also offers a very important lesson for the Mat-Su Visitor Center: with a newly incorporated 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization to operate the facility, the Center is governed by a board of directors that is overwhelmingly composed of appointees from the primary partner entities. This governance structure was very effective during planning and construction for the facility, and has resulted in a facility that provides space for the partner entities for far less than market rate due to the amount of shared space in the facility. Once the partners moved into the new facility, however, the Board has been challenged to develop and maintain an overarching view of the center's operations. Often, Board members' perspectives are dominated by the interests of individual partner organizations. This situation could be mitigated by ensuring a board composition that reflects a broader body of interests and perspectives than just the primary partner organizations.

For a full discussion of lessons learned from surveying comparable facilities, both inside and outside of Alaska, please see the “Comparable Facilities” chapter.

## **Summary**

- To be successful, this project must be a partnership. Though it has taken significant steps in forwarding the Mat-Su Valley Visitor Center planning process, the Mat-Su CVB cannot alone raise funds or operate a facility with the quality and level of attractions needed for success.
- The ownership and operations of the facility must be clear, legally binding and formal. The desire to include contributing partners must be balanced against the complexities of managing a large group.
- The time required to design, fund and build the facility is governed to a significant degree by the level of skill, creativity and energy of project sponsors. A diplomatic, well-organized project manager, with the time to stay on top of all the dimensions of the project, to pursue multiple funding leads, and to build and nurture many relationships, can make the difference between a project that happens in five years, and one that is still trying to get traction after 10 years. Acquiring funds to hire a project manager who is responsible for seeing the project through from planning to grand opening has proven to be a successful method for many facility projects.



# IMPLEMENTATION

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## Introduction

Bringing the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center from vision to reality will involve a series of progressively more precise refinements of the work begun in this report. The process will require sorting out the details of all major project elements: partners and programs, site control, building design, funding, governance, building construction and ultimately the operation of the new facility.

The timeline figure below gives an overview of the general process and sequence of steps to take the project from its current planning phase through fundraising, design, construction and grand opening. These steps are divided into “Programs and Partners,” “Funding,” and “Site and Building” streams. Given the current stage of the project’s development, and the necessary work ahead, it is likely that the project will take an additional four to five years to complete; the timing of the project may change, depending on factors like funding availability, commitments from project partners, and other issues.

As the project moves forward, the project leadership will need to plan out a more specific project timeline, or work plan. During this process, an important concept to keep in mind is *project benchmarks*. These benchmarks are essentially “gateway achievements” – meaning that until a specific task or goal is accomplished, the project cannot successfully move into the next phase of development. Some typical project benchmarks are included in the “Project Work Plan” table below, but the project leadership can and should create additional or alternative benchmarks to evaluate progress and successful project development. In conjunction with these benchmarks, the project leadership should conduct a “threshold review,” to determine if the benchmarks have been met successfully. If so, the project is ready to move into the next phase. If not, then work from the current phase must be refined further before moving forward. Adhering to and meeting these benchmarks minimizes backtracking and rework on a project, thereby minimizing costly budget and schedule overruns.

Figure 10.1 Sequencing of the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center Project Development Steps

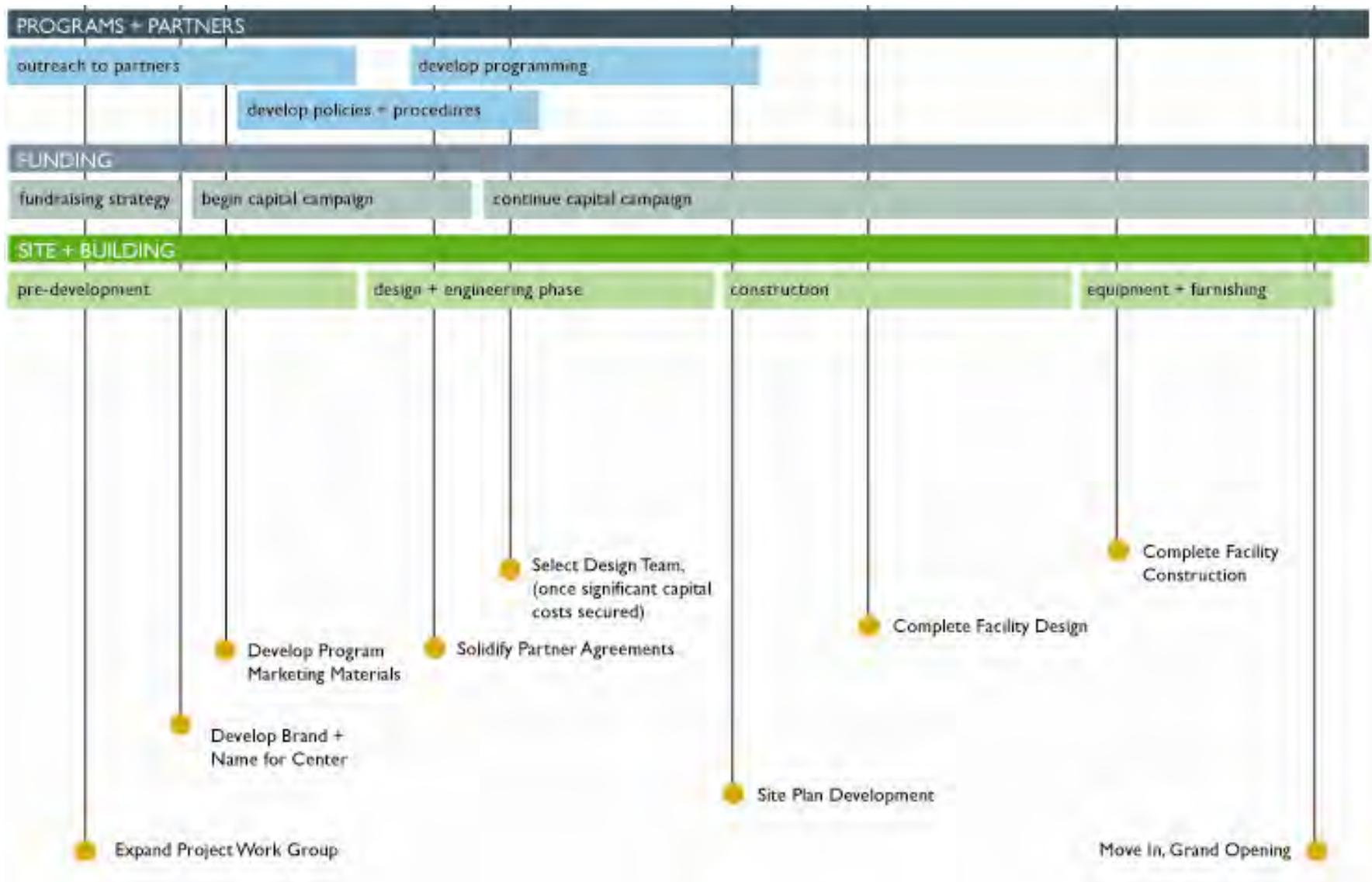


Table 10.2 Project Work Plan

Phase 1: Pre-Planning (previously conducted)	Year 1
Phase 2: Project Assessment/Preliminary Feasibility Study (this report)	Year 2
<i>Possible Benchmarks: wide-range of partners involved in process; preliminary facility concepts created; initial capital and operations budgets developed; preferred sites identified; probable markets and visitation levels evaluated; vision and goals for facility formally articulated; level of project feasibility determined</i>	
Phase 3: Project Action Plan	Year 3
Continued, focused outreach to partners.	
Set up formal project leadership; establish formal partnership agreements (e.g., memoranda of understanding).	
Identify preferred site, site access.	
Refine project programs.	
Develop and refine project branding and marketing materials; begin to use these for fundraising and gathering community support.	
Refine fundraising strategy; work with partners to begin fundraising.	
Secure planning funding (funding for full-time project manager, to hire an architect for initial design work, and locally-raised funding as evidence of resolve for other funders).	
<i>Possible Benchmarks: approved marketing materials that have buy-in from project partners; active project leadership with formal understandings in place; initial outreach to community members to educate and gather local support for the project; initial, written programming plan; agreed-upon fundraising strategy; planning funding secured; initial capital funding of approximately 50% secured from a significant source (e.g., from a bond measure or State appropriation); single, preferred site identified</i>	

Phase 4 – Site Control + Business Plan	Year 4
Hire project manager to oversee project development.	
Further evaluate preferred site; ensure site control; finalize access plans. <sup>1</sup>	
Hire design team to prepare schematic design; refine estimated costs (building, utilities and other site improvements, site amenities).	
Refine business plan to demonstrate project sustainability to funders; if necessary, refine scale and scope of project to better match realities of funding availability.	
Leveraging funding commitment from bond measure, state appropriation or other significant funding source, work with partners to continue fundraising.	
Continue community outreach to sustain interest and support.	
<i>Benchmarks: project manager overseeing project development; site control secured; final access plans; refined business plan accepted by project leadership and funders that fits with schematic design; community supporting project; additional funding secured to approximately 75%</i>	
Phase 5 – Design Development + Refine Business Plan	Year 5
Once a significant portion of total capital funding is secured, authorize the next phase of design work (design development).	
Work with partners to continue fundraising; report on project status to funders.	
Continue community outreach.	
Develop detailed operations plan, including facility management and ownership arrangement; refine business plan, program plan.	
<i>Benchmarks: 90% -level design completed and business plan updated to match current design plan; operations plan developed and approved by leadership; programming refined; capital funding secured to approximately 95-100%</i>	

<sup>1</sup> This represents the latest time by which site selection and control should occur. Ideally, a site should be selected as early in the process as possible in order to maintain project momentum and obtain financial support.

Phase 6 – Construction + Move-In	Years 6-7
Resolve best approach to construction process (e.g., design build).	
Initiate process for selecting a team to construct the facility; hire a builder.	
Once full funding is available, authorize the final phase of building design work (construction drawings).	
Work with partners to fulfill final capital fundraising; continue outreach to community.	
Initiate construction.	
Continue fundraising for interior improvements and site amenities.	
Begin hiring and training any new project staff. Begin implementing programs.	
Complete construction.	
Report to funders on project status.	
Grand opening.	
<i>Benchmarks: completed, fully-operating facility within stipulated budget and schedule; satisfied partners, funders and community</i>	

Experience with other public projects similar in scope and funding opportunities suggests the time needed to plan, fund, design and construct this project will be dominated by two interrelated variables: first, the capacity of the project sponsors to aggressively work through all the steps above, and secondly, the time needed to raise necessary funds.

Refinement of this sample Project Work Plan should include more specific dates as well as identification of “leads” on elements of the project, e.g., people or organizations responsible for carrying tasks forward.

The remainder of this chapter provides a general overview and recommendations for moving the overall project forward, discussing each of the three broad categories in the chart below: programs and partners, funding, and site and building.

## Recommendations

### Programs and Partners

The process to clarify and integrate the interests of project partners will be the key determinant of the nature of the future facility and the pace of project planning. Like the Mat-Su CVB, other project partners will need to play a substantial, active role in all the steps required to develop the facility, including refining the project program, site selection, building design, and (most importantly) fundraising.

For example, if the State of Alaska, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation becomes a major project partner, it will require working closely with the State to define all the particulars of the facility's size, location, and programs. The Mat-Su CVB must commit to this degree of collaboration so that partners have a practical incentive to invest time and effort in project planning and fundraising, knowing they eventually will be rewarded with a facility that meets their needs.

#### Recommendations:

- **Formalize Partner Relationships.**  
Achieve the required level of collaboration among partners by setting up a formal project planning committee. The governance chapter includes more information on this topic.
- **Gain Local Support.**  
Work actively to keep local communities (residents, businesses, governments, non-profits, etc.) aware of, engaged in, and supporting the project.
- **Create Organizational Structure.**  
Consider creation of an Advisory Board comprised of Mat-Su CVB Board members, partner members, and community leaders willing to promote and realize the Center.
- **Fund a Project Manager Position.**  
Consider creation of position for and recruitment of a Project Manager or Facility Director who under the direction of the Board would act to implement strategies toward securing funding for and development of this project.

### Fundraising

A separate chapter outlines specific recommendations for funding this project; general principles for successful fundraising are listed below.

#### Recommendations:

- **Maximize Partner Contributions.**  
Design the program and the building itself with an entrepreneurial mindset: emphasize building and programmatic elements that increase opportunities to raise capital funds and generate ongoing operations funds. For example, if the project includes access to wetlands and the chance to offer education information on this topic, this opens the door to partners and funding with an interest in this issue.
- **Balance Size and Cost.**  
Size the facility with the goal of finding the right balance between partner needs and cost considerations; the facility should serve partner missions, but not be so costly as to require a fundraising program that stretches beyond the level of interest of partners, Mat-Su CVB

staff, the public, and funders. At the same time, as is shown in the operations chapter, recognize that some program/building elements are important generators of operating revenue (e.g., gift shop, coffee sales, rentable space).

- **Have a Solid Operations Plan.**

Recognize that obtaining ongoing operations revenue is almost always more of a challenge than obtaining initial capital funding. Additionally, funders are extremely interested in knowing that your facility will “pencil” – i.e., be sustainable – over many years. With this in mind, invest upfront in programs and a facility that can help reduce costs and increase revenues, and have a realistic budget showing these costs and income. Understand, too, that factors such as an upfront investment in energy conservation can save money for the full life of the project (and also provide another line on capital funding sources).

- **Secure a Local Match.**

Most private and public funding sources require a local contribution as a condition for their support. Typical local matches are at least ten percent of project costs. As a rule, projects offering a higher local match are much more likely to receive funding. It pays to be creative in arranging for local cash and in-kind contributions. Even if these produce a small amount of the overall cost, they are very important to funders trying to gauge local commitment. Some options include:

- Donated land (e.g., from City, State, a land trust, a private individual )
- In-kind services for design and program
- Community donations and local fundraisers (e.g., a benefit social event organized by the Mat-Su CVB)
- Individual contributions (e.g., sell bricks or plaques on the wall)
- Donations from Native Corporations
- City bond measure

- **Secure State and Federal Appropriations.**

Public funding through the State Legislature and or Congress remains a very important strategy for funding in Alaska. This might be done either through a special appropriation or through the agency partner. Strong support in the Governor’s office is extremely helpful in getting support in Washington, D.C.

- **Work Closely with Alaska Native Organizations.**

Native organization involvement and leadership not only broadens the attractiveness and cultural value of the Visitor Center, but can also open up a range of funding options.

- **Start Fundraising Now.**

Early funding (to initiate and keep the project moving) will require initial funds for project management and design, as well as a local match for capital fundraising. Project sponsors should aim to secure \$300,000-400,000 as quickly as possible.

## **Site and Building**

Good progress has been made over recent months to refine a project concept and an initial program. As noted above, work is now needed to refine all the assumptions that will ultimately go

into a successful design. General principles for the site and building design process are outlined below:

- **Identify a Single, Preferred Site and Obtain Site Control.**

Building design cannot proceed beyond a concept level without greater certainty about the project site. Consequently, it is critical to push ahead and reserve a site as quickly as possible. It is essential to work with partners during this process.

- **Follow an Iterative Design/Build Process.**

Building design can be phased to respond to funding levels and deepening knowledge of site characteristics, access and partner needs. General building design steps are outlined below, along with a general estimate of time required for each step:

- Initial space program/concept design and community review: four months (much of this has already been completed as part of this report)
- Schematics (general layout): three months
- Design development: three months
- Construction documents: three months
- Bidding and negotiation: one to five months (the process can be slow if Federal funding is involved, e.g., EDA money)
- Construction and occupation: one to two years (this estimate includes site preparation, utilities and building construction)

- **Remember that Programs and People – not Buildings – are the Key to Success.**

Ultimately, success comes from people: what goes on inside the building, not the building itself. That said, a well-sited, thoughtfully-designed facility can inspire travelers as well as the community seeking to attract and serve them.

## APPENDIX A: SOURCES

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## APPENDIX B: STAKEHOLDERS + CONTACTS

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The following names are the Mat-Su CVB Board members and Project Work Group members who participated in this preliminary feasibility study.

