

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM NO. 96-33

From: Duane Dvorak, City Planner *DD*

Through: Sarah H. Palin, Mayor *By JWC*

To: Wasilla City Council

Date: November 20, 1996

Subject: Preliminary investigation of the possible acquisition of Lots 8, 9, and 10, Block 2E, East Wasilla Townsite, for the purpose of expanding the Wasilla City Museum Complex and to provide additional facility space for City Recreation Services Division.

At the November 13, 1996 regular meeting, the Wasilla City Council requested staff to investigate the possible acquisition of the above referenced property. This memorandum is a preliminary investigation and is intended to provide Council with a brief overview of issues related to the land acquisition process.

Property Value/Ownership of Land and Buildings

The assessed value and ownership of Lots 8, 9, and 10, Block 2E, East Wasilla Townsite, is summarized below. This information is extracted from the current Mat-Su Borough tax roll dated 9/23/96 (attached).

Ownership of all lots:

Kurt A. and Marianne Schreiber
P.O. Box 870530
Wasilla, AK 99687

Assessed Values

Lot #	Land Value	Bldg Value	Total	Lot size
8	\$34,900	\$0	\$34,900	6,970 Sq. Ft.
9	34,900	10,900	45,800	6,970 Sq. Ft.
10	34,900	3,800	38,700	6,970 Sq. Ft.
Total	\$104,700	\$14,700	\$119,400	20,910 Sq. Ft.

According to the proposal jointly submitted by the Wasilla-Knik-Willow Creek Historical Society and the Wasilla Parks and Recreation Commission, the asking price for the three lots is

\$180,000. The total variance between the asking price and the current assessed value of the land and appurtenances is \$60,600.

Comprehensive Plan

The 1996 Wasilla Comprehensive Plan describes future expansion of the City Museum block on pages 137 - 141 (attached). The plan specifically references the acquisition of Lot 2, Block 8, Wasilla Townsite, which is located between the Herning, Teeland, Mead Building and the Old Wasilla Townsite building display. To this end, the Council appropriated \$40,000 for the acquisition of Lot 2 in the FY97 Wasilla Capital Budget, which is discussed below. The plan also identifies the possible acquisition of Lots 7, 8, 9 and 10, Block 2E, East Wasilla Townsite as the ultimate plan for expansion of the Museum complex.

The comprehensive plan suggests that Boundary Street could be vacated if the City is able to consolidate all lots in the Museum/Library Block and the four privately owned lots on the west side of Block 2E, East Wasilla Townsite. Access to Boundary Street could not be restricted in this fashion unless all lots fronting on this stretch of right-of-way are in common City ownership. Even if Lots 8, 9, and 10 are acquired, there is still Lot 2, Block 8, Wasilla Townsite and Lot 7, Block 2E, East Wasilla Townsite to consider.

The comprehensive plan is a policy guide for the City Council and other elected and appointed city officials, to guide the City's decision making process. The plan is an expression of community needs, wishes and desires, as well as a plan for orderly and coordinated future development.

The comprehensive plan is not fiscally constrained. With regard to the acquisition of land for expanded public facilities, or the development of new public buildings, etc., the plan may serve as justification for capital budget appropriations.

The Council should give the comprehensive plan due deference, when considering issues that are directly addressed in the plan. The Council should balance the recommendations contained in the plan with a thorough investigation of each proposal that is brought forward for Council review and approval. The recommendations of the plan should be balanced with other supporting information, and with public sentiments, at the time council decides to pursue a project referenced in the plan.

Capital Improvements Program (CIP)

The FY97 Wasilla CIP Budget contains \$40,000 for the acquisition of Lot 2, Block 8, Wasilla Townsite. The proposal of the Historical Society and City Parks and Recreation Commission is to re-allocate these funds to partially fund the acquisition of Lots 8, 9 and 10, Block 2E, East Wasilla Townsite. The purported asking price of the lots would require up to \$140,000 in additional funding, should the asking price be determined by competent appraisal to be fair market value for the lots. Additional funding would have to be appropriated by Council, whereas the Council could re-allocate the existing \$40,000 as partial funding for this new purpose by a simple resolution.

