



# City of Palmer

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**SPECIAL JOINT PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION AND  
CITY COUNCIL MEETING  
6 P.M. TUESDAY, MARCH 15, 2011  
PALMER CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
231 W. EVERGREEN AVENUE, PALMER**



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

- A. Call to Order
- B. Roll Call
- C. Pledge of Allegiance
- D. Audience Participation
- E. New Business
  - 1. Committee of the Whole Concerning the Following Items (note: action may be taken following the committee of the whole):
    - a. Gravel Pit Legislation
    - b. Code Changes Recommended in Annexation Strategy Plan
- F. Comments
  - 1. Planning and Zoning Commission
  - 2. City Council
- G. Adjournment



**Item E.1.b. – New Business  
Code Changes Recommended in  
Annexation Strategy Plan**

# RECOMMENDED ANNEXATION STRATEGY

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## **An Annexation Strategy for the City of Palmer**

First and foremost, all proposed annexations should comply with all Local Boundary Commission (LBC) standards and procedures for approval. LBC approval is just one part of a successful annexation. The annexation petition and process must also fairly address local issues and concerns about annexation, and the City must be prepared and committed to implement the annexation to the general satisfaction of existing and new residents.

The following recommendations represent the consultant's advice to the City of Palmer for a successful and effective approach to annexation.

### ***Prior to any future annexation proposals:***

The City of Palmer should:

1. Articulate clear goals for City of Palmer annexations in general. Consultants recommend that the City use the following three goals:
  - a. Plan for orderly growth in nearby areas so essential public services can be provided efficiently and cost-effectively where and when warranted. Make plans for needed infrastructure prior to development, to avoid the high costs and inconvenience of retrofitted infrastructure.
  - b. Sustain a desirable quality of life in and around Palmer.
  - c. Protect the City's long-term economic viability and fiscal health.
2. Proactively address legitimate issues created by annexation, prior to annexation. Only by solving these issues first can the City build trust and credibility. A number of these issues are identified in this report, with preliminary recommendations for how the City can address and resolve them. Examples include revised zoning for agricultural lands, creation of a rural residential zone, and revised standards for services in low density residential areas.
3. Establish an explicit approach to deciding when and where to annex territory:
  - a. Though future annexation petitions will be brought on a case-by-case basis as deemed appropriate, the City should define a long-term conceptual boundary for territorial growth. Over time, the cities of Palmer, Wasilla, and surrounding areas will continue to grow. As land is developed and more people locate their homes and businesses in these areas, the two cities will be asked to provide higher levels of service. In order to provide increased city services, Palmer and Wasilla will annex developed territory, growing closer together. Given these trends, the

consultants recommend designating the existing Palmer Water and Sewer Service Area boundary as this long-term conceptual outer boundary for the expansion of City limits.

Identifying the Water and Sewer Service Area as the long-term conceptual boundary for the City of Palmer does not, by itself, mean that the City will actively pursue annexation of this area. Rather, it is meant to a reasonable guide for landowners and the City in preparing for growth and the possibility of future annexations. It may be decades before Palmer's growth warrants annexing to the limits of this long-term conceptual boundary.

- b. Phase annexations within the long-term conceptual boundary, following the criteria below:
  - i. Scale individual annexations to the City's infrastructure, operational and fiscal capability to deliver services.
  - ii. Coordinate the City's annexation planning with other public and semi-public entities that also have major local governance or service responsibilities such as the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and its service areas, the University of Alaska, Matanuska-Susitna College, and public utilities, and with applicable Matanuska-Susitna Borough plans (e.g., its Comprehensive Development Plan, Core Area Plan, Long-Range Transportation Plan, and Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan).
  - iii. Annex vacant territory with imminent development potential sooner rather than later. A major benefit of annexation is that it provides a chance to coordinate and guide infrastructure development. After development occurs, this and other benefits of annexation are often forfeited, and annexation often becomes unwelcome and politically problematic. Specific priorities include:
    - Existing or potential commercial corridors and nodes near the City whose development might erode the City's sales tax base.
    - Undeveloped and/or under-developed tracts with near-term potential for residential or other land uses, in order to ensure that development meets city standards for roads, drainage, utilities, etc.
    - Undeveloped and/or under-developed tracts whose future use and development will have major influence on the quality of life in and around Palmer (mainly the two major road corridors: the Glenn Highway corridor and the Palmer-Wasilla Highway corridor).