Tony Kavalok	Alaska Department of Fish & Game	tony.kavalok@alaska.gov	746-6325
Joe Meehan	Alaska Department of Fish & Game	joe.meehan@alaska.gov	267-2281
Clair Holland-LeClair	Alaska State Parks	claire.leclair@alaska.gov	269-8696
Bill Kiger	Alaska State Parks	bill.kiger@alaska.gov	269-8747
Kris Abshire	Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats	kabshire@palmerhayflats.org	373-7484
Susie Kiger	Alaska Railroad	kigers@akrr.com	
Steve Halloran	Anchorage Convention & Visitors Bureau	shalloran@anchorage.net	
Kevin Keeler	Bureau of Land Management, Iditarod	kevin_keeler@blm.gov	267-1201
Dave Pfeifer	Cook Inlet Region Incorporated	dave.pfeifer@gci.net	263-5110
Miriam Valentine	National Park Service, Talkeenta Ranger Station	miriam_valentine@nps.gov	733-2231
Dorothy Cook	Native Village of Eklutna	president@eklutna-nsn.gov	688-6020
Jennifer Harrison	Chickaloon Village Traditional Council	jenni@chickaloon.org	745-0709
Debbie Call	Alaska Native Heritage Center, Knikatnu - Knik Tribal Council	dcall@alaskanative.net, dcall@kniktribe.org	330-8016, 373-7991
Dave Hanson	Mat-Su Borough Economic Development Department	dave.hanson@matsugov.us	745-9519
Linda Brenner	Mat-Su Borough Community Development Department	linda.brenner@matsugov.us	745-9634
Bonnie Quill	Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau	bonnie@alaskavisit.com	746-5001
Cheryl Metiva	Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau, Greater Wasilla Chamber of Commerce	cmm@gci.net	631-2662
Jason Votruba	Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau, Deshka Landing Outdoor Association	dloamanager@hotmail.com	495-3374
Nicole Bendle	Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau, First National Bank Alaska	nbendle@fnbalaska.com	352-5900
Wes Tegeler	Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau, Wesley Tegeler & Associates, CPA	wes@tegelercpa.com	376-4925
Karen Harris	Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau, Alaska Garden Gate Bed & Breakfast	info@gardengatebnb.com	746-2333

Marty Metiva	Mat-Su Resource Conservation and Development, Inc.	matsurcd@mtaonline.net	373-1062
Patricia Wade	Chickaloon Village Traditional Council	patricia@chickaloon.org	
Randi Perlman	Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats	rperlman@palmerhayflats.org	892-0898
Marion Elliott	Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats	melliott@palmerhayflats.org	
Bruce Carr	Alaska Railroad	carrb@akrr.com	265-2468
Steve Zadra	Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau, Princess Tours	szandra@princesstours.com	830-6052
Dee Dee Kay	Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau, Alaska Heritage Tours	dkay@ciri.com	727-4018
Wayne Biessel	Alaska State Parks	wayne.biessel@alaska.gov	745-8935
Rich Farber	Knik Tribe	rfarber@kniktribe.org	373-7991
Dan McDonough	Convention and Visitors Bureau, Alaska Lifetime Adventures	info@lifetimeadventures.net	746-4644
Melissa Saunders	Alaska Native Heritage Center	msaunders@alaskanative.net	330-8035

# APPENDIX C: FUNDING SOURCES

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An array of potential funding sources are available to help support the Mat-Su Visitor Center project including primarily federal, state, and borough appropriations along with various private and public funding sources to support both 1) capital development costs; and 2) programming (e.g. educational displays).

## Local, State, and Federal Government Offices

### Matanuska Susitna Borough Assembly

(907) 745-4801 or online at <http://www.matsugov.us/>

### State House and State Senate Representatives

State appropriations requests are submitted online via the CAPSIS, the Alaska Legislature's Capital Budget Submission and Information System:

<http://www.legfin.state.ak.us/ProjectBackup/enterCapitalProjects.php>

Contact your state representatives to create an account in order to submit a capital request:

#### Mat-Su Valley State Representatives

Senate-G	Linda Menard (R)-Matanuska-Susitna: Sen.Linda.Menard@legis.state.ak.us 877-465-6601	Carl Gatto(R)-Palmer: Rep_Carl_Gatto@legis.state.ak.us 800-565-3743	House-13
		Wes Keller (R)-Wasilla: Rep_Wes_Keller@legis.state.ak.us 800-468-2186	House-14
Senate-H	Charlie Huggins (R)-Wasilla: Sen.Charlie.Huggins@legis.state.ak.us 800-862-3878	Mark Neuman (R)-Wasilla: Representative_Mark_Neuman@legis.state.ak.us 800-505-2678	House-15
		Bill Stoltze(R)-Chugiak/Matsu: Representative_Bill_Stoltze@legis.state.ak.us 866-465-4958	House-16

## **Federal Delegation**

Federal earmarks are requested by submitting an electronic or paper “Appropriations Request Form” to your Senate representative. The form may be downloaded from your representatives websites:

- Senator Lisa Murkowski: 202-224-6665 or [appropriations@murkowski.senate.gov](mailto:appropriations@murkowski.senate.gov); online at [www.murkowski.senate.gov](http://www.murkowski.senate.gov)
- Senator Mark Begich: 202-224-3004 or [appropriations@begich.senate.gov](mailto:appropriations@begich.senate.gov); online at [www.begich.senate.gov](http://www.begich.senate.gov)

## **Primary: Capital Funding**

### **The Kresge Foundation**

**Contact:** Sandra Harrison at [SMHarrison@Kresge.org](mailto:SMHarrison@Kresge.org)

**Eligibility:** Nonprofit organizations

**Award Information:** Not specified

**Description:** Kresge’s giving program is in particular focused on “Bricks and Mortar” - A grant program to build facilities and to challenge private giving. Eligible requests include:

- Construction of facilities
- Renovation of facilities
- Purchase of major equipment or an integrated system at a cost of at least \$300,000
- Equipment costs may include computer software expenses, if applicable.
- Purchase of real estate

<http://www.kresge.org>

### **M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust: Letters of Inquiry for General Grants**

**Contact:** (360) 694-8415

**Eligibility:** Eligible applicants include 501(c)(3) tax exempt organizations. Priority is given to applications for the support of projects within the five states of the Pacific Northwest: Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington.

**Award Information:** Common award amounts range from \$50,000 to \$500,000

**Description:** The M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust offers general grants in the areas of Education, Health & Human Services, and Arts & Culture. There are no deadlines for submissions of letters of inquiry to the Trust. The letter of interest, no longer than two pages, should include information about your organization, the type of project you would like the Trust to support, and a proposed budget for the project.

<http://www.murdock-trust.org/grants/general-grants.php>

## **The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation**

**Contact:** (206) 342-2030 or [info@pgafamilyfoundation.org](mailto:info@pgafamilyfoundation.org)

**Eligibility:** Nonprofit organizations, governments or government agencies, and federally recognized tribes

**Award Information:** Varies by program

**Description:** The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation supports nonprofits working to strengthen communities in the Pacific Northwest. Giving programs include:

- Arts and Culture
- Asset Building
- Education and Youth Engagement
- Emergency Relief
- Library
- Science and Technology Innovations

<http://www.pgafamilyfoundation.org/default.aspx>

## **U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA)**

**Contact:** See specific RFPs for contact information

**Eligibility:** Varied. Generally nonprofit organizations, federally recognized tribes, states or political subdivisions, and institutions of higher education

**Award Information:** Varied by program

**Description:** The EDA offers multiple investment programs including: Public Works and Economic Development, Economic Adjustment Assistance, Research and National Technical Assistance, Local Technical Assistance, Planning Program, University Center Economic Development, and Trade Adjustment Assistance for Firms. Funding opportunities are listed on the EDA's website:

<http://www.eda.gov/InvestmentsGrants/FFON.xml>

## **USDA: Community Facilities Loan and Grant Program**

**Contact:** USDA Alaska Office at (907) 761-7700

**Eligibility:** Towns of up to 20,000 in population are eligible to apply. Eligible applicants include public entities, nonprofit corporations, and tribal governments.

**Award Information:** Varies.

**Description:** Community Programs administers programs designed to develop essential community facilities for public use in rural areas. These facilities include schools, libraries, childcare, hospitals, medical clinics, assisted living facilities, fire and rescue stations, police stations, community centers, public buildings and transportation. Through its Community Programs, the Department of Agriculture is striving to ensure that such facilities are readily

available to all rural communities. Community Programs utilizes three flexible financial tools to achieve this goal:

- Community Facilities Guaranteed Loan Program
- Community Facilities Direct Loan Program
- Community Facilities Grant Program.

<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rhs/cf/cp.htm>

### **Community Development Block Grant Program for Municipalities**

**Contact:** Jill Davis, Block Grants Program Manager at (907) 451-2717 or [Jill.Davis@alaska.gov](mailto:Jill.Davis@alaska.gov)

**Eligibility:** Municipal governments, excluding Anchorage and Fairbanks

**Award Information:** CDBG competitive grants are single-purpose project grants; maximum of \$850,000 per community. There are three basic funding categories: community development, planning and Special Economic Development.

**Description:** The goals of the Alaska Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG) are to provide financial resources to Alaskan communities for public facilities and planning activities which address issues detrimental to the health and safety of local residents and to reduce the costs of essential community services. The program may also fund Special Economic Development activities which result in the creation of jobs for low and moderate income persons.

<http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/dca/grt/blockgrants.htm>

### **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development: Community Development Block Grant Program for Indian Tribes and Alaska Native Villages (ICDBG) Alaska**

**Contact:** Office of Native American Programs (907) 677-9836

**Eligibility:** Indian tribes or tribal organizations on behalf of Indian tribes

**Award Information:** For Alaska, award ceiling is \$600,000; total of approx. \$6.5 million

**Description:** The purpose of the ICDBG program is the development of viable Indian and Alaska Native communities, including the creation of decent housing, suitable living environments, and economic opportunities primarily for persons with low- and moderate-incomes. Two types of funding are available:

1. Single Purpose Grants: To principally benefit low- and moderate-income persons. Not less than 70 percent of the expenditures of each Single Purpose grant shall be used for:
  - a. Area Benefit Activities
  - b. Limited Clientele Activities
  - c. Housing Activities
  - d. Job Creation or Retention Activities

ICDBG funds may be used to improve housing stock, provide community facilities, improve infrastructure, and expand job opportunities by supporting the economic development of the communities, especially by nonprofit tribal organizations or local development corporations.

2. **Imminent Threat Grants:** ICDBG Imminent Threat (IT) grants are intended to alleviate or remove threats to health or safety that require an immediate solution. The problem to be addressed must be such that an emergency situation exists or would exist if the problem were not addressed.

<http://www.hud.gov/offices/adm/grants/nofa09/icdbgsec.pdf>

### **Rasmuson Foundation Tier II Grants**

**Contact:** Jeff Clarke, Chief Administrative Officer

**Eligibility:** Nonprofit organizations, and also faith-based groups and governmental units depending on the use of funds

**Award Information:** Awards of over \$25,000 for capital projects

**Description:** Tier 2 applications are for strategic projects and the expansion or start-up of innovative programs by established organizations. The Rasmuson Foundation is a catalyst to promote a better life for Alaskans. It focuses on organizations that demonstrate strong leadership, clarity of purpose, and cautious use of resources.

<http://www.rasmuson.org/index.php?switch=viewpage&pageid=33>

### **Secondary: Programming Funding**

#### **The Atwood Foundation**

**Contact:** Robert Reeves, President, at (907) 274-4900 or email [atwoodfoundation@gci.net](mailto:atwoodfoundation@gci.net)

**Eligibility:** Nonprofit organizations

**Award Information:** Awards have ranged between \$1,000 and \$200,000

**Description:** The Atwood Foundation only gives grants to nonprofit organizations based in the Anchorage Borough who specialize in arts and education.

<http://www.atwoodfoundation.org/index.html>

#### **Chugiak Eagle River Foundation**

**Contact:** Call (907)694-4702 or email [info@cerfoundation.org](mailto:info@cerfoundation.org)

**Eligibility:** Nonprofit organizations that have as their primary purpose, at least one of the following purposes: charitable, educational, eleemosynary, civic, patriotic, social, literary, cultural, athletic, scientific or trade association.

**Award Information:** Not specified

**Description:** The Chugiak-Eagle River Foundation, a non-profit organization, is dedicated to improving the quality of life and to address emerging needs in the community of Chugiak/Eagle River, Alaska by providing grants and scholarships from a permanent endowment. The purposes of the Foundation are to make lasting improvements to our community and its residents; to foster the tradition of neighbors helping neighbors; and to promote a healthy and productive community. Activities include provide grants to the Chugiak-Eagle River community organizations, and educational scholarships.

<http://www.cerfoundation.org/index.html>

### **U.S. Department of Commerce: Environmental Literacy Grants for Informal/Nonformal Science Education**

**Contact:** Rosalie Vega at (301) 713-0922 or [rosalie.vega@noaa.gov](mailto:rosalie.vega@noaa.gov)

**Eligibility:** Institutions of higher education, other nonprofits, and state, local and Indian tribal governments in the United States

**Award Information:** Ten awards will total \$7.5 million

**Description:** The goal of this funding opportunity is to support projects that engage the public in educational activities that utilize emerging and/or advanced technologies and leverage NOAA assets to improve understanding, and stewardship of the local and global environment. There is specific interest in projects that use emerging and/or advanced technologies to (1) facilitate outdoor experiences involving scientific inquiry and exploration of the natural world apart from formal K-12 curricula and (2) visualize, display, and interpret data to improve understanding and provide a systems perspective of Earth's dynamic processes. This program has two priorities. Priority 1 is for large-scale projects that occur over a longer duration with regional to national implementation. Priority 2 is for small-scale projects that occur over a shorter duration with local to regional implementation. Funded projects will be between one and five years in duration.

<http://www07.grants.gov/search/search.do;jsessionid=KN62LvZBT14HvNb1z62nrRLXzv32sv5cvPIMSGnvX6H143nY4pys!-1179711943?oppId=51333&mode=VIEW>

### **Administration for Native Americans Grants**

**Contact:** Email questions to: [app\\_support@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:app_support@acf.hhs.gov)

**Eligibility:** Consortia of Indian tribes; incorporated non-Federally recognized tribes; urban Indian centers; Alaska Native villages; and tribally-controlled institutions of higher education  
**Award Information:** 15 awards totaling \$2.1 million

**Description:** ANA provides competitive financial assistance to eligible Tribes and Native American non-profit organizations in support of locally determined and designed projects that address community needs and goals. Program Areas include:

**Social and Economic Development Strategies (SEDS) for Native Americans:** ANA provides project funding to eligible applicants for the purpose of assisting Native communities to achieve the goal of economic and social self-sufficiency.

**Economic Development Projects:** Involves the promotion of the physical, commercial, technological, industrial, and/or agricultural components necessary for a sustainable local

community. Applicants are encouraged to develop sustainable projects to support stable and diversified private sector local economies.

**Social Development Projects:** Involves investment in human and social capital for advancing peoples' well-being. Applicants are encouraged to develop and implement culturally appropriate projects to enhance Tribal, community, and village activities. Social development projects under this area support elders, positive youth development, and individuals with disabilities.

**Governance Projects:** Involves assistance to federally-recognized Tribal and Alaska Native village governments to increase their ability to exercise local control and decision-making over governance activities.

**Native Language Preservation and Maintenance:** ANA provides project funding to eligible applicants for the purpose of assisting Native Americans to assure the survival and continuing vitality of their languages.

**Environmental Regulatory Enhancement:** ANA provides project funding to eligible applicants to strengthen Tribal Governments by building capacity to identify, plan and develop environmental programs consistent with Native culture. ANA funds projects that address the responsibility of Tribes and Alaska Native villages to formulate environmental ordinances, implement laws, and train community members in the use and control of their natural resources.

[http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ana/programs/program\\_information.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ana/programs/program_information.html)

### **Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR): Recreational Trails Grant Program**

**Contact:** Samantha Carroll, Trails Coordinator at (907) 269-8699

**Eligibility:** Municipalities, public agencies, Native organizations and nonprofits are eligible to apply

**Award Information:** The program offers 80/20 federal matching funds. Applicants are allowed to request up to a maximum of \$50,000 per application

**Description:** The Recreational Trails Grant Program is available for trail development and maintenance, easement acquisition, environmental protection or safety education relating to trail use.

<http://www.alaskatrails.org>

### **Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR): Outdoor Recreation Land and Water Conservation Fund Grants**

**Contact:** Kristy Gray at (907) 269-8694 or [kristy\\_gray@dnr.state.ak.us](mailto:kristy_gray@dnr.state.ak.us)

**Eligibility:** For acquisition and development money, the State, Cities, and Federally recognized Indian Tribes that have state designation as sub-state jurisdictions are eligible

**Award Information:** 50% State or political subdivision match is required

**Description:** Provides financial assistance to state and political subdivisions for the preparation of statewide recreation plans and acquisition and development of outdoor recreation areas and facilities. This federal grant program was established through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act in 1965 to provide a nationwide legacy of accessibility for all to high-quality outdoor recreation. Projects such as downhill ski areas, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant trails, neighborhood parks, rifle ranges and sports fields have been funded in Alaska through LWCF. The funding provided by LWCF can make the difference between build/no build for important outdoor recreation opportunities. These projects benefit the people of Alaska by providing both facility development and open space. Each development project provides short-term jobs for planning, construction and management during the construction phase as well as continued long-term positive economic impact from ongoing utilization of the park site. This grant is a 50/50 match program. Local governments provide their share of match, and the state provides match through existing CIP grants for deferred maintenance.