Public Works

Public Works has indicated that there are underground city utilities in this section of Boundary Street that might preclude structural development over portions of the right-of-way. In addition, there is a possibility that the City may want to consider exchanging the undeveloped Yenlo Street right-of-way for an extension of the Boundary Street right-of-way between Swanson Avenue and Bogard Road. This has been discussed informally within Public Works over the past several years as a way of relieving some traffic congestion in the vicinity of the Post Office and Carrs Shopping Center. Closing a section of Boundary Street might foreclose this option in the future.

Environmental

Concerns have been expressed about possible contamination of the Lots 8, 9, and 10, due to the current use of the lots for an auto repair business. Current environmental regulations require land owners to be responsible for contamination on their property. For this reason, the City would not want to acquire a potential liability if there is any kind of environmental contamination on Lots 8, 9, and 10. Any offer by the City to acquire these lots should be contingent upon an investigation of the property by a qualified environmental consultant and be contingent on the current property owners ability to demonstrate that the site is not contaminated.

The City Attorney and Public Works department can advise further on the need to address these concerns and the appropriate methods of dealing with these issues in a negotiation process. This concern would need to be addressed regardless of what property the City might be considering for acquisition.

Acquisition process - Fair Market Value

City ordinance requires that all property acquisitions be accomplished for fair market value (or less). An independent appraisal within six months of purchase is required to establish fair market value. Since this costs money, this step is not usually taken unless the City Council is seriously considering an acquisition of land. Considering the variance between the asking price that has been conveyed by the Historical Society/Parks and Recreation Commission, and the current assessed value for tax purposes, the "fair market value" is probably somewhere between these two figures. Only a current appraisal could determine the maximum amount that the City could legally appropriate for acquisition of Lots 8, 9, and 10 (including all appurtenances).

The City may acquire property by any legal means and choose any method of financing that is available within the City's powers. This could range from an appropriation of the full amount of purchase, to a consumer loan over time, to a land exchange of other city lands. The City could negotiate an owner financing arrangement if it were the preferred method of payment for the land owner. The City has a great deal of latitude to negotiate with the property owner for the terms and conditions of financing land acquisitions.

Items for Further Consideration

This memorandum is intended to provide a broad overview of issues related to the possible acquisition of Lots 8, 9, and 10, Block 2E, East Wasilla Townsite. If the Council would like to have staff look into this further, some suggested options are summarized below:

1. Up until now, it does not appear that the City has had any official contact with the property owners of Lots 8, 9, and 10, Block 2E, East Wasilla Townsite, i.e. Kurt and Marianne Schreiber. To explore this issue further would require direct discussions with the property owner to obtain additional information about the property, asking price and potential financing options. To investigate further, the Mayor's Office should be directed to enter into negotiations with the property owner and bring back an offer for Council consideration at a subsequent meeting.

2. The \$40,000 currently in the CIP budget for acquisition of Lot 2, Block 8, Wasilla Townsite, may be reallocated to another similar purpose, i.e. other land acquisition for the Museum and Recreation Services Division, by Council resolution. It is not clear, however, what the status of acquiring Lot 2, Block 8, Wasilla Townsite is, and why this original purpose should be abandoned in favor of acquiring Lots 8, 9, and 10, Block 2E, East Addition. Perhaps it may be prudent for the Mayor's Office to investigate and update this project before reallocating funds to another purpose.

WASILLA PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
WASILLA, KNIK, WILLOW CREEK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MEMORANDUM


RECEIVED

DATE: October 24, 1996

OCT 28 1996

TO: Mayor Sarah Palin

CITY OF WASILLA, ALASKA

FROM: Ron Rucker, Chairperson 
Wasilla Parks and Recreation Commission

LeRoi Heaven, President
Wasilla, Knik, Willow Creek Historical Society

REF: Operational Space for the Functions of the Department
of Museum and Recreation Services (MARS)

On October 22, the Wasilla Parks and Recreation Commission (WPRC) and the Wasilla, Knik, Willow Creek Historical Society (HS) held a joint meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to share concerns developing as a result of the current and potential changes occurring in personnel and organizational structure under your new administration. A priority concern was the assurance of adequate space for effective operation of the various functions within MARS. We, therefore, jointly recommend the following series of phased actions:

First, the museum staff and the p&r administrative assistant will continue to operate out of the Dorothy Page Museum. The HS will maintain its office in the Townsite Cabin. The p&r maintenance function will continue to operate out of the City shop.