- Nearby vacant tracts whose development potential has been or may be substantially enhanced by public infrastructure investments.
  - Tracts that enhance the City’s long-term ability to function as a trade, service, governmental, and job center for Greater Palmer.
  - Built-up areas as requested by residents, or as essential to maintain cost-effective city services, or as required by LBC boundary standards.
- c. Include Planning and Zoning Commission review in the process of deciding when and where to annex territory. A resolution supporting annexation in itself and specific areas would be an asset to the City Council in their decision-making process.

***When the City is ready to proceed with future annexation proposal(s):***

4. Identifying Priorities for Annexation: If and when the City is ready to move forward with an annexation proposal in the near-term, and considering the criteria presented above, it is the judgment of the consultants that the priority for annexation should be the area bounded by the Palmer-Wasilla Highway corridor on the north, the old Trunk Road on the west and the Glenn Highway corridor on the south and east. Identifying a particular area helps all parties focus attention where benefits of annexation are greatest and limits unnecessary expenditure of planning resources and political energy.
5. Public Process: LBC (Local Boundary Commission) regulations set minimum requirements for local public consultation before an annexation petition is submitted for review. Experience indicates that the City would be wise to greatly expand its local public process for drafting and review of annexation petitions. Based on conversations with Palmer-area residents and business owners, consultants recommend the following measures:
  - Conduct general public outreach regarding annexation issues; work to solve legitimate concerns prior to proceeding with annexation (this report is a part of implementing this recommendation)
  - Define a preliminary territory of interest for consideration for annexation.
  - Hold advance informational meetings and consultations with residents, landowners, and stakeholders in the preliminary territory to learn of local issues and concerns before drafting an annexation petition.
  - Prepare a preliminary draft annexation petition for internal review that:
    - Addresses issues raised by residents and stakeholders about the potential impacts of annexation on taxes, services, and land use and rural lifestyles;

- Analyzes the impact of a prospective annexation on city operations and finances;
  - Evaluates the costs and resource requirements to extend city facilities and services to prospective annexations;
  - Includes a detailed transition plan for the extension of city services in the post-annexation period, and for intended land use policy.
- Initiate appropriate revisions to existing city policies and codes; ensure that critical revisions are in place for timely post-annexation implementation.
  - Present the draft petition for public review with residents/stakeholders.
  - Present the (revised) draft annexation petition for formal hearing and final action by the city council.

### **Specific Steps to Address Identified Issues**

In the course of the many meetings and consultations that have occurred to date, additional specific ideas surfaced that merit the City's consideration, some of which the City has already begun to implement. These are listed below.

- 1) Clarify the process for zoning newly annexed territory. This could be done through a three-step process:
  - a. As part of the City's process to develop an annexation proposal, prepare a preliminary land use plan map with generalized land use classifications (e.g., residential, commercial, industrial, and park/conservation, agriculture) for the territory proposed for annexation. These preliminary classifications may be based on the city development goals and the Core Area Comprehensive Plan Land Use Plan Map. Accompany this map with an explanation of the intent of these designations, allowing for refinements in boundaries, uses and intensity of use upon annexation approval by the LBC.
  - b. Identify areas where current or likely future uses are not a good fit with existing zoning codes. For these areas, develop general intentions for new or revised zoning districts. New categories expected to be needed include: a low density/rural residential zone, a revised agriculture zone, and changes to better accommodate home-based business.
  - c. After annexation approval, work with landowners to amend the City's land use plan, based on the generalized land use classifications in the preliminary land use plan. Discontinue use of the (T) Transitional Use District now in city code.
- 2) Complete the process to revise PMC Title 17.56 (Agricultural District). In particular, consider:
  - a. Revising setbacks for fences on farms to allow fencing to the lot line.
  - b. Allowing vehicle storage for a limited number of vehicles as a permitted use, with additional vehicle storage allowed only as a conditional use.