<http://www.dnr.state.ak.us/parks/index.htm>

### **Alaska Scenic Byways Program**

**Contact:** Aneta Synan, Scenic Byways Coordinator

**Eligibility:** Nonprofits, state and local government agencies, or political subdivisions may apply for projects along officially designated state and national byways

**Award Information:** Once a route is officially designated an Alaska Scenic Byway, it is eligible for National Scenic Byway funds to prepare and implement a corridor management plan, a local match of 20% is required for all grant projects

**Description:** Scenic Byway Grants can be used for developing corridor management plans, safety improvements, byway facilities that interpret or enhance the intrinsic qualities of the scenic byway. Applications are accepted on an annual basis.

[www.byways.org](http://www.byways.org)

# APPENDIX D: MEETING NOTES

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## **MAT-SU VALLEY SOUTH GATEWAY VISITOR CENTER Project Work Group Meeting #1 Meeting Notes October 29, 2009**

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Seventeen people attended the meeting. The meeting was facilitated by Ellen Campfield Nelson and Chris Beck of Agnew::Beck Consulting, LLC, as part of the Mat-Su Valley South Gateway Visitor Center Project.

Attendees included: Marty Metiva (Mat-Su RC&D), Cheryl Metiva (Mat-SU CVB), Bonnie Quill (Mat-Su CVB), Miriam Valentine (National Park Service), Marian Elliott (Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats), Wesley Tegeler (Mat-Su CVB), Joe Meehan (AK Dept. Fish & Game), CWE, Jason Votruba (Mat-Su CVB), Karen Harris (Mat-Su CVB), Dave Hanson (Mat-Su Borough), Linda Brenner (Mat-Su Borough), Nicole Bendle (Mat-Su CVB), Patricia Wade (Chickaloon Village Traditional Council), Gary Wolf (Architect), Chris Wittington-Evans (Architect), and Steve Rowland (Engineer), Randi Perlman (Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats).

Groups invited to the Work Group meetings include: Alaska Department of Fish & Game, Alaska State Parks, Alaska Railroad, Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats, Anchorage Convention and Visitors Bureau, Chickaloon Village Traditional Council, Cook Inlet Region Incorporated, Eklutna Corporation, Knikatu, Knik Tribal Council, Mat-Su Borough Economic Development Department, Mat-Su Borough Land & Resource Management Department, Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau, Mat-Su Resource Conservation and Development, Inc., Native Village of Eklutna, US Bureau of Land Management, US National Park Service.

### **Visioning**

- What is a “Mat-Su?”
- Longer stays – stay, play, spend, pay
- Original inhabitants and their rich history – a “living brochure”
- Showcase scenic beauty, not urban – an “appetizer”, a motivator to stay and spend
- Fish
- Wildlife
- More than/before Denali – Denali plus
- National heritage area (application)
- Educate people what we have to offer, strong visuals
- Co-op effort
- Community needs
  - Coffee?
- Open all year?
- Alaskan and out of state travelers

- Primary MSB info center
- Jumping off/in point for (on site and in the borough):
  - Hiking
  - Fishing
  - Birding and wildlife viewing
  - Iditarod race
  - Hatcher Pass
  - Indigenous peoples and heritage – place names, interpretive
  - Diverse array of things to do
  - Attraction for Anchorage residents and outside visitors
  - Destination attraction
- Sustainable
- Creates great pride
- Public restrooms year-round
- Meeting room/gathering place
- Flexible, multi-use space – more partners
- Economic driver – what else in the Mat-Su Valley is there to do?
- A gateway and a destination
- Area to show films
- Open reception, lobby
- Education stewardship
- Local buy in
- Programs for locals
- Strong partnerships
- Interpretation and education
  - Visitor opportunities
  - Natural history
  - Culture/People history
- Pride stewardship
- Strong, positive first impression
- Let people know what's available
- Office space for MSCVB?

### **Programming**

What activities in the building? What activities on the site?

- Ways/places to showcase my business

- “Beyond rack cards”: Kiosks, podcasts, wi-fi, Internet, interactive DVD
- Daily interpretive programs (fishing, crafts, etc.)
- Trained receptionist/interpreters
- Space for programs (flexible)
- Space for display – videos, Internet access display screens, next generation info (wi-fi)
- Information desk to “guide” – kids, volunteers
  - Services
  - Public resources
- What about:
  - Gathering
  - Education
  - Offices
  - Food
  - Movies
  - Guided interpretive walk
  - Educational demonstrations (crafts)
  - Intro to Denali National Park
- A way to create identity
- Trail with interpretive information
- Question: How does function of South Gateway Center mesh with planned Natural Science Education Center?
  - Options:
    - Separate/cooperative compatible?
    - Combined?
    - Separate duplicative
    - School programs
    - Gathering
    - Close to prep centers
- Activities
  - Hatchery
  - Trails (walking, cross country skiing, biking)
  - Wildlife viewing
  - Activities for whole year
  - Outdoor programs
  - Birds
- Access to technology

- Friendly, access to knowledgeable people
- Who is it for:
  - Travelers passing through (in-state and out-of-state)
  - Independent travelers with more flexibility about time and destination
  - Package travel (“I’m impressed and I’m coming back”)
  - Alaskan youth and adults coming for education, workshops
  - Travelers coming to the facility as destination (for a day, an afternoon)
- Site selections:
  - Bus turn-around accessibility
  - Easy in and out
  - Scenic – glaciers, mountains, Knik glacier, “wowed from the moment you walk in” (e.g., Mt. St. Helens)
  - Create memories
  - Lively? Quiet? (sounds recorded in the Morris Thompson Center)
  - Option for solitude
  - Visible from highway
  - Place to take photos
  - Natural feel and theme
  - Use building, berms and trails to reach/create quiet, solitude
  - Quiet interior room with natural sounds (for winter, for handicapped)
  - Ways to use signage to provide visibility

### **Look & Feel, Character of Structure**

- Use of logs
  - log cabin
  - more modern but use logs
  - Reference AK history
  - Spruce bark beetle logs
  - Use Alaskan woods: Birch, Spruce, Cottonwood, etc.
- Traditional – Palmer Pioneers
- Big windows, not a box, very modern
- More costly to have openings and/or more complex forms
- Live or green roof
- Working garden on roof
- Not: 80’s ponderosa logs or Seattle feel

- One big “campus” – like to wander, don’t want to miss things
- 4 earth elements: stream, nature in the wind
- Tidal to alpine – unique
- Incorporate recycling, recycled materials
- Building to fit with the site
- Option for expansion
- “Wow!”
- Staff on-site – 6 coaches, 300-400 people at a time
- Size – respond to realities of volume of visitors and population in South Central AK

## **Next Steps**

1. Partner meetings (one on one)
  - Friends (Palmer Hay Flats Board)
  - National Park Service
  - Fish & Game
  - Alaska State Parks
  - CIRI
  - Tribes
2. Site Evaluation (“regional approach”)
  - Map and matrix
3. Name
4. Market analysis
5. Comparable facilities
6. Schedule and structure next meeting (week of January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2010)
  - Options – schematic drawings, square footage
  - Spreadsheet with costs, revenues
  - Site
7. Notes from October 29, 2009 meeting
8. Public face of project
  - Website
  - MSCVB newsletter



**MAT-SU VALLEY SOUTH GATEWAY VISITOR CENTER**  
**Project Work Group Meeting #2**  
**Meeting Notes**  
**February 16, 2010, 1-3pm**

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## Part I

### In Attendance:

- Randi Perlman, *Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats*
- Karen Harris, *Mat-Su CVB + Alaska Garden Gate Bed & Breakfast*
- Steve Zadra, *Mat-Su CVB + Princess Tours*
- Debra Call, *Alaska Native Heritage Center, Knik Tribe*
- Melissa Saunders, *Alaska Native Heritage Center*
- Jason Votruba, *Mat-Su CVB + Desbka Landing Outdoor Association*
- Dan McDonough, *Mat-Su CVB + Lifetime Adventures*
- Nicole Bendle, *Mat-Su CVB + First National Bank Alaska*
- Bruce Carr, *Alaska Railroad*
- Cheryl Metiva, *Mat-Su CVB + Greater Wasilla Chamber of Commerce*
- Linda Brenner, *Mat-Su Borough*
- Bonnie Quill, *Mat-Su CVB*
- Chris Beck, *Agnew::Beck Consulting*
- Ellen Campfield Nelson, *Agnew::Beck Consulting*
- Heather Stewart, *Agnew::Beck Consulting*
- Gary Wolf, *Wolf Architecture*
- Chris Whittington-Evans, *Wolf Architecture*

### Introduction

- This phase of the process is to create a kind of decision-making machine to help this group sort out the many inter-related variables that will affect what the facility will eventually be:
  - Program
  - Construction cost
  - Operations cost / revenues
  - Site design
  - Market / partners
  - Site

### Vision and Goals

- Suggested change to goals as listed: Encourage **visitors** *and* **residents** to be environmentally responsible.
- Summary vision: provide an experience, a reason to stop
- How:
  - convenience
  - parking
  - gathering place

- flexible
- destination
- Why:
  - pride
  - economic health
  - stewardship
  - benefit locals
  - benefit businesses
- How to define success?
  - New reasons to visit, to stay (jobs and business opportunities)
  - Benefits diverse partners (broad support)
  - Creates pride and sense of stewardship (branding/image)
  - Helps stitch together partner missions (partnerships)

## **Market**

- “A reason to stop”
  - The Mat-Su CVB’s existing facility is not attracting people as much as it could be
  - Make it more than just a place with map and card racks; provide an experience
  - the Mat-Su gateway area is too close to Anchorage to be a bathroom break
  - AKRR stops are driven by customer demand – they need a reason to stop.
  - has to be something that can be advertised on the Internet,
  - a package that people can sell from the Lower 48
  - Some kind of adventure
  - Denali is a big draw
  - Build it and they will come – South Denali is a good reason to stop, once you stop, find out about the rest of the Mat-Su
  - Food and restrooms are also reasons people will stop
  - Cultural tourism has grown (e.g., Dena’ina, Ahtna)
  - People want to stop; they already are stopping at the Palmer visitor center, had about 30,000 a year
  - Give residents and people visiting friends and relatives (VFRs) a reason to stop as well and make it easy to stop
- Need to be part of the larger MSB plan for the future. What is that plan?
  - How does the MSB plan link tourism, economic development, and its overall comprehensive plan?

- A key challenge is to define the Mat-Su – the community is growing, so what is our identity? Who are we?
- This is who we are and what we are proud of sharing
- So much potential, but the MSB is scattered
- Generate pride for the Borough and improve MSB reputation in Anchorage
- Out of state visitors don't recognize the Mat-Su as a recreational area on par with Lake Iliamna or Kenai
  - competing with Kenai, Denali: Kenai has a focus, the MSB doesn't
  - They think of Alaska as a state, not regionally, with fishing everywhere
  - They know Alaska embraces its Native heritage better than the Lower 48
  - History of the area is good to emphasize (cultural, Dena'ina, Ahtna, farmers)
  - Independence Mine, Hatcher Pass, Iditarod
- How are we/MSB caring for natural resources? Promote Mat-Su Valley overall as a recreation destination?
  - Sportfishing: are we impacting habitat by not managing recreation better? (Jim Creek)
- Market trends:
  - Ridership on the Alaska Railroad dropped 10% in 2009; AKRR expects that it will go down another 10% in 2010.
  - But, need to plan for tourism growth 5, 10, 20 years from now

### **Facility Program + Space**

- Acreage:
  - Small facility will need about 6 acres
  - Large facility will need about 12-15 acres
  - Includes land for interpretive trail/outdoor programming
- Amount of per-hour usage?
  - Used per-day and being able to handle the pulses
  - Average high points per season, per day
  - More restrooms in the Medium and Large facilities
- The facility itself should be part of the destination
  - If programming grows beyond the information desk into a real destination, you might not want to call it a "visitor" center – that name is too limiting.
  - Seasonal is important to consider – is it year round?
  - Borough lacks meeting and event space
  - Could offset Anchorage-based demand for function facilities
  - Events – can we afford to staff event coordination?
- AKRR experience: depot at airport

- Had it open year-round for weddings, banquets, etc.
- Brought in revenue, but required a staff person to manage bookings
- Staff position that coordinated that was cut; facility is now closed in winter
- Bill Sheppard would be the person to talk to about that.
- Can it be multiple stories or are we thinking ground floor only?
  - Can be multiple stories – will depend on site, programming needs, etc.
- The building itself should express the goals of fostering stewardship and be innovative
  - Somehow, a “sustainable” building
  - Create an impression to almost complete/compliment the scenery
  - We can’t compete with the Federal government; they can spend more money than this group can
- Visibility of the building is important
  - Make sure it doesn’t get visually lost
  - Great view
  - If we site it on a hill and include a wind generator, we could also get access to energy-related funding
- Small-scale seems too small.
  - It’s easier to build bigger up front (harder to get more money for additions later on)
  - Operational expenses in winter are going to be tough, so we’ll need year-round programming, which is easier with a larger-sized building (with auditorium, etc.)
  - The larger facility has more tenants, which also helps even out revenues



**MAT-SU VALLEY SOUTH GATEWAY VISITOR CENTER**  
**Project Work Group Meeting #2**  
**Meeting Notes**  
**February 17, 2010, 10am-12pm**

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**Part 2**

**In Attendance:**

- Richard Farber, *Knik Tribe*
- Kris Abshire, *Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats*
- Randi Perlman, *Alaskans for Palmer Hay Flats*
- Dee Dee Kay, *Mat-Su CVB + Alaska Heritage Tours*
- Karen Harris, *Mat-Su CVB + Alaska Garden Gate Bed & Breakfast*
- Jason Votruba, *Mat-Su CVB + Desbka Landing Outdoor Association*
- Steve Zadra, *Mat-Su CVB + Princess Tours*
- Dan McDonough, *Mat-Su CVB + Lifetime Adventures*
- Cheryl Metiva, *Mat-Su CVB + Greater Wasilla Chamber of Commerce*
- Bruce Carr, *Alaska Railroad*
- Linda Brenner, *Mat-Su Borough*
- Wayne Biessel, *Alaska State Parks*
- Bonnie Quill, *Mat-Su CVB*
- Chris Beck, *Agnew::Beck Consulting*
- Ellen Campfield Nelson, *Agnew::Beck Consulting*
- Heather Stewart, *Agnew::Beck Consulting*
- Gary Wolf, *Wolf Architecture*
- Chris Whittington-Evans, *Wolf Architecture*

**Facility Finances: What Will It Cost?**

- The numbers give a framework and reinforce the idea that bigger (or medium) is better, more opportunities for revenue and generating uses, although it requires more fundraising
- Davis Bacon (labor): 30-35% of project costs
- LEED: 10-20% of project costs; of that
  - 50% = materials
  - 50% = certification

Table – Portion of S.F. cost due to D.-B. wage

	Cap Op	Size
Small	\$4.8m	8,697 sf
Medium	\$9.2m	12,791 sf
Large	\$14m	21,107 sf

**Program, Site Design, and Site Selection: Tying the Facility to the Place**

Critical factors for site selection:

- Visibility of the center from the Parks and Glenn Highways is critical
- Need decent signage – work with DOT, no matter where it is
- Access is important
  - Many visitors will be coming in and out off the highway, possibly driving a motorhome; it will need easy-in and out turn lanes
  - need access from the Parks Hwy (80% of tourist traffic goes up the Parks, not the Glenn)
  - Multimodal (cars, trains, bicycles)
  - D.O.T Relationship – signage, access – turnoffs
- Mat-Su CVB mission: primarily to attract/serve independent traveler?
  - Need to give all visitors a reason to stop, things to do
- RR access; RR is something like a cruise ship, will dock at places where there’s something to do
  - Trying to develop a commuter rail system
  - Don’t discount Jacobsen Lake: residents know it, visitors will find it, it’s on the RR commuter plan (can get people in and out from Anchorage/ANC airport)
  - Southern sites look too difficult
  - DMU – Diesel Multiple Unit (small car, would be used for commuter rail)
- like Seward, there need to be multiple reasons for people to visit
- Complimentary programming with the hay flats education center
- Site selection is the pillar everything else rests upon:
  - The gateway area is the southern sites; if we go too far north, we lose that gateway association
- Market it right
- Economic Development Priority
- Activity is essential
- Cultural Interpretation Site
- Integrate history – tribal, gold rush, farming, etc.