Second, when the Herning/Teelands Store renovation project is sufficiently completed, the HS will move its office to the Store. The p&r maintenance function will relocate its administrative functions to the Townsite Cabin. The museum staff, the p&r administrative assistant, and the p&r maintenance equipment will remain where they were in the first phase above.

Third, the City immediately takes action to acquire the Kurt Schreiber property, Block 2E, Lots 8, 9 and 10, on Boundary Street. Estimated price for this acquisition is \$180,000. Important information pertaining to and benefits of this action are as follows:

The City already owns Lot 6, and its intended use is for parking for the museum and Townsite Village.

Lot 7 is privately owned and already paved as a parking lot. The City could enter into a joint use agreement with the owner of Lot 7 and cooperatively develop a larger, more efficient parking area to meet both the property owner's and the City's needs.

Lot 8 would become the permanent home of "Shorty's Barn", temporarily stored on Lot 6, and the "Trick House", currently located behind the police station.

The buildings on Lots 9 and 10 could serve as the administrative office and shop for the p&r maintenance function. Since these buildings currently serve a similar function only minor modifications are anticipated.

The HS currently has earmarked \$40,000 in CIP funds for purchase of the Hetrick Property. Since this action appears to be indefinitely delayed, the HS is willing to have the Council redesignate these funds for purchase of the Schreiber property.

The Council would have to appropriate an additional \$140,000 in CIP funds to acquire the Schreiber property.

Eventually, if the Hetrick property is acquired sometime in the future, then the City could vacate Boundary Street between Herning Street and Swanson Street and create a significantly increased area for the Townsite Village.

Your support in general for the Department of Museum and Recreation Services is needed and appreciated. Your support for this specific action is highly desirable.

If you have questions or further information on this issue for the WPRC or the HS, please feel free to call Ron at home at 376-3935 or at work at 745-7571 or LeRoi at home at 376-5679.
Thanks.

*LeRoi Hearon, President
WKAC Hist. Soc.*

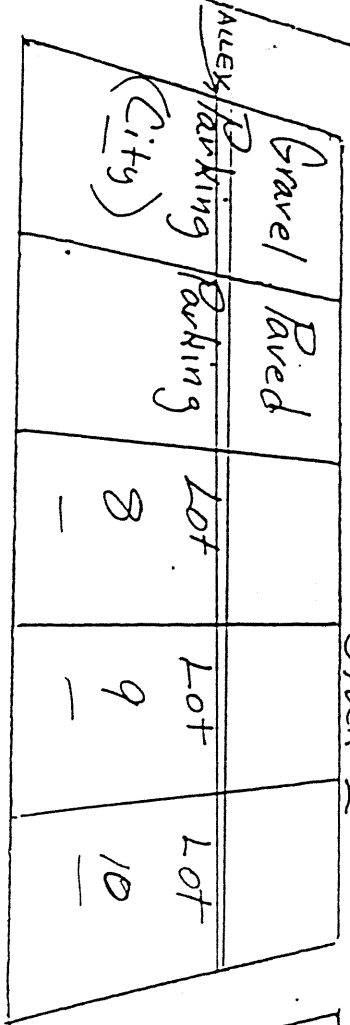
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CARRS MALL

YENLO ST. Block 2 E

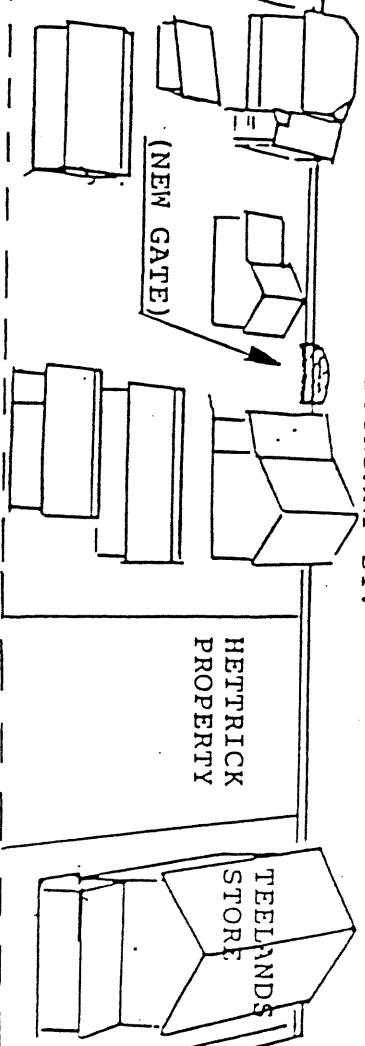
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Old Wasilla Town Site Park