- c. Including the conservation of Class I and II soils as an explicit purpose of the Agricultural Zoning District.
  - d. Including an Agricultural Use Notice.
  - e. Including a statement that one purpose of the Agricultural Zoning District is to implement the Palmer Comprehensive Plan, which endorses the goal of protecting agricultural lands and promoting agriculture as a component of the local economy.
- 3) Revise PMC Title 6 to allow, within the Agricultural District:
- a. Smaller setbacks for livestock to correspond with fencing requirements or as otherwise deemed acceptable, and
  - b. Noise and odor from livestock that is associated with normal farm operations.
- 4) Explore the possibility of designating parts of the city, in very low-density areas, where refuse hauling service may not be required, as long as other trash-related ordinances are followed (e.g., no burning, compliance with zoning rules).
- 5) Explore the desirability of agreements to contract with existing services areas to continue to deliver services for a transitional period.
- 6) Public process:
- a. Have multiple meetings at different times of day to accommodate business people, families, and people who cannot make City Council meetings. In particular, the City should seek to meet with farmers in winter months when they have the time to attend meetings, prepare responsive briefs/comments, etc.
  - b. Hold informal meetings focused on annexation (at City Council meetings, people don't get their questions answered). Give people an opportunity to ask questions about how annexation will impact them.
  - c. Prepare an information sheet and have a public workshop attended by city staff who can answer questions about these topics: What is annexation? How will it impact landowners? What is different upon annexation (rules, business license, new rules about business)?
  - d. Provide a draft plan for providing services upon annexation that it can share with the public early on in the outreach process preceding an annexation petition.
  - e. Make sure the City releases correct information, ahead of the rumors.
  - f. Be sure information on annexation issues reaches people with concerns about this topic. Good ways to get out information include:
    - post at the library
    - banners/signs on roads (as long as it's legal)
    - present to groups that meet regularly: Kiwanis, Rotary, Elks, Senior Center, Chamber of Commerce, farmers, etc.
    - give at least four weeks notice of meetings/etc
    - newspaper notices are often not effective, but putting an extra flyer in the newspaper is.

- Flyer in the mailbox
  - Try to include a notice in the DNR newsletter on crop reports that goes out to farmers
  - Email: For persons who have business licenses with the City or Borough, email out to them. Probably have email addresses in order to get the business license; if not, include that as part of the application.
- 7) As part of communications about annexation proposals,
- a. Include a cost-revenue analysis
  - b. Include information about the planning process that precedes annexation proposals. Refer to the 2006 Palmer Comprehensive Plan and regional plans such as the Core Area Plan, the Matanuska Susitna Borough's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), and Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan.
  - c. Present a clear rationale to the public for proposing the annexation of particular lands. Guide any future annexation plans consistent with the three goals below:
    - Fiscal Health: Revenues – annexation can help sustain the City's fiscal health by securing tax revenues development within the Greater Palmer area, in particular possible from commercial development along the Palmer Wasilla and Glenn Highways.
    - Fiscal Health: Costs – annexation provides residents, land owners and the City the opportunity to guide development to ensure public services and facilities can be provided effectively, efficiently and at low cost
    - Keep Palmer "Palmer" – annexation provides the opportunity to guide development
  - d. Be clear and consistent in communicating how zoning of annexed properties will be handled. To the extent possible, work with landowners prior to annexation to clarify acceptable zoning designations. If necessary, revise the zoning code.
- 8) Take steps to enforce real estate disclosures and educate homeowners about living next door to farms. Consider other ways of addressing this issue, including:
- a. Passing a resolution not to enact nuisance ordinances that would restrict normal farming practices.
  - b. Requiring resource management easements for new residential development adjacent to an agricultural zone.
  - c. Passing a local right-to-farm ordinance
- 9) Adopt a preferential policy to route public infrastructure improvements around rather than across farmland, where feasible.
- 10) Support agricultural reforms, as needed, in State policy regarding fertilizer application, manure management, water management, etc.