### Potential Sites

- Another site for consideration: Jacobsen Lake (up Parks Highway past Church Road)
  - For sale
  - Lake, trails, views
  - RR depot
  - interchange
- B sites (Kepler-Bradley/Matanuska Lakes/Parks-Glenn split)
  - B sites: will work if visible; summer market visitors need correct signage, but will take the extra time to get to the classic Alaska experience, snowmachiners take that route in winter
  - B1 is extremely visible across the Flats, has spectacular setting/views, because we see tour buses all over; not being on Parks Hwy is probably not a major thing. Work with

- DOT on ingress/egress. There is also a good relationship/experience with the Kepler Bradley park area. RR – might not be too difficult to do a spur (nothing is impossible)
- B 1 – B 2 Connection – collaboration time is now
  - The ability of the community to use the facility is important; Kepler Bradley is more attractive for community use (hike, bike, ski, equestrian) than the other areas
  - Kepler Bradley is being renamed to Matanuska Lakes
  - It is a big bicycling draw, a diamond in the rough for the Mat-Su Valley
  - Biking capital of Alaska
  - Bike path along the Highway, no bears in Mat Lakes area
  - There is an opportunity to expand the greenbelt, which would give the center a multi-destination appeal if located in the B sites
  - State Parks is trying to get funding to do capital improvements in the area, so State Parks would be very interested in a partnership; it might improve their chances of getting the funding if others are on board
  - C 2 – AK RR / DOT
    - Interchange potential
    - 1,000 home Subdivision
    - Glenn Parks Hwy is a main station (C2) for commuter rail
    - For more information on possible commuter rail service, see project fact sheet on [www.alaskarailroad.com](http://www.alaskarailroad.com) Projects, Anchorage, Commuter rail. This is only a proposal. It will be up to the Regional Transportation Authority to determine in more specificity the schedules/routes they want to operate.
    - RR will put a lot of pressure on DOT regarding access to C2
  - D-E-F sites (Knob, Reflecitons Lake, etc)
    - Knob: in MOA; might require a land trade between MSB and MOA or some other agreement, also with Eklutna. This is not off the table at this early stage in the process as far as the MSB is concerned, but it would be a challenge.
    - Grand vision – tram, zipline, F sites with view
    - F2 – multitude of archaeological sites in that area, which could be a cultural element of the center. The Palmer Hay Flats facility also has many ideas for cultural programming and Native history education
    - F sites are the “Gateway”
    - F sites are too far out

## **To-Do**

- Develop a summary vision statement (doubles as evaluation)
- Comparable facilities:
  - Polynesian cultural center on Oahu, Hawaii (cultural tourism)
  - Utah, Idaho, northern California

- April 10<sup>th</sup> Tourism Summit
- Partners:
  - National Heritage Area (ask Randi about people)
  - Parks Departments – incl. offices for Park staff (i.e., Morris Thompson, King Salmon)
  - Richard Farber
  - James King (partners: ARRC, Native)
  - Jim Amundsen, DOT Glenn Hwy Project Manager
  - Iditarod has outgrown its space; can't afford to move
  - The Alaska Railroad recently built a LEED building; Paul Farnsworth, Facilities Manager, 265-2540 is the project manager and might be able to offer advice based on that experience



## APPENDIX E: SITE EVALUATION RANKING

Mat-Su Visitor Center Summary								
Evaluation subjective judgment 1 highest, 5 lowest	Physical Capability + Cost For Development, Utilities	Accessibility + Visibility	Site Amenities	Location relative to users	Land Use Issues	TOTAL	Critical Issues	Summary Ranking
<b>North: Parks Hwy</b>								
A1 Current site	22	11	23	9	10	75	too small (2 acres); very "urban"	marginal
A2 Parks Hwy	16	12	26	9	15	78	overlooks gravel site	
<b>North: Glenn Hwy</b>								
B1 Glenn Hwy Bluff South	11	6	14	6	9	46		
B2 Glenn Hwy North	18	8	14	6	10	56		
B3 Glenn Hwy North State	14	7	13	6	14	54		
<b>Central: Hay Flats</b>								
C1 Rabbit Slough	33	17	17	11	22	100	roundabout access	not viable
C2 North Flats	33	17	20	13	20	103		
<b>South Hay Flats</b>								
D1 Reflection Lake	35	10	17	9	23	94		
E1 East of Reflection Lake	32	16	16	12	24	100	limited area; wetlands	not viable
<b>South: Old Glenn</b>								
F1 Old Glenn Hwy West	35	12	22	13	19	101		
F2 Knob Site	23	9	10	8	18	68		
F3 Old Glenn Hwy East	35	18	20	14	19	106		

Mat-Su Valley South Gateway – Site Evaluation Worksheet				AI Current Site	
Subject	Specific Criteria	Rating Y/N/U	Rating (0-5)	Critical Issue	Notes
<i>Physical capability &amp; cost for development, utilities</i>					
Parcel size	size relative to program needs		5		4 acres
Developable area	useable area for structures and parking		5		2 acres
Site development challenges	physical limitations, costs for construction		2		sloping
Geotechnical Hazards	unstable soil or slopes, flooding, seismic hazard		1		
Natural Gas	ease/cost to provide		1		
Power, communications	ease/cost to provide		1		
Wastewater	ease/cost to provide		1		city sewer
Water supply	ease/cost to provide		3		well on-site
Design compliments parcel and environment			3		not consistent with area dev.
			22		
<i>Accessibility &amp; visibility</i>					
Ease of access	distance of route from road to site		2		1/2 mi
Ease of access	difficulty of route from road to site		2		Existing frontage road
Access from railroad	Location relative to rail siding		4		2 mile to siding
Visibility	ability to draw highway travelers		3		
			11		
<i>Site Amenities</i>					
Views	mountains, open space, etc.		2		
Noise	separation from hwy noise		4		
Activity options	trails, water, etc.		5		
Micro-climate; aspect	Sunlight, wind		3		

Subject	Specific Criteria	Rating Y/N/U	Rating (0-5)	Critical Issue	Notes
Wildlife	odds of seeing birdlife, moose, salmon, etc.		5		
“Wow factor”	overall memorability; draw of site		4		
			23		
<i>Location relative to users</i>					
Visitors	contact with north bound road and rail travelers		3		On G. Parks Hwy past Glenn
Residents (e.g. for social events)	proximity to residential areas		1		
Compliments other partner projects			5		
			9		
<i>Land Use Issues</i>					
Ownership	difficulty of establishing site control		1		
Zoning, regulatory issues	challenge for development approval		1		
Politics	any special real/perceived issue		2		
Land use context	impact of setting, adjoining uses		4		
Cost	relative full site development cost		2		
			10		
Evaluation – subjective judgment; 1 highest, 5 lowest			<b>75</b>		

## Mat-Su Valley South Gateway – Site Evaluation Worksheet

A2  
Parks  
Hwy  
South

Subject	Specific Criteria	Rating Y/N/U	Rating (0-5)	Critical Issue	Notes
<i>Physical capability &amp; cost for development, utilities</i>					
Parcel size	size relative to program needs		2		8 acres
Developable area	useable area for structures and parking		2		8 acres
Site development challenges	physical limitations, costs for construction		1		none
Geotechnical Hazards	unstable soil or slopes, flooding, seismic hazard		1		
Natural Gas	ease/cost to provide		1		
Power, communications	ease/cost to provide		1		
Wastewater	ease/cost to provide		2		conv. On-site sewer
Water supply	ease/cost to provide		3		well on-site
Design compliments parcel and environment			3		not consistent with area dev.
			16		
<i>Accessibility &amp; visibility</i>					
Ease of access	distance of route from highway to site		2		1/2 mi
Ease of access	difficulty of route from highway to site		2		Existing frontage road
Access from railroad	Location relative to rail siding		4		2 mile to siding
Visibility	ability to draw highway travelers		4		
			12		
<i>Site Amenities</i>					
Views	mountains, open space, etc.		5		
Noise	separation from hwy noise		4		
Activity options	trails, water, etc.		5		

Micro-climate; aspect	Sunlight, wind		3		
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Specific Criteria</b>	<b>Rating Y/N/U</b>	<b>Rating (0-5)</b>	<b>Critical Issue</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Wildlife	odds of seeing birdlife, moose, salmon, etc.		5		
“Wow factor”	overall memorability; draw of site		4		
			26		
<i>Location relative to users</i>					
Visitors	contact with north bound road and rail travelers		1		On G. Parks Hwy past Glenn
Residents (e.g. for social events)	proximity to residential areas		3		
Compliments other partner projects			5		
			9		
<i>Land Use Issues</i>					
Ownership	difficulty of establishing site control		3		Private residential parcel
Zoning, regulatory issues	challenge for development approval		2		
Politics	any special real/perceived issue		3		
Land use context	impact of setting, adjoining uses		5		adjoins race track & gravel pit
Cost	relative full site development cost		2		
			15		
Evaluation – subjective judgment; 1 highest, 5 lowest			<b>78</b>		

## Mat-Su Valley South Gateway – Site Evaluation Worksheet

B1  
Glenn  
Hwy  
Bluff  
South

Subject	Specific Criteria	Rating Y/N/U	Rating (0-5)	Critical Issue	Notes
<i>Physical capability &amp; cost for development, utilities</i>					
Parcel size	size relative to program needs		1		48 acres
Developable area	useable area for structures and parking		1		12 acres
Site development challenges	physical limitations, costs for construction		1		bluff above Spring Creek
Geotechnical Hazards	unstable soil or slopes, flooding, seismic hazard		1		
Natural Gas	ease/cost to provide		1		
Power, communications	ease/cost to provide		1		
Wastewater	ease/cost to provide		2		Conv. On-site system
Water supply	ease/cost to provide		2		well on-site
Design compliments parcel and environment			1		not consistent with area dev.
			11		
<i>Accessibility &amp; visibility</i>					
Ease of access	distance of route from road to site		3		1/2 mi
Ease of access	difficulty of route from road to site		1		Fronts on Glenn Hwy
Access from railroad	Location relative to rail siding		1		1/4 mile to siding
Visibility	ability to draw highway travelers		1		
			6		
<i>Site Amenities</i>					
Views	mountains, open space, etc.		3		
Noise	separation from hwy noise		3		

Subject	Specific Criteria	Rating Y/N/U	Rating (0-5)	Critical Issue	Notes
Activity options	trails, water, etc.		2		
Micro-climate; aspect	Sunlight, wind		2		
Wildlife	odds of seeing birdlife, moose, salmon, etc.		1		
“Wow factor”	overall memorability; draw of site		3		
			14		
<i>Location relative to users</i>					
Visitors	contact with north bound road and rail travelers		2		east of Glenn/Parks inter.
Residents (e.g. for social events)	proximity to residential areas		2		
Compliments other partner projects			2		
			6		
<i>Land Use Issues</i>					
Ownership	difficulty of establishing site control		2		for sale by owner
Zoning, regulatory issues	challenge for development approval		1		
Politics	any special real/perceived issue		3		
Land use context	impact of setting, adjoining uses		2		
Cost	relative full site development cost		1		
			9		
Evaluation – subjective judgment; 1 highest, 5 lowest			<b>46</b>		

## Mat-Su Valley South Gateway – Site Evaluation Worksheet

Glenn  
Hwy  
North  
(pvt)

Subject	Specific Criteria	Rating Y/N/U	Rating (0-5)	Critical Issue	Notes
<i>Physical capability &amp; cost for development, utilities</i>					
Parcel size	size relative to program needs		3		5 acres
Developable area	useable area for structures and parking		4		4 acres
Site development challenges	physical limitations, costs for construction		2		bluff above Matanuska Lake
Geotechnical Hazards	unstable soil or slopes, flooding, seismic hazard		1		
Natural Gas	ease/cost to provide		1		
Power, communications	ease/cost to provide		1		
Wastewater	ease/cost to provide		2		Conv. On-site system
Water supply	ease/cost to provide		2		well on-site
Design compliments parcel and environment			2		
			18		
<i>Accessibility &amp; visibility</i>					
Ease of access	distance of route from highway to site		2		1/2 mi
Ease of access	difficulty of route from highway to site		1		Fronts on Glenn Hwy
Access from railroad	Location relative to rail siding		3		3/4 mile to siding
Visibility	ability to draw highway travelers		2		
			8		
<i>Site Amenities</i>					
Views	mountains, open space, etc.		2		
Noise	separation from hwy noise		3		
Activity options	trails, water, etc.		2		adjacent to State rec. area

Subject	Specific Criteria	Rating Y/N/U	Rating (0-5)	Critical Issue	Notes
Micro-climate; aspect	Sunlight, wind		2		
Wildlife	odds of seeing birdlife, moose, salmon, etc.		2		
“Wow factor”	overall memorability; draw of site		3		
			14		
<i>Location relative to users</i>					
Visitors	contact with north bound road and rail travelers		3		east of Glenn/Parks inter.
Residents (e.g. for social events)	proximity to residential areas		2		
Compliments other partner projects			1		adjoins rec. area
			6		
<i>Land Use Issues</i>					
Ownership	difficulty of establishing site control		2		for sale by owner
Zoning, regulatory issues	challenge for development approval		1		
Politics	any special real/perceived issue		3		
Land use context	impact of setting, adjoining uses		2		
Cost	relative full site development cost		2		
			10		
Evaluation – subjective judgment; 1 highest, 5 lowest			<b>56</b>		

## Mat-Su Valley South Gateway – Site Evaluation Worksheet

Glenn  
Hwy  
North  
(state)

Subject	Specific Criteria	Rating Y/N/U	Rating (0-5)	Critical Issue	Notes
<i>Physical capability &amp; cost for development, utilities</i>					
Parcel size	size relative to program needs		1		12 acres
Developable area	useable area for structures and parking		2		9 acres
Site development challenges	physical limitations, costs for construction		2		bench above lakes
Geotechnical Hazards	unstable soil or slopes, flooding, seismic hazard		1		
Natural Gas	ease/cost to provide		1		
Power, communications	ease/cost to provide		1		
Wastewater	ease/cost to provide		2		Conv. On-site system
Water supply	ease/cost to provide		2		well on-site
Design compliments parcel and environment			2		
			14		
<i>Accessibility &amp; visibility</i>					
Ease of access	distance of route from highway to site		1		Fronts on Glenn Hwy
Ease of access	difficulty of route from highway to site		1		poor intersec. sight distance
Access from railroad	Location relative to rail siding		3		3/4 mile to siding
Visibility	ability to draw highway travelers		2		
			7		
<i>Site Amenities</i>					
Views	mountains, open space, etc.		3		
Noise	separation from hwy noise		2		
Activity options	trails, water, etc.		1		in State rec. area

Micro-climate; aspect	Sunlight, wind		2		
Wildlife	odds of seeing birdlife, moose, salmon, etc.		2		
“Wow factor”	overall memorability; draw of site		3		
			13		
<i>Location relative to users</i>					
Visitors	contact with north bound road and rail travelers		3		east of Glenn/Parks inter.
Residents (e.g. for social events)	proximity to residential areas		2		
Compliments other partner projects			1		in rec. area
			6		
<i>Land Use Issues</i>					
Ownership	difficulty of establishing site control		2		Developed State facility
Zoning, regulatory issues	challenge for development approval		4		
Politics	any special real/perceived issue		4		
Land use context	impact of setting, adjoining uses		2		
Cost	relative full site development cost		2		
			14		
Evaluation – subjective judgment; 1 highest, 5 lowest			<b>54</b>		

## Mat-Su Valley South Gateway – Site Evaluation Worksheet

C1  
Rabbit  
Slough  
Site

Subject	Specific Criteria	Rating Y/N/U	Rating (0-5)	Critical Issue	Notes
<i>Physical capability &amp; cost for development, utilities</i>					
Parcel size	size relative to program needs		1		180 acres
Developable area	useable area for structures and parking		2		8 acres
Site development challenges	physical limitations, costs for construction		5	X	in floodplain and wetlands
Geotechnical Hazards	unstable soil or slopes, flooding, siesmic hazard		5	X	very high risk siesmic
Natural Gas	ease/cost to provide		3		
Power, communications	ease/cost to provide		4		
Wastewater	ease/cost to provide		5		treatment plant required
Water supply	ease/cost to provide		4		well quality & qty questionable
Design compliments parcel and environment			4		elevated pad in wetland area
			33		
<i>Accessibility &amp; visibility</i>					
Ease of access	distance of route from highwayto site		5		2 mi
Ease of access	difficulty of route from highway to site		5		on frontage road from Trunk
Access from railroad	Location relative to rail siding		4		3 mile to siding
Visibility	ability to draw highway travelers		3		
			17		
<i>Site Amenities</i>					
Views	mountains, open space, etc.		3		
Noise	separation from hwy noise		3		

Subject	Specific Criteria	Rating Y/N/U	Rating (0-5)	Critical Issue	Notes
Activity options	trails, water, etc.		2		
Micro-climate; aspect	Sunlight, wind		3		
Wildlife	odds of seeing birdlife, moose, salmon, etc.		2		
“Wow factor”	overall memorability; draw of site		4		
			17		
<i>Location relative to users</i>					
Visitors	contact with north bound road and rail travelers		4		
Residents (e.g. for social events)	proximity to residential areas		4		
Compliments other partner projects			3		
			11		
<i>Land Use Issues</i>					
Ownership	difficulty of establishing site control		5		
Zoning, regulatory issues	challenge for development approval		5		
Politics	any special real/perceived issue		4		
Land use context	impact of setting, adjoining uses		4		
Cost	relative full site development cost		4		
			22		
Evaluation – subjective judgment; 1 highest, 5 lowest			<b>100</b>		