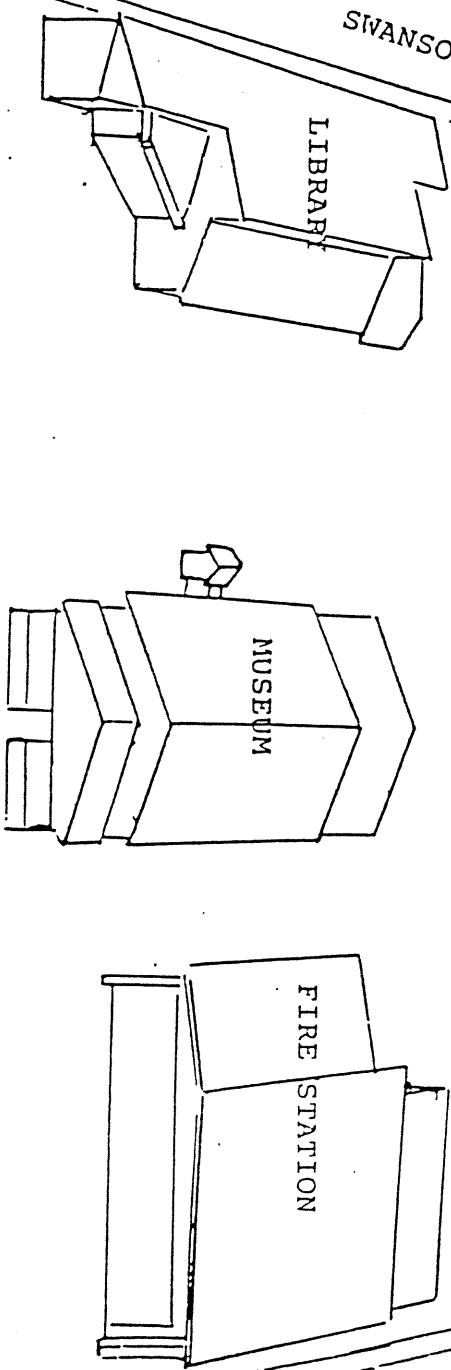
META ROS SQUARE

BOUNDARY ST.



DEDICATED ALLEYWAY

SWANSON ST.



POST OFFICE

HEENING ST. LOT 1 BLOC

ACCOUNT NUMBER	ZONE	OWNER / BUYER	LAND APR	BLDG APR	TOTAL APR	EXEMPTION	ASSESSED	ACREAGE
101B2E000E	CTY	LARSON JOAN E	34,900	0	34,900	34,900	34,900	.16
		LARSON MICHAEL S #10						
EAST WASILLA		500 E SWANSON						
17N01W10	WALL	AK 99654						
101B2E000E	CTY	WASILLA CITY DE	34,900	0	34,900	34,900	34,900	.16
		290 E HERNING AVE						
EAST WASILLA		WASILLA						
17N01W10	WALL	AK 99654						
101B2E000E	CTY	LARSON JOAN E	34,900	0	34,900	34,900	34,900	.16
		LARSON MICHAEL S #10						
EAST WASILLA		500 E SWANSON						
17N01W10	WALL	AK 99654						
101B2E000E	CTY	SCHREIBER KURT ASMARIANNE	34,900	0	34,900	34,900	34,900	.16
		PO BOX 870530						
EAST WASILLA		WASILLA						
17N01W10	WALL	AK 99687						
101B2E000E	CTY	SCHREIBER KURT ASMARIANNE	34,900	10,900	45,800	45,800	45,800	.16
		PO BOX 870530						
EAST WASILLA		WASILLA						
17N01W10	WALL	AK 99687						
1020B01L001	CTY	NOVOTNEY ROBT R SR & B TRE	9,000	0	9,000	9,000	9,000	.38
		NOVOTNEY BERNARD A TRE						
FLOYD		NOVOTNEY FAMILY TR						
17N01W10	WALL	ANCHORAGE						
1020B01L002	CTY	NOVOTNEY ROBT R SR & B TRE	9,000	0	9,000	9,000	9,000	.31
		NOVOTNEY BERNARD A TRE						
FLOYD		NOVOTNEY FAMILY TR						
17N01W10	WALL	ANCHORAGE						
1020B01L003	CTY	NOVOTNEY ROBT R SR & B TRE	9,000	0	9,000	9,000	9,000	.31
		NOVOTNEY BERNARD A TRE						
FLOYD		NOVOTNEY FAMILY TR						
17N01W10	WALL	ANCHORAGE						
1020B01L004	CTY	NOVOTNEY ROBT R SR & B TRE	7,500	0	7,500	7,500	7,500	.20
		NOVOTNEY BERNARD A TRE						
FLOYD		NOVOTNEY FAMILY TR						
17N01W10	WALL	ANCHORAGE						
1020B01L005	CTY	NOVOTNEY ROBT R SR & B TRE	7,500	0	7,500	7,500	7,500	.20
		NOVOTNEY BERNARD A TRE						
FLOYD		NOVOTNEY FAMILY TR						
17N01W10	WALL	ANCHORAGE						

accepted library standards require 1 parking space per 250 square feet of building. Thus, the existing facility, which is under-sized, should have at least 32 spaces.

Concerns for pedestrian safety. The library faces Swanson Road, a busy urban street with congested traffic conditions.

Parking and traffic flow problems in the library are chronic. Resolving the inadequate number of parking spaces at the library will be difficult, since the facility is surrounded to the west and north by public streets, and to the east and south by the Dorothy Page Museum. Library staff park on museum property to make as many spaces as possible available to the public. The lack of parking space is a problem for all users (library, museum and fire station) on this block. During 1992, the City purchased an additional lot for parking and additional property for parking could be acquired to the east across Boundary Street.

The library collection is also too small. Despite the increase in holdings, the collection falls short of the desired standard of three-four books per person in the service area. There is not enough room in the library building to expand the collection.

To resolve these problems, the plan recommends the City pursue one of these two options:

If the Post Office facility becomes available, the City should conduct a feasibility and cost study to determine whether the library could cost-effectively relocate across Swanson Road into this structure. Remodeling this facility could provide a new library very near the current location in the downtown core. The facility would have increased parking, and an elevated pedestrian crossing would provide safe access between the library and museum historic area. The library would remain close to the museum, taking advantage of many common programs and constituents.

A second option shown as part of the Old Wasilla Airport Master Plan (Figure 5-1) is to construct a new library as a major element of the new area at the Old Wasilla Airport site. Conceptually, Figure 5-1 shows a new two-story structure with about 16,100 square feet. The library would be located adjacent to a new Community Center. Together, these facilities would have about 200 parking spaces and be located on the citywide trails system. The proposed site is about one mile from existing schools and is conveniently located for most residents.

In any event, once vacant, the existing facility could be used for other public purposes.

Wasilla Museum and Townsite Park

Located in downtown Wasilla just east of Main Street is a group of nine buildings which represent much of the past of the Wasilla area. The historic buildings are grouped on neighboring lots, now called Old Wasilla Townsite Park. Comprising slightly less than

one acre the facility is anchored by the adjacent Dorothy G. Page Museum, constructed in 1931 as the community hall. The associated historic buildings are located behind the museum on lots 1, 3, 4 and 5 of 7,000 square feet each in block 8. Arrangements are soon to be concluded for the purchase by the City of lot #2. The Wasilla-Knik-Willow Creek Historical Society is temporarily headquartered in the "Capital Site" cabin in the Townsite Park.

The museum building has served as a museum and visitor center since 1967 when it was enlarged and renovated for Alaska's Centennial celebrations. It is on the National Historic Register. The building was enlarged in 1993 and is comprised of 5,065 square feet of exhibit, office, collections storage and research space. While physically fronting on Main Street the museum's main entrance opens on the alley behind it, adjacent to the Old Wasilla Townsite Park.