## Mat-Su Valley South Gateway – Site Evaluation Worksheet

C1  
Rabbit  
Slough  
Site

Subject	Specific Criteria	Rating Y/N/U	Rating (0-5)	Critical Issue	Notes
<i>Physical capability &amp; cost for development, utilities</i>					
Parcel size	size relative to program needs		3		11 acres
Developable area	useable area for structures and parking		2		10 acres
Site development challenges	physical limitations, costs for construction		5	X	in floodplain and wetlands
Geotechnical Hazards	unstable soil or slopes, flooding, seismic hazard		5	X	very high risk seismic
Natural Gas	ease/cost to provide		3		
Power, communications	ease/cost to provide		2		
Wastewater	ease/cost to provide		5		treatment plant required
Water supply	ease/cost to provide		4		well quality & qty questionable
Design compliments parcel and environment			4		elevated pad in wetland area
			33		
<i>Accessibility &amp; visibility</i>					
Ease of access	distance of route from highway to site		5		1.5 mi
Ease of access	difficulty of route from highway to site		5		on frontage road from Trunk
Access from railroad	Location relative to rail siding		4		2.5 mile to siding
Visibility	ability to draw highway travelers		3		
			17		
<i>Site Amenities</i>					
Views	mountains, open space, etc.		3		
Noise	separation from hwy noise		4		

Subject	Specific Criteria	Rating Y/N/U	Rating (0-5)	Critical Issue	Notes
Activity options	trails, water, etc.		3		
Micro-climate; aspect	Sunlight, wind		3		
Wildlife	odds of seeing birdlife, moose, salmon, etc.		2		
“Wow factor”	overall memorability; draw of site		5		
			20		
<i>Location relative to users</i>					
Visitors	contact with north bound road and rail travelers		4		
Residents (e.g. for social events)	proximity to residential areas		4		
Compliments other partner projects			5		
			13		
<i>Land Use Issues</i>					
Ownership	difficulty of establishing site control		4		private parcel
Zoning, regulatory issues	challenge for development approval		4		
Politics	any special real/perceived issue		4		
Land use context	impact of setting, adjoining uses		4		
Cost	relative full site development cost		4		
			20		
Evaluation – subjective judgment; 1 highest, 5 lowest			<b>103</b>		

## Mat-Su Valley South Gateway – Site Evaluation Worksheet

DI  
Reflection  
Lake  
Site

Subject	Specific Criteria	Rating Y/N/U	Rating (0-5)	Critical Issue	Notes
<i>Physical capability &amp; cost for development, utilities</i>					
Parcel size	size relative to program needs		2		120 acres
Developable area	useable area for structures and parking		2		8 acres
Site development challenges	physical limitations, costs for construction		5	X	in floodplain and estuary
Geotechnical Hazards	unstable soil or slopes, flooding, seismic hazard		5	X	very high risk seismic
Natural Gas	ease/cost to provide		3		
Power, communications	ease/cost to provide		4		
Wastewater	ease/cost to provide		5		treatment plant required
Water supply	ease/cost to provide		4		well quality & qty questionable
Design compliments parcel and environment			5		elevated pad in wetland area
			35		
<i>Accessibility &amp; visibility</i>					
Ease of access	distance of route from highway to site		2		1/4 mi
Ease of access	difficulty of route from highway to site		2		existing Knik R. Access ramp
Access from railroad	Location relative to rail siding		5		7 mile to siding
Visibility	ability to draw highway travelers		1		
			10		
<i>Site Amenities</i>					
Views	mountains, open space, etc.		2		
Noise	separation from hwy noise		5		

Subject	Specific Criteria	Rating Y/N/U	Rating (0-5)	Critical Issue	Notes
Activity options	trails, water, etc.		2		
Micro-climate; aspect	Sunlight, wind		3		
Wildlife	odds of seeing birdlife, moose, salmon, etc.		2		
“Wow factor”	overall memorability; draw of site		3		
			17		
<i>Location relative to users</i>					
Visitors	contact with north bound road and rail travelers		1		
Residents (e.g. for social events)	proximity to residential areas		5		
Compliments other partner projects			3		
			9		
<i>Land Use Issues</i>					
Ownership	difficulty of establishing site control		5		State land in Game Refuge
Zoning, regulatory issues	challenge for development approval		5		
Politics	any special real/perceived issue		4		
Land use context	impact of setting, adjoining uses		4		
Cost	relative full site development cost		5		
			23		
Evaluation – subjective judgment; 1 highest, 5 lowest			<b>94</b>		

## Mat-Su Valley South Gateway – Site Evaluation Worksheet

EI  
East of  
Reflection  
Lake

Subject	Specific Criteria	Rating Y/N/U	Rating (0-5)	Critical Issue	Notes
<i>Physical capability &amp; cost for development, utilities</i>					
Parcel size	size relative to program needs		1		120 acres
Developable area	useable area for structures and parking		1		25 acres
Site development challenges	physical limitations, costs for construction		5	X	in floodplain and estuary
Geotechnical Hazards	unstable soil or slopes, flooding, seismic hazard		5	X	very high risk seismic
Natural Gas	ease/cost to provide		4		
Power, communications	ease/cost to provide		2		
Wastewater	ease/cost to provide		5		treatment plant required
Water supply	ease/cost to provide		4		well quality & qty questionable
Design compliments parcel and environment			5		elevated pad in wetland area
			32		
<i>Accessibility &amp; visibility</i>					
Ease of access	distance of route from highway to site		2		1/4 mi
Ease of access	difficulty of route from highway to site		5		crosses railroad and slough
Access from railroad	Location relative to rail siding		5		7 mile to siding
Visibility	ability to draw highway travelers		4		
			16		
<i>Site Amenities</i>					
Views	mountains, open space, etc.		2		
Noise	separation from hwy noise		4		

Activity options	trails, water, etc.		2		
Micro-climate; aspect	Sunlight, wind		3		
Wildlife	odds of seeing birdlife, moose, salmon, etc.		2		
“Wow factor”	overall memorability; draw of site		3		
			16		
<i>Location relative to users</i>					
Visitors	contact with north bound road and rail travelers		3		
Residents (e.g. for social events)	proximity to residential areas		5		
Compliments other partner projects			4		
			12		
<i>Land Use Issues</i>					
Ownership	difficulty of establishing site control		5		state & adjacent to game refuge
Zoning, regulatory issues	challenge for development approval		5		
Politics	any special real/perceived issue		5		
Land use context	impact of setting, adjoining uses		4		
Cost	relative full site development cost		5		
			24		
Evaluation – subjective judgment; 1 highest, 5 lowest			100		

## Mat-Su Valley South Gateway – Site Evaluation Worksheet

FI Old  
Glenn  
Hwy  
West

Subject	Specific Criteria	Rating Y/N/U	Rating (0-5)	Critical Issue	Notes
<i>Physical capability &amp; cost for development, utilities</i>					
Parcel size	size relative to program needs		4		6 acres
Developable area	useable area for structures and parking		5		3 acres
Site development challenges	physical limitations, costs for construction		3		low area
Geotechnical Hazards	unstable soil or slopes, flooding, seismic hazard		3		possible poor soils
Natural Gas	ease/cost to provide		4		
Power, communications	ease/cost to provide		2		
Wastewater	ease/cost to provide		5		treatment plant required
Water supply	ease/cost to provide		4		well quality & qty questionable
Design compliments parcel and environment			5		
			35		
<i>Accessibility &amp; visibility</i>					
Ease of access	distance of route from highway to site		2		1/4 mi
Ease of access	difficulty of route from highway to site		2		approach onto Old Glenn Hwy
Access from railroad	Location relative to rail siding		5		8 mile to siding
Visibility	ability to draw highway travelers		3		
			12		
<i>Site Amenities</i>					
Views	mountains, open space, etc.		4		
Noise	separation from hwy noise		3		
Activity options	trails, water, etc.		3		

Subject	Specific Criteria	Rating Y/N/U	Rating (0-5)	Critical Issue	Notes
Micro-climate; aspect	Sunlight, wind		3		
Wildlife	odds of seeing birdlife, moose, salmon, etc.		4		
“Wow factor”	overall memorability; draw of site		5		
			22		
<i>Location relative to users</i>					
Visitors	contact with north bound road and rail travelers		3		
Residents (e.g. for social events)	proximity to residential areas		5		
Compliments other partner projects			5		
			13		
<i>Land Use Issues</i>					
Ownership	difficulty of establishing site control		4		Private
Zoning, regulatory issues	challenge for development approval		3		
Politics	any special real/perceived issue		5		in Municipality of Anchorage
Land use context	impact of setting, adjoining uses		4		
Cost	relative full site development cost		3		
			19		
Evaluation – subjective judgment; 1 highest, 5 lowest			<b>101</b>		

## Mat-Su Valley South Gateway – Site Evaluation Worksheet

F2  
Knob  
Site

Subject	Specific Criteria	Rating Y/N/U	Rating (0-5)	Critical Issue	Notes
<i>Physical capability &amp; cost for development, utilities</i>					
Parcel size	size relative to program needs		2		40 acres
Developable area	useable area for structures and parking		2		8 acres
Site development challenges	physical limitations, costs for construction		4		bedrock hill
Geotechnical Hazards	unstable soil or slopes, flooding, seismic hazard		1		
Natural Gas	ease/cost to provide		3		
Power, communications	ease/cost to provide		1		
Wastewater	ease/cost to provide		5		treatment plant required
Water supply	ease/cost to provide		4		well quality & qty questionable
Design compliments parcel and environment			1		
			23		
<i>Accessibility &amp; visibility</i>					
Ease of access	distance of route from highway to site		1		adjacent to hwy
Ease of access	difficulty of route from highway to site		1		at interchange Parks @ Old G.
Access from railroad	Location relative to rail siding		5		8 mile to siding
Visibility	ability to draw highway travelers		2		
			9		
<i>Site Amenities</i>					
Views	mountains, open space, etc.		1		
Noise	separation from hwy noise		2		
Activity options	trails, water, etc.		2		
Micro-climate; aspect	Sunlight, wind		2		
Wildlife	odds of seeing birdlife, moose, salmon, etc.		2		

Subject	Specific Criteria	Rating Y/N/U	Rating (0-5)	Critical Issue	Notes
"Wow factor"	overall memorability; draw of site		1		
			10		
<i>Location relative to users</i>					
Visitors	contact with north bound road and rail travelers		1		
Residents (e.g. for social events)	proximity to residential areas		5		
Compliments other partner projects			2		
			8		
<i>Land Use Issues</i>					
Ownership	difficulty of establishing site control		4		Private
Zoning, regulatory issues	challenge for development approval		3		
Politics	any special real/perceived issue		5		In Municipality of Anchorage
Land use context	impact of setting, adjoining uses		2		
Cost	relative full site development cost		4		
			18		
Evaluation – subjective judgment; 1 highest, 5 lowest			<b>68</b>		

## Mat-Su Valley South Gateway – Site Evaluation Worksheet

FI Old  
Glenn  
Hwy East

Subject	Specific Criteria	Rating Y/N/U	Rating (0-5)	Critical Issue	Notes
<i>Physical capability &amp; cost for development, utilities</i>					
Parcel size	size relative to program needs		4		6 acres
Developable area	useable area for structures and parking		5		3 acres
Site development challenges	physical limitations, costs for construction		5		steep mountinside
Geotechnical Hazards	unstable soil or slopes, flooding, siesmic hazard		2		
Natural Gas	ease/cost to provide		5		
Power, communications	ease/cost to provide		2		
Wastewater	ease/cost to provide		5		treatment plant required
Water supply	ease/cost to provide		4		well quality & qty questionable
Design compliments parcel and environment			3		
			35		
<i>Accessibility &amp; visibility</i>					
Ease of access	distance of route from highwayto site		4		2 mi
Ease of access	difficulty of route from highway to site		4		steep access to buildable site
Access from railroad	Location relative to rail siding		5		10 mile to siding
Visibility	ability to draw highway travelers		5		
			18		
<i>Site Amenities</i>					
Views	mountains, open space, etc.		3		
Noise	separation from hwy noise		3		
Activity options	trails, water, etc.		3		
Micro-climate; aspect	Sunlight, wind		3		

Subject	Specific Criteria	Rating Y/N/U	Rating (0-5)	Critical Issue	Notes
Wildlife	odds of seeing birdlife, moose, salmon, etc.		4		
“Wow factor”	overall memorability; draw of site		4		
			20		
<i>Location relative to users</i>					
Visitors	contact with north bound road and rail travelers		4		
Residents (e.g. for social events)	proximity to residential areas		5		
Compliments other partner projects			5		
			14		
<i>Land Use Issues</i>					
Ownership	difficulty of establishing site control		4		Private
Zoning, regulatory issues	challenge for development approval		3		
Politics	any special real/perceived issue		4		in Municipality of Anchorage
Land use context	impact of setting, adjoining uses		3		
Cost	relative full site development cost		5		
			19		
Evaluation – subjective judgment; 1 highest, 5 lowest			<b>106</b>		



# Glenn Highway/South Gateway Visitor Center

Site Evaluation  
1/15/10

Prepared For:

Prepared by:



*Rowland Engineering Consultants*

481 W Arctic Avenue  
Palmer, Alaska 99645  
907-746-3630

Site Evaluation of six potential locations for proposed Glenn  
Highway/South Gateway Visitor Center

## INTRODUCTION

Six sites have been selected for preliminary evaluation to determine suitability for development of the subject visitor's center. RECON, LLC has been tasked with assessing each site with respect to development potential and limitations as related to site surface and subsurface characteristics. RECON also provides an evaluation of site accessibility and relative development cost. The intent is to develop an understanding of site conditions sufficient to aid Agnew::Beck in selecting preferred sites for further consideration. RECON reviewed each site location and any available information of record that would aid in this assessment.

## REFLECTION LAKE SITE (AREA D)

### Location

The Reflection Lake site is located adjacent to and west of the Glenn Highway (Alaska Route 1, Interstate A1) immediately north of the Knik River Bridge. The site is within Section 10, T 16 N, R 1 E, S.M., AK. The land parcel has no specific description, as it is a portion of a larger State of Alaska owned land block included in the Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge. The south boundary of this site is common to the Municipality of Anchorage.

The specific site location appropriate for consideration is an area immediately north of Reflection Lake and bordered on the east by the Glenn Highway Right of Way and on the north by a channel of the Matanuska/Knik River. The site is four miles south of the Glenn Highway and George Parks Highway Interchange.

### Access

Access to the site is via the Knik River Public Access ramps directly from the Glenn Highway. The northbound lane ramp includes a tunnel underpass of the Glenn Highway. Specific access would likely require that a new approach be constructed to the Knik River Access Road directly in-line with the underpass. Departure and entrance to the Glenn Highway is via merging lanes.

### Site Description

The Reflection Lake site resides in the Knik Arm estuary and the floodplain of the Knik and Matanuska Rivers. The geographic area on which the site is located is essentially

a point of land defining the head of Knik Arm and the mouth of the Knik and Matanuska Rivers. The 120 acre land area defining this "point" extends west of the Glenn Highway for one-half mile and fronts the highway between the river channels for approximately one-half mile. Most of the land area is wetlands and subject to tidal inundation and flooding. A 20 acre pond occupies the south portion of the area. This pond was created by gravel extraction for highway construction. Mounds surrounding the pond consist of overgrown piles of material and organic debris stripped from the site to expose the underlying gravel. The majority of the point is wetlands of typically high value. Numerous channels and sloughs wend through the site and serve as drainage channels following periods of tide inundation or river flooding. Just one mile south of the site the Chugach Mountains rise dramatically to elevations of nearly 6000 feet. In all other directions the land is essentially flat and comprised of wetlands, estuary and river floodplain. The Chugach Mountains are visible to the south and east, while the Talkeetna Mountains are readily visible to the north. On a clear day, the Alaska Range may be seen to the west over Knik Arm.

Elevation of the higher portions of the property with potential to be developed, range from 13 to 28 feet above mean sea level. Extreme high tides may reach an elevation of up to 15 ft. The area encompassing about eight to nine acres north of Reflection Lake and south of the river channel appears to be the only portion of this point of land with potential for development. Reflection Lake has recently been developed as an interpretive site for the Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge. Pedestrian trails and information signage are located around the lake. A parking area adjacent to the Knik River Access Road is limited to about six vehicles. A chain link fence with a gate limits direct access to the Reflection Lake site. The Glenn Highway is immediately adjacent to the site and is elevated roughly 20 to 25 feet above original ground. As a result, views to the east are restricted by the highway embankment.

Except for the northeast portion of the site, the area is vegetated with typical marshland scrub and brush. The extreme northeast corner is mostly forested with mature cottonwood and spruce.

From a geologic perspective, the site is located in an estuary at the mouth of the Knik and Matanuska Rivers. Consequently, the soils found at the site are a mix of estuarine and alluvial deposits. A typical soil section would include layers of poorly consolidated silt, sand, and sandy gravel. Previous drilling at the site, to depths in excess of 100 feet, have failed to locate bedrock. During the 1964 earthquake, the land surface at the head of Knik Arm is documented to have subsided approximately two feet. Substantial subsequent uplift has also occurred. During the 1964 earthquake numerous ground fissures developed in the Knik River floodplain. Fissures were documented and mapped on the proposed site (McCulloch & Bonilla, 1970).