The museum and adjoining buildings are operated as a Museum Department within the City of Wasilla, Department of Museum and Recreational Services. Currently the nine historic structures are owned by the City of Wasilla, with two additional historic structures (owned by the Wasilla-Knik-Willow Creek Historical Society) awaiting or in the process of placement. The Dorothy G. Page Museum, an integral visitors center, is open year-around and is staffed by three full-time personnel under the supervision of a Department Director who is also responsible for the Recreational Services Division. The museum enlists the help of a strong cadre of volunteers for year-around activities, special shows/exhibits, and projects. More than 17,000 visitors toured the museum in 1994, up substantially from 12,000 people in 1991.

The museum houses an archive of historical printed materials and a variety of regional history exhibits, including Native artifacts, homesteading exhibits, natural history dioramas of Alaska wildlife and fossils, the beginnings of Wasilla, and the history of Mining in the Hatcher Pass and Willow Creek areas. The museum operates a visitor and information center throughout the year, sponsors a series of art and craft shows, special historical exhibits, slide presentations, and training workshops. Together with the Wasilla-Knik-Willow Creek Historical Society the museum sponsors a very successful summer and early fall farmers market in the Old Wasilla Townsite Park.

The best known historic structure in Wasilla, the Herning, Teeland, Mead Store (the three owners between 1917 and 1986) was built in Wasilla by Orville G. Herning in 1917 where the new Alaska Railroad crossed the Carle Trail. (The trail was used to transport bulk supplies to the gold mines in the Willow Creek Mining District from the town of Knik and this new intersection shortened the supply lines, leading to the rise of Wasilla and the demise of Knik as a regional trade center.)

The Store was donated to the Wasilla-Knik-Willow Creek Historical Society in 1986 to save it from destruction and moved to a new foundation on its permanent site in 1990. (The store is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.) Development of the museum, historic park, the relocation of the store to the same block, and somewhat improved public parking, give form and substance to the historic block concept. The

buildings already within the historic park are: Wasilla's first school (1917), The Paddy Marion Cabin (Paddy Marion was a partner in the Marion Twin Mine in the 20's) The Herning-Teeland House (1935), the Walter Trensck Cabin (1940's), The Community Sauna (late 20's early 30'), the Willow Capital Site Cabin, a Blacksmith Shop, and Oscar Johnsons Smoke House. Two additional buildings await future placement and restoration, Shorty Gustafsons Barn/Shop (1910) and the old Wasilla Post Office (1920's). Major restoration work on the museum and a number of the other historic buildings has been accomplished. Currently the 1917 Herning, Teeland, Mead Store restoration is well under way with a projected completion date of 1997 (Wasilla's's 80th year).

The combination of the historic block, the Dorothy G. Page Museum & Visitors Center, an active outreach program, the activities of the Historical Society, important support from the City and other active community volunteers have resulted in a strong constituency for historic preservation and interpretation. These programs offer tremendous potential for public education, cultural growth and economic development.

Although these historic resources are of tremendous value to the community, the existing site has a number of serious limitations which need to be resolved:

1. The entire site is presently within the Core Area District, as outlined in the Wasilla Development Code. The intent of the core area is to denote the "the major multifamily, commercial, office and industrial areas of the City." There is no designation over this site to afford it any special protections as a historic area. The plan recommends designating this area as public/institutional lands to protect the area from conflicting uses and activities. The historic area appears to be bound by Main Street, Swanson Avenue, Herning Avenue, and the alley between Boundary Street and Yenlo Street.
2. Parking in the area is still a serious concern. While over the last several years available parking space has been improved it is still limited, potentially discouraging tour buses and recreational vehicle (RV) travelers. However, in the context of the old town physical layout, large numbers, of large motor homes, may always have difficulty fitting on anything short of specially designated parking areas. The overall parking problem is related to both small lot sizes and the close proximity of the Library and Post Office. Both of these facilities have high traffic volumn. Not counting the nine parking spaces next to the Library, only three museum parking spaces are presently provided on the north side of the museum (with a forth to be added in spring of 1996). Parking space behind the museum has been improved and there are now six spaces, with four spaces behind the 1917 Schoolhouse, four in front of the Herning, Teeland, Mead Store, parking in the area is still a serious concern. There is room for 12 cars and two buses, or a mixed combination of motor homes and autos, on the unimproved City parking

area at the corner of Boundary and Herning. When site work for the Herning, Teeland, Mead Store is completed, another four spaces will be available on Swanson Street, adjacent to the Old Wasilla Townsite Park (purchased in 1992. Bringing the total to 31 museum parking spaces (including two for buses). Parking remains a problem for all users (library, museum, fire station). Even though the museum facilities may have 31 parking spaces currently available plus another 19 spaces available around the library and fire station (for an overall total of 50) parking is still an issue because of the high, and increasing, activity/use level concerning all three agencies. (Wasilla seems to be maintaining a steady 6% annual population growth rate average and tourism is steadily increasing.)

Additional space or parking, and modest overall site expansion, could be acquired to the east across Boundary Street. Street parking could also be designated for tour buses and RV parking, during specific times of the day. Boundary Street could be vacated between Herning and Swanson Avenues to provide additional room and site flexibility. With room for people to stop, the area could help with the expansion and continued success of both the adjacent commercial and historical areas.

3. Incompatible land uses on the site restrict needed expansion, and should be vacated. Once vacated, the fire station could serve in one of several capacities: A natural history gallery dealing with fossils, minerals and flora and fauna of the region, a gallery museum maintained by the local Native Alaskan community, a gallery studio area where selected artists and crafts people could work in view of the public.
4. The library building could become the new museum headquarters with much greater capacity for indoor winter programming and expanded exhibit capacity. The library building has excellent potential for museum displays with more space and superior lighting.
5. The museum/community hall can remain a "wing" of galleries once the library building is obtained for museum use, or the community hall can be restored as a usable historic hall for public functions.
6. Private property within the historic area should be purchased or obtained through normal municipal procedures.

Wasilla is fortunate to have rescued and preserved much of its early history. The plan supports efforts to support and safeguard these structures.

Since the last Plan revision in 1992 considerable improvements have been made in the museum facilities which have taken the facilities from an average to below average condition rating, to an average to above average rating. With a continuation of needed restoration funding and adequate maintenance the museum and historic buildings

should easily be able to reach a useful service life in excess of 30 years. The front porch of the Museum does encroach into the existing Main Street right-of-way, but this encroachment has been accommodated, with no adverse impact on the physical structure, by the current Alaska Department of Transportation Main Street Improvement Plan.

The Museum of Alaska Transportation & Industry

The Museum of Alaska Transportation and Industry (MATI) moved to Wasilla in 1991 from the State Fairgrounds. Together with the airport, the Museum's 10 acre site anchors the western boundary of the city limits just south of the Parks Highway. The 501(c)(3) non-profit Museum has a statewide mission to collect, preserve, exhibit and interpret artifacts of Alaska's transportation and industrial history for the education and scientific benefit of current and future generations.

Museum facilities consist of the two-story Don Sheldon Building which houses a research library, gift shop, rest rooms, meeting room and 5,600 square foot exhibit hall. Approximately seven acres are filled with a growing collection of historic military and pioneer aircraft, antique vehicles, fishing vessels, railroad rolling stock, mining, construction, and farming equipment. The remaining acreage is given over to a 4,800 square foot building and storage yard. A park equipped with picnic benches and gazebo for use by Museum visitors. Volunteers from the Alaska Live Steamers, Inc. have constructed and operate the Alaska Central Railroad, a 1/8 scale line that extends through the woods on City property.

MATI attracts visitors year-around, and focuses on the individual interested in historic railroading, aviation, mechanical technology, or industry. Although the single best venue for marketing has been the "Mile Post", the Museum is also advertised in several specialty publications in this country and in Europe. Attendance figures have increased annually since the Museum moved to Wasilla:

- 1991 - 2,000
- 1992 - 3,800
- 1993 - 5,000
- 1994 - 6,000

Attendance figures at the end of the 1995 tourist season exceeded 8,000 visitors.

In fulfillment of its statewide mission, the Museum has an extensive community education and outreach program. School children participate in the Museum's education programs both in their classrooms and through field trips to tour the exhibits. The meeting room is used regularly by numerous community groups. Reciprocal arrangements with state and federal grant programs provide job training to individuals in need while augmenting the Museum's meager workforce.