## Development Considerations

### Climatologic

The Reflection Lake site is generally is not subject to the notorious strong northeast and southeast winds in the Matanuska Valley. Location of the site does make it susceptible to local fog lying along the adjacent rivers and Knik arm. Temperatures at the site are not unique, except that during winter cold periods, the low temperatures may be less than in Palmer or Wasilla. With the Chugach Mountains rising abruptly just to south, there are several months when the site does not receive the midday sun.

### Soils

USDA Soil Survey of the Matanuska Valley Area did not cover that subject site since it is considered part of the river floodplain. As noted previously, the soils are associated with estuarine and alluvial deposits consisting of unconsolidated silt, sand and gravel. The State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys (DGGGS) completed a comprehensive report (RI 84-26) titled "Liquefaction-Susceptibility Analysis for Foundation Soils, Knik River Bridge, Glenn Highway, Alaska". This report includes an assessment conditions at the Knik River Bridge that apply to the Reflection Lake site. In the 1984 DGGGS report, the Author stated: "I conclude that soils in the vicinity of the (Knik River) Bridge are liquefiable within a zone from 4 to 30 feet below the water table, which fluctuates significantly". The author further concluded that with regard to the Knik River bridges, "larger magnitude earthquakes---depending on their foci locations---are a serious concern for the integrity of these structures". Foundation development would likely include piling and extensive volumes of imported fill. Earthquake damage analysis would be critical to planning for any proposed development at this location.

### Flooding

The subject site is located in the mapped flood hazard area and is susceptible to periodic flooding due to high water levels in the Matanuska or Knik Rivers. Prior to 1967, Lake George would "breakout" on nearly an annual basis. This event completely inundated the entire Knik River floodplain, including the Reflection Lake site. A recurrence of the Lake George outburst is considered possible if not likely. The 1971 Matanuska River flood also inundated the subject site. Extreme high tides will flood the lower areas of the site.

### Access

Access to the site appears to be appropriate for the proposed purpose. Further review of the project with Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities traffic

engineers would be required for a final determination of suitability of the existing Knik River Access ramps to handle the additional traffic.

## Noise

Given that the only potential suitable location for development is immediately adjacent to the highway, traffic noise will be prominent at the site. Trails or interpretive sites that extend further to the west may not be as influenced by traffic noise.

## Utilities

It appears that a natural gas pipeline is located adjacent to the site (not verified). Electrical service may be available from lines to the east of the highway. It appears that substantial cost may be associated with getting power to the site.

Water supply would be from an on-site well. The well will have to produce at a rate of 50 to 100 gallons per minute to meet minimum estimated supply requirements. Fire system flows must be met using stored water and booster pumps. There are no wells in the area to give an indication of viability. There is a real risk that the available aquifer will have poor water quality and possibly be tainted with salt water.

Estimated peak daily wastewater volume is 1500 to 2500 gallons. Due to the character of the site and soil conditions, it is assumed that an advanced on-site wastewater treatment system will be necessary. Such a system requires a heated structure of roughly 1,500 square feet. Discharge would be to the surface. Cost to develop an on-site wastewater treatment system may be \$500,000. A trained operator is necessary for a treatment system of this type.

Storm water runoff will require site treatment for removal of sediment and trace petroleum contaminants.

## Special Considerations

Significant hazards associated with earthquakes are a reality for the Reflection Lake site. Soil liquefaction has occurred at the site in the past and is documented as a risk to structures.

Being in a floodplain and estuary will necessitate elevation of all structures to a level above a minimum high water mark of record. At the subject site, a large volume of imported fill is needed to bring the site up to this minimum allowed elevation. It is estimated that upwards of 20,000 cyds of fill might be needed to develop the building site. This quantity of material does not include fill required for parking areas and drives. Given soil conditions at the site, all development will require imported gravel

with a minimum base thickness of two to four feet. Native soil, which salvaged from excavations, will be of limited use except as unclassified fill.

The Glenn Highway road embankment serves as an upstream levee aiding in control of river flooding and erosion at the Reflection Lake site. However, it is anticipated that some erosion control measures will be necessary to ensure long term integrity of the development.

It is certain that the development would involve encroachment on jurisdictional wetlands and possibly on the intertidal zone.

## **SUMMARY**

## **LIMITATIONS**

The services described in this report were performed consistent with generally accepted professional consulting principles and practices. No other warranty, expressed or implied, is made. Services were performed consistent with RECON's agreement with the client. This document is solely for the use and information of Agnew::Beck. Opinions and recommendations contained in this document apply to conditions existing when services were performed and are intended only for the client, purposes, location, periods, and project parameters indicated. RECON is not responsible for the impacts of any changes in industry standards, practices, or regulations subsequent to performance of services. RECON does not warrant the accuracy of information supplied by others, or the use of segregated portions of this document.



## PHOTOGRAPHS

Figure 1:

## APPENDICES

Appendix A:

Appendix B:

End

# Glenn Highway/South Gateway Visitor Center

Site Evaluation  
4/15/10

Prepared For:

MAT-SU CONVENTIONS AND VISITORS BUREAU

Prepared by:



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Site Evaluation of six potential locations for proposed Glenn  
Highway/South Gateway Visitor Center

## INTRODUCTION

Six sites have been evaluated to determine suitability for development of the subject visitor's center. RECON, LLC has been tasked with assessing each site with respect to development potential and limitations as related to site surface and subsurface characteristics. RECON also provides an evaluation of site accessibility and relative development cost. The intent is to develop an understanding of site conditions sufficient to aid Agnew::Beck in selecting preferred sites for further consideration. RECON reviewed each site location and any available information of record that would aid in this assessment.

## MATANUSKA LAKE / GLENN HIGHWAY F2 & F3 SITES

### Location

Site F2      Homestead RV Park

The subject site is situated on the Glenn highway (Alaska Route 1, Interstate A1) approximately ½ mile north of the Parks Highway interchange and is located on the south side of the highway. The land in consideration is a privately owned 40 acre parcel currently developed as the Homestead RV park and has panoramic views of the Chugach mountains to the south. Approximately 18 acres of the land is suitable for development. The remainder of the parcel is located in wetlands and would be utilized for interpretive trails, salmon viewing, and access to the Alaska State Railroad. The parcel is a portion of a larger State of Alaska owned land block included in the Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge.

Site F3      Matanuska Lake Park

This alternative site is again situated on the Glenn highway (Alaska Route 1, Interstate A1) approximately ½ mile north of the Parks Highway interchange and is located on the north side of the highway. The site in consideration is a portion of publicly owned land managed by the State of Alaska and currently utilized as the Matanuska Lake Park recreation area. The site is adjacent to the Kepler/Bradley lake system, the Crevasse Moraine park, and University of Alaska Lands allowing access to Lakes and a developed trail system.

## Access

Currently each site is accessed from a two lane portion of the Glenn highway, approximately three quarters of a mile from the parks interchange. The State of Alaska Department of Transportation is planning to upgrade this portion of highway in 2013 and is currently updating the Environmental Impact Statement. Project design will commence in November 2010 and access to the selected site could be designed and implemented during the design process. Access for this facility will require dedicated turn lanes and may include option bicycle and pedestrian underpass to link the facility to either the railroad, bicycle, and/or an interpretive trail system.

## Site Description

Both sites F2 and F3 are located on the southern boundary of the Crevasse Moraine and are bisected by the Glenn Highway.

## Development Considerations

### Climatologic

Sites F2 and F3 have excellent opportunities to take advantage of topography and southern orientations. The two sites are generally subject to the strong northeast and southeast winds in the Matanuska Valley prevalent during winter months.

**Precipitation.** Average annual precipitation is about 15 inches (38 cm) at Palmer and has and average annual snowfall is about 45 inches.

### Soils

The USDA Soil Survey of the Matanuska Valley Area classifies the subject site within the Knik-Kalamback association. The geologic structure was formed during Quaternary Glaciation period and includes nearly level and undulating outwash and till plains, pitted outwash plains, and steep hills. Soil parent materials include loose sandy and gravelly glacial outwash, friable to firm loamy and gravelly glacial drift, and firm gravelly glacial till. The soils are generally well drained and suitable for construction

## Noise

The Matanuska Lake site is shielded from the Glenn Highway by an earthen berm. The berm would provide a significant acoustic barrier to highway noise. Alternatively, the Homestead RV site alternative is positioned on a hill paralleling the Glenn Highway and may experience a higher decibel level of road noise.

## Utilities

It appears that a natural gas pipeline is located adjacent to the site (not verified). Electrical service is available to the Homestead site and is adjacent to the Matanuska Lake Site.

Water supply would be from an on-site well. The well will have to produce at a rate of 50 to 100 gallons per minute to meet minimum estimated supply requirements. Fire system flows must be met using stored water and booster pumps. There are no wells in the area to give an indication of viability.

The City of Palmer has recently installed a new waste water extension through the Matanuska Lake site and it is anticipated that this utility can be utilized for any future development on the site. The Homestead RV site will require an on-site septic system.

## SUMMARY

## LIMITATIONS

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## PHOTOGRAPHS

Figure 1:

## APPENDICES

Appendix A:

Appendix B:

End



# **APPENDIX F: FINANCIALS**

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**Program and Capital Costs: Small**

**Program and Capital Costs: Medium**

**Program and Capital Costs: Large**

**Operations Revenues and Expenditures: Small**

**Operations Revenues and Expenditures: Medium**

**Operations Revenues and Expenditures: Large**

**Estimated Admissions Revenue**

**Estimated Gift Shop Revenue**

**Capital Replacement: Small**

**Capital Replacement: Medium**

**Capital Replacement: Large**

## Program and Capital Costs: Small

FACILITY PROGRAM-DRAFT (3.31.10) SMALL	ESTIMATED SQUARE FEET	ESTIMATED ANNUAL OPERATING COSTS	NOTES
<b>Potential Uses</b>		<b>\$8</b>	sf estimate adjusted based on 2008 Anchorage sf estimate for new construction of similar space and corroborated by operations costs obtained from Mat-Su School District.
<b>Reception</b>			
Entry	64	\$512	8x8
Lobby	240	\$1,920	12 x 20
Storage/Coat Room	80	\$640	6x14
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>\$3,072</b>	
<b>Office + Personnel Space</b>			
Mat-Su CVB offices	1,616	\$12,928	
Storage	100	\$800	
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>1,716</b>	<b>\$13,728</b>	
<b>Visitor Space</b>			
Exhibit space	2,000	\$16,000	
Tour Desk - visitor services	100	\$800	20 l.f. counter
Virtual Tour Kiosk	100	\$800	online interface station w/6 stations, wireless and wired hookups; printer
Info/Reservations - public lands			kiosk
Auditorium/Multipurpose	1,000	\$8,000	100 seats
Storage--printed materials	300	\$2,400	
Snack Bar/Coffee Cart/Retail	150	\$1,200	
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>3,650</b>	<b>\$29,200</b>	
<b>SUBTOTAL AREAS ABOVE</b>	<b>5,750</b>	<b>\$46,000</b>	
<b>Maintenance, Operations Support and Circulation</b>			
General Storage	144	\$1,152	chairs; tables; exhibits;
Cleaning Janitorial	48	\$384	
Public Restrooms	360	\$2,880	Women: 4 stalls, 2 sinks; Men: 2 urinals, 2 stalls, 2 sinks
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>552</b>	<b>\$4,416</b>	
<b>NET EST'D SQUARE FEET</b>	<b>6,302</b>	<b>\$50,416</b>	
<b>ADD 20% CIRCULATION</b>	<b>1,260</b>	<b>\$10,083</b>	
<b>ADD 11% STRUCTURE</b>	<b>693</b>	<b>\$5,546</b>	
<b>ADD 7% MECH/HVAC*</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>\$3,529</b>	
<b>GROSS EST'D SQUARE FEET</b>	<b>8,697</b>	<b>\$69,574</b>	

FACILITY PROGRAM-DRAFT (3.31.10) SMALL	ESTIMATED SQUARE FEET	ESTIMATED ANNUAL OPERATING COSTS	NOTES
<b>Outdoor Space</b>		Construction Cost	
Clearing and Grubbing @ \$8400/acre	6	\$50,400	
Parking (vehicles and motorcoaches) @\$8/sf	120,000	\$960,000	50 spaces; 15 RV; 3 motorcoach
Utility Extension		\$100,000	completely dependent upon particular site (this cost is difficult to fund)
Exterior Interpretive and scenic overlooks		\$150,000	
Associated trail system		\$40,000	cost dependent on location and design
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>		<b>\$1,300,400</b>	
Construction Costs @\$400/sf	\$3,478,704		
Site Prep and Construction Costs	\$1,300,400		
<b>TOTAL SITE + BUILDING CONSTRUCTION COSTS</b>	<b>\$4,779,104</b>		
Design + Project Development Costs	\$1,051,403		
Construction Administration Costs	\$95,582		
FF+E** + Move-in Costs	\$334,537		
Exhibit Design + Materials @ \$5/sf	\$43,484		these costs could be covered by partner programming/funding
LEED Silver Certification	\$205,501		
<b>TOTAL PROJECT COSTS</b>	<b>\$6,509,612</b>		

\* HVAC+E = heating, ventilation, air conditioning and electrical

\*\* FF+E = furniture, fixtures and equipment

## Program and Capital Costs: Medium

FACILITY PROGRAM-DRAFT (3.31.10) MEDIUM	ESTIMATED SQUARE FEET	ESTIMATED ANNUAL OPERATING COSTS*	NOTES
<b>Potential Uses</b>		<b>\$8</b>	sf estimate adjusted based on 2008 Anchorage sf estimate for new construction of similar space and corroborated by operations costs obtained from Mat-Su School District.
<b>Reception</b>			
Entry	96	\$768	8x8
Lobby	300	\$2,400	
Storage/Coat Room	100	\$800	
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>496</b>	<b>\$3,968</b>	
<b>Office + Personnel Space</b>			
Mat-Su CVB offices	2,240	\$17,920	
Storage	135	\$1,080	
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>2,375</b>	<b>\$19,000</b>	
<b>Visitor Space</b>			
Exhibit space	2,750	\$22,000	
Tour Desk - visitor services	150	\$1,200	
Virtual Tour Kiosk	150		computer stations
Info/Reservation - public lands	150	\$1,200	
Auditorium/Multi-purpose	1,550	\$12,400	150 capacity
Conference/classroom space			may share with MSCVB Board Room if on same floor
Retail shop	300	\$2,400	
Café -- seating for 30	650	\$5,200	pre-prepared foods; drinks; minimal kitchen/dish/storage; share seating space w/exhibit area
Storage--multipurpose, café, retail	240	\$1,920	
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>5,790</b>	<b>\$46,320</b>	
<b>SUBTOTAL AREAS ABOVE</b>	<b>8,661</b>	<b>\$69,288</b>	
<b>Maintenance, Operations Support and Circulation</b>			
General Storage	200	\$1,600	
Cleaning Janitorial	48	\$384	
Public Restrooms	360	\$2,880	
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>608</b>	<b>\$4,864</b>	
<b>NET EST'D SQUARE FEET</b>	<b>9,269</b>	<b>\$74,152</b>	
<b>ADD 20% CIRCULATION</b>	<b>1,854</b>	<b>\$14,830</b>	
<b>ADD 11% STRUCTURE</b>	<b>1,020</b>	<b>\$8,157</b>	
<b>ADD 7% MECH/HVAC</b>	<b>649</b>	<b>\$5,191</b>	

FACILITY PROGRAM-DRAFT (3.31.10) MEDIUM	ESTIMATED SQUARE FEET	ESTIMATED ANNUAL OPERATING COSTS*	NOTES
GROSS EST'D SQUARE FEET	12,791	\$102,330	
<b>Outdoor Space</b>			we will need a different multiplier if we want to figure costs for these spaces
Clearing and Grubbing @\$8400/acre	8	\$67,200	
Parking (vehicles and motorcoaches) @\$8/sf	145,000	\$1,160,000	
Utility Extensions		\$100,000	
Interpretive and scenic overlooks; event venue		\$200,000	
Associated trail system		\$60,000	cost dependent on location and design
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>\$1,587,200</b>	
Construction Costs @\$400/sf	\$5,116,488		
Site Prep and Construction Costs	\$1,587,200		
<b>TOTAL SITE + BUILDING CONSTRUCTION COSTS</b>	<b>\$6,703,688</b>		
Design + Project Development Costs	\$1,474,811	22%	
Construction Administration Costs	\$134,074	2%	
FF+E** + Move-in Costs	\$469,258	7%	
Exhibit Design + Materials @ \$6/sf	\$76,747		these costs could be covered by partner programming/funding
LEED Silver Certification	\$288,259		
<b>TOTAL PROJECT COSTS</b>	<b>\$9,146,837</b>		

\* HVAC+E = heating, ventilation, air conditioning and electrical

\*\* FF+E = furniture, fixtures and equipment

## Program and Capital Costs: Large

FACILITY PROGRAM-DRAFT (3.31.10) LARGE	ESTIMATED SQUARE FEET	ESTIMATED ANNUAL OPERATING COSTS*	NOTES
<b>Potential Uses</b>		<b>\$8</b>	sf estimate adjusted based on 2008 Anchorage sf estimate for new construction of similar space and corroborated by operations costs obtained from Mat-Su School District.
<b>Reception</b>			
Entry	180	\$1,440	
Lobby	360	\$2,880	
Storage/Coat Room	120	\$960	
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>660</b>	<b>\$5,280</b>	
<b>Office + Personnel Space</b>			
Mat-Su CVB offices	1,552	\$12,416	
Program offices/Tenant space	2,800	\$22,400	1-1200sf suite; 1-1600sf suite; share common spaces listed below with MSCVB offices
Board/meeting room	600	\$4,800	
Restrooms	150	\$1,200	
Break Room	345	\$2,760	
Entry/Lobby	300	\$2,400	
Storage	180	\$1,440	
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>5,927</b>	<b>\$47,416</b>	
<b>Visitor Space</b>			
Exhibit space	3,250	\$26,000	
Tour Desk - visitor services	240	\$1,920	
Info/Reservations Desk - public lands	120	\$960	could be tied to APLIC or AKSP tenant space
Auditorium/Theatre	1,800	\$14,400	200 capacity
Multi-purpose/Classroom/Event Area	900	\$7,200	
Retail shop	450	\$3,600	
Café	1,000	\$8,000	
Storage	300	\$2,400	
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>8,060</b>	<b>\$64,480</b>	
<b>SUBTOTAL AREAS ABOVE</b>	<b>14,647</b>	<b>\$117,176</b>	
<b>Maintenance, Operations Support and Circulation</b>			
General Storage	240	\$1,920	
Cleaning Janitorial	48	\$384	
Public Restrooms	360	\$2,880	

FACILITY PROGRAM-DRAFT (3.31.10) LARGE	ESTIMATED SQUARE FEET	ESTIMATED ANNUAL OPERATING COSTS*	NOTES
SUBTOTAL	648	\$5,184	
NET EST'D SQUARE FEET	15,295	\$122,360	
ADD 20% CIRCULATION	3,059	\$24,472	
ADD 11% STRUCTURE	1,682	\$13,460	
ADD 7% MECH/HVAC	1,071	\$8,565	
GROSS EST'D SQUARE FEET	<b>21,107</b>	<b>\$168,857</b>	
<b>Outdoor Space</b>			we will need a different multiplier if we want to figure costs for these spaces
Clearing Grubbing \$8,400 ac	15	\$126,000	Bury stumps on Site
Parking (100 vehicles; 30RV; 5 motorcoaches) \$8 s.f.	180,000	\$1,440,000	\$4 compacted gravel base / \$3 6"D 1 2" Asphalt - \$1 Contingency - Assumes on site Gravel Source
Utility Extension		\$100,000	depends on site
Interpretive and scenic overlooks; event venue		\$250,000	approx.
Water features-dock, skating shelter		\$100,000	for summer and winter activities on an adjacent water body
Associated trail system		\$80,000	cost dependent on location and design
SUBTOTAL		<b>\$2,096,000</b>	
Construction Cost @\$385.00/sf	\$8,126,234		sf estimate is reduced slightly from smaller versions of facility to allow for economy of scale
Site Prep and Construction Costs	\$2,096,000		
<b>TOTAL SITE + BUILDING CONSTRUCTION COSTS</b>	<b>\$10,222,234</b>		
Design + Project Development Costs	\$2,248,891	22%	
Construction Administration Costs	\$204,445	2%	
FF+E** + Move-in Costs	\$715,556	7%	
Exhibit Design + Materials @ \$8/sf	\$168,857		these costs could be covered by partner programming/funding
LEED Silver Certification	\$439,556		
<b>TOTAL PROJECT COSTS</b>	<b>\$13,999,539</b>		

\* HVAC+E = heating, ventilation, air conditioning and electrical

\*\* FF+E = furniture, fixtures and equipment

### Operations Revenues and Expenditures: Small Scenario

OPERATIONS REVENUE + EXPENSE, 5 YEAR PROJECTION (small scenario)								
ITEM	NOTES	FY 1	%	FY 2	FY 3	FY 4	FY 5	NOTES
REVENUE SOURCES								
EARNED INCOME								
Event Income	15 event-days per year @ \$400/day	\$6,000		\$7,500	\$7,500	\$9,000	\$9,000	assumes increase in per day rental fee in FY 4 and 5
Admissions	See 'Estimated Admissions Revenue' table	\$85,800.00		\$88,374	\$91,025	\$93,756	\$96,569	Includes 3% annual increase
Cafe Rental	n/a			\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	500sf x \$2/sf x 12mo. , includes 3% annual increase
Gift Shop sales	calculate based on current revenues	\$14,376		\$14,807	\$15,252	\$15,709	\$16,180	Includes 3% annual increase
Auditorium/Theater	n/a							
MSCVB Operations Contribution		\$26,000.00		\$26,780	\$27,583	\$28,411	\$29,263	Includes 3% annual increase
<b>SUBTOTAL EARNED INCOME</b>		<b>\$46,376.05</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>\$49,087.33</b>	<b>\$50,334.95</b>	<b>\$53,120.00</b>	<b>\$54,443.60</b>	

ITEM	NOTES		FY 1	%	FY 2	FY 3	FY 4	FY 5	NOTES
<b>OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS</b>									
Borough Govt./ Partner or other committed contributor			\$42,000.00		\$43,680	\$45,427	\$47,244	\$49,134	Includes 4% annual increase
Other Organizations	Corporation X				\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
	Corporation Y				\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
	Agency				\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
	Tribe				\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
Individual Contributions									
Business Contributions									
Endowment income									
Other									
<b>SUBTOTAL OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS</b>			<b>\$42,000</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>\$43,680</b>	<b>\$45,427</b>	<b>\$47,244</b>	<b>\$49,134</b>	
<b>TOTAL REVENUES</b>			<b>\$88,376.05</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$92,767</b>	<b>\$95,762.15</b>	<b>\$100,364.29</b>	<b>\$103,577.66</b>	
<b>Facility Operations + Maintenance</b>	<b>\$/ Sq Ft.</b>	<b>Est. Sq. Ft.</b>	<b>FY 1</b>		<b>FY 2</b>	<b>FY 3</b>	<b>FY 4</b>	<b>FY 5</b>	<b>NOTES</b>
<b>EXPENDITURES</b>									
Facility	\$8.00	8,697	\$69,574		\$72,357	\$75,251	\$78,261	\$81,392	Includes 4% annual increase for facility operation costs
Outdoor Spaces Maintenance	\$400.00/ acre	6 acres	\$2,400		\$2,472	\$2,546	\$2,623	\$2,701	Includes 3% annual increase for outdoor maintenance costs
Capital Reserve (Repair + Replacement Reserve) Facility			\$15,315		\$15,315	\$15,315	\$15,315	\$15,315	
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>			<b>\$87,289</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$90,144</b>	<b>\$93,112</b>	<b>\$96,199</b>	<b>\$99,408</b>	
<b>REVENUES LESS EXPENDITURES: SURPLUS (DEFICIT)</b>			<b>\$1,087.06</b>		<b>\$2,623</b>	<b>\$2,650</b>	<b>\$4,165</b>	<b>\$4,170</b>	

## Operations Revenues and Expenditures: Medium Scenario

OPERATIONS REVENUE + EXPENSE, 5 YEAR PROJECTION (medium scenario)								
ITEM	NOTES	FY 1	%	FY 2	FY 3	FY 4	FY 5	NOTES
REVENUE SOURCES								
EARNED INCOME								
Event Income	20 event-days per year @ \$500/day	\$10,000		\$10,000	\$10,000	\$12,000	\$12,000	assumes increase in per day rental fee in FY 4 and 5
Admissions	See 'Estimated Admissions Revenue' table	\$407,750.00		\$419,983	\$432,582	\$445,559	\$458,926	Includes 3% annual increase
Cafe Rental	commercial lease amount	\$15,600		\$16,068	\$16,536	\$17,004	\$17,472	café sf x \$2/sf x 12mo. , includes 3% annual increase
Gift Shop sales	calculate based on current revenues	\$38,086		\$39,228	\$40,405	\$41,617	\$42,866	Includes 3% annual increase
Auditorium/Theater	n/a							
MSCVB Operations Contribution		\$32,000.00		\$32,960	\$33,949	\$34,967	\$36,016	Includes 3% annual increase
<b>SUBTOTAL EARNED INCOME</b>		<b>\$95,685.80</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>\$98,256.37</b>	<b>\$100,890.02</b>	<b>\$105,588.64</b>	<b>\$108,354.18</b>	
OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS								
Borough Govt./ Partner or other committed contributor		\$52,000.00		\$54,080	\$56,243	\$58,493	\$60,833	Includes 4% annual increase
Other Organizations	Corporation X			\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
	Corporation Y			\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
	Agency			\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
	Tribe			\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
Individual Contributions								
Business Contributions								
Endowment income								
Other								
<b>SUBTOTAL OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS</b>		<b>\$52,000</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>\$54,080</b>	<b>\$56,243</b>	<b>\$58,493</b>	<b>\$60,833</b>	
<b>TOTAL REVENUES</b>		<b>\$147,685.80</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$152,336</b>	<b>\$157,133.22</b>	<b>\$164,081.57</b>	<b>\$169,186.83</b>	

Facility Operations + Maintenance	\$/ Sq Ft.	Est. Sq. Ft.	FY 1		FY 2	FY 3	FY 4	FY 5	NOTES
<b>EXPENDITURES</b>									
Facility	\$8.00	12,791	\$102,330		\$106,423	\$110,680	\$115,107	\$119,711	Includes 4% annual increase for facility operation costs
Outdoor Spaces Maintenance	\$400 / acre	8 acres	\$3,200		\$3,296	\$3,395	\$3,497	\$3,602	Includes 3% annual increase for outdoor maintenance costs
Personnel Bookings + Events Coordinator	\$20.00 Pay + Benefits	960 PTE hours annually	\$19,200		\$19,776	\$20,369	\$20,980	\$21,610	Includes 3% annual pay + benefits increase costs
Capital Reserve (Repair + Replacement Reserve) Facility			\$21,519		\$21,519	\$21,519	\$21,519	\$21,519	
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>			<b>\$146,249</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$151,014</b>	<b>\$155,963</b>	<b>\$161,104</b>	<b>\$166,442</b>	
<b>REVENUES LESS EXPENDITURES: SURPLUS (DEFICIT)</b>			<b>\$1,436.64</b>		<b>\$1,322</b>	<b>\$1,170</b>	<b>\$2,978</b>	<b>\$2,745</b>	

## Operations Revenues and Expenditures: Large Scenario

OPERATIONS REVENUE + EXPENSE, 5 YEAR PROJECTION (large scenario)								
ITEM	NOTES	FY 1	%	FY 2	FY 3	FY 4	FY 5	NOTES
REVENUE SOURCES								
EARNED INCOME								
Event Income	24 event-days per year @ \$600/day	\$14,400		\$14,400	\$14,400	\$16,800	\$16,800	assumes increase in per day rental fee in FY 4 and 5
Admissions	See 'Estimated Admissions Revenue' table	\$727,000.00		\$748,810	\$771,274	\$794,413	\$818,245	Includes 3% annual increase
Cafe Rental	commercial lease amount	\$24,000		\$24,720	\$25,440	\$26,160	\$26,880	500sf x \$2/sf x 12mo. , includes 3% annual increase
Gift Shop sales	calculate based on current revenues	\$69,275		\$71,353	\$73,494	\$75,698	\$77,969	Includes 3% annual increase
Auditorium/Theater	200 person capacity	\$24,000		\$24,720	\$25,462	\$26,225	\$27,012	assumes 120 movie showings annually with 100 average attendance and \$2 admission fee
MSCVB Operations Contribution		\$40,000.00		\$41,200	\$42,436	\$43,709	\$45,020	Includes 3% annual increase
Other Tenant Contributions (Rent)	2,800	\$50,400.00		\$51,912	\$53,469	\$55,073	\$56,726	Includes 3% annual increase
<b>SUBTOTAL EARNED INCOME</b>		<b>\$222,074.77</b>	<b>96%</b>	<b>\$228,305.02</b>	<b>\$234,700.57</b>	<b>\$243,666.38</b>	<b>\$250,407.57</b>	

OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS									
Borough Government/Partner Contributions			\$9,000.00		\$9,450	\$9,923	\$10,419	\$10,940	Includes 5% annual increase
Other Organizations	Corporation X				\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
	Corporation Y				\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
	Agency				\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
	Tribe				\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	
Individual Contributions									
Business Contributions									
Endowment income									
Other									
SUBTOTAL INDIVIDUAL + COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS			\$9,000	4%	\$9,450	\$9,923	\$10,419	\$10,940	
<b>TOTAL REVENUES</b>			<b>\$231,074.77</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$237,755.02</b>	<b>\$244,623.07</b>	<b>\$254,085.01</b>	<b>\$261,347.13</b>	
Facility Operations + Maintenance		Est. Sq. Ft.	FY 1	%	FY 2	FY 3	FY 4	FY 5	NOTES
	\$/ Sq Ft.								
EXPENDITURES									
Facility	\$8.00	21,107	\$168,857		\$175,611	\$182,636	\$189,941	\$197,539	Includes 4% annual increase for facility operation costs
Outdoor Spaces Maintenance	\$400.00 per acre	15 acres	\$6,000		\$6,180	\$6,365	\$6,556	\$6,753	Includes 3% annual increase for outdoor maintenance costs

Personnel Bookings + Events Coordinator	\$22.00 Pay + Benefits	960 PTE hours annually	\$21,120		\$21,754	\$22,406	\$23,078	\$23,771	Includes 3% annual pay + benefits increase costs
Capital Reserve (Repair + Replacement Reserve) Facility			\$32,936		\$32,936	\$32,936	\$32,936	\$32,936	
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>			<b>\$228,913</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$236,481</b>	<b>\$244,343</b>	<b>\$252,512</b>	<b>\$260,999</b>	
<b>REVENUES LESS EXPENDITURES: SURPLUS (DEFICIT)</b>			<b>\$2,161.82</b>		<b>\$1,274</b>	<b>\$280</b>	<b>\$1,573</b>	<b>\$349</b>	

## Estimated Admissions Revenue

	low			medium			high		
Visitor Group	Number of Visitor Days	Average Admission Fee*	Estimated Admission Revenue	Number of Visitor Days	Average Admission Fee*	Estimated Admission Revenue	Number of Visitor Days	Average Admission Fee*	Estimated Admission Revenue
<b>In-State</b>									
Mat-Su Residents	7,500	\$0	\$0	12,500	\$2	\$25,000	30,000	\$2	\$60,000
In-State Residents (other than Mat-Su)	22,000	\$2	\$44,000	60,000	\$3	\$180,000	110,000	\$3	\$330,000
<b>Out-of-State</b>									
Independent Travelers	7,500	\$3	\$22,500	22,250	\$5	\$111,250	37,000	\$5	\$185,000
Package Tour Travelers	7,400	\$2	\$14,800	22,000	\$3	\$66,000	36,500	\$3	\$109,500
Other Out-of-State	1,500	\$3	\$4,500	4,500	\$5	\$22,500	7,500	\$5	\$37,500
<b>Special Groups</b>									
School Groups	1,000	\$0	\$0	3,000	\$1	\$3,000	5,000	\$1	\$5,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>46,900</b>	<b>\$2</b>	<b>\$85,800</b>	<b>124,250</b>	<b>\$3</b>	<b>\$407,750</b>	<b>226,000</b>	<b>\$3</b>	<b>\$727,000</b>

### Estimated Gift Shop Revenue

		FY #1	FY #2	FY #3	FY #4	Notes
Annual number of visitors						
Low	46,900	\$14,376.05	\$14,807.33	\$15,251.55	\$15,709.10	increase of 3% annually
Medium	124,250	\$38,085.80	\$39,228.37	\$40,405.22	\$41,617.38	
High	226,000	\$69,274.77	\$71,353.02	\$73,493.61	\$75,698.41	

assumes \$0.31 in profit per sale, based on 10-year sales and profit history of existing gift shop

### Mat-Su CVB Visitor Center - Gift Shop History

Year	# of visitors	gift shop sales	gift shop expenses	net revenue	amount spent per visitor	percent profit
1999		\$14,549				
2000	12,435	\$16,170			\$1.30	
2001	13,168	\$21,649			\$1.64	
2002	13,109	\$26,096			\$1.99	
2003	8,895	\$23,633	highway construction		\$2.66	
2004	13,154	\$27,058	highway construction		\$2.06	
2005	6,165	\$11,642	no signs up		\$1.89	
2006	5,857	\$9,806			\$1.67	
2007	6,154	\$4,403			\$0.72	
2008	5,523	\$6,271			\$1.14	
2009	4,874	\$6,435			\$1.32	
2010 (projected)	5,000	\$8,000	6,500	\$1,500	\$1.60	0.1875
<b>Average spent per visitor</b>					<b>\$1.63</b>	
<b>Profit per visitor</b>						<b>\$0.31</b>

## Capital Replacement: Small Scenario

Small Scenario Capital Replacement Expense		
	<b>Facility Cost:</b>	<b>\$ 6,509,612</b>
	Inflation Rate:	1.5%
	Expected Life in Years:	30
	Future Value of Facility (Cost with inflation):	<b>\$10,175,045</b>
	Percent Local Cash Required for Replacement:	10%
10%	Capital Replacement Amount:	<b>\$1,017,504</b>
	Expected Interest Rate:	5.0%
	<b>Annual Capital Replacement Expense</b>	<b>\$15,315</b>

(formula for future value of an asset)

(future value multiplied by % local cash required)

(formula for determining annual capital replacement amount)

Small Scenario Capital Replacement Fund				
Year	Start of Year	Annual	Interest	End of Year
	Balance	Deposit	Earnings	Balance
1	\$0	\$15,315	\$0	\$15,315
2	\$15,315	\$15,315	\$766	\$31,396
3	\$31,396	\$15,315	\$1,570	\$48,280
4	\$48,280	\$15,315	\$2,414	\$66,009
5	\$66,009	\$15,315	\$3,300	\$84,625
6	\$84,625	\$15,315	\$4,231	\$104,171
7	\$104,171	\$15,315	\$5,209	\$124,694
8	\$124,694	\$15,315	\$6,235	\$146,244
9	\$146,244	\$15,315	\$7,312	\$168,871
10	\$168,871	\$15,315	\$8,444	\$192,629
11	\$192,629	\$15,315	\$9,631	\$217,576
12	\$217,576	\$15,315	\$10,879	\$243,769
13	\$243,769	\$15,315	\$12,188	\$271,273
14	\$271,273	\$15,315	\$13,564	\$300,151
15	\$300,151	\$15,315	\$15,008	\$330,474
16	\$330,474	\$15,315	\$16,524	\$362,312
17	\$362,312	\$15,315	\$18,116	\$395,743
18	\$395,743	\$15,315	\$19,787	\$430,845
19	\$430,845	\$15,315	\$21,542	\$467,702
20	\$467,702	\$15,315	\$23,385	\$506,402

Small Scenario Capital Replacement Fund (cont'd)				
Year	Start of Year	Annual	Interest	End of Year
	Balance	Deposit	Earnings	Balance
21	\$506,402	\$15,315	\$25,320	\$547,037
22	\$547,037	\$15,315	\$27,352	\$589,704
23	\$589,704	\$15,315	\$29,485	\$634,504
24	\$634,504	\$15,315	\$31,725	\$681,544
25	\$681,544	\$15,315	\$34,077	\$730,936
26	\$730,936	\$15,315	\$36,547	\$782,798
27	\$782,798	\$15,315	\$39,140	\$837,252
28	\$837,252	\$15,315	\$41,863	\$894,430
29	\$894,430	\$15,315	\$44,721	\$954,466
30	\$954,466	\$15,315	\$47,723	\$1,017,504
31	\$1,017,504	\$15,315	\$50,875	\$1,083,695
32	\$1,083,695	\$15,315	\$54,185	\$1,153,194
33	\$1,153,194	\$15,315	\$57,660	\$1,226,169
34	\$1,226,169	\$15,315	\$61,308	\$1,302,792
35	\$1,302,792	\$15,315	\$65,140	\$1,383,247
36	\$1,383,247	\$15,315	\$69,162	\$1,467,724
37	\$1,467,724	\$15,315	\$73,386	\$1,556,425
38	\$1,556,425	\$15,315	\$77,821	\$1,649,561
39	\$1,649,561	\$15,315	\$82,478	\$1,747,354
40	\$1,747,354	\$15,315	\$87,368	\$1,850,037
41	\$1,850,037	\$15,315	\$92,502	\$1,957,854
42	\$1,957,854	\$15,315	\$97,893	\$2,071,061
43	\$2,071,061	\$15,315	\$103,553	\$2,189,929
44	\$2,189,929	\$15,315	\$109,496	\$2,314,740
45	\$2,314,740	\$15,315	\$115,737	\$2,445,792
46	\$2,445,792	\$15,315	\$122,290	\$2,583,397
47	\$2,583,397	\$15,315	\$129,170	\$2,727,882
48	\$2,727,882	\$15,315	\$136,394	\$2,879,591
49	\$2,879,591	\$15,315	\$143,980	\$3,038,885
50	\$3,038,885	\$15,315	\$151,944	\$3,206,144

## Capital Replacement: Medium Scenario

Medium Scenario Capital Replacement Expense			
	<b>Facility Cost:</b>	<b>\$ 9,146,837</b>	
	Inflation Rate:	1.5%	
	Expected Life in Years:	30	
	Future Value of Facility (Cost with inflation):	<b>\$14,297,240</b>	(formula for future value of an asset)
	Percent Local Cash Required for Replacement:	10%	
10%	Capital Replacement Amount:	<b>\$1,429,724</b>	(future value multiplied by % local cash required)
	Expected Interest Rate:	5.0%	
	<b>Annual Capital Replacement Expense</b>	<b>\$21,519</b>	(formula for determining annual capital replacement amount)

Medium Scenario Capital Replacement Fund				
Year	Start of Year	Annual	Interest	End of Year
	Balance	Deposit	Earnings	Balance
1	\$0	\$21,519	\$0	\$21,519
2	\$21,519	\$21,519	\$1,076	\$44,115
3	\$44,115	\$21,519	\$2,206	\$67,840
4	\$67,840	\$21,519	\$3,392	\$92,751
5	\$92,751	\$21,519	\$4,638	\$118,908
6	\$118,908	\$21,519	\$5,945	\$146,373
7	\$146,373	\$21,519	\$7,319	\$175,211
8	\$175,211	\$21,519	\$8,761	\$205,491
9	\$205,491	\$21,519	\$10,275	\$237,285
10	\$237,285	\$21,519	\$11,864	\$270,669
11	\$270,669	\$21,519	\$13,533	\$305,722
12	\$305,722	\$21,519	\$15,286	\$342,527
13	\$342,527	\$21,519	\$17,126	\$381,173
14	\$381,173	\$21,519	\$19,059	\$421,751
15	\$421,751	\$21,519	\$21,088	\$464,358
16	\$464,358	\$21,519	\$23,218	\$509,095
17	\$509,095	\$21,519	\$25,455	\$556,069
18	\$556,069	\$21,519	\$27,803	\$605,392
19	\$605,392	\$21,519	\$30,270	\$657,181
20	\$657,181	\$21,519	\$32,859	\$711,559

Medium Scenario Capital Replacement Fund				
Year	Start of Year	Annual	Interest	End of Year
	Balance	Deposit	Earnings	Balance
21	\$711,559	\$21,519	\$35,578	\$768,657
22	\$768,657	\$21,519	\$38,433	\$828,609
23	\$828,609	\$21,519	\$41,430	\$891,559
24	\$891,559	\$21,519	\$44,578	\$957,656
25	\$957,656	\$21,519	\$47,883	\$1,027,058
26	\$1,027,058	\$21,519	\$51,353	\$1,099,931
27	\$1,099,931	\$21,519	\$54,997	\$1,176,447
28	\$1,176,447	\$21,519	\$58,822	\$1,256,788
29	\$1,256,788	\$21,519	\$62,839	\$1,341,147
30	\$1,341,147	\$21,519	\$67,057	\$1,429,724
31	\$1,429,724	\$21,519	\$71,486	\$1,522,730
32	\$1,522,730	\$21,519	\$76,136	\$1,620,386
33	\$1,620,386	\$21,519	\$81,019	\$1,722,924
34	\$1,722,924	\$21,519	\$86,146	\$1,830,590
35	\$1,830,590	\$21,519	\$91,529	\$1,943,639
36	\$1,943,639	\$21,519	\$97,182	\$2,062,340
37	\$2,062,340	\$21,519	\$103,117	\$2,186,976
38	\$2,186,976	\$21,519	\$109,349	\$2,317,845
39	\$2,317,845	\$21,519	\$115,892	\$2,455,256
40	\$2,455,256	\$21,519	\$122,763	\$2,599,538
41	\$2,599,538	\$21,519	\$129,977	\$2,751,035
42	\$2,751,035	\$21,519	\$137,552	\$2,910,106
43	\$2,910,106	\$21,519	\$145,505	\$3,077,131
44	\$3,077,131	\$21,519	\$153,857	\$3,252,507
45	\$3,252,507	\$21,519	\$162,625	\$3,436,651
46	\$3,436,651	\$21,519	\$171,833	\$3,630,003
47	\$3,630,003	\$21,519	\$181,500	\$3,833,023
48	\$3,833,023	\$21,519	\$191,651	\$4,046,193
49	\$4,046,193	\$21,519	\$202,310	\$4,270,022
50	\$4,270,022	\$21,519	\$213,501	\$4,505,043

## Capital Replacement: Large Scenario

Capital Replacement Expense			
	<b>Facility Cost:</b>	<b>\$13,999,539</b>	
	Inflation Rate:	1.5%	
	Expected Life in Years:	30	
	Future Value of Facility (Cost with inflation):	<b>\$21,882,402</b>	(formula for future value of an asset)
	Percent Local Cash Required for Replacement:	10%	
10%	Capital Replacement Amount:	<b>\$2,188,240</b>	(future value multiplied by % local cash required)
	Expected Interest Rate:	5.0%	
	<b>Annual Capital Replacement Expense</b>	<b>\$32,936</b>	(formula for determining annual capital replacement amount)

Capital Replacement Fund				
Year	Start of Year	Annual	Interest	End of Year
	Balance	Deposit	Earnings	Balance
1	\$0	\$32,936	\$0	\$32,936
2	\$32,936	\$32,936	\$1,647	\$67,519
3	\$67,519	\$32,936	\$3,376	\$103,831
4	\$103,831	\$32,936	\$5,192	\$141,959
5	\$141,959	\$32,936	\$7,098	\$181,993
6	\$181,993	\$32,936	\$9,100	\$224,029
7	\$224,029	\$32,936	\$11,201	\$268,166
8	\$268,166	\$32,936	\$13,408	\$314,511
9	\$314,511	\$32,936	\$15,726	\$363,173
10	\$363,173	\$32,936	\$18,159	\$414,267
11	\$414,267	\$32,936	\$20,713	\$467,917
12	\$467,917	\$32,936	\$23,396	\$524,249
13	\$524,249	\$32,936	\$26,212	\$583,398
14	\$583,398	\$32,936	\$29,170	\$645,504
15	\$645,504	\$32,936	\$32,275	\$710,715
16	\$710,715	\$32,936	\$35,536	\$779,187
17	\$779,187	\$32,936	\$38,959	\$851,082
18	\$851,082	\$32,936	\$42,554	\$926,573
19	\$926,573	\$32,936	\$46,329	\$1,005,837
20	\$1,005,837	\$32,936	\$50,292	\$1,089,065

Capital Replacement Fund				
Year	Start of Year	Annual	Interest	End of Year
	Balance	Deposit	Earnings	Balance
21	\$1,089,065	\$32,936	\$54,453	\$1,176,455
22	\$1,176,455	\$32,936	\$58,823	\$1,268,214
23	\$1,268,214	\$32,936	\$63,411	\$1,364,561
24	\$1,364,561	\$32,936	\$68,228	\$1,465,725
25	\$1,465,725	\$32,936	\$73,286	\$1,571,947
26	\$1,571,947	\$32,936	\$78,597	\$1,683,481
27	\$1,683,481	\$32,936	\$84,174	\$1,800,591
28	\$1,800,591	\$32,936	\$90,030	\$1,923,557
29	\$1,923,557	\$32,936	\$96,178	\$2,052,671
30	\$2,052,671	\$32,936	\$102,634	\$2,188,240
31	\$2,188,240	\$32,936	\$109,412	\$2,330,588
32	\$2,330,588	\$32,936	\$116,529	\$2,480,054
33	\$2,480,054	\$32,936	\$124,003	\$2,636,993
34	\$2,636,993	\$32,936	\$131,850	\$2,801,779
35	\$2,801,779	\$32,936	\$140,089	\$2,974,804
36	\$2,974,804	\$32,936	\$148,740	\$3,156,480
37	\$3,156,480	\$32,936	\$157,824	\$3,347,240
38	\$3,347,240	\$32,936	\$167,362	\$3,547,538
39	\$3,547,538	\$32,936	\$177,377	\$3,757,851
40	\$3,757,851	\$32,936	\$187,893	\$3,978,680
41	\$3,978,680	\$32,936	\$198,934	\$4,210,550
42	\$4,210,550	\$32,936	\$210,528	\$4,454,014
43	\$4,454,014	\$32,936	\$222,701	\$4,709,651
44	\$4,709,651	\$32,936	\$235,483	\$4,978,070
45	\$4,978,070	\$32,936	\$248,903	\$5,259,909
46	\$5,259,909	\$32,936	\$262,995	\$5,555,841
47	\$5,555,841	\$32,936	\$277,792	\$5,866,569
48	\$5,866,569	\$32,936	\$293,328	\$6,192,834
49	\$6,192,834	\$32,936	\$309,642	\$6,535,411
50	\$6,535,411	\$32,936	\$326,771	\$6,895,118

## APPENDIX G: PROGRAM + FACILITY TABLES

Small Facility Program	Estimated Square Footage	Medium Facility Program	Estimated Square Footage	Large Facility Program	Estimated Square Footage
<b>Potential Uses</b>		<b>Potential Uses</b>		<b>Potential Uses</b>	
<b>Reception</b>					
Entry	64	Entry	96	Entry	180
Lobby	240	Lobby	300	Lobby	360
Storage/Coat Room	80	Storage/Coat Room	100	Storage/Coat Room	120
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>496</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>660</b>
<b>Office + Personnel Space</b>					
Mat-Su CVB offices	1,616	Mat-Su CVB offices	2,240	Mat-Su CVB offices	1,552
				Program offices/Tenant space	2,800
				Board/meeting room	600
				Restrooms	150
				Break Room	345
				Entry/Lobby	300
Storage	100	Storage	135	Storage	180
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>1,716</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>2,375</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>5,927</b>
<b>Visitor Space</b>					
Exhibit space	2,000	Exhibit space	2,750	Exhibit space	3,250
Tour Desk - visitor services	100	Tour Desk - visitor services	150	Tour Desk - visitor services	240
Virtual Tour Kiosk	100	Virtual Tour Kiosk	150		
		Info/Reservation - public lands	150	Info/Reservations Desk - public lands	120
Auditorium/Multipurpose	1,000	Auditorium/Multi-purpose	1,550	Auditorium/Theatre	1,800
				Multi-purpose/Classroom/Event Area	900
		Retail shop	300	Retail shop	450
Snack Bar/Coffee Cart/Retail	150	Café -- seating for 30	650	Café	1,000
Storage -- printed materials	300	Storage--multipurpose, café, retail	240	Storage	300
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>3,650</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>5,790</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>8,060</b>
<b>SUBTOTAL AREAS ABOVE</b>	<b>5,750</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL AREAS ABOVE</b>	<b>8,661</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL AREAS ABOVE</b>	<b>14,647</b>

<b>Maintenance, Operations Support and Circulation</b>					
General Storage	144	General Storage	200	General Storage	240
Cleaning Janitorial	48	Cleaning Janitorial	48	Cleaning Janitorial	48
Public Restrooms	360	Public Restrooms	360	Public Restrooms	360
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>552</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>608</b>	<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>648</b>
<b>NET EST'D SQUARE FEET</b>	<b>6,302</b>	<b>NET EST'D SQUARE FEET</b>	<b>9,269</b>	<b>NET EST'D SQUARE FEET</b>	<b>15,295</b>
<b>ADD 20% CIRCULATION</b>	<b>1,260</b>	<b>ADD 20% CIRCULATION</b>	<b>1,854</b>	<b>ADD 20% CIRCULATION</b>	<b>3,059</b>
<b>ADD 11% STRUCTURE</b>	<b>693</b>	<b>ADD 11% STRUCTURE</b>	<b>1,020</b>	<b>ADD 11% STRUCTURE</b>	<b>1,682</b>
<b>ADD 7% MECH/HVAC*</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>ADD 7% MECH/HVAC</b>	<b>649</b>	<b>ADD 7% MECH/HVAC</b>	<b>1,071</b>
<b>GROSS EST'D SQUARE FEET</b>	<b>8,697</b>	<b>GROSS EST'D SQUARE FEET</b>	<b>12,791</b>	<b>GROSS EST'D SQUARE FEET</b>	<b>21,107</b>

